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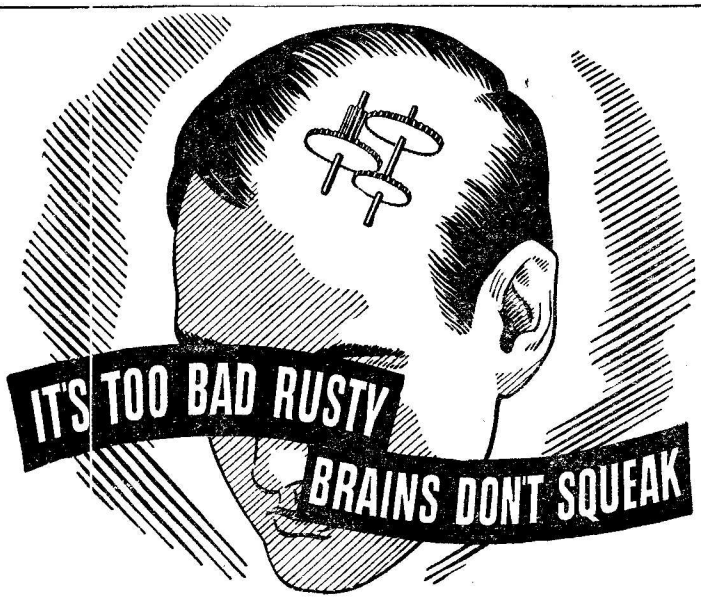

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ARGOSY

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From behind the headlines, this vivid story of the menace that looms on tomorrow's horizon—America under the Mailed Fist!

Kingdom Come

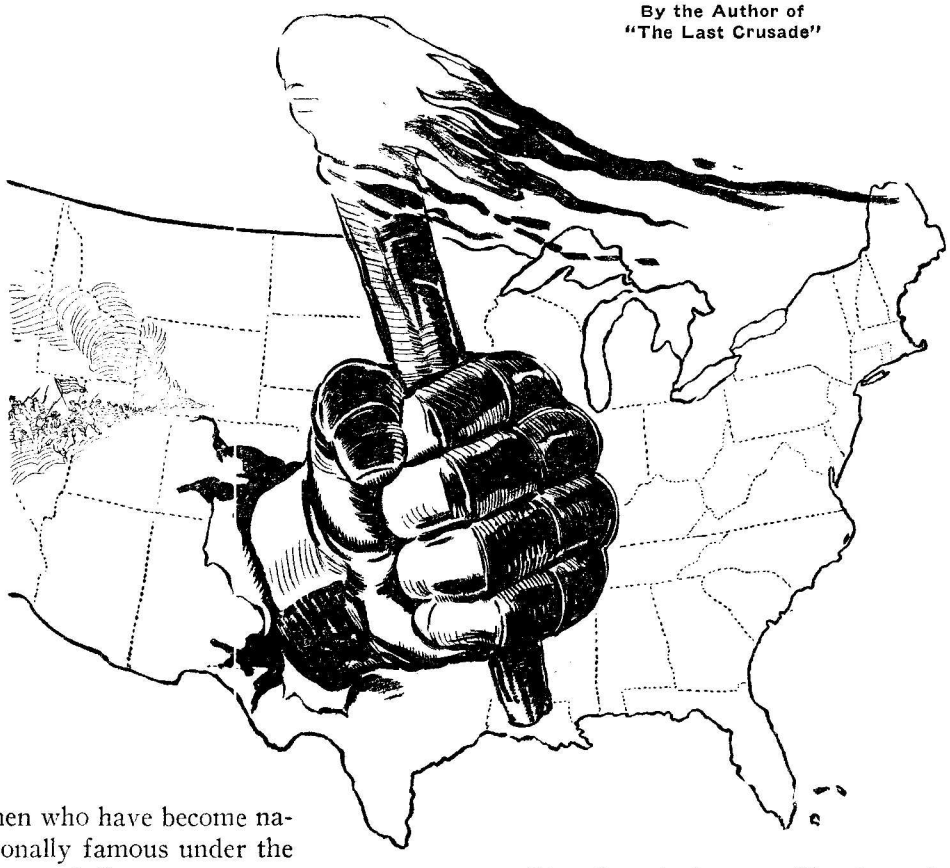
By MARTIN McCALL

CHAPTER I

ETCHED IN ACID

CORCORAN rubbed the stiff joint of his knee, his leg, rigid in its steel brace, sticking out straight in front of him as he sat in the chair behind his desk. It was an unconscious gesture with him, one that Dominick Vane, who sat opposite him, knew very well. There was action in the wind, and at such times Corcoran's lips would tighten and his fingers would explore the knee which would no longer bend. The knee kept him out of the action which had been the bread and meat of life to him until that day when a Chicago gangster's machine gun had shattered his leg beyond all repair. It was after that that John Corcoran had become head of the Investigation Division of the Department of Justice in Washington—the head of that body of

By the Author of
"The Last Crusade"



men who have become nationally famous under the name of G-men.

Dominick Vane had been one of Corcoran's closest friends since the early days of the department. They had fought a dozen battles side by side, this curiously matched pair. Corcoran was a short, stocky, two fisted, fighting Irishman; while Vane was tall, slim, dark with the hard, lined face of a man who had been to hell and back, despite the fact that he was not yet thirty-five. You knew this when you looked into his cold blue eyes that scarcely ever showed any warmth or emotion; a silent man, apparently without nerves, yet with a habit of smoking an endless chain of cigarettes which he consumed with furious rapidity. You sensed, despite his outer calm and his low, soft speaking voice, an inner quality of explosiveness, like that of a seething volcano.

"You look all in, Nick," Corcoran said.

Vane made an impatient gesture with his hand. "It's nothing that a little sleep won't put right. The last few days have kept me on the run."

Corcoran smiled gently. The last few days had seen the capture of the Scorsi kidnaping gang, and it had been Vane who, single-handed, broke into the mountain cabin where they were hiding and shot the three Italian murderers to death. Vane had been too impatient to wait for reinforcements!

"Of course you should have a week off to get yourself rested up," Corcoran said, "but . . . well, something's turned up that I would rather have you handle

than anyone else we have available."

"Shoot!" said Dominick Vane, and lit a fresh cigarette from the stub of the one he'd been smoking.

Corcoran leaned forward and picked up a sheaf of papers and clippings that lay on his desk. "I know you haven't been reading the papers the last few days," he said, "and even if you had you might not have paid any attention to this story." Corcoran made as if to pass the papers to Vane but the latter leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"Tell me about it yourself, Corky. That way we'll skip the unimportant details."

"It's a queer story," said Corcoran. "On the face of it, it wouldn't seem to be up our alley. Three nights ago—about two in the morning to be exact—a Jersey State Trooper was riding along the main highway near the town of Marshfield on his usual nightly patrol. As he turned a corner in the road his headlights picked up the figure of a man lying in the ditch by the side of the road. This trooper, a guy named Hardwick, stopped his machine and went back to where the man was lying. Hardwick thought at first the man had been the victim of a hit-and-run driver. When he got to him the man wasn't dead. He groaned as Hardwick touched him and kept his face buried in the grass. Hardwick turned him over and . . . well, this fella didn't have any face!"

DOMINICK VANE'S eyes popped open and he said: "Why not, Corky?"

"Acid of some kind," said Corcoran. "Somebody had thrown it in this bird's mug and it had literally eaten away his face . . . eyes gone . . . the works! Hardwick told the local sheriff afterward that he nearly fainted when he looked at it. Well, this poor guy tried to talk, but he was coughing and choking and, before he could get anything out, he died."

Vane grunted and blew a spiral of smoke toward the ceiling. "Starts out like a dime novel," he said.

"It gets more like one as it goes on," said Corcoran grimly. "Trooper Hardwick sent for the Marshfield sheriff and the coroner. They came out and got the dead man, and the doctor concluded that the poor guy must have swallowed some of the acid . . . that was what killed him."

"Who was the dead man?" Vane asked.

"I'm coming to that," said Corcoran, and his voice had a hard ring to it. "They went all through his clothes and there wasn't a single thing to identify him by. But Hardwick figured it was murder. Somebody had thrown acid at this guy and it had killed him. There was a pretty clear trail through the swamps adjoining the highway where the dead man had staggered blindly to reach aid of some sort. Hardwick decided to back track on that trail in the hope of getting some clue to the murder. Though it was still dark he set out alone."

"Good man," said Dominick Vane.

Corcoran laughed mirthlessly. "Nobody heard from Hardwick for hours after that," he said. "In fact not till the next afternoon. About five miles from where Hardwick started out lives a rich young dope named Philip Jaxon, a nephew of H. R. Dawson, the big Wall Street operator. Young Jaxon doesn't do much but ride horses and drink. He plays around with a very fast set. That afternoon he was sitting on the terrace of his house having a highball when, suddenly, a man stum-

bled through the garden hedge. He started toward the house and fell flat on his face. When Jaxon got to him he was unconscious. It was Hardwick. His uniform was torn to shreds. His gun was gone. And one of his hands—his right hand, to be exact—was almost eaten away by some strong acid."

"Ah," said Dominick Vane, and lit a fresh cigarette.

"They rushed him to a hospital," said Corcoran. "He was suffering from terrible internal injuries. Nearly all of the ribs on one side of his body were smashed and he was having internal hemorrhages. The doctors say he hasn't got a chance. They only hope they'll be able to bring him to before he dies—long enough for him to give them some idea of what happened. I had a report an hour ago. He was still unconscious."

"It's a nice case," said Dominick Vane, "but what has it got to do with the Department of Justice?"

"The local authorities sent us the fingerprints of the dead man—the one Hardwick found. They hadn't been able to identify him and they thought there might be a chance we'd have him on file. It was a ten strike. We had him all right."

"Who was he?" Vane asked.

Corcoran's voice was harsh. "Ted Drewes," he said.

Dominick Vane literally sprang out of his chair. "What are you talking about, Corky? Ted Drewes—dead! Why he—he's the best man your outfit ever had!"

"With the exception of yourself," said Corcoran grimly. "Oh, it's Ted all right enough. About four days ago he telephoned me from New York. He was up there on a job for us. He'd washed it up and was due back but he said he'd got on the trail of something very hot—something tremendously important. 'Biggest thing the department has ever been up against,' were his words. He didn't want to talk about it over the phone. He sounded all hopped up and wanted leave to work on his own hook for a day or two. I told him to go ahead."

"Quite right," said Vane grimly.

"And that was the last I heard from him, until these fingerprints came in." Corcoran shifted restlessly in his chair. "Ted wasn't the kind to go off half-cocked on a wild goose chase. If he said he was after something big he *was*. I want to know what that something is, Nick. And I want to know who got Ted!"

Dominick Vane was on his feet. "Have a car here to take me to Marshfield in ten minutes," he said, "with someone to drive me. I'll sleep on the way up." His eyes were cold and bright as diamonds. "Notify the hospital where this trooper is that I'm coming. I want to be on deck if he does any talking."

PAYING scant attention to speed limits, a Department car drove rapidly from Washington toward the town of Marshfield in Jersey. Sitting beside the driver Dominick Vane slept. Sleep was never a pleasant experience for this gaunt, hard-eyed agent of the Government, for it was always accompanied by a dream—a dream that brought out cold beads of perspiration on his forehead and wrenched his lips into a taut, suffering line. It was a dream that Dominick Vane had never been able to blot out since that terrible day five years ago when all the joy of living left him.

On that day Dominick Vane and his bride of two weeks had been standing arm in arm in front of a shop window on Fifth Avenue in New York. Dom-

inick Vane was a promising lawyer, madly in love with the slender, lovely girl whose fingers clung to his arm so confidently, so happily. A touring car with drawn shades had come up the avenue. There had been a sudden roar of machine-gun fire. Instinctively Dominick Vane had drawn his wife into his arms to protect her . . . but she was dead, even as he looked down into her face. . . .

The papers' account of the incident said:

MOB KILLING ON FIFTH AVENUE
JOE EMMANUEL KILLED BY GUNMEN WHO ESCAPE

WOMAN ALSO SLAIN BY STRAY BULLETS

Woman also slain! Even in his sleep Dominick Vane could see those cold impersonal words. *Woman also slain!* That *woman* was Joan . . . his Joan! His life!

Dominick Vane had wanted to die, yet some iron streak in his character made it impossible for him to blow out his own brains. And while he struggled to get hold of himself that seething cauldron of fury began to bubble within him. A fury against every criminal, every gangster, every racketeer. It was as if he had a score to settle with each one of them. He joined the Department of Justice forces. Oh, he worked under orders from Corcoran, but each case on which he served was in reality to him a private war of vengeance. Dominick Vane succeeded where others failed because he took chances no other man would take. He wanted to die and, perhaps for that very reason, he lived. . . .

Dominick Vane opened his eyes, and for a moment there was a tortured look in them—a look that was always there when he first came back to consciousness after sleep. It faded rapidly to be replaced by that diamond-hard, chill light that always glittered there whenever the chase was on. Ted Drewes had been a friend—a brilliant and fearless agent. Vane had a double score to settle in this Marshfield business.

"How much farther?" he asked the driver.

"Only about five miles, sir. You've slept all the way."

A few moments later they reached the town of Marshfield and were directed to the hospital. This proved to be no more than a large private house converted by the local doctor into a sort of sanitarium. Vane swung out of the car before it came to a full stop. "Wait!" he snapped at the driver and hurried up the porch steps to the entrance. A nurse in white starched uniform sat at a reception desk.

"You wish to see Doctor Tyler?"

"At once," said Vane. "He's expecting me."

"Doctor Tyler is engaged right now. If you'll—"

"At once!" Vane's voice had a whiplash quality to it. "I am from Washington."

"You're Mr. Vane?" she asked, with quickening interest.

"Stop asking questions and take me to Doctor Tyler!" said Dominick Vane.

At the same instant a door opened across the hall and a little gray man with rimless spectacles looked out.

"This is Mr. Vane, Doctor Tyler," said the flustered nurse.

"Mr. Vane . . . come in, come in. We're delighted to see you. It is something of an occasion for us to have a man of your reputation come to Marshfield. Of course we've all heard of your exploits, and I for one—"

"Has he talked yet?" Dominick

Vane interrupted sharply, as the doctor closed the door of the office.

"No, Mr. Vane. I—ah—" The doctor, too, seemed flustered by the agent's cold, abrupt manner.

"What are the chances?" asked Dominick Vane.

Doctor Tyler shrugged. "There's no telling. Hardwick is terribly injured. He may die without ever recovering his senses."

"No delirium?" Vane asked. "No talk of any kind?"

"No," said the doctor. "There has been a nurse at his side ready to take down anything he might say, but up to now there has been nothing."

Dominick Vane lit a cigarette and sucked hungrily on it for a moment. "This acid, Doctor Tyler . . . what is it?"

The doctor looked down thoughtfully at the iodine stains on the fingers of his right hand. "Quite frankly, Mr. Vane, we don't know."

"You've had three days to find out!"

"We've had the chief chemist from the State Laboratories here. He doesn't know either," said the doctor, a little tartly.

VANE looked at Tyler sharply, and for just a second the hard lines at the corners of his mouth relaxed. "You'll pardon my abruptness, Doctor Tyler. Drewes, the murdered man, was a close friend of mine. If I could have got here at once . . . but after three days the trail to the murderer is already cold. I must know every possible fact relative to the crime, no matter how unimportant it may seem. Be good enough to send for the sheriff at once. I don't want to leave your hospital as long as there is any chance Hardwick may speak."

Doctor Tyler was not altogether a fool, and as he looked into the sharp, intense face of Dominick Vane his resentment faded. Here was a man very much on the job. Doctor Tyler approved of that sort of thing. He reached for the telephone on his desk and a moment later informed Sheriff Waters of Marshfield that Vane wanted to see him at once.

"This is a very strange case, Mr. Vane," said the doctor, turning from the phone. "You may know that we performed an autopsy on Drewes. In his case he had swallowed some of the acid which destroyed his face and eyes. It had literally eaten away his stomach, the lining of his throat, and part of the small intestine. In the case of Hardwick matters seem different. There is no sign of the acid having touched anything but his right hand. While his injuries are internal they have been caused by a terrible beating or a bad fall of some kind. If it were not for the mutilation of his right hand caused by the acid there would be no link between the two affairs. But, quite obviously, Hardwick came into close contact with the agency which caused Drewes' death. Those are all the medical facts in the case, Mr. Vane, and quite frankly I—"

The office door opened, interrupting the physician. A nurse poked her head in. "Hardwick is stirring, Doctor Tyler. Doctor Morgan thinks he may talk. He sent me to—"

Dominick Vane sprang out of his chair. "Hurry!" he said.

Trooper Hardwick lay in a bed in a private room on the second floor of the sanitarium. One look at him told Dominick Vane that the man was dying. The pallor of death was on his haggard face. But even as they entered the room his lips were moving swiftly.

Dominick Vane unceremoniously

pushed aside the nurse and the young interne who were leaning over him and knelt by the head of the bed. But there was nothing rough about the way his cool hand closed over the left one of the dying man which lay on the coverlet. Hardwick was muttering unintelligibly.

"Try to speak a little more distinctly, old man," said Dominick Vane very gently.

Hardwick's fingers closed tightly about Vane's and his head moved restlessly on the pillow for a minute. Then very slowly and quite distinctly he said: "Men . . . hundreds of men . . . without faces. . . . Death . . . death everywhere."

Dominick Vane looked up sharply at Tyler, but the doctor shrugged. The trooper's words carried no significance for him.

"Where are these men?" Vane asked softly.

Once more the trooper's lips moved. "Hundreds of men . . . without faces . . . and . . . and a white-haired monster . . . horrible white-haired monster. . . . Oh, my hand . . . my hand . . . it's burning up . . . it's all burned to . . ." The lips stopped moving and the fingers relaxed their grip on Vane's hand.

"Where did this happen?" Dominick Vane asked, more sharply this time. But there was no response.

"I'm afraid he's gone," said Doctor Tyler, and his voice was a trifle unsteady.

CHAPTER II

COOK'S TOUR

SHERIFF WATERS of Marshfield was waiting in Doctor Tyler's office when the physician and Dominick Vane returned from the room where Trooper Hardwick had just died. Waters was tall, paunchy, and decidedly rustic in appearance. He had never had any more serious crime to deal with than petty larceny or a drunken fight at one of the local road houses. He was impressed with meeting Dominick Vane, the famous government agent who had done for the Scorsi Brothers, but he did not want to appear overawed by the sharp-eyed Vane in the presence of Doctor Tyler. He listened judicially to the account of the death-bed scene.

"Sounds as though Hardwick had been hittin' the pipe," he said dryly. "Men without faces! White-haired monsters! That's crazy, Mr. Vane."

Dominick Vane was pacing restlessly up and down the office, a thin frown penciling his forehead. "Hardwick was trying very desperately to tell us what happened, Sheriff. It doesn't make sense now, but I'll bet you a five spot that when we get to the bottom of this it will." He paused in his pacing to light a cigarette.

"I'll take that bet," the sheriff laughed. "What do *you* reckon lies behind all this business, Mr. Vane?"

"I don't know," said Vane. "But this much I *do* know. Drewes was one of the shrewdest agents we had in the department. He told Corcoran, our chief, that he was on the trail of 'the biggest thing' the Department had been up against. The trail was hot, because he was brutally murdered. Hardwick accidentally stumbled across it, too, and he got his. I'm going to find out what Drewes was after, and I'm going to find out what Hardwick was talking about when he died."

"All most interesting and—ah—thrilling," said Doctor Tyler.

"Just part of the day's work for a G-man, eh, Mr. Vane?" said Waters, with a sage wink.

Vane paid no attention to either com-

ment. "I want you both to coöperate with me in one respect," he said. "The criminal or criminals, whoever they are, probably know of my presence in Marshfield. They will naturally be anxious to know whether or not Hardwick told us anything before he died. I want you both to give out the report that he died without speaking."

"He might just as well have," said the sheriff.

"There is probably a definite key to the whole affair in what he told us if we can figure it out," said Vane. "I don't want anyone to know what he said. I want the criminals lulled into a sense of security. Is that understood, gentlemen?"

"Perfectly," said Doctor Tyler.

"And now, Sheriff, I should like to have you take me to the place where Drewes' body was found."

IT WAS a dismal spot on a deserted stretch of a great cement highway running south through the state. Both sides of the road were bordered by thickly grown marsh land. The sheriff chewed on a large cud of tobacco as he looked complacently down into a little grassy ditch.

"Drewes was lyin' here, face down in the grass, when Hardwick found him," he said. "Hardwick told me his fingers were sunk into the ground like he'd tried to pull himself up and couldn't. When I got here with the doctor, Hardwick had rolled him over on his back. But he was dead—died before we got here."

Dominick Vane's face looked as if it were hewn out of granite as he stared down at the spot where his friend had died. Then he looked out over the swamp land.

"I understood there was a pretty clear trail indicating which way Drewes had come," said the agent. "I see nothing now."

"The swamp grass was all stomped down," said the sheriff. "But it's rained since and it's all sprung up again."

"You made no attempt to follow it when Hardwick showed up—done in?" There was a caustic note of criticism in Vane's voice that made the sheriff shift his feet uneasily.

"Well, you see, I figured there was no use in that," he said. "I knew the murderer would be miles away by then."

"I see," said Dominick Vane. "You didn't think it worth while setting out after a man who had brutally killed two other men." He drew deeply on his cigarette and then flicked it away into the ditch. "What lies out there?" he asked, pointing to the dreary swamp land.

"Marsh fer about a mile," said the sheriff. "Then you come to the barrens."

"The barrens?"

"Pine barrens," said the sheriff. "Ain't nobody lives out there except a few half-wit squatters that've been there for years. Nobody bothers to kick 'em off because the land ain't good for anything anyway."

"Is this the only way to get there—through this swamp?"

"Oh, no. Up to the other end of town there's a sort of a road that goes in most of the way."

"Let's go," said Dominick Vane.

"You're goin' into the barrens?" the sheriff asked incredulously.

His little eyes blinked.

"At once," said Vane.

"You won't get nothin' out of them people in there," the sheriff said. "They're all looney."

"Let's not waste any more time talking about it," said Vane.

THE sheriff drove his car in sulky silence. He wasn't accustomed to being dealt with quite so sharply. He was a person of importance in Marshfield and this government agent had no business ordering him around this way—even if he was a big shot.

Dominick Vane was far too absorbed with his own thoughts to take any notice of the other man's injured feelings. This was no ordinary murder case. Somehow Ted Drewes had got onto something of immense importance and had died in consequence. Yet why, if someone wanted to silence him, had they taken this clumsy method of throwing acid in his face and then let him go? If Hardwick had come on him sooner in that roadside ditch he might have been able to tell his whole story. And Hardwick, in turn, had been permitted to get away. He too had seen something. Hundreds of men without faces and a white-haired monster! What *had* he seen? And who had killed him and Drewes? There was nothing—not a single clue of any sort as yet—to give even the faintest suggestion as to what lay behind the death of these two representatives of the law.

The sheriff broke in on Vane's reverie. "Young Jaxon lives over there," he said, pointing to a big, white colonial house set back from the road.

"Jaxon?"

"Sure. That's where Hardwick turned up. In Jaxon's garden. Lousy with money, young Jaxon is. Nephew of H. R. Dawson."

"Wait a minute," said Vane. "Let's go in and have a talk with young Mr. Jaxon before we go any farther, Sheriff. There may be something he can tell us. Hardwick may have said something, or Jaxon may have noticed something that would be of use to us."

"Blind alley there," said the sheriff. "I asked him plenty the day Hardwick turned up. He don't know anything."

"If you don't mind," said Dominick Vane coldly, "I'd like to do my own questioning."

"Say, look here . . ." The sheriff's face was beet red.

"That seems to be the entrance on the right," said Dominick Vane.

The sheriff swung the wheel of the car so sharply that they nearly skidded into one of the stone entrance gates. "I just want you to know, Mr. Vane," he said angrily, "that we aren't so dumb around here as you seem to think. If Jaxon had seen or heard anything he'd have told me. You can count on that."

"Lovely willow trees along this drive," said Dominick Vane.

"Okay, Mr. Wise Guy," said Waters. "We'll see just how smart *you* are." And he brought the car to a grinding halt before the magnificent entrance to Philip Jaxon's house. Vane had got a glimpse, as they came up the drive, of extensive stables at the back of the house. He remembered Corcoran saying that young Jaxon was something of a horseman.

A butler answered Vane's ring at the front door bell. "I'll see if Mr. Jaxon is at home," he said. Presently he returned. "If you gentlemen will come this way . . ."

THE butler led them through a great entrance hall that ran the length of the house to a pair of French doors at the rear. Outside these doors was a flagstone terrace overlooking a lovely garden. There were two people on the terrace—a young man and a very pretty girl. Philip Jaxon sat sprawled in a wicker armchair, a highball glass in his hand. He was dark, brown as a nut, handsome in a sort of collar-ad way; a young man a little dissipated, a

little too cynical for his own good, but with a very level pair of dark brown eyes that looked with interest at his callers. The girl too was dark, smart, brilliantly beautiful. The scarlet of her lips matched the flame colored tea gown she was wearing. She was vaguely familiar to Vane, who suddenly realized that he had seen her picture often in the rotogravue sections.

"Ah, Sheriff, sleuthing again?" Philip Jaxon drawled, without rising from his chair.

"Not today," said Waters. "I'm just conductin' a Cook's tour." He gave Vane a malicious look. "This here is a Government agent from Washington who wants to ask you a few questions."

Jaxon threw up his hands in a mock gesture of surrender. "Don't shoot," he said. "I've paid my income tax."

"My name is Vane," said the agent dryly. "I want to ask you one or two questions about Trooper Hardwick."

"Not Dominick Vane, the scourge of the Scorsi boys!" cried Jaxon. "Angela, we were talking about Mr. Vane only this morning." The girl gave Vane a keen, interested look from beneath her dark lashes. Jaxon's voice had a note of respect in it. "That was a devilish brave thing you did, breaking in on those three murderous mutts single-handed! Sit down. Have a drink. Tell us about it."

"Can't you be polite in the presence of a national hero, Philip?" asked the girl. "Introduce me, please."

"Sorry," grinned Jaxon. "Mr. Vane, this is Miss Angela Dawson who might be Mrs. Jaxon, except that she consistently refuses to marry me. But a Jaxon never fails to get his missus. Highball, Mr. Vane?"

"Thanks, no," said Dominick Vane. He was irritated. He hated any talk of his exploits, and he was in no mood for bantering. "Hardwick died about an hour ago," he said.

"Poor devil," said Jaxon. "They told me he didn't have a chance. Did he talk before he died?"

"No," said Vane. "I've come to see you in the hope that you can tell me something I don't already know. Something that you may not have recalled at the time Sheriff Waters questioned you."

"There isn't a blessed thing," said Jaxon. "Hardwick just stumbled into the garden there and collapsed. Never said a word. Of course you've figured it out, as I have, that whatever happened to him took place down in the pine barrens somewhere."

"Sure, we figured that out all right," the sheriff chimed in. "Mr. Vane is all for going down there but I tell him it's a waste of time. Them pineys won't be able to tell him nothing, and the murderer will be hundreds of miles away by now. And anyhow," he added as an afterthought, "it'll be dark in a couple of hours. We wouldn't be able to find anything out tonight."

"The sheriff's right, Mr. Vane. The pineys are a rum lot. You won't get much out of them," Jaxon said.

"None the less," said Vane acidly, "it seems rather elementary to me that in investigating a crime one shouldn't avoid the scene where it took place. I wouldn't bother you, Waters, but I would probably get myself nicely lost without a decent guide."

"Look here, Vane," said Jaxon with alacrity, "if the sheriff doesn't want to take you, I'd be delighted. I know that country like a book."

"Gosh, Mr. Jaxon, would you really?" said Waters eagerly. "There's business in town I ought to look after."

"What do you say, Vane?" Jaxon asked.

Dominick Vane hesitated a moment. Jaxon would undoubtedly be a better guide than the sulky sheriff. On the other hand, the pine barrens didn't seem to be a very healthy place for investigators at the moment. It was a risk he shouldn't let the young millionaire take.

"I used to know some of the pineys as a kid," said Jaxon. "They might even talk for me. But as I said, they're a rum lot. Undernourished, interbred for generations—they aren't very bright. A lot of 'em are albinos, you know."

"Albinos!" Vane's voice cracked sharply.

"Sure. White hair and pink eyes."

"Yes, I know," said Dominick Vane softly. He was thinking of Hardwick's last words. A *white-haired* monster!

It was then that Dominick Vane made a decision for which he was very grateful a little later. Jaxon knew the country; he even knew some of the pineys; he was eager to go. He would be a hundred times more useful than the antagonistic sheriff.

"Come along," Vane said, "if you really want to go with me, Mr. Jaxon."

Jaxon sprang out of his chair, his languid manner gone. "Great stuff," he said. "I've got a couple of electric torches in the house. We'd better have those because it will be dark before we get back."

"Have you got a gun?" Vane asked quietly.

"Sure. You think . . . ?"

"I think you'd better bring it—just in case."

Angela Dawson looked up at Vane. "You think there's danger?" she asked.

"Drewes and Hardwick didn't find it exactly healthy," said Dominick Vane.

"There ain't nothing to worry about, Miss Dawson," said the sheriff. "It's like I said, the murderer will be hundreds of miles away by this time."

"Has it occurred to you, Waters, that he was still around a good many hours after he attacked Drewes? He was still there when Hardwick caught up with him. I'm not at all convinced that we won't find him there now!" Vane looked at Jaxon steadily. "I want you to understand that this may be no picnic."

"Fine!" said Jaxon. "I hate picnics."

CHAPTER III

SQUADS RIGHT

THEY went on foot, for there was no adequate road into the Barrens. At first they talked a little. It was perhaps two miles to the nearest piney settlement, Jaxon told the agent. They had lived there for generations, these strange people, in a land where nothing would grow. How they kept body and soul together was a mystery. Completely illiterate these people were, with less contact with the civilized world than the Kentucky mountaineers, even though they were comparatively close to the greatest center of civilization in the world. They weren't vicious, Jaxon said, but childish in the extreme, utterly primitive in their point of view and in their way of life.

"A man could hide out among them for months and never be discovered," said Jaxon, "because nobody ever comes here."

And then, because Jaxon was sharing this adventure with him, Vane told him the whole truth; told him what Drewes had said to Corcoran. He told him of Hardwick's strange dying words: *"Hundreds of men without faces . . . and a white-haired monster!"*

Jaxon looked blankly at Vane. "It doesn't make any sense, does it?" And

his voice echoed strangely in the cathedral-like silence of the great pine forest.

"The bit about the white-haired monster I think you've already explained to me," said Vance. "One of your albino pineys. If Hardwick saw him after he'd been injured the man might have seemed grotesque and horrible to him."

"Of course," said Jaxon, and he laughed a little nervously. "It has a very delirious sound to it—yet it might have been one of the pineys he saw. But . . . but the men without faces? What do you make of that?"

"Nothing . . . yet," Vane said.

And then he stopped walking. They had come into a sort of clearing and what he saw made Vane stare with a puzzled look in his eyes. The ground was pitted with holes—holes with earth and stone thrown about them.

"Now why the devil should anyone be digging holes out here in the middle of this waste?" Jaxon asked.

Vane went forward and stood on the edge of one of the pits. The muscles of his jaw rippled under the skin of his cheeks as he looked. Then he turned to Jaxon and asked, in a curious voice:

"How old are you, Jaxon?"

"Twenty-six. What the devil has my age got to do with it?"

"You were too young to have been in the war," said the agent. "I wondered. Because these, my friend, are *shell holes!*" He stopped and picked up a fragment of metal. "They were made by a small field piece of some sort."

"Shell holes!" Jaxon stared, utterly incredulous. "Vane, are you sure?"

"Positive," said Vane grimly. He looked up at the tree tops bordering the clearing. "From that direction," he said, pointing, "judging from the way the trees on that side are damaged."

"But what is anyone doing firing off a field piece out in this forsaken place?"

"That's what we'll have to discover," said Vane.

THEY stood in silence for a moment. Darkness was descending rapidly now, even there in the shell-pitted clearing. For a moment Dominick Vane had an overwhelming desire to turn back; for that one moment he was aware of a cautioning foreboding. It would be better to go back for more men, something told him. Ted Drewes had been unable to cope with the danger that lay ahead, and Drewes had had some inkling of what it was all about.

He drew a deep breath. "Game to go ahead?" he asked Jaxon.

"Why not?" said Jaxon. "Do we head in the direction from which these shells were fired or do we go toward the village?"

"I suggest the village," said Vane. "We may be able to get some direct information there that will save us a lot of guesswork."

They walked on for a bit. It was almost completely dark now. Jaxon took out the electric torch from his pocket.

"Use it as sparingly as possible," said Vane. "I haven't any particular desire to announce our coming."

They proceeded in silence, Jaxon flashing on the torch from time to time to spot some landmark he knew, for there was no clearly defined path now. Presently Dominick Vane stopped him, hand on his arm.

"Lights over to the right," he said. There was a rise in the land and from over beyond it a faint, flickering glow illuminated the trees and sky. It looked as if it might come from some sort of

burning torch. Jaxon started to speak when from the distance came a voice, clear, metallic, sharp:

"Right by squads. March!" Then there was utter silence.

Vane and Jaxon stared at each other. Jaxon coughed. "Funny sickish smell in the air," he said. "Get it?"

Vane did. He got a whiff of some acrid stuff that seemed to burn the lining of his nose and throat.

"Column left. March!" came that metallic voice across the barrens.

"What is it?" said Jaxon. His voice sounded shaken.

"Let's head toward the light. We may be able to see something," said Vane. "Quiet as possible." And then he coughed, his throat burned by that unpleasant vapor that had suddenly pervaded the night air.

They moved on silently forward toward the glowing light that showed over the rise in the land and, as they moved, that strange metallic voice kept repeating a series of military commands. There was not another sound in the night. The air grew heavier with that sultry, sickish smell. Once they stopped while Jaxon choked back a strangling fit of coughing. No swamp ever gave off such acrid burning vapors as these, thought Vane.

As they approached the top of the rise in the ground, the glowing of the flickering light was much brighter . . . unquestionably from some sort of stationary torch. The commanding voice grew louder and yet there was no other sound, not even the crackling of a twig.

Then they reached the top of the hill.

Jaxon was the first to see, and his hand shot out and gripped Vane's arm so tightly his fingernails bit deep into the G-man's arm.

"Look!" he whispered, choking as he spoke. "The men without faces."

Vane looked. His lungs felt scorched. His eyes burned like fire. Yet he, too, saw. There was a wide square clearing over the brow of the hill. Stuck in the ground at various points were torches on the end of long sticks, giving a weird flickering light to the astonishing scene that lay before their eyes. Several hundred men were marching in military formation . . . there was not a sound as they trod on ground deep in a soft carpet of pine needles. *And they had no faces!*

SUDDENLY Dominick Vane found that he could not concentrate on this strange sight. His head was swelling up to an enormous size like a balloon, and then contracting until it seemed to him that the bones of his skull were going to be crushed. The whole scene wavered drunkenly before his eyes . . . the men were first enormously tall and then, an instant later, like distorted pygmies. Jaxon, beside him, suddenly began to laugh . . . mad, hysterical laughter.

Dominick Vane had one moment of clear thought left to him. Gas! And those marching men were wearing gas masks. And he and Jaxon were done for unless they got out fast! Drunkenly he staggered to his feet, grabbing Jaxon by the arm and yanking him to his feet.

"Run!" he said hoarsely. "Run for your life!"

Jaxon ran, laughing crazily. Vane plunged into the trunk of a pine tree, fell, struggled up once more and stumbled on. His lungs were on fire; tears were streaming from his scalding eyes. It was like some ghoul-filled nightmare. The sensation of swelling and contracting was growing more acute. Vane could hear the metallic voice of the commander of those

masked troops shouting something that was now no more than a mad gibberish. Jaxon ran ahead of him, looking like a crooked figure reflected in a cracked mirror.

And then suddenly Vane fell . . . into a cool pond of still water. Jaxon was there ahead of him, sucking moisture into his tortured throat, bathing his seared eyes. The air was sweeter here. They must have run a long way. Vane, sick and dizzy, thought how easy it would be to sink under the cool surface of the water and die. Then he saw the monster . . . the thing that Hardwick, as he lay dying, had called the *white-haired monster!*

It crouched on the opposite bank of the pool, teeth bared in a diabolical grin. It was in the shape of a man, yet somehow the long white hair drooping down to the shoulders, the glittering little pink eyes, were like nothing human.

Yet it was a man. Vane heard Jaxon cry out:

"Furno! You know me! It's Philip Jaxon!"

The white-haired thing laughed—a horrible, gloating sound. In its hands it held a long brass tube which looked like a fire extinguisher. The plunger was drawn back and it was pointed at Jaxon.

"Furno fix so no one know you!"—A frightening falsetto voice—frightening because it was the toneless voice of an idiot.

Dominick Vane tugged at the revolver in the holster under his arm. The whole world was whirling around him now, but somehow he knew that he must get out that gun or he and Jaxon would face the same fate that Ted Drewes had met. The roar of the revolver was the last thing Vane remembered.

CHAPTER IV

WALL STREET

DOMINICK VANE opened his eyes. It was daylight. He was lying between cool white sheets of a very comfortable bed. A streak of morning sunlight stretched across the soft gray of the ceiling. For a moment or two Vane could not seem to collect his thoughts—could not remember where he was or how he had gotten there. He turned his head slowly on the pillow. Then he remembered that nightmare of the pine barrens, and he wondered if it was not in reality just that—a bad dream.

"How do you feel, old man?"

Vane turned quickly to see Philip Jaxon standing beside the bed, dressed in a handsome silk robe, looking down at him with a wry smile. Then Vane remembered that last moment of consciousness: the white-haired creature on the bank of the pool pointing the extinguisher at Jaxon.

"We're at my place," said Jaxon, seeing bewilderment in the agent's eyes. "We had a close squeak, if you ask me."

"How did we get here?" Vane asked, struggling to recall something beyond that moment in the pool of water.

"Carried you most of the way on my back," said Jaxon casually, "until we got close enough to home for me to yowl for help."

Vane sat up in bed and ran his fingers nervously through his hair. "I'm not dreaming, am I, Jaxon? We did see marching men in gas masks? We did nearly pass out as a result of inhaling the stuff? We did run into Hardwick's white-haired monster?"

"We did," said Jaxon grimly. "And if you hadn't shot him I doubt very

much if we'd be talking about it now."

"I shot him?"

"You emptied your gun into his chest," said Jaxon quietly. He took a cigarette from the pocket of his silk robe and lit it. "Then you passed out." He looked down at his fingernails. "I had the foresight to bring that little brass tube along with me, Vane. I squirted a drop or two of its contents on a piece of cloth in the kitchen. It eats through cloth and wood like fire. It's plenty bad stuff . . . and Furno was about to let go with a charge of it full into my face. You saved my life."

"And you mine," said Vane.

"Let's forget that part of it," said Jaxon. He sat down on the edge of the bed and looked into Vane's haggard face. "What does it all mean, Dominick?" he asked. "What's going on out there? What were those men drilling for?"

"I don't know," said Vane. He passed a hand over his eyes, which were still sore and red from the encounter with the gas the night before. "I only got a moment's look at them before I realized we had to get out of there. They were armed with rifles."

"Right. And there were little crimson bands around the sleeves of the gray shirts they wore. Those men weren't pineys, Dominick."

"But the man you called Furno?" Vane asked.

"One of the pineys I knew," said Jaxon. "Where he got hold of that little brass toy of his I don't know."

"From our friends with the rifles, the artillery, the gas masks and the gas," said Vane. He swung his feet over the side of the bed. "Look here, Philip, how many people know what happened to us last night?"

"Only Angela knows the real truth," said Jaxon. "She was waiting when we got back. I had to tell her, but she'll be silent as a clam. She promised not to say a word to anyone until you came to and decided on a course of action. The servants simply think we had an accident of some sort."

"Good," said Dominick Vane. His strength was slowly coming back to him. "I must get in touch with Washington at once. Then we'll decide what to do."

"I'll have the butler plug a phone in here for you," said Jaxon. "You'll be able to talk in complete privacy that way." As he finished speaking there came a discreet knock at the door. "Well?"

"It's Devins, sir." The door opened to disclose the butler. "Your uncle, Mr. Dawson, and a friend are here, sir. They—"

BUT before the butler could finish a man brushed past him and came into the room. H. R. Dawson was almost as familiar a figure in America as the President. Everyone knew this suave, elegant man of fifty-five, said to be the greatest financial power in the country. He was immaculate in a short black coat and striped gray trousers. He wore a gray silk cravat against his wing collar, ornamented by a handsome black pearl stick-pin. The waxed gray mustache and sleek gray hair completed a picture of rich sartorial dignity.

"Philip, my boy, I couldn't wait to be announced," he said. "I was terribly anxious about you."

"Anxious, uncle?"

"After your experience of last night, of course!" H. R. Dawson's voice had just the proper note of concern in it. "This gentleman is, I presume, Mr. Vane? Thank God you are both quite all right."

Jaxon was about to reply when another man came into the room. A fat man in a plain business suit. He wore a soft-brimmed black hat pulled down over squinting little black eyes that were sunk in pouchy sockets. He was a big man, broad of shoulder, huge of girth, and yet he walked with an almost catlike tread. He had flabby, sensuous lips which he kept moistening with the tip of his tongue. His shirt was none too clean, and there were food stains on the rather gaudy purple tie he wore.

"Ah, Moxelli," said H. R. Dawson, "this is my nephew, Philip Jaxon, and his friend, Mr. Vane. Moxelli is a business associate of mine, Philip."

The thick lips of Moxelli twisted into a curious little one-sided smile. "I am delighted to meet you both," he said. His voice was soft, almost a whisper. The little pig eyes looked only at Dominick Vane, who still sat on the edge of his bed. "You had quite a time, by all accounts."

"Look here, uncle, how the devil did you know anything about last night?" Jaxon asked sharply.

"Why—Angela told me, of course," said Dawson smoothly.

"I'm rather surprised," said Jaxon. "Because she promised me to say nothing to anyone."

"You could hardly expect her to keep it from me, her father, Philip," said H. R. Dawson. "Moxelli happened to be at the house at the time and we were both very much concerned about you. For heaven's sake tell us exactly what happened."

Dominick Vane spoke for the first time. "Perhaps Miss Dawson also told you that I am a government agent, Mr. Dawson. I am very anxious that nothing of our experience should be known until we've had a chance to investigate further."

Moxelli smiled that one-sided little smile. "Is there more to know than that you found men drilling in the middle of the pine barrens, that you were nearly badly gassed, and that you had to kill a man to keep him from emptying a container of acid in your faces?" he asked softly.

Vane's cold blue eyes were fixed on the fat man's face. "You seem to be thoroughly informed," he said. "I can only ask that you keep this entirely to yourselves until such time as we see fit to break the story."

"Anything you say, of course," said H. R. Dawson hastily. "But I am gravely concerned for my nephew's safety. Of course it is too late to criticize your judgment, Mr. Vane, in taking him on this expedition with you. But now that it has been done I am wondering as to what his best course of action would be. You are quite obviously up against some sort of very sinister business. Philip knows so much his life may be in danger. I came here to suggest that he leave Marshfield at once until the government forces have cleared up this business."

"My judgment may have been faulty," said Vane coldly, "but it so happens your nephew saved my life."

"My dear sir," said H. R. Dawson, "I am not questioning Philip's courage. I simply think he should get as far away from this mess as he can until it is cleared up. Come down to my place on Long Island, Philip, and stay there until this thing has blown over."

"I rather think I'll stay here and string along with Vane if he'll have me," said Philip.

"That would be a mistake," said Moxelli, very softly indeed.

For a moment no one spoke. Somehow the whole atmosphere seemed to be electrically charged. Dawson tugged

nervously at one of the waxed ends of his mustache. Moxelli only smiled that one-sided smile, and licked his lips. His eyes never left Dominick Vane's face, as if he were fascinated by the government man.

"If you don't mind, uncle," said Philip Jaxon, "I think I'll talk this over with Vane. We've been in this together up to now. If he thinks it's advisable for me to leave Marshfield, I'll let you know."

There was a silence, as shrill—somehow—as the sharpest of noises. Uncle and nephew surveyed each other coolly, questioning, appraising, deciding.

H. R. Dawson shrugged his elegant shoulders. "I cannot force you to follow my advice, Philip. All I can say is that I think it would be criminally foolish for you to lift another finger in this affair."

"Better do what your uncle says," said Moxelli.

"I'm very grateful to you for your interest in my safety, Mr. Moxelli," said Jaxon coldly, "but I must ask you to allow me to make my own decisions."

Moxelli moistened his thick lips. "It's your funeral," he said. Almost reluctantly, it seemed, he looked away from Dominick Vane to Dawson. "We'd better be getting right along," he said.

Dawson nodded. "I can only urge you earnestly to consider my suggestion, Philip. Goodbye. Goodbye, Mr. Vane."

Alone, Jaxon and Vane looked at one another in silence for a moment.

"Queer sort of business associate, that fellow Moxelli," said Jaxon.

"Very queer indeed," said Dominick Vane. "The man was a walking arsenal, Philip. Gun under each arm—and the eyes of a killer if I ever saw them."

CHAPTER V

EXTERMINATION

CONSULTATION with Corcoran in Washington brought about some very quick action. A little more than an hour later, under Vane's leadership, a body of State Police augmented by about fifteen G-men who were rushed from Washington by plane, began an excursion into the barrens. Armed to the teeth, this force was, with rifles, rapid-fire guns, grenades, and gas masks. It was a trail of death they followed, for as they approached the clearing, where the night before Vane and Jaxon had seen the masked men drilling, they found the barrens littered with the dead bodies of animals and birds; a fox or two, woodchucks, squirrels, birds of all kinds, and even the bony carcass of a mongrel dog.

Vane had been leading the way with a G-man named Morse, who had worked with him before, at his elbow. "Looks as though you and your friend Jaxon got out of here just in time last night. That gas must have been bad stuff."

Vane looked puzzled. "I wonder, Roy. Or was this something else that was turned loose later?" He felt a cold chill run along his spine. "The piney village lies just ahead, according to Jaxon. You don't suppose . . ." He didn't finish, but he quickened his stride, that diamond-hard light glittering in his eyes. Somehow he knew what they were going to find, yet the idea was so horrible that he refused to accept it.

They found the great open space where the men had drilled, the burnt-out torches still stuck in the ground. Beyond were the shacks of the piney

village, yet there was no sign of life there now. No one appeared to greet them as they moved swiftly forward, weapons drawn, ready for any sort of surprise attack that might await them. But no attack came.

Outside the first shack they reached lay another dead dog, his nose pressed against the rickety door as if he had been trying to get in when he died. Gun in hand Dominick Vane kicked open the door of the shack and went in.

"Mother of—!" It was a hoarse whisper from Morse at Vane's elbow.

There were five dead people in the shack, a man, a woman, and three children. The man was an albino, as were the three children. There were no wounds of any sort on the bodies.

"Some kind of lethal gas," said Dominick Vane grimly.

They went on, and in every shack of that miserable little community they found the owners dead. Not a single person out of more than fifty had escaped, not an animal for a distance of nearly a mile in all directions had survived. Everywhere was complete destruction of life in every form. The pineys had been harboring some outside force, that was clear, but with the danger of discovery imminent that force had brutally wiped out those wretched people who had sheltered them. Not a living soul remained to tell these officers of the law what had been going on out here in the silence of the woods.

Nor was there any trace of the armament that Vane knew must have existed —no trace of the guns that had pitted the woods with shell holes—no trace of the rifles with which that sinister force had been drilling. Later they found the body of Furno, lying by the little pool where Vane had shot him. The destruction of that village was complete.

PHILIP JAXON had not accompanied Vane on this expedition. The G-men had received orders from Washington, strict orders to exclude him. Corcoran had explained it on a routine basis, but something in his voice had puzzled Vane. He wondered if by any chance H. R. Dawson had already used his influence to make certain his nephew had no part in things.

But Jaxon, champing, restless on the bit at home, was not to have an entirely eventless morning. Just a little before noon Devins came out onto the terrace with a card on a little silver tray. Jaxon looked at it.

Mr. Samuel Seaver
Real Estate

Ordinarily Jaxon might not have seen him, but this morning anything was better than inaction.

"Show him out here, Devins," he said.

Jaxon took an instinctive dislike to Mr. Samuel Seaver. He was a slim young man with black hair brushed slickly back from a very low forehead, and there was a curious, almost Oriental slant to his black eyes. He smiled a very white-toothed smile and held out an unpleasantly moist hand to the young sportsman.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Seaver?" Philip asked, without enthusiasm.

Mr. Seaver pulled one of the wicker chairs close to Philip and sat down. "I've got a wonderful proposition for you, Mr. Jaxon—a really wonderful proposition." He rubbed his hands together as though the thought of it was excessively pleasant to him. "I've got a client. He wants to rent your house for the summer."

"My house is not for rent," said Philip coldly.

Seaver laughed. "But there is a price for everything, eh, Mr. Jaxon. My client has been all over Jersey, all over Long Island, all over Westchester, and yours is the only place he has seen that he wants. He is prepared to offer you ten thousand dollars for your place from now till October."

"I have already told you the place is not for rent," said Jaxon.

"Fifteen thousand! How about fifteen thousand, Mr. Jaxon?"

"Nothing doing," said Philip, with finality.

Mr. Seaver looked distressed. "You must know how it is with a very rich man, Mr. Jaxon. When he wants something he wants it. Price is no object. Suppose you say what you would rent it for."

"I wouldn't rent it for anything, Mr. Seaver. I built the place because I like it myself, and I want to live here myself, and I'm not renting. Who is this client of yours anyhow?"

