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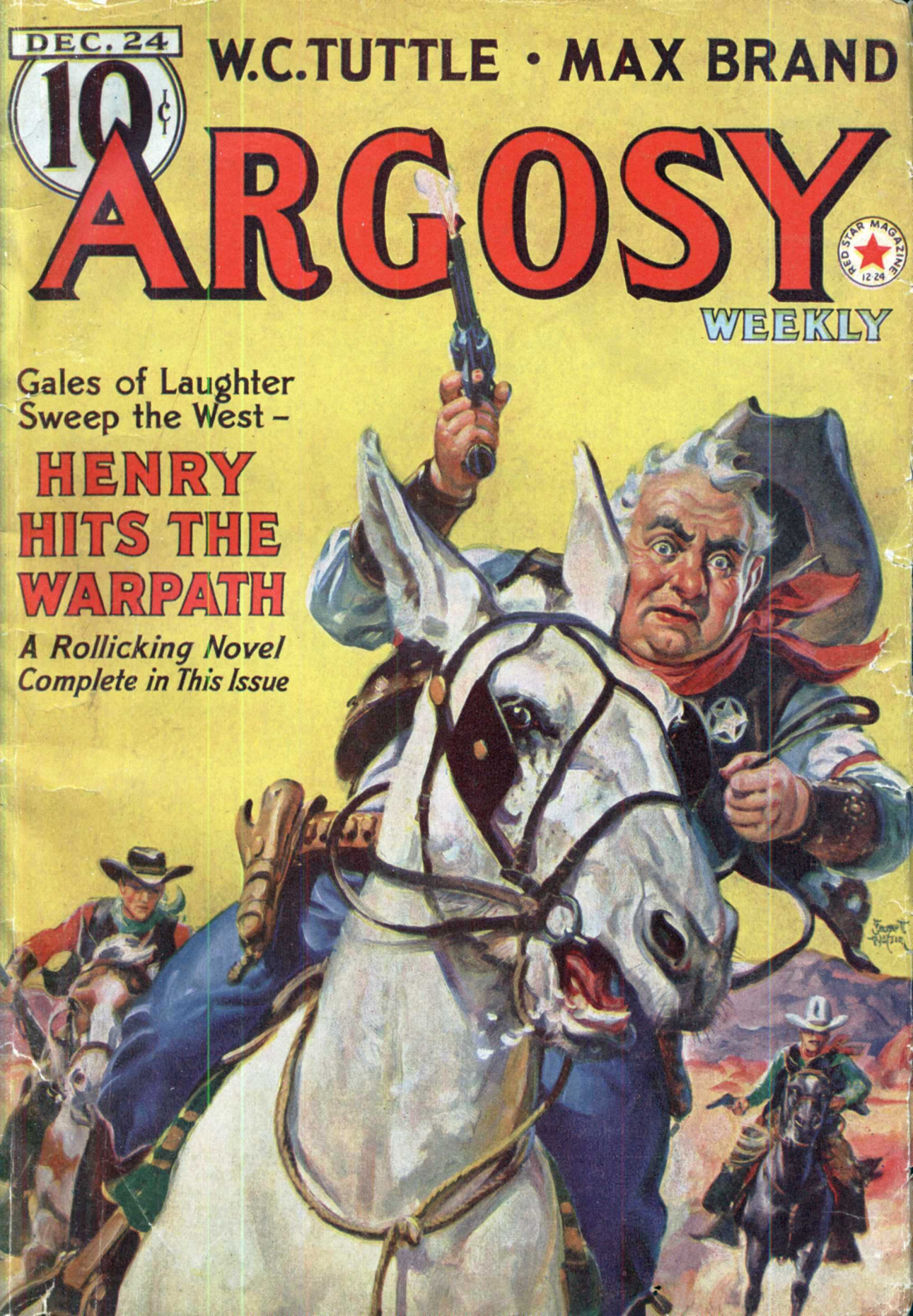

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Volume 287 CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 24, 1938 Number 1

Cover by Emmett Watson
Illustrating Henry Hits the Warpath

This magazine is on sale every Tuesda

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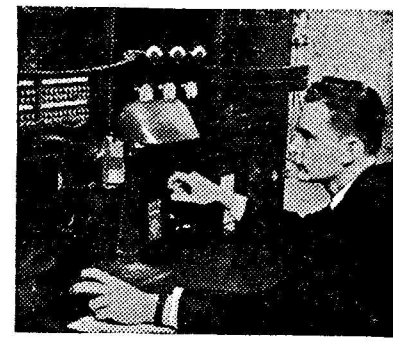

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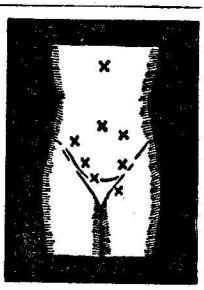

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A Short Novel

Henry Hits the Warpath

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "High Heels—and Henry," "Galloping Gold," etc.

Even though all the varmints of Wild Horse Valley are ag'in' him, the white-haired, fumble-fingered custodian of Tonto's law is determined that his record for incompetence, square-shooting, and fiasco shall not be besmirched

I

"HENRY," said "Judge" Van Treece soberly, "Oscar Johnson is up to something. That vitrified Viking has been drinking liquor all the afternoon with a drummer, and he is full of both whisky and nonsense."

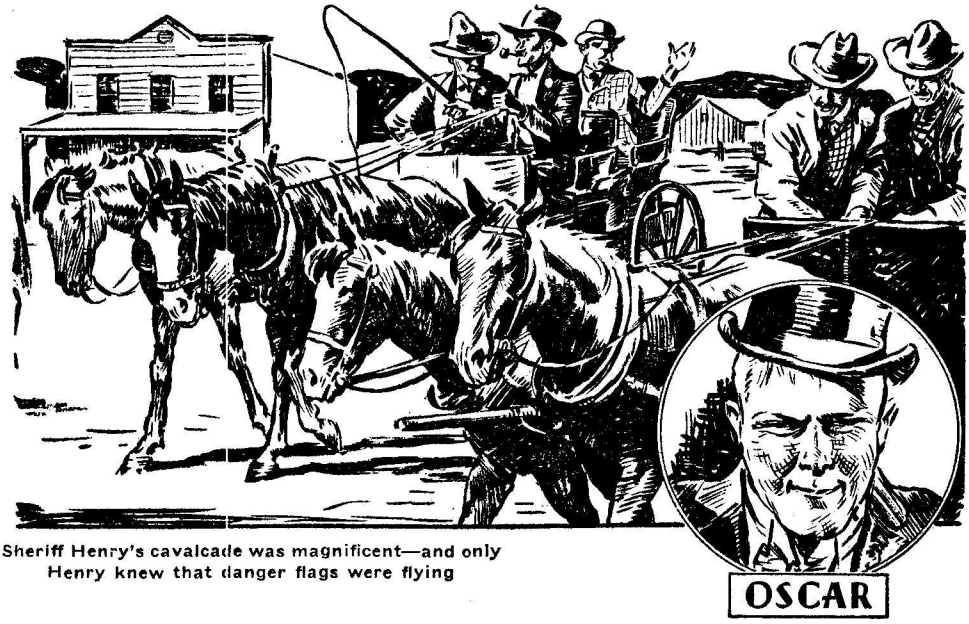
Henry Harrison Conroy, Sheriff of Tonto City, gravely considered his deputy, who stood beside the desk, one bony hand resting on a dog-eared copy of the brand register.

Sheriff Henry Harrison Conroy, formerly a brilliant luminary of tanktown vaudeville, made three separate and distinct efforts to lift his boots to the tabletop, grunted in disgust and subsided. He rubbed his huge, red nose and fixed his small, squinty blue eyes on Judge, and remarked:

"I find that my hinges do not function properly—and I sigh for the days of my youth, when I was so supple that I could easily put an ankle behind my neck. Oh—er—yes, of course—you mentioned Oscar."

Judge Van Treece, tall and gaunt, with the features of a melancholy hawk, looked wearily upon Henry. Judge Van Treece, once a renowned criminal lawyer, had drunk himself right out of the profession, and was well on the way to total submersion when Henry Conroy came to Tonto City.

Henry had inherited the JHC spread in



Sheriff Henry's cavalcade was magnificent—and only Henry knew that danger flags were flying

Wild Horse Valley, and had come to claim his inheritance, blessed with a complete lack of knowledge of the cow country. With his derby, spats and gold-headed cane, he had found himself elected sheriff of Wild Horse Valley on a write-in ballot. This was very funny. Realizing that it had all been done as a joke, Henry appointed Judge as his deputy, and made Oscar Johnson jailer. If Arizona wanted a laugh—he would play to the gallery for all he was worth.

Oscar Johnson was a huge Swede, uneducated, belligerent, and always in trouble. Where none existed, Oscar created it. His courtship of Josephine Swenson, maid at the Tonto Hotel, was, in matters of matched size and strength, a battle of Titans.

"Yes, I mentioned Oscar," Judge replied ponderously. "There is something in the wind. Oscar and that clothing salesman went to supper together, and a while ago I saw them enter the hotel together. They were both listing heavily to starboard. And I need not remind you that when Oscar gets to a point where he lists, he is dangerous. At such a time he is, chemically speaking, ninety percent alcohol."

"How blissful for Oscar!" Henry exclaimed quietly.

"Blissful! A man in Scorpion Bend declared publicly that there isn't three sober breaths drawn in the sheriff's office in a month. No wonder they call us 'The Shame of Arizona'."

"That, sir," declared Henry, "is base calumny. The man does not know whereof he speaks. Last Wednesday you were sober. Please do not interrupt me, Judge. Tuesday night you dropped and broke that jug in which we had a gallon of Frijole Bill's prune whisky. You were so depressed that you forgot to drink anything on Wednesday."

"Well," remarked Judge quietly, "a man must fast—at times."

"True, Judge—true. Now that we have a railroad of our own, linking us with the outside world, we must—well, meet civilization half-way."

"I still prefer the stagecoach, Henry. I protested openly, asking that Tonto City be afforded passenger service—not a damnable caboose at the rear of a cattle or ore train. Damnable grades and creak-

ing curves—and one train a day. An antiquated engine, spewing cinders, and—what on earth?"

THE office-door flew open and in staggered Oscar Johnson, clad in a misfit dress-suit, which had split at elbow, knee and down the middle of the back. The pants, which extended to a point about six inches above his shoe-tops, exposed yellow shoes with white spats.

Oscar's shirt was a happy combination of red and lavender, topped by a tall, bat-wing collar, unfastened at one end. While, hanging down the back of his neck was a bright blue four-in-hand tie. In one hand he carried a silk top-hat, which looked as though it had been caught in a stampede. Oscar's nose was swollen and scarlet; one eye had assumed a deep purple hue, and was tightly closed.

He kicked the door shut behind him and limped over to a vacant chair.

"What on earth happened to you?" gasped Henry.

"Me?" queried Oscar in a weak voice. "Ay am de wictim of romance."

Henry closed his eyes tightly and made gurgling sounds in his throat.

"Romance?" queried Judge weakly. "Where on earth did you get those clothes, Oscar?"

"Ay *vars* svell looking, Ay'll tell you," whispered Oscar, mournfully.

"My goodness!" breathed Henry. "Wh-where's the romance?"

"Yosephine," sighed Oscar. "She yall hike ha'al—Yosephine did."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Judge. "The moment I saw you, I—"

"Hold it, Judge," choked Henry. "Let Oscar tell it."

Oscar shifted his position, groaned twice and said:

"Ay vars going to elope, and Ay—"

"With Josephine?" interrupted Judge.

"Yah, su-ure. She vanted romance. She vanted me to put a ladder up to her vindow—and steal her avay."

"Who from?" queried Judge weakly.

"Ay never dit find out, Yudge. Das ha'ar drummer he tell me he vill fix me up in vedding clothes, and ve got drunk togedder and—yeeminy, Ay am von mass of hurts. Das hat is too small; so ve tied it on vit a string.

"Ay got de ladder oop to Yosephine's vindow and made de climb oll right. De vindow is open and Yosephine has yust closed her valise, ven Ay look in de vindow and Ay says, 'Hallo, Baby.'"

"Keep going, Oscar," whispered Henry. "Don't stop now."

"Va'l, she yust took von look at me, yalled bloddy murder, and hit me sqvare in de face vit her valise. Va'l"—Oscar tried to smile, as he fingered the ruined top-hat—"de ladder vent over backvard—and Ay vars on it."

Henry buried his face in his arms, while Judge covered his mouth with a blue bandanna. Finally he managed speech. "And so you did not get married."

"You can see for yourself, Yudge. Ay am not in shape for matrimony."

"Let us all be calm," whispered Henry. "At a time like this it is good to try and repeat poetry. It—it takes the mind off things at hand. For instance, any simple nursery rhyme, such as—Oscar, take that hat off your head!"

"Vedding clothes—huh!" snorted Oscar.

"Were you going to take a bridal tour?" asked Judge.

"Ay vars not! Ay love her, Yudge. Ay vouldn't strike her vit anyt'ing. Take a bridle to her! Huh! Ay am a yentleman."

"Now, listen!" wheezed Henry. "This must cease—at once, sir! By gad, if no one else will protect my blood-pressure, I shall do it myself. Oscar, you take those—er—clothes back to their owner. At once, sir!"

"Ay am de owner, Hanry," replied Oscar. "Ay bought 'em."

"You—you bought 'em?" gasped Judge.

"Yah—su-ure, Ay bought 'em. He told me dey vars like iron. Huh! Ven Ay hit de ground dey bost like a vatermelon. Yudas, Ay am a mess."

"The best thing you can do is to find Josephine and apologize," said Henry.

"Me—apologize to Yosephine? Who de ha'al do you t'ink threw dat valise—me?"

"I suppose you are right."

"Of course, Ay am right. Ay vars dere —Ay ought to know."

"Oscar, have you seen Thunder and Lightning this evening?" queried Judge, by way of a diversion. Thunder and Lightning were two Mexicans employed by Henry at his JHC ranch.

"Yah, Ay seen 'em," nodded Oscar. "Each von had bottle tequila. Dey ride dobble on that Yeronimo mule."

"Henry, I told you they'd spend that money for tequila," declared Judge. "Overalls, indeed! Socks and drawers! You gave them each a dollar and a half—and they spent it for tequila. You are a trusting soul. Why on earth you keep them I can't figure out. They won't work."

"'They toil not, neither do they spin'," quoted Henry, "but where on earth might a man find two people who can do more gymnastics with the King's English than those two blessed Mexicans."

"From an economic standpoint—" began Judge, but stopped.

FROM outside came the staccato thudding of hoofs, the *r-r-r-r-rip!* of gravel, as a rider skidded his animal to a stop in front of the office. The three men were staring at the door, as boot-soles slithered across the wooden sidewalk.

A man flung the door open; stopped on the threshold, panting.

"Is the sheriff—" he blurted, when from somewhere behind him came the report of a shot. The man in the doorway was falling forward, dead before he reached the floor. . . .

From the street, thudding hoofs mingled with a crash, a yelp of alarm or pain. Oscar Johnson, in spite of his bruises, leaped over the dead man, dodged a rearing gray shape, which was Geronimo, the mule, and went galloping after a man who was running up the badly-lighted street.

Oscar could really run, and in front of the Tonto Hotel he made a diving tackle, bringing down his man, who was carrying a shotgun in both hands. As they crashed down in a cloud of dust, the shotgun roared, and part of a front hotel window left its moorings, adding to the general excitement on the main street.

People came running from every direction. Henry and Judge were examining the dead man, as loiterers crowded in, wondering, questioning.

"It's Johnny Brent," Judge told them. "Someone shot him from behind, as he stood in the doorway."

"One of the JP outfit," growled a voice outside. "Patterson said he'd get square."

"Oscar Johnson's got the killer!" yelled a voice. "Caught him in front of the hotel; and he still had the shotgun."

Oscar shoved his way through the crowd, and the prisoner was Lightning Mendoza, frightened almost white. His nose was skinned, where Oscar had skidded with him on the gravel. Oscar didn't know whom he had captured until he saw him in the lamplight. He shook the little Mexican violently.

"Easy, Oscar," Henry warned. "What happened, Lightning?"

But Lightning couldn't talk. Eyes wide, jaw sagging, he looked from face to face, trying to realize what had happened. Someone shoved Thunder forward roughly, and the two brothers bumped into each other.

"Who push?" Thunder demanded indignantly.

"I did!" snapped a hard-faced cowboy. "Don'tcha like it?" He strode forward.

"Sure," nodded Thunder, unhappily. "I don' mind from leetle push."

"Now wait a minute, you folks," said Henry calmly. "*I* shall handle this. Lightning, did you shoot Johnny Brent?"

"Johnny Brent ees shot?" blurted Thunder.

"With the shotgun that Lightnin' had," said a cowboy.

"Madre de Dios!" howled Lightning, suddenly discovering that he had a voice. "I'm keel not'ing. Me and our brodder ees riding these mule, and for eenstance a horse ees trying for getting on the mule

and all t'ree from us get knocked down. W'at ees going on, that ees all I hope—and pray."

"Well, that clears that up," said Henry calmly. "Now, Lightning, can you tell us why you had the shotgun?"

"W'at shotgun?" Lightning queried, looking at his empty hands.

"The shotgun you had when Oscar caught you, Lightning," explained Henry kindly. "You remember that, do you not?"

Lightning shook his head.

"Ay t'ink he shoot ha'al out of de hotel vindow," offered Oscar.

"You look as though you'd been in a fight yourself," said one of the cowboys.

"Yust keep your face out of my business," replied Oscar with the hauteur of a Caesar.

DOCTOR BOGART, the county coroner, bustled in with his little black bag and fussed adroitly over the dead man.

Henry turned to Thunder Mendoza. "Thunder, perhaps you can tell us what happened. Now take it easy."

"Sure," agreed Thunder eagerly. "I know everytheeng. W'at you want for knowing?"

"What were you and Lightning doing out there and what happened?"

"Me and my brodder go home on Heronimo, theese damn mule. That ees sometheeng—I hope. All from a sodden we are hearing gon go *boom!* Then a horse ees trying for get on the mule, too. That ees all."

"I see," nodded Henry. "You heard someone fire a shotgun, and then a rider collided with your mule. But where did Lightning get that shotgun?"

Thunder turned to Lightning and said:

"W'at you do weeth that shotgun?"

Lightning blinked foolishly, looked at his empty hands and wiped them on his hips.

"I am escared that my leetle brodder ees gone loco," he told Henry.

"If I may interject the cold light of reason into this disjointed interview," said Judge, "I might say that following the collision, Lightning, acting in sort of a daze, secured the shotgun, when the original owner dropped it; being dazed from the day of his birth, and not materially helped by the aforementioned collision, he likely ran and ran, until overtaken; and in the scuffle which ensued, the shotgun was accidentally discharged."

"That ees exactly from w'at happen!" Thunder exclaimed.

"What was that?" queried Henry curiously.

"Listen!" exclaimed a cowboy. "I saw them two drunken Mexicans get on their mule about a minute before the shot was fired. They rode the mule bareback, and it's a cinch they didn't have no shotgun."

"Thank you, sir." Henry nodded gravely. "You did not happen to see the man who fired the shot, did you?"

"No, I didn't, Sheriff."

Henry turned to Oscar and ordered him to release Lightning. Campbell, the prosecutor, had arrived. They shooed the crowd outside, leaving only the coroner, prosecutor, sheriff and deputy with the body. Henry told what they knew about it. Johnny Brent had been riddled with buckshot, killed instantly. John Campbell looked gravely at Henry.

Johnny Brent owned a small spread south of Tonto City, and Johnny Brent had just lost a suit in which he had claimed that the JP spread, a large outfit owned by Jim Patterson, had been stealing his calves. The JP outfit beat Brent in court, and Patterson had told Johnny Brent that he would get even with him for bringing the suit. So much they all knew.

"I believe I know what you are thinking, John," said Henry.

"It was a cold-blooded killing, Henry," said the lawyer. "Buckshot in the back—from behind. From your testimony, it would seem that Brent needed your services—and in a hurry."

Henry nodded sadly and picked up the shotgun. It was old, cheaply made, ten-gauge, with short double-barrels. He

opened the gun and took out the shells. They were old-fashioned, brass shells, had been reloaded many times, as evidenced by their thin edges. Except for the imprint of some hardware store, there were no identifying marks on the gun.

"Don't look like it had been shot for a century," said the lawyer. "Probably dug up special for this occasion."

Henry looked thoughtfully at the lawyer. "I was wondering about Old Shep Hart," he said.

Shep Hart lived with Johnny Brent. He was a grizzled old rawhider from Wyoming, who had gained his nickname from working in a sheep country.

"Why wonder about him?" queried Judge.

"Johnny Brent rode fast and far, judging from the lather and sweat on his horse," replied Henry. "He might have ridden for help, Judge."

Judge Van Treece scratched his thinning thatch thoughtfully. "You would think of something like that," he said wearily.

"I *could* ride alone," said Henry.

"Yes," nodded Judge, "you could. But if Johnny Brent rode for help, what could you do alone?"

"Well, I might ride back here to get you," smiled Henry. He turned to the doctor and said, "Doctor, you don't need us. So we will go and see how things are at Brent's *rancho*. Judge, call Oscar and have him help you saddle the horses. And—wait a minute—show Oscar which end of my horse the head is on. I do not want the saddle on backward again."

"I shall saddle him myself, Henry."

"Then have Oscar show *you* which is the head-end."

II

FIFTEEN minutes later, Judge climbed into his saddle. At the same time, Henry Harrison Conroy struggled stoutly to assume a sitting position in his own. The greatest trouble in Oscar's life was to find a horse strong enough to carry Henry around.

"Ay t'ink ve should hang de Mexican and settle everyt'ing," declared Oscar. "He had de shotgon, and he run avay."

"Your word against his—and we saw *you* with the shotgun, Oscar," replied Henry.

"Yah, su-ure," Oscar agreed.

"As a rebuttal," remarked Judge, "he should have remarked that he was with us when the murder was committed, Henry. Oscar, you are not bright."

"By Yudas, das vars right!" exclaimed Oscar.

"Send him your bill, Judge," Henry chuckled. "That amounts to legal advice. Shall we shake up these equines before they go to sleep under us?"

"Shake up yours and perhaps mine might get excited. Or else fall apart."

It was nearly midnight when the three rode up to Johnny Brent's little ranchhouse. There was not a light in the place, but this was not surprising. They dismounted at the sagging porch, called loudly for Shep Hart, and pounded on the door.

There was no answer. Cattle bawled quietly around the creaking old windmill, and a rooster crowed sleepily from inside the stable. They pounded some more, but nothing happened. Henry tried the door and found it unlocked. They stepped inside and Henry lighted a match.

"Good glory!" Judge exclaimed. "Quick, Henry—light that lamp!"

With shaking fingers they lit the lamp and surveyed the room.

Sprawled on the floor, his shoulders against a bunk, was old Shep Hart, dead for hours. Lying across his legs was a 30-30 carbine, and the floor was littered with empty 30-30 cases. There were many .45 cases, too. Henry levered the rifle, but found it empty. Shep's Colt .45 had been cast aside—empty.

The windows had been shot out, and there were a score of bullet holes in the flimsy door. The three officers looked uneasily at each other.

"Your hunch was right, Henry," Judge whispered.

"I saw something that perhaps you overlooked," said Henry. "Johnny Brent's gun and belt were empty."

"Yudas Priest!" exclaimed Oscar. "Dey have a var here."

"Evidently," nodded Henry gravely. "I wish I knew who'd won it."

He made a tentative examination of Shep Hart. "Shot to shreds," he told Judge. "It looks as though they crossfired him. I wonder how Johnny ever got away from here."

"That is something we may never know, Henry. Well, we can do no good here; so we may as well go back and notify the coroner. I've seen raw and hideous murder before—but nothing so raw and hideous as this. We've got to get them, Henry. We've got to hang them."

"What chance have they to escape?" Henry queried soberly.

"Their chances of escape are about ninety to ten, I would say."

"You are very modest, Judge. You give us ten points. Ten percent. Nine-to-one against us. I wish I had a drink."

"I wish I had a quart," sighed Judge. "By the way, this was to have been Oscar's wedding night—and look what happened!"

"Yah, su-ure," sighed Oscar. "She t'rew a valise at me. Ay am t'rough vit vimmin for life. Ay hope Ay can find de clothes-drommer. Ay don't t'ink he fit me. Ay look like a busted skveese-organ."

"Yes, I think we better go home," said Henry.

NEWS of the battle at the Brent Ranch spread quickly, and next morning the valley was well represented in the posse that went there with the coroner. Judge noticed that there was not a man from the JP spread, and mentioned it to Henry.

John Campbell, the prosecutor, saw it too, and rode in beside Henry to talk about it.

"They are the only ones ever had trouble with Johnny Brent," he remarked.

Henry nodded. "That same old finger of suspicion, John," he said. "I often think of it when I get angry. A foolish threat, made in the heat of anger, always swings that accusing finger. Oh, I will admit that Jim Patterson was mad. His pride was hurt. The case was dismissed from lack of evidence—so Patterson was not exonerated."

"And he *is* hot-headed, Henry."

"Very true, John. I see we have two representatives from the Circle M with us."

"Oh, the two in that near buckboard. That's Peter Hatton, the new owner. The driver is Len Stryker, his foreman. Hatton has only been here a few days. He looks like a man who had eaten well but unwisely, Henry."

"Liquor, John. Being what I am, I hesitate to criticize; but liquor alone gave him that paunch and those jowls. I understand he paid a pretty penny for those twelve thousand acres."

"I believe he did. He's going into the cow business on a big scale, I understand. The railroad people are building a siding and loading corrals on the Circle M for Hatton's exclusive use."

"I heard they were. I don't believe that Hatton employed any local punchers. At least, I haven't heard that he did."

"No, I believe not. He brought in four, including Len Stryker. I don't know where they came from."

At the Brent Ranch Henry was introduced to Peter Hatton, after the coroner had made his investigation and the body had been removed to a wagon.

"It must have been a hell of a fight," Hatton remarked. "The poor devil sure got salivated. Must have been caught in a crossfire between them two windows. I hear this pardner was buck-shotted in yore office doorway last night, Sheriff."

"Yes." Henry nodded. "He was. Fine boy, too."

"Had trouble with the JP outfit, I heard."

Henry looked narrowly at Peter Hatton. "Matter of public record," he said quietly.

"Oh, I mean the threats that passed between Patterson and Brent."

"Men often speak threateningly, under stress of anger." Henry smiled his most lamblike smile.

And Hatton smiled at Henry. "You shore juggle words, Sheriff. You ain't a native of Arizony, are yuh?"

"Only by adoption, sir. Our mission here is finished so we may as well go back to Tonto City. It has been a pleasure to meet you, sir."

"Yeah—well, that's fine," Peter Hatton said. "See yuh later."

As they walked to their horses, Campbell said: "Henry, I don't believe you like Peter Hatton."

Henry smiled slowly and shook his head. "Queer people," he said.

"You mean that Hatton is queer?"

"No—Henry Harrison Conroy. For over thirty years I featured my big, red nose, John. It was plastered on bill-boards from New York to San Francisco. And today I formed a dislike for Peter Hatton, because he never took his eyes off my proboscis, while talking with me—and I know he was laughing at it—internally."

"It seems to me," interjected Judge, "that murder gives it an added sheen. Or it might be the sun."

"I feel," remarked Henry stiffly, "that under the circumstances we should avoid personalities, Judge. What did you deduce from an examination of that room? I saw you sniffing like a bloodhound—or was that merely a recurrence of your hay fever?"

"I am not in the habit of sniffing—like a bloodhound, or otherwise, sir. And I would have you know that I lay no claim to any hay fever. It would seem that at least one member of the sheriff's office should show some inclination toward investigating this mystery. It would look better, I think. All you did was polish your nose and make banal remarks."

They managed to climb on their horses. Henry, with his ten-gallon hat tilted over one eye, squinted at the lanky Judge. "And your solution is what?"

"I believe that Johnny Brent and Shep Hart were together in the house when trouble started. Brent's horse was tied at the front porch, and in some way he managed to ride away for help. Some of the attackers followed him and shot him in our office doorway."

"Marvelous," Henry whispered. "All we have to do is to find who the attacking parties were. Have you any idea why the attack was made, Judge?"

"You might inquire at the JP, Henry."

"That is also elementary, Judge. With my mind all set on a mystery—you shame the noonday sun by parading the obvious."

"There must be some reason for the attack, Henry. The JP threatened Johnny Brent. The JP are the only ones who have a motive."

"You overlook one thing, Judge."

"What is that, sir?"

"The fact that anything can happen in Arizona."

"In this case I must disagree."

"Oh, that is perfectly all right, Judge. Glad to have you. If you ever agreed with me, except on the age of whisky, I would be afraid that my opinion was not worth expressing."

THEY came back to Tonto City, where the body was placed with Johnny Brent's. Jim Patterson, owner of the JP outfit, and two of his riders, Tod Ellers and Eddie Lee, were in town; and they all had been drinking heavily. They followed Henry and Judge to the office.

Patterson was tall and dark, high-cheeked as any Indian, hard-faced, his eyes bloodshot. He was past forty, lean and hard as an ironwood pool, his gun swinging in a short holster against the leg of his worn chaps.

"We been listenin' around, Conroy," he told Henry harshly, "and some of these fools are hintin' that me and my boys had a hand in them killin's. 'Cause I told Brent that I'd pay him back for that suit against me, they figure I killed 'em both. All right—suits me. Next move's yours."

Henry rubbed his nose, swallowed painfully, a weak smile on his lips. "It—it was a—er—nice evening for it, Mr. Patterson," he said.

"You—you admit it, Patterson?" gasped Judge.

"Who sold you any chips in this game, you moultin' sand-hill crane?" Patterson demanded angrily.

"Thank you, Mr. Patterson!" blurted Henry. "I have tried and tried to think up an apt description for Judge. That is a jewel, I assure you. Moulting sand-hill crane. Good—in fact, very good."

"What are you talkin' about?"

"A—a beautiful description," explained Henry. "I would like to shake your hand, sir. If you do not mind—"

"Get yore hand away from me! Yo're both crazy. C'mon, boys."

Jim Patterson and his two men stalked outside and headed for the hitchrack, without a backward glance toward the office doorway, where Judge and Henry stood together.

"Both crazy," murmured Judge. "Damme, I believe he's right."

"To think otherwise would only be to prove his point, my dear Judge. But he came here with malice aforethought and with two gunmen—and we sent him away, talking to himself. Genius is always crazy. And sometimes vice versa."

"Oh—are you a genius?" queried Judge.

"Rather—a squirming genius, Judge. The man was looking for trouble—and you—you moulting sand-hill crane—asked him to admit a murder. Tck, tck, tck, tck! Your stupidity revolts me."

"I do not believe in beating around the bush."

"That is no excuse for parading through it with a brass band. Judge, I love life. I find it good. So I believe I shall go out to the JHC for the night—away from the roar and rattle of Tonto City, the petty annoyances of murder mysteries and the smell of dank jails. I crave solitude and peace."

"And a liberal portion of Frijole Bill's prune whisky," Judge added.

"Would'st retire to solitude with me, sir?" queried Henry soberly.

"Would'st. The sclitude doesn't appeal to me; but there is something in Frijole Bill's prune whisky that actually warms the cockles of my heart."

"Warms! Man, the cockles of your old heart were incinerated after your first drink of that stuff. Mine were, I know. After that, cauterization set in. An autopsy on either of us would have to be done by a chimney-sweep. Let us go at once, Judge; Jim Patterson might wonder what I meant—and come back for an explanation."

III

THE inquest over the two bodies brought out no new information; so the six-man jury brought in the usual verdict—killed by parties unknown. Jim Patterson attended the inquest, sitting there grim-faced, alert, hostilely on the defensive. The crowd watched Patterson as much as they did the coroner and witnesses. But there was no hint in the questions nor testimony that might link the killings to the JP outfit.

Oscar Johnson was jubilant again. He and Josephine had once more reached an understanding, and Oscar was in the office, caressing weird discords out of an ancient accordion, when Henry and Judge came from the inquest.

"When Ay am happy Ay like to play de skveeze-organ," he told Henry.

"Happy?" queried Henry, hanging his sombrero on a nail.

"Yah, su-ure. Ay explained everyt'ing to Yosephine."

"That is mighty interesting, Oscar. But it would seem that the explanation should have come from Josephine."

"It vars from Yosephine. She t'ought I vars a ghost."

"Oh, my goodness! A ghost of whom?"

"De ghost of a man Yosephine saw long time ago. He vars very smort and he vore a tall hat. She say I look yust like him."

"Who was the man?" queried Henry.

"Villiam Yennings Bryan."

"Well," choked Henry, "there is a—er—certain resemblance. You both have two arms and two legs."

"Yah, su-ure. But ve are not going to elope next time. Ay put my fute down on it. Ay say to her, 'Yosephine, next time dere vill be no monkey business, you bet you. You vill marry me in cold blood. You vanted romance, and all Ay got vars a ruined suit, a lot of bomps, and a busted ladder. Next time Ay vill run de shindig myself.' "

"Good for you!" Henry applauded, wiping his eyes. "I salute you, Oscar."

"T'ank you, Hanry. Now, how far on de odder side of Scorpion Bend is Niagara Falls?"

"Well, I—how far? Oh, possibly twenty-five hundred miles."

"Yumpin' Yudas! Every time Ay open my mouth, Ay get a fute in it!"

"SANDY" CRANE rode up to where a small crew of men were building a loading corral on the Circle M spread, and dismounted from his nervous horse. The sight of building activity, the rattle of hammers, did not soothe the fretful disposition of that half-broke sorrel. Sandy gave the animal a little extra footage on the tie-rope and rolled a cigarette.

Sandy was young, tall and gaunt, with sad brown eyes and a wide mouth. His nickname had been shortened from Sandhill. When Laura Morris married Dusty Cole and sold the Circle M to Peter Hatton, she purchased the Bar N, with the intention of raising fancy stock. Because Sandy and Dusty were closer than the famed Damon and Pythias, it was natural that Sandy should stay with the Bar N. Sandy heard that the railroad company had built a siding on the Circle M; so he rode over, neighborly-like, to take a look at it.

Sandy was upset over the killing of Johnny Brent and Shep Hart. Sandy liked them both—and he didn't exactly cotton to Jim Patterson. Sandy always rode with a Winchester on his saddle because he had little faith in certain brands of humanity.

With his sombrero tilted low over his eyes he surveyed the construction. The foreman climbed down and came over near him.

"Like to see somebody?"

Sandy looked him over soberly, nodded shortly. "Yea-a-ah."

"Who?"

"George Washin'ton," replied Sandy.

"George Washington? You—you mean the original George Washington?"

"Yea-a-ah."

"He's been dead for years and years, feller."

"Uh-huh. But that don't stop me from wantin' to see him, does it?"

"Oh, I see." The foreman turned, wiped his brow with his sleeve and spat dryly. "You ain't with the Circle M, are you?" he asked.

"Yuh hadn't ort to say 'ain't. You should say am not. No, yo're right—I ain't with no Circle M; I'm with the Bar N. How's all yore folks—and what was yuh before yuh started carpenterin'?"

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded the foreman.

"That loadin'-chute," explained Sandy. "It's wide enough for a cow to turn around in. The the'ry of a loadin'-chute—"

Sandy paused and turned his head. From a mile or so away came the whistle of a locomotive. Instinctively Sandy drew the restless broncho closer, taking a firm grip on the tie-rope.

"Don't reckon my steed ever met a train," he said, grinning widely. "You better move, pardner, 'cause this might be a merry-go-round in a minute."

The carpenter foreman moved quickly back to work, as an ore train came rumbling down through a cut, cars swaying from side to side. The road-bed was new and badly in need of ballast. Sandy's terrorized horse was dragging him in a circle, as the train rattled and clanked to a stop, with the caboose opposite the new corral. A grimy brakeman, with a valise in each hand, climbed down, while

behind him came a girl, wearing a gray suit. He helped her down, waved a signal to the fireman, and the train rumbled away.

THE girl looked all around, ignored the carpenters, who had ceased work to look at her, and came out toward Sandy, who had his horse under control again. Sandy got one close look at her, drew a deep breath and fumbled for his hat. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"How do you do?" she said smiling.

"Well—howdy, ma-am," replied Sandy, eloquently. "I—I wasn't expectin' a lady."

"Mr. Hatton received my wire, didn't he?"

"Why, I—I dunno if he did or not, ma'am. Yuh see, I ain't—am not—"

"You are from the Circle M, are you not?"

"No, ma'am, I ain't—I are not from the Circle M. Yuh see, I wish I was."

The girl laughed and looked around. "How far is it to the Circle M ranchhouse, Mr.— ?"

"Crane, ma'am. Sandy Crane. The ranchhouse? Why, it's 'bout five miles, as the crow flies. Around the road it's mebbe seven."

"Since I can't fly," she said, "it would mean a long walk. I can't understand why Mr. Hatton did not meet me."

"You—you ain't Pete Hatton's wife, are yuh?"

"You are quite a hand at guessing, Mr. Crane." She smiled. "How about me being his daughter?"

"Gee, that'd shore be great."

Sandy noticed a cloud of dust across the mesquite-covered mesa, and pointed it out to the girl.

"Looks like somebody comin' from the Circle M," he said. "Yeah, that's what she is. A buckboard, with the team on the run. Mebbe yore train was ahead of time."

"After riding in that caboose all the way from Scorpion Bend, I doubt that it is ever ahead of time."

"I've rode it," grinned Sandy. "Yuh have to spur the seat and hang onto leather. Well, here's yore buggy, Miss Hatton."

Peter Hatton whirled the buckboard team in a circle and came to a stop near them. Sandy got the valises, while the girl went over to the buckboard. Peter Hatton looked keenly at the tall cowboy, as he stacked the valises in the back. Then he swung the team around and drove away in a flurry of dust, without so much as a thank-you to Sandy Crane.

Sandy stood there, looking after them, a puzzled expression in his eyes. One of the carpenters laughed shortly and Sandy whirled around, but the men were all busy. None of them looked in his direction. Sandy had never met Hatton; just knew him by sight. He climbed into his saddle, spurred across the track and headed south.

"That's jist another hombre I don't like," he told his horse. "He might at least have kissed her. I'll bet I would. Purty as a june-bug's ear. Cowboy, you've got somethin' worth dreamin' about."

SANDY stopped at Tonto City, intending to tell Henry about the arrival of Peter Hatton's beautiful daughter, but Henry and Judge were out at the JP ranch. Henry impressed on Jim Patterson that the visit was in no way official as they sat on the big front porch of the rambling old ranchhouse.

"I'm not sayin' anythin'," Patterson declared. "There ain't a damn bit of evidence against me; so why should I talk about it?"

"Everybody liked Johnny Brent," Judge offered.

"I didn't!" Patterson snapped.

"At least, you are frank, sir," Henry remarked. "What puzzles me is that only Brent and Hart were killed. From the number of shots they fired, I am rather surprised that there were so few fatalities."

"Wild shootin', I reckon," Patterson growled.

"Bugs" Taylor, the cocky little horse-wrangler of the JP, sauntered up to the

porch, grinned at Henry and Judge and sat down on the steps.

He rolled a cigarette carefully, reached in his pocket and drew out something that glittered. Henry craned his neck. The shiny object was a brass shotgun-shell. In fact, it was two shotgun shells, a ten-gauge and a twelve-gauge, which Bugs had fitted together, making a match-safe.

"Kinda cute, eh?" he chuckled, holding it up for all to see. "Lotta old twelve-gauge shells around here, but I had a hard time findin' a ten. It shore makes a watertight matchbox."

Henry glanced sharply at Jim Patterson, whose face was tense, his narrow-lidded eyes fastened on the back of Bugs' neck. Brass ten-gauge shotgun-shells—like the ones in the shotgun that murdered Johnny Brent. Bugs put it back in his pocket and leaned back, puffing on his cigarette.

"Possibly you are right, Patterson," remarked Henry.

"About what?" queried Patterson quietly.

"Wild shooting."

"Oh, there is no doubt of it," said Judge quickly. "I am afraid it is going to be an unsolved mystery, gentlemen. Henry, I suggest that we ride back home before that sun gets too hot."

"I—I believe it would be a wise move," Henry agreed.

A mile down the road, Henry chuckled thoughtfully. Judge looked at him curiously and said:

"I should be pleased to learn of anything funny that may have occurred to you." His mouth was filled with lemons.

"Your suggestion that we ride home before the sun gets too hot. The hottest part of our day is around noon. It is now four o'clock, and at least ten degrees cooler than at noon."

"I was feeling the heat very much, Henry."

"Increased no doubt by the sight of that brass shell, Judge."

"And the expression on Jim Patterson's face. He could have gladly wrung Bugs Taylor's neck. I—I rather expected you to take the shells away from Bugs—as vital evidence."

"As a matter of fact, you thought nothing of the kind. You were *afraid* I might. I'll wager that by this time Bugs Taylor is shy one matchbox, and that eager eyes are searching out every brass shell on the JP."

"And we had the evidence in our grasp, Henry."

"Quite right, sir. The only obstacle would have been Jim Patterson's forty-five. Judge, I am not a hero. Marching bands and flying colors fail to bring a lump into my throat. I might, if properly drafted, die for my country. But, damme, sir, I absolutely refuse to die for my county. That doesn't cover enough territory."

"I know, Henry. But it only strengthens my belief that you are—well, a bit timid."

"If you want the truth, and are willing to admit your share of the episode, I would say that we were both scared stiff, Judge."

"Yes, I believe you have expressed it quite correctly, Henry. But the fact still remains that more and more the evidence points to the JP outfit as the killers of those two men."

Henry nodded thoughtfully. "I believe you are right, Judge; the country does need rain. A brush-fire at this time of year might ruin all of Wild Horse Valley. Yes, you are entirely right, sir."

"I surrender," sighed Judge. "If I carried a sword, I would pass it to you—hilt first, sir."

"If you carried a sword," declared Henry, "we would not be riding together, Judge—because you wouldn't know the hilt from the point."

IV

HE TOLD the stage-driver that his name was Albert Novelle, and he tried to induce the driver to drink from a bottle with him. But the road from Scorpion Bend to Tonto City required sober, steady nerves; and Albert Novelle

drank alone. Albert was young, dressed to the point of dudishness, and as the stage-driver expressed it, "Didn't know a chuck-walla from a chuckhole."

Albert arrived in Tonto City during the siesta period, and went to the Picador Bar, a cantina frequented mostly by the Latin element. This was odd. Most strangers would have found the Tonto Saloon more convenient to the coach-station, whereas the Picador was hardly visible at fifty yards.

"Frijole" Bill Cullison, together with Thunder and Lightning Mendoza, had come in from the JHC ranch that afternoon, driving a pair of half-broken horses to the ranch buckboard. Frijole did the driving. Not because he was any good, but because Thunder and Lightning were the worst drivers in Arizona. Thunder and Lightning were in the Picador Bar, gulping tequila, when Albert Novelle sauntered in.

"Buenas tardes, señor," Lightning greeted affably. Albert's eyes took in the cool interior of the place.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," he replied a trifle shakily. Albert had taken over a pint of liquor during his stage-ride; and now he was inclined to be affable and patronizing.

"What is the best drink the place affords?" he asked, leaning against the bar and eyeing the bottles on the back-bar closely.

"The best for dreenkeeng ees tequila," declared Lightning. "You do not onnerstand dreenkeeng tequila?"

"You swallow it, do you not?"

For sure. Firs' you take leetle beet salt on the hand—so. Leek heem off the hand, then take the leeker een your face —so. *Mucho bueno.*"

Albert grinned and reached for the salt dish. "Fill 'em up," he told the bartender.

Tequila does not taste as potent as it really is. Neither does it manifest its powers at once. It lurks rather deceitfully in one's interior. After imbibing five or six drinks of tequila, Albert merely grew a little more patronizing.

"Where," he asked, "is the Circle M ranch?"

"Firs'," explained Lightning, "you do not go south, because those ees the wrong way for going."

"East ees jus' as good for wrong going," added Thunder.

"It seems," hiccoughed Albert, "that we have north and west left."

"Take your peek," Lightning shrugged. "One ees wrong."

"Before we draw the grand prize in this guessing contest, suppose we have another drink?" suggested Albert. "Fill 'em up, bartender."

THAT one drink became several. Albert was a lavish host, and the two Mexicans were entirely willing to be thus entertained. Suppertime came and passed. Frijole Bill, deep in a draw-poker game at the Tonto, forgot the passage of time. By nine Novelle and the two Mexicans were magnificently, and certainly complacently, under the influence.

Albert had long since confided that he was a college graduate; that he couldn't remember the name of the college; that he had had lots of money all his life; but just now he was fighting for existence. Someone had doublecrossed him. He was supposed to be wealthy—and wasn't. Albert cried a little, especially when Thunder and Lightning sang a song about a cockroach.

After several hours Albert remembered that he had asked the way to the Circle M. But by that time neither Thunder nor Lightning could tell him which way it was.

"I can go to heem," declared Lightning, "but I'm not knowing one way from a hole in the ground."

"I'll give fi' dollars t' anybody who'll take me there," declared Albert.

Lightning grew thoughtful. Five dollars. That was a lot of money. Five dollars to be taken to the Circle M—and it was such a short way. Not over six and a half miles. Crooked road, yes; but what was the difference? Lightning nudged Thunder, who was clinging with both hands to the bar.

