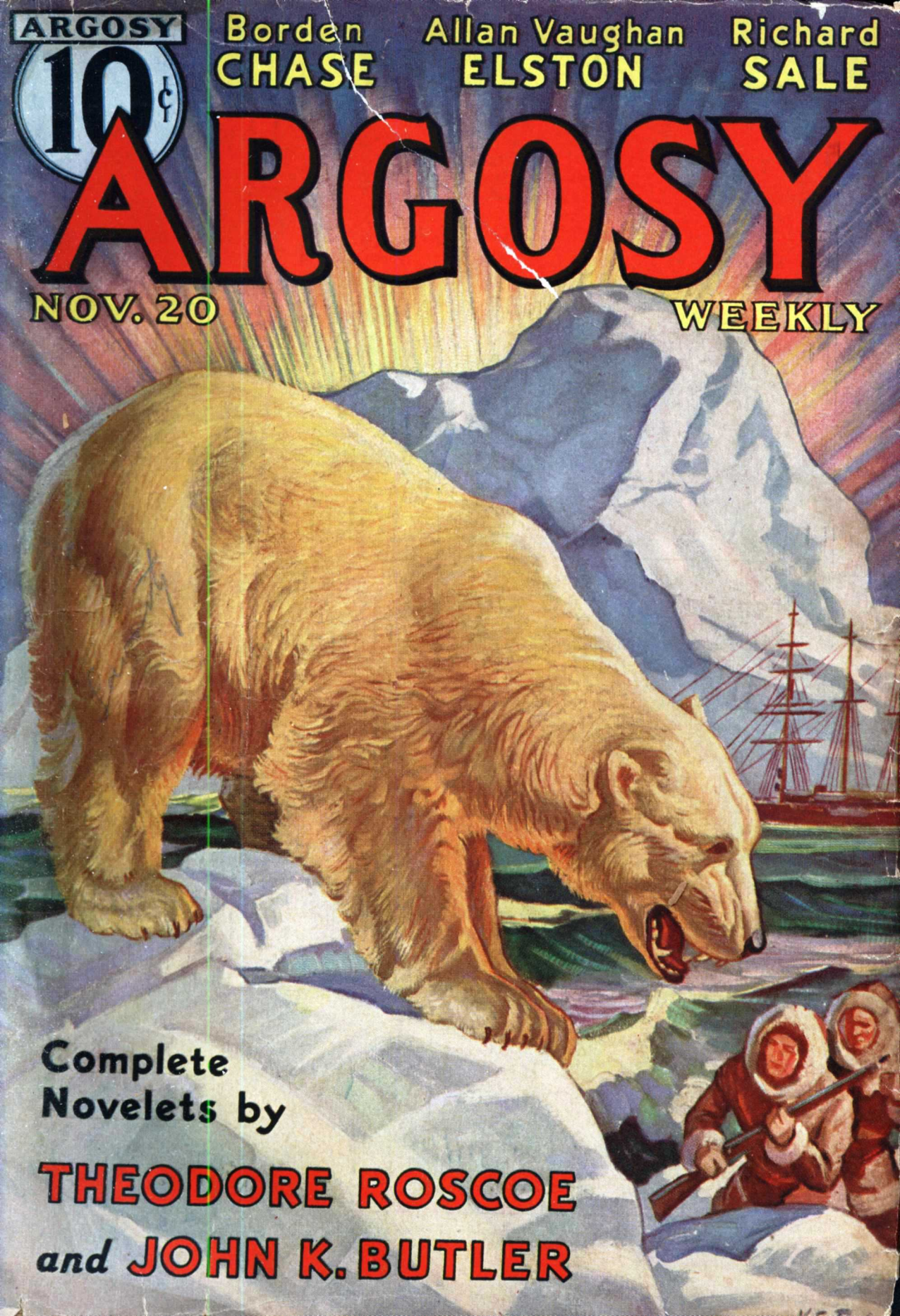
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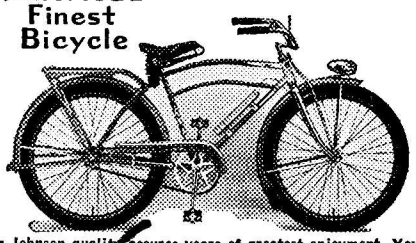

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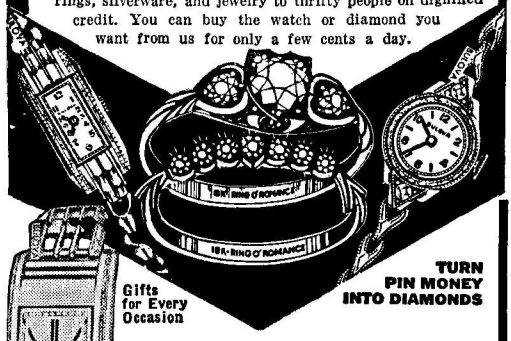

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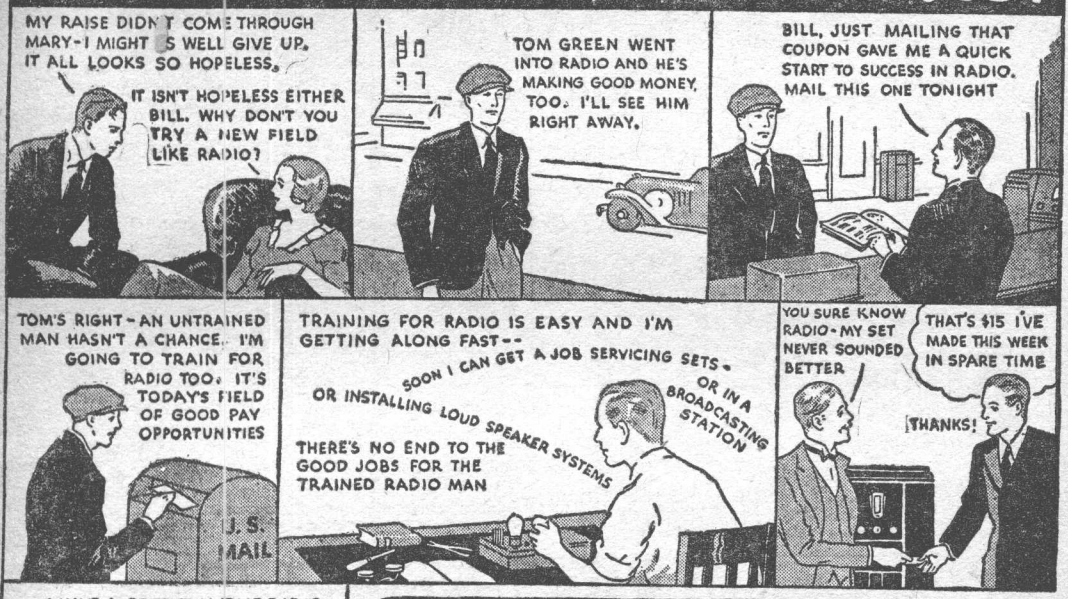

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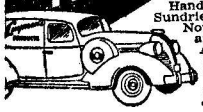

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The Man Who Lost His Head

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "Monkey See, Monkey Do," "Red-Headed Dancing Girl," etc.

A Complete Novelet

I

SOME sailor had left a month-old copy of the *Paris Soir* lying on the café table, and Baker, the young British consular agent, looked up from its thumb-smeared contents with an exclamation.

"Jove! here's a weird story. Girl faints at her work bench in one of those big Paris knitting mills. Girl next to her sees her faint, and topples over. The next maiden in line goes into a swoon, and in ten minutes women all over the room are shrieking and passing out until the whole shop is on the floor. Investigators couldn't find a thing wrong with 'em except a sort of community hysteria, as if all their minds went blinko *en masse*. I suppose it's the kind of thing that could happen only in France."

March, the American doctor, didn't think so. "Mass hysteria isn't neces-

Legionnaire Thibaut Corday tells of Darkest Africa in the days of Stanley and Livingstone

sarily French. There are hundreds of cases where one person going off the handle will take the whole crowd along, like the bad apple spoiling the barrel. The human mind is as touchy and delicate as a radio. We haven't begun to find out what shuts it off or turns it back on—nobody knows just where your mental balance is—but I've always had an idea one man's brain is telepathically connected with another's. For example," the doctor laughed, "suppose you bottled the group of us up with a crazy man for some length of time. Ten to one, sooner or later he'd drive the rest of us crazy. Maybe crazier than he was."

Old Thibaut Corday did not laugh. Blue gleams flickered fiercely under his mustache-thick eyebrows as he cuffed a wine stain from his cinnamon-bearded mouth and broke into the conversation with, *"Sacré!"* The old Frenchman tapped the doctor's knuckles vehemently. "That was a smart observation for you to make, *monsieur*—about nobody knowing what shuts off the mind and turns it back on, and how one crazy man might drive those bottled up with him mad, perhaps madder than he. I think I can back up that observation with experience. *Bleu!* I know I can."

"You mean you were once closely associated with a lunatic?" Baker asked.

"Myself, and about twenty others. For weeks we rubbed elbows with a man," old Thibaut Corday chose his words with careful emphasis, "whose every act was crazy as a hoot-owl's. His eyes were like the windows of a haunted house. His laughter was a yell from a nightmare. One minute he was helpless as a baby, and the next he was as cunning as a crocodile. For weeks, I say, we had to live with him. It was a terrible companionship."

"And did he drive you crazy?" the young British agent grinned.

"Who knows when one is crazy or not?" Old Thibaut Corday snapped. "It is not a grinning matter, either; nor is insanity peculiar to the French. There were Germans, Poles, Danes, an American—*oui,* and one of your sacred English, too—in the party I speak of. And they lost their heads just as quickly as I did. We must have gone crazy. That fool in our midst drove us all as mad as March hares, and in the end I am sure we were ten times as crazy as he was. Listen: did you ever know that Noah, Abraham Lincoln, Judas Iscariot and the Czar of Russia were in the French Foreign Legion? Order some cognac, *messieurs,* and I will tell you of the time I was a homicidal maniac."

His two companions ordered cognac. Old Thibaut Corday sniffed his glass suspiciously; then swallowed its solace at a gulp. Beyond the café awning, Algiers was lavender in twilight; and the eyes of the oldest Foreign Legion veteran in Africa seemed covered with cobwebs as his voice spun from memory one of the maddest exploits in his soldier-of-fortune career.

IF YOU'VE heard of the French Foreign Legion, then you have heard the expression, *cafard.* Literally the word means carting—to go around ranting a lot of hypocritical chatter. In Legion idiom, though, it implies a demented state of mind. Let-down. Low morale. What is the American slang—to have the jitters? That is *cafard.* When a Legionnaire goes to pieces from monotony in a desert outpost, too much discipline, too much marching around in a circle. Then he blows up and tries to snatch the tonsils out of the captain's throat, or he goes over the wall—desertion.

When I first enlisted in our sacred Army of the Damned I was sent down to French Guinea between Senegal and the Ivory Coast, and there was plenty of *cafard* in that place. It was Africa with a capital A, which means jungle with a capital J, and that jungle was capital H-E-L-L. You marched into a blockhouse on the Konkure River and sat down to wait. Nothing happened except the mosquitoes. There wasn't any fighting because the natives of that green wilderness were all tired out from the heat by the time they were six years old. There weren't any moving-picture shows. After a year it got boresome. A Legionnaire would kick his commandant in the seat just for something to do. Or he would get to remembering the theatres along the Potsdamerstrasse in Berlin or the cafés along the Cannebiere in Marseilles, and he would start to walk home. It was a long walk from French Guinea, too. Those deserters never got very far. The natives were not too tired to chop up a white man when they caught him alone. The jungle was a trap in itself. Or the Legion patrols would catch them and teach them a lesson with the firing squad.

But there were many desertions from Legion outposts in French Guinea just the same, along with mutiny and other

gestures of *cafard*. So it was expressly for the sake of keeping us happy and busy that General Headquarters gave our company something to do. The exercise might do us good. I have to laugh now when I think of it. It was to keep us all in good mental trim that Captain Falloir was ordered to take us out on that expedition to hunt for a lost explorer. Ha ha ha.

In those day people looked for lost African explorers the way they look for missing trans-Atlantic flyers today. It was the fashion of the time—that wasn't so long ago, either—for scientists, millionaire sportsmen and cranks to get themselves lost in the Congo or somewhere, and have an expedition look for them. Sometimes there was a happy ending.

Alors, the one missing this time was a crank, a sensation-seeker, a big-bug social lion famed for his exploits in the elegant salons of Europe as well as the dark corners of Africa. The Duc d'Ormonde. When this duke was not hunting countesses in Paris or Vienna, he was hunting the Mountains of the Moon in Madagascar or Abyssinia. He had been with Bouchette in Somaliland, and with the great Du Challu after gorilla. He was related to the line of Napoleon. He had gone into the interior of French Guinea the year before; become detached from his *safari* and never came out.

Captain Falloir read us these brief details at assembly, explaining that our Legion detachment was to march for the interior and scout around in the limberlost, looking for the duke. The government was offering a hundred thousand francs to the party that located the explorer. Our outfit might come into the prize money. Any man who did not wish to go could remain behind on garrison duty.

NOBODY remained behind on garrison duty. Those hundred thousand francs glittered before our eyeballs as we started off through the French Guinea jungle. *Oui,* they did! We would have sought the Devil in Paradise Lost for that amount, and a jaunt to the interior would be a nice little hike with that bonus at the end. We could picture the Duc d'Ormonde sitting in the middle of Nowhere under a big shade tree. We would walk up with outstretched hand. "Doctor Livingstone, I believe." You know the scene. Henry M. Stanley was the hero of those days, and we Legion curs wanted to emulate him. That glittering reward had spurred our imaginations.

Then something else glittered before our eyes. Jungle! Green, green, green! Miles of it! Seas of it! Our little column walked into that ocean of equatorial green, and it drank us up as the Atlantic would absorb a trickle of sand. Swamps. Mucklands. Fever. It was the devil of a jungle. It was that. In a week of savage pushing we were only a hundred miles from our outpost on the coast, and that explorer had lost himself in the Beledugu country near the Niger River, about five hundred miles farther north. And already we were off the map. Do you know that feeling of being off the map? Of being in a place that is not on the charts back home, a place where you do not know where you are? It is a queer feeling, and there are not many places where you can have it any more. Like being blind with your eyes open. That French Guinea interior gave one that feeling.

Plants steamed and gasped under the airless surface of that green ocean. Vines writhed and clung together in suffocation. Nothing moved in all that jungle-drowned wilderness except us. The silence grew at every kilometer.

We saw no animals, no evidence of human life. For the past two days we might have been groping our way through a land that out-dated Adam and the dinosaur—Eden as it was before the gardener put in fig trees and an apple orchard.

"What are we doing here?" I panted to my *copain,* Yankee Bill the Elephant, as our column fought its way up a valley of plants that seemed to be made of green chewing gum. "I thought we were looking for the Duc d'Ormonde. There is nobody in this part of Africa. No one has ever been here before or will be here again. Why do we try to find a man in a place where there isn't anybody?"

That seemed like logical reasoning in that silent, sweltering limberlost, but I was wrong in my deductions. That night we found a man. Or, rather, he found us. Bivouacked around a camp fire, we were frying our supper of monkey meat, hugging the blaze in silence because there was nothing to say in that vast black hush, and all of the sudden this man was there. He came unannounced. He might have been conjured from the wood smoke that pooled momentarily around the base of a huge baobab tree and whisked away and left him standing there on the edge of our circle, a pair of glaring eyes in the head of an apparition.

Dieu! it gave us a fright. Our fire was no more than a match flare in that bay of great trees; the night was enormous, impenetrable; in that ocean of African jungle we had thought ourselves the only human life for a million miles. And there was that man standing at Yankee Bill's elbow. The American Legionnaire gave a little jump of dismay.

"Don't do that again, mister. Why don't you knock when you come in?"

The apparition did not reply. It continued to stare at our fire with eyes like round silver moons. In a flutter of firelight its face was a skull set in a great thorny funeral-wreath of wild gray hair. There seemed to be no body behind the ribs. Impossible to tell whether the wisps that clung to its loins and legs were threads of smoke or gray rags. It looked like a mummy half out of its wrappings. A mummy that had escaped its case somewhere in Egypt and come floating down to the middle of Africa looking for something.

Zmeinogorsk, the Pole, was first to grab his rifle. "What do you want? If you are the Jew I killed in Buczacz, go back to the bottom of the Dniester River. *Szentpétery!* Go away—!"

"I didn't do it—!" That was from Charcross, the Londoner in our midst. "I swear to God, I didn't do it, Sir John! Agnes shoved that pistol into my hand, and—!"

Thousand thunders! I suppose the whole lot of that criminal Legion batch would have started a confessional before that ghost, if it had not moved. Then it wasn't any murdered Jew or Sir John. *Non!* Whatever it was, it had been starving to death, and the smell of frying meat had brought it on the wings of its nostrils. Without bothering about a napkin or invitation, that creature came out of shadow in one pantherish pounce and fell on my meat tin. Flick! and my supper was gone. So was Yankee Bill the Elephant's. So was Christianity Jensen's. *Mon Dieu!* That living skeleton emptied our wine *bidons* in three inhales, and then it sat back companionably, grinning and rubbing its bony hands and rolling its glassy eyes in thanks. We stared in astoundment and saw this piece of wreckage was a white man. About the foulest-looking white

man I had ever seen, and that goes for something when you have passed through a recruiting bureau in the French Foreign Legion. I could not begin to tell you how foul that man looked. There were some scars across his back that might have been whipped there by a cat-o'-nine-tails. Three of his upper front teeth were missing. It gave his grin a sort of urchin expression. Can you imagine an urchinish expression on a hairy skull? But his eyes were the worst. After that first glow of hunger they kindled with a new light. They looked as if they were planning something. As if they knew a naughty joke and wouldn't tell. As if they were full of schemes. They were extraordinary eyes.

My companions did not notice the eyes. They crowded around him, blurting questions, but they could not get much out of him. At first it seemed he could not understand any language. until Brükker, the squat Wurttemburger, spoke to him in German. Then he answered, *"Ja, ja, ja."* It appeared he could understand a little *Platt-deutsch*—Low German. He could not tell us how the scars came on his back, or what he was doing in that God-forgotten jungle. He could not tell us where he was from. He had come, he finally managed to explain, from "that way," which was South, in the direction of the Ivory Coast. He chuckled. He did not want to go back there.

It was funny none of us thought to ask him who he was until Captain Falloir, hearing the commotion, came stalking out of his tent beyond the baobab grove. "What have you got there? Sacred pipe! Is that a man?" He stopped in his tracks; stared at that jungle hobo, thunderstruck. But that captain was a quick, sharp officer. *"Dieu!*—he does not look quite bright."

All the gamin mischief had gone out of the mummy-man's eyes at sight of our officer's uniform. For a moment they had flickered with the terror of a frightened animal. On the instant of the captain's speech, they were cunning again. Captain Falloir brushed the rest of us aside; darted forward and caught that scarecrow by the scruff.

"Who are you? What is your name?"

The fellow seemed to understand that. He said his name was Noah.

"Noah what?"

He shook his scraggy head. Just Noah.

"How did you get here?"

I think his answer to that took the captain by surprise. He thought about it for a while, then gave the answer in French. "On the Ark!"

Ah, la, la, that was funny. It was very funny. Coming unexpectedly, and the fellow looking like Noah, too—Noah as he might have looked if he had been wandering around without anything to eat since the Bible. Ha ha ha! It doubled up those amusement-hungry Legionnaires as Bo-Bo would have rolled them in the aisles of the Moulin Bleu. It was a relief after that ghostly appearance, and they clung to each other shouting, convulsed, prodding each other in the ribs, loosening the strings of their nerves in a roar of mirth. Now one understood the mischief in those brilliant eyes. The fellow was a humorist, a clown. Even the discipline on our captain's face had to crack into a grin. What is the American expression? *Eh bien*—it brought down the house.

And that was out last laugh for a long time, my friends. Right in the middle of our hilarity that Monsieur Noah joined in with some hilarity of his own. He threw back his head and

let go at the sky. *Yaaah—yaaah—yaaah—!* Have you ever heard a jackal howling at the moon—the wail of a train whistle late at night—the screech of a tickled parrot—the hysterical sobbing of a widow beside an open grave in a cemetery? By Saint Anthony's Shroud—that laughter was all those sounds rolled into one. It froze us to the marrow of our bones. We stood in icy horror. There wasn't any brain behind that laugh!

II

A MADMAN! *Messieurs,* to tell about it now, on this safe-and-sane boulevard with a glass of cognac in my hand and a gendarme on the corner—it sounds like nothing. But it sounded like something down there in the black heart of Africa, the night standing around like solid ebony, the jungle as trackless as the Sahara, the world of things we knew a million miles away. Never could I describe the sound of that maniacal screech. *Jamais de la vie!* The mad laugh of old Ben Gunn in *Treasure Island* was nothing in comparison. The laugh of that castaway in our midst climbed a dank stairway out of hell and hooted off in diabolic obbligato across the jungle. I said it was a sob and a screech at the same time, with a jackal in it, too. There was a goat's *baa* in it, besides—a goat that walked on its hind legs with vine leaves in its horns—and it reached the top of the scale on a windy *whaaa* like a blast from a witch's trumpet. But I cannot describe that laugh. Even though I got to know it as one knows the bondage of some clinging bugbear—like a goiter—some familiar menace that one cannot shake off, that follows one around.

"Blood of a hangman!" the captain sweated out, "the fellow is as crazy as a cockroach. *Mon Dieu,* do not make him laugh like that again!"

"He's lost some of his buttons, all right," Yankee Bill the Elephant shivered. "If he yips like that once more I won't sleep for a week."

We were all cooled off by that time, I can promise you. Not a man of us who hadn't edged around to the other side of the fire from that merry-maker, keeping our hands within grabbing distance of our rifles. Having laughed the rest of us sick, the scarecrow had turned his back on us, and was now making mud pies in the soft loam under the baobab tree.

"Look!" Captain Falloir shouted at him. "Look, you! Turn around!"

Slowly the creature wheeled on his haunches. Every last mite of expression had washed from his skull-face. The socketed eyes were like the painted unwinking stare of a picture. Blank. Like catalepsy.

"That man has had some kind of shock," Captain Falloir said in a low voice. "I studied three years of medicine before I joined this cursed army. That look like psychic trauma. He has had some terrible experience and lost his head." The captain walked close to the crouching figure, and shouted down. "You! How did you get here? Who are you? Try to remember!"

The eyes continued their empty stare, but the mouth spoke. To our astonishment it answered this time in English. "My name is Lincoln."

"Now we are getting somewhere." The captain's tone was kindly, urging. "Perhaps you can give us your full name, Mister Lincoln."

"Abraham Lincoln."

We did not laugh this time. *Non!* Captain Falloir clutched his forehead in a gesture of despair, and Abraham

Lincoln squattered around to his mud pies. The captain motioned us aside into a confidential group, away from the fire. "That man does not know who he is. He speaks three languages, but I think he is English. Sometimes treatment can cure that type, or perhaps a shock similar to the one he had can bring him to his senses. He has suffered much exposure, and in the present state is harmless. Perhaps after food and a night's sleep he will recover. Perhaps not. *"Sacré Dieu!"*

"But what are we going to do with him?" someone gasped.

"We can't leave him here," the captain snapped. "And it is too far to take him back to the coast. We have got to take him with us."

Well, that was something our little explorer-hunting expedition had not bargained on. That sort of mascot! But Captain Falloir had the kind of jaw that checked any protest; duty was duty to that French officer; he would leave no stray behind in the jungle to die. *Voilà!* This was an army of France. Someone must have an extra pair of *brodequins* for the scarecrow. There was a canvas tunic on the pack mule. In the end we all chipped in, a shirt here, a belt there, a *bidon,* a mess kit, to outfit the idiot with a uniform. After all, Legionnaires are human.

But that mummy-man out of the jungle was not human! Once in uniform he gave an almost rational appearance—no more ratty-looking and scar-faced than some others in our company—but there his humanity ended. We hoped he would sleep that night and be all right in the morning. Name of a Name!—about midnight he woke up and turned his face to the moon and for ten minutes howled like a wolf. About dawn he uncorked that fiendish laugh again. In the blackness with the fire out, it froze us solid on our blankets and the poor guards posted on the skirts of our camp put their fingers in their ears and wept at him to stop. *Sapristi!* The good captain tried to question him that morning, and the madman said his name was Judas Iscariot.

WE MARCHED off that morning with Judas Iscariot between Yankee Bill the Elephant and me, rattling off a lot of nonsense about our kindness and how he was going to repay us with thirty pieces of silver. Marching seemed to quiet him. It quieted his talk, but it didn't quiet his eyes. Every once in a while he would screw his head around and give me a stare from those blank eyeballs, eyeballs that looked like open camera lenses without any film behind them. Without warning that noon, where we had halted for the captain to study a compass, he walked up to me, clicked his heels together, bowed. Very calmly he tore a button from his tunic and handed it to me with a spew of gibberish I could not understand.

"He is speaking Russian!" gasped Zmeinogorsk, the Pole. "He is decorating you with the Order of Saint Andrew. He says he is Nicholas Romanoff!"

All that afternoon on the march he kept it up. He was King Menelik of Abyssinia at three o'clock, and at sundown he was posturing and striking the fierce attitudes of Frederick of Prussia. He would go into those parts and play them, you understand. Sputtering, clutching his wild hair, rolling his eyes, sticking out his tongue; in several instances—Frederick of Prussia, for example—his grimaces were a horrible caricature of a portrait he must have seen, the more gruesome for

the pompous, scowling resemblance.

Those antics we might have tolerated, but that impersonator was not satisfied with a little fun. At intervals of about every two hours he had to stop and let off steam with that terrible yah-yah-yah. It was not the sort of sound you could become indifferent to. At each repetition it seemed to grow worse, and it made the sweat gush out on the foreheads of my companions (and my own forehead also!) as our little Legion band struggled single file through that steaming green wilderness.

"Holly calliope!" Yankee Bill the Elephant gave me from the side of his mouth at our mess that night. "It gives me a creep to have that nut marching behind me. No telling what a crackpot out of his head like that is going to do next. How do we know he may not take it into his noggin he's Jack the Ripper or somebody, and dig a hidden knife into my spine?"

"Look at him over there," Christianity Jensen whispered. "Playing paddy-cake with the shadows on his knees like a little child."

"By Sebastopol's Holy Bones!" a Corsican growled at my left, "every time that comedian looks at me I feel as if Old Madam Death had just knitted my name in her black scarf and the Hand was waiting to fall on me. Do you notice how his eyes keep rolling? They are never still."

Charcross, the Legionnaire from London, pulled a sleeve across his mouth. "It's a dashed rotten thing to go insane. You aren't a man, because you haven't any soul—when you're insane you've lost your soul, that's what. But you're not dead, either. You keep on goin' like that blinkin' idiot over there, not knowin' whether you're alive or dead or—"

"Like a vampire," Titelescu, the black-bearded Rumanian put in, edging back from the fire with his Lebel rifle. "Like a vampire that leaves its coffin at night and drinks from the veins of beautiful girls. That madman over there has the eyes of a vampire."

Charcross muttered, "I once had an aunt that went insane. At a finger-snap. All of the sudden just like that. She was on her way to the races at Epsom Downs and all the sudden she jumped from her carriage, climbed a farmer's fence and jumped on the back of a cow, shrieking she was a jockey going to win the Irish Sweepstakes. Died in a dashed asylum, mad as a hatter. In the blood, I suppose." That Englishman's face went suddenly white. "The trouble is, you can't tell when you're daffy. You don't know when you're mad and when you're not. Mad people always think they're sane. That blighter over there thinks he's right as rain."

"Eyes like a vampire," the Rumanian repeated in a basso voice.

At that moment the creature across from us uncorked one of his screaming laughs, and every Legion dog in that camp went back on his heels in cold fright. That little fireside chat with the jungle shadows close around, the African blackness shutting us in on all sides, a feel of isolation in the middle of Nowhere fingering our skins—that little chat had not been good for tired nerves. A mad scream, then, was like somebody jumping out from behind a door. It brought Captain Fallior storming out of his tent. He bellowed at the madman to be quiet, then whirled at his white-faced company.

"What the devil is wrong with you? Sheath those bayonets. Attend to what I say, you species of jackrabbits! The next soldier who draws a bayonet on this poor fool will go back to the coast

under arrest. This cerelict is under the protection of the flag of France. Can't you see the creature is harmless?"

HARMLESS? Ah, that he was, so far as physical threat was concerned. Those first weeks he was among us, any Legionnaire in the party could have broken the clapperclaw to kindling. Also he was unarmed. But now I am coming to the point of these recollections, the point about a mysterious connection between the minds of men —what is it that unbalances the little pinch of gray matter we carry under our scalps—the point about the bad apple in the barrel. Maybe an idiot is harmless as a baby physically, but mentally that man who seemed to have no brain in his skull was as dangerous as a plague.

We feared him because we had no common touch with him, no way to reach the thing inside him, if you will —the human bond that sparks inside all men to make them brothers under the skin, so that an Esquimaux and a Zulu meeting somewhere on a star might recognize relationship and become friends. We feared him as the Unknowable. His meaningless stare was a barrier, and his laugh would have upset the poise of a statue, not to mention soldiers on a holiday excursion supposed to relieve them of *cafard*. Worst of all, he inspired a morbid train of thought. That remark of the Britisher's: "You don't know when you're mad and when you're not."

Did you ever read *The Nigger of the Narcussus?* That is a wonderful book of Conrad's. It tells of a black man dying on shipboard of consumption; throughout a long voyage his impending death wrecks the state of mind of the sailors, ruins the morale. It might have been written for what we are talking about. Our explorer-hunting Legion detachment was in the same boat. Not in a ship, but at even closer quarters on a more endless, more uncharted ocean. The mental hazard with us was worse than the *Nigger*. We could not go up on deck to get away from him. And night after night the *Nigger* did not torture his companions into loss of sleep with a nightmare laugh.

Harmless? His capers, his senseless antics, his cat-eyed buffooneries grew more unbearable every day. With the wits of one insane, he took to annoying us, teasing us, stealing little things from our kits. Tobacco. Soap. We did not see him pick our pockets, but we knew. At any hour he might frazzle our sensibilities with his blood-curdling, wizardish hilarity. Again he changed mood and personality, went galloping down our staggering line of march, flapping his arms at his sides as General Wellington. Shouted and cursed at unseen sailors as Christopher Columbus. Made a horn of his fists and stamped around our campfire, announcing himself the Angel Gabriel.

Captain Falloir did not suffer as we did. By day he rode ahead on horseback with the guides, by night he had the privacy of his tent. "Forget him!" he tongue-lashed one of the sergeants who complained. "He does no harm, does he? At all events, we leave no man in this unmapped jungle to die. He goes with us, and those Legionnaires do not molest him, that is final." That same night he summoned the company before his tent. "I am sick of all this trouble over a half-wit. What is wrong with you dogs? Have you forgotten the hundred thousand francs offered by the French government to the party who finds the lost Duc d'Or-

monde? In a few days we should be near the country where the explorer disappeared."

He tried to fire us with enthusiasm, telling us of the duke. The Duc d'Ormonde came of a great French family, all the men of which, because of relationship to the line of Napoleon, had the Napoleonic eagle tattooed under the right armpit. The Duc d'Ormonde was one of France's greatest adventurers. A great honor to the Foreign Legion if we could find him. It was a stirring speech Captain Falloir made. It was all right.

Our enthusiasm might indeed have been fired, if different things had not happened. After midnight that maniac with us rifled our kits again. Stole the laces from my boots. Buttons and a packet of needles from Christianity Jensen's repair kit. Zmeinogorsk's medallion of Saint Christopher. The Pole caught him at it and started to beat him, and his screams brought Captain Falloir thundering to stop the row. Yankee Bill sided with the Pole, and the captain knocked him down. Mutiny almost broke out. During the rumpus the screeching idiot dashed into the jungle and laughed at the moon from a distance all that night. In the morning he was back in camp, hair smeared with mud, pockets crammed with little blue berries, face smeared indigo with the juice.

That was the morning our column, looking for a lost explorer, got lost. Our expedition got lost because the Beledugu guides leading us deserted and left us somewhere off the African map. That was the morning Charcross stopped suddenly beside a baobab tree and shot himself through the head. That was the day Titelescu, the Rumanian, whispered to me in a steamy voice, "My friend, I keep hearing voices in my ears. I think I am losing my mind." At the fore of the column our cursed jungle orphan was telling Captain Falloir he was Julius Caesar and would like to lead our expedition. *Cochon!*—we hated him by that time. Hated him as a creeping, beastly plague. He had skipped off into the jungle and laughed as we buried Charcross under the baobab trees.

OUR complaints to the captain did no good He was a smart, hard officer, but there were some things he could not see. He was as stubborn as the statue of General Carnôt that guards the square overlooking this boulevard. He did not realize it was the antics of his ward which had made Charcross recall bad inheritance and blow out his brains.

You begin to see how it went? That laughing hyena knew the captain was bound to protect him, and his tormenting didoes continued. By day he would skip along the line of marching, leaping between the trees, running off and coming back with new ideas to unnerve us. By night he would go by himself into the jungle and bay at the moon. Physically he had improved two hundred percent, wolfing our rations without stint, squaring up to fill his uniform, a lithe, hard-muscled animal in Legionnaire costume, with skinned grapes for eyes. Mile after mile as we slogged through the endless green that fiend was in our company. *Alors,* I will not tell you of the day Titelescu wandered off and did not return. Of the sergeant who walked off after the Rumanian and has not been seen from that hour to this. Of the Greek Legionnaire who suddenly whipped out a bayonet and tried to plunge it into the hyena's throat, and was shot through the fist by Captain Falloir.

"How long is this hell going on?" my American *copain* gritted at me one night. "If that maniac is with us much longer this outfit will blow up like a bomb."

How long? *Messieurs,* it went on six weeks. Forty-two days from the day we were cursed by that devil's appearance among us. Forty-two days while we had struggled to the middle of the Dark Continent. Forty-two days, and no longer. The bad apple had spoiled the barrel, *messieurs.* That forty-second night we decided the madman must be killed.

III

IT WAS the sort of night one never can drink enough cognac to forget, and I remember every detail. Our camp was where no map can ever place it (I will always wonder how we found our way back from there). A frightened moon made a wraith's face in a midnight sky. A moist, stretching haze the blue-white of cigarette smoke wisping through the jungle so that the black palms and baobabs looked like a dream forest bound in spider-webbing. In that fog it was not Africa. It was a country for ghosts to walk, and one was walking that night, too. Some distance from the camp, somewhere out in the vaporized jungle, sounded that laugh. Worse than ever in streaming mist. As if a door had blown open in an insane asylum.

I woke up cursing with the echoes in my head, and a black figure leaning over me. Brükker the German, clutching my sleeve.

"It is the last time you heard that sound, *mein Freund.* Come."

In the blackness beyond the dead campfire the whole of our company was huddled. Every man save Captain Falloir. Yankee Bill's teeth shone in the misty dark. "We're drawing lots, Corday. It's either him or us. He's driving us potty. Look at Charcross and those others. Jensen, here, can't stop crying. I'm wondering about my own brains, now. Falloir must be cracked, too, or he wouldn't be saving that hyena. He'll slip the belts off all our flywheels. Do you hear him out there?"

"I hear him." My ears were curdling.

"It's to be with a knife. Quiet, so the captain won't hear. Short man goes. It's your draw, Corday."

Will you believe I was not sorry to draw the short straw? I tell you, I was glad. I wanted to do it. I was off in the white-steamed jungle on the trail of that hyena laugh as a panther stalks its lunch. It did not take me long to find it, *messieurs.* When you want a man as badly as that a quarter of a mile is not far. I crept out of a thicket of white-webbed palms, and he was crouching on what seemed to be a grassy knoll, caterwauling at the shrouded moon.

I could see him crouching in that opalescent mist like a shadow-wolf squatting on a cloud. "I am going to kill you," I explained to myself and the listening God. "Soldiers kill men who are sane, and for less cause. As you are, you are worse than dead. I am going to kill you before you destroy the rest of us with that laugh, drive us all to insanity!"

He couldn't have heard me, because I whispered that death-sentence in my mind. But his laughter stopped halfway up that stairway in his throat; choked off as if by a hand. He must have felt me coming. My presence got to him on the writhing tentacles of fog, and he spun like a tense leopard, catching a scent.

He saw me! I could see his eyes shining through the mist, and some sixth sense told him what I was there for. He knew. Perhaps he read it in the tension of my bunched shoulders, spring-bent knees, braced boots. Perhaps he saw it in my eyes which must have been shining through that fog at him just as his were at me. I think my eyes were every bit as mad as his, right then. I am certain they were. I was going to murder him in cold blood without giving him a chance to defend himself, and no sane man takes another man's life like that, no matter what the provocation. But that werewolf howling had snapped a little wire in the back of my brain—I was crazier than he was—and with that laugh in my ears I could have pulled the voice-box out of his throat with my fingers as one rips the gizzard from a plucked chicken.

For he was mad—and his driving lunacy had made me mad, too.

He never gave me a chance! Sacred heaven!—it was my own throat that got a plucking, at that moment. Lightning quick, giving no warning, the devil I had stalked to kill sprang ten feet across the ground at one leap to reach my neck. For the moonshine gleam of his eyes had turned to dazzling terror as they read the homicide in mine, and from terror they had blazed to tiger fury. The tiger fury of a carnivore with its back to a wall. A beastly ululation poured from his throat, and he was on me ravening. He struck me with the impact of the Marseilles Express, with such terrific suddenness I was thrown to the ground like a bull-fighter, my knife sailing off in the fog and the breath gored out of me before I knew what had hit me. His hands got my windpipe in the grip of a garrote.

TO this day I can feel the crush of those tightening hands on my neck, and I finger my collar tenderly, thanking my patron saint for the favor of being alive. I got a choking that night, *messieurs!* That fiend on top of me had the strength of a maniac in his fingers, the strength of ten maniacs. With that terrible power which can only come from insanity or the fear of death—with that power, and the practiced thumbs of a garrotter, he set to wringing the head from my shoulders. He shut off my breath. He squeezed the tongue from my face. Almost he crushed the core from my Adam's apple. I got a first-class pinching, I can tell you.

But I was a madman fighting for my life, too, and when I realized I was being strangled to death, I didn't just lie there. Somehow I got my fingers on his wrists and tore my throat free of those hands. Ah, we fought, then! Boot, tooth and nail. Berserk! Locked together like jungle cats, eyes an inch apart, the breath of one going into the other, rolling around in the dreadful obscurity of moonlight and vapor as one single body fallen in a convulsion of hate.

I might have unlimbered my pistol, but at the first I dared not shoot, fearing to arouse the night and bring the captain, hoping somehow to recover the knife. But the knife did not seem to be anywhere on the ground—whirled from my grip, it might have been absorbed by the moon-shot whiteness—and then when I did want to shoot, that devil had my arms pinned in the hug of a gorilla; he was crushing my body as he had crushed my throat; breaking me in his grip as if I were a bushel basket.

Oui, he had filled out a lot since first we had seen him as Old Man Noah.

Stuffing for six weeks on our rations he had turned into Samson. His arms could have toppled a building. If I had not remembered a little trick a wrestler in Dijon had taught to me to do with my knees, I would have been mashed like a sack of potatoes. With my knee in his solar plexus he could not kill me. That memory came to me just as I was dying. I knew I must be dying because I could no longer feel the ground under my head. My shoulders were plastered on ground as hard as rock, but my head seemed to be hanging loose with nothing under it, hanging out in space.

Slamming my knee into my murderer's stomach, I managed to loosen his clutch long enough for a sidewise glance. *Dieu!* Never will I forget what I saw then. Never, never, never! My head was hanging out into space. Actual space! Do you know how it would be if you were rolling along the flat roof of a building with your body on the roof and your head out over the street? Like that, it was. Only I wasn't on the edge of any building. There was not any street down below. There was a sheer rock wall, if you can picture it, that dropped down, down, down, far and farther still into a valley that seemed to be at the bottom of the world.

What chasm that was, and what a sensation I had when I looked out over the overhang at its top! Moonlight shafted through the clouds we were in and fell down that chasm wall a sheer mile. It was the place where the world came to its sky-bound edge. A giant trench that marked the boundary between earth and terrestrial infinity. The eye could hardly see the trees at the bottom. A river was a thread of silver. I would like to know what ancient upheaval had sliced that chasm out of Africa. There is a line from Kipling, I think, which suits the situation on the rim of that precipice. "With a drop into nothing below him, as far as a beggar could spit." *Bleu!*—at any time a look down that moony gulch would have made your head swim. Some pebbles rolled out from under my shoulders and disappeared to specks in the dropping moonlight, and I saw where my knife had disappeared to, and my head swam like a million fish in a globe. The mist had hidden our view of that drop. The mist wasn't fog but cloud vapor, and for the past ten minutes I had been fighting a madman along the edge of the sky. *Non,* I was still fighting him!

I PULLED my face away from that overhang with a yell. Didn't I fight then! He had stopped for a second to look over that precipice, too, and now he slugged and gouged to get me over that edge. I fought him slug for gouge, bursting with the terror of that yawning Nothingness along which we rolled. I hate to think of the way we battled, clawed, wrestled through silver vapors along the edge of that drop. The gravity of that chasm pulled one towards it like a magnet. One misstep would have been farewell. Sometimes in my dreams I fall down that thing, and I wake up hollering with the sweat of terror on my face. It makes me sweat now to tell of how we waltzed and spun on the cloudy overhang of that high place like ants fighting on the cornice of a building.

And I suppose because I am here to tell it now, you believe you know how that fight ended. I do not believe you do. We were talking about the tricky minds of men, you will remember—what may shut off the mind and turn it back on, and how one mentality

may ruin a lot of others like a bad apple in a barrel—eh?—this is not the story of a fight. *Naturellement,* I did not go over that edge—I preferred choking to death at the hands of a maniac a thousand times, and I clung to my assailant like a brother. He tried to break my hold, tried to make me go so he might shove me over. He put his thumbs against my eyeballs, pushing, but I stopped that treatment by sinking my teeth in his arm. In desperation he clawed my face; we broke, came together, fell back, charged like fiends. Our clothes were red rags. Our beards dripped. Lungs panting as broken engines. Faces battered green. I do not know what I looked like, but my enemy was a Gorgon, a thing out of nightmare, a scarlet-mouthed monster with two blazing yellow eyes.

The chasm in outer mist was a good thing, in a way. Otherwise I might have let that villain kill me. The chasm made me exert myself. I have faced bullets and bayonets and Arab knives; on the battle field the Grim Reaper has given me many close shaves, but I have never been as afraid of anything as I was of that awful verge. It was like extinction. We do not want to die, but if we must we like to think of ourselves as laid out in full-dress uniform with coffin and first-class funeral drapes, something for people to look at and say, "How natural." Secret in all of us is the feeling that we are going to turn up in the Hereafter in pretty much the physical form of our earthly being. It is a silly but common phantasy. And the man who fell into that gorge would drop off into Nothing. Nothing!

I do not know how long I fought in that breath-of-death mist atop that jumping-off-place, inspired by a frenzy of terror to save myself from going over. To say the less of it, fright loaned me muscle, inspired me with cunning. "Captain Falloir!" I screamed, suddenly shooting my glance into the creaming gloom behind that manaic's shoulder. "Come on, Captain Falloir! Hit him from behind—!"

It worked. For half a second those yellow eyes switched their focus as, in a jerk of reflex action, the animal turned his head to look. Enough! In that whisk I had out my gun. There was no time to fire an aimed shot. He rushed me with a caterwaul, and I whipped the heavy barrel down slashing on his scalp. As he slid down the front of me, I kept pounding his head. I battered the rats out of that one's belfry, I can tell you. *Whack! Whack! Whack!* I saw the mad lights go out of his eyes. I saw him sluff to the earth and roll out into the moonlight on the rim of the precipice, and stop there by God knows what unconscious instinct, one arm across his eyes, the other arm hanging over.

I saw him hang there unconscious on the rim of Eternity, and it made me so sick I sprawled flat on the ground, afraid to move an inch toward that vast gulch of space. And then I saw something else. A glint of rifle barrels in the cloud-banks to my left. Shadows running. Captain Falloir bounding up like a fireman coming through dense smoke.

"Go back! Go back!" I screamed. "The chasm—!"

THAT captain was a brave man. He went over me in a leap, and right to the edge of that void to snatch the unconscious man away from its pulling gravity. He would have risked his life for an insane man. He dragged the sodden body thirty feet back to

safety, to a patch of ground where the vapors had cleared and the moonlight came through, and left me to follow on my hands and knees. Do you know what I thought? I thought that miserable man was dead, and my mind was so twisted that I was going to pour out a lie and say the crazed brute had attacked me without warning and tried to chuck me over the cliff. I never told that lie. I never told it because that devil was not dead, his wild mop of hair had protected his skull and my punished arm had not struck the blows I had thought. In fact, he was in better condition than I. The captain emptied a canteen in his face, and he rolled over on his side on the ground, and spoke first.

The brute's eyes were not yet open, but his fingers were sleep-walking over his face and up into his clotted hair, and his swollen lips mumbled. Can you guess what they said? I do not think so. What they said turned the Legionnaires crowding around to a ring of wooden images in the moonlight; brought the captain down on one knee; paralyzed me flat on the earth.

They said: "Where is my *safari?* Doctor Duchapelle—where are you? Edouard—? Achille—?" It was not a voice we had heard before. Rousing from a mumble, it came out haughty, crisp, the highly-bred accents of an effete Parisian Frenchman. "Why—why, *mon Dieu!*—how did all these filthy rags come on me?"

He was sitting bolt upright, clutching his scalp, staring at us with wide, astounded eyes.

"Who are you?" Captain Falloir gasped.

His glare was a weird parody of wrath, astonishment, dizziness, haughteur. "Who the devil do you think I am—must I introduce myself, then?" What a scene it made as he swayed up to his feet—that pounded derelict with an aristocratic stare. "I am the Duc d'Ormonde, *monsieur.* And who are you?"

"Captain Falloir, second regiment *Étrangère,* in command of special detachment from the Post Twenty-One, Konkure River." The captain's voice was husky. It was very husky. "Do you know how you come here, monsieur le duc?"

"Why—I seem to remember a hunting expedition. . . . Of course! I was stalking a lion in high ground—no, I fell over a cliff—that is it!—and tonight there was a cliff again—I was attacked—a man—a soldier came at me with a knife—*that one—!*"

Mother of heaven! I saw his finger pointed straight at me. An accusation of murder in that point. That was not all I saw in that moon mist, either. I saw myself on the way to Devil's Island. In the penal cells of New Caledonia. On the bascule under the Guillotine! I had tried to kill the Duc d'Ormonde. Knocked sane by that first bash on the skull, he had seen me beating him. I had committed murderous assault on the lost explorer the government had sent us out to find. A duke of the family of Napoleon. As the very least I would get the Guillotine!

CAPTAIN FALLOIR dealt me a black-eyed glance of savagery; returned his stunned gaze to the man who was tilting on his feet. "This is a miracle, *monsieur.* We found you wandering in the jungle. Your mind is clear?"

"Certainly it is clear. I tell you, I am the Duc d'Ormonde—"

"Louis - Celestin Albert Xavier Pierre Joseph Antoine, Duc d'Or-

monde related to the line of Napoleon?"

"But of course I am."

"Forgive a last query, asked only because of these incredible circumstances. Doubtless the Duc d'Ormonde can furnish proof of his identity."

"Certainly." He rolled back a bloodied sleeve; rubbed grime from his arm. There, on the underside of the arm, close to the armpit, where we had not seen it before under a crust of dirt, was a faint blue eagle printed on the skin. *"Voilà!* the tattoo of my family crest. Now I am ill, Captain Falloir. I need food, medical aid, a tent. But first I demand we proceed with a military indictment of murder, attempted by that—"

"One indictment at a time, *monsieur."* Captain Falloir was at rigid attention. What was this? If I live to be a thousand and three, I, Thibaut Corday, will never forget what happened then. Captain Falloir was at rigid attention; then his hand went into the breast of his tunic, flicked out a yellow dispatch-paper.

"One indictment at a time. Perhaps the Duc d'Ormonde is quite unaware that the *Bureau de Sûreté,* acting on the death-bed confession of the Countess d'Herault (who died in Biarritz shortly after the duke was reported missing in Africa)—the *Bureau,* acting on that confession, wants the duke for the murder of the Count d'Herault, Commanding General of the French Fortress at Verdun six years ago. For your apprehension, *monsieur,* there is a government reward of one hundred thousand francs. Since there is no denying the evidence of the tattoo, you are my prisoner. In the name of France I arrest you for murder."

I wish you could have seen the eyes in that skull-face when they heard that little speech. All the blow-torch madness that had been in them before was nothing to the glow in them, then. And the laugh! The laugh that screeched out of his throat when the captain's words finally penetrated his brain, the laugh that howled up into the moon-silvered whiteness and fled away in echo like a witch on a broom. It was worse than insane. It was a howl from hell. It was Satan.

And as Satan, he sprang. I do not know how he got the gun. Snatched it from the stunned hand of a Legionnaire, doubtless. There was a Lebel in his grip, that is all. He was firing as he backed off in the mist. Firing as he dimmed off in that whiteness like a shadow dissolving in steam. He shot Christianity Jensen in the foot. Blasted a hole through Zmeinogorsk's shoulder. Shot the pistol from Captain Falloir's hand. That was all. In the middle of his fusillade, he let out a scream. Fire tongues stopped licking vapor. His shadow wasn't there. Simply, he vanished.

For a moment we were frozen—held completely immobile by the nightmare of that dreadful, chilling circumstance.

We rushed to the place he had vanished, and we found ourselves clawing the cloud-hidden rim of that chasm to Eternity, clawing the wet grass tufts on that awful overhang as our bellies hugged the ground to keep from going over. He was still falling. Turning over and over as he went down through moonlight. He continued to fall. Halfway down he looked no bigger than a bird, and many seconds after that he was about the size of a bee. Far at the bottom of that drop-off were some microscopic trees and a scatter of tiny rocks. Then on one of the rocks there was a drop of blood.

IV

OLD Thibaut Corday's face was wet, and when he quit polishing it with a handkerchief, it looked as if it had been varnished. For a time it was as quiet under the café awning as if, with the abrupt stoppage of the old French veteran's voice, all other sounds had stopped. Traffic moved languorously through lampshine on Boulevard Sadi Carnot; Algiers went about its colorful, Arab-cloaked night-life, but Old Thibaut Corday's two companions did not hear it. March, the doctor, and Baker, the British consular agent, were staring at the table, At a drop of ruby wine that Baker's shaky glass had let fall to the dark-lit wood.

"Oui," the old Legion veteran spoke finally in a grim voice, "it was a drop no bigger than that. It makes me ill to think of it. I might have been that drop, myself. That scoundrel came within an ace of killing me. If I had not gone madder than he, I would have plunged down that chasm. His sanity made him too smart. He would have been a lot better off as Noah and Judas and Abraham Lincoln, I think. He should never have told us he was the Duc d'Ormonde."

"It was a piece of great luck you cracked him on the head as you did," Baker lifted his stare. "Wonderful luck! Otherwise he'd never snapped out of it like that, and you wouldn't have gotten the reward."

"We never got the reward!"

"But you found your man," March protested. "You found the Duc d'Ormonde."

"We never got the reward," Old Thibaut Corday snarled. "Listen. All the way back to the coast through that jungle hell we kept congratulating ourselves on the capture. Captain Falloir patted me on the back for having cracked that devil on the head. He said he had kept quiet about the duke being wanted for murder, fearing the word might be spread around by our guides to the natives, and the duke might get wind of it somehow and run farther into the jungle. Our only regret was that for all that five hundred mile march we had had the cursed duke with us.

"Then what? We reached our outpost on the Konkure River, and dispatched a runner to General Headquarters at Konakry. What do you think came back? More congratulations for capturing a murderer. But no hundred thousand francs. The Duc d'Ormonde had been found and captured by a Spahi regiment in southern Senegal three weeks before, and shipped to France on a transport boat in chains. That jackal we had picked up in the jungle was a deserter—a lousy Legionnaire!—who had escaped the police after butchering a corporal in an outpost farther down the coast."