"I'm not at liberty to say," said Mr. Seaver.

Philip was suddenly very angry. He believed along with Vane that he had been excluded from that expedition into the barrens because of his uncle's influence. Now he suspected that this was another move of Dawson's to get him away from Marshfield.

Again Philip faced a man, questioning, testing, deciding.

"Tell your client," he said grimly, "that nothing on earth would persuade me to give up the place; that I expect to live here all summer myself. There is nothing more to be said about it, Mr. Seaver."

Seaver shrugged. "You might be sorry," he said.

Philip got up so abruptly from his chair that it fell over backwards on the flagstone terrace. "Get out!" he rapped.

IT WAS late afternoon before Dominick Vane returned to the Jaxon house. He had made a report to Washington of the discovery of the Village of the Dead. Corcoran had ordered him to stay on the scene for a few hours more unless, at his own judgment, something should turn up that would justify his leaving. Telegraph wires were clicking to all parts of the country to manufacturers of arms. Who had supplied hundreds of rifles to a secret organization? Who had equipped them with gas masks? What chemical plant had produced a lethal gas which had wiped out a whole village in the course of a night and laid waste to the fauna of the countryside? Military and Naval intelligence operatives were on the job as well as the G-men. Vane had sent the brass tube of acid, wihch the albino Furno had dropped, to a famous laboratory in New York. First reports were that the acid was an unknown product to them. It would take time to make an analysis of it.

Somehow, after the terrible day, Philip's story of the visit of Samuel Seaver seemed a little tame to Vane.

"Your uncle seems determined to get you out of here, Philip," he said.

Philip had offered, in fact had insisted, that Vane stay at the Marshfield house along with Roy Morse, the other G-man. Morse sat most of the night at the telephone picking up reports from the Department in Washington, trying to piece them together into a picture that made sense. Dominick Vane slept. He was close to exhaustion. After midnight Morse curled up on a couch in the living room, close to the phone. There was no definite information of any kind. Every arms manufacturer in the country denied the sale of rifles, machine guns, field pieces, gas masks, or any other equipment to any organi-

zation unlicensed by the government. No chemical plant would admit the sale of gas, or the manufacture of an acid like that in Furno's brass tube. It was a very blank wall they found themselves against.

And then about five-thirty in the morning the Jaxon household was thrown into an uproar. Morse was wakened by a hysterical pounding on the front door which quickly roused everyone else. Jaxon, Vane, Devens, all came running. The front door was thrown open to disclose Ryan, Jaxon's head groom in a state bordering on collapse.

"Please, sir, come down to the stables at once."

A ghastly spectacle awaited them. Six fine hunters and four crack polo ponies lay dead in their stalls. Two spotted Dalmatian coach dogs were stretched out on the floor. And upstairs, in a loft room, the body of a stable boy was crumpled near the door he had tried to open in an effort at escape.

Philip stood leaning against an upright beam, dazed, unashamed tears running down his cheeks. The stable boy had been a faithful servant. He had loved these animals. Morse, Devens and the groom seemed as stunned as the stricken young owner. Only Dominick Vane retained anything of balance. He examined the body of the stable boy.

"The same thing we encountered in the barrens," he said grimly, "—gas." He turned on Ryan, the groom. "What time were the stables closed?"

"About ten o'clock, sir. That was when Jerry and I turned in. Jerry was a fine lad, sir."

"Not a sniff of anything in the air now," said Dominick Vane. "They must have gone to work shortly after you shut up shop." He paused abruptly, his eyes on the inside of the big stable doors. "Look," he said harshly.

Scrawled across the door in big crimson letters was a message:

JAXON!
GET OUT UNLESS YOU WANT SOME OF THIS.

Philip Jaxon cried: "We've got to find them, Vane! *We've got to find them!*"

Dominick's face was white and tense. "I think we may have been doing your uncle an injustice, Philip," he said. "He wouldn't turn his hand to anything like this to get you out of here." Then he pounded his clenched fist into the palm of the other hand. "Seaver!" he cried. "Did you save that card, Philip? Was there an address on it?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

A Hole in the Moon

By GEORGES SURDEZ

Author of "Long Live the Emperor," "Madame X of the Legion," etc.

I

SERGEANT MAUREL perceived with dismay that his suspicions had been justified. His colleague and senior in rank, Sergeant Langlais, had no stomach for fighting.

In the world at large, of course, such a lapse might not have proved a serious shortcoming, but it was a grave fault in a non-commissioned officer of the French Foreign Legion. For if every individual started to think of what might happen to his carcass, of what an unsightly cadaver he would make, the Legion might as well be disbanded.

"He's showing it, too! The dirty—"

Maurel added a few colorful qualifications, without realizing that the only thing to be held against Langlais was that "he was showing it." No sane, healthy man would have been at ease

A Complete Novelet of the French Foreign Legion

on the slope, creeping from cover to cover under the blazing Moroccan sun, with the bushes ahead spitting flame and a nasty cross-fire lashing knee-high from the flank.

Being rather tall and wide, Maurel had felt several times that he was a good target, and a sensation of cold emptiness had clutched his middle. Even through his anger, the thought persisted that he would give a month's pay to be safe in Casablanca or Meknes, and another month's pay to be seated on a café terrace with a stein of beer in his paw.

His captain, Guichard, who shared Maurel's opinion of Langlais' courage, had given orders, precise orders, as to what to do in an emergency. Maurel's responsibility would not be involved, for the captain was not the one to go back on his word. Yet he was drenched, he felt, by two sorts of perspirations, one brought out by physical effort, the other by his mental confusion.

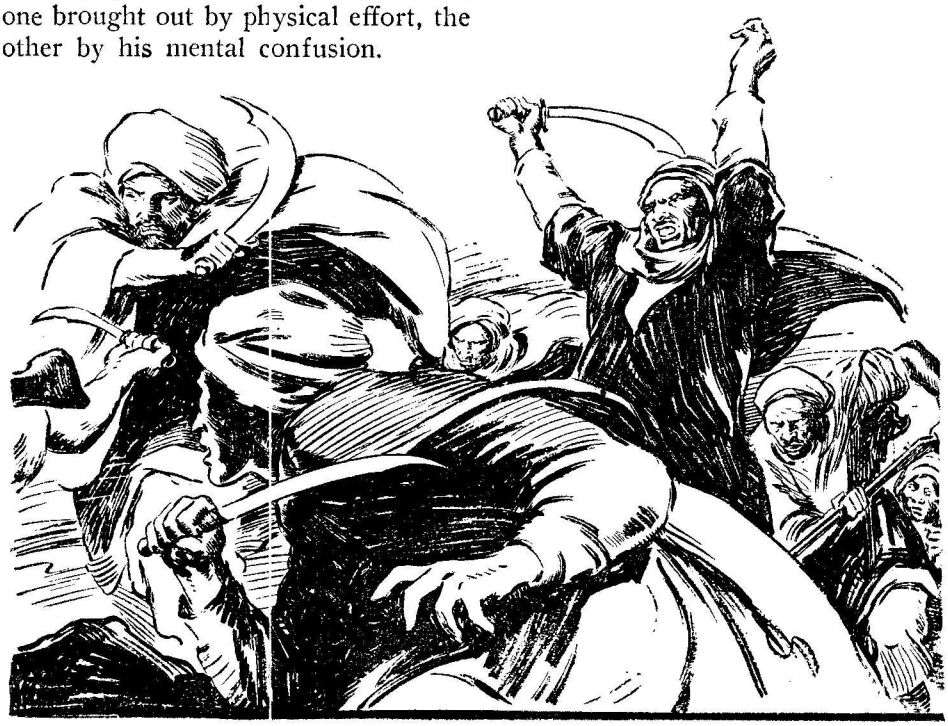
"No mess, he says—" Maurel thought: "Guichard wants no mess. Smart guy, he is. And what about all this: We're maneuvering like a pack of—"

He was not thinking of the Legion, for that would have been sacrilege. The Legion was doing its job, carrying out orders. But the combat as a whole, in his opinion, had been engaged too late in the day, or too far from its objective, a shallow pass through the hills. This was not a neat show, briskly finished with bayonet and grenade, but a persistent, dogged crawl, pushing back the alert, scrappy Chleuhs. Not a chance to win a decoration or a promotion in this lousy business today, but one could easily get killed off or mained for life.

His eye caught the signal.

"Allons-y!" he called. "Let's go!"

He wiped his clammy forehead with



his dirty palm as he started forward. Langlais had said nothing and was actually tottering on, silent, spiritless, as if cuffed about by his own terror. Maurel pitied him. Langlais was looking wildly for safety, and often his white hand covered his abdomen, in the instinctive gesture of the badly frightened man. His palate would be dry and bitter, he would feel his eyes hard as agates within his skull. Maurel saw those eyes now, popping out of his ashen mask.

"He's going to break and run—" he thought.

Flight was in the man's mind, and must be avoided at all cost. Guichard had made himself clear on that point: "Remember that this is a company of Legion, Maurel. That we shall be watched from the sides, from the rear. I want no scandal, no mess. You understand?" Which left it up to Maurel and the big automatic in his sweaty fist. Did Langlais know this?

If he had not been told, he sensed it, for his eyes rested on Maurel often. Perhaps he was begging for comfort, for a word of encouragement, even from a junior?

"Hot, isn't it?" Maurel called.

THIS was a stupid enough remark to shout across thirty yards, ten feet ahead of an advancing skirmish line. But Maurel knew that a casual voice might brace Langlais, grant him, as it were, his spiritual second wind. In any case, it would let him know that he was being watched. That might help.

Langlais opened his mouth, but his vocal cords did not function, for he ended with an unintelligible, hoarse yelp and a gashtly nod of agreement. Right and left, Maurel caught grins on the faces of Legionnaires. Sure, those mugs had guessed what was going on, what Maurel was trying to do. And they forgot their own stinking fear long enough to gloat because a guy wearing chevrons was more terrified than they were.

Maurel knew that somebody had been hit in Section Four, on the left of the line. Again, he had sensed this rather than seen it, by the perceptible "swaying" of the unit, as if the impacts that had knocked out two of its cells had carried through the hundred and eighty-four bodies of the company. Let one of those slugs smack into a man nearby, and that would do the trick: Langlais would crack and run. The sight of blood, of death, would melt his remaining courage. He would run or drop to cover.

In either case, Maurel would have to shoot him. He felt deep sympathy for the man, for a professional soldier of proved courage pities a coward, as a healthy man with sound limbs pities a cripple. But panic is contagious, and a coward must be removed from a fighting formation just as gangrened flesh is cut from a festering wound.

Maurel had orders.

"Down—Section Two—automatics at my orders—range five hundred—" As he shouted, Maurel saw the other *échelons* of the line rise to progress covered by the fire of the alternate sections. He had sunk to one knee, and indicated targets. He was in virtual command.

Some distance to the left, he saw Captain Guichard, standing as usual, solid and calm, resting on his walking-stick. If there was a man on the slope unconcerned with danger, Guichard was that man. But what did he have to lose? His whole life was the Legion, he was nothing except a soldier. He could not expect others to keep up with his inhuman standards.

Langlais was the exact opposite, a soldier only by accident of Fate, be-

cause of some unknown catastrophe. Anyone could see that he had had a fine education; he could play the piano and he had a pleasing singing voice. He read a lot of books and magazines, and had always preferred bookkeeping to soldiering. And, in his fifth year in the Legion, with but four or five months left to serve, he was forced into action, action which he had ducked successfully for fifty-five months!

He was out of place. The wisest course would have been to demote him, if needed, and ship him back to the regimental base when the battalion took the field. But an army officer could not reason that way.

And the result had brought Langlais here, lying so flat that his behind was actually higher than his head. One might have thought that he was trying to burrow face first into that pebbly soil. Would he get up and carry on when the signal came, the signal to rise which was due in a couple of minutes?

And if he didn't rise . . .?

Maurel shrugged and strolled across the thunderous slope. The sight of such cowardice had slain his own fear. He knelt by the man's side, touched the quivering shoulder. The pale face and the staring blue eyes turned toward him.

"How are you making out?" Maurel asked.

"I'm sick, you know. Reported sick when we started, reported again this morning—I reported sick—"

"We're all sick," Maurel snapped. "Maybe I'm not supposed to tell you. But you better stick it. I have orders."

"I know. *He* told me."

"He did, eh?" Maurel was startled. That made for a nice situation, for fine feelings between the two sergeants in the future! He grew furious: "You're a fool, Langlais! After what the colonel had said, you should have had better sense than to do what you did. Guichard can't swallow that, you know."

THEY had to shout, for the nearby automatics hacked the air with sound. And the men around them must have guessed what was going on, that Maurel was seeking to brace the other sergeant!

"Maurel, you couldn't — you wouldn't—"

"If you doubted it, you wouldn't have come this far."

"You—you're right—" Langlais surrendered completely. He was pathetic, nauseating. Maurel was red for the humiliation he could not feel himself. But there was no sense, no profit, in bawling Langlais out.

"It'll be over in a few minutes—they'll break and run any time now—"

A slug struck a round stone two or three yards away, shattered it, and there was a confused, bewildering shrieking of rock and metal particles. It sounded as loud as the explosion of a one-pounder shell, and Langlais' whole body shook.

"Come on, there's the signal. Get going."

Maurel did not dare leave Langlais alone now. The coward needed the "comfort" of his presence, the "reassuring" proximity of the .38's muzzle. Maurel yanked at his shoulder, heaved him erect.

"You're a stinking mess, you are," Maurel grunted.

And he whipped Langlais on with curses. The situation was not wholly new to him, or to anyone around. From time to time, even brave men buckle under the test. Maurel could remember a couple of cases when commissioned officers had had to be "encouraged" and carried along by their subordinates. But

theirs had been temporary fears, a peculiar sort of stage-fright, overcome in a few minutes.

With Langlais, it was different. He was like a puppet with broken string, he was as if annihilated by fear. And he was too old to learn quickly—his age on the record was thirty-two, but he was probably older. His plight was pitiful, but why had he enlisted in the Legion?

Captain Guichard spread his arms, lowered his hands.

The sections dropped to the ground. The entire company was halted. Maurel turned, inspected the slope. In long files, the accompanying artillery section was coming up. There would be a longer pause, until they had got to work. The sun was descending across the sky, the shadows were lengthening. Maurel nodded with satisfaction. He had been right, the action had been started too late.

Guichard had squatted and was smoking. Once, and only once, his glance met Maurel's, swept briefly over the crouching Langlais. And even at that distance, Maurel could see the clipped mustache lift in the familiar, sardonic grin. One could guess what he was thinking: "Eh, Langlais, my smart friend—you did not want to fight, you wanted to pull out of the Legion without fighting? That isn't done, fellow, that just isn't done!"

At this moment, there was no room for pity in Guichard's soul toward the sergeant. Langlais had broken a tradition, shamed his captain and his comrades. The captain would probably take away his chevrons later, transfer him as a private to some other outfit. But those chevrons, for which Langlais had been slated by Guichard, those chevrons would have gone into an attack. It would not be said truthfully that one of Guichard's sergeants had funked it.

II

THE trouble had started at Kheniffra, when the March Battalion had been assembling. Guichard's company, down from Meknes, had been assigned to active service at the last moment, after a despairing period of uncertainty when all had feared they would be put in the line of blockhouses while others reaped the glory.

Langlais had been a bookkeeper, a *sergent-comptable,* and a very efficient one. And he had been working in the company's office when the colonel had arrived to pass the battalion in review before the beginning of the operations. A fine chap, the colonel, a short, slim guy, as neat and sharp as the blade of a rapier. And his eyes had inspected Langlais, who stood at attention with the rest.

"Eh, eh, Guichard," he had remarked jovially. "Here's a rare phenomenon for one of your companies—a sergeant without a decoration! We'll have to mend that, you know." He addressed Langlais: "Say, my friend, how long have you been in the Legion?"

"Four years and some months, *mon colonel.*"

"What action did you see?"

"None, Colonel."

Guichard had stroked his mustache in annoyance. "You understand, Colonel," he explained, "Langlais came into my company as a corporal, and I promoted him. Excellent man at figures. Unfortunately, served chiefly in Algeria. But he will get his chance now. He has a brevet as section-commander, and I'll give him his opportunity."

Maurel knew that the colonel had not been displeased to tease Guichard a bit. The captain was a vain man, and the moment he took charge of a company, he presumed it to be the best in the

Legion—the instant a man joined his company, he became a warrior and a hero. As a matter of fact, the other sergeants could display imposing combat records—including six Legion of Honor and eleven military medals.

Guichard, however, had been too fair a man to blame Langlais for the little scene. What had aroused his anger had been the sergeant's request to be transferred to another unit on the pretext of poor health—weak ankles. The captain had refused to transmit his plea.

"In all my career in the Legion," he had told Langlais, "I have never had a man apply for medical examination and transfer on the eve of a campaign. The opposite occurred frequently, sick men trying to fake health to come along. You've been unfortunate in your Legion career, Langlais, since you have not found out that a Legionnaire is never ill when there is fighting ahead."

Langlais, foolishly enough, had tried to go over his head, and with his knowledge of regulations, had contrived to pass before the medical board. He had been declared fit!

Guichard's rage had been something to behold. "You were trying to crawl out—you made me a laughing-stock! Well, he laughs best who laughs last. You'll fight, my clever friend—you'll fight! You'll go under fire, if I have to have you carried to the front on a stretcher! And you'll go as a sergeant, with your chevrons in evidence!"

"You misunderstood my motive, Captain—" Langlais protested.

"I hope I did. I'd hate to think I signed my name at the bottom of your application—if my suspicions should be right."

After that, Langlais' life had been a hell. Perhaps Captain Guichard had hoped that the sergeant would be forced to bravery by the public scorn showed him. Perhaps, he had not bothered to think of the matter abstractly, for he was a real soldier, solid metal throughout. The men persecuted Langlais in a bizarre fashion, by showing him extreme respect and punctilious obedience.

"Yes, Sergeant. At once, Sergeant As you order, Sergeant."

To the other non-coms in the company, Langlais had become a sort of leper. They knew that Guichard's wrath lay heavy upon him, and waited for him to prove himself. Maurel, younger and probably more sensitive, had tried to buck him up.

And it was possibly as an indirect lesson for his misplaced sympathy that Guichard had selected him to follow up the suspected man. One seldom knew how much of what the captain did was prompted by a wish to teach discipline and correct "army thought."

MAUREL was relieved when, at dusk, the Chleuhs abandoned their positions and retreated toward the Pass. The company marched back a couple of miles, to the encampment selected. After the hard labor of throwing up a defensive wall of stones, of linking position to position with shallow trenches, the non-coms reported to Guichard, who sat before his small tent, on a folding stool.

Night had fallen completely, and the officer's silhouette seemed more formidable in the semi-darkness of the camp than in broad light — it enhanced the massiveness of his shoulders, the forward push of his boar-like head. He listened to the reports, commenting with a brief word, an order.

"Only three wounded," he concluded. "Not bad. You may go. Maurel, Langlais, remain." A match scratched, flared, flickered over the bowl of his pipe. His strong nose was outlined redly. Then

he spoke, in a very low voice: "I am not pleased with you, Maurel."

"Sorry, Captain."

"You left your assigned position in the advance. Your group was in charge of a corporal most of the time. I have no business going in to your motivating impulse. But you assumed charge of the section—*before its commander had fallen.* I did not instruct you to do this. Sergeant Langlais?"

"Captain—"

"You allowed a subordinate to supersede you in charge of your section. That is not done. You know that I have my own reasons to maintain you in your present rank. Otherwise, I'd have taken away your chevrons. A word of advice—don't let it happen again." There was a long pause, then the calm voice resumed: "You may leave."

"Captain—" Langlais spoke.

"What is it?"

"I wish to relinquish my chevrons voluntarily. I feel that I could follow better than I can lead." —Langlais spoke manfully enough, Maurel thought— "And according to regulations, I have the privilege to surrender my chevrons."

"And I have the privilege to refuse, for the good of the service." Guichard rose, came nearer, and spoke in a tense whisper: "You've drawn a sergeant's pay for months, and you'll earn it—as a sergeant." The officer started to laugh, a rasping, macabre chuckle. "You may fool me, for there is a way out. But think well—suicide is sure, an enemy's bullet is a speculation. Dismissed."

Maurel felt that if the captain had addressed him in that tone, with such words, he would have drawn his automatic and put a bullet in his belly. He realized how completely Langlais' morale had gone when the sergeant saluted, pivoted and strode away without another word. In a few steps, he caught up with him.

"Look here, Langlais—you know you have to go through with it. Can't you brace yourself and put on a fair show? The Old Man's a bit mad on the subject, but he'd be satisfied easily enough. To tell the truth, I think he believes you're doing all this on purpose. He can't conceive that you're really scared. Take today, three wounded out of over one hundred and eighty—one chance in sixty!"

"You're very kind," Langlais retorted. He halted to light a cigarette. "What overwhelms me is the sheer stupidity of ending that way. I've tried to rationalize as you're doing, and it's no go at all. All I can think of is that one second you're alive and the next you're dead. Permanently dead."

Maurel had to laugh. "Yes, rather!"

"And I have reasons to live."

"Why did you enlist, anyway? You must have heard of the Legion."

"I had. And I had worked out a plan to go through five years quietly. I was giving value received, you know—you don't get the sort of work I do on books and organization for eight hundred and sixty francs a month, on the outside. I always managed to get transferred without attracting attention—until this time."

Maurel realized that Langlais felt no shame, and did not continue the argument further. When they reached the non-coms' camp a few voices greeted Maurel. No one spoke to Langlais.

A few minutes later, a voice hailed them out of the darkness: "Any letters? Convoy going back north in an hour!"

SEVERAL men, Langlais among them, entered the plank and canvas shelter backed against the defensive

wall, in which it was safe to light candles. Caution had to be used outside, as the moutain snipers discharged their guns at the least provocation.

Maurel accompanied the young lieutenant of his company, Durian, on a turn of inspection. The officer spoke guardedly: "Captain seems to be pretty sore at Langlais, eh?"

"Guess the colonel's crack stuck in his crop, Lieutenant."

"I wouldn't be surprised. Bad business, bad business."

Maurel agreed silently. It was a bad business.

When he returned to the shelter, Langlais had left. As he was off duty and there was nowhere in particular to go in the darkened camp, Maurel inquired about him. Some one replied vaguely, that he had left some time before, without saying a word. And brought a laugh with a concluding remark:

"Don't fret. He won't get hurt!"

Maurel then had a queer premonition. He was not a fanatic on company honor and Legion traditions such as Guichard proved, but he nevertheless was proud of the uniform he wore. Rightly or wrongly, he thought that members of other corps were glad, always, to discover some weakness in a Legionnaire. He did not want a scandal. He started out, and headed straight for the place where the muledrawn carts of the returning convoy had gathered, ready to start into the night under armed escort.

And it was there, as he had expected and feared, that he located Langlais. The sergeant had his pack, his carbine, and was about to march northward with the convoy—in brief, about to desert!

"Are you crazy?" Maurel challenged. "Come on back."

"No. Listen, it's quite in order, I handed the officer in charge the proper papers—"

"Forged them, eh?" Maurel grasped the other by the shoulder. "Listen, I'll keep quiet this time. Better get back that pass and destroy it."

Langlais pulled free with surprising strength, drew Maurel into the darkness out of hearing of the drivers. In any case, small attention was paid to them. The mules were restless because of the constant firing.

"Maurel, how much? A thousand? Two? Let's say three!"

"Where would you get three thousand francs?"

"I have them right here. I'm not asking much for it, either. Just let me go now. I know the radio will report me, that I'll be picked up. I know it's desertion before the enemy and twenty years in the can, maybe. That's my headache. I have dough, plenty of dough—and I'll get away with it. Bet you I don't catch more than degradation and six months." Langlais had grounded the carbine: "I tell you I have it here. Three sacks, three thousand!"

One could have an amazing spree on three thousand francs anywhere in North Africa. Sergeants found it hard to save that much in a year. And what was lost if Langlais did get away? He was no good, absolutely no good in the field. But Maurel was surprised to hear his own voice saying:

"I ought to smack you one for that! Get hold of that fake pass and come along."

"You fool—I said—"

Maurel's patience was ended. He struck. The punch knocked Langlais down.

"Pick up your stuff—" Maurel urged in a whisper. He replied to the lieutenant of infantry in charge of the

convoy's escort: "No, nothing wrong, Lieutenant. Counter-order about this sergeant. If you'll let me have the pass . . ."

THERE was a short argument, the officer questioned Langlais, then surrendered the paper. The two walked back toward the Legion's side of the camp.

"I'll say nothing this time," Maurel announced. "But don't try anything like it again. Maybe I should report that money of yours. You must be a fine bookkeeper!"

"I wouldn't bother with army money, not the kind I handle," Langlais declared. "That money's mine, all right. I'll stick it out—and you won't have to shoot me, either. I know when it's time to stop kidding!"

"Mean to say you're not scared?" Maurel said skeptically.

"No. I'm scared all right. I'd give twenty thousand francs this minute to be one hundred miles away. But it's not just being afraid of being killed. It just seems too stupid to be bumped off now—after almost achieving something planned for ten years. Yes, almost that long—nearly four years of civilian life and nearly five of Legion!"

"Twenty thousand!" Maurel repeated.

"And ten times that to be out of the service, away from Morocco!"

Maurel laughed. "Two hundred thousand? You're crazy!" He hesitated. "Why, I don't believe you have ten thousand."

"Not more than that on me, but I can show you bank statements for a lot more—Bank of Algeria, of Morocco, Crédit Lyonnais and so on. But that's nothing. My real dough is stowed away in another country, under another name."

"What are you doing in the Legion?"

"Why?" Langlais laughed. "Because I had to lay low for a few years—banks were being watched. I planned it all, including these five years in the Legion, about four years before I enlisted. When I get out, I have dough in London, dough in New York. I can live—really live. I've sweated five years out here to make it safe. Then I'm supposed to giggle happily when I'm asked to get myself shot for maybe twenty-eight francs a day!"

Maurel did not know whether to believe him or not. This rather short, inconspicuous man, did not seem to him capable of being a crook on a large scale. Nevertheless, there are ways and ways of making money, and specialists did admire Langlais for his ability to handle figures. He might well have been a banker. But Legionnaires, even among themselves, could be such magnificent liars concerning their past!

"I'm a sap to tell you this," Langlais continued. "But you have been decent to me. Durtheil or Kerfingua would have carried out orders, without pity. You socked me—"

"And saved you from being picked up as a deserter."

"I tell you I'd get away with it."

"How?"

"Dough," Langlais replied simply.

"You think that's everything."

"Among intelligent people it is. It's when you come up against one-track minds like Guichard's or yours that trouble starts." They had nearly reached the non-coms' shelter when Langlais halted again. "Look here, Maurel. You know the captain very well, know his weaknesses. You wrangle a soft job for me some way, and I'll hand you five thousand. You know, with the supply-train or the reserve section."

"That's hard to do, the way he feels about you."

"That's why it would be money earned."

MAUREL was puzzled. But what prompted him to discuss the proposition was possibly more curiosity than greed. A zero in the field, Langlais evidently had been quite a large figure elsewhere. Here was one of the legendary Legion characters—Maurel had heard of so many of them and met so very few!

"Suppose I wangle it, as you ask—how will I collect? You say it's honest, but you know perfectly well that Guichard would boot me about if he learned of it. Where's my guarantee? What have I got on you?"

Langlais was silent for several long seconds. Maurel could feel him struggling with caution.

"Did you ever hear of Maurice Sanglart?" he said at last.

"The Gold Mines of the Gayacal?" Maurel exclaimed.

"Yes. President of the company."

"Sure. He committed suicide when the cops came to arrest him."

"He did?" Langlais laughed. "That was easier than to admit he had been missing two months before the police looked for him—" Langlais broke off, resumed awkwardly, "Well, I am—I was—his secretary. I mean to say, I know where to—in short, I was mixed up with that deal."

"Don't tell me you're Sanglart," Maurel said sarcastically. Yet he was dimly impressed, for he vaguely remembered that there had been a certain mystery connected with that death.

"Eh? No, no, don't be crazy." Langlais groped for Maurel's hand, gripped it hard. "You don't really think I'm Sanglart? I look a bit like him, sure. You see, I was a second-cousin, a relative. That's why I had such a fine position with the Company."

"Something to be proud of, I suppose," Maurel grumbled.

"There was gold, less than we thought. The placers could not be worked for the amounts we claimed, that's all. And who knows—if I had had time! But I cashed in my stock three months before the crash, for plenty. Being a relative—a cousin—I was afraid my dough might be seized to pay off creditors. So I denied having any. That's why I enlisted. To make sure that, no matter how tempted I got, I'd stay away from my money until I was sure I was no longer watched."

Maurel was growing thoughtful. "Where's Sanglart? You said he wasn't dead."

"I said I didn't believe he had shot himself. I think it was—well, an accident, so that he couldn't testify."

"How will that help me if you don't pay?" Maurel asked.

"You can reveal my identity. It will cost me a lot more than five thousand to have lawyers fight the case in court."

"All right," Maurel agreed, "I'll think it over."

The other pressed his hand again, then entered the shelter. Maurel remained outside, then walked along the defensive wall, in the stillness of the night. He wondered whether he was as unmoved by the offer of a sizable bribe as he liked to think. And all sorts of suspicions were taking shape.

The Gayacal Gold Mines—the case was more than five years old, but no one who read newspapers could forget it. Thousands of people had sunk their savings into stock that proved worthless, and the man who had floated the business, Sanglart, had taken the easiest way out—suicide. What had happened

to the millions of francs which had seeped into his coffers from all over the Republic? That had been a question often asked after a Government Commission had investigated the miserable river placers in the Central American Colony. Even all of Sanglart's castles, apartments, luxurious automobiles, his girls, could not have absorbed everything.

Had Sanglart died? There were many who doubted it—one newspaper had insisted for months that the police and judiciary were covering their failure, and that Sanglart had realized *un magnifique trou dans la lune*—a magnificent hole in the moon. When a trusted employee, a banker, a cashier, absconds, an old French slang phrase has it that he has made a hole in the moon.

And—why would it be utterly impossible for Sanglart to have found his "hole" in the Legion? Even if the police had not been interested in allowing him to vanish, for political reasons and to avoid scandal, they would not have scanned the Legion enlistments for Sanglart. A penniless crook, a murderer, might take shelter there, but who would suspect that a man with millions, presumably, would go and live in North Africa, as a Legionnaire?

"I'm crazy," Maurel mused.

An idea occurred to him. Remote though this mountain camp in the Mid-Atlas was from civilization, the Gayacal Crash had spilled some of its victims to it. Maurel knew of two, a lieutenant of artillery and a corporal in his own company, Cassette. Being directly concerned, they would have more information.

HE LOCATED Cassette, in charge of a machine gun in an angle pit. Cassette was a husky, good-natured fellow, despite his change in fortunes. Maurel cautiously guided the conversation on the Gayacal Case.

"You said it, Sergeant, it's funny to be here," said Cassette. "In the Legion, I mean. You see, I was preparing the exams for Saint-Cyr, to become an officer. My people were well off, my old man had got pretty rich during the War, selling wine to the army. We'd moved to Paris from the country, to make my studies easier. Well, my father got smart, wanted to double his money. When he heard of Sanglart's flight and realized he was broke, he didn't say much. But I came back from school one afternoon, and found the stairs crowded, firemen, cops, the janitress. My folks had taken gas. There was a little money left, but not enough to last me. I had to quit school. So I enlisted. I have the clippings here, Sergeant—"

It was a queer scene, Maurel thought, two men in khaki huddled against the side of a pit, scanning faded clippings by the light of a weak pocket torch:

TWO MORE VICTIMS OF THE CRASH
Police claim to have located Sanglart

—and then Maurel spotted what he sought, a photograph of the fugitive. The cut was poor, messy as most ordinary newspaper photographs. But there was a vague resemblance to Langlais!

And if Langlais were Sanglart, what would Maurel do? A Legionnaire does not turn in a comrade. Yet, this was an exceptional case. Had a murderer been involved, Maurel would not have done anything. Because all that would have been achieved would have been the punishment of the guilty man. Now, it was not merely a question of punishment, but of wider justice. Could not those who had invested in Gayacal Mines collect a percentage of their

losses? Even if it were only Cassette, a very nice, intelligent young man, who received enough refunded cash to finish school and get a commission? And the artillery lieutenant—even a few thousand francs would be welcome to him—he had a wife and two little girls living in Meknes!

Maurel left Cassette, sought his blankets. But he could not fall asleep. Unexpectedly, he found himself bearing a crushing burden. Did he have the right to keep quiet?

If Langlais were Sanglart, he had a duty to accomplish. But was Langlais Sanglart?

If he was, why had he talked? Yet he had spoken only in a desperate effort to avoid danger of death, danger of losing his loot. Disconnected incidents which Maurel had not noticed formerly now grouped, massed to shape his conviction.

Langlais, he knew, had been trying to take another name legally, a name which he claimed had been his own. To achieve this "rectification of identity," as the process is known in the Legion, he had offered a birth-certificate and an old passport, of German origin. Yet, Langlais spoke perfect French.

He had also applied for French naturalization, as was his right as a Legionnaire of several years standing. Maurel figured that he could have obtained the papers in advance, from anyone of the many crooked dealers in identification documents that have flourished on the fringe of the European underworld since the War. Once naturalized French, with a passport in order, Langlais would be safe anywhere in the world.

If Langlais *was* Sanglart, Maurel was in a position to bleed him of large sums. But he dismissed the idea very soon. He did not want that kind of money. Cheating investors, chiefly old people with savings to place, was lower than any crime he could think of—because it was so cowardly.

Maurel wondered now how that bribe talk had started, why he had allowed Langlais to hope. He was a mercenary, a professional soldier. In a sense, he had sold his body. But his conscience was not for sale.

"How would Guichard act?"

Maurel found this speculation pleasant, amusing. Guichard was somewhat vain, somewhat simple in his ideals. But he was a thoroughly honest man with unsuspected gentleness of heart when one grew to know him. But what could he do in this case? Always assuming that Langlais was Sanglart, he could be forced to surrender the stolen funds, the creditors could be repaid in part. That would bring happiness to thousands. But should he be killed, the matter ended right here!

Would Guichard consent to keep him safe for the benefit of strange civilians? That was a neat, well-defined problem in ethics, a direct conflict between Legion traditions as interpreted by the captain, and common, every-day decency.

Why not ask Guichard?

That was it: Maurel must ask the captain. The decision eased his mind, and he fell asleep contented. While the expression "passing the buck" is not current in the French Army, the practice is as general and comfortable as elsewhere.

III

THE captain's first reaction was unfavorable.

"I don't understand anything in that cock-and-bull yarn of yours, Maurel. This is our business"—his big chin

snapped up to indicate the camp, the troopers moving to formations— "I understand nothing, either, in that speech about five thousand francs. Sounds like a dishonest trick to me. What can you do, what can anyone do, to influence me in the line of duty?"

"Nothing, Captain. I thought—"

"A soldier isn't supposed to think—not when there's someone higher in rank nearby to think for him."

"That's what I thought, Captain."

"Eh?" Guichard was startled, then nodded, "You did, yes, you did! See here, my lad, I am not accusing you, not blaming you. This fellow, what's his name?—Sanglart—you imagine to be very important? Yes, of course, he would be important to those he stole money from. But that's none of our business, Maurel, none of our business. Beat it and do your job."

Nevertheless, when the company assembled for roll-call before leaving camp, Guichard was not present. Maurel saw him, some distance away, pacing up and down beside the major commanding the battalion, a tall, lean chap with narrow shoulders, who resembled a stork. The captain was gesturing, talking with animation, and the other replied in a series of nods and shrugs.

Then the major halted, beckoned to another captain, who trotted toward him. Unconsciously, the new man's eyes swept Guichard's company, seemed to rest briefly on Langlais, who stood before his section, rigid and as unconcerned as the others, on the surface.

Maurel was making certain bitter observations. For instance, that when a man has hold of a lot of money, regardless of his actual position in life, he assumes great importance for everybody. Undoubtedly, this crook in khaki intrigued the chiefs far more than an honest, brave sergeant with a reproachless past!

The sergeant thought that his comrades, who had refused to talk to Langlais because he was a coward, would be eager to exchange a few words with him as soon as they discovered he was Sanglart. Through silly vanity, just to be able to say in the future: "Sure, I knew Sanglart when he was in the Legion. Why, he was telling me . . ."

Behind Maurel, the Legionnaires were beginning to whisper. Of course, they had guessed that the unusual conference going on did not have a routine, military significance. All details of the day's operations had been worked out the preceding evening, in the tent of the column commander.

At last, the major gave an opinion. The two captains separated, returned to their respective companies. Guichard gestured with one hand. *"Pssst!* Langlais, Maurel—come here."

The two non-coms doubled forward, presented arms.

"Fall out. You will follow with the baggage-convoy."

Langlais' amazement and relief sagged his jaws. On the other hand, Maurel grew furious. There was no motive to remove him, he had a right to take his chances with the rest.

"Captain," he started to protest, "I—"

"There's been enough clowning," Guichard cut him short. "You've been replaced." As a matter of fact, a sergeant was trotting over from another company. Turning, Maurel could see the puzzled, excited faces of his men. "You're responsible for both, Maurel, you comprehend that?"

It was useless to argue. After all, Maurel had brought this on himself. Captain Guichard gave the signal, the company formed in combat groups and

marched down hill, across a valley, toward the front. The first detonations were slapping and echoing southward.

"What happened?" Langlais wondered. "How did you do it?"

Maurel tossed his pack on top of one of the two-wheeled *arabas* of the convoy, laughed shortly. "Just told them who you were—"

"I didn't want you to do that," Langlais said angrily.

"I know that. But you can't get away with it, Langlais. If it's any satisfaction, Guichard jumped when he learned you were Sanglart!"

"You fool!" Langlais commented.

Maurel eyed the swelling left by his fist on the preceding night. He was tempted, but restrained himself. The situation had changed subtly. The relationship was that of guard to prisoner.

"I told you I'm not Sanglart."

"We'll see." Maurel said.

THE two followed the column with the baggage. Shortly before noon, they reached the company again, halted for food. Guichard called them.

"Sergeant Langlais, you will remain out of the ranks until the colonel commanding the column has time to hear the case. But let me tell you that as long as your enlistment in the Legion lasts, I'll try to protect you. If the civic authorities claim you when your time is up, that's their business."

"I'm not Sanglart, Captain, I just—"

"Be quiet. There is a chance that you are, so far as we know." The officer smiled. "But, financier or not, I made you wear your chevrons under fire, at least once. I'm sure the Chleuhs did not know they were shooting at a millionaire."

By that time, everyone knew that Langlais was believed to be the vanished promoter of the Gayacal Mines. Not a few of the men strolled up casually, looked upon him with awe. The sergeant appeared embarrassed, and his pale face often flushed redly. Cassette's newspaper clippings were literally worn to dust by constant handling, in efforts to compare Langlais with the photographs.

Early in the afternoon, the company marched away, skirted the flank of a long slope on a gash-like trail, and disappeared. An hour later, its automatics could be heard, in alternate bursts. An attack was in progress. Meanwhile, the carts progressed slowly, and Maurel was nearly ill with nervousness. If he had started all this without a foundation of truth, as Langlais insisted now, he would be covered with ridicule. Moreover, not a few kind friends would hint that he had seen a good chance to duck the fighting.

The baggage's escort was composed of Tunisian Infantry, soft-fleshed, lazy Arabs. One of their French sergeants, perched on a cart, bantered Maurel and Langlais mercilessly.

"You're smart guys, the two of you. While your little pals are getting demolished up in the shooting gallery, you take it easy. But never mind, they'll fix you for this. Sanglart, my eye! Eh, millionaire, how about a cigarette?"

"You're not fighting yourself, you sap," Maurel replied.

"I'm not supposed to. I'm no hero, I'm no Legionnaire. I'm not even a volunteer. My regular two years' service, that's what this is. Ben Hamda," he howled to the driver, "if I have to get off, look out! I'll boot you."

Discipline was not the escort's strong point, and Ben Hamda was a city Arab. He replied to the threat in sharp, clear *sabir:* "And I'll have your tripes out the next minute, mug! I'm having trouble."

That was the truth, for he had four balky mules to handle on a trail barely wide enough for the cart, with a high embankment to the right and a sharp decline to the left. Carts were strung out, ahead and behind, and between them walked small groups of armed soldiers.

The front lines were more than two miles away. Despite the sound of combat, the warm sunshine, the leisurely progress, gave a deep sense of security and peace. That was one good feature of colonial warfare, Maurel thought—no need to worry out of rifle range, no shells to fear, no airplanes to come along to rip up a convoy with machine-gun fire.

AS for Langlais, he appeared almost as worried and nervous as the day before under fire. Instead of leaving well enough alone, he returned persistently to his grievances.

"You needn't think you'll get anything from me, Maurel. You only got me into trouble. You gave me your word you wouldn't talk about it—well, it was a private conversation, anyway."

"You got what you wanted, didn't you?"

"A mess, that's what I've got!"

"Suppose I'd let you desert? You'd be in jail now—with a few years to serve."

"Oh no! I'd have been reported right away, picked up. Where do you get *desertion,* after less than twenty-four hours? It takes six days. 'Illegal absence from post,' that was all I'd been charged with—a couple of months' can."

"Leaving post before the enemy, absence from a territory in a state of siege," Maurel pointed out. "That's what it would have been. That's desertion."

"Where do you get a state of siege? That was my out," Langlais explained. "This is not a campaign, this is a policing operation. Read the official paper. I'd have got a civilian lawyer to prove it. How can there be desertion before the enemy when officially there is no enemy, just people who must be impressed by a military demonstration."

"Say, that's not such a foolish argument!" Maurel exclaimed.

"The only stupid thing I did was to talk to you." A gesture of resentment escaped Langlais. "Now you've got me saddled with this ridiculous Sanglart business. . . ."

Maurel was uneasy also. The matter had gone further than he had expected. From the captain to the major, from the major to the other officers. Probably, the colonel commanding would be informed tonight. And after the official wireless report to Rabat, there might be an inquiry concerning one Langlais, Rudolph, Sergeant in the Twenty-Fourth of the Second Foreign Regiment! Maurel had not counted on the magic of a famous name.

"Eh, there, Crœsus," the escort's sergeant shouted from the top of the cart, "can you spare a cigarette?"

Langlais, mumbling something about borrowers, tossed him a package. "Help yourself—keep it. Don't bother me."

The man grinned widely as he caught the cigarettes, leaning far back. Then, instead of straightening, he sank down on the canvas covering the cases and crates in the cart. The two Legionnaires watched him, thinking he was clowning again. But the sergeant rolled over, slid and thumped to the road surface. A nearer outburst of firing had frightened the mules, and the driver had his hands full trying to control them.

"Get up, you fool!" Maurel called,

"you'll get crushed—" He was stepping forward, when Langlais gripped his arm.

"Look, look!"

Maurel looked at him in surprise, startled by the expression of fear and horror contorting his face. Then he stared down. The back of the sergeant's skull was burst.

Then things were happening all at once, fleeting, incoherent visions, a confusion of sounds and impressions. Shots popped very near, the air was alive with vibrations, one of the mules went down. The others knocked over the driver, then the cart upset. Seemingly dropped out of the sky, more logically from the high embankment flanking the path, men were swarming about. Natives, mountaineers, some of them adults, bearded and wiry, others skinny lads, some mere children. But all of them armed, with clubs, with knives—those who had rifles were covering the onslaught of their less wealthy comrades.

IV

MAUREL tried to take command, but there was no one to be commanded. The Tunisian *Tirailleurs* were bounding down the incline as fast as they could travel.

He emptied the three cartridges in his carbine's magazine, reversed the weapon, struck with the butt. But he saw that it was useless to make a stand alone—he would be butchered. He leaped away in his turn, on the heels of Langlais, who was showing what he could do when properly inspired to speed.

It did not need an expert to know what had happened: The Chleuhs had contrived to seep through the flanking units of infantry presumably protecting the convoy. This attack had two purposes: The first to create a diversion, to bring back some of the troops engaged in the frontal drive, and the other more sordid—loot!

The greed of the assailants probably saved Maurel at first. They were hacking off the lashings of the canvas covers, seeking stuff that might be carried away easily. The riflemen were firing at the bends of the path, where some members of the escort were reforming and trying to fight back.

Maurel, panting, saw Langlais bounding ahead of him, gaining rapidly. There was a row of thick bushes, stretching a spiny barrier, one hundred and fifty meters from the path. Langlais plunged into it, vanished. Maurel might have laughed at the ludicrous sight, had not the bullets started to nose about for him.

Fifty yards to go, a matter of seconds —another stride, another— A shock spun him about; he reeled and fell jarringly, on his back. Normally, he would have been dazed for several seconds. But the instinct for safety made him rise immediately, to take one step and drop again. He was hit, although he felt no pain as yet.

Already, a merciful sensation of unreality started—the odd, precise knowledge that grips men in moments of danger, the refusal to admit the end. He flattened out, tried to fire the carbine. The dry click infuriated him. Feverishly, he tore a clip from his right pouch, slapped it into place, worked the bolt.

There was no want of targets. There were natives among the carts, up on the embankment, silhouetted against the light, and some scuttling near, down slope towards him. These halted and vanished at his first shot. Luckily for Maurel, although he felt alone, this

was but one of a multitude of episodes occurring in the vicinity. The scattered escort was reorganizing.

At the third jar on his shoulder, Maurel automatically reloaded. His whole being concentrated on that. He must keep shooting. . . .

He lifted himself on one elbow to get a better aim, dropped. Now, he felt pain, a searing pain that spun through his body, throbbed in his brain, nauseated him. Somewhere in the right hip. . . .

A comforting thought came: The natives could not take him alive. Troops were even now rushing back to recapture the carts. They would have no time to torture him. For small mercies, Allah be praised!

He pressed the trigger. Slid the bolt back and forward, waited. When he did not try to move his leg, his eyes were clear, his mind functioned. He realized that his little affair had dwindled to a four-cornered duel—there were three men who had singled him out, and were centering their attention upon him. His vision seemed astonishingly sharp. The nearest was a very young fellow, beardless, with an odd, reddish clump of hair in the middle of his skull, resembling a scalp-lock. His nose deviated, his lips were thick, negroid. Maurel knew that he would carry that face always, as if etched on his retina, no matter how long he lived. He fired.

"Not bad," he thought. "I used to get special leave for marksmanship in my younger days."

Third cartridge in the magazine—then he must reload. Third cartridge—one cartridge—two targets—which?

THESE two were a bit harder than the other, more experienced, less eager. They had lived longer because they had learned to take their time. They darted down the slope in short leaps, contrived to disappear completely behind stones that appeared no larger than a man's hand. Maurel could see the calves of one of them. But a man wounded in the leg can still shoot—as he was proving—and Maurel knew he must fire disabling bullets.

Maurel would have to lift himself somewhat to shoot at one. Then the other would get him, very likely. That's what you learned in the army—that you have to take to give.

"Safe with the baggage-convoy," he grumbled. "Safe with—"

The chap on the right was about to get up. Maurel could see his exposed leg gather. A second, two—here he was—Maurel pressed the trigger, and missed. . . .

Smart fellows, both of them. They had counted his shots, knew he was firing clips of three, and that he had fired his third and must reload. They rose and came forward, cool enough to save bullets when butts and blades would do—a cartridge sold for fifty centimes, in the hills.

One, two—they tumbled at the same moment—as pretty a doubled shot as Maurel could remember.

He was grasped from behind then. He felt himself rise in the air, effortlessly. He was jerked this way, that way—and darkness welled from within himself, blanked out the world.

An impact—he had fallen. Where?

"Are you all right?"

"Sure, sure—"

Maurel gaped as he looked at Langlais. He had not thought of the man for some minutes—expected him to be halfway to Casablanca by this time. And there he was, his light brown hair, which he wore longer than strict regulations permitted, plastered on his forehead by sweat. His blue eyes were pop-

ping out of their sockets, his throat worked convulsively. Scared half to death. . . .

"They saw me get you—they'll be coming," Langlais announced.

"Did you carry me?" Maurel did not believe it. He outweighed the other by twenty-five pounds!

"Yes. I'm afraid I wrenched my back lifting you."

Poor Langlais, always afraid of one thing or another. Yet, Maurel looked around, saw that they were alone behind the bushes. Langlais must have fired those two shots, must have carried him —sick with fear all the time!

Langlais was crouching, peering through the leafage.

"What's going on?" Maurel asked.

"Nothing much. A lot of them are taking stuff up the embankment—small cases. Looks like tinned goods—bags —there's nothing doing on the right bend—all quiet. Most of them are shooting toward the left. There's three or four guys looking down this way. Two of them are arguing—"

"—whether we're worth taking a chance to kill—so long as we leave them alone," Maurel suggested. "Don't fret, they'll be after us. They'd sooner fight then eat, any day. If they can fight their own way, as they can now."

INSTINCTIVELY, although he was unable to walk, Maurel sought for a line of retreat, an escape. What he saw caused him to stare at Langlais with renewed admiration. He had taken it for granted that the other had stuck nearby because it was safer to remain than to leave.

Yet, behind the bushes, the ground declined sharply, into a gully skirting the hill, a natural lane of escape! Langlais could have fled without risk. Why had he remained? By what miracle had he found the nerve to stick? Legion traditions? Two vain words to him, Maurel knew. Why?

"I think they're coming down to look for us," Langlais said.

"They must know about the gully, but they figure you can't carry me very far." Maurel's gratitude was mixed with pity. "You better scram. I'll be all right." He was placing magazines nearby, in readiness. The sensible thing to do was to fight it out alone. "You've done enough, Langlais!"