"Leesten, lettle brodder, from me," he said. "Togedder we weel take theese *caballero* to the Circle M een the buckboard."

"Sure," agreed Thunder, "and then Frijole Beel weel keel hell out from bot' of you. I am escared—unless I do the driving."

"*Mmmm,*" mused Lightning. "*Por Dios,* we weel bot' do the driving. You tak' one line, I tak' the other. How you fill 'bout those?"

"Sure. You get those fi' dollar firs'."

The advance payment was easily secured, and the three of them managed to get outside, with only one bad jam in the doorway; and Lightning led the way past the Tonto to the hitchrack. Thunder and Albert got into the buckboard, while Lightning untied the team.

"Whoa!" yelled Thunder, and surged back on the lines.

The half-broke team whoaed to such an extent that they backed one complete circle in the street, during which time Lightning managed to crawl over the rear end. The equipage went out of town, the team galloping wildly, while Lightning, his legs dangling, yelled:

"*Alto! Alto! Alto!*"

There was no brake on the buckboard, and Thunder's surge on the lines merely loosened the tugs.

"You're goin' li'l fas', are you not?" queried Albert, clinging with both hands. He had long since lost his hat.

"*Alto!*" yelled Lightning weakly. "Thonder! You are not een the right direction. *Madre de Dios,* we weel all be keeled from dying, you fool—that ees all I hope!"

The flying buckboard rocketed from chuck-hole to chuck-hole, while Albert clung to Thunder, and Lightning clung to the back of the seat, yelling to Thunder please to stop and consider. It was not through any expert driving that the equipage stayed on the road. In fact, it was too dark for a driver to see all the curves.

A mile of fairly level going gave Lightning an opportunity to figure out some way to get control of those lines. With Thunder humped over, the best he could do was claw at his shirt, only to be bounced madly when they struck more chuck-holes.

But now Thunder sagged back, and Lightning threw both arms around his neck in a stranglehold.

"Geeve up those line!" he yelled in Thunder's ear. "Or I squizz!"

At that moment the team left the road and started cross-country, crashing through mesquite and cactus; the buckboard bounced like a tin can tied to the tail of a frightened dog. Down the steep slope of a swale they went, the skidding vehicle cutting brush like a scythe.

Lightning caught a momentary flash of men around a lighted lantern, before the careening buckboard threw them head over heels into the brush.

MIDNIGHT came, and with it went the last of Frijole Bill's wages. "I reckon I'll be goin'," he declared. "In fact, I know blamed well I'll be goin', 'cause I'm tired of tryin' to make a pair of deuces beat two pairs. I guess I'm a born optimist. *Buenas noches.*"

But Frijole had no way of going home, except on foot. The buckboard and team were gone. Frijole went to the Picardor, where the bartender explained that Thunder and Lightning had taken a very rich man to the Circle M.

"He geeve them five dollar," explained the bartender. "Have dreenk?"

Frijole accepted a drink. "You like to go to funerals?" he asked.

"Somebody ees dying?" the bartender asked anxiously.

"Uh-huh. Couple Mexicans. *Hasta luego, amigo.*"

Frijole Bill borrowed a horse and rode out to the Circle M. There were no lights at the ranchhouse, and neither was there any sign of Thunder, Lightning or the buckboard; so Frijole Bill came back, went into the hotel and awoke Henry and Judge.

"If they worked for me," declared Judge

sleepily, "I would kick them all the way to Mexico."

"And I'd help yuh, Judge," Frijole complained.

"You have no idea how tired you would be," yawned Henry.

"But what's to be done?" wailed Frijole. "By this time they've likely wrecked the whole darned thing."

"Then it is too late to do anything," soothed Henry.

"And perhaps killed themselves," added Judge. "Who was this very rich man, Frijole?"

"I dunno. He paid 'em five dollars to take him to the Circle M—and they never got there. The Lord knows where they are. That team wasn't even half-broke. If I ever get my hands on—who's that?"

Someone was coming down the hall toward their open door, heading for the light, it seemed. A moment later Thunder and Lightning halted in the doorway. Bloody and dirty, their clothes in ribbons, they stood there, looking like the victims of a careless hurricane.

Henry rubbed his nose and squinted at the two apparitions. "Talk. One at a time," he said gently. "No use pooling conversation. Lightning, suppose you tell what happened to you."

"One man ees keeled," whispered Lightning.

"The rich man?" asked Judge.

"Was he reech man?" asked Lightning.

"How in the devil do I know?" Judge blurted out. "There were only three of you—and neither of *you* is dead."

"Pretty queeck, I theenk," groaned Thunder.

"That's right," said Frijole. "Pretty quick—y'betcha."

"Come in and shut that door, before you wake the hotel," commanded Henry. "All right, now, who got killed, Lightning?"

"I don't know heem," replied Lightning. "He ees stranger from me."

"Begin at the beginning," ordered Judge. "You are unintelligible."

"There ees no begeening, Judge," stated Lightning. "The man ees geeve us five dollar for taking heem to the Circle M."

"Well, where in the devil did you take him?" asked Frijole.

Lightning shrugged his shoulders. "I theenk not," he replied.

"Very likely not," agreed Judge. "Where is that man?"

"Quien sabe? The damn bockboard upset in the brush. I find Thunder on hees head in mesquite. We never find those bockboard. Then we find the man who ees dead. The lantern ees gone, but I have match and—"

"What lantern?" queried Henry.

"I don't know—ees gone."

"All right. You used a match to look at the dead man."

"Por Dios, how you know those?"

"You just said you did. Was it the man you started to take to the Circle M?"

"No, theese ees deefferent dead man."

"Different dead man?" queried Henry. "Were you making a collection? How many, in all?"

Lightning looked at Thunder. "How many you see, my leetle brodder?"

"Seex or seven," declared Thunder. "All dead."

"I think he's crazy!" snorted Frijole.

"Where did all this happen?" asked Henry. "Can you take us to the spot?"

The two Mexicans looked at each other. Thunder said, "I don't theenk it was."

"Well, we seem deadlocked. Frijole, get a room for those two, and one for yourself. In the morning we may be able to puzzle out where they went and what happened."

"I hope," said Lightning.

"You *hope?"* snorted Frijole. "What do yuh hope?"

"I hope I leeve that long."

V

EARLY next morning Sandy Crane, coming to town from the Bar N, found Albert Novelle wandering dazedly along the road. Albert was no longer handsome and dapper. His suit was ruined, his

hat gone, and his face scratched, gouged and bumped. One eye was swollen almost shut.

Sandy drew rein and eyed the wreckage critically. Albert seemed totally indifferent to his careful scrutiny. Albert gave the impression of no longer caring.

"Yo're a mess, feller," Sandy told him. "How old are yuh?"

"I'm twenty-two," replied Albert in a dreary monotone, and sounded as if he could give Methuselah cards and spades.

"How on earth didja manage to git in such a shape in such a short len'th of time?" queried Sandy soberly. "My, my, you must have started poppin' brush early in life. Gotta name?"

"I am Albert Novelle. '

Sighing, Sandy drew his left foot from the stirrup. "Hook a toe in there and pile up behind me, Albert, and I'll take yuh to Tonto City."

"I have never been on a horse," said Albert. "I do not believe I could climb up there. I've had a terrible night."

"Insomnia?" queried Sandy. "Mebbe yuh drank too much coffee."

"Coffee!" Albert's laughter was bitter. "Have you ever drank tequila? You place a little salt—"

"I know," interrupted Sandy. "Where'd you drink it? Never mind; it don't make any difference. Git on behind me and we'll go bye-bye."

"I—I wonder if I could? Really, I am shattered from walking."

"Yeah? Well, git on."

Between the efforts of two of them, Albert managed to straddle the horse behind the saddle, and they went on toward Tonto City.

"I am looking for the Circle M," Albert explained.

"Yea-a-ah? The hell yuh are! Huh! Say, do you know Peter Hatton's daughter?"

"I—I don't even know Peter Hatton. I wish to find Jane Laird"

"Jane Laird? Never heard of her. Do yuh have to wish?"

"I do not believe I understand."

"Neither do I, Albert. But what are you doin' out here in the hills this mornin'—lookin' like yuh do?"

"Last night," explained Albert, "I hired two Mexicans to take me to the Circle M. At least, I dimly remember such an arrangement. But it seems that the team ran away and—"

"Thunder and Lightnin'?"

"Why, yes, that is their names."

"Oh-oh! There goes another JHC buckboard. So you hired them two, eh?"

"Was I wrong in doing that?" queried Albert. "I—I meant no wrong."

"Jes' foolish," said Sandy. "Here comes a reception committee."

A cavalcade composed of Henry, Judge, Oscar, Frijole Bill, Thunder and Lightning came around a curve in the road. Sandy drew off the road and waited for them.

"Por Dios, there he ees!" yelled Lightning, pointing at Albert. He screamed his delight at the reunion.

"Oh, hello," said Albert, wincing.

"I picked him up back here a ways," explained Sandy. "Says he wants to get out to the Circle M."

"Same theeng like las' night, eh?" grinned Lightning.

"Keep your nose out of this, Lightning," Judge ordered. "You've had too much to say.

Albert introduced himself to the white-haired sheriff.

"Mr. Novelle," said Henry, "have you any idea where you—er—busted up last night?"

"I haven't the least idea," replied Albert. "I know we did, though."

"I see. Yes, the evidence points to that fact. Did you see a dead man?"

"Dead man? Was there a dead man?"

"I hope not. Did you see a lantern?"

"A lantern? Well, I saw a bright light, but it was more like—well, like a pyrotechnic display."

"It's shore an education—jist a-ridin' with him," said Sandy.

"As a matter of fact, you do not know what happened," said Judge.

"I'm afraid you are right," sighed Albert. "I had no idea that tequila was so powerful."

"You may as well take him to town, Sandy," said Henry. "His grips are at the hotel. The stage-driver did not know what else to do with them."

"I'll try and git him there, Henry. Somebody ort to take him out to the Circle M, before he starts bouncin' off into the brush again."

"Oh, I'm docile now," Albert assured him, smiling wearily.

THE sheriff's cavalcade found the spot where the careening buckboard left the road, and it was an easy matter to follow the tire-furrows into the deep swale, where the occupants had left the vehicle. They found the buckboard, upside down in the brush, little the worse for its wild voyage through the mesquite. Pieces of harness indicated that the horses went right ahead.

Here they found what seemed to be a half-dug grave, but there was no corpse. On top of the pile of dirt was the circular indentation of a lantern-bottom. Henry pointed it out to the others as evidence that Lightning had been right—for once in his life.

Frijole, Lightning and Thunder went on, hunting for the horses, while Judge, Henry and Oscar rode back to Tonto City. Albert had taken a room at the hotel, where he cleaned up, changed clothes and bought Sandy a drink.

"Tell me somethin' about this here Jane Laird," Sandy suggested.

"I really know nothing about her," replied Albert. "Queer, isn't it?"

"Lotsa women I don't know—and it never struck me as bein' queer."

"But I was supposed to marry this one—when I became of age."

"And you don't even know her?"

"I haven't seen her since we were ten years old."

"I'll be a stepchild to a sidewinder!"

"We were betrothed at ten."

"Are yuh sure she's at the Circle M?"

"Reasonably sure, yes."

"Uh-huh. Albert, did I tell yuh about Peter Hatton's daughter?"

"I believe you mentioned her. What about her?"

"I ain't been able to sleep since I seen her—and everythin' tastes alike to me. You want to go to the Circle M, don'tcha? Well, so do I. If I took yuh out there—I might see this yere angel that flew into my life—off an ore train. Let's wait until the cool of the evenin'. No use ridin' in the heat."

"You are manna from Heaven," said Albert.

"I'm Crane from New Mexico," corrected Sandy. "Well, here's to both of your back teeth—may they stand the shock."

PETER HATTON answered a knock on the ranchhouse door that evening, and scowled with surprised annoyance at sight of his visitor, Samuel Eckles, attorney-at-law from a small Wyoming town. He closed the door and listened to the departure of the horse and buggy that Eckles had hired to bring him from Tonto City. Eckles tossed his hat to the table and sat down in a rocker. Eckles was small, emaciated, with a hooked nose, very little hair, and a wise expression.

"Of all the cursed, dusty, rough trips I ever had!" he snorted.

Hatton glanced toward the stairway and came closer to Eckles. "Why did you come here?" he asked roughly.

"Has Albert Novelle been here yet?" asked the lawyer.

"Novelle? No. What about him, Sam?"

"He came to see me. Some fool told him that Jane Laird was on her way down here. He demands an accounting of his father's estate—and he's no fool, Pete. Where's Jane?"

"Upstairs. Keep yore voice lower. I've been tryin' to get her to go home. I told her to go and talk to you, 'cause I didn't have anythin' to do with it. Claims she has been robbed."

"So does Albert Novelle," sighed the

lawyer. "Blame it, they won't listen to reason."

"Make 'em listen. It was yore scheme."

"Albert Novelle insinuates that his father was murdered. He wants to talk with Jane. He—he told me that I was a crook, and that he'll send me to the penitentiary."

"Well, that's true, Sammy," grinned Hatton. "I'm in the clear. I've got a deed to everything—and you've got to depend on my word to give you a square deal. If anybody goes to the penitentiary—it won't be me."

"You'd doublecross me, Pete?"

"I'd doublecross anybody, Sammy. This is my chance for a stake, and I'm goin' to keep it. If Novelle comes to me, I'll refer him to you."

"You can't do this to me, Pete Hatton," breathed Eckles. "I own half this ranch. I own half of everything."

"Try and get it," replied Hatton, sitting down across a small table from the white-faced lawyer. "You didn't dare show any of the papers. Crooked, but cautious, that's you, Sammy. I'm not sayin' that you killed Jim Laird, 'cause I can't prove it. But I had enough on yuh to drive yuh into a corner and make yuh play the game my way. Now, I've got all the chips on my side of the table; so what's the answer?"

"Pete, you wouldn't do that to me," whined Eckles. "Why, I came all the way down here to warn you against Novelle. I can handle him, but"—Eckles leaned across the table, his jaw tensed—"but before I do that, you've got to play the game my way. One word of what you are going to do—and you're through. They'd hang you, my swell-headed friend. There's law in Wild Horse Valley—but it wouldn't help you one bit."

"I see," nodded Hatton coldly. "You threaten to tell, eh? Yes, I'm afraid you might, Sammy. It is something I've wondered about."

"Novelle might tell, too," said Eckles. "Jane might tell."

"That's right," agreed Hatton coldly. "They *might*—but you *would*."

Sam Eckles got slowly to his feet, facing Hatton. "You understand me perfectly, Hatton," he said quietly. "You will play square with me—or I'll ruin your game in Wild Horse Valley."

"Is that yore last word, Sammy?" queried Hatton.

"That is my last word," replied Eckles firmly. His eyes were quick. They saw his danger—but there wasn't time enough to do anything but gasp. . . .

THE ranchhouse shuddered from the concussion of Hatton's forty-five, shot from under the table-top. Eckles' body, jackknifed from the shock of the bullet, fell forward, half under the table.

Hatton was on his feet. A door banged upstairs. Hatton jerked forward and blew out the lamp. From the darkness at the head of the stairs came a woman's voice; "What's happened?"

Peter Hatton laughed shortly. "My gun fell off the bed and hit on the hammer. Nobody hurt, my dear. Sorry if I woke yuh up."

"I thought I heard voices a while ago."

"That was Len. He came to ask me somethin'."

Hatton listened for the closing of the upstairs door before he moved. Without lighting the lamp, he dragged Eckles' body out on the porch, then carried it down beside the table, where he left it. Then he went to the bunkhouse. All the crew were at Tonto City. By the light of a lamp he examined himself carefully, but there was no blood on his clothes.

Someone in Tonto City must know that Eckles had come to the ranch, but in case of an investigation he could say that his men had taken Eckles back to Scorpion Bend. Just what to do with the body was a problem; he decided to wait until the boys came home. Mopping his head, he went back to the bunkhouse.

Peter Hatton did not know that Sandy Crane and Novelle were sitting on the corral fence out there in the darkness. They had arrived just ahead of Sammy Eckles in the livery-rig, and Albert had

seen Eckles in the light from the doorway.

Sandy had secured a horse for Albert—a staid old plug. After Eckles entered the house, they tied their steeds to the corral fence to wait a while before announcing their arrival. They had heard the shot, and later had seen Novelle carry his victim down to the stable.

"Do you really suppose he killed him?" Albert whispered.

"Yeah, I reckon," replied Sandy. "But you didn't like him, anyway."

"I know—but murder—Sandy."

"Yeah. Do yuh know, I never shot a man that I didn't have it on my conscience for hours afterward. That's why I never was a success as a killer—I've got a conscience."

"Don't you think we should notify the police, Sandy?"

"The which? Police? Oh, yeah. But there's no hurry. While I'm out here, I'd shore like to see Miss Hatton. And you want to see Jane Laird."

"I—I do not believe I—well, don't you realize that murder has been done? We should do something—at once, too."

"*Sh-h-h-h!* Not so loud. He might take a shot at us."

"That is true. Let us go back to town, Sandy."

"Uh-huh. Well, let's go down and take a look at the corpse."

"No, no, no!"

"All right, I'll do the lookin', Albert. C'mon. I know right where he left it."

They climbed down and made their way carefully to the stable. The body was no longer there. They circled the stable, but there was no sign of it.

"Didja ever hear of such dang fools?" marveled Sandy.

"Who—us?" Albert queried.

"Sure. There ain't no corpse. Yuh see what yore mind can do to yuh? Blamin' an innocent man. Yore lawyer is prob'ly in bed in the house."

Albert sighed. "I still do not want to go to that house tonight."

"Write yore own ticket," said Sandy. "C'mon."

As they reached their horses they heard Hatton leave the bunkhouse and go back to the ranchhouse. After he closed the door and lighted a lamp in the main room, they rode away from the ranch.

On the way to town they met the four cowboys from the Circle M, but drew aside to let them pass. Hatton was waiting for his boys, and drew Len Stryker aside to tell him what happened.

"We'll handle it all right," said Len. "There won't be any slips on this'n. Where'd yuh say yuh put him?"

"I'll show yuh, Len. All the others need to know is that a man died."

Peter Hatton took Len down beside the stable, but the corpse had not returned. Hatton cursed viciously. "The skunk played possum! Len, we've got to stop him. Get the boys together—we're goin' to Tonto City and see that he don't talk. C'mon."

IT WAS about an hour before daylight when someone knocked on the door of the sheriff's office, waking Oscar Johnson. Oscar listened sleepily to the visitor, whom he left in the office, while he went to arouse Henry. Both Henry and Judge being heavy sleepers, Oscar had nearly to tear down the door of their room at the hotel.

"Ay yust vish to say," Oscar stated, "that a man is at de office, and he vishes to speak vit de shoriff."

"My goodness—at this hour," yawned Henry. "What is his business?"

"Ay didn't ask him," replied Oscar, "but Ay t'ink he has been testing out de inside of a threshing machine. He looks veak, and he is hoomped up, like he has belly-ache. He say somet'ing about bullet in de belt-bockle."

Henry reached hastily for his boots. "Did he give his name, Oscar?"

"De man is not in shape to give anyt'ing, Henry. He looks like all de vind had been knocked out of him, and he can't get it back."

"Interesting, Judge," observed Henry. "An epidemic . . ."

They dressed hurriedly, clattered down the stairs, and headed for the office. But it was empty.

"Are you sure you did not dream it, Oscar?" Henry inquired.

Oscar scratched his head foolishly. "Ay don't t'ink so, Hanry."

"He said he would wait for you?" Judge demanded.

"Yah, su-ure. Ay never saw de man before. By yimminy, Ay vonder if it vars a dream. De son-of-a-gon, he look yust as natural. Ay—vell, by golly, he ain't here."

"Bullet in the belt-buckle!" snorted Judge.

"Wait a minute!" Henry exclaimed. Half under the corner of his desk was an envelope, addressed to *Samuel Eckles, Attorney-at-Law, Bender, Wyoming*. Inside was a letter.

"Eckles — Eckles — Eckles?" queried Henry.

"Yust like a hen," remarked Oscar.

"Someone must have dropped this recently," said Henry. "I know no one named Samuel Eckles. Listen to this, Judge."

Dear Sir:

Your letter of the 12th was a painful surprise, but not exactly convincing. For that reason I am making a trip to your town.

I can't believe that my father died broke and that there is nothing left of the estate. In fact, it looks fishy to me. You say that before he died he turned all his assets over to Jim Laird. Why? There must be a reason. My father was a conservative business man.

For years the Laird and Novelle interests have been the largest of their kind in that state. You also say that Jim Laird died shortly after my father's demise, and that it was discovered that the estate of Jim Laird had dwindled to a paltry few dollars.

Well, I demand an accounting. I want to know just why my father did not leave a cent. You say that Jane Laird's share of her father's estate did not exceed a few thousand dollars. I intend to contact Jane Laird, and between us I expect we will ferret out the truth. Expect me in about ten days.

Very truly yours,

Albert Novelle.

"Nothing very enlightening about that letter," Judge said, frostily.

"Yust might have been dropped by de man who vars here," suggested Oscar.

"You may be right, Oscar," nodded Henry. "The letter was sent from Chicago on the seventeenth of this month. The contents means nothing to us. I haven't any idea who Samuel Eckles may be, of course."

"I suggest that we go to bed, Henry." Judge yawned.

"Meeting adjourned." Henry nodded. "If he shows up again, Oscar—sit on his head and yell."

SANDY CRANE took Albert Novelle to the Bar N for the night. Next morning they rode out to the Circle M again. Albert was sure that Jane Laird came to the Circle M—and he had recognized Sam Eckles. Albert had talked with Eckles in Wyoming, but the lawyer had not mentioned that he was coming to Tonto City.

"Somethin' fishy," Sandy declared. "We heard the shot fired, Albert. And we both saw a man carryin' somethin' down to the stable. 'Course it was too dark to see what he had, but—well, jussasame—"

Hatton met them on the front porch and Albert introduced himself.

"How do you do?" Hatton nodded coldly. "What is yore business?"

"I came to see Jane Laird."

Hatton's brows lifted slightly. "Yo're a little late, Mr. Novelle. Miss Laird is on her way to Scorpion Bend. One of my men took her and Mr. Eckles, a lawyer, in a buckboard. They didn't want to ride an ore-train caboose."

"Yuh can't blame 'em for that." Sandy grinned. "I've tried it. How's yore daughter standin' the heat, Mr. Hatton?"

"My daughter? I haven't any daughter."

"Huh?" grunted Sandy. "Why—uh—you remember meetin' her over at the sidin', don'tcha?"

"Oh, yeah," smiled Hatton. "That was Miss Laird."

"Well, I'll be a stepchild to a sidewinder!" snorted Sandy. "She said she was

—well, what do yuh know about that?"

"Did Miss Laird say where she was going?" asked Albert.

"I believe she was going to New York," replied Hatton. "Mr. Eckles was goin' with her as far as Chicago."

"We," said Sandy, "are not interested in Eckles."

"Perhaps I am," remarked Albert. "I want to get my hands on that crooked little shyster—when there are no police around."

"He is Miss Laird's lawyer, I hear," said Hatton. "Dunno much about him myself."

"You are very fortunate, Mr. Hatton," said Albert. "Good morning, sir."

They rode back to Tonto City, where Sandy introduced Albert to Henry and Judge. It was evident to them that Albert was the writer of the letter they had found in the office, but neither of them mentioned it.

"Do you," queried Henry, "know a lawyer by the name of Eckles?"

"I certainly do," replied Albert firmly. "I went out to the Circle M this morning and they told us that Eckles was on his way back to Scorpion Bend."

Sandy grinned slowly, his eyes squinted in deep thought.

"Just what is in the back of your mind, Sandy?" queried Henry.

SO Sandy Crane told them what happened at the Circle M last night, but first he told about meeting the girl at the train—the girl who intimated that she was Peter Hatton's daughter. Henry said to Albert:

"Just why did Jane Laird come here to see Peter Hatton?"

"I haven't any idea, Mr. Conroy. A man in Bender, Wyoming, told me that she had gone to Tonto City. He said it was her ranch—but I guess he was mistaken; it belongs to Peter Hatton."

"And why did you come here—merely to be with Miss Laird?"

Albert Novelle told his story to Henry and Judge. Judge paced the floor, his brow furrowed in thought.

"The firm name was Laird and Novelle?" he asked.

"That is right, Mr. Van Treece."

"By dad, I remember it now! Laird and Novelle. Sheep!"

"The biggest sheep outfit in the state," added Albert.

"Just where does Peter Hatton come in?" queried Henry. "Why did Jane Laird come to see Peter Hatton?"

"Jane Laird might be able to answer that question," said Albert.

"She's shore beautiful," sighed Sandy, "but she lied to me."

"And," continued Henry, "you boys thought that Peter Hatton shot Eckles and dumped his body beside the stable."

"I reckon we imagined too much," grinned Sandy.

"Evidently," mused Henry. "Well, I wish you luck, Mr. Novelle."

After they left the office, Henry and Judged looked thoughtfully at each other.

"We know," said Henry, "that Eckles hired a livery rig in which to ride to the Circle M. The driver came back alone. Sandy and his companion imagine that Eckles was shot and killed at the Circle M. At an ungodly hour this morning, Oscar tells us of a small man who looked as though he had been through a threshing-machine, and who needs the services of a sheriff. But the man is gone, leaving a letter on the floor. Now we hear that someone from the Circle M has taken him to Scorpion Bend, along with a beautiful, but untruthful lady, who is on her way to New York. It doesn't make sense, Judge. If the man was in the condition as described by Oscar, how on earth did he get back to the Circle M—and why would he go back there?"

"We," reminded Judge, "can only concern ourselves with cases where the law has been violated, Henry. As far as I can see, nothing wrong has been done. We cannot constitute ourselves as guardian angels for this elusive Mr. Eckles; and it is no crime for a beautiful woman to lie to a cowpuncher. They all do it, I believe."

"You have taken a weight off my mind,

Judge," said Henry solemnly. "I would buy a drink."

"I feel that it *is* about time we got back to normal, Henry."

VI

IT WAS about noon next day when Henry and Judge rode up to what had been Johnny Brent's ranchhouse. Somehow it had managed to burn itself to a huge heap of cold ashes. Henry had suggested a search of the ranchhouse to see if they might find any clue as to the cause of the battle.

They dismounted and walked around the ruins. Every timber and shingle of the place had been consumed. The stable and sheds had not been injured, nor had the fire spread to any of the surrounding brush.

"Mighty funny," remarked Judge. "Mighty funny, Henry." He looked like a man who has just found a snake in his bedroll.

"Not funny, Judge—queer. Note the heap of ashes in what was the center of the room. That would indicate that all the furniture had been stacked in the center. I believe I shall do a little wading in the ashes. It is possible that—well, we seem to have visitors, Judge."

Jim Patterson, owner of the JP, and two of his men were riding in behind them, looking curiously at the charred ruins. Patterson nodded coldly as he rode up.

"Place burned down, eh?"

"That is evident," Judge replied coldly. Henry tucked his pants inside his boots, secured a heavy stick, and walked into the ashes. As he poked around in the large pile of ashes, Patterson said to Judge:

"What's he lookin' for?"

Judge shrugged his shoulders. "I wouldn't have any idea, Patterson."

"Fire must have been set," remarked a cowboy. "Nobody livin' here, was they?"

"Not as far as we know," replied Judge.

Henry was very busy now, shoving ashes aside. He turned and called to Judge: "See if there is an old broom in the stable, Judge."

Judge found a worn-out broom in a shed and gave it to Henry, who proceeded to do considerable sweeping. Finally he came back, a grim expression on his usually placid features.

"A man burned in that fire," he said. "The body is mostly consumed, but enough is left to show that it was once a man."

"Someone burned to death?" queried Patterson.

Henry held out his open hand, on which were two small, dark objects.

"Those were in the ashes below the remains, Patterson," he replied. "They are melted bullets—melted out of the body, I believe. That would indicate that the man was dead before the house was fired. Whoever used this as a funeral pyre, piled all the furniture in the center of the house, placed the body on top, and tried to make a complete job of destroying the body. However, the human body requires a lot of heat before it turns to ashes."

Patterson and his two cowboys looked grimly at the two officers. Patterson said, "They'll prob'ly blame me for that, too."

"Are any of your men missing?" queried Judge.

"They are not. Why ask about my men, Judge?"

"Oh, merely curiosity, Jim." Judge looked elaborately disinterested.

"The question is well put, at that," said Henry. "Unless I am mistaken, the dead man who burned in that fire was either killed or wounded in the battle here. They did not dare notify a doctor or the officers—and they had to dispose of the body."

"That sounds reasonable, Conroy," nodded Patterson. "Find out who is missin'. I'll do all I can to help yuh."

"Thank you," said Henry. "I believe our next move is to summon the coroner, before removing the remains. An autopsy might give us a clue as to who the man was. Dentistry is traceable, I believe, and there might be other clues."

Jim Patterson nodded. "I wish yuh luck, Sheriff. If yuh need any help, call at the JP."

THEY rode on, and in a few minutes Henry and Judge mounted and started back to Tonto City. But they did not go far. Henry led the way off the road, where they concealed their horses, and crawled to a spot where they could overlook the burned building. They could not see Patterson and his cowboys.

"Do you expect them to come back, Henry?" queried Judge.

"If he is guilty—yes, Judge."

But Patterson and his cowboys did not come back; so, after an hour, the two officers went on to Tonto City, where Henry told the prosecutor about what they had found. The coroner had gone to Scorpion Bend and would not be back until late; so they were obliged to postpone further investigation until next day.

Oscar Johnson overheard the conversation, and Oscar told it in the Tonto Saloon. Several men asked Henry about it, but he set his lips and tried to look wiser than he felt. There was wickedness in the Valley; it made Henry very angry, and a little sick. Henry was a crusader born.

Next morning, along with the coroner, they went to Johnny Brent's ranch, but their trip was useless. The huge pile of ashes had been flattened, and the remains were missing.

"Too much information," sighed Henry. "Who was in the saloon when you shot off your mouth, Oscar?"

"Everybody," replied the big Swede. "Ay didn't count 'em."

Judge drew Henry aside. "Perhaps Patterson knew we were watching yesterday, Henry. When we left—well, it isn't a bad theory."

"Just as good as any other, I suppose," smiled Henry. "However, it does prove that a body was burned in that fire."

"Prove? The body was there, Henry."

"Did you see it, sir?"

"No, I—well, I took your word for it. Didn't you find a body?"

"If I had, do you suppose I'd have been foolish enough to leave it for anyone to take away or destroy? I merely *believed* that a body had been burned; the body which was to be buried when those two Mexicans and young Novelle broke up the burial."

"But you found the bullets!"

"Remember, Judge, that house was *full* of bullets, after that war. A sifting of those ashes might disclose half a hundred hunks of melted lead."

Judge nodded solemnly. "But the fact still remains, Henry—that we are no nearer the solution than we were the day it happened."

"Oh, yes, we are—several days nearer. Remember the old saying, 'Murder will out,' Judge? I believe it is true. But I may say, sir, that there is more behind this than the fact that a young man accused a big cowman of rustling calves, and the big cowman threatened him. Damme, sir, I believe I am on the point of a big discovery."

"Perhaps it is the heat," Judge said, with sympathy. "I have known cases where it induced a belief in something like a nonrefillable bottle, or perpetual motion. Suppose we ride across country to the JHC. I'm sure that Frijole Bill will be glad to dig up some of his two-day-old prune whisky."

"Yes, I think that would do very nicely, Judge. You are very thoughtful."

After two hours of hard riding they reached the JHC ranchhouse, where they found Frijole Bill Cullison, half asleep on the shady porch. Frijole Bill was sixty, a skinny, half-pint in size, with a small, lean face and long mustaches. He shut one eye, so as to get the proper focus, and grinned widely.

"Just a word of warning, Frijole," said Judge soberly. "Do not tell us any lies about Bill Shakespeare. If you have anything to drink—"

"Lie about Old Bill?" queried Frijole. "My goodness, Judge! Why, I—sh-h-h-h-h! Go easy and I'll show yuh somethin'. No noise, remember."

Frijole stepped off the porch and moved quietly to the corner, where he motioned to them to go easy. Cautiously they eased their way to the rear of the house. On the back porch, beside the steps, sat a huge, gaunt, gray old rooster, with only an occasional feather decorating his skeletal frame, and one long, ragged feather in his tail. He was fast asleep.

Frijole craned his neck and looked all around. "Bill!" he called quietly. "Bill, whereat's that bobcat?"

"Now, listen, Frijole—" began Judge.

"I left 'em asleep together not more'n ten minutes ago," declared the old cook. "Sweetest sight yuh ever seen. Yuh see, every time Bill Shakespeare got full of prune mash he'd track that wild-cat down and whip hell out of him. Well, sir, I dumped some mash this mornin', and Ol' Bill filled up. I wasn't payin' no attention, until I hears a awful rumpus goin' on out here; so I runs out. Ol' Bill's got too much aboard, and he's done tied into the biggest rattler that ever crawled out of Mummy Canon.

"Well, sir, I'm shore scared that Bill's done chose too much. This yere whiz-adder is ten, fifteen feet long and as big around as my leg, right at the forks; so I does myself a hop, skip and a jump into the house to git me a gun. But before I get outside agin, I hears a lot of spitting and splutterin'. Yuh don't have to believe me, but there's that big, ol' bobcat a-helpin' Bill Shakespeare tie that rattler in knots. Fact. Returnin' good for evil. I'm shore plumb amazed; so I gets myself another drink, and then I finds them two, Bill and the bobcat, sleepin' side by side on the back porch, jist like a couple little kids. What didja say, Judge?"

"I just cleared my throat," said Judge weakly. "Is there anything left in the jug?"

"Shore. I bottled this mornin'. I never seen anythin' age as quick. Why, yuh can't even git the cork into the jug, before it starts sproutin' gray whiskers. Set down and I'll git a jug."

Frijole hurried away. Henry sat down and mopped his brow. Bill Shakespeare opened one eye, gazed balefully at Henry but went to sleep again.

"Look!" whispered Judge.

Around the corner of the house came a black-and-white kitten, dragging the remains of an eighteen-inch gopher snake. Henry and Judge looked at each other, and Henry shook his head sadly.

"Our very best lies have a basis of fact," he said.

THE next afternoon Henry sauntered down to the Tonto depot, a rough, unpainted structure, recently completed. It was little used by passengers, because they preferred the stage to a rough-riding caboose at the end of a slow-moving cattle or ore train. Len Stryker, from the Circle M spread, came out and mounted his horse. He nodded curtly to Henry and rode away.

Henry entered the little building and leaned through the ticket window, watching the operator tap out a message.

"I noticed Mr. Stryker leaving," he remarked casually.

The agent nodded and filled his pipe. "The Circle M must be shipping cattle here," he said. "Do you know a man named Eckles, Sheriff?"

Henry pricked up his ears. "What about Mr. Eckles?"

"He must be connected with the Circle M. Stryker brought a telegram, signed by Eckles, ordering a man named Anderson to load and ship immediately. The wire went to Bender, Wyoming."

"Oh," said Henry quietly. "Signed by Mr. Eckles."

"Samuel Eckles," said the agent. "Perhaps he is a buyer."

"Yes—perhaps," agreed Henry. "Getting warm. This new lumber draws the heat."

"And," added the agent, "there isn't enough to do here to forget the heat."

Henry went back to the office and told Judge about the telegram.

"But Eckles has gone to Chicago," said Judge.

"It seems to me," remarked Henry, "that

somewhere among the kindling lurks an Ethiopian. Mr. Eckles and a Miss Laird are taken to Scorpion Bend, from which city they proceed eastward. Today Mr. Eckles sends in a signed telegram from the Circle M."

"Possibly he came back, Henry. You're still trying to build a mountain from a molehill. Doggone it, why not go to the Circle M and find out? Saw Sandy Crane and Albert Novelle a while ago. Useless pair of young men. Oscar is with them, adding tone to their uselessness. By the way, Oscar said he was going to ask for a leave of absence, in order to marry Josephine. Personally, I hope they go so far that they cannot come back again."

"I believe I have an idea, Judge!" exclaimed Henry.

"Regarding Oscar?"

"Oscar, my dear Judge, does not require ideas; all he needs is an opportunity. Continue your siesta, while I take a little walk."

Henry went back to the depot, where he spent about fifteen minutes, after which he came back to the office and informed Judge that the sheriff's office was about to indulge in a horseback ride.

"You are a confounded old fool," complained Judge. "No normal human would ride at this time of day. But that is like you, Henry. No consideration for anyone. I may fry in my own grease, as far as you are concerned."

"I shall be with you, my antiquated weasel, riding between you and the sun, offering as much shade as my meager body may afford."

"The sun," reminded Judge, "will be on our backs."

They rode in at the Circle M. Len Stryker was there, and told them that Hatton was somewhere back in the hills.

"We were coming out this way, anyway," explained Henry blandly, "and the depot agent asked us to deliver two telegrams that came today."

Stryker reached for the telegrams when Henry took them from his pocket, but Henry drew them back.

"You see," he explained to Stryker, "these telegrams are special, and may only be delivered to the proper parties. One is for"—Henry read the names carefully—"one for Jane Laird and the other for Samuel Eckles."

"Well, I'll tell yuh," said Stryker, "they ain't here now—but I can see that they get 'em."

"Sorry," said Henry, "but I cannot leave them. I will give them back to the agent, and he can hold them until the proper parties call."

"Well, yeah, that's all right, I reckon," said Stryker. 'Yuh don't know who they're from, do yuh?"

"They are sealed," replied Henry, examining the envelope flap. "No way to determine where they are from, of course."

On the way back, Henry remarked:

"I still feel that everything is not right, Judge. Stryker was nonplussed for a moment, offered no information regarding the whereabouts of the two people, and was unduly curious as to the origin of the two telegrams."

"Such a stupid time of day to deliver telegrams," complained Judge. "I thought you had an idea. Idea, indeed! I might have known. The whole sheriff's force, riding in the worst heat of the day—to act as messenger boys. At times, sir, I really feel that your brain is weakening. Ideas! Pah! Ride all the way to the Circle M—delivering telegrams."

"And not be able to deliver them, Judge," added Henry. "All this long ride—and not even that satisfaction. Continue, sir, with your castigation, and I will add any small detail you may have overlooked."

They found Oscar at the office, well-filled with spirits frumenti, and grinning widely.

"Ay am putting on a party next T'ursday night, and Ay vish to inwite you both," he informed them.

"What sort of a party, Oscar?" queried Henry.

"Va'al, Ay am going to ved mit Yosephine—Ay hope. Ve are goin' to ved in

Scorpion Bend. Ay am inwiting both of you, Free-holey, Thonder and Lightning, Sandy Crane and dis new faller, Olbert. Olbert say he vill pay for de sopper, and Free-holey vill furninsh de prune yuice."

"And you," added Judge dryly, "will furnish the bride."

"Ay hope," sighed Oscar. "Ay have had my ops and downs."

"Love is like that, Oscar," said Henry. "Speaking for Judge and myself, we will be greatly honored to attend your marriage. You are very kind."

"Yah, su-ure," grinned Oscar. "Ay am great faller, you bat you."

"Are you going to Niagara Falls?"

"Ay don't know yet, Yudge. Ve talk it over, and Yosephine says if Ay ain't got money enough for both of us to go, she vill make de trip and send me a postal-cord. Anyvay, it is only vater going over a tall rock."

"At any rate, Josephine has a sense of humor," remarked Henry. "What minister will perform the ceremony?"

"Ay have been getting prices," said Oscar. "De best deal ve can get is from a Yustice of de Peace. He vants two dollars."

"Close with him at once," advised Judge. "I will pay the justice. What will you do, Henry? If Albert Novelle will pay the supper bill, and I pay the minister, while Frijole furnishes the prune juice—what is left for you to buy?"

"Very likely—a new belt," replied Henry. And added, "For myself."

VII

JOHN CAMPBELL walked heavily into the sheriff's office and sat down. Henry tried to put his feet on the desk-top, failed dismally and squinted inquiringly at the prosecutor, while Judge cleared his throat raspingly. They both knew that the commissioners had been in session, and had called John Campbell into their conference.

"I presume that you have read the latest paper from Scorpion Bend," said Campbell. "The leading editorial is—"

"We have," interrupted Judge. "The heading is, I believe, 'Wild Horse Valley—A Murderer's Paradise.' Correct me if I am wrong, sir."

"You are perfectly right, Judge," the lawyer sighed. "I have just finished a long discussion with the commissioners."

"Of course, they resent the slur," said Henry.

Campbell's brows lifted slightly. "I regret to say—they quite agree with the editor, Henry."

"As far as that is concerned—so do I," added Judge grimly.

"Suppose we made it unanimous?" queried Henry. "I hate to be outdone."

"They say that nothing has been done to solve the murders of Johnny Brent, Shep Hart and the unidentified man, cremated in the Brent ranchhouse fire. Three apparent murders—and one of those not even identified."

"In fact," remarked Henry, "my office is getting so damned lax, sir, that we cannot so much as name our dead. I believe that is the common viewpoint. What we need is a crystal ball. But we do know two of the victims, John. I hope the commissioners credit us with that."

"Had I been sheriff," said Judge firmly, "I would have Jim Patterson behind the bars—at least for an official questioning. Did the commissioners suggest such a thing, John?"

"The commissioners haven't any ideas, Judge; they leave that to the law-enforcement officers. They do resent publication—or I might say, reasons for publication of such an editorial."

Henry shook his head sadly. "I am not a man who asks for much. All my life I have gone along my path, perfectly willing that the other man get the breaks, asking little for myself. But if there is anything in luck, or divine favors, all I ask is that some day I find the editor of that paper, with his head caught in a barbwire fence, a section of two-by-four lying handy, and Henry Harrison Conroy arriving on the scene in the same frame of mind as he is at the present moment."

"He said," quoted Judge solemnly, "that the voters of Wild Horse Valley had elected a red nose, only to discover later that even the olfactory nerves had been atrophied from continuous jug-sniffing."

"Judge," reproved Henry, "we have all read it."

"I am sorry, sir. But, damme, the man has a sense of humor. When he says—"

"Judge," interrupted Henry, "you have too much sense of another man's humor, and not enough of your own. You will please excuse him, John."

"Certainly," nodded the lawyer gravely. "But what is to be done, Henry?"

"Rome," replied Henry, "was not built in a day."

"But they say that Nero fiddled, while Rome burned," reminded Judge.

"I am not a fiddler, sir!" snapped Henry. "I lay no claim to—"

Oscar Johnson came in; and Henry stopped to look inquiringly at him.

"Ay vars yust talking vit de depot agent," Oscar stated, "and he said to tell you that he had borglars last night."

"Burglars? My goodness! Pickpockets in Tonto City, next. What did they get, Oscar?"

"He says he can't find anyt'ing missing."

"Some tramp prowler, I suppose," sighed the lawyer.

Henry chuckled quietly. "I feel that Tonto has grown up, John."

"I wish *you* would grow up," said Judge soberly.

"That gives me a real idea," smiled Henry.

"Growing up, sir?"

"No—burglars, Judge."

The prosecutor yawned and got to his feet. "I wish you luck, Henry," he said. "Something should turn up."

"If only our toes," added Henry thoughtfully.

FEW people in Tonto City knew that Josephine and Oscar were going to Scorpion Bend to get married, but they did wonder and grin at the cavalcade which went up Main Street. In front were Henry and Judge in the JHC buckboard, drawn by two half-broken steeds, while behind them rode Sandy Crane, Albert Novelle, Frijole Bill, with Thunder and Lightning bringing up the rear, riding a pair of mules.

Judge, clad in rusty black, drove, while beside him, straight and round and dignified, sat Henry Harrison Conroy, clad in a black cutaway, pearl-gray trousers, spats, patent-leather shoes, a black derby hat carefully balanced on his head, his hands clutching a gold-headed cane.

Josephine, who had never ridden on a train, chose to gain her first experience at rail travel by accompanying her groom-elect to Scorpion Bend in the caboose of an ore train, which *might* arrive at its destination at eight o'clock that evening.

"All we need is a gaslight flare, a colored banjo-player and a few bottles of colored water," declared Judge grimly, as they drove out of Tonto City.

"My hair is too short," said Henry. "But, at that, I have always felt that I would have been a success with a medicine show, Judge."

"The three commissioners and the prosecutor were in front of the courthouse, watching our parade."

"Was that where the applause originated?"

"There was no applause, sir," growled Judge. "What you heard was the frightened milling of horses at the Tonto hitch-rack."

"Anyway," sighed Henry, "I doffed my hat. Possibly that is the first time that the Great Conroy ever acknowledged the fright of a broncho."

"I am afraid, sir, that Tonto City looks upon us as a couple of inefficient old fools."

"I appreciate that—all except the 'old,' Judge," replied Henry. "I am not growing old. An occasional twinge of rheumatism, perhaps; but that even attacks the young. My mind is as clear as it was at thirty."

"Fortunately, I did not know you at thirty," said Judge soberly, "so I am unable to draw my own conclusions. But I do know this much—Tonto City would be

very pleased if we did not come back."

"I am afraid you exaggerate, sir."

"I would hate to repeat what they are saying about your régime as sheriff of Tonto."

"Then it must be rather bad," sighed Henry. "Outwardly, perhaps, I am not deadly efficient—but inwardly, sir, I am —well, I must grope for a word, if you do not mind. While I am searching my vocabulary, please try and keep the left-hand wheels of this equipage on the grade. I do not care to go to glory, with something unsaid."

