

# ARGOSY



NOV. 5

COMBINED WITH THE

WEEKLY

10¢

**All-American  
Fiction Magazine**

**A  
New Novel  
EUSTACE L. ADAMS**

**H. BEDFORD - JONES  
MURRAY LEINSTER  
CAPTAIN DINGLE  
A. MERRITT**



# Thousands turn to Listerine as science proves it CURES DANDRUFF

*Clinical evidence that Listerine Antiseptic kills queer *Pityrosporum ovale* germ, that causes dandruff, starts wave of home treatments . . . letters pour in telling of rapid, complete cures*

Ever since the amazing dandruff cures accomplished with Listerine became a matter of clinical record, thousands of dandruff sufferers throughout the country have swung over to Listerine for quick, effective relief. Many of them write to us, fervently praising Listerine for what it has done for them.

Here are a few random excerpts from the hundreds of grateful letters that reach us:

"Have been using Listerine for only two weeks. Already feel wonderfully relieved from the horrible itchy feeling."

"Two weeks after first using it my dandruff was gone."

"Tried Listerine for 21 days and can find no trace of dandruff now."

"Tried everything possible, until one day I used Listerine. The itching stopped at once. My hair has stopped falling out."



**Kills the Germ**

In the sensational research that established the *Pityrosporum ovale* germ as the cause of dandruff, it was positively proved that Listerine kills the germ.

When a mid-western skin clinic instructed dandruff patients to use the daily Listerine Treatment, a substantial number obtained marked relief within



IT IS WONDERFUL HOW  
**LISTERINE** STOPS THAT  
AWFUL SCALING, ITCHING  
AND BURNING

the first two weeks on the average.

76% of a group of dandruff sufferers at a New Jersey Clinic, who used the Listerine treatment twice daily, showed complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in the symptoms within thirty days.

## **Start Treatment Today**

Don't waste time on ordinary remedies that merely wash away dandruff symptoms temporarily. Start ridding your scalp of the dandruff germ with Listerine today.

And remember, like any other germ disease, dandruff is a stubborn malady requiring persistent treatment. Even after it has been cured, it is wise to guard against re-infection by occasional Listerine Antiseptic massages at regular intervals.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, St. Louis, Mo.

*Cut this out*

### **THE TREATMENT**

Once or twice a day, use full strength Listerine on the scalp, spreading it with fingers, or parting the hair and applying with cotton or eye dropper.

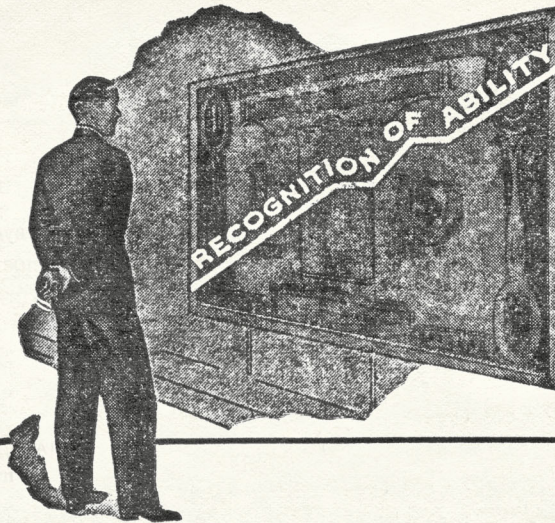
Now massage scalp vigorously and persistently with fingertips; active stimulation of the scalp is highly important in dandruff treatment.

If scalp is excessively dry, use a little olive oil in conjunction with Listerine. Listerine will not bleach the hair.



P. S. Listerine, which has been discovered to be such an excellent germicidal treatment for dandruff, is the same Listerine Antiseptic which has been used as a mouth wash and gargle for years.

# LISTERINE the PROVED treatment for DANDRUFF



## Money is MORE than pay

• "He's a twenty-dollar-a-week man" means far more than the actual cash a man receives in his pay envelope. It indicates at least one thing beyond doubt — his training is limited! • Thousands of men, tired of being twenty . . . thirty . . . forty . . . fifty-dollar-a-week men, have removed this limitation of training by mastering International Correspondence Schools Courses in their spare time. They found that I. C. S. modernized textbooks and methods fitted their needs to a "T." They found that there IS opportunity for the trained man! • The coupon will bring you complete information.

### INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2215-F, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

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Name.....Age.....Address.....

City.....State.....Present Position.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada  
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In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention ARGOSY.

# ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety  
Combined with All-American Fiction

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Volume 285    CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 5, 1938    Number 6

---

- Dead Storage—*First of four parts*.....Eustace L. Adams    7  
*Hate and the will to live can be even stronger than the need to die*
- The King of Halstead Street—*Complete Novelet*..Murray Leinster    24  
*When the princess loves a commoner, even a pushcart kingdom stands in jeopardy*
- Isle of the Dead—*Short Story*.....H. Bedford-Jones    37  
*Tonight, Agrippa, master wizard, you must break the spell of living death*
- The Ship of Ishtar—*Second of six parts*.....A. Merritt    48  
*More terrible than the galley-master's lash was the golden laughter of Sbarane*
- Nomad's Debt—*Complete Novelet*.....C. F. Kearns    74  
*When a redskin red-coat gets his man, justice is not always served*
- River Man—*Short Story*.....James Kjelgaard    90  
*Lance had long ago learned that a boatman's life belongs to the river and the moon*
- Men of Daring—*True Story in Pictures*.....Stookie Allen    96  
*Ned Buntline—Stranger Than Fiction*
- Two Hours to Go—*Fifth of six parts*.....Theodore Roscoe    98  
*Step outside, Mr. Enfield—and four thousand feet down*
- Tough on the Gulf—*Short Story*.....Captain Dingle    114  
*Meet the Acid Kid; he found his soul on a derelict, a hundred miles off-shore*
- 
- Eyes of Stone .....Charles Dorman    36
- Argonotes .....    125
- Looking Ahead! .....    124

Cover by Rudolph Belarski

Illustrating Dead Storage

*This magazine is on sale every Tuesday*

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD.  
3 La Belle Sauvase, Ludgate Hill, London, E. C. 4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE  
111 Rue Réaumur

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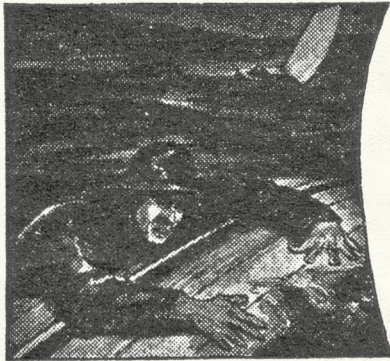
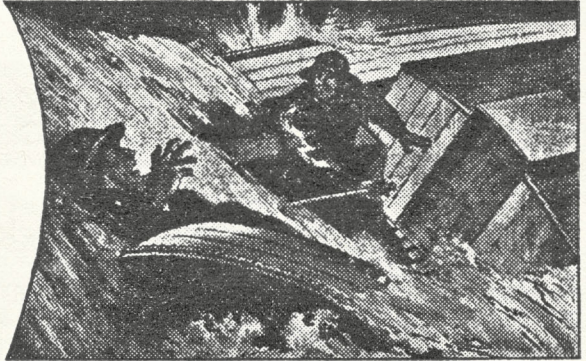
# "GOODBYE WORLD! MY SHIP FADED INTO THE NIGHT!"

OVERBOARD IN STORM, YACHTSMAN CLINGS  
TO CAPSIZED DORY AS SLOOP HOLDS COURSE



of 280 Bronxville Road, Bronxville, N. Y.  
"At midnight..."

① "My 40-foot sloop was footing it up Long Island Sound like a scared cat before a stiff sou'-west breeze," writes Tom Meyer



② "...off Smithtown Bay, it really began to blow. My partner, Larry Starr, was asleep below, and I gave the tiller to a friend who had done no sailing before, so I could get the dinghy in on deck before it got away from us. Then, with the darn thing half-way on board a big comber pounded over the stern, swept my feet out from under me and overboard I went, weighted down with boots and oilskins. I still clung to the dinghy, but its line had parted and my ship faded quickly into the black night!

③ "The lad at the tiller didn't know how to bring the ship about, and although he would wake Larry, they'd be too far away to ever find me in that roaring darkness.

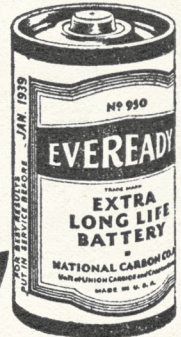
"I was growing numb with cold. I couldn't hang on much longer. I rolled against the gunwale of the dinghy for a fresh grip on the world that was slipping away from me. Something hard dug into my side... the flashlight in my pocket! Soaked, though it was, here was a chance!



④ "I pressed the switch. A finger of light stabbed through the storm. Time dragged on as I played the light about me. I cursed my shipmates. 'Why can't the fools see my light?' and then...the beam caught the white sail! I screamed for joy. An arm waved encouragement. Minutes later, thanks to those fresh DATED 'Eveready' batteries that kept working under the toughest conditions imaginable, I was warm and happy in my own bunk on my own ship, our Block Island cruise resumed.

(Signed)

*Tom Meyer*



**FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... Look for the DATE-LINE**

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.  
Unit of Union Carbide  and Carbon Corporation

In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention ARGOSY.

# A Cold?



Help soothe your throat and clear your head... buy Luden's.

Luden's relieve, and they contain an important **Alkaline Factor**

## Start a POTATO CHIP BUSINESS IN YOUR KITCHEN and MAKE MONEY!

**B**UY potatoes for 2¢ a lb. Make sensational new "Greaseless" Potato Chips and sell for 35¢ a lb. Ideal business for men or women in spare or full time. Small investment buys complete equipment. No experience needed. I show you how to get stores to sell all you make; tell you how to make profit first day. All information, pictures, prices and terms sent free. Send a postal card for Free Facts on this big "Home Business" Opportunity. Food Display Machine Corp., 620 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. D-2311, Chicago.



In appearance, dead-accuracy and hitting power, the "Champion" is as sweet a single gun as sportsmen ever laid on game or target. America's most popular gun. Only \$9.00, yet performs like an expensive arm. Beautifully finished—walnut trap-style forend and full pistol-grip stock—full choke—automatic ejector—3-piece take-down—all standard gauges. Own this all-round gun—write today for Booklet A20 of complete line Single and Double Shotguns, Skeet-ers, Rifles, Revolvers.

**IVER JOHNSON'S ARMS & CYCLE WORKS**  
65 RIVER ST., FITCHBURG, MASS. New York, 65 Chambers St.

## Classified Advertisements

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the HOME, OFFICE, FARM, or PERSON; to offer, or seek, an unusual BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Forms Close Two Months in Advance.

### AGENTS & SALESMEN

**BIG MONEY**  
taking orders; Shirts, Ties, Hosiery, Underwear, Raincoats, Pants, Dresses, etc. Sales Equipment FREE! Experience unnecessary. Write **NIMROD, 4922-AE, Lincoln, Chicago.**  
**BE YOUR OWN BOSS!**  
Operate used-new clothing business from store, home, auto. Up to 300% profit. Everything furnished. Catalog FREE!  
**PORTNOY, 566-AR, Roosevelt, Chicago.**

### HELP WANTED

Two minute demonstration to housewives, churches, fraternal organizations, earns you plenty money—full or spare time with Magic "Dustex" and home necessities. FREE samples.  
**BEST PRODUCTS, Dept. 31, Sturgis, Michigan.**  
M. M. earned \$267, three weeks, raising mushrooms in cellar! Exceptional, but your cellar, shed perhaps suitable. We buy crops. Bock free. **UNITED, 3848 Lincoln Ave., Dept. 281, Chicago.**

### HOBBIES

**METAL CRAFT.**  
A hobby that can be made profitable. Simple! Easy! Fascinating! German Silver Bracelet, Complete Kit with instructions except for nitric acid, which may be purchased locally, \$1.25 postpaid.  
**JAMES GORDON, 22 Clinton Street, Bloomfield, N. J.**

### MALE HELP WANTED

#### STEADY WORK—GOOD PAY

Reliable man wanted to call on farmers. No experience or capital required. Pleasant work. Home every night. Make up to \$12 a day. Wonderful new proposition. Particulars Free. Write **McNESS CO., Dept. 220, Freeport, Illinois.**

### PATENTS OR INVENTIONS

**INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED.** Patented or Unpatented. Send sketch and description of model, or write for information. In business 30 years. Complete facilities. **Adam Fisher Company, 249 Enright, St. Louis, Mo.**

### INVENTORS

Write For New Free Book, "Patent Guide for the Inventor" and "Record of Invention" form. No charge for preliminary information.  
**CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HYMAN BERMAN**  
Registered Patent Attorneys  
537-M Adams Building Washington, D. C.

### SONG POEMS WANTED

**SONG POEMS WANTED AT ONCE!** MOTHER, HOME, LOVE, PATRIOTIC, SACRED, COMIC OR ANY SUBJECT. DON'T DELAY—SEND BEST POEM TODAY FOR IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION. **RICHARD BROS., 61 WOODS BLDG., CHICAGO**  
**WANTED ORIGINAL POEMS, SONGS,** for immediate consideration. Send poems to **Columbian Music Publishers Ltd., Dept. 160, Toronto, Canada.**

In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention ARGOSY.

# HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

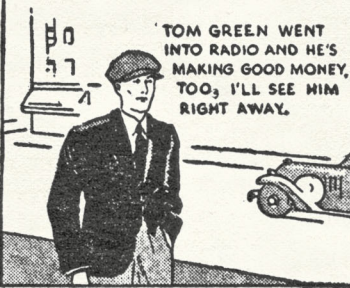
MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY—I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP. IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.

IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD (LIKE RADIO?)



80  
77

TOM GREEN WENT INTO RADIO AND HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY, TOO, I'LL SEE HIM RIGHT AWAY.



BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT



TOM'S RIGHT—AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF GOOD PAY OPPORTUNITIES

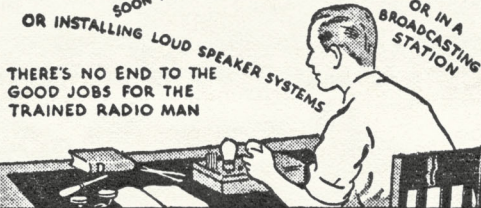


TRAINING FOR RADIO IS EASY AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST.—

SOON I CAN GET A JOB SERVICING SETS—

OR INSTALLING LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS

THERE'S NO END TO THE GOOD JOBS FOR THE TRAINED RADIO MAN



YOU SURE KNOW RADIO—MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THAT'S \$15 I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME



I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME RADIO JOB NOW—AND A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO

OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.



**HERE'S PROOF THAT MY TRAINING PAYS**



Broadcast Operator After Twenty Lessons

\$10 to \$25 a Week in Spare Time



"When I had completed the first twenty lessons I had obtained my license as Radio Broadcast Operator and immediately joined the staff of WMPC, where I am now chief operator."—**HOLLIS F. HAYES**, 85 Madison St., Lapeer, Mich.

"I am making from \$10 to \$25 a week in spare time while still holding my regular job as a machinist. I owe my success to N. R. I.—WM. F. BOPP, 203 W. Front St., West Conshohocken, Pa.



\$3,500 a Year in Own Business

"After completing the N. R. I. Course I became Radio Editor of the Buffalo Courier. Later I started a Radio Service business of my own, and have averaged over \$3,500 a year."—**T. J. TELAAR**, 657 Broadway, Buffalo, N. Y.



## I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME In Your Spare Time For A GOOD RADIO JOB

**Many Radio Experts Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week** Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many \$200 to \$500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, and pay up to \$6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loudspeaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

**Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15, a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning**

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money—\$200 to \$500—for hundreds, while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

**Find Out What Radio Offers You**

Act Today. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8MK National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8MK National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

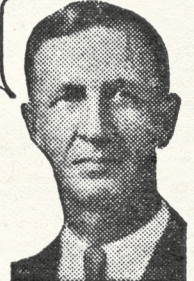
Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home to become Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)

NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

**THIS FREE BOOK HAS HELPED HUNDREDS OF MEN MAKE MORE MONEY**



**J. E. SMITH, President National Radio Institute Established 1914**  
The man who has directed the home study training of more men for Radio than any other man in America.

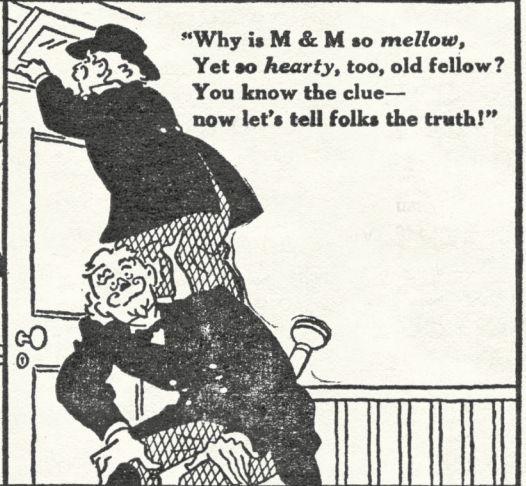
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# Mr. Mattingly & Mr. Moore track down a great whiskey value

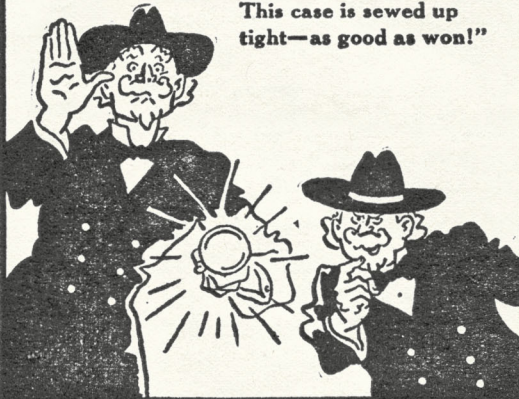
"Oh, Mr. Mattingly,  
Oh, Mr. Mattingly,  
Here's a mystery—and you're  
a first-rate sleuth!"



"Why is M & M so mellow,  
Yet so hearty, too, old fellow?  
You know the clue—  
now let's tell folks the truth!"



"Why, Mr. Moore,  
Why, Mr. Moore,  
This case is sewed up  
tight—as good as won!"



"It's because folks realize  
That the flavor they so prize  
Comes from old-time slow-distill-  
ing—the way we've *always* done!"



You're on the trail of a *real* whiskey value when some friend tips you off to Mattingly & Moore!

For M & M is *ALL* whiskey—every drop distilled by the slow, old-fashioned method. What's more, M & M is a blend of *straight*

whiskies—and that's the kind of whiskey that's *tops* with *any* man!

Ask for M & M at your favorite bar—or package store—today. You'll say it's just about the grandest whiskey you ever tasted—and you'll like its low price!

## Mattingly & Moore

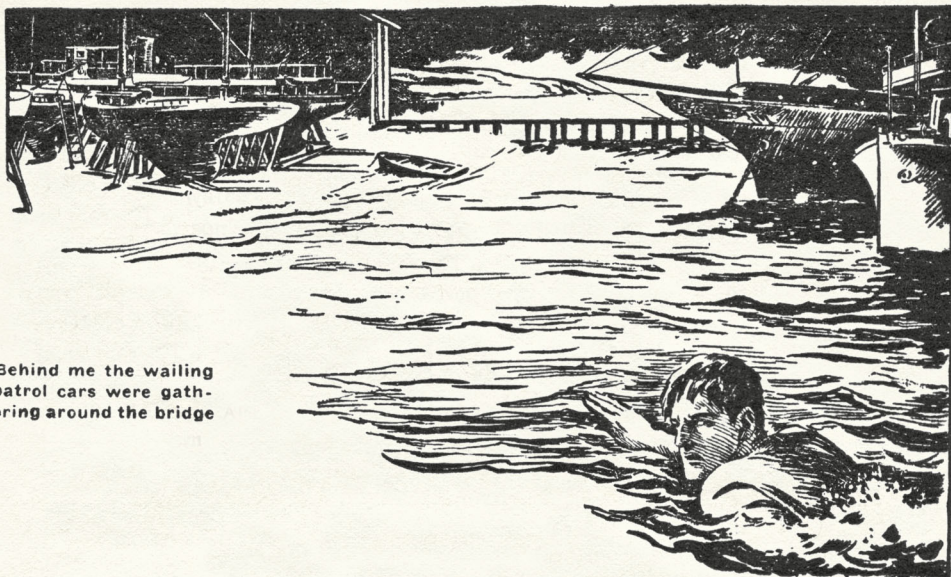
**Long on Quality — Short on Price!**

*A blend of straight whiskies—100% straight whiskies—90 proof.  
Frankfort Distilleries, Incorporated, Louisville and Baltimore.*



This advertisement is not intended to offer alcoholic beverages for sale or delivery in any state or community where the advertising, sale or use thereof is unlawful.

In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention ARGOSY.



Behind me the wailing  
patrol cars were gath-  
ering around the bridge

# Dead Storage

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

Author of "Loot Below," "Stunt Man," etc.

*They wanted to walk Tom Bates down a grim corridor and strap him in a chair—for nothing. But hate and the will to live are powerful motives . . . Beginning a gripping novel of adventure on America's Gold Coast*

## CHAPTER I

### CRUSH OUT

THE instant the foreman of the jury came through the door I knew I was as good as dead. I could see the verdict written all over his puss. I could hear, just as plainly as if he had already said it, what he was going to say to the judge:

"We find the defendant, Thomas Bates, guilty of murder in the first degree."

If I had done that killing, I would have figured it was up to me to take it. You know, dog eat dog. But I did not have any more to do with the murder of that gambler than the man in the moon. I just happened to be too near it, that

was all. And I happened to be down on my luck at the time. Those two things, and the fact that I had unwittingly tramped on the patent-leather feet of Miami's most prosperous racketeers, the gamblers, was going to cook me.

Boy, did their slick New York lawyer, Izzy Moscovitz, acting as advisor, or friend of the court, or something, put me over the bumps! He was supposed to have gone north for the summer, but when this thing happened in front of the night club of one of his best clients, he stayed down an extra three weeks to fix me up.

And I'm telling you, he did just that. He had me so punch drunk with his catch-questions I stuttered even when I told him my name; why he had me almost

believing I had shot that house man who had switched the dice on me at the craps table.

You know Izzy Moscovitz if you ever read any papers at all. Remember, he was the only lawyer who fenagled his clients safely through the racket trials in New York? Remember the stories in the paper about him the time he saved Pinky Leftwitch from the chair when four respectable witnesses swore they had seen the murder? Remember—oh what's the use? He was heading me straight into the little white room.

Just imagine, if you can, marching down that grim corridor they call, for lack of a better name, "The Last Mile." Imagine yourself, a decent, law-abiding citizen, being strapped into the chair before all those kibitzers, and having them put a black bag over your head, and then waiting, hearing the rising hum of the dynamo while it builds up current to crash through your own flesh and bone—and all of it for nothing.

You can't imagine it? It couldn't be done—to you? The hell you say! They were going to do it to me. And if they could do it to me, an innocent man, they could do it to anybody, and that means you!

They had, believe it or not, an airtight case, thanks to this slick Izzy Moscovitz, who could play a tune with his voice, and could shed real tears when he was defending the characters of some of those gamblers who were appearing against me.

It was wonderful to see him work on those jurors. They were all against him, at first, because he was a damyankee and they had read about his never losing a case. You could just hear them saying to themselves, "Here's one he's going to lose."

And before the second day was over they were hanging on his every word and when they weren't too busy watching his act they would glare at me as if they'd like to take me out of the courtroom and give me the old Ku Klux Swing on the nearest telegraph post.

WHAT he did to me, with the aid of his lying witnesses and his way of confusing honest men who were trying to testify for me, was so neat that even the judge gave me dirty looks while he was instructing the jury. And Izzy, who supported a yacht and a couple of country estates on his earnings from his criminal—and I mean, *criminal*—practice, looked as tickled as a sleek house cat full of cream.

Hour after hour as I sat there, listening to him making a murderer out of me, I thought how I'd like to get the forefinger of my right hand under his windpipe and jerk like a bass viol player plucks his strings.

I wouldn't wonder if that lug could read my mind. After a while he stopped meeting my eyes. He looked as if he wished I would stop watching him like that. And once, when all I did was to shift my position in my chair, he stepped away from me so fast it was funny and even the jurors laughed. And he made the best of that by saying:

"Look at him, gentlemen of the jury. Look at the breadth of his shoulders, and the way his arm muscles bulge out his sleeves. You have already heard, gentlemen of the jury, how he punched Joseph Maños, the murdered man. And the defendant—look for yourselves!—learned to use a gun in Cuba. He has admitted that himself. He has told you himself how when he ran a sugar plantation in Cuba he always carried a gun—and was always ready to use it. A man with the physique and the instincts of a killer, gentlemen of the jury, and—"

Sure, I knew what was coming. As the jurors filed in from their jury room I could tell. It was on their faces. They all glanced at me, sort of sheepish, and then pulled their eyes away as if they were ashamed.

Blood began to pump in my temples and in my throat. I could hear the thumping of the pulse beats in my ears.

"Steady, Tom," said my lawyer, a young punk who had taken my case to get experience. Experience, seeing how Izzy Moscovitz worked. Hell, my case was lost before he made his first objection to the judge! He looked at Izzy with the same adoring eyes as a sand lot player would look at Joe DiMaggio. But what would you expect for a fifty-dollar fee? That's all I had, so that was all he asked. Sweet, huh? I should have charged him a grand note for the chance to appear on the same bill as Izzy Moscovitz and he'd have paid it. "Steady," he said again, and started to say something more, but stopped when I looked at him and he saw what was behind my eyes.

So those jurymen were going to burn me, were they? With a couple of dozen reporters and assorted thrill-seekers watching me as if I were a freak in a side show.

OFFICER ROONEY, sitting on my left, was watching the jury file in. Officer McMillan, on my right, had his broad back turned to me for the moment while he, too, watched the twelve good men and true. Even the judge, as well as the two hundred-odd spectators behind me, were staring at those incoming men, trying to guess what they had decided.

I didn't have to guess. I knew. In three or four minutes I would again be handcuffed, starting on the first leg of the one-way march. The hell I would! I might end here, or down on Flagler Street outside—but not in the hot seat!

It was easier than you would think. There was a little door just to the left of the judge's bench, between the witness stand and the jury box. I remembered where that door went; I had been brought in that way once when the elevators had broken down. There was a men's wash-room just beyond and, across from that, the judge's retiring room. Then there was a right-hand turn to the stairs which led to the street floor, one flight down.

And beyond was God's wide open air. Miami streets, with people walking around

free—free, mind you, without the shadow of the electric chair to hag their sleep of nights. Did I say it was dark outside? The jury had been out only three hours. They had left the courtroom at seven o'clock, and it was now ten. And while they had been out I had been looking through the window at a great white moon that had sailed up past the window and out of sight over the courthouse. Well, out there, under that moon, wouldn't be a bad place to die; better, anyway, than—that other.

The last of the jurors was just sidling into his box as I went out of mine. And I went out in a hurry, I'm telling you. All I wanted was the first few seconds, and I got them.

I suppose it never once occurred to them that their prisoner, flanked on each side by a burly cop, would even dream of getting out of there. And that element of frozen surprise gave me just the break I needed.

I went over that thigh-high rail like a greyhound at the first hurdle. I got a split-second's glimpse of just one face as I began to fly across the floor. Izzy Moscovitz, his popped brown eyes expanding like those of a cat, fairly pushing themselves out of his bullet-shaped head as he saw me, the stooge he had framed, going away from there.

That single glimpse almost ruined things for me. Hate welled up in me like corrosive acid. I marked the spot on his swarthy neck where I could dig my fingers in.

Izzy squeaked and made a flying leap for the judge's box. And I knew I'd have no time to chase him. Nor, if I caught him right away, to kill him. They'd be on me the instant I stopped running. So, regretfully, I let him go and put everything I had into getting into full speed.

I GIVE you my word I put six or eight steps behind me before the first gasp of astonishment stirred the quiet air of that hot Florida courtroom. Two or three men were standing in the doorway ahead of me. They, like everybody else, had

been watching the jurors. Now their eyes hauled around and their mouths fell open a mile when they saw me charging straight at them.

I couldn't wait for them to make room. I put my head down and dived through them. Even after two months in the jug I still weighed 178 pounds, mostly solid bone and muscle, and my shoulders split them apart like the impact of a 16-inch shell.

It seemed like hours, but I guess it was only two or three seconds, before the shouting and screaming began behind me. That helped me, prevented people outside from concentrating their minds on me.

Five or six men were moving about in that tiled corridor beyond the door. They wheeled and stared at me, bug-eyed with astonishment.

"Bates is escaping out the other door!" I panted, jerking my thumb behind me. "Hurry! Get cops, quick!"

They weren't fast thinkers like Izzy Moscovitz, and they took several seconds wondering if I were Bates, and what I meant by saying that I was escaping the front way. A couple of brighter thinkers among them started for the courtroom door to prove for themselves that I couldn't be in two places at once. The rest didn't know just what to do so they compromised safely by doing nothing at all. And by that time I had shifted into high gear and was going places.

I put my right hand on the top of the banisters and skidded around on the smooth tiles until I was headed down the stairs toward the first floor. A little group of men was climbing the stairs, having heard, no doubt, that the jury had arrived at a decision, and they wanted to hear the bad news. The bad news for somebody else, I mean.

The more people on those stairs the better. There wouldn't be so much promiscuous shooting with people clotted around me. I went down that stairway four steps at a time, my palm making a loud squeaking noise as it slid along the banister.

And then, half-way to the first floor, I knew my brief spurt of luck—the first I'd had in longer than I wanted to remember—had changed for the worse. Police Lieutenant Riker was coming up. Talk about your rats! He was the one who had appeared at the scene so suddenly, so quickly, that he might very well have been hiding behind a hibiscus bush in front of the night club. This gambler had hardly stopped plucking at the grass when Riker was all over me, wrestling me away from the guy who had first grabbed me. And later, at the station, Riker had laid the rubber hose over my bare belly to make me confess something I had never done.

He looked up, saw me bounding down the stairs. He didn't wait to puzzle things out. He had been a copper so long that his actions were purely automatic. His eyes narrowed and his mouth went thin. He stopped right where he was, got himself set and made a fast grab for his cannon.

THERE was no use fooling around. I took off from the tenth or eleventh stair and put my feet out ahead of me like a broad jumper going into the loose dirt of the pit. And with the momentum I had behind me, those two feet could have carried away the side of a barn. One foot caught him on the chest. The other hit the bull's eye, his belly. And they kept right on going, with that uniformed louse moving along ahead of them. When he hit the floor, he hit all over. His gun went skittering off toward the door. And I crashed right on top of him.

Even with his body to cushion my fall it knocked most the wind out of me. It made everything go fuzzy in my mind. But a desperate voice inside of me kept crying, "Get up, Tom, or you'll fry!" So I got up. Hell, with that thought spurring me on I could have gotten up and moved along with a couple of broken legs.

Riker didn't get up. He didn't even twitch. Well, that was perfectly all right with me. For what he had done with his rubber hose I wouldn't have put my hand out six inches to stop him from falling

off the top of the Courthouse building, twenty-five or twenty-six stories high.

They were shooting now. From the top of the stairway they were beginning to pour it down. I could hear bullets whacking past me and kicking up little puffs of stone-dust just ahead of my fast-moving feet.

Five or six men were entering the lobby from the Flagler Street door. One of them was a constable, which made it bad, because in Florida constables not only carry guns but know exactly how to use them. They milled to a confused stop and stood staring at me as I raced toward them.

"Constable," I panted, "sheriff wants you, and for God's sake, hurry!"

I made it. Sure, I did. You see, I was the only one who knew—in the scant instants when intelligent action would have brought me down—precisely what was going on. And, brother, that gave me the breaks. For a little while, anyway.

I got to the front door and dived like a rabbit into the lighted reaches of Flagler Street. Oh, I could hear trouble behind me—but it was behind me, and as long as I could keep it there I was all right.

The street directly before me wasn't crowded. Flagler is, you'll remember, a one-way street, with the traffic moving only eastward, toward Biscayne Bay. But I didn't want to go that way, for when—or if—I went that way, where was I, with Bayfront Park blocking me off from escape?

In the other direction, however, there was a freight train just moving across the street half a block away and effectually cutting off all traffic along Flagler, pedestrian as well as motor.

That was bad. There were plenty of people on the opposite sidewalk, window-shopping at the cheap-john stores over there. But not enough of them, I saw as I bolted down the Courthouse steps. Not enough to make a crowd in which I might lose myself in blessed anonymity.

So what now? I had no plans. My mind was only a step ahead of my feet.

But I had to keep moving. People were beginning to get the idea. Someone screamed, "Stop thief!" Men started to run toward me. I swerved away from them, and that headed me toward the railroad—and toward that freight train which was rattling across the street.

THERE was a cop in the lofty traffic tower which overlooked both street and tracks. He was a good, fast thinker and he must have sized up the situation at once. And sitting there, like a sniper in a second-story window, he began to throw careful shots down at me. It wasn't any fun hearing them whine past. But what the hell? I was out in God's sweet moonlight.

The train was moving slowly, the box cars rattling and banging as they picked up speed. I remember to this day the Southern Pacific car that swam past me. A long way from home, that car on the Florida East Coast Railway, but so was I.

Without really thinking, without knowing what I was going to do next, I leaped for the hand-hold on the after end of that car. I don't know the name of the thing I put my foot on—it was sort of an iron stirrup—but there was I, hanging on, and the cops and the swift-growing excitement all sliding away behind me.

A bullet spat into the side of the car not three inches from my head. That moved me. I scrambled up those stirrups like a monkey and swarmed around the end of the car, putting the corner between me and the uproar.

I stood there for a moment, looking down at the clattering couplings and the snake-like air hose and at the flowing rails and ties in the darkness below. I needed that moment of comparative security to catch my breath and decide what I was going to do next. Now it was time to do some pretty fast planning, because that breathing space was going to be short.

The train, however, was not short. It was still blocking Flagler Street like a stone wall. Peeking out from between the two cars I could see automobiles streak-

ing southward along Miami Avenue, just one block away. They were running parallel to the tracks, figuring to be right where I was when someone succeeded in attracting the attention of the train crew and got them to stop. On that side there was hell and confusion. On the other there was quiet. And that quiet would last only until the caboose passed Flagler.

I took a long breath, stepped along the cross-beam and dropped from the train on the other—the quiet—side. But that quietness was ripped into shreds by the eerie shriek of a prowler car's siren. And it was on my side of the train! So I knew the long arm of the police radio was reaching out after me.

I went away from there at a lunge, ducking between store buildings and sheds, chewing my heart as I ran. Did you ever see a stray dog chased by yelling boys? That's the way I felt. Only worse. I knew what would happen if they got me cornered.

The sounds of pursuit were growing louder. Two or three police cars must have gotten around the rear of the train. They were screaming through the night like banshees. The freight cars were banging to a stop behind me. But that was fine. At least they made a protective wall which blocked some of the east-and-west streets, anyway.

I plunged out of an alley onto the sidewalk of River Drive, that winding thoroughfare which skirts the bank of the Miami River on its meandering course from the Everglades across the city to Biscayne Bay. Across the street were the low roof lines of a fish market and beyond were the masts of fishing boats moored to the wharves.

I shrank back into the shadows, watching my chance to get across, to get anywhere away from where I was.

Then I saw what I wanted. A big gray coupé was turning the next corner and coming in my direction. Under the glow of the street lights I could see there was only one person in it, a man.

It was too bad for him.

I DARTED out into the street, purposely passing so close in front of the car that the driver was forced to jam on his brakes to avoid running me down. That was a brighter idea than I had known, for he stopped the car, stuck his pan out of the window and began to curse me.

"Why, you—" he began. "What are you trying to do, get yourself—"

That was as far as he got. I whirled, twisted the handle of the door. I had to work fast for the lifting wail of the police sirens was louder. There was no time for politeness now, and I wasn't feeling polite anyway.

The driver's left elbow was resting on the sill and when I yanked the door open it almost pulled him out of his seat. And I finished what the door started. I didn't like what he had called me, anyway.

"Out!" I snarled.

I got a fistful of the shoulder of his coat and put my beef into a pull that would have tipped a cabbage palm off its roots. And when I saw he came out from under that wheel in a hurry, I put it mildly.

He made a grab for the wheel but he hadn't a chance in the world of staying where he was. He came out like a sack of cement and before he knew just what had happened to him he was on his hands and knees in the middle of River Drive.

Brother, I slid under that rakish wheel before he even hit the street. No time for careful driving. The gears whined in protest as I jerked her into first. I gave her the gun and heard the tires scream as they tried to get traction on the smooth concrete. And then she went away from there like a scorched cat.

I got one quick look in the rear-view mirror and it lifted my heart right up into my mouth. There, sliding around the corner just behind me, came one of the prowler cars and the guy I had given the heave-o was scrambling to his feet and waving his arms like a scarecrow in a windstorm.

I gave the big coupé all the throttle she had, and she had plenty. But in the mir-

ror I could see the police car had not even paused to pick up the guy who was trying to flag it down. Maybe he had pointed toward me; or maybe the speed at which I was going away from there told its own story. But the way the two headlights were gaining on me told me all I needed to know. They had spotted me and if they had two-way radio I was in a thin spot.

I roared under the first street traffic bridge and headed for the thick cross-traffic of Flagler directly ahead. The light was against me. But no red light was going to flag me into the electric chair, nor any cross-traffic, either. I slapped the flat of my hand on the horn button and told them I was coming. And I came.

Don't ask me how I got through that procession of cars, because I couldn't tell you. Dim in my memory is a recollection of wrenching the wheel this way and that, of tinny crashes as my fenders raked others, of a ripping sound as my rear mudguard hooked on somebody's bumper and something was torn loose—but whether it was the bumper or the mudguard I wouldn't know. I never got around to examining the car for damage, as you shall presently see.

But somehow I got across Flagler, and for the first time it occurred to me that maybe I had a chance for my little white alley. I had never expected to get clear. But I had wanted to die doing something instead of just sitting still.

NOW I was doing something. It didn't matter so much what happened from now on. Anything was better than what I had left behind me. Oh, I was likely to die, all right. I knew that. But unless they laid me unconscious with a slug, or I was knocked out wrecking this car, they weren't going to sit me in the hot seat. No, not ever.

The big coupé was putting her heart into it as she roared along that winding drive by the river, as she buckled down to the work of getting the hell out of Miami and into the open flatlands west of the city.

There was plenty of confusion behind

me; you can't drive like that through a well-traveled section and expect people not to pay attention or to phone indignantly for the cops.

And there were two prowler cars behind me now. Geared up as they were they were slowly eating up the distance between us. The screech of their sirens was a horrible sound that seemed to chill my blood—it was like, I thought, the high scream of the dynamo just before the electrician threw the switch.

Somewhere—I believe it was at Ninth Street—a small sedan came popping directly into my path. I almost wrenched the steering wheel out by the roots as I skidded left, right and left again, getting around that damned jalopy. At any other time the narrowness of that escape from catastrophe would have left me weak and shaking; now it left me unmoved.

Boats and yachts, moored to the banks of the Miami River, passed in an almost unbroken wall to my left. Once I had had a boat—a yacht, really, for it was a 47 foot yawl—moored there, too. I used to sail up in her from my sugar *finca* in Cuba when I craved to hear a little English spoken, but not any more. Not since my luck changed. Not since that night when they burned my *finca* and sunk my boat and I had to swim four miles to take refuge on a fishing smack bound for the snapper banks. Queer, how you can remember things like that when you are roaring ahead just a few hundred yards beyond range of police guns.

And now, definitely, the prowler cars were gaining. I was clearing the traffic for them and they were moving up. My arms and shoulders ached from pulling and hauling the wheel to pass and dodge other cars. Through the mirror I could see the coppers overhauling me.

Why couldn't one of these automobiles that got in my way belong to Izzy Moscovitz? And I know it! Wouldn't I take him along to hell with me! One huge crash at full speed would fix everything and then I could grin as the lights went out, knowing I had gotten even.

I couldn't die until I had seen him again. If he were ten feet away, or a hundred, I could walk to him with a dozen slugs in my heart and tear his windpipe out with my fingers. I knew it.

I heard a sharp smack against the window behind me and in front of my eyes the windshield became dim with a thousand spiderwebby cracks. Close. The River Drive veered ahead of me, the left side mounting a steep slope to a bridge across the river. I didn't know where the street went beyond the bridge, nor did I care much; I just knew that I would be overhauled by those cops in a few more minutes if I kept on going straight ahead.

I swung the wheel to make the bridge and as I did so I heard my right rear tire go *pop!* Good shot, and it raised hell with me. I went crabbing toward the curb, fighting the wheel all the way to keep the car from turning over.

The next thing I knew the radiator struck the stone railing of the bridge and went right on through. Then the coupé was an airplane, spinning down for a crash in the inky water below. I had just enough time—and sense—to slap the door-opener and throw myself to the left against the swinging door. I felt myself falling out into thin space. The car and I hit the surface together. . . .

## CHAPTER II

### SANCTUARY

**I**T IS hard to remember details when death rides on your shoulder, grinning expectantly, when all hell is going on around you and when your brain is a maelstrom of despair, hate, and, above all, a grim will to live.

I remember being sucked down into that brackish water in the wake of the plunging car. But that didn't worry me. I had learned to swim about the time I learned to walk, and I could do one about as well as the other, and as tirelessly. I remember, too, that I knew I was in one sweet mess, for when I broke the surface I would come out into half-moonlight and

the cops could sit down on the bank, or on the bridge, and take plenty of time filling my skull with lead.

I remember telling myself to swim downward, not upward, and to kick my shoes off. Then I started with long, powerful breast strokes, toward the opposite bank. And when I had come up to breathe broke the surface as quietly as I could, sucked in an enormous lungful of air and went down again.

In the split second I had been above the water I noticed things: that the tide was carrying me up-river instead of down, and that the wailing prowls were gathering on and around the bridge like bees around a molasses pot.

Well, if that was the way the water wanted me to go, that was the way to go. So I got my head down, took a couple of big strokes and, safely below the surface, exhaling a little at a time when the pressure on my lungs got too painful, I shucked my tight-binding coat.

I came up, grabbed another breath and a look-see. Some car had a big searchlight slanting down on the surface of the water where the coupé was probably still sending up bubbles and spreading gobs of oil. Cops were rushing to the river's edge, their flashlights glimmering.

Down I went, putting my mind on really getting away from there with the tide. No sense in reaching shore too quickly. I'd as soon swim as walk, especially when there was a tide to help me, and I knew I'd be a fine-looking sight strolling around the streets, dripping wet, and with neither coat nor shoes. In five minutes people would be paying money to crowd around and have a look at me.

It was good to get out of that light-spotted water and into dark, smooth currents where a guy could swim quietly, so long as he remained in the shadows of the boats that lined the bank, moving right along, minding his own business, and putting yards and quarter-miles between himself and the hurly-burly behind him.

A dozen times I was tempted to swarm up the side of one of the cruisers or sail-

boats tied to the bank of the river, but the desire to get away, well away, from that bridge was even stronger. So I kept on moving, and it seemed to me that with every stroke I was swimming into a new world, where there were no Izzy Moscovitzs, no snarling prosecuting attorneys. . . .

A steady, distance-destroying six-beat flutter, I used, taking care not to roil the water too much. I swam from boat-shadow to boat-shadow, and when I saw ahead of me a yacht whose portholes were lighted, I drifted alongside and past as silently as any fish. But it was the beginning of summer—June—and most of the boats were tied up for the season. With astonishment I realized that I was having a little luck at last—the first in too many months of heartbreak. The wailing of the gathering prowls was thin and distant in the soft night. I could go ashore any time. But what after that?

**I**T WAS about then, I think, that I saw, looming ahead of me, the giant storage sheds of the marine basin where most of the big boats in the Miami area went for repairs and where practically all the millionaires who did not take their yachts north for the summer left them in wet or dry storage.

I had kept my own yawl in one of those slips a couple of summers when, having plenty of money, I had gone to Europe on vacation trips. And here was the real laugh: Izzy Moscovitz's big 170-foot diesel yacht had both summers been in a neighboring slip to my trim little *Roamer*.

I had seen him two or three times there under that immense roof and, knowing his reputation, had stared curiously at him as, standing in the cockpit of my yawl, I had watched him pompously giving directions to the yard foreman about work to be done. I guess there is no such thing as a hunch, or I should have had one then. As it was, all I remember feeling was a cold dislike for one who had made millions by cheating the chair of people who belonged in it.

And then, as I moved silently ahead through that tepid water, a swift tingle of excitement surged over me. It was summer now. Every summer Moscovitz put his yacht in that many-acred storage yard. *Was it there now?*

With no clear plan in my emotion-drugged mind I changed course and began to move toward the stygian darkness beneath that gigantic roof. I didn't know what I was going to do when I got there. I only knew that there were only two things in the world that mattered; not to die in the electric chair and to get even with the man who had arranged that I should do just that.

Izzy's yacht being in that vast dead-storage shed didn't mean that Izzy was there—or would be there for months. Nevertheless it seemed as if an invisible magnet was hauling me toward that shed—and I made no effort to resist.

Treading water, I surveyed the stygian darkness which enveloped four or five million dollars worth of yachts. The white silhouettes of a dozen craft showed dimly through the gloom; others, I knew, lay bow to stern alongside the catwalks which extended for perhaps half a mile up the river.

Perhaps three in the entire building showed lights which indicated that a ship's husband might be aboard. At the far end was a small cruising houseboat with plenty of lights showing; the owner, I guessed, would be living aboard while minor repairs were being made.

A tiny dancing light, appearing and disappearing behind the yachts, indicated that old Jake, the watchman, was on one of his hourly rounds. And here and there was a fixed droplight which stabbed an inadequate pinpoint of brightness amid all that gloom.

I moved in, silently, toward the great cavern of a place. And already, because I was near boats, I was feeling a little better. Always I had felt better near boats, which are very often better than the men who own them.

I began to look for Moscovitz's yacht.

She was, I remembered, white with two military masts, one shore funnel and a cruiser stern. And her name—how's this for a gag?—was *Faith*. In what did that rat have faith in when he named her? Only his ability to make money—and to stay alive—you can bet on that.

**I** ROUNDED the stern of a great white yacht with all her tan awnings battened down over her brightwork and another with a big tent of canvas covering her like a shroud. Next was a houseboat with heavy shutters over each of her big square windows. There were a lot of little craft—sport cruisers, runabouts and sloops—scattered among the big fellows. And I swam from one slip to another looking for the *Faith*.

There was an immense and eerie silence hanging over the whole place, as if a blight had descended upon it and upon all the craft which lay in it.

But I knew it would not be so in the morning. Some of those battened and canvas-covered yachts would still drowse through the heat of the day, waiting until fall for the arrival of the workmen who would put them in commission for another season. But upon others would swarm shipwrights, steamfitters, riggers, painters and mechanics, and the sound of their activity would shatter the quiet through which I now swam.

And then, in the fifth slip, I saw the *Faith*. She was not easy to recognize; I had to swim right up to her stern to make out the name painted blackly against the white of her hull. She had wooden shutters over her portlights and a tent of canvas slanted down from a sort of ridgepole and covered her entire deckhouse and its expensive mahogany finish.

But when at last I picked the five letters of her name out of the darkness a curious satisfaction ran through me. It was almost as if I had met Izzy Moscowitz face to face—and both of us alone.

But how to get aboard? Her gunwales were too high for me to reach and there were no rope's ends trailing overside. But

just beyond her bow was a varnished runabout, perhaps waiting to be hauled out. Swell. I went up over her side like a monkey and sat there, beginning to realize how tired I was and how much the events of the night had taken out of me.

