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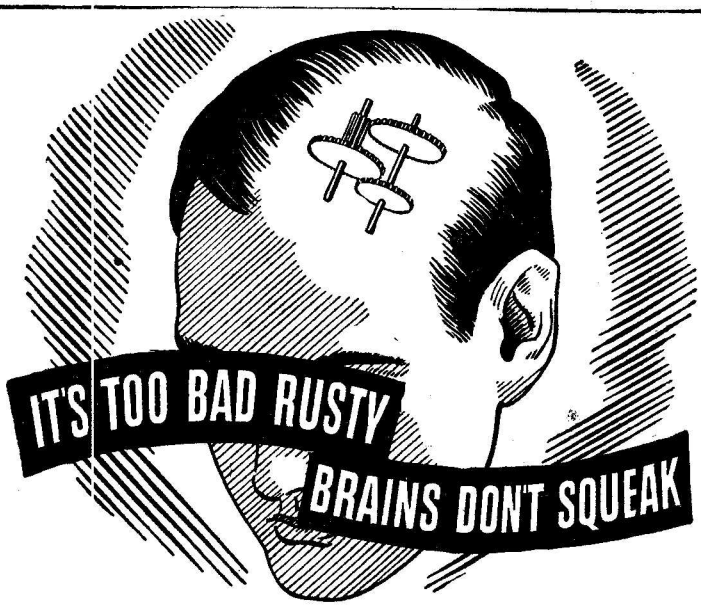
AUG. 14

WEEKLY

TRAILS WEST

By Bennett Foster



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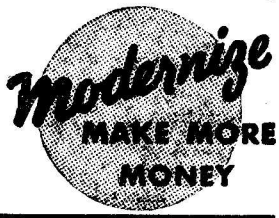

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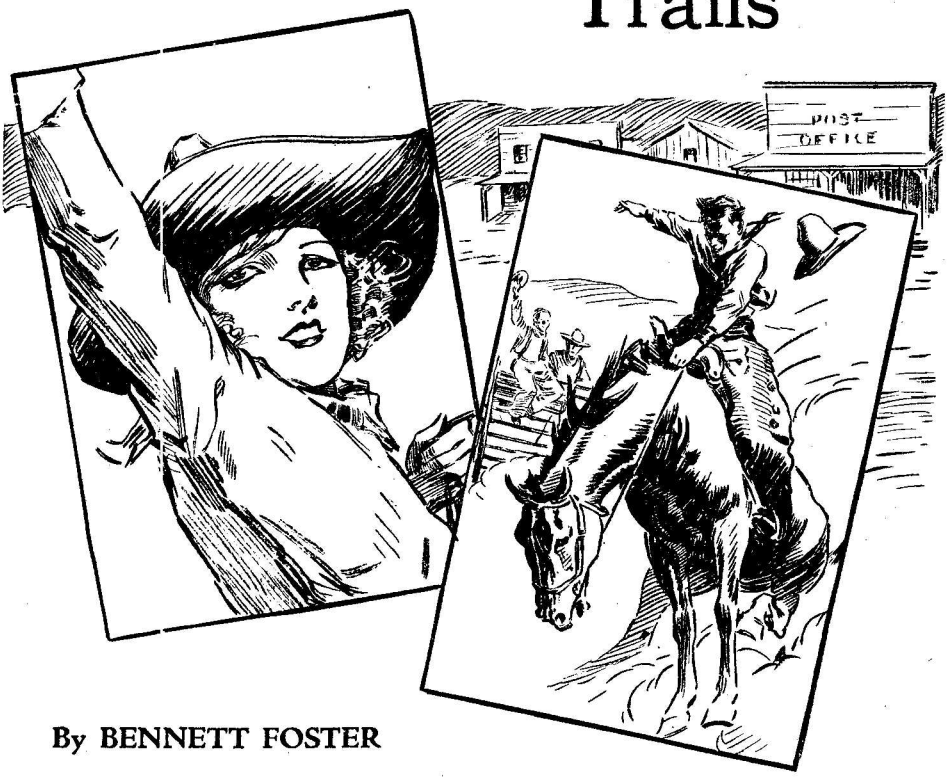


By BENNETT FOSTER

CHAPTER I

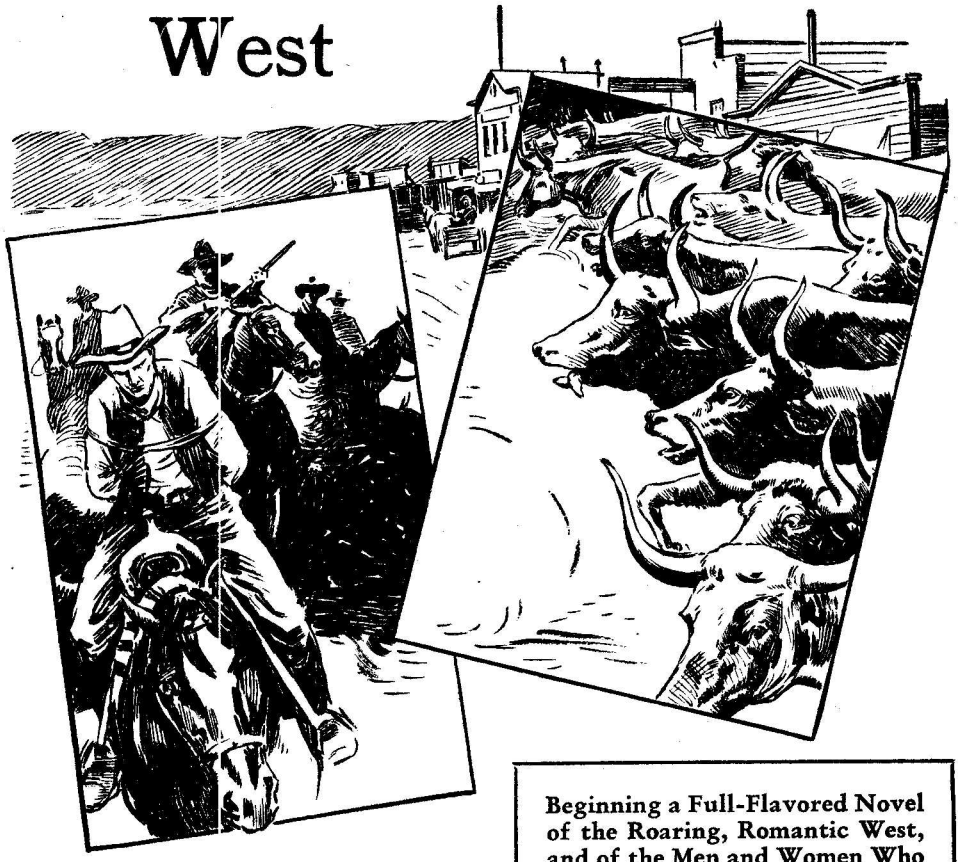
I SPY

As far as Miles Trask could see, there was no end to the westward reaching of the drift fence. He had ridden along its tight four strands all day and now, with dusk approaching, the fence still stretched before him. It had been a weary day, with a noon rest at a waterhole where gaunt cattle had stared uneasily at Miles and at Junebug. Junebug had thought to work cattle at the waterhole and had come in, ears pointed and alert. Now, with the sun slipping into the mesa and a line of gray clouds hovering above it, they were almost at their journey's end. Trask leaned forward wearily in the saddle, his weight on the stirrups, taking Junebug's long trot as it came. Junebug was weary too. The dun gelding seemed to sense that the day was almost done.

"Just over the rise," Miles said, half to himself, half to the horse. "Tomorrow you get a rest, Bug, but I don't. There's no rest for the wicked."

This was old, familiar country to Miles Trask. As a boy he had ridden it. As a man he had worked cattle over its wide expanse of sand and yucca-dotted flats. The fence to his left kept cattle from drifting into the Gonzalitas roughs and the roughs of the Canadian. The Don Sabio hills to his right, red-bluffed and dotted with the dark green of cedars housed men that he

West



Beginning a Full-Flavored Novel of the Roaring, Romantic West, and of the Men and Women Who Fought to Keep Its Heroic Spirit Alive—by the Talented Author of "Riding Gun."

knew. In front of him, beyond the Gonzalitas, beyond the sand dunes and the creeks, was the Tramparas Mesa and, topping the mesa, was the gaunt cowtown of Tramparas.

Old country, old and filled with painful memories. Miles had sworn never to return to it. . . .

Five years ago Miles Trask had left, a wild, grieving youngster, his father dead; his uncle, Benbow Trask, a gnarled, humpbacked man, sitting in the YT ranchhouse that should have been Miles' own; and his girl, the girl that he loved and who'd promised to marry him walking down the street with Phil Heming. Miles could see her yet—looking up into Phil Heming's heavy face, her hand on Heming's arm, laughing at Heming's heavy jokes. That had been five years ago. . . .

Junebug topped a sandy knoll and Comanche Creek lay before them. Beyond El Rito Comanche there was a cabin and corrals and the fence of a horse pasture. Smoke spilled from the cabin chimney, and in the corral a man walked, rope in hand, with horses milling restlessly before him. Miles Trask reined Junebug down, loosened the heavy single action Colt in the shoulder holster, and settled himself in the saddle. This was Miles Trask's im-

mediate destination—the Coffin line camp.

Junebug watered at the creek, sucking in long draughts, lifting his head only to lower it again and drink at his ease. When he had finished, Junebug moved of his own volition, splashing across the creek toward the house.

The man in the corral had come to the fence and was staring at Miles. The horses were huddled in a corner and Junebug nickered to them. In the door of the house a second man appeared, holding a frying pan in one hand, the other lifted to shield his gaze. Junebug stopped and Miles eased himself from the saddle. The man with the frying pan stepped out on the porch, his flour-sack apron flapping, gray mustache lifting over his teeth.

"SUPPER time, stranger. Make yourse'f welcome."

"Hello, Wink," Miles Trask said quietly, moving nearer.

Wink Revier put his frying pan carefully on the porch floor. He advanced two slow steps and then, breaking into a bandy-legged run, he yelled his shrill surprise. "Holy whiskers! It's Miles!"

Wink seized his arm, shaking Miles Trask by the shoulders as though to make sure himself that this was really flesh and blood he grasped. Wink's faded blue eyes were anxious as he peered into Miles' face.

"But—" Wink Revier began. "I heared that you was in the army. I heared that you went to the Islands. Miles . . . what brought you back?"

"Who's the other fellow, Wink?" Miles asked softly, looking toward the corrals. "I'm back on business."

"Boy named Feltman," answered Wink, quietly. "Pretty good kid. Come in, Miles."

"I'd better 'tend to my horse."

Feltman was coming up from the corral now. Wink paused. "We got company, Curly," he announced. "Make you acquainted with Curly Feltman, Miles. Curly, this is Miles Trask."

Curly Feltman extended his hand. He was slim and young, and the stubble of beard on his face was curling and silky.

"Glad to know you, Feltman," said Miles Trask, and meant it.

"Any friend of Wink's is a friend of mine," Feltman returned. "You go to the house. I'll unsaddle for you."

Friendship was offered here and Miles took it. "I'd be obliged," he said. "He's already watered. You can just turn him with the others."

Feltman picked up Junebug's trailing reins and started for the corral while Miles and Wink moved toward the house. "There's some clothes in my slicker," Miles said, turning back.

"I'll bring it," Feltman told him. Miles and Wink went on inside.

"You said business," suggested Wink, turning to Miles. "Have you come back to give Benbow Trask his needin's? If you have I'll quit this lousy job an' go with you—"

Miles shook his head. "I swore I'd never come back to this country, Wink," he said. " I never meant to, but I've been sent in here. I'm working for the Cattle Sanitary Board. I've been with 'em a year, ever since I quit the army. The secretary of the board—"

"Wentworth?" interjected Wink.

Miles nodded. "Clay Wentworth. He figured that I know the country and I know the natives. I'm a spy, Wink."

A smile broadened under Wink Revier's sweeping longhorn mustache. "I've been hearin'," he said. "There's cattle comin' in from Texas."

"From Texas and from the Indian Territory," Miles corrected. "They kind of sprout wings, from what I hear. The ranchmen over across the Line are kicking up a row. Maybe the cattle come into the Canadian and maybe into the Gonzalitas. Nobody can find 'em once they're gone. I was sent to see what I could do."

Wink said, "Hummmm," deep in his throat and Miles pulled two folded papers from the inner pocket of his coat. These he tendered to Wink who unfolded them carefully.

THE old man scanned the two sheets in silence. When he handed them back he spoke. "Pretty well heeled, ain't you?" Wink's voice was dry. "A commission from the Sanitary Board and a complimentary commission from the Texas Rangers. Now if you was just a Deputy U. S. Marshal you might make it."

"I can get that too if I need it," Miles said. "How long have you been here, Wink?" He put the papers back in his pocket.

Wink squinted his eyes as he considered his answer. "Just two weeks tomorrow," he said. "I thought there was somethin' damn' funny. The riders at every camp in the Gonzalitas an' on the Mesa have been shifted."

Miles nodded. "The fence riders have been shifted clear to Tascosa," he said. "We thought that maybe cattle were leaking through the fence and we took no chances. This is a clean-up, Wink."

"You workin' out of here?" questioned Wink.

"For now," answered Miles. "You got extra horses?"

"Five," stated Revier.

"I didn't know who I'd find here," said Miles. "I didn't know you were riding the drift fence or I'd have asked for you. It couldn't be better, Wink."

"I've been ridin' fence for two years," Wink announced. "It's the only job a broke-down old cowboy can get. Dang me, Miles, I'm glad to see you! I—"

Boots thumped on the porch and Revier broke off. The door opened and Curly Feltman came in. "I left your saddle in the shed," he said, smiling. "Here's your slicker."

Miles took the bulging yellow roll and spoke his thanks. Feltman began to get ready for supper.

"That horse you got is considerable," said Feltman, pouring water into the wash basin. "He kicked sparks out of Smoky the first thing he done. Leave him here awhile an' he'll be boss of the *remuda*."

"Junebug can do everything but cook and talk Mexican," agreed Miles. "He'll have a chance to boss the *remuda* too. I've been sent in here to work a while."

Revier was slapping plates and cups on the table, serving out steak, hot biscuits, canned tomatoes and coffee. "Come an' get it."

They ate silently. When sorghum from a gallon can had been poured over biscuits and when the coffee pot had been wrung for the three last cups, they pushed back from the table and rolled cigarettes.

"And you're holding down the Coffin camp, Wink," Miles said slowly. "Remember when this fence was built?"

Wink grunted. "I do," he answered, "an' quite a time the association had gettin' the Mexicans to throw in with 'em. It wasn't nothin' to the Mexes if a few cows drifted. The fence saves a lot of work, though. I've worked enough cattle out of the Canadian roughs to make a sizeable herd."

Miles nodded. "It saves work," he agreed. "They used to start their wagons at Raton and work all the way south to Alamogordo. I remember seeing twenty wagons on the Crow Creek flats at one time. There were eight or ten men with each wagon, a cook, a wrangler, and mounts for every man. That was when I was a kid."

Revier laughed. "Yo're twenty-five now," he said. "Speakin' out of yore old age, just when *was* you a kid?"

Miles smiled. "Sometime back, Wink." The smile left his face, leaving only a friendly afterglint in his eyes. Wink, watching him, knew that he had spoken the truth. It was a long time back to the days when Miles Trask had been a kid.

"You must have seen some action in the Philippines. You was in the cavalry, Miles?"

Miles nodded. "Some," he agreed.

Revier pursued the subject. "You went over in ninety-eight," he mused. "That was five years ago. What happened to you, Miles?"

THERE was no use trying to get out of it, Miles saw that. He might as well give Revier the story without further ado. "I went over in ninety-eight," he agreed. "They shipped us out of San Francisco on a transport. We were on Luzon and Mindanao mostly. I got to be a sergeant before I was discharged."

Revier's square hand came down sharply on his leg. "I knew it!" he ejaculated. "I knew they wouldn't hold you down. A sergeant—"

"A sergeant is just a goat, Wink," interrupted Miles. "He's just there to obey orders and to have the buck passed to him. A sergeant doesn't amount to much."

Wink grunted. He did not believe Miles but he saw that this friend did not want to answer questions. Still he could not let the subject drop. "You was in the First Cavalry?" he asked.

"The regulars," agreed Miles. "Let's skip it, Wink. We've got the dishes to wash."

Feltman got up. "I'll wash 'em," he said cheerfully. "You go ahead an' talk."

BUT Miles was not in the mood for talk about his army experiences. He got up from his box, flicked the ash from his cigarette and, taking a dish towel from a nail, moved to join Feltman. "You wash and I'll dry," he said. "Wink, you can loaf."

It didn't take them long and after a brief smoke outside in the cool of the star-glittering evening, they began to think about sleep.

"You might at least've brought a bed with you," Wink grumbled to Miles as he pulled a tattered quilt from his own roll. "Dang it, you ought to lie on the floor."

"There's that roll in the shed," Curly suggested. "That freighter ain't ever come back for it."

"Get it," Wink directed. "There was a freighter left a bed here two weeks ago," he continued, addressing Miles. "You might as well use it 'til he comes for it. That is, if it ain't dirty."

"We'll look it over," suggested Miles.

"I'll get it." Feltman moved toward the door. "I know where it is."

When the younger man had gone out Wink turned to Miles. "You goin' to tell Curly why yo're here?" he asked.

Miles shook his head. "Not now," he answered.

"Just what is the idea, Miles?" asked Wink.

Miles shrugged. "I told you," he said. "There are cattle being rustled from Texas and the Territory. They come this way. Someplace in here or in the Canadian roughs they get lost. There is going to be a combing of the roughs, liking by a sheriff's posse with maybe some Rangers to help. I'm in here because I know the country and I know Mexicans, leastwise I did." He made a wry face.

Revier raised bushy eyebrows. "Why is it," he asked, "that every time there's a cow stole the Sanitary Board wants to hang it on the Mexicans? They're a pretty good bunch of people mostly."

"I know it." Miles reached for papers and tobacco and began to fashion a cigarette. "But there is this about it, Wink. You know that they're a close-mouthed bunch and that they hang together. If you've got one for a friend he's a real friend and if one's your enemy he'll go to any lengths to get you. The Gonzalitas is Mexican country. There's ten or a dozen families in here, all of 'em running cattle. They—"

"There's Heming's Three Dollar an' there's the YT too," interrupted Wink. "What about them? Phil Heming—"

Miles' face stopped the old man. Wink cleared his throat. "Excuse me, Miles," he apologized. "I'd forgot—"

"Let it go at that, Wink," directed Miles. "I'll look over the Three Dollar and the YT, too, but mainly I'm here to look after the Mexicans. I've got friends in the Gonzalitas, or I had. There's the Sisneros brothers and Emelio Sisneros. I went to school with Emelio. Then there's Esteban Romero up under the hill and Tyban Valverde and Cruz Santisteven and Jesus Armijo that all run pretty good wads of cattle. I know 'em and I don't think they'll hold out on me if they savvy anything. But mainly I was counting on Leandro Chavez. Leandro was Dad's foreman for a long time and he pretty nearly raised me."

Wink nodded. "He's a good one, Leandro is. He's had his little place down here a long time an' these Mexicans tote all their troubles to him. Likely he'll help you." A thud sounded on the porch and Wink got up. "Here comes Curly. I tell you, Miles, that kid will do to take along." As he spoke Wink crossed to the door and opened it. Curly Feltman came in, dragging a canvas-covered roll.

"Here's yore bed," he announced. "Nice an' dusty, too. I beat some of the dirt off it but I didn't get it all."

"I could sleep in a mud puddle tonight. A little dust won't matter. Give me a hand and we'll put the roll on the bunk."

As he spoke Miles caught one end of the bedroll and Curly, stooping again, took the other. They deposited the bundle on the one unused bunk and Miles unlashed the bed, dropping the rope on the floor. When the bed was rolled out he tested its softness and then grinned at Curly. "Plenty good," he said. "I won't mind using it a bit."

When they were undressed, Wink blew out the lamp. The men settled themselves in their soogans, and the cabin, warm and velvety black, was close around them.

"Old country, Miles, drawled Wink through the darkness. "Mighty old. First time I was in here was in sixty-three. That's forty years ago. I was twelve years old, gettin' my education at the tail gate of a chuck wagon an' earnin' a livin' wranglin' horses for the old X I T." Wink chuckled in the darkness.

A pause followed the chuckle and

then the old man's voice drawled on. "There was an old Ranger with the wagon that trip. He'd chased a bunch of Comanches through here one time. Caught 'em on this creek. That's where it got its name—El Rito Comanche."

Again a pause and then again the drawling voice: "The Cow Thief Trail they called it then. From Texas past the Don Sabios and across the Gonzalitas an' up Gonzalitas Hill. . . . It's a hard country an' it's big."

"Big enough," Curly's voice came out of the darkness.

"Not too big," said Miles.

Wink yawned. Pretty soon he was snoring gently. Curly slept, too, but Miles lay awake thinking. "The Cow Thief Trail," Wink had said. And still a trail for thieves. From Texas through the Gonzalitas and up the hill. He wondered. . . .

CHAPTER II

PRISONER

AT the corral in the morning waiting for Curly to bring in the horses from the pasture, Miles Trask and Wink Revier watched the line of dirty white clouds above the mesa. Both knew the signs. "Goin' to blow," grunted Wink, gesturing toward the clouds. "Yesterday was the first day in March that it ain't blowed hard enough to snap the socks off a man. Dang it!" There was disgust in his voice.

"It's going to blow, all right," Miles agreed. "I'm going to ride some of the Don Sabios today and if the wind is too hard I'll hole up."

"And that would suit you all right," grunted Wink. "Here come the horses."

The *remuda,* with Curly behind them, came over a rise and trotted into the pen. Wink closed the gate and took his rope from his saddle. Curly dismounted and came to the fence.

"What horse do I get?" asked Miles.

"A good honest horse," answered Wink, going through the gate. "Name's Sucker." The rope snapped out and settled, and a big bay came out of the milling horses.

Clamping his saddle on the bay and pulling his cinch tight about Sucker's girth, Miles was satisfied. Sucker looked as though he might weigh eight-hundred pounds and actually scaled about a thousand. Deep-barreled, short-coupled, and clean-legged, the horse stood, ears pricked forward while he was saddled.

Curly, leading his own horse out of the gate, grinned at Miles. "Sucker's honest," said Curly, repeating Wink's statement.

That was a warning. An honest horse is one that, if he pitches at all, will do so immediately after being mounted, and not wait until his rider has dropped his guard. Miles grinned at Wink, saw that Curly was watching, opened the gate and led his horse out of the corral. Evidently is was to be Miles' show.

Miles gathered the reins over Sucker's neck, and twisting out a stirrup, caught it with his toe and went up slowly. Sucker stood waiting. When Miles had settled himself in the saddle, the bay looked back, flicked his ears, and suddenly ducked his head, pitching out across the sand. Miles sat easy, letting the horse buck himself out. His spurs swung free and he took the jumps as they came. No sense in spurring an honest horse.

As suddenly as he had begun to act up, the horse stopped, setting his feet and sliding in the sand. Miles waited a moment, saw that Sucker was all

through, and reining him around, rode back to the others.

"Nice horse," he said cheerfully.

"Better than this one," agreed Curly, throwing his saddle up on the back of his own mount. "This fool'll wait till I'm at a gate or some place where I'm not lookin', and then come undone."

Miles laughed and looked over to where Wink was saddling. "I'm going to pull out," he said. "I'll go to Leandro's first. Maybe I'll stay there tonight."

Curly mounted. "See you tonight," he called, and rode toward the west. Wink finished his latigo strap, pulled a rein over his horse's neck and mounted.

"Take care of yourse'f," said Wink and rode off to the east.

ON his way north toward the Don Sabios, Miles encountered cattle. The brands, still covered with winter hair, were almost unreadable. Still Miles made some of them out—the old, familiar markings setting recollections astir in his mind. Two miles from the Coffin camp he saw a YT cow. The sight of the brand made a queer shock run up Miles' spine. How many heaving beasts had he burned with that iron?

Further along there was a heifer branded a Diamond Lazy H. Looking at the heifer Miles noted a second mark on the ribs. It looked like a small pothook. And that was odd. This would not be a vented brand but rather a holding brand. The hair was heavy over the marks and Miles was curious.

"We'll just see," he commented. "You a rope horse, Sucker?"

Sucker stood quietly while Miles climbed down and tightened the cinch, but when the rider was back in the saddle and had taken down his rope the horse's ears came forward.

"So you know what it's all about," said Miles. "Well, here we go."

Sucker *was* a rope horse. He brought Miles up on the running heifer and when the loop dropped true, Sucker went on past and hit the end of the rope. The heifer went down and Sucker turned to face the caught animal. Miles swung off.

While Sucker held the rope tight Miles took a pair of curved scissors from a pocket on his saddle and ran back down the rope. He dropped with a knee on the heifer's neck and when the animal was quiet, reached back with the shears and fell to clipping the hair over the brands.

With brand clipped free Miles saw that it was a Diamond Lazy H, the Sisneros brand. It seemed to Miles that the brand had not been put on well. There was a blur in the H and one point of the Diamond was not completely closed. When he clipped the hair over the ribs he saw that the other mark was a pothook.

Miles stared at it, scowling.

There were several explanations for that second mark, the most likely being that one of the Sisneros was branding a few calves for his son or for some member of the family. Miles freed his rope and the heifer, two-year-old, scrambled to her feet and ran a short distance. Miles walked back to Sucker, returned his scissors to their sheath, and mounting, rode on north, coiling his rope as he rode. He did not notice that the scissors had missed the sheath and he did not hear them fall into the sand.

Miles passed other bunches of cattle as he rode and once was forced to detour because of a new fence line. A scurrying wind whipped about Sucker's

feet and Miles grunted. Winks' weather prophesy was coming true.

At the edge of the first line of red hills Miles turned a little toward the east, skirting the mountain. Presently a canyon came in view and, entering it, Miles turned back to the west, followed the draw and within a mile saw a rock house clustered about by corrals and sheds. This was the Diamond Lazy H, the home ranch of the Sisneros.

AS Miles approached a man came from a shed and advanced to the fence. Stopping Sucker, Miles dismounted and went forward on foot.

"Buenos dias, Primo."

Primo Sisneros puckered his eyes and squinted, then recognized his caller, his pock-marked face widened in a grin.

"Miles!" he exclaimed and then went on, rapidly in Spanish. "What are you doing in this country?"

Miles tied Sucker to a fence post and walked to the gate. "I'm riding the drift fence,' he answered, in Spanish. "Thought I'd drop in to see some of my old friends."

Primo opened the gate hospitably, shook hands, and urged Miles toward the house. "There is coffee on the stove," he said. "Come in."

Inside, Primo poured coffee, talking as he set out the cups. He was alone, he said, his brother Segundo and the two boys having left early that morning to hunt some stray horses, and he was very glad to see his friend Miles Trask.

While they drank Primo demanded Miles' own news, asking questions that were personal and pointed. Some of these Miles answered, others he let pass. Gradually he brought the talk around to conditions in the Gonzalitas.

The grass, Primo said, was good for this time of year and there was plenty of water. The winds were bad, but then the winds were always bad at this period. The cattle were standing up well. There had been some newcomers in the country and Primo named one or two, Miles mentally filing the names away for future investigation.

"I saw some YT cows down along the creek as I rode over," Miles said, throwing out a bait. "They're working pretty far down from the mesa."

Primo ignored the remark and his next speech had nothing at all to do with cattle, but concerned his eldest boy who, he said, was thinking of getting married.

The evasion might, of course, be nothing at all. Miles knew that a man would be more interested in the marriage of his son than in another man's cattle. Still Miles thought the choice of subject odd, coming where it did in the conversation. Miles inquired about the bride-to-be, learned that it was one of the Piaz girls, then adroitly brought the subject of cattle to the front again.

"I saw a new fence as I rode along," he said.

"That is a horse-pasture fence," Primo explained quickly. "We are going to build a house for Emelio."

It struck Miles as odd that the horse pasture should be fenced before the house was put up, but he said nothing of that, returning patiently to the cattle once again. "You are marking some cows for Emelio?" he suggested.

Primo appeared to be startled, hesitating for a moment.

"I saw one of your two year old heifers with a second brand on her," explained Miles.

Primo responded to that. *"Si,"* he agreed. "I have branded some heifers for Emelio each year."

"You brand them . . .?"

Again Primo changed the subject as though, apparently, he had not heard. The talk went on that way with Miles arriving exactly nowhere. Despite his adroitly thrown leads, Primo would not give any information and finally Miles ceased his interrogation. There was something here, something concerning cattle, that Sisneros did not want to discuss. Having learned nothing, Miles made his departure, assuring Primo that he would return to visit with him again. Primo accompanied Miles from the house into the already sizeable windstorm, saw him mount, and bade him, *"Adios."*

Riding on northward after leaving the canyon, Miles was going across the wind. Sucker did not like it and kept trying to bend back east; Miles constantly had to keep the horse in line. Sand was coming in gusts, beating up into his face. Miles pulled up his neckerchief over his nose and mouth, and settled his hat more firmly on his head. The wind seemed to grow in force, and pausing behind a dune where the sand scurried and settled in little ripples, Miles decided to look for shelter. Cap Hall's one-room shack on the creek was about the closest refuge he could think of even if to reach it he would have to ride squarely into the wind. He skirted the sandhill and rode west, straight into the growing wind, his head down as Sucker bucked the gale.

It took some time to reach the creek and once there he found the old landmarks so hidden that he did not know which way to turn. He chose to ride south along the bank, believing that if he missed Hal's he would eventually arrive at the Coffin camp and shelter.

Before he had traveled half a mile, the wind stopped suddenly and in the lull Miles saw Hall's square rock shack. REACHING it, with the wind still howling across the clearing, Miles led Sucker behind the house and into the rock shed that Cap Hall used for a stable. There he tied the horse and loosened the cinches of the saddle. Satisfied that Sucker was sheltered from the storm, Miles clung to his hat and fought his way to the house.

Miles did not stand upon ceremony when he reached the door but flung it open, entered the room, and forced the door shut behind him. Blinded by sand and wind he stood a moment recovering his breath, then looked about the shack. The single room was deserted, and with a start Miles recalled that this was Saturday and that every Saturday, come what might, Cap Hill went to town. There was a tarp pulled over the blankets on the bunk, the floor had been swept and there were clean dishes stacked on the table, but there was no fire in the stove and the house was cold. With a grunt Miles crossed the room and fell to making a fire.

The wind beat against the sides of the little rock structure, finding its way down the chimney and driving smoke out into the room. Finally the fire burned and as the room gradually warmed Miles removed his sheepskin and laid it on the bunk.

It was fully noon. Finding cold biscuits and meat, Miles warmed the coffee that remained in the pot, and satisfied his hunger. Having cleaned the dishes he had used, Miles then rolled a cigarette and repaired to the bunk with a two year old magazine for company. Time wore on with Miles smoking, reading from the magazine, and now and again replenishing the fire. Twice he was forced to go out into the storm to bring in wood, and each time it seemed that the wind had increased in violence.

At four o'clock, sensing some new note in the wind, some added beat, Miles laid aside the magazine. Propping himself on an elbow he looked out of the window but could see nothing but dust swirling past. Positive that he had heard something, Miles got up, but his feet had scarcely touched the floor before the door was flung open and men came into the room. The last of the arrivals forced the door shut, closing out the storm.

The leader of the quartet, tall and gaunt, pulled a neckerchief from his face, exposing lean, hard features. As he shoved back his hat Miles saw eyes so light a blue as to be almost white, and hair so blond that for a moment he thought it was gray. Behind the leader was a short, dark man and as he moved Miles could see that the dark man's hands were fastened together with handcuffs. There was a towering redhead behind the dark man and behind him, a squat fellow with a brown stubble of beard and restless brown eyes.

"Yore horse in the shed?" asked the leader, staring at Miles.

Miles nodded. The white-haired man turned and spoke to the prisoner. "Go over by the stove, Frenchy," he commanded.

Frenchy obeyed, moving to the stove and standing there, his eyes wide and filled with fright.

"Who are you?" the leader demanded, turning back to Miles.

"My name's Trask," Miles answered.

There was a momentary gleam in the blond man's eyes. "Any relation to Benbow Trask?" he asked.

"Nephew," Miles said shortly. "Storm caught me and I holed up here at Cap's."

"The storm caught us, too," the red-haired man rumbled "We'd 've been in Tramparas if it wasn't for the wind!"

"Nephew of Benbow Trask's, huh?" said the blond man. "What you doin' in this country?"

Miles did not answer at once. "Who are you?" he asked.

One corner of the blond man's lips curled. "My name's Arburg," he said. "I'm deputy sheriff. What you doin' here?"

"I'm riding fence out of the Coffin camp." Miles recognized the officer's right to ask questions.

"Quite a ways from the fence," Arburg remarked, moving across the room to stand beside the handcuffed Frenchy. "Better come over an' get warm, Irish."

The redhead and the man with the brown beard approached the stove. They formed a compact little group, standing there with the prisoner.

"Damn the wind," said the redhead.

"It's pretty bad," Miles agreed.

"Likely it'll let down by dark." The brown-bearded man spoke for the first time. Miles eyed the speaker and then looked again at Frenchy. The prisoner's eyes were pitiful.

"You ain't been in this country for some time." Arburg spoke to Miles.

Miles Trask shook his head. "I came in yesterday," he said.

"Find things changed much?" Apparently Arburg was trying to be sociable.

"I haven't been around much."

"Can't you take these cuffs off me?" Frenchy asked. "I ain't goin' to try to make a break."

"Take 'em off, Bud," ordered Arburg. The brown-bearded man moved to obey and Arburg turned back to Miles. "Been some rustlin'," he explained. "We caught Frenchy here killin' a beef early this mornin'. We're takin' him in."

"Oh," said Miles, making the words come slowly.

"Irish here, is foreman for Heming." Arburg jerked his head toward the red haired man. "It was a Three Dollar beef that Frenchy was workin' on. We got the carcass an' the hide in a wagon."

Miles made no answer. The brown-bearded man was working at the cuffs and the prisoner spoke. "Go easy, Pond, can't yuh?"

Bud Pond, then, was Brown-beard's name. Pond was grinning. "I did make 'em a mite tighter, didn't I?" he asked, his voice cruel. "Give me a lift, Whitey, will you?"

Whitey Arburg took his eyes from Miles and moved toward Pond and the prisoner. His big hands were deft and the cuffs swung free with a click.

"Might as well leave 'em off," said Irish.

Arburg turned back to Miles. "Goin' into the Coffin tonight?" he asked.

"I thought I'd ride to Tramparas when the wind lets up," Miles answered, taking a chance. The situation was interesting and he intended to follow it if possible.

"Long ride," commented Arburg. "Go sit on the bunk, Frenchy. Yo're warm enough."

The dark man moved to obey, putting himself on the edge of the bunk and sitting there gingerly. The move put him in a positon where Arburg could watch both the prisoner and Miles Trask.

"I'll ride on in with you when the wind dies," said Miles.

Pond and Irish exchanged glances and then looked at Arburg. Arburg seemed to revolve something in his mind, then suddenly, as though reaching a decision, lifted his head. "Better get some wood," he suggested.

Irish moved toward the door but Pond stood, seemingly undecided.

"We'll all get a load," said Arburg. Miles moved and Arburg added quickly: "You been carryin' wood since you come. We'll bring it." Miles remained standing and the three went out.

FROM the bunk Frenchy spoke quickly. "Stick with me!" Miles looked questioningly at the dark man. "They aim to kill me!" said Frenchy. "Stay with me!"

"Arburg's an officer!" answered Miles. "You're all right. They . . ."

The door opened and Irish came in carrying an armload of wood which he dumped behind the stove. "Wind's lettin' up," he announced. "We'll move pretty soon."

Arburg and Pond came in. Pond was carrying a little load of wood but Arburg's arms were empty. Plainly the men had gone outside to talk, not to replenish the fuel.

Miles turned toward the red-haired man. "The wind is letting up, you say?"

"It's quietin' some," Arburg answered the question.

"Let's make coffee," suggested Pond. Acting on his own suggestion, Pond filled the pot, put coffee in it, and the men stood about the little room waiting for the coffee to boil. On the bunk Frenchy still sat stiffly upright, his eyes wide, seeing something that the others could not see. Miles was silent, watching, noticing the movements, the low word that Arburg occasionally flung either to Irish or Pond. Outside the gusts of wind were only fitful.

The coffee boiled, was settled with cold water and poured into cups. There was not enough cups to go around and Miles noted that Frenchy was left out. Pond gulped down the hot fluid; Ar-

burg and Irish drank more slowly.

Arburg put down his cup. "Might as well pull along," he said. "We can make it now."

"All right," agreed Coffin, moving toward the door.

"You better ride back to the Coffin," urged Arburg. "It'll be a long ride."

Miles paused. "I'm going to Tramparas," he said mildly.

Arburg eyed Miles speculatively and by the door Pond seemed to tense. Miles stood quietly waiting.

"All right," acceded Arburg slowly. "Mind watchin' Frenchy for us while we hook up the team? We put 'em in the shed."

Miles nodded. These men wanted to talk further, alone. Miles began to understand the terror in Frenchy's eyes.

The three went out and Frenchy moved on the bunk, whispering fiercely. "They're goin' to kill me!"

Miles shook his head. "No," he began, "you're—"

"Listen!" The tone was insistent, filled with despair. "They'll kill me. Look—I got a kid. You'll look after her?"

"You'll be all right," assured Miles. "I'll be along—"

"Promise you'll look after her!"

Miles could not bear the fear in Frenchy's eyes. "Sure," he promised. "But you're spooked. Arburg's an officer—"

"You promised!" Frenchy leaned forward. "Don't forget."

"If you're sure, we'll get out of here," Miles said with sudden decision. "I can—"

"They'll kill you, too," snapped Frenchy. "They—"

The door opened and Pond came in. "All right," said Pond. "Move out, Frenchy. Come on, if yo're comin', Trask."

CHAPTER III

FRAME

OUTSIDE the cabin the wind had lessened in strength and the shed was dimly visible. Taking Sucker from the shed Miles tightened his cinches. A wagon stood beside the shed with a tarp thrown across something in its bed; the carcass of the beef, Miles surmised. The men mounted their horses, Irish climbing to the wagon seat and Arburg waiting until Frenchy was in the saddle before he himself climbed up. Miles noted that Frenchy's hands had not been refastened and wondered at the omission. Pond, the last man in the saddle, swung in beside Frenchy, and the little cavalcade moved toward the creek, with the wagon following.

The horses splashed across Comanche creek and took the steep bank on the further side. Pond and Frenchy reached the top of the bank as Miles reined in to let Arburg precede him. The wagon was moving downstream to cross at a better place.

Up on the bank there was a sudden wild yell and the horse that Frenchy rode leaped and broke into a run. Miles could see Frenchy bent low in the saddle; could see Pond pulling a rifle from his saddle scabbard, dismounting and moving, it seemed, almost deliberately. Arburg was in the trail up the cut bank. Arburg's horse blocked the way, the officer having stopped his mount instead of spurring after the fugitive.

The rifle in Pond's hands spoke once, authoritatively, spoke again, and then twice more. Frenchy lurched in his saddle, reeling. Dust whipped up and when Miles could see again Frenchy's horse was running free, riderless. Arburg moved his horse on up the bank.

When they reached the top Pond was walking forward, his rifle at ready in his hands. Arburg loped his horse, moving not toward the body on the ground but toward Frenchy's mount. Miles Trask saw Arburg reach the free horse, lean out and catch the reins. Sucker was objecting to going any further ahead and Pond was beside Sucker, grinning up at Miles.

"Got him the first slug," announced Pond, his brown eyes fixed on Miles' face.

Arburg, leading back the riderless horse, stopped beside Miles. "We'll put him in the wagon," Arburg told Pond. "You and Irish can bring 'em in. Trask, you an' me'll ride ahead to Tramparas. I'll want you at the inquest. Frenchy tried to make a run for it. You saw it, didn't you?"

Miles Trask nodded slowly. "Yeah," he said, very slowly. "I saw it."

IT WAS after nine when Miles and Arburg reached Tramparas. The ride was one that Miles felt he would not soon forget. All the way he had watched Arburg covertly. The wind had ceased at sundown and that had made it easier, still there had been a continuous strain. Miles had not been deceived by the act at Comanche creek. That had been staged for his benefit. Miles had seen Pond's horse swing toward Frenchy, and he had heard Pond's yell. Frenchy had made no sound. Of course Miles had not seen the thrust of the spur that had made Frenchy's horse run, but Miles was sure that it had occurred. Frenchy had been terror-stricken, far too frightened to make a break. The man had been fascinated by his captors, and he had been certain of impending death. Miles almost shuddered when he thought of how sure Frenchy had been. No, that had been no attempt to stop an escaping criminal there by El Rito Comanche; that had been murder.

When Miles and Arburg reached the little town where kerosene lamps flickered at the street corners, the deputy turned to Miles.

"We'll have the inquest some time in the mornin'," he said shortly. "There ain't but one hotel in Tramparas. You can stop at the jail if you're a mind to, or you can go to the hotel."

"The hotel," Miles chose. "What time do you think the inquest will be?"

"I'll let you know," returned Arburg. "Yo're a witness so don't try to leave town."

"I'll be here," Miles answered shortly.

Arburg looked at his companion for a long moment and then nodded and rode away. Miles watched him go, then turned Sucker and made for the livery barn.

The Tramparas House, the only two story building in town, loomed black against the sky. Miles knew the man behind the desk. Sam Warfler had run a small restaurant when Miles left Tramparas. Now Warfler was fat and smooth-shaven and had an air of well being about him. He greeted Miles somewhat effusively and when Miles failed to respond, handed him the key to a room on the ground floor.

For a moment Miles was tempted to seek a bar. He could have used a drink, perhaps two drinks, very nicely. But good sense overcame the temptation and Miles went back to his room, lit the lamp, undressed, washed some of the dust off and went to bed.

For a while he lay awake revolving in his mind the happenings of the day. He thought of his talk with Primo Sisneros, of his holing up at Cap Hall's, and finally of the tragedy at the creek.

There had been a reason for Frenchy's death, and Miles wondered what that reason might be. Frenchy had not denied that he had been caught in the act of butchering stolen beef. Probably Frenchy was guilty of that, but one beef, or even several, was not cause enough to murder a man. Or was it? Miles wondered. Weariness dulled the edge of his curiosity, and he slept.

MILES was awakened by an unearthly din. He rose from bed and looked out the window at shining sunlight. The clangor resolved itself into the jangle of the Tramparas House breakfast bell. Miles yawned, stretched, and dressed slowly.

After breakfast he strolled out on the street, feeling that since he was in town he might as well look it over. Miles knew that he had no close friends in Tramparas, but there were one or two people that would be glad to see him and that he would be glad to see. There was Colin McFee and his wife, Bridget, for example. McFee ran a blacksmith shop and Bridget ran her husband and a neat white vine-covered cottage.

At the barn when Miles stopped to inquire after Sucker's welfare, the hostler had heard the news of the killing. Indeed the wagon that had hauled the beef and Frenchy's remains was in the wagon yard next the livery. The hostler asked questions that Miles answered briefly.

"They put Frenchy down in jail," the hostler said, accompanying Miles out into the wagon yard. "Cold enough for him to keep, I reckon. You goin' to testify at the inquest?"

"That's what I'm here for," answered Miles, "What was Frenchy's last name?"

"Belland," said the hostler. "He lived down in the Gonzalitas, about the end of the Sabios. Had a place down there."

"Any kin?" Miles asked.

"I heard he had a daughter," replied the hostler. "Here's the wagon."

For the moment Miles did not look at it. He was remembering, suddenly, the terrorized man on the bunk, and the words, harshly whispered, that Frenchy Belland had spoken: ". . . Promise you'll look after her?"

"How old was the kid?" asked Miles.

The hostler shrugged. "I don't know. I never seen her," he countered. "Look. They never took the beef out; must've just taken the hide."

Miles saw the carcass of a butchered beef in the wagon bed and noted bloodstains, too, some of which Miles knew had not come from the butchered animal.

Leaving the hostler at the wagon-yard gate Miles went back up the street. As he walked his hand moved over the rough stubble beard on his chin and cheeks.

The barber shop was empty of customers.

"Shave?"

"And a haircut," supplemented Miles Trask.

The barber was small, dark and voluble. In his talk he referred to himself as "Tony," and Miles, scanning a week-old paper while his hair was being clipped, saw that its mail address was *T. Rosetti, Tramparas.* Tony was filled with speculations about the death of Frenchy Belland and these he poured into Miles' inattentive ears.

Miles answered Tony's voluble questioning with disinterested grunts and eventually Tony relapsed into silence. Forty-five minutes later Miles emerged, clear-cheeked, his hair cut, and with time on his hands.

At a loose end, he strolled on down

the street, making toward the raw yellow paint of the depot.

It was new. The railroad had reached Tramparas since Miles had left town. A whistle sounded, faint and indistinct, and with a grin of amusement at his own interest, Miles hastened his gait.

At the depot there was a little crowd of loafers. Five years before these same men, or others like them, would have gathered to see the arrival of the stage, but now they went to the railroad station. Miles lounged against a corner of the yellow building and watched the track. So occupied, he failed to see the arrival of a buggy drawn by a shining team of bay geldings and driven by a woman. It was not until he heard his name called that Miles looked up.

HE COULD not repress a start when he saw the driver. Her dress was modish; the sleeves of her coat were puffed at the shoulders and tight at the wrists; her hat was set back on her head so that the smooth brown roll of her pompadour was exposed. She was leaning forward toward Miles. Ellis Heming called again. "Miles! Miles Trask!"

Outwardly Miles' composure was unbroken but inwardly he was in a turmoil. Ellis Heming was the woman he had loved— the woman who, years ago, had promised to marry him. Miles had kissed those parted lips and looked into the depths of those blue eyes.

With his heart pounding he walked slowly toward the buggy.

"Why, Miles," Ellis Heming began, holding out her gloved hand, "when did you come back to Tramparas?"

"I came in last night, Ellis," answered Miles, the name slipping familiarly from his lips. He was looking up at the blue eyes.

"I knew that you hadn't been here long," Ellis Heming stated. "You would have come to see me, wouldn't you, Miles?"

"Why . . ." Miles began.

"We're living in town." Ellis did not permit Miles to complete his reply. "Phil and I have a house here. I've just come down to the depot to meet him."

"Phil's been away?" Miles found refuge in the question.

"To El Paso." Ellis pouted prettily. "I wanted to go with him but he wouldn't take me. Isn't that mean, Miles?"

That did not call for an answer. Miles stood beside the buggy, waiting, wishing that he could get away and yet not wanting to go.

"Are you going to be here long?" Ellis asked.

"For a while." Miles answered. "How is Mr. Ryland, Ellis?"

"Dad is just as usual." Ellis looked away and then back again to Miles. "He and your uncle are together in business of some kind. What are you doing in Tramparas, Miles?"

"I'm on business," said Miles, remembering why he was in town. "I'm riding fence down in the Gonzalitas."

Ellis Heming made a little moué. "Then we won't see much of you," she remarked. "I thought that . . ." The train whistled again, nearer now. There was a plume of black smoke down the track.

Miles took a step back. "Here comes the train," he announced needlessly. "I'll—"

Ellis gave him dismissal. "You must come to see us, Miles," she said absently. "Be sure to come before you leave. Phil will want to see you, I know."

Miles took another step back and put

on his hat. "Thanks," he replied dryly. "I'll see Phil."

The woman nodded and Miles, walking slowly, went back to the corner of the depot. As he reached it he saw Whitey Arburg standing beside the depot door. Whitey was scrutinizing Miles, his pale eyes expressionless.

"Got the time set for the inquest yet?" Miles asked.

"One-thirty," stated Arburg. "At the jail."

Miles nodded. With the engine snorting and couplings clanking, the train drew into the depot and stopped.

There was a flurry of arrivals and departures. Miles saw Phil Heming, tall and dark, descend from the car platform and cross the cinders to the waiting buggy. With a twinge Miles saw him climb up to the buggy seat, kiss Ellis, and take the reins from her hands. A loiterer who had held the team when the train arrived, stepped back and Miles watched the buggy back out, turn, and drive away. When it was gone he turned back to the depot platform.

A LITTLE crowd was on the platform, a hack driver and a man and a woman who, from their clothing, were plainly from the East. Miles was puzzled as he looked at the face of the newcomer. He had seen that face somewhere but he could not be sure where. Then the man moved and with the gesture the question in Miles' mind was answered. The last time he had seen that face it had been against another background and setting and the face had been white and drawn with fear, albeit firmly set to face the danger. Another figure caught Miles' eye—a hump-backed man, one shoulder higher than the other, who limped forward and spoke to the Easterners. At Miles' shoulder Arburg's drawling voice asked a question.

"Benbow Trask. Yore uncle?"

Miles ignored the question. He was watching Benbow shake hands with the Easterner, watching Benbow remove his hat and bow awkwardly to the woman. Benbow Trask turned and as his eyes met Miles', they gleamed with recognition. Speaking hurriedly to his companions he limped forward, stopping before Miles.

"You got my letter?" Benbow Trask queried, directly.

Miles shook his head. He had no word from his uncle; his throat was filled with anger.

"How long you goin' to be in town? Where you stoppin'?" Benbow flung the questions at Miles.

"As long as I please," Miles found his voice to answer. "I'm at the hotel. You—"

"I got to see you," Benbow said hastily. "I'll come over this afternoon."

He did not wait for Miles to reply but turned and stumped back to the man and woman who were waiting for him. Miles stared after his uncle. What did Benbow Trask want? Why had Benbow come to him? What had Benbow meant about a letter?

Again Arburg drawled at Miles' elbow. "I reckon he's kin," said Arburg.

Miles turned to the deputy. "I'm going uptown."

"I'll just walk along," Arburg offered. Arburg's steady stride held him apace of Miles' vigorous military gait. As the walked they heard the train pull out, its whistle shrieking for a crossing.

"I take it," Arburg remarked casually, "that you an' Benbow don't hitch so well. Huh?"

"You can take anything you want to," Miles retorted.

There was silence for a moment and then the deputy spoke again. "Uh-huh," he drawled, "I can."

Since it was Sunday, there was little activity on the streets of Tramparas. Now that the train had come and gone the town was utterly lifeless. The stores were closed; so were the blacksmith shop and the saddlery. Only the hotel, the livery stable, the saloons, and a gaunt white building on a corner, showed some animation. As the two walked along, a bell pealed in the white church.

Arburg spoke again. "You goin' to church?"

Miles shook his head.

"I'll leave you then," said Arburg. "I'm goin'. You be at the jail at one-thirty. We'll get the inquest 'tended to."

Standing on the corner, Miles saw the deputy's tall figure swing off, cross the street and mount the steps to the church. When Arburg had disappeared inside, Miles turned and went slowly back to the hotel. He couldn't figure Arburg, he couldn't figure him at all.

MILES ate a barely palatable dinner at the Tramparas House. He was leaving the dining room when the two Easterners appeared at the door. The man hesitated when he saw Miles, seemed about to speak, and then, apparently not sure of himself, passed on. The girl had caught the man's hesitation and glanced curiously at Miles as she passed.

Miles, walking down the corridor to his room, wondered why the man had not spoken. After all there was no reason for him not to speak and every reason why he should. Miles grinned wryly as he recalled the Easterner's name—Lester King. King had been a lieutenant in a troop of volunteer cavalry stationed next to Miles' outfit in the Philippines. Lester King would not be here or anywhere else on the earth if it had not been for Miles Trask. Miles shrugged. Perhaps King was remembering the difference between an officer and a sergeant, or perhaps the difference between a silk-stocking, volunteer outfit and a hard-bitten bunch of regulars.

There were a number of people in the little jail office when Miles arrived a little before the time appointed. The coroner's jury of six that Arburg had summoned sat stiffly on a row of chairs, and Arburg and Irish Keleher and Pond stood in a corner, forming a little group. Asa Ryland, ruddy of cheek, his eyes showing red like the eyes of a blooded hound, was behind a desk. Miles spoke to Ryland, nodded to two jurymen he knew and shook hands with another, Colin McFee, the broad-shouldered, wide-faced blacksmith. McFee's face brightened as he greeted Miles. And Miles knew that this was the first authentic welcome he had received since he had reached Tramparas.

There was no time for talk. McFee had scarcely spoken his welcome before Ryland, acting as Justice of the Peace, opened the proceedings. The jury, one by one, filed solemnly through a corridor and into a cell where lay the remains of Frenchy Belland. When they returned Arburg was called to testify.

