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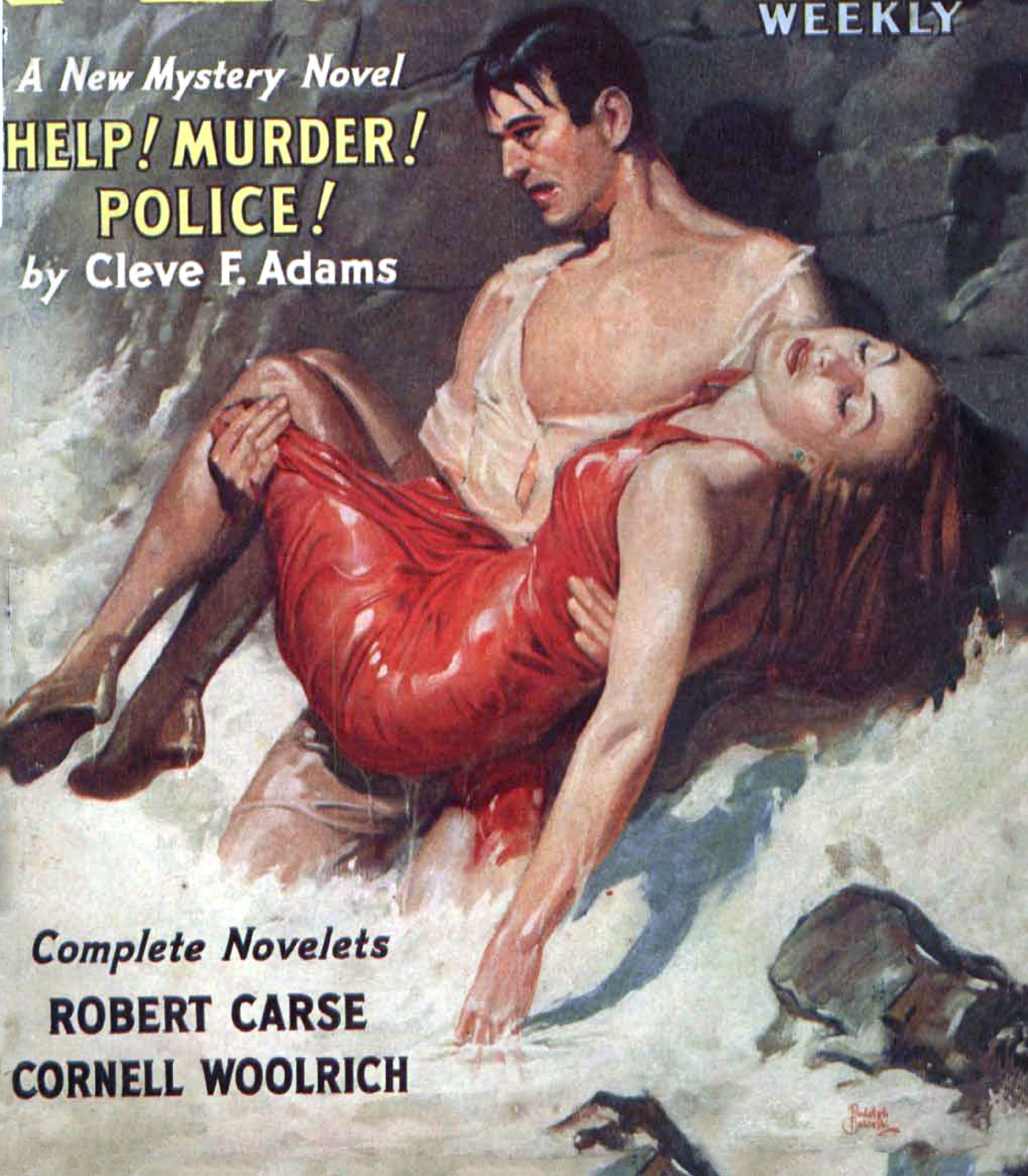
Donald Barr Chidsey · Eustace L. Adams

ARGOSY

RED STAR MAGAZINE 2-4

WEEKLY



A New Mystery Novel

HELP! MURDER! POLICE!

by Cleve F. Adams

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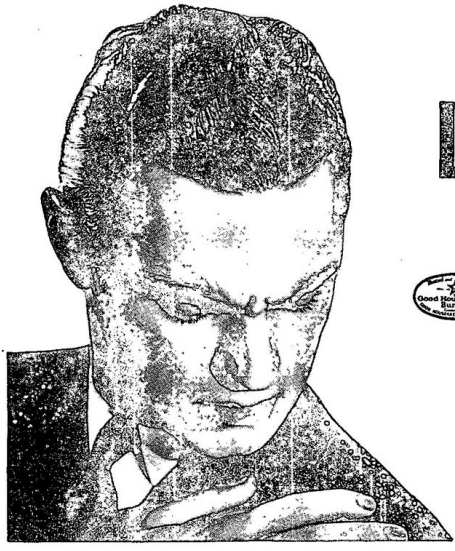
Get rid of that telltale DANDRUFF for keeps—with LISTERINE



Pityrosporum ovale, the germ that caus dandruff, magnified many times.

Sensational discovery that a germ causes dandruff leads to antiseptic therapy. Listerine Antiseptic relieves and masters dandruff, tests prove. 76% of patients of New Jersey clinic got amazing relief.

THINK of it, dandruff that defied science so long now yields to a new delightful treatment.

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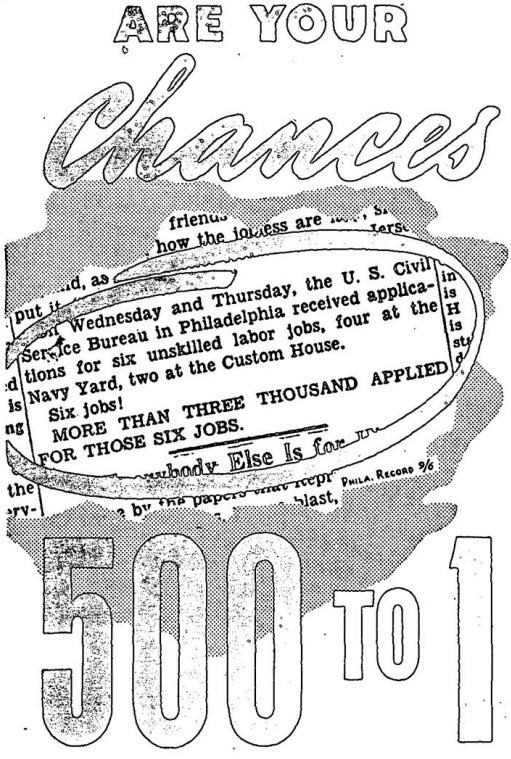

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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

Combined with All-American Fiction

Volume 288 CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY 4, 1939 Number 2

Cover by Rudolph Belarski

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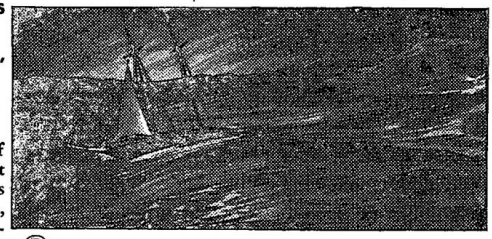
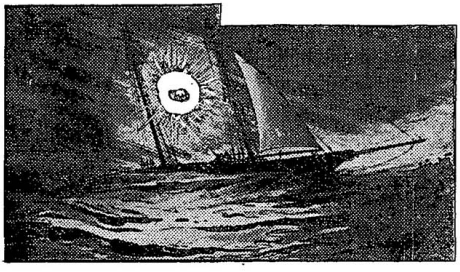
IF I FAILED...WE WERE ALL DEAD MEN

LASHED TO SHROUDS OF SINKING, BURNING SCHOONER, SAILORS SEE HOPE OF RESCUE FADE

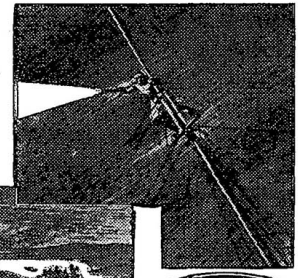


① "The dream of my life, for which I had saved since I first went to sea at twelve, had come true!" writes Capt. Hans Milton of 610 West 111th St., New York City. "I was making my first voyage as master and owner of my own vessel, the two-masted topsail schooner 'Pioneer,' when the hurricane of last September caught us 400 miles off Nantucket.

② "We were pumping to keep afloat when we passed into the windless vortex of the storm where the waves were leaping and jumping crazily and where they crashed in our companion ways and filled the ship beyond hope of saving her. The five of us and the cat scrambled aloft for our lives. Our deck-load of lumber kept us afloat and without fresh water and with almost no food we lived, lashed to the rigging, for three endless days and nights.



③ "Once a steamer hove in sight—but failing to see our distress signals, went her way. At 3 a.m. on the fourth morning steamer lights showed momentarily over the wild sea. We rigged a huge ball of sails and blankets, soaked it with gasoline, touched it off and hoisted it aloft.



④ "But the steamer did not change her course. She thought we were fishing. The wind blew burning fragments back on the ship setting her afire in various places. I could see the stern light of the steamer going away from us. *If I couldn't stop her, we were all dead men!* I climbed to the fore-top and in desperation pulled my flashlight from my back pocket and in Morse code signalled 'Sinking... SOS... Help!'

⑤ "Slowly, I saw the ship turn! In her last hour afloat, all of us and the cat were saved from the sinking, burning 'Pioneer' by those fine seamen of the United States Liner 'American Banker' and by the power of two tiny 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries that stood by us in the blackest hour of our lives!"

(*Signed*) Captain Hans Milton

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Gregg struck again, and the French officer went down

By
ROBERT CARSE
Author of "Return to Glory," "The Bright Sword," etc.

Seven Came By Sea

Haiti, 1791: In the dark hills the drums began softly, but before that night of flame and terror was over, they had pounded out a protest against tyranny that shook the Empire of France. A complete novelet

I

THAT was the year 1791 and no man's ship was safe in the Western ocean. Henry Gregg went aloft himself when the foretop lookout hailed the deck. To the southward the sea lay smooth, fired to a brilliant sheen by the noonday sun.

Upon it the wreckage lay motionless. Only the sharks moved, and one or two of the men hanging to the shattered spars. The men were black; their naked backs showed sharp as they kicked a spume to keep the sharks from them.

The lookout man squinted around at Henry Gregg. "Somethin'," he said, "from last night's snorter, Cap'n."

"Keep your eye on 'em," Henry Gregg told him and swung sliding down a sidestay to the deck.

He brought the tall ship right in beside the wreckage, then sent his longboat away. The sharks had come in very close. They shunted against the boat and the big Connecticut men at the oars struck out with fierce loathing at the rolling gray forms.

There were twelve men the boat-crew helped aboard. Four were already dead and another was dying. All of them had suffered extremely from immersion and

exposure, and just one, a little man, could sit up to talk. He studied Henry Gregg and the red-striped ensign at the gaff peak. *"Donvorro,"* he mumbled. "Big wind take ship . . ."

"Right," Gregg said in his terse New England way. "What ship you out of?"

The black man simply touched his shoulder where the slavers' iron had burned the great scar deep.

Behind Gregg the mate stirred and cursed. "Look at where the leg irons grabbed 'em," he said.

"I've looked," Gregg said. "They're from a Middle-Passage ship out of Africa. Get back on your course now, mister. She must have gone down in that storm last night."

He sat near them there in the mainsail shadow during the rest of the sun-heavy hours. He and the carpenter sewed up the dead men. At dusk he read the burial service and they were tipped into the sea.

The little black man and another were conscious to watch it. The other was very tall and strong, with the cicatrices of his tribe's facial markings broad along his upper jaws and brow. He stood and spoke and the cracking snap of his voice was like a whip. The rest of the blacks roused and swayed to stand beside him. But it was the little man who addressed Gregg:

"This feller, Yubu, like for know where cap'n bound. Him son big fellar Africa. Him no care come 'longside for be slave."

Henry Gregg looked full into Yubu's eyes. It was like looking at a wild animal, at a lynx that had been caught in a trap. He had seen a lot of fighting men, he thought, and here was a real warrior. This one hadn't been born to be a slave. "Tell Yubu," he said to the little man, "that I'm bound for Cap François, in French Hispaniola. But tell him, too, that I'm not the kind who trades in slaves."

Yubu raised a huge hand when he understood. He silently saluted Gregg. Then he moved away to the rail and stood staring at the pale glimmer of the horizon. All the blacks followed him except the little man. He remained before Gregg. "Them fellar be happy," he said.

"I reckon that," Gregg said. "But how about you?"

The little man's brine-puffed face tightened. "Me fellar long time 'longside slave factory, Senegal. Ship me out when other fellar sick."

Gregg mildly cursed. "You stand real lucky, then," he said. "What they want at Cap François is big, tough men like Yubu."

MR. TOWER, the mate, was nervous. He was a widower with four small children living with a sister in Stratford, and he kept to the sea only out of necessity. "Never liked this coast," he muttered to Henry Gregg. "Never liked this island. Frenchies live here like rats in a powder keg. Right now us carrying blacks ain't a good thing. You might ha'—"

"Me," Henry Gregg said, "I got dealings here. So pipe down. Get your ladder over for the pilot and forget the blacks. I'll take care of them."

Past the low, brass-green line of the Tortuga the main island reared magnificent over the sea. Cloud was about the crags and cliffs of the upper slopes. Sun broke through it unevenly to touch the coastal plain with quivering radiance. The smoke from the cane-fires rose in blue, straight pillars and the massed white town gleamed.

Haiti, that was what the first folks here, the Caribs, had called it, Henry Gregg remembered. The word meant a high place, and it was high and it was lovely. But there was shoal water in by the forts, and the French pilot knew more about rum than soundings. *"Doucement,* hey, mister?" Gregg said.

The pilot flipped a laced wrist and the helmsman put the wheel up a spoke. Then he stepped forward to the quarter-rail, peered down at the blacks gathered in the halfdeck. "Good men," he told Gregg. *"Assez forts.* Where did you find them?"

"Out to sea," Gregg said short-voiced.

"You must declare them," the pilot said. "You must pay a tax on them. For a small consideration, though, I will arrange it for you with the harbor-master."

Gregg wanted to laugh. "They're men from a ship that sank," he said. "We saved them from the sharks. I'm paying no tax on them."

"Alors," the pilot said, "let go your anchor now. You'll have to wait to get alongside the wharf. Things have changed in Cap François since your last voyage. They'll tell you ashore."

The light in the main cabin was not very good and Henry Gregg swore as he dressed for shore. Blast all pilots, he thought, and blast all ports. Sea was the one place where a man was really happy. Now he had to go up the town and wrangle with the rum-pot harbor-master, then spend long, difficult hours with Monsieur Destreau. When they were through with all the cargo sheets, though, Monsieur Destreau would take him out to the plantation for dinner. That was something different. Then he'd have a chance to see Leonie.

He leaned closer to the bull's-eye mirror and studied himself. Even your own mother, he thought, never put you down for the handsomest lad in town. And seagoing hasn't cured you any. Homespun might be the stuff to wear in New Haven, but among these Frenchies you look like a Vermont parson with the frostbite. A bit of lace now, and a silk coat would do all right.

Then he grinned at his lean, long-jawed reflection in the glass and jammed his hat down square. You're wanting to fix up like a Tory dandy, he told himself. Let the Frenchies keep their lace and silk. You're a man who stands master and owner of his own ship. If Leonie doesn't love you, it won't be for want of fancy gear.

He stopped for a moment at the ladder-head before he went overside into the boat. The black men had risen as he passed, and the little man had followed him. "We make trouble for cap'n?" he asked.

"No trouble that counts," Gregg told him. "My agent's a big man in this town. He'll tend for you."

Sharply filed teeth flashed in the black face. "Fellar want for thank cap'n."

"Thank him," Gregg snapped, "when you're free. Now keep out of sight of shore."

THERE were marine patrols in varnished black hats around the customs house, he found. Further up toward the Place d'Armes grenadiers and mulatto militia paced the cobbles in steady files. They stared at him as he shouldered past them and once a sergeant asked to see his papers. Then when he turned into the Place d'Armes heading for Monsieur Destreau's counting-house he understood.

The great, wide space was nearly clear of people. Here usually was a gay and noisy crowd, black women in from the hill plantations to sell their mangos and papayas and bananas at market, house slaves from the wealthy city homes who haggled over every *sou,* and the wives and daughters and kept women of the rich planters, officers and soldiers from the garrison. Now no more than a hundred civilians were in sight. Out of the center before the huge arsenal troops stood shoulder to shoulder. They faced two big iron cages. The cages held men, black men who were being burned to death.

Henry Gregg had gone to sea with John Paul Jones when he was sixteen. He had fought in the battles against the *Drake* and the *Serapis,* learned to look on death without undue emotion. But these men were being slowly and terribly killed. Flame rose around them from the fires beneath until the cages creaked. Smoke choked them as they flailed and twisted and tore at the glowing bars.

Muscles constricted in Gregg's throat. He wanted to yell out and knew he could not. His hands and entire body shook with the desire to run forward, rip a musket from a soldier, shoot until those men within the cages were dead. "Steady, you," he told himself. "Steady, you fool. There's no helping them. Nothing anybody can do for them now."

He went on then, through the smoke-dark sunlight to Monsieur Destreau's door.

A mulatto clerk stood on the doorstep and his face was the color of an unripe squash. "*Entrez*," he managed to tell Gregg. "M'sieu Destreau is waiting for you."

Monsieur Destreau sat at a broad mahogany desk in a close-shuttered room. He rose and took Henry Gregg's hand. "I regret, Captain," he said slowly, "that you should have chosen this time to call. But such things must be. There has been—a little unrest in the colony. That out there is the end of it."

Monsieur Destreau helped himself to perique as he spoke, and there was perfume on his satin coat and his wig. But it was Henry Gregg's impression that the room reeked with the smell of roasting flesh. He felt stifled, almost sick. "Here," Monsieur Destreau said, and poured him rum from a decanter on the desk. "Your voyage seems to have been quite fatiguing."

Henry Gregg drank the rum standing up. He put the glass back and for the space of several seconds stared into the Frenchman's haggard, handsome face. "Tell me," he said then. "What did those men do?"

Monsieur Destreau frowned and slightly touched his high-arched nose. "They were black men," he said, "who made the mistake of seeking liberty through violence. But you are an American. Our petty local troubles shouldn't bother you."

Henry Gregg forced himself to nod. He owned every inch of his ship, he thought, but not the cargo she carried. Men in New Haven held shares in that with him and it was consigned direct to Monsieur Destreau. Until it was cared for he'd have to keep a stopper on his ideas about the rights of man. Reason and the rights of man, though, had nothing to do with love. He was in love with Leonie. Leonie was Monsieur Destreau's daughter. There were eight black men out aboard now who trusted him to save them through Monsieur Destreau. It was all confusing, and all of it except the cargo had to wait.

"I reckon," he said in a level voice, "you want to hear about the stuff I brought South."

Monsieur Destreau smiled pouring more rum. "I have a full cargo of sugar and coffee ready for you," he said. "When can you unload?"

"As soon," Gregg said, "as I can get alongside the wharf."

"*Trés bien*," Monsieur Destreau said. "Give me your papers for the authorities. Tomorrow I shall see that you get the necessary permission to come alongside. It is impossible to reach the right people today. I suggest that now we go out to the plantation and forget commerce."

Henry Gregg said the words before he was fully aware of them. "Mam'selle Leonie is there?" he asked.

"Until last night," Monsieur Destreau said, "she was at our summer place at Plaisance. But I sent for her. I thought she would be pleased to see you."

Henry Gregg blushed to the ears, then tried the bow he had been practicing for Leonie. "Thank you, sir," he said.

II

MONSIEUR DESTREAU'S carriage rolled fast across the Place d'Armes. Nothing was left there now except the dark firemarks on the cobbles. But Henry Gregg did not look long at them. He was watching Monsieur Destreau.

He failed to understand this man completely, he realized. The other was a strange mixture of an Old World fop and a man who had been shrewd enough to make one of the greatest fortunes in the French colonies. Monsieur Destreau talked most of the time about the latest clothes from Paris and the stupidity of island social life. But he also knew to the ha'penny the latest rum and sugar prices in New York and London and Paris, and most of the cargoes being carried in the West Indies trade. Now he chose to talk about the difficulty of keeping silk waistcoats fresh in a moist climate and Henry Gregg sat back, half listening.

The carriage had swung down the tree-

lined promenade called La Fossette. At the massive city gates, Henry Gregg noticed, the sentries snapped sharply to attention and the officer of the guard stood alert. Monsieur Destreau waved his hand easily back toward the city. "The blacks want all that," he said in that same drawling voice. "They'd take our wealth from us, we who have held it always. Odd, don't you think, Captain?"

"Odd," Henry Gregg said, "for any men to hope to hold anything always." Then ahead of the carriage, out in the powdery dust of the white limestone road, he saw the black men.

They were the lot from his ship. Yubu led them and behind him shuffled the little man. Water glistened on their blue-black skins and kinky hair. They came from the marshy land bordering the bay and a rigor of exhaustion was on them. Not even Yubu could do more than run at a trot.

From the bamboo thickets and guinea grass of the marshland rose a clamor of shouts and a couple of shots. Soldiers were in there, Henry Gregg knew. They were searching for the black men. Turning, he saw that Monsieur Destreau was standing up.

Monsieur Destreau held a gold-chased pistol in this hand. He was calling to the blacks. *"Halte-là!"* he said. "Stand where you are!"

But the soldiers had crashed forth to the edge of the road. Their long muskets swung squarely to the blacks. Yubu stopped and the others stopped with him. A tall officer in a white-plumed shako and muddied boots advanced to Yubu. He lifted his saber and with the heavy guard-piece struck Yubu in the mouth.

Henry Gregg was not sure how he got down from the carriage. But he was there in the road and he was walking with big, swift strides toward Yubu and the officer. He recognized the officer. It was Armand Vileil and he had met him in Monsieur Destreau's house. "Wait a minute," he told Vileil. "I know these men. They're from my ship."

Vileil was panting and his gold-looped tunic was badly torn. He stared at Henry Gregg with savage eyes. *"Par example!"* he said. "Wait for what?"

Henry Gregg did not answer him. He was speaking to the little man. "Come here, Shorty," he said. "Tell me about it."

Fear strained the little man's face. "Pilot fellar come back aboard," he said. "Bring them fellar soldier. Yubu—"

Yubu moved as he heard his name. He wiped the blood from his mouth. Then, talking in rapid gutturals, he pointed to the great blue hills.

He was still talking when Vileil struck him again with the saber.