The other looked at him hopelessly, shook his head. "Can't."

"Don't be a fool. You can make it all right."

"I know. But"— Langlais hesitated — "the captain would be sore if I quit you."

Maurel, at one time or another, had heard Guichard's citations for valor, brief, terse military phrases, written by men who knew courage and heroism. But never had such a compliment been paid the captain: Langlais was more afraid of his anger, of his scorn, than he was of death itself!

Somehow, this choked Maurel, stirred him as few words could have stirred him. He crept nearer the bushes, dragging his useless leg, scanned the slope. Help must still be remote, for the natives showed no haste. What they could not take away or did not want they sought to destroy. One of the carts was on fire. There were three big barrels on the path, spurting out red wine, to churn the red earth into expensive mud.

"They've forgotten us," Langlais spoke hopefully.

"Don't kid yourself, they'll be coming," Maurel said. "I guess there were two or three attacks of this sort along the line of march, and they feel they have time. Might as well see what we

can do." He rested the butt of the carbine against his shoulder, then relaxed. "Eh, listen—all joking aside—are you Sanglart?"

"I'm not!" Langlais grew angry again.

"Then why the devil did you—"

"I knew I looked a bit like him. Just after I enlisted, when I was second-class Legionnaire in Bel-Abbès, I was even called for questioning, because the case was fresh in people's minds and a couple of our fellows kidded some civilians along. I remembered that when I wanted to impress you. I should have known that the only way to get me out of today's attack was for you to tell that story to the captain. But I was desperate. You know," Langlais said guilessly, "I have no guts at all."

"Then you're not rich?"

"A few thousand I carry around with me, maybe fifteen more in a bank. Managed to put over some deals in wine between Algerian guys and a home firm. They cut good Burgundy with Algerian wine, to make it stronger. I used to be in that business—"

"Where did you learn bookkeeping?" Maurel interrupted.

"Picked it up. A guy doesn't have to be much good at anything to be a wonder in the army!"

"And the police aren't looking for you?"

"Might as well admit—no. I had a nice little business, I was married, in Germany. My wife went nuts or something, and went to live with another guy. She took my two kids with her." Langlais' face reddened. "Sure, I ought to have shot her, or something like that—everybody was egging me on. I swear I wasn't afraid to do *that*. But I wasn't mad, just sad. So I told her she could have the business, too—and went away."

V

LANGLAIS seemed to have shrunk as he spoke. He had shrunk from a picturesque thieving millionaire, a man of prey, to a small trader betrayed by his wife, robbed of his family—to a sucker. Maurel had to make an effort to recall that this commonplace little chap, with the thinning damp hair and frightened eyes, had saved his life.

"Well," Maurel decided, "you don't have to worry—you said nothing to the captain. I'm the one that's holding the sack for this one!" He grinned. "Though they may have trouble doing anything to me, in an hour or so. Listen, have some sense and beat it before they come. I would if I had two good legs."

For he could see that the natives had finished their work on the road. He saw two boys, the younger could not have been more than ten, hacking heads off the fallen. After business came pleasure, after loot came trophies.

Maurel did not look at Langlais for a while, hoped sincerely that he would find him gone when he turned. But the other sergeant had imitated him—disposed clips within convenient reach. It would be the two of them against whatever was coming . . .

And here they came! Perhaps a dozen, several yards apart, were bounding with the agility of goats. For thirty seconds, the carbines rattled like machine guns. Then there was a pause—the attackers would make it next rush.

Well, it had to come some time. As late as possible, Maurel thought—now, seconds were as precious as years. In the lull, a strange noise drew his attention for a brief moment—a rasping breath—Langlais was weeping with fear, sobbing. But he was there, beside his comrade, fighting on. . . .

"Steady, steady," Maurel shouted, mechanically. "Here they—"

The Chleuhs bounded nearer, loomed very large, like figures leaping out of a moving-picture screen, for Maurel was seeing them from below upward. The bolt pushed close, he pressed the trigger—a click—no time to reload. He dropped the carbine, rolled about painfully, found his automatic—the pistol he had gripped yesterday for quite another purpose. . . .

The branches crackled as the bodies hurtled through. The natives lunged for Langlais, instinctively seeking to bring down the enemy who was standing. The little sergeant swung his carbine around his head, knocked clubs aside. Extreme fear brought the same result as extreme courage—it did not matter which it was—he was putting up a great fight in the Legionnaire tradition.

Maurel fired—too fast. One of the men picked up a stone and flung it at him, struck him in the chest. Another had slipped headlong, and clutched at Langlais' ankle.

"Help, Maurel! Help!"

The fool, why had he not gone when he had the chance? What could Maurel do, on his back, with an empty pistol? They had him down now. Maurel could see the skinny arms rise and fall, each one tipped with rusty steel—the long, sharp, home-made dirks of the hill people. A superhuman effort brought him to his feet.

"Coming, you sap, coming—"

His bad leg collapsed under his weight, and Maurel fell and rolled down into the gully. His last thought was a prophetic vision—lines of thin print on rough paper:

Maurel, Paul, Sergeant
Second Foreign Regiment.
Killed.

CAPTAIN GUICHARD called on Sergeant Maurel in the Military Hospital at Meknes, some weeks later. Maurel was due for three more months in the hospital and four months' convalescent leave.

"Shows you never can tell," Guichard said. "I thought I was sending you two to the safest place in the column. What must be must be, as the *bicos* claim! You know, of course, that all that excitement you started amounted to nothing? We got an answer to our inquiry in thirty-six hours. Langlais had been questioned years before on the same subject. But you see, although he succeeded in fooling us into keeping him out of action, he couldn't fool destiny. That's why, the longer you're at this business, the less scared you get."

"Thanks for my citation, Captain," Maurel replied, "but it was really a theft. I was fighting for my hide. I'm glad also you gave Langlais that posthumous award of the Colonial Cross. He has a couple of kids back home, who probably had the wrong idea of the old man."

Guichard laughed. "Yes, that report of yours was a fine fable. You're a good egg, Maurel."

"It was absolutely true, Captain."

"You're the same guy who claimed he was Sanglart, if I remember rightly." Guichard shrugged. "Don't worry, it's almost routine to cite a dead man, these days. One of your colleagues in the company took this photo. I thought you might like to have it."

The photograph was postal-card size. It showed a grave in the hills, with a real stone cross surmounting it. Langlais had been buried where he had fallen. Maurel recognized the embankment in the background. He could almost see the twisted nose and thick lips of the young Berber he had shot. He and the

others also must be underground somewhere near.

This was Langlais' hole in the moon, his final resting place.

"Many thanks, Captain," Maurel said sincerely. "It is a nice souvenir."

That seemed to conclude the episode. But several months later, in a café of the European Town, Maurel recognized one of the corporals of his old company. He was standing at the bar, having a tall glass of white wine flavored with citron syrup, narrating his deeds of valor to a circle of skeptical admirers.

"All right, you think we Legionnaires are bluffers? Well, let me tell you. . . . Remember Sanglart, the millionaire crook who's supposed to have committed suicide? He was a sergeant in my company, up there in the Middle Atlas. I used to talk with him just like I'm talking to you. Look at this—" The corporal produced a photograph. "That's his grave. Sure, he was a Sanglart. You can ask anybody in that expedition. It all came out because he confessed his identity to the captain, thinking he might be killed. Had a hunch, or something. . . ."

Maurel shrugged, picked up his cane and hobbled out.

Poor Langlais—the coward and unworthy Legionnaire—had done better than most heroes. He had given his life for a friend, and a new legend to the Legion.

Lo, the Poor Place-Name

CONTRARY to a rather widespread belief, the American Indian was not a poetic soul who roamed the land bestowing names of pleasant assonance upon waters, beasts, birds, trees and mountains. The latest verdict upon the literary caliber of the American aborigine places the Red man as a realist: when he named a thing the name meant something, it was never merely poetic or fanciful. This is the opinion of experts at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C., who—realists themselves—have set to work re-translating our Indian place-names.

States with Indian names suffer most from the poetical distortion of the Paleface, say the experts. For instance, Alabamans like to think that the name of their state was Choctaw for "here we rest," while it really means "thicket cutters." And Kentucky does not mean "dark and bloody ground," but, more likely, "level country" from the Iroquois "Kentagenton-ga." Iowa, according to the latest researches, means "sleepy ones," while Dakota—a little harsh to Paleface ears—was a term of good-fellowship with the Sioux; to them it meant "me feel friendly."

About the only state that does not fall under the clinical scalpel of the Smithsonian is Minnesota. There, some Sioux appears to have let the Muse grab his scalp-lock. Minnesota really does mean "land of the sky-blue water"—from the Sioux word "Minnie," meaning water, and the Sioux word "sota," meaning clear, but (like so much poetry) not entirely clear.

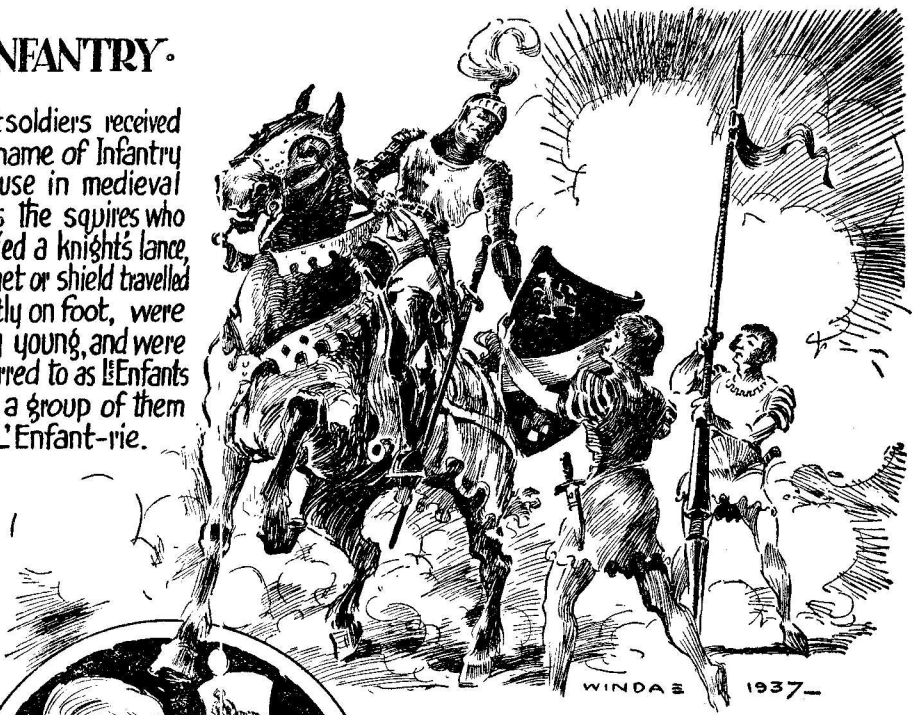
—*J. Wentworth Tilden.*

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS

·INFANTRY·

Footsoldiers received the name of Infantry because in medieval days the squires who carried a knight's lance, helmet or shield travelled mostly on foot, were very young, and were referred to as Les Enfants ---- a group of them as L'Enfant-rie.



·TOMMY ATKINS·

Years ago when the average enlisting English soldier was unable to spell even his own name, a recruiting-sergeant hit upon a happy solution by supplying each of such men with the name "Thomas Atkins," much in the same spirit as we use "John Doe." It became the nickname for all English soldiers.

·BAYONET·

This weapon received its name because troops from BAYONNE pushed the hilts of their knives down the muzzles of their guns, and used the thus considerably lengthened weapons to repel attacks.

GRENADIER ·GUARDS·

This famous regiment is named after the Pome-granate. The hand-gren-ade was first made in Spain, and was called a GRANADA (Spanish for Pomegranate). Originally the Guards were hand-grenade companies

Bloodshed and Roses

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "Call Me Mike," "Enter the Tiger," etc.

I

PEOPLE were in from the districts and people were down from the hills. Some played and sang one song, some another, but it didn't make any difference because still other groups sang still other songs, and anyway everybody was happy. The whistle sounded deep and very loud, and out of it, before an echo had a chance, came the voices of leavetakers.

Aue! Aue! te vahine hupipi!
Aue! Aue! patia tona apoo sepo!

Out of the crowd dashed a frantic-eyed half-caste carrying a portion of ship's supplies which should have been delivered the previous day—eight live ducks, two white, six black, in a crate. The ducks quacked indignantly. The half-caste bellowed for a steward, for the cook, for anybody. He climbed the gangplank, squirming past those who were descending. An officer, cursing him, leaned over the rail, lifted the crate of ducks, handed it to a sailor; and the half-caste, mopping his face, mixed with the descending crowd, while those on the deck roared with delight.

Old fat women in Mother Hubbards, younger women in cheap silk dresses. Men in *pareos,* men in trunks, men in shorts and polo shirts and great flopping straw hats. They waved, and they shouted or sang, and some were drunk—drunk with rum or whisky, perhaps, but drunk certainly with the music and excitement.

"Seal amulets?" Little Eddy Savoy leaned against the rail. "That's a new one. With all the ice I've lifted, I never ran across a seal amulet."

"You wouldn't be likely to. They're Persian and they date 'way back. These I'm after date back to the tenth century."

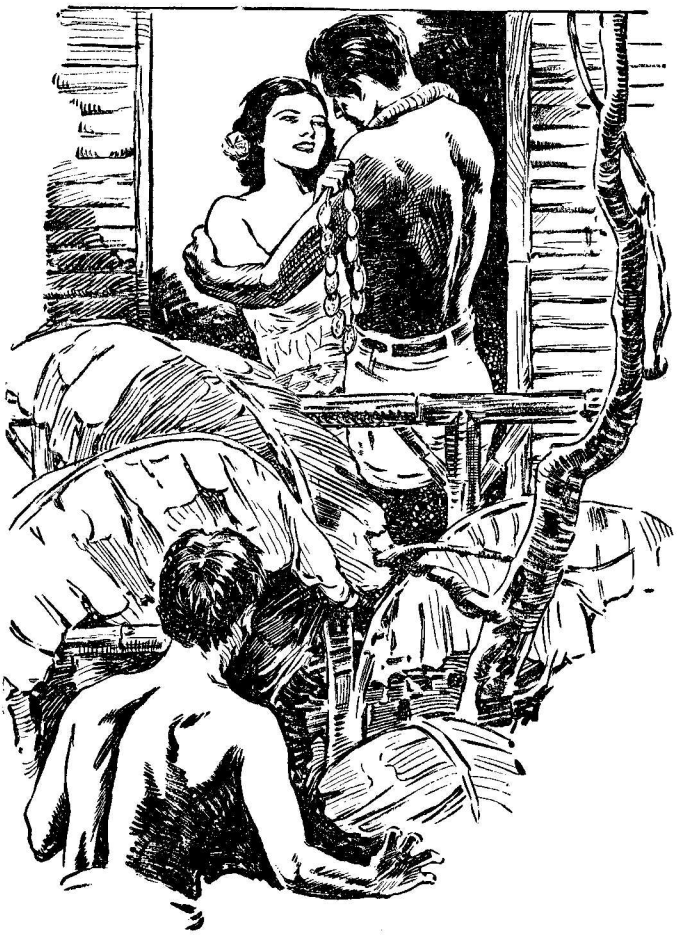
"Worth much?"

"About four thousand apiece, and there are fourteen in this necklace, held together by gold clasps. But they're worth more than that. It's the fact that they're all perfectly matched and all of the same period—took years to collect—that's what makes them so valuable. Well, to give you an idea: we had the thing underwritten for one hundred thousand, and Bambridge insists it's actually worth at least twice that."

"Oh-oh!"

Eddy Savoy was silent, his professional envy stirred. That is, it *would* have been stirred if he had still been in the old game. In his time he had been the cleverest jewel thief in the United States. Now, officially, in the police records, he was dead — though by no means forgotten. He was living quietly, reformed and retired, on a sugar plantation on the island of Molokai, Hawaii, where he went under the name of Everard Savage. He would have been in Molokai still, for he liked the place, if his friend Nick Fisher, the insurance detective, and the only man who knew his identity, had not called him out of hiding to assist in the recovery of certain rubies in faraway Cambodia. Nick knew Eddy Savoy, knew what he could do, knew that

A Complete Fisher-Savoy Novelet



under proper supervision he would make a crack detective. He couldn't wean Eddy away from the tropic island permanently—oh, no!—Eddy liked peace and peaceful fishing too much—but he had succeeded in inducing the little monkey-like fellow to accompany him to Cambodia, where thanks to Eddy's collaboration the rubies had been recovered. Now they were returning, Eddy to Molokai, Nick to his New York office. They had decided that since they were on the other side of the world they might as well cross the equator together and take a look at some of the South Sea Islands on their way home. The *Kipapa* was bound from Sydney to San Francisco by way of New Zealand and Tahiti.

The crowd on the deck eddied noisily around them.

"OUT on the plantation," Eddy mused, "I naturally wouldn't hear about as big a job as that, even."

They had been killing time on the long slow journey with yarns, Eddy telling how he used to steal gems, Nick about how he caught some of Eddy's competitors. Eddy Savoy himself, Everard Savage on this ship and elsewhere, was the only important jewel crook Nick never had actually caught—and held. They were friends. For the present, though Nick's company would have had a fit about it, they were associates.

"That's going to be my next job when I get back. Nasty one, too. Bam-

bridge's butler tried to stop the robbery."

"Sapped?"

"Yeah, and he never did recover. Thieves with hot ice will sometimes let you catch them if they think they can make a dicker, but when they've killed somebody—"

Along the rail, the passengers—there were only ten of them—cheered wildly and waved to friends. The rusty little freighter had never looked so bright and gay. *Tiare* and *frangipani,* tuberoses, ginger, *piki,* jasmine, rioted along its grimy rail. You don't leave Tahiti without being half buried in flowers. It simply isn't done.

The sun was low, blasting Moorea's peaks, and back of Papeete great Orafena and Mount Aorai and the Diadem were smeared with scarlet light.

"Shame to leave this place. Boy! what an island!"

Eddy asked in a quiet taut voice, "Who pulled that Bambridge job, Nick? You always know about those things."

Nick was grinning down at the crowd which surged on the dock while brightly uniformed gendarmes tried to keep them back so that the gangplank could be taken in. "What?" he asked absently. "Oh—who did it? A bad egg, Eddy. A man I've been trying to get behind bars for a long time. My worst professional problem since you retired."

"Yes, but who was he?"

"He ought to be showing his face again pretty soon. Skipped somewhere after the job. He undoubtedly had a market — some millionaire collector who couldn't get the seals any other way and decided to hire a cracksman. But the cracksman skipped afterward. Murder's another thing, and he didn't dare hang around."

"Yes, but who *was* he?"

"Who was he? Sampson Jasper. Why?"

Nick turned his head to gaze at his companion. Eddy, who should have been happy, was open-mouthed, staring past Nick.

"Nothing," answered Eddy, "except that Sampson Jasper himself is down the deck a little way right this minute with a flock of wreaths around his neck. He must be a passenger with us. Must have boarded here."

Eddy used his thumb to point.

Nick Fisher straightened, twisting around as best he could in that crowded narrow place. He was a big man, Nick, and when he moved people usually got out of his way. But at sailing time in Papeete nobody ever got out of anybody's way.

"Fish hooks, you're right!"

NOT forty feet from where they stood—the intervening space was jammed with fellow passengers, with stewards and ship's officers, with last-minute disembarkers who were being forcibly hurried ashore—not forty feet away Sampson Jasper leaned against the rail and waved at the crowd below. Jasper was a big man, too, tall and broad. He wore linen and three bulky *leis.*

"You're right, Eddy! He's been laying low out here somewhere, and now he thinks it's safe to sneak back. I'm going to take him."

"Wait a minute! He'll be carryin' a gun!"

"Has that ever worried me?"

"No, but it should. What have you got on him?"

"Nothing. But if he pulled that Bambridge job, and I'm morally certain that he did, he'll have the evidence himself. He wouldn't let a thing like that necklace get away from him. And

if I nab him with it he'll burn for cracking that butler's skull."

Nick started away. Eddy grabbed his arm. "Take it easy! Remember, he's a passenger! Let's at least wait until we get out to sea. There's two whole weeks."

"I'll take him here and now," said Nick grimly, "before he sees me and gets rid of the thing."

What happened then happened very fast, and not even quick-thinking Eddy Savoy, who saw it all, was able to figure quite what it was. Eddy acted mostly on instinct. It was later that he doped it out.

Nick started elbowing his way toward Jasper; it was slow going. A smallish hatchet-faced man on Jasper's other side looked over Jasper's shoulder, and the eyes of this man became bright with fear. The face vanished. Somebody reached up and slapped three more *leis* around Jasper's neck, and somebody cried: 'Roses to you, kid! Give my love to the U. S. A." A man wriggled away, ran down the gangplank, jumped to the dock just in time. Hatchet-face? Eddy Savoy could not be certain, for the man kept his head low.

To all appearances this was simply another case of somebody staying on board until the last moment, and then giving his friend a few more *leis* and racing ashore barely in time to avoid being carried along and obliged to pay to be taken back by the pilot.

But Eddy Savoy guessed otherwise. Eddy had never seen Hatchet-face before, but having been a crook himself for so long, he had little trouble recognizing a fellow crook. Sheerly a matter of instinct.

Hatchet-face—for it *was* Hatchet-face as Eddy could see when the man's hat fell off—scrambled to his feet, ran to a place on the dock just below where Jasper stood. A gendarme grabbed his shoulder, hauled him back behind the police lines. Hatchet-face waved and shouted something up to his friend.

The passengers were throwing *leis* now. In Honolulu they do not throw away their *leis* until the ship is off Diamond Head and standing out to sea. In Papeete they start throwing them the moment the gangplank is raised. They throw them to anybody and everybody.

Toki mai Toki mai, ia matou
Rava Tuai matou!

The air was filled with flowers; the dock was a blanket of them, until the police relaxed their push and islanders snatched *leis* from everywhere. Then the dock itself blossomed miraculously: just like that, in a snap of the fingers, the dock became a dazzling garden.

Sampson Jasper—Eddy was watching him—was throwing his *leis* too. Sampson Jasper had not been a jewel thief all these years for nothing. He had sensationally swift hands. He might have been a first-rate stage magician had he not decided to be a thief and murderer instead. He was throwing *leis* with his left hand, while with his right he was slipping something out of an inner coat pocket and entwining it quickly and firmly into one of *leis* remaining around his neck. He had spent almost a year among the natives of Moorea, Huahine, Bora-bora, Raiatea, and he was singularly skillful in the manufacture of those wreaths of ferns and flowers. You could have stood right next to him and not noticed what he was doing. But Eddy Savoy, forty feet away, saw it—or sensed it.

Eddy himself couldn't have told you which.

Eddy yelled: "Nick! He's twisting it into a *lei!*"

His voice was lost in the clamor. Nick Fisher elbowed and butted his way toward Sampson Jasper. The whistle sounded again.

Jasper had thrown five of his *leis.* Now, with the ship fifteen or twenty feet from the dock, and with Nick Fisher almost at his side, he took off and threw the sixth, the last. It was a *lei* of roses. It was heavy, and Jasper threw it with all his strength.

"Roses to you, kid!"

AGAIN there was nothing unusual about this. It was exactly what most of the other passengers were doing—what people always do when they leave Tahiti.

A hand fell on Sampson Jasper's shoulder, and Nick said: "Hello, Sam. What have you done with Bambridge's amulets, or may I ask?"

Jasper turned, laughing. He did not seem frightened, only amazed and then, a moment later, amused.

He did not have the amulets with him, Eddy surmised. He would never have looked so calm about it, with Nick Fisher at his side. He wasn't so clever an actor.

Eddy's glance shot to the dock. The rose *lei,* though thrown hard, seemed uncommonly heavy. It had carried only to the edge of the dock, where it hung uncertainly. A scuffling foot, even a breeze, would topple it into the water.

The dock was a madhouse in that last wild scramble for *leis.* It is a great game, and a game all Tahitians love to play. Hatchet-face was playing it too, Eddy Savoy noted, with the difference that Hatchet-face was not to get any old *lei* but was intent upon getting the one of roses.

Only three men knew that a necklace worth perhaps a quarter of a million dollars was neatly entwined in that rose *lei.*

Hatchet-face kneeled, snatched—but somebody's foot touched it, and the *lei* slid off the dock.

Sampson Jasper was saying to Nick: "Well, well, well! Fancy meeting you here!"

"I'm going to frisk you, Sam, and then I'm going to go through your cabin and all your baggage."

Jasper drawled: "By what authority?"

Something hit his ribs. Nobody, not even Jasper himself was able to see what it was; but Jasper could guess.

"This authority," Nick said. "Is it enough?"

"Yes. I expect it is. But you don't mind if we postpone this search a few minutes, do you? I'd like to wave goodbye to my friends."

"I do mind," said Nick. "We start now."

"Oh, well," said Sampson Jasper, and shrugged. "If you feel that way about it—"

Nobody saw Nick's pistol. Nobody even saw Nick's hand slide beneath Sampson Jasper's coat and adroitly remove a small automatic from its holster.

A lot of *leis* floated between ship and dock now, a wide rocking sheet of them, but the rose *lei* was easily identified. Roses do not make very good *leis.*

Hatchet-face, on the edge of the dock, was panic-stricken. It was obvious that he could not swim. Boys were diving into the water. They came to the surface, laughing, yelling, holding up their palms for tossed coins or for more *leis.* They started to swim along with the ship.

One came up with the rose *lei* neatly

encircling his neck. He laughed in delight. It was a favorite trick among the Papeete harbor boys. Lots of others had *leis* collected in this fashion—but only one had the rose *lei.*

IT was then that Eddy Savoy acted. There was no sense shouting; nobody could hear him. By the time Eddy reached Nick the swimmer might have thrown the *lei* away, or given it to somebody else—or he might have swum ashore where Hatchet-face would certainly be waiting for him.

There was only one thing for Eddy to do—and he did it.

He spun around, squirmed through the crowd, dodged into a companionway, crossed to the starboard side. The deck there was deserted. Eddy peeled off his coat, kicked off his shoes, and vaulted head-first over the rail.

He cleaved the water cleanly.

As a boy in New York's East Side he had been a wharf rat. He could have stayed afloat, even have outdistanced a moderately good swimmer, had he been clad in medieval armor. Water was land to Eddy.

The *Kipapa* was moving ahead under her own power, picking up speed. Eddy swam around her stern, taking care to keep clear of the suction caused by the screws. He swam fast. He had to.

Rinta. Nina te haere—
He? He? He? He?
To matou kira, kira,
To fenua Monkelia!

It would have worked out all right if it had not been for the launch.

The launch, circling the *Kipapa,* was filled with natives and whites waving farewell. They were noisy, they were happy, they were covered with flowers and filled with liquor. Eddy, swimming hard, was within a few feet of the native with the rose *lei,* when the launch picked that native up.

"Hi, Fanaa! Climb in!"

Fanaa, climbed in, laughing, panting; and the launch sped away. Eddy, half way between the dock and the tiny palm-studded isle of Motouta, cursed his luck. Darkness came, and a casual breeze wrinkled the flower-strewn water. The launch, white foam dancing in its wake, was headed east. The *Kipapa's* engine was at full speed ahead now, and she was making for the break in the reef, for the open Pacific, for San Francisco.

II

FANAA SIMPSON was two parts Tahitian, one part French, one part British, one part Tongan, and one part Danish, which is to say that he was a typical Tahitian. He was young and husky, he loved to get plastered, and he had a girl named Tetura who shared with him a little bamboo shack in Taunoa. The gasoline launch deposited him and his friends at a dock in Pirae, some six or seven miles from Papeete, and there, since it was still practically afternoon, they settled down to a little serious drinking. Punches first; but when the rum ran out they switched light-heartedly to whisky.

Fanaa quit the party at about eight, still able to walk.

By this time he had discovered the fact that the wet *lei* of roses around his neck for some unknown reason had entwined in it some sort of souvenir—a necklace of oval plates with funny figures engraved on them and fastened together by metal clasps. It was pretty, and unusual, he thought. Not worth anything, of course, but it would be a nice thing to give to Tetura.

Fanaa, of course, had not the faint-

est notion that those strange-looking plates, about two and half inches long, were made of slabs of carnelian and chalcedony, and that the raised lettering against a matte background of fine crossed lines comprised quotations from the Koran. He never dreamed that it had been taken dozens of cunning craftsmen to make it for the great Sultan Alp Arslan, Lord of the East and the west, second of the Suljukide line, in far Nishabur a thousand years ago. He did not realize that because of it one man had been murdered and that there was everything to indicate that at least one more would be murdered—and that, in a very few hours right here in Tahiti.

Tetura wasn't sure, when Fanaa staggered in, whether he was going to kiss her or beat her. Drunk, he might do either, being a man of unguessable whims. Drunk or sober, he would certainly have beaten her if he'd heard that she'd been out with one of the sailors from the *Kipapa* the previous night, while he himself, Fanaa, had been working at the phosphate warehouse.

"This is for you." He beamed idiotically. He held out his arms, and Tetura flew into them, laughing. They embraced.

It was exactly the wrong moment for Hatchet-face to enter; but Hatchet-face—his name was Arthur Horge—was wild with anxiety and could not be expected to know better. He had traced the launch to the house in Pirae, he had asked for Fanaa by description and had learned that Fanaa had left and was presumably on his way to Tetura. So Horge had hurried, he had almost run, to the bamboo shack in Tanoa. He burst in on that embrace.

Hatchet-face, hiding out with his friend and associate Sampson Jasper, had lived in the Society Islands for almost a year, and though he seldom showed his face in Tahiti, and never at all on boat days, he could speak the language. But in bursting in upon Fanaa and Tetura he forgot this. He forgot everything, in his excitement, except the Persian amulet necklace which Fanaa held in his hand.

"Say, listen here. I'll give you ten bucks for that thing! Listen, I'll give you twenty—"

Fanaa didn't understand English, but if he had he would have reacted in the same way. He had a quick temper, and even when drunk he had a wicked right hook. Snarling, he released Tetura.

Hatchet-face must have thought it was raining sledge hammers. He went backward through the little doorway, backward down the four or five steps to the earth. He was hauled to his feet, knocked down, picked up again, knocked down again. A bare but large and well calloused foot whammed several times against his right ear.

"Now beat it," suggested Fanaa, or words to hat effect in Tahitian.

Arthur — Hatchet-face — Horge crawled away, his head singing, his chest thumping, his mouth and nose a great wet slobber of blood. He disappeared around an oleander bush, staggering toward the road, and Fanna, brushing his hands, lurched back to his Tetura—and promptly passed out on the floor.

ARTHUR HORGE, however, had not the slightest intention of calling it a night. His one thought, when his singing head permitted him to think at all, was for that necklace. *He* knew its value. *He* was expecting to get a fifty-fifty cut on it when the thing was sold to the millionaire who had commissioned the Bambridge robbery, and

he had wanted that necklace so badly that in order to get it he had become a party to murder. He was prepared to participate in another murder too, if necessary.

A short distance down the road he stopped, washed his face in the water of a ditch, wiped it with a handkerchief. The sky was packed with stars, the air was warm and fragrant with the odor of frangipani. An exquisite Tahitian night—but Horge didn't care.

He went back to Tetura's house, not eagerly this time, not boldly, but with caution. He slipped behind the oleander bush. He had an automatic pistol in his felt hand, an opened clasp knife in his right. It was he knife he really intended to use; the pistol was just in case of emergency. Horge was convinced that he was dealing with a madman, and radical methods, he believed, were needed. Sooner or later that native would have to emerge. And when he did—

TETURA got her Fanaa to the bed. There were no shoes to take off, no collar to loosen. Tetura sat for a little while, fingering the necklace Fanaa had given her, fingering, too, a one hundred franc note.

The sailor the previous night, the sailor Fanaa didn't know about, had been generous. And when a girl like Tetura had one hundred francs—that spelled *party!* She didn't have to wait for her chance, either. It was right here now. Within a few minutes Fanaa would be sound asleep—and he would stay asleep, she knew, for a good eight or nine hours.

She slipped out of her *pareo* and wriggled into a pink and purple and very tight-fitting dress of watered silk. She even put on shoes, for she had a pair of shoes. They had marvelous high, if not very straight, heels. She always had difficulty getting about in them, but they looked swell.

She wanted to sing. She left the lamp on, turned low; just in case Fanaa should wake up for a little while she would be able to convince him later that she'd only been chatting with a neighbor. She hung the funny-looking necklace around her neck. She started for the door.

Outside, in the shadow of the oleander, Hatchet-face stiffened, and his hand got tight on the clasp knife.

But the necklace clanked a little as Tetura walked. She slipped it off. She wanted to wear it—she wouldn't think of *not* wearing something new and fancy like this!—but there would be time to put it on later. For the present she wrapped it in some *nono* leaves, so that it would make no sound. She went out.

She paused at a hibiscus bush not four feet from where Horge crouched. He saw her bare neck in the starlight, and did not stir. She went on down the road between Papeete.

Marcelline was waiting for her—Marcelline, her best friend, who knew all about the one hundred francs, and knew that Tetura would get away tonight if it was possible. They embraced one another, tittering. They fastened behind their ears the hibiscus flowers Tetura had paused to pick. Tetura unwrapped the necklace, showed it to Marcelline, put it on.

They were the two happiest and most excited girls in the world. They went down the road singing and giggling, the amulets clacking at Tetura's chocolate-colored neck. Tetura had to walk a little slower because of her shoes. But Marcelline, though she didn't possess a pair, was a swell dresser too. Marcelline wore amber silk slashed with

scarlet. Hot dog! They had a hundred francs to spend.

III

IT was at least two hours later that Arthur Horge decided to quit the oleander bush and risk a visit to the hut. This was not the first house he had entered by night without invitation, but with his mouth still tasting of blood, his eyes puffed, his head ringing from the impact of that huge calloused foot, he was more that ordinarily careful.

There was not much furniture; only a single room. In three minutes Horge had searched the place thoroughly—all except the bed itself.

He approached the bed silently as a cat. He had the clasp knife in his right hand, and while with his left hand he felt under the skimpy mattress he held the knife so that its point was not half an inch from Fanaa's throat.

Once Fanaa blubbered something, interrupting his own hearty snores, and squirmed. Horge in that terrible instant almost let him have the steel out of sheer nervousness.

But Fanaa settled back into slumber —and lived.

No necklace. At first it did not seem possible. Horge went outside, searched the ground carefully, on hands and knees, going over every inch of space to which the necklace might have been thrown from a window. But he didn't find it.

Then he remembered that the girl, when she quit the house, had been holding something that looked like a small native pandanus leaf basket. The necklace *could* have been in that. In fact it *must* have been in that!

When he reached the road again, Horge started to run.

EDDY SAVOY? He was accustomed to acting alone, though not as a detective, and he did not lose his head. Nevertheless he knew, as he pulled himself out of the water at the Quai du Commerce between two bedraggled islands schooners paintered sternward, that he was in a tight spot. He had committed no crime; he had some money which though wet probably was still good; but his passport, made out to Everard Savage, was aboard the departing *Kipapa*. His friend Nick Fisher was aboard the *Kipapa*. He was alone in a land where the authorities, stringently French, are by habit suspicious of men who lack identification.

Eddy Savoy the jewel thief, wanted in at least half of the states of the Union, was dead; Eddy Savoy was lying at the bottom of Honolulu harbor. Yet his fingerprints were still on file, and the G-men not so long ago had broadcast to thousands of police stations, post offices and sheriffs' offices, Eddy Savoy's description and copies of his prints. If the local French authorities decided to check with Washington— Well, Eddy had so many raps hanging over him that he would unquestionably spend the rest of his life in jail.

As long as Nick was around it was different. Nick had prestige—he was easily the most celebrated insurance detective in the United States—and he knew how to handle cops. Nick would move heaven and earth to see that his friend Eddy Savoy remained Everard Savage to the world. But Nick was on his way to San Francisco. Eddy was alone.

He kept his head. He didn't start running around asking questions. He limped into a bar where, as he knew, the proprietor spoke some English. He

whispered with him for a few minutes. Why, certainly! Right into the back room here! The *Banque de l'Indo-Chine* was closed at this hour, of course, but the proprietor would see that nobody disturbed him. The proprietor would see that his clothes were dried. A cup of coffee? Certainly! Would *monsieur* care to have a little cognac with it? Excellent thing for a man who had fallen into the water, coffee and cognac.

So Eddy sat, stark naked, in what amounted to no more than a large closet. For two hours he sat there sipping *café royals* and smoking cigarettes and listening to the noise from the bar the other side of a paperlike partition. He was thinking things over.

When the proprietor had returned with the dried clothes, and had been well paid, Eddy asked about Hatchet-face. Eddy had a gift for description. He had seen Hatchet-face for only a few fleet minutes, but he described him perfectly.

Ah, yes! That was Monsieur Horge! Yes, Monsieur Horge had been in the barroom only half an hour ago, asking for a girl named Tetura, a native. Why did Horge want Tetura? Ah, this was something the proprietor did not know. But the proprietor could *guess*. Tetura was very pretty indeed, and she liked to drink, she liked to go around. . . . *Monsieur* understood?

Yes, Eddy understood; though Eddy had a strong hunch that this man Horge — probably some small-time crook who'd got mixed up with Sampson Jasper—as not pursuing Tetura because of her physical charms.

Eddy, in appearance now tolerably respectable, went to the wireless office, sent a message to Nick aboard the *Kipapa:*

SAFE HERE STOP NEXT BOAT SIX WEEKS STOP MEANWHILE CHASING TRINKETS.

Then he went looking for Hatchet-face Horge.

THAT personage, wild with anxiety, was scampering from hot spot to hot spot in search of Tetura, who with her girl friend Marcelline was having a wonderful time. They had been at Laurey's, where somebody had bought them a couple of drinks. They had been at Bohler's, at Perry's, at Lionel's. They had left each of these places just before the arrival of Horge, who was driving a hired car. They had been at Quinn's.

"They said something," the bartender at Quinn's remembered, "about going to the Moana."

Horge drove to the Moana, and there at last he ran Tetura to earth.

But Horge was over-anxious; Tetura and Marcelline had picked up four or five men at the Moana, and they were all spiffed; and Horge did not take this into consideration. He was conscious only of that necklace. Unlike Eddy Savoy, who at that very moment was arriving at the Moana in a taxicab, having pursued Horge as Horge had pursued Tetura—unlike Eddy, Hatchet-face did not keep his head. As he had done at Tetura's house, so he did now. He had not learned his lesson. He charged in, snatched at the necklace, started shouting something about giving her twenty dollars for it—

Tetura was dancing with a giant *kanaka.* These were all her friends around here, all Tahitians. Recognizing Horge, she screamed. Not in fright —she was too tight to be frightened— but in sheer, wildcat indignation.

What Arthur Horge had taken from Fanaa was as nothing compared with what he took now from the four or five men for whom Tetura had been buying drinks. They all landed on him at once. They had extremely little sense of fair play, and no notion at all of Queensbury rules.

They booted and slugged him all the way out to the edge of the road, where he collapsed on his hatchet-face. They gave him a few extra kicks for good measure, and then, singing and laughing, returned to the bar. A little mêlée like that never interfered with a Tahitian's drinking. The music started again, and the dancing.

Eddy Savoy, of course, had witnessed this scene. So had the taxi driver who had brought him to the roadhouse. The taxi driver, monstrously fat, chuckled with delight. Being of Tahiti —there is not a more democratic place on earth—the driver naturally expected to go into the bar with his fare and have a few drinks with him. It was the custom, more or less.

But Eddy stopped him, a hand on the mighty chest.

"No, you wait here, pal. I'll just be a few minutes."

The taxi driver couldn't understand English but he could get the idea; and he was hurt. He sulked by the side of his car. He glowered at Eddy as Eddy went inside.

However, a moment later the driver was scowling no longer. He was popeyed with amazement.

This fare, this funny little American —he *must* be an American, he was so crazy—had seemed until now perfectly sober. Yet he staggered into the Moana. He shouted gibberish, waving his arms. Several of the revelers shouted back, waving. Eddy thumped the bar.

"Champagne!" Eddy cried.

There is no word for it in Tahitian, and in English it sounds much the same as it does in French. Besides, a bartender anywhere would manage to understand an order for champagne—even if you used a Hindustani dialect.

A cold-beaded bottle was in front of Eddy in a flash. Eddy shook his head. The bartender looked crestfallen.

"No, no, no! Not *one* bottle!" Eddy spread his fingers counting on them. "Not *one* bottle! *Five* bottles!" He waved an arm, laughing drunkenly. "Set 'em up for the whole house!"

Dancing stopped. Everybody came to the bar. Corks popped. Bubbles raced upward with dizzy speed. Eddy Savoy, that souse, slapped backs and asked everybody if he were having a good time. They understood him now. People at bars *do* understand things like that, no matter in what language they are said.

EDDY slid in between Tetura and her friend. He put an arm around each. Of course nobody objected. The American was buying champagne, wasn't he?

"Come on," Eddy whispered. "Let's go up to the Lafayette."

That word "Lafayette" was the only word they caught; but it was enough. The Lafayette is several miles up the road from the Moana, away from Papeete, and it would be the only other spot on the island open at this hour. The Lafayette? *Ah, oui!* Marcelline and Tetura, as boiled as hoot owls, would go to the Lafayette any old time with a man who bought champagne.

Laughing and singing, they staggered out. To Eddy went the reward of diplomacy. Nobody dreamed of objecting to this departure. The men were much too busy with what wine Eddy and the girls had left. They paused

only long enough to give Eddy a cheer and to wish him luck with the girls.

The fat taxi driver chuckled all over. He held open the door. He liked parties like this; and surely at the Lafayette the mad American would invite him in. Then he, the driver, probably would manage to get one of the girls for himself before the evening was over. Hot dog! Tahiti is a great place.

Not one of them, the driver, Eddy, Tetura, Marcelline, ever got into the taxi that night.

A hand fell on Eddy's shoulder, whirled him around, pushed him back so that he sat on the running board. The movement threw the two girls aside, and one of them collided with the fat driver, who went "Oof!" in astonishment. An automatic pistol glinted under Eddy's nose. Then the pistol swung back and forth, including the driver and the girls.

"All right, we've had our little fun," snarled Arthur Horge. He had covered his face with a handkerchief, the ends tied behind his head. It was a clumsy attempt to conceal his identity, but it served to make him look grim and dangerous in the moonlight. "One crack out of you," he snarled at Eddy, "and it goes bang-bang. Clear?"

"Perfectly clear," said Eddy, not moving.

Horge snapped something in Tahitian to the others. Then he reached out with his left hand and snatched the string of Persian amulets from Tetura's neck, breaking the clasp.

"Now stay right where you are," he rasped, backing toward his hired automobile. He was thrusting the necklace into a coat pocket as he went. "One move out of any of you—"

Eddy would have remained motionless, for he was not a fool. The taxi driver, too, had no inclination toward suicide. Marcelline was plain downright scared. But Tetura was something else again.

Tetura, even sober, had a hot temper. When alcohol burned in her savage young veins, the goad of anger turned her into a hellion. A little thing like an automatic pistol meant nothing to Tetura. You couldn't have frightened her with a field gun.

She hated this little hatchet-faced man who was always appearing at the wrong moment. Now she took two steps toward him.

"Stand where you are," he warned her, "or I'll kill you."

TETURA took another step toward him and swung her sturdy right hand. Just above the mask-handkerchief on the right side a long red mark appeared. Horge's face had suffered already this night from men's fists; now it was to know what a woman's fingernails could do. Blood ran swiftly down, coloring the handkerchief. Horge screamed in pain, stumbled backward, fired three times.

A groove of paint disappeared from the top of the car's hood. Marcelline and Tetura, with the luck of the intoxicated, were not touched. Eddy sprang low, from his sitting position, at Horge's ankles.

It was the taxi driver who got it. The driver's mouth fell open, and he made a grunting sound as though somebody had punched his huge belly. He slammed back against a fender, then slid to the ground, settling with a quiet, almost a sedate bump, his legs spread in front of him. Blood spurted from his neck, blood appeared at his breast, and in his forehead just above the left eye was a little blue-black hole.

Eddy caught Horge's heels, but Horge was already in retreat. Horge

fell, but was up again instantly. He fired twice more at Eddy now. But he hadn't fully recovered his balance, and the bullets only plowed the earth an inch or so from the right side of Eddy's head, showered Eddy's right ear with dirt.

The man must have taken the precaution of leaving his engine going, his car turned. A door slammed, a gear clacked, and before Eddy could even get to his knees, the car, its lights out, was roaring toward Papeete.

Eddy did not linger for the investigation. Eddy was not a man in a good position to meet and questioned by police. Shaken but unwounded, he scrambled to his feet, and as the crowd from the Moana rushed out into the moonlight, Eddy was dodging into jungle.

IV

FOR perhaps an hour he stumbled through wild hilly country, barked his shins on rocks unseen in the darkness, slashed his way through eight-foot masses of fern, collided with smooth shiny clumps of bamboo, splashed through mountain brooks cold on his feet and ankles. Twice he saw by automobile headlights that he was approaching the road, and each time he turned further back into the jungle. He was drenched with sweat, his clothes were torn, his head throbbed.

Music attracted him—slow, sad music—not the rapid jerky hula music of the Teturas and the Marcellines—but dreamy, melancholy music, the music of ancient Tahiti. There was a strumming of guitars, there were soft Tahitian voices.

E Tiura te Ti,
E faifai noa hia e te hui tapairu:
E marere hua e!
Na'u tena no Ti,
E Ti tanu e!

Eddy listened.

Cautiously he approached the hut. Five or six natives were seated on the steps. Two played guitars. All sang. They wore *pareos* and were barefooted. Light from an oil lamp on the floor of the hut behind them cast their figures in sharp silhouette.

Eddy Savoy opened a pack of cigarettes and strolled out into the clearing. They did not cease singing until song was ended, but they waved at him and smiled. They didn't know who he was; they didn't care; they were Tahitians, and he was welcome.

"Haere oe hia," one of the men said amiably.

"No spik Inglish," said Eddy, "but have you got a place where I could grab a little sleep?"

He demonstrated, tilting his head on his hands at an angle, and they roared with delight, understanding him. Certainly he could sleep here! Was he hungry? (Business of arching the eyebrows while fingers were thrust into mouths.)

Was he *hungry!* He suddenly realized how very hungry he was; he had had nothing to eat since noon. He distributed cigarettes while one of the women fussed with a fire. He sat and smoked and listened to them sing.

"These people," he thought, "really know how to live."

He remembered old tenement days in New York when he had been a kid, when he had slept in doorways, stolen from fruit stands, blacked shoes in City Hall Park. He remembered his first timid ventures into crime, his days as a dip, his preliminary successes in the high-class business of lifting diamonds and rubies and pearls and emeralds from fat foolish women. He remembered years of ducking the cops, whole weeks spent in smelly stuffy bedrooms

in third-rate hotels, when he did not dare even at night to show his face on the street. This was the life, here! He was glad he'd quit the game while the quitting was good. He had never liked it. He'd gone into it, in the beginning, simply because he didn't know any better. He knew better now.

But if he were caught—if Everard Savage's fingerprints were sent to Washington, and a man in that big building in Pennsylvania Avenue pulled open a green steel filing case, flipped over cards, stopped, muttered: "Well, what do you think of that?" If this happened—

THEY brought him *poi* and *mahi-mahi, umara, fei,* steamed *taro* in bananas served with coconut water, *ipotico* sweetened with raw native molasses. They laughed with delight when he wolfed this meal, and when he nodded, grinning his gratitude. They brought him arrowroot and *pia, mape, niu, atae tahatai,* curious ancient Tahitian dishes already forgotten down in Papeete. He couldn't eat a quarter of it.

Soon he stretched out on a mat, which might have been hard since it was nothing but pandanus fronds over the bare floor, but which seemed of a heavenly softness to Eddy Savoy. And he fell asleep, the sound of their singing still in his ears.

E Ti tanu e!
Nau tena no Ti,

It was almost dawn when he awoke, stiff but not groggy. A smear in the east was pushing against the stars. Tahitians, men and women alike, in their *pareos,* were strewn around him in the dim hut, sleeping peacefully. He stepped over them, making his way out. He left a fifty franc note on his mat; it was much too much, practically five dollars in American money, but Eddy felt curiously happy. After that sleep he felt that somehow everything was going to be all right.

He followed a path, and it led him to the Papenoo road. He went downhill, humming a little. Papeete was ahead and below, its last street lights blinking out. There was no traffic.

By the time he reached the wireless office it was full daylight. The operator, yawning, handed Everard Savage a radiogram from the *Kipapa,* but the radiogram was not signed by Nick Fisher. It was signed by the Captain of the freighter, whom Eddy had met coming up from Sydney.

YOUR MESSAGE NOT DELIVERED BECAUSE FISHER NOT ABOARD STOP WE HAVE REASON TO THINK FISHER WAS MURDERED AND THROWN INTO THE OCEAN STOP WE ARE PUTTING BACK TO PAPEETE

All that precious happiness faded, and all the light bright morning air of Tahiti became a stink in his nostrils. His head swam. It simply wasn't possible! Nick Fisher killed! Good old, steady old, faithful old Nick Fisher—Eddy's worst enemy at one time, his dearest foe, and now his dearest friend. It couldn't be!

. . . ARE PUTTING BACK . . .

The message had been received a little after eight o'clock the previous evening while Eddy was running all over the island looking for the man who was looking for Tetura and her quarter of a million dollar necklace. The necklace could go to perdition now! All Eddy thought of was Nick Fisher.

. . . ARE PUTTING BACK . . .

