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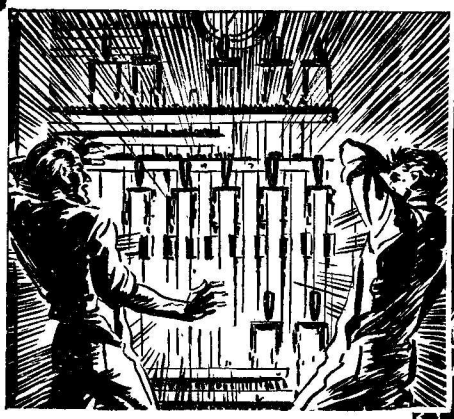
WEEKLY

The WONDERFUL LIPS *of* THIBONG LINH

by Theodore Roscoe

Panic Loomed...The Show Went On!



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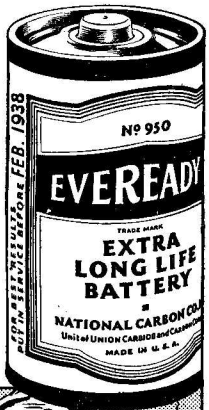
(Signed) Frank M. Polhamius Jr."



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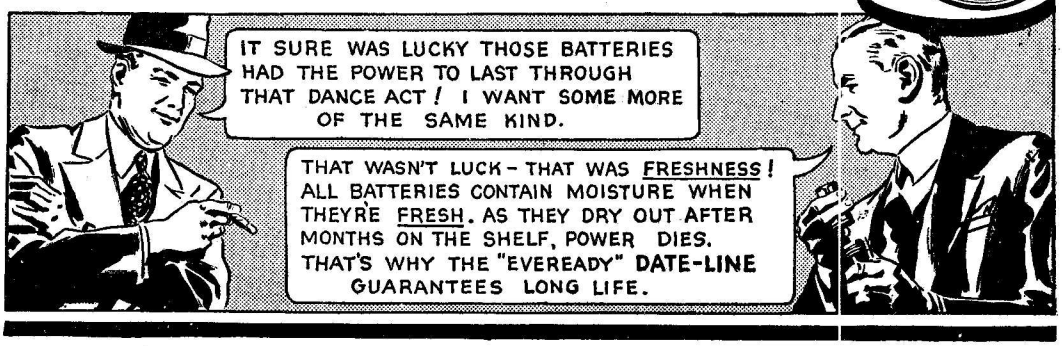

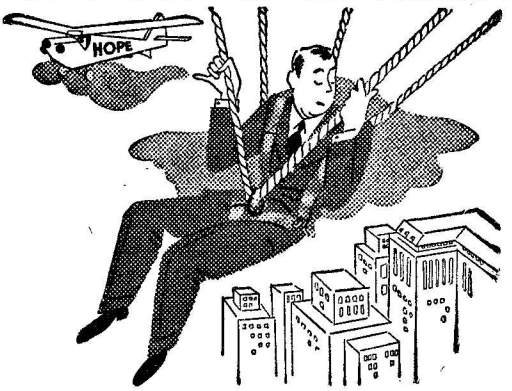

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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 277 CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 4, 1937 Number 6

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The Wonderful Lips Of Thibong Linh

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "I Was the Kid With the Drum," "Monkey See, Monkey Do," etc.

A Complete Thibaut Corday Novelet

"BUT I was once a deserter from the French Foreign Legion," said Old Thibaut Corday one night when we were discussing the iron-handed exactions of that famous army whose code is Honor, Valor and Discipline—especially Discipline. "You are surprised? But I was thirty years in the Legion, my friends, and it would be a rare Legionnaire who did not go over the wall at least once in thirty years. There are pictures on the walls of our barracks rooms that show what happens to Legion deserters when caught by hostile natives—but they do no good. There are the stone quarries at Oujda where apprehended absconders break rock in the chain gang for fourteen hours a day—it does no good, either. Also there is that terrible disciplinary corps called the Zephyrs, and for deserters in war-time there is

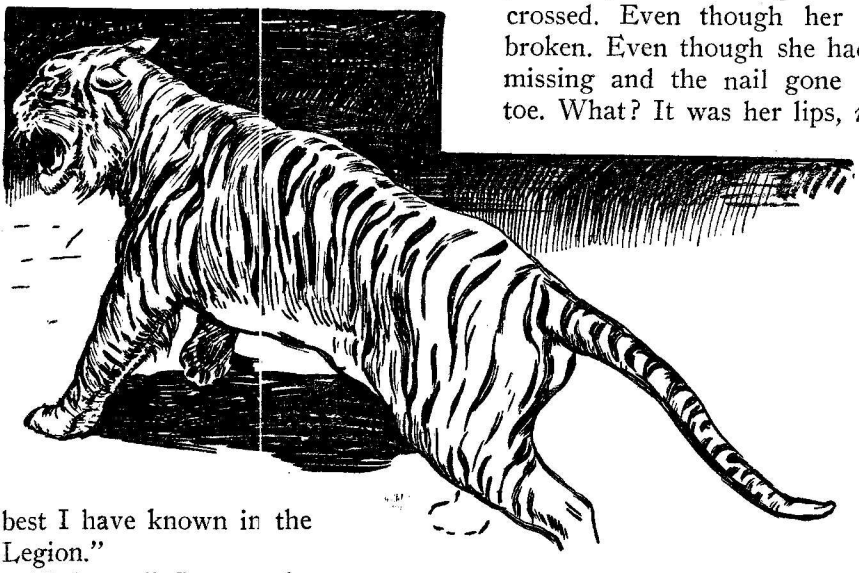
always the firing squad, but sooner or later a Legionnaire will try it. *Bleu!*" the old Frenchman reproached himself for recklessness. "I took a chance with the firing squad. I deserted in wartime."

The tall American across the table lowered an un-gulped pony of cognac. "Gee—your post must've been pretty hard, to make you go on pump against odds like that."

"On the contrary, it was the softest post of all the World War. Compared to some of the fronts I saw it was a flower garden."

"The officers, then," the American suggested. "You had a bunch of brutal officers?"

"Not so, *monsieur*, but some of the



best I have known in the Legion."

"I know." It was the British consular agent, leaning out of shadow with a chuckle. "As the French say—*Cherchez la femme*. Am I right, Corday? You deserted the Foreign Legion because of a woman."

"You are right in one way," Old Thibaut Corday snapped, "and in another you are not. Let me tell you, it would have taken something more than a woman to make me jump the Legion at a time when the Germans were on us. And this woman was something more, too. She was a goddess, *messieurs*. The most wonderful goddess you ever heard of, and that includes Venus and Minerva and Aphrodite. Those lovely deities were unattractive alongside the one of whom I speak; for beguiling men she would have made that Greek siren, Circe, look like a Gascon fishwife."

"She must have been beautiful," murmured the American.

The veteran soldier of fortune, whose bayonet-sharp eyes and cinnamon beard had come untarnished through a dozen wars, nodded emphatically. "Even though her eyes were crossed. Even though her nose was broken. Even though she had a finger missing and the nail gone from one toe. What? It was her lips, *messieurs*. They whispered in my ear to give me ideas like opium dreams. They drove me mad. They made me forget the War and desert the Foreign Legion. I have never told you about the wonderful lips of Thibong Linh? They told me the two greatest things in the world! But it is a strange chapter from

my life, I assure you—perhaps the strangest chapter in the unwritten history of the Legion—certainly the strangest story of all the World War. You are not going to believe it unless you listen through to the end. You promise to listen through to the end?"

We promised.

Old Thibaut Corday dismissed Algeria beyond the café awning with a hand-wave. "It did not happen here in Africa. It happened in Asia. In Cambodia. Only in Cambodia could such a thing have happened—"

I

IT IS a tribute to modern civilization that the World War should have reached Cambodia, *messieurs*. One must pause to admire the marvels of transport and communication that our Western nations have developed. There is Cambodia tucked up in a corner of French Indo-China, a million miles from Paris and Berlin. Without transport and communication—and not being able to read the Christian newspapers—Indo-China would never have heard about the War. *Non,* her people would have stayed home peacefully smiling into lotus ponds and twining blossoms in their hair. Those dreamy Annamites and Tonkinese, they would never have heard of bayonets and machine guns and Christianity. They could not have gone to France and died heroic deaths in the mud. They would never have seen the Foreign Legion. Think what they would have missed!

Even so, the War did not do well in Cambodia. It was hard to make the natives understand why they should dress up in soldier suits and go to Europe to kill people. The recruiting sergeants tried to explain the glory of hand grenades, and the mission priests offered stirring prayers for patriotism, and those lazy Cambodians sat around dreaming. There was a lot of trouble about teaching them how to use bayonets, and so, early in the War, the Foreign Legion was sent out there to give them some private lessons. Imagine those stupid little people trying to resist civilization like that!

Alors, we could teach the natives a little about war, but the country itself was impossible. One must have mud, rubbish, ambition for war. Fields to burn. Buildings to blow up. Bitter desert or cold rain—those are things that inspire the proper martial spirit. It is easy to hate in a cold rain. And Cambodia is warm, tropical. Too sleepy for progress. Its towns were too old to blow up. Its fields too drowsy. I said it was like a flower bed.

You can't fight in a flower bed.

Do you know Saïgon, on the coast? The days there are scented with vanilla, the nights as soft as liquor and far-heard violins. The spell of the East is brewed in that city of parks and paper lanterns and toy pagodas surrounded by jungles of hibiscus, frangipani and tamarind trees. How could you haul seventy-five guns down a road where trumpet vines tangled in the cannon wheels and the native gunners kept forgetting what they were doing and would stop to eat an orange or pin a blossom behind an ear? There were lily pools in a No Man's Land of pink and lavender, and you had to mount guard through long purple evenings lit with fireflies. Temple bells tinkled at dusk, and the café sold wine that tasted like rose leaves. It was not good for Legionnaires, that atmosphere. We yawned at drill and were late for parade. That softness was too much after campaigns in Flanders and Africa. Like drinking *crème de menthe*

after a diet of gasoline. That country was no good for war.

Our navies made the best of it, though, and there was some civilized fighting in the South China Sea. The German cruisers shelled some coastal villages, killing a lot of children and fisher folk. That would teach them to jump faster! It stirred up recruiting among the natives, and the U-boats taught them another lesson when they sailed for France. One transport after another was sunk when it left for Europe. At last there was some real civilization around there!

ONE night I was summoned to headquarters at the marine barracks on Quai Francis Garnier. Consider my dismay at finding myself before the General Staff. After numerous questions and serious head-nods, I was told I would do. For what? Our Legion *commandant* took me into his office for a private talk. He pulled the blinds and shut all the doors before it began. Then he told me because of my good record of only being drunk four times since the Legion came to Cambodia, a great honor was to be conferred on me.

"Corday, it seems there is a war going on somewhere and the Legion hasn't done a thing around here except to drink and drill these stupid yellow natives. But it is hard enough to make soldiers of these Cambodians without having the Boche drown them by the boat-load the minute they sail out of the Me-Kong. For the past six months every troop ship to leave Saïgon has been stopped by a tin fish." He banged the desk to show me how serious it was. "And that is where the Legion comes in!"

I suppose my face was blank. The *commandant* read my look.

"One would believe it a matter for the French Navy," he agreed, "but as usual the Legion is called upon to do everything. The chief of staff thinks we should do something, since we are here to police this ridiculous colony. What is the War doing away off here in Asia, anyway?" He shrugged disgust; then glared. "Of course you know why all those troop ships are being sunk."

I said something about the U-boats being everywhere.

"The German spies are everywhere," he corrected tartly. "Espionage. Our ships leave port always under secret orders, and the Boche submarines find it out as if it had been in newspaper headlines. The German spies are thicker in Saïgon than the crazy ideas in the Kaiser's head. *Dieu!* we have shot dozens. Still they intercept our wireless, eavesdrop on our telephones, steal our code. Right now they are probably listening under the floor. That would be too bad," he grunted humorously as I jumped, "because I am giving you a message those Boche agents would love to get. It carries special instructions to our northern naval base at Hanoi, and you are to go through Cambodia on foot and take it there on a *mission extraordinaire.*"

So that was what my good record had let me in for! I was to carry a secret document five hundred miles to the north, follow the jungle trails on foot, go alone, and probably be chased by German spies all the way. I protested I knew nothing about dispatch bearing and less about Cambodia. Exactly why they were sending me! German agents would never suspect a common Legionnaire, and maps would tell me all of Cambodia I wanted to know. Name of a Name! before I could recover my senses that paper was sewed into the lining of my tunic. I was given

money, charts, a pass, a month's leave and instructions to start at once.

"You have thirty days—a month—to reach Hanoi. Take your time or hurry, use your own discretion. They may try to stop you; they may even kill you," I was told, "but if you talk to nobody—listen to nobody—you will probably be all right. Remember the winning of the War may depend on your delivering that paper. Remember the great trust our army has put on you. The honor of France and the Foreign Legion is in your hands. Get there!"

Sacred Saint Sulpice! that officer shook hands in a way that said "good-bye" too decidedly for comfort, and the next minute I was out in the night with all the responsibility of the War on my shoulders. Talk about the Message to Garcia! In that Asian wilderness Hanoi seemed as far away as the moon, and my life wasn't worth a *piastre* with that document in the lining of my coat, and as I walked up Quai Francis Garnier under the stars I could see a German spy peering out from behind every hibiscus blossom. I hummed the *Marseillaise* off key for courage, and decided I would start for Hanoi that very night. I would talk to nobody and listen to nobody. France, the Legion depended on me. I was scared and proud and determined not to fail. You would hardly have thought it the time for one so burdened to fall in love.

But I walked into a side street off Rue Catinat to have a drink before I started on that perilous journey, and that is what happened, *messieurs*. I repeat, only in the East could it have happened. A fist shot out of a black doorway and knocked me down. I looked up, and fell in love! I fell in love for life.

I fell in love that instant.

II

NOT that I knew I was in love then! All I knew was that a fist had hit me in the eye, and when I glared up from the paving I saw a gang of yellow ruffians fighting around a woman. A paper lantern hung in a window across the alley, and its frail light showed me about ten of those dogs—greasy Me-Kong boatmen, by the looks—scuffling fiercely in that doorway. One of the curs had swiped me by accident, and I would have sprung up in fury, but I had to stop a second and grab my breath. I grabbed a mighty big breath, I can tell you! The woman in that doorway was in a bad way. It did not need the terror on her face to tell me that. She was backed against a plaster wall, a tiny silk-wrapped figure clutched against her bosom, and with her free hand she was lashing a bamboo switch at that swirl of evil faces.

But it was not that which made me fill my lungs. *Non!* It was her beauty. Never had I seen a woman like her. Never! Those river rats clawing at her were natives, and she, herself, was Asian—I knew that at a glance—but her beauty was something beyond complexion, race or country. Even in terror she was beautiful. The taut curve of her throat, the glow of her eyes, the exotic magnificence of her courage (I thought of a flower doing battle with hornets) as she lashed at her assailants. Many times afterwards I wondered about her, *messieurs*. When I saw her in calm. Her eyes like moonlight in the fragile oval of her face; her gentle, shapely hands; her feet in tiny sandals; her skin of palest sulphur in a sheer ice-blue sarong—where was she from? She was not Annamite, Lao or Tonkinese. She was not any of those races of Cambodia or the China Coast. Her

beauty was not of this world. Do you know what she made me think of when first I saw her, fighting to protect that small bundle in her arm? The Madonna —*La Giaconda.* The Madonna as she might have looked, fighting to keep her child from Evil.

"Devils!" I shouted, plunging into the fray. "Attack a woman with a child in her arms—!" *Sacré!* the sight of those brutes striking at her made me blind with rage.

She had been fighting magnificently, uttering no sound, and that doorway battle had been silent as a scuffle of cats. But she gave a low cry of thankfulness as I reached her side, and that cry was enough to make me fight like a wildman. I had to fight, too. Those curs were on me like wolves, and only then did I remember I had gone to the Marine Barracks unarmed. *Bleu!* I was suddenly in the vortex of a cyclone of knives, in the devil of a brawl. Before I had time to howl for the police I was crowded into a sort of hallway off the alley, a door was slammed, and I was battling tooth and nail in the pitch dark.

"Legionnaires! Aidez-moi! Au secours!"

My shouts were blotted by close walls and a smell of dank plaster. Knives were coming from all directions, and I could hear slippered feet running down a stairway I couldn't see, more rats joining the riot. Twice I went down under the pack, and I had thought the woman was finished when suddenly her hand was on my wrist, her low voice at my ear.

"Quick! Quick! This way! There is a passage here. Hurry, or they will kill us!"

TO THIS day I do not know how we got into that passage. It seems to me she pulled me up by the arm, and *then, as if we had gone through the* wall by some manner of magic, we were running in a place like a tunnel, an underground corridor that bent and burrowed through the blackness as a rabbit's hole—all the ferrets in the world coming after us. I would like to know about the tunnel under Saïgon. I would bet it was dug in a day before Marco Polo. A good many days before. We may pave the streets of Asia with concrete ten feet thick, but underneath she remains the same. She keeps the same secret panels and hidden passages under her surface as she keeps in her mind. We ran a long time in that tunnel under there. We ran out of the present and back down the ages a thousand years, as you will see. We ran right out of reality.

But it was real enough under there with fifty assassins at my heels, and I ran like mad to keep up with the woman. She would touch my hand to lead me around a turn, and sometimes I followed her scent. Her fluttering sarong left a perfume in its wake that was like the quick breath of a suddenly opened porcelain jar, a perfume as strange as a Chinese garden, as delicate as moonflower, as tenuous and unknown as some secret from Thibet. Even while running for my life it intoxicated me; seemed to lighten my heels. It was strange in that pitch-black tunnel. It made me feel as if I was running after a rainbow.

But a couple of times I banged my head into unseen corners, fell down on loose stones, tore shreds from my elbows on invisible walls. Once when I took a tumble those ferrets behind almost caught me. It was no time to suddenly remember the paper hidden in my tunic, the mission entrusted me by France. Thousand thunders! I couldn't die in that rat hole before I

had even started. Imagine that! To be butchered by a huggermugger gang of Cambodian river rats, and not even give the agents from Berlin a chance! I cursed the luck that had put a woman on my hands, and at the same time I knew I could not let the dogs behind us kill her. Humanity came first. The War Department would not see it that way, but departments are never human, only the people in them are. Any Frenchman would have tried to help that woman. I told myself I would get her out of there.

As a matter of fact, she got me out of there. I suppose we ran two miles—I have no idea—but with the suddenness in which she pulled me into that passage, she pulled me out of it. A quick side-turn. A breath-taking door. More magic, and we were out in the night, running in one of those lotus-pooled jungles that make of Indo-China a warm botanical garden. Through the maze of orchid-hung palms and tamarinds the woman's silk-clad body slipped and flashed like a moon-seen fish. She stopped abruptly in a glade bowered with ferns; stood finger to lips, listening. Then she sank down on a knoll, hugging her tiny, wrapped-up burden.

"We are safe for a minute, I think." Her voice was husky, speaking French in a quaintly accented whisper. "They have taken the wrong turning. It will be some moments before they discover our track."

She parted a fold in the bundle in her arms; peeped down at a face I couldn't see; then her eyes looked up into mine with a thanks that rewarded me for my rescue-act a million times. I stood staring at her. It was time for me to clear out of that; but the strange circumstances of our exit from Saïgon to this moon-lit jungle, the revealed beauty of that woman, held me as before a mystery. In that glade she was lovelier than ever. An oval face framed in a casque of jet hair. Complexion of faintest lemon tint and that electric-blue sarong which fitted her like her skin. Sculptors from the time of Athens had been trying to find such a figure, and painters trying to find such eyes. When I looked into their deep clarity I felt as if I were drowning. *Oui,* I had to pull myself up with a shock.

"Where are we?" I panted. "We must return at once to Saïgon."

She pointed over my shoulder, and by parting some ferns I could look across a night-blue valley to a scroll of lights that seemed miles beyond the jungle's fringe. The sight of those city lights put me in a sweat to get back there. *Mon Dieu!* I was supposed to be carrying a military message to Hanoi. I motioned the woman to come, but she shook her head.

"They would kill me in the city. I am safer here."

"Who are they?" I snarled. "And what would they kill you for?"

"They are bad men," she whispered. "Very bad men. They would kill me for this." She patted the little bundle cradled in her arms, and once more fear was on her face. "I dare not go back to Saïgon."

"But you must!" I told her desperately. "I will take you to the Legion barracks, put you under the protection of the army. The French police will protect you from those kidnappers. I have got to go, and you must come with me."

Again she shook her head. "It was brave of you to help me. You have saved my life, and I would not imperil yours. Go! I will stay here."

"But I can't leave you here in the

jungle," I cried. Her face was pale in determined resignation, and sweat streamed on my forehead at this emergency. "I can't leave a woman and a child—!"

Do you know what she said then? I would wager a thousand francs you cannot guess, but it would not be a fair bet, *messieurs*. I had started for her without outreached hand to make her come, and what she said, then, rooted me to the ground like a banyan. Embracing that little silk-wrapped bundle, she drew back from my reach.

"It is not a child," she whispered. "It is a goddess! I am the priestess, Thera, and the goddess is in my care. It is the goddess, Thibong Linh—!"

WELL, that was something to choke on, was it not? I give you my word, I swallowed six times before I could get a spoonful of air. If that woman had told me she was Mother France with the cherished L'Aiglon against her bosom, I would not have been more surprised. But perhaps you do not know about the goddess, Thibong Linh!

Alors, I knew a little about her—not as much as I was going to, but enough to be astounded. Even a Legionnaire could not be long around Cambodia without hearing some of its religious legends; like most Asian countries, Cambodia is soaked in religions. Confucious got around there, and Buddha with Lao-Tse at his heels, long before the Bible. Those religions mixed and exchanged ideas, the same as Christianity borrowed its monks from Mithraism and some of its ceremonies from Egypt; and lost somewhere in the mix-up in Cambodia was Thibong Linh. You can see how lost she was when I tell you she was the Goddess of Truth. She did not have any more followers in Cambodia than she would have had in Paris or New York. She would not have been followed at all if something else hadn't been lost with her. But her immortal image was supposed to hold the secret of a vast treasure, a tremendous fortune that some ancient devotees had buried in her honor. One legend had it that the devotee had inscribed the location of the treasure on one particular image. That brought the goddess some followers! *Oui,* that started the adventurers hunting Thibong Linh from one end of Asia to the other.

But Truth proved as hard to find in Asia as in Europe or America, its treasures as deeply buried. The trouble was to find the right image. The East is as full of old images as a dog of fleas, and a lot of them look alike. You can imagine it gave me a twist when that woman said she had Thibong-Linh in her arms.

"You are the priestess, Thera?" I burbled. "And that is the goddess, Thibong Linh—?"

"The goddess was entrusted to my care by the monks of the Temple of the Moon at Angkor Wat," she whispered. "Those Buddhist renegades were trying to steal her, and I was told to bring her to Saïgon for safekeeping."

The Temple of the Moon. Angkor Wat. Those whispered names had an exotic something that went through my head like the wafts of rare perfume released from the woman's delicate sarong. That wasn't all that went through my head, either. All at once that beautiful priestess was telling me the story of Thibong Linh, the story of the Goddess of Truth, a story no easier to believe than some of our Old Testament tales, but just as virtuous and wonderful.

It had come down through the East-

tarnished ages, that parable of Thibong Linh, the Cambodian Queen who told lies. She was the most beautiful queen to ever sit in the palace at Pnompenh; princes fainted, overcome when they looked at her; her face was lovely as a lotus, and most beautiful of all were her lips, soft and curvy as rose petals kissed with dew. And that was a pity, for her mouth was false, a fount of black prevarication.

Always she lied. Ask her the weather on a golden day and she would say it rained. Ask her who broke the jade pitcher at the bath and she would blame someone else. Never, never, never did she tell the truth. The habit of lying grew on her, and it was dangerous, for people believed her because of the innocent look of her lips. Her falsehoods got the country into an epidemic of troubles, courtiers were unjustly accused, marriages broken up, and at last a perjury to a neighboring king brought on a war in which thousands were slain. The sacred Buddha heard of that, and decided it was time to take a hand. In the form of a white dove he appeared before Thibong Linh and told her that henceforth every time she spoke an untruth her body would shrink an inch. Thibong Linh told Buddha she would never tell another lie, and straightway her body shrank an inch. She denied that she had shrunk at all, and down she went another inch. That scared her.

But try as she would, she could not stop lying. The habit was too fixed on her, and in three weeks she had dwindled to a midget, a queen hardly sixteen inches tall. She realized then that Buddha wasn't fooling, and if she kept on her fibs she would soon be reduced to nothing. At that point the little queen determined she would always give honest answers.

Then the politicians stepped in to make it hard for her. She was much too honest for any court, and they wanted to get rid of her. The wicked courtiers tried to force her into lies, asking all manner of tricky and embarrassing questions. Time after time she told the truth and sent them off in consternation. Finally they put their heads together, and the cunning court chamberlain said he knew how to shrink the queen to the size of a pin. "We will finish her now," he exulted. "I have a question no woman in the world will answer truthfully." Before a great gathering in the palace he faced the queen. He asked her her age!

The little queen told him how old she was, and when she gave her age truthfully, the listening Buddha was so pleased he made her a goddess! "From now on," Buddha told her, "your lips will always speak the truth. All knowledge is yours, and to any question asked of you, you will give an honest answer."

THAT was the story of Thibong Linh, the parable told me by that beautiful priestess there in that jungle. But I wish you could have heard it as she told it. Her voice a low, earnest murmur. Her eyes cast down worshipfully on the bundle in her arms. Moonlight on her face. If you had heard it as she told it, you would understand why I forgot those murderous coolies who had been chasing us, why I forgot the dangerous mission I was on, why I stood there like a child listening to a lullaby. And like all good story-tellers, she climaxed her fairy tale with a piece of drama I will never forget. By Saint Anthony's Fire! if I outlived the millenium I would never forget it.

"There is only one true Goddess of Truth," the beautiful priestess con-

cluded softly. "When Thibong Linh died, Buddha decreed that her body should never go to dust, and he gave her to the monks of the Temple of the Moon. For twenty-four hundred years Thibong Linh has remained in what Westerners might call a state of suspended animation. Truth is eternal! She is not alive today; neither is she dead. Look! You would like to see the goddess—?"

As she pulled the silk wrappings from the little thing in her arms. I suppose I swallowed a gurgle of dismay. You know how it is with Oriental legends. At the most, I had expected something remarkable in solid gold; at the least some sort of ancient, sacred mummy, some holy relic worth risking your life for. What the woman held up for my inspection was hardly a good carving, a thing of wood so old the grain had cracked and the paint had blurred and peeled—the sort of old image you could buy for a dollar in a Singapore curio shop. Except for the almond eyes and the Buddhistic lips in the cracked face, it resembled the *santas* I had seen in old Portugese and Spanish shrines. There was no valuable inscription on it, either.

"Why, it's just a worthless shrine-piece," I cried. "Nothing more than an old wooden doll."

A look of reproach crossed that woman's moon-lit face, and, hugging the image to her bosom, she recoiled as if from a blasphemy. "You do not know what you are saying, Monsieur Legionnaire! It is Thibong Linh, Goddess of Truth, Mistress of all the Verities. She sees all, knows all—"

I stared.

"And so does that cinema newsreel which is trademarked with a rooster," I snapped, infuriated that I had risked my life and the secret plans of France to rescue a woman's wooden toy. "You can take your image and—"

"She answers all!" the woman continued, ignoring my outburst. "Any question you wish to ask of her, Thibong Linh will answer truthfully. It was so decreed by Buddha, and it is written that Thibong Linh will answer two questions asked of her between sundown and midnight—any two, but only two—and the truth will be given to the questioner. Do you understand now why those men would kill me to get her?" The woman's eyes were narcotic, shining up into mine. "It was she who told me of the tunnel which let us escape from that house tonight. One question she has answered; tonight she will answer one more. Is there nothing you would like to ask, Monsieur Legionnaire? Hold her lips to your ear and listen closely. Ask, and her lips will speak—!"

Well, that was the dramatic climax I have tried to prepare you for. I took that cracked wooden image from the woman's outstretched hands and held its silly face to my ear. Don't ask me why I did it. The soft voice of that lovely priestess was one reason, and the jungle-scented moonlight was another. I was mad at myself for doing it, too. That a Frenchman from the country of Voltaire, that a soldier of the Foreign Legion should be trying out such a caper!

"What are the two greatest things in the world?" I snapped. My eyes were on that woman sitting a few feet away on the knoll, and I felt like forty fools —asking a question of a painted piece of wood. "If you are really the famous Thibong Linh, answer that one. What are the two greatest things in the world?"

"Love and peace," answered a small voice at my ear. "Love and peace."

Messieurs, I dropped that image as if it were a hot cake. It was not just the voice in perfect French. The lips against my ear—the wooden lips had moved! And at that tremendous moment a knife came sailing from the tamarind thicket behind me and buried itself in a tapang at my elbow!

III

AND now from your expressions, *messieurs,* I see you have forgotten your promise to listen through to the end before disbelieving, and you think old Thibaut Corday is crazy. I do not blame you, *messieurs.* Turn me into a pepper mill, but I thought old Thibaut Corday was crazy, myself! I thought a little belt had slipped off the flywheel in my brain when I heard that voice from the image and felt its painted wooden lips moving against my ear. The dagger that had missed my shoulder-blades and twanged into a tapang tree did not bother me half so much as that image miracle. That scared me a lot more than the knife. I thought I was as mad as De Maupassant when he heard conversation in an empty room.

The woman screamed and caught up the image from where I had dropped it in the ferns.

"Run! Run! It is the brigands come to take the goddess! They would cut us to pieces for Thibong Linh! Follow me!"

She was flashing off through the undergrowth again, carrying the image as if it were a baby. I followed her. There was no hallucination about that knife hilt-deep in the tree, and the howling pack coming after us moved too fast for any doubting. All night I raced after that woman and that image through the jungle, and only when the sun burned a scarlet hole through the misty orchid veils in the east did the sounds of murder stop curdling the silence behind us. But the woman didn't stop going. Soundlessly she glided on and on through that flowery jungle welter, scarcely pausing to draw a breath. I was tired enough to fall on my nose as I stumbled after her.

With tropic daylight slashing my face and the reality of noon around me, I was sure that Thibong Linh business had been a dream. It had to be a dream! That image in my hands had been nothing but a piece of carved wood, an old tarnished piece of carved wood, chipped and battered, the paint pastel with age, the gilt worn dim. Shrine-piece or not, a wooden image can't talk, and I knew I must have imagined that tiny voice.

But at the same time I knew I had not imagined those lips whispering against my ear. I had felt their movement with my skin—like the lips of a child pressed close to tell a secret—and the lobe of one's ear does not have that much imagination. Maybe you can understand why I threw all my senses to the winds and ran after the woman who had that marvelous image in her possession.

At noon we halted by a mossy-banked pool in a jungle of palms and kaladangs, and for the first time since midnight the woman spoke, saying we ought to eat something and rest. Eat something? In the surrounding bowers of warm green the fruits and legumes hung like globes on Christmas trees, plump durians, wild oranges, pomegranates, crimson mangosteens. The very air had a flavor as delightful as custard; had the woman told me she had brought me to the garden of the gods I could not have disbelieved her. I was starving for one of those juicy jungle fruits, but the uproar in my

mind was far greater than my appetite.

"Let me see it," I panted. "Let me see it in the daylight. Now!"

She smiled softly, putting the silk-wrapped object in my grabbing hands. *Non,* she made no protest as I tore loose the veilings and glared at the little image in my shaking fingers. In the daylight it looked more mutely wooden, more crudely carved than in the moonlight before. The nose was chipped, one finger broken from the folded hands. Dented, weather-beaten, it looked as worthless as the figure-head of a Chinese junk.

"But the lips moved," I panted. "I felt them move last night against my ear."

"She was speaking to you, Monsieur Legionnaire. Thibong Linh was answering your question."

"If this image can really talk," and even to myself my whisper sounded mad, "it is just about the most valuable thing in the world!"

TAKING the miraculous figure from me reverently, the woman shook her head. "She has revealed to you the two greatest things in the world, Monsieur Legionnaire. But you are right as to her priceless value. Imagine what the world would do to possess her. Imagine what men would do to own Thibong Linh who gives the truthful answer to all questions, who knows the secret of all life, the key to all worldly treasure—"

"I have a question I want to ask her!" I blurted. "Where—?"

The woman was quicker than my outcry, putting two fingers against my greedy lips, two cool fingers that reproached my feverish grabbing and soothed the tumult of excitement and unbelief in my brain. "Not now, my good friend. You forget the sacred Word. Only between sundown and midnight will the lips of Thibong Linh answer questions—any two, but only two. And now we must rest . . . we must rest . . ."

It is hard to believe it, Messieurs, but I sank down on that mossy bank like someone sleepy on a bed of cushions. My thoughts were whirling like a gramaphone disk, but the warm custard scents of that Cambodian jungle, the lush green shade, the fatigue of an all-night relay race had induced in my body an impossible langor. Or perhaps it was the woman's soothing voice as she brought me a lap-full of ripe fruits from that tropic bower. Or the calm strange beauty of her as she sat beside me on that green velvet bank, the fern-cooled sunlight on her face, goddess cradled in her arms, her reflection mirrored in the pool as a turquoise water maiden smiling from the placid depths.

Do you wonder I stayed there beside her? That for the second time in twenty-four hours I forgot the alley fight, the rat pack coming after us, the desperate departure from Saigon? *Eh, bien,* my mud-spattered uniform reminded me I was a Legionnaire, and that reminded me of my important dispatch to Hanoi, but the urgency did not seem so urgent somehow, and I told myself I had thirty days. And what was that compared to this woman and her marvelous possession? There was one more question I wanted to ask that Goddess of Truth!

The last thing I remember before drifting off to sleep was the fragrance of the woman's curve-moulded sarong. May I become a Gascon, then, if I didn't wake with twilight on my eyelids, the woman bending over me, her hand gently shaking my arm!

"Legionnaire! Legionnaire! Our

enemies will be catching up with us, for they always travel at night. It is sundown, now! It is time to go!"

"Sundown!" I sprang to my feet. "And will the goddess answer questions now?"

"Any two, and only two! But we must hurry—hurry—!"

She handed me the wooden image and walked down to kneel on the mossy bank, drinking then from the clear pool. Ah, she was beautiful as she knelt in the mauve dusk, drinking. I had no mind for beauty, though. I can tell you, I hurried. Holding the head of the image to my ear as she had instructed me the night before, I put the question I had been choking to ask, in the rapid-fire tones of a lawyer in a court room.

"Where is the treasure that the fortune-hunters say was buried in your honor?"

Naturally, I knew the image would not answer. I knew it had all been a mental stunt. The dark-eyed woman had mesmerized me, and now she could not mesmerize me with her face bent over, drinking from the pool.

"The treasure of Thibong Linh is buried in the Vault of the Stored Moonbeams at Lu-ong Kuampur."

I did not drop the little image that time! Name of a Name! When I heard that minikin voice at my ear, felt the movement of those hand-carved wooden lips come alive, I was too excited to let go.

"How does one get there?" I asked in a voice that I had to extract from my liver. "How does one reach Lu-ong Kuampur to find the treasure vault?"

Again the occult pronouncement in perfect French. Again the whispery, baby-kiss movement of the image's lips. "Find the writing of Buddha on the wall of the Dragon Shrine in Angkor Wat. The writing will tell you how to reach Lu-ong Kuampur and the treasure of Thibong Linh—"

IF YOU who are listening want to call me a liar and go home, I will not hold you to your promise in spite of my ability to keep mine. You remain? Too kind, *messieurs*. Then it will not be hard for you to believe how I went with that beautiful priestess to Angkor Wat.

With the spell of a miracle on my face, I went—all the laws of life and nature, the rules of existence which had held me to my obedient lock-step with the herd, turned to water on the brain. A wooden image had spoken in my ear; told me how to find a treasure. If an antique carving had moved its lips against your ear, revealing the hiding place of a million dollars, you would have gone with that woman to Angkor Wat, too!

And from there we went to Battambang, Stung Treng, Kompong Thom, and Pnompenh. Even the names of those places in Cambodia are like dreams, and our pilgrimage, going from Angkor Wat to those towns, was like a child's bedtime trip to the capitals of Never-Never Land.

Thibong Linh's treasure was not in the Dragon Shrine at Angkor Wat, you understand. We went there to read the writing of Buddha on the wall of that ancient ruin, and when we found the writing on the wall of that archaic cloister neither myself nor the woman could read it. I believe Buddha wrote that inscription, too. It looked like his handwriting. Angkor Wat was not built the day before yesterday. Archaeologists for three generations have been trying to solve the hieroglyphic mysteries of that venerable cluster of

stone temples in the heart of the Cambodian jungle, a construction job finished in the dawn of Asia. Only there was someone in our party a whole lot smarter than an archaeologist. What do you think we did?

Why, we sat down to wait for sunset, and then I held the Goddess of Truth against my ear and asked her please could she translate the letters scratched in the ancient plaster? Yes, she could. Buddha had written: *Burn a rice paper before the Sacred Elephant at Battambang, and the next step toward the door of Thibong Linh's treasure vault shall be revealed to you!* And what, please, was the nearest way to Battambang? *Take the footpath through the swamp land southward, bewaring of the water buffalo!*

From there on it went like that. We burned a rice paper before the Sacred Elephant at Battambang, and then we waited for Thibong Linh to read the ashes—which told us to go to Stung Treng, two hundred miles east as the crow flies. At Stung Treng it was tea leaves. Tea leaves which the wooden image read for me, directing me to a certain ancient monastery in the jungle beyond Kompong Thom. We were out to find Thibong Linh's treasure vault at Lu-ong Kuampur, you comprehend, and neither the woman nor I knew where that place was, and those were the steps we had to take to get there. One night it occurred to me to ask the image if there was not a more direct route instead of —what is the American phrase?—all about Robin Hood's barn?—but the image said we must follow the footsteps of Buddha, and so we went on. Old Buddha must have had a little something to drink, the way his footsteps wandered around that patch of Asia, cutting hundred-mile circles and figure-eights in those Cambodian jungles. Perhaps the atmosphere of Cambodia had intoxicated him, too.

Pnompenh. If you don't believe it, look on the map. And those other towns, their pagoda spires and paper lanterns glimmering up suddenly in some recess of the jungle, unexpected, unreal, enticing as the colored pictures in the quick-turned pages of a storybook. Put a rakish-hatted, slog-footed Legionnaire in a fairy tale—afoot in a land of sugar and spice with buildings made of candy; lakes of soda pop, all flavors; forests of flowers under skies of curly cloud and blue and gold —and you have an idea of what I was like, going hand in hand with that beautiful Asian woman to those impossible places at the instruction of a wooden doll.

But do you wonder I walked like one enchanted? Every sundown I could ask two questions of that image, and it would answer me—answer me, I tell you!—in a pixie voice!—in Parisian French!—moving its lips of wood against my ear!—sending me to places that couldn't be (and always were) there—! on my way to the biggest buried treasure in the East. And that lovely priestess at my side; for all the world, the spirit of a rainbow in her diaphanous sarong; soothing me with her quaintly-accented talk, quieting my impatience, bidding me put my faith in our other-worldly guide—that woman who walked beside me, the Goddess of Truth in her arms! *Oui,* it was a country of enchantments. If a butterfly had alighted on my wrist and spoken to me in the basso tones of a brother, I would not have been surprised.

THE war in Europe? The war in Europe seemed a long ways off

from the jungled interior of Cambodia where the orchid's perfume shut out the memory of gunpowder, and the peaceful forest stillness could tame a nature so rapacious as the saladang's and keep him snoozing on his mud-bank while we tiptoed by.

My trusted mission to Hanoi? I thought of that at first, *pour sûr,* but that was early in the pilgrimage when I would say to myself, "I still have twenty-four days!" or, "I will find the treasure first, and then deliver the message!" or, "Of course I will start tomorrow, there are eighteen days left to go in."

"We must hurry!" I would blurt at my companion. "Name of a Name! are we never coming to the hiding place of the treasure?"

"Patience," her answer would come with a softness that laid cool fingers on my eyelids. "The treasure of Thibong Linh is not easily found."

"And will it be worth all this traveling when we get there?"

"I am only the priestess, Thera, and I cannot tell you. If you would know the treasure's value inquire of Thibong Linh."

Was a million dollars in gold and precious stones worth looking for? Thibong Linh reported the vault to hold all of that, and the thought of such a fortune seized my brain like a drug. Today I am ashamed of the way I went after that treasure. My lust to get my paws on it overrode my awe of the presence of a great mystery. My fingers itched and my tongue poked out. A gloomy commentary on the mind of man, not so? That my main concern with the Goddess of Truth should be the quickest way to riches! My only excuse is that I was a Foreign Legionnaire who had been living on a penny a day. There are people who should know better who are trying to get into heaven because they think the streets up there are gold.

Non, I thought of nothing but the riches I should stuff my pockets with, and the promised bonanza blinded me to almost everything else. Almost. The sun, itself, could not have blinded me to the beauty at my side, but I became accustomed to her there as one becomes accustomed to dawn and nightfall and takes their priceless splendors for granted. Whoever looks at the stars anymore? We are spendthrift with them because they are always there, and so we ignore them as if they were bits of tinsel. Let them be missing for a week, and there would be a panic that would make our stockmarket riots seem like kindergarten flurries in comparison.

Alors, we traveled mostly at night, that woman and I, and I never looked at the stars and not often enough at her. I was too busy mentally fingering a million dollars to consider my companion or even wonder why she was accompanying me on that dreamland tour. She was wonderful company, too. In the thatch-roofed villages through which we passed, she would make the natives bring us anything we wished. She would show the head-man the image of Thibong Linh and he would salaam on his wishbone for an hour. On the pink-and-blue rivers that laced through the jungle, she would produce a canoe from practically nowhere, and paddle with me, stroke for stroke, like a man. On the trail, uphill and downhill, her sandals were tireless. And in the daytime, when we slept, she would find some sheltered nook by a stream or pool, make a fire and prepare a little meal of fish and fruit and cocoanut wine. *Dieu!* I will never forget those days with her in

the jungle. How I would roll up and fall asleep on a bed of ferns, and wake up to find her scraping the mud from my boots, sewing a rent in my ragged tunic, or repairing a dent in the leather visor of my *képi*.

"You have slept well, Monsieur Legionnaire? The sun has been down an hour, and it is time to go. I have asked Thibong Linh if we are near the treasure, and she reminds us to have patience—Lu-ong Kuampur is not far. But she says there are dangers, and we must hurry on."

NOW throughout all that journey we were followed, you understand, and that is why we traveled at night. I knew that rat-pack from Saïgon was after us, because sometimes in the gloomy stillness I could hear them coming. The woman told me they were after the image, and it didn't take any imagination for me to understand why. So our amazing journey across Cambodia was in reality a continual flight, and that night it seemed to me my companion was very worried. All at once it broke through my blindness that for the past week she had been hiding a great anxiety. Fear filled me. Fear of something I had not thought of before.

"*Sac à papier!*" I reproached myself. "I have been one pig! Look, *mademoiselle!* With that image in your possession your life is not worth a centime. I cannot let you go on like this—! *Mon Dieu—!*"

"But where else can I go?" she whispered sadly.

"You must hide! Stay in some convent! Something! We must find a place—!"

"And you do not wish to find the goddess's treasure—?"

"Give Thibong Linh to me!" I babbled. "I will follow the trail alone. There is no need for you to risk your life in this jungle as—"

"I must go with you," she refused my suggestion. "The image was placed in my care, and I could not surrender her to you, although I know you would bring her back. I must go with you, Monsieur Legionnaire, for in helping you find the treasure Thibong Linh and I will repay the risk you took for us."

Well, I wanted to find that treasure vault, and so we went on. The image sent us to Binh Dinh. From there we went to Quang Gai. We had to keep a move on, *messieurs*. That Saïgon batch never let up chasing us for a minute, and Thibong Linh told me we must not slow down. We moved like a family of Gypsies, the three of us—a woman, a wooden image, a ragged Legionnaire—about the strangest family of Gypsies to ever take the trail. Those yellow devils from Saïgon followed us too closely. I had snatched a hunting knife from a Laos beggar we had met along the trail, and one night I told the woman to go ahead, and I lay in wait for the pursuit. Sure enough. It was not long before I heard the *plut-plut-plut* of bare feet coming along the jungle's floor, and presently one of those hairy Saïgon river rats, the advance scout of the party after us, came nosing along our tracks.

He jumped on me with a yell, and I cut him to pieces and left him there with his knife in his chest as a warning to the others to keep their distance. But at Quang Gai they were so close I could almost feel them breathing on my neck. The fear in my companion's beautiful eyes was constant. As we ran through the palm groves she would turn pale and look back. I did not like that a little bit. I wanted to stop and fight

them, but the woman said no, we must not stop, not if we ever wanted to reach the treasure.

Mention of the treasure was all that was necessary to keep me going full steam ahead. Then the image talked in my ear and said we did not now have far to go, and that information drove me as before a bullwhip. I wanted to find that bonanza before those rats on our heels caught up with us and asked for a share. I wanted to pocket the treasure, and then hide the woman and her precious relic somewhere where she would be safe. We left Quang Gai at once, at the advice of the image. Moving under forced draught, we circled into the hills beyond Moulapoumak.

And there another worry attached itself to my heels. Something that harried me a whole lot more than a batch of Cambodian cutthroats from Saïgon. A fear that hit me from the back of my head like a bullet out of ambush. Listen—

AWAY back near Pnompenh we had passed some Legion patrols. My special permit had let us through, and I had laughed at those sun-bitten soldiers slogging along in the sweat and dust. Do you see? I had laughed myself sick at them, and made up my mind, without realizing it, that I would never go back to them. Since then I had not thought of them. Long ago I had forgotten about the message to Hanoi.

And in those tinted hills beyond Moulapoumak I got a jolt. We were camped for the day in a jasmine grove by an amethyst lake; with Thibong Linh in her arms the beautiful woman was asleep. Me, I could not sleep. I had a feeling that those Cambodian trackers might stretch their legs some afternoon while we rested, and come up with us. *Morbleu!* I was not afraid of those yellow mongrels, but on the edge of finding the treasure I did not want to be caught napping. That afternoon I decided to play the little ambush trick on them again, so while the woman slept in the ferns I crept back down the trail the way we had come, thinking to surprise any scouts. There were some scouts in those hills, all right! I saw them on the distant slope of a lavender valley, threshing the ripe undergrowth, this way, that way, as if they were looking for somebody. Like an animal watching hunters, I crouched on a ledge above the valley, amused because they were making little progress.

And then I did not grin. My mouth screwed up as if filled with lemon juice, my eyeballs swelled in terror. About a quarter mile off, that party was, moving slowly through the undergrowth, aimlessly as berry-pickers, scouting the slope in the other direction. But it seemed to me as if they were coming straight at me with the speed of antelopes. They were not that cutthroat gang from Saïgon! Bones of the Little Corsican! *Non!* But the glint of sunlight on rifle barrels. The glimmer of buckles on polished straps. White square-visored caps grouped in consultation. That unmistakable canvas tunic; that famous *képi!*

I was suddenly reminded that the arm of France is long. I was suddenly remembering how the Foreign Legion is everywhere. The dispatch to Hanoi! But in that story-book junket across Wonderland I had lost all count of time—thirty days must have gone by long ago! Holy Saint Catherine! there was a war going on! I had failed to carry out a *mission extraordinaire!* I was a deserter from the French For-

eign Legion! The secret service, the army, the Foreign Legion—all the bloodhounds of France would be after me! And the penalty for desertion from the Legion in war-time is death!

THAT glimpse of those Legionnaires paralyzed me. Going south, they passed out of sight, but the chance that they might come across my hobnailed track and raise their eyebrows at it made my blood run cold. As sure as sundown the arm of France would reach out for me. I was crazed with fear.

Not of dying—I have never been afraid of that. But I did not want to miss my chance at Asia's biggest treasure, and along with that I had been having a good time. How wonderful seemed this wandering across Cambodia, now it might be interrupted. How delightful the tropical evening, the forest hush, the fragrant air. I looked around and saw flowers I had never seen. The sky above the valley was striped with pale greens merging into a sea of burgundy where the western sun-shafts, violet and gold, were spread out like a Japanese fan. Little parrots quarreled cheerfully in a nearby thicket. Somewhere far off a temple bell tinkled.

Cursing, I fled back to our hiding place. Even as I damned the scouts I had seen, my jawbone rattled at the knowledge that the Legion would soon be looking for me. That night in the Moulapoumak hills I asked our miraculous instructress a different sort of question.

Panting into our hide-out, I saw my companion had done something she had never done before. Always, save for the few moments when she surrendered it to my hands, the woman had kept the image in her clasp; sleeping or waking, it was by her side. That evening she had left it on the shore, and gone into the amethyst lake for a swim. *Dieu!* she was something to look at out there in the water. Beautiful? A pale Chinese moon hung over the jungle tops, and the woman was like a naiad among the lilies. Her luminous form took my breath away as she saw me and rested her cheek against the water and started swimming for shore.

Figure to yourself the panic I was in when I tell you I turned my back on her. *Oui,* I turned my back on that vision and grabbed up the little image; tore loose the silk coverings, and held the carved wooden face against my ear. I had to ask my question in a hurry. You bet I did.

"Will the Legion ever capture me?"

My voice was a harsh, low rattle in my throat, for the woman was nearing the bank, and I did not want her to know about that desertion business. The answer came in a whisper, too; I had to press the fluttering lips against my ear to catch the faint, squeaky reply.

"No one will overtake you if you proceed more swiftly than they. Have courage. Keep east on the trail and tonight you will reach Lu-ong Kuampur where the treasure is hidden. The Vault of the Stored Moonbeams is only a kilometer from here."