THE rage kept any clear thought out of Henry Gregg's brain. All he saw was Yubu, down, pitching in the dust, and the big, heavy-shouldered French officer sweeping at him with the saber. Then the saber was in his own hands. He flung it far off into the bamboos. After that Vileil straightened and swung at him.

He measured Vileil for a long right, let him have it just below the ear. The man teetered with his hands flopping. He sent his second blow to the jaw and Vileil whirled headlong in the ditch.

Henry Gregg followed him sailor-style, poised to kick his feet out from under if he tried to rise. But Vileil stayed there, motionless and soundless. Monsieur Destreau was coming up the road.

"Captain," Monsieur Destreau said. "Captain, I think you have forgotten yourself. Commandant Vileil is one of my friends and an officer of the garrison."

Henry Gregg could feel the blood pulsing in his knuckles where they had met jaw bone. That sensation and the sight of Vileil sprawling there in the ditch took the rage out of him. "Yes, sir," he said. "I guess I have."

"Captain," Monsieur Destreau said quietly, "allow me to remind you. This is a French colony. You are a foreigner here. Please do not put too great a strain upon my friendship. Be good enough to help the commandant up."

Vileil got up unaided. He talked with Monsieur Destreau in French so fast that Henry Gregg could not understand it. But then Monsieur Destreau turned and motioned to him. "We are to go on," he said. "Get in the carriage."

"But how about them?" Henry Gregg said. "How about the black men?"

For the first time Monsieur Destreau showed outright impatience. His face flushed and his hands jerked. "They are in Commandant Vileil's charge. He will do with them what he thinks best. I repeat; get in the carriage."

They were lined up there along the road as he and Monsieur Destreau passed in the carriage. The blue-coated grenadiers were chaining them together with short pieces of chain. But Yubu's cuts had stopped bleeding and the little man smiled up at him through the dust. The little son-of-a-gun, Henry Gregg thought. He's telling me they know what chains are. They've been in 'em before, and out of 'em. . . .

Henry Gregg was never to lose his memory of that road. It was always to stand forth clear in his brain. But then, riding beside the slender, foppish man in the warm golden torrent of the sunshine, he did not realize it.

The drowse of late afternoon was over the wide, flat plain. In the tawny spread of cane on either side the fieldhands worked chanting, the clopping strokes of their cutlasses in unison. Bullock wagons laden with the sticky-sweet, fresh cane slowly passed in the shadow of the vast mango and cottonwood trees along the way. A fat priest with a red face and a black shovel-hat jolted by on a sturdily trotting burro, waved his hand in pleasant salute to Monsieur Destreau.

Through the ornate iron gates of some great plantation came carriage after carriage filled with ladies and gentlemen in silk and satin. Their laughter rippled over the road and their cries of greeting to Monsieur Destreau awoke the shotes sleeping in the ditches.

There was still peace here, Henry Gregg thought. This was France's richest colony. She wasn't going to lose it right off because a pack of blacks wanted liberty. All of the folks in the place weren't as frippery as that lot who had just passed. Men like the one beside him really ran it. Monsieur Destreau and his kind kept a tight hold on the fuse to the powder keg. But then Henry Gregg's thoughts were clouded by another—of the caged and blazing black men there at the Cape. If enough black men were willing to die, in time the keg would go.

Monsieur Destreau turned to look at Henry Gregg. "I have rebuilt my gateway," he said. "It is in the style of Fontainebleau."

The gate columns were tall and lovely. Beyond the broad drive led straight from the road toward the house. Henry Gregg saw it through masking trees. A king wouldn't want a better house than that, he told himself. Then he wryly smiled. Right here, he remembered, Monsieur Destreau was his own private king.

Greyhounds ran down the marble steps as the carriage halted before the house. A liveried butler met them on the lower terrace where the peacocks trailed shimmering against the distant shimmer of the sea. He murmured softly and Monsieur Destreau nodded. "Leonie asks us to excuse her," Monsieur Destreau told Gregg. "She has just finished her siesta and will join us in a few minutes."

THEY went side by side into the immense house. Cool shadow fell over them and in the salon the gilt furniture, the vases and the great lacquered screens were dully glinting pools of light. Monsieur Destreau sat on a brocaded divan and stretched his legs.

"I have waited until now to say this," he said. "And I speak as your friend and a man engaged with you in commercial enterprise. Today you acted quite rashly. Just what the consequences of your—meeting with Vileil will be I don't know. But I advise you to make out immediately a detailed report of where and how you found those blacks. Then if Vileil should

make any complaint to his superiors I shall be in possession of the facts and can move to protect you."

Henry Gregg stood four or five feet away. In that light he could not clearly see Monsieur Destreau's eyes. He wished that he could, and that he understood this man better. But Monsieur Destreau was talking sense, he realized. Back there on the road he had been pretty handy with the big grenadier, and all the laws of the colony were tough about blacks. He'd had a number of dealings with Monsieur Destreau and never found him anything but absolutely square. Right now there wasn't any cause for doubting him.

"All right, sir," he said hoarsely. "But I won't see those fellows sold as slaves. They're mine if they're any man's."

Monsieur Destreau indicated a desk across the room. "You will find pen, ink and paper there."

Leonie entered the room as Henry Gregg finished writing. She stood right inside a sunlit doorway at the far end. He sensed her presence before he actually saw her. Then he swiftly signed his name and held the pages to dry over the candle on the desk. "Here, sir," he said to Monsieur Destreau. "I've given the whole thing, latitude and longitude and all, and what that greasy-neck pilot said this morning coming up the bay."

"Very good," Monsieur Destreau said. But Henry Gregg was already striding toward Leonie.

She let Henry Gregg take her hand and smiled a little bit as he kissed it. "You have picked up our ways fast," she said.

"I should," he answered rather shortly, remembering that the Commandant Vileil was the last man he had seen kiss her hand.

"You are jealous, Henry?" she asked him, her oval face gravely lifted. "I thought sailors could never be jealous men."

"New England men are different," he blurted. "But will you take me for a walk in the garden?"

They walked for quite a time in silence and until they faced the sea. Leonie stood so that her slim body and dark-haired head were full in the radiance of the sunset. It flowed up from the sea and bathed them both, but he stood back a pace to look at her.

She was dressed in a brocaded gown, he saw, and wore little, golden brocaded slippers. But fancy stuff or no, she made the New Haven girls look like a parcel of frumps. She wasn't only lovely; she was smart, too. All the dreams were true when he was with her. Everything he wanted in the world was right here.

"Leonie," he said, very calmly now, "you know I love you. You know I want to marry you. I reckon it's about time that you told me how you feel." . . .

She crossed the space he had left open between them. Her fingers lifted and grasped the lapels of the homespun coat. "Yes," she said, "it's time I told you, Henry. But things are not right here. My father and the other men in the colony are worried. There is going to be trouble, trouble about which I can only guess. This is no moment to talk about marriage."

"But you love me?" he said, and suddenly his hands were bringing her against him.

"What did you think?" she whispered after he had kissed her.

"I thought," he said, "that maybe you were in love with Vileil. The last time I was here you danced with him nearly all evening."

Her laughter was quick and soft. "Because you still dance like a sailor with a monkey on his shoulder. Armand Vileil, though, is nothing but a professional soldier looking for a lot of money. If it has a pretty wife attached, all the better."

Henry Gregg looked down into her face. "How about the other?" he said. "The trouble you spoke about here?"

An expression of perplexed dismay, of almost open fear, came into her dark eyes. "It is the blacks," she said. "And what the people in Paris would do for them. They are half a million here, and we're nothing but forty thousand against them. In Paris

they are talking of giving them their freedom, and the blacks have heard."

"You're afraid of that?"

"Not for myself. But for my father and the other men like him. They will never give up what they have here. All of them have tried to make the new world too much like the old. None of the hatreds is forgotten, and new ones have been added."

Henry Gregg released her from him. He stood alone, staring at her with narrowed eyes. "Liberty," he said, "is a thing all men should have. I fought for it in my own country when I was a youngster. The color of a man's skin doesn't make him a slave."

"True," she said. "But listen. Listen now. . . ."

DARKNESS was down over the sea and the plain. The high inland mountain crests held the last flicker of the sunset. When that went the drums began.

There were many of them and they all took the same beat. It was like the sea in a gale, Henry Gregg thought. The vibration, the driving fury of sound were the same. But the beat changed. It was slower, lower pitched, and he could feel the pulse of his heart change to the rhythm. If it stopped, he told himself strangely, his heart would stop. Then he heard Leonie.

"They are the *marrons*," she said, "the wild, escaped slaves who are playing. Some night they are going to come down out of the mountains. We can't stop them. They'll sweep right across the plain to the Cape. They'll—"

He put his arm about her and she was steady. "Take me to the house, Henry," she said. "In there I can believe we are safe from them."

Henry Gregg left her in the vast main hall of the house, watched her climb the candle-gleaming staircase. Then he went slowly on toward the salon. The sound of the drums was still in his ears. For a moment as he stood at the entrance to the room he did not clearly hear Monsieur Destreau's and Vileil's voices.

The two sat together on a divan. Vileil wore a fresh uniform and polished duty-belts. When he leaned forward vehemently speaking his saber scabbard scraped the floor. "You know," he said. "The man is easily handled. Scruples don't count any more. We'll have to fight for anything we've got. But in a few days ships will be at a great premium in the port. And a place must be found for Leonie."

Monsieur Destreau did not answer at once. The drums seemed to shock him like direct physical blows. His body slightly and constantly quivered. "Yes," he said. "I could send Leonie in that ship."

It was Vileil who saw Henry Gregg. He rose from the divan and pulled his saber free. But Monsieur Destreau was up by then and he held Vileil back. "No," he said. "No, I'll talk to him."

Henry Gregg waited in the middle of the room. He wanted to laugh at Monsieur Destreau, and at himself. It was a simple sort of trap, he thought, and he'd run into it bow-on.

"I have bad news for you, Captain," Monsieur Destreau said. "The commandant's superiors have ordered your arrest. There is doubt about how you came to have those eight blacks in your ship. They were originally from a French ship. Their brand-marks prove it. So you will be held in prison at Cap François until you can establish your innocence more clearly."

"You mean," Henry Gregg said, "you and the commandant have figured out a handy way to steal my ship."

"The question of theft," Monsieur Destreau said, "concerns you alone. But don't try to escape. The commandant has a guard all around the house. Be sure that I shall say your farewells to Leonie; I regret you couldn't stay for dinner. Good night."

The rage gathering in Henry Gregg's throat kept him from speech. He turned and went silently out the door before Vileil.

Vileil had horses in front of the house. A pair of his grenadiers chained Henry Gregg, shoved him up into a saddle. Gregg hardly watched them. He was still as they started down the drive. But a bit past the house and near the slave quarters he saw

men he knew. Yubu and the little man, all the seven were there. They were being hurried along in a fettered line by an overseer with a whip. Stumbling, the little man turned to stare up at him.

Henry Gregg spoke in a clear voice to Vileil. "What made you so generous, Commandant?" he said. "Black men bring a good price."

"You mistake me," Vileil said, riding close. "I'm really selfish. For that pack of cattle Monsieur Destreau is giving me a half share in your ship. But turn about is fair play. Here . . . I've been saving this for you." From the shoulder, slashed and hard, he struck Henry Gregg in the face.

III

HENRY GREGG had been in the prison for two days at Cap François when Mr. Tower came to see him. The mate wore his shore-going suit and a deeply frightened look. "Don't know how it started," he said. "Don't know how it's going to end. But them French marines kicked me and some others out of the ship yestiddy. Now we been sent aboard a lime-juicer clearing right quick for Boston. The rest of the crew's still aboard your ship, with the Frenchies guarding 'em. How come, though, you got yourself in all this fix?"

"The consul," Henry Gregg said slowly, "will give you a better story than I can. You just say hello to the folks at home for me. Tell 'em I'll be along after a spell."

"Godamighty, you're the cool one," Mr. Tower said. Then the bearded keeper rattled the keys at him and he ran.

Henry Gregg went back to sleep after that. He dreamt of Leonie and it took the drums to wake him.

The drums had an absolute madness in them tonight. They tore apart all other sound, shattered and split the night. It was quite a time before he realized that outside in the Place d'Armes the cathedral bells were ringing and bugles blew. Soldiers ran from the barracks and the arsenal and sweating horses swerved low-haunched on the cobbles. Then to the west, in the direction of the plain, he saw the flame. It reached carmine, terrible, billowing across the plain.

He got back from the window slit and sat down on the bunk. As he would say a prayer, he whispered Leonie's name. But that did not do any good. She was out there where the black men were killing anybody with a white skin. She was with her father, a man the blacks would strike at first.

He stood and strode the cell. He kicked the barred door and yelled. But other men were doing the same thing through the prison. The blacks were very near. You could hear them, for now the drums were almost still.

Clear and swift, a bugle sounded. The last note of the call was crashed out in musket fire and the blast of cannon. That was out by the gates, Henry Gregg knew. Then, straining at the window again, he saw the black men in the Place d'Armes.

They formed a solid, rushing mass. A few wore the livery of house servants, but most of them were hulking and half-naked men. In their hands were the cutlasses given them for cutting cane. Swirling, they ran at the arsenal, the barracks and the prison.

The black men who were prisoners shouted to them in the African talk. The keeper and the guards came clattering back past Henry Gregg's cell. He laughed hoarsely at them. He had seen Yubu and all the eight. They were coming for him, he knew. They had remembered him. The little man was calling, "Cap'n! Cap'n, sar!"

Yubu gripped the door bars with both hands. He tore the bars and a huge chunk of the planking loose. Then Henry Gregg kicked down what was left and Yubu grinned at him. "Happy for see cap'n," the little man said over Yubu's shoulder.

"You come from the plantation?" Henry Gregg said, his body still quivering.

"Yes, sar."

"The folks all right out there when you left?"

"Yes, sar. Master shoot quick there. Us fellar run very quick. But you want for us to stay 'longside you?"

"That's right," Henry Gregg said.

They went from the prison crouched nearly double. The blacks were being driven out of the Place d'Armes. Volleys of musket fire repeatedly swept them. Chain-shot from the arsenal cannon whipped the cobbles. But Henry Gregg ran thinking of Leonie and of the ship.

He was suddenly in the alley ahead, the eight men close around him. He took them out of that and into another one, then a street empty except for a whimpering dog. Beyond, the house walls were illuminated by the vast flame from the plain.

WHERE he brought the seven out upon the plain was among blossoming orange trees. He kept to the trees and away from the road. The road was clogged with death and terrific rout. The blacks who had attacked the city were retreating. Headlong they met the whites who had survived to cross the plain.

A daze of horror held Henry Gregg. He was no longer able to feel any clear emotion. Great gilt carriages and coaches were being overturned. The people inside them burned. Men as slender as Monsieur Destreau stood for several minutes holding back the blacks with swords and pistols. Then they went down and the blacks filled the road from side to side.

After a time Gregg went to the road. It was the quickest way to Leonie, and here it was almost deserted. Once a priest stumbled past them, his robe charred with flame, his voice an inchoate moaning sound. Then they came upon a man who lay very still in the dribble of blood beneath his horse. Gold coins had scattered from his split saddle-bags. The horse's hooves shuffled them in the dust. Before the gates of a plantation a little old lady sat in a long velvet cloak. There were pearls around her throat and her hands held gems. House slaves were beside her, but they were dead, and the words she whispered had no meaning.

Rage which rose from the depths of his being claimed Henry Gregg. He knew the men responsible for this, he thought with searing clarity. They were Monsieur Destreau's lot, the ones for whom liberty was a joke. It was as Leonie had said; their own hatred and cruelty was the cause. Their pleasure had been to torture black men. But black men could remember, and could kill.

Between the columns of Monsieur Destreau's gateway was a heap of wagons. A militia sergeant lay against it, his head severed from his body. In back of him was what had been his platoon. Their heads were stacked together like cannon balls.

"Hill fellar," the little man murmured, "no care for soldier."

But Henry Gregg was staring forward at the house. It was not yet afire. The blaze shriveling the darkness was from the outbuildings. Men yowled there with cries fiercer than wolves, and a spattering of musket fire answered them. He rolled the sergeant over, took the big pistol from the holster and started up the drive.

Yubu and the little man kept right beside him. "Hill fellar kill quick," the little man said. "Make to kill cap'n."

"Pipe down," Henry Gregg said. Black men were standing forth from the shadows of the trees. But they were plantation slaves; they stopped as they heard Yubu. "Tell them," Gregg said to the little man, "that I want to get to the house. I want to get the young lady out of there."

"Say no can do, cap'n."

"All right, Shorty. Stay here with them, then."

The little man smiled at that. "Yubu fix me good, I leave cap'n," he said. "Cap'n say we go, we go."

THEY entered the last fringes of the darkness then, crawling prone. The grass of the lawn was cool to Gregg's sweaty hands, and the marble of the terrace steps was slippery and very cold. His impulse was to get up and run, lunge openly for the house. But that wasn't

the way, he told himself. That way he'd get killed. And he wanted to live, for Leonie.

It seemed as if the naked hill men rose right up out of the ground. They were huge and they moved with the speed of animals. Yubu barked some words at them, but if they heard they did not halt. Henry Gregg let the first of them have the pistol ball through the legs. He kicked another vaulting with a blow of his square-toed boot. Then he broke past the rest, lashing with the pistol-butt and his empty hand.

The seven caught up to him where the flower beds banked the side wall of the house. He lay panting, tasting the salt blood that trickled from a cutlass cut on his temple. Furniture was piled against the windows of the house. The thick wooden shutters were set tightly in place. But one rush of the hill men had unhinged the main door. If he stood straight and walked out in full sight, he knew, there might be a chance of his getting in there. White men weren't shooting white men tonight.

"Now," he told the little man, "stay here. I'll be out. She'll be with me. Then we got to shove off quick."

He stood to his full height after that. The quivering glare of the outbuilding flame fell over him. He felt nine feet high, and as though every man in the plain could see him. Now walk slow, stupid, he told himself. If you'd been as smart as you're big you wouldn't be in this howdy-do.

Some of the hill men had muskets. They drove ragged volleys at him, hunkering near to shoot. But the shots from within the house were better aimed, drove them back. Henry Gregg walked the final paces in a weird, throbbing silence. He pushed the cracked mahogany of the door and it opened before him. He stepped inside and shut it.

Right in front of him was Leonie. "It's good," she said, "that you are here."

"Yes," he said. "I reckoned you might need me."

Her dress was stained with powder marks and there was blood on the hem. But her eyes were clear and her motions steady as she barred the door again.

There were only dead men in the hall. The people who lived were in the salon. That room glistened with light. Every candle in the huge central chandelier was lit. Henry Gregg did not understand why until he saw the faces of the women gathered under it. They were afraid of darkness and the night, he realized. The black men had come in the darkness to burn their homes. If they were going to die here, it was to be in brilliance and in sight of their own kind.

But Monsieur Destreau was the one man who remained to protect them. The rest were dead or dying. They lay still, their vacant faces turned toward the crystal gleam. Monsieur Destreau dominated the room. He wore a magnificent purple coat and his best wig. As if he was giving a reception, Henry Gregg thought. Then he crossed the room to the older man.

MONSIEUR DESTREAU had loaded muskets piled on a chair beside him at a front window. There were pistols in his pockets, a sword at his hip. The glance he gave Henry Gregg was remote, absolutely cold. "I dislike," he said, "to have you sent twice from my house in the same day. But now I must ask that you leave at once. What is happening concerns only us who live here."

Henry Gregg's hands tightened. "You could have shot me," he said, "while I was out there. That'd saved you breath."

Monsieur Destreau made no reply for a moment. He had lifted a musket, thrust it through the shutter crack. The concussion of his shot made the chandelier crystals chime. He looked back slowly at Henry Gregg. "I have a favor to ask of you," he said. "Not for myself, naturally. But for these ladies here. Be good enough to take word to the nearest troops that the plantation Destreau is in some danger."

"The nearest troops," Henry Gregg said, "are at the Cape. Blacks hold the road all the way there. If it hadn't been for black men, the fellows Vileil swapped you,

I wouldn't be here now. So forget your fancy ideas. Get out of here before the place is burned over you."

Monsieur Destreau lowered the empty piece and picked up a loaded one. "You will excuse me," he said, "if I fail to believe you. Such a thing is not possible."

But Leonie had come forward to where they stood. She touched her father's arm. "You must trust this man," she said in a low, controlled voice, "if only because I love him. If he says we should leave here, he speaks the truth."

As he stared at her a pallor filled Monsieur Destreau's face. He became suddenly a very old man. "I did not know," he murmured. "I had no idea that you . . ." Then he straightened and made a little bow to Henry Gregg. "There is some way," he asked him, "that you can get the ladies out of here?"

"I've got those eight black boys," Henry Gregg said. "They're waiting outside for me now. With them helping, maybe I can take the ladies into the Cape. But how about you?"

Monsieur Destreau answered, firing another shot out into the darkness. "I shall stay here," he said, "to hold what is mine."

Leonie drew Henry Gregg away then, back into the room. "He has told me that over and over," she said. "He will stay here until he dies. I can't change him from it; he won't listen to me."

Some of her control had broken and she was softly weeping in Henry Gregg's arms. "Then we've got to think about you and the rest of them," he said. "We'll have to shove off while we can."

More than a score of women were in that room, and some of them were not young or strong. Yet they went quietly with Henry Gregg. He led them one by one through a side window out to where the eight waited. The hill men were gone from there. In this moment they were making a furious, open charge against the front of the house.

They had axes, mattocks, clubs. Their blows rent the door in fragments. Shoulder to shoulder they smashed in, screaming.

Through a window Henry Gregg briefly could see Monsieur Destreau. The chandelier had fallen, shattered. Flame leapt hissing and crackling in the room. Around Monsieur Destreau it formed an incandescent wall. The flame had his clothing, his wig, but as he sagged forward the sword was very straight in his hand.

IV

IT WAS Henry Gregg's belief for some time afterward that all the night was full of flame. He carried Leonie, and was aware the other women, Yubu and his blacks were about him. But the light from the house, the sparks and embers had partly blinded him. He moved toward the sea by instinct, hearing the wild shouts of the hill men behind.

He stopped when sea wind blew fresh in his face. His vision returned. He saw the empty gray sea and the half-wrecked hulk of the old fishing boat on the rocky beach. Then he let Leonie down out of his arms. "Don't be afraid," he told her. "I'm going to take that boat. It will get us to the Cape."

He stared toward the Cape as the black men hauled the boat down the beach. A bitter fog of smoke from the plain covered the city. The pulsation of cannon shivered it. Darts of streaking orange flame marked the cannon. They were served in salvos; the bursts gathered rolling one upon the other. White men met black men fiercely in battle there, he knew. Anybody who went into that went to death.