Well then, the boat ought to be—

He raised his eyes, and saw that it

was. It was loafing a short distance beyond the reef out there, the rusty grimy old freighter *Kipapa.* It had been out there, perhaps, most of the night. It either didn't have a pilot or didn't want to get one. A murder—and so it had put back. A murder perhaps inside of the three-mile limit, so that the captain was not certain of his authority and did not care to take chances. Nick Fisher murdered? Oh, it *couldn't* be!

Eddy ran to the water's edge, signaled a native who was paddling a small outrigger canoe. He pointed to the *Kipapa* and showed a five franc note.

CAPTAIN SHAW of the *Kipapa* was puzzled and angry and somewhat frightened. He was not accustomed to murders. He was not sure what he ought to have done, not sure whether the killing had taken place inside of or beyond the three-mile limit. The French were fussy that way. When the French got excited they talked like streaks of lightning—and they were excited this morning. For that matter, Captain Shaw himself was excited, and so was everybody else.

A launch or speedboat or pirogue was pulling alongside the anchored vessel every few minutes, and more officials than the captain had even supposed to exist were swarming aboard, babbling questions, flourishing forms which must be filled out and affidavits which must be signed. All Captain Shaw could do was stand there, hot and red of face, drenched in sweat, after a sleepless night, and try to make them understand what he meant.

"I'm blowed if I'm going to pay a pilot to go in again and then pay for dockage besides! I'm not even sure whether the murder was committed inside French territory or on the high seas. You can conduct your investigation right here and now. We're two days late as it is!"

Somebody gushed out a torrent of words which as nearly as Captain Shaw could make out meant that there had been another murder, though on land, the night before. A taxi driver killed? No wonder the local cops were excited! They don't get as many murders as that, ordinarily, in five years!

"But what's that got to do with me?" Captain Shaw demanded. "I'll hang and rot before I'll get another pilot and then—"

He saw the second of the two missing passengers—one had already returned—and went to him eagerly.

"Say, possibly you can tell us something about this. Mr. Savage. You were Mr. Fisher's cabin mate, weren't you?"

"I was," said Eddy in a flat low voice.

"What happened? You miss the boat, the way Mr. Horge did?"

"Yeah, I missed the boat," said Eddy. Then, impulsively: "For Pete's sake, Captain, what happened? Is Nick really dead?"

The captain said, "Maybe you can help us. *I* don't know what it's all about!" He took Eddy's arm. "Let's get away from this place before somebody else tries to stab me with a deposition."

In his cabin, a drink of whisky in his hand—Eddy had refused one—Captain Shaw told the story.

Mr. Fisher had come to him shortly after they'd passed the reef to say that one of the passengers who got aboard at Papeete—a Mr. Sampson Jasper—was a notorious criminal who had in his possession, or *had* recently had in his possession, a stolen necklace. Mr. Fisher admitted that he had searched

Mr. Jasper and Mr. Jasper's stateroom and luggage thoroughly, but had been unable to find this necklace. He was certain, however, that Jasper knew where it was. He insisted that the *Kipapa* put back.

"He said the fact that you were not on board proved that this necklace was in Papeete and that Mr. Jasper knew where it was. I couldn't see that line of reasoning at all, and I told him so. I said you had simply missed the boat and that was all there was to it, and I said that we were two days late already and I wasn't minded to put back. We'd dropped the pilot, and there was no way possible for Mr. Fisher to get ashore again.

"Well, he was furious about it, made a terrible fuss. I told him I was sorry but we were on our way, next stop San Francisco, and that was all there was to it. He said, 'You mark my words, there's going to be trouble if you don't put back, Captain!' And I suggested that he get out and let me do my work in peace. And then he went.

"Half an hour later a sailor came to my cabin and said that somebody had been murdered. There was blood all over the starboard port aft—it's a port about two or three times as big as an ordinary porthole, only oval. I went there and found the blood. It's still there. I'll show it you in a few minutes."

Eddy asked: "Sure it was blood?"

"Absolutely. It's dried now and it looks like that much dark gray paint, but it was fresh when I first saw it, and there's no doubt in the world that it was blood. It *smelled* like blood too."

"Go on," said Eddy.

"Well, I looked around and found a button with a torn shred of gray alpaca still clinging to it. It was wedged in between the lower flange of the port and a rivet head. A body had been shoved out of that port and this button had been ripped off and stuck there in the process. There can't be any question of it. I haven't got the button to show you because the gendarmes are photographing it and dusting it for fingerprints and everything else, but the cloth was gray alpaca."

"Nick," Eddy whispered, "had a gray alpaca coat."

"I know he did, and he had it on yesterday too. He had it on when he was in here demanding that I put back to Papeete. I remember it. What's more, nobody else on the ship had a coat anything like it."

"Did you search?"

"Of course I searched! I hove to and had the entire ship searched from stem to stern right away. Not a trace of Mr. Fisher."

"Sampson Jasper?"

"I thought of him immediately, of course, and questioned him myself. He had a perfect alibi. At the time the murder must have been committed Mr. Jasper was on the boat deck talking to our second officer. There isn't any doubt of this. Not only does the second officer himself confirm it, but four or five other people saw them there at the time."

"I see," said Eddy.

"Can Mr. Fisher swim? Is it possible that—"

"Nick can swim maybe a quarter of a mile, no more."

"We were at least two miles from land at the time, and there wasn't another craft near us. Want to see that blood?"

"You go back to your officials. I'll take a look around myself."

"Have you got any ideas, Mr. Savage?"

"None, except that I'm convinced that Nick Fisher isn't dead. He *can't* be dead!" Eddy was desperately in earnest. "Damn it, you couldn't kill a man like Nick Fisher! You simply *couldn't!*"

V

HE WENT below and gazed glumly at the stains. There was a great deal of blood. The gendarmes had scraped up a little for analysis, and some morbid sailors had stolen a bit for souvenirs, but there was plenty left. The place where the button had stuck was clear enough. A button *would* stick in just that place if the body of a man wearing a coat had been shoved out through that port.

Eddy lighted a cigarette. Smoke wreathed his thin sharp monkeylike face—an ugly yet curiously attractive face. He just stood for a while, puffing at the cigarette. Nobody paid any attention to him. His turn for filling out forms and signing depositions would come later.

He drifted away.

For a time he simply drifted around the ship, ignored, talking to no one, looking at nothing in particular. He found himself near the galley—this he knew by the smell—and he began to grin hopefully.

Nobody could ever know how much this little ex-crook loved the big insurance detective. It was something he himself didn't think about, ordinarily.

The galley was empty, but not silent. In a corner seven crated ducks were quacking, seven ducks which did not understand why they were being kept in that cramped dry place. Six black ducks and one white one. Eddy counted them carefully, thrusting his hand inside the crate to make sure that one duck had not swooned or something.

No, there were only seven. Six black ones and a white one.

Then Eddy really grinned. The grin cracked across his lips, swung up the ends of his mouth, wrinkled at the corners of his eyes, dimpled his sharp little chin. The grin indeed seemed to make its impression upon every part of him.

"Damn it," he whispered, "I *knew* they couldn't kill Nick!"

FINDING the cabin was not difficult. The *Kibapa* had accommodations for only ten passengers, and a steward told him that Mr. Jasper and Mr. Horge were in Number 4. The corridor was empty, and Eddy, listening at the door, heard a rustle of voices. He could not distinguish what was being said. He started away, nodding.

"Where are *you* going?"

Eddy, turning, saw Horge in the doorway. There was an automatic—Eddy had seen it before—in Horge's hand. Why Horge had stepped out just at that moment Eddy was never to learn.

"I've seen you before. I knew you even by your back."

"Did you?"

"Step in the stateroom here. I've got things to say to you."

"Delighted."

He stepped into the stateroom. Sampson Jasper was backing away from a small ventilator.

"Is that where you've hidden the amulets?" asked Eddy.

Jasper stared, then began to frown.

Horge closed and locked the door, and stood with his back to it, the automatic loose at his hip. He looked nervous. His mouth twitched. He wasn't, and never would be, big-time. He was a small crook who'd run into something much too large for him. But

for that very reason he was dangerous. He might shoot when shooting was not necessary, panicked. He had done that once already.

"This is the guy I was telling you about. He saw me bam that cabby. He'd been chasing me around, I think. Must have been working with Nick Fisher."

Sampson Jasper still was frowning. He couldn't make this out at all. He paid no attention to Horge. After a while he said slowly, to Eddy:

"You're supposed to be dead."

"Am I?" asked Eddy.

"I read about it. Cut to pieces by the propeller of a ship in Honolulu harbor. Sunk without trace. Body never recovered. You're dead."

"Well, well, well," said Eddy, who couldn't think of anything better to say.

"You couldn't possibly be working with Nick Fisher. You couldn't *possibly!* Dead or alive, you just couldn't be working with him."

Jasper stood, dumbfounded, suspicious, scarcely believing his own eyes, and not at all certain about what to do next. Hatchet-face Horge knew no such uncertainty.

"I don't know what this is all about," said Horge, "but I do know one thing, and that is that this is the guy who was after that necklace, and he's the guy who saw me bump that cabby. You know what that means, don't you?"

Jasper said slowly, all the time staring at Eddy but speaking now to his partner: "You know who this is, Art?"

"Sure, I know who he is. I just told you. He's the guy that saw me when—"

"This," said Jasper, "is Eddy Savoy."

"What!"

Horge had heard of the great Eddy Savoy. Who in the underworld of America had *not* heard of that wraith-like figure, that phantom crook, that fabulous, unbelievably slippery little man who played the game alone and in his own way, who flitted from ballroom to bedroom and from bedroom to ballroom, making off with staggering loot, trusting nobody, appearing now here, now there, and now a thousand miles away? Who *hadn't* heard of him? Already, though it was scarcely a year since the report that he was dead, Eddy had become in the underworld almost a myth. "There will never," old-timers would say, "be a crook like Eddy Savoy. That guy," they would add, "had *everything!*" He had been blamed for hundreds of crimes, many of which he had not committeed, but nobody had ever questioned that he had been tops in his chosen field.

HORGE gasped. Jasper had recovered from his amazement. That it really was Eddy Savoy here in front of him he had not the slightest doubt. Nor had he any doubt as to what ought to be done about Eddy, now. You didn't buy that man off, you didn't offer to split with him. Not Eddy Savoy! If he got in your way—and indisputably he *had* got into Jasper's way—there was only one thing to be done about it.

"Yes, you're right, Art. He's got to be handled."

"You're tootin' he's got to be handled!" Horge, stiffening at the door, raised his automatic.

"That way?" asked Eddy, and smiled. "That way, with all the noise, and the boat swarming with cops? My, my, my! You never were much good, Sam, but I didn't think you'd ever act like an Eighth Avenue muscleman."

Sampson Jasper could take talk like this from a master. Nevertheless Jasper

had his own pride. "You belittle me, Eddy. That way, yes. And again, no."

"Puzzling," Eddy suggested.

"Is it?" Jasper snapped open a handbag. "Well, I'll soon show you what I mean. Art, keep that gun on him."

He took from the handbag a small single-shot .22 caliber pistol, in appearance almost a toy, meant merely for target practice. He also took from the bag a steel tube about eight inches long with a bulgy end. He started to screw one end of this tube—the end without the bulge—onto the muzzle of the target pistol, which, it appeared, was threaded for this. He glanced sideward at Eddy. "Catch on?"

"Oh, yes," Eddy said casually, though now his throat was dry and for the first time he was afraid. "Yes, I catch on."

He stared unhappily at the little steel barrel—and knew that very soon now death would come rushing at him through that small and shiny tunnel—come ploughing through his chest, boring for his heart. . . .

Silencers, so popular in fiction, are extraordinarily rare in real life. It makes a nice story; but in fact you couldn't possibly fire a revolver or an automatic pistol with a silencer attached—not unless you feel like burning half your hand off.

However, there is one sort of pistol which can be fired, and safely fired, with a silencer attached. This is a single-shot pistol—the kind made for target practice.

Well, it would be target practice soon. The target being the heart of Eddy Savoy, scarcely missable at this distance.

And not a sound would be made.

"Yes, I catch on," Eddy said.

Jasper asked: "Ready to take it?"

His finger tightened a little.

He had slipped a cartridge into the gun, he had shaken the weapon to be sure that the silencer was attached with no slack. He looked up with a wan, sadly mocking smile.

Eddy Savoy waited a moment until he was sure that his voice would be firm. He might have known, he thought, that he'd finish up like this some day. Quietly, firmly, with no sound. Of course it would be easy to dispose of his corpse afterward. The Pacific Ocean is most accommodating in that respect.

He had lived silently, furtively, and his life had been a mystery to cops and fellow crooks alike. He would die that way. It was fitting and proper. All right. "Yes, I guess I'm ready—to take it," he said.

There was a knock on the door.

THE only things about Sampson Jasper that moved were his eyes. He glanced for an instant at his partner, who stood with his back to the door. Then he looked back at Eddy Savoy. He whispered: "Step one step to the right. Art, see who it is."

Arthur Horge called in a low voice: "Who is it?"

Eddy had stepped one step to the right. This was in case it was necessary to open the door half an inch or so; he would not be seen.

"The steward, sir. The captain would like to see Mr. Jasper and Mr. Horge."

Horge glanced at Jasper, who nodded. "Tell him we'll be there in a couple of minutes."

"Sorry, sir. The captain said it's very important. It's about the investigation. He asked me to give you this note."

"You got a note?"

"Yes, sir."

Horge glanced at Jasper. Jasper nodded. Horge unlocked the door and opened it half an inch, reaching out with his left hand, for his right hand was holding the automatic pistol.

A cyclone, or something very similar, hit the door from the outside. The door flew in, slamming against Horge, knocking him backward into the bunk. This Horge, be it repeated, was a low thing, a no-account, taken on by a smart man like Sampson Jasper only because Jasper had needed him badly at the time. He had no head. He couldn't use his brains. In an emergency he went wild and started to shoot.

He did that now.

Jasper fired once, and once only. Because the gun he held in his hand was just a single-shot pistol. No one ever knew exactly at what instant he fired, because of that silencer, but that made no difference. Jasper was reasonably accurate, and a very fast thinker. Nick Fisher, in the doorway, was a fast thinker and *absolutely* accurate.

Jasper fired once—and died.

Only Nick's head and his left arm turned. Even in that instant he knew that he'd been hit on the left side of the neck; he knew it from the burn. But nothing stopped him from doing what he was going to do.

Jasper, as has been mentioned, fired once and died.

Arthur Hatchet-face Horge fired five times altogether.

Nick Fisher fired twice. Once at Sampson Jasper—that's been recorded—and once at Hatchet-face Horge.

Horge fell, crumpling on the floor in a heap.

Through the ensuing choke of gunpowder, and while Eddy Savoy was stepping away from the wall against which he had flattened himself, Nick said lazily: "You're okay, aren't you, kid? I was worried about you."

Eddy said: "Sure, I'm okay. What do you think? Sure!" He motioned toward the ventilator. "Those Persian things are in there somewhere, I think."

"As long as you're okay—"

EVERYBODY was singing or yelling, and tropical flowers fairly hurled their incense into the air. Men in *pareos,* in swimming trunks, in shorts and polo shirts, men in espadrilles and great flopping straw hats with shell bands, were bright among the brighter women—women in Mother Hubbards and women in giddy cheap silk dresses. Even Tetura was probably there somewhere; she usually was; and since it was now a good three days since the murder of the taxi driver at the Moana, the police had actually finished their important business of getting her to sign her name to this form and that form and the other form.

Yes, probably Tetura was there.

People were throwing *leis.* Two other passengers had taken reservations made available by the violent deaths of Sampson Jasper and his ally, and they were popular persons. Lots of people had the excuse that they knew them. Or had met them once. Or had seen them.

People yelled and shouted and sang and waved. They reached for the flying *leis.* Frangipani, *piki, tiare,* ginger, jasmine . . . But there were no rose *leis.* No two parties were singing the same song.

"I can figure everything," Eddy complained, "except where you were hiding all the time after you'd killed that duck and smeared its blood all over the port and left your torn-off button there and so forth. Cap Shaw told me

he'd had the ship searched from stem to stern. Where were you, anyway?"

"I *had* to get them to turn back," Nick pointed out.

"I understand that. It was quick thinking all around. And of course you're pretty dumb about some things—"

"And of course I'm *what?*"

"Anyway, where did you hide?"

Nick chuckled, patting the bandage around his neck. The *Kipapa* was moved away at last, and Nick started to throw his *leis*. He threw with his left hand. He had writer's cramp, he explained, in his right hand.

"I was under the bunk in the captain's cabin. It seemed the logical place to go. I did the act with that duck—poor duck, I felt sorry for it!—and I left the button, and then I went and hid behind a pile of rope near the door of the captain's cabin. I figured that as soon as the blood was found the person who found it would report right away to the captain direct, and that the captain would dash out to investigate. Which is just what happened. And the moment he dashed *out* of his cabin I dashed *in*. *Savvy?* They thought they looked everywhere, but naturally it never occurred to them to look in the captain's own cabin. Why, he'd been there himself at the time the murder occurred, is it not so, my friend? Huh?"

"Nick," said Eddy, "I take it back. You're not as dumb as I thought you were."

"And then when I finally emerged—the captain never went to his cabin once after that—too busy, I suppose—when I emerged, and learned that you were aboard, I figured right away, that you would have headed for Jasper's stateroom. So I went there. I pulled out my gun, and knocked, and when a strange voice answered it still didn't faze me. I—I was a little worried about you, kid," Nick Fisher confessed. "Anyway, I spouted the steward stuff and managed to get the guy to open the door a little way. I was ready for that, of course. I used my whole body. And sure enough—fireworks. I'd had a hunch there was going to be fireworks before this business was finished."

He leaned over the rail, grinning and waving at some fool Tahitian woman who was doing a burlesque hula on the dock.

He threw her a *lei*.

The boys were jumping into the water, yelling for coins or for flowers—it didn't matter which. The people were yelling and waving. The *Kipapa* turned slowly.

Aue! Aue! te vahine hupini!
Aue! Aue! patia tona apoo sepo!

Nick said: "In a way it's a swell break for us. In spite of all the things we had to sign, we get two send-offs for one visit. Which is something, huh?"

"Yeah," said Eddy.

He grinned.

"And we've got Old Man Bambridge's blinking Persian amulets. Which is also something." He paused, his face still fixed in a smile of departure as he gazed down at the fast-receding dock. "One thing I can't help wishing, though. I can't help wishing I could have you along with me all the time."

"Yeah?" said Eddy. "Well, you *can't* so get over the idea. Me, I'm Everard Savage. I like fishing. Detective work's too rough for me. I'm going back to Molokai!"

Partners in Ossi Osser

By HOWARD R. MARSH

WHEN that streak of white flashed across the desert sky in front of his roadster, Clem Stuart blinked his eyes and pursed his lips into an of-course-it-can't-be-true expression. "This," the voice of sophistication warned Clem Stuart, "is the Mojave desert. Out here they have mirages. They're famous for mirages. Don't be fooled!

"But who," Clem Stuart asked himself, "would bother to make up a mirage about a golf ball? Sounds silly to me. White butterfly mirage, yes; golf ball mirage, no. And if that wasn't a golf ball smacked like nobody's business then I haven't been a golf professional seven years, going on eight."

When a golf ball is traveling places, Clem Stuart decided as he braked his roadster, its sheen and parabola is as distinctive to a golfer as the swoop of a swallow or the towering of a partridge to a bird dog. That thing he had just seen definitely *was* a golf ball. But a golf ball on the Mojave desert fifty sand-blasted miles from the nearest four-corners? A golf ball rising behind a mesquite thicket and rifling two hundred yards toward a black lava bed? A golf ball with not a person, not a building in sight, which meant a good ten miles in all directions?

"We shall see what we—" began Clem Stuart. "Sheep," he finished as a pungent, disagreeable odor smote him.

He saw them then, a milling, wethering, dust-kicking flock as dirty gray as the vegetation which half concealed them—two thousand sheep flowing like water covered with gray moss. But sheep don't smack golf balls. "Some crazy bozo—" Clem Stuart began.

The bozo ambled out from behind the mesquite thicket and flopped in the direction the ball had taken. Again Clem Stuart's eyes widened into that it-can't-be-possible expression. He believed he had worked professionally over every size and shape of living humanity, from pot-bellied brewers to gangling, lathlike high-school boys. He had struggled with strange anatomies, queer deformities, attempting to prove to barrel-like movie presidents that arms must extend in front of bay windows if golf balls are to be hit; or urging human pieces of string that they must not tie arms and legs in more than double hitches if they are to get untied in time to smite the pellets from the tees. In all his experience as player and teacher he had never seen such a figure as the one which plumped from that mesquite in the center of the Mojave Desert.

"String bean," muttered Clem Stuart. "String bean with hair."

The string bean paid no attention to Clem Stuart's shiny roadster. He flopped along after the golf ball with forty-inch strides, his ragged trousers exposing brown flesh and bare feet. His hands flapped near his knees.

"Hi!" Clem Stuart called.

Without breaking his loose-jointed stride the desert man turned his face. A good deal of it was hidden by loose-hanging hair-hanks which had wandered from the uncombed copper-colored mane that fell to his shoulders. Blue eyes, deep in the squint furrows which the desert brings, stared with an utter lack of interest.

"Hi!" Clem Stuart called again, piling from his car. Here was a genuine believe-it-or-not. That gawky beanpole was actually dangling a midiron at the end of one tremendous arm. A *midiron!* He was the bomber who had exploded the golf ball from the mesquite thicket. "Hi! Say, fellow!" But the string bean ambled stolidly across the road and disappeared in a clump of head-high creosote.

CLEM STUART reached back to his golf bag on the shelf behind the car seat and drew forth two shiny new golf balls. With these as bait he waited beside the road for his game. Its coming was heralded by another flash of white—a golf ball shooting westward.

"Boy, oh boy!" cheered Clem Stuart, judging the trajectory. That ball had carried over two hundred fifty yards and yet was never fifty feet in the air. "French seventy-five!"

The pinkish face appeared above the creosote; the long-limbed desert fellow strode into the road. He was bare of foot but walked on leather nonetheless.

"Look!" called Clem Stuart and raised the two golf balls.

Results were instantaneous. The fellow stopped in his tracks, wheeled. His face pushed forward. Interest, cupidity shone in his eyes. A long brown arm reached from a tattered shirt; a sinewy hand opened and closed, grasping the air like a carp out of water.

"Sure," said Clem Stuart genially. "Here, catch!"

Now that the fellow had his prizes over which to gloat, he started away but some instinct of appreciation held him. "Thanks," he said. "Much 'bliged."

"Let's see your club," Clem Stuart ordered in time to halt precipitate flight. "Wait! I'll show you mine." He jerked out the heavy leather golf bag, emptied it beside the road—a jackstraw pile of irons and woods. "Look!"

The invitation was unnecessary. The beanpole ambled loosely forward like a

bear to honey. For the first time Stuart was certain he was just a youngster, so responsive were his eyes. He dropped his own battered iron to the sand, seized Stuart's driver, waggled it, waved it, swung it. The air whistled.

"Jus' like mine," the desert boy said. The words came hoarsely, slowly, as if his speaking mechanism were unoiled and rarely used. He turned the head close to his face, pointed at the name: "Clem Stuart Driver—Number One." He picked up his rock-scarred, sand-burnished iron. "See! Clem Stuart—Two Iron."

Clem Stuart grinned. This was luck. "Yeah," he said. "Glad you like it. It's my model. Named after me."

"Named after—" the boy beanpole began. Then his eyes widened, his mouth opened, he gulped. "Diggity dog!" he mumbled. "Hot diggity, diggity dog!"

Standing there in the desert road the boy and the golf professional, young and sturdy and reliable, looked at each other and a certain spark flashed between them, back and forth from anode to cathode.

"Come on!" the boy cried and leaped away like a fleeing elk. Behind him Clem Stuart trudged, sinking ankle-deep in the alkali sand. Amid a conglomeration of tins, blankets and old clothes, the boy waited, beaming with pride. He had, it seemed, his own golf bag, every bit as good as Stuart's; he had his own pile of clubs. He emptied them to the ground. But here was tragedy. The clubs were shattered pieces of wood and iron—nothing else. All except the two-iron were hopelessly smashed.

"I TRIED to fix 'em," the young fellow said sadly. Words were coming easier to him now. "The brassie, I broke that last week against a hidden rock." He picked up a shattered shaft and mourned over it. "But it lasted me six years," he hurried to add, as if defending the worth of the club.

"Six years!" Clem Stuart's eyes widened. "How old are you?"

" 'Bout eighteen, mebbe. Yeah. Six years this month those clubs lasted me. I got 'em the first year I run sheep for old Lekta. Only six hundred sheep that year. I was only Number Two herder. Now I got"—he waved a hand at the smelly sea of mutton—"two thousand and I herd 'em alone for Lekta. They're good sheep. Darn good sheep."

"You brought your clubs out on the desert with you?" Clem Stuart primed.

"Me? No. They was a car goin' through like yours. They—they dropped off the back." The boy glanced up quickly and down again.

Clem Stuart nodded. He understood now. Some other golfer had chosen to drive the desert road from the courses of Los Angeles or San Bernardino valley to the northern clubs. Pebble Beach and Cypress Point had been hosts to more than their share of tournaments in the past years and some unlucky golfer, choosing the desert route, had arrived without his clubs. In the middle of the Mojave Desert they had jounced from some running board into the sinewy brown hands of—

"What's your name?" Clem Stuart asked.

"Ossi Osser," came the answer. "I'm Basque."

"Sure," Clem Stuart agreed. "The Basques make the best sheepherders, they say." He wondered at the copper-colored hair. Must be some Irish in that Basque.

Ossi Osser considered the last remark. "Yeah, best herders," he said.

"Good prizefighters, too, like Paulino Uzcudun. And me, I'm a good golf player. Mebee I'm 'bout the best. For six years I practiced. All day long. Ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day. The sheep, they're good sheep. They let me play. They move two or mebbe three miles a day. At night I find 'em a water hole. The rest of the time I play golf. They let me play. Three years ago I got me some new balls sent me from Chicago, 'long with a new pup tent. They're all gone now but one. And my clubs—" He pointed at the jumbled pile of wreckage. Suddenly his face brightened. "Lookit!"

The Basque sheep-herder dropped one of the new balls to the sand, backed away from it. He had his battered two-iron in his great hands; he flexed his corded wrists; his long body and tremendous arms flowed into a backswing. *Wham!* With a puff of sand and the thwack of iron on the ball, a white bullet was released.

"Diggity-dog!" cried the young herder. "Hot diggity-dog! Close, eh?"

Then Clem Stuart saw what the target had been—a tin can perched in the topmost spines of a yucca. More than two hundred yards away, yet the ball had missed it by less than five feet.

"Again!" ordered Clem Stuart, indicating the other new ball.

THIS time the professional watched the lad's swing. In all his experience he had never seen anything like that particular form. The young Basque placed the ball so far in front of him that it seemed impossible that he reach it. Yet with his long arms, his long waist and without lunging, that uncouth desert youngster picked the ball cleanly and sent it on its way like a bullet.

"Leverage!" said Clem Stuart. "Darnedest leverage I ever saw. And smooth! Smooth as silk! Man, you must drive a mile!"

"Aw, I did once," the herder admitted. "But it was on the Asphalt Dry Lake and the wind was behind me. I lost me my golf ball and I never tried that again."

"What about a niblick? A mashie? Use them?"

"Uh-huh. 'Till I busted 'em. The niblick is fun. It makes the ball go—" The Basque pointed at the sky.

"Where'd you learn what the clubs were for?"

Ossi Osser dropped to the ground, pawed among his tattered blankets, brought out an advertising booklet—*Clem Stuart Clubs*. He pointed at the various pictures with a long, grimy index finger. "That's where I learned to play golf," he said. "I hit jus' like you do in them pictures. Only better."

"Blamed if I don't think you're right," Clem Stuart muttered. Then, directly, "Come on out to the road. Use my clubs. We'll find a straight stretch of a couple hundred yards."

"You mean 'bout eighty rods," Ossi Osser protested.

Clem Stuart, plodding back to the desert road with the Basque and his swishing two-iron in tow, laboriously multiplied and divided figures in his mind. As nearly as he could approximate, eighty rods seemed to total about four hundred yards.

"Blamed if I don't think you're right," muttered Clem Stuart for the second time in three minutes.

"Eight, ten, twelve hours a day for six years! Practicing, practicing. Every day. And with that physique and natural timing! Man, oh, man!" He turned to call over his shoulder. "My lad," he said, "I begin to think you're going to see the world!"

"AW, BUT I can't leave them sheep," protested Ossi Osser. He and Clem Stuart were gathering up golf balls from the desert road, twenty-five balls which had all traveled as if by compass three hundred and forty yards from the driver's head, two hundred and twenty from the three-iron, one hundred and eighty from the mashie. "They're good sheep."

"We'll get you a substitute herder," Clem Stuart promised. His brown eyes were glowing with enthusiasm and excitement. Never in all his young life had he seen such an exhibition of accuracy and long-hitting. "Twelve hours a day," he repeated to himself. "For six years. With that physique! And still I don't believe it!"

"What'd you say?"

"I said, 'Can you putt?' "

"Sure I can. I smoothed me a place in the sand and put down a tomato can. That was the year the sheep and me was over by Lost Horse Springs. 'Twasn't much fun puttin' after the balls all got so's they'd go in the can most of the time. The next year over 'gainst Cactus Wells I broke my putter tryin' to make a niblick outa it after I broke my niblick."

"One of the first things," mused Clem Stuart, "is a haircut. Wonder what he'll look like."

"I ain't leavin' my sheep," Ossi Osser announced again. " 'Bliged for you sayin' you'll give me a lot of new clubs and take me to some dandy golf courses. Much 'bliged. But I ain't leavin' my sheep. They're good sheep and somethin' might happen—"

"Listen!" Clem Stuart ordered. "We'll drive right over to your man Lekta and tell him to get a new herder. We got time. The California championship doesn't start till next Thursday. I was going up early to practice. Plenty of time, Climb in, Ossi Osser!"

"Naw!" The gangling Basque planted his bare feet in the sand. He had picked up his battered two-iron and held it in front of him like a sword. "Them sheep is my job and I like 'em. You jus' go along, Mr. Stuart, only if you could leave me a couple of balls and—"

"Leave you nothing!" Clem Stuart snapped. "Get in that car!"

Ossi Osser backed away.

"Ever see a sand wedge?" Clem Stuart asked more gently. "It isn't in your catalog. A new club. Funny thing how it works—it actually hits the ball twice. Look here!" He produced the club, waved it in front of the Basque's fascinated eyes.

Like hay before a balky horse, a Royal Coachman in front of a trout, Clem Stuart trailed that short, shiny sand wedge luringly in front of Ossi Osser. "Come sit down and look it over. It's more fun to use than any club you ever saw. And then there's a bashie you never saw and—"

The car door slammed. Ossi Osser cast one long regretful look out the back window at his sheep.

"Guess they'll be all right till Lekta gets someone else over," the Basque said. "They're good sheep."

"WHERE'S Clem Stuart?" demanded Helen Andrews on the club house porch. "Where in the name of his wretched sex is my Clem Stuart?"

The chairman of the tournament committee wrinkled a worried brow. "That's what we'd all like to know," he said. "How in blue blazes we can make a tournament like this not cost us our eyeteeth when our headliners like Clem Stuart disappear—" He stopped to stare up and down Helen

Andrews' trim figure and to like what he saw. "*Your* Clem Stuart, eh?" he said. "Where do you get the possessive pronoun?"

"Because he's mine. I'm going to score for him. Scorer for Clem Stuart, Miss Helen Andrews. It's a tune I'm humming all the time. Paean of thanksgiving. I'm going to walk beside him, step for step all day, every day. A driad worshipping her Apollo. Something like that. Don't you think I can pick the handsomest golfer in America when I see him? Black curly hair, eyes that start a fire and—"

"What'd it cost you? Why didn't I get in on it?"

"Go see the chairman of the committee on arrangements, my good man. He has a case of champagne with my card in it. Make him divvy. But first find me my Clem Stuart. I want him to get used to my lovely hypnotizing blue eyes and my hair like corn silk under a September sky. He won't be able to play his game, not if he sees me all of a sudden. Oh, Davey, find him for me, won't you? Really. Seriously. Just suppose he wouldn't come, after the weeks I've campaigned to get to be his scorekeeper. It'd be too awful, the way I've boasted to the other girls—"

"All we know, Helen, is that he left Bel Air in Los Angeles last week. Since then he's just disappeared and—"

A long, superannuated, squirming man with squirming eyebrows slithered apologetically forward. "Pardon me," he said, "but I heard you asking about Mr. Clem Stuart. Pardon me, but he's out at the Hillside Club." His eyebrows jumped up and down his face.

"Hillside?" cried Helen Andrews. "Hillside! Oh, that awful rundown cheap place where—"

"Yes," the man said. "I'm secretary out there. Secretary Singletree . . ."

"How awful!" Helen Andrews said. "I mean, of course, that Clem Stuart should be right here this minute practicing on the championship course. The tournament starts tomorrow."

"And he's living downtown in Monterey," the cheerless secretary said. "He's got a boy with him. A long-legged stepladder with Mount Vesuvius hair, and hands as big as North America and South America—"

"Oh," said Miss Helen, "how interesting! You taught geography, didn't you, Mr. Singleton, before—"

"I was made secretary of the Hillside Golf, Country, Tennis and Riding Club. Yes, miss. And the reason I know about Clem Stuart is that he sent me here to enter one of our new members from the Hillside—"

"Golf, Country, Tennis and Riding Club. Yes, yes. Hurry!"

"Club. Yes. It's the red-headed fellow. Name's Ossi Osser. Mr. Stuart's new protegé, I mean. Mr. Stuart has been playing golf with him every day, all day. Mostly putting. And ruining our sand traps. Only took a temporary membership, and our finance committee said to me—"

"But did you file the entries?"

"No. I—"

"Then I'll do it myself!" Helen Andrews tossed her yellow head with a gleam in her bright blue eyes. "I think you're perfectly horrid—"

"Mr. Stuart was already entered, so I just entered the boy," the man protested sadly. "Ossi Osser. I swore he was eligible."

"Is he?"

"Mr. Stuart paid my expenses here," Secretary Singletree said and one of the brush eyebrows squirmed and drooped heavily.

"Is Clem Stuart coming for the Calcutta Pool tonight?" Helen Andrews

asked. "Some of the men are in the bar right now getting ready for it. Hear them? Clem Stuart's coming, isn't he? Is he going to bid on some of the players?"

"AND who'll make it eleven hundred?" demanded the auctioneer, waving a slip of paper expectantly at the four hundred diners and bidders at the club's Calcutta Pool. "Who'll make it eleven hundred dollars for Clem Stuart? The buy of the evening. Clem Stuart. One-time winner of the Open Championship! The pool has eight thousand dollars in it already and more to come! Ah, I hear eleven hundred!"

Clem Stuart, sitting on a window sill at the back of the huge smoke-filled dining room, grumbled to himself. "Too blasted high!" he muttered, tugging at his pipe. "No sense." He glared at the auctioneer who was proving why he was the most persuasive bond salesman on the coast, glared at the bankers and sportsmen, eager gamblers, who were bidding for him and his chances in the tournament.

An oil promoter, glistening like his own product, pushed through to Stuart. "Some of us Santa Barabara guys are forming a syndicate to buy you," he said, "but we want to know first if you're going to buy back a half interest like you have the right to do."

"I always have taken my half of myself but—"

"Twelve hundred!" shouted the oil man.

"Price's getting out of sight," Clem Stuart grunted.

"Some of the boys are a little liquored," the promoter stated happily. "That makes 'em a mite reckless. But it builds up the pool. Fifty percent to the owner of the winner—that's five grand already. Thirty percent for the runner up and ten percent for the quarter finalists. The pool ought to double before everyone's sold. If you should win—Your game's good, ain't it?"

"Oke. But don't go bidding haywire—"

"Sold!" shouted the auctioneer. "Sold down the river to the Santa Barbara syndicate! Clem Stuart for twelve hundred dollars! What a buy, boys, what a buy! And now Horton Brown! Start the bidding myself at five hundred! Do I hear eight hundred?"

One by one the entries in the tournament were sold, first the leading professionals, then the best of the amateurs. Prices slid rapidly downward as the well-known names were distributed to purchasers.

"Now the field!" called the auctioneer. "Twelve names left! Maybe the dark horse is among them. Who can tell? Lumping the last names on one ticket, for one bid. Preston, Harris, Twombly, Metheringham—"

A hoot went up. Apparently Metheringham was a well-known and well-liked duffer who had managed to qualify but was hopelessly outclassed.

"Pfeiffer, West, Cooke," called the auctioneer. "One of 'em might win! Thompson, Walker, Osser—er, ah—Osser Ossi or Ossi Osser, I don't know—"

Clem Stuart waited for the first bid.

It came: "Twenty dollars and thirty cents for the field."

An answer: "Same bid without the twenty dollars!"

"Be serious, men!" called the auctioneer. "I'll make it a hundred myself." He looked around, momentarily disturbed lest he be left with it.

"Hundred ten!" called Clem Stuart soberly.

"Hundred twenty-five!" was the quick response from across the room.

Clem Stuart glanced over there. The bidder was Secretary Singletree of the squirming eyebrows and the Hillside Country, Golf, Tennis and Riding Club. Clem Stuart grimaced. The man knew too much. He had seen Ossi Osser lace golf balls three hundred and fifty yards squarely down the center of the fairway; he knew why Clem Stuart had spent his time with that gawky, red-haired young fellow who used a mashie like a trench mortar.

"Two hundred!" called Clem Stuart.

"Two twenty!" sounded right back.

OTHERS in the room seemed to sense that the "field," notorious for never winning a Calcutta pool, held a real dark horse this year. "Three hundred!" called a jovial insurance man with an alcoholic nose. "Three-fifty"—raising his own bid amid a gale of laughter.

"Four hundred!" called the insurance man's daily golf opponent, a railroad operator who hated to see his friendly enemy ever win anything, even the right to a losing bet.

"And I hear four-fifty from Secretary Singletree of the Hillside Club," called the auctioneer. "Who'll make it five? I hear five, and now six? Six? Thank you! Now seven, seven, seven come eleven!"

Clem Stuart groaned. Out loud. Perspiration gleamed on his brown face; his curly black hair was damp and tousled. His hand felt at his billfold. He had already paid six hundred dollars for a half interest in his own ticket; he had three hundred dollars left. No miracle could make that three hundred grow into seven hundred which he already needed to buy the field. And he must have the ticket for Ossi Osser. Why else the investment in the boy—time, money, patience? Hours of careful teaching, wild hours of argument and persuasion preventing the Basque from returning to his sheep. A complete new set of golf clubs, a dozen new balls every day to keep Ossi Osser happy.

"He's locked in my room right now," Clem Stuart said to his bill fold. "Had to buy him a sheepskin for a blanket, too."

"What's that?" demanded the glistening oil man, who was sticking close to Clem Stuart like the proud owner of a new racehorse.

"Nothing." Clem Stuart sagged against the window sill. He was done. No more money. Rotten luck. Well, he had been bunkered before and—hell's bells, why didn't he have more money? Borrow it, yes. But he couldn't afford another cent on a wild gamble like this. No. Sunk. Without trace.

Through the smoke he heard the auctioneer's suave, persuasive voice. "Seven hundred for the field. Going once, going twice and—"

"Eight hundred!"

Clem Stuart whirled. He was startled. The voice had sounded close behind him. Out of the night it came, through the open window—a husky, intense young voice. He saw a white blur against the wall outside.

"Quick!" came the imperious order. "Bid eight hundred!"

"Eight hundred!" shouted Clem Stuart and turned again to the oval blur of a raised face outside the window. A hand reached toward him; his fingers closed on a wad of bills. "Wait a minute!" he ordered. "You bidding for Ossi Osser, Miss Andrews?"

"Yes, yes! For you. You want him, don't you?"

"Not this way. Not with your money."

"Oh, don't be a ninny! I'll lend it

to you. I'll take a half interest. Anything you say."

"That's oke if you want to gamble. It's a good gamble. We'll go partners. Partners on Ossi Osser." He raised his voice. "Auctioneer, we'll make it eight! Yes, and nine! We're buying Ossi Osser!"

HELEN ANDREWS caught up with Clem Stuart on the fifth tee. She was breathing rapidly; her eyes snapped with excitement; her yellow hair waved in the wind from the Pacific.

"Oh, it's terrible!" she confided to Stuart who was jolted by her tousled beauty. "He's gone to blue blazes in a police patrol. Ossi Osser, I mean. The crowd has him stampeded. Took eight on the first hole."

Clem Stuart nodded; his mouth set in a grim line as he drove a ball far down the tree-bordered fairway. "You're *my* scorer," he said as he strode off the tee. "You stay with me from now on." His tanned face turned toward her. "All you can do is pray a little on the side," he suggested.

"For you?"

"No, for poor Ossi. For our partnership. It looks like it's going busted. . . . Caddy, the spoon." A beautifully played ball soared high and true to the green, plunked there. "And, Miss Andrews, the way you coo your 'oh's' isn't professional in a scorekeeper."

"Phooey! I won't say another word till we're off the eighteenth green."

It was there they waited for Ossi Osser, on the bank just below the clubhouse. They saw him coming hundreds of yards away, his coppery hair glinting in the sun, his long legs leaving partner and caddies far behind.

"That can't be his drive," Helen Andrews said. "Must be his second."

"His drive. And watch this!" A ball sailed toward them, dropped to the green, hopped for thirty feet, stopped. "Home in two!" enthused Clem Stuart. "It's been done once before, I think. And did you see that swing? Boy, he may qualify yet. Put some horsepower behind your prayers, Miss Andrews."

"Partners," said Helen Andrews, while they waited for the foursome to climb the slope, "generally call each other by their first names. Like Abe and Mawruss. George and Gracie. Like Clem and Helen."

"Sure!" grinned Clem Stuart. "Helen, let's see if our partnership is still solvent." He motioned to the bedraggled, wild-eyed young woman who was scoring for Ossi Osser. She approached and there was awe, wonder and total disbelief on her face. Stuart took the card from her shaking hand. He glanced hastily at it, looked at the green where Ossi Osser rolled an approach putt against the cup, then studied the blurred figures on the card in earnest.

"Holy mackerel!" Clem Stuart crowed, but he was not too excited to feel Helen Andrews' shoulders press close to his as she studied the figures with him nor to miss the fragrance of her hair. "Look what the kid did! Six over par on the first two holes, then earned five of them back with birdies. Seventy-three! Same score as mine. He'll qualify easy! There's his putt. Seventy-three. Grand! That boy has a future, Helen. A glorious future. . . . Hi, Ossi."

The long-legged boy with the apelike arms flopped toward his mentor. His cheap white suit seemed to have shrunk; he protruded from it in all directions.

"Ossi, this is Miss Andrews."

The Basque shot a quick look at the

girl. "Seen her before," he muttered. He sat down, pulled off his shoes and gazed sorrowfully at his feet. Then he plucked at Clem Stuart's arm. "Can I go back now?" he whispered hoarsely. "Mebbe my sheep ain't—"

Further words and his breath were knocked from him by a smack on the back from Clem Stuart's hard hand. "Come on, Ossi, we'll go see that movie! What do you say? It's a grand movie."

"Yeah, but—"

"It's called *Miracle of the Mesas,*" Stuart explained to Helen Andrews. "It's got sheep in it. We've seen it five times already. It's a grand picture. . . . Come on, Ossi, put on your shoes! We're going!"

"Do you mind if I come along, Clem?" Helen Andrews asked. "We partners have got to stick together."

THE gallery, thought Ossi Osser, was like his own flock of sheep. Milling, wethering, aimless, harmless. More excitable than his sheep, more noisy, but just as senseless.

The gallery made Ossi Osser homesick.

The gallery, thought Clem Stuart, was the biggest he had ever seen for the State Open finals. That was due to the newspapers, the dramatic play they had given that angling anthropoid from the Mojave Desert, the long-armed boy with flaming hair and the projectile ability of a siege gun which blew opponent after opponent into the discard until he reached the finals. The contrast, too, between the strange youngster and himself, a calm, methodical old-timer, as old as twenty-seven years. The gallery amused Clem Stuart and sometimes angered him.

The gallery, thought Helen Andrews, must just love Clem Stuart. Glad there were so many girls and women in the gallery, hundreds of them. They all knew that Clem Stuart was the handsomest nicest fellow who ever played in the State Open Championship and they all saw how he smiled at Helen Andrews and let her walk beside him. The gallery thrilled Helen Andrews.

She felt exactly the way they did—only they couldn't know how much she felt it. It was marvelous to share an emotion that way, and yet to have a little, secret, unshared part all to herself.

The mob trooped from the seventeenth green to the eighteenth tee. "Clem Stuart just sank a chip shot!" an excited official announced loudly to a breathless newcomer. "They're all even again. Both are three under par. Such golf!"

Clem Stuart sat down on the bench, Ossi Osser on one side of him and Helen Andrews on the other. He grinned at her; she had been an inspiration and a treasure. They waited for course officials to clear a lane through the buzzing wide-eyed spectators. Stuart felt the bench shake, wondered if he were developing nerves, then suddenly realized that Ossi Osser was shaking and Helen Andrews was trembling and he himself twitching at the shoulders and wrists. The tension was an electric thing, a searing thing, disagreeable, sinister.

The gallery grew even quieter, became just a fierce collection of eyes, staring, insistent, waiting.

"Can't beat a birdie, Ossi," Clem Stuart said, placing his hand on the Basque's corded wrist. "I was lucky on that chip shot."

"Mebbe," Ossi Osser said, licking his dry lips with his tongue. He didn't look at Clem Stuart. His eyes were on

the milling people and yet he didn't see them either; he looked beyond them, through them, at the coastal hills and mountains, at the blue sky beyond the mountains.

There was something there that had drawn his heart right out of him, leaving his long, skinny body just a shell filled with a numb longing. Clem Stuart knew that—knew it was up to him to do something about it.

"Look at me!" ordered Clem Stuart and Ossi Osser turned obediently. His face told the story. He was folding up. He didn't care any more. He wouldn't try. The heart had gone out of him. Gone. Maybe over the mountains, out to the desert blue sky. He didn't care.

"Your honor, Mr. Stuart!" announced a pompous official.

The professional stepped on the tee with his club, placed his ball, sighted the fairway, drove straight and far. A cheer went up. The gallery might pull for red-haired youth, for an amateur kid, but the gallery liked Clem Stuart, too.

Ossi Osser sagged forward, dropped his ball. Clem Stuart bumped into him, "What'd you do," he demanded in an undertone, "what'd you do if coyotes got in your sheep?"

The face of Ossi Osser drew into a snarl; he bared his teeth, his hands clenched.

"Hit the ball!" ordered Clem Stuart.

OSSI OSSER swung. A gasp sounded. It trailed into a bellow. Time after time that day Ossi Osser had driven more than three hundred yards but no man on that course had ever seen a drive like the one on the eighteenth hole. The ball shot away like a bullet; it piled air in front of it; it rose, soared, continued to travel. On, on it went until it seemed it would never turn earthward. When it dropped to the turf it was only a tiny white pebble, so far away it was.

"My Lord!" muttered the prayerful official again. "Carried three-forty, rolled to damn' near four hundred. He's got a short pitch for the green on the long par five!"

"Nice going!" called Clem Stuart but Ossi Osser was away after his ball, swinging the driver viciously. "Braining coyotes," whispered Clem Stuart to Helen Andrews. "Isn't homesick now, just crazy mad. If only he doesn't break! He's got a grand future if he hangs on now."

"But don't you want to win yourself, Clem?"

Clem Stuart didn't answer. He had been asking himself that same question for the past three hours and even now he didn't know. He trailed his driver behind him, trudging thoughtfully. At his ball he took a brassie from his bag, smacked a long low shot toward the green. It hit the slope only forty yards short, skidded ahead a few feet. The crowd cheered the magnificent courage of the shot; a pull or a slice against the hillside would have meant complete disaster in the woods on either side of the fairway.

Ossi Osser had reached his ball. He was still swinging his driver around him. Clem Stuart hurried to him. "Easy, Ossi!" he called low-voiced. "Seven-iron. About one-sixty. Take three practice swings, boy!"

"That's what I call bad sportsmanship," a loud-mouthed official declared for Clem Stuart's benefit. "No business talking to his opponent like that, telling him what club to use. Put the boy off his game."

"He's trying to help the boy," came the answer. "Know why? Because it's

worth about four grand to him to have the boy win. Stuart owns a half interest in himself but he bought the boy outright. You heard him at the Calcutta pool. And the difference is about four thousand dollars. You watch Clem Stuart fall down here on purpose. He's just been trying to make a match of it. He'll fold up here. These professionals don't play for the fun of it. They're all crooked."

So there it was. Clem Stuart was a rat either way you took it. Nice going.

Clem Stuart whirled in his tracks. Helen Andrews, who had seen his eyes on fire before, saw them blaze again, saw his fists clench, his jaw set. She caught his arm. "Steady, partner! Just go out and win! That's the only answer for pups like that poisoned bulldog."

"Oke, Helen!" Clem Stuart agreed, staring straight ahead of him.

A soughing wind of a sigh rose from the gallery, then the excited barking of individual applause and cheers. Ossi Osser had pitched high and true to the green, a little less than thirty feet from the cup.

"That probably settles it," Clem Stuart muttered to Helen Andrews. He raised his voice.

"Nice going, boy!"

WHEN he reached his own ball he studied the lie carefully, walked up to the green and studied its contours. The gallery was silent as he selected his favorite pitching iron, addressed his ball, but cheers broke out again when the pellet plunked straight for the cup and stopped only two feet beyond. A magnificent shot under pressure.

Clem Stuart would halve the hole after all.