Never had the wooden lips spoken at such length, and never such a message. Only a kilometer! I shouted out loud. I held the Goddess of Truth in front of me and made as if to kiss her, but cool, wet hands reached around my elbow and took her from me. Dripping, a turquoise garden statue in her translucent silk sarong, the woman was there. Hugging Thibong Linh to her bosom, she regarded me with widened eyes.

"You are frightened tonight, Monsieur Legionnaire. You have seen something off in the jungle. What did you ask of Thibong Linh?"

"Only a kilometer! Lu-ong Kuampur is only a kilometer—!"

Soberly her deep eyes looked into mine, looked through my excitement to my anxiety. "I know," she whispered softly. "Come! We must fly—"

Her sandals were as wings flitting off up the moon-surfaced trail, and I was after her at the strain of every leg muscle. The Goddess of Truth had said something when she told me that treasure was only a kilometer distant, and she had said something else about no one overtaking me if I proceeded more swiftly than they. But there was a catch in that last bit of honesty. How fast were my enemies proceeding? I took no chances with that, and as I went at full stride I kept a watch over my shoulder and was ready for rear-guard action with drawn knife.

The woman, the little image and I, we went like the wind. Three faces East! It was one of those bright nights, all black and yellow and silver, the sort of night when the Little People hold their dances in the grass. The moon cast a sharp-edged shadow. One should take care, in Asian moonlight as bright as that.

OUR trail led into a forest of sandalwood that looked drugged. There was a smell of cloves. Sinbad might have landed somewhere around here on his magic carpet. Aladdin got the oil from those sleeping tropic flowers for his wonderful lamp. That forest in Indo-China was steeped in mystery. What? Consider a Legion deserter chasing after a priestess named Thera, who carried at her bosom a goddess of wood that could talk. *Voilà!* Exactly at what I judged to be a kilometer from where we had started, the woman swerved off the trail into a clump of poincianas, pushed aside the blossoms, gave a little cry of awe as she pointed to a doorway in the ground.

Do you know what it resembled, that doorway screened by flowers? Entrance camouflaged, steps going down, it looked like the entrance to one of those concrete dugouts you can see today in the Maginot Line, one of those armored subways under the fortified French frontier. Only the stones of those down-going steps were a whole lot older than any modern architecture. Those steps were so old they looked like gray sponge, and they climbed down into a darkness that hurt my eyes. That stairwell went deep. Father Time lived down there. I could smell his breath as I peered down those deep-descending steps.

The woman pointed at some characters chiseled in the stone casement. "The Vault of the Stored Moonbeams, Monsieur Legionnaire. Wait—"

I was paused on the lowest moon-lit step when she said that, trembling, hardly able to restrain my legs. She slipped off into the camouflage a moment, returning with a lighted flambeau. I do not know where she found that oily torch-wood, or how she lighted it. Perhaps by a moon-ray. She was a remarkable woman.

Side by side we crept down the steps, the woman holding the torch and clutching Thibong Linh, me holding my breath and clutching my knife. We were like two children starting down the stairs late at night to see the Christmas tree. Awed. In excitement. Unable to wait. And a little scared.

And a little more scared as the steps went farther down. Suppose there wasn't any Santa Claus? And scared

a little more as the steps went down farther. What was that peculiar smell? Father Time had a bad case of halitosis down there. A staggering case. Ancient plaster and damp rot and something else, I could not tell what. The woman caught a whiff of it, and looked at me. Her eyes did not like it, but she thrust the torchlight ahead of her and went on down.

I remember a stone door ajar at the bottom, and how the torch-light went in ahead into blackness, and how that bad breath came out. It was enough to almost quench the torch-flare, but nothing could quench my desire to get in and have a look at the treasure. Certainly nothing like a gust of stale air. I leapt down the three bottom steps, kicked open the door. But then my companion slipped by me and went in first. *Sacré!* past the threshhold we stood rooted. Rooted in that underground vault by a pair of gold eyes!

My faith, they were terrible eyes! Solid gold, lidless, blazing from blackness in a corner like the eyes of a bodyless wizard enraged at our intrusion. It was Father Time. *Non,* someone had eaten up Father Time; his bones were in a bloody pile in mid floor. His bones and little scraps of cloth. His family, too? There were three skulls! I will not describe to you the mess on the floor of that cellar. The woman screamed. The gold eyes from the corner leapt at us like automobile headlights. There was an arched streak of black and orange blurs. One roar, and I was fighting with a tiger!

Now I am going to tell you about something that happened to me. This part of the story I cannot guarantee by explanation; it was an emotional experience—you will have to take my word for it. You know how they say a drowning man in one second can see his whole past life before him? It was something like that. In the flash when those gold eyes jumped and I saw it was a tiger, it was as if cataracts were peeled from my vision. I saw the tiger leaping at a girl. I saw the days I had spent with her in the flowered jungle. I saw her swimming in an amethyst lake; her face as I had seen it in moonlight; her graceful walk at my side; her gentle hands sewing my torn tunic; her cool smile; her eyes—

I do not know how I flung myself in front of that girl. I would have thrown myself in front of an express train for her, *oui,* and I would have beaten it, too. That tiger hit me like a blast from the muzzle of a cannon. With the roar of a howitzer. With the impact of a zooming airplane. I can show you the marks of that collision. I went down like a straw bag under a rushing charge of steel bayonets.

I can show you the marks of those steel bayonets, but I could never show you how I fought back. With a tiger. Ravening. On that greasy floor. Lights and shadows flying. Snapping and roars. Myself on that wild brute's back (before God, I do not know how!) my left arm locked about his throat, right fist flailing the knife. Do you imagine what it would be like to have an arm around a volcano of orange and black flame? To wrestle with an explosion? To roll, bound and twist with one lightning-muscled Gorgon of solid violence? *Messieurs,* the memory of those giant snapping jaws sends a river of shivers down my spine. The great sickle-clawed paws slashing air. The terrible, kicking hind legs. If those hind feet had come up under me they would have scooped me out like a cantaloupe. One bat from a forepaw would have killed me. Looking back, he could have bitten off my head. I saw down

his throat in that instant when he struck me. His fangs were bared scimitars, his breath like a million salmon cans.

I must have knifed that tiger in the jugular vein first stab, otherwise I do not think I would be here. Probably he was dying when we crashed to the floor, and I was battling his dying reflexes. But the dying reflexes of those Asian jungle cats are like a box of exploding hand grenades. From wall to wall we pitched, locked in dreadful contortion, flopping, tumbling. The roars of the beast shook that underground chamber like an earthquake. Sweat filled my eyes. Fur smothered me. It seemed to last a long, red time. Again and again I struck with the knife. His last scratch got my left arm; ripped my elbow open as if with shrapnel.

AFTERWARDS I discovered three fractured ribs, a shoulder sprain, the skin scraped off one leg from knee to thigh. Only a fury which matched the tiger's had saved me. The power which charged through me in that flash when the beast sprang at the girl. *Non,* I did not feel my picayune injuries when I reeled to my feet. And that was a big tiger. Almost seven feet long, stretched out on the floor amidst the left-overs of last night's supper. I did not look at that.

I looked at the girl in the doorway of that Vault of Stored Moonbeams. She was crying. Not in terror with her face askew, but differently. Silently. Standing there on the threshhold, torch upheld, chin lifted—she had not run, *messieurs!* She was looking at me marble-pale, her eyes as stars with tears.

"You save my life, Monsieur Legionnaire. Again! That tiger—"

I nodded foolishly.

"But there is nothing," her low voice broke on a sob. "The vault—the vault is empty. There is nothing here but those men who were here before us—and that tiger. There is no treasure—"

"Why, but there is!" I can see myself charging at her, waving my arms like a blockhead. "I have found my treasure, *mademoiselle.* All the treasure I ever want, and I had to come all this way to find it! Do you see? Do you see?" I was rushing her up the steps to get her out of that evil den. Yelling as I carried her up into the sweet air and moonlight to set her down among the fragrance of poincianas.

And then I give you my word, I could not speak to her. *Non!* I had killed a tiger—I could have killed another—but facing so much beauty in the moonlight, I could not get out the question I wanted to ask. "Thibong Linh!" I whispered, thick-tongued. "Give me Thibong Linh."

Wordless, she handed me the little figure. Will you believe I had to turn my face away to ask my question. What? But all men are fools.

"Does she love me?" My hand was shaking in anxiety as I held the wooden image-face against my ear. "Does she love me, too?"

It was funny how the wooden lips fluttered. Stammering at my ear, they did not seem able to speak. When the answer, the one word came, it seemed as if Thibong Linh was choking in emotion, too.

"Chérie!" I shouted, whirling, clasping her in my arms, dizzy. "Beautiful! Wonderful! We will marry at once! Tomorrow! Ah, sacred girl! We will spend the rest of our days in these flowered forests! What? *Non,* do not be sad! We will spend our days in these forests together, and live a thou-

sand years!" With Thibong Linh between us, I hugged her and danced.

So she kissed me, that girl. Once! And for everything in my life I was repaid. For the dreary misfortune that sent me in exile from Paris. For the kicks and batterings of luck that have knocked me around the globe. For the disappointments, the shin-bangs, the stupidities, the failures. *Oui,* even for the hobnailed boots that came crashing through the poinciana shrubs that night, the sweaty grinning faces, the hard-jawed Legion captain who rushed at me out of nowhere, his voice like gunfire blasting away a dream.

"Nice work, Corday! Take the woman, boys! Sergeant, just duck down into that hole and see if there are any more of her crowd below. March along with the dancer, lads, and lock her in that stone hut near the camp. Did you know our tents were just over the hill, Corday? *Mon Dieu!* and we have been trying to find this very dugout for weeks. Tonight we thought we heard a tiger. But they wired from Quang Gai you were headed this way. Why, man, you look just like hell!"

He stopped his rapidfire shouting to stare. Then he wheeled, bawling at the Legionnaires. "Well, what are you standing like sticks for, you fools! Get that woman into the guard house, double quick. *Allons!*"

IV

I LEAVE it to you, my feelings when I saw those soldiers form a cordon around that flower-faced girl. Right Oblique! Forward March! Tramp, Tramp, Tramp. In a little brown cloud of moon-dust they swung by, and I stood too stunned for protest or belief.

Just as the squad clicked by, the girl reached out and thrust a silken bundle into my hands. I saw her eyes were shining with tears. "Take it, *mon brave.* A little souvenir to remember me by. And remember, too, that she did tell the truth. About the two greatest things in the world. And at the last."

With that she was gone in the moonlight, and I found myself with Thibong Linh in my hands. I remember the sergeant coming up the dugout steps, howling something about wireless instruments, some bones, a dead tiger. I remember screaming, "Wait! She has done nothing, you fools! Wait!" and fighting the Legion captain and the sergeant all the way through the sandalwoods to a camp. Men were bivouacked in a barbwire clearing, and I was dragged to an officer's tent. The captain flung me into a camp chair; stood over me with a Red Cross kit, bellowing and grinning.

"Don't be an idiot, my boy! No, but I cannot blame you, you are not the first to fall in love with that siren. Hold on—let me bandage that—maniac!—I am offering congratulations. You will win the *Croix de Guerre,* the *Medaille Militaire*—for your part in helping capture the greatest spy in the East—"

"It is a mistake!" I howled. "She is never a spy! She is the priestess, Thera, from the Temple of the Moon in Angkor Wat. She was trying to save the goddess, Thibong Linh—from a gang of yellow thugs, the night I left Saïgon headquarters. They were fighting her in an alley off Rue Catinat—trying to steal from her the Goddess of Truth—"

"Priestess, Thera! Goddess of Truth, be damned!" he gave me saltily. "That woman is a German-paid spy,

Corday, their most dangerous agent in Asia. Headquarters sent you out for her as bait!"

"Bait!" I whispered.

"And do you think they would start a Legionnaire walking across Indo-China, alone, inexperienced in dispatch work, with an important military message like that? You were bait, *mon gar,* and they took you hook, line and sinker. The German agents. We knew there must be spies there in Saïgon Headquarters—they relayed your departure to their chief. Their chief was that woman, Corday. Of course. That alley fight was staged for you, a snare of their own manufacture. They were not certain if you had an important message, and they dared not kill you without finding out where it was. But our agents caught them in their own trap. Throughout that alley chase, throughout your trip across Cambodia, the French Secret Service and a Legion detachment were following you. Pardon me, but I have been in constant touch with the Intelligence Department, and I know. All that priestess business of hers, that chase through the jungle was a trick to draw you along. Those were her own men following you; they must have discovered our men trailing them, and signaled her something was wrong. Doubtless she kept you with her because she was unable to find your hidden paper. Why she brought you to that dugout wireless station, I can only guess. Hold you as hostage, perhaps. But it seems a tiger cleaned up the place before she got there. *Alors,"* he gestured sympathy, seeing my face, "it is too bad we could not have let you know that she was a fraud."

"Ha ha!" I screamed. "So Thera was a fraud, was she? Pardon me, Monsieur Captain, but right now I will give you and the smart French Secret Service the surprise of your life!"

HE MUST have had the surprise of his life, all right, when I unwrapped that image from its silk swaddlings, and held its little face to my ear. He must have thought me mad when I asked it to tell me if the woman I loved was a spy or not. "Answer me, Thibong Linh!" I prayed. "Answer loud enough for both of us to hear!"

Can you see me standing there with that wooden goddess to my head? The captain leaning across his camp table with enlarged eyes? Both of us listening, listening for a carved wooden image to speak? *Ah, mon Dieu!* The wonderful lips of Thibong Linh! Those lips moved, *messieurs!* Those wooden lips moved against my ear. That captain saw them moving, too. But no voice came!

I clutched the image desperately, and shouted for it to speak. The lips continued moving, but no voice came out. *Non,* it was voiceless, dumb. I must have hurled it to the floor as one hurls a suddenly dislocated telephone, for I heard the crash, and there was the image in pieces at my feet. And like an instrument, too, there also was its mechanism.

The head was broken off, and we could see the lips in that face still moving, opening and shutting on an inner hinge, operated on the sort of bobbin that moves the eyes of a doll. Like a doll the image was hollow, and there was a little heap of wooden cog-wheels and cunningly carved levers, similar to the innards of a Swiss clock.

In a flash that Legion *commandant* seemed to understand. He understood, also, that my own insides had broken up in that smash.

"The Asians are clever at making

that sort of toy," he said kindly, pushing me into a chair and pressing a cognac bottle into my hand. "It is too bad, *mon gar,* but at least you will have more satisfaction for the double-crossed affections than most men. Tonight she lets down her hair in the guard house, and at dawn you will hear a little echo from the firing squad."

Presently, sorting some papers behind his desk, he looked up over his glasses.

"It might interest you to know. Her name is Mata Hari."

* * *

Old Thibaut Corday wrinkled his beard with a sigh, and slumped back deflatedly in his chair, leaving the name of Germany's greatest World War spy in the tobacco smoke before us as casually as if it were the gilt calling card of a princess tossed on the table.

It was the American who picked it up in astonishment. "Mata Hari! The —the dancer! The actress! *The* Mata Hari—?"

The old Legion veteran nodded as if it didn't matter. His eyes were somber.

"But—Mata Hari!" the American repeated, obviously unable to believe the name. "Good Lord! Corday, it couldn't have been. She was a German spy and all that—Asian, too—but she was in France the last year of the War. Sure. Dancing in Paris before the diplomats. The secret service caught her in Paris and she was executed as a spy somewhere in France."

A faint, admiring twinkle shone darkly in the old veteran's eye. "So I have heard it reported, my friend. But I would hate to bet on that report. I would sooner bet she talked herself out of that prison in France, the way she must have talked herself out of that guard house in Cambodia. You recall how the Legionnaires had her there, waiting to be shot? In the morning when the firing squad called for her she was not there. No door had opened, but just before dawn the sentries had heard her call them a good-bye from some bushes off to the left. When they ran to investigate—gone! When they returned to the guard house —empty! Like that," Old Thibaut Corday snapped his fingers, "she was gone. She talked herself out of that guard house, *messieurs.* She was a wonderful woman, and I would bet she could talk herself out of anything."

"But the image!" the British consular agent cried. "Maybe the woman had conversational powers, but how about that image of Thibong Linh. You said its lips moved by some sort of clock-work—"

"Some very cunning clock-work, *oui!* I think she must have wound it up while she held it in her arms, and when I held it against my ear, you comprehend, my fingers gripped on a button or a spring."

"But the voice!" was the Englishman's protest. "Really, old man! Cog-wheels might work the wooden lips, but to make an image talk—answer all those questions like that—I mean, a voice—"

"I wondered about it, too," Old Thibaut Corday nodded. "I wondered much. Some sort of gramaphone record—but even a Victrola cannot answer questions. Wireless sending? But there were no wires. *Non,* cog-wheels did not solve the voice from those wooden lips. But some years after the War I was on leave in Paris. The Legion had given me a month's furlough, and it was my last night before

returning to Algiers to serve out my enlistment."

Old Thibaut Corday paused to stare out at the quiet darkness. "Are you familiar with the Moulin Bleu? It is a little theatre off the Rue Pigalle, what the English call a variety show. I stopped in late, just before the curtain of the final act. That last act was billed as The Wonderful Zethra. That was her name—The Wonderful Zethra. She was swathed in Oriental veils, and sitting in the center of the stage with a glass of water in one hand and a figure on her knee. Do you know what she was doing? She was asking the figure questions, and while she drank the glass of water that figure would move its wooden lips and answer her. How the audience roared. 'Tell them the two greatest things in the world, little one.' And the figure replied shrilly, 'Love and peace!' She hugged up the figure, kissed it and ran off the stage. The crowd roared applause, but I, Thibaut Corday, did not roar. Do you know what that dummy was? It was the wooden dummy of a Foreign Legionnaire, *messieurs!* A Foreign Legionnaire with a toy uniform and bright blue eyes, a too-big nose and a cinnamon beard—a dummy of *me!*

"I got to the stage door on feet of air, but already she had gone. A very strange performer, the doorman told me. Never gave her real name or where she stayed, and she treated that dummy as if it was her very life. 'Her act closed tonight, and she has gone to play at the Palladium Theatre in London.'" London! I ran half the way to the boat train. And then I remembered. I was a soldier of the French Foreign Legion! Ah, *mon Dieu!* I had deserted the Legion once; I could not desert it again."

It was growing dark.

Old Thibaut Corday passed a hand across his eyes, and when he sighed back this time their twinkle had faded. "From Algiers I sent a telegram," and the tone had gone from his voice, "only to learn The Wonderful Zethra had been killed trying to rescue her dummy in that fatal Palladium fire. But a lot of people would have been surprised to learn that wonderful ventriloquist was Mata Hari, the War's greatest spy. Only she was more than a ventriloquist, more than a spy. She gave me the two greatest things in the world," said Old Thibaut Corday huskily. "And only a goddess would have done that for a Legionnaire."

Genius Jones

By LESTER DENT

IT was the palatial yacht of multimillionaire Polyphemus Ward that took the man Jones off his iceberg and precipitated one of the newspaper sensations of the century. Jones, the son of Polar Jones, had been reared in the Arctic wilds by a half-mad scientist, the only other survivor of a 1916 polar expedition. By the time his unbalanced tutor died, Jones was a young man, filled with an itch for the world outside.

Before the Ward yacht came along, a German liner had endeavored to rescue him but the young savage, believing that the World War was still in progress, had fired on the rescue party with an antiquated machine-gun.

Polyphemus Ward, rich beyond the dreams of Crœsus, had been cruising the Seven Seas, on a restless search for two people. One, his daughter Janice who had walked out on him less than a year before; and two, an honest man to whom Ward can entrust the distribution of his vast personal fortune after his death.

IN the naïve but learned Jones, Ward thinks he has found his man. Handing Jones a sheaf of bills, "Here," he says, "is one hundred thousand dollars. I want you to give it away—sensibly—in one-thousand-dollar lots to people it will honestly benefit. Keep a record. If I am satisfied with the way you handle this, I will appoint you administrator of my entire estate."

Jones accepts the charge with misgivings, amazement and an almost total lack of enthusiasm. He is unimpressed by Ward's money, and finds the old tycoon an irascible and totally unpleasant petty tyrant. Others aboard the yacht learn of Ward's decision with decidedly mixed emotions.

Funny Pegger, Ward's publicity counsel and Jones's only real friend, is delighted at the eminent newsworthiness of the whole idea. Lyman Lee, Ward's secretary, is annoyed, jealous, disappointed. The penniless Countess de Gracieu begins to make plans for annexing some of the hundred thousand. Her brilliantly beautiful, brilliantly selfish daughter Glacia has a few thoughts of her own on the subject. Particularly when she remembers the kiss that Jones had given her one night in the interests, as it were, of scientific experimentation.

Then the bombshell bursts. Funny Pegger announces to Jones that he has heard, via the ship's radio, that Jones is to be arrested when they dock in New York on charges arising from his spirited but misguided assault on the captain of the German liner.

It is while Jones is pondering this disturbing tiding that Lyman Lee, armed with a butcher knife and dressed in dark clothing, is on his way to Jones's cabin. . . .

CHAPTER VII

TARGET JONES

THREE O'CLOCK of the morning preceding the arrival of Polyphemus Ward's yacht in New York harbor, preparations to receive a strange fellow named Jones were already under way. Final editions of morning papers had been put to bed, and night editors were writing notes to leave for editors on the day trick, notes suggesting it might be a good idea to have reporters and cameramen meet Jones.

There was something that appealed to the public in the idea of a young man being rescued off an iceberg in mid-Atlantic. The story had caught on. It was a story not just about a poor devil, a nobody, marooned on an iceberg, but the son of Polar Jones, who had been famous in his day, and whose death had been a long-standing mystery since the schooner on which

This story began in last week's Argosy

he had taken Colonel Adams to the Arctic in 1917 had disappeared with all aboard.

So the story of Jones, son of Polar Jones, picked off an iceberg, had taken hold, was building circulation, and was therefore going to get plenty of attention from the press, particularly since it was rumored Jones himself was a pretty odd specimen.

Start it now—this amazing novel of the man who astonished America

The story had good color, too. Polyphemus Ward, Jones' rescuer, was one of the richest men alive; and in his time had socked more photographers and broken more cameras than any other industrial Merlin. That didn't make the press any less gleeful about smearing his glower on the front pages now that it had the chance.

And Polyphemus Ward's big yacht was good camera fodder. The craft was the most luxurious thing afloat, widely known, and daily stories about the floating château were sure to sell a lot of papers to the gentry on the left, who could wave them under the noses of friends and shout: "Look at Polyphemus Ward's yacht! Down with the rich!"

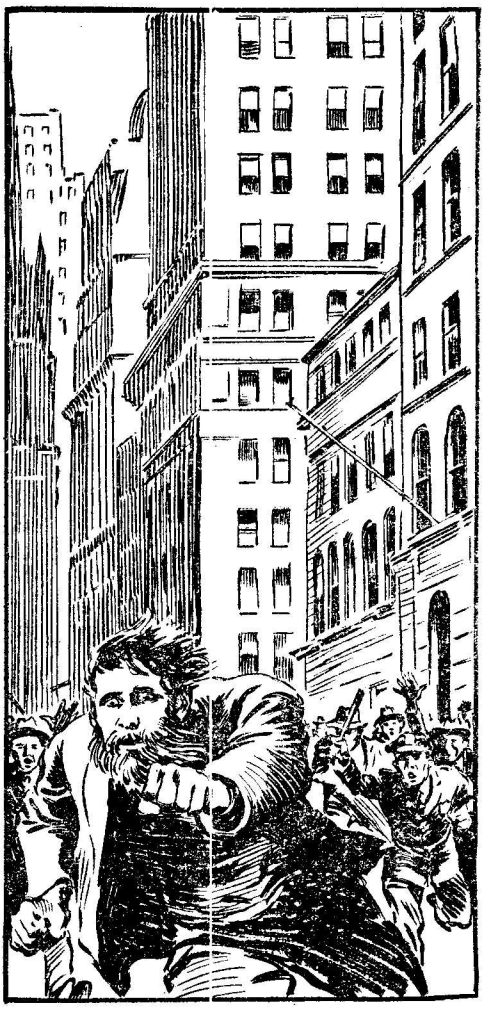
ABOARD Ward's yacht, the center of all the commotion slept poorly. Usually he placed himself on the berth —he'd never ceased to marvel at the comfort of mattresses—and it required only one deep sigh to put him to sleep. This morning he was pitching, tossing, turning, grinning, groaning, frowning, smiling, and gazing vapidly at nothing. Jones was experiencing some of civilized man's troubles. He had, in fact, both the big ones. He had money trouble, and he had woman trouble.

A slight noise caused Jones to open one eye. It was inkish in his stateroom. Then a patch of shadow caught his eye. It was near the door.

Some one was after Polyphemus Ward's hundred thousand dollars, Jones realized. He had never encountered a thief. About the only thing he knew was the definition of the word thief in the big dictionary he'd read on the island.

"I say," he remarked, "that money is in my custody." Jones strung his words together carefully at all times.

The big shadow flew toward Jones. A hand reached out to grab him and



out of it stuck a sliver of steel—a knife blade. And so Jones was having his first fight with a man.

It was a grim desperate encounter without Queensbury courtesy, or rules.

Jones spun, met the rush with his feet. He exerted force. The assailant, caught in the middle, flew back. But the knife came down and shaved skin off Jones' leg.

Jones came out of the berth. Having spent his life where nights were six months long, he had probably moved around more in the dark than several generations of average citizens.

He grabbed the knife-wrist, lunged with it against the wall. The blade entered the wood and broke at the hilt. Jones got a wallop on the back. It started him coughing. A foot crunched his bare toes; the foe grabbed Jones' remarkable red beard and Jones howled.

Jones picked up his opponent bodily, threw him at the other wall. Bulkhead panels cracked. A picture jumped off the wall.

That decided the fight.

The other man staggered up, dazed, scared, took a run and leap, got through the door, and sped away. Jones, jumping after him, tripped over a chair, fell and saw a whole constellation. Arising, Jones stumbled down the passage. But the other had taken a lead, and was not to be found.

Jones was returning to his cabin when Funny Pegger turned the lights on in the corridor.

Funny Pegger's stateroom was located close to the one inhabited by Jones, and he had heard the uproar. Pegger stared at Jones accusingly. "You have been," said Funny Pegger, "taking another walk without any clothes."

"I should hesitate," Jones said breathlessly, "to dismiss my recent exertions as a mere walk."

FUNNY PEGGER followed Jones into the stateroom and stared at the knife blade sticking in the wall. He popped his eyes at Jones' damaged leg.

"For the love of little lambs! What happened?"

"I awakened," explained Jones, "to find I had a visitor. I accosted him, and without more ado, he sprang upon me."

"You mean he tried to kill you?"

"I rather got that impression," Jones admitted.

"Great blazes! Let's get a hunt started. What did he look like? Who was he?

"I am afraid," Jones explained, "that there is no use searching. I could not describe him because, unfortunately, it was too dark to see him very well."

Funny Pegger threw up his hands. "What was he after?"

"Why the—" Jones stopped. He remembered that nobody was to know about the hundred thousand dollars because old Polyphemus Ward was afraid they would think he had gone crazy.

"Well," said Funny Pegger, "what was he after?"

"I—cannot say," Jones said uncomfortably.

"Your lying," said Funny Pegger, "will improve with practice." He looked around the stateroom, lifting strewn blankets, scrutinizing the knife blade and examining the hilt which was still wrapped with a flannel cloth.

Jones' assailant had been cautious.

"No fingerprints," he remarked. "In fact, no clues at all. Look here, Jones, did you have much of a fight?"

"There was some difficulty before it was settled."

"What you needed," said Funny Pegger, "was a western settler."

"A western settler?"

"The contents of a six-shooter,"

said Funny Pegger, the inveterate gag man.

The two men set about straightening up the stateroom. Jones put the blankets back in place, at the same time making sure the hundred thousand dollars was concealed.

"You've got Atlas stopped," he remarked.

"Atlas," said Jones, puzzled, "was the Titan son of Iapetus and Clymene; he warred against Zeus, and as a punishment was forced to support the heavens on his head and hands. I fail to detect any similarity."

"No?" Funny Pegger grinned. "I might point out you seem to be supporting some trouble on your hands."

"You refer to the recent raid?"

"I also refer to the fact that I would like to know what your raider wanted."

"I do not choose to explain," Jones said.

"I'm your friend."

"I know that," Jones said sincerely. "But I still do not choose to explain."

Funny Pegger shook his head slowly as he stared at Jones. "Okay," he said. "You can think of more ways of sticking your neck out."

"I—sticking my neck out?"

"Laying yourself open."

Jones was bewildered.

"There was a library on my father's schooner when it was shipwrecked in 1917, and by studying the books diligently I hoped to fit myself to cope with the outer world, if I ever succeeded in reaching it. Oh—I did not imagine the English language would change in twenty years so extensively that I could not understand it at times."

"I am referring," said Funny Pegger, "to Glacia."

"Er—to be sure." Jones colored warmly. "The wow."

Funny Pegger shivered dramatically. "You said it."

"You hinted," said Jones with enthusiasm," that she had qualities, and I am beginning to agree. On that point, our minds seem to run in the same path."

"All great minds run in the same path."

"Er—possibly."

"But so do little pigs."

Jones frowned. "I seem to detect a satirical note."

"I like women," said Funny Pegger, "but I like toast and coffee, too—and I don't like them cold."

"Cold?"

"Glacia," said Funny Pegger, "is a piece of calculating ice. She's out to grab off a rich guy. She's got no more money than a grasshopper has pants. Her mother, the countess, was a sap heiress who married a foreign title, and he blew all her shekels for her. Glacia is out for heavy sugar, and make no mistake about that."

Funny sighed. "What floors me is the play she started making for you last night. Until then you were as popular with her as Mussolini is with Ethiopians. All of a sudden she began to purr and show you her teeth. It gets me."

"I did seem to detect a change," Jones confessed.

"You've never seen a woman before." Funny Pegger contemplated Jones. "God made the earth, and rested. God made man, and rested. Then God made woman, and neither man nor earth has had a minute of rest since. All I can say, Jones, is that you'll learn. You'll learn."

"I am beginning to think," said Jones, "that I shall be enthusiastic about this learning."

Funny Pegger groaned, "Time wasted," he muttered. "Let's get some sleep. Big day ahead tomorrow. We reach New York." He

steppped to the door. "That is, if you can get any sleep after what's happened. How's your iron?"

"Iron?" Jones didn't understand. "Iron is a malleable, ductile, readily oxidized silver white metallic element with an atomic weight of 55.84, and rarely found native except in meteorites. It's melting point is 1530 Centigrade, its specific gravity varies between 7.86 and 8.14, while its weight is 491.508 pounds per cubic foot. The content of iron in the human body is—"

"Ample, in your case, I hope." Funny Pegger grinned. "Let it ride. I'm hitting the hay. By the way, how did your visitor get in? How'd he unlock the door?"

"The door," Jones explained, "wasn't locked."

"Why not?"

"I didn't know how.'

Funny Pegger swallowed.

"You slay me, Jones! You know the specific gravity of iron and the names of the papa and mama of Atlas, but you don't know how to lock a door." Funny Pegger shook his head. "Here, I'll show you. You use a key. That's it on the dresser.'

"I wondered," remarked Jones, "what that bit of metal was for."

CHAPTER VIII

KETTLES ON TO BOIL

THE iron in Jones fell down on the job. He lay on the berth intending to sleep, but the unusual turmoil inside him kept him wide awake. He was realizing that his fellow man in New York was going to regard him as a strange kind of a bug.

To be sure, the attitude was mutual, as Jones already considered his fellow man, judging by those he had so far met, a rather unique style of goods, but this might be a case of the raindrop calling the ocean wet, since it was a minority opinion. If anyone was an unusual article, it was conceivably himself, but he had the good sense not to feel inferior about it, on the theory that no man need feel inferior when he has done his best, because, although some men get farther than others, some men do not have as many obstacles to overcome as others.

His fellow man baffled Jones. He couldn't quite make him out, and wondered if he should be uneasy—the people he had met struck him as being eccentric, which meant that either they or Jones belonged to the category Funny Pegger described as screwballs.

Polyphemus Ward particularly baffled him. Being a self-made man, Ward should also be a wise man, the two things usually going hand in hand, or so the books said. But Ward had handed Jones, a comparative stranger, a hundred one-thousand-dollar bills to give away.

It made Jones wonder who was screwball.

Jones felt under the mattress. The sheaf of thousand-dollar greenbacks was still there. "I am to give that," Jones reminded himself aloud, "to needy persons, no more than a thousand to a person." He shrugged. "Oh, well, it should be easy."

It was indicative of his lack of experience with money—the things it would buy, and the mad capers men cut to get it—that his mind did not dwell in more than a passing way on the prospects of receiving a million outright, "to keep you honest," as old Polyphemus Ward said.

Jones did rather like the idea of playing angel to the needy. He couldn't think of anything more desirable. He went to sleep and dreamed rosily about a pleasant future.

But Lyman Lee did not sleep.

He sat in his cabin, wearing cream silk pajamas and a matching cream silk dressing gown and stuck cigarettes in a long holder and smoked them up rapidly. On a table were a pencil and sheets of paper which he had covered with stars, crosses, funny faces and other doodlings. A miserable scowl was on Lyman Lee's good-looking face, a blacker funk behind it.

He had the nerves of an oyster, so he had not been scared at any time, except for a bad moment or two after he had entered Jones' cabin with the knife, and discovered Jones could get around like a circus acrobat. It had been too dark for Jones to recognize him, so he was not worrying about that.

He knew, now, that he should not personally have tried to take care of Jones and the hundred thousand dollars, and he was irked at himself for being impulsive. He usually farmed out his dirty work, but there was no one on the yacht whom he could trust with the job, so he had tried himself.

He had tried and failed.

Lyman Lee had not changed his mind. He still felt robbed. He had worked with efficiency for years for old Polyphemus Ward; he knew as much concerning the Ward business as Polyphemus Ward, and he couldn't see the sense of the Ward millions being administered to charity by Jones.

Lyman Lee had expected the job. He had dedicated his life to getting it, having spent in his imagination the million that Polyphemus Ward was going to give the administrator of the wealth to keep him honest, purchasing, in his thoughts, a Rolls Royce, a penthouse, a flashy yacht, maybe a racing stable—everything he'd ever wanted.

Now they were gone.

Suddenly, Lyman Lee took a fresh sheet of papper and wrote:

PAUL SHEVINSKY
72 RITZ LANE
NEW YORK CITY

He chewed at the inside of his lower lip while he consulted a small codebook and composed a radiogram.

Paul Shevinsky was the man to take Jones over. Paul was Lyman Lee's lawyer, but only the two of them knew that. Paul had a number of clients no one else knew about, a few of them in penitentiaries, but not as many as would have been if it hadn't been for Paul Shevinsky. When he heard about Jones, Shevinsky would be sick, too, because he had looked forward to administering the Ward millions with fully as much expectation as Lyman Lee.

A kind of partnership existed between the two of them dimly resembling a collaboration of two pirates, an arrangement which persisted because Lee respected the shyster lawyer's connections with the most talented gentry of crookdom, and because Shevinsky had a wholesome awe for anyone with the reptilian sort of brain that Lyman Lee possessed.

The message Lyman Lee put into code read:

THE JONES OF THE ICEBERG HAS BEEN GIVEN ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND-DOLLAR BILLS TO GIVE TO NEEDY PERSONS. IF HE DOES A GOOD JOB POLYPHEMUS WARD INTENDS TO HAVE HIM ADMINISTER WARD FORTUNE TO CHARITY. SUGGEST YOU THINK OF SOMETHING.

He took this to the radio room and had it transmitted. Within an hour, there was an answer, which he decoded.

HAVE THOUGHT OF THIS: SOMEBODY HAS GONE CRAZY.

Lyman Lee scowled and replied:

IT IS ON THE LEVEL.

To which, in short order, came a response:

HOW ABOUT PROVING JONES INSANE AND HAVING HIM COMMITTED STOP JUDGING FROM NEWSPAPER STORIES, CAN DO.

Lyman Lee contemplated the desk top for a time, then coded instructions.

GO AHEAD AND PROVE JONES NUTS. SOMETHING MIGHT ALSO BE DONE ABOUT THE GERMAN LINER CAPTAIN WHOM JONES SHOT IN LEG.

Having sent that, Lyman Lee took a large drink of whisky and went to bed. He felt better.

JONES greeted the dawn with vim, vigor and pleasant delusions about the future, since this was the day of days when they would reach New York, when he would see his first skyscraper, look at his first automobile, perhaps partake of his first ice cream soda.

Jones dressed in his borrowed clothes, combed his long red hair, carefully, untangled his impressive red beard, made two rounds of the deck, relishing the salty tang of the morning air, and entered the dining room to dispose of bacon and eggs. Next, he went in search of Polyphemus Ward. He wanted to clarify a detail or two that had been bothering him. It was a clear morning, not a cloud, with the temperature pleasantly cool for July, and blue vastness of the sea flung away to the horizon was made mysterious by smoke from an occasional steamer. The yacht was near enough New York to encounter sea traffic

Polyphemus Ward sat at a table on the sun deck and scowled at a bromo. The financial tycoon wore old sneakers, flannel trousers, furry tweed coat, and a towel tucked in around his hippo neck. Jones was reminded of a picture of a rhinoceros he had seen in a book, labeled: "Male of the species."

"Good morning," Jones ventured.

"What do you want?" asked the moneybags.

"I—er—how are you this morning?"

"What do you care?" growled the financial power. "You're not a doctor."

If this is one of the world's richest and most astute men, Jones reflected, I wonder what the others will be like.

"A crab," Jones remarked aloud, "is a crustacean belonging to the order of Decapoda, or to suborder Brachyura, and also to the group Anomura which are known as hermit crabs, or purse crabs. They can walk in any direction without turning."

"Are you," Polyphemus Ward inquired acidly, "referring to me?"

"Well, the remark occurred to me."

"Take your remarks," Polyphemus Ward requested, "a long way away from me. You've got your job. I don't want to see anything more of you until you've done it. Or failed to do it. I don't want to be bothered. Understand?"

"There is a matter I wished to discuss," Jones replied thoughtfully. "You see, I have slept on your proposition and—"

"Look here now, Jones. You can't back out!"

"On the contrary," said Jones, "I am more enthusiastic. The prospect of using a hundred thousand dollars to help the needy intrigues me. But a point or two needs to be clarified."

"What point or two?"

"First, is there a time limit?"

"Thirty days."

"Excellent. A month should be ample. Thank you for being so generous."

"What's the other point?"

"Ah—I lack funds for personal operations."

"Broke, eh?"

"I am without financial assets."

"And you want to know if charity begins at home?"

"To tell the truth," said Jones, "that hadn't occurred to me. But it's a thought."

"No." Polyphemus Ward slammed the table. "Every cent of the hundred thousand goes to needy people."

"But if I become needy myself? I might, you know."

"Your own hard luck."

"It seems to me that you are endeavoring to make this as difficult as possible."

"Yes. That's the idea. It's all a test of your judgment. You take receipts for every cent of this money. And I'll have detectives investigate and see whether you picked needy people."

"I understand that perfectly," Jones replied. "Also, I am to tell no one about this."

"You bet you're not."

"Ummm."

"If you can't say anything but, 'Ummm,' you can get out of here!"

JONES strolled away and shortly found himself collared by Funny Pegger. Funny chuckled. "I noticed you locking horns with the bull of the woods."

"You refer to Polyphemus Ward?"

"How'd you get along with him? He give you the geological survey?"

"I—the what?"

"The stony stare."

"He spoke rather tersely," Jones confessed.

"The old reprobate is as tight with words as he is with money."

"I don't believe I understand."

"Skip it." Funny Pegger grasped Jones' arm. "You and I have some talking to do," and moved to two deck chairs.

"I've been consulting booking agents by radio," Funny explained. "Fixing it up for you."

"But I do not wish to buy any books. And I certainly have none to sell."

"No, no. These guys book you for theater and radio jobs. Jones, you're going to land on the velvet."

"Velvet?"

"In the dough.'

"Dough," said Jones, puzzled, "derives from the Icelandic *deig,* or possibly the Sanskrit *dih,* meaning to smear, and means a mass of moist flour not yet baked. Er—I fail to perceive the connection."

"All right, all right, I'll put it the classic way. Mr. Jones, I have communicated with the representatives of a radio hookup, a vaudeville organization, and a tabloid newspaper, all of whom agree to pay you substantial sums for your services."

"Pay me for what?"

"Oh, you can tell them how you speared seals for a living on the island."

"My problem," said Jones, "is not to make money, but get rid of it."

"What? What's that?"

Jones said hurriedly, "I mean—thank you very much. I—er—appreciate your efforts in my behalf, which I shall have to decline."

"Decline?"

"Yes. Thank you."

Funny Pegger groaned. "You can't do this! You can't let me down."

Jones considered the point. "I do not see how I am letting you down, as you put it."

"You don't, eh? You're taking money

out of my pocket, that's what you're doing. You're gypping your manager out of his cut."

"Manager?"

"I was coming to that," Funny Pegger explained. "You need a manager. Look around. Who do you see? Me. Who's the best manager you could get? Me. Who's the best friend you've got?"

"You, I believe," Jones said sincerely. "Check."

"Nevertheless," Jones declared firmly, "I'll have to insist on postponing decision on this matter."

Jones was uncomfortable. He liked Funny and ordinarily would have been pleased to work with him. But that was hardly advisable now. For, although Jones was sure it would be simple to dispose of a hundred thousand dollars, to be safe, he'd thought of devoting the first few days exclusively to the matter. A week at the most.

"By the way," announced Funny Pegger, "there's another little thing."

"I—thing?"

"The German liner captain you shot in the leg."

"Yes, I remember," said Jones. "As I explained, that was an error. I thought the World War was still in progress."

"It was an error all right. The German captain has sworn out a warrant for your arrest when you hit New York."

"I believe you previously mentioned that complication."

"The complication," said Funny Pegger, "has had pups."

"Pups?"

"Not only are you to be arrested, but they're gonna put you in the booby-hatch."

"Gracious! You mean an institution for the insane?"

"That's it. I understand some lawyer named Paul Shevinsky popped up this morning and volunteered to do the job."

"Paul—Paul Shevinsky."

"You see you have friends ashore."

"I do not know anyone named Paul Shevinsky."

"That," said Funny Pegger, "makes it one of those things."

"How did you learn this?"

"The radio. A wonderful invention." Funny Pegger added grimly. "And don't underestimate this Shevinsky. He's big-time stuff, and his middle name is shyster. I asked some of my newspaper pals about him. Shevinsky should have been barred from law practice long ago. But he's slick. You're practically occupying a straitjacket right now."

"But I'm not insane!" Jones gasped.

"You'd better practice saying it," advised Funny Pegger. "With a good deal of conviction. I hope the judge believes you."

JONES walked gloomily to the upper deck to be alone and ponder. He imagined jails were unpleasant places. Likewise, he had no desire to visit, in the capacity of inmate, any institution for the irrational. Not ever to oblige an unknown lawyer named Paul Shevinsky.

Paul Shevinsky—why on earth should a perfect stranger volunteer to prove he was mentally sub par? It wasn't logical. Jones had been carefully building his knowledge of men, and he had found a queer brick; he had found a number of odd pieces of masonry so far, but Paul Shevinsky was far the oddest.

Jones brooded.

Glacia appeared on the upper deck, glancing about as though in search of something. Apparently it was Jones, for she came toward him, looking crisp, bright and altogether beautiful.

"Bad boy!" she said gaily. "You've been avoiding me."

"Er—not at all."

"You darling, I've been looking everywhere for you."

"You have?"

"Everywhere, simply everywhere! I even imagined you might have fallen overboard. My heart almost stopped."

"Oh, did it?" Jones said, experiencing a glow.

"Absolutely," said Glacia fondly. "Just think! I wouldn't have seen you again, ever. Not ever." She turned her wide eyes up to him. "I don't think I could have stood it."

"Not actually!" gulped Jones.

"I am sure," said Glacia dramatically, "that I couldn't. Life would have been empty. Just a shell!"

"Indeed!"

"Life would have been a mockery!"

"Er—"

"And not worth the candle!"

"I—ah—see," said Jones.

He didn't. Not exactly. Yesterday he had been as popular as an ant in Glacia's consommé, but last night she had taken a great interest in him. The shift was a little to fast for Jones. However, he was warmed by it.

"Poor boy." Glacia slipped her arm in his. "I've heard about your trouble."

"Er—you mean the matter of the captain's leg?"

"Yes. The other, too. That horrible lawyer." Glacia patted his hand comfortingly. "But don't you worry. I'm going to help you."

Glacia being comforting would melt the heart of a sheik with a large harem, and what it did to Jones, whose experience with the female of the species was limited, was something indescribable.

"I—ah—" was the best he could do.

"You sweet, mistreated boy," Glacia purred.

There is, in every critical situation, a point where action, not words, is called for. Such an occasion was here. It was powerful. It was compelling. By some natural impulse, Jones found his arms around Glacia, and discovered that his lips were against hers. The following ten seconds were so momentous that, as soon as he could organize, he released Glacia and stepped back.

"Goodness!" he exclaimed. For some moments, bells continued to ring and things went up and down.

"Darling," said Glacia, "darling, it was all right for you to do that."

"I—the explosion again!" gasped Jones.

There was silence. Glacia appeared to be waiting for something.

"Aren't you," she asked, "going to continue?"

"Continue?"

"And ask me if we are engaged, silly."

"Are we?" Jones asked wildly.

"What a cute way of asking me." Glacia said warmly. "Of course we are."

Jones was bewildered.

"Engaged," he gulped, "to be married?"

"You darling! Of course!"

Jones opened his mouth to get out that she had wrongly interpreted his words, but Glacia kissed him, and that fixed that.

There was a small animal of caution trying to warn Jones, but the kiss drove it scurrying away.

"You'll come to live at our apartment," Glacia informed Jones. Now that she had staked out her gold mine, Glacia certainly had no intentions of letting it, so to speak, run around loose.

"But—would that be proper?"

"Mother will chaperon us," Glacia explained.

"I—I'd rather not. I have some business to transact," he added desperately.

Glacia's smile sweetened. "I'm going to help you, darling."

Jones colored unconfortably, recollecting he had promised old Polyphemus Ward not to tell anybody about the hundred thousand.

CHAPTER IX

INNOCENCE AT LARGE

JONES watched Glacia's triumphant departure, and felt inclined to listen for the thunder that follows lightning. He was engaged. *Whang!* Just like that.

He did not believe he felt quite as he should. He had just acquired a mate, or at least been given a breathtaking shove in that direction, and he imagined such an event should be an occasion of joy and dancing on the decks. He felt sinkish.

He felt trapped.

He began to experience a doubt that was a sort of spike-tailed devil. Soon there was to be a herd of them.

Jones had just sampled another privilege of the human male—he'd been treated to the whole repertory by a scheming woman who was also beautiful, but like many men who get taken, he did not have a true perspective. He could not conceive that a woman had roped him. He thought it had just happened. There was innate chivalry in Jones, which was unfortunate, because there seems to be something about chivalry that convinces a man that female hearts are universally pure. This, unfortunately, works out rather badly sometimes.

The yacht hardly rolled, the sea was so calm, and there was a steady sighing sound as the bow cut water and threw it aside, leaving a long wedge of wake stretching out behind, widening until it blended with the horizon. Directly ahead appeared the shabby-looking vessel which was the Ambrose Lightship, the sea-signboard that marks the entrance to New York's harbor. The yacht ploughed on, picked up a lane of buoys marking Ambrose Channel. Coney Island was on the right and Sandy Hook on the left, and directly ahead was the Statue of Liberty, carrying the torch.

Funny Pegger appeared beside Jones. Jones pointed at Liberty. "That, I presume," said Jones, "is the Statue of Liberty."

Funny Pegger nodded.

"Er—what are those big buildings in the background?"

"Those," explained Funny Pegger, "are known in the vernacular as skyscrapers."

Jones experienced a sensation of shrinking, of becoming unimportant. Although he was not aware of it, he was looking at one of the most impressive sights in the world.

Captains of incoming liners frequently remark on a strange silence which grips their passengers as they are confronted with the skyscrapers on the lower end of Manhattan Island.

"You wait here until I come for you," directed Funny Pegger. "As your manager, I've arranged a bang-up welcome for you."

Jones entered into the formality of quarantine-inspection with genuine pleasure. Their little tugs, black as water beetles, came out to push with their noses against the hull of the yacht, turning her around and easing her into a long green-shedded wharf near the foot of Wall Street. Husky sailors flung heaving lines, long light lines with a lump of lead enclosed in a Turks head knot on the end. The heaving lines were used to drag out the hawsers with loops spliced in the ends to drop over pilings. Men sweated the lines tight, put out fenders and rub-boards, set up

gangplanks, and four businesslike gentlemen in trim uniforms marched up the gangplank. The latter were the U. S. Customs agents.

Automobile horns bleated on Front Street, nearby. Tugs tooted. Steamer whistles moaned. Newsboys shouted, stevedores hollered, people on the dock squealed at friends on the yacht. People ran, yelled. A seaplane came from the seadrome near the foot of Wall Street, scudded out on the harbor, lifted off the water, motor bawling. A swarm of men collected at the shore end of the gangplank. The men carried cameras, microphones, notebooks.

"Bring on Jones!" shouted the newspaper and newsreel men.

"Soon as the customs go through our pockets," yelled Funny Pegger, "I'll lead him to slaughter."

Jones passed a hand across his forehead. There was perspiration. Slaughter struck him as the appropriate word. He became aware of a strange feeling that was growing, and he suddenly wished he could leave all this confusion like the seaplane had left the water. He didn't like this excitement; it confused him. He had lived, in the past, a life of absolute aloneness; everything that he had done, he had accomplished alone.

In the face of the tumult around him, his instinctive reaction was that he wanted to solve his problems as an individual. His job was not to become a celebrity—it was to give away one hundred thousand-dollars in bills. He didn't want Funny Pegger to manage him. He didn't want to marry anybody yet, including Glacia. What he did want, he realized all of a sudden, was to work alone, as he was accustomed to.