From somewhere beyond the shoreward end of the storage shed came the distant wail of a police siren—or maybe an ambulance. They were still hunting me, then, even though they must believe me to be trapped in the big coupé at the bottom of the river a couple of miles away. Even Izzy Moscowitz hadn't bothered to look into my college record and to learn that I had been captain of the Yale swimming team in my senior year.

Would they always go on hunting me, I wondered dismally, right on to the very end of time? Of course they would, because when they got tired of hunting me for the murder of that gambler, they'd start all over tracking me down for the murder—no, the execution—of Izzy Moscowitz, because killing that crooked lawyer was, little by little, becoming even more important to me than the clearing of my own name.

Well, I couldn't accomplish anything by sitting in that runabout. And I was so tired I knew I'd fall asleep sitting up, if I stayed there any longer. So I got to my feet and clambered up to the workmen's catwalk.

I staggered and almost fell as my feet struck the unyielding boards of that bridge-like runway between the twin lines of silent yachts. Now, gradually, I was beginning to think, to take stock of myself and of the tough spot I was in. To kill Izzy Moscowitz I would have to go on living—at least until I found a way of getting to him.

So I would have to find a hideout of sorts. And what better could exist than aboard one of these great yachts which were covered and empty of people for the summer? I didn't stop to ask myself how I would eat. I was like a hunted animal seeking a hole. And now I knew I had found not one, but many.

I MOVED along the gangway toward Izzy's yacht and for a moment it seemed better to take a station on a big, clipper-bowed ship which lay just across the runway from the *Faith*. Aboard that big boat I could watch Izzy's ship and—with luck—perhaps see Izzy one day going aboard for an inspection trip.

I went alongside the strange craft and then turned away, for a smell of fresh paint hung over her like a halo and I knew that in the morning there would be a gang of workmen aboard and I would have no more privacy than at the corner of First and Flagler.

That settled it. My first hunch had been right. I turned toward Izzy's yacht, reconnoitering before I attempted to get aboard. And right away I saw something that suited me just fine. A thick electric cord snaked aboard her from the catwalk; they were feeding electric current into a trickle charger to keep her batteries up during the summer months. And that, in turn, meant there might be lights aboard.

I went across that two-foot gangplank with my heart beating high and fast. I pushed aside the curtained flap which hung across the break in the rail and stepped into a darkness like that at the bottom of a coal mine.

I stopped for a moment and sniffed, but there was no smell of fresh paint, nor of new-cut lumber, nor any odor which might indicate they were working in her engine room.

I put my hand against the wall of the deckhouse and began to grope my way aft, stopping at every window and door to test it. But they were all locked. I moved past a sort of glassed-in lounge and forward along the opposite—the port—side, hoping against hope that one window might be open to prevent dry rot, but apparently they were putting all their hopes in the ventilators.

I wanted to light a match to see how thick the glass might be, but my paper of matches was a soggy mass, as were my cigarettes. And as soon as I realized that, I wanted a cigarette like hell.

I ran headlong into a ladder which led up to the bridge deck, circled around it and began to slide my hand along the deck house wall again. And then I found my luck. A big square window left undogged. Open perhaps two inches. It was almost under the bridge ladder. I'd probably have missed it in daylight.

It took me about fifteen seconds to shove it inward and squirm over the high sill. And you can bet your last fin that as soon as I dropped to the floor I turned and dogged that window up tight.

And did that utter silence, that infinite blackness, feel good! No sound now of wailing sirens, no glimpse of uniformed cops. Maybe this wouldn't last long—already I was remembering that one of these days I would have to eat—but while it lasted this feeling of being away from everything was pretty nice.

I LOOKED around, or tried to, but it was like standing in a dark closet and looking into a derby hat. My impression was that I was in a big room.

I cleared my throat, not too loudly. It was the first conscious noise I'd made since the coupé had hurtled off that bridge. The echo did not bounce back from close-set bulkheads; the room was large and the echo was perceptibly tardy. I laughed to myself at my cautiousness. I could have spoken out loud—shouted—and the sound would never have penetrated the steel walls of the deckhouse nor the half-inch plate glass in the windows.

But just the same, when I began again to grope through that blackness I found myself walking on tiptoes.

I touched a chair. It was shrouded with dust-covers, but it was heavy and overstuffed. I guessed I was in a big lounge, or living room. Every instinct in me cried aloud, commanding me to sit in that chair and to let sleep ease the bone-deep weariness that was in me, making me ache all over.

But I was like a rabbit, wanting to burrow deeper and deeper into a hole. The next deck below was what I wanted.

There, I supposed, would be Izzy's suite and the guest cabins, with fine beds, shuttered ports and—possibly—electric lights invisible from outside.

I skirted around a grand piano and found the after door of the lounge. By the feel of the wall I was in a passageway leading past the funnel enclosure to various rooms at the after end of the deck-house. My hand touched a bannister and I knew I had groped my way to the stairway which led down to the deck below.

I swung around, sliding my foot along the floor, feeling for the first stair which would take me down to privacy, a good bed, a moderate amount of security—and the best place I knew to wait for Izzy Moscovitz, or to plan just how I could go looking for him.

And right there I stopped, with every hair on my head lifting, my heart coming up into my throat and almost choking me.

Faintly to my nostrils came a scent. The drifting smell of Turkish tobacco—of fresh cigarette smoke!

**H**OW easy it is to say that, and how unexciting it sounds. But put yourself in my place aboard that silent, pitch-black yacht, with your nerves ragged and stretched like wires. And then get a good, long, whiff of warm cigarette smoke and you'll get a jump that will make you shake all over and cause icy sweat to break out of every pore in your body. That's the boot I got out of it, and nobody ever accused me of scaring too easily, either.

For a moment or two it occurred to me that Izzy Moscovitz might be down there, and at the thought my fingers began to hook. What better place than this could there be for giving that rat what was coming to him and what he was sure to get, sooner or later, if I lived?

And then I realized it couldn't be Izzy who was smoking down there in that darkness. Not unless he had rushed, full speed, to this yacht the moment I had escaped from the courtroom. And that, while possible, wasn't likely.

I stood there with my foot hanging

over the topmost step, trying to get my pulses under control. For a moment I considered scrambling out of the *Faith* and finding another yacht. But I remembered the trouble I had had finding a window I could open and I knew I might not be so lucky again.

But that, when you come right down to it, wasn't the thing that kept me aboard. This was Izzy Moscovitz's yacht. When I remembered that, nothing could have driven me ashore.

So down the stairs I crept, one at a time. You would not believe that the lower deck could be any darker than the one I had just left, but it was. I felt as if my eyesight had been suddenly, completely, destroyed. And that cigarette smell was becoming more and more definite with every groping downward step.

Now I was in a sort of foyer at the bottom of the stairway. Remembering the conventional interior layouts on yachts of this type, I guessed the forward passageway would lead out of this foyer until it came to and end against the engine-room bulkhead or, perhaps, the water-tight bulkhead separating the owner's and the crews' quarters.

Behind me the passageway would extend aft past cabins until it finally ended at the door to Izzy's own suite, which would probably spread the full width of the hull.

**I** SNIFFED carefully, attempting to locate the source of that drifting smoke. I could see no ruddy glow at the tip of a cigarette, no sliver of light to mark the doorway of an occupied cabin. So, at a guess, I began to work my way aft and after a few cautious steps I knew I was right.

The faint smell of that smoke became more definite. Presently, without knowing how I knew, I became aware that somebody was very near to me in that infinite blackness. My heart was beating so loudly it sounded like the booming of a bass drum and I wondered how it was that the bird didn't take alarm.

I was careful with my hands. I let only my fingertips brush along the wall, locating the cabin doors one by one.

And then with a noise which in that incredible darkness was as loud as the firing of a cannon, a door opened straight before me. An immense blaze of incandescence from a hand flashlight smacked against my expanded pupils, blinding me more effectively than the surrounding darkness.

I stood there helplessly, blinking and desperately trying to focus my eyes into that glare.

But only for a second or two. To be discovered now! No use turning and trying to run away. The man behind that light—*was* it Moscovitz, I wondered desperately—could take his time about shooting me in the back. Or, if he had no gun, he could follow me up to the deck and if I managed to get one of the doors or windows unlocked in time to escape, a few yells from him would turn the whole searching world in my direction.

So there was only one thing to do. I put my head down, got my feet set and made a rushing dive for the invisible person behind that flashlight.

"Stop!" cried a shrill voice.

In mid-air I tried to turn that dive, but I was too late. I heard a gasping sob come from the darkness ahead. Yellow and crimson flame jetted from a point just to the left of that flashlight. An enormous blow struck the back of my head.

But even as I was drifting off into the star-shot blackness of unconsciousness, I knew I had made a damned fool of myself—again. That voice—that sob—didn't come from Izzy Moscovitz. They didn't come from any man. They had come from a girl and the slight body my diving shoulder had stuck and sent flying away—that was a girl's, too.

But I couldn't do anything about that now. The agony in my head seemed to withdraw painlessly to some far distance, where it remained poised, like a blood-red spider, waiting to pounce upon me when—or if—I regained consciousness.

I remember seeing that flashlight swing up toward the ceiling, but I don't remember seeing it go out. I don't even remember hitting the floor. . . .

### CHAPTER III

#### YOU FIGURE IT

IT wasn't pleasant, coming to. I thought they were fitting an electrode over my head and it hurt like hell. And Izzy Moscovitz, his sallow face twisted with sadistic pleasure, was urging them to bear down harder, and I couldn't get my arms out of the straps to reach for the louse and strangle him.

I squirmed lower and lower, trying to get out from under that metal plate, but it followed me down. I heard myself groan and felt myself moving my head from one side to the other.

And that, I guess, was when I really began to come out of it. Instead of a metal plate my fingers touched a turban-shaped bandage, and I stopped trying to shove it off my dizzy head.

I opened my eyes and closed them, instantly, when a blinding light from an inverted bowl overhead struck into my throbbing brain. I reached around with my hands and my sense of touch informed me that I was lying on the floor, with my bandaged head on a pillow. Now who had taken all that trouble?

Turning my face away from the light I squinted around through half-closed lids. I was alone in a yacht's cabin, a cabin luxuriously furnished in the modern manner. Dressers, bed, vanity, chairs, everything was of plate glass, chromium and rare woods and fabrics.

I gritted my teeth against the pain and turned so I could look at the portlight. It was closed and the butterfly nuts had been turned down tight. And on the other side was one of those wooden shutters which I had noticed from the water a little while before. That was—I thought it was—a little while ago, but I had no way of knowing. It shut out all view of the night—or day—beyond.

Choking down a belly-deep groan, I pushed myself to a sitting position. The door was closed and a silence as of death itself lay over the ship. It was disturbing, that silence. Especially when I didn't know who the girl was who had shot me, nor how bad my skull had been injured, nor—and at this thought, a sharp fear stabbed through and through me—whether or not I was a prisoner. Perhaps I was Izzy's prisoner, waiting for the police to come.

At this disturbing possibility I lurched to my feet and staggered drunkenly over to the door. As quietly as I could I twisted the knob and to my infinite relief it turned quite easily. I opened the door and peered outside into a passageway which was, as before, inky black except for a small square of refulgence on the floor before me. I stared down at that passageway floor, but there was no blood there. If I had been shot in front of this door, someone must have taken the trouble to wash the blood away.

Relieved that I could march up that passageway and off the ship if I wished—and if I had the strength—I backed into the cabin and closed the door to shut the flooding light out of the corridor.

I would have felt better, I thought, if there had been plenty of fresh air in the cabin. Enviously I turned and stared at the portlight, wishing I could open it. Then I noticed something which puzzled me.

Walking across the room I looked through the heavy glass at something which appeared to be a tiny plug of black cloth in the wooden shutter outside. A peep hole!

I twirled the nuts, lifted the portlight and hooked it before I remembered. Then I hurried back, slapped the light switch by the door and plunged the cabin into darkness.

**I**T was the work of an instant to jerk out the wadded black cloth which had been poked into a tiny hole bored in the wooden shutter. And to my astonishment a tiny pencil of broad daylight came through that small round aperture.

More came in than just light. The sound of men's voices, close at hand, the tapping of a calking mallet and, in fainter volume, the high-pitched whine of an outboard motor somewhere on the Miami River nearby.

Incredulously I put my eye to that peep hole. Before me was a circumscribed segment of the storage shed. The catwalk was slightly below eye-level and opposite was the clipper-bowed yacht which hadn't looked too good to me the night before.

And now I knew how wise I had been in shying away on account of the smell of paint I had noticed in the darkness. A crew of men was at work sanding and painting her brightwork and even as I squinted at her a man in mechanic's dungarees strolled along her back carrying a brass compression coupling. I'd have had as much privacy aboard that vessel as in the exact center of the Yale Bowl.

But this was what caused my skin to prickle; here I was on Moscovitz's yacht and within spitting distance of dozens, scores perhaps, of men, any of whom could summon the entire police force of Miami simply by lifting his voice.

I drew back from that porthole as suddenly as if my nose had blundered only a few inches from a rattlesnake. Where was the girl who had clipped me—it must have been nine or ten hours ago—and then bandaged me and put a pillow under my head—and vanished? Why hadn't she notified the coppers?

I plugged up the peep hole and was willing enough now to drop the portlight and to dog it down securely. Fresh air was at this moment of much less importance than privacy.

Well, what now? Restlessly I began to prowel the luxurious cabin, wondering whether or not that mysterious girl might have gone to Moscovitz, rather than to the police, to tell him of the prowler she had shot during the night.

That would be bad. She would only have to describe me, broad-shouldered, flat-hipped, with unruly dark hair and a little

dent on the bridge of my nose accumulated during a tough bout of water polo with Harvard.

Add to that the fact I had been dripping wet and anybody much dumber than Izzy Moscovitz would know exactly where to find Tom Bates, the fall guy who thanks to him had done a perfect job of stooging for whoever killed that gambler.

And what was a girl doing on this decommissioned yacht, anyway? Certainly if it had been intended for anyone—especially a girl—to be aboard, ports and windows would have been open for ventilation and there would have been lights here and there. Moreover, she had been pretty damned quick on the trigger for anyone whose presence aboard was lawful.

I gave up trying to puzzle it out because it only made my head ache and all the thinking I did just got me back to where I had started—nowhere.

**I** SWITCHED on the overhead lights and for a moment I got a tremendous start. I happened to be facing a full-length pier glass which was affixed to the bathroom door. And I thought some tough plug-ugly had moved in on me.

It took me a couple of long breaths to recognize the scarecrow before me. My shirt and pants were wrinkled and shrunk-en. Across my chest and shoulders were dull smudges where I had done plenty of bleeding before the mysterious girl had stopped the flow with the blood-stained turban which now perched raffishly upon my head.

But it was my face which astonished me most.

The events of the past two weeks—and of the past two days in particular—had taken more out of me than I had dreamed possible. Long, deep, lines of fatigue and anxiety were etched around my gray eyes and ran from my nostrils to both corners of my mouth. Even my shoulders, which had been broad and tapering, seemed thinned down and sagging.

Now, looking critically at the apparition which was Tom Bates, I couldn't blame that girl for taking a crack at me.

I was standing there, wondering what in heaven's name to do next when I heard a sound which caused a prickling along all my nerves. Faintly, but certainly, footsteps were approaching along the linoleum-floored passageway outside the cabin.

Hastily I looked around for a possible connecting door which might lead to another room. One, just to my left, I opened hastily but it gave into a full-length locker. The other led into the bathroom. So I was trapped.

I grabbed up a chair, swung it high over my bandaged head and stepped to the hinge side of the door. Weak as I was, there was one thing of which I was sure. Neither the police nor Izzy Moscovitz and his gambler clients were going to take me.

They wouldn't have done it so easily the first time had I not harbored the delusion that an innocent man had only to tell the truth and they wouldn't convict him.

Well, I knew better now. All it took to convict a man—any man—was a smart *criminal* lawyer and a dozen lying witnesses. Well I had had enough of that.

The door knob twisted. The panel swung inward toward me. I balanced my body, getting it ready to throw my whole weight behind the wicked downswing of that chair.

And then all the strength went out of my muscles.

Past the edge of that door and into the lighted cabin marched one of the prettiest girls I had ever seen in my life.

**S**HE cast one quick glance around the cabin, then turned and saw me standing there foolishly, the chair still waving high above my dizzy head.

"Put that down!" she said, breathlessly. "They're coming aboard."

I guess I wasn't too bright, what with my head aching so, and being that tired and that low in my mind. I stood right

where I was, with that chair still poised, just staring at her.

She was nice to stare at, even at a time like that. Her hair was dark and clung to her shapely head in close, soft, ringlets. Her eyes were of a particularly vivid shade of blue and her lips, despite the fact she was wearing no make up at all, were very red indeed. And my astonished gaze now discovered that she was wearing, instead of a dress, a clean white sailor suit, blouse, pants, and all.

She didn't wait for me to make up my mind to lower that chair. She fairly flew across the cabin, snatched open a drawer in the big dresser and yanked out pile after pile of things made of tan linen, which I presently discovered to be dust covers.

"Come and help me," she panted. "You want them to find you?"

"Want who to find me?" I demanded.

"Well, anybody," she said, hard at work slipping those linen covers over the furniture.

Automatically I lowered the chair to the floor, went across the cabin and gave her a hand. In a couple of minutes we had everything covered with those linen things. The cabin looked as if nobody had been in it for months.

"Get under that bed," she said, commandingly.

I had never taken to hiding under beds before and I wasn't in any mood to start now. What is there so ignominious about hiding under a bed? Heaven knows I didn't want to be discovered—not by anybody—yet my gorge rose.

"Damned if I will," I said, decisively.

"Okay," she retorted. "Go ahead and let them find you."

She rushed around the room, obliterating small signs of human occupancy which I had not noticed. She carried an ash tray into the bathroom and brought back a towel with which she mopped fingerprints from the portlight. She hurried to the locker, pulled down an armful of dresses and threw them under the bed, lifting the lower edge of the dust cover and kicking them out of sight.

"The least you could do," she said to me, "would be to hide somewhere so you won't spoil my hiding place, too."

And with that astonishing remark she ran to the light switch and threw the cabin into Stygian darkness. It sounded as if she were crawling under the bed.

"What are *you* hiding from?" I said into the blackness.

Her voice was oddly muffled as she replied, "The same one you are—Izzy Moscovitz. He's trying to put me in an insane asylum!"

A COINCIDENCE? Sure, it was. It is a coincidence when you or I, or you or anybody else in the world, happen to meet on Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street. Let's see you live through one single day without a dozen coincidences affecting you to a greater or lesser degree.

The only really strange thing about this affair was that this girl and I, both apparently on the lam, should have chosen to hide out in Moscovitz's yacht.

And when you pause to consider it, even that wasn't so strange. I had remembered his yacht and, in vague hopes of catching him aboard, sometime, had headed toward it. Swimming there in the river I had recognized the fact that a decommissioned yacht would be as good a place in which to hide as any—and I wanted to lay my hands on Moscovitz's windpipe!

But if you start trying to figure out the hows and whys of things like coincidences, which do happen whether you can reason them out or not, pretty soon you begin hearing funny noises in your head and in a little while you tell the male nurse to bring the paper dolls and a pair of scissors.

The full impact of the girl's words hit me like a clout on the head.

"Listen, Toots," I said, trying to keep my tone level, "is Moscovitz coming aboard?"

"No," she replied from under the bed, "but two of his friends are. We'd better be quiet."

"How did you know I knew Mos-cowitz?" I asked her.

"I can read, can't I?" she said in an exasperated whisper. "And even if I couldn't read, Tom Bates, I could still look at the pictures."

"So you know I'm supposed to be a murderer," I said.

"Yes, and if you'll only be quiet, and hide somewhere, and they don't find us, I'll let you see the morning paper and let you read all about yourself."

"The morning paper?" I said, dizzier and dizzier. "Where did you get a morning paper?"

"The carrier left it outside the yard office about five o'clock. I thought I recognized you when I was bandaging up your head. So I sneaked out and stole the paper before the office staff came to work. Now, will you *please* be quiet! I—I hear doors slamming."

**I** WANTED to ask her what was all this about the insane asylum, but I heard the slamming of doors, too. I blundered across the inky cabin, found the panel of the door with my fingers and pressed my ear against it. Right away most of my doubts vanished. This girl might be crazy, all right, but not about this. Somebody was aboard the yacht and doing a lot of moving around.

I swung around. "The gun," I said, grimly. "The one you shot me with. Where is it?"

"I—I must have left it in the galley. It was in the chest of drawers beside the stove. I got so excited when I saw them come aboard, I guess I just ran away and left it."

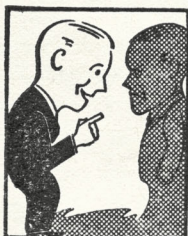
"Well, that's just too lovely," I said in a gritty voice. "When I come down the corridor, you'd have it. It would be in the galley when someone else comes along." I could hear the sound of footsteps now, but I couldn't tell from where I stood whether one man or two was moving along the passageway.

"Oh," the girl moaned, "won't you hide somewhere? Get in that locker, *please!*"

I groped my way to that full length locker, backed into it and closed the door all but a very thin crack. The scent of perfume was in there, left, I suppose, by the dresses the girl had just removed. Why, I asked myself irritably, didn't she wear dresses instead of that damned sailor suit? And why, when there were so many homely girls in the world—

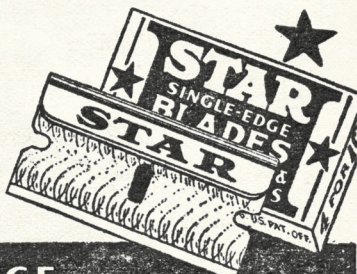
I heard the cabin door open and a swift anger surged through my entire body. After all I had been through in the past twenty-four hours—to be cornered like this! A light switch clicked and a thin line of brightness streaked down the crack between the edge and the jamb of my locker door. I waited, crouched there, with my hands slightly ahead of me and my fingers stretched like claws, just waiting for whoever might swing the door wide.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

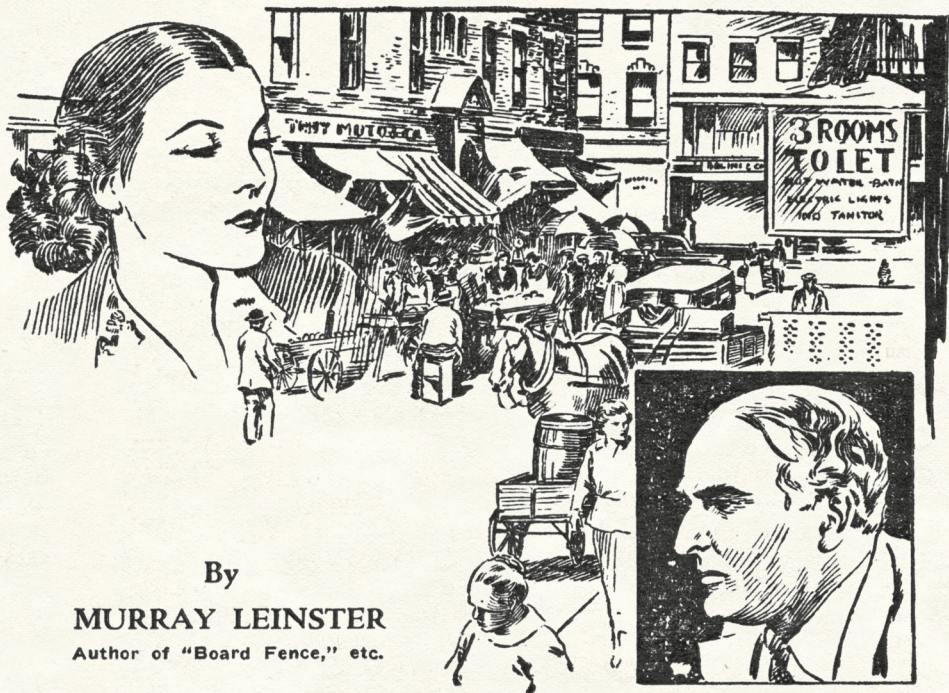


## WARNING TO CRANKS

If you want to stay cranky, look out for Star Single-edge Blades! They're so keen, they're so gentle with a tender skin that if you're not careful, you'll be smiling all over. Famous since 1880! Star Blades cost little: 4 for 10¢. Star Blade Division, Brooklyn, N. Y.



**STAR SINGLE-EDGE BLADES 4 FOR 10¢**  
FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS



By  
**MURRAY LEINSTER**  
 Author of "Board Fence," etc.

# The King of Halstead Street

Tony Brecchia ruled there, and loved his *paisanos*; but in that dark hour he was ready to give up his kingdom—for a princess must be defended even to the death against care and sorrow

## I

THERE is a princess in this story. A very beautiful princess, who lived on the second floor of a practically enchanted castle on Halstead Street. And a princess must be defended to the death against care and sorrow, especially by her father. But sometimes it is not easy, especially on Halstead Street. You know what that is like. It is narrow, and has pushcarts and fire-escapes and a perpetual din in which traffic is only one element. The princess lived there because her father was Tony Brecchia, who was the king.

He was the king of Halstead Street. He'd been a gambler once, but he was something much more admirable now. He was an honest man, and he wasn't proud, and he lived where he did because he liked to have his *paisanos* around him. They liked him too. As king of Halstead Street Tony Brecchia had plenty of loyal subjects who were loyal for reasons quite consistent with their self-respect. That meant a lot. And when he'd made money he bought a tenement house and carved out an apartment which was quite regal and filled with beautiful objects to make a background for Antonina. She was the princess, and he wanted her to have absolutely everything she could desire.

He wanted other things, too. He wanted to pay young Pete Standish a debt he owed to Pete's father. He'd spent a lot of money getting Pete out of trouble, but the debt wasn't paid yet. And he was grimly resolved to pay another debt of another sort

entirely, which was only lately incurred. Somebody had robbed him of things that didn't belong to him; that he'd been keeping for somebody else. He wanted to pay off whoever had done that. But mostly, he wanted Antonina to have everything she could desire.

And yet, on a certain rainy night when she did desire something very much indeed and was almost afraid to tell him about it, he went down to the corner to make a business deal. Somebody wanted to go into business for himself with a shoe-shine parlor. Tony Brecchia very gravely lent him the money, at a strictly legal rate of interest and with no security to speak of. Then he started back home.

There was a drizzling rain falling. The fire-escapes glistened with the wet, and the street-lamps shone through tiny haloes. The asphalt glittered erratically. Above, there was a faint golden glow from the sky itself, which came from very many street-lamps and neon signs elsewhere.

Tony Brecchia saw two figures moving in the rain. He reached the door of his own building, and one of the figures called to him. He halted. As the figures came closer, he saw that one of them was Detective-sergeant James. The other—the big man—was Ex-Alderman Germanos, and Tony Brecchia did not like Germanos.

"Hello." He nodded cordially to the detective. "What' you doin' out in the rain?"

"We were on the way to see you," said the detective, almost apologetically. "You know the Alderman, here?"

"Yeah," said Tony without cordiality. "Come upstairs."

HE OPENED the door and waved them in. When the apartment door closed behind them, the inside looked like a king's palace—which it was—because Tony had good taste, and he'd used it in making a background for Antonina. Some things he'd bought probably for his own satisfaction, at that. People used to travel half across the continent to go down to Halstead Street and see the most beautiful Venetian glass in America.

"Cigars?" asked Tony. "A drink? What's on your mind? Have you found out somethin' about that stuff that was pinched from me?"

The policeman looked embarrassed. Tony saw it and shrugged.

"I'll get those guys yet," he said evenly. "It ain't that I mind what it was worth, so much, but old lady Vecchia wanted her daughters to get that jewelry, an' she didn't trust the banks, an' she did trust me. So she left it with me to give to her daughters when they got married, an' some rat stole it the same day. I'll get it, Sammy, some day or other. An' I'll tell you."

Ex-Alderman Germanos looked covetously about him at the things in the room Tony used as an office. Detective-sergeant James said awkwardly:

"Uh—the Alderman, here, asked for some help. And me being off-duty, they asked me to go around with him and help him find out something."

Tony Brecchia looked politely interested. He was rather short and stocky, but his clothes fitted him and he looked at home in the rather magnificent background he'd made for the princess who was his daughter.

"Yeah?" said Tony Brecchia. "What's he want to find out?"

He gave the detective all his attention, entirely ignoring the bigger man. But Germanos thrust out his under lip and said:

"We want to find out plenty! Have you see Pete Standish lately?"

"No," said Tony Brecchia politely. "What about him?"

"You heard about the killin' this mornin', didn't you?"

"Of the late Bertrand Hamlin?" asked Tony still more politely. "Who used to be a police lieutenant, and got fired off the force for producin' a signed confession he swore a Polack had written with his own fair hand, only his lawyer proved the Polack couldn't read or write? Yeah. I heard about his killin'. He was a dirty punk, that Hamlin, an' whoever bumped him had a bright idea. I'm for him, though I don't know who he was."

The detective squirmed. Germanos scowled darkly.

"Maybe we can pep up your memory!"

"Cops," said Tony Brecchia gently, "can pull that stuff. You can't, Germanos. All I know about the killin', Sammy," he added to the detective, "is that they found him in the street, his own gat out an' two shots fired, but him considerably dead. Everybody swears they didn't hear a sound. My *paisanos*," he added again, "don't like to get mixed up in things like that."

"I know," said Detective-sergeant James awkwardly, "but—uh—the Alderman says he's gotta hunch that Pete Standish was in the party. We thought maybe you could find out somethin' for us. If there was somebody that saw it happen, they'd tell you if you asked."

"Sure!" said Tony readily. "Sure they would! But I won't ask. Whoever bumped Hamlin oughta get a medal. He was almost as big a rat as Germanos, here."

Germanos sputtered. But he looked remarkably ill at ease. Detective-sergeant James said distastefully:

"Listen, Tony! After all, you don't believe in killings, and you've got a lot of friends on the force—"

"When Germanos' friend Hamlin was on the cops," said Tony grimly, "there was a lot of jobs pulled off that shoulda been stopped. Some people said he was in on 'em, an' when things smelled too bad he just picked up guys to send up for 'em. Like the Dummy. He framed the Dummy, an' you know it. The Dummy's slap-happy right now because of the goin'-over Hamlin gave him!"

Detective-sergeant James squirmed.

"The Dummy pleaded guilty, Tony," he said placatingly, "and—uh—it isn't any use now being—uh—"

"Truthful?" asked Tony. "Like sayin' Germanos, here, is a rat? Maybe it ain't useful, Sammy, but it's a satisfaction."

Ex-Alderman Germanos said furiously:

"I got plenty of influence still, an' I'm goin' to use it on you, guy! When we get Pete Standish—"

"Take him out, Sammy," said the king of Halstead Street, "before I throw him out."

He looked like he meant it, and Germanos was suddenly uneasy. But he blustered as the detective went to the door, and sputtered indignantly as he passed out, first. The detective grinned apologetically at Tony. After all, a cop has to do a lot of things he doesn't like, for a lot of reasons besides duty. Germanos was out of office, and his reputation stank to high heaven, but there is such a thing as politics and a necessity to placate people who may yet return to power. The door closed behind the pair.

## II

TONY BRECCHIA picked up a telephone on his desk. He dialed a number and in a casual tone asked if Pete Standish had been seen around there lately. He had not. He tried a second place. A third. He hung up and frowned. This was one of the few occasions when Tony Brecchia, who was king of Halstead Street, did not think about Antonina. Tony was thinking about Pete Standish, who had inherited a debt Tony owed his father, but who had already been too many times in trouble. Antonina, though, was thinking about Tony for a change. Mostly, of late, she'd been thinking about Pete Standish.

She'd heard Tony come in and heard him talking to someone. She waited, her breath coming irregularly, for his companions to go out again. They did go out. She hesitated a last instant in the hallway, a startlingly dark and beautiful girl, with her eyes oddly somber. She took a deep breath and made the beginning of a gesture from her forehead to her breast—and there was a knock on the outside door.

Antonina pressed her lips tightly together and answered it. A battered, rather vacuous face presented itself above a suit which had been natty some years back. It was extraordinary, that suit, for the belatedness of its fashion and its preservation alike.

"Tell Tony the Dummy wants to talk t' him," said the battered and vacuous face, through immobile lips. Then it smiled. "Oh! H'llo, Antonina! You was a little kid when I seen you last."

Antonina searched the face and remembered vaguely. Also, she was desperately concerned about the thing for which she had to ask her father.

"You can go right in," she said primly.

She shut the door and watched the door of her father's office open. She even heard Tony Brecchia say: "Hello, Dummy! I was wonderin' when you'd come to see me," before the door closed behind this new visitor. Then Antonina went back to her half-frightened waiting. She did not consider that there was anything odd about an ex-alderman and a detective and a newly released convict—the Dummy's suit was proof of his status—coming to see her father. There wasn't. Stranger characters than these came to see the king of Halstead Street.

Everybody in the world came to see Tony sooner or later, it seemed. He would lend money to a gambler on no other security than that gambler's word, if he knew the gambler. And he had set up more than one boot-black parlor, and a reasonable number of pushcart peddlers, and a wholesale florist, and there were various other people who owed their station in life or their freedom from jail to timely sums obtained from Tony Brecchia.

There had even been a girl, once, very much frightened, whose trouble was that she had begun to tremble every time she passed a church. And she told Tony, hopelessly, and he grew very angry and stormed, but he managed to adjust that matter too, with the help of a priest and a sullen young man. So Antonina did not think the Dummy's call peculiar. He was just another person to see her father.

**I**NSIDE her father's office, the Dummy sat down in a chair and smiled vaguely at Tony. "I was thinkin' of sendin' word around that I wanted to see you," said Tony. "When'd you get out, Dummy?"

"Las' week," said the Dummy. He spoke slowly, with an odd appearance of listening intently to his own words, as if at any moment he might astonish himself by some unexpected utterance. "They give me a new suit, but I wanted my own clo'es. I got 'em. They' right much outa style, though, Tony."

"Yeah," agreed Tony. "They are. I guess your friends've got to stake you to a new outfit. How's the head, Dummy? Clearin' up?"

The Dummy shook his head discouragely.

"Only sometimes. Bein' slap-happy ain't no joke, Tony. Sometimes I'm pretty near all right. Then I get all dumbed up again."

"They treat you all right in the pen?" asked Tony.

"Yeah," said the Dummy without interest. "Sure!"

Tony Brecchia opened a drawer of his desk. He fumbled out bills and passed them over. The Dummy took them docilely.

"Your old friend Hamlin got his last night," observed Tony.

The Dummy smiled. His battered, empty features looked pleased. His eyes lighted up.

"Yeah. I was goin' to tell you about that. I did it, Tony. That's what I really come to see you about. Y'see, I got to figurin' they might start to huntin' around an—an'—"

Vagueness flickered across his face. He stopped, and searched urgently within his own brain. He shook his head discouragely.

"It's gone, Tony, what I was goin' to tell you."

Tony Brecchia stared at him. He said softly: "*Madonna mio!* You bumped Hamlin las' night?"

"Yeah," said the Dummy relievedly. "That's it. My head was workin' good las' night, an' I trailed him an' called him. He was talkin' to another fella, but he saw me an' jerked out his rod. An' we shot it out. He didn't even touch me, Tony, an' I got him good, an' he knew I was the

one that done it. Yeah. My head was workin' good las' night."

He smiled almost happily. Tony Brecchia drummed on his desk.

"*Madonna mio!*" he repeated anxiously. "You got to scram, Dummy! There's already been somebody askin' what I knew about that. I'm goin' to double that stake, an' you get outa town. . . ."

"Yeah," said the Dummy with docility. "I'd oughta do that. I know. The fella that was with Hamlin told me to get to hell away from there. 'Friend o' yours, too. Here's my gat, Tony. Will you get rid of it for me? That's what I was figurin' on. They might start checkin' on guns. If I need it, I can ask you for it."

Tony Brecchia looked distastefully at the squat and ugly weapon the Dummy put in his hand. Then he laughed shortly.

"Swell!" he said sardonically. "I bet Germanos would give plenty to know I got the gun that bumped Hamlin! I just called him a rat an' some other things. Wouldn't he love to nail me with your gun, Dummy?" Then he said suddenly. "Say! Have you heard anything about Pete Standish bein' in trouble? Germanos—"

The Dummy beamed.

"He was with Hamlin when I bumped him," he said readily. "He was the one that told me to get to hell away from there. He's a pretty good fella, Tony."

Tony Brecchia stared. The Dummy added casually:

"Y'know it was Hamlin's workin' on me that made me slap-happy, don't you, Tony? Hamlin did it. That first time him an' his gang worked on me. Before I went up to the big house. He framed me twice, Tony, an' I'm slap-happy from the beatin' I got before I caved in that first time. I won't never be much good because o' that. I hadda right to bump him, Tony."

"Yeah," said Tony. He drummed on the table. "Hell! Sure you did. But Germanos is lookin' for Pete Standish. He's got some kinda idea he knows. An' Pete's in a jam, helpin' you, tellin' you to get away an' all. Listen here, Dummy! You take this

besides what I already gave you, an' you get clear outa town. Don't wait a minute, an' when you get out, stay out! Understand?"

The Dummy rose. He nodded vigorously and tucked the money away.

"Sure. I get you, Tony." He paused. "There's somethin' else I was figurin' on attendin' to, but it's slipped outa my mind. I'm all dumbbed up today." He said doubtfully: "Maybe I'll think of it later. But I'll go on outa town."

TONY BRECCHIA tried to smile at him as he went awkwardly to the door. But when the door closed, and the Dummy was in the act of fumbling his way down the hall, Tony Brecchia said, "*Madonna mio!*" very softly to himself. Then he picked up the revolver the Dummy had left on his desk. He looked at it with increasing distaste. He dropped it in the top drawer and began to use the telephone, trying urgently to reach Pete Standish. At just that instant the Dummy, out in the hall, smiled with battered lips at Antonina, waiting with a swiftly-beating heart for a chance to talk to her father.

"Gee, Antonina," said the Dummy, benignly marveling, "you was a little kid last time I seen you."

He opened the outer door of the apartment and went clumsily out. And Antonina made a gesture from her forehead to her breast, and from her left shoulder to her right, and then went into her father's office.

She stood timidly inside the door until Tony put down the phone. He couldn't locate Pete Standish. And he had been scowling and he was very much worried, but at sight of Antonina his expression changed. Antonina was a very pretty girl. Tony owned the most beautiful Venetian glass in America, and there were other treasures in his flat on Halstead Street, but Antonina was quite the most beautiful thing that belonged to him. He looked at her, and pride and satisfaction glowed suddenly on his face.

"*Se—se benedic', Padre,*" said Antonina, breathlessly.

Tony cocked his head on one side.

"Yeah?" he said, though the thought of Pete Standish nagged at him. He grinned at her. "When you say '*se benedic*' to me, 'Tonina, I know you want somethin'. What's botherin' you?"

Antonina sat down and spread her skirts carefully. Tony nodded his head, as if amusedly recognizing the prelude to some request of more than ordinary magnitude. But his eyes dwelt on her with a vast paternal pride.

"You oughta be the worst-spoiled kid in the world," he informed her, "with a damn-fool pop like you've got. What do you want, 'Tonina, an' how much does it cost?"

"You—can't buy it," said Antonina, catching her breath. "You'll have to give it to me, *Padre*."

Tony waited, his eyes glinting amusedly. Antonina twisted her hands together. She stammered. Then, quite suddenly, she spoke with absolute steadiness:

"I want to marry Pete Standish, *Padre*. He—asked me to."

There was silence, except for the street-noises of Halstead Street outside and the slow dripping sound of the rain. The color drained away from Tony Brecchia's face. He swallowed.

"You wanta marry Pete Standish?" he said with an extraordinary difficulty of speech. "*Madonna mio!*"

He swallowed again. He was very pale indeed.

"I didn't want to want to," said Antonina unhappily. "I knew how you'd feel. He has been in lots of trouble. And he—wanted me to run away and get married without telling you, because he thought—" She stopped. "But I know you, *Padre*. So I'm here and telling you about it."

TONY BRECCHIA swallowed for the third time. He fumbled in his pocket. He found a cigarette and lighted it.

"Yeah," he said presently, his throat dry. "You know me. You know I wouldn't pull the stern parent stuff. Y'know I can't."

Antonina went quickly to Mm. They were extraordinarily alike, though Tony Brecchia was short and stocky and no one had ever called him handsome, while Antonina was the most beautiful thing that belonged to him. She put her arm about his shoulder.

"I'm sorry, *Padre*," she said shakily. "Awfully sorry. But I—can't help it. I do want to marry him."

"Yeah." Tony Brecchia nodded, very white. "But you know what he is. A cheap skate of a gambler. He's been in trouble more'n once. I've been hopin' for somethin' better—"

"You lend him money," said Antonina humbly. "You know you do."

"Yeah. I got a reason," said Tony. He breathed harshly; heavily. "When you was born I had just twenty bucks. I was pretty desperate. I gave somebody half of it for the loan of a gun. I was goin' in a crap game with the other ten. If I cleaned up, I'd let it lay. If I didn't, I was goin' to stick up the crowd. I was that desperate. An' Pete Standish's pop lent me money. A grand. It kep' me straight."

Antonina patted her father's shoulder.

"You got here all right," said Tony, "but she—passed out. Your ma. An' I was pretty near crazy. I paid all the bills. Yeah. There was some left. Then I got in a game. I didn't care whether I won or not. So I cleaned up. Then Pete Standish's pop come to me an' says, 'I want two grand, Tony.' I gave it to him, an' he says, 'The other grand ain't interest. I'm goin' to keep it for the kid. She'll need it presently.'"

Tony Brecchia's hands worked.

"That got to me. I begun thinkin' about you. I quit gamblin'. I been thinkin' about you ever since."

"I know," said Antonina. She said earnestly, "I did try not to—want to marry Pete, *Padre*. Honestly."

"I believe it," said Tony. "But now y'see why I lend money to him. Why I get him outa jams. On account of his pop. If he was to get in a jam an' felt desperate—"

"You've loaned money to a lot of people that way, *Padre*."

"I made a lotta money," said Tony. "I got to pass my luck along, or it'll run out." He swallowed convulsively. "But you wantin' to marry Pete Standish is somethin' else. He's just a cheap gambler, 'Tonina. He—he—did he give you a ring yet?"

Antonina flushed warmly.

"I told him I wouldn't wear it until you—"

"Let's see it," said Tony Brecchia.

She hesitantly tugged at a little gold chain about her neck. The ring appeared. It flashed like fire. The stone was large and the setting antique. Tony Brecchia went paler still, staring at it. His hands quivered.

"*Madonna mio!*" He licked his lips and started to speak, but did not. Then he said in a queer voice: "I'm your damn-fool pop, an' I know you. You knew I wouldn't want you to marry him. You wouldn't come to me till you were so sure that—that you'd do it anyways, no matter what I said. Ain't that so?"

Antonina swallowed, in her turn.

"I want to marry him, *Padre*. You don't know how much!"

"Yeah," said Tony Brecchia. He moistened his lips again. "I do know how much. I know a lotta things. When're you plannin' to get married?"

"S-soon," said Antonina faintly.

"Not t'day?"

"N-no. Of course not."

Tony Brecchia drummed on his desk. He was white even to the lips.

"He knew y'were goin' to talk to me today," he observed evenly. "He's got it fixed so you could let him know right away what I said. Ain't he? Were y'goin' out to meet him, or were y'goin' to telephone?"

"I—was going to phone him," said Antonina faintly.

"Gimme the number," said Tony without expression. "I wanta call him up myself."

Antonina stammered out the arbitrary, meaningless symbols which enable lives to

be connected together by threads of wire and speech. Tony wrote them down. Then Antonina said unsteadily:

"What—what are you going to say to him?"

Tony Brecchia tried hard to smile.

"What'd I say, 'Tonina, excep' that I'm your damn-fool pop? Run on, now, an' let me straighten out my head."

Antonina bent down and pressed her cheek against his. He did not stir. A princess must me defended—even to the death—against care and sorrow. Especially by her father. She put out her hand for the ring, smiling with wet eyes.

"I wanta keep that ring a while," said Tony. "No, I ain't goin' to give it back to him. I know when I'm licked. I just wanta keep it a while."

Antonina went slowly to the door. She turned there and smiled at him, though the tears still stood in her eyes. Then the door closed behind her. And Tony Brecchia put his head in his hands.

"*Madonna mio!*" he whispered. "*Madonna mio!*"

### III

THEN he straightened up and pulled the telephone to him. But before he could dial, the instrument rang sharply. He picked it up.

"Yeah. . . . What?" He straightened in his seat. His eyes grew hard. "Yeah! An' I want to talk to you too! . . . Uh-huh! Y'know they' lookin' for you, don't you? . . . All right. Come on. I'll meet y'down at the street door."

He slammed the phone back. He stood up irresolutely. He paced back and forth across the room. Then he went quickly out of the apartment and down the steps to the street door of the building. He stood there, smoking grimly, just inside the doorway.

A truck drove by, a mist of splashings scattering from its wheels. There were innumerable small noises all about. The distant rumble of an elevated train. Music somewhere. A radio grumbling sport news

in the adenoidal growl of a cheap set. Small, almost furtive noises in the building in which Tony Brecchia lived.

He was thinking desperately and exclusively about Antonina, as he peered out into the misty street. Antonina wanted to marry Pete Standish. She would marry him anyhow, knowing he was a cheap gambler and knowing he'd been in trouble more than once, though she didn't know the cops were hunting for him. And he was the king of Halstead Street, and she was his daughter, and a princess must always be guarded even to the death against all care and sorrow. Especially by her father. But Tony's face was drawn and without hope while the rain drizzled down in the street outside, and somewhere a trolley-car clanged and bumped, and from everywhere all around came the night noises of the city.

Then Pete Standish came quickly, moving close to the houses with his coat-collar turned up against the rain.

"Hello," said Tony harshly. "You musta been right close by. You missed a cop an' Germanos, lookin' for you."

Pete Standish crowded into the vestibule, out of the lighted but still-dark street. Tony Brecchia looked up almost grimly into his face. It wasn't a bad face. In a good light it would have been seen to be too pale, to be sure. Not enough sunlight ever shone on it. And it was lean, as if Pete missed too much sleep. But it wasn't a bad face.

"I've got you outa plenty of jams," said Tony Brecchia harshly, "because of what your pop did for me once. But this time—"

"Listen!" said Pete Standish hurriedly. "We haven't got time for all that, Mr. Brecchia. This is important! Did—did Antonina say anything to you yet?"

"About what?" demanded Tony formidably.

"About me asking her to marry me," said Pete. There was an odd bitterness in his tone.

Tony Brecchia opened his mouth, and closed it. Then he said:

"Yeah, she told me. What about it?"

"You don't like the idea," said Pete hurriedly. "I know! I'm pretty much of a punk. I figured I'd straighten out for Antonina. I would've, Mr. Brecchia! But it's all off now. It's got to be! And—somehow or other you've got to fix it with her."

Tony Brecchia stiffened suddenly, as if he were surprised.

"Yeah?" he said. "What's turned you decent?"

"I'm in a jam," said Pete Standish. "A hell of a jam! You know about that Hamlin killing. I—I was talking to Hamlin when the guy that killed him turned up. I saw the killing. And I'm not going to tell what I saw. See? I'm not going to tell it!"

TONY BRECCHIA stirred, there in the almost-dark doorway of the practically enchanted castle in which Antonina lived.

"I'm listenin'," he said in an emotionless voice. "Go on!"