His story was brief. Acting on a tip, he had deputized Bud Pond and Irish Keleher to accompany him. They had followed Frenchy Belland from his home to a corral hidden in the Don Sabios. There Belland had penned and killed a steer that bore the Three Dollar brand. Arrested while he dressed the beef, Belland had given up without

resistance and the three deputies had put the beef and the hide in Belland's wagon and started for Tramperas. The dust storm made it impossible to proceed further than Cap Hall's shack on the Comanche; they had stopped there and found Miles Trask. When the dust storm subsided they had all gone on. Belland had made a break to escape and Pond had shot him.

"He'd 've got away in the dust that was blowin'," Arburg testified. "Pond had to shoot him to stop him."

The hide of the butchered Three Dollar steer was offered in evidence and the jury examined it. Miles watched them as they turned the hide, looking at the brand. There was, on the branded side, another mark, a small pothook which none of the jurymen seemed to notice. A blacksmith, a saddle maker, two merchants and two clerks from general stores would not be apt to spot anything so out of the way. Miles wished that the flesh side of the hide would be shown. He would have liked, from pure curiosity more than from any other reason, to examine that side of that hide. It was odd, Miles thought, that the Three Dollar should use a mark identical with the one Primo Sisneros branded on cattle he was giving his son.

KELEHER and Pond, called in turn, corroborated Arburg's story, and then Miles was called. He took oath and Ryland began the interrogation.

"You were in Hall's house when the posse and their prisoner came in?"

"I was," Miles answered.

"What were you doing there?"

"I was waiting for the storm to let up."

Ryland cleared his throat. "Was there any special reason for you to be at Hall's?" he asked.

It seemed to Miles that the question was out of line. "I was headed for Tramparas," he answered, and then added, lest other questions he might not avoid be asked: "I'm riding fence out of the Coffin camp. I'd decided to ride in to town. It was Saturday."

Ryland nodded. "I see," he said. "Riding fence. Yes. Now, tell us what happened at Hall's and afterward."

Briefly Miles told the rest of his story. But he didn't speak of Frenchy Belland's fear of death or of the promise he had made the dead man. He told of leaving the shack, of Belland's horse bolting and of Pond's dismounting and shooting. "When we came up, Belland was dead," Miles said, finishing.

"Ah . . ." Ryland stared at the ceiling, "in your opinion was it necessary for Pond to shoot? Could he have stopped Belland without shooting?"

This was a poser. If Miles answered, "Yes," he allied himself with Arburg and with Pond and Keleher. If he said, "No," he put himself in jeopardy. So Miles did not answer at all.

"In Pond's place," Ryland continued smoothly, "would you have shot Belland?"

Miles saw that Pond was looking at him, his eyes red with a glint of warning in them. Arburg was placid but Keleher looked uneasy.

"I wasn't in Pond's place," said Miles. "I don't know what I'd have done."

"I see." Ryland appeared to consider and Miles wondered if more questions were coming. The justice turned toward the jury. "Are there any more questions, gentlemen?"

Two of the jurymen wanted minor points cleared up. Then the jury adjourned and within a short time returned. Frenchy Belland, according to the jury's verdict, had met his death at

the hands of an officer while trying to escape and no censure was accorded the officer. Ryland thanked the jurymen and excused them.

The crowd in the jail office broke up and Pond, pushing close to Miles Trask, growled, "Next time yo're asked a question, you answer it right, cowboy!" There was still the dangerous glint in his eyes.

Miles looked at him speculatively. Pond was bad. How bad, Miles wondered. At the door men stepped back, pushing away. There was a sudden flurry of excitement and through the men at the door came a slight, boyish figure. Men gave back right and left. Miles stared at the girl; at her bib overalls, battered felt hat, broken boots, and bulging coat. She stood in the doorway, her dark eyes flashing, red lips fiercely parted, the smooth olive of her cheeks flushed.

"Where is my father?" demanded the girl. "Where is Frenchy. If you've hurt him, you . . .!"

A man tried to catch her swiftly moving arm but the girl flung his hand away, turning on him. "Where's Frenchy?"

No one intervened after that outburst. The men in the room looked sheepishly at Ryland, waiting for him to answer the question. The girl fell silent, panting a little, her breast rising and falling beneath the coarse blue of the overall denim.

"Your father," Ryland said slowly, "is dead, Jackie. He was killed by an officer performing his duty."

THE girl took the announcement bravely. She seemed to shrink in the too-large overalls, her body slumping. Then, with an effort she gathered herself together.

"What officer?" she demanded.

There was no need to answer that question. The men were looking at Bud Pond. The girl followed the direction of their glances and straightened again.

"You!" she spat. "Bud Pond!"

Pond's broad hand shot out to slap the girl's smooth cheek. She reeled under the impact, clawing at Pond. Long red marks appeared on Pond's forehead. Men grappled with the girl, catching hold of her arms. Pond, his fist doubled, stepped in. But there was a hard body between Pond and the girl. Miles Trask had crowded forward. Now he stood facing Pond, caution forgotten. His hazel eyes, almost green, were hard as his open hand sent Pond staggering back.

"Easy!" commanded Miles Trask. "Take it easy!"

Pond caught his balance and raging, came forward. The cold, blue snout of a gun stopped him. Miles held the gun low, his elbow braced against his ribs.

"Did you want something, Pond?" grated Miles, his voice low.

Arburg had caught Pond and was holding him. Keleher came up on the other side, pushing him. Behind Miles, the girl, her rage burned out, was sobbing.

Arburg broke the silent tension that filled the room. "If yo're lookin' after her, get her out of here," drawled Arburg, his voice completely expressionless.

Miles had put the gun he held back in its holster under his arm, looking at Arburg, at Pond, and at Keleher with a long, hard look.

"I am looking after her," he warned, "and don't forget it."

He turned then. Jackie Belland was leaning against the doorjamb, weeping, the men who had held her standing clear now. Gently Miles put his hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Come on, Jackie," he urged. "Come on away."

CHAPTER IV

FRENCHY'S GIRL

THERE were three steps between the board sidewalk and the door of the jail. Miles Trask, his arm around Jackie Belland, half led, half carried her down the steps. At the bottom he paused. His promise to Frenchy Belland that he would look after his daughter worried him; he had so little idea of how to keep it. Miles did not have any great amount of money. He had his salary from the Sanitary Board and he was allowed a small drawing account, but that was all. He could not take Jackie Belland to the Coffin camp with him and he had no home in Tramparas, no place to take her. The hotel offered the only refuge and Miles was not anxious to take the girl there. Jackie was sobbing against his shoulder, lost in her grief, the fire all gone out of her. Miles stood, hesitating.

Men came out of the jail and down the steps—the coroner's jury freed from their service. They passed by Miles and the sobbing girl with eyes curious and faces set. They had no sympathy for a rustler's daughter, or for the man who had befriended her. Miles paid these men no heed. He was trying to comfort the girl, to check her weeping. A hand fell on his arm and he looked down to where Colin McFee stood beside him, a mixture of emotions on his face.

"Bring her along," ordered McFee. "We'll take her to Bridget."

Here was an answer to Miles' problem, yet—

"Will Bridget—?" he began.

"Bridget will look after her," assured McFee firmly. "Come, girl. Come with me. Come on, Miles!"

The girl clung to Miles. He was her rock in this strange world of grief she had entered. Miles put his arm about her shoulders, and docilely, like a child, she walked by his side, Colin McFee stalking grimly ahead, his narrowed eyes daring the curious to speak. A dour man, the little blacksmith, when his feelings were touched. The three went down the street and to the corner, and then turning, left the main thoroughfare of Tramparas. Two blocks from the jail Colin turned it at the gate of a small white cottage and hurrying ahead, opened the door. As Miles led the girl through the door a big woman, her cheeks apple red and her blue eyes bright with curiosity, appeared.

"Miles!" she exclaimed. "What—"

"Here's a girl, Bridget," interrupted Colin McFee. "Her father's been killed, an' she has no place to go. We brought her here. You'll look—"

But Bridget McFee already had one plump arm about Jackie and had taken the girl from Miles. "Come with Bridget, darlin'," the big woman crooned. "Come with Bridget an' cry your little heart out if you like." Together the two women disappeared into the bedroom off the hall. Miles turned to face the little blacksmith.

Colin McFee took a long breath. "Now," he said harshly, "let's have the truth, Miles!"

Miles considered his friend. He knew McFee and liked him. In a measure he trusted McFee but he must trust him further. "This is one-time talk, Colin."

"When did I ever blab a secret?" McFee demanded. "Sit down an' tell me."

Together the two went into the little living room. Miles put his hat on the floor and sat down.

"Frenchy Belland was murdered, Colin," said Miles Trask. "I'll tell you."

McFee listened carefully. Miles held nothing back. If he was to confide in Colin McFee he would tell him the whole story with nothing at all withheld. Everything or nothing, Miles thought grimly, as he talked. When he had finished he waited for the little blacksmith to speak.

McFEE was a slow man, part Irish, part Scotch. He took his time thinking over all that Miles had said, then he delivered his opinion. "I'll get that jury together," he said, finally. "We'll change that verdict fast enough."

"And kill any chance of my doing what I have to do," asserted Miles. "How far will I get when the word goes out of why I'm in the country?"

"You value a man's life less than you do the job you're doin'?"

Miles spoke slowly. "Frenchy Belland is dead," he said. "Can you bring him back? I held my peace and told my story at the inquest. I told the truth but not all of it. Give me time, Colin."

McFee paused. There was another thoughtful silence while McFee assimilated this new point of view. His head nodded. "I'll not talk then," he said. "You'll leave the girl with Bridget an' me. We've none of our own an' we'll welcome her. But Miles—"

"Yes?" said Miles.

"When you get to the bottom of this, I want in on it," said McFee. "I want a hand. Do you promise?"

"I promise," agreed Miles.

Bridget came from the bedroom holding a finger to her lips. "The poor child has cried herself out," she whispered. "How did you come by her, Miles? How—?"

Miles picked up his hat and rose to his feet. "Colin will tell you, Bridget," he answered. "I've told him all about it."

"But you're never goin'?" Bridget still whispered but there was command in her voice. "You've just come, Miles. You—"

"I have to go to the hotel," interrupted Miles. "Benbow wants to see me. Then I have to ride back to camp. I'll be in before I go."

Bridget had to be content with that and Miles shook hands with Colin who accompanied him to the door. Miles paused.

"I want to give you some money," he said. "I want to leave some—"

"No!" McFee snapped. "We always wanted a child, Bridget an' me. We've never had one. Now—in a sort of way—we have. We'll look after her, Miles."

"Then," said Miles, "I'll pay for Belland's funeral. I—"

"That you can do," agreed McFee. "I'll 'tend to it for you. Bridget is wantin' me. Goodbye, Miles."

Leaving the cottage Miles retraced his steps toward the center of the town. It was past three o'clock and he had twenty-five miles, a three hour ride, between himself and the Coffin camp. Benbow Trask, Miles decided, could go to the devil; Miles would pay the hotel bill, get Sucker, and pull out.

BUT Benbow Trask was waiting for him at the hotel. He limped across the lobby as Miles entered, and held out his hand. Miles seemed to fail to see that extended hand, and after a moment Benbow dropped it awkwardly.

"I want to talk to you, Miles," Benbow said.

"We can go back to my room," Miles said, gruffly.

They walked across the lobby and down the hall to Miles' room. Inside, Benbow seated himself on the only chair and Miles walked across to the bed and sat down. "Well?" he said.

"I wrote you a letter," began Benbow, tentatively. "I wanted you to come home, Miles. Did you get the letter?"

Miles shook his head.

Benbow's voice was conciliatory. "I'm gettin' old, Miles," he said. "I'm not so spry as I was, an' my heart ain't actin' right."

"You're spry enough."

Benbow shrugged that aside. "You've held it against me that I took what was mine," he said. "Your father an' me were partners. When he died, I took over. You weren't of age an' I was executor. I—"

"I've heard all that from you and Ryland," interrupted Miles. "You stole what was mine, Benbow."

"I've held your part in trust for you." Benbow got up and walked to the window, turned and faced his nephew. "You don't know, Miles. You don't know how hard the cow business has been."

"I know that you've sold cattle that belonged to me," returned Miles. "I know that Ellis Heming and I would be married if it weren't for you. You cheated me, Benbow. Now what do you want?"

"I want you to come home, Miles." There was a wheedling note in Benbow's voice. "I want you—"

Miles Trask got up from the bed. "You want me where you can cheat me again!" he flared. "You want something that I've got. You can't have it. I don't know what it is you want but whatever it is, I'll keep it."

"Now, Miles," Benbow began, spreading his hands in a gesture that was meant to conciliate.

"To hell with you, Benbow," Miles grated. "You got all you'll get from me except a funeral. I'll pay to bury you, Benbow, and be glad to do it. Get out of here!"

He had moved across the room as he spoke and now he jerked the door open. There was a man in the corridor, a fat, paunchy man—Sam Warfler. Warfler moved as the door opened, turning to go down the hall, but with one quick step and a reaching arm Miles halted the fat man's progress.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded sternly. "Listening, weren't you?"

Warfler struggled to get out of Miles' grasp. Failing, he stammered an alibi. "I—I come back to see if you was leavin', Miles. I—"

"You came back to listen!" Miles snapped. "I hope you heard what you wanted to. Get out, Benbow, and take your sneaking witness with you. Get out!"

He shoved Warfler against the opposite wall of the hall and turned to Benbow. Benbow Trask had come out of his chair, his face angry, his bushy eyebrows drawn down in a scowl. "Miles!" he snapped.

"Get out!" ordered Miles Trask again.

Slowly Benbow moved away, limping toward the door. At the door he paused, turned once again, and opened his lips to speak. "You—" he began.

Miles had turned his back. He stood by the bed, stolid, unmoving. Benbow paused by the door and then still scowling, stepped on into the hall. Miles could hear his limping step retreating down the corridor.

When Benbow was gone Miles crossed the room, through the door and down the hall to the lobby. Warfler was behind the desk when Miles en-

tered and Warfler moved nervously as Miles walked over to the desk.

"How much do I owe you?" Miles demanded curtly.

"Two dollars," answered the hotel man. "I come down to see if you was goin' to stay, Miles. Honest."

Warfler's eyes clung unhappily to his, and Miles, feeling uncomfortable, looked quickly away.

"Don't lie," Miles ordered, putting two silver dollars on the desk.

From the Tramparas House Miles went to the livery barn where he had Sucker saddled. Miles mounted and rode to Colin McFee's cottage. Colin was not at home but Bridget told Miles that Jackie was sleeping and so, content with that knowledge, Miles started out of town.

BUT he was not yet to leave Tramparas. He had ridden back toward the main street and had turned east toward the road that led down Gonzalitas hill when he saw Asa Ryland and the two Easterners on the walk. Ryland called to Miles and Miles stopped.

Ryland walked briskly out into the street.

"Did you see Benbow, Miles?" he asked.

Miles nodded. "I did," he answered. His gaze was chill.

Ryland cleared his throat. "Are you going to the YT?" he queried.

Miles shook his head.

"I had hoped that you would," Ryland said.

"What does Benbow want?" Miles asked sharply.

That was the thing he couldn't figure out.

Ryland's face showed his astonishment. "I don't know what you mean," he answered. "Benbow—"

There was an interruption. King, the man from the East, had left the sidewalk and was approaching. He looked up to Miles and there was a smile on his face.

"Trask, isn't it?" he asked pleasantly.

Miles nodded.

"I thought so but I wasn't sure." King held up his hand. "I saw you in the hotel and was about to speak to you but you seemed to be in a hurry so I didn't. Can you come with me a moment? I want you to meet my sister, Grace."

"Why—"

"You know Trask then?" There was surprise in Ryland's voice.

"I should," returned King, warmly. "He saved my life."

Miles swung down from Sucker. King put his arm through Miles' own and together, with Sucker and Ryland trailing them, they went to the sidewalk.

King was blond, a pleasant-faced, blue-eyed, smiling man. The girl on the sidewalk was also fair and looking at her Miles knew that he had never seen anyone so beautiful.

He removed his hat and stood holding it while King made the introduction.

"Grace, this is the man I've told you about so often. This is Sergeant Trask. Trask, my sister, Grace King."

Miles managed a bow. Grace King held out one slender, gloved hand. "Lester has sung your praises, Sergeant Trask," she said, smiling. "I've wanted to meet you and thank you for what you did for my brother."

"Uh—" said Miles, embarrassed, "don't mention it. It was nothing—" He broke off, aware that both the Kings were laughing.

Miles reddened.

"Save my life and say that it was nothing," laughed King. "I like that! I tried to find you, Sergeant, after that day at Linao, but you were on patrol when I came to your camp, and the next day my outfit pulled out. We went directly to the transport and I've never had a chance to thank you for what you did."

"That's all right," Miles said quickly. "If I hadn't been there someone else would have done the business. I—"

"But perhaps that somebody else would not have shot so straight," interrupted King, and then, noting Miles' confusion, "I never expected to see you here. What are you doing nowadays, Trask?"

"Why," answered Miles, "I'm riding fence down below here. I sure never expected to see you, Lieutenant."

King smiled. "We're buying a place," he explained. "I've always wanted to be a ranchman and now it seems that I'm in a fair way to get my wish. Grace and I are dealing for— By the way, the man—"

Ryland interrupted. "I'm sorry," he said smoothly, "but if we are to see the party we have an engagement with, we must go on."

There was something pressed—something furtive and uneasy—in Ryland's speech. Miles' curiosity was aroused, but he asked no questions, instinctively playing the waiting game.

"Don't let me hold you," said Miles. "I was just riding out of town."

King nodded to Ryland and spoke to Miles again. "You'll be somewhere near?" he asked.

"Twenty-five to thirty miles," answered Miles.

"Come and see me." King caught Miles' hand with a firm grip. "I want to talk with you. I'm a greenhorn, you know, and I'd welcome advice. You can help me. Perhaps when I get a place we can do something together."

"Sure," promised Miles. "Sure. I'll be glad to help when I can."

Grace King smiled at him and nodded her head, and the three of them moved along the walk. Miles mounted Sucker and as he rode, wondered what King had been about to say when Ryland interrupted him, but that query was lost as he remembered Grace King, the way she looked, and the warm, friendly pressure of her hand. Miles almost forgot his business and the happenings in Tramparas, remembering Grace King.

RYLAND walking along the board walk, King at his left, looked curiously at his companion.

"I didn't know you knew Trask," he said.

"Trask saved my life," explained King. "I was a lieutenant in a regiment of volunteer cavalry. We were stationed at Linao on Mindanao in the Philippines. There was a troop of regular cavalry stationed next to us. Our horse lines were almost together. I'd gone to take stable call when a *juramentado* came in sight. He was whirling a *kris* and the natives began to shout, *'Amok! Amok!'* and dive out of the way.

The Moro slashed one of my men and I ran toward him. I had no weapon of any kind. I don't know why I ran at him. It was a crazy thing to do. Then out of the regulars' horse line stepped Trask. He was swearing at me and he pushed me back and stood in front of me. I've never seen anything like it in my life. He had a pistol and he unloaded it into that charging Moro as coolly as though he were on the target range. The *juramentado* dropped right at his feet and I'll swear that

Trask had fired six times in less than two seconds. It couldn't have taken more than that. Every shot was in the Moro's chest and you could have covered four of them with the palm of your hand.

"And all the time Trask was cursing me like a trooper."

Ryland grunted. "Killed him, huh?" he said.

"As dead a Moro as I've ever looked at," affirmed King. "Naturally there was a good deal of excitement at the time. I lost track of Trask. That night when I went over I found that his captain had sent him out on a two-day patrol and the next day we pulled out, as I told him. I hadn't seen him since until today."

Ryland said nothing and the three walked along in silence for a moment. "What kind of job does Trask have?" King asked curiously.

"Riding the drift fence," answered the lawyer. "It isn't much of a job."

There was that in Ryland's manner that deprecated, not only Miles Trask's immediate position, but his worth as a man generally. His tone said more plainly than words that a man who'd be content with a job riding fence couldn't amount to much.

Now why, King wondered, did Ryland wish to make him think less of Trask, of his opinions, of any advice he might give . . .?

King nodded decisively. "Then he is the man I need," he declared. "I'm sure of that, aren't you, Grace?"

"He looked like a man that would make a good friend," answered Grace King, quietly, "or a bad enemy. I think he is the man you want, Lester."

There was a pause.

"What do you mean?" asked Ryland.

"Grace and I have decided that we will get some Westerner to advise us," King answered. "We want someone who will be disinterested and someone that we can keep with us, at least until we learn something of the cattle business. Finding Trask here makes it easy. He is the man we want."

Ryland was looking straight ahead. He said nothing and King spoke again.

"Odd, isn't it?" commented King, "the man we've been dealing with, has the same name: Trask!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Resurrection in Paris

By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

Author of "Guns Over Gibraltar," "Keepers of the Peace," etc.

Prelude

UNDER the Pont d'Iéna, one of the many hump-backed bridges which cross the Seine as it winds its snaky way through Paris, the man crouched on a cement ledge a few feet above the turbid waters. He was penniless, he was desperate, and closing in on him were detectives from the Sûreté Generale, and *agents de police,* armed with a complete description of his weird appearance and ordered to capture him dead or alive.

Forty-eight hours of dodging pursuit, and a gnawing hunger, had left him too weak to go farther, and he had crept under this bridge more as a protection against the drizzling cold rain than with any idea of further postponing his fate. He drew the thin garments of the guard he had half-killed closer about him, and forced his tired brain to consider the decision he must make. It was, after all, a simple problem.

Should he submit to recapture, knowing it meant death in a slow and cruel manner, or should he take his courage in his two hands and jump into the water gurgling

Complete Novelet

about the cement pilings below him?

There was an alternative: to fight the police until a merciful bullet brought oblivion.

This appealed to him. He wanted to live with a savage intensity that was born of hatred and a desire to be avenged against those who had brought him to this pass. So he could not give them the peace they desired by destroying himself. Yet the thought of going back to La Chaizes' with all its slow torture made him shudder.

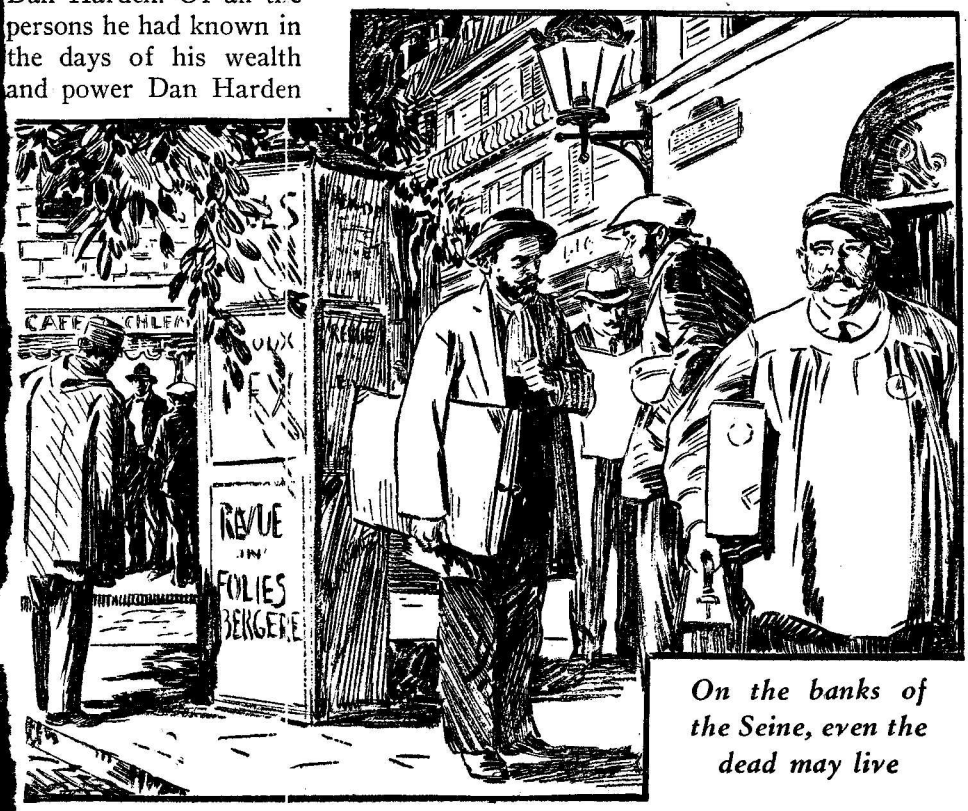
A wave of futile fury shook him. Was there no way he could escape this finale of death or unendurable imprisonment? For the hundredth time his brain sheered away from death and its implications and set itself to scheming.

Ah, if he could only get word to Dan Harden. Of all the persons he had known in the days of his wealth and power Dan Harden remained the only man to aid him. Yet, with this horrible face, to show himself anywhere was to invite instant capture. He—

He drew his tired body rigid, braced. Fear struck through him like a sharp knife.

Someone was climbing down to come under the bridge. So! The police had found him at last, found him weaponless and with scarcely room to stand up and swing his fists. He shrank back, flattened himself against the cement piling in the hope of avoiding the prying eyes. His heart pounded and his eyes strained through the darkness.

He saw the silhouette of the newcomer against the sheen of Paris lights on the water. A small, slender shadow. He tensed his tired muscles for the ultimate battle. Closer and closer drew



On the banks of the Seine, even the dead may live

the figure until it stood just beyond arm's reach from him. Here it paused. He waited for the flashlight and its exposure but the revealing light did not come.

Instead a vagrant breath of wind brought him the faint, sweet scent of perfume; his ears caught the brief sob of an unmistakenly feminine voice. He waited tensely.

The girl stared at the water as if fascinated, leaning outward until he thought she must fall in. He knew she was screwing up her courage for the final jump.

Suddenly she laughed bitterly and spoke aloud. "If I wasn't so hungry I could do it easy, but if I wasn't hungry I wouldn't want to do it."

She spoke in English and as she finished she had her courage all gathered and her knees bent slightly for a spring that would throw her too far from the stream's edge to reach back and save herself.

The man said quietly, "Shall we hold hands and do it together?"

SHE gave such a start that she might have fallen in if he had not reached out a steadying arm. She shrank back. "Who are you? What did you say to me?"

He remembered the many operations to disfigure his face. They had twisted his mouth into this horrid, perpetual grin, and interfered with his speech.

"You must listen carefully to what I say," he told her. "But I, too, am an American, and I thought we might jump together."

The puzzle of his slurred, almost choked words, took her mind from suicide.

"I got that," she said, "you're an American and you'd go in with me."

"Yes," he said. "When a man reaches the end of a rope that will stretch no more he must choke."

"Are you hungry, too, and haven't any money?"

"I am hungry," he assented, "but I have money—twenty million dollars."

"I couldn't laugh now even if that was funny. But you got my mind off jumping and I couldn't get up my courage again tonight to try it. Maybe I ought to thank you for that, but I doubt it."

A sudden sense of hope pouring in where no hope had been made an exquisite pain in his breast. There might be a way out of this yet.

"I was not joking," he spoke slowly, trying to articulate every word, "I have twenty million dollars of my own. I cannot get hold of it but one man could if I could get word to him—and find a place to hide until he reached me .... Do you have lodgings?"

"I have a hole in the wall on the Place des Martyrs, but only until tomorrow. I have nothing left to pawn." She came closer, tried to peer into his muffled features. "About this money—you do not sound as if you are joking."

"I am not joking, and you can save my life."

"And you don't sound cracked," she spoke half to herself.

A hoarse sound like laughter burst from his lips.

"There are those who say I am insane, but I am not. I swear it." He paused. "Yet I am pursued by the police for something I have not done. I am tricked out of my money and unless you help me I either die in that water or by a bullet, for I will not go back."

There was some quality to his tortured speech that made her say suddenly, "Why, you poor man! All this is true, and you are suffering."

The fact that she had found some one in worse straits than herself lifted her own soul from the depths. She felt of him. "You're wet. You're cold. At least I can get you in out of the rain, and give you a place to sleep." She laughed genuinely. "That's something. A man once told me that he who sleeps, eats. And if we wait we always know what we can do. Come."

Yet she tottered going up and he caught her, braced her thin body. "I guess being hungry makes me giddy," she said.

They were out now where the light of the bridge illumined them both. She said, "A couple of bums, we are! I guess I'm not so hot to look at now. You'd never think I was 'Miss Muncie of 1936'."

He stared into her thin, pale face, with wet yellow hair stringing around it. His own face until now he had kept muffled. But as his eyes found her steady stare, he suddenly snatched down the coat collar.

"You had better look now so you can change your mind," he said.

As the light beat downward on his pallid, twisted features, she stifled a gasp. The instinct to draw back made her start to shrink. But then her eyes came back to his—and held. Abruptly she thrust an arm through the crook of his.

"Let's get in out of the rain," she said gently.

He had seen people shrink in fear from his face. He had heard children scream during that long pursuit from Meaux. He had expected anything but this from her, and the reaction broke him. A sob tore at his throat.

She drew him steadily onward toward the Montmartre.

"My mother once said," she told him softly, "that people's bodies were simply houses in which they lived. Some houses were pleasanter to look at than others, but that people who lived in ugly houses might be nicer than anybody else." She hugged his arm with hers. "I saw something in your eyes—and I like you. Tell me about this man and what can be done to help you. It'll make us forget we're hungry."

* * *

I

DAN HARDEN fitted a wad of damp paper into the home-made slingshot (a thick rubber band stretched between two fingers) and was preparing to let go at a large lithograph of Hitler when Mademoiselle Trevier came in.

"*M'sieur!*" she said.

Dan drew his bead. "Yes, *mademoiselle,* one franc will get you two I hit him under the cowlick."

"M'sieur Touchard has come in and desires your presence," she said.

Dan drew the paper wad back, and let go. The loud, wet *spat* was followed by the vanishment of Hitler's mustache; hidden by the spattered paper wad.

"You should have taken the bet," Dan said. "Then I would have owed you forty-seven francs instead of forty-five."

As he rose she came to him, her face troubled. She was old, she was fat, and short; and the dark down of a mustache dyed her upper lip. Dan kept her on for these reasons: he hated all women, and pretty women most of all.

"*M'sieur,*" she said sadly," is it true that the International Surety Company is no more? That we shall be without jobs? I have been here twenty-six years, and at my time of life to find

another position . . ." her lips quivered.

Dan patted her arm kindly. "The company is in a bad way, *mademoiselle,* just between you and me. But Papa Touchard is a genius. He will find new financing. We shall go on. Do not lose hope."

She looked at him so trustingly that Dan was eager to leave, for he did not tell a good lie. He hurried through the offices of the International Surety Company ("We Insure Anything—Anywhere") and entered without knocking the private chamber of Papa Touchard.

Papa Touchard had hung up his black hat, his black overcoat and his black furled umbrella.

"It is the finish, *mon cher* Dan," he said sadly. "I have been to all the banks. I have even seen the Minister of Finance. They all say the same thing. We took bad risks in the Ethiopian business. And our claims in the Spanish civil war have been terrific. They know that we have no reserves to meet pending and prospective claims."

He sat down heavily. "Tomorrow or the day after we shall be in bankruptcy. I shall be as penniless as I was thirty years ago."

Dan Harden's habitual levity was absent now. Papa Touchard had been kind and splendid to him for the six years Dan had been employed as chief investigator of claims.

"Won't they let you float a new bond issue and guarantee it?" he demanded. "They know if we can tide this crisis we are in good shape."

"Certainly they know that," assented Papa Touchard bitterly. He pulled nervously at his white, spade-shaped beard. "But they want this business, Dan, some of those smart financiers on the Bourse. They will bid in our assets, reorganize and with new capital buy for a song a business worth millions."

"People are like that," said Dan "—plain poison. But haven't you any alternative?"

Papa Touchard laughed "They gave me an alternative. And what a one! They say that if I can show a reserve of twenty-five million francs by day after tomorrow they will guarantee a bond issue and let me go on. But where could I raise twenty-five million francs? Or twenty-five million *sous?*"

"Twenty-five million," muttered Dan. "A million dollars, American money. And if you had this you could pull through?"

"Easily. But where could I raise a million centimes?"

Dan sat down and began thoughtfully shooting paper wads at a portrait of Marshal Foch. Papa Touchard was too discouraged to stop this blasphemy against French patriotism.

Suddenly Dan grinned. "Twenty-five million francs, eh? All right, you'll have them." He rose. "I'll be back in an hour with the check."

PAPA TOUCHARD looked at this gay-hearted American incredulously. Then he relaxed, hopeless.

"Ah, Dan, it is impossible. I grant that you saved two million francs in that suicide affair in Shanghai. And the fraudulent murder in Singapore was a brilliant case. But twenty-five million francs out of thin air—"

"Leave it to me," cut in Dan.

"But how will you do it?"

Dan frowned slightly. "By practically going down on my knees to a girl who taught me that all women were treacherous two-faced beings, one face, the real face, being hidden by the paint."

He saw Papa scowl and resumed his own smile. "However, I would do more than that, Papa, for the man who took me in when I was broke and disgust

He went to the door, and suddenly paused. His grin became embarrassed.

"It is a long way to her house," he murmured, "can you loan me ten francs cab fare?"

The incongruity of a man seeking a loan of twenty-five million francs and needing ten francs caused even Papa Touchard to smile sadly. He gave Dan ten francs.

"I expect nothing, and hope for much." He sighed. "If only we had not had to pay that forty million franc death claim on Stephen Rayburn."

"The old guard never surrenders," Dan grinned. "In an hour . . ."

He got his hat, a new pearl-gray Borsalino of which he was proud, and went down to the Boulevard de l'Opéra. As he emerged from the door a ragged youngster hurried to him.

"Monsieur Dan," he said urgently, "they took my sister to the hospital this morning, and I have no money with which to buy my papers. Could you advance me a few francs?"

Dan looked into the bright blue eyes of the urchin, aware of the many times he had used the boy's shrewdness in investigating claims.

"So Julie is ill, Victor," Dan said. "when we are poor it seems that Fate heaps new burdens onto us . . . . Well, Victor, will ten francs do?"

The boy took the bill joyfully, thanked Dan, and hurried off to the offices of *Le Midi.* Dan stared after him for a space, then sighed.

"The walk will do me good anyway," he muttered.

As he strode toward the Champs Elysées, a young girl came from the opposite direction and darted into the insurance company offices. The doorman, tall and smart in his blue uniform, stopped her with his white-gloved hands. His eyes stared down his nose at her ragged beret, her ragged, torn coat with its tired old collar of cheap fur.

"Go away," said he.

In bad French she cried breathlessly, "But I must see Monsieur Dan Harden. It is a matter of life and death."

"For you to beg," the doorman sneered. "Such as you are not permitted within."

The girl broke loose from him and ran inside, but he caught her in three strides. Though she kicked and struggled and struck at him with her tiny fists, he hauled her back to the door. Brutally he hurled her out onto the sidewalk.

"*Allez,* you beggar," he cried angrily, "before I summon the police."

She had fallen down, and now, pale with the pallor of exhaustion, she dragged herself to her feet. One shoelace had burst. Another run had been added to her cheap stockings. For a space her face twisted as if she would burst into tears. Indeed, two large ones welled and trickled down her cheeks.

"The gracious French!" she said in English. "It's a tough country to be broke in!"

But then she remembered another person depending on her and her mouth tightened. "I'll see Dan Harden," she said grimly. "They can't throw me out all the time."

II

NORTH of the Champs Elysées and the Arc de Triomphe is a section of Paris called the Bois de Boulogne district where the really rich of this world have homes that are truly palaces, and have been used as such by kings on vacation. Here behind high walls to keep out the prying eyes of

more common souls live those who consider themselves poorly served with less than a hundred servants. These people pass their lives amidst a luxury unknown and unbelievable to the rest of us.

Dan Harden passed through the high, bleak wall that surrounded one of these palaces off the Avenue de la Grande Armée, mounting a walk that led to a house of seventy rooms whose architectural beauty had been created for an Indian maharajah.

There was this much difference between the time the Indian potentate had the house and now: as Dan passed up the landscaped vista, a man, obviously a private detective, jumped out of some bushes and stared at him coldly. As he approached the pillared entrance another man, also a detective, jumped out, and kept his eyes on Dan until the butler answered the summons.

Dan's humorous eyebrows went up. What did all this scrutiny mean? Fear, surely, but fear of what?

The butler's long hatchet face was cold. "I don't know if Miss Aiken will see you," he said.

"Well," offered Dan mildly, "why don't you go and ask her?"

The butler looked startled, then scowled.

"And," continued Dan, "while you're at it tell her to cut your livery full enough in the left chest to hide the gun and holster you've got hung from your shoulder."

As the butler scowled anew, Dan said, "You've got a swell pair of legs for silk hose, and the little ribbons on the knee breeches are simply divine."

"When do I laugh?" snarled the butler, "you half-baked comic?"

Dan said, "It's a scientific fact that horses lack the facial muscles to laugh; that's why they always look so sad."

The butler turned, trembling, and strode away. A footman, built like a wrestler came and regarded Dan coldly, as if afraid Dan would try to sneak inside.

Miss Marjorie Aiken reposed on a chaise longue in her private sitting room, a pile of unopened mail on a silver salver, a priceless coffee cup balanced in her hands. She was staring with unconcealed adoration at the sleek, saturnine young man who smiled so coldly upon her. His face was narrowed aristocratically, his black hair was parted in the middle, and his features were classically regular. Only the subtle glitter in his dark, restless eyes rebuffed you.

"A woman," said Marjorie, "is haywire emotionally. I know you're a swine, that you philander with other women nightly. I know you don't love me—that you only go through with this marriage to get the money you want. And yet I love you."

She laughed quietly. "I who have had princes and dukes and no less than Posoff begging at my feet."

"Ah," said Slee Mortry, "that was their trouble—they begged. You want someone who takes. Someone who knocks you off your feet. Someone who knows you as you are." He smiled. "You are not such a haughty blonde as they would believe. And yet your beauty and your coldness have brought you far."

"Yes," she assented, "farther than you think. So we will be married Friday—"

"If you have arranged for the marriage settlement."

"Yes," she nodded, "ten million dollars to you on Friday night—by signing my name. I have bought other things, but you—" she broke off and stared at the butler.

"A Monsieur Dan Harden of the International Surety Company to see you, *mademoiselle.*"

THE extended ash on Mortry's cigarette suddenly broke loose and fell on a priceless carpet. Marjorie Aiken dropped the Sevres cup with a crash. As sudden fear tugged at her, her eyes turned appealingly to Mortry. He had recovered and frowned at her.

"See him by all means, darling," he smiled, "I'll stay if you like."

"Please do," her voice had steadied, "show him in, Borodoff."

As the butler withdrew, Marjorie sprang up. "Do you think he knows, Slee? Does he know that the escaped maniac is—"

"Hush! Be still. If he knows we can do nothing about it. Meantime, let us find out what is in the wind. We have nothing to worry us yet."

"I—I—" she was beginning to shake.

Slee Mortry swore softly and poured her a drink of cognac from a decanter. "Down it, you idiot. This is coincidence. It must be. There was no way for Lepard to get in touch with Harden —not and escape capture."

All his cruel strength was in the grip with which he thrust her back to the chaise longue; all his dominance of her was in the glance he shot her.

OUTSIDE, Dan Harden began a parade through rooms which must have assayed thousands of dollars a square foot. Priceless tapestries, priceless furnishings—his feet sank into rugs that had come from the Sultan of Turkey's seraglio. One room was filled with Egyptian antiques. There were faience, scarabs and the gold death masks of long-dead pharaohs. Under glass was a curious chunk of pitch which showed nothing to indicate what its value could be except the prints of naked feet.

He saw Marjorie rising to greet him. She was tall, like some Greek statue, and the effect was heightened by the long sweep of the negligee she wore. He had always said she had what it took, and he knew it now, seeing her for the first time in years.

She said, "How-de-do?" all in one word.

"I was all right up to now," rejoined Dan. "I want to talk to you alone."

"Anything you could possibly have to say to me, my fiancé, Mr. Mortry, may hear."

"You just think so," Dan told her. "Should I tell him about—"

She cut in hastily. "Please leave us, Slee, my darling."

Mortry went out, giving them both a glance so shot with shrewdness and curiosity that Dan instantly marked the man as dangerous.

After the door had closed Marjorie said, "Are you trying to blackmail me now that I'm about to marry him?"

"About you being Maggie Aherne from south of the railroad track?" Dan rejoined. He shook his head. "No, Maggie."

"Then what do you want?"

"The loan of a million dollars to the International Surety Company for one year, the loan to be secured by the firm's good will and liquidating assets, and later, an issue of seven percent bonds."

"What makes you think I'd make such a loan?"

Dan shrugged. "When Stephen Rayburn crashed in his plane he left you twenty million dollars—you didn't even have to marry him for it. You just had to be his fiancée. Some men are suckers that way. You also got a million dollars

cold cash as death settlement from our company. So you've got the money. It's a good investment, and you'd save poor old Touchard's life. I'm asking you to do it."

His face was pale from the effort, but he had got it out. She smiled tantalizingly at him. She knew he didn't know what she had feared he knew, and she was supremely self-possessed and prepared to be cruel in this moment of triumph.

"Are you asking as the little Dan Harden who used to carry my books home from school?"

"No," said Dan, "you got over loving china dolls early."

"You don't want the money to fight my claim?"

"Why should I?" Dan's eyebrows went up. "Rayburn's dead, isn't he? I saw the corpse—I don't mind alluding to it because I know you just hooked him for his money. Anyway, we've settled—that's water over the dam. I want this as a loan."

He noticed her relaxation, and was puzzled. Then she laughed. "The answer is no, Dan Harden," she said. "And you don't know how much pleasure it gives me to be in a position to turn you down—and rub it in—when I could easily make the loan."

She flung back her head in laughter, her eyes blazing. "I've waited a long time for this moment, Dan, just a small payment on all I stood from you stuck-ups who used to look down on Maggie Aherne and her ragged dress and thick cotton drawers. It pays partially for the hours I waited table in a brakemen's boarding house while you were swanking it at law school, and coming back to parties I couldn't get invited to."

She narrowly watched Dan's face to see if she were hurting him. Seeing it impassive, she drove on to new lengths: "How I laughed when that snooty brother of yours broke the bank he was president of. And how I laughed when you took the blame and fled abroad to keep from testifying against him. 'The Ups come Down', I said, and I watched and I waited. And now comes my big chance."

The bland expression in his eyes drove her desperate.

"I know you've been keeping yourself broke sending back money to that brother of yours and the putty-faced girl he married! And now your company is going broke, and you'll be broke, and you can't send them any more money and they'll suffer. And that'll make me laugh!"

Dan carefully lit a cigarette and reached for his hat. "You were a little witch then, Maggie," he said, "and you're a big witch now. But you know me too well. You'll be Marjorie Aiken in Paris, and I hope Mortry beats you. He looks the kind that could and would."

"I'm on top here!" she cried breathlessly. "They all bow down to me. And yet, I'm feeling like Maggie Aherne now, and I'd like to slap your face!" She came a step toward him.

"Do it," said Dan softly, "I wish you would. I've never socked a priceless marble statue yet, and I'd like to see if your chin is as brittle as your soul."

She drew back. "Borodoff," she called, "Mr. Harden is going. If you throw him out I won't be angry."

Dan walked without haste toward the butler, and Borodoff bore down on him.

"Borodoff," said Dan, "you'd never have time to draw the gun. And a jaw like yours is sure to be broken."

Borodoff caught Dan's glance. He looked startled at what he saw, an

turned quietly to lead the way out. Dan followed without a backward glance.

Then Slee Mortry emerged from his concealment. "You were a silly fool," he said.

She knew it now She flushed. "I lost my temper."

"Only the stupid do that. However, it my be for the best. I've had a chance to observe this Dan Harden and I tell you he is dangerous. He knows nothing now. If our men can capture Lepard, he'll know nothing. But we must have Lepard and he must be—er—disposed of."

"Murder!" she spoke the word in calm fascination.

"Can one murder the dead?" Slee asked calmly.

"Ah, but—" she could not take her eyes off him nor finish her sentence when he looked at her that way.

"If, by some mischance, Lepard gets to Harden," Mortry went on evenly, "Mr. Harden will have to be cared for, too. Permanently. And I wouldn't mind —strangely enough," he laughed. "I think I could do it perfectly. And besides he insulted my future bride. He called you a witch, didn't he—my witch?"

III

"I'LL have crêpes suzettes to finish off, Armand," said Dan, "and you can charge the dinner—what we call in America, writing it on the cuff."

Armond Frederic, whose restaurant was famous from Shanghai's Bund to Leningrad's Nevsky Prospect, smiled.

"Zis writing on zee cuff, she is slang, eh?" he laughed, "but I say, M'sieur Dan, if she write on zee cuff, when weel you send cuff to zee laundry, eh?"

"As soon as Aunt Matilda leaves me her money," said Dan.

Armand Frederic went off to make sure about the dinner with his own hands, and Dan was glad, because when you're at your wit's end you want to be alone. He had failed Papa Touchard; he had bruised his pride by going to Maggie Aherne, and he was now without an idea as to where to raise even a million pennies and he dared not call Papa Touchard and tell the truth. There was the further fact that if the International folded up, he could not renew his work permit (a necessity for a foreigner to work in France) and he would have to go home. That meant more trouble over the bank failure, trouble for him, more trouble for Jim and Sybil and the three kids.

"Nuts *alors,*" he muttered, and whipping out the Paris edition of the *New York Herald* he tried to get interested in the story of the chase after the escaped homicidal maniac, Pierre Lepard. But he couldn't. The *potage pomme de terre,* made as only Frederic's could make it, didn't taste right: the pressed duck lacked its usual succulence, the salad had too much garlic.

He was trying to whip up his spirits with the crepes suzettes pulled hot off the alcohol heater beside his table when he heard the rumpus from the front end of the restaurant. He didn't turn around at first. The headwaiter's cry, "Such as you are not allowed in here," merely meant some newsboy or beggar.

But as the rumpus came closer, he turned in time to see the headwaiter darting furiously after a ragged, skinny young girl in dowdy clothing, her hair streaming around a pallid face. The girl almost reached him when the headwaiter grabbed her, one hand over her mouth.

"You for the police, *grisette,*" he growled.

Dan saw the girl snatch his new

Borsalino hat off the rack and stuff it under her moth-eaten coat.

"Hey, now," he said, rising swiftly.

The headwaiter and the girl reached the door. The headwaiter removed his hand, severely bitten, to use both arms to heave her into the street, As he hurled, she cried. "Mr. Harden. Mr. Harden! I've got to—"

She went out head foremost and sprawled across the damp sidewalk. The headwaiter whistled shrilly, then yelled, "Police!"

The girl scrambled to her feet, dragging Dan's Borsalino across the dirty walk. As the headwaiter yelled, "Police" again, she started staggeringly to run. Dan ran out the door.

"She's got my hat," he cried.

The girl did not have much of a start, and she was not running fast. As he got close to her, she whimpered in her throat, staggered and would have fallen backward if he hadn't grabbed her. Feeling his secure arms she sagged limply against him.

"It was the smell of that food in there," she muttered. "It just went to my head."

Then she looked up and in the street light saw Dan's face. Her own was ashen, her eyes covering half her face, it seemed, but at sight of his lean, tanned face, she suddenly smiled, then actually laughed.

"In spite of 'em!" she cried. "I swore I'd talk to you. And here you are."

"Here I am," said Dan, strangely amused, "so where's my hat?"

He suddenly realized with a jerk that they were talking in English. This girl was an American. She brought out the smeared hat which Dan eyed ruefully.

"I'm all right," she said. "Let loose. It was just the idea of eating my way through two feet of two-inch steak that knocked me."

She had an elfin spirit and an indomitable gallantry that somehow appealed to Dan. He straightened her up.

"All right," he said gently, "we'll go get the steak."

"No," she cried decisively, "the steak can wait. You've got to come with me. You've got to help the poor fellow. Otherwise he'll die."

"What poor fellow?"

"You should see his eyes," she said softly,"—like bitter holes in a pallid carpet. A smile that is fixed on—it gives you the creeps to see his eyes weep and that smile, smiling at you. He says he's worth twenty million dollars and that you are the only man in the world who can save him."

Dan saw she was serious. He didn't know what it was all about, but she intrigued him, and he needed to do something to keep from brooding.

"I said I'd bring you," she went on.

"I'll go, but first food."

She protested but he stopped at a little place called the Chop de l'Opéra where he often ate and came away with a half chicken and a foot or so of bread. In the taxicab she ate this with her fingers, eating with excited little sounds and sighs of utter joy. Dan had never seen anyone eat so hungrily.

"And who might you be?" he inquired as she worked along a drumstick.

"I'm Sally Barlow. 'Miss Muncie' of last year's vintage, the heiress apparent to Hepburn in the movies but it didn't jell. Dancing partner to a heel named Raoul Vincie, who brought me to Paris, saying we'd knock them cold. They knocked us cold, and Raoul chose a brunette with money—and here I am."

"You'd be lovely if you were fed and well-dressed," he said.

She stared coldly. "Eating and drink-

ing that way, Mister, isn't worth what it costs."

"Miss Muncie of 1936, with 1836 principles." Dan said.

"Maybe," she sighed. "This chicken makes me think you might be right. I'll save the rest for my friend. He's hungrier than I am, poor fellow. Hey—tell the driver to pull up over there."

THEY were in a dark, silent place, paved with wet cobbles, the bright dome of Sacre Coeur rising magnificently on their left. Dan paid the taxi-driver out of his last twenty-five francs—borrowed from Mademoiselle Trevier, and followed to a row of dilapidated dirty houses, their ground floors *bistros* of the cheapest sort. As he entered the hallway, he gasped and said, "Whew!"

"Don't sniff so," she whispered, "you get used to it and it won't kill you."

"It's strong enough to," said Dan.

They clambered breathlessly to the fifth and top floor where a dirty window gave out over the chimney pots and peaked roofs and faint crimson glow that is Paris by night. She rapped with a quick tattoo of knuckles.

"It's me, Sally," she called.

A key turned in the lock; the door opened hesitatingly and flung out a rectangle of yellow kerosene light. Framed in this yellow bath was a shrunken man with pure white hair and a face that looked like a clown's mask. One eyebrow was cocked satirically higher than the other. The mouth was a perpetual V of smirking smile. The cheeks were sunken and pallid. Only the eyes blazed with an agony that was shocking against the smirk of the grin.

"Dan Harden!" cried this caricature, only it sounded through his stiff, drawn lips like "Bam Har'n!"

"Yes," said Dan.

The caricature stared, waited, and then in a tortured voice said, "Don't you know me?"

Dan figured this out after a while. "No," he said, "I don't know you."

The cartoon tried to pull itself up straight. In a low voice it said, "I am Stephen Rayburn. I am the man you paid the million dollar death claim on ten months ago."

DAN reached for his rubber band, but he did not snap any paper wads. He stood plucking at the stretched rubber, making a sound like a tired cello.

"Stephen Rayburn," he said after a while, "was killed in the smash of his private plane near Senlis. I viewed the body before I approved the claim."

"You only *thought* you saw my body," said the clown-face tensely. "You really saw the body of a stowaway."

"You're Pierre Lepard, the escaped maniac, aren't you?"

"That's the name they search for me by. I am Stephen Rayburn. Oh, Dan Harden, will you listen to me? I've got to make you believe. I've no one else to turn to now." His eyes blazed. "When I escaped from La Chaize's sanitarium I went to Marjorie—at the house. I thought she would help me. She called the police. She summoned that cursed half-brother of mine, Slee Mortry. If they get me now they'll kill me."

Dan remembered the private detectives around Maggie's place; the butler with the gun. "I'll listen to you, man," he said softly, "tell me things."

"You believe me then?"

"No," said Dan. "How can I? Stephen Rayburn was young, twenty-six to be exact. You appear to be at

least fifty. Rayburn had black curly hair. Yours is pure white. Rayburn was handsome—I even thought so myself. Your face is—is what it is. Rayburn was six feet tall and you're two or three inches less than that. You don't look like Rayburn, sound like him, or act like him—and I have a memory for appearance."

"But still I am he," blazed the clown-face. "If you were confined to an underground cell too low to stand straight in, with water trickling off the walls, you'd be bent and your joints would ache. If you never saw daylight for ten black months your hair would turn white. If you had a swine like Dr. La Chaize operate on your face it would look like mine, not yours. If you had been half-starved, beaten, forced to sleep on a damp pallet without covering, forced to walk and stand in three inches of water you would perhaps die as they wanted me to die. Certainly you would look old beyond your years as I do."