But the wind was veering inshore, lifted some of the great gray drift of smoke. His ship was still in the horbor, at the same anchorage where he had left her.

A rush of wind, keen hope flared in him. He was going to get his ship back, he told himself. Somehow, he was going to get aboard, slip cable and run for the open board. He was a sailor, and he belonged in his own ship on the sea.

"All right, Shorty," he called. "Tell them to break up the spars for oars. Tell them to row quick."

"Yes, Cap'n," the little man said. "Quick."

Every couple of hundred yards across that expanse of sea he lost sight of his ship. The smoke blurred it out. They seemed to be absolutely alone here in the rotten, sinking boat. Leonie sat among the women, her low, clear voice calming them. But water was up over the floor-boards, touching the hems of their dresses, then their knees. Straining, their breathing thick in their throats, the black men hauled at the chunks of wood they used as oars. It had to be soon now, Henry Gregg thought, crouched at the tiller. It had to be right soon. . . .

Then they were close beside a dim, dark mass. He reached out and touched stout planks. He raised his hand and the women and the blacks sat very still. This was his ship.

He went aboard alone up the heavy ladder rigged overside. The moment he left the boat they lifted their eyes to him. Their expressions were strangely the same, he realized.

All of them trusted him.

Smoke hazed the deck. He could not see clearly. But there were uniformed men aft, he knew, and they worked around the main hatch. Then, starting aft, he saw Armand Vileil.

The big man stood by the mainmast. He was poised with his feet set wide, and there was a pistol in his hand. "I didn't," he said, "expect you, Yankee. But I can use you. I've got a few things I'm taking out for the governor. Get down in the hold and help your crew there. Move!"

Henry Gregg rested motionless. He looked aft, counting the marines around the hatch. Fourteen of them, he thought, but not too many for the men in the boat. "Listen, Vileil," he said. "I'm not here alone. Leonie Destreau is with me, and some other women from the plantation. I brought them out after the place was burned. They're alongside now."

Vileil walked up the deck toward him. He kept the pistol trained on Gregg's chest. "You must be lying, Yankee," he said.

"Look over the side," Henry Gregg told him. "They're waiting to get aboard."

VILEIL leaned very slightly out over the side. Then he leaned swiftly back, the pistol jerking. But Henry Gregg had been waiting for that. He hit Vileil with a hooked, sidewise blow. The shock of the shot batted the pistol from Vileil's hand. It slid down between him and Henry Gregg as they went down together thrashing to the deck.

Vileil was a strong man and the pistol ball had caught Henry Gregg high in the shoulder. It took Gregg some little time to get free from him. But Vileil was dead then, his face puffed purple from the throttling grip of Gregg's hands, and the black men were aboard.

Yubu led the black men. He went straight past Henry Gregg and at the marines. The marines were armed with bayoneted muskets and cutlasses. They came eagerly forward.

Yubu went low in a crouching dive. He grasped their legs and tripped them over him. He rose and flung them headlong. But great, jagged wounds were down his chest. Blood pumped out over the shining black skin. His breathing was a thin, fluttering whisper. He staggered from side to side when three of them rushed him. They got very close, within reach of his arms. He grasped them and they went plunging, reeling to the rail, slipped and were gone.

The splashing of their bodies made sharp sound. The other marines heard it. They backed from the black men before them on the deck. A sergeant jumped first, then all of them.

Henry Gregg stared wide-eyed at the little man. "Get the women aboard, Shorty. We're bound for sea."

He let the anchor cable go roaring while the women came aboard. Then he turned and came aft, flipping halyards and braces loose from the pins. "Haul," he told the little man. "Haul up and give me sail."

Wind slowly swung the ship. It fluttered, then filled the canvas the black men sent aloft. Somewhere ashore men shouted

and there was a cannon shot. But Henry Gregg did not listen, or look. He stood at the wheel talking with the little man.

"You go 'longside home now?" the little man said.

"As soon," Henry Gregg said, "as I can."

"You got place 'longside you for black fellar?"

"Lots of place. My country, black men are all right."

The little man teetered on his heels. He gazed out past the Cape where beyond the smoke the sun shone on open sea. Then slowly his glance came around to the cannon-throbbing city, the burning land. "I care for stay 'longside you," he said. "But better stay here. Yubu, he care for stay here."

"Yes," Henry Gregg said, "I reckon Yubu did. But Yubu was a fighting man. This place will see a lot of fighting yet."

"True, Cap'n," the little man said, and he was holding out his hand. "I care for stay, fight like Yubu."

He turned toward the rail then, walking with deliberate strides. For an instant he paused there, to smile at Henry Gregg, Leonie and all of them. But the smoke swirled and he dived unseen from the ship.

"So long, Shorty," Henry Gregg said, and headed the ship straight for sea.

DOWN the elm-lined street some man was burning leaves. The smell was pungent in Henry Gregg's nostrils as he went through his own dooryard. Leonie stood within tending her last Autumn flowers. She moved to stand beside him as he pulled the paper from his pocket. "News?" she asked him quietly. "News from there?"

"Yes," he said, and spread the smudgy New York journal in his hands. "A fast packet just got in from the Cape. Her skipper talked with some of the folks ashore. Napoleon's sending troops out. But the blacks have got an army of their own now. They're fighting to keep the whole place for themselves. Listen:

"'Following the recent engagement fought at Crête à Pierrot I was enabled to talk with several of the black leaders. Among them are a number of intelligent ment, namely Toussaint l'Ouverture, Dessalines and Christophe. But the man to whom they render credit for their defense at Crête à Pierrot against the hugely superior French forces is a black hitherto unknown. Although his comrades refer to him as General Paul Romain, he insists personally that his real name is Shorty. He speaks a little English, and it is possible of course that at one time he was aboard an American or English ship.'"

"The little man," Leonie said, very slowly.

Gregg's mouth spread in a smile as if something fine had happened.

"Sure," Henry Gregg said. "The little man."

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

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

·CASHIERED·

Cashier, from the French "cassé" meaning discharged or disbanded. Originally this word did not imply discharged with ignominy as it now does. Commanders would detail an officer to ascertain "how many new troopers had been entertained (enlisted) in lieu of such as had been killed or casseer'd since last pay-day."

·HOW!·

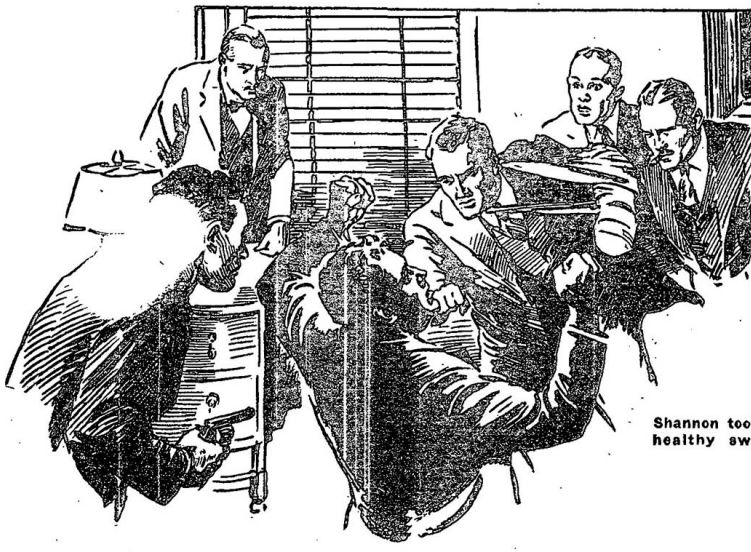
The old U.S. Army toast. One origin has it that the "H" and "O" represent the chemical symbol for water (H2O), and the "W" meant whisky. Hence "How" means "Here's whisky and water to your health."

·VOLLEY·

Volley is derived from "vol" or flight (as a flight of rockets). A rifle volley is purely ceremonial, and not to be confused with a "general discharge" fired in action.

DEFENCE ·SERVICE FREE·

In the middle ages, a king, calling his men for defence of their country, obtained their service gratis; but if to help another king, he had to pay them.



Shannon took a healthy swing

Help! Murder! Police!

By CLEVE F. ADAMS

Watch us take the lid off Big Town—where Corruption holds high revel and an honest cop doesn't dare turn his back on his neighbor. Sure, Big Town is a tough nut to crack—but "Irish" Shannon swears it can be done. Beginning a thrill-a-second novel . . .

CHAPTER I

BLACK IRISH

THERE was a corpse on the table in the autopsy surgeons' room adjoining the morgue. The surgeon's deft fingers probed for the three slugs that had turned a captain of detectives into a corpse. Lieutenant John J. Shannon took a pull at a pocket flask to fortify his stomach. Outside, in the anteroom, reporters and cops buzzed like flies, but in here it was very quiet; only the faint metallic snick of the instruments as the surgeon laid them on the porcelain tray. Presently even that ceased and there was no sound at all.

The surgeon's face was tired, gray and disillusioned under the glare of the cone light. Shannon's was tired too, younger but just as bitterly cynical. He had a dark skin and very dark eyes and a big nose and a thick shock of pepper-and-salt hair that you somehow knew was peppered prematurely, not with age. A hard guy until you looked at his mouth. The mouth was a give away. It was as fine and sensitive as a woman's and it had to be deliberately twisted into either a snarl or a sneer to keep you from knowing how soft he was.

He watched the surgeon put the three slugs into a little envelope and lick the flap. It was like an official seal on a document of state. Shannon's eyes met the dead eyes of the man who had been his boss. Almost roughly he pulled the edge of the sheet higher. Then he and the surgeon went out into the bedlam of the anteroom.

Jack Hardy of the *Telegram* grabbed Shannon's arm. "Tough on you, fella, but it's something to know they got his killer. It *was* Duquesne, wasn't it?"

Shannon glanced briefly at the olive face of Acting Chief George O'Meara. "O'Meara says so, doesn't he?"

O'Meara overheard him and gave him a dark smile. "Was that a crack, Shannon?"

"Maybe," Shannon said. He shook Hardy off, shouldered through the crush and went out the side door into the fresh coolness of the night.

FOG swirled above Civic Center as though trying to cleanse the already pristine buildings. Shannon was reminded of a paint ad: *Save the Surface and You Save All.*

He wondered if the guy who was responsible for that slogan had ever been in politics. Alone out here, crying would have been a relief. He wanted to cry, to get rid of that terrible ache in his throat and the stuffiness in his chest. But he couldn't cry, because he was Shannon. Presently he went over to the cab rank on the corner and rode down to his hotel. Upstairs, in his room, he lay on the bed, fully dressed, and stared at the ceiling. The skipper's dead face kept intruding and the eyes kept saying, "It was a frame, John J. I didn't do it."

"I know that," Shannon said, just as though Captain Goudy were really there in the room with him. He didn't believe that the gambler Duquesne had shot the skipper; he didn't believe that Duquesne's five-grand check, found in the skipper's pocket, had come there with the skipper's knowledge. Nor with Duquesne's, for that matter.

After a while there was a knock on the door. "Come in," Shannon said. He didn't bother to get off the bed.

The door opened and Frances McGowan came in. She'd been crying, but even with the marks of it still plain around her eyes she was something to look at. You have looks and a shape or you don't get to

model five hundred dollar gowns in the salons. You have a certain amount of intelligence or you don't sell many detective stories. Fran McGowan did both.

She sat down on the edge of the bed. "I just heard, Shan. I knew how you'd be feeling. I'm sorry."

"Thanks."

She got up and moved over to the windows. She had on a pair of silver foxes that would have set Shannon back a couple months' salary. "You don't want me here, Shan?"

"Sure." Quite suddenly he rolled over and buried his face in the pillows. She came and put cool fingers on his neck, rubbing it a little, not saying anything.

After a little he sat up. "You'd better ring for a drink, kitten."

"All right." She went to the phone. Shannon went into the bathroom and washed his face in cold water. When he came out he looked almost normal and the bellhop had come and gone. Fran was pouring the drinks. "What are you going to do, Shan?"

"I don't know yet. I haven't had time to think. They're holding Duquesne for the job."

"I know." She nodded. "Acting-chief O'Meara gave a statement to the papers and the networks. He hated to uncover what was bound to make a department scandal, but the check proved that Captain Goudy had been shaking Duquesne down. It is believed that Goudy squeezed once too often and Duquesne got tired of it."

"That's the way it's meant to be believed. Goudy never took a crooked dime in his life. Not only that, but Duquesne is a square gambler; one of the squarest I've ever known. He didn't have to pay off because he never had a squawk."

"Then what's behind it all, Shan?"

"Election's three days away," he said significantly. "I wish Regan was in town."

"Where is he?"

He laughed bitterly. "At a police chiefs' convention in Florida. A fine time to be horsing around the country!"

"Why don't you go to the mayor?"

"Maybe I will. Trouble is, I haven't got a thing to go to anybody with. If those slugs check with Duquesne's gun, and I think they will, even if they have to fake it somehow, it's going to be his neck and nobody would believe him on a stack of Bibles."

Fran shook her head. "I don't get it. What does O'Meara stand to gain by all this?"

"That's something else that's over my head," Shannon said gloomily. He put on his hat. "I think I'll go down and have a talk wtih Duquesne."

"May I come too?"

He looked at her. "Don't be a fool, Fran. This is big stuff. The skipper's dead and everybody in town knows what I thought of him. The minute I start getting in anybody's hair I stand a good chance of being found dead too. I'm going to have to watch my step and I don't want to be worried about you."

"Well, isn't that fine! Isn't that just dandy! *You* don't want to be worried about *me*. Why do you suppose I came up here in the first place? Why do you think I'm always around under your feet? Because you're a second Einstein?"

"I don't know." He shrugged. "Anyway, I've got to handle this thing my way. For a while, at least."

Her shoulders drooped. "All right." At the door she turned, facing him. "Would you mind kissing me just once, Shan? You never have, you know."

"I never knew you wanted me to," he said. He bent and kissed her on the mouth. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"You're a fool, John J. Shannon!"

"Sure," he said. "All cops are fools. If they weren't they wouldn't be cops." They went downstairs and he put her in a cab. It was eleven o'clock when he got back to Civic Center.

FLOYD DUQUESNE was in one of the detention cells on the top floor of the Hall of Justice. He was a tall man, tall and very slender, and Shannon had never

seen him before when he wasn't dressed in perfect taste; quietly unobtrusive but complete down to the minutest detail. He was in shirt and pants now and there were sweat stains under his arms. They had been working him over all right, even though there wasn't a mark on his face. His gray eyes had the look of a caged eagle's, bleak but watchful.

"Hello, Shannon."

"Hello," Shannon said. He watched the turnkey down at the end of the corridor. "They allow you to send for counsel yet?"

"O'Meara took a message. I don't know whether he forwarded it. Probably he didn't."

"Who did you ask for?"

"Duffield."

"All right," Shannon said. "I'll see you get him."

Duquesne's small mustache curved upward in a brief smile. "What's your angle, Shannon?"

"The skipper was a friend of mine."

"I'm supposed to have killed him. Or hadn't you heard?"

Shannon made rumbling sounds in his throat. "I could let them hang you."

"Or even help them a little, eh?"

"If I thought you did it I'd shoot you down right here," Shannon said. He would have, too. He waited till the stiffness went out of Duquesne's shoulders. "Where were you tonight?"

"Home. I told them that. I couldn't prove it."

"And was your gun home too?"

"It still is as far as I know." Duquesne spread his fine, well-cared-for hands. "I'm not much of a gun-toter, Shannon."

"I know that." Shannon curled strong fingers about the bars, leaned his face close. "You've been a thorn in the side of the gambling ring for a long time, Floyd. Because you wouldn't conform. Because, acording to your lights, you played the game straight and gave the sucker an even break. It's Lombardi that's doing this to you, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't know, copper."

Shannon was up against the same old blank wall. These guys always figured they could take care of things themselves.

"All right," he said doggedly, "we'll skip that. Was the check they found in the skipper's pocket on the level? Was it yours?"

"They didn't let me see the check."

"Remember giving out a five grand check recently?"

"I cashed one at the bank about a week ago. I made it out to bearer because I expected to send someone else after the money. Then I had to go down anyway so I cashed it myself."

"Where do you bank?"

"The Third National."

There was a clang down at the end of the corridor and Shannon turned around. O'Meara pounded hard heels toward him. His darkly handsome olive face was flushed and his eyes were hard, antagonistic. "What's the idea, Shannon?"

"I thought I'd work on the case a little. Mind?"

"What is there to work on?"

"Nothing, I guess," Shannon said. "I can see by the look on your face that the slugs checked with Duquesne's gun."

"You're damned right they did!"

Shannon put his hands in his pants pockets so O'Meara couldn't see how they were balled into fists. He said, "Duquesne tells me he asked for Duffield as counsel. You send for him yet?"

O'Meara's eyes shifted. "I was just going to when I heard you were up here fooling around."

"Well," Shannon said carefully, "I'll go with you while you send for him. That way I'll be sure of one thing at least."

"Look here, Shannon, I don't like your tone! Aren't you forgetting something?"

"What? That you're acting chief while Regan's away? No, I'm not forgetting it." He saluted mockingly. "Lead on, Chief." They went up the corridor together. In the elevator Shannon could feel O'Meara's eyes covertly watching him. Presently O'Meara said under his breath. "There's a captain's berth vacant, Shannon. How would you like to be a captain?"

"I'd like it fine if it didn't make a heel out of me."

"Or maybe a corpse like Goudy."

"Meaning what?"

O'Meara let a string of gutter-oaths dribble out between set lips. "How would you like to have me break you, Shannon?"

"It might prove something."

"What, for instance?"

"It might prove that you're afraid of me. Are you?"

O'Meara looked startled. "Hell, no!"

"That's nice," Shannon said. "Then I'll probably go right on being a cop for a while."

CHAPTER II

FIREWORKS

IN THE press-room Shannon found Jack Hardy with a limp copy of the *Telegram,* still damp from the presses. A bunch of legmen from the other sheets were sitting around theorizing as to what the murder would do to the administration. Hardy shoved the paper at Shannon. A banner and a couple of sub-heads carried the main facts. In a series of boxes were comments by various officials.

Mayor Arbogast: "I can't believe it."

District Attorney Jorgensen: "I have always found Captain Goudy an efficient police officer. However, my office has been aware for some time that the metropolitan force has been honeycombed, if not by actual bribery, then by an amazing lack of cohesion. Evidence furnished this office is often so incomplete that successful prosecution is impossible."

Acting-chief O'Meara: "I could have followed the usual procedure and whitewashed a brother officer, but to me there is a higher duty. I shall probably be censured by men inside the department. Actually I believe my life to be in danger for the stand I have taken, but my oath of office demands a strict accounting to the public which pays my salary. I shall give it, let the axe fall where it may. It is unfortunate that Chief Regan is not at his desk at this time."

An editorial commented on the fact that Captain Goudy had been a close friend of the mayor and also of the absent chief of police. By innuendo you gathered that all three were tarred with the same stick and that it might not be entirely coincidence that Chief Regan was in Florida.

Shannon ripped the paper to shreds. "You'd think the skipper was on trial instead of lying dead in the morgue! What is this, anyway?"

"Election time," Jack Hardy said.

Three or four of the other guys got up and joined hands and did a little dance around Shannon. "For I'm to be Queen of the May, mother!" They weren't particularly hard; they were just newspapermen. The thing hadn't touched them as it had Shannon. He went across the hall to the telegraph bureau and sent a wire to Regan at Miami. "If you like being a police chief you'd better get back here. John J. Shannon, detective-lieutenant." He then went over to City Hall.

The anteroom of the mayor's office was as crowded at midnight as a bargain basement at nine in the morning. A dozen committeemen, a bunch of lobbyists for the contractors, a couple of ministers and, over in one corner with a little clique of his own, Nick Lombardi. Shannon knew them all. A little silence fell as he came in. He shoved through to one of the secretaries' desks.

"Tell His Honor Lieutenant Shannon would like to see him." He didn't even try to lower his voice. The girl looked scared for a minute, then as everybody started talking again she picked up a phone and said something into it.

Shannon went over and planted his feet in front of "Big Nick" Lombardi. "My skipper never took that check or any other, and anybody says he did is a liar."

Lombardi looked at him, sleepy-eyed. He was a fat-faced Italian, slow moving, almost lethargic in his manner. It was rumored that he never got up before two in the afternoon and that he had to have somebody bathe him. He had shiny, crinkly black hair and eyes as soft as a cow's.

He smelled of lilac vegetal. "No doubt you're right, Lieutenant." His voice was liquid velvet.

"You're right I'm right!"

"Sure."

The two guys who acted as Lombardi's bodyguards deliberately turned their backs and pretended to be very interested in what was going on in the street ten stories below. A couple of reporters came over and asked Shannon if he wanted to go on record as defending the dead man's integrity.

"Why not?"

They scribbled in their notebooks. The girl secretary touched Shannon's arm. "The mayor will see you now, Lieutenant." He went through the solid-paneled door.

PAUL ARBOGAST was not a big man, nor did he strike you as being a strong one. In private practice he had been an excellent attorney, not brilliant perhaps, but competent. His years in public office had done little to change this impression. The papers quoted him occasionally on topics of the day, so that you knew there was a man named Arbogast in the mayor's office, but there had been no issues of vital importance to make him an outstanding figure. Any one of the city's five councilmen was better known. He had sandy hair and a short-clipped sandy mustache and he wore pince-nez. His desk was much too big, too ornate for him.

Shannon took off his hat, not out of respect but because it irked him. "What kind of a statement was that—you can't believe it?"

"It was a safe statement."

Shannon turned purple. "Safe! The guy was my friend, and your friend, and you sit there and talk about a safe statement! Who cares?"

"You are talking to the mayor of this city," Arbogast said.

"No kidding!"

Arbogast's glasses glinted in the light and his rather fragile fingers played a little tattoo on the desk. "Just why did you come here, Lieutenant?"

Shannon took a deep breath, expelled it slowly, carefully, as though afraid that if he let it out all at once he'd collapse like a punctured balloon. He went over to the window. "I seem to be bucking the whole town on this thing. Nobody gives a hoot about a dead police captain, or how his reputation is slimed up. All any of you can think about is how it's going to affect you."

He turned, put his two hands flat on the broad desk. "All right, even on that basis you can't afford to sit still and twiddle your thumbs. They'll pull you down, and they'll pull Chief Regan down. You think if they could frame that check on the skipper that they can't frame you? Already the papers have hinted that there is a tieup, that Regan is off the scene because he's afraid."

"What do you want, Shannon—a promotion?"

Shannon made an inelegant sound with his mouth. "The best you could do is make me a captain and I've already been offered that. I want the real killer of the Old Man and I'm going to tear this town to pieces to get him."

"You don't think Duquesne did it?"

"Do you?"