"But the tattoo?" Baker cried. "The eagle on his arm . . .?"

"Do you remember I said how he ran off picking those blue berries? The nights he would creep away by himself? The packet of needles he stole? With a little berry stain and those needles—*non,* that cur had brains."

March exclaimed, "No madman could be so rationally clever!"

"Exactly," Old Thibaut Corday nodded. "So he was not a madman. He was never mad. He played he was crazy when he joined us there in the jungle because he was starving, lost. Insanity was a good disguise. It gave him a sort of power over us, too. He saw that. You will recall at the start of this account, I used the phrase, 'a man whose every act was mad'? All

those languages he had learned in the Legion mess, all those senseless antics —*oui,* it was an act. And later when he heard us talking about the lost duke, he figured he could pretend to be the explorer; as the Duc d'Ormonde, he would be waltzed back to the coast where he would have a good chance to escape. That night when I tried to beat his brains out, he knew it was time to climax the stunt. He had put on his crazy act too well, you comprehend. He did not know that as a bad apple in a barrel he would spoil the minds of the rest of us. Was I right in saying he drove the lot of us madder than he? I would have killed him that night," Old Thibaut Corday whispered, "and I wish I had. Like that!"

He brought his fist down smashing on the wine drop on the table. Then, scrubbing his hands on his handkerchief, he walked out into the night.

Last Voyage

THROUGHOUT the nation the month of October is moving day. This last October was singular in that it was not only moving day on land, but it was also moving day at sea. It was perhaps the biggest moving day the sea has ever known. With the advent of Fall 300,000 tons of shipping was moved from Staten Island to Fort Eustis, Virginia. Thirty-three great ships went South for the winter, to bask their corroding bones in the Dixie sun. Aged and decrepit, they went not under their own power. They were towed. The Coast Guard played moving man for the government, saving the Maritime Board many thousands of dollars in moving fees.

What are these pampered derelicts going South for the winter? They are souvenirs of the World War—steel-plated relics of the ships built to transport men and supplies across the Atlantic. They are not to be confused with the acres of old wooden ships of the War ship-building period that lie mouldering in Chesapeake Bay. With new wars endemic in the world the Maritime Board is selling its steel fleet fast. It can't sell munition of war to combatants, but scrap steel is another matter—and scrap makes very good bullets.

The job of towing has been a quiet but heroic one. Picture a tiny Coast Guard cutter towing a looming lightened monster of some 10,000 tons. Off the North Atlantic coast anything can happen and that the government's moving day did not make the headlines is only due to the benignity of the weather.

—*Crossen Howard*

Sandhog

By BORDEN CHASE

●

SANDHOGS—the men who burrow in the muck of river beds and sweat their lives out underground to push the tunnel forward—are a race, a clan, apart. Even their womenfolk live with a deep, unyielding, separate pride within them.

That is why Bert Saxon, tunnel-superintendent for the Paul Touchet Construction Company, cannot believe Kay McLane when she tells him that she has left the "clan" behind her. All the McLanes have been sandhogs. Now only two—her brother and her uncle—are left. And it is to bring her news of her brother's injury that Bert Saxon seeks her out once more.

Ten years before Kay McLane had been a dark-eyed, spindly-legged girl with two black braids hanging down her back; and Bert Saxon, then just an apprentice in the trade that had claimed his father's life, had been her schoolboy sweetheart.

Something of that old feeling stirs in him when he meets her again. He takes her in his arms and kisses her. She returns the kiss—and then shows him to the door. "I'm through with sandhogs, Bert," she says. "Forever. I've suffered enough for one lifetime."

BUT Bert won't give up. Learning that she is to be a guest at the home of his boss, Paul Touchet, he attends the party to meet Kay again. Touchet is interested in the girl, but he's Bert's best friend, too. To Kay, Bert represents the life she has left behind her, and Paul Touchet, brilliant, cultivated, sardonically intelligent, stands for the world she is trying to gain.

That night, Touchet announces that he intends to submit bids for a new East-River tunnel; but Bert refuses to superintend the job when he learns that Paul has taken in Gus Blaucher as his partner. Blaucher, Bert knows, is a crook and a grafter, a climber by the filthiest route. Sane men will not work for him; decent men refuse to know him.

A telephone call informs Blaucher that there has been a slide on his Fulton Street job. Blaucher is indifferent and worse. The ultimate fate of his men is of no importance

Kay watched breathless as Bert shouted orders

to him. But Bert realizes that there still may be a chance to save some of the survivors. As he turns to go, he hears a voice behind him.

"Wait, Bert!"—It is Kay—"My uncle—Joe Treadwell—was on that Fulton Street job. I'm coming with you!"

CHAPTER V

CAVE-IN

THE elevator operator started to close the door when there was a sound of hurrying heels on the tiled floor. Kay, with her silver foxes

This story began in last week's Argosy

slung over one arm, ran toward the car calling to the operator to wait. The door swung back and she stepped inside. She smiled and waved to Paul who had put out an arm as though to stop her.

"I'll phone you," she said. "Sorry to be rude."

The door closed and the car started down. Bert leaned against the handrail and looked at the girl beside him. There was a slight flush in her cheeks and her hands fumbled nervously at a needlepoint evening bag. She looked at Bert. Looked away. When they reached the street she walked with him to his car and said nothing as he raced down the drive toward the express highway. Bert's hands were tight on the wheel. He looked straight ahead and sent the car twisting about the curves with tires screaming and motor wide open. It was close to midnight and there was little traffic headed south. What few cars were on the Drive gave Bert the right of way when his hand came down on the horn button and stayed there. At Seventy-second Street he swung onto the highway and continued downtown.

The top was down and cool night air whipped against Kay's face. Tugged at her hair. Soft dark tendrils were plucked loose from the tightly coiled braids. She tilted her chin upward to keep them from her face and once, as they raced under a light, she caught Bert glancing at her from the corners of his eyes.

Kay was no fool. She knew she was a beautiful woman and she also knew tonight she had been at her best. Even now, during this wild ride along the highway her cool composure must be startling to Bert. It wasn't an act. Kay wasn't pretending. Life had schooled her in the control of her emotions. As a child she had been taught to acc death and injury to her relatives something that might come at a time. During the hard, long fight had made in the world of business had learned that a flick of an eyel might sometimes be used against h Until at length her studied calm h become as natural to her as the co stant attention she attracted fr men. It was part of Kay McLane.

When Bert swung off the highw and headed across town he cut t speed of the car and glanced at her.

"Why have you been lying to me he asked.

"Lying?"

"Yes. You said you'd run aw from the clan. Didn't want to he anything about sandhogs and didn know anything about them. But yo knew Joe Treadwell was working th Fulton Street job."

"Why shouldn't I? He's my uncle

Bert laughed shortly. "I'd been wo dering about that restaurant Joe's bee threatening to open. For the past fe years he's been trying to quit the trad I know darn well he's never saved nickel and I couldn't imagine wher the money would come from. Now know."

"Is there any harm in that?"

"None at all," he laughed. "But doesn't match the things you've bee telling me."

"Yes, it does. I saw Joe when h was on the Hudson River job—th time he lost one of his fingers on th iron. I offered to set him up in busines and I've never seen him since."

"You almost spoiled a good sand hog," said Bert. "Every time he has one too many at the corner he snaps his fingers under my nose and tells me he's going to quit. Last month, when I told him he was slowing down, he

walked off my job and went to work for Gus Blaucher."

"Joe's all right," said Kay quietly. "Next year he'll be too old to pass the medical examination for air-work. Then he'll be glad to open that restaurant. Unless—"

She was silent for a moment, thinking of the men who were trapped under a mass of fallen earth and stones at the Fulton Street job. Bert sensed the cause of her silence and took one hand from the wheel. For an instant he held it over hers, then grabbed the wheel and sent the car skidding around a corner into Broadway. Kay waited until he was in the clear before she spoke again.

"I meant everything I said to you, Bert," she said at length. "I'm out of it and I'm going to stay out. My whole life—everything I do, is as far away from the old life as I can possibly make it." She looked up at the tall buildings that made lower Broadway a narrow chasm between man-made cliffs. Lights were in some of the windows where cleaners were preparing the offices for the coming business day. Further south she saw the tall spire of Trinity pointing like a finger toward the star-filled sky. "Yes, Bert," she said, "my world is a very different one. It's filled with soft-voiced, well-dressed women and cultured men. Music, art, an occasional trip to Europe and summers on Long Island. I like it—enjoy every moment of it. Sometimes I stop in at a little church near my shop and say a few 'thank-you's' to the God that made me run away. He must like Kay McLane— He's been so good to her."

"Perhaps He does," said Bert. "I wouldn't know much about that. I'm only a sandhog."

She looked at him. "I'm not going to say what you want," she said quietly. "You've probably talked like that to a great many women. And they've tried to convince you it was wrong. They've admired your courage, pretended to be frightened at your rough and easy conversation—your strong hands and wide shoulders. Oh, I know the act. It usually works very well. But tonight you're with the wrong woman. If you say you're only a sandhog—I agree with you. And I'm quite sure I don't want to spend any more time than necessary with one."

"Don't flatter yourself," said Bert. "Have I asked you to go out with me?"

"No. But—"

"Did I ask you to come along tonight?"

"No," she said quietly.

"Then what makes you think I give a damn whether or not I see you again? You're spoiled, Kay. Too many of those cultured men have been making a play for you. Personally, I don't think you're so hot. And I don't like cold dames."

"A few hours ago you thought differently."

"You mean when I kissed you?" he laughed. "Don't let that go to your head. It's a habit I learned on Broadway. It saves me the trouble of making conversation and it sometimes leads to better things."

"I didn't know a Saxon would say that to a McLane," she said. "I thought sandhogs respected their women."

"Their own—yes! You're an outsider."

SHE leaned back against the seat-cushions and looked straight ahead. "Why are you so angry at me, Bert?" she asked. "You're talking as

though you'd been cheated by some girl you'd picked up on Forty-second Street. I haven't done anything to you. Why do you dislike me?"

"Is this when I'm supposed to tell you I love you?" he snapped. "If it is. skip it. I've heard other dames pull that act and they did it better than you. For my part, you don't exist."

"Then you're not angry?"

"Of course not!"

"Then why are you heading for Bowling Green? We passed Fulton Street four streets back."

"Hell!" said Bert and stepped hard on the brake. "If you'd stop gabbing in my ear I might know what I'm doing."

There were few cars on the street and he circled quickly. A moment later he was racing through Fulton Street to where a derrick boom swung over a construction job. Even at midnight a small crowd had gathered and was standing in the silent street looking into a gaping hole where once had been a sidewalk and roadway. Police cars, an ambulance and an emergency truck were there and officers were roping off the area near the excavation. Huge flare-lamps lit the scene and their white splash of light made the surrounding section darker by contrast. Kay looked up at the lines of the nearby buildings. An eerie quiet held them. From the foot of the street came the hoarse blare of a tug. It was answered by one of the many craft that kept the river awake throughout the night. An elevated train rattled along the Pearl Street structure and from one of the nearby narrow streets came the blare of a taxi horn.

To Kay it seemed as a stage—some ultra-modern setting designed by Bel-Geddes to house a drama of the city. She watched Bert drive the car toward the police lines, saw a grimness set in his face at sight of the twisted roa way and mound of raw earth. Wh an officer stopped him he cut the m tor and jumped from the car. K didn't wait for his hand to help her the street. She knew it wouldn't there. Bert Saxon was running towa the cave-in.

She followed, shrugging aside t arm of an officer with such comple dismissal that the man merely grinne and let her go. When she reached t jagged edge of the hole she saw Be again. He was crouched low, watchin a small gang of laborers digging int the sliding rubble. With each swing c their shovels fresh earth slid fro above. She heard Bert curse. H walked to the far side of the excava tion and watched a smaller group cu ting planks into short lengths. Jac McGraw was there—one of the me who had worked with her father year ago. He was grayer, older. But sh recognized the square jaw and broke nose of the hard-bitten sandhog. Th man was cursing and yelling for speed He wanted timbers and planks and h wanted them in a hurry.

Kay knew what this meant. A drif had been driven under the street—a short passage leading from the side wall with timber sides and top. Some thing, perhaps a poorly set plank, hac caused it to collapse. When the earth rushed in it had trapped or buried the men working in the drift. And now Jack McGraw was about to drive an other drift to reach them. Kay remembered stories the men of her family had told of this ground in lower New York. Backfill and quicksand. The entire tip of Manhattan was a shifting quagmire with rock a hundred and more feet below the surface.

Each of the towering buildings

about her was resting on concrete and steel posts set by sandhogs. The ground was such that only the hogs could work it. Treacherous stuff. The accumulation of years of building and re-building. And now a section had moved. Four men were buried beneath it. She heard someone mention their names—strange names with the exception of one. Terry Reardon was down there. And Terry was one of the clan.

WHEN she watched the rescue party at work Kay was aware of a stumbling confusion that marked their work. Each man went at his task willingly but with an uncertainness apparent to a McLane. Kay had seen men work at the tunnel mouths. To an outsider they may have seemed like so many ants scurrying about without direction or reason. But Kay's family were construction people. She knew the meaning of every move. And now she saw confusion. Unskilled labor with no one to lead them. Jack McGraw could direct the single job before him. But he lacked the quality of command needed to coördinate the whole.

And then she heard Bert shout.

"Jack," he cried. "Why don't you hook an orange-peel scoop onto that hoist and swing it over the street? Drive sheeting as you go and run another drift in from the side."

"Who is running this gang?" cried McGraw. Then he looked up and saw Bert. His arms went up and he came leaping toward the superintendent. "Bert!" he cried. "Man— 'tis glad I am to see ye! Take over! Run the job. Four men are under that pile of muck."

"You're doing all right," said Bert.

"Doin', be damned! Take over and run things, Bert!"

"Not a bit of it," said Bert, and he smiled. "You're the boss, Jack. But I'll be glad to help out."

Kay watched him run toward a group near the hoist. She heard his voice—crisp, sure, filled with authority and sparing of words. Soon the weaving arm of the derrick lowered and men hooked a wide-jawed scoop to the cable. It lifted and Kay heard Bert order men to the shovels. Order and strict routine followed his words. Planks were driven to form a protecting envelope and the scoop bit into the muck. As the closing jaws lifted the first load of dribbling earth Kay saw Bert running across the sloping pile.

"You men!" he cried. "Shovels and picks. Two of each at that pile. The rest lend a hand with the timbers."

Jack McGraw had stopped his cursing and was bossing a group with the easy command of a gang foreman. He was at home now. The job at hand fell into quick routine and Kay saw Bert thump Jack heartily on the back as he passed. Lights were rearranged, a line formed with wheelbarrows to carry the waste from the drift. Planks were laid to form a runway, and gradually order came.

Kay sensed a rhythm to the work. A swinging tempo that stepped up its pace a trifle each time Bert made his rounds. She heard him laugh and pass a word of praise to a mucker whose shovel flung a steady shower of earth past his shoulder. Others near him increased their speed. A man put down his sledge and reached for a bottle tucked into a nearby coat pocket. He tried to hide it when Bert approached but the superintendent grinned and asked for a drink. The bottle was passed about and the work went on. Faster. Always faster. Kay wondered if muscles and lungs stand it.

SHE lost track of time. Minutes, hours, days—she didn't know nor care. In the flaring hole beneath her she saw one strong man make giants of a ragged tired gang. She crowded closer, breathing into her nostrils the raw damp smell of fresh-turned earth. Mingled with it was the tang of resin and the bite of new-cut wood. The sledges sang a song and the shovels danced in the light. Shirts were torn away and the men worked naked to the waist. Sweat glistened on their backs. It ran into their eyes, blinded them. They dashed it away but did not lose the rhythm of the work. And always Bert moved quietly among them. His voice was low now. At times he lifted it to call an order to a distant group. Confidence was in it. Kay listened and knew they would find Terry and the others alive.

Yes, she knew it. Conviction was so strong she felt an urge to grasp a shovel and join the men at work. She wanted to call to them—tell them to hurry. Something was driving her. It was in the air. The men felt it and set their feet more solidly in the ground. The shovels swung faster. A mucker turned and cursed the man beside him—told him to hurry. Tension grew stronger. Kay saw a man drop his shovel and stagger a few steps from the drift. He turned and bent to pick up his tool. Then he plunged headlong into the muck pile.

Bert was beside him. Even as he lifted the fallen man he sent another into the breech. Not a moment was lost. Not a second. And always there was the voice of the superintendent—steady, confident, quick to praise and never in doubt when a question was asked. Kay saw blood on a mucker's face. It was pouring from his nose and dripping onto his chest. The man crouched and dug savagely at the p before him. He cursed when Bert to his shovel and sent him to shift light. But he went. No one argu when the tunnel-man spoke. And she watched Kay grew afraid.

Realization came to her. A sudd knowledge of what was taking pla in this seething pit. Bert Saxon w turning men into machines, whippi them to fury with quiet words, spee ing them, driving them, lashing the with praise. As she watched, the dri moved slowly ahead. From above a below men inched closer to the trapp crew. Some worked as they had nev worked before. Some, as they wou never work again. Bert was burnin them out, using their last ounce strength. And they gave it gladly.

Kay's lips were sore where her tee bit down. Her nails left red crescen on the palms of her hands. It was u real. Ghostly. For a moment she sa Bert Saxon as another Lucifer buil ing a molten Inferno. Fires touche his face and sharpened the feature His eyes were bright, alive, sharp. Sh heard his voice put new life into wor out men—one more stroke with sledge, one more swing of the shove Bloodshot eyes lifted toward him a he passed. She saw a mucker touch h arm and stand straighter. It was a though a healer walked amidst stricken group and left them whol And with the passing of the momen Kay learned why the Saxons had a ways headed the clan of the tunnel.

They were leaders of men—born t command. Bert's every word and ac tion demanded obedience. And think ing of this Kay knew below her wa a man who held within him the powe for great good or terrible destructio Men followed him. They loved him More than that—they looked up t

him as a god whose orders brooked no breaking. In the tunnel men died for him. When he was in command iron tubes grew beneath the rivers. No obstacle was too great, no threat too deadly to stop them.

Her knees were as water and she walked to a heavy timber near the curb. Seating herself she rested her hands on the rough wood and fought for composure. Her eyes were closed but she heard a step and felt a strong hand on her shoulder. She looked up and found him smiling above her.

"Tired?" he said quietly.

"No," she answered.

"We'll reach them in a moment."

"And they'll be alive?"

He looked long into her eyes. "You were telling me God likes you," he said. "I'm sure He does."

"Yes?"

"Then ask Him to give those fellows a break. Perhaps He'll listen to you. I would."

CHAPTER VI

A WOMAN OF THE CLAN

HE was gone, then. Kay looked up to the narrow stretch of sky where summer stars shone as though all were well with the world. A soft breeze walked up from the river and touched her lips. She opened them and moistened them with her tongue.

Then she prayed.

"Let them come out alive," she asked. "Please let them come out alive."

It was a prayer old in the clan. One that women had used from the time men first built tunnels beneath the rivers of the world. It never changed. And it was always said through lips that were red and lined with marks of a woman's teeth. Sometimes for a husband, often for a friend. Men of the clan were dying and the women prayed.

Kay had thought she would never use it again—never hear it again. She wanted to forget it and the reason for its use. She forced herself to her feet and turned away. The street was empty and the sidewalks were wide. They led to Broadway where a cab would take her to a quiet, restful apartment. If she wished, she could stop at one of the hotel bars where men talked and laughed and flattered the beautiful women who laughed with them. Her friends would be there, eager and glad to see her. Men would angle for introductions. There would be soft music and good food. Even the noises of the street would be far away. And certainly she would not hear the rasp of shovels on sand.

A shout from the excavation turned her as though a hand had swung her shoulders. She hurried forward and leaned far out above the jagged edge. Men had stopped working. They were grouped about the drift—listening. The silence was sharp after the rattle and crash of tools. It made the night pregnant with question. And then Kay saw Bert. He crawled from the drift and started to unbutton his shirt. His immaculate dinner-coat had long since been tossed aside. Now he stood stripped to the waist and tense. Kay saw the muscles ripple and swell across his back as he flexed them. Flaring lights touched the whiteness of his skin —a whiteness that came to all men who worked long below ground. It made of it a finely turned figure of gleaming marble. It played upon his hair and once Kay caught twin gleams as it struck his eyes.

"I heard them," he said to the men. "Terry is alive. He signaled to me."

"Glory be to God!" cried Jack McGraw. "What was the signal, Bert?"

"Three raps and a rattle."

Kay knew the language of the sandhogs. The speech of steel on steel—signals passed by men in the compressed air to others beyond the locks. Sometimes it was used by trapped men to talk with their rescuers. A "rattle and three" meant "come out immediately" when used in a tunnel. Now the meaning was reversed. Terry Reardon had said, "Get us out quickly, or we die."

A silence followed Bert's words. Soon it was broken by sandhogs in the group who told the message to others who leaned on their shovels. Jack McGraw stepped forward. He put a mud-stained hand on Bert's white shoulder and looked into his eyes.

"What are ye' up to," he asked quietly.

"We haven't time to extend the planking," said Bert. "Terry knows what we're doing. He wouldn't ask us to hurry if there were a chance to finish the drift."

"Ye'll go it without a wood sheeting?"

"I'll try," said Bert simply and crawled into the low drift.

KAY screamed. Her voice was shrill and high like a wild thing that flies at night. She ran to a slanting pile of rubble that led into the excavation. Her tall heels sank in the earth and she stumbled forward. When she fell, her knee came through the skirt of her evening gown. Still she kept on. At the mouth of the drift Jack McGraw grabbed her and swung her about. Recognition came to his eyes and his jaw sagged open.

"Kay, darlin'," he cried. "What brings ye' here, child?"

"Stop him!" she cried. "Don't l him do it, Jack. He mustn't!"

"Hush now, child," said Jack. "St back a mite. Bert needs the light that lamp behind ye'."

"Don't you know what he's doing? she cried. "That ground won't hol You know it won't. It'll slide, Jac He'll never get through!"

Jack's great arms were about he and he led her from the drift. He silver foxes had fallen to the groun and one of the muckers lifted the and stood awkwardly with the silklik things in his grimy hands. Once he ex tended them, tried to put the fur across her arm. Jack took them an fixed the clasp about her throat as h would a scarf on a child's sailor blouse. He didn't speak. But a sof crooning sound came from his wid throat and he rocked slowly forward and back as Kay rested her hea against his shoulder. Sympathy was i the eyes of the men. They stood si lently, turning first to glance into th drift. Then toward Kay. Jack wave them away and cursed a man wh dropped his shovel. The clank of th tool made Kay start and she looke quickly into the drift.

In the narrow confines of the tunne she could see Bert braced upon hi knees. Sand came over his shoulder i a low brown stream. The raw ends o new timber were even with the heel of his low cut shoes. Forward and o all sides of him the walls were of sand His blade cut into it. Sweeping stroke that ripped a narrowing hole in th brown face. Short strokes. Cramped for lack of space. But each one sank the shovel blade deeply. Each one cut true along the line of the last.

A murmur ran through the gang when a section of wall crumbled behind his shoulder. The sliding brown

particles spilled in a stream across his legs. Covered them and crept upward. Bert worked himself free and dug on. A mucker crawled part way into the drift and scooped back the growing pile. Kay heard the rumble of a distant truck on Fulton Street. It was coming closer and she pounded an insistent fist against Jack's chest.

"Stop it!" she cried. "Send men into the street and stop that truck."

"Good girl," said Jack and turned to the men. "Up ye go, boys. Let nothin' nearer than the two corners. We'll have no trucks shakin' sand on our Bert!"

The men ran and Kay pushed herself free of Jack's arms. She walked to the mouth of the drift and crouched to look along the tunnel. A man brought another flare and tilted it to send a beam of light into the shower of sand. Kay listened to the constant rasp of Bert's shovel. It bit and chopped, tearing at the wall with relentless strokes. And soon she heard another sound—one that brought a cry from Jack McGraw's throat. She had never heard it before but Kay knew it for what it was. Instinct, perhaps. A heritage passed down by generations of human moles. A sense and knowledge of ground that is born with a sandhog. It was the sound of shifting earth. Somewhere, perhaps along the line of the drift, a section of ground had moved. A dull rumbling whisper, as though a giant had tried to muffle his voice, came to her. It touched her like a chill wind on a warm day and made her cold.

"It's coming, Jack!" she cried. "I heard it! Listen—"

"'Twas nothing, mavourneen," lied McGraw.

"Call him out," she said. "Call him—before the drift is closed!"

"'Tis a Saxon in there," said McGraw stolidly. "He'll give the orders, child."

AND soon from the dark end of the narrowing drift came a shout. Not loud. Not wild. Simply the voice of Bert Saxon saying all was well. Men crowded forward. Their reeking wet bodies stained the shoulders of Kay's gown. Heavy boots brushed against her legs. They bent, looking into the drift. She felt their breaths on her back. She heard them laugh—nervous, short gasps that held a question. Then she saw a man crawling toward her in the drift. Blood was smeared across his jaw and one leg dragged limply. A dozen arms reached toward him and carried him clear.

Behind him was a young mucker who whimpered and blinked as the light struck his eyes. He opened his mouth to shout but no sound came. Just as the men of the gang reached him he fainted. And Kay looked past him into the tunnel. Terry Reardon was there. Grinning and wiping a smear of blood from his chin. He winked at Kay and nodded toward the hole behind him. When he was helped to his feet and hurried away, Kay saw Bert. He was stretched on his chest, clawing at the sand and thrusting with his legs. Balanced on the flat of his back was a man whose head lolled drunkenly. Quick hands lifted him and laid him on a pile of hastily gathered coats. When Bert stood erect McGraw's eyes asked a question.

"Gone," said Bert. "Terry says he's been dead an hour." He drew a deep breath into his lungs and wiped sand from his lips. "Get an ambulance for the others, Jack. I'll take Terry home."

"'Tis in the street, waiting," said Jack. "The boys will tend to them.

And would ye be wantin' a doctor yerself, lad?"

"Hell, no," said Bert. "All I need is a bath. But if I were you, Jack, I'd knock the gang off for the night. They've earned it."

"Faith, and I will that," said McGraw. "Now slip into yer clothes and take this little lady away. I'll take Terry home meself."

"I'll take him," said Bert quietly. And McGraw nodded.

When Bert offered his hand to Kay it was as though he were seeing her for the first time. He helped her from the excavation and walked with her to his car. He glanced at the torn gown, the mudstained shoes and draggled furs. For a moment he simply stared and grinned. Then he took a handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to her.

"Your nose is dirty," he said.

"You should see your own," said Kay and dabbed with the handkerchief. "You look like the devil, Bert Saxon."

It was said as a jest. But as the words came Kay thought of the picture she had seen an hour previous. She found it difficult to remember the driving, lashing leader of men when she looked at the grinning giant before her. When he opened the car door and motioned to the seat she stepped in without question. A crowd had gathered about the roadster but Bert talked as though he were alone with Kay at a table in some secluded restaurant.

"I'm going to take Terry to Brooklyn," he said. "He wants to get home before his wife hears of this."

"Is he badly hurt?"

"Nothin' much. A tub and a bottle will fix him unless those ribs are actually broken. He claims they're not."

"They probably are," said Kay.

"I'll run you to Broadway and ge you a cab. You won't mind if I don see you home?"

"I'll mind very much," she said, an smiled. "If you expect me to drive t Brooklyn with you, the least you ca do is take me home later."

"Going to see it through, eh?"

"Why not?"

"Darned if I know," he laughed "Wipe the mud out of your ears an give these peasants something to stare at. I'll get Terry and we'll hustle along."

He started toward the excavation and the crowd fell back before him. Kay glanced in the mirror over her head and laughed at the girl who looked back at her. Lipstick was smeared at one corner of her mouth and mascara had lined the upper curve of her cheek. The muddy furs had dirtied her chin. Wisps of hair stuck out at odd angles. All in all, she decided, Kay McLane looked like a child's doll that had been left in the back yard and rained upon.

She went to work with Bert's handkerchief and repaired what she could. Her vanity case contributed its share and soon she could pause to take stock of the damage to her clothes. The gown was a wreck. Sand and gravel had undone in a moment the work of weeks. She smiled when she thought of Colette, the little French seamstress. There would be tears, lamentations, excitement and demands for an explanation of the sacrilege. As for Pierre, the designer—Kay refused to think of what he'd say. She snapped closed the cover of her vanity and smiled a welcome to Terry Reardon who was coming toward the car with Bert.

She felt closer to Terry now than she had for years.

THE miner was tired and hurt. But his grimy face was creased with laugh lines and Kay saw the bright blue eyes so characteristic of the Reardon family. They were alive, wide, inquisitive. All of the Reardons had them. She remembered Terry's brother who had lived next to the McLanes in Detroit. A big man with a thunderous laugh and eyes that put the blue of the heavens to shame. He had died in Antwerp when the Sheldt River caught him in a flooded tunnel. Kay shook her head as though to clear away the thoughts. Not many of the Reardons were left.

Terry and Bert must have been talking about her. She saw the miner nudge Bert and wag his head knowingly.

"And when I stuck me head out of the drift and saw that girl," he was saying, "I knew her on the instant. Big she is, and beautiful—but the mark of the McLane is in her face." He paused and held a pair of huge hands toward Kay. The effort caused a grimace of pain that was quickly grinned away. "Kay, little one—'tis good to see you again. Like as not, when I stick me face into Purgatory there'll be one of the McLanes waitin' to meet me."

"Purgatory, is it?" said Kay. She mimicked the miner's slight brogue. "Since when have they let a McLane *in there? I thought* Scotchmen went straight down."

"Most of them do," agreed Terry. "But we Irish take in a few to keep us from thinkin' we're in heaven. 'Tis the same with the English. We let them in to do up the beds and wash the dishes."

"And to keep you micks in order," finished Bert. "Now climb into the car and let's be going."

"What?" cried Terry. "Put these stinkin' clothes next to that beautiful creature? Not a bit of it. I'll take the subway."

Kay reached out and caught his shoulder. "In you get, Terry," she said. "And no more talk or I'll tell Helen about that time in Detroit when you missed mass to go on a chowder party."

"'Tis blackmail, no less," said Terry. He looked to Bert, then climbed gingerly into the car. "None but a Scot would have such a vile memory."

They drove west on Fulton Street then swung toward the entrance of the Brooklyn Bridge. Bert, remembering Terry's cracked ribs, kept the car at an even pace. Little was said until the dark waters of the East River were slipping past beneath. Then Bert turned to the miner.

"What happened back there?" he asked. "How did the face get away from you?"

"'Tis not well to speak ill of the dead," said Terry, "but that lad you brought out was a careless pup. 'Twas his first day below ground. What he knew abut mining you could stick in your ear. I turned me back for a moment and the damage was done."

"But I don't understand," said Kay. "That was a union job. Why did the hall let him go in as a miner if he wasn't fit?"

SHE slipped into the jargon of the sandhog as though it were but yesterday when men of the tunnel had been her constant companions. From the day Kay McLane was old enough to know the meaning of words, the language of the tunnel builders had been part of her life. She knew of the union—a local with a membership of less than a thousand. An honest, clean, hard-working group of construction

men. They had little time to worry over labor troubles and less inclination. Occasionally there were discussions at "the hall" where men of the clan met and talked of the problems of their trade. Sometimes there were strikes. But this was man's business and women seldom heard of it.

Yet, Kay knew the hall would allow no man to work at a trade for which he was not fitted. Long years must be spent on a shovel before a mucker could graduate to the position of miner's helper. Then more years below the river, watching, helping, learning the ancient and intricate art of the miner. A knowledge of sand and its treacherous ways. The feel of timber. And above all the miner must know and respect the constant threat of the river above his head. When the hall sent him in to work at his trade he was qualified to be entrusted with the lives of the men of the gang.

Knowing this, Kay was surprised at Terry's words. Why had the hall sent an inexperienced man below ground to work as miner?

"He was not sent from the hall," said Terry gruffly. "The man would not make a patch on a sandhog's pants."

"Then—then why was he working?" said Kay. "Isn't it a union job?"

"It is that," said Terry. And looked off across the river as though to end the discussion.

Kay realized she had intruded upon man's business. The women of the clan were not expected nor encouraged to meddle in things of this sort. But Kay was no longer in that class. She was a business woman—a very successful one, at that. In her own shop she was faced with the constant annoyance of union difficulties. The needle workers belonged to their local and made their demands. The designer—the fitter—each member of her organization wa affiliated with a particular group. Kay was puzzled at Terry's words.

"It doesn't make sense, Terry," sh said. "If that is a union job, only min ers sent from the hall should have bee in the drift. Your men won't wor with non-union men."

"I told you the man was sent from union," said Terry.

Kay shrugged and looked ahead t the blinking tail light of the car i front. She glanced toward Bert an saw his lips set tightly and the muscl bunched at the base of his jaw.

"It's something new since you day," he said at length. "Something Gus Blaucher invented."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure you'll understand. Bu to put it quickly, Gus uses union labo on all of his jobs. He made a contract with the hall to use miners below ground on this one. Then he hooked up with another local that supplies unskilled labor for the routine work above ground In fact, there are a half dozen locals that have men working in Fulton Street."

"I can understand that," said Kay.

"Good," said Bert. "Then you realize each group should keep to its own work?"

"Of course."

"Gus doesn't believe in that. It saves money to have unskilled labor do the work of the miners. So Blaucher makes a new deal with the laborers' local and feeds in a few inexperienced men to work below ground."

"And the sandhogs stand for it?"

"Generally."

"But that isn't fair," said Kay.

"The hogs know it," laughed Bert shortly. "But the jobs are usually small ones and they don't want to make

trouble. Rather than pull a strike they decide to finish the work As a result, Gus adds a few hundred thousand dollars to his bankroll—and some poor devil's wife has a corpse dropped into her lap."

There was a dull savagery to his words that checked a question forming upon Kay's lips. She looked at the man beside her and found him hard-eyed and grim, looking off into the night. Terry was slumped in the corner. The miner had found a broken match in his pocket and was picking the grime from beneath his cracked nails. While Bert spoke he voiced agreement with an occasional grunt. Now he moistened his lips and glanced across to the man at the wheel.

"'Tis rumored Gus Blaucher is to bid on the new job under the East River," he said. "Have you heard about that, Bert?"

"It's true," said Bert. "And Jack Flynn wants to watch his step when he draws up the union contract."

"Flynn?" said Kay. "What's he doing now?"

"Business agent for the hogs," said Bert. "Old Jack hasn't been able to work in the air since he lost a leg."

"He's a good man," said Kay.

"Very good."

"Not bad for a Corkonian," admitted Terry. "A bit thick, but honest."

They rode in silence to the bridge end and Bert sent the car through the narrow alleys leading to the Brooklyn waterfront. Tall loft-buildings and factories lined the streets. They were silent, ghostlike affairs at this hour of the morning. An occasional figure moved quietly along the sidewalks. A cat yowled. From a distance Kay heard the dull rumble of trucks and the clank of metal. She saw the derrick when Bert turned a corner, and caught a glimpse of the lighted hoghouse where men of the night shifts changed clothes.

YEARS dropped away and she saw herself as a little girl who lived close to the mouth of a tunnel shaft. The sounds and smells and sights brought remembrance of tall, mud-grimed men who tossed her pennies or shared an orange as they sat on the curb and ate. She recalled their laughter and crude jests. The way they teased her when she stood on tiptoe and waved to the young mucker going below with the gang. That youngster had grown tall, now. And the freckled girl, whose black braids were the longest in the neighborhood, was a fashionable modiste whose creations were worn by many of New York's best-dressed women. And as Bert's car swung past the job and headed toward a row of tenements nearer the river, a nostalgic sadness touched her.

Bittersweet. Filled with a thousand pleasing memories, yet clouded with the constant sorrow that was the most real thing of Kay's youth. It was good to see again one of the places where the clan had gathered to build a tunnel. Good—because she knew it was no longer part of her life. Perhaps, she thought, a man who had fought through the great war might have such feelings when he visited again the towns and villages where he slogged through wet, deep mud of France. It was over. And that was good. Please God it might never come again. And Kay promised herself it would not.

When they stopped at the door of a clean but old apartment, she made no move to get out. Instead, she took Terry's hands, leaned toward him and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

"Tell Helen I was asking for her," she said. "And for the Lord's sake, Terry, try to take care of yourself."

"Tell her?" said Terry in surprise. "And why not do it yourself?"

"Oh, no," said Kay quickly. "Three in the morning is no time for a visit."

"Visit, yer eye! If Helen knew you'd passed the house without so much as a cup o' tea—she'd murder me entirely, she would."

"But we can't go in, Terry."

"Hush now, and mind yer manners," said Terry. "Climb out of this car and up we go."

"Might just as well," laughed Bert. "It's quicker than arguing all night."

"But, Bert—"

"But, nothing," said Terry. "Out with you, Kay McLane!"

Kay laughed and stepped from the car. She followed Terry to the narrow entrance hall and climbed a flight of stairs with Bert at her heels. Terry opened a door—it wasn't locked—and stepped into the small apartment. He switched on a light and Kay glanced about. A slow smile came to her lips. The place was spotless—scrubbed and polished and dusted. Neat white curtains hung at the windows. Cheap but substantial furniture told her she was in the living room of the Reardon home. A sofa with embroidered pillows was flanked by easy chairs on which were crocheted antimacassars. Two former Reardon's looked down in tinted photography from the walls. There was the statue of the Virgin, a bit of palm in the form of a cross. And on a small table near the windows was a picture of young Ethel Reardon in her Confirmation dress.

Terry motioned to chairs and went to a door leading to the rear of the apartment. He called, and moments later his wife came into the room. She looked first at Bert, then to Kay. She glanced quickly at Terry and crossed toward him.

"You're all right, Terry?" she said quickly.

KAY'S teeth closed on her lower lip. It was a routine she knew well and had seen often in her own home. The sudden appearance of the man of the family at an early hour—people with him—a strained silence. Yes, she had seen it all before.

"Not a scratch," lied Terry cheerfully. "We had a bit of trouble at the job and knocked off for the night. Bert drove me home. And look—do you know her, Helen?"

He pointed to Kay and his wife brushed a wisp of hair from her eyes to look. She was holding the folds of a print dressing gown about her and she gathered it closer as she walked toward Kay.

"Know her?" she said, and her arms went out. "Sure—and 'tis one of the McLanes." Her smile broadened. "Kay, me child! 'Tis good to see you."

There was a kiss and a tight squeeze while Bert grinned and helped himself to one of Terry's Sunday cigars. Helen hustled to the kitchen and put on the kettle. There was talk and more talk of families and jobs. Minutes ran into hours and the cups were kept filled. When Kay caught Bert nodding over his tea she got up and walked to the door.

"We've got to go," she said. "Bert is going to drive me to the city and he won't have an hour's sleep."

"'Tis enough for him," laughed Helen. "But we'll be seeing more of you now, Kay girl. Drop in for a cup and a chat. The job is only at the corner and you'll be waiting for Bert no doubt."

Bert grinned at that. He took Kay's arm, advised Terry to see a doctor in the morning and headed for the stairs. When they reached the street the first flush of day was in the sky. He pointed to it.

"How long since you've seen morning walk down the river?" he asked.

"Too long," said Kay quietly. "The last time was in Jersey."

"You remember that?"

She smiled. "You came off shift at four in the morning and like a little fool I got up and met you."

"Then we stood on the end of the dock and waited for the sun."

"Yes," said Kay. "Because you wanted to be with me but were afraid to let the men of your gang know it."

"I wasn't afraid."

"Yes, you were. You said you wouldn't take me to the movies until I wore long dresses."

"And when you asked for them, your mother spanked you."

"But I didn't cry."

Bert laughed and his arm went around her waist. Without words they walked down the narrow street, past the car to the waterfront. He helped her over a pile of freshly turned earth at the street end and they walked slowly along the open pier. The water was dark. Flat. Silent in its flow toward the sea. At a nearby dock a freighter was moored. It smelled of paint and rope and tar. And there were other smells. Of spices and hemp and cargoes from far lands. The place reeked of that odor peculiar to the waterfront. And the sounds were of the river, too.

There was a transitory feeling that all the rest of the close-packed humans in the buildings that soared and spread for miles about them, flanking the river, had gone away. They were alone.

CHAPTER VII

DAWN

WATER sloshed against the dock piles. A distant tug panted and chugged in its labor. Nearer, a small boat's motor chugged as some night prowler of the river went on his mysterious errand. A thief, perhaps. Out before dawn to steal ropes and canvas. And as he prowled he paused to stare at a white froth of phosphorescent water bubbling not far from the dock.

Kay watched it, too. She knew below this boiling geyser was the mouth of a tunnel. Bert's tunnel. She felt his arm tighten about her waist as she watched it. Men were down there. Men of the clan who were driving tunnel. They were working now, stripped to *the waist and reeking with sweat. And* in New York, on the upper section of Riverside Drive, the man who made this work possible was entertaining a houseful of guests.

As the thought came to her she recalled Paul's eyes when he had looked down from his place beside her at the piano. A single glance had been enough to tell Kay that Paul Touchet wanted her. At the time she had thought little of it. Many men wanted Kay McLane. Through the years she had learned to expect desire from men.

But in Paul, Kay knew she had found a man far different. He was strong. Still, there was an appealing softness about him that made women feel he might truly understand them. When she had told him of her ambition to play and had coupled it with the realization that greatness would never be hers, a slow droop of one eyelid had told her she was not alone. Without words, Paul Touchet had let her know that he, too, wanted to make music that was beyond him. And there

were other things—the way his eyes took in the details of her gown, the apparent admiration in them when he studied the manner in which she dressed her hair. The soft, delicate touch of his hands upon hers. These things and many more told Kay she had met a man worthy of her steel. She liked Paul.

And he wanted her.

While she turned these thoughts slowly in her mind Bert walked with her to the dock end. Night was drifting away over the tall stone mountains of lower Manhattan. Soon day would rush in from the sea. But not yet. For just these few moments she and Bert would be on the ebb of the tide. Alone. Seated on a square rough timber while his arm was about her waist. She leaned toward him and rested her head upon his shoulder. His great hand lifted hers and held it clumsily. Strength, prodigious and perhaps frightful was in his every movement. She was conscious of it in the arm that circled her waist. Giant muscles that had come from hours with sledge and shovel. And this man would spend every ounce of it for the woman he loved. The men of the tunnel were like that. Plain men—not given to words or pretty speeches. But to them, women of the clan were things apart. Not to be mentioned except in terms of endearment.

As she looked at the water Kay's thoughts followed the eddies. She compared Bert with the men she had met recently. She compared him with Paul. Here, perhaps was a touch of similarity. Paul was strong. Not physically. But Kay had been aware of his strength. And then she drifted. She saw Bert coming toward her across a green lawn. Children were there. Their children. He was laughing and in his arms were paperwrapped toys. She heard him shout and tumble about like a huge mastiff, crawling on hands and knees while a straight young son rode kicking upon his back.

THEY were on Broadway. And women turned to stare at this smiling giant whose eyes were only for Kay. She pictured him as he had been at Paul's home. Women had made fools of themselves to interest him. And Bert had looked over and through them to fasten his eyes upon Kay. And this could be hers for the asking. This, and the knowledge her husband would always be the best man in his trade. There would be money—not millions. But always enough. Bert had been offered six hundred and would soon make a thousand a week. They would travel. Tunnels were built in far corners of the world. Paris, London, Vienna—in time they could visit each of these places. And they would meet beautiful women. But always, Bert's eyes would search for and find his wife.

She lifted hers and looked into his. He smiled. It was a little boy's smile. The same she had seen when they sat together years past and planned the many things they would do when he was given a tunnel to build. He drew her closer.

"Happy?" he asked.

She wrinkled the tip of her nose.

"Love me?"

She brushed her cheek against his.

"Marry me?"

The words brought terror. Wild, unreasoning terror. When he leaned and put his lips against hers she tried to fight clear. He laughed and rested those huge hands upon her shoulders. For a moment he held her. As though to show her the futility of struggle.

Then he leaned closer. She thought he would kiss her again. But he didn't. Instead, he smiled and waited.

Kay's breath came faster to match the pounding of her pulse. She wanted him. She wanted Bert Saxon. Her arms were about his shoulders. She lifted her lips closer and felt his breath upon her cheek. Then time and sound and movement slipped into nothingness. She kissed Bert as she had never kissed another man. She felt his arms tighten until the pressure brought pain to her back. But she didn't care. It was pain that was welcome. Tears came to her eyes. They wet her cheeks and touched her lips. She didn't know why she was crying. She didn't care. All that mattered was Bert's arms about her. Her little boy had grown to manhood. He'd come back to her. Wanted her. And she was Bert Saxon's sweetheart.

She drew back her head. Rested it upon his shoulder. For a time she was content to watch the graying waters of the river slip past. She didn't want to think. Wouldn't think. This moment was hers. But as her eyes followed the curve of a tide run they came to the frothing white water of the boil. Tomorrow Bert would be down there. And each tomorrow after that he would be beneath some river. Some day a man would make a mistake. A smothering rush of water and mud would surge into the tunnel. And that night Bert would not come home. She'd stand with other women at the mouth of the shaft. Thinking—yet afraid to think. Hoping but knowing that hope was futile. Then there would be tears. Perhaps she would curse the God that had made her. Then years alone with a memory.

And as the constant routine of the tunnel came to her she stiffened. Long ago she had promised this would not happen. Not for Bert or a hundred Berts. Not for any man. She was Kay McLane. Her life was her own. She'd made it. She was damned if she'd ruin it. Happiness was here and a quiet, well-ordered procession of pleasures. Why look for misery? Why hunt for sorrow? Because of love?

KAY laughed. It was a harsh, bitter laugh. It carried along the water and an echo answered from a nearby pier. She was acting like a child—doing the very thing she had told Bert not to. A twisted, childish emotion had sent her to this riverfront with a man whom she had once admired. A childhood romance had stripped her for a moment of the wisdom she had gained. Nostalgia was the answer to Bert's kisses. But that was over. She'd end it once and for all. Quickly. Before the dull warmth in her breasts made her a perfect fool.

"I'm going home, Bert," she said shortly. And she stood up.

"Certainly, Kay," he answered. "Let's go."

He took her arm and walked with her along the pier. Kay had expected protest. She thought he would ask for one more kiss—another moment alone. Most men would. But not Bert. She glanced at him as they picked their way through the scattered gear on the dock. He was looking ahead, smiling, humming the chorus of a popular tune. Kay recognized the air. It was from a Broadway musical that had been playing to capacity houses. And thinking of this, she realized Bert was not the young sandhog she had known. He too, had grown. His money had taken him to the bright spots of this and other cities. And in these cities he had met women. Women who wanted him.

He had learned to handle them, even as he was now catering to her whim.

Kay resented this. Why? She didn't know. She had definitely decided this was to be her last meeting with Bert. But the knowledge that other women wanted him bothered her. She quickened her pace. It wasn't well to think of these things.

"Why did you ask me to marry you?" she asked suddenly.

"I thought it might be a good idea."

"It's ridiculous."

"Maybe."

"You weren't serious, I hope?"

"What do you think?" he asked.

"Oh, the whole thing is so foolish. I shouldn't have let you kiss me but—"

"Don't apologize. I enjoyed it."

"*I* didn't." He laughed. "I didn't!" she insisted. "The excitement, seeing old friends—"

"I've told you not to apologize."

"But I want you to understand my position," she said. "Tonight, I'll admit I acted like a loon. But this is the first and last time. And I mean it!"

"Not the first time, Kay," he said. "Or do you forget what happened at your apartment."

"And that's—"

"Nor the last time," he went on. "In fact, it's just one of hundreds of times."

His mood was light, cheerful. He bent occasionally and lifted a stone which he threw at nothing like a boy coming home from school. He was tired from the work in the drift but still he wanted to run and laugh while he ran. Kay loved him. He was sure of it, now. And knowing this, his world had changed in an instant. Until tonight. Bert had played through life. His work in the tunnel was simply another form of play. He enjoyed it. Looked forward to each new day below the river. His evenings were times for laughter and excitement. Nothing mattered. Nothing was serious. Each payday found him broke but that meant little. Work was plentiful and a dozen firms were bidding for his services. Tunnels would always be built and contractors would want a Saxon to build them. But those few moments alone with Kay had changed things.

AS Kay suspected, Bert knew women although he never pretended to understand them fully. Kay's changing moods bothered him not at all. She loved him and some day she would be his wife. Until that time arrived he would save his money and plan for the future. In his mind, he was building a home on Long Island when he saw a short, khaki-clad figure coming from the yard near the shaft. When he stepped under a street light Bert recognized Ed Powers, one of the hydraulic men who do the work of mechanics in the tunnel. He called. Powers waved and quickened his pace.

"'Lo, Ed," said Bert. "Out for a breath of air?"

"Yeah," said Powers and stared quizzically at Kay.

Bert laughed and realized he and Kay must make a weird spectacle in their bedraggled evening clothes. He explained quickly and as he talked Powers looked sharply at Kay.

"One of the McLanes?" he said slowly. "Sure enough—little Kay grown up. Glad to see you."

For a moment they talked of old times and finally Bert told of the accident on Fulton Street. Powers grunted. He was a middle-aged man, short, wide shouldered and not given to long speech. He listened to the cause of the trouble and ground his cigarette beneath a heavy heel.

"There'll be a meeting at the hall tomorrow," he said. "I'll put it up to the men. We ought to pull that job."

"Why not talk it over with Blaucher first?" asked Bert. "This would be a good time to hit him."

"Ah, Jack Flynn wouldn't get anywhere. He can't sling words like Blaucher's crowd. Before he left they'd have an agreement to let anyone work below ground."

"Maybe you're right," said Bert. "Flynn isn't much of a business man. I don't understand why you made him business agent."

"He's honest."

"Of course. But that isn't enough."

"Who else is there?"

Bert looked toward the distant gantry—a wide wooden platform built above the shaft where materials were loaded onto cars and sent below. He turned in his mind the names of many men in the clan but could think of none that would suit. Eventually he was forced to admit Powers was right. The hydraulic man grinned, bowed to Kay and swung off into the night. As he went he turned and called to Bert.

"Better get out of here before the next shift comes out," he laughed. "Some of the fellers have to go to Murphy's funeral. They'll try to borrow your fancy outfit."

Bert looked down at his stained trousers and laughed. "They're welcome to these," he said. "I can't use them again."

"Then send 'em to the hall. It costs five bucks to rent a suit."

CHAPTER VIII

FIVE BUCKS A SUIT

HE was gone, waving a friendly hand as he headed toward the river. His remark about Bert's clothes was such a one as might be passed by any sandhog. There was nothing to it. A jest to be forgotten with the fading of the words. But Bert didn't forget. And the words wouldn't fade. "It costs five bucks to rent a suit." The idea was new, or at least something from a distant past. *"Five bucks to rent a suit."* Why, the clothes he was wearing had cost two hundred dollars. There were three other suits like this hanging in his closet at the hotel. *Five bucks to rent a suit.* And that's what the men of the clan must do when they went to a funeral. Rent a suit. They didn't own one. Not even a cheap one. That money must go for food, rent, a thousand and one other things that make up the business of living.

"Five bucks to rent a suit." He said it aloud and Kay turned at the sound: "I'll be damned."

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

Bert didn't answer. He turned to stare up at the low, mean tenements where his men lived. They were always the same, these homes. Old and dirty on the outside. Clean and well-scrubbed within. Brooklyn, Detroit, Boston—even in foreign lands when the clan traveled to drive tunnel abroad—tenements on the river front. Plain food and cheap clothing. And when a funeral came—*"Five bucks to rent a suit."*

Funny he'd never thought of that before. A man can't raise a family and buy fancy clothes if he only makes ten dollars a day. But then—ten dollars wasn't so bad. It was the minimum wage scale of the sandhog. The amount a mucker received for swinging a shovel under the river. For these ten dollars he breathed compressed air, worked short hours, received a pot of steaming hot coffee when he came out

of the tunnel. It was nothing new to Bert. The scale had been the same for years. He'd worked for ten dollars a day until he became a miner. Then they paid him eleven. As heading-boss he'd received a hundred a week and thought he was king. But as he thought of others who had worked with him—men with families—he realized not one had any money put by.