Dan put away the rubber band. His gray eyes began to glow. "What happened on that plane?" he asked gently.

But Rayburn began further back than that. Now that he had Dan's attention words spilled so swiftly that his facial impediment rendered them sometimes incomprehensible. He began back when his father, Arthur Rayburn, inventor of the cathode tube, had died and left him twenty million dollars.

"We Rayburns were always fools about women. After my mother died my father married again, Cecilie Mortry, who already had a son, Slee. Before he died, my father found out what kind of a she-devil his second wife was, what a stinker Slee Mortry was. So his entire fortune was left to me, and ten thousand a year for life to Slee."

He broke back then to describe his own intense interest in Egyptology; how he had pursued his subject vigorously, financing digs himself, establishing himself as an authority on the twelfth and thirteenth dynasties. He had even met Marjorie at Luxor—and fallen madly in love.

"I was coming back from an important dig when it happened," he said. "We were flying back from Cairo where I had just made an important find, a Greek tablet that throws new light on Alexander's campaigns. I was flying back to marry Marjorie. Slee and myself and the two pilots. We flew by way of Crete, Athens and Brindisi. And if ever fortune played into Slee Mortry's hands it did then."

"How so?" asked Dan.

"Slee always hated me, first, because I got all the money he wanted. He has what you call a Napoleonic complex and he wanted money for power. He loved to exercise it. Second, he loved Marjorie—and I know now she loved him. I, like a fool, felt sorry for him. I took him with me. On the way back we stopped at Brindisi for gas and oil. Two things happened, one of which was that Slee got drunk and began to talk about Marjorie. By now the plane was on its way. Somewhere over France our quarrel reached the point of blows.

"Slee said, 'Money is wasted on a fool like you. You get everything and are entitled to nothing.'

"We fought, there in the cabin. And he tried to throw me from the plane. He had me half-stunned by a blow and actually was forcing me against the door. The door was opening against the pressure. In another second or so I must have been pushed out and fallen four thousand feet. But hands grasped Slee and pulled him away from me. It

wasn't the pilots, for they were in the cockpit ahead, and cut off from sight.

"What had happened was that a young professor from an Italian university, escaping Mussolini's arrest order, had stowed himself in the baggage compartment. He had seen and he came to help me. That should have been the end of affairs. Mortry had exposed himself. I told him I would never see him again—told him to keep away from me and mine."

Dan was watching Sally's eager young face. "Yes," he said.

"But it was not the end. Over Senlis something happened to the plane. The air was calm, but the plane shook and trembled and a motor tore off the port wing. We crashed."

The clown-face paused, rubbed at the V-smirk of his mouth as if to wipe it away.

"I have had hours to put together what happened then, although, being knocked out and somewhat smashed up I have no personal recollection. What happened was this: The two pilots were instantly killed. The stowaway, Cavacchi was either killed in the crash or murdered by Slee. In any case, he was dead. Do you see what happened then?"

"I've an idea," assented Dan, "but you tell it."

"Slee was not injured badly, and seeing me smashed and all the others dead, the plan must have occurred to him to win all at one throw. He stripped me, dragged me into the woods and hid me. If Cavacchi was not battered, Slee smashed his face beyond recognition. We were, unfortunately, about of a size. He dressed Cavacchi in my clothes. His body was passed off as mine. He was not listed aboard. No one thought to question. Some time that night—while I was just recovering consciousness, Slee had me taken to La Chaize's sanitarium near Meaux and incarcerated as a maniac named Pierre Lepard."

"It makes sense," said Dan.

"It is the truth. Mortry knew better than to murder me. Death entails relatives—police investigation. So he had me buried alive in that cell. La Chaize changed my face. They hoped, in a year either to kill me by disease and privation, or actually to drive me mad."

"And you had left your money to Marjorie," mused Dan. "Was that her idea?"

"Yes. She said flying around the way I was something might happen. She said she loved me so," he laughed bitterly. "So she got all."

"And now, marrying Slee," went on Dan, "he can get half—or ten million dollars—as a marriage settlement under French law; and the actual control of *all* the fortune. And by keeping you alive in a madhouse he held your living as a threat over her head to keep her true to her pact."

"She's mad about him. Such a precaution is unnecessary."

A SILENCE fell. Dan took out his rubber band and snapped it idly. Maniacs, as he had cause to know, developed extraordinary cunning. Many of these outstanding facts the clown-face could have obtained from the newspapers, and the rest, pieced together with a madman's cleverness made a plausible story.

"Sally," said Dan, "do you believe this?"

"Of course," she replied instantly. "Can't you feel the man's soul in what he says? Look at his poor face—here—you can see the scars where he was mutilated." She put a hand on Dan's arm. "Anyway, the story's too crazy

to be a lie. A man couldn't *think* that up."

The clown-face said, "You're the only man who can help me, Dan Harden. You're the only man who can prove that I'm alive."

"And you *can* prove he's alive, Dan Harden," said Sally. "It's in your jaw, in your eyes—in your heart."

"It would give Papa Touchard his million dollars, recovering that death claim," Dan admitted. "But when a man's officially declared dead—with twenty million dollars hanging in the balance—proving him alive takes some doing."

"His handwriting," said Sally.

Dan glanced at the bent stiff fingers. "Even if he could write his own hand, Mortry could buy plenty of handwriting experts to declare the signature a forgery."

"His friends?"

"I knew Stephen Rayburn," said Dan gently, "but I do not recognize this man. Nor his voice. Neither would they."

"You can have his face put back the way God made it."

"Yes," said Dan, "but the scars would show. Mortry's lawyers would swear that the face was plastically changed to resemble the dead man as part of a conspiracy. And the court, unless other evidence was forthcoming, would back up the charge. Damn it all, my dear, you can get murder done for a lot less than twenty million."

Her eyes showed the sudden fear of failure. "It's not fair—but—wait a minute!" she cried triumphantly. "What about fingerprints. They'd prove anything, wouldn't they?"

"Yes," said Dan. He examined the clown-face's fingertips and saw they were unscarred. "Are they on file anywhere?"

"No," said clown-face hoarsely, "they have never been taken."

Sally whimpered.

"Stephen Rayburn had several moles on his back," Dan said.

"I had them, too," nodded clown-face bitterly. "Only La Chaize burned them off—and left no scars."

There was silence then while the incredible truth made its impression.

Sally muttered, "Oh—how can you prove him alive, Dan Harden?"

IV

STEPHEN RAYBURN (to grant him that name) suddenly cried hoarsely, "But there *must* be some way. A man cannot be dead when he is alive."

"You don't know French law," muttered Dan. He put away his rubber band and suddenly stepped close to Rayburn. "Open your mouth—as wide as you can, anyway."

"That's it!" cried Sally. "See, he's got a gold filling on that tooth. Take X-ray films of his jaw. I read once where they proved a murdered man's identity that way."

"I had an impacted wisdom tooth which cost me part of the jawbone when they sawed it out," said Rayburn.

"What dentist?"

"Dr. Crosby on the Rue Scribe."

Sally squealed in delight. "I *knew* there was some way."

"It's a point," admitted Dan, "but not necessarily conclusive. Teeth alone would not be sufficient evidence in a twenty million dollar case unless supported by other evidence."

He paused, thinking very hard to recall every nuance of his visit to Marjorie Aiken's. He smiled grimly. "However, it's a place to begin. And we have one advantage: they're frightened and

perhaps do not know how strong their position is. We can always bluff."

They stared at him expectantly, Rayburn's eyes blazing like fire in his sunken cheeks. Dan fished in his pocket and came up with twenty francs.

"Eighty cents American to start a fight for twenty million dollars," he grinned. "The case has its moments at that. Well, muffle your face, Rayburn. You, too, Sally. We've got places to go."

"But—but I'd be in the way," Sally said. "I wouldn't want to—"

Rayburn swung on her. Suddenly he took her red, chapped hand and pressed it against the V-smile of his mouth.

"You'll come." His voice was low. "But for you—"

"Come," cut in Dan. "I'll go first and you slide down to the corner of the square where the taxi is."

As Dan emerged he saw the shadow emerge from the tree shadows across the street.

"Hurry," he called back. "Run for it if you must. I'll delay him."

He walked bluntly at the approaching figure. Closer inspection showed the kepi, cape and button sparkle of an *agent de police*. The officer tried to brush by. Dan blocked him off.

"Out of my way, you fool!" said the gendarme. "Who are those two?"

"My brother and his sweetheart," said Dan softly. "What interest is it to you, Monsieur officer?"

"*Arretez!*" called the gendarme. "It is that maniac, Pierre Lepard, we are seeking. I—"

He fell with a crash as Dan tripped him. "Oh, a thousand pardons," cried Dan, and fell atop the man in trying to help him up, and in the ensuing minute so snarled his legs with the man that neither could arise. It was palpably a trick, and worse yet, an old one, and the gendarme was furious when at last he got himself clear. His hand flew to his black box holster as Dan tried to dust him off.

"You did that purposely!" the man cried furiously. "You species of *vache* I'll—"

Dan leaped at the gendarme and grabbed the gun arm, holding it immovable. His own attitude completely reversed. "You are insulting, my man, and altogether too free in drawing a weapon. I'm Dan Harden of the International Surety Company, known to the Sûreté Generale, and you can't talk to me as you do your guttersnipes."

He started to relax his hold, thinking this would be enough. To his amazement the man started to raise the weapon again. "So if you're Dan Harden—" he began.

There was no time to lose. Dan swung a right hook with one hundred and eighty pounds riding behind it. The gendarme lit on the back of his neck and remained prone. Dan pocketed the gun and, running swiftly, overtook Rayburn and Sally just as they were entering the taxicab.

"Dr. George Wentworth, eighty-seven-bis Rue Passy," Dan muttered. "And hurry it!"

He leaned back, while the two breathlessly asked him what had happened.

"The man was not a real policeman," Dan said. "And I've been a fool! Mortry doubtless figured you'd try to get in touch with me, and had me watched, hoping to be led to you. That was his man. Now, Mortry knows we are together. He'll move heaven and earth to get you, not even stopping, perhaps, from calling in the regular police."

"Which would mean?" Sally asked.

"That they would throw me in the

hoosegow until I told where I had you hidden."

IT WAS a new danger that left them silent during the remainder of the ride into the Passy section. It was a roundabout ride during which Dan made certain they were not followed. Finally the cab halted before an old house next to a new modern apartment. He led the way to the door and rapped vigorously.

Dr. Wentworth, himself, gargantuan in size, his dressing gown a tent over a colossal stomach, came frowning to the door.

"Dan Harden!" he muttered. "I might have known any call after midnight would be you."

"Save it, Doc," Dan said. "Get inside. I'm about to fix it so you may go to jail long enough to slough off fifty or a hundred pounds."

He pushed Rayburn and Sally within quickly and shut and locked the door behind him. He cut the hall light and peered out. He saw nothing.

Dr. Wentworth watched all this quietly. He and Dan had killed many a quart of benedictine over chess games, keeping up a friendship which had begun when Dr. Wentworth was a consultant at the American hospital in Neuilly, and physician for the International.

"Jail?" he repeated.

"Jail," assented Dan. "This is Pierre Lepard, an escaped maniac, wanted for half-killing his guard with a stool. I believe him to be Stephen Rayburn upon whom Papa Touchard paid a million-dollar death claim. You're going to help me prove my point."

"Really," drawled Doc.

"Really. You'll put his face back together again as nearly as God had it originally, and get the arthritis out of his joints and stretch him to six feet. You'll dye his hair black and counsel his mind with good words and comfort. You'll keep him out of sight and not mention it to a soul." He paused. Then: "You'll buy the girl, Sally, here, a brand new outfit from silk undies out. You'll feed her up until she's as beautiful as she can be, which will be plenty. You'll keep her out of sight, too, and be prepared to foil any attempt at kidnapping—even to using a gun."

"And you—what will you be doing?"

"I'll be proving he's alive—and that will take all my mind, to say nothing of my patience."

Dr. Wentworth grunted. "Step to the light, Mr. Rayburn. I've done plastic surgery in my time; indeed, I was what Dan here calls a honey. I'd like to do a rare job—an artistic one—particularly as I couldn't do a worse job than has been done on you. . . ."

He studied the white, clown-like face, and Rayburn said quietly, "Make me what I was, Doctor, and I'll pay you a hundred thousand dollars when I am declared alive."

"Humph! What would I do with a hundred thousand. Money's a nuisance. . . . Ah, as I thought, the job's been botched. The tucks are terrible, the overlays are worse. I'll have to graft. You're in terrible physical condition, but the problem has its interests."

"You'll do it," said Dan, "and do a good job, because it's for abstract justice which you and I have decided rarely wins, but should." He clapped on his Borsalino. "I'm on my way. Stay out of sight, you two."

He shook hands with Dr. Wentworth, then with Rayburn who squeezed tightly, overcome with emotion. Sally's eyes were starry as he took her hand.

"You're swell, Dan Harden, swell," she murmured.

"I'll remember that—from a gallant little lady," Dan said, and turning swiftly, he departed. But not to his own home in Passy, late as the hour was. He went to the *vieille cité* and got Victor Deslys out of bed. The young newsboy had only to put on his shoes to be all dressed.

"Victor," said Dan, "go now to the home of Dr. Wentworth, eighty-seven-bis Rue Passy. Watch the house. See who goes in and out, and particularly see who hangs around. Do well and Julie is all paid for at the hospital, and you shall go back to the *écôle*. I say so. Report to me by telephone."

He gave the boy the last of his francs which meant a walk home. But he did not mind the stroll. Despite the difficulties which he foresaw, he was somehow gay-hearted. He loved a fight and he knew he had one on his hands. He undressed, jumped into bed, and fell asleep grinning at a pre-sleep vision in which he saw Maggie Aherne packing a dinner pail for an elongated, heavier-faced Slee Mortry.

V

DR. CROSBY, short and fat, with little blotches of good living on his face, blew a reek of early cognac into Dan's face and smiled.

"Mr. Harden, of course. Glad to know you. What can I do for you?"

Dan showed his big white teeth in a grin. "None of that," he gestured toward the chair and the drill case. "You treated the teeth of the late Stephen Rayburn, I believe."

"Yes," assented the dentist.

"To clear our records we'd like copies or the originals of the X-ray plates you made."

"That's funny . . ." mused Dr. Crosby.

Dan felt a little catch in his throat. "How so?"

"You asking for Rayburn's X-ray films. You see, I haven't got them."

"Where are they then?"

"Destroyed." Dr. Crosby frowned. "About four months ago somebody broke into my office—to steal gold and silver for filling, I guess. Anyway, they got monkeying with acids and set fire to the place. One whole file of X-ray prints was burned, and Rayburn's among them."

Dan nodded, impassive of face. He was thinking, "This Mortry is really smart. He thinks of everything." Aloud he said, "If you saw Rayburn's jawbone, either in the skull or through X-ray, could you identify it—say for a court of law in a matter of inheritance?"

"We-ell," Dr. Crosby pulled at his lips. "Maybe yes, maybe no. Impacted wisdom teeth are very common. If the face was preserved—embalming you know—that would help. But without the plates to refresh my memory—I do a lot of work, you see—"

"I see," said Dan.

Dr. Crosby looked anxious. "I hope they were not too vital."

"No," said Dan. "Just a check—that's all."

But it was more than a check, it was a crushing blow and he knew it. He tried to visualize what would happen with Rayburn's face restored and this Crosby called to identify the wisdom tooth operation. He shook his head; it wouldn't be enough, not in a French court.

He went back to the office to get another couple of hundred francs from Papa Touchard.

Papa was disconsolate. "The Minis-

ter of Finance has attached our bank deposits and assets to prevent them being dissipated," said he. "It is the beginning of the end."

"Just how much time have we?" Dan asked gently.

"Seventy-two hours at the most, and only because a week-end intervenes. By Monday we must have the twenty-five million francs or be sold up."

"Suppose," said Dan, "that you had the promise of a million dollars—that you obviously were to get this death claim returned. What then?"

"All would be well. But you have told me the details and I don't think you can prove it."

"Ah, but I can. So give me the two hundred francs and I can be about doing it."

He got the two hundred francs, and then called Dr. Wentworth on his own wire. "I'm refitting the face," Dr. Wentworth said, "but he can't stand the skin graft until later."

"He's got to," insisted Dan. "He's got to be finished and polished by Monday, so you can remove the bandages at least for a time."

He hung up so Wentworth couldn't argue. On his desk was a report by telephone from Victor Destrys. No one had entered, no one had left, but a Peugot car had pulled up while the chauffeur examined the motor and then went on.

"Hm!" Dan frowned. "I seem to feel time crowding me."

HE went without lunch to check the burial records, and after locating the Rayburn private mausoleum in Mount Valerian cemetery he hired a car and drove out there. He did not get a court order, because he and *l'oncle* Hugo, the superintendent had had an acquaintance in previous cases.

"Of course, you can look at the body," assented *l'oncle* Hugo. "But how strange it is that you should come today. For tomorrow it would be too late."

"What do you mean?" demanded Dan.

"Tonight we shall cremate what remains."

"Ah, now, really?" Dan murmured. "Isn't that rather strange at this late date?"

"I thought so, M'sieur Dan, but it seems Mademoiselle Aiken is to be married tomorrow and will no longer live in Paris, and wishes to keep the ashes of her first beloved with her. Such sentiment!" he sighed. "Even with her destiny calling her to the marriage bed."

"Such sentiment, indeed," nodded Dan.

The mausoleum was a small Gothic chapel of exquisite proportions in which Rayburn's father, his own mother and his step-mother were interred. *L'oncle* Hugo unlocked the place, let Dan into the cool, musty interior and then opened the coffin next to the outer wall.

"There is not much to see, in truth," *l'oncle* Hugo said. "He was not embalmed by Mademoiselle Aiken's orders."

Dan stared at a mass of fine-powdered brown dust, and a skeleton that had fallen into separate bones, not even one tendon holding.

He thought, "This Mortry is a genius. Allowing the body to rot and now burning the ruins to be doubly sure." Aloud he said:

"Such sentiment, indeed, *l'oncle* Hugo. She thinks of everything."

He stared at the collection of brown

bones, letting his mind play with an idea. Finally with a little decisive shake of his head he reached in and removed the right shin bone—the tibia.

"I want to have this X-rayed for the record, *l'oncle* Hugo," he said. "It is not often that a twenty-five-million franc death claim is paid. You may report my act if you like, and I will sign a receipt for this bone and return it in time for the cremation."

L'oncle Hugo scratched his thatch of gray hair. "It is very irregular," he muttered, "but, as you say, twenty-five million francs—*nom d'un nom* what a sum! It is not often paid out. I will permit you to take the bone."

Dan wrapped the shinbone in a newspaper and rode back to his office. He put the bone in his desk, and then dispatched a telegram in code to a newspaperman friend of his in Rome, asking for all details on Giovanni Cavacchi. Over a beer and a sandwich at Johnny's bar he checked what he had done.

"And now," he murmured, "for a little chat with dear Maggie."

Baradoff answered his summons, but not in livery.

"My word!" drawled Dan, "where are the silk stockings and the ribbons? And the coat, Baradoff, the gun sags and makes it bulge."

Baradoff said thinly, "You'll be asking for it when you get it."

"Spoken like a professional," Dan approved. "Do you shoot in the back, or the front?"

The man disappeared while the detectives outside kept an eye on Dan. Baradoff returned. "She'll see you," he said as if surprised.

ONCE again Dan passed the chunk of pitch under the glass dome and eyed it curiously. This delay enabled Marjorie to prepare to greet him. She was smartly dressed for the street, and Slee Mortry in black stock, dark coat and striped trousers was a picture of what the aristocratic young man of Paris wears on a stroll.

"I want to see Miss Aiken alone," Dan said.

"She marries me tomorrow morning," said Mortry, "and she is accepting my advice."

"Do you hold her power of attorney?" Dan asked.

"No, but the marriage—"

"Until it comes off you're just a gigolo to me," said Dan. "She talks to me alone."

Pale with anger, Mortry silently obeyed the injunction of Marjorie's look and retired. Dan hummed a line from an old song that went, "You don't know Maggie like I do. . . ."

"Stop it!" she cried furiously. "Must you always rub it in?"

"No, Maggie," said Dan. "I've come to make you a grand proposition."

Marjorie fought for her poise and recovered it. "You can make me no proposition I'll even listen to."

"Ah, but I can," murmured Dan, watching her closely. "Steve Rayburn is alive. I know where he is. I'm getting his face fixed—it won't frighten you again the way it did when he escaped and came here. You can get rid of your gunmen and dicks."

"You're mad," she said. "Stephen Rayburn is dead."

"You wish he was. Maybe your friend Mortry will try for sure this time. But Rayburn's not dead, Maggie; you and Mortry made your play and lost. I'm willing to bail you out of the jam—to your advantage."

She waited silently, statuesquely cold.

"If you'll surrender your claim to the money and acknowledge Rayburn

when I bring him into court, as himself, as your fiancé, Rayburn will settle twelve thousand dollars a year for life on you. Married or not. One thousand dollars a month, every month. That's straight from the feedbox, Maggie."

"Twelve thousand," she flung back her head. "I spend more than that in a month on clothes alone."

"Ah, yes, now," nodded Dan. "That's because you have it. But with Rayburn alive you have nothing. You might find yourself back in Haverly packing a dinner pail for a man who would be too good for you."

"You lie!" she blazed. "You can't prove anything. Stephen Rayburn is dead, and we'll fight you all the way. It's a conspiracy to defraud. You can't get anywhere but in jail."

"That's a quotation from Mortry," grinned Dan, egging her on, hoping for a break. "And what will you say if I tell you I'm going to get a court order placing the Rayburn fortune in the court's hands until this affair is decided? You couldn't draw twelve grand a month for clothes."

"That's a bluff!" she cried hotly. "You wouldn't dare get a court order. You'd have to produce Pierre Lepard and he'd go back to the insane asylum pending the adjudication, and he doesn't want to go back there."

"Smart girl," murmured Dan. "Or rather, smart Mortry. The bluff is called."

He rose, put on his hat. "But think it over, Maggie—about the twelve grand I mean. Mortry will double-cross you if he can, and drop you flat if you lose. This way you can't lose."

He saw her blaze and grinned. "Never mind calling Baradoff. He was going out anyway, and I can find my own exit."

Marjorie Aiken watched his departure, her heart pounding as if it would suffocate her. She sank into a chair and reached for the cognac decanter. She finished a straight jigger as Mortry came in, studying her thoughtfully. His eyes were glassy pools of black thought.

"That man is dangerous," he said. "He's been to the cemetery and got a shinbone of the corpse. I got the telephone while you were with him."

"What does that mean?" She was frightened anew now.

"Nothing, I believe. I looked over the dead body. There was nothing peculiar about it. One shinbone from a skeleton is very like another. What did he say to you?"

She told him, and then she rose and flung her arms around his neck and put her head on his chest. "I'll go with you, stay with you forever," she said. "Only hold me tight, Slee. I'm frightened."

Over her head he made a grimace of distaste and, unlocking her fingers, pushed her not ungently back to her chair.

"I'll have my hands on Rayburn presently," he said. "But that isn't enough. Harden has got to go."

"You mean—kill him?"

Mortry smiled. "I don't mean play postoffice with him. I've got the method. Late this afternoon I want you to call him. Say you have changed your mind about his proposition. Tell him you want to see him. Say you are going to be out but will be home between eleven and midnight. Even offer to sign an agreement—anything to get him here. The rest you can leave to me."

"The guillotine, it cuts off your head . . ." she whispered.

"Hush!" he cried sharply. "There

s no question of guillotine, or even arrest, the way I intend doing it. Nor will there be in the case of Rayburn's final demise. Do you think I am a fool to take too great chances at this stage of the game?"

"No," she assented. "I will do as you say."

He patted her cheek. "Stout girl." His color flushed high, and he smiled again. "Do you know, my dear, I'm enjoying this? It gives me a sense of power to know I can wipe them both out and not even a murmur raised by the police. Come, let me kiss you."

She shuddered but she came to him and held up her face for the kiss.

BACK at his office Dan sat in his swivel chair and shot paper wads at Hitler's forelock, whistling in horrible tones, "You don't know Maggie like I do!"

He broke off this diversion to call Wentworth. "How's the face?" he asked.

"The face is perfect," said Wentworth. "Even Sally likes it. As for the rest of him, not so good. The let-down has upset him, and it will be weeks before I can straighten him to his full height—even if I can do it then."

"All right," nodded Dan, "dye his hair. We'll be needing him tomorrow."

At four o'clock he got a surprise. A friend of his on the *Herald* dropped by for a drink (and didn't get it) and said, "Marjorie Aiken married the stiff-shirted bazoo, Mortry, this afternoon. Civil ceremony at the *mairie*. Geez, you'd think that people with all that dough would hire Notre Dame Cathedral."

"Notre Dame might fall down," murmured Dan.

"Meaning?" said the amazed reporter.

"Churches are reported ready to fall down as soon as the devil comes in."

"Screwball," said the reporter, and went out.

Dan pondered this move while he shellacked Hitler with a barrage of paper wads. It was unlike Marjorie to accept a civil ceremony with no pomp. There was, of course, an opportunity later for a large religious ceremony with all the pomp and glory that twenty million dollars can buy. But still—Dan didn't like it.

He got no call from Victor, and after spending a half hour cutting a chunk out of the shin bone he was preparing to go to Wentworth's. It was six o'clock. The telephone rang.

"Dan," said Marjorie. Her voice was soft and persuasive.

"Ah, yes, Maggie," said Dan. "Permit me to withhold my congratulations and offer the profoundest sympathy in your sorrow."

"Stop it," she said, but not angrily. "I've called about something else."

"The proposition," said Dan.

"Exactly. I've been thinking it over. I want to talk to you. I'll tell you frankly, I want to accept. I love Slee, but I'm afraid of—well, of the full dinner pail, if you get me."

"I'm way ahead of you. What time do I come?"

"I'm just on my way out to a dinner. I'll be back at eleven. Come then, and bring your agreement. I'll sign it."

"I'll be there," assented Dan.

He stared down his nose at the telephone and slowly shook his head.

"It smells bad," he said. "They're up to something. I've got to see it through. And yet—" he broke off, reached into the desk and taking out a Lüger eight-shot automatic, looked to the clip, the breach and the mechanism, and slid it into his pocket.

Victor Deslys met him across from Wentworth's. The lad was munching on a sandwich. "Nothing but that car, M'sieur," he said. "It was the only suspicious thing, and since it did not come back, it was probably not irregular."

"Probably," nodded Dan, finding another twenty franc note. "But you nap with one eye open, and get your pal Raoul to relieve you. I expect to be somewhat jammed up later and I'm depending on you."

He went into the house where Sally met him. Hope and food and rest had already done wonders, and he smiled gently as she took his hands in girlish joy. "Come," she said, "you can't see his face. It's all bandaged. But he can talk beautifully."

Dan followed her to the bedroom.

"It's working, Dan Harden," said a clear, pleasant voice. "We're winning."

A chord of memory in Dan twanged. "That's Stephen Rayburn's voice," he murmured. "A little hoarse —but his voice."

VI

NO DETECTIVES jumped out of bushes when Dan went up the walk of the mansion at five to eleven. Marjorie herself let him in.

"Borodoff's off for the evening," she said, "and I've let the others go to bed. Come in."

Dan's quick glance noted the negligee that so accentuated her flawless Greek stature; he perceived the soft yellow curls, freed now, from their diamond clasps. He was aware of the exotic scent that she used.

"Now, Maggie," he remonstrated, "you're not going to work on me. Not at my age?"

"Don't be silly," she snapped. "This is my bridal night if you don't know, and I expect Slee in an hour. That's why I'm seeing you now—waiting up."

"How romantic, seeing a man about business on your wedding night."

By now she had led the way into her boudoir, a thing of pure white beauty that wrung a reluctant nod of admiration from Dan, although he told himself it was a hundred to one bet that some interior decorator had supplied the taste.

"Here's the agreement," he said. "And I hold Rayburn's power of attorney, so it's good."

She placed it on the table. "Before we go into that, Dan," she said, "please explain why you took that chunk of pitch from under the glass case when you left today."

"Chunk of pitch?" repeated Dan.

"Don't stall!" she snapped. "You took it. Borodoff was going out and you left by yourself. It was there when you came, gone when you went. So why? And where is it? Or shall I summon the police?"

"Let's compromise," grinned Dan. "You sign on the dotted line, and I bring back the chunk of pitch tomorrow morning."

He saw fright in her eyes but it vanished quickly. "I hear you took a shinbone of Stephen's, too."

"You hear a lot of things that aren't true. I took no shinbone of Stephen's."

Abruptly she changed her tactics, came closer. "Listen, Dan," she whispered, "I'm out of my depth. All this frightens me. After all, I'm only a small-town girl, and I can't stomach too much."

"Then sign," said Dan.

She took his arms in her slim fingers. "Do you swear there'll be no prosecution? That my check will come?"

As she talked she moved her slim body to the right, and, since she was still clutching Dan's arms, this forced him to move in a circle so that his back was to a door leading to either a closet or another room. The hackles on Dan's neck began to rise.

"I gave you my word," he said. "And you know me well enough to know it will be kept. Meantime, I don't like this stalling and this ribbing. You're a lousy actress, and you can't—"

She gave him a shove. In almost the same instant she ripped her negligee, rumpled her hair, and, in doing so, actually scratched her face with a long crimson nail.

"Help!" She screamed. "You devil! Get out of here!"

Dan did the only thing he could. As his hand streaked for his gun, he hurled himself backward in what is called a tumbler's fall; that is to say, he hit on his back rolled up, flopped and came down on his belly with his gun out in front of him.

Where he had stood two bullets lanced the warm air. Two explosions roared one on top of the other. And as Slee Mortry came out of the door with a smoking gun, he fired still again at where Dan lay prone.

The only trouble was his third shot was a hair too late. For Dan, shooting up from the floor had placed a slug neatly between the wrist and elbow of Mortry's right arm. You could almost hear the bone crack to the smash of the bullet.

Marjorie screamed and ran to Slee. "You're hurt! Oh, darling, what has he done?"

Mortry thrust her aside. "He's broken my arm with a bullet, you idiot." The gun dropped to the floor.

"Just as well," said Dan, getting up. "I was going to ask you for it."

He stood grinning in the center of the floor. "My, my, Mortry, you think of everything. Marrying li'l Maggie this afternoon so she was legally your wife. Leaving her here tonight to receive me, presumably on a matter of business. But ah, Mortry, you knew Maggie was an old flame of mine. So you could come home, Maggie could do her act, and then you could burst in—the outraged husband—and shoot me dead. You could tell the police: 'This man has always loved my wife. He came to her room tonight and assaulted her. I defended her honor and mine.' The police kiss your hand. The magistrate apologizes for even a few hours inconvenience. The whole French nation bows in homage to the stern man who defends his hearth with a gun."

He watched Mortry as he spoke. The man's face was expressionless.

"It didn't work," said Dan calmly. "So now, I withdraw my offer to you, Maggie. May you starve and like it. Tomorrow being Saturday a dispossess order can't be obtained. But be prepared to move Monday. Goodbye now."

He picked up Mortry's weapon and backed out of the room. Marjorie waited until she heard the door slam. Then she sank down and burst into tears.

"YOU failed!" Marjorie stormed. "What will become of us now?"

Slee Mortry was staring thoughtfully at his wound. Squeezed by the fingers of his other hand it was not bleeding so much now.

"That man is quicker than thought," he murmured. "I had him covered. The gun was cocked. Yet between the time I willed to shoot and the muscle squeezed the trigger, he was not there.

Remarkable, Marjorie, positively extraordinary."

"What shall we do now?"

The numbness was wearing out of Slee's wound and the pain irritated him. "I've two more arrows to my bow. They both cannot fail."

He smiled at her. "Come, get some clothes on and help me to the doctor. This thing must be fixed, and I've much yet to do tonight."

"Why," she kept on whispering, as she changed into street clothes, "—why did he take that chunk of pitch?"

"He's bluffing, my dear," Mortry told her. "He found out that the pitch was part of the loot Steve brought back from Amenophis's tomb. I know it only contains portions of the Greek tablet. It can mean nothing. It is bluff."

She came over to him suddenly. "Let's take what we have and run," she whispered. "There's enough to keep us in comfort. There are a thousand places to see together—a thousand ways to be happy."

"Hush!" he growled. His eyes began to glitter as she had never seen them before. "You don't understand. Would you be a beggar of life when you could be master? Would you relinquish power when you have it? There's more power to come if only I manage right—and I shall."

He looked at her as if she were some stranger.

"Three years from now I shall be the most powerful man in all Europe." He took her arm. "Come, let us hurry."

MEANWHILE, Dan alighted from his taxicab and went to his simple apartment in the heights of a new Passy apartment building that looked out over the crimson glow of Paris. But he did not go immediately to bed, late as was the hour. He sat at the window, feet on the sill, thinking. He knew Mortry had not placed his entire reliance on the outcome of a framed badger game case. The man was moving swiftly, with a confidence that foresaw a definite end. But what—

The telephone rang sharply, interrupting his thoughts. Dan glanced at his watch. One-thirty! He picked up the French set, said, "Hello!"

"Dan Harden!" He stiffened at the note in Sally's voice.

"Yes, Sally."

She wailed, "They've got Steve, Dan."

"Who's got him?"

"The police! They came ten minutes ago. Three of them. They hit poor Dr. Wentworth on the head. He's still unconscious. I ran after being knocked down. Then they took Steve, bandages and all, in a car."

"Stay right there, honey," he said. "I'll be right over!"

He took a taxi to the house and, as he paid his fare, a small shadow came out of the darkness. "Where's Victor, Raoul?" Dan asked.

"He went after the police, *monsieur,*" said Victor's taller cousin. "He told me to stay until you came. I tried to reach you by telephone, but you were not at the office."

"What happened, then?"

"Why, *monsieur,* three police came and went into the house. Two of them came out, carrying a man. The third jumped into the driver's seat. He was tall and had a horse-like face."

"Borodoff," murmured Dan. "What else?"

"One of them said something and the others laughed. One of the others said, 'He is no Lazarus.' And that was all, *monsieur,* except that Victor was riding on the spare tire when the car went away."

"Stout fellah, Victor," Dan said. "Remain here. I may need you."

He went into Wentworth's house to find the physician conscious, growling at Sally to be more careful in snipping hair around a bloody scalp wound that she was binding under the doctor's direction. Dan took over the job.

"What happened?" he asked.

Wentworth knew scarcely anything. The three men, dressed in the blue of the police, came in and demanded Pierre Lepard. When Wentworth gave them an argument one of them hit him with a blackjack.

"They weren't police, Dan," he concluded. "They wouldn't have attacked me if they had been. That was why I was surprised."

"I know," said Dan. "Uniforms can be hired or made, and a policeman's uniform can cover a lot of skullduggery. The point is, where have they taken him? Did you hear anything, Sally?"

"Nothing," she rejoined shakily. "Only they're going to murder him. One of them said, 'There is no return from where he is going.' He meant La Chaize's sanitarium, I'm sure. Oh, Dan, can't you hurry out there?"

Dan finished taping the bandage with gentle fingers. "Taking him to La Chaize's doesn't make sense," he muttered. "Mortry knew, of course, that I did not wish to invite the police into this because of complications—the fact that Steve would have been sent back to La Chaize's which I did not want. But Mortry also knows that if I figure he has sent Steve back, then I'll call the police to protect Steve's life. So he wouldn't take Steve to the madhouse. He'd arrange to kill him. Does that sound right, Doc?"

"It does," said Wentworth sadly. "I'm afraid you're too late."

"Maybe so, maybe not. Where's your telephone? I'll just check and make sure."

He called Leon Chaippe, a detective at the Sûreté Generale with whom he had had dealings, and whom he intended to call in when the situation warranted it.

"No, Dan," Chaippe said in answer to his questions, "Pierre Lepard has not been caught. I should know, for I have been in active charge of the case. We have had no clue whatsoever. Since he was seen on the outskirts of Paris, he has vanished."

"How long would it take you to check Dr. La Chaize's sanitarium to make sure Lepard is not there now?"

"Three hours. But, Dan, what makes you think he is there?"

"I don't." Dan's face became grim. "Listen, Leon. Will you do this? Arrest La Chaize, charging him with kidnaping, illegal operation, and holding a free man a prisoner, and conniving in a conspiracy to defraud? Put him in jail and keep him incommunicado. Tomorrow I'll tell you why."

"Yes, of course."

"And call me at Wentworth's as soon as you have checked the madhouse."

Dan hung up. He began pacing the room in silence, his brain spinning webs of plans only to discard them.

"Listen, here," he growled suddenly, "Mortry has the situation in hand. He is married to Maggie; he's got ten million dollars—or will have Monday if we don't stop him. Is he going to risk that on a wild, silly plot such as putting Steve back in La Chaize's private madhouse? No, he's not, particularly since I've got him worried and Maggie scared by some moves I've made. He's going to kill Rayburn because he has to. But he's going to do

it so that no finger of suspicion will point at him."

"Where is all that soliloquy getting you?" grunted Wentworth.

"I'm trying to figure how Mortry could kill Rayburn and get away with it. Because a kill means a body to dispose of. And if I find the body, with what I know I can prove—" he broke off, and for an instant his face was ashen beneath the tan.

He slapped on his hat. "How much start have they had?" he jerked at Sally.

"Thirty-five or forty minutes."

Dan groaned. "Too much. Doc, how fast will that Renault of yours go?"

"As fast as you can spin her," said Dr. Wentworth. He rose, tried to make his hat fit over the bandages, and failing, left it, and yelled for Nichi, his man. Nichi came, the perfect Jap servant, dressed and ready at two o'clock in the morning.

"The car," snapped Dr. Wentworth.

Dan handed him the pistol he had taken from Mortry. "Let's go, and don't be afraid to use that thing. Mortry's hired all the American gunmen who are in Europe dodging murder raps."

But as he made Sally comfortable in the car, and squeezed Raoul in beside Wentworth, a gnawing sensation of being too late tore at him. His stomach was a cold hard knot of fear.

"Mount Valerian," he said, "and don't spare the horses."

THE car roared into motion and broadsided around the curve with a screech of protesting tires. Dan leaned back, fingering his Lüger.

"I've been a fool," he said, "but I'll be one no longer. If we get Rayburn alive there'll be a show-down tomorrow morning just to get Mortry in the can. That guy has a positive genius for murder."

The car made remarkable speed, and reached the huge concrete walls and wrought iron gate in thirty-five minutes.

Sally gasped, "A cemetery!"

"Yes," said Dan. "Cut the lights, Nichi."

There was a quarter moon riding leisurely through scudding clouds, and the dark road made a streak easy to follow. But they were not a hundred yards past the superintendent's office when a figure loomed directly ahead, and Nichi braked hard.

"Messieurs," said a childish voice, "can you—"

"What is it, Victor?" cut in Dan.

"Ah, *nom de Dieu!* It is you, Monsieur Dan. *Attendez.* They have the man and are now carrying him to a Gothic house. They are too many for me, and I was going for the police, and then to call you."

Dan sprang out, drawing his gun. "Come on, Doc. We'll be in time—maybe."

He ran across the grass, with Wentworth lumbering behind him. "I don't get it, Dan," Wentworth panted.

"Simple, and therefore clever," retorted Dan. "I wondered why Marjorie had ordered *l'oncle* Hugo to burn the remains of Cavacchi. It is now plain. The coffin will remain in the mausoleum which belongs to the Rayburn estate. An empty coffin—what better place to hide a corpse?"

"Whew!" muttered Wentworth. "They may already have knocked him on the head."

Dan did not reply, for the pointed lovely spires of the mausoleum now rose against the sky. He strode softly, and cautioned Wentworth to be quiet. Dan saw the car that had brought Mortry's people, and as he went beyond

directly for the door to the vault, he saw a man leaning against the side, and the door just about to close.

He sprinted that last few feet. He told himself that the murder had not been done; but it would be as soon as that door was closed to lock in the sound of struggle or shot. He did not try to run softly, and the figure leaning against the vault turned, saw Dan bearing down on him, and with an exclamation raised his arm.

The figure wore the uniform of an *agent de police* but that made no difference now. Dan squeezed the trigger, aiming for the thigh. The red flash flowed cone-shaped from the muzzle. The blue-uniformed man spun and his leg buckled and he went back to strike his head against the gray stone of the vault. He never did fire the pistol which slid from his senseless hand.

Dan jerked at the door, yanked it wide and, taking a deep breath, jumped inside. His flashlight bit through the murk here. But another flashlight also gleamed.

A uniformed man held Rayburn who was bound at his hands only, but whose bandages were pulled from the fresh healing wounds of his face. Beyond him stood Borodoff with a gun.

"This," he said, "is a pleasure."

He shot with the words, and yet it did not seem as if his hand had moved at all. Inside that place the explosion echoed hollowly. Dan felt the tug of the bullet, the hot burn of it across his skin as it passed between his left arm and his body, skidding along his ribs.

Dan shot to kill. His gun *whacked* three times, the crimson flash licking out almost continuously. The bullets drummed on Borodoff's chest with sounds like a soft shoe dancer tapping on the floor. Borodoff grunted and belched as a man who has eaten too much. Quietly, almost leisurely, he sat down on the floor. His eyes never left Dan's face.

On the floor he slowly raised the gun, and Dan's muscles tightened to pour in another burst. But he did not shoot yet. He could see the clay color steal across Borodoff's face. He could see the knuckle of Borodoff's trigger finger grow white with the effort to pull the trigger. He saw the crimson leak out of Borodoff's mouth, and then the hand went limp and the gun dropped from it.

The third uniformed man had stood speechless, stunned.

Dan turned on him, his own face pale. "Carry him out to our car," he said quietly, "and be careful how you do it."

As the man carried Stephen Rayburn past, Dan felt of the pulse. It was slow, lazy. Morphine injection, he surmised, to keep Rayburn quiet during the ride. Nothing that a few hours wouldn't cure. Borodoff's flashlight lay on the floor where it had fallen, still burning. Dan picked it up, gently closed the vault door.

He helped Wentworth carry the first uniformed man, still senseless, to the car, and bound the man's hands with his handkerchief. Sally was hovering over Rayburn, pale, but under control. Dan tied up the other man with his belt. He was about to order Nichi to drive away, when two flashlights danced across the grass from the entrance. Then a third.

One was *l'oncle* Hugo. The other two had kepis and capes—*agents*.

"The shots, I heard them— M'sieur Dan, it is you then! What is it that has happened?"

Dan sighed. The contingency he had hoped to avoid had happened. The po-

lice were in, and if he failed to prove his case on Mortry, the death of Borodoff was going to be hard to explain.

VII

DETECTIVE LEON CHAIPPE fingered his soft curling mustache and looked very grave. "It is an incredible story, Dan, and if I did not know you I should doubt strongly."

"So would I," rejoined Dan. He was in his office, but under technical arrest, charged with homicide.

He flicked a desultory paper wad at Hitler. "Did you make La Chaize talk? And what about the other guys?"

"La Chaize swears to his innocence and produced a commitment from the prefecture of the Somme to prove that Lepard was legally incarcerated. The two Americans simply keep saying, 'We want a lawyer.'"

Dan smiled grimly. "An old Yankee custom." He glanced at his strap watch. Eleven o'clock!

"You have made sure that Mag—that is, Miss Aiken is at home—I mean Mrs. Mortry. And Slee Mortry, too?"

"They profess entire ignorance and remain over from their honeymoon only because I insisted. You understand, I hope, that unless you can prove your charges to the hilt, they have cause for suit?"

"I understand," said Dan.

He took the shinbone from his desk and wrapped it up. He picked up the box that held the chunk of pitch. The doubts he felt did not appear on his lean, tanned face.

"Give a lift to Rayburn and Sally," he said. "And remember, Leon, don't be surprised at anything I say or do, and let me run the show."

"Of course."

They had Wentworth's car and the tireless Nichi. Sally, Chaippe, Rayburn, Victor and Raoul and Dan made a crowd, but they all managed somehow. As they were about to depart, Papa Touchard came down to the curb.

"I must give an answer now," he said. "What shall I say, Dan?"

Dan drew a long breath, and let it escape slowly. "Tell the Minister," he said, "that you will have Rayburn's death claim returned on Monday, as soon as a sitting magistrate can legally adjudge Rayburn to be alive."

Before the shining hope in Touchard's face made him sick, he ordered Nichi to drive on. Dan was very quiet during the ride, but after he had pressed the bell at Marjorie Aiken's he deliberately began to grin and whip up his spirits.

A footman answered the summons and at Chaippe's sharp order led them to Marjorie's private sitting room. Slee Mortry rose as they entered.

"I hope you realize," Mortry said gravely, "that you are intruding on a honeymoon." He gestured awkwardly with his left hand (his right was in a sling) to chairs.

"You spent part of your honeymoon in the cemetery last night," said Dan. "I spotted the prints today of those pointed shoes of yours."

"That is a lie," Mortry replied wearily. "Well, get on with your hokus-pokus." He did not stare at the bandaged face of Stephen Rayburn.

"I'll try to be very brief," grinned Dan. "Maggie, help yourself to a slug of cognac—you won't tremble quite so visibly."

"Get on with it, man," growled Mortry.

Something like admiration glinted in Dan's eyes. Mortry was going down with colors flying—or perhaps not going down at all.

"Let me ask you both first of all," Dan said, "if this man"—he pointed to Rayburn—"is Stephen Rayburn, or is he not? I'll take off the bandages so you can see."

This he did. Marjorie's eyes flicked the wounded face, darted away. Mortry let his remain coolly staring.

"He looks like Steve, of course," he admitted finally, "but it is obvious that plastic surgery has been done to create this resemblance. So I deny that he is Rayburn."

"Speak, Steve," said Dan.

Rayburn's eyes blazed. "What can I say? What can I say when my hands cry out to grip his throat?"

Dan said, "Do you deny that is the voice of Steve Rayburn?"

"A superficial resemblance—that you could find anywhere for the purposes of conspiracy and fraud."

"All right," Dan said quietly, "let's start from there."

A BREATHLESS sort of hush fell on the room while every eye watched his expressionless face. Dan kept his eyes on Marjorie, watching her, studying her.

"Remember, Maggie," he said, "you had a chance. I'll still back it up if you want to change your mind."

"Speak to me," snapped Mortry. "My wife is merely a spectator—I am the victim of this conspiracy."

"Very well," said Dan. "How do you explain the presence of your men last night at the vault with Rayburn here a prisoner?"

"The men were there working to clean the place," said Mortry coolly, "and they surprised this maniac, Pierre Lepard, trying to desecrate the tomb. They had merely taken him prisoner when you dashed in and murdered Borodoff. This," he added quickly, "I state on facts furnished by the police."

"How do you account for the fact that your men were in uniform?"

"They were going later to a masquerade ball," said Mortry.

Dan laughed almost deliberately. "Splendid, Mortry, positively."

Mortry let a shade of a smile cross his face. Dan knew the man's Napoleonic complex was at work; he felt sure and confident.

"All right," rapped Dan swiftly, "did Steve Rayburn ever have an injury to his leg?"

Suspicion leaped into Mortry's eyes. "Nothing of a permanent nature that I know of."

"Ah," murmured Dan. He unwrapped the shinbone but kept the paper so that it hid the object from the others. "How does it come, then, that the body buried as Stephen Rayburn had a silver plate in the shin?"

"That is not true," growled Mortry.

"Ah, but it is," snapped Dan. "Here is the bone. Furthermore, Enrico Cavacchi, whose body was buried as Rayburn's had such a silver plate." Dan waved a telegram. "Here are the facts from Cavacchi's relatives gathered by George Holmes, the Rome correspondent of the New York *Planet.*"

Mortry said, "You're lying, Harden."

But Dan heard Marjorie give a gasp. And he was overjoyed when Chaippe said sternly, "That is very strong evidence, Monsieur Mortry."

"So at this point," said Dan pleasantly, "I charge Slee Mortry and Marjorie Aiken with the murder of Enrico Cavacchi."

Mortry pulled at his lip with steady fingers. His eyes told nothing; neither did his face. He waited.

"Now," said Dan, "take off your shoes and socks, Steve. Sally, help him."

Dan started to unwrap the package that held the chunk of pitch. As its blackness emerged Marjorie uttered a stifled sound and looked as if she would faint. Mortry for the first time turned a greenish tint. A little muscle in his jaw worked, creating a peculiar light effect as the shadow played on it.

By the time Rayburn's shoes were off, Dan had the chunk of pitch open where the footprints were.

"Put your bare feet in these, Steve," Dan said, moving the chunk of pitch so Steve could reach it. Chaippe bent forward eagerly.

"Sacré nom d'un nom!" he gasped. "It is a perfect fit."

"Of course, it is," thundered Dan. "Because Steve Rayburn's feet made them. In hot Egypt, on the desert where the sun makes it one hundred and forty in the shade and no shade, this pitch, exposed after centuries of being hidden, softened. Steve had run a nail slant-wise into his boot. He took off boot and sock to look to the injury. He put his bare foot here. And, Mortry," he regarded the sleek man saturnine-ly, "Monsieur Chaippe here will tell you that a footprint is as perfect an identification as a finger print, and stands in a court of—"

A scream came from Marjorie. She rose straight out of her chair, her face wild, her mouth twitching. She held out her left hand to show a ball of crumpled paper.

"You promised, Dan!" she shrieked. "You told me no prosecution, no trouble—always a thousand a month for life. See! See! I have signed."

Mortry uttered a sharp oath and sprang at her, grasping with his left hand for the paper. But not being left-handed he was awkward. Dan reached the paper, snatched it, and gave Mortry a shove that sent him staggering back.

"You swear this is Steve Rayburn?" he cried.

"I swear it," she sobbed. "I had nothing to do with it. It was all Slee's doing. He did not murder Cavacchi. Neither did I. Cavacchi was killed in the crash, and Slee built his—"

"Look out," yelled Dan, and gave her a shove.

THE shot blasted. But once again Mortry's awkward use of his left hand made him fail. The bullet struck her in the fleshy part of the shoulder, sent her falling. And before he could swivel the gun, Dan jumped him. The right hook traveled only a foot at most. But Mortry's chin rode on the knuckles for a while and then he fell down. Dan went after him and got the gun.

"He's like a rattler," he muttered, and searched for more weapons. He found none.

"Enough!" said Chaippe sternly. "You have done what you have done, Dan, and now I am in charge."

"Go ahead," said Dan wearily. "I'm bushed, if you want to know."

Slee Mortry was sitting up. The greenish tint had left his cheeks, and he was merely pale from the shock of the blow.

"You bluffed, Harden," he said quietly, "but you won. If she had kept her mouth shut—"

"Never mind that," cut in Chaippe. "Please get yourself to your feet to come with me."

"I can't get up," said Mortry. "Do you think I was not prepared even for this contingency?" His eyes sought Dan's and his mouth smiled. "Adrena-lin! A very large dose brings shock, coma and death. The coma is coming on now."

Chaippe looked at Dan. "He's done

it," said Dan soberly. "If a man like him can't have power he doesn't want to live. You can't counteract against adrenalin."

"Correct," smiled Mortry and said no more. Presently his eyes closed and he fell over on his side and remained so until Chaippe called police officers to have him rushed to a hospital. Chaippe remained to take statements for his *dossier.*

Sally, who had stayed beside Steve and shielded him with her body when Mortry had drawn the weapon, now came to Dan.

"You're swell," she said simply, and quickly taking his hand pressed it against her cheek.

"Don't do that," Dan said, "I'm a misogynist."

"What's a misogynist?"

"A man who hates women."

Sally laughed. "You make a bad liar."

"Well, all of them except you."

Chaippe interrupted. "I'll take that shinbone for evidence," he said.

Dan gave it to him. "But there's no silver plate in it," he said. "It's a perfectly good bone."

"No plate!" exclaimed Chaippe. "But the telegram?"

Dan handed it to him. "Just a lot of dry statistics about the Cavacchi family. Nothing that's very important."

"Well!" grunted Chaippe. "Well, help me to take a footprint of Monsieur Rayburn then."

"Sure," said Dan, "but it won't do you any good. That's not his in the pitch. It's just some old-timer of an Egyptian who lived three thousand years ago and happened to step in it. The only comparison between him and Rayburn is that both had a size nine foot."

Chaippe knew his poker. "Didn't you even have a hole card?"

Dan grinned and glanced at Marjorie, pale and wan. "Just Maggie's hatred of dinner pails and the idea of having to pack one."

"Permit me to shake you by the hand," said Chaippe gravely.