Ossi Osser already had his putter in his hand. He walked to his ball, decided the line of the putt and stroked quickly. The ball slid down the green carpet directly for the hole, then eased to the left and stopped eighteen inches away.

Again hand clapping, the excited buzz of approval.

"Both of them'll get their birdies," a know-it-all declared. "That means extra holes."

Clem Stuart stepped to his ball, addressed it carefully with his putter. Suddenly he stopped the easy pendulum of his swing, turned toward Ossi Osser. The Basque was watching him and his face was strangely altered. It was white, not pink, and his eyes were large. His lip was trembling, too. Clem Stuart walked away from his ball, walked toward the edge of the green. His brain was pounding. What to do? Good Lord! It meant such a terrible lot to the boy. Probably meant his whole future.

The lad wouldn't realize the gallant fight he had made, the beautiful golf he had played. He would only realize defeat. That might mean the end of the boy as a golfer. Yes, probably it would.

He would go back to his sheep—beaten.

"I guess I can't do it," Clem Stuart decided. "Can't break the kid's life in two. Not this way."

"He's got nerves," the talkative man announced. "Trying to quiet his nerves."

"If I don't try, though," Clem Stuart was thinking, "I'm a doublecrosser. I'm doublecrossing the syndicate that bought me. And everyone will say that I did it to win an extra four thousand dollars because I own Ossi Osser in the pool. They don't know that Helen Andrews owns half. They'll

just think I did it for the money I'd get out of it."

He had wheeled now and was moving toward the ball. He glanced again at Ossi Osser. The boy had the "shakes" now and the huge sinewy hand which gripped the putter was white at the knuckles. 'Doublecross or no doublecross," Clem Stuart decided definitely, "I can't do it to him. Not to Ossi."

It was a good bluff he made as he addressed the ball, sighting down the line of the putt. The putt he made was perfect. He was the only one who knew that he put a slight cut on the ball so that it approached the hole only to curve away and stop six inches to the right.

A groan went up from the gallery, a groan interspersed with hysterical applause and cries which sounded like genuine anguish. "He did it on purpose," the cynic said. "Did it for four thousand."

AND suddenly Clem Stuart decided it was nerves. He swore in his rage. He had done just the wrong thing. His ball had stopped on the line between the hole and the ball of Ossi Osser. A stymie. For a moment only he was horrified, then he grinned his relief. He remembered the instruction he had given the Basque on stymies, knew how easily the fellow could loft his ball into the cup.

A bare eighteen inches, a cinch shot for the Basque. Yes, everything was all right.

Absolutely all right, he thought again as he saw Ossi Osser take an old battered club from the bag. It was the old desert-scarred two-iron, the club the Basque knew the best, loved best, trusted most. He was slow now, deliberate, more deliberate than he had been all day. He studied the position of Stuart's ball, then his own. He waggled his two-iron, felt of its blade, studied the shot again. He seemed troubled. Suddenly his face cleared. He was smiling as he leaned over the ball; slowly the two-iron came back.

Clem Stuart stifled his warning. Instead of laying the blade of the iron back to loft the ball Ossi Osser was tilting it forward. Impossible to loft the ball over Stuart's that way.

Ossi Osser stroked his ball. It rolled true, rolled rapidly, decisively on the green carpet. Straight at the hole it went. Six inches short it hit the ball of Clem Stuart, hit it squarely, bounded back. Stuart's ball moved ahead, hesitated, trickled into the hole.

Stunned surprise settled on the gallery. Then a man swore as if the oath were wrenched from him. "Hot dawg! That means Stuart holed out his last shot. That gives him a three. That gives him the match."

Shocked and speechless, Clem Stuart turned toward Ossi Osser, mechanically stretching out his hand. Then he knew for sure the thing he had suspected in those last ten seconds. Ossi Osser was grinning at him, grinning with joy. Color had come back to his face, his eyes were happy. Ossi Osser had knocked in Stuart's ball on purpose. To do it he had made the most difficult shot of his life. Four hundred yard drives, explosions, all the other spectacular things he had done that day meant nothing to him compared to that last true putt which bumped Clem Stuart's ball into the hole.

"But Ossi," began Clem Stuart. Then, "Come on! Let's get out of this jam. Oh, you great big"—he tried to find the right word—"bum," he said. "Boy," he amended it. "You did it on purpose."

Ossi Osser grinned again. He took hold of Clem Stuart's arm, walked with him toward the club house while the crowd, recovering from its shell shock, trailed behind. Helen Andrews held Stuart's other arm. Color had not come back into her face or words to her lips. She gazed at the two, the stocky young professional and the gawky red-haired boy. She felt the drama of it strangely, felt as if both men had gone through a fire and come out arm-in-arm. It was peculiarly all right. Suddenly she giggled, half hysterically, a safety-valve giggle.

"You big its!" she said. "You both tried to lose. Just plain soft-hearted its."

CLEM STUART went down from the celebration to pull Ossi Osser out of the locker room once more. The boy was in the darkest corner, caressing his golf clubs. He looked up quickly as Clem Stuart approached.

"These clubs you bought me," he said. "They're mine?"

"Sure, they're yours. And here! They just paid off the Calcutta pool upstairs. You're entitled to some of it. Boy, you sure are. Helen—Miss Andrews thinks so, too. This is from us." He pressed a roll of bills into the Basque's hand. "That's yours. Now come on upstairs. The crowd's yelling for you."

"Jus' a minute," Ossi Osser mumbled. "I gotta put my clubs away. You go on. I'll be comin'."

He grinned his homely grin, and turned away.

Ten minutes later Clem Stuart sought the dark corner of the locker room again. It was empty. The door leading to the golf links was open. He ran to it, looked out into the night. At the top of the first rolling fairway a huge figure showed in the night, a figure in a cheap white suit sizes too small, a figure which flopped along with gangling strides, burdened with a heavy sack of clubs. It was headed eastward, headed toward the mountains and over the mountains to the desert.

Clem Stuart checked the cry in his throat. Instincts of a gentleman and a golfer stifled his hail. That boy belonged out there. Over the mountains to the desert, back with his sheep. Clem Stuart knew suddenly that it was all right, perfectly all right. Ossi Osser had no business in this other world with its accusations of double-crossing, of cheating, its noisy gamblers, its queer ways.

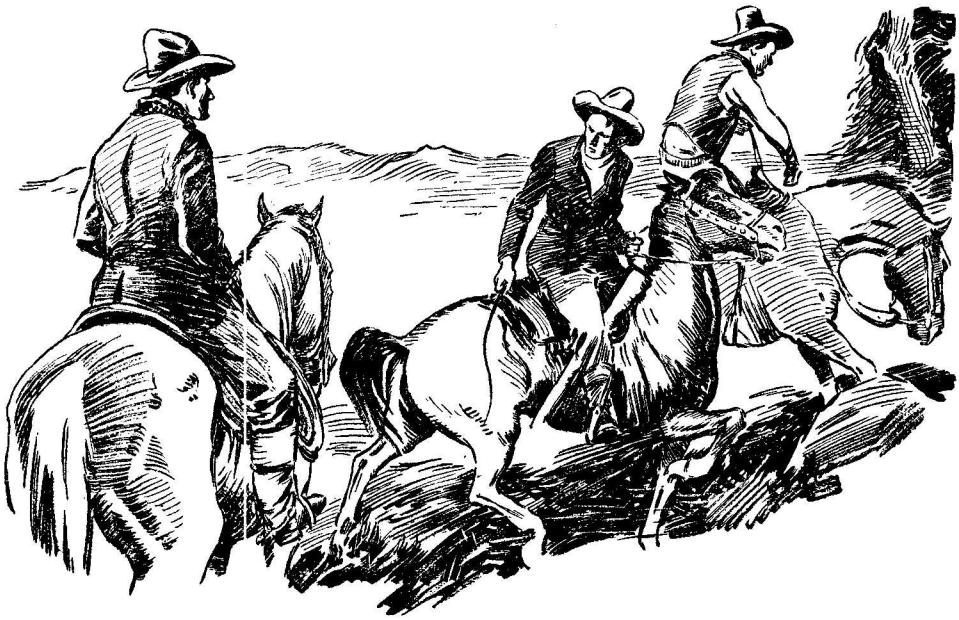
Ossi Osser, trudging along, was happier than he had ever been. "Hot diggity dog!" he said. "Two thousand dollars! That'll buy me a lot of sheep of my own and I got me these golf clubs." He unslung them from his shoulder, carried them in his two arms as if they were a treasured child. "Hot diggity dog! . . . Say, wonder how my sheep are. They're good sheep." The thought made him quicken his stride eastward.

Clem Stuart softly closed the door leading out to the links and turned his back on it. He walked slowly toward the stairs, head down. He reached the foot of them. A bundle of white leaped toward him.

It was Helen Andrews, her arms outstretched.

"Clem," she cried, "you aren't deserting the partnership, are you?"

Clem Stuart caught her, swung her from the floor. All the pent-up emotion of the day caught in his throat. "Never!" he said. "Never."



Trails West

By BENNETT FOSTER

WHEN Frenchy Belland ran a fence across the Cow Thief Trail, he signed his own death warrant. For the rustler mob that preyed on the herds on Gonzalitas range used that trail as a highway to the south. It was not difficult, after that, for Deputy "Whitey" Arburg and Bud Pond and "Irish" Keleher to rig up a rustling frame on Frenchy—to shoot him down when he "resisted" arrest.

Miles Trask, recently returned to his home country, was a witness of that shooting, and knew it for the cold-blooded killing that it was. But for reasons of his own, Trask covered up for Arburg at the inquest. Trask was working undercover for the Cattle Sanitary Board, trying to get to the bottom of the rustling ring that is operating from Tramparas.

The tentacles of the ring spread pretty deeply into the county. Somewhere near its head is Judge Ryland, the father of the girl who jilted Miles five years before. Her husband, Phil Heming, and Miles' Uncle Benbow are also involved, although Benbow Trask, his colleagues suspect, is making a desperate attempt to pull out of the combination, a move which they bitterly resent.

Miles' problems are not made any simpler by his old—and still persisting love—for Ellis Ryland Heming, nor by the responsibility he has assumed in promising to take care of Frenchy Belland's red-headed daughter Jackie, a fiery little savage of the range.

THERE are only two whom he confides in—Colin McFee, who has taken Jackie Belland into his home, and Wink Revier, an old-time fence-rider Miles has known from boyhood. Even Wink's young assistant, Curly Feltman is kept in the dark, although he has more than half guessed the truth.

Riding through the country, seeking a lead, Miles encounters a strange reticence among the Mexicans. They seem unusually prosperous, and the ones he once knew well are friendly but not communicative. They are hiding something but Miles cannot discover what it is. On a visit to one of them, Miles runs into Irish Keleher, and Keleher's unexpected solicitude for their welfare further arouses Miles' uneasy suspicions.

Keleher seems to have something on his mind, and he finally blurts out: "Look, Trask. These people—I'd sure hate to see them mixed up—in things. They shouldn't be. I'd try to remember that."

From which cryptic utterance, Miles realizes that Keleher has guessed what Miles' real mission in Tramparas is. "And if Keleher knows," he muses, "then they all

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know. The whole gang of them." It is not a comforting thought.

WHEN Wink Revier and Miles ride off on some mysterious mission they won't tell him about, Curly Feltman decides to do a little range-detecting on his own. Hearing shots, he is attracted to a pine knoll where a girl—Jackie Belland—is firing at someone below in a cabin. He tries to stop her.

"Bud Pond is down there!" the girl rages. "The man who shot my father!" She goes on shooting. Curly doesn't know exactly what to do. He's heard enough from Miles and Wing to guess that Belland was murdered, and he admires the girl's determination to avenge her father's shooting. His problem is solved when another rider appears, calling out to Pond.

Curly orders the girl to her horse. "We'll be caught between two fires if we don't light out of here—quick. We'll head for the line camp."

The girl, recognizing the authority in his voice, obeys. As they ride along, they could hear the voices of Bud and the other man calling back and forth. . . .

CHAPTER IX

TRASK INTERVENES

MILES TRASK and Wink Revier had laid out a program in the conference at the shed. Miles had hoped to get information from either the Sisneros brothers or from Leandro Chavez. He had not yet given up that hope but he realized now that it would be a slow task. If the Sisneros, who had been friendly, and Leandro, to whom he was a son, would not talk freely, then pumping the other native ranchers in the Gonzalitas would be more difficult. It would be almost impossible.

There remained the fence riders as sources of information. They were comparatively new to the country but familiar with the land along the fence and probably some distance north of it. It was their job to throw cattle back from the fence toward the north and some of them would also have ridden away from the fence-cutting sign. Accordingly Miles and Wink decided to visit the camps to the east and west and interview the men.

Having watched Curly leave the corrals Wink and Miles mounted and took a leisurely way westward. They skirted the corner of the horse pasture along its northern edge climbing steadily upward for almost half a mile. At the top of the ridge, Miles looked back, stopped his horse and spoke to Wink.

"Rider coming into camp," he remarked.

"Curly?" asked Wink, checking and turning in his saddle.

Miles reined Junebug around. "No," he answered, "it isn't Curly. See him?"

Now Wink caught sight of the man riding toward the camp. "He's comin' from the fence," he said. "Looks like he'd come out of the Canadian. Shall we ride back?"

"Might as well." Miles started Junebug down the long slope that they had just traversed. Wink followed.

When they rode around the fence corner and toward the corrals the rider they had seen from the hilltop was waiting for them. He was a youngster, dark-haired and dark-eyed. His dress showed hard wear and there was a stain on his sheepskin coat, just at the shoulder. His left arm was under the coat, swung across his chest in a sling.

"Howdy," the stranger greeted, moving toward them. "Which one of you is Trask?"

Miles, stopping Junebug, dismounted and advanced. "I'm Trask," he answered.

Keen black eyes scanned Miles. Then the owner of the eyes smiled. "My name's Dunham," he said. "I've got a message for you, Trask."

"Yes?" said Miles.

"From Captain Henry," pursued Dunham.

"You're a Ranger?" Miles looked keenly at the visitor.

Dunham nodded. "Cap said to tell you that we'd been through the Canadian country and it's clean."

Miles nodded slowly. "You went across," he said. "I knew that the Canadian was to be worked, just on an off chance. And you didn't find a thing?"

"No cattle, no," agreed Dunham. "We did happen onto a little bunch that robbed a Marfa bank mebbe a month ago."

Miles eyed the visitor's left arm swung in the sling. "Some of those bank robbers can shoot," he commented.

"Some of these could," agreed Dunham. "It's kind of past practice for most of 'em now."

Wink interjected a question. "You was kind of off your territory, wasn't you?"

"Texas is a big state." The Ranger eyed Wink. "I'm not sayin' how far she goes. For all I know I might be in Texas now." He paused, grinning. "But it was all regular enough," Dunham continued. "We went to the sheriff. He deputized us an' went along, only," the Ranger paused, "somehow in the fight we worked plumb across the line an' into Texas. Old Jeff Lycomb is a damn' good fellow. Used to be a Ranger himself, and we didn't want to be bothered with extradition an' all."

Miles and Wink laughed and Wink spoke again. "Come on in," he invited, dismounting. "There's a pot of coffee on the stove."

"I'll come," the Ranger said, "but I can't stay. I've got to catch Cap Henry an' the rest down below."

THE three went to the house and Wink poured coffee from the pot that was still hot. They drank it all. Dunham spoke again.

"I've got another thing to do over here," he announced. "I'm checking up on a man named Belland. Know him?"

Miles and Wink exchanged glances. "Frenchy Belland was killed," said Miles. "You're too late to check on him, Dunham."

"Killed how?" Dunham snapped the question.

"For rustling beef" Miles answered. "I'll tell you." Again he related the story of Frenchy Belland's death. When he finished Dunham made comment.

"Captain Henry ain't goin' to be much tickled over that," said Dunham. "Henry put Belland in here for a spotter. Belland was an ex-convict from Huntsville. He'd been pretty straight and we had a mind to help him out. Henry sent him in here."

Dunham reflected for a moment. "Those fellows knew that Belland was a spotter," he said. "They must've known."

"How?"

"Does it make a difference?" asked the Ranger. "Old Thomas of the Rafter T staked Belland in here. The old man will climb a tree when he learns about this."

"Thomas is already raising the roof," Miles commented, recalling letters that he had been shown.

"A man that owns a million acres an' thirty thousand cows is entitled to." Dunham seemed to relish the idea. "You Territory boys are goin' to get yore tails rode."

Miles flushed. "They've been rode before," he remarked. "Dunham, I'd just as soon you didn't mention who I am while you're in here. I'm supposed to be under cover."

"I'll be out of here in thirty minutes," assured the Ranger, "an' I won't mention it. I'm plumb sorry about Belland."

"So am I," said Miles, "but I'm glad to know who he was."

"That's who he was, all right," returned Dunham. "Well, *hasta luego*."

Miles and Wink, rising from their boxes, accompanied their guest to the corral. There Dunham untied his horse, mounted, and lifting his head in a parting salute, moved off toward the south. When he was gone Miles turned to Wink.

"I WISH," he said bitterly, "that I'd been told a few things before I came in here. If I'd known that Belland was all right, I could have—"

"Don't blame yourself, kid," interrupted Wink. "You didn't know."

They were silent for a moment and then Wink spoke again. "We might as well go along an' do what we'd planned," he said.

Miles nodded. Mounting their horses they again started from the Coffin camp. They rode along easily for there was no need to reach the camp above until supper time. They skirted the horse pasture and striking the main line of the drift fence, followed it.

Some six miles from camp they came upon a bunch of YT cows against the fence. These they gathered and pushed back to the north, giving them a good shove. In fact they moved the cattle so far from the fence line that they crossed the road that came down from Gonzalitas Mesa and ran on east. Riding back across the road they saw a rider coming toward them at a dead run. Both Miles and Wink reined in their horses and waited. Within minutes they recognized the rider as Colin McFee.

Before he reached the two McFee began to shout. The words were garbled and conveyed no meaning but Miles caught:

"Jackie— Gone. . . !" McFee had a rifle in his hand and he gestured with it as he told what had happened.

"She pulled out," he yelled. "She was gone this mornin'. Couldn't find her. She'd took my rifle an' . . ."

"Easy, Colin," Miles calmed the man. "Jackie pulled out, you say?"

Under the influence of Miles' calm McFee toned down. "This mornin'," he reiterated. "Must've been early. Bridget went in to wake her an' she was gone. She took her old clothes an' my rifle an' pulled her freight. Got her horse from the corral behind the livery an' got her saddle from the saddle room. The fool hostler was asleep an' she sneaked in an' got it."

"Which way did she go?" asked Miles.

McFee shook his head. "Nobody seen her leave," he answered.

"What did you do?" Miles asked.

"I started some lookin' for her around town an' on the mesa an' I headed this way," answered McFee. "I wanted to tell you an'—"

"Yes!"

"An' Bud Pond come down to hold down Belland's place," completed McFee. "Jackie knows that Bud killed her dad."

Miles looked at Revier. "Where's Belland's place?" he snapped.

Revier nodded toward the east.

"Let's go," said Miles. "Wink and I will make time, Colin. You come along as best you can."

Not waiting for Colin's reply Miles turned Junebug and headed back toward Coffin camp, Wink beside him riding Smoky.

THERE was a chance that the girl had gone to the Coffin. McFee keeping pace with the other two for a short distance, spoke of that; accordingly Miles directed McFee to make for the camp while he and Revier rode on toward the east. It was agreed that the two would return to the Coffin, should the girl not be at her old home, and McFee swung off in that direction, while Wink and Miles kept at it, trot, lope, trot, and then a breathing spell at a walk. They did not know how much riding lay ahead and while they wanted speed, caution kept them down to a moderate gait.

They had crossed the Comanche and Wink was recalling the facts he had heard concerning Belland, when Miles swung sharply to the left and climbed a low hill. At its top he paused, then pointed and put spurs to Junebug. The horse came down from the hill at a run and below Revier strung Smoky out into his best effort and tried to keep up with the dun. Crossing a low ridge he saw what Miles had seen—two riders coming full tilt.

The two men intercepted Curly and the girl a full half mile from the hill that Miles had climbed. Curly waved an arm toward the rear and kept his horse going. Miles swung in beside the boy and within a minute Revier joined them. Curly wasted no breath in explanations.

"Pond," he shouted to Miles. "Him an' another one comin' behind us."

Miles did not ask questions. Instantly he made decision. "Go with 'em, Wink," he yelled. "Go to camp. I'll meet Pond."

Wink had no chance to expostulate. Miles turned Junebug and swung off toward the east. Curly kept right on going, so did Jacqueline Belland; and Wink Revier, knowing that Miles Trask needed no protection and that these two innocents did, reluctantly swung Smoky and followed after them.

Miles kept steadily on. He followed the tracks of the running horses, keeping Junebug in them, and when the others had dropped from sight in the rolling country Miles reined Junebug in and kept on at a hand pace. As he rode he unbuttoned his sheepskin and the coat beneath it and pulled his glove from his right hand.

Perhaps twenty minutes after he had turned to the east, Miles saw two other riders coming on the track. Ahead of him were two heavy clumps of mesquite and the trail led between these. Miles reached the end of the mesquite and stopped, waiting. He had so picked his ground that when Pond and his companion came up they would be forced to stay together by the brush. If they were to separate before reaching it, Miles had a solution. He carried it in leather under his arm.

Seeing the single rider, Pond and the man with him slowed. They rode in between the mesquite and stopped.

Miles nodded. "Howdy," he said.

"So it's you!" greeted Pond.

"That's right," agreed Miles. "Hello, Emelio."

Pond's companion, Emelio Sisneros, returned the salutation with a somewhat sickly grin.

"Ridin'?" suggested Miles when Pond said no word. "Must be chasin' something."

"I'm after two murderers!" snapped Pond. "They tried to bushwhack me in my cabin."

"You ought to recognize murder when you see it, Pond," drawled Miles. "You're an expert."

Pond's face above the beard flushed a brick red. "What do you mean?" he snarled.

"You know what I mean," Miles answered. "Emelio, I've heard you are smart."

Under Miles' level gaze Emelio froze and sat still in his saddle. "That's right," Miles commended. "You *are* smart."

"I'm on their trail," blustered Pond. "I'm goin' to follow it. Get out of my way, Trask!"

"Look," drawled Miles, "the fence is south and it's been ridden today. There's not a thing along it that you'd want. I've just come from the west and I sure haven't seen a murderer 'til right now. That means that they must have gone north, always providing that there was a couple that tried to down you. Why don't you try it north?"

Miles' hand rested on his saddle horn. Junebug was turned a little to the right and the horse stood stock still. The horses of Emelio and Bud Pond were nervous and excited, still expecting the spurs that had been applied so freely.

"Get out of my way or I'll drop you out of it!" Pond roared.

"Don't you hesitate on my account," urged Miles, his eyes narrowing. "Junebug isn't a bit gun-shy. Go right ahead."

Emelio turned his horse. He had had enough. He had no intention of cutting himself a piece of this cake; he might choke on it.

Miles eyed Pond. "Well?" he drawled. "What are you waiting for?"

Pond, noting Emelio's departure, was discouraged. He took out his anger in bluster and threat. "I'll see you, Trask!" he promised. "You've got in my way too often. Lead poisonin' can be awful fatal. Remember that."

"I'm right here to be killed," vouchsafed Miles. "Get at it. What have you got that gun for?"

Pond made no answer, but turned his horse viciously. "Emelio!" he called. He spurred his horse after his departing companion.

Miles watched them go. When they were a long pistol shot away Miles turned Junebug, putting him to a run. Miles had seen the carbine on Emelio's saddle and he wanted to get away from that rifle. Miles put brush and distance, and presently a little hill, between himself and those others, then slowed his gait. Riding on back toward the Coffin camp he kept to the high spots and looked back constantly. Miles had not forgotten how Frenchy Belland was killed and he did not intend to go the same way.

CHAPTER X

RUNAWAY GIRL

ASA RYLAND and Benbow Trask had an appointment Wednesday morning to show the YT to Lester King and his sister. Benbow had requested the delay for he wanted the YT ranch house clean and fit to receive guests. There had been another reason for the delay, also, and when he reached Ryland's office early Wednesday morning Benbow spoke of it.

"I been hopin' Miles would come out before we showed these people the place," he said. "We got to get a hold of Miles, Asa."

Ryland nodded thoughtfully. "We can get together with Miles, I believe," he said slowly. "Miles isn't what bothers me, Benbow. There are other things."

Benbow scowled. "Miles bothers *me!*" he announced emphatically. "We've got to get Miles to turn over the deeded ground before we can turn a wheel an' I don't think he'll do it."

Ryland shrugged. "Miles is broke," he stated "He's riding fence for thirty a month and his grub. Besides that, Miles knows King and King want Miles to help him pick a place. He told Miles so."

Benbow nodded. "You'll have to handle Miles," he said. "He hates my guts. You go to him an' tell him that you think he can get some money out of me, an' get a power of attorney from him. Then we can give him a little somethin' to satisfy him an' get him to boost the YT to the Kings."

"It won't be quite as easy as that," Ryland answered, "but Miles can be handled. I'm wondering if the others can be handled as easily."

"What do you mean?" snapped Benbow.

"Arburg told me," Hyland said slowly, "that they don't want you to pull out of the country, Benbow. He said that they wouldn't like it."

Benbow Trask's brown skin bleached a trifle. "Phil is your son-in-law," he said. "If you haven't any influence with him—"

"Phil Heming is my son-in-law, yes," interrupted Ryland. "A year ago—or better, two years ago—I could have handled Phil. Now I'm not so sure."

"It means money to you," snapped Benbow.

"I know that, and I want it," Ryland stated frankly, "but I'm not sure that we can go through with it, Benbow. You see, a year ago Phil gave the orders. Now I'm not sure but that he takes them."

"You mean that Arburg—?"

"I mean that Arburg and Pond, and perhaps Keleher, are running things," Ryland stated. "I'm not sure. I've never been mixed up in that business, Benbow. I've kept my eyes closed when it was convenient and I've had some nice business thrown my way. I've been paid for what I did and I don't complain. I don't know just what happens below the hill and I don't want to know. But from what I've seen, the younger natives down there take their orders from Arburg or Pond. If that is so perhaps Phil Heming won't have much to say about what is done."

Benbow Trask limped the length of Ryland's little office and back again. "They can't interfere with a man's private business. They can't—"

Again Ryland interrupted. "They can and they will if it's to their advantage," he contradicted. "And it is to their advantage to have you stay here. After all, Benbow, it might cramp their style of doing things considerably, to have someone holding the YT who would really work the country and who would inquire into certain brands that we both know about. A stranger in the country would certainly be a detriment to things as they stand." He smiled wryly.

"But King's green," expostulated Benbow. "He wouldn't know the difference."

"King would have to have a foreman," Ryland pointed out. "From what he said, that foreman would be your nephew. Do you think that Miles, let us say, could be handled like the Valverdes have been handled, or the Sisneros, or for that matter, Benbow Trask?"

Benbow stumped across the office again, scowling. Ryland got up from his desk.

"We have an appointment with the Kings," he reminded. "We can at least keep that. I have an idea or two in mind Benbow. Perhaps things will work out."

LESTER KING and his sister Grace were waiting in the lobby of the hotel. In company with many who had served in the army during the Philippine troubles, King had returned home only to find that daily life was a prosaic, difficult thing to settle back into. An orphan, with no relatives except his sister and some distant cousins, King had decided not to return to the incipient law practice he had left when he volunteered. With plenty of money at his command he chose to seek a more exciting life.

Grace King was a product of the east, of a fine finishing school and of Beacon Hill society, but she rebelled against the uselessness of Eastern life. She had jumped at the chance to accompany her brother west. If they purchased a ranch Grace was to own half interest.

"I'm glad we found Miles Trask here," said Lester, while they were waiting. "I owe him something and I'd like to pay it. From what Ryland said, Trask isn't too well off."

Grace laughed. "You've said that a dozen times, Lester," she reminded. "I'm beginning to believe you."

"I do," her brother returned her smile.

"And," Grace continued, "I'm also beginning to believe that you aren't too sure of your own judgment and that you are glad to find someone who knows this country whom you think you can trust."

"That's part of it," Lester admitted frankly. "Don't you like Trask, Grace?"

The girl sobered. "I don't know," she said slowly. "There is something about him that I don't understand. He's—well, he is elemental, Lester. He has a driving force behind him, a something—I don't know what it is . . ."

"Trask is a man without veneer, Grace," Lester told her. "The drive you mentioned is there and it is close to the surface."

"He speaks well," mused the girl. "He is a gentleman. He seems to be a real person, but he is doing pretty poorly paid work and apparently has no ambition for anything better. That doesn't seem to fit. I wish I knew . . ."

"You seem to have spent a good deal of time thinking about him." King glanced sharply at his sister.

"I have," the girl answered frankly. "He interests me."

"Well,"— Lester King shrugged—"at all events I'm not going to buy a place here until he looks it over and recommends it. I've made up my mind about that."

Grace nodded. "I had a caller yesterday," she said suddenly. "Did I tell you?"

"No." Lester King looked his interest.

"While you were at Mr. Ryland's office," Grace continued. "She is the wife of one of the ranchmen here. A man named Heming."

"Heming owns the Three Dollar ranch below the hill," Lester informed her. "I've heard of the place through Ryland."

"Mrs. Heming is Mr. Ryland's daughter," Grace went on. "She and her husband have a house here in town. She asked me to call."

"Are you going to?" Lester looked at his sister, amusement in his eyes.

"I think I shall," Grace answered. "After all, if we are going to live here . . . She is just a girl, Lester, and she seemed very nice."

"I'm glad you're getting acquainted," King said. "It's fine. . . . I wish Ryland would get here."

As he spoke, Ryland and Benbow Trask entered the lobby and crossed to where the brother and sister were sitting. Ryland removed his hat and bowed, while Benbow stood awkwardly by.

"Are you ready to go?" asked the lawyer. "Mr. Trask has a buckboard at the livery barn and we can go out in that. Have you brought a grip? You remember I warned you that we might spend the night."

The Kings got up from their chairs. "We're ready," said Lester. "I was hoping that Miles Trask would come in. I wanted

him to go out to the ranch with us. As I've said, Mr. Ryland, I'm going to place a great deal of confidence in what he says."

"I understand that," said Ryland. "This is purely an inspection trip."

Lester King turned to Benbow. "Is Miles Trask a relative of yours? You have the same name."

Ryland spoke quickly. "Miles is Mr. Trask's nephew," he said. "I'm sure that he would be glad to go with us if he were here."

King was looking out of the dirty windows of the Tramparas House. He spoke quickly, interrupting Ryland.

"There Trask is!" exclaimed Lester King. "He's ridden in. Wait! I'll ask him to go with us. You won't mind waiting?"

Not pausing for an answer Lester King hurried out the door, leaving Benbow Trask looking blankly at Ryland.

WHEN Miles Trask left Bud Pond and Emelio by the mesquite and rode away, he made straight for the Coffin Camp. He found the camp in something of a state of siege. When he rode in, Wink came up from the shed and across his arm he carried a rifle. Wink got his name from the fact that when excited he blinked his eyes, moving his eyebrows and contorting his whole face in the motion. Men who knew stood from under when Wink Revier began to move his eyebrows. He was doing that now and there was wrath in his voice when he spoke.

"Meet 'em?" snarled Wink.

"And turned them back," agreed Miles, wearily.

"Why didn't you let 'em come on?" demanded Wink. "We'd've fixed 'em."

"I know," said Miles, "but I've got my job to think about, Wink."

"Consarn yore job. Know what happened?"

Miles shook his head.

"That girl Jackie took Colin's riflle an' went out to get herself Bud Pond," announced Wink. "Missed him the first shot but made him hole up. She was holdin' him in that shack when Curly heard the shootin' an' rode over. Jackie was about out of shells when Curly took a hand. If he hadn't, Pond would've beefed her. He would've anyhow when Emelio come. I hate a smart *picaro* like that, Miles. Them Sisneros will stand watchin'."

"And then what happened?" asked Miles, disregarding Wink's digression.

"Curly pulled her down off the hill she was on an' got her on her horse an' they made a run for it," stated Wink. "She wanted to borrow Curly's six-shooter an' stick it out." There was admiration in Wink's voice.

"I reckon," drawled Miles, "that Pond must've had to catch and saddle a horse. They were a full fifteen minutes behind the kids."

"What'd Pond say?" snapped Wink.

"He told me he'd see me sometime," Miles answered easily. "I told him I'd be around when he looked. Where are the kids?"

"In the cabin," Wink answered. "What do you want to do, Miles?"

Miles looked at the sun which was low. He glanced at the cabin.

"I want you to run in about five head of the fastest horses you got," he answered. "Get me that Sucker horse. Put 'em in the corral and throw down a feed of hay for them. There's a little left in your stack. We'll stay in the cabin tonight and I reckon one of us will sit up some."

Wink nodded approbation. There was no need of taking chances on riding the long trail to Tramparas after dark. "What are you goin' to do, Miles?" he asked.

"I'm going in and talk to Jackie," Miles answered grimly. "I can't have her chasing around over the country with a rifle. Not if I'm responsible."

"Let me have your horse," suggested Wink, "an' you take my rifle to the house. I'll run in the horses like you say."

Miles surrendered Junebug's reins and took the rifle. Wink mounted Junebug and rode away, and, carrying the rifle, Miles walked to the cabin. He was tired, not from exertion but from pressure. Bud Pond was bad, and Miles had faced Bud Pond down.

Colin McFee, Curly Feltman, and Jacqueline Belland were in the cabin. Curly was by the window, watching; McFee was talking angrily. Jackie sat serenely on a bunk paying not too much attention to McFee's dressing down.

"What will Bridget say?" McFee demanded as Miles entered.

"Bridget loves me," Jackie answered composedly. "She told me she did."

"She'll spank you were you need it," vowed McFee. "She was that wrought up you'd thing the world had come to an end. And"—reproachfully—"after the nice dresses she bought you, too!"

MILES closed the door and looked from McFee to Jackie and Curly Feltman who was standing dejectedly by the window. Curly's face was grim and firm and, it seemed to Miles, not so youthful as it had been that morning.

"Good work, kid," Miles said, putting a hand on his shoulder. "I'm obliged."

Curly looked up at Miles, nodded, and turned again to the window. Colin McFee had ceased talking. He walked across the room and stood in front of the bunk. "You might have been killed, Jackie," he said evenly. "Bud Pond would just as soon down you as he would me, and he wants to down me."

"He killed my father," answered Jackie. "I'll kill him!"

Miles shook his head. "That's not for you," he said heavily. "I promised your father that I'd look after you. Do you think I can if you run around over the country?"

"You saw my father killed and you didn't turn your hand!" The girl flung the words at Miles. Venom was in her eyes. "I hate you! I tell you—"

There was hysteria there. Miles checked it with two sharp words. "Shut up!"

Jackie started. Her opened lips remained parted for a moment, then closed, and the girl slumped on the bunk.

"Bud Pond," Miles said slowly, "will be taken care of when the time comes. *You* won't do it. Tomorrow morning we're going to go to Tramparas. We'll stay here tonight. From Tramparas I'm going to send you to the convent school at Las Cruces. They'll look after you there. They'll make a lady of you. I promised your father I'd look after you, Jackie, and by the great horned spoon I'll do it!"

He turned from the girl and walking to the water bucket in the corner, filled the dipper and drank. When he turned to the room again Jackie was face down on the bunk and Curly and McFee were staring at him. From outside the cabin came the sound of Wink bringing in the horses.

Supper was a silent affair in the Coffin Camp that night. After the meal a bunk was curtained off for Jackie Belland and the beds were torn apart so that each man had bedding. Jackie retired behind her blanket screen and the men heard her moving about. When, after a time all sound of movement ceased, they waited until they were finally assured that the girl slept. Then they talked in low tones.

Curly Feltman told what had happened at the Belland cabin. He spoke tersely, as a man might speak, not as a boy would embroider an adventure. Miles listened and when Curly had finished he nodded.

"Good kid. I been holding out on you, Curly. You've been wondering why I'm in the country. Now I'll tell you." When he had done, he paused a little, speculatively. "I'm counting on you to help me, kid," he concluded.

Curly nodded. Somehow he felt pretty big inside. Miles Trask trusted him! There was silence until the boy broke it. "Did you mean that about sendin' her to the convent?"

"As soon as I can get the money," Miles stated. "She's got to have a chance, kid."

Curly turned his head away, and Wink Revier spoke from his box beside the stove. "I'm sittin' up with my knittin'," he announced, crossing to the door and picking up his rifle. "I'll wake you about midnight, Miles."

"I'll take it from midnight," McFee spoke swiftly. "You take the mornin' shift, Miles."

Miles nodded and Wink Revier went out, closing the door softly behind him.

IN THE morning when Miles wakened the others at four o'clock they dressed swiftly. Jackie came out from behind her curtain, wan and white-faced from her long weeping. She refrained from looking at Miles. A hasty breakfast, and the men went out to the corral. Lead ropes were put on Jackie's horse and on the livery stable horse that McFee had riden, and the five of them set out for town. The sun rose before they had reached the Gonzalitas Hill and as they climbed, their shadows were long before them. At its top they hastened on, reaching Tramparas before nine o'clock. McFee and Jackie were left at the McFee cottage where Bridget embraced Jackie, and scolded her, and kissed her, all in the same moment. The three men from the Coffin camp rode on down town. They turned into the main street, a compact little group, and were riding down it when King came running from the door of the Tramparas House.

"Trask!" he called. "Trask!"

Miles reined in, the others with him. King came up, smiling. "I'm certainly glad to see you," he exclaimed. "Are you busy?"

"Not too busy," Miles answered. "Why?"

"Because we're going out to see a ranch today," King explained. "I want you to come with us. Can you do that? It would be a big help to me."

"Maybe," said Miles. "What ranch?"

"The YT," King answered. "Benbow Trask's. Can you come?"

For a moment Miles was tempted to refuse. Looking down at King he saw that King was as eager as a youngster about to acquire a new pair of boots. Thoughts flashed through Miles' brain. He had Jackie Belland to look after. He had promised, and he had no money with which to carry out that promise. Perhaps—perhaps here was the place where he could get the funds he needed. He would go with King, and he would see Benbow Trask.

"I'll come."

CHAPTER XI

BENBOW TRASK AND NEPHEW

MILES' decision to accompany the Kings caused a delay in the party's departure from Tramparas. He talked briefly with Wink Revier, making arrangements, and perforce, went to McFee's before he left town. There he found Bridget and Colin both talking to Jacqueline, half scolding her, half pleading with her. Miles was curt with the girl. He was responsible for her actions, he said, and she must stay with Bridget.

Jackie Belland had recovered her spirits to some extent. She eyed Miles, smiled at him, and if Miles had given ground, would have cajoled him into relenting. But Miles was not in a relenting mood and Jackie's smiles were wasted. Realizing this, she sobered and promised to stay with Bridget and cause no more trouble. Satisfied, Miles rejoined the Kings and their party.

When they'd gone, Wink looked at Curly and spoke his mind. "I'm goin' to stay in town," he said. 'I'm goin' to ride herd on that girl we brought in, an' I'm goin' to rim around some. An' I got a little serious drinkin' to do. It's been a long time since I had a drink."

Curly nodded. He'd stay in town, too, and enjoy Wink's self-declared holiday. Curly thought the idea of riding herd on Jackie Belland a good one. He liked the girl's style and he liked her looks. Staying in town, Curly thought, might give him a chance to see her again, but he did not spot the real purpose underlying Wink's decision. Wink Revier knew Bud Pond, and he was taking no chances. Pond, Wink believed, would not take kindly to being shot at and held holed up in his cabin by a girl and a kid fence rider.

Curly stabled Jackie's horse at the livery barn. Then with her saddle behind his own, he rode back to McFee's.

Bridget knew boys, even if she had none of her own. And she knew that Curly was a good boy. So Curly was invited into the kitchen and there, because he stood around

and watched Jackie, Bridget hit upon a happy idea. Bridget did not want to lose her newly acquired charge; she did not want Jackie taken from her and sent to Las Cruces. Curly would make a good ally —and Curly was a boy and therefore hungry. Bridget declared that she was going to make doughnuts and invited him to stay. No second invitation was needed.

Wink had not been talking for noise when he declared that he had some serious drinking to do. A call at the Exchange Saloon started Wink well along the way to getting it done. From the Exchange Wink went to the Golden Rule Bar and from there to the White Palace. By noon he had a nice edge built up and was keeping it honed.

MILES TRASK, riding along a familiar road, kept behind the buckboard all the way out to the YT. The wind began to blow in little gusts, and by the time the buckboard and the rider had dropped from the mesa top into the canyon that housed the YT buildings, the dust was whipping along. At the ranch the Kings and Ryland were hastily escorted to the house while Miles went with the native *vaquero* who came to take the team. He put Sucker in the barn, threw down hay from the loft, then battled the wind back to the long, low-built rock house.

The Kings, Ryland, and Benbow Trask were in the living room when Miles came in. Benbow was nervous; the Kings were taking the wind as a good joke played by nature; and Ryland was smoking a stogie beside the fireplace. It gave Miles a twinge to see the lawyer lolling at ease in his father's old chair.

With Miles' advent Benbow brought out a map of the ranch and put it on the table. All of them gathered around to look at the map and Benbow pointed out the owned land, the fenced lease, and the open range that was being grazed by YT cattle. It was a familiar story to Miles, but he listened carefully as Benbow told of the holdings and the cattle. It seemed to Miles that his uncle was upset.

The Kings asked questions and Benbow answered them. Ryland thrust in an occasional word and before they had finished with the discussion the native woman that Benbow employed as cook, came in to set the table. The map was folded and they all moved over to the fireplace where Ryland talked to the Kings, and Benbow, his voice betraying his nervousness, addressed his first real word to Miles.

"I'd like to talk to you," said Benbow. "Can you come into the office a minute?"

At Miles' nod, Benbow led the way to the little corner room where all YT business was transacted. There he seated himself behind a littered desk and motioned Miles to a chair.

"You always thought that I cheated you, Miles," said Benbow by way of beginning. "You always thought that, an' you'd never listen to my side."

Miles crossed his legs deliberately, and reached for papers and tobacco. "I never thought it, Benbow," he replied slowly, "I *knew* it."

Benbow shook his head. "I didn't, though," he objected. "Yore father was my half-brother. I put money into the ranch here an' I had a right to everythin' I done, but you wouldn't believe it. You thought that I was cheatin' you an' you had that bust-up with Ryland's girl an' went streakin' it away from here an' joined the Army. That left me up against it. I'm crippled an' I need you here at the place. You should have stayed." Benbow's tone and expression were those of an injured man.

"You didn't try very hard to hold me," Miles said, carefully scrutinizing his cigarette and then reaching for a match. "Not as I recall it."

Benbow shrugged that off. "You was mad," he reminded. "There wasn't any use talkin' to you."

"Well?"

"Well," Benbow offered, "of course you had somethin' comin' to you from the place. You wasn't of age then but you are now. You got about a thousand dollars

comin'." He watched Miles through narrowed eyes.

"I've got more than that," Miles answered evenly.

"No," Benbow shook his head, "an' I can't give you that offhand. Times are mighty hard, Miles."

"I hadn't noticed." Miles drew in smoke, inhaled, and let it trail out thinly.

"They are," asserted Benbow. "Now look, Miles. This King has got money. He thinks a lot of you. You recommend that he buy the YT an' I'll be able to pay you the thousand."

"Yes?" drawled Miles.

"Yes," answered Benbow. He watched his nephew closely but Miles' face told him nothing. "An' I'd make a bonus, too," hazarded Benbow. "You haven't got it comin' but I'd give you a commission of a thousand on the sale."

MILES got up. "You figure to sell the YT for about fifty, sixty thousand dollars," he stated bluntly. "I'll take half, Benbow, and I won't recommend buying to King 'til I've looked the place over and seen that it's in shape. That's my offer."

"That's yore offer?" Benbow was calm.

"That's it," Miles answered, and turning, walked out of the office. Benbow also got up and limped after Miles. When they reached the living room where food was being served, Ryland looked up and past Miles, catching Benbow's eyes. Benbow shook his head slightly and Ryland nodded, the movement imperceptible. Benbow had failed and now it was Ryland's turn.

When the meal was finished, King, Benbow and Ryland talked while Grace King walked to a window and looked out at the wind whipping past. Miles, not entering into the talk of the others, watched the girl and presently joined her.

"I've never seen the wind blow so hard," commented Grace King, not turning. "This must be a hard country to live in, Mr. Trask."

"It is a hard country," Miles agreed, slowly, "but you get to liking it. When I'm away from here, sometimes I get homesick even for the wind." The girl turned and looked up at him.

"I was born here," he went on. "In this house. I lived all my life here except when I was sent to school in Denver and when I went to the Army. It's home."

Grace King nodded her understanding and silence fell between them. From the table Lester King called: "Can you come here, Miles?"

Grace watched his compact figure as he moved across the room. There was easy, flowing grace in every movement, a controlled power. Miles leaned over the table and placed his finger on the map.

"Miles knows the ranch," Ryland said smoothly. "He's ridden every foot of it."

"I've never seen that water play out," said Miles, answering a question from King.

The wind held on. Business talk ceased and Ryland gravely entertained the Kings, telling them of the country, its history and makeup, and drawing on his knowledge for amusing stories of the past. Benbow Trask watched Miles, while Grace King, sitting quietly apart, her eyes alert, looked from one face to the other, matching the benign countenance of Ryland against her brother's eagerness; the strong composure of Miles Trask against the twisted, withered face of Benbow. So the afternoon passed. The native woman silently served supper and cleared the table. Twilight fell and with it the wind slowed, blew less gustily, and presently died. Miles Trask got up from where he sat beside the fireplace.

"I've got to ride to town," he said. "My pardners are there and we're due back at work in the morning."

Lester King arose. "You can't stay?" he asked. "I thought that we could go over some of the place tomorrow and—"

Miles shook his head and smiled faintly. "I work for a living," he said. "I've got to get back on my job."

"We all must go, Lester," interposed Grace King. "We can come out another time, Mr. Trask."

Lester eyed his sister. He did not know

why she wanted to leave, but he knew that there was some reason. Grace King did not act on impulse and Lester had always respected her judgment.

Benbow Trask and Ryland expostulated, urging the Kings to stay. Then Ryland suddenly flashed Benbow a warning glance, and the argument ceased. Benbow went out to see that the buckboard was made ready; Miles saddled Sucker, and Ryland, making his excuses, joined Benbow.

Left alone in the YT living room Lester questioned his sister. "Why, Grace?" he asked. "Why don't you want to stay here tonight?"

Grace King shook her head. "I want you to talk with Miles Trask," she answered. "There is something here that isn't just right. I watched you while you talked and there is something between Miles Trask and his uncle and Ryland. I want to know what it is."

"Intuition?" laughed Lester.

"Let *me* talk to him, then," urged Grace King. "You can call it intuition if you like, Lester, but something *is* wrong."

OUTSIDE the house, walking toward the corrals and sheds, Ryland stopped Benbow, catching him by his elbow. "What luck?" asked Ryland.

"No luck at all," grunted Benbow. "He wants half. You'll have to try, Asa."

Asa Ryland nodded and they walked on.

When the team had been hitched to the buckboard and Miles had led Sucker out of the barn, good-byes were said. Benbow Trask was not going to Tramparas with his guests, entrusting Ryland with their safe return to town. Miles mounted Sucker and waited until the others were ready. Finally, Ryland clucked to the team and the buckboard rolled ahead.

Conversation in the buckboard was desultory. When the lights of Tramparas were twinkling ahead on the flat, Miles leaned from the saddle and spoke to King.

"I think I'll lope on ahead," he said. "I want to see Wink."

"Are you leaving tonight?" Ryland asked.

"In the morning, likely," replied Miles.

"Come in and see me before you go," the lawyer requested.

"All right," Miles agreed.

"And I'd like to talk with you, Miles," Lester King announced. "If you could see me before you leave town—"

"I'll be in," Miles promised. "Good night."

Reaching town a good five minutes before the others, Miles went to look for Wink and Curly.

Both of them were located in the Golden Rule. Miles could tell as soon as he saw Wink that Wink was drunk, but not too drunk. Curly had had a drink or two, too. They were at the bar, near the door, and there was mischief in their eyes.

Miles joined them. "What you been doing, Wink?" he demanded sternly, his own eyes glinting with amusement.

"Me?" Wink asked innocently. "I been standin' around waitin' for Curly. Curly, he's been eatin' doughnuts at McFee's."

"Any left?" Miles asked practically.

Curly nodded. "Not many though," he added.

"How'd you come out, Miles?" asked Wink.

"I got an offer of two thousand dollars," Miles replied. "Tell you about it in the morning." He turned to the bartender. "Rye."

Wink grinned at Miles over his glass. "We're waitin' here for a little excitement," he announced. "Ain't we, Curly?"

Curly almost choked on his drink and Miles pried into Wink's seriousness. "What have you been up to?" Miles demanded.

"Had we better let him in on it, Curly?" asked Wink. Curly nodded and Wink turned back to Miles. "Curly went off an' left me by myse'f," he complained. "That ain't no way to do, is it?"

Miles shook his head. "No," he agreed, "that was bad."

"So I looked around to find me a drinkin' pardner," Wink confided. "'Long about five o'clock I found him. You know that barber—Tony?"

Miles nodded, and Wink, putting his

glass on the bar, continued. "Tony likes wine," said Wink seriously. "Taken me quite a while to get him weaned off it an' onto whiskey, but I finally made it."

"They were drinkin' bourbon with rye for a chaser when I found 'em," Curly added his bit.

"These Eyetalians can't drink," announced Wink. "Tony done passed out on us." He paused impressively.

"Well?" urged Miles.

"Well," said Wink, "there he was with a lot of sleepin' to do an' no place to do it. Curly an' me fixed him up a place."