Their wives were careful, conservative women. Bert could recall no wild spending-orgies, no expensive cars, nor even a washing machine in the kitchens of the homes he knew. Why, then, was there no money? Ten dollars a day meant sixty dollars a week. Surely, there should be something left at the end of the year. But there never was.

And as he walked and stared at the tenements Bert found an answer. Accidents. Crippled men drawing doles from the compensation bureaus. Six or eight weeks with little money coming in would soon eat up the small reserve. And then, the slack times between jobs. Tunnels weren't built every day. And a man must travel and bring his family when a river in a distant city was to be tunneled. Oh, there were many reasons. Reasons Bert knew were growing each day. Many of the men at the hall were idle now—skilled men and good at their trade. There was work for them but others were doing it—others less qualified.

Gus Blaucher had started a wave of price cutting. Not on the tunnel jobs. But on smaller construction-projects upon which the sandhogs depended to tide them over. The Fulton Street affair was a sample. Fifty inexperienced men were doing the work of trained miners. Youngsters, most of them. Glad to work for any price. And while they worked, men who had spent years learning their trade were idle.

BERT thought of the youngsters he had seen playing in the street the previous day. Dan Hannagan's kids. Their father had worked hard from the time he was old enough to swing a shovel. Yet what had he to show for it? A crushed chest and a family that would go hungry if it were not for the charity of the clan.

"It's all wrong," he cried aloud. "It's wrong—rotten wrong!"

"What on earth are you talking about?" said Kay. "What's wrong?"

"The whole scheme of things," said Bert. "Like a fool, I've been going along for years—working with these men, eating with them. But I hadn't brains enough to know what was happening."

"I wish you'd talk sense. I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you understand, Kay?" he said quickly. "I've been getting money—plenty of it. More in a week than Dan Hannagan gets in a month."

"Of course you have."

"But it isn't right! The men should get more, too."

"Have they asked for it?"

"That's it—they haven't. Don't you see? They—they haven't asked."

He looked at her as though at a loss for words. Something—he couldn't place it nor define it—but something was happening within his mind. He stared at the cobbles beneath his feet and slowed his steps. In the distance morning was creeping higher into the sky. Light. A warm red glow that touched the edges of a few low clouds. Bert lifted his head. He looked toward it. Somewhere just over the rim of the earth the sun was lifting to make a new day. Perhaps it would be a better day. Bert hoped it would. And as he watched he felt a slow surge of purpose creeping up with the sun.

He wanted to tell Kay. He had to ell her. He caught her arms and wung her to face the east.

"Look!" he said and pointed. "Don't ou feel it? Don't you—Kay?"

There was bewilderment in her eyes. A moment ago she had smiled at Bert's hildish antics. Throwing stones—aughing aloud and singing. Then they ad talked for a moment with a sand-og. Bert had made some foolish re-nark about renting clothes. And now, s she turned to face him she found a different man.

"Please, Bert," she said, "let's get n the car and go home. You must be ired."

"Tired? What difference can that nake? Don't you understand, Kay? Don't you know what I'm trying to ell you?"

"I'm sorry, but I don't."

"It's about the men—all of them. They're not going anywhere—never ave been going anywhere."

She turned and found Bert staring gain at the tenements. His eyes were vide and his arms half lifted to hold something invisible to her eyes. He valked a few steps and turned to look t the tall mast of the derrick. It was s though a man had suddenly awak-ened from deep sleep and found him-elf in a strange world. His steps were hort. Hesitant. A puzzled frown put leep creases about his eyes. Kay won-dered if the excitement of the night ad been too much. She touched his rm gently.

"Don't worry about things now," he said. "Get some rest. And tomor-ow everything will be all right again."

"Rest? I don't need rest."

"Bert—you're—you're acting so strangely."

"Perhaps I am," he said quietly. "I'm sorry, Kay. But it's all so plain to me—all of it. And I've let them down."

"Let them down? What do you mean? Who?"

"The men—the sandhogs. The men of my clan," he said. "They need me —have needed me for years. But I was blind and couldn't see."

"Need you? In what way?"

"To take care of them out of the tunnel, just as I do below ground."

"That's ridiculous."

"No, Kay—not at all. I've been making hundreds—thousands of dollars. And what have they been getting?"

"But you're a superintendent. You earn it."

HE looked at her patiently. For a time he seemed to be groping for words—phrases that would explain the great thought that had come to him.

"Yes, I earn it," he said. "But they —they earn something, too."

"Bert—you're talking in circles. If you're getting five hundred a week it's because you're worth that amount. You know your trade, you know how to build tunnels."

"So do they."

"Oh, they know how to swing a shovel or drive a drift. Some of them are heading-bosses and some are miners. Each gets paid according to his work."

"But—but they're not—not strong." His speech was halting and slow. "They're not strong."

He looked at her with mute appeal in his eyes. A man without words to express an idea. Strangely she was reminded of her designer, Pierre the eccentric Frenchman, who dreamed in fabrics as a painter might in colors. She had seen such an expression come to Pierre when he spoke of a gown

about to be designed. A few words in English—a few in French—a waving of hands and that mute look. As the silks were shaped and blended she had caught the thought he had tried so helplessly to express. But words couldn't do it.

Now she turned to Bert and found the same intangible appeal. He wanted her to understand. Tried to tell her. But his thoughts had not yet taken shape. They were nebulous things—clear only in the mind of the man who dreamed them. And as she stood with him he took her hand and walked with her to the door of the shabby tenement where the Reardons lived. He pointed to the sagging steps, the narrow and dark hall with scrub-worn spots on the paint. He pointed to the fire hydrant where sandhogs' children, too young to swim in the fouled waters of the East River, would cool themselves and play at bathing as they dodged the lumbering trucks.

"It isn't right," he said slowly. "They shouldn't be here—not here. It shouldn't be."

"It's always been," Kay answered quietly. "It's part of the business of living. You can't change it, Bert. No one can, in our day. Perhaps long after we're gone, the tenements will go, too. I don't think we'll live to see it."

"Oh, I'm not trying to change that. I'm talking about the clan—the sandhogs. They don't belong here."

She was patient. "Of course they don't. But that's another thing can't be changed in our day."

"You're wrong, Kay! Wrong!"

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps I am, but—"

"It can be changed," he said. "I can change it. I'm going to change it. I've *got* to!"

KAY didn't argue. She started toward the car and Bert followed. Unconsciously, as though it were her right, she seated herself behind the wheel. He took the place next to her and was staring toward the shaft as she sent the car around a corner and headed for the bridge. For a time there was silence. Bert was scarcely conscious of the girl beside him. The fingers of his wide hands flexed and gripped. At times he beat the side of a fist against the heel of his hand. When they turned into Lafayette Street and headed north he rested a hand upon Kay's arm and faced her.

"I'm going to change it," he said evenly.

"How?" she asked.

"I'm not sure. But I'll start at the hall—at one of the meetings. I'll talk to the men and—"

"Don't be foolish, Bert! You can't afford to get mixed up in union troubles."

"Can't afford it?"

"Of course not! You're a superintendent—responsible to the contractor for all the work in the tunnel. That's your job and you're well paid for it. How long do you suppose you'd have it if you became active at the hall?"

"But, Kay—"

"But, nothing! You've worked your way up from a shovel to the top of the trade. Be sensible and keep what you've earned."

He laughed shortly. "It's not going to be easy to make them understand. They'll think I'm crazy."

"And they'll be right—if you're talking about the sandhogs."

She stepped down on the gas and the car leaped forward. Early morning traffic was on the streets but Kay skimmed through it with little trouble. She wanted to get home—get Bert

ome. A few hours sleep would gather p the raveled edges of his mind and ut an end to these foolish thoughts. When they reached the door of her partment she pulled up the parking-rake, turned and extended her hand. "Goodnight, Bert," she said. "Stop or a drink on your way home and nen get some sleep. You need it."

He took her hand and held it tightly. You'll see a difference soon," he said. They'll listen to me if I have to pound ense into their heads with a sledge."

"Oh, forget it," she laughed. She drew her hand from his and stepped from the car. "Thanks for a wild night, Bert. It was more fun than a cyclone."

She waited, expecting some word from him. The tunnel-man was looking past her—through her. His eyes were filmed and set. She turned away but still he said nothing. When she reached the grilled doors of the apartment she waved and smiled.

Bert had slid in behind the wheel. Silently, he started the car and headed east, driving into the morning.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Mark of Zapotec

ARCHAEOLOGISTS haven't really had much fun since the early 'twenties when Tut-ankh-amen's admirably preserved mortal coil was removed from Mother Egypt's secret cupboard. Those, as it were, were the days for the boys who wrote history with the pick and shovel—unearthed centuries with the turn of a spade—repainted civilization's past with the intelligent application of elbow-grease. Even more—influenced style-trends for almost six months. Who can forget the days when she who looked not like Ptolemy's sister was obviously something that a fraternity brother had dug up as a blind date?

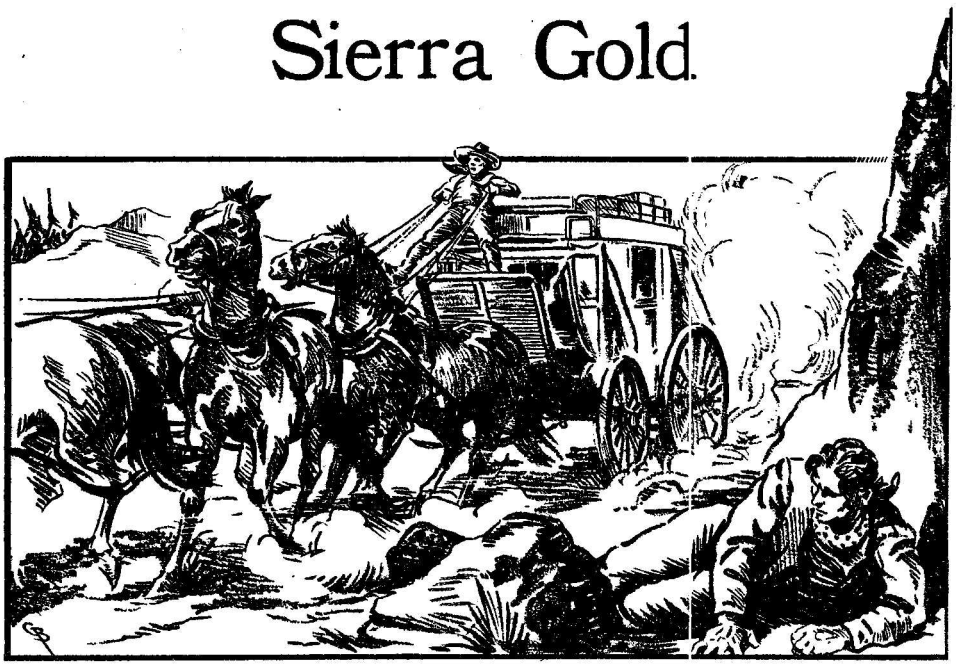
But today, this hour, this minute, there are chip-chip-chippings on the rock of old Mexico, frenzied, breathless excavations into the soil of ages; and what archaeologists prophesy may be the biggest treasure trove—speaking scientifically—since Lord Carnarvon's Egyptian diggings is about to be unearthed on the site of the long-lost city of Monte Alban in southwestern Mexico.

Ornaments, jewelry, carvings thus far unearthed bear every indication that Monte Alban was the center of culture of a superior race—the Zapotecs, predating even the Old Mayan civilization in Guatemala. From present findings the Zapotecs had their own forms of religion; possessed a calendar more complicated than but certainly comparable to our own; knew baths to stun the ancient Romans; held dances and other "modern" festivities.

From what the expedition, headed by Dr. Alfonso Caso, has already discovered, indications are that the Zapotecs went through five epochs of civilization before they quietly vanished into limbo. Five epochs—ample time to provide some pretty Zapotecan styles for, say, next Spring. Watch out, boys, the lady fair is about to go pre-Inca on you.

—Peter Kelly

Sierra Gold



By JOHN K. BUTLER

Author of "A Street in Singapore," "Reunion on River Street," etc.

A Complete Novelet of The Days—and the Men—of '49

I

IN THE early summer of that year, there were still snows melting on lofty Sierra peaks, and the American River ran high and muddy, racing in narrow gorges and between steep pine-slopes. That year, hydraulic mining on a huge scale helped the snow to swell the river and added to the flow of silt. Stumps of trees, often whole pines, came downstream in fast water; they had been uprooted by powder blasts and water-pressure, higher up in the mountains. The trees came along swiftly, bumping against banks and mid-stream boulders. Sometimes they became trapped and remained. Sometimes, with a shudder of wet dripping branches, they shook themselves free, and on they went, bouncing and dipping through the churn of rapids. Turning and rolling in deeper water. Onward against obstacles toward the far-away Sacramento.

For seven summers Floyd Wainright had worked the American, but this summer, he thought reluctantly, might be his last. He had worked hard the past years, had worked with pan and rocker, with "tom" and flume. Yet each summer his reward grew smaller.

All over the Sierra, prospectors faced the same disappointment. Stories of their failures traveled through the mountains. One man, last August, had shot himself. Excited tales of new strikes sent many packing on their way, only to meet new disappointments. Prospectors shifted from the American, to the Yuba, to the Feather, to the Stanislaus—then back to the American again, always less in number. Lines of weariness and defeat showed in their lean brown faces.

"It's the hydraulic system," they complained. "Mass operations—they take out the dust up above—nothing but silt and branches comes down the rivers. . . ."

Others, fatalistic, were of the opinion hat there was no more gold in the mountains. "It's gone—all taken out—the trikes are over—nothing for a lone prospector to get any more."

Picks and shovels and shallow pans lay usted at many deserted claims, a reminder of the men who had failed and one. Now and then a broken rocker, or section of flume, came drifting down he river. It was the year 1877.

FLOYD WAINWRIGHT didn't want to quit. Some inner hope gave him he will to continue doggedly—anyway, or another summer. He was a young man till, not quite thirty, and it took more o defeat him than the disappointment of he last four years. He was strong and ard-muscled, his shoulders a little stooped rom back-straining work with pick and hovel, and endless hours over rocker and an. His eyes had a clear blue depth, and he fatigue that showed in the eyes of ther miners, older, was not present.

"We won't quit till Fall," he told his artner, Jim Colton.

Colton shook his head. His discouragement had been plain to Floyd since last ear when the total take-out from their laim on the North Fork amounted to ardly enough to stake them through the inter. They were living, this summer, n little more than flour, wild game which ey killed themselves, and a small sack f salt. Even their ammunition was running out, thus threatening the wild-game art of their diet.

"Why try to stick it out?" Colton complained. "It won't be no different this year. 'll just be the same old thing."

"It might go better for us this time," loyd said with deep conviction.

Jim Colton swore bitterly and threw own his pick. He put his right arm raight out, pointing at the river. "Look t it! Just mud and trees and branches. o gold a-tall coming down. It's all washed ut. We can't go on forever like this, 'less e're crazy."

"Our luck's bound to change sometime, Jim. We've got to stick it out."

"Change?" Colton laughed. "That's what you said last year, and the year before, and the year before that. And all the time, what we got to eat? We don't even have no smoking-tobacco. We don't have nothing a-tall." He spat disgustedly at his right boot. He was a big man, broad, heavily built, and could swing a pick deep into hard-packed gravel. He was over fifty, had taken part in the original Sierra strike of '49. But he was still strong, even stronger than Floyd. One time Floyd had seen him in a rough-house brawl at a saloon in Hangtown. Colton had fractured a miner's skull with a whisky bottle, had thrown another miner clean over the bar.

It was after the Hangtown brawl that Floyd teamed up with him. Five years ago. They'd stuck together pretty close all this time, had staked nine claims and worked eight of them. This was the eighth they were working now.

Floyd didn't like to hear Colton's dark discouragement. Not that he thought Colton was a quitter. Not at all. Deep inside him he had an unwelcome hunch that perhaps his partner's attitude might be right. There was no more gold, nothing for the prospector. Only the big operations, the big companies mining by the hydraulic process and quartz-tunneling, were successful. Yes, maybe Colton was right. It might be crazy to go on working the river and tributary streams. . . .

Yet Floyd didn't want to believe that. He wanted to put the thought of failure out of his mind and go on working with the enthusiasm he'd had when he first started out, when he later teamed up with Colton. He liked to recall an early prospecting success when he panned an average of five hundred dollars a day for seventeen straight days. He liked to remember the four thousand dollar nugget he discovered in 1872 on the Middle Fork of the American. But all that seemed long ago. Grubstake prices had been sky high and money didn't last long. In Ransville you paid ten dollars a plate for ham and eggs. At Indian Bluff you paid twenty.

"If we got any brains," Jim Colton said, "we'll quit right now. We'll shove off down to Frisco and maybe get us a job tending bar, or something."

FLOYD WAINWRIGHT ran fingers through long locks of black hair. He shook his head slowly. Tending bar wasn't his idea of making a living. Not while there was still a possibility of gold in the Sierra. He eyed Colton thoughtfully and a glint of fresh enthusiasm came into his eyes.

"I got an idea, Jim! Let's quit this claim and—"

"I'm with you," Colton agreed at once.

"Wait, Jim. You ain't heard my idea yet. I mean we'll quit this claim and shove up the river to our Silver Stream claim. We ain't worked it yet. Maybe it's good. Maybe . . ."

"For cripes' sake!" Colton grumbled in sullen disgust.

"Don't you even want to try it, Jim?"

"No."

But we ain't even worked it yet! How do we know what it's got. It looked good when we staked it."

Jim Colton sat down on the edge of a wooden flume, and wiped his sweating face with a blue polka-dot handkerchief, crumpled and soiled. "Listen, Floyd, I been finding me claims for nigh thirty years, and every last one I staked *looked good* when I staked it. Only some of them *was*, and some of them *wasn't*. I've got so I figure that if they *look* good, the chances are they ain't."

"Don't you want to give the Silver Stream a try?"

"No."

"But we ain't worked it a-tall, Jim. We've had it claimed for two years and we ain't even tried it."

Again Colton spat at his boot. "We had *this here* claim staked two years, but we ain't got nothing out of it, have we?" He wagged his head cynically. "No, sir, Floyd, I ain't gonna work Silver Stream with you. I even ain't so sure I'm gonna go on working this here one. No, sir, I ain't so sure."

They didn't speak to each other for the rest of the morning. At noon, the sun became hot on their backs. The water running in the flume, sidetracked from the stream's natural bed, sparkled in the sunlight and gurgled into the roaring American River fifty yards below them.

Floyd Wainwright and Jim Colton worked with pick and shovel in the bottom of the stream-bed. They worked hard and relentlessly, taking up gravel and black sand and washing it in rockers.

In the afternoon, the shadows of pines grew longer and the canyon in which they worked began to lose its heat. Gradually, the shadows reached even the flume.

"Floyd!" Jim Colton called suddenly. "There's somebody a-coming."

Floyd glanced up from his job sluicing water and sand in the rocker. He saw a small, bent-shouldered man picking his way down the slope through the pines. The man seemed weak, almost unable to walk. The pack on his back didn't look very big, yet several times he appeared to be borne down under the weight of it, fell to his knees. His boots kept slipping on the mat of pine needles. Now in the deep shadows of trees, now briefly in a patch of sun, he made an awkward, slipping descent of the slope and came into the canyon.

He was a Chinaman. Faded denim pants and jacket draped loosely on his frame. He was skeleton-thin. His face was brown wrinkled parchment stretched too tight over bony cheekbones. His hands were the hands of a skeleton with only tight skin and big veins added. Unmistakably in his gaunt eyes was suffering, and a resignation to defeat.

HE MADE an effort to smile at Floyd and Colton. Some of his teeth were missing, those that remained were yellow stumps. "*Pletty* sick man," he said.

"What's the matter with you, China boy?" Jim Colton asked.

"*Pletty* sick man. No eat three day. Come down North Fork. Long time no eat. Long way come—long way go."

"Where you headed for, Chinaboy?"

"Go San Flan-cis-co. Long way go. Pretty sick man."

"Let's give him some grub," Floyd suggested to Colton.

The Chinaman understood and smiled and nodded vigorous thanks. Then he shook his head negatively. "No can pay for food. No gold dust, nothing. Thank you, please. Kind man. Goodbye."

Floyd Wainwright stopped him in front of the tent. "You don't have to pay. Hungry men can come into this camp, but I'm darned if we'll let 'em go out hungry."

The Chinaman sat on his haunches and smiled continuously. The effort of smiling was a task, and Floyd realized what a tough time he'd probably had. Prospectors weren't friendly to Chinese. No doubt this yellow man had gone through many camps without asking for food. Even starving, he wouldn't ask. If he asked, the white prospectors would hurl rocks and shovels at him and chase him on his way.

Floyd cut a large slice of cooked meat off a leg of venison which was kept cool in a sack tied in the flume.

"Try that."

The Chinaman rose up and bowed and attempted to form a speech that would express his gratitude. But his starved stomach took charge of him. Ravenously, he ate the meat, hardly chewing it. He swallowed chunks whole, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down in his scrawny throat.

Jim Colton sat on the edge of the flume and sucked on a pipe which had no tobacco in it. "I don't like this, Floyd. We ain't hardly got enough to eat ourselves. And you go passing it out to some damn Chinaboy that's been taking all the gold out of our mountains."

"He's hungry, Jim."

Colton snorted, and spat into the flume. "Sure, he is. Everybody's hungry this summer. I'm hungry myself."

They learned the Chinaman's name was Ah Fong. He'd come to California, from China, in '52 and had headed immediately to the gold region. He was an incredibly old man, the hardships of his years in the Sierra increasing ruthlessly his appearance of age.

He gulped another slice of deer meat, and was deeply grateful. He wanted to know Floyd's name and where he could be reached by mail. Floyd gave his address as General Delivery, Three Pines—a town that lay twenty rugged miles over the mountain ranges. Ah Fong explained, with a great deal of gesturing and pidgin English, that he had a son in San Francisco. The son could write English—A-mel-ican he called it—and would formally express the family appreciation of Floyd's kindness.

"My son, him velly fine. Him have laund-ly San Flan-cis-co. You savvy laundly. Clean 'em up him clothes. Washie-washie."

"You aiming to go a-foot all the way to Frisco?" Floyd asked.

Ah Fong nodded. "Long way come—long way go." He explained that he had been prospecting the river, all its forks, for thirteen years. He had worked the waters all the way up to Indian Bluff. In recent years he had found barely enough dust to buy rice. All the good streams were claimed. Hydraulic companies took the rest. He had no more luck. It was over, finished.

"Gold all gone," he said, shaking his head sadly. "No more gold in mountains. Him all gone away."

Floyd suggested that Ah Fong rest in camp overnight, but the old man declined with wrinkled smiles. His unspoken code wouldn't allow him to accept more of the white man's hospitality. He lifted up his meager pack, old blankets, a few pans. His gnawing stomach temporarily appeased, he faced the long lonely trek to San Francisco. Perhaps not again would a white man offer him food. Before him lay greater suffering, greater hunger, greater strain.

He summed it all up in his expression: "Long way come—long way go."

The Sierra might yet claim his frail body. Or the foothills might, or the wide

flat valley of the Sacramento. Yet in his veins still ran the blood of China, and he would stumble on and on, against hunger and fatigue and loneliness, like a dog trekking endless desolate miles homeward to his master.

Floyd Wainwright and Jim Colton watched him climb slowly and steadily up the slope opposite camp, watched the pack bob and jolt on his thin stooped shoulders. Up and up he went, through the pines, pulling himself over the steeper, more slippery places by clawing at branches and underbrush.

"Hope the old man makes it," Floyd said.

LATE afternoon put the canyon in cool shadow, and the only sound was the whisper of water in the flume and the rushing roar of the American River farther on.

Floyd turned and saw that his partner had gone inside the tent, was rummaging around in there and packing a duffle bag. He knew at once, and with a pang of surprise and disappointment, what Colton was doing.

"Aiming to quit, Jim?"

Colton grunted. "I've had enough. When even the Chinese quit, it's enough for *me*. If you got any more sense than you was borned with, you'd be a-coming along with me, Floyd."

"Let's give Silver Stream a try."

Colton, not answering, continued to pack, and finally came out with his bag slung across his back.

"You gonna come along, Floyd?"

For a moment Floyd Wainwright stared up at the sky. There in the canyon, it was like looking up from the depths of the earth. He heard the roar of the river, continuously, and he looked at the flume they'd built, looked at the rockers, the tent, the picks and shovels. A deep loneliness, arising from the thought of facing work without his partner, filled his heart.

He shook his head. "No, Jim. Reckon I'll stay."

"Gonna work Silver Stream?"

"Don't know yet, Jim. I ain't yet figured just *what* I'll do."

"Better be a-coming along with me, Floyd. Better get some sense."

"No," said Floyd. "I aim to stick it out —anyway through the summer."

Jim Colton shuffled his right boot and toed thoughtless designs in the gravel. He didn't meet Floyd's eyes when he stuck out his hand.

"So long, Floyd."

Floyd grasped his hand briefly. "So long, Jim."

Colton turned away and began to hike up the slope under the pines. After a short distance, he stopped and looked back. "If you aim to work Silver Stream, and you get anything, it's all right for you to keep it—long as I ain't working it with you." He shrugged deeper into his pack harness. "Good luck to you, Floyd."

"Same to you, Jim," Floyd said.

Colton hiked up toward the ridge of the mountain. As Floyd watched him from the bottom of the canyon, he got smaller and smaller along the trees. Colton wasn't taking the same route Ah Fong had taken; he was heading in the direction of the Middle Fork and the covered wooden bridge that would bring him to the road into Three Pines.

After a while, Floyd couldn't see him any more. He had gone and Floyd was alone in the camp near the roaring river. He sat on the flume and dangled his hand in the ice-cold water. He didn't feel the cold. He didn't feel anything. He knocked his boot heels together with the slow beat of drums, dangled his hands there in the water.

Shortly, he noticed that the shadows had crept up the slope. It was getting dark. He ate some venison, but he didn't feel very hungry. He didn't bother to build a fire. He rolled up in his blankets inside the tent, and it was a long time before the strong song of the river put him to sleep.

It was a desolate country for a man to live alone in. He couldn't imagine working a claim without Jim.

II

IN THE morning, after the sun was up and silvering the pines on the ridge, it was still like cool dawn in the canyon. It was dark down there, and damp.

Floyd Wainwright rolled out of his blankets and built a small fire and cooked himself some flap-jacks and a small pot of coffee. He felt better after he had eaten. He began to think of gold again. He dismissed all thought of the Chinaman who had quit, and his partner who had quit.

He decided to go up and try the one remaining claim which he and Jim Colton hadn't worked—Silver Stream.

He packed his canvas bag. It contained little—blankets, a shallow gold pan, meager food supplies and utensils, fourteen rounds of rifle-ammunition and some cartridges for his revolver. The revolver was a Samuel-Colt Navy arm that had been rebuilt to use metallic ammunition in place of its original powder, ball, and cap.

He shoved the revolver into the belt of his trousers, put on a wool jacket, a felt flat-crowned hat, hefted his bag across his back. Strapped to the pack was his rifle, single-shot, a short-handled shovel and a light pick-axe.

He began to make his way, upstream, on the bank of the full-flowing river.

It was hard going, and he knew that only by relentless march and a good bit of luck could he reach Silver Stream before the end of the day. He marched relentlessly. He climbed through dense undergrowth, slipped down slopes of pine-needles. Sometimes he was close to the river; sometimes, to get around a giant bluff of rock, he was high above it, and when he looked down, it seemed only a fast-running creek.

He removed his wool jacket, but still he sweated. Whenever he stopped to rest, the air was cold, a breath of snow from the higher ranges. He pushed on and on, but at one point the river was so swollen he had to work his way all around the base of a mountain to get back again.

When dusk came, he was still a long way from Silver Stream. His hope to make it in a single day had been only a hope, an ambition. It would take part of the next morning to get there.

He hadn't seen a human all day, nor even the sign of a human—not even a deserted gold camp. He realized again how great the Sierra mountains were. He thought of Ah Fong stumbling mile on mile through the wilderness, trying to get out of them, trying to reach the distant goal of San Francisco. He thought of the long, wide Sacramento Valley, and about how far away civilization was. He thought for a long time about Mary Marshall.

She was waiting for him. She'd been waiting three years now. He'd promised that she wouldn't have to wait after he made his strike. A good strike. Perhaps that strike was to be made at Silver Stream.

He went to sleep, rolled in blankets, and the big pines above him whispered softly in the night breezes.

IN THE morning of the next day, he shot a small deer. He butchered it, packed the best sections of meat, and moved on toward Silver Stream.

He got there as the sun was straight up in the sky and playing bright warmth into the gorge of the American River.

Silver Stream, as he and Jim Colton had named it, was a rippling creek that raced swiftly down a narrow chasm and dumped itself over a thirty foot waterfall into the river. Floyd edged his way along the top of the bluff, beside the waterfall, and then he became aware of a path cut by man's tools out of the slope.

He stopped and stood for a long time, studying the path. All about him was the sound of water, the rush of the river, the continuous splashing thunder of the waterfall; all about him were big silent pines clinging to the sides of the steep mountains.

He got down on his knees and studied the path more closely. It had been recently traveled. Yet the path itself didn't belong

there. Silver Stream, from the waterfall to the stream's source on the ridge, belonged to Floyd Wainwright and Jim Colton by right of field claim. No man had a right to make a path.

Floyd set down his pack by the edge of the waterfall and took his revolver from his belt. He walked briskly, yet stealthily, along the path.

Soon he came to a camp. There was a tent, rockers, picks and shovels. But no man about.

He cupped a hand to his mouth and shouted, "Hello!" through the pines.

Forlornly, the voice of a ghost cried: *"Ha-low!"* from up above the stream's canyon. Again Floyd called and again that cry came back to him, a repetition of his own call: *"Ha-looo!"* The echo was his only answer.

He stepped to a bed of dead ashes, surrounded by stones, and put a hand into the ashes. They were warm.

He hiked rapidly back down the path to the edge of the waterfall where he'd left his pack. Only a yard from his boot, the bluff made a sheer drop of thirty feet to the foaming, churning river. He shoved his revolver back into his belt, but not deep down; the butt was ready to his grasp. He unloosened his rifle from the pack, checked to see that a cartridge was in the firing chamber. He intended to scour the surrounding forest for sight of the man, or men, who had jumped the claim belonging to Jim Colton and himself.

He hefted the pack to his shoulders, and as he did so, something struck him between the shoulder-blades with the force of a pick-axe. Thought, with the speed of a lashing whip, told him he'd been shot. He knew he'd been shot even before he heard the crack of the rifle.

THERE was nothing he could do to save himself. It happened so fast—the sharp blow against his spine knocked him off his feet. The sound of the unseen gun seemed trivial and unimportant. He tried to grab the edge of the cliff . . . it hit him in the chest. He tried to grab a protruding root, found it well beyond his reach . . . he was falling.

He turned over twice, in midair, touching nothing. The bullet made no pain in his back. He was conscious of no pain whatever—even his chest didn't hurt after he struck the edge of the bluff. Nothing hurt him. He was falling, turning over in the air . . . had just a sensation of falling.

The American River rose up crazily and hit him square in the back and deadened all the nerves in his body. He saw a mighty splash of water rising up around him and knew without personal concern that his own body had made the splash. Then he was under water, rolling and turning. His breath had been knocked out of him. No longer was he without concern. He was drowning; every drag of new breath caused him to gag, to choke. He was going under and under. . . .

He didn't think about the bullet's hurting him. His whole back was numb, without pain. He knew that a shot fired from the pines had knocked him over the waterfall into the swollen river. He knew that he was drowning.

He thrashed his arms and legs, fought to the rough surface. Blue sky and mountains shimmered before his flooded eyes. He gagged, choked, coughed up water; tried to swim.

The current whirled and tossed him, bearing him onward toward the rapids. He was just a toy for the angry river to play with and destroy.

He clawed and flayed to keep himself afloat. Twice, in the boil of white-capped water around him, a slim little fountain spurted up mysteriously and vanished; twice, following each quick spurt, there was a distant crack of sound, like the snap of timber. He knew, after a long second's time, that somebody was shooting at him from the bluff.

They'd shot him once, pitching him over the waterfall, and now they were trying to shoot him again.

The river had him now, took hold of him in a mighty grasp, and sucked him

under the surface, twisting him with sharp violence. Boulders struck him thudding blows in the back, the head, the arms, the legs. He was hammered and pounded, rolled over and over on the rocky bottom.

The rapids released him as suddenly as they had taken hold of him. He bobbed up in swift wide water racing through a gorge. He thrashed with his legs, to keep on top, and the water in his lungs hurt. It hurt him when he coughed . . . and he couldn't stop coughing. It hurt him to swim, to breathe; it hurt just to be living.

Looking back, he couldn't see the bluff and the waterfall of Silver Stream. All that was past, far back.

In deep water, he tried to thrash his way toward shore, but always the cruel current bore him on, taunted him by turning near successes into abrupt failures. He saw rapids rushing toward him, felt the increased suction of the river. Panic gripped him now; he didn't see how he could stand it again.

But he was in it, beaten, pounded, dragged along without mercy; rolled over and over in the rapids.

He came up half-drowned and half conscious in a broad bend in the river. He could see a wide gap in the mountains ahead of him, and he realized, with a frantic fear knotting his bruised muscles, that he was heading for the Middle Fork branch. He would have no chance to live if he was carried into that mighty mad swirl where the two forks met.

He clawed for shore with every ounce of his remaining strength, with wild energy that came from man's will to live. A log, whirling beside him, smashed him in the face, drew a flow of blood which the river instantly washed away. He didn't swim against the current, but with it; intelligence had returned to him after the torture of the rapids. He went with the current, always thrashing toward the outer edge of its force.

And he came at last to slower water. There was a branch above him, trailing down, and he caught it. There was a feeling that the branch wouldn't hold his weight, but it did hold. He coughed water from stomach and lungs, remained clinging there for a long time, feeling the ineffectual tug of the cheated river.

III

THE town of Three Pines lay in a meadow in the mountains. During the 'Sixties and 'Seventies, it was an important jumping-off place for miners trekking deeper into the Sierra. It had a church, several saloons; it had a large hardware store, a scattering of private frame-dwellings—some of them abandoned; a general supply store which became the Town Hall for occasional meetings of citizens; and it operated a stage line which made a round-trip journey over the mountainous road to Auburn. It proudly possessed the Nevada House, a two-story frame hotel with a *de luxe* restaurant attached.

An old man named Marshall, known to the Sierra as "Short John," owned the Nevada House. He also owned a stable of horses and mules which he bought in Sacramento and sold in Three Pines, to prospectors, at a fancy profit. On top of that, he got a small salary each month for enforcing local law.

His election to the office of chief law-enforcer came about when a general meeting of local citizens was called at Joe McGivern's Hardware Store. It was decided that what Three Pines needed was somebody to make the law mean something and that nominations for the post were then in order.

A burly man, proprietor of the Trail's End Saloon, got to his feet and made a speech.

"Gentlemen," he said, "what this here town needs is a town marshal. And right at this here meeting we got a man named Short John Marshall. Now I figure this way: as long as we need a town marshal, and as long as Short John's name is Marshall, we might as well give him the job."

"Is that a nomination, Ed?" the chairman of the meeting asked.

"Sure—what do you think I'm talking

for, if it ain't a nomination? We can't go and elect somebody else, 'cause that'll make two different men called Marshall, and when some fellow says marshal, nobody's gonna know which Marshall he means."

So Short John Marshall, by unanimous vote and virtue of his peculiar qualification, was elected Town Marshal of Three Pines in 1868. He was still in office.

Short John had had a brother, called Long John, who died in a gun-fight following a card game in Virginia City. That was in '73. Long John left a daughter, Mary, who came to live in Three Pines with her uncle.

Short John was a strict guardian over his niece. She'd come to the Nevada House at the age of sixteen, and she was a beautiful young woman in a region that had few women at all, let alone beautiful and young.

Her hair was like gold-dust trapped in the black sand of a mining pan, and she had a figure, full and firm, that made the miners in Three Pines look at her, and stare at her, in a way that Short John Marshall didn't like.

MARSHALL threw a rage one evening when he found Mary sitting on the porch of the Nevada House with some young upstart of a prospector whose name was Floyd Wainwright. He thought of arresting Floyd on a charge of being a criminal character not wanted locally, but he was unable to discover any tangible evidence that Floyd was either malicious or unwelcome in Three Pines.

In fact, he learned that everybody around town liked Floyd, and spoke of him in the best of terms, and that caused Short John's rage to mount. In his own distrusting mind, he arrived at the conclusion that Floyd Wainwright was some sort of a snake-in-the-grass who won confidence and then resorted to criminal trickery. He was very sure the young fellow would ruin Mary's life.

The situation took a decided turn for the worse when he accidentally discovered them sitting in the empty church one afternoon. They were holding hands.

He hit Floyd in the face so hard that the young upstart fell clear over a pew. And Floyd didn't show any anger, or try to fight back. Short John wasn't surprised; he'd suspected all along that Floyd was a coward.

The young man said: "You don't understand, Mr. Marshall—"

"I understand you plenty!" Short John barked. "I been town marshal for nigh on ten years, and I can smell you skunks a mile away!"

"You don't understand," Floyd repeated with patient respect. "I love your niece, and I just asked her to marry me."

Short John fumed: "What do you mean by sneaking my niece into an empty church?"

Floyd hung his head and grinned at Mary. She smiled back, frankly. He said: "It's sort of hard to say, Mr. Marshall. Mary and me, we sort of come here and we knelt down by the altar. It sounds sort of funny when you tell about it. I said to Mary we'd get married when I made a gold strike. And I asked her to wait for me, and she sort of said she would—"

"I *did* say I would," Mary corrected.

Short John Marshall slapped Floyd on the side of the head. "You get out of here, and don't let me see no hide nor hair of you! 'Cause if I do, I'll kick your yellow liver and run you right out of Three Pines. I ain't gonna have my niece victimized by no sneaking, smooth-talking skunk!"

The young prospector nodded solemnly, shuffled along the aisle of the church. As he got to the doorway, he looked back. "I'll make a strike, Mary."

"I'll wait for you, Floyd."

ON A day in June, 1877, a man came limping down the dusty road into Three Pines. His clothes were ragged, his shirt half torn away. A four-day growth of beard darkened his jaw.

He trudged along through the dust, and there was nobody about to notice him as he entered the Nevada House restaurant.

The room was empty, and five tables were set with checkered cloth and bright silver.

Mary Marshall came out of the kitchen, wearing an apron, and said: "Yes? Be seated, please." Then she recognized the man. *"Floyd!"*

"Hello, Mary."

"Oh, Floyd! What happened?"

Floyd Wainwright, half sat, half collapsed, into a chair at a table. "I came back, Mary. I didn't make a strike yet, though."

"I don't care about any strike," she said. "What happened to you, Floyd? It appears like you've been hurt."

"I'm all right. I just sort of ran into a little trouble. But I don't want you to go worrying, 'cause I'm all right."

She examined closely a healing cut on his cheek, and her fingers were cool against the bruised hot muscles of his shoulder as she probed under his ripped shirt. There was no bullet-wound. The shot fired at him from the trees by Silver Stream had struck the gold pan in his pack, glancing off. It had been the impact that pitched him over the waterfall to the river. He had been cruelly punished in the rapids. His back and shoulders were cut and bruised. His left knee, striking a boulder under water, was swollen and stiff, leaving him with a painful limp.

"You *are* hurt, Floyd! You come right into the kitchen."

Floyd frowned worriedly. "Where's your uncle? He won't like it a-tall if he goes and finds me here."

"Never mind about my uncle."

She took him to the kitchen, and poured hot water into a basin and made him wash. She went upstairs to her uncle's room and brought down a razor and a clean shirt.

"Old Short John won't like this a-tall," Floyd grinned. "Me shaving with his razor and wearing his shirt."

But he did shave with Short John's razor, and he did put on Short John's shirt. Mary wanted to get Doc Whitman to tend his hurts, but Floyd wouldn't stand for that.

"I'm all right, Mary. I'm just sort of tuckered and hungry, 'cause I fell in the North Fork and it took me nigh three days to get here, and I ain't had nothing to eat."

"Nothing to eat?" She stared at him, horror-stricken, "Oh Floyd! Poor Floyd!"

She was at the stove then, taking things from pots and heaping them on a plate. It was near to dinnertime and lots of things were already prepared. She heaped the plate with potatoes and cuts of hot beef, and biscuits. She put a whole pitcher of milk on the kitchen table, along with the plate. "You just set right there Floyd."

He sat down and looked at the food with hungry eyes. "I sort of hate to do this on account of I don't have no money nor dust, and it's not right for me to go eating Short John's food when he don't like me."

"You set right there and eat," Mary said.

Floyd's hand trembled a little, hesitated, then reached for the pitcher. "Maybe I'll just sort of drink a little milk. . . ."

Before he was through, he ate the beef and potatoes, two batches of biscuits, and some stewed apples. He also put away half the pitcher of milk.

"I feel awful ashamed of myself," he said afterward. "Old Short John'll be fit to hang me."

"Don't you even think about Short John." She studied him thoughtfully, then, trying to read some secret in his face. "Why don't you tell me what happened, Floyd?"

He shrugged. "Nothing did."

"Mr. Jim Colton came to town yesterday."

"He quit," Floyd explained. "I ain't blaming him much. We didn't find nothing. Nobody's finding nothing these days. Even the Chinese call it quits."

Mary looked pleased and hopeful. "Are you aiming to quit now, Floyd?"

"Well . . . it's sort of this way. I ain't worked Silver Stream yet and I got a certain sort of reason to figure there's gold there." He didn't tell her the reason, didn't tell her that some unknown party had sneaked in and worked Silver Stream while

he and Jim Colton were starving and toiling farther down the American River. He didn't tell her because he didn't want her to worry. He didn't want her to learn that the reason he "fell" into the river was that somebody tried to kill him.

"You figure there's gold on Silver Stream, Floyd?" Mary wasn't very happy at the prospect. In her heart she wished that Floyd would quit and that they would get married, in spite of Short John Marshall. She wasn't selfish; it wasn't that she didn't care to go on waiting for Floyd. She didn't mind waiting. It was just that she knew, from seeing prospectors trekking home in failure through Three Pines, that the boom days were over—and she didn't want Floyd to face more disappointments. Yet it never occurred to her that she should advise him to quit; she would never dare advise him. Anything Floyd wanted to do, she accepted. Floyd was a man, and she respected him as well as loved him, and anything he did would be the right thing.

Floyd said: "I figure for certain there's gold on Silver Stream. And me and Jim Colton got it claimed. So I figure to go see Jim and tell him he shouldn't quit yet. Me and him will go back, and we'll work hard at Silver Stream." Sudden dejection, worry over a problem, caused him to hang his head. "Only thing is, we don't have a grub-stake."

Instantly, without a single hesitation, Mary removed something from her finger, put it on the table. "It's my mother's ring, Floyd. It's got three diamonds in it. I think Mr. Joe McGivern, at the hardware store, will buy it, and then you'll have enough money to get supplies for you and your partner . . . and I'll wait for you, Floyd."

He got up from the table and kissed her in a brief self-conscious way. He put the ring back on her finger. "Not in a million years—not if I had a million Silver Streams. If me and Jim can't get a stake some other way, we won't have no stake a-tall. I owe you enough as it is, Mary. I don't see why a girl like you wants to wait for me.

MARY was standing near the open kitchen door, and happening to glance through it at that moment, she saw a customer for dinner sitting at one of the tables. Her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. "Excuse me, Floyd . . ." She hurried into the room, straightening her apron. "I'm awful sorry, Mr. Thomson. I didn't hear you come in—I was sort of talking in the kitchen—with a friend of mine."

"That's all right, Miss Marshall."

"Would you like dinner, Mr. Thomson? We have hot beef and potatoes, and stewed apples and biscuits."

Floyd Wainwright, hitching up his belt, went through the door into the dining room. "I figure I'll sort of amble along, Mary. Got to find Jim Colton."

Thomson pushed back his chair and got up. He was a big broad man, fifty, and he wore better clothes than a prospector. His suit was expensive cloth, with large checks in it, and he wore a high celluloid collar with a black bow tie. His shirt was silk; his boots soft black leather with hand-stitched designs, and he wore his trousers on the outside of the boots. There was a heavy gold watch-chain looped across his vest. He looked to Floyd like a city man from San Francisco.

"Pardon me, sir," he called. "I'd like to have a word with you."

Floyd stopped by the door and smiled at the stranger politely. Thomson had a ruddy face, a horseshoe mustache, the ends of which curved down and were neatly trimmed and twisted at his jaw. His hair was cut short and parted in the middle.

"Just a private word with you, sir," he said, and bowed to Mary. "I hope you will be so kind as to pardon us, Miss Marshall. I shan't want dinner until later."

Mary made a brief curtsy and retreated to the kitchen.

Thomson had hard calloused hands, and he rubbed them together and then began to finger his watch-chain. "My name is Thompson. I have been a long time in the Sierra." He offered his hand.

"Pleased to met you, Mr. Thomson. Me, my name is Floyd Wainwright."

"A fine strong American name," Thomson stated in a smooth, soft-spoken voice. 'I once knowed a family named Wainwright who met a sad fate at the hands of Cherokees on the overland trail."

"That was my family," Floyd told him. "My father and mother and most of the wagon train was killed. My brother and me got through to Sacramento with a gentleman named Adams, who is now dead. My brother is dead also."

Thomson frowned sympathetically. "It makes me very sad to hear that news, Mr. Wainwright. Yes, very sad. The hardships of the trail in '49 were indeed hardships. Indeed, and I regret to say, it is little better at the present time."

"That's true," Floyd agreed courteously.

Thomson lifted a hand and cupped it over a discreet cough. "It embarrasses me to confess to you that my ears have been rude."

"Rude?"

"Yes. I was sitting here at the table, waiting for dinner, and my rude ears heard what you were saying to Miss Marshall in the kitchen. I learn that you got a claim called Silver Stream on which you believe there is gold."

"That's true, sir."

"I also learn, through my rude ears, that you own this claim along with a partner—Colton, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"And I learn that only by means of money, for a grub-stake, can you and your partner hope to work this here claim." Again, Thomson palmed a light, self-conscious cough. "Also, I figure you for a man worth trusting and believing."

FLOYD WAINWRIGHT felt a sudden surge of enthusiasm. He could tell that this man Thomson had money, and he figured that Thomson was about to propose advancing a sum for the working of Silver Stream. "You'll stake me and my partner, Mr. Thomson?"

Thomson shook his head. "No, young man, I'm afraid I shan't."

"Silver Stream is good," Floyd defended, fearing another disappointment. "I know it's good. It's a strike. If you'll stake us . . ."

"Young man, I have been staking prospectors for nigh five years and I have had little return from my investments. Never, so long as I live, will I stake another miner. The big profits no longer exist in the Sierra. No, sir, I'm sorry to say I shan't advance your money for your claim. However, I have something in mind."

"Something else?" Floyd was grasping at a straw, any straw.

"Yes, sir. I have in mind a method whereby I believe you can earn enough money to work your claim. You can earn a thousand dollars."

"A thousand?"

Thomson nodded mysteriously, casting a brief glance over his shoulder as though to make certain no person could be listening. "Can you handle a revolver, Mr. Wainwright?"

"I'm not so intolerable bad," Floyd said.

"Then please go at once to the Trail's End Saloon and wait for me. I believe I can show you a method which will earn you the sum I mention, and for only one day of work. Are you interested in the proposition, Mr. Wainwright?"

Thoughtfully, Floyd stroked his freshly shaven jaw. "I thank you kindly, Mr. Thomson." He shuffled his boots on the pine floor in embarrassment. "Of course—well, I don't mean to cast no reflections on you, Mr. Thomson—but, well, I ain't the kind of man to accept no lawless propositions."

Thomson gave a hearty laugh and clapped a hand on Floyd's shoulder. "Well spoken, my boy. I can see you're just the kind of man I need on this proposition. May I count on meeting you at the saloon?"

"Yes, sir," Floyd agreed. "Shall I go get my partner?"

Thomson pondered for a moment, then shook his head. "I think I need only one man on this proposition, and I would rather not, at the present, explain it to others."

"My partner, Jim Colton, is a trustworthy man," Floyd said.

"I do not doubt that, Mr. Wainwright. But for the present I would rather you go direct to the saloon and wait for me. I shan't be long."

"I'll go right now," Floyd promised. "And thank you kindly."

IV

THE bartender of the Trail's End Saloon was reading a week-old San Francisco newspaper with deep interest, and he was not in a mood for conversation. He was particularly annoyed by Floyd Wainwright's presence in the saloon. Floyd, not having any money, didn't order anything, just sat at a round wooden table waiting for Thomson to come.

The bartender rustled the newspaper angrily. "Don't you even want to buy a see-gar?"

"No, sir. If you don't mind, I'll just set here. I'm waiting for a party."

The saloon had the smell of last night's smoke and whisky. It was dark, there being only a small window at each end of the bar and the front doorway. After awhile a man strode in from the bright sunlight and blinked to adjust his eyes to the dim interior. "I'm looking for a fellow," he said.

Floyd recognized him and called: "Hello, there, Jim."

Jim Colton grinned broadly. He went over and pumped Floyd's hand. "I been looking for you, Floyd. I just been to the Nevada House to get me some dinner, and Miss Marshall, she told me you was in town. I'm powerful glad you quit, Floyd. No use breaking your back and heart when there ain't no more gold. Me, I'm taking the stage tomorrow to Auburn. From there, I figure to shove somehow to Frisco. Want to come along, Floyd?"

"No, Jim. I ain't quitting. And I don't figure that you ought to quit yet, either. I was gonna find you in a little while. I want me and you to go back and work Silver Stream."

Jim Colton grunted wearily. "And here I went and thought you was quitting."

"Not while there's gold on Silver Stream."

Colton wagged his head as though he thought Floyd was a hopeless case. "That's what you said before."

"But this time I'm right, Jim. There *is* gold on Silver Stream. Listen, Jim: Right after you left, I shoved up the river. And when I got there I found somebody'd been working the stream."

Colton stared at him, puzzled. "Silver Stream?"

Floyd nodded.

"You mean somebody went and jumped our claim?"

"Somebody's been a-working it, Jim. I seen a tent and equipment, and a path from the river, and it looks like they been working it a long time, maybe a year."

For a moment Colton couldn't speak. He just stared at Floyd. Then all he said was: "Well, I'll be a son of a dirty Injun!"

"Listen, Jim. When I found this here strange camp, I didn't see nobody around. I went back to the waterfall and got my rifle. And just then somebody shot at me from the trees."

"Hit you?"

"In the back," Floyd said. "Only lucky for me, I'd just shouldered my duffle pack, and I figure the bullet stopped in the pack. Or maybe it bounced off my gold pan, or my shovel. Anyway, I don't have no bullethole in me. But the bullet hit the shovel—or whatever it did hit—so hard it knocked me clean over the waterfall into the river.

"I'll be a dirty Injun!"

"And after I was in the river, somebody up in the trees still kept a-shooting. Didn't hit me though. The river took me over rapids and almost to Middle Fork. I still kind of pinch myself to make sure I ain't dead."

"Got half a notion to pinch you myself," Colton told him. "It ain't hardly human for a man to bounce down the river almost to Middle Fork and still not be dead."

"Maybe I ain't human," Floyd grinned. "Anyway, Jim, if somebody went and

neaked in and worked our claim, it must ave gold in it."

Jim Colton nodded thoughtfully. "It nust have plenty of gold in it when they ven try to kill you."

"That's what I mean."

Colton's jaw clamped to fighting hardness. "We won't stand for nothing like hat, Floyd. We won't let nobody take gold ff a claim that is ours by right of law. And we won't let nobody try to kill us. We'll shove right back there and fight for vhat is ours." Then his fighting purpose elaxed; it had met an obstacle. "Hell," he ursed, "I only got seventeen dollars."