"With pleasure, *monsieur,*" bowed Dan. "Could you loan me twenty francs taxicab fare so I can go tell Papa Touchard? We are not wanted around here," he glanced at Sally and Rayburn with their heads together.

He got the twenty francs. As he went out he saw in the drawing room a bronze head of Napoleon. He could not resist the temptation to stop and snap a paper wad at it.

"Right on the beezer," he laughed, and went out into the sunshine feeling swell.

Swindle School

By DALE CLARK

Author of "A Racket in Blondes," "The Devil in Hollywood," etc.

J. EDWIN BELL lifted the phone to his shallow cheek and heard the voice of the girl in his outer office. "The Countess de Brixxe is here." She said this importantly, and as an afterthought added, "So's the man to wash the windows. Shall I tell him to come back later?"

Mr. Bell gave a dry chuckle. "Send the window washer in first."

"But—"

"You heard me!"

J. Edwin Bell leaned his English-tailored but extremely lank figure farther back in its chair. He adjusted a monocle to his eye, and bent a critical stare upon the man who now lurched noisily through the door.

The fellow was roughly clad in canvas trousers and a denim shirt, with a heavy leather belt where the two garments met. A face nearly as dark as Mr. Bell's mahogany desk was decorated with a ropelike black mustache which trailed brilliantined ends on each side of a wide mouth. In one grimy fist he carried an overfull bucket of dirty water, slopping liberal quantities of the fluid onto Mr. Bell's costly Oriental carpeting.

J. Edwin Bell showed his teeth in a grimace which he fondly imagined to be a smile. "You're the man I advertised for? You speak French?"

The dark-faced man lifted wide shoulders in a Gallic shrug. The shrug tilted the bucket dangerously, so that at least a quart of the murky contents cascaded over his trouser leg—and thence, more slowly, onto the rug.

He said: *"Ah, oui! Tiens! Alors! Hélas!"* and set the pail down so abruptly that a miniature tidal wave overlapped the brim and rushed under Mr. Bell's desk.

J. Edwin suppressed a groan. Cleaning carpets costs money, and Mr. Bell was not accustomed to parting with a dollar lightly. Far from it. His pockets were practically lined with glue and fish hooks, and getting him to sign a check was a task comparable to persuading a murderer to sign a confession. For a moment a bitter gleam pierced his monocle and a savage oath trembled on his thin lips. But with a terrific effort he managed to restore the smile.

"Okay, fine!" said Mr. Bell. "Now, here's what I want you to do. There's a dame coming in here, she claims she's from Paris, but personally I suspect she's a phoney. You'll be hanging out the window, see, and when she gets going good you put your head in and shoot some of that Frog lingo at her. If she don't get it, then I'll know she's a fakealoo. You understand?"

White teeth flashed under the brilliantined mustache. *"Voila! Mais oui! Comment donc? Enfin!"*

"What?" J. Edwin spoke no French.

"I onnerstan', *m'sieu!* I get the edge, as you say in America!"

"The ed—oh, you get the point! Uhh, careful with that water, my man!"

Trailing a small rivulet of soupy liquid, the dark-visaged man perched himself on the window sill. In a few moments he stood there, leaning out over the Hollywood street eight stories below. Mr. Bell pushed a button on his desk. The door of his office again opened, letting in a fragrance of exotic perfumes closely followed by a curvacious young woman.

SHE was brunette, with flashing black eyes. Around her neck was a summer fur, while her shoes served principally to exhibit scarlet toenails that peeped through their open tips. She wore a slinky blue frock, so tight that its silhouette changed with every undulation of her supple form. In short, she was the typical Parisian girl—of the "art" magazines. She was svelte, sophisticated, and sinuous.

J. Edwin Bell bowed so deeply that the monocle popped out of his eye. Rescuing the glass just before it shattered on the desk, he gasped:

"My dear Countess!"

The young lady flirted a slender hand clad in an open network of black lace glove. *"Mais non!"* she ejaculated. "But let us arrive at once at—what you say?—the little ear of corn. Eh, m'sieu?"

Mr. Bell was not easily dashed, but at this remark an expression of perplexity overspread his shallow features. He grunted vaguely. "The corn—Countess, I don't get you."

"Comment? The little ear of corn—the nubbin."

"Oh-h, you mean the nub—the nub of the matter?" J. Edwin Bell folded his lank length into the chair behind the desk. He focused the monocle upon his caller, and said:

"Okay, Countess. What *is* the nub of it?"

She leaned toward him. *"Monsieu* is the *entrepreneur cinematique?"*

J. Edwin coughed dryly. "I'm a movie talent agent, if that's what you're aiming at." Mr. Bell was what in Hollywood is known as a flesh-peddler, a beauty-broker, a cuticle-vendor. He supplied actors and actresses (chiefly bit players) to the studios (chiefly the small ones) in return for a ten percent cut on their salaries.

The countess smiled brightly. *"Alors, m'sieu* is sharp—so they say."

She did not exaggerate. They said in Hollywood that J. Edwin Bell was so sharp that he frequently cut his razor when shaving. He was shrewd, cynical, and more than slightly sinister. There are men who will do the crooked thing when the honest one would pay just as well; Mr. Bell was such a man.

He also looked like just that sort of a man. The face behind the monocle was whetted to the keenness of hatchet. Mr. Bell, as he stretched his scrawny neck toward the young woman, and fixed a beady stare on her charms, bore a close resemblance to a bird of prey. "It boils down to this," he said. "You want to break into the movies, hey, Countess?"

The young woman nodded vigorously. *"Oui, m'sieu! I must!* It is of the —how shall I say?—necessity absolute!"

J. Edwin grinned. "Broke, kiddo?"

"Comment?" Her eyebrows went up. "But no, I don't understand?"

"Broke. Stony. On your uppers," elucidated Mr. Bell, apparently pleased by the thought. "In other words, you got to have the job so's you can eat?"

"Oh, non!" She broke open her purse as she spoke, and drew forth a jeweled cigarette case. Mr. Bell was right there with a match, and his eye did not fail to discover the handsome wad of banknotes in the corner of the open purse.

The girl puffed rapidly. *"Merci, m'sieu.* But, *peste!* it is not the money. Oh, non! It is—a little wager—personal entirely, but so important!"

The glimpse of the contents of the purse had changed J. Edwin Bell vastly. He grinned, and rubbed his hands. "Any experience, Countess? I mean in front of the camera?"

Smoke purled with her words *"Certainment!* The *Révue Cinema* in Paris—"

"That won't do. America is very different. What you need is—" and Mr. Bell's skinny hand clawed open a top drawer of his desk. He produced a brightly colored folder. "What you need is—"

"Permettez!"

The word fell harshly into the room, from the mustachioed lips of the window washer who stood there with his dark face thrust in above the lowered upper sash. He waved a sponge at the Countess. *"Permettez, mademoiselle? Vous savez, ma jolee? C'est plus—"*

J. Edwin Bell whirled around. His talony fingers closed into a fist. "Shut up, you!" he bawled.

"But, *m'sieu!"*

"Shut up, you fool!" glared Mr. Bell, who had charitably put aside all misgivings about the Countess's title and nationality since glimpsing her bankroll. The last thing he now wanted was an interruption from the window. He turned to the young lady with an apologetic murmur:

"Excuse the guy. He's just one of them screwball foreign—I mean, servant type."

"Morbleu!" muttered the man at the window. He shook the sponge viciously, shedding an ungentle brown rain in the direction of J. Edwin Bell's perfectly tailored form. *"Sapristi! Espèce d'idiot!"*

The flesh-broker deafened his ears to the sounds behind him. He bent toward the lady, and an eager gleam polished his cold eyes.

"My dear Countess," breathed he, "all that you need is a little training. I recommend a school of the drama—a movie acting college,

Countess—which absolutely guarantees you a part in a Hollywood production as soon as you complete the ten lesson course. It's all very private. You study at home in front of your own mirror. And the tuition is a mere trifle —only a hundred dollars."

MR. BELL spoke with great enthusiasm. He had reason to do so, for the movie college was one of the cuticle-vendor's less savory enterprises. Of course his name did not appear on the advertising brochures, but nonetheless the profits found their way to his bank account.

He pressed the leaflet into the girl's black lace glove. "It's the short cut to movie fame," he assured her. "Naturally there's a long waiting list, but I'll call up the president of the place and arrange for an interview for you right away."

The Countess de Brixxe gave a tinkling laugh of pleased delight. *"Merci! Merci beaucoup!"*

"Don't mention it," and J. Edwin waved his skinny hand.

The Countess exited, leaving behind her a fragrance of Parisian perfumery, and also a satisfied grin on the face of J. Edwin Bell. He smacked his thin lips with relish. 'Hot dog! And I thought maybe she was coming here to try and rook me!"

He turned to the window, which was rapidly assuming a pale coffee complexion under the ministrations of the mustachioed man. Mr. Bell snorted, and the satisfied grin faded from his vulturelike features.

"You can climb out of there, my fine felow," he pronounced coldly. "I didn't need you after all, and don't think that I'm forking over money for having my rug ruined."

The window washer swung himself lightly into the room. Although not tall, he was stockily made and the movement suggested considerable strength and agility. He dropped the sponge into the pail with a splash, shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Nuts to you, old turky buzzard!"

Mr. Bell's beady eyes peeled open, and Mr. Bell's skinny jaw sagged. He recoiled as the window washer put up his hand and yanked off his mustache. Thus was exposed a patch of upper lip considerably lighter than the rest of his face.

J. Edwin spluttered. "What's the meaning of this—this imposture?"

The other drew a handkerchief from his pocket, began wiping the nut-brown makeup from his features, and replied:

"It's the twenty-first of the month —that mean anything to you?"

"Certainly not!"

The handkerchief had cleaned an area of freckled, blunt, and unhandsome countenance. The features were by no means striking, but they were rugged and strong. Mr. Bell could not recall ever having seen the face before.

"The name," said his caller, "is Clem Sawyer. That doesn't click with you, either?"

"No—"

Clem Sawyer grunted. "I suppose it don't. You catch so many suckers, you couldn't be expected to remember 'em! But I'm a graduate of that movie college of yours, and the twenty-first is the anniversary of my graduation. We're going to celebrate that anniversary together, Mr. Bell."

As he spoke, the young man unbuckled the window washer's safety belt from about his waist. He weighed this thoughtfully in a muscular hand. The belt was a good, stout, substantial

piece of leather—a man could lean his whole weight on it without risk of plunging to the street below. It had been designed for heavy duty and faithful performance.

J. Edwin Bell quailed. His long legs carried him swiftly to the far side of the desk, and his skinny hand gripped the cradle phone. Shrill alarm came into his tone

"You get out of here, Sawyer! I'll call the cops!"

Young Sawyer advanced with ominous calm "You *do* that! I'd like a chance to tell the judge about that school of yours! Maybe I could even get the story into the papers!"

Wetting his lips nervously, the flesh peddler hesitated. While the advertising and contracts of the movie college were carefully worded so as to be within the letter of the law, the project was not of a nature to bloom in the fierce glare of publicity. The school was, in fact, a child of the darkness. Mr. Bell emphatically did not want it mentioned in court, to say nothing of the newspapers.

CLEM SAWYER'S hand shot out, and his fingers pinned onto the flesh-broker's scrawny neck. With a jerk, he hauled J. Edwin face down across the desk. The young man's blunt features wore a sudden grin. He paid no attention whatever to Mr. Bell's wildly flailing arms and legs. He swung the belt. He swung it right onto the seat of J. Edwin's fashionably tailored trousers.

The belt landed with a *ker-thunk,* followed by a squall of fear and pain as the victim writhed futilely.

"That's for the hundred bucks tuition!" exclaimed young Sawyer. "And *this* is for the seventy-five dollars I had to lay on the line for the special projector so's I could benefit by your exclusive and unique film study plan. I reckon that projector was worth at least seven-fifty in any department store!"

Again the belt descended across the southerly exposure of J. Edwin Bell.

"Stop it!" bleated the flesh broker. "Let go of me!"

Young Mr. Sawyer laughed grimly. "We're not through celebrating yet. There's the film fees you soaked me for, although the film was only cutting-room scrap—*and* the special diploma fee—"

The strap rose and fell. Amid the cacophony of *ker-thunk* and "Ouch! Stop it!" other words became audible. Mr. Bell was exclaiming piteously, "I done what I promised! You got no kick—"

Clem Sawyer grunted. "I know. You even got me that 'part in a Hollywood production.' Only the 'Hollywood production' was never released because that *Empire Film Company* is just another of your stooges, and the movie was nothing but a lot of suckers like myself going through their acts. Furthermore, the job lasted only two days, at five dollars per, and now we'll celebrate *that!*

Ker-thunk!

"Ouch!" bawled J. Edwin Bell. *"Ow-wowowow!"*

Clem Sawyer stepped back and rewrapped the belt around his middle. J. Edwin Bell struggled lamely to his feet. His scanty hair was disarranged, his collar undone, and there was a suspicion of a tear behind the monocle.

Mr. Bell did not immediately repair these damages to his appearance. He applied both hands to the smarting portion of his anatomy, and groaned.

Young Sawyer grinned. "Pretty hot down there? Well, we'll cool that off!"

He seized J. Edwin by his expensive lapels, trundled him swiftly across the expensive rug, and deposited the flesh broker into the water bucket.

"So long!" said Mr. Sawyer, and he turned at the door. "See you *next* anniversary!"

For several moments, the lank figure of the cinema agent remained folded into the bucket. After that leather massage, the feel of the water was actually comforting. Mr. Bell even went so far as to rock to and fro slightly in order to apply the alleviating influence to the largest possible area.

He was so engaged when the telephone began ringing briskly. J. Edwin jerked himself to his feet. The bucket overturned and sloshed a quart or so of water into the cuticle-vendor's imported English oxfords. Cursing dismally, Mr. Bell went to the phone.

The voice of the office girl reached him. "There's a Mr. Gaylord here—"

"He can wait!" snarled J. Edwin.

"But he won't wait. He says he's a detective! He's on his way in right now!"

"A d-detective," faltered the agent. He hastily ran bony fingers over his disordered locks, yanked his tie into place, and was screwing the monocle tighter into his eye when the door opened to admit Mr. Gaylord.

THE newcomer wore blue serge and a hard-brimmed straw hat pushed up high from a thin face. He was tall and lean and raw-boned, and yet he stepped nimbly enough. His icy blue stare made Mr. Bell uncomfortable, and so did his first words—pronounced around a well-frayed cigar: "What's the trouble in here?"

J. Edwin stammered, "N-nothing. . . ."

Obviously Gaylord did not believe this. "It certainly sounded like a ruckus," he said suspiciously.

Mr. Bell swallowed nervously. "The —the window washer fell off the sill," he offered imaginatively. "I—he called for help and I rescued him at the risk of my own life. That was the—er, ruckus."

The flesh-broker opened a desk drawer and produced glasses and a bottle. "Have a drink, officer?"

Gaylord's frayed cigar tilted, and the man chuckled. "I'm not a city officer, Bell—I'm a private cop."

"A private—!" Mr. Bell's manner became cold, and his skinny hand slid toward the bottle. Hospitality was not a vice of his, nor was he in the habit of pouring his liquor down just any throat that came along.

Gaylord proved to be quicker on the draw. He whisked the bottle away from the flesh-broker's fingertips, and poured himself a hearty jolt. "Good stuff!" he observed, after drinking. "Pour yourself a slug, Bell. You look like you need it."

J. Edwin's tone was frigid. "I seldom drink with strangers!" He sat down regally. Unfortunately, an involuntary wince destroyed the intended dignity of the act. Mr. Bell was not in condition to sit regally at the moment. Discomfort sharpened his voice. "What's the purpose of this call, Mr. Gaylord?"

The raw-boned man put down his glass. "I tailed that dame here."

"The Countess de Brixxe?"

Gaylord restored the cigar to the corner of his mouth, and a wise-guy gleam dawned in his blue stare. "Malarkey! That French doll is nothing but a second-rate chorine from the *Revue Cinema* in Paris. She came over to the U. S. A. with one of them

European leg shows. Surely you didn't fall for that Countess gag?"

"So what?" countered Mr. Bell. "I'm not interested in her antecedents, if any. My concern with her is purely professional—"

Gaylord cut in. "Then you do represent her?"

The flesh-broker shrugged. "I'll answer that, Gaylord, when I can see just how it's any of your business."

The raw-boned man nodded. He pulled a chair close to the desk and his voice sank.

"It's my business, Bell, to keep that doll from landing a movie contract inside the next six months."

J. Edwin started. A little color came into his wan cheeks, and his eyes brightened He asked, "Why?"

"She's here in Hollywood on borrowed money," said Gaylord "Right. after she landed in New York, she got acquainted with one of those big butter and henfruit men. The guy fell for her hard and pulled that change-your-name-to-mine gag on her. She said she didn't want to settle down until she had a crack at the flickers, no matter if it took her five years to do it. He lent her the money to come out here, with the understanding that she'd marry him if she didn't make a go of it inside six months. To make double sure, he's hired me to make sure she *doesn't* make a go of it."

Mr. Bell shook his vulture-like head. "It sounds screwy to me."

"He's in love," grunted Gaylord. "And, like I always say, love is the eight ball on the table of life."

J. Edwin's smile was tight. "What I don't understand is how you could possibly prevent the girl from breaking into the movies—assuming that she's the lucky one in a million."

"I haven't done so bad this far," grinned the raw-boned man. "She applied for a screen test at C-M-C, and the casting director was impressed enough to give her one. I intercepted the letter from the studio, so she didn't show up for the test. She's had a couple calls from the Central Casting Bureau, too, but I've been able to bribe the switchboard girl at her hotel so's the calls come to me."

Mr. Bell gave a dry chuckle. "Pretty crude, Gaylord. What are you going to do now that the Countess has placed her affairs in the hands of a capable agent?"

Gaylord bit into his cigar. "I'll buy up her contracts—in case she gets any"

J. Edwin placed his hands on the desk, and his skinny fingers erected a steeple "Suppose that one of the studios offered this girl a two hundred dollar a week contract—which would be about tops for a mere bit player. My commission on that would be twenty dollars a week, or say eight hundred dollars for the customary forty-week year."

"A contract like that, signed by one of the studio bosses," said Gaylord, "would be worth fifteen hundred dollars to my client. With the understanding, of course, that the dame never even knew there *was* such a contract in existence."

"Cash?"

"Naturally. We don't want any checks lying around, any more than you do."

Mr. Bell sniffed. Characteristically, the proposition aroused no moral scruples in his being. He had no objection whatever to selling out on a client.

"Leave your phone number with the office girl," he told the raw-boned man.

"If anything comes up, I'll let you know."

His thoughts were racing, but his sallow face gave no clue. As soon as Gaylord had gone, the flesh-broker arose hastily from his chair He adjusted a derby to his narrow skull, and strode into the outer office.

"Miss Baines, I'm going over to the movie college. If anybody calls, tell 'em I'll be back in an hour." The flesh broker showed his teeth in a cold grin. "Unless I'm awful mistaken, Miss Baines, there's a representative from the *Revue Cinema* on his way over here right now."

Miss Baines looked up stupidly. She was homely as a rail fence, and apparently hard of hearing; also it took her forever and an hour to get the simplest information from the files. But she worked for next to nothing, so Mr. Bell had endured her for two whole weeks.

"I'll tell him you're expecting him," said Miss Baines.

"No! I don't want him to know that!"

LEAVING the building, Mr. Bell walked briskly for several blocks in the direction of Hollywood Boulevard. Walking saved taxi fare, and also it permitted the California breeze to exert a drying influence on the seat of Mr. Bell's trousers. He never talked to the movie college over the phone, anyway. Disgruntled students were great at complaining to the postal inspectors, and J. Edwin lived in fear of having his wires tapped. He had an acute notion that it would go hard with him in case it should come out that the college and the Empire studio were under one management—his own.

Therefore he ducked furtively through a doorway, climbed the stairs instead of using the elevator, and slipped cautiously through a rear door into the *Pacific School of the Cinema.*

The atmosphere here was not exactly collegiate. A row of tinny-looking picture projectors ranged along the wall of a large room, and two large Irishmen with hairy arms were packing these into cardboard boxes to ship—collect—to the hopeful students.

In the next, smaller room a blond girl sat snipping open envelopes and withdrawing checks and money orders. Some of these undoubtedly represented the total savings of young gullibles who believed Mr. Bell's advertising circulars—but this failed to worry J. Edwin. A dollar was a dollar, no matter where it came from. With a grin, he picked up the day's booty.

"Not bad, eh, Hilda? Have the president sign these, and get 'em cashed—I need some money."

He strode on into the president's office. This worthy—in spite of his silver hair and benign features that graced the advertising brochures so nobly—was a mere five-dollar-a-day extra. Mr. Bell ignored him, and allowed his stare to concentrate on the Countess de Brixxe.

That young lady sat raptly listening while the president's voice boomed on. It seemed she would be making the mistake of a lifetime if she didn't take advantage of the special reduced tuition and join the college right away—

J. Edwin Bell interrupted. "Countess, I got wonderful news for you! A big studio just called my office and asked for a feature player exactly your type! You can have a screen test right away, and if you're lucky it'll be a two-hundred-fifty dollar a week job!"

The girl sprang to her feet. "How wonderful! *Alors!*"

The president looked flabbergasted, to put it mildly. His voice choked. "But, Mr. Bell! The Countess was just going to sign up for the course here—"

J. Edwin favored him with a freezing stare. "Never mind that! The Countess and I are going right over to the Empire studio and arrange for her test!"

They went, in a cab. The exterior of the Empire lot was not impressive, consisting of a ramshackle building planted in the middle of a large but barren lot.

"It isn't much for looks," admitted J. Edwin, "but they do most of their stuff on location, you know."

"Mais non. But they make the cowboy pictures perhaps?"

"Exactly," agreed J. Edwin Bell. He hurried the young woman into the producer's office. The producer took his heels off the desk, and climbed to his feet in a hurry. He owed his financial life to his arrangement with Mr. Bell, and he knew it. Without batting an eyelid, he heard the flesh-broker declare:

"This is the Countess I told you about."

The producer nodded brightly, "Oh, yes. Yes, indeed."

"You'd better call in one of your directors and have a test made."

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed."

The director came in—there was only one director employed by the outfit, and he was by way of being a luxury—and the Countess de Brixxe was escorted off in his charge. Mr. Bell turned to the producer with a grin:

"Harry, fix up a contract for that girl at two hundred and fifty a week."

"Good—!"

"Don't worry," and the flesh-broker chuckled. "She'll never sign it—never get to see it, even."

"Then why in the —?"

"Its okay, Harry. Perfectly okay."

Mr. Bell hustled back to his office with the contract in his pocket. He had not waited to see even a rush from the test—in fact, the test had been made without film in the camera. Just a matter of economy.

Miss Baines blinked at her employer. "You *were* right, Mr. Bell. There's a man named Raoul waiting in your office now, and he says he's from the *Revue Cinema!* Mr. Bell, what is the *Revue Cinema?"*

"Never mind," growled J. Edwin. "Just get Sam Sunday on the wire for me, will you?"

Sam Sunday being an extra whose specialty was hard-boiled cop rôles.

Mr. Bell sauntered on into his office. A dark-haired young man turned from the window, and bowed stiffly. He carried a béret in his left hand, and wore a pencil-line of mustache on his upper lip.

"Permettez, m'sieu!" he exclaimed rapidly. "But I onnerstan' you 'ave make the contrac' weeth Mme. de Brixxe, *n'est ce pas?"*

The flesh-broker stared. He moistened his thin lips, and his jaw advanced truculently. "So—what?"

"Mais non! But you cannot!"

"I can't what?"

"'Ave make zis contract. *Alors.* Mme. de Brixxe—she 'as already the contrac'."

Mr. Bell had been moving toward the desk; he stopped short. "What's that? What are you saying?"

The young man repeated it—the *Revue Cinema* already had an option on the services of the Countess. *"Oui, m'sieu,"* he concluded. "I am what you call—the Hollywood representative!"

They eyed each other a moment. Then J. Edwin spoke softly. "How much do you want to hand over this option to me?"

A smile lifted the pencil-line mustache. M. Raoul's eyes flashed. "But a trifle. Five hundred dollars—a trifle."

"And if I don't want it that bad—?"

The young man's smile was less pleasant, and an ominous gleam came into his stare. "So? In that case, pairhaps M'sieu Gaylord would buy!"

J. Edwin Bell pulled a very long face. He said hastily, "Could you have it here—the option—at three tomorrow?"

"Bien! If *you* can have the cash," replied Raoul. *"Au revoir!"*

The flesh-broker growled, "Goodbye!" But his good humor returned as soon as the phone rang. He snatched up the instrument. "Sam Sunday? Say, I got a little job for you at the office tomorrow—at three o'clock."

He put down the phone for a moment, to break the connection, and then spoke to Miss Blaine:

"Listen, girlie. Make appointments with the Countess and that gumheel, Gaylord. Yeah. Have 'em at three o'clock."

THREE o'clock found Mr. Bell in one of his most pleasant moods. Pleasant to himself, that is. It was the mood of a python whose toils are constricting on its victims, and who foresees a hearty meal.

He passed five hundred dollars in crisp century notes across the desk, and M. Raoul laid down a legal-looking document couched in French.

"Merci!" murmured the young man, and he reached for his béret. *"Merci, beaucoup! Au revoir, m'sieu!"*

J. Edwin Bell suddenly ceased to be affable. His thin lips tightened, and a glacial cold came into his monocled eye. His voice grated:

"Wait a minute, you crook—*that money's marked!"*

The words seemed to hang a long time in the air. M. Raoul staggered. His lips paled under the pencil-line mustache, and he blinked uncertainly.

"Marked! But, *m'sieu!* Surely there ees some meestake, what?"

"Yeah! Your mistake!" J. Edwin's skinny hand clawed the phone from its cradle. He barked, "Miss Baines! Tell Officer Sunday to bring those two fakealoos in here!"

M. Raoul pulled himself together. His stare narrowed aggressively. "I protest! I am outraged! I appeal to the French consul—"

Sam Sunday, wearing a derby hat pulled low over the hardest of his screen expressions, was pushing the Countess de Brixxe into the office. Behind the two trailed a crestfallen Gaylord. Mr. Bell darted a glare of triumph at them. He spoke again into the telephone. "Miss Baines, get Monsieur Garnett at the French Consulate. Tell him to come over here if he conveniently can. Say that some of his countrymen wish to say goodbye before they go to the Big House for a long, long stay."

Grinning, Mr. Bell watched M. Raoul sink in a chair. "You see, my bucko, your consul happens to be a close friend of mine!"

He exaggerated. In reality, J. Edwin Bell had no friends at all. But he had once meet M. Garnett in regard to an actress who was having trouble over her temporary visa.

M. Raoul's eyes fell. He sat nervously twisting his béret into a knot. J. Edwin shifted his stare to the Countess—that young lady was biting her lips.

Pleased with the effect of his announcement, he turned to Sam Sunday. "Have you got the warrants in your pocket, officer?"

"And how!"

Mr. Bell gave a mirthless laugh. "Wait outside the door, officer. It's just possible I won't press charges against these people—in case they see the error of their ways."

Sam Sunday retired, and J. Edwin helped himself to a cigar from within his desk. The three conspirators exchanged confused glances. Mr. Bell chuckled, enjoying the situation.

"So you thought I'd buy the sawdust diamond?" he sneered.

A scowl printed on Gaylord's lean face. "What's back of that crack?"

Mr. Bell leered. "It's the oldest confidence game in the world. The first worker goes into a saloon and shows the bartender a diamond ring; they have a few drinks, and then the diamond's missing from the ring. The first worker disappears after offering a big reward—five, six hundred dollars—for the stone, if found. Then his confederate pops in, pretends to find the diamond in the sawdust on the floor, and sells the stone to the barman for—say, a couple hundred. But the diamond's phoney, and the bartender never sees the first worker again."

J. Edwin blew a whiff of cigar smoke at Mme. de Brixxe. "In this case, Countess, you're the phoney diamond. Gaylord is the first worker, offering the big fifteen hundred dollar reward, and Raoul is the confederate. I'm supposed to pay him five hundred bucks—and then try and collect from Gaylord. Huh! Boy, would you two make tracks out of here the minute Raoul popped out with the cash?"

Raoul said, *"Mais non!* But you are wrong!"

Mr. Bell chewed his cigar comfortably. "I'll give you a chance to prove that! I'll cheerfully drop the charges—when Gaylord produces the fifteen hundred bucks. I'll burn both this *Revue Cinema* option and the Empire contract in your presence, and we'll forget all about it. Well," he challenged, "what do you say?"

Gaylord rubbed his face. "You got this wrong! I'll get the dough, but it'll have to come from my client in the East—which will take a couple of days."

"You'll have to do better than that!" grated J. Edwin. "Maybe Raoul here can borrow it from the consul, hey?"

His jest brought only one laugh—his own.

"Come! That cop ain't going to wait any couple of days," said Mr. Bell, when he had enjoyed his merriment. He ankled slowly around the desk, then suddenly snatched the purse from Mme. de Brixxe's lap. The young woman sprang from her chair with a cry of protest, but J. Edwin had already dumped the contents of the handbag onto his desk.

With a chortle, he peeled a twenty-dollar bill from the rubber-banded bankroll. His face fell, and a snarl crossed his lips as he thumbed through the remainder.

"Stage dough!"

IT was a body blow. J. Edwin faltered in his stride, but only for a moment. Then a sneer curled his lips, and he shook a skinny fist at the three. "Yah! Just pikers, ain't you? And I wasted my time playing ball with you! Well, I'm still taking you—for all you got! Shuck out that five hundred of mine, Raoul, and anything else you got in your pocket! Countess, you can peel that watch off your wrist. I play for keeps—"

Mr. Bell broke off, aware that the door had opened. On the sill stood a square little gentleman with a frock coat buttoned tightly across a round

abdomen, and a fringe of white beard descending over a stand-up collar. A gardenia blossomed in his lapel. His hand gripped a walking stick.

J. Edwin ejaculated. "Garnett! What the devil—?" He could not understand it. He had explicitly told Miss Baines to disregard any telephone messages from the office—

The square little gentleman replied, *"Comment?"* and then his mild stare found M. Raoul. A cry escaped the bearded lips. "Raoul, *mon cher* Raoul!"

Raoul sprang from his chair, and Mr. Bell's heart sank as the two men embraced. Not only that, but M. Raoul proceeded to implant a kiss amidst the whiskers whilst his own cheek was being smacked. . . .

J. Edwin heard a strange, croaking voice—his own. "You mean—this—he's on the level? He—he really represents the *Revue Cinema?"*

"Tiens! Certainly he does," replied the square little man, waggling his walking stick to emphasize the point.

"Haven't we been trying to tell you that fact?" rasped Gaylord. He threw a threatening stare at J. Edwin. "Maybe you don't know it, bo, but you're liable for damages — false arrest! Libel! Not to say blackmail!"

Mr. Bell shrank. Perspiration dotted his narrow face, and his usually nimble tongue faltered. "It—it was only a joke. Sunday isn't really a cop—"

"Impersonating an officer?" snapped the lean man. "That's worse yet!"

The Countess de Brixxe snatched her purse from the desk and marched angrily toward the door. "I shall see a lawyer about this!"

"We'll both see a lawyer," and Gaylord hard-heeled after the young lady.

Mr. Bell sank into a chair, and winced. His cigar wabbled weakly, showered ashes upon his vest. Dull-eyed, he watched Raoul stalk from the room.

"Monsieur Garnett!" he groaned. "They—they can't sue me, can they?"

The square little man shrugged, and with a smile picked up the legal-looking document from the desk. "Do you perhaps read French, Mr. Bell?"

A startled gleam came into J. Edwin's eye. "No! Uh-h, what does that say?"

"It's a receipt," explained the other. "It's a receipt for five hundred dollars refunded by you to Miss Sally Briggs because she wasn't satisfied with some movie course or other. It's all itemized —one hundred dollars, tuition; seventy-five dollars, projector; fifty dollars, film fees; traveling expense from Brooklyn to Hollywood to work two days for the *Empire—"*

J. Edwin Bell's jaw sagged. "Briggs! Brixxe! I knew she was a phoney!"

His arm shot out, and he seized the phone. "Miss Baines! Those people just walked out of here—with five hundred dollars of mine—call a cop—!"

Miss Baines laughed at the other end of the wire. "Don't worry, Mr. Bell. The police are on their way over, with a couple of postal inspectors."

"P-Postal insp-p-pectors?"

"Yes, Mr. Bell, And you'd better wait for them to get here, because I have a gun in my desk. Besides, it wouldn't do you any good to run away. During the last two weeks, I've supplied copies of all your private papers to the chief inspector." Miss Baines laughed again. "Because, Mr. Bell, I happen to work for the Government—"

THE phone clattered from J. Edwin's unnerved fingers. For a long moment the room seemed to whirl in circles about him. Miss Baines had doublecrossed him! The Countess de

Brixxe — Briggs — had doublecrossed him! The world was full of doublecrossers! Even Raoul and the consul were mixed up in it some way—

A cheerful voice interrupted these meditations. 'What the devil, Mr. Bell! Cheer up! After all, it's an anniversary, and we're due for a little celebration here!"

A cry whimpered on Mr. Bell's thin lips. He cowered as the consul lifted a hand and swept off his beard—thereby revealing a familiar face.

Mr. Bell gasped, "Clem Sawyer!"

The consul tossed aside his frock coat, and removed a bulging pillow from the waistband of his trousers. He said, "Yeah! You see, Bell, all my friends tell me I'm quite a mimic. I take off Eddie Cantor, Maurice Chevalier, W. C. Fields, and all those guys. Taking off the consul was easy, because after I got fired by *Empire* I got a job answering the phone at the Consulate."

J. Edwin snarled. "You were in this deal, too, you crook!"

"Not until yesterday. I followed Miss Briggs—the Countess—out of here, and warned her to lay off because you were Hollywood's prize skunk. She told me how Raoul—that's her brother—and her uncle Gaylord were trying to get back the money she'd invested in your swindle school. And you'd better not call her a crook!" cried Clem Sawyer. "That paper on your desk really *is* a receipt for refunded tuition!"

He reached out as if to pick up the paper, but his hand kept right on going until its fingers fixed firmly onto J. Edwin Bell's neck. He jerked, hauling Mr. Bell face down across the desk. His other hand lifted the cane.

"And now," said Clem Sawyer grimly, "to celebate the day I went to work for *Empire*—"

J. Edwin Bell twisted, and craned his scrawny neck so that his sharp chin aimed back over one hunched shoulder. He took a good long look at the walking stick. It was by no means a frail or fashionable stick. On the contrary, Mr. Bell's stare found a choice length of stout blackthorn reinforced at frequent intervals with thick, silver bands. The wood was exceedingly gnarled, furnished with a great number of fairly sharp edged, knotty protuberances.

The monocle spilled from Mr. Bell's gaping eyes, and a shudder jerked his lanky frame. "No! Please! I—I—oh, please let me refund your tuition, too!"

MEN OF DARING

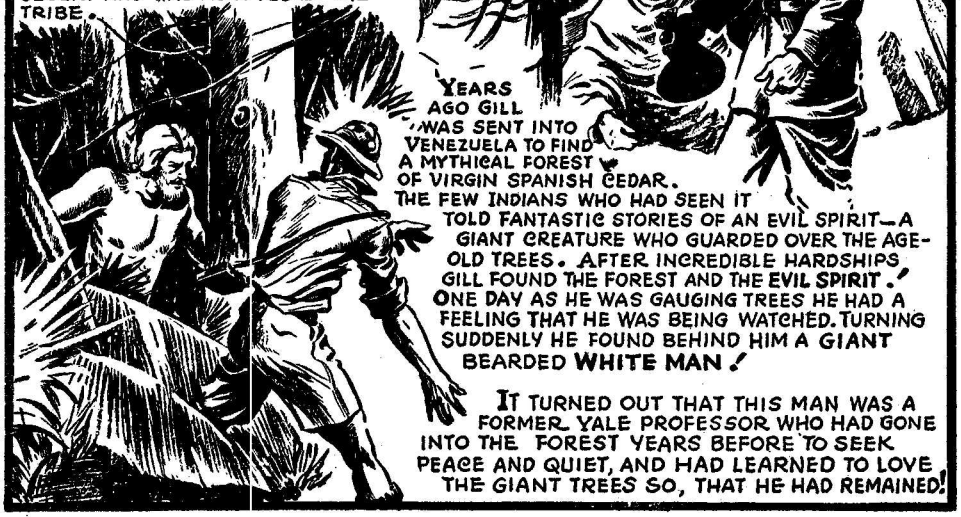
by Stookie Allen

Forester

THE LIFE STORY OF TOM GILL, FAMOUS WRITER, IS EVERY BIT AS EXCITING AS THE THRILLING YARNS HE SPINS. STARTING HIS CAREER AS A FORESTER IN THE NORTHWEST, HE FOUGHT FIRES AND CROOKED LUMBERMEN, MAPPED COUNTRY KNOWN ONLY TO THE INDIANS, NAMING STREAMS AND LAKES AS HE MAPPED THEM.

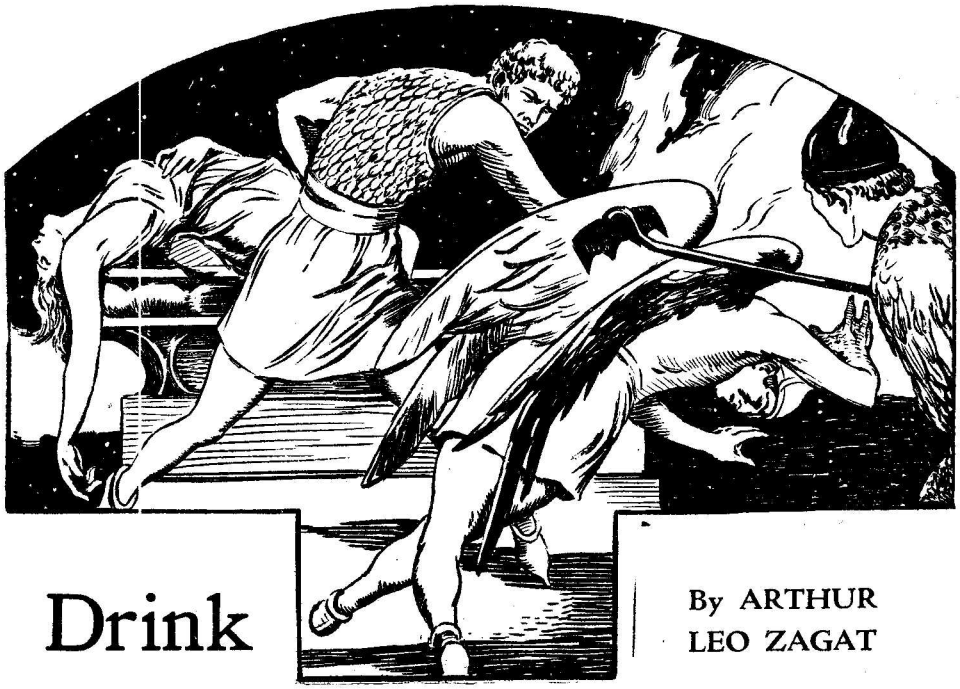
TOM GILL

HE HAS RIDDEN ACROSS DESERTS SO HOT AN EGG COULD BE FRIED ON THE SADDLE, AND PASSED THROUGH COUNTRIES SO COLD THAT TREE TRUNKS WOULD SPLIT. DOWN IN THE SOUTHWEST HE TRADED WITH THE ARAPAHOES, THOSE FIERCE NOMADS OF THE DESERT AND WAS ADOPTED BY THE TRIBE.



YEARS AGO GILL WAS SENT INTO VENEZUELA TO FIND A MYTHICAL FOREST OF VIRGIN SPANISH CEDAR. THE FEW INDIANS WHO HAD SEEN IT TOLD FANTASTIC STORIES OF AN EVIL SPIRIT—A GIANT CREATURE WHO GUARDED OVER THE AGE-OLD TREES. AFTER INCREDIBLE HARDSHIPS GILL FOUND THE FOREST AND THE EVIL SPIRIT! ONE DAY AS HE WAS GAUGING TREES HE HAD A FEELING THAT HE WAS BEING WATCHED. TURNING SUDDENLY HE FOUND BEHIND HIM A GIANT BEARDED WHITE MAN!

IT TURNED OUT THAT THIS MAN WAS A FORMER YALE PROFESSOR WHO HAD GONE INTO THE FOREST YEARS BEFORE TO SEEK PEACE AND QUIET, AND HAD LEARNED TO LOVE THE GIANT TREES SO, THAT HE HAD REMAINED!



Drink We Deep

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

AROUND the Helderbergs broods a strange, dark mystery. Through their jutting ravines, glancing from their rocky flanks, the wind whispers of other times . . . of other men . . . and hums a weird lament for things that are passed, and for things that have never been.

The menace appears to center around the bottomless azure of Lake Wanooka. Dr. Courtney Stone, resident there, is troubled by a series of phenomena that even his expert medical knowledge cannot fathom.

What, first of all, is the strange epidemic that is spreading over the countryside with such alarming rapidity? It seems to be a form of sleeping sickness, endemic to the Wanooka region, but its symptoms are completely baffling.

And what--in the name of reason stripped and mocked--could explain the affair of the tramp picked up in a roadside accident and brought to Stone's office in the dead of night? Hugh Lambert, Stone's friend and manager of Camp Wanooka for Boys, suffered a severe loss of blood in the crash; and, discovering that in Lambert's veins flowed a type of blood that did not belong to any known classification, and discovering, too, that the tramp, by weird mischance, also had this unknown blood-type, Dr. Stone ordered a transfusion. And slowly before the eyes of Stone and Nurse Horne, the tramp melted away into nothingness. . . .

AFTER that, Lambert's actions had been puzzling, to say the least. Then he disappeared. The earth swallowed him. There was no trace of him except his clothes piled neatly on the shores of Lake Wanooka.

Most of the boys have left the camp when the strange sickness strikes at one of those remaining. The camp is quarantined. Dr. Stone is helpless to cope with the disease, and all its victims are dying.

It was Jethro Parker, a farmer of the neighborhood, who had noticed the tramp's resemblance to Jeremiah Fenton, drowned the winter before in a skating accident at the lake. And it is Jethro Parker who takes it upon himself to investigate the tramp's disappearance.

Edith Horne, certain that somewhere, somehow, Hugh Lambert is still alive, feels that if she or Dr. Stone tries to explain about the tramp to the authorities, Hugh will never be seen again. So Stone, half for that reason, half to protect himself from what might very well turn out to be a murder charge, drugs Parker, who is striking too

This story began in the Argosy for July 31

close to the truth, and takes him to the camp. . . .

THE explanation for all these mysteries lies in the existence, fathoms below the lake, of the strange race of Little Folk. And into the heart of their subterranean civilization Hugh Lambert has been taken, carried away by the uncontrollable impulsion that seized his brain immediately after the transfusion.

Down . . . down . . . down . . . he travels, shrunken to the size of the Folk, following one Vanark, sent to earth's surface to fetch him. Lambert discovers that while his thoughts are his own, his muscular actions and responses are directed by some Other. It is the voice of this Other, speaking through his lips, that defends him when Vanark would have killed him. Temporarily recovering the use of his volition, Lambert had launched an attack upon Vanark, and for this he is condemned to die. But he temporizes cannily, inspired by the Other, until the maiden Nalinah, of equal authority with Vanark, appears upon the scene and rescues him.

"He was brought here for a purpose, Vanark. The Council must decide what is to be done with him," Nalinah says.

"But he is no good," Vanark protests. "He is uncontrollable . . . he will not help us. Better to kill him immediately."

Nalinah, however, triumphs, and takes Hugh Lambert, whom she calls first Hugh Lambert, and then, for convenience, simply Hula, to the City. On the way they fall into conversation about the Law of her civilization—and of his.

Nalinah tells him of a proposed invasion of the earth. At first Hugh laughs at the idea, and then, remembering the strange powers of the race, is sobered.

"We need only to learn a little bit more," Nalinah muses. "And it is you, Hula, who shall tell us what we need to know."

Lambert refuses.

Nalinah laughs. The sound is girlish, even merry, yet Hugh's ears catch a horribly sinister note in her laughter. . . .

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER I

Continuation of Hugh Lambert's Narrative:

RA NALINAH'S laugh was sinister with its implication of my utter helplessness against the forces of which she and her people were masters. Yet, curiously enough, it warmed me to her, calming, in the moment it was born, the rage her astounding statement had aroused in me!

There was in that silvery trill and in the glamorous countenance she turned to me, a soft caress almost as if she brushed my lips with the dusky velvet of her own.

More than any other of the strange folk who people this adventure of mine, which is too fantastically unreal to be a dream, I shall carry the thought of Nalinah with me into the oblivion that is death. Since first she had appeared in the doorway of what so narrowly had missed being my execution chamber, I had seen her imperious and regal as an affronted empress; wide-eyed and fluttered as a sub-deb at the sight of a new male; artfully seductive as a courtesan of the *Petit Trianon;* callously cruel as a Borgia. She had been, only a moment ago, a keen-minded analyst of politico-economic systems; as the representative of a super-race she had announced their intention of a world-conquest that would brook no opposition and conceived no possibility of defeat.

Now Nalinah, wise with the ageless, instinctive wisdom of her sex, covered with a laugh her heartache over the man child who strutted brash defiance of a doom she knew must overwhelm him.

Yes, there was mocking gaiety in her laugh; but there was also pity!

Because of that, the interior of the rushing *lusan* was chilly with a fear that struck into my very bones. But I said quite calmly, quite steadily;

"If you and your people, Ra Nalinah, will come among mine as friends, I shall be happy to do everything in my power to help you. If you come as enemies, Satan himself could not compel me to stir so much as my little finger to aid—"

A screaming hell of sound battered at me. Nalinah jerked the *lusan's* control lever toward her, her pupils abruptly widened to dark pits, her face lined and suddenly pallid! I catapulted out of my seat, crashed agonizingly against the visual screen!

My legs, arms, skull burst with the surge of blood forced to them by the sudden checking of our tremendous speed. Half stunned, I heard Nalinah's scream, managed to twist.

The girl's clutch tore loose from the lever. In the flashing split second before she would strike it I thrust myself sidewise along the wall to which I was pinned, took the impact of her soft form on my own, cushioning the blow that certainly would have maimed her.

What little breath I had left was smashed out of me. I pounded with Nalinah down into the narrow space between screen and seat-base. Then we were falling again.

Jackknifing in mid-air, I contrived to get between the girl and the metal just as we struck. I folded her in my arms. I saw the lever spearing down to impale us. I jammed a foot into a corner, crooked a knee over that threatening handle, and clung like that while the crazy, bounding roll continued.

It slackened, stopped. . . .

THE floor of the vehicle pitched steeply forward. Nalinah was a limp, unconscious bundle in my arms. I shifted her, and twisted to get my knee free of the lever. The screen came across my vision and, oddly canted in its depths, I saw a field through whose stand of some vividly orange crop ploughed the wide furrow of the *lusan's* mad plunge. Across this field a score of white-faced Taphetnit, their outspread wings a rainbow shimmer about them, streamed toward us with high, awkward bounds.

Dazedly lifting Nalinah to the seat, I wondered why our rescuers were not flying.

The image of their leader expanded to fill the screen like a movie close-up. I saw that those glorious wings of his were cruelly cropped, and knew why they did not fly.

He went past. Behind them I glimpsed a green-uniformed soldier on the ground, contorted and very still. I saw another guard, his belly ripped open. I caught sight of the road from which the *lusan* had been flung.

Grating metal whirled me to the side wall. It was pierced by a circle of light that opened out from its own center. The Taphet was right outside, waiting for the aperture to grow wide enough to admit him.

I crouched. The murdered guards, my flashing glimpse of a pit in the road that had been skilfully masked to trap the *lusan*, had warned me that the wreck was no accident, but a trap.

The Taphet leaned in, reaching for Nalinah's recumbent form. I leaped, smashed a fist into his face. Bones crushed under my knuckles. My momentum hurled me out of the *lusan*. The Taphet went down, but I snatched at the edge of the entrance, managed to hold to my feet.

Another of the winged men sprang at me, flailing something that looked like a hoe at my head. I ducked under it, buried a one-two in his midriff.

Hands grabbed my ankles, living weight pounced on my back. I stumbled, flailing out, and was swamped under a heaving, tossing mass of the Taphetnit. I was on the ground, my face being pressed into rock, my arms, my legs pinioned and useless.

Blows battered me, stinging but ineffectual because the attackers were in each other's way. That gave me a moment to realize that I was overwhelmed, that they would finish me off first, then . . .

Their twitterings, shrill, excited, told me they were getting organized. One by one they extricated themselves from the pile.

When I judged only one or two Taphetnit remained on my back I heaved upward, came up easily. Too easily! I whirled to face the marauders.

One sprawled headlong where he had been flung by my leap. Another staggered, fighting to catch his footing.

There were only two of them! Where were the others?

The standing Taphet was suddenly rigid. Then—I pulled a hand across my eyes—he was *blurring!*

The surfaces of the winged figure at which I stared were wavering and losing definition. Details merged into one another as though he were a waxen statue exposed to the blasting heat of furnace. Just like that he was melting, was running together!

There was agony in the Taphet's face, such agony as I hope never to look upon again: and then there was no face at all. There was no Taphet, only an irregularly shaped pillar whose outlines changed constantly as it shrank. Runnels of viscid liquid dripped from it. It toppled, splashed in a great pool that glistened yellow on the ground, dissolved.

The beat of frantic wings tore my gaze from that horror. The last Taphet was fighting to get to his feet. A flash of light flicked to him, and he was immobile, his frozen pinions shining with splendor. At once he too began to melt.

The flash seemed to have come from the direction of the *lusan*. I looked there. Nalinah was tensed just outside its entrance. She held her curious wand high before her and the tiny sun at the center of the device blazed hot and dazzling as if it were veritably a miniature sun.

The glare was fading, its lethal task accomplished. Of the score of Taphetnit who had attacked us, nothing but that glistening pool was left. The grisly fluid lapped around a half dozen metallic implements whose use I could not make out; then settled to a gruesome stillness.

At the very edge of the pond a single iridescent feather floated.

"They *planned* to kill me, Hula." Nalinah brought me back to realization that we were both alive who, were it not for the awful power of her wand, would be corpses now. "See there," she pointed, "behind that tumbled stack of harvested *fortlik*, the opening of the tunnel they bored to undermine the road. When they saw my *lusan* approaching they killed their guards and sought to slay me."

There was in her tones only a kind of uncomprehending wonderment. Just so had a small boy I once overheard in Gramercy Park sounded as he said to the nurse from whose side he had strayed to become embroiled with an urchin of the slums: "He hit me, Nana. I only said hello and he hit me."

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I WENT gingerly around the yellow pool to the girl's side. I forced my lips to grin, wryly. "It was a good thing you came to so quickly."

I tried not to think of why it was a good thing. I tried not to think of that slip of a maid deliberately, coldly, efficiently, extinguishing twenty living beings.

"Yes," she agreed, and turned to gaze at the *lusan*. "It is staunch," she pondered. "It is injured not at all. If it could be gotten back to the road it would function as well as before."

I was bruised, battered, aching with pain and exhaustion. Twice in the cataclysmic moments just past I had saved her from injury, from death, and she knew it. If she had thanked me I should have disclaimed her gratitude. But this calm acceptance of what I had done, this matter-of-fact ignoring of it, angered me.

"Look here," I burst out, hotly. "Do you realize— *Look out!* There are more of them coming!" I grabbed her arm. "Get into the *lusan!* We'll be able to defend ourselves better from inside."

She twitched out of my grasp, swung around. "Where?" she gasped.

I flung a pointing finger to the dots I had glimpsed speeding toward us across the flaming terrain. "There. Don't you see them?"

She was laughing once more, laughing at me! "Those are not Taphetnit, my Hula. They are an emergency troop of the labor squadron guard. It has taken them long enough to appear."

I saw then that though only one small group was in motion, other figures speckled the horizon, completely circumscribing us. Silent silhouettes against the drab sky, they watched us from afar, and it came to me that, wing-cropped as the Taphetnit had

been, they could not possibly have hoped to escape that ominous ring.

I said something to that effect. "Yes," Nalinah agreed. "They knew that in attacking me they condemned themselves to certain death. Just think what such devotion would be worth to the Folk, were the Taphetnit willing to serve Mernia as they serve their own fantastic philosophy."

I recalled that futile sacrifice later, when I learned what philosophy it was she called fantastic; but now I had no time to respond. The foremost of the oncoming guard had reached us.