"I suppose we will swelter all the way to Scorpion Bend, and then have to wait hours for that ore train to arrive," complained Judge. "I don't see why Oscar did not put his foot down and insist that Josephone make the trip in a buggy."

"I am afraid that Oscar has put his foot down for the last time, Judge," remarked Henry. "From now on, Josephine's foot will be the one that is put down. His marriage may not be a prison bar, but it is little more than a parole. I feel genuinely sorry for the boy—and I don't care if the train doesn't reach Scorpion Bend in time for the ceremony."

"There is no time element involved, Henry; the justice of the peace lives there."

LATE in the afternoon, hot, dry and dusty, they reached Scorpion Bend. Henry's splendor was somewhat wilted and grimy.

"Henry, yuh look like a lily that had been drug," said Sandy Crane.

"Just a withered old bouquet," sighed Henry.

"Stand in some water, and mebbe you'll revive," suggested Sandy.

"I never expected to come to that, Sandy. I do believe that a drink or two might at least put a shine on my dusty nose."

Henry gave Thunder and Lightning some money for tequila, while the rest of them repaired to a thirst-emporium.

"Ees Henry getting married?" queried Thunder, as he and Lightning hurried to a saloon.

"Leesten, my lettle brodder," said the very wise Lightning, "you come all the way for a wedding, and I don't know yet who is marrying?"

"*Por Dios,* I'm theenk we come see fight."

"Fight? Who spiks of fighting?"

"Somebodee ees saying that this weel be fight from night to morning."

"Sure. But when people are married the fight ees legal. Stop talking, and get the face feexed for tequila."

At eight o'clock they all met at the depot to await the coming of Josephine and Oscar. The garrulous depot agent growled;

"It'll get here, when it arrives. That ore train hasn't any schedule."

Thirty minutes later the headlight came in view, the engine laboring under the drag of the heavy train. Another train pulled in and stopped some distance east of the depot, where a switch would allow them to turn onto the track leading to Wild Horse Valley and Tonto City.

The heavy ore-train rumbled and clanked into the station, drawing the dusty caboose even with the platform. Josephine and Oscar dismounted, tired and dusty, to be greeted warmly by the small crowd.

"Next time Ay will walk," declared Josephine wearily. "Ay never vars so rattled in my life. Yerkety-yerk, boompity-boomp! Sving your pondner! Vedding trip!"

That other train was clanking over the switch, its headlight centering on the platform. Henry turned and watched it, as it came in behind the depot. Lights from the platform illuminated the slow-moving cars. Henry yelled:

"Sheep! Sheep, heading for Tonto City, Judge! Look!"

The crowd whirled around. The cars were not fifty feet away, and the crowded sheep were visible through the slatted sides of the cars.

"Stop it!" yelled Judge. "In the name of the law—"

"Yudas Priest!" howled Oscar. "Voolies!"

Forgetting Josephine, forgetting his marriage, Oscar went galloping across the high platform, straight for the slowly passing cars, while Henry, his derby in one hand, his cane in the other, headed for the caboose, with Judge running a close second.

With a flying leap, displaying uncanny agility for his bulk, Henry landed on the back platform, while Judge managed to grasp the handles, his coat tails flying, and swung aboard. The conductor met Henry at the doorway, but Henry knocked him aside and stumbled into the car.

Peter Hatton and Len Stryker were there, in the dimly-lighted caboose, facing him in the aisle.

"Stop this train!" panted Henry, shaking his cane. "You—you cannot take sheep into Wild Horse Valley!"

"Can't I?" rasped Peter Hatton. "Stop me, Conroy."

A gun flashed in the car-lights, as Hatton covered Henry and Judge, neither of whom had a gun. Len Stryker reached over, took Henry's cane away from him and flung it through the doorway. The train had gained speed now, as it struck the down-grades. Henry drew back from the menace of the gun.

"Set down—you two!" ordered Hatton.

"Wh-what's this all about?" quavered the conductor.

"Keep yore nose out of this," ordered Hatton. "Yo're paid to run the train; this is private business."

"But you cannot do this, Hatton," protested Henry.

"No? Well, I'm doin' it, Conroy. I know my rights. Once I get sheep into Wild Horse Valley—nothin' can stop me. I know how much range belongs to the cattlemen. You two set there and enjoy the ride. As soon as we've unloaded at the Circle M sidin', you can go home."

"My goodness!" gasped Henry. "I see it all now, Judge."

"See what?" asked Judge huskily.

"The reasons for those murders. It proves my ideas. Don't you see it? Laird and Novelle—sheep. They bought the Circle M. Shep Hart was an ex-sheepman from Wyoming."

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Hatton grim-faced, tensed.

"You couldn't let him tell us who you are, Hatton."

Len Stryker swore bitterly. "And you said he was a fool, Pete."

"He is," replied Hatton, his voice brittle. And added; "For tippin' his hand that way. Not a brain in his head. But the sheep go onto the Wild Horse range, Len—nothin' can stop that—not now."

BUT Hatton reckoned without the vitrified Viking. Oscar had caught the ladder of a sheep-car and climbed to the top of the train, where he started on a dog-trot toward the engine. Oscar was unarmed, clad in his Sunday best. As he ran he threw away his coat and hat, leaping from car to car; the train gathered speed.

At the last car he leaped down to the tender, sprawling over the coal, and came upright in the engine cab, a huge, coal-streaked figure, howling at the top of his voice;

"Stop de train! Stop de train!"

Possibly the fireman thought Oscar was a crazed tramp, because he swung a brawny fist at Oscar's jaw, only to find himself in the grip of a roaring giant, who tossed him head-first into the tender. The engineer, reaching for a wrench as a weapon, found his arm caught in a vise, while Oscar yelled in his face:

"Stop, you fule! You vant to get wrecked?"

Oscar meant a personal wreck, but the engineer thought there might be danger ahead; so, in the parlance of the rail, he shot-gunned the train. The big engine, flung into reverse, threw sparks far above the cab, as the sanded wheels bit into the rails.

The sudden jerk threw Henry and Judge the length of the caboose, where they tangled with Hatton, Stryker and the puzzled conductor. For several moments

all of them were too dazed to do anything. Hatton had lost his gun, and Stryker was too stunned to think of one. Henry was sitting on Hatton's six-shooter, but had not realized it yet.

The train was backing up, almost as fast as it had been going ahead, the engine spouting sparks, as Oscar forced the engineer to open up the throttle. They were nearly back to the Scorpion Bend depot when the conductor yelled:

"Look out! Look out! We're going in the ditch!"

Hatton and Stryker were trying to get through the narrow door together, following the frightened conductor, when Henry struck them, knocking them through the doorway. Henry struck the railing, rebounded, and went off the train, followed by Judge, who made a mighty leap, high in the air.

Both men went rolling in the cinders and sage, but Henry saw the caboose leap high, as it cut across the main line, while other cars piled up behind it. Henry had lost Hatton's six-shooter, and as he staggered ahead he saw Hatton and Stryker running past the depot.

Judge was sitting up, panting like an over-heated pup. Henry said:

"Judge, can I—I do anything for you, sir?"

Judge muttered something sour about "only a good embalming job," as Henry headed for the spot beyond the depot where he had left the buckboard and team. Judge came staggering behind him, wheezing loudly. Men were running to the wrecked train, but the sheriff of Tonto was not interested in that.

As quickly as possible he untied the team, ignoring Judge's panted questions, ordered Judge into the seat and climbed in behind him.

"Sh-shall I dud-drive?" panted Judge.

"Hang onto your hat!" snapped Henry. "This is a man's job."

HENRY whirled the team away from the fence, swung them down a short street and onto the road to Wild Horse Valley. People were still running toward the wreck, as the equipage whirled on two wheels and went out of Scorpion Bend in a cloud of dust.

"There's a six-shooter under the cushion!" yelled Henry. "Dig it out—and use it if we are followed!"

"By who?" yelled Judge, digging frantically with one hand, while he clung to the seat with the other.

"By any of the Circle M outfit. If we can reach the grades ahead of them, they'll have a fine time getting past us on that narrow road."

Ignoring ruts and sharp turns, where the buckboard mowed down cactus and mesquite, they reached the grades, and Henry drew down the weary team.

"Go easy," squalled Judge. "One mistake is all anyone ever makes on this grade, Henry. But why hurry? Why did we not stay in Scorpion Bend? Why—why, Oscar and Josephine's marriage—"

"Oscar! That is it, Judge! I saw Oscar running for that train. Somehow he brought it back. It must have been Oscar. Wild Horse Valley should build a monument to Oscar Johnson."

"Make it a tombstone—if Josephine caught him," Judge choked.

A mile or so for a breathing spell, and again Henry sent the team at a headlong pace around the sharp turns. Mile after mile, while Judge prayed, swore, and talked of just how he wanted to be laid away. But Henry paid no attention, except at times to glance back, where the moonlight silvered the stretches of road behind them.

"There is no one behind us, Henry," said Judge. "Slow down, you moth-eaten puffball of an imitation Jehu!"

"Trusting soul," replied Henry, and slashed the tired horses with the whip, sending them down the last twisting grade to the valley level, where without a word of explanation he swung the team off the road and behind a screen of mesquite, the tires cutting deep in the hissing sand.

Sitting there behind the winded team they saw two riders gallop past in the

moonlight, making hardly a sound on the sandy road. Barely giving them time to pass and disappear, Henry urged the weary team back to the road, and on toward Tonto City.

"Who were they, Henry?" asked Judge wearily.

"It might have been Sandy and Albert —but I don't believe it was."

After a mile or so Henry drove slowly, scanning the barbwire fence along the road, finally drawing up sharp.

"There it is," he said. "The old road to the Circle M. I believe that old gate is only wired shut, Judge. It will cut off several miles."

"But we cannot cross the new railroad," protested Judge. "You're loony!"

"I could cross the Red Sea right now, Judge. Take care of the gate."

Grumbling wearily, Judge managed to open the wire-and-stake gate, and Henry drove through. The road was little used, partly grown over, but that was no obstruction to Henry Harrison Conroy. They reached the railroad at the siding, where they managed to bump over the heavy rails, and onto the road to the Circle M ranchhouse.

They tied the team to a drift-fence and proceeded on foot to the house, where a light shone dully through the curtains of the main room. Henry had a gun now, as they slowly worked their way to the front porch, which was raised about three feet off the ground. Heavy rose bushes gave them partial concealment, as they crouched there, protected from the moonlight by the side of the house. The window was up nearly a foot from the bottom, and voices were plainly audible.

"A—a woman in there!" whispered Judge. "Listen, Henry."

"Shhh."

THEN a man's voice, speaking in shrill, frightened tones, saying: "But I can't do that, Hatton. You know I can't!"

"It's up to you, Eckles," said Hatton's heavy voice. "The sheep train is wrecked—and our scheme is wrecked, too. Blast that fat-nosed sheriff! Just when everything was all set—I should have shot his heart out."

"But what do you want of me—of us?" queried Eckles.

"I want you to write a statement, Eckles. Write that this was yore scheme—to sheep out Wild Horse Valley. Say that Peter Hatton was hired by you to do this job. I've got to be in the clear. After you've written and signed that statement, you are both free."

"Wait a minute," begged Eckles. "You say that the sheriff accused you of murdering Brent and Hart tonight. I didn't do that, Pete. They'll hang you for killing them two cowboys."

"They can't prove anythin', you poor fool. I'll face that charge. But I want them to know that the sheep was yore scheme, and that I only worked for you."

"The ranch is in your name, Pete. It don't work out, I tell you. Why don't we all pull out, before anybody comes? You can't harm Jane Laird. Man, she didn't have anything to do with the deal."

Peter Hatton laughed. "No? Then why did she come here and accuse me of stealing her old man's money—of murderin' him. You know blame well, she did. And she hasn't anythin' to do with it. She knows now who killed Brent and Hart. Turn her loose? You fool—and you call yourself a lawyer."

"But there must be a way out," protested Eckles. "You can't save yourselves by murdering us, Pete."

"I can shut your mouths," gritted Hatton. "Confound the luck! Just when we had everythin' our own way, too. If I ever get a crack at that sheriff, I'll kill him, if it's the last thing I ever do."

"Why argue, Pete?" queried Stryker nervously. "We never know what minute somebody might come here. I tell yuh, somebody was ahead of us. That wasn't fog over the cañon, it was dust."

"Nobody was ahead of us, Len. Let's settle this thing right now."

"Wait. Let me go out and take a good look, Pete. Yuh can see a long ways on a

night like this. I tell yuh, I'm skittish."

"Go ahead," growled Hatton. "Don't stay long."

Henry and Judge crouched low, as the door opened and Stryker came out on the porch. He stood there for several moments. Then he opened the door a trifle and said quietly:

"Pete, there's a couple riders comin'. Might be Hank and Pat—and it might not. Better move them two into the back room, until we're sure."

Stryker closed the door and stood there, almost in reach of the two officers, who did not know what to do, except wait. The two riders came straight to the porch. Stryker stepped out to the edge of the porch, calling to them.

"Hatton?" queried one of the men.

"Hatton's in the house. This is Stryker."

"Oh, yes; this is John Campbell and Bob Keys."

Bob Keys was one of the commissioners.

"Yeah," said Stryker quietly. "Kinda late, ain't yuh, Mr. Campbell?"

"It is a little late, Stryker. But a telegram came for Peter Hatton—a rather queer telegram; so we brought it out to him. Mind if we come in?"

Hatton came to the doorway, as the men came up the steps.

"A telegram for yuh, Pete," said Stryker, his voice tense. "The prosecutin' attorney and the commissioner brought it out to yuh."

"If you don't mind, I'll read it to you," said the lawyer, and in the lighted doorway he read aloud:

PETER HATTON, CIRCLE M. RANCH, TONTO CITY, ARIZONA

TRAIN LOAD SHEEP CONSIGNED TO YOU WRECKED HERE TONIGHT SEVERAL CARS SMASHED AND CONTENTS SCATTERED IMPOSSIBLE MOVE FOR TWENTY-FOUR HOURS PLEASE ADVISE BIG SWEDE WHO SAYS HE IS JAILER AT TONTO CITY ARRESTED BY MARSHAL FOR WRECKING TRAIN AND WHIPPING ENGINE CREW, BUT HANDCUFFED MARSHAL TO A BUGGY WHEEL AND WENT AWAY WITH THE KEY BELIEVE HE WENT BACK TO TONTO CITY WITH A WOMAN AM WIRING SHERIFF AT TONTO.

BENSON AGENT.

"Well, that's shore funny," said Hatton huskily. "Come in, gents."

"I don't believe that we—" began Campbell.

"Come in!" snapped Hatton, and added: "Before I shoot yuh and drag yuh in."

The door closed behind them. Henry whispered:

"My goodness! Locked the marshal to a buggy wheel. Yes, he would do a thing like that."

"My God, Henry, don't you realize—"

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" warned Henry.

John Campbell was protesting against Hatton's actions, and Bob Keys was expressing indignation in no uncertain terms.

"Shut up, you jugheads!" roared Peter Hatton. "Bring 'em out, Len. Mebbe you folks never met. Miss Laird, gentlemen. She stuck her nose into somethin', and couldn't get it out. Mr. Eckles, the crookedest lawyer in Wyoming, who thought he was smarter than Peter Hatton."

Hatton laughed insanely.

"Shut up, Pete," begged Len Stryker. "They can hear yuh in Tonto."

"Who cares? This is my party—and the guests are here. Don't shiver, Eckles—you'll be plenty warm in a few minutes."

"Pete, there's no use makin' it any worse," pleaded Stryker. "We can tie 'em up and head for the Border. No use of—"

"No use, eh?" snarled Hatton. "This is my blaze of glory, damn yuh! All my life I've schemed and planned to get somethin' for myself. If a man stood in my way, I killed him. I'm close to fifty now—and all I've schemed and planned has been ruined by a red-nosed sheriff who don't know the difference between a sheep and a goat.

"Yeah, we can be safe across the Border—safe and broke, dodgin' every time we see a white man. What's life worth that way? All I've got left is a chance to get even with the people who ruined me—and I'll get even. I'll make Wild Horse Valley date time from the night they ruined Pete Hatton.

"I'll send this place up in smoke—and then I'll get that sheriff. If it hadn't been for him I'd sheep out this whole valley

and get rich. I'd be the big man of this range. They'd all come to Peter Hatton."

"But it ain't worth it, Pete," said Stryker. "Stay, if yuh want to, but I'm goin' now."

"You are—are yuh?"

The concussion of Hatton's forty-five rattled the windows, echoed by his insane laugh of derision. Jane Laird screamed. Then the room was silent, broken only by Hatton's chuckle.

"Yeah, you went somewhere, Len," purred Hatton. "I'm still the boss. I'll light a fire that they can see in Tonto City. Mebbe it'll bring the sheriff. That's the idea. Bring him out here and kill him in the light of my fire."

Henry leaned in close to the window.

"My goodness, what an ambition!" he exclaimed loudly.

VIII

FOR a moment there was silence in the house. Then Campbell gasped: "Henry Conroy!" With a roaring curse on his lips Hatton forgot all caution, as he leaped for the door and flung it open, his six-shooter high in his right hand.

Six feet away from him, the big forty-five clutched in both hands, Henry Conroy was shooting swiftly, driving bullet after bullet into the crazed killer, who plunged forward, smashing into the porch-rail, flinging his gun out into the yard.

A moment later, the empty gun dangling in his hand, Henry stumbled into the smoke-hazy room. Horses were galloping into the yard of the ranchhouse, and Judge yelled:

"Sandy! You are just in time!"

"In time for what?" queried Henry. "Breakfast?"

Sandy Crane and Albert Novelle came in with Judge. Jane Laird and Sam Eckles were tightly bound, but Campbell and Bob Keys were loose. Sandy quickly unbound Jane and Eckles, while Henry leaped over and examined Len Stryker. The tall cowboy was not dead.

"You—you got Hatton?" he whispered.

"Yes, I believe the gentleman is deceased, Stryker," replied Henry.

"He went crazy. I—I reckon he allus was crazy."

"My God!" exclaimed Campbell. "He was going to burn us all up in this house. The man was criminally insane, Henry. I never realized it. And he blamed you for ruining him. We brought a telegram—"

"I know all about that," nodded Henry. He turned to the white-faced Eckles. "You better tell the truth, Eckles," he warned. "It is the only way you can save your neck."

"I'll talk," quavered Eckles. "Hatton and I looted the Laird and Novelle outfit. It was easy up there, where—they believed us. Hatton killed Novelle. I can't prove it, but he did. I believe he killed Laird, too. Our scheme was to steal everything and move the sheep down here. I bought the Circle M with stolen money. We forged wills, bills-of-sale and everything we needed. It was easy. But I had to do everything in Hatton's name, because I couldn't show in the deals.

"Everything was air-tight—but Jane Laird was suspicious and came here to see Hatton. Novelle wanted an accounting; so he came here, too. I came to warn Hatton and help him get rid of them—but he doublecrossed me and tried to murder me; only his bullet struck my belt-buckle and just knocked me out.

"I was terribly sick, but I managed to walk to Tonto City. I stayed in the sheriff's office, while a man went to get the sheriff—but Hatton and his gang took me away before I could tell what I knew. I can easily prove that the Circle M belongs to Jane Laird and Albert Novelle. Several thousand sheep, too. Some money and bonds. But I want you to understand that I never murdered anybody."

"Which one of Hatton's men was killed at Brent's ranch, Stryker?" asked Henry.

"BEN WALL. We didn't dare get a doctor for him. We were buryin' him when that runaway buckboard almost ran over us. Then Hatton got the idea of

burnin' him in that old ranchhouse. When Hatton heard that you had found a corpse in the ashes, we went down there at night and destroyed everythin'."

"Hart had recognized Hatton?"

"That's right. He knew we were sheepmen. He'd have blocked our deal. Hatton shot Brent in yore doorway that night."

"What about that brass shotgun shell at the JP?" queried Judge.

"Oh, that!" grinned Henry. "Why, I saw Bugs Taylor in town yesterday and told him I'd like to have a matchbox like the one he carries. He said he could give me a twelve-gauge shell, but I'd have to go to the Circle M to find a ten."

"What were those telegrams?" queried Stryker weakly.

"Jail-bait," replied Henry. "I knew I could not deliver them—and I felt sure that Hatton would have the station burglarized, trying to discover what they were all about."

"You—you knew all this—and did nothing?" queried Judge. "You fiddled while Tonto City nearly was sheeped out. Dilatory, I would say, sir."

"Just a moment, Judge," said Bob Keys. "Henry's methods worked out just right. I congratulate him. As I said to the board—"

John Campbell cleared his throat raspingly. "I believe we owe a lot to Henry and his organization."

"We certainly do," agreed Keys heartily.

Albert grinned wearily at Jane. "I came here to see you—but you were rather hard to find, Miss Laird. But everything is all right now."

"I hope so," said Jane weakly. "I am still dazed."

"So'm I," said Sandy.

"You always was," smiled Judge. Sandy grew embarrassed, when Jane looked at him. She said:

"Why, you are the man who met me at the train that morning."

"Yes'm, I'm the man; the one you lied to. Why didja say you was Pete Hatton's daughter? If I was pickin' out a father, I'd do better than that."

"Just a foolish whim, I suppose. You were so curious." Jane smiled.

"Listen!" exclaimed Henry. From outside came the sound of lusty singing; as a roaring voice neared the porch. Not melodious, but loud.

"That vitrified Viking!" exclaimed Judge. "That is his fighting-song."

Oscar Johnson came on the porch and looked at the body of Peter Hatton. "Ay will be dorned!" he snorted. "Somebody beat me to him. Oh, hallo."

He stepped into the room and looked around. Oscar was minus coat and hat, and only a remnant of his wedding shirt fluttered from his mighty shoulders.

"You are late, Oscar," reminded Henry.

"Yah, su-ure," agreed Oscar disgustedly. "Ay olmost had to ride a sheep. But Ay found Frijole and Ay took his hurse. He's valking back—with a yug in his hand. Are de ship-horders all dead?"

"Everything is under control, Oscar," replied Henry. "Where is Josephine?"

"Yosephine?" gasped Oscar. "Yosephine? Yudas Priest, Ay forgot her!"

"Never mind, Oscar," said John Campbell. "We will put on the biggest wedding ever seen in Wild Horse Valley. Don't you realize what you've done tonight?"

"Ay will," replied Oscar, "as soon as Ay meet Yosephine."

"We will erect a monument to you," said Bob Keys.

"Oh, yah," sighed Oscar. "Yust put little lamb on top. Ay know Yosephine."

Thirty minutes later the cavalcade moved on to Tonto City, while across the old road came the two Mexicans on their slow-moving mules. On the main road they had met Hank Hess and Pat Dolan, the two cowboys from the Circle M who had been in town. They stopped to question Thunder and Lightning, who gave them a weird account of the wreck of the sheep train.

"Yuh can go to the Circle M and tell Pete Hatton that our address is Somewhere in Mexico," Pat Dolan told them, and that was why the Mexes were on their way to the Circle M.

They knocked loudly, but there was no response. The door was unlocked. Fearfully, they entered, calling for Peter Hatton.

"I'm theenking we better go home," quavered Thunder. "Nobody ees here."

Lightning found a match in his pocket, which he scratched on the sole of his boot. On the rough couch was a sheeted figure.

"Madre de Dios!" whispered Thunder. "W'at ees eet, Lightning?"

Lightning reached out a trembling left hand and drew aside the sheet. The match fell from his fingers, leaving them in total darkness. From the throat of Thunder Mendoza came a strangled, "Ee-e-ek!"

The next moment they went through that doorway together, tore down what was left of the sagging porch-railing, and leaped into the darkness. The two weary mules lifted their heads and watched the flying figures disappear down the road. It was only about nine miles to the JHC; so why bother with a mule?

Readin', Writin' and Revelation

THERE is a new regime in report cards. For more than thirty years the New York City schools have been using the same sort, but this winter a new model has been introduced. These streamlined cards are only issued three times a semester, but they tell all. They tell so much that it is practically indecent.

The grades are only part of the story. These cards are four-page folders; they last the student throughout his school career—in fact, they haunt him. Because in them you will find a record of his personal, social and work habits; comments as to whether he is pulling his full weight or shirking; suggestions for his improvement. You will learn whether he speaks clearly, plays well with others and is thoughtful of their rights; when he was vaccinated and what foreign language is spoken in his home. You will be given a ruthless running comment on his personality.

Apparently there is no escape for the student. He must go through his schooldays with the knowledge that a gargoyle rides on his shoulder, recording his every move, snickering when he blots a word or gets gum in his hair.

—*Albert George*

"Please let me die. Help me to die!" she whispered

Young Doctor Kildare

By MAX BRAND

A dramatic human story of one man's war against Fate and Disaster. Don't miss it!

WHEN young James Kildare completed his medical schooling he came home to face his first big problem. His family took for granted that he would settle down in the small town of his birth. In time he would marry Beatrice Raymond, his high-school sweetheart, and take over his father's practice. They had even prepared an office for him, and Beatrice had planned the house where they would live.

But Jimmy Kildare had other plans. A serious and intense young man, he was almost fanatic in his devotion to his medical career. He wanted wider horizons. There was a chance to spend his interneship in one of the famous New York hospitals, to work with the great minds of his profession. And so, reluctantly, he broke the news to them. His father and mother were deeply hurt but offered him encouragement nevertheless. Beatrice, loving him still, agreed he must follow the path where his destiny seemed to lie.

At the great Dupont General Hospital, therefore, the next phase of his development began. The other internes are amused by the grim seriousness with which he attacks his studies. Even Tom Collins, his roommate thinks he is a wet blanket. More important he manages to attract the attention and the subsequent ridicule of the great Dr. Gillespie. Gillespie is the crabbed and sarcastic diagnostician acknowledged to be a genius in his field. For years, it is said, he has been searching for some young student to whom he could pass along the depths of his medical lore.

In due course Kildare is assigned to the ambulance service. On one of his early trips he picks up an injured man from a saloon, and is called to attend a girl—apparently a suicide—before he can return his first patient to the hospital. By heroic efforts in artificial respiration Kildare returns the girl

to life. She is young, beautiful, and her rich clothes do not jibe with the squalid room in which he found her. She mumbles curious sentences as consciousness begins to return, and the mystery of her sharpens Kildare's interest. At the rooming house she has given the name of Barbara Treat.

Meanwhile, however, the ambulance attendant has not been diligent enough with the first patient. The injured man dies and somehow the newspapers learn of this. It is a black mark against Kildare—a serious threat to his future.

CHAPTER VI

MY ART IS LIVING

AN AMBULANCE call sent Kildare away to resume his night's work but he saw Gillespie later on, during the dark hours of the next morning when he came off duty. He went to the emergency ward, first, to look at the attempted suicide. Her bloodless skin had a greenish-grey tint like certain kinds of jade; the cyanoid coloring remained only around the eyes and in one pale shadow beneath the lower lip. Now that he was instructed to look for beauty, he could see a wealth of it. Her head was of the Mediterranean type, the brow low and broad and the features worked with exquisite precision. Her pulse remained rapid and irregular but she seemed surely on the way to recovery. He had been certain enough of that, before; it was not this question which brought him back to stare at her.

A nurse came to stand by the bed watching Kildare with a cold curiosity. "What do you think, doctor?" she asked.

"A lot of question-marks," answered Kildare. "Why did she do it?"

"Maybe Doctor Gillespie knows—he wants to see you," said the nurse.

Kildare hesitated. If the great man wanted to see him, it could not be for any friendly reason, he was sure; but he went at once to the diagnostician. Next to the children's clinic there was a small waiting room with a brass plate over the door bearing the legend which was famous throughout the medical world: "Dr. Gillespie. Office hours: 12 a.m. to 12 a.m." In fact, he kept himself ready to receive patients for twenty-four hours of the day. In two rooms, one for his bed and library, one for his office interviews, he lived year after year, rarely putting foot outside the hospital walls. The penniless old man refused to accept a larger fee than a dollar a visit, and even this fee was payable on easy terms. For as he explained, he wanted more sick people, not their money.

In this waiting room Kildare discovered, in the four rows of seats, the oddest group of people who could be found outside of a nightcourt. Over them presided that grizzled negro, Conover, who was almost as celebrated as his master. For forty years he had served Gillespie day and night, except on Friday evenings when he left the hospital and got himself carefully drunk with Jamaica rum.

A tall man in camel's-hair coat and silken neck-scarf preceded Kildare into the room. He leaned on a walking stick and on the arm of his wife. She had health enough for two, with big, expansive jowls and oversize diamonds jittering in her ears.

"You can take us right in to the doctor," she said to Conover. "This is John H. Miner, of San Francisco."

"Set down and rest your feet," suggested Conover. "The doc'll see you when your turn comes."

Mrs. Miner laughed a little, though she was not greatly amused.

"I've brought you *the* John Miner," she said. "If you'll kindly tell the doctor—"

"Even if he was John H. Archangel Gabriel," said Conover, "he'd have to set down there and rest, trumpet an' all, till his turn come. . . . What you want, doctor?"

"Doctor Gillespie sent for me. My name is Kildare."

Conover rose from his desk, opened the door of the inner office, and held Kildare by the arm. Inside, Gillespie was using a stethoscope on a man who stood stripped to the waist.

"You like to see Doctor Kildare?" Conover asked.

"I don't like to, but I need to."

"Step in, doctor," Conover invited, and closed the door behind Kildare as Gillespie's patient said, smiling: "Have I got to cut down on the stuff, doctor? Should I taper off to beer and wine, perhaps?"

Gillespie hooked the earphones of the stethoscope around his neck and stepped back, shrugging.

"Why taper off?" he asked. "Stick to the whiskey if you like it better. Because it's too late for you to change."

The thrill of fear went visibly through the body of the patient. "Too late?" asked his shaken voice. "You mean that I can't be cured?"

"Four months with whiskey—six months without, say. Why not be happy right to the end?" asked Gillespie's remorseless voice. "You had your warning ten years ago, and your chance. . . . This way out, please!"

But the patient, struck to a blind stagger, reached out a feeble hand as though his eyes were gone and he could only feel his way. A big attendant took him by the arm and fetched him through the far door.

"WHY d'you look at me?" demanded Gillespie, scowling at Kildare. "You wouldn't talk to 'em like that, I suppose? The fools who throw away what God gave 'em you'd still baby 'em with soft talk?"

Kildare said nothing.

"Answer me!" shouted Gillespie.

"You've been telling me things, not asking questions, sir," said Kildare.

"You're the calm and cool type, are you?" sneered Gillespie. "You have eyes and you can use 'em, too. Isn't that right? . . . What did you think you saw on my hand this morning, for instance?"

"A small melanoma—I think you know what it means, sir," said Kildare.

"Bosh and nonsense!" roared Gillespie, but he fell silent a moment later and, dragging a hand through the white mist of his hair, he looked past Kildare at some face of unhappiness which was not far away. He rallied himself back to his usual gruffness to ask: "Since you have eyes in your head, tell me why Barbara Treat did it?"

"Barbara Treat?"

"You don't know her name?" growled Gillespie. "You didn't even know that she had a face, until it was pointed out to you. What *do* you know about her?"

"Her height and weight, approximate age, general physical condition, and a few details which are not medically important," said Kildare.

"What details?" asked Gillespie.

"She was educated abroad, rides horses and plays tennis," said Kildare.

"What tells you she was educated abroad?"

"The sort of French she speaks."

"What did she say?"

"'*Mon mestier et mon art—*'" repeated Kildare. "If it's a quotation the next words are: '*c'est vivre.*'"

"'My business and my art is living—living is my occupation and my art,'" translated Gillespie. "Very good. Excellent from a young woman who has just tried to kill herself. How do you explain that?"

"An inverted impulse, perhaps."

"The tennis?" snapped Gillespie.

"She has the tennis callous on her right thumb."

"Has she the saddle callous from riding?" asked the great man, sneering.

"She has well-developed muscles under her shoulders," answered Kildare. "Also her forefingers show the pull of reins."

"Interesting," said Gillespie. "Have you any interest in her identity?"

"None, sir," answered Kildare.

"Ha?" cried Gillespie. "She's young, beautiful, and even rich, you tell me; and yet you don't give a damn about her."

"I care very much about her—as a case," said Kildare.

"Ah, only as a case?"

"Yes, sir. What made her turn on the gas in a cheap rooming house?"

"Despair because she had lost the comfortable home you infer in her background," suggested Gillespie.

"Her nails had been carefully mani-

cured not more than two or three days before; and she had not lost weight," answered Kildare.

"You mean that she ran away from a happy home to kill herself in a tawdry little roominghouse?"

"That's my suggestion," said Kildare.

"A clear indication of an unsettled mind."

"I think not, sir," said Kildare.

"Ha? And why not?"

"I don't know," answered Kildare. "I have an instinctive feeling—"

"God in heaven!" exclaimed the diagnostician. "Are you talking to me about instinctive feelings? Are you a doctor or a schoolgirl?"

Kildare was silent.

"Is this lovely girl a human being or a problem to you?" demanded Gillespie.

Kildare was silent again.

"Answer me!" bellowed Gillespie.

"A problem, sir," said Kildare.

"Ice-water! Ice-water!" cried Gillespie. "A man of ice-water instead of blood. Even the nurses in the emergency ward have seen it already. A man with no heart, so there can't be emotion in him. A brain without a body! God help your friends. You'll bring enough pain to 'em. And God help you in this hospital. They want men here, not machines—Goodby!"

KILDARE rang the police and got the Bureau of Missing Persons. There were, he was told, eleven girls of a similar description missing within the past few days. But they'd come up the next day with photographs and try to make an identification. Then he went back to the emergency ward to look at Barbara Treat.

The dawn had come; it was stronger than the electric lights and marked the faces and the wrinkled bedding with daubs of soot. Three others were in the ward, one an alcoholic with stertorous breathing and a face of pale purple. Kildare shut them out of his mind as he stood over Barbara Treat. Her pulse was rallying still. The delicate pastel red of her lips showed the life coming closer to the surface.

The nurse came to her side, glanced curiously at Kildare, and went away after a hesitant moment, as though she hardly dared to trust such a charge to such a doctor.

The eyes of Barbara Treat opened a moment later. They were that vivid blue which we call violet. The whites were slightly smoked with yellow and almost imperceptibly veined with red. The lens seemed not for outward so much as inward use and he had a singular feeling that he was looking straight into her mind. She grew aware of him by degrees, detail by detail, and then forgot him, passing back deeply into her own thoughts.

She was remembering. A shadowy line of pain deepened between her eyes; her lips pinched; there was a slight dilation of the nostrils. It was a pleasure to Kildare to view these characteristic symptoms from a point so close to the object. The visible diminution of her color also was worthy of attention together with a slight tremor of the entire body. A moment later she had clasped her hands together. But all these surface indications, like wind and wave shadows on the surface of the profound ocean, gave him no picture of the objects which floated in the deep of her mind.

"Where am I?" she whispered.

It is a medical rule to reassure every patient. Kildare followed the rule in three steps, saying: "You are resting well; you'll sleep again soon; nothing shall harm you because I am your friend."

He was pleased to see the effects of the words at once, noting that the tremor disappeared, the tension of the face was relieved greatly, and a lifted hand moved toward him. He took the hand in his. It was dry and cold, an unfavorable symptom in such a case. He chafed the hand between both of his. Perhaps it was the warmth that caused her to smile a little. She relaxed, her head turning gradually to the side. She seemed, in fact, to be smiling at thoughts she desired to hide. Then sudden fear, as sharp and biting as pain, closed her hand hard over his.

"Steady, steady," said Kildare. "Everything is all right and I'm your friend."

The words were prescribed; they were almost out of the book; but they had an almost instant narcotic effect.

"Friend—" she whispered, and a faint recognition appeared in her before she relaxed again into sleep. Her hand still clung a little to his. She took a deep breath with a shuddering exhalation and drew his hand against her breast. This was an unexpected advantage because it enabled him to study the rhythm of her heart, that great chronometer of the sick-room.

As he expected, consciousness returned again, and again with a knife-thrust of pain that made her entire body tremble, her startled eyes stared at him.

"All right—I'm a friend," said Kildare, patiently.

"Then let me die. Help me to die!" she whispered.

IN THIS no-man's land of half-mind, half-darkness, it may be useful to influence the patient by firm, insistent suggestion which often exerts a semi-hypnotic effect. Kildare seized upon the opportunity.

"I'll help you," he repeated. "But now we are going to sleep; now we are going to rest; now we relax; we breathe deeply and the sleep enters us. We need to sleep and be strong. Then we can do what needs to be done."

"It needs to be done," she whispered, her eyes closing.

"I'm a friend. I'll help you," said Kildare.

"Friend—" said her almost soundless lips, and again they smiled, remaining parted as the next wave of sleep overcame her.

A shadow crossed close to Kildare. He was aware of the nurse who now looked from him to the patient with an air of awed surprise.

Kildare said: "Don't come too close, please. She's almost ready to talk. Like hypnotism. She may tell everything."

The awe and the interest disappeared from the glance of the nurse. "Like peeping through a keyhole isn't it?" she suggested, sardonically.

As Barbara Treat stirred toward consciousness again, he leaned close and murmured: "It's all right—I'll help you—"

"I have to die—" whispered her lips.

"Why do you have to die? Why do I have to help you to die?" he asked.

"Before they all find out—" she answered.

She was gone again. His own lack of sleep was sucking out his life. An ache went out of his back down his legs and up into the base of his brain. So he gave up the hold that linked them hand to hand and mind to mind, as it were. He withdrew his fingers, gradually. Her own hand followed in a blind gesture but fell to her side again; her breathing became more deep and regular. So, after another moment of watching, he left the room, only lingering at the door to say to the nurse: "It's not a mental case. Not a bit. A guilty secret. That's all. If we can probe that to the bottom—"

"What a detective you would have made! What a *friendly* detective!" said the nurse, icily.

Kildare went up to his room to find Tom Collins in the act of rising for his day's work, stretching long, double-jointed arms and yawning his eyes out of sight.

"Hey, you look as though you'd been out among 'em!" said Tom Collins. "What you been doing? Swinging her?"

Kildare answered, slowly: "I've been out collecting trouble—like marbles—and I've got a whole pocketful."

Then he went to bed.

CHAPTER VII

ONE DROP OF POISON

IN FOUR hours he was wakened by jazz. In the next room he could hear the radio and the voices of the three friends. He shaved, bathed in haste, and was dressing when Collins came in with mail and tossed two letters on Kildare's desk.

"I hear you went fishing and pulled Venus out of the sea," said Tom Collins.

"I hear she's got golddust in her hair. So I go down and have a look. And is she real, brother? She is!"

"Has she talked?" asked Kildare, tearing open his letters.

"How could I tell has she talked?" answered Collins. "The moment I saw her I was floating, I was swinging it. All the violins went jitter-jump when I saw that babe, and all the drums went whitcha-whatcha-hotcha. Like this!"

He spun across the room with intricate tanglings and untanglings of his long legs. Kildare yawned and opened the letters. His mother told him that Judge Banks had gone broke and stopped building the new barn; and his father had a new fertilizer for the onion-bed; and they both loved him and missed him and hoped *one* day he would be home with them again.

Beatrice Raymond wrote a different sort of letter, as direct as her spoken words:

Dear Jimmy,

Asking questions of you is dangerous, because you always answer with the truth but I have to ask one now. Do you love me? You've never told me and that's why I have to ask. I know you like me but is your heart empty without me? Is everybody else a hideous bore?

I shudder when I ask the question, but I have to ask it. Do you love anything except your work, really and truly?

Beatrice

He spent a long moment looking up, as he always did when a question searched his soul with pain; but then he found himself wondering whether this were a pain more real than what he had felt when he faced Gillespie the night before. After that he scratched out an answer.

Dear Beatrice,

After what's been happening to me recently, I begin to believe that I don't feel things as other people feel them. The people at the top here haven't much use for me. On top of that the thought of losing you is pretty bad. I suppose that's what you mean. If without you my heart isn't empty and there's no salt in the taste of life, you want to know it so that you can start forgetting me. Anyway, I have to tell you the truth. You're the best I know. You're tops. But probably something is left out of my makeup. The fact is that there's plenty of taste to life without you. There's almost too much taste, in a way. When I think of you, I think of quiet, and vacation days, and somebody who always understands everything. But you want more than that. You want a love with a taproot that goes right down to bedrock. Maybe I never can love anybody that way. I don't know. I'm going to dread the answer you will send to this letter but I can't lie to you.

Much love

Jim

It was hard to seal that letter and put the stamp on it. He looked up grimly from that work to find Tom Collins watching him with a whimsical eye.

"Don't she love you, brother?" he asked. "If she doesn't, this won't help, unless she likes this kind of fame. They're writing editorials about you. Listen!"

He folded back a newspaper, saying: "That fellow your ambulance picked up last night—the drunk, the first one—he wasn't drunk after all, it turns out. And the newspapers decided to get tender about him. Suppose he were your brother or son or father, or something. Here's the editor stepping into his work. He says: 'Are our hospitals our public servants or our public masters? Must we continue to suffer from their brutal haste? Poor Kegelman, housepainter out of work, drops from a heart attack, is picked up as a drunk, tossed into an ambulance handled by a young interne on his first day of duty, and allowed to die like a rat in the dark.' That's pretty stiff, Kildare, isn't it?"

Perhaps it was not a very odd co-incidence that brought a telephone call for Kildare at that moment. He was told that Dr. Carew would see him at once.

OLD Carew was polishing the shining dome of his head with one hand when Kildare came into the office. Off to the side stood Bill Weyman, the ambulance attendant, in a uniform of military

neatness. His hair shone like opaque brown glass and his eyes held so straight forward that nothing could bend his glance from the high goal of duty. He was the perfect figure of discipline.

Carew said: "Kildare—dead drunkard—newspapers. Yes. My young friend, I have called you in to tell you that every good report that appears about this institution is a help to us, and every bad report is a loss of blood. Of blood, literally. We depend upon the money of taxpayers. We depend upon the money given by the charitable. The additional wing which was planned fifteen years ago still is unbuilt. The laboratories and their equipment rust away. The beds, the mattresses, the linen, the antiquated kitchen, the very face of the hospital is growing old and decrepit; and the face of age revolts the public eye, my very young friend."

Here Carew made a pause in which he seemed to be listening to the echoes of his own words. At last he said: "Have you heard the report of the autopsy on this Kegelman—or do you know who Kegelman was?"

"I do know, sir," said Kildare.

"Ah? From the newspapers I gathered that you were in some doubt as to his identity," said Carew. "The autopsy discovered that it was a coronary case, not alcoholism."

Kildare said nothing.

"One bit of bad news from the hospital," commented Carew, "is like one swallow of poison, it undoes the good effects of much honest living and labor. What was the appearance of this Kegelman when you picked him up?"

"His color was ashen-gray," said Kildare, remembering the details. "His face was beaded with perspiration. His pulse was irregular and rapid. He was in a state of shock. Even in his coma he gave indications of being in great pain."

"Great pain—ashen-gray color—they are not classical symptoms of alcoholism, are they, Doctor Kildare?"

"No, sir," said Kildare.

"To what, other than alcoholism, might you have attributed the pain and the color of the face?" asked Carew, so softly that Kildare knew he was on trial for his life—the life of his medical reputation, at least. The doctor who fails once fails forever, and he knew it.

"There was the head injury, which suggested a possible fracture," answered Kildare.

"That was your diagnosis, then," insisted Carew.

"I thought that it might be a coronary case," said Kildare, the words coming out hard and flat.

He felt the glance of poor Weyman turn upon him. The head of the attendant did not move but his eyes managed to reach Kildare with an electrical appeal.

"Thinking that it *might* be a coronary case," said Carew, "what did you propose to do about it, my *very* young friend?"

"I thought of giving oxygen," answered Kildare, "and going straight back to the hospital. But a second order came to pick up another case."

"When in the ambulance you know that you are in charge," stated Carew. "You could have come straight to the hospital and disregarded the radio order."

"Yes, sir," admitted Kildare.

"Not coming to the hospital, you immediately had oxygen administered did you not?"

"Oxygen was being administered," said Kildare, slowly, "by the time we had picked up the second call."

"By the time you had picked up the *second* call? And in the meantime you permitted that state of shock and asphyxia to continue without administering a single whiff—"

From the corner of his eye Kildare could see the forehead of Weyman, red-varnished with the heat of his blood and shining with ten thousand beads of sweat. This was the time to make the man a sacrifice. But he heard himself saying as Carew choked with unuttered anger: "The case might have been alcoholism and concussion, sir."

Carew took a deep breath. He blinked his eyes shut, and without looking up again he said: "You are young; it was your first day. Strange that many who have been here for years never have given their hospital such a hard blow. Perhaps you are not at home in the emergency service. I'll see that you're transferred to surgery. . . .That is all!"

HE STILL had his eyes closed as Kildare walked into the hall. There Weyman overtook him, walking rapidly, his heels making a loud clicking through the naked corridor. The ambulance attendant mopped his face as he drew alongside:

"Is that gunna do you in? Are they gunna do you dirt for that?"

"That'll be all right," said Kildare.

"I didn't ask you to cover me up," insisted Weyman.

"Never mind," said Kildare.

"I'd be down flat on my face," declared Weyman. "The old girl would be the first one to step on me, on her way out. And I never would have seen her again. My God, doc—"

"It's okay," said Kildare. "Quit it, will you?"