Floyd gave a short bitter laugh. "How bout *me?* I ain't got nothing. I lost my back in the river. I lost my rifle and my evolver. I even lost that little pouch of lust I had around by neck. I ain't got nothing, Jim. Even the shirt I'm a-wearing belongs to Short John Marshall."

Jim Colton threw back his head and roared with laughter. "Does Old Short John know you're wearing his shirt?"

"Of course he don't. I'd be hanging by my neck from a pine bough if he knew it."

"I'll bet," said Colton. He produced a pipe from his jacket and sucked on the cold stem. His eyes grew gravely thoughtful, and he ordered two whiskies from the bartender. With the fingers of both hands, he began to drum on the stained table-top. "We've got to figure something, Floyd. We got to figure how to raise a grub-stake so we can shove back to Silver Stream and chase them claim-jumpers off."

"That's right, Jim. And I think maybe I got something lined up already."

"Already?"

"Maybe. Anyway, right now I'm waiting for a fellow named Thomson. I sort of met him by accident over at the Nevada House."

"Thomson? Old Jack-pot Tommy Thomson?"

"I don't know his first handle."

"I'll bet it is. He's a gambler. He can deal himself more aces from a pack than any man in the Sierra. One night, over in Hangtown, I seen him take seven thousand dollars and a bag of dust off some prospectors. He can make a deck of cards stand right up and talk."

JUST then Thomson himself came into the Trail's End Saloon. He walked with a pompous stride, like a city banker, or like some rich saloon-keeper from San Francisco.

"Gentlemen," he greeted, bowing briefly.

Floyd introduced him to Jim Colton. He was very cordial to Colton, remembering that he had met him years ago in Hangtown. "You have a fine man for a partner, Mr. Wainwright," he told Floyd. "Yes, a fine man. Now that I see who he is, I shan't mind taking him in on my proposition." Thomson called over to the bartender to refill the two glasses already on the table, and to bring a third bourbon, with a twist of lemon peel in it.

"We ain't got no lemons," the bartender grumbled sullenly, annoyed at the request.

"Ah, that's the trouble with these mountain saloons," Thomson complained in a sophisticated way which showed he knew all the better places of the country. "These mountain saloons don't have nothing—not even lemon peels."

The bartender cursed. "Listen, mister, if you don't like what we got, you don't need to come in."

Thomson did not reply. His manner indicated clearly that he was above bandying words with a bartender.

Thomson waited until the bartender had left the drinks and had retreated to his newspaper behind the bar. Thomson then leaned forward over the table and talked in a smooth whisper.

"Gentlemen. No doubt you know that there is a certain evil party in the Sierra who is called 'Wells Fargo' Billy Smith."

"Seems like I've heard about him," Floyd nodded. "He's a road robber."

"Sure," added Jim Colton. "I seen his name on posters nailed to the trees. He robs the stages and breaks open the Wells Fargo boxes."

"Correct," said the gambler in a whisper. "Now, this here Billy Smith is much

sought by the enforcers of the law. He is a menace to the peace of the Sierra, on account of he has killed several men, and the Wells Fargo Company offers five thousand dollars for his capture"—Thomson tossed down his whisky before finishing solemnly—"dead or alive."

The sinking sun had thrown a long shaft of white light into the west window of the saloon, and in that light many flies buzzed and darted over liquor stains and around the cuspidors. A gentle afternoon breeze wafted in the window and twitched the towels drying on a rack behind the bar.

"Now my idea," said Thomson, "is that I would like to capture this road agent, and collect the reward from the Wells Fargo Company. Last night I got certain information which tells me where, maybe, I can catch him. But I aimed to keep this information to myself. If I informed it to an officer of the law, such as Short John Marshall, he would go out and capture Billy Smith and keep the reward. Me, I am a gambler by trade, and I never put five thousand dollars into another man's pocket, particularly an old grouch like Short John Marshall."

"Where does the proposition come in, Mr. Thomson?" Floyd asked.

"It comes in right here, like this: I am myself—if you'll allow me to say so—a rather handy man with a gun. But I'm modest enough to know I can't capture Wells Fargo Billy Smith all by myself." He looked sharply at Floyd. "So when my rude ears heard you talking to Miss Marshall in the kitchen of the Nevada House, I figured you was just the man I needed. You want money to work a claim, you and your partner, and you can get it if you help me catch Billy Smith. I will be glad to pay you a thousand dollars out of the Wells Fargo reward money."

"And you keep four thousand?"

Thomson grinned expansively, sure of himself. "I am a gambler by trade and I always get the best of the percentage. But I am also a fair man. As long as Mr. Colton will come along and help us, I will give you fifteen hundred between you."

"Make it two thousand even," Colton said.

Thomson smiled wisely and shook his head. "Fifteen hundred is my guarantee. Nothing more, nothing less. I believe I am being fair. After all, the information is mine."

"We'll take it," Colton agreed.

But Floyd pondered, considering something. "I'm not so sure I can accept this offer, Mr. Thomson."

Colton stared at him in amazement. "Why not, Floyd? We need the money for Silver Stream, don't we?"

"Yes, but I ain't so sure about the proposition. If Mr. Thomson has information about a bandit, he should tell the town marshal about it."

Thomson frowned indignantly. "And let Short John collect the reward?"

"Maybe," Floyd said. "Maybe—anyway I have a sort of fondness for his niece, and I wouldn't want to do anything against Short John Marshall that Mary wouldn't like."

JIM COLTON banged an impatient fist on the table. "Don't go talking like that, Floyd. What did Short John ever do for *you?* He just about chased you out of Three Pines, didn't he? He don't want you to see his niece, does he? He thinks you're a no-good prospector, don't he? All right, here's your chance to prove you're honest. All you got to do is help Mr. Thomson capture Billy Smith."

"Somehow, I don't feel it's right," Floyd said.

Thomson started to get up. He spread his hands in a hopeless gesture. "Of course, if you gentlemen don't want to take my offer . . ."

"Listen, Floyd," Jim Colton pleaded, "we *got* to take it. We got to have money to go back to Silver Stream. The claim is half mine, and as my partner you got to help me make money to go back. Also, if you don't have no money, how do you figure to ever marry Miss Marshall?"

"That's true," Floyd nodded.

Thomson's eyes twinkled. An idea for a

final persuasion had occurred to him "Mr. Wainwright," he said, "you come from fighting stock. You come from the Wainwrights who died fighting the Cherokee Indians in '49. It's a blow to my heart to find you are afraid to fight a road agent such as Wells Fargo Billy Smith."

Floyd glanced up defensively. "I ain't afraid of nobody. I just figured that if it's capturing a bandit, we should tell Short John Marshall. But I ain't afraid."

Thomson knew his card game was now over; he had played an ace in the hole. He stuck out his hand to both Floyd and Jim Colton. "Do I understand that you gentlemen accept?"

"We accept," Colton said.

"Shake on it?"

Colton shook his hand. Thomson turned to Floyd. "And *you,* Mr. Wainwright? Will you shake on it?"

"I shake on it," Floyd said, and did.

But he felt all along that he was doing something against his will, something his conscience warned him not to do.

Thomson called over his shoulder for another round of whisky. "Gentlemen, I will meet you at dawn tomorrow at the Three Pines Livery Stable." His voice was a soft whisper, softer than the gentle breeze through the pines outside. "I will supply horses and guns. I got my information at a card game last night at McGivern's Hardware Store. Billy Smith plans to hold up the stage at Boulder Gap. If we start at dawn, we can reach Boulder Gap before noon. The stage don't come through till four. That gives us plenty time to set our trap. Yet I want all three of us to understand that we share the Wells Fargo reward if we win, and death if we lose. We are not setting out on no picnic. Wells Fargo Billy Smith will fight for his life." Thomson shrugged. "I consider it a gamble—reward if we win, death if we lose. May I count on you both at dawn?"

"At dawn," Jim Colton promised. "We'll be there."

"At the livery stable," said Floyd Wainwright.

They downed their whisky.

V

IN THE early morning, before sun-up, the town of Three Pines squatted cold and silent in the mountains. There was gray, half light. Dew sparkled like millions of tiny diamonds on the grass back of McGivern's pasture, and water in a pail, forgotten on the back porch of the Nevada House, was ice cold and without motion.

Birds began to sing. The branches of mighty pines didn't even whisper, there being hardly a breeze. A pine cone fell mysteriously from a tall tree behind the Trail's End Saloon, and squirrels were out scampering, nervous, briskly hunting.

Floyd Wainwright had slept overnight in the loft of McGivern's barn, and as soon as he woke up, he remembered that this was the day he either won or died.

The eastern sky, over the ridge, had strong color in it, the colors of dawn. Pines and boulders on the ridge stood out in sharp silhouette.

Floyd hiked across McGivern's back pasture toward the Nevada House. He wore, in a holster on his belt, a six-shooter revolver which Tommy Thomson had furnished to him the night before. They were going out on horses to Boulder Gap and try to catch Wells Fargo Billy Smith.

Roosters crowed raucously as Floyd hiked down through the chill morning air to the back porch of the Nevada House.

When he got to the porch, Mary Marshall opened the screen door, saying: "I have breakfast for you, Floyd."

She'd been up and waiting, for a long time, and there was a nice warm smell of cooking in the kitchen. Floyd sat down at the table she had set for him. He ate fried eggs, potato cakes, corn muffins, and drank two big glasses of milk. There seemed no end to Mary's ability to feed him. Yet she was worried and nervous. She had noticed the revolver strapped at his waist.

"Where are you going, Floyd?"

He hadn't told her and didn't want to. He looked embarrassed, chewed a mouthful of corn muffin. "I'm just sort of figuring to make some money so I can work Silver

Stream, and then you and me—we can get married, like we said that day in the church."

"What've you got the pistol for, Floyd?"

"You mean this one here?" He didn't meet her eyes, forked up the last of the potato cakes. "A man's got to have a gun, don't he, Mary?"

"Yes, but you didn't have one yesterday."

"Sure. I lost mine in the river. So a friend of mine loaned me this here one." He eyed her levelly. "Say, what's bothering you, anyhow, Mary?"

"Nothing." She said that in a choked little voice and turned away, looking out the window and across McGivern's pasture to the pine-studded ridge and the brightening dawn.

"I know," he admitted. "It's on account of you don't want me to go back with Jim Colton and work Silver Stream. I don't blame you for being tired of waiting. . . ."

She turned suddenly. "I'm *not* tired of waiting. I don't care how long it is, just so as you come back."

He got up and tightened his gun belt, giving a short reassuring laugh. "You don't need to worry never about that, 'cause I'll always come back."

THEY were waiting for him at the stable, Jim Colton and the gambler called Jack-pot Tommy Thomson. Three horses, saddled, bridled, stood just inside the doorway. Thomson wore buckskin pants which had seen much service, an old flannel shirt, and a battered felt hat. His boots were run-over at the heels. In that outfit he suggested a mountain man, a prospector, rather than a gambler.

He shook hands briefly with Floyd.

"Where you fellows heading for?" the stable man asked.

"Indian Bluff," said Thomson.

"Aim to be gone long?"

"I don't know, sir. But you can be assured all charges for the horses will be paid."

Thomson swung into the saddle of a tall roan. Jim Colton, already mounted, had not said a single word to Floyd. He had grinned a greeting as Floyd came in, but that was all. His fingers seemed nervous as they unconsciously tied knots in the leather thongs on the pommel of the saddle. He tied knots, then untied them, and tied new ones. His eyes were bloodshot, as though he hadn't slept, as though he had sat up drinking all night. Perhaps he had. Floyd had left him at the saloon with Thomson just before sundown.

Floyd mounted the third horse, a bay mare, and lengthened the stirrup straps one notch to suit his long legs.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" Thomson asked.

Floyd nodded, and the three of them jabbed heels to horses' sides and rode from the stable.

The sun had just appeared, white-hot and glaring, over the ridge back of town. Shutters wouldn't be opened for hours yet on the windows of the saloons. In McGivern's barnyard a woman was walking out back with two pails to feed the chickens. The morning was hushed, quiet, and the sun hadn't yet warmed the meadow of Three Pines.

The horsemen rode abreast, at an easy lope, along the wide road past straggling frame buildings As they went by the Nevada House, Mary Marshall was on the front porch. Floyd waved to her. The gambler doffed his hat gallantly, as if it had plumes, and they rode straight by the Nevada House and on up over the ridge.

Shortly, the road became narrow, not much wider than the wheel-ruts left by the passage of the weekly stage from Indian Bluff via Three Pines to Auburn. Sometimes it was so narrow that Thomson rode on ahead, Floyd following next, Jim Colton last. That way, single file, they loped in the path between the wheel ruts, a path worn and beaten by the horses of the weekly stage and by occasional freight wagons.

Often the road was a mere gash cut into the steep mountainside; often it dipped and climbed, and skirted giant

trees and bold formations of rock. Often it forded clear cold mountain streams. And once in a while it routed itself in a detour around a point where spring rains had washed it out.

Riding through the early morning, Thomson chatted in a casual, easy manner, showing no sign that he feared the final showdown. He talked like a man going to a card game, rather than a man riding out to capture Wells Fargo Billy Smith. He talked of the failure of lone prospectors along the rivers, the successes of hydraulic and quartz-mining. He spoke of a new strike of silver in Nevada's Comstock Lode, and he discussed at length a revolver which was this very year being produced by Samuel Colt, a revolver called "double-action." The mechanism was such, he said, that a man could fire it merely by pulling the trigger. You didn't have to cock the hammer first. You just pulled the trigger, and the hammer went back, and fell; or you could cock it first, if you wanted to. That's why they called it "double-action."

"A very interesting invention, gentlemen," Mr. Thomson said, "and one that promises to revolutionize firearms."

HE CARRIED in his belt, going out to fight Billy Smith a Colt Peacemaker .45. This was holstered on his hip. He also carried, stuck in his boot, a New Line derringer .41, and there was a rifle in a saddle scabbord under his leg.

Jim Colton had a Peacemaker and a rifle, while Floyd's revolver was just a made-over powder-and-ball arm of the Civil War.

Thomson kept talking as they rode. Jim Colton said nothing. Jim looked weary in the saddle, and Floyd suspected with reluctance that Jim was afraid.

He didn't want to believe that his partner was afraid. He'd seen Jim in a brawl at Hangtown, and he'd seen Jim tackle a bear with a hunting knife. Jim had never seemed afraid of anything.

"Say, Mr. Thomson?"

"Yes, Mr. Wainwright?"

"How many men do you figure this fellow Billy Smith will have along with him when he tries to rob the stage?"

"One. Certainly not more than two."

Floyd pulled in his horse and rode for a while beside his partner. "We got nothing to worry about, Jim."

"I'm not worried," Jim Colton snapped testily.

"I didn't say you was, Jim."

"Then what did you ask me if I was worried for?"

"I didn't ask you. I just said we got nothing to worry about. There's three of us, and we got guns. We don't need to worry about no Wells Fargo Billy Smith."

"Who's worying?" Colton said. "Go ride with Thomson. Me, I don't feel like talking."

They rode around an outward horseshoe bend in the road, and below them, far below, a branch of the American River looked as harmless and impotent as a creek. The road turned through a narrow chasm, between giant rocks and boulders: the rock surfaces hot as stove-plates in the noon sun.

"Here we are," Thomson said. "This is Boulder Gap."

"What do you aim to do?" Floyd asked.

"I aim for us to hide our horses in the brush and take posts in the rock till Billy Smith comes along. The stage don't come by till four, but Billy and his boys'll probably come along sooner. Then we'll fight."

Jim Colton's hand trembled as he took his Colt revolver from his belt and checked the loading. Sweat moved in beads down his face. He produced a handkerchief from his hip and wiped the back of his neck.

"It sounds like a good idea," Floyd said.

"It's a fine idea, gentlemen," Thomson announced. "All we need to do is carry it out. Now let's stake our horses up in the trees back here."

The three of them dismounted. Jim Colton looked a little sick, his face pale. He explained that he drank too much at the Trail's End Saloon last night.

"I ain't used to it. And riding in the

sun . . . it sort of makes me feel funny." He looked at Floyd. "Know what I mean?"

"Sure, Jim," Floyd said. "You'll feel all right pretty soon."

They left the horses in a side canyon, tethered, and walked back to the road which ran through the formation of rock known as Boulder Gap. Jack-pot Thomson took the dignity of an army general.

"Gentlemen, it'll be like this: Mr. Colton will hide on one side of the road, up in the cliff, and me, I will hide on the other side. You, Mr. Wainwright, you go up ahead there so you can cut 'em off from the rear. Don't nobody shoot till I yell. Do you agree, gentlemen?"

"I agree," Floyd said.

Jim Colton blinked bloodshot eyes and stared at his boots. He spat into the dust.

"Do you agree, too, Mr. Colton? We got to let me call the signal, 'cause I don't want us to shoot nobody but Wells Fargo Billy Smith and his men."

"I agree," Colton said, staring at his boots.

"All right, gentlemen. Let's get to our posts."

FLOYD WAINWRIGHT began to hike up the dusty road between mighty piles of granite. He figured that there was a good spot in which to conceal himself at the far entrance to the gap. It was high up, amid stunted pines.

He'd gone fifty yards along the road when a shot fired behind him. The bullet kicked up a quick fountain of dust beside his boots.

"Hey!" he called, turning.

Fifty yards back, Jack-pot Tommy Thomson sighted a revolver in his extended hand. It was sighted at Floyd. He fired again. The bullet smashed chips from a boulder by Floyd's head.

Floyd didn't try to move or dodge. His own gun just dangled from his hand. He saw his partner standing beside Thomson, not doing anything, and he called in bewilderment: "Hey, Jim! He's shooting at me!"

Thomson snapped: "Get him!" and Jim Colton fired.

Something smashed Floyd in the leg with the blow of a pick-axe, and spilled him into the dust. It all happened in a second. Floyd had the impression that it was only a dream, a nightmare. It couldn't be true because it had no reason. Mr. Thomson had tried to shoot him in the back. And now his own partner, Jim Colton, had shot him. There was no sense to it; it couldn't be anything but a dream.

"I got him!" Colton cried.

It wasn't a dream. They'd taken him by surprise, tricked him, but Floyd acted with shrewd speed. With hot pain in his leg, he jumped up, and dived for the cover of boulders beside the road. A bullet showered fine chips of granite into his face—the sound of a gun came next, and then, far off, there was an uncanny screech, like the cry of a wild ghost in flight. The ricocheting bullet soon died.

Floyd crawled into a protecting crevice in the rock, sighted his revolver over the top, and snapped a quick shot down the road at Thomson. Four shots came back at him, one nicking the flesh of his neck with the sharp burning sting of a bee.

They intended to kill him. Floyd knew that. They had intended to kill him all along. Going out to capture Wells Fargo Billy Smith had just been a lure to get him into a trap. After they killed him they would say that the three of them had had a brush with the road agent while riding to Indian Bluff and that Billy Smith's bullets had cut Floyd Wainwright down.

Floyd knew at last why Jim Colton had been nervous on the way out here to the Gap. It wasn't because Jim had been afraid of a fight with a road bandit; it was because Jim had felt inwardly tense at the prospect of killing his partner.

Floyd called: "It sure hurts me to find out you're a dirty skunk, Jim. . . ." and shot twice down the road.

Both Colton and Thomson had found cover. A rifle spat brief smoke from behind a tree. The angry whine of the bullet was

high above Floyd's head, and too far to the right.

Floyd fired close to the tree, to scare Thomson. Floyd had had six cartridges in the hog leg, and seven in the pocket of his pants. He knew by the indiscriminate way Colton and Thomson fired at him that they had a comparatively unlimited supply of ammunition.

Boulder Gap lay in silence now, under hot noon sun, and there was just the faint whisper of a breeze through stunted pines and the far-away hush of the river below the mountain pass. A frightened squirrel darted swiftly across the dusty road, and in the pale depth of the sky a buzzard coasted with motionless wings.

Floyd took the opportunity to replace the fired cases in the cylinder of his revolver. While he was doing that, Tommy Thomson appeared suddenly from behind a tree, running. He ran in long bounding strides and dropped behind granite boulders before Floyd had a chance to take a shot at him.

BOTH Thomson and Jim Colton were now on the side of the road opposite Floyd, and neither of them was visible. That side of the road, opposite, had a steep bank which rose high, studded with boulders, and Floyd had a worried idea that perhaps both men were working their way up the bank so they could shoot down on him. If they climbed up high enough, they could find a position that would afford them easy shooting into Floyd's shelter.

He scanned the bank for a sign of movement, but saw nothing.

He felt wetness creeping warm and slow into his boot. It was from the bullet in his left thigh. Quickly, he took out a pocketknife and cut a sleeve from his shirt—Short John Marshall's shirt. He made a tourniquet of the sleeve, and, using a stick he found nearby, twisted it tight until his leg became numb and the bleeding stopped.

When he touched his neck, his fingers came away bloody. But his neck didn't hurt much. And it wasn't bleeding badly, like his leg had bled, so he guessed no vein had been severed.

Jim Colton's voice sang out from across the road, from somewhere high up in the boulders. "Hey, Floyd!"

"What-cha want?"

"You can come out now, Floyd. This rat, Thomson, he tried to kill us. But I got him cornered. I got a gun pointed at him right now. So you can come over and help me."

Floyd gave a tight laugh. He wasn't fooled by the note of friendliness in the voice. "I ain't budging," he called in response. "You skunked me once, Jim, and I don't aim to let you skunk me again."

He heard a faint whispering sound that didn't come from the breeze in the pines, nor from the distant river. It came from human voices in conference, Jim Colton and Tommy Thomson.

Colton's head appeared abruptly across the road, from atop the bouldered bank. A leveled rifle also appeared. The rifle spat, and instantly Floyd's left leg was no longer numb. It had new pain in it. Searing hot, like the thrust of a poker taken red from a blacksmith's forge.

Floyd blasted twice, reflexively, at the head across the road. But the head had already ducked away. He heard Colton say: "I got him again, Tommy."

Floyd felt dizzy and a little sick. He wanted to retie the tourniquet which had loosened on his leg but he was afraid to spare the time. Grimly, he held his gun raised, ready to fire at anything which appeared across the way to do him more harm. His face got ghastly white while he waited. He felt sleepy and weak. He thought he might go unconscious from loss of blood, so he propped his back against a giant boulder in the crevice.

From somewhere Thomson yelled: "Push them loose rocks on him, Jim! Them rocks'll bounce right across the road!"

Soon a boulder came loose from its natural position and thundered down the opposite bank. It hit the road in a cloud

of dust, bounding high, and crossed the road and came up the crevice at Floyd. But it stopped short before it got to his crippled leg.

"Try another!" Thomson called.

A second boulder, many times the size of a man's head, kicked dust in the road, jumped into the crevice and landed with a crushing thud on Floyd Wainwright's ankle. He went sick with pain, but he didn't lower the gun he held in his hand.

"I got him that time!" Jim Colton shouted.

Thomson's voice asked: "Is he dead yet?"

"I don't know . . ."

Across the way, Thomson appeared, head and shoulders, over the top of a boulder. Floyd emptied his gun by a rapid thumbing of the hammer, and Thomson vanished with awkward suddenness, crying: "By God, he hit me, Jim!"

"Bad?"

"I don't think so. I don't know yet."

"I'll get him," Colton's voice said.

TWO big boulders, big as tree stumps, came thundering down the bank almost together. They volcanoed dust in the road, bounded heavily across it, but both missed the crevice where Floyd was hiding.

Floyd had fingered the last three cartridges into his gun, and when Jim Colton peered out of his shelter to see if Floyd was dead or not, Floyd fired all three shots in fast thumbing.

That had been a mistake. He should have held to those last four cartridges as a dying man clings to life. But his mind was weighted with pain and an uncontrolable desire to sleep. The left ankle, he sensed dully, had been crushed. Tiny hot wires of pain raced through his body to his brain.

"We got him!" Thomson cried in victory, but he still didn't appear, remaining hidden among the boulders.

"How do you know?" Colton asked.

"On account of the shells he went and shot. I gave him six in the gun and seven in his pocket."

"Damn' fool!" Colton said.

"No, Jim. I had to give him shells, or he would've figured something was strange. I figured we'd get him before this. But we got him now. I been counting every time he shot, and I know he don't have no more bullets."

Floyd called: "You fellows forgot something! I got six more brass cartridges. I had 'em myself all the time."

It was a bluff, of course, a desperate bluff. He had no hidden cartridges and now he dropped his gun into the dust, getting out his hunting knife.

"He's a liar! Don't worry about what he says. We'll get him."

"You ain't got me *yet!*" Floyd challenged. "I'll shoot the first man that sticks his head out!"

Thomson laughed, and his voice carried far far through the silence of the Gap, calling to Colton. "Don't worry, Jim. He's like a man who holds only a deuce in the hole and tries to bluff it out as an ace. Let's call his hand, Jim."

They did call his hand right then. Thomson appeared first, stalking cautiously from behind a natural breast-work of boulders just across the road. He had a rifle held before him.

Then Colton appeared. He was high above the road, he appeared hesitatingly, not quite certain that he wouldn't be shot. Courage came to him gradually. Climbing down, half sliding, he landed in the road, crouching. Still no shot came from Floyd and he had complete courage now. He cocked the hammer of his Colt revolver and walked steadily toward the crevice, ready to shoot.

Thomson came along and joined him.

Floyd waited for them. Soon the crevice would no longer serve him as a hiding place. Sweat dripped off his face. He used every last bit of his strength to get himself standing, only half standing. He was on his good leg supporting himself by leaning his back against the wall of granite. He knew in his heart that he had no chance to save his life with only the hunting knife. He thought of Mary Mar-

shall. He'd promised to come back, but now he wouldn't be able to. . . .

VI

ON THAT afternoon in June, 1877, a story had its beginning. It became a story which was told for many years up and down the Sierra. You heard it by firelight at lonely claims on the river, or you heard it in a saloon, over drinks. You heard it on a winter night with your boots propped up near the pot-belly stove in McGivern's Hardware Store, and maybe you listened to it again while men worked with pick and shovel two thousand feet under the ground in a quartz mine. You heard it through the late 'Seventies, into the 'Eighties, and after that it became a legend which wasn't told so often, and which, when it *was* told, nobody really believed.

Yet it was real. It was just as real as the mountains and the gold strike, just as real as the road through Boulder Gap and that monumental crevice in the granite where Floyd Wainwright, a prospector, waited, with only a hunting knife, to battle for his life against two men armed with loaded guns.

Jim Colton and Jack-pot Tommy Thomson had tricked Floyd Wainwright into believing the bandit, Wells Fargo Billy Smith, would hold up the stage that afternoon. It had been only a lure to a death-trap, and now they closed in for the kill.

Thomson said: "Shoot him, Jim. We can't take no more time."

Floyd, waiting to die, heard a sudden pound of horses' hoofs in the road. First, he thought their own horses, the ones they'd ridden out from Three Pines, had stampeded. Then he thought it might be the stage coming along three hours ahead of schedule.

He braced himself against the crevice-wall and looked over the top.

He saw three horsemen thundering down the road from the north end of Boulder Gap. Two wore masks. The third, leading them through the mountain pass, had a face Floyd remembered from posters nailed to trees throughout the Sierra.

Wells Fargo Billy Smith rode high in the saddle of a black mare. He rode standing in his stirrups. He rode with a reckless abandon, leaning far to one side, and he had a pistol in each hand. He laughed as he rode, like a schoolboy on a holiday, and he laughed as he hammered his guns.

The bark of guns mingled with the thunder of horses' hoofs; and Jack-pot Tommy Thomson stared at the riders in stupid surprise. He hadn't counted on anything like this. It bewildered him, left him suddenly speechless and inactive. Bullets thudded into his body, the force of them turning him around. He staggered in the middle of the road, like a drunken man, and then Wells Fargo Billy Smith shot him in the back of the head as he rode past, and Thomson collapsed limply, twitching and thrashing in the road.

Jim Colton started to run for cover, firing unaimed shots over his shoulder at the riders. Billy Smith laughed, his teeth bright in the sunlight, and he stood erect in his stirrups and emptied his guns into Colton's back.

Floyd Wainwright, crouching down in the granite crevice, expected to be the next to be riddled by outlaw bullets. But they didn't fire at him at all. They thundered past his shelter, clods of dirt kicked up from pounding hoofs. Wells Fargo Billy Smith was waving, shouting something:

"Good luck, stranger . . . *hasta la vista* . . ."

DRAGGING his dead leg, Floyd crawled out into the road. It didn't seem real. Like ghost riders they had appeared, charging through the Gap, shooting down Thomson and Colton. And like ghost riders they rode on, shouting and waving their greeting to Floyd.

They rounded the bend as he watched them—left behind them only the pounding echo of their passing, the remembrance of roaring guns, and a faint roll of dust that drifted back and softly powdered the pines.

Floyd sank down weakly in the dusty road. The sleep of unconsciousness weighed heavily on him, and his arm was leaden as he lifted it, in tardy salute, to the outlaws who had ridden on.

"I thank you, Mr. Smith," he said, "I thank you very kindly."

THE stage from Indian Bluff was on time that day. It came rattling and rocking through Boulder Gap, bound for Three Pines, at two minutes to four. Six horses, sleek with sweat, foaming under the friction of harness, shortened their stride as the driver stood on the brake-pedal and hauled hard on his fistful of reins.

"Easy, there! Whoa there, Whisky. . . . Hold on. . . ."

The cumbersome stage tipped on its springs, wheels dragging; and when it stopped, a cloud of dust rose up and engulfed it like a fog.

Mark O'Brian looped his lines around the brake-pedal and vaulted down from the high seat. Passengers poked frightened faces out of the coach windows. "Is there trouble, driver?"

"Plenty," said O'Brian. "Hey, Albert, lend me a hand here."

The guard employed by the Wells Fargo Company booted the steel box under the seat, set down his shotgun and joined O'Brian.

They put the body of Jim Colton on the rear baggage rack, tying it under canvas. Thomson and the young fellow were still breathing, and the passengers made room for them on the floor of the coach trying to make them comfortable.

Then the stage was rolling again. Mark O'Brian cracking his long whip, didn't touch his brake-pedal except on the long downgrades and to slacken the reckless speed on the sharp bends in the road. The stage pitched and rocked, O'Brian's eyes squinted in the wind, his scraggly brows powdered with dust.

It was long after dark, but twenty-one ninutes ahead of schedule, when the stage from Indian Bluff rolled victoriously down the long slope into the valley of Three Pines.

* * *

Doc Whitman said Floyd Wainwright was a mighty lucky young fellow not to have to part with his left leg by amputation. He was lucky the stage got him to town so soon, lucky that Short John Marshall volunteered to give him blood in a transfusion—and lucky, Doc Whitman added with unashamed pride, to have such a fine doctor as Doc Whitman the best in California.

On the fifth day, Floyd was allowed visitors, the first visitor being Short John Marshall. He appeared gruff and sour, explaining that duty required him to investigate further into the circumstances of the shooting at the gap.

"I thank you kindly for giving me your blood," Floyd said.

Old Short John snorted sullenly and bit off a chaw of tobacco. "Twasn't nothing I wouldn't do for anybody else," he informed Floyd.

"And I'm sorry about your shirt," Floyd said. "Mary loaned it to me, but I knew you wouldn't like it."

The marshal shrugged. "I won't hold that against you, long as my niece, she give it to you and you didn't steal it. Anyway, it wasn't my Sunday shirt." He looked around vaguely for a cuspidor, didn't locate one, and let fly with tobacco juice out the open window. "Le's get down to business. You filed the Silver Stream claim along with your partner, Jim Colton. Ain't that correct?"

Floyd nodded. "Here's what I think. I think Jim sneaked up, maybe two winters ago, and found gold on it. But he didn't want to share it with me like a partner should. All the time he was a crook, and I didn't know it. He tried to get me to quit prospecting, pretending there wasn't no more gold in the Sierra. But I wouldn't quit. So he sent some friend of his up to work Silver Stream without me knowing it. Maybe it was this fellow Thomson. I noticed his hands, and they didn't look

like he just played cards with them. They looked like miners' hands."

"That's correct," said Short John. "It was Thomson. He confessed just yesterday, before he died. His real name's Whitney, and he's Jim Colton's cousin. All the time Jim kept you working down the North Fork, Thomson was up at Silver Stream taking the gold out and splitting it with his cousin. Jim kept trying to get you to quit and go away, so he could sneak up and help Thomson at Silver Stream. Only you wouldn't quit—and when you hiked up the river last week, Jim had went up to Silver Stream ahead of you, and him and Thomson tried to shoot you. They knocked you into the river. Then you came walking into Three Pines when they was just planning to buy supplies, and Thomson seen you talking to my niece. So he figured he had to get a way to kill you."

"They had a good way," Floyd muttered bitterly. "They tricked me about Wells Fargo Billy Smith. They said we could get reward money if we captured him. I needed money for a stake, so I fell for it. Of course, they knew all the time Billy Smith wouldn't hold up the stage at the Gap. They just wanted to shoot me at the Gap and blame it on a run-in with the bandit. It was a pretty smart idea they had."

The gruffness melted a little on Short John Marshall's face. "That's where the funny part comes in. It's just like maybe you had a Guardian Angel. Only it wasn't any angel; it was Billy Smith."

"He really *did* plan to hold up the stage that day, didn't he?" Floyd asked, marvelling at the coincidence.

Marshall chuckled. "Sure. Thomson and Colton never counted on nothing like that. Only it happened. It's the strangest damn' thing I ever heard. Along comes Wells Fargo Billy, sneaking into the Gap to lay an ambush for the afternoon stage, and him and his boys hear shooting. They sneak along and see two men got another man holed up and are trying to kill him. Now when it comes to ambushing, this here Wells Fargo Billy is the champion ambusher of the Sierra. He's ambushed more people than you and me can count, but when he sees you all holed up in the boulders and about to get shot, he figures out that anybody who ambushes somebody else is a skunk. It makes him so crazy-mad that he signals to his boys and they ride right through the Gap, and kill the ambushers, and thereby save you from getting assassinated."

Floyd smiled at the strange fortune of his rescue. Then he eyed the town marshal sharply. "Say . . . how do you know about all this—I mean what Wells Fargo Billy seen and thought?"

Short John spat out the window. "They caught him three days ago down in Auburn. He told about it after they caught him, and before they strung him up, him and partners. They strung 'em all up down there in the square an' two guys split the reward."

Floyd felt a queer sinking as though he had lost something very important to him. "They lynched Mr. Smith?"

"Sure. He had it coming to him," said Short John.

Floyd swallowed a lump in his throat and said: "I suppose maybe he did. I suppose maybe . . ."

LATER that day Mary Marshall came to see Floyd. She brought him news that her uncle didn't feel so firm against him anymore, now that he had "Marshall blood in him." She also brought him a letter postmarked from San Francisco. It was a long time before he opened it, because he and Mary were planning the future, trying to plan a way to get a grubstake for Silver Stream. Finally he opened the letter. It read:

Mr. Floyd Wainwright
General Delivery
Three Pines, California

Most Honorable Sir:

I beg to write to you for behalf of most esteemed father, Ah Fong, who unable to address you because cannot write English. I am his son, Ah Sing Chan, who begs

most humbly to be allowed to thank you for kindness to my father when he sick and tired and hungry in mountains.

The Hop Sing Tong, to which belongs my family in San Francisco, desires the happiness to send to you next week the sum of one thousand dollar. The Hop Sing Tong begs your superior self to please accept this very humble sum as token of the gratitude of my father for your kindness. And as token of to appreciate greater understanding between the esteemed people of the United States and their humble servants from China.

Forever your servant,
Ah Sing Chan
Son of Ah Fong.

Floyd read it over again. The thousand-dollar gift came unexpectedly to solve the problem of his future. It did more than that. It gave him an idea he'd never had before, and he began to laugh soundlessly at his discovery.

"What is it, Floyd?"

"Me? Well, I was just thinking about something. About an old Chinaman named Ah Fong. He went and told me there wasn't no more gold in the Sierra."

"Of course there is," Mary Marshall assured him. "There's lot yet. And you've got it on Silver Stream."

He shook his head, frowning. "That's not what I mean. I don't mean gold like a fellow works out of a pan or a flume. I mean, sort of—"

He meant so many things, all at once, that the thoughts crowded confusingly in his mind and were beyond his ability to express. He knew though, that a miracle of good fortune surrounded him. He wondered at his luck.

He thought of Mary, sitting right here beside him, and how she'd waited for him without weariness or impatience.

He thought of her uncle, Short John, who had always seemed so coldly antagonistic, but who had parted with some of his blood in an emergency.

He thought of the gratitude of Ah Fong for merely a few cuts of venison.

And Doc Whitman who was a fine old gent and saved Floyd's leg from possible amputation.

And Mark O'Brian, a seasoned old stage-driver who lashed his horses down from the Gap to bring Floyd hurriedly to Three Pines.

And he thought for a long time about Wells Fargo Billy Smith, who they said was a very bad gent and a killer of men, and whom they lynched to a tree three days ago in Auburn; Billy Smith had gone to an outlaw's grave, but in the heart of a living man he would ride again and again, not as an outlaw but as a gentleman who had made a gallant last ride through Boulder Gap to lend a hand to an ambushed stranger.

Floyd Wainwright had discovered another kind of gold in the Sierra.

The Shortened Hammer

A Two-horse Swen and Hand-sled Burke Story

By C. F. KEARNS
Author of "Men Without Dogs," etc.

FOGGY POINT is a name, a pin prick on the blank and lonesome map of Canada's northland. It is also a jumping-off place for airplanes, an outfitting center for trappers and the mosquito hub of the universe. To young Constable Swanson, hastily disembarking from the stern-paddle river steamer, it was an acute pain in the neck.

He intimated as much to the staff sergeant at the police post and that phlegmatic individual listened in positive boredom. He yawned.

"Quit beefing. You sissies are all alike. The Old Man is here from Division and he'll give you your needings. Just holler to him and see what you get."

The staff sergeant tapped at a door opening off the main office, opened it, said, "Constable Swanson reporting, sir," and jerked his thumb for the constable to enter.

The inspector was a dour veteran with a row of medal ribbons, a horseshoe of shiny scalp and a bristling iron-gray mustache. He acknowledged Swanson's salute with an impatient jerk of his head.

Swanson felt let down. He was strictly regulation from the polished cherry toes of his blocked and boned Strathconas to the glossy leather band on his Stetson. The broad shoulders of his brown service tunic were as unwrinkled as his flare-pegged riding breeches. But he had something to offset, to enhance, to balance the uniform. He had two hundred and ten pounds of solid flesh and resilient muscle to back his

six feet two inches of supple height. And his big, long-fingered hands, his oversized nose and jutting chin were the hallmarks of a man who could handle himself most willingly if the need arose.

He thought his reception might have been a shade more cordial.

"Hah!" barked the inspector. "You're going to Rickman's Lode. Ever done detachment duty? Never mind answering. It's about time you did some."

He was harsh, impersonal and uncompromising—all in a breath. The resentment that had been leavening inside Constable Swanson for the past few days suddenly decided to boil over. He made an incautious protest.

"Rickman's Lode, sir? That's the new mining camp. Why, it's four hundred miles north. North of here!"

"Well?" spat the inspector.

"I don't want to go there," objected Swanson vigorously.

The inspector snorted like a bull preparing to charge.

"I'll get out first." Swanson set his jutting jaw. "It's a punishment post, that's what it is. It's not coming to me. I've got a clean record. I'll quit first. I'll buy my discharge."

"Hah!"

It had a dismal foreboding sound. It was cynical and derisive and negative. The inspector's eyes were the bluest and most frigid that Swanson had ever looked into. They warned the young man that he was being rashly precipitate but he had gone too far to withdraw. He forced himself to say quietly:

"I'm sorry if I upset your plans, sir, but I've been thinking it over ever since I left Winnipeg. I've got a girl down home and she's entitled to something better than a couple of rooms at the back of an isolated police office. I'm willing to refund my fare from Winnipeg here. I think I'm within my rights, sir. . . . I want my discharge."

INSPECTOR BUNTLE bounced upright. He was four inches shorter and forty pounds lighter than his junior but he menaced Swanson with a stubby forefinger, a finger like a stick of dynamite and no less dangerous.

"Discharge! The only discharge you'll get, my lad, is a dishonorable one with three months in Regina jail tacked on for refusing duty. Discharge! Hell's bells! You've been four years and nine months on the force and what have you ever done to deserve any special consideration?"

Swanson's eyes narrowed. That was a silly question. Why—

The inspector's dictatorial fist smacked a thin pad of papers on the table. "Here's your dossier: Eric Gunnar Swanson, one year at the University of Wisconsin, age twenty-one when you enlisted. That's a lie—your age, I mean. If you were a day more than eighteen then I'm a blanket nitchie. I suppose you were mad because you got bounced from the University, but I wouldn't know about that. It doesn't matter. Listen. Listen to me:

"You're a husky put-up lad, and you know it. You look good in uniform. You look too damn good. You're a pretty boy, a magazine cover."

Constable Swanson's uniform grew too tight, his collar began to choke him. He could feel the hot flush clear up to the roots of his blond hair. Pretty Boy! That hurt. "Pretty Boy!" The inspector seemed to gloat as he mouthed the damning term. "Circus parades. Hah! You've been in lots of them. You've been to the horse show at New York in your pretty red coat and the blue breeches with the wide gold stripe down the legs. You've been to the world's fair and you've done guard duty at the door of Canada House in London. Yah!" He was sarcasm rampant. "Red meat for the tourists with their cameras. They 'oohed' and they 'aahed' at you. Now you come back, all puffed up from being one of the Coronation contingent and you want to quit when you get transferred to the sticks."

Swanson was biting his lips to withstand a terrible temptation. A man could stand just so much. An overpowering impulse dared him to smash down this jealous

autocrat, to erase the sneer from his voice, the contempt from his brutal eyes. He was mad clear through. He knew if he moved, or spoke, the thin, shredded strands of his self control would snap and he would be in trouble. Serious trouble.

"Maybe"—the emphatic forefinger waved like a club—"maybe that's how the Canadian Mounted happens to be the most over-advertised police force in the world. Maybe it isn't. Maybe a few forgotten men in the backwoods with some sand in their crops had something to do with it. I wouldn't know. I was never pretty enough to go on an advertising tour myself. I'm just an old harness bull who got this job because there wasn't anybody around with pull enough to bump my seniority when the vacancy occurred. See?"

Swanson didn't see. Every other emotion was subordinate to the insane desire that possessed him to take this blistering old man's nose between his thumb and forefinger and show him that there was one constable who couldn't be treated like a slave. And they both knew it.

"You're mad." The inspector never shifted his bitter eyes. "I hope you stay that way. I started to tell you this outfit needs men. It needs 'em bad. It always has needed 'em. It always will."

He sat down.

Dismissal. Swanson's throat was hot and dry. The palms of his hands, thumbs-down by the seams of his breeches, were moist and sticky.

"The plane leaves for Rickman's Lode at six tomorrow morning. You will be on it," stated the Inspector with somber finality.

Discipline. A man took orders, and liked them. He had to like them.

"Yes sir," acknowledged Constable Swanson, as his heels clicked and his hand came up.

IT was four hundred long northerly miles to Rickman's, three and a half hours flying. Swanson viewed the far-flung lonely vistas without enthusiasm. It was a pastel picture of flattish forest, river and lake; cobalt depths and turquoise ribbons and dark greens shading to distant purple. And always in the midst were etched the hostile features of Inspector Buntle with a perpetual sneer in his frosty stare.

Pretty Boy!

Rickman's Lode was just about when he expected; a ragged gash in the timber, a huddle of buildings, a white paddle-wheeler and a couple of scows moored to the bank. The floats slid up on the mud and he stepped ashore to be greeted by the usual mosquitos and bulldog flies. A grizzled stocky man, whose authority clad him like a garment, held out a hand.

"Stevens, Resident Manager for Amalgamated." He chewed an unlit cigar. "Buntle radioed you were coming. Said he'd be along later. We're busy as heck but there's a two-room shack next to the restaurant you can use until you can get a better building. We put your stuff inside. Sorry I can't give you any help but all hands are busy." He grinned approvingly at the height and width of him. "Guess you'll get along. You're pretty young."

"Thanks." Sawnson nodded confidently. "I think I will." He spoke just a shade stiffly because he had a feeling that Stevens was weighing him critically. So he was sort of young, was he? He inflated his chest, slanted his Stetson a shade to the front, hooked the long fingers of his hands into the handles of his two grips and stalked up the bank.

Mr. Stevens' tolerance was unpleasantly reminiscent of the attitude of Inspector Buntle.

The single brief street of the embryo mining town was a slithering sheet of mud through which a screaming tractor crawled with a laden stoneboat in tow. A green plank sidewalk ranged from the plane landing on the riverbank to the steep-roofed bulk of the machinery plant beyond the hastily thrown-together log-and-lumber building of the business and residential section. Swanson found that Rickman's had a company store, a post office, a hotel and a restaurant. His two-room shack stood next to the latter place and he noted with

his first approach to approval that there was a standpipe at the edge of the plank walk in front. Anyhow there would be decent water.

A barbaric medley of men, mosquitoes, machinery and mud, with an underlaying motif of haste, aptly described the place. He reflected he didn't have to endure it very long as his enlistment would be up in another three months. Meanwhile. . . .

By supper time he was installed, approximately. There was still the steel cell to be bolted together but otherwise the equipment was in place. A desk, two tables, six chairs, a typewriter, files, handcuffs and leg irons, rifles, a cook stove and a heater, axe, saw, pails, gasoline lamps, cooking utensils. The shack was rough lumber and tar paper but it would do. It could be lined at leisure and painted. Linoleum on the bare floors would also help. Swanson wearily decided to wash up and have something to eat. He had missed his lunch but hot weather always took away his appetite.

He changed his shirt, brushed off his uniform and rubbed the glossy leather of his belt and hatband with a soft rag. He tilted his Stetson at a slightly more rakish angle than the regulations prescribed and strode to the adjacent cafe. It was a long, low, log building with a wide screened door and open screened windows, and a welcome clatter of dishes came from within. He flung open the door.

A murmur of talk suspended, the rattle of dishes ceased. A long table ran the length of the room and it was nearly filled on both sides. Somebody said: "Here comes the Law." Somebody else laughed and a sharp voice jarred: "Shut that door. You'll let in all the mosquitoes in the country."

THAT voice carried an edgy timbre that Swanson didn't like. He shut the door and met the bleak, level gaze of a big reddish man as tall as himself. He had a lean hard jaw and wore a white apron. "Sit down anywhere," he said shortly as he collected a double handful of empty dishes from the table.

"Here," invited a stubby, weathered sort of a man at the head of the table, indicating a vacant place by his side. "Treloar is the name. I'm the foreman of the diamand drillers." He held out his hand.

"Swanson." They shook hands. "What's wrong with that waiter? He seems on the prod?"

"Just had an argument with him; made a bet, in fact." There was a lurking triumph in Treloar's explanation. "He needs to be taken down a peg. We—the drillers—called their bluff. We bet 'em two thousand dollars that we have a team that can beat them."

The big red waiter was back with steaming coffee pots in his hands. He moved lithely and with no waste motions, filling soup jugs, replacing bread plates, milk pitchers, platters of meat and vegetables. The food was all on the table and Swanson selected a bowl from the stacked enamelware and ladled out a dipperful of aromatic soup.

"I don't get it," he told the foreman. "How do you mean—beat them?"

"Hand drilling," explained Treloar. "This man Burke has a partner bigger than he is. He does the cooking. They blew in here a month or so ago from the bush and they started this dump. They had a freight canoe loaded down and they rustled the logs to build this cabin. The Company—the Amalgamated, I mean—don't cotton to them much." He kept his voice low when the waiter came near. "They had a cargo of grub, mostly canned, come up on the Hudson Bay Steamer, and they have a pretty good thing here if they can hang on. Meals a buck a throw and they're better than the company boarding house."

"But how come the hand drilling," persisted Swanson "I shouldn't think a couple of cooks would be any good at that sort of thing."

"This bird Burke never waited on table before," continued Treloar quietly. "He's been around, that bird. Educated like a schoolteacher and tough as they make 'em. His partner Swen is a good man, too

Husky—you better believe it! They go out at night and drill for fun since we had the little competition a couple of weeks ago, which they won. They got a little cocky so we called 'em today. They didn't have any spare cash—guess they owe for their grub—but they put up the business against our two thousand dollars."

Swanson piled food on his plate. Treloar lifted his coffee cup. He spoke from the corner of his mouth. "We'll take 'em to the cleaners. I got a couple of new men. Old hands of mine from Idaho. We'll send these bums back to the bush where they belong."

Swanson wondered at the latent enmity in his tone. Mr. Treloar evidently did not like the two men who ran the restaurant. The long figure of Burke overshadowed them.

"How's the grub, Kid?" he asked, and the patronage in his voice stung.

Kid!

"I've tasted better soup," answered Constable Swanson acidly, "but I won't commit myself until I've sampled the rest of the stuff. The spuds look a little underdone, or burnt, or something. And the meat seems to have seen better days."

"You don't say." It was a dry drawl, and pregnant with danger. Swanson stiffened to the chill breath of trouble. In the same moment something warm and soft plopped on his head and spilled inside his collar and ran down his flawless shoulders in fleecy globs.

"Maybe these potatoes would suit you better," jeered the waiter.

THE room was a cacophony of helpless mirth as Swanson got to his feet. Even the tall waiter showed his white teeth as he waited, arms akimbo, ready for reprisals. Behind him a huge man jammed the doorway of the kitchen; a flat-nosed brute of a man whose white chef's cap brushed against the lintel. He was laughing mightily. "Ho! Ho! Ho! Dot's a good yoke. Hey Burke. Sure dot's a good yoke."

Swanson was more astonished then angry. So far in his service no sober man had laid a disrespectful hand on the uniform. He clawed a double handful of mashed potatoes from his head and fought the instinct to throw them in his tormentor's face. He flicked his hands and white spots spattered the floor. "So your name is Burke, is it?" He raked his head again. "Just a minute."

The laughter was dying so that most of the men in the room heard what he said. It faded completely as he unbuckled his belt and flipped the button of his shoulder flap. He let the belt and revolver slide to his chair, ripped the buttons of his tunic open, and slid out of it.

"I hate to fight a man old enough to be my father," he said as calmly as he could manage, "but you seem to want trouble. Put up your mitts."

"Says you!" The man Burke glided forward and aside like a sinewy shadow, but his right fist was a striking rattlesnake. It blasted Swanson's mouth and snapped his head back as a second pile-driver blow numbed his jaw and blinded him with a curtain of red fire.

Fists filled his world and his own arms were lead. A mule kicked him in the stomach and a sledgehammer sent him reeling against the table. He was falling into a bottomless black pit when strong hands grasped his shoulders. A cold blast overcame the flames and the clanging bells began to fade.

He was seated in a chair with Treloar's hand steadying him. Burke was grinning wolfishly through saturnine lips, still holding the empty water pitcher.

"Want some more, kid?"

"No." Swanson stood up. His tunic and belt were on the floor. As he stooped to pick them up his whole head ached crashingly. He managed to put the tunic on and button it up. His mouth was wet and he wiped it with his handkerchief. He was mildly surprised to find it came away redly wet. He fumbled with his shoulder belt and Treloar buttoned the shoulder tab for him.

"Thanks," said Constable Swanson, automatically. He looked eye to eye at Burke for a long glance. "I said your grub

was punk, fella." He licked his bruised lips, and waited.

It was so quiet that Burke's prompting "Yes?" was plainly audible.

"Yes," repeated Swanson. "I was mistaken. I think I'll have some more of it."

He turned the chair around and sat once more at the table.

"Ho, ho, ho!" bellowed the gigantic cook from the doorway, brandishing a meat fork. "Ho, dot's a good one, Burke. He says maybe he'll have some more. I guess maybe he learns it don't pay to kick about the grub here. Hey Burke, you—"

"Back to the kitchen." Burke shoved his partner through the door. He was back again with a damp towel. "Here you are, policeman. Drag that over your head and wipe off the rest of those *pommes de terre.* Next time you argue with me you better use a gun."

Swanson's jaw and eyes hurt desperately. He took the towel and mopped his head and neck. It was coldly refreshing. Everyone was looking at him, waiting for his answer, so he laid the towel aside and picked up a fork.