One of the springlines which held the yacht to the dock terminated at a big cleat near where Jones stood close to the stern, and Jones' eye followed this down to the dock while the seed of an idea germinated, grew and flowered in his mind, all in the space of a few seconds.

Jones obeyed an overpowering impulse. He slid down the rope to the dock.

ONE of the newspapermen, seeing Jones, pointed and emitted a shout. Funny Pegger craned his neck. "Jones! Hey, what the blazes?" Jones commenced running.

"Come back here!" Funny Pegger howled. "Hey!... He's running away! *Jones!* I'm your manager! Stop him! Stop Jones!"

Stop Jones? Not if he could help it! He put back his head and stepped out. The newspapermen angled to cut him off, but they didn't make it.

Out into Front Street, Jones dashed. He took a turn to the right, a turn to the left. He got out and traveled in the middle of the street, where there was plenty of room. Rather sooner than he expected, the sounds of pursuit were lost.

He could communicate with Funny Pegger later, after he had disposed of the hundred thousand.

Jones proceeded up the middle of New York streets with enthusiasm, vigor at high level, his eye bright, and began looking around for a needy man. Came a rattling noise behind him, and a screech. A loud toot followed. Jones turned curiously and found himself confronted by a large mechanical device, equipped with wheels, two headlights, and a sloping glass window, from behind which an irate stranger leaned.

"Whatta d'you think this is?" the motorist inquired

Jones contemplated the mechanical device.

"Automobile," he hazarded. "A self-propelled vehicle suitable for use on

street or roadway, usually propelled by internal combustion engines consuming inflammable or volatile fluids, such as naphtha, gasoline, petrol or even alcohol."

The motorist blinked. "Ya wanna get run over?"

Jones was astonished "No," he said. "Certainly not."

"Then whatcha walkin' in middle of the street for?"

Jones considered. "Am I to understand there is something incorrect about my behavior as a pedestrian?"

"For the luvva mud!" sputtered the motorist. "What is this, anyhow?" But he evidently had business more pressing than arguing with a red-bearded psychotic, because he clashed gears, tooted his horn, and drove around Jones, who stood in the middle of the street and considered the departing vehicle in some puzzlement.

It had seemed to him that there was more elbow room in the street, and therefore that was the sensible place to walk. It wasn't apparently. He was willing to learn. He transferred his course to the sidewalk and proceeded on his search for a needy man.

Jones noticed that people were turning to look at him. Occasionally they bumped into each other in their absorption. And they said such things as: "Did you see *that?*" Or: "Santa Claus has his whiskers sunburned." Another favorite crack seemed to be: "His girl must have given him a necktie for Christmas." Jones commenced to feel uncomfortable. The only visible difference between himself and the other men was that they didn't have long red hair and a remarkably fiery beard. But even so...

However, interest was not one-sided, for Jones was making elaborate observations of the passersby. He felt let down. Some of the people he saw looked worried, even unhealthy, and they all seemed to be in an unnecessary hurry. Jones wondered if making a living was as hard as all that.

A mound of reddish earth stood near the sidewalk. On this sat a man attired in ragged, extremely grimy khaki pants and a shirt which was in danger of falling apart. The man's face was remarkably dirty.

As Jones saw the individual, he was suddenly reminded that his immediate mission was not to observe humanity, but to distribute money. Here was a man who looked needy.

"Er—good morning," Jones began.

The man glanced up, not unpleasantly. "H'yah," he said.

"I beg your pardon," Jones said. "It is my intention to ask you—ah—rather an embarrassing question."

"About money?"

"Why, how did you know?" asked Jones, puzzled.

"A touch, ah?" The man considered, then reached into a grimy pocket, fished out a fifty-cent piece, which he extended. "Here you are, pal."

"Are you," asked Jones, "giving me that?"

"Sure."

"Gracious!" Jones swallowed. "There is, I am afraid, a misunderstanding. My intention was not to solicit alms, but to distribute them."

"You mean," said the other, "that you were gonna give me dough."

"Dough?"

"Were you gonna pass me a shekel?"

"The shekel," Jones replied, "was the ancient money unit of Babylonia and Phoenicia, as well as the Hebrews, the Hebrew shekel being of gold with a weight of 252 2-3 grains, and valued at ten dollars and eighty-eight cents. It was not used prior to the year 139 B. C., and I do not believe it is used as an American medium of exchange."

"What," asked the man, "are you driving at?"

"I was defining the shekel."

"*What,*" asked the man in a louder voice, "*are you driving at?*"

Jones was confused.

"I had the impression," he explained, "that you were a needy man."

"Needy?" the other looked indignant. "Buddy, I'm a sandhog. I get twenty bucks a day for digging in this tunnel down under me. I wouldn't change places with Henry Ford, J. P. Morgan, or Polyphemus Ward."

"I perceive that I have made an error," Jones announced. "Ah—good morning, and thank you."

With which, Jones took as dignified a departure as he could manage. Apparently you couldn't tell a needy person by looking at him.

He progressed a few blocks and a voice accosted him. "Spare a dime for a cup-a-cauffee, mister?"

Jones examined a short, seedy man who needed a shave, a bath, and a trip to a dry-cleaners'.

"Are you soliciting alms?" Jones inquired.

"No. I'm just askin' for a dime, mister."

"You are a needy individual?"

"Mister, I ain't eat since yesterday," mumbled the other.

"Excellent!" Jones was elated. "Just a moment, please," he said. He produced his sheaf of bills, shucked one off the top and presented it to the needy man.

The man seized the bill avidly, and started to depart.

"Wait, if you please," Jones said in haste. "It is essential that I secure your name and address and a few facts about yourself. Merely routine data for a record."

The man stopped. He happened to glance a second time at the bill. His eyes popped.

"A grand!" he exploded.

The man turned the piece of currency over to scrutinize the other side. "Jeepers creepers!" He peered at Jones suspiciously.

"Is this the McCoy?" he gulped.

"I didn't," Jones replied, "know that individual pieces of currency had names. I am sure I do not know whether that one is named McCoy."

The man flung the bill at Jones.

"I ain't gettin' roped in on no gag!" he snarled. He took a nervous and rapid departure.

CHAPTER X

ALL ABOUT MONEY

WITH an air of dignity, which was entirely synthetic, Jones retrieved the thousand-dollar note. He was confused, and further than that, depressed, for it seemed that he had started out confidently to climb a mountain that was slicker than he had anticipated.

Lifting his eyes, he saw a clock, which told him he had been ashore more than hour and involuntarily, he did some mental arithmetic—he'd allotted a week to disposing of the money, which meant six working days. He would, therefore, have to give away sixteen thousand, six hundred sixty-six dollars and some odd cents as a daily quota, or if he worked an eight-hour day, he had to give away slightly in excess of two thousand dollars an hour.

These statistics made him suspect a hundred thousand might be a lot of money.

The size of the bill must have frightened away his last prospect. The thing, then, was reduce the bills to smaller denominations.

He set out walking rapidly, with a

definite objective—a bank. He covered a few blocks, and found one.

It was a cold-looking structure with shiny brass doors. Jones entered and at once noticed that two men in gray uniforms were giving him attention. He did not know they were bank guards, nor was he aware that a bomb exploded in Wall Street in 1920, killed thirty persons, injured two hundred, did two millions damage, and that ever since this event Wall Street has been jittery about men with whiskers.

Jones moved to a grille, where a well-dressed young man surveyed him coolly.

"Ah—I wish some money changed."

The teller frowned. However, New York is a city of strange people and the financial district has its share, so the bank cashier decided to think nothing of it.

Jones produced one hundred thousand dollars. He laid the roll on the black marble slab in front of the window. "It is my wish," he stated, "to have these reduced to smaller denominations."

The well-dressed young man on the other side of the bars was accustomed to handling money, and a hundred thousand dollars would not have startled him, ordinarily. However, Jones was very whiskered, and the bills looked new enough to be counterfeits, and the bank had a motto: Be cautious.

The teller was cautious.

"If you don't mind," said the teller, "I shall call an officer."

Jones was shocked. "Officer?"

"Yes."

"I would prefer," said Jones firmly, "that you do not do that."

Jones had heard Funny Pegger refer to policemen as officers. And he remembered, with an unpleasant feeling, that the police wished to arrest him for shooting the German liner captain in the leg.

The bank teller frowned. "You do not wish me to call an officer?"

"No."

"It will only take a moment."

"No," Jones said stubbornly.

"Nevertheless," said the teller, "I shall have to call one of our officers." With which, he pressed a button.

Jones knew what happened when you pressed buttons. The servants on the yachts had been summoned in that fashion. Without more ado, he reached for the hundred thousand.

Jones' excitement convinced the banker something was amiss. He decided he was dealing with a crook trying to pass counterfeits. He snatched the money for evidence.

It was no time for ceremony. Jones grabbed the cage, piled over the top, seized the money. The teller showed fight. Jones gave that man a shove which turned him end over end. Then Jones bounded out of the cage.

An alarm bell rang. Men shouted. Jones dashed for the door, reached it, raced down the street. Looking back, he saw the bank guards pursuing him, guns in their hands; but they were well-trained and did not shoot because of the danger to pedestrians.

Jones put back his head and stepped out. Every time he came to a street intersection, he turned.

Having distanced his pursuers, he trotted into an alley, sat down on an ashcan and panted for breath.

FASHIONING the thousand-dollar bills into a compact roll, he stowed them in a pocket. He was actually relieved to get them out of sight. They represented a bull he held by the tail.

"Gracious!" he remarked gloomily.

Jones had been accustomed to dealing with factors which were predictable, things which did about what was expected of them, like a seal or walrus,

for instance, that could be depended on to flee when scared, and fight when cornered.

Man was a different article. The shabbiest looking one had money, one who needed money wouldn't take any as a gift, and the bank that was in business to change money wouldn't do so.

Jones needed advice. A mentor was his immediate requirement. Someone he could consult.

Funny Pegger occurred to him naturally. Jones decided to find Funny Pegger.

As he walked along, Jones noticed a pole which bore red and white stripes, and peering through the window of the place of business it marked, got an inspiration. He entered the barber shop, seated himself in a white chair and leaned back.

"I wish," he advised, "to dispense with a considerable portion of my hirsute adornment."

The barber pondered.

"Shave and haircut, you mean?"

"Exactly. I desire to look like other men."

The barber surveyed his customer. "With that build, you'll never make the grade."

"I fail to see why not," Jones responded.

"You wouldn't be, now, one of them bearded wrestlers, like Man-mountain Dean?"

"Please," said Jones, "start operations."

The barber picked up his clippers and a comb. About to take first cut, he drew back and grinned in admiration.

"Mister," he said, "we couldn't, now, make a deal."

"Deal?"

"I never saw whiskers like them. Now, no offense, you understand. But I'd like to have such whiskers to put in my window. Kind of a display. I might, maybe, shave you for nothing if you'd give me the whiskers."

"Er—would you make a telephone call or two for me, also?"

"Why, sure."

"I am very anxious," Jones explained, "to find a man named Funny Pegger. He told me he had a wide acquaintance among newspapermen, so I presume you might locate him by calling some reporters."

"Then, it's a deal."

"It is," said Jones, "a transaction."

The scissors snipped.

JONES surveyed the results. He saw a firm face with a long jaw, flat cheeks, well-shaped lips, high forehead over serious blue eyes. There was a lean impression generally. Jones was more satisfied than he had expected to be. His face had changed considerably since his last look at it.

"What beats me," said the barber, "is why you let a good-looking phizz like that get covered up with hair."

"You," asked Jones, "approve of it?"

"Approve? Pal, I wish we could trade."

"Er—indeed?"

"You've got Robert Taylor stopped. And Gable—phooey!"

"Who," Jones inquired, "are those gentlemen?"

The barber grinned. "Don't kid me. Now that you've had an unveiling, I can see you'll have your pick of the girls."

"You think so?" Jones asked thoughtfully.

"You'll have to club 'em away with a stick."

"I should dislike," Jones said, "to do that."

"Well, that's up to you."

Jones digested these remarks as he left the barber shop. On the streets, he noticed attractive girls in numbers, but

resolutely kept them out of his mind, the experience with Glacia having lent him at least some caution. Glacia who had happened to him rather fast, had half convinced him that women were lightning that struck you before you could dodge.

The barber came back from the telephone and said, "Your friend Funny Pegger, now, lives in Greenwich Village."

"Another town, you mean?"

"No, no," the barber said, and explained that Greenwich Village was just a section in the heart of New York which didn't look much different from the rest of the city.

"How do I go to get there?"

The barber gave directions.

CHAPTER XI

MERELY MURDER

CAPTAIN FRITZ HANNOVER was enjoying the bullet-wound in his leg. He had a private room in the hospital, food he liked, a pitcher of beer whenever he wanted it, a relay of pleasant-faced nurses, and it was not necessary to be on an ocean liner bridge or answer silly questions put him by passengers who wanted to be seen talking to the Captain.

Too, getting shot in the leg by Jones had turned out to be a better break from a publicity standpoint, than if he had managed to rescue Jones from the iceberg without a hitch.

Captain Hannover's picture was on front pages of newspapers; better still, so was the picture of his ship, and the free advertising pleased his owners. His salary was going on; there was the money from his accident insurance policy; also there had come a cablegram from an official high in the conclaves of the German Government.

The cablegram congratulated Captain Hannover on his bravery and his escape, told him he was a brave man, a true follower of *der Fuehrer;* then bluntly ordered a grand gesture of forgiving the iceberg-man, Jones, for the shooting. Jones was to be forgiven because the world must know that the New Germany was the soul of heroic gesture.

When the nurse said there was a visitor, Captain Hannover presumed it was another newspaperman and asked that he be sent right in.

But the captain looked at the visitor without too much pleasure.

"Ach!" he muttered. "Back again, *ja?"*

The newcomer was large and thirty years or so of age; his body was as loose as a sack. He had a large nose, cow lips, one chin when he held his head up, and three when he happened to glance at his feet.

"I am Paul Shevinsky," he told the hovering nurse. "Captain Hannover's lawyer. May we be alone?"

The nurse left.

Paul Shevinsky lit a cigarette, squinted one eye at the smoke, then brought papers out of his inside coat pocket. He had the lazy-bodied air of a catfish, the size of his nose and lips gave his face a poisonous swollen look; around him was the scent of gardenia.

"Here are some papers for you to sign," he said.

"Of what nature?" asked Captain Hannover.

"A deposition stating that you believe the man you found on the iceberg to be insane."

"I am sorry," said Captain Hannover. "I have changed my mind."

Paul Shevinsky took the cigarette from his lips and moved a fleck of tobacco around with the tip of his tongue. He dropped the cigarette into a beer pitcher that was almost empty. He

folded his papers in his hands once, neatly.

"What has got into you?" he asked.

"I have," said Captain Hannover, "changed my mind."

"You won't sign this?"

"And," said Captain Hannover, "I am going to withdraw the complaint against the iceberg man—Jones—for shooting me."

Paul Shevinsky got out another cigarette. The tips of the two forefingers on his right hand were dark brown with nicotine.

"Am I to take it," he demanded, "that you're not going to press any kind of a charge against Jones?"

"That is right."

"Why?"

"That is a personal matter."

"If you've been bought off," said Paul Shevinsky, "I can raise the ante."

"You get out of here!" Captain Hannover said.

"Now listen—"

Captain Hannover picked up the beer pitcher.

In a low ugly voice, "You get out of here!" he said. He made a motion with the pitcher.

Paul Shevinsky got out.

PAUL SHEVINSKY walked to the nearest drugstore, entered a telephone booth and dialed a number.

"Lyman," he said.

"Yes, Paul," said Lyman Lee.

"The captain has decided not to press charges against Jones."

"What?"

"We're blown up."

"You—but why? Why did he back out?"

Shevinsky raised his beefy shoulders and looked hurt.

Lyman Lee swore bitterly. "Let me think."

Lee was silent so long that Paul Shevinsky had to deposit another nickel in the telephone.

"Paul—"

"Yes."

"Suppose something happened to Captain Hannover?"

"What could happen to him?"

"He might die from that wound in the leg," suggested Lyman Lee.

"Not a chance!" snorted Paul Shevinsky. "It's only a flesh wound—oh! Oh—I see. Yes, I do see."

"It would be kind of tough on Jones, wouldn't it?" Lyman Lee asked.

Paul Shevinsky's forehead got wet, although it was cool in the telephone booth. He blotted it with a handkerchief, and wiped his lips.

"Yes," he said. His voice was different. "It'll be tough on Jones."

Twenty minutes later, Paul Shevinsky was in conference with a longish middle-aged man who had a very pale face. "That's the set-up, Hover," Paul said.

Hover contemplated his colorless hands. His eyes had become prominent. He swallowed. "I don't like it any too well," he muttered. "What will it pay?"

"A grand."

"Double it."

"I won't double anything," Paul Shevinsky said.

Hover got up and walked around. The room was large, and by the window there was a wooden table, and on the table two microscopes, one large and one small, also a collection of jars containing germ cultures. Through the window was visible the other buildings and campus of the college in which Hover was a professor.

"All right," Hover said.

Paul Shevinsky grinned, shook hands with Hover, and left...

Hover entered the hospital and said to Captain Hannover, "I am Doctor Augustus Albert, and I am employed

by the insurance company in which you have your accident policy."

"Ja," said Captain Hannover. "Insurance is pretty nice, *nein?"*

Hover nodded. "Everyone should have insurance." He opened a small dark bag. "It is necessary for me to examine your wound."

"Ja."

During the course of the examination, Hover emptied the contents of a glass phial on the bullet-wound in the German-liner skipper's leg, and was not observed.

"You're going to get well in a hurry, Captain," he said in a queer voice.

"Nein. I like it here." Captain Hannover chuckled.

Hover got his hat and bag and left.

Later Captain Hannover began to complain of fever....

After he had died, they examined his corpse. Said the doctor: "He died from an infective germ that spread at great speed from the bullet wound."

Said the District Attorney: "The man who inflicted the wound is therefore guilty of murder."

Said the police rule-book: "Code signal *thirty-one*—arrest for murder."

Said the police radio: "Signal thirty-one. Signal thirty-one A man known as Jones, six feet two, one-ninety, red hair and possibly red beard. Has the habit of reciting unusual facts. The man Jones may make himself conspicuous because he has almost no knowledge of civilized customs."

JONES strode along New York streets. His destination was Funny Pegger's apartment in the Greenwich Village section. Jones had become pleasantly aware of a marked change in the general attitude toward himself, for the men no longer noticed him in particular, and the women noticed him in a different way. It appeared that his status had been altered by the simple magic of the scissors. His self-consciousness was gone. He felt warmed. Yes, he was one of them, and no longer looked or felt like what Lyman Lee had once called him—a hitch-hiker off an iceberg.

Having reached Greenwich Village, he next located a street called MacDougal Alley, wherein Funny Pegger was supposed to live.

Then he saw the girl.

He was suddenly presented with the sensation of having the earth and everything else substantial whisked from under him.

She came around the corner, went past and gave no evidence of noticing him.

This girl distinctly had qualities. She was a long girl, a well-shaped girl, with a firm little chin, warm rose-colored lips, a slightly snub but delectable nose, large devastating blue eyes, and a wealth of coppery red hair. However, Jones had been seeing girls with similar assets in varying degrees, and they hadn't made him feel as though he had been given a little push behind the knees.

The quality this girl had was something besides looks. A look at her was like a glance at an electric spark. She radiated energy. The way she carried her chin showed vitality and intense joy in living. The girl was a diminutive, auburn-haired dynamo in a streamlined mounting.

A series of collisions between his feet and the sidewalk revived Jones and he realized that he was following the titian-haired girl.

She turned into a recessed doorway and rang a door-bell, then as she waited, she chanced to turn. Her blue eyes—instantaneously it seemed—began to disapprove of Jones, who stood not much more than an arm-length away. Unfortunately, no one had told Jones

it was unorthodox to survey a strange red-headed girl with frank approval.

"As a rule," the young lady remarked coolly, "the easier they are on the eye, the harder they are on the pocketbook."

"—indeed?" said Jones.

He continued to scrutinize her, noting such details as a little dimple to the left of a nice mouth.

"I presume," she remarked with more edge, "that you are an astronomer?"

"Astronomer?"

"A man in search of heavenly bodies."

"The planet Venus," stated Jones, "moves in an orbit between Mercury and the earth, at a mean distance of 67,000,000 miles from the sun. Venus was also an ancient Italian goddess of bloom and beauty."

The titian-haired young woman considered this remark for a moment.

"Scat!" she said.

"Eh?"

"You weren't," the girl inquired, "thinking of lingering?"

"To tell the truth, I was not contemplating departure."

"What were you contemplating?"

"I was considering indulging in—er—osculation."

"You were?"

"Yes indeed. I have found it highly exhilarating on the two previous occasions in which I participated."

The red-headed girl's toe began to tap the floor.

"Osculation," she said, "is a large word for kiss."

"Exactly."

"Try it—"

"Why, thank you!"

"—and see how high you bounce!"

THE door, the bell of which the auburn young woman had punched, opened. A short round young man with a humorous mouth appeared.

It was Funny Pegger.

Jones was astounded for a moment, then realized that it wasn't such a great coincidence because Funny Pegger lived on this street.

Funny Pegger looked at the girl.

"The Indians are coming!" he gasped. "Vix, what brings—?"

Vix grabbed Funny Pegger's arm and pointed at Jones. "Sock him!"

Funny Pegger surveyed Jones. There was no recognition in his eyes. It dawned on Jones that Funny Pegger didn't know him without his red whiskers.

"Sock this clown," the girl commanded Funny Pegger, "a good one."

"Why?" Funny inquired.

"He annoys me."

Funny Pegger snorted. "They all annoy you, if I remember rightly."

The red-headed young woman's ire widened quickly to include Funny Pegger.

"Are you going to swat him one?"

"I doubt it."

"Why not?"

"I never," said Funny Pegger, "hit anybody I don't think I can't lick."

The young woman stamped a foot, indignation mounting.

"It seems," she told Jones, "that you will have to hit *him*." She pointed at Funny Pegger.

Jones was confused. "Er—why should I?"

"Because I would approve heartily."

Jones brightened involuntarily. "You really wish me to—er—sock him?"

"Absolutely!"

Jones was conscious of an intense desire to do anything this young woman wanted. His fist lifted—lifted rather absentmindedly, since he had no real intention of striking his friend.

Funny Pegger was not asleep. When Jones' fist came up, he lunged in, struck. Jones gasped. Out of self-

defense, he seized Funny Pegger. The two young men rolled head over heels out of the entry onto the sidewalk.

A moment later, a large red-faced, policeman was holding them by their respective collars.

"Sure, and what's goin' on here?" inquired the policeman.

"Officer," snapped the red-headed girl. "these men were annoying me."

"Sure, and then me duty is to throw their pants in the can."

Funny Pegger yelled, "Vix! Hey, Vix, you can't do this!"

"Maybe I can't," Vix said sweetly, "but the officer can."

He did.

The indignity of being hustled toward jail, literally by the scruff of his neck, brought a remark from Jones.

"Vixen," he stated, "is the name of the female of the fox species, and also designates a shrewish, ill-tempered woman with no patience."

Funny Pegger peered at Jones. He said, "Love a duck!" He had recognized Jones—no one but Jones made quotations.

A bit later, the gag man got an opportunity to whisper to Jones. "Your name," he breathed, 'is Holmes."

"Er—I understand. A pseudonym is called for," whispered Jones.

They reached jail, were booked, and Jones remembered to give the name of John Holmes.

"You can come back in the morning and appear against these two in court," the desk sergeant told Vix.

"Swell!" Vix said. "Can I watch you hang them too?"

Jones and Funny Pegger were taken to another room and relieved of belts, shoe laces, and their pockets were emptied.

"Great Moses!" said the cop, ogling one hundred thousand-dollar bills which he had taken out of Jones' pocket.

"I do hope," volunteered Jones, "that you will not lose that."

"We've got a nice strong safe." The cop eyed Jones. "A little later, we may let you tell us what mint you own."

Funny Pegger had been ogling the money in pop-eyed silence.

"Wait a minute!" the gag man blurted. "Jones! You can bail us out!"

"I—which?"

"Give these gentlemen in blue uniforms part of that money," explained Funny Pegger patiently.

Jones perceived instantly that this was out of the question, it being most emphatically part of his bargain with Polyphemus Ward that he should not use any of the hundred thousand for himself.

"Impossible," he said firmly.

"But—"

"No," said Jones. "We go to jail first."

"You bet you will," a cop said.

Funny Pegger and Jones soon found themselves consigned to adjacent jail cells. It was only a question of time until they made the discovery that, by keeping their voices low, they could conduct a private conversation.

"Who did you rob?" Funny Pegger demanded grimly.

"Rob?"

"You got that hundred thousand somewhere, didn't you?"

"But I did not rob anyone."

"You earned the dough I suppose."

"Well—no."

"Let's have your story. It had better be good."

JONES, in the middle of an uncomfortable silence, wished he had not promised old Polyphemus Ward not to tell anyone about their bargain.

Funny Pegger said, "Go ahead. I'm practically drowning in suspense."

"I—er—can not impart information

concerning the hundred thousand," Jones muttered.

"You *what?*"

"Silence," said Jones, "is the entire absence of sound, and is supposed to be complete only in a region of vacuum, such as interplanetary space."

When there was no answer from the other cell, Jones grew embarrassed.

"Ah—Mr. Pegger," he ventured.

"Go away! You've no idea how you aggravate me!"

"I confess to a mistake in judgment in separating myself so abruptly from your company," Jones said gloomily. "I am referring of course, to my flight from the yacht. At the time it seemed the thing to do."

"Running out on your manager was just the thing, eh?"

"I—er—felt urged to depend on myself," Jones said.

After that, conversation rather hung up on a snag, because, to each remark Jones made, Funny Pegger bluntly demanded to know where the money had come from. Almost an hour passed, and the gag man persuaded the jailer to furnish him with the late editions of the afternoon papers.

"I want," Funny Pegger explained sourly, "to read the latest about a man named Jones."

The instant he looked at the front page, Funny Pegger grew rigid. With great haste, he read the rest of the way through the story that startled him.

"Jones!" he hissed. "Can you take a little shock?"

"I shall do my best to cope with my problems," Jones said.

"Your problems," muttered Funny Pegger, "are going to take some coping. You remember that German-liner captain you shot in the leg?"

"I—what about him?"

"You're only charged with murder now."

"Murder?"

"Yes. M-u-r-d-e-r. The thing they invented electric chairs for."

"But I—I don't understand!" Jones gasped.

"The German-liner captain died."

"Died?"

"As a result of the hole your bullet made in his leg, this paper says. So now you are charged with killing him. That's in the paper, here, too."

"But it—it was a superficial wound!" Jones exclaimed.

"That puzzles me, too," Funny Pegger muttered. "And it happened rather damn suddenly, if you ask me."

Jones groaned.

Funny Pegger also groaned.

"You need all the cooperation you can get," he explained.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Clan of Kirk

By
WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN
Author of "With Sword and Drum," "Battle Shouts Down the Wind," etc.

THEY hated each other. Big Jim Kirk, substitute end; Johnny Kirk, his brother—for two seasons All-American halfback. Old John Kirk's boys.

There was nothing sullen, hidden about that hatred. It was a flaming thing which crackled over Bethane's practice field like white lightning. They were strong, fierce young men—the sons of Kirk. Their hate, too, was strong, fierce, magnificent.

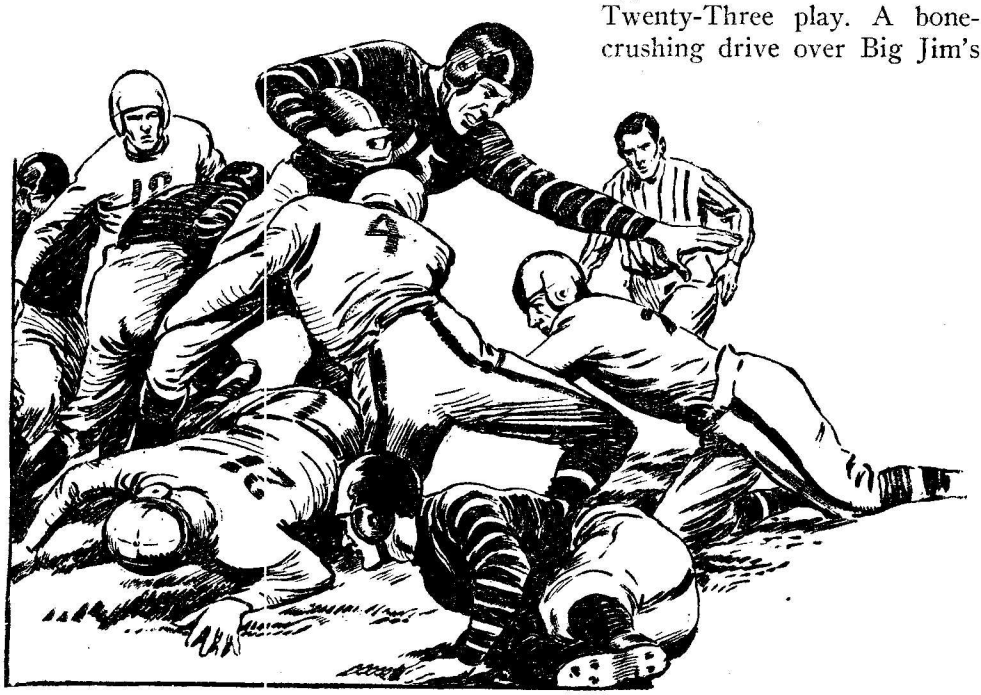
The afternoon shadows slanted across Glidden Field. Autumn was dropping soft fingers over Bethane; already it had splashed the maples with a scarlet paint brush. On the bench the Old Man sat, pipe between his teeth, while he watched the Kirk boys' feud.

They came out of the huddle, dropped into their places. Cleats biting at the turf; bodies crouched. In front of them the B team waited. Johnny Kirk stood, hands on slim hips, while he looked over the tight line. The sunset gleamed on his lean, red face; it touched the flame of his hair.

Big Jim—tough, dark with a piratical swarthiness, hard as tempered steel—laughed. Joyous laughter in the slanting shadows.

He said: "Baby face! Come on over, baby face! Let papa get his hands on you!"

Johnny Kirk smiled—a tight, thin-lipped smile. He crouched. The Twenty-Three play. A bone-crushing drive over Big Jim's



A story of the gridiron and of the hate that flamed between two brothers

end. Big Jim waited.

"Hup!"

Twenty-two jerseys surged forward into smashing, thudding action. The ball dropped into Johnny Kirk's fingers. He paused for a split second as his interference got under way—then slashed forward. Head down; cleats digging at the sod. A hundred and seventy pounds of meat driving at Big Jim's end.

Big Jim was laughing; his laughter bubbled up over the practice field in the sunset. On the bench the Old Man sucked at his pipe and watched.

The interference crumpled, died under Big Jim's swinging arms. His great hands tossed them aside; tore them from in front of the ball packer. His brother's pounding attack struck with the shock of a bullet. Then his arms were about Johnny's hips. He was smashing him back; hauling him down to the torn sod.

Brother against brother and over them the blue flame of their hatred flickered and crackled like unleashed electricity. Old John Kirk's boys.

Men were picking themselves up—moving back to the huddle which was slowly forming. Johnny Kirk still smiled. A tight smile which didn't quite reach his eyes. Johnny Kirk was beginning to be afraid.

"Spilled you, baby face! And *you* an All-American! Come on! Come on! Let papa get his hands on you!"

Yes, their hatred was a flaming, magnificent thing.

THE Old Man had found them in a little logging town in northern Washington three autumns before. He had stood at the edge of a flinty, grassless field and had watched two high-school teams play. Twenty-two mud-covered figures out there but just two that the Old Man had eyes for.

A rangy youth, with a flame of hair above his lean face, smashed through a bewildered line. Ten yards. Twenty. Thirty-five. He ran like an elusive ghost, the Old Man thought. Knees high; feet driving like the pistons of a locomotive.

The Old Man sucked at his dead pipe. A long pass flipped to a helmetless boy whose hair was like a buccaneer's flag in the wind. Touchdown! Just two men out there that the Old Man could see.

The game was over, then. Shivering spectators wandered away into the growing drizzle. The Old Man touched one of them on the arm—jerked his head toward the players who walked slowly toward the gate with blankets across their shoulders.

"Those two lads," he asked. "Who are they?"

The man was stooped, round shouldered. The collar of his thin overcoat was frayed. He looked at the Old Man through the lenses of heavy glasses.

"Their name is Kirk," he answered. "Jim and John. They're twins."

The drizzle was growing colder. The Old Man ducked his head against an icy gust and thrust numbed fingers into his pockets.

He said under his breath: "John Kirk! It couldn't be . . ."

The other laughed shortly and the Old Man looked at him again in the fading day. A white face, care-worn, deeply lined—no, it couldn't be. But it was.

Back through the years the Old Man was seeing a steaming locker room again. It had been a chill day with a cold drizzle which had made a bog of

the field. The moist warmth from the showers was pleasant. There were familiar smells—rubbing alcohol, liniment, iodine. It was funny how the smells came back.

A boy, with a darkly handsome face and laughing eyes, was singing. Head thrown back. A towel knotted carelessly about his naked waist. Singing triumphantly while the gas light flickered on the beautiful symmetry of his shoulders.

The man murmured: "*Old* John Kirk now."

"That must have been 1912," the Old Man answered him slowly.

"Eleven," the other corrected. "We beat State that year. A lot of water can go under the bridge in twenty-five years, Brian. Come on home with me."

They talked far into the night, sitting on either side of the round table with its worn red tablecloth.

It was queer, the Old Man thought. John Kirk, a mediocre teacher in an obscure high school. Old John Kirk now, stooped, worn beaten by life. John Kirk, whose name headed Bethane's roll of immortals—who had been the greatest of them all. The kerosene lamp smoked and sputtered. Outside the drizzle had turned into rain. It slapped spitefully at the windows.

"She died when they were born," old John Kirk was saying. "In a way it was best."

The Old Man held a match to his empty pipe; placed the charred stick carefully in the white saucer beside the lamp. "They'll come to Bethane, John?" he asked.

The other's eyes darkened for a moment—as though a thick shadow had fallen on the drawn shade of a lighted window. Then he shook his head.

"I've never told them about *that*, Brian. You see . . ." He stopped and gestured vaguely at the bare room. "Well . . . I guess I didn't have the courage."

The Old Man sat quietly for a long while listening to the beat of the rain. His thoughts were jumbled, confused. A steaming locker room across twenty years. Bethane men singing in the golden afternoons. A pass dropping into the hands of a boy whose hair was a sable banner in the wind.

"I've seen them play," the Old Man said under his breath. "I could make them great—almost as great as you were, John."

For a moment the Old Man thought that the other man hadn't heard. He sat there, staring with bitter eyes at the red tablecloth. Life had not been good to old John Kirk. Then he lifted his head finally.

He said slowly: "They're good boys, Brian."

"You'll send them to me?"

"Yes." He laughed harshly all at once. Bitter laughter. "A broken down school teacher, Brian. I was going to set the world on fire—once. Well, it's hard to remember those days after all these years."

SO OLD John Kirk's boys came to Bethane in the autumn when the leaves were beginning to turn. It was different from the logging town among the Washington hills.

Long afternoons sleepy with the haze of Indian summer. The smell of burning leaves along the driveways. Music throbbing in the cool dusk and the lights of Glade Hall winking through the trees with a yellow friendliness. . . .

Old John Kirk could have told them.

Down on Glidden Field men in black-and-gold jerseys trotted up and down the white-barred sod. Kicks thudded with the thud of leather meeting leather.

Clean, sweet punts spiraling up into the slanting sunshine; dropping into waiting arms. Men huddled in a tight knot; raced out to explode into flashing action while the Old Man watched.

On the freshman field Johnny and Big Jim stood, shoulder to shoulder, and listened while an assistant coach talked. Other candidates were there—men who had come from the corners of the earth to pay homage to Bethane. Presently they trotted out to toss yellow footballs back and forth.

It was a great freshman eleven—the greatest since Alan Wentworth and Brian Sande had flashed over the yard stripes wearing Bethane colors. It was a slashing, driving team which couldn't be stopped. "Kirk to Kirk" was a phrase which the sport writers learned to love.

"The greatest forward-passing combination in a decade," they said.

A sweet team . . . Johnny Kirk sidestepping, dodging, fading. Johnny Kirk shooting flat and bullet-like passes deep into enemy territory. Big Jim Kirk under them. Picking them out of the air with his great hands—laughing while he shook off tacklers. . . .

It was Wallace Givens, ace of sport writers, who first called them "The Clan of Kirk." That was after they had beaten State Freshmen in the season's fiercest game.

There was no hate then.

The Old Man sat and watched that game with a satisfied glow in his eyes. They were going to be great—greater, even, than that other Kirk had been. That greatness was bred in them, the Old Man reflected.

Concerning whence they had come, of the heritage which was theirs, the Old Man kept his peace. When sport writers queried him, recalling a great Johnny Kirk of a quarter of a century ago, he shook his head—turned aside their questions. It was not an uncommon name, he said.

Old John Kirk had wanted it so.

BETHANE played Army in mid-October. The Soldiers had come down from the plains of West Point with a marching song on their lips and a great team which fought with a fierce and stubborn fury.

It was a battle of giants. Bethane backs flashed, stabbed at the Army goal. They were hurled back by a fighting line which crouched, growling, and gave no sound. The third quarter passed into the fourth while the Old Man sat, elbows on his knees, and sucked at his dead pipe.

ARMY 0 BETHANE 0

The figures stood, stark and cold, on the scoreboard above the rim of the stadium. Eighty thousand people waited. Then the Old Man turned his head, beckoned.

"All right, boys," he said. "Let's have a score."

A murmur grew like a breath of wind rushing down a forest aisle. It swelled into a roar—a mighty thunder from eighty thousand throats. The Clan of Kirk was taking the field; the Old Man had saved them for this.

High upon the rim of the stadium men spoke excitedly into microphones. "Here they come, folks . . . they're the ones we've been waiting to see . . . Bethane's great sophomore flashes. They're trotting out onto the field now. One's red-headed . . . that's Johnny and can that boy do things with a football? Big Jim—that's Johnny's brother, folks—is black-headed and, believe-you-me, that lad can catch any pass that was ever thrown. They're lining up now

. . . Boy oh boy oh boy . . . we're going to see something, folks. What a game! *What* a game!"

They came out of the huddle slowly. Linemen, with grim and sweat-furrowed faces, dropped into their positions. A dozen yards away the Army backs shifted, watching.

"Hup!"

The ball settled into Johnny's hands. He was fading back. Tacklers dove at him—the line hadn't held. Then he swung himself clear and the sun flashed on yellow leather as he threw.

Big Jim was laughing as his great hands reached up. They had done it so many times before—old John Kirk's boys. The stands rocked with a triumphant acclaim.

". . . first down, folks . . . first down on Army's thirty yard line and was it a honey! Kirk to Kirk, folks . . . forty yards on that pass . . . they're lining up again . . . same formation . . . here's the play!"

"Hup!"

Hard and flat and true. That was the way Johnny Kirk threw them. And always Big Jim was down there waiting. The scoreboard was changing as they walked back to their positions.

ARMY 0 BETHANE 6

"A touchdown, folks . . . a touchdown in three plays. I tell you these Kirk twins are hot . . . the Clan of Kirk, they call them . . . boy oh boy oh boy!"

AS THEY walked Big Jim threw an arm across his brother's shoulder. "We'll make it one more, keed. Huh?"

Johnny grinned. He was a handsome youth with his red hair gleaming like burnished copper in the sunshine.

He said: "Let's make it two, ape."

There was a minute left to play when it happened.

"Hup!"

The two teams surged into crashing action. Big Jim was running like a black flame—down there in the shadows was a white mark which he must cross. Feet thudded behind him. "Jim!"

Johnny's voice. He spun about. Leaped. The spinning oval settled into his arms as he came down. Then his long legs were cut from beneath him and he was falling—things were going black.

There were white sheets, an orderly array of cots when he awoke. The air smelled strangely of ether and disinfectants, a hospital smell. Johnny was sitting beside the bed with a worried scowl on his face.

Big Jim said: "What happened?"

Johnny was grinning now. He reached over and put an awkward hand on Big Jim's arm. No, they didn't hate each other then—old John Kirk's sons.

"Don't talk or I'll bat your homely mug off," Johnny said. "You've had a little concussion."

Big Jim remembered now. It had been those feet pounding along behind him—he should have gotten away from them. His right leg was strangely stiff. He tried to move it but it wouldn't move.

"My leg?" he asked.

Johnny was scowling again. His red head looked out of place against those white walls. "It's your knee," he answered. "A little . . . twisted is all, ape. Don't worry. The Doc says it'll be as good as new in a little while."

October passed into November and still Big Jim lay in the white cot. Mid-November and they took the cast off; he went to the State game on crutches

and sat on the bench and watched while Johnny, a flashing, red-headed demon, ripped through the State line for ten yards—fifteen—twenty.

It was a great game. When it was over he stood up, leaning on his crutches, while they sang *Men of Bethane*—that grand, thundering song which Bethane saves for the mightiest of her sons.

It was Johnny that they were cheering and Big Jim was glad. Johnny had earned it. Then the music died away in a quivering whisper and the dusk was beginning to drop over Glidden Field.

Johnny, dirt-streaked and weary, walked beside him as he limped back slowly toward the dressing room. Johnny with his handsome face and his red hair blazing like a guidon in the dusk.

"Next year, ape," Johnny said. "Next year we'll show 'em something —together, huh?"

Big Jim grinned. He was happy. There was no room for jealousy in Big Jim Kirk.

Sure, next year they'd show 'em!

DOC CRAWFORD looked at Big Jim across the broad expanse of the polished desk. He turned his glasses slowly between his fingers as he talked. Outside the open window the wind was sweet with the fragrance of another autumn.

Doc Crawford was saying soberly: "It's like this, Jim. The old knee may last out one game. Two, maybe. You can never tell. You might get through the whole season with it."

Big Jim's brown, good-natured face was expressionless. He picked up a pencil and drew little circles on the blotting pad.

"You mean, Doc . . . ?"

Doc Crawford nodded his sleek head. Down below, cleated shoes were clacking along the sidewalk which led to the practice field.

"Another twist now, Jim, and you'll never play again. It's a matter of time. Let it rest this year—you've still got a year left. Next year it ought to be as good as new."

Big Jim drew three little circles. He put a big circle about them. Next year! That was what they had told him last year. He looked up steadily.

"Give me the straight dope, Doc. I'll play next year?"

Doc Crawford got up off his chair and walked around the desk. He dropped an affectionate hand on Big Jim's shoulder.

"I'm giving it to you straight, Jim. You'll play."

"Okay, Doc. Much obliged."

It was a great season. Big Jim sat on the bench beside the Old Man and watched Johnny lead a great team, unbeaten and untied, through as tough a schedule as a Bethane team had ever faced.

Johnny Kirk was high scorer in the east that year. By mid-season the sport writers had picked him as inevitable All-American. He had grown into a flame-topped tornado which blasted everything in its path.

Big Jim was proud. He liked to watch the kid. Sweeping the flanks with a drive which couldn't be stopped. Picking his way through a broken field. Dropping back to kick. Tackling with relentless ferocity. Handsome Johnny Kirk. Yes, he liked to watch.

It was two years now and sport writers have short memories. They had forgotten that there had once been another of the Kirk boys—even Wallace Givens had forgotten the Clan of Kirk.

Big Jim didn't know, though—wouldn't have cared if he had known.

Jealousy never occurred to Big Jim. He was proud of Johnny.

The Old Man was the one who wondered—wondered as he sat there watching with his dead pipe between his teeth. The sport writers were saying that Johnny Kirk was the greatest back that football had ever known. The Old Man was wondering if Johnny Kirk was great enough to laugh at what the sport writers said.

STATE had come down from the north again. State with a veteran line which was rock hard; State with backs who ran like wolves eager to avenge last year's defeat. It would be a hard game—a great game.

The air was crisp and cold and sullen banks of clouds hung low in the afternoon. In the broadcasting booth men stamped their feet against the chill.

"Second half starting, folks. It's anybody's game so far . . . Score . . . nothing nothing. These State boys have been fighting a great game down there, I can tell you. They haven't let Johnny Kirk, Bethane's All-American back, get started. Here they come, folks. We'll give you the line up for the second half in just a moment."

The Old Man had talked to them as they lay on the benches in the locker room. A half a dozen swift, terse sentences. The Old Man didn't have much to say.

"*Teams* win football games," he told them shortly. "You know that you're *good*. Well, you can forget that! I'm not watching for one man or for six men to win this game. I'm watching for a *team* to win it!"

The Old Man had been looking at Johnny Kirk. Handsome Johnny Kirk lying on his back and staring sullenly at the locker room ceiling.

". . . Bethane's coming out of the huddle, folks. Here's the play. McCartney back. Bang! They got that lad . . . slammed him down in his tracks. Second and ten to go and the ball's on State's forty-five yard line. Johnny Kirk's back this time. He's going to pass . . . no he's not! No he's not! He's running with it! He's away! Johnny Kirk's away! He's going to the thirty-yard line . . . the twenty! . . . the ten! . . . *he's over for a touchdown!* Oh boy oh boy oh boy! Johnny Kirk just made a touchdown with a fifty-yard run! Listen to that crowd!"

On the bench the Old Man sucked at his pipe. Beside him Big Jim Kirk sat with a blanket over his shoulders.

The Old Man said: "How's Johnny taking it, Jim?"

Big Jim's voice was hoarse from yelling. He looked at the Old Man with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Taking what?" he asked.

The Old Man sat with his elbows on his knees and his keen old eyes followed the players as they trotted to their positions.

"They're making a lot of fuss over him, Jim," he answered slowly. "Sometimes that isn't good. A man gets to thinking that he is bigger than he really is. I wouldn't want to see Johnny go that way."

Big Jim laughed. "You needn't worry about Johnny, sir. He's a good kid. No, you needn't worry."

But, after the game was over and he was walking down Carver Avenue in the dusk, Big Jim remembered what the Old Man had said. There *had* been things—then he shrugged his shoulders impatiently. No, he was crazy. Johnny was a good kid.

BIG JIM sat in a worn bathrobe with his feet on the table when Johnny came in that night. It was after two but

Jim hadn't felt sleepy. In spite of himself the thing that the Old Man had said was worrying him a little. He wondered why Johnny hadn't come home after the game.

"Hi, kid," he said. "Nice game."

Johnny was a little drunk and his handsome face was flushed and sullen as he tossed his hat onto the table. He dropped into a chair without answering. Jim got up slowly.

"What's the matter, kid?"

"Nothing."

"Kind of late, aren't you?"

"What's it to you?" Johnny flared. "Nita was at the game," he added sullenly. "She brought some friends along from New York. We went out afterwards."

Jim had seen her a couple of times—a slender girl with a face which was coldly beautiful against the gray fur of her expensive coat. He had never met her; Johnny hadn't suggested it. It was queer but he didn't know many of Johnny's friends any more.

He said: "You need sleep, kid. Better turn in."

Big Jim lay quietly for a long while after he had turned out the light. Thinking. There *was* a difference. Red-headed Johnny Kirk, of the Clan of Kirk, was a different person from Handsome Johnny Kirk, All-American back.

It wouldn't last, though. Johnny was a good kid.

* * *

It came after Christmas. The suddenness of it was like a blow.

Big Jim stamped the snow from his feet and started up the stairs to the room which he and Johnny had shared since that autumn, three years ago now, when they had first come to Bethane. Johnny looked up sullenly as his brother entered. There were packed suitcases on the floor.

"What the hell, kid," Big Jim said. Then he stopped. Johnny had been drinking again—Johnny had been drinking too much lately.

"I'm moving out."

Big Jim sat down slowly and there was a puzzled look on his brown face. The radiator hissed and banged. The sound bothered him and he reached down to turn it off.

Johnny didn't look up. He went on stuffing clothes into another bag. On top of the table a black sweater with a big gold B lay carefully folded.

"Nita's brother is taking an apartment," he mumbled. "He's asked me to come up there with him."

Big Jim laughed. Even then he didn't realize. He reached out a big paw and shoved the other into a chair. Johnny sat there—eyes on the floor and his mouth twisted sullenly.

"Get into bed and sleep it off, kid," Big Jim advised. "You're pretty well ginned up. I reckon you'll feel differently about it in the morning."

Johnny got up slowly. Face flushed. Eyes narrow. He didn't look much like the old Johnny, Big Jim thought, as he picked up the sweater and stuffed it into the suitcase. A leather bound scrap book dropped to the floor and Big Jim reached for it absently.

"I'm going tonight," Johnny declared in a flat, dead voice. "I'm through, I tell you!"

Big Jim idly turned the leaves of the book. Newspaper clippings, he saw. Hundred of them. Pictures. More clippings. JOHNNY KIRK UNANIMOUS CHOICE FOR ALL-AMERICAN. JOHNNY KIRK WINS ARMY GAME WITH SEVENTY YARD RUN. GIVENS NAMES JOHNNY KIRK AS BACK ON ALL-TIME TEAM.

Big Jim tossed the book contemptu-

ously onto the table. Anger was beginning to smoulder at the back of his eyes. He stood up.

"What's the matter, Johnny?" he asked softly. "Isn't *this* good enough for an All-American?"

He jerked his head at the walls of their plain, bare room.

Outside it had started to snow again and the afternoon was going fast. Jim noticed indifferently that a car was coming down Carter Avenue. A low-slung, expensive car. It was stopping down below under the bare trees. Nita's car. He understood then.

Johnny had straightened, his hands at his sides. In the fading light his face was sharp, unpleasant. His lips were white with anger.

"What if it isn't? I've got friends! I suppose you think that I'd want to bring *them* in here!"

Big Jim shrugged. "Why not? I'm not ashamed to bring mine."

Johnny laughed but there was no mirth in his laughter. His red hair gleamed dully against the gray of the window. Handsome Johnny Kirk.