"The guy that did it," said Pete Standish fiercely, "he had a girl. He was going to get married. Like me and Antonina. And Germanos wanted that girl. He and Hamlin were partners, and Hamlin was still on the force. So Hamlin did Germanos a favor. He framed this guy. And—well—there's more of it, but while this guy was in the pen Germanos got the girl. Understand?"

Again Tony Brecchia stirred abruptly there in the darkness.

"I'm still listenin'. That ain't half the jam you're in!"

"If somebody framed me to put me outa the way while a pal of his did to Antonina what Germanos did to that other girl. . . . See? I'd kill that guy! So would you!"

Tony Brecchia made a curious noise. His face was inscrutable.

"So what?"

"So it's all off with Antonina," said Pete Standish. "Germanos knows I was talking to Hamlin about the time he got

bumped. I'd called up Hamlin to raise hell with him. He went broke in a poker game with me, and he put up some jewelry—"

Tony Brecchia said woodenly:

"That's where you got the ring you gave Antonina?"

"Yes. You saw it, then." Pete Standish's voice sounded like his throat hurt him. "That it. Listen, Mr. Brecchia! I'm crazy about Antonina! I'd—I'd do anything in the world for her. But—but if somebody framed me and treated her like—"

Tony Brecchia said evenly: "That ring was part of old lady Vecchia's jewelry. She left it with me to give to her daughters when they got married, an' somebody stole it from me the day I got it."

Pete Standish's breath whistled into his lungs. Then he said fiercely: "It was? An' that—" He stopped short. But he ground his teeth. "I got three or four more pieces. I figured luck was breaking for me in that poker game. Hamlin wanted to buy it back, and he stalled, and I figured I needed cash, because of Antonina and me." He half laughed and half sobbed. "Swell, isn't it? I was raising hell with him and saying either he'd give me cash or I'd sell the stuff, when the guy that shot him turned up."

He fumbled in his pockets. He thrust small, glittering objects into Tony's fingers.

"Here's the rest of what I won from him. I—"

"It's a swell story," said Tony Brecchia tonelessly.

"You don't believe it? To hell with you, then," said Pete Stanish bitterly. "I'm finished, anyway. I haven't got an alibi for when Hamlin was shot. They could pin the whole thing on me unless I split, and I won't, and even if I did they could send me up for accessory for not telling right away. I've got to beat it, and—and I love Antonina too much to ask her to go with me."

"I'm expected to believe that?" asked Tony sardonically.

"No!" raged Pete Standish. He found breathing difficult. "I came here to tell you I've got to beat it, and to get you to try to keep Antonina from feeling too bad! But you'll tell her the ring was stolen from you, and—" He gulped. "All right! Go ahead! It'll cure her of caring about me, anyway! But if you'll only try to make it easy for her!" Then he said desperately, "Try not to let her grieve about it, Mr. Brecchia! I'm crazy about her."

"Who bumped Hamlin?" asked Tony sardonically, "if you didn't?"

Pete Standish beat his clenched fists together.

"I'm not splitting!" he cried furiously. "I've lost Antonina, anyhow! I'll go the whole hog—"

Tony Brecchia put out his hand and touched Pete Standish's shoulder.

"The Dummy told me all about it," he observed quietly. "Okay. I needed to know somethin' about you. Now I know it. But somebody's got to take a rap."

#### IV

A YELLOW taxicab came slowly down the street, with many brightly colored lights aglow. It came to a stop before the very door of the practically enchanted castle in which the king of Halstead Street lived. Pete Standish stiffened. Tony looked at it sharply. He gripped Pete Standish in an iron grip.

"That's Germanos," he said harshly. "You get upstairs in my house. Find Antonina. Go sit in the kitchen with her an' talk, an' don't say a word of all this. Hear me?"

"But—"

"Move!" said the king of Halstead Street, savagely. "I got no time to fool now. He's payin' the driver. Move!"

Footsteps rustled up the stairs. A door creaked in the darkness. Tony Brecchia opened the street door and stepped out. He almost bumped into the bulky, gross figure of Germanos on the sidewalk.

"Oh!" he said shortly. "You again, huh? Lookin' for me? If so, why?"

Germanos gulped. Then he wheezed. Then he said imploringly; "Listen, Tony! I—I got to talk to you!"

The king of Halstead Street stared at him coldly, there in the drizzling rain.

"You changed your tune considerable since I saw you a little while back. What's come over you?"

"James," said Germanos bitterly. "He ditched me! I knew he was off-duty, but he said he hada go on duty, an' he left me! Left me!" Rage consumed him, with an alloy of fear. "An' I don't know what I got to find out! You can tell me!"

Tony Breccia looked the gross figure up and down. The taxi-driver let in the clutch and drove away.

"I got some business to attend to," said Tony coldly. "I can let you have five minutes. That's all."

He led the way back into the building. In the vestibule he bumped heavily against Germanos, as if he had tripped. He said: "Excuse me," in an icy voice, and led the way up the stairs. He opened the door of his apartment and left it open as he again led the way into the room he used as an office.

"I'll make a phone call first," he said formidably.

He dialed, while Ex-alderman Germanos sank nervously into a chair. Germanos looked as if he were scared all the way through.

"Luigi?" said Tony into the telephone. "Yeah? . . . Who's in the place tonight? . . ." He listened. "Good! I want you to ask some of 'em to come around here right away. . . . Yeah. Mr. Bianca, an' Umberto, an' Pietro, an' old Mr. Caffarele. . . . Yeah. . . . Ask 'em as a favor to come up to my place right off. . . . Thanks."

He hung up. His manner was very grim. He was the king of Halstead Street, and he had just given orders to some of his most loyal subjects. He began to write on a scratch-pad on his desk.

"Spill it," he said, his eyes on his writing.

"It's that Hamlin killin'," said Ger-

manos abjectly. "Listen, Tony! Pete Standish called up Hamlin last night. Said he hada see him. Hamlin went to meet him, an' got bumped. Pete Standish did it."

"Go on," said Tony, his pen moving over the paper. "I'm listenin'."

"I gotto find out what's back of him killin' Hamlin!" said Germanos in a sudden desperation. "He didn't have nothin' against Hamlin. We were pretty close, Hamlin an' me. I'd know. An' Pete Standish didn't have no reason to bump Hamlin."

Tony Breccia blotted what he had written.

"He should've been bumped a long while ago," he observed. "You too, Germanos. You two rats've done a lotta damage."

Germanos quivered.

"Maybe," he said desperately, "but Tony, what I got to find out is, who got Hamlin killed? If they just had it in for him, it's all right. Pete Standish'll burn an' that's that. But if the guy that had Hamlin' bumped is goin' to get me bumped too, I—I gotta do somethin' about it! I got a chance to get back in politics in a big way, but if that guy's layin' for me too, I—I gotta do somethin'! Listen, Tony! I'll make a bargain. Somebody stole old lady Vecchia's jewelry from you. You tell me what I want know, an' I'll get it for you inside of two hours. How's that?"

Tony Breccia smiled without warmth.

"You know where old lady Vecchia's jewelry is, huh?" he said softly. "An' you know that Pete Standish called Hamlin out last night, an' he got killed. I'll tell you somethin' I know, Germanos. You're quite a lady's man, ain't you? That's your trouble, or part of it. How many girls have you had, Germanos? That'd have been all right if you'd left 'em alone? I'll tell you that, too. You had one too many, an' Hamlin helped you. That's what you wanted to know, Germanos, an' now you knew it. But I'll give you even better pay than tellin' you what you want to know. Here!"

He reached in the top drawer of his desk. He pulled out a squat and glittering revolver and laid it in front of Germanos.

"Here's extra pay," he said. "You're goin' to need that before you get home, Germanos, or mighty soon after, anyhow!"

There were tramping footsteps on the stairs outside the apartment. They crowded to the door. They came in. A voice called Tony's name.

"In here!" said Tony. He smiled again at Germanos. "Better hold that gun in your hand, rat."

The big man grabbed the gun with shaking fingers, his eyes, dread-filled, turning to the door.

**B**UT there came into the room only Mr. Bianca, who was very neatly dressed and was a prominent banker in the area containing Halstead Street, and Mr. Umberto Piacienza, who was equally prominent in the handling of paper stock, and Pietro Buonfuoco, who had nine daughters, and old Mr. Caffarele, who possessed two sons-in-law. They did not look alarming. Rather, seeing the gun in the big man's hand, they looked alarmed.

"Evenin'," said the king of Halstead Street, grimly. "You' just in time for the party."

He glanced shrewdly at his loyal subjects. They were men of unquestionable respectability. No lawyer, however smart, could make a jury believe that mild Mr. Bianca was a crook, or old Mr. Caffarele a scoundrel. Any juryman would believe what they deposed upon a witness stand.

"This fella," said Tony Brecchia evenly, "has got old lady Vecchia's jewelry that was pinched from me, an' that gun in his hand is the one that killed his pal Hamlin. He's been tryin' to make a deal with me, but I don't deal with his kind. Excep' like this!"

He stood up and suddenly flung his fist savagely into the face of Ex-alderman Germanos. The big man squealed. Terror beset him. Tony Brecchia hit him

again; a savage, chopping blow that was designed to hurt. And Germanos had a gun in his hand. He squealed once more. The gun came up.

"Get back!" he panted. "I—I—get back!"

Tony Brecchia smiled at him.

"I'm wonderin' if you' got backbone to shoot me," he said softly. "Here's somethin' to help."

He struck again. And again. And again. His four loyal subjects gazed in bewildered awe. Germanos reeled and crashed here and there. He tried to cover, and he did not dare to drop the gun, and he did not dare to use it because there were witnesses who would see him use it, and he was bewildered and battered and utterly, utterly terrified. Because he could not understand.

In the end Tony drew back savagely. He wiped off his knuckles as Germanos gazed incredulously about the room, inclined to slaver a little because his previous terror had been multiplied by Tony.

"After all, you ain't got the backbone," said Tony softly. "I was givin' you a chance to kill me, because somethin' has turned up that means you' goin' to get bumped. The chair would do all right, but you didn't want it that way. Okay. Have it the way you want it. You asked if you' goin' to be bumped. I'm answerin' you. You are. An' you'll never exac'ly know why."

He went to his desk and pulled out the next to the top drawer. With a wheezing cry, Germanos fled.

Tony Brecchia's loyal subjects blinked uneasily at one another. Tony closed the drawer again. His face was very bitter indeed.

"I figured he'd shoot me. I wanted you gentlemen to see him do it. It woulda shut him up for good. But he didn't shoot me. I'm sorry y'had your trouble for nothin'."

Mild Mr. Bianca made a brief and very diplomatic speech which said nothing whatever. He went out. With him went Mr. Piacienza and Pietro Buonfuoco and old Mr. Caffarele. The king of Halstead

Street was left alone. He stood still for a moment, abstractedly wiping the blood off his knuckles. Then he squared his shoulders and went out into the kitchen of his apartment, where he had told Pete Standish to wait with Antonina.

HE WAS gone for a long time. A very long time. He came back walking very quietly, with a smile on his face that grew fixed as he realized he was no longer observed, and then vanished abruptly. He opened the second drawer of his desk again. He took out a revolver. He inspected it critically and decided that it was not in perfect shape for an emergency. He found a tiny can of oil and oiled it, standing. He frowned absorbedly at his task.

A knock on the outer door. It opened and somebody came lumbering in. Tony nodded to the Dummy and went on with his task.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Tony," said the Dummy humbly, "but I—uh—remembered what it was I had to tend to. Will you let me have my gun back, Tony? I—uh—got to tend to something.

"I got rid of your gun, Dummy," said Tony Brecchia. "They check on 'em, these days, an' they could prove it killed Hamlin. So I got rid of it. An' I'm goin' to need this one myself."

The Dummy frowned perplexedly.

"That's too bad. I need it." He sighed heavily. "Y'see, Tony, I just remembered about Kitty. You remember her, Tony? The girl I was goin' to get married to?"

"I remember," said Tony. "But she's dead, Dummy. She died a long while back."

"Yeah," said the Dummy slowly. "Somebody told me. Y'know, Germanos wanted her, so he got Hamlin to frame me. He got me slap-happy, beatin' me up so I'd take the rap. An' Germanos—he got Kitty. An' she died, after. So I just remembered what I got to attend to, Tony. An' I need a gun."

Tony Brecchia regarded him somberly. He put down the little oil-can with which he had just oiled a revolver.

"Listen, Dummy," he said gently. "You butt outa this for a while. 'Tonina wants to marry Pete Standish, an' Germanos can get Pete in a pretty bad jam. So he's got to be shut up, an' 'Tonina's my daughter an' I owe Pete Standish somethin' for his pop. So shuttin' Germanos up is my job. You lay off."

The Dummy said painfully: "If you got business with Germanos I'll lay off a while, Tony. You' always been a good friend of mine. But I got a right to bump him, ain't I?"

"Yeah." Tony Brecchia said with a trace of bitterness. "Who ain't?"

The phone rang sharply. Stridently. Tony Brecchia automatically lifted it. He spoke into it.

"Yeah. . . . I'm here, Sammy. Why? . . . Huh?" Then Tony was silent for a considerable time while brittle scratching noises came out of the telephone. Once he licked his lips. Then he said slowly: "Yeah. . . . I get it. . . . Say, Sammy, why don't you check that gun against the bullets in Hamlin? I wouldn't put it past him. . . . Uh-huh. . . . Thanks."

He put back the phone.

"Germanos is dead, Dummy. Bumped himself off in a cab goin' home."

"Dead?" said the Dummy, perplexed. "That's funny."

Tony Brecchia drummed on his desk, abstractedly.

"Maybe not. I'd told him I was goin' to get him, an' he knew if I didn't, somebody would for me. So he couldn't wait."

He drew a sudden deep breath. He reached over and tore up a note he'd written on a scratch-pad while listening to Germanos' bargaining. Neither Pete nor Antonina would need to know what he'd written, now. He put away the revolver. Definitely.

"It was as good a way out as any," he said with a forced casualness. "I thought I'd have to fix him. 'Tonina's gettin' married, an' he coulda put Pete Standish in a jam. He hada be fixed so 'Tonina wouldn't need to worry. But bumpin' him-

self with the gun that killed Hamlin, that fixes things for Pete. They won't have any reason even to ask him questions." Then he added suddenly. "Say, some of old lady Vecchia's jewelry was in his pocket. I guess they'll find the rest either in his stuff or in Hamlin's."

The Dummy groped among the words he'd listened to.

"Antonina's gettin' married?"

"She's goin' to marry Pete Standish," said Tony Brecchia. "He's pretty crazy about her an' I think he's goin' to straighten out. He'd better. An' she—" He winced a little and said soberly, "She's plenty happy, marryin' Pete."

The Dummy stared. Then he smiled vaguely.

"Gee!" he marveled benignly. "Antonina was just a little kid when I seen her last! An' her gettin' married!"

Tony Brecchia swallowed a lump in his throat. He was the king of Halstead Street, and he had made all this about him to be a background for Antonina on the second floor of a practically enchanted castle. And it wasn't enough. She was going to get married, now and Tony Brecchia's whole mind was—for the time being—filled with the anticipation of loneliness.

But already he was making plans to hide that from her, and for a new and still more enchanted castle she would want to live in, and for this and that and the other thing she had never needed before and would need now. Because, being the daughter of the king of Halstead Street, Antonina was a princess. And a princess must be defended even to the death against care and sorrow.

Especially by her father.

## Eyes of Stone

**E**YE specialists have recently reported one of the most singular cases in medical history. They have found a man whose eyes are slowly turning to stone. According to Doctor Russell E. Simpson, there have been only seventy-one known cases of ossification, and "Mr. X." is the first person to be afflicted in the eyes.

Ossification, Doctor Simpson says, is the result of over-activity of the parathyroid gland. "Mr. X." has been suffering from this unique disease since 1933, and complete ossification probably will not come for fifteen years. Doctors agree that the only cure would be removal of the parathyroid gland.

—Charles Dorman

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Agrippa faced those two  
false necromancers

# Isle of the Dead

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Bluebeard's Closet," "Rebell's Luck," etc.

The world knew the beautiful Tiphaine; but only Agrippa, the master wizard, could read in her suffering something far more tangible than Satan's curse. A Halfway House story

WHEN I took Soulie to see Halfway House, I was far from anticipating any queer happenings. Soulie, sallow and cavernous of face with a glossy black mustache, is a Frenchman who knows everything—absolutely. His learning is prodigious. He had heard of Halfway House and its founder, Sir Roger Balke, and was anxious to see the place.

"It's fascinating, to me," I said as we were in the taxicab. "Partly because it's a collection of macabre, occult and ethnologic objects from all over the world, everything from paintings to witch-doctors'

drums; but more, because of its mystery. Sir Roger Balke himself is rather mysterious. A wealthy old man, by report, he's never been interviewed, little or nothing is known about him. He established Halfway House as a free museum, and that's all there is to it."

"But the mystery?" queried Soulie with interest.

"Everything there has an air of mystery," I told him. "Sir Roger does queer things with light; some of his lighting schemes are devilish tricky. I've even heard that he's made black light practical—not the absence of light that we call darkness, but a positive black light. That's rumor, of course. However, there are very odd angles to Halfway House. No guards, for example, yet nothing is stolen."

"Sir Roger has a reputation abroad," Soulie confided. "He's said to have spent

years in Tibet and Egypt, and to have a passion for exposing false magicians, occult fakes and all that sort of thing. Do you know him?"

I shook my head. "I think I've seen him, but I'm not sure. No, I never met him."

We alighted at the old brownstone front, the door guard took our things and we went straight into the collections, which occupied the entire ground floor. No watchman were about. A few dreamy-eyed addicts of the occult wandered the rooms, and a group of art students were studying the section containing carved figures from the Congo and Dahomey. No one else.

"Didn't you once publish a monograph on the Swastika?" I said to Soulie. "Well, I know something that'll interest you. Nothing in this place, you know, is what you'd expect it to be. Sir Roger has some odd theories, I believe, which he puts into effect. I want you to look at a painting which is very singular. I fancy it may be a hypnotic picture. It's unsigned. Looks as though it might have been done by Roerich or some such master of light and color. Really, it's superb."

I took him into the side room, the little room with its black drapes. A single picture was on the wall, and before the painting was a single, narrow showcase. Now, at first glance you would pass the picture by; anyone would. It showed only a man standing on a rocky height and looking across an expanse of sea—or snow. So curious was the play of colors that you could get either effect; at least, I could. The thing was gorgeous. And the more you looked at it, the more things you began to see in it, or to imagine.

Soulie was at once interested in the narrow showcase. Here were swastikas of various sorts, in stone or metal; a number of bronzes, all representing the vajra, or five darts bound together, a Hindu and Tibetan emblem; and many amulets of smaller size bearing these symbols.

"Why were these grouped together?" murmured Soulie abstractedly. He glanced up at the painting, and his eyes narrowed.

"That's a bit of the Breton coast, I could take my oath. What has it to do with these things? What has the vajra of Tibet to do with the swastika, which is the most universal symbol known?"

"Just what does the swastika mean?" I asked.

He shrugged. "No one knows. It's probably the earliest of amulets, one of the first symbols used by man. Its primordial meaning has been lost in the antiquity of the human race. A multitude of theories exist, certainly, but no knowledge."

There was a distinct flash of light from the painting.

"Hello!" I exclaimed, as the light leaped up and then became normal again. "A fuse must have blown somewhere."

The illumination of the picture was on the principle used by the ultra-modern interior decorators—a shaft of light exactly fitted to the picture, projected from a tiny aperture across the room. This light was not white, however. It was peculiar blend of hues that brought out marvelously the colors of the painting; the man's figure stood out as though in three dimensions.

"All very odd," said Soulie, returning to the bronze objects in the case. "A Tibetan vajra; another from Bali, degenerated into a bell, used in the worship of Siva. Strange how this emblem of Indra's thunderbolts was altered across the centuries! Symbols surviving from the earliest human race are today mere amulets or charms. The vajra, the thunderbolt of Indra, had some earlier Aryan form we don't know."

I pointed to the amulets, asking the difference between the swastika, with its arms or crambons to the right, and the sauvastika, with its arms to the left. He replied with his Gallic shrug.

"Who knows? There are many explanations. I recall one very fanciful account related by Cornelius Agrippa; it concerned some strange and terrible experience in his travels."

"Who was he?" I demanded. "A Roman?"

"Heavens, no!" Soulie broke into a

laugh. "A German. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa was the most learned man of his day; his book on occult philosophy is still a standard work on magic. He was renowned as a master of the occult; he was a soldier, had been secretary to the Emperor Maximilian, and somewhere around 1530 received an appointment at the court of Charles V. It was while he traveled to Brussels that the experience happened, in regard to the swastika. It shows how even the most sincere student can be deceived by false reasoning—"

I chanced to look up, and felt a startled chill. Whether it were the queer lighting effect, some mental quirk, or a trick of my imagination, that figure in the painting certainly had moved.

THE movement continued. The figure turned slightly, as though it were studying Soulie scornfully; it had a gaunt, impish face with a wide and humorous mouth, shaggy brows overhanging the eyes, and a short two-pronged beard. The vibrant hues softened now into a sunset radiance.

And then the man stepped out. With long, swift strides he approached a horse tethered among the rocks, mounted it, and urged the steed into a road that skirted the rocky shore. He was a sturdy, powerful man, clad in battered half-armor.

The tide was out. Sighting a peasant digging in the sand for cockles, the rider drew rein and hailed him, in a lusty voice.

"Comrade! Where is the dwelling of the Lady Tiphaine?"

The fisher crossed himself, and pointed into the golden sunset. "Straight ahead, at the island. God help you if you're an honest man!"

The rider laughed. "Honest, and a knight to boot, by grace of the Emperor! And a good Christian, which is more than I hear of you Breton folk. I thank you."

He rode on. Ahead rose gaunt rock crags, and beyond them, in the blinding glare of sunset, lay an island. More accurately, it had been an island until the tide drew back; now there was a narrow

strip of glistening sand and black rock leading to it.

This was the Ile de Sein—the Isle of the Dead.

That thin strip of land was a good four miles in length, and a dangerous passage. Treacherous currents swept on either hand, lifting water over the bar at times, and further on the strip was hemmed in by menacing reefs. Except at the very ebb tide, this narrow way would be flooded. The rider put spurs to his horse. "Ultima Thule!" he muttered, looking at the island ahead.

He reached it at length, and barely in time; already, behind him, half the strip of sand had disappeared. He rode on in the fading daylight toward the jutting rocks, where a huge old structure appeared. There was no sign of life anywhere until, as the horse halted before the massive entrance of this lonely mansion, the iron-bound door swung open. Two savage-looking men came out—and then a woman. The rider stared at her incredulously.

"Who are you?" she asked in Breton. Then, when he did not answer, she repeated the question in Latin, and he understood.

"I am Heinrich Cornelius, a *ritter*, a knight, a soldier," he replied in Latin. "I am traveling to Brussels, and on the way I have been visiting places of which I have heard in far lands. If the Lady Tiphaine will give me shelter, I seek guesting for the night."

"I am Tiphaine," she answered. "You are welcome; but I think you have come at a poor time."

Cornelius dismounted, took a few effects from his saddle-bags, and let one of the men lead his horse away. But he could not take his eyes from this woman before him; he stood there, gazing at her, until at last she said:

"Why do you look at me so hard?"

"I have seen all the women of the world," he answered, his voice quiet and grave, "but never one like you. The stories are true."

She flushed a little, then smiled. "You have heard that in this house you sup with the devil, and sleep under the hand of Satan?"

"Yes. I no longer believe it."

She smiled again, and extended her hand. He bowed over it, kissed her fingers, and took from beneath his breastplate a little amulet of rich green jade.

"I come bearing gifts, Dame Tiphaine," he said. "I think this will please you."

She studied the jade, on which was graven a swastika; then, after a moment, she looked up at him with troubled, anxious eyes, as if she were trying to read his face. At length she turned.

"Come. I knew by the stars a guest would be here; I have a place ready for you."

The Lady Tiphaine was not old, nor young. Now, as she walked, she carried her head proudly, and the gleaming white robe clung to her exquisitely-formed body. Her oval, beautiful face was turned away from Cornelius; but, following her, he was staring at her hair. It was pure white.

Tiphaine of Brittany was known above all other women, and the mark of her fame was that silken white hair. Satan, it was said, had turned her hair white because she was an enchantress and dwelled where the ancient wizard Merlin was born. There was truth in this; for the Ile de Sein had been Merlin's birth-place.

**T**IPHAINÉ paused before a door, upon which in the last dying daylight could be seen strange letters deeply burned into the wood.

"Did you come here by chance?" she said.

Cornelius shook his head, smiling. "No. I have heard of you; I wanted to meet you."

"I mean, today. You know what day this is?"

"Why, no! Sometime in June—to tell the truth, I've lost count of the days. I've been studying manuscripts at the castle of the Sieur de Rohan—"

"This is the fifteenth." Her wide eyes searched him. "It means nothing to you?"

"Nothing," he said, smiling again. She shrugged and pointed to the door.

"Nor this?"

He looked at the letters burned in the wood, and his shaggy brows lifted.

"Ah! At the age of twenty-four I was teaching Hebrew in the University of Dole. Yes; this is the magical name Abrakala—but whoever burned it here did not have much learning. It should be written with square letters in the Ashuri style, each letter separate."

Tiphaine caught her breath. "Then you know something of the mysteries!"

"I know all of the mysteries." Cornelius regarded her gravely. In the growing obscurity her face had become very pale. "All of them. And for the first time in my life I'm tempted to make use of the Seal of Merlin; from my first sight of you, Lady Tiphaine, the world changed and the stars fell."

She drew back a little, her eyes dilating. "The Seal of Merlin!" she echoed. "Then you do know what night this is—the end of the twenty-nine year period when the moon is eclipsed—"

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "So that's it!"

"Who are you?" she demanded fiercely. She caught his arm and shook it. "Who are you, to know such things? Do you know that tonight I work the spell of the living death? Is that why you came? Confess it!"

He froze at those words; he knew what they meant—he, Cornelius Agrippa, at whose command was the knowledge of all sorcery. And this was the darkest and most terrible of all necromantic horrors. He knew in that instant that this woman, so beautiful and grave, was wavering at the brink of hell.

"Why?" He uttered his thought aloud, his voice suddenly challenging. "What do you seek, Tiphaine? Answer me!"

She drew back, as if she felt the power in him.

"Not now, you who call yourself Cornelius. You are no ordinary man;

I knew it when I first met your eyes. Rest, bathe, put on the clothes ready for you. I saw in the stars that some great person was coming. Meet me with truth, and I'll repay it. In half an hour."

She was gone, like a white wraith.

In a tumult of emotion, Agrippa pushed open the door. A lamp was flickering; here was wine, and water for bathing. Upon the bed lay outspread a white mantle with a golden sickle embroidered on the breast. There were sandals, too.

With a sigh of relaxation, Agrippa put aside his corselet and leather jerkin and his sword, his other things. He bathed, combed his hair and short pronged beard, tossed aside the white mantle, and stretched out on the bed. The only thing he had not removed was the tiny Crucifix hanging about his neck. A soldier, as his naked body showed by its wound-scars; a man in his early forties; and now a man deeply perplexed and disturbed.

Something wrong here, he knew. Agrippa had no love for the black art; he had mastered it in all its phases in order the better to combat its folly and empty superstition. He knew it was a stepping stone to higher knowledge, a step on which too many stumbled and clung in blind fascination. For Agrippa had attained, as once in an age a man may attain, this same higher knowledge.

"Perhaps I did come here by destiny," he muttered, "to save this woman. From what? Herself, perhaps. Ah, what eyes! Our gaze crossed, and we knew one another on the instant."

A deep-toned bell sounded softly through the ancient house, above the throbbing hammer of the surf outside. With a sigh, Agrippa rose. He dressed with great care, turning the white robe inside out before he donned it, placing certain objects in the wallet at his girdle. At last he picked up a slender poniard and bound it by a leather armlet to his left forearm. This night, he thought, there might be need for more than wizardry to protect himself—and Tiphaine.

HE FOUND her waiting in a room lit by fitful lamps, where a table was spread. It was a small chamber, low-ceiled with black ancient beams. Now and again the house shook slightly, as though shuddering at the angry touch of the sea upon the black rocks. Tiphaine was regarding him gravely, with tacit questioning. He bowed.

"I gave you only half my name. The remainder is Agrippa. I am a knight of—"

"Agrippa! The great Cornelius Agrippa!" She breathed softly, and gave him her hand. Her eyes were brilliant now. "Master, I am honored. This house is yours."

Agrippa held her hand for a long moment, then brought it to his lips. The blood was hot in him now; somehow it seemed as though he and this woman had known one another always, had waited for one another. She led him to the table, and he sat opposite her.

"Why did you turn the robe inside out?" she demanded abruptly, as though startled.

He helped himself to fruit, bit into it lustily, and his laugh rang out.

"You'll see, later. Why don't you build a good road to your house?"

"Soon there'll be no road at all," she said. "All the land there is sinking. When I was a child, wagons could cross; when I'm an old woman, there'll be only the sea."

"You'll never be an old woman," he exclaimed, laughing. "Age cannot touch you."

"That's truer than you think," she said and her eyes darkened. Then the cloud was gone. "And you are Cornelius Agrippa, the master! No wonder you spoke as you did. Do you know that the Druids buried their dead on this island? That around us, sunken in the sea, is the ancient country—"

"I know all that," said Agrippa. "And I know hell is very close to you."

The sudden change from laughter to stern gravity frightened her. But before she could speak, he was laughing again,

describing incidents at the castle of Josse-lyn, where he had lately been staying. Then abruptly he began to relate tales of his soldiering; he talked swiftly and continually, as if she must not have the opportunity to speak. And Tiphaine listened, fascinated.

Suddenly Agrippa leaned forward, looking into her face, and gestured toward the window.

"Clear moonlight; no clouds. Are you set upon this night's work?"

"Beyond recall," she said, paling a little. "You asked me why—"

What he read in her eyes then made him lean forward, his face set.

"Put out your hands, palms up," he said. "Perhaps I can guess why; perhaps I already know why!"

"Impossible," she murmured, but she obeyed him. He sat staring at her hands; roughened as they were by the life here, they were lovely. He touched her fingertips, but his eyes were fastened upon her slim, strong wrists, upon the pulse that fluttered now and again. Among other things, this man of many trades had been physician to the Queen Regent of France.

He leaned back, and when she saw the sadness in his eyes she began to speak, rapidly.

"My life is loneliness, you see; I'm alone here, except for rough fisher folk. I've studied the mysteries, and in consequence I'm shunned. My hair is white; they say I'm marked by Satan. I'm a woman apart. I've sought solace in the stars, in magic, in the black arts—anything!" A passionate ring came into her voice. "Alone! Do you know what it means to be alone in the world of men?"

"All that," said Agrippa slowly, "is not the real reason why you plan such devilry for this night. You seek to know—how long."

"Yes." The fire died out of her eyes. "Ah, you are indeed a master of magic, to guess such a thing!"

"Magic be damned," said Agrippa. The fluttering pulse had told him the secret; she was destined for short life, this lovely

woman who had never known real living. If he could only listen to her heart, he would be sure. There might still be hope.

"That is not the real reason," he said with sudden sternness. "Someone else here. Who is it? Who's using you? Who is behind all this devilry?"

She drew herself up with quiet dignity. "Devilry? Don't be absurd. No one at all. I've asked Gilles de Raz and his brother Pol to conduct the work; they're here now, preparing for it."

"And who are they?" asked Agrippa, controlling himself.

"You must have passed the village of Raz coming here," she said. "Once their family were *seigneurs* in these parts; they're the last of the old race. They know all the art of the Druid priests, all the mysteries of the golden sickle—tell me, why is your robe inside out? No greater honor could be paid you than to offer you a priest's robe."

"I thank you; but I'm no priest of this magic cult," he rejoined. "I'll not wear it."

"Why not?" She spoke eagerly. "You are master of all wizardry. Will you not assist at this spell of the living death? Please! It's nearly time now."

He came to his feet, decision made. "Yes! On one condition." He took from his wallet a thin chain of gold, on which hung a flat bit of lapis. Like the jade he had given her, this was engraved with a symbol, but a different one. "Let me put this about your neck, let me see if your heart is attuned to the sacred vibrations of the Name. Then let me meet these brethren."

"Certainly," she said, and rose.

HE hung the chain about her neck. Then, his hand on her shoulder, he put his ear to her heart. Through the thin white robe he could feel the warmth of her flesh and hear the swift beat of her heart. But it was for something besides the rapid beat that he listened, and he heard what he had most dreaded to hear.

The deathly knowledge stilled his own

racing pulses. Tell her? No! She knew already that she had no great while to live. He straightened up.

"Is there a cure?" she asked softly. And, looking into her eyes, he lied.

"There's a cure." He leaned forward and kissed her on the lips. "Now for those two magicians, those brethren! Where are they?"

"Outside at the menhirs, the great stones of the Druids. One moment—"

She caught up a crystal flagon from the table, put it to her lips and drained it. At her grimace, Agrippa started. A frightful suspicion seized him. He took the flagon from her, smelled it, tasted the last remaining drops.

"What was in the cup? No, no it can't be—"

Surprised, she smiled a little. "A secret potion that Gilles de Raz gave me. I was to drink it just before going to the meeting. Why? Why do you look so strangely?"

Agrippa tasted the drink again. He felt a cold chill stealing through him, for he knew the taste of that witch-draught. Belladonna, daturine from thorn-apples, hemlock—the dread formula to produce delirium and death. Swift, horribly swift—and there was no antidote. He caught at the table-edge, controlled himself, and spoke with studied calm.

"Let me give you an additional potion," he said, reaching into his wallet. "It will make the effect certain. Quick! Water in the cup!"

She poured some. His fingers were shaking as he emptied a little vial into the cup. Unnoting his agitation, she smiled, lifted it, drank. A deep breath escaped him; there was but the one hope. He could not destroy all the effects of that witch-draught.

Tiphaine, very pale, lifted a hand to her brow. "Wait. I'll be back in a moment," she said, and hurried from the room.

Agrippa smiled grimly. That emetic, swift and powerful as the poison, would do the work; and presently she would

sleep. But why did they want to kill her in this fashion, with delirium and madness? Here on this lonely isle, a knife would be swifter.

"Ah!" He was at the window, looking out upon the moonlit rocks. His startled gaze caught moving shapes there, figures in savage Breton dress, flitting across the moonlight. He stared amazedly. A score; two score; full fifty or sixty of them in all. And he had thought this isle empty of people! They must live in houses huddled among the rocks, he realized, like wild beasts. Her people, no doubt. Then he turned, as she came back.

White and wan, she staggered to a seat and sank down. Her eyes lifted to him.

"Your potion—it was like fire! It made me deathly ill. Like fire, burning me."

Agrippa smiled calmly. "Good. That shows it was effective; if you were sick, so much the better." He eyed her keenly. He must hold her quiet for a space, interest her, take her mind from everything else. Soon enough, she would sleep. "You have the jade I gave you, Tiphaine? And the lapis? Put them on the table. Look at them. On one is the swastika, on the other the vajra of Tibet and India. What does the swastika represent?"

She looked dully at the blue stone and the green stone.

"You know very well. It's the emblem of light, of fire. We use it tonight."

"It's nothing of the sort," said Agrippa flatly. "Think of the earliest man in his cave, cowering as the thunder rolled and the lightning struck around him. What is that vajra emblem? Five darts bound together, the center one protruding. Strike it into the ground and you have five marks. Connect them, you have a cross; put a tag on each arm of the cross, you have a swastika. The vajra is nothing but a swastika developed from its primitive state, to represent the thunderbolts of Indra.

"And the swastika?" he went on, holding her attention. "To primitive peoples the letter Z represents the jagged light-

ning flash. Lay one Z across another, and you have the swastika full-formed. Not fire, not light—simply the thunderbolt! The very name has been preserved unchanged from the earliest ages in China; *lei wen*, the thunder-scroll!"

"But in magic," she said with an effort, "in spells and—"

"Bah!" he struck in. "The swastika amulet is merely a charm to protect one against lightning. Tricksters who pretend to magic take old symbols and invest them with impossible meanings, muttering spells and incantations. All that is rubbish!"

"You don't deny the powers of magic?" she gasped.

"No!" cried Agrippa. "The true magician must possess faith and hope. The secret power of God is in all things; to draw forth that power, a magician must evoke its own surge within himself. The divine spirit is in accord with the human spirit; if a man keep his spirit pure, he may work miracles. Trickery leads to hell. Come! You're feeling better."

"Yes, yes; we must go, there's not much time." She rose, still deathly pale.

He regarded her with strangely softened eyes. Pity for her, a passionate longing for her, swept across his heart. This woman was no fool to be duped; this woman, who had never tasted life, whose heart-murmurs told him death was not far distant. She might believe in their mummery, up to a certain point—but why would they seek to kill her thus horribly?

"There are people here on the island?" he asked.

"Yes. My people. Others have come from the mainland by boat; we have two harbors. There will be an assemblage to-night. The eclipse is not total, but nearly so—"

**S**UDDENLY he had the solution, a solution so simple that it staggered him. They passed out into the moonlight, and she pointed to the upthrust menhirs. Once there had been a circle of the lofty stones, she said, but most of them had vanished. On that very spot, the enchanter

Merlin had been born; and there among the stones was waiting her own tomb, hewn in the rock.

"Who inherits this place after you?" asked Agrippa.

"I've sold the reversion to Gilles de Raz. I have no heirs."

So his solution was correct. A furious rage gathered in him, as they approached those towering splinters of rock. He understood everything now; he scarcely noted that she had taken his arm, that her eyes were heavy, her footsteps uncertain.

The rocks upthrust by ancient hands were on the very edge of the water. Out there the moonlight glittered on faces. These people were there, silent, waiting, motionless as the stones themselves. Two white-robed figures came in sight. There was the mouth of an opening, a tomb; something was lying in it.

"Do these magicians of yours speak Latin?" demanded Agrippa.

"Of course," she said. "I've told them who you are. They welcome you."

Agrippa smiled grimly, as he led her in past the staring, silent faces to the high monoliths and the two waiting priests. They saluted him gravely. Both were bearded men. Gilles was powerful, short, wide of frame. His brother Pol was tall and scrawny.

"Honored master, we are overjoyed to have your assistance," said Gilles de Raz. "The time grows short, Lady Tiphaine! Give us the sacred twigs."

A low, hollowed seat in the rock showed itself, with a golden casket beside it. Tiphaine seated herself and sighed; Agrippa perceived that drowsiness was upon her. She opened the casket and took out a bundle of dry mistletoe twigs, handing them to Pol. He began to work swiftly with them. Gilles de Raz went to the open tomb and dragged out a litter. The torso of a man was revealed in the moonlight, a man stiff and cold in death.

"He was drowned two days ago," said Gilles. "Quickly, Pol! Another moment and the moon will be touched—"

Pol de Raz had made a swastika of the twigs, upon a wire frame. Agrippa glanced at Tiphaine; she was drooping in the stone seat. Fire blazed up; the twigs on the swastika began to sputter. Gilles, taking up an ash wand, stepped into the open.

The mocking, impish laughter of Agrippa rang upon the moonlight.

"So you transfer the light of the dying moon to the swastika!" he said. "You light the sacred twigs as the moon veils her face. And then what? Suppose you let me cast the spells here."

The two stared at him, startled. Outside, beyond the towering stones, the circle of faces looked on, silent, motionless. The voice of Tiphaine lifted, very sleepily.

"Let the master perform the rite. There is no other magician in all the world like Cornelius Agrippa. Help him, brethren, help him—"

The disc of the moon was touched on one side. The solid rock underfoot shivered a little, as the incoming tide hammered the reefs. Gilles de Raz awakened from his stupefied astonishment.

"You cannot interfere here! You do not understand the rite."

"I understand it perfectly." Agrippa laughed again, but there was something terrible in his laughter. "The false magician who tries to work evil, to do trickery and murder, deserves death. Bring out your dead man! When the swastika flames, when the incantations are said, when the face of the moon is darkened, the dead man will speak—ha!"

At the open mockery, Gilles de Raz turned in suppressed fury.

"What does this mean, blasphemer?" he cried. "Do you know that in this very spot the proper spells can draw down thunderbolts from heaven?"

"Very likely." Agrippa glanced at the high monoliths. "Given enough iron in those stones, and thunderclouds overhead, I'd perform the miracle without any spells."

He glanced again at Tiphaine. She had drooped over and was lying in the seat, asleep, breathing gently. The shadow was

creeping across the moon. From the watching circle of faces came a stirring, a sound of uneasy voices.

"You profane the mysteries!" burst forth Gilles de Raz. "Withdraw, blasphemer—false magician that you are, begone!"

"Bah!" Agrippa laughed harshly as he looked at the man. "So you could not wait a little longer for her to die, eh? You try to murder her before these people, so you'll be held guiltless—"

"You are mad, insane!" cried Gilles, but fear lay in his voice. The rock under them quivered as the flooding tide surged.

"Too bad those people around can't understand my words," said Agrippa. "Confess, tricksters! Your accursed witch-poison would drive her into raving madness and death. No blame to you, eh? No one would know you had given her the poison to take beforehand. And you'd remain masters of the Isle of the Dead, feared and revered throughout Brittany, glorious necromancers with wealth and power—"

The acid of his words sank in beyond all bearing. Gilles de Raz flung down his wand, and in the waning light something glittered in his hand. Agrippa's laugh barked forth in bitter mockery.

"What? You'd spoil your own false spells and sorcery with weapons, with unclean metal?"

A SLIGHT scrape sounded behind him. Pol de Raz was there, unobserved, in the very act of thrusting home a blade. It drove in, straight at the back of Agrippa; he staggered to the fierce lunge. A wild cry went up from the watching folk. Gilles de Raz leaped in, his own blade driving forward.

Unharméd, Agrippa tried to regain balance. He was unprepared for the ferocity of this attack. Unaccustomed to the sandals, he slipped on the rock surface and went down. Pol de Raz hurled himself headlong at the falling figure.

Desperate, Agrippa clutched him; they went rolling, twisting, writhing in an ac-

cess of furious energy. A wild, wailing cry came from the watching people. They went fluttering away, drifting across the moonlight, scattering.

The two struggling figures hung together above the shore rocks, above the black water flooding in. A flash, another flash, a gasping cry that was choked midway. Then Agrippa came clear and rose, his white robe torn clean away by the clenched hand of his opponent.

Gilles de Raz rushed at him with a wild cry, that rose into a scream of rage and dismay. A mail-shirt cloaked Agrippa from throat to thighs; in his hand was the long stiletto. He flung himself at Gilles; the two men grappled, slipped sideways, lurched down across the dead figure of Pol.

But, in their furious clutch, they were blind to everything. A gasping breath, a shrill cry, and they were gone together into the black waters that bordered the rocks.

The thin remaining crescent of the moon struck a dim glow upon the scene. All the people around had fled; the white figure of Tiphaine was motionless in the hollowed seat. In the half-light, a hand emerged from the water and gripped at the rocks. Another hand rose and joined it.

Agrippa, his dagger gone, drew himself up and stood erect, gasping, breathing heavily. With an effort, he got rid of the clinging mail-shirt and stood naked, shivering. He glanced around and then turned to the corpse, which was wrapped from neck to heels in another white mantle. This he removed, gently.

"Pardon, friend," he murmured. "I think you don't need this, and I do."

He wrapped himself in it, grateful for the warmth.

The moon crept out and farther out from the dark shadow. Her disc grew clear and round; her silver light flooded down in glorious radiance upon the sea and the high rocks and the island.

Tiphaine opened her eyes. Agrippa sat holding her in his arms; his strength was comforting to her bewildered senses. She

glanced around. The litter and corpse were gone. The two priests were gone. The circle of people, the burning swastika were gone. The solid rock shuddered a little to the vibration of the thundering surges, whose crests were white in the moonglow.

"Awake?" said Agrippa, and took her hand in his. "Quiet, quiet! The potion I gave you will have no lasting effect; your mind is clearing already."

"But where are they?" she exclaimed. "The work—"

Agrippa laughed softly; the impish curve of his wide lips more pronounced.

"The great work is finished, the others have departed. Their spell failed, and mine prevailed. Ask me whatever you want to know."

She remained silent for a little, then sighed, and her fingers clenched on his.

"I think you know my desire already, master," she said. "I told you all my empty loneliness—"

"You told me all, and I answer all," said Agrippa. "I've wandered half across the world to find you; you've waited half your life for me to come."

"My life? It's a wasted life."

"I shall make it bloom, my dear," he said gently. She shivered.

"But the other thing? The thing you understood? Is there any cure?"

"When the gods offered Achilles long life and humble destiny, or a few days of glory, he took the latter," said Agrippa slowly. "So would any great spirit choose. So would I choose, or you."

"I don't understand." She stirred a little, so that she could see his face. "I'm not afraid of the truth, master. Is there a cure?"

Now Agrippa lied again; his hand was upon her heart, and he could feel, could sense, the fluttering murmur there.

"A cure? Yes," he said gravely. "The cure for all your lonely life, my dear, for all your dreams and mine, for all the empty hours and the vain longings and the hunger of the heart. There is a cure, and I bring it, if you will have it."

"I understand." Her fingers pressed his

again. "Yet I could not bear to be alone here again, and you gone."

"I remain, my dear, as long as you wish; here is my destiny also."

"Then you remain for ever," she exclaimed joyously. "You'll never leave, never!"

Smiling, he bowed his head, and their lips met and held. From the moonlit reefs around came the murmurous voices of the waves; from the silvern water a stiff dead hand uprolled to clench at the air, and was gone again.

Never, she had said. Yet it was only a week later that Cornelius Agrippa, in his rusted half-armor, headed his horse along the narrow sands at low tide, coming to the high rocks of the shore beyond. It had been sunset when he came. Now it was sunrise, the level rays gilding the sea and the flat island with its jutting stones. Dismounting, Agrippa climbed among the rocks and stood gazing out at that island.

"The Isle of the Dead!" he muttered.

New lines were graven in his face, lines of grief, of empty despair. The tomb under those old Druidic rocks was closed now; it was no longer empty. As he stood staring out, the face of Tiphaine rose before him in the sunlight as it had been in life, lovely and glorious. Then it faded.

**E**VERYTHING faded. There was only the painting on the black-draped wail, the painting of a figure standing

there looking out upon the water. I drew a deep breath and turned. Soulie, his black mustache quivering, caught my arm in a vise-like grip.

"Did you see—did you see what I saw—and heard?" he muttered.

"Apparently I did," was my reply. "I told you the picture had a hypnotic effect."

"Hypnotic fiddlesticks!" he snapped. "It's more than that. Look, look there in the case."

I followed his pointing finger. There lay a disk of rare gem jade, graven deeply with the swastika, and beside it was a fragment of lapis, on which was carved the vajra.

"It's all very easily explained," I ventured. He checked me abruptly, at the same time pulling me towards the door.

"I don't want it explained. Let's get out of here—Halfway House, eh? Halfway to what, to where?"

Outside, on the sidewalk, as we stood waiting for a taxicab, Soulie gave me a queer look.

"The devil of it is," he said slowly, "that Agrippa wrote this exact story, but the manuscript was never found: I discovered it last year, lost in the library of the University of Dublin. I left it there, carefully hidden. No one else has found or read it. Certainly you haven't. Neither has this Sir Roger Balke. So, how do you explain that, eh?"

I didn't.



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The priests darted at Kenton like four lank wolves

# The Ship of Ishtar

By A. MERRITT

**Begin now the story of John Kenton's voyage into a world beyond time—where the beautiful Sharane warred against the Lord of Death**

**J**OHN KENTON stands before the great stone block from Babylon, puzzling over its cuneiform inscriptions. These, he knows, concern the Goddess Ishtar, yet he cannot read their message. At length, angry and at the same time aware of a strangely compelling fragrance from the stone, he strikes it a blow—and his fantastic adventure begins.