"I'll remember that, Burke. I'll be sure to remember it."

HE FINISHED the meal, chewing gingerly because his teeth hurt a little more at each bite. When he lifted his hat from the wall he found Burke watching him speculatively.

"Put it on the cuff," said Swanson calmly, through his puffing lips. "I'll be boarding here for the present." He found Treloar waiting outside with a group of other ex-diners. From their grins he had no doubt what the topic of discussion had been. Treloar fell into step beside him.

"Sa-ay, that was a dirty trick!" His sympathy was colored by a savor of suppressed relish. "That Burke must have been in the ring." He grew confidential. "Never mind. You can laugh at him after tonight."

"How's that?" asked Swanson, chaffing at Treloar's too smug solicitude. It would have been less irritating if the man had laughed outright. "Why tonight?"

"Didn't I tell you? This drilling match is coming off tonight. Burke and Swen think they can sink a deeper hole in a rock in fifteen minutes than our team can. They don't know the Westergaard brothers are the champions of the Coeur d'Alene. The Westergaards will beat them so bad there won't be any argument. Then it's the bush for Mister Burke and Swen. They'll be on the rocks. No money, a bunch of debts and a busted credit. Aw, they're just a couple of tramps anyhow."

"Can't they get a job?"

"Boo!" Treloar's derision was absolute. "Not at Rickman's Lode. Burke and Stevens had words. Hello, here comes the boss now and he's got your mate with him. Must have come in on the plane that landed when you and Burke were having the—er—dispute."

Swanson groaned. It was a fitting finale to a disastrous day. Inspector Buntle was with Mr. Stevens, and he awaited them in front of the police office.

The Inspector returned Swanson's salute with a casual wave of the hand. "Followed you up," he said briefly. "Didn't intend to be along so soon but the plane was coming, and—"

He broke off in astonishment. Stevens chuckled, Treloar was grinning broadly. The bruises on the constable's face, the white drying stains on his tunic, spoke for themselves.

They fairly shrieked.

"I got licked, sir," explained Swanson defiantly. "I got doggone well good and licked."

"Did you!"

"Yes sir. I took my coat off." He gestured towards the police office. "Will you come in?"

"The inspector is dining with me," explained the amused Mr. Stevens. "He can do his inspecting later. You better put some cold cream on your face, Son."

WHEN they came back an hour later Swanson had a bulky file open on the table and he was registering pleasure. He was very pleased about something.

"Mr. Stevens has consented to act as Justice of the Peace as well as Coroner for the present," stated the inspector. "And what the dickens are you smirking about?"

"This circular, sir." Swanson detached the printed sheet and handed it over. "It gives me great satisfaction. I'm going to get a real kick out of this."

The inspector glanced at him sharply, took the paper, and read aloud:

"Hand-sled Burke and Two-horse Swen. Big men, dangerous, wanted in Alaska for assault on a deputy marshal. Suspected of poaching fur on the Yukon game reserve. Correct names unknown. Burke, six feet two, two hundred pounds, age forty-one, war aviator, hup, hup. . . ."

"Let me see that circular," said Stevens. The inspector laid it on the table and both men read it together. Stevens nodded slowly as a perplexing matter was made clear. "I notice they don't enlarge on Swen. He's just a man Friday for Burke. You know, that fellow had me guessing. I couldn't place him at all. He's an anomaly; a strong, intelligent, educated man gone wrong. He took the wrong turning somewhere. Ah . . . he and I don't speak."

"You'll speak to him tomorrow," Swanson informed him easily. "You have to start the judicial stuff sometime, Mr. Stevens, and Burke will do to start on. I'll arrest him in the morning after breakfast." His glance at the older men was coolly confident. "I hope he gets tough."

"Do you?"

"Sure do." Swanson stood his ground. "I won't take my coat off this time." He inflated his deep chest and his breath whistled. "Mr. Burke may be a hard guy but he'll come walking or he'll come feet first—I don't give a hoot which."

Stevens drew his eyebrows together, took a cigar from the breast pocket of his green windbreaker, and slowly bit off the end. "You sound slightly vindictive—for a policeman," he suggested bruskly.

"Maybe I do." Swanson paced the length of the room and his fingers sought his bruised lips cautiously. "Maybe I am. It would give me considerable pleasure to have an excuse to plant a forty-five slug just above Mr. Burke's belt buckle."

Stevens lit his cigar and did not attempt to hide the disgust in his eyes. The outside door opened gently and a white cook's cap oozed around the jamb, followed by the apprehensive eyes of the burly cook, Swen. He hesitated at the sight of the three men.

"Come in," invited Swanson briskly.

"Well . . ." Swen stepped dubiously in and closed the door carefully behind him. "I—look, Mister Police: I yust got to hurry. My partner, Burke . . . aw . . . he ain't such a bad feller."

"He's a rat," snapped Swanson, chagrin flooding his face. "You're a couple of rats. You were laughing not so long ago." He waved at the pile of circulars. "We'll see how well you can laugh tomorrow when you tell it to the judge."

"Hey, now . . . look." Swen seemed to shrink as he cringed. "I—we ain't so bad. We didn't kill nobody. The police ain't got no use for us but we didn't—"

"Dangle. I'll talk to you tomorrow. There's the door."

"Hey!" Swen was suppliant, pleading. "Wait. My partner Burke is a good guy. He yust wants to make a stake so he can go back and live like a white man again. Look—if we lose this bet we are going to be broke. Ain't dot trouble enough! Sure. Den we couldn't even hire a lawyer."

"Outside." Swanson opened the door and Treloar almost fell into the room.

"Hello, Mr. Stevens. I was looking for you. We want you to be on hand tonight and see fair play. Hello Swen. Police got you already?"

"Hey?" Swen backed out, his beseeching gaze riveted on the adamantine Swanson who callously shut the door in his face.

"Ha," stated Treloar with elation, "those bums can take their canoe and head downriver." He grinned in anticipation of the prospect. "We'll let them take a sack of flour and a blanket with them. That's all they need."

Stevens said:

"This is Mr. Treloar, Inspector Buntle.

He also locked horns with our friends. He took it to heart so much that he prevailed upon me to import a couple of star drillers from the States. Old hands of his down there. It would appear that the notorious team of Hand-sled Burke and Two-horse Swen are skating on thin ice."

"So it would seem," agreed the Inspector as he shook hands with Treloar.

NEARLY two hundred white men and a brace of curious Indians gathered at the rear of the camp where a platform of planks had been erected around a granitic boulder whose flatttened top protruded a few inches above the boards. It was situated in a shallow depression so that the ranks on three sides had a clear view. On the lower side a plank bench had been arranged and here Stevens found room for the two Policemen and himself. Treloar was timekeeper of the competition.

The crowd was good natured, buzzing with talk. There were shouts and clapping as the Westergaards made their way to the edge of the platform promptly at nine o'clock. Ole carried two eight-pound striking hammers, and Bjarne a burlap bundle on his thick shoulder. He lowered it to the board and it clanked with a weighty jangle that was the sum of a number of minor tinkles.

"That's his steel—his drills," explained Stevens, leaning across Swanson to speak to the inspector. "Pretty husky men, aren't they?"

The Westergaards were sturdy men, the inspector agreed, thick through and across. Ole was over six feet, his brother barely under. Swanson eyed their physiques approvingly and mentally compared them to himself. He estimated they would both strip around two hundred pounds. Blond-haired, blue-eyed Norsemen, all bone and hard-muscle. They were not yet in their thirties.

"Bring on the grub butchers," announced the tall Ole, amiably. His brother's teeth showed in a wide smile.

"Here we are." The crumpled cook's cap loomed through the crowd and the flattened, bovine face of Two-horse Swen was split with a gap-toothed leer. "Yah, you bet. Me and my partner Burke will show dese Swedes something about drilling holes in rocks. Hey Burke?"

Laughter rose, and boos and catcalls, but without rancor. Swen also carried a burlap bundle which he flung down. Burke, behind him, had two hammers under his arm. He stood eye to eye with the Westergaard brothers and his lips were twisted cynically so that the Westergaards lost their friendly mood, staring back coolly.

"So that's the man?" mused inspector Buntle curiously. "That's the lad they call Hand-sled Burke? By George, he's salty, sure enough."

Burke glanced towards the bench, looked again, and came three indolent steps towards them; a springy, grim, red-headed man in a maroon windbreaker and clean overalls. His bleak eyes bored into Swanson's as he snapped an insolent: "Hello kid. How's your face?"

It was patronage. It was uncharitable defiance. Everyone was watching and Swanson's face was scarlet, as men looked at Burke and at the policeman who had so lately felt the weight of his fist.

Constable Swanson stood up. "All right Burke," he said, and his voice shook a little in spite of himself, because he was young and very wroth. "Rub it in while you have the chance. But I'm coming for you when you get through here and I'll warn you now—I'll keep the uniform on —this time."

Burke had been drinking. He stood as straight as a guardsman with the twin hammers in the grip of a muscular hand. There were depths in his pale eyes, his nostrils twitched. He showed his wolfish white teeth as he turned away, aroused but not intimidated.

"Will you then, little man?"

Treloar stepped on the platform. "Call it." A coin flipped upwards, a silver sparkle in the golden sunshine of the far-northern summer night.

"Heads," snapped Burke.

"You win."

"It's your honor," Burke told the Westergaards as he jabbed Swen in the back ungently and shoved him form the platform.

Bjarne Westergaard unrolled his bundle and arranged the graduated steel bars in a row on the platform, shorter ones to hand. They both stripped to their woolen undershirts. Ole hefted the sledge hammer, swung it one experimentally for distance, and then tapped the shortest drill that his brother, squatting on one knee, held between his hands.

"Ready?" Treloar glanced at his watch. *"Go".*

Clang. The drill bounced and rock dust spurted. *Clang. Clang. Clang!* Ole struck short, fast, hard blows. At each blow the drill leaped in his brother's grip. *Clang-uh-clang-uh-clang!* Ole was catching quick deep breaths on the brief upswing.

"He isn't hitting it yet," said the inspector in Swanson's ear. "Wait until the drill head sinks out of sight. I've seen these drilling matches before."

SLOWLY the drill ground beneath the surface while white dust flew from the cutting edge. Somebody yelled in exasperation. "Hit it, Ole. Hit it!"

Ole hit it. The tempo of his striking speeded up, the eight-pound hammer slammed the drill-head so viciously that the short steel shuddered shrilly. *Clang-hah-clang-hah.* He was expelling his breath in gasps on the down stroke now and there was power in his blows; the skillfully directed power of a strong man who knows how to apply his strength.

Something stirred in Constable Swanson at the sound of that mighty pounding, at the sight of the flailing hammer. He had Norse blood as well as the Westergaards. Their fathers—a thousand years ago—had written history across the whole of the known world with smiting hammers struck in the name of the war god, Thor. There was a martial swing, a pounding, thudding surge, to the hammer's music. It brought out the red, cold rage of human hate in Constable Swanson, because the Vikings were his own people. He laid his hand fiercely on the inspector's sleeve.

"Those dishwashers must be crazy to try to beat these men," he said positively.

"That Burke will take some beating," said the inspector.

"Change steel," called the timekeeper.

Bjarne reached out his right hand while his left kept the drill turning. He selected the piece nearest him and held it slantingly with the bit against the shorter drill in the hole. As the hammer lifted, he drew out the short drill and flung it aside as his right hand slid the new one in fast. His brother's hammer drove it home with a striking martial chord.

"Yo!" gasped Ole.

Swanson grunted with surprise. Ole relinquished his hammer in midair, it seemed, as he dropped to his knees. Actually he put it head down, by his side. Bjarne's sledge was in his hand as he rose to his feet opposite.

Clang-huh! Clang-huh. Clang-uh-clang-uh-clang.

"These friends"—Stevens stressed the word with placid irony—"of yours, Constable, are going to get badly beaten. The Westergaards will make thirty inches at this rate. Guess that won't make you mad."

"Not me," said Swanson. "It will rile the inspector though. He thinks Burke has a chance."

Stevens glanced quizzically at the Inspector, who continued to gaze stonily at the drillers.

"Change steel!"

Clang-huh. Clang-huh. Clang-uh-clang-uh-clang.

A man with a hose directed a trickle of water on the rock so that white sludge splashed on the nearest spectators. The ringing notes of the pounded steel took on a duller tone. Inspector Buntle explained to Swanson.

"Cleans the bits and washes out the rock dust. Some of it comes out when they change the steel and the rest is spattered out. Saves time cleaning the hole with a spoon. Now . . . it's getting deep."

Ole was striking with such weight that his brother was forced to jerk and lift the drill to keep it turning.

"He's got to keep it turning," said Stevens. "If the drill jammed it would have to be knocked loose and they'd lose time. Each longer piece is just a fraction smaller across the cutting edge so they won't jam. Quite a science to getting them the right size and sharpness."

Clang-uh. Clang-uh. Clang-uh-clang.

The shirts of both men were dark with sweat. Their faces were flushed and flecked with gray mud. But the tempo of terrific hammering never slackened.

"I've seen men," Stevens was chewing a cigar thoughtfully, "drill by hand in Montana and Mexica and Ontario and Peru. I never saw a smoother pair. Your man Burke is due to lose his peanut stand."

"Time!"

Ole dropped the hammer and wiped a hand across his dripping brow, panting. Bjarne straightened up, and drew out the long hexagonal column of steel. Treloar stepped forward with a flexible steel tape.

"Twenty-nine and a quarter inches."

"Hooray!" Stevens called jubilantly. "Good work, boys." Men were thumping the Westergaards on the back, wringing their hands. The brothers grinned their satisfaction.

"Is that a good length?" asked Swanson.

"So good it's almost a record for fifteen minutes drilling," said the inspector soberly. "Depends on the hardness of the rock, of course. It's good all right. It's too doggone good."

"Burke will have to step on it," he added reflectively.

BURKE stepped to the platform with his hammer in his hand. He was stripped to a sleeveless cotton singlet. Swanson felt a reluctant admiration for a perfect human animal. This man might be old, but he was in his prime. The vivid scar of an ancient wound slanted across the top of his left shoulder. He stood plumb, from heel to toe, his chest arching above his flat waist. He was a lean greyhound, a thoroughbred racehorse. His eyes were insolent, sneering, but they were the indomitable eyes of a man who would die before he would quit.

The brawny Swen waved a short drill.

"Ho," he announced loudly. "That ain't much of a hole. When me and my partner Burke get through we'll show these Swedes something. I guess maybe we drill about forty inches, hey Burke?"

"Back to the kitchen," advised a derisive voice, amid laughter. Swen flexed his great arms significantly as he squatted.

Burke struck a single preliminary tap, then, at the word he slid easily into an increasing rhythm, the swinging leverage of his long body finely coördinated.

Clang. Clang. Clang. Clang-ah. Clang-ah. Clang-ah-clang-ah-clang.

"He's strong," said Stevens critically, "but he's no expert. He hasn't done much drilling. He's got strength but that isn't all. He won't last at that speed. They are both over forty, those men. They can't keep it up."

"You don't say." Buntle gave him a thin grin. "You and I are over forty, too, Mister. This man Burke may not work for Amalgamated but you'd make more profit if he did."

"Ho!"

Clang. Haugh. Clang-haugh. Clang-haughclanghaughclanghaugh.

The mighty Swen was striking. Under the long-sleeved woolen undershirt his bunched muscles rolled. He gave no straight-limbed, clean-cut blows. Swen was mastodonic. Slivers flew from the drill head. Rock mud spurted. The short steel jumped in the hole, trilling to the hammer talk.

Clang-haugh-clang-haugh-clang-haugh!

"He hits hard," said the inspector. "The hardest hitter yet. See that drill head flatten. But I'll bet he yells for help sooner than Burke. Two or three minutes of that is all he can stand."

The inspector was right. Swen's "Ho" was a throaty pant and he was choking as he dropped his hammer and squatted.

Burke was striking instantly. His breath played a muted accompaniment to the ham-

mer strokes; but it was shorter, less bestial than the animal-like exhausts of his partner.

Flailing hammers on ringing steel. Burke and Swen were not as smooth as the Westergaards; their changes lacked the finish and precision of long practise, but their striking was a marvel of furious intent. The hole went steadily down.

To Swanson's annoyance a grudging admiration for these two men stole over him. Virile they were, and unsparing of themselves. His jaw set. If a man like Burke —whose speech alone sufficiently tapped the earlier advantages that were his birthright—chose to follow the crooked paths, then he could pay the penalties. He was more to be blamed than the vacuous, moronic Swen.

At these thoughts Swen's plea of an hour earlier was in his ears, above the medley of the thudding hammer and frenzied steel. It merged with the hammer beats like a threnody of utter despair.

"My partner, Burke—aw—he ain't such a bad fellow."

SWANSON shook his head, shaking off a wild, alien idea, tardily begotten. Hell with that stuff. He was a policeman. His duty was clear.

If there was pleasure in doing his duty that was just so much velvet.

"Humph!" Stevens leaned forward, anxiously. The time was getting short. Burke drew out a length of mud-plastered steel and inserted his last drill; the longest one. Treloar held up three fingers. Everyone present craned eagerly forward.

The result would be close.

There was no sound now but the ring of steel on steel and the sobbing breath of Two-horse Swen, wielding the eight-pound hammer as though it were a wooden flail. He was battering frantically. White specks of mud, hard driven, spat in his face, mingled with the salt sweat that streamed from his hair. Swanson saw the man was nearing the limits of endurance; he was exhausted, swaying as he swung the hammer.

"Yo," bellowed Burke warningly. "Yo—you fool. Change!"

He, too, sensed disaster, but too late. Down came the reeling hammer . . .

Ker-thuk-er-ack!

Burke staggered back, still squatting. His right hand went down on the planks and he steadied himself for the space of a long breath. Then, fighting for control, his legs straightened as he came to his full height. But his left arm hung at his side, the wrist askew. Blood showed on the skinned knuckles of the twisted left hand.

"Lord!" gasped Stevens. "Swen missed the drill! He smashed his partner's arm. He—"

Swen was reeling aimlessly, trying to stand in one place, his gasping mouth open, his eyes stark with a fearful horror. His hammer stood with its head half through the splintered floor planks. Constable Swanson reached Burke's side in a single jump, his arms around the man's shoulder, steadying him.

"Easy. Easy, Old Man. Don't get—"

"Hey Burke! Burke!" The frantic Swen pawed at them both, sobbing. "Did I kill you? Hey, Burke. Burke! I didn't—hey—"

"Let go. Get back." Burke's good right arm slung Swanson away. His right fist thudded against Swen's wet shoulder. His anger lashed in a snarling roar.

"Grab that drill, Swen. Grab it! I can't turn it with one hand." Again his fist thudded against solid flesh. "Move—damn you! Grab that drill."

"No. No!" Swen held both hands high, his chest heaving. "We lost the bet, Burke. To hell with the money, Burke. You're hurt bad. Hey Burke, we—"

Burke stooped swiftly as his right hand flashed to his hammer. He grabbed the handle by the end and his foot came down on the wood midway to the head. He heaved, and the ragged snap of the hickory made a weird splash in a pool of staring silence. He straightened up with the shortened hammer brandished in one hand over his head.

"Turn that steel!"

"Clang, clang, clang, clugg! He beat an insane, one-handed tattoo on the jumping steel rod. *Clang, clang, clang!* The drill bleated with each slamming blow. "Turn that steel, or I'll pound your blasted head in!"

Clang-clang-ah-clang!

"Turn that steel! Turn that' —*clang-ah-clang-ah*—"steel!"

Swen still held his hands high as he turned a stricken gaze on those about him and Ole Westergaard answered that mute plea in an odd fashion. He stepped impatiently from the press of men and his two big hands encircled Swen's thick neck. His bellow of exasperation overlaid the strident hammer tones.

"Turn that steel—you flat-nosed Scowegian. Back up your partner, you big stooge!"

He thrust big Swen down to his knees and he kicked him with a heavy boot in the same instant. Swen's hands went out to the drill instinctively as he slumped.

Pang-ah-pang-ahpang, pang, apang, pang, aahpang.

Then Bjarne Westergaard jumped. He snatched the watch from the paralyzed hand of the popeyed Treloar and he shoved him off the plank platform.

"I'll hold this," Bjarne grinned easily. "Time's almost up anyhow."

Burke was setting a terrific pace. The four men made a star on the platform. Swen opposite his frenzied partner and the Westergaards between them on opposite sides, watching. Watching the drill go lower. Watching it.

Pang-pang-pang-ahpang-ahpang-pang-ah-pang! Red blood dripped from Burke's useless left hand but his mighty right went up and down implacably while men marvelled at this thing, that would become a relished tale, and a legend in the land. Slowly Ole Westergaard raised a hand, his eyes on the twisting steel rod, gauging its depth in the hole to a nicety. "Mud!" he shouted.

"Time." Bjarne roared at the raging Burke. "Time, you big red wolf. Time, I said."

Swen bounced to his feet and one big hand snared Burke's hammer arm on the upswing. "Stop, Burke. Stop!" His other hand went around the overwrought man's neck. "All over. We fix that arm now. Hey Burke. Quit!"

Burke reeled against him, the hammer dropping from his hand. He had no breath. He had gone his limit, and past. He labored to get air into his empty lungs, his head lolling, his mouth open, his eyes glassy, as Ole Westergaard drew out the column of steel.

"Where's that tape?" demanded Bjarne. "Here, give it to me."

The only sound while he inserted the tape into the hole was the choking of the exhausted Burke, leaning on his contrite partner.

"Twenty-nine and a quarter inches," stated Bjarne clearly. "I guess it's a tie. Nobody wins the bet!"

His announcement was the cue for a minor sort of a pandemonium that broke loose at Rickman's Lode. But it was only minor in a relative sense because the crowd was small and it was such a big country.

Still, the sincerity of acclaim from two hundred throats made a heady tonic for the drooping Burke. His chin came up and he shrugged free of Swen's solicitous grip. He held out his good right hand to Bjarne Westergaard and those close to them heard him say as their fingers gripped.

"You're a good little man, fellow. You're a couple of good little men. You're a . . ."

His voice died away in his throat as he tried to put his hand out to Ole also. But his knees went back on him, and Big Swen caught him in his arms as he fainted dead away.

IT was eight o'clock of a crystal morning when Constable Swanson entered the restaurant and the place was noisily full. Burke was there, with his left hand in a sling. He was gaunt, and his eyes were smudged with blue rings, but he bore his burden of steaming food and spare plates easily on his right palm. He lowered the tray by the table and willing hands lifted

off the serving dishes, coffee pots and platters of eggs and bacon and sausage. They piled the empty dishes back and Burke bore them away.

Swanson noticed men were nodding and smiling at him. He nodded and smiled back. He poured himself a cup of coffee and scooped crisp bacon and fried eggs from a platter onto his plate. There were pan-warmed potatoes and toast. He ate leisurely and with an appetite.

He was finishing when he found Burke at his shoulder.

"How do you like those eggs, John Law?" demanded Burke harshly.

Swanson drained his cup, set it down, and half twisted in his chair. Burke stepped back a pace. Behind him, framed in the kitchen doorway, waited Swen.

Again a silence filled the restaurant at Rickman's Lode.

"You got any mashed spuds handy," retorted Constable Swanson, meaningly, and somebody guffawed. Swanson let his own teeth show and found the whole room was laughing with him. The whole room, apparently, except the two big men who ran the eating place.

Burke's eyes were cold and hard, but there was anxiety in them as well. Swen, Swanson saw, was actually scared.

He stood up, walked past Burke, and took his Stetson from a nail on the wall. He adjusted it carefully and the two tense men hung on his every move.

"I'll tell you, Burke,' he said, and wondered at his own words. "I think I'll just wait until that left flipper of yours is in shape again. One of these days I'm due to beat hell out of you and I don't mean maybe."

He walked leisurely out. But back in the office his jaunty mood evaporated. In sober apprehension he awaited the arrival of Inspector Buntle, and was almost relieved when he saw him approaching with Mr. Stevens.

The inspector stepped inside, glanced pointedly around and raised his eyebrows.

"No prisoners, sir," Swanson told him.

"No prisoners?"

"I tore up the circular."

"Did you?" The inspector seated himself at the desk. Stevens lit a fresh cigar and took a chair. Humor showed in the manager's eyes, and twitched at his mouth corners. Swanson felt he was being laughed at.

"I may be a trifle thick in the top story," suggested the inspector stiffly, "but in view of your conduct and remarks yesterday, I think you might do a little explaining. Mr. Stevens was also led to believe that he would have some official adjudication to do."

As he spoke, Swanson's carefully rehearsed and dignified statement abruptly took wings because it would not, he realized sinkingly, fit the situation at all. He grew frightened, and embarrassed, and mad at the same time.

"I guess I'm a softie, sir," he tried to keep his voice calm, but his tongue felt thick. "I'm a parade cop. I don't seem to have what it takes—out in the bush. I—I'm refusing duty. You can give me that three months in jail. I—that's all."

To his intense amazement the inspector only grunted and crossed his hands on the desk, where his fingers lightly mimicked the canter of horses. Stevens calmly chewed his cigar, and contemplated the ceiling. They were apparently unimpressed.

It was their indifference that caused Swanson to blow up.

"TIE nothing!" his words spilled in a hot torrent. "The Westergaards let Burke drill enough overtime until he was down as far as they went. They didn't care if he did beat them. They thought more of his nerve than anything else. They let him save his face. Nobody kicked. Mr. Stevens knows that's so. He didn't say anything."

Stevens continued to say nothing.

"I won't do it," Swanson declared passionately. "I'd be a proper heel if I did—especially after Burke knocked me for a loop yesterday. I won't do it even if I—"

The words froze on his lips. Hand-sled Burke stood on the threshold with a cigarette between his twisted lips and in his

insolent eyes lay the feral fire of a trap-bound wolf.

"Good morning, gentlemen." He came in and closed the door. "Here I am. I presume the charge sheet is a long one. Well—I'm the man. Swen is out of this."

"Who told you to come?" asked Buntle quietly, but he was looking at Burke's bandaged left hand in the sling.

Burke nodded at Swanson. "The lad here."

"You lie," stated Inspector Buntle, coldly.

"Ah!" Burke took the cigarette from his lips, glanced keenly at the flame-faced constable, and drew his own conclusions. He turned to the inspector again.

"You've got some men in your outfit, after all, mister."

"You're telling me!"

"Who has a better right?" Burke snapped back at him.

"Yah!" Buntle slapped the table. "You'll talk?"

"I'll talk," agreed Burke grimly, "about some things."

"This Alaska business—the deputy marshal?"

"A fair scrap," snarled Burke. "They ran us out of the territory. They could have caught us if they wanted to. That's history. They won't bother to go to the expense of extraditing us."

"Ummm! So you say. What about poaching the Yukon Game Reserve?"

"Bah!" Burke grinned with his lips. "Your wardens never saw us. Suspicion isn't proof. Ask me another."

"Is there some more?"

Burke countered with an ironic, "Isn't it in your records?"

"No," admitted the inspector.

"In that case there isn't any more," said Hand-sled Burke.

Mr. Stevens stood up. "I don't like history," he said succinctly. "I always like to start from here."

He held out his hand.

Burke drew back. "Don't be sentimental," he advised harshly. "I never apologize."

Stevens continued to hold out his hand. Burke hesitated, stepped forward, and gripped it briefly. He found Inspector Buntle was standing up with his hand out.

"History is our business, Burke, but the little red book doesn't cover everything. How about it?"

"Chinese New Year," gibed Burke. "You're a couple of nice old ladies." But he took the inspector's hand. He wheeled on Swanson with his own hand out first.

"No hard feelings, old man?"

Swanson couldn't speak for the life of him, but his grip was answer enough. It made Burke wince. He opened the door and went out without another word or a backward glance.

Swanson found Inspector Buntle was glaring at him.

"This girl of yours. Did she say she wouldn't live in the bush? The police quarters weren't good enough for her? Did she say that?"

"No sir." The question startled him. "It was me. I wanted her to have something better than—"

"Here, here, here!" Stevens walked between them with his arms spread. "Enough of this. There's been too much talking around here and I'm used to giving a few orders myself. If this young fellow is figuring on getting married, I guess we can go ahead and get our wives in here along with the rest of civilization. We'll give you a hand to build that new barracks of yours and we'll treat the newlyweds to a honeymoon trip by plane from Foggy Point here. Might even stretch a bit and fly them in from Edmonton." He winked at Swanson. "You would want to go out that far at least to meet her."

Swanson swallowed. He couldn't see Stevens very well. Both he and the inspector and the furniture in the room were getting blurry. He could hear the inspector saying.

"Well, I suppose this will be a good-sized place, and it will need a sergeant in charge, with an assistant or two. Can't do that right away, though. This fellow Swanson will have to worry along with a corpo-

ral's stripes until his first enlistment is up. He might change his mind and not want to re-engage."

That last suggestion was so silly that Swanson did not even try to deny it. He didn't dare to use his voice because he knew it would break. A man could only stand so much—of some things. His heart was thumping so joyously inside his tunic that it sounded as loud as a sledge hammer hitting a drill.

He just couldn't talk.

So he did the only thing possible. He grabbed his hat and rushed outside, and proceeded to take a walk. A long walk through the friendly mud and glorious sunshine of Rickman's Lode was just what he needed.

Requiescat on Riverside

YOU never can tell. Millions of tourists—at a very rough guess—have gazed upon Grant's Tomb since it was opened to the public. 1897, to be precise. They have admired it. Looking at it, a large number of them have felt that they were really in the big city. In fact, the tomb of Shiloh's soldier has ranked second to none as a Manhattan *Sehenswürdigkeiten*. And that goes for the Aquarium, too.

And now—now we hear that Grant's Tomb isn't finished yet. Seems that the original architect had in mind a lot more landscaping and statuary than anyone ever got around to putting in. Plain, pillbox-like and yet curiously stirring, the structure stands today exactly as it was when work on it was suspended "temporarily."

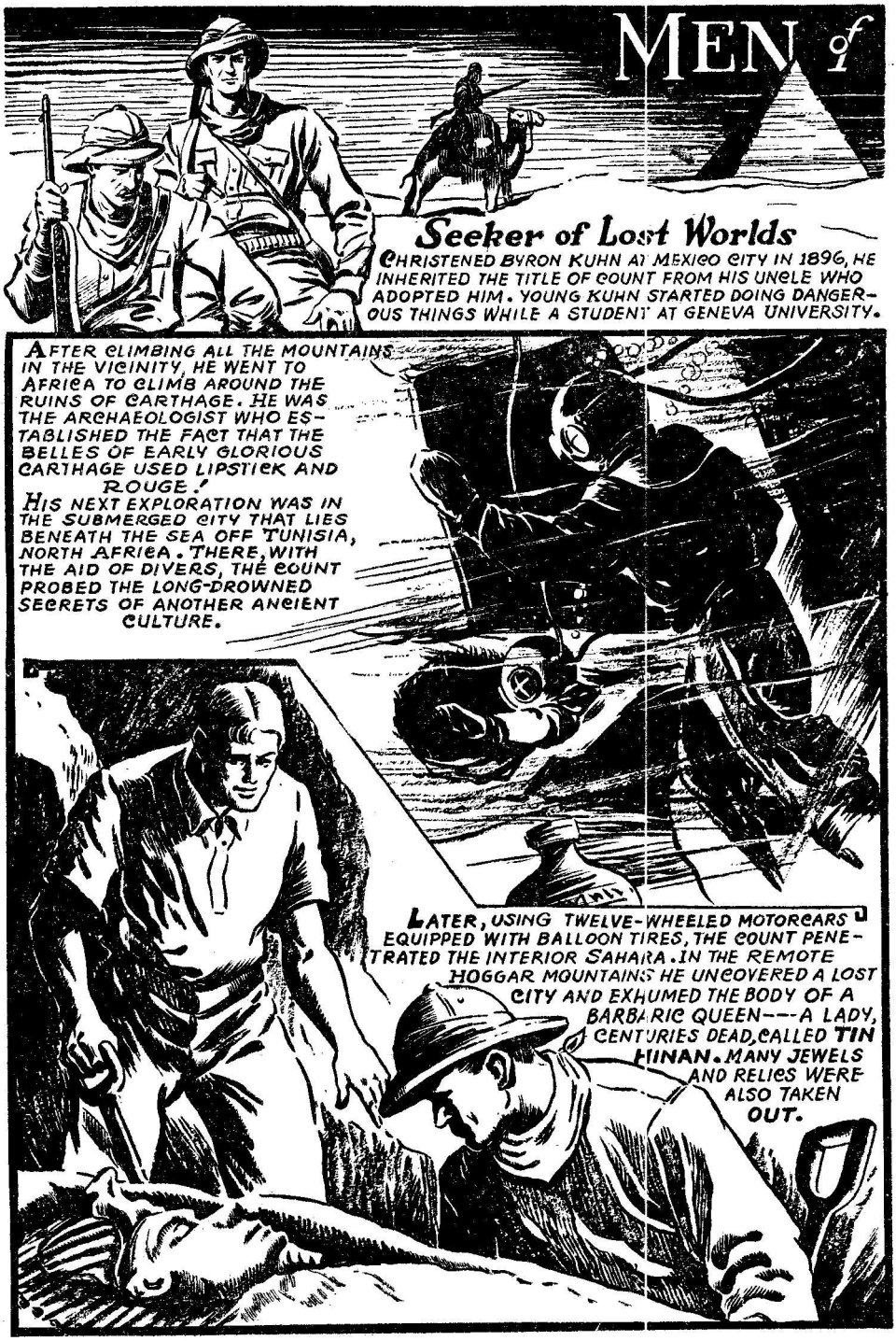
But the WPA lads are busy as beavers on it now—cleaning it up, lifting its frowning, melancholy face, and "finishing" it. Furthermore, this winter will see the first-time installation of a heating plant—that those who view may be in comfort. Some poetic souls, who find in the February chill of the Tomb's wintry temperatures an austere echo of the grim Presence, may disapprove—but most of the visitors will no doubt be satisfied to view a landmark in comparative comfort and to leave the symbolism alone.

Perplexed, baffled and more than a little disturbed by this sudden eruption of necrophile activity, your reporter the other day obtained an interview with H. L. Satterlee, the president of the Grant Monument Association, in an endeavor to find out the why of it all.

"The interior already is as beautiful as Napoleon's Tomb in Paris," Mr. Satterlee said. And soon "it will be the most beautiful monument ever erected for a soldier anywhere." *Soon* turned out to mean, "by the time the World's Fair opens."

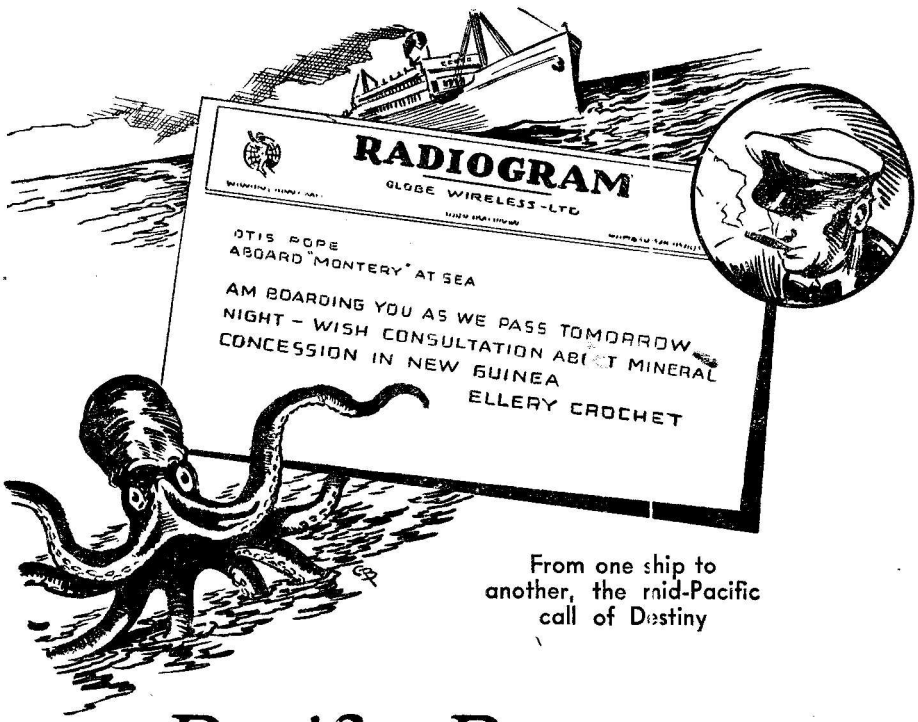
Anyhow it will be dandy when it is, at long last, all done, and any New Yorker who wants to resent the fact that it takes a World's Fair to get the city finished off at the rough edges can just go ahead and resent it.

—*Eduard Hellman Ohlson*



A True Story in Pictures Every Week

Coming Next Week: Roy Hamsen—Deep Sea Diver



From one ship to another, the mid-Pacific call of Destiny

Pacific Passage

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

AS THE liner *Monterey* steamed out of Honolulu harbor for remote Pago Pago, OTIS POPE, world-famous consulting-engineer found a stack of unopened mail missing from his stateroom. At the same time his room steward was found murdered in another part of the ship. Under the body of the steward was found an unopened letter addressed to Pope. It was a wedding invitation from an Australian girl named Harriet Dow who was to marry a man named Spragg.

LAURA GILMAN, spinsterish American school teacher was in the lounge watching a moving picture with her friend, Australian-born, lovely JUNE DARROW and a young actor, LADISLAW, when a ship's officer requested anyone who could shed light on Mr. Pope's missing mail to step into the library. Laura Gilman, while on deck, had seen a hand reach out of a porthole below her and throw torn letters into the sea. She told this to June Darrow and Ladislaw and then went to her cabin to change her dress before reporting to the handsome Pope in the library. But she never got to the library. She was found murdered in her cabin. And, later, as Pope strolled on the deck with June Darrow, someone took a shot at him.

POPE and SERGEANT HONUAPO, Hawaiian detective, who came aboard in a cutter when the murder of the steward was reported in Honolulu harbor, check over the list of suspects. Among them is KAREN ROSSMORE, half-caste beauty who was seen by an elevator boy knocking on the door of Pope's suite just before Pope came aboard. Her naïve excuse is that she wanted Pope's autograph. Then there is ENGLE who nurses a grudge against Pope because of an old lawsuit. And there is ASHURST who might have had a motive to steal Pope's mail and get Pope out of the way because Engle has a son being held for homicide in Pago Pago, whom Pope is supposed to identify when the *Moncrey* gets there. June Darrow seems to be about the only one who suspects DR. MINGO, Pope's Chinese secretary, of complicity in the ship's crime wave. She may be on the

right track, as witness the midnight meeting between Mingo and the hunchback, JULIAN BENEDICT: Benedict (a pseudonym) has employed Mingo, a passionate Nationalist, to falsify Pope's engineering reports on Chinese mining property, thus causing American capitalists to invest millions of dollars. This aids Mingo's beloved China and is a source of huge profits to Benedict who has bought up the mining stock cheap so that he may unload as the capital comes in. Benedict's real name is not revealed, but he tells Mingo that he is traveling as *two* men. Part of the day he occupies another cabin and moves about the ship as a normal young man, the rest of the time he plays the hunchback. He wants Mingo to continue falsifying the mining reports Pope sends to America and he threatens the Chinese secretary with death if he refuses.

Meanwhile, aboard the sister ship of the *Monterey*, the *Mariposa*, steaming North in the same steamer lane, ELLERY CROTCHET, South-Sea tycoon, is talking to the captain. Crotchet, onetime suitor of June Darrow, is a predatory, ruthless figure and is known as the "Octopus of the South Seas." He tells the captain that when the *Mariposa* passes the *Monterey* he wants to change ships in mid-ocean so that he may consult with Otis Pope on some mining matters.

Back on the *Monterey* Pope is carefully looking at the Honolulu paper. Of a batch brought aboard in the island port it is the only one left. Someone has stolen all the rest and in the news columns Pope feels he may find some clue. . . .

CHAPTER X

MAYBE, JUNE, YOU LIE

ON THE *Monterey*, after-dinner coffee was being served in the lounge. Half a hundred passengers in dinner dress were waiting there, while stewards moved about offering cups from silver trays.

Voices hushed when Otis Pope entered. The eyes of many, any especially the eyes of women, followed his stalwart, well-tailored figure as he moved alone to an armchair and sat down.

"Isn't is devastating?" Mrs. Royer whispered behind her hand to George and Karen Rossmore. "He's such a gorgeous man, and he might have been killed! Or he may be . . ."

"He's alive," Rossmore said shortly. "Two other people *aren't*, though, and it's about time they found out who did it."

"And to think the murderer has a passkey!" Mrs. Royer gave a shudder of apprehension. "He might creep in on *any* of us, any night."

"George," said Karen Rossmore, "you must put the trunk against our door tonight."

Rossmore scowled. "Madame Garaud's gonna sing for us tonight, isn't she?"

"She promised," Karen said.

Rossmore made a wry face. "In that case I'm getting out." He left the lounge.

"How," sighed Mrs. Royer, "can anyone *sing* at a time like this!"

Otis Pope sat looking from group to group with keen speculation, hoping that June Darrow would come in and join him. He had carefully refrained from asking her. At dinner this evening he had suddenly realized with a faint sense of guilt that he had attached himself almost constantly to the girl since boarding the ship. How could he be sure he was welcome? Otis Pope had a nice sensitiveness about such things. Many times he had seen obtrusive males at work on shipboard, and he did not want to be placed in such a category himself.

Stewards now were arranging chairs to face the platform from which Madame Garaud, presently, was to sing. It was clear to Pope that a restraint gripped everyone, waiters and patrons alike. When Corliss came by with a much-handled copy of a newspaper and said discouragedly, "I can't find anything in this, Mr. Pope," it was evident that many ears were straining to catch his words.

"Neither can I," Pope admitted in a lower voice. "And neither could Miss Darrow. It must be there though—the thing we want."

Corliss made a gesture of desperation. "There's a screw loose somewhere. It just doesn't add up!"

"With twenty-nine copies of this paper stolen from the ship by someone who overlooks no bets," Pope said, "it's got to add up. There must be a reason. Better go through it again."

"I will, with a fine-tooth comb," the first officer promised, and moved on.

More passengers came up from the dining room and the lounge filled. An oldish hunchback came by, tapping with his cane. Dark, round glasses obscured his eyes, and in dress, compared to the others, he was shabby.

"Coffee, Mr. Benedict?" a steward asked.

"No. Keeps me awake." The response was short and ungracious. Then the old hunchback took a seat near Pope and leaned forward, as though bored with it all, hands and chin resting on the globular head of his cane.

Dr. Mingo, in his long black robe, entered the lounge silently. With a slight bow he delivered a radiogram to Pope. "This arrives only now," he announced, and then as silently withdrew.

Fifty pair of eyes in the room were on Pope as he opened the envelope.

TO POPE'S surprise, the radiogram was not in answer to any he had sent himself. He read it twice. As his astonishment increased, a steward wheeling a tea cart came by and said, "Coffee, Mr. Pope?"

"Black," Pope answered absently.

As he read the message a third time, the steward set a demi-tasse of black coffee on the arm of Pope's chair. Pope half raised it to his lips, then, at a short distance through the crowd, he caught sight of June. Abruptly he set the cup down on the arm of his chair, arose and made his way to her.

"Can you stand a shock?" he asked, and handed her the radiogram. "It was sent to me from the north-bound *Mariposa*."

June read:

OTIS POPE
ABOARD MONTEREY AT SEA:
AM BOARDING YOU AS WE PASS TOMORROW NIGHT WISH CONSULTATION ABOUT MINERAL CONCESSION IN NEW GUINEA.
ELLERY CROTCHET

June looking reprovingly at Pope said, "You didn't tell me he's a client of yours!"

"He isn't," Pope said. "I didn't know he had a mineral concession in New Guinea. But often I'm consulted about projects I never heard of before."

June gave a hopeless laugh. "It's rather weird, isn't it?"

"Uncanny," he admitted.

"You mean he's really going to change ships in the middle of the ocean?"

"He says so." Pope saw that many in the room were watching them curiously. Noting also that June held her after-dinner coffee in hand, he added: "Come, let's take our coffee out on deck. Too many eyes in here."

June moved with him a few steps to the armchair he had just vacated. Doing so they had to thread through a swiftly assembling crowd and Pope felt his elbow jostled by the elderly hunchback.

"Sorry," the man murmured. "Good evening, Miss Darrow."

He stood there hunched over, and barring the way to Pope's chair.

June smiled. "Good evening, Mr. Benedict. You've met Mr. Pope?"

"Glad to know you," Benedict said without warmth. Pope extended a hand and the other grudgingly took it with his own. The hand felt moist and fishy, Pope thought. Abstractedly he noticed a slight reddish ring around the extended wrist, as though a wrist watch had once been worn there too tightly.

Then occurred what seemed to be a minor accident. It was so entirely natural there in the crowded aisle, that Pope, afterward, never gave it a moment's thought. To shake hands, the hunchback had clasped his cane under the hollow of his right arm, so that the right hand would be free. The knob of it thus protruded a little way in front of him while the blunt end reached out horizontally to the rear.

When Pope released Benedict's hand Benedict allowed the cane to descend to the floor behind him, in position for him to go limping away on it. And by what appeared to be pure accident the cane's end struck Pope's demi-tasse.

The cup fell from the arm of the chair to the floor and crashed into bits.

"Sorry," Benedict murmured. "Awkward of me, that."

"Never mind," Pope said. "I can get another one."

Benedict went tapping away through the crowd with his cane, while Otis Pope took another demi-tasse from the steward's cart. Neither Pope nor June had given more than an absently courteous attention to the encounter.

Both were thinking of Ellery Crotchet. Crotchet who was still a thousand miles down the sea, but coming closer with every turn of the screws.

NEITHER of them spoke until they were at the port rail of A deck. June was clearly chagrined, nor did Pope miss the irony of the situation. Crotchet—the man who always reached out—was now reaching. For what? For something on the *Monterey*, or he would not be shifting from ship to ship in mid-ocean.

"Can there be any connection?" Pope asked after a while.

"With what?"

"With a series of crimes on this ship."

"There can't be any," June said.

Pope wasn't sure. Things like this didn't happen without a reason. It occurred to him that Crotchet's mention of a consultation might be just an excuse, that perhaps he really was coming aboard to join June Darrow.

Pope considered the thought for a moment, then discarded it. For why should Crotchet need to go to such trouble and expense? If he knew June was on the *Monterey* he must have known it before leaving Pago Pago. In which case he could have disembarked from the *Mariposa* at Pago, boarding the sister ship a few days later when she came along.

"Tell me more about this man," Pope said.

"I've told you about him. He's a grasping autocrat.

"What else?"

"He's an insufferable—you Americans have a word for it—an insufferable grandstander. He likes big galleries."

"He'll have two big galleries tomorrow night," Pope admitted. "One on each ship as he comes over to us."

A steward came down the deck. Pope handed him two empty cups, then leaned elbows on the rail to face seaward with June. Bright tropic moonlight on the water gave it an amber sheen. Waves swished gently below, as the *Monterey* plowed onward down the sea to leave a thousand phosphorescent jewels gleaming in her wake.

"We can't be far from the equator," June murmured.

She was lovely tonight. Pope turned to look at her profile, chiseled into gentle lines by the moonlight. He saw that she was leaning outward to look down at rows of portholes along the ship's side.

"I'm remembering that poor Laura," she said, "must have been standing like this when she saw the letters thrown into the sea."

"She was probably on a port deck," Pope agreed. "Anyway she was last seen on this side of the ship. I mean when we left Honolulu harbor and most of the passengers were out here waving at the dock."

"It means," June said, "that the man she saw reaching a hand through a porthole must have a cabin on this side."

"Corliss mentioned that—but there's a loophole. Some Kanaka boys were diving for coins on the starboard side. Many passengers went from this side to the other to watch them—and Miss Gilman may have gone along unnoticed."

"It couldn't be an interior cabin," June said, "because there wouldn't be any porthole."

"True. So the captain eliminates interior cabins and is concentrating the watch on occupants of exterior cabins, C deck and D deck. B cabins have windows giving directly to the decks."

"There are such long lines of portholes!" June exclaimed hopelessly.

"Twenty-four portside exterior cabins on D, and thirty-one just above them on C. But wait!" Pope's brow furrowed as a new thought came to him. "Miss Gilman

said she knew definitely *which* porthole!"

"But they all look alike!" June said.

"They do. You wouldn't remember which one unless it were the end one of a row, or the second from the end."

"Or a porthole next to one of the gangplank gates," June suggested.

"Wait. I'll get a ship's chart." Pope left her and went to his suite.

He returned with a room plan of the *Monterey,* one over which Honuapo had labored methodically, and on which the name of the occupant was now written across each cabin.

With June at his elbow Pope studied the plan and saw that only six first-class cabins fulfilled the specifications of being end exteriors, or adjacent to gangplank gate, C or D deck. Pope wrote the names of occupants on the margin:

Doctor's office
Mr. and Mrs. George Rossmore
Lt. and Mrs. K. Phelps, U.S.N.
Boris Getman
Mrs. G. G. Fanning and daughter
Maurice Engle

"If we include next-to-end cabins," Pope said, "we get twelve instead of six. Kim Lennox, I notice, is next to the doctor's office."

If the reasoning were correct it would narrow the search. It was worth calling to Honuapo's attention.

The clear soprano of Madame Garaud came to them from the lounge.

"That song—all about the mystery of the sea—gives me the shivers," June said. "I think I'll go down to my room."

"Good night," Pope said.

"Good night." She turned to go, then stopped to look back at him. Anxiety creased her forehead and he saw that she was gazing at his temple.

Pope laughed. "Oh, that?"

She asked abruptly, "Is it true about Mr. Ashurst?"

"That he has a son in custody at Suva?"

"Yes. Mr. Corliss told me. Is it true that if you identify him, he will be hanged?"

"I imagine. Yes."

"Then please don't stay out here alone." Impulsively June laid a hand on his arm.

"Never mind about me," Pope said. "Anyway they're watching Ashurst—as long as I'm on deck at least."

"But there's a person named Engle, too, isn't there? Someone who sued you once, over a patent, and lost, and has been bitter—"

"Every man has an enemy or two," Pope said. "You run along and forget all about it."

SHE left him as though under protest. Hardly a minute passed, however, before the third officer came out and took a stand at the rail near Pope.

Pope moved to his deck chair and sat down. The third officer strolled by him, then took a chair about twenty feet away. June had sent him, Pope guessed. She had posted the man there to guard his life.

He lighted his pipe, and as he puffed his thoughts concentrated on Ellery Crotchet—Crotchet who had been a persistent suitor of June Darrow's and who was now changing to her ship in mid-ocean. How did Crotchet fit in, anyway?

In a moment Pope turned his eyes toward the next chair, which was June's, and saw a book lying there. He had noticed her reading it this afternoon. Idly he picked it up to note the title. It was Adams' *Epic of America.* An apt bit of reading, he thought, for an Australian girl returning from her first visit to the United States.

June Darrow. A nice name, he reflected, and turned to the fly leaf to see how it might look in writing there.

He did see it there, and he saw another name which both confused and astonished him. On the fly leaf was written:

To our dear guest, June.
From the Gilmans—
Ada
Laura
Ruth and
Sadie

So June had been a guest at the home of Laura Gilman! With something of a

shock Pope remembered June saying: "I don't know her background. No, I don't know why she was going to Australia."

But if June had been a "dear guest" of the Gilman's, she must have known.

The entire aspect of the mystery was suddenly changed now for Pope. June was connected with it. June hadn't been quite frank with him, or quite truthful, and it hurt.

And Pope remembered something else. That the reason June gave for going herself to America hadn't seemed quite adequate for an independent modern girl. To escape the persistent attentions of Crotchet! Modern girls do not usually run from one continent to another because of a suitor's unwelcome wooing. Usually they simply turn a cold shoulder and stay put. If the suitor becomes too annoying, they can always call the police.

Pope tossed the book aside. There was something else—he was sure—something she hadn't told him.

Captain Jansenn in his impeccable whites came strolling down the deck. He stopped in front of Pope's chair.