More drumming of fingers. "I don't know, Shannon. Honestly I don't." The brown eyes behind the pince-nez steadied on Shannon's face. "You see the spot I'm in about O'Meara, don't you?"

"Sure. You remove him as acting-chief and they'll say he was an honest cop trying to do his duty and you were afraid of what he'd uncover. Leave him in and he'll uncover something if he has to manufacture it first. Either way you're sunk. That's what this whole thing is about and it's the only reason I think you're an honest man. What do you owe Nick Lombardi?"

"Lombardi's votes put me into office."

"But you haven't panned out as good as he expected?"

"I don't know, Shannon. On the surface he's still friendly. It may be the opposition that is causing all this trouble.

When someone wants to be mayor badly enough, or district attorney badly enough, almost anything is possible."

"The D.A. isn't worried."

"No, Jorgensen isn't worried. He'll win, no matter what happens to me. In fact, he can use this police business to further his own ends. The city is all the opposition wants, not the county."

Shannon nodded. "The big dough is in the city. Has Nick Lombardi got anything on you?"

"No. I've done him what favors I could without its costing the taxpayers anything. Chief Regan has never had orders from me to lay off anything criminal."

"Lombardi ever ask you to?"

"He's asked me to speak to Regan a time or two. I told him Regan was handling the police department."

Shannon put on his hat. "Okay, I'll be seeing you."

"I hope so." He let Shannon get to the door before he added. "You sent a wire to Chief Regan."

Shannon whirled. "Things certainly get around, don't they?"

"O'Meara didn't like it very well."

"So what did he suggest?"

"That you be suspended."

"Well, am I?"

"Not yet," Arbogast said. "Just watch your step."

Shannon went out the side door, caught a down elevator and went over to the police garage and got in the car he always used. Nobody tried to stop him. At the far end, where the mechanics' benches were, a bunch of cops were standing around a wrecked prowl car. Shannon stepped on the starter and the whole world seemed to explode in his face.

HE WOKE up in the emergency ward. An interne was trying to pour some whiskey down his throat. He sat up and looked around. Besides the interne and a male nurse there wasn't anybody that seemed to give a jitney slug whether he lived or died. His left arm was broken.

"Pretty lucky, copper," the interne said.

"Yeah."

The street door opened and Captain O'Meara came running in with Jack Hardy, and a couple of other reporters. "What happened, Shannon?"

"Somebody gave me a trick cigar," Shannon said. He wobbled over to a mirror and looked at his face. There wasn't a mark on it. He said, "I thought explosions did things to you."

"The steering wheel hit you in the heart," the interne said. "That's what knocked you out. You broke your arm falling out of the car afterward."

"Imagine that." He sat on the edge of the operating table while they set his arm and mixed a batch of plaster and finally hung the arm in a sling around his neck. Sweat rolled down into his eyes but he never said a word.

Jack Hardy said, "You can take it, fella."

"And I can dish it out." He looked at Captain O'Meara. "You publish the story in your own way, Chief. I don't know what happened. I just got in the car and stepped on the button. It's a very funny joke on somebody."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I only busted an arm. It should have been my neck." He looked around for his hat, finally found it, put it on at just the right angle and walked out. He went up to the mayor's office. The same gang was still there, and the same little silence fell when he went in, only everybody looked at the bulk of his broken arm instead of his face. He walked directly across the room until he stood in front of Nick Lombardi. Then he made a fist of his right hand and smacked Lombardi in the mouth. One of the two bodyguards was very fast with his gun. He had it out and shoved in Shannon's belly almost before the sound of the blow had died away.

Lombardi touched an immaculate handkerchief to a drop of blood on his lips. "Never mind, Sticky."

Sticky put his gun away with an air of frustration. "Hell, Nick, it would be

self-defense, wouldn't it? There's a whole roomful of witnesses that he asked for it."

"I said to let it go, Sticky."

The guy must be made of lard, Shannon thought.

One of the ministers came over. "He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword."

"You hear that, Shannon?" Lombardi asked softly.

"I hear it," Shannon said. "But at least a sword's clean."

He turned and walked out.

CHAPTER III

A CHECK FOR FIVE GRAND

LIEUTENANT GUS VOGEL was a round-bellied little man with a pinkly fat moon face and blue eyes as naïve as a child's. He owned the only derby in the department. He was masticating a wad of gum with cowlike placidity and watching Shannon search Captain Goudy's desk.

"Well, now, look, John J.," he remarked after a while, "there ain't no sense in you being dead too."

Shannon cursed him without looking up from what he was doing. Vogel stuck a finger in his mouth and snapped his gum. Shannon jumped as if he'd been shot. "Why don't you be your age?"

"Okay," Vogel said resignedly. He took off his derby and stared into its green-black interior with great concentration. One of the phones rang and Shannon picked it up. The guy in the telegraph bureau said they hadn't been able to locate Chief Regan in Miami.

"Keep trying," Shannon said. He went back to searching the desk drawers. He didn't know what he was looking for. It wasn't very likely that the skipper had known in advance that he was going to be killed and made provision for the apprehension of his murderer, but sometimes you find a lead where you least expect it.

Shannon finished the desk without finding a thing.

His broken arm bothered him. It wasn't only the toothache pain of it, but the awkwardness of the thing hung across his middle. Every time he moved he bumped it into something; and his nerves, already frayed, were jumpy. The vertical lines at his mouth corners had deepened in the last couple of hours and his eyes had a half-dazed look in them.

Vogel coughed apologetically. "I'm a funny guy, John J."

"You're telling me!"

"I know," Vogel said, "I know what you're thinking. You're thinking about all the times I've tripped over my own feet, and made things tougher for you when we happened to be working a case together. You're thinking that the Dutchman is pretty thick between the ears and that all he's interested in is what he's gonna have for breakfast. You're forgetting that I worked for the skipper as long as you."

"So what?"

Vogel's moon face turned beet red. "So I'm trying to tell you, John J., that if you need any help all you gotta do is say so."

Shannon stood up, stuck out his good hand. "I'm a heel, Gus. Lots of times I've been a heel to you. I'm sorry."

"Sure."

Neither man said anything more for a while. Shannon finally picked up a phone and called the Glendale airport. There was a plane due down from 'Frisco in an hour. Duffield, Floyd Duquesne's attorney, would be on that.

Vogel said, "Why do you want to see Duffield?"

"Because he's got one of the best minds in the country. I need that kind of a mind."

"He'll have to be a wizard if he springs Duquesne."

"The hell with Duquesne. You and I could spring him in a minute if we wanted to. At least we could fix it so that any two-for-a-nickel shyster could spring him."

"How?"

"Maybe I'll show you after a while. Right now Duquesne is doing all right where he is. Once on the streets again he'd be playing right into the hands of the

guys that framed him in the first place."

Vogel's forehead wrinkled. "I don't see that."

"Say he was turned loose; say he disappeared after that—for good. Would there be any doubt that he was guilty? Not much, there wouldn't! I'm surprised our friends haven't figured that out."

"O'Meara?"

There was a knock on the door and Shannon put a cautioning finger to his lips before he went over and unlocked it. Frances McGowan stood there looking at him.

"Well, aren't you going to invite me in?"

"I thought I told you to stay away from me."

She glanced at his broken arm. "You told me you were going to handle this in your own way, too. I think it's a bum way, if you ask me."

"I didn't ask you."

A couple of dicks going past in the hall looked at her curiously. "You'd better come in," Shannon said. He closed and locked the door after her.

GUS VOGEL stood up on his short, thick legs and put his derby on so that he could make the polite gesture of taking it off again. "How do you do, Miss McGowan?"

"Hello, Gus."

He said, "Now look, Miss McGowan, about this last story of yours I read? What I want to know is—"

Shannon yelled at him. "What is this—the Tuesday Afternoon Club?" He pushed Frances down in a chair. "When are you going to get it through your head that I meant what I said? I'm poison. You've simply got to stay away from me."

Her gray eyes studied him curiously. "I can't make up my mind about you, Shan. You're either being very smart, or crazier than usual. Either way you're worrying me sick. First I hear that somebody planted a pineapple in your car, then I hear that you smacked Nick Lombardi in front of forty-'leven witnesses."

He scowled. "One cancels the other."

"I see," she said. "A cut lip for a broken arm." She stretched her legs out in front of her. "It looks to me as though you got cheated. What makes you think Lombardi tinkered with your car?"

"I don't think he did. Not personally, anyway."

"Then why did you smack him?"

Shannon stopped pacing up and down the room. "Look, kitten, Lombardi has more or less run this town for years. He wants to go on running it. Guys like Floyd Duquesne and Chief Regan have been making it tough for him, and Mayor Arbogast hasn't turned out as well as he expected. With election less than three days away Lombardi has two choices. He can use this mess to break Arbogast and put another man into office, or he can use it to make Arbogast listen to reason. Regan's being away at this damned convention just makes it easier, is all. I think O'Meara wants to be chief."

"So you smacked Nick Lombardi and fixed the whole thing."

"That was insurance. If anything else happens to me, people will remember that I pasted Lombardi in the mouth and they'll wonder if maybe he didn't do something about it. He may do something anyway, but he'll have to be pretty careful."

She looked at him. "That was smart, Shan."

"Sure it was smart! But what good is it going to do if you keep tagging me around? If they find out how much I—if they think I know you they'll cop you off and use that as a leverage to stop me."

She stood up. Her eyes were shining and there was a little smile on her lips. "That's the closest you ever came to telling me anything worthwhile, Shan. Be careful, will you?"

"Take her home, Gus," Shannon said.

"Well now, look," Vogel demured, "first I gotta know where you're gonna be." He rolled his eyes at Frances. "He is a very trying guy, Miss McGowan."

"Very trying indeed," she agreed. She

looked at Shannon. "Did you find out anything about that business down in the garage?"

"No."

"Have you tried?"

"Of course. There are around four thousand men in the department who have access to the garage. Any one of them could have done it."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to work on Floyd Duquesne's five-grand check. The one they found in the Old Man's pocket. Duquesne cashed that check himself. Somehow it got out of the bank without being stamped and I've got a good idea how it happened."

"Well?"

"Nick Lombardi is on the Third National board of directors."

CHAPTER IV

YOUR BADGE, LIEUTENANT!

THERE was a high fog riding the airport. Shannon, pacing the concrete promenade between the administration building and the fabricated steel fence that enclosed the landing field, was oppressed by the feeling that he too was a pilot trying to land blind. He didn't even have the beacon, or the banks of floods or the border markers to guide him.

There weren't very many people around. At two in the morning the sightseers are usually in bed and it was a safe bet that those who were left had business here. He was surprised to see Sticky, the fast gun who belonged to Nick Lombardi, come out onto the ramp from the lobby waiting room. Sticky didn't see Shannon at first. He was a tall, lanky guy with a thin, down-drooping mouth, very natty in a double-breasted Chesterfield. He sought the shadows beside one of the closed novelty shops and just stood there quietly.

Shannon went over. "Hello, pal."

"Hello, there," Sticky said. He didn't seem a bit put out by Shannon's presence. "Quiet tonight, isn't it?"

"I hadn't noticed," Shannon said. "I've been pretty busy, myself."

Sticky looked at the empty left sleeve of Shannon's overcoat. "How's the arm?"

"Fine." They were just two casual acquaintances passing the time of day. You'd never know that an hour or so ago one had been ready to shoot the other for smacking his boss in the mouth. Shannon glanced aloft as a plane droned. "Meeting someone?"

"Unh-unh. I just like to see them come in. I'm going to horse one of those things around some day myself."

"If you really want to do that," Shannon said, "you hadn't better pull a rod on me again."

"Next time I pull one," Sticky yawned, "it'll probably go off. I hope you're not in front of it." He flicked a pocket lighter aflame, touched it to his dead cigar. His mouth was faintly smiling but his eyes were cold.

NUMBER 11 came down out of the clouds, rolled a little way, squatted down. A couple of porters pushed the canopy out to it. Sticky moved forward into the light, watching the pilot and co-pilot get out, and then the stewardess, and then three or four passengers. Ames Duffield came through the gate, carrying a briefcase.

Shannon stepped forward. "Duffield."

The lawyer paused. He had a club foot and he favored this a little as he walked. It was his only distinguishing feature. The rest of him was gray, inconspicuous. Even his face was gray. "Yes?"

"I'm Shannon. Headquarters."

"Yes?"

"I'd like to ride in with you."

"All right." They went into the rotunda and got Duffield's suitcase and Shannon, carrying this, flagged a cab. The guy Sticky had disappeared. As the cab got under way Shannon could feel Duffield's eyes on him. Presently Duffield said, "Official escort?"

"Not exactly," Shannon said. He couldn't tell whether he was going to like this guy or not. He'd seen him in court, knew him for a legal wizard, but of the man himself he knew nothing. He got out a pack of cigarettes, offered it.

Duffield accepted one without comment and they smoked in silence for a moment or two. Shannon moved his shoulders irritably. "You a friend of Duquesne's?"

Duffield considered this. "Why?"

"Hell's-fire, don't you ever talk out of court? What kind of a guy are you, anyway?"

"I'm Floyd Duquesne's counsel. He's supposed to have shot a policeman. You are a policeman. It's rather obvious, isn't it?"

"Nuts!" Shannon said. "I'm the guy that helped Duquesne's hurry-call get through to you."

"Why?"

"There you go again!" Shannon complained. "Look, the guy that was killed was not only my skipper, he was my best friend. I know Duquesne didn't do it and I want the guy that did. Is that plain enough?"

"You have proof?"

Shannon told him of the things that had happened.

"None of that is proof, my young friend."

"All right," Shannon grated, "all I've got is absolute faith in my skipper's honesty. If the check they found in his pocket was sour then it's dollars to doughnuts that the rest of it is sour too. Will you do something for me? Will you leave Floyd Duquesne in the can?"

"I probably couldn't do anything about it either way. I've been in touch with a source or two down here and I understand Duquesne's gun checks with the slugs they took out of the body. You don't spring a man on that kind of evidence."

"Play with me, counsellor, and I'll prove the evidence was phony."

"Why don't you do it now?"

"Because I don't want Floyd Duquesne on the streets. If he turned up missing, all the evidence I could collect or frame wouldn't mean a thing. He'd be guilty."

"You have a personal motive in this, Shannon? Besides your natural feeling over Captain Goudy's death?"

"You're right I have! I've got a busted arm that could just as well have been my neck."

"All right," Duffield said, "I'll play with you for a day or two. We won't even make an attempt to spring Duquesne."

THE cab drew up before the Hall of Justice. There was quite a crowd on the steps and in the lobby. Sighting Duffield, a dozen reporters swarmed down upon him. "I guess you won't be needed, counsellor. Your client just escaped."

All Duffield said was, "Indeed?"

Shannon didn't say anything. He was so mad it hurt even to breathe. Finally, when he couldn't stand the chattering of the reporters any longer, he climbed the steps and went up to Acting-chief O'Meara's office.

There was a crowd up here, too. O'Meara was at his desk, very busy with the phones. A turnkey was slumped in a chair and a couple of dicks were giving him first aid. He had a lump on his forehead the size of a walnut and there was a deep gash in the top of his head. He was sobbing hysterically.

O'Meara beat Shannon to the punch. "Did you have anything to do with this?"

Shannon's jaw dropped. And then, by an effort so great that it drained all the blood out of his face, he swallowed the hot retort that bubbled on his lips and looked about the office. Everybody seemed to be staring at him with a mixture of awe and disgust. Jack Hardy of the *Telegram* deliberately turned his back.

O'Meara said, "You've been bucking me all the way on this thing, Shannon. First you intimate that we arrested the wrong man; then you go up and get chummy with the man himself. Now the man is gone and I'm asking you what you had to do with it. Where have you been this last hour?"

"I've been out to the airport!" Shannon yelled.

"Why?"

"Meeting Duffield if you've got to know!"

A little smile flicked over O'Meara's lips. He looked around the room. "You

see? Here is a man who professes great friendship for a dead superior, yet he consorts with the murderer and the murderer's attorney." His eyes bored into Shannon's. "I'm trying to be very fair, Lieutenant."

Shannon's voice sounded thick, even in his own ears. "I can see that." He looked at the turnkey. "What happened?"

The guy tried to talk and couldn't. O'Meara said wearily, "Never mind. If you had seen who conked you all this wouldn't be necessary." He glanced obliquely at Shannon. "Still trying to be fair, Shannon, I'll repeat what happened. We had Duquesne down for questioning again and he was left in one of the detention rooms for a minute with only the turnkey as guard. Somebody knocked the turnkey out and Duquesne just disappeared. I hope you can prove you were at the airport."

Duffield came in, his club foot making little clumping sounds on the bare floor. "He can prove it." He looked around. "I hope I am sufficiently well known to all you gentlemen so that my word will be enough?"

O'Meara said, "Of course, counsellor." He was making no direct accusation of complicity against Duffield. Shannon had a flash of insight which told him that O'Meara was actually afraid of the gray-faced Duffield. O'Meara said, "I suppose you'll be going back north in the morning?"

"No," Duffield said. "No, I shall stay down here for a day or two. In case Duquesne is picked up I should appreciate hearing from you. I'll be at the Corinthian." He turned and clumped out without looking at Shannon.

O'Meara said, "Well, Lieutenant, is there anything else I can tell you?"

"Not without putting your neck in a sling," Shannon said.

A blanket of complete silence fell over the room. O'Meara stood up. "I think I shall have to ask for your badge, Shannon."

"I was going to turn it in anyway," Shannon said. "I'm not very proud of being a cop any more." He fumbled the little leather case out of his pocket, laid it on the desk. "Goodnight, gentlemen—and Captain O'Meara."

CHAPTER V

THREE LITTLE SLUGS

THE laboratory was a series of cluttered-looking rooms on the tenth floor of the Hall of Justice. At two in the morning almost everyone had gone home and Shannon was hoping that the two technicians who were left hadn't heard about his dismissal. You don't get much coöperation from a police laboratory unless you're entitled to it. He pushed through the swing gate in the long counter and dropped into a chair, watching Ziegler, the little ballistics wizard, play with his microscopes.

Ziegler looked up. "Hello, Lieutenant." He had a face only a mother could love. At one time he had been a bantamweight fighter, not a very successful one, and each one of his features was a record of his various failures. "How's tricks?"

"Tricks," Shannon said, "are just swell." He made a great business of lighting a cigarette one-handed. Ziegler didn't offer to help him. To Ziegler a broken arm was not even a minor injury.

Shannon said, carefully casual, "Who turned the slugs from Goudy over to you?"

"O'Meara. Why?"

"I just wondered. I saw 'em taken out." He took a couple of drags on his cigarette before he added: "They were still in a sealed envelope, of course?"

Ziegler bridled. "What is this? You think I don't know my business. Of course they were in a sealed envelope!"

"Okay. Am I arguing?" Shannon got up and wandered around the room. The other technician put on his hat and went out for a cup of coffee. Shannon looked at Ziegler. "Seems to me it was Captain Goudy who gave you your first real chance in the department. You ought to feel almost as bad about him as I do."

"Maybe." They stared at each other for a while. Finally Ziegler said, "What's your angle, Shannon?"

"The envelopes could have been switched," Shannon said. "I didn't see the surgeon put any identifying marks on it."

"O'Meara put them on."

"He could have put them on another envelope, couldn't he?"

Ziegler fiddled nervously with things on his table. "You're playing with dynamite, Shannon. What's more, you're asking me to play with it." He shrugged irritably. "They bring me a gun and three blood-stained slugs. I match 'em. My responsibility ends there."

"Does it?" Shannon said gently.

Ziegler wiped sudden beads of sweat off his forehead. "All right, what do you want?"

Shannon dropped his cigarette to the floor, put a heel on it. "I have the feeling that the skipper wasn't killed just to frame Duquesne. The frame was an afterthought. I believe Goudy had something and was killed on account of it."

"But the slugs and the gun checked, I tell you!"

"Sure they did. But the slugs you got might not be the ones that did for the skipper. You can prove it quite easily."

"How?"

"I saw the autopsy surgeon remove the slugs and seal them in an envelope. Presumably he gave the envelope to O'Meara, who brought it to you. If it's on the level you should find the surgeon's prints on the envelope, right?"

Ziegler snapped his fingers. "It's a thought!" Then he paused. "But the slugs had blood on them! If Captain Goudy wasn't killed with them it's a cinch somebody was. Who?"

"I don't know that," Shannon said. He made a bitter mouth. "Probably, though, we'll have a few more corpses turn up before this election is over. Maybe it'll be one of them." He went to the door. "This'll be about the last time I'll be able to contact you direct, Heinie. I'm on the outside looking in. Anything you turn up you can pass on to Gus Vogel. Okay?"

"So they tied the can to you!"

"A whole string of cans," Shannon said. "Every time I move I sound like a guy trying to get through a barbwire entanglement. I had to see you just once, though, before I went into retirement."

"Yeah."

"Well, goodnight, Heinie." He went out and down to the street and caught a cab to his hotel.

FLOYD DUQUESNE was sitting on the edge of Shannon's bed. "Hello, Shannon." He had a gun in his hand.

Shannon let out a string of profanity a yard long. "Well for crying out loud, what is this?"

Duquesne smiled thinly. "I escaped."

"You're telling me!"

"I escaped twice."

"That's swell. I'm very glad to know you, Mr. Houdini." Shannon didn't sound very glad about anything. He reached behind him with his good hand and snapped the lock on the door. Then he went over to the dresser and poured himself a drink. He sipped this meditatively, eyeing Duquesne. The gambler had managed to get some clothes somewhere, some of his own, apparently, because he looked his usual immaculate self. Shannon said, "There are lots of other places you could have escaped to besides this. I've already been accused of helping you."

Duquesne toyed with the gun. "I'm giving you credit for being a square copper, Shannon."

"Thanks a million, pal. Only you're wrong. I'm not a copper any more. I'm just an indignant citizen."

"They broke you?"

Shannon nodded. "In forty-'leven pieces." He put his empty glass down on the dresser, smacked his lips. And then with a motion incredibly swift his right hand buried itself in the slash pocket of his raglan, curled about his gun. "That makes us about even, Duquesne. You've got a gun and I've got a gun. What do we do next?"

Duquesne said, "If I'd wanted to shoot you I'd have done it long ago, wouldn't I?" He let the gun slide off his knee to the floor.

Shannon flushed dully. "Yeah, I guess you're right." He took his hand out of his pocket. "I guess I'm a little jittery tonight, not in the mood for games."

"Did you get hold of my brother?"

"Your what?"

"I'm just showing you that I trust you, Shannon. There aren't many people that know. Ward Duffield, the eminent attorney, is my brother."

"The hell you say!"

Duquesne nodded. "A fact. We just happened to have different ideas about things when we were younger. I changed my name so I wouldn't embarrass him."