"What did you do?" prodded Miles.

Wink chuckled. "You know Stern's warehouse?" he asked.

Miles nodded. Stern ran a general merchandise store just across the street from the Golden Rule. The merchant's warehouse was next to the store, a long low building that contained everything from harness and wagons, down to safety pins.

"There was a big Mexicano died over by Loco Canyon yesterday," said Wink. "Stern sold his *amigos* a coffin an' he had it in the warehouse close to the back door. It was a right nice coffin, down-padded an' silk-lined an' everythin'."

"So . . . ?"

"Me an' Curly an' our drinkin' pardner was by the back door of Stern's when Tony passed out," completed Wink. "Seemed like a shame to waste all that down paddin' on a dead man so we just put Tony into the coffin an' throwed a hide or two over the box to keep him warm. Seems like he must be there yet."

"And you're waiting for him to come to and find where he is," suggested Miles. "He'll likely be surprised."

"Moren likely," Wink agreed casually. "The door of the warehouse is open so them Mexicanos can get the coffin, I reckon. The street light on the corner throws in there right nice. I never seen the sense of these lamps on the corners before. Always seemed like a waste of coal oil to me, but mebbe I'm wrong. Me an' Curly are waitin' to see."

"I'll just wait with you," Miles announced. "Somebody ought to prove that street lamps are useful anyhow."

Wink's chuckle was deep in his throat. "In the interest of science," he said. "We'll have a drink. Bartender!"

A long, high-pitched, wailing yell floated into the Golden Rule. It pierced the murmur of voices, overtopped the whir of shuffled cards and the soft clanking of poker chips, and the chink of glasses. The yell arose, quavering, filled with terror, and sustained. Men stopped what they were doing and looked up inquiringly.

Wink Revier spoke to his friends. "Looks like Tony has woke up," he exulted. "Let's go see."

CHAPTER XII

NIGHT IN TRAMPARAS

BEING close to the door Wink, Curly, and Miles were the first out of the Golden Rule. There were others running toward the back of Stern's warehouse. They hurried around the building, their boots pounding on the walk, turned at the alley and went on back of the loading platform. In the vacant lot behind the warehouse a lantern showed and the runners converged upon the light. Arburg held it, and there was a man on the ground—a small, pudgy man who had a death grip on the marshal's leg just above the boot top. The fat man on the ground was wailing in holy terror, and when Arburg attempted to move, he clung all the tighter to the leg.

"It's Stern," whispered Wink in Miles' ear. "We must've done better'n we expected."

"Let go my leg!" snapped Arburg. "Let go! What happened to you?"

"In the—in the— Oh, my Judas Priest!" Stern wailed.

"Leggo!" Arburg was angry.

Stern's unwilling hands were pried from the marshal's leg and the pudgy man was pulled to his feet. "Now," Arburg snarled, "what happened to you? Do I have to knock some sense into you?"

"In the warehouse," babbled Stern. "He talked to me!"

"Who talked to you?" Arburg had lost all patience. Around him men were chuckling. Wink punched Miles in the ribs and Curly struggled to control his mirth.

"The man in the coffin!" babbled Stern. "He stuck up his head."

"What coffin? Where?" demanded Arburg.

Bit by bit the tale came out. Stern had been passing through the warehouse, intent upon closing the back door. As he went by the black box on the floor a man had thrust up his head and profanely demanded to be freed. Stern had run out through the back door, across the loading platform and missing the jump had landed in the vacant lot. There Arburg had found him.

"He talked to me!" wailed Stern. "He talked!"

Headed by Arburg, who bore the lantern, and with two men escorting the unwilling Stern, the crowd surged to the warehouse.

Inside the building the lantern sent long shadows dancing and the street light by the alley shed a faint glow through the door. There on the floor close to the door was the black coffin and as Arburg set down the lantern, a head was thrust up—a tousled, disheveled and very live head.

"Lemme out of here!"

The lantern was on top of the coffin. There were hides below the lantern, hides that Wink Revier and Curly Feltman had taken from a pile and thrown over the box. Their weight was enough to hold Tony imprisoned. The lantern light glared down on those hides.

"How'd you get in here?" Arburg demanded.

"I don't know," wailed Tony. "Can't you lemme out? This is a coffin! And I ain't dead."

The crowd exploded into laughter. Miles Trask, beside the coffin, backed away. At the edge of the crowd he found Wink and Curly, convulsed with mirth.

Miles spoke to them quickly. "We'd better pull out," he said. "If Tony sees you—"

Wink wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. "There's no time like right now," he agreed. "Ain't Arburg mad? Ain't Tony mad? An' ain't Stern?"

"Come on," urged Miles. "Don't spoil it."

"We won't," promised Wink, following Miles. "Gosh, Curly, it was sure worth the trouble we took gettin that jasper into the casket."

FADING back from the crowd where Arburg was pulling Tony from the coffin, the three reached the door. They dropped from the edge of the loading platform and swiftly, but apparently without hurrying, went around the corner of the building. Back on the main street Wink suggested the Golden Rule and a drink, but Miles vetoed that.

"Suppose they bring Tony in?" he asked. "We'd better hit for the hotel. I'll buy a bottle to take with us."

Miles crossed the street to the saloon while Wink and Curly continued toward the Tramparas House. Within a few minutes Miles joined them, his coat pocket bulging, and they went into the hotel.

Lester King was sitting in the lobby. Miles led Curly and Wink over and introduced them, and all four were standing talking when Sam Warfler came in.

Warfler had been out to see what had happened and he had a report on the excitement. Stern, so he declared, was hiring a man to watch the warehouse for the remainder of the night. When the hotel-keeper asked a question. "Did you see Jose Valverde today, Miles?" Miles shook his head.

"He was in town," announced Warfler. "He came in lookin' for you. Said he'd stopped at the Coffin Camp but you weren't there."

"Did he say why he wanted to see me?" Miles asked.

"He said Leandro Chavez had asked him to ride over," replied Warfler. "Leandro wants to see you."

Miles stood undecided. He had seen the hides thrown over the coffin in the warehouse and he wanted a closer inspection of them, but he did not want to be seen. He had planned to return to the warehouse when the town was still, but now with a watchman on duty his plan was frustrated.

"It's too early to go to bed," Wink announced, "an' it's too late to do anythin' else. What we goin' to do, Miles?"

"We might sit down awhile," suggested Miles. "Did you get a room here, Wink?"

Wink went to the desk to attend to it. He came back jingling a room key and tag in his hand, and sat down beside King.

"So you was in the Army with Miles," said Wink to King. "Miles is a close-mouthed sort of cuss, Mr. King. He's never told us much about the Islands."

"There isn't much to tell," said Miles. "I was just there."

"Which was my good fortune," King stated. "Miles saved my life, Mr. Revier."

"So?" Wink looked his surprise. "How was that?"

King repeated the tale he had told Ryland. When he finished Wink and Curly were leaning forward and Sam Warfler had come from the desk and joined the group.

"So Miles done that," said Wink. "I didn't think he could shoot that good."

"I assure you he is an excellent shot." King smiled. "Accurate and fast."

"Well," grinned Wink, "he had some good teachin'. I learned him some of that myse'f."

"The Moros"—Curly was not interested in Miles' prowess with a gun, but rather in geography and customs—"they just turn themselves loose like that an' go choppin' people up?"

"They are Mohammedans," said King. "They believe that if a man dies after having killed an infidel he will go straight to heaven. And they have a pretty nice idea for heaven."

"What's that?" Wink asked.

"Wine, women, and song," King laughed. "Beautiful women to wait on them and all the wine they want."

"That beats a harp an' a pair of wings four ways from a jack." Wink nodded his approbation. "Mebbe I'd better turn Mohammedan."

They all laughed at that and Curly asked another question. "They must be pretty salty kind of people, ain't they?"

"Salty?" King turned to Miles for interpretation.

"Curly means that they are tough," explained Miles.

"They are," King turned back to Curly. He was enjoying himself and his audience. "I could tell you some things—"

"Go ahead," urged Wink Revier. "It's just the shank of the evenin' an' we got some snake bite remedy in case you get too bloody for us. What about these here Moros?"

"They are the cruelest people on earth," stated King with conviction. "Remember when we took Datu Ali's compound?"

Miles nodded and Wink, Curly, and Sam Warfler hunched forward in their chairs.

"WE marched all night," said King. "We had word that the Datu had taken three Infantry men and was holding them. We formed a relief expedition. Horses were useless and we went on foot. There was a native guide but he fell into a trap along the trail and was killed so we had to go slowly. It was breaking dawn when we reached the cleared place about the Datu's village."

"They wall up their villages," interposed Miles. "Make a stockade and fort up."

"I'll never forget what we saw." King's voice was low. "They had caught the infantrymen all right. We saw them."

"What'd they done?" Curly's voice was tense.

King shook his head. "They had bound the men," he said, "and set them on growing spikes of bamboo."

"Huh?" Wink was puzzled.

"Bamboo," repeated King. "You've seen it. Those old cane fishing poles are bamboo."

"That don't sound so tough to me," Wink scoffed.

"But you don't know bamboo," King interrupted. "The little growing spikes of it are hard as iron and sharp as a sword point. They will grow six inches in a night. Those men had been placed on spikes of growing bamboo. It had pierced up through their bodies and they were impaled upon it as it grew."

"Yuh mean it just growed up through them?" Curly was incredulous.

King nodded and Wink and Curly turned to Miles for confirmation. Miles, his face grim, gave it. "We shot those boys," Miles said slowly. "There wasn't anything else we could do for them. They must have been out there two or three days."

"Then what'd you do?" demanded Wink.

"Then we took the compound," grated King. "I don't remember that we took any prisoners, do you, Trask?"

Miles shook his head soberly. "I didn't take any," he answered grimly. "Mine were all dead."

"Well," Wink still did not believe all he heard, "that beats anythin' I ever hear, that does. Just a little plant an' it growed right into 'em."

Miles rose to his feet. "It's bedtime," he stated. "I'm going to turn in. Coming Wink? Curly?"

"When we've had a drink around," returned Wink. "I need one. After that bamboo thing I do."

Miles produced a bottle and after it had passed around, the men said goodnight and parted. Undressing in their room, Wink reverted to the story King had told. "Was that all so, Miles?" he queried. "Did you sure enough see that? You really saw that in the war?"

"I wish I hadn't," Miles answered. "But I did—I really saw it."

"Well," drawled Wink, "it's kind of hard to take. Sam Warfler was believin' it though. He sure was believin' it. Did you see the way he looked?"

Miles nodded absently. "I won't go out with you tomorrow, Wink," he said abruptly. "I'm going to stay in town a few days."

Wink looked at him inquiringly. "Why stay in town?"

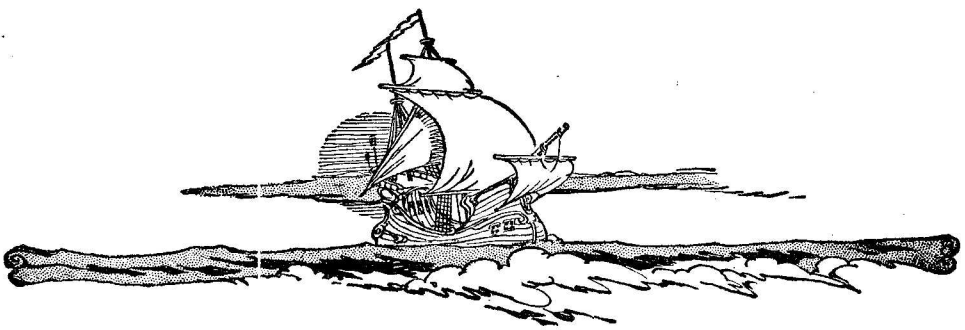
"I want to check on some things," Miles explained. "Tell you when I get back to camp. You and Curly ride on out and I'll be out in a day or two."

"You better hobble that Belland kid," suggested Wink. "Sideline her, too. If you don't she's goin' to collect Bud Pond's scalp—not that I blame her any."

"I'll try to look after her," agreed Miles. "Blow out the lamp when you're ready, Wink."

Miles lay awake in the darkness, staring, thinking. Jackie Belland was a problem, all right. But there were other worries that tugged at his mind. . . . Worries about King and his sister—about Benbow Trask— Suddenly, for the first time in his life, Miles felt alone and utterly helpless. There was so much to be done. It would be a long time before peace and contentment could come back to Tramparas. There were black days ahead for all of them. . . .

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



A True Story in Pictures Every Week

Next Week: Martin J. Callagg—Fire-Fighter

Sons of the Wolf

By FOSTER-HARRIS

Author of "The Wildcat's Whiskers," "Well, Mr. Weeble," etc.

THE rabbit shot out of the cedars like a little, furry cannonball. A slim, brown shape came hurtling over the rocks to cut him off. The hare saw his peril, and tried to dodge. Too late. Lightning fangs had him. There was one brief flurry, and on the raw, whistling, March wind, Blade Barlow heard the rabbit's pitiful death scream.

It was swift death for the killer then, too, for Blade's .30-.30 swung and splashed fire. The shot was a tricky one, 'cross wind, in very bad light, and at the blurred leaping target. But old Blade had learned his marksmanship in a school where those who couldn't shoot fast and straight didn't graduate. They got transferred instead, to another world.

Levering the empty shell out of his rifle, Blade swung down, tied his horse to a limb, and started stiffly up the slope. The cattlemen's association was paying five dollars bounty on wolf scalps. Blade eked out his meager income quite a bit, that way. Five dollars was more than he often panned out in two or three hard days' work on his little placer claim.

He hurried, for the swift, mountain dusk already was at hand and he was still four miles from home. The wolf had dropped behind a rock, so all Blade could see was one limp forepaw. He fished out his knife, opening the blade as he knelt. And then his breath went in a little grunt of disgusted surprise.

This wasn't a wolf he had shot. It was a dog, instead, a brown shepherd, and a bitch with pups, too. There was a worn, leather strap about the shaggy neck. Barlow's bullet had ploughed the heart, and death had come so swiftly that the little bitch had not even had time to drop her prey.

Blade rocked back on his heels. He was sorry now he had shot. The cowmen weren't paying any bounty on dogs, although they should. This wasn't anyone's tame dog, Blade knew. Aside from his own cabin, there wasn't an inhabited house in twenty miles. This was a tame dog, gone wild.

Undoubtedly she had belonged to some one of the fool nesters who had tried to dry farm the nearby Bitterroot Valley. They had starved out. But, meantime, of course, they had ploughed under all the grass, so that the once green valley was

now a dry desolation. They had also abandoned many of their dogs on leaving, and these dogs, perforce, had gone wild.

Running now, and interbreeding, with the wolves, these dog pariahs were certainly just as bad, if not worse than, the wolves.

But Blade Barlow had been a hunted pariah himself. He knew all about having to range with the wolf clan. He could be iron hard. But also, he could sympathize with this little, dead female.

He could guess what a game, gallant, bitter fight she had had to put up for her life. And not only for herself. Somewhere in these jumbled rocks, he knew, was her den, with a litter of helpless pups. Blade Barlow could not remember his own mother. But he did not like to think of those little fellows starving.

So, knowing the quest was virtually hopeless, he looked for that den. He didn't find it. But he did not quit until pitch dark.

He rode home, and during the night, a howling, March storm blew in. Next morning the ground was white. Cold, too, but Blade contrived to ride over and have another look for that den. He did not find it. And it was only in mid-morning of the third day, when he told himself he was really prospecting, and not looking for those pups at all, that he at last discovered them.

A PITIFULLY thin wailing led him to the craftily concealed lair. It was not more than a quarter of a mile from where he had shot the bitch. A flat rock masked the door, and when Blade pushed it away, there inside was a little pile of furry bodies. Only one tiny fellow still cried for the mother who would never come home.

But when the light hit him, and Blade stripped off a mitten and reached in, he knew something was wrong. The pup was too little and weak to do much. But he reared up on his wobbly legs, with a ludicrous effort to snarl, and when Blade touched him, he struck.

"Why, you little devil!" Blade jerked back, too late. The tiny, needle sharp teeth had drawn blood. He grinned admiringly and reached again, more cautiously. This time, despite the pup's efforts, he caught him by the back of his bristling little neck.

The rest of the litter were dead. It was just as well, perhaps, for their sire obviously had been a wolf. Blade put them back in their home, and closed the door. The live pup, he dropped carefully in the pocket of his sheepskin coat.

A snarling spit of snow lashed his face as he straightened, and he pulled his collar higher. Too cold to be prospecting today, anyhow, he told himself solemnly. He headed for home.

He had been a bachelor all his life, so he didn't know a great deal about babies. But when he reached the cabin, he quickly contrived a sort of gruel, out of flour, water and canned milk. With a twisted rag for a teat, he dripped the warm stuff into the pup's mouth and tried to get him to nurse. The hungry baby choked, strangled and cried. But, finally, he caught on.

After that, he pumped his lank little stomach as full as Blade dared let him. Then, still wailing for more, he went to sleep, cuddled against a bag of warmed salt. He was not more than a few weeks old, Blade judged. More wolf than dog, and if he lived, he'd doubtless turn out to be just another curse for the cowmen. But he had survived, where his sisters and brothers had perished, and, little as he was, he had stood up and fought for himself. Old Blade Barlow liked that.

He fed the puppy again, when he wakened, and at various other times during the day. He had his doubts whether the gruel was perfect food for a starved, baby wolf. That night, when the puppy writhed and wailed with the bellyache, he knew it wasn't.

Blade nursed him. He had quite a time of it, what with those amazingly sharp little teeth. But when morning came, the pup was yelling lustily for more grub; and Blade felt like a wreck.

Having a baby was every last bit as bad

as he had heard, he reflected sadly. But he mixed more gruel and the pup ate it and lived. Nor did he get the bellyache again, either. Or, at least, if he did, he kept it to himself.

That night, he let Blade handle him, without trying to bite. Within a week he was sprawling across the floor, wriggling and whining a shy joyous greeting every time Blade came in.

He was a funny little dog, Blade thought. A queer mixture, wild as the dickens, tough and smart. He never barked. But his eyes were not a wolf's eyes, and, as he grew older, there was a red sheen and curl to his coat that was not wolf either. Scratching his tummy, old Barlow talked to him.

"Aimin' to grow up, and be a red, curly wolf, are you, pup? Well, it's some ambition!"

Curiously, he never formally gave the little wolf dog a name. He addressed him as just pup for awhile, and then drifted into calling him Son. A psychologist might have made something of that.

So the weeks passed. Blade worked at his placer, and about once every two months, rode down to Reedsville for supplies. He never lingered in town. At rare intervals he had a visitor, a cowhand, or one of the not-so-neighboring ranchers. But, generally, the world passed him by, and he was content to let it.

He had a living here, meager, but sufficient. He was bothering no one. The bone-handled guns that had worn callouses on his lean hips were hanging on the wall now, and when a storm howled in the night, he could sit, snug and warm, by his own fireside. He had paid for his outlaw days. Now all he wanted was peace.

SUMMER passed, and fall came. The first light snow did not arrive until mid-October. Blade would remember, because the next day, Son had his scrap with the coyote.

When Blade came running with his rifle, it was all over. He had shot a deer the day before, and had left it hanging out back of the cabin. While he was down at the creek, a daring old dog coyote had tried a raid. And Son had defended his master's property.

The marks showed plainly it had been a whale of a fight. Son was chewed up from stem to stern. But he was grinning. The coyote was dead.

It was no mean feat for an eight months old dog to kill such a foe, either; for the coyote was a big one, scarred with many old battles.

Blade grunted approval, and patched Son up. He got well quickly, and, after that, he put on a little swagger. He was growing into a big fellow, strong, lightning fast, and good-looking. He was getting to be quite a dude. But also, he was learning.

He tackled a full-grown, loafer wolf one December day while he and Blade were out hunting, and learned plenty! Only Blade's prompt arrival, in fact, saved him from learning all about dog heaven. It was a painful experience. But, after that, he mixed a little more caution with his courage.

While his wounds healed, he sat and listened solemnly to old Blade's lectures on the difference between being a dead game fighter and just a plain fool, and maybe, vaguely, he understood. At least, when the sheriff and his deputies rode in, just after Christmas, he acted so precisely like a wary, old owlhooter, that Blade was amazed.

It was a day ominous with threat of storm. Blade was fixing up the leanto in which he kept his one horse. Abruptly Son snarled a warning and flashed for cover around the corner of the cabin.

He didn't run farther, because Blade wouldn't follow. But he stayed out of sight, snarling and whining. And when the puzzled Barlow turned, there were the officers, riding out of the timber.

A swift cold urge to run went through Blade, too, as he saw those guns and badges. But he stood fast. He knew Sheriff "Blackjack" Kraft slightly. This was likely just a casual visit. If not, it was too late to get away now, anyhow.

"Howdy, Barlow." The sheriff nodded amiably. "Just ridin' out this way, and thought we'd drop by, see how you was gettin' along."

"Why, fine, Sheriff." Blade felt a swift wave of relief. They weren't after him. "Light down, gents, and come in where it's warm," he urged hospitably. "I got a pot of coffee on the fire."

"Like to, Barlow." The sheriff grinned, glanced ruefully at the north, and shook his head. "But we're gonna have to high-tail, to git home while we can. Shore smells like a blizzard comin'."

He hesitated, then asked casually: "Uh, by the way, Barlow, you noticed any strangers passin' lately? Strange riders, I mean."

"I ain't seen a soul, Sheriff." Blade drew a quick breath and looked away. His bearded face betrayed nothing, but inside he had gone suddenly taut. Instinct was warning him. He could feel their eyes on him, and, somehow, they were staring just a little too hard. That big deputy, particularly.

"Why?" he asked. "Somethin' wrong?"

"The bank was robbed up at Garber yesterday." The sheriff's voice was flat. "Two masked men. They killed the cashier. We thought mebbe they headed down this way."

He broke off abruptly, staring toward the corner of the cabin. "Say! What's that you got there a wolf?"

"Huh?" Blade swung. "Oh. You, Son! Come out! You hear?"

Son came, but not willingly. He stood stiff, bristling, with red glints in his eyes. Other men with rifles had ridden up to the cabin and he'd been shy, but never like this. Certainly he couldn't know these were officers. He'd never seen them before in his life. But he was acting just like Blade felt inside.

Suspicious, chill, edgy as all get out.

"Yeah, his daddy was a wolf, I guess," Blade answered Kraft's question. "He's a fightin' son of a gun."

"He looks it." The sheriff glanced again at the lowering north, and gathered up his reins. "Got to be shovin' along boys," he barked at his deputies. "Well, Barlow, if you do see anybody suspicious, why let me know. And be careful. One of them hellions is thought to be Big Jack Mears, out of the old McCandles gang. He's a bad hombre."

With a parting wave, Kraft spurred away, his men at his heels.

"'Son,' huh?" The big deputy snorted, as they topped the ridge. "Hear what he called that wolf? I'd say there was two sons uh wolves back there. A young 'un and—"

He broke off, riding for a moment with brooding eyes. "You know, Sheriff, I've seen that old guy's face before, somewheres," he said in a moment. "Couldn't be sure, behind them whiskers, but, seems like I recollect it—on a reward notice or somethin', mebbe."

"Yeah, if your memory's long enough, Bill, I wouldn't be surprised," said the sheriff.

"Huh?" The deputy looked at him sharply.

The sheriff did not reply. "Come on, boys, hit it up!" he snapped.

BACK in the cabin about then, Blade was just going in, with the wolf dog at his heels. He barred the door and turned, staring into space. He must have just stood there for several minutes. The dog's uneasy whine aroused him at last, and he looked down into the brown eyes, whispering.

"Yeah. I know, Son. I'm feelin' it too. But I—"

He broke off, shaking his head. Wild instinct was telling him to do the same thing the wolf dog had started to do. Run. Get away from here quick. But Blade Barlow couldn't.

This little claim, the cabin and its few contents, were all Blade had in the world. He was old, and the years in prison had taken their toll. If he went out on the dodge again, he would just go to death or disaster. Besides his reason was arguing stoutly that he didn't have any real cause at all to get panicky yet.

What if instinct had always warned him correctly in his outlaw days? Now was different.

A roaring blast shook the cabin, and Blade shivered. Then he turned, with a short laugh. "Go out with this blizzard comin'? Shucks, I'm gettin' scary as an old woman! Just because a sheriff talks of the McCandles bunch—and a fat deputy looks at me—"

But he took the long .45's down off the wall, cleaned and oiled them carefully, and buckled them on. He had never gotten quite used to going around without at least one of these guns handy. And from now on, he didn't propose to try.

He knew all about Big Jack Mears and the old McCandles bunch. He should know—he had ridden with them once, until their murderous brutality had sickened him.

Treacherous, gunswift Bronc McCandles had flatly promised that death would be the take of any man who ran out on his bunch, and all the West couldn't hide the rat who tried. Just the same, Blade had quit. He had expected swift, gang vengeance. But the law had struck first, and had put him away safe for a nice, long time.

About three months after he had gotten out, Blade had read with relief of McCandles' death in a train stick-up. He had thought that finished it. But now he knew better.

He had slipped McCandles' vengeance, perhaps. But not his own past. Two bandits, one believed to be from the old McCandles gang, robbing and murdering at Garber, not fifty miles north. And just suppose Sheriff Kraft learned, or even suspected, that here was another of the McCandles' hellions, right under his nose? An ex-convict, under an alias, and with no alibi at all where he had been during that robbery, save his own word. Blade Barlow shuddered.

The blizzard blew in that night, as it had promised to, and it was a lulu. For a week the hills were impassable with ice and sub-zero cold. And when it thawed at last, Blade grimly expected visitors.

But none came. Day after day passed and still nothing happened. January went by, and half of February. It was unusually warm, mild. But weather-wise old Blade knew what these hills could do.

He still clung to his guns, but he was forgetting his fears as the days slipped by. Sometimes, at night, he had an uneasy feeling of great, invisible wheels grinding, the inexorable mills of destiny. But, like most men who have spent their lives perilously, Blade was something of a fatalist. If his sign was really up at last, nothing he could do would change matters.

THE last day of February was so bright and warm, it seemed almost summer. But the day was a weather breeder, Blade judged. Winter wasn't through yet, by a long shot. Blade took his rifle, whistled to Son, and went for a hunt in the surrounding hills.

He had disobeyed his instinct about running, but that same uneasy, sixth sense had kept him away from town. So he was very low on supplies, and heavily dependent on his rifle for food. He knocked over several rabbits. And, as he turned homeward he knew that his weather forecasting had been dead right.

The false, luring sunlight had faded to dead, cold gray, and the wind was shifting. Another cold spell coming. Whistling to the wide-ranging dog, Blade quickened his pace towards his cabin.

His instinct gave him no warning at all as he neared the door, but the wolf dog knew. Bristling, Son stopped with a quick snarl. He was facing the house. Blade saw what looked like a gun muzzle inside of window. Then, before he could move, the door whipped open and a harsh, remembered voice boomed in his ears.

"Well, well, Kid! Where you been? Come on in!"

On leaden feet, Blade Barlow obeyed. There was nothing else to do. That was a rifle in the window, and they could pot him like a rabbit, if he tried to run or resist.

"Long time no see you, Kid." It was

Big Jack Mears himself in the doorway. A thickened, older, coarser Mears, and he had been coarse enough as Blade remembered him. He was grinning as he waved Blade in.

Still-faced, and deadly taut, Blade stepped by him. The wolf dog snarled suddenly, and Mears' hard voice lashed out. "Stay outside, you mutt! Git, or I'll—"

"That's my dog, Mears!" Blade whirled. "He comes inside."

"Oh, all right." Mears let the bristling Son enter. "Don't you snarl at me, you kyote, or I'll blow your head off!" he roared, almost genially. "Uh, Snake, meet my old pard and runnin' mate, the Cimarron Kid hisself!"

Blade Barlow winced as he heard that old name. He looked across the room at the other bandit, and it came to him instantly, here was a man appropriately called.

Snake. Not a rattler—fair enough at least to give warning. This was a coral snake, equally deadly, but different. One of those treacherous, vicious killers that hides in the dust or grass and strikes without warning or provocation. Even the outlaw's gaudy, yellow and red striped mackinaw was in character.

"You don't seem very glad to see us, Kid." Mears' grin widened as he barred the door. "Ain't you even goin' to invite us to a square meal?'

"I see you've already had one." Blade looked coldly at the littered table. "Well, what do you hombres want?'

"Now that ain't no way to act, Kid." Mears' voice was an exaggerated whine. "Put them bunnies and that rifle up and set down. Why, we're just payin' you a sociable visit."

Blade obeyed, taking off his sheepskin coat also. He had his Colt's buckled on underneath, and he'd need all the free reach he could get and then some if a showdown came. One against two, he would have only a ghost of a chance at best, and he knew it.

Age certainly had slowed Big Jack up, as it had Blade. But that other outlaw, Snake, wasn't old. One look at him had told old Barlow that there, undoubtedly, was a lightning swift killer.

"Whyn't you tell us we was neighbors?" Mears seemed to be enjoying himself, for there were cruel, amused glints in his eyes. "Here we been winter resortin' over in one of them sodbuster shacks in the valley for two months. And only learned yesterday the Cimarron Kid was livin' practically next door!"

It was beginning to snow now, and getting dark. The gunman, Snake, got up and lit the lamp. His filmy, reptilian eyes looked over it at Blade, and at the surly, silent wolf dog, crouched at Blade's feet. "Well, go on, Mears, tell him," he said, in a flat voice.

"Aw, plenty of time." Big Jack Mears stretched luxuriouly. "Might as well take your coat off, Snake. Looks like we're goin' to be here a day or two, anyways. Let's eat again."

He glanced disdainfully at the rabbits. "That what you're livin' on, Kid? You ought to be glad we come over! We been eatin' the things too—till our ears wiggle —but we're changin' that. Oh, clean 'em up, cook 'em, I can stand one more mess, anyhow."

SILENTLY Blade complied. Then they weren't here just to kill him. They wanted something. A bleak hostility welling up in his breast, he cooked the rabbits and sat by while they gorged.

"Ah, that's better!" Replete, Mears pushed back, rolling himself an extravagant cigarette from Blade's scanty tobacco supply. "Might as well get down to business now, huh?"

He lit his quirly and flipped the lighted match at the wolf dog, grinning as Son flinched. "Y'know, Kid, we only pulled a measly five hundred out of that Garber job," he said abruptly. "Just chicken feed. But we got another spotted that ought to take us off rabbit steaks for life. Only trouble, it's more than a two-man job."

Blade said nothing. After a moment, Big Jack went on.

"It's the bank down at Reedsville. Lots of dough, feller! Snake's already looked it over careful and it'll be a pipe. We'll cut you in for a full third, of course, and—"

"I'm not goin' to do it!" Blade Barlow's voice fairly exploded. Smoky wrath flaring in his faded eyes, he whipped to his feet. He had not meant to speak so flatly, but it was out now. "I've paid my debt to the law, and I ain't chalkin' up any more!" he rasped and set himself for gunplay.

But none came. "Tell him, Jack," said Snake, with a chill smile.

"Aw, set down!" Mears made a disgusted gesture. "Sure you're goin' to help us! You, uh, remember what Bronc McCandles use to say he'd do to ary man ratted out on his bunch? You remember?"

"I'm still alive." Blade glared. "I know Bronc's dead."

"He's dead." Big Jack nodded lazily. "But he didn't forget you, Kid. He fixed you up, dandy. Can you, uh, prove an alibi, where you was the night Bronc got killed, holdin' up that express train?"

Blade didn't answer. A cold, clammy wind was blowing through his brain. He got it now. Mears' harsh voice was lazing on.

"Well, Bronc, he made a dyin' confession you was with him, Kid, and you was the one killed that messenger. There's a five hundred reward for you. I bet the sheriff of this county would be right interested to hear that, don't you?"

"Why, you—" Blade choked, dazedly. "You—wouldn't—dast—"

"We could just drop him a lil' note, couldn't we?" cut in Snake coldly. "If we had to. Well, Kid, now whatta you say?"

"Aw, give him time to think it over, Snake." Mears grinned and yawned. "I wouldn't want an old pard to think we was threatenin' him. No, sir! Sleep on it, Kid, and you'll see we're really doin' you the biggest favor you ever got in your life."

He moved to the door, to glance out at the storm, while Blade Barlow sat down on the edge of the bunk. Like a man sleepwalking, Blade felt. This couldn't be real. After all these years, all this bitter effort to go straight. He couldn't prove an alibi for that "confession" of McCandles, and he knew it. Whether he helped these killers or not, he was a hunted outlaw again.

There was no sleep for Blade that night. He lay in his blankets, thinking, thinking. The howl of the wind seemed to have a ghostly ring of mocking mirth in it. Probably, somewhere, Bronc McCandles was chuckling. Black laughter, in hell . . .

Remembering Bronc, Blade couldn't doubt the truth of what Mears had told him. What could he do? Whether he took the outlaws' offer or not, he was caught. He thought of shooting them, as they slept. But both of them never were asleep at once. Every time he looked, one or the other was watching him.

The payoff came in the morning. Mears had lost his good humor during the night, and was in an evil mood. Leaving the chill Snake to watch Blade, he went out to the leanto, to saddle the horses. When he came back in, he tripped over Son. The wolf dog whirled with bared fangs, and Big Jack exploded.

"Snap at me, you mongrel!" Mears leaped back. "I told you what I'd do!" His hand clawed toward his gun; and stopped short.

"Don't yuh, Jack!" Old Blade Barlow's voice had flared like a flame. "You touch that dog, I'll kill you!"

It was the showdown. The strained, hostile room was starting to explode like a bomb. As his gun came up, Blade knew he was out-drawing Big Jack. But, over to the left, Snake was beating him a country mile. It meant lights out unless . . .

There was a snarl, a red, hurtling blur, and Snake's gun crashed wildly into the wall. The wolf dog had leaped. Not at Mears, but at the real danger, over to the left. Blade thumbed his hammer, driving his first shot into Big Jack's belly. Snake was screaming, cursing, trying crazily to fight off the red demon attacking him. Blade started to swing his gun—and ran

into a bursting, whirling flare of lights.

He was hit. Blackness was spinning about him now, and he felt numb. But he could still sense the kick and leap of the guns in his hands. He must still be firing. Faintly, he could hear the raging clamor of the dog. Then something slammed, and it was still.

HE must have lost at least several seconds more, before at last he burst the paralysis holding him, and regained a blurred vision. Son was clawing and leaping at the closed door. Snake was gone. Blade knew immediately where, as he heard the clatter of running hooves, fading into the wind. Big Jack Mears was lying on his back, hands clutching his belly. He was dead.

Blood was trickling down the side of Blade's own face, and he wiped it off. There was a gash in his scalp, where a bullet, probably Mears', had ploughed by. Not much. But a half inch closer and it would have been all over for the Cimarron Kid, alias Blade Barlow. Yes, and probably for the best, too. Blade had no illusions about what that fleeing, vengeful outlaw would do.

He had kicked over the bandit's playhouse, and Snake would pay him for it, or die trying. Now Blade *had* to run.

He swayed to the door, and the raging dog swept out with him. "Cut it, Son!" he warned sharply. "He's gone! He—"

The fleeing Snake had left the leanto door open, and Mears' horse was clattering away. But Blade's was slower, more reluctant to leave his warm shelter. Blade caught him, just in time.

There was almost no snow on the ground. It had been too cold during the night, and the scouring wind had swept it away. A bad, gray, blustery day, but it would serve. Blade had traveled in worse.

He swung back inside, starting to pack. Now that the die was cast, he was almost relieved. The farther he got before storm or law came after him, the better it would be. Without friends or money, he would need every advantage he could get.

Then he made a momentarily disconcerting discovery. The fleeing Snake had managed to snatch up Blade's sheepskin. But he had left his own gaudy mackinaw. Mears' coat was blood-soaked, so Blade had no other choice.

It didn't matter much. Blade went on with his other preparations. Within thirty minutes, he was ready to go.

He put Snake's mackinaw on, and cast a last look about the little cabin. It was the only real home he had ever had, and he knew he would not see it again. But his face gave no sign. "Come on, Son!" he said quietly, and picked up his saddlebags and rifle.

Mears, he left just as he had fallen. Sheriff Kraft would be finding the body eventually. What did that matter now, either?

He did not look back as he rode off. His mouth was twisted in a thin, bitter smile. Maybe, off somewhere, a ghostly Bronc McCandles was laughing, but the Cimarron Kid wasn't dead yet. It was sardonic—not even Blade Barlow had been able to kill him.

He headed north and east, toward the Bitterroot Valley. There would be houses over there, where he could hole up if this cold got too bad. And maybe, just maybe, he could find Snake.

Without food, or even a hat, the outlaw would have to go somewhere. He'd hardly chance coming back to the cabin. He might head for one of the nearest ranches, but again, he might be riding for the bandits' former hideout in the Valley. If so, there was a thin chance Blade might find him; and an even thinner chance he could shut Snake's mouth, too—forever.

It grew colder steadily. There was a deadly bite in the wind, and more than a hint of sleet. The wolf dog didn't seem to mind, but Blade did. Before the first hour, he had to get off and walk awhile, to keep from freezing in his saddle.

Perhaps the very hoplessness of this flight had something to do with it, but Blade found the going more agonizing every mile. It was different from the old days.

He had not the resiliency of youth now, or youth's warmth, or hope. He believed he was going to his death. He was just going as an aged wolf goes, dying hard.

HE had to stop, build a fire and warm up, about ten. But he made time. At noon he was sliding down the slope into the Valley. Far ahead, very dimly, he could make out the first house, and he knew he would have to stop there, or at the next house, at best.

This cold was really getting murderous. The wind was driving bitterly and the north was getting all set to do its worst. Sleet squalls, mixed queerly with dry dust, were whirling across the valley floor. Even as Blade watched, a squall obscured the house.

Almost certainly the fugitive outlaw would not be there, but old Blade tightened grimly, nevertheless. If Snake did chance to be there, and if he had a rifle, it might be bad. Somehow, Blade smelled trouble, and he found it. But, unexpectedly, it was from behind.

He heard what sounded like a wind-smothered shout, and he whirled. There, behind him, was a pounding horseman. The flying murk and dust were obscuring him, but with a swift gasp of dismay, Blade recognized that hat. It was Sheriff Kraft.

He clawed off his mitten, snatched his rifle and blasted back a shot, all in one lightning succession. His cold-numbed muscles made him miss. But Blade didn't intend to be taken. He checked his pony and steadied himself for a second swift, yet deliberate, shot. Over his sights, he saw bright flame spurt from the blur of the oncoming officer. And, just as he pressed his trigger, his pony went down under him, in one abrupt, shuddering fall.

That spoiled his own shot. Blade spraddled and lit on his feet. The jar of those deadened extremities hitting the ground sent a wave of agony clear through him, but he didn't stop for that. Spitting like a cat, he whirled, dusting off the charging officer with a machine gun fusillade.

Considering the circumstances, he did some right fair shooting then. He saw the running horse rear suddenly and flinch away. The rider rolled out of his saddle, and hit the dirt, flat and hard. He wasn't dead, for he flopped instantly over into a tiny hollow, and his gun flashed. But he was stopped cold. Blade grunted with satisfaction as he dropped down behind his own dead horse.

It was stand-off then. Kraft still could shoot, for his next slug tore the top out of Blade's hat. Blade lay doggo, and managed to get in a shot himself. After that, both rifles were still.

The wolf dog had spun back at the first shot, and now was flickering uneasily, some ten yards off to Blade's left. He didn't know what to do. He knew these roaring flamesticks killed, for he had seen Blade shoot rabbits and deer, and he had sniffed that dead outlaw in the cabin. But he wanted to help. He crouched, snarling. And then, stiff-legged, he started to charge that hostile blur.

"You, Son! Cut that out!" Blade's roar stopped him, just in time. "He'll kill you! Get away from here, you hear?" With a puzzled whine, Son obeyed, hovering out on the flank.

There was no more firing. The storm was really getting bad now. Vast clouds of blinding dust vied in the wind with stinging sleet. The bellowing savagery of the north was pouring down, wide open.

Blade hugged the ground. He had been cold enough to begin with; and to lie motionless like this would be fatal. But if Kraft wanted to play freezeout, why, okay. Blade could play that, too.

He tried another shot, without results. He couldn't see Kraft without exposing himself. And that, of course, was just what the officer must be waiting for—the instant when Blade just couldn't stand it any longer. Well, Kraft would have quite a wait.

The wolf dog slid in, whining, and Blade ordered him back. The wind was a furious gale now. It was zero, undoubtedly, and dropping lower. Snake's mackinaw wasn't

so good about holding out that knifing death, either. Blade gritted his teeth and swore.

It was torture—endless, merciless—and getting worse. The horse's body was some protection for Blade's face and torso, but his legs were dead, clear above the knees. Freezing. He threshed about, trying to kick some life back into them, but it didn't do any good.

It became clear to Blade that he was freezing and he didn't have the will to do anything about it. He felt very tired and very old—it didn't seem any calamity to him that he was going to die. It would be like dying in bed; in his sleep. He would go gently, peacefully, scarcely knowing that he was going.

HE began to hear things in the wind after awhile. Voices Big Jack Mears' snarl, and Bronc McCandles' laughter. They were so real presently that he raved back at them; and checked himself only with an effort. Going loco! It wouldn't be long now.

The next he knew, something was tugging at him, and he twisted, with a drugged, panicky gasp. It was Son again, pulling and whining desperately. Blade's hand was so numb, he couldn't unclasp it from the rifle. He broke, then, with a sort of black fury.

What good to lie here and die agonizingly by inches, when a bullet was waiting to do the job, swiftly, cleanly and mercifully? Sheriff Kraft was much younger, and in far better shape to defy this cold. A few minutes more, and he would be able to walk over and take Blade without firing another shot—if Blade waited. . . .

But Blade wasn't going to wait. "Git away! Beat it, you hear!" He drove the reluctant dog off. "Goodbye, Son, and—good luck. Now, Sheriff . . ."

Sobbing, he fought up to his feet, trying hoarsely to shout. "Okay, Kraft! Have at me, you manhunter! Quick, or I'll blow you to—" The rifle in his deadened hands roared his defiance, and he stiffened for the killing smash of the answer, weaving on his feet.

But no answer came. Swaying, trying vainly to lever in another shell and shoot again, he stood there several seconds before the meaning of that silence came home to his numb brain. Then he straightened, with a thin, thriumphant cry that was whisked away in the wind.

Sheriff Kraft wasn't shooting back because Kraft had lost in this grim game of freezeout. Either the cold had got in its work, or one of Blade's slugs had gone home. Either way, Blade had won the strange contest.

The realization served as a brief, powerful stimulant. He reeled forward, stooping and yanking at the saddlebags on the dead pony. Somehow, he got them loose. He must find shelter fast now, he knew, or this game would turn out a draw, after all. He swung about, and the wolf dog came racing joyously in, whining to see Blade on his feet.

The driving storm was so thick by now he couldn't see a hundred yards. But he judged he was pointing straight toward that abandoned house. He better head straight to it, he knew, or else. He went about a dozen steps; and stopped short, swaying in the wind.

Sheriff Kraft was lying back there, and Kraft might not be dead.

Just why that should matter, Blade's half-frozen mind didn't consciously reason out. By cold logic, he shouldn't have cared. For a wolf to go back and inquire into the welfare of the hound chasing him was just plain unnatural—nature had not planned things that way.

But Blade went back. Maybe it was the same streak that had made him look for those pups.

Sheriff Kraft wasn't dead. He had a bullet through his chest, and he was unconscious. The wound itself didn't even look very serious. But, of course, joined with this cold, it speedily would be fatal, unless Kraft was taken to shelter and cared for.

Unless . . . A queer, blind stare on his battered face, Blade rocked back. He had sort of sidestepped a decision, back there

in the cabin. But he couldn't sidestep here. There was just one thing an honest man would do. One other course for an outlaw. No third choice. Blade must decide now.

With a terrific effort Blade lifted the unconscious man. He had less use for a sheriff right now than anything else he could imagine. But this was no place to debate about it.

The saddlebags were already on his shoulder, under Kraft, so he managed to keep them. But he had to abandon his rifle. Perhaps he could come back and get it. If not, it wouldn't matter.

The wolf dog was whirling impatiently, eager to be gone. Blade headed toward where he thought that house was. He had about a mile to make, as he remembered No fences, no guides of any kind on the flat plain, and he couldn't see more than fifty feet now. If he missed the house he and Kraft would die together.

The sheriff was a heavy man, but he didn't dare drop him and rest. If he did, he knew he'd never be able to pick him up again. Head down, he kept going on into the storm.

He had to make a harder effort of will each step. He went what he considered a good mile, and still there was no house. And when he realized he was lost, he traveled on sheer, raw nerve alone.

He was conscious no longer of moving his legs or of the burden on his shoulders. He moved like a man in a dream.

Finally, stark terror gripped him and he stopped. He was finished now, he believed. He had missed the house. It was all over. But the wolf dog came racing back out the the murk; and like a drowning man, Blade caught frantically at a last straw.

"The house, Son! The house. I'm lost! Find the house for me!"

Son whined, trying hard to understand. Abruptly, he leaped away, a half dozen paces directly over their back trail. Then he looked at Blade.

Blade reeled despairingly. "He thinks I mean the cabin. The house, Son. The house! Please, God, make him understand!"

The wolf dog came leaping back. He was trying to bark, something he had never done before. He caught at Blade's trouser leg and tugged. Straight back over the back trail; and because there was no other choice, Blade gave way.

STAGGERING, swaying, battling desperately, he made a hundred yards. And there was the house. He had passed within fifty feet of it, without seeing it. it. Twice in six hours Son had saved him. Once in the fight at the cabin, and again here.

The door of the deserted house was wide open, and sleet was sifting across the floor. But there was a big fireplace, a wreck of a table for fuel; even some old newspapers. Dropping Kraft, Blade banged his dead hands savagely together until he drew back a little, stinging life into them. He wasted a half dozen matches, because his fingers would not hold. But, at last, he got a fire—a feeble reassuring flicker.

Ten minutes later, with a roaring blaze pouring out its lifegiving warmth, he was working over Kraft. The wounded officer had a frostbitten cheek to add to his injuries. He might also lose an ear and some fingers, Blade thought. He rubbed the frozen members with sleet, and pulled Kraft farther away from the fire.

He had warmth, shelter, food, a snug hideout. Everything except a horse—and no sheriff. He stared at the unconscious officer grimly, wondering what in the devil he was going to do with him, and how Kraft had come so swiftly on his trail. Just chance, probably.

He was in the other room, tearing up some of the flooring for fuel, when he heard Kraft's wavering call. His hand jerked stiffly to a gun He hadn't frisked that Kraft, he was remembering. But the sheriff was just lying there, when he peered guardedly in.

"You, Barlow?" Kraft blinked dazedly. "You—lugged me in?"

Blade didn't answer that. There seemed no need.

The wolf dog came over to regard the officer with suspicious disapproval. Perhaps he, too, wondered why Blade wanted a sheriff. Or perhaps he just naturally didn't like the law, anyhow.

Son knew what side he was on.

"That mackinaw." Kraft's voice was a bit stronger. "I thought you was Big Jack Mears. Never even seen your dog, until after you'd knocked me outa my saddle. Uh, why'd you shoot at me?"

"When a man shoots at me, I usually shoot back," growled Blade.

The sheriff might have pointed out that Blade had shot first, but he didn't. He looked at the room, the fire, the bandage on his chest. His voice was subtly different when he spoke again.

"We had a tip-off them two bank robbers was holed up over here somewheres. Run onto one of 'em this mornin', and he plugged my deputy, Bill Briggs, in the leg before we killed him. So I sent Fred back in, with Bill and the body, and come on, solo. I'd give a pretty to know why that outlaw was ridin' bareheaded—and what's become of his pardner, Big Jack Mears."

Blade Barlow drew a slow, rasping breath. So Snake was dead! Snake and Big Jack, both silenced forever. Blade's secret was safe, then, unless the sheriff was lying. And it didn't sound like he was—unless he was setting a trap for Blade.

"You mean, you had a tip one of them outlaws was wearin' a mackinaw like this?" Blade played it cautious, even in his excitement. "Why, then, I—I reckon I know where Mears is, Sheriff. I—you see, two hombres rode in on me last night, and this mornin' we had a fight when one of 'em got after my dog. One of 'em grabbed my coat and got away, but I shot the other fella. That's why I was runnin', you see. I—didn't know—didn't know who it was I'd shot."

It didn't sound very convincing, but neither did Kraft's stunned surprise seem perfect. At that, Kraft was by far the best actor.

"You was runnin' away because you'd killed a man! Well, I'm damned! Why, ten to one, Barlow, that was Jack Mears you plugged! Nothin' to run for. Why, you'll get a reward for downin' that double-dyed outlaw. You've sure heard of the McCandles gang. There wasn't a tougher bunch ever robbed a train. An' Mears was the lowest son-of-a-gun who ever shot a man in the back. Yep, you'll get a reward, all right."

A twinkle in his eye, the sheriff coughed and twisted his head, listening to the roar of the storm. "Yeah, and if you're worryin' about the little mutual mistake you and me made, why forget it," he added cheerfully. "Easy enough mistake to make, in all this blow. Anyways, we didn't kill each other; and between us, we've sure cleaned up all that was left of the old McCandles bunch. All but the Cimarron Kid, and as far as I know, he's goin' straight."

"The—the Kid is—" Blade choked. "You mean, he ain't wanted?" He paused. "I once met the Kid," he explained.

"Not as far as I know." The sheriff tried to sit up, but gave it up, with a wry grin. "Oh, he was for awhile, because Bronc McCandles made a deathbed statement he was in on a holdup. But the express company proved that wasn't true six months ago. Bronc McCandles was just lyin', for revenge, I guess. No, Kid—uh . . . Barlow—the Cimarron Kid is still plumb in the clear. And, what's more, I got an idea he never was much of an outlaw at heart."