"We've just crossed the line, Mr. Pope," he announced. "Made up that hour we lost waiting for you."

He meant the equator, Pope knew.

Inside, a chatter of guests issuing from the lounge indicated the Garaud concert was over. Then Pope heard the shrill voice of a bellboy paging someone.

"Mr. Spragg! Mr. Kenneth Spragg!"

To Pope the name seemed vaguely familiar.

It was Jansenn who said, with a frown: "Spragg! Don't recall any name like that on the passenger list!"

Pope took a passenger list from his inside pocket and looked at the S's. In the smoking room the call boy was repeating:

"Mr. Spragg! Mr. Kenneth Spragg!"

Pope saw that no such name was included in the present company of the *Monterey,* either in first or cabin class.

Then he remembered. Instantly he was on his feet, with a hand on Jansenn's arm. "The wedding invitation! The one to me from the Dows at Melbourne! The marriage of Harriet Dow and Kenneth Spragg!"

Jansenn remembered, and was no less alert. He called to the nearby third officer, "Tell that bellboy I want to see him."

WHEN the bellboy came out he had a radiogram in hand. "It's for Mr. Kenneth Spragg," he said. "I've been paging him everywhere. But he doesn't answer."

"Naturally," Jansenn snapped, "because there's no one by that name aboard. Now pop up to the radio room and bring me the file copy of this message."

In a few minutes the boy returned with a carbon of the message.

It read:

KENNETH SPRAGG
ABOARD MONTEREY
WELCOME TO SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE HARRIET

"It came in," the boy said, "just as we crossed the line."

"But hang it," Jansenn exclaimed in exasperation, "Spragg isn't on the *Monterey.*"

Pope said quietly. "Evidently the bride-to-be *thinks* he is. Nice, timely touch of sentiment, that! She welcomes her bridegroom just as he crosses the line."

He smiled.

Jansenn's eyes narrowed. "She *thinks* he is, but he isn't! And an invitation was found at the Wilkins' murder!" He turned brusquely to the bellboy. "Boy, keep on paging Mr. Spragg. Let me know if anyone claims the message."

To the third officer he said: "Post a notice on the bulletin board to the effect that the radio room has an unclaimed message for Mr. Kenneth Spragg."

CHAPTER XI

HERE COMES THE GROOM

POPE remained alone in his deck chair and considered the message to Spragg. It might mean nothing at all. Spragg might

have missed the boat at Honolulu or the mainland. Still, a man en route to marry an heiress doesn't usually miss his boat.

Boris Getman came along with a tall thin brunette with a flat dissipated face. They paused for a moment and Getman introduced the lady as Miss Mundy.

"Is it true, Mr. Pope," Getman asked with an affability he had not shown on Pope's earlier encounter with him, "that we stop to take on a passenger from the *Mariposa* tomorrow night?"

"I believe it is," Pope answered.

Miss Mundy gushed: "Be a marvelous sight, won't it? Two big ships all lighted up and stopping alongside. Way down here on the equator, too!"

"Join us in a drink, Mr. Pope?" Getman's newly acquired sociability drew a sharp look from Pope.

"Thank you. I think not," he said.

Getman and Miss Mundy strolled on.

Otis Pope looked up Jansenn and received a confirmation of the news about stopping to take on Crotchet from the *Mariposa*.

"It's orders from the San Francisco office," the captain said sourly.

"When are we due to pass?"

"At ten tomorrow night."

Pope displayed his own radiogram from Crotchet.

"Looks rather cooked up to me," he said. "Crotchet's no client of mine."

"It's all cockeyed," Jansenn said, "and getting worse fast." He took off his cap and stood there fanning himself. The night was still and sultry.

"Has the Spragg message been claimed?" Pope asked.

"It has not."

"And probably won't be. Good night."

Pope went to his own suite. Dr. Mingo was in the sitting room there. Mingo handed over the much-studied issue of a *Star-Bulletin*.

"Mr. Corliss says he gives up," announced Mingo, and glided away to his own quarter in the suite.

Pope frowned at the paper. He had received it from Getman, and Getman was one of those who had an end-of-a-row cabin on the port side.

Again Otis Pope went through the paper, sheet by sheet, this time looking particularly for some reference to a Kenneth Spragg. He found none. This time he did observe, however, that here and there were faint brown spots. Apparently they were cigaret burns. Live butts could have been dropped on the paper as it lay discarded in Getman's room.

But no one of these brown specks was bigger than a pin point. None of them was sufficient to obscure the reading of a single word or line.

An insistent knock on the door came just as Pope was getting into bed. Captain Jansenn entered, and his expression was now more defeated than ever. He sat down wearily.

"I said things are getting worse fast, and they are, Mr. Pope."

"What now?"

"Ship's doctor reports a bottle of strychnine crystals missing," Jansenn said.

"From his office?"

"From a cabinet there he usually keeps locked," Jansenn said. "But a man gets careless sometimes. Maybe the cabinet wasn't locked. Anyway this prowler stole some strychnine. And there we are."

There they were, admitted Pope. Shipmates with a murderer.

"He wasn't satisfied with a passkey," groaned Jansenn. "He had to go get him some poison! He's got everything he needs now but a conscience."

HOURS after midnight, Mr. Julian Benedict looked cautiously from cabin 325. The corridor was clear.

Creeping out into the starboard aisle of D deck, Benedict, hunched over his cane and, careful not to tap loudly with it, moved aft. He proceeded to a distant area of the first-class accommodations. There he stopped before a stateroom door. Again he looked both ways and made sure the corridor was clear.

Observing that it was, he unscrewed the globular head from his cane and produced

a passkey. With this he cautiously unlocked the stateroom door. He pushed it open to a crack. The interior was dark. The even breathing of a sleeper came from Bed A.

This cabin, Benedict knew, had only one occupant.

Careful not to awaken the sleeper, the hunchbacked intruder entered and closed the door softly. He stood for a moment in the dark. Then he groped his way to the bed.

From his pocket he drew a flashlight and for a bare instant flashed its flare on the face of the sleeper. He extinguished the light. Boldly then he placed his knee on the sleeper's chest while his fingers encircled a throat. Benedict made no pressure there. Merely he made himself master of this recumbent form and then shook it vigorously.

The even breathing stopped. From the darkness of the bed came a gasp of terror.

"Do no say a word," Benedict warned. "I'll do the talking. Now listen: what was it you put in Otis Pope's demi-tasse up in the lounge?"

He gave no chance for an answer. Only a gurgled gasp came from the dark and Benedict shut it off with a pressure of his fingers.

"Arsenic, perhaps? Never mind. It did no harm, for I saw and knocked his cup over. Now get this: lay off Otis Pope. I want to use him myself, understand? And get off this ship at Pago Pago. If you're aboard after Pago, or if you make another break before Pago, I ll—"

Benedict applied a thrust of savage pressure which all but strangled his victim.

"I ought to do it now," Benedict's monotone said from the dark. "But it would mean more searching of the ship and questions. So I'm giving you a chance to get off at Pago. Meantime, lay off Mr. Pope."

The intruder released his victim, leaving him there half paralyzed for the moment, and slipped from the room. Once out, Julian Benedict retreated to cabin 325. He only rumpled the bed there, so in the morning a steward would think it had been slept in. When 325's occupant emerged half an hour later and went toward his other cabin, he was not Julian Benedict at all.

OTIS POPE spent a restless night, disturbed in spite of himself by a feeling that June Darrow had not been altogether frank. As a result he slept late. Arriving in the dining room at nine, he found to his disappointment that June had already breakfasted.

Corliss came by his table and said: "The old man's getting impatient, Mr. Pope. He feels bound to have this mystery thrashed out before we make Pago. So he wants a council of war in his quarters at four bells. He wants you there, and Sergeant Honuapo."

"I'll be there," Pope promised. "You look up Honuapo."

Promptly at four bells Pope entered Jansenn's quarters on the boat deck, where the captain was waiting with his first officer and Honuapo.

Jansenn was pacing the floor. He turned brusquely. "Any new ideas, Mr. Pope?" he asked as Honuapo and Corliss entered.

Pope eased his bigness into a chair and lighted his pipe. "You're asking me because my mail was stolen?"

"That, and because an attempt was made on your life."

"We're not sure of that last," Pope said. "The shot may have been fired at Miss Darrow, who was with me."

"If you will excuse, I do not think so," Honuapo put in politely. "For have we not already developed two motives? Two men each with reason for enmity against Mr. Pope?"

"Yes," fretted Jansenn. "Ashurst and Engle. And there may be others."

Pope offered his list of the six end-of-a-row cabins on the port side, with names attached. He suggested an especial vigilance on those cabins, and gave his reason. Also, he said, cabins next to the end of a row should not be overlooked.

The others agreed with him.

"Now let's go back to the first homicide," Pope said. "The killing of Wilkins. And

let's stick to facts. What facts have we in the Wilkins case?"

"Only one, please," offered the Hawaiian sergeant. "This invitation to wedding." He produced an engraved invitation postmarked Melbourne, and addressed to Otis Pope in care of the *Monterey* at Honolulu.

"And now," Pope said, "the name of the bridegroom comes up again. He gets a radiogram welcome from the bride. He should be aboard, but he isn't. That suggests two possibilities. Either he missed the boat, or applied for a reservation either on the mainland or at Honolulu and was denied. The chief purser, in either case, should know about it."

Jansenn called the chief purser on the phone. He asked if a Kenneth Spragg had applied for a reservation on the *Monterey*.

The purser looked at his records and in a few minutes called back. "There was no such application," he said, "nor did anyone by that name miss the boat. But while you're on the line, captain, there's something else."

"What is it?" snapped Jansenn.

"A passenger is in my office and he's making a rather extraordinary request. It's so unusual that I must refer him to you."

"Who is he?"

"Mr. Kimbert Lennox, sir."

"Send him up."

JANSENN looked at a list just handed him by Pope and saw that Lennox had a cabin on D deck which was next to the end of a row.

In a few minutes Lennox came in. He appeared surprised and a little disconcerted to find Pope, Corliss and Honuapo in a group with the captain.

"You made some special request of the purser?" Jansenn asked.

"Yes, I did. It's because I heard the *Mariposa* is stopping alongside us tonight, to transfer a passenger. Is that true?"

"It is."

"This passenger pays all the expense?"

"He does."

"He'll be rowed over from ship to ship in a small boat?"

"In the bos'n's boat, yes."

"Very well," Lennox said. "Then let *me* transfer to the *Mariposa*."

Four men stared at him.

"Why?" demanded Jansenn.

"Simply because I'm fed up," Lennox said. "I don't like this ship, and I want to get off."

"You don't like my ship?"

"Can you blame me? You've had two murders on it and almost three. You've got a fiend running loose with a passkey. And this morning I hear he's also got a bottle of poison. So of course I want to get off. Who wouldn't?"

Jansenn looked at him keenly. "You have no personal reason to fear this killer, have you?"

"No more than anyone else. But's he crazy, I tell you, and I want to get off. I came along on a pleasure trip. And believe me, it's no longer a pleasure to ride the *Monterey*."

He went on to urge that it wouldn't cost the ship anything to let him transfer to the *Mariposa*, inasmuch as a bos'n's boat was coming over anyway with Crotchet. "In fact you'll make money by it," Lennox said. "My passage is paid for to Sydney and I don't ask for a refund. You can sell my cabin again at the next port. And I'm willing to buy another one on the north-bound ship."

Jansenn conceded his logic. "There's only one reason for saying no to you, Mr. Lennox. We've had crimes aboard and haven't fixed the guilt. So I don't like to let any one leave the ship until we do."

Lennox looked offended. "But you don't suspect me, do you?"

"No more than anyone else," the captain conceded. "I'll take time to think it over, let you know."

Before Lennox could go Pope said: "One question, Kim. Do you know this man Crotchet, who's joining us tonight?"

"Never heard of him before," Lennox said, and went out.

Jansenn looked queerly at Pope. "You called him by his first name. Know him well?"

"I've known his family for years," Pope said. He puffed thoughtfully for a moment, then added: "That reminds me, when I asked if he'd brought his wife along, he said no, that this was just a business trip, so he'd left her at home."

Jansenn scowled. "Now he says it's a pleasure trip and he wants to get off! I think we'd better go through his baggage, and see if we can get something on him."

Corliss agreed. "I'll get the third to hold him in talk while we pay a visit to his room."

FIVE minutes later the four men met at Lennox's cabin. A room steward was tidying up there. Jansenn ordered the man to withdraw, and Honuapo began a systematic search.

"Here are his passport and ticket," Corliss said. He took them from a drawer.

The passport and ticket were perfectly in order.

Honuapo sifted every item of baggage. Jansenn felt that they were entirely justified. Crimes were unsolved and every mysterious circumstance called for inspection.

"No firearms," Honuapo reported. "All things seem all right."

Pope himself handled a few of the garments which came from a suitcase. "All things but one," he said. "There aren't any labels, tags, laundry marks. Not even any initials on the baggage. Nothing to identify this stuff as belonging to Lennox."

"Except the ticket and the passport," Jansenn said. "They're made out to Lennox, and you know he *is* Lennox."

Pope continued to search. "No papers or letters," he said. "No checkbook, diary or memos of any kind with the name Lennox. No initials on the toilet articles. Strange, isn't it?"

At first it did not seem so strange to Jansenn.

"But if you go through any normal baggage," Pope insisted, "such as mine or yours, you'll find dozens of identifications. Initials on a hair brush. A novel with a name on the flyleaf. Lennox, although he actually is Lennox, has none of these."

Suits in the wardrobe locker likewise yielded no name or initials.

Then Honuapo moved a pillow on the bed and found a gold watch there. Evidently it had lain under the pillow all night and this morning Lennox had failed to put it in his pocket.

"No initials on watch," Honuapo said. He pried open the rear case. "Picture of lady here," he added.

Jansenn took the watch. "You know the Lennox family, Mr. Pope. This is his wife, isn't it?"

Otis Pope looked at the small round photograph of a girl's face which was fitted in the rear case of Lennox's watch.

"It isn't his wife," Pope said. "It's Harriet Dow of Melbourne."

"The bride waiting for Spragg!" Jansenn exclaimed.

Pope nodded. "Things begin to tie up now. Lennox's uneasiness when he first met me on board; the unclaimed radiogram last night from Harriet Dow to Spragg; Lennox's sudden wish to turn around and go back home; and now the picture of Harriet Dow in this watch."

Jansenn looked blank. "I don't quite see what you mean."

"Do I have to draw a diagram?" Pope spoke with a degree of exasperation. "Suppose Lennox, a married man, wants to marry a Melbourne heiress who knows him as Spragg!"

Honuapo's broad brown face glistened with excitement. "It makes reason. Lennox is Spragg."

"No, he's Lennox," Pope said. "But probably he plans to be Spragg when he gets to Australia. With no labels in his outfit, he simply disembarks from the *Monterey* as Lennox and registers at a hotel as Spragg. Then the happy wedding with Miss Dow."

"It's pat," admitted Jansenn.

"Don't forget," Pope said, "that I received an invitation to the wedding—it was part of the stolen mail. I know the bride and I also know Lennox. Attending, I would have to say that I know the bridegroom to be Lennox, a married man."

Corliss whistled. "So that's why he took a shot at you!"

Jansenn roared: "Mr. Corliss, go arrest Lennox at once."

"Hold on a minute," Pope objected. "There's a feature or two which miss fire. If Lennox stole my mail, why should he leave the one letter of interest to him at the crime?"

"He got the buck ague," Corliss asserted, "and dropped it."

"The *Monterey's* murderer," Pope argued, "isn't the kind who goes around dropping clews carelessly. There's something else. It goes deeper. Moreover, we can't prove this case on Lennox—yet. It sounds right, but we haven't anything on him yet."

"Nothing on him? Why not?"

"Because we can't prosecute him for a bigamy he plans to commit in Australia. He's faked no passport. He's still openly Lennox."

Jansenn was again confused. "But he must be Spragg already, because that's the name on the invitation."

"You can't arrest a name on an invitation," Pope said. "And you can't arrest a man for a planned bigamy not yet carried through. He has a motive for shooting at me, but did he? Engle also has a motive. So has Ashurst. Of the three, Ashurst's motive is the most desperate."

Jansenn gave a gloomy nod. "Yes," he admitted, "with Ashurst, it means death or life for his son. Hang it all, this thing's driving me crazy. There's poison loose on the ship, too. We haven't explained that." The captain rumpled his hair, glaring from Corliss to Honuapo.

"Please sir," suggested Honuapo softly, "shall we not talk with this man Lennox?"

"Sure we will," Jansenn snapped. "Bring him down here, Mr. Corliss."

While Corliss went on the errand, Honuapo restored the room to order. There was no evidence of a recent search through baggage when the officer returned with Kimberton Lennox.

Lennox, finding them there, lost color. He asked tensely. "Is anything wrong, Captain?"

Jansenn held up the gold watch. "Is this yours, Mr. Lennox?"

Lennox stared at the watch. "No, it is not mine," he said.

CHAPTER XII

"HAVE YOU HEARD . . .?"

JANSENN did not lose the manner of dignified deference with which he was accustomed to address passengers. "We found it under your pillow, Mr. Lennox."

To Pope, Lennox looked like a man who was thinking fast. When Lennox spoke, it was obvious that he weighed his words carefully.

"Oh, yes, I did leave it there. The watch isn't really mine, though. I'm only holding it as security for a loan."

"What do you mean?"

"I was in a San Francisco hotel," Lennox said. "A man I know named Spraggg came running up, all excited. He was in some big hurry and said he wanted to borrow fifty dollars."

"When was this?"

"Just before the boat sailed. Naturally I hesitated. I didn't know Spragg very well. But he high-pressured me. Insisted he had to have the fifty right away, that it was urgent. He was in some kind of a jam, he said, and he offered me this watch as security. He'd redeem it next time he saw me, he said. Well, it happened my own watch was pretty well worn out. So I let him talk me into it. And that's the truth, Captain."

With effort Jansenn kept a biting skepticism from his voice. "You're telling me this man didn't even take the picture of his girl out of the watch?" He opened the rear case of the watch and exposed to Lennox the face of Harriet Dow.

Lennox gaped at the picture. "I didn't even know it was there," he said.

"Come, Mr. Lennox, you must have opened the rear case since leaving San Francisco. To wind the watch—"

"It winds at the stem," Lennox said. He was regaining color now, and resentment showed in his eyes.

No amount of inquiry could shake his story.

The captain, leaving Corliss there to inquire further, withdrew with Pope and Honuapo. Once outside, Jansenn gave his doubt full play. "That's the best alibi," he said with irony, "that I've heard since the Rossmore woman claimed she was looking for your autograph!"

Pope smiled. "She really does collect autographs," he said.

Jansenn turned crossly to Honuapo. "What about his bathrobe? I mean Lennox's. A yellow silk bathrobe cord was used on Laura Gilman, wasn't it?"

"Yes sir," Honuapo said. "We have look at all bathrobes on ship, to find one which match. But Mr. Lennox has no bathrobe at all."

"He *wouldn't*," Jansenn admitted. "After using the cord, he'd naturally chuck the bathrobe out a porthole."

Pope offered doubtfully: "That's another thing that doesn't fit. I tell you the man we're looking for doesn't go around dropping his own bathrobe cords, or wedding invitations, at his crimes."

"But you said—"

"I make a hazard that Lennox contemplates bigamy—and that's all. What about firearms? I mean—have you found any except that thirty-two caliber on the sun deck?"

"A hatful," Jansenn growled.

Honuapo was more exact. "We have found sixteen pistols on ship. Mr. Corliss now keep them all in his locker."

"Some of the passengers raised a row about it, too," Jansenn said. "Don't know as I blame them, either. With a murderer loose on deck, they claim they have a right to keep armed. Still, we had to confiscate all guns."

Pope made a notation and handed it to the captain. "Here's the address of Harriet Dow's father in Melbourne. I suggest you ask him by radiogram for an exact description of his prospective son-in-law, Kenneth Spragg."

"I'll do that, Mr. Pope. Ought to have an answer before midnight. And if the description fits, I'll put this Lennox slicker in irons."

"In any case you're not letting him change to the *Mariposa?*"

Jansenn shook his head. "In any case he stays on the *Monterey*. I can't stop Crotchet from getting on, but I can and will stop anybody from getting off until I know the answer to these crimes."

The captain hurried away toward the radio room.

OTIS POPE went looking for June Darrow. The cage going up was stifling hot. Raymond Ladislaw got on at C deck and said to Pope: "Terrific, last night, wasn't it? My room was a furnace. Long about midnight I had to go up and sleep in my deck chair."

He did look rather haggard, Pope noticed. His face was like melting wax.

Pope looked in the smoking room for June. She wasn't there, but to his mild surprise he saw Dr. Mingo seated at a table with Karen Rossmore. Then he remembered that the woman was half Chinese. A glass of wine was before Mingo. Mrs. Rossmore was drinking beer. She smiled at Pope as he passed and explained, "Dr. Mingo is brushing up my Chinese. I was born in Hong Kong, you know."

Pope found June at the rail. She was in white slacks this morning, looking cool in spite of the intense heat.

She smiled a good morning. "I was wondering about you," she said.

"Thought I'd been shot, or poisoned, or something?" He spoke lightly, but his brown eyes held a serious question.

"The truth is," he went on in a moment, "I didn't sleep very well. A small thing bothered me. Little things, you know, sometimes bridge big gaps of confusion."

"For instance?"

"For instance, why was Laura Gilman traveling to Australia?"

He waited, but there was no answer.

"Do you know anything about her," he asked, "that you haven't told me?"

Her eyes became disturbed and evasive. "About Laura? Why no, of course not."

He could hardly say he didn't believe her. An uncomfortable restraint grew between them. To change the subject Pope said, "I've just come from a session with Kim Lennox."

"Mr. Lennox? I believe you said you knew him in Canada."

"Quite well. He has a wife there. Also he has a gold watch. In the watch is the picture of a woman who isn't his wife."

"A married man leading a double life! Gracious!" June exclaimed. "I'd better be careful. I was playing shuffleboard with Mr. Lennox only yesterday. With him and the Rossmores."

"In the shuffleboard game, did you get any new angles on Lennox?"

June laughed. "No, except that Mrs. Rossmore seemed to find him quite attractive. She flirted with him rather openly and Mr. Rossmore had to call her down. Mr. Rossmore appears to be an extremely jealous husband."

"What did he say to her?"

"I heard him say to her, bitterly: 'No etchings, please, Karen. Dixon might hear about it and get sore.'"

"Who's Dixon?"

"A passenger by that name got off at Honolulu, I think."

Ladislaw joined them at the rail, asking curiously: "What's this row about Lennox. I just saw him, and he looks like he's in some kind of a jam."

Pope explained about Lennox. Ladislaw gave vivid attention.

"He's on a limb," Ladislaw said. "And when that answer comes from the Dows at Melbourne, he'll have to climb down."

"If he's really Spragg, will it solve everything?" June asked.

"It won't even start to solve everything," Pope admitted wryly. "It will simply put Lennox in the same category with Ashurst and Engle."

"A man with a motive," Ladislaw agreed with a sage nod. "Three of 'em, take your choice."

June gave a sigh. "I can't imagine it's poor Mr. Ashurst. I feel sorry for him, really I do."

"And Engle?" Pope asked.

"I hardly know him," she said. "You mean the bald man, who plays poker every night? Tell me about him, Mr. Pope."

Pope did not, for Engle himself appeared at that moment and stood at the rail about ten feet away. Engle threw a hostile look toward Pope, then stared sourly at the sea.

Boris Getman strolled by, hands in his pockets, puffing at a short bulldog pipe. He stopped to ask amiably, "Anything new? There's a buzz going around about a bottle of strychnine."

"Is there?" asked Pope non-committally. "Who started the buzz?"

"Mrs. Royer. She got it from the ship's doctor."

Ladislaw lighted a cigarette. He offered one to Getman.

Getman shook his head. "I never use them," he said, and sauntered away.

Pope looked after him. Again he was struck by the man's newly acquired affability. "That's another one of those little things," he said to June.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Getman says he doesn't smoke cigarettes. Probably true, for pipe smokers rarely do.'

"Well?"

"But when Getman bought a *Star-Bulletin* from the ship's newsstand, he also bought a package of cigarettes."

June tamped out her own. "And he doesn't smoke them?"

"He says he doesn't. The inference is that he had a guest in his room who does. For the crumpled paper was, when I got hold of it later, scorched here and there with cigarette butts which had been dropped on it."

"Is that important?" June asked.

"Anything may be important. We can't forget that twenty-nine copies of that paper disappeared. I still think the answer to the entire mystery is printed somewhere on those pages, in black and white."

Otis Pope turned with his back to the rail and looked through an open window into the smoking room. Karen Rossmore, he noticed, was still seated with her beer,

facing Dr. Mingo. This morning her hair was coiled high on her head, with an Oriental comb in it. From this angle she impressed Pope as hardly less Chinese than Mingo himself. Mingo was passing something to her across the table. The woman fitted it into a long, ivory holder, placed in between her lips. Mingo leaned forward to light it. It was one of his own slim, Chinese cigarettes.

FIRST OFFICER CORLISS strolled up to a group on the deck. Mrs. Royer was there, fanning herself desperately. "You first-trippers'll be getting your Neptune diplomas," Corliss said with a grin. "We crossed the line last night, you know."

"Feels like it," George Rossmore echoed. He mopped beads of moisture from his face. There was no trade wind and the atmosphere grew more sticky by the minute.

The sea was like oil, a glassy doldrums as far as the eyes could reach. Ladies on deck, utterly enervated, were clad mainly in bathing suits or the flimsiest of slacks.

Raymond Ladislaw winked mysteriously at Rossmore. "I understand one of our passengers," he said, "got *his* crossing-the-equator diploma already. In the shape of a telegram from a lady named Dow."

Mrs. Royer said: "I want to be up tonight when we pass the *Mariposa*—if I don't melt before then."

Rossmore cocked an eye at the first officer. "Any new dope on the crime wave? I mean besides the Dow-Spragg sketch?"

"Nothing," Corliss told him. "We have angles, but they don't tie up any too well with the stealing of Mr. Pope's mail."

"He's so handsome, don't you think?" came with a sigh from Karen Rossmore. She was gazing down the deck toward Otis Pope and June Darrow.

"You haven't a chance," her husband remarked cynically. "In the first place, I'm along; in the second place, that Australian girl's already tagged him."

"Do you really think so?" whispered Mrs. Royer. "I've been wondering. They've been together practically all the time, you know. But they say Otis Pope's positively uncatchable; and he must be ages older than she is."

"But girls like mature men," objected Mrs. Rossmore, and again drew a scowl from her husband.

"Well," Rossmore said acridly, "if you women are going to stand around mooning about the romantic Mr. Pope, I might as well go in and play a few hands of poker." He looked through a window into the smoking room. "I see they're dealing stud in there."

Hands thrust deep in the pockets of his baggy whites, he moved away.

Corliss strolled on from group to group, apparently idle. Actually he was collaborating in the investigations of Sergeant Honuapo. Honuapo was doing the same thing on B deck. The two were listening in here and there, alert for reactions. While heat waves danced on the deck, passengers whispered nervously one to another. They asked curious and confusing questions from which, all in all, the first officer was able to glean little.

Finally Corliss joined Honuapo. "Can't make much out of it, Sergeant. No new leads. True, three men have a motive against Mr. Pope. But, all three were in a poker game when Pope was shot at."

"That is so," agreed Honuapo. "A thought strikes me," he said. "I would like to see the steward who served them that night." He smiled a thoughtful smile. "Drinks, you know. . . . So very curious about that poker game."

At the A-deck rail June Darrow was saying the same thing to Otis Pope.

"Yes," he answered thoughtfully, "Ashurst, Lennox and Engle were all in the poker game that evening. And Getman, after watching the game with Mrs. Royer, went in to dance with her. They were dancing when the shot was fired. But—"

"But what?" questioned June.

"But the poker alibi may have a hole in it, somewhere. If it hasn't, then it doesn't make any difference what answer we get from the captain's message to Melbourne. Lennox will still be in the clear."

CHAPTER XIII

EENEY, MEENY, MINEY, MINGO

THEY were elbow to elbow, looking out on the glassy sea. Here and there a flying fish went skimming over the surface like rippling silver; overhead a great frigate bird floated in slow, predatory circles. "Are you sure," Pope asked suddenly, "there's nothing more you can tell me about Laura Gilman?"

He was sorry he asked it, for again a curtain of restraint fell between them.

"Quite sure," she answered coolly. "And I think you asked that before."

When she saw his expression she added penitently: "Don't think I'm cross. I'm just depressed, that's all."

"Because Crotchet's coming aboard tonight?"

"If you knew him you wouldn't blame me," she said.

"But he can't possibly hurt you," Pope protested. "If he annoys you, you can report him to the captain."

"It's frightfully hot," she evaded. "I think I'll go for a swim."

Off she went, leaving Pope uncomfortably aware that she hadn't asked him to join her at the pool. Then the sight of Honuapo down the deck recalled him to grimmer issues. With murders unsolved this was no time to be fretting about a girl.

Instead he ought to get busy and help Honuapo. Marshaling his wits to this end, Pope took a card from his pocket. On it was a memo: "Find out about Dixon."

Dixon, he remembered, was in some way connected with the Rossmores. Karen Rossmore's implausible story was still a loose end, so Pope now went down to the chief purser and inquired about Dixon.

"A man by that name," the purser said, "got off at Honolulu."

He looked it up in his records. "Yes, a Bernard Dixon booked with us on this trip from San Francisco to Honolulu. Incidentally, Mr. Pope, he had your stateroom, number 125."

Pope almost laughed. "My stateroom! Everything in this tangle boomerangs right back toward me! What sort was this Dixon?"

"A gay bird," the purser said. "Always throwing parties. Lots of women on the string." He lowered his voice to confide, "Including that pretty little half-caste, Mrs. Rossmore."

Was the Rossmore angle, Pope wondered, as simple as that? Had Karen Rossmore, not knowing Dixon had just disembarked, knocked on the door of number 125 simply to resume a five-day flirtation?

It would be a more logical explanation than the one she had offered—that she had called there in the hope that Pope would sign her book of autographs.

Eddie the bellboy came along and Pope drew him aside.

"Eddie," he inquired persuasively, "in strict confidence tell me about Mr. Dixon who had my room up to Honolulu. Do you know who went to his parties?"

Eddie was reticent. He had a bellboy's sense of honor about telling tales out of school; Pope divined that Dixon had tipped him well.

"It's like this, Mr. Pope. We bellboys ain't supposed to see anything when we take drinks up to a man's stateroom."

"But in this case," Pope pointed out, "you can perhaps help to clear a lady of a more serious suspicion. Do you think Mrs. Rossmore wasn't aware of Dixon's disembarkation, and so went there again?"

"Oh, no," Eddie said. "She knew he got off. Fact is she went ashore with him for cocktails at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. That's where Rossmore caught 'em. And was he burned up!"

"That," Pope admitted, "knocks my first idea into a cocked hat, but it gives me another one. You've practically admitted that the lady did quite a bit of drinking with Dixon in his room, on the way over from the mainland. Who else beside you would know about it?"

"The room steward, Wilkins," Eddie answered promptly.

"That would explain things," Pope said. "Mrs. Rossmore and Dixon, ashore at the

Royal Hawaiian, were encountered by a jealous husband. The husband came on board in a mood to ask questions."

"He did ask me questions," Eddie said, "and I didn't tell him a thing."

"Of course not," approved Pope. "But another dangerous witness would be Wilkins. If the lady sought you out, why wouldn't she also hunt up Wilkins? To tip him liberally and so insure his silence. How much did she tip you, Eddie?"

"A tenner."

"Just as she came aboard with her husband?"

"Yes, about an hour before we sailed from Honolulu."

POPE did some solid thinking. She came aboard, tipped Eddie, then went looking for Wilkins. Wilkins about that time was getting room 125 ready for its next occupant. The woman must have been seeking an interview with him there, when the elevator boy saw her at the door.

But on the way up to A deck, another thought struck Pope. Blackmail! He was loath to consider it, in fairness to the dead Wilkins. But it had to be considered—the possibility that she *had* interviewed Wilkins, and that Wilkins had demanded *more* than she could offer. If so, Karen Rossmore herself would have motive for the murder of Steward Wilkins.

And what about George Rossmore? Where was he all this time? This man was touchy, brittle-tempered. He himself could have interviewed Wilkins, and then, sensing that Wilkins was dissembling awkwardly, holding back the truth, could have become enraged and struck the man down.

Pope left the elevator and looked into the smoking room. At a large round table he saw six men playing poker. It was the same coterie that had played almost daily during the voyage, and except for one man the same group that had been so engaged the first evening out of Honolulu.

George Rossmore was there, his face perspiring and his sleeves rolled to the elbows. They were all coatless. Engle sat with a green shade over his eyes. Ashurst, with the look of a man who whistles to keep up his spirits, was at Engle's left. The other players were Ladislaw, Lennox and the cameraman, Piper. Smullet was not about.

Looking at them, Pope was keenly aware that three men at the table had obvious motives for taking his life. He was no less aware that not one of them could have fired the shot at ten minutes to eleven on the first night out of Honolulu, if the testimony of the others was accurate.

Was it accurate?

Pope moved closer to the game, standing back of Engle's chair. Over Engle's bald head he watched the movement of cards and chips. It was stud poker for light stakes, a twenty-five cent limit.

Piper was dealing. He dealt a hole card, face down, to each of six players. Then he dealt one card face up to each man in the game. All eyes followed those cards. The highest in sight was Ashurst's King.

"King bets," Piper said.

Each man looked covertly at his hole card. Ashurst put in a nickel chip and the others came in. Piper then dealt another card to each player. This time Engle had two Eights exposed.

"Pair of Eights is high," Piper said.

Again a cautious scrutiny by each man of his hole card, a weighing of chances, and bets. The routine was repeated at the dealing of a third exposed card to each player, and then at a fourth. At each deal all eyes followed the cards.

"May I sit in?" Pope asked.

"Of course," Ladislaw said.

Otis Pope drew up a seventh chair and sat in.

For half an hour he played stud, watching men and cards. He was waiting for them to get used to his being there. Also he was waiting for a hand of such interest that all six of his opponents would "stay," that is, would not drop out until the final call.

When such a hand came Pope dropped out. All the others stayed.

While attention was riveted on the cards, Pope arose quietly and left the room. He

went up to the sun deck by one companionway and descended by another. Reëntering the smoking room he resumed his seat. The hand was just being completed. Engle won the pot.

Otis Pope played a few more hands, then asked abruptly, "How long have we been playing?"

"Close to an hour, I should say," Piper guessed.

He looked a little surprised at the financier's question.

The others agreed.

"How many of us," Pope asked, "have been playing that long?"

"Why, all of us." Ashurst spoke with surprise.

"Not one of us has left the room?"

Pope waited for the answer, which could change everything.

"Not that I noticed," Piper said.

Pope waited for a dissension but none came.

"I was gone myself for several minutes," he told them. "Eyes which follow stud poker cards evidently see nothing else."

They stared at him.

Then Lennox laughed nervously. "Can you beat that? He was gone and we didn't know it."

"It could happen," Piper admitted.

POPE cashed in. As he left the game, he knew that the poker alibis were anything but rigid. Any one of those men could have left that other game for a few minutes, just as he had left this one.

Particularly, he reflected, if there had been any amount of drinking done.

He went down to his suite on B deck and called for Dr. Mingo. Mingo was not there.

Then the telephone rang and Pope answered.

"This is Otis Pope," he said.

He waited, but no response came from the other end of the line. No voice answered Pope's. Instead, he heard what impressed him as a furtive click.

A wrong number? Pope was inclined to think not. Usually a caller apologizes for ringing the wrong number. And this ti Pope vaguely sensed something fugitive a cautious retreat at the announcement his own name.

There had even been something furt and tentative in the speaker's tone—alm as if whoever it was had attempted to d guise his voice. And suddenly Pope's fl crawled, as if he had come in contact w something dangerous in the dark, his fe ing would have been much the same.

He lifted the receiver again and ask ship's Central: "Did someone just ask be connected with Otis Pope's room?"

"No, sir," Central said. "The cal asked to be connected with Dr. Mingo."

"From what cabin did the call come

"Not from any cabin. It came from t public phone in the midship foyer."

Pope hung up. So someone wanted M Mingo! That was not strange. The s nificant thing was retreat. Hearing a sponse, "This is Otis Pope," an hon caller would say, "May I speak with M Mingo, please?"

It could only mean an attempt to ma a clandestine contact with Mingo. Somec who had been frightened away by Pop voice.

Pope now remembered an unfavoral appraisal made by June Darrow. She d not quite trust Mingo. Was she justifie Women, Pope conceded, were sometim psychic, often accurate in their ratings men.

Was Mingo in this mystery? No one all this ship knew so much about Pop affairs as Mingo. Always before he h thought of Mingo as a clever, though fai ful, clerk. Now he tried to picture the m as deep in some insiduous plot with—w whom? With a woman of his own blo Karen Rossmore?

It couldn't be, thought Pope. He p away suspicion, for it shamed him. Mir was upright. Far from mercenary, he w exceptionally unselfish. A man of bro charity was Mingo, sending away five titl of his wage, each month, to the l fortunate of his race.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Close—But No Cigar

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "China Station," "Dear Old Mudder of Mine," etc.

C. EMERY GAINSBOTTOM, gruff and brusque and truculent, patted his paunch once lightly as he settled down for the day at his desk, peered belligerently at Miss Salz, his private secretary, who picked up all her gray hairs from the sound of his voice, glanced then at the clock which read: 9:05 A.M., and then he bellowed: "You're late!"

"Yes, Mr. Gainsbottom," Miss Salz said meekly.

"Won't stand for it!" C. Emery Gainsbottom roared. "Never been late once in my life! Punctuality is discipline! If I can manage to get here on time, you can and so can every one else connected with this firm. Understand me, Miss Salz! Next time and you're fired!"

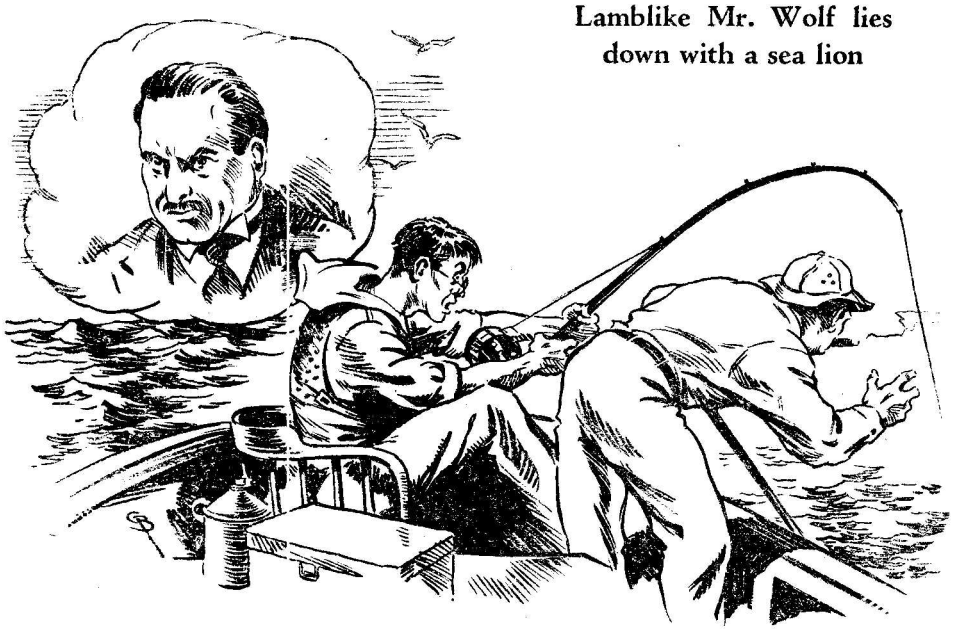
"Yes, Mr. Gainsbottom," Miss Salz said, having heard the threat thirteen times before in the last three years. "The subway broke down near Times Square, sir. A short circuit or something."

"You should leave for the office allowing plenty of time for any emergencies which may arise!" C. Emery Gainsbottom thundered. "And I'll have no wishy-washy excuses either! What's done is done, understand me, Miss Salz? And stop annoying me. Haven't I got enough on my mind without being bothered by the lateness of careless employees? Do you know what day this is?"

"Yes, Mr. Gainsbottom," said Miss Salz. "Today is *the* day."

"Today," said Mr. Gainsbottom in an oratorical bass voice, "is worth quarter of a million dollars to me! Today old man Bradley will give me his decision on those neckties! Is it any wonder I'm at my wit's end? Think of it: a contract worth two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and he thinks it over and thinks it over while I lose my hair. What kind of a business man

Lamblike Mr. Wolf lies down with a sea lion



is he anyhow? Don't see how he ever built up a chain of stores!"

"But he did, Mr. Gainsbottom," said Miss Salz sweetly. "Three thousand Bradley ten-cent stores—in every state in the Union except New Mexico."

"Did I ask you?" Gainsbottom said with sarcasm. "Are you trying to tell me my business? I know he's got three thousand stores. I know we have a market there for these cheap—I mean—inexpensive ties that'll startle the world. Imagine! A good tie for ten cents! Imagine how they would sell. Like hot cakes? No! Like gold bricks! A wonderful product and a marvelous idea and what? He thinks it over and thinks it over. And then he says he will drop by here and give me his decision today. It's not ethical. He can't lose. Why does he have to think about those contracts so much?"

Mr. Gainsbottom underlined his question by waggling his eyebrows madly.

"Maybe," said Miss Salz meekly, "that's how he built up those three thousand stores. I read in the paper that Mr. Bradley is a very shrewd man. Maybe he found out that the mill told you all those ties were defective and that you would have to get rid of them as best you could. After all, Mr. Gainsbottom, when you try and sell a two-dollar tie wholesale to a firm at six cents a tie, they might smell a rat somewhere. Don't you think so?"

"I think you talk too damn much!" Gainsbottom roared. "What time is Bradley due here?"

"Three this afternoon," said Miss Salz.

Gainsbottom hit himself across the forehead. "Oh! Oh, I just remembered! Smoke. Cigar. Bradley can't stand anything but the kind of cigar he smokes himself. Charlie Lewis said he lost a deal with Bradley once because he offered him an ordinary cigar and Bradley got insulted. What's the name of those cigars he smokes —Dalma—no—Dalmatian cigars! That's it! Dalmatian cigars from somewhere in Dalmatia wherever that is! Got to have some right away! Send Wolf in here!"

"Yes, Mr. Gainsbottom," Miss Salz said.

MR. WOLF entered in a momen standing rigidly at attention, h hands and knees trembling while he trie to swallow the frog in his throat.

"Wolf!"

"Y-y-y-es, sir?"

"Draw fifty dollars from the cashier an run out and buy a box of genuine Dalma tian cigars! I don't know what they co but if B. J. Bradley smokes them, the cost plenty! Genuine Dalmatians, unde stand me, Wolf?"

"Genuine Dalmatians," Mr. Wolf echoe tremulously.

"And hurry right back here! You g those cigars as quickly as possible! N loitering on the company's time, unde stand me? If you're more than ten minute you're fired, and I'll send the police aft you for trying to abscond with compan money! Go on, go on, Wolf, go get thos cigars and make it snappy!"

"Oh—Mr. Gainsbottom—I wouldn't ab scond—"

Mr. Wolf swallowed unhappily.

"Scram!" snapped Mr. Gainsbotto nastily, and Mr. Wolf took it—as they sa in the gangster movies—on the lam.

His full name was Ernest Byron Wol He was ashamed of that "Byron" in th middle because, the boys would alway kid him about being a great lover, an there he was, not even married. He ha gotten the name because his mother ha read poetry before he was born.

Ernest Byron Wolf was thirty-four yea old. He was everything a fine figure of man should be. And he was as lamblike a his last name was not. He was a little bal and he wore rimless spectacles which h really didn't need, except for reading aft a hard day. His weight was one hundre and thirty pounds, his height five feet thre inches. He had a moon for a face, an inno cent sort of moon which always wa touched with a plaintive wistfulness and smattering of fear. In the winter he wo long underwear, in the summer he wore three-dollar hat and worried about sun stroke. Like Mr. Gainsbottom, he had neve been late to the office in his life, nor ha

he missed a day. He had worked for the Gainsbottom Manufacturing Company for sixteen years; the other guys called him the Iron Man for having stood it that long. Ernest Wolf thought they were a little crazy. It wasn't a question of standing it; it was a question of keeping it. Hadn't he worked long and faithfully for sixteen years? Hadn't he risen from a lowly office boy at twelve bucks a week to the position of office manager at twenty-eight dollars a week? It was a record to which he would point with pride, something which his children could strive to emulate. Like Horatio Alger's stories, he told himself.

He had no friends because he was afraid of people. C. Emery Gainsbottom owned him heart and soul. He was afraid of people, and of Mr. Gainsbottom, and of losing his job. His heart wasn't so good either, he often thought. He'd get pains there sometimes. The fact that he cramped himself up at night when asleep and made a muscle stiff in his chest somewhere had nothing to do with it. Bad heart definitely. He liked having that make-believe bad heart. It gave him an excuse to avoid physical combat, like the time that guy had insulted Dorothy Tucker when he took her out to the movies one night. He could walk away from street demonstration too and later tell the boys: "You should have seen it. Felt like getting in there myself, but with my heart—" and a shrug.

In other words, Ernest Byron Wolf was utterly unwolfish. He was more like a worm.

C. Emery Gainsbottom once called him a worm and it upset him no end. He even told Dorothy Tucker about it and she was very sweet. "Don't fret, Ernie," she said "Some day you worms will inherit the earth. There should be more worms, and less Gabriels like C. Emery. It would be a much more peaceful world. No, Ernie, stay as you are."

"The worm can turn!" Ernie Wolf said firmly.

"I wouldn't want you to turn," she said. "You're sweet as you are. Stay that way. There's only one thing wrong with you, Ernie. You're afraid. You're afraid of everything in life including yourself. If you're a worm, fear made you one. And you shouldn't be afraid. But just the same if one could be a worm without being afraid of life, I think that would be a wonderful existence!"

Dorothy Tucker was a good-looking girl. The other boys in the office had carried the torch for her and been turned down, and they said among themselves that they couldn't see what she saw in a dilly like Ernie Wolf. And when she said that about the worms to Ernie Wolf, she meant it. A good-looking dame like that didn't have to hand out orchids to a goop like Wolf to get along.

IT WAS nine-fifteen A.M. when Ernest Wolf stepped from the elevator and went through the long marble hall of the Whitehall Building and approached the little cigar and newspaper stand just to the right of the building entrance, where—when his budget allowed him—he would purchase a package of cigarettes now and then to indulge.

"Good morning, Mr. Wolf," said the stand owner with a condescending sort of respect—a kind of grade B respect, as it were. "A package of your usual, I suppose?"

"Good morning, George," Mr. Wolf replied. "No, no cigarettes for me today. I want some cigars. A box of cigars. They're for Mr. Gainsbottom."

"Well," George said with a marked increase of interest. "What kind will it be, Mr. Wolf?"

Ernie Wolf said: "Dalmatian cigars. Genuine Dalmatian cigars."

George's face fell. "Dalma—I never heard of them."

"They're special," said Ernie Wolf. "And they're very expensive, I understand. You don't have them?"

"Not me, mister. I only carry the popular brands. You'd better try a regular cigar store for them."

Ernest Wolf glanced at his watch—In-

gersoll 1923, $1.98—and frowned worriedly. It was twenty after nine. Mr. Gainsbottom had said ten minutes and ten minutes it should have been, but he hadn't expected to run into trouble finding the cigars.

He left the newsstand hurriedly and went down the street to another cigar store. "Dalmatian cigars?" the clerk said. "No got, brother, no got here."

"Have you any idea where I could get some?" Mr. Wolf asked in desperation. "It's most important."

"I've heard of them cigars," said the clerk. "But I dunno. Wait a second and I'll get the manager."

The manager was a guy with the face of a prizefighter. He surveyed Ernest Wolf and shook his head sadly. "Dalmatian cigars? Now don't tell me *you're* gonna smoke them?"

"They're for my boss," said Ernie Wolf. "Most urgent."

"They cost forty dollars a box," said the manager. "That's wholesale. Probably another ten bucks retail. I don't know where you can get them in town. We carried them once, but no go. Too expensive and no call for them at all."

"Haven't you any idea where—"

"Sure, sure," said the manager. "You can get them direct from the importers if you *have* to have 'em. That's simple enough, isn't it? All you do is go to the importer and buy a box."

"But who is the importer?"

"Kadrey Incorporated. They have offices and storage over on Staten Island."

Ernest Wolf's heart bounced into his shoes and back up into his throat. "Staten Island? oh my . . . Can you give me the address?"

"Sure," said the manager. He wrote it down and handed over the slip of paper.

Ernie took it and thanked him very much and then dashed into a telephone booth and called his office. "I don't seem to be able to get those cigars anywhere in town," he said. "They gave me the address of the importer over in Staten Island, Mr. Gainsbottom. Should I go there?"

"Yes, you ninny!" Mr. Gainsbottom d tonated. "I don't care where or how, y get them. But get them! And they've g to be here by three o'clock! Can y understand me?"

"Yes, Mr. Gainsbottom, but I have take the ferry and there is a heavy f down on the bay and I get seasick. Beside it's not really good for my heart. Y don't suppose some one else—"

"You get those cigars," the benevole Mr. Gainsbottom growled, "or it's yo neck. Now fade, Mr. Wolf, fade—and st on it!"

THE Staten Island ferry certain wasn't a frail craft. Ernie Wolf fe heartened when he saw the pair of Ma trucks on it. If a ferry could carry Ma trucks, it could carry him all right. N that he hadn't been on ferries before. H had, once or twice when necessity forc it. But the trip to Staten Island was long trip. Why, you went right down to t Narrows with the Atlantic Ocean pra tically licking your feet. No telling, a stor might come up and blow you right out sea and then where would you be? Stat Island was, definitely, too near the Atlant Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean was n good for anybody's heart, Ernie decide

He stayed in the stern. No sense getti up front. If you hit anything, you'd right in the center of things. It was saf in the stern.

He stayed close by the aft rail on t portside. Standing up on one of the hu cleats where they roped the hawser at t ferry slip, he hung half over the railin and his position was dangerous. To hi it was safe and sane. Especially sane. he got seasick now, leaning over like tha hardly anyone would notice when he fe the fishes. It was embarrassing to feed t fishes with onlookers. They had laughe that other time, when he went to Hoboke and the girl with the blond hair whom h had liked had said, ridiculing him: Wh ever heard of anyone being seasick on ferryboat? It was very humiliating.

There *was* fog. Bad fog. He had rea

about it in the morning paper, to be sure, along with the Marine News in Section Two of the *Tribune*. But he had not expected to be in it. And it terrified him. It was white and thick, like a great cloud, and it closed around the boat, omnivorous and clammy, like a great cloud. River traffic was instantly blotted out. Looking forward, he could hardly see the bow of the boat. He was relieved to see that his terror was shared by others. Passengers instantly became amateur sailors. Everybody stood watch, peering into the mist for a looming black bulk, ready to greet it with a hearty scream. There were whistles and fog horns now blowing all around the ferry. There came a gap in the fog for an instant, and Ernie could see the antiquated fort on the east side of the Narrows, and then it was gone, eaten alive by the muck.

The ferry slowed almost to a halt. It began to bellow on its own horn, sounding its warning. An answering blast greeted it, somewhere ahead. Ernie shivered. He felt tight. His stomach felt tight. Sweat stood out on his head. The motion of the boat became quickly unpleasant. He felt his stomach rising to meet his throat, up and up. He stood on the cleat and leaned overside for the inevitable.

It was unfortunate that, at that moment, the ferry collided with another ferry. They had both slowed so much that the bump was not much greater than when an impetuous captain rushed into a slip and let the pilings take up the shock. It was enough, however, to throw several people off their feet. Screams, cries, then silence; the bellow of captains' voices, more whistles. "Sheer off, sheer off!" "No damage!" "Okay, go ahead, no damage!" And then a swirl of water, the two ferries passed and the fog hung over the bay as before.