Before him now there stands a ship—a jeweled craft scarcely three feet long, with a carven, crystal hull. This miniature ship is manned by toy figures, and on it sit scores of tiny white doves. While he studies it, John Kenton hears the whisper of a magic sea; his room swirls with a silver mist, and now as his eyes close the sea sounds are loud.

**This story began in last week's Argosy**

Kenton awakes to voyage on the Ship of Ishtar. He sees the beautiful woman called Sharane and Klaneth, who bears the concentrate of evil in his face. And later he learns these people's story from Sharane herself. Thousands of years before in Babylon Zarpanit, priestess of Ishtar, and Alusar, servant of Nergal, had fallen in love. But Ishtar was the Mother of the Heavens and Nergal Lord of Death; so their two servants were condemned to dwell aboard the Ship, separated by a boundary, never to meet in love. At last they conquered that command for one instant—and died.

**S**O NOW Sharane, who was Zarpanit's companion, remains on the Ship of Ishtar to wage unceasing war on Klaneth, minion of the evil Nergal. On the white deck are Sharane's maidens, on the black the dark-robed priests of Klaneth; and none can cross the boundary in that endless conflict between Good and Evil.

John Kenton is fascinated by the lovely Sharane. But because he tells her the truth—that Babylon is dust now—she believes him an emissary of Nergal and has him cast onto the black deck. In the struggle Kenton is wounded . . . and back in his own room he is bleeding still. But his prayer is to be returned to the Ship, to the beautiful Sharane. . . .

## CHAPTER VIII

### PRAYERS OF MIST

**S**WIFT was his answer. He heard far off a bellowing roar as of countless combers battering a rock-ribbed coast. Louder it grew. Then with a thunder of vast waters the outward wall of his room dissolved.

Where wall had been was the crest of one tremendous wave. And that wave curled down over Kenton, rolled him far under it, shot him at last gasping for breath up and up through it.

He was afloat upon the turquoise sea.

He thrust himself high above the waters. The ship was close! Close? Its scimitared bow was striking down by his head; was flying past him. A golden chain hung from it, skittering over the crests. Kenton clutched at it—missed it.

Back he fell. Swift raced the shining side of the ship past him. Again he threw himself high. There was another chain.

He gripped it. The sea tore at his thighs, his legs, his feet. Grimly he held fast. Hand over hand, cautiously, he drew himself up; scaled the side of the ship. Now he was just below the rail. Slowly he raised his head to peer over.

Long arms swept down upon him; long hands gripped his shoulders, lifted him, hurled him down upon the deck, pinned him there. He felt a thong drawn round his ankles, his arms pinioned to his sides. He looked into the face of the frog-mouthed beater of the serpent drum.

And over one of the drummer's enormous shoulders stared the white face of Klaneth. He heard his voice:

"Carry him in, Gigi."

And the answer of the drummer, indifferent: "As you will it, Klaneth."

3 A—5

He felt himself lifted by the drummer as easily as though he had been a babe; and cradled in huge hands he was carried through the black cabin's door.

The drummer set Kenton on his feet, regarding him with curious, half-amused eyes. Agate eyes of the red bearded warrior and pale eyes of Klaneth dwelt upon him as curiously. But in the last was no amusement.

As curiously Kenton took stock of the three. First the black priest—massive, elephant hewed; flesh fallow and dead as though the blood flowed through veins too deeply imbedded to reveal the creep of its slow tide; the vulture nose and merciless lips; the phosphorescence glimmering behind the wan pupils; the face of Nero remodeled from cold clay by the hands of some sluggish god. Heavy; plastic with evil—but this was a cold evil.

Then Gigi—the drummer. His froglike face with the pointed, jet hung ears; his stunted and bowed legs; his giant's body above the hips; the great shoulders whence swung the sinewy and apish arms whose strength Kenton had felt; the slit of a mouth in whose corners a malicious humor dwelt. Something of old earth gods about him; a touch of Pan; more than a touch of Satyr.

Red beard—a Persian out of that time when Persia's hordes were to the world what later the Roman legions were to be. Or so Kenton judged him by his tunic of linked light mail, the silken sheathed legs, the high buskins and the curved daggers and the scimitar in his jeweled belt. And human as Kenton himself. About him was none of the charnel flavor of Klaneth nor the goat-rankness of Gigi. The full red lips beneath the carefully trimmed beard were sensual, life loving; the body burly and muscular; the face whiter than Kenton's own. But it was sullen and stamped deep with a half-resigned, half-desperate boredom that even his lively and frank curiosity about Kenton lightened but little.

They said nothing; only stood there measuring him; and each, so it seemed to Kenton, with different purpose. He turned his eyes from them; looked about him.

IN FRONT of him was a wide slab of bloodstone. Six priests knelt upon it, worshipping something that stood within a niche just above the slab. What it was he could not tell—except that it breathed out evil. A little larger than a man, the thing within the niche was black and formless as though made of curdling shadows. It quivered, pulsated, as though the shadows that were its substance thickened constantly about it, passed within it, were replaced swiftly by others.

Dark was that cabin, the walls somber as dull black marble. Other shadows clung to those dark walls and clustered in the corners; subtle, sinister shadows that seemed only to await command to deepen into substance.

Beyond, as in the cabin of Sharane, was another chamber and crowding at the door between, glaring out at him, were a dozen or more of the black-robed, white-faced priests.

"Go to your places." Klaneth turned to them, breaking the silence. They slipped away. The black priest closed the door upon them. He touched the nearest of the kneeling priests with his foot.

"Our Lord Nergal has had enough of worship," he said. "See—he has swallowed your prayers!"

Kenton looked at the thing within the niche. It was no longer misty, shadowed. It stood out, clear-cut. Its body was that of a man and its face was that same awesome visage of evil into which he had seen the black priest's turn on that first adventure of his upon the ship.

The face of Nergal—Lord of the Dead!

What had been the curdled, quivering shades enveloping the statue? What was it Klaneth had said—that Nergal had *swallowed* their prayers? Had the shadows really been that—the prayers of the priests? Black prayers streaming out of the minds of the priests like mists, shrouding the image, passing into it?

He felt the eyes of Klaneth searching him, covertly. A trick! A trick to frighten him. He met the black priest's gaze squarely; smiled.

The Persian laughed.

"Hai, Klaneth," he said. "There was a bolt that fell far short. Mayhap the stranger has seen such things before. Mayhap he is a sorcerer himself and can do better things. Change your play, Klaneth, change your play."

He yawned and seated himself upon a low settle. The black priest's face grew grimmer.

"Best be silent, Zubran," he said. "Else it may be that our Lord Nergal will change his play for you in a way to banish forever your disbelief."

"Disbelief?" echoed the Persian. "Oh, Nergal is real enough. It is not disbelief that irks me. It is the eternal monotony. Can you do nothing new, Klaneth? Can Nergal do nothing new? Change his play for me, eh? By Ahriman, that is just what I wish he would do, if he can!"

He yawned again, ostentatiously. The black priest growled; turned, to the six worshipers.

"Go," he ordered, "and send Zachel to me."

THEY fled through the outer door. The black priest dropped upon another settle, studying Kenton somberly; the drummer squatter, also watching him; the Persian muttered to himself, playing with his dagger hilts. The door opened again and into the cabin stepped a priest who held in one hand a long whip whose snaky lash, metal tipped, was curled many times around his forearm. He bowed low before Klaneth.

"The slaves sleep?" asked the black priest.

"They sleep, master," answered he called Zachel. And now Kenton recognized him. When he had lain on the deck close to the mast he had seen this man sitting on a high platform at the foot of that mast. Overseer of the galley slaves, the oarsmen, was Zachel, and that long lash measured to flick the furthestest of them if they lagged.

"Is this he whom you saw upon the deck some sleeps ago when our Lord Nergal poured into me?" asked Klaneth. "He who

lay there and, you say, vanished even as that cursed drab of Ishtar yonder bent over to touch him?"

"He is the same, master," answered the overseer, coming close to Kenton and scanning him. "He was not dressed the same as now, but he is the same."

"Where went he then?" asked Klaneth, more to himself than to the other. "To the drab's cabin? But if so, why did she drive him out, her cats clawing him? And whence came this garb he wears, and the sword she waved and bade him come re-take? I know that sword—"

"He went not into her cabin at that time, master," said Zachel. "I saw her seek for him. She went back to her place alone. He had vanished."

"And his driving froth," mused Klaneth, "that was two sleeps ago. And the ship has sailed far since then. We saw him struggling in the waves far behind us. Yet here he is upon the ship again—and with the wound those temple furies gave him still fresh, still bleeding as though it had been but a moment gone. And how passed he the barrier? Yea—how passed he the barrier?"

"Ah, at last you have stumbled on a real question, Klaneth," cried the Persian. "Let him but tell me that, let him but teach me that; and, by the Nine Hells, not long would I sit in this company."

Kenton saw the drummer make a swift and warning gesture to Zubran, saw the black priest's eyes narrow menacingly, his face grow grim.

"Ho! ho!" laughed Gigi. "Zubran but jests, Klaneth. Would he not find life there as tiresome as he pretends to find it with us? Is it not so, Zubran?"

Again he made the fleet, warning sign. And the Persian heeded it.

"Yes, I suppose that is so," he answered, grudgingly. "At any rate, am I not sworn to Nergal? Nevertheless," he muttered, "the gods gave women one art that has not grown tiresome since first they made the world."

"They lose that art in Nergal's abode," said the black priest, grimly. "There is no

loving there, Zubran. Best remember that and curb that tongue of yours lest you find yourself in a worse place than here—where at least you have your body."

"May I speak, master?" asked Zachel; and Kenton felt malignancy in the glance the overseer shot at him.

The black priest nodded.

"I think he passed the barrier because he knows nothing of our Lord," said Zachel. "Indeed—may be an enemy of our Lord. If not, why was he able to shake off the hands of your priests, vanish in the sea—and return?"

"Enemy of Nergal!" Klaneth started.

"But it does not follow that he is friend of Ishtar," put in the drummer, smoothly. "True if he were sworn to the Dark One he could not pass the barrier. But true it is also that were he sworn to Ishtar equally would that have been impossible."

"True!" Klaneth's face cleared. "And I know that sword. Nabu's own blade."

He was silent for a moment; thoughtful. When he spoke there was courtesy in the thick voice.

"Stranger," he said, "if we have used you roughly, forgive us. Visitors are rare upon this ship. You—let me say—startled us out of our manners. Zachel, loose his bonds."

The overseer bent and sullenly set Kenton free of his thongs.

"If, as I think, you came from Nabu," went on the black priest, "I tell you that I have no quarrel with the Wise One or his people. Nor is my Master, the Lord of Death, ever at odds with the Lord of Wisdom. How could he be when one carries the keys of knowledge of this life, and the other the key that unlocks the door of the ultimate knowledge? Nay, there is no quarrel there. Are you a favored one of Nabu? Did he set you on the ship? And why?"

**K**ENTON was silent, searching desperately for some way to answer the black priest. Temporize with him as he had with Sharane, he knew he could not. Nor, he knew, was it of any use to tell him the

truth as he had to her—and been driven out like a hunted rat for it. Here was danger; peril, greater than he had faced in the rosy cabin. Klaneth's voice cut in:

"But favored of Nabu as you may be, that could not save you from losing your sword nor from the javelin of the women. And if that is so—can it save you from my whips, my chains? And worse?"

And as Kenton stood, still silent, light flared in the dead pupils and the black priest leaped to his feet crying: "Answer me!"

"Answer the Lord Klaneth!" roared Gigi. "Has fear of him killed your tongue?"

Under the apparent anger of the drummer's voice Kenton sensed a warning; friendliness. And Gigi had not told of his second appearance on the ivory deck, his entering of Sharane's cabin. Why?

"If that favor could have saved me, at least it did not," he said.

The black priest dropped back upon the settle, chuckling.

"Nor I think could it save you if I decreed your death," he said.

"Death—if he decrees it," croaked Gigi.

"Whoever you are," went on the black priest, "whence you come, or how—one thing is sure. You have power to break a chain that irks me. Nay, Zachel, stay," he spoke to the overseer who had made a move to go. "Your counsel is also good. Stay!"

"There is a slave dead at the oars," said the overseer. "I would loose his chains and cast him over."

"Dead." There was new interest in Klaneth's voice. "Which was he? How died he?"

"Who knows?" Zachel shrugged his shoulders. "Of weariness, maybe. He was one of those who first set sail with us. He who sat beside the yellow haired slave from the North that we bought at Emakhtila."

"Well, he has served long," said the black priest. "Nergal hath him. Let his body bear his chains a little longer. Stay with me."

He spoke again to Kenton.

"Bearer of Nabu's sword," he said, "I offer you freedom. I offer you riches and power. I will give you honors and wealth in Emakhtila whence we shall sail as soon as you have done my bidding. There you shall have priesthood and a temple if you so desire. Gold and women and rank—if you will do what I desire. And if you will not—then torture such as few men have known. And long, oh, very long after that—death."

"What is your desire that will win me all this?"

The black priest arose and bent his head so that his eyes looked straight into Kenton's own.

"Slay Sharane!" he said.

## CHAPTER IX

### SLAVE OF THE SHIP

**S**LAY Sharane! And despite her wrath—her kisses still sweet on his lips! The thought shook him to the depths of his being. He steadied; cast about for something that would let him play for time.

"Little meat in that plan, Klaneth," the Persian spoke, mockingly. "Did you not see her girls beat him? As well send to conquer a lioness a man who has already been conquered by her cubs."

"Nay," said Klaneth, "I meant not for him to pass over the open deck where surely her watchers would see him. He can clamber round the ship's hull, from chain to chain, ledge to ledge. Or we can still the oars, drop the sail, becalm the ship. Then he can slip down into the water, swim silently to the bow. There is a window behind the cabin wherein she sleeps. Up to it and through it he can creep—"

"Best swear him to Nergal before he takes that road, master," Zachel interrupted. "Else we may never have him back again."

"Fool!" Gigi spoke. "If he makes his vows to Nergal perhaps he cannot go at all. For how know we that then the barrier will not be closed to him as it is to us who are sworn to the Dark One?"

"True," nodded the black priest. "We dare not risk that. Well spoken, Gigi."

In Kenton's mind a plan had begun to form.

"Why should she be slain?" he asked. "Let me take her for slave that I may repay her for her mockery and her blows. Give her to me, and you may keep all the riches and honors you have offered. So greatly do I hate her!"

"No!" The black priest leaned closer, searching more intently the eyes of Kenton. "She must be slain. While she lives the Goddess has a vial into which to pour herself. Sharane dead—Ishtar has none on this ship through whom she may make herself manifest. This, I, Klaneth, know. Sharane dead—Nergal rules. Through me! Nergal wins. Through me!"

In Kenton's mind the plan had formed. He would promise to do this—to slay Sharane. He would creep into her cabin, tell her of the plot. Some way, somehow, make her believe him. And then he would take the sword, creep back the way he had come and slay Klaneth. But, could he do this? A sudden doubt touched him as he looked at the bulk of the black priest, the three others. And then, there was the black-robed pack. Could he, alone, meet all these?

The doubt fled. Something whispered that neither Gigi nor the Persian would fight against him; that there was some secret understanding between those two, some deep hatred of the black priest. Else why the drummer's covert warning to Zubran? And why the peculiar protection for himself that he had sensed in Gigi during all this encounter? Why Gigi's silence to Klaneth on Kenton's second sailing on the ship? Was the beater of the serpent drum tired as Zubran of life on the black deck? Eager to see Klaneth overcome? Yet by vows the strength of which he could not understand made powerless to harm the black priest?

**T**OO late he saw by the black priest's face that something of all this had been revealed in his own—that Klaneth had caught his thought! Too late remem-

bered that the sharp, malignant eyes of the overseer had been watching him, losing no fleeting change of expression; interpreting.

"Look, master!" Zachel snarled. "Look! Can you not read his thought, even as I? See what it is he plans? You have held me here for counsel and have called my counsel good. Then let me speak what is in my mind. I thought that he had vanished from beside the mast, even as I told you. But did he? The gods come and go upon the ship as they will. But no man does. We thought we saw him struggling in the waves far behind the ship. But did we? By sorcery he may have made us see that which in reality was not. Upon the ship he must have lain all this while, hid in Sharane's cabin. Out of her cabin we saw him come—"

"But driven forth by her women, Zachel," broke in the drummer. "Cast out. Beaten. Remember that. There was no friendship there, Klaneth. They were at his throat like hounds tearing down a deer."

"A play!" cried Zachel. "A play to trick you, master. They could have killed him. Why did they not? Why his wounds are but pin-pricks. They drove him, yes. But over to us! Sharane knew he could cross the barrier, even as now do you. Would she have made gift to us of new strength unless she had a purpose? And what could that purpose have been, master? Only one. To place him here to slay you, even as you now plan to send him to slay her!"

"He is a strong man—and lets himself be beaten by girls! He had a sword, a sharp blade and a holy one—and he lets a woman take it!"

"Ho! Ho!" laughed Zachel. "Do you believe all this, master? Well, I do not!"

"By Nergal!" Klaneth swore, face livid, eyes aflame. "Now by Nergal—"

Suddenly he gripped Kenton by the shoulders, hurled him through the cabin door and out upon the deck. Swiftly he followed him; set heavy foot upon Kenton's breast.

"Sharane!" he howled. "Sharane!"

Kenton raised his head, dizzily; saw her standing beside the cabin door, arms around the slim waists of two of her damsels.

"Well toad?" she called.

"Nergal and Ishtar are busy elsewhere," he mocked. "Life on the ship grows dull. There is a slave under my feet. A lying slave. Do you know him, Sharane?"

He bent and lifted Kenton high, as a man a child. Her face, cold, contemptuous, did not change.

"He is nothing to me, worm," she answered. "I drove him forth. To you, where he belongs. Do as you will with your own. It is nothing to me."

Beneath her stillness the black priest must have seen something hidden to Kenton, for the dead eyes brightened, the lips curled with cruel delight.

"Nothing to you, eh?" roared Klaneth. "Yet it was by your will that he came to me. Well, he has a lying tongue, Sharane. By the old law of the slaves shall he be punished. I will pit four of my men against him. If he master them I shall keep him for awhile—to amuse us further. But if they master him, then shall his lying tongue be torn from him. And I will give it to you as a token of my love—O, Sacred Vessel of Ishtar!"

"Ho! Ho!" laughed the black priest as Sharane shrank, paling. "A test for your sorceries, Sharane. To make that tongue speak! Make it"—the thick voice purred—"make it whisper of love to you. Tell you how beautiful you are, Sharane. How wonderful—ah, sweet Sharane!"

"Ho! Ho!" laughed Klaneth; then as though he spat the words: "You temple slut!"

He thrust a light whip in Kenton's hands.

"Now fight, slave!" he snarled, "fight for your lying tongue!"

**F**OUR of the priests leaped forward, drawing from beneath their robes thongs tipped with metal. They circled,

and before Kenton could gather his strength, they were upon him. They darted about him like four lank wolves; slashing at him with their whips. Blows flailed upon his head, his naked shoulders. Awkwardly he tried to parry, to return them. The metal tips bit deep. From shoulders, chest, back, a slow rain of blood began to drip.

A thong caught him across the face, half blinding him.

Far away, he heard the golden voice of Sharane, shrill with scorn.

"Slave, can you not even fight!"

Cursing, he dropped his useless whip. Close before him was the grinning face of the priest who had struck him. Before his lash could be raised again Kenton's fist had smashed squarely on the mouth. He felt beneath his knuckles the bones of the nose crumble, the teeth shatter.

Instantly the other three were upon him; tearing at his throat, clawing him, striving to drag him down. He broke loose. The three held back for an instant; then rushed. There was one a little in front of the others. Kenton caught him by an arm, twisted that arm over his shoulder, set hip to prisoned flank, heaved and hurled the priest through air against the pair poised to strike. Out flung the body; fell short. The head crashed against the deck. There was a sharp snap, like a breaking faggot. For a moment the body stood shoulders touching deck, legs writhing as though in grotesque mid-somersault. Then crumpled and lay still.

"Well thrown!" he heard the Persian shout. "There is one who will never use lash again!"

Long fingers clutched his ankles; his feet flew from beneath him. As he fell he caught glimpse of a face staring up at him, a face that was but one red smear; the face of the first priest he had battered down and who, recovering, had crept along the deck and thrown him. Falling, Kenton swept out his arms. They clutched one of the two against whom he had hurled that priest who now lay dead, neck broken. They dragged him down.

He whom Kenton had caught writhed, twisted and clutched his throat. With the strangling grip there flashed into his mind a dreadful thing he had seen done in another unequal combat upon a battlefield in France. Up swept his right hand, the first two fingers extended. They found place in the eye sockets of the throttler; pressed there relentlessly. He heard a howl of agony; tears of blood spurted over his hands; the choking fingers dropped from his throat. Where eyes had been were now two raw red sockets with dreadful pendants hanging down beneath each.

KENTON leaped to his feet. He stamped upon the crimson face looking up at him. Stamped once, twice, thrice—and the grip about his ankles was gone.

He caught a glimpse of Sharane, white-faced, wide-eyed; realized that the laughter of the black priest was stilled.

At him came the fourth acolyte, a broad-leaved knife gleaming in his grip. Kenton bent his head, rushed to meet him. He caught the hand that held the blade; bent the arm back; heard the bone snap. The fourth priest shrieked and fell.

He saw Klaneth, mouth loose, staring at him.

Straight for the black priest's throat he leaped, right fist swinging upward to the jaw as he sprang. But the black priest thrust out his arms, caught him in mid-leap. Then lifted him high over his head; balanced him there to dash him down upon the deck. Kenton closed his eyes—this, then, was the end.

Then there was the voice of the Persian, urgent, agonized.

"Hai, Klaneth! Hai! Kill him not! It is long since I have seen such a fight! By Ishak of the Hollow Hell—kill him not, Klaneth! Save him to fight again!"

Then the drummer: "Nay, Klaneth! Nay!" He felt the talons of Gigi catch him; hold him tight in double grasp. "Nay, Klaneth! He fought fairly and well. He would be a rare one to have with us. Maybe he will change his mind, with discipline. Remember, Klaneth—he is the

only one of us who can pass the barrier."

The great bulk of the black priest trembled. Slowly his hands began to lower Kenton.

"Discipline? Ha!" It was the snarling voice of the overseer. "Give him to me, master, in the place of the slave who died at the oar. I will teach him discipline."

The black priest dropped Kenton on the deck; stood over him for a moment. Then he nodded, turned abruptly, and stalked into his cabin. Kenton, reaction seizing him, huddled; hands clasping knees.

"Unchain the dead slave and cast him over, Zachel," he heard Gigi say. "I will watch this man till you return."

Kenton heard the overseer patter away. The drummer bent over him.

"Well fought, wolf cub," he whispered. "Well fought! Now to your chains. Obey. Your chance shall come. Do as I say, wolf cub, and I will do what I may."

HE WALKED away. Kenton, wondering, raised his head. He saw the drummer stoop, lift the body of the priest with the broken neck and with one sweep of his long arm send it whirling over the ship's rail. Bending again, he sent after it the body of him upon whose face Kenton had stamped. He paused speculatively before the wailing blind man, stumbling and falling about the deck. Then, grinning cheerfully, he tossed it overboard.

"Three less to worry about hereafter," muttered Gigi.

A tremor shook Kenton; his teeth chattered; he sobbed. The drummer looked down on him with amused wonder.

"You fought well, wolf cub," he said. "Then why do you now quiver like a whipped hound whose half chewed bone has been cast away?"

He laid both hands on Kenton's bleeding shoulders. Under their touch he steadied. It was as though through Gigi's hands flowed some current of cold strength; as though he had tapped some still pool of indifference both to life and to death.

And never again, although then he did not know it, was Kenton to feel for either life or death that respect or fear which, in his own world, were their legitimate shadows. All that he then realized was that whatever weakness of spirit within him there had been—was gone. Gone, too, all remorse, all shrinking from his brutalities.

In its place welled reckless will to conquer this ship, to conquer Klaneth and his Dark God.

To conquer Sharane!

"Good!" said Gigi, and stood up. "Forget not. Now Zachel comes for you."

The overseer was beside him; touched his shoulder; pointed down a short flight of steps that led from the black deck to the galley-pit. Zachel behind him, he groped down those steps into the half darkness of the pit. He stumbled along a narrow passageway; was brought to halt at a great oar over whose shank bent from white, muscle-gnarled shoulders a head. Here a golden haired oarsman slept. Around his waist was a thick bronze ring. From this ring a strong chain swung, its end fastened to a staple sunk deep in the back of the bench on which he sat. His wrists were manacled. The oar on which his head rested was manacled, too. Between manacled wrists and manacled oar two other strong chains stretched.

There was an empty chained circlet at the sleeper's left side; on the oar at his left two empty manacles hung from chains.

Zachel pushed Kenton down on the bench beside the sleeping, golden haired oarsman; swiftly and deftly girdled his waist with the empty bronze circlet; snapped it close; locked it.

He thrust Kenton's unresisting hands through the manacles dangling from the oar; closed them on him; locked them.

The golden haired giant never moved; slept on upon his hands, head bent over the oar.

And suddenly Kenton felt warmth of eyes upon him; looked behind him; saw leaning over the rail the face of Sharane. There was pity in her face; wonder, too;

and dawning of something that set his heart to beating wildly.

"I'll discipline you, never fear!" said Zachel.

Kenton looked behind him again. Sharane was gone.

He bent over his oar beside the sleeping giant. Bent over his oar, chained to it— Slave of the ship!

## CHAPTER X.

### THE HORN OF SLEEP

**K**ENTON awakened to the shrilling of a whistle. Something flicked his shoulder like the touch of a hot iron. He jerked his head up from the bed of his arms; looked stupidly at the chained wrists. Again the flick upon the shoulder, biting into the flesh.

"Up, slave," he heard a snarling voice say—a voice he knew and struggled with drugged mind to place. "Up! Stand to your oar!"

Then another voice, close behind him, whispering, hoarse, but with warmth of comradeship in it: "On your feet ere his whip covers your back with the blood runes."

He struggled upright; hands falling mechanically into two smooth, worn hollows in the wooden shaft to which he was chained. Standing thus upon the bench, his eyes looked out upon a tranquil, turquoise ocean, waveless, within a huge inverted bowl of silver mist. In front of him were four men, two standing, two sitting, at shanks of great oars which, like that he clutched, thrust through the side of a ship. Beyond them sloped a black deck. . . .

Memory rushed upon him, banishing the last of sleep. The first voice had been that of Zachel, and the hot touches on his skin the bite of his whip. He turned his head. A score of other men, black and brown, sat and stood at other great sweeps, bending and rising, sending the Ship of Ishtar through the still blue sea. And there on a platform at the mast step was Zachel, grinning evilly. Out at Kenton

flicked the long lash once more, this time drawing blood.

"Look not back! Row!" snarled Zachel.

"I will row," whispered the second voice. "Stand and sway with the oar till strength comes back to you."

He looked down on a head fair haired, long haired as any woman's. But there was nothing womanish in the face that was lifted for an instant to his. Ice cold and ice blue were the eyes in it, though thawed now by a rough kindness. The skin was storm beaten; from left temple to point of chin ran a deep red scar, written there by sword. Nor was there anything womanish in the muscles that swelled on shoulders, back, and arms as he swung the great sweep, handling it as easily as a woman would a broom.

Norseman from tip to toe. A Viking straight out of some ancient saga—and, like Kenton, a slave to the ship.

"Sigurd, Tyrsg's son, I," muttered the Norseman. "What Norn of ill-luck set you on this ship of warlocks? Speak low; bend to your oar. The devil with the lash has sharp ears."

**T**O THE motion of the oar Kenton bent and rose, standing there on the bench, his chains rustling. The odd benumbment that had held his mind was passing; passed ever more swiftly as his tightened grip on the oar began to send the blood more swiftly through his veins. The rower beside him grunted approval.

"No weakling, you," he whispered. "The oar wearies, yet up it flows strength from the sea. But sip that strength slowly. Grow stronger slowly. Then it may be that you and I together—"

He paused; shot a wary side glance at Kenton, as though the thought had come to him that he were going too fast.

"By your looks, you are a man of the Eirnn, The Southern Isles," he whispered. "No grudge bear I against them. Viking, they met us always sword to sword and breast to breast. Many the blows we have struck between us, and the Valkyrie's hovering went never empty-handed back

to Valhalla when we met the men of Eirnn. Brave men, strong men, men who died shouting, kissing sword-blade and spear-point as gayly as a bride. Are you one of these?"

Kenton thought swiftly. Cunningly must he shape his answer to bind this comradeship so plainly offered him; neither bewilder by whole truth nor be so vague as to rouse suspicion.

"Kenton, my name," he answered softly. "My fathers were of the Eirnn. Well knew they the Vikings and their ships—nor have they handed down to me any grudge against them. I would be friend of yours, Sigurd, Trygg's son, since for how long neither of us know I must labor here beside you. And since you and I—together—"

He paused meaningly, as had the Viking. The Norseman nodded, then again shot the keen side glance at him.

"Not yet, man whose fathers were of the Eirnn, have you told me how this bane fell on you," he muttered. "Since they drove me aboard this ship at the Isle of Sorcerers no harbor have we entered. You were not here when they chained me to the oar. Yet—here you are! How?"

"Sigurd—by Odin All-Father—I do not know!" The Norseman's hands quivered at the name of his god. "An eye that I could not see looked upon me. A hand that I could not see plucked me out of my own land and set me here. That son of Hela who rules the black deck offered me freedom—if I would do a thing of shame. I would not. I battled with his men. Three I slew. And then they chained me to this oar."

"You slew three!" The Viking looked up at Kenton, eyes blazing. "You slew three! Skoal! Comrade! Skoal!"

**S**OMETHING like a flying serpent hissed by Kenton; hissed and struck the Norseman's back. It withdrew, blood spurting from where it had bitten. It struck and struck again.

The whip of Zachel, the overseer. His voice snarled.

"Dog! Sow spittle! Have you gone mad? Shall I flay you then!"

Under the lash the body of Sigurd, Trygg's son, shuddered; from deep in his throat came a low moaning. He looked up at Kenton, bloody froth on his lips. Suddenly Kenton knew that it was not from the pain of the blows that the Viking shuddered and sobbed—that it was from the shame of them and from rage.

And Kenton, leaning over, thrust his own bare back between that lash and the bloody shoulders; took the blow himself.

"Ha!" snarled Zachel. "You want them, do you? Jealous of my whip's kisses, are you? Well, then—take your fill of them!"

Mercilessly the lash hissed and struck. Kenton endured its bite stoically, never shifting the shield of his body from the Norseman; meeting each sharp agony by thought of what he would do to repay them when his time had come—when he has mastered the ship.

Abruptly the hailing blows ceased.

"Stop!" Through pain-misted eyes he saw the drummer leaning over the pit. "Would you kill the slave, Zachel? By Nergal, if you do, I shall ask Klaneth as gift to me to chain you to that oar for a while!"

Then Zachel, sullenly: "Row, slave!"

Silently, half fainting, Kenton bent over the oar. The Norseman caught a hand, held it in iron grip.

"Sigurd, Trygg's son, am I! Jarl's grandson! Master of Dragons!" His voice was low, yet in it was the clanging echo of distant swords; and he spoke with eyes closed as though he stood before some altar. "Blood brotherhood is there now between us, Kenton of the Eirnn. Blood brothers—you and I. By the red runes upon your back written there when you thrust it between me and the whip! By every drop of that blood are we brothers. And I shall be your shield as you have been mine. Our swords shall be as one sword. Your friend shall be my friend, and your enemy my enemy. And my life for yours when need be! This by Odin All-Father and by all the Aesir I swear—

I, Sigurd, the Viking! And if ever I break faith with you, then may I lie upon the poison of Hela's snakes until Yggsdragil, the Tree of Life, withers, and Ragnorak, the Night of the Gods, has come!"

THE heart of Kenton swelled, grew warm; his scourged back was forgotten in the glow that followed the Viking's vow. Chained to his oar, Sigurd might be even as he, and as helpless under the lash; but still—a friend here in the galley-pit. And once the two were loosed, a mighty friend indeed, a blood brother worth the having. This Master of Dragons, as he had called himself, and by that phrase Kenton knew he meant captain of war fleet of the old Norse galleys, should command the Ship of Ishtar—under him, of course.

Thus Kenton decided, letting no doubt of future victory assail him. Now he was but a slave with whip-torn back and chained to an oar. That did not matter; he would conquer.

Against him were the black priest, the dread power he served, and his score of acolytes. And he did not know, actually, when it came to grips with Klaneth, whether the drummer Gigi, for all his apparent friendliness, and the Persian Zubran, would not, bound by vows, give their strength to his enemies. Still, it did not matter. He would conquer!

And Sharane and her fighting women—them, too, he would conquer. What mattered the odds against him of men and women with their Nergal and their Ish-tar? There burned steady within him the unquenchable conviction that one day he would conquer the ship.

Master—Sharane!

The Viking's hand still gripped his. He placed his other hand upon it.

"Sigurd," he said, "blood brothers you and I from now on. Glad is my heart because of it. In ill luck and fair luck, in peace and in war, my fortune shall be your fortune and your bane my bane until the Norn who cuts the thread of life severs mine, Skoal, blood brother! Skoal! And

may Oden All-Father give us strength to take this ship and sail it as we will!"

The grip of the Viking tightened. He withdrew his hand and bent once more to the oar. He said nothing but Kenton knew the vow was sealed.

The whip of the overseer cracked, a shrill whistle sounded. The four rowers in front lifted high their oars, shunted them into a niche. The Viking raised his sweep, set it in a similar rest.

"Sit," he said. "They wash us now and feed."

A cascade of water fell over Kenton, and another. The salt of it stung his wounds, brought tears to his eyes.

"Quiet!" warned Sigurd. "Soon the pain passes, and the salt will heal."

Then down over him swished the water. Two brown men, naked to the waists, backs scarred, went by. In each hand they held buckets, raised them, and poured the water over two of the men at the stroke oars. They turned and went back along the narrow way between the benches. Powerful were their bodies. Their faces were those of men come to life out of some ancient Assyrian frieze, narrow, hook-nosed, full-lipped. No mind dwelt behind those faces. Their eyes were staring, empty. They moved like automatons. An irresponsible tremor shook Kenton; the Viking noted it.

"Their souls are gone," he whispered. "They have long been gone. They are like the slave who died beside me. They have been so long upon the ship that it has sucked their souls from them. They are all like that, save two black men behind us. By the Aesir," he swore, "it was what I feared for myself until you came!"

**B**ACK the pair came with other buckets, which they dashed over the other two oarsmen. Bucket after bucket they emptied over the floor of the pit, washing it clean. And when this was done two other slaves set upon the bench between Kenton and the Norseman a rough platter and a bowl. On the platter were a dozen long pods and a heap of round

cakes resembling cassava bread. The bowl was filled with a dark, thick liquid, purplish red.

He munched the pods; they were fleshy, with a curious meaty flavor. The round cakes tasted exactly like what they resembled—cassava bread. The liquid was strong, pungent, a trace of fermentation in it. There was strength in that food and drink. As he ate, Kenton felt strength rising in him. And the dousing had done him good. His back had ceased to smart, the wounds no longer throbbed. He relaxed. The Norseman smiled at him.

"No lash now, so we speak not too loudly," he said. "It is the rule. So while we eat and drink ask what you will of me without fear, blood brother."

"Two things I would first know of many," said Kenton. "How came you on the ship, Sigurd? And how comes this food here?"

"From here and there comes the food," answered the Viking. "It is a ship of warlocks and a cursed one. Not long may it stop at any place, nor at any place is it welcome. Nay, not even at Emakhtila, which is full of warlocks. Where it harbors they bring food and gear quickly and with fear. Quickly do they give to speed it quickly away, lest the demons who possess it grow angry and destroy. They have strong magic—that pale son of Hela and the woman on the white deck. Sometimes I think her a daughter of Loki, whom Odin chained for his wickedness. And sometimes I think her a daughter of Freya, the Mother of Gods. But whatever she be, she is very fair and has a great soul. I have no hatred toward her."

He lifted the bowl to his lips.

"And so for how I came here," he went on, "that is a short tale enough. Southward I had sailed with the ships of Hagnor and Red Spear. Twelve great dragons had we when we set forth. Southward sailed we through many seas, raiding as we went. Then after long, with six of our ten dragons left us, we came to the land of the Egyptians, to a city named Alexandria. It was a very great city and full of tem-

ples to all the gods in the world—except our gods.

"It irked us that among all these temples Odin All-Father had none. It irked us, and we grew wroth. So one night when we had drunk overdeep of the Egyptian wine six of us set forth to take a temple, cast out its god, and give it to Odin for a home.

"We came to a temple and entered. It was a dark temple and full of black robes like these on board the ship. When we told them what we meant to do, they buzzed like bees and rushed us like a wolfpack. Many then we slew, shouting. And we would have won that temple for Odin, for six of us fighting in a ring, but—a horn blew!"

"Summoning too many for you?" asked Kenton.

"Not at all, blood brother," said Sigurd. "It was a warlock horn. A horn of sleep. It blew sleep through us as the storm wind blows the spray through a sail. It turned our bones to water, and our red swords dropped from hands that could no longer feel their hilts. And down we all dropped, sodden with sleep, among the slain.

"When we awoke we were in a temple. We thought it the same temple, for it was as dark and the same black-robed priests filled it. We were in chains, and they whipped us and made us slaves. Then we found we were no longer in the land of the Egyptians, but in a city named Emakhtila, on an isle of warlocks set in the sea of what I think a warlock world. Long I slaved for the black robes, I and my comrades, till they dragged me to this ship that had dropped anchor in Emakhtila harbor.

"And here ever since I have bent over my oar, watching their wizardries and fighting to keep my soul from being sucked from me."

"A horn that poured out sleep!" said Kenton, puzzled. "But that I do not understand, Sigurd."

"You will, comrade," Sigurd said grimly. "Soon enough you will. Zachel plays it well. Listen—it begins."

FROM behind them a deep, droning horn-note sounded. Mellow yet vibrant, it crept into the ears, and seemed to pour through them along every nerve.

The Viking's eyes were fierce and strained with struggle against slumber. Slowly, slowly the lids closed over them. His hands relaxed, the fingers opened, his body swayed his head dropped upon his chest. Then like a man from whom all life is suddenly withdrawn, he slumped down upon the bench.

The horn droned on. The four slaves at the stroke oar lay with heads on outstretched arms.

Fight as hard as he might, Kenton could not thrust away that soft slumber that pressed inexorably in on him from every side. A numbness crept through his body.

Lower and lower dropped his own lids.

And suddenly he could no longer fight. Chains rattling, down against Sigurd he fell, wrapped in that same impenetrable web of sleep.

## CHAPTER XI

### GOLDEN LAUGHTER OF SHARANE

SOMETHING deep within Kenton whispered to him to awaken; something reached down into the abysses of his charmed slumber and drew up to its surface his drugged consciousness. Slowly his heavy lids began to rise—then stopped, obeying some subtle warning. He looked out through narrowed eyes. The chains that bound his wrists to the riveted manacles of the oar were long. He had moved in his sleep and now lay with head on arm stretched along the back of the low bench. He faced the ivory deck.

There, at its edge, looking down upon him, was Sharane. Veils of palest blue, through which the hands of Assyrian maids had woven golden lotuses, draped her breast, coiled round her slender waist, and fell to the delicate, sandaled feet. Her black-haired maiden Satalu beside her, she leaned over, scanning him. The wide, clear eyes were shadowed by a pity that held within it half scornful wonder.

His heart leaped to her loveliness. Here was his mate—in this world or any other this was his woman! And not by any of the standards of his own lost world could she be won.

"Mistress," he heard Satalu say, "he cannot be man of Nergal, since Nergal's men have chained him there."

"No," mused Sharane. "No—in that I was wrong. And had he been of Nergal, never could he have crossed the barrier. Nor would Klaneth have taunted me as he did—"

"He is very handsome and young," sighed Satalu, "and strong. He fought the priests like a lion lord."

"Even a cornered rat will fight," answered Sharane, scornful. "He let himself be led to his chains like a whipped dog. And he lied to me! He came to me in borrowed plumes bearing a sword he could not use!"

Her clenched hands trembled; she beat them upon her breast.

"Oh," cried the Lady Sharane—and half of that cry was a sob, "oh, Satalu, I am shamed! Liar and coward and slave—still he stirs something in my heart that never yet has stirred for man. Oh, I am shamed!"

"Lady Sharane, do not weep!" Satalu caught the fluttering hands. "He may be none of these. How do you know? Perhaps he did speak the truth. How know we what has happened in that world of ours so long lost to us? And he is very handsome—and young!"

"At least," said Sharane, and bitterly, "he is a slave."

"*Sh-h!*" warned Satalu. "Zachel comes."

They turned; walked toward Sharane's cabin, out of Kenton's vision. He heard soft steps nearing him; closed his eyes. The overseer paused beside him; evidently scanning him closely, suspiciously. He put his hand on Kenton's head and pushed it from the pillow of his arm. Kenton let it fall limply, dragging the arm down with it. Satisfied that the spell of the horn still held him, Zachel passed on. Eyes still closed, Kenton lay thinking of Sharane.

THE wakening whistle shrilled. There was a stir among the slaves, and Kenton groaned, raised himself, rubbed eyes, and gripped the oar.

Exultation was in his heart. There could be no mistaking Sharane's words. He held her. By a slender thread, it might be; but still—he held her. And if he were not a slave—when slave he ceased to be—what then? He laughed—but softly, lest Zachel hear. Sigurd looked at him curiously.

"The sleep horn must have brought you a gay dream, Kenton," he murmured.

"Gay, indeed, Sigurd," he answered. "The kind of dream that will thin our chains until we can snap them."

"Odin send more dreams like it," grunted the Norseman.

When Zachel blew the horn again Kenton had no need of it to send him to sleep. For the sharp eyes of the overseer had seen through Sigurd's self-sacrificing stratagem, and he had watched Kenton continually, lashing him when he faltered or let the whole burden of the oar fall upon the Norseman. His hands were blistered, every bone and muscle ached, and his mind lay dulled in his weary body. And thus it was between the next five sleeps.

Once he roused himself enough to ask of Sigurd a question that had been going round and round in his brain. Half the rowers in the pit were behind the line that separated black deck from ivory deck—that line which neither Klaneth and his crew nor Sharane and her women could cross. Yet Zachel roamed at will from one end of that pit to the other; other priests, too, for he had seen them. And although he had not seen Klaneth or Gigi or the Persian there, he did not doubt that they could come and go if they so wished. Why, then, did not the black robes swarm up the farther side and overwhelm the rosy cabin? Why did not Sharane and her woman drop into the pit, and lay siege to the ebon cabin?

It was a warlock ship, the Viking had repeated, and the spell upon it no simple one. The slave who had died had told him that he had been on the ship since the

gods had launched her, and that the same unseen, mysterious barrier shut off the side of the rower's that rimmed Sharane's deck. No javelin or arrow or other missile other than those hurled by god and goddess could penetrate it. Humanly, each opposing camp was helpless against the other.

There were other rules, too, the slave had told him. For instance, neither Sharane nor Klaneth could leave the ship when it hove to in harbor. Sharane's women could. The black priest's men, yes—but not for long. Soon they must return. The ship drew them back. What would happen to them if they did not? The slave had not known, had said that such a thing was impossible. The ship would draw them back.

Kenton pondered over all this as with aching back he pushed and pulled at the oar. Decidedly these were practical, efficient deities who had doomed the ship, overlooking no detail, he thought, half amused. Well, they had created the game, and certainly they had the right to make that game's rules. He wondered whether Sharane could roam at will from stem to stern when he had conquered the ship. Wondering still, he heard the drone of Zachel's horn begin, and pitched, content, into the bottomless *oubliette* of sleep.

**H**E AWOKE from the sixth sleep with mind crystal clear, an astonishing sense of well-being, and a body once more free from pain and flexible and vigorous. He pulled at his oar strongly and easily.

"Strength flows up to you from the sea through blade, even as I foretold, blood brother," grunted Sigurd.

Kenton nodded absently, his sharpened mind grappling with the problem of escape from his chains. What went on in the pit and on the ship while the rowers were asleep? What chance would offer then to free himself and the Viking if he could stay awake?

If he could stay awake!

But how could he close his ears to that horn which poured sleep into them as the sirens of old poured with their songs fatal

fascination into the ears of sailors strayed within their ken?

The sirens! The story of crafty Ulysses's adventure with those sea women flashed into his memory. How desire had come upon that wanderer to hear the siren song—yet no desire to let it draw him to them. How he had sailed into their domain; had filled his oarsmen's ears with melted wax; had made them bind him to the mast with open ears, and then, cursing, straining at his bonds, mad with desire to leap into their white arms, had heard their enchanted measures—and sailed safe away.

That was it! Some way he must shut his ears to the horn. But how?

A wind arose, a steady wind that filled the sail and drove the ship through gently cresting waves. Came command to rest oars. Kenton slouched down upon the bench. Sigurd was in one of his silent moods, face brooding, gaze far away, filled with dreams of other days when his dragons cleft the Northern Ocean.

Kenton dropped his hands upon the silken rags upon his legs; his fingers began, seemingly idly, to unravel their threads, twist and knot them into little silken cylinders. He worked on, the Viking unheeding. Now two were finished. He palmed one, rubbed as idly the side of his face, and so rubbing slipped the little silken cylinder into an ear. He waited for a time; slipped in the other ear the second plug. The roaring of the wind sank to a loud whispering.

Carefully, unhurrying, he drew them out; twisted more threads around them. Again he set them in place. Now the wind's roar was only a murmuring, faint and far away. Satisfied, he slipped the silken cylinders under his torn girdle.

On sped the ship. And after a while the slaves came and dashed their buckets over him and the Viking; brought them food and drink.

On the very edge of the sleep-horn drone Kenton slumped down upon the bench, face on forearms, the silken cylinders hidden under thumbs. Swiftly he slipped them in his ears. Then he let every muscle go

limp. The droning diminished to a faint humming. Even so, a languor crept through him. He fought it. In it was none of that inexorable command that saturated the horn's full note. He beat the languor back. The humming ceased. He heard the overseer go by him; looked after him through half raised lids; saw him ascend the pit's steps and pass over the deck to Klaneth's cabin.

The black deck was empty. As though shifting in slumber, Kenton rolled over, threw an arm across the back of the bench, rested his head upon it, and through lowered lashes took stock of what lay behind him.

The slaves at the oars lay sprawled, asleep. His gaze rested on the two blacks among the ancient, brown-skinned men. Could he trust them to fight with him and the Viking, he wondered?

**H**E HEARD golden laughter. To the edge of her deck, black haired Satalu beside her, walked Sharane. She seated herself there, unbound her hair, shook the flaming red gold cloud of it over face and shoulders.

Through that web of loveliness he felt Sharane's eyes upon him. Involuntarily his own opened wide; clung to her hidden ones. She gasped, half rose, parted the curtains of her hair, stared at him in wonder.

"He is awake!" she whispered.

And equal wonder filled the face of Satalu.

"Sharane!" he breathed.

He watched shame creep again into her eyes—her face grow cold. She raised her head, sniffed daintily.

"Satalu," she said, "is there not a stronger taint from the pit?" Again she tilted her nose. "Yes, I am sure there is. Like the old slave market at Uruk when they brought the new slaves in."