HE CLICKED heels, saluted. *"Gor Surah,* Ra Nalinah," he greeted her, crisply.

"Gor Surah, Colonel Skoolteh." She went through one of her amazing metamorphoses, and was once more a figure of imperious hauteur. "How is it that this outrage could occur in your district?"

"Outrage?"

She told him what had happened. "You reported this region completely under control," she ended, angrily.

"I did." Skoolteh was taller than Vanark or Hafna, older, the tight black cap of his hair graying at the temples. Every line of his erect form spoke of the habit of military dignity long ingrained. "The Taphetnit laboring here had been altogether amenable. We were short-handed and I had every reason to believe it would be safe to leave only a skeleton guard here, transferring the men thus released to the fields nearer Calinore where there have been so many outbreaks of late."

"It is evident that was part of their scheme," Nalinas retorted. "They had observed that I always followed this route on my visit to Gateway Wall during the past few *steena.** Apparently the conspiracy is widespread. They contrived that the Taphetnit working here should be as scantily guarded as possible, so that they might carry out their attack on me with little risk of discovery or interference."

"Not *their* plan, Ra Nalinah," Skoolteh glanced around. His men, were drawn up in rank, well beyond earshot. "No Taphet has the capacity to scheme so well. They carried out the plot, but it could only have been formed in the brain of a Surahnit."

Nalinah's nostrils twitched once. "You but seek to minimize your shame, that you should have been so deceived by the flutter-minded Taphetnit," she said coldly. "You know as well as I that no Surahnit could be so recreant to the Folk Weal."

"No?" The officer's smile was as frosty as the girl's voice. "Has the Ra forgotten the Surahnit Battalion that formed the spearpoint of the Taphetnit attack upon our city of Tashna seventeen *sloonit** ago?"

"What Mernian tot has not been taught that tale? It is you, Colonel Skeelteh, who seem to have forgotten how the wrath of Nal Surah went out against the traitors, and how they were extirpated root and branch."

Nalinah gestured to the pool at our feet, drying already and green-scummed. The small motion made plain how the renegades had been punished.

*Note: Weeks, approximately. Properly speaking, since the peculiar illumination pervading Mernia is by its very nature constant, there are no days or nights here. The Folk do, however, have a measurement of time, and this is as good a place as any for me to set it forth.

The smallest unit of their clock is the *neks,* roughly corresponding to our minute. Twenty *neksa* make a *roh* or hour, sixty *roho* constitute a *ranhaltin* or day.

The *ranhaltin* is divided into three equal portions of twenty *roha.* The first, called the *ran,* is the period of labor; the second, the *hal,* a time for relaxation and pleasure; during the *tin* the Mernians sleep. The *roha* within each of these periods are separately numbered, so that one speaks of "the third *ran roh,*" or, "twelve *neksa* past the sixth *hal roh,*" or, "four to the sixteenth *tin roh.*"

Then there is the *steen,* the Mernian week, composed of ten *ranhaltinit.* The tenth *ran* in each *steen* is devoted to the strange form of worship I shall later describe, and is called the *fusran.* Thus their Sunday is called *Fusranhaltin,* while the other *ranhaltinit,* the other days, are simply numbered, two to ten; e.g. *ranhaltin* three, or, more commonly, *ran* six, *tin* nine, etc.

Ten *steena* constitute a *thom* (month); not named but similarly numbered one to ten; ten *thoma* a *sloo* (year). I have not yet had occasion to discover what terminology they assign to the *sloonit* for the purpose of reckoning dates.

One thing it is imperative to bear in mind. While I have compared the *neksa* to minutes, the *ranhaltinit* to days, and so on, I have done so simply for clarity. I have no idea of just how the *sloo,* for example, compares in actual time duration to our year, and will not until when, if ever, I return to the Upper World and can compute the time elapsed since my leaving it in terms of both systems. H. L.

*Years.

"The wings of the rebel Taphetnit were cropped, and from them the labor squadrons were formed, so that through the rest of their life they might expiate their crime," she went on. "But of the Surahnit who led them not a drop of blood was left in all Mernia. From Wall to Wall they and their families were hunted down, and they were herded in the Central Plaza.

"I was there, General Skoolteh. It is my earliest memory, how my mother held me hight, a tot of two *sloonit,* so that I could see over the heads of the throng and watch them perish—old men and young, mothers, wives and sisters, sons and daughters—in the glorious purge."

Something of a long ago horror, never obliterated, crawled in the cerulean depths of her eyes, belying the adjective with which she had described that holocaust. "None escaped. None at all."

"*One* did escape." Skoolteh was a graven image, staring straight ahead of him, only his lips moving. "A baby boy. A subaltern then, I had become separated from the squad of troops I commanded. I saw him borne off between the wings of a fleeing Taphet. I could have brought both down with my *coret,* but I did not.

"That boy, if he still lives, would be eighteen now. Ra Nalinah! Some *roha** ago it was reported that our search rays have spied out a Surahnit in Calinore, where by the Law no Surahnit may dwell. A lad of about eighteen. The Nal has already made demand for his delivery. There has been no reply as yet. If that reply should be in the negative, it will be my duty to lead a force against Calinore and take the boy from the Taphetnit who shelter him."

The girl appeared not to have heard the latter part of Skoolteh's statement. "You permitted the offspring of a traitor to escape the purge?"

"His mother was the wife of my dearest friend."

"He ceased to be your friend when he turned renegade."

"*I* had ceased to be *his* friend long since. The boy—was my son."

"Your son!" Nalinah paled with fury. She took a step toward the colonel, her wand rising. "You violated the strictest law of Mernia, committed a second and more loathsome crime because of your offense. You, most trusted of the Nal's officers!"

Skoolteh's hand darted to his belt, flashed away again, a coret clenched in his webbed fingers. Before either of us could move, a scarlet ray streaked from the weapon's splayed muzzle.

The smell of burned flesh stung my nostrils. The body that crumpled to the ground in front of me had no head. I saw the charred place where it had set so proudly. I saw the edge of a green uniform-collar smoulder briefly and black out.

Colonel Skoolteh had resigned his command.

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Clipping from "Sound-Stage Secrets," Gossip Column of the Hollywood Herald, Thursday, August 30, 1934:

There's a grin around town so wide one jitters lest it slice off the head of the fellow wearing it. * * * The grin's the property of Carton Ford, World Pic's ace megaphonist. * * * He's doing *Heart's Desire* for Tycoon Ratskoff and it's the work of Ann Dorin in that epic that's got him dancing on the Boulevard. * * * "She reaches right into your chest and plays the Lost Chord on your heartstrings," Carton burbled to your correspondent. * * * "She was good in Love's Repentance but she's great in this. GREAT!" * * * Well, we always said our Ann would show the other gals something when she came down off that ice-cake she's been using as a perch. * * * What? * * * She's been scarcer around the nite spots than ideas in a contract writer's skull since she came back from her trip East. * * * Yeah, but there are whispers it took a strong-arm squad to *bring* her back. * * * One of the toughies is said to be nursing a jaw busted by a very masculine fist. * * * Seems clear *someone* has been teaching La Doring things she never knew before. * * * *

*Mernian hours. See Lambert's note. A. L. Z.

iv

Hugh Lambert's Narrative, resumed:

"HE'S killed himself," I exclaimed. "He—"

"Yes." Nalinah's somber look came away from Colonel Skoolteh's beheaded corpse. "He has cheated the Law."

She fingered that silvery wand of hers. Recalling the agony that had been on the Taphet's face in the moment before it was a face no longer, I knew very clearly why the man had chosen the *coret's* death. "But the evil he spawned still lives. I must get to Tashna at once." She turned toward Skoolteh's squad, beckoned.

They had remained at attention, so rigid their discipline that they had not stirred even when they saw their commander drop. Now, at Nalinah's signal, one stalked stiffly toward us. He halted two paces from the Ra and saluted her. His toes almost touched the colonel's body, but for all the expression on his swarthy countenance the ground might have been bare.

Nalinah's arm dropped from her answering salute. "Sergeant," she snapped, "have my *lusan* replaced on the road, on the Tashna side of where it was undermined."

"Very well!" the non-com responded. He saluted, spun on his heels. His left arm shot above his head, jerked in swift, crisp movements to either side of the vertical.

From the point on the horizon he faced, some of the watching forms vanished. I understood that he had semaphored an order, was being obeyed.

"Let us move aside," Nalinah said to me. "We shall be in their way here."

I was glad she made the suggestion. The stench from the puddle over which we stood was unpleasant to say the least. We walked a little way off, the girl very silent and thoughtful at my side.

The tall orange grass she had called *fortlik* rustled against our knees. The luminous stalks were about the diameter of my forefinger. They rose almost straight from the ground. The broad, pointed leaves sheathed the stems with their bases, and then curved gracefully outward. Here and there along the plant's height, ovid clumps, the thickness and length of my thumb, were tipped by tiny tassels of a silken lighter-colored fiber.

I plucked one of these, stripped off its covering. I was holding a wee ear of corn, its kernels just about the size of grains of wheat.

But if this were corn already ripe, I thought, the stalks should be well above our heads. Then for the first time since I had passed through the grisly morgue high within what the girl had called the Gateway Wall, I remembered the diminished scale I must apply to everything I saw in Mernia.

By the measurements of my own world, this corn was four inches tall, its ears less than half an inch long, the kernels microscopic.

Were I my proper size, this rustling field would appear only a shaggy, unmowed lawn to me. Even on the Mernian scale it was dwarfed. And although I was now on that scale there were times when I was aware of the minuteness of Mernia.

I speculated that this might be through starvation. The growth seemed too lushly luxuriant for that, yet nowhere in the vast cavern had I seen any soil fertile enough to support a crop. I bent, parted the stalks, looked down to their base.

There was no soil. There was only lava-like, darkly glowing rock. It was deeply scored by lines too straight to be anything but the handiwork of man. Within those almost thread-narrow ruts, running water glistened, washing the *fortlik's* roots!

This great field, the whole vast expanse of growing things I had glimpsed on the *lusan's* rushing journey, was artificially irrigated! The Little Folk had with infinite labor scratched into hard rock a myriad of tiny channels to make its barrenness fertile!

"Where does the water come from?" I voiced the next question that came to me. "I've seen no streams anywhere."

Nalinah came out of her reverie. "It

seeps out of the Western* Wall." She gestured in the direction toward which we had been speeding before the wreck. "Far beyond Tashna. *Fortlik* was first grown there, but when the Taphetnit were conquered the fields were moved here to be nearer their city of Calinore."

"I can imagine that some porosity in the rock there might permit sufficient water to seep through from some subterranean stream; to give you enough for your needs while not threatening to overwhelm you as long as its use keeps pace with its inflow. But plants need more than water to grow. Is that seepage also imbued with the food they require?"

"No. That which flows out of the Wall is water only. It is led to certain great basins there in the West, to which also are conveyed all our sewage, all the débris from our living and the bodies of our dead. Our scientists process these things and impregnate with the result the water out of which the *fortlik* grows."

"The bodies of your dead!" My voice was thin with shock. "You eat the grain that grows out of the bodies of your dead!"

MY FACE must have portrayed the revulsion, the horror, that crawled within me, for Nalinah stared at it with a curious mixture of non-comprehension and surprise. "Now what is strange in that?" she asked. "We know something of the life of your people. You slay living beasts and feed upon their burned flesh. This we do not do."

"But those are animals of a different species," I protested. "They are not our own kind. Our human kind we bury in consecrated ground and make certain that they lie undisturbed forever. We tend their graves, make them beautiful with grass and flowers that clothe forever the good fertile soil. They sleep forever—" I stopped suddenly. A query had sprung unbidden to my mind. Whence came the elements that mixed with what in the beginning was nothing but rock pulverized by wind and weather—rock that could support no life—to make it good and fertile?

Aeons of time raced through my thoughts. Out of a warm, salt sea, bits of living protoplasm crawled upon a sandy and barren beach, died, and decayed. Green things, as tiny, grew out of the slit. Once more the sea gave up a froth of microscopic life. This fed upon the green, and it was a little longer before dissolution claimed it.

Epochs wheeled by, uncountable tens of centuries. Now shaggy, brute-faced men prowled a steaming jungle. They killed for food, it is true, the monstrous beasts that shared their haunts; but they stuffed also into their fanged maws the tender fronds of the ferns, and the now forgotten fruits of a primordial verdure. The apemen died, and their corpses lay moldering in the jungle, and from what the chemistry of decay made of these corpses new verdure grew; whose fronds, whose fruits the children of the apemen stuffed into their fanged maws. . . .

I thought of grass and flowers upon carefully tended graves, their roots drinking from fertile loam the life elements washed out of cracked coffins, washed out of that which lies within these coffins. The grass and flowers die at last, are mowed down and carted off, perhaps to fertilize some field so that it may become golden with waving wheat. Perhaps some child, spooning his breakfast cereal, will nurture his chubby little body with an atom or two that once lived in the body of his great-grandfather.

Not horrible, this. Somehow beautiful. Somehow it lent a new dignity to death, a new and glorious symbolism to every gardened graveyard. *"Dust thou art, to dust returnest, was not spoken of the soul,"* indeed. But neither does the dust of the soul's

*Note: She did not say Western, of course, but I see no point in transliterating the Mernian names for the cardinal points of the compass, since they use four principal ones as we do. I cannot be quite sure, but I have a definite impression that the Gateway Wall is a prolongation of the mountainside on a shelf of which Camp Wanooka is situated. Orienting Mernia on this hypothesis, I am assuming that we had been traveling West, that North is to the right of our course, South to the left, and shall use this terminology whenever I have occasion to speak of direction.

I shall use the English words for distance also (yards, miles, etc), feeling that this will make my chronicle more intelligible.—H. L.

brief shelter remain mere dust. *"On Flanders fields the poppies grow . . ."*

"Forever!", Nalinah was exclaiming. "They lie forever undisturbed. How profligate that is! How rich your Upper World must be if it can afford such waste! Here in Mernia we dare not waste anything, dare not lose anything. Look you, Hula. Since Skoolteh's traitorous corpse is not worthy the honor of serving the Folk again, it will not go to the Basins. Because of this, because the scientists will not change it and so the crop of *fortlik* must be reduced by just so much, some Surahnit child must be denied the right to birth."

"Denied?" I was still dazed by the revelation, the new understanding, that had flashed upon me in a split second of insight. "Birth?" I repeated. And then I comprehended the full implication of her statement. "Your state does that? It grants or denies even the right to be born?"

"But yes, Hula. It is necessary." She spoke to me with the same patience, the same effort to understand that what to her was matter-of-fact must be explained to me, as that with which I have justified to some Arab of the trackless desert our law that one may move on a highway only when a green traffic light signals us permission to move. "Within the four Walls of Mernia there is sustenance for just so many. The balance between the needs of the Folk and the things that satisfy those needs is so delicate, the margin between race-life and race-death, so minute, that only by utmost care can the Folk survive."

I saw her point. "Yours is a meticulously planned economy," I exclaimed. "Not by choice, but forced upon you by the conditions, the poverty of your environment." I understand now the reason for their Creed for the rigorous, ruthless discipline of their Law. "Your totalitarian state—"

I WAS halted by the drum tattoo of many hoofs, rushing upon us. I wheeled. Horses were stampeding across the *fortlik* field—a band of horses herded by riders in the uniform of the labor guard. The cavalcade poured headlong through the swishing grain and my pulses thudded with the blood-tingling sight.

They were almost upon us. The riders shouted. The animals' forelegs braked them to a halt, a troop beautifully trained. High-spirited, they curvetted in their places. The guards leaped to the ground. Some were busy at once buckling the harness straps together, hitching the beasts into a team. Others snatched coils of leather strapping from their saddles, and commenced rigging it about the *lusan.*

Something odd about the beasts clamored for my attention. I moved nearer for more careful scrutiny. Its head was chunky, its jaws heavier than any horse I'd ever come across. It batted its great, lustrous eyes at me, shied away, neighing and pawing the ground. The luxuriant fetlocks of its legs made shaggy stockings completely veiling the pasterns. The hoofs beneath them—

Those were not hoofs! Not horses' hoofs. They were cloven into three indurated toes. *Three* toes!

My fist smacked into my palm.

If I were of Upper World height these horses would appear to be the size of St. Bernard dogs. Their hoofs were three-toed. They were not horses. They were the remote *ancestors* of our horses. They were *Eohippi,* the horses of Evolution's infancy. They were dawn-horses, the like of which have not roamed Earth's surface for fifty thousand years!

CHAPTER 11

Statement of Edith Horne, R.N.; dictated to the author:

MEN are such fools! Any woman would have known by Dr. Stone's face that he was lying when he drove up to the gate Thursday night; Jethro Parker lolling all over the seat beside him; and stammered out a story full of holes. But Ed Hard and Bob Falk swallowed it whole cloth, and of course the three boys did.

Morphy, the cook, did look a little puz-

zled, as nearly as one can make out any expression on his walnut shell of a face. I decided that was nothing to worry about. Even if Shean suspected something, he was an unreconstructed Sinn Feiner, aversion to constituted authority a fetish with him. He might do a lot of thinking, but he would do no talking.

The four men carried Parker into the infirmary. We shooed out the cook and the councillors. While I undressed the farmer and made him comfortable, I learned what really had happened.

"There wasn't anything else to do," Doctor Stone finished. "We ought to be safe enough for the two weeks till his wife, Martha, returns from her visit, and if we've heard nothing from Hugh by then there will be no point in keeping up the deception."

"You intend to keep him under chloral for two weeks, doctor?" I let no surprise, no protest, sound in my voice. "Hadn't you better review exactly what I should do when he collapses?"

"Collapses!" He stared at me. "I—I hadn't thought of that." I knew that. One of the first things a nurse in training learns is how to remind a physician of his lapses without appearing to have noticed them. "It won't work. We can't take a chance on killing him."

"We can't tie him up either, but we must not let him go."

"If we talk to him, if we explain everything," the doctor faltered, "perhaps we can persuade him to keep silent, at least for a while."

I have seen Courtney Stone in the operating room, confronted by more than one emergency that would have appalled another surgeon, and he was always completely unperturbed, brilliantly efficient. Now out of his element, he was a bewildered man, utterly at a loss.

"No," I answered him. "You know as well as I we'd never succeed in that, if he is normal. But there must be some way we can make him do exactly as we want him. Some drug, maybe, not as dangerous as chloral or an opiate. Didn't you say once, lecturing to the probationers, that a man thoroughly acquainted with the *materia medica* can play on the human body and mind as a master musician plays on his violin?"

"Some drug—?" He snapped his fingers. "Of course. Hyoscine hydrobromide! An injection of that paralyzes the centers of voluntary action in the cerebellum, renders the subject amenable to any suggestion. I was reading only yesterday about Dr. Calvin Goddard's use of it in criminal investigation. Given one-hundredth of a grain of it, the suspect cannot refuse to tell the truth when so directed. We can inject it while Parker's still under the influence of the chloral. When he comes to, he'll obey us as though he were a will-less cretin."

"I *knew* you would think of something," I exclaimed, admiringly.

"Boil up a needle while I go out to my car and see if I have any hyoscine in my kit."

"Your kit's here. I brought it in, and I am almost sure you have a tube of the tablets in it." I knew he had. I'd looked, while they were carrying Parker in.

ii

Affidavit of David Hard, Instructor at West End School for physical culture:

State of New York :
County of New York : ss
City of New York :

Edward Hard, being duly sworn, deposes and says:

I was, during the summer of 1934, head councillor of Camp Wanooka for Boys, situated near Albany, New York. The camp officially closed on the morning of August 30, 1934, but because of a possible contagion that had been discovered after the greater part of its members had left, there were quarantined within it the following: myself and Councillor Robert Falk, Nurse Edith Horne, Cook Shean Morphy, Campers Roger Norton, Percy White, Richard Loring and Charles Dorsey, and a neighborhood farmer named Jethro Parker.

Charles Dorsey and Jethro Parker were ill and confined to the infirmary. The rest of us were free to come and go about the

camp as long as we kept within its borders. Dr. Courtney Stone, Chief Surgeon of the Albany Post-Graduate Hospital, was medically in charge and was spending as much time with us as he could spare from his practice.

At about eight P.M. on the evening of the said August 30th, 1934, Robert Falk and I were with the three well boys in the recreation hall. I was refereeing a doubles table-tennis game the others were playing. Doctor Stone and Nurse Horne were in the infirmary with their patients.

The players were absorbed in a spirited rally when I heard a soft tap on a window behind me. I turned. Shean Morphy's face was pressed against the pane. Be beckoned to me, furtively. I nodded and he slid away.

I made some excuse and went outside. After the glare within the rec hall, I was blinded for a moment. I heard a rustle in the underbrush, started toward it, calling softly to Morphy. Fingers gripped my arm. They were trembling with palsy.

"Ed! I seen them. The leprechauns. They're all about."

His breath smelled to high heaven of alcohol, which was unusual. Morphy had been honest about this failing of his when Mr. Lambert, the director, had employed him, but during the season he had confined his sprees to hike days, when the camp was empty and they would not interfere with his duties.

His free hand pointed in the direction of the rustle I had heard. By this time my pupils had accommodated themselves to the dimness, but I saw nothing except the tree trunks.

I say I saw nothing. Remembering that I am under oath I must admit that for a moment I thought there was something there. The nearest I can come to describing it is that the air itself seemed to have thickened, to outline a human form scarcely a foot high.

It was imagination, of course, and the blinking of my eyelids dispelled the illusion. "You're seeing things, Shean," I said quietly.

"Seeing things, am I? Maybe it's the same way I'm hearing someone walking through the woods, way down at the end of the lake. But hush and you'll hear him too."

I listened. The muffled *click click* of the ball behind the rec hall's closed door made no impression on the close stillness of the mountain night. For some reason even the all-pervading shrill of the nocturnal insects was silenced, so that the sounds Morphy meant were quite distinct, despite their distance—the scrape of fabric against tree bark, a stealthy footfall, the snap of a dried twig under a heavy heel.

There was no doubt of it, someone was prowling through the camp grounds, there to the north. That called for investigation.

"I'm going to take a look," I whispered. "Be quiet, I don't want the others to hear."

I had two reasons for that. In the first place, the youngsters had been greatly overexcited by the disappearance of Hugh Lambert, the camp director, and I didn't want to set them off again.

I hate to confess that my second reason for not calling out Bob Falk was my sneaking suspicion that he might have had something to do with what had happened to Mr. Lambert. The only reasonable explanation I could evolve for the way the vanished director's clothing had been found was that Bob had arranged the garments. The prowler might be connected with that, might be trying to get in touch with Falk.

There was nothing I could do about Morphy except let him come along, but he was surprisingly quiet for a man in his condition. The skulker hadn't heard us, even when we reached the edge of the bushes at the lake front, and, halting, saw him standing at the very edge of the shore, *stark naked.*

An odd violet glow from the water silhouetted him. I recognized the farmer, Jeremiah Fenton.

He bent, picked up some objects from the ground. I made out a chessboard, a handful of chessmen, and a battered pipe. Then he was wading out into the lake.

"He's going to drown himself!" I exclaimed, and started out to stop him. Morphy caught my arm. His calloused palm flattened over my mouth.

"Wait," he breathed. "Let's see what queer thing it is he's up to."

So absorbed Fenton was that he was unaware of us. He halted, knee-deep in the violet shimmer, held the things he had with him out over the water.

"It's our birthday, Elijah!" His tone was as matter-of-fact as if the non-existent person to whom he spoke were right there in front of him. "And I know you want these presents more than anything I could buy."

He opened his hands and their contents dropped.

The violet light exploded to meet them, enveloped Fenton! Shean screamed, dragged me backwards into the bushes. We floundered there, the cook yelling, myself trying to bat him away and get to my feet.

When I succeeded, Fenton was gone, although his clothes were still on the shore. I looked down at Morphy, gibbering on his knees. "You scared him away, you damned drunk," I growled.

"The leprechauns took him. Did you not

see him get small in the midst of the light and the little men pulling a shining cloak over him? Did you not see them drag him into the lake, and themselves vanish under the surface with him?"

"No, I didn't," I snarled. "*I* haven't got the d.t's."

Falk and the boys were rushing up just then. We sent the kids packing and Bob helped me manhandle Morphy to his bunk, where we tied him down. We got Dr. Stone to come down to give him a shot of apomorphine, and after a while the camp quieted down.

Both men agreed with me that Morphy was half-crazed by the bootleg applejack he had assimilated. Doctor Stone told me that Fenton's twin brother had been drowned in Wanooka the winter before, which explained his actions nicely. Those Helderberg farmers are pretty sentimental, but they don't like to be caught at it.

Nobody tried to explain the way the light had flashed out of the water. Nobody thought it needed any explanation.

In witness whereof I set hereunto my hand and seal this 12th day of December, 1936.

(Signed) Edward Hard

iii

Hugh Lambert's Narrative resumed:

RA NALINAH and I were once more in the *lusan,* and it was again traversing the road. She had not been altogether right about the vehicle's being uninjured by the accident. It had started, true enough, when she pulled the control lever toward her, but it did not attain the blurring speed it had before.

The girl bit her lip, pettishly jerked the gleaming rod, but she could not get the *lusan* to move faster than what I reckoned somewhere around a hundred miles an hour. At this comparatively slow rate I had a chance to examine the shifting images in the visual screen.

At first, though, there was only the undulating expanse of the *fortlik* fields on either side, a great sea of orange luminance, and scattered buildings too far off for me to make out their nature. I began to lose interest.

"Hula," Nalinah murmured, nestling close to me, "from what you said, back there in the *fortlik,* I gather that in the world from which you come there is no such balance between life and death as here in Mernia."

It was a question, and I answered it. "Yes. Of course there is a balance of existence in the Upper World, not so very different from what you have here. Every living entity contributes to the welfare of every other, and depends on every other for its own well-being. Plants and animals, for instance, complement one another, what is poison to the one is the other's food. I have just thought of the reason why your scientists go to so much trouble to grow this orange grain"—I waved at it in the screen—"when apparently they are advanced enough to synthesize what food you need. It furnishes a perfect, and at the same time simple, example of that interlocking of function of which I speak.

"Your people, your animals—and ours—breathe in oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide. Your *fortlik*—like our vegetation of every kind—inhales the carbon dioxide and breaks it down into carbon, which it uses to build its substance, and oxygen, which it breathes out as useless to it. Without this supply of oxygen people and animals would perish. So it is with every other life-process, with us as well as with you. Do you understand that, Nalinah?"

"Hula." She was looking into my eyes, her own suddenly agleam with elfin laughter. "When you are absorbed, like this, your face is palely handsome as a Taphet's and at the same time darkly strong as one of our Surahnit. The combination thrills me."

I felt like spanking her for that, but I ignored it. "We, too, walk upon a narrow, unrailed bridge over a bottomless abyss that is black with the oblivion of our race's death. Till lately the bridge was a way so broad we could not descry its borders. Even then our safety depended upon that balance between our needs and their satisfaction but we did not think about it or trouble to maintain it. Nature did that for us, and we thought Nature would do it forever."

Nalinah's high brow grew pensive, and she became wholly attentive. I was all at once tingingly conscious again of her otherwordly beauty.

"Nature," I went on, my jaw ridging with my effort at self-control, "having started us off with her lush abundance, still watched over us. Kindly cruel and very wise, when either plants or animals out-stripped each other in numbers, upsetting the balance she had set up, Nature restored it by drought or floods, by catastrophe or pestilence, by the extinction even of one species or the creation of another."

"Why do you speak in the past?" the girl demanded.

I DID not reply at once. As the *lusan* mounted one of the great, smooth waves into which the bed of the Mernian cavern was folded, I caught sight, in the distance, of a clearing in the spread of grain. It seemed to be walled in by a gray palisade of stone, except where on one side a long, low building paralleled the road, and within that fence there seemed to be some sort of bustling activity.

"Why, Hula," Nalinah asked again, "do you say these things *have been?*"

"Because, like half-grown children, we have come to think ourselves wiser than she who fostered us. Over the whole face of the globe we have interfered with Nature's plans. We have drawn upon the stores which she laid up for us against a time of scarcity, and have wasted them. We have taken far more from the other forms of life upon the surface of our planet than we have given to them. We have even altered the span of life Nature decreed for us; even altered the ratio between our own births and deaths—not for the good of the race but for our pleasure. We have weighed down the scales against us almost too far for a chance of retrieval, and Nature has given up the task of holding the beam level."

We were now close to the enclosure whose appearance had intrigued me. Animals within the fence milled to escape some Taphetnit who worked among them. I saw one of the little beasts caught and dragged off into the windowless building. We flicked past.

"What are they?" I exclaimed.

"Tivra," Nalinah gave me their Mernian name. "From their skins comes the leather from which all our clothing is fashioned, and all our cordage."

She called them *tivra,* but I knew them by another name. Most laymen think of prehistoric creatures as the incredibly gigantic reptiles of the Mesozoic, *Dinosaurus, Triceratops,* and king of all, *Tyrranosauraus.* True, these did stalk old Terra fourteen million years ago, but the Glacial Ages, beginning five thousand centuries before the birth of Christ and ending some five hundred B.C., are quite as prehistoric. As we know by the fossil record of the rocks the fauna of those times, were diminutive rather then enormous. They were the tiny ancestors of the mammals we know today, like the Eohippi, like the *tivra.* Deer scarcely larger than our present-day fawns, their full-grown horns mere knobs behind their ears, our unimaginative paleontologists have named them *Dicroreri.*

The people of Mernia were diminutive humans, the wings of the Taphetnit notwithstanding. The two specimens of their animal life I had seen (I suspected then and know now the *only* two) were miniature mammals known to Earth's surface as recently as the end of the Pleistocene Era, but vanished since.

My slitted gaze strayed to Nalinah's wand, where she had thrust it into her belt. The device at its tip was, beyond dispute, a representation of the sun and its nine attendant planets. What could these dwellers in the subterranean world know of our solar system? True enough, they had made some excursions to the surface, yet it seemed utterly incongruous that the tenants of our skies should be important enough to them to inspire what was too evidently the symbol of their autarchy.

There was some clue, in all this, to their origin. The answer hovered tantaliz-

ingly at the threshold of my mind, slipped away from me as Nalinah brought me back to our discourse.

"Hula! You seem dismayed as you speak of the situation in your Upper World, yet to me it seems still a very Paradise, compared to Mernia."

"I don't wonder," I grunted, my mind still busy with the problem suggested by the *Dicroreri*. "No, I don't wonder."

"You started with a lavish abundance and much of that remains. Our universe is a closed one, limited by the four walls, the ceiling and the floor, of this great cavern. Nothing can come into it save the water that feeds the *fortlik*. Nothing can go out of it. Yet the Folk have survived here for thousands of *sloonit*."

"That is about all you have done," I responded. "Survive. Because you know nothing better, you are content to be ruled in all your thoughts, and all your actions, for every minute of your waking and sleeping lives by laws so rigorous that the punishment for their violation is a horrible death. You are content to be not individuals but mere creatures of your commonwealth, mere cells in a social organism, not free to live or love or even hate as you desire. You cannot comprehend how abhorrent such a life seems to me, how abhorrent it must be to any who has known the freedom of the Upper World."

"We are slaves, Hula, it is true. Yet we go on. You are free, and your race rushes to its own extinction."

"Not yet," I snapped. "We can still save ourselves."

"How, Hula? How?"

"By turning from our reckless course. By conserving wisely that which is left to us of Nature's bounty. By restoring, in our relation to our environment and our relations with one another, that balance of which I have spoken. By remembering, as a race and as individuals, that we must contribute to the common welfare as much as we take from it. By planning our existence, and living according to that plan."

"Your people, every one of them, are so wise then, so altruistic that you can do this, Hula, without sages to make that plan, without rulers to promulgate it as a Law, without dire punishments to enforce the Law? Are they, Hula?"

"Well . . ." I hesitated, then honesty compelled the answer. "No." The hint of a triumphant smile shadowed her lips, warning me of the trap into which she insidiously had led me.

What I had proposed was exactly the planned economy of Mernia that I so pitied the Folk for having to endure; what the negative I had just spoken made inevitable was exactly the despotism of a ruler caste, the absolute subjection of each individual to the state, that I stigmatized as revolting!

I recovered myself. "But we shall learn to be, so that we may work our destiny as free, masterless individuals, and not as slaves. The alternative is already too clear to us. Some territories upon Earth's surface, isolated by the artificial boundaries we call national borders, have already gone the way you imply we all must go. We have our horrible examples, our totalitarian states built upon one fanatic doctrine or another, and we see what sacrifice of happiness, what misery, they entail.

"Perhaps all humanity is mortgaged to that doom by the race's instinct to perpetuate itself, accepting any fate rather than extinction; but that mortgage is not yet foreclosed."

"No, my Hula?"

"No," I flung at her. "We are not yet in the situation of your Folk. Our resources are not yet drained. We still have a margin of safety. We still can preserve it and widen it. We still can save ourselves from the dire necessity that afflicts you, not by imposed Law but by our own enlightened choice. I still have faith, Ra Nalinah, that, joining hands in a great unselfish, democratic band, we shall yet march on to greater heights of happiness and well-being than we have ever known."

Her smile was gone. She seemed troubled.

"You are eloquent, Hula, but it seems to me that perhaps only you, of your race, feel the way you do."

"That is not so. Thousands upon thousands, millions, grow aware of the truth. The great army is forming. The hands are groping for one another. We shall blunder, we shall make lamentable mistakes, we shall know our dark days yet, but in the end we shall win through to the glorious light."

"Nay," she sighed, "but if this is more than just your dream, perhaps we Mernians have no right to—"

THE *lusan* lifted, abruptly. Nalinah cut herself off, fell into a dark absorption. I turned to the screen, saw that the ground, bare and dark once more, was dropping away from beneath us. The road was now a ramp stalking across the land on tremendous stilts, and climbing. The pitch of the incline slowed the limping *lusan* even more, so that it was crawling.

I peered downward at the airy network of the trestle members, a little dizzy with the height to which we were attaining, troubled a little by a sense of insecurity. The girders of that scaffolding seemed far too slender, far too fragile to support itself, let alone the weight of the *lusan*. They seemed to sway perilously in the dead air.

Quite suddenly the lacy structure was no longer a scaffolding springing from solid rock but a flying arch, a feathery bridge over an awesome chasm. I looked down into that terrible abyss, down till my eyes ached with the strain, and I could not probe its depths. Bottomless it seemed, its black mystery plumbing Earth even perhaps to the eternal fires bubbling at its core.

We were no longer over that fearsome gulf. The trestled ramp had curved suddenly, had become an ascending spiral, a mile across. Within the embrace of its arc, encircled by that incredible chasm, I saw the Surahnit city of Tashna.

I saw Tashna, but not for the first time.

I had seen all this; the strange buildings that spread beneath me, the great Central Plaza out of which soared a topless crystal shaft within which rainbow-hued clouds swirled and billowed while the whole city pulsed with a weird, unwholesome light—in my dreams!

CHAPTER III

Statement of Edith Horne, R.N., resumed:

THE drug we administered to Jethro Parker did all that we hoped it would. Friday morning he woke up and asked me where he was, what had happened to him. I told him, bluntly, not to bother me with questions. I fed him his breakfast, ordered him back to sleep. He obeyed like a babe. When Ed Hard came in to inquire after my patients only a practised eye could have made out any difference between poor Charley Dorsey and the farmer.

The healthy youngsters, Roger Norton, Dick Doring, Ann's brother, and Percy White, were much more of a problem. Restless, full of life they were continually getting into mischief. I had suggested to the councillors that they work out a schedule of activities, as near the ordinary routine of the camp as possible, and they had done so. I thought the water was getting too cold for swimming and forbade it. There had been quite a little argument about this, but I managed to win my point.

After I was through with feeding Parker at noon, and with the task of giving young Charley such nourishment as possible, there was nothing for me to do. Dr. Stone had run back to Albany to attend to his practice; Ed and Bob were giving the boys lessons in boxing; Shean Morphy, recovered from his indisposition of the night before was busy in his kitchen. The thought of Hugh broke through the barriers I had contrived to erect against it.

It was the uncertainty as to his fate that was so dreadful. I could have borne it better if I knew him to be dead.

With a queer idea that it might make him seem nearer, I went into the room

where Hugh had slept the night after he returned from Dr. Stone's and again the night after he almost drowned. I stood at the window and looked out into the woods.

I tried to look at the trees, gaudy with fall's yellow and gold and crimson. I saw only the smoke of autumn hazing the underbrush, and, through the wide-spaced trunks, Lake Wanooka's slate-gray surface, mirroring an over-cast, low-hanging sky.

It was down there, I recalled, that we found Hugh's clothing, each garment in its proper place, the tie knotted, the shoelaces tied, as they had been when he wore them. I remembered how the stiff corduroy trouser legs had been cylindrical, as though there were still calves and thighs within them.

There had been no legs, there had been no body within those garments. Hugh Lambert had vanished from within them.

But he was not dead. I should have known it if he were. He was alive, somewhere. I did not know, I could not conceive, where he could possibly be, but I knew that he was somewhere. And I knew that he was in danger.

The strange feeling of peril obsessed me. It seemed to be directed at me now, rather than at Hugh. The formless intangible mist at which I gazed was filled with wraiths just beyond the threshold of sight. They seemed to be creeping, slyly, furtively up the hill towards the infirmary.

My nails dug into my palms, so tightly were my hands clenched. The pain rayed up my arms, stung my brain, stung sense into it. I laughed, shortly, at my reasonless hysteria.

And heard a scream from within the house, a man's hoarse scream that could come only from Jethro Parker!

I WHIRLED, dashed through the door, into his room. He was out of his bed. His eyes bulged with terror and his great hands were pawing at his chest.

"Jethro!" I cried, halting in the doorway. "What is it? What—?"

He tore something away from him. Those hands of his were spread apart, as though they held something between them. Their fingers were curled, as though they clutched something. Hands, arms, were shaking as that something were alive, were fighting frenziedly to get loose. But I saw nothing. Nothing at all, except the farmer, the familiar furnishings of the little room.

Parker's arms swept over his head, slashed down, as if he were hurling from him the imagined Thing he fought. Glass crashed. The window pane had broken, just as if he had thrown some object.

"Jethro!"

He turned and stared at me, glassy-eyed. "Sucking me," he gasped, his hands back at his hairy breast but fumbling there now uncertainly. "It was sucking me."

Delirium, I thought. Hyoscine sometimes acts like that. "Get back into bed," I snapped. "Get back into bed and go back to sleep."

He did. He crawled into the bed like a scolded child. His eyes closed. He breathed slowly, deeply.

I crossed to him, felt of his brow. It was damp with cold sweat, but not feverish. His pulse was slightly rapid, but not more so than his exertion would account for. It could not have been delirium.

It could not have been delirium unless I, too, was delirious. Parker had had nothing between his hands. He had flung nothing at the window, that was four feet from where he stood.

But *something* had struck that window. *Something* had smashed through its pane and crashed with its shards on the ground outside.

When I looked at Jethro Parker I saw, where his hairy chest was exposed by the open V of his nightshirt, a reddened spot on the skin—as though his blood had been drawn close to the surface by a tiny, sucking mouth.

ii

Clipping from "Sound Stage Secrets" column of Hollywood Herald, Friday, August 31, 1934:

SCOOP!!! SCOOP!!!

*** * * This one just made the last edition deadline. * * * That grin on Carton Ford's phiz is gone. * * * World Pic's prexy Ratskoff is tearing the last three hairs out of his dome. * * * Their star turned out to be a Comet. * * * Ann Doring * * * Got a letter on the set this morning. * * * Read it * * * Walked out of the sound stage door. Out of the Lot gate. Hopped a taxi and before anyone tumbled to what she was up to was out of sight. Gate-keep Flannery had sense enough to get the hack's number. But La Doring must have tipped the cabbie plenty. He "don't know nothing." "I didn't make no pick-up in front uh the World lot this afternoon an' if I did I don't know where I took her." * * * Well, that washes-up *Heart's Desire*—and Ann Doring. Unless she shows back before Ratskoff strikes the sets and writes half a million off the books. * * * Exhibs won't take anyone else in our Ann's place. * * * Keep this to yourself. * * * I promised the guy I got it from I wouldn't tell anyone. * * * But I know I can trust you to keep it a "Sound-Stage Secret" * * ***

iii

Hugh Lambert's Narrative, continued:

IN THAT dream of mine I had seen the stone-built houses of Tashna from the ground level. That way they had appeared odd enough—hexagonal, windowless, their doors rectangular plates of the dull-red metal I have learned is an allotrope of copper called by the Mernians *lural.* Now, from the vantage of the slowly mounting *lusan,* I saw their real difference from any terrestrial structure. They were roofless! I could look down into them, as they were imaged on the vehicle's visual screen, and see every detail of their internal economy.

This was, come to think of it, quite to be expected. There is no rain in Mernia, no snow, no wind. The temperature is unvarying. The Mernians did not build their homes for shelter, but for privacy.

For privacy? Numerous small, railed platforms were bracketed to the legs of the trestles supporting the ramp-spiral that encircled the city, and the roads coming radially in to merge with it. On each platform a man stood, leaning over the rail, staring down. I pointed them out to Nalinah.

"They are the Watchers," she told me. "Their duty is to observe any infraction of the Law and report it to the Ratanit for punishment. They seldom have a report."

"I don't wonder," I remarked, thinking of those never-sleeping eyes watching the city. "Have you got some way of spying on the people's thoughts, too?"

My sarcasm failed. "Yes," was the girl's amazing reply. "See there." She pointed to a corner of the screen, to a building larger than most. "That is the Listeners' Post."

I leaned forward. The houses of Tashna are divided within into six-sided compartments or rooms, some of their partitions double-walled to allow for interconnecting passages. The entire city is laid out on this hexagonal plan, its resemblance to a vast honeycomb corresponding so well to the Surahnit's beelike sociology that I think I might have been surprised had it been otherwise.

There seemed to be less of a bustle of activity within the structure Nalinah had indicated than inside the others, but it was distinguished by a sparkling glitter, as though it contained much polished metal.

"You listen to their very thoughts," I repeated, wonderingly. "I said that because I deemed it impossible—"

"Impossible? Thought is electrical in nature,* every brain continually sending out etheric waves. All that is needed to pick these up is the proper apparatus. Look."

Nalinah's hand touched the edge of the screen. The interior of the Listeners' Post leaped at me. I seemed to be right on top of it as it revolved slowly, with our slow circling about the city.

*Author's Note: A recent newspaper report (New York *Times;* Dec. 12, 1936) deals with the experiments of Drs. Lee Travis and Abraham Gottlober, of the University of Iowa, along this line. Their results, while not complete yet, only tend to confirmation of the electrical nature of thought, but of course the Mernian scientists are far in advance of ours in this field as in almost everything else.—A. L. Z.

The walls of the hexagonal rooms were of crystal. Fastened to them was an orderly jumble of metal bars and levers, of angling bus-wires. Seated along these walls were hundreds of Surahnit girls, wires coiling from the electrical apparatus on the walls to disklike contrivances clamped to their ears. Every now and then one of the girls would stretch out a white-webbed hand to make some adjustment, otherwise they were immovable, visibly tense with concentration.

"The Listeners," Nalinah murmured in my ear. "Vanark has them well trained, has he not? Even in his absence they attend strictly to their duty. They are forbidden only to scan the thoughts of us on the Ratanit, and of the higher officers of the labor guard."

This, too, I had dreamed about. I had seen one of these walls, a white hand moving . . .

NOT quite. The wall in my dream had been somewhat different from these. The connections had been different, the levers . . . I noticed, at the very center of the honeycomb, a small cell that was covered over. "That—why is it hidden? Is there something special there?"

"Special? Yes. An invention of Vanark's, not yet perfected." Nalinah's voice halted abruptly. When she spoke again, almost at once, there was a curious mixture of speculation and excitement in her tone. "Or so he claims. But—curious—He seemed to have no doubt that you—Can that be the real reason for his eagerness to destroy you? To hide his mistake?"

"What are you talking about?"

"His experiment for which he promised so much." I realized she was so caught up by her train of thought that she did not realize I had spoken to her or that she was answering me. "Far beyond mere eavesdropping on thought, though based on the same principle. Control of the will itself. Remote control! He reported that it had temporarily failed with the first emissary we sent into the Upper World. But are you not subject to it? I did not realize . . . Hula! You did not come here willingly, did you?"

"No. I could not help myself. Something made me follow Vanark, obey him, in spite of myself."

"In spite—Wait," she broke off, thought for an instant, was speaking again. "Hula! You *are* a human, are you not, reduced only to our size, but otherwise wholly a human? Yet—were you ever dead?"

"Dead?" I laughed, "Why no? I'm living, breathing. Once dead a man stays dead."

"Not always, Hula. The emissary—the one Vanark reported as lost—was dead once. Then he was alive again—the blood of a Surahnit in his veins, the blood through which only Vanark's invention could act on a human. It was not perfected. It could not reach efficiently through the mountains above us, and the emissary was lost."

She was thinking aloud again, again oblivious of me. "I see it! I understand! Vanark searched for the emissary while the other parts of the Great Plan moved forward. He reported that he had found him again and was returning with him to Mernia. It was you with whom he returned. But you are not the lost emissary. You are not like those who lie in the cave in the Gateway Wall. You were never dead. Yet your will is not your own. You spoke, back there, of matters you could not know. How can that be when there is no Surahnit blood in your veins?"

My pulse pounded. I had been thinking too, fitting into the weird occurrences of the past few weeks the weird things she was saying. Seeing the pattern almost plain now.

"Perhaps there is, Nalinah. There is another's blood in my veins, not my own. Perhaps that other was the emissary of whom you speak." The blood of the tramp had been transfused into my veins—of the tramp who gruesomely resembled the man, Elijah Fenton, who had been drowned! "If that was Surahnit's blood, then within me there courses blood of the Surahnit."

"That's it!" No doubt of Nalinah's ex-

citement now. Her eyes were gleaming with it, her face flushed. "When Vanark lost control of the emissary he lived for a while, blundering aimlessly about like a machine with its controls jangled." Into the path of my car he had blundered, I thought. "He no longer had a mind, but his muscles might have retained some memory of the time when they were alive on earth, might have reacted in response to motor impulses not yet faded from the ganglia that are independent of the central nervous system." A hand now dead, having blundered into old familiar surroundings, might have completed a chess move it had started months before. As Elijah Fenton had done.

"Sooner or later," Nalinah ran on, "the life loaned his dead body would be exhausted and it would dwindle, vanish to nothingness, as had been provided for should it be captured."

THERE it was! The incredible thing that had happened in Court Stone's surgery was explained. Why I had been so irresistibly drawn to Lake Wanooka was also clear. That attraction had grown as the Surahnit blood that had been added to my own had invested mine with its peculiar chemistry. With that gradual change I had progressively gained the ability to see the Little Men who, invisible to anyone else, had been searching for the vanished tramp. When the change was completed, Vanark had obtained complete control of me, had carried me off . . .

"You are not the emissary, as Vanark pretended. If he deceived by that much us others of the Ratanit," Nalinah mused aloud, "he may be hiding more in his secret room. He may not have yet returned to it. Before he does—the search ray!"

She reached once more to the screen, pushed one of a series of disklike buttons flush in its frame, so exactly the color of the metal that I had not noticed them before. The image of the house she had called the Listeners' Post was again enlarged, so that practically the whole field of our vision was occupied by the lid over Vanark's secret room!

Nalinah thumbed another button.

The roof was abruptly transparent! I could now see into the chamber beneath it.

I saw more crystal walls, more gleaming metal bus bars screwed to them. I saw gauges and levers, and a screen much like the one before me. There was only one girl in the cell. She was seated before the screen, was watching it intently. I gasped.

That which she watched was my own countenance, staring out at her! Nalinah's was beside it, the interior of the *lusan* backgrounding us!

The girl down there turned and I saw her face.

It was small, winsome. Black curls capped it. Its fathomless gray eyes were not puzzled now, but terrified!

It was Leeahlee!

I was not surprised. If I had found the city of my dream, what was there astonishing in the fact that the girl who I thought existed only in that fevered dream dwelt within it?

The screen was blank! I realized that it was blank because I had reached out and jabbed the uppermost button of the series on its frame. Nalinah snatched at my wrist, tried to drag my hand away. I fended her off with my shoulder.

"Hula," she cried. "What are you doing? I thought I saw another there, a stranger. I must—"

The *lusan* jolted to a stop. There was the grate of metal on metal and the vehicle's side was opening. Just before anyone outside could have seen what I was doing I had released Nalinah, had settled back in my seat as if I had never left it.

I had intended to do none of all this. I did not know why I pressed the button, nor that my pressing would blank the screen. I did not know why I fought Nalinah to keep it blank. Once more the Other had taken control of me.

I knew that Other's name now. Leeahlee. I had seen her white fingers flash among the keys before her as I had acted as I did.

A labor guard subaltern appeared in the *lusan's* entrance. "Seal the covered cell in the Listeners' Post," Nalinah cried, whirl-

ing to him. "At once! Before anyone within it can escape."

"Gor Surah, Nalinah," the officer saluted. And then he clipped; "I cannot obey your commands. By order of Nal Surah you are suspended from your powers as Ra, and directed to consider yourself under close arrest."

"Arrest!" the girl exclaimed. Her wand jerked up. A film of green spread under the subaltern's dark skin, but there was no tremor in his voice. "You are to report to the Nal immediately," he continued, "and I am to take charge of your prisoner."

Prisoner! I didn't like the sound of that. I liked still less what I glimpsed over the shoulder of the man who had said it.

It was the hook-nosed, swarthy visage of Vanark I saw—expressionless save for the sneering triumph that leered out of his malign little eyes!

CHAPTER IV

Hugh Lambert's Narrative, continued:

NALINAH sprang out of the *lusan,* twisted to the Rata. "Vanark," she cried. "I saw in your cell—"

"Stop." He cut her off. "You forget that an arrest order forbids communication between its subject and anyone but her judges. Surrender your *kitor* to me and obey the order to report to the Nal."

Nalinah stared at him, the luminance emanating from her excited little face fading to a grayish pallor. For a long moment she stood so, her lovely body tensed, frantic appeal in her wide-pupiled eyes. Then she held out her wand to him, he took it, and she went past him, stumbling as if she were half-blinded by tears.

"Out!" The officer snapped. I shoved along the seat, emerged on a circular platform, some hundred yards in diameter, to which the end of the great spiral had broadened, here high above the city. At its further edge a half-dozen or so *lusans* were being serviced by Taphetnit under the watchful eyes of *coret*-armed guards. Between them and the three of us the wide expanse of darkly rubescent *lural* was untenanted, broken only by a small, six-sided penthouse at its center into which the flutter of Nalinah's robes was just disappearing.

"What are your orders, Rata?" the subaltern inquired.

"Fetch the prisoner along with me, Riskal," Vanark responded, his evil countenance an impassive mask. "He is to be brought before the Ratanit for questioning."

"Very well."

Vanark wheeled, and stalked off toward the small structure into which Nalinah had gone. Riskal indicated by a gesture that I was to follow.

Vanark had not even glanced at me, but an alarm bell was ringing within me, warning me of peril. I was now fully aware, from Nalinah's broken sentences, that it had not been simply because of my attack upon him that he had attempted to have me killed at the Gateway guardhouse. His purpose had been to cover up my substitution for the tramp who had vanished from Doc Stone's leather couch, apparently for no other reason than that I was living proof of his blunder.

Nalinah had saved me then, but I was in Vanark's power once more. I needed no other evidence than that he had accomplished this by somehow bringing about her arrest, to tell me that he did not intend me ever to bring me before the Mernian Council.

The girl had at least given me the choice of aiding the Mernians in their intended invasion of the Upper World. I had reckoned myself fairly safe as long as there was a possibility of my being of use to the Little Folk. Now, trotting after Vanark to the little hexagonal penthouse, I was tensely aware of immediate and deadly peril.

I glanced wildly around, searching for some means of escape. Other than Vanark and the officer, no one was near enough to make me out clearly, let alone interfere with me, but I saw at once the idea was hopeless. I might by some miracle overcome the two Surahnit, but a *lusan* would

overtake me at once if I made for the ramp by which the platform was reached. There was no other visible exit, no way I could go except over the edge, to plunge headlong down to the ground, a half mile below.

Even if the Other, Leeahlee, permitted me to act, there was nothing I could do. Nothing at all.

REACHING the penthouse, Vanark touched the wand he had called a *kitor* to its *lutrol* wall. It slitted vertically, opened out. Within, an absolutely bare, ceilingless chamber was disclosed. Startlingly, though it took up the entire interior and only seconds before I had seen Nalinah enter it, she was not there.