Weyman quit it. Kildare went down to the diningroom, unclenched his teeth, and made himself swallow a cup of coffee. He heard someone say, and it was like a thought made vocal out of his own brain: "That's *one* way to get into the newspapers!"

But what held him like a dog on a leash was the need to see Barbara Treat again as quickly as possible. She was in the psychopathic ward of course, between the locked doors and the barred windows. The great Gillespie himself came out, surrounded by a group of internes, attending and resident physicians; for wherever he went a cluster of the hungry-minded was sure to form about him. When he saw Kildare he halted and with a gesture pointed him out and held him motionless, like a fish on the end of a spear.

"Ah, there he is!" said Gillespie. "There is the fellow who caught her. Therefore he ought to know all about her. What's wrong with this Barbara Treat, doctor? Tell us, will you?"

The others stood back a bit, cruelly amused, already laughing in the anticipated pleasure of the game.

"Won't you tell me first, Doctor Gillespie?" asked Kildare. "I've never examined her when she was fully conscious."

"But why should you? Few of you young fellows ever enter the state of full consciousness," said Gillespie, as his companions roared. "By sheer sympathy in the kindred state, you ought to be able to tell me what's wrong with her, eh? Tell us, Doctor Kildare, what form of mania is it?"

Kildare looked up.

"The ceiling won't tell you, however, I'm afraid," said Gillespie.

Kildare, crimson of face, waited for the laughter to die down again. Then he said: "It's not a mania."

"No? No?" echoed Gillespie with a mock admiration. "No form of dementia at all? Just a whim, perhaps? Young man, do you know that she's just attempted her life a second time?"

The shock got Kildare onto his toes, but he said nothing.

"But it's not dementia," said Gillespie. "Not a mania at all. Probably trying to escape from boredom, eh?"

"She's simply afraid," said Kildare.

"Ah? Not a manic fear, though?"

"No, sir, a natural one."

"And of what, I pray?"

"I don't know," said Kildare.

"He doesn't know," echoed Gillespie.

His followers broke into a hearty laughter. Kildare stuck out his chin. "I know why you're doing this, but it's unfair, sir," he said.

"Know why I'm doing what?" demanded Gillespie, scowling. "What do you know?"

"Nothing, sir, naturally," replied Kildare.

Gillespie turned on his heel, exclaiming: "A damned lot of impudence!"

Ugly, inquisitive glances turned back toward Kildare. He thought that two or three of the older men were about to pause to give him a bit of pungent advice; but finally they went on, afraid to miss even random words. It astonished Kildare to hear the parting words of Gillespie, for the diagnostician was saying: "What fools we'd be with our laughter, if he turned out right in the end!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE CRAZY WARD

A NURSE was at the door of the psychopathic ward, about to enter. She was a tall, pale-haired Swede of a girl and she was pursing a smile like a cigarette upon her lips as Kildare came up to her. He said, with a bluntness which could be peculiarly his own: "It's a great thing to have something to smile about, isn't it?"

The nurse was named Lindon, or something like that but more Swedish. The Swedes are a fighting people and this abrupt questioning made her angry. She cleared hir throat and looked Kildare over deliberately before she answered: "Pardon me, doctor. I didn't know that there was a hospital rule against smiling."

"Of course there isn't," nodded Kildare, watching her. "Particularly when there's a Gillespie to set the example."

The pale, Swedish-blue eyes of the nurse held to his without flinching.

"Well, doctor?" she asked.

There was no answer to that. The door of the ward opened, then, and Kildare entered with the accurate sense that he had been making a fool of himself. The head nurse sat at a table near the door, and he said to her: "I want to see Miss Treat. What's she done?"

"Rather clever, you know," remarked the head nurse. "She broke the crystal out of her wrist watch and slashed the veins of her left wrist quite badly. There she is in restraining sheets—left aisle at the far end."

He went down through the room slowly, trying to get words in his throat and finding none that made sense. Left and right he picked up a few impressions of the other women in the ward. One old thing sat up in an attitude of command with her hand stretched out before her as though she were about to address a throng. The gesture remained though the words never came. That hand could remain suspended for an hour, perhaps, if she were a true catatonic case of dementia precox. Another woman of middle age sat with her chin on her fist, contemplating eternal space and chuckling at the immensity of the jest which it contained for her. At the barred window at the end of the room a tall girl with an emaciated body stood with her hands locked behind her head, staring upward toward the sky, speaking quietly. Then Kildare stood over the bed of Barbara Treat.

She was tense with high excitement, her whole body rigid, the lips compressed and the nostrils flaring. Someone near the door laughed. The sound set her shuddering.

"It's all right," said Kildare, "but you should have waited. Don't you remember that you were to wait?"

She had to consider him through a long moment before the terror, like an opaque mist, melted from her eyes and let recognition come through. Fear is ugly and she had been terribly afraid. A mere week of this concentrated agony might write years into her face in an ineradicable, fine hand. Now, as she relaxed a little, the beauty began to flow warmly back.

"I remember your voice," she said.

"When you were coming out of the mist—away back there. I was the friend who talked to you," he told her.

"Were you?" she asked. "Friend?"

"You were to wait for me. You recall that?" asked Kildare. "Now you've been foolish."

Laughter again came from the end of the room, stifled laughter. It brought a gasp from Barbara Treat.

"Steady, steady!" said Kildare. "They're not laughing at you."

"They are!" she whispered. "They're

laughing at me. They all know, but why should they laugh?"

"That's the only thing you're wrong about," argued Kildare. "They don't know. They only laugh because most girls are silly. But they know nothing. I'm the only one who knows."

"You?" she breathed, terrified of him at once.

"Don't you remember talking things over with me?" lied Kildare.

"Did I?" pleaded the girl.

The voice of the emaciated figure at the barred window began to mumble a soft prayer. She spoke to a lover and called the name of God.

"Poor thing—poor girl," murmured Barbara Treat. "Do they think I'm like that? Is that why they have me in here?"

"Exactly," said Kildare. "If they knew about you, if they really knew, of course they wouldn't have brought you to a psychopathic ward. But I'm the only one who knows."

SHAME made her crimson. Her face shone with a fine perspiration. With his handkerchief he wiped it away.

"You were not to be ashamed," urged Kildare. "Don't you remember? We agreed on that."

"Did we?" she whispered.

"Of course we did, or I wouldn't be here. Don't you remember that, now?"

"And did you swear never to speak to a soul about it?" she asked, panting out the words with a dreadful eagerness.

"No, because you trusted me. You knew that I never could say a word that would hurt you," he told her.

"Ah, but promise me now!" she begged.

He tried to add up quickly the loyalties of a medical man to his hospital and those other loyalties which the Hippocratic Oath states so clearly, to say nothing of the honor of man to man, and man to woman. His own voice surprised him, saying: "I'll promise, of course."

"And swear?" she asked. "No, I don't want that. A promise is better than an oath, if there's your honor in it."

He had a cold feeling around the base of the brain that it was wrong, that it was disastrously wrong for him to make the promise, and that he would be called strictly to account for it later on, but in spite of that he was putting his hand over his heart, like a silly Frenchman or something, and saying solemnly: "My honor's in it, too."

"Thank you," she whispered, and then she began to cry, making poor stifled motions beneath the sheet to get a hand to her eyes. He kept his handkerchief busy. A nurse came up with preparations for giving a hypodermic.

"You'd better wait," murmured Kildare.

"Yes, doctor," said the nurse, and paused rather insolently to survey the patient and then Kildare before she went away.

"I'm sorry—I can't stop!" breathed Barbara Treat.

"It's all right to cry. It'll do you good," said Kildare. "But you remember," he lied, "that we agreed there'd never be anything worthy of tears between us? Don't you remember how well we understood everything together?"

"Did we?" asked the girl, the tears suddenly stopping.

He dried the last of them, leaning casually against the high restraining rail of the bed which fenced her around like a child in a crib; and he smiled down at her as he spoke. If there were no audience except the sick, he always felt that he could have been one of the great actors.

"We understood perfectly," he assured her. "And we'll have the same understanding again, and always."

"But if you know what I've done—how much do you know?" she asked, her face burning again.

"Everything," said Kildare. "And understand everything," he added.

She closed her eyes, but flashed them open again to try to catch some change in his expression; somehow he managed to maintain that same devoted look of adherence and faith. The very skin of her face drew tight with her pain.

"But you're a doctor," she said. "And doctors will say anything just to—"

"I'm not talking as a doctor," lied Kildare, with a swift chill crawling through his spinal marrow. "Not as a doctor," he repeated. "But because you mean a lot to me, I want you to be happier."

"As though it weren't—as though I hadn't—I mean, as though there were nothing wrong?" she asked. Tears came rushing back to her eyes and made her lips tremble with the forerunning of sobs. "In your heart you *know* how you despise me!"

"Listen to me," said Kildare. "I've only been in the hospital for a few days and already I'm a failure. They laugh at me. But I keep trying to remember that what they think doesn't matter because they're strangers. If a friend were to laugh—if *you* were to laugh, for instance, it would be different."

"Is that honest? Do I count that much with you?" she asked.

"You do, because we're both in pain," he said. "And so you see, in a way, we can be doctors to one another."

She was saying gently: "It's true, then. You don't think that I'm unclean. God bless you for that. But if I've told you everything, then you know—"

Just at the moment when he hoped the revelation would come, her voice died away, and Kildare's hope died with it.

"We will talk again later, when you're stronger," he said. "That's why I want you to rest, now."

"I *shall* rest," said the girl.

"And close your eyes for sleep."

"I shall close them," she said, and obeyed.

"And promise me that you will do nothing until you've seen me again?"

"I promise," she whispered. "I don't want to die now. Not so suddenly."

Kildare went back through the ward. At the entrance he said to the head nurse: "You can take the restraining sheet away from Miss Treat, if the resident agrees. She won't make another attempt."

The head nurse surveyed him from the eye to the Adam's-apple and back again. "I'll bring it to the attention of the resident doctor," she said coldly.

As he went out, while the door was closing behind him, he heard one of the nurses say: "He's wonderful isn't he? He knows how to make the girls cry!"

CHAPTER IX

FREE CLINIC

HE WENT back to his room with a book on neuropsychiatrics from the hospital library and was well into it when Tom Collins came in and turned on his radio full blast. Kildare endured as much as he could, while the jazzy words crooned their way into the midst of the medical terms. Then he covertly made two balls of cotton and wadded them into his ears. After that he could hear the singing, but only as a far-off murmur down the wind, or the drowzing noises of bees on a summer's day. It was a long time later before something other than the music reached him from the outside. He looked up at last and heard the angry voice of Collins saying, as he pulled the cotton from one ear: "If you don't want to answer, why don't you say so, and be damned to you?"

There was Collins with a pamphlet open and his finger marking the place about which he had been trying to ask some question. Kildare turned to explain but Collins slammed out of the room; a moment later his voice was raised in a fine staccato of cursing in the room of Vickery and Dick Joiner nearby. Kildare sighed. He had been wondering if he could not ask Collins and his chums if they thought it honorable for an interne to make love to a sick patient for the sake of her nervous and mental health, but he could see that he had opened a wider gap than ever between him and the rest.

So, impatient of himself, he closed his book and went off to hunt for relief in the place where he never failed to find it—one of the great free clinics which the hospital maintained. There were a dozen parts of the huge building about which he knew

nothing, but already he was familiar with every nook and corner of the clinics. There, where the sick gathered in a steady stream, he found himself employed by an irresistible fascination.

It was the children's clinic that he headed for at this hour of the day. They were unlike all the other patients. Mature people dreaded the very thought of disease but the children seemed to feel that important maladies gave them an added personal dignity. Regardless of faces, to every white uniform of nurse or doctor they gave a boundless ocean of trust. To adults, hospitals, like the police, are symbols of things that have gone wrong; to children the police and the hospitals are emblems of fatherly and motherly care. But Kildare was not thinking of that as he moved slowly through the waiting room, scanning white faces and humped shoulders and parents anxious or serene.

"What are you thinking about, Kildare?" asked a man's voice behind him.

"I was thinking how much good stuff comes out of bad soil," said Kildare. Then, turning, he recognized Gillespie. He stood on his dignity at once.

"Ah, our independent thinker," said Gillespie, standing closer and looking down his nose at every feature of Kildare's face, as though each had aseparate meaning. "Aloof, proud, hostile. Why?"

"I think you know why, sir," said Kildare.

"Not at all. I'd like to have an explanation of your attitude toward me, young man," insisted Gillespie.

"Suppose there was a whole library of books across the street from your house, and you wanted to read the books?"

"Are you trying to pay me a compliment?" growled Gillespie.

"On the contrary," said Kildare. "Suppose that they have guards at the library who throw you out when you try to get in."

"Stuff and damned nonsense," said Gillespie. "But what are you doing down here?"

"I don't know, sir," said Kildare.

"I mean, are you learning or just looking?"

"I thought the two went together, sir," said Kildare.

"Don't be clever when you talk to me," snapped Gillespie "Don't try to be smug and cryptic and short in your answers. . . . By the way, I wonder what's the matter with that pinch-faced baby, yonder?"

"Malnutrition," answered Kildare.

"And that pot-bellied one with the square head?"

"Rickets," said Kildare.

"What's wrong with that little girl on the front bench?"

"She's allergic, I think," said Kildare. "I think that's an itching eczema she has on her hand."

"There's a sick-looking baby, yonder," said Gillespie. "Not much to that one."

"Dehydrated, isn't it?" asked Kildare.

"How do I know?" snapped Gillespie. "You're the one who's giving the information and I'm doing the listening. *What* a fat boy that one is, Doctor Kildare!"

"That pituitary gland must be off function," suggested Kildare. "Extracts might help that boy, don't you think?"

"I'm not thinking. I'm letting you think for me. What about that mouth-breather, there?"

The child had the pinched nose and the infantile, drooping lips of the mouth-breather.

"Adenoids, I suppose," said Kildare. "I'll take a look."

The youngster grabbed suddenly for his mother's skirts. "I'm sorry. He's a terribly nervous child, sir," she apologized.

"It's all right," said Kildare. "He won't be nervous with me."

He picked up the boy under the arm-sockets and lifted him onto a bench. The lad seemed to have lost his tension; he looked with a mild curiosity into the face of Kildare.

"You're one of these fellows who have a touch with children, are you?" asked the sneering voice of Gillespie.

"No," answered Kildare, "but sick people never are afraid of me."

He took an antiseptic stick from a nurse and depressed the child's tongue. "Say 'ah'" he directed, and then nodded at Gillespie. "Adenoids *and* tonsils," he remarked.

"Should there be an operation?" asked Gillespie, tapping the chest of the boy and listening.

"Yes. Certainly an operation," said Kildare.

"General anesthesia?"

"Naturally."

"Run along, son," said Gillespie to the child, putting him back on the floor. "So you'd give a general anesthesia, would you? You'd get out the tonsils and the adenoids, all right; and then you'd have a dead child. That chest is full of tuberculosis. The anesthesia would kill him, young Doctor Kildare!"

HE TURNED on his heel and went off, shrugging and chuckling to himself; and Kildare looked for a long moment after him. Then he had to go up to begin his work in the surgical service. Doctor Vincent Herbert, the head of the service, saw him and said: "You like fat men, Kildare?"

Kildare regarded the surgeon with a bit of care. Vincent Herbert himself was broad and rosy enough of face, large of belly and voice, to be a successful obstetrician.

"I like fat men well enough," said Kildare, guardedly.

"All right," laughed Herbert. "We'll give you one to work on right now. There's a fat man with a bad appendix going into Room 9. Take him on, Kildare. Scrub up and just take him on so that I can see how you work."

It was not twenty minutes before Kildare, his feet pinched in sneakers, his hands filmed over with rubber gloves, was masked and sweating in the torrid humidity of Operating Room 9. The malicious bad luck which had followed him every day in the hospital seemed to be with him now. Herbert Vincent was himself on hand as though to enjoy his little joke at the expense of the latest addition to his service. And the joke itself was a middle-aged beer-drinker with a four inch wall of fat layered across his abdomen. Through that white greasy dough Kildare had to slice down before he arrived at the poneurosis of the muscle. A moment later he was at last on the site of the appendix, but instead of sticking out of the end of the cecum as a normal one should, this was a retrocecal appendix withdrawn completely from view. Even Herbert Vincent, as he watched, swore a little.

Out of the dim distance Kildare vaguely heard a voice saying: "Are you up to that job, Kildare? Can you handle that?"

He heard the words but did not hitch them together into a coordinate meaning. The flat voice of Vincent Herbert was informing the students in the gallery of the nature of the trouble. A whispering shuffle, an excited murmur gave a thin answer. And Kildare felt the craning of necks as nurses and assistants around the table peered down at the difficulty, like people on the edge of a cliff, admiring the enormity of an abyss. As a matter of fact, he knew that it was quite deep enough for him to lose his surgical reputation in it, as he had lost one reputation already on the ambulance. But his hands went on.

He was already extending the incision; and now he was at work on what every surgeon hates most to do—cutting through the peritoneum which seals the great cavity of the body from invading germs. He cut it down the lateral side of the cecum along the appendix until he could get at the appendix itself. That work and the re-sealing of the peritoneum was a long job. His feet began to pinch and burn in the wretched little sneakers which were all he could afford to risk in the iodine-drippings and blood-spatterings of the operating room. And the sweat ran sometimes in maddening trickles under his mask. However, the incision was closed with the last stitch, finally, and he was able to look up.

Somebody said: "Good work, Kildare!"

That was another interne; and suddenly he recognized big Vickery, the football player, looking at him with kindly eyes above the white of the mask. Then a hand grabbed him and steered him into the hall, and across the hall into a vacant operating room. It was Vincent Herbert in person, saying, as Kildare pulled off the mask. "You've got the hands. You've got the whole make-up. Kildare, when you get through with your interne year, I want you to think of surgery for your future. What about it?"

It was plain that Herbert was inspired to add a more personal promise of a future if there were an opening for it, but Kildare was looking up at the ceiling with puzzled eyes, asking questions of himself.

"In one word, what do you think of surgery as a profession?"

"I think," answered the honest, blunt voice of Kildare, "that it's like being a master mechanic. A very fine sort of mechanic, of course," he hastened to add. But his words already had told on Vincent Herbert heavily. The chief surgeon grew taller by inches of offended dignity.

"It's every man's privilege," he said, "to pick his way in the world; but it's God's pity that so many are born blind and never get eyes."

Then he took himself away, before Kildare could rally his wits to make some conciliatory remark.

AT LUNCH, Tom Collins sat down unexpectedly beside him.

"Vickery says you're a devil with a knife," said Collins. "Good work, guy. They can't look down at a fellow with a handy scalpel. He has too much point. . . . And now that I've got you all built up high, have you ten bucks to spare till to-morrow?"

"In my room," said Kildare.

"Sure—sure—that's all right," said Collins. "I won't need it till this evening. She's a Russian, Jimmy. Where they have the platinum mines. That's why her color is natural—Whicha-whatcha-hotcha!—I'll be round for that cash this evening."

He drummed lightly on the table.

"I hear that the great Vincent Herbert thought you might work in with him, after your interne year. That right? If it is, it can't be straight that you turned him down! That would be about twenty thousand a year almost from the start. Brother Kildare."

"Surgery is great stuff," explained Kildare, getting at the words with difficulty. "But it doesn't touch what I'm after."

"What *are* you after?" asked Collins. almost concerned.

"I don't know,' said Kildare. "Something that has more to do with people—"

"Good God, doesn't surgery have to do with people?"

"Of course it does," agreed Kildare, "but it doesn't touch their insides—I hardly know how to put it."

"Well, we'll talk it over some time," said Tom Collins, indifferently, as he rose.

"I wanted to tell you about not hearing you the other day—" began Kildare, but Tom Collins was gone, improvising a catch-step on the way.

After lunch, Kildare pocketed the ten dollars out of his other clothes to make sure that he would have it on hand when it was wanted. One of the beauties of the surgical service was that when the daily program of operations had been completed there was little to do; he was about to use that leisure to go to the women's psychopathic ward when an attendant ran him down with word that the great Carew in person wished to see him.

"There's some kind of hell popping all over the place," said the panting attendant, accompanying Kildare to the elevator. "They even had old Gillespie up there. Somebody says it's old Chanler that's with Carew. You know—the guy that owns all the oil that's tucked under the chin of Texas. John D. Rockefeller runs errands for him and Henry Ford washes his windows once a week."

THERE was no waiting to see Carew. The administrator of the hospital came out in person and took Kildare into

a corner of the outer office. A glint of something even brighter than anger was in his eyes.

"Doctor Kildare," he said, "you have had beginner's luck. You have brought the daughter and sole heir of Robert Mann Chanler to our hospital." A warmth in his intonation implied that the hospital was peculiarly the property of Carew and Kildare.

"We are not mercenary," said Carew, "but we cannot help knowing that the hospital has crying needs which can be met not by the public but by the private purse; and therefore we must be sharply aware that a hundred million dollars and his wife are sitting in my office at the present moment, together with the fiance of their daughter. James Hamilton also is a man of large fortune. . . . Kildare, the future of the hospital is, to a certain extent, dependent upon our immediate actions! And you are important, very important, in our picture. They want particularly to see you. They have been at the lodging house where the unfortunate girl made the attempt on herself. They are strangely insistent on seeing you at once. And I cannot help telling you, Doctor Kildare, that on the excellence of the impression you make a great deal may depend. . . . Shall we go in? Are you prepared?"

"I'm ready," said Kildare.

"As for removing you from the ambulance service," said Carew, "of course you understand that that is the fortune of war."

"Certainly," said Kildare.

"You're a good lad," said Carew, with amazing warmth, and led the way into his office.

It was high up in the great building, so that its tall windows framed a smoking prospect of New York skyscrapers and, in the distance, the crowded river, and the bridges bent like delicate fingers to hold Manhattan to the mainland. It seemed that this background was specially arranged for the portrait of the millionaire as he stood up from his chair. His years were fifty or so but he was half young and half old. His body already was beginning to starve and bend with age but his face was still ruddy, firm of texture, and bright-eyed. He had the white, sparse hair of a very old man but his mustache was black, with the healthy sheen of youth. Beside him, young David Hamilton looked handsome enough to model men's clothes —if he ever had to give up his polo string. The men were put out of his mind at once by Robert Chanler's wife. She would not even let them shake hands with him but kept his hand in both of hers and made him sit down beside her. She was a big, ugly woman with an understanding kindness written into every line of her face.

"It's you who found our girl, Doctor Kildare," she said. "They'd drawn the sheet up over her face and given her up, but that didn't stop you."

Carew breathed: "Kildare!"

"Didn't he tell you that, Doctor Carew?" she asked, without taking her eyes from Kildare for an instant. "Perhaps he doesn't talk about things. He merely does them. . . . Am I making you terribly embarrassed and unhappy, Doctor Kildare, when I thank you for keeping our girl for us?"

The tears ran out of her eyes over the profound ugliness of her face but she kept on smiling at him.

"I'm glad that I was there."

"I'm going to ask you one thing," she said. "Is it true that although she was saved, my poor Barbara is almost worse than dead? Is it dementia precox?"

"No," said Kildare.

The others had settled into their chairs but this word got them up again on the jump. Carew said: "Doctor Kildare—my dear lad—really—"

Big Robert Chanler came right over and poured his shadow down on Kildare. A pleasant reek of Havana tobacco breathed from his clothes. His wife kept a tighter hold on Kildare's hand.

"There are lots of older and better doctors than I am, in the hospital," said Kildare.

"I don't give two pennies for the older and wiser doctors," answered the mother. "I want to know what you think. On your honest soul, you don't believe that she's out of her mind?"

"No," said Kildare, and again there was a faint exclamation of protest from Carew.

The tears stopped running from her eyes and a new look came into them. "There's an instinct in me—it's probably a crazy, blind mother's instinct—that makes me feel you're right," she said. "But leaving out all the other things she has done—Doctor Kildare, when I saw her a few moments ago, she screamed and fainted!"

Kildare jumped to his feet.

"She's always loved me and been close to me," said the mother. "But when she saw me just now she seemed to be trying to tear away the restraining sheet, as they call it—"

"Did they have that thing still on her?" asked Kildare softly, through his teeth.

"Is there any natural explanation of her reaction when she saw me?" she asked.

"I'd like to talk to her," said Kildare.

"Impossible," answered Carew. "She is, of course, necessarily under a sedative and must have complete—"

"Let him see her. Please!" cried the mother. "Will you let him see her, Doctor Carew?"

"If Doctor Kildare thinks it wise—" said Carew, slowly, holding the interne with his eye.

"I'd like to—I think it wise," said Kildare in spite of that commanding eye.

"Very well," answered Carew. "I'll telephone to the ward."

CHAPTER X

THE REBEL

THE woman's psychopathic ward, Kildare found, no longer contained Barbara Chanler. She had been moved to a private room. The priest-like figure of Lane Porteus, the great psychiatrist, appeared at the door, as Kildare entered. He had his assistant with him, peering through huge spectacles that permitted him to see only the scientific truths and no others.

"That's Doctor Kildare now," said the nurse.

One carefully hooded lamp gave a dim twilight to the room, for the window had been darkened. A peppery sweetness of roses lived in the air for flowers in every corner were banked like the tributes at a funeral. Kildare dimly perceived these things as famous Lane Porteus approached him and offered a chill, bony hand.

"I understand," said the psychiatrist, "that you are to take over for the moment. I hope you will not undo too much that has been done, Doctor Kildare. In all humility, I hope that you will not undo too much!"

Then he went out.

"How is she?" Kildare asked the nurse.

"Miss Chanler is not very well, Doctor Kildare," said the nurse. It seemed hard for her to make a report to such an underling. "Here is her chart. She will have to have more sedatives; she is in a practically spastic state at present."

He pushed open the door and went slowly around the big white screen which gave a double privacy to the bed. He could hear her breathing, hurried and rasping. Then she swallowed, audibly. The restraining sheet still swathed her, outlining the rigid body as though the cloth were wet.

"You've had a shock," said Kildare, coming up to her. "But it's going to be all right, now."

The girl whispered: "They all know. . . . I'll never see them again. I want to die."

"We'll get this thing away, and then we'll talk," said Kildare.

He lowered the side of the bed, unfastened the sheet that bound her, and set free her hands. Her left hand and wrist were bandaged. After that he pulled up a chair and sat down. It seemed to him that a whole procession of famous spirits were standing behind him, criticizing. In the forefront stood Lane Porteus and the great Gillespie. He said nothing

through a long moment but listened to the breathing as it grew easier.

After a while a hand fumbled. He found it and held it. It was cold and dry. A little more of this tension and she would not need gas or broken glass to finish her. She gripped his fingers hard, with a trembling strength. In a queer absentness of mind he felt the tough tennis callous inside the thumb. There was a constant tremor in her, like something wavering and about to fall.

"All of them—they all know!" she said. "Why don't they tell me about it?"

"Hush—they don't know," said Kildare.

But her whisper answered: "I saw Dave Hamilton white with disgust and trying to smile and be a gentleman. I'll die before I ever see him again. I'll hold my breath till my heart bursts—"

"If they had the least idea about anything," answered Kildare, "why did they send me here to find out what's wrong?"

"Is it true?" she gasped.

"Because the nurses told them that I was here and that you talked with me. They begged me to come here and see what I could discover. How could they tell that I knew everything already?"

"Everything?" asked that small voice of agony.

He felt that every word expended a vital energy. Yet he knew it was good for her to talk.

"Don't you remember?" said Kildare.

'But did I tell everything?"

"Because you knew nothing could matter to me," said Kildare.

SHE turned over on her face and began to sob heavily, but stifling the sound with the pillow as though even the noise of her weeping might betray something to the outer world. But Kildare did not matter, it seemed. He alone was of the inner circle. He put his hand on her back and felt her body go rigid and loose in recurrent spasms. All these were perfect symptoms of dementia precox; Lane Porteus and the rest of the great ones were agreed about her; there was only the unproven instinct of Kildare against the lot. As he thought of that, the fear came oddly back on him.

She found his other hand and kept on weeping against it.

"It's all right," said Kildare. "Nobody else knows. That's what makes everything all right."

The weeping stopped. He put out his handkerchief and fumbled it over her face.

"Blow!" commanded Kildare.

She blew. He fumbled the handkerchief again and drew it back.

"How gentle and how sweet you are!" said the girl.

"Be quiet," said Kildare. "You must rest again."

She was silent for a moment. He could tell how thought came and went in her by the pressure of his hand.

"They can't help knowing," she said then. "That girl will tell them. She's always wanted David, and she's always hated me."

"I can make her be quiet," said Kildare.

"But the man! What if he talks? When I saw him the day after, I knew that he was simply a beast!"

"I'm attending to him, also," said Kildare.

"How could I have done it!" she moaned.

Her voice went up the scale into a whispering scream. Kildare slipped an arm under her and held her close to him with both hands. She was shuddering violently from head to foot.

"I've got to die. I *want* to die!"

"You're wrong," said Kildare. "We can face it out, together. That's what friendship amounts to: two people who stand back to back and keep trouble away."

"Will you say that again?" she asked.

He said it again, and as he spoke her rigid body grew flaccid once more. He laid her back in the bed.

"Don't leave me!" she pleaded.

"I'll be right here," said Kildare.

"Don't leave me—till I'm asleep. Make me sleep so deep that I won't dream."

"You're going to sleep that way now."

He put his hand on her head. She held the other with a grasp that momentarily relaxed, and gripped hard again, and then fell away completely. After that he stood up but remained leaning over the bed for a time. Once she cried out in a quick, muffled voice of pain. He spoke, and instantly she was asleep again. It seemed to Kildare, as he made his way quietly from the ward, that the funereal sense had gone out of the fragrance of the roses and that life had come back into the air of the room.

At the door, which had remained slightly ajar, he found the nurse with two attendants standing close, their heads bowed as they still listened.

He said: "I've taken off the restraining sheet. I hope it won't be put back on her."

The resident psychiatrist standing by with arms folded, sullenly enduring his vigil, now lifted his head and stared at the young interne.

"I wonder if you'll permit another hypodermic presently, doctor?" he asked with infinite irony.

"She's sleeping soundly," answered Kildare. "Do you think it well to waken her for a hypodermic?"

"And if she grows violent, we're not to put a restraining sheet on her?" demanded the ironical resident.

"You'll do exactly what seems best, of course," said Kildare. "But if she's not disturbed, she won't become violent. And if she seems to be excited about anything, I wonder if I may be called?"

The resident stared at him with owlish, unfriendly eyes. In place of answering the last remark he said: "Doctor Carew and the Chanlers are waiting your convenience in his office, Doctor Kildare whenever you see fit to drop in on them."

KILDARE went to Carew's office. Hamilton and the two Chanlers rose slowly, anxiously from their chairs.

"I ventured on taking off the restraining sheet," said Kildare. "Also, I suggested that she did not need another hypodermic."

"Doctor Kildare," observed Carew, "is not a psychiatrist. He does not realize the essential importance of sleep, no matter at what cost."

"She is sleeping perfectly now," answered Kildare.

The ugly face of the mother grew beautiful as she smiled. "What did you do, doctor?" she asked.

"I talked to her," said Kildare.

"What did she say?" asked David Hamilton, speaking almost for the first time, the words breaking with unexpected force out of the high tension in which he was held.

Kildare looked at him and then at the map of New York which extended in diminishing relief outside the window.

"I'm afraid that I can't repeat what she said," he told them.

"Not repeat it? But why not?" asked Carew.

"It was spoken in confidence," said Kildare.

"But my dear young Kildare, you must know that it is not necessary to preserve the confidences of a psychopathic patient."

"I'm unable to agree that she's psychopathic," said Kildare.

"The opinions of men like Porteus and Gillespie mean nothing to you?" asked Carew.

"They mean a great deal," said Kildare, growing hot in the face.

Carew picked up his telephone and asked that Gillespie be invited to his office in urgent haste. Then he sat down again in his official chair and folded his arms. He tried to smile but he was deeply shaken with anger.

Robert Chanler said: "Of course I'm completely a layman, but it would seem to me that if Doctor Kildare has won Barbara's confidence so that she'll talk with him, he is almost our only satisfactory means of getting in touch with what is passing in her mind."

"That's an obvious truth," said Carew. "He's our only bridge to her, and yet refuses to be crossed. However, we'll presently have the opinion of Doctor Gillespie. In some quarters of the medical world," added Carew, dryly, "the word of Gillespie has some trifling weight."

"I've heard him referred to as the outstanding medical genius of the entire world!" said David Hamilton.

After those words of unnecessary introduction Gillespie came striding into the office in great haste.

"I can't have these interruptions, Carew," he said in his rough way. "You've taken me away from one of the most beautiful hearts I've ever listened to. A real fibrillator with a really worth-while murmur; a regular deathsong. I don't care if the Chanlers *are* here; I don't care if the hospital needs *two* wings, and fifty other improvements; I can't be taken from my work like this—"

The self control of Carew broke down completely under this frontal bombardment. He turned crimson and groaned: "Good God, Gillespie!"

"Ah, well, I'm sorry," said Gillespie. "I shouldn't have said that. But," he added, turning to Chanler, "you know the world puts a high value on you. It rates you as a real deep-water millionaire and it wants part of your cargo. This hospital wants a share, for instance."

His eyes were angrily bright as he looked at them.

"Mr. Chanler," said Carew, with desperate eyes, "I'm frightfully sorry that this mercenary motive should be attached to an institution devoted to the charitable service of—"

"Ah, shut up, Carew, will you?" asked Gillespie. "Chanler's not a thin-skinned little boy. He knows what we want out of him, and by being frank about it you'll get more than if you're mealy-mouthed. Isn't that true, Chanler?"

"I'm glad you put it this way, Gillespie," said Chanler. "I know the General Hospital has always worked like a Christian martyr for the good of the world and I also know that it has needs. You give me a chance to say that if you can put Bobby back on her feet, I'll put my resources at your disposal. Don't be embarrassed, Doctor Carew. We know your calibre and we know the rating of this hospital. That's why Barbara is still inside its walls. Suppose we get back to her case?"

"Gladly," said Carew, still sweating with the heat of his emotion. "I've asked you to come here to say again, Gillespie, what you've said before: Do you or do you not consider Barbara Chanler a psychopathic case?"

"Who else has any other opinion?" Gillespie growled.

"Young Doctor Kildare," said Carew, pointing.

"He still thinks that there is nothing but a case of fright and hysteria?" demanded Gillespie.

"He sees nothing else," said Carew. "So far he has laid the only wire that contacts her but he protects her by refusing to give his information to older minds."

"What makes you think you're right and the rest of us wrong?" asked Gillespie.

"I have a feeling—" began Kildare, and stuck there because in fact he had little else with which to expand his idea in medical terms.

"He says that he has a feeling!" exclaimed Carew.

"Ah ha?" cried Gillespie, and putting his chin on his fist he stared at Kildare with bright eyes.

"Rather absurd, eh?" remarked Carew.

"No doubt," answered Gillespie shortly, still absorbed by what he saw or tried to see in Kildare.

"This is all very painful for you, Mrs. Chanler," said Carew, "but the fact is that your daughter has suffered a slight malady of the mind. We must admit that frankly and study it frankly before we can hope to perform a cure."

"Only two things can happen here, young man," said Gillespie. "Either you must give way or the hospital must change its mind."

KILDARE wiped his wet forehead. He could not speak. Chanler's wife came close to Kildare and let all her simple goodness shine directly out upon him.

"I know you're trying to shelter her, but you must talk," she said. "We owe Barbara's life to you, and I think you'll let us owe you even more than her life."

"Wait a moment," broke in Gillespie. "He doesn't know all the facts of the case. He hasn't had a chance to learn from the Chanlers the neuropsychiatric details of the picture. He doesn't know that Barbara as a child was bright, good natured except for moods, quiet, thoughtful but excitable, over-affectionate, shy, sensitive, easily frightened, a poor sleeper. Obvious introvert, Kildare, eh?"

"I suppose so, sir," said Kildare.

"Damn the supposing. Do a little knowing and a lot less supposing. Now, three mornings ago, the Chanlers tell us, she went off to a party and came home late. Three in the morning. Policeman found her wandering in the neighborhood at that hour. Absolutely wandering, eh?"

Chanler said: "The officer asked her where she was going and she answered: 'Who am I? Where do I live?' "

Chanler's wife looked suddenly down at the floor; and young David Hamilton turned quickly away.

Gillespie went on: "She comes into the house. Her father and mother, pretty badly alarmed by her late hours—she was always home early—speak to her and she seems hardly to recognize them. The next day she was suspicious, more active, sleepless, depressed. She wanted to see nobody. Never at ease or at rest. Wanted to be alone. Thought the servants were spying on her and laughing behind her back. I ask you, Kildare, is that the sense of persecution? Is that the perfect paranoid set-up?"

"It sounds so, sir," said Kildare.

"It *is* so, sir," said Gillespie. "And the sooner we can find what is that upset her between twelve-thirty and three on Tuesday morning, the faster we'll be able to effect a cure. Kildare, have you any idea what it's all about and what torments her?"

"Not a perfectly clear idea," said Kildare.

"Damn perfect clarity," exploded Gillespie. "Have you any inkling at all?"

"Yes, sir," said Kildare.

"Good fellow! Out with it, then."

"I'm sorry, sir. I gave her my word and honor that I would repeat nothing."

"Your word and honor—to a case of dementia precox? Are you actually going to let *that* hold you?" shouted Gillespie. "Why it's the damnedest thing I ever heard of. Don't you know you can be thrown out of the hospital for this sort of stupidity?"

Kildare nodded dumbly.

"Do you know that once out of the hospital your career is smashed as completely as a broken tumbler?"

"I know that, sir," said Kildare.

"Then don't let yourself be damned. Speak out, man; speak out! You can see how the Chanlers feel. They know that precox is often curable; but only if we can get the fullest picture of the case. Isn't that true?"

"Utterly true!" exclaimed the mother. "Do you see, Doctor Kildare? We all are entreating you!"

"Are you with the rest of them?" asked Kildare, suddenly, looking across the room at young Hamilton.

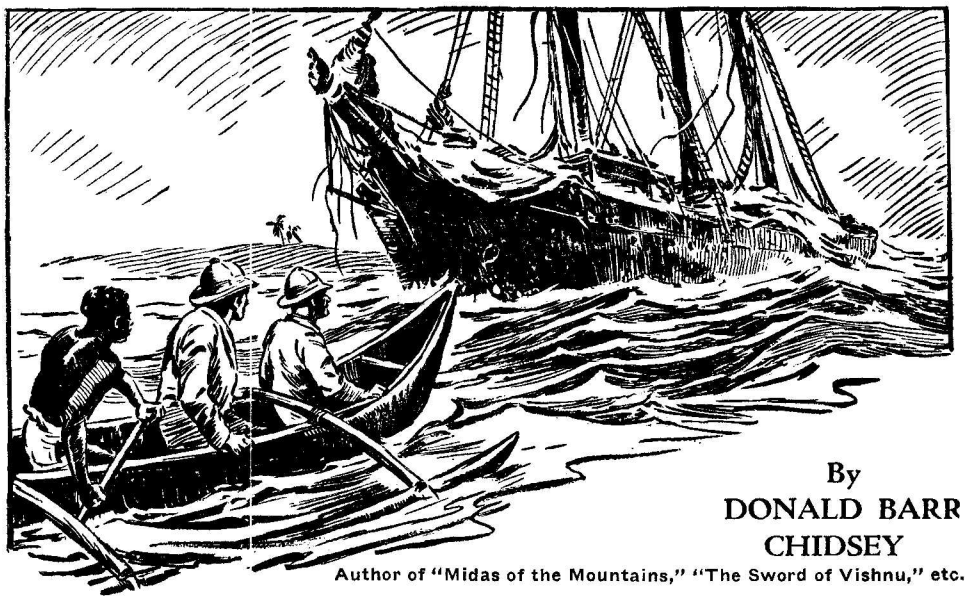
"Certainly I am," said Hamilton.

"You see," summed Carew, "that good sense, decency, and every motive compels you to let us have what you know. Will you start now, Doctor Kildare?"

"I've thought it over carefully," said Kildare. "And there's no use pressing me a step farther. I don't find delusions in her. I merely find fear. She has my promise. I can't repeat a single word she spoke to me. I'm sorry."

"You only *think* you're sorry," said Carew, after a moment. "I've an idea that before you're much older, Kildare, you're going to know what sorrow really is!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



By
DONALD BARR
CHIDSEY
Author of "Midas of the Mountains," "The Sword of Vishnu," etc.

Ghost of the Teave

Hugged to the reef she lay, seams agape —with every surge of the Pacific threatening to blot out her secret forever

THE resident-agent took off his topee, wiped his face, smiled apologetically at Harry Jackman. "It's a shame we couldn't supply better transportation since you're so kind as to do this for us, Doctor, but you can see how it is—the *Marama* only comes once every two months, and we need every launch we have for lighterage."

"It's quite all right," Jackman said. "I like this better than any launch anyway. South Sea atmosphere."

This was an outrigger canoe paddled by a one-eyed native. It was narrow and not dry. But as the R.A. had said, boat day at the half-forgotten island of Tepara was a big day. The 6,000-ton freighter *Marama* was much too large a vessel to come alongside of Tepara's tiny wharf, and trade goods had to be landed; bananas and cocoa and copra had to be lightered out and hoisted aboard.

Every man on the island was busy that day, and most of the women too. Only the fact that he was asking a favor of this young American skin specialist, Dr. Harry Jackman, who was making a survey of the South Seas for a big American foundation, had caused the resident-agent to go along to the wreck himself.

"If it comes to that," he said eagerly, "you'll get plenty of atmosphere aboard the wreck itself. The *Teave* was quite a famous vessel in these parts, and there's a story connected with her."

Jackman said, "Really?" and tried to look interested.

In fact he was watching the smash of westering sunlight upon the lagoon, and the pert launches and long vigorously-paddled canoes plying between ship and shore. He was watching the sea and sky beyond the reef, where black clouds were massing; there were whitecaps out there.

The resident-agent put his topee back on his small round shiny head. He was a nervous little man, a New Zealander, married to a Cook Island woman.

"And of course, if this chap really has leprosy, we want to know about it."

"Oh, of course."

"We don't want any lepers around here. As I told you, our regular physician is laid up just now, and it's mighty kind of you to consent to come out. If the man does have leprosy we'll ship him off to Auckland or Sydney."

"Naturally," said Jackman. Then, remembering his manners, he asked, "What was the story you mentioned?"

THE *Teave,* the R.A. told him—and he told it like one who had told it many times before—had piled up on the reef one stormy night three years ago, and had been left as a complete wreck after the underwriters had stripped her of everything valuable. There was no sense trying to float her, the underwriters had decided. Nevertheless there was something very strange about that wreck. There had been an investigation, which came to very little.

"You see, the skipper, an Englishman named Cambridge, was white; and the first and second mates were white, and also the supercargo. The assistant supercargo and the third mate were half castes, and the crew were all natives. Well, the only person lost was the skipper."

"Decided to go down with his ship?"

"Not him! I knew old Captain Cambridge well, and he had none of that romantic nonsense about him. Besides, the ship didn't *go* down! The assumption was that Cambridge had somehow been jolted overboard when she struck. But it was strange that they never found the body."

"Is it suggested that he was murdered?"

"That's exactly what was suggested. You see, after the official inquiry, which was never very satisfactory to anybody, the assistant supercargo and some of the crew got to talking.

"They said that the first and second mates and also the supercargo had been quarreling violently with Captain Cambridge for some days. They didn't know what the quarrel was about, but they knew there was a lot of unpleasantness on both sides.

"And this talk, together with the fact that the skipper's body was never found, prompted another investigation. The police took it up then.

"They didn't get far. In fact they didn't get anywhere at all. They searched the wreck, as soon as the weather would permit, but they didn't find anything suggesting murder.

"They questioned everybody. The first and second mates and the supercargo, a little runt named McNeile, flatly denied that they had been quarreling with Captain Cambridge. And of course it was their word against the word of natives of the crew. They all said they hadn't seen Captain Cambridge go overboard either, which seemed strange, though of course there was lots of excitement on board at that time.

"What the police did disclose was the fact that all three of these suspects, the supercargo and the two mates, had been close friends in Sydney, where they came from, and incidentally that they were wanted by the Sydney police on charges of assault and robbery. This was learned through their fingerprints. They were using different names at the time.

"So all three were shipped off to Sydney, where I understand they were tried and found guilty and sentenced to long terms in jail. But nobody ever found out what had happened to Captain Cambridge."

Jackman said, "And since then the wreck has been deserted?"

"Yes. Except for this native I told you about. He moved out there about a year ago, after his wife died. Lived as a sort of hermit. A little cracked, you understand. A very old man. Used to fish from the wreck itself and trade his catch for fruit and tobacco and so-forth when other natives would paddle out to the wreck.

"Now and then some party of tourists

from the *Marama* would go out there to look the wreck over—we don't have many tourist attractions here, as you've seen for yourself, Doctor—and then I suppose Mana, that's this native's name, would pick up an odd bob or two. That was all. He never left the wreck. I don't know how the rumor got around that he was a leper. I heard it only a few days ago. There may not be anything in it, of course."

"Well, we'll soon find out," said Jackman. "Here we are now. It might be a good idea if we made this short, eh? That squall over there looks as if it might hit the island pretty soon."

THE *Teave* was a sad sight, as all old ships must be. Silhouetted against the flaming sunset, and against the clouds massing black for the coming squall, she was a dreary, gaunt, shattered thing. She was ignored. Further along the lagoon—they could hear the whirr of hoisting engines—her successor, the sleek new *Marama,* held all the attention of the islanders.