"We may as well have this out, Jim," he said shortly. "You and I don't travel in the same class any more. I'm sorry —but it's true. I've gone on and you haven't. *My* friends wouldn't understand this. They're wealthy, influential . . ."

He stopped under his brother's steady gaze.

"And what about *you?*" Big Jim asked him softly. "What are *you* contributing to these friendships?"

The scorn in Big Jim's voice was a biting, searing thing. Johnny took a cigarette from an expensive case; did not offer one to Jim. His mouth had taken on that sullen twist again, and he didn't look like Johnny now.

"I've got a name," he mumbled. "I guess they're glad enough to be seen with me."

Down, underneath the bare trees, an auto horn chimed with a deep and expensive sound. Nita was getting impatient. Big Jim's lip curled.

"I don't suppose that you told them that your father is teaching school for a hundred and fifty a month in a logging podunk in Washington. You forgot to mention *that,* didn't you?"

"Suppose I did?"

Big Jim's face grew darker.

"Ashamed of *that,* too, eh?"

"I've got my own life to live," Johnny said sullenly. "It isn't my fault if he's a failure . . ."

The flaming, sardonic anger in Big Jim's face stopped him. The scorn in Big Jim's eyes was like the slash of a metal whip.

"We've grown mighty big in the last two years, haven't we?" Big Jim was saying. "We're All-American and the papers print our picture. We've got a lot of nice friends—pasty-faced rats who aren't good enough to wipe John Kirk's shoes! They haven't got nerve enough to teach school. Go on with them! That's where you belong. Get out of here before I forget that you're my brother!"

So Johnny Kirk went. At the door his brother's voice stopped him for a moment.

"You want to sell that scrap book of yours for all that you can get, pretty boy," he was saying. "There'll be another Kirk playing football next season and you won't be All-American then. Now get out, rat!"

SO OLD John Kirk's boys came into the last season in which they would wear Bethane's black and gold. Johnny Kirk, All-American half, leading Bethane's back field. Big Jim Kirk, sub-

stitute end, playing with the scrubs. And over them burned the blue flame of their hate.

It was like that.

"Baby face! Come on, baby face! Let papa get his hands on you!" and Big Jim's laughter would go on bellowing over the practice field in the long autumn afternoons.

Big Jim was a black flame out there. Other backs—Eddie Topping, McElroy, Johnson—might filter through the scrub's line for five yards, ten, sometimes fifteen but Johnny Kirk, Bethane ace, never got past the scrimmage line. Big Jim was always there. Hard, gripping arms tightening about Johnny's knees; an iron shoulder driving him back—always back.

"Come on, pretty boy!"

At first Johnny Kirk smiled—that thin-lipped, mirthless smile. But, as sunny afternoon followed sunny afternoon, that smile faded. Disappeared. There were worried wrinkles in Johnny Kirk's forehead now.

The sport writers, who came in with passes to watch the Saturday afternoon practice games, shook their heads wisely. "Burned out," they said. They wrote: "Bethane's great backfield star has shown little promise this season. It seems likely that Joe Trevor, who has been coming along fast, may replace Johnny Kirk."

The Old Man, sitting on the bench with his dead pipe between his teeth, said nothing. The Old Man was wise in the ways of teams and of men and he understood. He valued men above football.

Johnny Kirk fought against it but somehow he had known from the first, with a feeling of cold helplessness at the pit of his stomach, that he would lose. In his sleep he could hear Big Jim, his brother, laughing. He could feel those arms tightening about him—driving him back.

He knew, now, that Big Jim had been right. He couldn't take it. Big Jim had been able to take it during those two bitter seasons when he had waited on the bench beside the Old Man. Old John Kirk, teaching school in a lumber podunk in Washington, hadn't whimpered—but Johnny Kirk couldn't take it.

"Pretty Boy! Let Papa get his hands on you!"

* * *

Big Jim was playing first-string end when Army came in October. Johnny Kirk didn't play. The sport writers had been good prophets and Joe Trevor had taken Johnny's place in Bethane's backfield.

It was a battle of two great lines—granitic forward walls which ebbed and flowed between the thirty-yard stripes, giving no quarter and asking none. A new star flashed across Bethane's horizon in that game.

Big Jim Kirk smashing interference. Big Jim Kirk hauling down runners, blocking kicks, intercepting passes. Big Jim Kirk all over the field. Black hair—like a buccaneer's flag; laughter bubbling behind him in the slanting sunlight.

No score at the end of the half. Then, early in the third quarter, little Joe Talbot tossed a twisting, wobbling pass. No man but Big Jim Kirk could have done it. He leaped high, got one great hand on it and was gone with his laughter trailing behind him.

The timekeeper's gun cracked sharply and shadows were deep around the south goal posts. Tired men straightened; caught the blankets which subs tossed over their shoulders. It had been

a great game—and Berhane's record was still unsoiled.

Johnny started the Holy Cross game. Twice he was smeared behind the line of scrimmage by men who would never have laid a finger on him in the old days. There were new lines in Johnny's face now.

Big Jim said to him as they came out of the huddle: "What's the matter, big shot? People *know* you. What will your friends think?"

Johnny's lips were white and thin as he crouched. Cleats biting the turf. Up in the stands fifty thousand people were watching.

"Hup!"

He was smeared again and the ball spurted from his arms and rolled free for a second. It was buried in a smother of Holy Cross players. Big Jim's lips curled unpleasantly as he looked at his brother. He spat.

"All-American!" he said.

A red curtain of anger dropped down in front of Johnny's eyes. He stepped forward, his hand half lifted. Then he dropped it to his side and turned away. His anger had gone and that numbing coldness had come back to take its place. Joe Talbot was trotting out from the sidelines. Blindly Johnny Kirk walked off the field; turned toward the tunnel which led to the showers.

Nita was sitting a dozen feet away as he entered the tunnel. There were others with her—Johnny knew them all. He waved a hand half-heartedly. Nita was looking at him with her pale, beautiful face but there was no sign of welcome in her eyes. She turned away and whispered to the man beside her. Johnny could hear them laughing as he went up the tunnel.

Jim had been right on that gray afternoon ten months before.

Well, that was that. And then, suddenly, Johnny Kirk knew that he was glad. Unaccountably the cold knot had gone out of his stomach. He was old John Kirk's boy—Big Jim Kirk's brother. To hell with the rest of them.

The thought made him feel warm and happy all at once. He wished that Big Jim was there so that he could tell him about it; tell him what a fool he had been.

BIG JIM stood in the center of the bare room in the house at the end of Carver Avenue. Johnny closed the door, stood leaning against it. He thought that Big Jim's face was harder than it used to be. Big Jim's eyes were bright and cold.

"I wanted to tell you that I know I've been a fool," Johnny said awkwardly. "I'm sorry, Jim."

Big Jim's smile was sardonic. "They've thrown you over, eh? And so you've come crawling back!" He laughed harshly. "I don't know you, big shot."

Johnny went slowly back down the stairs and out into Carver Avenue. He didn't know that, up in that small, bare room, Big Jim was watching him go with a white and strained face.

At practice the next afternoon the Old Man followed them soberly with his eyes. It wasn't working out the way he had hoped—somehow it had gotten away from him. As he watched he felt helpless; old all at once. After a while he walked slowly back to his little cubbyhole of an office.

That night he sent a long telegram to a little lumber town in Washington. The State game was only ten days away.

* * *

It was a bitter game fought out in an icy drizzle. State, scenting victory

after three barren, futile years, slashed and tore and hammered at a Bethane line which dropped back foot by foot. Big Jim Kirk wasn't laughing now as he hurled himself against that Blue Juggernaut.

Drive. Drive. Drive!

That was the way State did it. Slowly, steadily those charges were pounding a lighter Bethane line to shreds. Past mid-field. Past the forty-yard line. The thirty. The fifteen. On the ten yard line they held.

". . . State's made it, folks . . . wait a minute . . . wait a minute! No, they *didn't!* Bethane takes the ball on downs. That's the third time, folks, that that great Bethane line has stopped this State team in the shadow of the goal posts. Joe Talbot's going to kick . . . he gets it away . . . not a very good kick . . . there goes the gun, folks. The half is over. Nothing to nothing in the first half of this great battle between a fighting Bethane team and a State eleven which just won't be denied! We'll cut you in so that you can hear the music. . . ."

Johnny hadn't gotten in during the first half. Now he walked back to the tunnel through the drizzle with a blanket over his shoulders. Big Jim passed him without speaking—mud-streaked, weary. Big Jim was playing a magnificent game in there.

The Old Man stood in front of them as they soaked up the soft warmth of the locker room. There was an odd light at the back of the Old Man's eyes.

He said slowly: "You're licked! You've got your tails between your legs! They bred Bethane men differently twenty years ago!"

The Old Man's words slashed at them.

"I want you to meet a friend of mine. He played football for Bethane once—played it like *you* never will if you live to play a thousand years. No team ever lived that could send Black John Kirk to the showers with his tail between his legs!"

The tired men in the locker room stiffened. Black John Kirk—that name was tradition! Big Jim looked up slowly with a puzzled expression on his dirty face. Johnny got to his feet.

"Black John Kirk, gentlemen! John Kirk who was the greatest back that Bethane has ever known—or ever will know!"

HE WAS standing there in the doorway behind the Old Man. Black John Kirk. Not old John Kirk now. The stoop was gone from his shoulders and his head was thrown back as he held them with his eyes. There was the note of bugles in his voice.

"I've seen Bethane teams beaten," he said. "I have never seen one licked. I do not expect to!"

His voice deepened and there was a stirring quality in it which sent little shivers across the back of Johnny Kirk's neck. *His* father! Black John Kirk!

"Go back in there and remember this. Black John Kirk is going to be running interference for you. He's going to be taking out tacklers as you come through the line. He'll be trotting right behind you when you go over the goal line. Just remember that. It may help make men of you."

Weary shoulders were straightening as they went back down the tunnel and out onto the soggy field. Black John Kirk—the greatest of them all—was going with them.

Old John Kirk's sons walked side by side with a blue flame of pride in their eyes. As they came out into the

drizzle Big Jim dropped an arm across his brother's shoulders.

"With Black John Kirk running with us we ought to be able to take them, kid," he said.

Johnny nodded. His throat was tight and he couldn't speak. They broke into a trot across the smeared line stripes.

". . . what a game, folks . . . what a game. Listen to that crowd yell. You never in your life saw anything like the way this Bethane team has come out to win this ball game in the second half. Twenty to nothing, folks . . . that's the way it ends . . . twenty to nothing . . . boy oh boy oh boy . . I wish you could have seen those Kirk boys go. They used to have a name for that pair. What was it, Ted?"

Down below, in the gray drizzle, old John Kirk walked slowly toward the tunnel. And, on either side of him, walked old John Kirk's boys with their arms across his shoulders. The Clan of Kirk. . . .

". . . that's it, folks . . . I remember now. The Clan of Kirk . . . that's what they used to call them . . . the Clan of Kirk!"

The Rough Hand

By

RICHARD WORMSER

Author of "Gorilla Cargo," "McGlusky's Lucky Day," etc.

A Complete Novelet

I

DOC WILSON rode the Kentucky bay gingerly up to the veranda of the club, and winced when he saw the group of dapper young engineers lounging on the porch. He was in for a ride now—a worse ride than the last five miles had been. He did his best to hide the trouble by turning the bay's offside to the porch before he swung down. As soon as his ankle hit the ground, sweat started up under the brim of his battered Stetson, and cut channels down the dust of his face.

He felt a little better when the head groom, Sergio, arrived at a gallop to take the Kentucky horse. If the engineers thought he was a joke, he mused, at least the natives still respected him. He told Sergio: "You don't have to walk him—he's stopped sweating. Four liters of oats and two of bran, mix them up well, and be sure you water him *before* he eats."

"Si, Señor Doc," Sergio said, though he'd been receiving the same orders for ten years. The groom swung into the saddle, and started for the stables at the proper walk, and Doc went up on the veranda, trying not to limp.

But it was no use. Jerry Carpenter—head of the mill at twenty-nine, and too good-looking—said, "Lame, Cowboy?"

"Snake," Doc said. "That horse isn't used to them. I had to police myself to save the horse from going crazy." The Chinese house-boy slid a double-bourbon into his hand, and put the bottle of mineral water and the glass on the table. Doc gulped his whisky in one swallow, and then leisurely poured himself a glass of the water, sipped on it.

"He-man drink," Mike Shields of the

A story of the men who sweeten your coffee, and of one man who did not have a saccharine touch

sugarers murmured. "He-man horse. He-man country. How many miles today, Cowboy?"

Doc was still good-natured. "Forty, even. Lunch at Posada."

"Two hours drive in a Ford," Carpenter said. "At the most. Half a morning's work for an inspector who didn't have to be picturesque. Look, Cowboy—"

Doc swung around in his chair so fast that the wicker was still creaking when he spoke. His voice was quiet enough. "Listen, Carpenter—I don't mind being kidded by my friends. But when you talk to me, my name's Wilson. Mr. Wilson, Dr. Wilson, or Harold Wilson, if you want to be formal."

"Yes, *Mr.* Wilson. Only—if you don't mind, Mr. Wilson—the cane'll be ripe in two weeks. My mill's ready to crush—and it would make me easier in my mind if I was sure it was going to have something to crush. There's two hundred miles of cane roads, and with the cane ripe, they *all* ought to be ridden every day. In the interests of the company, Mr. Wilson."

Doc said: "I'm sorry this came up at the Club. But you started it. I've been riding the cane for this *Central* for eighteen years. There's been cane to crush every year, and good cane. No other rider in this country—or Cuba—has a record like that." He rose, putting his weight on his good ankle. "When any of you boys who learned sugar out of a book can put up a record better than that, I'll shoot at it. And from horseback, too."

CARPENTER rose and faced him, his face white. "You're not out in the cane now, Cowboy. Central Quarto crushed two weeks earlier than we did last year. They're starting again tomorrow. While my grinders stand empty, they—"

"Are crushing burnt cane," Doc said easily. "Okay. Let them. Central Dos doesn't burn its cane, never has, never will—while I ride for it." He shoved Carpenter aside, made for the door, then thought better of it. He reached up, unbuckled his heavy gun-belt, tossed it through the door, and turned back. "In case you want to make anything of it, kid."

"I thought you were a cowboy," Carpenter said contemptuously. "Fists don't settle sugar."

Wilson shrugged and followed his gun, bellowing: "Leong! Hot bath, double whisky, can do?"

The Chink called back: "Can do, Señor Doc!"

A voice from inside the living room said, lightly: "That horse-pistol nearly got my toes. They told me the tropics would be like this!" It was a girl's voice.

Doc stepped back, pulling off the Stetson again.

The girl came through the door, very slender, very blonde, in a white sport dress. She looked at the hat. "You must be Mr. Wilson. I've heard about you. I'm Irene McGibney."

"Mac's niece?" Doc asked. "He hasn't any daughters."

"That's right," Irene said. "The boss's niece. I'm down here with my brother. He's to work in the office."

"Good stuff," Doc said. "Anything you want to know—either of you—look me up. Your uncle and I started even down here." He looked at Carpenter. "Eighteen years ago." He went on into the bath.

He was sitting on the edge of his bed, dressed in his white trousers and shirt, when there was a rap at the door. He barked: "Come in," and sipped his mineral water.

The boy who came in was pale for the tropics—a new hand, obviously. Doc grunted: "You McGibney?"

"Yes, sir. Don McGibney. I'm—I'm honored to know you, Mr. Wilson."

Doc studied the boy. Weak face, not a very strong body. He shrugged. "Cut the *sir* stuff, Don. Just Doc, or Wilson . . . I met your sister outside."

Young McGibney flushed. "Yes, si—Doc. Mind if I sit down?" He took Doc's

wave for an invitation to perch himself in the one chair. "Irene said you hurt yourself today."

So the girl had heard the whole childish thing. "It wasn't fatal," Doc said dryly. "The kids like to make fun of me because I ride a horse and carry a gun. And because I won't let them burn the cane."

"I don't understand," Don said. "Why should they want to burn the cane?"

"Save time," Doc said. He poured himself his third drink. "Ripe cane won't burn. So you start fire through it, and it burns out all the weeds, the brush, and the cane tassels. Leave you nice clean sticks to grind."

"Well—that sounds sensible."

"Yeah. Sure. Only when cane's been burnt it has to be ground at once. If the mill breaks down, you lose all of your crop that isn't through the maw yet. We've never done it here at Central Dos because a mill's made out of metal, and metal breaks." The pent-up irritation boiled over. "Mr. Carpenter'll tell you his mill can't break. You've got his word against mine. But if we burn the fields," Doc Wilson said, "I stop riding them. That—so long as you're Mac's nephew—is why I ride on horseback. When you don't burn, you have to weed and weed again. From a Ford, the hands can fool you. From a horse—well, if my mount can find enough weed to eat in an acre of Dos Fields, I'll eat it myself."

"I see." McGibney shook his head. "But—Doc. Maybe Carpenter's right. Mills are better than they were eighteen years ago. And with modern fire equipment, you could burn one field at a time."

"Cuba tried that," Doc said, getting up and putting on his jacket. "The result was, they passed a law, making it a capital offense to burn cane. Let's go to dinner, kid."

HIS ankle didn't feel so bad since he had had his hot bath and the use of a roll of adhesive tape. Doc hardly limped at all as he went into the dining room to take his usual place at the head of the table—the administrator was married and ate at home. Irene McGibney had been placed at his right hand, and when Leong brought Doc's usual trade paper and handed it to him, the cane-rider waved it away.

Mike Shields, as the official jester, said: "You ought to be honored, Miss McGibney. The Cowboy usually reads all through dinner, honoring us with a grunt from time to time."

Doc tried a little joke. "I've got a deep-laid plan. I'm going to talk Miss Irene into riding with me tomorrow. If I leave her here, you young bucks won't get any work done."

"Now we know," Mike said. "Doc's been riding all these years in preparation for the great event. You can't ask a girl to go touring in a Model T."

"If you have any more horses like the one you came up on this evening," Irene said, "it'd be an honor."

Doc warmed up. "Now you've got me," he said. "That's my weakness, my horses. I bring 'em down from Kentucky and Missouri myself. I've got ten of 'em. Two here and one at each of my posts. Those ponies can really go, too. The native stock is awful, bred back to Shetland size."

"All right," Irene said, "it's a go."

Doc clapped his hands, and spat Spanish at Leong. The boy said: "Can do," and went away.

Jerry Carpenter shook his head. "I've got to hand it to you, Doc," he said reluctantly. "There's not another man in the West Indies could give an order like that and make sure it was carried out."

Doc flushed, pleased that Carpenter was trying to heal the breach, pleased that the girl had heard the compliment.

"What did he order?" Irene asked.

"He told Leong," Jerry said, "to tell Sergio—that's the head groom—to move four horses about twenty miles tonight, and to make sure they were led, and not ridden. So you'll have mounts at the posts where you change."

"That's why they call him Doc," Graves, the lab man, said. "The natives think he's a witch doctor of some sort."

The girl said: "Oh—that must be a hard

reputation to sustain for eighteen years, Doc . . . do they really have witch doctors down here?"

"Ask Doc," Mike said.

Doc Wilson said, slowly: "Yes. Oh, yes. You see, the natives here are a mixture of Spanish—sort of a debased Spanish, descended from pirates—and Congo negro, and Indian. It makes for superstitions. Men have been shot—and worse—for riding a horse over a little clay hut they never even saw—a hut that contained a feathered lizard."

"Feathered lizard?"

"Uh-huh." Doc slit open a grilled flying fish with a deft motion, attacked it. "Seems to be some corruption of the Winged Serpent of Mexico, crossed onto the snake worship of Voodoo—like in Haiti—with a touch of what they remember of the Cathedral that was built here during the Spanish occupation. Nice stuff." He made a slip. "If the Feathered Lizard tells 'em to, Jerry, you'll get a break. They'll fire the cane for you."

Jerry Carpenter stiffened. "If you're implying that I'd—"

"Forget it, kid. I never imply anything. I'm just a simple cowboy." Doc cast around for a change of subjects. "Ever go swimming with your uncle, Miss Irene—or you, Don?"

"No," Irene said. "Now that you mention it, it's funny. He has a place on the North Shore of Long Island, with a swell beach, only he won't swim."

Doc nodded. "The Feathered Lizard's to thank for that. He's got a scar on his chest and across both arms. He rode through the wrong clearing in 1920, when he was surveying."

"Don't let the Cowboy scare you, Miss Irene," Mike Shields said. "This island's civilized now. Why, almost nine-tenths of it's under cultivation."

"Sure," Graves said "But there are still lizards."

II

AS THEY were finishing their coffee, Leong brought Doc a note. He read it, nodded, and said: "Chrissler wants us all to come down to his place after dinner. Mrs. C's giving a little blow-out for the McGibneys."

"Ugh," Mike said. "Warm drinks and cold conversation. When we were in Cuba—" He mimicked Mrs. Chrissler's mincing accent.

"Chrissler's a good sugar man," Doc said.

"Ah, relax, Doc," Graves said. "Stop setting a good example for the younger generation. You don't see me doing it, do you?" He had gray hair, was perhaps ten years older than Wilson. When sober, he was not a bad laboratory man.

"No, Graves, I don't," Doc said. "Okay, I'm sorry. Chrissler's a good sugar man, but his wife's a bore." He shoved his chair back from the table, started to walk out, as was his custom as senior bachelor. Then he remembered, and helped Irene to rise, escorted her out.

"What ought I to wear?" she asked him solemnly.

"Why—uh—you look swell in what you have on." He stared after her in confusion as she laughed and went to her room. Then he shook his head, and nodded to Perrin, his clerk. "Come on in my room, and we'll go over the reports today. Might as well knock them off."

"Yes, sir."

Don McGibney spoke for the first time since they had started dinner. "Mind if I come too, Doc?"

"Come on, kid." He was a little amused at young Don, sitting on the bed, gravely listening while Doc dictated off crop estimates, handed over cane samples, and told his clerk what requisitions he would need and where. "And get the notices out, Perrin. No more smoking off the Central grounds till after harvest."

"Yes, sir."

"You really worry about fire, don't you, Doc?" Don asked, as Perrin took his notebook to his own room. "Ever have one here?"

"Not on Central Dos. Tres and Quarto have each had two, and Uno has had three since I've been here." He swelled a little with pride. "The devil of it is, when they

have a fire, we have to turn out and help them put it out." Doc went over to the wall, where his gun belt was hanging, and broke the revolver open, slid the cartridges out in his hand, and dropped them in his pocket. "If you have a gun, it's a good idea not to leave it loaded when you can't watch your room."

"Revolutions?"

"Not quite. Private feuds among the natives. And then, too, Sno-White Sugar's a small company. There are bigger ones that might like to drop it in their coffee. High finance in the tropics is a little more direct than around your uncle's office."

"He said that was all over."

"I wish it was. Mac ought to come down here more," Doc worried. "When he and I used to work together, he was the first guy to yell about absentee ownership. The last couple of years, he's been giving it to us. . . . Don't get me wrong. Mac's the salt of the earth. We were kids together, after the war. Only me, I'd come in from the fields and hurry through my paper work, while Mac was always poking around, learning how some other department did its work. Well, he owns the company now, and I'm cane-rider on a fourth of his fields. Which proves something. Only I wish he'd come down."

"He's not well, Doc."

"Too much swivel chair's all that's wrong with him," Doc grunted. "Put him on a horse again, and he'd be okay. Let's go to the Chrisslers', kid."

HALF an hour later, Doc nursed a warmish lemonade, and listened to fat Mrs. Chrissler tell Irene: "When we were in Cuba, there used to be a band concert every Wednesday, and a big dance every Saturday. And we got all the latest clothes from New York."

Graves and Mike Shields looked at Doc, who choked on his drink and turned away, straight into the arms of Joe Chrissler. The administrator said: "I'm pretty well served up as a host. Come on in the study a moment, Doc. Jerry and I have something we want to talk over with you."

"Sure," Doc said. He set down the lemonade gladly, and went into the book-lined room. Chrissler shut the door, took two bottles out of a cabinet.

"A double, Doc?"

"A single," Doc said. "I've got one more double coming to me tonight on my quota. I'll take half of it now."

Chrissler poured it, then poured rum for himself and Jerry Carpenter, and squeezed limes into it. "How you can drink whisky in this heat, Doc, is more than I care to think about. . . . Sit down, boys, and let's get to our dog fight."

"So it's going to be like that, eh?" Doc asked.

Jerry said: "Yeah. But before we start, Doc, I want to apologize for that mess on the club porch this evening. I was hot and tired from wrestling with native clerks all day, and I forgot myself."

"Forget it, kid. Only I get a little tired of that cowboy joke." He stuck out his hand.

Jerry took it, and said: "I should have shown more respect for you."

Doc dropped the hand, and asked: "Why? The head of the mill rates even with the cane-rider."

"But you're fifteen years older than I am, Doc," Jerry said.

Doc squinted his eyes and said: "If that's supposed to be a crack, let it be. I'm forty-two. I rode tea in Ceylon when I was fifteen, but that doesn't make me an old man."

"Boys, boys," Chrissler said. "Break it up."

"Okay." Carpenter pulled papers out of his white jacket, laid them on the desk. "Here's the figures. Read 'em and weep. Sno-White—meaning McGibney—has two million dollars tied up in this crop. Roughly a quarter of that is in Central Dos. Right?"

"A little over a quarter," Doc said, "but let it go. Call it a half-million dollars."

"According to the New York office, the company needs cash. It pays about eight percent for it when it borrows. Forty grand a year interest on Dos. Seven hundred and seventy a week, roughly, or fifteen hundred for two weeks. Got that, Doc?"

"Sure. Go on."

"All right. In addition to that, sugar falls about a cent and a half a ton from the time the new crop comes in here till the Cuban crop comes in. Because we're warmer here than Cuba or Louisiana or the Philippines, we get the full advantage of that cent and a half. Right?"

"Okay," Doc said. "Okay. I can add."

"That cent and a half, on Dos alone, means something like twenty-three hundred bucks. Add that to your fifteen and you have—"

"The thirty-eight hundred dollars you would save by burning the cane," Doc said wearily. "My God, man—are you a fire-bug, or something? We've done this for years. Because Dos cane is not burnt, because it's clean, because it doesn't have weeds while it's growing, we get about two dollars more to the acre than any other Central in the West Indies. Which gives us four thousand, or two hundred more than the money you—"

"I wasn't through," Carpenter said. "But, parenthetically, why not get the four thousand *and* the thirty-eight hundred as well? But let's go on. In a shed over there, we have ten thousand dollars' worth of the most modern fire-fighting equipment. In this climate, with this moisture, it depreciates nearly twenty percent a year. There's another two thousand dollars going to waste."

"That's childish bookkeeping," Doc said. "Write that off to insurance."

"I can see you haven't been paying much attention to the accounting department," Jerry snapped. "The insurance companies expect the equipment nowadays. The premium is the same the other companies pay. Only they make it back by saving two weeks' labor in the—"

"All right," Doc barked. "There's what you're driving at. Two weeks' work for my field hands. Man, they've always had that two weeks' work. They have the pay spent before they get it. Give them a year's warning, if you're going to take it away. Fire those fields, and the hands go into the new crop in debt, and I won't be responsible for them. I'll quit first."

"Stop shouting," Carpenter shouted. "Are we running the company for the hands or for the McGibneys?"

"Both," Doc said. "Our only right in these islands is the work and money we give the natives. I tell you, if you fire that cane, Sno-White can get itself a new rider."

"That might not be a bad idea," Carpenter said. "A rider who can't sit a horse and is too senile to use a car isn't any great asset—"

Doc didn't know he'd hit the younger man till he saw Jerry Carpenter on the floor and felt Chrissler's plump hands holding him back. "Cut it, Doc," Chrissler moaned. "Cut it out."

CARPENTER got up, standing his ground. "I told you fists didn't crush sugar," he said. "Or earn dividends. But if you want to make it that way, come on outside."

Doc said: "Okay. I'll swap you your fifteen years for my ten pounds."

Chrissler said: "Boys, boys. You're grown men—executives."

"No we're not," Doc said. "I'm nothing but a peon overseer, a field hand. Ask Carpenter."

"And me," Jerry said. "I'm a pen-pusher, a textbook sugarman. Ask Wilson."

The whine and the nervousness went out of Chrissler's voice, and the snap of command came back into it. "That'll be enough. Shake and make up, and if there's any more trouble, you both get off this Central and out of the sugar business. Supposing the natives saw you fighting?"

Doc Wilson shook his head as though to clear it. "Okay, Joe—you're right. Here it is, Jerry."

Carpenter shook hands gingerly. "Let it rest at—aw, nuts, Doc. We're both crazy with the heat." He picked up the bourbon bottle, poured himself a slug. "I'll try your poison, Doc."

Doc slapped him on the back. "You'll do, Jerry—till the next time." He took a little glass, poured whisky into it. "This thing's going to break up Central Dos some day, Jerry. Put your recommendations on paper, and send them to New York, and let them decide." He drank down the

whisky and said: "I'll be seeing ya," and went back to the living room.

"The boys were right," Jerry Carpenter said softly to Chrissler. "Just a big cowboy." He shrugged. "They made the work picturesque once—but that's all over."

"I'm sorry for him," Chrissler said. "He was here when you were still in grade school, when I was a punk starting out in Cuba. Now he's going. New York can only decide one way—our way. Wonder what Doc'll do?"

"Open a horse-breeding farm in Missouri," Carpenter said. "Or a trading post in the West Indies some place. Or just drink himself to death."

"He's drunk a pint of whisky every day since I've known him," Chrissler said. He failed to mention that he had never seen Doc drunk, or seen him take more than that even pint.

"Let's get started on the letter," Jerry Carpenter suggested. "There's a mail plane tomorrow."

III

A BRIDGE game had started outside. Mrs. Chrissler, Walters, the chief accountant, Graves and Don McGibney were playing. Irene McGibney and Mike Shields were watching, and the rest of the men were in a corner, talking sugar.

Doc sauntered up to the bridge game, put his hands on the back of Don McGibney's chair to watch. Irene said promptly: "It's terribly hot here, isn't it?"

"You ought to go to Cuba," Mrs. Chrissler said. "It really does get hot there. But you don't mind it, because—"

"Take me outside for a breath of air, Doc," Irene said.

He nodded, and followed her to the door. Immediately outside of it, she said: "You'd better keep your right hand in your pocket. Blood ill-becomes Mrs. Chrissler's drawing room. I'm sure nobody bleeds in Cuba."

Doc chuckled and wound his handkerchief around his barked knuckles.

"Well," she said, "what door did you run into?"

"It was nothing," he said. "The heat makes me irritable occasionally." He coughed. "I banged my fist on Joe's desk too hard."

"Oh, yeah—" she imitated his drawl. "You never let the heat bother you in your life." She leaned on the veranda rail and looked up. "Pretty stars. . . . You know, Doc—you've got a lot to live up to. Uncle Mac's told Don and me about you all our lives. The great Doc Wilson. Best sugar man in the business. Best horseman, most loyal friend, toughest fighter. The man who had more sense than Uncle Mac—who stuck to the fields instead of going in for money."

"I never had the brains to make money. I know horses and natives and sugar, and not much else. Only I think I know those better than anybody else, and maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm getting old."

She laughed. "Why, Doc, you're a young man. You're forty-two, and in Wall Street, that's the athletic age."

"How'd you know. . . ? Oh, yeah, Mac. He's just ten years older than I. But you see, in this business, I'm old. Most of our men come down as soon as they get out of college. If they can stick it for five years, they get a job in New York, and a pension—it's pretty easy. All expenses paid by the company, a couple of thousand a year, and all they have to do is agree not to get married or quit. Only, that way, you see so many of them come and go. And I stay on."

"Jerry Carpenter's no college boy."

He said: "It is hot tonight. Hot and clear, and dry. . . . You said Jerry Carpenter. But Jerry's going places. He'll be administrator when Joe's wife makes Joe take her back to Cuba. At my age, he'll be general manager in New York."

"And you—"

"Will still be riding horses," he said. "Or fired. If Mac—" His voice rose to a shout. "Hey . . . you! Pull up!" His voice barked in Spanish, and he vaulted the rail of the veranda, ran across the clearing.

He ran like a young man.

Irene saw metal glint in the moonlight, heard someone grunt, and then a high rising wail sounded through the night. She ran out, yelling, scarcely conscious of the

men pouring out of the building behind her.

A ragged peon, coffee colored, huddled at Doc Wilson's feet. The native was holding one arm in his hand. Three tin cans sprawled at his knees.

Doc Wilson straightened up, said: "It's nothing. Just a boy I fired out of the fields stealing canned salmon. He tried to knife me."

The cane-rider tossed the knife, glinting, out of the clearing. "All right, Vanez. Get going, and if I catch you on company ground again, I'll skin you alive." He stirred the man with his toe, and the native scuttled out of the clearing. They saw him searching for his knife.

"He'll find that knife,' Mike Shields said. "You should have kept it."

"Without a knife, he can't make a living at all," Doc answered. "Let him have it. Poor devil—knife a man for three cans of salmon. I'd take him back, only I can't have a hand who drinks in the cane."

Jerry Carpenter said: "You'll die from a knife out of the cane some day, Doc."

"Yeah? He isn't sore at me. I did what was right. If he had three cans of salmon, he'd break the arm of anybody who tried to steal it."

"Good grief," Jerry said. "You can turn anything into a lecture on native customs and morals."

"Don't start that again, boys," Joe Chrissler said. "Good work, Doc. Make an example."

As they started back for the house, Irene said softly, "Now you don't have to hide your knuckles. They'll think you barked them on the native. So it was Jerry Carpenter."

"I'm going home," Doc growled. "Be ready to ride at seven if you want to go with me."

THE MIST was still hanging over the cane when they started out. Doc squinted at the sun. "Going to be hot," he said, while his horse bucked the morning kinks out of his back. "This damp'll burn away soon. Good growing weather. If this keeps up, Jerry'll get his cane in ten days. Or," he added, "two hundred and sixty-nine dollars and thirty-two cents sooner."

She laughed. "Jerry is a demon figurer, isn't he? Uncle Mac thinks he's a comer."

"Mac's been too long in New York," Doc said. "You can't make sugar out of a book." He fussed with the throat strap on his bridle, went on. "Look, this is important to me. I've got to tell someone. It's not that I don't like Jerry. He's a good kid, and a hard worker. But you can't put a lot of theories into work till you've tried them. You can't figure Cubans, Americans, Filipinos, and our Islanders are all the same people. Jerry's been down here seven years. For six of them, he's been in the office, planning, figuring. He doesn't figure the human element right."

"Forget it, Doc. I understand you. . . . Isn't it a swell day?"

"Swell."

They rode along, through the thirty-foot fire-break that divided the cane. The sugar plants were high over their heads, green and waving, and ripe, and there was the faint smell of sugar in the air. Insects hummed, and a little distance away a crew was working in the cane, their machetes striking rhythmically, steadily.

Doc squinted at the cane, then suddenly wheeled his horse and took off into the cane at a gallop. Irene followed him as best she could. The space between the cane was just enough for the leaves to meet, and she had to ride with her head bent and her crop held up in front of her to fend off the foliage from her eyes.

Her horse stopped abruptly, and she dropped the crop, sat speechless. Doc was kneeling beside his horse. The bay was plunging at his bridle, which was hooked over Doc's arm. A man writhed on the ground, and while she looked, she saw Doc's knife rise and fall.

She screamed: "No! No, Doc—no!" and thought she was going to come off the horse in a faint.

Over his shoulder, Doc Wilson barked: "I'm no murderer. Shut up and—you're wearing a handkerchief, aren't you? Take it off and come here. Hang on to your horse."

She slid off the horse in a daze, took off her neckerchief, and brought it to him. He reached back for it without looking up. Then her horse plunged, trying to get away from the blood that was on the ground, or from something she didn't see.

Doc stood up after a moment, his face grim. "Snake bite," he said contemptuously. "I cut it open, put a tourniquet on." He slung the native over his saddle horn, mounted. "Come on. We'll ride him to the nearest post. It's only a few miles."

Despite the double burden, Doc's horse took the few miles faster than Irene liked to ride. At the post—a mud-and-grass hut with a horse corral and adobe stable—Doc slid off, carried the man into the hut. She heard him giving orders in Spanish, heard a woman answer, and then he was back, just as a boy led out two fresh horses.

"You change horses here," he said, "if you're going on. If you're not, Jose here'll ride back to the station with you."

"I'll ride on," she said weakly.

He nodded, and they mounted. They went off at a more leisurely pace this time. She said: "I'm sorry. I thought—I mean—when I saw the knife—"

"I know what you thought," he said. He turned his horse, still trotting, into the cane, where machetes broke the silence. She followed him, to see him riding up to a foreman. Doc gave what seemed to be explicit orders in Spanish, then broke into English. "This is Miss McGibney, Batista. The Big Boss's niece. You better be good."

The foreman said: "*Si,* Señor Doc. The young lady, she no spik our language yet, huh? Young lady, you come with the Señor Doc, you tella me? Is not the cane clean like the table top all the way from here to Arroyo Christobal?"

"I wouldn't know," she said, smiling. "Doc came through so fast I couldn't tell."

"Oh, that Señor Doc," Batista sighed. "He ride like the wind, see like the sewing woman, all the same time. Sometimes, I t'ink I go to the city, drink myself to death, just to get away from him."

"Nevertheless, you get your gang back there and finish cutting that brush out," Doc said, grinning. "Or you don't get paid for that last five acres. *Adios, muchacho.*

"*Adios,* Señor Doc," the foreman said. "Goodabye, young lady. You come again huh?"

"Sure thing, Batista," she said. She wheeled her horse to follow alongside Doc.

DOC SAID: "Riding on with me, eh? Aren't you afraid I'll kill you when I get you out without any witnesses?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said, coldly.

"Don't talk like that," Doc Wilson barked. "I know what they say about me. The Cowboy, the bully, the rider who keeps his cane clean by making the men afraid. Did Mac send you down here to spy on me, check up on the reports Jerry's been sending North?"

"You're crazy, Doc. Uncle Mac's the best friend you've got. You've been in the tropics too long."

"I haven't been here too long; Jerry's not been here enough."

Abruptly the cane stopped, and the began to climb a steep trail. Big out-croppings of rock guarded the path on each side. There was a road, but it wound around, easing the grade, and they left it to follow a horse trail nearly straight up.

"What's up here?" Irene asked, clinging to her pommel horn.

"Mesa Ysidor," Doc said. "Best canland on the island. They get the cane down in trucks. We can't get a track through up here."

"Oh. I've heard Uncle Mac speak of Mesa Ysidor. Wasn't—"

"Yeah," Doc said. "That was our first field. When Mac and I came here after the war, that was all Sno-White had under cultivation."

They went on climbing, with no noise but the tingling of the bridles and the rolling of stones away from the horses' feet. Far below them, a truck came to the foot of the hill and began to climb, its motor whining rebelliously. It was amazing how small the truck seemed down on the level they had left only twenty minutes before. They climbed faster than the truck did, and then went over a little dip, and all that

was left of the car was its whine on the hot air.

Then the trail sloped out and rejoined the road. Irene started to go down it, but Doc said: "Wait," and turned his horse up a little bluff that commanded the top of the road. She looked at him inquiringly, but he didn't say anything—just rode. Then he stopped, tied the horse to a clump of bushes, and went on afoot.

She shrugged and dismounted too, tied her horse beside his. He led her to the very top of the bluff, and stopped behind a big rock. He knelt, brushed the dust away from the base of the rock with his old Stetson, and pointed, silently.

Irene knelt and saw that there were some letters rudely scratched in the surface of the rock. She made them out only with difficulty:

*WE E D OWN TO 20 BUL LET & 2 M N. JUAN S CH Z LED T EM.

Underneath were two sets of initials: A.McG. and H.P.W.

"What was that?" she asked silently.

"Six months after your uncle and I took over here," Doc said, "this was on the old Central Uno then, the only plant we had. . . . An egg who called himself Juan Sanchez arrived from Cuba, and started telling the men how the sugar companies over there gave each man a bottle of rum and a new girl every evening. . . . Only we didn't know that, at first. We just thought what a nice guy Sanchez was—all the time giving us advice. Then the hands rose. Mac and I were not killed, because we kept them off from behind this rock till help came from the next island."

"What was Sanchez," she asked, "a communist or—"

"Last time I saw him," Doc said, "he was running the Wall Street Bank and Trust Company's office in Curacao. That happened to be the bank that owned the Mid-Carib Sugar Company."

She said: "Oh."

He grinned, slowly. "Go on, say 'oh.' Say it good and loud. Say 'ah,' too, because you people from up North get the idea that all white men stick together in the tropics, and you have to look out for native revolutionaries. I'll tell you this—nine out of ten revolutions down here are financed with American money. And supervised by American men."

She walked to her horse, fumbled with the stirrup. "You wouldn't be trying to tell me that Jerry Carpenter is selling the company out?"

"Somebody is. It's got all the signs."

She turned and faced him, leaning against her horse's side. "I don't believe it. I don't—"

"So that's the way it is." Doc stared hungrily for a moment, then dropped his eyes. "Why go riding with me, then?"

"You're Uncle Mac's oldest friend. You're—"

"A has-been," he finished for her. "An old bull with his horns knocked off. . . . Let's ride."

But after they were mounted, she turned her horse back to the summit for a moment, looking down on the fields. "That truck's still only halfway up," she said. "And there's a car passing it."

He rode over to look with her. "It's Joe Chrissler," he said. "Let's wait."

The car was like a child's toy, coming up from way below, riding in the middle of a dust cloud that danced at its edges in sun rays as tangible as swords. Then it grew larger and finally they could hear its motor. Doc sat his horse as impassive as a statue, leaning on the pommel, staring down. The girl could sense rather than know that something was very, very wrong.

Chrissler arrived, red-faced, panting, too hurried for politeness. He jerked the brim of his Panama at Irene, and said hotly: "Gotta see you, Doc. Important."

Doc drawled: "Sure. You look funny out in the fields, Joe."

Joe said, "Ha!" and shot Doc Wilson a quick, suspicious glance. Then he bustled over to lean on the Revolution Rock, and waited for the horseman to join him. Doc did not dismount.

"Look," Chrissler said. "Just found out. Carpenter's selling us out to Mid-Carib. I found letters in his room that—"

"Easy, Chris, easy," Doc said. "You're going pretty strong."

"All right. I tell you I know it. Ride back with me and let me—"

"I can't leave the fields this time of day, this time of year. What do you want me to do? You're the Administrator."

"Just sign this letter with me," Chrissler said, "asking Mac to send an investigator down. That's all."

Doc looked at the letter. It mentioned Carpenter by name. Finally he said again: "You're the Administrator," and signed with the pen that Chrissler held out to him, signed without taking his gauntlet off. Afterwards, he said: "You know, Mac's niece and Jerry—" and choked and couldn't finish.

Chrissler whistled sympathetically. "Yeah? That's too bad. Too bad," and walked back to his car, again jerking his Panama vaguely in Irene's direction.

Doc Wilson watched him start down hill, and then said: "Okay, kid. Let's ride." His horse jumped with fright and astonishment at the jab the spurs gave him.

IV

IT WAS not much of a lunch they had at Doc's number two post. The cane-rider didn't talk, wouldn't rise to the conversational bait the girl threw him. The native woman who ran the post took Irene away for a siesta, and Doc squatted in the shade, rolling wheat-straw cigarettes and grinding them into the dust after two or three puffs. When Irene woke up and went to find him, there was a circle of wheat straw and tobacco around him for two feet.

She imitated his drawl: "Okay, kid, let's ride," and beamed when she drew a smile.

They mounted fresh horses and took off into the cane. It was hotter now, hot with a fierceness that sent the sweat down their faces faster than the dust could cake it, that made the horses lather with a fierceness that was amazing.

Everywhere there was sun, and more sun; sun you couldn't hide from, sun that beat against your hat and ate through, that reflected off the ground and got under dark glasses, sun that seemed to lance through your shoulders.

At three, Irene said, a little uncertainly: "I don't see how the men stand it, working out here. I don't see why they don't just melt away."

"They're natives," Doc grunted. "Bred in this sun, used to it." Then he added: "The water's boiled out of a flivver every fifteen minutes in this weather. Flivver!"

"Is that still rankling, Doc? You ought to be bigger, you ought to ride—"

He barked at the foreman of the group they were passing: "Make 'em pick their feet up! Whatda they think we're payin' 'em for?" And then, at the foreman's puzzled look, repeated it in Spanish.

The girl laughed, saying: "I think the sun's getting you, Doc." But he didn't look around, didn't pull his reins. They rode on.

A quarter of a mile farther on, she said suddenly: "Doc, I think I'm—" and when he turned, she was already half out of her saddle, fainting.

He wheeled, caught her, dragged her up on his pommel, and then, almost as an afterthought, hooked her horse's reins around his knee, before taking off into the cane at a gallop.

He pulled up at the first clearing he came to, where a pepper tree gave some shade. Sliding off, he knotted the horses' reins together, and carried her over to the tree, laid her down. Then he kneeled next to her, frowning in puzzlement. Finally he loosened the belt on her riding breeches, pulled off her boots. Then he got the flask out of his pocket, forced some liquor between her lips, and when she coughed and fluttered her eyelids, he wet his handkerchief with water from the canteen on his pommel and washed her face, gently, softly.

She opened her eyes a little, and murmured: "I'm all right, Doc. Just let me rest a minute—" she reached out and took his hand, hung onto it.

He knelt there, not wanting to move, not daring to move, looking down at her gently.

They stayed that way for five minutes,

and then she sat up, leaned against the pepper tree, and said: "Could I have a cigarette?"

"Sure!" He fumbled in his pockets, got confused when he pulled out only his makings.

"That's all right, Doc. Roll me one."

"Well—" His movements were a little flustered. He got the cigarette rolled, held it out for her to lick. She laughed suddenly, and the tobacco went flying. On the second try they made it.

HE ROLLED himself one, leaned back against the tree at her side, careful not to touch her. But she moved nearer, dropped her head on his shoulder, leaned there. Idly her toe poked at the riding boots. "Turned lady's maid, Cowboy?"

"I feel like a rat," he said. "Keeping you out in that sun so long. I was thinking of something, and—"

She moved her head on his shoulder and looked up at him. "What were you thinking of, Doc?"

He didn't answer at once. There was the noise of machetes swinging in the distance, of the hands calling to each other in the canebrakes. "Business," he said. "Machinery and men and—"

She laughed. "I'm disappointed. I thought you were thinking of me."

"I was. You came into it, too." He added quickly: "You're Mac's niece and this is his company."

"I'm still disappointed I meant really thinking about me—"

He didn't mean to do it, but her face was near and infinitely desirable and—the kiss longer than he had expected. Then she pushed him away. "Don't apologize, Doc," she said. "I meant you to do that. Think I'm shameless?"

"No. But, kid—that kiss wasn't from your uncle's oldest friend."

"It wasn't from a man who was thinking about sugar cane either. You did a pretty good job, Cowboy."

"Hey, that's no way to talk. You wouldn't want to embarrass a guy that hadn't seen a white woman in nigh these eighty years, would you?"

"You're developing, Doc . . . What's that?" She nodded across the clearing, and he turned to follow her eyes. Something dangled from a bent-over cane.

"It looks like—" The old grin came back on his face, and he rose, walked heavily across the clearing. The thing was made of sticks and dried leaves and a little string, and it had the vague outline of a lizard—with feathers. He poked cautiously with his boot at the bush around the foot of the cane, and two or three empty bottles came to view.

He strode back, barked: "Get your boots on. Let's get out of here."

"What is it? Doc, you look—"

"The Feathered Lizard. Voodoo, or Juju, or whatever you want to call it, but—let's ride."

She jerked her boots on hurriedly. Doc worked around, removing the last traces of their presence, then nearly threw her over the horse helping her mount.

He took off for the opening to the clearing at a hard gallop, the girl's horse following along. Nearly out, he blurted, "Okay, I think we're safe," when a ragged, sleepy-eyed peon leaped out of the brush, ran screaming across the path. They had a brief glimpse of a black head slashed with a pure white streak of hair.

Doc pulled his gun, drew down on the man, shouting: "Stop. Stop, you—"

The girl hit his arm, and the bullet went wild. She faced him wild-eyed. "You'd have killed—"

"I was going to shoot a leaf off over his head, stop him. Now he's gone, and there may be enough dead to—"

A machete came hurtling out of the cane and stuck, quivering, in the ground—after doing a neat parabola that cut the air three feet from their heads.

"They didn't mean to hit us," Doc said. "If we get out of here, they may think we've done no harm."

He reined his horse down. "Don't gallop. We can't show we're afraid. Supremacy of the white man and all that sort of thing."

She said: "I'm frightened. Really frightened. I never knew what it was before."

"You're smart to be frightened. In

'Twenty all the smart people were—it was the fools who thought the signs meant nothing." He sighed. "All the fools died."

"You don't help a girl any." Her teeth were chattering.

THE road twisted, and came on a field where a crew was working. As they rounded the bend, the machetes began to chop again, and this was different than the other fields they had seen, because none of the hands stopped work to goggle at the girl from the North.

The foreman pretended not to see them, stood with his back to them, watching his men. Doc said: "Well, we can't act any different than usual," and rode up to the man, the girl dropping her horse back a little. Doc said: "Ho, *mi amigo. Cómo está usted?*" His eyes were alert; there was no man here with a white streak across his head.

The foreman turned slowly, and it was significant that he spoke in English. "We are alla right, Señor Doc. We make fine in the cane."

"That is good," Doc said, in slow Spanish, "because if you didn't make good, my boy, I would have to be strict with you."

The foreman said: "We alla know the Señor Doc and are afraid." There was no grin to go with it.

Doc shrugged, and said, in English: "Tell your men not to work so hard. The sun is hot."

"*Muy bien,* Señor Doc."

They rode out of the clearing, and onto the road. As soon as they were out of sight, Doc put his hand on the girl's, and said: "Listen!" Behind them the machetes had stopped chopping.