The Rata went into the room. Wondering what had become of Nalinah, I imitated him. I felt relieved as the subaltern joined us. Vanark had told him they were taking me to the Ratanit. He would not have permitted the youth to come along if he had other plans. Perhaps my apprehension was reasonless.

The chamber wall shut—leaped upward. A familiar, whistling roar assailed my ears. The mystery of Nalinah's disappearance was solved. We had entered an elevator like the one in the cliff at the Eastern boundary of Mernia, were descending to Tashna's street level. The girl had preceded us, that was all.

Fast enough in all conscience, the speed of this drop was not nearly as stupendous as the first. It did not daze me as that had, did not rob me of my senses. I could see my companions, could see Riskal start suddenly and twist to the Rata—surprise, inquiry, written large on his swarthy, sensitive young face.

"Yes," Vanark answered that look, a thin smile licking his sadistic mouth. "We are now below the ground level. We descend to a secret passage beneath the city, known only to the Ratanit. You—"

A piledriver blow against the soles of my feet jarred the breath out of me. The chamber wall was no longer rushing upward. Vanark's gesture created an aperture in it, and we went out into a passageway.

Its roof just cleared our heads. It was just wide enough to permit us to proceed single file, Vanark ahead, Riskal behind me. The darkly glistening walls were glass-smooth, as though the same terrific heat that had shaped Mernia's rocks had been applied to pierce the foundations of Tashna.

I was oppressed by a sense of immense weight piled above me, by an illogical notion that any instant these walls would narrow and crush me. The whisper of our padded footfalls hissed away from us, pent in by the interminable burrow. The tunnel's sides ribboned past us far more swiftly than we could possibly be walking.

It was as if the floor were moving with us, utterly without sound or vibration, yet when I looked down I could descry no appreciable separation between it and the side walls, no visible motion of the rock beneath us.

There *was* no motion. We were being swept forward as I had seen surfboards swept forward on the breast of a wave that was not water but a form rushing at breathless speed toward Waikiki beach. But here there was no wave, no change in the smooth surface of our footing, unless that change were so minute that its measurement was in the realm of the microscopic.

It occurred to me that the *lusan* might have been propelled in the same manner. I wondered. . . . My startled speculations were interrupted by the abrupt appearance of a fork in the tunnel ahead. Vanark took its left-hand branch.

Riskal called out to him. "Are you not going wrong, Rata? Is not the other the direction of the Council House?"

"Follow," the man ahead responded. His voice resounded, hollow in the tunnel's sightless reaches, seeming never to die out. I was again afraid . . . .

THE passage bent sharply. Vanark did not turn with it. He went straight at the solid rock ahead of him, went straight *into it*. For an instant his form shimmered within the stone, then it was gone.

The tunnel floor hurtled me straight ahead, my frantic efforts to stop or turn unavailing. I struck the wall.

There was no impact. I blanked out into a vertiginous darkness. It was not around me but within me; within every cell, every atom, of my being—and as suddenly was gone.

Falling forward, I twisted to a choked half cry, half scream behind me. I saw the other side of the wall; Riskal flinging out of it, out of its very substance, as though he were being formed from it. There was on his face the same shock, the same mixture of amazement and retching nausea as must have been on my own.

The subaltern reeled, straightened. Stark terror struck his countenance livid!

He was pinned to the wall by the brilliant, white glare of sunlight! His arm lifted. By a visibly tremendous effort it reached the horizontal. His contorted lips formed the words, *"Gor Surah!"* its syllables only a shadow of sound. Then he was blurring, agony shrieking from every melting line of his body.

The hands with which I had held myself to my knees shoved against the floor, pivoted me from that dreadful treachery. From Vanark's upraised grasp, the *kitor* blazed the lethal rays that were utterly destroying the subaltern who had obeyed and trusted him, the officer on whose presence I had relied for my safety!

How right I had been to be afraid!

The scene photographed itself on my brain. Vanark was a half dozen feet from me. Behind and to either side of him was a clutter of wires, bus-bars, fantastic metallic fabrications, apparatus whose purpose and nature I could not even guess at. The room, its very walls and ceiling, exuded an atmosphere of murky stealth, of buried secrecy. A screen, like that in the *lusan* except for greater size, occupied the rearmost wall.

Before that screen stood the "tramp" who had vanished from Stone's surgery.

I started to throw myself to my feet, aware that there was no possibility of escape from the murderous Mernian, aware that he could transfix and obliterate me with the *kitor's* deadly beam before I could reach him, but determined to attempt the impossible. I started to rise, but froze rigid, paralyzed by the sound of my own name, cried out by the tramp.

"Mr. Lambert. Have they got you, too?"

Staring at him across the murk of that lair, only my bulging eyes alive, it dawned on me that he was *not* the tramp. He was Jeremiah Fenton, the farmer whose tale of a chess game mysteriously ended I had listened to. He was Elijah Fenton's twin!

Vanark's scheme was clear now, in all its ingenuity. While Nalinah and I had been delayed in the *fortlik* field, he had somehow gotten hold of Fenton. He had beaten us to Tashna and provided for the girl's arrest. Murdering the guard, the only other Surahnit who could bear witness against him, he would destroy me next and then present the farmer as the emissary he had sent to spy on the Upper World.

There was no doubt that the deception would succeed. The resemblance between Fenton and the tramp was no accidental coincidence. The emissary was—had been —Elijah, Jeremiah Fenton's twin.

"Hughlambert!" Vanark's voice pulled my eyes to his saturnine countenance. "This is your end." The *kitor* swung around. Its blaze struck deep into my brain. I saw nothing but that white glare, felt nothing but the excruciating torture of those brilliant darts . . . .

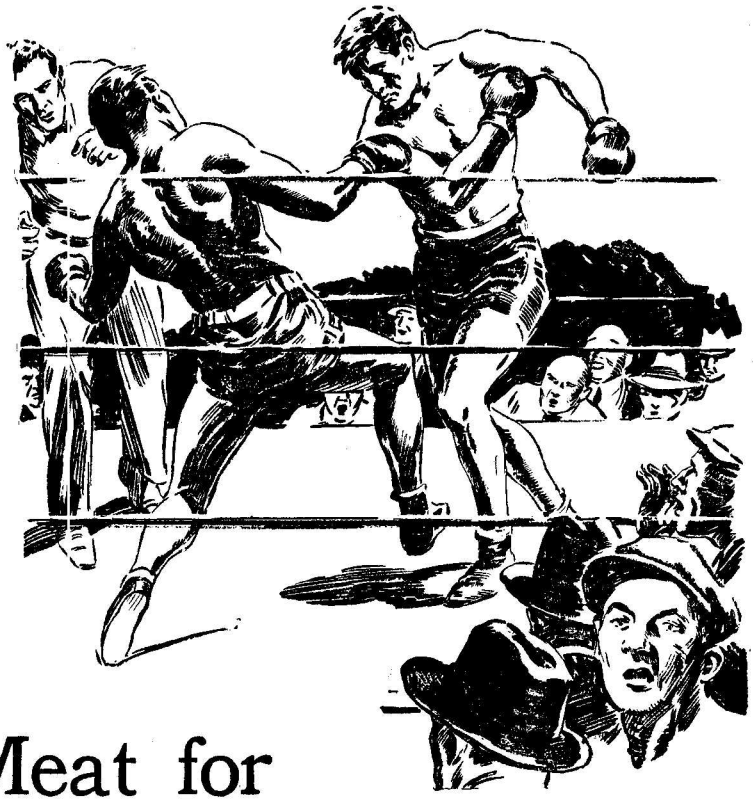
Radiogram from files of Transcontinental Western Airlines:

Flight 4 Eastbound Aug. 31/34 9:13 P.M.
Commercial 25wds Paid

DR. COURTNEY STONE
ALBANY N Y
ARRIVE ALBANY AIRPORT SATURDAY AM SPECIAL PLANE FROM NEWARK STOP PLEASE ARRANGE TRANSPORTATION AND ACCOMMODATION CAMP WANOOKA STOP IS THERE ANY GOOD NEWS LOST LAMB

ANN DICKSISTER

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



The crowd did not contest the decision. It was wise to the fact that the Kisser, as usual, was unconscious before he left the dressing room.

Meat for the Grinder

By HENRY F. CHURCH

Author of "Great Study, Chemistry," "Path to the Stars," etc.

From The Los Angeles *Blast*:

DOWN THE SPORTS ALLEY

By Jock Bland

BARNEY Toot's inimitable Kisser McCall—identified by the emerald trunks—ran true to form last night in a so-called main bout with Juggy Hendricks, at the Anchor Athletic Club. In fact Juggy had some difficulty in catching up with the Kisser to deliver the languid bunny punch to the back of the neck that decided Barney's middleweight hope to play possum in the third, for a count of twelve tolled by the bored and absent minded third man.

Jock Bland,
Sports Writer (?)
The *Blast*.

So that was the "fine write-up" you promised the Kisser for your screwy colyum this A.M. Nerts to you, you mental cripple!

Why don't you dirt-slingers give this boy a break? Take last P.M. for inference. The Kisser, raring to go, comes bounding over the ropes with such momentum that naturally he encircles the ring five or six times before he can slow down, and then he sees this yellow-livered Hendricks running from him, so naturally he keeps up the pace. Only Hendricks, almost scared outen his trunks, runs away so fast that he overtakes my boy from the rear and slugs him cowardly in the back of the neck, dropping

him for one of the few times he ever hit the rosin.

You sports writers are skunks of a feather. Even Bill McHaffey, of the *Trumpet,* hollering down that sweet-scented sewer pipe he calls a sports colyum, claims that I yanked a false alarm on the gong a minute before it was due to bong. Why can't you assassins be fair?

What really happened was, when the Kisser fell on his face with considerable force, the timekeeper, maybe thinking the ring was falling down, got nervous and stroked the bell, himself, and what McHaffey saw, with his wood alcohol vision, was me trying to play square and stay the T. K's. nervous hand. Anyhow, it doubtless saved this Hendricks a terrible lacing, for I could see from the glazed look in the Kisser's eyes that he was working up to a temper!

In the second round the Kisser was so mad when he raced from his corner that he couldn't pull down his speed for the first seven or eight times around the ring, and when this punchdrunk Hendricks, still lurking nervously in his corner, socked him on the jaw and tripped him, why, naturally, according to the law of gravitation, the Kisser slumped.

Again McHaffey grows unethical. I admit the bell maybe did ring prematurely, as the referee (?) was tolling eight, but he was doubtlessly counting two-four-six etc., and maybe the T. K. did hit the gong a second too soon, because he ill-naturedly took a whack at my mitt with his hammer about then, when, absent-mindedly and in the attending excitement, I laid my hand in the vicinity of the bell.

Well, now for the *country-temps,* as the Dutch say. As he is leaping out for the unfortunate third, the Kisser is stricken with a cholly-hoss in his left leg, which accounts for the why he has to race around the ring eight or nine times, limping. Then happened the most cowardly and unsportsmanlike action ever recorded in fisticana. This yellow-gizzarded Hendricks, cowering in the center of the canvas and ready to fall down from fright, summons his last puny strength, and, flanking the Kisser from the rear as he goes past, lollops him in the back of the neck with the horse's shoes and brass-dusters he must have had sewed up in his glove. But, be it said to the credit of my boy, he went down without a word of protest!

What difference does it make whether the blind man they put in the ring to get under my boy's feet tolled twelve, or even more? By then both me and the Kisser is so disgusted with such tactics we quit from sheer disgust against such odds, which, summed up, are a crooked opponent, crooked referee, crooked timekeeper, crooked sports writers, and crooked crowd.

The Kisser could have leaped up at the count of two and lolloped the tar outen that punk Hendricks, but the sheer futility of it had took the heart outen him, and so, with sportsmanlike dignity, he just lay there and let injustice briefly triumph.

Yours respectfully (Oh yeah?)
BARNEY TOOT, *Promoter*

P. S. Bring that new, washed-out blonde of yours around Tuesday night, and me and Mame will take you at pinochle as per usual. If the Kisser is presentable by then I may ask him in to thank you for all the nice things you've said about him.

BARNEY

MR. JOCK BLAND AND MISS SALLY CASH
ACCEPT WITH PLEASURE
THE CORDIAL INVITATION
OF MR. AND MRS. BARNEY TOOT
TO PLAY PINOCHLE ON TUESDAY EVENING
AND MEET MR. KISSER MCCALL
IN A VERTICAL POSITION

Mr. Jock Bland,
The Los Angeles *Blast*:
Dear Sir:

I read your anaemic sheet, the *Blast,* for the one red corpuscle in its make-up—your column, *Down the Sports Alley.* Especially I am interested in your question and answer department, so here are three of the former which I will thank you to match with three of the latter.

(1) Who is Kisser McCall? (2) Where did he get his euphonious monicker? (3) Where is he headed, if anywhere?

OLD GOB

From The Los Angeles *Blast*:

DOWN THE SPORTS ALLEY

By Jock Bland

Answer to Old Gob: (1) Kisser McCall is a forlorn goat—pardon, we mean hope!—that Promoter Toot won in a raffle, or something. A heretofore unrecorded middleweight, he weighes 163, and is 5 feet, 11 inches, including his pompadour. (2) Probably born McCall, he doubtless derived his handle from his habit of frequently kissing the canvas. (3) As to his destination, it is the guess of this department that McCall is going no further than the dressing room.

Dear Mae:

How are things in the Hoosier metropolis, Waynetown? Your letter of introduction to your cousin Jock was thoughtful, but not necessary. Three minutes after I had been assigned to part of a desk on the *Blast,* he had introduced himself as heaven's gift to sportsdom, and, between hurtling shafts of sports lingo, informed me that he was taking over my reportorial and social debut.

Apparently I am starting from the bottom and may work up. To date he has introduced me to many quaint phases of West Coast life. We've done two wrestling bouts, three box fights, a roller skating marathon, and a longshoremen's ball, which last embodied all of the outstanding features of the others.

But we're progressing. On Tuesday evening we stepped up into legitimate society. Jock took me to play pinochle with promoter Barney Toot, small, bald, and gingery, and his hennaed but kindly wife Mame; quaint, simple souls who speak Jock's adopted tongue. After feeding us lavishly on pig's knuckles and beer, the Toots reduced us to a diet of coffee and sinkers until next payday.

However, it was worth the price of admission. I got to meet an amazing creature named Kisser McCall, who, it seems, lives in Mr. Toot's stable (!) and fights under his direction. We saw him defeated last week by a fighter named Hendricks, but the action was so kaleidoscopic with McCall's green trunks flashing around the ring and his red head thumping against the canvas, where the stocky Hendricks repeatedly slapped him, that I didn't immediately recognize him as the rather good-looking youngster asleep on the Toots' davenport when we arrived for the pinochle pogrom.

I was embarrassed over the way Jock has been flaying the Kisser (an intriguing name!), when the latter turned out not to be the clown we expected. In fact he was very gracious to us after the Toots succeeded in waking him up, and, before returning to slumber, granted us a three-minute interview that was modestly confined, for the most part, to "Uh-huh," and "Nuh-huh," which phrases Jock identified as Shoshonean Ute.

Jock claimed that the reason I lost at pinochle was I couldn't keep my eyes on the cards.

Affectionately,

SALLY.

From The Los Angeles *Blast*:

DOWN THE SPORTS ALLEY

By Jock Bland

Barney Toot's marvel, Kisser McCall, achieved a new low in ring records last night, at the Anchor Athletic Club when Jinx Curly slapped him through the ropes exactly two-thirds of a second after they had touched leather.

Apparently fandom can always count on the Kisser to provide an innovation in style, and this scribe is of the opinion that his performance is influenced by the current trend in sports.

It will be remembered that last week, when the roller skating marathon was in progress, the Kisser gave a long distance speed exhibition that rivaled any spurt assayed by that fleet-footed congregation. Last night's split-second slumber act, put on by the Kisser, leads us to believe that he was inspired by the example of Swami Uranus, whose ability to throw himself into a cataleptic

state at a moment's not ce is the current attraction of the windo·v-gazers over on Olive street.

Imitative, but entertaining, we calls it, since we get in on a pass, but if it's real action you fans crave, ankle over and gaze on the Swami.

Mr. Jock Bland,
Blah Writer,
The *Blast.*
Phooey!

I had hoped that you would lay off my lad, after meeting him socially, but no, you bite the hand that fed you pig's knuckles and suds!

Why don't you pour chloride of lime on that filthy colyum of your's, and go bury it in some swamp? I speak also for the maybe half dozen other guys named Joe who, perhaps, maybe, glance at your printed dribble when they run outen mail order catalogs.

Why don't you be white? What really happened was the Kisser was never in better shape in all of his illustrious career. He went in clocked to win over that ape Curly, and would have did so, if, as a result of his gentlemanly instincts, he hadn't hesitated, while shaking hands with the aforesaid rat, to cast a polite nod of recognition to that faded-out blond moll you now drag around.

Then there occurred one of the most outstanding and unsportmanlike atrocities ever sprang in a squared ring. Instead of shaking hands as required by this know-it-all guy, Queensberry, this thug Curly foully struck my boy a clip in the jaw that could have been heard up to Frisco, and, because the ropes were loose as part of the plot against him, the Kisser fell out on the typewriters and got all of you sports wranglers sore on him!

What box fighting needs is a potentate like Mr. Hays of the movies, and the good old Judge in baseball, with dictatorial powers to bar out you unethical ditch diggers. Why don't you all go pour lime on yourselves and bury each other in some swamp?

BARNEY TOOT, *Promoter.*

P. S. What are you and your dizzy dame doing come Tuesday night? Are you pinochle minded?

BARNEY

Mr. Barney Toot,
Anchor Athletic Club,
Los Angeles, Cal.
Dear Barney:

It would serve you right to answer your crude literary effort through my column, but a long friendship deters me.

Granted McCall is a nice enough lad when he can be trapped into wakefulness, where did either of you get the ghastly idea that he is even a fifth-rate fighter?

Can it be that you are secretly conducting a crusade to kill the fight game? Or is it you're slipping as a promoter and, regardless of the glory of the sport, are grasping at a straw (man) to keep you and Mame out of the soup line, and you from the necessity of going to work to earn an honest living?

If the latter is the case, take the advice of a friend, who knows the fight racket from every angle, and follow the prescribed form. Don't try to match a black-out like McCall with promising boys like Hendricks and Curly. Take your man on a dud circuit, and give him a build-up with trial horses, set-ups, and pushovers, so that around 1945, he'll have copped the dozen or so victories necessary to a convincing prospectus.

Then, when he has got confidence, give him a shot in the arm and tout him for a contender, and match him with some of the fast-failing favorites who are about ready to fall down, anyhow. That will bring in pig's knuckles and beer for you and Mame at best, as the poor punk can never make good. He just hasn't got it!

Regards to Mame. Thanks, no pinochle.

JOCK

Jock Bland,
Muckraker,
The *Blast.*

It's just as well you and your dame didn't come over to play pinochle Tuesday

night, as me and Mame found something better to do, and wouldn't have been in anyhow.

What you mean the Kisser "just hasn't got it?" He's building up a following, ain't he? What if they do give him the razz, they pay to get in, don't they? Ain't that the last laugh for our side?

Listen, wise bozo. The Kisser's got something new up his sleeve what's never been pulled in a ring before, that he'll uncork on Buster Bascom next Friday night. In any *live* town the sports writers would be trying to ferret it out, instead of crouching around to hold a post mortem after all is over except the shouting of the satisfied customers.

Disgustingly,
BARNEY TOOT, *Promoter*

From The Los Angeles *Blast*:

DOWN THE SPORTS ALLEY
By Jock Bland

As disappeared good old Greco-Roman rassling under the influx of the modern gouge and grunt boys, so he-man boxing with hair on its chest seems slated to go, if last night's fiasco between Buster Bascom and Kisser McCall, at the Anchor Athletic Club, is a fair sample of what draws a crowd.

Five years ago such a main bout would not have coaxed in even the Annie Oakley brigade, much less paying patrons, yet Barney Toot had to borrow circus seats to hold the five thousand or more fans who plunked down good dinero, knowing that the Kisser, matched against the passable Buster, wouldn't last through the first round. Nor did he.

Puffed by the versatile Barney to have something new up his ragged bathrobe sleeve, the Kisser kept faith. Rushing into an affectionate clinch in the first stanza, he missed a right uppercut, and, connecting with his own jaw, *knocked himself out!*

Fortunately for the old guard the preliminaries and the semi-final were good.

Bland,
The *Blast*,
Aw, for Pete's sake!

I suppose if you'd had brains enough to think of it you'd have wisecracked that the slight earthquake shock, felt last night in several parts of the nation, was all them dead champs rolling over in their narrow graves because my boy accidentally knocked himself out! That would have been right down your alley!

If they'd make you barn owls take an eye test, you and McHaffey would have seen that the Kisser stumbled over a loose shoestring, and barely missed landing a punch that would have lifted that fade-out Bascom over into the press section, where he would have been at home with the rest of the tripe!

I just ain't got the words!
BARNEY TOOT, *Promoter*

Mr. Jock Bland,
Sports writer,
The *Blast*.
Dear Sir:

What would be the proper odds to receive on Kisser McCall to win over Hank Turner, the Oakland Bruiser, in their coming fifteen round bout?

OLD GOB

From The Los Angeles *Blast*:

DOWN THE SPORTS ALLEY
By Jock Bland

Answer to Old Gob: Any goop with money to waste on Killer McCall should demand the following odds from Turner's backers:

Kisser to win by a knockout, 50 to 1; by a decision, 25 to 1. Kisser to last ten rounds (the S. P. C. A. will stop it by then) 10 to 1, scaling down a dollar a round until even money is reached in the first. The safest bet would be to offer 5 to 1 that the Kisser knocks himself out in the dressing room.

From the Los Angeles *Trumpet*:

CLOCKING 'EM COLD
By Bill McHaffey

Our steamed-up contemporary of the Blast's sports page, Jock, the Bland, publishes an interesting table of betting odds against the chances of his pet

peeve, Kisser McCall, winning over the Oakland Bruiser in next Friday's bout.

Perhaps Jock has started something, as there are plenty gullible souls who use no salt at all when taking smart newspaper advice.

This scribe predicts that a legion of Longshot Luthers will dig down in the old sock on that clocking, and find ready takers among the Sure-thing Sammies, who accept, as reliable, the systematic tear-down that soothsayer Bland has been gratuitously dishing out to McCall.

Believing that every Palooka packs at least one winning punch in his career, ye scribe has a nest egg he'll lay in the lap of Mr. Bland, at any or all of those juicy odds. Reputable Los Angeles papers please copy.

WESTERN UNION

TELEGRAM—COLLECT.
BILL MCHAFFEY,
THE TRUMPET,
LOS ANGELES, CAL.

BACK AT YOU STOP FIVE HUNDRED SMACKERS ON TURNER ANYWAY YOU WANT TO SMEAR IT AT ODDS QUOTED STOP

BLAND

WESTERN UNION

CABLE, FOR RELAY VIA HONOLULU, FULL RATE—COLLECT.
JOCK BLAND, SPORTS WRITER,
THE LOS ANGELES BLAST,
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA,
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

IT IS A BET STOP TEN BUCKS FLAT AGAINST YOUR HALF GRAND THAT HANK TURNER THE OAKLAND BRUISER IS KNOCKED OUT BY KISSER MCCALL STOP

BILL MCHAFFEY,
SPORTS EDITOR,
THE LOS ANGELES TRUMPET,
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA,
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Dear Mae:

Following Jock is a dizzy business—conversationally or otherwise. Last week in a Hungarian restaurant under the quieting influence of a rhapsody, he stopped talking sports long enough to offer me the privilege of tagging along permanently. Some Tuesday next year, I may get the chance to answer yes or no.

Jock is a nice lad except for one failing. Anything, or anybody, is prime scrap meat for his precious column, through which he daily grinds out the fans' ration of bolony.

Take Kisser McCall, for example. We've run into him several times along with the Toots, and the poor dazed dear, when he can keep awake, is downright nice; yet Jock ruthlessly feeds him to the fans. I wish he wouldn't.

There's a mystery about the Kisser. Mrs. Toot told me that Barney found him in a waterfront brawl, where he K. O.'d three bums who had ganged him, and, when Barney asked him his name, he muttered "Kisser McCall, that's all," and went to sleep against a telephone post.

Impressed with such nonchalance, Barney took him into his stable (not a boudoir for horses, I have learned) and has been trying to wake him up ever since.

Mrs. Toot also confided that he has the symbol DD28 tattooed on his chest, and that Barney, fearful it might be a prison number, paints it out with grease paint before each bout. I'm worried about that, too, so I think I'll ask Jock confidentially.

Affectionately,

SALLY

From the Los Angeles *Trumpet*:

DOWN THE SPORTS ALLEY

By Jock Bland

One minute mystery: Why does Promoter Toot, before each match, carefully paint out the mysterious symbol DD28 tattooed on the manly chest of one Kisser McCall, alias the Sleeping Sickness?

Besides Army mules, and the lads from the Big House, what others rate a personal number? The mystery intrigues us. The label might stand for nothing, just as McCall stands in boxing circles; or it might stand for anything, as do

those dim-witted fans who pay to see the Kisser perform.

THE LOS ANGELES BLAST

(Intra-office Memorandum)

TO: Mr. Jock Bland.
FROM: Miss Cash.

That was a rotten thing to do. I told you that in confidence!

Sally

Chf. Bosn. Danny O'Rourke,
Headquarters, Eleventh Naval District,
Oakland, California.
Dear Danny:

The enclosed clipping from Bland's column in the *Blast* definitely spots our man.

Round up everything that wears bell-bottoms and can get transportation, and come over for the Turner-McCall fight on Friday night. Borrow from the Marines, if necessary, like Moses did from the Egyptians on the eve of the exodus, but have a turnout. At last it's payday in the navy! Details later.

BLINK HOBSON,
(Alias Old Gob)

From the Los Angeles *Trumpet*:

CLOCKING 'EM COLD

By Bill McHaffey

Although Jock Bland's column is absent from this morning's *Blast*, an anxious perusal of the obituary notices fails to reveal his name, so it can be assumed that he outdistanced the army of irate customers who went on his trail immediately after Johnny Kisser, middleweight champion of the destroyer squadrons of the U. S. scouting fleet, flattened Hark Turner, the Oakland Bruiser, at the Anchor Athletic Club last night.

Although billed as Kisser McCall, the Boxing Commission has ruled that he was not a dark horse, and no protest will be allowed, as Kisser is the gentleman's surname, and McCall the name of his ship, the DD28. Even Barney Toot's naïve explanation that the printer just left out a comma, was not really necessary.

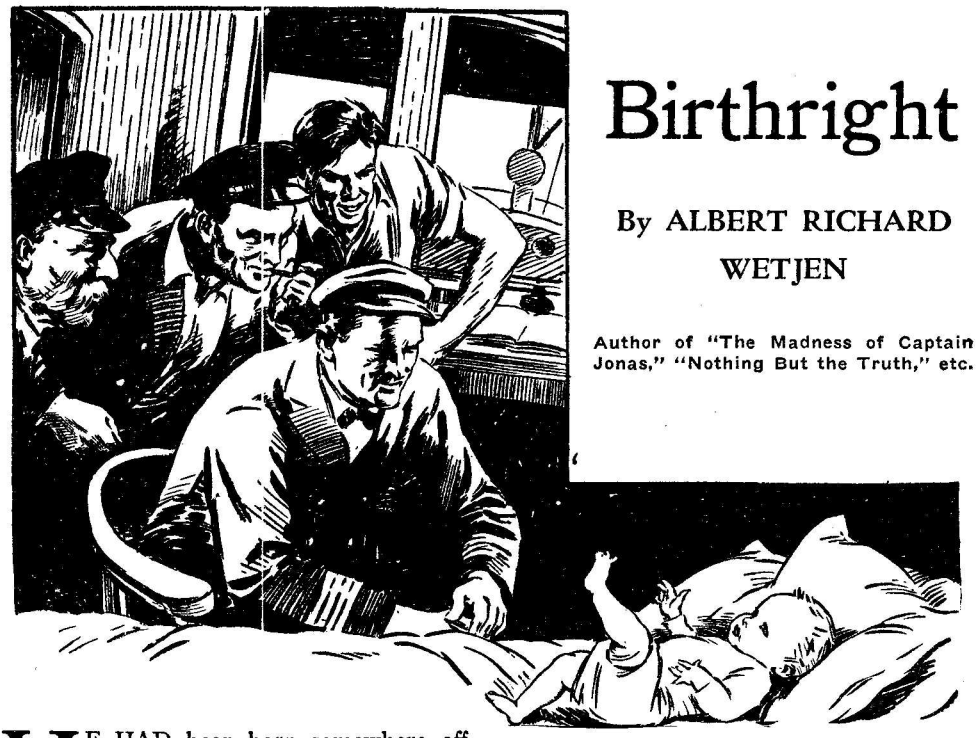
No, fellow fans, the Kisser was not running a phoney. Six weeks ago he secured a sixty-days furlough and immediately disappeared. Since then, it seems, he has been enjoying a little private amnesia under the tutelage of Mr. Toot, who attributes the malady to a bump yet evident on the back of the Kisser's head. How, or where, he got that bump is Mr. McCall's own business. Anyhow, as usual, our hero, looking dazed, condescended to shuffle into the ring, and, just as most of the fans were getting set for the slaughter, a cheering section of bluejackets arose from their ringside seats and shouted:

DD28—DD28,
Take him, mate!
Bah for Turner!
Rah for Kisser!
What Kisser?
Johnny, of the old McCall—
That's all!

Honest, folks, you never heard a yell like that—or one that helped out a lagging fight so much.

The cheer brought Mr. Kisser out of his habitual trance, and he took the trouble to shake hands with himself. Assured by Barney Toot that he must be the guy the Navy was rooting for, the Kisser blew taps for Turner, and was received on the shoulders of a naval delegation, including one rear admiral. It was all very smooth except for the slight delay to the triumphal exit while some four thousand misled fans thundered past in pursuit of prognosticator Bland, late of the *Blast*.

And here's the pay-off! Interviewed last night, while awaiting transportation to the naval hospital at Oakland to have his bump of forgetfulness reduced, Gob Kisser claimed that the events of the past six weeks were a total blank until the Navy woke him up. But that we respectfully doubt. The Kisser seemed perfectly acquainted with the pretty blonde who clung to his arm—a young lady heretofore noticed frequently in the company of a certain departed sports writer—I mean that if he *didn't* know her before, the lad works fast!



Birthright

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

Author of "The Madness of Captain Jonas," "Nothing But the Truth," etc.

HE HAD been born somewhere off the China coast, on a rather handsome freighter named the *Mohawk,* wallowing at the moment in the heel of a hurricane. A much-married and not-too-sanitary steward had been his doctor and first nurse, Captain Waring being far too busy on the bridge bringing his ship through a small matter of shifted cargo and two smashed hatches. By the time that had been settled Mrs. Waring was dead and the future George Waring was wedged between cushions on the cabin settee, crying consistently and with the steward holding him fast against the heavy rolls.

Captain Waring took off his dripping sou'wester when he finally came below, wiped salt from his wet face and lighted his pipe with shaking fingers. He looked for a long time at the sheeted figure on his bunk, shook his head and frowned.

"Well, he's got a good start for a sailor," he observed. "A lot of Warings have been born at sea. Begin from the deck up, so to speak. Er . . . steward . . . it *is* a boy, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, it's a boy," agreed the steward.

"That's good," said the captain with some relief. "I don't know what I'd have done with a girl." He considered a moment. "We'll ship a competent woman at the next port to see him through the worst, and after that we'll attend to him ourselves. He'll cut his teeth on a marlinespike." Which is exactly what George Waring did.

He could steer before he was as tall as the *Mohawk's* wheel, when he had to stand on tiptoe to look at the compass. He knew all his knots and splices even before that, and in his early 'teens he was reasonably competent to take a sight. All the Warings had been sailors, not infrequently owners of their own ships, and it seemed quite natural to the captain that his son should follow the family.

It seemed quite natural to George Waring, too, while he was still a boy. The *Mohawk* was his home; his world was one of ships and docks and men who talked sea-talk. Occasionally his father took him

ashore, when he had to go to the consul's or the agent's on business; and occasionally one of the mates was allowed to give him a run about the cities, but such times were rare. He was, by and large, confined to the ship much as a shore boy might be confined to his own street by the threats and warnings of an anxious parent. The only other boys he met were such as joined the *Mohawk* for a voyage or two, and then drifted on to larger horizons, and while they were friendly enough they were naturally reserved with him because he was the captain's son.

QUITE early he was made acquainted with the grim portraits of other Warings that looked down from the bulkheads of his father's cabin: Great-great-grandfather Elias who had been famous in the days of the East Indiamen; Uncle John who had made two clipper records in the Australian wool trade that had never been equalled; Grandfather Amos who had gone down with his ship off Madagascar; and Cousin Paul who even then commanded an Atlantic crack.

They were all severe-looking men, and quite obviously they had all done remarkable things. Captain Waring expounded on the matter as soon as George could understand, and he repeated the various histories on many occasions and at appropriate times.

"We're proud of the family," he would state solemnly. "I'm proud of it. You're proud of it. We do our duty. We bring our ships home or go down with them. Some day, when you take the *Mohawk,* you can put my picture up there with the rest, and you want to feel that some day your own son, on another *Mohawk,* will put your picture up, too. You see?"

And standing very still the curly-haired, weather-tanned boy who did not see at all would mutter, frowning, "Yes, sir. I see." And Captain Waring would pat his shoulder and set him a course to work out or make him repeat the rules governing circular storms. He was a very kind and sometimes indulgent father, except on family matters and his horror of the shore which he privately considered as being peopled by barbarians; two-legged curiosities who called a companion a stairs, a bulkhead a wall and a deckhead a ceiling. And George, as the stories of his ancestors bit further and further into him, was at first consumed with awe, then with some dismay because of what he was expected to live up to, and finally with deep indignation. This latter came in his middle teens, just before he was to go up for his second mate's ticket and was filled with a curious consuming resentment and unrest.

"Don't you think, sir," he ventured haltingly, "that I ought to try something else first? I might not like the sea . . . that is, for good . . . And then," he floundered, "I'd like to see the world before everything's settled."

"See the world?" His father was astounded. "Good heavens, boy, you've been all over the world! You're talking nonsense."

"I didn't mean that," George stumbled. "Not just that, sir. But . . . all . . . everything else . . ." He stopped because his father was frowning with tight lips, and without another word he went away. He wanted to explain but how could he explain? His throat was filled and his eyes were dim with visions.

All his life he had listened to the seamen talking of the delights of the land; he had listened to the ship's boys gleefully planning what they would do when they were paid off. He had heard stories from sailors who in their time had wandered across the American prairies, worked in the Canadian woods, caroused with dark women in the outer Islands and sought romantically for gold in the heart of the Australian Never-Never. He had seen more cities and queer ports than he could remember, but it was like lifting the bare fringe of a glamorous, only half-guessed life that went on beyond.

AND so there had grown in him a passionate yearning for the land. The land was adventure, the sea nothing

but the same drab grind. He wanted to explore that other world, as other men and boys did. With a curious reversal of things he wanted the shore as other boys wanted the sea, and there were times when he almost carried the reversal through and ran away to land.

He actually did once, the day before he was to sit for his examination. He had the sick feeling that once passed—and there was no doubt of that—he would be definitely committed, tied down forever, bound to the *Mohawk* as other boys might be bound to a factory bench or an office desk. So that night he waited until the watchman went into the galley for his coffee, and then he slipped down to the wharf. The police picked him up a week later, happily working with a road gang just outside the city. And they brought him white-faced and defiant back to his father. Captain Waring was white-faced, too, with anger and a half-conviction that he had produced a monstrosity.

"I could send you to jail," he said grimly. "You're a deserter from ship's articles and a minor to boot. A son of mine! A Waring! Digging ditches. Have you gone mad?"

"I'm sick of the sea! I'm sick of ships!" the boy had blazed with sudden passion. "You wouldn't understand! I don't want anything to do with them. Why can't you let me alone?"

His father leaned on his desk then and drew a long, hard breath. He seemed suddenly weak and old.

"You don't . . . want anything . . . to do with the sea," he managed. "You, a Waring? I've made you a sailor because you were born one."

"Do you think I want to spend all my life loading cargo, unloading cargo?" the boy screamed. "I'm sick of overhauling derricks and gear; laying out courses, taking a ship from one dirty port to another. I tell you I won't! I can look after myself. You let me alone!"

He started sobbing as the fury abated and Captain Waring sat down heavily, all but stunned.

"But you can't mean that, boy," he said weakly. "You'll have the *Mohawk* some day. I've been looking forward to it, when I could retire and sail with you just as a passenger. My son taking over. Why, all the family . . ." He looked at the serried portraits and shook his bewildered head.

And then the sudden lines and the bleakness that came to his face made something turn over inside George. He loved and respected his father as much as any boy, and there lay in him besides the long years of training and discipline. His father was master. The revolt faltered, wilted and died. George looked at the portraits of dead and living Warings and it seemed all the severe faces were frowning and critical, bearing him down, contemptuous of the one Waring who did not want to follow the sea.

"Very well, sir," he said at last, wearily, "I'll stay."

Captain Waring had a sudden thought then that brought him bolt upright.

"You haven't met a girl?" he said harshly. "Some young fool who wants you to stay ashore?"

"No, father. It isn't a girl," answered his son. But he added after a curious pause, as if the thought had just struck him, too, "Not yet."

He went up for his examination soon afterwards and became third officer of the *Mohawk*. And Captain Waring drew a deep breath of relief and told himself it was all just a boy's fancy.

THE most meticulous of shipmasters could have found little fault with George Waring in the next few years. As regarded the ship's work he was almost a perfect automaton, never late on watch, never amiss in any duty. He faithfully attended to the cargo stowing in his holds, never over-drank, and never had any trouble handling his watch. He grew to a big young man, broad, weather-tanned, with heavy brows that scowled over gray eyes, and with a firm jaw beneath a sullen mouth. And he *was* sullen.

With all the bitterness of a boy who

considers he has been mistreated, who feels he has been thwarted, he fostered his hatred of ships and the sea as faithfully as he carried out his duties. Every action, every curt word bespoke that he was doing what he was doing under duress. He knew this hurt his father, at times he thought he meant it to. His father had made him a sailor; therefore his father should never forget for an instant that he had driven his son into a profession he had no will for. He was petulant at times, at others morose. He seldom went ashore at first, preferring to stay in his room with a somewhat martyred feeling, and among his shipmates he was rather disliked. The occasional hesitant advances his father made, for sympathy, for friendship, and once or twice in an effort to talk the boy over, brought no response.

"I don't understand him," said the despairing old man one time, coming out of Wellington, New Zealand. "I don't understand him at all. He has no interest in life."

The pilot, an old friend who knew something of the situation, spat tobacco juice over the rail and wiped his mouth in his hand.

"It's your own fault," he said drily. "You rammed the sea down his gullet. Why didn't you let him run ashore a bit and get it out of his system when he was a kid? You've treated him like those fancy Europeans raising geese for the liver. Shut 'em up in a cage so they can't move, and gorge 'em day in and out so the liver'll grow. Well, that is George. Now he's all liver!" The pilot chuckled and called, "Port a bit!" to the helmsman over his shoulder.

"I don't see what I can do," muttered Captain Waring fretfully. "He's a sailor by birth and instinct, but he doesn't know it."

"That's just it," agreed the pilot. "It's too late to do anything. All you can hope is that he'll wake up, or that something will wake him up."

"That may never happen," said the captain morosely, and the pilot seeing the tired lines in the other's face made a mental note that Waring was getting old. Well, it got everyone in time, years and the sea, and it was worse when you were wrapped up in a son who didn't care for your ways. The pilot shook his head and jerked on the siren lanyard to warn a crossing tug.

IN COURSE of time George became second mate and then first mate of the *Mohawk*. He worked as mechanically as ever but with some philosophical resignation now, for there was no other trade he could follow and he was still young enough so there were times when he clean forgot to brood. He took to running ashore with the other mates, caroused a little, and, finally, he met the girl.

It was in San Francisco and she was a waitress in a Market Street café, slender, fair and very pretty. George had never paid much attention to women before but there was something about Evelyn that drew him. He had no way of defining it, had no wish to. All he knew was that the first time he met her he must have ordered a dozen cups of coffee before he found the courage to speak to her. She looked at the tall, brown young sailor with speculative eyes, decided that she liked him, and smiled very pleasantly. She was a sensible girl for all her prettiness, and by the time the *Mohawk* was ready to sail again she had made up her mind.

"I'm quitting the ship after this trip," George told his father shortly. "I'm getting married."

"Ah," said Captain Waring softly, and there was a sudden pain under his heart. He had known it had to come some time. "Does she want you to stay ashore?"

"Why not?" said George bitterly. "What's the use of being married if you only see each other once every four or five months. I'm only making this trip so you'll have time to find someone else."

"And what will you do ashore?" asked the old man stonily. "You only know the sea."

"I've a chance to work for a shipping company. Evelyn—that's my fiancée—has

an uncle in the business who can help me."

"It would be better if you waited until you had command first," said his father. "Don't you see? With that behind you you'd stand in better."

George made an impatient gesture. "I can't wait, sir. I've waited long enough as it is. I've tried to please you, but I've got to live my own life now. Evelyn doesn't want a husband who's only a signature on a letter."

Captain Waring steadied himself with a hand on the bridge rail and bit the stem of his pipe.

"If you must you must," he conceded wearily. "I'll not stand in your way any longer. But let me help you this much. Make another voyage after this. Just one. I'll step down so you can command and get your rank. It'll mean something in the shipping business to be known as Captain Waring."

"But what will *you* do?" asked George with some curiosity. He looked at his father's gray face and felt a little sick. "You're . . . you're not staying ashore then, away from the *Mohawk?*"

"What else can I do? I had hoped to be with you when you were master, just an old man puttering around the decks and taking things easy. But there's no sense in my carrying on if you . . . if you quit. But never mind that. Will you make the last run as master? I'll feel better then."

George bit his lip. "Evelyn won't like it," he said uncertainly. "But I'll see."

His father nodded and tapped the rail absently with his pipe stem. "Does she know," he asked with apparent irrelevance, "that we—I—own the *Mohawk?*"

"Why, no." George was puzzled. "I never mentioned it. Why should I?"

"No reason. I just wondered." And Captain Waring went below a little relieved. At least the girl wasn't marrying George for what he would inherit. The *Mohawk* was worth a fortune. He looked at the portraits on his bulkheads and smiled a little. The last of the Warings. He did not know that later his son, too, looked at those same portraits, and with a sense of exultation.

"You can't lick me," he whispered. "I'm getting out. I'm going to be free. You and your ships!" He hated every feature in the grim faces he had known so long. They represented all the barriers he had felt before him. But no longer. He was going ashore very soon. He was going ashore to Evelyn.

"IT'S getting thicker seems like," said the second mate on an afternoon months later, peering into the white fog ahead. He hung on the siren lanyard for a long blast and added, as the echoes died muffled in the mist, "There's someone over to port, I think, sir."

Captain Waring bent his head and listened. There was a small noise of lazy, calm swells lapping along the barely moving hull. There were quiet fog-drippings from the rigging and spars. The wheel creaked a little as the helmsman turned it, while far below there was the rhythmic *thump-thump* of the engine. And then from port came muffled the eerie boom of another siren as George Waring came up the companion from the main deck and pushed his peaked cap back on his head.

"There's something afire in the after hold all right, sir," he told his father. "You can smell the smoke. I've men down there trying to locate it."

"All right," said the captain absently. They had suspected fire only that morning. "It probably isn't serious. There's a ship to port of us." The *Mohawk's* siren boomed again and was answered, closer this time. Captain Waring looked at the second mate. "Stop her!" he said curtly. The second rammed the telegraph up and down. The engine thump ceased and the *Mohawk* drifted in the swirling ghostly white. And then the strange ship was upon them, leaping out of the fog at full speed.

Men shouted. Sirens screamed. A great black bow took the *Mohawk* a glancing blow just for'ard of the bridge, on the port side, and careened away ahead. The *Mohawk* lurched and listed and there was

a horrible sucking sound of water. Captain Waring thrown half-way across the bridge, fell down the port companion and crumpled at the bottom, unconscious and with a broken leg. George and the second mate fell on the bridge itself but were unhurt. By the time they got up the strange ship was only a blur in the fog and her siren was silent.

"Isn't she going to stop!" choked George, incredulous. "She must have holed us. Go down and see what's the damage." The second mate stumbled away. The *Mohawk's* crew was milling about the decks, half of them just awakened from a watch below and quite bewildered. George swore and shook his fist at the swirl of fog where the strange ship had disappeared.

"Scared to face an inquiry," he raved. "Running full ahead in this! The murdering swine!"

He found his father and had a man help carry him to his room. He left him then in care of the steward and went back on deck. The *Mohawk* was listing more than ever and was already down a little by the head.

"There's a whopping hole in her side, sir," the second reported, white-faced. "And she's making water pretty fast in number one and two."

George whistled down the engine-room tube and got the chief.

"Give her all the pumps you can for'ard," he ordered. "We're in a mess." He plugged the tube and turned as the bosun came pawing up the companion from the main deck. His face was gray.

"She's broke out, sir," he reported. "The whole bloody hold's full of smoke aft, and you can see flames."

"The jar must have shook the cargo loose and let air get down," said George grimly. "Take half the men and start the hoses," he ordered the second mate. "I'll attend to the leak for'ard."

THE next six hours were a nightmare, with the *Mohawk* drifting listlessly on the sober swells and through the indifferent mist, one half of her crew trying to get as much water as possible in her afterholds and the other half trying to keep water out of her foreholds. George started some of the men jettisoning cargo so they could get down to the terribly ripped plates that were right on the waterline. The rest he had sew a rope cargo net to a double hatch-tarpaulin, and this they lowered overside until the inrushing sea fastened it against the gaping hole. Water still swept in but in greatly diminished quantities, and the pumps could hold that. They dug out cargo far enough so they could stuff mattresses into the hole from the inside, and then they built a wooden bulkhead of sorts behind the mattresses to keep them pressed against the outside collision mat. It was a long job.

Every so often George went aft to see how the fire progressed, and found great volumes of black smoke vomiting from the hold, making the men choke and stagger as they tried to keep the hoses directed below.

"Haven't seen any flame for more'n an hour," gasped the second mate. "I think we've got it."

"Don't be too sure," said George grimly. "And what's worse the sea's rising."

That was true. An uneasiness was creeping into the swell and the wind was beginning to shred the fog. George climbed on the bridge to look at the glass, found it was falling, and then went down to his father's room. Captain Waring was conscious for the moment, but utterly helpless, and seemed paralyzed below the waist. George gave him a short report and the captain groaned.

"Well, she's all yours, George," he whispered, and he seldom had used that name all through the years. "Your first command."

His son looked at him queerly, and then looked slowly around the cabin as if he had never seen it before. His first command. Well, that was true in a way. He was in charge. Whatever he said would be law. He was fascinated by the idea as it grew on him. The *Mohawk* was in a bad way. There was ugly weather coming up.

The coast was not more than forty miles to the east and the boats would easily make it. The *Mohawk* could go to the bottom and that would be the end of heartache and irritation, and the deadly thing called duty. Captain Waring would not suffer, with the insurance to carry him on. And his son would not feel sick inside because he wished a life that his father opposed. It would be very easy. He looked at the portraits of the Warings and drew his lips back from his clenched teeth. Yes, very easy.

"You'd better come, sir," said the bosun, busting into the cabin. "The collision mat's giving way!"

"All right," said George dully. He looked at his father and their eyes met. Something curious passed between them and as if reading his son's thoughts the old man muttered, resigned, "Abandon if you think it best. The *Mohawk's* yours."

The old man's stare was grim. "I'm not sure," said George uncertainly and then stopped.

His father had lapsed into unconsciousness again.

"Stay with him," George ordered the frightened steward and ran down to the main deck. The collision mat was chafing apart against the sharp steel edges of the ripped plates, the surging sea working it back and forth. George leaned over the rail for a long look and the bosun touched his arm.

"The men figure we ought to leave her while there's time, sir," he said respectfully. "They sent me to ask you. We can't fight the leak and the fire both, not with the weather making."

Sudden guilty fury rose in George Waring then and he whipped about snarling. "You tell the men I'll decide whether we'll abandon or not! Get back and tell them!" The bosun fled. "Start making another collision mat," George ordered his own crew. "We'll use wire rope this time. Pad mattresses between the canvas and the wire. That'll stop the chafing for a while." The men stared at him, muttered, and then went to work.

THE fog thinned away before dark and the wind came whining cold from the west, inching the *Mohawk* towards the iron-ribbed coast. The sea rose until the combers were topped with white and the heavy sprays smashed over the rail and dripped from the rigging. The fire aft had apparently been subdued enough to risk smothering, so the hatches had been battened down and the ventilators plugged. There was water in the engine room and most of the steam was needed for the for'ard pumps, but the chief managed to get the engine going at slow ahead and George steered the ship for a sheltered cove to the north where there was a slowly shallowing sand bottom on which the freighter could safely rest until such time as she could be salvaged. He wondered what Evelyn would want him to do. Let the ship go? It would solve everything.

And it was toward dawn with the wind a howling torrent and the sullen seas beginning to break clear over the decks when the second mate found him on the bridge.

"There's no more we can do, sir," he protested. "The men are about worn out. If this gets any worse we'll founder. We'll founder anyway pretty soon. The collision mat's going again and the smoke's seeping thick out of the very deck aft."

"We can make the cove by noon."

"If we last that long," said the second grimly. "And if we don't smash on the reefs before then. The men want to chance it in the boats before the sea gets too high for launching. There's plenty of beach we can make safe landing." He pointed where the line of the coast loomed vaguely.

George felt the *Mohawk* shudder all along her length as a comber boarded her and swept her. It was as if someone had given him a blow, too. Instinctively, and through the very soles of his shoes, he sensed the loggy condition of the freighter, as he also sensed she was still fighting. He had condemned the *Mohawk* and all that she had meant so many times, but he could not find it in his heart to condemn her now. It was like kicking a man when he was down. And it came to him with a queer

shock that a world in which there was no *Mohawk* would be a very strange one. He could not conceive of it. Why, the *Mohawk* was the only home he had known. He had been born on her. He was part of her. Another great sea roared across the scuppers and ripped a winch half out of its boltings with a wrenching crack that made something give way inside George Waring too. He leaned over the bridge rail and cursed the sea.

"Leave her alone! You leave her alone!" he shouted hysterically. "She's my ship!"

He swung back to the second and shook him savagely "We'll make the cove or go under! Get every spare man below to keep up steam. As long as they turn the engine and pumps over we've got a chance."

"But, sir, she can't last. She might . . ."

George Waring put his face very close to the other man's and took him by the throat. "Do you want me to chase you below with a gun?" he choked. "Get out of here and do as I say. She'll last! Shouldn't I know? I've served her over twenty years! Get out!"

The second mate ran. What could you do with someone insane? She would not last, not if the sea continued to make as it was. It would smash in her hatches, tear the collision mat apart.

But whatever happened George Waring understood now that he must bring her in or go down with her. He prayed for a miracle.

Down in his father's cabin he found the old man still unconscious and the exhausted steward asleep. He knocked the man awake and ordered him to make coffee and then he looked at the portraits of other Warings staring down at him. He hated them. He hated every one of them, and yet somehow now he didn't.

"All right," he said bitterly. "You've got your way. Now I hope you're satisfied." He took a stiff drink of whisky with the coffee and went back on deck to stand by the helmsman. Evelyn wouldn't marry him now, not if he saved the *Mohawk* and stayed with her, as he knew he would. No, Evelyn was too sensible, and she didn't want a husband who was only a signature on a letter. He didn't blame her. He laughed a little and prayed the collision mat would hold for a few hours yet.

IT WAS early afternoon when Captain Waring became conscious again, to find himself in a hospital bed with a nurse on one side of him and a doctor on the other.

"You'll be quite all right," the doctor said. "Mostly shock."

After that there was a pause and opening his eyes again Captain Waring saw his son, hollow-eyed, unshaven and grim.

"I got her into Bram's Cove, sir, and beached her. She'll take a little work but she's sound. The gale nearly finished us . . . but you wouldn't remember . . . and anyway we had a miracle. Ran into the kelp beds and that held the sea."