The *Teave* was forgotten.

The tide was low, and the reef was broad at this point, and white water churned and fumed all around her, breaking into twisting angry whirlpools, splitting into long streamers, hissing, foaming, as though furious in the attempt to push the *Teave* off. But she held firm.

There was a little strength left in her hulk yet. High if not entirely dry, canted at an angle of perhaps fifteen degrees to port, she was a dingy broken hulk of rust and memories; yet somehow she held to her place.

Yes, rust and memories—and not much else. She had taken her grip, and she held it; but she sagged; she was stiff with age, and salvagers, official and otherwise, had stripped her of every good and graceful thing she'd ever contained.

No paint had she known in these three long years, and sea air is notoriously cruel to unpainted steel. The glass had been removed from her portholes. Her mainmast and mizzen, which were of wood, remained standing; but they were rotten and split, and they were no longer proudly straight.

Her shrouds, indeed all her standing rigging, had long since rotted away or been removed. Somebody had chopped off her wooden bowsprit, a seemingly needless indignity. Even the wheel was gone; and there was no compass, not even the rusted remains of a lamp, in her binnacle.

The native lashed his canoe and scrambled up on the slanting deck after them. His one eye was big indeed now, and he stayed close to them.

"Scared," the R.A. whispered. "Since Mana's been living out here none of the others will come aboard. They say he's crazy, and they're afraid of him. They say he talks to his wife's ghost out here. This boy's only following us now because he thinks he's safe if white men are with him—and he'll have a grand time in the village tonight telling everybody how brave he was!"

Jackman smiled. "Well, let's find this Mana," he suggested, still thinking of that approaching squall.

"It's odd he isn't out on deck to greet us," the R.A. said. "Maybe he's scared too. Maybe he's heard we're coming to examine him for leprosy, and he's hiding. Or maybe his wife's ghost won't let him come out."

Jackman had started aft.

Foothold on the slanting deck was not easily maintained. The plates were crusty with rust, and everything they touched to support themselves left rust on their hands.

Jackman first, the R.A. second, the boatman following in the rear, they made their slow way to the aft superstructure. It contained what once had probably been a chart-room and now was no more than a dim square place littered with old wood shavings, bent fish hooks, cigarette butts—and the body of an aged native.

"Oh," said the R.A.; and stopped.

Jackman said nothing at first. He kneeled by the side of the native, and his fingers went over the native's head.

THE boatman turned and ran. He'd seen enough. They heard him scrambling wildly back across the deck to the dubious steel ladder where he had painted his canoe.

"Is—is he hurt?"

"He's dead."

"Oh . . . Heart failure, I suppose? Or can't you tell, in this light? He was a pretty old man."

"No, not heart failure. He's been hit on the back of the head and his skull's cracked. He couldn't have fallen and got a wound like that, or he wouldn't be lying as he is, on his face. Somebody hit him."

"Oh . . . See here: We'd better get ashore and report this right away."

"That's an excellent idea," Jackman said heartily.

Nevertheless Jackman lingered a few moments to examine the body more thoroughly. And when at last he went out on deck it was to find the resident-agent, white with fear and rage, waving his arms and shouting curses at the one-eyed native, who was paddling away from the wreck as hard as ever he could.

"The fool's lost his head entirely! Absolutely lost his head! He won't come back!"

"That's too bad," Jackman said. "Because I really think this ought to be reported promptly. It's murder all right. What's more, it happened only a little while ago—within the past half hour."

"Good heavens! You mean to say—"

"I don't see any boat around, but I did think I heard somebody move down below just after you'd left that chart-room."

"Rats! It must have been rats!"

"Would there be rats on a deserted wreck? What would they eat?"

"But you mean to say you think—you think we—"

The agent gulped.

"I think we're sharing this wreck with the murderer. And personally I'd just as soon go away and let him have it all to himself!"

THE squall hit them then, and vindictively, as though it had waited years for just this opportunity. Four wavering blue-purple columns of rain decided to join forces just outside the reef, and hung between black clouds and black-and-white sea like a monstrous water spout.

The men on the wreck could scarcely hear it—a thunderous drummming sound—before it was upon them. Rain slammed everything, springing back in billions of smaller drops, filling the air with spray. The Pacific was lashed in capped fury. The sun was blotted from sight and it became suddenly very dark.

They ran for the charthouse. Reluctant as they were to go back into that dim place where dust jumped on the floor and the corpse of Mana lay limp, they had no other choice. It would have been impossible to stay outside. There was nothing reliable to cling to, and the deck canted dangerously, so that they would have been blown off, or more probably beaten off by the sheer force of the rain.

Though he was a physician and indisputably an authority, the representive of one of the greatest medical research funds in the world, Harry Jackman was no bearded dodderer. He was in his thirties, weighed close to two hundred, and his muscles were flat and hard.

He was a crack golfer, an excellent tennis player, and still handy with the six-ounce gloves. Moreover he had been through a lot in the past few years. In the Orient and again in the West Indies—though he had never before visited the South Seas—he had known what it was to toil twenty out of twenty-four hours through plague and panic when people all around him were dying faster than they could be buried.

So it was not likely that he would lose his head now. He only shrugged a little and lighted a cigarette.

In the flare of the match he caught a glimpse of the R.A.'s white strained face. The R.A., instead of being tanned, as tropical residents are supposed to be, was extraordinarily pale. Two bouts of black-

water fever, coupled with the fact that he never ventured out-of-doors without his huge sun helmet, had done this for him. In addition, now, he was badly rattled. He had not forgotten what Jackman said about the murderer being below.

And even Jackman felt his chest tighten a bit when the shock came. They heard nothing—nothing, that is, except the pound of the rain which would smother every other possible noise anyway—but they distinctly felt the deck shiver beneath their feet. Its position shifted, too. It had tipped a bit to port.

They stared at one another wildly. The resident-agent cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted, "Did you feel that?"

Jackman nodded gravely. He shouted back, "Must be that the wreck's breaking away from the reef. Or else it was an earthquake tremor. Do you have those down here?"

"Sometimes. Not bad ones."

However, they both knew that a bad one would not be needed. Even a slight tremor might loosen this rusty hulk from her grip on the reef and sink her swiftly, leaving the two of them to swim away from the suction. They were not more than half a mile from shore—but that half mile was a madness of whitecaps galloping amid the sharp upjutting chunks of coral with which this part of the lagoon was scattered.

If the wreck slid off—

It was better not to think of that.

The squall passed as quickly as it had come. The R.A., eager to be out of the charthouse, hurried to the wet deck, looking for a boat. Harry Jackman followed him, but not until Jackman had first taken a look down the companionway which led from this room. It was a black square hole, below which were steps so sharp that they virtually constituted a ladder. He could not even see the bottom, for it was dark as pitch. But he thought he heard a noise down there. Indeed, he was sure of it.

It was an odd scraping spluttering noise, and started and stopped jerkily. It was not rats: even though Jackman's ears still hummed with the drumming of rain that was gone, he was sure of this.

He went out on deck.

IT WAS very dark now. The squall had erased the last vestiges of day, and night-time came rushing. A sickle moon was trying to make something of the sky just over the hills of Tepara, but it would be a long time fighting its way free of the clouds there.

The canoes and lighterage launches, which had scattered for cover at the outbreak of the squall, were emerging again. They carried kerosene lamps or fishing flares as they hastened back and forth between land and ship. The loading of the *Marama* must go on.

The one-eyed native who couldn't take it was probably lying under a couple of mats back in his hut at this moment, too frightened to move; and in all the work and fuss there was nobody to remark that the resident-agent, ordinarily the most important personage on Tepara, and Dr. Harry Jackman, surely the most distinguished of the *Marama's* passengers, were not in sight.

If anybody had noticed it, he would have assumed quite naturally that they were at the R.A.'s house having a spot.

"I don't like this," the R.A. said shakily.

"I don't either."

"I've got a box of matches, but they go out as fast as I can light 'em. They'd never be seen at this distance anyway."

"We might," Jackman suggested with no enthusiasm, "snoop around down below, lighting matches—they'd stay lit longer down there—in the hope of finding some sort of rubbish we could manufacture a flare out of."

"We might," admitted the R.A., "but the way I feel, I think I'd rather take my chances up here—for a while, anyway."

"I think I would too," said Jackman.

A small hatch almost at his feet, pushed from below, opened suddenly. A man appeared. He was about half out, above

deck from the waist up, when he saw them. He stopped, his mouth falling open.

He was at least as large as Jackman, and wore blue trousers, a black jersey, a black peaked cap. He seemed a sailor. His forearms were blue with tattooing, and he needed a shave.

He was at least as dumbfounded at seeing them as they were at seeing him.

"Hello," Jackman said quietly.

He had been through more than his share of adventure, and he had often been obliged to make quick decisions upon which his own life and the lives of many others would depend. He had never had anybody draw a pistol on him—his experiences, though varied, had not included that particular item—yet somehow here on the deck of the *Teave* he knew instantly what was about to happen.

He saw the man's right hand move.

There wasn't time to stoop, and there was nothing to jump behind. He kicked.

He kicked very hard, and his foot caught the emerging pistol, knocking it out of the mans' hand, and sent it spinning across the rusty wet deck into the scuppers.

But the sailor, it seemed, could think as fast as Jackman. He cursed in pain, but almost before the pistol struck the deck he was out of the hatchway and scrabbling after it.

Jackman grabbed him from behind. Wriggling, tugging, they fell within a few feet of the pistol, neither willing to let the other reach it.

It was a heavy revolver, a Webley .455.

The resident-agent was forgotten. Once Jackman got his right hand within scant inches of the Webley, but the sailor kicked him smartly and he doubled in pain. He rose to one knee. The sailor, now, was reaching for the gun. Jackman punched him in the ear, toppling him off balance.

They rose as though by unspoken agreement, giving up all immediate thought of the pistol. They were deadly serious about this fight, hating one another with silent ferocity. They were businesslike about it too. Except for their heavy breathing they made no sound. They uttered no threats or taunts, took no tricky positions.

THE sailor crouched low, his long arms weaving. He came in with a careful shuffling walk, his feet spread wide. Jackman, erect, awaited him.

The sailor feinted with his right, hooked a hard left to Jackman's head. Jackman half rolled it off, but it stung all the same: it made him dizzy. He stepped back swiftly as the sailor rushed.

Here was no rough-and-tumble barroom battler. This man knew how to use his fists!

He came in again, the same way, crouching, his arms weaving. Again he feinted with his right—or seemed to. In fact—the right drove straight in. But Jackman was ready for it. Jackman sidestepped, slipped in closer still, and smashed two hard punches into the sailor's abdomen.

It looked like a hard jaw that the sailor had—an iron jaw—but to Jackman the body seemed a bit soft.

The sailor grunted in pain, retreating a step. But he lashed out, a trifle wildly this time, right and left for Jackman's face.

One blow caught the side of Jackman's cheek, and hurt. But Jackman had been braced for it. He slipped in again, his fists low. His heels dropped firmly to the deck, and he right-lefted once more, mercilessly, into the sailor's body.

It was too much for the man. One had been a perfect solar plexus blow brought up accurately under the ribs. The sailor's arms dropped. He teetered on his heels. His eyes went glassy.

Jackman didn't wait to see whether he would fall. Instead Jackman swung deliberately, cruelly, with a long cruel right—to the jaw this time.

The sailor went down with a crash. He didn't stir.

And he *wouldn't* stir, Jackman estimated grimly, for a little while yet. He had been wide open for that swing, which Jackman had brought up from somewhere behind the knee. Jackman's own right hand, if

nothing else, told him about the knockout. It hurt so, this hand, that he could scarcely pick up the pistol with it.

He cocked the pistol, looked around. The resident-agent was not in sight.

For a moment Jackman feared that the little man had somehow in the struggle—though Jackman didn't remember this—been knocked over the side. Or that in a frenzy of fright he had jumped over.

But there was no sign of him in the water. Yet he was not anywhere on deck, and he certainly would not have taken refuge in the charthouse where the body of Mana lay. The only other place was the open hatch. Jackman went to it and looked down.

There was not much he could see, but he did distinguish a blur of white at the foot of the ladder.

What was more, he could hear the noise again. The same noise he had heard at the head of the companionway in the charthouse, though it was somewhat louder here, a sort of spluttering rasping sound.

One hand gripping the Webley, he descended very carefully.

The white blur was the R.A.'s topee. Had the man fallen down here?

The rasping sound again, jerkily; then it stopped. It came from somewhere on Jackman's left. He could see nothing there. On his right, close, as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, he could see a second and larger blur of white. He moved toward it slowly, stooping.

"Is that you, Mr.—uh—"

It came to him that absurdly enough he did not even remember this little man's name. He had visited so many islands recently and met so very many resident-agents, resident-commissioners, district-officers, governors. . . .

He reached over and touched the man. There was a faint groan. "Are you hurt? Here, let me—"

Yes, it was the R.A. Jackman's hands told him that. Jackman's hands also told him, though he could not here be sure of the extent of the injury, that the right leg had been broken just below the knee. In a man of the R.A.'s age—the little fellow must have been close to sixty—this was no slight matter.

He seemed semi-conscious or perhaps even unconscious. From shock and pain, no doubt. He moaned a little sometimes in a very low voice, but he did not answer Jackman's whispered questions.

Then the ship quivered again.

THERE was something ridiculous and yet terrifying about the way this long-dead hulk showed occasional signs of life; and Jackman for the first time began to feel the back of his neck grow cold.

It quivered, it lurched a little to port, and it seemed to sink a trifle. An earthquake tremor? Jackman didn't think so this time. The movement seemed entirely the *Teave's* own with no connection with the outside world. And it was more difficult to explain now than before because there was no longer a squall, no high wind to try to push the wreck off the reef.

This made the situation worse than ever. If the wreck was going to behave like this, what would happen to the poor suffering R.A.? A little movement—and he might be a cripple for life. Jackman's professional instinct was aroused. Damn it! What was the matter with this derelict anyway? Why couldn't she stand still?

He heard the sound again, a little higher in note this time.

The rasping stopped, and there was a steely grind.

Then he heard water pouring into the hulk, somewhere near where he stood.

He was not afraid for himself. He would not be trapped. He could get up on deck in considerably less than half a minute if necessary, and since the squall had subsided he could, if he wished to, no doubt swim to the beach without achieving anything worse than a wetting and perhaps a few nasty coral cuts on the knees or elbows. But the R.A. was another matter. He ought to be moved very gently by at least two men. And here was the battered *Teave* acting as though she thought her-

self a bucky young schooner in a high sea!

Besides, the sound of the water was not great, though it echoed eerily in that dark eerie place. Not very much was entering.

Frowning impatiently, the Webley still gripped in his fist, he moved away from the figure on the floor. He heard water *slish* against his feet, and leaned over, touching it with his left hand. There was perhaps an inch and a half of it, but it was flowing slowly in a sort of channel made by the buckling of the plates. It would stay in that depression, or find similar depressions. The R.A. was lying on a higher place, and unless the water came in much faster than it was coming now he would be safe for another ten or fifteen minutes.

The ship lurched again, the water splashed a little around his hand. Something floated against that hand, something narrow and white and without thinking he picked it up. Straightening, he held the thing to what light came down through the hatchway.

It was then that he realized for the first time what he had stumbled into.

This was a bone. Another man might have supposed it to be the bone of a pig, say, which the late Mana had once eaten in this wreck-home of his, carelessly letting the skeleton lie there afterward.

But Dr. Harry Jackman's practiced eye knew better. He knew his anatomy. This was no bone of a pig, or a goat or any similar animal. This was the right ulnar bone of a human being.

THE rasping sound came again, more of a coughing and spitting now, louder than before, firmer, more confident. On Jackman's left. He moved in that direction, his left arm outstretched.

He was simply following his ears. He could not see anything, at first. He moved very slowly toward the sound, taking tiny steps, feeling with his feet as well as with his hand. The feet scraped over steel rust or slid silkily through water. The hand felt rusted sheets of steel, rusted rivets and bolts. It turned a turning.

He could see light now. It was a little distance ahead, perhaps eighteen or twenty feet, and it jumped an erratic electric blue against the wall. It jumped and fell, jumped and fell, and as it jumped the spluttering sound increased.

He turned another corner and came upon the source of the light.

Two men were bent over the lower end of one of the *Teave's* plates. They both wore goggles and one carried the smallest oxy-acetylene torch Jackman had ever seen. There was a tiny tank of it between them.

Absorbed in their work they did not see nor hear him, though he shared with them a cabin not more than twelve by nine feet.

They had cut the lower end of this plate away and sea water sometimes came through the opening. The water did not flow steadily but in half-hearted spurts as though from the force of wavelets. The violated plate was not an outside one. It closed off a bulkhead of some sort; but presumably the outside plate, a foot or two distant, had sprung some leaks, and the bulkhead was partly filled with water.

Eight or nine human bones, including part of a skull and a complete left thigh-bone, lay on the floor just behind the men. With these were some tarnished brass buttons and the pulpy battered visor of a sailor's cap.

The mystery of what had happened to Captain Cambridge of the *Teave* was at last explained.

Explained at the same time was the mystery of the *Teave's* heaving. As the plates were loosened the support against some spike of coral outside doubtless slipped a little, dropping the wreck more firmly down into the grip of the reef. Instead of going off she was getting further on!

The man on the right clicked off the oxy-acetylene torch and put it down. At the same moment the other man snapped on a flashlight.

"Just keep that on," Harry Jackman said. "Because if you put it out again I'm going to start shooting."

THEY did not understand him at first, didn't realize that he was an outsider, for the last thing they expected was interference. But they were puzzled by his tone. The man with the flashlight moved its beam upon Jackman, saying, "Is that you, Secker? I say, what's the—"

He broke off, gasping. The other man, too, gasped. He pushed the goggles above his eyes, blinking in amazement.

This second man had a revolver—Jackman could see the butt in his right hip pocket—but he made no move to reach for it at first; he was too astonished.

"Your friend Secker's up on deck," Jackman said. "And that's where you're going. You're going carefully too! Understand?"

The one with the light was a little rat of a man, waxy pale, with blue-veined trembling hands. Because of the goggles Jackman could not see his eyes; but Jackman could guess that they were small and shifty and bright with fear.

The other man, the one with the revolver, was certainly more dangerous. He was large, as large as Secker, though older, fatter. He had a hard bloodless mouth, a large jaw. He was flabbergasted now, and his eyes showed that he would respect Jackman and the gun; but he was not scared; he was only sore, and the blood mounting to his face and banging slowly and heavily in his temples showed that he was getting more sore every moment as he realized that he was trapped.

"Stand up," Jackman commanded. "Both of you. And keep that light steady."

They stood, the big man promptly, angrily, his hands held with palms outspread at the level of his shoulders; while the little man got up uncertainly, lurching a bit so that the light wobbled.

"I said *keep it steady!* And keep your hands up. Now turn around."

He never heard a step behind him, or any other sound. The first he knew about it was when the big man's eyes got suddenly less hard and a glint of glee came into them.

It that man had kept his goggles in place, so that Jackman had not been able to see his eyes, as the little fellow had done, Jackman would not have lived another twenty seconds. As it was he had some warning.

He ducked, moving the Webley aside. Two arms went around him from behind, and a great hand scrabbled for the Webley, but because of his movement there was no firm grip.

Secker had a jaw even harder than it looked. He had recovered consciousness. And he was no man to run away.

The big fellow reached for his pistol.

The little fellow, in his excitement, snapped out the light.

"Put that thing on again! Secker—*duck!*"

But it was Jackman who ducked. He swung swiftly on his heel, shoving out with his right elbow and right shoulder. Secker, who didn't have a good enough grip to reach the Webley, nevertheless had too good a grip to release it in time. He was spun toward the center of the cabin.

The light went on again. Jackman, on one knee, fired twice. The big man fired twice.

The noise in that narrow steel place was deafening. Slugs of lead ricochetted madly, slapping the walls, bringing down great showers of rust.

Jackman fired again, and fell flat. The light went on. The big man fired three times in rapid succession, and the bullets slapped and cracked angrily against the wall just above Jackman's head.

Jackman fired at the flashes.

Then there was silence.

THE silence seemed to last a long time. Jackman did not move. He had not examined the Webley's chambers and did not know whether he had one or two shots left—or none at all. He had cocked

the thing with his thumb, and he lay flat, holding it in front of him. The thumping of his heart mingled with the echoes of the shots, and the echoes, like the bullets a moment earlier, seemed to skitter wildly from place to place, glancing off walls, trying to find concealment.

At last there came a whisper. It could only have been from the little rat of a man, the one with the flashlight.

"Don'—don't shoot again, please!"

Jackman put his head far over to the right, and said in a low fast voice, "Put that light on. Aim it at the ceiling." Then he jerked his head back.

Silence. After a moment the light went on. Its beam struck the ceiling, but reflections of this showed what had happened below.

The big man was indisputably dead. A bullet had smashed the bridge of his nose and gone right on into his head. He was seated, his back against the far wall, his mouth open, staring in astonishment at nothing whatever. He must have been killed instantly. The revolver had fallen from his right hand and lay near him on the floor.

Secker lay in the middle of the room, on his left side. There was blood coming from two places in his chest, and undoubtedly he had been shot by his own friend when Jackman whirled him around. He was breathing wheezily, and his eyes were shut.

The rat stood whimpering, afraid to move the flashlight, afraid to do anything at all except plead with his eyes for mercy.

"Kick that gun over this way," Jackman said. "Wait till I'm up on my feet. . . . All right now. And be sure you only *kick* it! Don't reach for it!"

The little fellow did not need the warning. It was all he could do to kick the weapon, he was so stiff with fright.

It came skittering toward Jackman, who stopped it with a foot, picked it up with his left hand.

"All right. We're going up on deck now. And bring that flashlight along. I've got a message I want you to send."

THE resident-agent, the captain and Dr. Harry Jackman had a spot in the captain's cabin late that night. The R.A. was propped up in a chair. His leg was not in bad shape, but because medical service was not available in Tepara just then it was thought best for him to make the trip on the *Marama* where he could be under Jackman's eye.

"When you started to fight that chap I started to run around the other side of you to get the revolver," he explained to Jackman. "I remember tripping over the edge of that hatch, but I don't remember falling."

The captain said, "The first I knew of it was when my second officer happened to notice the flashes over that way." He glanced across his upraised glass at Jackman. "So you know the Morse code too, Doctor?"

Jackman smiled and shook his head.

"No. But I told McNeile I did—that's the little ex-supercargo of the *Teave*—and I told him the message to flash. *He* knew the Morse code, and he was so scared, seeing me there with a gun in each hand, that he sent the right message."

"Strange thing—them daring to come back here after getting out of jail," the R.A. said reflectively.

Jackman cried, "Don't you see? They didn't dare *not* come back! They'd murdered Captain Cambridge by shooting him through the head—each one says one of the others did it, but anyway in the eyes of the law they're equally guilty—and in the excitement of the storm, with all hands standing by, they didn't dare weight his body and toss it overboard. They thought they were sure to be lost anyway, and they were just about to take to the boats. So they stuffed the body into that bulkhead in order to make sure it wouldn't float away and be picked up later.

"But the ship fooled them—and didn't sink! It piled up on the reef instead. Naturally they couldn't go and extricate the body in all that fuss and investigation, and before they had a chance to do so they were sent back to Sydney—and to jail.

"They worried about that body for three years. They knew that even though the insurance salvagers and the natives hadn't found it, sooner or later the *Teave* would break up, and when that body was recovered, no matter how many years later, they'd all face a charge of murder. What with the familiar *Teave* story, and their own records as criminals, they wouldn't have a chance. The body might be no more than a skeleton, but there would be brass buttons that could be identified, and the bullet, and the gold teeth Captain Cambridge was so proud of, and even the bones themselves.

"Cambridge's left arm had been broken in two places in a hurr cane once, and the surgeon who reset the emergency job could easily identify his work—and that surgeon was still alive. So they *had* to get out the body.

"As soon as they were released they managed to get jobs aboard the *Marama*. They were experienced seamen, and they had underworld connections who could do some forgery for them, so it wasn't too hard. They came out here, paddled to the wreck, talked Mana into letting them search it, and they found the body again —but it had got wedged in so deep that they saw they weren't going to be able to get it out without cutting the plates away. They were desperate. When they returned to Sydney, according to McNeile's confession, Secker got the oxy-acetylene apparatus from a friend who was a safe-cracker. And they came back again.

"They stole a small canoe and when they got to the wreck they concealed this below decks, on the chance that some natives might paddle past and wonder why it was tied there and get to talking. Mana recognized them from the previous time and he was suspicious. Why should ordinary tourists want to go over his wreck-home a second time? When they produced the steel-burning apparatus he told them they'd have to go. It was *his* wreck. Of course he was crazy. He probably thought they were going to try to do something to the ghost of his wife, his only companion. He got nasty about it—and Secker cracked him on the head.

"They were all a little panicky. They didn't take the trouble to get rid of the body right away, probably figuring they'd have plenty of time later to weight it and chuck it into the lagoon. Their first thought was to get Cambridge's body. So they set to work. They didn't hear Mr.—uh— They didn't hear you and me when we came along. And Secker got the shock of his life when he came up on deck for a breath of air. Well . . ." He finished his drink. "It's all over now. Healthy-looking lot of natives you have on this island, I must say."

"Keep the white man away," the captain grumbled, "and they might be all right. But with all these murderers running around—"

"Speaking of running around," said Jackman, and pointed to the R.A.'s leg. "You'd better go below and get to bed with that. Otherwise I might have to put it into a plaster cast."

The R.A. sighed.

"Here I get leave a year and a half earlier than I'd expected, and I get on a nice ship like the *Marama* here, and I can't play deck tennis. I love deck tennis too."

"Cribbage is about the roughest game you're going to play for some time," Jackman pronounced grimly. "You could do worse, at that."

The agent perked up.

"Do *you* play cribbage?"

"Love it," said Jackman.

The R.A. grinned.

"Well now, I say! That's grand! Maybe this won't be such a dull trip after all!"

They only had this one chance to score

The Old Razzle Dazzle

There were a lot of things mixed up in that game that the crowd never knew about—a new contract, chloroform, and something that turned out to be Fate with a knife in its hand

By HERBERT DALMAS

THIS is the story of one of the biggest bonehead plays in football history. You've probably read about it, because the sports columnists haul it out of the cedar every once in a while to fill in a believe-it-or-not column of cockeyed incidents of sport. . . .

Pop Holliday knew a man who knew a man who knew somebody's cousin, and that is how he got the job at Bingham. As a matter of face, Pop was finished at the time—a disappointed old man coaching a high-school football team for eighteen hundred a year.

But there had been a time when the name Holliday had meant something in the sport world—the golden era of Northeast when Maddigan and Kress romped through three straight seasons to All-American berths. In those days the Holliday system of deception was a legend; the master of razzle dazzle, they called him, and rightly.

Then Maddigan and Kress graduated; Northeast found that it had paid for its stadium, and decided to go amateur for a while. Such a change always means a new coach, so Pop went, but somehow after he left Northeast nothing seemed to go right with him. He couldn't find men good enough for his system; he went from failure to failure until he landed in a Massachusetts high school where systems do not count. He endured oblivion by telling himself he would come back some day, but it was becoming harder and harder to believe when the Bingham job finally came along.

It was strange that the impetus back should be the same as the one out. Bingham, after seven unlucky years in football,

happened to get a new president who felt that as long as the team was unsuccessful anyhow, it might as well have the credit of being amateur. So there was a complete renovation of the athletic department and its policies.

Pop was glad it was to be that way. He was too old to go back to the routine of big time coaching and all that it represented. He went into the first conference with Sam Price, his new boss, with a peaceful feeling that he was back on the smooth seas with good weather ahead at last.

SAM PRICE was fifteen years younger that Pop. He was smart, progressive, definitely on the way up. Bingham had imported him from another college with a good deal of fanfare to put its athletic mess in order.

He said to Pop, "Of course you know why we hired you. We had to have a name well-known in football but at the same time not associated with it in a way that would signify professionalism to the public. Not recently at any rate."

Pop, remembering the great days at Northeast, smiled.

"Also," Price said, "I happen to know enough football to know that you're a fine coach."

"Thanks," said Pop.

"And I need a good coach," Price went on. "I'm taking this department over with a twenty-thousand-dollar deficit piled up from the last seven years, and the trustees are yelping to have it written off. Your job will be to put Bingham back on the football map."

"With amateurs?" Pop asked dryly.

"And how. Wait till you see them. But that doesn't matter so much. The chief reason I okayed you was that I remembered how your teams always had color with the old razzle dazzle you gave them. That's what we need now. Something to draw our share of the crowd on Saturday. That'll be up to you. Incidentally the important game is with Tech. If you beat them or tie them, it's a successful season no matter what happens before that. Also, it'll mean a thousand-dollar raise for you next year."

"And if we don't beat Tech?"

Price shrugged his shoulders.

"My job depends on writing off that deficit," he said frankly. "I can't do that without a football team that will start to draw this year and show enough promise to pack 'em in next year. A few of the alumni are working on the thing, and we'll have some good freshmen then—all on the up-and-up of course. I don't want to be tough about it, but it means my future. If you can't give me the team I want, I'll have to get some one who can."

That was nice. But Pop Holliday had been born a fighter. It was something to know what you were up against.

ONE look at this squad killed any lingering hope he might have had that the job would be a sinecure. It was just an average, small-time college team. You couldn't ask for finer boys to work with; Pop saw at once that they were earnest and unsparing of themselves, wanting only his slightest urge to work their hearts out. It was too bad you needed a little more than that to turn in a list of victories.

As he watched them work out in their first scrimmage, Pop thought wistfully of Maddigan and Kress. There would be no All-Americans on this team. Two boys in the backfield had possibilities; in a couple of years they might have been minor stars. But they were seniors and would graduate the obvious amateurs they were.

The difference between your born athlete—the kind who makes headlines and All-Americans—and your manufactured product is that with the first every action is instinctive. The body works more or less by itself, leaving the brain free to take in a situation and plan split-second strategy. The manufactured athlete must concentrate on his arms and legs. He may develop the ability to do this to a high degree, but when it comes to the test, the instinctive sort will be a shade better.

Pop recognized at once that he had the manufactured sort to work with. The Tech squad, he knew, inclined the other way, with the quarterback distinctly star material.

But this Bobby Hunter and Jim Devine, though, were good enough to build a respectable team around. At least Pop was convinced of that until the opening game. They were roommates and football fanatics. They lived it every waking hour and played it during practice with a crusading fervor.

But in that first game Pop made a discovery: he saw early in the first quarter that Devine was no good without Hunter. It wasn't a question of courage; Devine had plenty of that, but he had a weakness and he knew it. Hunter knew it too and divided his efforts between the game itself and giving his roommate continual moral support.

The trouble was Devine was a fumbler. He was high-strung and in his effort to concentrate was inclined to miss his timing when taking the ball from center. Naturally, the more he tried to overcome the fault, the more tense he became and the more he aggravated it. Hunter, at such times, hovered around him anxiously, with the result that neither of them was much good when Devine took the ball. It hadn't happened during the practice scrimmages, and Pop was in a quandary.

He might have benched Devine, but the boy was good material, and there was little of that on the Bingham squad to throw it away. You can't just go up to a nervous man and say, "Relax." You can't kid him out of it either. However, Pop Holliday had not been a great coach in his day only because of his genius for deception. Even with a team of Maddigans and Kresses things go better if the coach uses his head.

The thing almost everybody is likely to forget in these days of high pressure, highly publicized sports is that a college athlete, no matter how famous, is still usually under twenty-one. Very often they can be pretty young.

SO AFTER Devine fumbled for the fourth time, Pop called him and Hunter out.

Devine said, "Gosh, I'm sorry, Pop. I don't know why I can't sink my hooks into that apple out there. But I will. Honest I will."

"Jim's a little nervous the first game of the season," Hunter said, lying anxiously to help his friend out. "He's not like that all the time, you know."

"Forget it," Pop told them. "Fumbling's like colic. You've got to outgrow it. I've got an idea. I called you out because when you go back in I don't want you to stop fumbling. Now listen."

Near the end of the last quarter, with the score still 0-0 and the ball almost at midfield, Pop sent them back. After a couple of plays, time was called and the team went into conference.

On the next play Devine took the ball. He started to the right, but even before the play took form, he began the familiar, desperate juggling that four times earlier in the game had presaged a fumble. The opposing line fought through to fall on the ball; the secondary defense relaxed just a little when they saw that the play was going to die of its own weight.

Then, just as the linesmen were almost upon him and he seemed about to juggle the ball into disaster, Devine batted it laterally to Hunter, and Bobby scampered down the field for a touchdown—and the game.

Of course Pop knew a play like that wasn't going to work very often. But as a result of it he had convinced Devine that a fumble could be used, which made it a less haunting fear; and he had resuscitated the colorful old Holliday razzle dazzle that might be built up into something.

During the following week he had the college publicity office send out a story about Devine as a quadruple threat man: runner, passer, kicker, and fumbler. He got a friend of the old days—a sports columnist—to write a discussion as to whether Devine's fumbling was genuine

or just another trick conceived by Holliday, the old fox had come out of his lair to apply his magic to modern football.

That attracted some attention, and when Bingham beat a fairly strong Middletown team, the talk in the papers grew. Middletown was leary of Devine's fumbling, with the result that when he made one unintentionally, they didn't recover. Devine only made one more—when they pulled Pop's impromptu play. It failed, as everyone had known it would, but they felt they owed it to Middletown to try it, and they had a lot more that were better.

The following Saturday they played to fairly well filled stands and held State's highly favored team to a scoreless tie. Sam Price was jubilant and told Pop his salary of five thousand for next year was practically in the bag. The ballyhoo in the papers began then in real earnest, needing no further impetus from the college publicity department. Pop Holliday was making a dramatic comeback as a coach; he and Bingham were riding together to the top of the football heap again. Talk began to appear about Tech's chances of holding Bingham—the first time in seven years there had been any doubt as to the outcome.

POP began to glimpse the heights once more. He was invited to a coaching clinic the next summer by a New York paper that had forgotten him since soon after he left Northeast. It would be like a rebirth to see all his old friends again, to be able to swap tall stories of victories and defeats with the other big-time coaches.

The squad was in perfect condition. They had no delusions of grandeur, but they didn't fear any team on the schedule. And Pop's brain seemed to be working better than it ever had before. He evolved plays with a gusto he had thought was gone forever.

The fourth game was with Metropolitan, a team that had expected Bingham to be a breather. But the Bingham boys were hardly able to wait for Saturday. Hunter and Devine had been going better every day; the team expected to beat Met if they got one break, and they intended to force that.

About two o'clock Saturday morning Pop was blasted from sleep by the telephone. It was Jim Devine, on the verge of hysteria. The boy was incoherent, but Pop gathered that he was at the infirmary and that Bobby Hunter was at that moment on the table being operated on for a ruptured appendix. Pop dressed in a daze and hurried over. He couldn't make it seem real, but it was.

Pop stayed with Jim, who was heartbroken, until they were assured that Bobby was all right. Then he went home, realizing slowly that with this swift, cold blow of fate he had lost two men. Without his roommate, Jim Devine was going to be just another earnest kid in there.

He saw Bobby when the doctors would let him and listened to the boy's determined assurances that he would be on the field for the Tech game. He pretended to agree, promising to use him if he could get into a uniform, but he knew different . . .

Those next four games were cruel. Trying to make up for Bobby's absence, Jim Devine tightened up worse than ever, and gave two games away with fumbles.

The team began to get jittery. They lost everything right up to the Tech game. True, they managed to pull together better as the season wore on, but they were without their spark-plug. All they really had was their fight, and against superior power that was good only as long as the human frame could stand up. Pop finally cut out practice scrimmages altogether, so that they could save every atom of strength for the Saturdays.

AS HE hurried toward the dressing room the day of the Tech game, Pop Holliday took stock. He was pretty sure he wasn't going to get his raise for next year; there might be some chance

of his keeping his job, but he wouldn't know about that till later.

The strange part of it was that his job wasn't what was most important in his mind at the moment. He told himself he was probably getting soft with age or something, but he was feeling exactly as he knew the team was. It was as if he was one of them. It was so different from his memories of Northeast—to be all season with a bunch of kids who played the game only for the love of it. He was somewhat startled to find that his attitude toward them was real affection. Good Lord, he thought. They'll be calling me Grandad pretty soon.

In the dressing room he said to them, "We've got to beat Tech to make this a good season. But it's going to be tougher than you expected. Most of you have doped it out already, I guess, even if I haven't had the plain guts to tell Bobby. You're going to have to play without him."

Hunter was in uniform, looking pretty fit considering everything. His face went blank.

"Aw, Pop!" he said, and his voice was suddenly all quivery. "You—you told me I was going to play."

"Sorry," Pop said brusquely.

"But I'm all right, I tell you," Hunter insisted. "They've got me padded up like a mummy. I won't get hurt. My whole family's up here to see me in my—last game."

"I know," Pop told him. "But I can't help it. One good wallop would rip out all that nice embroidery you've had done on your belly. You sit on the bench."

Hunter said nothing, but his jaw set angrily.

Pop made a little speech to the rest of the squad then. "I'm not much on the old fight talks," he said, "but weaker teams have cleaned up stronger ones before this. You're going up against the strongest you've hit. You can outfight any team in the country, and if the score's a hundred to one against you I won't believe you're licked. That's all."

It wasn't much of a speech, but Pop Holliday never had been able to talk well.

The team went out and did exactly as he had predicted. They received the kick-off and in five plays took the ball to Tech's four-yard line. But there power told, and they lost the ball on downs.

After that it was a struggle of sheer fight against skill. Jim Devine, heroically determined to get along without his balance wheel, played the game of his life both on offense and defense. He bore the chief burden of both and only fumbled once. That once, however, was enough for Tech. Coming together beautifully, as a smart team will under the impetus of a break, they rolled over a touchdown. They didn't kick the extra point, but that was obviously just a detail.

POP didn't say anything to the squad between the halves. They didn't need talk, and they did need every second of rest they could get. Their part of the game from then on was a series of goal-line stands, each one more miraculous than the last, and with little enough breathing space between. They had to kick out of danger right away every time they stopped a march, and then Tech would begin another. It was only a question of time.

But by one of those sheer impossibilities that make football the game it is, the score didn't get any larger. Bingham kept itself in the game—and dangerous—every moment.

Then late in the last quarter Devine intercepted a Tech pass and ran the ball back past midfield. During the ensuing bedlam from the stands Sam Price came up and slipped quietly into a place next to Pop on the bench.

"When are you going to put Hunter in?" he asked.

"You know Hunter's not going in," Pop said.

"You might put him in to kick," Price suggested. "They could run the fifty-seven play."

"And somebody would tackle Hunter and rip him in half."

"Not necessarily."

"Maybe he might l've, eh?" Pop said sarcastically.

"They won't have time to score any other way," Price persisted, ignoring Pop's remark. "Fifty-seven is the only chance. It depends on there being one weak spot in the opposition's defense. And their blind spot will be that Tech never in the world will think Hunter is going to run it. They probably won't even lay a hand on him."

"No," said Pop briefly.

"It's the difference between a flop and a successful season," Price said. "Between a thousand more a year and no job at all. This game means something to us financially. The trustees'll raise hell if they find out we could have won and just threw it away."

"The kid could be hurt for life," Pop said.

"Oh, my God!" Price burst out disgustedly. "It isn't as if there was any danger. He's all over that lousy operation. There's nothing to appendicitis anyway. There are a hundred kids around the country right this minute playing in worse shape than Hunter's in."

Pop remained silent.

"It isn't your responsibility anyhow," Price told him. "The kid's dying to play. Ask him."

But Pop only continued to gaze out at the field.

"Listen," Price said finally, "I'm telling you to put him in. Do you get that?"

Pop opened his mouth to answer, then closed it again.

"Okay," Price said. "You may not care about your job, but I've got my way to make. I'm not going to take it on the chin just because you've gone sweet." He looked down the line of substitutes. tutes. "Hunter!"

Pop started forward but Price's fingers sank into his arm. One does not fight with one's boss in front of undergraduates, so Pop said nothing. But he wasn't finished.

"Go in for Brown," Price told Hunter, "and run the fifty-seven play. You've got about a minute left."

"Just a moment, Bobby—" Pop put in.

"Go on, I tell you," Price said, his voice suddenly a snarl.

HUNTER looked apologetically at Pop and then as if fearful that the orders would be remanded, ran out onto the field. A joyous wave of sound rolled down from the stands and swept him on.

"You can't do that," Pop said to Price.

Price smiled unpleasantly. "Hell, you can see he's tickled to be a hero. This is a big moment."

For an instant Pop stared into the younger man's face, silent because he could not trust his voice. Then he turned swiftly and saw that Hunter was reporting to the referee.

"I'm still running the team," Pop said. "Hoyt!"

A substitute ran up from the other end of the bench.

"Sit down," Price told him. "Listen," he said to Pop, "I'm taking over now. You do as I tell you."

Well, boss or no boss, Pop Holliday had no intention of taking that. He stood up and faced Price. But he got no further than that, for suddenly the whole bench, the whole stadium was on its feet, and he felt as if he were in a jungle of sound.

The play had begun.

Hunter had gone back as if to kick. He had flipped the ball to Devine, who had gone wide to the left as if fading back for a long, desperate, last minute pass. At the last instant he had turned and thrown it to Hunter who hadn't moved from where he had been standing at the beginning of the play. And now Bobby was free and coming down his own sidelines.

Price had been right. There hadn't been a hand laid on him so far. The whole Tech team had been sucked over by the three eligible men who had gone down the field on the other side. Bobby was tearing along toward his own bench as if he had never had an appendix.

And then Pop saw the Tech safety man.

He was coming over to make the tackle. Pop knew this man was good, and he suddenly went a little sick. Hunter might get by. He might not. Of course the Tech man knew Bobby had been sick, but he wasn't going to hold back for that. That wasn't the game.

And he would tackle high. He couldn't take the chance of missing, and his shoulder would smash into Bobby right where the pad hid the newly healed incision. The safety man would hit with all the power he had, which was plenty. Pop knew the trainer had thought Bobby wasn't going to play; he probably hadn't been too conscientious about those pads.

In that split second as the two players converged upon each other time stopped, and Pop saw many things, as a drowning man is supposed to do. He saw his old descent into obscurity, his comeback, and the life that awaited him if Bingham could at least tie the score. Price would be magnanimous if that happened; Pop would be given credit everywhere for the supreme strategy: putting his crippled man in for the one touchdown play.

Then he saw Bobby Hunter, a kid with his whole life before him, occupied at the moment with doing the one thing that lay nearest his heart: beat Tech. He saw the two players crash—though they were still thirty yards apart; he saw Hunter lying there afterward, his side ripped open from the blow. Perhaps crippled forever. And for what? That was the question there was no answer to.

THERE was only one thing to do, and that was an impossibility. He might have done it in practice when the stands were empty, but not with forty thousand people watching. A spectacle for forty thousand people, who would forget it by the next week, was more important than the life of a nineteen year old kid.

Pop said something that sounded like "Phooey!"—a sound of disgust—and shot from his place in the hysterically screaming and capering line of substitutes.

They froze in horror as they saw what he was doing.

He cut out into the field diagonally in front of Hunter—and took out the Tech safety man with a perfect block.

They went down together with a crash, and Bobby flickered by. Even as he did so, the Tech man's hands touched him. Bobby couldn't twist much with that wound.

For a moment the Bingham stands went completely silent. It was simply something you couldn't believe. Things like that don't happen. Then arose a confused, excited murmur as they tried to explain to each other what had happened.

From the Tech side of the field there was silence too for a moment, then, gaining slowly in volume, laughter. Hundreds and then thousands and thousands of people laughing and laughing. The greatest bonehead play in football history.

Pop heard it all lying there on the ground. He knew that in a moment he would have to get up and face them, an old man who had cracked into idiocy when the going got hot. It was back to obscurity, this time forever.

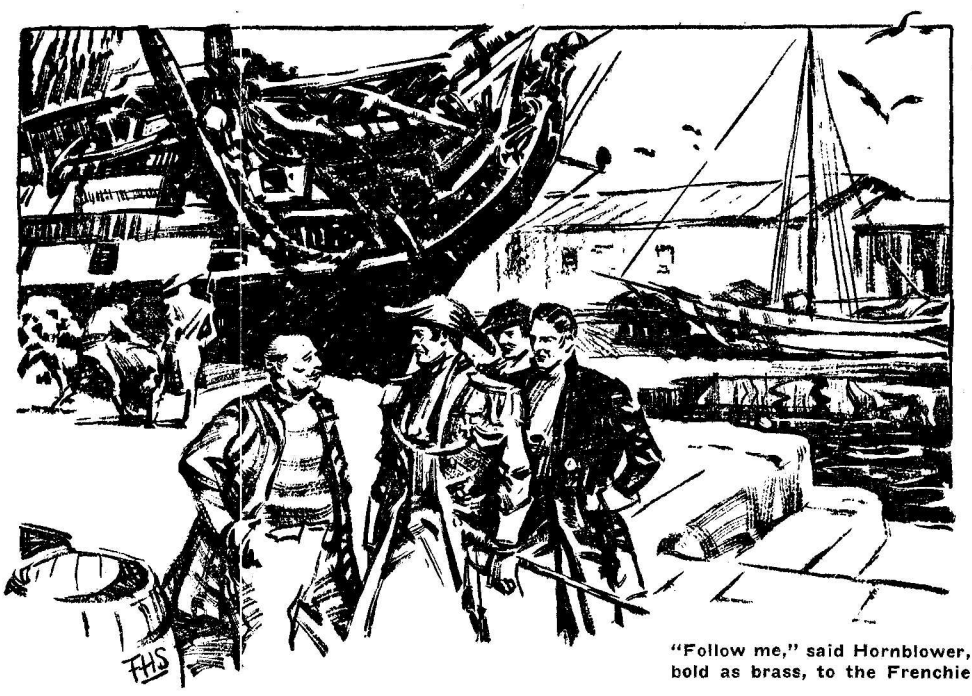
The Tech safety man pulled him to his feet.