Blade Barlow swayed. He got it. Nor had he missed the sheriff's slip. And if he had left Kraft lying out there, had gone on alone. . . . Again a wanted killer. . . .

The wolf dog looked up at him, and grinned. "Son, I'm right glad I went back and got you, when you was a pup," said Blade Barlow. "It was a good habit to start."

DRINK WE DEEP

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

THE weird and terrible events that have cast a shadow over the Helderbergs by the shores of Lake Wanooka—the indescribable coma-like malady that has cropped out in the region; the disappearance of Hugh Lambert and the farmer, Jeremiah Fenton; the literal dissolution of the tramp who bore such a strange resemblance to the drowned Elijah Fenton, Jeremiah's brother; the invisible horde that troubles the sleep of Jethro Parker, and torments the victims of the "Helderberg disease"—all these are but the manifestations of the struggle taking place deep below the azure waters of the lake . . . a struggle whose outcome may well determine the fate of the Upper Earth.

Investigating the disease, trying to understand it so they may combat it, are Dr. Courtney Stone and his nurse, Edith Horne —Edith Horne who for years has been in love with the missing Hugh Lambert, quite without his knowledge. In fact Hugh had recently fallen in love with the lovely motion picture actress, Ann Doring, who is now flying East from Hollywood to be near her young brother, Richard, quarantined in Camp Wanooka.

MEANTIME, Hugh Lambert and Jeremiah Fenton, brought to the underworld region of Mernia, have been drawn into the struggle in dead earnest. Mernia is inhabited by two races—the Surahnit and the Taphetnit. The Surahnit are a daring, greedy and utterly ruthless lot who now plan an invasion of the earth. Their military leader is one Vanark who has at his command an army of resuscitated corpses drawn from the waters of Lake Wanooka—drowned humans horribly brought to life, now to be sent as the van of the invading army.

But the Taphetnit, led by Antil, a Surahnit turned against his people, oppose this design with all their strength. But since the Taphetnit—winged, fairylike creatures—are a peaceful race they have no weapons. And when the Surahnit determine to destroy the whole Taphetnit folk before they attack mankind itself, the Taphetnit are helpless.

ANTIL has captured a *kitor,* a strange ray gun with which the Surahnit army is armed. When the scientists of the Taphetnit cannot reproduce it. Hugh Lambert undertakes to magnify the deadly light it emits—in other words to turn a gun into a long-range cannon. Fenton and he are the only ones—being human and immune to the sun-ray—who can handle the gun.

Word is brought to them that the Surahnit army is at hand. Hugh Lambert finds himself thinking of three women: Ann Doring, of course. Ra Nalinah, the Surahnit girl who has befriended him and whom Vanark has had arrested. And—even Hugh finds that this is strange—Nurse Edith Horne. . . .

This story began in the Argosy for July 31

BOOK V

CHAPTER I

Extract from the diary of Ann Doring:
Sept. 1, 1934.

HERE I am, back at Camp Wanooka, but how different everything is! Instead of the happy chatter of a half-hundred boisterous youngsters, a brooding quiet overlies it, an empty hush that seems underscored with fear.

Everyone seems to be trying to put a smiling face on an uneasy situation. Doctor Stone smiled, last night, when he tried to persuade me to go to a hotel in Albany, or to his home there, instead of to the camp. He kept smiling even when I blazed up at him, telling him that I was certain he was hiding from me the fact that Dickie was sick, and threatened to go to the authorities if he refused to take me to my brother. There is some advantage in being an actress, I am certain that he does not suspect the real reason for my hurried flight across the continent.

Edith Horne smiled when she met us at the gate. Like the doctor, she smiled with her lips, not with her eyes. She took me to her own infirmary, insisting that I must sleep with her instead of in the guest house. She wasn't fooled by my pretended anxiety over Dick. It was of Hugh Lambert we talked, lying beside each other in the dark.*

When Edith had finished, I peculiarly enough shared with her her inexplicable certainty that Hugh is alive somewhere, and that somehow he will fight his way back to us. I shared something else with her, the knowledge that we are both desperately in love with him, although we neither of us had put *that* into words.

She is quite too grand a person for there to be any jealousy between us. On the contrary we were drawn together by our common distress, so that when sleep finally came to us, toward dawn, it found us in each other's arms.

I am writing this in her room. Edith is tending to her patients and after she is through we shall go down to the mess hall for breakfast. The sun is streaming in through the window, and there is a bird on the sill, a brave little fellow with gray head, gray wings and yellow, black striped breast. His little throat swells as he peers impertinently in at me with his bright little black eyes, and he is telling me to "Cheer*up*, cheer*up*, cheer*up*." But I can't. I can't throw off the feeling that something dreadful has happened, something that I shall learn about when, with Edith, I go down the path between the empty bungalows.

I WAS right. Dick did not wake up this morning. They brought him to the infirmary a few minutes ago. I have just been looking at him. He seems only to be asleep, but he didn't answer when I called his name. His slow, even breathing didn't even quiver.

Can it be that the lie I told Doctor Stone last night has brought this on my little brother? Silly to think so, I know, but . . .

Edith tells me there is only one way Dick can be saved. If Hugh returns in time. *If Hugh returns!*

Please, God, bring Hugh back.

ii

Appendix to Hugh Lambert's Narrative, written by Jeremiah Fenton:

The last words Mr. Lambert said to me was, "Fenton! You keep on writing what's going on here, as long as you last. Maybe sometime, somehow, these papers will get to our people, and I'd like them to know how we fought for them, down here in this strange place." Then he took my hand and we said goodbye.

Well, I'll try my best, though I know I'll make an awful bum job of it.

* (Editor's note: Miss Doring here retells what little Miss Horne knew of the circumstances of Lambert's disappearance, a story already herein set forth and therefore omitted. The nurse did not of course reveal the real nature of Jethro Parker's illness, nor did she say anything of the strange and disturbing events of the previous twenty-four hours.)

There we was, up on top of that church. I was feeling terrible after reading what Mr. Lambert had written, because now I knew how close my brother Elijah had been to me that night when the chess piece was moved, and what had become of him, of his body. It was like hearing that he had died over again, only it was worse.

I can't explain things like that the grand way Mr. Lambert can, but I can feel them. Look. Even the lowest-down savages take care of the corpses of them they have loved. There's something in us that makes us feel a little better, no matter how deep our sorrow, to know where the bodies of those who have been near and dear to us are; to know that for a little time longer, at any rate, that much of them still exists. The nations recognized this need of ours after the World War, that's why each one has its grave of an Unknown Soldier so that everyone who lost someone in battle can feel that maybe, maybe, it is him that lies in that honored grave.

Well, I couldn't have that feeling. I knew now that Elijah's body didn't exist at all, anywhere. That it was gone, like no body was ever gone before. That this other part of me didn't exist any more, that it wasn't even dust, not even slime at the bottom of the Lake . . .

But that ain't telling my story. Like I said, there we was up top of the church, watching that green army coming toward Calinore. Mr. Lambert had tried out how far the light from the dingus he'd rigged up would reach, slanting it down so it just missed the top of the curtains we'd put up around the wall to keep it from hitting the Winged People we were trying to help. There was a kind of wave in the ground where the end of the beam would first hit, and there was another one further back beyond which it would go off into the air. It was only between those two folds that it would be any good, and we had to wait till the army reached it.

That waiting was the hardest thing I ever did.

They kept coming, maybe a couple of thousands of them. They came very slow, and either they didn't make any noise or they was too far off for us to hear them. But we could see them, spread out along the field, marching forward, slow and very sure.

THERE was something terrible about the sureness of them, and about the quiet. There wasn't any sound out there, and there wasn't any sound below us, in the City. The Taphetnit were hidden from us by the curtains on the wall, and they might not have been there for all the noise they made. The women and children were huddled inside the houses, so that when we looked down into Calinore we saw only empty streets with nothing and nobody at all moving. We were two humans all alone up there in the sky, watching that silent army coming, coming; slow as death and sure as death; and knowing that the fate of a race, that the fate of the world, depended on us alone.

I was standing by the pole to which we had fastened the thing they call a *kitor*, and my hand was on the kind of ring on its handle that we'd found out you moved a little to make the ball at its top shine. Mr. Lambert was back of me, at the reflector, ready to aim it.

The Surahnit came nearer and nearer. I started shaking with the buck ague. I wanted to yell something, anything, to smash that awful silence.

"Steady," I heard Mr. Lambert's voice, quiet like. "Steady, Fenton. Calm and easy does it."

"Don't you worry about me," I said back, watching those green ranks come on. "I'm all right." I was, when I said it. It was like as if I had got some of his strength from his voice, some of the kind of strength that had made it possible for him to sit there and write page after page when all the time he knew he might be dead before he could finish writing.

It can't be that he *is* dead now. It can't be that no one will ever again see the brown skin crinkle at the corners of his eyes and be warmed by his friendly grin.

The soldiers from Tashna kept coming

on, coming on. Now I could make out two little figures out in front of them who were not in uniform, and behind those two leaders there were the others, rank after rank of them spread across the field and getting nearer and nearer.

I could hear the *thud, thud* of their marching feet now. Far away yet, but each thud a little bit louder than the one before. It put me in mind of the song we used to sing on Decoration Day (will anyone ever sing that song again?):

> He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.
> He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword. . . .

Only this wasn't His host that trampled the grapes of wrath but the legion of His enemy, and the fateful lightning that would soon be loosed wasn't the thunderbolts of His anger but the terrible red darts of Antichrist's ccrets.

The two leaders went down into the hollow of a ground wave, and were hidden by the ridge that was our marker for where our light could first reach them. The front line of the soldiers from Tashna went down into that hollow, and the next, and the next, till we couldn't see any of the Surahnit any more.

For a minute it was an almighty peaceful scene I was looking at, but my hand was tight on the *kitor* ring and my palm was sweating.

"They'll get a surprise," Mr. Lambert said, "when they come up over the next crest. Get set, Fenton, but don't switch on the light 'till I say so." Then the line of rock—dark and shining like as if some black light was inside of it—was broken by two moving knobs. Two heads came up over the ridge, and then two bodies. I could see them plain.

One was the Suhahnit Mr. Lambert and Antil had called Vanark. The other one was a Surahnit girl.

They come down the slope, right into the range of our searchlight of death. The first rank of the soldiers came over the crest behind them like the ground wave was breaking into a spume of green foam, but Mr. Lambert didn't say, "Turn it on."

He groaned instead, groaned a name. The name was "Nalinah."

iii

VANARK turned around. The sound of his voice came clear across the rolling, dark field, though I could not make out what he said. I knew though, at once, that it was an order because the arms of all the soldiers moved like they was on a single string and their hands came up with the little rods of *corets* in them. I knew that they were coming within range of Calinore's Wall and that in another second the red rays would lash out to sweep the parapet clean of its defenders.

"Turn it on," Mr. Lambert said hoarsely. "Turn the *kitor* on."

My hand twisted the ring, and all of a sudden I could see nothing because of the blaze that blinded me and the heat that burned me. I closed my eyes, as we had planned, and dropped to the platform, and crawled toward where I knew the reflector was.

My groping hand found the track we'd made for the reflector to move on. I pulled myself over it, got up to my knees, to my feet. The light didn't shine so strong through my lids any more and I opened them.

I was behind the reflector, like I'd figured, and I was alongside Mr. Lambert. His two hands were on the handles we'd fixed to the back of the metal that was like the top of an umbrella laying edgewise and he was moving it.

I looked past the edge of the thing. My eye followed the blazing white beam it sent out over Calinore and over the Wall, and over the plain.

The beam slanted down over the Wall and across the plain. Its end moved slowly along the line of Surahnit soldiers. It was like a great white finger stroking a design of green chalk someone had drawn on the wavy rock out there, stroking the design and rubbing it out. For where the finger

had passed there was no longer any military rank, there was no longer anything living. There was only a splash of wet yellow on the rock, some of which dribbled in thick streamers down the slope.

A quarter of the left side of the line was already gone when I looked, and that dreadful finger of light was moving steadily to the right, but the soldiers of Tashna who remained were still coming on, marching as if nothing was happening, and from their *corets* scarlet rays were streaking to the Wall of Calinore.

Screams from the Wall, screams of agony, killed the silence. Little bursts of flame spurted above the curtain that hid the Taphetnit there, and plumes of black, greasy smoke waved above the Wall. But the scythe of blazing death steadily mowed the Surahnit rank. Half of it was gone, and more than half; and in the next second the beam was going to hit Vanark and Nalinah. I remembered what Mr. Lambert had written about Nalinah and I felt cold fingers close on my throat.

THE white light-finger jumped upward! It went over the head of those two and flashed downward to melt away the last of that oncoming rank of Suurahnit. "I couldn't do it," Mr. Lambert groaned. "Heaven help me, I couldn't do it."

A second later the two Ratanit stood stock-still, because the blazing disk that was the tip of our death-beam lay on the ground right in front of them, and if they took another step they would walk into it. Then it started to creep toward them, slow as a cat creeping up on a bird. They stared at if for two beats of my heart. Then their nerve broke and they turned and ran back over the ridge.

There were no more Surahnit to be seen on the plain. There was only that dreadful yellow wetness. For a minute I was sick, looking at that, and then there was a great burst of twittering from the Wall, like cheers, and I was banging Mr. Lambert on the back.

"We got them licked," I was yelling.

"We've—"

A cry from behind whirled me around to the Wall on the eastern side of Calinore, so I didn't hear the rest of what Mr. Lambert said. I saw that a Taphet was pulling open the curtain there and was yelling to us, waving his arm excited-like.

I looked over the curtain and out on the plain on that side to see what he was so excited about, and then I grabbed Mr. Lambert's arm. "Look!" I yelled. "Look there! They ain't licked yet. They're sneaking up and trying something else."

I pointed to the thing I had seen. It was coming over the top of a ridge like the one on the other side and just about as far away. It was a great big thing of shining metal, with a barrel sticking out of it so that it was as much like a big cannon as the *corets* were like pistols. There were about a dozen Surahnit pulling at it. Then it was on the gentle downward slope of the rock-wave, and the dozen soldiers were shoving back against it, braking it.

"That's a blast projector," Mr. Lambert exclaimed, "like the one with which Vanark wrecked the Listener's Post." He started pushing at the trolley on which the reflector was mounted, was wheeling it around behind to the other side of the kitor. "They must have brought it up on a *lusan* from the Gateway. They've got an idea they can beat us with that, but we'll take care of them right now. Help me, Fenton."

The Surahnit got the projector stopped, swarmed over it, working to slew it around in position to fire at the Wall. We had our reflector set first. Mr. Lambert grabbed its handles, slashed the beam across the ground out there. The light hit the green-uniformed men and blazed all about them.

Nothing happened.

They didn't melt. They didn't even stop working with the thing. They didn't pay any more attention to the blaze that had whiffed other beings just like them into a few drops of yellow liquid than I would have done if someone was flashing sunlight on me with a mirror!

Mr. Lambert made a kind of funny sound in his throat.

"What's happened?" I asked him. "Why don't it work any more?"

"I don't know," he said low-toned. "I haven't the least idea I don't see how they could have figured out a way to combat its effect so quickly. And why are there only a few of them out there? Why, if they're no longer afraid of the light, aren't they coming over in force?"

"They are!" I popped back. "On this side." I'd looked back, and I'd seen the green wave coming over the first ridge again. "But that guy Vanark ain't leading them. I wonder—"

"He isn't?" Mr. Lambert exclaimed. "Maybe—" He was wheeling the reflector around once more. "Maybe . . ."

They were firing off their *corets* again when the white flash hit them. Then they weren't firing any longer. They weren't there!

"Something screwy," Mr. Lambert grunted. "These fellows aren't immune to it but the others are. Just the few of them. Watch them, Fenton, while I keep the main force back. Watch them, and tell me what they're up to."

I DIDN'T have to tell him. A crash told him, the crash of the Wall falling in. A blue flame had flared across the plain from that blast projector. It had hit the great rampart, and the looming rock had exploded upward.

A great cloud of dust rose to the sky from where a gaping and terrible hole was torn in the Wall. Out of that cloud rained black stones, and white pieces of cloth, bits of flesh, and feathers, a many-colored snow fall of feathers.

"They've blown up the Wall, Mr. Lambert," I gasped when I could talk again. "They've killed Lord knows how many Taphetnit."

"Keep watching, Fenton," he answered, cool and steady. "Keep telling me what they do. I don't dare turn around. Vanark is sending another wave of his L. S. G. over the ridge. They're going to get us, but I'll do for as many of them as I can before that happens."

"They're working with the blast projector. They—I think they're trying to swing it up so as to hit this tower. Now they've stopped. They couldn't do it. I guess it isn't made so as it can shoot up. They're lowering it again."

"Lord, Fenton," Mr. Lambert exclaimed, "those boys have guts. They keep coming over the ridge, keep trying to get across the zone I can reach with the beam. None of them has got past yet. That whole belt is running ankle-deep in the liquid I'm melting them down into. But still they come."

"The ones on this side just fired another blast," I went back to him. "It smashed a row of houses to smithereens. I wonder why they did that instead of blowing up some more of the Wall."

"Because it isn't the Taphetnit on the Wall that's bothering them. It's us, up here. Don't you get it, Fenton? They're clearing a way for their blasts to reach this temple, and then they'll blow it out from under us. Smart people, the Surahnit."

"We're done for, then—Lord! There goes another row of houses!"

"Yes, Fenton, they've beaten us, but they know they've been in a fight. If we have to go out, this is the best way to do it. Scrapping!"

"What about what they're going to do to the Upper World, Mr. Lambert? What about them dead humans in the Gateway Wall they're ready to send up where our people are, and the rest of them that's going to follow?"

"Don't think of it, Fenton. Don't dare to think of what it's going to mean to the human race when that blast projector blows this temple out from under us. Just fight. Just keep on fighting. We've done our best, and we're licked. Humanity is licked. Humanity, oh Surahnit, *morituri, te salutant!*"

He sounded almost happy. He was flashing that terrible white sword of his up and down the field out there, melting

the Surahnit soldiers down to a trickle of yellow liquid. I was watching the terrible blue flame of the blast projector smash nearer and nearer to us, and he sounded like he was having the time of his life.

Then he started singing:

The sons of the prophet are hardy and bold!

This deep-chested baritone sounded above the screams of terrified Taphetnit and the thunder of exploded stones.

And quite unaccustomed to fear.

He was singing while he fought, while he wiped out score after score of the Surahnit with his blazing shaft of death.

But of all the most reckless of life or of limb . . .

While another blinding flash burst from the projector and another slice of houses went smashing down to ruin.

. . . was Abdul the Bulbul Ameer.

"Oh, oh, one of them got through, Fenton! One of them's past where I can catch him. He's coretting the Wall and I can't do anything about it."

I whipped around, shaking from the terror I was watching. I saw a green-uniformed young fellow, maybe he was about eighteen, running toward the wall, red flashes spitting from his outstretched hand, spitting at the Wall. And then I saw a flash of shining feathers dart up from the Wall, and out over the plain, three Taphetnit flying fast as flushed partridges. I saw one go down in a blaze, a second. But the third swooped down on the soldier, knocked the *coret* from his hand, and now he was flying up in the air again, carrying the boy.

HE went up a hundred feet, two hundred, and then he dropped the screaming youth. I saw green-clad arms and legs jerking frantically in mid-air. I saw the youngster hit the rock, and I heard a squelching sound, as if a rotten pumpkin had smashed, out there.

Behind me there was a crash! The blast projector had fired again. Mr. Lambert never turned a hair. He was bent over the reflector, and he was working it very steady. His jaw was sticking out, square and hard, but his hair was streaming back from his high brow, and his eyes were shining. He was singing. He was singing.

There are heroes in plenty and well known to fame
In the ranks that are led by the Czar. . . .

Another crash behind me was like a peal of thunder, and the tower rocked under my feet, like this was the time it was going to come down. I spun around. Half the City lay in ruins, from where a great pile of rubble showed where the Wall had been to a hundred yards away from the base of the temple.

"They're close, Mr. Lambert. Another two shots and they'll have us."

But among the most reckless of fame or of name
Was Ivan Skavinsky Skivar.

That was all the answer I got. What Mr. Lambert sounded like was a man who had worried a long time, trying to find a way to stave off something terrible, and now it had happened and it was no use to worry any more about nothing.

He could swing the trapeze, play euchre or pool
And perform on the Spanish guitar. . . .

"They're not coming any more, Fenton. Either I've got them all or they've given up hope. Here, help me slew this thing around. I'll try another shot at those artillerymen."

I jumped to help him. He went on with his song as we pushed at some contraption and the tower rocked with the detonation of another blast.

In fact quite the cream of the Muscovite team
Was Ivan Skavinsky Skivar. . . .

JUST as we got the reflector around there was a tremendous swoosh of wings, and a crowd of the Taphetnit sailed

straight up from the City. They went higher and higher.

"The yellow curs," I growled. "They know we're licked and they're running away."

"Never mind them, my frolicsome farmer." The light-beam was shooting out to that blast projector again, was playing on it, with no more result than before. "What I want to know is what magic those damned Surahnit have worked, to make those few suruvaguns immune to sunlight. And why only that handful *is* immune."

Another bolt of blue lightning flashed from the projector. The street just below us blew up. The air was dark with dust, with falling stones.

"There's another one of them," I said, "just coming over the ridge. It's that guy Vanark." I could see him through the veil of dust, standing straddle-legged on that ridge. "He's laughing at us."

"Yeah, he's laughing at us, but he's not coming down to where I can reach him. He isn't immune. He's just gone around there to watch the next blast, the one that will finish us. So long Fenton, it's all over. You better climb down with those papers and hide somewhere. Vanark seems to have some use for you, maybe he won't kill you." He held out his hand.

But I didn't shake it. A stone had come down out of the sky, plunk on one of the Surahnit out there. He went down, and another rock dropped, hit another soldier. They were coming down fast now, those stones, raining out of the sky, too fast for the cannon to be shot again.

"Look!" Mr. Lambert yelled, "look Fenton! Up there!"

He was pointing up into the sky. I looked where he pointed. Far, far up against the muddy dome that was Mernia's sky, there was a little flash of white and the hail of rocks was streaming down from that.

"What—what—?" I gasped.

"The Taphetnit, Fenton! The ones we called yellow. They've carried pieces of their ruined city up there and they're raining them down on the Surahnit we couldn't kill. They've saved the battle. They've saved us!"

I looked back to the projector. There wasn't any living being moving around it. It was covered by a pile of stones, and the pile was spreading out around it. I saw one green-sleeved arm twitch, and then that too was buried.

The white started drifting down. It was a fleecy cloud, and then it was a covey of Taphetnit, slanting fast toward the City. One great white figure flashed down ahead of the main body and I saw that it was Seela. If ever I see one of God's Angels I know he will look just like that Taphet looked to me just then.

Mr. Lambert turned off the *kitor* light. I turned to him, and he didn't look as happy as I thought he should.

"They didn't get Vanark," he said. "The Rata ducked back over the ridge when the first stone fell and got away." His hands closed slowly at his sides, into knuckled fists. "As long as that fellow's alive we can still expect trouble."

He was right, but he didn't know how right he was.

CHAPTER II

Account of Courtney Stone, M. D., continued:

THERE was nothing I could do for Dick Loring. How could there be, when I had been able to do nothing for Charles Dorsey, or for the two farmers in the hospital, one of whose bodies I had dissected the day before?

I knew now that there was only one hope of saving the boys and Job Gant. There was only one hope of stopping the slow spread of the mysterious disease from which they suffered. If I could find someone who had resisted the inroads of the disease, and make from his blood an antitoxic serum, I might be able to work out a successful treatment.

It would be entirely useless to start a search for the tramp. He must be miles

away from Albany by now. Almost as futile to hope for Hugh Lambert's return. This was September first. He had been gone three days now, and there was no justification for Edith Horne's sturdy faith that he was still alive, that he would still return.

But I could not sit idly by and watch my patients die. I must try something. A possibility occurred to me, a million to one chance of my finding what I so desperately needed.

I had already decided that the focus of infection was in this Helderberg region. I knew of two cases of recovery from it, who were not aware even that they had been affected. There might be others. There might be one among the patients in the hospital, particularly in the surgical wards, or among the members of the staff.

If I ordered the blood of everyone in the institution typed, one among the two hundred might show up with the peculiar qualities of Lambert's and the tramps. That was all I needed, just one.

Nurse Horne was like a quietly burning white flame moving about the infirmary. I called her out from Parker's room, and I told her my idea. I was no longer sure of myself, you see. I was no longer sure of anything.

There was something abnormal about the atmosphere of the camp, and I was abnormal as long as I was in it.

Edith smiled wanly when I got through.

"You can try it," she said. "It can't do any harm, and it will be something to do."

IT WAS something to do. I went out to my car and I drove down to Albany. They were waiting for me at the hospital. They knew how interested I was in the syndrome and they were waiting to tell me that three more patients suffering from it had been brought in during the night.

One was a woman, Hepzibah Foster, wife of the owner of a general store at Four Corners, on the highway that used to be called Waley Road. The other two were little children, a boy of four and a girl of five. I knew Jimmie Crane. Doctor Deutsch, our pediatrician, had presented him at a clinic as an outstanding example of what a course of treatment with vitamines could accomplish in curing rickets. He should have presented tiny Frances Hall as a control specimen. She was pigeon-breasted, bow-legged, emaciated. She came from the same sort of land-poor farmer family as Jimmie, but she had not had the benefit of modern scientific care.

It didn't make any difference now.

They were both deep in the coma of which I had seen too much in the past month, the sturdy, straight-boned lad and the twisted, pinch-faced little lass alike.

Unless I could find, somewhere in the hospital, an individual the serum of whose blood would agglutinate the corpuscles of Type IV and whose corpuscles would agglutinate the serum of no known type, those two infants were doomed.

The technicians looked askance at me when I gave the orders for a general typing, but they did not question me.

Perhaps there was something in my face that forbade any questioning.

ii

Jeremiah Fenton's story, resumed:

SEELA was still about fifty yards above us. He stopped sudden-like, hanging on his wings like a hawk would. He pointed off to the west and his head went back like he was hollering to the other Taphetnit above him. Four of them swooped off in that direction, and slid down behind the ridge. The Seela came on down to us.

"We have much to thank you two for," he said, lowtoned, "but so many, many Mernians have gone from among us. I shall declare a *fusran** at once, so that all that are left in Calinore may light white tapers and green upon the altar below."

"They're gone then, Seela?" Mr. Lambert asked. "The Surahnit?"

"A pitiful remnant are retreating. Curi-

* Holy day

ously enough they go not towards Tashna but are making a great circle which will take them to the Gateway Wall. All but one, after whom I have sent my brethren."

"A wounded one? I didn't think any whom the light touched escaped alive."

"Not wounded, Hula. She was coming toward Calinore, staggering and weary, but whole."

"She! Who?"

"The Ra Nalinah, she whom Antil wished to take as hostage. She is our prisoner now, but after what has happened this *tin*** I have no illusion that she will avail us aught as a hostage. Our only protection is this that you have devised" —he laid a hand on the reflector—"and I misgive me that the Nal Surah and the Surahnit scientists may not yet find a way to shield themselves from it."

"They did just that," I put in. "Those guys that were working the blast projector didn't feel it no more than I would have."

Seela started to say something but Mr. Lambert butted in.

"What are they doing with her? Where are they going to take her?"

The Taphet smiled, kind of sad.

"To my dwelling. I wish to question her and—"

"What are we waiting for?" We'd passed through a lot together but I never saw Mr. Lambert get so excited. "Let's go."

That Seela sure is strong. He scooped me up under one arm and Mr. Lambert under the other and he took off from that platform like he wasn't carrying no weight at all.

I wasn't scared this time. I went up in an airplane once, at the County Fair, and I was so tarnation frightened I swore I would never go up in one again. Flying with Seela was different.

I just looked down at that city below. Half of it was as beautiful as before, all shining white houses and big open circles where you could see grooves worn where the Taphetnit used to dance, and the other half of it was a terrible jumble of broken stones smeared with glistening red.

I wasn't scared, but I was awful sick, thinking of what that red was.

iii

THERE wasn't anyone in Seela's house when we got there except Leeahlee. She'd fixed up some kind of food and she made us eat it. It was kind of like corn mush except that it was orange color, and tasted a lot better, and we drunk wine with it that was better than Martha Parker's dandelion wine that she always sent around to Elijah and me in the fall.

Seela and I ate pretty hearty, but the two others kept looking out through the door. When we was about half through Antil came in. He was all ruffled up, and there was an angry weal across his cheek where it had got burned by a *coret* flash.

Leeahlee run to him, and she touched the mark on his cheek, and there was tears in her eyes. It wasn't much to make her take on so, but I guess women are the same all over the world and underneath it when the man they love gets hurts. In the middle of that fuss, Mr. Lambert jumps up all of a sudden, his face lighting up.

I turned around to see who it was he was so glad was coming. There was two Taphetnit in the doorway, and between them was Nalinah, all sagged out.

Her dress was half torn from one shoulder, and her hair was all mussed up, but her little face was kind of smiling and peaceful, for all its being deathly tired. It put me in mind of someone that's been lost in the woods, and worried stiff, and now was on a path he knew would lead him home.

She kind of pulled away from the Taphetnit that were holding her and took a step into the house, and I knew she only saw Mr. Lambert. He came past me, taking big strides, and he took the hands she held out to him, and they stood there like that, looking into each other's eyes for a long minute. They made a grand-looking couple, he tall and brown and strong; she little and frail and beautiful.

** night

She kind of sighed, and then she said: "I had to come, Hula. "I had to come to you."

"I know," he answered. That was all. Just: "I know."

After a while he said, "Tell me about it, Nalinah." I can hear everything they said right now, in my ears, so I can put it down just the way they said it.

"Vanark had reported to the Nal," Nalinah began, "that you had swayed me against the Folk Weal, and that I was plotting with you to defeat the invasion of the Upper World. That was why my arrest was ordered. Vanark lied, Hula, but waiting the long *roha* for a chance to defend myself, I thought over all we had spoken together and Vanark's lie became the truth. I saw that you were right and the Taphetnit were right, and that the weal of our Folk lies here in Mernia, just as the weal of yours lies among the green fields and the blue seas above."

"Yes, Nalinah," he murmured. "We each have our own sphere to which we are born and to which we are fitted."

"VANARK accused me before the Nal, while the bridges were being rebuilt, of being a traitor to the Folk. I denied that, for no traitor to them I am but more loyal than he who has lied and deceived the Ratanit and Nal Surah and is plotting to seize the Nalship for himself when once the invasion he has planned and urged shall be successful. I swore to my denial by the sun-shaft that rises from the Central Plaza of Tashna, and the shaft turned white in token that I swore truly."

"You convinced the Nal, and by some trick he turned the shaft white."

"Nay, Hula, the shaft is the heart and the brain of the Folk, and the shaft turned white. Therefore was the Nal convinced that I am no traitor, and I too was convinced that for their true happiness the Folk must remain in Mernia. But Vanark is very shrewd. He proposed that I lead with him the attack on Calinore, and I could not refuse. Could I, Hula?"

"No, Nalinah."

"So I led the attack beside Vanark, and though my heart bled for the gallant Surahnit as they died in your ray, yet was I also glad that Vanark and his host were being defeated, for that defeat, I thought, meant that the Folk would remain forever in Mernia, and too, I was so proud of you that you had found a way to defeat us.

"But Vanark, leaving orders for the attack to continue, took me far to one side of Calinore, chuckling with some secret mirth. From there he showed me the blast projector that had been dispatched on a *lusan* from the Gateway Wall, and he showed me that the Surahnit who served it were untouched by the white, destroying blaze of the Ray. I pretended joy at the sight, but within me I was desolate, till from the very sky began that rocky rain.

"Your Taphetnit smashed them, Hula, so that for a while you are safe. But only for a while. That is why I have come to you; openly a renegade now to the Nal and to Vanark, but not to the Folk; to warn you that you have won not a victory but only respite. They will be back, Hula and Seela and Antil!" Nalinah turned around to face us all, now for the first time showing she knew there was anyone there but Mr. Lambert. "The Surahnit will return to the attack in a *ranhaltin** or less, and this time their hordes will be as little affected by your Ray as the twelve who lie out there. Vanark is not defeated yet!"

"Good Lord!" Mr. Lambert took a step back from her, another, and his face was white as a sheet. 'You mean that he can make more of them immune to the *kitor's* light!"

"All of them, my Hula, given time. Unless before they come again you can devise a new defence against them, Calinore is doomed, and the Taphetnit, and your World Above is doomed to fall before the conquering hosts of Mernia."

"But—but—how can we figure out a new defense when we don't even know

* day

how they are protecting themselves against this one?"

"That last I can tell you Hula, and with what I can tell you, perhaps you can meet this new threat. You are so wise, so very wise."

"Tell me, Nalinah. Tell me all you know."

"I will tell you as much as I know, as much as I understand."

Well, Leeahlee got Nalinah to sit down, and Mr. Lambert sat down, and we all sat around and listened while she told us about it. This is the part that's going to be hard for me to write down, because I didn't understand it any too well. But I'll try to make out as best as I can.

CHAPTER III

Account of Jeremiah Fenton, continued:

WHAT Nalinah told us was something like this. She began with very much the same thing Antil had told Mr. Lambert back there in that room under the Listener's Post, when he was telling him why Vanark hadn't been able to kill him with the *kitor*.

The people down here, the Taphetnit and the Surahnit both, look a whole lot like humans, but the tiny building blocks their bodies is made up of (Mr. Lambert said the words she used meant the same as ions and protons and neutrons in English) are hitched together in a different sort of way, so that while they stay together all right in the kind of light there is in this cavern, they fall apart in the sunlight up above.

That was why they had never tried to capture the world before, because they could only live up there for a little while in the night, and never at all in the day. But when last winter the skating party from the Four Corners Church got drowned, they got hold of the bodies and some scientist or other among them got a bright idea.

There was one of the drowned people that wasn't all dead when they got him inside the Gateway Wall and this scientist took a little blood out of him and injected it into the veins of a Surahnit, and then sent him up to the surface in a *sibral* suit. Well, it seems that this Surahnit could stand it up there longer than any of them had ever been able to before, and he even stood about five minutes of sunlight. He come down then, but a week (Nalinah said a *steen*) later he went up again, and this time he stood the sun for fifteen minutes.

That seemed to prove that a little bit of human blood in the veins of a Mernian would fix him after awhile so that he could live on the surface, but when they tried again with blood from one of the other bodies, it didn't work. That set them back for a while, till somebody got the bright idea of taking blood from the first Surahnit and putting it into the veins of another.

That worked better, although not as well as the first transfusion, but it gave them the clue to what they had to do. The blood they needed had to come from *living* humans.

Well, they worked and worked, and finally they worked out a scheme for making the corpses they had hold of come alive. They tried it on one, and he did come alive, but the blood from him wasn't any good.

So that put them up against the proposition that they had to get the blood from humans that had never been dead. They sent the first Surahnit up again, and he sneaked into someone's house, and sucked out a little of his blood, putting some of his own in its place. When he came down they tried out the *kitor* ray on him, that was the same as sunlight, and he stood it.

They gave another Surahnit the blood from him, and after awhile the second guy got so that he could stand a little sunlight. They sent the two of them up for more. These two found that the human that the blood had been sucked from was lying in bed, not moving, and they thought he was dead but they saw his pulse beating in his neck and then they knew he wasn't. They both sucked blood from him and went down again, and gave the blood to others.

The next time they went up the first human was gone, so they tried another one. But somehow they found out where the first one was too. He was quite a distance away, in a place where there were a lot of beds in a row.

"The hospital," I bust out. "That first human was Adath Jenks, and the second must've been Job Gant. That sleep they're in is caused by these Surahnit sucking their blood out of them. Drinking the life out of them."

Mr. Lambert's eyes were like slits. "You're right, Fenton," he said. "But keep quiet, and let Nalinah finish."

WELL, there wasn't much more. It seems like the Surahnit can't be seen by humans so they could keep right on drinking the life out of their victims even though they was both in the hospital. After Mr. Lambert got took down to Mernia they started on another victim, that was in a little house near the lake.

"The camp!" It was Mr. Lambert who did the exclaiming this time. "One of the boys. Which one?"

Nalinah shook her head. "I don't know. But his blood is stronger than those of the first two, and the process is going on faster. There were twelve of the L.S.G. who were altogether fitted for life in the sun, and it was those twelve whom Vanark detailed to serve the blast projector.

"When he saw that this experiment was successful he gave orders for an acceleration of the stealing of human blood. Even while the battle was going on, four more victims were attacked by the living test tubes he is dispatching to carry human life down to Mernia. Just now the sun is bright in your Upper World, and the drinking of life is perforce halted, but in the laboratory there in the East that life is being pumped into the veins of many other Surahnit. As soon as it is again dark above, which will be in ten of our *roha,* all these will flock up through the waters to seek out more and more victims. Thus multiplying the immune ones as fast as he can, Vanark figures that in a *ranhaltin,* sixty *roha,* a thousand or more Surahnit will be immune to your ray. Then he will lead them once more against Calinore, and there can be no doubt of the result. Calinore will be wiped out."

"No doubt at all," Mr. Lambert groaned, his brown fist closing on the edge of the table. "No doubt that Calinore will be wiped out, and no doubt that a hundred humans will be lying at the point of death, above there."

"Maybe they're the lucky ones," I said. "I don't like to think of what's going to happen when this bunch of Vanark's gets ready to take over Albany County, with their *corets* and their blast projectors. You've got to stop it, Mr. Lambert. You've got to find a way to stop it."

He gave me a look then—and if I ever saw hell staring out of a man's eyes, it was in that minute.

"How can I, Fenton? There isn't a single thing in what she has told me that gives me the glimmer of an idea. It's all black, blacker than the pit of hell."

"Look!" I answered him. "You're a million times smarter than I am, but sometimes even a fool can get a notion. If they're drinking the blood of the humans, maybe if the blood was poisoned that would poison the Surahnit, and—"

"If we could get word to the people above and if we knew how to poison the Surahnit without killing the human beings first. No, Fenton, that won't—"

"Hula!" Nalinah broke in. "Perhaps there is something in what your friend says. While I was standing with Vanark a messenger came from the Gateway. He reported that something ailed the drinkers from one of the humans. They could not bear the test-flash of the *kitor* upon them. It was as if instead of being blunted, the power of the white blaze were redoubled by the blood they had drunk. One hundredth of a *neks** they were exposed to it, and they melted as if they had been in its light a full five *neksa.*"

Mr. Lambert shouted out loud.

* minute

"Now we're getting somewhere! Was there any difference between this human, do you know, and the others?"

"It was a small one, a tiny child. But that cannot mean anything, for others had drank from another child and the blood of that one was effective as all the rest. Vanark thought it strange too, that the second child was described to him weak and weazened, its bones all awry, while the first was perfectly formed."

MR. LAMBERT screwed up his face, thinking hard. 'The one whose blood works is—rickety, huh, the other one isn't. Rickety. There's something—Wait! I've got it! Nalinah, I've got it. There aren't many rickety children now, they give them viosterol and cure them. And what's viosterol, but a solution of vitamin D in oil, of the vitamin that's manufactured in the body by what? By sunlight! *By sunlight,* Nalinah! That's why your Surahnit who've drunk that blood burn up when just a little more sunlight hits them. It's like taking too strong a dose of something—a little's medicine but a lot's poison. *That's* what we've got to do, pump a lot of viosterol into the veins of all the Life Drinkers' victims, a lot of the sunshine vitamin. Then it will be death they bring down to Mernia. They and the others with whom they'll share that blood will be sensitized to the sunlight instead of being immunized. That's what . . ."

He stopped, all of sudden, and the light went out of his face. "But that's all nonsense. How am I going to inject viosterol into any human's blood when I'm down here, miles underground, and they're up there, and there's no way for me to get there?"

Mr. Lambert started pacing up and down. Like a wild animal in a cage he was; like something shut up and going crazy. I knew how he felt, too. It must have been awful for him; knowing how he could save us all and knowing at the same time that there wasn't no way to do it.

"There is a way." It was Seela who said that. He'd been listening silently, sitting way back in a corner, but now he pushed forward. "If you have the courage, Hula, there is a way of reaching the Gateway lock without being spied by the Surahnit. You are still clad in the *sibral* suit, Hula, and once through the lock you can ascend through the waters. Failure means death, Hula, and the chance of failure is very great. Have you the courage to try it, friend Hula?"

"Have I?" Mr. Lambert pushed down on the table with both his hands, shoving himself to his feet. "What are we waiting for?"

It was then that he asked me to finish writing out what was happening in Mernia, and said goodbye to me. He said goodbye to Antil and Leeahlee. To Nalinah too, he said goodbye but we left those two alone together for that.

I don't know what more I can say. They've been gone almost a whole ranhaltin now, Mr. Lambert and Seela and the two picked Taphetnit that went with them. None of them has come back and we haven't heard a word from them. We're waiting in Seela's house, the four of us, and we aren't saying a word to each other. We're just waiting.

That little messenger boy just came in to say that the scouts report that the Surahnit are massing again, east of here, between Calinore and the Gateway Wall. They have three blast projectors with them, all mounted on *lusans*. I guess it's all over.

The Taphetnit are flocking to the Wall, and I'm going up to the top of the tower to work the reflector. It won't do no good, but I might as well die fighting as not.

What was that song Mr. Lambert was singing?

> In fact quite the cream of the Muscovite team
> Was Ivan Skavinsky Skivar.

I hope I'll be singing it when the tower is blown out from under me and I tumble with it into the ruins of Calinore.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

The Great Markley

By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

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

THIS is the way The Great Markley and Claymore saw each other for the first time. The Dutch skipper of the *Java Maid,* Tahiti bound, said, "You t'ink it iss hot, yet up here? Vait! I show you men who t'ink diss deck, she is cool as refrigerator, now."

The deckwork burnt through The Great Markley's paper-soled shoes; the brasswork would have blistered his hands. The *Java Maid* was ploughing South, and what wind there was, preceding the coming of the hurricane, was also South, about eight knots of it, so that on the *Java Maid* there was no air at all. Even the thin Great Markley boiled in his own sweat.

He would rather have stayed in the shade of the deckhouse, but the skipper insisted. The Great Markley was by way of being a celebrity aboard. Eight-thousand-ton, combination freight-passenger ships don't get many passengers; and those they do get are looking for cheap passage. But at Sydney the skipper had seen The Great Markley in the variety theater and had been impressed.

The Great Markley might be a cheap vaudeville performer elsewhere, but here, on the ancient rusty tramp, he was different, a celebrity, alongside of whom all seamen were ankle high in their monotonous existence.

So he followed the skipper through the midships door and came finally to the steel grating that looked out over the stokehole. The blast of air was enough to curl his hair, wither his skin, dry the sweat on his lath-thin body.

With his eyeballs smarting from the heat, The Great Markley tried to focus on the bent and moving figures before the open firebox doors. He saw men at the bunkers scooping coal to piles nearer the furnaces, and other men scooping it from

there to piles before the firebox doors. And here a giant of a man, his flesh as pale as fishbelly, stood naked, hauling at the fire with a slicebar. The coal went in, the firebox clanged shut, and the gorilla stepped back, wiping at his eyes with a dirty sweat rag.

This was Claymore, and, his eyes clean, he looked up at Markley and the skipper, clearly marked by their white silks against the dingy dark bulkhead.

The sight of them looking down at him as if he were dust beneath their feet, irritated Claymore. At best he had an ugly temper; men dreaded the sight of him and his fists when ashore. His eyes blazed and his mouth curled. A fury of hatred swept him; hatred of the living hell he endured, vented on these two cool-looking persons because they were there, tangible, to curse.

"The Great Markley," he sneered. "Look at 'im, now, will yer? If I was to 'it 'im 'e'd fall into pieces, 'e would. Don't weigh more'n eight stone, if that. Wot right's 'e got to stand up there, cool in 'is silks 'n' me down 'ere sweatin' and slyvin' to tyke 'im where 'e goes?"

"'E's the bloke wot throws 'is voice into that little dummy wot 'e calls Algy," said a coal-passer. "I seen 'im in Sydney. Lots of jokes 'e 'as."

"Man to man I'm a better one than 'e is," snarled Claymore. "There's somethin' wrong with the world when the likes of 'im can lord it over a man like me."

He struck his chest a blow that made it boom like a drum. "Why carn't I 'ave a bloody steward to draw me bath, and make me bed, and serve me bloody good dinners like 'e 'as, 'stead of the garbage wot I 'as to eat?"

"Aw, shut yer fyce, Claymore," said the coal-passer, "that don't do any good. Watch yer gauge."

"Aye, watch yer gauge and keep the bloody steam up," growled Claymore. "I just wish I 'ad the charnce to show that bloody little sack of 'and-me-downs wot 'e is. I wish I 'ad 'im where strength counts, where he don't get grub and bed by the trick of throwin' his voice inter a dummy."

The third-assistant engineer shouted, "Claymore, look to your fires. Stow that gab!"

Up above, on the grating, The Great Markley felt a little faint. "Good heavens!" he said, "I don't see how they stand it."

"Healthiest men in der vorld if dey don't take pneumonia," said the skipper, opening the door. "Sveat all der impurities out of der system, *ja.*"

The deck felt cool after the fiery bath below, and beside the deck house The Great Markley dozed, thinking of home. Thinking of Marion, Indiana. It had been fifteen years since he had been home. He was lonesome. He loved to talk, talk by the hour about anything, but you couldn't talk with the skipper. Great guns! You could scarcely understand him, and he was mostly drunk anyway. He finally slept.

THE hurricane was a gigantic blue-black fist that reached out of the day to squeeze the *Java Maid* in steel fingers, while the wind shrieked with laughter and the waves crashed against the rusty plates to smash their applause. The Great Markley came out on the deck, the wind pummeling him, his clothes flattened to his skin, his eyelashes peeled back, and scarcely able to get his breath. A terrific roll of the stricken liner flung him against a stanchion, and he was scarcely conscious when they tumbled him into a small boat. Half-drowned by spray, rolled in salt water in the bottom of the boat, he was more dead than living.

Freakishly his mind recorded one sentence said in his presence, "What's the fool bringing along the dummy for?"

And his own reply, "Why, Algy, he's almost human. I talk to him by the hour."

And in the dreadful time that followed while the giant waves quieted, and night came, and then day and then night and day again, he hugged the dummy to his chest, croaking only for water. When the stillness came he must have slept, for his first conscious memory was of a rough hand shaking him brutally and a voice

saying, " 'Ere, snap out of it. Drink this noggin of rum, and get ready to row."

In the dazzling sheen of sun reflected from glassy swells Claymore's body seemed whiter than before. He had rigged a tarpaulin in the stern sheets of the small boat and under this he reposed. The Great Markley's eyes shifted around the boat, and then across the eternal expanse of ocean. It was all blue even to where the sky came down to meet it; and there was no cloud bank and no wind.

"Where are the others?" The Great Markley asked.

"The fish got 'em, as they'll get us without we find land," Claymore growled. His head was battered on one side, a huge scab of dried blood and hair. He suddenly grinned savagely.

"They're dead, d'ye 'ear? And I'm the boss. You'll do as I say. And I say row. Let me 'ear them oars squeak in the bloody pins."

"I don't feel well," The Great Markley said.

Again Claymore laughed.

"Wot do I care 'ow you feel? You ain't a bloody passenger now. You're a man, or wot passes fer a man, and I'm the boss because I could break your bloody carcass in two. It's muscle wot counts now, little man, so row, blast yer, afore I let yer feel of me fist."

The Great Markley began to row, but so feebly that the water did not even gurgle at the prow.

"Starboard it, you swab," growled Claymore. "Them's land clouds on the horizon. We'll find somethin' there—or nothin'."

The Great Markley twisted the small boat's bow. He did not do so badly at first because the rum had given him a false surge of strength. But this wore off and then came a sense of exhaustion, a sickness in his stomach.

"Row, blast yer bloody 'ide," snarled Claymore. "I'm syvin' meself for the last." He saw the dummy, the sun already peeling the paint from its funny wooden face.

" 'Ere, get that out of the boat. Fair gives me the creeps, it does, and it's bad luck." He reached for the dummy.

"No, no," protested Markley. "I've had him for fifteen years. Alicia gave him to me. You—"

"Let go, curse yer!" growled Claymore viciously. But Markley would not let go. With the last of his strength he did the only thing he could, grabbed at Claymore's leg, yanked at it, so that the brawny stoker lost his balance and fell backward. In falling, Claymore struck his head against the sharp edge of the thwart. He groaned and relaxed, unconscious. The scabbed wound in his head bled anew, and Markley saw a strange pulsing there.

He also saw, protruding from Claymore's hip pocket, the cracked butt of a cheap .32 revolver. He took it immediately. It was already a little rusted from sea water.

Then, as the boat drifted idly under the hot sun, he stared at the senseless stoker.

"He'll kill me when he wakes up," he muttered aloud. "What I ought to do is tumble him into the water." He looked out where a dorsal fin made a white line on the deep blue only to vanish quickly. And yet—and yet to be alone—out here—His muscles relaxed, the blackness of fatigue swept him and he slept.

HE NEVER knew whether it was the sixth sense of peril or the frightful scorch of the sun that made him stir. But when he opened his eyes he saw Claymore, flat on his belly, crawling toward him inch by inch. The man's eyes were bestial.

"Get back," cried Markley. He raised the gun. "I'll shoot if you don't."

Claymore stopped, rigid, the white of him red now where the sun had worked its will on his putty-colored flesh.