Captain Waring nodded. The great kelp beds of the coast, vast areas of weed, acted upon roaring combers like thick oil, smothering the crests, reducing walls of breaking white water to mere swollen swells that were comparatively harmless. George Waring looked at his skinned raw hands.

"I guess I won't be getting married after all, sir," he went on quietly. "I'm sticking with the *Mohawk*. I guess I didn't know what she meant until we nearly lost her."

"But Evelyn?"

George shook his head and made a despairing gesture of final renunciation. "She'll never take a sailor. That's one thing she's set on. When she marries she wants to be with her husband."

Captain Waring smiled and raised weakly on one elbow. "George," he whispered. "George, boy. Has it never occurred to you that the Warings always take their wives to sea with them?"

His son stared at him for a long moment and then comprehension dawned. No, that had never occurred to him. He headed for the door.

"I'll be back," he promised huskily. "But right now I've got to telegraph."

Strike

By JOHN HAWKINS

IT WAS on the second day of the big sit-down strike at the Falcon Automobile Plant that Falcon's guard turned the gas on the strikers. That was a mistake. A big mistake. For it drove the men completely into the hands of Mike Finn, the racketeer-union boss, who was trying to establish entire control of the plant. Mike Finn didn't care a hoot about the workers—it was the rich gravy of power and graft that interested him.

Duncan McCann, the son of the Governor, is working at the plant under the name of John Duncan. He knows Finn for what he is. Trying to discover the identity of the man higher-up behind Finn, McCann has joined the union and worms his way into a confidential position around union headquarters.

But Helen Falcon knows his identity. Half in love with him, she gives him thirty-six hours to leave town. Then she will, because of her rather half-baked but very earnest labor sympathies, tell Finn that Duncan is a spy.

DUNCAN arranges to meet with a handful of men antipathetic to Finn at the house of Mack Saddler, one of the few workers who is his friend. When Saddler hears what Duncan is trying to do, he shakes his head.

"Lad, you're as good as dead already."

Duncan grins hopefully. "I've got thirty-six hours yet, I hope." He glances at his watch. "Or rather thirty-one. I've got to get busy."

On the street he bumps into James Stanley, political strategist and the Governor's confidential adviser. Duncan tells Stanley what his plans are, and Stanley, too, warns him to be careful.

"If you tell Dad you saw me," Duncan says, "I might take a swing at you. Just for luck."

Montana Fells, Finn's ace gunman, has been following Duncan all day, but he didn't get a good enough look at Stanley to recognize him.

"Come on, you," he says to Duncan. "We're going back to see who that was you were talkin' to. If this is what I think it is, morning will find you a long time dead."

Duncan grows tense. Montana Fells is holding a gun in his pocket, holding it jammed tightly against Duncan's ribs. . . .

CHAPTER XX

FLOWERS COST MONEY

DUNCAN McCANN stood quite still. The gun pressure was solid against his ribs. Ugly lights glinted in Montana Fells' eyes, but no other trace of expression crossed his flat, high-cheekboned face.

Montana said, "Move, punk!" in a chill, deadly whisper.

Taut seconds tiptoed by. With desperate

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coolness McCann weighed his chances of escape. He could whirl, slap Montana's still pocketed gun aside—and die! There was no doubt about that. Montana wanted to shoot; he was only seeking an excuse.

Again came that iced whisper, "I said move, punk!"

McCann came around in a careless half-turn, and went back between the tables to the row of booths. None of the other diners gave them more than a casual glance.

Ten steps, eight steps, six steps—and then the booth. Montana wouldn't wait for more than a glance at Stanley. Just the fact that McCann had been talking to someone would be evidence of a double-cross, evidence enough to fan Montana's burning kill-lust to a blazing heat. McCann might hear the first hammering roar, might even see the first orange-bright spurt of flame, but after that—

Montana's chill voice came to his ear. "We're goin' right up to that booth. You in front, an' if you're pulling a double-play—"

A hurrying waiter jostled by them. McCann's eyes flicked along the booths, his nails bit into his sweating palms.

"Freeze!" Montana's weight pressed McCann against the table edge, held him there. Just a flickering second, and then relief surged through him. Because the booth was empty . . . .

Montana cursed, and stepped back as McCann turned to get just a glimpse of Stanley's bulky, tweed-covered shoulders, of his thin cigar, of smoky gray eyes under slanting hat-brim, and then the swinging door of the kitchen closed, and cut Stanley from sight.

Stanley must have seen Montana stop him, must have known what was coming and slipped into the kitchen in the second before Montana and Duncan started toward the booth.

"How do you like that?" McCann asked. "Got any more screwy ideas?"

"Yeah, I got a lot. You ain't goin' to your hotel, an' then make a phone call, an' then grab a cab here just because you want air. That don't make sense. Only I don't know what does. So you get clear—for a minute!"

"You made your play," McCann said, "and it missed. Don't get in the way again, unless you want to play for keeps."

Montana didn't move. His big shoulders were hunched, and his hands deep in his raincoat pockets. Icy rage shone in his eyes. "I don't play any other way."

McCann stepped past him, and went out into the night. He looked back, two or three times, on the ride to the hotel, but apparently Montana had not trailed him.

McCANN had to fight his way through a dense crowd to get inside union headquarters the next morning. And, once inside, he found the stairs and hall packed with a seething mass of excited men. Twin radio speakers mounted on the wall blared a news dispatch:

"Two full companies of National Guards arrived in this city early this morning, under the command of Major-General Williams. Governor James McCann ordered the militia to Industrial City after yesterday's riots at the Falcon Automobile Plant in which two men were fatally injured.

"Governor McCann, who has been in this city since late last night, today refused to disclose to the press his plans for the settlement of the Falcon Strike.

"Major-General Williams stated that his men will police the strike area, and that the streets immediately around the plant will be closed to general traffic. Half of the guardsmen form the crack machine-gun company from the State Capitol."

Roaring, strident sound welled up in the hall, blotted out the announcer's voice.

McCann had nearly reached the head of the stairs when a broad, dark face was thrust close to his, and Johnny Robb's remembered voice rapped out, "It's the stool pigeon!"

Clutching hands caught McCann's arms, and a swirl of bodies jammed him tight against the wall. Robb said, "This time you won't get out so easy!"

"You're sticking your chin pretty far

'out, Robb," McCann said steadily. "Finn will—"

"Yeah?" The squat man laughed. "We'll see." He tipped his head back to shout, "Outa the way, we're bringin' a stool pigeon in!"

A lane opened, almost magically, in the jam. Robb said: "You're goin' inside, guy, an' you'll wish you'd never poked your nose in here."

Mike Finn was standing only four or five feet away when McCann came through the door. He said: "You're late, Duncan. Where . . . " his voice lagged to a stop as he saw Robb. "What *is* this?"

Robb stepped forward. "I caught him climbin' the stairs, boss. The rat's tryin' to get somethin' he can take to the cops. This's the stool—"

"Fool!" Finn was in front of Robb in a single bounding step, his outthrust jaw only inches from Robb's face. "Once more I'm going to tell you—and only once more —stop trying to run things! Twice now you've got out of line, and twice I've let you get away with it. Montana gets you the next time. Now get out of here!"

"But, boss—"

"Duncan works for us, understand? He *works* for us! If you'd used your eyes yesterday you'd have seen him in the sound wagon. Now get out!"

Montana Fells eased up to them. "I'll take care of it, boss."

Finn said, "Do!" and spun away. McCann watched the squat Robb retreat from Montana's cat-graceful advance. Watched him go back until his shoulders hit the door, and then whirl and claw at the knob. Montana let him go.

Mike Finn went back to the group he had left, and Montana dropped in a chair beside the door. Helen Falcon wasn't around anywhere.

McCann stopped at Marcia Dubois' desk. If she answered his, "Good morning," at all, the sound was lost in the staccato chatter of the keys. He waited a moment and then leaned close to her to say, "I've never burned an orphanage, or poisoned a dog. I'm good to old ladies and—"

"And you annoy me." Marcia looked up at him from under long lashes. "Boy scouts always do."

McCann forced a grin. "Even when they're doing their good turn?"

"Even then. Especially then."

Mike Finn stepped between them and elbowed McCann to one side. "So he's bothering you, Marcia? Pay no attention. I'll see that he doesn't—"

"Oh!" Marcia's head jerked up. "You're wrong, Mr. Finn, it's a joke we have between us. A joke that started when we first met. Oh—months ago." Her words were hurried, ragged, and a shadowed something that might have been fear looked out of her eyes.

Finn worked a cold cigar between his teeth. "Months ago, huh?"

"That's right." Marcia laughed, but even laughter couldn't erase the lines of strain around her mouth.

Finn said, "Ryan's waiting for you, Duncan."

McCann turned away. He looked back from the inner door to find the big, red-headed man's eyes still on him. Finn's lips were pressed flat, and his eyes held the cold shine of gun-steel.

RYAN had his feet propped on the table. He held a sheet of copy paper in one hand, and a glass of whisky in the other.

"Hey, Quixote," he said, "you an' bankers have nice hours, but it's tough on us workin' guys."

"Are we takin' the sound wagon out today?"

"Not unless Finn changes his mind. I got too many other things to do." He drained the glass, placed it on the table, and made a penciled correction on the sheet.

"What's Finn going to do now that the strikers aren't in the plant?"

"He'll put a moving picket line clear around the plant. Then the sound wagon, the radio, handbills, everything." He yawned. "You'd think Falcon was working for us. Every time he pulls a stunt like he

did yesterday he puts the union in solid with the public. One more bad move, baby, an' Falcon might as well give us the business."

A sudden clamor seemed to burst, full-blown, in the street below, and then the sound swelled and grew. A single word was caught, bellowed by a hundred throats.

"Scabs!"

Ryan jerked stiffly upright. "Scabs!" he breathed softly, and his mouth pulled down at the corners. "Quixote—this is it!"

"What do you mean?"

The thunder of voices pounded the walls. The sound had come up the stairs. The outer office was in an uproar.

Ryan jammed his battered hat low over his eyes. "Falcon's making another bull play. The fool's bringing in strikebreakers." He scooped a flask off the table, and snapped, "Come on, we got work to do!"

McCann followed Ryan into the outer office. Finn's red head towered above the crowd that swirled around him. A stocky man was shouting from the door.

"Two cars of the rats got in before we could stop 'em! We got the street covered with tacks and broken glass now, but—"

Finn shouted: "Quiet! Keep quiet!" Then, as a semblance of order was restored, he went on, "How many cars were there?"

"I seen twenty or thirty. The cops are there, and the National Guard's settin' up machine guns on the corners."

"We'll stop that." Finn spun, eyes searching the throng. "Montana, break open those cases in the basement that got here this morning. The gas, and the masks."

Montana plowed a silent path to the door. The crowd swarmed in his wake. Ryan jerked an aside to McCann as Finn came toward them:

"Got here this *morning?* There's dust on them cases an inch thick!"

"How—?"

FINN waved them back to the inner room, and waited in the doorway until they had passed him. He came in then, closed the door, and leaned back against it. "You know what to do, Ryan?"

Ryan said, "Yeah, I ought to. This same gag was written six hundred years ago—only they used swords then." His voice was thin and bitter.

"I want you to keep them going long enough to make it look like something big. The papers'll give us a play, and if we can keep the public behind us we'll win this thing in a walk."

"Sure." The two deep lines bracketed Ryan's mouth. "Sure, keep them goin'. They're walkin' into guns that fire real bullets, and gas that burns the hides off 'em if they get too close."

Finn's voice was a very soft purr. "Shut up, Ryan!"

"Sure! They're walkin' into that with gas masks that're rotten and grenades that are so old they creak. But if three or four of them get killed, it'll be swell!" Ryan's voice thinned, shrilled. "Sure, it'll be swell. Falcon will have to pull the strike-breakers out of the plant, because the papers'll pan him for killing his own workmen! That puts it right in your lap."

Finn moved then, with blazing speed. His open hand caught McCann in the chest, sent him reeling backward across the room. He stepped close to Ryan. His fist seemed to move only a matter of inches. There was a dull *splat!* and Ryan heaved back, his arms flailing, to hit the wall and collapse in a corner.

McCann was on his feet, hurling himself toward the big man, when a gun appeared in Finn's hand. McCann stopped in his tracks.

"Don't do it, kid," Finn said huskily. "I don't want to see you get it just because this blabbermouth got drunk and spilled his insides all over the place."

Ryan's eyes were glazed, his jaw hung open. He put one shaking hand over his smashed lips, and said clearly:

"No, Mike Finn, you're wrong. That's the trouble, a man can't stay drunk enough to like this job. It'll get you too, after while. It'll get through that thick hide of yours. You— You damn butcher!"

Finn's hand tightened on the gun butt. "Keep on, you fool, keep on, and they'll be buryin' you!"

The tableau held for a long-drawn awful moment, and then Ryan whispered an oath. He sat up, and fumbled in his pocket for the flask. It was half empty when he lowered it from his lips.

The door behind Finn opened silently, and Montana slipped in. His muddy eyes flicked over the room. "Any trouble, boss?" he asked quietly.

"No, Ryan and Duncan are just leaving with the sound wagon. Maybe you better go along, just to be sure that nobody forgets his lines."

Montana nodded. He waited, his big shoulders hunched, his hands deep in his pockets, until Ryan got to his feet. He stepped away from the door then, and followed Ryan and McCann through the office and down the stairs.

MONTANA wedged his bulk in behind the seat, and Ryan got under the wheel. McCann cradled the microphone in his lap as they rolled in the wake of the strikers.

Ryan asked, "Can you ad lib, Quixote?"

"I don't know," McCann answered.

"Here's the setup. These guys have got to keep goin' until the reporters and camera men get here, and for a while after that. It's got to look good, it's got to look like they're being manhandled. You've got to keep 'em goin' back."

"If its all the same to you," McCann said bleakly, "I'd rather drive, and let you do the talking."

"It ain't." Montana's gun snout prodded McCann's neck. "You're the barker!"

The sound truck nosed through straggling groups of hurrying men. A dozen or more of them climbed on the running boards and fenders. Others shouted, trotting to stay abreast of the truck.

Ryan sunk his elbow in McCann's ribs. "Okay, turn on the horns."

McCann flicked the switches up, got the microphone close to his lips. His thoughts ran black and deep within him. He didn't move until Montana's gun touched his neck again.

McCann spoke then, and the four horns roared. "Are we going to let a bunch of scabs steal our jobs?"

A ragged cheer answered him, and one man waved a sack of grenades. "They'll get these first!"

A plank barricade barred Mill Street four blocks from the plant. Five or six hundred men already surged restlessly around that barricade when Ryan braked the sound wagon to a stop.

The National Guard was there. Fifty or sixty of them were in sight, grouped around machine guns which had been set up in the intersections near the plant, or pacing with shouldered rifles up and down the walks. There were other uniforms there, too. Policemen. Firemen. White hose lines crisscrossed the pavement between the barricade and the machine guns.

McCann's eyes were sober as he spoke into the microphone. "There they are, men! The cops and the militia are helping the scabs. We pay taxes, why don't they help *us?*"

McCann stopped. A lone man, in a captain's uniform, strode down the center of the street toward the barricade. Head up, chin firm, shoulders well braced, he might have been on a parade ground. The sun struck bright arrows of light from the insignia on his cap and the decorations on his chest.

A barrage of jeers greeted his approach. His face was stiff as he halted fifty feet from the barricade.

"Go home!" His crisp voice cut through the welter of other sound. "You men are ruining whatever chances you have of a peaceful settlement of this strike, and are creating public feeling that works against your union. I don't know why you are on strike, or what reason you had to strike—that isn't my job. I do know that you will destroy no more property. I do know that you will not riot around the Falcon Plant. We have machine guns, rifles, gas—and the men to use them. We don't want to use them—but we will if you force us to! Go

home, and wait until your strike is settled."

McCann saw Robb's squat figure wiggle close to the barrier, heard him shout:

"Tin soldier!"

A flush crept up the captain's neck. He wheeled stiffly, and stalked back up the street. Robb hurled a brick that arched high to bounce off the pavement beside the captain. The second hit his shoulder. He staggered, his cap bounced off, but he kept moving in his stiff, unhurried, parade-ground stride without looking back.

CURSES welled up in McCann's throat. Robb was turning when McCann clawed at the door handle, and lunged up. If he could get his hands on Robb's throat, if he—

Steel fingers dug into McCann's shoulder, slammed him back into the seat. The gun snout pressed into his neck, and Montana rasped, "Stay where you are, an' get talkin'!"

Robb yelled, "Come on, let's take these scabs!"

A hundred men echoed that yell. The mob surged against the barricade, like dark, swirling water against a dam. Then the barricade went down, and the mob raced toward the plant.

Montana said: "Get them horns goin'!"

McCann opened the switch again. "Don't let the scabs stop you." A tight lump stopped McCann's throat then as gas shells began to explode over the heads of the mob, and the thick, white vapor settled down. McCann watched, locked in rigid silence.

The street ahead of the sound wagon was walled solidly from curb to curb with running men. That wall split suddenly, and white water geysered through. The firemen who held the bucking nozzle swung it, and the stream sent a dozen men sprawling.

The mob split into eight or ten separate segments. A half dozen hoses threw powerful streams of water into the packed bodies. The mob broke, fell back.

The chill voice behind McCann snapped, "Get 'em goin' again."

"Cut the hoses! Cut the hoses!"

Some of the men heard that giant voice. One group got between two of the streams, swarmed over the two firemen who held the nozzle. The firemen went down, and the hose whipped back and forth like a live thing in pain. The flashing nozzle struck one man in the face. He dropped as though pole-axed, and the stream sent his body tumbling limply into the gutter.

A tight knot of men were past the fire hoses, running toward the plant. McCann saw the line of uniformed men that formed across the street, saw the white streams of gas that leaped to meet the strikers.

A crimson haze danced in front of McCann's eyes. He leaned forward, spilled words into the microphone.

"Come back, you fools, can't you see it's a—"

There was shuffling movement behind McCann. Agony-shot blackness exploded in his head, and he was tumbling over and over into a quiet dark.

THE sound wagon was moving when McCann struggled back to consciousness. A dull ache throbbed at the base of his skull, and the sunlight was like a hot knife laid against his eyes.

Dimly, he could hear Ryan's earnest voice. The words gradually took meaning. ". . . he did yell. He didn't hurt anything. They'd done enough then. The cameramen had plenty of footage, and every newshawk in town got an eye-witness story. I say it was a smart play. That's goin' to look plenty good in print."

"Tell it to Finn," Montana said softly.

The truck bounced over the alley cobblestones, and stopped. Ryan got his hands under McCann's shoulders. "Hey, fella, are you all right?"

McCann nodded heavily. "I'll make it."

Montana said, "Get out."

McCann staggered when his feet hit the pavement. Ryan reached for his arm, and Montana's chill voice said, "Let him alone. He'll get there if he has to crawl."

Ryan led the way, straight through the big, deserted office to the inner door. He

tried the knob, found it locked, and hammered on the panel.

A key grated in the lock, the door swung in, and Mike Finn swayed in the opening. He was in his shirtsleeves, his hair was rumpled, his eyes bloodshot. His breath carried the thick odor of whisky.

"How'd it go?"

Ryan said: "Fine, but this cowboy nearly queered the deal. The men charged the National Guard, and Duncan yelled for them to come back. That'll sound good on the news-reel sound track, and it'll look good in print. But Montana had to slug Duncan."

Finn's eyes raised to Montana's face. "Why?" he asked.

"He was doublecrossing us."

Finn looked at McCann, said: "I'll want you here in the morning—beat it!"

Finn leaned against the door, and watched McCann leave before he spoke again.

"Montana, I told you to lay off him, and I mean just that. I'm still running this show, and you're still taking orders from me. Get that? We need him plenty. You can have him when the time comes, but until I give you the word—make one pass at that guy and I'll kill you with my bare hands."

Red anger came into Montana's face, but he didn't speak. Finn turned to Ryan. "You think a lot of him, don't you."

"Yeah, I guess I do."

"Well, get over it—flowers cost money!"

CHAPTER XXI

COUNCIL OF WAR

DUNCAN McCANN had used a full thirty minutes in making sure he wasn't being followed. He had been in and out of three department stores, had ridden in two cabs, and one bus. Then he used a phone booth in a midtown drug store. Stanley answered the phone almost at once.

"This is McCann. Listen, that riot at the plant today was planned. Finn wanted to make it look as if the National Guard and the police were unnecessarily brutal. Wanted to make it look as if they were on Falcon's payroll. Then the newspapers will play up the strikers' side, and Falcon will have to pull the strikebreakers out of the plant or have the public boycott the Falcon distributors."

"No. . . ." Surprise thickened Stanley's voice. "And it worked. Falcon just notified the Governor that he is removing the strikebreakers from the plant."

McCann swore. "Now we *will* have to deal with Finn—at Finn's terms!"

"Have you got anything else?"

"Not for sure, but tell them to stay on their toes! That red-headed devil has another plan brewing. I'll let you know as soon as I do."

Stanley asked: "Do you need any help!"

"No. I'll call you again tonight." McCann dropped the receiver, went out into the street.

The early darkness was an hour old when McCann came up the walk toward Kim Saddler's small house. No glimmer of light showed through the tightly drawn shades, and the whole house was wrapped in an air of dead silence. Three or four weathered newspapers lay in front of the screen door.

McCann knocked. Instantly there was quick movement inside, and a husky voice asked, "Who is it?"

"Duncan."

The door yawned on a dark room. A hand gripped McCann's arm, and Mack Saddler's voice said: "This way, lad."

Six or seven men waited in the inner room. Men whose faces were only half visible in the reflected glow of the flashlight that threw its shaded beam against the wall.

"We thought you weren't coming, lad."

"Montana followed me last night, and I couldn't take the chance of leading him here. It took time." McCann got a folded newspaper out of his pocket, said, "Here, look at this, it just came out."

The flashlight swung to center on inky headlines.

FALCON ISSUES ULTIMATUM TO STRIKERS

Since the workmen of my plant have refused to consider the offer made by me I make the following statement: My plant will remain closed until that offer is accepted, for under no conditions will I accept the Union as it now exists. Further, since the Governor seems to be unable to protect my property from wanton destruction, I also state that if any further damage is done to my plant by rioting strikers I will move that plant out of this state and assume the resulting financial loss before I resume production.

Mack Saddler's heavy breathing exploded in a harsh curse. A thin-faced man gasped; another said: "He can't do that! It'd cost—"

"He will, though," Saddler said bleakly, "if he goes broke doing it. He's just that kind of a guy. I worked for him for twelve years, and in all that time I never heard of him breaking a promise of any kind. No matter what the price, Falcon kept his word. He will again."

McCann said: "That's my idea."

"What're we goin' to do?"

"Easy, Joe, the lad will explain it to you." Saddler turned to McCann. "What's your idea, lad?"

"Look," McCann said, "Finn isn't the real boss. There's someone higher up, someone with plenty of power. Finn can't do anything without orders, but at the same time the higher up can't do anything without Finn. Remove him, and the union falls apart."

"Lad, are you sure there's a man above Finn?"

"Yes. This strike is just the start. They'll force Falcon to sign with the union—or they'll break him, and they don't care much either way. If he joins, swell. If he doesn't, and they smash him, then the other plants will sign in a hurry."

Joe asked: "What can we do against a set-up like that?"

"This higher up can't come out in the open if Finn isn't there to hold the men in line. And the strike can only be successful for them if they do hold the men in line. That means we've got to get Finn!"

The short man's face looked like a skull in the half light. "You—You mean kill him?"

"No, we can't do that. But there's another way to put him out of circulation."

Tense voices asked: "How?"

"THERE were two men killed in the plant before the strike was called. They were killed because Finn ordered them killed. We've got to find either the crane man who dropped the sedan on Kim, or the man who let the drill hit O'Malley in the stomach. Then we can prove that Finn ordered those deaths. Those men will talk when we find them—we're not the police, but we can use the same methods."

"Would the police arrest Finn, lad?"

"They'd be glad to if we can produce the evidence. Then, with Finn in jail, the strike will fall apart. The men didn't want to strike, and they'll be glad to go back to work."

Joe said, "That might work!"

"It will!" McCann put both hands flat on the table, leaned forward. "Our best bet will be the man who let the drill slip to kill O'Malley. You can find someone who worked near him. Get his name and description, and the rest is easy."

"But—"

"Find him, and I'll make him talk if I have to tear his heart out by the roots."

Joe said: "We'll all be in jail if—"

"That's the chance we've got to take," McCann said bitterly. "Finn has already had two men killed in the plant, has started riots that killed two more. This isn't a picnic—this is war! A wartime spy would get just the same treatment we will if Finn finds us poking into this. There won't be a stone wall and a firing squad, but we'll be just as dead."

Saddler nodded soberly. "Aye, lad, we all know that. But what about you? You're in the worst place of all. When—"

"I'll go on working in headquarters, and hope that Helen Falcon doesn't talk.

She gave me thirty-six hours, I've still got part of that left."

"But what if she does talk?"

McCann's voice was raw. "I'll think about that when the time comes."

"Have you got a gun, lad?"

"No."

Mack Saddler placed a black forty-five automatic on the table. "Here, I can get another, and you need this one."

McCann pocketed the gun and stood up. "It's eight now," he said. "I'm going back to union headquarters and see if I can find anything we can use. Mack, why don't you meet me in front of the Anchor Bar at midnight?"

"That's only three blocks from the union hall."

"Right, that's why I picked it."

"I'll be there."

CHAPTER XXII

EVERY SECOND COUNTS

NORMAN STANLEY surveyed the glowing tip of his cigar, and then placed it precisely between his teeth. "Sure," he said genially, "you're the boss, but it's still a fool stunt. The taxpayers elected you Governor, but that doesn't mean you have to play Haroun Al Raschid and run around in a strike mob in disguise. You won't find anything that way."

"Possibly not." Governor James McCann slipped the blue work shirt over his head, tucked the tails into baggy trousers. He squinted at his image in a long mirror. Pain and exhaustion had whipped the skin tight across his cheekbones, added new frown lines around his eyes. He asked: "How does a workman wear his collar, Stanley, open or shut?"

"Open, I guess." Stanley grunted disgustedly. "So you insist on going through with it?"

The Governor turned just as the phone rang. He crossed to the table, and a moment later said: "Yes, Williams, come right up."

Major-General Williams was tired. It showed in his eyes, in the flat line of his lips, in his voice. "I thought it best to report now, sir, while things are a bit quiet. My men are all placed. I have machine guns set up at four intersections. Each position has two guns, one fixed to fire each way. We have the full coöperation of the fire department and the local police force, but I'm afraid the fire hoses wouldn't stop them if they charge the plant again. We'll do our best, of course, with gas and water, but they have masks now and—"

Governor McCann shook his head. "Turning a machine gun loose in the face of a mob is murder. Legal murder, perhaps, but murder none the less. We can't have that—not if they tear the Falcon Plant to bits."

"Right." Major-General Williams' mouth was stiff. "I knew you'd feel that way. These guns are set to fire just below knee height, and the belts are loaded with a new ammunition—they sometimes use it in war scenes in making motion pictures—the bullets aren't lead, but a kind of cardboard."

Governor McCann drummed his fingers on the table, listened.

"They'll leave a bad bruise, and possibly break the flesh, but they won't kill—unless they hit a particularly vital spot, like the eye or temple."

"Still they might . . ."

"We would only use them as a last resort. The sound of them, and the sight of a few of their number going down when they charge us, might have the right effect. A machine gun isn't a thing most men want to run into."

Governor McCann said, "No, someone might be killed. These men didn't want to strike, and now they can't settle. Falcon won't sign with their union, and the union leaders won't let them adopt Falcon's plan. They're only fighting for what they think is theirs, and they have every right to live."

Stanley got to his feet then. "General, maybe you can help me. The Governor insists on going into that strike crowd in disguise. He can't gain anything, but I

can't quite convince him of that, and—"

"You're right. He couldn't gain anything. That's an ugly crowd if I ever saw one. The strikers have been gathering around the barricade since early this afternoon. That's a powder-house down there, sir, and anything will touch them off. Why not let one of my men do it for you?"

Governor McCann smiled bleakly. "It's no more dangerous for me than it would be for him."

Stanley cut in: "Davork or I will be glad to—"

"Davork has been missing since noon. He hasn't called in. The police have been searching, but so far they haven't found anything." Governor McCann shrugged into his coat. "The biggest thing you can do for me, Stanley, is to stay here where you can get any calls."

"But—" Major-General Williams interrupted, "it was all I could do to get through that mob in my car. I tell you they're ugly."

"You were in uniform."

"Yes, but—"

Stanley came over. "You'll take a gun, anyway. I don't see what you expect to find, but . . ."

"I can look." Governor McCann's voice was oddly clear. "There are a lot of things I might find. I have a son somewhere in that mob!"

NINE O'CLOCK found Duncan McCann striding rapidly west on Mill Street. The gusty wind tugged at the tails of his coat, and got under his hat brim. A dull, constant sound, like the distant roar of breakers, came from the direction of the Falcon Plant, but the street in front of union headquarters was deserted.

McCann was crossing the alley when the small figure shot out of the shadow. A hand gripped his arm, and Ryan's voice said:

"An' I been turnin' this town inside out tryin' to find you!"

McCann peered down into Ryan's drawn face. "What's wrong?"

"Hell's runnin' over, fella. I heard it twenty minutes ago. I tried your hotel, an' then—" He was panting. "Finn's sending six or eight cars full of strikers out to Falcon's place!"

"The rat!" McCann's mouth tightened and he thought swiftly. "They won't be able to get through the gate. The guards'll stop—"

"Guards!" Harsh laughter exploded from Ryan's lips. "What would you do if you were an eight-dollar-a-day guard, and somebody poked a forty-five in your face and told you to open the gate." He pawed at his lips. "*You* might get your brains blown out, but a *smart* man would open the gate."

"What are you talking about?"

"Finn's sending a couple of torpedos along. They're goin' to pull something, Lord knows what, and the strikers will get the blame. It's a trick to scare Falcon into—"

"That's *murder!*" The words spilled from McCann's stiff lips. His hands clenched at his sides, and anger darkened his face. "Did you call the police?"

"They'd just laugh at you, and anyway they haven't got a man to spare tonight. I thought you'd want to tell the girl. You and she are . . . Anyway, guy, she'd listen to you. You can phone."

"Right!" McCann spun, raced for the restaurant on the corner. Ryan fell behind, but crowded into the phone booth before McCann could shut the door.

McCann reached for the phone book, and Ryan said: "It won't be listed, you'll have to pry the number out of the company."

McCann dialed information, who connected him with the night supervisor's office. A woman listened to his request.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but we aren't allowed to give out any information of that—"

"You fool!" McCann gritted. "You rule-bound fool! This is life and death. Do you want a couple of people to die because you can't break a rule? Don't give me the number, but in heaven's name connect me with them. Can't you under-

stand that this might mean the difference between their living and dying?"

"You must—"

"Call them!"

Hysteria edged the woman's rising voice. "Did you try the police?"

"No, there isn't time. Understand me, they might be killed while you talk—"

"Just—Just a moment and I'll connect you."

McCANN pressed the receiver tight against his ear. He could hear the clicking buzz as the operator rang the number again and again. After what seemed a year the operator said: "They do not answer."

"They've got to!"

"I'm sorry, but—"

Ryan had McCann's arm then, was jerking him away from the phone. "We got to get out of here before a million of them cops on riot duty land on this joint. We'll climb a cab, an' go out an' tell 'em!"

"Have we got time?"

"Maybe." Ryan tossed the word back over his shoulder as he ran for the door. He turned back toward the union hall, and then stopped so suddenly that McCann plowed into him.

"Look!" His up-swinging arm pointed at the roadster parked in front of the union hall. "That's Marcia's hack. Grab it!"

Siren sound split the night as they sprinted the half block. McCann asked: "How'll we get the keys?"

"Finn's gone," Ryan said, "she'll be—" They were beside the roadster then, and Ryan grinned: "Hey, we don't need 'em, the motor's runnin'."

McCann rounded the car, yanked the door open, and was sliding under the wheel when the slender figure came out of the doorway.

"Stop thief!"

Ryan pulled his hat off, said: "Hold it, Marcia, it's us!"

The motor growled under McCann's foot. Marcia Dubois' face was pale, her voice unsteady. "But why—why should you steal my car? I can't—"

The siren sound was closer now. McCann shoved the gear lever into second, and Ryan caught Marcia's wrist. "Come on, there isn't time to talk. The law'll be here in a minute. Too much law!" He pulled her inside the car.

McCann toed the accelerator flat. Rubber wailed, and the roadster rocketed, its motor snarling, into the night. McCann hunched over the wheel, his lips pressed thin. He pumped the brake lightly, whipped the wheel over, and shot the roadster around a right angle turn in a shuddering dry-skid.

Ryan jolted solidly against McCann as the roadster swayed. "Hey!" he shouted. "If you stack this crate up, we ain't goin' to help nobody!"

McCann didn't answer. Ryan got a flask out of an inside pocket, tilted it to his lips. McCann took the roadster across the ramp, jumped a red light, and turned west on Rosemore.

McCann had just one glimpse of Marcia—a glimpse of wind-ruffled hair, of vivid lips, of a firmly set chin, and angry eyes. Then he was curving the roadster around a truck.

The speedometer needle crawled up to seventy as they swept around a wide curve, touched eighty as the roadster slashed, wide open, down a long tangent.

Ryan shivered, drank again, and dropped the empty flask in his lap. Howling wind clawed at the car top.

Then McCann was braking for the turn into the lane. The motor snarl faded, and gravel crunched under the tires. The headlights showed an empty lane, and a closed gate.

"We win," McCann said, "they haven't got here yet!"

Ryan said, "Nothin' but a plane could have made it any faster." His shaking hand went to his lips.

"Would you mind?" Marcia's voice was very stiff, very clear, "would you mind explaining why you tried to wreck my car, and why—"

Ryan said, "Sure, we—"

"It was life and death," McCann inter-

rupted. "There wasn't time to explain. Finn is sending six or eight cars of strikers out here. And he's got a couple of gunmen riding in those cars. He's trying to scare Falcon into signing with the union." McCann snubbed the roadster to a stop.

"You're lying!" Two spots of deep color burned in Marcia's cheeks. "He wouldn't do that. He might—"

"He *is* doing it. Finn doesn't care what happens to Falcon. If he dies, then the heirs will sign with the union. Somebody will go to the chair for it, but not the right men. That's why he's sending union men out. They'll be cover for the gunmen."

"He couldn't! Finn might force men to join the union, I know he has done that, but he wouldn't stoop to murder. Not even if he was told to, not even if—"

McCann's hand leaped out to grasp Marcia's wrist. He pulled her close until her lips were only inches from hers. "Until who told him to?" His thin voice cut. "Who gives Finn his orders?"

MARCIA pulled away from McCann, pressed her slender body back hard into the corner of the seat. She didn't speak for a long moment, and when she did her voice was very low.

"You're hurting my arm."

McCann released his grip. "Marcia, who gives Finn his orders?"

"I can't tell you that. I—"

Ryan said: "Quit it. We got to get in there, the cars will be here in a minute!" He slammed an elbow deep into McCann's ribs, reached past him to the door.

McCann was out of the car then, leaning back to say, "Marcia, you've got to—"

Ryan plucked at his arm. Marcia was still pressed back in the seat, her unbelieving eyes glazed, her vivid lips parted.

"Come on!"

McCann whirled, ran toward the gate. The bulky guard was standing close to the bars full in the headlight glare. His eyes glinted suspiciously under the brim of his cap.

"Where do you think you're goin'?" He recognized McCann then. "Oh, it's you, huh? Well, I got orders to keep you out!"

McCann said: "Quit clowning. I've got to get in. This is a matter of life and death!"

The guard sneered, hooked his thumbs in his belt. "Yeah, well you can—" He stopped then, because the black muzzle-eye of the automatic in McCann's hand was looking straight at him.

The guard's breath hissed through slack lips. One hand jerked toward the holster that sagged at his belt.

There was cold fury in McCann's raging voice, "Take that gun out with two fingers, and drop it. Then open this gate. Open it or so help me, I'll let you have it!"

The guard obeyed dumbly. Ryan scooped up the gun, and McCann said: "Scare up another gun, and then get this gate locked. There's hell comin' right behind us!"

The big guard was still standing stock-still when the headlights of Marcia's car began to move backward. McCann ran up the path to the house. Ryan panted along beside him, said:

"What'd I tell you about that guard?"

McCann took the low stairs in a single leap. His heels cracked on the porch tile, and then he had the bell pressed flat under his thumb. After a long time deliberate steps came toward the door.

McCann's nerves jerked as the door swung in, and an icily precise voice said, "If you will please state your business."

"We've got to see Falcon!"

"He isn't in."

A raw curse sprang from McCann's lips as his shoulder hit the panel. The white-faced butler yelled, clawed at McCann's shoulder. McCann stiff-armed him aside, ran down the long hall.

Falcon appeared suddenly, framed in the yellow light of an open doorway. "What's wrong— Oh, it's you, McCann, and you've brought a gun this time! What madness is this?"

McCann stopped, tried to stow the gun out of sight. "I'm sorry that I had to break

in on you this way, sir. I did phone, but you wouldn't answer, and then the guard tried to stop me—"

"The police will, if he couldn't." Falcon's deep-set eyes were blazing. "You can't—"

"You're in danger, sir! There are six or eight cars of strikers on their way here. They— Anything might happen. Two or three of these men are gunmen. I'd advise you to leave, at least temporarily, sir."

"Rot!"

Helen Falcon appeared behind her father then, her face dead-white, her hands covering her mouth. She asked, "What is it, what's the matter?" in a low, muffled voice.

"This young fool is trying to tell me that we're about to be attacked—"

"They're *here!*"

RYAN'S voice rang down the hall. He Slammed the door, shot home the bolt, and trotted to meet them. "That gate might as well have been paper. They pulled a gun on the guard, slugged him silly, and—"

Excited, high-pitched, angry voices sounded outside the house. Window glass crashed in one of the rooms off the hall. The sound jerked Falcon rigid. Rage came into his lean face. His jaw was set, his hands doubled into fists.

"You've got to leave, sir!" McCann said earnestly. "Is there a back way out?"

"Let that rabble run me out of my home? Never!"

Falcon strode past McCann before he could realize the older man's intention. He moved stiffly toward the front door, past the trembling butler who was backed against the wall.

McCann shouted: "Don't open that door!"

Ryan ducked into one of the rooms off the hall. McCann pushed Helen Falcon back into the library, and shut the door.

The front door was open; Falcon's lean, iron-backed figure rigidly erect in the opening. A wave of sound broke over the men grouped around the steps. Falcon shouted: "Quiet!"

McCann was behind Falcon then. He stared past the lean man at the tense faces that glistened in the reflected light. There were twenty or thirty men out there. Men whose emotions trembled on the brink of mob insanity.

Gradually the shouting died away. Falcon waited for dead quiet before he spoke:

"I'll give you five minutes to get off my grounds. Five minutes, and then I'll order every man of you arrested. Not one of you will ever work in my plant again. Go now, and go quietly or—"

One of the men yelled. A rock whirled out of the crowd to hit Falcon's shoulder. Then, as he swayed there, a voice roared, "Get him!" and gun flame lanced the night.

Falcon's arms were suddenly thrown wide, and the impact smashed him back. McCann was crouching in the doorway before the sound of those shots died. The automatic in his land leaped, bellowed, leaped again. He sent the slugs over the heads of the crowd, but the sound of the gunfire scattered them like quail.

McCANN swung the door shut, bolted it. Ryan and Helen Falcon were in the hall. Helen was sobbing as she bent over her father. McCann said, "Let me look," and pushed her gently aside.

Low, whimpering sounds of pain escaped Falcon's lips. His eyes were closed. A spreading redness stained his shirt and his coat sleeve.

McCann stripped the coat away. "They got bone," he said. "Broken shoulder, anyway. We've got to get him to a doctor." He got to his feet. "The garage is in the back. Helen. You lead the way." He stooped and got Falcon up in his arms. A hoarse scream bubbled up in Falcon's throat, and then he was very limp and quiet in McCann's arms.

Helen Falcon led the way through an inside passage, and down a ramp that opened into the garage. McCann whispered, "No lights," and then stood there squinting into the gloom. All four of the stalls were filled. Three of the cars were

parked nose in, and one—the topless roadster—had been backed in.

McCann said, "We'll take the roadster. Get in."

Ryan trotted beside McCann. He had a quart bottle in one hand, and the guard's automatic in the other. He tucked the bottle into his pocket, and helped McCann get Falcon's limp body into the seat. Helen Falcon slipped in, held her unconscious father upright.

Ryan went to the garage doors, and came back, a moment later, to whisper: "They're ajar. Nose into em—and then step on it!"

McCann nodded, flicked the switch open. Ryan scooped the bottle up, climbed into the rumble seat. The motor caught instantly, rolled easily the few feet to the door, and then leaped forward, its exhaust roaring.

The doors bounced open, and the headlight beams showed a single man crouching in the drive. He dived to one side. McCann fought the wheel. Gravel sprayed, churned under the racing wheels, and the roadster slewed around the curve, streaked toward the gate.

"Get your heads down!" McCann said.

There was a tight bunch of men directly in front of the house. McCann swung the heavy roadster wide, mowed down a row of shrubs. A finger of flame from a gun licked out to meet them, and then they were past. There were shouts and several of the men started to run after them, firing as they ran.

McCann slowed for the gate, braked the car to a sudden crawl as he saw the cars parked in the lane. Then he said, "Hang on!" and pointed the roadster for an opening that looked feet too narrow.

There was a splintering crash as the bumper hit. The roadster bounced, and one of the other cars swung ahead of them, and then tilted up, rolled into the ditch. The motor under the hood of the Falcon never missed a beat. Its snarl mounted to a full-throated song of power, and a moment later they were rolling back to the city at seventy miles an hour.

CHAPTER XXIII

OKAY, QUIXOTE

THE white-smocked surgeon stripped the rubber gloves off of his hands, said, "It wasn't as dangerous as it looked. One bullet went through the flesh of his arm without touching the bone. The other—well, the shock and the loss of blood will keep him in bed for two or three weeks, but he's coming along splendidly."

"You're sure?" Helen Falcon asked. "Don't lie to me, doctor. I—"

The surgeon smiled. "Of course I'm sure, Miss Falcon, it's my business to be sure. He'll be spanking you with that arm in a month." He turned to Duncan McCann. "You and Miss Falcon look as if you could do with some rest. Stop worrying about Mr. Falcon and get some sleep."

"Doctor!" Helen Falcon interrupted, "The strikers may try again. They might come here and—"

"Not here." The surgeon shook his head. "No one but the staff knows that Mr. Falcon is here. I've never heard of a mob rushing a hospital, but we're not taking chances. The guards will be on duty constantly."

McCann led Helen Falcon down the white-walled corridor, down stone steps to the curving drive, and along the drive for a hundred yards to the roadster.

Ryan's mashed-in hat appeared over the back of the rumble seat. One hand fumbled with his chin as he asked in a strange, clouded voice, "How is he?"

McCann told him, and then helped Helen Falcon into the car. She huddled there—a tiny, dejected figure, her face buried in her hands. McCann got behind the wheel.

"Where can we take you?" McCann asked.

"The beast!" Helen Falcon raised troubled eyes to McCann's face. "He tried to kill my father! What are the police for? Can't they stop this madman? Why don't they arrest him? He can't do—"

McCann looked away, and said softly:

"That sounds funny coming from you. Things haven't changed. It's the same crooked union, I warned you about, but now it's striking closer to home. This isn't the first death Finn has ordered—but it is the first time he's missed. The other men are dead. Their families felt worse than you do. You see, a doctor couldn't help them."

"You—you don't have to say that. I know I was wrong. I—I thought that—" Her voice broke then, and she dropped her head. "I don't know what I thought. I must have been mad."

"Not mad, Helen. Just mistaken. Your ideas were pretty good, some of them, but you picked a bad union to back. Finn isn't running a labor union, he's running a racket. He's after money. And not one other thing."

"Isn't there something we can do?"

"No. At least—there's nothing you can do. This mess is no place for a woman."

"I am going to help!" Her hands knotted into tiny fists. "If you won't let me work with you, then—"

"Listen, Children—" Easy laughter bubbled up in the rumble seat. "Papa Ryan shouldn't be talking, he isn't really, it's old man Falcon's brandy talking. You two go hunting windmills and you'll be deader than yesterday's beer. You can't stop this —nothing short of the army could. There's too much power behind it."

McCann turned quickly. "Ryan, who's backing Finn?"

The laughter went out of Ryan's eyes, and deep lines framed his mouth. "I don't know, McCann. That's on the level, I don't."

Bitterness burned in McCann's mind, and then he realized that Ryan had called him by name. His hand flashed out to catch the small man's wrist. "Who told you who I was?"

"Quixote, I've known it all the time. Finn told me the night Montana brought you in. He's framing you for a goat." His voice deepened, became husky. "Get out of this town, you two, and don't stop till you see the ocean. You *can't* break this thing. It's too big. All you can do is die. You're too young, too clean, there's too much of life ahead of you. Beat it while you can."

McCann said, "I've got to play it out, Ryan. I've got to look at this face in the mirror for a lot of years."

"Not if you stay here, you won't."

Helen Falcon cut in, "You're not going to tell Finn that we're trying to trap him, are you?"

"No." Ryan's voice was thin, his eyes were a thousand years old. "No, if you want to get killed I won't hurry the firing squad. I might even give you an idea. The easiest way would be to get Marcia's filing system. There might be a clue in there that would lead to the higherup. But you won't live to use it. Understand, you're walking into death, just as sure as tomorrow's coming. There are too many of them, and they won't miss. Finn plans to kill McCann anyway, and if you try to trap him—"

Ryan twisted away suddenly, pulled the quart bottle out of his pocket. The bottle stayed at his lips a long time.

"Thanks, Ryan, you're white." McCann pushed his hand out. "Maybe we can get through."

"What're we waitin' for?"

"You mean—"

"Sure, you're a fool. So am I. Why not? The brandy's gone, and I'm too old anyway. I'm drunk, I guess." His arm flashed up, and the bottle splintered on the curb. His voice was crisp, hard. "Let's go find a windmill."

McCann said, "Okay, Quixote," and reached for the switch.

RYAN leaned forward to talk as McCann grooved the roadster toward the city center. "There's a chance we can swing this tonight—and it will be our only chance. Finn and Montana are in the sound wagon down near the plant. Marcia won't be in the office. I've got a key. We can strip the filing system and get out of the office in ten minutes. There might not be anything there we can use, but if there

is, I know a dozen newspapers that will be glad to use it."

Helen Falcon said, "I'll come with you."

"You'll stay in the car!"

The clock in the *Times'* tower was striking eleven, the slow, booming notes rolling out over the city, when McCann braked the car to a stop two blocks from union headquarters.

"I've got to meet Mack Saddler in front of the Anchor Bar in an hour," McCann said. "But we can have the files cached somewhere before then, and I can come back."

Ryan shivered, turned his collar up. "Come on, come on."

McCann stopped long enough to say: "Don't wait if there's any sign of trouble. Get away from here, and get away fast."

A single dusty bulb shed wan light over the stairway. Ryan keyed his way into the big office, and stood there for a full moment staring into the darkness and listening.

"We're in," he whispered.

McCann's throat was dry, and his jaw muscles ached from constant pressure. He shifted the automatic in his grip, asked, "What's next?"

Ryan said, "We'll use the desk light."

McCann eased the door shut, padded silently through the dark in the wake of the small man. There was a sharp *click,* and the lamp on Marcia's desk spilled a shaded yellow pool over the desk.

Ryan knelt, fumbled with the drawers. "Locked," he said, and got to his feet. "She keeps all the important stuff in a file in there."

"Let me see." McCann put his gun on the desk, stooped in front of the drawers. Then he fumbled in his pocket for a penknife. "This won't be very tough," he said. "A kid could—"

McCann worked silently for a moment. The lock snicked, and he yanked the drawer open. Ryan bent, pulled it free, said, "We haven't time to sort it. We can take the whole drawer. Now—there's one file in a case over there that we ought—"

There was the sound of a footfall. Glaring light flooded the room, and a brittle voice said, "Put up your hands!"

Icy shock jerked McCann rigid. His hand started toward the gun on the desk, but Ryan blocked the way.

"Don't move or I'll shoot!"

Red anger filmed McCann's eyes, churned in his head. His teeth sunk deep in his lip as he came around to face Marcia Dubois!

SHE was standing just inside the door. Her dark eyes were stormy, her lips pressed into a firm line. The flat automatic in her hand was steady. "Move away from the desk, and don't try to reach that gun," she said coldly. "I can shoot, and I will—if you make me." McCann didn't move. His hands were at waist height. "Move away from that desk."

"This is it." Ryan's voice was flat, dead. "If you could reach the gun you couldn't shoot a woman. We lose, Quixote—the hard way."

"Right." McCann moved back.

Marcia Dubois came swiftly to the desk, picked up McCann's gun. "Now," she said, "you can put that drawer on the floor, Mr. Ryan."

Ryan obeyed silently.

"You're part of it," McCann said bitterly. "I should have known. You and Finn and Montana. Three of a kind. You want money, and you'll get it—even if the price is *murder!*"

Marcia's lips worked, but no sound came out of them. She swayed, and then said in a thin, tight voice! "Murder? What do you mean?"

McCann said: "Save the act!"

Ryan said: "Wait a minute! Marcia, a couple of Finn's torpedoes tried to kill Falcon tonight—and almost did!"

"I don't believe it!"

"It's true." Ryan pushed his hat away from his eyes. "I don't know how much you know, but—"

"You can't tell me that Mike Finn ordered anybody killed. I won't believe it. Not that. He couldn't. He's too—"

"Three times since I've been here men

have died because Finn has ordered it," McCann said flatly. "O'Malley, Kim Saddler, and the policeman. Falcon was meant to die too." The gun in Marcia's hand wavered.

McCann went on: "We wanted that file so we could find out who the higher up is. We have to know, so we can drag him out in the open, and smash this union. We would have done it, but now Finn will add a couple of new names to his list!"

"You can go," she said huskily. "You can go, but you'll have to leave the drawer."

Ryan said: "That's our exit line, Quixote."

"No!" McCann pushed one hand out in a tight gesture. "I came after that, and I'm taking it with me. You can shoot—you'll have to shoot! Because that file goes with me!"

Her eyes were pleading. "Don't—don't make me shoot. If I thought that you were telling the truth— But you can't be! Can't"

McCann said: "Come with us and we'll prove it!"

"I—I . . . " Doubt grew in her eyes, and her vivid lips trembled. "I think—"

FREEZE, punk!" Montana's chill, clipped voice came from the door. Marcia gasped, eyes widening. McCann's aching eyes pulled around to see the big man coming toward him. The Lüger glinted wickedly in his hand.

Mike Finn's big body filled the doorway, and then Johnny Robb came into the room, his arms filled with bundles. Finn locked the door, and stood there on widespread legs, tossing the key into the air.

"Drop the gun, Marcia," he was almost casual. "Drop it on the floor!"

She obeyed numbly. Montana stopped only three feet from McCann. His thick lips were pulled down at the corners, and hatred shone in his eyes. "Get your hands up," he rasped, "and get 'em up fast!"

Finn purred: "Don't do it, Montana!"

Fells apparently didn't hear the low words. "So you were tryin' a shortcut, stool pigeon?" he said. His left hand leaped out like a striking snake, the open palm cracked against McCann's cheek. McCann staggered, and Montana whipped the gun barrel around in a tight arc. Smashed it solidly across McCann's mouth.

Pain blazed in McCann's head. He reeled back, fell. Darkness pressed up around him. Dimly, he could see Montana advancing. See the down-curved lips, the glowing eyes, the gun.

McCann knew he had to get up. He must try and get past that gun barrel. If he could get his hands locked around Montana's throat nothing else would matter.

McCann's hands slipped on the bare floor. The dark taste of blood was in his mouth as he heaved himself to his knees. Montana loomed up in front of him.

"Get up, punk, an'—"

Two, gliding, cat-smooth strides put Finn beside Montana. Gun glitter showed in his hand. His voice was cold, deadly.

"One more step, Montana, and you're through. Just one step, and I'll blow you apart!"

The flame died in Montana's muddy eyes. "But—"

"Go ahead," Finn's silky voice went on, "go ahead, just one step. I should have thrown you to the police long ago. You've killed too many times, Montana, you're kill-crazy. I should—"

Montana said: "He was double-crossing you, boss!"

"Back up!"

Montana growled low in his throat, and moved away from McCann. Finn's lips twitched, but his voice was still the same chill purr as he faced Ryan.