"You couldn't embarrass that guy," Shannon grunted, remembering the unemotional gray man with the club foot. "Why didn't he tell me?"

"Would you have?"

Shannon considered. "Well, no, I guess I wouldn't have, at that. So you want to know where he is?"

"That's right."

"All right, I'll tell you. But you've got to tell me a few things first. I find you here in my room with a nice fresh outfit of clothes and a gun in your hand. This don't exactly fit in with my theory that you were sprung by your enemies. What happened?"

"A couple of guys walked into the detention room. At first I thought they were dicks. Then one of them slugged the turnkey and I didn't think they were dicks any more. They walked me out under a pair of guns."

"Okay, okay," Shannon said impatiently. "Then what?"

"Then I had a little luck," Duquesne admitted. "One of these punks was a reckless driver. He took a corner on two wheels and this threw me against the other punk and I got his rod." The gambler spread his hands. "I shot both of them."

Shannon took a deep breath. "Just like that, hunh?"

"Just like that. Then I got hold of a friend of mine and he rustled me some clothes. The gun belongs to one of the punks I drilled."

"Who were they?"

Duquesne shrugged. "I wouldn't know."

Shannon lost his temper. "Look here, Duquesne, you claim you trust me. I've tried to do what I could for you, because I don't think you killed the old man. But if you think you're going to carry on a nice little private feud and leave me out in the cold you're crazy. Who were these punks?"

"I don't know, I tell you. I didn't wait to find out." Gray eyes, very like his brother's, met Shannon's in a stare that told absolutely nothing. "Every cop in town is looking for me with orders to shoot on sight. A guy doesn't just stand around asking for it."

"All right, your brother is at the Corinthian. I'll want to see him, myself later on. Meantime, I want to know two things: where did you shoot these two mugs and which one of the Third National tellers cashed that five-grand check for you?"

Duquesne stood up, retrieving the fallen gun. "The teller was a kid named Frank Little. The—ah—accident happened out in Gopher Flats, around Riverside and Terhune." He walked to the door. "Anything else, Shannon?"

Shannon shook his head. "Not a thing, Floyd. Every detail of the whole setup is now as clear as mud. Maybe I'll be seeing you around, though. If I find you've crossed me up it will be just too bad. Keep that in mind, will you?"

"I'll remember it," Duquesne said. He went out.

Shannon waited till the sound of his footsteps had died away down the corridor, then picked up the phone and called Precinct 5. "There was a shooting out your way an hour or so ago. Near Riverside and Terhune."

"What kind of a shooting?" the sergeant asked cautiously. You could tell he had been ribbed before.

"There's supposed to be a couple of dead hoods lying around out there somewhere. A guy just told me."

"He must have been kidding you, then. I ain't heard nothing about it." There was

a brief pause. Then: "Just a second. Car 17 is reporting in." Presently the sergeant's voice again: "You tell your pal he's all wet, fella. Seventeen ain't even seen a kid with a B.B. gun tonight. Nuts!"

"Thank you," Shannon said. He hung up.

CHAPTER VI

WHERE'S THE WARRANT

DUQUESNE'S lie seemed rather a pointless one. Why should he have come to Shannon with it in the first place? If he'd been able to contact the friend who got him his clothes he certainly could, with time, have located his brother. He didn't need Shannon. Or did he? Say it wasn't a lie. Say the gambler had been sprung in the manner he'd described; say he'd really shot the two guys and lammed before he'd had a chance to identify them. Not knowing that Shannon had been kicked off the force, trusting him to at least a certain extent, he had come here hoping Shannon could point him to an identification of the two hoods and the guy behind them. You could be sure of that much, at least. Floyd Duquesne was very eager to meet the guy who had spotted him in the first place.

It was quite a mess.

Obviously Big Nick Lombardi was dissatisfied with the coöperation he'd gotten from Mayor Arbogast and Chief Regan. Arbogast had as much as admitted this. He'd said that he had refused to interfere with Regan in the performance of his duty. Chief Regan, then, must have stepped on some of Lombardi's underlings to the point where it was becoming a nuisance. Lombardi had to do something about this or lose his hold on his own men. So what? There was nothing new here. Nick Lombardi was out to put a new man in the mayor's office and either break Chief Regan to harness or, through the new mayor, appoint a new chief. It was obvious that Acting Chief George O'Meara rather fancied himself for the job. Was O'Meara on Lombardi's payroll or was he acting independently?

Shannon sourly regarded his reflection in the dresser mirror. "You're a sucker," he said. His reflection mocked him. It said, "You're a sucker," right back at him. This seemed to make it unanimous.

But why, if all the foregoing were true, had they picked on Captain Goudy to kill? Why frame Floyd Duquesne and Duquesne's five-grand check in the deal? Duquesne, of course, had been taking money out of Lombardi's pockets by operating outside the ring. Okay, getting him hung would be a swell move. But why the skipper?

Why had Captain Goudy been killed? Just to cast a reflection on Mayor Arbogast's administration? No, Shannon decided, there was more to it than that. It would have been just as easy to frame Arbogast himself, or the absent Chief Regan, instead of sort of implicating them by proxy as it were.

Tackling the problem from the only other possible angle Shannon decided definitely that Captain Goudy had something on someone, and was killed to shut him up. The framing of Duquesne for the job, the besmirching of a dead man's good name, was just an added touch, an astute political move by an opportunist.

You wouldn't think that a guy could forget a broken arm, but Shannon had. Not in the physical sense, perhaps, but in the equation of cause and effect. The broken arm went back to a bombing in which something besides a broken arm was supposed to have happened. Say a neck, for instance. Someone had tried very earnestly to murder Shannon after succeeding with Shannon's skipper.

Goudy had been killed because he was holding cards that would have ruined somebody. The attempt on Shannon's life was motivated by the belief that Shannon, being Goudy's friend, might also know something. The fact that Shannon didn't know didn't help matters much. If a guy believes you've got something he wants, telling him different doesn't do a lot of good. Especially when you don't know who the guy is.

The only bright spot—or black, depending on the point of view—was that certain parties might still believe Shannon was holding aces and would try for him again. He decided to be very circumspect indeed in the immediate future.

Trying to figure out the most circumspect thing to do, and still produce results, he began opening dresser drawers looking for a clean shirt. He found the shirt. He also found that someone had been messing around in his personal effects, though probably not in search of a shirt. Things had been put back very carefully; a little too carefully, in fact. Shannon's mind went to Floyd Duquesne. Had Duquesne searched the room? Was this the real reason for his visit, and the rest of it just a stall? Or had it been someone else?

IN EITHER case Shannon derived a deal of satisfaction from the search itself. It proved that there was something tangible being sought, something you could get your two hands on. Ergo, Shannon had just as good a chance of finding it as anybody. He went to the phone and called Duffield at the Hotel Corinthian.

The attorney's voice was carefully noncommittal. "Yes, Shannon?"

"Look," Shannon said, "a certain guy who said he was your brother left here a little while ago. I understood he was going to see you. Is he there?"

There was a brief pause. Duffield's voice, when it came, was a bit more harsh than usual. "I don't know what you are talking about."

Shannon cursed without warmth. "Would he have told me what he did if I wasn't to be trusted? You lawyers make me sick. So look, whether you admit it or not, this brother of yours was here and gave me a song and dance about killing a couple of guys that have since disappeared. He is on the loose. If I were in his shoes I'd probably be looking for the guy that framed me. You'd better stop him."

Duffield didn't say anything. There was a knock on the door and Shannon, carefully laying the receiver on its side, went to the door and unlocked it. Two dicks from the homicide squad pushed in. One was a very tough hombre named Costigan. He had been up on charges two or three times for shooting first and asking questions afterward. The other guy was a little rat whose only reason for being on the force was that he was Captain George O'Meara's brother-in-law.

Shannon was very careful about keeping his hand away from his overcoat pocket. "Hello, mugs."

"The chief wants to see you," Costigan said.

"What about?"

"Floyd Duquesne was seen leaving this hotel a few minutes ago. O'Meara thinks you might know where he is."

Shannon raised his voice. "How should I know where Duquesne is? This is a public hotel, isn't it? And if you saw him leaving it why didn't you pick him up?"

The rat-faced dick said, "We didn't see him. It was another guy and he didn't know who it was until it was too late. So he called in. You want to argue about it?" He got a sap out of his hip pocket, very casually. Costigan took out a gun.

Shannon backed toward the table, screening the phone. "Is this a pinch?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. O'Meara wants to talk to you."

"O'Meara probably wants to beat the tar out of me."

"We could save him the trouble," Costigan suggested.

"All right," Shannon said, "I'll go down with you. Can I call my attorney?"

"No."

Shannon let his shoulders droop in resignation. Rat-face sidled up and took the gun out of Shannon's pocket. The three of them went down in the elevator and got in the squad car and went down to headquarters. It was three o'clock in the morning.

Night janitors were busy swabbing down the long marble halls. A telegraph key clicked fitfully in the Communications Bureau, but there weren't many people around. Most of the ground-glass office

doors were dark, the graveyard shift either out on the streets or asleep.

CAPTAIN O'MEARA was alone in his office. His olive face looked haggard and there were pouches under his eyes from lack of sleep. Costigan closed and locked the door. Then he lifted a fist and smacked Shannon in the mouth. Shannon sat down in the chair that Rat-face had thoughtfully placed behind him. Nobody said anything for a full minute.

O'Meara looked at Costigan. "Have any trouble?"

"Unh-unh."

"You frisk him?"

"We got his gun, is all."

Shannon wiped a little blood off his mouth with his free hand. His eyes were red hot. "I thought you wanted to see me about Duquesne."

"That's right," O'Meara said. "You don't mind if the boys turn out your pockets, do you?"

"Would it do any good if I did?"

Rat-face and Costigan did everything but rip Shannon's clothes off him without finding anything that O'Meara seemed to want. They weren't particularly careful of his broken arm. Little beads of sweat stood out on his forehead when they'd finished, and the nostrils of his big nose were flared, like a horse's after a hard run, but he hadn't lifted a hand. They couldn't say afterward that he had put up a fight.

O'Meara leaned back in his chair. "Where is Duquesne, Shannon?"

"I don't know."

Costigan took a sap out of one of the desk drawers, hefting it. Somebody knocked on the door. O'Meara flicked a worried glance toward the hall, motioned for Costigan to put the sap away. "See who it is, Charlie," he told his brother-in-law. Then, as Rat-face started to obey, "No, wait a minute." He jerked his head at a communicating door leading into an inner office. Rat-face and Costigan closed in on Shannon.

Shannon yelled, "In here, Duffield!"

The glass door shivered under a series of blows. O'Meara shrugged. "Okay, let him in."

Costigan went over and unlocked the door. Ward Duffield limped in on his club foot. He had Jack Hardy of the *Telegram* with him. He was quite a guy, Duffield. Shannon guessed that there weren't many tricks in the bag this gray-faced lawyer hadn't memorized.

Duffield looked at O'Meara. "Warrant?"

O'Meara's eyes had a harried expression. "Now see here, counsellor, what's your interest in this thing?"

"I understood that Mr. Shannon had been arrested."

O'Meara glared at Costigan and his brother-in-law. He couldn't figure it out and neither could they. Shannon didn't tell them he'd been talking to Duffield and had deliberately left the line open.

Duffield apparently never wasted a word. He said again, "Warrant?"

O'Meara had to admit he didn't have one. He said, "This wasn't a pinch, counsellor. We just wanted to have a talk with Shannon. Another client of yours was seen leaving Shannon's hotel."

"Was he seen in Shannon's company?"

"No."

Duffield stirred the little pile of Shannon's pocket-junk with a slender forefinger. "No doubt you thought Mr. Shannon had my other client in his pockets?"

Jack Hardy was looking at Shannon's bruised lip. "You run into a door, keed?"

O'Meara stood up suddenly, thrusting his chair back so hard it crashed into the far wall. "All right!" He pointed a shaking finger at Shannon. "But you watch your step, Irish! One more caper out of you and we'll nail you to the cross." He looked hot-eyed at Duffield. "You're playing with dynamite, counsellor."

"Dynamite has its uses," Duffield said. He gave Jack Hardy a fleeting smile. "Better luck and a better story next time, my young friend." He took Shannon's arm and they went out and down to the street.

There was a taxi waiting. In it, heading down Broadway, Shannon said, "Thanks, Duffield."

The gray man smiled. "You're smarter than I gave you credit for, Shannon. You knew I'd come, didn't you? You sort of had me over a barrel."

"Because I knew he was your brother?"

"Because he *is* my brother. There's a little distinction there. If Floyd thought enough of you to tell you that, then you must be all right. In spite of his faults Floyd knows men."

"Have you seen him?"

"Not yet. I left word at the hotel that I'd be back shortly. He may be waiting."

Shannon looked out the rear window. "We're being tailed."

"Of course. O'Meara isn't exactly a fool."

The gray man's face set grimly. He knew the game they were playing and knew that the stake was high.

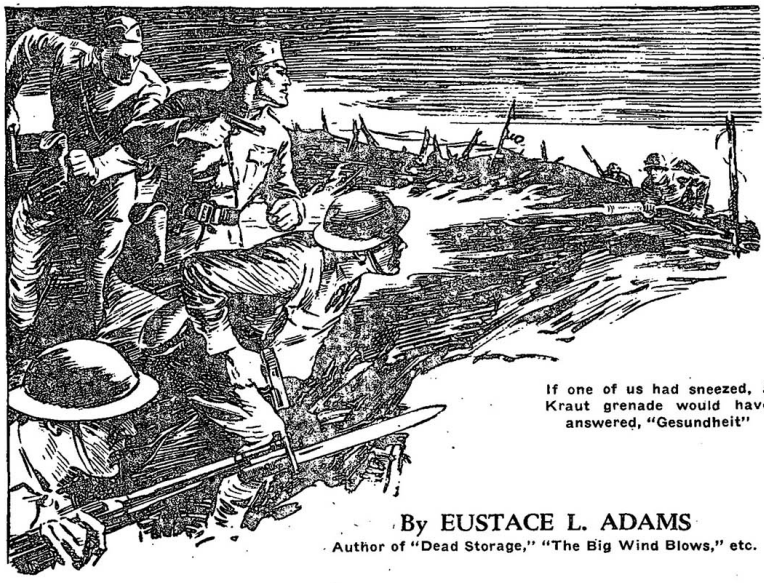
"I'll drop off around the next corner," Shannon said. "Unless Floyd was lying to me he doesn't know who jacked him out of the can. On the other hand, maybe he does know. Find out if you can. I'll call you in the morning." He leaned forward, tapped on the glass. "Take the next turn fast, fella, then brake it a second till I fall off." He opened the door as rubber screamed, landed running and sprawled into the protecting shelter of a darkened store entry.

The cab vanished around the next corner. So did the prowl car following it.

Shannon stood for a moment, his face puckered in thought. There was nothing more for him to do right now. Just to be low.

Shannon walked three blocks to an all-night drug store, bought two packs of cigarettes, walked another block to a small second-rate hotel across from his own and asked for a room on the fourth floor. Presently he was sitting at a window which commanded a good view of the deserted street, the entrance to his hotel and even one of the windows of his own room. He had an idea someone might come looking for him again. Before anyone did he went to sleep.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



If one of us had sneezed, a Kraut grenade would have answered, "Gesundheit"

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

Author of "Dead Storage," "The Big Wind Blows," etc.

Flame-Thrower

He was just one inch shorter than a telegram, but he packed more mayhem than an Army mule. He'd rather fight than eat. The time he tackled two mammoth marines as well as most of the Kaiser's troops was tops, even for "Poison" Lee

LIEUTENANT "Poison" Lee glanced up from his maps and made a quick grab for his gun. I ducked. The chances were no better than five to three that he was going to take a slap at me with the butt end of it. What with the flame-thrower across the way getting all ready to cook us down to soup-stock—the way they had already done to the outfit of French Alpine Chasseurs we had relieved—and with not sleeping for three nights on account of worrying so much, Poison Lee was pretty low in his mind.

And in spite of his size, which was knee-high to a Missouri jughead, when Poison Lee was low in his mind he craved action—rough action—and seldom failed to get it.

The lieutenant, however, did not even look at me. A couple of strange guys were coming down the steps of the cellar we used for a dug-out. Their cordovan boots were muddy, but their puttees glistened like a bar-fly's nose. The sight of those gleaming puttees did not help the disposition of our half-pint lieutenant any, he not having had his gunboats unlaced for a month came next payday.

Moreover, no guy in B Company, One Ninety-Ninth New York, had even seen the color of his boots for weeks on account of the mud. So these two mugs

would be strangers. Poison covered them with his gat and waited hopefully for something to happen that would give him a fair excuse to shoot them.

Then we got a look at their uniforms and our back hair began to lift our tin hats right up off our heads. They were marine lieutenants. It was even worse than that. According to the gold naval aviators' pins which adorned their forestry-green tunics, they were flyers. If there was anybody we hated worse than the Krauts it was the leathernecks. And every footslogger in the A. E. F. will tell you that there should never be any closed season on flyers, they being fair game for any marksman of any nationality at any time.

These two lugs squinted at us through the candlelight and by the look on their hard pans they had not come just for a sociable little chit-chat.

Lieutenant Poison Lee went right on scratching his seam rabbits with one hand and holding the cannon on the marines with the other. He looked over at me, his face as bland and as innocent as a Sunday School kid waiting his chance to slip a garter snake down teacher's neck.

"And who would these gentlemen be, Sergeant Murphy?" he purred at me. "Do you recognize the pretty uniforms?"

When Poison Lee spoke in that tone of voice, it was up to me to answer fast. Especially when he was looking innocent that way.

I'm almost half again his size, but he knows holds that would cause a jiu-jitsu artist to swoon with shocked disapproval. You know? And don't ever let anybody tell you those jiu-jitsu lads don't play rough—and dirty!

"Yes, sir," I said, promptly. "They're Y. M. C. A. secretaries coming to invite us to a splendid Sing at the Hut."

Our half-pint lieutenant smiled sweetly. "I think you're wrong, Sergeant," he said. "They are temperance workers here to protest against our associating with the French on account of they drink so much red wine."

The rearward marine, who was so big he would have had to sit on the floor to look into Poison's eyes, seemed just a trifle upset. He shouldered his brother lieutenant out of the way.

"Why, listen, you pop-eyed peewee!" he roared in a voice that caused hunks of dirt to shower from the ceiling. "Us, Y secretaries? Us, temperance workers?" He stood there gasping like a catfish.

I grabbed up my bayonet, remembering that Poison did not care to be reminded that he was—by whole inches—the shortest officer in the A. E. F. From where I sat, trouble didn't look any farther away than you can throw a .75 fieldpiece by the muzzle and I wanted to be prepared. "Listen, you!" bellowed the big slug, "what outfit is this, the 199th New York?"

"Yes." Poison nodded. "B Company."

The big one swiveled a hard eye at his buddy, who looked small beside him but would have weighed in as a light-heavyweight anywhere.

"It's them," said the smaller one, his bronze face cracking into a smile. "Do we start now?"

"WAIT," snapped the other. "Listen, runt," he said to Poison, and I wondered why lightning didn't come down and strike him dead. "Three hours ago we flew across your lines to strafe a flame-thrower in front of you and your damned draft-dodgers turned machine guns on us."

"We need new machine gunners," Poison said, apologetically. "With anti-aircraft experience. Next time they miss an easy shot like that I'll run them clear back to Hoboken."

Some of the sweetness and light went out of his face. "Did you hear that some dizzy leatherneck flyer came over our front yesterday and—not being able to read maps, or something—machine-gunned hell out of our outposts? So from now on any gunner who brings down a marine gets first place in the chow line. If he gets three, I recommend him for a Congressional Medal."

"You know what I'm going to do, midget?" the big gyrene snarled. "I'm going to forget we're officers. I'm going to pull the living heart out of you and slap you in the face with it. If they shoot me for it I'll die with a song in my heart. Socko, let's go to work."

"Okay, Pete," said the other, getting himself set.

So right there in that cellar which wasn't three good spits from the enemy lines, a ruckus started that made our last raid against the Heinies seem like a wrist-slapping affray between a couple of chorus laddies.

The two marines came at us with the momentum of ten-ton tanks. Poison Lee, still smiling beatifically, slid up out of his busted chair and pushed the pine table over, directly in their charging paths. The big leatherneck hit it in full stride and pitched headlong toward the dirt floor.

Poison Lee sidestepped and, as the marine's chin passed him on its way down, took a smack at it that was a lovely thing to see. And our half-pint lieutenant packed a punch that was like the recoil of a French .220. But this Pete guy took it and liked it. He just rested his blue-black chin on the floor for a minute and then came up grinning—but that was the last thing I saw in detail, for a split-second later something clipped me on the ear that made me hear the Westminster Chimes.

And there seemed to be marines all over me.

I don't care for marines, and never will. But I'll say this—and I speak as an expert, having learned my barroom brawling around old Five Points, in New York, where you acquire the finer points of mayhem before you are dry behind the ears—marines can, and do, toss around a noble flock of knuckles.

All four of us were rolling around the floor in one huge squirm. I found a foot in my mouth and bit it. A sudden flow of catch-as-catch-can profanity burst forth that made my ears buzz worse than the punch the guy Socko had hung on me. I spit out four pounds of dirt, so from that and the choice of profanity, I knew I had been chewing away on the foot of my own lieutenant.

Poison reached down and tried to pry my left eyeball out with his thumb. I scrambled to my feet to get away from him.

A marine face—Pete's—appeared before me and I smacked it with all good will. It had been a long time since I had swung one on a leatherneck and the first time I had ever taken a healthy punch at a Yank officer, although I had been longing to lay my knuckles on one ever since the day I had waked up with a hangover and learned I had enlisted.

So now I began really to enjoy myself for the first time in months. By the dim light of the single guttering candle the four of us—three lieutenants and one top sergeant—thrashed around in that twenty-by-ten cellar when what we really needed was the Yale Bowl.

LOOKING out from under a marine's throttling arm, I happened to glance toward the dugout steps. It was crammed with men. All the survivors of B Company were standing there, and their eyes were bugging out so far you could have knocked them off with a single swipe of a gun butt. When they saw we were fighting with marines—and with marine officers, at that—they brightened and began to yearn to buy a stack of chips in the game. Corporal Heeney slid his hand into his pocket and came down the steps. When he brought his fist into view he was wearing a very pretty pair of brass knuckles.

"Get outa there, Heeney," Lieutenant Lee snarled from a position somewhere under the big marine.

And since Poison Lee, either end up, was more dangerous than the entire Marine Brigade, Heeney wistfully retreated.

As a plain and fancy fighter I was not without skill, but this Socko lieutenant was good. We rolled over and over like

a couple of cats in a bag and I was begining to hurt in various and assorted places. He got his teeth good and set in my left ear and that spurred me on to greater efforts.