"I—I notice it not, mistress," faltered Satalu, pity for him in her look.

"Why, yes, of course." Sharane's voice was merciless. "See, there he sits. A new slave; a strange slave who sleeps with open eyes."

"Yet he—he—looks not like a slave," again faltered her handmaiden.

"No?" questioned Sharane sweetly. "What has happened to your memory, girl? What is the badge of a slave?"

Once more the glance of the black-haired girl was filled with pity. She did not answer; bent low over the locks of her mistress.

"A chain and the brand of whips," mocked Sharane. "These are the slave's badge. And the new slave has both—in plenty."

Still Kenton was silent beneath her mockery; made no movement; indeed scarce heard her, his eyes drinking in her beauty.

"Ah, but I dreamed one came to me with great words, a bearer of promises, fanning hope in my heart," sighed Sharane. "I opened my heart to him in that dream, Satalu. All my heart! And he repaid me with lies, and his promises were empty, and he was a weakling, for my girls beat him. And now it seems to me that there sits that liar and weakling of my dream with brand of whip upon his back and weak hands chained. A slave!"

"Mistress! Oh, mistress!" whispered Satalu.

But Kenton kept silence, although now her mockery began to sting.

Suddenly she arose, thrust hands through shining locks.

"Satalu," she murmured, "would you not think that sight of me would awaken even a slave? That any slave, so he were young and strong, would break his chains—for me?"

She swayed, turned; through her thin robes gleamed exquisite curves of breast and thigh; lithe loveliness. She spread the nets of her hair, peered through them at him with wanton eyes; preened herself.

He raised his head recklessly, the hot blood rushing through him.

"The chains will break, Sharane!" he called. "I will break them—never fear! And then—"

"And then my girls will beat you as before!" she cried, and sped away.

He watched her go, pulse beating like drums. He saw her halt, whisper to Satalu. The black-haired girl turned, made him a warning gesture. He closed his eyes, dropped head on arm. And soon he heard the feet of Zachel striding down the steps, go by him. The waking whistle shrilled. Why, if her mockery had been real, had she warned him?

## CHAPTER XII

### GIGI, THE BOLD SATYR

SHARANE looked down upon him again from her deck. Time had gone, by since she had stood there mocking him. Time had gone, but how measured in his own lost world Kenton had no means of telling. Sleep after sleep he had lain on his bench, watching for her. She had kept to her cabin, or if she had not, she had kept herself from his sight.

Nor had he told the Viking that he had broken the spell of the sleep horn. Sigurd he trusted, heart and soul. Yet he was not sure of the Norseman's subtlety; certain that he could feign the charmed slumber as Kenton could. Trust Sigurd as he did, he could not take that risk.

And now again Sharane stood and looked down upon him from the platform close to the emerald mast. The slaves slept. There was none at watch on the black deck. There was no mockery now in Sharane's face. And when she spoke she struck straight to the heart of her purpose.

"Whoever you are, whatever you may be," she said, "two things can you do. Cross the barrier. Remain awake when the other slaves must sleep. You have told me that you can break your chains. Since those two things you can do, I find belief within me that of the third you speak the truth. Unless—"

She paused; he read her thought.

"Unless I lied to you about that as I lied to you before," he said levelly. "Well, those were no lies I told you. But go on."

"If you break your chains," she said, "I will give you your sword—if with it

you will slay Klaneth. If you can break your chains, something tells me you can slay Klaneth with that sword which certainly is Nabu's own. If you will."

Again she paused, searching him with wide eyes.

"Will you?" she asked.

He feigned to consider.

"Why should I kill Klaneth?" he asked at last.

"Why? Why?" Scorn tinged her voice.

"Has he not set his chains upon you? Had you whipped? Made you slave?"

"Did not Sharane drive me forth with javelins?" he asked. "Did not Sharane pour salt in my wounds with her mockery?"

"But you lied to me!" she cried.

Again he feigned consideration. "What will this liar, weakling, and slave gain if he kills the black priest for you?" he asked bluntly.

"Gain?" she repeated blankly.

"What will you pay me for it?" he said.

"PAY you? Pay you! Oh!" The scorn in her eyes scorched him. "You shall be paid. You shall have freedom—the pick of my jewels—"

"Freedom I shall have when I have slain Klaneth," he answered. "And of what use to me are your jewels on this cursed ship?"

"You do not understand," she said.

"The black priest slain, I can set you on any land you wish in this world. In all of them jewels have value."

She paused, then: "And have they no worth in that land from whence you come, and to which, unchained, it seems you can return whenever danger threatens?" Her voice was honey poison. But Kenton only laughed.

"What more do you want?" she asked.

"If they be not enough—what more?"

"You!" he said.

"Me!" she gasped incredulously. "I—give myself to any man, for a price! I give myself to you! You whipped dog!" she stormed. "Never!"

Now, up to this Kenton's play with her had been calculated; to match her mockery with his own, to dissolve in the acid of her rage her contempt for him. But now he spoke with wrath as real and hot as hers.

"No!" cried Kenton. "No! You'll not give yourself to me! Because, Sharane, I'll take you!"

He thrust a clenched, chained hand out to her.

"Master of this ship I'll be, and with no help from you—you who have called me liar and slave and now would throw me butcher's pay. No! When I master this ship it will be by my own hand. And that same hand shall master you!"

"You threaten me!" Her face flamed wrath. "You! *You* dare threaten *me*!"

She thrust a hand into her breast, drew out a slender knife—hurled it at him. As though it had struck some adamant wall, it clanged, fell to her feet, blade snapped from hilt.

She paled, shrank back; one look of hate she threw him; then fled to her cabin.

"Hate me!" jeered Kenton as she ran. "Hate me, Sharane! For hate is only the flame that cleanseth the cup for wine of love!"

And, laughing grimly, he bent his head over his oar; was soon as sound asleep as the Norseman snoring beside him.

**T**HERE came another time when, as he lay luxuriating in the full new tides of life within him, listening to the rush of waves past the ship, he heard a stir upon Sharane's balcony, a cooing welcome from her doves. Out upon it she stepped, the handmaiden Satalu at her side.

His eyes dwelt upon her sweetly amorous, scarlet mouth. She paid no heed to him, gaze far away upon the mist girdled waters. She leaned far out over the balcony on white and rounded arms; softly began to sing. And this was Sharane's song:

*In Babylon red roses blow,  
All who list may kiss and wear them;  
Wide to all their hearts they throw,*

*Ev'ry vagrant wind may share them;  
King or slave may be their lover,  
Any bee above them hover  
Sipping from their lips the dew—  
Roses—roses—wanton roses!  
I am not like you!*

The golden voice ceased. And Kenton, sensing well the hidden meaning of her song, reddened with mingled shame and remorse. Again she sang:

*Honey sweet with heart of fire  
Hides a white rose in a bower,  
'Tis the rose of Heart's Desire,  
Only one may pluck its flower;  
Bold and strong must be the lover  
Who its wonder may uncover,  
Pass the wanton roses by—  
Rose—rose—hidden rose!  
Rose like you am I!*

Echoes of her song still sighing, she turned; still with no glance for him swept back into her cabin.

And Kenton was filled with such longing for her that for the first time black despair touched him. After all—could he break his chains? Would ever again he find himself plucked from the ship, spun through the interlaced atoms of these two worlds and come to rest upon his own? Free! And with power to summon the ship, board it once more—and now he knew what he would do to safeguard himself against chains and black priest if that chance would but return.

But would it return? It must! Resolutely he shook off the despair.

Other sleeps went by. And stronger and stronger grew Kenton, with a body like tempered steel and arms and broad shoulders that now could swing the oar as easily and tirelessly as Sigurd himself.

**A**GAIN he awakened to a stirring and humming through all the ship. On ivory deck and black the ship's folk stood, pointing, talking, gesticulating. A flock of birds, the first he had seen in this strange world, hovered above him. Their wings were shaped like those of great butterflies. Their plumage shone as though lacquered in glowing vermilions and pale golds. From their opened beaks came a chiming.

"Land!" the Viking exclaimed. "We run into harbor, Kenton. Food and water must be low."

There was a brisk wind blowing and the oars were at rest. Careless of Zachel's lash, Kenton leaped up on the bench, looked over the bow. The overseer gave no heed, his own eyes intent upon what lay before.

It was a sun-yellow isle, high and rounded, and splashed with craters of color like nests of rainbows. On its crest feathered trees drooped branches like immense *panaches* of ostrich plumes.

Closer drew the ship. At the bow the damsels of Sharane clustered, laughing and chattering. And upon her balcony was Sharane, watching the isle with wistful eyes.

Now it was close indeed. Down ran the peacock sail. The ship rolled slowly to the shore; not until the curved prow had almost touched that shore did the steersman shift the rudder and bring the ship sharply about. As they drifted, the plumes of the strange trees swept the deck with long leaves, delicately feathered as those the frost etches on the winter pane. Topaz yellow and sun amber were those leaves; immense clusters of flowers dropped from the branches, lily shaped, flame scarlet.

Slowly, ever more slowly, drifted the ship. It crept by a wide cleft that cut into the heart of the isle. The sides of this vale were harlequined with colors, and Kenton saw that these were fields of flowers, clustered as though they filled deep circular amphitheaters. The flashing iridescences were birds—birds of every size from smallest dragonflies to those whose wingspread was that of condors in the high Andes. Large and small, on each glittered the lacquered butterfly wings.

The isle breathed fragrance. But there was no green on it, save for the emerald glintings of the birds.

The valley slid behind them. The ship slipped into the mouth of a glen at whose end a cataract dropped rain of pearl into a golden-ferned pool. There was the rattling of a chain; an anchor splashed. The

bow of the ship swung in; nosed through the foliage; touched the bank.

Over the rail climbed the women of Sharane, upon their heads great baskets. From her balcony Sharane looked after them with deeper wistfulness. The women melted within the flower spangled boskage; fainter and fainter came their voices; died away. Sharane, chin cupped in white hands, drank in the land with wide and longing eyes. Above her red gold hair a bird hovered—a bird all gleaming emeralds and flashing blues. Kenton saw tears upon her cheeks. She caught his gaze, dashed them away angrily. She half turned as though to go; then slipped down woe-fully behind one of her balcony's tiny blossoming trees where he could no longer see her weeping.

NOW her women filed back along the bank, their baskets filled with plunder; fruits, gourds purple and white, and great clusters of those pods he had eaten when first he had broken fast upon the ship. Into the cabin they trooped, and out again with baskets empty. Time upon time they came and went. At last they bore away skins instead of the woven hampers; water bags which they filled from the pool of the cataract. Time upon time they brought them back, swollen full, upon their shoulders.

They trooped out once more, burdenless; darted joyously over the rail; doffed their scanty enough robes and plunged into the pool. Like water nymphs they swam and played; they sprang from the pool, wove flower crowns and with sprays of the fragrant lily blooms in arms clambered, reluctant, over the side and into the rosy cabin.

Now the men of Klaneth crawled over the rail. They slipped on and off the ship with their burdens, poured the last water skins into the casks.

Again there was stir upon the ship. The chains rattled, the anchor lifted. Up and down flashed the oars, drawing the ship from the bank. Up rose the peacock sail. The ship veered, caught the wind, swam

slowly through the amethystine shallows. Faster swung the sweeps. The golden isle diminished; was a saffron shadow in the mists; vanished.

On sailed the ship.

And on and on—by what signs of reckonings or to what port Kenton could not know. Sleep after sleep it sailed. The huge bowl of silver mists whose edge was the horizon contracted or expanded as those mists thickened or thinned. Storms they met and weathered; roaring storms that changed the silver of the mists to lurid copper, ambered jet, darkness deeper than night. Sudden storms threaded with lightnings that were like the shatterings of immense prisms; storms that trod on feet of thunder.

Steadily strength of the sea poured into Kenton up his oar blade, even as Sigurd had promised; remaking him, hardening him, turning all his body into a machine as finely tempered as a rapier and as flexible. Often he wondered what was happening in that room of his where rested the jeweled bark, the mysterious symbol of this ship on which he sailed, the enigmatic ferry between two worlds. How long had he been away from that room by his own world's time?

Between sleeps Sigurd whispered to him Viking tales, sagas unsung, epics of the Norse heroic and forgotten. Steadily their friendship, their brotherhood, grew.

Twice the black priest sent for him; questioned him, threatened him, cajoled him—vainly. And each time with blacker, more venomous face had sent him back to his chains.

Strife of god and goddess there was none. And Sharane during the sleep time of the slaves kept to her cabin. Awake, he could not turn his head to seek her without inviting the bite of Zachel's lash. So often he let the horn of sleep have its way. What use to keep awake while Sharane hid?

**T**HERE came a time when, lying awake, he heard steps coming down the pit's stair. He turned, face against the

back of his bench, as though in troubled slumber. The steps paused beside him.

"Zubran." It was the voice of Gigi. "This man has become a young lion."

"Strong enough," grunted the Persian. "It is a pity that his strength be wasted here, driving this ship from one place of weariness to another as bad."

"I think as you," said Gigi. "Strength he now has. Also he has courage. You remember how he slew the priests."

"Remember!" There was no boredom in Zubran's voice now. "Can I forget! By the heart of Rustum—could I forget! It was the first draft of life given me, it seemed, for centuries. I owe him something for that."

"Also," went on Gigi, "he has loyalty where his heart turns. I told you how he shielded with his own back the man who sleeps beside him. I liked him well for that, Zubran."

"As a gesture," said the Persian, "it was magnificent! A trifle florid, perhaps, for perfect taste. But still—magnificent!"

"Courage, loyalty, strength," mused the drummer; then, slowly, a hint of mirth in his voice. "And wit. Unusual wit, Zurban. Since he has found a way to shut his ears to the sleep horn—and lies here now wide awake, pretending to us that he is asleep!"

Kenton's heart stopped; began to beat furiously. How did the drummer know? Did he know? Was it only a guess? Desperately he strove against quivering nerves; forced his body to remain inert.

"What!" exclaimed the Persian, incredulously. "Awake! Gigi, you dream!"

"Nay," said Gigi quietly. "I have watched him when he saw me not. He is awake, Zubran. Listening."

Suddenly Kenton felt his paw upon his breast, pressing upon his pounding heart. The drummer chuckled; withdrew the hand.

"Also," he said, approvingly, "he has caution. A little he trusts me, but not too much. Nor does he know *you* well enough as yet, Zubran, to give you any trust at all. Therefore he lies quiet, saying to himself: 'Gigi cannot really know. He cannot

be sure as long as I open not my eyes.' Yes, he has caution. But see, Zubran, he cannot keep the blood from stealing up into his face, nor slow his heart to the calm rhythm of sleep."

Again he chuckled, half-maliciously.

"And there is other proof of his caution, in that he has not told his comrade that the horn has no power over him. Hear him snore? No mistaking that for wakefulness. I like that too: He knows that a secret shared by two runs constant risk of remaining no secret at all."

"He seems sound asleep to me." Kenton felt the Persian bend down over him, doubtfully.

His eyelids fought to rise; by sheer will he kept them down, breathing regularly, motionless. How long would they stand there looking at him? How long could he keep up this semblance of sleep?

At last Gigi broke the silence.

"ZUBRAN," he said, quietly, "like you, I tire of the black priest and this fruitless strife between Ishtar and Nergal. Yet bound by our vows neither you nor I may come to grips with Klaneth, nor may we harm his men. It matters not that by trickery were those vows gotten from us. We made them and they bind. As long as Nergal's priest rules Nergal's deck we may not give him battle. But suppose Klaneth no longer ruled—that another hand thrust him to his dark master?"

"A mighty hand that! Where on these seas could we find such a hand? And if found, how persuade it to close on Klaneth?" jeered the Persian.

"I think it is here." Kenton felt again the drummer's touch. "Courage and loyalty and strength, quick wit and caution. He has all these. Besides, he can pass the barrier!"

"By Ahriman! That is so!" whispered the Persian.

"Now I would make another vow," said Gigi. "A vow in which you would join. If this man's chains were broken easily, then could he pass to Sharane's cabin; easily now, I think, regain his sword."

"Well, what then?" asked Zubran. "He would still have Klaneth to meet and all his pack. And we could not help him."

"No," answered the drummer. "But neither would we hinder him. Our vows bind us not to fight *for* the black priest, Zubran. Were I this man—with chains broken and sword regained—I would find way to release this comrade sleeping beside him. He, I think, could keep off the pack while this wolf cub, who is now no longer cub but grown, could match himself against the priest."

"Well—" the Persian began doubtfully; then changed to cheerfulness, "I would see him loosed, Gigi. At the least, it would give break to this cursed monotony. But you spoke of a vow."

"A vow for a vow," answered Gigi. "If his chains were broken, if he regained sword, if he met Klaneth and we fought not against him at Klaneth's side, and if he slew Klaneth, would he vow comradeship with you and me, Zubran? Wonder?"

"Why should he make that vow to us," asked Zubran, "unless we also loosed his chains?"

"Exactly," whispered Gigi. "For if he made that vow, I *would* loose them!"

Hope sprang flaming up in Kenton. Cold doubt followed. Was this all a trap? A trick to torment him? He would take no chance—and yet—freedom!

Gigi again bent over him.

"Trust me, wolf," he said, low. "Vow for vow. If you accept, look at me."

Suddenly doubt fled. The dice were offered him. Were they straight or weighted, he would cast them. He opened his eyes, stared straight for an instant into the twinkling beads of jet so close. Then he closed them tight; resumed his slow breathing; his semblance of deepest slumber.

And Gigi rose from him, laughing. He heard the two move away.

Freedom again! Could it be true? And when would Gigi loose his chains? Long he lay between fiery hope and chilling doubt. Could it be true?

Freedom—and Sharane!

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE CHAINS FALL FREE

NOT long did Kenton have to wait. Hardly had the faint hum of the sleep horn died than he felt a touch on his shoulder. He thought it was Zachel, and lay limp. Long fingers twitched his ears, raised his eyelids. He looked into the face of Gigi. He pulled out the little silken cylinders that shut off the compelling slumber of the horn.

"So that is how you did it." Gigi examined them with interest. He squatted down beside Kenton.

"Wolf," he said, "I have come to have a talk with you, so that you may know Zubran and me a little better; perhaps, see more clearly the road on which soon your feet may be set. I would sit here beside you, but some of those cursed priests may come prowling around. Therefore, in a moment I shall seat myself on Zachel's stool. When I have done so, turn you around facing me, taking that highly deceptive attitude I have so often watched you assume."

He stepped up on the bench, scanning both decks.

"We will have plenty of time." He squatted again on the bench. "Zubran is with Klaneth, arguing about the gods. Zubran, although sworn to Nergal, thinks him a rather inferior copy of Ahriman, the Persian god of darkness. He is also convinced that this whole matter of warfare between Nergal and Ishtar for the ship lacks not only originality and ingenuity, but taste—something, indeed, that his own gods and goddesses would not do; if they did, would do much better. This angers Klaneth, which greatly rejoices Zubran."

Once more he arose and looked about him.

"However," he went on, "this time he is doing it to keep Klaneth and especially Zachel away while we talk, since Klaneth leans a great deal upon Zachel in these arguments. I have told them that I cannot bear their talk, and that I will watch on Zachel's seat until it is finished. And

it will not be finished until I return, for Zubran is clever, oh, very clever and he expects our talk to lead, ultimately, to permanent relief of his boredom."

He glanced slyly at the ivory deck.

"So do not fear, wolf." He swayed up on his dwarfed legs. "Only as I go, slip sideways and keep your eyes on me. I will give you warning if warning is needed."

He waddled away, climbed into the overseer's seat. Kenton, obeying him, turned sleepily; rested arm on bench and head on arm.

"Wolf," said Gigi suddenly, "is there a shrub called the *chilquor* in the place from whence you came?"

KENTON stared at him, struck dumb by such a question. Yet Gigi must have some reason for asking it. Had he ever heard of such a shrub?

"Its leaves are about so large." Gigi parted fingertips for inches three. "It grows only upon the edge of the desert and it is rare—sorrowfully rare. Look you, perhaps you know it by another name. Perhaps this will enlighten you. You bruise the buds just before they open. Then you mix them with sesamum oil and honey and a little burned ivory and spread it like a paste over your head. Then you rub and rub and rub—so and so and so—" He illustrated vigorously upon his bald and shining pate.

"And after a little," he said, "the hair begins to sprout; like grain under the rains of spring it grows, until soon the naked dome is covered. Instead of the light flying off affrighted from the shining dome it plays within new hair. And once more the man who was bald is beautiful in the eyes of woman!

"By Nadak of the Goats! By Tanith, the dispenser of delights!" cried Gigi with enthusiasm. "That paste grows hair! How it does grow hair! Upon a melon would it grow it. Yes, even those planks rightly rubbed by it would sprout hair like grass! You are sure you do not know it?"

Struggling with his amazement, Kenton shook his head.

"Well," said Gigi, sorrowfully. "All this the *chilquor* buds can do. And so I search for them"—here he sighed mightily—"who would once more be beautiful in woman's eyes."

He sighed again. Then one by one he flicked the backs of the sleeping slaves with Zachel's whip, even the back of Sigurd.

"Yes," he said, "yes, they sleep."

His black eyes twinkled on Kenton, the slit mouth grinned.

"You wonder," he said, "why I talk of such trivial matters as shrubs and hair and bald pates, while you lie chained. Well, wolf, these matters are far from trivial. They brought me here. And were I not here—would you have hope of freedom, think you? Ah, no," said Gigi. "Life is a serious matter. Therefore all parts of it must be serious. And therefore no part of it can be trivial. Let us rest for a moment, wolf, while you absorb that great truth."

Again, one by one, he flicked the backs of the sleeping slaves.

"Well, wolf," he went on, "now I shall tell you how I came aboard this ship because of the *chilquor*, its effect on hair and because of my bald pate. And you shall see how your fortune rests upon them. Wolf, when I was but a child in Nineveh, girls found me singularly attractive.

"'Gigi!' they would cry as I passed by them. 'Gigi, little love, little darling! Kiss me, Gigi!'"

Gigi's voice was ludicrously languishing; Kenton, forgetting his plight, could not restrain laughter.

"You laugh, wolf!" observed the drummer. "Well, that makes us understand each other better."

His eyes twinkled impishly.

"Yes," he said, "'Kiss me,' they cried. And I would kiss them, because I found them all as singularly attractive as each found me. And as I grew this mutual attraction increased. You have no doubt noticed," said Gigi complacently, "that I am an unusual figure of a man. But as I grew out of adolescence my greatest beauty was, perhaps, my hair. It was long and

black and ringleted, and it fell far over my shoulders. I perfumed it and cared for it, and the girls who loved me would twine their fingers in it when my head was on their knees. They joyed in it even as I.

"And then I had a fever. When I recovered, all my beautiful hair was gone!"

He paused to sigh again.

"There was a woman of Nineveh who pitied me. She it was who anointed my head with the *chilquor* paste; told me how to make it; showed me the growing shrub. After years of—ah, mutual attraction—I had fever again. And again my hair vanished. I was in Tyre then, wolf, and made what haste I could to return to Nineveh. When I did return the kindly woman was dead and a sand storm had covered the spot where she had pointed out to me the *chilquor* shrubs!"

HE SIGHED, prodigiously. Kenton, amused and fascinated by his tale as he was, could not forbear a suspicious glance after that melancholy exhalation. It seemed overdone.

"Then before I could search further," went on Gigi, hurriedly, "word came to me that one who loved me—a princess, wolf—was on her way to Nineveh to see me. Shame was mine and anguish! I could not meet her with a bald pate, wolf. For no one loves a bald man!"

"Nobody loves a fat man," answered Kenton, grinning. He had spoken, it seemed in his own tongue, for the drummer apparently had not understood.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"I said," answered Kenton, gravely, "that for one whose excellencies are as great as yours, the loss of your hair should have been of no more consequence to a woman than the falling of one feather from a pet bird."

"That is a fine tongue of yours," remarked Gigi, stolidly. "It can say so much in so few sounds."

"Well," he continued. "I was distressed indeed. I could have hidden, but I feared my will would not be strong enough to keep me hid. She was a very lovely

princess, wolf. Besides, I knew that if she found out I was in Nineveh, as find out she surely would, she would rout me out. She was a fair woman, wolf. And this is the one difference between the fair women and the dark—that the latter wait for you to come for them, but the former search for you. And I could go to no other city to hide, for in each of them were other women who admired me. What was I to do?"

"Why didn't you get a wig?" asked Kenton, interested now in Gigi's tale to the extent of forgetting entirely where he was.

"I told you, wolf, that they loved to thread their fingers through my locks," answered Gigi, severely. "Could any wig stay in place under such treatment? Not when the women were such as loved me. No! I will tell you what I did. And here is where you will see how my lost hair and you are entangled. The High Priest of Nergal in Nineveh was a friend of mine. I went to him and asked him first to work a magic that would plant my head afresh with hair. He was indignant—said that his art was not to be debased for such a common purpose.

"It was then, wolf, that I began to have my suspicions of the real power of these sorcerers. I had seen this priest perform great magic. He had raised phantoms that had raised my hair—when I had it. How much easier then ought it to have been for him to have raised my hair without the trouble of raising the phantoms too? I suggested this. He grew more indignant—said that he dealt with gods, not barbers!

"But now I know better. He could not do it! I made the best of the matter, however, and asked him to put me for a while where my princess could not find me and where, weak willed, I could not go to her. He smiled, wolf, and said he knew just the place. He inducted me as an acolyte to Nergal and gave me a token that he said would insure me recognition and good will from one he named Klaneth. Also he sealed me with certain vows, not to be broken. I took them cheerfully think-

ing them but temporary and his friend Klaneth the high priest of some hidden temple where I would be safe. I went to sleep that night trustfully, happy as a child. I awakened, wolf—here!

"IT WAS a sorry jest," muttered Gigi, angrily. "And a sorry jest would it be for that Ninevite priest if I knew the way back to him!

"And here I have been ever since," he added, briskly. "Barred by my acolytage to Nergal from crossing to that other deck where there is a little vessel of joy named Satalu that I would fain take within my hands. Barred by my vows from slaying Klaneth. Barred by other vows from leaving the ship wherever it may touch for food and gear, since it was sanctuary I asked from which I could not go nor my princess come to me. By Tiamat of the Abyss, I got the sanctuary I asked!" he exclaimed, ruefully enough. "And by Bel who conquered Tiamat—as weary of the ship and its fruitless strife as Zubran himself!

"But were I not here," he added, as by afterthought, "who could loose you of your chains? By shrub and lack of hair, an amorous princess and my vanity—these brought me on the ship to set you free when you came. Of such threads do the gods weave our destinies."

He leaned forward, all malice gone from twinkling eyes, a grotesque tenderness on the froglike mouth.

"I like you, wolf," he said, simply. "And do you like Gigi a little better now?"

There was a wistfulness in the question; wistfulness and utter sincerity. Kenton's heart went out to him without reserve.

"I like you, Gigi. Greatly, indeed, do I like you. And trust fully. But Zubran—"

"Have no doubts about Zubran," snapped Gigi. "He, too, was tricked upon this ship and is even more eager than I to be free. Some day he shall tell you his story, as I have mine. Ho! Ho!" laughed the drummer. "Ever seeking the new, ever tiring of the known is Zubran. And this

was his fate—to be shot into a whole new world and find it worse than his old. Nay, wolf, fear not Zubran. With shield and sword will he stand beside you, until he tires even of you. But even then will he be loyal.”

Suddenly he grew solemn; kept unwinking gaze on Kenton, searching, it seemed, his soul.

“Consider well, wolf,” he whispered. “The odds are all against you. We two may not help you as long as Klaneth is lord of his deck. It may be that you cannot free the long-haired one beside you. You have Klaneth to face and twenty of his men—and, it may be, Nergal! And if you lose—death for you, wolf, and only after long, long torture. Here, chained to your oar, you are at least alive. Consider well!”

And Kenton, without hesitation answered him; held out to him his prisoned wrists.

“When will you loose my chains, Gigi?” was all he said.

“Now!” he shouted. “By Sin, the Father of Gods! By Shamash his Son and by Bel the Smiter—now!”

**H**E THRUST his hands between Kenton’s waist and the great circlet of bronze that bound it; pulled it apart as though it had been made of putty. With those same prodigiously long fingers he broke the locks of the manacles on Kenton’s wrists.

“Run free, wolf!” he whispered. “Run free, but craftily! And when you bite, bite deep!”

With never a look behind him, he waddled slowly to the pit’s steps and up them. Slowly Kenton stood upon his feet. His chains dropped from him. He looked down at the sleeping Viking. How could he unfasten his links. How, if he could unfasten, awaken him before Zachel came hurrying down among the slaves?

Swiftly he thought. A plan formed. If he could pick the locks that held Sigurd, he could put back his own broken chains upon himself; whisper to the Viking after

the waking whistle shrilled what he had done, what had been done for him. Then at the right moment, the pair of them could rise, rush the overseer, slay him and leap for Sharane’s deck—for it came to him that Sigurd, vowed as little either to Nergal or Ishtar as himself, could pass as easily as the barrier that held all others back.

Again he looked about him. At the foot of the overseer’s high stool lay a shining knife. Dropped there by Gigi for him? He did not know. But he did know that with it he might pick the Viking’s locks. He took a step toward it—

How long he was in taking the second step! And there was a mist before his eyes! Through that mist the sleeping forms of the oarsmen wavered; were like phantoms. And now he could no longer see the knife.

He rubbed his eyes, looked down on Sigurd. He was a wraith, his outlines nebulous, foglike.

He looked at the sides of the ship. They melted away even as he sought them. He had a glimpse of sparkling turquoise sea. And then—it became vaporous. Ceased to be!

And now Kenton floated for an instant in thick mist shot through with silvery light. The light snapped out. He hurtled through a black void filled with tumult of vast winds that shrieked and roared but touched him never. On and on, like a meteor, he flew through that black void.

The blackness snapped out! Through his closed lids he saw light. And he was no longer falling. He stood, rocking, upon his feet. He opened his eyes.

**O**NCE more he was within his own room! Outside hummed the traffic of the avenue, punctuated by blasts of auto horns.

Kenton rushed over to the jeweled ship. Except for the slaves, on it was but one little figure. A manikin who stood half way down the pit steps, mouth open, whip at feet, stark astonishment in every rigid line.

Zachel, the overseer.

Kenton poked him with a contemptuous finger. A toy!

He looked down into the slave pit. They lay asleep, oars in rests. He touched the bent head of Sigurd, lovingly. With finger tips tried to move the chains on the empty seat on the bench beside the Norseman; the empty chains that fell from the oar. They were immovable. Toy chains, toy oars. Sigurd, a toy; Zachel, a toy. His adventures—a dream!

So his mind, back in its own familiar environment, told him; that other part of him, which accepted the ship as reality, lying dazed with swift flight within him. And suddenly he caught sight of himself in the long mirror. And stood, wondering, before it. For what he saw was no more the Kenton who had been borne out of that room upon the breast of the intruding mystic sea. Mouth hard hardened, eyes grown fearless, falcon bright. Over all his broadened chest the muscles ran, not bulging, but graceful, flexible, and steel hard. He flexed his arms, and the muscles ran rippling along them. He turned, scanned his back in the mirror.

Scars covered it, healed teeth marks of the lash. The lash of Zachel—no toy had made those scars!

And suddenly all Kenton's mind awoke. Awoke and was filled with shame, with longing and despair.

What would Sigurd think of him when he awakened and found him gone—Sigurd with whom he had sworn blood brother-

ship? What would Gigi think—Gigi, who had made vow for vow with him; and trusting him, had broken his chains? And—Sharane.

Fresh food for her mockery, her contempt.

A frenzy shook him. He must get back! Get back before Sigurd or Gigi or Sharane knew that he was no longer on the ship. He had fled again to that place—what was it Sharane had said—the place he fled when peril threatened?

Again his fingers sought the jeweled slave ship. But this time there was no love in his touch; only anger moved the fingers that tore at Zachel with violence. A toy! But toy though it was, all his strength could not budge the dark driver of slaves. For a moment he was tempted to lift the jeweled ship and crash it to the floor. Then the vision of Sharane drove back the tide of his anger, leaving him weak from the force of its breakers.

How long had he been away? As though in answer a clock began chiming. He counted. Eight strokes!

Two hours of his own time had passed while he was on the ship. And in those two hours all these things had happened? His body changed to this?

Then in the two minutes he had been in the room what had happened on the ship? Did they now not know that he was gone? Were they thinking him liar, coward, traitor?

He must get back!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

## Many Never Suspect Cause Of Backaches

### This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning shows there may be something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

An excess of acids or poisons in your blood,

when due to functional kidney disorders, may be the cause of nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)

Complete Novelet



# Nomad's Debt

By C. F. KEARNS

Author of "The Lives of Handsled Burke," "Refugee Land," etc.

Only Charley Dicks really understood how the mountain redskin's mind worked . . . but then Charley was part Indian himself, and for the first time in his life he wished he was not on the bloodhound's side

## I

**N**ORTHLAND summers are intense; floral growth is crowded into the brief hot months; the duck broods flourish and moose calves wax lusty. The sun forgets to set—and men forget the winters!

June was almost July when young Charley Dicks drove his freight canoe ashore at McLean's Landing and waved his hand.

Old Sandy flourished his axe from the woodpile. Mrs. McLean slipped back into her kitchen. Charley was always hungry. But Jane bounced down the turf, her twin plaits streaming as she skimmed the three-foot cutbank and stopped as lightly as a puff of thistledown, with a capable hand on the canoe's bow. She drew it up on the sands as he stepped nimbly out, his grin wide, his dark eyes more than appreciative.

"Hello, Injun." She was cordial and cool at once. "I've been home a week." She flung a thick braid over a slender, supple shoulder impatiently. "Nice of you to come at all."

"Not so much of that Injun stuff." Charley smoothed back his sleek hair and tried to tell himself he was not afraid of this glowing, golden girl. "I've been busy.

Anyhow I figured to give some of the other guys a break." He tossed an airy hand. "I knew you'd be waiting for me. Look, Jane. How about us getting married? You're grown up now."

Jane's reaction to this direct and personal suggestion was a scoffing giggle that Charley didn't like—the sort of amusement that follows a ridiculous and over-exaggerated statement.

"Hey?" He tried dignity, letting his pliant width of shoulder and thick chest compensate for his lack of height. "Quit laughing. How about it?"

Jane laughed again, but her hazel eyes were aloof, with distances in them. "Stop fooling. You came to get some of mother's cooking—like they all do."

"Laugh then, doggone it." He resisted an impulse to grab her. "How do you want me to say it? Like a book? I've been working for the police nearly a year now. I guess I've got a steady job. I'm not fooling, Jane. I've built a two-room cabin at Rickman's—a good one. All papered and everything. We can put on another room if—"

"Cabin—humph!" Jane drew herself up sharply and to Charley Dicks she was a lissom goddess; a vital, freckled-with-old-gold wild and elfin woodswoman. "Me live in a cabin! Me!"

It chilled him fast. She meant it. Her chin was up but it lowered a little as she read him, so she looked down the bridge of her straight nose and she softened the blow—a little.

"I'm sorry, Charley. I guess I've grown up more than you think. I guess I've grown—beyond cabins in the bush. Even two-room cabins with wall paper. Police job! What do you do? You drive the policemen's dog team and you do their chores. One of these days they won't need a guide and then what will you do? You'll be a trapper with a cabin in the bush. I—I'm not your kind of a woman, Charley."

Jane always was a talker, but this: Never be a regular policeman, eh? She meant more than she said. What she

meant was that he couldn't hold a white man's job. A real white man's job. Wasn't a fair thing to say to a fellow who was only twenty-two and never had a chance to go to school much, except two winters when he was a small kid.

"You're a Siwash yourself," he told her glumly. "My Dad was as white as yours even if—"

Her chin tilted higher and her eyes flashed ominously. He checked himself. This wouldn't do. The McLeans had been pretty nice to him when his folks had been lost in the white water. McLean had let him work winters around the store, had got him a job as a deckhand on the Hudson Bay steamer for the summers. And after all—Jane was only a quarter Injun.

"Okay," he said, trying to be offhand. "That's all there is to it, Jane. Marry your white man, then." But he could feel his jaw tighten. "I won't ask you again. Next time you'll do the asking, see?"

Jane scowled and put out her tongue. Scandalized, Charley jumped into his craft with a thrust that sent it fifty feet out into the river. He jerked the starting cord savagely. Nice thing for a girl to do who had been educated by the Sisters!

**D**ISMAL cogitation had brought no relief when he drew abreast of Stem's log shanty midway between McLean's Landing and Rickman's Lode. He had not stopped on the way down although he had seen a mooseskin boat drawn up and the usual kids and dogs of one of the McKenzie Mountain nomads. The fly-by-night free-traders were to be found on any tributary nowadays to intercept the mountain people on their way to the old fur posts on the McKenzie. Dicks held to the center of the Rickman River. It wasn't his place to stop and check up on the trader. That was the work of the regular police—the white men—who wore uniforms.

He looked across gloomily. It would be nice to be a policeman. To wear a uniform and go about and look into things. A man could go to a girl like—well—to Jane

McLean and she couldn't sniff and say: "Policeman! Where's your uniform?"

Uniform! Wryly Charley Dicks decided that was impossible. The mounted police didn't give uniforms to youngsters whose mothers were natives of the North Land. Maybe there wasn't any real reason for it. Maybe there was no law against it. But it just didn't happen. They would give them jobs as special constables and guides—but that wasn't the same. They didn't wear the uniforms and the jobs weren't permanent.

Shucks! Darn Jane McLean! He slammed the steering handle over and headed for the bank. Once—just once—he would act like a regular officer on patrol. As he could be if he had the chance, if he was white. Just once to see what it was like. He'd say to this trader, this Stem:

"How's business? Buying some fur off this Injun? How much? Give him good value now. Don't gyp him. These fellows from the McKenzie Mountains don't keep up with prices or—"

His prow ran up on the mud. He shut off the outboard and stood up. The nomad Injun was shoving his skin boat off with a pole. His wife looked scared. So did the two moon-faced children, whose heads just cleared the gunwale in a line with half a dozen long-haired pack dogs and a couple of fuzzy pups.

"How," greeted Charley, amiably. "You trade?" And he knew the answer.

The nomad shook his head. He was a big Injun, a six-footer, and his clothes had been patched until the patches were in rags. They had no new stuff so they had no trading.

"No trade. Go Fort now. No good, this place."

"No good? Why? Where's Stem? I mean—where white man?"

The Indian pushed clear of the shore. He lay his pole aside and picked up a paddle. His wife, a comely copper lady looked definitely frightened.

"He go dead. No trade."

The skin boat was rapidly drifting

away. Charley called sharply, "Hey! Hey, come here!"

They did not answer. Both of them plied their paddles lustily. Charley shook his head. "Go dead, eh?" This was a job for the police after all. The regular police.

"Oh well. He pulled the canoe higher. Might as well find out what had happened. Corporal Swanson or Constable Dean would come down later and do the matter up properly. Swanson, in charge of the detachment at Rickman's Lode, was regulation as heck.

CHARLEY DICKS' investigation was hasty but sufficient. Stem was lying inside his own doorstep in his own blood, dead from a rifle bullet in the throat. And Charley could see why.

Murder! Charley ran for his canoe, shoved it off in a mighty lunge and wound his starter furiously. Murder! . . .

He boiled alongside the skin boat, killed the motor and hooked a foot over the gunwale of the primitive craft, standing balanced.

"Hey? What for you killem?"

The Indian said calmly, still paddling. "Catchem squaw. No good. I shoot."

The Indian lied. Beneath his naïveté was deception that did not fool Charley Dicks. The squaw was apprehensive. She hissed a warning in sibilant gutturals.

"Hey. No shoot white man. Bad." Charley gave the advice a confidential twist. "You savvy red coat?" The police had discarded the scarlet tunics except for ceremonials, but the name persisted. "You savvy red coat?" He pointed upstream. "We go tellum red coat. Hey?" He held up a rope. "I pull."

The Indian grinned. The choice of a free ride intrigued him. He grunted a monosyllable to his spouse and her reply was understandable in any language.

She was forcibly opposed to the idea.

Negotiations were in a fair way to break down. Charley tossed the rope end to the Indian and motioned with a circular sweep of his hand to make it fast. He stepped to the stern of his canoe and, holding to

the edge of the cranky skin boat, he managed to pivot his canoe around, using the outboard for an axis. He held the rope loosely in his hand, and winked at the Indian.

"Go zip. Savvy?" He grinned and made a swooping pantomime along the water with his free hand. The Indian nodded, not understanding fully, but very grave.

Charley started the motor as slowly as he could, with spark and throttle retarded and one cylinder off compression. The line tightened and the skin boat followed the canoe, backward.

Charley made the hasty motion of tying the rope. The Indian took the hint, and made his end fast to the projecting framework sticks that crossed at the stern. Thankfully Charley took a turn around his motor support and opened up.

White water boiled before the skin boat. Its owner leaned luxuriously back. The squaw harangued him bitterly. The buck paid no attention for which Charley was thankful. That woman had savvy. She could smell trouble coming, and lots of it. She tried to crawl past her lord and master with a knife in her hand. He grunted and pushed her back.

CORPORAL SWANSON strolled down to the river bank when the outboard came roaring in. He stared frankly, somewhat amused.

"Where did you get it?" he wanted to know. "Are these those skin boat Indians from the mountains? What are you trying to do? Convince me that there really is a tribe like that?"

Charley said calmly. "No. But get organized. That guy who went into business between here and McLean's is hammering at those pearly gates and the reason is with us today. Let me handle this. Be doggone unfortunate for the Force if Hiawatha connects with that cannon. Talking slang this way he probably won't recognize my meaning."

Swanson tensed and began to whistle softly between his teeth, watching the dogs and children scrambling ashore.

"What name you?" Charley said.

"Joe."

"Joe?"

"Ummm. Joe. Big—Big Joe." He pronounced it "Pig Choe."

Casually Charley reached into the skin boat. It was made of untanned moose hides, hair side inward, neatly tied to a sapling, spidery frail framework. The seams of the hides were sewed and pitched. The floor of the boat was covered with spruce boughs, a bundle of pelts and a few—pitifully few—articles of domestic use. Some tin pails, a frying pan, two moose-hide food-bags containing dried meat or fish and a ragged blanket or two. A primitive and spartan outfit. He picked up the battered thirty-thirty carbine, and felt relief with the weapon in his hands.

"You trade?"

Big Joe grinned broadly, stepping ashore. "No trade. Good gun."

"We go talk," Charley forgot to put the gun down. He pointed to Corporal Swanson. "Tellum redcoat."

Big Joe nodded acquiescence. He was staring at the unaccustomed sights of Rickman's. The steady thump of a distant compressor came to them. A Diesel stationary thudded in a muted diapason, *oom-oom-oomph!* Somewhere the scream of a laboring tractor rose above the miscellaneous sounds beyond the bushes on the river bank above them.

Big Joe walked with Dicks and Swanson up the bank while his squaw stayed with the boat and her children and the dogs.

Anguish stood in her eyes.

## II

TALL young Corporal Swanson was a punctilious officer who left nothing to chance. His investigations were painstaking. He summarized the result of the present one when he returned from Stem's cabin late the same afternoon.

"Murder," he told Dicks, who was acting as jailer. "Have the preliminary hearing tomorrow. Then the prisoner will have

to go to Fort Smith for trial." He flicked the radio switch and the blue lights pulsed. "I'll see what the inspector says."

Big Joe stood with his face pressed against the bars of the steel cage in the corner of the police office. He asked wistfully. "I go now?"

"Pretty soon." Charley Dicks soothed him. "How long will it take Mr. Stevens to get here? Did you tell him Joe is getting kind of impatient and I've got as much as I can stand of the squaw howling on first the front steps and then at the back. So has your wife. And look—wait a minute: There ain't going to be any committal. When I say my say to Mr. Stevens he's going to turn this guy loose. Mr. Stevens has some savvy. You needn't bother to call the inspector until—"

He broke off as Swanson contacted divisional headquarters and the blue lights pulsed as he tapped the key. When he had completed the report Swanson took off the headphone.

"I left Dean in charge," he announced briskly. "Straight case of cold-blooded murder. The Indian got scared off when he saw your boat, without a doubt. We couldn't find any relatives' names among Stem's papers so we'll just hold everything for the public administrator. We don't bury the body until the inspector gets here."

Dicks' jaw dropped. Dismay showed as he gasped weakly:

"Cold-blooded murder nothing? Why, that Injun—"

"Oho!" Patronage ran in Swanson's assured grin, no less than his words. "Now what? Sure it was cold-blooded. Stem's gun was standing against the wall just inside the door. He never had a chance to reach for it. Murder, sure. Preliminary hearing tomorrow and then we take the prisoner to Fort Smith for a jury trial."

"Hey," begged Charley. "Not so fast. Stevens will turn him loose and—"

"Will he!" grinned Swanson. "I don't think so, but if he does our Mr. Stevens the magistrate is due to get educated. I'll simply arrest the accused again and take him to Fort Smith without a committal.

This isn't a trial, this is only a preliminary hearing. You know that, Charley. Haven't you been reading the Code in your spare time for the past year?"

"Yeah," admitted Charley Dicks, slumping morosely into a chair. "This is what I get for pretending to be a regular policeman. For trying to act like one. Aw, I ought to stay where I belong, keep on being a chore boy, a hired man for you guys with the uniform."

Swanson felt acutely uncomfortable. He knew what ambitions surged in the young guide's heart and he was sincerely sorry that he could not encourage them. The Force maintains a high standard of enlisted personnel and exceptions are rarities. There was nothing against taking on a man of mixed blood or scanty learning in the regulations, but there is such a thing as procedure and tradition. He could not conscientiously give Dicks any hope. It would be unkind, even cruel to do so.

"Hey," Dicks begged again. "Why can't we get Mr. Stevens and fix this thing up right now? I got something to say about that cold-blooded murder stuff. I feel doggone mean about this. That Big Joe has been suffering ever since we coaxed him into that cell and slammed the door on him. That was a kind of a dirty trick but it makes it worse to keep him shut up. He won't eat and he won't sleep and he'll die quick."

"No." Swanson was unyielding. "We'll wait for the inspector. I'm in charge here. This is my bailiwick. Murder is murder and it gets handled according to the law. If you think this Indian didn't do it, just say so and we will go after the man that did. And that's that. Somebody did it and somebody gets a trial for it."

**I** HAVEN'T got a uniform," Dicks drummed his fingers disconsolately on the desk, "but I can read tracks. I read what happened at that place different to what you did. I figure when I tell Mr. Stevens what—"

A mournful wail arose from the street. Swanson said sharply: "What's that?"

"Big Joe's family. They kind of don't like the idea of him being shut up in a steel cage. They figure—"

"Chase them away," snapped Swanson. "They'll drive my wife off her trolley."

"She went over to Mrs. Stevens' early," Dicks told him. "I couldn't shut them up and I was afraid Joe here would start howling himself any minute. Look, you ain't dealing with civilized people now. These wild folks from the mountains are different. They don't know a doggone thing about our laws or regulations and wouldn't understand them if they did."

Swanson stood up and strolled over to the cell. Big Joe grinned happily. "I go?"

"No," said Swanson flatly, "you stay. You killem white man. You stay here long time, see."

"I go—Fort," explained Big Joe patiently. "Squaw—papoose—dogs. We go Fort. Catchem grub—med'sine—bullets. We go now."

"Aw, he don't understand." Charley Dicks was bitter. "He wants to go to Fort Norman like he has always done. Like the mountain people always do. They see white folks once a year and they get their trading and their churching done then. Two or three weeks in the summer, once a year. Then they take what they can carry on their backs—and that ain't much when you figure it's got to last them a year—and they load up the dogs and they head back across the muskegs on foot until they hit the mountains again."