"We'll take the first road back to the Central," Doc decided. "This is sure to mean trouble. The man who attacked us wasn't in that gang; and I don't know any of my men who looks like him. He's from outside, an agitator."

"What can you do?"

"Tomorrow's pay day. Nobody starts anything when he's about to be paid. So when they come in to get their money, we people will be staging a rifle contest. There are some pretty good shots among the boys, and it'll help the peons to see the rifles. And a cock-fight tomorrow night. Maybe they can blow off steam on it. Here's our road."

They turned up the side road, and went at a gallop back to the mill.

V

JERRY CARPENTER looked around Chrissler's office, and said. "The whole thing's ridiculous. Giving an extra holiday when the cane's ripe and the mills are ready is throwing good money down the sewer. Some more of the Cowboy's nonsense. He's been down here so long he thinks like a native."

Doc Wilson said: "Let's bury the hatchet. This is a real emergency. Ordinarily, you could take their Feathered Lizards and feed them to the horses, and they'd make more, but when they've already sore, any insult to the Lizard starts them off."

Don McGibney said: "After all your years here, Doc, I should think you'd be able to avoid their voodoo shrines, or whatever they are."

"You too, Don? I didn't have to leave you around long for Jerry to—"

"If you're going to start anything tonight," Jerry said, "watch yourself. You won't catch me off-guard again. . . . All right, Joe. If the Cowboy insists on a half holiday tomorrow afternoon, I insist on the right to sign a protest on the order. New York'll know soon enough who's the real sugar man between us! I wrote them today."

"So did Doc," Joe Chrissler said. "He wrote to Mac."

"Sure," Doc said. "And I know whose opinion Mac'll take. He's known me for years."

"Mac won't always be the head of Sno-White," Carpenter said. "When the kid here gets in, he'll know enough to get rid of old fogies. . . . Doc, I like you. Only your business is cutting cane—not telling the rest of us about your great gift of native psychology."

"I like you, too, Jerry," Doc said. "Only —you need seasoning."

Don McGibney, who had been Doc's admirer the night before, said: "Irene affects them that way all the time, Jerry. He'll get over it." Doc scowled at the boy, and Don winced despite himself.

"If times weren't so bad," Doc said, "I'd ask you for Don here as assistant rider, Joe."

Joe tried to laugh. "All right, gentlemen. Then the matter stands like this: tomorrow morning, Doc rides in for the payroll, as usual. Tomorrow afternoon, he gives the field hands the afternoon off. But the natives who work in the mill stay in and work."

"Okay," Doc said. "Jerry, you're making a mistake that may cost all of us our lives. I'd think it over. . . . Jerry, have you ever gone in for the payroll?"

"No. Why?"

Doc said: "I'd like you and Don here to ride in with me tomorrow. You might learn something about native psychology."

"I hate to take the time off," Jerry said. "But all right. I'll give you your chance." He and Don got up and left.

"The guy's good," Joe Chrissler said. "Look how quick he won young Don over."

Doc said: "Don's young, and impressionable. He needs working out; but it doesn't matter. Old Mac knows me, and knows I know sugar." He grinned and swaggered out.

Joe lit a cigar and watched him go, then strolled after him. Doc was in one corner of the room, good-naturedly talking to Mrs. Chrissler about Havana. The other two were leaning over a table full of old magazines, chatting.

Joe went up and jerked the cigar at Jerry Carpenter. Jerry joined him, looking out the window. "He's counting on Mac," Chrissler said softly.

"Our letter ought to fix that," Jerry said, but there was uncertainty in his voice. "Signed by his own nephew," he added.

"He knows the nephew," Chrissler grunted. "That's bad."

Jerry laughed. "You've got to hand it to the old boy, though," he said. "Doc's got something. If what you told me hadn't convinced me that his methods were going to ruin the Central—"

"There's no place for sentimentality in this business," Chrissler said. "I'm glad Sno-White and I have someone like you to count on, Jerry."

DOC WILSON walked slowly from Chrissler's house back to the club. Occasionally he passed some of the natives who worked inside the compound. It seemed to him that they were nervous. If this was going to be 1920 all over again, he ought to get Irene and Mrs. Chrissler out. But Irene wouldn't go, and Mrs. Chrissler was Joe's worry. Joe Chrissler was an old sugar hand.

He stepped off the road and went over to the wire that enclosed the North Americans' living quarters. Good tough wire, horse-high and hog-tight with barbs on the top. A mestizo shuffled behind him, and Doc called: "Ho, *muchacho!*" The man came over.

Doc took the man's machete and struck at the wire with it. It bounced back. Then he put the blade through two strands and twisted, and the wire broke. Doc snorted without humor, and handed the blade back to the solemn-eyed native. "Take them time, anyway," Doc said, half aloud. Jerry Carpenter's car roared along the road. Jerry didn't see him.

"That's all, *muchacho,*" Doc said. "Go along." The man melted into the shadows, and Doc strolled on to the club. Don McGibney was sitting alone on the porch.

"Where are the boys?" Doc asked.

"Most of them went into town," Don said. "Jerry just went for a walk with Irene." The boy's voice was sulky.

Doc dropped down next to him. "What's on your mind, Don? What have you got against me?"

"Nothing. Why should I?"

"Last night we were friends, *amigos.* Today when I came back from the cane you looked like you'd like to kill me. Speak up, man."

"What's it to you?"

"Ah, stop being a kid. Your uncle's

my oldest friend. We fought off a revolution together. Now he sends his kids down here, and I want to take care of you."

"I don't need taking care of," Don said, viciously. "I'm no child. You'd think you're the only man on the island who knows sugar. You think we're all a bunch of kids. Only we know something you don't; times have changed, and you can't run the fields by murdering anyone who—"

"Shut up!" Doc barked. "Has Jerry been putting this nonsense in your head?"

"Jerry's a smart guy, Doc. Jerry—"

But Doc Wilson was gone. He went across the compound at a gallop; tore around a corner, and found Jerry Carpenter and Irene at the edge of the wire, looking down on the river.

Doc caught Jerry by the shoulder and whirled him around. "Carpenter," he grated, "there's been enough of this. It started over burning cane or not burning cane, but it's gone past that. When you tell Don McGibney I'm a murderer, you're going too far."

"Me?" Jerry backed off, white lines down the corners of his mouth. "When you say I told him that, you lie. If that's the best you can do to pick a fight, okay. You've been spoiling for one for a long time, Cowboy."

Doc saw it coming and rolled his head, and the blow only stung his ear. Then he was wading in, slugging for Carpenter's midriff while Irene screamed.

He was hardly conscious of the shower of jabs that rocked his head back, until he found himself sprawling on the ground. He struggled to his feet, under the grinning gaze of the millman, shook his head, and waded back into the fight.

A loose rock rolled under Jerry's foot, and he staggered back. Doc waited for him to get his footing. Wilson's breath was coming hard, and there was a red haze over the moonlight. He saw that Jerry's mouth was open as though the younger man was hurt, too, and blood streamed from Carpenter's cheek.

Then they went at it again, the dust rising in lazy, choking clouds from the ground as their heavy bodies circled each other, as their feet shuffled, and always thei hands slugged, slugged hard, with blow that thudded into the tropical night. A sleeve ripped off Doc's coat at the armpi and he back-pedalled, wriggling to get i off his arm. Jerry seemed glad enough o the respite, not coming after Doc, bu standing and mopping at his face, tryin to stanch the blood.

In the silence that had fallen, Irene said "You big kids. You—you babies. Can' you see this isn't any good—isn't gettin you any place. Stop it!"

Doc hesitated, but Jerry started forward and then they met again, and the pitiles battle started. The fog of fighting cam down thicker and thicker over Doc, an he was still striking out when he realize that his blows were going into the air only and then he stopped. Carpenter was lyin at his feet.

Doc Wilson said, uncertainly: "Well I—"

But Irene had flung herself on her knees "You—you beast," she screamed. "You'v killed him. Jerry, Jerry, what has he don to you?"

"He's all right," Doc said dully. "He' coming to. Look." He shook his head, mop ping at his face. "Maybe that was a sucke play. And maybe not. At least you know where you stand now, Irene."

He went towards the club, past Don McGibney, who drew aside coldly. Mayb the kid was right.

In the Club, Leong came up loyally "You hokay, Señor Doc?"

"Yeah, sure, Leong. Double whisky, *muy pronto.*"

"You still lick 'em all, huh, Senor Doc?"

"Maybe that isn't enough, any more Leong. . . . Hurry up with that whisky you hear?"

VI

WHEN DOC woke up in the mornin he felt stiff and sore and battered and full of his years. But he rolled out o bed, and dressed in whites, and put on hi gun. This was pay day and he had to go t town and get the money. Leong served hin tea and eggs in silence, then went out t

the old car he used for going to town and started warming her up.

Irene appeared and said: "Wait a few minutes, will you? Jerry and I are going with you."

Doc was genuinely startled. "Jerry and —you."

"Yes," she said. Her voice was cold. "To show you and the hands. The company's more than a personal grudge. You said you had something we could learn with you; Jerry wants to learn it. There's no time, he says, for fighting anything but sugar till the crop's in the vats."

"Which is a slap in the face for me," Doc told her. "Okay. Ride in with me."

She started to turn away, then couldn't resist a personal crack. "You know, you mustn't feel too good about being able to lick Jerry. A little extra strength doesn't mean so much. A man with a machine is stronger than a thousand men."

"I knew that," he said. "You might be surprised, but I even heard they've invented a thing called the telephone. Going to replace carrier pigeons, they say."

She didn't smile, but went away. He sat there in the car, warming the motor, listening to it, until she and Jerry came back and climbed into the back seat. Then he took off, driving hard, not worrying about bumps.

They hit the town of Santa Ynez at fifty an hour, dropped down, went two blocks, and were stopped by a policeman who walked out, leaned on the edge of the car. "*Buenos dias,* Señor Wilson."

"*Buenos dias, Señor el Tenente.*"

The lieutenant removed his hat to the lady and gentleman in the back, and said: "I trust you have carried no firearms into town this day, Señor Wilson?"

Doc snapped his fingers. "Golly, Lieutenant, I forgot. Here, I brought a gun with me."

"For this there is a fine, and the confiscation of the weapon. Ten *pesos,* please."

Doc Wilson gravely peeled off ten native dollars, handed them and the gun over. "Good day and God go with you, *Tenente.*"

"And with you, Señor Wilson."

Doc started the car.

Jerry couldn't restrain himself. "That's a hell of a note. How are you going to get the payroll home without a gun?"

Doc repressed a smile. "Oh, I'll manage. Here's the bank. Mind waiting?"

He got out, went into the bank, and signed for the sealed payroll bag. This he took out to the car, which he started.

"Hey," Jerry said, "We aren't going back to the Central without a gun, are we?"

"Not all the way," Doc said, stopping the car down the block. "Come into this saloon with me."

They followed him in, wondering. The bartender was a fat, dark man with tremendous pointing moustaches of the Kaiser Wilhelm type. He bowed at Doc.

"Good day, Señor Wilson. And how can I serve you?"

"Why, Pablo, I find myself inconvenienced. I have a large amount of money to take to the Central, and no weapon with which to protect it. I was wondering—"

"Señor Wilson, you have come to the right man. It so happens that a dear friend of mine died just a day or so ago; and for his widow, I wish to sell this fine revolver. Only five dollars, and a superior weapon."

Doc took the gun, looked it over, said: "This will do me nicely," and laid five *pesos* on the bar. "All right," he said to the two younger people. "Let's go. Till next week, Pablo."

"God be with you till then, Señor Wilson."

"You see how easy it is," Doc asked, chuckling, outside. "You can always get a gun."

"LET ME see that revolver," Irene asked, sharply. She took it from him, held it up. The initials H.W. were worked in pearl on its butt. "That's your gun," she said.

"Of course," Doc said, climbing into the car. "The lieutenant and Pablo and I have played that game for fifteen years. The *tenente* fines me and takes my gun, sells it to Pablo for four pesos, and I buy it back for five. That way, I am allowed to use a gun on the public highway, which is against

the law; the police remain my friends; and Pablo, whose uncle is a police *jefe,* makes a little profit." He started the motor. "Which is what I wanted you to see. That is native psychology. In my country, friends, we would pay a lobbyist to get the law changed; here we have an easier way. Such as breaking up a revolution by calling a holiday and putting on a cockfight."

"I'm still not convinced," Jerry Carpenter said.

Doc barked: "All right, then. I'll lay my cards on the table—if trouble starts, the natives'll be no respecters of persons. We'll all be killed or have to fight for it. If you've got any ideas—"

Carpenter said: "Are you accusing me of selling the company out, Wilson?"

"I've been in the tropics too long to accuse anyone of anything. It's too hot. But there's one thing I'd like to know. Do you know a millhand—a native—with a funny white streak across his hair? Like a skunk's back," Doc said.

Jerry growled: "I don't know every peon in the mill."

"This is important," Doc said. "Think."

"Well then—no," Jerry said. "I don't place him."

Doc was turned around in the front seat, staring at them. He held his eyes on Jerry's for a moment, then said, "If you spot him, grab him," and threw the car into gear.

He let them out at the Chrisslers' house and drove over to the office. The native paymasters took the bag from him, opened it, counted the money, and started laying it out in the cages, while Doc placed his company policeman on guard.

But his brow was furrowed, and when the accountant said: "We're ready if you are, Doc," he didn't answer at once. Then he suddenly snapped: "Guard, attention! Rack your rifles."

The paymasters looked up startled; but he was sure he was right when the soldiers dragged their feet reluctantly to the racks, put their guns up with maddening slowness.

Doc pulled the guard bar and padlock down on the rifles, looked them in, and put the key into his pocket. He put his hands on his gun belt and rocked back on his heels, looking at the ceiling. "In the trouble of 1920," he said, "the company paid twenty dollars gold, afterwards, to every man who stayed loyal."

He didn't look, he felt and heard the natives whispering among themselves. Then he barked: "Take your posts. Today we guard the pay office with machetes, and we guard it well."

The long shuffling line of peons began, working up to the window. The mill hands got their money and went over to squat in the shade outside the mill, chewing their cold frijoles, apparently ready to go back to work when the post-siesta whistle blew.

Doc walked up to Walters, the accountant, and said: "Go around to the club, and get Perrin. Tell him to get every white man in the compound, and bring him here."

"Trouble?" Walters asked. "I heard something, but I don't see any signs of any trouble."

"Look," Doc said. "It's noon, isn't it? Well, see those hands over there? They've finished eating, and they're not asleep. Get it?"

The accountant looked startled and then started running off.

"Walk, you fool," Doc snapped, and leaned casually against the wall, waiting. He did not feel casual.

THE MEN started coming into the pay office through the back door, and it was curious how, when they heard Walters' message, they stood back and looked at Doc. Jerry Carpenter and Irene arrived together, wondering.

Doc came to life. "Jerry!" he said. The mill head came over. Doc pointed at the sitting men, said: "Satisfied?"

"Phew! I—Doc, I'll tell them right away we're closing the mill this aftern—"

"Too late. Too dirty late. Where's Joe Chrissler?"

"I don't know. Here's Perrin, though."

Doc's clerk came in, said: "All in, Mr. Wilson."

"Where's Chrissler, Perrin?"

"He and Mrs. Chrissler went into Santa Ynez an hour ago, Mr. Carpenter."

Jerry Carpenter swore, turned to Irene, said: "Well, I—"

Doc said: "Good grief, Jerry—look. They've shut the gates." A solid wall of sober-eyed peons were around the building. Walters called: "Pay all paid. They've got their money."

"This is it," Doc said. "This is going to be worse than 'Twenty, because they're sober mad this time. Somebody put experts among 'em. I didn't hire any outlanders for the cane, that I know of, Jerry . . . and I guess you didn't hire any for the mill, and we've got our answer, now."

Irene had been looking out the window. She said idly: "The white-streak man's not there.

Walters came up and said: "I tried to get Chrissler, in town. The wire's cut."

Doc said: "Chrissler!" He hissed it as though it were a curse.

"You mean he sold you out?" Irene asked.

"His wife wanted to go back to Cuba," Jerry said. "He made a deal with one of the other companies. Then he had to put the blame some place, so he started trouble between Doc and me. . . . So, if there's an investigation, his mill head and his cane-rider were fighting, and it spread to the hands—"

"When Uncle Mac finds this out," Irene said, "he'll kill Chrissler."

"Mac won't find it out," Jerry said. "We'll all be wiped out! They've trapped us."

"Mac wouldn't find it out, anyway," Doc told them. "Because Mac died last night. I got a cable this morning. . . . He wrote me two months ago—he had an incurable disease He wanted you and Don to be down here, Irene, when he died—down where I could look after you." Doc Wilson laughed, said: "I've done a fine job. But you kids own Sno-White."

Jerry said: "Good grief, Doc, I—we—"

"Forget it." Doc shrugged, pointed. "There's your wish come true, Jerry—the cane's burning." He pointed out the window, dark clouds of smoke were rolling over the mesa already. "Only it won't do you any good. Their next move'll be to wreck the mill, so even if they don't kill us, they leave Sno-White broke."

"Well, let's all take the rifles, and go over to the mill," Jerry said. "We might as well die fighting."

"If we carried one gun out that door," Doc told him, "we'd start the trouble. The mill's locked; it always is for siesta. Let me—I've got it. Irene, will you take a chance with me? I need a woman—that is, I need someone light that I can get over a wall, and I need someone with fast hands!"

"Yes, Doc. Sure. If you think it'll do any good."

"Okay, Doc," Jerry said, slowly, his face white. "I'll trust her—to you."

"Come on, Perrin," Doc said. "You come with us."

The *mestizo* clerks and the North Americans watched them as Doc Wilson took a machete and cut a hole in the building-board ceiling of the room. He gave Perrin a boost up into the hole he'd made, said: "Haul Miss McGibney up, Perrin," and then turned away as Irene and Jerry embraced. After she had disappeared into the hole, Doc slipped off his boots, prepared to jump. "I'm a little heavy for this. But—"

"So long, Cowboy," Jerry said.

VII

IT WAS dark and hot up there in the false roof of the pay shed. Doc unconsciously dropped his voice to a whisper. "If we get through here," he said, "we can cut our way into the attic of the storeroom, and then on. We'll make the kill without going outside, that way."

"Why not take everybody?" Irene whispered back. "And bring the rifles?"

"I've fought off one revolution. That way's no good. If it comes to a fight, we lose; they'll have rifles hidden out in the brush." Doc coughed. "Anyway, I picked you two because you're light. This ceiling wouldn't support more than one man my weight."

Flattening his big body, he crept on, and on. Sweat made his hands slick and then coated them with the accumulated

dust of ages. Once Irene screamed, and he wriggled around, slashed with his machete, and got the head of the snake as it was coiling to strike.

Irene stopped, lying on the rafters, shivering. "I can't—Doc, I can't—"

"Cut it out," he barked. He cracked her on the shoulder. "Shut up, and go on, or—"

After a moment she said: "All right. That helped—" and crawled on some more. Little Perrin scuttled after them; the clerk seemed without nerves.

The pay office was separated from the storeroom by a little alley, scarcely two feet wide. It had been left just to allow air to circulate around the buildings. When Doc cut his way out the end of the pay office, bright sunlight hit them, and it seemed they had been in the loft so long that they were afraid of the sun; they shrank back. Then the big cane-rider chuckled. "Through the storeroom," he said, "and then the *mestizo* mess-hall, and we'll be in the machine shop. It's connected with the factory directly."

He leaned out and began cutting their way into the storeroom.

After half an hour of waiting, Jerry Carpenter's nerves began to crack. He bit through the cigarette he was smoking, and let the two halves fall to the floor. Graves put the burning ash out with a heel. "We don't need any more fire, Jerry." He gestured out the window.

"I don't understand," Don McGibney said. "Why should they fire the cane?"

"Visible symbol of the North American," Walters snapped. "So Doc Wilson told me. Thank the Lord, Wilson was here. He can get us out of this if anyone can." Walters gestured toward the cane. "It's good and ripe; it won't spoil if they don't wreck the mill. How did Doc figure on saving it, Carpenter?"

Jerry Carpenter whirled. "I don't know. He wouldn't take me into his confidence; not the great Doc Wilson. No, he had to be the witch doctor to the end. He—"

Graves flicked a thumb at the *mestizo* clerks. "Shut up, Jerry. Your nerves—Doc's okay. After all, he expected this; he would know what to do about it."

"Yeah," Jerry said slowly. "He expected it. He told us it was going to happen. How did he know? How do we know Joe Chrissler and his wife aren't dead some place, instead of run off? How do we know what's happening outside? Maybe Doc had a way fixed to get out, and took the girl with him. He's nuts about her."

Graves said nervously: "Shut up, Jerry. Shut up and sit tight till we hear from Doc."

Walters and Mike Shields nodded agreement, but some of the younger North Americans had huddled together—and as for the *mestizos,* they were obviously out of their wits.

Don McGibney said: "Jerry! I think we ought to do something. Instead of waiting here. I'm the head of this mill, and—"

Mike Shields said: "Don't be fools. If we start anything, it's suicide. They're sure to have rifles. Doc said—"

"Doc knew last night," Don told him, "that my uncle was dead—that his job was gone. The natives'll do anything for Doc Wilson—Uncle Mac's said so a dozen times. Maybe he—"

Mike Shields dropped the clowning manner that distinguished him. He sidled towards the rack of rifles, leaned against it, holding a machete. "All right," he said. "Lose your heads, and the fight starts here. I'm waiting for Doc."

Jerry Carpenter barked: "You guards! Take that machete away from him!"

The guards muttered something about "Señor Doc." Their eyes rolled whitely.

Jerry said: "Mike, you're calling the turns. Don and some of you kids get behind him; I'm coming up in his front. He can't watch us all at once."

Graves made a move to go to Mike's side, and Don McGibney felled him with an uppercut. The circle of white clad, white-faced men started closing in on Mike.

OVER the *mestizo* mess-hall it was much, much hotter than it had been over the storeroom or the pay office. There was a heavy odor of garlic and grease in the very wallboards over which they crept

dangerously, smoothly. Perrin stopped once and lay, retching, while the board swayed under his slight body; then the little clerk crept on again without a word. Irene's face was very white in the light that came from the hole behind them. Doc put out a hand and helped her along.

It seemed as though they would never reach the machine shop, but they did. Doc cut a hole in the ceiling and they dropped down into the oily, airy room. Irene leaned against a lathe, gasping. Perrin was frankly and happily sick to his stomach.

Doc himself wiped sweat from his face with a greasy rag that he found on a bench. It left black streaks on his skin.

Then he looked at his watch. "Let's go, kid," he said. "We've only got an hour till siesta's over." He went to the window, scraped it clean. "The men are beginning to mill around," he said. "Thank the Lord it takes the islanders an hour of speech-making before they can do anything. Let's go."

He shoved them over the partition between the machine shop and the factory, and then clambered after them. "Keep low," he said. "We don't want them to see us in here. This is going to be magic."

"What are we going to do?" Irene asked.

Doc told her, and for the first time in the history of the company, Perrin laughed. Then his laugh choked in his throat and died, gurgling, and his little face got pale as he stared at something behind Doc's shoulder.

Irene pushed a scream back.

Doc turned. The white-streaked peon who had thrown the machete at them stood by one of the machines, leaning there.

"Hello, *muchacho,*" Doc said. "Don't you know this is siesta?"

The man split his swarthy face in a grin. It was not a very pretty effect.

"Who paid you to start trouble, *paisano?*" Doc asked. He was moving towards the man, but so slowly that it didn't look as though he were moving at all. "How much did he pay you, *hombre?* It might be worth something to me to know?"

The man's hand fumbled under his greasy shirt, and came out with a gun. It looked clean and polished and strangely efficient in that dirty claw.

"Don't be foolish, *pobrecito,*" Doc said, still moving. "All around are my men."

For the first time the man spoke. "Not yours, *señor.* For why do you crawl through roofs?"

Doc shrugged, throwing his hands out in the Spanish fashion. "For this, then—"

One of the hands turned into a fist, suddenly, a fist that shot out with the speed of lightning. There was only one punch to that fight; the man went over backwards on the concrete floor of the mill, and the gun, still unfired, clattered on the floor beside him.

"Oh—pretty!" Irene cried.

Doc snapped: "You seem to have changed your mind about killings. Go on, stop goggling, get to work."

"Is he dead?"

"Yeah," Doc said. "Either that, or his neck's double-jointed. Well, we can use him, he clinches the thing. It'll work, now, it's got to work, now. Perrin, help me drag him behind this little motor here, and then get to work." His voice rose. "Both of you know what to do—we haven't got all night."

When Perrin and Irene came back from their jobs nearly an hour later, they found Doc leaning on the little motor, his face shiny with sweat. "All ready," he said. He waved the crowbar in his hand, and looking they saw he had broken the heads off the bolts that held the motor to the floor. "Take that other bar, Perrin, and help me heave this thing."

"You're not going to dump that thing on—" Irene asked. Her face was pale.

Doc said: "Yeah. I'm going to lay this motor right in that guy's lap." His face snarled under its sweat-streaked dirt. "Why not? His body's no use to him now—and we can use it. We're not playing for marbles."

"All right," Irene said. "I won't faint."

* * *

The circle around Mike Shields was getting smaller and smaller. The once-jovial

sugarer was looking tight-lipped and grim. He snarled: "You can get me, but I'll get at least three of you first!"

One of the kids dropped out. "Count me down," he said. "We're nuts. Doc Wilson wouldn't sell us out. I'm going to wait."

Don McGibney whirled on him. "And be killed like a rat. Look out there—the hands are all on their feet, and there's a couple of them standing on boxes, waving machetes."

"I'm going to wait," the kid said, but more weakly.

It was enough. It took everyone's eyes to him for a moment. Mike Shields swung the machete, and brought the flat of it down on McGibney's head. The New Yorker folded—went to the dusty floor.

"Okay," Mike said. "There's the president of Sno-White. Take a look at him, boys."

The kid who had backed down first laughed, suddenly. "Relax, boys," he said. "Let's give Doc another fifteen minutes, anyway."

Jerry Carpenter said: "All right."

Mike said: "Jerry'll tell you, he doesn't know what to do; Doc does. Wait for him."

A couple of the boys pulled cigarettes out of their pockets and lit up, and the tension relaxed. And then almost instantly it started forming again, and tightening; and each man remembered that there had been treachery before, and what had happened, and that both Doc and Jerry said there was treachery this time, and each man pulled a little away from his neighbors, and each man began eying the rifle rack covertly; and the clock crept around. Don McGibney rolled over and sullenly got to his feet.

At five minutes of two, Graves snapped. He yelled: "Mike, we shouldn't have stopped them! Doc's been gone an hour and a half. He's had plenty of time to—"

Little Perrin dropped from the roof, and said: "Mr. Wilson sent me, Mr. Carpenter," which was ridiculous enough to start them all laughing. The danger blew past.

"All right," Jerry said. "What is it?"

"The timekeeper for your mill is to go over and open the gate and blow the whistle for the end of siesta," Perrin said. "Just as though nothing had happened. Mr. Wilson's orders."

"You know," a kid muttered, "nothing has happened." His tone was full of wonder.

Jerry got his nerve back. He snapped: "All right. You—White—you're the timekeeper. Get over there. You heard the order."

"The rest of you are to stay here, Mr. Wilson says," Perrin told them.

White hesitated, gulped. He was a thin boy, with eyes a little too-closely set. But under their stern eyes, he went to the door. He turned around, wet his lips as though to say something, then changed his mind.

There were a couple of dozen sets of eyes on the boy as he walked across the compound, but he walked like a man. He had to pass through a group of peons, but they parted to let him through. They could see he was just one man, and unarmed.

White unlocked the front gate, went into the little timekeeper's shack, and then the Central whistle split the air.

The men out in the yard, hesitating, rushed forward; and they could see that each peon carried his machete, which was not the way the mill hands were supposed to dress.

Jerry Carpenter said: "It'll take more than that. If Doc was counting on habit—"

"Listen," Walters said. "Listen to that—"

There was a droning sound in the mills, and then the hands came rushing out. They huddled in the compound yard like a bunch of sheep.

"What the—"

Doc Wilson appeared from the *mestizo* mess-hall, and walked over to them. They could hear his firm voice: "Siesta is over. What is this playing in the yard? Get to work."

There was no fight in the men now. "The Feathered Lizard! The Feathered Lizard is in there."

DOC WILSON climbed up on a pile of scrap iron. Somewhere he had washed, pulled his clothes together; he looked composed, but Perrin could have told them better. He laughed at them.

"Did you think you could fight the Feathered Lizard?" he asked the mill hands. They huddled at his feet, moving around a little, not making any noise. "There was a man here," he said. "He was the emissary of the devil. He told you the Feathered Lizard wanted you to strike." Doc Wilson laughed, and even the white men watching—even Perrin almost believed the laugh was spontaneous. "I am *El Doctor*, Señor Doc!" Wilson roared, suddenly. "I sent the spirits to kill that man? Is he dead? Can you see with your own eyes?"

A mutter from the crowd assented.

"All right. The Feathered Lizard killed him. As it will kill all who touch the machinery of El Central. For long have I seen the mark of the Lizard on the machinery. Now you see it, too, though you are only foolish cattle." He laughed again, more easily. "Go to your shacks, drink your rum—sleep. You are women, not men, who need a day off today. No more work till Monday."

The men milled away from him, heading for the gate. By the time they had reached there, some of them were laughing already. Doc walked slowly to the room where the executives and the clerks waited.

He came in, said: "Perrin, here's your dollar."

Jerry Carpenter said: "What's that for?"

"I bet Perrin," Doc said, "that Irene could tie more Feathered Lizards out of rope and machine rags than he could. He won. We put one," Doc said, "at each man's work-bench. But at that, we might not have made it if I hadn't happened to kill Chrissler's *agent provocateur* over there. I made it look as though he had tried to break a motor, and it had jumped over and crushed him." Doc sighed, suddenly looked old. "Irene's over in the mess-hall, Jerry. And the rest of you guys had better come out to the fields with me. That modern fire engine's going to have a workout at last."

VIII

THAT night, Doc sat in his room at the club, sipping his double bourbon and dictating to Perrin as though nothing had happened. There was a knock at the door, and Jerry Carpenter came in.

Doc said: "The man I wanted to see. You better get your mill ready to roll in the morning, Jerry. A hundred acres of cane has been burnt and you'll have to crush it at once."

"That's what I came to see you about, Doc. You can take Chrissler's place. You'll have to run the mill, too, Don says. I'm catching the mail plane tomorrow morning."

"Running out, pal?"

Jerry looked at the floor. "No. Not running out now: I ran out on you this morning when the trouble was going to start. I —I—"

"You didn't do badly, kid," Doc said. "You should have seen me, my first time out. Next time you'll know the rough hand does you no good. I'm writing to Mac, recommending you for Joe's place. And by the way, my friend the *tenente* picked Joe up this evening. He's going back to Cuba, but without a reference."

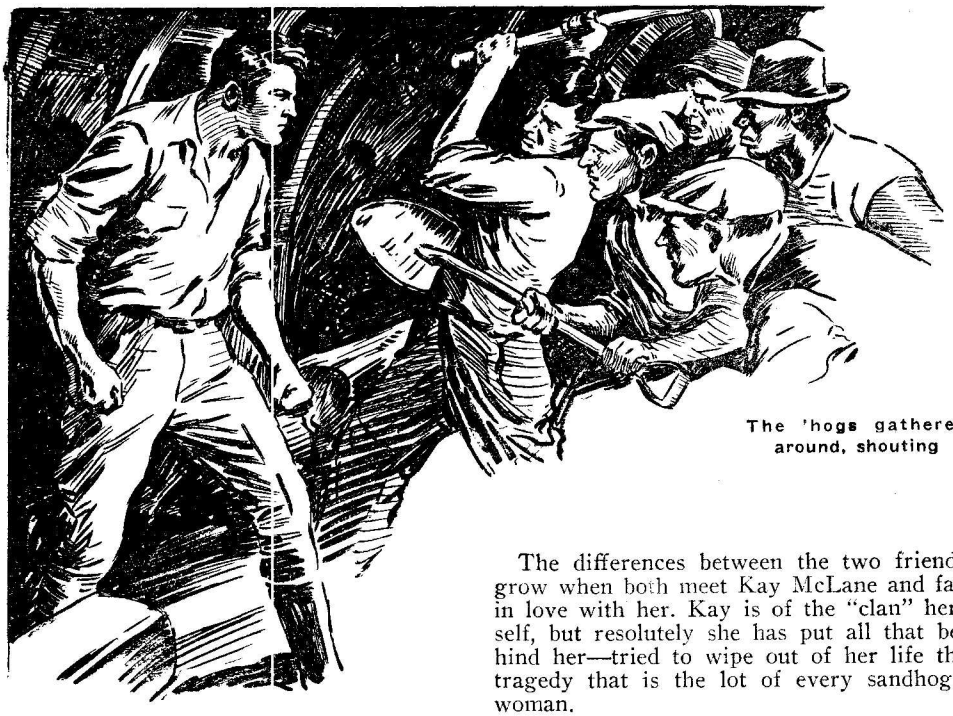
"You're writing to Mac? I thought he was—"

"I got that off on purpose. I thought it might make a difference in young Don. But it didn't, and starting today, Don's going into the fields for two years. That ought to toughen him. Mac wants to retire, and he sent the kids down to see what I thought of them. I'm writing him that I think plenty of Irene." Doc hesitated, added: "You'll have a hard time wearing the pants in your family, kid."

"Me—I thought—"

"You jump at conclusions, son," Doc managed to smile. "Get on out there and tell your girl she's going to be an Administrator's wife."

A True Story in Pictures Every Week



The 'hogs gathered around, shouting

Sandhog

By BORDEN CHASE

IN THE bowels of the earth the sandhogs fight—fight time and danger—fight death and disaster—fight the very earth that every moment threatens to crush them. They are builders and heroes, and the song of the tunnel rings in their hearts. . . .

Such a one is Bert Saxon, risen from the ranks of the muckers to the highly paid job of tunnel-superintendent for his friend and boss, Paul Touchet. Bert is of the clan—and proud of it. His future is golden and assured. And then, without warning, Bert's whole life is changed.

Paul Touchet is forced, through financial difficulties, to take Gus Blaucher into partnership. Blaucher is a slimy grafter, artist supreme of the doublecross—tricky, heartless, entirely unscrupulous. Saxon refuses pointblank to work under him, even on the great East River job that Touchet plans to bid for.

The differences between the two friends grow when both meet Kay McLane and fall in love with her. Kay is of the "clan" herself, but resolutely she has put all that behind her—tried to wipe out of her life the tragedy that is the lot of every sandhog's woman.

FOR this reason she attempts to resist the love for Saxon that she knows is growing in her heart—is determined to make herself love Paul Touchet whose friendship she values deeply. But friendship isn't love—and Bert, she knows, is the one man in the world for her.

One night Touchet takes her to the sandhogs' union hall. In an impassioned, brilliant speech, Bert Saxon announces his intention to give up his present job and to become the "hogs" business agent.

"You can't fight for yourselves—your bosses trick you and cheat you while they walk off with all the gravy! Well, I can fight for you—fight men like Blaucher—and win . . . if you'll have me!"

The crowd roars its approval. Paul, realizing what this step will mean—the end of Bert Saxon's career—tries to stop him by making the men believe Saxon simply wants the job for the graft-possibilities attached to it. But the men know and trust Bert and elect him their business agent.

THAT night Bert and Paul and Kay spend the evening together. Paul suggests a toast. To the present. "Let's forget that a labor leader's future is nothing but heartbreaking struggle. Let's forget that a change

This story began in the Argosy for November 13

in leaders brings strikes and riots and broken heads—that men will starve and freeze and die at his command. That a thousand men will fight by his side during the day . . . but that at night he walks alone."

Bert smiles. "They've starved before—and many have died in the tunnels they've dug for you, Paul. And if I walk alone at night, at least I'll walk with my head in the stars. If I don't win—then, one day, someone else will. . . ."

When Bert proposes to Kay on the dance floor, she agrees to marry him, and then in a last, desperate attempt to save him from what she and Paul consider his quixotic idiocy, tries to talk him into going into partnership with Paul.

But her plan doesn't work. Bert thinks only that her acceptance of his proposal was a meaningless gesture of friendship and sympathy—that she wanted to save him from himself even if she had to marry him to do it.

"Thanks, both of you," he says coldly. "You've tried your hardest. I appreciate it. But I don't want your sympathy—either of you. And on these terms, I don't even want your friendship!"

And, turning on his heel, he walks out. . . .

CHAPTER XIV

SKIRMISHES

FROM the window of his office, Paul Touchet watched the first snow of winter. It was November snow—wet, soggy stuff mixed with rain and mist. There was no breeze and the gray flakes dropped in straight lines to settle on the lower roofs. As through a lowering yet transparent curtain Paul saw in the distance outlines of buildings in Long Island City. Nearer, the gray East River was a smooth roadway winding from under the Queensborough Bridge toward the Upper Bay. At a sharp downward angle he could see the brown tops of the Third Avenue elevated trains moving like long silent bugs, or drawn to a stop at the covered Forty-second Street station.

For a time he looked down at a swirl of traffic on Lexington Avenue. But slowly his eyes were drawn again to the river. Not far from the bank on either side were two white spots. The tunnel boils. Each day they had moved an imperceptible distance toward the center where Paul knew they would one day meet, merge into one large mass of dancing water, and finally sink to rest. Or, at least he hoped this day would come.

Each morning from the time he and Gus Blaucher started the job he had watched the frothing white water on the river. Not long after Bert had made that scene at the Astor Roof, the bids were opened and Paul's figure had been safely under that of Martin & Ranger, his nearest competitor. Contracts were signed with the sandhogs and the shafts went down. Throughout the long and anxious days when the work was starting, Bert had been in constant touch with Paul and Blaucher. A raise in the wage scale had gone through smoothly; a tightening of the invisible lines that separated the hogs from the other laborers had been made; the number of men in each gang was fixed and the old rule of "soft jobs" had been revived.

Paul had always been in favor of this ruling. It concerned a number of necessary but easy jobs connected with the business of driving tunnel. The men who opened and closed the huge iron doors of the locks, the men who swept and kept clean the men's quarters, and the watchers who sat before a set of large air gauges and kept the pressure steady in the tunnel—all these jobs and some few others were the accepted property of the local. And always they had been given to old-timers who were incapacitated for laborious work. Men who had been crippled by the air were appointed by the union to the "soft jobs" and never had favoritism nor drag been connected with the appointments.

During the bad years this ruling had been neglected. But Bert Saxon again put it into force. He also demanded clean and fireproof quarters where the men could change clothes before and after shifts, and gaining these concessions had gone on to demand more. But Paul always was aware of the hand of the crafty business man in Bert's work. There had been no blustering or yelling. He hadn't presented a list of "musts" and haggled with the contractors through interminable days of bargaining.

Instead, there had come a sharp, yet

reasonable notification that due to increased living conditions, the scale of wages must be raised. Blaucher had laughed and been inclined to dismiss the demand lightly. Paul, knowing Bert, advised acceptance. When Bert had won his first demand, the second followed. It was a trivial thing and unimportant. But again Blaucher objected. Paul counseled agreement, sensing the move in Bert's mind. But Gus was firm. He turned down the request —and during the following week turned down two more of Bert's demands, cursing as he did so.

Paul laughed and said nothing. And there had been a quiet smile on his lips the day Bert walked into the office to present the next, and by far the most *important,* demand.

"Not a chance!" Gus had yelled.

"No?" said Bert quietly. "Am I to go back and tell the men Touchet & Blaucher refuse to meet any of our demands?"

"You got your rate-raise," said Gus stubbornly.

"Sure—but I've been here with three legitimate requests this week and you've refused each. Now I'm here with another, and this time I'm afraid I can't take no for an answer."

It was the old rule of capital applied for the first time to labor. Bert was using the tricks he had learned from the contractors. When trivial and unimportant matters were discussed he was always ready to concede to the contractor's wishes. Point after point was thrown away. But Gus Blaucher did not seem to realize they were worthless points. He fought Bert and bragged to Paul of his victories. Finally, when something important was to be argued, Gus had used up his ammunition and could only agree.

"Better watch your step, Gus," Paul had said to the contractor. It was after Bert's visit to the office, and again the tunnel-man had come off with the honors. "You're not dealing with the old-style delegate now. Bert is twisting you into loops."

"Yeah?" said Gus. "Then why don't you stop him? He's your pal—not mine."

"Is he?" asked Paul, and turned away.

HE was thinking of that now as he looked from the window. Was Bert his friend? Were they still as close as formerly? Or had Bert changed? As he turned the thought in his mind Paul realized the huge tunnel-man had become a definite factor to be dealt with in this business of making a living. Each week and each day Bert was driving deeper into the firm's resources. Paul was dealing with a man who was never satisfied. Conditions had been bettered and the hogs were making higher wages. But still Bert wanted more. Always more. Paul remembered a conversation held one evening in a Times Square restaurant. Kay had been with him and they were on the way to a theater. She wanted a good steak dinner and Paul had suggested Moore's on Forty-sixth Street, forgetting for the moment it was one of Bert's haunts in the old days.

Bert was sitting alone at one of the rear tables when they came in. He was no longer the immaculate and well-clothed man of previous years. His suit was of good material but it needed attention by a tailor. His eyes were bright but infinitely tired. He smiled when he saw them and motioned to chairs at his table.

"Good to see you again, Kay," he had said quietly. "Sorry I can't say the same about Paul. I have to see that egg every day."

"So I understand," said Kay.

She was studying Bert and Paul noticed her eyes narrow with a hurt look as she saw the change that had come to the tunnel-man. And during the meal Paul was conscious of a peculiar fact—one that was part of their every meeting with Bert. For weeks Paul would patiently string a thousand threads of kindness and consideration. Each would draw him just a trifle closer to Kay. Soon she would think of him not as a patient and understanding friend but as a man who loved her and wanted love in return. Sometimes a warmth came into her smile; the hand that touched his held a caress. And then they would meet Bert in some out-of-the-way place.

One by one Paul watched the threads snap. As the evening waned Kay drifted

further away from him—closer to Bert. Once again Paul would become merely the good friend. And he would start again from the beginning to re-weave the threads.

This night at Moore's he had watched Bert step quietly between them. Not consciously. In fact, Paul wished Bert would make some definite attempt to win Kay. It would be easier to fight than this forced formality—this ever present knowledge that only Bert's work kept them apart.

During the meal Bert consistently kept the conversation along the lines of the work. He talked of tunnels. Nothing else. When Paul spoke of the constant demands, Bert smiled and told him there would soon be others.

"But it isn't fair," said Paul firmly. "The men have more now than ever before. Why aren't you satisfied?"

"That wouldn't be good business," Bert had said. "On this job, I don't ever intend to let them be satisfied."

"Why on *this* job?"

"Because right now we've got you in a tough spot, Paul. You need us—need us badly. There are only a thousand men in the local. A thousand experienced sandhogs. You need just about all of them on your job. If you don't play ball, I'll send the men over to Martin & Ranger. They've been crying for 'hogs to work on that Boston job."

"In other words," said Paul, "because you've got me in a tough spot, you're putting on the pressure."

"Exactly," laughed Bert. "It's good business—the same tactics you'll use when Martin & Ranger finish their job and the hogs have no other work but yours."

"You think I'll squeeze them then?"

"Think? I know it. With Gus Blaucher for a partner you'll squeeze us until we're dry."

"Dog eat dog, eh?"

"Sure—and just now I'm the big dog, Paul."

"But a rather greedy dog. One that isn't satisfied with good red meat."

"Satisfied?" said Bert quickly. And Paul saw a light come into his eyes. "Satisfied because the men are getting a dollar a day more than last year? Don't make me laugh, Paul! That isn't meat. It's simply a larger bone than you've thrown us in the past. But it's still a bone—and a dry one at that!"

"How much do you finally expect to get for your local?"

"I don't know," said Bert. "But perhaps it will be enough so Martin Duffy can send his boy to school—so Terry Reardon can buy those new dresses for his kid—so Dan Hannagan can sit in the sun and let the bones in his chest heal instead of limping around at the bottom of a shaft closing iron doors and pulling cars loaded with river sand. Perhaps it may even prevent you and Gus Blaucher from spending a few weeks in Florida this winter while the hogs are shoveling in the heading. I hope it does!"

Paul smiled. "That's the first time I've heard you go red, Bert," he said. "Don't you think I've worked for the things I've got?"

"Sure you have—but the 'hogs have worked, too. And what have they got?"

KAY had changed the subject then. With infinite tact she led Bert along to other and less dangerous fields. She held the conversation on an even keel until they separated in front of the restaurant—Paul and Kay to go to the theater while Bert walked west to a small café on Ninth Avenue where he sat for hours with a bottle of raw whisky before him. And drank.

Paul hadn't known that night of Bert's visits to the café. He learned at the conclusion of another meal when he hurried after Bert to remind him of a meeting the following day. Kay stayed in the car while Paul walked into the dimly lit barroom and searched the tables for Bert. Not seeing him, he described the tunnel-man to the bartender and asked if he were there.

"Sure," said the man with the cloth. "He's here. And he'll be here the rest of the night. Sittin' in the back room with a bottle in front of him. And take my advice, mister—leave him alone!"

"Why?"

The bartender shrugged. "That's just a

friendly tip," he said. "A couple of guys interfered with his drinking a few weeks ago. That big egg tossed 'em through the plate-glass window. Then he licked the cop who tried to lock him up."

"Does he do this often?"

"About once a month. He's a nice quiet drinker if you leave him alone. Just sits there mutterin' about some dame that give him the air."

"Thank you," said Paul, and went out to the car.

He didn't mention it to Kay—simply told her he had seen Bert, and the tunnelman was talking with friends. After that he tried to persuade Bert to come with them when they met—tried to keep him away from that little café on Ninth Avenue. But it hadn't worked.

And now the tunnel was driving hard. Another superintendent was in the place where Paul had hoped to see Bert. Kay was once more treating Paul more as a man and less as the sympathetic friend. Winter was moving in on New York and Paul stood near the window and dreamed. At length he shrugged and crossed to the piano with the bleached-mahogany case. He looked idly through some sheets of partially completed manuscript and ran his fingers over the keys. Memory brought to him the theme of a Chopin concerto he had heard when he and Kay stopped in at Carnegie Hall the previous evening. He played it. And in the music he forgot for a time the troubles of the day.

When the door of his office opened he was scarcely conscious of the men who entered. He was humming the orchestral accompaniment while his fingers raced toward the completion of the first movement. Gus Blaucher interrupted the passage with a jesting comment and beat the palms of his moist hands together.

"Very nice, professor," he said. His voice was guttural and deep. "That's as good as anything Lopez can do. How about a few hot licks from Nola or the Rhapsody in Blue?"

"Now, boss!" said the man at his side. "The Rhapsody isn't classical. It ain't—I mean, it isn't in the same category."

Blaucher grinned. "Nice word, Specks. Where'd you pick that one up?"

Specks beamed. His small black eyes looked less cold through the horn-rim spectacles as he squirmed like a dog whose ear has been scratched. He helped himself to one of the cigarettes in the silver box on Paul's table.

"That's nothin'—I mean, nothing," he said. "When you read literature in the higher brackets, wordage comes naturally."

"Lay off that higher bracket stuff," laugher Gus. "You sound like my lawyer when he's making out my income tax."

HE tossed his gray fedora onto the arm of a chrome rack, walked to the piano and sat down beside Paul. Specks seated himself, opened a large leather-bound volume he had been carrying under his arm, and slowly turned the pages. As he read, he flicked ashes to the single-tone rug under his feet and let a thin stream of smoke drift from between his lips. Paul looked at him, sighed and turned to Blaucher.

"Must you always have that poison-tongued bookworm with you?" he asked. "Can't you park him in the outer office?"

Gus laughed and Specks looked toward Paul with mild inquisitiveness. He worked the cigarette to the corner of his lips and closed the book.

"There isn't poison on my tongue, Touchet," he said in surprise. "I never ratted on anyone in my existence."

"My error," laughed Paul. "I was referring to the load of poison you carry under your right armpit. My metaphors were mixed, I'm afraid."

"Metaphors," said Specks thoughtfully. He opened the book and thumbed the pages. "Mela—mesa—metal—oh, here it is. Metaphor—'a figure of speech in which one object is likened to another by speaking of it as if it were that other.'" His long, thin index finger traced below the line in the dictionary as he repeated the definition. "That ain't—I mean, that isn't very clear but I think I've got it, Touchet. And I must say, it's a very elegant word. Thanks."

He dropped the cigarette and stepped on it. Paul shook his head and ran his fingers along the piano keys.

"He should be housebroken, Gus," he said. "If you insist upon letting him be the tail to your kite, the least you can do is teach him as many manners as you would a dog."

"Ah, Specks is all right," laughed Blaucher. "If he behaves himself I've promised him a course at Columbia—maybe at Harvard. And someday he's going to write a book."

"Splendid," said Paul. "He can call it *The Gentle Art of Murder*—or perhaps, *Killing Is My Business*. And he can make it autobiographical."

Specks looked up. "What was that last word, Touchet?" he said. "Auto—what?"

"Skip it," said Paul.

The contractor got up from the piano-bench and walked to his desk. Gus spread his fat hands over the keys and played Chopsticks, banging heavily on the loud pedal and thumping his left foot against the floor.

"For heaven's sake, stop it!" cried Paul. "If you must play something, try the radio. It's on that table near the window."

"Don't appreciate good music, eh?" laughed Gus. "Well, tonight I got a guy comin' to the house that will knock you right for a loop. Got him for you, especially, Paul."

"Oh, Lord—another session?"

"But different."

"Yes," added Specks. "Educational."

"What is it?" asked Paul wearily. "Another fan dancer with feathers that shed?"

"Oh, that was a honey!" cried Gus. "But this is different, Paul. It's your party and I want you to bring the guests. I got a couple of singers—opera singers. And I got that bloke you were raving about. The one that plays the fiddle—er, Bertillowitz—"

"You mean Bertillotti?"