I gouged him with my elbow, digging it practically shoulder-deep into his short-ribs and the air went out of him with an explosive sigh like the blowing out of a fat inner tube. He stopped playing and devoted all his attention to getting his wind back.

I heaved myself to my feet.

Poison Lee was standing in front of the huge marine, Pete, and he was swaying like a shimmy-shaker. He was out on his feet, Poison was. His gray eyes were glazed, but that quirky smile was still on his hard face as he stood there, unable even to lift his arms while the big guy looked down on him, measuring him for the final kiss of the party.

Figuring it might be the last chance I'd ever have to hang one on a commissioned officer, I moved up and laid a sweet rabbit punch on the back of his neck. If I had hit anyone but a marine like that it would have knocked his apple clear over into the Kraut rest sector. But the leathernecks are tough babies, any way you take them. His conk stayed on. It did take the play out of him, though. He folded up and fell over on the limp form of his partner, who was still gagging and retching on the dirt floor.

Poison Lee took a long breath. His metallic gray eyes returned to focus. Also his disposition, which was, in its normal condition, so bad that motor cars backfired when he walked past them. If he had been a foot taller, there wouldn't have been any need of an AEF. He, alone, would have run the Imperial German Army clear back to Berlin. Now he swung his hard gray gaze up toward the cellar door, where the entire roster of B Company stood framed against the darkness outside. He smiled across a lip that was swelling to the size of an inflated inner tube.

"If you gentlemen," he purred to the soldiery, "wish to dig retiring rooms for the entire division, just stay where you are for six seconds more."

They disappeared as if a steam crane had suddenly jerked them away. That was the thing about Poison Lee. He didn't even look like an officer. Up here, where things were so hot they would have fused the Hinges of Hell, he didn't even wear an officer's uniform.

He wore a private's blouse, with his single silver bar pinned to the inside of his cuff. A fairly healthy cootie could have leaped to the top of his steel derby, but he made up for his lack of size and weight by an abiding conviction that monstrous assault and battery were the everyday tools of a soldier's trade.

So often had he been up on charges that it was rumored General Pershing himself winced whenever Lieutenant Lee's name was mentioned, which was quite frequent on account of the staff offers complaining that he was the scandal of the entire sector. Maybe that is why we of B Company always found ourselves on the sharp end whenever there was dirty work to do in the division, which was practically all the time.

The brass hats figured the easiest way out was to let Poison Lee get himself killed, but tradition was gathering force that bullets bounced off his slight figure like the cue-ball off the eight-ball, which made it hard for all concerned.

THE fact was that whenever there was a red-hot potato to be pulled out of the fire of battle anywhere in our sector it was we of B Company who were passed the job of tweaking it from the embers. That was why we were here now, at the spear-head of a salient so hot Hell would not have it. We were so close to the Germans that if we sneezed in any direction except straight to the rear we'd hear a dozen voices call, *"Gesundheit!"* Between fighting the Krauts in front of us and the marines and wild Alabamans on both sides of us, we had been fairly occupied for six days.

Nor was that all which was turning the cheese bitter on us.

There was this flame-thrower—some new engine of deviltry the Germans had thought up—directly before us. It had a longer trajectory and bigger volume than any *Flammenwerfer* ever used on the front. It had been tried only one time—the day before we had taken over this salient, but what it had done to the Alpine Chasseurs was nobody's business.

According to Division Headquarters the thing was being adjusted and was ready to spray its avid flame at us tomorrow—which was why we were low in our minds tonight. Unless we went across and beat the Krauts to the punch, we'd be cooked to a turn by this time tomorrow.

We supposed that was the reason the marines had been flying so low over our heads for the past three days, trying to find the concrete pill-box where the flame-thrower was supposed to be hidden. But there was no reason for the flying leathernecks to mistake our outposts for Kraut dugouts unless they were just too dumb, or too mean, to know or care. Maybe they were both.

And Poison's reaction in ordering our machine gunners to give the marine planes the business was as natural, as involuntary, as drawing his next breath. If Pershing, Joffre and Haig had been altogether in one plane, and had fired a single shot at us, Poison would have unloosed his gunners without a qualm. But since it had been marines, who are natural M. P.'s at heart, our machine gunners turned loose with enthusiasm.

Now the big marine lieutenant whom I had clipped with a rabbit punch was sitting up and beginning to take a little interest. He shook the warbling cuckoos out of his hairy ears and looked unbelievingly at Poison.

"The Marine Corps," he said, thickly, pausing to expectorate a sizable bicuspid, "could use you for a mascot."

"Since when," asked Poison, politely, "did the tail wag the dog? Sometime we haven't anything else to do, and need exercise, I'll take what's left of my B Company and run your best division into the Atlantic Ocean." He lifted his hand and tried to push his ballooned lower lip out of the way. "I'll have to be asking you gentlemen to be tottering along—or shall I send a stretcher detail with you? You've been trying all day to get that flame-thrower from the air. In a few minutes, now, we're going over and bring it back in our bare hands. And any other time you leathernecks are up against something too hot for you to handle, send a runner over and we'll fix it for you."

The guy called Socko blinked. "Never was a place a doughboy could go that a marine couldn't lead the way. One hundred francs will bring five that the marines'll get their hands on the thing before any footslogger out of this company, or this whole regiment."

"You'll have to get busy on it, then," Poison said, grimly, "because we're going over after it in ten minutes and we're going to get it or else."

"That gives us ten minutes, Socko," said big Pete, still looking a little dizzy. "Where's your fire step? We'll start from there."

"You're punch-drunk," Poison said. "Two of you wouldn't have a chance. You'd just wake up all the Krauts and they'd be ready to meet us with the Greeters' Committee."

"You say you're taking a patrol over?" asked Socko.

"In nine minutes," said our half-pint wonder, glancing again at his wristwatch.

"We'll go with you," snapped the big lieutenant.

POISON looked at them for a few seconds in sultry silence, appraising the way they wore their now-battered uniforms, the fighting glint to their eyes and the cocky angle the overseas caps sat on their heads.

"Okay," he snapped. "But if you go, you'll be under my orders."

"Any time we take orders from a soldier," snarled big Pete, "you'll see green

bluebirds." He glanced at his buddy. "Come on, Socko, we'll go now, and let's see this turkey stop us."

Poison sighed and dragged his gat out of its holster.

"The minute you start over the parapet, I'll shoot the backbone off your ribs," he said. "Ever figure on dying—shot in the back? That'll look nice, won't it? Listen, you lugs, this is too important to let a couple of leathernecks bungle it for us. The safety of an entire division depends on whether or not we get that *Flammenwerfer,* so cut out the horsing around."

The two marines looked at him.

"Tough, isn't he?" asked Lieutenant Socko.

"Yeah, when he has the only gun," admitted the other. Then, to Poison Lee, "You win, squirt. We go with you. When we get close to that flame-thrower, move out of the way."

I went over into a dark corner and put my chin in my hands. Besides aching all over on account of the recent fisticuffs, I'll admit in strict confidence to being scared to a bright blue twitter. Oh, I had been over the top more times than I wanted to remember, both in raids and in real attacks, but I wanted no part of this business that was coming up.

While I was thoughtfully scatching Grace, Lulu and Earl, my favorite cooties who had grown to the size of Persian kittens up on my person, Lieutenant Lee's voice snapped through my melancholy reflections.

"Sergeant Murphy," he said, crisply. "Find these officers a couple of guns, trench knives and a bag of hand grenades apiece."

That was easy enough. We had collected enough odds and ends from the casualties to outfit a fresh division. In four or five minutes I was down in the cellar again.

"If you do any talking up there in the darkness," Lieutenant Lee was warning the two leathernecks, "I wouldn't know you from my own men. So if I should kick you, it's a sign—"

"It'll be a sign you'll be shaking hands with St. Peter in five minutes," growled the big gyrene, nastily.

And when I saw the look Poison gave him I felt ice-cold clams trotting up and down my backbone. The impression was growing upon me that I had enlisted in the wrong war.

"Okay, Sergeant," Poison Lee said to me. "We'll get up to the firing step now. I go over first. These officers will follow me. And you crawl along directly behind them. If they talk out of turn, stop them in any way that occurs to you."

The big marine gave me the eye. "Sergeant Murphy," he said, "if you happen to forget I'm an officer, I'll reach down your throat and turn you inside out."

I was beginning to have a feeling about those marines.

They were the first eggs I'd seen on the French side of Hoboken who looked as if they might be as tough as Poison Lee himself. There was a light in their eyes as if they really craved to go over the top and jerk the flame-thrower up by the roots. And from where I stood, they looked so hard that if the Krauts turned the heat on them it would just toughen them up some more.

Now me, my skin is so sensitive that I sunburn very easily. I am allergic to heat. A good clean fight was just fine and dandy, but if I could vote on the flame-thrower business, I'd have stood up and suggested that we just go away and let the Germans have their good, clean fun.

"Let's go," Poison said, grinning as he glanced at his wrist watch.

B COMPANY was at stand-to, and the clicking sound, as of twenty or thirty softly-rattling castenets, was that of their chattering teeth. It was funny to see them ease behind one another when Poison called them together and began to pick out five men to go with us. Volunteers? Not in B Company, Elmer. We had volunteered once, when we had joined up, and we figured that covered everything. So Poison just tagged one shrinking violet

after another and turned them over to me, so I could keep an eye on them in case they suddenly had to telephone, or something.

"According to the dope from Divisional Headquarters," Poison said in a low, crisp voice, "this new *Flammenwerfer* is in a concrete dugout, or pillbox, just opposite us, some 50 or 60 yards away. It's protected by plenty of machine guns. We'll know just what it looks like when we see it. Keep close together, you men, Indian-file. If one of you feels a cough or a sneeze coming up, I suggest you cut your own throat with your trench-knife to save me the trouble of hunting for you."

The soldiers were all gandering at the two marines, who, if I do say so grudgingly, looked pretty damn businesslike with their gats hanging down in holsters and their trench knives and hand-grenades all ready for the night's fun. But Poison didn't bother to introduce, nor to explain, them. The smaller one—Socko—listened to Poison, then turned and began to shinny over the parapet.

Calmly Poison grabbed him by the slack of his forestry-green pants, hauled him back and scrambled up himself. The two marines scrambled up after him, Socko saying things under his breath. I got the gang over somehow and then felt my way along until I knew I was behind one of the leathernecks.

It was blacker than the inside of a cow's second stomach and the only way I knew I was close to the leathernecks was because they smelled better than anyone in B Company had smelled for a couple of months.

So we got ourselves straightened out somehow and crawled slowly along, heading for God knew what kind of flaming hell.

Somebody's trench knife clanked against metal. Up ahead Poison must have come to a halt, because I heard a tiny thump and then my helmet bumped against the stern of one of the marines and somebody bumped solidly against mine. It was like a freight train trying to stop with loose couplings between all the cars. But the marine didn't like being bumped that way.

He lashed out with a foot and caught me in the brisket. Not being in the mood for that kind of fun, I reached around with my fist and hooked a nice one to his short ribs. In the next instant he had spun around and the two of us, on all fours, were growling into each other's faces like a couple of pit bulldogs just before the leashes were slipped by the handlers.

"Don't do that again, soldier," he snarled. "I don't like it."

"Go back and get yourself a tail light, then," I snapped, forgetting he was an officer.

There was a faint scratching noise from somewhere alongside and another face jammed right between us. It was Poison's.

"If you two gentlemen want to play post-office," he purred, "just tell me, and I'll play, too."

Hastily I scrambled back, knowing that when Poison spoke so sweetly he was all ready to pull somebody's skeleton out with his bare hands. I butted full in Private Shumway's helmet and his muffled protests caused my heart to come into my throat and to turn over three times before settling back into place.

Then I heard the noise of fabric sliding along on dirt and I knew the three little pals up there—Poison and the two marine lieutenants—were moving again. So I hurried along, not wishing to be left alone out there, with five dumb privates depending upon me for guidance. The only guidance they'd get in that case would be straight back to home and mother.

FORTUNATELY we and the Jerries had been waltzing back and forth across this narrow strip of No-man's Land so long that neither of us had had time to get any decent wire in place. I heard a tiny *ping* up ahead and knew Poison had cut one of the few strands of barbed wire that zigzagged between the lines.

I burst out into light pink gooseflesh and waited, my chin dug deep into the stink-

ing mud, for the Krauts to start tossing steel at us. But nothing happened, so after a while I stopped shaking.

The next thing I knew I was crawling up the legs of the big marine. He had come to a full stop and was lying flat on his stomach, and I was clambering up his frame. As soon as I made sure it wasn't a stiff I was climbing over, I tried to stop, but Private Shumway's helmet sneaked up behind me and gave me a bump with his tin hat that almost drove my spine up through the top of my skull.

The naturally combative spirit of a marine rose in the big hulk under my elbows and knees. His back rose like that of a bucking broncho. I went flying, spread-eagled, over his head, going face-first through the blackness in the general direction of Berlin.

I landed flat on a mound of loose dirt, my face hanging over one side, my feet sprawled over the other. I found myself staring straight down into a dim white face whose eyes were wide and staring and whose mouth was loose with astonishment.

From beneath a coal-scuttle helmet his voice came clearly:

"Gott im Himmel, wass ist los?"

A split-instant later, just as my two hands were darting over the parapet for the Heinie's wind pipe, I heard Poison's quiet voice beside me, saying:

"Well, that tears it. Let's go, boys!"

By now I had the Boche by the gullet and was trying to rip the windpipe clear out of him.

He got his gun up between his chest and the parapet, all ready to stick me. It had a bayonet that looked a mile long. I dragged him toward me, jamming the gun against the dirt so he couldn't bring it up. I knew things were happening on each side of me, but I couldn't bother to look.

The only important things in the world right then were that Heinie and his gun. I felt someone stumble over the outstretched calves of my legs. I heard feet dropping from the parapet to the duckboards of the German trench.

For a long, long moment there wasn't the sound of a human voice, just grunts and gasps and the sound of clumping boots. Then, suddenly, my Kraut stopped trying to get his gun up. His muscles turned to flabby flesh and the only things holding him up were my fingers digging into his throat. I opened my hands.

He slumped. I wriggled over the top and dropped into the trench.

Then it was no longer silent. A long, shrill scream of agony split the night, a sobbing shriek on a rising note that went up and up into falsetto before it was suddenly choked off in a bubbling gasp. I heard a dull thud somewhere as a bullet smacked into solid meat. For an instant we milled confusedly around in the darkness of that trench.

"This way, B Company," said Poison's quiet voice.

My hands were shaking so I could hardly hang on to my automatic, but Poison's calm tone steadied me. I swung around to the left and hurried toward it in the stygian blackness. I could hear guys ahead of me, and behind me. My trench boots cracked down on somebody's instep. And I was rewarded with a flow of profanity that would have peeled the paint off a battleship. It was Socko, the smaller marine officer. I cursed him back and went on.

A magnesium flare exploded high over our heads. For a dozen seconds I was blinded. Then, gradually, my vision cleared. We were hurrying along, single file, toward a place where the trench widened behind a concrete dugout. Poison, the two marines and Private Shumway were ahead of me. And just ahead of them was a cluster of Krauts, looking, in that incredible white light, just as scared as I felt. They all had guns and were lifting them to shoot us down like sitting birds. Behind them the trench zigzagged. The whole German Army might be just beyond that turn. If it was, I was glad I couldn't see it. I was looking at plenty right now.

POISON, the two leathernecks and Shumway leaped ahead, firing as they ran. The flare blinked out just as the rest

of us clattered down the duckboards after them. Then all Hell broke loose.

I found myself wrestling with a smelly Kraut who was trying with his bayonet to gut me like a codfish. Men crashed against me. I could hear shots, shouts, screams. I jammed my automatic into the Heinie's belly and pulled the trigger.

In the confusion that surrounded me, I never heard the muffled explosion of the gun. But I heard him squall, all right, and as he folded forward at the waist I knew I needn't bother any more with him. I sidestepped and he went down. I spun around, grabbed a handful of cloth and started to drag another dark figure toward me. A fist flashed up and clipped me on the side of the jaw.

Something warned me that I was getting too close to Poison Lee. I ducked and eased out of his way in a hurry.

A machine gun began its lethal *tac-tac-tac.* A Yank cried out. The confusion was stultifying. I was beginning to think we were doing a lot of roaring around and not much else. So far as I was concerned I was willing to call it a fine little party and go on home.

"What are you doing, Sergeant," said Poison Lee's politest, most dangerous voice, right in my ear, "taking a shave? Come on, before I shave you off at the shoulders!"

Others must have heard him. We went through those crowded Huns like a greased snake through an Epworth League picnic.

"Where are those marines?" Poison shouted.

"Back in Paris, I guess," somebody grunted.

"This way!" Poison called through the confusion. "Here's the entrance to the dugout."

His flashlight stabbed a white slice through the blackness. There it was, a square, inky, opening.

Another flare burst overhead. I saw Poison Lee, small, deadly, efficient, standing in the entrance to the dugout. His wiry body was bent forward. He was in the act of tossing a hand grenade into the darkness of the dugout below. His arm swept forward. I waited for the *ker-blam* of the explosion. Instead, Poison dropped flat on his face. Like a child's rubber ball attached to an elastic, the grenade bounced right back.

I sucked in a long breath, expecting it to be the last one I'd ever take. But the guys in the dugout who had caught the grenade had pitched it back too hard. It flew right up over the rear wall of the trench and blew up a harmless geyser of dirt.

A million Krauts were galloping down the trench toward us. I could hear them behind me, too. Our gang was shooting fast, but it was like trying to sweep back a flood tide. I heard someone get it behind me.

He grunted, gave a strangled sob and fell, clawing at my legs as he went down. I whirled, but it was a German and my heart almost gagged when I thought how close he had been to me when somebody plugged him.

IT WAS about time, I thought, to be going home to mother and the girls. But where was Poison? I caught a glimpse of him just as—with gun in one hand, trench knife in the other—he took a headlong dive down into that pitch-black dugout!

"Come on, you guys!" I yelled. "We got to get the loot out of this!"

I didn't know whether they heard me or not. All I knew was that I had to get Poison, dead or alive, out of that rattlesnake's nest. I ducked a German arm that swung at me, took four running steps and —hating like hell to do it—jumped down into the pool of blackness that was the inside of the dugout.

And as I dropped, it seemed as if all the noise outside had been snapped off like a light. But there was plenty of noise inside, too. I could hear grunts and the hissing intake of breath through clenched teeth. The whole place stank of Germans, so I couldn't trust my usually accurate nose to tell friend from foe. I just clawed around, trying to lay a hand on somebody.

Then I heard Poison's voice, breathless and wire-edged.

"All right, then," he panted, "take this."

"Well," said a remembered voice, "I'll be daggoned! If it isn't that runt of a lieutenant!"

"Ouch!" cried another—and instantly I recognized the voice of the leatherneck called Socko. The sound of a heavy blow bounced through the concrete-walled room. "Clip me, would you, peewee!"

And then the fighting broke out all over again, while our gang dropped through the hole one at a time, until the whole place seemed packed by sweating, cursing, Yanks.

"Hey, find the loot!" called Shumway's voice. "The whole damned Kraut army is up there!"

"Give me elbow room!" I snarled, and pitched a hand grenade through the black square of the door up there. It exploded in the trench and for a moment there was something which passed for quiet.

"Sergeant, heave another up there," said Poison's calm voice. "Here, you men. I've got my flashlight. Look for that flame-thrower. It's in this dug-out—or in another just like it."

Hating to do it, I climbed two or three of those steps which led up to the trenches. With a sidewise motion of my right arm, I rolled a grenade along the duckboards toward a mass of men I could not see, but could feel, in the yonder darkness. I pulled my neck in just before it exploded, and heard, in that split-second of static silence, the voice of Socko, the smaller marine, yelling ecstatically:

"Hey, I've found something that—"

"An asbestos suit!" shouted the lieutenant they called Pete.

And Poison's level voice: "Put it on. You'll need it in the place you're going. We'll—"

I didn't hear any more. My grenade exploded. I pushed my neck out of the entrance an inch or two for one quick glance. My heart went into a tailspin. Both sides of the trench, to my left and right, were jammed from wall to wall with Germans. On one side they were in plenty of confusion on account of my grenade, which had torn their front ranks up like a meat cutter, but those on the other were milling up to gang us.

I heaved another potato to their direction. The detonation knocked me off the step and I fell back in some disorder upon the heads of B Company.

And then I knew I must have been wounded and was now becoming delirious. A strange figure tottered past me. It looked like a Ku Kluxer in an asbestos nightie. It was carrying something that looked like the nozzle end of an orchard sprayer. And just behind him—in the faint refulgence from Poison's flashlight—was the huge marine officer, lugging a double armful of what appeared to be gas tanks and assorted gimmicks.

Private Shumway had scrambled up the steps I had vacated so suddenly and was heaving hand grenades up and down the trench as fast as he could.

"Hey," he squalled. "They're coming! There's millions of Krauts!"

POISON LEE, his automatic in one hand and his flashlight in the other, pointed the beam of his light at the steps toward which the two laden marines were heading. A rain of machine-gun bullets hit the entrance to the dugout and chips of concrete began to shower down upon us. Private Shumway swayed backward and pitched down upon us. Bullets began to whip in through the door now and go *spang* against the concrete wall behind us, but their trajectory was high. In a minute we'd be getting a couple of German grenades in our midst and they'd have to trowel us off the wall.

"It lights from this electric battery!" the big marine called.

"Hey!" somebody scramed, "let us outa here before—" but his voice was lost in the increasing din.

The black silhouette of a German appeared in the doorway. About four of us shot him at the same time and he vanished into the darkness.

The marine called Socko clambered up the steps. He shoved the nozzle of the flame-thrower just outside the portal. There was a sudden hiss that I could hear through all the riot that was going on outside. I sat down on the body of a dead Kraut and waited to be cooked.

There was a dazzling sheet of red and yellow flame that roared out of the pipelike nozzle. The nightshirted marine swung it along the trench to the left of the door.

An unearthly glow lighted up the inside of the dugouts, outlining half a dozen of the scaredest-looking Yank faces I ever saw. A tremendous scream went up from somewhere outside. All our guys were yelling, too. It was getting warm down in our nice little oven.

I could see the guy Socko at the head of the stairs, and just below him was our half-portion of a lieutenant, holding Socko by the legs, and below Poison was the big marine, Pete, with his arms full of machinery. They had pulled their tin hats down over their faces against the heat and they looked in that red and yellow glare like devils from the seventh pit of Hell.

The nozzle of the flame-thrower was spraying fire like water from a garden hose as Pete swung it this way and that. The machine-gun firing had almost died out, but there was still plenty of yelling and screaming out there in the trenches. Poison reached up and slapped the marine on the back.