"And them mountains are steep and tall and so doggone cold and generally mean that you haven't got any idea how tough it is to live there. But that's all they know. And next summer they make themselves some skin boats and they come down the twisty creeks and foaming rivers to the McKenzie and on to Fort Norman again. They ride down but they walk back because they can't take no boats up them rivers. Now, how the heck are you going to make a man like that understand the Criminal Code?"

Swanson chewed his under lip resentfully. There was a sincere ring to Dicks'

argument that almost obscured the specious reasoning behind it. It was all wrong, and yet, somewhere in the halfbreed lad's unorthodox debate lay concealed a prickle that rasped on the inner lining of Swanson's rigidly honest conscience.

"Dry up," he snorted, taking refuge in the inevitable and eternal alibi of his profession. "We didn't make the laws. Our job is to enforce them. Somebody killed a man and somebody has to be tried in the manner prescribed by law. It's too bad about this Indian's wife and kids but every man that gets behind the bars for one thing or another has some women and children who have to suffer."

"Yeah," Dicks persisted, watching the eyes of the trapped wild man. There was a bewildered look in them; a hurt, afraid look. "Some goonies wrote the law, Corporal, but that don't say you can't use a little sense enforcing it."

"Shut up," snapped Swanson. "Your argument is haywire. The inspector will come in himself on this. Probably be in tomorrow. I hear the steamer puffing up the bend. I'm going down to see who comes."

SWANSON almost stumbled over Big Joe's wife on the office stoop. She sat huddled in the folds of a faded and soiled calico Mother Hubbard while her children of four and two years played at her feet. She looked up tearfully at Swanson. It struck him as odd that the Indian woman should be crying. He had always understood that the Indians were a stoical bunch.

"He come?" she breathed, and seemed to shrink from the uniform. "My man—come?"

From the corner of his eye Swanson could see two ladies approaching down the board walk of Rickman's single street: his own bride of short months and handsome Mrs. Stevens, the wife of the manager of the mining town, and its first lady. He glanced again to the groveling aboriginal at his feet and felt oddly embarrassed.

He stepped hastily back inside and shut the office door.

Charley Dicks was sitting with his feet on Swanson's desk; and the thick volume of the Criminal Code was open on his knees. He did not look up as Swanson crossed the room and left by the hall door to his living quarters at the rear of the police building. He gave no sign of interest at the murmur of voices outside until the outer door opened, when he jumped hastily and respectfully to his feet.

Young Mrs. Swanson was red-eyed and Mrs. Stevens was urging the Indian woman into the room. Mrs. Big Joe came in, furtively, and frightened, only reassured by the touch of the white woman's hand on her shoulder; the sympathy and understanding in her voice.

"Of course you can talk to him." Mrs. Stevens pushed gently and the squaw scuttled across the room. She clung to the bars of the cell and her concern poured forth in a moaning stream, in the silvery idioms of the mountain-people: a simple barbaric language that was the vehicle of grief and the voice of a great and terrible fear.

Mrs. Swanson went through the same door her husband had used a moment before.

Charley Dicks beamed at the two youngsters who peered furtively in from the stoop. "Woof," he said pleasantly. "You kids eat all that candy yet? Looks like you got most of it on your faces. Pretty soon when the boss gets back I'll get you some more. I got to watch your old man just now so that somebody don't slip him a hacksaw or a can opener or something."

"Hacksaw!" repeated Mrs. Stevens and sat against the edge of the desk, her palms on the edge behind her. "Oh, yes, I see what you mean, Charley." Dicks was squatting at the open door, grinning at the children. "Don't you give them any more candy," she warned. "You'll make them ill."

"Naw," he scoffed, over his shoulder. "You can't make them sick, Mrs. Stevens.

These kids can't get enough of that sort of thing. They live on meat and dried fish the rest of the year. You know what these mountain Injuns do the first thing they hit a store? They buy a couple of pounds of butter and a pail of jam or honey and they sit around and eat it by the handfuls. Then they go and buy some more."

Mrs. Stevens seemed to shudder. Charley Dicks said, "Doggone, I like kids. As soon as Swanson comes back I'm going to rustle around and see if I can't buy this little girl a doll. I bet she never had anything like that in her life. Nope, I don't suppose there is any such thing in town. Aw—I'll get some red and blue cloth and a couple of bright buttons and I'll make them some. Something that won't be too heavy to pack.

"Sa-ay, Mrs. Stevens—you ought to see me make dolls! When I worked on the steamboat I used to make lots of them. The Injun kids used to look out for me all the way from Aklavik to Fort Smith. Sure, I can make dandy ones."

### III

THE steamboat whistled down by the bend. Mrs. Swanson came out with a laden tray in her hands and put it on the desk. "Here is some tea, Charley. I—if there is anything else you think you want, give me a shout."

Mrs. Stevens sighed and followed her out. Charley Dicks took two pieces of buttered bread off the tray and tried to give them to the children. They hung back, wary as foxes. He set the slices down on the doorstep and carried the tray over to the cell, pulling a bench out from the wall with his foot to place it on.

"Hey!" he said loudly to interrupt the moaning of the Indian woman. "*Muck-a-muck!* Tie into this chow and forget things for awhile. Hey, you, Joe—you eat. Savvy? Maybe you would savvy this stuff better if Mrs. Swanson had made it in a black lard pail. This pouring tea out of a spout isn't in your line. I'll do it. See?

Tea. Hot and strong. Put in some sugar. Like this—and you drink. Here—take the cup.”

Big Joe did not take it. Instead he asked again. “I go? I go?”

His squaw still reached in through the bars for him and her lamentations filled the room anew. Charley put the cups back on the tray. Sadly he went back to the door where the children were devouring the bread and butter. He gazed at them moodily and his thoughts were dark. . . .

Half an hour later the Indian woman still moaned at the steel lattice while her man gazed stonily forth.

Swanson came in, stepping gingerly past the children who were contentedly building wigwams of sticks and dirt on the stoop. He was followed by a slender young lady who immediately turned Charley Dicks to a palpitant statue of utter astonishment.

“Hello,” said Jane McLean brightly. “It’s a wonder you wouldn’t come down to the landing to meet me.”

“Huh!” Charley swallowed thickly. “What—what are you doing in Rickman’s? Why didn’t you tell me this morning that you were coming up? Hey?”

Jane made a face. She looked about the police office with emphasized aversion. She looked out at the two dusky, dirty babies and she gave attention to the poignant tableau at the barred cage. She said candidly:

“That Stem was no good. Everyone says so. Everyone thinks he got what he deserved. Big Joe is a good Indian.”

“What are you doing here?” demanded Charley again. “Did you come to tell me you treated me pretty darn mean this morning? Hey?”

“Come on out where we live, Jane,” Swanson interrupted impatiently. “You can leave these fusses until later. You had a scrap, did you? I thought Charley has been pretty grouchy all day.” He opened the door to the hall. “Out this way.” All ears, Charley could hear the introduction. “Mrs. Stevens, here you are. Here is your new maid, Jane McLean; the pride of the

north, the toast of the McKenzie watershed, the true love of our own inimitable Charley Dicks.” He laughed at his joke.

Charley’s ears burned. It didn’t comfort him to hear Jane giggle, too.

“Isn’t it awful? Captain Forsheim said you wanted a girl to help in the house because you couldn’t get anyone to stay in Rickman’s, so I came along on the steamer. I get so tired of living out in the bush. I told Dad if he wanted me to stay that he’d have to put in running water and have electric lights but he just laughed and said the next thing, I’d want to go to Edmonton or some real city.”

Charley listened shamelessly. The hall door was open and Swanson’s broad back filled the inner door beyond. Swanson said:

“Take a breath, young lady. This is Mrs. Swanson.”

Jane acknowledged the introduction and seemed suddenly embarrassed. Mrs. Swanson’s cool, young loveliness made Jane uncivilized, inadequate, even clumsy.

Mrs. Stevens said gently: “It was nice of you to come, Jane. But are you sure you would like to work for me? I’m a fussy old woman and—”

Jane murmured something, and bobbed her head eagerly.

Swanson closed the door abruptly and scowled at Charley Dicks.

“Well, you heard it all. Listen—what did you let that squaw in for? Chase her and the kids out of here. And then you can tote Jane’s trunk up to Stevens’. Come on, get busy.”

“You say it easy.” Charley still smarted. “But I think we are going to have plenty trouble separating those Injuns. Let me tell you something. Don’t you let this Joe out of that cage unless you got some more help handy than just me. If he ever gets out it will take some extra muscles to handle him.”

“Think so?” Swanson snapped. “He doesn’t look so fierce to me.”

“You believe me,” Dicks insisted. “He’s wild and we coaxed him into that cage before he knew what it was all about. But we won’t put him in again unless we knock

him out to do it. So save yourself some trouble. Be plenty if he got away, hey?"

"You bet," Swanson eyed the cell and his eyebrows drew down. "It would mean the end of our jobs, Charley, and maybe a few months in the hoosegow for neglect of duty. That doesn't worry me but the thought of a dishonorable discharge does. I wouldn't feel like holding my head up again. Now, suppose you start carrying out orders?"

DICKS laid his hand on the Indian woman's shoulder, shoving the bench with the untasted food tray to one side. He said calmly. "You go now. Maybe tomorrow you come. Go now."

The woman clung to the bars, wailing. Her sorrow filled the room and Swanson stopped his writing, staring bleakly in front of him. Dicks appealed to Big Joe, appealed with a slow shake of his head, a jerked thumb over his shoulder: man to man stuff. The woman had to leave and it should be done decently.

Big Joe read sympathy in Charley Dicks—sympathy and a distaste for the task he was doing. Big Joe spoke a terse, guttural sentence, as if his mouth was full of soft food.

The squaw reluctantly let go of the bars. She stumbled for the door and her stricken shoulders shook. She could not control the harsh, dry sobs.

Charley Dicks stopped in front of the table. "I get paid for doing this," he said dourly. "I get paid money. But some things there ain't money enough to pay for. See?"

"You're telling me!" snarled Swanson. "Maybe you think I enjoy this?"

"Humph." Dicks grinned an odd, grim sort of grin. "But you wear the uniform. I just do the chores. The dirty work, see. It makes a lot of difference."

"Want a uniform, do you?" Swanson snapped. It was as if he had thrown a knife.

Charley straightened and threw it back—point first. "Not any more than you want your right eye, fella," his voice

shook a trifle, but it was cold, defiant, and honest. "Not any more than you want 'em both, see?"

. . . It was eight o'clock in the evening and the sun was brilliant when Charley Dicks reported to Corporal Swanson.

"Well, I removed the local disturbance," he announced wearily, "and if you think I didn't have my hands full you got another guess coming. I sort of managed to make her understand not to come back until tomorrow. It's pretty hard to make them understand what tomorrow means when it doesn't get dark."

Swanson spoke abruptly, trying not to see the pleading man who stood with his face against the bars, as he had been standing ever since they had put him in, eight hours before. "How much did you spend in the store, Charley?"

Charley's cheeks turned from beige to scarlet. "That's my lookout," he asserted angrily. "These people are in a jam, see? They just got a few furs and with no Big Joe to do their hunting for them this winter they are going to have a tough time. I bought them some grub, sure. And some knickknacks like they never get a chance to get."

"Okay." Swanson grinned. "You needn't apologize. The storekeeper stopped in just now. He says you just about loaded them down with a year's supplies. Well—as you say—that's your lookout. But I told my wife and she thinks you are a dear little thoughtful boy."

Charley glared ferociously. Swanson stayed him with an upraised hand.

"Don't get mad. So does Mrs. Stevens and your friend Jane. They have been holding a mother's meeting out there. Mrs. Stevens forgot to go home. Anyhow, Mr. Stevens will be down here shortly. Got a radio that this inspector is coming in on the plane that is due almost any time now and we are going to have the inquest and the preliminary together. Tomorrow you and I will probably have to escort Big Joe to jail to await his trial. I guess we'll go by plane."

Charley rolled a meditative smoke. He said, slowly:

"A plane ride would tickle me to death any other time. You heard what Jane said about wanting to live like white folks. Well, I guess I'm the other way. I'd like white folks' things, too, but I don't like white folks' laws. Not the way they use them, I mean. I guess I got too much Injun in me. I just can't see shutting that poor guy up in jail for six months waiting for a trial. Be a lot better for us to take him out in the back yard and shoot him. Better for him, I mean."

"Go in and sing that chorus with the ladies." Swanson consulted his wrist watch and stood up. The chest of his tunic was wrinkle-free, the strap of his Sam Brown glittered cherry red. He was polished and spruce and his big frame was made for a uniform as his big nose and chin were the hallmarks of a fighter.

Charley felt a vast and wistful envy; an honest, hopeless envy. Swanson set his Stetson at a rakish angle.

"Go and talk to them. Tell 'em that the weight of the law is the height of oppression. I'm going out to meet the inspector. He's due in ten minutes."

#### IV

**B**UT the inspector did not arrive in ten minutes. The plane was a full hour late and in that time Charley Dicks had, at Mrs. Stevens' request, run an errand for her to the store and to her house, three blocks up the street. Sort of foolish errands they were, too. He had not been able to find the October copy of the book, *Northland Gardens*, Mrs. Stevens wanted.

He trotted in the back door, breathless. He really should not have left the prisoner so long. But it was great to be able to do a favor for Mrs. Stevens. He had been listening for the plane all the time as it would not do to let the inspector think he had been away.

"Sa-ay, Mrs. Stevens. I looked all over but I couldn't find that book." It struck him that Mrs. Stevens was pretty uncon-

cerned, seeing that she had especially wanted it. She seemed worried too. "I couldn't find it anywhere. And I had to hurry back. The plane is just landing. Maybe you put it somewhere else?"

He teetered anxiously. Mrs. Stevens said graciously, "Thank you, Charley. Perhaps I did. Sorry to trouble you."

Jane had on one of Mrs. Swanson's aprons and was busy at the white tile sink, and Mrs. Swanson had the radio going strong in the living room. Charley sort of wished Jane would look at him.

He went out through the hall smoothing his hair back. He wondered if he should put on a coat, but it was more comfortable in his shirtsleeves. He stepped into the police office and instantly felt something was amiss. There was a different feeling to the room. The strain, the wretchedness and the misery were gone. And Charley Dicks' world suddenly stood still with a sickening jerk.

One look told him everything. A section of one cell bar had been removed and Big Joe was gone. He had squeezed through and out.

In the same look Dicks glimpsed Swanson's straight back through the street window. He was carrying a parcel under one arm and he towered over the uniformed man who was with him and over Mr. Stevens, the magistrate and coroner and resident-manager of the Rickman Mines.

Thoughts! They jumped and raced and whistled and they scared hell out of a man. A fellow daren't think. He daren't think of a shuddering squaw and a caged wild man and three white women in the rooms behind. He daren't think of the rigors of a disciplined force and the disgrace, the punishment, that would fall on a tall young corporal whose heart, whose life was wrapped up in the uniform that he served with a fierce unswerving loyalty.

A fellow daren't think about those things. Not a man that wasn't only a jump from the teepee himself. But a man couldn't stop his thoughts. They flew faster than the police radio messages and

they spelled a grim and grisly reckoning that just made a fellow sick to his toes to think about them. A man could think such a lot, in the time it took three men to walk from the window to the door, along the sidewalk outside.

Charley Dicks was standing by the table when the door opened. He was standing with his hips against it and his hands behind him on the corners. His hands were holding so tight they shook.

Swanson said: "This is Charley Dicks, our Special, sir. We're proud of Charley. He's done some good work. He made this arrest, and he was unarmed. This isn't the inspector after all, Charley. This is the commissioner himself. The inspector is—"

Something was wrong. Charley made no move to acknowledge the introduction. Swanson snapped his head to the cell and he dropped the bundle with a thud on the floor. He turned to the commissioner and his face was the face of a man who sees the end of everything.

**I**T WAS Stevens who spoke first. Stevens said, dryly, in the same tone he used to pass a judgment in court or to make an important decision for his great company, the Amalgamated: "Jailbreak! The bird has flown. The wild man has gone back to the wilds and now somebody pays the piper. Charley, I didn't think it of you. You've let us down."

Swanson made a strangled sound in his throat. His thick chest heaved. The fiber had gone out of him. Stevens took charge. Authority was second nature with him.

"Your visit seems to be opportune, Mr. Commissioner. If you will take a seat at the desk we will hear what these young men have to say. The prisoner is gone, and seeing that he is a bush Indian, I have a feeling that pursuit will be somewhat more than useless. That so—Charley?"

"Yeah." Charley moved away from the table. He did not like the way Mr. Stevens looked at him, as if he was awful disappointed and kind of ashamed, too.

"Yeah, it's no use to chase one of them mountain Injuns. They go just like a wolf through the bush and they don't leave no tracks. I guess he's gone back to the mountains."

The commissioner sat down at the desk and his brow wore a thundercloud. His mustache was clipped and brown; his hair was gray. He wore a double row of war ribbons on his left breast.

Corporal Swanson took his stiff-brimmed hat from his head and he flipped it flat on the desk before the man who had charge of the police in an area that could accommodate a dozen European nations.

"I'm finished. There it is, sir. You can have the rest of my uniform as soon as I can take it off." His fingers tore at his clothing.

The commissioner's eyes were somber. He swept the hat impatiently aside. He barked: "Stop that! Don't act like a child in a tantrum. If you have been remiss in this matter, Corporal, we shall certainly have your uniform. Meanwhile I shall hear what you have to say."

Swanson slowly began to button his tunic again. The commissioner made a gesture toward a chair at his right.

"You are the magistrate and first citizen of these parts, Mr. Stevens." He tried to be genial but his mouth clamped ominously. "I would feel honored if you would sit in judgment with me. I—this is rather a shock."

"Shock to me, too," admitted Stevens. "Thanks, I will sit with you. I've known these boys quite a time. They are good lads. I can't quite understand it myself."

"I'm in charge." Swanson stood very stiff and unflinching. "I'm—I was in charge of Rickman's Lode Detachment. The prisoner has escaped and I am responsible. I don't think it is necessary to investigate further. The fault is mine."

"Wasn't the prisoner here an hour ago?" demanded Stevens. "Wasn't he in safe custody at that time—when you left to meet the plane?"

Swanson kept his eyes from Charley Dicks. He nodded. "Yes, sir."

"You were with me waiting for the plane for the last hour or more," Stevens stated. "If he was in the cell when you left that lets you out for the present. Suppose you stand to one side and let Charley explain what happened."

The commissioner decided it. He nodded curt affirmation and Swanson reluctantly stepped to one side. "It was my fault," he insisted stubbornly. "I shouldn't have left Charley to—"

The commissioner silenced him with a glare. He said to Charley Dicks, "Well—what have you to say?" It was plain that he did not think much of Charley.

Charley slouched over to the cell, looked at the space where a single bar had been sawed top and bottom, picked up a thin object off the floor and came back.

"Well," he said. "I couldn't stand it. I slipped him this hacksaw blade and took a walk. When I came back he was gone."

THE commissioner acted as if he were suffering from an undue pressure of outraged feelings. He tugged at his collar with a finger next to his throat, and his eyes bulged perceptibly.

Stevens sat back and bit the end from a cigar. "Go on, boy," said Mr. Stevens in the same dry, impersonal tone. "That isn't all the story. Something led up to all this. You've been with the police quite a while. In fact it seems to me that your great ambition was to be taken on regularly, to wear the uniform. So we would like to know just how it happened that you turned this wild man loose, after he had committed a murder."

"Well . . ." Charley could not look at Mr. Stevens because Mr. Stevens had that disappointed expression, as if he had caught Charley stealing, or something. Stevens was stocky and grizzled but he was the boss of Rickman's and knew it. Mostly he held a twinkle in his eyes, but not now. "It's like I told Corporal Swanson. It ain't the law so much, it's the way the doggone thing is handled."

The commissioner snorted. "Grrarf!" and continued to glare.

Stevens said quietly: "Go on, Charley. Tell us all about it. Take your time and tell it in your own way."

"Well," Charley started again. He was distressed because he could not look Mr. Stevens straight in the eye, and he never dodged anybody's eyes, unless maybe it was Jane McLean's when she said she didn't want a cabin in the bush.

"Before I picked up Big Joe I had a look at what happened. I read the tracks. That's one thing I can do. Lots of people think they are trackers but I practice that stuff. I notice things. I saw where Stem stood. I saw where the Injun woman stood. I saw where she ran. I saw where Big Joe walked backward toward the river bank. I saw where the squaw stood when she fired the shot. I picked up the empty shell. I saw where Big Joe walked over and looked at Stem. He picked up Stem's gun and reached inside and set it against the wall. Them mountain Injuns are careful of guns. They got to depend on them."

"You're lying," growled the commissioner.

"No," Stevens raised a forefinger. "He's not lying. He started to lie to us but he's not lying now. I believe him when he talks about tracks. I've seen him do some tracking myself that would puzzle a bloodhound. Let him talk."

"Swanson and Dean didn't see what I saw," Charley argued slowly. "That isn't their fault. They are smarter than me but that's my line. I figure that this Stem grabbed the woman and Big Joe interfered. Maybe it just started as a joke but I don't know. He maybe hit big Joe and maybe Joe gave him a shove, or something. Anyhow Stem got mad and grabbed his gun. Joe started to back up, naturally. The squaw had run to the boat. Heck—he was her man, wasn't he? She didn't stop to think. She drew a bead on this Stem and, doggone, you couldn't blame her."

Swanson's breath came heavily. The commissioner leaned forward in his seat. Stevens chewed at his unlighted cigar.

"We shut this guy up in a cell and he never been shut up one minute in his life before," Charley looked over Stevens' head. Doggone, it was hard to fool Mr. Stevens. "We shut him up in a cell and we told him it was because he killed a white man. Yeah. Did we think he was going to say it was his wife did it?"

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" Swanson roared. "You know I would have taken your word for the tracks. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Aw, I tried to, but you said the guy would get committed for trial and that it would be six months before the judge even got around to him and you couldn't do anything about it. Hey? Did you think I was going to have you shut the squaw up instead of Big Joe? Humph! We'd've had to kill Big Joe first. That's what we'd've had to do."

The commissioner clicked his tongue against his teeth. "The evidence showed the woman did the shooting and you promptly locked the man up." He seemed horrified. "Incredible!"

"Go on," said Stevens calmly. "Go on, Charley."

"Aw, that's all," said Charley Dicks. "The woman was howling around here, the kids were howling, the dogs were barking. Mrs. Swanson was getting all jumpy and I couldn't stand no more of it. I couldn't stand the sight of that poor gooney standing there with his face pressed between the bars, knowing he was thinking of his wife and kids. Wondering how they was going to live this winter in the McKenzie Mountains where nobody but a fool wild man would try to make a living anyhow."

"I knew what that Big Joe was thinking, see? I guess it's because I'm half Injun myself, but my mother was from the River people. Big Joe knew the squaw would have a tough time going back across the muskegs and alder bottoms and up the mountain trails because there ain't no trails to speak of. She could maybe make out to load the dogs but she would have to carry both the kids too—and that

was Joe's job. Aw—I slipped him the hacksaw blade and I took a walk. Yeah."

The commissioner's eyes were frosty flames. He said in a cold voice of judgment:

"You know what that means? You know what you are saying, before witnesses—to your commanding officer?"

"Yeah. I mean yes, sir." Charley Dicks swallowed hard. "I read the code quite a bit. I know what it means. It means three to seven years in the penitentiary for me—for a police constable conniving at the escape of a prisoner from lawful custody."

A sound of muted voices came from the hallway, feminine voices. A thump. A girl's shrill: "They can't—they won't—"

SWANSON turned his head in annoyance but before he could move the commissioner's crisp query halted him. The commissioner asked sternly: "Did you think of that?"

"Yeah." Charley licked his lips and tried to look at Mr. Stevens who was watching him like a hawk. Mr. Stevens had a hard cynical smile on his face. "Yeah. I guess I did. I know the—"

"Stop!" The muted voices broke, the door flew open and Jane McLean came flying half across the big room in a sliding skid. She was turning before she came to a halt and the muzzle of the double-barreled shotgun she clutched covered the four men by the table. "Don't move." Her command trembled on a note of hysteria but the gun swung to the hall door where Mrs. Stevens thrust out a hand to bar Swanson's young wife. "Stay there—all of you. Don't move! Don't move I tell you! You won't lock Charley up in any jail! You won't lock him up to die. You won't! He—he's—part Indian. He's like I am. He isn't used to being shut up. He won't stand it. He can't! He can't stand to be shut up!"

Swanson made to step toward her and Charley Dicks clutched his arm fast. "Don't. She'll shoot. Let me talk."

"No!" Jane stamped her foot and her

eyes were terrified as she backed slowly from them; but the gun muzzle was level and her fingers curled on the triggers. You run, Charley. Run quick. I'll hold them until you get a start. They'll never catch you. Nobody can catch you in this country. Anybody will help you. Anybody in a thousand miles of river. You go—"

The plea died in her throat. Charley Dicks was shaking his head. Slowly and positively. "Put down the gun, Jane. I don't run from anything."

"Yes," whispered Jane. "Charley, run. And I'll go with you the first chance I get. I'll go with you to the McKenzie—you go quickly, Charley. I—you'll know where to find me. I'll be waiting. I—I don't want running water and a bathroom, Charley. I just want you!"

Charley Dicks weakened. He wriggled a step sideways and he edged away from Swanson and Mr. Stevens and the commissioner. He said in a marveling, jubilant tone: "Gosh, Jane, I—"

Mrs. Swanson lifted Mrs. Stevens' arm at that and walked past the older woman with a smile. She ignored Jane's weapon, turning her back upon it. She picked up the hacksaw blade from the table and she held it up before the commissioner and Mr. Stevens.

"It's our blade, from our hacksaw. Isn't everyone being just a little bit premature? I—I might have given it to Big Joe!"

Swanson jumped as if a wasp had stung him on the ear. He jumped back and his face went white. The commissioner looked at the composed young woman and puzzled, shifted to Swanson.

"This is somewhat confusing as well as—er, theatrical," he stated coldly. "Do I understand—"

Corporal Swanson stepped forward and put his long arm across his wife's shoulders. The look he bent on the commissioner was an ancient one, and primitive. It was a leveled lance, a dagger's point.

"What my wife chooses to do, sir," he said, and he was barely within the borders of respect, "is nobody's business but mine!"

The commissioner sat up straight and startled. Jane McLean said weakly: "Oh. Oh—Charley! D-didn't you do it?"

There was a moment of confusion. Charley Dicks took the shotgun from the girl and she had hysterics loudly and with abandon. Swanson drew his wife closer and pushed her gently toward the hall door as Mrs. Stevens came into the room with a sad smile on her lips and distress in her eyes. The commissioner scratched his head and looked at Mr. Stevens who was watching his own wife. He was watching her oddly and the cigar fell from his teeth unheeded.

It was so confusing that for a moment no one noticed that the street door was open and a ragged, brown man in old flannel shirt and blue overalls with a battered black felt on his head was standing there. He had a red bandanna around his neck and he hesitated because he could not understand the queer people who lived in this house and the mysterious things they did.

Charley Dicks saw him first and he clapped a hand over Jane McLean's mouth to shut her up, and the hot tears scalded the back of his hand as he shouted:

"Hey, you Joe! You go quick. What for you come back?"

That brought their bewildered attention, reduced the room to a static silence and Joe stalked in with simple dignity.

"I get out," he spoke slowly and painfully, groping for the white man's word. "That's good—for let me out. I bring—present." He snapped his hand and a fluffy, blue-tinged lynx skin unrolled before them. He held it up and it reached from his chin to the floor: long haired of an unbelievable silkiness, silvery and buff and sparkling; a lovely thing. He stopped before Mrs. Stevens and held it out. "You take—present!"

## V

ANTICLIMAXES are dangerous. The commissioner knocked back his chair as he jerked to his feet, thoroughly in-

censed and indignant. He slapped his palm flat on the desk for attention—and got attention.

"This is grotesque!" A lesser man would have spluttered furiously—would have spoken his mind with no mincing of words or sparing of individuals. "This is absurd." The commissioner was an autocratic leader of men, backed up by an established and inflexible discipline. But he was also a gentleman. "I have been placed in a ridiculous and intolerable situation. Is there—can there be a reasonable explanation?"

Mrs. Stevens held the lynx pelt to her throat, smiling over it at Big Joe. She said, "Thank you, Joe."

Big Joe grinned wide. The debt was paid. "I go."

Mrs. Stevens looked around at the others; then she nodded slightly, as if in tacit permission.

No one said him nay. Big Joe walked out of the room as he had entered it, silently, on moccasined feet. Mrs. Stevens spoke to the commissioner; answered him softly, lingering so slightly on the key words that her explanation carried reproof and conviction and a plea for tolerance. She said to him:

"I am Mrs. Stevens. On an impulse—an old woman's impulse—I did a terrible thing—in the eyes of the law. But can you say that no good has come of it?"

The commissioner bowed frigidly. "Madam, I do not understand you."

Stevens started up and his mouth went grim. Charley Dicks and Swanson grabbed him together. Swanson hissed, "Shut up, Judge. Keep quiet. Wait!"

Mrs. Stevens smiled wistfully. "I do wish you would. I wish you would believe that I had no thought we would have such a terrible scene. You came in so suddenly and everything began to happen so quickly, that before I could come out everyone was—"

Her hands lifted.

She half turned so that she looked at Charley Dicks and Jane McLean and the Swansons all at once. But she looked long-

est at her husband. Dicks and Swanson hastily took their hands off him.

"In order for you to understand why I hesitated, I must tell you that my husband wasn't always a wealthy man. He didn't always have a highly paid and responsible position. He was a miner when I married him but he was ambitious. And I was ambitious for him. We had been married five years before he was able to finish the schooling that made him a specialist in his work. Before he got his degree as a mines engineer."

It was breathlessly quiet in the police office at Rickman's Lode.

"Perhaps I'm an old, romantic fool," Mrs. Stevens told the commissioner although she was talking to them all. "But I know everyone here so well. Eric and Lila Swanson and Charley Dicks. I know Jane very well now, too. I know how ambitious these boys are. I know how devoted they are to the force that you command in the Territories, Commissioner. I know also how a woman instinctively wonders, sometimes, because she is a woman, if her husband's greatest interest does not lie in his work."

"Have I proved something tonight? Have I proved that chivalry is not dead, that decent people are always decent and that self-sacrifice and honor aren't just artificial ethics, and confined to any particular caste of society. That primitive Indian, Big Joe, as well as Charley and Jane, and Lila and Eric: they were all rather splendid, weren't they? They would even lie—what an insufficient word! As for my own husband—I know what he is thinking now. He is as primitively honest in his inherent sense of right and wrong as the rest of us."

The commissioner bowed, and it was a different bow. It carried courtesy and homage and respect. He said soberly:

"You have made it very clear, Mrs. Stevens. I can understand, I think. Won't you please sit down? There are chairs for everyone."

The ladies sat down. The men stood. The commissioner looked at the roof and choose his words.

"The words of our northland poet come to me. He wrote that there are strange things done in the midnight sun. Surely that statement is applicable to what has transpired here tonight. In view of Mrs. Stevens' er—explanation, I think we should take stock:

"We can agree, in view of Dicks' evidence at the scene of the shooting, that it would not be—ah—politic to prosecute the woman. No jury would convict her and we would probably lose prestige by bringing her to trial. We have also released Big Joe because there is no evidence to convict him. Perhaps I am going too fast. You are the magistrate, Mr. Stevens. What are your views?"

"Absolutely," boomed Stevens, "no case whatever."

The commissioner brought his eyes down from the ceiling. He crooked a finger at Charley Dicks. And his brows drew close. He said:

"Come here, you."

Charley took the three steps that brought him before the desk.

"You're through as special constable with our force," said the commissioner bluntly. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," Charley gulped. "I knew that. I guess a man can't have everything.

I guess I can make out. If Jane was willing to go with me into the mountains I guess I've got no kick coming. I'd rather have her than the job."

"Don't interrupt," snapped the commissioner. "By heaven, it's about time you learned some parade manners. Stand up straight. Throw your chest out. Keep your thumbs down by the seams of your breeches. When you get that uniform Swanson is going to measure you for, I want you to be a credit to it. And if you are getting married you might arrange with Mr. Stevens to rent one of his company's standardized bungalows he was telling me about as we came along. Four rooms and a bath, with steam heat."

"Absolutely," boomed Mr. Stevens, the manager of Rickman's Lode. "And now, Commissioner, if you will come over to my house, I will—"

"Hey," cried Charley Dicks deliriously, his eyes gleaming, his whole face radiant. "Hey, you mean I get another chance? A real chance! You mean I'm going to be on probation as a—"

"Probation, hell!" snorted the commissioner, and didn't trouble to apologize to the ladies. "You're on the regular force. The uniformed force! You've served your probation, son."



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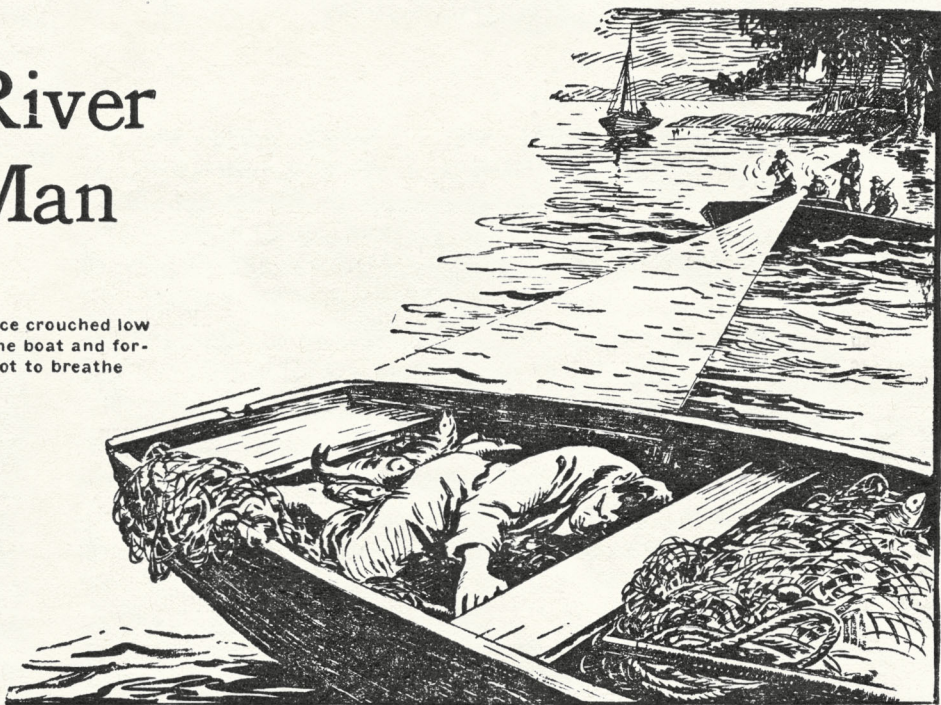
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# River Man

Lance crouched low in the boat and forgot to breathe



*The moon and the river: every denizen of the Big Water must know them and respect them—for they can be the faithful servants of one man . . . and certain death to another. A vivid short story of the Mississippi*

By JIM KJELGAARD

LANCE FERRIS pushed his scow as close as he could to the bank under the twisted willows. He poled it upstream a good ten poles, and let the current catch its nose and swing it down-river again. Lightly he let the pole trail over the stern. Halfway back to the willows the pole shot through his hands. Lance lay on the back seat, and keeping hold of the pole with one hand, thrust his free arm as far down in the roiled water as he could reach.

It was the place all right.

The scow drifted back down to the willows. Lance shoved in to the bank again, and stepped ashore. Taking the guy ropes of his seine, he fastened them to a tree ten feet up on the bank. He got back into the scow, and shoved it up the river

at a forty-five degree angle from the willows. The seine played into the water as he went. When the seine stretched taut behind him, he tossed out the anchor and let the scow swing.

That would be all for the present. Lance lay in the bottom of the scow and filled his pipe. Everything depended on the moon now. About the first time it shone through the clouds a whole shoal of carp should be in the deep place he had found, feeding on the rich store of food that the flood waters had washed in there. Even some old fishermen said there was no use fishing when the river was in flood—but they didn't know much about the moon and the river. You merely had to understand them both and you could take almost anything you wanted from them.

Lance suddenly clapped the ball of his thumb over his pipe, and lay in tense watchfulness. There were other boats on the river, close to the center or even next the other shore. He could not see them, and he could not hear them, but he knew they were there. There were at least two of the other boats. Probably they were neither friend nor foe, but somebody as anxious as he to escape detection. If a warden should happen to come prowling around, it could cost Lance a year in jail. Seining was forbidden by law.

The boats passed down the river. Lance relaxed in the bottom of the scow and lit his pipe again. It was surprising, the number of people who found the river a convenient highway after dark had fallen. Liquor runners, bringing the products of the brushland stills, choice scoundrels, who found the river the safest way to transport their contraband, poaching fishermen such as himself, and an uncountable miscellany of others whose affairs could be easiest carried on in solitude. How long they lasted usually depended on how much they knew about the moon and the river.

A soft rain pattered on Lance's face. The moon behind the clouds painted their edges a dull silver. Slowly, as though it had infinite time and patience, the moon's rays on the clouds grew a little brighter. At last, as if discouraged by their failure to break clear through, they grew dull again. Casually Lance pulled his anchor and pulled to the bank. The seine dragged behind, a dead weight.

He tied the scow to the bank, and lashed a small pulley to the twisted willows. The other end of the seine had been fastened to the stern of the scow. Lance untied it, and strung the rope through the pulley. Heaving mightily, he pulled the seine in through the pulley. The river had been right again, as usual. The seine was over-full of fish. When the seine brought up against the pulley, Lance stepped into the water.

Thrusting his hands into the packed mass of fish, he tossed them into the scow one by one. It was a good haul,

ninety-five fat and stupid carp that would average eight pounds each. The trader, whose bateau would be down the river tomorrow, would pay him two cents a pound for the run.

LANCE rolled his seine, and threw it on top of the fish. He shoved the loaded scow out onto the river. With good luck he would be home in an hour. Throwing himself down on the seine, he let his bare legs trail over the side of the scow, and studied the sky.

Tomorrow would be clear, the river would lower about four inches, and the deep hole would be good for another haul of carp. The day after they would be in other feeding grounds.

He yawned, and fished his pipe from his pocket. When it was half full of tobacco he replaced it, and crouched in the scow with eyes and ears alert. Not more than fifty feet dead ahead of him was another boat. Doubtless it was one of those that had gone down the river while he had been fishing. Noiselessly Lance thrust the pole over the side. In a dozen strong strokes he sent the scow leaping towards the bank. He cursed as the pole gritted on the side of the boat.

Instantly a bright stream of light leaped across the river in his direction. Lance turned the scow downstream, and gave one last powerful shove on the pole before he threw himself flat.

A shotgun roared. Lead pellets pattered against the scow's wooden wall, and sprinkled the water about him. The gun blasted again. Lance leaped to his feet and poled furiously. They were using a double-barreled gun; there would be a few second's respite while they reloaded. The light that had picked him up for only the barest fraction of a second played back and forth on the river as though it did not quite know where to go.

Lance drifted in close to the bank.

A huge willow tree, whose lower branches dipped into the water, loomed beside him. Unhesitatingly Lance shoved his scow directly into it. Magically the

branches parted to receive him; closed in behind him. A second later he was safe in a little backwater eddy that was shielded by the willow. The light, exasperated because its prey had escaped, darted back and forth erratically.

LANCE kneeled in the scow, and peered between the cracks in the willow branches. Without any warning at all a fish spear flicked so close to his face that a barbed tine actually brushed his cheek. Lance whirled.

There was another boat in the eddy. It was small, and hardly a yard away from the scow.

Lance gripped his pole firmly. A single dim figure stood in the little boat. When he drew back his arm to thrust again with the spear, Lance would strike with the pole.

"Don't make any fool motions, old coon," an amiable voice said. "I only barked the first time. This time I'll bite."

Lance drew the pole back. "You're a fine-eared purp," he muttered. "What kind of tree you figure you're barkin' up?"

There was silence for a second. "Toss your gun over here," the man in the other boat commanded. "If you don't I'll blow you clear to Canada."

Lance chuckled silently. If the other man had a gun he wouldn't be fooling around with a spear. "Shoot," he jerked. "I can pull a trigger as soon's you can."

The clouds parted again, and for a second the river was bathed in a moon-drenched whiteness. A nighthawk flashed between the two boats, twisting and turning with startling suddenness as it pursued some luckless insect. Lance saw the other man crouch down in his boat.

There was a moment of hesitation.

"Lance. Lance Ferris," the man said, "if you would tell a body when and how you were going to be about, you could save your face from getting stuck on a spear."

Lance drawled, "Ain't seen you in a couple years, Al. 'Most every time I do you're always just gettin' out of some

old deviltry or gettin' in some new. How come you're harbored in Possum Eddy 'long about this time of night?"

"Last time I seen you you was about twenty miles below here, comin' upstream with the old river just a-boilin' a ruckus behind your canoe," the other man chuckled. "A couple of wardens was travelin' just about as fast lookin' for you, only they thought you had gone downstream. Look, Lance, you ain't mad just because I soaked a spear at you, are you? Heck, I knew it wouldn't hit. I thought you must be somebody else."

"Bygones is bygones," Lance said lazily. "Think any of your friends saw you come in here, Al?"

"No," the other asserted gloomily. "They didn't see me come in. But what's worryin' me is how I'm goin' to get out again. You noticed somebody else on the river, hey?"

"Was some indications of 'em," Lance admitted. "They tried to sprinkle my carcass with buckshot 'bout four minutes back. Must be open season on poachers."

"Don't you know who they are?" Al inquired.

"Guess I wouldn't be far wrong in sort of suspectin' they might have somethin' to do with badges and sheriffs' stars," Lance said dryly.

"That's right," the other muttered. "It's Joe Hoagland and a deputy. They're after me."

Lance waited silently. Al Toomey had lived on the river in former years. From fish seining, and other ways of earning a living that the river offered, he had gone to gambling and small politics. Lance knew him for a thoroughgoing crook.

"Say, Lance," he said finally, "how would you like to earn some easy money?"

"I'd like it," Lance said cautiously. "But I ain't tangling with no sheriffs."

"You don't have to," Al Toomey assured him. "I'll fix it so they'll never know you had a hand in it. Hoagland had twenty thousand dollars in his office to-night that he got for selling out that busted silk concern up to Bardley. He got

back too late to put it in the bank—so he kept it in his office. I made a play for all of it, but only got a thousand. Do you follow me?"

"Go on," Lance said laconically.

"I slipped up," Al continued. "Dodged around for a couple hours, and took to the river. Thought I'd shaken 'em, but the first thing I knew they was right on top of me. They don't know for sure I done it—so here I am."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"This," the other responded. "Hoagland's got the river blocked above and below. I can't get by, but you can. I got the money with me. You take it, slip by Hoagland, and take three hundred for your cut. Keep the rest until I call for it."

"How about you?" Lance inquired.

"I'll just slip up the bank, hotfoot back to Bardley, and let 'em prove it was me. I don't want any money with me. If they get no evidence all the suspicions in the world won't do 'em any good."

"Suppose Hoagland searches me?"

"He won't," Al Toomey stated. "He knows it was somebody besides a river tripper done the job. Just sink your seine, then you could even tell him that you got the fish on a hand line, and he won't be able to do a thing."

"I don't know," Lance said uneasily.

"Afraid?" Al Toomey challenged.

"Give me the money," Lance said.

"That's great, Lance," the other said.

"I knew we didn't spend all those days on the river for nothing. Don't be afraid of Hoagland."

LANCE tied Al Toomey's little boat to the bank, and carefully shoved his scow out onto the river again. He cut a willow wand from the tree at the entrance to Possum Eddy, and poled up the river two hundred yards where he tied ten lead weights to his seine and threw it overboard.

The willow wand he hung to the seine by means of a long piece of fish line. It

would float in close to the bank, and mark the place when he wanted to get the net again.

This done, he set the scow on a diagonal course across the river, and leaned over the back dangling his hands in the water. When the feel of the current was right he threw out the anchor and let the scow point its clumsy nose downstream and swing. Being careful to make no splashes in the water that might betray his position, he lifted the carp one by one and gently dropped them over the side of the boat.

The last carp, a big one that weighed at least fifteen pounds, he kept in the scow until all the rest of his catch had been consigned to the river.

Taking the roll of bills that Al Toomey had given him, he pried the carp's mouth open and stuffed the money as far down the fish's gullet as he could reach with his hand, pounding it still farther with the end of his pole. Then he closed the carp's jaws, and threw it in the river.

For half an hour he crouched in the now empty scow while the current swung it gently back and forth. The boat blockade was still down the river.

When the half hour was gone he stood erect. Hoagland and his deputy were not real rivermen; by now every fish he had thrown in had had a chance to float past them beyond any danger of detection. Making no attempt at silence now, and no effort to conceal himself, Lance hauled in the anchor and thumped it noisily into the bottom of the boat. Standing in the rear of the scow with the pole in his hands, he floated down the center of the river bellowing at the top of his voice a tune of which he knew neither the tune nor all the words.

*I would not exchange my home on the  
range  
Where seldom is heard a discouraging  
word  
And the deer and the buffalo play*

Lance blinked in dumb surprise when a light flashed into his eyes, and a boat drew close on either side of the scow. A man sat in each boat, holding a shot-

gun trained on his breast. One of them gripped the gunwale of the scow with his hands, and arrested its course. The other, Sheriff Hoagland, kept his shotgun trained on Lance.

"Where you going?" Hoagland demanded.

Lance fumbled bewilderedly. In his business it paid to know as much about every law enforcement officer as he could find out, and he knew Hoagland as a man of not too savory practices.

"I'm just prowlin'," Lance answered amiably. "You catch any fish?"

"Maybe," the sheriff muttered. "We'll see after a bit." He scrambled over the side of the scow to grasp one of Lance's arms. Lance stood meekly while he was handcuffed to the sheriff. "Pull to the bank, Tom," Hoagland ordered.

The scow's nose thudded gently against the bank. The man in the third boat, who had towed the other two beside his own, leaped to shore to train his gun on Lance. Hoagland waved it down as he and Lance stepped ashore.

"Suppose you tell us just what you were doing on the river this hour of the night?" the sheriff said.

"Suppose," Lance said gently, "that you stop bein' so nosey about things that are none of your affairs."

"Tough baby, huh?" Hoagland purred. "We got ways to make your kind open their mouths."

"I've seen 'em work," Lance said amiably. "And I might as well tell you that if you try any of that stuff I'll just naturally have to take you and your comic deputy apart and feed you to the mullets inch by inch. Has it struck you that we'll get along just as well if you act halfway decent?"

"I'll have to search you and your boat," Hoagland explained, somewhat more gently.

"What am I supposed to have?" Lance inquired.

Hoagland removed the handcuffs from his arm. "Never mind. Take off your clothes."

"Sure," Lance assented cheerfully.

HE SLIPPED off his faded blue shirt, and removed his ragged dungarees to stand naked on the river bank. He stretched his arms above his head, and flexed his stomach as he breathed deeply of the cool air. Years of guiding a boat up and down the river had given him his wide chest, his slim stomach and hips.

"Don't you boys mind me," he scoffed. "And be careful of that full dress suit. It cost seventy-five cents."

Silently Hoagland and the deputy searched Lance's clothing, exploring the few pockets with their hands, and kneading every seam with their fingers. Hoagland handed them back to Lance, and stayed to watch while the deputy went down to the river's edge for a minute examination of the scow.