BUT there was a slight difference. Ernest Wolf had been transferred. He was no longer on the ferry. He was in the bay. The bump had turned him neatly overside where he splashed quietly and drifted away. He could swim; and he did when he returned to the surface, gasping with horror at the thing that had happened to him, being so filled with terror that he was unable to open his mouth to yell, finally opening it to yell and swallowing a goodly portion of the water, coughing, and shutting up again.

He paddled for a few moments, trying to get his bearings. There were no bearings. The whole thing hit him suddenly, left him empty. Overboard in the bay in a fog, which way to land? His eyes popped, awe-stricken. He lost his head, began to fight the water, and he screamed: "Help! Help! *Help!*" until he thought they must have heard him in Canarsie.

The strange flashing lights were dancing in his mind when he felt a stunning blow on the back of the head, saw stars detonate in space, and then passed out colder than an Eskimo's heel.

He awoke to the sound of his own voice: "Yes, Mr. Gainsbottom, Dalmatian cigars . . ." And then he sat up with a start. He was no longer in the water, he had on dry clothes: denims and a singlet. But where was he? The room was small and close. The sun poured in through a porthole. The bunk beneath him was hard. And the darn room just wouldn't stand still. It rolled and it pitched and it tossed.

Ernest Wolf, unnerved by it all, emitted a short yell.

Almost instantly, a man was down in the room beside him. The man had on white ducks and a white shirt and a white hat with a green celluloid brim. He was an elderly man with white hair and sharp eyes. On his feet were rope-soled white sneakers. There was a waterproof watch on his left wrist and a solid tan on his face and his arms. He said: "Take it easy, son. You're all right now."

"Where—where am I?" Ernest asked, gulping.

The man laughed shortly. "You're aboard the *Marlin II*," he said. "About ten miles southeast of Sandy Hook in the Atlantic Ocean." He held out his hand and shook hands with Ernest. "My name is Bill, but the boys call me Bilge. You can too. Come on up topside."

"Thank you," came the slow, vague reply. "My name is Ernest Wolf."

"Okay, Woofsie," said old man Bilge. "Come on up."

He led the way up a ladder to the stern of the boat. Ernest had rather a shock. It was not a big boat compared with the ferry. It was only about thirty-eight feet long. There was a pulpit on the bow, a mast with a chair at the top of it, and the aft cockpit was entirely opened and had a fishing chair in the center of it. There were two other men aboard, one at the helm, working on a chart, the other in the stern, feeding smelly moss bunkers into a grinding machine and pushing the result of the grinding overboard so that it drifted astern. The boat was anchored to a big white barrel. It tossed in the slow swell.

ERNEST stared. He could not see land anywhere, just the expanse of ocean. Off the starboard quarter, he suddenly sighted a ship. It was black and squat and it had the word "Ambrose" painted across its hull. It was half a mile southeast. "Where—" he faltered.

"That's Ambrose Lightship, Woofsie," said Bilge. "We're on the ocean after the big fish. Tell you how it happened. We were on our way out here when we heard you yelling. Up by the Narrows that was. Jim Daniels—the blond ape by the helm there—grabbed a boat hook and went for you"—Jim Daniels nodded to Ernie and grinned—"and Wally Cantrell, who's chumming in the stern"—Wally waved blithely—"pulled you in. You hadn't taken any water into you. Jim was careless with the boat hook and knocked you out when he swung it for your collar. We didn't know who you were and where we could land you, so we decided to take you along with us and talk it over when you came to."

"Thank you," Ernest said. "Thank you for saving my life. But—oh my, gentlemen—I've simply got to get back to New York! My boss will fire me! He sent me out to get some cigars this morning and I had the most difficult time, and I had to take a ferryboat and I always get seasick. Then there was the collision and I fell off—I've simply got to get those cigars and hurry back—"

"Nonsense," said Bilge. "You can't get back to work today. You've had a trying experience, son."

"But you don't know Mr. Gainsbottom," Ernest said. "Oh, he'll be mad. I'm as good as fired now. I had to get cigars because he had a very important date for this afternoon."

"Gainsbottom?" Bilge said.

"—at three o'clock," continued Ernest, "and those Dalmatian cigars have simply got to be there—"

Bilge screwed up his tanned face and roared with laughter. He slapped his belly and his legs and his laugh rolled across the water. Ernest Wolf frowned politely because he didn't see anything funny in his getting fired. Or was it the Dalmatian cigars?

"Sorry, Woofsie," Bilge said, when he could get his breath again. "We're out here now and we're not going back until tonight. I'll fix it with Gainsbottom. You won't get fired."

"Oh," Ernest said, pleased. "You know Mr. Gainsbottom?"

"Too well," Bilge grinned. "Too well indeed. Take a load off your feet and sit down. How's she coming, Wally?"

Wally called: "The slick is holding nicely, Bilge. Better hang onto your rod now. We may raise something. You can't tell. There's enough bunker here now to feed every tuna along the coast."

"Chair hurts my bottom," Bilge grunted. "I'll let Woofsie hold it for me. Come here, Woofsie. Have you ever fished?"

Ernest nodded his head. "I caught a flounder once at City Island. It was quite a tussle. Off the dock there."

"How much did it weigh?"

"Easily a pound and a half," Ernest said with pride.

Bilge roared with laughter again. "Woofsie, I love you. Here, you get in this chair and hold this rod for me. I'm going to have a cigar and then I'll take it over."

"I don't know—" Ernest said. "Do you

think I ought to—I really don't know why I'm not seasick. I always get seasick."

"Woofsie," Bilge said, "if the smell and sight of those moss bunkers hasn't made you indulge in a little *mal de mer,* nothing ever will. You hold the rod. I'll take this wicker chair and have a smoke. Keep the chum dropping, Wally. I feel lucky today."

ERNEST climbed into the fishing chair. It was all very strange. When he had gone to work that morning, the day seemed like any other. And what had happened? Dalmatian cigars and now he was fishing in the Atlantic Ocean . . . Incredible, really. And he did hope Bilge could fix it up with Mr. Gainsbottom. Mr. Gainsbottom would take a lot of fixing. "Oh my . . ." Ernie murmured, thinking of his boss. "Oh my indeed. . . ."

The fishing chair was screwed into the floor of the cockpit. It was rather comfortable he thought. The rod sat in a socket on the front of the chair. The reel was huge. Ernest said: "My word, Mr. Bilge! This is an awfully big fishing pole! I never fished with a pole before. I caught that flounder on a handline."

Bilge smiled indulgently. "We call them rods, Woofsie."

"What are we after?" Ernest asked.

"Tuna."

"Like in cans with nice white meat?"

Bilge laughed. "Yep, like in cans. That's it, Woofsie."

They all fell silent. Bilge leaned back and closed his eyes and puffed expansively on a cigar. Wally kept on grinding chum from the moss bunkers, making faces at the smell. Jim stayed forward in the cabin, occasionally climbing up into the chair to the rod. It was a heavy rod and soon it tired his arms. He rested it on the stern. The sun was very hot. The ocean was placid. The lapping of the waters against the hull was enough to put a man to sleep. Not seasick either. Well! He felt healthy! This sort of thing could build a man up.

And then Ernest Wolf was jerked violently upright. His reel began to smoke. A high, resonant whine split the air and the rod jerked down, nearly lifting him out of the fishing chair. He put his thumb on the reel instinctively to stop the line running out and he nearly burnt the cushion off his finger. *"Hey!"* he yelled, and everyone came to life. *"Hey,* the boat's running and I've caught the hook in something!"

"The hell you say!" Bilge roared. "This boat's standing still and the only thing you've caught your hook in is a tuna! Tighten that star drag! The line'll hold. It's a 39 thread and he won't break it! Tighten the drag and bear down!"

"Strike!" Wally yelled. "Fish!"

Jim screamed from the seat on the mast, "I saw him, I saw him! Oh, glory, what a monster!"

"What is it?" Ernest cried, frightened.

"It's a fish!" Bilge roared. "You've got a tuna on there and he weighs a thousand pounds if he weighs an ounce! *Bear down!"*

"A th-th-th—" Ernest paled. "Y-you m-mean a f-f-f-fish is r-r-running out with th-th-this line? A th-th-thousand pounds —" He closed his eyes and prayed for a moment. "Quick, Mr. Bilge! You'd better take the rod now! If the fish is on, you catch him! A th-th-th—you catch him!"

"Don't be a fool, Woofsie!" Bilge said in horror. "I can't touch that rod now! None of us can. It's your fish, you lucky devil! He's a button fish! You've got to land him yourself or the record won't be legal. Go on and play him! *Play* him!"

"I don't want to!" Ernie wailed. "I'm scared! I don't know how to—"

Bilge rushed to his side and knelt in the stern. "All right, son. Keep your head now and I'll tell you. No buck fever. You can't lose. Remember this: the fish doesn't live that a man can't land. Are you set?"

Ernest, terrified, gulped miserably.

"When he stops running—there he's stopped—tighten that star wheel on the side of your reel—not too much, that's it. Okay. Now sit tight. Try and pump him in. Not with your arms. Your whole body. Lean back and pull the rod up. That's it! And reel in line every time you do it. Keep going. *Jim!* Bring the harness! Wally, get

the gaff and put on the gloves. Pump him, Woofsie, pump him hard!"

"Uh!" Ernest said. *"Uh!"*

"That's the way, Woofsie. You're getting back line. Keep him coming, keep him coming. Don't let up on him! Every minute you rest, he can rest two. Work him hard!"

"Uh!"

An hour later, Ernest Wolf was drenched with sweat and very tired. "Please," he pleaded, "some one else take the rod now. . . ."

"Can't do it, son," Bilge said. "Your fish."

They all avoided him like leprosy.

TWO hours later, Ernest Wolf was exhausted. He begged, pleaded, entreated for aid. None was given. He got mad. He called them names, surprised at his own vehemence. His back felt broken, his tongue hung out, his arms ached, he had gotten back little line it seemed.

Bilge gave him water but did not touch the rod. The tuna sounded, went right to the bottom beneath the boat and nearly pulled Ernest overboard, rod, reel, and attached harness too. Bilge said: "Jim, move ahead a bit. Cast off from the barrel and move ahead so's he can bring up the fish's head."

Ernest just groaned and fought for his life.

Three hours later, he stopped being mad at his comrades and got mad at the fish. He seemed to get a second wind. Some one gave him a ham sandwich and some coffee and it put new life in him. He pumped hard on the rod and he began to get back line. And then, for the first time, he saw the tuna. "Oh . . . " he groaned. It was huge. It scared him. A long torpedo that looked sinewy and green beneath the surface. "Oh . . ." Bilge came over and said: "Look, Woofsie. He's going to take the heart out of you now. . . . I've got to warn you—"

Before he finished speaking, the reel started to smoke again, the high whine returned, the line sang out. Ernest stared at it in horror and yelled like a madman: "Damn, damn, damn, damn. . . ."

"I told you, son," Bilge said sympathetically. "Tuna always do that. He saw the boat and ran out again. Pull him back now and next time he'll behave."

"I'm tired."

"He's more tired. You haven't got a hook in your mouth."

"Will some one take this rod?"

"No."

"Oh . . ." Ernest moaned.

Two more hours. Two solid hours of pumping and heart-break while the tuna tried to sound, tried to fly off again, tried to go under the boat, tried to shake the hook loose on the surface.

Finally Ernest said: "I got him coming now. Boy, I got him coming. The *umph* is out of him! Come on, baby. Relax, baby, and come along to poppa!"

Bilge grinned like an expectant father. He was pleased with Ernie. Ernie wasn't mad at anybody any more. He had finally become a fisherman. He was fishing. He'd played this damned old fish for seven hours now and he was finally winning. "Come along, baby, come along. . . ." Wally got the gaff and stood by, waiting. Jim was getting out the winch.

Suddenly the rod sagged. Ernest's heart fluttered. There was a dead weight on the line. It hung straight down. He pumped but it was backbreaking. "Something—is—wrong—" he gasped.

"Nothing's wrong!" Bilge yelled. "He's through! You've got him. He's stone dead! Stone dead! He's fallen to the bottom! Pump him up slow Woofsie, it's all over!"

It took half an hour of pumping, during which Ernie's heart froze when he thought the thread might break under the strain of that weight. But at last the head of the monster showed. A giant head with large expressive eyes and a streamlined skull. A torpedo. And the body didn't look green now. It was all silver underneath and all bright blue on top. Ernie saw it once and said: "Gosh!"

Wally grabbed the leader with his left hand and swung the gaff with his right. He caught the fish under the gill, pulled him directly aft the stern, being unable to raise

the weight. Jim put the portable winch into place in the stern. A loop went over around the tail. They went to work on the pulley. In ten minutes, the dead tuna hung up on the winch by his tail. The stern sank low under the weight. Ernie gaped at the fish. He couldn't believe it. It was bigger than all of them put together. "Me," he said. "Me! My goodness!"

"Get back to the barrel," Bilge snapped. "Pull up anchor there and let's get under way. I want registered scales for this fish and as soon as possible. Go in Sandy Hook. We'll find scales at the Highlands. Hurry Jim, we've got a new United States record here. Will Francis Low pull his hair when he hears about this one!"

"Who," Ernest asked, "is Francis Low?"

"Only the fellow," Bilge replied, "who holds the U.S. record now with a 705 pounder taken right in this spot. Get under weigh, boys. My hair is turning white! I've been trying to catch one like this for twenty-two years, and thank God I was around to see it done!"

THEY found registered scales at the Highlands all right. The tuna weighed 806 pounds. The weighers signed affidavits. Jim, Wally, and Bilge signed as witnesses to the catch. A telegram was dispatched at once to the American Museum of Natural History. Newspapers were telephoned and photos were taken. Ernie looked very tiny beside the big tuna rod. He looked like a gnat beside the strung tuna.

"Gosh," he told Bilge on the way back to New York in the boat, "there sure is a lot of fuss, isn't there?"

"You damn near broke the world's record," Bilge said. "I think that's 881. Some Englishman holds it, I understand. But you've set a new record for U.S. coastal waters! That's something!"

"Oh well," Ernest said, "it was your rod and your boat and everything—"

"But you played the fish. Woofsie, I like your guts. You stuck with that fish. You had what it takes. I like your kind of man."

"But how could I leave it?"

"Hell, man, you could have unstrapped that harness and gotten up and just left that rod in its socket."

"But," Ernest replied, "then the fish might have gotten away!"

Bilge beamed. "You hear what he said, boys? By gosh, Woofsie, you're an angler. I love you! You're a man after my own heart!"

"Thank you," Ernie said. And his face clouded. "Boy, I bet Mr. Gainsbottom is going to be awful mad."

"Gainsbottom?" Bilge said. He roared with laughter again. "Hell with Gainsbottom. You're through with him, Woofsie. You're working for me now."

Ernest Wolf looked concerned. "I've been with Mr. Gainsbottom for sixteen years—"

"And you're getting thirty bucks a week," Bilge said. "Eh?"

"Twenty-eight."

"He *would!* From now on you're my confidential secretary at a hundred a week. You take shorthand? Fine. You're hired, Woofsie. A hundred a week. Why, listen, Woofsie, I need you. Think of all the work I can do while I'm out fishing. Contracts, letters, sundry things. I can dictate while we're fishing. You're just the man I need! We'll be in Miami in November after the marlin and sailfish. And then Bermuda in February for the broadbills. And maybe Cuba for tarpon, and I tell you, I've got a hankering to go after the great white shark off New Zealand. There are lots of fish to be caught in this world yet—"

"But Mr. Gainsbottom—"

"Ha-ha," Bilge said. "That crook won't miss you, Woofsie. And I would. I'll send Gainsbottom a box of Dalmatian cigars tomorrow. I'll also send him my regrets that I forgot to keep my engagement with him this afternoon. And then I'll give him the bad news. I wouldn't sign those tie contracts with a chiseler like that for a million dollars!"

Ernest Wolf stared in awe. "Are you—are you—?"

"B. J. Bradley," Bilge said. "Bill J.

That's where the nickname comes in. Bilge. Sit down, Woofsie, and take it easy."

Ernest Wolf sat down. He stared, then smiled, then burst out laughing, and Bilge slapped his back and laughed with him. "Oh my," Ernie said, "Mr. Gainsbottom will have a fit! He thinks he's so smart—"

They roared. Bilge finally said: "Well, Woofsie?"

"You," Woofsie said with pride, "have hired yourself a man, Mr. Bradley."

"Bilge."

"Bilge."

"Then it's done. . . . You've never caught sailfish, have you, Woofsie? Well, they're not like tuna. They tick the bait first to stun it, and then you have to drop back your line a hundred yards or so and they think the bait is stunned. So they take it, what a strike, and they come out of the water walking on their tails. . . ."

Ernest Wolf, the Man, listened in rapt awe, while new worlds unfolded themselves before him in the blue thick smoke of a genuine Dalmatian cigar which Mr. B. J. Bradley proffered him.

A Matter of Living

BY RIGHTS the life insurance salesman should be a man whose outlook on life is as gloomy as that of the hangman or the gravedigger. He is a fellow who deals in life and death, and, if you are fairly healthy, he will gamble with you on how long you'll live. Usually he will win. But his almost proverbial cheerfulness about the human race may be explained by the information contained in a recent bulletin issued by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Americans, the Metropolitan says—and with 17,000,000 industrial policy-holders alone, they should know—are getting healthier; their life-span is getting longer; and the odds against death are getting bigger.

The reason that we may all expect to live a little longer is due chiefly to the advances made by medicine in the last twenty-five years. The young are not so liable to the disabling effects of measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough and diphtheria. In the adult age groups, mortality has been curtailed by new methods of treatment for glandular diseases, cancer and diabetes.

The average life-expectancy of the present American seems to be about sixty years. Twenty-five years ago it was only forty-six years. In New Zealand the populace may look forward with some hope (if the actuaries are right) to sixty-eight years, for women, and sixty-five years, for men.

The Metropolitan says that there is no reason why Americans should not look forward to the three-score-and-ten that they have always been led to expect. After that—well—the life insurance companies won't say. After all, they're in the business, and they have to have *something* to gamble on.

—*Chandler McGinnis*

Horses Can't Read

By DUDLEY EARLY

THE relationship between some men and some horses is a strange thing. I've seen some pretty weird instances of communion in my day. When a man really loves horses, and one horse in particular, he'll usually go to town for that animal. He'd do anything. Take the case of Stookey Adams.

I run a small stock-breeding farm about forty miles out of Lexington, and, in my small way, have had some luck racing. One of my fillies finished third in the Kentucky Derby, and Brown Betty—but this is Stookey Adams' story, not mine. That is, it's the story of Stookey and Golden Hooves, who might have been a great race horse. At least that's what Stookey says. I might have thought that he was a trifle prejudiced, if Goldy's record didn't back up the statement.

Never getting down Texas way, I didn't see the race at Arlington Downs that caused all the trouble and kept the sport pages filled with accounts of it for weeks following. And I didn't know Stookey, except by hearsay. All I knew was that he had been a good jockey, a smart rider and a cool head—except for that once. I had often wondered what happened to him in that race. Us fellows follow jockeys' records just like we do horses'. After all, one without the other isn't much good in a race.

The day I first met Stookey I had gone into town to settle a bill with Tyson Jones, for lumber. I walked out of his office boiling mad, because he had refused to shave the bill a little and I couldn't do anything about it. I couldn't very well tear down a whole row of stables just to return his darned old lumber.

Rounding a stack of 1 x 12 x 20's, I saw this grubby little fellow waiting for me. He struck me right off as being a jockey,

or someone connected with racing. You get to know the type. Then, very politely, he jerked off an incredibly dirty and misshapen cap, and said:

"Hello, Mr. Wington! I followed you in from the farm. I'm Stookey Adams."

"So what?" I growled, intending to pass him by, thinking he was after a hand-out. Then the significance of his name struck me, and I stopped.

"Stookey Adams, eh?" I said, none too pleasantly I'm afraid.

He didn't finish, though he must have been greeted in just such a manner for a couple of years.

"Yes, sir—Stookey Adams. I want a job."

For a moment it hit me—just as it must have hit many another to whom Stookey had applied for work—that here was a priceless bit of effrontery. A jockey barred from every track in the country, no matter how small, whose very name was enough to get him kicked off them bodily, asking for work from a racing man! I could feel my upper lip curling in derision, and started to speak my mind, but Stookey beat me to the punch:

"Never mind," he said, dispiritedly, "I know the signs. I wouldn't have asked, except that I've heard lots of places that you were a right guy, that you don't judge a fellow too quick. I'm sorry, sir!" He started to walk off, his narrow shoulders sagging.

Now, whether Stookey had flattered me and I had jumped at the flattery, to this day I don't know. And I don't care. Something inside me began to squirm, and I said, "Wait a minute, Stookey!"

He stopped and turned round. "Yes, sir?"

I pushed my hat back on my head, then adjusted it forward again, trying to think of something to say. Finally, I blurted, "Let's go and have a beer! Maybe we can talk this thing over."

He shook his head. "I don't drink, sir. I'm still in training."

That last sentence was the most pathetic one I had ever heard, and I felt like putting my arm around the kid. Imagine him, in his position, keeping in training! For what? Then I became very curious. Maybe, thought I, there was something in Stookey's story that nobody else knew. Maybe—just a possibility—he could be reinstated through some technical loophole and with the proper influence, which influence I believed I had, or could swing. So, I asked:

"What kind of a job did you want, Stookey?"

His little squinched-up eyes brightened. "Anything, Mr. Wington! Just anything!" he pleaded. "Honest, I can train horses like nobody's business. Horses understand me, Mr. Wington. Just give me a chance—say with Brown Betty!"

NOW, Brown Betty is and was my prize filly. But I had been keeping her under wraps. She had been entered in only a few small races at unimportant tracks, as part of her training course. I knew that Betty had everything, but I didn't think that anybody, excepting my own staff of three enthusiastic darkies, knew of it. So, I glowered at him.

"How did you know about Betty?" I asked gruffly. "And what makes you think I'd trust her to a kid with the biggest black mark in racing against him? You must be out of your mind!"

He looked crestfallen. "I saw Betty race two weeks ago at Huntington," he said. "She's a winner, Mr. Wington—but, I guess you're right; you wouldn't want me around her. A guy who is so rotten as to smash a horse across the face with his whip when that horse is beating his isn't anyone to trust, I guess. That's the way you look at it, ain't it, Mr. Wington?"

I hesitated. "Well, Stookey," I said, at last. "I guess that's about it."

He surveyed me coolly, then asked: "It's sure a sign of bum sportsmanship, ain't it? It's a sign that a fellow can't take an honest beating, ain't it? It's a sign that he just ain't got any love of horses. Imagine a jockey taking a chance on blinding a good racehorse!"

He was becoming bitter, and I knew by his tone that in some way that he had been misjudged. I don't know just how I knew, except, maybe, that nobody could have said what he did so sincerely if he hadn't been misjudged. I wanted to hear his story, and—well, just possibly—help him to a new start.

"Why did you do it?" I asked bluntly.

He looked about, then said, "Want to sit down here, on this lumber, for just a minute, Mr. Wington? I'll tell you something. I never told another living person. The odds were too much against me, if you know what I mean. And not many people could understand. You love Brown Betty, don't you, Mr. Wington?"

I nodded vigorously. Brown Betty was my sweetheart. So, we sat down on the stack of lumber, and Stookey pushed back the dirty cap from his forehead.

"Mr. Wington," he said, "some people think horses ain't got any sense. I know better. You take Goldy, for instance—you sort of remember Golden Hooves, I guess?" I nodded, and he went on:

"Me and Goldy first got acquainted three years ago at Pimlico. He won the first race we ran together, and when that race was over, Goldy was as frisky as anything you ever saw. And, believe me, sir, I knew at that minute that he *knew* he had won. He was naturally a cut-up. He'd play tricks, like pulling the blanket off the stableboy at night, biting me gently on various parts of me, when I wasn't looking. Just full of life—not vicious or mean. I learned a lot about Goldy that first week.

"But, then, we lost the next race. Goldy wasn't ready, and I knew it. He kept acting up at the post. I told him I knew he wasn't ready, but there wasn't anything I could do about it. Anyway, we lost, and Goldy was the most dejected horse you ever saw. He just stood in his stall for a week, not paying any attention to nobody. I knew then that it hurt Goldy to lose, especially when he knew he could have won if he had been right. Right then and there I had my horse spotted.

"We were both under contract to the Greenbay Stables—well, anyway, I was, and Goldy was owned by them. And right after that race, I went up to Mr. Green, the owner, and told him that, if he didn't mind, I'd just ride Goldy all the time. And I promised him that me and Goldy would win almost every time if he'd let me handle the horse—sort of act as personal trainer and all. Joe Willys, the trainer, didn't mind. He had a flock of horses to look after, and didn't think too much of Goldy, anyway. He was glad to let me take Goldy, under his supervision, of course. Mr. Green said he'd take a chance—but he laughed when I said me and Goldy understood each other. He didn't know nothing about horses—just raced because he had a lot of money.

"I WORKED with Goldy for two weeks, worked him out of the dumps, and got him in fine shape again. I had to do a lot of talking to him, though. I bet I talked to that horse for a week straight about how it wasn't his fault he'd lost that race, that he shouldn't have been started, feeling a touch of cold. Well, he listened to me, finally, and then you never saw a horse so ready to run.

"We went to the post next Saturday, in the feature race, and we won by five lengths—a classy field, too!

"And don't you think Goldy wasn't happy! He walked around with his barrel chest stuck out a mile after that. And me and him could have had anything Mr. Green had. We were the fair-haired boys of the Greenbay Stables. Goldy felt so good that he nipped at the seat of Mr. Green's pants that night, then laughed at Mr. Green. Oh, Goldy was smart. He knew where he stood, then!

"From Pimlico, we made four tracks. And we were a cinch everywhere we went. Mr. Green wanted to enter Goldy in the big stake races, but I said no, he wasn't ready. Mr. Green fussed around about it, but I told him right off that Goldy wouldn't win. He needed some more confidence, a few more minor races under his belt.

"Well, we got 'em. And Goldy was a

happy horse. He wasn't no playboy, you understand, Mr. Wington. You know, horses have temperaments like humans. Goldy had just the right amount of playfulness, but when he was in a race, he was serious—plenty serious. When he was right, he never moved a muscle at the starting gate. Other horses would act up, but Goldy just stood waiting— the handsomest piece of horseflesh in the world, and as keen as he could be. And he always ran his best race.

"Then, Mr. Wington, Goldy pulled a tendon. That was down in Florida, and we lost that race, of course. We were at the halfway pole, and I felt the tendon give. I felt a little sick, Mr. Wington, as Goldy slowed up. He just stood there in the middle of the track, refusing to budge. We limped in, finally."

Stookey took off his cap, ran his fingers through his dirty straw-colored hair, pulled a cigarette stub from his pocket, lit it, and lay back against the lumber. I was impatient to hear the rest of the story, because I felt that we were coming to the interesting part of it, the part that might explain a lot of things, and which might give me a chance to do something for the boy. I had visions of Stookey riding in a race again, and—strangely enough—he was wearing Cardinal and Blue colors. Cardinal and Blue are my colors.

Stookey just lay there, though, puffing at the cigarette stub and staring at the sky. I guessed that it was just a little bit hard for him to go on, and I tried to respect his feelings. But I was impatient. However, he finally tossed the butt away, sat up, shook his head once or twice, then said:

"Sorry, Mr. Wington. It ain't easy to talk about something that you believe to be right, yet the whole world thinks you're a louse for doing. Howthesoever, I said I'd tell you. I just hope you'll understand."

"I'll try, Stookey," I told him. I really meant that.

"Thanks, Mr. Wington. You see, after that, me and Goldy had a tough time of it. He fretted something awful. There wasn't anything we could do except to wait for it to heal. And I was in a terrible stew. You know, when a horse pulls a tendon, it's doubtful if he'll ever run again—you know, really be fit. It was tough on me and Goldy.

"The stable moved to Arlington Downs. Along about the middle of the meet, Goldy began to get frisky again. We worked out every morning, and he got better and better. With the Handicap coming up, he began to get restless, and I could tell that he was wanting to run. I don't say that he knew anything about Handicaps or anything like that, but he knew that he was ready; anyway, that he felt all right.

"The doc said he was all right, but that you never could tell what might happen. And Mr. Green was all for entering him in the Handicap. I was a little doubtful, but Joe Willys pooh-poohed any objections I had, the doc said go ahead, so I said all right.

"ME and Goldy went to the post for the 'Cap. It was one of those beautiful, cloudless days, Mr. Wington, with everything in the world just looking all right, except for that funny feeling I had that maybe I ought not to be there on Goldy. It just kept hanging on, and I tried hard to shake it.

"The odds were pretty heavy on us, because we hadn't raced in a long time, and nobody knew how Goldy was coming along. It was a swell field, really classy. I remember, the Milky Way entry was right next to us at the post, and the Vanderbilt entry on the far right. He was the favorite, but I didn't think he was so hot; I didn't like the looks of his chest; I didn't think he had it in him for distance.

"The one I was afraid of was a big red gelding named Poo-Bah. He had been coming along well for two years, and had won a big stake race at Santa Anita the year before. Built something like Head Play, you know—big and red, with beautiful chest and head. And a long, graceful neck. It was the first time I'd ever seen Poo-Bah.

and he looked all right to me. I figured right then and there that I'd have to watch out for him.

"Then the starter gave the signal, and we were away. It was a scrambled start, with the Vanderbilt entry taking the lead right off. That horse ran like greased lightning, and I wondered if he might be able to keep up the pace. Then I remembered the chest and laughed to myself. He couldn't do the distance.

"Goldy and me took it easy, just like we always did, figuring to take first place in the stretch. There wasn't no horse in the world faster'n Goldy in the stretch. He seemed to smell that finish line without no word from me, and then he started pounding dirt.

"I tried to find Poo-Bah at the quarter pole, but he was lost in the shuffle. We were in fifth position, near the rail. This is swell, I thought; I figured to pass the two horses in front of me at the half, and had a hunch that the Vandy nag would begin to drop 'way back about that time. That left two. I wasn't afraid of them if we could go into the stretch in third place. That would be enough for me.

"Then I happened to look around and saw Poo-Bah moving up. And, mister, he was moving! Arty Jenkins was on him, and I caught a flash of Arty's snaggle-teeth. For Arty was grinning, knowing that he had a real piece of horseflesh under him. Arty looked at me and grinned broader. When we hit the three-quarter pole, us and Poo-Bah was neck and neck, with one horse in front of us. We passed that horse like he was flat on his back. Our wind almost blew off the jockey's cap.

"I could hear the grandstand going wild, because they knew that they were going to see a real race. That sound just broke over me and Goldy like big, splashing waves. That's what I remember now—big waves of sound and thudding hooves. It seemed to spur the horses faster.

"We hit the stretch. I touched Goldy with my heels just to make sure that he knew, and, boy, we took a leap that nearly unseated me. I looked back and grinned at Arty. But I never had seen Poo-Bah race. He took a leap, too, and without seeing him, I could feel him crawling up on us. I got scared.

"I whispered in Goldy's ear, 'Listen, pal. There's a big, red horse over on our right. He's plenty good. Can't you let out another notch of speed. Just one! Come on baby, you've got it."

"He understood me, all right. I could feel that extra tension in him. By that time Poo-Bah had moved up neck and neck again, and we were so close to the wire that I could see it. And it seemed the horses could too.

"Well, Mr. Wington, I knew then that it was going to be a real race, that Goldy was going to give all. But I knew that Goldy wouldn't mind a bit if he lost to a better horse. He was just that kind. He'd run his best, and if he lost, he'd just shrug it off. I knew I would. And I knew that we were going to make some kind of history. Just felt it. The track record was already broken, I had a hunch about that, too. And all the while, those big splashes of sound breaking over us. It was a thrill, believe me! I never wanted to win a race as much as I did then.

"If we won this race, it would mean the Santa Anita Handicap for us next season, I was certain. So I leaned over and whispered to Goldy, 'On, fellow! On, you big, beautiful baby! Do you hear me—ON! We gotta win!'

"Mister Wington, that horse gathered himself for the last spring across the line, a spring that would put him in front by half a head. I felt like shouting for joy. I was all ready too—then—"

SUDDENLY I realized that Stookey had stopped talking. And I realized that I was about ready to leap off the lumber pile. I'd seen finishes like that, and once I had leapt out of my box without realizing what I was doing at one of them. I was like that now.

"Go on, Stookey!" I cried, half in anger. Then I saw that he was crying, blubbering like a schoolboy. "Come, come, Stookey!"

I said. "What's it all about? Pull yourself together! What happened?"

He wiped his eyes with his dirty sleeve, and the tears left streaked places of cleanliness on his face. He caught the last sob between his teeth, and said:

"The tendon pulled again, Mr. Wington. I could feel Goldy shiver all over and go sideways. I think my heart broke that second, sir. Because I knew that this time his racing days were over, and that he would lose his last race.

"I wonder if you know what that means to a horse like Goldy? He'd fret his life away, sir, if he lost. No matter what happened to me for it, I just had to do what I did. Goldy would be retired, but he'd think that he had won. I know that he thinks so right to this day, sir. And he's a happy horse, even if he has got a game leg. You see, sir, horses can't read, and he couldn't see up on the board that he had been disqualified after what happened. All he knew was that he came in first. That was what counted."

I nodded. "I don't doubt but what he did realize it, Stookey," I said. He was happy.

"Yes, sir. And just in that split second, sir, I reached out and smacked Poo-Bah right across the nozzle with my whip. Everything I had was in it. But I didn't take no chance on blinding him, like they said. I aimed low, sir. Honest, I did! I wouldn't hurt a horse.

"Anyway, Poo-Bah swerved and slowed up. We limped in those last ten feet the winner. Goldy thinks we did, anyhow! He'll never know."

I handed a pack of cigarettes to the lad, and lit one myself. My hands were shaking so that I could hardly hold the match. Because I knew that no amount of explaining to stewards would get the boy reinstated. He was finished on the track. He could never wear my colors, though I'd have posted a big bond on any track in the country for the privilege of having him wear them.

I said *privilege!*

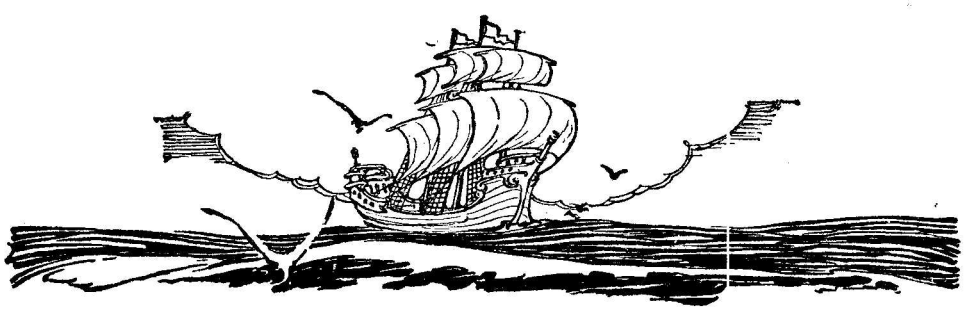
"What happened to Goldy, son?" I asked. "I haven't heard anything about him."

He smiled sheepishly. "I bought him, sir. He's staked out on a farm in Texas. I pay for his keep when I can find any kind of work to do. He don't cost much, but I don't make much."

Well, to make a long story short, Stookey is now my chief trainer around the farm. Of course, he never handles the horses on the tracks, but Brown Betty—you've all heard of Betty by this time—is his own handiwork. Next to Goldy, I believe he loves her more than anything in the world.

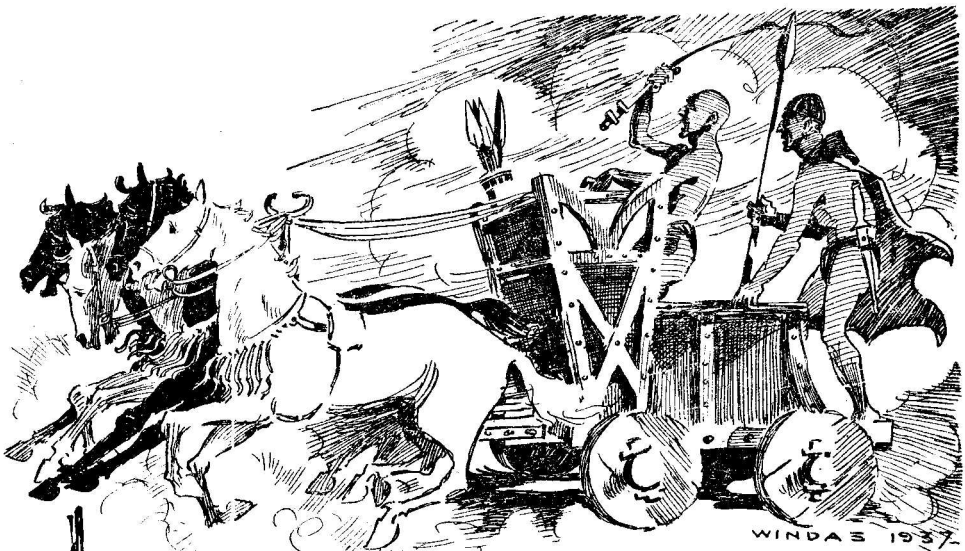
Goldy? Oh, I had him shipped up from Texas. Stookey is training two of his youngsters now. He says that some day he'll have the greatest racehorse in the world—a foal by Golden Hooves, out of Brown Betty.

Man, what a horse that'll be—with Stookey to teach him.



LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

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



·WHEELS·

Were invented by Sumerian soldiers who, 3500 years B.C., fixed wooden discs to their clumsy dragging sleds, thus making them into chariots.

·THE DRESS CORD·

Originally, this cord, now worn with dress uniform, was not an ornament, but a rope carried by foraging parties to tie up bundles of food, wood, etc. Alas! it was often used to hang any peasant who resisted the soldiers when they stole his cows.·

·BOYCOTT·

We got this term from Ireland, when peasants would not have any dealings with Captain Boycott because he was a British Agent.·

·HAY FOOT, STRAW FOOT·

This nickname for right and left, dates back to when New England Militias' raw lads, recruited from farms, could not grasp even the simplest military commands. Their officers put hay into the rookies' right shoes, straw in the left, teaching them how to keep time to "HAY foot, STRAW foot."

Tiger On Parade

By JUDSON P. PHILIPS

CHAPTER XVII

NOSTALGIA FOR NASSAU

OLD Peter Dominick welcomed his son back to Winsett with joy. The old man was laboriously washing out some overalls in the kitchen wash tub when Dominick came in the door and set down his suitcase. He had not notified his father that he was coming home.

"Jack! It'sa you! You come home!" he cried. He embraced Dominick oblivious of the fact that his hands were covered with suds. Then he looked at his son shrewdly. "What'sa matta? This isa no week en'! You catch ina some trouble?"

"I'm back for good all right, Pop," Dominick said. "I'm pretty tired right now and I don't want to talk about it much. But you were right. This fancy education isn't the right sort of thing for fellows like us I guess."

The old man was troubled. "You do something you 'shamed of?"

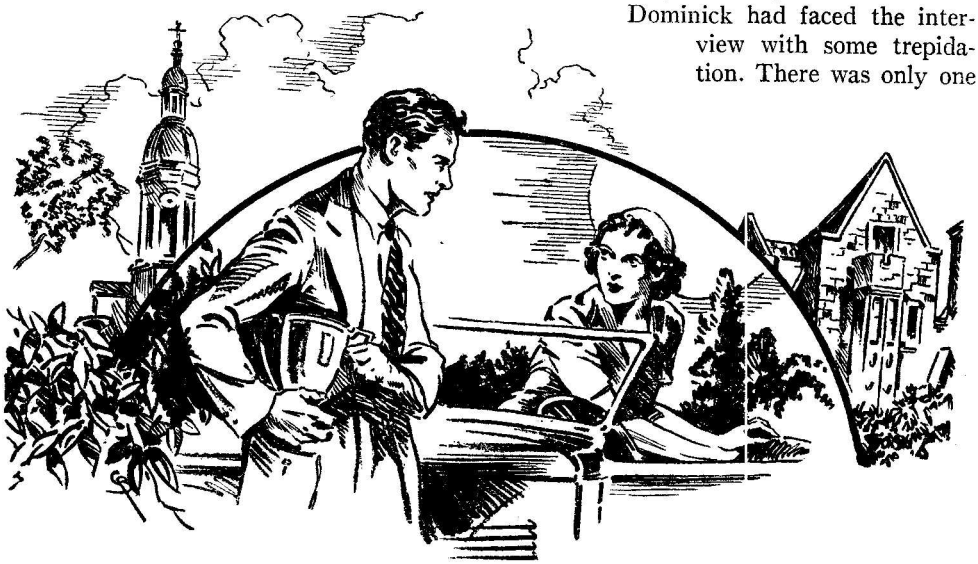
Dominick looked straight at his father with level gray eyes. "Nothing I'm ashamed of, Pop!" he said.

The old man clapped him on the back. "Then it's okay. You catcha your job back in the mill?"

"If Mr. Trevor will have me back," said Dominick.

He saw George Trevor in his office the next day, and Trevor was politely sorry that Dominick had missed out at Princeton. The truth was George Trevor had never wholly approved of Dominick's going to Princeton. He had felt a big city university would have been better for the boy, and he pointed out to him that it was not too late now for him to try Columbia or New York University or some other large, democratic college. However, if Dominick wanted his job back he could have it. He was a good workman, and the factory was busy.

Dominick had faced the interview with some trepidation. There was only one



thing he had been afraid of; that Hope might have said something to George Trevor in the way of a real explanation of why he had been ousted. What he didn't and couldn't know was that Hope hadn't an idea what had happened. Fat Shanahan had returned the keys of her car to her that night in Princeton with the cryptic announcement that "everything was all right." Hope hadn't come back to Winsett. Instead she had accepted an invitation from a friend to visit for a week or two in Boston. She would be there when Princeton played Harvard at Cambridge. Thus she did not know that Dominick was in Winsett; did not know that anything at all had happened. Perhaps it was just as well, because Hope had found herself a little bewildered about her own life after that moment with Dominick on the terrace at Peacock Inn.

THE next two weeks were about the hardest Dominick had ever lived through in his life. He found himself suffering from homesickness for the first time in his life. He was overwhelmed by a nostalgia for Princeton, for his room at Mother McGrady's, for the smell of sweat and liniment in the field house, for the wisecracks of the Omelette squad as they prepared for practice, for the exhilaration of the scrimmages on the green turf of Palmer Stadium. Yes, and he was even homesick for Barry Trevor, for the battle they had waged so fiercely against each other on those crisp fall afternoons!

The boys at the mill kidded him quite a bit about his failure to stick it out at Princeton. There was a good deal of rather forced humor about "Rah-rah boys!" Some of them pretended that they detected a slight British accent in Dominick's speech since he had returned. All that he could take cheerfully.

But he found himself hurrying from work each afternoon to the newsstand in Winsett to buy the New York evening papers. He devoured every word the sports writers had to say about Princeton's team. That first week they were preparing to meet Dartmouth. The Hanover squad was reckoned one of the strongest in the East. Sports writers said that Princeton's performance against the Green would determine whether they were really good or whether their play against Navy had simply been one of those inspired afternoons that a mediocre team sometimes has.

The mill was closed on Saturday and Dominick stayed close by his radio to listen to the running account of the game. With his eyes closed he could visualize the crowds pouring into the big concrete horseshoe. He could see the team in the dressing room, with Tyson giving them last minute instructions. The radio brought him the sound of the Princeton section's roared greeting as the team trotted out on the field. He could feel, almost as intensely as if he were there, that tightening of his stomach muscles as the announcer described the Princeton team lining up to receive the kick.

Five minutes later Princeton had scored. "It looks as though the Navy game was no fluke," the announcer informed his listeners. "Princeton's attack in that sustained drive down the field was one of the most powerful we've seen this year—not excluding Minnesota! Which is handing the boys a real bouquet!"

Before the game was over Dominick was weak. The final score was 17—13 with Dartmouth making both her scores in the last quarter and being on the way to a third when the final gun saved the Tiger. It was a costly victory for Princeton, for Big Bob Amos, tower of strength at tackle, and Snead, the regular center, both left the field in the third quarter with injuries. Of course the announcer was unable to say how badly they were injured.

Between the halves came the news of other games. Most significant was the fact that the Yale team was pulverizing Brown, continuing an all-conquering and undefeated season.

Somehow Dominick felt a growing tension the next week. The papers reported that both Amos and Snead would be out of the Harvard game, and it was doubtful

if they'd be in first class shape for the Eli. Princeton became the underdog again for the game in Cambridge. Raphael Jones wrote in the *Globe*:

> Trevor is Princeton's hope against the Crimson. Princeton has the most brilliant back of the season in this son of another brilliant back. Trevor's blocking against Navy and Dartmouth recalls the heyday of Marty Brill at Notre Dame. Like Brill, Trevor, too, can carry the ball, and when he starts places with it he really goes to town. But he outshines Brill when it comes to all-around accomplishment, for he is a good passer, and has developed into Princeton's most reliable punter when she's in a tight spot. He has overcome an early season tendency to kick his punts straight at the safety man and is now a real coffin-corner artist. The sons of Nassau needn't worry about their attack while young Trevor is on the job. The game boils down to a question of whether the Tiger, with its defenses weakened by injury, can hold off the Crimson. Princeton will score, perhaps more than once. But Dick Harlowe's boys at Cambridge will also score. They have a fast, varied attack, and they are in tip-top shape. I look for the score to be large and close, and just because I'm a sentimentalist I'm stringing with the under-dog. Or should I say the under-Tiger? Skip it!

THE week dragged again for Dominick. He found he was unable to concentrate properly on his job. He wanted to talk football to someone, but there was no one. The day of the Harvard game found him hunched close to his radio again.

It was a bad afternoon for Princeton supporters for a good part of the game. Harlowe had evidently devised a powerful defense against the Tiger attack and it got nowhere. Meanwhile, in the first half the Crimson beat through the Tiger line for a touchdown and later added a field goal, leaving the field at half time with a 10—0 lead.

Dominick listened to comments between the half. It looked all Harvard. Then, the broadcast was halted for a moment to pick up a Princeton song, and as the familiar tune reached him Dominick felt a hard lump rising in his throat.

Crash through that Crimson line
And send the backs on round the end.
Fight, fight for every yard,
Princeton's honor to defend!

Dominick got up and began to pace the room. "You got to get in there and knock 'em over!" he cried suddenly, much to his own surprise. He sat down, his hands clenched tightly together and listened.

Lew Tyson performed some magic between the halves. Dominick could only guess that he had devised a way for meeting the Harvard defense, for suddenly the Princeton attack clicked. Brewer, Neville and Flohr began ripping off long gains, and always the announcer added: "Beautiful blocking by Trevor on that play! Trevor smeared the Princeton secondary on that one!"

John Harvard never got a chance to get moving in that second half, and Princeton, on a rampage that couldn't be stopped, scored twice in the third quarter and once again in the closing minutes when Eddie Wilson intercepted a desperation pass and scampered sixty-odd yards for the clinching score. Princeton 20—Harvard 10!

On that same afternoon Yale smothered Georgia under a score that read like a telephone number.

And it was that night that Dominick decided he had to go back to Princeton the following Saturday for the Yale game. Hell, he had worked for weeks to help point the Varsity for that game. His heart and soul had been in it. There was no reason why he shouldn't go back. There was no reason why he couldn't sit up in the stands at the stadium and root for his team. Because . . . because it was *his* team! Nothing could take that away from him. He knew them all, had pitted himself against them all, had been part of the machinery. Win, lose, or draw he had a right to be there and root for them.

He sat down that night and wrote to Hugh Stoddard:

> *I have decided to come down for the Yale game. The authorities might not view it as being exactly in good taste, so I suggest*

you keep it under your hat. Knowing how extremely difficult it will be to get tickets for the game I'm writing you to ask you to go direct to the Athletic Office and get me one. I don't care how good it is—if you see what I mean! And I wouldn't exactly break down and cry if you were to arrange to sit with me, you little runt. Enclosed you will find the wherewithal. Give my love to Mother McGrady.

On Tuesday he got a telegram:

HAVE TICKETS ON FORTY YARD LINE STOP CHEERING SECTION STOP MAYBE YOU BETTER WEAR FALSE BEARD.

STODDARD

When Dominick went to work at his lathe that day he found his fingers dangerously unsteady. He was going back! Back to Nassau Hall! Unconsciously he began to form the words with his lips. He sang.

Going back, going back
Going back to Nassau Hall;
Going back, going back
To the best old place of all;
Going back, going back
From all this earthly ball—
We'll clear the track, as we go back,
Going back to Nassau Hall.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONFESSION

BARRY TREVOR closed the book he had been studying, with an irritated bang. He looked across the study table at Shanahan who was lolling in an easy chair, smoking a cigarette, and looking pensively at the ceiling. It was the Thursday night before the Yale game. An air of tension and excitement was beginning to pervade the campus. The day of days was close at hand. Every Princeton graduate who was able would be there for the week end. On Friday there would be the Freshman football game with Yale and after it the Cane Spree between Princeton Freshmen and Sophomores on Witherspoon Green. Friday night there would be a mammoth mass meeting in Alexander Hall at which the team and the entire student body would be present. After the game there would be parties at all the clubs. If Princeton won, hell would break loose.

But the atmosphere in that room in Blair was anything but bright or excited. Barry had reached a point where he couldn't stand it any more.

"Look here, Fat! What the devil's eating you? You've been sour as a crab apple for three weeks. Every time I suggest doing something you haul out an excuse to avoid being with me. It's about time you came clean. What's wrong with you?"

Shanahan flicked the ash from the end of his cigarette. "Nothing that could interest you in the slightest degree," he said, exaggeratedly casual.

"Damn it, we're going to have this out!" Barry said. "Or else . . ." he added, meaningly.

Shanahan looked at him with mildly curious eyes. "You won't like it," he said.

"I don't give a hoot whether I'll like it or not!"

"I've just been unable to get over the extraordinary set-up that exists here at Princeton," said Shanahan coolly. "You've become a sort of campus hero, you know, Trevor. Not only campus, but national. Every newspaper writer in the country is in a delirium about you."

"So what?" Barry demanded.

"I was just thinking how odd it all is," Shannon drawled. "You see the guy who's really responsible for our beating Navy, and Dartmouth, and Harvard isn't at Princeton at all. He's working in a hot, grimy mill in Winsett, Connecticut."

There was a long, awkward silence. Then Barry said, "You mean Dominick?"

"I do!" said Shanahan, an acid note in his voice. "He's the only mutual acquaintance we have working in a mill in Winsett, Connecticut."

Barry went to the window and stood staring moodily down at the campus.

"I suppose I'm a little too sophisticated to have tears well up into my eyes when anyone pulls a noble act," said Shanahan. "If Dominick wants to be a damned fool

that's his affair. I told him so. But all the same it leaves me with the unpleasant feeling that I'm rooming with a heel."

Barry spun around from the window, his fists clenched, but Shanahan continued, quite unperturbed.

"I'm not getting the proper appreciation out of our triumphs on the gridiron. I have the uncomfortable feeling that we're paying quite a price for victory. I mean," and his elaborate manner broke down, "the guy worked eight years to earn enough dough to come here. And he kicked his chances out the window because—"

"Because he lost his head over Hope!" Barry cut in.

"I've seen worse numbers for a guy to lose his head over," said Shanahan.

"Well, what do you expect me to do?" demanded Barry, in an irritated tone. "Go to the Dean and sob out the whole story on his breast? Kick the Yale game right out the window . . .? Oh, I'm not being swell-headed, but you know damn well our chances would be lessened if I got the sack."

"The fact is we would almost certainly lose," said Shanahan complacently.

"Well, what do you expect me to do?"

"My dear fellow," said Shanahan, crushing out his cigarette, "I don't *expect* you to do anything."

IT WAS nearly midnight that same evening when Lew Tyson, sitting in the study of the little white cottage on the edge of the campus where he lived, heard a knock at his front door. The room was thick with stale tobacco smoke. Tyson had been going over and over his plan of strategy for the Yale game. He got up wearily from his desk, wondering who could be calling on him so late. He switched the light on outside the door and opened it.