"That's the guy. I gave him two grand just to stroke his fiddle tonight at my place. Class, eh?"

"Elegance, is the word, boss," said Specks.

The phone rang and Paul smiled as he lifted the receiver. As he listened to the voice on the wire his smile faded. He answered shortly and hung up. Then he turned to Blaucher.

"That was Talcot, the super on the Long Island side," he said. "He claims you've sent in some men from another local to take over the jobs on the locks and gauges. Is that right, Gus?"

"Oh, that—sure, I took care of it this morning."

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Of course not."

PAUL lit a cigarette and studied the ash. "You must be," he said. "We've got an agreement with the hogs that covers the locks and gauges. You can't send in cheap labor to do those jobs."

"That's what you think," laughed Gus. "We've been paying those guys eleven dollars a day to sit on a bench and do nothing. Well, if anyone is going to rest on that job, he'll get four bucks a day for doing it. And not a cent more!"

"That's ridiculous!"

"Like hell it is," cried Gus. "And while we're at it, you might as well get ready for some more changes. I've been letting that pal of yours get away with murder long enough. Starting today he's due for a sock in the eye every time he sticks his head up. And if he don't like it—t'hell with him."

"Better take it easy," warned Paul. "Bert has a nasty habit of hitting back when he's hurt."

"Ah, nuts! He's like all the rest of them. He picked you for a softy and he's been rubbing it in. Well—I let him get away with it long enough. Now I'll show him Gus Blaucher ain't a sap like his partner."

"Like his partner?" said Paul slowly.

"You heard me," said Gus. "It's time we had a showdown, too, Paul. You're a swell guy, and when it comes to tunnels you know all the answers in the book. But as for handling men—nuts!"

"Thank you, Gus," said Paul. "If you mean I don't use your tactics—I consider that a compliment."

"Consider it anything you want," said Blaucher harshly. "If you're trying to say I'm tough, you're right. I'm damn tough. Tougher than any punk that ever swung a shovel. And that's why I got money. Because I'm tougher than they are—because I can outsmart them and outrough them. Nobody ever found a way to beat Gus Blaucher whether it was building subways, bridges, office buildings or back houses. Always—I'm the boss!"

"Just a shrinking violet," laughed Paul.

"Oh, go ahead and laugh! But get this in your head, Paul—you were broke when you tied up with me. You know it and so do I. And what's more—if you could have got the money anywhere else you wouldn't have let me come through the door of this office."

"You must be clairvoyant."

"Clair—what?" said Specks quickly.

"Shut up!" yelled Gus. He turned again to Paul. "I'm not kidding myself, Paul—and you're not kidding me, either. You tied up with me because you wanted to build that tunnel. It's the biggest job ever proposed—and you want your name on it. To get it, you stepped out of your class and tied up with Gus Blaucher. Blaucher, the handshaker—Blaucher, the roughneck—Blaucher—the guy that makes politicians jump through a hoop. Oh, I know all the answers. I know a lot of stiff-shirted punks invite me to their homes when they'd like to send me around to the servants' door. They smile and grin when I slap their backs but they'd like to spit on me. Sure they would—like to see me broke and sitting in the gutter. But I ain't broke—see? I've got money and influence. And I rub it right in their noses and make 'em like it."

He stopped, a flush creeping up from his full throat and coloring the heavy jowls that drooped beneath his jaws. His hands shook as he beat them one against the other, and water gathered in the corners of his eyes. Paul looked at him thoughtfully. For the first time he was seeing his partner in a new light. Here was a man who had fought his way up from the streets; fought his way to money and power. And now the taste of victory was bitter in his mouth. Gus Blaucher was human. He wanted people to like him—wanted them to meet him as an equal and share the hospitality of their homes. And, clever man that he was, he knew this could never be.

IT was only reasonable that bitterness had come to him. Just as Paul and his friends disliked Blaucher, so in his secret mind did Gus hate them. But never had he allowed it to become evident. Always he was the laughing, genial man of wealth. Always there were extravagant parties, entire theaters bought out for his acquaintances, and week-end affairs that put to shame the spending of a Hindu prince. Gus made donations to every cause—tickets by the hundred for the police games; a dozen boxes at a fight staged by some charitable organization composed of socialites; he tossed money right and left to clubs that would not let him put his name at the bottom of the application list. And through it all he laughed and pretended.

But for just a moment the mask was off. Paul saw a Gus Blaucher the world would never know. It was a pathetic spectacle. One that did more for Gus than all his blustering. But seeing it, Paul knew he and his partner had been schooled in different lines of ethics. What Paul knew to be right—Gus knew to be wrong. What Paul saw as fair and just—Gus called idiotic and stupid.

"Let's forget personalities, Gus," said Paul. "We were talking about the job—about your replacing the men at the gauges and on the locks. You've made a mistake and one that may cost us money. If you don't mind, I'll go to Long Island and try to straighten things out."

"No, Paul, why don't you leave that part to me?" asked Gus. "You stick to the work in the office and let me run things at the tunnel. I'm used to handling labor—know how to do it."

Paul had walked to the door. He took a light raincoat from the rack, reached for his hat and turned to face Gus.

"Make yourself at home," he called. "I'll see you in an hour or two."

He closed the door behind him and Gus cursed. Specks put aside his book and reached for another cigarette. He lit it, dropped the match on the floor and walked to the piano. His thin fingers moved wistfully over the keys and he shook his head.

"Touchet don't—I mean, he doesn't belong in the commercialized world, Boss," he said thoughtfully. "He's an artist. He lives on figments of the imagination."

"He can live on prunes and be damned to him," growled Blaucher. "But from now on, I run things in this outfit, Specks."

"Undubitably correct," said Specks. "You've always taken over and brought things to an abundantly satisfactory conclusion."

"Stop spitting words and talk sense," growled Gus. "From now on Paul Touchet can think he's the boss. But I'm taking over."

"Touchet gets the works?"

"What's that?"

"I mean," said Specks, "do you want me to take Touchet for a nice ride in the Bronx and drop him in a sewer?"

"Hell no!" cried Gus. "Can't you think of anything but that gun under your arm?"

"Don't you want him killed?"

Gus pounded a heavy fist against the desk top. "Shut up!" he cried. "Don't let me hear you make that crack again!"

"All right, Boss," said Specks quietly. "But I was only thinking that—"

"And don't try to think!" shouted Blaucher. "Some day you'll try that once too often and find yourself strapped to a chair with a hot seat."

"Not a chance," laughed Specks. "Not with Gus Blaucher for a boss."

"Well—forget it," said Gus. "And after this park yourself outside when we come here. And tonight, if Paul comes to my place, I don't want to see you moping around with the guests."

"Sorry," said Specks. "My job is to watch you, boss. "That's why you pay me. If some guy sets sore and slips a slug into your chest—I lose a good meal-ticket, if you'll pardon the metaphor."

The buzzer of the inter-office phone sounded and Gus pushed down a key.

"Yeah?" he said.

"Mr. Saxon is here to see Mr. Touchet," said the voice of the secretary. "Shall I send him in?"

"Sure—why not?" said Gus, and again flipped the key. He winked at Specks and pointed to a chair in the corner. "Sit there. And keep quiet."

CHAPTER XV

DEFI

SPECKS nodded and walked to the chair. He had just reached for another cigarette—one of his own this time—when Bert walked into the office and closed the door. The tunnel man looked at Blaucher, shifted his eyes to Specks and then glanced about as though looking for Paul.

"He ain't in," said Gus. "Anything I can do for you, Bert?"

"I think you'll do," said Bert quietly. He shook the water from his hat and brushed the shoulders of his coat. "I came to talk about a violation of the union contract."

"Oh, sure," said Gus, and dipped into his vest pocket. He brought out a handful of cigars and offered them to Bert. "Have a smoke? I bring them in from Cuba myself—import them."

"Thanks," said Bert. "I'll stick to cigarettes."

"Fair enough. Have one of these." He offered Bert the silver case from the desk. "They're Paul's."

Bert took a cigarette, pretended not to see the matches offered by Blaucher and lit it with one of his own. When Gus suggested a drink, Bert shook his head.

"Now, before we get down to brass tacks," said Blaucher, "I've got something I want to ask your advice about." He paused and paced across the room. "I've got a snappy little roadster in my town garage that's drying up from lack of work. When I was looking at it yesterday I thought it would be just the thing for you to get around in. Sort of a ferryboat to take you back and forth across the Queensborough Bridge when you're performing your union duties."

"A very nice thought," said Bert.

"Oh, it's nothing much. But the hogs have been pretty good to me on this job and I'd like to return the favor. Suppose I make a present of it to the union? And chuck in another for Jerry Hawkins, the president?"

"Could you dig up another for Austin O'Toole? He's the secretary."

Blaucher laughed and dug a fist into Bert's ribs. "Why not?" he said. "It wouldn't be right for Austin to get his feet wet while you fellows ride."

"No," said Bert. "It wouldn't."

"Then that's settled," said Gus. He looked critically at Bert's suit and then stared at the ceiling. "Come to think of it, a business agent ain't really dressed for the job unless he wears decent clothes. Not that I don't like yours—"

"They could stand a press," agreed Bert.

"Sure they could," said Gus. "And if you get time this week, why don't you stop in to see my tailor? He's turned out some swell clothes for some of the other boys and he never sends a bill."

He laughed heartily and dropped a hand on Bert's shoulder. The sandhog moved slightly to dislodge it, then looked up to the man above him.

"The other boys?" he questioned. "What other boys?"

"The business agents from some of the other locals—you know, Mathews and Tom Sedley."

"Oh, yes," said Bert. "Mathews represents the local that sent some men to the job this morning."

"Sure he does," said Gus. "A great guy—grand feller."

"And did he get a snappy little roadster?"

"Now, now," laughed Gus. "That's a secret. But between you and me, Bert—I think Mathews is a very smart guy."

Bert stood up. "And between you and me, Gus," he said slowly, "I think Mathews stinks. In fact, whenever I walk into the same room with him I can smell the same slimy odor that oozes from you. Maybe it comes from your cars—maybe your tailor sews it into the suits. Whatever it is, I don't want it on me. And neither do Jerry Hawkins or Austin O'Toole."

GUS laughed. Not a nice laugh but one that was forced from his throat. He walked to the small buffet at the far side of the room and lifted a decanter. When he had poured himself a drink he carried it across the room and sat on the desk, facing the sandhog.

"I could get sore about that if I wanted," he said. "But I guess I had it coming to me. I always heard that Bert Saxon wouldn't take—and now I know it." He put out his hand. "No hard feelings?"

"None at all," said Bert, but made no effort to take the hand.

"Now, look, Bert," said Gus. "Why can't you and me be friends? I've never done anything to you—never made it tough for you. Why not be a regular guy and play ball?"

"That's what I've been doing, Gus," said Bert. "Ever since the East River job started I've been trying to forget that I hate your guts. I haven't let it interfere with any of the deals I've made for the union. If that isn't playing ball, what is?"

"Goin' to be tough, eh?" said Gus slowly. "All right—get tough. But you'll find I'm not exactly a soft touch, Bert. Now what do you want today—and what makes you think you'll get it?"

Bert twisted in his chair and pointed to a filing cabinet in one corner of the room.

"If you'll look in that file," he said, "you'll find an agreement drawn up between this firm and the local I represent."

"I don't need to look for it. I know what it says."

"There's a clause that stipulates our local is to have all the work below ground."

"So what?" said Gus.

"This morning Mathews sent some of his four-dollar men to take over the work at the bottom of the shaft. Does that mean you intend to tear up the agreement?"

"Why should it?" laughed Gus. "The bottom of the shaft ain't below ground. It's below the sky. There ain't any roof on it."

"If that's a gag," said Bert, "it's not so good. In the language of the contract below ground means everything connected with the compressed air work. And you know it."

"Maybe it does to you, Bert. But it don't to me."

"In other words—you're tearing up the agreement?"

"Of course not! But if you, as a representative of the sandhogs union want to tear it up—"

"Don't be a fool, Gus. I fought too hard to get it."

"Then don't squawk when I hold you to it."

Bert laughed. "Any man in the trade would laugh at your interpretation of that clause."

"That's great. I like laughs," said Gus. "But Mathews' men keep those jobs."

"Oh, no, they don't, Blaucher!"

"And if I say they do—then what?"

"What usually happens when a contract is violated?"

Gus laughed and bit through the tip of a cigar he had taken from his pocket. "Well, if I remember right—I think both parties go into court. Then one side asks for a postponement and it's granted. In a year or two the case comes up and maybe it's postponed again. And in the meanwhile the tunnel is finished and you and the men can go fry!"

"Plain and simple, eh?"

"You asked for it."

"Perhaps you're asking for something, too," said Bert. "The men might decide not to work while they're waiting for that case to come up. Then what would happen to your tunnel?"

"It'd be built," said Blaucher. "Mathews' men would finish it for me. And your local would have another case for your two-bit lawyer. One in which *you* had violated a contract."

"So that's the setup, eh, Blaucher?"

"That's it, sucker. And you can take it or leave it!"

Bert pushed back the chair and got slowly to his feet. He ground the tip of his cigarette against a metal ashtray and looked thoughtfully at it. When he lifted his eyes they were hard. He turned to Blaucher and there was a thin smile on his lips.

"I FIGURED this was coming when Martin & Ranger finished their job in Boston," he said. "But I didn't think you'd be quite so raw about it."

"Raw?" laughed Gus. "You haven't seen anything yet."

"Maybe not. But don't forget—you need miners in the heading under the East River. Experienced men. The only place you can get them is from our local, Gus."

"And I'll get 'em from your local!" snapped Blaucher. "I'll pay 'em enough to turn in their union cards and sign up with Mathews' local—see? And if I need iron men, I'll get them, too. Shield driver, muckers—anything I want. Money talks, Saxon! It talks loud when a guy is hungry. And I've got enough to make a big noise."

"Why, you poor fool! Those men—" Bert stopped. He leaned against the desk and laughed at Blaucher. "For a moment I'd forgotten you've never built a tunnel. You don't know the 'hogs, Gus. You're used to dealing with a crowd of shovel-swingers that don't speak English or know what it's all about. When a loud-mouthed heel kicked them around, they took it and asked for more."

"Meaning me?"

"Certainly."

"Listen, Saxon," said Blaucher slowly. "I've taken a lot from you—but I'm through. When you talk to me, keep a civil tongue in your head or—"

"Or what?" said Bert.

"Or I'll have some of the boys take you up an alley and give you a working over—see? Maybe when you've spent a few months in a hospital you'll learn how to talk to a gentleman."

"Why, grandma—what big teeth you have," laughed Bert.

"Wise guy, eh?" said Blaucher and stepped forward. "Maybe you'd like a punch in the snoot right now?"

He lifted his hand and Bert weaved from the hips. The sandhog's hand came

up, caught Blaucher by the lapels of the stylishly cut coat and forced him back toward the desk. He grinned, and shook him as a terrier might.

"I've always wondered if you could take it, Gus," he said. "Paul is going to be mad as hell when he has to sweep you up off his rug."

"Turn around, sucker!" said Blaucher.

Bert followed the direction of Blaucher's eyes. Behind him he found Specks standing flatfooted, his eyes cold yet slightly amused. In his hand was a flat, short automatic. Its muzzle was centered between Bert's shoulders.

"Whenever you're ready, boss," Specks said quietly. "But step aside when he falls. Convulsions set in sometimes, and they kick in the process of extermination."

Bert looked at the gun. Then looked at the eyes behind the horn-rim spectacles. He let go of Blaucher and moved toward Specks.

"So you want to play, too?" he said quietly.

"Stay where you are, Saxon," said Blaucher sharply. "This isn't a gag!"

"Why not let him find out for himself, boss?" asked Specks. "It's time we got rid of this pest, anyway."

BERT looked again into Speck's eyes. In the cold, dull surface he found the look of a killer. How he knew this to be so, Bert couldn't tell. Yet it was there. Bert had spent too many hours with death at his shoulder in the tunnels not to recognize its presence in this room. Specks would pull that trigger with as little compunction as he would light a match. He was waiting now for the nod of Blaucher's head that would tighten the muscles of his hand. The gun was rock steady. It was nothing more than a job of work to Specks. And Bert knew it.

He looked at the thin neck of the gunman and his hands lifted. Perhaps—perhaps he could twist it just once. A sharp twist as the slug tore into his chest. It wouldn't stop the bullet, but in going out it would be a satisfaction to take Specks along with him. He played with the thought. And with another even more pleasing. Perhaps he could drag Blaucher along on the trip to hell? That would be doing a real service to the clan.

And as he thought of the clan he dropped his hands. He couldn't die. Not now. Not yet. There was so much to be done. So many changes to be made. The men needed him—needed him more now than ever before. He couldn't afford to die—not with so much unfinished work to be done.

He stepped back.

"You win, Gus," he said quietly.

"Changed your mind about hitting me?" grinned Blaucher.

"Specks changed it for me."

"It's a habit of his," said Blaucher, and nodded to Specks. "Put it away. Everything's all right."

"I wouldn't be too sure, boss," said Specks gravely. "I saw this guy sizing me up, for a second I thought he was goin'—I mean, he was going to take a gander on a quick punch. There's no use taking chances with a nut."

"Put it away!" snapped Gus. "He's yeller like all the rest."

"Sure I am," said Bert easily. "And now we've settled that, I'd like to get out of here—if Specks doesn't object."

"Go ahead! Scram!" said Blaucher. "And when you get back to the hall, tell your hogs Gus Blaucher is running things from now on. And he's running them his way."

"I'll try to remember that," said Bert. "In the meanwhile—you don't mind if I pull the East River job, do you?"

He walked to the door and Specks swung toward Blaucher.

"Hear that, boss?" he cried. "Are you goin'—I mean, are you going to let that punk pull the job?"

"Why not?" laughed Gus. "He'll be doing me a favor."

Bert stopped for a moment at the door and turned. "Perhaps you'd better talk things over with your partner," he said. "Ask Paul if he thinks day laborers can drive a thirty-two foot tunnel through the stuff the shields have hit today."

He closed the door and hurried across the outer office. In the truth of that last remark Bert knew he held a card that would top any that Gus might find at the bottom of the deck. The tunnel headings had been driving through mud and sand for the past two weeks. But this morning the heading on the Long Island side of the river had run into gravel and hardpan. Farther along there would be boulders—in fact, just before he came to the office Bert had heard the men were shooting a huge stone, the first to make its appearance. It was dangerous work. A single mistake might bring in the river, snuff out forty or more lives and flood the tunnel. But with old-timers of the local working in the face of the tube there was little about which to worry. They didn't make mistakes.

At the curb on Lexington Avenue Bert found his car wedged between two trucks. It was a small coupé—not the fast car he had previously driven. That had been sold when Jack Tierney needed money for an operation. Jack was a friend of Bert's—a miner who had worked with Bert's father years ago. Strain had done something to the walls of his stomach, and the service of an expensive surgeon were needed. Bert put his share into the collection raised at the hall and now he drove this small coupé.

WHEN he had jockeyed the front wheels clear he turned north and headed for the Queensboro Bridge. It was past noon and he swung onto the upper roadway reserved for passenger cars. The snow had stopped and in its place was a steady drizzle that made the roadway a place for careful driving. As he slowed his pace Bert thought again of the man who had held a gun to his back and waited to pull the trigger. Guns had been pointed at the sandhog before. As a youngster he was mixed up in a few strikes in which company guards and city police had been forced to draw their guns. But that was different. Excitement and the tension of the moment had tightened the guard's fingers on the triggers. But Specks hadn't been excited.

In his visits to New York's night spots Bert had met his share of gunmen Not so many, now that Repeal had made the trade less fashionable. But they still roamed Broadway and ate in the better restaurants. He considered them a peculiar breed —one in which he was not particularly interested. Certainly, he had never expected to have one turn a gun upon him. And when it happened, Bert was surprised to find the sensation no different from that he had experienced when facing danger in the tunnel. Something was going to happen —something had to be done about it. When Specks lifted his gun, Bert was ready for the gamble so natural to the sandhog.

Then had come the realization he was playing a game in which he had no right to lose. He simply couldn't afford to get himself killed. And as he drove off the bridge and turned into the wet streets of Long Island City, Bert grinned at the peculiarity of the situation. The question of courage didn't enter his mind. That was a quality as necessary to the tunnel as a strong back. Men without it seldom lasted more than a week. The work was based upon the supposition that all tunnel builders were reckless fools.

The wage scale took this into consideration. Four dollars would hire a good man to swing a shovel. The additional few dollars were in recompense for the dangers of the tunnel. Compressed air diseases—the bends that drew a man's arms and legs into twisted angles of leaping pain; the staggers that drove these same bubbles into his brain and sent him reeling and lurching into a blind stupor; or perhaps paralysis and death—these were some of the reasons for those extra dollars. Others were found beneath the river. Reasons that made the average laborer glad to get clear of the air locks after his first shift. Reasons that kept any but old-time tunnel men and their sons from seeking work at the shafts.

No, courage was not a thing about which a sandhog would think often. True, he admired and respected it, just as he might admire the skill with which a miner handled a sledge or the play of swollen muscles on an iron man's arms. And, had

here been any men of the clan in the ffice with Bert that day, they would have een not at all surprised to see Bert start winging at the man who held the gun. n fact, thought Bert and he smiled, there ould have been some tall explaining on is part to justify his actions.

HE PARKED the car near the sprawling wooden gantry that bridged the unnel shaft, lit a cigarette and walked ward a group of men near the gauge anty. Martin Duffy was there and the eavy-necked miner was talking to the en. Bert saw the stubborn set of the iner's jaw and knew Duffy was primed r fight.

"Someone steal your lunch, Martin?" ert laughed. He nodded to the others and sted a hand on Duffy's shoulder.

"It's about time you got here," said uffy. "Do you know what's been goin' n?"

"About Mathews' men?"

"Yes! That lousy scut sent a crew to ke over the locks."

"I heard about it," said Bert. "Are they orking now?"

"Like hell they are!" growled the miner. Touchet come up and chased them."

"Touchet?"

"Yeah. He's in the office now."

"Thanks," said Bert and turned away. 'll see him."

"Just a minute," said Duffy sharply. I've been talking things over with some f the men here. They think the same as do—that Blaucher is gettin' ready to tart trouble."

"You're right," agreed Bert. "He'd like , but I don't imagine he'll get very far. ouchet knows the kind of ground we've it down below. He'll keep Blaucher in ne."

There was a stir in the group that faced ert.

"Touchet will?" laughed Johnny Novasy, the Polack heading-boss. "Ho! Dat's unny, Bert! If he goin' to do somethin'—hy he don't do it already?"

"What do you mean, Johnny?" asked ert. "Anything else gone wrong here?"

"Plenty wrong," said the heading-boss. "This week I lose two good man—Barney Corcoran gets busted leg, and Higgins lose one finger."

"You mean when the muck cars got away?"

"Yeah. Dat's right."

"But that was no fault of Touchet's," said Bert. "You can't blame him for an accident in the heading, Johnny."

"I blame de man what buys bum couplin'-links!" shouted the Polack. "Dose links is junk! Soft—like chewin' gum!"

"He's right," said a burly sandhog. "Salvage stuff—like everything else on this lousy job."

Bert looked at the man who spoke. He was a quiet, serious-minded Cornishman who worked as miner for Johnny Novasky. The man's words came as a surprise and Bert turned to Duffy.

"Is that the truth, Martin?" he asked.

Duffy spat. "We didn't want to bother you, Bert," he said. " 'Tis a busy man you've been lately, and we know you're doin' your best. But when were you in the the tunnel last?"

"When?" said Bert thoughtfully.

He tried to recall when last he had ridden the cages of the huge shaft, and as he thought, he realized his work on top had demanded all of his time. Since the day the tunnels started driving he had been constantly on the go—first to one shaft, then to another. But always he had stayed above ground.

"Why do you ask, Martin?" he said.

Duffy looked to the men. The Polack nodded his head slowly and motioned toward the gantry. Others stared in silent agreement.

"Come on, Bert," said the miner. " 'Tis time you had a look around."

CHAPTER XVI

KNOW THE TRUTH

HE STARTED toward the wide steps leading to the gantry top. Bert followed, wondering what Martin had in his mind. The drone of hoisting machinery came from a small shanty perched high

above the street. Muck cars rattled across the switches of narrow gauge tracks, carrying their stinking loads of wet river sand from the cages to the shoots. Laborers stood at levers and sent sand rushing down the iron sheeted runways to waiting trucks in the street. Above them swung the long arm of the derrick. It lifted heavy iron tunnel segments from the yard and lowered them onto small cars waiting near the cages. Men shouted and cursed. The small elevators squeaked their way to the top of the shaft, emptied their loads and returned to the tunnel with iron.

Duffy led the way to the derrick shanty where a hoist engineer sat on a long bench operating a set of levers with hands and feet. He grinned to Bert—a drawn, nervous grin that went from his face as the signal bell rang. Bert wondered at the man's appearance. Dick Richman had always been a laughing, cursing engineer who sang as he sent the long arm of the derrick swinging over the shaft. Now he was silent. And Bert saw the man's hand tremble as he moved the levers.

"What's wrong with Dick?" Bert asked quietly.

"Plenty," said Duffy. "The man sends a prayer with every load he drops to the gantry. Look at that stick!"

He pointed to the huge timber that thrust outward from the base of the derrick. It was newly painted. But Bert saw the long wide cracks that extended along the arm. The iron straps were loose and the wood had rotted in spots.

Duffy swung toward the drum where a black cable twisted in creeping coils as the motor hummed. Bert followed the run of the wire. There were splices, and spots where strands had split away from the twist. Old stock. Cable that had been used on many jobs before it found a home on the Long Island waterfront. And as he watched, Bert saw the engineer's foot come down hard on the brake and hold there while the load slid to a slow stop.

Duffy was walking down the steps from the shanty and Bert followed. They stopped at a short siding where muck cars were standing, waiting to be unloaded. Duffy lifted one of the rusted links and handed it to Bert.

"More junk!" he said. "And these tracks are the ones we used on the Cranberry Street job ten years ago. They were old then. Now they're ready to curl!"

"Wait a minute," said Bert slowly. "Let's get Touchet before we go any further. He'd like to see this."

"He's seen it," said Martin. "But he's standin' down there by the office. Call him, if you like."

Bert walked to the gantry edge and shouted to the contractor in the street below. Paul looked up, waved a hand and nodded. He crossed to the stairs and joined Bert and the miner.

"Sorry about that mix-up this morning," he said. "I've put the old men back on the jobs, Bert."

"Thanks," said Bert. "I was talking to Gus and told him it wouldn't be smart to crack down just yet. Bad ground under the river, eh, Paul?"

"That wasn't the reason. Good ground or bad—when I make a contract, I keep it. You and the men should know that."

"We do," said Bert. "And we also figure you don't want to kill any more of the men than you have to."

"Kill them?" said Paul. "What do you mean?"

"I've just had a look at the stiff-leg," said Bert, pointing toward the derrick. "It's ready to fold, Paul. And this equipment on the gantry is older than we are. Suppose we go into the tunnel and have a look around?"

"All right," said Paul. His eyes were tired. "Coming along, Martin?"

"Damn right, I am!"

THE miner led the way to the nearest cage and stepped aboard. Bert and Paul followed, gripping the chains that swung from the peaked iron roof. There was no front or back section to the small elevator, merely wire-mesh sides to screen the runners along which it slid.

"Cut the rope!" growled Duffy.

The cage-tender pressed a button and they started down. At the street level the

ght of day winked out and a string of ectric lights showed twisting streams of oisture on the steel sides of the shaft. ert said nothing while the cage dropped eadily to stop with a sudden jerk at the aft bottom. Here, the rank smell of stale ater lifted from the sumps—river water nt from the tunnel to be pumped later the sewers.

On two sides walls of the shaft crowded e cage-frames. Inland, tracks led to a t of huge air locks. Level with the ooden floor was the rounded end of the uck lock—a large steel cylinder set in concrete wall that blocked the tunnel trance. To the right of this was the an lock where the gangs locked into and t of the pressure. High in the concrete all was the emergency lock—the last eans of escape in the event of a flooded nnel. Men worked at the heavy iron ors rolling cars of sand toward the cages. ast the bulkhead was the "uphill gang"—e men who were driving tunnel away om the shaft at the river front to a point here compressed air need no longer be ed.

Opposite this set of locks, and across the idth of the shaft was a duplicate set of linders in a concrete bulkhead. This tun-el led beneath the river. And already irty-five pounds of compressed air were eing used. As Bert stepped from the cage screaming blast of air howled into the haft. Bill Ryan, a former blaster now aralyzed in one leg, had opened the ex-aust valve of the muck lock. Pressure oured from the cylinder and soon Ryan nd his helpers pushed against the door. s it swung inward fog rolled from the ock—thick, cold billows of mist caused y rapid decompression. When the men alked in to get the cars of sand they eemed as crippled phantoms—ghosts that alked with limping strides.

Duffy had climbed the short flight of teps to the man lock. He lifted a bolt nd pounded the sandhog's signal to bring out the lock." *Rap-rap—rap—rap-up!* The message to the lock-tender rought a flood of memories that made Bert or the moment a man alone. Thoughts of days when he too had pounded the signal and waited for the pressure blast that followed. When the door swung inward he bent and groped through the clinging fog. He didn't know Paul was at his side, that Duffy had closed the door and signaled to the lock tender. When air screamed in through a valve above his head and the fog dissolved into nothingness, he lifted a hand and pinched his nostrils, forcing air into the upper passages of his head to equalize the steadily building pressure.

He watched the pointer of an air gauge. Twenty—twenty-five—thirty—as the hand swung Bert wondered if ever again he would come into a man lock as a builder. Were his days of driving tunnel over? Would there come a time when once again he would stand crouched in this lock and wonder if his men were doing a good job in the tunnel beyond?

"A penny for your thoughts," said Paul. He leaned close to Bert and lifted his voice above the scream of the air.

"You know them," said Bert shortly.

"Yes—I think I do. But it's not too late, Bert."

"How would you like to go to the devil?"

"Aren't we?" laughed Paul. "A river heading has always been my idea of a model for that place."

"Then why don't you stop building tunnels?"

"Maybe I will—after this."

THE air lessened its scream; sighed; stopped. The door groaned and Bert swung it open. He stepped with Paul and Duffy into the misted cavern of the tunnel. Before him rounded walls arched away into darkness. A wooden platform served as a floor along which extended a set of small tracks. Near the concrete bulkhead was a switch and a run-around where inside lock tenders shunted cars loaded with dribbling muck. Bert nodded to them and started down tunnel. Unaccustomed to the pressure, his head was tight and he gaped to clear it. Paul walked silently at his side and Duffy, after a few words with the men at the lock, followed.

At short intervals a light flickered close

to the rounded roof—an opalescent bead of brightness wound with a veil of mist. Pressure in the tunnel was never constant and the change brought fog. It rolled in slow spirals that moved with the men toward the heading. In the distance Bert heard the clank of tools and shouts of men that lifted in counterpoint to the dull roar of pressure pounding into the tube. Old sights—old sounds. This was his world and one he loved. When a string of muck-cars headed by a clanking electric-motor came thundering out of the hazy darkness he stepped aside and waved a greeting to the motorman and the sandhog who rode the last car. Duffy caught his arm and pointed to the track.

"Look," he said. " 'Tis God's grace the cars don't tear it to bits. Look at the junk we've used for timber."

Bert watched the rails spread and bend beneath the weight of the load. The rotted boards of the flooring sagged and Bert saw spikes lifting from their beds. He stopped and faced Paul.

"One of these days a load of iron is going to rip this track apart," he said. "The motorman may get a few tons of it on his chest."

"I doubt it," said Paul quietly.

Bert turned toward the heading. On either side were pipe lines swung from iron hooks—water, high air to run the drills and tools in the heading, a thin but heavy line that carried hydraulic pressure to the great shield, and further up the wall a huge black pipe that brought the compressed air upon which the men depended for their safety. Water dripped. And at the joints in the lower line air jetted in whining streams. Loose connections. Sloppy lines. Bert glanced along the tunnel to where three men stood at a small wooden bench. They were hydraulic men—pipe-fitters and mechanics. He motioned to one.

"Hi, Baker," he said. "Got a minute?"

" 'Lo, Bert," said the pipe-fitter. He put down his stilson and crossed the tunnel. "What are you doin' down here?"

"Just looking around," said Bert. "I notice those lines are in pretty bad shape. You men getting lazy?"

"Lazy, hell! You can't make a tight joint with a couple of pieces of spaghetti. That stuff is junk—salvage pipe. The threads are gone and the rust is an inch thick in it. Yesterday a high-air line split and nearly took my head off." He looked at Paul and grinned. "Sorry you weren't standing next to me, Touchet."

PAUL smiled but said nothing. He was watching Bert who had climbed the tunnel wall to a small plank runway that hung from iron straps fastened to the roof. This was the "flying gantry," a narrow footpath set well above the tunnel floor to provide a means of escape when the river flooded into the tube. Bert was testing the planks—throwing the weight of his body against the wood and cursing as it sagged beneath the strain.

"This won't do, Paul," he said shortly.

"The inspectors haven't complained," said Paul. "Why not speak to them?"

Bert leaped down to the floor. He motioned to Duffy and started toward the heading. They had gone but a few steps when the miner caught his arm and pointed to a pile of timber stacked beside the track.

"That's the stuff we're usin' in the face," he said. "Every time I put in a brace I bless meself and promise to light a candle if it holds. Look at it, Bert!"

The wood was bad—timber that had been used on other jobs and salvaged to work again. Bent spikes and rusted nails studded the planks. The heavier beams showed sledge marks, and some were split. Bert lifted a bolt and rang it against the nearest timber. The sound was bad. The wood had lost its life.

"I understand young Weaver was hurt this morning," he said quietly. "How did it happen, Martin?"

"Oh, that—" Duffy spread a brown strain of tobacco juice on a split timber. "We hit a small boulder in the top of the face. Weaver cut a brace to hold it till we were ready to bring it down. The brace snapped and the stone landed on Weaver's foot."

"I see," said Bert thoughtfully.

They were far down the tunnel and as

a twisting current of air spread the fog Bert saw the gang at the muck pile. Ten men—muckers with heavy shoulders and strong backs. They were naked to the waist and they crouched above a low pile of sand. Shovels moved in rhythmic strokes as they worked. Nearby were four cars at the track ends. A small electric locomotive raced toward them. A switchman jumped from the front, ran along the track ahead of the motor and crouched beside a car. In his hand was a short stick and he placed it under the connecting link that extended from the coupling. He lifted a hand and signaled. The motor rolled ahead to make the pick-up.

Bert saw the motorman's hand pull hard on the brake. He yelled and the switchman leaped clear. An instant later the motor crashed into the muck car and jolted a shower of sand across the floor. Men at the muck pile cursed. They didn't change the tempo of their strokes—didn't turn to look or yell at the motorman. Faulty brakes were accepted as part of this job. They were used to them.

"Very nice," said Bert. "I've seen sloppy headings but this beats them all."

A sandhog in high-laced boots and torn khaki trousers came toward them. He was Tom Malloy, one of the younger heading-bosses in the trade. He glanced at the muckers, spoke to one, and then turned to Bert.

"How do you like it?" he asked. "This is the first time I've ever tried to drive tunnel with a nickel's worth of spit and a prayer."

"Don't forget the prayer," laughed Bert. "I'd like to go up into the face. Do you mind?"

"Help yourself," said Malloy. "But don't blame me if the river drops in your lap."

BERT climbed a narrow wooden ladder to a platform hung on turnbuckles at the center line of the tunnel. Before him was the shield—a monstrous steel cylinder that overlapped the forward part of the tube. An intricate maze of copper pipes wound across the near side and from the rim extended a series of heavy jacks that forced it forward into the river bed. Upright braces and horizontal platforms divided it into pockets. And in the center, swung like a giant pendulum was the erector, a heavy beam equipped with a sliding arm to lift the tunnel segments.

On the platform where Bert stood worked the iron gang—a group of monstrous blacks who swung long wrenches and tightened the joint of the tunnel lining. Big Frenchy was their boss—a Senegalese with a pair of hands that had been known to straighten the curve in a horseshoe. In fact, Frenchy's favorite bet was with some doubting newcomer who refused to believe a man could bend a half-dollar piece with his fingers. Frenchy never lost this bet.

His men sang as they worked. Short, jerky phrases that broke from their throats as they kept the rhythm of the stroke. Two men to a wrench, bending and weaving in the swirling mists of the tunnel. They were stripped to the waist—naked, some of them, except for a pair of rubber boots. The violent heat of the tube drenched their wide backs in glistening sweat, while from overhead dripped large splashes of red lead squeezed from the washers about the bolts. It marked their shoulders and backs, painting them in wavering lines of red that gave to them the appearance of war-daubed savages bending and swaying to a tribal dance. A dance that was held in a long black cavern where the pounding air sounded a constant beat like the monotonous throb of the tom-tom.

It was old to Bert—part of his life. He nodded to Frenchy, stepped along a short plank runway to an upper pocket of the shield and stooped to make his way forward into the face. Here was the life of the tunnel—the forward end where nothing but a wall of planks and the intangible pressure of air kept back the river bed. The face was as the firing step of a front line trench. Miners crouched here, plying a trade that was old when Rome was born. They were small men, most of them. Wiry and bent from years on their knees swinging a shovel that cut at the

sand with the art and precision of a surgeon's scalpel. They knew their trade, these men—and they knew of their responsibility. Upon the turn of their shovels and the skill of their sledges depended the life of every man in the heading.

Bert nudged a man who worked at a brace. " 'Lo, Scotty," he said. "Got time for a few words?"

Scotty turned and put down his sledge. He looked at Bert, looked at Paul who was standing behind him, nodded to Martin Duffy who stood silently. He wiped his hands carefully on the sides of his khaki trousers and brought out a square of tobacco. When he had bitten into it and offered it around, he spat. And turned to Duffy.

" 'Twere you who brought him dawn," he said. The burr of the highlands was thick on his tongue. " 'Twere agreed not to bother the mon, Martin."

"Bother, be damned!" cried Duffy. " 'Twas time he knew."

"Aye, that may be," agreed Scotty. "And lang as yer 'ere, Bert—look yer eyeful and see with which we 'ave to contend."

Bert glanced about. On the surface, work in the face appeared to be the same as in most tunnels. Planks were braced carefully against the sand wall, upright timbers and slanting props held them in place. To one side a cribbing of timber had been set beneath the rounded snoot of a boulder that jutted forward in delicate balance. Later this huge stone would be drilled and shot, broken into small pieces and loaded into the cars. Behind the planking Bert saw the usual mat of salt marsh hay that served as a binder to keep the sand from running. Cracks had been carefully packed with clay to keep the precious air from leaking too freely. In every respect the forward part of the tunnel was in perfect order. But to the experienced sandhog, danger sat on every stick of timber.

"How does it look to you, Paul," Bert asked.

"The same as usual," said the contractor. "You know I haven't spend much time below ground, Bert."

"Not lately, perhaps. But you were once a miner's helper, if I remember. Look around—use your eyes, man."

BERT watched while Paul crawled from one pocket to another. He waited patiently until the contractor had completed his inspection. At his side, Martin and Scotty chewed and spat. Their eyes were on Paul and they said nothing. Soon other miners and their helpers joined them. And a silent group waited.

"Could be better," said Paul at length. "I can't put a finger on what's wrong. But things seem—well—loose. Not quite right."

Duffy's hand went out and caught Paul's arm. "Loose!" he cried. "The whole damn thing is held together with spit!"

Paul smiled. "Good spit?"

"It's not funny," said Bert quietly. "These men have been working with poor materials. Under the circumstances, they've done a wonderful job. But it can't last. Someday—perhaps today or tomorrow—a timber will snap and hell will break loose. When that happens, my men aren't going to be here."

"What do you mean?" asked Paul.

"I think you know," said Bert. "Either you get rid of this junk today, or the men stay out of this tunnel. There's no argument, Paul."

"Right, you are!" cried Duffy. "We've enough of this nonsense! We'll get what we want or tie up your damn job!"

"Just a moment, Duffy," said Paul. "If you've—"

"T'hell with you!" cried the miner. "Do we get good timber?"

Paul stepped forward and faced the miner. His voice was quiet and he smiled. "There's no need for that, Duffy. If you've—"

"Don't give me none of that smooth talk!" cried Martin. 'We've given you a day's work for a day's pay. But you'll not send us down here to work with rotten timber."

"Right!" cried a miner's helper."

"We'll tie up yer job!" said another.

" 'Twere no fit place fer a mon!" said Scotty. "I ha' me docts if there's a clean

nail in the headin'. Rusty they be. I like it not a' all."

"Take it easy, men," said Bert. "Let's hear what Touchet has to say before you get excited."

"We've listened to the likes of him too long!" said Duffy. "Let him listen to us, now!"

"That's just what I've been doing," said Paul. He leaned against a steel upright and stared at Duffy. "I've known you for years, Martin. And you've always had a fast tongue when it came to trouble. Take my advice and learn to hold it."

"Not by a damn site!" cried the miner. "Right is right—even though you lousy contractors don't like to hear it. But this once you'll listen! You've sent us in here to build our graves with the leavin's of every job in the country. Rusty pipe, patched cable, a derrick that's fit for the scrap heap! We've worked with wood that splits under the sledge—and we've said nothin'! We've come into your tunnel and blessed the minute the shift was over. We've waited for you to act like a man and change all this. And what have you done? What—I ask you?"

"Take it easy, Martin," said Bert. "If you do all the talking you won't hear anything."

"I've heard plenty!" yelled Duffy. "And I've taken enough! This guy Touchet used to be right. But since he's tied up with that creepin' rat with the big belly, he stinks!" He turned to Paul and shook a fist beneath the contractor's face. "You hear that? You hear what I say?"

"Yes," said Paul. "I think I do, Martin."

"Then listen to more You can't lie down with dogs without gettin' up with fleas. You've taken a skunk for a partner and the stink is on your body!"

BERT stepped forward and caught the miner's arm. He pushed him back toward the shield and held him there. "Quit it!" he snapped. "That's enough out of you, Duffy!"

"Who says so?"

"I do! Do you want me to back it up with a rap on the jaw?" Bert's lips were thin. "I say it, Duffy. "Shut up!"

"Be blazed to you, Bert! And who do you think you are?"

"Aye," said Scotty. "Who be you, Bert?"

Bert swung to the miner. "Looking for trouble, Scotty?"

"Nae—not trouble, Bert. Just a few words."

"You're acting like fools," said Bert. "This is no place for arguments."

"Ye haven' answered me question," said Scotty stubbornly. "Jist who do you be, Bert?"

"I don't get you," said the sandhog.

" 'Tis time you did," said Duffy. "Scotty and the men would like to know if you're Bert Saxon the business agent—or Bert Saxon the friend of Touchet. You can't serve two masters, Bert!"

"Why—you thick-skulled—"

Bert's fist smashed against Duffy's jaw. The miner staggered. Half lifted his arms and shook his head. His knees buckled and he sagged forward. Scotty reached for a sledge. A helper jumped forward with shovel lifted and the blade pointed toward Bert's chest.

"I'll cut his—"

Bert's hand fastened on the steel. He twisted the blade and wrenched it free.

"Quit it, you fools!" he cried. He turned to the little miner. "Put down that sledge, Scotty. Put it down—or so help me God I'll split your skull!"

"Aye," said Scotty and dropped the hammer. "But why did ye hit Martin?"

Paul stepped forward and faced the men. He put one hand on Bert's shoulder.

"I'll tell you," he said quietly. "Because Duffy asked for it. Bert Saxon has given you everything he's got—given you more than any man in the local. In return, what does he get?"

"But, mon—" Scotty lifted a hand.

"I'll talk now," said Paul. "You and Duffy have said more than enough, Scotty. You're not smart—haven't the brains God gave a louse. When I came into this heading I was ready to meet any demand Bert might make. He knew it! That's why he

tried to stop Martin's tongue. But if you, or any of the 'hogs think you can kick me around without getting kicked back—you're greater fools than I thought. And now—with my compliments you can all go plumb to destruction!"

He turned and went out of the face. Bert pointed to Duffy and motioned to two miners nearby.

"Douse him with the hose and get him out of here," he said. "I'll be up top." He looked for a moment at the group. "Any questions? Anything you'd like to say?"

Silence was his answer. He crouched and went through the pocket of the shield to the heading. Paul was walking up tunnel and Bert hurried after him. Nothing was said while they made their way to the main lock and Bert swung closed the heavy door behind them. He nodded to the lock tender and the valve was opened. Air screamed from the lock and fog closed in. The pointer on the gauge moved quickly around the dial as pressure dropped.

CHAPTER XVII

STRIKE A BARGAIN

THE first rule of the tunnel called for one minute of decompression for each pound of pressure in the tube—thirty-five pounds of air meant thirty-five minutes in the man lock. But the tender knew Bert Saxon—knew him as an old timer who laughed at rules and went "out on the button." Like some in the trade, Bert gambled with the air. An attack of the bends had brought him back for recompression at times, but as a rule he was seldom bothered.

Paul Touchet was another who rarely took the total time for decompression. Ten minutes perhaps, sometimes longer. And today the lock-tender glanced at him inquiringly as he stopped down the flow of pressure.

"Twenty minutes," said Paul.

"Getting soft?" asked Bert. "Won't five do?"

"For me—yes," said Paul. "But you've been out of this a few months, Bert."

"Thanks," said the sandhog, and turned up the collar of his coat to protect himself from the chill. "Maybe I'm getting soft."

The air sang a thin tune for twenty minutes and Bert glanced through a newspaper the lock tender had given him. Paul leaned against the rounded wall of the lock and closed his eyes. When the door to the shaft swung open they walked silently to a cage and were lifted to the brightness of a clear November day. The rain had stopped and clouds were drifting in torn shreds toward the flat reaches of Long Island. Sun was drying the puddles near the shaft and men who were off shift walked slowly along the sidewalks. Paul headed toward the field office located near the shaft and Bert went with him. When they were alone in the contractor's office he grinned and offered Bert a cigarette.

"Well—that's that," he said. "It reminds me of a guide I met in Yellowstone Park. He told me not to feed the bears and when I asked the reason, he said, 'It's this way, partner—these critters are nice while you're feeding them. But they've got an awful appetite. When you've fed them all you've got—they want to keep right on eating. Generally they stop when they get to your elbow.'"

Bert lit the cigarette and tossed the match into a basket. "It's not quite that way, Paul," he said.

"Oh, Bert, don't kid yourself about it. It's happened a thousand times before and it'll happen a thousand times again. Give a group of men everything you've got and sooner or later they'll want more than that. Why don't you quit the whole thing and come back to work?"

"For you? Here?"

"Why not? The job of general superintendent is yours whenever you want it." He looked out of the office window along the street that led to the river. "It's a big job, Bert—the greatest tunnel ever driven. When it's finished the men who built it will go down in construction history with Holland. You'll have a place equal to that of Ole Singstad—tops in the trade."

"And the men—"

"Will be just where they've always been

—no better and no worse. With the rest of the labor world they'll be living through the Great Change. A part of it, but an unknowing part."

"The Great Change?" said Bert slowly. "I don't think I've heard that expression before."

"Probably not," laughed Paul. "It's my own. For me, it covers a period from the time in which machinery started to take the place of muscles, to a time in the distant future when power will be free—drawn from the sun, perhaps—but free for the asking. When pistons and wheels were unknown quantities, men worked for a few cents and they worked from sunup to sundown. Work days of fourteen and even sixteen hours were common. Then wages went up a trifle and the twelve-hour day was established."

"In the steel plants?"

"There and in most places," said Paul. "The Great Change had started but no one realized it. Then came slightly better conditions and the eight hour day—six days a week. The Change was gathering momentum and people were learning how to spend a few hours of leisure."

"Damn few hours."

"Yes—but more than before. And in our day we've watched the swing to six hours—five days. More leisure and in comparison to the last century, far better living conditions. Soon—perhaps not in our lifetime, there will be further change. Shorter hours, fewer days of work. It's coming, Bert—we all know it. But it *can't be hurried.* You, nor anyone else can effect that change overnight. It simply isn't in the cards."

"But I'm not trying to do that," said Bert.

"I think you are."

"No," said Bert firmly. "I'm not working for Labor—not at all. These sandhogs are the men of my clan—friends and relatives of mine. This is their fight."

PAUL laughed. "You sound like an infantry sergeant I met in France," he said. "I was caught in a jam with some of my men and we ran for a shell hole. This sergeant had what was left of a squad and they were pounding away with a machine gun. When he saw I was in the Engineers he yelled, 'Hey, Cap—find your own war. This is a private argument.' "

"But you don't understand, Paul. This is—"

"Neither did I then," laughed Paul. "Why don't you listen to reason and take the job?"

"Sorry," said Bert. "That's out."

"Still playing Santa Claus, eh?"

"Call it that if you want. But I've got a job I like and I think I'm doing it fairly well."

"Too well, if you ask me."

"That's just what I'm going to do."

"What?"

"Ask you," said Bert quietly. "I'm going to ask you to forget what happened in the heading. But I want you to remember what you saw."

"Do you think I'm a magician?" laughed Paul.

"I'm not clowning, Paul. Conditions are in a hell of a shape here, and you know it. Why not talk to Blaucher and get things straightened out before I have to pull the job?"

"My pal," grinned Paul. "He sits in my office, puts his big feet on my desk and tells me he's going to pull a strike on my pet job. You're the kind of a guy that would enjoy a dinner in my home and steal the cook."

"Sure, I am. I like good dinners."

"Then how about eating one tonight—at my place? I've moved across town to the East Side. Tudor City section. For the past two weeks I've tried to seduce you with a good meal—why not give in?"

"I've got a date with Austin O'Toole and—"

"So what? Gus is throwing a party for me at his place but I'll duck it." He crossed the room and put an arm about Bert's shoulders. "Come on—loosen up. We'll try some of that brandy in the brown bottle—remember?"

"Vaguely," smiled Bert. "I seem to recall moving the piano out onto the terrace so the moonbeams could dance on the keys.