Pop looked down the field and saw Bobby Hunter, dazed and uncertain, standing at the goal line. Standing, that was the point.

"I think I get it," The Tech man said, slapping Pop on the shoulder. "The kid's okay. Nice going."

Then he turned and trotted down the field. But for a moment longer Pop did not move. He had the curious feeling that none of this had happened, that he would soon return to reality. And then he saw Bobby Hunter coming toward him—and he awoke again.

The crowd began to pour onto the field. The gun must have gone during the play. Pop straightened and shook off the weight of the last five seconds. He drew a deep breath. It seemed like the first peaceful one in thousands of years.



"Follow me," said Hornblower, bold as brass, to the Frenchie

Flying Colours

By C. S. FORESTER

ON the eve of Napoleon's defeat by Wellington, and just as the ramshackle structure of the French Empire is ready to totter, Captain Horatio Hornblower, ex-master of the British ship-of-the-line *Sutherland,* is being taken to Paris and the firing squad. With him are his wounded lieutenant, Bush, also likely to be shot, and Brown, former coxswain on the *Sutherland,* and now Hornblower's personal servant, selected by the shrewd captain because Brown's physical sturdiness may be useful in an escape—should there be an opportunity.

Because of "Boney's" vindictiveness against the British fleet in general and his desire to discredit the English in the eyes of his apprehensive allies, the Emperor has trumped up charges of piracy against Hornblower, and the death penalty is a foregone conclusion. Hornblower's daring raid on the French-held harbor of Rosas, resulting in smashing Napoleon's hold on the Spanish Mediterranean, has also earned him the Emperor's bitterness.

ON the long coach-journey to Paris, Hornblower waits his opportunity; during a forced halt on the snow-blinded post-road, overcomes Caillard, his captor, and the three Englishmen make good their escape. After a miraculous navigation, in a small boat, of treacherous rapids and mad currents, fighting the odds of cold and snow and absolute darkness, the trio is wrecked by a crashing cascade.

They make their way to the house of the Comte de Graçay, where they are, to their surprise, graciously received. The *comte,* whom his widowed daughter-in-law describes as never having refused help to anyone who asked it, explains that he will be happy to give them shelter. He is no friend to Napoleon whose mad will to domination has robbed him of three sons and left his illustrious line without an heir. But the very loss of his sons on the battlefields places him above suspicion; in addition, he is the mayor of the community. So the Englishmen will be safe under his roof.

This story began in the Argosy for December 3

IT is decided, to Hornblower's dismay, that they must remain until April—four months. To try to reach the port by coach is impossible. And the river will not be navigable until after the spring floods. In addition, a boat must be built, and Bush's leg must be allowed to heal.

But Hornblower chafes under the forced delay. Napoleon's newspapers have reported him dead, and Hornblower knows that his wife Maria, expecting a child in January, will be comfortless. He wonders, too, how deep will be the grief of Lady Barbara, who had loved him once and had been incensed and bewildered at his refusal, out of stubborn loyalty, of that love. Lady Barbara has since become the wife of Hornblower's admiral, Leighton; but Hornblower cannot stifle the yearning he knows he will always feel for her.

The count warns Hornblower that his plans for proceeding must be perfect. "Napoleon has announced you dead. If you fall into his hands, he will have to make that good."

A final complication is introduced when Hornblower realizes that the *vicomtesse*, de Graçay's son's widow, has fallen in love with him although she knows he cannot, will not, ever return that love. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

THE EMPEROR'S TRINKET

THE affair thus consummated seemed, to Hornblower's mind at least, to clear the air like a thunderstorm. He had something more definite to think about now than mystic speculations; there was Marie's loving kindness to soothe him, and for counter-irritant there was the pricking of his conscience regarding his wooing of his host's daughter-in-law under his host's roof. His uneasiness lest the count's telepathic powers should enable him to guess at the secret he shared with Marie, the fear lest someone should intercept a glance or correctly interpret a gesture, kept his mind healthily active.

And the love affair while it ran its course brought with it a queer unexpected happiness. Marie was everything Hornblower could desire. By marriage she was of a family noble enough to satisfy his liking for lords, and yet the knowledge that she was of peasant birth saved him from feeling any awe on that account.

She could be tender and gay, protective and yielding, practical and romantic; and she loved him so dearly, while at the same time she remained so reconciled to his approaching departure and resolute to help it on in every way, that his heart softened towards her more and more with the passage of the days.

That departure suddenly became a much nearer and more likely possibility—by coincidence it seemed to come up over the horizon from the hoped-for into the expected only a day or two after Hornblower's meeting with Marie in the upper gallery. The boat was finished, and lay, painted and equipped, in the loft ready for them to use; Brown kept it filled with water from the well and proudly announced that it did not leak a drop.

The plans for their journey to the sea were taking definite shape. Fat Jeanne, the cook, baked biscuit for them—Hornblower came triumphantly into his own then, as the only person in the house who knew how ship's biscuit should be baked, and Jeanne worked under his supervision.

Anxious debate between him and the count had ended in his deciding against running the risk of buying food while on their way unless compelled; the fifty pounds of biscuit which Jeanne baked for them (there was a locker in the boat in which to store it) would provide the three of them with a pound of bread each a day for seventeen days, and there was a sack of potatoes waiting for them, and another of dried peas; and there were long thin Arles sausages—as dry as stocks, and, to Hornblower's mind, not much more digestible, but with the merit of staying eatable for long periods—and some of the dry cod which Hornblower had come to know during his captivity at Ferrol, and a corner of bacon.

Taken all in all—as Hornblower pointed out to the count who was inclined to demur—they were going to fare better on their voyage down the Loire than they had often fared in the ships of His Majesty, King George.

Hornblower, accustomed for so long to

sea voyages, never ceased to marvel at the simplicity of planning a river trip thanks to the easy solution of the problem of water supply; overside they would have unlimited fresh water for drinking and washing and bathing—much better water, too, as he told the count again, than the stinking green stuff, alive with animalculae, doled out at the rate of four pints a head a day, with which people in ships had to be content.

He could anticipate no trouble until they neared the sea; it was only with their entry into tidal waters that they would be in any danger.

He knew how the French coast swarmed with garrisons and customs officers—as a lieutenant under Pellew he had once landed a spy in the salt marshes of Bourgneuf—and it would be under their noses that they would have to steal a fishing-boat and make their way to sea.

Thanks to the Continental system, and the fear of English raids, and precautions against espionage, tidal waters would be watched closely indeed.

But he felt he could only trust to fortune—it was hard to make plans against contingencies which might take any shape whatever; and, besides, those dangers were weeks away, and Hornblower's newly contented mind was actually too lazy to devote much thought to them.

And as he grew fonder of Marie, too, it grew harder to make plans which would take him away from her. His attachment for her was growing even as strong as that.

IT WAS left to the count to make the most helpful suggestion of all. "If you would permit me," he said, one evening, "I would like to tell you of an idea I have for simplifying your passage through Nantes."

"It would give me pleasure to hear it, sir," said Hornblower—the count's long-winded politeness was infectious.

"Please do not think," said the count, "that I wish to interfere in any way in the plans you are making, but it occurred to me that your stay on the coast might be made safer if you assumed the role of a high official of the customs service."

"I think it would, sir," said Hornblower, patiently, "but I do not understand how I could do it."

"You would have to announce yourself, if necessary, as a Dutchman," said the count. "Now that Holland is annexed to France and King Louis Bonaparte has fled, it is to be presumed that his employés will join the Imperial service. I think it is extremely likely that, say, a colonel of Dutch *douaniers* should visit Nantes to learn how to perform his duties—especially as it was over the enforcement of customs regulations that Bonaparte and his brother fell out. Your very excellent French would be just what might be expected of a Dutch customs officer, even though—please pardon my frankness—you do not speak quite like a native Frenchman."

"But—but—" stammered Hornblower. It really seemed to him that the count's customary good sense had deserted him, "It would be difficult, sir—"

"Difficult?" smiled the count. "It might be dangerous but, if you will forgive my contradicting you so directly, it would hardly be difficult. In your English democracy you perhaps have had no opportunity of seeing how much weight an assured manner and a uniform carry with them in a country like this, which has already made the easy descent from an autocracy to a bureaucracy. A colonel of *douaniers* on the coast can go anywhere, command anything. He never has to account for himself—his uniform does that for him."

"But I have no uniform, sir," said Hornblower, and before the words were out of his mouth he guessed what the count was going to say.

"We have half a dozen needlewomen in the house," smiled the count, "from Marie here to litle Christine the cook's daughter. It would be odd if between them they could not make uniforms for you and your assistants. I might add that Mr. Bush's wound, which we all so much deplore,

will be an actual advantage if you adopt the scheme. It is exactly consonant with Bonaparte's methods to provide for an officer wounded in his service by giving him a position in the customs. Mr. Bush's presence with you would add a touch of —shall we say realism?—to the effect produced by your appearance."

The count gave a little bow to Bush, in apology for thus alluding to Bush's crippled condition, and Bush returned it awkwardly from his chair in bland ignorance of at least two-thirds of what had been said.

THE value of the suggestion was obvious to Hornblower at once, and for days afterwards the women in the house were at work cutting and stitching and fitting, until the evening came when the three of them paraded before the count in their neat coats of blue piped with white and red, and their rakish *képis*—it was the making of these which had taxed Marie's ingenuity most, for the *képi* was still at that time an unusual headdress in the French government services.

On Hornblower's collar glittered the eight-pointed stars of colonel's rank, and the top of his *képi* bore the gold-lace rosette; as the three of them rotated solemnly before the count the latter nodded approvingly.

"Excellent," he said, and then hesitated. "There is only one addition which I can think of to add realism. Excuse me a moment."

He went off to his study leaving the others looking at each other, but he was back directly with a little leather case in his hand which he proceeded to open. Resting on the silk was a glittering cross of white enamel, surmounted by a golden crown and with a gold medallion in the centre.

"We must pin this on you," he said. "No one reaches colonel's rank without the Legion of Honour."

"Father!" said Marie—it was rare that she used the familiar mode of address with him—"that was Louis-Marie's."

"I know, my dear, I know. But it may make the difference between Captain Hornblower's success or—or failure."

His hands trembled a little, nevertheless, as he pinned the scarlet ribbon to Hornblower's coat.

"Sir—sir, it is too good of you," protested Hornblower.

The count's long mobile face, as he stood up, was sad, but in a moment he had twisted it into his usual wry smile.

"Bonaparte sent it to me," he said, "after—after my son's death in Spain. It was a posthumous award. To me of course it is nothing—the trinkets of the tyrant can never mean anything to a Knight of the Holy Ghost. But because of its sentimental value I should be grateful if you would endeavour to preserve it unharmed and return it to me when the war is over."

"I cannot accept it, sir," said Hornblower, bending to unpin it again, but the count checked him.

"Please, Captain," he said, "wear it, as a favour to me. It would please me if you would."

CHAPTER XVII

SOME MISGIVINGS

MORE than ever after his reluctant acceptance did Hornblower's conscience prick him at the thought that he had made love to this man's daughter-in-law while enjoying his hospitality, and later in the evening when he found himself alone with the count in the drawing room the conversation deepened his sense of guilt.

"Now that your stay is drawing to an end, Captain," said the count, "I know how much I shall miss your presence after you have gone. Your company has given me the very greatest pleasure."

"I do not think it can compare with the gratitude I feel towards you, sir," said Hornblower.

The count waved aside the thanks which Hornblower was endeavouring awkwardly to phrase.

"A little while ago we mentioned the

end of the war. Perhaps there will come an end some day, and although I am an old man perhaps I shall live to see it. Will you remember me then, and this little house beside the Loire?"

"Of course, sir," protested Hornblower. "I could never forget."

He looked round the familiar drawing room, at the silver candelabra, the old-fashioned Louis Seize furniture, the lean figure of the count in his blue dress-coat.

"I could never forget you, sir," repeated Hornblower.

"My three sons were all young when they died," said the count. "They were only boys, and perhaps they would not have grown into men I could have been proud of. And already when they went off to serve Bonaparte they looked upon me as an old-fashioned reactionary for whose views they had only the smallest patience—that was only to be expected.

"If they had lived through the wars we might have become better friends later. But they did not, and I am the last Ladon. I am a lonely man, Captain, lonely under this present régime, and yet I fear that when Bonaparte falls and the reactionaries return to power I shall be as lonely still. But I have not been lonely this winter, Captain."

Hornblower's heart went out to the lean old man with the lined face sitting opposite him in the uncomfortable armchair.

"But that is enough about myself, Captain," went on the count. "I wanted to tell you of the news which has come through —it is all of it important. The salute which we heard fired yesterday was, as we thought, in honour of the birth of an heir to Bonaparte.

"There is now a King of Rome, as Bonaparte calls him, to sustain the Imperial throne. Whether it will be any support I am doubtful—there are many Bonapartists who will not, I fancy, be to pleased at the thought of the retention of power indefinitely in a Bonaparte dynasty. And the fall of Holland is undoubted—there was actual fighting between the troops of Louis Bonaparte and those of Napoleon Bonaparte over the question of customs enforcement. France now extends to the Baltic—Hamburg and Lubeck are French towns like Amsterdam and Leghorn and Trieste."

HORNBLOWER thought of the cartoons in the English newspapers which had so often compared Bonaparte with the frog who tried to blow himself up as big as an ox.

"I fancy it is symptomatic of weakness," said the count. "Perhaps you do not agree with me? You do? I am glad to have my suspicions confirmed. More than that; there is going to be war with Russia. Already troops are being transferred to the East, and the details of a new conscription were published at the same time as the proclamation of a King of Rome. There will be more refractories than ever hiding about the country now. Perhaps Bonaparte will find he has undertaken a task beyond his strength when he comes to grips with Russia."

"Perhaps so," said Hornblower. He had not a high opinion of Russian military virtues.

"But there is more important news still," said the count. "There has at last been published a bulletin of the Army of Portugal. It was dated from Almeida."

It took a second or two for Hornblower to grasp the significance of this comment, and it only dawned upon him gradually, along with the endless implications.

"It means," said the count, "that your Wellington has beaten Bonaparte's Masséna. That the attempt to conquer Portugal has failed, and that the whole of the affairs of Spain are thrown into flux again. A running sore has been opened in the side of Bonaparte's empire, which may drain him of his strength—at what cost to poor France one can hardly imagine.

"But of course, Captain, you can form a more reliable opinion of the military situation than I can, and I have been presumptuous in commenting on it. Yet you have not the facilities which I have of gauging the moral effect of this news.

"Wellington has beaten Junot, and Vic-

tor, and Soult. Now he has beaten Masséna, the greatest of them all. There is only one man now against whom European opinion can measure him, and that is Bonaparte. It is not well for a tyrant to have rivals in prestige. Last year how many years of power would one have given Bonaparte if asked? Twenty? I think so.

"Now in 1811 we change our minds. Ten years, we think. In 1812 we may revise our estimate again, and say five. I myself do not believe the Empire as we know it will endure after 1814—Empires collapse at a rate increasing in geometrical progression, and it will be your Wellington who will pull this one down."

"I hope sincerely you are right, sir," said Hornblower.

The count was not to know how disturbing this mention of Wellington was to his audience; he could not guess that Hornblower was daily tormented by speculations as to whether Wellington's sister was widowed or not, whether Lady Barbara Leighton, née Wellesley, ever had a thought to devote to the naval captain who had been reported dead.

Her brother's triumphs might well occupy her mind to the exclusion of everything else, and Hornblower feared that when at last he should reach England she would be far too great a lady to pay him any attention at all.

The thought irked him.

HE WENT to bed in a peculiarly sober mood, his mind busy with problems of the most varying nature—from speculations about the approaching fall of the French Empire to calculations regarding the voyage down the Loire which he was about to attempt.

Lying awake, long after midnight, he heard his bedroom door quietly open and close; he lay rigid, instantly, conscious of a feeling of faint distaste at this reminder of the intrigue which he was conducting under a hospitable roof. Very gently, the curtains of his bed were drawn open, and in the darkness he could see, through half-opened eyes, a shadowy ghost bending over him. A gentle hand found his cheek and stroked it; he could no longer sham sleep, and he pretended to wake with a start.

"It is Marie, Oratio," said a voice, softly.

"Yes," said Hornblower.

He did not know what he should say or do—for that matter he did not know what he wanted.

Mostly he was conscious of Marie's imprudence in thus coming to his room, risking discovery and imperilling everything. He shut his eyes, as though still sleepy, to gain time for consideration; the hand ceased to stroke his cheek.

Hornblower waited for a second or two more, and was astonished to hear the slight click of the latch of the door again. He sat up with a jerk. Marie had gone, as silently as she had come. Hornblower continued to sit up, puzzling over the incident, but he could make nothing of it.

Certainly he was not going to run any risks by going to seek Marie in her room and asking for explanations; he lay down again to think about it, and this time, with its usual capriciousness, sleep surprised him in the midst of his speculations, and he slept soundly until Brown brought him his breakfast coffee.

IT TOOK him half the morning to nerve himself for what he foresaw to be a very uncomfortable interview; it was only then that he tore himself away from a last inspection of the boat, in Bush's and Brown's company, and climbed the stairs to Marie's boudoir and tapped at the door. He entered when she called, and stood there in the room of so many memories—the golden chairs with their oval backs upholstered in pink and white, the windows looking out on the sunlit Loire, and Marie in the window-seat with her needlework.

"I wanted to say good morning," he said at length, as Marie did nothing to help him out.

"Good morning," said Marie. She bent her head over her needlework—the sun-

shine through the windows lit her hair gloriously—and spoke with her face concealed. "We only have to say good morning today, and tomorrow we shall say goodbye."

"Yes," said Hornblower, stupidly.

"If you loved me," said Marie, "it would be terrible for me to have you go, and to know that for years we should not meet again—perhaps for ever. But as you do not, then I am glad that you are going back to your wife and your child, and your ships, and your fighting. That is what you want, and I am pleased that you should have it all."

"Thank you," said Hornblower.

Still she did not look up.

"You are the sort of man," she went on, "whom women love very easily. I do not expect that I shall be the last. I don't think that you will ever love anybody, or know what it is to do so."

Hornblower could have said nothing in English in reply to these two astonishing statements, and in French he was perfectly helpless. He could only stammer.

"Goodbye," said Marie.

"Goodbye, *madame*," said Hornblower, lamely.

HIS cheeks were burning as he came out into the upper hall, in a condition of mental distress in which humiliation only played a minor part. He was thoroughly conscious of having acted despicably, and of having been dismissed without dignity.

But he was puzzled by the other remarks Marie had made. It had never occurred to him that women loved him easily. Maria—it was odd, that similarity of names, Maria and Marie—loved him, he knew; he had found it a little tiresome and disturbing. Barbara had offered herself to him, but he had never ventured to believe that she had loved him—and had she not married someone else? And Marie loved him.

Hornblower remembered guiltily an incident of a few days ago, when Marie had whispered, "Tell me you love me," and he had answered with facile kindness, "I love you, dear." "Then I am happy," answered Marie.

Perhaps it was a good thing that Marie knew now that he was lying, and had made easy his retreat. Another woman with a word might have sent him and Bush to prison and death—there were women capable of it.

And this question of his never loving anyone; surely Marie was wrong about that. She did not know the miseries of longing he had been through on Barbara's account, how much he had desired her and how much he still desired her. He hesitated guiltily here, wondering whether his desire would survive gratification. That was such an uncomfortable thought that he swerved away from it in a kind of panic.

If Marie had merely revengefully desired to disturb him she certainly had achieved her object; and if on the other hand she had wanted to win him back to her she was not far from success either.

What with the torments of remorse and his sudden uneasiness about himself Hornblower would have returned to her if she had lifted a finger to him, but she did not.

At dinner that evening she appeared young and light-hearted, her eyes sparkling and her expression animated; and when the count lifted his glass for the toast of "a prosperous voyage home," she joined in with every appearance of enthusiasm.

Hornblower was glum beneath his forced gaiety. Only now, with the prospect of an immediate move ahead of him, had he become aware that there were decided arguments in favour of the limbo of suspended animation in which he had spent the past months.

Tomorrow he was going to leave all this certainty and safety and indifferent negativeness. There was physical danger ahead of him; that he could face calmly and with no more than a tightening of the throat, but besides that there was the resolution of all the doubts and uncertainties which had so troubled him.

Hornblower was suddenly aware that he did not so urgently desire his uncertainties to be resolved.

At present he could still hope. If Leighton were to declare that Hornblower had fought at Rosas contrary to the spirit of his orders; if the court martial were to decide that the *Sutherland* had not been fought to the last gasp—and court martials were chancy affairs; if—if—if. And there was Maria with her cloying sweetness awaiting him, and the misery of longing for Lady Barbara, all in contrast with the smoothness of life here with the count's unruffled politeness and the stimulus of Marie's healthy nature.

Hornblower had to force a smile as he lifted his glass.

CHAPTER XVIII

RIVER JOURNEY

THE big green Loire was shrinking to its summer level. Hornblower had seen its floods and its ice come and go, had seen the willows at its banks almost submerged, but now it was back safely in its wide bed, with a hint of golden-brown gravel exposed on either bank.

The swift green water was clear now, instead of turbid, and under the blue sky the distant reaches were blue as well, in charming colour contrast with the springtime emerald of the valley and the gold of the banks.

The two sleek dun oxen, patient under the yoke, had dragged the *travois*-sledge down to the water's edge in the first early light of dawn, Brown and Hornblower walking beside to see that the precious boat balanced on it came to no harm, and Bush stumping breathless behind them.

The boat slid gently into the water, and under Bush's supervision the stable hands loaded her with the bags of stores which they had carried down.

The faint morning mist still lay in the valley, and wreathed over the surface of the water, awaiting the coming of the sun to drink it up. It was the best time for departure; the mist would shield them from inquisitive persons who might be unduly curious at the sight of the expedition starting off.

Up at the house the farewells had all been said—the count as unruffled as ever, as though it were usual for him to rise at five in the morning, and Marie smiling and calm. In the stableyard and the kitchen there had been tears; all the women had lamented Brown's going, weeping unashamed and yet laughing through their tears as he laughed and joked in the voluble French which he had acquired, and as he smacked their broad backs.

Hornblower wondered how many of them Brown had made love to that winter, and how many Anglo-French children would be born next autumn as a result.

"Remember your promise to return after the war," the count had said to Hornblower. "Marie will be as delighted to see you as I shall be."

His smile had conveyed no hint of a hidden meaning—but how much did he guess, or know? Hornblower gulped as he remembered.

"Shove off," he rasped. "Brown, take the sculls."

THE boat scraped over the gravel, and then floated free as the current took her, dancing away from the little group of stable hands and the stolid oxen, vague already in the mist. The rowlocks creaked and the boat swayed to Brown's pulls; Hornblower heard the noises, and felt Bush seated in the stern beside him, but for some seconds he saw nothing.

There was a mist about him far denser than the reality.

The one mist cleared with the other, as the sun came breaking through, warm on Hornblower's back. High up the bank on the opposite side was the orchard at which Hornblower had often gazed from his window; it was marvellous now under its load of blossom.

Looking back he saw the *château* shining in the sun. The turrets at the corners had been added, he knew, no more than fifty years ago by a Comte de Graçay with a

rococo taste for the antique, but they looked genuine enough at this distance. It was like a fairy castle in the pearly light, a dream castle; and already the months he had spent there seemed like a dream too, a dream from which he regretted awakening.

"Mr. Bush," he said sharply. "I'll trouble you to get out your rod and make an appearance of fishing. Take a slower stroke, Brown."

They went drifting on down the noble river, blue in the distance and green overside, clear and transparent, so that they could actually see the bottom passing away below them.

It was only a few minutes before they reached the confluence of the Allier, itself a fine river almost the size of the Loire, and the united stream was majestically wide, a hundred and fifty fathoms at least from bank to bank.

They were a long musket-shot from land, but their position was safer even than that implied, for from the water's edge on either side stretched an extensive no-man's-land of sand and willow which the periodic floods kept free from human habitations and which was only likely to be visited by fishermen and laundering housewives.

The mist had entirely vanished now, and the hot sun bore with it all the promise of one of those splendid spring days of central France.

Hornblower shifted in his seat to make himself more comfortable. The hierarchy of this, his new command, was top-heavy. A proportion of one seaman to one lieutenant and one captain was ludicrous. He would have to exercise a great deal of tact to keep them all three satisfied—to see that Brown was not made resentful by having all the work to do and yet that discipline was not endangered by a too democratic division of labour. In a fifteen-foot boat it would be difficult to keep up the aloof dignity proper to a captain.

"Brown," he said. "I've been very satisfied with you so far. Keep in my good books and I'll see you're properly rewarded when we get back to England. There'll be a warrant for you as master's mate if you want it."

"Thank 'ee, sir. Thank 'ee very kindly. But I'm happy as I am, beggin' your pardon, sir." He meant he was happy in his rating as a coxswain, but the tone of his voice implied more than that.

Hornblower looked at him as he sat with his face turned up to the sun, pulling slowly at the sculls. There was a blissful smile on his face—the man was marvellously happy. He had been well fed and well housed for months, with plenty of women's society, with light work and no hardship. Even now there was a long prospect ahead of him of food better than he had ever known before he entered France, of no harder work than a little gentle rowing, of no need ever to turn out on a blustering night to reef topsails.

Twenty years of the lower deck in King George's Navy, Hornblower realised, must make any man form the habit of living only in the present. Tomorrow might bring a flogging, peril, sickness, death; certainly hardship and probably hunger, and all without the opportunity of lifting a finger to ward off any of these, for any lifting of a finger would make them all more certain.

Twenty years of being at the mercy of the incalculable, and not merely in the major things of life but in the minor ones, must make a fatalist of any man.

For a moment Hornblower felt a little twinge of envy of Brown, who would never know the misery of helplessness, or the indignity of indecision.

THE river channel here was much divided by islands each bordered by a rim of golden gravel; it was Hornblower's business to select what appeared to be the most navigable channel—no easy task.

Shallows appeared mysteriously right in the centre of what had seemed to be the main stream; over these the clear green water ran faster and faster and shallower and shallower until the bottom of the boat was grating on the pebbles.

Sometimes the bank would end there

with astonishing abruptness, so that one moment they were in six inches of rushing water and the next in six feet of transparent green, but more than once now they found themselves stuck fast, and Brown and Hornblower, trousers rolled to the knee, had to get out and haul the boat a hundred yards over a barely covered bank before finding water deep enough.

Hornblower thanked his stars that he had decided on having the boat built flat-bottomed—a keel would have been a hampering nuisance.

Then they came to a dam, like the one which had brought them disaster in the darkness during their first attempt to navigate the river. It was half natural, half artificial, roughly formed of lumps of rock piled across the river bed, and over it the river poured in fury at a few points.

"Pull over to the bank there, Brown," snapped Hornblower as his coxswain looked to him for orders.

They ran the boat up onto the gravel just above the dam, and Hornblower stepped out and looked downstream.

There was a hundred yards of turbulent water below the dam; they would have to carry everything down. It took three journeys on the part of Hornblower and Brown to carry all their stores to the point he chose for them to re-enter the river—Bush with his wooden leg could only just manage to stumble over the uneven surface unladen—and then they addressed themselves to the business of transporting the boat.

It was not easy; there was a colossal difference between dragging the boat through shallows even an inch deep only and carrying her bodily. Hornblower contemplated the task glumly for some seconds before plunging at it. He stooped and got his hands underneath.

"Take the other side, Brown. Now—lift."

Between them they could just raise it; they had hardly staggered a yard with it before all the strength was gone from Hornblower's wrists and fingers and the boat slipped to the ground again. He avoided Brown's eyes and stooped again.

"Lift!" he said.

It was impossible to carry the heavy boat that way. He had no sooner lifted it than he was compelled to drop it again.

"It's no go, sir," said Brown gently. "We'll have to get her up on our backs, sir. That's the only way."

Hornblower heard the respectful murmur as if from a long distance.

"If you take the bows, beggin' your pardon, sir, I'll look after the stern. Here, sir, lift t'other way round. Hold it sir, till I can get aft. Right, sir. Ready. Lift!"

They had the boat up on their backs now, stooping double under the heavy load. Hornblower, straining under the lighter bows, thought of Brown carrying the much heavier stern, and he set his teeth and vowed to himself that he would not rest until Brown asked to.

Within five seconds he was regretting his vow. His breath was coming with difficulty and there were stabbing pains in his chest. It grew harder and harder to take the trouble to attend to the proper placing of his feet as he stumbled over the uneven surface.

Those months in the Chateau de Graçay had done their work in making him soft and out of condition; for the last few yards of the portage he was conscious of nothing save the overwhelming weight on his neck and shoulders and his difficulty of breathing.

Then he heard Bush's bluff voice. "Right, sir. Let me get hold, sir."

With the small but welcome help that Bush could afford he was able to disengage himself and lower the boat to the ground; Brown was standing over the stern gasping, and sweeping the sweat off his forehead with his forearm.

Hornblower saw him open his mouth to make a remark, presumably regarding the weight of the boat, and then shut it again when he remembered that now he was under discipline again and must only speak when spoken to. And discipline, Hornblower realised, required that he himself should display no sign of weakness before

his subordinates—it was bad enough that he should have had to receive advice from Brown as to how to lift the boat.

"Take hold again, Brown, and we'll get her into the water," he said, controlling his breathing with a vast effort.

They slid the boat in, and heaved the stores on board again. Hornblower's head was swimming with the strain; he thought longingly of his comfortable seat in the stern, and then put the thought from him.

"I'll take the sculls, Brown," he said.

Brown opened and shut his mouth again, but he could not question explicit orders. The boat danced out over the water, with Hornblower at the sculls happy in the rather baseless conviction that he had demonstrated that a captain in the King's navy was the equal even in physical strength of any mere coxswain.

ONCE or twice that day shallows caught them out in midstream which they were unable to pass without lightening the boat to a maximum extent. When Hornblower and Brown, ankle-deep in rushing water, could drag the boat no farther, Bush had to get out too, his wooden leg sinking in the sand despite its broad leather sole, and limp downstream to the edge of the shallows and wait until the others dragged the lightened boat up to him—once he had to stand holding the bag of bread and the roll of bedding before they could tug the boat over the shallows, and on that occasion they had to unstrap his wooden leg, help him in, and then tug the leg free from the sand, so deeply had it sunk.

There was another portage to be made that day, fortunately not nearly such a long one as the first; altogether there was quite enough interest in the day's journey to keep them from growing bored.

On that big lonely river it was almost like travelling through an uninhabited country.

For the greater part of the day there was hardly a soul in sight. Once they saw a skiff moored to the bank which was obviously used as a ferry boat, and once they passed a big waggon ferry—a flat-bottomed scow which was moored so as to swing itself across the river by the force of the current, pendulum-fashion on long mooring ropes. Once they passed a small boat engaged in the task of dredging sand for building purposes from the river bed; there were two weather-beaten men on board, hard at work with small hand-dredgers on poles, which they scraped over the bottom and emptied into the boat.

It was a nervous moment as they approached them, Bush and Brown with their ornament-fishing rods out, Hornblower forcing himself to do no more with the sculls than merely keep the boat in midstream. He had thought, as they drifted down, of giving orders to Bush and Brown regarding the instant silencing of the two men if they appeared suspicious, but he checked himself.

He could rely on their acting promptly without warning, and his dignity demanded that he should betray none of the apprehension which he felt.

But the apprehension was quite baseless. There was no curiosity in the glances which the two sand dredgers threw at them, and there was cordiality in their smiles and in their polite *"Bonjour, messieurs."*

"Bonjour," said Hornblower and Brown—Bush had the sense to keep shut the mouth which would instantly have betrayed them.

Clearly boats with fishing parties on board were just common enough on the Loire to escape comment; and, besides, the intrinsic innocence of fishing as a pastime shielded them from suspicion, as Hornblower and the count had agreed long before. And nobody could ever dream that a small boat in the heart of France was manned by escaped prisoners of war.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FIRST NIGHT

THE commonest sight of all along the river was the women washing clothes, sometimes singly, sometimes in little groups

whose gossiping chatter floated out to them distinctly over the water. The Englishmen could hear the *clop-clop-clop* of the wooden beaters smacking the wet clothes on the boards, and could see the kneeling women sway down and up as they rinsed them in the current; most of the women looked up from their work and gave them a glance as they drifted by, but it was never more than a long glance, and often not as much.

In a time of war and upheaval there were so many possible explanations for the women not to know the occupants of the boat that their inability did not trouble them.

Of roaring rapids such had nearly destroyed them once before, they saw nothing; the junction of the Allier, and the cessation of the winter floods, accounted for that.

The rock-strewn sandbars represented the sites of winter rapids and were far easier to navigate, or rather to circumvent. In fact, there were no difficulties at all.

Even the weather was benign, a lovely clear day of sunshine, comfortably warm, lighting up the changing panorama of gold and blue and green.

Brown basked in it all unashamedly, and the hard-bitten Bush took his ease whenever the peacefulness of it caught him napping. In Bush's stern philosophy mankind—naval mankind at least—was born to sorrow and difficulty and danger, and any variation from such a state of affairs must be viewed with suspicion and not enjoyed too much lest it should have to be paid for at compound interest.

It was too good to be true, this delightful drifting down the river, as morning wore into noon and noon into a prolonged and dreamy afternoon, with a delicious lunch to eat of a cold paté (a parting gift from fat Jeanne) and a bottle of wine.

The little towns, or rather villages, which they passed were all perched up high on the distant banks beyond the flood limits; Hornblower, who already knew by heart the brief itinerary and table of distances which the count had made out for him, was aware that the first town with a bridge was at Briare, which they could not reach until late evening.

He had intended to wait above the town until nightfall and then run through in the darkness, but as the day wore on his resolve steadily hardened to push on without waiting.

He was aware that it was a very remarkable thing for him to do, to run into danger, even the slightest, when urged neither by the call of duty nor the thirst for distinction. Here the only benefit would be the saving of an hour or two's time. The Nelsonian tradition to "lose not an hour" was grained deeply into him, but it was hardly that which influenced him.

Partly it was his innate cross-grainedness. Everything had gone so supremely well.

Their escape from their escort had been almost miraculous, the coincidence which had brought them to the Chateau de Graçay, where alone in all France they could have found safety, was more nearly miraculous still.

Now this voyage down the river bore every promise of easy success. His instinctive reaction to all this unnatural prosperity was to put himself into the way of trouble—there had been so much trouble in his life that he felt uneasy without it.

BUT partly he was being driven by devils. He was morose and cantankerous. Marie was being left behind, and he was regretting that more with every yard that divided them. He was tormented by the thought of the shameful part he had played, and by memories of the hours they had spent together; sentimentally he was obsessed with longing for her.

And ahead of him lay England where they thought him dead; where Maria would by now have reconciled herself to her loss and would be doubly and painfully happy with him in consequence; and where Barbara would have forgotten him; and where a court martial to inquire into his conduct awaited him.

He thought grimly that it might be better for everyone if he *were* dead; he shrank a little from the prospect of returning to England as one might shrink from a cold plunge, or as he shrank from the imminent prospect of danger.

He had always forced himself to face danger, to advance bravely to meet it. He had always gulped down any pill which life had presented to him, knowing that any hesitation would give him a contempt for himself more bitter still. So now he would accept no excuse for delay.

Briare was in sight now, down at the end of the long wide reach of the river. Its church tower was silhouetted against the evening sky, and its long straggling bridge stood out black against the distant silver of the water. Hornblower at the sculls looked over his shoulder and saw all this; he was aware of his subordinates' eyes turned inquiringly upon him.

"Take the sculls, Brown," he growled.

They changed places silently, and Bush handed over the tiller to him with a puzzled look—he had been well aware of the design to run past bridges only at night.

There were two vast black shapes creeping over the surface of the river down there, barges being warped out of the lateral canal on one side and into the canal of Briare on the other by way of a channel across the river dredged for the purpose. Hornblower stared forward as they approached under the impulse of Brown's steady strokes.

A quick examination of the water surface told him which arch of the bridge to select, and he was able to discern the tow-ropes and warps of the barges—there were teams of horses both on the bridge and on the banks, silhouetted clearly against the sky as they tugged at the ropes to drag the bulky barges across the rushing current.

Men were looking at them now from the bridge, and there was just sufficient gap left between the barges to enable the boat to slip between without the necessity to stop and make explanations.

"Pull!" he said to Brown, and the boat went careering headlong down the river.

THEY slid under the bridge with a rush, and neatly rounded the stern of one of the barges; the burly old man at the tiller, with a little grandchild beside him, looked down at them with a dull curiosity as they shot by.

Hornblower waved his hand gaily to the child—excitement was a drug which he craved, which always sent his spirits high—and looked up with a grin at the other men on the bridge and on the banks.

Then they were past, and Briare was left behind.

"Easy enough, sir," commented Bush.

"Yes," said Hornblower.

If they had been travelling by road they certainly would have been stopped for examination of their passports; here on the unnavigable river such a proceeding occurred to no one. The sun was low now, shining right into his eyes as he looked forward, and it would be dark in less than an hour.

Hornblower began to look out for a place where they could be comfortable for the night. He allowed one long island to slide past them before he saw the ideal spot—a tiny hummock of an island with three willow trees, the green of the central part surrounded by a broad belt of golden brown where the receding river had left the gravel exposed.

"We'll run the boat aground over there, Brown," he announced. "Easy. Pull starboard. Pull both. Easy."

It was not a very good landing. Hornblower, despite his undoubted ability in handling big ships, had much to learn regarding the behaviour of flat-bottomed boats amid the shoals of a river.

There was a back-eddy which swung them round; the boat had hardly touched bottom before the current had jerked her free again. Brown, tumbling over the bows, was nearly waist deep in water and had to grab the painter and brace himself against the current to check her.

The tactful silence which ensued could

almost be felt while Brown tugged the boat up to the gravel again—Hornblower, in the midst of his annoyance, was aware of Bush's restless movement and thought of how his first lieutenant would have admonished a midshipman guilty of such a careless piece of work. It made him grin to think of Bush bottling up his feelings, and the grin made him forget his annoyance.

He stepped out into the shallow water and helped Brown run the lightened boat farther up the bank, checking Bush when he made to step out too—Bush could never accustom himself to seeing his captain at work while he sat idle.

The water was no more than ankle-deep by the time he allowed Bush to disembark; they dragged the boat up as far as she could go and Brown made fast the painter to a peg driven securely into the earth, as a precaution in case any unexpected rise in the water level should float the boat off. The sun had set now in the flaming west, and it was fast growing dark.

"Supper," said Hornblower. "What shall we have?"

A CAPTAIN with strict ideas of discipline would merely have announced what they should eat, and would certainly not have called his subordinates into consultation, but Hornblower was too conscious of the top-heavy organization of his present ship's company to be able to maintain appearances to that extent.

Yet Bush and Brown were still oppressed by a lifelong experience of subordination and could not bring themselves to proffer advice to their captain; they merely fidgetted and stood silent, leaving it to Hornblower to decree that they should finish off the cold paté with some boiled potatoes.

Once the decision was made, Brown proceeded to amplify and interpret his captain's original order, just as a good first lieutenant should.

"I'll handle the fire here," he said. "There ought to be all the driftwood we need, Brown. Yes, an' I'll want some sheer-legs to hang the pan over the fire—cut me three off those trees, there."

Bush felt it in his bones that Hornblower was meditating taking part in the preparation of supper, and could not bear the thought. He looked up at his captain half appealingly, half defiantly.

A captain should not merely never be seen doing undignified work, but he should be kept in awful isolation, screened away in the mysterious recesses of his cabin.

Hornblower left them to it, and wandered off round the tiny island, looking over at the distant banks and the rare houses, fast disappearing in the growing twilight.

It was a shock to discover that the pleasant green which carpeted most of the island was not the grass he had assumed it to be, but a bank of nettles, knee high already despite the earliness of the season. Judging by his language, Brown on the other side had just made the same discovery while seeking fuel with his feet bare.

Hornblower paced the gravel bank for a space, and on his return it was an idyllic scene which met his eyes. Brown was tending the little fire which flickered under the pot swinging from its tripod, while Bush, his wooden leg sticking stiffly out in front of him, was peeling the last of the potatoes. Apparently Bush had decided that a first lieutenant could share menial work with the sole member of the crew without imperilling discipline. They all ate together, wordless but friendly, beside the dying fire; even the chill air of the evening did not cool the feeling of comradeship of which each was conscious in his own particular way.

"Shall I set a watch, sir?" asked Bush, as supper ended.

"No," said Hornblower.

The minute additional security which would be conferred by one of them staying awake would not compare with the discomfort and inconvenience of everyone losing four hours' sleep each night.

Bush and Brown slept in cloak and blanket on the bare soil, probably, Horn-

blower anticipated, most uncomfortably.

For himself there was a mattress of cut nettles cunningly packed under the boat cover which Brown had prepared for him on the most level part of the gravel spit, presumably at a grave cost in stings. He slept on it peacefully, the dew wetting his face and a gibbous moon shining down upon it from the starry sky. Vaguely he remembered, in a troubled fashion, the stories of the great leaders of men—Charles XII especially—who shared their men's coarse fare and slept like them on the bare ground.

For a second or two he feared he should be doing likewise, and then his common sense overrode his modesty and told him that he did not need to have recourse to theatrical tricks to win the affections of Bush and Brown.

CHAPTER XX

SEA SMELL

THOSE days on the Loire were pleasant, and every day was more pleasant than the one preceding. For Hornblower there was not merely the passive pleasure of a fortnight's picnic, but there was the far more active one of the comradeliness of it all.

During his ten years as a captain his natural shyness had reinforced the restrictions surrounding his position, and had driven him more and more in upon himself until he had grown unconscious of his aching need for human companionship.

In that small boat, living at close quarters with the others, and where one man's misfortune was everyone's, he came to know happiness. His keen insight made him appreciate more than ever the sterling good qualities of Bush, who was secretly fretting over the loss of his foot, and the inactivity to which that loss condemned him, and the doubtfulness of his future as a cripple.

"I'll see you posted as captain," said Hornblower, on the only occasion on which Bush hinted at his troubles, "if it's my last act on earth."

He thought he might possibly contrive that, even if disgrace awaited him personally in England. Lady Barbara must still remember Bush and the old days in the *Lydia*, and must be aware of his good qualities as Hornblower was himself.

An appeal to her, properly worded—even from a man broken by court-martial—might have an effect, and might set turning the hidden wheels of Government patronage. Bush deserved post-rank more than half the captains he knew on the list.

Then there was Brown with his unfailing cheerfulness. No one could judge better than Hornblower the awkwardness of Brown's position, living in such close proximity to two officers.

But Brown always could find the right mixture of friendliness and deference; he could laugh gaily when he slipped on a rounded stone and sat down in the Loire, and he could smile sympathetically when the same thing happened to Hornblower.

He busied himself over the jobs of work which had to be done, and never, not even after ten days' routine had established something like a custom, appeared to take it for granted that his officers would do their share.

Hornblower could foresee a great future for Brown, if helped by a little judicious exertion of influence. He might easily end as a captain, too—Darby and Westcott had started on the lower deck in the same fashion. Even if the court-martial broke him, Hornblower could do something to help Brown. Elliott and Bolton at least would not desert him entirely, and would rate Brown as midshipman in their ships if he asked them to with special earnestness.

In making these plans for the future of his friends, Hornblower could bring himself to contemplate the end of the voyage and the inevitable court-martial with something like equanimity; for the rest, during those golden days, he was able to avoid all thought of their approaching end.

It was a placid journey through a placid limbo. He was leaving behind him in the past the shameful memory of his treatment

of Marie, and the troubles to come were still in the future; for once in his life he was able to live in the lotus-eating present.

ALL the manifold little details of the journey helped towards this desirable end—they were so petty and yet temporarily so important. Selecting a course between the golden sandbanks of the river; stepping out overside to haul the boat over when his judgment was incorrect; finding a lonely island on which to camp at night, and cooking supper when one was found; drifting past the gravel-dredgers and the rare fishing parties; avoiding conspicuous behavior while passing towns; there were always trifles to occupy the mind.

There were the two nights when it rained, and they all slept huddled together under the shelter of a blanket stretched between willow trees—there had been a ridiculous pleasure about waking up to find Bush snoring beside him with a protective arm across him.

There was the pageantry of the Loire—Gien with its château—fortress high on its terraces; and Sully with its vast rounded bastions; and Château-Neuf-sur-Loire, and Jargeau.

Then for miles along the river they were in sight of the gaunt square towers of the cathedral of Orléans—Orléans was one of the few towns with an extensive riverfront, past which they had to drift unobtrusively and with special care at its difficult bridges.

Orléans was hardly out of sight before they reached Beaugency with its interminable bridge of countless arches and its strange square tower. Blue and gold and green was the river.