"I'll have to take you back with me," the sheriff said.

Ceremoniously Lance tightened his belt. "You know, Hoagland," he observed, "I always did claim that everybody should help uphold the law, and I don't see no reason why I shouldn't tell you about my being on the river tonight."

"Why?" Hoagland demanded.

"I couldn't sleep," Lance explained. "I had a dream and it bothered me, so I came out on the river for a boat ride. No, I wasn't even poachin'. In fact, in all your beat there probably ain't an honest man than I am. Remember that what's-his-name who went around with a lantern lookin' for an honest man? If he was about today I'm just the jasper whose trotline he would stop by. He might even know why so honest a man could have such dreams."

"What was it?" Hoagland demanded.

"Believe it or not it was all about sheriffs," Lance said with earnest simplicity. "Not good sheriffs like you, understand. It was about any old sheriff. I dreamed one had a lot of money in his office. It was an awful lot of money. Then one of the crooks that the sheriff somehow or other hadn't been able to put in

jail yet figured out a good way for him and the sheriff to split the money he had."

"Go on," Hoagland urged.

"I just kept right on dreamin'," Lance continued. "I dreamed that the crook knew quite a bit about the river. He said to the sheriff, 'Look here. There's a bunch of brainless poachers down there what ain't got no homes to amount to anything, and nobody would ever miss one. Suppose you gave me a handful of this money and planted me—say in Possum Eddy. There's sure to be one poacher on the river tonight. When he comes down you could be waiting to throw a little lead at him. He'd be sure to hightail for Possum Eddy. I could plant the money on him, then you could pick him up when he tried to get on down the river and say he took all of it, but a thousand's all we could get back. You and me could split the rest while the river hound took the rap'."

"I dreamed the sheriff thought this was a pretty good way to get money without workin' for it, and he gave the guy a deputy's badge just in case anything went wrong he could say he was a sworn deputy doin' his duty. The sheriff took an honest deputy along, or anyway his most honest one, to be a witness when the money was picked off the river tripper. But the moon and the river upset all their plans. So besides not bein' able to get their hooks in the river tripper, they lost the money and had to put it back out of their own pockets. Now wasn't that a crazy dream?"

"Sounds crazy," Hoagland agreed.

"That ain't all, though," Lance went on. "I dreamed that the sheriff and the temporary deputy came down the river again, and both of them got tangled up in a trotline and drowned there. Well, if you got no objections, guess I'll go home."

HE STEPPED into the scow and pushed it into the river with his pole. It reached the current, swung a second, and headed down-river to glide smoothly along. As though moved by an afterthought, Lance stood up in the scow.

"Hoagland," he bellowed. "When Al Toomey gets back to the office give him my regards, will you?"

The moon was breaking through the clouds again as he lay down in the scow.

The moon and the river—if you took the trouble to understand them, you could regulate everything by them and never go astray. If the moon hadn't shone just when it did he probably never would have noticed that deputy's badge on Al Toomey's shirt back there in Possum Eddy. As far as the river was concerned, its various currents flowed in various ways, and the current he had dropped those carp in should have taken every one of them to the whirlpool at the head of Farrel's Island where they would be easy to pick up again. The biggest one of all, fifteen pounds at two cents a pound, would be worth a thousand dollars and thirty cents.

The moon and the river were things a man could depend on. But you had to know them. You couldn't trifle with either.

## Man Can Now Talk With God

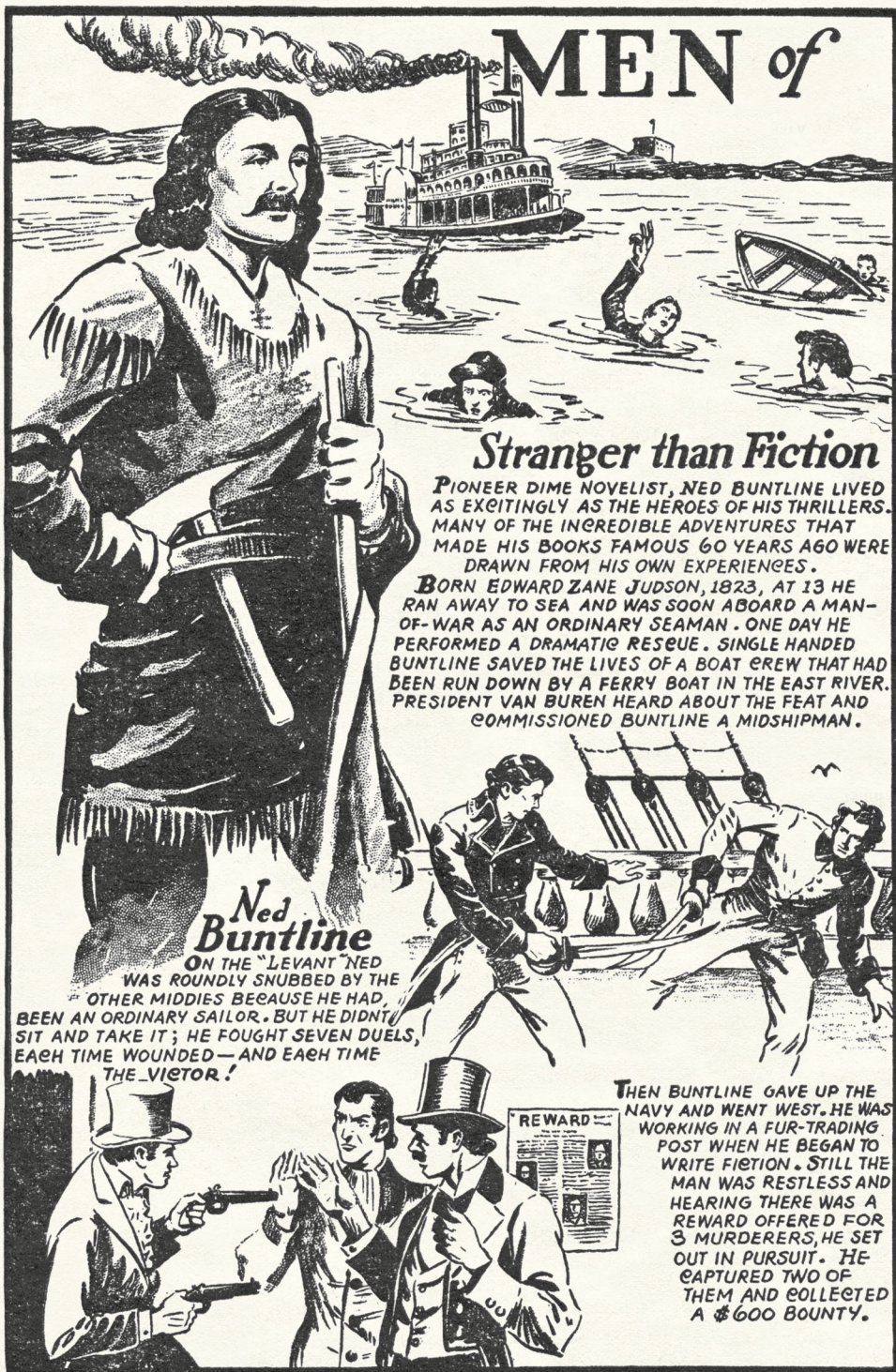
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# MEN of

## Stranger than Fiction

PIONEER DIME NOVELIST, NED BUNTLINE LIVED AS EXCITINGLY AS THE HEROES OF HIS THRILLERS. MANY OF THE INCREDIBLE ADVENTURES THAT MADE HIS BOOKS FAMOUS 60 YEARS AGO WERE DRAWN FROM HIS OWN EXPERIENCES.

BORN EDWARD ZANE JUDSON, 1823, AT 13 HE RAN AWAY TO SEA AND WAS SOON ABOARD A MAN-OF-WAR AS AN ORDINARY SEAMAN. ONE DAY HE PERFORMED A DRAMATIC RESCUE. SINGLE HANDED BUNTLINE SAVED THE LIVES OF A BOAT CREW THAT HAD BEEN RUN DOWN BY A FERRY BOAT IN THE EAST RIVER. PRESIDENT VAN BUREN HEARD ABOUT THE FEAT AND COMMISSIONED BUNTLINE A MIDSHIPMAN.

### Ned Buntline

ON THE "LEVANT" NED WAS ROUNDLY SNUBBED BY THE OTHER MIDDIES BECAUSE HE HAD BEEN AN ORDINARY SAILOR. BUT HE DIDN'T SIT AND TAKE IT; HE FOUGHT SEVEN DUELS, EACH TIME WOUNDED—AND EACH TIME THE VICTOR!

THEN BUNTLINE GAVE UP THE NAVY AND WENT WEST. HE WAS WORKING IN A FUR-TRADING POST WHEN HE BEGAN TO WRITE FICTION. STILL THE MAN WAS RESTLESS AND HEARING THERE WAS A REWARD OFFERED FOR 3 MURDERERS, HE SET OUT IN PURSUIT. HE CAPTURED TWO OF THEM AND COLLECTED A \$600 BOUNTY.



A True Story in Pictures Every Week

# DARING

by STOOKIE ALLEN

LATER THAT SAME YEAR BUNTLINE GOT INTO A SHOOTING SCRAPE IN NASHVILLE WHERE HE WAS PUBLISHING A MAGAZINE. ARRESTED, HE MANAGED TO ESCAPE BY LEAPING FROM A WINDOW, BUT A MOB RECAPTURED HIM. HE WAS DRAGGED TO THE CITY SQUARE AND HANGED!



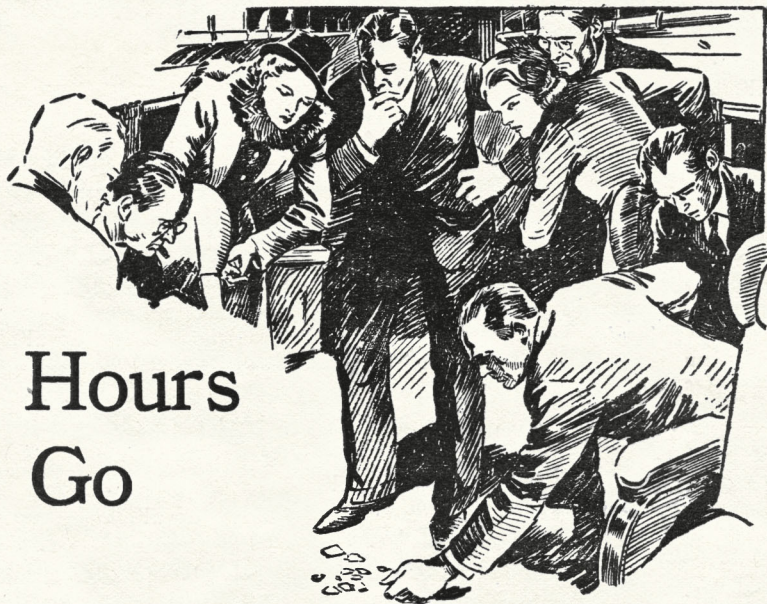
By some miracle of luck his friends were able to cut him down before his neck was broken and he successfully jumped the shooting charge. Ned fled to New York City and entered politics. He was a violent partisan of Edwin Forrests, and in '49 he led the mob in the celebrated Astor Place riot. That landed him in prison for a year.

During the Civil War Buntline served out West as chief of scouts among the Indians. He was wounded 20 times in the battles which later served as material for his stories. Ned became a friend of William F. Cody and he used "Buffalo Bill" as the hero in a series of dime novels which made Cody famous. During all of Buntline's adventures, he still had time to get married five times!



Coming Soon: Vincent Schmidt—War Chaser

# Two Hours to Go



They huddled round  
the sinister fragments

By THEODORE ROSCOE

TO MOST of the passengers aboard the great airliner, stranded with a sabotaged radio on a deserted field in the mountains, the delay is merely a temporary annoyance. But to John Enfield it is welcome, for one of his thirteen fellow travelers may be the murderer he seeks. In his pocket is a letter: *Taking Trans-Andean Air Express Sept. 15 Buenos Aires to Santiago, Chile*. It is signed by a characteristic bit of flowered foulard, and similar to the bit he has found beneath the ashtray beside his seat. After the pilot has set out for a mining settlement for aid: "Suppose you had only two hours left to live, how would you wish to spend them?" Enfield asks in an attempt to make the passengers talk. The question produces some surprising answers as they hear from Mary Messenger, the little school teacher who deplores a life of routine; ex-attorney Hammand Carlyle, who would humanize the Law; Henry Adam Clay, the blustery newspaper tycoon; Millicent Royce, resentful of snubs; austere Mrs. Piedmont Lennington and her outspoken daughter; emotional Mr. Flaum; unsociable Herr Gerstner, self-styled German envoy; motherly Mrs. Earwig and her frustrated husband; Jack McCracken, the hard-luck gambler; white-haired Dr.

Hilary; Charles, the valet. But none reveals himself as the killer, or as the homicidal maniac Enfield knows to be aboard. And now he plays his last trump. "I am a G-man," he says, "and if I had only two hours left to live—I'd like to catch the kidnapper who murdered Bascomb Wynstreet and his little son." But his startling revelation fails of its purpose. His quarry does not betray himself, and he tries once more. "Let me tell you some of the inside . . ."

## CHAPTER XIX

### MURDER MOST FOUL

"THERE were two puzzles that baffled the police about the Wynstreet case," Enfield said. "They were: why the boy and his father were murdered by the kidnapper, and how did the killer get away? Bluepoint Lake is private, hidden in the heart of a two thousand acre estate, pine woods posted against trespassing. The State road to Lake Placid borders one end of the estate; the rest is surrounded by conservation park, pretty wild country. Bluepoint Lake is some two miles long,

This story began in the *Argosy* for October 8

a mile wide; the house—Bluepoint Lodge—on an island in the middle. The only boat on the lake was Bascomb Wynstreet's speedboat. To reach the lodge on the island one had either to swim out from the wooded lakeshore or, as was the case with visitors, be taken over in the speedboat.

"Bascomb Wynstreet entertained few guests. Bluepoint was a retreat from Wall Street where he had a seat on the Exchange; the wealthy broker liked to retire to his place in the Adirondacks and spend several months of the year in pretty close solitude. The lodge had only two attendants, and old Indian and his wife—been with Wynstreet for years, and lived on the island the year 'round. The boy, Billy, stayed there each summer.

"It must've been pretty lonely for the kid; Bascomb Wynstreet was fifty-one—the boy, nine years old. His mother was dead, and there wasn't anybody for him to play with. Wynstreet told somebody it was a good idea for the boy to learn to get along in the woods by himself; he was a strict disciplinarian, Wynstreet, and winters he kept Billy in military schools.

"The lad was really a stepson—legally adopted. The boy's mother, of excellent family, had made an unfortunate marriage in the West. The husband had deserted, been in Europe a short time after the honeymoon, then disappeared. When the boy was born his mother sued for divorce in Reno; Bascomb Wynstreet had married her when Billy was two.

"The boy never knew he wasn't Wynstreet's son; afterward it was a surprise to many of Wynstreet's New York friends; the boy's real father, it came out, had committed suicide, been washed up on a beach in southern France. But Wynstreet gave the lad everything money could command—except companionship, I suppose. Made the boy heir to the Wynstreet fortune only a month before the murder.

"Those of you who read about it in the papers know the murder details. The evening of July fifteenth, Bascomb Wynstreet took the Indian caretaker and his

wife across the lake in the speedboat, left them on the bank where there was a boathouse and garage, and told them to drive to Lake Placid after grocery supplies. The pair were absolutely alibied, for they remained at Placid that night, as was their established custom.

"Before driving from the garage they saw Wynstreet return to the island and tie up the speedboat at the dock in front of the lodge. Next day, on returning from Placid, they were alarmed to see the speedboat, a powerful Chrysler, overturned in the lake, midway between island and shore. Shouts brought no answer from the lodge, and they lost no time in driving back to the State road after the Troopers.

"Bascomb Wynstreet was found dead on the veranda of the lodge, shot through the head. A Colt .45 lay in the path between the dock and the veranda. Billy Wynstreet was found floating in the shallows near the dock, shot through the base of the spine.

"Wynstreet had put up a terrific struggle; the veranda was in great disorder: a desperate fight was indicated by contusions on the man's head, rips in his clothing and the fact that his necktie, just below the fore-in-hand knot, had been torn off. The boy had simply been shot through the back.

"THE Troopers at first believed some prowler had swum out to the lodge and attempted robbery. Then the kidnap letters were found—typewritten notes addressed to Wynstreet, threatening to snatch and murder the boy if he did not pay the fifty thousand dollars ransom. The letters had not been sent by mail. No signature and no stamps.

"They were found in Wynstreet's desk: looked as if he might have carried them in his pocket for some time. How, when or where they had been delivered to him there was no way of determining. It was believed they might have been left by secret messenger in his Wall Street office. He had made no report to the police; no mention of the notes to any-

one. Possibly he had received warning phone calls, other messages telling him where the money was to be paid.

"Obviously he hadn't paid it. There were no withdrawals to that amount in his various banks—in fact he didn't have that amount.

"It might have surprised the kidnaper—as it surprised the investigators—to learn that Wynstreet was almost without funds. Market reverses had netted him severe losses that spring; his New York properties and his Adirondack estate were heavily mortgaged; he was almost bankrupt. He could not have paid such a ransom if he had wanted to.

"We worked on the theory that he had purposely taken the boy to the Adirondacks early that season for safe-keeping, feeling his isolated island lodge to be secure. There was evidence he had taken other precautions; hunting rifles were distributed about the lodge; he had requested the State Police to keep a sharp eye out for trespassers.

"The ransom notes brought the Federal Men at once. We were there in a matter of hours. Local police had established the time of the murders around midnight, and were dragging the lake when we got there. Others were beating the banks. There was good reason to believe the murderer had drowned. The speedboat had struck a submerged flat rock with tremendous force, glanced off and capsized. Who else but the murderer—tracks on the path indicated one man—could have been in the launch?

"We reconstructed the crime this way: The killer must have been a local party to know the Bluepoint setup. Some trapper, guide or camper, a good swimmer. Watching from the bank, he had seen the Indian couple depart for Lake Placid, and knew Wynstreet and the boy were on the island alone.

"Some time around midnight the killer had swum out to the lodge. Wynstreet had surprised him on the veranda. Young Billy, hearing the fight, had run from his bedroom, fled screaming out on the

dock. Or perhaps he had seen Wynstreet murdered, and the killer shot the little boy to silence the only witness.

"At any rate, Wynstreet and the boy were slain; the murderer fled from the veranda down to the dock, jumped into the speed launch and set out for shore. He must have been exhausted, perhaps wounded, from his fight with Wynstreet, otherwise he would have swum away from the island, for the speedboat made a terrific roar—neighbors a dozen miles away could hear it in the Adirondack stillness, and the noise at that time of night might have aroused their curiosity.

"But in his panic to escape, the killer overturned the boat. Capsizing at such speed, a man, already injured or exhausted, must certainly have drowned.

"Meantime the Colt .45 was identified as Wynstreet's own gun. It had been wiped of fingerprints, as had the veranda furniture. The footprints in the gravel path were little help save to show a man's shoe. Seemed queer to me the invader had swum out to the island with his shoes on, but there it was. Of course there was no absolute certainty the murderer was the same party who had written the kidnap threats, but the crimes seemed connected; there'd been no robbery, and Wynstreet had a couple of hundred dollars in his billfold when found.

"A search of the island revealed no other clue than the mentioned shoeprint. One thing struck me as odd—we couldn't find the necktie that had been torn from Wynstreet's throat. The killer must have carried the fragment off with him.

"**O**DDER still, after twenty-four hours of search we could find no body in the lake. Spring-fed, with no tide or current at that time of summer, the lake was shallow with sand and gravel bottom, unusually clear of weeds, and a drowned man's body would not have drifted far or been hard to locate. Expert trackers combing the banks could find no trail left by a fleeing vagrant, no tracks where an injured swimmer had crawled up on land. The di-

vers were sent for, the lake was crisscrossed with grappling hooks, and when three days of that proved fruitless, a dam was opened, and the lake practically emptied. No drowned man was found.

"No man's track was found on the bank, either. That was when the newspapers headlined their Vanishing Kidnapper stories. The murderer might have dissolved in the water after that launch capsized. It was an incredible getaway after a horrible crime. An overturned speedboat, a man's shoeprint on a path, a murder gun, evidence of a fierce struggle, three meaningless ransom demands made before a threatened kidnapping—that was all the Department had to go on. A man and a boy savagely slaughtered, and the killer vanished from the lake.

"The whole Adirondacks was combed. C.C.C. boys, army men from Plattsburg, State Police and campers threaded the woods looking for a suspicious fugitive. A forester at a mountain station ten miles from Bluepoint said he thought he'd heard Wynstreet's speedboat going around midnight, but that only placed the time, and even that wasn't sure because there are speedboats roaring on all those mountain lakes at all times of night, the echoes are confusing. It hadn't been a clear night, either; slightly overcast, no moon.

"It's funny about tracks. Only goes to show how fallible experts can be. Three weeks after no body in the lake, no tracks on the bank—tracks were found! Been there all the time, of course. Where the trappers, scouts and Indian guides had missed them. Tracks at the south end of the lake where nobody had searched very hard because it was the farthest point from the island, and who would imagine an injured person would strike out on a mile swim? Tracks on an abandoned wagon path that came down through the woods from the distant State highway and ended at the water's edge. Tires of a Ford car. Prints in the gravel where a person had gone swimming. And, as you know if you remember the papers, they were the prints of a *woman's* foot!

"You'll recall the rest of it, too. How a pair of men's old shoes were found in the weeds near by, watersoaked and shabby castoffs. How the flivver was traced to a tourist's camp near Placid. How Clara Ketchell was picked up. How she admitted going swimming in Bluepoint Lake the night of the murder; claimed she had turned off the road to have a midnight dip; paddled around by herself; hadn't seen the launch or even noticed the mid-lake island; been unaware she was on private property.

"Queer girl, Clara Ketchell. One of these semi-vagrants who roam the United States in battered old cars, living in tourists camps year round, unmarried, independent, pretty hard around the edges after a few seasons on the road. Berry-picking, fruit-picking, she trailed between upper New York and Florida; sometimes worked in canneries or ran carnival booths at country fairs. She wasn't quite a Gypsy, though. She'd written some short stories about her travels; took Leica photographs as she went along. She had no police record of any kind as so many girls on the road have, and she was well educated. More of a Bohemian than a Gypsy.

"**W**ELL, we asked the usual questions and she gave the usual answers. Said she'd never heard of Wynstreet, but admitted she knew the Adirondacks pretty well. Yes, she could run a typewriter but she'd never owned one. Why hadn't she come forward and said she'd been at Bluepoint Lake the night of the crime? Well, she hadn't heard about it until late the next evening, and then she was afraid to get mixed up in the thing.

"The police were looking for a good swimmer, and she was known as an excellent one. She was a good shot, too; had worked in carnival shooting galleries. She had been frightened at the thought of her midnight dip in a lake where a killer had been in the vicinity; she had been there alone without witnesses; she'd been afraid to confess to trespassing.

"I questioned Clara Ketchell, myself,

and she didn't seem any murderer to me. Rather a homeless wanderer living hand to mouth, pathetically maladjusted, due to end up sooner or later in a hospital or woman's retention home—that type. What if she did smoke a pipe; it used to be considered smart around Greenwich Village and those places. Tough? Yes, in a way maybe hardy was a better description. I liked her statement that she'd never been on relief.

"Even when she admitted putting on that pair of men's shoes—said she'd found them in the bushes, left there by some tramp, and put them on when she went swimming because the bank was stony—even then I couldn't see her as a criminal.

"The papers made a lot of it, of course; but the tracks the murderer had left on the island were smeared—might have been those tramp shoes or any man's shoes. That the woman had swum out to the lodge with those shoes on her feet to leave a false clue—as the newswriters suggested—was a little too pat for my way of thinking. And although there was a bruise on her arm—she claimed from a dive in shallow water—there were no such markings as must have resulted from that battle on the veranda.

"Still, she was all the police had, and the local authorities held her on a vagrancy charge. It was the fingerprints that almost won her an indictment. Her fingerprints, discovered on the greasy rudder of the speedboat. We had towed the launch ashore and gone over every inch of the craft. Clara Ketchell's fingerprints on that rudder were bad news for her!

"At the inquest it seemed as if we had our murderer. Confronted with the fingerprint evidence, she revised her story. Said she'd seen the overturned launch that night and thought there'd been an accident. Swam out to see what had happened. Hung to the overturned craft, and called to the lodge for help. When no answer came, she swam to the dock. The veranda lights were on, and she saw Wynstreet's body, bloodied and torn, beyond the railing. She hadn't seen the boy. Had fled

in terror, swimming back to the bank where her car was parked.

"Why hadn't she told the police? Well, she'd meant to, but there was no phone at the tourist camp, she was afraid to rouse any of the other campers—for all she knew one of them might be the murderer—she didn't propose driving around the mountains at night looking for Troopers when a murderer was loose in the dark—she'd go to a police station first thing in the morning.

"But, exhausted by her long swim, she'd overslept; in the morning the news was out. Imagining the murderer would be overtaken, she hadn't volunteered her story. Later, when no criminal was found, she hadn't dared tell about her swim for fear of being accused.

"She was accused, all right, and practically convicted by the press. We held her under suspicion, and the public raged. But hours of questioning couldn't crack her story, her claim of innocence.

"I'll admit circumstantial evidence was pretty overwhelming; nearly everyone in the Department believed her guilty. The D.A. wanted to prosecute, and Clara Ketchell was held on a charge of obstructing justice. She still is. I'm sure if she'd been indicted, the authorities could have convicted her. But she hasn't yet been indicted, and I don't think she will be.

"That's the way the case stands today. Bascomb Wynstreet and little Billy were brutally murdered and we haven't brought the murderer to justice. I'm sure it wasn't Clara Ketchell—"

He went on mechanically.

No it was someone right here in this plane; one of this little group of travelers aboard this storm-grounded airliner in the Andes; someone right here in this cabin lounge within hearing of his voice. One of them! One of them! The thought kept reeling through the back of Enfield's mind as he talked; a dull, aching thought. Whereas the knowledge that another of his listeners might be a madman recurred as a series of nervous shocks, sending tingles down his spine.

## CHAPTER XX

## ENFIELD WEAVES A WEB

CONCLUDING his verbal outline of the Wynstreet case, Enfield broke off speaking to fire a cigarette, and in the ensuing pause he thought he could hear the lull before the storm. As though the night's gale were being staged at his direction, the wind died down at that moment, the rain veered and slowed, descending in the darkness with a monotonous, abated drumming.

In the cabin lounge the atmosphere was soporific. The candles were drowzy, the shadows still. It was 3.30 A.M. by his wrist dial. Postures fatigued but not inattentive, the passengers ranged down the aisle were regarding him with interest, as though not quite sure his recital were done.

He had a candid-camera glimpse of their faces—faces shadow-angled, expressions unguarded—relaxed in the candle-glimmer. Mary Messenger watching him with a little frown of concentration, determinedly wakeful from sipping coffee. She was curled up in her chair with her feet under her—her hair and complexion only a little untidied by the lateness of the hour. Hammond Carlyle, grave, thoughtful, a quiet portrait with folded arms. Mrs. Peidmont Lennington, her expression still unforgiving, a couple of hairpins loose around prim ears. Rowena Lennington bright-eyed, chin propped on fist, her pose attentive as a student's at a lecture. Gerstner's sullen, red visage glowering at nothing across the tall girl's shoulder; and Dr. Hilary's saintly countenance framed in dusk beyond.

On the port side of the aisle, Adam Henry Clay, grouch-featured, squinting crabbedly. Millicent Royce, blowzy-eyed, head drooped, but ready at invitation to become combative. The fuzzy-haired Flaum sitting up in his chair alert, his glasses glowing in the candle shine like the eyes of a night owl. Mrs. Earwig, quaint and fluttery in the next chair; Mr. Earwig a little daguerreotype of dejection in the

chair beyond; and at the aisle's end the bony-featured, hard-jawed poker face of Jack McCracken.

Charles joined the group picture by looking from the steward's door to ascertain Miss Royce's wants, his valet face arranged in its stereotyped manservant aspect.

It was one of them! One of this group of travelers—one of these people before him who had, in a mountain wilderness at the other end of the world, murdered a man and a small boy in cold blood!

"That's odd." Hammand Carlyle's voice, speaking out of that silent charade, made Enfield start. The lawyer had broken his pose to reach for his pipe, and he rubbed the hot bowl thoughtfully against his nose as he spoke. "Odd of you to have picked the Wynstreet case as your special subject, Enfield."

"Odd?"

"Well, it struck me as queer at the time—about the Ketchell woman."

Adam Henry Clay barked, "It struck the whole United States as queer. She was guilty as sure as her fingerprints were on that boat. I happened to know Wynstreet personally, and I think it's an outrage that woman vagabond wasn't sent to the chair. All the world's jeering at us as a nation of kidnappers. Mussolini writes editorials advising us to clean up our kidnapping cases before our State Department criticizes the Fascists."

"That's nonsense," Carlyle retorted.

"But what about Clara Ketchell?" Enfield asked him.

CARLYLE nodded, rubbing his chin with his pipe-bowl. "It struck me queer because it was so *a propos* for the book I'm writing. You know—I guess I mentioned it—the book I'm writing against convictions by circumstantial evidence. I'm using the Wynstreet case—Clara Ketchell is a perfect example. You yourself said the authorities could have convicted her."

"But," Enfield said in an even tone, "they didn't prosecute."

"They may," Carlyle suggested. "She looks guilty. For all I know, perhaps she is. My point is just that—maybe she is—maybe she isn't. No one should go to the chair as long as there's that 'maybe'."

"No one has gone to the chair," Enfield reminded, "yet."

"I know." The quiet man nodded. "But suppose a hot-headed D.A. had been on the case, suppose Clara Ketchell had been convicted on the evidence against her. Still that 'maybe' isn't settled."

"It's settled as far as I remember the case," Rowena Lennington gave her opinion. "Who else could have been the murderer?"

"If there were no other tracks around the lake," Clay rasped.

Enfield was thinking, Maybe it's Carlyle—maybe it's Miss Lennington—or even Mr. Clay. A nerve throbbed along his jaw, and he heard the young lawyer replying, "I don't know, Mr. Clay; in my book on legal injustice I'm citing the Wynstreet murders and noting some possibilities. Did it ever occur to you that the boy might have shot Wynstreet and then killed himself?"

"Impossible!" The publisher looked away with a snort.

"Unlikely, but not impossible," Carlyle corrected. "Nine year-old boys have committed suicide before; also they have fired guns at their parents. He might have been playing with the pistol. Playing bandit or something. Wynstreet came after him. The boy went into a tantrum, kicking and fighting, batting at Wynstreet with the weapon. The gun accidentally went off. The—"

Mary Messenger cried, "But the little boy was shot through the back!"

"True. But Enfield can tell you such things sometimes happen. Suppose Bascomb Wynstreet, dying, kicked the weapon. It slithered out to the path. Another dying kick felled the little boy. He rolled down the steps and down the path. Rolled over the gun, and the weapon discharged. He rolled on down the path and across the dock into the lake. As I recall the

news accounts the path was quite steep."

"After which he cleaned up the trail of blood and typed those kidnap threats to his father," Clay scoffed.

Carlyle protested, "The notes might have been sent to Bascomb Wynstreet by a kidnapper; as for the—the blood, the wound might have been bandaged by his nightclothes. I don't believe that's what happened, of course; I'm discussing possibilities. There's also the possibility that Wynstreet might have shot the child himself; suppose he suddenly went mad? He fought with the boy and—no, suppose he did it by design, smashed up the veranda to make it look as if there'd been a fight, shot the child and then intended to tell the police a prowler had done it. But after he saw the lad dead he couldn't go on with it. So he shot himself. Remember, the papers said the boy was very heavily insured—"

Adam Henry Clay snapped, "That's absurd, Mr. Carlyle, and I don't intend to listen to a former friend of mine being traduced."

"I don't mean to start an argument," Carlyle said to Enfield. "But you see what I mean, don't you?"

Enfield said huskily, "Your theories don't take into account the footprint."

"Clara Ketchell. Suppose she swam out to the island. Saw evidence of murder. Ran from the lodge—she was wearing those old shoes—and fled in the launch, overturning it in her frantic haste to get away. And I've thought of a third possibility. Little Billy Wynstreet's real father. The man who deserted his mother and went to Europe some months before Billy was born. Suppose he—"

"We checked that," Enfield interjected. "The boy's real father committed suicide in France after deserting his bride. French police found the body washed up from the sea near San Raphael, easily identified by the passport in the pocket. That was eight years or so ago."

Flaum waved a hand at Enfield, "Sure the Ketchell woman must've been guilty from what you've said."

Clay barked, "Of course she was guilty! Mr. Carlyle has certainly gone out of his way in this book of his to draw the long bow."

Carlyle said, "I'm not pretending to be a detective—I'm merely trying to prove how Clara Ketchell *might* be innocent."

Enfield said with quiet emphasis, "She *was* innocent!"

HIS audience sat forward. Jack McCracken got up to perch on the arm of his chair, and old Dr. Hilary interrupted himself in a search for his cigarette holder, fixing Enfield with a look of mild surprise. Even Millicent Royce, on the verge of torpor, arrested herself from a slump and gave Enfield a stare, sensing something meaningful in his inflection.

Enfield said, focusing his gaze on a tracery of shadow half way down the aisle, "Bascomb Wynstreet and little Billy Wynstreet were not murdered by Clara Ketchell. She had nothing to do with the crime."

One of them knew it. Behind one pair of eyes that watched him through shadow and candlelight there was knowledge, cunning, the red-hazed memory of homicide, secreted guilt. It was as unbelievable as the possibility that another in this audience was a fugitive from a madhouse. As incredible as the deliberate decoying which had baited him on a murder trail from the Adirondacks of northern New York to the Andean wilderness of South America.

"The murderer of Bascomb Wynstreet and little Billy—is still at large!"

He heard a stir go through the audience, scuff of shoes on carpet, grunt from Adam Henry Clay, little Mrs. Earwig's sigh. Rain rattled on the black-glazed windows as the wind veered suddenly, skimming the airliner's streamlined hull with a keening howl. A draught from the ventilators agitated the candles; Mrs. Piedmont Lennington sniffed, sipping coffee; and Enfield heard Carlyle whisper to Mary Messenger, "I thought the police

knew more about that case than they were willing to admit."

"Clara Ketchell was never indicted," Enfield said slowly, "because the day before the indictment was to have been made, our F.B.I. headquarters received a letter. It was typed. Postmarked San Francisco. *I killed Bascomb Wynstreet.* That was all it said. But it carried a signature that made it something more than just a crank letter. Something a whole lot more. It wasn't signed in writing. It was signed," he let his gaze drift across the faces ranged before him, "by a little piece of cherry-colored foulard dotted with forget-me-nots. A little piece of foulard silk!"

Expressions of raised eyebrows. Frowns of incomprehension.

Enfield assumed a pose of negligence, hands thrust in coat pockets, shoulder leaning against the icewater cooler, shoes crossed.

"Remember I said Bascomb Wynstreet's necktie had been torn off in the fight? Ripped off just below the knot? And we hadn't been able to find the missing portion? Now you can understand why that letter meant something. Pinned to the message was a fragment from the missing end of the murdered man's necktie. There was no mistake about it. Wynstreet had his ties made to order by Sulka. The fragment was bloodstained. The stain checked with the blood of the murdered man."

"*Whaaat?*" Adam Henry Clay was on his feet. Empurpled. Fumbling to yank something from an inner pocket, and glaring at Enfield. "*Whaaat?*" he shouted, yanking a fountain pen out of his pocket. "A piece of Wynstreet's necktie was sent to Department of Justice headquarters from San Francisco? And my papers never got the story—?"

THE story wasn't given to the press," Enfield said, relieved because the portly man's gesture had not produced a gun. "I imagine it will be soon, for we won't hold Clara Ketchell much longer. That little fragment of silk saved her

from an immediate indictment. And you can imagine it took the F.B.I. to San Francisco where the note had been postmarked. Ketchell wasn't immediately released; there was a millionth chance that she might have forwarded that bit of silk to some friend in California to be used as an alibi.

"But the next letter, postmarked Florida, signed by another fragment of the murdered man's necktie pretty well cleared her. And when, three months later, we got a third similar message signed by another bit of that silk—this time mailed from Chicago—we knew the murderer was on the loose."

Irving Flaum said, "Pretty wide territory, jumping from Frisco to Florida to Chicago like that. Like a traveling salesman."

Enfield stretched the corners of his mouth with an artificial grin. "You'll get an idea of the jumps when I tell you the fourth note was mailed from Shanghai. The fifth, a month later, from Rotterdam, Holland. The sixth," inadvertently his glance went to Jack McCracken, "from Cadiz, Spain. The seventh," and Rowena Lennington's face flickered through his swerving line of vision, "from Switzerland."

"Heavens!" the tall girl exclaimed. "What part of Switzerland? It might have been the village I was in nine years ago, or the town mother and I visited last winter."

"Lucerne," Enfield said.

"Think of that, Mother. The Wynstreet murderer may have been living at our hotel." To Enfield, "And I suppose the G-men went to Switzerland?"

"A good deal farther than that, Miss Lennington. The letters kept coming, sometimes a couple of months, sometimes a couple of weeks apart. Tracing ordinary mail doesn't get you much farther than the postbox. Foreign mail makes a tougher problem, for it gives the sender a two-weeks start on the investigators. Besides, the murderer addressed only his first letter to F.B.I. headquarters—after that

he picked the names of various Federal men, doubtless conned from the newspapers, and sent the notes to us personally.

"From Europe the murderer taunted us, telling us to meet him in Bulgaria or Morocco if we could identify him. Once or twice the letters were on feminine stationery, leading us to believe the murderer might be a woman.

"Growing more daring, the murderer would inform us that he (or she) would be taking such and such a train for such and such a place at a certain date. There's a type of criminal mind that enjoys taunting the police—most criminals are egotists given to boasting of their crimes—we saw we were up against this type.

"More letters came from Rome, Stamboul, Algiers, Havana. Each was signed by a cutting of cherry-colored silk dotted with forget-me-nots, a cutting from Bascomb Wynstreet's necktie." With a nonchalance that he felt must rival the best acting of any of the Barrymores, Enfield drew a square manila envelope from an inner pocket. "Would you people like to see them?"

There were gasps, cranings. Jack McCracken stood up at the aisle's end, and at Enfield's elbow Adam Henry Clay, who had been jotting shorthand in a small leather notebook like the wildest cub reporter, sat thumpishly down. Mary Messenger cried, big-eyed, "You've got those pieces of silk—from a dead man's necktie—with you—?"

## CHAPTER XXI

### RESULTS

ENFIELD ran a thumb under the flap, opened the square envelope, shook out into his palm a little handful of silk cuttings. Each dated, numbered and cryptically marked by tabs glued at the corners, they might have been dressmaker's cuttings, save that the fragments were alike as to material, color and design. Cherry-colored foulard, dotted with pale blue forget-me-nots. Cut in triangles, slivers and jagged trapezoids, the bits of

silk heaped on Enfield's palm resembled the jumbled pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

He held them out in the candlelight so that everybody might see, smiling at the blur of faces. "There are thirteen pieces," and his smile felt as stiff as if his mouth had suffered a day's stretching in dentist's clamps. "Thirteen cuttings from the necktie that was torn from Bascomb Wynstreet's throat by the hand that murdered him and slaughtered the little boy."

A caterwaul of wind in outer night, a burst of rain assailing the starboard windows made sound effects as if in answer to a cue. The deluge, after momentary abatement, roared. Was that sleet whipping across the windows? A skin of ice forming on the glass? No moment to worry about the weather; one trouble at a time. Winds, like crazed mentalities, were beyond his reckoning or control. He found himself watching Mrs. Piedmont Lennington who, her expression horrified, was staring fascinated at the bits of silk in his outstretched hand.

"I can't look at them!" she was saying. "To think where they came from—I can't look at them!"

Enfield's face felt like wood. Taut muscles ached in his leg as he forced them to flex. Never taking his eyes from his audience, he went to one knee at the head of the sloped aisle; hastily sorted the tabbed fragments in his palm; then, in the manner of someone assembling a jigsaw puzzle, began to lay out the pieces of silk on the aisle carpet. Piece Number 1: San Francisco and the postmark date. Piece Number 2: Miami, Florida. Piece Number 3: posted from Chicago. Piece Number 4: from Shanghai.

Working quickly, he assembled each in place, fitting triangle to trapezoid, fragment into fragment. He saw Jack McCracken moving up the aisle to watch, followed by old Dr. Hilary. Little Mr. Earwig came up on tiptoe, leading his frail bird-like wife by the hand. Charles, the valet, was peeping from the back, and Gerstner's sullen stare slanted over McCracken's narrow shoulder.

In the foreground the others watched from their chairs—Flaum's glasses moony with candleshine—Millicent Royce frowning—Clay with his neck shortened down into his collar, scowling, chewing his cigar—Rowena Lennington studying forward, hands gripping chair-arms—Mrs. Piedmont Lennington, fascinated, eyes horrified—Hammand Carlyle with his pipe forgotten part way to his lips, attention riveted—Mary Messenger craning from her seat to see.

Candles guttering, shadows close around, background of tempestuous night, the airliner's cabin had assumed the air of a seance; atmosphere tense, baited. Enfield, without looking, knew the co-pilot was watching from the cockpit companion at his back.

He fitted the thirteenth scrap of silk into the pattern and drew back, wordless. On the carpet at his knee, he had assembled that decorative part of a man's necktie which expands below the knot. One fragment still remained missing. A star-shaped cutting from the center where the adjoining fragments were darkly, sinisterly stained.

WANTING someone in his audience to speak, he made the wait purposely dramatic. No one spoke. He touched a fragment at the bottom spread of the tie.

"Piece Number Twelve. It was mailed to me from Grand Central Station in New York. The murderer, having finished his European tour, had come home."

No answer. No change of expression among his listeners. Then it was Millicent Royce who expressed herself somewhat heartlessly. "Well, I can't see that collecting these bits of silk has got the G-men anywhere—an' I must say I don't think much of this Wynstreet's taste in neckwear."

"The G-men weren't getting very far until that twelfth fragment was sent in," Enfield admitted grimly. "But our correspondent was. The note that came with Piece Twelve advised us to follow the

sender to Buenos Aires." Easing to his feet, he put his hands into trouser pockets, stood nodding and smiling down at the bright silk pattern on the carpet. "That wasn't all the note said. The note advised us that the writer would be taking this plane on this scheduled trip from Buenos Aires to Santiago, Chili!"

Pose! Group picture of faces caught in candid-camera stares. Then Jack McCracken's voice, flatted, off-key, from among the standees.

"What's that you just said, Enfield?"

"I said that fragment Number Twelve," pointing, "came with a note advising the Department of Justice that the sender would be taking this airliner across the Andes on this date. In other words, the Wynstreet murderer was advising us of an intention to travel on this plane."

Consternation! Group picture of faces angled out of focus. People with their features disarranged. Mouths open.

"Perhaps Piece Number Thirteen," Enfield pointed, "is even more significant. It wasn't mailed like the others. It was tucked under the ashtray beside my chair where I found it a few moments after the plane left Buenos Aires yesterday morning."

Mr. Earwig, hand cupped at the side of his head, shrilled, "You found it beside your chair? Right here in the plane?"

"Still, it might have been planted as a ruse before the take-off—a lead to send me astray. I was last aboard the plane, for I only arrived in Buenos Aires yesterday morning, barely in time to make the connection. But the steward assured me it hadn't been there when he distributed the ashtrays a few minutes before flight-time. And the murderer reassured me. Fragment Fourteen! Fragment Fourteen which would be that missing piece from the center." Enfield indicated the star-cornered gap. "That last fragment is most significant of all."

Fumbling, tantalizingly deliberate, he fingered a star-pointed scrap of silk from his pocket; stooped; carefully fitted it into the pattern.

"That last fragment"—he came upright slowly—"was slipped into the pocket of my topcoat. Not two hours ago. At that moment while the cabin lights were out."

Shock! Group picture of faces stunned, eyes wide open, expressions caricatured—the unnatural faces of a flashlight photo.

Enfield knew his own features must be unnatural, too. His throat felt constricted, blood tapped in his temples, breathing had become difficult from sudden compression in his chest; at the same time his heart was skipping, and every nerve in him seemed tightened to the snapping point.

FOR the faces before him told him nothing. In that moment of shock while eyes grew and complexions pallored, while those standing in the aisle jostled backwards a little and those in their chairs stared at the assembled silk scraps on the carpet as if at a snake—while expressions altered from nervousness to fear, from fear to near panic—while the passengers looked at each other and reflexed back from each other, aghast—while Irving Flaum brought the climax to its peak by voicing the realization developing in the minds of the others, "*But, my God! then the Wynstreet murderer is some one of us right here aboard the plane!*"—in that moment of shock Enfield knew he had lost.

All night he had tried to penetrate these masks. All night he had hoped for some momentary giveaway, some flaw in the murderer's voice or manner or eyes. Now, at this moment of prepared climax, he realized he was up against an acting technique that outmatched his own. Every member of his audience had blanched. All wore expressions of startlement, horror, fear. Their features told him no more than their stories had—every passenger before him, with the probable exception of Gerstner and the Earwigs, remained suspect as the Wynstreet murderer.

He wondered if the murderer was laughing at him, secretly exulting at thus baffling a G-man. Or had the killer lured

him here into some kind of cunning trap?

Add the problem of Francis Yates, and anyone's nerves might snap.

Enfield's snapped. As the thought that they might passed through his mind. Something broke within him—some control muscle regulating checks and balances. He could feel the thing give, as though an emotional dam were going out. An emotional dam, breaking under an accumulated weight of fatigue, apprehension, frustration before a deadlock, pent-up sense of emergency, suspense. He could feel the blood rushing up in his face. Red anger smoking over his eyeballs. The cabin lounge blurred on his reddened vision. For a second the faces went out of focus: swam merry-go-round.

He shouted, "All right, damn you! Which one of you is it? I'm all through playing Truth and Consequences, the party's over, and from now on it's a tougher game. The murderer had better step forward and get what clemency can be had from voluntarily giving up!"

They stared at him, at each other aghast.

"All right," Enfield shouted, "you've had your chance. It's my turn now. I want to see your passports. No use anybody making trouble. You couldn't escape in this sleet storm if you tried it, and when the pilot gets us to Santiago after daylight, the police will be waiting on the landing field. I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen." He broke off shouting to grit the words through his teeth. "One of your number is the Wynstreet murderer. Until that one be identified, you will all be held under suspicion. Make no attempt to leave the plane. You're all under arrest!"

He had wanted some responsive action. He got it!

"Under arrest—?" and the screech coming from the person who gave it was as surprising as a bolt through the roof. "Nobody's going to put me under arrest. I've got you covered, you fool! I've got all of you covered. Up with the hands, everybody! First who makes a wrong move, I shoot dead!"

## CHAPTER XXII

"STEP OUTSIDE!"

ENFIELD stared in paralytic astonishment at the massive Luger pistol threatening his heart. At the mottled fury on the screecher's face. The passenger he had least suspected—had eliminated from the Wynstreet case—had failed to watch as vigilantly as he had watched the others. Gerstner!

The German's move caught Enfield off his guard. Before he could drop hand to pocket, the Luger muzzle was on him. Slowly he forced up his arms in unison with the others, while Gerstner advanced menacingly, shoulders hunched, head lowered, eyeballs glittering as they swerved to the left and right between slitted lids. Shoving to the fore, the German sprang to reach Enfield's side.