One of the legs split and I had to hold the damn thing on my shoulder while you played."

"Later we tried to rent Carnegie Hall, I think. You had some idea about staging a heavyweight championship fight while the Boston Philharmonic played Tristan and Isolde."

"Not bad," said Bert. "I must have been going swell that night."

"Night?" laughed Paul. "It lasted a week! You didn't get sober until you'd proposed to every girl in the Metropolitan ballet."

"Any of them accept?"

"How do I know?"

They laughed and Paul searched a nearby locker for a towel with which to clean the mud from his shoes. He found one, scrubbed for a moment and handed it to Bert.

"There's a new Oriental in the library," he explained.

"Oriental rug, or Oriental dame?" grinned Bert.

"Rug—you idiot! For the past few months I've been strictly on my good behavior."

"Has Kay McLane anything to do with that?"

"The man is a mind reader," laughed Paul. "And by the way—suppose we ask her to join us at dinner?"

"But I've got to meet Austin."

"Phone him and call it off," said Paul. "I'm serious about this, Bert. We'll draw up a list of things you want changed in the tunnels and talk them over. Perhaps we can come to some sensible agreement over a bottle of good wine."

"Fair enough," said Bert. "Dinner it is—and before I get finished with you, Paul, you'll probably find it the most expensive meal of your life. I've got a sneaking idea your capacity for brandy isn't any better than it used to be. After the second bottle I'll present my demand for a new wage scale—"

"And I won't be able to sign my name to it," laughed Paul. "Come on—let's get going."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Dey's a Rustlin' in de Cotton

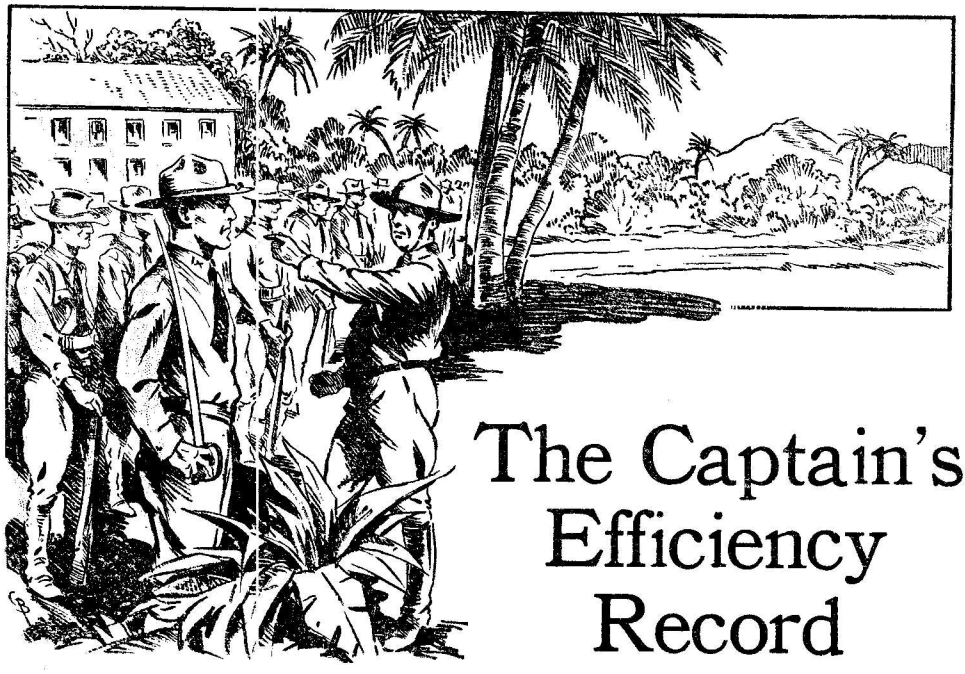
Since hard-riding straight-shooting deputy sheriffs have made cattle rustling too precarious for the Southwest's desperados, the badmen have taken to rustling cotton!

Heavily armed ranchers and law officers patrol the Rio Grande border these days, just as they did during the cattle wars, but today they are guarding cotton fields.

The raiders steal across the border in bands of thirty or forty. Protected by a barrage of rifle fire from sharpshooters deployed in the hills, they strip a field of its cotton bolls and return with their loot to Mexican territory. The stolen cotton is disposed of to individuals who are waxing rich at this strange variety of bootlegging—just as they once thrived as cattle "fences" and liquor runners.

Chris Fox, Sheriff of El Paso County, says that cotton rustling is equally as dangerous as cattle rustling. Perhaps more gun battles have been waged in the past few months along the border than were waged in years of liquor running and cattle rustling.

—*David Howard Lester*



The Captain's Efficiency Record

By JOHN HOPPER

Author of "File Boner," "Notre Dame to Beat!" etc.

CORPORAL MOODY looked at the gun and scowled.

"Does the captain expect to get it up on top of the hill today?" he asked.

"He does," returned Sergeant Henderson grimly, "if he has to break the back of every mothers' son in the battery."

The two noncoms sat in the shade of a pile of creosote-smelling cross ties, against which they rested their backs. They gazed hostilely at the gun a few feet away. It was a three-inch cannon, bolted to a heavy wood platform equipped with runners.

The hour was noon and the hundred odd men Captain Van Steck had brought with him to haul and push the gun to the top of the nearby hill—where it was to be emplaced with three others already there, forming a jungle-hidden anti-aircraft battery—were scattered along the line of a single track, narrow gauge railway, eating the lunch they had carried with them from the fort.

Under the blazing tropical sun, they ate subduedly. They were tired. In the humid heat, which alone was sufficient to drain white men's strength, they had already wrestled the ponderous mass of metal from the Fort Amador dock to the deck of a mine planter and, across the Pacific mouth of the Panama Canal, had wrestled it off onto a flat car.

Then they had pushed the car several miles into the jungle, past the sixteen-inch gun battery the tracks served, arriving at last at the end of the line, where, across a soggy meadow, the jungle-matted hill rose steeply. Once more they had struggled prodigiously with gun and platform until they had it off the car and on log rollers in the meadow.

After that, Captain Van Steck had called a halt to eat. The day was half done, but the worst labors were ahead.

You don't need to mutiny to get the captain's goat

SERGEANT HENDERSON was tall, Corporal Moody was short, the sergeant was as lean as the corporal was stout, both going

close to the extreme in their respective builds.

Corporal Moody scowled again.

"The captain oughta throw a tarpaulin over it an' leave it lay for today. The fellows are all in."

"He won't," assured Sergeant Henderson. "I heard him tell the colonel yesterday that he'd get it up there in one day."

"Always thinkin' of his efficiency record," Corporal Moody said resentfully. "What does he care how many men he kills as long as he gets a high mark?"

"He's apt to kill a couple, too," said the sergeant. "If we get that gun more'n halfway up before dark, I'm a cockeyed Chinaman!"

"Of all the captains in the army," sighed Corporal Moody, "we had to draw him!"

"I'd hate," Sergeant Henderson observed, crossing his long, denim-encased legs, "to be in Lieutenant Donald's shoes. Now there's a nice guy. What a break for him to come out of West Point an' get somebody like Captain Van Steck for his first battery commander!"

"Yeah, it is a shame," agreed Corporal Moody, lacing his stubby fingers comfortably on his damp undershirt where his stomach bulged. "What an efficiency record he'll have by the time he gets through with Van Steck! Every lousy thing that goes wrong in the battery, he'll get blamed for."

Sergeant Henderson nudged the corporal. They both jumped to their feet as two officers approached. Captain Van Steck, in advance of Lieutenant Donald, was the shorter by a couple of inches but possessed a stockier build. Second Lieutenant Donald, youthful, respectful, obviously eager to learn and to please, still had the narrow waist and slender suppleness of a West Pointer on parade. In contrast to the men, who were wearing denim work-clothes, the officers were in uniform, the green breeches and green lightweight shirts of the Panama Canal Department.

Captain Van Steck took his cigarette out of his mouth and squinted around. Practically all the men had finished eating, and, with their cloth hats over their faces, were lying stretched out, recruiting energy for the hard afternoon they knew was coming. Under his campaign hat, the captain's face was red from the heat. But it wasn't the heat which gave his features their sour look. That was his official expression, save when in the presence of higher-ranking officers.

"Get 'em up!" he ordered Sergeant Henderson. "We've got to get this gun up the top of the hill before dark."

"Yes, sir."

The sergeant let out a bellow. "Okay, fellows! Let's go!"

The men rose to their feet, grumbling to themselves at the shortness of the luncheon period.

THE trail up the hill, thickly bordered with vegetation and roofed by tree branches, was like a green vault, even to a damp, pungent smell, which came from the slippery mold underfoot. Never lighter there than twilight, it was now turning definitely dark.

"God!" muttered Sergeant Henderson, watching the straining, panting men. "Ain't he never gonna quit?"

The gun was little more than halfway up the hill. While it ground poles, which wouldn't roll, into the muck, its long nose poked upward an inch or two at a time as the sweating men pushed and pulled. A pair of taut ropes went up the hill from the gun, one to each side of the trail, where they passed through big wooden pulleys lashed to trees. Doubling back down the hill, each rope had two score of men on it, fighting a tug o' war with the steel beast whose great weight stubbornly contested every step of the way.

Corporal Moody, who had been pushing with the men behind the gun, stepped to the side of the trail to join Sergeant Henderson. Begrimed with sweat mixed with gun grease, the corporal eyed the tight-pulled ropes critically.

"Sure play hell," he observed, "if one of them was to bust."

Sergeant Henderson grunted. His job was directing the men pushing on the gun itself.

Lieutenant Donald joined them wearily,

looking anxiously up the trail through the fast-gathering gloom to where Captain Van Steck stood alone impatiently watching the gun come toward him at snail's pace.

"Whose hat is that?" the lieutenant asked, noticing the headgear lying on the trail a few feet behind the gun.

"One of the men musta dropped it," answered Corporal Moody "I'll get it, sir."

The corporal was bending over his corpulent middle to pick up the hat when one of the pulley ropes broke. *Gung*—and then it was snaking free viciously through the foliage. The men who had been on it fell over themselves, while the gun slewed around on an angle, with men scrambling to get out of its way. Fortunately the second rope held for a few seconds.

Lieutenant Donald and Sergeant Henderson yelled for everybody to get clear, while Captain Van Steck, running down the hill, contrarily commanded them frantically to hold it. It was a moment of indecision and fear. Then the gun's drag on the second rope became too great for the men fighting desperately to hold it and the rope burned through their hands.

These things had required only seconds to happen. Corporal Moody, who had bent over with his back to the gun, straightened and stared, puzzled as to what was taking place. One instant, he heard cries and shouts, and saw men fleeing; the next instant, the gun was tearing down upon him.

"Moody!" yelled Sergeant Henderson. "Run!"

THAT second a flying body struck the corporal at his middle. It knocked the wind clean out of him and drove him off the trail to crash into the brush. The gun rushed by, riding almost soundlessly on its runners in the muck.

A few yards down, one runner met a stump beside the path. There was a splintering crash in the silent half-darkness. Carrying part of its platform with it, the gun leaped into the air and went smashing through the trees off the trail. When it finally came to rest, somewhere in the shadows on the side of the hill, the men looked awedly at one another.

Sergeant Henderson gave Lieutenant Donald a hand out to the trail, and then pulled Corporal Moody, gasping, out of the bushes.

"You're lucky," the sergeant said in the corporal's ear, "the lieutenant's a quick thinker."

Corporal Moody shivered at the thought of what would have happened to him had it not been for the lieutenant's flying tackle. He and the sergeant stood by silently as the captain arrived.

It was evident that Captain Van Steck was very nearly beside himself, not only with rage, which showed plainly on his contorted features and pale face, but also with thoughts of what the colonel would say when he learned that a brand new three-inch gun was now probably only something for a junk heap. What the colonel would write in the captain's efficiency record might be something that would easily wipe out every good report the captain had ever earned by slave-driving his men and stealing the credit of his subordinates. Such report of smashing a perfectly good three-inch gun, even if nobody was directly at fault, might some day keep the captain from a general's star, or even a colonel's eagle. The responsibility was, after all, the captain's, and he should have made sure of his ropes.

"Lieutenant Donald," he said, quivering, "what do you mean by ordering the men to quit the gun when I ordered them to stay?"

Sergeant Henderson saw the set of the wind at once. Lieutenant Donald was going to get the blame for the runaway gun.

Flustered, Lieutenant Donald returned, "I saw the men couldn't hold the gun, sir. You were some distance away and—and I thought—I—I knew you wouldn't want anybody to be hurt."

In the darkness, the men were shadows, listening. They knew they couldn't have held the gun. If they had tried, there would now be a man or two lying crushed in the muck of the trail along with the log poles.

The captain was recovering some composure. He saw his way out of the mess. His voice hardened and cut.

"Perhaps they don't teach obedience to

superior officers at West Point any more, Lieutenant? The men could have held that gun, at least until we had a new rope rigged. In your ordering them away from it, directly contrary to my own orders, you are responsible for what happened."

He turned sharply to Sergeant Henderson.

"There's nothing more we can do tonight, Sergeant. Lead the men down."

IN BARRACKS later, sitting on the cot in the sergeant's little room off the big squadroom, Corporal Moody expressed himself freely.

"It's the rawest thing I ever saw!"

Sergeant Henderson, sitting with his feet up on his homemade desk, pulled soberly at his pipe. Outside the screened window, the tropical night was soft, cool, and black.

"What hurts," he frowned, "is the captain's got the lieutenant dead to rights. He did order the men to stay with the gun. I heard him myself. An' the lieutenant told 'em to get away."

"My gosh! They'd'a' been somebody killed, sure as shootin'!"

"That don't make no difference—now. The captain'll say the men could of held the gun. They couldn't have—but the captain's word'll be the one that'll be taken. It always is."

"What did he care how many men was killed?" said Corporal Moody bitterly.

"In fact, he was lucky it happened the way it did," Sergeant Henderson observed. "If somebody had of been killed, there'd be more hell to pay."

"Yeah; then he'd of put the blame on Lieutenant Donald for *not* tellin' the men to get away from the gun."

"Whichever way," the sergeant agreed, "the lieutenant was outta luck."

"He saved my life," said the corporal.

Sergeant Henderson took down his feet and knocked the ashes out of his pipe into an ashtray.

"This'll make it tough for him. They watch those new officers like hawks. They'll put it in his efficiency record, which'll probably get him Class B'd."

"Which means," Corporal Moody added, "if he don't buck up, he'll get kicked out of the Army in a year."

"Yeah. An' since Captain Van Steck has two more years in Panama, by the time the lieutenant's year is up, the captain'll have made so many mistakes an' passed 'em on to the lieutenant that he'll have an efficiency record bad enough to kick six guys outta the Army."

"I wish to heck we could do somethin'!" said Corporal Moody fervently. "Maybe if I went an' told 'em how he saved my life—?"

"That wouldn't help much. Remember, accordin' to the captain, the lieutenant's the guy that's responsible for the gun gettin' away in the first place. Don't worry. The captain'll have all angles covered."

"The son of a—" began Corporal Moody.

"We're just common soldiers," Sergeant Henderson interrupted. " 'Ours not to reason why, ours but to do an' die.' "

Corporal Moody put his elbows on his short, fat thighs and rested his moonlike face in his fists. After a moment's face-crinkling thought, he exclaimed suddenly, "I know! We can give the captain a few things on his efficiency record that he *can't* pass off on anybody else. Maybe he'll get wise an' give the lieutenant a break."

"What?"

"Ain'tcha heard it said soldiers can make or break an officer? Suppose the outfit starts goin' to inspections lookin' like they just come off a payday drunk—dirty rifles, uniforms not pressed, nor nothin'? We'll keep the barracks in a mess. The three-inch guns'll look like they just come off the bottom of the Bay or somethin' An' when we have target practice, the captain's target practice reports'll sound like he was shootin' at somethin' down in Colombia!"

Corporal Moody's enthusiasm increased until it forced him off the cot and started him ponderously walking about the tiny room.

"The fellows'll do it! They all hate the captain's guts—an' they're for Lieutenant Donald a hundred percent. What can the captain do to the whole outfit? He can't put everybody in the guardhouse."

"Mm-mm-mmh," said Sergeant Henderson. "I dunno. I saw sonethin' like that in the Philippines oncet."

"Yeah? What happened?"

"They transferred the battery commander."

"Well," said Corporal Moody happily, "there you are! That's just what we want—get Van Steck transferred away from here. That'll save Lieutenant Donald's bacon—an' I'm doggoned sure nobody in the outfit's gonna cry because the captain went!"

Seeing that the sergeant still remained unreceptive to the idea, Corporal Moody continued, "I know you an' the noncoms can't get messed up in anything like that, Sarge. Just forget I said anything, will yuh? You an' me's been friends a long time," he entreated anxiously.

Sergeant Henderson was looking at the chevrons on Corporal Moody's sleeve.

"To the devil with 'em!" said the corporal. "I'd just as soon be a buck private anyhow—if it'll help get the captain outta here."

"You ain't said a thing," Sergeant Henderson said at last. "A lotta people talk, but you can't put a man in the guardhouse just for a little talkin'. If they did, half the battery 'ud be there."

" 'At a pal, Sarge! Boy, won't we fix his wagon! Wait till the general's annual inspection next week. The captain's gonna be the battery commander of the crummiest lot of troops the general ever saw! He'll think we're a bunch of Mexican bandits, an' won't he give Captain Van Steck hell!"

" 'Tisn't my conscience, or my rank either, that bothers me so much, Moody," Sergeant Henderson said soberly. He glanced down at his own chevrons. "I could lose 'em an' not feel too bad—'cept maybe about the pay. But I got a hunch your scheme ain't so hot. Captain Van Steck is a little different than that officer out in the Philippines. Van Steck is mean an' nasty an' a devil when he gets riled. He'll fight."

"Let him!" said Corporal Moody grimly. "We'll see if he can take it as good as he dishes it out."

WHATEVER his failings, no one ever accused Captain Van Steck of being dumb, and it didn't take him long to catch on to what was up. On the third morning, after seeing the barracks constantly untidy, the men slovenly, and the gun batteries generally junk-yardish in appearance, he summoned Lieutenant Donald before his desk in the orderly room.

Taking a cigarette out of a package on the desk and lighting it, he began sourly, "Lieutenant, there are indications of a minor revolt in the battery. Beginning today, there will be no further rest periods or afternoons off. From now on, the men will fall in every available moment on the battery parade, equipped with full packs and rifles. You will give them infantry drill. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Lieutenant Donald, his heart sinking at the thought of extra "doughboy" in the heat.

"I want them drilled constantly, Lieutenant. We'll take this revolt out of them before the general's inspection," he added grimly.

He picked up a paper on which he had been writing.

"This is my report on the accident to that three-inch gun. I regret, Lieutenant, that I had to show your conduct in rather unfavorable light."

"Yes, sir."

"By the way, I am reducing Corporal Moody to ranks. Make sure that he is present at every drill. He appears to be one of the ringleaders of the revolt."

"Yes, sir."

"Remember, no rest periods. I want you to drill them yourself, personally. That's all."

"DOUGHBOY" was as tough on Lieutenant Donald as it was on the men. Although he did not, like they, have to trudge around with a fifty pound pack on his back and a heavy rifle, yet the responsibility of command was his and, in the terrific heat, it weighed heavily. He got so that he could not look at the sweat-dripping devils as he marched and countermarched them under the broiling sun on

the burnt grass of the parade ground, across the road from the battery's two-story white stucco, red tile-roofed barracks. Their tongues actually hung out as they panted for air, and that air was hot enough to belong to a boiler room. Squads right, left, and right about, endlessly, with never a halt for rest. The men stuck to it grimly, bending under their packs. Moody, now plain Private Moody, lost weight, and his uniform, as wet with sweat as any tropical downpour could have made it, began to hang off him.

As the week passed by, each day bringing closer the general's inspection visit, the struggle between the men and Captain Van Steck grew more dogged and tense. Lieutenant Donald, who failed to suspect that he was at the bottom of the revolt, wondered how the men could continue to take it and, regardless of his opinion of revolts by the rank and file, had his respect increased immeasurably for the guts of the American soldier. On the other hand, Captain Van Steck's worry was growing steadily. The punishment seemed to be affecting the men no whit. As time shortened to the general's visit, even a Mexican bandit might have hesitated joining such an indifferent, slovenly lot.

The captain's answer was to increase the punishment. It seemed that the battery did little else but turn out for "doughboy."

Captain Van Steck knew he had good cause for worry. Sooner or later the state of affairs would come to the attention of the commanding officer and, while Captain Van Steck would be transferred elsewhere, the business would be written up in his efficiency record, and doubt cast forever upon his ability to handle men. To an officer with ambition, this was fatal.

IN THE afternoon preceding the day of the general's inspection, Captain Van Steck went out to his three-inch anti-aircraft battery on Naos Island, taking along a handful of men in the hope that by standing over them personally, he could get the guns into some kind of decent shape for the general. The rest of the men had been left back at barracks, and Lieutenant Donald had been given positive instructions to drill the pants off them and not pause for a moment's rest. The captain still hoped grimly to break the revolt before the next day.

The afternoon seemed hotter than usual. Even the trade breeze, which customarily blew steadily in the dry season, had died away until not a leaf rustled in the palm trees along the sidewalk adjacent to the battery parade. Lieutenant Donald hoarsely shouted commands and the men wearily went through the same, old, tiresome infantry evolutions.

Somewhere in the perspiring ranks a tortured voice croaked, above the rattle of equipment and the dull pounding of feet, "Water! For God's sake, we want a drink of water!"

Following this, a man collapsed, carrying his pack and rifle with him to the baking earth under the marching feet.

"Battery—halt!" cried Lieutenant Donald.

Two soldiers picked up the man who had dropped and carried him to a palm tree, where they laid him in the shade and unbuttoned his blouse. The rest, being still at attention in ranks, kept their eyes front.

Lieutenant Donald looked at their heat-twisted, thirsty faces. Then he glanced at the barracks across the road. He knew that the captain had gone out to Naos Island.

"Fall out for ten minutes," he said. "You may smoke and go in barracks for a drink of water."

For a moment the men stood incredulous. Then they broke ranks with a yell, leaving Lieutenant Donald alone in the hot sun, his saber under his arm, and soberly wiping the perspiration out of the band of his campaign hat. He could use a drink of water himself, but he preferred not to take advantage himself of the rest he had given the men. He found justification for what he had done in the thought that the afternoon was hotter than usual and if Captain Van Steck were present, he would himself probably have given the men a rest. Army regulations state that soldiers shall not be subjected to cruel and unusual punishments and, to Lieutenant Donald's no-

tion, drilling with full packs and rifles under this sun without a rest period, constituted something along the line of "cruel and unusual." In the last analysis, what Captain Van Steck never knew wouldn't hurt him.

At that moment, however, Captain Van Steck was entering the rear door of barracks. He had come, in his car, around the back road after some cans of brass polish, the supply that had been at the guns having mysteriously disappeared. When he saw the hall filled with smoking, talking, resting men, his astringent features hardened. He made his way, through their snapping to attention and sudden silence, to the front door.

Lieutenant Donald saw him come and saluted with his saber.

"What's all this?" demanded the captain harshly, ignoring the salute.

"Rest period, sir."

"At whose orders?"

"Mine, sir."

Captain Van Steck narrowed his eyes on the sober young officer standing at attention before him.

"Get the men out here at once!" he ordered.

When they were at attention in line, he glared at them. They stared straight ahead, and not even the most timid ones bothered to keep their feelings out of their eyes. Seeing that, and their appearance, which was more slovenly than ever, the captain's ire increased. His face choler-congested, he wheeled upon his lieutenant.

"Now," he said, "drill 'em until they drop!"

He said something else, which the ranks couldn't hear. But they saw the lieutenant's saber flash up and heard it rattle down into its scabbard. Taking a step forward, the lieutenant swung. The captain went down, and the lieutenant, white-faced, stepped back with clenched fists.

Not a whisper of sound rose. . . .

Holding his jaw, Captain Van Steck got to his feet.

"Striking a superior officer. That, I think, Lieutenant, just about finishes your military career."

THAT night, in Sergeant Henderson's little room, Private Moody paced the floor in rage and desperation.

"That winds up the lieutenant all right!" he said savagely. "They'll bobtail him outta the Army for sure—the gun, an' now this!"

He paused and glared at Sergeant Henderson, who was soberly pulling at his pipe.

"Wasn't Van Steck smart? He knows no senior officer has got a right to call a junior officer names, so whatever he said he said it so none of us could hear."

"You can't testify what he said if you didn't hear it," Sergeant Henderson agreed.

"He probably didn't think the lieutenant had guts enough to punch him one!" snorted Private Moody.

"I was surprised myself," admitted Sergeant Henderson. "It musta been the heat. If the lieutenant did anything, he shoulda just reported the matter to the colonel—in writin'. He'd have a chance then. Maybe," the sergeant concluded, pulling on his pipe reflectively, "the captain figgered the lieutenant would do just what he done. The lieutenant's new outta West Point an' he ain't onto such things as that."

"An' it was just his luck to get a captain like that," sighed Private Moody. "Look the whole Army over an' you'll never find another one like him."

"He's the worst I ever see," Sergeant Henderson agreed.

Private Moody sat on the bunk and held his head in his hands.

"You were right," he admitted dolefully. "We should never of started this revolt business. All we done is get the lieutenant in worse."

Sergeant Henderson was silent.

Private Moody got up and began pacing the floor again. He stopped beside the sergeant's desk and picked up one of the cigarettes lying there. He was about to light it when the sergeant noticed what he was doing.

"Don't smoke that!"

"Why not?"

"They're marihuana cigarettes. Full of

marihuana—dope. I took 'em away from some rookies. The suckers bought 'em in Panama City."

Private Moody looked at the cigarette. Except that its paper wrapping was brown like the wrapping on native cigarettes, which were cheaper in the Republic of Panama than American brands, it had the appearance of an ordinary cigarette.

"Ain't that the stuff that makes you feel like a good drunk?" he asked.

"Yeah. Somethin' like that. It ain't as bad as other drugs, like morphine or coke, but the men ain't supposed to smoke it."

Private Moody put down the cigarette thoughtfully.

"The general's inspection is tomorra," Sergeant Henderson remarked.

"Yeah," returned Private Moody absently, "so it is."

Sergeant Henderson looked at him sharply.

"How about the men? They gonna keep on like they have or are they gonna shine up for it?"

"Uh? Oh! Not much!" Private Moody scowled.

Sergeant Henderson sighed.

"The noncoms are goin' crazy, Moody. Between the captain ridin' 'em an' the men layin' down—"

"Say!" Private Moody interrupted suddenly. "You still got that camera of yours?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Can I borry it?"

"Sure. You gonna take some pictures?"

"Maybe," replied Private Moody cryptically.

A FEW minutes later. Private Moody appeared in the big squadroom, with its long rows of bunks. He went directly to where a slender, dark-haired youth, one Private Popska, who had put in a hitch in the Signal Corps, was reclining on his bunk in shorts, waiting for Taps and lights out. Private Moody sat down on the bunk with Sergeant Henderson's camera.

"Popska," he began, "weren't you one of them picture-takers when you was in the Signal Corps?"

Private Popska sat up lazily on one elbow.

"Yeah."

Private Moody displayed the camera.

"I wancha to take a couple tomorra mornin' before the general comes. They gotta be good ones."

"Sure, I'll take 'em. Wanta send 'em home to your girl, Fat?"

"No. I don't want my picture took." Private Moody looked cautiously around the room. A few soldiers, here and there, were chinning or leisurely getting ready for bed. "Can you keep a secret, Pop?"

"That's my middle name—Mum."

"Okay. I wancha to take pictures of the captain."

Private Popska stared suspiciously.

"Whacha want pictures of him for?"

"Well, he's gonna be drunk. Drunk on duty, see?"

"That guy don't drink!" snorted Private Popska. "He wouldn't take a drink. Somebody might put it in his efficiency record."

"Well," Private Moody insisted, "he's gonna drink tomorra."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Ever smoke marihuana, Pop?"

"Not me! What do I wanna smoke that dope for?"

"It makes you feel an' act like you're drunk."

Private Popska sat up and looked closely at Private Moody.

"Say, what is this? The captain don't smoke marihuana."

"He's gonna smoke some tomorra," replied Private Moody doggedly. "He smokes a lot of regular cigarettes. I know his brand an' I'm gonna slip him a deck—loaded with marihuana."

Private Popska widened his eyes.

"You are!"

Private Moody looked around him and nodded.

"After he smokes a couple," he went on, "I'm gonna hand him a Tom Collins—with plenty of gin in it—only he'll think it's lemonade. The cooks make lemonade an' they often send him in a glass."

Private Popska was fascinated but skeptical.

"He'll know it ain't lemonade."

"Not after he smokes marihuana, he won't," promised Private Moody. "He'll be drunk enough from that anyhow, but I want a picture of him with a glass in his hand—an' a bottle of gin on his desk. I'll see that that's there. An' that ain't all. I got a couple of fellows an' we're goin' in with the captain. We're gonna have glasses an' bottles in our hands an' we're gonna look drunk. Maybe the captain won't like it but he'll be too drunk himself to do much about it. That's where you come in. You take pictures of us."

Private Popska began to reneg.

"Gee, Fat, that's pretty risky business! I do' wanta—"

"What're you scared of? The captain won't see you take the pictures. With all that marihuana, he won't even know what's goin' on."

"What good is it gonna do?" dodged Private Popska.

"What good is it gonna do? Say, do you know what they do to officers who get drunk with enlisted men—on duty? They kick 'em out of the Army—pronto."

"Yeah," returned Private Popska. "An' what do they do to enlisted men who get drunk with an officer?"

"They just give 'em a stretch in the guardhouse. Soldiers is different than officers."

"An' you an' a couple of other guys are willin' to take a rap to get Captain Van Steck?"

"We ain't gonna take no rap."

"No?"

"No. We just want the pictures to make a little deal with the captain. Nobody's ever gonna know anything about it 'cept us an' him— if he makes the deal."

"Don't you suppose he's gonna know he was doped or somethin'?"

"What good'll it do him? Sure he might know, but he won't be able to prove nothin'. He won't take no chances tryin', either. Don't worry. He'll make a deal for the pictures."

"What's the deal?"

"He gives the lieutenant a square break on that gun an' forgets about the slam in the puss the lieutenant gave him this afternoon. To make sure he don't ride the lieutenant or nobody afterwards, we'll keep a set of prints."

Private Popska hugged his knees.

"Sounds pretty screwy to me—an' an awful lot of risk," he said. "The captain ain't no dumbbell. What is liable to happen is that we all land in the guardhouse an' don't accomplish nothin'."

"You won't land in the guardhouse," Private Moody argued. "You don't come in until after everything's all set. If it ain't set, you don't take no pictures an' nothin' happens to you. If it is set, we're all set. An'," concluded Private Moody grimly, "it'll be set all right."

"You'd do a lot for Lieutenant Donald, wouldn't you?"

"Why wouldn't I? He saved my life. An', what's more, how about that time he got you outta that jam in Panama City? If it hadn't of been for him, you'd stayed in that lousy Panama jail. The captain wouldn't lift a hand to get you out."

"Okay, okay," said Private Popska. "Let's see that camera."

THE general was due at eleven o'clock. First he would inspect the outfit under arms on the battery parade. Next, the barracks. In the afternoon, he would be taken on a tour of the three anti-aircraft gun batteries the outfit manned, one on Naos Island and two in the jungles strategically located to defend the Canal.

Captain Van Steck arrived at the orderly room shortly after seven o'clock. A trip around barracks showed him that the men had not yielded an inch, and that the general, who was used to everything slick and clean as a whistle when he came around, was going to see sights to fill him with amazement and ire. It promised to be a bad day for Captain Van Steck.

He noticed on his desk a report, prepared by Lieutenant Donald, of the lieutenant's version of the gun episode. Scowling, he picked it up and began to read. His hand went across the desk seeking the package of cigarettes he had put there before going through barracks. It was his

custom to take out his cigarettes and leave them on the desk during the day if he was going to be in the orderly room. Tropical heat induced copious perspiration and cigarettes kept in the pocket eventually became damp. The captain was an inveterate cigarette smoker and damp cigarettes annoyed him.

His hand found the package and extracted a cigarette. Lieutenant Donald's report was proving absorbing, causing the captain to light the cigarette absently and draw in deeply. Exhaling suddenly, he stared at the cigarette.

ABOUT a half hour later, Private Moody entered, bearing a glass of what looked like lemonade. Placing it on the desk within the captain's reach, he announced deferentially, "Lemonade, sir. The cook sent me in with it to the captain."

Private Moody watched Captain Van Steck closely. Keeping quiet in the hall outside, two men were waiting with bottles of gin and glasses like the captain's. Private Popska was with them, with Sergeant Henderson's camera loaded and ready.

The captain laid aside Lieutenant Donald's report and smiled. Private Moody's heart bounded at this sign. Captain Van Steck never smiled in barracks—not unless there was a major, or a colonel, or a general around.

Picking up the package of cigarettes which Private Moody, knowing the captain's habit of leaving his cigarettes on his desk, had substituted for the captain's own during his tour barracks, Captain Van Steck held them out.

"Have a cigarette, Moody?"

"No, thank you, sir," Private Moody replied, putting his hands behind him and backing off. Only marihuana, he exulted, could have caused this unusual generosity on the captain's part.

"Don't you smoke?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Private Moody, putting his hands farther behind his back. "But I don't feel like one now, sir."

Captain Van Steck laughed and waved the package gaily in the air before putting them down on the desk.

"Ha-ha!" he laughed.

"Ha-ha!" encouraged Private Moody, joining in with the spirit of things.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed the captain.

Private Moody mentally rubbed his hands. The captain was pretty high.

"Lemonade, Moody?" the captain queried, cocking a jovial eye upon the drink.

"Lemonade, sir. Ha-ha!" Private Moody assured him.

"Ha-ha!" chuckled the captain.

This was the moment Private Moody had been waiting for. He was on the point of backing swiftly across the room to summon his confederates.

"But," continued the captain, "there's a little too much gin in it, don't you think?"

PRIVATE MOODY remained where he was. "Come over here and sit down," the captain invited, still genially.

Doubts began to assail Private Moody. For anyone as hopped up on marihuana as the captain appeared to be, he had caught on pretty fast to the gin in the lemonade! Sidling cautiously to the chair beside the captain's desk, Private Moody sat down gingerly.

"Better throw these out," said the captain, pushing the cigarettes across the desk. "They're full of marihuana—and I don't use it."

He sat back in his chair and gazed at Private Moody, who began to quake. The captain's face still wore a smile, but it had a grim cast to it.

"Moody," he said at last, "have you any idea how many years they'd keep you in Leavenworth for putting dope in an officer's cigarettes and trying to feed him liquor on top of it?"

Private Moody grew pale.

"You see," Captain Van Steck went on, "I've had some experience with marihuana before."

The captain smiled peculiarly.

"I could," he said, "forget about this if—if—well, we have an inspection by the general today. Things aren't in very good shape, as you well know, Moody. We still

have almost three hours before the general is due to arrive."

A dogged expression appeared on Private Moody's face and he said nothing.

Captain Van Steck scowled. He had been genial to encourage Private Moody to develop his game to the point where he was irretrievably trapped. All along, Captain Van Steck had felt sure that Private Moody was the backbone of the revolt, which Private Moody would now have to bring to an end in order to save himself. There was not eonugh time, perhaps, to have everything in such shape as to knock the general's eye out, but there was at least enough to mend matters sufficiently to get by, which would save Captain Van Steck's skin and reputation. As much as he would like to see Private Moody in Leavenworth, there was the efficiency record to be considered.

But Private Moody continued to sit and say nothing.

"What do you want?" Captain Van Steck exasperatedly cried at last.

IN THE big squadroom, everything was in a bustle as the men cleaned up, shined, and polished, getting ready for the general's inspection.

The door to Sergeant Henderson's room opened and Moody's big face appeared.

"Got a needle an' thread, Sarge?" he asked cheerfully. "Gotta sew these chevrons back on before inspection."

"Come in here!" ordered Sergeant Henderson grimly. "Did you take those marihuana cigarettes I had here last night?"

Moody, again Corporal Moody, entered and closed the door.

"Who? Me? I don't know a thing about them, Sarge!"

Sergeant Henderson snorted.

"You're too all-fired smart, Moody! I suppose you think you was the one who got the lieutenant out of his jams?"

"I don't know anything about that, either," Corporal Moody stated innocently.

"Well, you didn't," growled the sergeant. "So don't go thinkin' you did. The lieutenant got himself out of the gun one. He's a mathematical wizard. He ranked No. One in his class at West Point. He proved the gun couldn't of been held, after the rope broke, even if the men had stayed with it. Cold figures. I saw it in the lieutenant's report in the captain's basket before the captain got here this mornin'."

Corporal Moody frowned.

"It even had the endorsement of the staff engineers up at GHQ," Sergeant Henderson went on. "I guess even Captain Van Steck can't get around *that!* That Lieutenant Donald's a smart hombre."

"Yeah," said Corporal Moody thoughtfully, "he is."

"He don't need nobody to fight his battles for him," Sergeant Henderson added pointedly.

"No?" questioned Corporal Moody. "What about the sock in the puss he gave the captain?"

"Haven't you heard?" Sergeant Henderson inquired sarcastically. "The adjutant's wife happened to be passin' by on the sidewalk near where the captain an' the lieutenant was standin'. We was all too busy to notice her, but she heard every word the captain said to the lieutenant, an' it wasn't very nice, either. She told her old man, who went in an' told the colonel about it. The sergeant-major told me. The colonel called up Captain Van Steck an' gave him hell an' said the sock in the puss served him right 'cause he was too all-fired plain nasty anyhow, an' maybe he'll take the hint, which nobody else but the lieutenant had guts enough to give him before. You know the colonel. He's also transferrin' Lieutenant Donald over to the Atlantic side. That's why he wasn't around this mornin'. We won't see him no more."

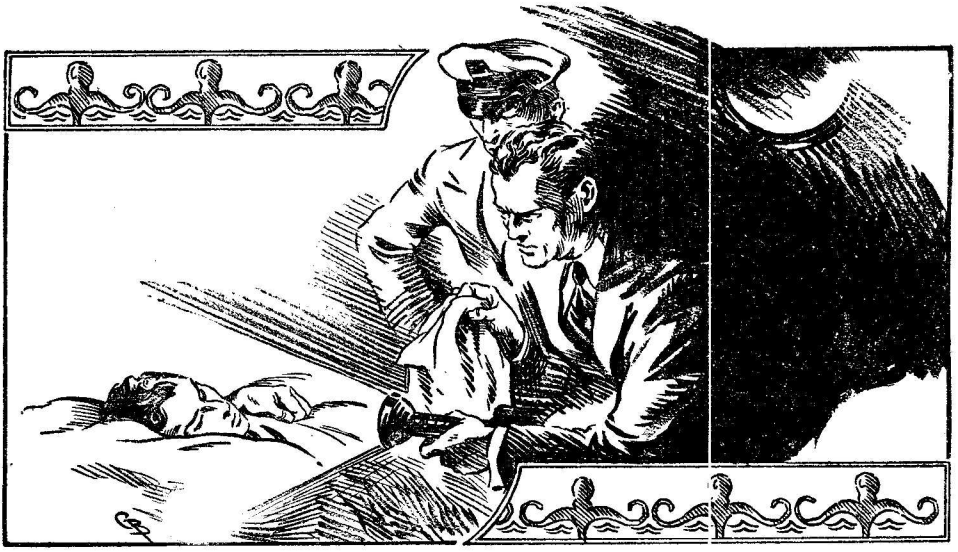
Sergeant Henderson paused and looked closely at Corporal Moody.

"What's the matter?"

"Did that son-of-a-gun—the captain, I mean—know all them things this mornin'?"

"Sure. I just got through tellin' yuh!" Sergeant Henderson replied. "The colonel bawled him out yesterday afternoon an' the lieutenant's report was in his basket before he got here. Why?"

"I been gypped," said Corporal Moody injuredly.



Pacific Passage

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

CHAPTER XVIII

CROTCHET WANTS TO BET

GEORGE ROSSMORE stood angrily at bay before Jansenn and Corliss. "If he was in my room, I didn't know anything about it," he protested.

"Are you sure?" Jansenn gave him a searching look.

Rossmore's temper burst into flame. Jansenn had encountered touchy passengers before, but never one so brittle as this one.

"Yes, I'm sure," Rossmore raged. "I know what you're thinking—that maybe I'm Benedict myself. Why don't you find out? You can hogtie me, can't you? And go poking in my mouth for false plates? Wouldn't that be cute of you! All right, try it. And then start hiring lawyers. I'm just itching to sue this line for fifty thousand dollars!"

Jansenn began placatingly, "I wouldn't take it that way—'

Rossmore cut in with: "Of course I'm not Benedict. I got on at Honolulu, didn't I? And you had Benedict all the way from the mainland. If you'd spend more time using your head, and less time insulting passengers, you might get somewhere."

He turned on his heel and walked away.

The captain suppressed his own indignation. "The man's just mad enough to file suit," he said to Corliss, "so we'd better not stir him up any more."

"Besides," agreed the first officer, "he can't possibly be Benedict—not with that bulldog jaw. And he *did* get on at Honolulu; while Benedict rode with us from the mainland."

"Well, we'll go on down the passenger list," said Jansenn.

They did, and by lunchtime they were certain that no man with a red-ringed wrist was aboard the *Monterey*.

"We've looked at practically everything except appendicitis scars," Corliss said when he passed Pope's table.

The first installment of this story, herein concluded, was published in the Argosy for November 6

Pope was there waiting hopefully for June. Hoping that he might be wrong, and that she had been merely indisposed this morning.

But again at lunchtime she did not appear in the dining room. Going above, he found her still truant from her deck chair. He resisted a temptation once more to telephone her cabin.

He went to his own room and tried to lose her from his thoughts by a determined grapple with the Benedict mystery. A newspaper caught his eye.

It was the much-read copy salvaged from Boris Getman.

Again Otis Pope went through it, line by line. And still he found nothing illuminating. Yet a fact persisted—twenty-nine copies of this same paper had been pilfered from the ship's store.

Dr. Mingo came softly in.

Pope asked him: "Did you ever take any particular notice of an old hunchback passenger named Benedict?"

Mingo confronted him with an impassive face. "I have not paid notice to the gentleman," he said.

Pope smiled. "Let's not call him a gentleman. By the way, what did you ever do with those mystery thrillers?"

"They are put away, Mr. Pope. Do you like to read one now?"

"Save them for some duller voyage," Pope answered with a laugh. "Right now, please telephone the chief purser and tell him I'd like to know the number of Benedict's room. That is, the room he occupied before he disappeared."

With his usual obedience and efficiency, Dr. Mingo stepped to the telephone. He called the chief purser's office. "What, please," he inquired, "is the number of room assigned to Mr. Benedict?"

The answer evidently came promptly, for Mingo said, "Thank you, sir," and hung up.

To Pope he reported, "It is room three two five."

"That is all," Pope said in dismissal, and Mingo went out.

Alone, Pope lifted the receiver and again called the chief purser. He asked: "What answer did you give to my secretary's inquiry?"

"I gave the answer you told me to give, Mr. Pope," the purser said. "I told him it was room three two nine."

POPE'S face grew somber as he hung up. He had long trusted Mingo. And now he knew that Mingo was not without guile.

Mingo, from long habit of accuracy, had given him the correct figures although he had been told wrong ones by the purser. Exact knowledge as to the number of Benedict's room must already have been in Mingo's mind. He had made the call merely for effect, knowing the true answer himself all the while. Therefore he had paid only indifferent attention to the figures announced over the phone.

It could only suggest that Dr. Mingo had had contact of some kind with Julian Benedict. That he had paid the gentleman no notice was not true. Duplicity was aboard, and Mingo himself was implicated. Mingo, to whom Otis Pope had entrusted a hundred professional confidences.

Gravely disturbed, Pope left his suite and went out on deck. There his face brightened, for he saw that June Darrow had come up for air. She was seated in her deck chair with an open book in her lap.

Pope hurried to her. The book, he saw, was the same one she had been reading before, *Epic of America.*

"I've been checking up," she said, "on who really crossed the Delaware."

But her smile was mirthless. Her eyes were harassed and she was looking not at Pope but at some one at a distance down the deck.

"I approve," he said lightly. "I want to make a good American out of you, June."

She pretended to miss this.

Pope took the seat beside her. "Last night I asked you a question. Would you rather I wouldn't ask it again?"

He stared.

Still gazing at someone down the deck, she answered, "Yes, I'd rather you wouldn't."

Ellery Crotchet was coming toward them.

June said quickly: "I think I'll go below now. Oh, by the way, here's your book, Mr. Pope. I've quite finished with it."

She handed him the book, got up and walked away. Pope looked after her in surprise. This was not his book, but her own.

Crotchet stopped in front of Pope's chair. He stood puffing at a cigar and watched the retreat of June Darrow until she disappeared. Then he rocked back on his heels, upturned the cigar to a steep angle and looked down ironically at Pope.

"Taking the air, are you, Pope?"

Pope ignored the double meaning. "I'm concentrating on the devious ways of a criminal," he said.

Crotchet squinted at him shrewdly. Then his mouth rounded to blow smoke rings. He flicked off an ash from the cigar and said: "Doing a bit of amateur detecting, are you? Getting anywhere?"

"I'm entirely mystified," Pope admitted.

"Mystified, eh?" Crotchet spoke with a jeer. "That's funny, for a smart man like you! Well, I might have to take a hand myself."

"In the solution or in the crimes?" Pope asked in a level tone.

Crotchet flushed, then shot at him: "They tell me you've appointed yourself sort of a generalissimo in the solution end of it, Pope. Think I'll take a hand just to show you up."

"Help yourself, Crotchet."

"Tell you what I'll do, Pope. I'll lay you a little bet, anything you say, that I'll have the straight of this thing by dinnertime tonight."

Otis Pope was quickly alert. He had a feeling there was more behind this than idle boasting. Crotchet, in some way, was on the inside. Dinnertime tonight! "That," Pope said, "only gives you about four hours."

Again Crotchet rocked back on his heels and flicked an ash from the cigar. "Time enough," he said. "Just to make it interesting, what about a little bet? I'll lay you one of these against a hundred quid."

He took a jewel case from his pocket, opened it and exposed two dozen of exquisite black opals. One of these he took in his hand, thumped it into the air and caught it before the eyes of Pope.

A term of June's came back to Pope. This man was indeed a consumate grandstander. People both ways along the deck were looking at him now. He knew it and he liked it.

Truly the display of these opals was in character. The man would be in his element, Pope thought, if he could really solve the mystery and thus win the applause of a gallery.

Pope studied the man, trying to fathom what was back of those hard gray eyes other than vanity. In a moment, then, he opened the book idly in his lap; and again his senses quickened. He saw that the front fly leaf of it had been torn out. He remembered that an inscription of presentation had been there, from the Gilman family to June Darrow.

That page was now gone, but on the next he saw that a few words had been hurriedly written in pencil by June herself.

He read: "Please don't think I'm rude. But it will make a lot of unnecessary unhappiness if I even speak to you."

So that was why she had given him the book! A covert message passed to him as Crotchet approached along the deck. Otis Pope didn't know whether to be elated or chagrined.

To Crotchet he said: "No. I'd rather not bet on life and death. Besides, I'm not sure you haven't some inside information."

Crotchet laughed. "How could I have? I just got on, didn't I? You've had three days' head start on me, Pope. But if you're afraid to bet, I'll dig up the answer anyway by dinner tonight, just to show you up."

He moved on jauntily down the deck.

POPE remained there and looked through June's book from cover to cover. But there was no other message. Then he considered the bold proposition of Crotchet. Otis Pope was human enough

to admit that he *would* feel rather humiliated if Crotchet should unravel in a few hours a tangle which had baffled others for days.

So he forced himself to concentrate on Benedict. He must find out how often Benedict had been seen, and by whom. Often by his stewards, of course.

Pope arose and went down to cabin 325. There he found Benedict's room steward, a waxen-faced German.

"Mr. Benedict didn't take much service," the room steward said. "He never was in when I made up the bed. Told me he liked to be left alone."

"Did he tip liberally?"

"Tips? No sir; not a penny."

"Did you draw his baths for him?"

The steward shook his head. "If he ever took one, sir, I never knew it. And his towels never seemed to be used."

Pope went down to the dining room and there got the same kind of negative information. A table steward said: "Mr. Benedict was always the first in for breakfast, sir. It was the same in the evening. He never came to lunch at all."

"Did he dress for dinner?"

"Not him, sir. That's why the chief put him at a little corner table all alone."

"Did he ever talk to you?"

"He made me talk, sir. But I could never get much out of him."

Pope sought out the chief dining-room steward. "What passengers," he asked, "habitually fail to appear at breakfast?"

"Lots of them, Mr. Pope. Plenty of 'em stay up late, dancing or playing cards, and never get up at all until the middle of the morning."

Pope gave the head steward a twenty dolllar bill. "Please circulate among the table stewards and make me a list of all patrons who until this morning were never seen at breakfast. You see, I'm looking for a person with eating habits opposite to Benedict's."

"Yes sir. Thank you sir. It means maybe one out of every ten or twelve patrons'll be on that list, but I'll have it in a few hours."

On the way up to deck, Pope encountered Corliss. "Still think Benedict jumped overboard?" he asked.

"I'd bet on it," Corliss said. "But the captain's turned to your notion. He thinks Benedict's still aboard, only we don't know him."

"Will he stand for a round-up of false dental plates?"

"He won't go that far," Corliss said. "Too many touchy passengers—like Rossmore. They've always got a chip on their shoulders, these first-class tourists, and plenty of them bought their teeth at a store."

"I wish you'd do something for me," Pope said. "Make an inquiry among passengers to find out if anyone bought a *Star-Bulletin* on the streets of Honolulu, and brought it aboard. The store's supply was stolen, but the thief didn't have any chance to get at papers brought aboard in pockets."

"I'll see what I can do, Mr. Pope."