"You did think a lot of McCann, Ryan. Too much! We stood outside and listened in. I'm sorry, you were a good man."

"Okay," Ryan said wearily. "I was a good guy—until I sobered up. Let it go at that."

McCann was on his hands and knees. He shook his head, watched the bright pattern of crimson drops form on the floor. His head swam as he swayed groggily to his feet.

"Mike—Mike!" It was Marcia Dubois. Her splayed fingers covered her mouth, her eyes were wide, frantic. "Is it true that—that you sent gunmen out to kill Falcon?"

Finn shook his head.

Ryan laughed. "You dirty liar!"

Finn spun. The corners of his mouth pulled down, and the blue glitter looked out of his eyes. He took a single step, and the gun came up.

"Go ahead," Ryan said. "Shoot me—and *then* try to sell her the idea that you're a Boy Scout. You're stuck, Finn. You've got three more on your hands now. You can't kill us all, not even you. Any one of us will blow your racket wide open."

"Shut up!"

"I'm getting a cigarette," Ryan said, and dipped into his vest pocket. The cigarette was between his lips, his hand was starting for his overcoat pocket when Montana slapped his hand away.

"Hah!" The big man lifted the gun out of Ryan's pocket. "I ought to—"

Finn said: "Back up. I'm still running this!"

Ryan said: "And I still want a match." He lit his cigarette, left it hanging from his lips. "Go on, Finn, wiggle out of it. Three more kills. Murder piles up. After this there'll be another and another. There isn't whisky enough in the world to drown what you're going to carry inside of you . . . "

"Shut up!"

"Want me to cool him, boss?" Montana asked.

"No, let him talk. It's little enough, and maybe he won't have an audience where—"

McCann's head cleared gradually. There wasn't, he thought savagely, any chance now. Finn wouldn't let them live, knowing that they would smash his union. They'd die, but Finn would frame it so that someone else got the blame, so that . . .

McCANN sucked a full breath into his lungs. And suddenly he was afraid. He didn't want to die— not yet! Then the small, remembered voice in his mind said: "The name you wear. I didn't think I'd have to call my son yellow!"

A sobbed curse spilled from McCann's lips. He went up on his toes, hurled himself straight at Mike Finn.

"Look out!" Robb squealed a warning from across the room.

Finn pivoted. Pivoted, and stepped forward to meet that staggering rush. His left hand streaked up in a twelve inch blow. There was the dull sound of bone meeting flesh, and McCann fell face forward.

A distant roaring sounded in McCann's ears. He tried to drag himself up, tried to shake his head. Then cool hands touched his face, and Marcia's voice said:

"Don't touch him! You—You—" Her voice rose. "So you're a murderer now! You! And once you were going to be the greatest labor leader this country had ever seen. You might have been, but you wanted money. You got it! You sold out, and everything that was fine in you died—two years ago. You're worse than—than Montana. You *could* have been something."

McCann rolled over, opened his eyes Marcia was kneeling beside him, facing Finn. Her dark eyes were blazing. Contempt and scorn rode each burning word

"Judas! But even he only sold his Friend. You sold yourself, sold everything you could have been. You were going to make labor history. Well . . . you're just a killer now!"

Finn swayed, one hand going out in a taut, strained gesture. He closed his eyes, and there were deep lines around his mouth. Marcia crumpled suddenly, buried her face in her cupped hands. Muffled sobs filtered through her fingers, shook her shoulders.

Finn came grimly erect, his shoulders snapped back, and his head came up. "Montana, you and Robb get into those monkey suits. We haven't got all night!"

McCann touched Marcia's arm, said "Easy, Marcia, easy. It isn't worth . . . "

Her fingers closed suddenly over his.

Robb was ripping the paper off one of the fat bundles, to disclose an olive uniform. No one spoke while he shook the wrapping away from trousers, blouse, and cap. Another package yielded a Sam

Browne belt. There were two gold bars on the blouse shoulder, and the cap insignia was that of the National Guard!

A puzzled question burned in McCann's eyes.

Robb and Montana went into an inner room. Finn leaned against the desk, the gun hanging at arm's length at his side.

Ryan said: "The old gag, huh?"

Finn didn't answer.

The small man went on, "The oldest one of all. They used that in the first strike that was ever pulled. It's good, but someone has to die. Someone—" Ryan brushed his hand across his eyes.

"What is it?" McCann asked. "What's he going to do?"

Ryan didn't raise his head when he spoke. "Montana and Robb will wear National Guard uniforms, and it's an even money bet that there's a car in the alley that looks plenty like a National Guard car."

"I'll tell it," Finn said, and his voice was surprisingly soft. "There is a National Guard car in the alley. Montana and Robb will take that car, and drive until they find a place to turn a submachine gun loose in the crowd. Five hundred or a thousand of the strike mob will see them. That mob is right on the edge of charging the plant now. When that machine gun gets through they'll wade through an army to wreck Falcon's plant. That's the idea. This strike is lost now, but we can still win plenty by making the other manufacturers fall in line. The next plant will be easy to organize. And Falcon will still have to sign, some time, or he'll never build another car."

The full meaning of Finn's soft words smashed through to McCann's brain. "But — You can't do that!"

Ryan said: "Tell him the rest of it."

"Let him guess," Finn replied.

"What— What else could there be?"

"Plenty!" Ryan said bitterly. "This gag calls for a goat. The strikers see the National Guard use the machine gun, Quixote. Get it?"

"No."

"The National Guard can clear themselves, and so it would kick right back in Finn's lap if the police didn't find two guys in National Guard uniform at the bottom of a ditch. Two guys who should have known better. Quixote—*you and me!*"

McCann jerked up, and Finn's gun moved instantly to cover him. The inner door opened, and Montana and Robb came back into the room. The uniform blouse was tight across Montana's lumpy shoulders, and the pants were an inch too short, but in the half light of the street he would pass as an officer of the National Guard.

Montana was grinning as he unlocked a small closet, lifted an oilcloth-wrapped package off the floor. The oilcloth fell away, and the dark steel of a Thompson submachine gun glittered in his hands. He fitted a fifty shot drum in place, and then turned to Finn.

"Want me to lock 'em up?"

Finn nodded.

Montana said: "On your feet, mugs, you're all goin' back to a nice cozy room where you can wait.

McCann's hands twitched at his sides. Ryan's voice was cool, "Don't do it, Quixote. He'd cut you in two."

McCann swung to face Finn. "What are you going to do with Marcia? You couldn't be low enough to kill her?"

Finn said: "Save it, McCann, you're just being silly. I'll decide that when the time comes." He nodded at Ryan. "Better take that quart of whisky along, Ryan, you'll need it—and they don't have whisky where you're going."

"Come on, move!" Montana snarled. He had the submachine gun hip high. "Down the hall, all of you."

Then they were all in a windowless, heavy-walled, thick-doored room, and Montana was grinning twistedly at them from the door.

Ryan cursed him as the door clicked shut, and the key grated in the lock.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Steel Men Die Hard

By W. CHAMBERS WARD

MIKE SHEEN was big, mister, bigger than any man on the Crazy River bridge job, and tougher. His shoulders jutted out like the flanges of an I-beam, and his arms were strung with wire cables. But, mister, he might have been tougher, and maybe he was bigger, but that black Irishman's temper was peanuts along side of Sheba Kane's.

Yes sir, peanuts is the word. You never saw a job get balled up faster, and more things go wrong, than Crazy River did when that girl took over. She was a half-pint of a woman. The top of her spun-copper hair didn't come up to Mike Sheen's chin. But what she lacked in size, mister, she sure made up in a lot of other ways.

That's how it all started. That's how the Crazy River bridge got into such a mess with heavy weather coming on. You might say it was hay-wire. Hay-wire, even though Mike Sheen had as sweet a bunch of steel monkeys as ever cut their teeth on a dolly bar. A wild bunch, they were, and they had followed steel from one end of the world to the other.

Wild, that is, till Sheba Kane came on the job. There was Black Henry, for instance. As tough a steel man and just as fur-chested as any you could find. He was up there, practically hanging by his toe nails from a sway brace. He had a rivet gun in one hand, and he was trying to keep his necktie from tangling in the air hose with the other. And cussing all the time because he was getting his shirt dirty.

That's why Mike Sheen was mad. That's why he was bellowing like a stuck bull. And bellowing at Sheba Kane.

"I don't care who's running this job!" he roared, so she could hear him above the clatter of the rivet guns. Mostly, though, because he was mad. "This is no place for a woman!" he yelled. "Get off this staging, before something falls on yah!"

"You can't talk to me like that, Mike Sheen!" she came back at him. And, if he was bellowing, she was screaming. The wind picked that copper hair and tossed it into her face. She threw it back, and tried to get her face as close to his as she could.

"This is my job, Mike Sheen, and I'm going to run it! I want you to put up a safety net out here. . . ."

"I tell you, we don't use safety nets. We never have!" he roared at her. "It don't

matter if you are Old Kane's daughter. If he wants you to run this job, you got to do it from the office And don't come around with any of your fancy ideas. I'll run this end. Now git!"

"I'm not going!" she screamed, and she meant it. But, mister, Mike Sheen was stubborn. Anybody that knew him would have ducked, when they saw that pile-driver jaw of his slide out. That is, anybody that wasn't just as stubborn as he was. You can see by now, that Sheba Kane didn't give him anything but size. She stayed put.

Well, Mike Sheen did have the size, so he used it. He spun her around, got a hand under each elbow, and picked her up. He held her at arm's length. And she was so mad, mister, she was stiff.

THEN the rivet guns stopped. Stopped like somebody had slapped every one of them into the river. Every riveter, every bucker stopped. And even the time keeper came out of the time shack and stood there with his eyes bugging out of his head.

Mike Sheen had the cow by the horns, you might say, only it was Sheba Kane, and he had her by the elbows, which was just as bad, or worse.

Mike Sheen started walking, then. He carried her off that heating platform, back along the staging. A couple of times there was a hundred feet between the girl's feet and the water.

She never made a sound, though he carried her off that bridge and up by the time shack, before he set her down. Then he backed off a couple of steps, and waited. She spun around, those brown eyes of hers fairly snapping sparks.

"You big slab of concrete!" she said. "You thick-skulled, iron-headed, shanty Irishman!" she said. "If you ever lay a hand on me again, I'll take a top maul and put a dent in your skull that'll jar your grandfather!"

You think, maybe, that that's no way for a lady to talk. But, mister, Sheba Kane was construction. Sure, she went to one of the classiest girl's schools in the east. But before that, wherever Kane Construction Company had a job, you'd find the girl in overalls. She'd be out in front of the time shack, playing with a couple of rivets, maybe, or a jackhammer. So she was born construction, she knew construction and she talked construction. And no girl's school could take it clear out of her, either.

"Yes, you!" she said. "Just touch me, and I'll split your skull." And you could see the construction training scrapping with the best girl's school in the east. "Heck", she said, when the construction won, "I'll do it *now!*" And she reached for a top maul.

That girl grabbed it, mister, and she sure meant business. And all Sheen could do was stand there and wait for it. Just wait, because he was a man, and he had to. He'd let her beat him with that maul till her arms fell off.

"Brace yourself, you big slug!" she said, and she came at him. She started a round-house swing with that top maul that sizzled. It missed him, not very far, but it did, and she whirled around to try again.

Then the time keeper reached out and grabbed it. You see, that fellow wasn't exactly a time keeper. He was a graduate bridge engineer. He and Sheba Kane were like that, see? Wherever you'd see one, you'd see the other.

"Sheba!" he yelled. "Stop! Stop, I say! Let me. . . ." But Sheba Kane just tried to jerk the hammer loose.

"Let go! Let go! I'll show that overgrown . . ." and then she remembered who she was. She remembered she was a lady, and she let him have the hammer. She went into the time shack in a huff.

Now this timekeeper, Ross Hunter was his name, was no feather-weight. A good six feet in his sock feet, and built to match. Everybody thought he was a right guy. Even though he was just out of college, and had a lot of screwy ideas about how to build a bridge. So he went up to Mike Sheen and slapped his face.

It was a new one on Sheen. You see, a real, honest-to-goodness steel man would

have probably kicked him in the stomach.

Mike Sheen just looked at him, a black frown on his face, like he was trying to figure it out, and couldn't. Hunter waited some, then slapped him again. That time he got action.

Sheen let out a roar like a busted boiler, and swung his fist at Hunter's face. But Hunter's head wasn't where it should have been. He ducked under, and slammed one into Sheen's belly.

The breath went out of Sheen, and he doubled over. Hunter got his right cocked, and straightened him up with a smash to the chin.

Sheen got mad then, and he quit bellowing and started boring in. He took a lot of fists here and there doing it, mister, but he got in and then—blooey—the fight was over. Hunter was lying on his face.

Well, mister, about that time the engineer on the hoisting derrick blew the noon whistle. The boys came in off the steel. They carried Hunter down to the bunkhouse.

AFTER they had eaten, Sheen got them together. He lined them up there by the cook shack, and said to them,

"Listen, you white-livered apes," he said, "from now on things are gonna be different! Just because Old Kane ain't here, it ain't no sign we haven't got a bridge to build. And say—who told you you could wear a necktie on a job of mine!" He glared around, but nobody said anything. They just looked kind of uneasy.

"Sheby Kane's here on Old Kane's orders," he went on. "And she's gonna run this job while he's sick. We're behind schedule two weeks. Three more, and the snowballs are going to be bouncin' off our heads. You know what that means.

"It means," he roared, gitting wild again, "that we're lettin' Old Kane down when he's in a spot. And if you white-shirted, purple-necktied highbinders think you're lounge lizards and not steel monkeys, I wanta know about it. Let me catch one white shirt, one of those ribbons around your neck, one face without a day's beard, and I'll take that guy and scatter him from here to the head waters of the Crazy River. Now git!"

And they got, mister, they got. Sure, and there was a grin on every one of them. That kind of talk was what they liked, music in their ears, you might say. And, mister, they went out there and really started putting her up.

Well, anyhow they tried. It wasn't their fault the last of the steel wouldn't fit—not their fault that the holes were drilled a half-inch off. But there it was, and it slowed the job down. That and a lot of other things. Little things, they were, that nobody could see coming, or do anything about till they arrived.

It had Mike Sheen sleeping in his clothes. That frost on the superstructure every morning meant snow before long. And the job not done. Believe it, mister, when that first snow hits the Crazy River country, you might as well head for the nearest town. There won't be any work till the steam shovels dig their way in sometime in June.

MAYBE you wonder, since Mike Sheen was just the super on the job, and Sheba Kane was supposed to be running it, why he could talk to her like he did and not get canned.

Well, you got a right to wonder, mister. It goes back to when Old Kane was starting in the construction business. All he had was a worn-out steam shovel and, maybe, a bull dozer. But he also had a first-class nerve. He built Kane Construction from nothing. Lean years, they were, and hard. But Old Kane was bull-headed, and a sticker. He could bluff a full-house any time with a pair of deuces.

That must be where Sheba Kane got the stuff she was made of. She come by it honestly, you might say. When she was born it was quite a blow to Old Kane. Of course, he wanted a boy, but that wasn't what laid him out. It was because her mother died the same day.

If ever there was a time when Old Kane

wanted to quit the construction business, it was then. You know about these hard, tough guys. They're hard outside, maybe, but inside. . . . Well, if you'd seen Old Kane after that, you'd know.

For weeks after, the boys never saw him. They had a job going, and they kept it going. Then he came back, about the time the job was done, and he brought that little piece of humanity with him.

From then on the jobs went by, the years went by, and Old Kane made money. A lot of it, and Sheba Kane grew. Somewhere along the line he picked up Mike Sheen.

He was a dirty-faced little kid, that day Old Kane brought him into camp. Dirty, but ready to whip any man on the job, and he was all of six-years old. Old Kane got him, he said, to keep Sheba company. He said it was not good raising a kid alone.

Well, maybe he was right. He had wanted a boy, you know, when Sheba came. But that's the way it was, and they never seemed to get along. They had always fought. Always—ever since either of them could remember.

Why didn't Old Kane let Sheen run the job, you say? Why not, since he was a man and Sheba Kane was a woman? You say that construction is a man's job, and there's no place for a woman in it?

Sure, you're right. But you forget how the girl was raised. Raised on construction. She knew an abutment from a pier at the age of two. She could tell you the difference between a dolly bar and a crow bar at. . . . But, no difference, you're still right. Construction's no game for a woman.

But you know by now, that Old Kane was smart. He knew people, and he knew how to get what he wanted. He did, he got what he wanted. You'll see what it was, and how he got it.

MIKE SHEEN had to get that job done for two reasons, mister. First, because the brass hats, who made the book of specifications, had put a time limit on the job. The completion date was the first of October. If the job wasn't done by then, Old Kane started paying out cold, hard dollars for every day he was late. It meant he paid from October till June, because the snow got there about October. And believe it, mister, that would run into more money than you'd see in, maybe, twenty years.

That other reason was the most important to Mike Sheen. Always, before, his jobs were done with plenty of time to spare. But this looked like it was going to be the time he missed.

Mike Sheen drove his men, yes. The steel went up as fast as the best steel crew in the northwest could put it together. But things still went wrong. The frown got so it never left Mike's forehead, and his face got bitter, with hard lines around the mouth.

He seldom spoke to Sheba Kane. That is, about anything but the job. They sat at the same table in the cook shack, but weeks went by, with never a word spoken between them there.

Ross Hunter was the same way. You could see that the beating he'd gotten from Mike Sheen was bothering him. Hunter was doing queer things. Every night you could hear noises in his cabin. Fast, hard sounds, like a rivet gun, only they splatted, and they had a kind of a rhythm. You'd see him running too, like the devil was after him, up the road for miles and then back. The boys wondered about it.

But they all got along on the job. Mike Sheen driving the men and Sheba Kane and Hunter running the office. It went that way until one day along in the middle of September.

That morning Mike Sheen was standing out front of the cook shack, waiting for the whistle to blow. Will Telfer come out and said to him:

"Well, Mike, it looks as though we're going to make her."

"Guess so, Will, if nothing more happens," Mike Sheen said. Then he looked at Telfer, and a worried frown crossed his face.

He said, "Look here, Will, you men be

careful out there from now on. That frost looks like it's an inch thick on that arch rib. With that wind, gusty as it is, and slippery footing, you got something to watch."

"Shucks, we'll make it all right. We'll get that last splice plate this morning. From there on it's a down-hill drag." The fireman sounded the whistle, then, and Telfer went off to the tool shed.

THINGS went smooth enough the first part of the morning. Will Telfer, Black Henry, and Stan Church were up on the crown of the arch rib. That's the highest place on the bridge. They were slamming the last rivets into the last splice plate, laughing and yelling all the time because, with that done, they were finished with the arch.

Will Telfer stood straight up on the top of the rib and yelled down at Elex Ebel, the heater:

"Give us one, Elex, and make it good, 'cause it's the last."

Ebel spit into the forge, and picked up his tongs. "Here she is!" he yelled, and tossed it up.

Sheen was standing on the heating platform along with Ebel. He was cussing to himself about the way Telfer was standing on that rib. He could see the wind jerking at his coat, see his body sway as he leaned against the different gusts of wind. Tight lines gouged the corners of his mouth as he watched.

He saw the rivet sail upward, saw Will Telfer lean out and catch it. He turned his head away with a kind of sigh of relief.

Then the hoarse cry came from up there on the crown:

"Headache!"

It jerked Sheen's eyes up, stiffened his body, and jammed a yell into his throat. Will Telfer had screamed, like any good steel man would, when something is falling and is liable to hit a man below. It was a warning—the last he ever gave.

When Sheen looked, Will Telfer was etched against that dirty, gray sky. He was lying flat out in a patch of emptiness between the lateral braces. He seemed to be hung there, his feet inches away from the rib and his fingers just missing the brace he had jumped for.

His eyes turned downward, his mouth opened, and he fell—fell the way he was lying, stretched out flat.

Sheen's big body lurched into motion. His feet pounded along the staging, jumped to that frail network of steel. But he had only started, when a brace on the deck level stopped Telfer. It caught him in the middle of his stomach, his feet on one side, and his hands on the other, and he hung there.

Mike Sheen reached the brace and started out it after Telfer. The brace wasn't big enough for a man to walk on, the flat surface was no bigger than your hand. But Sheen was walking it, the wind tipping his body, his arms whirling to keep his balance.

Maybe Will Telfer was out when he hit that brace, or maybe he didn't want to live then. Anyway, when Mike Sheen was barely five feet away, he rolled. He rolled and started sliding off the brace. He seemed to be looking at Sheen, and there was a flicker of something that could have been a grin on his face.

The rocks stopped him that time.

Sheen teetered, turned, and made his way back to the heater platform. His face was set in stiff planes and his eyes stared rigidly at his fingers when they knotted on the edge of the planking.

The men climbed down out of the steel. They didn't hurry, because there was no need of it then. Sheen heaved himself up and started for the bank. The men followed him.

They were a quiet bunch, when they climbed down to the river. They waded out, got Will Telfer and brought him back.

WORD of the accident had reached the shack and Sheba Kane and Ross Hunter met Sheen when he came up out of the canyon. He walked up to them, and the boys carried Will Telfer to the bunkhouse.

Sheba Kane's hands went to her face. An ice-white face with eyes that were wide with horror. Her voice was high and breaking:

"It's your fault Will Telfer was killed!"

Sheen stopped as though he had been hit by a hammer. He asked hoarsely, "Me? My fault? But Sheba, how could I. . . ." He looked at her, and then at Hunter, a stunned expression on his face.

"Yes!" she screamed. "I went out that day you carried me off to tell you about the safety net. You wouldn't listen. And now Will Telfer's dead. . . . You murdered him!"

"But, Sheba," Mike Sheen pleaded, "you don't know what you're saying. We never have used. . . ."

Sheba Kane turned away from him, buried her face on Hunter's coat. Sobs wracked her shoulders. Mike Sheen reached out and patted her clumsily. She pulled away from him.

"You've done enough," Hunter said. "Leave her alone. The plans for the safety net are on my desk. You'd better get them!" And he led Sheba Kane to her cabin.

Sheen stood staring numbly after them, his shoulders slumped. He wanted to go after them, wanted to explain why they had never used a safety net. But he knew they wouldn't listen.

He turned on his heel and went into the time office. The blueprints for the net were there, on Hunter's desk. He made a list of the materials he would need and headed for his car.

A safety net, mister, is like a fish net. Only made out of manila rope. The rope is three-eighths stuff, and the mesh is six inches square. They make this net up in sections, and sling it under the bridge.

Well, Mike Sheen got the rope. It took him two days to get it, but he did, and he made the net. It was hanging under the bridge forty-eight hours after Will Telfer fell. Mike Sheen was there, on the job, till the last rope was in place. Then he tottered up to his shack, and fell into his bunk.

You'd think that he would have had his share of trouble, wouldn't you? So would anybody else. But Old Lady Grief seemed to be riding his neck, because as soon as he came out of that sleep, he walked into more.

He came out of that cabin, rested maybe, but there was still a nervous tightness about him, and circles under his eyes. He was looking for Sheba Kane. He was going to make her listen while he told her why they had never used a safety net before.

He found her all right, mister, and maybe then he wished he hadn't. He came around the time shack and there she was, standing with her arms around Ross Hunter's neck, her lips against his.

Mike Sheen froze for a moment, then he reached out and grabbed her shoulder. He pulled her away, and planted his right fist in Hunter's face. One startled cry came from Sheba Kane's throat, and that was all. After that, she watched.

HUNTER staggered back, shook his head to clear it. Then he went up on his toes and came at Sheen. Sheen waded in, like he did before, to get that right hand in close. But Hunter faded away, out of his reach, and his feet were moving lightly under him. He held a long left in Sheen's face, jabbed him with it, and sunk a hard right under Mike Sheen's heart.

The boys knew, then, what that noise was in Hunter's cabin every night, and why he had been running. That noise had been a punching bag, and that running was roadwork. They found out later that Hunter had been some kind of a boxing champion in college.

You know, mister, that Mike Sheen had to get in close to do any good. Well, Hunter knew that now, too, so he never let Sheen get past that long left. He cut him to ribbons with it, and it wasn't pretty to watch.

Of course, Sheen kept coming in. He never backed a step. Hunter's fists hit his face with a splat, splat, that was as regular as a clock ticking. And still Sheen kept coming in. His eyes closed, his lips

smashed, and blood ran in red streaks from his nose.

He kept going, though, till his arms hung by his sides, till his eyes were blind. And when he fell, it was forward, and on his face.

He didn't know, when he came to in his bunk, that Sheba Kane had been the one who had washed the blood from his face, patched his cuts. He didn't know that while she was doing it there was a funny softness in her eyes, a mistiness, and in her hands a tenderness that he'd never felt. No, and he wouldn't have known why it was there, if he'd seen it.

Another thing Mike Sheen didn't know was why he had hit Hunter. But Sheba Kane knew, and that was why her eyes had been misty, and her hands tender. There wasn't anything anybody could do about it now, because Mike Sheen had been licked in a fair fight.

Things got worse from then on. Sheen spoke even less, his face never cracked in a smile. But still he drove the men, still fought to beat that time limit. He figured he'd finish the job and leave Kane Construction Company. He'd been whipped, he told himself, and he knew when to quit.

But that wasn't the real reason. It was something inside of him. And maybe a pair of brown eyes and a pile of copper hair had something to do with it. But he wouldn't have admitted it, even if he knew, and he didn't.

It began raining then, like it does in the Crazy River country, before the snow comes— Rain with snow mixed in, and freezing cold.

It made the men move slowly, made them curse with bitterness.

And it made the river itself come up. It didn't rise fast. It just swelled, like a fat snake, and you knew that pretty soon there would be a real river down there. It gave the men something to look at, something to wonder how they could get out of, if they fell.

Mike Sheen got the job to a place where a week's work would see the end of it. A hard, man-killing week, maybe, but possible. Possible, if the weather didn't pull a new trick out of its bag.

Sheen was standing on the deck, his coat collar pulled up high around his neck. His face was hard, with the rain driving into it, and it didn't get any softer when he saw Ross Hunter coming toward him.

Hunter stopped in front of him, said, "My work in the office is done. I thought maybe you could use another man out here."

Sheen stared somberly at him for a moment, then he said, "Black Henry could use some help up there on that scaffold." He jerked his head to where Black Henry and another man were pulling out false work.

Hunter looked up and saw where Black Henry was working. He bit his lips. The scaffold was up near the crown of the arch. Up where the men were hit by the full bite of the wind. Where the rain would drive into his face like slung shot.

But he never said a word. He just climbed up there and went to work.

IT WASN'T grudge work, mister, when Sheen sent him up there. It was a job that had to be done. It needed young men to do it, and, even then, it took a long time. The wind cut through their clothes, stiffened their muscles with cold.

Sheen had his back to the wind, standing where he could keep his eye on the men on the scaffold and the deck crew. He saw Hunter working, but his mind wasn't on the things he did.

Then his eyes caught Hunter kicking loose a cable. It was the wrong cable. Hunter was obviously sick with terror— blind with it. He didn't—couldn't—know what he was doing. Sheen jerked erect, roared:

"Hey! Watch it! Look out. . . ."

Hunter had loosed the ties that held the scaffold against the steel arch, held it against the force of the wind. As Sheen watched, the scaffold began swaying, working away from the steel. And then it was too late to do anything.

It tipped slowly, the men standing on

it were frozen images, unable to move. Their white, strained faces gaped at the planking that was suddenly rocking under their feet.

Sheen roared into the wind, "Jump! Jump, you fools!"

But the men didn't jump. They crouched there, caught the planking and held on. Sheen saw that it was going to take the staging where he was standing, so he leaped. And it was for the safety net.

His feet hit the mesh of the net, and he dug his fingers into the rope. A hoarse scream jerked his head around. The scaffold crashed into the deck staging. The staging folded out from under it and the scaffold cut through and into the safety net. One man was thrown clear, screaming as he fell, his body pinwheeling into space.

That safety net couldn't hold a thing like that scaffold, mister. It was built to catch men. The scaffold was two-inch planking and it had dropped a long way before it hit the net. It sheared through that rope as if it had been thread, instead of three-eighths manila.

The net was cut in half, the two ends dropped toward the water. Mike Sheen was clinging to one of the ends, his fingers clawing at the rope. The net dropped until the scaffold had broken past it and plunged into the river. Then it jerked to a stop, the lashings holding it suspended from the bridge. The abrupt stop snapped Sheen off the end of it, his body twisting as he fell.

He hit the water flat on his back, and disappeared. A long minute ticked by, long enough for anybody to figure he was gone. Then his head broke surface downstream. His face turned up, white against the yellow water. His arm tossed, and he sank.

But he came back to the top, the arm moved again, and then the other, and he kept himself afloat.

The staging was swept downstream ahead of him, and he disappeared from sight of the bridge around the bend in the river.

MAYBE it was luck, mister. Whatever it was, it made that scaffold catch on a brush pile that was built up on the island. Sheen brought up solidly against it.

The island was under eight feet of water now, because of the heavy rains, and the current was a vicious, tugging thing. Sheen managed to hook his fingers into the planks and he fought his way to the top of it.

He clung there, his nails digging into the hard wetness of the wood, and sucked air into his tortured lungs. He could hear the cries of the workmen on the bridge and on the bank, coming dimly above the sullen roar of the river.

A short moan came to him through the rest of the sounds and he looked up. Then he lunged, his hands twisted into the hair of the man who was just sliding off the scaffold. It was Black Henry, and he was out cold.

A high, fear-distorted voice came from the other end of the stranded scaffold. "It's moving! These boards are moving. We'll go downstream. Get me off here! I can't swim. Get me off here!"

It was Ross Hunter's voice and Ross Hunter's eyes were wide, an insane light of fear gleaming there, and his face was a totally strange, horror-twisted thing, that Mike Sheen had never seen.

Sheen tipped back his head and laughed. Yes, mister, he laughed, but there wasn't any mirth in that harsh, booming sound. It was from nervous pressure, you might say, and from finding Hunter there, safety net or no safety net.

"You see why we don't use safety nets, huh?" Sheen yelled, "When a steel man's going, he'll go. You see that now? See?"

"Get me off here!" Hunter pleaded hoarsely. "I tell you I can't. . . . It moved again!"

The scaffold was moving, surging up and down against the brush pile in the toss of the current. Branches gave way and floated off. The pile of brush was gradually going to pieces. That meant that the scaffold would go with it.

Sheen looked at the bank. It was a good hundred and fifty feet away. And, mister, with that current as swift as it was, it

looked a thousand. There wasn't a boat on the job and the bridge was too far upstream to float a line down.

He added it up like this, mister. He could take one man and swim ashore with him. But that would leave one on the scaffold. It would be a long time before he would have strength to go back after him—longer than it would take for the brush pile to go to pieces.

Two of the men on the bank were taking off their clothes. They were going to try to make the swim. But, mister, steel men aren't fish. Mike Sheen was the only man on the job that really stood a chance of making it either way.

And he knew it That's why he jumped up the way he did, and yelled and waved his arms. The men kept on though. They really meant to try.

Then Mike Sheen dove from the scaffold. The men gasped, when they saw him go, and swore harshly, because they knew that he was exhausted. His head broke surface when he was ten yards down stream.

It was a fight, mister, like you'd never see but once in a lifetime. The men followed him down the bank. They yelled, screamed curses, and ran like mad to keep abreast of him. But Sheen plugged on and he did make headway. Finally his hand leaped up and caught at a branch. He pulled himself up, rested a bit, then ran back along the bank.

The men ran to meet him, grabbed his arms. He yelled at them through their excited voices,

"Get chalk line. Half inch rope. Hurry!"

He jerked loose from them and ran on, stumbling, up the bank. One of the men ran on ahead, and by the time Sheen had reached a place a hundred yards up stream from the scaffold, the chalk line was there. Sheen grabbed it, tied one end around his waist, and dove in again.

CHALK line, mister, in case you don't know, is a heavy cord. It's strong, sure, but not strong enough to hold a man's weight, or to pull Mike Sheen back if he missed.

The boys paid out the line as Sheen swam, and it went out with terrible slowness. But there was a fervent prayer went with every foot of it. Prayers spliced with hot curses when the weight of the line made Sheen roll.

Old Elex Ebel spotted the log first. He screamed wildly to make Sheen hear above the roar of the river. The log was big, torn from some storm-gutted canyon by the raging current. It was coming down on Sheen with the devil's own speed.

Maybe it was the yells of the men, or maybe it was something else. But Sheen looked up, saw the log and dove. He carried the line with him. The log tore past, the line jerked hard twice and then went limp.

Ebel swore madly, his hands tore at the line, pulled at the slack. His curses changed to yells, then, the line went tight, and Sheen came to the top. His body flashed out, rolled, and then his arms moved again, the line went out again, foot by foot.

He ploughed on, that way, until the current carried him down abreast of the scaffold. His hands reached out, his feet churned madly to make that last few inches. His fingers scraped along the wood, digging for a hold. They slid into a crack, curled, and then held. Hunter reached down and pulled him up.

"Pull. . . . Pull that line in!" Sheen panted. He stretched out there, trying to catch his breath. When he finally did raise his head, he saw Hunter, and he yelled,

"Pull it in, you fool! That line won't hold you!"

Hunter had tied that line around himself, and he was sitting on the edge of the scaffold, waving at the men to pull him in.

It would be hard to say what Mike Sheen thought when he saw what Hunter was doing. But from the bank you could see him reach out and pull Hunter back, you could see Hunter struggling wildly and you could almost hear him plead,

"Let me go! I tell you! The scaffold—it's— Let me go!"

"You'd leave us, huh?" Sheen snarled. "You'd leave us to save your own yellow hide!"

Hunter beat his fists into Sheen's face, and Sheen didn't have the strength to stop him. He took it, mister, like only Sheen could, and shoved his hands up till they found Hunter's neck. Then he squeezed with the last strength he had in him. He squeezed, while Hunter's fist turned his face into a bleeding mask.

The men on the bank went raving mad, mister, because they could see what Hunter was trying to do. They could see the brush pile going to pieces, and the scaffold breaking loose. And they knew that it was Hunter's fault that the scaffold had fallen in the first place.

Finally Hunter's arms dropped and Sheen rolled free. Sheen sat there, on the scaffold, looking out across the water. He plucked at the line, and his hands were slow, tired.

NO one could say where he got the strength to pull that line. But he got it, somewhere, and he pulled till he got the heavy rope that was lashed to the end of it.

If you'd been on the bank, you would have seen him heave on that rope, and you would have screamed insane curses when the current tried to drag it from his hands. You would have seen him crawl on his hands and knees and fasten it, first to Black Henry, and then to Hunter. And if you'd been out there on the scaffold, you would have heard him mumble to Hunter,

"I can't figure what she wants with you. But she does. And that's good enough for me. . . ."

Sheba Kane hadn't been on the job when it all happened. She got there just as they pulled the men in off the scaffold. She looked at their bruised, half-drowned bodies, and she went down on her knees beside them.

She knelt there, mister, in the mud of the river bank, and the men stood in a silent ring around her. Her hands pushed the wet hair from their faces—her voice pleaded with them to live.

Turning a frantic, grief-filled face to the men around her, she cried, "Can't you do something? Don't stand there! Oh, please. . . ."

Elex Ebel put a fumbling but gentle hand under her arm, lifted her. "It's all right, Miss, they ain't dead. You come away now. They ain't dead."

You'd think that Mike Sheen had done his part, that he would let things go and rest. But no, he had to get up on his hands and knees, had to say to Sheba Kane,

"We wouldn't be here, only Hunter swum out with a rope and got us off."

Nobody said anything for a moment, they just gaped. It was old Ebel that finally burst out, "Why you dirty liar!"

Sheen pushed himself up to his knees, looked around till he found Ebel. He swung his fist at Ebel's chin. No, it didn't connect, it missed by two feet, and Sheen fell on his face. He didn't move after that—he couldn't.

They carried him to the bunk house, then, and their faces were strained, their hands gentle, when they put him in the bunk.

They went out and left Sheba Kane standing by his side.

She waited till his eyes flickered open. "The bridge," Sheen muttered. "I got to get up. I got to finish. Old Kane. . . ."

"Old Kane is coming," Sheba Kane said softly. "He'll finish."

"Hunter—is all right?"

"Yes. Now you must sleep."

"Look, Sheba, there's one thing I gotta know." Sheen said, and his voice was low. "This Hunter—do you—?"

Sheba Kane's face came close to his. Her eyes were as soft as a smoky sunset. And her hands were tender when she touched his face.

"No," she whispered, "It's you—Mike Sheen."

And tears, mister, as real as any you'd ever see, were running down her face.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

BELOW is a letter from a—well, from a character who calls himself, with fine, Spencerian simplicity, McDonald. It is about Leo Lawson Rogers and that dratted Dale Clark story. We'll print it this time, but we wish to announce, with great finality, that if the mother of the man who illustrated the plagiarized story (in the Clark yarn) feels she has to tell her side of the case, or if anyone else even remotely connected with the somewhat agonized personnel of *Reader, I Killed Him*, has to get anything else about it off his or her chest, let him or her hire a hall. As far as we are concerned, this is absolutely all we care to hear about it. And, Mr. McDonald, if you do run across Leo Lawson R. anywhere, you can keep him. Anyhow, keep him out of here. All right, now go ahead:

McDONALD

It is to be sure, a pity that you do not publish the street addresses in your Argonote department, of the people, like Leo Lawson Rogers who write your magazine letters concerning murders. It is a pity for the simple reason that by this time I would have borrowed my second cousin's new submachine gun, and bolstering my courage with some choice bootleg beer which my cousin bootlegs (you see he is a bit on the lame-brain side and he doesn't believe repeal is here) I would search out Mr. Rogers and put one burst of gun fire after another into him until his blood oozed out (as Mr. Adams would put it) for at last I have discovered who it was plagiarized the only story of mine which was ever accepted.

You doubtless remember that story, "Reader, I Killed Him"—the story Mr. Rogers mentioned in his recent letter wherein the editor of a certain magazine attempts to bump off a friend who is also an editor, and as far as he himself knows, succeeds, but then, the editor got the idea for the murder from a story which was submitted for publication. He thinks the plot was original and he will be undiscovered, but little does he realize that the author who submitted the story was Leo Lawson Rogers, and that he plagiarized the story from ME!

I first had it accepted by an Arizona magazine—the first story an editor didn't send back to me with a bottle of arsenic and directions for its use. And this guy Rogers robs it on me and sells it again. Topping it all he gets it mixed up in a murder, which to be sure is the last straw.

Now Mr. Editor, you have the entire cast of characters. Typed in my own inimitable bad typing.

You have the editor who thought he killed the victim and went to the chair for it, you have Mr. Leo Lawson Rogers who says *he* killed the victim but remains unpunished and finally you have me who wrote the story which Rogers robbed which the editor used as an idea to knock off the victim, and you have the victim himself who unfortunately was killed in the mêlée.

My counsellors are bringing suit against Mr. Rogers for a slight case of plagiarism and I myself am organizing an expedition to Pongo Mongo Island. Incidentally, that is the correct method of spelling Pongo Mongo.

Oh, yes! Mr. Lawson if you read this in Pongo Mongo, I might mention that a relative of mine, a third cousin, runs the Pongo Mongo Beer and Grill which as far as I know is the chief eating place on the island.

Beer five cents per glass, three cents tax. Fresh roasted Grills, ten-cents ditto.

Best wishes to the ARGOSY, which published a very good story in "McGluskey's Lucky Day".

New York City

HEREINAFTER, a letter from a gentleman with a distinct grievance, accusing us of practically everything but tax evasion and highway robbery. Shamelessly we let you behold our sins as viewed by

MARTIN SULLIVAN

This is my first letter to you but it won't be the last if you continue to edit such tripe in your magazine.

I am going to tell you what is on my mind. I don't give three hoots in ***** (EDITOR'S NOTE: Bad word here) whether you print this letter in the Argonotes or not. I don't believe you will for I notice that you print only the letters which praise the magazine to the highest extent. (EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Sullivan's is the second letter making this charge that we have received within the last month or so. We printed the other one, too.)

The first thing I am going to talk about is the removal of the red band from the cover. A while back you promised to put the little ship back on the cover and now you removed the whole business. The red band was a characteristic of the magazine. It set it apart from the other cheap magazines polluting the stands. Now it is in appearance as well as in quality (as it has been for some time) a pulp magazine, no better than the rest.

I will now orate on the quality which I mentioned above. Pick up the magazine of, say, two years ago and last week's issue and compare them. Here is what you find: (1) The cover is different as I mentioned before. Very often the cover picture does not illustrate the story it is representing. (2) Look at the contents page . . . In the older magazine the complete stories are under one heading, the serials under another. The name of the cover artist was given below. In the newer issue the stories are all jammed together and the cover artist's name is left out completely. (3) In the former periodic the picture at the beginning had a few words by it, telling the direct action of the picture, and under that a few lines telling what the story was about; now there is only one and sometimes neither. (4) There are too many typographical errors now. (5) All the other old writers are gone.

See what you can do about these defects.

Perry, Fla.

YES, sir. Right away, Mr. Sullivan. And would you like the ice water taken up to your room now? We don't get that about the writers, though. What "other old writers"—the old typographical ones?

All joking aside, though, we are a little chagrined that Mr. Sullivan is so displeased with us. Typographical errors are of course inexcusable, and although we take great pains to avoid them, a few do seem to creep in every so often. We don't recall promising to put the ship on the cover. If memory isn't playing fast and loose with us again, what we did say was that we would look around the shop and see if we could find it. We did, for a while, and then the idea came to remove the band entirely. So we did that, instead.

Mr. Sullivan will probably be pleased to know that his letter put us into quite a state for a while. That is until we got one from an admirer, signing him(?)self only:

SATISFIED READER

I have just discovered something I never knew before! George Challis is a super-author. I have always read every story printed in ARGOSY but heretofore I have considered Challis rather mediocre. His historical novels were just ordinary, passable stories. But now! Now I have read four parts of "The Smoking Land," and I unhesitatingly pronounce it the best story since "Seven Worlds to Conquer." I can't imagine why Challis should waste his talents on a dry-as-dust historical novel when he can write a fantastic like "The Smoking Land." Here's hoping he writes more of this type of story.

Eustace L. Adams' "When the Big Wind Blows" has started off with a bang and promises to be a knockout. "Señor Vulture" by Johnston McCulley is equally good.

Many thanks to you for removing the unsightly red band from the cover of ARGOSY. The old mag looks a hundred percent better. But please don't spoil the effect by cluttering up the front with a lot of printing. Just the title of the story which the cover illustrates with, perhaps, an extra line of print across the top of the cover is enough printing for the front.

I see that Howard Rainey Castle prefers stories complete in every issue. He says the illusion is broken when you say *Continued Next Week*. I would suggest that Mr. Castle wait until he gets all the instalments of a serial before he reads it. After he gets all of the first serial, he will have a complete serial each week to read—and the rest of us will still have our *Continued* stories. As for myself I say, "The more serials the better."

My blood boils when I see that some reader has voted against the proposed quarterly edition. I can't see why anyone should vote against

it. If he doesn't want it he doesn't have to buy it. And almost everyone who votes against a quarterly admits he would like to read some of the old stories again. By the way, Mr. Editor, what have *you* decided about it? I vote *Yes.*

There is one feature in ARGOSY which I would dispense with and that is *Men of Daring.* It has been running for years and it has grown decidedly monotonous. Surely everyone must be tired of it by now. (EDITOR'S NOTE: Pardon the interruption, but don't you believe a word of it, Mr. S. Reader. Through an unfortunate interplay of circumstances a few weeks back, we had to leave *Men of Daring* out. We were forthwith flooded with written screams of protest that piled up on the desk to such an extent that we wondered for a while if we could dig ourselves out by Christmas. But we are whipping together a supplementary pictorial feature that we think will add a touch of novelty to Mr. Allen's seldom interrupted flow of Mighty Moderns. We didn't mean to break in this way, but we did want to get this business off our chest. Thanks.)

I would much rather have the space devoted to a swap column where we readers could exchange back numbers of magazines, books, curios, stamps, etc. Or you might alternate the swap column with a department of Western humor. The inimitable W. C. Tuttle or S. Omar Barker could write this.

Give us more stories like "Locusts from Asia" by Joel Townsley Rogers. It was great! Roscoe's "Z Is for Zombie" was a swell yarn, too. Brand's "War for Sale" was okay, but his "Baby Face" flopped at the finish.

Here's hoping to see stories by F. V. W. Mason, Loring Brent, Edgar Rice Burroughs or O. A. Kline in ARGOSY soon.

In spite of the complaints I have registered I am pretty well satisfied with ARGOSY.

Tupelo, Mississippi

LOOKING AHEAD!

CALL ME MIKE

It was Prince Mikuud-Phni Luangba's whim to sail as "Prince Mike"; and it was George Whalin's job to keep the Royal Mike from losing the Royal Jewels. A number of smooth, deft-fingered gentlemen had their eyes on them. But, on the passage to Honolulu, and off Waikiki, gem-detective Whalin found that the personable heir-apparent to Kammorirri was not the irresponsible play-boy he seemed. Introducing a charming new Argosy character in a jewel-encrusted novelet by

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

NINE LIVES

Airplane pilots are a courageous lot. A good many are as capricious and high-strung as the Metropolitan's most expensive prima donnas. Here is a fine story about one who dreaded walking under ladders more than he feared bucking air pockets—who preferred facing a squall to a broken mirror—and who worried more about a dropped pin than he did over ceiling zero. Then someone gave him a black cat. A novelet by

L. RON HUBBARD

Also fine fiction by GARNETT RADCLIFFE, ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT, JOHN HAWKINS, and others.

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—AUGUST 21

New Invention! WITH SUPERCHARGE PRINCIPLE SAVES GAS

MORE SPEED
MORE POWER
NEW MOTOR LIFE
QUICKER STARTING
UP TO 30% GAS SAVINGS

USERS REPORT 3 TO 7 MILES MORE PER GALLON

MOTORIST SAVES $180.00 A YEAR

"On an International truck on a round trip to Cleveland, 385 miles, it saved 19 gallons of gas."—*James Seeley, N. Y.*

"On my V-8 Ford, it works miracles. Its added power, acceleration and top speed has sold me. The results are unbelievable."—*Ralph Fields, Mass.*

"Very glad to say, the Buick showed an increase of 5 miles more per gallon."—*A. V. Grove, Washington.*

"On my Plymouth, I obtained an average of 22 miles per gallon, an increase of 7 miles. This means a saving of $15 a month or $180 a year."—*F. S. Peck, Calif.*

"It saves me one gallon a day. I had to buy 5 gallons each day—now only 4 gallons."—*L. V. Sweet, Pa.*

"My Chevrolet certainly runs smoother, has more power and snap to it since I put the Vacu-Matic on."—*J. H. Nelson, Minn.*

"On my Dodge 8 I am getting 6 more miles per gal., with more power and pick-up, which is all anyone could ask."—*Lee D. Esty, Calif.*

"I have twelve Vacu-matics on cars now, and they all show an increase in mileage. The car owners are very well pleased."—*Fred Taylor, Okla.*

"I averaged 25 miles per gallon on a trip with a model A Ford at 40 miles per hour, where before I only averaged 20. Also better pickup and smoother running.—*Wm. Lyons, Calif.*

"I have been placing Vacu-matics on expert mechanics' cars. All are well pleased."—*J. W. Donahue, W. Va.*

VACU-MATIC

PATENT PENDING

the Carburetor Control that "BREATHES"

AT LAST! Automotive engineers have smashed down the barriers to perfected combustion! The new VACU-MATIC solves the secret of greater power! With almost magical action, this amazing invention instantly puts new life and pep in any motor. It adds mileage to every gallon of gasoline . . . produces split-second pick-up, sensitive accelerator response, quicker starting, greater speed and smoother running.

Automatic -- Nothing Like It!

The self-starter—four wheel brakes—knee action—stream-lining . . . and now VACU-MATIC! The sensational money-saving invention! With it, engineers have achieved a practical means of balancing air and gasoline automatically for all speeds.

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It operates on the super charger principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely AUTOMATIC and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required. No idling troubles—no carburetor adjustments necessary. It is so simple it will amaze you—so practical it will save you many dollars on gas costs.

Guaranteed Gas Savings

VACU-MATIC proves itself on every car. It is guaranteed to give worthwhile gas savings, quicker pick-up, and more power or it costs you nothing. You can instantly tell the difference in added power and motor performance — you quickly notice the cash savings on gasoline.

Fits All Cars

VACU-MATIC is constructed of six parts, assembled and fused into one unit, correctly adjusted and *sealed at the factory.* Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can attach VACU-MATIC in ten minutes. Once in, its only reminder is the surge of instant power and speed it gives to the motor and the savings it affords your pocketbook.

Free Details

You owe it to yourself to know all about this remarkable discovery. Mail the coupon below. Start saving gas with VACU-MATIC and enjoy a new driving thrill! There's no obligation—so get the facts now! Write today!

Agents and Salesmen

VACU-MATIC offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor and motorcycle owner a prospect. Valuable territories now being assigned. Check and mail coupon.

-FREE OFFER COUPON-

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY
7617-242 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.

Gentlemen: Please send me full particulars concerning the Vacu-matic and details of your Free Offer. This of course does not obligate me in any way.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

☐ Check here if interested in selling proposition.

The VACU-MATIC Co. **Wauwatosa, Wis.**

FLASH! A MOTOR SPEEDS 20-TUBE MIDWEST DIAL TO DESIRED STATION WHEN YOU TOUCH A BUTTON

AT LAST!—A RADIO THAT TUNES ITSELF BY ELECTRIC MOTOR.... A NEW STATION EVERY 1/3 SECOND!

HERE'S today's most exciting and sensational radio development... TOUCH-BUTTON TUNING! Just touch a button, a motor spins the dial and the station you want comes in precisely tuned. This completely automatic Midwest will delight and surprise you with its brilliant world-wide reception on six bands: American, Canadian, police, amateur, commercial airplane and ship broadcasts...and the finest, most fascinating programs up to 12,000 miles and more away. They're all yours at the touch of a button!

MAGIC MOVIE DIAL

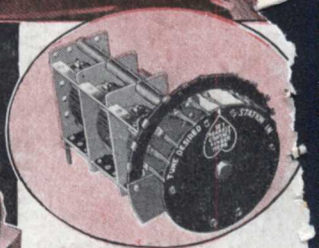
To have five bands suddenly appear and then, disappear like magic . . . as the wave band switch is turned to higher frequencies... that's Magic Movie Dial—an exclusive Midwest feature. Only the DOUBLE EXPANDED American Broadcast Band regularly shows.

SAVE 50%

DIRECT FROM MIDWEST FACTORY!

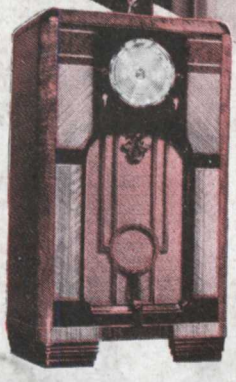
Why be content with an ordinary 10, 12, or 14-tube set when you can buy a 20-tube super deluxe motorized Midwest for the same money! You save 50% when you deal directly with the factory that makes radios, at wholesale prices.

20-TUBES 6 WAVE BANDS



only $49.95 NEW LOW BASE PRICE

This amazingly beautiful, bigger, better radio outperforms $150 radios on a point - for - point comparison. Never before so much radio for so little money.



This "Mystic Brain" interp... your push button signals ... controls the electric motor. T... contact fingers can be easily set to th... ten stations on the dial, if you prefer.

BEAUTIFUL NEW 3-SPEAKER CONS...

The new 1938 Midwest consoles are triump... of the furniture art. The Trio-Sonic Reproduce... (3 speakers), installed in this 20-tube conso... were especially developed for use with Do... Power Beam Output Tubes. The extreme h... are handled by a new type of 6" speaker . . . ... middle tones by another 6" reproducer—while t... very low frequencies are perfectly taken care ... by a heavy weight 12" low frequency reproducer.

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The famous Midwest 30-day Free Trial Plan enables you to try out the Midwest radio you like in the privacy of your own home, for 30 full days. You are triply protected with Foreign Reception Guarantee, One - Year Warranty and Money - Back Guarantees.

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You have a whole year to pay for your Midwest on the easiest and most convenient of credit terms. Send for the FREE 40-page catalog today — and begin to enjoy motorized radio at its best, right now.

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See for yourself that Midwest offers you today's greatest radio values! Write for new 1938 Factory-To-You Catalog showing 40 pages of radios, chassis and features—in their natural colors. Select the one you like on 30 days Free trial.

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