"Be reasonable," Markley urged. "I don't want to harm you. And I don't want you to harm me. Listen, man, it's been fifteen years since I was home. There's a girl there—she's a woman now—Alicia Bailey. Think of it, man, we've been engaged all that time. We're getting old now. But I got a little money saved, enough to buy a farm. I always wanted to farm. I

love the feel of the soil on my hands. And I want to go home and settle down, and get a little something out of life before I die. Don't you understand that?"

Claymore's piggish little eyes merely stared.

"Answer me, man! Don't stare like that," Markley said.

Claymore made a mewing sound in his throat, a sound as if he had said he had the strength of ten, and as he made this weird sound, he flexed his great shoulder muscles, bared his teeth in a wolfish grin and started forward again. But at sight of sun-glitter on the pistol he stopped.

The Great Markley stared and finally comprehension dawned. He cursed in sudden fear. "He's insane! That blow did something to his head!"

Claymore had a homicidal complex that manifested itself every time Markley took his eyes from him even for a moment. Claymore would start crawling forward in feline stalking movements, but always he stopped, shrank back when he saw the gun muzzle pointed. Always then he mewed, and grinned wolfishly.

"I know," said Markley, "you're waiting until I go to sleep. Then you're going to kill me. That's what you're thinking."

Claymore rumbled in his throat: the blow had apparently paralyzed his power of speech.

"Well," said Markley, "what's to prevent me shooting you? Like this?" He aimed the gun. Claymore jumped backward, mewing like a cat, and almost flung himself overboard. His eyes had fear of the gun.

"Good," said Markley, "stay like that and I won't harm you. Now, I'm going to row. And when I get too tired, you're going to row. And I'll tell you about Alicia."

He rowed toward the clouds low on the horizon, unknowingly aided by a current that set in the same direction, and as he rowed he talked, let his mind ramble over whatever subject occurred to him. Sometimes he even talked to Algy, and threw his voice into Algy's mouth to make reply.

He saw Claymore fidget and quiver, and said, "But I have to talk, man, otherwise I'd go crazy myself, thinking of myself being alone in a small boat with a killing maniac like you. Get back. I've still got the gun."

Claymore shrank back and did not move until Markley, weary, raised the pistol and ordered the brawny stoker to manipulate the oars.

There was a breaker of water and Markley drank his fill, even splashed water recklessly on his face to drive away the numbing sleep that would leave him helpless. . . . The day passed into night, punctuated by the creak of the oars in the pins, and with Claymore's tiny eyes never leaving The Great Markley's. Waiting. Markley whimpered a little. "Why don't I shoot him, Algy? The current's drifting. There'll be land over there. I can almost smell it. But—but—" He viciously pinched himself, dug his nails in to stay awake. Yet the monotonous creaking of the oars, the sway to the swells. . . .

He opened his eyes with Claymore almost upon him, huge hairy arms extended, fingers clawing.

Markley bashed the pistol at him, and Claymore fell down, thumping, as he reared back.

"Algy," Markley said, "I guess I got to kill him. This can't go on."

HE RAISED the pistol level, wanting to be sure to make the bullet hit Claymore in the head so he would die painlessly and quickly. But he did not shoot, for the roar of surf caused him to stare under the moon's pale radiance. He saw the high-piled blackness of land mounting into the sky to a peak two thousand feet up.

"Land! Claymore," he whispered. "Row! Land! We're saved."

There was an entrance through the coral reef that they found at dawn and shot through it in a welter of foaming breakers. But Claymore was clumsy at the oars, either accidentally or with purpose, and as the small boat broadsided, a comber came over the gunwale and swamped it. Mark-

ley could swim after a fashion, and he thought only of himself then, and somehow drew himself exhausted and racked onto the sandy littoral. He must have slept for hours, for the skin of his back fairly crawled with pain when he awoke to find himself blistered, and his mouth bloated with thirst.

He looked around for his pistol and concluded he had dropped it in the desperate effort to make shore. And its importance to him was forgotten in the hot desire for water. He strode into the polished green of the tangled shore growth, and attracted by sound, came finally to where a stream of water rushed down from the heights in great cascades of white purity. He flung himself into the pool, drinking his fill, feeling the cool caress of the water against his burned hide. He emerged, flung himself down and slept again. It was another dawn when he woke up, but it was not the sun that aroused him. Rough hands made him jump and cry out, and then he saw Claymore with the pistol. Claymore jumping up and down, grinning wolfishly, and mewing in his throat like a hoarse cat.

Markley moaned. "Why didn't I kill him when I had the chance?"

But that was behind him now, and he realized that his life depended on his wits and the ultimate possession of the gun. Queerly enough, however, Claymore made no vicious assault. Mewing and gesturing with the gun he forced Markley to the beach. Here were shell fish, not far from where the fresh water stream poured into the lagoon. Claymore made him gather them as Claymore pried them open and ate them by dozens, by scores, rushing Markley wolfishly whenever Markley tried to keep one for himself.

But at last the insatiate appetite was stilled, and Markley sat swallowing the bivalves. During this time Claymore pointed the gun, and the pressure of his finger brought the double-action trigger back. But each time he lowered it without firing.

Markley got up and walked along the beach a way. He saw the dummy Algy washed ashore and picked it up.

"What'll I do, Algy? He's crazier than a coot."

Then Claymore came. He made Markley gather palmetto fronds and weave a rough shelter. He made him bring fresh water in a gourd. Then he sent him to gather more shellfish. Markley saw it was slavery; read his doom in Claymore's slit eyes if he faltered. By nightfall he was so exhausted he slept on the sand.

"I've got to wake up before he does, Algy," he whispered. "I've got to get the gun. It's the only thing that makes us equal."

He got the gun the next day but not in the way he expected. He was gathering shellfish for Claymore's breakfast when he heard the maniac mew loudly. He turned to see the beach flooded suddenly with superbly tall brown men with thick shocks of black hair and garbed only in loincloths. They had long spears and two of them were tying Claymore with liana ropes. Three more now bounded down upon The Great Markley, and while one threatened him with a spear the other two securely bound his hands behind him. They jabbered in some unknown tongue.

Markley swore. "Why didn't the fool fire his gun? They've probably never heard one before and it would have frightened them away."

Then he realized that it was but a question of time before they would have come back. He was lost now, doubly so.

Claymore only mewed and glared at the dummy which one of the natives carried or gazed terrified at the gun which another one studied with deep curiosity. Markley saw no more, then, for the chief, bronzed and tall as a sea god, ordered the march and they were thrust through a narrow trail that led inland to the foot of the giant volcanic peak that shot upward. Here was a clearing, surrounded by thatched huts, rounded like beehives. Here were women and naked children making a bedlam of noise. And here, also, was the masked witch doctor, mumbling and jumping spasmodically before a huge wooden idol painted ochre and white.

One of the natives approached, trembling visibly, and handed the witch doctor the dummy. The masked native took it, glared at it and howled until a froth of white dripped below the mask's edge. Then he hurled the dummy to the ground and taking a knife, drove it time and again into the heart of the dummy.

"Hey!" cried Markley in agony, "don't do that. Don't hurt Algy. Alicia carved that face herself. Stop it, I say."

BUT the native continued until the knife was buried to the hilt in the dummy. Then he resumed his dance, calling out words, meanwhile, that started the women gathering fish, fruits and starting big fires. Then the witch doctor came to where Markley and Claymore were tied to upright posts. He jabbered and shouted and gesticulated, and out of this Markley finally got the truth.

"Did you hear that, Claymore?" Markley shouted. "They're going to kill us! Burn us alive. Where's all your strength now? Tear loose, help me loose, so we can at least die quickly. Tear loose, I say, you're so damned strong."

But Claymore merely mewed like a cat and stared, his mouth leering wolfishly.

Markley cursed the man, his fear of the new peril stirring him deeper than his simple soul had ever been stirred before. "Well, I'll stop them, then," he muttered. "And quickly, too."

He waited until the medicine man had returned to his god, dancing, shouting, imploring. Watching his chance for a pause Markley suddenly threw his voice at the god.

"Listen, you big dinge," said the god, "you turn those two men loose or I'll get mad."

The silence that fell was painful after the previous uproar. The witch doctor paused in a crouch, staring. The natives were like brown statues, and so were the women. Even the naked children ceased imitating the medicine man's dance and stared.

"Yes, I mean you," said the god. "Cut all this funny business. Or else I'll kill you all off with a bolt of lightning."

"And if you don't, brother, I will," spoke Algy from the ground.

The witch doctor leaped five feet in the air and landed on his back, scrambling away from Algy who lay where he had fallen, the knife still buried in his middle.

"If I only knew their language," Algy said, "I'd tell them to cut you loose, Markley. But it sounds like Bulgarian to me."

Markley had been working with his hands and now loosened the liana ropes sufficient to wrench free. He walked to Algy, picked up the dummy, and got his hands inside on the mouth and eye mechanisms.

In his own voice Markley said, "We've got to convince them you're a bigger god than theirs, Algy."

This time as Algy replied his huge comical mouth flapped open and shut. "I'll knock that big prune loose from his nosering, Markley. No fooling. Lemme get at him."

Markley looked around and saw that all eyes were upon him and upon the dummy. He got hold of the arm weights that made Algy wave and tip his hat. Then Markley walked to the idol, and leaned against it in the proper manner.

"Sock him, Algy," he said.

"He'll get pneumonia if I miss," cried Algy.

The dummy's fist swung; Markley leaned his weight against the base of the idol and the big wooden image toppled over to crash and break into two parts as it hit the ground.

"Let us hope," said Markley, "they don't get sore at this." He turned and looked at the hypnotized throng. "This little god is bigger than all your gods, and I'm his boss. Cut loose my white companion and bring us some food. Otherwise I'll have this god get good and sore."

"You said a mouthful, Markley," said Algy.

No one moved, so Markley wrenched loose the knife buried in Algy's wooden chest and with it cut Claymore loose. None

molested him. As soon as he had done, Markley backed up and picked up the pistol which a native had brought to the medicine man.

"Now, behave yourself, Claymore," warned Markley. "You look sideways at me from now on, and I'll kill you. I've got enough to worry me without being scared of you crawling loose, nights."

CLAYMORE mewed and watched the gun and did not move at all. Markley walked over to a gourd of water and the natives fell over themselves running back, uttering small frightened cries. Even the witch doctor ran for it. Markley took a healthy drink himself and then poured a little into Algy's mouth.

"How's it go, pal?" he asked.

"It rusts pipes," said Algy.

From that moment The Great Markley was king of the island. He buttressed his power by causing the gaily colored birds to talk, by having a freshly caught fish protest as it was gutted for food. By his power he caused the natives to build a huge bonfire on the side of the mountain where such a blaze would be visible from the sea and attract a rescue ship if one came that way. He had plenty of food, plenty of guarded sleep—three natives standing watch throughout the night. Indeed, there seemed nothing to do but wait in such patience and comfort as he might until a rescue boat hove to.

But Claymore haunted him like a nightmare. If Markley took a walk along the beach he could expect Claymore to stalk him, mewing softly, slitted eyes blazing, hands groping. Claymore even ignored the guards thrice, and was only stopped by Markley flourishing the pistol.

Once again Markley was faced with the decision of killing the mad stoker or letting him live.

To think the matter over, on a day, he took a walk that led up the mountainside. The old scenery was monotonous and he essayed the climb as much for something to do as offer time for reflection. He clambered breathlessly over the chipped lava outcroppings until suddenly the three guards stopped.

They said, *"Tabu!"* And then made him understand by signs that the crater above was the abode of the gods. It was all right for him, Markley, to go, for he was a god, but for them it was certain death.

Markley sighed. "Well, stay here, then. Maybe if I reach the top I can see a ship and get off this blinking island."

He went on alone. The crater held a pool of fresh water, and erosion had made earth of a sort around it so that the floor was green. But the sides were steep escarpments, with only here and there a narrow ledge. Descent was impossible. Markley grunted, "Now I've seen it all. I'll have to go back. I wish I had somebody to talk to. I feel as if I was going nuts myself."

He began his descent. And then Claymore came out of the brush!

He stalked Markley, his great shoulder muscles bunched, his forearms turned out, his fingers clawed. He was mewing wildly, foaming at the mouth.

"Stop it, Claymore," Markley called. "See, here, I've got the gun. Dammit, do you want me to shoot you?" He brandished the weapon. For a space Claymore stopped, but then as if his inner compulsion had overrode his fear he came on.

"All right," growled Markley. "I'll have to kill you."

Claymore came over the ground in great silent leaps like a charging tiger. Markley leveled the weapon. It was an effort to steady it, even a greater effort to squeeze the trigger. But he forced himself to do so. The hammer rose—and fell with a click.

Three times the trigger rose and fell, and then the rusted parts jammed and it would not even rise.

Claymore was almost upon him. Swiftly he hurled the gun at his face, and, turning, raced like a rabbit along the edge of the crater. Behind him he could hear Claymore mewing triumphantly, feel almost the man's breath on his neck.

He tripped over a sharp-edged chunk of lava and sprawled at the crater's lip.

He tried to get up. Claymore was so close his shadow blacked out the sun. Markley made his final desperate effort to forestall the end. He threw his voice behind Claymore and seeing Claymore plunge at him, the shock was too much and he fainted . . .

THE kanaka called Big Jack McGuire was saying, in the pre-dawn coolness, "Big fire—off starboard bow."

Doc Jameson, passenger on the pearling schooner *Bessie B.* also roused. "A fire?" he queried. "Must be a ship, then, Jack, there's no land in these parts."

"An island somewhere around here—an old volcano. Tanderoga. That may be it. Anyway, the water's low, and if it isn't a ship we can fill the butts."

McGuire glassed the spot of crimson that burgeoned from the black shadow of the mountain side. "Tanderoga, all right, and a fire," he said. "Either natives or shipwrecked people. By George, the Dutch *Java Maid* went down in that hurricane last summer. It's just possible—Neifer, break out the small boat."

Daylight had fully come when the *Bessie B.* put her hook to the coral and the small boat loaded with casks, and McGuire and Jameson went ashore. They went armed, for McGuire said repeatedly that the natives of Tanderoga were notoriously warlike. But the natives they encountered were meek enough, and by *talky-talky* McGuire heard of the big god and the little god and the white companion that had landed months before.

He translated for Doc Jameson. "Queer yarn, probably muddled in their heads," he said, "but undoubtedly some of the *Java Maid* people got ashore here. And they're up on the mountain side. There seem to be three of them—or were three, I can't tell which."

Laboriously they climbed the precipitous slope. On the way they encountered three natives who were just depositing food in woven leaf baskets. Farther up, at the crater's edge they came upon The Great Markley.

He was flat on his belly, saying, "Upsy-daisy. Let loose, you fool!"

Amazed, McGuire and Doc Jameson peered over the crater's edge. On a shelf three feet or so wide, thirty feet below, was a naked giant of a man, sunburned black, hairy as a wild man and mewing like a cat as he tugged viciously at a leaf-woven basket strung to a liana rope. The wild man had eaten the food.

Markley turned. "You can get him up, but watch out. He's a homicidal maniac and he'll kill you quicker than a wink."

They did get Claymore up and bound him hand and foot. And he and Markley at long last were carried aboard the schooner. After anchor had been weighed, and the sails bent to the wind McGuire and Doc Jameson listened, in the cabin, to Markley's story. Markley told it, seated upright on a hard chair, Algy, his dummy, propped on his right hip. As they listened, and Claymore became a mewing frightful reality to them, the two men exchanged glances of astonishment. When Markley finally ceased to speak Doc Jameson took a big breath.

"In heaven's name, man!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you kill the blighter? He's a hopeless maniac; and, anyway, in a case where it was his life or yours you had the right to kill him."

"Sure you did," asserted Big Jack McGuire. "Why didn't you kill him?" He stared at The Great Markley's scrawny figure, that even now could not tip the beam at ninety-eight pounds. McGuire was visualizing this thin smallish man against the gigantic bulk of Claymore.

"Why didn't you kill him?" he repeated.

The Great Markley smiled, and looked down at Algy. "Well, Algy, why didn't we kill him?"

"Aw!" piped the dummy. "The big palooka brags in the small boat that only strength counted; that the strong man was boss. And that got under our skin, didn't it, Markley? We showed him that even in the stone age it was the smart guy that got ahead."

Second Wind

By SAMUEL TAYLOR

Author of "The High One," "The Mistake Was Mutual," etc.

SNOW was two months late in the Sierras. When it finally began to come the dogs whined in frenzied ecstasy. There were fourteen inches in the morning when Sekara got out the sledge, and it was coming softly and steadily. He sang all the way down to Sylvester's Camp. Snow meant skiers, week-end parties who would come to Sylvester's. Sekara needed business badly, for the warden had watched closely all summer and Sekara had been able to get only six deer. He was in debt for oatmeal and lard for his dogs, beans and rice and flour for himself. His fur clothing had been carefully patched, the sledge and dog harness overhauled; new rawhide webbing was taut in his snowshoes. Everything had been ready but the snow, and now the snow was here. Sekara sang.

But soon after reaching Sylvester's camp, the song was gone from Sekara's lips and from his heart. Sylvester had gone to Los Angeles for the winter, and his son, he of kinky black hair and too much nose, was running things in his own way. He handed Sekara two letters, and then came out point-blank with the proposition.

Because of the grocery bill, young Sylvester proposed to take Sekara's dogs and outfit! He offered fifty dollars for a quiet settlement, or threatened to have the sheriff attach team and sledge. He proposed to let cheechakos from the city take the whip and the sledge handles and drive that great team of malemutes! He would let giggling women make pets out of working dogs! Malemutes descended from the great string that had made the famous rescue of Lieutenant St. John! The leader, old Scratch, was one of that original string!

From his mother Sekara had inherited great fortitude, so he did not strike young Sylvester. "No; only Sekara can drive the

team," he said, and added with simple dignity: "I am Sekara." From his father Sekara had inherited a temper, but he did not have that great white man's facility with words.

Young Sylvester had a loose mouth under that long nose. He said, "My old man fell for that 'I am Sekara' stuff. He was sorry for you. And he'd been in Alaska in the old days. But to me, pal, you're just a half-breed with a bum account."

Sekara took the letters near the window to read them. Old Step-and-a-Half was writing from Bettles. About every so often the boys would be in the roadhouse dancing and getting drunk, and they'd start talking of Sekara. Step-and-a-Half, being the literary light of Bettles—he had voluminous notes on an autobiography—would set himself down to write a letter filled with such things as, "And Hank says he kin still lick you. . . . Old Sitka Red decided he'd go Outside but we found him stiff on the trail—I guess he is Outside all right. . . . Went over in the South Fork and come back with three mountain sheep. . . ." And old Step-and-a-Half always ended with, "The mail service is awful since you went outside. When you comin back? Yrs, Step ½ & the Boys."

Sekara had laughed many times over Step-and-a-Half's letters, had answered them all scrupulously, as befitting a great man who doesn't want to forget the old boys, or have them think he's gone high hat. But now he didn't laugh.

HE LOOKED out the window at the sifting snow, at the malemutes curled in harness, bushy tails around their muzzles. For a moment he might have been back in Ash Can Jim's roadhouse, having just brought in the mail sack, listening to the sourdoughs roar out their letters aloud —love notes, business letters, duns, it was all one, all news and everybody's affair, up high on the Koyukuk.

Sekara's other letter was from Lieutenant St. John—now Major St. John: "Just happened to learn where you were, you old hermit," St. John wrote. "So we'll get together and chew the rag. I'm in San Francisco on leave, and I'll take a run out to Sylvester's next week sometime."

St. John's letter decided Sekara. Sekara knew he could never face the man, now, who had shared his glory. St. John had known the proud son of the great explorer and Flying Needle; he had known Sekara as the best dog musher on the Koyukuk, a mighty hunter of the North. St. John should not see him as he was now.

Sekara turned from the window to face young Sylvester. "All right. You take my dogs."

Sekara took the fifty dollars in settlement and waded back up the ravine to his cabin. It was awfully quiet with the snow slanting down all around. Sekara got out his big leather-covered scrapbook. The clippings were turning a yellowish brown. They gave him no comfort, now. Many times he had thumbed through the big book, but now everything seemed strange, as if he were another man than the one on the fading patches of newsprint. Finally he realized he *was* another man. Sekara the hero was dead. Young Sylvester was right; Sekara was nothing but a half-breed bum, a picturesque character to turn the eyes of the week-end skiers. It was his outfit—the dogs and sledge, his patched parka and caribou-hide pants—that brought attention. It was not that he was Sekara. Who was Sekara but a name in his own precious scrapbook?

Sekara would need dogs no more; that is why he had let young Sylvester take them. A sentence from Step-and-a-Half's letter kept running through his head: "Old Sitka Red decided he'd go Outside but we found him stiff on the trail—I guess he is Outside all right. . . ." That meant more than it said. Up north, no man is a burden to the community. When his days of usefulness are over, he takes a trip "Outside." Without fuss or ceremony he packs up and heads across the snowy wastes. Sekara had read in books that natives never committed suicide. The books were technically correct. But an Eskimo will not stay indefinitely and eat from the tribal food

cache if he cannot do anything towards replenishing it. He makes a journey.

FAME had come early for Sekara, as befits one whose father was a great explorer and whose mother was known from Point Barrow to the Mackenzie Delta for the speed of her needle. When the great explorer took his ice ship north for a dash to the Pole, Flying Needle had the honor of going along to keep the fur clothing in repair and make mukluks that would not leak. When Sekara was born and grew old enough to go to the mission school, he read books his father had written, and was filled with pride at the passages about the skill of Flying Needle. Flying Needle had two other husbands after the great explorer left, but she never tired of telling about the great trip on the ice ship.

At fourteen Sekara was the equal of any man in the hunting of the caribou, seal, walrus and polar bear; at sixteen he was the greatest of them all. He had the wide shoulders and long limbs of his father, the endurance and cunning of his mother. At eighteen he was running the winter mail under sub-contract, up the Koyukuk with his eleven-dog sledge team, the best in the country. He was not yet twenty when Lieutenants Bartley and St. John, on the last leg of a brilliant top of the world flight, were forced down in the Endicott mountains. Their proposed route was known, and it was Sekara who followed that line, so easy in the air, over the broken fastness of the Arctic wilderness. Bartley was dead, but Sekara rescued Lieutenant St. John, sailed Outside with him to San Francisco, rode with him in the back seat of a big car up Market Street, with James Rolph, Jr., sitting between them, a band in front and a band behind, flags on the lamp posts and the whole town lined up to yell. Yes, that was honor.

And there was money. A man named Kecks, a fat man with a squeaky voice, showed Sekara how to cash in. Sekara's picture appeared in magazines, in articles and in advertisements. A book, ghosted, sold well. He went across the country appearing in theatres. He went up in Yosemite and drove his malemutes through the snow while cameras ground. Everything was money. And then suddenly there was no more money. There was no more fame. Kecks said goodbye. A man named Lindberg flew the Atlantic.

And Sekara saw, now, that he shouldn't have gone on as he had; he realized at last what he should have understood the day that Kecks shook his hand and said squeakily: "Well, pard, we got the last drop of milk from the old cow, anyway. Good luck." Sekara hadn't understood. He'd taken his dogs to Santa Cruz, put wheels on his sledge and charged a dollar to "Ride with Sekara's Famous Malemutes." In the winter he went into the Sierras—Truckee, Tahoe, Sylvester's, Yosemite—and sold rides. When his price dropped by degrees down to a quarter a ride, he still didn't understand. But now, today—when he got the letters, and when young Sylvester took his dogs—he knew. The Sekara of the scrapbook was dead.

SEKARA checked his equipment carefully. Everything was in order, but he checked once more, for a man likes to leave things right. It was a bit incomprehensible that he should be making the long last trip. He was just coming into the prime of life, strong and quick and with all the skill that had made him a man among men of two races. But the Sierras are not the Endicotts; California is not Alaska. Quickness of hand and eye counted for nothing here. Endurance and skill with weapons and nature lore were hobbies, not means of existence.

The snow fell quietly all day. Sekara made a light pack of jerked venison, cleaned his rifle again and oiled it. By six o'clock, time to feed the dogs, it had been dark an hour and a half. Sekara shouldered his pack, strapped on the webs. Then he slipped the pack, put the leather-bound scrapbook in it, threaded arms through the loops again and headed out into the storm.

He stopped suddenly at the corner of the

cabin. The whine came again, a gentle, eager anticipation of food. Old Scratch! Sekara knew the voice of the dog-team leader. Sekara spoke his name and the old dog came out of his little house, trailing the chewed ends of his harness. Sekara took off his mitten, rubbed his fingers on the underside of the dog's muzzle. The warm tongue licked his wrist.

Sekara knew, then, that he had been very thoughtless, very selfish. Here was a dog whose ancestors ran back to the wild wolf, who came from a line that had lived and died in harness, dogs that had been partners of man, not his plaything. Sekara realized he could not sell Scratch to a life of shame. How long could Scratch maintain his deep dignity, hired out to cheechako drivers, staying around giggling women at Sylvester's, being petted and fondled and softened until he would come leaping with tail wagging to anybody who dangled a bit of food?

"You come with me, Scratch. We do not eat tonight, for we travel. We tell Sylvester we change our mind. You lead the team through the mountains tonight, Old One. Together we go on a long journey."

They headed towards Sylvester's, down the ravine. But the other malemutes were not at Sylvester's, nor was the sledge, nor was young Sylvester, nor the ski instructor, Halstad, nor the doctor named Moore. Everyone who had cabins around Sylvester's was at the place, talking together, saying the same things over and over and over, each one treasuring some special knowledge and telling it. Sekara got the story from half a dozen fronts at once.

"I go," said Sekara.

"You'd better stay here," a young fellow advised. He had been a week in one of Sylvester's cabins, and considered himself an old timer. He swore, as a man is allowed to do before ladies in a pinch, and struck a light for his cigarette on the sole of a brand new ski boot. "Halstad will make it, even if the dogs don't. Say, can that guy ski! Saw him last year in the slalom . . ."

Then they were all talking at once again. Sekara went out and headed up the ravine that led west and north. A wind was starting up, and the fine fast snow continued. Scratch followed along in the big tracks of the snowshoes.

THE story Sekara had pieced together at the store was a simple one of emergency, one that occurs a dozen times a winter in the Sierras. The importance of the people involved made it unusual. J. J. McCabe, Jr., son of the shipping magnate, was stalled in his car somewhere in the mountains. With him was his wife, a daughter of five and a baby boy. McCabe had left San Francisco the previous day with the intention of spending a few weeks at his lodge at Pine Flat. The next afternoon McCabe's father had telephoned from San Francisco, and the caretaker of the lodge said he had assumed the party had postponed the trip because of the snow. A check showed the car had last been seen when gasoline was purchased at Placerville. The party, then, was stalled somewhere between Placerville and Pine Flat, somewhere in the mountainous Tahoe National Forest. Highways 40 and 50 were blocked off because of the storm. Parties had started from Auburn, Truckee, and Georgetown. A state road tractor was forging down the south road from Soda Springs, another from Placerville. The wind was getting worse, piling the snow into drifts. Nobody knew exactly which road McCabe had taken out of Placerville. He might have gone up through Cool and Forest Hill; he might have taken the Georgetown route, or again headed through Pino Grande. The lodge was roughly in the center of a forty-mile circle bounded by Auburn, Emigrant Gap, Truckee, Lake Tahoe and Placerville. It was only some fifteen miles through the mountains from Sylvester's to McCabe's lodge, as the crow flies. But those fifteen miles would be stretched more than double by the torturous ravines and the folding of the abrupt hills.

Sekara clumped along the ravine on his snowshoes. He was hardly five miles out

when, whining, old Scratch floundered up ahead. Sekara came upon the dog team soon afterwards, and his snow-caked face was grim with fury. Skis! Those ridiculous sticks with which men got cheap thrills sliding down hills. Sylvester and Dr. Moore were trying to tramp a sledge trail ahead of the dogs with skis! And they were not pulling. They were just stomping with those silly boards in the soft snow, and letting the malemutes burn their hearts out with the heavily laden sledge.

"Can't get through, Sekara," panted young Sylvester. "Not with the dogs. Halstad kept on with his skis. He might make it. We're headin' back."

"Where is north?" Sekara grunted.

Young Sylvester pointed.

"And south?"

"I'm not lost, if that's what you're driving at."

"Then go home. I take the dogs."

"No, you don't. I tell you, you can't get through. And them's my dogs, now."

"Maybe we'd better go with him," put in Dr. Moore. "Sekara can break trail with his snowshoes."

"I go alone," said Sekara.

Young Sylvester swiped the snow from his long nose. "You want to be a hero again, huh? Well, you listen here—"

Sekara was beyond the laws and conventions of civilized California. The storm shut off everything but the little circle of visibility in the ravine. He didn't like Sylvester, and didn't intend to argue. He was furious at the way the dog team had been handled. And he knew the value of action. He stepped close to young Sylvester and struck him, fist closed, as white men fight. Sylvester floundered to the snow. When he was up again, the fight was out of him.

"Go," said Sekara.

SEKARA swore softly as he investigated the top-heavy sledge pack. He tossed three-quarters of the stuff away, lashed his own pack on the lightened load, put old Scratch in the lead position of the team. He cleaned caked snow from between the toes of the dogs, then gave the malemutes a quarter-hour rest before heading back along the ravine, tramping a solid trail with his wide webs. He had a rope around his shoulders to the end of the harness line, and he put his weight against it over the rough spots. There was hard going over a series of hills, and then he jogged into another ravine and followed a drifted roadbed. The snow was coming thinly now as the wind rose, thinly from the sky but driving like cold flint particles from off the hills. The stuff wormed past the wolverine fringe of the parka hood, up under the skirt of the fur garment, down the wrists of his mittens. The clouds were beginning to break. It would be a cold night, a freezing night for somebody marooned in a tin automobile.

"Hey!"

A voice called again. A figure came sliding, sprawling, floundering down the hillside with a frenzied sort of haste. It was Halstad, the ski expert from Sylvester's, who had gone on ahead. He wore a ski on his right boot and was using the broken half of the other as a cane.

"Sekara! By golly, it's lucky! I spilled in a clump of rocks, and my ankle—I don't know; it might only be a sprain." Red snow-slush covered one side of Halstad's blunt face. His pretty white-and-blue ski costume was snagged at the left knee.

"Can you walk?" Sekara asked. Halstad shook his head. Sekara helped him back to the sledge, covered him with the tarpaulin.

"Thanks a lot, old man. When we get back I'll—"

"We go after McCabe. Not back."

"You're crazy! There are plenty of others after McCabe I've got to get this ankle fixed up!"

"Maybe I leave you, huh?" said Sekara. And Halstad, looking at the half-breed's impassive face, said no more.

The extra hundred and eighty pounds bore the sledge runners deep through the web-packed trail so that it was a fight to go along the roadway, even, and soon it would be necessary to cut across the hills once more. Sekara stopped, clumped back to the sledge.

"Get off," he ordered.

Halstad's voice was shrill: "You can't leave me here, so's you can be a hero again! If you leave me, I'll get back! I'll get back if I have to crawl! And you won't be no hero then! You won't be a hero when I've had my say."

Sekara had no patience with this fool who had gone off alone on a pair of silly skis. He used his fist again, and took the fight out of Halstad. Then he threw the load, everything, into the snow, even the dog food. As an afterthought he recovered his leather-bound scrapbook and put it under the tarpaulin of the sledge.

"Get on."

"Listen, we've got to have food. If we're marooned—" Halstad shut up when the fist menaced again. Sekara began tramping trail once more, with the line around his shoulders.

Blotches of stars were showing through. There came glimpses of a cold moon. And the wind pulled like tearing fingers. It was a bad night to be out in the Sierras in a tin automobile, a bad night to be out without food. Food is warmth. Reasoning such as this was a part of Sekara's life. He knew these things: he knew that he must reach these people soon.

He broke to the right through the hills, squatting low against the line around his shoulders. Then the other side led down to the river swishing along in the deep-walled canyon. Sekara unhitched the dogs and carried them across the stream one at a time to keep them dry. He took Halstad on his back, then returned for the sledge. There was a long fight up the other side. Sekara felt his heart crashing against his ribs, and cursed the soft hulk he had become. There was a fold of fat at his middle, a double handful of it. When he was atop the river channel, he was shaking all over and his knees would not straighten. He wanted to rest.

Sekara, son of the great explorer and Flying Needle! Sekara gasping and sick from the work of a few hours! And he had planned nobly to take a long trip through the mountains, where he would be found in the spring by people who would feel very, very sorry. Sekara feeling sorry for himself, afraid to face the fact that he was no longer a hero! Old-Step-and-a-Half would be ashamed to write letters to such a one, if he knew. Sekara mushed along the hilltops, not sparing himself. There was almost a grim wish that his pounding fat heart *would* burst. Sekara had no use for a body that would not function.

AT DAWN the wind reached its greatest fury. It was just coming light, with the snow a pale purple, when Sekara reached the McCabe lodge on Pine Flat. It was empty. He left Halstad there. The store room was well stocked. Sekara cut up a side of bacon, giving a half-pound chunk to each dog, taking a like piece for himself. Immediately he had gulped it down he wanted to undo the act. The raw meat cinched his insides like an iron hand. Sekara was sick. And terribly tired. He knew it would be death to go out again. He was on the last edge of endurance, and any remaining strength was drained by a nausea that throbbed greenly. But he went. He headed down the canyon with a light food pack and many blankets on the sledge. The roadway was bounded by the tops of brush along one side, the tumbling creek on the other, crashing along through the crusted ice on its sides.

Within two hours he came upon an old man tangled in his skis. Probably the caretaker of the lodge. The old man was frozen stiff. Sekara wanted to lie down with him. The sickness, incredibly, had become even worse. His throat was burning and dry, and his wheezing breath rasped it scorchingly raw.

Sekara left the old man there, and pushed on, forcing himself to a lurching run. He went as fast as his shaking limbs would carry him, for he knew if he stopped it would be for the last time. Others would find him, as he had found the old man.

The wind gradually died. At sun-up the world was peaceful, clean and white and calm, and terribly cold. The big snowplows would chew the highways open once more.

The storm was over.

And so, Sekara discovered with sudden amazement, was his fatigue. When it seemed that he should die, then the beating of his heart had began to ease and strength to seep back once more into his bones. Sekara felt self-contempt anew. He had even forgotten second wind. How soft he was! How far from the Sekara of a few years ago! He had forgotten the reserve a man has, the great storehouse that can be tapped when ordinary endurance fails. But a man must go on until he can go no further to find this energy. A man can give up and die without ever reaching it.

From then on the going was easy. About noon a plane droned up the canyon, swooped closer on seeing him, then roared away. Another plane appeared a few hours later. Sekara smiled wryly. The car was not in this canyon; it had not taken this road, or else the planes would not be going on. They would have circled around the car, dropped food and sped back. Perhaps the car had taken a branch road, trying to get to one of the main highways. But Sekara kept on. He saw another plane before dark.

When he came upon the car, he realized why the planes had not spotted it. The vehicle was cramped against a high bank, completely drifted over. Off the other side of the road-cut the stream was a thundering rapids. And so the occupants of the car hadn't heard the plane. They'd had the sense to stick to the car.

McCabe's simple "Thank God," and the expression on his wife's face was enough reward to Sekara. The children were all right; the parents had sacrificed wraps for them. The skin from McCabe's toes would peel off in a week or so, but the frost-bite was not serious. Sekara hadn't forgotten how to make a warm camp.

THE next morning, McCabe, with his tender feet wrapped in strips of blanket, shoved at the sledge handles while Sekara broke trail ahead. Planes were soon dropping enough useless foodstuffs to founder a regiment. About noon the party met a clanking tractor. When Sekara reached San Francisco that evening he was once again a hero, with his name in big black letters on the newspapers and his old exploit rehashed. The familiar routine of publicity had begun.

The McCabes had a big house on top of a steep hill. Sekara telephoned Major St. John, slipped away and met him in a tavern. St. John didn't force the conversation. They were on their third drink when Sekara said: "Newspaper, they want a story. My life. I can go on the stage. A man who make canned dog food, he say I give a radio program. From Hollywood come two, three telegram. A man who is named Norman, he tell me he will arrange everything to see I do not be cheated. Norman, he is tall and skinny, with deep voice. But still he is very much like fat Kecks. You remember Kecks with the squeaky voice, who was the manager of Sekara the first time?"

St. John nodded. He was turning gray at the temples, but he was still as lean and hard as he had been the day he rode along Market Street with Sekara and James Rolph, Jr., with a band in front and a band behind, flags on the light poles and the whole town lined up to yell.

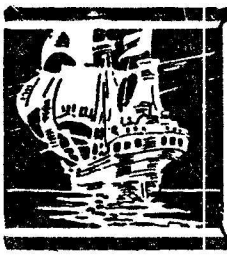
"Just like old times," he said. "You're a hero again, Sekara—I mean, still a hero."

"But tomorrow, I go back to my cabin in the hills," said Sekara. "McCabe, he own ships. In the spring, he send me North. Me and the dogs. He loan me one thousand dollar. I pay Sylvester, have enough for a grubstake in the North. And sometime I pay back McCabe one thousand dollar."

"No radio, no vaudeville, no endorsements, no Hollywood?"

Sekara shrugged. "Sekara very weak. Sekara a fool with money. Up North, maybe start again. Do you think?"

Sekara felt St. John's lean hand gripping his over the table.



Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

THERE was going to be a fine big lead on Argonotes this week. It was going to be juicy. And significant. We had it all planned out in our mind. It was going to start off with a fine discussion of the new trends in stories—what, these days, makes a piece of fiction important and exciting in the public's eyes. Nothing fancy, mind you, but sound, and calculated to start enough discussion to keep this column roaring like a pine-knot fire for months.

It was also going to establish us definitely as an analytical thinker of no mean proportions.

Then, along about the eighth paragraph it was going to get very funny. As it is, if you feel like laughing this week, this is as good a spot as any.

So have your laugh now and then we can get on with this.

Someday, maybe, we'll write the column that we were going to write today. It was probably going to be the best column that we—or anyone else—had ever written. (The suspicion stirs us at this point that perhaps the best columns are always the ones that never get around to being written.)

Anyway, apparently it wasn't to be.

In the first place, it's the beginning of the week—and there's no Blue Monday in *this* office. Blue is sort of a restful color—quiet and tinged with a fine shade of midnight reverie, or the soothing wash of mid-Atlantic waters, or the luminous spread of an April evening sky. No, sir, the color for Monday around here should be something considerably more lively. Say the orange-yellow of an explosion. Or the angry, bright crimson glow of a locomotive's firebox. Or maybe just the plain, screaming red that people paint on fire engines. A red, you might say, with a gong to it.

And today was even more so than usual. No sooner had we settled down to compose the weekly diatribe than things began to happen in great, surging tiers of tumult and confusion.

First there was the Woman with the Story. She wanted to leave it, and yet, somehow, she was reluctant to part with it. Just putting it down somewhere and going away again wasn't her idea of submitting a manuscript. No. There had to be a ceremony. We could understand a little how she felt. In fact, there were times when editors have had to pry manuscripts of ours out of stiff fingers that could have clenched no tighter if *rigor mortis* had set in. Anyhow we went out and cajoled the lady into leaving her story—after appropriate gestures of farewell—in our sympathetic hands.

Following the Lady with the Story there were four phone calls—all of them more or less complicated and involving a great deal of dashing about and conferring with people who seemed to have just left for the day.

Then there were several men who wanted to sell Things. The child in us always makes us a sucker for *them*. Anyone who can once get past the sentry in the hall can walk in here, fix us with a hypnotic glare, and whisk one gadget after another out of a small black case for hours on end. We never buy anything, but we're never strong-minded enough to convince the men ahead of time that we're not. And so they get their gadgets going, removing

spots, sharpening pencils, eradicating ink, brushing their teeth, and whatnot—and this department is held as spellbound as a child at its first circus.

More recently there have been the printers who wanted to know where we were hiding the proof, and please, they didn't want to play games, so if we would just let them have it. . . . And a man with a story idea which unaccountably he found himself unable to put into words. And an illustrator trying to get picturesque details on a story we couldn't remember. It's all been like that.

Anyway that's why we didn't get that lead done, and we're very sorry. We apologize and hope you'll find all the diversion and instruction we'd planned on giving you, from the mail.

THE first item is still another communication from the far-from-elusive Mr. Rogers.

LEO LAWSON ROGERS

New Rochelle, N. Y.

THERE, now, Mr. Rogers, perhaps you'll believe us when we told you—as we did last week—that we'd print no more letters from you—or anyone else—about *Reader, I Killed Him.*

We liked the report-card idea, and said so when we got the first one. It's about as clear a form of recording individual reader-preferences as can be desired. So naturally we like to see them. Here's another from:

W. S. BIRD

ENTER THE TIGER	**So-So**
STRIKE *(Part I)*	**Great**
BRIGHT CARTRIDGES	**Fair**
FRIVOLOUS SAL	**Just Good**
KING COLT *(Part III)*	**Very Good**
BATTLE SHOUTS DOWN THE WIND	**O.K.**
FORTUNE HAS HORNS	**Good**
COUNTY FAIR *(Part II)*	**Fine**
THE PUP COMES HOME	**Just O.K.**
ARGONOTES	**Swell**
LOOKING AHEAD!	**Looks Good**

THANKS very much, Mr. Bird. We seem at least to break even on that one. It sort of reminds us of the time we came home with a school report that had finally achieved a B in manual training.

Here's a letter from a new reader,

ROBERT BURNS

The first copy of your magazine that I bought contained the start of your serial, "The Smoking Land." Since then I find it hard to wait patiently for the next issue to appear. Naturally every story does not strike my fancy, but on the whole, I find your magazine very much to my liking. As a matter of fact I have never found a magazine which I considered was worth my time and trouble to convey my written appreciation for its consistent effort to print really good stories, until now.

I am sure that you are aware, however, that nothing remains at a *status quo.* I am interested in seeing the ARGOSY go forward. Naturally you are more interested than I to see the same thing happen. Therefore I am sending a few suggestions which I hope will accomplish that in some small measure at least.

Keep the cover on a plane that we can be proud of, such as that appearing with "The Yardarm Swing." Print more stories about the sea (contemporary). Last but not least, I am sure that we have in the United States much subject for adventure, witness the excellent beginning of the serial, "Strike." Enough in fact that it should not be necessary to delve into the "party line" hooey and petty, silly small-town gossip of Four Corners for subject material. Let's keep the magazine BIG.

Seattle, Wash.

WE'RE sorry you don't like the Roscoe Four-Corner series, Mr. Burns, especially when, as a matter of fact, the editors of ARGOSY consider them pretty fine. In the first place, to city-dwellers, they open up a whole new world. In the

second place, Four-Corners is much more American, and, because more frequently encountered, "bigger" than much of our other material.

However we'd like to hear from the rest of you. Shall Old Jonesey and Mule Lickette and Anton Grunner pass from the pages of ARGOSY, or not?

CLAYTON WORDEN

I have been reading ARGOSY for about ten years. That isn't long compared to some of your readers but I still have a good many years to read it because I'm still young.

Your new cover suits me fine. You can change anything except the excellent stories and the name ARGOSY.

The amount of serials should stay at three or more at least. Nothing less than three.

I would like to see more unusual stories than we've been having lately, but I like the other types of stories too

I can still remember a lot of past stories I enjoyed. The best ones were "Apes of Devil's Island," "Vanishing Professor," "Beyond the Stars," "Brand New World," "Murk," the "Dan Barry" series and best of all, "Dwellers in the Mirage." Your best authors I think were A. Merritt, Charles Francis Coe, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Fred MacIsaac, Garret Smith, Otis Adelbert Kline, Charles Seltzer, Max Brand, George Worts and many others that I can't recall at present.

I have quite a collection of books that were serials in ARGOSY first. Also have seen quite a few shows taken from ARGOSY stories.

I hope to see more fantastic stories in the future.

Flint, Mich.

WHILE we're on the subject of serials, here's another reader who likes his "To be continued next weeks" in large and unremitting quantities.

HENRY W. NAUMAN

After having received several issues of the new ARGOSY, I should like to comment on my reaction to your changes.

As the cover is the first thing one sees in purchasing a magazine it might be well to say that the removal of the red band is a positive improvement and a long-needed one. There is one thing in connection with the picture, however, that I think should be attended to. When a detail of the illustration runs higher on the cover than the ARGOSY title it should be superimposed on the title and not under it. This was done on the ears of the horse on the July 1 cover and it certainly showed up nicely. This system is regularly followed by the Saturday Evening Post and other magazines.

You are falling down badly on the four-serial policy and that certainly does not meet with my approval and I'm sure with many more of your regular readers. No abbreviated novelet will take the place of a really good story even if that story must be cut into four or five parts.

Looking over a file of old All-Story, Cavalier and other forerunners of our present ARGOSY I find as many as six serials running in each issue and they certainly were written by headliners.

Elizabethtown, Penna.

HERE'S one from a reader defending us—we think—from the charge of having too many corpses scattered unpleasantly through these pages.

R. J. BOWYER

I don't suppose this will be printed, but here's what I've got to say. To heck with A. Lynwood and Fred Minter who object so strenuously to murder stories and serials. I haven't missed an issue of ARGOSY for two or three years and I think that serials are the backbone of the book. My advice to them is to go buy a book of Mother Goose rhymes. I also would like to know what happened to Tizzo the Firebrand, Peter the Brazen, Bellow-Bill Williams and others.

Yankton, S. Dak.

THE writer following is a man released from years of not letting his right eye see what his left one was reading. We imagine a whole army of devoted readers now stepping home of an evening, ARGOSY under their arms, step firm, eyes bright, chin up, and looking the world square in the face.

J. E. MILKS

At last you seem to have overcome your desire for a cheap, gaudy-colored cover for the ARGOSY, for which please accept my sincere thanks.

For years I have carried the ARGOSY home from the drug store with the front cover hugged against my side so no one would see the dime novel type of cover.

I have been a constant reader of the ARGOSY since 1894 and the only real objection I ever had to it was the cover. I think that as a rule

it has the best stories of any magazine on the market.

Terre Haute, Ind.

POET'S CORNER

It's nice that some of you are taking this end of Argonotes seriously. We received several poems this week, most of them too metric and sensible to publish. The following contribution is, we're certain, destined for a place in American anthologies of verse. It is, obviously, a perfect specimen of pure lyric *surréalisme*. The title is ours.

Sonnet Descending a Staircase

Ding

—Smooge Van Gieson

That, my friends, is the sort of poesy we seek. It has streamlined vision and magnificent unity. We hope to publish more of Mr. Van Gieson's work soon.

Looking Ahead!

MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO

For spinning a tale of fighting men there's no one can equal Sergeant Thibaut Corday of the Legion. The moment he saw the camp cook teach his pet monkey how to fire a gun, Corday knew there was going to be trouble. For the man who looked like a monkey had taught the monkey how to act like a man—and taught him too well. An exceptional novelet of the Foreign Legion by

THEODORE ROSCOE

FOR THE LOVE OF MIKE

In spite of the most engaging grin this side of Indo-China, Prince Mike—or, if you want the works, Prince Mikuud Phni Luangba, of Kammoriiri—takes trouble with him wherever he goes. Trouble, with Mike, is in the form of a half-million-dollars worth of baubles—rubies, emeralds, and assorted gems. In the shadow of Fujiyama, George Marlin, gem detective, labors mightily to keep the royal person intact and the baubles in the purser's safe. The second chronicle of the perils of jewel-loving, likable Mike by

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

BLOOD UPON THE WATERS

The law of the sea is that the big fish eat the little ones—that the shark with the sharpest teeth and the most powerful jaws is the one that survives. And this is also true of men. . . . But among the lusty brawlers of the tuna fleet it isn't always the shark that wins. A short story by

RICHARD SALE

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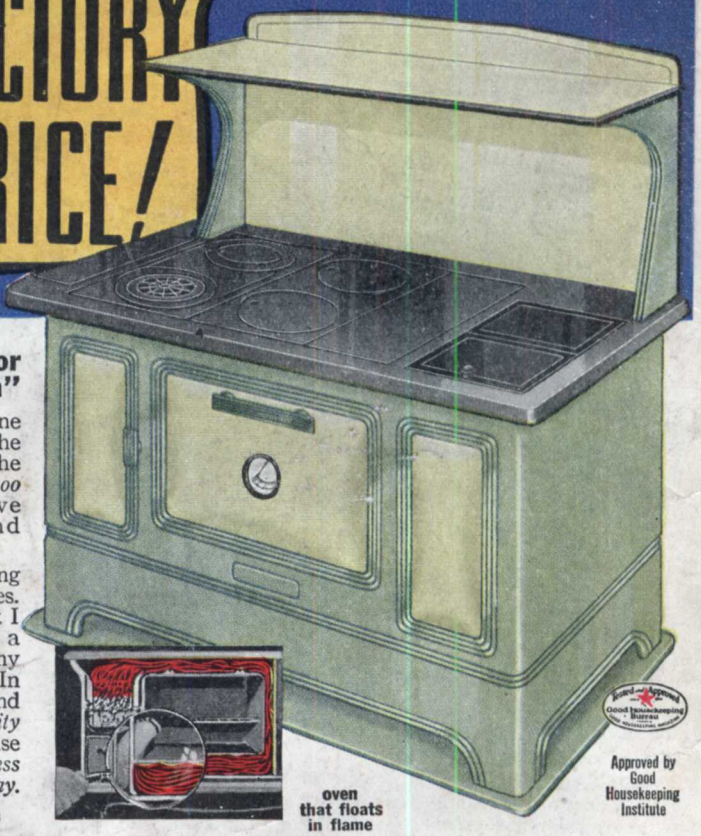
"My Suggestion is:—mail the coupon AT ONCE for free Catalog! Don't take my word—see it yourself. See what you save at FACTORY PRICES."

oven that floats in flame



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