The rocks above Nevers were succeeded by the gravel banks of the middle reaches, and now the gravel gave way to sand, golden sand amid the shimmering blue of the river whose water was a clear green overside.

All the contrasted greens delighted Hornblower's eyes, the green of the never-ending willows, of the vineyards and the cornfields and the meadows.

They passed Blois, its steeply-humped bridge crowned by the pyramid whose inscription proclaimed the bridge to be the first public work of the infant Louis XV, and Chaumont and Amboise, their lovely *châteaux* towering above the river, and Tours—an extensive waterfront to sidle past here, too—and Langeais.

The wild desolation of the island-studded river was punctuated everywhere by towers and *châteaux* and cathedrals on the distant banks.

Below Langeais the big placid Vienne entered the river on their left, and appeared to convey some of its own qualities to the united stream, which was now a little slower and more regular in its course, its shallows becoming less and less frequent.

After Saumur and the innumerable islands of Les Ports de Cé, the even bigger Maine came in on their right, and finally deprived the wild river of all the characteristics which had endeared it to them.

Here it was far deeper and far slower, and for the first time they found the attempt to make the river available for commercial traffic successful here—they had passed numerous traces of wasted work on Bonaparte's part higher up.

But below the confluence of the Maine the groyness and dykes had withstood the winter floods and the continual erosion, had piled up long beaches of golden sand on either bank, and had left in the centre a deep channel navigable to barges—they passed several working their way up to Angers from Nantes.

Mostly they were being towed by teams of mules, but one or two were taking advantage of a westerly wind to make the ascent under vast gaffmainsails.

Hornblower stared hungrily at them, for they were the first sails he had seen for months, but he put aside all thought of stealing one.

It would be senseless.

A glance at their clumsy lines assured him that it would be more dangerous to put to sea, even for a short distance, in one of those than in the cockleshell boat they had already.

THAT westerly wind that brought the barges up brought something else with it, too. Brown, diligently tugging at the sculls as he forced the boat into it, suddenly wrinkled his nose.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said, "I can smell the sea."

They sniffed at the breeze, all three of them.

"By God, you're right, Brown," said Bush.

Hornblower said nothing, but he had smelt the salt as well, and it had brought with it such a wave of mixed feelings as to leave him without words.

And that night after they had camped —there were just as many desolate islands to choose from, despite the changes in the river—Hornblower noticed that the level of the water had risen perceptibly above where it had stood when they beached the boat.

It was not floodwater like the time when after a day of heavy rain their boat had nearly floated during the night; on this evening above Nantes there had been no rain, nor sign of it, for three days.

Hornblower watched the water creep up at a rate almost perceptible, watched it reach a maximum, dally there for a space, and then begin to sink.

It was the tide.

Down at Paimboeuf at the mouth there was a rise and fall of ten or twelve feet, at Nantes one of four or six; up here he was witnessing the last dying effort of the banked-up sea to hold the river back in its course.

There was a strange emotion in the thought. They had reached tidewater at last, the habitat on which he had spent more than half his life; they had travelled from sea to sea, from the Mediterranean to what was at least technically the Atlantic; this same tide he was witnessing here washed also the shores of England, where were Barbara, and Maria, and his unknown child, and the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty.

But more than that. It means that their pleasant picnic on the Loire was over.

In tidal water they would not hope to move about with half the freedom they had known inland; strange faces and new arrivals would be scanned with suspicion, and probably the next forty-eight hours or so would determine whether he was to reach England to face a court-martial or be recaptured to face a firing squad.

Hornblower knew that moment the old sensations of excitement, which he called fear to himself—the quickened heartbeat, the dampening palms, the tingling in the calves of his legs. He had to brace himself to master these symptoms before returning to the others to tell them of his observations.

"High water half an hour back, sir?" repeated Bush in reply.

"Yes."

"M'm," said Bush.

Brown said nothing, as accorded with his position in life, but his face bore momentarily the same expression of deep cogitation.

They were both assimilating the fact, in the manner of seamen.

Hornblower knew that from now on, with perhaps a glance at the sun but not necessarily with a glance at the river, they would be able to tell offhand the state of the tides, producing the information without a thought by the aid of a subconscious calculating ability developed during a lifetime at sea.

He could do the same himself—the only difference between them was that he was interested in the phenomenon while they were indifferent to it or unaware of it.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PILOT

FOR their entrance into Nantes Hornblower decided that they must wear their uniforms as officials of the customs service. It called for long and anxious thought to reach this decision, a desperately keen balancing of chances.

If they arrived in civilian clothes they would almost certainly be questioned, and in that case it would be almost impossible

to explain their lack of papers and passports, whereas in uniform they might easily not be questioned at all; and if they were, a haughty demeanor might still save them.

But to pose as a colonel of *douaniers* would call for histrionic ability on the part of Hornblower, and he mistrusted himself—not his ability, but his nerve.

With remorseless self-analysis he told himself that he had played a part for years, posing as a man of rigid imperturbability when he was nothing of the kind, and he asked himself why he could not pose for a few minutes as a man of swaggering and overbearing haughtiness, even under the additional handicap of having to speak French.

In the end it was in despite of his doubts that he reached his decision, and put on the neat uniform and pinned the glittering Legion of Honour on his breast.

As always, it was the first moment of departure which tried him most—getting into the sternsheets of the boat and taking the tiller while Brown got out the sculls. The tension under which he laboured was such that he knew that if he allowed it the hand that rested on the tiller would tremble, and the voice which gave the orders to Brown would quaver.

So he carried himself with the unbending rigidity which men were accustomed to see in him, and he spoke with the insensitive harshness he always used in action.

Under the impulse of Brown's sculls the river glided away behind them, and the city of Nantes came steadily nearer. Houses grew thicker and thicker on the banks, and then the river began to break up into several arms; to Hornblower the main channel between the islands was made obvious by the indications of traces of commercial activity along the banks—traces of the past, largely, for Nantes was a dying town, dying of the slow strangulation of the British blockade.

The lounging idlers along the quays, the deserted warehouse, all indicated the dire effects of war upon French commerce.

They passed under a couple of bridges, with the tide running strongly, and left the huge mass of the ducal *château* to starboard; Hornblower forced himself to sit with careless ease in the boat, as though neither courting nor avoiding observation: the Legion of Honour chinked as it swung upon his breast.

A side glance at Bush suddenly gave him enormous comfort and reassurance, for Bush was sitting with a masklike immobility of countenance which told Hornblower that he was nervous too.

Bush could go into action and face an enemy's broadside with an honest indifference to danger, but this present situation was trying his nerves severely, sitting watched by a thousand French eyes, and having to rely upon mere inactivity to save himself from death or imprisonment.

The sight was like a tonic to Hornblower. His cares dropped from him, and he knew the joy and thrill of reckless bravery.

BEYOND the next bridge the maritime port began. Here first were the fishing-boats—Hornblower looked keenly at them, for he had it in mind to steal one of them. His experience under Pellew in the blockading squadron years ago was serving him in good stead now, for he knew the ways of those fishing-boats.

They were accustomed to ply their trade among the islands of the Breton coast, catching the pilchards which the French persisted in calling "sardines," and bringing their catch up the estuary to sell in the market at Nantes.

He and Bush and Brown between them could handle one of those boats with ease, and they were seaworthy enough to take them safely out to the blockading squadron, or to England if necessary. He was practically certain that he would decide upon such a plan, so that as they rowed by he sharply ordered Brown to pull more slowly, and he turned all his attention upon them.

Below the fishing-boats two American ships were lying against the quay, the Stars and Stripes fluttering jauntily in the wind.

His attention was caught by a dreary clanking of chains—the ships were being emptied of their cargoes by gangs of prisoners, each man staggering, bent double under a bag of grain. That was interesting. Hornblower looked again. The chain gangs were under the charge of soldiers—Hornblower could see the shakoes and the flash of the musket barrels—which gave him an insight into who the poor devils might be.

They were military criminals, deserters, men caught sleeping at their posts, men who had disobeyed an order, all the unfortunates of the armies Bonaparte maintained in every corner of Europe. Their sentences condemned them to the galleys and as the French navy no longer used galleys in which they could be forced to tug at the oars, they were now employed in all the hard labour of the ports; twice as lieutenant in Pellew's *Indefatigable* Hornblower had seen picked up small parties of desperate men who had escaped from Nantes in much the same fashion as he himself proposed now to do.

And then against the quay below the American ships they saw something else, something which caused them to stiffen in their seats. The tricolour here was hoisted above a tattered blue ensign, flaunting a petty triumph.

"*Witch of Endor,* ten-gun cutter," said Bush hoarsely. "A French frigate caught her on a lee shore off Noirmoutier last year. By God, isn't it what you'd expect of the French? It's eleven months ago and they're still wearing French colours over British."

She was a lovely little ship; even from where they were they could see the perfection of her lines—speed and seaworthiness were written all over her.

"The Frogs don't seem to have oversparred her the way you'd expect 'em to," commented Bush.

SHE was ready for sea, and their expert eyes could estimate the area of the furled mainsail and jib. The high graceful mast nodded to them, almost imperceptibly, as the cutter rocked minutely beside the quay.

It was as if a prisoner were appealing to them for aid, and the flapping colours, tricolour over blue ensign, told a tragic story.

In a sudden rush of impulse Hornblower put the helm over. "Lay us alongside the quay," he said to Brown.

A few strokes took them there; the tide had turned some time ago, and they headed against the flood. Brown caught a ring and made the painter fast, and first Hornblower, nimbly, and then Bush, with difficulty, mounted the stone steps.

"*Suivez-nous,*" said Hornblower to Brown, remembering at the last moment to speak French.

Hornblower forced himself to hold up his head and walk with a swagger; the pistols in his side pockets bumped reassuringly against his hips, and his sword tapped against his thigh

Bush walked beside him, his wooden leg thumped with measured stride on the stone quay. A passing group of soldiers saluted the smart uniform, and Hornblower returned the salute nonchalantly, amazed at his new coolness.

His heart was beating fast, but ecstatically he knew he was not afraid. It was worth running this risk to experience this feeling of mad bravery.

They stopped and looked at the *Witch of Endor* against the quay. Her decks were not of the dazzling whiteness upon which an English first lieutenant would have insisted, and there was a slovenliness about her standing rigging which was heartbreaking to contemplate.

A couple of men were moving lackadaisically about the deck under the supervision of a third.

"Anchor watch," muttered Bush. "Two hands and a master's mate."

He spoke without moving his lips, like a naughty boy in school, lest some onlooker should read his words and realize that he was not speaking French.

"Everyone else on shore, the lubbers," went on Bush.

Hornblower stood on the quay, the tiny breeze blowing round his ears, soldiers and sailors and civilians walking by, the bustle of the unloading of the American ships noisy in the distance.

Bush's thoughts were following on the heels of his own. Bush was aware of the temptation Hornblower was feeling, to steal the *Witch of Endor* and to sail her to England—Bush would never have thought of it himself, but years of service under his captain made him receptive of ideas however fantastic.

Fantastic was the right word.

Those big cutters carried a crew of sixty men, and the gear and tackle were planned accordingly. Three men—one a cripple—could not even hope to be able to hoist the big mainsail, although it was just possible that the three of them might handle her under sail in the open sea in fair weather. It was that possibility which had given rise to the train of thought, but on the other hand there was all the tricky estuary of the Loire between them and the sea; and the French, Hornblower knew, had removed the buoys and navigation marks for fear of an English raid.

Unpiloted they could never hope to find their way through thirty-five miles of shoals without going aground, and besides, there were batteries at Paimboeuf and St. Nazaire to prohibit unauthorized entrance and exit.

The thing was impossible—it was sheer sentimentality to think of it, he told himself, suddenly self-critical again for a moment.

HE TURNED away and strolled up towards the American ships, and watched with interest the wretched chain gangs staggering along the gangplanks with their loads of grain. The sight of their misery sickened him; so did the bullying sergeants who strutted about in charge of them.

Here, if anywhere, he told himself, was to be found the nucleus of that rising against Bonaparte which everyone was expecting.

All that was needed was a desperate leader—that would be something worth reporting to the Government when he reached home.

Farther down the river yet another ship was coming up to the port, her topsails black against the setting sun, as, with the flood behind her, she held her course close hauled to the faint southerly breeze. She was flying the Stars and Stripes—American again.

Hornblower experienced the same feeling of exasperated impotence which he had known in the old days of his service under Pellew. What was the use of blockading a coast, and enduring all the hardships and perils of that service, if neutral vessels could sail in and out like this with impunity?

Their cargoes of wheat were officially noncontraband, but wheat was of as vital importance to Bonaparte as ever was hemp, or pitch, or any other item on the contraband list—the more wheat he could import, the more men he could draft into his armies.

Hornblower found himself drifting into the eternal debate as to whether America, when eventually she became weary of the indignities of neutrality, would turn her arms against England or France—she had actually been at war with France for a short time already, and it was much to her interest to help pull down the imperial despotism, but it was doubtful whether she would be able to resist the temptation to twist the British lion's tail.

The new arrival, smartly enough handled was edging in now to the quay. A backed topsail took the way off her, and the warps creaked round the bollards. Hornblower watched idly, Bush and Brown beside him.

As the ship was made fast, a gangplank was thrown to the quay, and a little stout man made ready to walk down it from the ship. He was in civilian clothes, and he had a rosy round face with a ridiculous little black moustache with upturned ends. From his manner of shaking hands with the captain, and from the very broken English

which he was speaking, Hornblower guessed him to be the pilot.

The pilot!

IN THAT moment a surge of ideas boiled up in Hornblower's mind. It would be dark in less than an hour, with the moon in its first quarter—already he could see it, just visible in the sky high over the setting sun. A clear night, the tide about to ebb, a gentle breeze, southerly with a touch of east. A pilot available on the one hand, a crew on the other.

Then he hesitated.

The whole scheme was rash to the point of madness—beyond that point. It must be ill-digested, unsound. His mind raced madly through the scheme again, but even as it did so he was carried away by a wave of recklessness. There was an intoxication about throwing caution to the winds which he had forgotten since his boyhood.

In the tense seconds which were all he had, while the pilot was descending the gangplank and approaching them along the quay, he had formed his resolution. He nudged his two companions, and then stepped forward and intercepted the fat little pilot as he walked briskly past them.

"*Monsieur,*" he said. "I have some questions to ask you. Will you kindly accompany me to my ship for a moment?"

The pilot noted the uniform, the star of the Legion of Honour, the assured manner.

He bowed.

"Why, certainly," he said. His conscience was clear; he was guilty of no more than venal infringements of the Continental system. He turned and trotted alongside Hornblower. "You are a newcomer to this port, Colonel, I fancy?"

"I was transformed here yesterday from Amsterdam," answered Hornblower, shortly.

Brown was striding along at the pilot's other elbow: Bush was bringing up the rear, gallantly trying to keep pace with them, his wooden leg thumping the pavement. They came up to the *Witch of Endor,* and made their way up her gangplank to her deck; the officer there looked at them with a little surprise. But he knew the pilot, and he knew the Customs uniform.

"I want to examine one of your charts, if you please," said Hornblower. "Will you show us the way to the cabin?"

The mate had not a suspicion in the world. He signed to his men to go on with their work and led the way down the brief companion to the after-cabin.

The mate entered, and politely Hornblower thrust the pilot in next, before him. It was a tiny cabin, but there was sufficient room to be safe when they were at the farther end. He stood by the door and brought out his two pistols.

"If you make a sound," he said, and excitement rippled his lips into a snarl, "I will kill you."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

By GARNETT RADCLIFFE

Author of "The Pit of Punishment," "Beer Ach Toc Toc York," etc.

Their cargo was gold, and the dacoits were the cleverest robbers in the world

Simple Simon

Feroz Khan had always learned his cunning from Allah alone—until the day he was taught a deeper lesson by a young Britisher with the face of a guileless cherub

HAD the headman of the village of Chota Miran not been such a leaky-tongued gentleman this story would never have been written. But he wasn't discreet. When he heard that the Indian Government proposed sending him a large sum of rupees, he behaved as a hen does when she has laid an unusually large egg, and his cackling made the headmen of all the other villages between Zilla and the Balla Pass turn green with envy.

The reason for the money being sent was that a pilot of the Twelfth Peshawar Squadron had dropped two bombs on Chota Miran in mistake for the village of Rullah a few miles distant. The latter was inhabited by a tribe of *dacoits*—or robbers. The pilot can hardly be blamed, for his maps were bad and from the air Chota Miran and Rullah were as alike as a couple of beehives. And, as a matter of fact, the bombs had done so little damage that it hardly mattered on which of the two villages they had fallen. There had been no human casualties, the entire population having fled into caves at the first drone of the bomber, and half-a-dozen mud huts, a few goats, donkeys and sheep had been the sum total of the damage.

The Indian Government, however, takes a very serious view of the bombing of "friendlies." When the mistake had been ascertained, reparation was prompt and far more than ample. Mir Gul, the head-

man of Chota Miran, was not only apologised to personally by a political officer of high degree, but he was also informed that as compensation for the damage done by the bombs of the British Raj he would receive twenty-five thousand rupees, a sum for which he would have viewed the complete destruction of Chota Miran and all the donkeys, sheep, goats and dogs therein with complete equanimity.

The headmen of the villages that had not been bombed by mistake were furious. They asked Allah what Chota Miran had done to deserve such a stroke of good fortune. And the most angry of them all was Feroz Khan, headman of the *dacoit* village of Rullah for which the bombs had really been intended.

For what had happened had put Feroz Khan, whose nickname was "The Cunning," in an awkward position. When he had first heard of the bombing of Chota Miran he had been delighted and had informed his followers that the mistake had been due to a clever trick played by himself. What the trick was he didn't explain, but everyone had believed him and he had gained great kudos for a supreme display of cunning.

Now, however, it appeared that he hadn't been so very cunning after all. The bragged-of trick had brought enormous benefit to Chota Miran, between which village and Rullah there was a blood-feud so old that no one could remember how it had started.

A village council was called and Feroz Khan the Cunning was asked to explain why his policy had resulted in a gain for the enemy. And Feroz Khan the Cunning did what every statesman does in such circumstances—he made fresh promises.

"You are fools and as witless as drunken grasshoppers," he yelled at those who had been taunting him. "Am I then called Feroz Khan the Cunning for no reason? You feared the bombs were going to fall on Rullah, and behold, by my cleverness they fell on Chota Miran! Now you are angry because you have heard that the British Raj proposes to rain gold on Chota Miran! Is it then easier to guide bombs than gold?"

They stared at him, puzzled to understand his meaning. Then one who was brighter than the others threw back his head and laughed.

"Ho, ho, that would be a jest indeed! Having misguided the bombs of the Raj, you will now misguide the money. We of Rullah will receive a reward for the damage done to Chota Miran! But how can this trick be worked?"

Feroz Khan the Cunning had not the slightest idea, but he answered as any other statesman would have done:

"Wait and see."

IN THIS territory checks and paper money alike are as useless as pocket handkerchiefs. To be worth anything money must be in the form of hard cash, which you can bank under the sleeping-boards in your hut without fear of its being devoured by ants.

The sending, therefore, of the rupees to Chota Miran was not the simple matter it would have been in a more civilized portion of the globe, especially as, owing to a shortage of silver, the Indian Government had decided to make half the payment in *annas* and *pice*. It entailed more than the posting of a registered letter. Not to enumerate all the details of what it did entail, mention may be made of five strong mules, ten ammunition boxes to hold the bullion, a dozen *sepoys* and a native sergeant to act as escort, and, last but not least, a British subaltern to command the convoy.

On the shoulders of the adjutant of the Fiftieth Pathans fell the duty of making the arrangements. The ammunition boxes, the mules, the *sepoys* and the native sergeant were easy enough, but the British subaltern was another matter. Second Lieutenant Foster, the last-joined member of the mess, seemed to be the only person available, and what the Fiftieth Pathans thought of Foster may be deduced from the fact that they had nicknamed him "Simple Simon."

It was his appearance that had led them to give him that name. He was smooth and guileless-looking with blue eyes and fair hair. Dressed in a surplice and singing tenor in an English cathedral he would have looked as much in his proper element as a herring swimming in the North Sea. As commander of a treasure-convoy that would have to cross desperate country swarming with the cleverest thieves in the world he was not so convincing.

But it was a case of Hobson's choice. Having satisfied himself that there was no one else available, the adjutant sent for Simple Simon, showed him the bullion stacked in a corner of his office in the canvas bags in which it had arrived from the bank, and told him what was required.

"Think you can manage it?" he asked doubtfully. "Of course I'll let you have the best *havildar* I can—"

"It will be all right, sir," Simple Simon assured him.

"I hope it will," the adjutant said. "If that money fails to reach Chota Miran it will be a reflection on the regiment. Keep your eyes skinned for *dacoits*. I only wish I'd someone more experienced to send. . . ."

He looked at Simple Simon's guileless face and sighed. This, he thought to himself, was rather like sending a lamb into a wolf-infested forest.

TWO days later the convoy set out. Under Simple Simon's directions the bullion had been packed in empty ammunition boxes which were slung in pairs on the backs of five mules. Four other mules carried rations and water. Four *sepoys* and the *havildar*—the native officer—went ahead to act as scouts, and Simple Simon walked at the rear, his eyes glued on those precious ammunition boxes.

He wasn't going to let them out of his sight if he could help it. During his last two days at headquarters he had been hearing a lot about the ways of *dacoits*. His mentors had been his brother-officers, and Simple Simon had listened round-eyed to all they said.

His expression of simple wonder had encouraged his brother-officers. They told him of sleeping men who had been knifed in the middle of well-guarded camps, of rifles that had vanished in a way no white man could fathom, of laden mules that had vanished bodily from marching columns. They told him of poles with nooses lowered from the tops of cliffs, of greased naked forms slipping past sentries as soundlessly as lizards, of *dacoits* who employed ventriloquism and hypnotism, of *dacoits* who could bury themselves in sand and remain alive for days, of *dacoits* who had ridden into camps clinging upside-down beneath sheep. And apparently Simple Simon had swallowed it all—even as the dacoit whom the signal officer claimed to remember had swallowed a rifle, a bayonet and three packets of ammunition prior to concealing himself for days at the foot of a colonel's sleeping bag.

"He pretended to be a hot-water bottle," the signal officer had said. "That's gospel truth, Simon. I tell you, my boy, if you want to get that rhino to Chota Miran you'll have to carry it in your boots!"

Seemingly the warnings had sunk into Simple Simon's mind. Thanks to his excessive precautions, the experience of his sergeant and the alertness of his Pathan *sepoys*, the spies sent by Feroz Khan the Cunning from Rullah to observe the convoy were unable to detect any chink in the guarding of the treasure. They reported this to Feroz Khan, but Feroz Khan only smiled and told them to wait and see.

Day followed day and still nothing happened. Comparative civilization dropped behind and they were claimed by what has been called the Wilderness of the Knife. A ragged wilderness of gray peaks and black ravines, hunting-ground of the *dacoit*, the jackal and the scorpion. It was very silent in that wilderness, and the vultures hanging high in the sky saw the convoy as a centipede creeping among rocks.

At the rear of the centipede walked Simple Simon with his eyes ever on the ammunition boxes. They passed through

a defile into the Rullah district where he had been warned to be extra vigilant. But Chota Miran was only a short day's march distant. It looked as if they had baffled the *dacoits*.

And then it happened. One moment only the sound of their feet and the pattering, creaking noises of mules scrambling in file up a sheer track, the next moment a yell from the *havildar* ahead, staccato shots and then pandemonium.

Had they been fifty yards further on they must have been caught in Feroz Khan's ambush. He had scores of men hidden on each side of the ravine, gray-clad figures crouching behind rocks with rifles who yelled as they fired. One prolonged volley and before the echoes had ceased to roll round the canyon walls they were rushing down like a stampede of horses. Tall, ragged men with flashing knives who bounded down the rocks like tigers.

Fighting on the North-West Frontier is a fast, vivid, picturesque affair not to be compared to the dreary shambles that is commercialized war. It was in a sunlit kaleidoscope of running figures and banging rifles that Simple Simon received his soldier's baptism. He fired his revolver, shouted orders no one could hear, and then was engulfed in a swirl of bolting mules with ammunition boxes flapping against their wet flanks like wings.

He grabbed some flying leading-ropes and was dragged a score of yards, shooting his revolver through clouds of dust at a leaping *dacoit* with an upraised knife. A rifle butt crashed on the *dacoit's* head and he rolled under the hoofs of the maddened mules. The mouth of a large cave showed on the right. If they could get the mules into that cave . . .

They did. Simple Simon yelled the order and then with rifle-butt, bayonet and sheer man-power the *sepoys* swung the hybrid avalanche off the track. Before the mules had clattered to the further end of the cave they were piling rocks at the entrance to form a barricade.

Simple Simon leant against the wall of the cave and was very sick. When that—his natural reaction from his first sight of violent death—had passed, he looked at the ammunition boxes and saw that there were still ten.

FEROZ KHAN the cunning's ambush had resulted in a draw. He had the convoy bottled in a cave, but between him and the actual possession of the treasure there were still eleven rifles and a revolver in the hands of men who could shoot fast and straight.

A siege might be a prolonged affair. The defenders had excellent cover and a sufficiency of ammunition. There was, as Feroz Khan knew, a spring of water at the back of the cave and when they had exhausted their rations they could live on mule-flesh.

A surprise night-attack seemed the best hope. Against inexperienced troops it would probably have succeeded, for the *dacoits* could cross ground like the shadows of jackals, but the Pathan *sepoys* were as keen-eared as themselves. They waited till the *dacoits* had wormed to within twenty yards of the cave entrance and then let them have it, every rifle spitting like a machine-gun while Simple Simon fired Verey lights.

The *dacoits* retreated with their dead and their wounded. It had begun to dawn upon them that securing the treasure wasn't going to be as easy as Feroz Khan the Cunning had promised. Leaving a few of their number to guard the cave, the remainder withdrew to a distance and held a council of war.

It was a stormy council. The tribesmen bayed round their leader like hounds at feeding-time. What were they to do now? They had had heavy losses; only devils could rush that cave and there was no time to starve the defenders into surrender. Soon those dogs of Chota Miran would learn what was happening and come to the rescue. What did Feroz Khan, who, Allah-alone-knew-why, was called The Cunning, propose to do now?

Feroz Khan smiled, stroked his beard and spoke.

"Truly," he said, "you are like little children whose foolishness is too great even to arouse my wrath. Have we not already captured the treasure even as I promised? It has not reached Chota Miran; it is there waiting for us in the cave, guarded by only eleven Pathans and an English child. Since, however, you are too cowardly to secure it by open attack, I will secure it for you by the stealth given to me by Allah. Before the sun has set twice more you will be bathing your hands in the silver."

He sounded so confident that they stared at him in wonder. Then a man put the inevitable question.

Feroz Khan smiled again.

"Wait and see," he said.

THAT night the *dacoits* attacked again. But they employed different tactics. Instead of attempting a surprise rush they kept up a heavy fusillade from a distance.

The Pathans did not reply to this fire. They were crouched behind the barricade, their bayonets fixed. Much ammunition had been expended the night before; now not a shot must be wasted. Simple Simon's face was drawn and anxious, for the responsibility was his and he could see no way out of the trap.

They had taken the ammunition boxes off the mules and piled them on the floor of the cave. Simple Simon knelt behind the pile, his revolver in his hand. He tried to appear calm, but at the bottom of his heart he was horribly afraid.

Simple Simon, clinging fast to the playing-fields-of-Eton tradition, of which he was a product, had tried hard to persuade himself that no true Briton ever knows fear. That he, therefore, could not be afraid. It was, unfortunately, no go. He *was* afraid.

They were trapped, and no matter how long they resisted there could be only one ending. Now the firing outside rose to a furious crescendo. This must be the prelude to a charge. . . .

And then, suddenly, there was a slackening in the storm of lead lashing the rocks. The *dacoits* were still firing, but not in the direction of the cave. A new enemy had arrived. A Very light showed a band of men like a wolf-pack racing down the opposite side of the ravine.

Simple Simon leant over the breastworks and listened intently. Somewhere in the darkness a man shouted "Save yourselves, brothers. The men from Chota Miran are attacking in the rear." There were more shots and yells and then confused sounds of a running fight.

Tribesmen came running toward the cave. They shouted loudly that they had come from Chota Miran to rescue the convoy. Some of the *sepoys* shouted back in welcome. But the native sergeant grasped Simple Simon's arm and whispered in his ear, "Have a care, *sahib*. This may be treachery."

Simple Simon took no notice. He jumped on the breastworks and shouted to the approaching tribesmen.

Simple Simon stood up, and a look of dazzled thankfulness crossed his square and honest face. But only for a moment. It soon passed.

"Well done, men of Chota Miran! You came to our aid in the nick of time. The money is still safe."

It was Feroz Khan the Cunning himself who answered. He was chuckling in his heart at the simplicity of the little *sahib*.

"Allah be praised we came in time, *sahib*."

He strode up to the breastworks, his men crowding at his heels. Their knives were ready for a swift rush. Feroz Khan's eyes fastened on the pile of ammunition boxes. In a moment he would give the word and the *dacoits* would be at the throats of the Pathans. . . . But what was the little *sahib* saying?

"We tricked the Rullah dogs. Even if they'd rushed the cave and slain us all, they wouldn't have secured the money. This is all they would have found."

Simple Simon dragged a box from the pile and slid back the lid. Laughing, he rolled the box on its side. Feroz Khan's

mouth fell open in amazement. It was sand, not coins that poured upon the ground.

Simple Simon was laughing as he spoke.

"A good trick, was it not? The *sahibs* at Abbotshah had warned me of the cunning of the *dacoits*. We knew the convoy would probably be attacked when we neared Rullah. So we left the money in a safe hiding-place and filled the boxes with sand so that they might think we still carried it. . . . Go now quickly to the Zat defile. Close by our last camping-ground there is a tall white stone. The money the Raj has sent you is buried beneath that stone."

"Beneath that stone, *sahib?*" Feroz Khan exclaimed.

"Yes," Simple Simon said.

The *dacoits* were already melting away. Feroz Khan salaamed and followed them swiftly.

There was a silence in the cave when they had gone. The Pathan sergeant was the first to speak. His dark eyes glowed.

"By the beard of the Prophet, *sahib*, that was a well-told lie!" he said. "Almost I could have believed you myself. But, *sahib*, by what magic did you place the sand in the box to deceive that fool?"

Simple Simon's smile was cherubic as he answered.

"By the magic of my own hands, *havildar*. I found the coins only occupied nine boxes; therefore I packed the tenth with sand to balance the load for the mules. And now we must load up and proceed with all speed to Chota Miran."

THE convoy reached Chota Miran unmolested at dawn. About the same time, at the camping-ground in the Zat defile, a perspiring *dacoit* raised his head to yelp a question.

"Already we have dug deep enough to bury a camel. How much longer—"

"Wait and see," said Feroz Khan the Cunning, but his voice sounded anxious.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

Coming Soon: Albino Nunez—Nine Lives Plus

"I can't hold on—much longer. Please—" she breathed

The Last Horizon

Life was measured out for them in hours . . . minutes. But even Death could pity them. A distinguished short short story

By NARD JONES

Author of "Deadline," "It Was Like This," etc.

DONNELLY hung fast to a chain dangling from the ship's side while with his free hand he tested the straps of his life preserver. Then he pushed out from the listing hull—pushed with both arms, and was rolled back, gently because the sea was smooth. He tried again, pushing harder, and this time he got free. This time he began paddling furiously and awkwardly.

He hoped that no one had seen him worming between the deck and the rail. But then, he reflected, it wouldn't have mattered in that moment. They had all been intent on getting into the boats. Everything had been very orderly and quiet.

The last of the boats was a good way off now. Donnelly hoped that they wouldn't spot him and come back to pick him up. Safe for now, the people in the boat would notice things.

They would stare in pity at a man without legs, hauled dripping over the side.

Donnelly had not been long without legs, and so he was neither accustomed nor resigned to it. He had lost them in a senseless accident building a bridge in the interior. He would always wonder whether he needed to have lost them, or whether the alcoholic settlement-doctor had been incompetent.

Gradually he had come to hate that doctor with a killing hate, and he knew that he must no longer let himself stay in that lonely hole with his bitterness. But he had not let Bill Meacham come home with him. "Thanks, old man, I'd rather you didn't. I'll stay in my cabin and manage all right. I've some thinking to do."

The thinking hadn't done much good. The whisky the steward brought did not help. Because there on board ship Donnelly faced something.

He was going back into a world of beautiful young women, and it would mean nothing to him. There were half a dozen aboard and sometimes they passed on the deck. Donnelly saw them, peering bitterly from behind the port's curtains, propped like a fantastic creature on the bed. There was one in particular. She had honey-colored hair, finely drawn features. She looked like the girl he had carried in his mind since boyhood. The girl he had been going to find when the Carkeek bridge was built.

He stopped watching, finally.

Two days out he went to bed, covering up the place where his legs should be. He ordered more whisky; and sometimes he could almost believe that if he chose he could get up and put on his flannel suit and take a turn around the deck.

He was in bed like that when the ship shuddered.

He lay there, listening to the shouts and the sound of running. He was there when the steward flung open the door, and started toward him with arms outstretched —as though he intended to carry Donnelly like a baby.

Donnelly cringed back against the wall of the berth, screaming! "Leave me alone! I'll take care of myself!"

When the steward left, Donnelly did not move.

A strange feeling had come over him. It was as if the whole thing were for him, and he welcomed it. Yet he did not want to be trapped there in the cabin. He listened. There were still voices, but they came from down on the water now.

It was then that he buckled a life preserver around him. The ship was listing badly, making it difficult when he let himself onto the floor. As he felt his hands on the carpet, lifted his trunk, he hated himself. His flesh crawled whenever he did this apelike thing.

SO HERE he was, with a little more time to think. But this was somehow good. He was upright. His head rose toward the sky and it did not matter that he had no legs. The water was not cold in this latitude; he might stand it for two or three days. But there would be no reason to suffer from thirst and hunger. It would be easy to slip the life jacket off when he was ready.

The hull of the little passenger-and-freighter was settling slowly. Donnelly watched it, fascinated. The superstructure slanted off toward the sun. When the ship was gone it would be lonely. But, he thought, so much was solved now.

The strange future had seemed insurmountable, and now it had been simplified for him.

When the ship disappeared with a queer sighing, Donnelly thrashed toward the spot. He found a hatch-cover and clung to it, not for its buoyancy but only because it reminded him in all that vastness that there were men and their works.

It was almost dark when a short, gasping cry startled him. He turned, still clinging to the hatch cover, to see the head and shoulders of a girl. Donnelly was amazed, and then he saw that she, too, wore a life jacket. He pushed the cover in front of him with one hand, paddling with the other. He worked slowly and easily, so that she would not know that he had no legs with which to drive.

He reached her just as the sun sank down behind that great field of water. Somehow he was not surprised when he saw that it was the blond girl who had passed his cabin. She did not speak when he reached her. She clung to him, not in panic, but in a deep silent joy that he was there.

Donnelly brought the hatch cover around between them. "Hang to this," he said. "It will help. And don't tire yourself. It won't do any good. The water is warm and we'll be picked up."

She looked at him in the half dark. "How—how long can we stay like this?"

Donnelly rushed in with words, crowding out his thoughts. "A good long time," he said.

He saw that she wasn't afraid. But he saw something else that was more exciting.

She regarded him as a man, and she was glad to be near him.

They were not strangers. It was as if they had known each other always. There was nothing to get between them and their instinct to be friends. They did not talk very much, and when the sun grew hot on the water they did not talk at all. He showed her how to hold to the cover with her arms, without strain, and rest her head on them from the sun.

Her lips were swelling a little, Donnelly saw. They were beautiful lips, and he prayed inwardly that a ship would sight him and the girl so that her lips could have fresh cool water to touch.

That next night it was bad. And when dawn came at last Donnelly thought: "We'll have to cut it off. It'll be better that way. I don't want to see her changing and suffering." She was suffering now. But it was nothing to what it would be. One of them would go mad. What horror for her if he should be the first one. . . .

•

Aboard the S. S. *Lear,* one woman comforted another. They were wrapped in blankets from the *Lear,* huddled together in the captain's cabin away from the curious who had watched the life boats emptied. "They will find your niece," the one woman said.

The other shook her head. "The boats are all accounted for. They won't find her. I know now that she stayed out of the boats."

The first woman stared.

"Stayed out?"

The other woman nodded. She was too weary and numbed for grief. "Yes. The doctor had said—not more than six months. Perhaps she was right to do it. . . ."

•

Donnelly unhooked the girl's jacket first. She was weak now, almost too weak to cling to his shoulder. But she knew what he was doing.

When he stopped, thinking to himself that a ship might yet come, she shook her head. Her eyes said that no ship was coming. Her eyes thanked him.

"Please," she said, in a raw whisper.

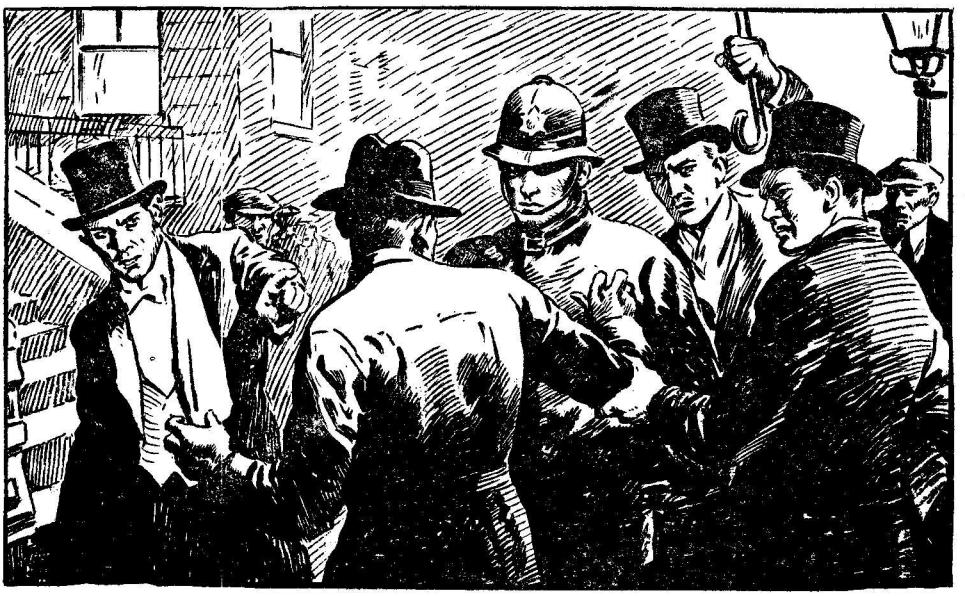
They clung there to each other, while the hatch-cover drifted off to be lost in the brilliance of the sun and the sea.

Done With the Wind

YOU can't beat the Third Reich for ingenuity. In spite of blood purges and the glorification of the Aryan race, Germany seems to be beset with road hogs and reckless drivers; eight thousand people are killed there annually in automobile accidents. So authorities in Berlin took steps.

Traffic police have been ordered to deflate the tires of reckless drivers at the exact spot where they are caught. Say you pass on the wrong side of the road or speed on curves: the lurking cop will haul you up at the side of the road and leave you there—deflated. Now the whole thing sounds rather prankish, but the Germans are quite serious about it. Still, this latest edict gives one to wonder. Can it be that beneath the brown shirt there beats the heart of a small boy?

—*Eric Sharpe*



"That man!" he cried. "He's the Portland Place murderer"

The Thirty-Nine Steps

By JOHN BUCHAN

ONE night a stranger named Scudder comes to Richard Hannay with an extraordinary story of international intrigue. According to Scudder a league of revolutionary extremists are plotting to set Europe ablaze with war. They possess money and power, he says; and the crisis is at hand—to come on June 15 when the Greek premier Karolides will be murdered in London. Scudder has carried out an elaborate ruse to convince these revolutionists that he is dead, and he begs Hannay to hide him. But only a few days later Hannay returns to his flat to find Scudder's body on the floor, stabbed to death.

Hannay flees to Scotland because he knows the police will accuse him of murder, and he is determined to continue Scudder's work, to uncover this war menace. Wandering the Scottish moors, he discovers all too quickly that he is being pursued—by the men who murdered Scudder. But for days he manages to escape them; and, too, he is able finally to decipher the dead man's notebook. It contains an amazing revelation: war is imminent; Germany is behind this plot, ready to take England unprepared.

BOTH the police and the spy league are closing in on Hannay; and at last he takes refuge in what seems to be a deserted house. But that is a fatal mistake, for a strange, scholarly old man dwells there, and when Hannay notices his curiously hooded eyes, he realizes that this is the man whom Scudder described as his most dangerous enemy. Hannay is taken prisoner.

Incredibly enough, he does effect his escape—by firing a supply of explosives stored in the room where he is locked. After weeks of suffering and illness he manages to reach the house of a man whom he has an introduction to—an important official in the British Foreign Office. They discuss the war plot, and Sir Walter is skeptical of its seriousness—until that very night he learns that the Greek Karolides has been murdered in London. . . .

The first installment of this three-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for December 10

CHAPTER X

THE COMING OF THE BLACK STONE

I CAME down to breakfast next morning, after eight hours of blessed sleep, to find Sir Walter decoding a telegram in the midst of muffins and marmalade.

"I had a busy hour on the telephone after you went to bed," he said. "I got my chief to speak to the First Lord and the Secretary for War, and they are bringing Royer over a day sooner. This wire clinches it. He will be in London at five. Odd that the code word for a *sous-chef d'etat* major general should be 'Porker'."

He directed me to the hot dishes and went on.

"Not that I think it will do much good. If your friends were clever enough to find out the first arrangement, they are clever enough to discover the change. I'd give my head to know where the leak is. We believe there were only five men in England who knew about Royer's visit, and you may be certain there were fewer in France. They manage things better there."

While I ate he continued to talk, giving me, to my surprise, his full confidence.

"Can the dispositions not be changed?" I asked.

"They could," he said. "But we want to avoid that if possible. They are the result of immense thought, and no alteration would be as good. Besides, on one or two points change is simply impossible. Still, something could be done if it were absolutely necessary. But you see the difficulty, Hannay.

"Our enemies are not going to be such fools as to pick Royer's pocket or any childish game like that. They know that would mean a row and put us on our guard. Their aim is to get the details without any of us knowing so that Royer will go back to Paris in the belief that the whole business is still deadly secret. If they can't do that, they fail, for once we suspect they know that the whole thing must be altered."

"Then we've got to stick by the Frenchman's side till he is home again," I said. "If they thought they could get the information in Paris, they'd try there. It means that they have some deep scheme on foot in London which they reckon is going to win out."

"Royer dines with my chief, and then comes to my house where four people will see him—Whittaker from the Admiralty, myself, Sir Arthur Drew, and General Winstanley. The First Lord is ill, and has gone to Sherringham. At my house he will get a certain document from Whittaker, and after that he'll be motored to Portsmouth where a destroyer will take him to Havre.

"His journey is too important for the ordinary boat-train. He will not be left unattended for a moment until he is safe on French soil. The same with Whittaker until he meets Royer. That's the best we can do, and it's hard to see how there can be any slip-up. But I don't mind admitting that I'm horribly nervous. This murder of Karolides will play the deuce in the chanceries of Europe."

After breakfast he asked me if I could drive a car.

"Well, you'll be my chauffeur today, and wear Hudson's rig. You're about his size. You have a hand in this business, and we're taking no risks. There are desperate men against us; they won't respect the country retreat of an over-worked official."

WHEN I first came to London I had bought a car and amused myself by running about the south of England, so I knew something of the geography.

I took Sir Walter to town by the Bath Road and made good going. It was a soft, breathless June morning, with a promise of sultriness later, but it was delicious enough swinging through the little towns with their freshly watered streets, and past the summer-gardens of the Thames valley. I landed Sir Walter at his house in Queen Anne's Gate punctually by half-past eleven. The butler was coming up by train with the luggage.

The first thing Sir Walter did was to

take me around to Scotland Yard. There we saw a prim gentleman, with a clean-shaven lawyer's face.

"I've brought you the Portland Place murderer," was Sir Walter's introduction.

The reply was a wry smile. "It would have been a welcome present, Sir Walter. This, I presume, is Mr. Richard Hannay, who for some days greatly interested my department."

"Mr. Hannay will interest it again. He has much to tell you, but not today. For certain grave reasons his tale must wait twenty-four hours. Then, I can promise you, you will be entertained and possibly edified. I want you to assure Mr. Hannay that he will suffer no further inconvenience."

This assurance was promptly given. "You can take up your life where you left off," I was told. "Your flat, which probably you no longer wish to occupy, is waiting for you, and your man is still there. As you were never publicly accused, we consider that there was no need of a public exculpation. But on that, of course, you must please yourself."

"We may want your assistance later on, MacGillivray," Sir Walter said as we left.

Then he turned me loose.

"Come and see me tomorrow, Hannay. I needn't tell you to keep deadly quiet. If I were you I'd go to bed; you must have a lot of sleep to make up. Anyway, you'd better lie low, for if one of your Black Stone friends saw you there might be trouble."

Now I seemed to be completely at loose ends. But at first it was very pleasant to be a free man, able to go where I wanted without fearing anything. I had been a month under the ban of the law, and that was quite enough for me.