He bellowed, "*Alt!*" to catch the co-pilot waking out of shock in the cockpit door; squalled something in German that brought the man jumping with his hands in the air; swivelled to roar a warning at old Dr. Hilary who had started to lower an arm.

"Keep them up!" he screamed. "All of you keep them up! *Herr Gott!*"—his left hand diving into Enfield's bulged pocket to snatch out the Colt—"I would as soon shoot any of you as not! You, too, *mein lieber Galgenvogel!*"—dodging behind Enfield to relieve the co-pilot of his automatic—"Did you think you could arrest Heinrich Gerstner? Did you think by this flimsy stratagem you could lead Heinrich Gerstner into a police trap?"

He swayed between the stricken co-pilot and Enfield, his legs apart, back to the cockpit door, a gun in either hand, the black muzzles aimed down the aisle and weaving from left to right in a synchronized movement with his eyes. His face was livid, the lips drawn back, cheekbones streaked purple as though stained by birthmarks.

He squalled, "Back! Back!" at the passengers standing rooted in the aisle. "All of you except Herr Enfield, back! You,

too!" he bellowed at Mary Messenger, frozen in her chair. "And you!" at Adam Henry Clay who seemed unable to rise. "Ail of you out of your seats and to the back of the cabin. Remain standing! Face me! Keep your hands in the air. *Gott in Himmel!* I will shoot the first one that lowers a hand. Shoot him like a dog!"

He drove them before the screech of his voice. Whipped them back with squalled commands. Sent them stumbling, staggering in bunched retreat, a terrified and helpless group held at distance by the menace of savage weapons, overwhelmed by the suddenness of this violence.

Enfield could only watch, appalled. He saw the passengers herded to the aft end of the cabin. Saw the white hands reaching for the ceiling, in shadow-play on the wall like hands lifted in prayer. Sleet whistled past the black glass in the cabin windows. The night outside seemed to howl with a vast wailing of sirens, and the atmosphere in the plane was a thrall of ice in which he could neither speak nor move.

For Walther, the co-pilot, had gasped in Spanish: "Look at him, Enfield. The man is mad! Raving mad—!"

AND Gerstner, hearing, stepped behind Enfield to cover Enfield's shoulder-blades and the passengers down the aisle with one pistol, while he trained the other at the co-pilot's head.

"I will show you if I am mad!" he snarled at the co-pilot, returning the Spanish. "This swine," he dug his right-hand pistol into Enfield's spine, "is a United States Government Agent. Doubtless he arranged to have the plane brought down here, to have me delayed while your pilot went after the police. I will teach him a lesson for interfering with Heinrich Gerstner. Presently I will ask him to step out of that door over there. When the plane is in the air!"

"When the plane is in the air—?" the co-pilot gasped.

"So!" Gerstner's tone became one of

command. "You will turn and walk into your cockpit, my little aviator. You will walk very slowly with your hands above your head. You will sit down at the controls, on the starboard seat where I can see you. You will start the engines, and you will take off. You will do this very carefully—very carefully, indeed!—for if you do not, I will shoot you very neatly through the head!"

"Take off?" The co-pilot was choking, white. "Fly in this weather—?"

"And you will fly," Gerstner's voice was a ruthless monotone, "north-east by north to the town of Valdivia which you will locate on your map. There is a German colony there which will take care of me after we make a landing. There is a secret flying field which I will indicate when we get there; and you will fly very carefully, my friend, because I have a compass in my watch and a charted map in my pocket. You will fly very carefully because I will shoot you if you do not. Also, that is the nearest landing field, and once in the air you will have the lives of your little passengers at stake."

Walther's lips blued. His hands, above his cap were shaking. He panted, "But there is sleet! The de-icers on the wings are uncertain. We are low on gas. The radio is dead—"

"You will be dead, yourself," Gerstner snarled, "if you do not walk into that cockpit and follow my instructions!"

"You command me to fly this plane? You will force Enfield to step out—"

"I will shoot him," Gerstner grated, "here and now, if you prefer. And you, also. And the rest of these idiotic people. If you do not take this ship in the air immediately."

Enfield, desperate, clenched his uplifted hands. Instantly Gerstner's gun was at his neck-nape. Enfield's scalp froze. He saw the frightened faces of the passengers crowded aft, the women terrorized, the men held at bay, afraid to move for fear the German might fire, unable to comprehend the rapid exchange of Spanish.

(Please turn to page 112)

# PALS

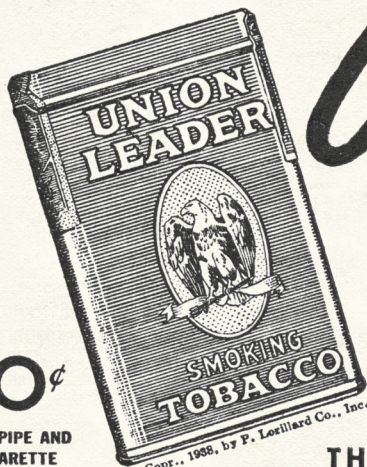
*...through the years*



IN 1907... "Meetin' the right pipe tobacco is pretty near as difficult (and important) for a man as courtin' the right girl. I didn't get hep to Union Leader until a travelin' man loaned me some about the time this picture was made. But I've had cause to thank that fellow ever since for my favorite smoke."



TODAY... "Here's the 'right gal, the right tobacco' and me, all pictured together. When a man, woman and tobacco get along good as us all these years they got to have something. Union Leader's got enough goodness to last a man all his life." C. S. Ross, Route 3, Farmington, Ia.



## Union Leader

**ALWAYS...** Since it made its bow, over a third of a century ago, UNION LEADER has been a favorite of American smokers. This tobacco is flavor-filled Burley from the hill crops of Kentucky. Mellowed in oaken casks and specially processed to remove all trace of harshness or tongue-bite. It's the friendliest smoke a dime ever bought.

**THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKE**

*In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention ARGOSY.*

He saw the face of the co-pilot gone deathly pale. The man's eyes mesmerized on Gerstner's levelled gun. The beads of perspiration swell and glisten like blisters on the menaced forehead.

The co-pilot looked from the aimed weapon to Enfield, then back to the weapon as though fascinated. Then his shoulders slumped brokenly and he turned and walked slowly into the cockpit.

Two minutes later the engines gave a shattering roar, the cabin flooring lurched wildly, and then the plane was in the air.

ENFIELD knew that if he lived, the next dozen minutes of that night would be engraved in his memory forever. The desperate emergency of that take-off while the plane staggered and fought for altitude through storming blackness, its headlights blinded by sleet, ice crackling off the wings with a sound like gunfire and, flung back in the slipstream, ricocheting off the fuselage like bullet-hail.

He would never forget Mrs. Piedmont Lennington's obbligate shrieks, screams of fear from the other women, Millicent Royce's, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" the frightened cries and oaths of the men as the airliner struggled skyward in the storm. And Gerstner bawling, "Shut up, fools, you're only going for a little ride. Do not interfere, either, or I will terminate it quickly by shooting our little airman through the back!"

Engine-roar and storm-roar shook the plane. The cabin flooring tilted and rocked. The metal walls vibrated. The candles smoked and guttered in their makeshift sconces.

It was terrible to stand there helpless, unable to stop the thing, arms numbly lifted, volition atrophied by the muzzle of a Luger two inches from his groin. Everything was happening too fast, with the swiftness of unloosed disaster. The plane had left the ground before he could realize it. There was Gerstner braced at the cockpit entry, chin down, eyes glitter-

ing, one pistol menacing the passengers in the after quarter of the cabin, the other trained on the co-pilot working the airliner's controls.

"I'll shoot!" Gerstner was bellowing. "Make one false move, any of you, and I'll shoot that flyer in there and bring the plane down crashing!"

Enfield saw murder in the glittering, blood-rimmed eyes, and knew this German meant to carry out his threat. The man's face was mottled as if with rabies, his lips wrenched back over grinning teeth that looked dry. He began to bawl directions in German at the co-pilot dimly seen at the starboard wheel in the cockpit; Walther turned once to look back in white fear, then, sighting the aimed gun, his shoulders cringed and he grasped the throttle obediently, sending the big transport upward in a lunge.

The plane climbed steeply—one thousand—fifteen hundred—two thousand feet on the altimeter Enfield could glimpse on the dim-lit instrument board under the cockpit windshield. Black sleet rushed past the windows as the accelerated propellers thundered.

ICY mist formed on Enfield's forehead. His stomach, as the plane climbed, seemed to melt away under his belt. Wind whining through the ceiling ventilators frosted the perspiration on his neck, the draught sweeping down the cabin to flatten the candles, and kicking a little scatter of cherry-colored silk fragments down the swaying aisle. The little scatter of cherry-colored silk fragments made Enfield sick. The close proximity of Gerstner's face filled him with nausea.

He was thinking, "This can't be the one! This can't be the one!" for Gerstner, at that time when the cabin's lights had gone out, had been coming up the aisle with his hat clenched in one hand, his suitcase in the other—impossible for him, thus encumbered, to have slipped that tell-tale fourteenth fragment into Enfield's coat. But if the German were not the Wynstreet murderer, why this kidnapping

of the plane? Who was he? Francis Yates—escaped asylum inmate? The thought curdled Enfield's heart-blood, bristled his hair.

Backed against the water cooler, he could not budge an upstretched elbow or stir a muscle. The cabin went out of focus on his vision, became a shadow-walled, nightmarish chamber peopled at the far end by frightened ghosts. At his side, diabolical, Gerstner presided as executioner, the power of life and death within his hands.

In the blood-rimmed eyeballs a despotism leered and burned. It seemed to Enfield that those eyes were holding him in the grip of a spell.

He heard Gerstner's thick-throated guttural, "Go to the door at the little vestibule there," and he moved as though impelled by hypnosis.

Gerstner was saying, "Keep your face toward me. Keep your left hand above your head. Reach with your right hand and clasp the doorhandle. When I give you the word, move the handle slowly upward. That will open the door!"

A trickle of perspiration leaked down Enfield's temple. Every fibre in his being protested, yet his shoes were walking him backward, unable to stop. His shoulder bumped the vestibule partition, a foot-wide stanchion that arched up over his head, separating the entry from the passenger cabin, the vestibule no more than a recess in the forward wall. There were two steps up, steep Pullman steps covered by rubber matting.

"Stand at the bottom step," Gerstner nodded. "Grasp the door-handle."

COMPELLED by the aim of the Luger pistol, Enfield obeyed. Groping upward he found the door-handle. His numbed fingers gripped; hung on. It was cold in that recessed entry at the head of the cabin. The door-handle, polished steel, was clammy chill as the handle of a refrigerator.

"Move the handle slowly upward!"

There was nothing Enfield could do. Shoulder-blades against the arched partition, body half way into the vestibule, boots spanning the cabin's threshold, he was facing Gerstner from a bay of shadow. But the German was marking his every gesture; there was nothing he could do in his awkward position, his right hand fastened to the handle of the recessed door, his left hand paralyzed at arm's length above his head.

A second-wink his eyes went wildly to a fire extinguisher hooked to the forward bulkhead that made the inside wall of the vestibule. But Gerstner saw that.

"It is your life or theirs, Herr Enfield!" his threat lashed out. "We are four thousand feet by the altimeter, *verstehen?* I can see it from here, and it is going up. That would be a long way for our women passengers to fall, Herr United States Government Agent. And if you do not step out of that door at my command, I will shoot the pilot and destroy us all!"

Enfield's eyes went in horror to the ghost-group at the cabin's end. Blurred faces came into focus—Mrs. Earwig's delicate features tear-streaked, agonized by alarm—Rowena Lennington stark-eyed—Millicent Royce's wild stare—Mary Messenger white, appalled. Mrs. Piedmont Lennington was a statue of terror in the foreground, and men's faces were cartoons of shock.

His life or theirs! Enfield felt his will evaporate.

"Your word on this, Gerstner?" He forced the demand through shut teeth. "You'll give me your word to land these people safely if I go out of the door?"

"Ja!" In the blood-rimmed eyeballs there flicked a gleam of admiration. "You bargain at the last, you Yankees, even when there is no opportunity offered to bargain. But I give you my word as a German. Go out of that door and I land these people safely. Go out," he aimed one gun at the pilot's cockpit, the other at Enfield's forehead, *now!*"

Then it happened!

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



# Tough on the Gulf

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

Author of "The Smoking Monkey," "Sunken Dollars," etc.

The Acid Kid didn't exactly get shanghaied — but you couldn't prove it by him

THE ACID KID shivered in the dripping fog. He had always thought he was tough. "Yeah, Prussy Acid, that's me! I bite!" But here he was, shivering in a dismal wet fog, his belly as cold as his fingers, as far from a meal, or a bit of slick work which would result in a meal, as—

He drew back into the thicker shadow of a dockside warehouse. There was something doing. Electric lamps bleared weakly in the swirling murk; nearby the clatter of a ship's winches set his teeth chattering; there was a hiss of escaping steam, and unpleasantly harsh voices. They sounded like work. There was a ghostly smudge of funnel, and masts, and derricks; a rumbling of

falling coal; a squeal of cargo tackles. But something more in the Kid's line was happening right there under his nose, his cold, moist nose.

A running figure, swinging a satchel, was almost abreast of the Kid when another shape grew from vagueness to solidity at the runner's heels. There was a blow, a grunt, a fall, and the satchel changed hands right there within reach of the Kid's itching fingers.

That was serious, a guy horning in on the Kid's territory. It wasn't very rich territory, but when the big shots freeze a guy out of the juicy spots, it was something to hang on to. Sometimes a sailor had money. There must be some in that satchel, else why the strong-arm stuff? The Kid slithered from his lurking place. His blackjack slipped down his sleeve. But as he moved to swing it the man with the satchel saw or sensed him, checked, and darted aside. The Kid's

blow whizzed through empty air, but the Kid's nimble feet carried him after the runner. The gaunt shape of a crane rose up, the runner rounded it, between crane and dockside, and the Kid darted through the framework. They met.

At the same instant that the Kid raised his blackjack, the runner swung his satchel. There was a mutual side-step, a clash, and a roar of coal tumbling down the chute into the bunkers of a small steamer lying beneath the crane.

Then in a cloud of coal dust and fog which was as palpable as a wet blanket the Kid pitched over the edge of the dock into the gaping coal pocket of the steamer's bunkers. The dribbling cataract of slack coal, the remnants of the last discharge, enveloped him, hurried him downward, buried him.

The Acid Kid breathed coal dust, ate coal dust, fought for air and only seemed to bury himself deeper.

After a while he had to stop struggling or suffocate. Then he found he could breathe, though as much dust as oxygen entered his lungs. After what seemed hours the heap began to slide, to settle. It took on a movement, little more than a throbbing, which somehow turned his stomach. He started to fight again; and now he heard voices below him, hoarse, profane voices, and the clink of steel. He slipped. He slid faster. The voices and the clink of steel were nearer. Then something hard and heavy struck his boot.

"Gee! Here's a stiff!"

**S**OMEBODY grabbed the Kid's boot, then his leg, and he was dragged forcibly from the coal and spilled out upon the greasy, cindery plates of a steamer's stokehold. They were not level plates, they tilted under his feet, and they were hot. He scrambled to his feet in the glare of an open furnace, and the face of the man who had hauled him out of the bunker underwent a swift change of expression. The Acid Kid's boots had belonged only a few hours ago to a

gentleman overtaken by alcoholic weariness and the Kid at the same instant. His wallet proving to be momentarily empty, his footwear solved the crying problem of the Kid's chilled feet. But no other part of his attire proclaimed the Kid a gentleman. He was ragged, he had lost his cap, he was a dismal piece of work, and he looked like a cornered rat.

"Ho, a stowaway! Come wiv me! The chief wants to see you."

The fireman grabbed the Kid, and the Kid was mad. He felt for the blackjack which was not there; he twisted loose, and tried to butt his captor, but the fireman was tougher than the Kid—more foot-sure, too. The hot plates would not remain level. The Kid's skull never found its mark, a hand like a piece of cindery iron slapped his ear, and toppled him upon a heap of ashes. Then the same hand gripped his arm and dragged him along a steamy, sizzling dark alleyway to the engine-room.

"You leave me be!" he squealed. A lean man in a boiler suit and a uniform cap looked curiously at him, wiping his hands on a wad of cotton waste.

"Stowaway—found in the bunker," the fireman announced.

"I ain't no stowaway! You let me off this boat! I'm the Acid Kid, I am. I bite, and—"

"I get you, laddy," the engineer said soothingly. "You come with me and bite the captain. He'll love that."

The captain of the *Heroine*, bound to the West Indies by way of Bermuda, was a comfortable man. He had just got clear of port, which he hated, had only a few moments ago heard the last fog-signal fade astern and felt the deepwater heave under foot, got away with his crew intact after a few moments of doubt, and ahead lay sunny skies and blue seas unblinded by fog. He was not to be upset by the apparition of a disheveled dock rat who swore he had tumbled down the boat's coal hole and demanded to be put back on land.

"Says he bites, sir," the engineer remarked.

"Aye, he looks as if a bite would do him good," the captain rejoined. "Poor devil." That was the first sympathetic word the Kid had heard for years. He was shocked. "Well, young fellow, you'll have to come to Bermuda. Too thick to mess about here. The consul will send you home. You don't look up to much work. If you want to eat, you can help the cook. Take him to the galley, Chief."

It was warm in the galley, and there was food. Outside, the fog had cleared, but there was a drizzle of rain, and the Acid Kid had found the captain easy. The cook didn't look any harder. So when, his belly filled, the Kid was shown a sack of potatoes and given a knife to peel what looked like a ton of spuds for the next day, he simply kicked the sack, sprawled along the board bench, and demanded a cigarette.

"Peel spuds, my son. What d'ye think you are?" growled the cook, and laid urgent hands upon the Kid.

"You leave me be, see? I'll—" The Kid was on his feet, the blade of the knife presented in gangster style. The cook was unimpressed. He picked up his tormentors, a terrible three pronged fork for fishing lumps of meat from the copper. The deck was even more unstable than the stokehold plates had been, and the Kid tottered backward, eying those formidable prongs.

"Git out!" breathed the cook. "I'll have you afore the Old Man in the mornin' for a waster. That'll be irons 'til we git to Bermuda, then the cops can feed you. Git!"

The Kid made one nervous attacking movement, his feet would not help him, and the tormentors flickered toward his throat. He backed, tripped over the door sill, and heard the steel door clang shut as he crashed to the deck. The knife was left inside.

**F**OOD filled him, he was warm, but somehow his stomach felt miserable. When he got up and

looked around the dark deck he was not happy. Seeing a glow from a partly opened door forward he staggered toward it, and flung open the seamen's forecandle where the watch below were just getting off to sleep. "Shut that door and git out!" a discontented voice bawled almost at his ear. The door swung with a crash. The owner of the voice dropped from his bunk, saw the Kid, and knew he was no member of the *Heroine's* crew. The Kid tripped over yet another door sill, crashed again to the deck, saw another door shut in his face.

He crept like a beaten dog into a gloomy space beneath the forecandle head, and then the rain pelted down, his stomach went back on him, and he cowered in misery through the night. In the morning the rain had stopped, a blazing sun came up, the sea was very blue, but he wanted no food. The more his misery grew, the more he hated all mankind, particularly seagoing mankind. He saw the cook dodging in and out of his galley, saw him bring out potatoes and peel them. He saw men moving about their work. Rough men, with rough voices. They had knives at their belts. He would let them know all about the Acid Kid, when he felt better. Knives? He knew all there was to know about knives. He wouldn't always be feeling like an empty water bottle.

Later in the day he heard words which told him the ship was in the Gulf Stream. It meant nothing to him; but he was feeling better. He would have ventured out, but now a succession of warm rain squalls kept driving down, and he didn't feel hungry anyhow. Not yet. When he did— He explored his hiding place for a weapon.

He found an iron belaying pin, though he didn't know it was that. All he knew was that it was better than a blackjack. It would croak a guy, properly handled. He slipped it into his pocket. Then he began to feel hungry. The day was almost done, and he had a little business to settle with that cook. As soon as the

men stopped passing to and fro he would go to the galley, if his legs would only behave. And if the rain would stop. Never in his devious life had the Acid Kid known such rain. It was warm, like steam, and it never settled down into a steady downpour as real rain should; it came in a marching series of slashing walls of water, thick as fog, hissing on the sea, drumming on the decks, with intervals of brilliant fine weather which only fooled a man into thinking it was all over.

But it seemed to be over at last, just when the daylight was almost gone. The Kid crawled out, stood up, and gripped his belaying pin. Never, since the gang threw him out on his ear because he got cold feet in the middle of a swell hold-up had he been made to feel so useless and unwanted as he felt in this steamer. He'd been kicked around long enough, now he'd show them. Peel potatoes? What a laugh. Had he asked for the trip? They had made a joke about his name, like a lot of silly sailors. Couldn't bite, eh? Wait!

Suddenly the steamer's siren blared; the rain blotted out the world again. The Kid bent his head to rain which hit his face like a wet paddle, and he darted erratically along to the alleyway where the galley was. It was poorly lit by a bulb set in the iron ceiling, but halfway along the fading daylight still entered through a wide square gangway port which stood open with only a chain across it. The corresponding port on the other side was closed against the weather. This was the lee side.

Again the siren roared. The rain was like fog. It drummed on the deck overhead and the alleyway resounded with it. The Kid reached the opening, breathless, clung to the iron handrail of the alleyway, and straightened up. The galley door was shut, but there was another door around the other side. He shivered as he glanced through the square opening at the hissing, foaming sea. Then he was hotter than he had ever been in his life, hotter than he had

been for that appalling instant in the stokehold. A man stood beside the port, one hand upon the chain, at ease. He was smoking, he was dry and clean; he looked well fed.

The Acid Kid stared, choked, then slithered upon the man.

"Hey, you! Whatcha done with it, hey? Where is it?" he squealed. The man regarded him with amusement, flicking his cigarette into the sea; then the light revealed the Kid's bedraggled figure, it lit his face, and amusement changed to memory. The Kid's grip was countered by one far more powerful.

"Well, well! You're the little scut who tried to cosh me under the crane and bumped me into the coaling pocket! I am glad—"

**T**HE siren blared again. A ringing shout from the unseen forecastle head was answered by louder voices somewhere above; the motion of the steamer swiftly changed; she quivered, lurched, and began to swing. Then, the deck reeling to her swerve, she crashed into something with her weather bow, and rolled heavily.

The Acid Kid and his antagonist were hurled against the guarding chain. It took the taller man below the waist, and both pitched headlong into the sea as the steamer slowly began to go astern and moved faster as she gathered way.

When he rose to the surface, the Kid saw the vague ghost of the ship, then it vanished, leaving behind only the churned foam of reversed engines. The Kid could swim, but never in his life had he swum in so much water as this. There was no limit to it. Nowhere to swim to. He swam in panic, shouting, and he heard a shout almost beside him, from the sea.

He screamed in answer. Then the two men, swimming without hope in the middle of a yeasty sea, were flung against the weedy side of the derelict which had all but murdered the *Heroine*.

A tangle of gear hung over the side; the planks of the hull were broken by the impact of the half-

stopped steamer; the sea was comparatively quiet on the lee side, and in the yelling darkness the Kid scrambled for a hold and started to climb. Now and then his teeth chattered, and when his fingers slipped he sobbed, but a hand was helping him; and presently he flopped through a broken bulwark on to an invisible deck over which the sea rolled with horrid gurgles.

"Better get aft. It's higher. Crawl, don't try to walk, the deck may be torn up." The Kid heard his fellow castaway beside him, and in terror grabbed him. They crawled toward the black loom of the derelict's raised poop, beaten by floating debris.

They heard far off the steamer's siren, twice, the second time fainter. She was leaving them. And then the squall passed, stars came out, and through the grim edges of a flying black cloud laughed the moon.

The Kid looked out upon a gleaming sea capped with foam; the only thing besides water was a cloud of black smoke spread across a dappled sky, and a heavy line of black cloud sharp ruled against the bright moonlight which seemed to be falling toward the derelict like a collapsing wall.

"There goes our hope!" the Kid's companion said quietly, pointing to the smoke. "I don't believe we've been missed. You wouldn't be missed, anyhow." The Kid was too miserable to assert his importance, his toughness. He was still seasick, half full of salt water, and the sullen, drowned heaving of this waterlogged wreck made him feel worse than ever. But he resented the apparent heartiness of his companion in misfortune, who had come through the same trials as he had, was nothing but a cosh guy, yet could find wits to examine the situation. Under the white moonlight, while that advancing black wall was yet some distance away, the ocean rolled down upon the derelict, leaped at her weather side, poured across her decks and out through broken bulwarks. The deck planks were broken in places. Water

rolled below and rolled back up. The Kid shivered desperately.

"Ain't this boat sinkin'?" he chattered. "Lookit them holes!"

"Full of lumber, I guess. Can't sink any deeper. Come on under cover, before that squall reaches us. What's your name? What d'ye call yourself?"

"ME? I'm the Kid, the Acid Kid, I bite—" the recital began. Bill grunted, ducked inside a black and odorous companionway dragging the Kid after him as the first rain pelted down.

"Better not bite me, Acid Drop. Stick close. It isn't safe to go nosing around in the dark. In the morning, if we're alive, I'll go into the little matter of that wallop you aimed at me. Look what it's got you. I'm *Heroine* Bill, if fancy names are in order. I don't bite—but I know a few other tricks."

"*Heroine* Bill?" whispered the Kid, who had never heard the name of the steamship he had for so brief a time traveled in. "Gee, I never touched dope! Wouldn't."

"You'll be lucky to have a chance to touch anything, Kid. I suppose you know where you are? You don't seem too bright. This old hulk has probably been washing round the seas for years. We'll wash around too, until we get washed off like beetles. Did you expect to find a restaurant aboard here? Or don't you ever think?"

"Rest'rant? Meanin' grub, Bill? There ain't no grub?"

"Maybe a few rats. We'll soon see whether we eat them or they eat us. It's lucky the ship was stopping when she struck, else all hands would be feedin' little fishes right now. Here, get in back of me. I want to see out."

The Kid didn't want to see out. He hated the sight of the sea, the roar of rain, the laughing moonlight between squalls. He hated his stomach, but that grew easier toward morning, and then it was worse still, for he thought of food. He roused out of an uneasy doze when Bill stepped out of the shelter

into a pearl and gray fine-weather dawn and shouted for him.

The Kid shivered. The sea was smooth, but still it rolled across the broken deck. Bill was digging through a heap of *débris* which blocked up some stairs leading below. In all the circle of the horizon no speck appeared. It was the emptiest, the loneliest spot the Kid had ever known. And he had not eaten since the night before last. He said so, when Bill ordered him to lend a hand.

"If we don't find some grub hidden away below, my son, it'll be long enough before anybody eats. Even the rats have been washed overboard. Catch hold of this plank, Acid Drop."

His skinny body in torment, his fighting spirit never more than a poor bluff, non-existent except when attacking from ambush and well armed, the Kid dragged broken timber and marveled at the strength and courage of Bill. What a fool he had been to take a wallop at Bill! That guy must be one of the big shots.

"Watch your step, Kid. The stairs are carried away," said Bill, disappearing into the reeking cavern of what had been the schooner's saloon.

Bill's cool fortitude encouraged the Kid. Perhaps it was better to swing in with a guy like him than try to run a one-man gang of his own. If they found food—of course, they would find food—Bill would find a way out of this pickle, and perhaps he'd let the Kid swing in with him when they got home again.

"No good trying to do anything if we know we can't eat," Bill said, poking into the darkness, his feet swishing in water. Wreckage which had fallen across the skylights had not been washed away by the seas, which had only wrapped the canvas and rope firmly about the woodwork. "Nip up and clear it away, Kid. We need light," said Bill. "This must be the pantry. It's cleaned. Hurry up."

**W**HEN the sunlight penetrated the interior, Bill wrenched open the grating in the floor which led to the storeroom. The grating was awash,

the storeroom full of water to the beams. But Bill lowered himself into the evil smelling water, held his nose, and disappeared. In a minute his head reappeared. He grinned, and flung at the Kid a flapping piece of salt cod, slimy and odorous.

"Chuck it on deck in the sun, Kid. We won't tackle that unless we have to. Find me a bit of line—rope. Know rope, Kid? You will, unless this job drowns you." Bill actually chuckled. The Kid sought rope, whimpering. *Heroine* Bill!

"They must have pretty well cleaned her out before they quit," Bill remarked on his next appearance. "Haul away, Kid. Let's see what we've won. It's all I can find."

The Kid hauled up a square case which, opened, revealed forty-eight cans of dried apples. Bill hacked a can open with his knife, and the Kid started to eat wolfishly. Bill stopped him, gave him half a dozen apple rings, one at a time, then pushed him on deck.

"The fish will help. Let it dry, Kid. Do you know how far it is to swim to shore?" The Kid shook his head miserably. Already the apples disagreed with his starved stomach. "Well, Kid, if you can't swim two or three hundred miles, we've got to hang on to this hulk until somebody picks us off. Let's take a look and see how long she'll float."

"I don't care if she sinks right now," the Kid whimpered.

"And you're the little tough who took a wallop at me and knocked us both into the drink! Shame on you, Kid!"

"If I did take a sock at you, you took a sock at the other guy—yes, and pinched his satchel!" squealed the Kid. Bill looked hard at him, then laughed, and dragged him along the streaming deck forward.

The Kid moved in a state of shivery bewilderment, momentarily increasing to awe. He followed Bill across yawning chasms of broken timber, crawling on all fours at times, when Bill strode or hopped on sure feet, stopping every now and then to peer

into the drowned bowels of the wreck. There was no doubt about it, Bill belonged to the big shots. Nothing scared him.

"She'll fall apart almost any time," Bill commented when they reached the bows and looked over. "Know what's in her, Kid? You wouldn't. She's crammed solid with mahogany logs. Not planks, logs. As long as she holds 'em together, the lot'll keep moving in one direction; once she spills open the sea will be strewn with murderous baulks of hardwood liable to punch holes in any ship afloat. They'd chew us to hash in two minutes, Kid. Like the idea?"

The Kid shivered and tried to fasten his chattering teeth. No answer seemed to be expected. Bill proceeded with his inspection, nibbling at a dried apple. He cautiously entered the wrecked forecastle, the Kid remaining outside, and in a moment Bill shouted with relief:

"Bit o' luck, Kid! Here's a water cask, half full, and it's sweet. Here, drink hearty, but drink slow."

The Kid greedily fastened upon the hookpot and drank. The water swelled the dried apples, and his stomach rebelled again. He sat down on the wet deck and let Bill wander about, feeling no interest. Looking aft, the derelict was a forlorn hope. Her wheel was gone, and her masts all gone except the foremast which was broken off at the crossrees. Here and there a broken boom or gaff was wedged across the deck; everywhere writhed a tangle of ropes, most of them rotten. Bill was looking at the windlass, shaking his head.

"Everything any good's busted or carried away," he said.

"Won't a steamer come this way, Bill? Ours did," the Kid whined hopelessly. Bill silently pointed, and the Kid looked. A trail of smoke lay on the horizon, the steamer under it keeping as far away from the derelict as possible. The day was brilliant; no good navigator would have an excuse for doing otherwise. Bill stood for a long time looking at the sea, and his face was grim. The Kid crouched

on the deck, holding his tortured stomach.

"Come on, Kid. No use feeling sorry for ourselves," Bill said at last. "If we don't help ourselves nobody's going to help us. Let's see how tough you are. Got to face up to it, my lad."

IN A daze the Kid followed Bill about the hazardous decks, obeying orders, but quite ready to lie down and wait for the end. He hauled fathoms of rope, which Bill tried, broke and flung overboard, or coiled carefully aside. They dragged broken planks and splintered spars, Bill carefully securing each one as if at any time the sea might cut up rough again and sweep the lot away. And cut up it did, toward noon, when a characteristic succession of Gulf Stream squalls marched upon and over the wreck, the rain turning everything to steam. They crouched in the imperfect shelter of the forecastle, watching the breaking seas roll athwart the deck.

"One good thing, Kid, water can't do more to her than it's already done," Bill chatted, watching the leaping, vivid seas. "Funny thing, this Stream. Keeps rolling along at sixty to eighty miles every day, never mind how the wind is. As long as we're in it, we move like that, too. Can't help ourselves, Kid. The tough part about it is unless we can edge out of it we'll get carried God knows where, maybe to Africa and back again for years—unless we fall apart. And here we are, like a couple of bugs, floating to hell—angone on a hundred thousand dollars worth of mahogany."

"Gee, that's dough!" chirped the Kid, soothed by Bill's quiet chatter and the mention of big money. "Is meehogamy worth that dough, Bill?"

"Half of it's yours, if you can find a shop to sell it," Bill laughed uneasily as the derelict quivered in a heavy sea. "A log of it spells curtains if it hits you in the puss when you're swimming, too. Come on. The squall's over, Kid."

The Acid Kid had never worked as Bill made him work. He had never

worked at all, since he tried selling papers and got tired. He couldn't see any reason for it, either, until Bill silently showed him another wide gap in the bulwarks which had appeared during the squall. The day was gone and another night blazed with stars before they ceased dragging heavy débris about, nibbling dried apples as they worked. Bill had ripped off the tarpaulins from the hatches, leaving more gaping holes; but, as he explained, a hole more or less made no difference, and the tarpaulins seemed to be the only canvas left on board.

"The sailors were better than their ship, Kid, the way they covered those hatches," Bill said. "Here, drag this small one into the companionway; it's softer than plank to sleep on."

The Kid was hauled out at daybreak again, and the killing round went on. Dumbly he did as he was told, seeing no good in it, feeling that his backbone would never again be straight.

Bill chatted quietly all the while, coaxing the Kid to perform feats of activity which amazed the Kid himself. Two broken spars were brought together, butt to butt; planks were laid along the joint and solidly lashed there with rope. Bill did all the lashing, the Kid passing the ends. Gradually the Kid ceased to feel broken to bits, as his long disused muscles recovered from their first torment; and his wits began to work too.

When the second day ended, and Bill handed out more dried apples, the Kid took his and went away to eat them alone. He peered into the gloomy fore-castle, dared his terrors and entered. Groping, he found what he had scarcely hoped to find, a tin pot; and right in the narrowest part of the fore-castle he found splintered wood which had escaped the drench. Now if he had a match, he'd show Bill that he wasn't the only smart guy. The Kid had hoboed it. But matches! The Kid was not to be beaten now. From the same gentleman who provided the good shoes he had taken a swell cigar-lighter; it was as good as the shoes; it had not let in water. He

produced it, tried it, and jittered gleefully when the small flame arose. The water cask was handy; in half an hour he took to Bill a steaming pot of stewed apples. Not thoroughly stewed, not sweetened, but anyway far superior to dry apple rings. Bill looked up in amazement.

"Well, Kid, you do surprise me!" he said, tasting.

"Good, eh? Them raw apples ain't good for yer stummick, Bill. Maybe I kin cook some o' that fish, too."

"The fish went overboard in the squall, Kid. But we'll make out with applesauce all right. I'll have to promote you to cook."

THE Kid felt himself part of the scheme of useful things when work began again. Twice the smoke of steamers smudged the horizon, and passed. But Bill said that every day the hulk drifted about eighty miles; they must get somewhere in time. Upon the broken stump of the only mast Bill had raised his fished spar, and was stretching out the tarpaulins along the deck.

"No use thinking we can sail this raft of logs, Kid; if we had canvas enough for a square-rigger we couldn't set it, or steer her when set. But as long as the wind blows from the south it'll help the Stream; if it comes on to blow from the eastward it'll edge us out of the Stream toward the coast. And as long as the tarpaulin stands we'll be seen by passing ships and they'll know somebody's aboard here. Clever, eh, Kid?"

"Gee, I'll say so! You're smart, Bill. If we git outa here all right, I want to run with you. What I mean, I'll join your gang, Bill. I ain't so dumb, myself. You see that, don't you, Bill? What I mean, them apples. I'm wise to a lotta other things, too."

With terrific labor they hoisted two tarpaulins, one to each yardarm, upon tackles formed out of far heavier blocks and rope than necessary; but Bill explained there was no question of making or taking in sail. He had not even tried to find materials for sewing the tarred canvas into sail

shape; one black square solidly strung on either side of the broken mast, it must hang until the wind blew it away. He had used all the gear there was.

"Looks like washing day in the Black Country, Kid, but it'll attract attention all the better for its queer-ness," Bill said, finally securing the last bit of gear. "Now there's nothing else to do but keep alive and hope. Call it a day."

At the end of four days the Kid's nose was peeled, his sickly skin had taken on color, he thrived upon par-boiled apples. Bill, used to much better fare than the Kid had ever known, was suffering grievously. There was nothing for them to do, but had there been it must have been the Kid who did it, for Bill was sick. He had tried again to find a change of diet in the drowned storeroom, without any luck, and he was not the same man afterward. The Kid tried to cheer him up.

"Gee, Bill, it was too bad we lost that satchel. Musta been dough in it. Whatcha do wiv it?"

"Satchel?" moaned Bill.

"Sure, the one you swiped from that guy and I—"

Bill laughed discordantly. It frightened the Kid. "Kid, you're funny. Must have seen too many gangster pictures. You and your Acid Kids, and gangs—"

"What about you? *Heroine* Bill, you said."

"Don't make me laugh any more, Kid. My belly won't stand it. That satchel was empty, it belonged to the Old Man—the captain—I'm second mate of the *Heroine*. The steamer, get me? Some guy snatched the satchel as I was hurrying aboard the ship in that darned fog; it was empty, but I wasn't having anything like that; I socked the guy and grabbed the satchel, and then you popped up and had another go. The Old Man was fuming to be off out of the fog, because it was getting thicker. You plonked me into the coaling pocket, and tumbled in yourself. But I knew enough to climb out before the next lot of coal came down; you must have

got buried and shot clear down to the bunker door. Then you spotted me having a smoke before I went up to the bridge, and took another wallop at me in the gangway. Look around, Kid. Here's the result. Now let me catch a nap. I'm all in."

THE Kid had something to think over—all this for an empty satchel. Being a tough guy wasn't so hot. And as the hulk blew over the inner edge of the Gulf Stream and a grim sea rose in an easterly gale which lasted a full day, he saw great pieces of timber wrenched from the disintegrating vessel and felt far from tough. He saw a great log of mahogany poke out of a hole in the side and float clear. Twice, before the derelict passed on, that baulk of valuable timber thudded against the crazy planks with a weight that frightened him.

Bill seemed to brighten up as the danger increased. He knew it, and was trained to face it. The Kid had no such resources. He could not understand Bill's insistence upon keeping awake. One of them must remain looking out, he said.

"We must have drifted and got blown a couple of hundred miles, Kid, mostly northeast, but a lot to the westward since this gale hit us. Haven't seen a ship lately, but we'll see plenty soon, and it's going to be nasty if it comes on thick and we get into the steamer lanes. Something with a thousand people aboard is likely to bust her nose on us—"

"Mean croak us, Bill?"

"Small loss, that! There'll be hundreds of others, too. Keep your eyes open—not that it'll do much good, Kid."

The next day a fog crept in with the moderating wind, and the derelict's black patches blew her forward at a noisy mile an hour. That night steamers were heard. Toward morning sirens were blowing all around. Bill found materials for a flare, lit it in a broken barrel, but it sent up only smoke which was indistinguishable from the fog. There was no

means of estimating the direction of anything, the derelict's binnacle had gone with the steering gear. But the number of those sirens, and their volume informed Bill's accustomed ear that some great port was near.

A big liner slid stealthily past, unseen, but making her nearness felt by her wash. It rocked the derelict. Her siren was deafening, so close was it. Bill shouted, the Kid squealed; the liner passed on.

The Kid was near collapse then, but he managed to keep from blubbering. For a long time he lay there on the deck, too miserable to move or to talk with Bill.

Hours later, shivering with growing fear, the Kid suddenly gripped Bill.

"Look, Bill! Ain't that the shore?"

Bill looked. Close alongside a running ridge of foam kept pace with the wallowing hulk. The sound of it surging down and resurging up a pebbly beach was weird. Only a moment it lasted, then was gone. Presently, like a spider, rotting piles of an old wharf appeared and vanished. Bill began to listen. His face recovered its good humor.

"Kid, we're pretty nearly home," he said, whacking the Kid on his skinny back. "What are you going to do with your cut in the salvage? Run a swell gang? You'll be a big shot, Kid."

"You ain't kiddin', Bill? Meanin' we stand to make dough if we really get to land?"

"If we do, Kid. Insurance must have been paid on this ship and cargo long ago. There ought to be a few beans in it, somehow."

"Gee! I'd like to buy me a paper stand, Bill, wiv candy and peanuts for the kids—"

Bill roared with laughter. He struck the Acid Kid again on the shoulder, still laughing; and before the Kid could go on, he said:

"Kids? You'd scare kids out of their wits! A tough guy like you—"

"Forget it, Bill. You don't know kids," muttered the Acid Kid. He was hurt.

He was aroused quickly. The derelict scraped sand. She staggered on a bit, then came to a stand, and the small seas rolled beyond her. Her tarpaulin sails blew away; her timbers cracked open, and she settled with a crunch into an easy bed. Bill gave a yell. He leaped overboard and disappeared into the fog. Presently his voice called for the Kid.

"Kid, I believe I know where we are! There's a railroad. You stick tight until I get back. I'm going to find a lawyer to take care of our interests. Mind, don't let anybody shift you off that ship until I get back. I'll bring you some real grub. I've got money in my belt. Don't forget, Kid. Stick!"

**B**ILL never came back. The Kid thought a lot about him during the ensuing days when things were happening, astonishing things. The fog had cleared; men had arrived at the shore; a smart lawyer had appeared first of all, so Bill had not just run out on the Kid. It was all very confusing, but it had resulted in what would never cease to be a dream to the Kid. There had been money—the underwriters who had paid insurance and now took over the load of mahogany were generous—and the Kid, behind his newspaper stand talking confidently to a friendly policeman while stealthy kids stole his peanuts and persuaded themselves that they were undetected, mentioned Bill and wondered at his desertion.

"Nothing can't have happened to Bill," he said. "Bill's a reg'lar guy. Wisht I knew his name. I'd start a search. There's money comin' to him, same as me. Course, he might have gone to chase his steamboat. Second mate, he was, on the *Heroine*—"

"Say, you kiddin' me?" the policeman demanded sourly. "Mean to say you don't know? Why didn't you say the guy you're always bellyaching about was that crook?"

The policeman spat over the curb. When he turned back, the Kid was staring wildly at him, mouth agape and hands fumbling. After some min-

utes the Kid found his voice again. "Crook? Bill a crook?" The Kid flared up at a policeman for the first time in his life. The policeman laughed indulgently.

"Sure he was. Don't you lose no more sleep over that bozo, Kid." He used the word idly, knowing none of its implications, but a flicker of panic passed over the Kid's face for a moment. The policeman never noticed it. He went on, comfortably:

"Gone up the river, Bill has. Been looking for him ever since the *Heroine* sailed. They nearly got him then, but he must have slipped through the fog."

"What they pinch him for?" whispered the Kid, stricken with awe.

The policeman grinned.

"Why, he'd just planted a nice little parcel of cocaine and was beating it back to the steamer. Slipped 'em in the fog, he did. They never saw him go on board. He'd have got away, too, if he hadn't gone and fell overboard in mid-ocean. You should worry. Crooks ain't in your line, buddy. Watch them kids. They'll clean you out. Be seein' yuh."

The Acid Kid absently gave a smart ten-year-old girl two dimes for a nickel and gazed after the broad receding back.



## Looking Ahead!

### THE MASKED MARVEL

The gong sounds; two men shuffle into the center of the ring—the Panther vs. Mr. Question Mark. Who is the man in the silken mask? The crowd is sure it's Slugger Carson, but Big-shot Al Medea has staked thousands that it is another. And even the Panther cannot tell whether he is fighting a slaphappy bum or a champion. A fast-moving short novel by

WALTER RIPPERGER

### SINGAPORE NIGHTS

"Give me till sunrise," Jim Thall said, and he set out down those twisting Oriental streets on the trail of a killer. Success would be a miracle, he knew; but only in a land of miracles would he dare ask the hand of an heiress—and claim the loot of a thousand years. A vivid novelet of the East by

ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

### GILT EDGED

The kid had one ambition: He wanted the biggest, flossiest shaving mug in the barber shop. But before that goal could be reached, he found himself playing a man's part in the drama of the cattle-country. An unusual Western story by

BENNETT FOSTER

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—NOVEMBER 12th



# Argonotes

## The Readers' Viewpoint



EVERY week it is our duty to dis-tribute a certain number of rejection slips; but in the future we will not be able to go through that process with the same assurance. For not long ago we heard about a divorce suit in Camden that has shaken us severely. The wife, suing, presented the story of her husband's love affairs, written by himself, as testimony—and attached to the manuscript was a rejection slip. The Advisory Master hearing the case recommended divorce.

With some relief we turn to people who can read stories without dragging them into court. First to

### O. E. DENNISON

After an intermission of over a year, due to illness, I have again taken up the ARGOSY. The last story I finished before I became too ill to read, "Z is for Zombie," by Theodore Roscoe was one of the very best I've read. It had only one rival, and that is "A Grave Must be Deep" published previously. Roscoe is a favorite with me. I'd like to see another serial from him coming up.

Last June, when I was allowed to read an hour a day again, I started with ARGOSY on "Mad Money" by Norbert Davis. It was tops. But "Three Against the Stars" weakened in plot considerably, and was disappointing, since the later installments did not live up to the expectations of intense drama promised in the first one. Had the author built up the story in the strong plot the idea suggested, those minor errors wouldn't have been noticed.

"No-Shirt McGee's Medicine Show" by Frank R. Pierce, was another story I much enjoyed. Other stories I have not read, since I have to await greater return of strength before increasing my reading time.

Before I forget, I hope you don't keep your threat made in September 3 ARGOSY "not to take any more test-tube stories." You might turn down a real worthwhile fantastic or something by living up to it!

San Francisco, California

BY NOW Mr. Dennison must have speeded up his convalescence by beginning Theodore Roscoe's new novel, "Two Hours to Go." We hasten to assure him that we're not really boycotting test-tube stories—even if our readers do get into a turmoil about scientific mistakes. . . . And here is a gentleman who manages to be extremely pleasant at an early hour in the morning:

### RICHARD FRANK

It is now early in the morning but I've just finished reading Robert Neal Leath's "Karpen the Jew" and I had to write ARGOSY at once.

What a tale. As a fantasy, it was perfect. As a well-aimed, scathing attack on war and its causes, it was superb. And as a piece of entertaining fiction, it will be hard to surpass.

Although I've only been reading ARGOSY for about seven years, my files are almost complete back to 1894. Yet in all those years I've never read a better yarn than "Karpen the Jew". Please keep Robert Neal Leath (whom I've always associated with detective fiction) and have him write more "modern parables" for ARGOSY.

A few other roses: Congratulations on Fred Painton's splendid Dan Harden series. Thanks, too, for the extra illustrations for "The Devil's Mushroom". Give us several illustrations for each story. Continue telling us who painted the cover and what story it illustrates.

And many, many thanks again for "Karpen the Jew."

Millheim, Pennsylvania

MR. FRANK puts the average human man being to shame. Writing practically in the gray of dawn, and still he seems to be happy about everything. We plan to call up Robert Neal Leath at two-thirty tomorrow morning and convey to him Mr. Frank's compliments.

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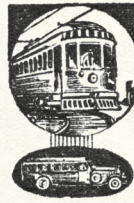
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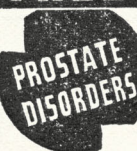
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