"Trevor!" he exclaimed sharply. "What the devil are you doing up at this hour of the night?"

"I've got to see you, sir," Barry said.

Tyson saw that there was something really wrong and he opened the door without another word of protest. He led the way into the smoke-fogged study. Barry sat down without waiting for an invitation and for a moment he covered his face with his hands. Lew Tyson felt his heart jam against his ribs. This boy was the key to all his hopes. If there was anything wrong . . .

"Trevor! You're not ill?" he demanded.

"No, sir," Barry said, in a tired voice. "I . . . I've been walking around Princeton for about four hours. I'm just tired, sir, that's all."

"What the devil's wrong?"

Barry looked up. "I've got to tell you something, sir. . . . I haven't any right to be playing in that game Saturday."

"What are you trying to say?" Tyson's voice was harsh, rasping.

Then Barry told of how he'd gone to Roark's after seeing Hope in Dominick's arms, and how Dominick had kept the proctors from finding him and had taken the rap for him.

"Let me get this straight!" said Tyson, who suddenly looked old and haggard. "You were at Roark's and Dominick tried to get you out. Failing that he socked you and kept you out of sight and allowed himself to be taken—and subsequently expelled."

"That's right, sir."

Lew Tyson brought his fist violently down on the desk. Then he got up and began to pace the room. He was torn by some sort of inner fury that made him have to fight to keep his hands off this boy.

"I wish to heaven you hadn't decided to turn noble the day before the Yale game!" he said, giving voice to an honest thought.

"I just couldn't stick it any longer. Does it mean that I won't be able to play?"

"Didn't you consider that possibility before you came to me?" Tyson demanded.

"Yes, sir, I did!"

Tyson muttered something unintelligible and paced the room several times. Finally he stopped in front of Barry. "Go back to your room and go to bed," he ordered.

"I'll see Dean Radcliffe now—tonight. I'll have it out with him. I'll let you know in the morning what his decision is."

"I'm dreadfully sorry for the whole mess, sir."

"*You're* sorry!" Tyson cried, bitterly. "What about the forty boys on the Varsity squad who have come to count on you? What about me? What about the whole damned college and its alumni? Oh, I'm going to fight for you, Trevor—but for a selfish reason. Because I need you! Now get out of here, and get what rest you can."

DEAN RADCLIFFE wore an old-fashioned nightshirt, which at any other time would have amused Lew Tyson no end. The Dean, with his gray hair awry and his little mustache and goatee looked very much like an old billy goat. He sputtered at Tyson.

"This is most extraordinary, Tyson! Getting me out of bed at this hour! Most extraordinary!"

"The circumstances made it necessary, Mr. Radcliffe," Tyson said grimly. "I've just had a highly disturbing piece of information. I confess, if anybody but the culprit himself had brought me the information, I'd have been inclined to overlook it until after Saturday's game. Since the boy confessed himself he's left me no course but to come to you."

The Dean tapped the edge of the table nervously with his fingers. "You're talking in riddles, Mr. Tyson. What's happened?"

Tyson told him the story, bitterly, but omitting none of the details. And as he finished there was a curious light of satisfaction in Mr. Radcliffe's eyes.

"Most gratifying!" murmured the Dean. "Most gratifying indeed!"

"*Gratifying!*" Tyson nearly exploded.

Mr. Radcliffe jumped. "Er—ah—sorry, Tyson. Point is, I was convinced of this chap Dominick's character! Couldn't understand his actions. Haven't been wrong about a boy in years. This keeps my slate clean!"

"It may please *you,* sir," said Tyson, drily, "but I've got the Yale game ahead of me! And, frankly, my fate rests on your decision. I've looked over the printed regulations. They state quite clearly that 'any student *discovered* at Roark's Tavern in Trenton, will be automatically expelled.' I'm looking for a technicality, Mr. Radcliffe, and there it is. No one discovered Trevor at Roark's place. He's confessed to it himself—confessed willingly, if a trifle late. The wrong that has been done this boy Dominick can be righted. If Trevor was the only one who had to stand the consequences of his action I'd say let him stand them. But a great many more people are going to be paying for what he's done if he's kept out of that game on Saturday. The football squad, the alumni, the college, myself, the whole corps of coaches who've worked like troopers all year to get ready for this game."

"The innocent must suffer with the guilty, Mr. Tyson," said the Dean.

Tyson groaned.

"But," said Mr. Radcliffe, in his judicial voice, his finger tips pressed together, "in the circumstances I think we can be lenient. The boy *did* confess of his own volition. Something of character there, Mr. Tyson. And a compliment for you that he selected you to hear that confession! And since there is—ah—a technicality on which we can base our decision, I think we may take advantage of it. As far as I am concerned, Mr. Tyson, Trevor remains eligible to play on Saturday."

Tyson heaved a great sigh, and taking a handkerchief from his hip pocket, he wiped the beads of cold sweat from his forehead.

"I must telegraph Jack Dominick in the morning that his record has been cleared," said Mr. Radcliffe.

THE Dean sent his telegram the next morning, but Dominick didn't get it. He didn't get it because he had left Winsett for Princeton, having decided he would be worse than useless at the mill. He was tremendously excited to be going back to the campus, to see Stoddard and

Mother McGrady and the rest. He wanted to see the Freshman game if he could, and the Cane Spree about which he had heard so much.

Meanwhile the eyes of the whole football world were focused on Palmer Stadium. Yale was unbeaten. Moreover Yale had crushed her opponents under one-sided scores. Yale had a backfield composed of Lee, Cowdin, Ferris and Rafferty that was compared with Notre Dame's Four Horsemen. And Yale had a line of typical bulldog tenacity.

Opposed to this was Princeton's surprising array that recalled memories of Bill Roper's famous Team of Destiny. They didn't rate with the Eli on paper, but they had come from behind to defeat Cornell, Navy, and Harvard. They had staved off the last-quarter drive of a powerful Dartmouth eleven. They had fought Penn to a standstill and would have won but for a tactical error in the last minutes of play. Only Columbia had beaten them cleanly, and Lou Little's Lions were having one of their good years. Wrote Raphael Jones:

> Only a sucker would pick Princeton in the annual classic, but I'm that sucker. Princeton teams always play their hearts out against the Eli. This team is well coached, it is not outweighed, and it won't be outcharged. The Eli have four triple-threat men in their backfield, but since only one of them can carry the ball at a time it doesn't scare me! I've seen Barry Trevor play savage blocking football for nearly sixty minutes of three games. He seems to be just as good at the finish as he is at the start, even if his mates have to pick him up after each play and dust him off. Brewer is a resourceful, heady quarterback, and Halligan, his alternate, is headed for stardom in another year. He might blossom out in this game. Neville and Wilson run well behind Trevor's blocking. Even I could run well behind it! Which brings me down to my alibi. If anything happens to Trevor so that he can't play the full game at his best, it's no dice! Incidentally, if you don't want to be a hunch player, like me, here's the tip-off on the betting. Princeton men like their team, but I understand there's plenty of Yale money floating around that isn't covered.

Dominick saw the Freshman game, and saw the Eli administer a sound trouncing to the Tiger yearlings. Afterwards he witnessed the Cane Spree along with hundreds of other spectators who crowded around Witherspoon Green to watch the fun. The Cane Spree is a simple business. Freshmen and Sophomores are divided into three groups, light-weight, middle-weight, and heavy-weight. They wrestle for canes, the object being for one man to get the cane away from the other. The class that winds up with the most canes wins! There are no fouls, and the contestants can use any methods they like to win. It is nothing like a pink tea! The Freshmen invariably win the Cane Spree because they seem much more determined about it than the more blasé Sophomores. After the Cane Spree there is a free-for-all between the two classes, the object being to rip off as many clothes as possible. Dominick finally went back to Mother McGrady's with Stoddard, weak with laughter.

The old woman had prepared a special dinner for her ex-favorite boarder, who was as yet unaware that he would presently be able to go back to his old room on the second floor. After a dinner of enormous proportions, Dominick and Stoddard went to the rally at Alexander Hall. Tyson, the other coaches, and the squad sat on a platform at the end of the hall. Jay Clark acted as master of ceremonies. All the players made speeches. The cheer leaders whipped the crowd into a frenzy. They cheered themselves hoarse, and sang until they could only croak. Dominick, struggling to keep the thought out of his mind that he didn't actually belong, joined in with a vim. After the rally Stoddard suggested a drink at Peacock Alley. Dominick turned thumbs down on that. Hope might be there. He didn't want to see her. He didn't think he'd be able to take that just yet. Instead they went to the Annex and drank beer along with a group of Freshmen who were keyed to a high pitch in anticipation of their first Yale game. Dominick had to laugh! He was just as excited as these kids!

CHAPTER XIX

PANDEMONIUM IN PALMER

YOU have to be a part of a Yale-Princeton crowd to understand what it's like. They are friendly rivals, but victory is of the utmost importance to both factions. It is a life and death matter to most undergraduates, and a great portion of the alumni aren't able to shake the old hysteria. Everybody is there with his best girl. It is the one game that everyone's family attends. The general football public has little or no chance to be on hand because alumni, having the first chance to tickets after the students themselves, snap them all up. This accounts for the intense spirit. There is no one on hand who hasn't a personal stake in the game.

Dominick and Stoddard sat in the Princeton cheering section. Princeton's hopes were high, but there was an undercurrent of nervousness that wasn't noticeable on the Eli side. Yale was confident, completely certain of victory. And when Dominick saw the big blue team come out on the field he felt a chill run along his spine. They were big and husky-looking, and they were *Yale,* the toughest opponent *any* Princeton team ever meets. The roar that went up from the Yale stands was deafening, and it had an uncomfortably bloodthirsty sound.

Then Dominick forgot all about them as the Tiger, in its orange and black trim, came running out of the south gate. They looked good. Dominick began to sort them out into individuals. There was Tex Brewer, and Tippy Lawson, and big Bob Amos, and Russ Peters, and Chris Flohr, and Boots Neville. And there was Red Dixon, the injured captain, in uniform for the first time since the Penn game. He was limping painfully and would not be able to play. But he'd be on the bench, trying to transfer some of his own fire to his team.

The cheering on both sides was earsplitting. Now the white-clad officials were on the field and Dominick saw Bill Lee, the Yale captain, come out from the other side. Dixon limped to the center of the field to meet him. Dominick's hands had a damp sweat on the palms, and he found he was clenching them tightly. He saw the coin go up and Dixon apparently won the toss. Princeton would kick off. In a minute —a long, suspense-filled minute—the game would be on.

Nobody who saw that game ever forgot a second of the thrill-packed afternoon. It was a game for the ages. A game that left first one side and then the other weak and delirious. To Dominick, who knew every Princeton formation and play and could see what was coming, it was a grueling experience. He found himself trying to outthink Tex Brewer—groaning when Tex called plays which in his judgment were not the most advisable.

The Princeton side had the first moment of jubilation. Cowdin caught Ed Snead's kick-off and came up the field with the ball as both cheering sections roared. Tippy Lawson, Tiger left end, made the tackle, a beauty. Fifty thousand people were on their feet to a man as the ball popped out of Cowdin's arms like a grape squeezed out of its skin. It rolled crazily back toward the Yale goal-line. Bill Carrigan of Princeton and Lee of Yale were after it in a wild scramble and it was the Tiger who fell on it on Yale's six yard line. Almost before the crowd had its breath Barry Trevor had smashed a gigantic hole in the Yale line through which Brewer rammed his way for a touchdown. A score on the second play of the game, and Princeton's supporters began to beat each other to death in frenzied joy, while Yale's supporters were struck dumb. Brewer kicked the extra point, and a jubilant Princeton team trotted down the field to receive Yale's kick-off.

DOMINICK'S eyes were on the blue team. A break like that could demoralize even as good a team as the Eli. But there was no sign of discouragement on the Blue side of the field, and a few minutes later Princeton supporters began to understand why. After pounding her

way to one first down Princeton was forced to kick. Barry angled a beauty out on the Tiger twenty-five yard line and then the Blue began to move. Lee, Cowdin, Ferris, and Rafferty—those four great backs behind a powerful line—began to operate like a well-oiled machine. The Tiger fought stubbornly, but Yale's precision was not to be denied. Dominick, hands clenched tight, thought he had never seen so smooth an outfit. They moved steadily down the field without once losing possession of the ball and finally over the Princeton line for a score.

Princeton had one more chance for cheering, as big Bob Amos smashed through to block Rafferty's try for the extra point, thus leaving the Tiger out in front 7—6.

But with an unnerving coolness the Yale team started to march again. The Tiger defense was more stubborn this time. They halted the Blue at mid-field, but Rafferty sent the Yale stands into a paroxysm of joy as he punted magnificently out of bounds on the Princeton three yard line. Barry was forced to return the kick at once, and his angled punt went skidding away from Lee, the safety man, and rolled out on Princeton's forty, so that Yale actually netted ten yards on the exchange. Once more the Blue came on, and in his heart Dominick knew they couldn't be stopped.

They weren't. Cowdin climaxed the march by swinging off tackle on a short-side reverse for Yale's second score. This time Rafferty didn't miss the extra point. Yale 13—Princeton 7.

The quarter ended shortly after that. Tyson's men put on a little spurt then. Three first downs in a row behind savage blocking by Barry made it look as if they were under way. But a holding penalty set them back on their heels and then Ferris intercepted a pass from Brewer and Yale had possession. Down the field swept that Blue team again.

Dominick had relaxed in his seat. He knew that this was not to be the Tiger's day. He tried to watch the game with some sort of detachment; tried to concentrate on the perfection of that Yale attack. But all the time he felt a dull ache of disappointment. *His* team was being outclassed. The Blue rolled over the goal line for its third score just before the half ended, and again Rafferty converted. Yale 20; Princeton 7.

The goings-on between the halves had little savor for the Princeton stands. The two college bands paraded and maneuvered and played lustily. Yale sang the *Undertaker's Song* with full throated gusto. Princeton sang the *Cannon Song,* and *Rah Tiger,* but they sounded a little flat in view of the score. Around him Dominick heard Princetonians consoling themselves.

"It was expecting too much!"—"Yale has a great team!"—"Best backfield in the country!"—"Best *team* in the country!"—"Tyson might pull a miracle!"—"Not today. This Yale team is the *goods!*"

THEN came the second half—the wildest second half in the history of Yale-Princeton games. A second half that left everyone weak and dizzy. Battered Princeton received the kick-off. Brewer evidently had orders to shoot the works and he did. On the very first play he called for that double reverse with Barry carrying the ball off the weak side. As in the first half Princeton scored on the second play, for Barry galloped seventy-two yards down the sidelines to score standing up. Brewer converted, and Princeton was in the running again.

"But only till Yale gets rolling," Dominick told himself, trying to discourage the little flame of hope that burned brightly all of a sudden.

Of course he was right. Yale elected to receive, and proceeded to stage another irresistible march, first down after first down, with relentless regularity. Then, with a first down on the Tiger seven yard line there came a fumble. Dominick could not see who was guilty, nor could he see who had recovered. The stands stood breathless while the referee unpiled the players. Then Dominick heard himself

yelling and realized that he was beating Hugh Stoddard with his right fist. Ed Snead was wrapped around the ball!

Barry dropped back into the end zone to kick. Dominick jumped to his feet. Brewer was crazy! Barry wasn't kicking—he was passing! Passing from *behind* his own goal-line.

"It worked! It worked!" Dominick shouted.

Brewer himself snagged that pass, out to the right, and set sail. For one nerve-tingling moment Dominick thought Brewer was off to a score, but after carrying the ball just across the midfield stripe Lee made an all-or-nothing dive and threw him out of bounds.

Some of the frenzy that had characterized the attack at the Harvard game crept into Princeton's play now. And for the first time Dominick saw signs of cracking on the Yale team. Somebody was in the wrong position. The Yale center was pounding his linemen on the back, shouting hoarsely at them. The aspect of the game had changed with such kaleidoscopic speed that the Yale team was a trifle dazed. With Eddie Wilson and Brewer doing the carrying and Barry and Chris Flohr leading the way, the Princeton team really went to town. Yale, battered and off balance, was hurled back by the sheer fury of the Princeton blocking. Six plays were enough to send Chris Flohr over the goal-line with the tying touchdown.

Dominick had seen hysteria before, but never in such mass quantity as was present in the Princeton cheering section. Dominick was cold as ice as he waited for Brewer's attempt at the extra point. Straight and true it sailed between the goal posts and bedlam broke loose. Princeton was ahead 21—20.

But that particular game had yet to hit its frenzied peak. The Tiger was smarting and bruised from that savage attack. Tyson was forced to pull out some of his regulars who were walking about with their knees buckling under them. Out came Amos, and Snead, and Barry—Barry so groggy that Fitzgerald had to walk out and lead him hotly protesting off the field.

Then the bulldog started. They received the kick-off. Their backfield began to click again with that marvelous precision. Yard after yard they ripped off. There was a blood-chilling calm about the way they played . . . so sure, so perfect.

Dominick leaned back with a sigh. "Well, nobody can say we didn't give 'em one hell of a scare," he said to Stoddard. Stoddard's lips moved, but he didn't have any voice left to reply.

THE quarter ended with Yale on the Tiger twenty yard stripe. Three minutes after the last quarter started Codwin churned his way across the line to put Yale in the lead once more. Lee's try for extra point hit the upright and bounced back on the playing field, but it didn't seem to matter. Yale was leading 26—21, and Yale was clearly in command. She had lost her poise and her assurance for a few minutes in the face of that snarling, clawing Tiger, but she was once more in the driver's seat. Princeton's attack had very little left. The second-string backfield was carrying on, but it was getting nowhere. Minutes clicked off on the clock.

Once more Yale had the ball. And steadily, she pounded her way into the scoring zone again. A first down on the five yard line. Nothing would stop them from another score, it seemed. Then an offside penalty set them back, and when an embattled Princeton line took heart at this break Yale's attack stalled. Halligan batted a fourth-down pass to the earth in the end zone, and Princeton took possession.

Three minutes to play. It was hopeless.

There was a commotion down on the Princeton bench that attracted Dominick's attention. Some Princeton player was arguing with Tyson, and Fitzgerald, the trainer, was trying to drag him away. The boys were gesturing wildly. It was Barry!

Suddenly Tyson shrugged, nodded, pointed to Brewer and Flohr on the bench. Barry was already racing out on the field. He had forgotten his headguard, and

Brewer brought it out to him. Dominick guessed what was coming. Barry was the best passer in the squad. He had pleaded for a chance to throw some last minute passes.

But Dominick was wrong!

On the first play Brewer faded back as if he were going to pass, but it was a straight line-buck. Barry came catapulting through guard with Chris Flohr lugging the ball at his heels. Barry smashed out Sorsby, the Yale center, and Flohr continued up the field for a good fifteen yards before Lee came in to nail him. Passes hell! The Tiger was going to play the one game at which it had been successful all year—a running game. Of course it was hopeless. Two minutes and thirty seconds left, and the Yale goal line seventy-five yards away. But they did not play like hopeless men. They came in and out of their huddle with lightning speed. Barry was driving ahead of his runner and hitting so hard Dominick could hear the impact way up in the stands. Brewer plowed through center for eight yards, dragging three tacklers with him. Brewer swept around left end for another ten yards, and Barry hit the Yale end so hard that he was bowled a good fifteen yards away from the point they'd met. Flohr ripped a hole at guard and picked up four more yards. And then with Barry running ahead of him Brewer started out around right end. Barry tore at the Yale right end, but just as they were about to meet, Barry cut around him, leaving him free to tackle Brewer. The eager Yale secondary was right on the end's heels. And then Brewer flipped a beautiful lateral to Barry and Barry was off. Only Rafferty and Lee were between him and the goal-line. Big Rafferty tore at him. Barry couldn't cut out without stepping out of bounds. To Dominick's amazement he turned in and ran straight at Rafferty. A stiff arm caught Rafferty squarely in the jaw, and Barry ran over him like a runaway freight train. But his feet caught in Rafferty's flattened form and he stumbled. Somehow he kept going. Stumbling on, yard after yard, unable to recover his balance, yet still gaining. Finally Lee hit him and he went skidding along the turf on his face while the Princeton stands went wild. He'd carried the ball all the way to Yale's twelve yard line.

Dominick found himself on his feet, yelling like a crazy man—yelling wildly for Barry Trevor!

FIFTY seconds to go! Time for two plays at the outside. It was magnificent—but it was still hopeless. Then, on the next play, Princeton scored. It was the last play in the world Yale expected. With only two chances left Princeton *had* to pass. But Princeton didn't. Brewer called for a straight line buck between guard and center. Snead and Chuck Seligman opened a hole. Through it sped Barry, with Flohr at his heels. A fierce shoulder block disposed of Sorsby, the center. The Yale secondaries had spread wide, anticipating a pass, now they were closing in frantically, while Barry and Flohr raced straight up that center alley that had been left open. Five, six, seven, eight yards! A white faced Lee was in the way, but only for an instant. Barry gave the block every last ounce of strength he had and both he and Lee went flat to the earth. Flohr raced past them. Rafferty made a despairing grab round the waist, but Flohr had too much momentum and he dragged the Blue tackler by main force with him over the goal-line.

There was sheer lunacy in the Princeton stands then. It didn't matter that Brewer, cool as ice, kicked the extra point to make it Princeton 28—Yale 26. Princeton men were already storming down on the field. And before the teams could line up for a kick-off the final gun was fired. It was over. *Over!* And an incredible Princeton team gathered in the middle of the field to cheer their dazed and bewildered opponent. A moment later they were being carried bodily off the field by their delirious supporters.

And all was madness—all was sound, confusion, and excitement.

CHAPTER XX

IS IT ALL A DREAM . . . ?

THE bulk of the Princeton cheering section had remained in the stands, Dominick and Stoddard among them. Now they all stood and, according to custom, raised their voices in the singing of Old Nassau, waving their hats back and forth to the slow rhythm of the famous old song. Voices were hoarse, throats were dry, and yet somehow they made it ring with a note of triumph.

Tune every heart and every voice
Bid every care withdraw;
Let all with one accord rejoice,
In praise of Old Nassau.

And then the booming chorus:

In praise of Old Nassau, my boys,
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!
Her sons will give while they shall live,
Three cheers for Old Nassau.

They went on with the rest of the verses. Dominick, raising his own voice loudly, felt a choking lump in his throat. He no longer belonged here, but they couldn't take away from him the fact that he *had* belonged . . . that he could be stirred deeply by this magnificent victory of *his* team, *his* college.

Finally it was over and he and Stoddard made their way slowly out through the nearest exit gate.

"Well, it was worth coming down for, eh, Jack?" Stoddard said, in a feeble voice.

Dominick laughed. "The greatest football game I ever saw. Oh, those last three minutes! The nerve of it, Hugh! Straight line-bucks . . . beating their way over with sheer power. They just couldn't be beaten, that's all!"

They were outside the stadium now. Suddenly Dominick felt fingers close tightly over his arm. He turned and saw Gus, the proctor, scowling at him.

"Come with me, Dominick!" he said.

Dominick gave a little wrench and freed his arm. "Hold on, Gus. There's no law against my coming to Princeton to see a ball game."

"Listen," Gus growled. "Tyson wants to see you. And I'm going to take you to him if I have to call out the New Jersey National Guard to get you there."

"*Tyson* wants to see me!"

"Yeah, Tyson!" Gus sneered. "Did you ever hear of him? He's a football coach, and I've heard a lot of guys say in the last few minutes they think he may keep his job!" Then Gus' ugly face spread in a broad grin. "Don't be a sap, guy. He's had me lookin' for you all day, and when he has anything on his mind besides football the day of the Yale game it must be good."

Dominick, his heart thumping painfully against his ribs, turned to Stoddard. "Looks like I'm pinched," he said. But his voice was shaking. "I'll meet you later, kid."

Gus led the way to the back entrance of the dressing room under the stadium. It was a madhouse, crammed with tired delirious players, excited alumni, proud fathers. Gus led the way along the outside row of lockers to Tyson's office, opened the door, and shoved Dominick in.

Tyson sat at his desk, leaning back in his chair. His face was a strange gray color, but he was smiling. Muscles Blondell beaming like a neon light, stood beside him. Over by the window was Red Dixon. The injured Princeton captain's shoulders were shaking, and as Dominick came in he heard Dixon say, in a broken voice:

"God, they were wonderful!"

As Tyson's eyes lit on Dominick his voice cracked sharply. "Dominick!" He jumped up out of his chair. "Where the devil have you been, lad?"

"Watching the game, sir," said Dominick. "I don't know how to put into words what I'd like to say to you. . . . The team was magnificent."

"That's all there *is* to say," snapped Tyson. "Leave me out of it. It wasn't coaching that won that game. It was a burning flame that just wouldn't be put out." He stooped over and picked up a yellow telegraph form. "This wire was sent to you yesterday morning. You

weren't there and it was returned. I guessed that you'd come down here and we've been on the lookout for you ever since. Here—read it."

Dominick took the telegraph form and read it, and as he did so the words suddenly blurred in front of his eyes. It was from Dean Radcliffe, telling him his record had been cleared and that it was the Dean's personal hope that he would avail himself of the chance to return to Princeton. It added further that it was Tyson's wish he should come for the game and sit with the Omelettes on the bench.

Dominick turned away. He didn't want Tyson to see his eyes for a moment. He could come back! It was still his team . . . his college.

"Now listen," said Tyson gruffly. "The football squad, Varsity, Jay Vees, Omelettes and all have a banquet at the Athletic club tonight. It's an old custom. They elect next year's captain and certain awards are given out—and, incidentally, the boys break training. I want you there. The fun begins in about an hour."

"I'll be there, sir."

THAT night was one Dominick never forgot. Two things happened to him that he had never dreamed of.

The squad greeted him almost to the man like a long-lost brother. All the Varsity squad, and the Omelettes in particular pounded him on the back till he was sore and lame. Moxie Farrell, Jay Clark, Tom Rothrock, Eddie Grant and Dixon, Brewer, Flohr, Amos and the rest of the boys—all were glad to see him.

There was an awkward moment when Barry Trevor came over to him. Barry's face looked as if he'd been through a meat grinder. One eye was closed and his lips were shapeless and swollen. He managed a crooked smile, and held out his hand.

"I'm glad you're back, Dominick," he said, and there was a real sincerity in his voice. "I—I've been an awful heel about you. It took me a long time to realize what I had to do! But it's all come out all right, hasn't it?"

Dominick gripped his hand. "Sure," he said. "And listen, Trevor, I'd probably have done the same thing in your shoes. About that day at The Peacock . . ."

"Forget it," said Barry. He laughed.

It was not until later, after the dinner had been eaten, that the first of the two undreamed-of things happened to Dominick. Chris Flohr had been elected Captain for the following year, and there had been much cheering and back slapping. And then Tyson rose from the head of the table. A silver cup stood beside him—the famous Coach's Award.

"You all know what's coming now," Tyson said, when silence had been achieved. "This cup is given away every year to the player who has done the most to contribute to Princeton's gridiron success in the eyes of the coaches. We have had a successful season. If we had won no other game but the one today, I would still consider this the greatest team Princeton ever had. It's hard to remember that we got off to a bad start. It's hard to remember that our team didn't click for the first four games on its schedule—that we were lucky not to lose all four of them. But there came a point in our development when we suddenly started to go places. There was one man who was solely responsible for that. One man who brought about that change in our team, who made it possible for us to go on to a triumphant conclusion of our season."

Dominick looked down the table at Barry. Nearly everybody was looking at the boy whose blocking had paved the way to victory. Barry had a funny grin on his face. Afterwards Dominick realized he must have known what was coming.

"I can see," Tyson said, "that many of you have a notion that you know who is to receive this cup. Barry Trevor is unquestionably the man who changed us from a futile uncoördinated team into a driving, powerful outfit. Certainly the newspapers and the alumni and the student body look upon him as the man of the hour. But Barry Trevor is not the man the coaches have selected for the award."

There was a murmur of astonishment around the table.

"I talked to Trevor about the award a few minutes ago," said Tyson, "and when I told him of our selection he agreed heartily that we had made the proper choice." Tyson picked up the silver cup, and a whimsical smile twisted his thin lips. "And so, gentlemen, for the first time in the history of this award, it is not going to a member of the regular eleven, nor to a substitute. It is going to a man whose name has never appeared in the newspapers and never will—at least in connection with Princeton football. It is going to the man who made Barry Trevor into the sparkplug, the lancehead of our team. I take great pleasure, gentlemen, in presenting the Coaches' Award to the man who did the most to contribute to Princeton's gridiron success in this year of Our Lord, 1937. Mr. Jack Dominick!"

THERE was a moment of dead silence and then thunderous applause. The whole room-full of boys stood and applauded, while Dominick sat dumbly in his chair, turned to stone. They had given *him* the award! It must be a dream.

Somebody handed him the cup, and there were cries of "Speech!" Finally Dominick stood up, clutching the cup to him in hands that shook. He opened his mouth to say something but his voice stuck in his throat. He looked around with shining eyes at that group of laughing faces. They all thought he deserved this! They were all his friends! This meant that he had made his mark at Princeton! That he would some day belong to one of the best clubs. That he would some day have his own beer mug in the drinking rooms at The Nass! That he would some day sit with the Seniors on their sacred steps in the spring evenings and sing with them!

In a whisper he said: "I guess . . . I guess I must be dreaming!"

And he sat down abruptly, gripping the table with his fingers, because he thought he was going to blubber as he hadn't since he was four years old.

* * *

The second thing Dominick had never imagined could happen, took place when he left the Athletic Club about eleven. As he came out the door, clutching his cup, and turned, still in a daze, toward Mother McGrady's, he heard the musical notes of a French automobile horn. He spun around abruptly. There, drawn up to the curb, was a little blue roadster, and behind the wheel sat Hope Loring.

"Hi, Mr. Dominick!" she called out.

He walked over to the car. He looked at her, and then looked down at the cup. He still couldn't say much.

"I know," she said softly. "Moxie told me it was going to happen."

He stood there awkwardly. Barry would be out in a moment, he knew.

The girl smiled. "I have a yen to see what this countryside looks like in the moonlight," she said, just as she had on the occasion of their first meeting. "Will you join me, Mr. Dominick?"

"Please!" he said, in a strained voice. "Everything has gotten straightened out somehow. Barry knows that afternoon at The Peacock meant nothing."

"Did it mean nothing?" she asked, and her voice was low and strange.

"To you!" he said, quickly. "To you—I meant."

Hope Loring's eyes had laughter in them. "You're a bum mind reader, Mr. Dominick!" she said.

The world started to spin dizzily around Dominick again.

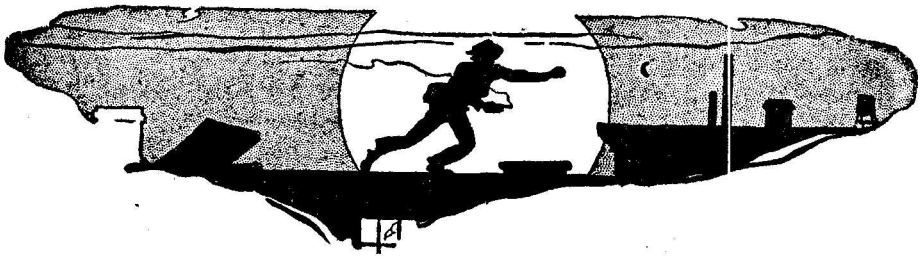
"I've done a lot of thinking in three weeks," she said. "I've been wondering whether you could really stand a spoiled brat like me. But I've decided that while you're finishing up here I might make myself into something you'd really want!"

"Hope!" he said. "Hope . . ."

"Are you going to get in this car so I can take you some place a little less public?" she asked. "Or am I going to have to kiss you in front of the entire Princeton football squad?"

THE END

The Lady and the Lug



By MARTIN McCALL

Author of "Kingdom Come," "The Last Crusade," etc.

"THE trouble with you," the lady said, "is that you are a lug, Muldoon. You got muscle on the brain. You're lucky, I admit, but there's no gas in your think-tank."

Pokey Muldoon grinned up at her. From brown hair to pigskin pumps she was class with a capital *K*. Her dress must have cost a hundred bucks, and a grand wouldn't buy that coat on the chair. Park Avenue and imported cars and Tiffany's—you thought of those when you saw her. That was one of the things Pokey liked about her.

"That's why I like you, babe," said Pokey, stretching his grin. "Two days you know me an' you got me tabbed already."

She sat down, crossing her knees discreetly. Into a jade holder she fitted her cigarette. In the West they knew her as Gentle Julia, she had admitted, and confidence was her racket. She puffed out smoke, round and ladylike.

"Just a lucky lug," she said. "For a month I'd been casing the Hannover necklace and everything was set. Then you prowl in the night before, a second-story grifter who don't know pearls from goose eggs."

"Ah," said Pokey softly. "Would you like a slug of gin?"

"All right, deny it," the lady purred. "Just keep on being a dope, my friend. You got 'em—and so what? A string of beads worth fifty grand—and what will *you* get out of them? Hire some crooked shamus to dicker with the insurance people and you net a couple of gees. Or maybe Ollie Sturdevant will take them on at five percent of value."

"He'll pay me five grand and not a dime less," said Pokey, frowning. "Or he would if I had 'em."

The lady smiled. "Now we're getting places." She leaned forward, and her neck was white and smooth. "You gotta let that necklace cool off, Pokey. Hide it out for a year and you cash in big. But I got a scheme to keep it working while it's cooling off—a gag that's good in twenty different towns. What's my cut if I show you how to plant those pearls and make other little pearls grow, and not a squawk from no one?"

"I'm listening," Pokey said. And his smile grew beatific as her words flowed swiftly. . . .

MR. POKEY MULDOON advanced the cash with which the lady rented a suite at the swanky Belmont Arms. As Mrs. Roderick Brace

she posed, spendthrift wife of a mining man from the wild and woolly. Pokey paid for the limousine she hired, and from a distance admired the tips she lavished. Just like a real lady, he thought, and sometimes he would shake his head regretfully when he thought of their parting. Those early days of fisticuffs had ruined the Muldoon profile but a romantic heart still thumped beneath his shoulder-holster.

On the third day, he smuggled himself into Gentle Julia's suite and listened while she telephoned to dapper Ollie Sturdevant. He was hidden in a closet, with the perfume of her dresses, when little Ollie came to call.

Mr. Oliver Sturdevant was a jeweler. His shop was not the greatest in town but his stock was rich and varied. If the police suspected that stolen property passed through his hands, they had never been able to prove it. In person Mr. S. was short and slight and his shoes were as sharp as his mustache. He had a bright brown eye for the ladies.

Pokey Muldoon heard the smack as Ollie kissed the hand of the pseudo Mrs. Brace, and he frowned a frown. He heard Ollie's coos of admiration, praising the pearls that once had been the property of the dowager Mrs. Hannover. Yes, of course, Ollie understood. Mrs. Brace wished to enlarge her necklace. Ten additional pearls, he would suggest, and he was most sure he could match them. Three days? Yes, he could have the work complete the day before her husband arrived. And here was her receipt, duly attested.

Pokey emerged when the dapper jeweler had gone with the necklace. "I bet if I wasn't in there," he said darkly, "you'd of taken 'im up on that dinner invite."

But Gentle Julia's smile ignored the thrust. "You see?" she demanded. "Just like I told you. They're still hushing up the Hannover heist and he doesn't suspect a thing. Oh, yes—I know he'll match them up with something hot. Safe enough with a wealthy hick who will take them back to Denver. But all the better for us. That's the one big reason he can't let out a squawk."

"That's what I like," said Pokey Malone. "No squawking."

ON THE afternoon of the third day, Mr. Oliver Sturdevant rang up the apartment of Mrs. Roderick Brace. Her necklace was completed and ready for delivery. What, Mr. Brace had been delayed? He would not be here until tomorrow? Ah, a pity! Mr. S. understood, of course, that payment would not be made until her husband arrived, but perhaps madame would care to inspect the result in the meantime? She would? Then Mr. Sturdevant would come around in person.

Pokey Muldoon had employed the phone in milady's boudoir to listen in. He shook his head dourly. "What suckers some guys are for the dames!" he mourned. "And they claim that Ollie's a wise guy!"

"A lone lady," Gentle Julia murmured, "gets 'em every time. Plus a nice refined dash of sex appeal."

Pokey shook his head at her and began to prepare his closet hideout. He was cosily tucked away therein when the phone announced the jeweler. Through the tiny crack of the door he saw Ollie Sturdevant kiss her hand and put his sly smirk on her. The jewel box was produced, and the delighted exclamations of Mrs. Roderick Brace were a work of purest artistry. The two stood close together, admiring the

softly glowing sheen of the necklace that Ollie held aloft. Their backs were toward the closet.

Pokey Muldoon had oiled the hinges. He crept in stockinged feet, cat-soft. His blackjack clipped Sturdevant behind the ear and the little jeweler collapsed. Pokey upsnatched the necklace.

The woman stared at him and fear was bright in her eyes. "You fool!" she breathed. "You hit him too hard. You may have—"

She dropped to one knee. As she bent above the crumpled form, Pokey struck again, carefully and regretfully. Her soft brown hair would cushion the shock, he thought, and leave her only a headache. A little ladylike headache.

"Muscle on the brain," he said sadly.

He put on his shoes and found his hat. At the door, he paused an instant to look back at them lying there together. In a little while she would know that Pokey Muldoon was a wise lone-wolf and not a lug. They had talked over a double getaway to Canada, and it might have been nice at that. But the next plane to the Coast was quicker and safer, and Pokey had the ticket in his pocket. An old friend had made arrangements with a fence in 'Frisco, and fifteen thousand could buy a lot of fun in some place like Hawaii.

He closed the door softly behind him. . . .

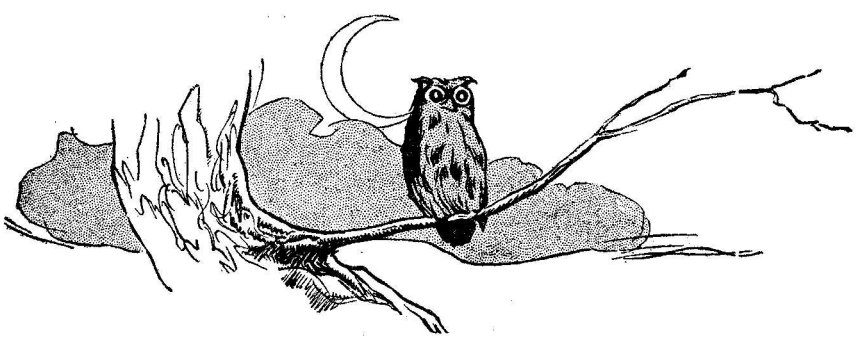
The shadows of dusk were clouding the window when Gentle Julia stirred. She moaned and she sat up. She gazed with consternation at Mr. Oliver Sturdevant for a blank moment, then managed to stagger to the bathroom. A pitcher of water cascaded in the jeweler's face and brought him to spluttering consciousness. He gaped at Gentle Julia, goggled around the room.

"But I thought—" he said vaguely. "Where is he?"

"That dirty double-crossin' rat!" cried Gentle Julia. "You know what he done? He let me have it too, right on the coco?" She touched her skull gingerly.

"My head!" groaned Mr. Sturdevant. "It's splitting—"

"Nuts, honey," said Gentle Julia. "Stop squawking. Just think of the headache Pokey will have when he tries to peddle that string of paste pearls he scrammed with."



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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY, sailing ahead on a broad reach with its fifty-sixth year already visible from the quarter-deck, has always been, primarily, a magazine of entertainment. From that first issue of THE GOLDEN ARGOSY, back in December of 1882, which featured *Do and Dare, or a Brave Boy's Fight for Fortune,* by Horatio Alger, Jr., it has been the purpose of the editors neither to instruct nor to moralize, but to print stories which the readers would enjoy. Nevertheless when, as happened the other day, we find that we have done all three, it cannot but delight us.

A young Porto Rican lad, just come to New York, was talking to a friend of ours. How did he get along on his first day here, our friend asked. And promptly the lad launched into his story.

He had landed in Brooklyn, he said, and was trudging across the bridge to Manhattan, last of a line of his fellow-countrymen, when a stranger approached him. The stranger seemed honest but agitated.

"I know you will help me," he said to our Porto Rican, "for your face is kind. . . . My mother is badly sick in Pennsylvania. She must have thirty dollars—at once, by wire. . . . I have hunted everywhere and finally gotten together thirty dollars . . ." (and this he produced) ". . . but I have not another cent to pay for the telegram and I cannot raise it. Will you help me, my friend?"

"Um-m-m . . ." said our friend to the Porto Rican. "So you gave—perhaps five dollars?"

"But no," was the naive answer. "It was my first thought to give it to him—but then I remembered. You see, *señor,* I have read the stories of the great Horatio Alger. In Porto Rico, everybody who goes to school reads Horatio Alger, as if he were a —a what you call it—a textbook. So thinking back upon these stories of the young boy who comes to the great city to make good, I knew this stranger for what he was —a confidence man So I gave him notheeng. . . ."

Laugh if you will. To modern Americans, the stories of Horatio Alger are likely now to seem a little old-hat. But they were entertaining in their day—and, it seems, instructive as well, to say nothing of moral —and that is why ARGOSY published them. Now, fifty-five years later, we feel that we're keeping true to the ARGOSY tradition. We claim only that our stories are entertaining — but when they are more than that, we are doubly pleased and proud.

It is always a good idea to pat our back *before* we open the mail. Our mailbag is a cave of the winds, a cacophony of many voices; there is the dust of Arizona in it and the scent of Oregon pine and Georgia peaches. And in its many wiffds are many voices. There is San Diego and Bangor and there are little breezes from places called Ypsilanti and Oxnard. Georgia, and peaches, are first out this cold Northern morning. Shivering to the tune of *Way Down South in Dixie,* we open the letter of

GEORGE W. MEYER

I'm sick . . . I'm sick . . . I'm sick. No, no—I'm not sick of reading ARGOSY. I'm sick of reading those letters about the little insignificant errors found in your magazine. I hope that the editor will have the courage to publish my letter, as I want to give a certain bunch of people a piece of my mind.

Say, what do those guys expect for a dime? Something perfect? Well, if that's what they want, I'm afraid they'll never find a perfect

magazine. Anyway what do those little errors amount to? These mistakes they mention are so trivial that not one person in a thousand would even notice them, if it were not for the fact that certain wise guys are always searching for them.

Personally, I've never found a mistake in ARGOSY. I've always been so busy digesting the good things in the magazine that I haven't had time to look for the mistakes. I've been reading ARGOSY for several years and I want to point out to you fellows just how and why this magazine is so much better than any other in its field. My reasons are listed as follows:

ARGOSY is a tonic. It puts more variety, pep, spice, adventure and mystery into my life than any other magazine that I have ever read.

Then, too, ARGOSY publishes many action stories, stories which are filled with interesting, exciting, and surprising plot twists. The best example of this type was *Without Rules* by Garnett Radcliffe. I liked this story so well that I read it three times.

I have also found that all stories published in ARGOSY have good openings. That is—one doesn't have to read through dull and uninteresting paragraphs to get into the story. ARGOSY stories begin at the beginning.

And in ARGOSY I find good plots, vivid descriptions, plenty of suspense and action. That splendid story *The Wall* by Robert Carse was filled with these desirable qualities.

I have read dozens of "pulp" magazines, but I have never seen one printed in such large clear type as ARGOSY. This makes the magazine easy to read. And I'm sure you've noticed that the paper used in printing ARGOSY is of much better grade than that used in printing other pulp magazines.

I like the delightful covers which appear on ARGOSY because you have different scenes on each issue.

I am sure that thousands of your readers will join me in congratulating you in publishing such a fine magazine.

Now, Mr. Editor, please don't forget to publish this letter, as I want a certain bunch of smart elecks (*sic*) to read it.

Newnan, Georgia

EXPECTING a bomb, we find balm—we get cream with our peaches. Mr. Meyer's letter is the nicest one we have ever received—with the possible exception of a three page poem from a man in New Jersey. But *that* flatterer, it turned out in his poem, really only wanted to sell us a second-hand automobile. Mr. Meyer doesn't want to sell a thing, he just likes us and he doesn't like those who don't like us. But the fine warm feeling of comradeship that wells up in us does not blind us to the fact that there probably are occasional mistakes in ARGOSY, and that there are those who — unlike Mr. Meyer — notice them and hold them against us. These typographical-error hounds have been very quiet lately and we have been lulled into a rather smug calm—sort of a typographical-error hiatus, as it were. We have even looked at issues of ARGOSY in which we could find *no* typographical errors! There —we've stuck our neck out and we will expect letters from hordes of people eager to cut it off.

Next is a plea from a man who wants no ARGOSY to appear without a *Men of Daring* gracing its pages, and in writing us he coins the neatest simile of the week. In our next issue we'll have some Western information for him.

IKE DEWELL

I've got a feeling I'm not getting my money's worth when I don't find a Men of Daring cartoon in ARGOSY. Without it your book looks as empty as Gracie Allen's head.

I also could use another Western serial, provided it's a good one like *King Colt*. Get Max Brand, Luke Short, or some of those fellows to write it.

Chicago, Ill.

S. FEIGENBAUM

You have certainly hit a high in the stories and serials of the last year. At one time I was foolish to say that I had read your best. After 28 years or thereabouts of continuous reading one should know better. Once in a while I find a story that I know will linger and stand out even among the most noted of your offerings. Then I know that I have finished a *story*. *Drink We Deep* will not be forgotten by your readers. With the variety of stories you offer each so entirely different from any of the others there is no yardstick to measure by except as it lingers in my memory as the years go by.

That reminds me of two serials which although entirely different, yet, show the same hand. I would almost bet that they are written by the same author. I did not mention them before because I do not remember the name, much less the author. One of the serials treated of a group who had arrived from another planet and after establishing camps tried to conquer mankind. If I remember right they tried to

change the human complex by tampering and reconstructing the brain complex of all they got hold of. The other serial told of an American who was transported to another planet that was inhabited only in short spots. A group that had been banished as unfit were trying with slower race to capture the entire inhabitable land. The women of the higher race were able to fly, but after marriage their wings were cut so that flying was impossible. I also remember in the last chapter our American and his friends were carried on platforms by the flying virgins. Although entirely different yet in some ways the treatment of the story was as similar and that made me think the last and *Drink We Deep* were written by the same author. These serials were written about nine or ten years ago.

You know I would like to have picked the best of this year's offerings. Here are a few, *Annapolis Ahoy, Grand National, King Colt, Senor Vulture, Strike* and last but not least *Kingdom Come.* Of course *Drink We Deep* I am classing by itself.

Sorry but I am going to ask again, "What happened to Herr Mentje, his friend Friday and their adventures around the Java Seas in their gasoline launch." You have been giving us some fine stories out of China, but they don't come up to the "Adventures of the Boston Bean, Cohen and their gang in China." Are the authors gone dead on you? Another series of stories I miss, Colonel Henry and the Hatfields of Kentucky. How about some stories from the far East?

St. Louis, Mo.

A BOW to Mr. Feigenbaum for the lovely flowers. They just brighten up the whole room. Diligent research has, up to the moment, failed to unearth the two serials to which Mr. Feigenbaum refers, but in any case they were not the children of Mr. Zagat's brain, as *Drink We Deep* marked his debut on these pages.

Looking Ahead!

REBELL'S LUCK

Bully Rebell, they called him—because he had spent his life in the brawling pursuits of the South Seas—because he couldn't look at a pearl without planning how he could take it, nor look at a pretty woman without wanting her. But one day, there was one pearl, one woman that made Rebell lose his head—at the time he should have been sanest. A complete novelet by

H. BEDFORD-JONES

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Investigate with us the roaring youth of No-Shirt McGee and listen to the tall but truthful tale of the time when, because gold wasn't panning in Alaska, he ventured into the cold and screaming wilds of the Russian Steppes. A complete novelet by

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A WHIP FOR THE COLONEL

Not all of the men who fought the American Revolution are in the history books. The "Swamp Fox" is—just ask anyone from the Carolinas—and this stirring chronicle will demonstrate why. It is the story of an indomitable spirit, of a man wounded and betrayed who would not admit defeat. A short story by

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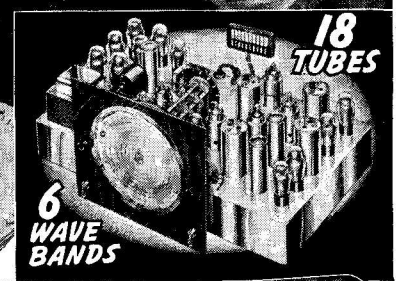

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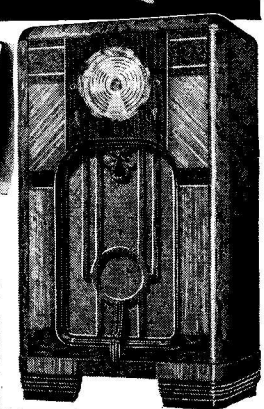

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Arrest Him, Officer!

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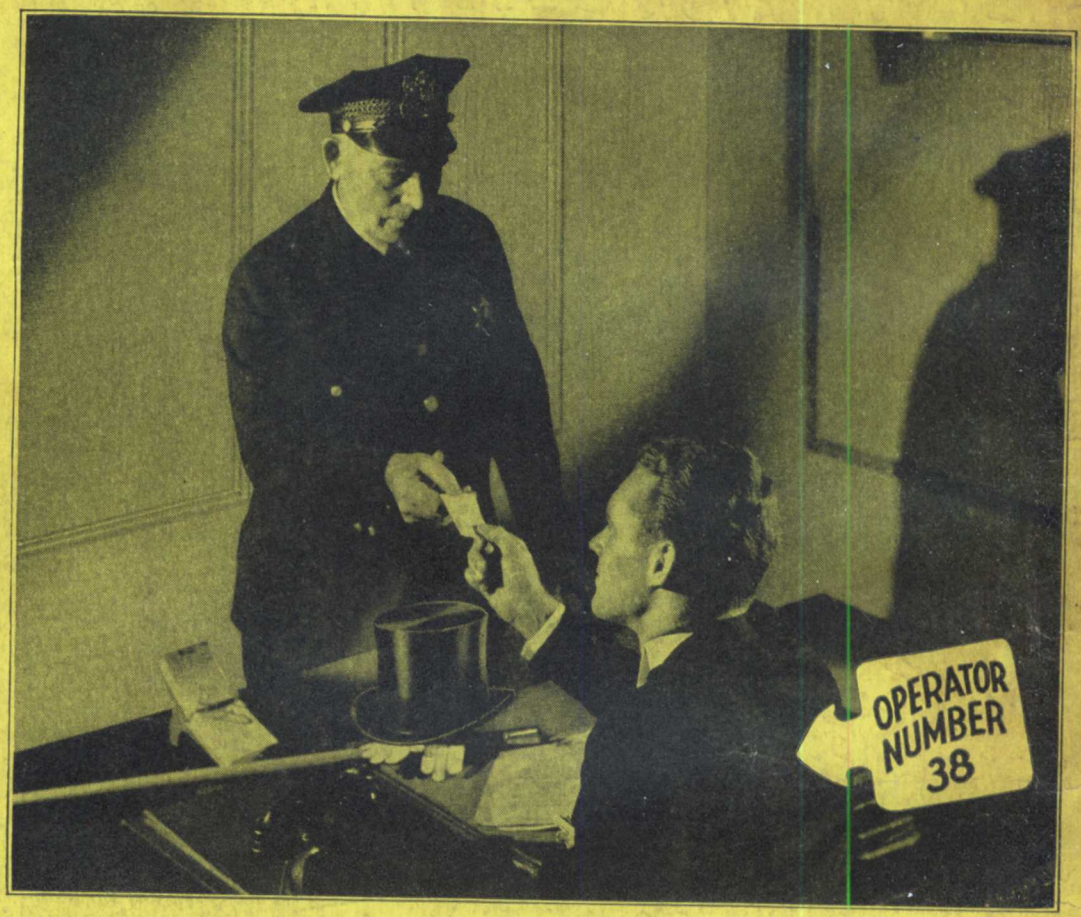

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