"That's enough!" he yelled. "Let's go!"

The asbestos nightie looked back through its goggled eyes. "Already?" he shouted in a muffled voice. "We show them how to fight this war, Pete, and now they want to go home."

Poison cupped his gun in the flat of his hand. "Turn that thing off," he said, grimly, "or I'll bash in your skull!"

The marine lieutenant instantly turned off the roaring flame and the whole place was bathed in an eerie silence. There were still a few shots sounding outside, and we could hear a few high-pitched cries from Germans who had been burned by the heat they had intended to use on us.

"What did you say you'd do?" the marine snarled at Poison.

"I'll tell you when—and if—we get back to our own lines!" Poison cracked. Then, turning to us, "Up and out, you mugs!"

He swung his flashlight to the floor. Three dead Krauts were lying there, and so was Private Shumway. There was another Yank sprawled face down in the corner. Corporal Heeney. I scooped up Shumway, he being nearest to me. Poison shouldered Private Wilson out of the way and lifted Heeney. The corporal was big. It was like an ant trying to walk away with a beetle, but Poison marched across the floor with Heeney slung over his shoulder and waited for the rest of us to precede him up the steps.

"I'll carry him, half-portion," said big Lieutenant Pete. "Here, Socko, you take this—"

"Beat it!" snarled Poison.

SOMEBODY helped me up the steps and the rest of them came scrambling up in a big hurry. The trench was a shambles. Plenty of guys there must have wished—for a second or two—that the German staff had never invented flame-throwers. They could give it, all right, but it must have come hard when they had to take it.

I don't remember much about the race back to our own lines. There wasn't a lot of firing from the fire-smitten trench, but the Jerry artillery was laying down a barrage to cut us off. Carrying Shumway on my back I had quite a handicap, but I was scared enough so I could have lugged a camel and still covered a hundred yards in something under ten seconds.

I remember seeing Lieutenant Socko scuttling along beside me. He hadn't had time to get out of his flame-proof nightie and he was stepping out high, wide and handsome like an old lady wading through a puddle, with the skirt gathered up in his hands. On my other side was little Lieutenant Lee, riding big Heeney pick-a-back and never drawing a long breath.

The next thing I remember was tumbling down into our own trench and being

slapped on the back by the gang we had left behind. The others were tumbling in, too, and careful hands were lifting Heeney and Shumway and carrying them away. We of the raiding party stood quite still, panting and shaking, trying to realize that it was all over.

"Well," said Poison Lee, begrudgingly, "for marines, you didn't do so badly. There were a few minutes there when I thought we were all headed for Berlin, or maybe for Hell."

The smaller marine pulled his nightie over his head and stared solemnly down at Poison.

"Was it that bad?" he asked.

"At least," said Poison.

Socko looked sort of surprised. He glanced up at his big buddy, then down again at Poison Lee.

"You see," he said, slowly, "being flyers, we never did any trenchwork before, so we thought everything was going all right. Well, I guess these raids have been over-advertised. Some time you have a real good one you want pulled, Pete and I'll bring over a couple of privates and we'll fix everything up for you."

Poison Lee bridled. "Oh, yeah?" he snarled. He edged over to Socko, and the big marine, Pete, moved up, all ready for a fight or a frolic.

I was pretty tired of all this ripping around, so I eased around behind the big one, all ready to bounce my gun off his noggin. But Poison glanced to the left and called Stinker Howard, one of our best machine gunners.

"Howard," he snapped in his politest voice. "These two marine officers are to have the run of our trenches any time they visit us. That is, any time they come afoot. But any time they fly low over us, there's a bounty of a hundred francs apiece on them."

The two marines hunched up their shoulders and I got myself set to let the big one have it. But Poison grinned up into his face.

"Lieutenant," he said, gently, "I have a couple of bottles of cognac in my blanket-roll. Sergeant Murphy, here, gets one of them to pass around for medicinal purposes only. But the other—do you leathernecks want a drink or two before I pay you the five hundred francs for getting your mitts on that flame-thrower first?"

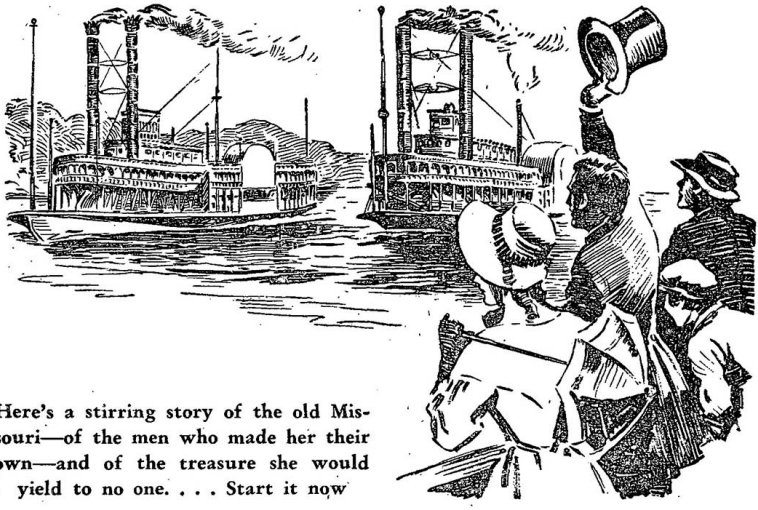
Lieutenant Pete looked at his buddy and his rugged face cracked into a grin.

"Tell you what we'll do, peewee. We never drink with enemies, but while our feet are on the ground, we're friends, see? So let's burn our tonsils."

They walked away toward the dugout, the two big leathernecks and our half-sized lieutenant. They walked a little warily as if each was afraid the other might turn and clip him at any moment.

Tiredly I turned to Stinker Howard.

"Get a detail of six men, and three stretchers," I told him. "Another war is just one quart away."



Here's a stirring story of the old Missouri—of the men who made her their own—and of the treasure she would yield to no one. . . . Start it now

Steamboat Gold

By GEORGE W. OGDEN

GOLD it was that drew Jonathan Randolph to the Narris, a somnolent community drowsing by the yellow waters of the Missouri—gold that had sunk with the river steamer *Morning Star* fifty years before; gold in an iron-riveted chest locked in her safe. It was now buried deep in the soil, for the storm that sank the *Morning Star* had also driven the river to a new course.

The land where she lay was the property of eccentric old Caleb Moore, who clung stubbornly to what had been a thriving river-landing store and who looked with sour eye on those come to disturb the *Star's* sunken timbers, thinking they sought the barrels of whisky that had been her cargo; for only Captain Randolph and his son, Jonathan, knew of the mysterious passenger with his equally mysterious money-box who had boarded the boat at the last minute on that ill-fated night.

Jonathan seeks the help of old Moss Gregg, who had been his father's pilot on the *Star*. He learns that Caleb Moore is not the only eccentric—or "genius" as Gregg calls them—in the strip of land known as the Narris. There's old Sam Langworthy who for years had been mining for gold-ore where none existed; and there's Joel Langworthy, his son, educated by Moore, whose facial disfigurement keeps him from the public office he so tirelessly seeks.

JONATHAN learns too that fifteen years before four men had come to explore for the *Star*. One of them was found in the road, his body clawed and torn as if by a catamount; the other three had never been seen again. "It's part of the curse that hangs around the old hulk," Gregg insists quite seriously. When Jonathan tells him of the gold and asks for his assistance, Gregg is obviously reluctant.

Sitting alone on the Gregg porch while Mystery, Gregg's daughter, prepares supper, and Gregg and his son Arkansaw are doing the chores, Jonathan Randolph senses a dim foreboding. Part of it is due to Gregg's un-

This story began in last week's Argosy

willingness to join him, part to the story of the fifteen-year-old murder; but mostly because of the strange, almost sinister quiet of the waning day and the turgid, hostile movement of the river itself.

His attention is caught by a small sound. Looking up he sees a man sneaking away from the house. It is Joel Langworthy. . . .

CHAPTER VI

GUILTY MONEY

CALEB MOORE'S house stood back a good half-mile from the site of his old landing on the Narris, on ground that rose much higher and gave a sweeping view. It had been a notable mansion in the days of Moore's prosperity, and had sheltered many a brilliant company. Its Ionic pillars, white once and gleaming through the trees like a pagan temple, were gray now, for they had known no paint in many a long and stormy year.

The melancholy of a disappointed man had long ago settled on Caleb Moore. His hope, his belief, that the river would turn back to him one day seemed never to be realized in his time. It bore upon him like the faithlessness of a woman, for he had loved the river in his proud commercial way, and reckoned it entirely his own. Now it had been alienated for half a century, and its disloyalty made him sad.

Price City, as the steamboat landing had been called in the age of its prosperity, had vanished, and left no evidence to establish its existence but Caleb Moore's store. It never had contained more than a dozen houses, although it had been the seat of slavery, when that vast valley was one unbroken field of hemp.

Captain Gregg had driven Randolph along the twilight road where pressing forest growth hemmed the wheel-tracks, and swarms of barbed mosquitoes charged them in the low places where the air hung moist and still. At Moore's gate he had left the adventurer, with the assurance that his house was open at all hours of the day and night.

Randolph was impressed by the dignity of that gray old house as he faced toward it from the gate. The sun was down now. Cool little gusts of wind were starting, like night creatures waking and winging softly away. Matted long bluegrass lay soft under the feet on the deep lawn, and there was the scent of honeysuckle coming down from the viny portico to meet him like a pale sweet lady with a smile upon her lips.

Caleb Moore rose up out of the shadow of vines to greet the stranger, standing tall upon the topmost of the three treads which lifted from lawn to veranda.

A man of heroic mold, like a warrior statesman of the old Roman days, his great head, proudly held, his eyes imperious, frowning piercingly under long harsh brows; his hair upstanding, thick and gray, as if distracted fingers had tossed it. A short gray beard curled on his strong, stern jaw.

"Yes, I knew Captain Randolph," he said, when the treasure-hunter had introduced himself, "as many another up and down the river knew him—in a strictly business way. He often touched at my wharf in the old days. Yes, I recollect him very well, very well; he left us a memento here when he went away."

Moore smiled reminiscently as he spoke of the wreck in those terms.

"Yes, something remains here in the Narris to keep his name alive, even though he has been dead more than twenty years," Randolph returned. "It is about the wreck of the *Morning Star* that I have come to see you sir—come a long and weary way."

Moore did not appear either curious or encouraging in his manner. He bent his head as if in reflection, and Randolph thought that he shook it a little sadly, but of that he was not sure.

"Tell me about it," he requested at last, not lifting his face.

Randolph plunged into the matter of the lost treasure, frankly and without reserve, as he had related it to Captain Gregg. Now and then Moore nodded, as if he approved or understood, and twice or thrice

he looked up at Randolph with sharp inquiry, his eyes made small in frowning concentration. When Randolph had finished his story the old man sighed, with a great sound in it, as of lifting of relief.

"So you've come after the old wreck, too," said he, musingly, "only you have come to me with a different story, a story that I believe to be the only straightforward and honest one that any man who has come to me ever told."

Moore seemed greatly moved by what he had heard. He left his chair and paced up and down the veranda, his great, noble head thrown back, his broad shoulders set like a soldier's.

HE STOOD a little while before the steps, hands clasped behind his back, looking off down the dusky valley where the fireflies were rising out of the corn; down the scar of the old river bed, now soothed over by green field and pleasant meadow, where Randolph knew the *Morning Star* lay deep under the down-drawing sands.

The old man returned to his chair presently, something of brightness in his manner, the outward glow of the excitement that Jonathan's tale had stirred in his breast.

"Others have come to me, and to Moss Gregg, whom you have seen before me, wanting permission and help to search for the *Morning Star,*" he said. "You have heard about them."

"Captain Gregg has told me how they came unheralded and disappeared without explanation or trace—all but the last."

"There are people in this community who believe I am the ghost that drove them away from their quest unsatisfied," the old man said, bitterness tincturing his contempt. "Some of them tried pretty hard to get me indicted by the grand jury for killing that man."

That was something Gregg had not told. Randolph spoke deprecatingly of the neighborhood suspicion, but the old man only shook his head in a manner of excusing their viewpoint.

"They felt justified, I suppose," he said, "for all along I have stood out against any exploration of the wreck. That was because I believed it was the whisky they were after, and I thought then as I think now, that it was in a better place down there than it would be on top of the ground. I suppose it looked suspicious to some of them around here who don't know me as well as neighbors ought to know a man who lived among them for more than sixty years."

Randolph nodded; he could not bring his mind back quickly from its long rambling touching the details of that old tragedy as they led away to far and unexplained things, and frame words suitable to the moment.

"The trouble of it all was that those men—four of them, I think, came during the course of the past twenty years—never satisfied me that they were square in their intentions. They all proposed a contract with me granting them permission to explore the wreck on a percentage of what might be salvaged from the cargo.

"Well, I knew there was nothing of the cargo left but the liquor that could be turned to money now. You know, in the steamboat days cargoes of whisky were frequently lost on this river. Years afterward, when whisky got to bringing more money than it did in the old days, and the wrecks were buried in silt and sand as the *Morning Star* is buried, men used to go around sounding for them. Steamboat whisky came to have a peculiar value, a peculiar excellence, according to the standards of that outlawed and villainous trade. Once in a great while a wreck would be located and the barrels pumped empty. But they seldom found a cargo, for the river is a pretty good hand at keeping what it takes.

"I didn't want any of that going on around me. I suppose those barrels are still sound, and that whisky would be worth a good deal of money now if a man cared to get his profit out of that kind of traffic.

"But I don't believe now, since you've

told me this, that one of those men, from the first to the last, was considering the whisky at all. They were after that money down in the bowels of that boat; they lied to me, and tried to deceive. They intended to make a pretense of exploration, find it, and disappear."

"Captain Gregg is of the same opinion, sir."

"IT DOES him credit," said the old man, with a shading of contempt for the opinions of Moss Gregg. "I tell you, Jonathan Randolph, that's guilty money, and the men who came hunting it were guilty men. There is somebody guarding the secret of the *Morning Star*, waiting his day. Guilt has been heaped upon guilt to protect what must have been gained in violence and crime."

"Whoever it is, he has stood a long and faithful watch," Randolph said. "Why, do you suppose, have they waited with all this secrecy? Why couldn't they have come to you, made a disclosure of the facts, and gone after their money—if it belongs to them by any honorable claim?"

"It does not; that's why. I don't know any more about it than you do—I didn't know as much a quarter of an hour ago—but what you have told me has begun to let a little beam of light into it. It's guilty money; no man has a claim on it that's an honest claim."

"Then it's any man's to find and take away in defiance of them and their ghostly guardian ship, but yours above all."

"I don't believe it would bring happiness or peace to any man," said Moore; "it has brought a great deal of sorrow and trouble to me. I never knew it was there, I never dreamed of that, but it has reached up out of the ground like the vapor of some foul thing, and cast a blight and a bitter shadow over my declining years. I would to God that you might cleanse that spot, fathoms deep that it lies buried, and purge away its blight and its mystery that hang like a cloud over me and mine!"

"All I ask is your permission to try."

"I always said that when the right man came, the man that could look me in the eye and give me a plausible and honest explanation of his eagerness to delve down to the bones of that old boat, I would give him leave to go ahead and explore.

"But since you have told me this about the old man's gold I seem to want only to cover it deeper, and let it lie there with its guilt, maybe its blood and broken honor, until the river—until the judgment of the Almighty descends upon this world."

"I believe I could clear away this mystery if I could get my hands into it, Mr. Moore."

"The dangers of such a quest offset the gain, outweigh the most extravagant hopes of it. You are a stranger here, you cannot know, or feel, the dread of this thing as we do, sir."

"I am not insensible to the danger of the undertaking, Mr. Moore, for there must be danger in touching a thing that had swallowed four lives already. But I'm not just what you call afraid of it, either. If you'll give me your consent to go ahead, I'll assume the risk."

"There is a risk, you have said the word, there is a subtle, waiting danger, graver because I cannot tell you how to proceed to guard yourself against it. I have hoped to see it cleared, and this vile suspicion that has piled on me and made my spirit bitter, swept away from my name before I go. But I don't know, Randolph—I don't know."

Moore left his chair again, and walked the length of the veranda and back. Near Randolph's chair he paused, looked at him steadily a little while as if he would speak, turned again and walked away. At the farther end of the porch he stood a few minutes, his chin up, his gaze on the darkening hills beyond the river, as if distance held the answer to his perplexity, elusive before his gleaning eyes.

"RANDOLPH," said he, coming back slowly, placing his hand on the young man's shoulder, "let the treasure

of the *Morning Star* sleep on—it isn't worth your life to go seeking it; no relief of suspicion and dread that you might give me would be worth a sacrifice like that. I have lived under the shadow of it, and the cloud of my eccentricities a long time; I can bear the load to the end. Let it go; let it go, boy—let it go!"

Randolph was deeply touched by the old man's manner, and by the sorrow that lay with such leaden weight behind that brave front.

"I'd feel like a coward now if I should turn tail and leave it untouched," he said.

Moore returned to his chair. He sat swaying gently on the rockers, his hand in his hair, his head drooped in thought.

"Still, there is much to be considered," he said in a low voice, as if to himself. "You must have counted on it with a good deal of hope, looking forward to it so long. It doesn't seem fair to deny you, since you have come frankly and honestly to me this way. How would you go about it, Randolph?"

"I've got her measurements, taken from the records of the surveyor of the port at St. Louis, where she was registered. My plan was to engage Captain Gregg to locate her as nearly as possible according to his recollection of the spot, and then make soundings until I struck her. There's no rock in the way, it would be a simple matter. When I'd found her, I'd outline her by sounding out the shape of her hull, then by her measurements fix the location of the clerk's office and the safe. A shaft could be put down to it in a few days' time."

Moore nodded his rough gray head. "It sounds simple, it sounds like you could do it that way." Then he fell into silence again, peering away into the distance, where the last sunlight reflected from a mass of thunderheads in the middle sky picked out the river over against the hills as bright as bared sword-blade.

Randolph knew that the old man must have spent many an hour out of his years gazing at the scene, where the river pressed against the hills. It had withdrawn from him as far is it could go; the rocky hills were curbing it, its yellow lips snarled at them as it went sulking by. It seemed that the old man, sitting there in dark concentration, was matching his unbroken will against its sullen strength seeking to bend its mighty current back into the Narris and sweep it past his door.

"Even after you had found her it would be like digging a hole in water to reach her, buried there under forty or fifty feet of quicksand."

"It would be very simple, with a coffer-dam and a pump."

"But costly."

"No; a few hundred dollars would do it."

"Still, that would be the smallest consideration of all, the expense in money. It is not so much what it would cost in money; that old treasure seems to call for blood. That old man's blood that you have told me of spattered it, he must have spent blood in his turn—and maybe the lives and souls of others—to get it into his hands."

"But its tragedy has been a long time quiescent now; more than likely the long watch on the old wreck is over. Fifty years is a long time for a man, or a set of men, to stand guard and keep a mystery covered."

"A long time!" Moore echoed. "But the watch is still kept; I can feel the foreboding of it; I can sense the danger, like a man draws back from some unseen obstruction in the dark."

"It only makes me keener to be at it," said Randolph, leaving his chair, tingling with the eagerness that this unexpected complication had given the quest of the *Morning Star*.

"YOUTH has such confidence!" Moore sighed. "I had it in my day, too. Well"—he laughed a little with the word—"I have a little of it yet, I keep a shred of it, like a scarlet thread from some old garment worn out and cast away. It is my only hope of life, Randolph, the confidence in old things to become new,

of the old justice, the old mercy. So, you've turned from the cold scents of Peruvian lost lodes to this warmer trail up here in the Narris? Peru; I used to read about it in Prescott, a long time ago. When I was a youngster I often planned to go down there and find some of that Inca gold."

"We are all adventurers at heart, I think, sir."

"Yes, no doubt we are, timid ones, cornfield adventurers, most of us, I am afraid. Is your mother gone, too?"

"Gone since I was a little boy."

"So you are alone."

"Quite alone."

"Even then it isn't worth the risk—it is not worth it, Jonathan Randolph!"

The old man spoke with almost dramatic decision, his great hand smiting the arm of his chair. "Let it go; it isn't worthwhile to stand your young life up against an old death-trap like this."

"If you have no other objection than the danger I might run," Randolph spoke eagerly, in sight, as he believed himself to be, of realizing on his dream; "if that is the only objection, sir—"

"There are other objections which we'll not stop to argue now," Moore interposed, with spirit-dampening haste. "Let me tell you, boy, even if I was to give you the permission you ask to go ahead and dig, you'd never come to the treasure you've set your young heart on, not even if you passed through the dangers that have driven other men away. No human hand will ever open the safe that hides that old man's money, for what the Missouri takes, it keeps!"

Moore leaned back in his chair, weary with his old vigil, depressed by the somber tragedy and unread mystery which clung to him like noxious vines strangling a noble tree.

"It took my youth and hope away from me," said he, sad and low, "and if it ever comes back—and it will come back, as sure as the judgment of God—it never will return them to me any more. It took wealth and prosperity away from me in a day, and left my life as barren as the top of a rock. It is greedy and capricious, wicked as a false woman, dangerous as a volcano. Let it keep its guilty money! You couldn't buy happiness with it if you had it in your hand tonight."

CHAPTER VII

THE DANGEROUS DREAM

SOMBER thoughts pressed upon Randolph as he sat silent beside the man whose hope the river could bring back to him never more. The treasure in the safe of the *Morning Star* seemed a small consideration to him then, for the taste of life was on his tongue like the miasma that sends a shudder through a man when he rises from drinking at a swampy spring.

He could not remember, out of his varied experience, such a complete collapse of spirits as he suffered that minute.

Was it the loneliness of the place, he asked himself, or the warning of that mysterious guardian over the treasure that had lured him so far and long?

He found himself turning to look about him into the shadows, with the indeterminate fear that belongs only to the dark. It came over him that he had made a mistake in expending so much energy and centering so much expectation on that buried gold.

The desire laid hold of him to steal down the steps and run away, like a boy afraid of the night, and leave Caleb Moore with his treacherous sad river, and the mysteries which bore on him so and made his last days bitter as the gall of death.

Somebody in the house began to sing, a slow, plaintive Southern melody in voice of rare sweetness and sympathy with the simple air. The sound came to Randolph like a reviving breeze, moving him with such a strong emotion of surprise and relief that he gathered his muscles to rise to his feet. He had not expected to hear the voice of youth rise out of that gloomy gray house.

"My granddaughter," the old man said. The gloom was too thick in the shadows

to see his face, but Randolph knew from the tenderness of his words that his stern features were softened by a smile.

"I didn't know, Gregg didn't say anything about—" Randolph hesitated.