POPE went to A deck and made a patrol through the lounge, library, writing room, smoking room and barroom. He gave a close scrutiny to the features of each man he passed, trying to reconcile them with Benedict's. Some, by their builds and breadth of face, he discarded as impossible of suspicion. Of others he was less certain. What would they look like without teeth, with dark glasses, a toupé, shabby clothes, and the bowed head of an old hunchback hobbling along on a cane?

Almost any man of average height and build, and with fairly lean features, might make up to fit such a part. Pope paused before Boris Getman. As he appraised Getman, Getman met his gaze and smiled whimsically.

"I know what's on your mind, Mr. Pope. And no offense taken, because I've been thinking the same thing."

"About who is Benedict?"

"Yes, I agree with you he might still be on the ship." Getman smoothed back his thin reddish hair and stared thoughtfully toward a divan on which Raymond Ladislaw was reading.

Pope followed his gaze.

"If you're looking for a masquerader, there's one," Getman said in a lowered voice.

"Ladislaw?" questioned Pope.

"He's a professional actor."

"I knew that. He makes no secret of it," Pope said. "It's mentioned on his passport. He's on his way to a stock company engagement at Sydney."

"He didn't tell you, did he, that he made quite a name for himself at female impersonations?"

"I didn't know that," Pope admitted.

"I saw him on the vaudeville stage once in Omaha," Getman said. "He made quite a convincing lady."

"You're suggesting that Benedict's a woman?"

"No. I only mean that if Ladislaw could successfully impersonate a woman, he could get away with the Benedict skit, couldn't he?"

"Did you ever see him and Benedict at the same time?"

"Can't remember that I did."

"It's odd," Pope said, "how few people can remember just when they saw Benedict, and where."

"I remember seeing him on the boat deck last night," Getman said, "when we were all up there watching the *Mariposa.*"

"Yes, I saw him up there myself," Pope agreed. Then a thought struck him. "I believe you've hit something."

"Hit what?"

This was a long shot, but—

"Hit upon an event so unique that it's doubtless the only one on the entire voyage which brought all passengers on deck at the same time."

Getman saw it immediately. "That's right. Generally there wouldn't be more than half the people on deck at the same time. There wouldn't be more than a fifth of them in any one room at the same time. Too many passengers and too many public rooms. But the spectacle last night made an exception. No one was going to miss seeing that boat come over with Crotchet."

Pope nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, even Benedict was there."

As he turned away, the head dining-room steward came in with a list of names. He gave it to Pope.

"It's just as I said, Mr. Pope. About one out of every ten first-class passengers never get down to breakfast. I checked up with every table steward. Here's a list of forty-four names of late-sleepers."

Pope thanked him and moved on with an idea churning in his mind. He stopped at a table where four ladies were playing bridge. One of them was Mrs. Royer.

"I want you to help me," Pope said with a smile.

They were all eager to help the magnificent Otis Pope.

"It'll take lots of smart diplomacy, but I'm sure you have it," Pope said. His smile charmed them.

"Of course we have," they agreed in chorus.

"Very well, then." Pope gave them the list of forty-four names. "Make three more copies, so you'll each have one. Then go about, each of you with a list, and interview people who are *not* on the list. Steer away from anyone who *is* on the list."

"Yes?" One of the ladies prompted breathlessly. "And what do we ask them?"

"Tell them to read the list and cross off the name of anyone positively seen on the decks last night, when we passed the *Mariposa.*"

"Do we ask everybody, I mean, either passengers or crew?"

"You ask anyone you see, if his or her name isn't on the list. But the witness must be sure before he crosses a name off. You may wind up with only one name not crossed off—and that's the name I'm after."

"Marvelous!" exclaimed Mrs. Royer.

SHE went into a huddle with the other three. Soon Pope saw the four women, each with a list and each very mysterious and important, bustling about to make inquiries among passengers.

Jansenn heard of it and came up rather disgruntled. "What are you trying to do, Mr. Pope? Make a detective out of every woman on the ship?"

"It can't do any harm," Pope protested.

"And it can't do any good. I tell you there's not a red-ringed wrist on board."

"But there's plenty of red ink on board, captain. And plenty of rouge and red crayons. No trouble for a man to mark his wrist when he wanted to be Benedict, and to scrub it off with soap and water when he didn't want to be Benedict."

Jansenn's jaw dropped. "You mean the red mark was phony?"

"Probably was, like everything else about Benedict. Think a minute. If the red ring had been a genuine scar, Benedict would have concealed it with a long sleeve. Instead, he exposed it as much as possible. I only met him once. He deliberately offered his right hand, holding the grip long enough for me to see the ring. Looks like a planned out, doesn't it? So that when we failed to find a man with a marked wrist we'd assume a suicide over the rail."

While the captain stood befuddled, a steward came up and summoned him to the telephone. Jansenn answered the call. In a few minutes he returned on the verge of apoplexy.

"That was Crotchet," he told Pope. "Confound the man, who does he think he is, anyway?"

"What does he say?"

"He has the nerve to say he'll know the answer to the whole business in half an hour. He must be crazy. What could *he* know about it?"

"He offered to bet me," Pope said, "that he'd know by dinnertime. It's either a bluff, or he has the advantage of us, captain."

Jansenn ran an exasperated hand through his hair. "He says it's simple. Mentioned your name, Mr. Pope, and said you're blind as a bat not to see through it."

"Is that all he said?" Pope asked stiffly.

"No, he says he'll be in the lounge in half an hour. He wants you there, and Miss Darrow, and your Dr. Mingo. And all those poker players and witnesses—everybody that's been even remotely mentioned in the case."

"But if he knows, why wait half an hour?"

"Says there's a detail or two he wants to figure out. What do you make of that fellow, Mr. Pope?"

Pope considered for a moment, then said: "It's quite possible that he really knows. But he's a colossal grandstander. He'll never spill a word until he gets that gallery in the lounge."

CHAPTER XIX

RENDEZVOUS IN 250

JANSENN looked at his watch. It was five o'clock. He called the smoking room steward and directed crisply: "Page Mr. Corliss and Sergeant Honuapo. Tell them to be in the lounge at five-thirty."

The steward hurried away on the errand and Jansenn said to Pope: "I'll personally notify Miss Darrow and the others."

"I'll get word to Dr. Mingo," Pope offered.

He went to his suite but Mingo was not there. He sat down to light his pipe and consider Mingo. His secretary possibly knew the real identity of the criminal. If so Mingo might be inclined to warn the man that revelations were about to be made by a witness in the lounge.

Foreseeing a hazard there, Pope pressed a button. Shortly Eddie the bellboy appeared in response.

"Did you ring, Mr. Pope?"

"Yes, Eddie. I want you to find my secretary, Dr. Mingo. Tell him to be in the lounge at five-thirty. Simply say that a group of us have been summoned there to hear important testimony by a witness. If he asks who the witness is, you don't know."

"Yes sir."

"One thing more, Eddie. After you tell Dr. Mingo that, you follow him. At a distance, you understand. Be careful not to let him see you tagging along. If he goes to any stateroom, note the number of it. Post a guard outside and then report to me immediately in the lounge."

Pope passed a ten dollar bill to the boy. But Eddie was even more delighted with the confidence imposed in him by the *Monterey's* most distinguished passenger. He hurried out in suppressed excitement.

At five-twenty Pope went up to the lounge. Captain Jansenn was there, pacing impatiently. The lounge steward was arranging a dozen or more chairs in an arc before the stage platform.

"A wonder Crotchet didn't call for the ship's orchestra!" the captain growled. "Why does he have to be so theatrical!"

"Some people are that way," Pope said.

At five twenty-five Mrs. Royer came in with Asa Ashurst. She had her list of forty-four names in hand and was rosy with importance. "I feel just like a real sleuth, Mr. Pope," she said. "And I've already crossed off nineteen names."

"Your committee is doing the same?"

"Yes. When we're done we'll compare notes and make a composite of all the cross-offs."

"You're sure they're to be trusted, this committee?" Pope asked with a smile.

Mrs. Royer pouted.

"Oh, of course. They're Mrs. Varden, Mrs. Stangle and Mrs. Fish, all of them Navy wives on the way to Pago Pago. All quite above suspicion, I'm sure."

First Officer Corliss and Honuapo came in with June Darrow. June took a seat between them without looking toward Pope. Then Kimberton Lennox appeared in custody of the third officer.

George and Karen Rossmore entered next, followed by the bald and somber Engle. Jansenn looked at his watch. It was five-thirty now. He said to the group: "While we're waiting for the witness, let me ask a question. Has anyone here seen Julian Benedict since we passed the *Mariposa?*"

There was a general shaking of heads. Corliss threw an I-told-you-so look toward Pope. Then Boris Getman came in with Ladislaw and the two sat down in the front row of seats.

When Cameraman Piper entered the room alone, Jansenn asked him, "Where's your friend?"

Piper said: "Smullet? Haven't seen him for an hour."

Then Eddie the bellboy appeared and said to Otis Pope: "I can't find him, sir. I've looked all over the ship."

Jansenn heard and gave him a sharp look. "You mean Mr. Crotchet?"

"No sir. I mean Dr. Mingo. Mr. Pope sent me to page him, sir."

"Dr. Mingo?" questioned Boris Getman, turning his head toward Eddie. "I saw him a little while ago on C deck."

"What," Pope asked, "was he doing?"

"Just caught a glimpse of him," Getman asserted. "He was stepping into a cabin."

"Which cabin?"

Getman thought a moment. "I'm pretty sure," he said, "it was the first cabin forward from the midship foyer, on the port side."

Corliss spoke up quickly. "That would be number 250. Mr. Crotchet's cabin."

Jansenn turned to Pope and demanded, "Did *you* send him there?"

"No," Pope said. "While it is true Crotchet asked to consult me professionally, I declined the consultation."

"Then there's no reason why your secretary should call at his cabin?"

Corliss paused.

"None that I know of."

They waited. A minute of suspense ticked by.

Then—"We'll smoke him out," Jansenn said impatiently, "and I'm not cooling my heels any longer waiting for Crotchet. Come, Mr. Pope, Corliss, Sergeant Honuapo, we'll go down to Crotchet's room. The rest of you please wait here."

WHILE June Darrow, Mrs. Royer, Ashurst, Engle, the Rossmores, Lennox, Getman, Piper, Ladislaw and the third officer remained in their seats, Jansenn, Corliss, Honuapo and Otis Pope hurried down to cabin 250 on C deck.

Jansenn knocked. There was no answer. He knocked more vigorously and there was still no answer. The door, he found, was locked. Pope, standing outside there, had a premonition that tragedy lurked beyond that locked door.

"Get a passkey," Jansenn yelled, and banged on it again. A room steward appeared a little way down the corridor and as Corliss shouted for him to bring his

passkey, the report of a pistol was heard inside the cabin.

"Hurry!" Jansenn bawled in a frenzy. He snatched the steward's passkey, thrust it in the lock, unlocked the door and pushed it open.

Two men sprawled there face down, either dead or dying. They were Crotchet and Mingo. Fresh blood was still flowing from Crotchet's head and from Mingo's heart.

The sight petrified, for a moment, those who stood in the door.

"Call the doctor," Jansenn directed hoarsely. "Touch nothing."

"We only heard one shot," Corliss whispered. "There must have been two." His gaze fixed upon a .45 Colt's revolver which lay just across the threshold in the cabin.

"Knock at adjacent rooms," Jansenn instructed, "and find out if anyone heard the other shot."

Corliss knocked at the doors of adjacent cabins. There were no responses. With the steward's passkey he entered several cabins nearby and found them all empty.

"It's the cocktail hour," Pope suggested.

The ship's doctor came then. He went in alone to examine the victims. Promptly he reported them dead, although both bodies were still as warm as life. "They can't have been dead more than fifteen or twenty minutes. Looks more like five minutes, in Mingo's case. Both men died instantly. I feel sure that Crotchet was shot first, then Mingo."

Jansenn used a handkerchief to pick up the gun. "It's been fired twice," he said.

"Crotchet," Pope told them, "had in his possession twenty-four opals of considerable value."

"See if he's got 'em now, Sergeant," Jansenn said.

Honuapo searched the body of Crotchet and reported no opals were to be found.

"Looks like a bulge at the breast of Mingo's robe," Corliss said.

"See what it is. Might be another gun."

But investigation proved that the bulge was not caused by another gun. Honuapo delved a hand to an inside pocket of Mingo's robe and drew forth a case containing twenty-four brilliant black opals.

The captain, as he looked at them, compressed his lips with a grimace of conviction. "Mingo," he said, "came in and shot him for the opals. Before he could get out, we came along and banged on the door. Mingo was trapped. Nothing he could do but shoot himself with the same gun.

It checked with the doctor's opinion on the order of deaths.

"Caught in dishonor," Corliss agreed, "an Oriental will nearly always commit suicide."

BUT Otis Pope could not reconcile robbery with the character of Dr. Mingo. "Admitting the first-officer's last statement," he said, "I still can't see Mingo stealing opals. He was not mercenary. In fact, I happen to know that he always sent half his pay to promote social welfare in China."

"But we heard the shot!" Jansenn protested.

"We heard one shot, but we didn't hear two."

"Well," argued Jansenn, "the door was locked and we were outside. There couldn't have been a third party in here, unless he wriggled out through that porthole."

One of the room's two portholes stood open. It gave directly to the sea. Even had it given to a deck the porthole was too small in diameter to have allowed the exit of an adult.

"Hold on a minute!" The exclamation came suddenly from the doctor, who was still making post-mortem examinations. "There were three shots," he said now. "Crotchet was shot once, through the head. But Mingo was shot twice, once through the heart and once through the right foot."

Jansenn looked blankly as Pope kneeled to examine Mingo's right foot. A bullet had passed through it just below the ankle.

Otis Pope arose puzzledly. "A suicide," he said to the captain, "doesn't first shoot himself through the leg."

"When that happened," Jansenn guessed,

"he was fighting with Crotchet for the gun."

Pope shook his head. The apparent situation, he felt sure, was an illusion.

"It's got to be that way," Jansenn insisted stubbornly. "A third person couldn't vanish in thin air, could he?"

Pope crossed to the open porthole. His shoulders were too wide for it, but he could and did put his head through. Doing so he noticed that the next porthole aft was also open. The portholes were only four and a half feet apart.

"Who has the next cabin aft?" Pope asked.

"A Miss Mundy," Corliss said. "She's a tall thin brunette. Not in her room now, though. I just looked."

"Did you look in her bathroom?"

"No, I didn't," the first officer admitted.

OTIS POPE, with Corliss following, passed out of 250 and entered room 252. The room as well as its private bath was empty. A green evening dress lay on the bed. Beside it lay a wire wardrobe hanger. Pope looked in a locker. Other dresses were there, draped over wire hangers.

Stepping to the open porthole, Pope managed to squeeze his head and one arm through it. His extended arm, reaching along the ship's side, could only reach half the way to the open porthole of the next room, which was Crotchet's.

Pope drew his head back in and said in a harassed tone: "I don't know what to think. Except that I feel sure Mingo didn't go around shooting people for opals."

Then Pope's eye fell upon a wire hanger on the bed. He picked it up, looked at it thoughtfully. "This thing," he said, "or one like it, could be broken and made into a straight wire about four feet long. Has the gun in there a sensitive action?"

Corliss didn't know.

"Find out, when you get a chance," Pope said.

The first officer gaped. "What are you getting at, Mr. Pope?"

"It's a long shot," Pope admitted, "but it might have happened this way: suppose someone killed both Crotchet and Mingo, then transferred opals from one to the other to pin a robbery motive on Mingo. Then suppose he locked the door and came in here."

"Why would he come in here?"

"He or she could remove one of two empty shells from the gun and put in a fresh shell. Then cock the gun and hook the trigger guard over a wire. Then extend wire and gun through the porthole and reach forward until the gun was opposite the next open porthole."

"You mean Crotchet's porthole?"

Pope nodded. "It's only two armlengths away. Then he or she could wait until people began banging on Crotchet's door. That would happen, because Crotchet was expected to appear before an audience in the lounge."

"And when he heard a banging on Crotchet's door—?"

"He or she simply needed to give the wire a swing. The cocked gun would catapult into Crotchet's room. If it has a sensitive action, it would explode. Those outside the door would hear a shot, and assume that someone in the room had fired the gun."

Corliss looked doubtful. "It's a bit fantastic," he said.

"I admit it is. But it's a thing that *could* happen. Something not apparent *must* have happened. We do know three shots were fired. The third shot hit Mingo's foot, which a wild shot fired at floor level could easily do. We also know that after shooting himself, Mingo couldn't have taken one of three empty shells out of the gun."

They went back to Jansenn.

Pope said: "I'm going up to the lounge and see if that crowd is still there."

"Do that," Jansenn agreed. "But let's not say a word about these murders. Don't want to start a panic—and anyway this ship's had about all the unfavorable publicity it can stand. Just dismiss the crowd up there, Mr. Pope, and say the witness isn't coming up."

Pope nodded and went directly up to the lounge. Seated there just as he had left them were June Darrow, Mrs. Royer,

Ashurst, the Rossmores, Piper, Lennox, Getman, Ladislaw and the third officer.

"Meeting dismissed," Pope announced. "Captain says the witness isn't coming up."

There was a buzz of questions. Pope called the third officer aside and asked one himself. "Has any one of these people left the room?"

"Not a one of them," the officer assured him. "Nobody except the bellboy, Eddie."

Pope looked the group over in complete puzzlement. It meant that no one here could have instigated some such trick as the catapulting of a cocked gun through an open porthole. That far, at least, each person in the lounge had a perfect alibi.

Mrs. Royer was swooping toward him for information. To avoid her, Pope promptly withdrew to his own suite.

CHAPTER XX

JUNE'S STORY

FROM the first it had been Captain Jansenn's policy not to let anything interfere with the routine social schedules of his ship. The usual deck tournaments had been carried out, as on all other runs of the *Monterey*. Movies had been held every other evening in the lounge, and there had been regular morning "horse racing" in the pavilion. More than ever, since the first outbreak of criminal activity aboard, Jansenn had insisted that scheduled diversions should not be interrupted.

Therefore tonight when Otis Pope appeared at the dining room door he was not surprised to see a cluster of multi-colored balloons on each table. Passengers already assembled, and unaware that barely an hour ago two of their company had been shot dead, were tossing streamers about from one to another. Most of them were fitting on their heads grotesque caps of green and red and yellow.

It was the captain's dinner—long a tradition on the *Monterey*. Always there had been a captain's dinner in mid-voyage, on the last evening before the ship arrived at Pago Pago. Special and elaborate menus for this one, Pope knew had been printed long before the intrusion of crime aboard.

He went to his own table, sitting down opposite June's empty chair. Sight of it made him disconsolate, caused him to remember that she hadn't joined him here all day. He did not respond when a spiraled streamer came flying gaily toward him from the next table.

Miss Mundy was over there with a boisterous party, one which apparently had been together in hilarity during all the cocktail hour.

Pope's eyes shifted from table to table. He saw Mrs. Royer in a ridiculously tight sailor's cap, and near her Boris Getman with the high conical headgear of a dunce. Further on the baldness of Maurice Engle was concealed under a four-corned cap of bright blue, with a long tassel. Almost everyone was laughing, giving liberal orders to the wine stewards and exchanging quips with the waiters.

Pope picked up his menu. It was a gorgeous twelve-inch folder with brilliant Hula girls featured on the cover—the sort of thing a first-tripper always keeps for a souvenir. Over it he saw Karen Rossmore with one of these captain's-dinner menus in hand. She was going about from table to table, getting signatures on it. Evidently the woman had an obsession for autographs, Pope thought.

Then, to his surprise and delight, he saw June Darrow enter the room. She wore a long, close-fitting gown of sheer white, and he had never seen her more lovely. She came to him with an unwilling smile straining her face. He stood up until she was seated.

The cluster of balloons obscured her. He moved them to one side as she said: "It's rather horrible under the circumstances—all this frivolity!"

When he looked his surprise she added: "I'm not supposed to know—but I do. Eddie followed you there and he told me."

"You mean the bellboy? He told you about Crotchet?"

"Yes, and your Dr. Mingo."

At once he understood why, after avoiding him all day, she had joined him at

dinner. Crotchet was dead. She no longer needed to fear Crotchet.

A forlorn smile formed on her lips. "Shall we put these on," she suggested, "so we won't be conspicuous exceptions?"

Pope picked up a pink paper cap, made in the form of a bishop's miter, and placed it on his head. She laughed outright. "I can't help it. You look so silly. Do I?"

When she put on her own foolish headgear he said, "You look enchanting, June."

Then Pope beckoned to a wine steward and ordered champagne.

KAREN ROSSMORE was gliding toward them, her souvenir menu by now signed by numerous of her fellow-passengers. She saw Otis Pope leaning far forward across the table as he spoke earnestly to June Darrow. Karen stopped, turned away as one who, wise in its ways herself, knows when not to intrude upon romance.

"Please tell me," Pope said presently, "why you were afraid of him. I mean Ellery Crotchet."

"I *would* rather tell you—now," June said. "You'll keep it in confidence?"

"Strictly," he promised.

"It's about a man named Gilman," she said. "He was an Iowa farmer. He left his family there and went to Australia. Everyone thought it was because he was restless and wanted to start a sheep ranch in New South Wales. But the real reason was he had stolen money from a bank."

"He was Laura Gilman's father?"

"Yes. Instead of buying a sheep ranch, he invested the money in a wool-brokerage business at Sydney. He prospered. Back in Iowa, no one suspected him. A bankers' indemnity company had paid the loss and Gilman's name had never been connected with the crime.

"But conscience made him a coward. He was afraid to go back home. He didn't send for his wife and four daughters, because he was ashamed to face them with guilt in his heart. But he prospered in the wool business, and I became his confidential secretary. About that time I met Ellery Crotchet. Crotchet began calling every evening at the office, to ask me to dinner with him. In that way he met Gilman."

"How long did this go on?"

"For more than a year. Then, late one afternoon at the office, Gilman had a heart stroke. His last act was to write a check payable to a bankers' indemnity company of Des Moines, Iowa. He was telling me what to do with it when Crotchet came in. I got rid of Crotchet by sending him for a doctor."

"Gilman told you to send that check to the insurers?"

"No. He said it represented the full amount, with interest, of stolen money which the insurers had paid. But if I sent it by post, he said the receipt of it would make a news story and bring disgrace on his wife and daughters. So he asked me to take it to the insurers, personally. I was to call on the indemnity company's president, hand him the check and plead for his confidence."

"And did you?"

"Yes. That's why I went to America. Incidentally I was glad to on my own account, because it was a chance to avoid Crotchet. The indemnity president accepted the check and agreed to keep the confidence. Then I called on Mrs. Gilman and her daughters. I broke the news about Gilman's death, told them he had died a respected citizen, and loving them."

It had been, Pope admitted, an heroic adventure. He refilled the wine glasses and raised his own. "To courage—and loyalty!" he said. A good deal makes passage of this broad Pacific, he thought, that the trade winds do not blow.

A WAITER brought the entrées and for a while they ate in silence. Then —"Laura Gilman booked to Australia with you?" Pope asked.

June nodded. "She was making a pilgrimage of sentiment to the grave of her father."

"How could Crotchet know that?"

"He didn't. But he happened to be a director in the bank on which the check

was written. The cancelled check, my sudden trip to America and a word or two he may have caught before I sent him for a doctor, made enough for him to guess the main facts."

"He held it over your head?"

"And think what it would mean!" June winced and a mist came to her eyes. "Mrs. Gilman's a frail gray lady, a dear soul! Then there are three girls younger than Laura. First, they get the shock of Laura's horrible death. That much can't be helped now. But if on top of that they heard that Laura's father fled with money—don't you see? After all I'd done to cover it up, I couldn't let Crotchet tell about it now."

Corliss was coming toward them. He stopped at Pope's elbow.

"You asked me to look for copies of the Honolulu paper, Mr. Pope, copies which passengers might have bought on the streets there and brought aboard."

Pope looked up. "Did you find any?"

"I found several people who bought such copies and brought them on the ship. But after reading them they threw them in the waste baskets. In fact one passenger, the little German who's manager for Madame Garaud, bought half a dozen copies at a Honolulu newsstand. That was because of a two-column write-up, with photograph, of Madame Garaud. He clipped the write-up for his publicity scrapbook, then threw the rest of the papers away."

Pope nodded. He knew that managers of artists are likely to keep clippings.

"So I guess we're all washed up on that end of it," Corliss said. "But we turned up something else—another lead on Julian Benedict."

"What?"

"A member of the crew saw Benedict about half an hour after midnight last night. This was a man on the night fire patrol—he patrols the ship every hour all night. Sleeps in the daytime, that's why we're just getting his evidence."

"Where," Pope inquired, "did he see Benedict?"

"He saw Benedict coming out of Crotchet's cabin, number 250," Corliss said.

Pope's eyes widened. "At half an hour after midnight?"

"Yes, and that isn't all. We learn now that Crotchet went up to the wireless room about forty minutes after midnight, and filed a radiogram to his broker."

"Have you a copy of that radiogram?"

"Yes sir. Right here." Corliss handed it over.

Pope read it. It was an instruction from Crotchet to his broker. The broker was ordered to sell ten thousand shares of a stock short. What staggered Pope was the name of the stock—Indo-China Silver and Lead Exploration Company.

"But there must be a mistake," Pope protested. "No one could sell Indo-China stock short. That stock's already at mud bottom. You could buy it for a rise, if you were foolish enough, but you couldn't sell it for a fall. I don't see—wait a minute! Maybe I do!"

Abruptly Otis Pope stood up. "Will you excuse me, please?" he asked June.

"Of course," June said. She gazed after him curiously as he hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XXI

ONE NAME REMAINS

ARRIVING in his room, Otis Pope picked up the much-studied copy of his *Star-Bulletin*. All along he had felt sure that an answer to the enigma was here, if he could only find it.

Now he turned quickly to the market reports and looked up a listed stock, Indo-China S. & L. Ex. This paper listed it at 14. Its par, Pope knew, was 100. The price had stood stagnantly at 27 when he last left New York.

His own unfavorable report from Indo-China should have made it fall. Apparently it *had* fallen, from 27 to 14. The company's realty holdings, he presumed, would keep it from falling much lower than that.

Now he noticed a thing he had noticed before, but to which he had attached no significance. Here and there on the paper were tiny brown spots, no bigger than pin points. What impressed him at this moment was that one of the tiny brown

specks, undoubtedly a cigarette burn, was directly in front of the figure listed as the price of Indo-China S. & L. Ex.

Had the tiny burn been applied there on purpose?

He turned the paper over, mainly to see if the cigarette had been applied from the other side. It had not. Then he saw before him the large Germanic face of Madame Garaud. The two-column write-up of her, with photograph, was on the reverse side of the sheet from the stock market news.

Pope put the paper in his pocket and hurried out. He went directly to Madame Garaud's suite, and was there just in time to intercept her manager as he came up from dinner.

"May I see your file of Honolulu clippings on Madame Garaud?" Pope asked.

The manager had no objection. He took Pope inside and showed him a clipping from the *Star-Bulletin.* Pope turned the sheet over. Here was an issue of the same paper without any brown burns on it. And it gave the price of Indo-China S. & L. Ex. as 114.

The truth flashed to Pope—the entire motive. It was a truth he would have discovered his first day aboard had twenty-nine copies of the paper not been stolen from the ship's store. Now he saw it clearly. Mingo, abetted by some unknown swindler, had changed figures on Pope's report. He had hiked those figures, making an unfavorable report favorable. As a result a board of directors had launched plans for expansion, and the stock had shot upward from 27 to 114.

"Not down to fourteen," Pope shouted to Madame Garaud's confused manager, "but up to one fourteen!"

Then Otis Pope raced up to the wireless room. There he filed a radiogram to the chairman of a certain board in New York.

IGNORE MY REPORT FROM INDO-CHINA STOP HAVE JUST LEARNED IT WAS FORGED—POPE

MOPPING beads of perspiration from his brow, Pope returned to his own suite. He knew the method and the motive of crimes, but as yet he did not know their perpetrator. Who was Benedict? Benedict in his true identity almost certainly must have murdered both Mingo and Crotchet.

But Benedict, he was forced to admit, could not be any one of those who had until now figured in the case. For all those persons had been assembled in the lounge, under the eye of the third officer, at the moment a shot had exploded in Crotchet's cabin.

Pope lighted his pipe and puffed viciously. Still the eternal question buzzed: Who was Benedict?

The door opened and Corliss came in.

Pope said to him: "Look, Corliss, I want a person who missed his breakfast, because Benedict *did not* miss breakfast; and I want a person who wasn't on deck when Crotchet came over from the *Mariposa,* because Benedict *was* on deck."

The telephone rang. Pope answered and heard the voice of Mrs. Royer.

"Oh, Mr. Pope," she said, "don't think we've quit on you. Our committee, I mean. We're almost through.'

"Any names not scratched off?" Pope asked.

"Oh, yes. I have a few I haven't been able to scratch off my list. And each of the other ladies has a few not scratched off her list. But now we're putting them together, you see? Just as soon as we can find Mrs. Stangle we'll make the composite list."

"And send it right up to me?"

"And send it right up to you, Mr. Pope."

"Thank you," Pope said.

As he turned from the phone, Corliss produced the .45 Colt's revolver found in Crotchet's cabin.

"You asked if this cannon has a sensitive action, Mr Pope."

"Has it?"

"Rather," Corliss said. "Take a look."

Pope took the murder gun and removed the shells from it. Then he cocked it. At a mere touch of his finger on the trigger, the hammer fell.

"Did the Crotchet radiogram explain anything?" Corliss asked.

"It explains everything," Pope answered,

"except the identity of Benedict. We know Benedict's still on board because late this afternoon he shot Crotchet and Mingo. By the same reasoning Benedict was not in the lounge when we assembled a group there at five-thirty."

"You suspect any one in particular, Mr. Pope?"

"Yes, but when I think of that person I run up against the stone wall of the lounge alibi."

"So it must be someone who wasn't there," Corliss said.

Pope looked at the gun in his hand. Again he cocked it; again a touch of his finger released the hammer. Then Pope looked thoughtfully at the door of his room. A locked door! A gun exploding behind it!

"Let's make a test, Corliss." Otis Pope took the gun to his door. There he recocked it. Then he inserted its foresight in the door's keyhole and left it hanging there precariously.

"Here's the key, Corliss. Go outside and put it in the keyhole, just as you would do if you were entering a locked room."

Corliss went outside and Pope closed the door gently. Outside, Corliss thrust the key into the keyhole. The heel of the key inevitably came against the foresight of the suspended gun. The gun was no less inevitably dislodged and fell to the floor.

There was a click as it struck the floor. Corliss came in. Pope picked up the revolver and observed that the hammer had fallen.

"There's your alibi," Pope said. "A jar on the floor made it go off, down in Crotchet's room. My wire-tossing guess was all wrong, but the main idea was right."

"But hold on," objected Corliss. "Down there we didn't put the key in the door at all."

"The gun was hanging there waiting for a key to push it through," Pope insisted. "It went off before the key got there because Jansenn's banging on the door had the same effect. It jarred the gun loose. What happened was this: our man, X, in some way induced Mingo to enter Crotchet's room with him. There he shot them both in cold blood."

"But where did he get the gun? We'd collected all the firearms on the ship, you know."

"You didn't collect any from Crotchet, when he came aboard last night. For all we know Crotchet had a gun, and this man X managed to get it away from him. We know X, or Benedict, had some contact with Crotchet because he was seen last night by the fire patrol coming out of Crotchet's room. We don't know what came out of that contact—except a gun, because here it is in plain sight."

"If X did it," Corliss wondered, "why didn't he take those black opals?"

"He knew he couldn't get away with them. So he simply transferred them from Crotchet to Mingo. Next he substituted a good shell for one of the used shells in the gun. He cocked the gun, suspended it by hind or foresight in the keyhole, set the catch so that the door would lock as he went out."

There was a knock. "Somebody's at *this* door now," Corliss said.

"Probably a messenger from Mrs. Royer," Pope guessed, "with that composite list of cross-offs."

But when he opened the door, the person who confronted him there was not from Mrs. Royer.

KAREN ROSSMORE smiled up at him, holding forth her captain's dinner menu. "Won't you autograph it, please, Mr. Pope?" she coaxed.

Pope was almost annoyed. Big things were afoot just now and he had no time for the whims of an autograph-hunting woman. However he summoned a degree of graciousness and signed this menu.

Karen Rossmore thanked him prettily, then offered an apology. "I wouldn't ask it, Mr. Pope, only I lost your other one. I mean my autograph book, that you signed, disappeared."

"Your autograph book disappeared?" Pope was in a mood to be instantly interested in anything that disappeared on the *Monterey*.

"Yes, Mr. Pope."

Pope's keen brown eyes searched this woman's face. She was part Chinese, he remembered, a compatriot of Dr. Mingo's. She was potentially mysterious. At the very outset of the mystery she had been found knocking at his door.

Too, there was the testimony of Miss Mundy that Julian Benedict himself had once emerged from the Rossmore cabin. Could Karen explain that? They had inquired of George Rossmore, but not of Karen. Now that she was here, Pope thought, why not hold her for a few questions?

"Mrs. Rossmore," he asked. "how well did you know Julian Benedict?"

Her penciled eyebrows arched and she stared at him. "Why, hardly at all, Mr. Pope. You mean that funny old hunchback?"

"Yes. Did he ever call on your husband?"

"Why no. I don't think George even knew him."

"But *you* knew him?"

"I only met him once," she said. "That was when he signed my autograph book."

"You got Benedict to sign your book?"

"Yes, Mr. Pope. You see, usually I asked only celebrities to sign it. For instance, I got you to sign it. And before that I got the autograph of Madame Garaud, the opera star. But Mr. Benedict happened to be sitting at the same table with Madame Garaud. So to be polite, I had to ask *him* to sign too."

Pope stiffened. Something clicked in his card-index memory.

"Let me be sure of this," he said. "First, Madame Garaud signed your book; then Benedict signed; then I signed; then the book disappeared?"

"That's it, Mr. Pope. It disappeared from my room. I can't imagine where."

"I can," Pope said slowly. "And thank you very much, Mrs. Rossmore."

She withdrew with a smile and Pope closed the door. Turning, he faced Corliss.

"I know who Benedict is, now," he said with conviction.

"You do?"

"Yes. The mystery made a perfect circle," Pope said. "It ends right where it began—with Mrs. Rossmore knocking on my door for an autograph."

Corliss stared. Before he could speak, Pope went on rapidly: "I want your help, Corliss."

The response was eager: "I'll go all the way with you, Mr. Pope."

"Isn't it a fact," Pope asked, "that regularly on this voyage the ship stages a costume show, or masquerade ball, or something of that nature? Haven't you got a locker full of costumes and make-up stuff somewhere?"

"Yes sir, we have," Corliss said.

"Good. See if you can dig up this list of properties." Pope sat down and wrote rapidly. In a moment he handed the slip to Corliss.

"Nothing to stump us here," the first officer said as he looked at the items. "Yes, I can get them."

"I'd like to use them about an hour after midnight," Pope said.

"I'll be here with them," Corliss promised, and went out.

A MINUTE later the telephone rang in Mrs. Royer's cabin. The call disturbed Mrs. Royer very much because, with three other ladies, she was in the act of completing a very vital mission for Otis Pope. Lists of forty-four non-breakfasters had been compared, checked and double-checked. There must be no mistake. On the composite list every name was now crossed off but one.

"I'll see who it is," Mrs. Royer said to her three helpers. "I wish they'd let us alone."

Her tone changed, however, to extreme cordiality when she found it was Pope himself on the wire.

"Yes, Mr. Pope," she said. "It's all done. We are just going to send it up."

A pause. Then the other ladies heard her say: "Yes, only one name isn't crossed off. You'd never guess who it is, Mr. Pope."

Another pause. Then Mrs. Royer exclaimed, "Oh! Why yes, that's who it is,

Mr. Pope. How on earth did you know?"

Mrs. Royer hung up and turned to her friends: "Isn't he marvelous!" she exclaimed. "He knew even before we told him!"

* * *

An hour after midnight Otis Pope and First Officer Corliss moved cautiously along a corridor on C deck. Pope carried a flashlight. Corliss had a passkey and a bundle.

"It'll simplify things," Pope said, "if he's asleep."

They stopped at a door. Using the passkey Corliss opened it and they entered. The room was dark. Pope's flash exposed a sleeper on the bed. The same beam revealed, on a stand by the bed, a plate of manufactured teeth.

Without sound Corliss opened his bundle. From it he produced a vial of chloroform. Otis Pope took a towel from the rack and soaked it in the anaesthetic. Then he held it under the sleeper's nose. Corliss stood ready to pinion the man if he should arouse.

However he did not arouse. In a short while Pope and Corliss were able to drag him quite unconscious from the bed. "Now we really go to work," Pope said.

Twenty minutes later they sent for Jansenn. The captain came in and stared at what was apparently an elderly hunchback seated with his chin and hands on the top of a cane.

"There's your murderer," Pope said.

"Julian Benedict?" gasped Jansenn.

"No. Boris Getman."

CHAPTER XXII

EXIT MYSTERY, ENTER LOVE

IT was eight in the morning and the *Monterey* was just raising Samoa. Otis Pope and June Darrow stood together at the most forward vantage, the forerail just ahead of the swimming pool on B deck. Far on the horizon they could see the island of Tutuila rearing like linked cones of moss floating on the sea.

Trade winds blew to make loose ends of June's hair, to swish at her skirts and to cool her bare arms with the moist freshness of this tropic morning.

Otis Pope cupped sturdy hands to light his pipe. He said to June: "They always slip up on something trivial. . . ."

"Did Boris Getman?" she asked.

Pope puffed with emphasis. "Yes, he autographed a silly woman's book. Forgot he was Benedict, at the moment, and signed 'Getman'."

"How careless!"

"But you see his mind was on the big things, the involved and intricate deceptions of his masquerade. So when a flighty woman handed him an autograph book to sign, he absently signed his real name."

"Didn't Mrs. Rossmore notice?"

"No, because she wasn't at all interested in Benedict's autograph. She had gone to a lounge table for Madame Garaud's. Then the Chinese in her made her be polite, and she offered the book to a shabby old hunchback who was sitting there. At the time she didn't even know his name was supposed to be Benedict. If she glanced at the signature at all, it made no impression; she was interested only in Garaud's."

"When," June asked, "did this happen?"

"It happened before Honolulu. At that time Benedict had committed no crime, and was not so tensely on his guard."

"I begin to understand," June said.

"Later, as we were leaving Honolulu," Pope continued, "she went to my suite, probably to tip the room steward so that he'd say nothing to her husband about an affair with the previous occupant. She couldn't give the real reason, so she had to trump up one."

June smiled. "And knowing nothing about Mr. Otis Pope except that he's a celebrity, she said she went there for his autograph."

"To make her bluff good," Pope said, "later she actually did get me to sign. Signing, I noticed that the next two names above mine were Getman and Garaud. By then Mrs. Rossmore's rather incredible excuse was noised about the ship, and reached Benedict. It made him worry, and

think back to his own signing. So to relieve his mind he entered the Rossmore cabin with his passkey and stole the book."

"And that clinched it?"

Pope nodded. "We have other points, of course. There was the check-up on forty-four non-breakfasters to find out which had missed the unmissable spectacle of Crotchet's boat ride. The only name not crossed off that list was Getman's."

"But it was Getman himself, wasn't it, who suggested that check-up?"

"I imagine he suggested it for effect," Pope said. "It was rather disarming to hear him say: 'Benedict was on the deck when Crotchet came aboard; I saw him myself.' Of course he didn't think I'd carry through with the check-up. And even if I did, he possibly hoped to use Mingo for a witness. But a few minutes later it became expedient for him to kill Crotchet and Mingo."

"When did you first suspect Getman?"

"Hazily I suspected Getman, who doesn't smoke cigarettes, for buying a package of cigarettes within five minutes of the time twenty-nine *Star-Bulletins* were taken from the ship's store. Getman had bought one copy openly, and this one turned up with tiny cigarette burns deleting a letter here and there. One deletion kept me from knowing that a mining stock had risen from twenty-seven to one fourteen, and made me think instead that it had fallen to fourteen."

"Getman had bought for a rise?"

"No doubt he had. And insured the rise by corrupting Dr. Mingo."

"What was Dr. Mingo's motive?"

"Sentimental or patriotic, I imagine. I remember he was sharply disappointed when I told him I'd have to advise against the pouring of Yankee millions into Indo-China. He was a zealot, I think, who dreamed of a Pacific passage of Western capital to the East."

"And Crotchet's motive?"

"Crotchet was just what you said—a man always reaching out. After he came on board he found out—we don't know how—about Benedict's stake. So he reached for it himself. His method was perfectly legal—and exactly opposite to Benedict's. Benedict had *deceived* me and *bought* the stock. Crotchet *sold* the stock short and then made an appointment to *undeceive* me. He had to allow himself seventeen hours, though, for his transaction to be made on the exchange. He would then tell me the truth. Inevitably I would radio New York and then every dollar made on the rise by Benedict would be gained by Crotchet—when the stock fell like a shot.

"But the shot," Pope finished grimly, "came from the gun of Getman into the brain of Crotchet."

JUNE shivered. Looking ahead she could see that lirked cones of floating moss had now become steep, green slopes, with leaning palms fringing them. Samoa lay before them in calm splendour.

"It's lovely!" June murmured.

"It's just a way station," Otis Pope said, "on the biggest of seven seas. Treachery and death pass by it—but also love and life. Shall we go ashore, June?"

She hesitated a moment, then said, "M-m-m."

"Now you're being British," he chided. "Don't say 'M-m-m,' say 'Yes.'"

"Yes," she said.

He took her by the shoulders and made her face him. "And don't forget," he cautioned sternly, "the chaplain's an American and he doesn't understand 'M-m-m.' So when he asks, 'Do you take this man,' don't say 'M-m-m,' say 'Yes.' Will you?"

When stubbornly her lips said "M-m-m," he kissed them.

"Hold it, Mr. Pope," a voice shouted.

June drew away quickly. In confusion she looked around to see Piper and Smullet, grinding at their camera.

"When we release this, Mr. Pope," Smullet yelled, "will it make your stocks go up or down?"

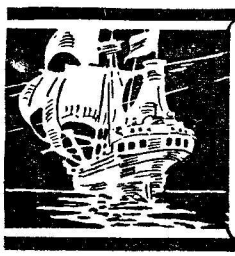
"Up," answered Pope with conviction.

THE END

Special Extra—

A New Thrill in Mystery Fiction

DON'T MISS IT



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

WILL the mad genius who sent in the following radio script, suggesting that we broadcast it on a ghost-to-ghost hook-up, please go away and let us sleep?

What have we done to deserve things like this? What queer magnetism in us attracts the odd and the bizarre? We resent every implication in this scurrilous screed. We defy the author to uncloak his anonymity and face us man to man. We publish it only to show our disdain, and as a favor to Hamilcar who rescued it from the wastebasket, where it belongs, and returned it to our desk with tears of pleading.

ANNOUNCER: This is Oscar Tonsil, ladies and gentlemen, the voice of the Sweetness and Light hour, bringing you a word-picture of this most interesting experiment which is being conducted here tonight at the Xsolidated Laboratories.

The subject of our experiment, seated there on the platform, are the editors of ARGOSY Magazine. See how stiffly they perch, how mute and moveless! But they are not—ha, ha—they are not dead, dear listeners. They have merely submitted to the Alphax Treatment which produces a state of coma, or trance. While in this state they will all be asked several moot questions, and their answers will come to you over our special Vocalo Audiofier. No, no—it's not just another variation of Professor Quiz. For these answers will come from the deep subconscious where Truth dwells. You will hear them speak from the heart.

Ready—get set!

Ah—there's the beam of our searchlight. The silver ray touches the face of the tall, dark, ugly—pardon, I mean rugged—individual at the left. Listen now as Doctor McEther questions him.

DR. MCETHER: Your attention, young man. Lift your right hand if you hear me. . . . Ah, good. . . . Now tell me, young man, what are your chief problems and troubles as an editor.

THE UGLY EDITOR: (Mumbles unintelligibly. Then, clearly:) I was home in bed at the time in question. I cannot tell a lie. I must of run into a door.

DR. MCETHER: Hush. Concentrate. Your troubles and problems—

UGLY EDITOR: Aaaahhhh. . . . (A brief silence; then, truculently:) Those authors who can't punctuate! Those (deleted) proofreaders! That (erased) circulation department! And those guys who write in to Argonotes—

MCE.: Yes, yes, go on.

UGLY: I don't mind the ones who are always bellowing about some minor error of fact or locale. Let 'em have fun. The guys who don't like Westerns or fantastics never bother me. But when they start that old plaint of "Why can't you make the present ARGOSY as good as the old-time magazine—"

MCE.: Attendant—grab him. Wipe that foam off his upper lip. (To Ugly:) And why, young man, does this particular plaint arouse your ire?

UGLY: (Through clenched teeth.) Because ARGOSY, right now, is head and shoulders above the magazine of yesteryear. The stories are stronger, the writers are better, there's more entertainment in it than ever before. I've compared the old and the new—and I *know*.

MCE.: Now wait a moment—

UGLY: Pipe down, doc. You're another

one of those hero-worshippers who want to make the world stand still. You want to argue that John L. Sullivan could lick Jack Dempsey the best day he ever saw. That Three-Finger Brown could out-pitch Lefty Gomez. That Washington and Lincoln were the greatest presidents we ever had. But I'm telling you, doc, we move and we grow. The Model-T has been replaced. We've tossed away our peg-top pants and celluloid collars because we've found something better. We're flying to California instead of sailing around the Horn—

McETHER: (harshly). Stop that man. Gag him. He's out of his head. That brazen young whippersnapper—

ANNOUNCER: Pardon the brief confusion, ladies and gentlemen. The searchlight shifts. The silver-beam finds a new face—a placid, lovely face, serene and otherworldly. It is the Poetry Editor of ARGOSY. The experiment marches on.

DR. McETHER: Ah, my dear young lady! And what message, pray, do *you* bring?

POETRY ED.:

I stood on the bridge at midnight
Two moons rose over the city
A cock crowed in the East
I'm sorry I made you cry

McETHER: Yes, of course. But what I wanted to know—

P. E.:

Eggso, roundo
And a glass of candelabra.
Pit-a-pat-pat goes the drum. . . .

ANNOUNCER: A full translation of the Poetry Editor's remarks will be mailed to those who leave name and address with the usher. Again our beam moves and our search for Truth continues. The next voice you hear—

CHILD IN THE AUDIENCE: Please, mom, I wanna go home.

McETHER: And now let us find what our third subject has to tell us. Here is a serious face, and I see poise in that mustache. Speak up, my good man. What steps would you take to improve ARGOSY if the task were yours.

THE DAPPER EDITOR: First of all, I'd fire the rest of these screwballs on the staff and put the magazine on a 100% serious basis. No more of this pixie guff and those too, too cute editorials. No more of that Leo Lawson Rogers bilge. I give my all to ARGOSY every week and what do I get? They call me Dead Pan Dan and steal my blotters. Boy, if I only had a chance to switch over to DETECTIVES AND DAMES or HAUNTED RANCH THRILLERS or one of those *good* publications!

McETHER: But why—

ANNOUNCER: We are interrupting the program at this time, ladies and gentlemen, to make a special announcement. Next week at this same time we are presenting the eminent Mr. Eustace L. Adams in a new chapter-play entitled "Loot Below." Tune in on this glamorous epic of the tropical skyways, brought to you through the courtesy of ARGOSY, spelled A-R-G-O-S-Y, or a reasonable facsimile of same. When you hear the musical note the time will be—

THE GONG: *BONG!*

THERE'S just room for a word from the ladies.

MRS. HOWARD SANDERSON

When I pick up the ARGOSY I first read the Argonotes and Looking Ahead. . . .

(Pardon the interruption, Mrs. Sanderson. There were some remarks her eabout serials—blue-penciled in accordance with last week's warning. However, consider another vote chalked up for the four-serials team.)

. . . We do enjoy your magazine just the same though. For sharpening our wits the Gillian Hazeltine stories are best ever. I don't read all of Theodore Roscoe's yarns, but find most of them cannot be beaten. "Z Is For Zombie" might have been weird but I wouldn't have missed a word. "Annapolis Ahoy" was tops in that line and because I think that way too, "Reader I Killed Him" seemed to me to be one of your best short stories in years.

You might print a good clean murder mystery once in a while though. I can understand cold-blooded murder or a series of murders for hate or greed, but this wholesale slaughter in some of your stories is too much. I'm not fussy about having my heroes beaten and kicked and burned and shot and pummeled into a bloody pulp—and still be able to save the blonde for himself and the brunette for some other guy.

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

LOOT BELOW

Ten years ago this would have seemed fantastic, but the air clippers across the Pacific were fantastic ten years ago, too. . . . Trans-Caribbean Airways knew it was no fantasy—but fact, when no word came from their latest, greatest sky-liner. Built to fly the Atlantic, the giant cruiser had disappeared on a test flight from Miami to Buenos Aires. Aboard, in addition to the crew, were a full quota of passengers. They didn't crash and they weren't lost. They were the victims of streamlined mile-high piracy. Begin this timely new novel of the airlanes by

EUSTACE L. ADAMS

RHYTHM IN THE RING

Barney Bimms was born with poetry in his soul and when he moved you saw it. A prize-fighter's manager saw it while Barney broke rock in a Georgia chain gang. The story of the career of Barney Bimms may give a hint to the source of the magnificent athletic prowess of such great athletes as Jesse Owens, Eulace Peacock and Joe Louis. This is a powerful, honest story of a fighter who was like no other fighter, just as it is a prize-fight story that is like no other story of the ring that you have ever read. A complete short novel by

ROBERT GRIFFITH

OMIT WREATHS

No-Shirt McGee has met plenty of queer ones in his long career in the Northland, but this was the first time he'd run onto a man who was afraid to be a hero. A rollicking Arctic yarn by

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—DECEMBER 11th