I went to the Savoy and carefully ordered a very good luncheon, and then smoked the best cigar the house could provide. But I was still feeling nervous. When I saw anybody looking at me in the lounge, I grew shy, and wondered if they were thinking about the murder.

After that I took a taxi and drove miles away up into North London.

I walked back through fields, the lines of villas, and then the slums, and it took me pretty nearly two hours. All the while my restlessness was growing worse. Here tremendous things were about to happen, and yet I, who was the cog-wheel of business, was out of it.

Royer would be landing at Dover; Sir Walter would be making plans with the few people in England who were in the secret; and somewhere in the darkness the Black Stone would be working.

I FELT the sense of impending calamity, and I had the curious feeling, too, that I alone could avert it, alone could grapple with it. But I was out of the game now. How could it be otherwise? It was not likely that cabinet ministers and admirality lords and generals would admit me to their councils.

I actually began to wish that I could run up against one of my three enemies. That would lead to developments; and suddenly I wanted enormously to get into a scrap with those three, to get near enough to them so that I could hit out and flatten someone. I was rapidly getting into a very bad temper.

I didn't feel like going back to my flat. That had to be faced sometime, but as I still had sufficient money, I thought I'd put it off till next day and go to a hotel for the night.

My irritation lasted through dinner, which I had at a restaurant in Jermyn Street. I was no longer hungry, and let several courses go untasted. I drank the best part of a bottle of Burgundy, but it did nothing to cheer me. An abominable restlessness had taken possession of me.

Here was I, a very ordinary fellow with no particular brains, and yet I was convinced that somehow I was needed to help this business through—that without me it would all go to blazes. I told myself it was sheer, silly conceit, that four or five of the cleverest people living had the job in hand.

Yet, I couldn't be convinced. It seemed as if a voice in my mind kept telling me to be up and doing or I would never speak again.

The upshot was that about half-past nine I decided to go to Queen Anne's Gate. Very likely I would not be admitted, but it would ease my conscience to try.

I walked down Jermyn Street, and at the corner of Duke Street passed a group of young men. They were in evening dress and apparently were going on to a music hall. One of them was Mr. Lancelot Brown.

He saw me and stopped short.

"By Heaven, the murderer!" he exclaimed. "Here—hold him! That's Hannay, the man who did the Portland Place Murder." He gripped my arm, and the others crowded around.

I wasn't looking for any trouble, but my ill temper made me play the fool. A policeman came up, and I should have told him the truth and, if he didn't believe it, demand to be taken to Scotland Yard.

But a delay at that moment seemed to be unendurable, and the sight of Lancie's imbecile face was more than I could bear. I let out with my left, and had the satisfaction of seeing him measure his length in the gutter.

That began an unholy row. They were all on me at once, and the policeman took me from behind. I got in one or two good blows, but an instant later the policeman pinned me, and one of them got his fingers on my throat.

THROUGH a black cloud of rage I heard the officer asking what was the matter, and Lancie between his broken teeth, declaring that I was Hannay, the murderer.

"Damn it," I shouted, "keep out of this, Brown. And I advise you to leave me alone, Constable. Scotland Yard knows all about me, and you'll get a proper wigging if you interfere with me."

"You've got to come along of me, young man," said the policeman. "I saw you strike that gentleman crool 'ard. You began it too, for he wasn't doing nothing. I seen you. Best go quietly or I'll have to fix you up."

Exasperation and an overwhelming sense that at no cost must I delay gave me the strength of a bull elephant. I fairly wrenched the constable off his feet, floored the man who was gripping my collar, and set off at my best pace down Dyke Street. I heard a whistle being blown and the rush of men behind me.

I have a fair turn of speed, and that night I had wings. In a jiffy I was in Pall Mall and had turned down toward St. James's Park. I dodged the policeman at the Palace Gate, dived through a press of carriages at the entrance to the Mall, and was making for the bridge before my pursuers had crossed the roadway.

In the open ways of the park I put on a spurt. Happily there were few people about, and no one tried to stop me. I was staking all on getting to Queen Anne's Gate.

When I entered that quiet thoroughfare, it seemed deserted. Sir Walter's house was in the narrow part, and outside it three or four motor-cars were drawn up. I slackened speed some yards off, and walked briskly up to the door.

If the butler refused me admission, or if he even delayed to open the door, I was done.

He didn't delay. I had scarcely rung before the door opened.

"I must see Sir Walter," I panted.

That butler was a great man. Without moving a muscle he held the door open, and then shut it behind me. "Sir Walter is engaged, sir, and I have orders to admit no one. Perhaps you will wait."

The house was of the old-fashioned kind, with a wide hall and rooms on both sides of it. At the far end was an alcove with a telephone and a couple of chairs, and there the butler offered me a seat.

"See here," I whispered, "There's trouble about and I'm in it. But Sir Walter knows and I'm working for him. If any one comes and asks if I am here, tell him a lie."

Somehow the butler must have known about me because he accepted that.

Presently there was a noise of voices in the street and a furious ringing at the bell. I never admired a man more than that butler. He opened the door and, with a face like a graven image, waited to be questioned.

Then he gave it to them. He told them whose house it was and what his orders were, and simply froze them off the doorstep. I could see it all from my alcove, and it was better than any play.

I HADN'T waited long when there came another ring at the bell. The butler made no bones about admitting this new visitor.

While he was taking off his coat, I saw who it was. You couldn't open a newspaper or a magazine without seeing that face—the gray beard cut like a spade, the firm, fighting mouth, the blunt, square nose, and the keen, blue eyes. I recognized the first sea lord, the man, they say, who made the new British navy.

He passed my alcove and was ushered into a room at the back of the hall. As the door opened I could hear the sound of low voices. It shut, and I was left alone again.

I could not sit still.

For twenty minutes I sat there, wondering what I was to do next. I was still perfectly convinced that I was wanted, but when or how I had no notion. I kept looking at my watch, and as the time crept on to half-past ten I began to think that the conference must soon end.

In a quarter of an hour Royer should be speeding along the road to Portsmouth.

Then I heard a bell ring and the butler appeared. The door of the back room opened, and the first sea lord came out. He walked past me, and in passing he glanced in my direction, and for a second we looked each other in the face.

Only for a second, but it was enough to make my heart jump. I had never seen the great man before, and he had never seen me. But in that fraction of time something sprang into his eyes, and that something was recognition. You can't mistake it.

It is a flicker, a spark of light, a minute shade of difference, which means one thing and one thing only. It came involuntarily, for in a moment it died and he passed on. In a maze of wild fancies I heard the street door close behind him.

I picked up the telephone-book and looked up the number of his house. We were connected at once and I heard a servant's voice.

"Is His Lordship at home?" I asked.

"His Lordship returned ten minutes ago," said the voice, "and has gone to bed. He is not very well tonight. Will you leave a message, sir?"

I rung off and sat down numbly in a chair. My part in this business was not yet ended. It had been a close shave, but I had been in time.

Not a moment could be lost, so I marched boldly to the door of that back room and entered without knocking. Five surprised faces looked up from a round table. There was Sir Walter, and Drew, the war minister, whom I knew from his photograph.

There was a slim, elderly man, who was probably Whittaker, the Admiralty official, and there was General Winstanley, conspicuous because of the long scar on his forehead. Lastly there was a short stout man with an iron-gray mustache and bushy eyebrows who had stopped in the middle of a sentence.

Sir Walter's face showed surprise and annoyance.

"This is Mr. Hannay of whom I have spoken to you," he said apologetically to the company. "I'm afraid, Hannay, this visit is ill timed."

I was getting back my coolness. "That remains to be seen, sir," I said; "but I think it may be in the nick of time. For God's sake, gentlemen, tell me who went out a minute ago?"

"Lord Alloa," Sir Walter said, reddening with anger.

"It was not," I cried. "It was his living image, but it was not Lord Alloa. It was

someone who recognized me—someone I have seen in the last month. He had scarcely left the doorstep when I rang up Lord Alloa's house and was told that he had come in ten minutes before and had gone to bed."

"Who—who—" some one stammered.

"The Black Stone!" I cried, and I sat down in the chair so recently vacated and looked around at five badly scared men.

CHAPTER XI

THE STEPS

"NONSENSE!" said the gentlemen from the Admiralty. Sir Walter got up and left the room, while we looked blankly at the table. He came back in ten minutes, and his face was white and drawn.

"I have spoken to Alloa," he said. "Had him out of bed—very grumpy. He went straight home from Mulross's dinner."

"But it's madness," broke in General Winstanley. "Do you mean to tell me that that man came here and sat beside me for the best part of half an hour, and that I didn't detect the imposture? Alloa must be out of his mind."

"Don't you see the cleverness of it?" I said. "You were too interested in other things to have any eyes. You took Lord Alloa for granted. If it had been anybody else you might have looked more closely, but it was natural for him to be here, and that put you all to sleep."

The Frenchman spoke, very slowly and in good English.

"The young man is right. His psychology is good. Our enemies have not been foolish!"

"But I don't see," went on Winstanley. "Their object was to get these dispositions without our knowing it. Now it only required one of us to mention to Alloa our meeting tonight for the whole fraud to be exposed."

Sir Walter laughed dryly. "The selection of Alloa shows their acumen. Which of us was likely to speak to him about tonight?"

"Or was he likely to open the subject?" I remembered the first sea lord's reputation for taciturnity and temper.

"The one thing that puzzles me," said the general, "is what good his visit here would do that spy fellow? He couldn't carry away several pages of figures and strange names in his head."

"That is not difficult," the Frenchman replied. "A good spy is trained to have a photographic memory. Like your own Macaulay. You noticed he said nothing, but went through these papers again and again. I think we may assume that he has every detail stamped on his mind. When I was younger I could do the same trick."

"Well, I suppose there is nothing for it but to change the plans," said Sir Walter ruefully.

Whittaker was looking very grim. "Did you tell Lord Alloa what had happened?" he asked. "No? I can't speak with absolute assurance, but I'm merely certain we can't make any serious change unless we alter the geography of England."

"Another thing must be said"—it was Royer who spoke—"I talked freely when that man was here. I told something of the military plans of my government. I was permitted to say so much. But that information would be worth many millions to our enemies. No, my friends, I see no other way. The man who came here and his confederates must be taken and taken at once."

"Good God," I cried, "and we haven't a rag of a clue."

"Besides," said Whittaker, "there is the post. By this time the news will be on its way."

"No," said the Frenchman. "You do not understand the ways of the spy. He receives personally his reward, and he delivers personally his intelligence. We in France know something of the breed. There is still a chance, *mes amis*. These men must cross the sea, and there are ships to be searched and ports to be watched. Believe me, the need is desperate for both France and Britain."

ROYER'S grave good sense seemed to pull us together. But I saw no hope in any face, and I felt none. Where among the fifty million people of these islands and within a dozen hours were we to lay hands on the three cleverest rogues in Europe?

Then suddenly I had an inspiration.

"Where is Scudder's book?" I asked Sir Walter. "Quick, man, I remember something in it."

He unlocked the drawer of a bureau and gave it to me.

I found the place. "Thirty-nine steps," I read, and again: "Thirty-nine steps—I counted them—High tide 10.17 P.M."

The Admiralty man was looking at me as if he thought I had gone mad.

"Don't you see it's a clue," I cried. "Scudder knew where these fellows laired—he knew where they were going to leave the country from though he kept the name to himself. Tomorrow was to be the day—from some place where high tide came at 10.17."

"They may have gone tonight," someone said.

"No. They have their own snug secret way, and they won't be hurried. I knew Germans, and they are mad about working a plan. Where the devil can I get a book of tide tables?"

Whittaker brightened. "It's a chance," he said, "let's go over to the Admiralty."

We got into two of the waiting motor-cars, all but Sir Walter who went off to Scotland Yard—"to mobilize MacGillivray," he said.

We marched through empty corridors and big, bare chambers where the charwomen were busy, until we reached a little room lined with books and maps. A resident clerk was unearthed, who presently fetched from the library the Admiralty Tide Tables.

I sat at the desk and the others stood round. Somehow I seemed suddenly to be in charge of this expedition.

It was no good. There were hundreds of entries, and as far as I could see 10.17 might cover fifty places.

I took my head in my hands and thought. There must be some way of reading this riddle. What did Scudder mean by steps? I thought of dock steps, but if he had meant that, I didn't think he would have mentioned the number.

It must be some place where there were staircases, one marked out from the others by having thirty-nine steps.

Then I had a sudden thought and hunted up all the steamer sailings. There was no boat which left for the Continent at 10.17 P.M.

Why was high tide important? If it was a harbor it must be some spot where the tide mattered, or else they were to use a heavy-draft boat. But there was no regular steamer sailing at that hour and somehow I didn't think they would travel by a big boat from a regular harbor.

So it must be some little harbor where the tide was important—or perhaps no harbor at all.

But if it was a little port I couldn't see what the steps signified. There were no sets of staircases on any harbor that I had ever seen. It seemed to me that the place must be a bit of open coast—and still the staircases remained puzzling.

THEN I went back to wider considerations. Whereabouts would a man be likely to leave for Germany, a man in a hurry who wanted a speedy and a secret passage? Not from any of the large harbors.

And not from the channel or the west coast or the north of Scotland, for, remember, he was starting from London. I measured the distance on the map and tried to put myself in the enemy's shoes. I should try for Ostend or Antwerp or Rotterdam, and I should sail from somewhere on the east coast between Cromer and Dover.

All this was very loose guessing, and I don't pretend it was either ingenious or scientific.

I wasn't any kind of Sherlock Holmes. But I had always fancied that I had a kind of instinct about questions like this.

My habit was to use my brain as far as possible, and after it failed me—to guess. Usually I found that my guesses came pretty close to being right.

So I set out all my conclusions on a bit of Admiralty paper. They ran like this:

FAIRLY CERTAIN

(1) Place where there are several sets of stairs; one that matters distinguished solely by having thirty-nine steps.

(2) Full tide at 10.17 P.M. from place. Leaving shore only possible at full tide.

(3) Steps not dock steps and so place probably not harbor.

(4) No regular night steamer at 10.17. Means of transport must be tramp (unlikely), yacht or fishing-boat.

There my reasoning stopped. I made another list, which I headed "Guessed," but I was just as sure of the one as the other.

GUESSED

(1) Place not harbor but open coast.

(2) Boat small: trawler, yacht or launch.

(3) Place somewhere on east coast between Cromer and Dover.

Abruptly I realized how incredible it was that I should be sitting at that desk with a cabinet minister, a field marshal, two high government officials, and a French general watching me, while from the scribble of a dead man I was trying to drag a secret which meant life or death for us.

Sir Walter had joined us, and presently MacGillivray arrived. He had sent out instructions to watch the forts and railway stations for the three gentlemen whom I had described to Sir Walter. Not that he or any of his colleagues thought that that would do much good.

"Here's the most I can make of it," I said. "We have got to find a place where there are several staircases down to the beach, one of which has thirty-nine steps. I think it's a piece of open coast with biggish cliffs somewhere between the Wash and the Channel. Also it's a place where full tide is at 10.17 tomorrow night."

Then an idea struck me. "Is there no Inspector of Coastguards or some fellow like that who knows the east coast?"

Whittaker said there was and that he lived in Clapham. He went off in a car to fetch him, and the rest of us sat about the little room and talked of anything that came into our heads. I lit a pipe and went over the whole thing again till my brain grew weary.

ABOUT one in the morning the coastguard man arrived. He was a fine old fellow with the look of a naval officer, and was desperately respectful to the company. At once the war minister began to cross-examine him.

"We want you to tell us the places you know on the east coast where there are cliffs, and where several sets of steps run down to the beach."

He thought for a bit. "What kind of steps do you mean, sir? There are plenty of places with roads cut down through the cliffs, and most roads have a step or two in them. Or do you mean regular staircases—all steps, so to speak?"

Sir Arthur looked toward me. "We mean regular staircases," I said.

He reflected a minute or two. "I don't know that I can think of any. Wait a second. There's a place in Norfolk—Brattlesham—beside a golf course, where there are a couple of staircases to let the gentlemen get a lost ball."

"That's not it," I said.

"Then there are plenty of marine parades, if that's what you mean. Every seaside resort has them."

I shook my head.

"It's got to be more retired than that," I said.

"Well, gentlemen, I can't think of anywhere else. Of course, there's the Ruff—"

"What's that?" I asked.

"The big chalk headland in Kent, close to Bradgate. It's got a lot of villas on the top, and some of the houses have staircases down to a private beach. It's a

very high-toned sort of place, and the residents there like to keep by themselves."

I tore open the Tide Tables and found Bradgate. High tide there was at 10.27 P.M. on the 15th of June.

"We're on the scent at last!" I cried excitedly. "Now how can I find out what is the tide at the Ruff?"

"I can tell you that, sir," said the coast-guard man. "I once was loaned a house there in this very month, and I used to go out at night for deep-sea fishing. The tide's ten minutes before Bradgate."

I closed the book and looked round at the startled company.

"If one of those staircases has thirty-nine steps we have solved the mystery, gentlemen," I said. "I want the loan of your car, Sir Walter, and a map of the roads. If Mr. MacGillivray will spare me ten minutes I think we can prepare something for tomorrow."

It was ridiculous in me to take charge of the business like this; but they didn't seem to mind, and, after all, I had been in the show from the start. Besides, I was used to rough jobs, and these eminent gentlemen were too clever not to see it.

It was General Royer who gave me my commission.

"I for one," he said, "am content to leave the matter entirely in Mr. Hannay's hands."

By half past three I was tearing past the moonlit hedgerows of Kent with MacGillivray's best man on the seat beside me.

CHAPTER XII

THREE INNOCENTS AT PLAY

A PINK and blue June morning found me at Bradgate, looking from the Griffin Hotel over a smooth sea to the lightship on the Cock sands, which looked the size of a bell-buoy.

A couple of miles farther south and much nearer the shore a small destroyer was anchored. Scaife, MacGillivray's man, who had been in the navy, knew the boat, and told me her name and her commander's so I sent off a wire to Sir Walter.

After breakfast Scaife got from a house-agent a key for the gates of the staircases on the Ruff. I walked with him along the sands, and sat down in a nook of the cliffs while he investigated the half dozen of them. I didn't want to be seen; but the place at this hour was quite deserted, and all the time I was on that beach I saw nothing but the sea-gulls.

It took Scaife more than an hour to do the job, and when I saw him coming toward me, conning a bit of paper, I can tell you my heart was in my mouth. Everything depended, you see, on my guess proving right.

He read aloud the number of steps in the different stairs. "Thirty-four, thirty-five, thirty-nine, forty-two, forty-seven, and twenty-one." I almost got up and shouted.

We hurried back to the town and sent a wire to MacGillivray. I wanted half a dozen men, and I directed them to divide themselves among different specified hotels. Then Scaife set out to prospect the house at the head of the thirty-nine steps.

He came back with news that both puzzled and reassured me. The house was called Trafalgar Lodge, and belonged to an old gentleman named Appleton—a retired stock-broker, the house-agent said.

Mr. Appleton was there a good deal in the summertime, and was in residence now —had been for the better part of a week. Scaife could pick up very little information about him, except that he was a decent old fellow, who paid his bills regularly and was always good for a fiver for a local charity. Then Scaife seems to have penetrated to the back door of the house, pretending he was an agent for sewing-machines.

Only three servants were kept, a cook, a parlormaid, and a housemaid, and they were just the sort that you would find in a respectable middleclass household.

The cook was not the gossiping kind, and had pretty soon closed the door in his

face; but Scaife said he was positive she knew nothing. Next door a new house was being built which would give good cover for observation. The villa on the other side was to let, and its garden was rough and scrubby.

I borrowed Scaife's telescope, and before lunch went for a walk along the Ruff.

I kept well behind the rows of villas, and found a good observation point on the edge of the golf course. There I had a view of the line of turf along the cliff top, with seats placed at intervals and the little square plots railed in and planted with bushes, whence the staircases descended to the beach.

I saw Trafalgar Lodge very plainly, a red-brick villa with a veranda, a tennis lawn behind, and in front the ordinary seaside flower-garden full of marguerites and scraggy geraniums. There was a flagstaff from which an enormous Union Jack hung limply in the still air.

Presently I observed some one leave the house and saunter along the cliff.

When I got my glasses on him I saw it was an old man, wearing white flannel trousers, a blue serge jacket, and a straw hat. He carried field-glasses and a newspaper, and sat down on one of the iron seats and began to read. Sometimes he would lay down the paper and turn his glasses on the sea.

He looked for a long time at the destroyer. I watched him half an hour, till he got up and went back to the house for his luncheon. Then I returned to the hotel for mine.

I WASN'T feeling very confident. This decent, commonplace dwelling was not what I had expected. The man might be the bald archeologist of that horrible moorland farm, or he might not. He was was exactly the kind of satisfied old bird you will find in every suburb and every holiday place. If you wanted a type of the perfectly harmless person you would probably pitch on that.

But after lunch as I sat in the hotel porch, I saw the thing I had hoped for and dreaded to miss. A yacht came up from the south and dropped anchor pretty well opposite the Ruff.

She seemed about a hundred and fifty tons, and I saw she belonged to the squadron from the white ensign. So Scaife and I went down to the harbor and hired a boatman for an afternoon's fishing.

I spent a warm and peaceful afternoon. We caught between us about twenty pounds of cod and lythe, and out in that dancing blue sea I took a cheerier view of things.

Above the white cliffs of the Ruff I saw the green and red of the villas, and especially the great flagstaff of Trafalgar Lodge. About four o'clock, when we had fished enough, I made the boatman row us around the yacht, which lay like a delicate white bird, ready at a moment to flee. Scaife said she must be a fast boat from her build and that she was pretty heavily engined.

Her name was the *Ariadne,* as I discovered from the cap of one of the men who was polishing brasswork.

I spoke to him, and got an answer in the soft dialect of Essex. Another hand that came along said a word or two with an unmistakable English accent. Our boatman had an argument with one of them about the weather, and for a few minutes we lay on our oars, close to the starboard bow.

Then the men suddenly grew silent and bent their heads to their work as an officer came along the deck.

He was a pleasant, clean-looking young fellow, and he put a question to us about our fishing in very good English. But there was no doubt about him. His close-cropped head and the cut of his collar and tie never came out of England.

That did something to reassure me, but as we rowed back to Bradgate my obstinate doubts would not be dismissed.

The thing that worried me was the reflection that my enemies knew that I had got my knowledge from Scudder, and it was Scudder who had given me the clue to this place. If they knew that Scudder

had this clue, wouldn't they change their plans?

Too much depended on their success for them to take any risks. The whole question was how much they understood about Scudder's knowledge. I had talked confidently last night about Germans being likely to stick to a carefully planned scheme, but if they had any suspicions that I was on their track they would be fools not to cover it.

I wondered if the man last night had seen that I recognized him. Somehow I did not think he had, and to that I clung. But the whole business had never seemed so difficult as that afternoon when by all calculations I should have been rejoicing in assured success.

IN THE hotel I met the commander of the destroyer, to whom Scaife introduced me, and with whom I had a few words. Then I thought I would put in an hour or two watching Trafalgar Lodge.

I found a place farther up the hill in the garden of an empty house. From there I had a full view of the court, on which two figures were having a game of tennis.

One was the old man, whom I had already seen; the other was a younger fellow, wearing some club colors in the scarf around his middle. They played with tremendous zest.

They shouted and laughed and stopped for drinks when a maid brought out two tankards on a salver.

I rubbed my eyes and asked myself if I was not the most immortal fool on earth. Mystery and darkness had hung about the men who hunted me over the Scotch moor in airplane and motor-car, and notably about that infernal antiquarian. It was easy enough to connect these folk with the knife that pinned Scudder to the floor, and with fell designs on the world's peace.

But here were two guileless citizens, taking their innocuous exercise, and soon about to go indoors to a humdrum dinner, where they would talk of market prices and the last cricket scores and the gossip of their native Surbiton

I had been making a net to catch vultures and falcons, and lo and behold!—two plump thrushes had blundered into it.

Presently a third figure arrived, a young man on a bicycle, with a bag of golf clubs slung on his back.

He strolled round to the tennis lawn, and was welcomed riotously by the players. Evidently they were chaffing him, and their chaff sounded horribly English. Then the plump man, mopping his brow with a silk handkerchief, announced that he must have a tub.

I heard his very words. "I've got into a proper lather," he said. "This will bring down my weight and my handicap, Bob. I'll take you on tomorrow and give you a stroke a hole."

You couldn't find anything much more English than that.

They all went into the house, and left me feeling a precious idiot. I had been barking up the wrong tree this time. These men might be acting; but if they were, where was their audience? They didn't know I was sitting thirty yards off in a rhododendron. It was simply impossible to believe that these three hearty fellows were anything but what they seemed, three ordinary, game-playing, suburban Englishmen—wearisome, if you like, but sordidly innocent.

And yet there were three of them; and one was old and one was plump, and one was lean and dark; and their house fitted Scudder's notes, and half a mile off was lying a steam-yacht with at least one German officer.

I thought of Karolides lying dead and all Europe trembling on the edge of an earthquake, and the men I had left behind me in London, who were waiting anxiously for the events of the next hours. There was no doubt that mischief was afoot somewhere.

The Black Stone had won, and if it survived this June night, would win.

THERE seemed only one thing to do—go forward as if I had no doubts, and if I was going to make a fool of myself

to do it handsomely. Never in my life have I faced a job with greater disinclination. In my frame of mind then I would rather have walked into a den of revolutionists, each with his Browning handy, or faced a charging lion with a popgun, than enter the happy home of three cheerful Englishmen and tell them that their game was up. How they would laugh at me!

But suddenly I remembered a thing I once heard in Rhodesia from old Peter Pienaar. I have quoted Peter already in this narrative. He was the best scout I ever knew, and before he had turned respectable he had been pretty often on the windy side of the law.

Peter once discussed with me the question of disguises, and he had a theory which struck me at the time. He said, barring absolute certainties like fingerprints, mere physical traits were very little use for identification if the fugitive really knew his business. He laughed at things like dyed hair and false beards and such childish follies.

The only thing that mattered was what Peter called "atmosphere." If a man could get into perfectly different surroundings from those in which he had been first observed, and—this is the important part—really play up to these surroundings and behave as if he had never been out of them, he would puzzle the cleverest detectives on earth.

He used to tell a story of how he once borrowed a black coat and went to church and shared the same hymn-book with the man that was looking for him. If that man had seen him in decent company before he would have recognized him; but he had only seen him snuffing the lights in a public-house with a revolver.

The recollection of Peter's talk gave me the first real comfort I had had that day. Peter had been a wise old bird, and these fellows I was after were about the pick of the aviary. What if they were playing Peter's game?

A fool tries to look different; a clever man looks the same and is different.

It was now getting on for eight o'clock, and I went back and saw Scaife to give him his instructions. I arranged with him how to place his men, and then I went for a walk, for I didn't feel up to any dinner. I went round the deserted golf links and then to a point on the cliffs farther north, beyond the line of the villas. On the little, trim, newly-made roads I met people in flannels coming back from tennis and the beach, and a coast-guard from the wireless station, and donkeys and pierrots padding homeward. Out at sea, in the blue dusk, I saw lights appear on the *Ariadie* and on the destroyer away to the south, and beyond the Cock sands the bigger lights of steamers making for the Thames.

The whole scene was so peaceful and ordinary that I got more dashed in spirits every second. It took all my resolution to stroll toward Trafalgar Lodge about half-past nine.

Scaife's men would be posted now, but there was no sign of a soul.

CHAPTER XIII

FLAMES REVEALED

THE house stood as open as a market-place for anybody to observe. A three-foot railing separated it from the cliff road; the windows in the ground floor were all open, and shaded lights and the low sound of voices revealed where the occupants were finishing dinner. Everything was as public and aboveboard as a charity bazaar.

Feeling the greatest fool on earth, I opened the gate and rang the bell.

A man of my sort, who has traveled about the world in rough places, gets on perfectly well with two classes—what you may call the upper and the lower. He understands them and they understand him. I was at home with herds and tramps and roadmen, and I was sufficiently at ease with people like Sir Walter and the men I had met the night before.

I can't explain why, but it is a fact. But what fellows of my sort don't understand

is the great comfortable, satisfied, middle-class world, the folk that live in villas and suburbs. We don't know how they look at things; we don't understand their conventions; and we are as shy of them as of a black mamba.

When a trim parlormaid opened the door I could hardly find my voice.

I asked for Mr. Appleton and was ushered in. My plan had been to walk straight to the dining-room and by a sudden appearance wake in the men that start of recognition which would confirm my theory.

But when I found myself in that neat hall, the place mastered me.

There were the golf clubs and tennis rackets, the straw hats and caps, the rows of gloves, the sheaf of walking-sticks which you will find in ten thousand British houses. A stack of neatly folded coats and waterproofs covered the top of an old oak chest; there were a grandfather clock ticking, and some polished brass warming-pans on the walls, and the barometer, and a print of Chiltern winning the St. Leger.

The place was as orthodox as an Anglican Church. When the maid asked me for my name I gave it automatically, and was shown into the smoking room on the right side of the hall.

That room was even worse. I hadn't time to examine it, but I would see some framed group photographs above the mantelpiece, and I could have sworn they were English public-school or college. I had only one glance, for I managed to pull myself together and go after the maid.

But I was too late. She had already entered the dining-room and given my name to her master, and I had missed the chance of seeing how the three took it.

When I walked into the room, the old man at the head of the table had risen and turned round to meet me. He was in evening dress—a short coat and black tie—as was the other, whom I called in my own mind the plump one.

The third, the dark fellow, wore a blue serge suit and a soft white collar.

The old man's manner was perfect.

"Mr. Hannay?" he said hesitantly. "Did you wish to see me? One moment, you fellows, and I'll rejoin you. We had better go to the smoking-room."

Though I hadn't an ounce of confidence in me, I forced myself to play the game. I pulled up a chair and sat down on it.

"I think we have met before," I said, "and I guess you know my business."

The light in the room was dim, but, so far as I could see their faces, they played the part of mystification very well.

"Maybe, maybe," said the old man. "I haven't a very good memory, but I'm afraid you must tell me your errand."

"Well, then," I said, and all the time I seemed to myself to be talking pure foolishness—"I have come to tell you that the game's up. I have here a warrant for the arrest of you three gentlemen."

"ARREST!" said the old man, and he looked really shocked. "Arrest! Good God, what for?"

"For the murder of Franklin Scudder, in London, on the twenty-third day of last month."

"I never heard the name before," said the old man in a dazed voice.

One of the others spoke up. "That was the Portland Place murder. I read about it. Good Heavens, you must be mad, sir! Where do you come from?"

"Scotland Yard," I said.

After that, for a minute there was utter silence. The old man was staring at his plate and fumbling with a nut, the very model of innocent bewilderment.

Then the plump one spoke up. He stammered a little, like a man picking his words.

"Don't get flustered, Uncle," he said. "It is all a ridiculous mistake; but these things happen sometimes, and we can easily set it right. It won't be hard to prove our innocence. I can show that I was out of the country on the twenty-third of May, and Bob was in a nursing home. You were in London, but you can explain what you were doing."

"Right, Monty! Of course that's easy enough. The twenty-third! That was the day after Agatha's wedding. I came up in the morning from Woking, and lunched at the club with Charlie Symons. Then—Oh, yes; I dined with the Fishmongers. I remember, for the punch didn't agree with me, and I was seedy next morning. Hang it all, there's the cigar-box I brought back from the dinner.

He pointed to an object on the table and laughed nervously.

"I think, sir," said the young man, addressing me respectfully, "you will see you are mistaken. We want to assist the law, like all Englishmen, and we don't want Scotland Yard to be making fools of themselves. That's so, Uncle?"

"Certainly, Bob." The old fellow seemed to be recovering his voice. "Certainly; we'll do anything in our power to assist the authorities. But—but this is a bit too much. I can't get over it."

"How Nellie will chuckle!" said the plump man. "She always said that you would die of boredom because nothing ever happened to you. And now you've got it thick and strong," and he began to laugh very pleasantly.

"By Jove, yes! Just think of it! What a story to tell at the club! Really, Mr. Hannay, I suppose I should be angry to show my innocence, but it's too funny. I almost forgive you the fright you gave me! You looked so glum I thought I might have been walking in my sleep and killing people."

It couldn't be acting; it was too confoundedly genuine.

My heart went into my boots, and my first impulse was to apologize and clear out. But I told myself I must see it through, even though I was to be the laughing-stock of Britain.

The light from the dinner-table candlesticks was not very good, and to cover my confusion I got up, walked to the door, and switched on the electric light. The sudden glare made them blink, and I stood there scanning the three faces.

Well, I made nothing of it. One was old and bald; one was dark and thin; one was stout. There was nothing in their appearance to prevent them being the three who had hunted me in Scotland, but there was nothing to identify them.

I simply can't explain why I, who as a roadman had looked into two pairs of eyes, and as Ned Ainslie into another pair —why I, who have a good memory and reasonable powers of observation, could find no satisfaction. They seemed exactly what they professed to be, and I could not have sworn to one of them.

THERE in that pleasant dining-room, with etchings on the walls, and a picture of an old lady in a bib above the mantelpiece, I could see nothing to connect them with the moorland desperadoes. There was a silver cigarette box beside me, and I saw that it had been won by Montague Appleton, Esq., of the St. Regis Club, in a golf tournament. I had to keep firm hold of Peter Pienaar to prevent myself bolting out of that house.

"Well," said the old man politely, "are you reassured by your scrutiny, sir?"

I couldn't find a word.

"I hope you'll find it consistent with your duty to drop this ridiculous business. I make no complaint; you'll see how annoying it must be to respectable people."

I shook my head.

"Oh, Lord," said the young man, "this is a bit too thick."

"Do you propose to march us off to the police station?" asked the plump one. "That might be the best way out of it, but I suppose you won't be content with the local branch. I have the right to ask to see your warrant, but I don't wish to cast any aspersions upon you. You are only doing your duty. But you'll admit it's horribly awkward. What do you propose to do?"

There was nothing to do except call in my men and have them arrested or to confess my blunder and clear out. I felt mesmerized by the whole place, by the air of obvious innocence—not innocence merely, but frank, honest bewilderment

and bright concern in the three faces.

"Oh, Peter Pienaar," I groaned inwardly, and for a moment I was very near damning myself for a fool and asking their pardon.

"Meantime I vote we have a game of bridge," said the plump one. "It will give Hannay time to think over things, and you know we have been wanting a fourth player. Do you play, sir?"

I accepted as if it had been an ordinary invitation at the club. The whole business had me hypnotized. We went into the smoking-room, where a card-table was set out, and I was offered things to smoke and drink.

I took my place at the table in a kind of dream.

The window was open, and the moon was flooding the cliffs, and the sea was a great tide of yellow light. There was moonshine too, in my head. The three had recovered their composure, and were talking easily—just the kind of slangy talk you will hear in any golf club-house.

I must have cut a rum figure, sitting there knitting my brows, with my eyes wandering.

My partner was the young, dark one. I play a fair hand at bridge, but I must have been rank bad that night. They saw that they had me puzzled, and that put them more than ever at their ease. I kept looking at their faces, but they conveyed nothing to me. It was not that they looked different; they were different. I clung desperately to the words of Peter Pienaar.

Then something awoke me. The old man laid down his hand to light a cigar. He didn't pick it up at once, but sat back for a moment in his chair, with his finger tapping on his knee.

It was the movement I remembered when I had stood before him in the moorland farm with the pistols of his servants behind me.

A LITTLE thing, lasting only a second, and the odds were a thousand to one that I might have had my eyes on my cards at the time and missed it. But I didn't, and in a flash the air seemed to clear. Some shadow lifted from my brain, and I was looking at the three men, with full and absolute recognition.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck ten o'clock.

The three faces seemed to change before my eyes and reveal their secrets. The young one was the murderer. Now I saw cruelty and ruthlessness where before I had only seen good humor. His knife, I made certain, had skewered Scudder to the floor.

His kind had put the bullet in Karolides. The plump man's features seemed to dislimn and form again as I looked at them. He hadn't a face, only a hundred masks that he could assume when he pleased. That chap must have been a superb actor. Perhaps he had been Lord Alloa of the night before, perhaps not; it didn't matter. I wondered if he was the fellow who had first tracked Scudder and left his card on him. Scudder had said he lisped, and I could imagine how the adoption of a lisp might add terror. But the old man was the pick of the lot.

He was sheer brain, icy, cool, calculating, as ruthless as a steam-hammer. Now that my eyes were opened I wondered where I had seen the benevolence. His jaw was like chilled steel, and his eyes had the inhuman illuminosity of a bird's.

I went on playing, and every second a greater hate welled up in my heart. It almost choked me, and I couldn't answer when my partner spoke. Only a little longer could I endure their company.

"Whew! Bob! Look at the time," said the old man. "You'd better think about catching your train. Bob's got to go to town tonight," he added, turning to me. The voice rang as false now.

I looked at the clock and it was nearly half-past ten.

"I'm afraid you must put off your journey," I said.

"Oh, damn!" said the young man. "I thought you had dropped that rot. I've simply got to go. You can have my ad-

dress, and I'll give any security you like."

"No," I said, "you must stay."

At that I think they must have realized that the game was desperate. Their only chance had been to convince me that I was playing the fool, and that had failed. But the old man spoke again.

"I'll go bail for my nephew. That ought to content you, Mr. Hannay." Was it fancy, or did I detect some halt in the smoothness of the voice.

There must have been, for as I looked at him, his eyelids fell in that hawklike hood which fear had stamped on my memory. I blew my whistle.

Then suddenly everything was a madness of blows and anger and darkness.

In an instant the lights were out. A pair of strong arms gripped me around the waist, covering the pockets in which a man might be expected to carry a pistol.

"Schnell, Franz!" cried a voice. *"Schnell!"* As it spoke I heard two of my fellows emerge on that moonlit lawn.

The young, dark man leaped for the window, was through it, and over the low fence before a hand could touch him. I grappled the old chap, and the room seemed to fill with figures.

I saw the plump one collared, but my eyes were all for the out-of-doors, where Franz sped on over the road toward the railed entrance to the beach stairs.

One man followed him, but he had no chance.

So he was off. Away. With that precious information stored up in his cunning brain. Down the tunnel.

The gate locked behind my fugitive, and I stood staring, with my hands on the old boy's throat for such a time as a man would take to descend these steps to the sea.

Suddenly my prisoner broke from me and flung himself on the wall. There was a click as if a lever had been pulled. Then came a low rumbling far, far below the ground, and through the window I saw a cloud of chalky dust pouring out of the shaft of the stairway.

I knew the tunnel was destroyed—locked behind the runaway. In the darkness a low, derisive chuckle chilled my spine. I lashed out involuntarily with my fist. And hit empty air.

Someone switched on the light.

The old man was looking at me with blazing eyes.

"He is safe!" he cried. "You cannot follow in time. He is gone. He has triumphed! *Es lebe hoch der Schwarze Stein!"*

There was more in those eyes than any common triumph. They had been hooded like a bird of prey, and now they flamed with a hawk's pride.

A white, fanatic heat burned in them, and I realized for the first time the terrible thing I had been put up against. This man was more than a spy; in his foul way he had been a patriot.

As the handcuffs clinked on his wrists I said my last word to him.

"I hope Franz will bear his triumph well. I ought to tell you that the *Ariadne* for the last hour has been in our hands."

And that was the end of that. Franz collared as he tried to board the yacht. The Black Rock destroyed.

•

Three weeks later, as the world knows, we went to war. I joined the new army the first week, and owing to my Matabele experience got a captain's commission straight off. But I had done my best service, I think, before I put on khaki.

THE END

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

PAWING hastily through the day's mail in a great rush to be up and battling our dragons (in the shape of harassed salesladies, who always vent their own peculiar seasonal spirit on us, and substation clerks, who have dandy eight-cent stamps and all the eleven-centers anyone could wish for but positively no ones, twos, or threes) we are drenched with gratitude to discover a couple of long letters, each crammed like a Yuletide pudding with comment, sidelights—and in one, even a poem to set like a nice shiny star at the top of the tree—that ought to fill out this column nice. Here goes.

MRS. J. D. NEIDHARDT

Will the serial now running in the ARGOSY, "Two Hours to Go" be published in book form in time for the Xmas trade? I think it would make a grand present for a certain brother-in-law of mine that likes that kind of a story the same as I do.

Please let me know, and also convey to the author, Theodore Roscoe, our pleasure in his story, not only because he appears to really knows his Andes, but tells the story in a marvelous style.

We have lived in Peru and Chile and when we read a story exactly describing the locale, we are particularly pleased. So few stories of South America are authentic. Most Americans seem to think that anything far fetched and utterly impossible can happen down there, while it is really a grand country with people as human as ourselves—good and bad.

The Chilean air pilots are some of the best in the world and Mr. Roscoe seems to know this.

While we were in Chile, the old Chilean national planes were condemned and the pilots in a body refused to take them out. As they are all under army discipline they were given their choice of flying or going to the island. The latter meant almost certain death and being army men too, the pilots took the planes out. Others were bought to replace these as soon as possible. All this beside the point, of course, but I couldn't help but pay this tribute to the Chilean pilots.

Also while we were there, a Chilean pilot had the bad luck to be caught in one of the mountain passes on that route between Buenos Aires and Santiago—a place where it is necessary to go between two exceptionally high groups—too high to fly over. A storm met him at the west end and he turned back to the east end only to be enveloped in another there. I have forgotten how many hours he put in between them before he could get thru, but he brought his plane and passengers thru. As good a record as those of any other country in the world.

Glad to know that "Ship of Ishtar" is being republished. We like the Captain Hornblower series, and liked immensely the "Invasion of America."

CRESTONE, COLORADO

THANKS for all that meaty stuff on the background material of "Two Hours to Go." We don't, by the way, know of any plan as yet to bring the story out as a book before Spring—not in time, unfortunately, to help you with your Christmas lists. Had you thought of an ARGOSY subscription for that brother-in-law? We have some little beauties, all ready for mailing. . . . (Advt.) (But subtle, huh?)

JACK H. FOSTER

Under its various titles I have been reading ARGOSY for about forty years, but this week's issue (Nov. 5th) is one of the best you've ever published.

Every story in it is good, very good. And, of course, I'm glad to be reading "Ishtar" again—a grand piece of fiction. Another real good oldtimer was Hulbert Footner's "A Self-Made Thief." Could read that again with relish. And, too, please tell Borden Chase that because he let "Smooth Kyle" and "Gilda" get married

is no reason why he should keep them locked up at home. We want to see them both out and around, strutting their eighteen-karat stuff. I saw Chase's "Midnight Taxi" in the movies, and actor Brian Donlevy as "Smooth Kyle" was very good, but the picture itself didn't do justice to the original story. There should be a law against movies mutilating original story plots. To the Iron Maiden with those theme butchers, say I!

Now about that "Three Against the Stars" ruckus. If the technical bloodhounds who criticized that story think they can do any better I'll buy them paper, pen, ink and *erasers* and let them go to it.

Fiction is my favorite reading in spite of any technical or scientific inaccuracies, because in fiction I read for entertainment, not instruction.

Poetry is a favorite, too. It has always been my secret desire to write (all you fiction readers have that desire—don't try to deny it!) a story or poetry. There's only one reason why I don't write, but it's a good reason, very good. It's because I have no brains.

Poets rave about the Rubicon
The Styx, Utopia and so on;
About the worlds of eons ago
And fairy lands where elfins go.
They tell of sights more strange to see,
Of worlds that really couldn't be
And rave about the far, far isles,
Sun-kissed beaches and mermaid's wiles.
They thrill to flowers very rare
That never existed anywhere;
E'en seem familiar with Paradise,
With southern sun and northern ice.
There's nothing that they do not know
And nowhere that they cannot go.
If only I could be as they,
Just close my eyes and soar away
To lands where I have never been
And see the things I've never seen!
But my poor mind could ne'er bestow it
I haven't the brains to be a poet!

Keep right on exactly as you've been doing with that grand fiction magazine ARGOSY.
MERCHANTVILLE, N. J.

BLACK GRANDEE

Oh, swords will flash in the sparkling sunlight and the blood of fighting men will encrimson the soil, for Don Luis comes riding down the King's Highway with hate in his heart and vengeance poised at the tip of his blade. Beginning another great romance of Old California by the author of "The Mark of Zorro"

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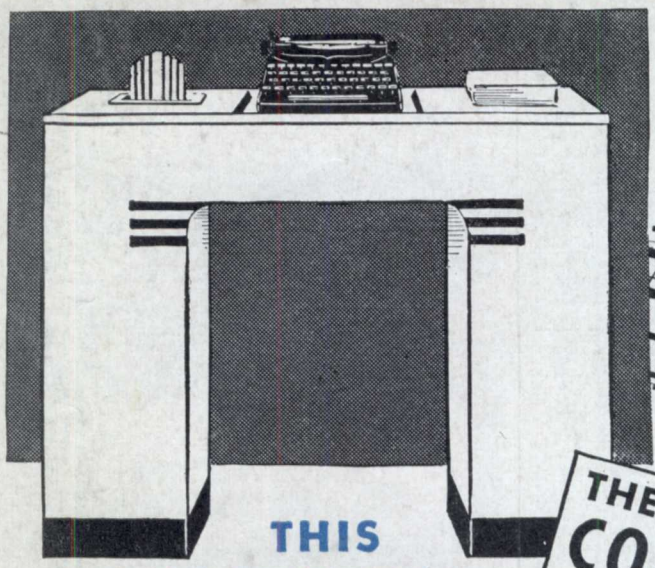

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