"My only son's child, Mr. Randolph. He was a ships' captain in the Honduran trade; he was lost at sea. She lives here alone with me, and has so lived these seven or eight years. Don't you wonder that she has any heart left in her to sing?"

"The waters have taken their toll from you, sir," Randolph returned, moved by the pain of that loss which Moore's voice betrayed.

"You must come in and meet the singer," said Moore, bestirring himself; "she is my first lieutenant, and will have her word in this business that has brought you to me. She thinks you have gone, or she wouldn't be singing, she's as shy as a redbird with her songs."

"One is seldom prodigal of a treasure," Randolph said, with such evident sincerity and feeling that Moore placed a hand on his shoulder again.

"Yes, it's a treasure to me, so dear that I am jealous of the Almighty, almost, in the thought that He may tear her from my side before my years are finished."

The song fell away, as a mother's voice hushes when she stoops to lay her sleeping child upon its couch.

"*Grandpère?*" the voice called, with respectful inquiry, a little nearer the door.

"She thinks you've gone, our silence fooled her," the old man chuckled. "Come in—walk softly—we'll give her a surprise. Yes, Juliet, I'm coming, honey."

As they entered, the girl, busily spreading the table for the late evening meal, began to scold the old man like one lovingly correcting a child of whose wilfulness he is proud at heart. Moore nudged his guest in appreciation of the joke, and led him in softly.

"That's right, larrup me all around with that sharp little tongue of yours, honey, I deserve it," he said, in mock contrition. "I know I ought have come in half an hour ago."

"You've been sitting out there dreaming," she chided. "Haven't I warned you, time without end, that dreams are dangerous?"

RANDOLPH could see her, polishing each piece of silver with a napkin before she laid it in its place, the light of the big, shaded lamp on her young body. Her face he could not see, for it was in shadow, and her head was bent pensively, as if there was more than banter in her heart on the matter of Caleb Moore's old dreams. She was a fair white figure there beside the table, her short-sleeved muslin dress giving her flashing arms free play as she leaned to place the silver on the cloth.

"I've been scheming more than dreaming this evening, child," Moore said, as he stepped into the light; "and I've brought my fellow-conspirator in so you can scold both of us together and save breath for your song after supper."

The girl started at sight of Randolph in the door, and lifted her hands in a quick little gesture of helpless surprise. This protest was but a breath in passing, and in its place a little shy smile came to her lips, a gleam of laughter to her eyes.

She gave him her hand as Moore presented him, and he bowed over it, wondering at his own gallantry, feeling himself an actor in some comfortable social drama of a time long past.

"He's Captain Randolph's boy—you've heard me speak of him," Moore said, a glow in his face as of pleasure over the return of somebody long-wandering and dear.

"Captain Randolph, of the *Morning Star?*" She looked up quickly, her lips apart, her lively eyes glowing.

"The very one," said the old man, proud of her quick memory.

"And I thought you were some kind of an agent!" said she, her self-rebuke lightened with laughter.

"How an old trade will betray itself!" said Randolph.

"Oh, have you been an agent, Mr. Randolph?"

"I sold books in Oklahoma one time. *Great Events of a Thousand Years* was the title. I sold four of them in seven weeks."

"Napoleon sold books," said she, laughter in her eyes.

"And Washington, as well as Lincoln and others on down the ladder of fame."

"A book-agent is 'a benefactor to mankind,' " she quoted, nodding; " 'his calling is one of the most lofty and respectable. He carried the torch of knowledge into places of darkness, and'—do you remember the rest?"

"I'm afraid I never learned it all from the yellow paper in the front of the prospectus; they said that was why I failed."

"Agents are about the only ones that ever penetrate from the world to this place," Moore explained, "and Juliet regards them as the medieval ladies did the troubadours, as entertainers to be welcomed at all hours of the day and in all kinds of weather. Shall we sit up, Juliet?"

"Yes, Rhody has been growling around about her biscuits getting cold—as if anything could really get quite cold this weather—for a quarter of an hour. Sit here, Mr. Randolph."

Randolph had stood debating with himself means of getting out of it, much as he wanted to remain and share the meal, for it seemed almost a profanation of that white linen and the presence of Juliet to sit to table in his rough boots, coatless as he was, and shaggy and dust-stained from the activities of the day. He fumbled with his necktie and began an apology, which Moore put an end to by gently forcing him into his designated chair.

"I had supper at Captain Gregg's, so you must not think that I—"

"Oh, that was a long time ago," said Juliet, dismissing it.

She sighed as if in relief and contentment as she seated herself opposite him, her elbows on the cloth, her face turned to him in ingenuous expression of pleasure.

"I thought you'd get away from us!" she said, so seriously that Randolph could not repress a smile.

RANDOLPH felt that he had discovered one treasure at least, even if his search should be barren of any other reward. This one, certainly, was not of the kind that a man might tuck into his strong-box and carry away and hide jealously from covetous eyes, but one that would warm itself into a man's heart and wrap the folds of it around her, to his eternal joy or everlasting pain.

Not so tall as to be stately, not grave enough to be cold, but lit with a spark of life that made her presence warm against the sophisticated, grave, slow stranger's heart; not so light as to be frivolous, nor so solemn as to be severe, but a sweet melancholy in her face that explained the feeling sympathy of her song. Her wings had beaten the bars; her soul had strained to be away. Duty had made her blue-gray eyes serious when the laughter was not twinkling in them as the sun flashes on broken water. Her dark hair carried back from her low forehead like a rippling pennant and lay massed on her strong, fair neck; a little red flower wilted now and drooping, was bright against it as coral in wet seaweed.

Rhody, a great waddling, solemn Negress, came in with a softness in her tread that betrayed bare feet, and served biscuits and ham, okra and chicken, honey and pickled beets. She rolled her eyes at the stranger with suspicious distrust and not well concealed contempt, and hovered protectively around her pretty mistress.

Moore allowed Juliet to chatter through the meal, realizing, perhaps, better than herself, how greatly her tongue needed stretching. Unbroken months of that solitude, with no more than an agent here and there, and her domestic duties to relieve the blank routine of life, had stored up a flood of talk which now poured over Randolph with the sprightliness of relief.

"Nobody ever stays long in the Narris," sighed Juliet, her eyes following Rhody as

she bore off the plates, leaving the cloth clear. "I suppose you'll be going on again tomorrow, Mr. Randolph?"

"That depends on you," he said, unable to forego a smile at her expense, seeing her start and flash scarlet at what seemed to be such hasty and irrelevant courtship. "If you say that I may stay, then I shall remain; if you say go, I must march along."

"I'm sure I shouldn't like to stand as the arbiter of your coming and going in our pleasant valley, Mr. Randolph," she returned.

"Mr. Randolph has come to dig for the golden key of the world," said the old man gravely; "he has come to search for the wreck of the *Morning Star* and make us rich again out of what he hopes to find buried there."

"Oh, treasure!" she whispered, her face growing white and her eyes round. "Now! what did I tell you, *grandpère?* I always said there was a treasure buried in the wreck of the *Morning Star.*"

"Why, so you did, child," he admitted.

"And I always knew you'd come for it," she declared, turning again to Randolph, reaching out her hand toward him across the table.

"You knew I'd come?" said he wonderingly. "How could you know?"

"The river is full of whispers and prophecies," she told him, nodding with great gravity, that inscrutable mask of melancholy flitting over her fresh young face, darkening on it like a cloud.

"Yes, it looks like a mysterious and secretive stream," said he, as if speaking to himself a thought that had been with him since he saw the river for the first time that day.

"But I expected you'd be older," she said; "much older, with gray hairs and weathered face."

"Give me time, Miss Moore, and I will come to them," he said.

MOORE sat in his place at the head of the table, studying them thoughtfully. They seemed to have taken the matter out of his hands, and to have forgotten his presence. Perhaps there was a coldness of loneliness in his breast at seeing this apparent selfishness, for his face was sad, and he shook his head as in gentle reproof at the precipitancy of youth.

"You know it's mostly old men who have the charts of sunken wrecks and treasures," she spoke defensively, yet with a little apology for any injustice that she may have done him in her expectation; "one of the crew, or somebody who was with the captain when—"

She caught herself sharply, on the margin of a blunder.

"When he died," nodded Randolph, finishing her gravely. "But I knew the secret of the *Morning Star* long before that day."

"It's the one romantic thing in the Narris, Mr. Randolph—you ought to hear the horible stories that Mystery Gregg can tell about it, full of ghosts and tragedies. Most of them had their origin in the fancy of these superstitious people in the Narris, I suppose.'

"Not all of them," Moore corrected, shaking his head sadly. "That story began and ended before you came here into the silences to abide with me. If Mystery has put any ghosts into the tales she has been telling you, then I will grant they are her own, but there has been tragedy enough without coloring."

"It's a regular medieval mystery," she whispered, leaning toward Randolph, her eyes grown large; "there must be gold at the bottom of it. Are you going to let him dig it, *grandpère?*" . . . . . .

Moore did not answer. Randolph turned to him, eager for the word that must open or close his business with that mysterious wreck.

The old man was sitting stiff in his chair, the glass of water poised halfway to his lips, his mouth slightly open, his eyes set and staring, with a look in them of the profoundest amazement and horror.

He peered hard at the window, which he sat facing, as rigid as if he had been struck by a sudden paralysis.

Strangely moved by this quick and unaccountable transformation, Randolph turned from his host to look toward the window, and discover if he might, the cause of the old man's disturbance.

In turning he met the appealing, wildly strained eyes of Juliet, who shook her head with almost imperceptible appeal. Her face was white; she sat straining as if to spring to the old man's side.

In a moment Moore sighed, the rigor passing out of his limbs, the distortion of transcendental fright out of his features and eyes. He put down his glass and rose.

"We will talk of this tomorrow," he said, his voice hollow and shaken. "I think there will be a storm before long, I feel the slackness in the air that falls ahead of it."

"And I must be tracking back to Captain Gregg's, he has a bed spread for me tonight," Randolph said.

"No, no!" Juliet interposed, putting out her hand quickly as if to stop him, "not the river road tonight—you can't go the river road—"

"You are our guest tonight, Mr. Randolph," the old man broke in calmly. "Juliet means that the river road is dark, and easily lost by strange feet."

CHAPTER VIII

WHOSE HAND?

THE first assault of the storm had disturbed Randolph in his sleep, for it had come in a splintering crash of thunder and wild-shrieking wind. After its first wrenching blasts it had settled down to twinkling lightning and far-rolling thunder and a drumming of rain that was soothing and assuring, like a penitential offering to repay the strain of its boisterous arrival.

He had fallen asleep with the spray of the drip blowing through the open windows upon his face.

He roused from this refreshing sleep with an upheaving start, like a diver breaking water after a plunge. His heart was laboring; sweat beaded his forehead. His lungs seemed empty, as if some compression had passed the breath out of them; he panted and gasped, unable to satisfy his need for air at once. His throat pained him, with an aching dry dullness.

In one second he was wholly awake, stirred by that primitive intuition of danger which sets the faculties all whirring in alarm. Dreams as well as danger sometimes move this subtle sense, but Randolph had experienced no disturbing dream; and danger he could not reconcile with the peace of the house.

Still he sat there in the dark, gulping great drafts of air to relieve the oppression of his lungs, straining and listening, prickling with the electrical emanations which made his whole body as sensitive as an eye.

There was no sound but the soft rain, and the splash from the eaves under his window. The low, cool wind came in rich with the scent of honeysuckle; the house was as still as untroubled sleep.

But the feeling was a certainty upon him that somebody had been in that room; that a knee had pressed his chest, a hand had throttled him with murderous intent. Which way had the assailant entered, in what direction fled? It rested between window and door.

Reluctant to believe that any harm could have threatened him out of the interior of that hospitable house, he leaned over and felt into the window. The screen was unhooked at the bottom and swinging. There was relief in the discovery. It absolved in one second his host, and all under that roof, of suspicion.

He was certain that the screen had been fastened when he went to bed, for he was sensitive to mosquitoes. But his bed was so near the window that one with long reach could have leaned through and touched him easily. It had not been a knee that pressed his chest, but an elbow. The assailant had stood outside, perhaps was standing there yet.

At the thought he leaped out of bed. He was feeling for the matches which he had left beside the lamp when he heard something start as if from concealment

close beside the window and run swiftly across the lawn. It went with the quick softness of a two-footed creature, with a swishing as of bare feet over the wet grass.

RANDOLPH strained out of the window with eyes and ears, but could see nothing, for the night was totally obscure. The swift feet had passed on, and all was still but the weeping trees.

Greatly disturbed, the choking, aching pain still in his throat, he turned to his bed and sat on it, still in the dark. Sleep was snapped like a broken line in his hand. Why should a prowler come there and seek him out with such sure and violent hand? Could it be that the devouring force that guarded the wreck of the *Morning Star* was reaching out for his life, as it had smothered the lives of those who had come before him?

It seemed incredible. It might have been the wind, and a little play in the frame, that had loosed the hook of the screen, imagination supplying the rest. Perhaps a dog had run across the lawn, frightened by his appearance at the window. Dawn came as he lay struggling to join the ends of his broken sleep, and with the spreading light the tranquillity and assurance which he would not confess in the dark he lacked to restore his repose.

He slept again.

His first care on waking was to look under the window for tracks, a useless search, for the grass grew close against the wall. He could have set the experience down to a dream, induced by the melancholy reflections on all that he had heard the day before, but for the evidence presented by the window screen. The wire had been cut and forced apart far enough to admit a slender hand.

He concluded to say nothing to Moore about the occurrence.

Moore appeared reluctant to resume discussion of the treasure hunt when Randolph joined him in what seemed his ceaseless vigil on the porch. He deferred broaching the matter with studious circumvention, talking crops, and the benefits which would heap in the farmers' cribs from the rain of last night, which had tempered the dead air and brought in the morning sparkling and sweet.

Randolph did not press the issue, but waited with what calmness he could draw over his inner tumult of doubt and anxiety, while Moore, who excused himself punctiliously, was seeing about sending his men to the hayfield, and other details of the day's work on his carefully attended farm.

Randolph walked the long veranda, clouded in spirit by an unaccountable oppression like the sickness of failure or the foretaste of disappointment.

Juliet found him marching gloomily there, and hailed him with a glad good morning, and came forward with hand outstretched, her eyes clear and untroubled as the rain-washed sky.

"It's something different from yesterday's dust," she said, lifting her chin, dilating her sensitive nostrils as she breathed the cool air.

"I've seldom seen so rare a sky," said he thoughtfully, looking at her eyes.

She crossed to the porch rail, and stood turning her gaze about the refreshed green world.

"It's seldom like this in summer," she said, "but in spring and fall there are days and days when it is so clear it seems to come right down and draw you into it. It's so beautiful sometimes that it almost hurts."

"There is nothing like a sky to transform a landscape, Miss Moore. Yesterday it was dim around the edges and glaring in the center, like a smoked lantern globe."

"Almost hateful." She nodded, her eyes fusing their own wonderful color with the deep indigo of the zenith.

"All things are balanced by their compensations, it is said."

"Well, there are watermelons," said she, quite seriously, "and hazelnuts. But it leaves quite a compensation deficiency after skies and all."

There was an underlying harshness in

her words, as of resentment against the circumstances which bound her in that place. He looked at her inquiringly. She was still sounding the sky-depths with her wistful gaze and did not see him. She would be away, if she could, seeking out the world's pleasant places on her young wings.

. . . At breakfast the old man was so silent and thoughtful that Randolph believed him to be formulating his decision on the exploration of the wreck. He could not hope for much light out of a countenance so gloomy and dark as Moore's, and his own spirits, which had enjoyed a transitory warming in the fresh, ingenuous presence of Juliet, sank again and left him cold in hope.

After breakfast Moore begged another day to consider it, which Randolph agreed to with as much heartiness as his failing expectations could arouse. The old man went to the gate with him as he set off in return to Gregg's, and from the veranda Juliet looked after him with disappointment in her eyes. He knew that in her he had an ardent advocate, for the golden key of the world, of which Moore had spoken as lying in the rotting wreck, would open the gate for her upon a freedom for which her loyal soul was aching.

CHAPTER IX

THE GHOST THAT SNAPS

IT WAS still early, and the sun had not yet kindled into a withering blaze. Shadows were cool and deep along the river road, where the wayside pokeberry hazel stood as fresh as morning schoolchildren after their long-waited bath. Randolph's mind was flicked with the shadow of many speculations, like the changing sunlight through the leaves upon the road as he passed.

Why had Juliet spoken with such sharp haste and evident dread about this same river road last night, warning him that he could not go that way? What had Caleb Moore seen at the window that froze him with fear, changing him in a moment from a warm-hearted host to a hoarse-voiced, unsteady old man? What ghost had come up out of his past to give him such a sudden qualm, and bind his tongue, and put the glaze of death into his eyes? Had that fleeting apparition at the window any connection with the skulker who had fled away from his own chamber later in the night?

There was nobody in sight as Randolph approached Gregg's place, but the dripping bucket on the curb and the gray smoke rising straight in the calm air from the kitchen chimney proclaimed that Mystery, at least, was astir, and under steam for her day's activities. Doubtful whether anybody but Mystery was even out of bed, Randolph drew under the elm tree, whose shade was creeping like the benediction of a loving hand over the curb of the wayside well.

After a little while of meditation Randolph turned toward the river.

More than on yesterday it seemed to be revealing itself, the sun aslant in its dark waters, its ebullitions rising like upshooting plants and bursting into foul florescence. Here sodden driftwood whirled in a slow eddy, low-floating, heavy with its water-bound years. Old logs slogged by, worn rounded of ends and smooth as polished cabinet work by contact with banks and bars and other drift; now lifting a little on a boiling upburst, now sucked out of sight and held long in the down-draft of a sulky slow whirlpool.

Strangely, tragically, the driftwood seemed to illustrate the grasping trait which Moore had spoken of with such sad bitterness. The river had taken its toll; its flood had snatched those trees, green and wide-stretching, anchored by a thousand grappling roots, and flung them like debauched beauties into its polluted tide. Years ago it had gathered them from its banks; it kept them still. What the river reaped it held, wearing its trophies in such melancholy adornment as this, or burying them deep in the satisfaction of its greed, as it had buried the *Morning Star*.

No wonder that the Missouri never had bred a poet on its shores, silt-laden, mournful, uncommunicative stream! There was no color in it, no sweet murmur over pebbly strands to move the measure of a song; no clear depths, no cool, grassy shores—nothing to kindle the fire of loyalty or the fancies of beauty upon which the heart of a poet feeds.

Slimy logs circling on the slow swing of a never-ending journey; tall sedge in the muck of its swampy margins and slime-discharging sloughs; young cottonwoods springing, quick-growing and rank, on its tow-head bars to be reamed out in the first grim-plowing of the flood; wild grape and greenbrier in choking tangle on its forest limbs.

Across the river, miles upstream and down, he could see the white bank, as white as a bone. The timber had been stripped from it, save only the willows by the water's edge.

ARKANSAW appeared from the house presently, carrying oars. He quickened his approach when he saw Randolph standing on the bank as if waiting for him. His face sunned over by grins. He was a much more wholesome-appearing Arkansaw than yesterday. Now the caterpillar fuzz was gone from his face, which was lean, tough and brown, not the aggravated and inflamed red of the general run of faces which Randolph had seen in rural Missouri.

Arkansas was a strong-framed man, with an easy slough to his pliant shoulders as he walked, and sparkling humorous eyes which seemed to offer friendship to all whom he met upon the road. His blue shirt and overalls were clean from the line, and Arkansaw looked as fresh in his rustic handsomeness as a hollyhock beside the fence.

He said that his father had been drawn for jury service, and had left at daylight on his ride of fifteen miles to the county-seat. Arkansaw lifted his worn, nicked-bladed oars from his shoulder and leaned on them with comfortable adjustment of his sinewy frame, and offered a chew of tobacco from his twist. Randolph declined the favor, with the excuse that it appeared too strong for his taste. Arkansas turned the brown dry twist, whittled and gnawed as if a tobacco-chewing cockroach had been at it, and eyed it as if searching for some spot offering a greater promise than was apparent at casual inspection.

"Shucks!" said he, in tone of self-disparagement, "what'd I want a chaw for, anyways? I aimed to smoke when I pulled that t'backer out of m' pocket, dang my fool head!"

While his voice was charged with derision of his own instability of mind, his merry eyes told that there was no sincerity in it, nor any guile in him, nor ill-feeling toward the meanest shadow of man that encumbered the earth that rejuvenated day.

He drew his cob pipe from one pocket, patted himself over until he located the stem in another, coupled the two together, and disposed of his oars against the curb while he cut off a filling and milled it between his palms.

Randolph produced his own stubby pipe and shared the twist, which was as strong as the mule-leg from which it took its name. Arkansaw made no inquiries, restrained by his natural courtesy, although it was plain that he was eager to learn how Moore had received the proposal to unearth the *Morning Star*.

"Well, I've got the day before me," said Randolph, hastening to relieve him; "my business with Moore is still up in the air."

Arkansaw, fully satisfied, shouldered his oars again.

"Well, I was just goin' out to run trot-lines," he said, "maybe you'd like to go along, it's cool on the river this morning."

Randolph was glad to go, for aside from helping him to fill in the day, which was sure to be full of vexatious chafing to make it long, he wanted to question Arkansaw about the river road, and what menace to travelers there lurked in its shadows by night, leaving it harmless and clear by day.

Arkansaw drove his skiff across the snarling current as gracefully as man ever handled boat, with regular sweep of his long oars, feathered to glide above the water like low-skimming wings. Commonplace on land, on the river he became at once romantic and promising, a battery of interest, a blood-kinsman of the yellow-brown stream itself.

RANDOLPH sat facing him in the stern, watching the rhythmic motion of his arms and oars. The river had seemed to broaden amazingly now that he was out upon it; and its dangers to multiply. Its current, so sluggish and slow to watch from shore, now seemed to rush in almost torrential rapidity, its murmur distinct, deep, threatening.

No longer mean and despicable the Missouri seemed to him, nor ever could it so seem again. Here, upon the bosom of it, the strength of it under his eyes, its mystery more inscrutable than from afar, a dread of it laid hold of him, impelling him to grasp the gunwales of the skiff and cling with rigid hands.

Only after Arkansaw had taken the fish from his lines, rebaited his hooks, and cast them forth again into the turgid waters, he found interest enough in the river road reviving to make inquiry about it.

"What's the matter with the river road between here and Moore's that people say you can't travel over it at night?" he asked curiously.

Arkansaw paused in his rowing, letting the boat drift, while he looked at Randolph with startled eyes, as a man might look whose family secret was being pried into by one who could not, in any reasonable conjecture, be suspected of having the means of coming to it.

"The river road?" he repeated vacantly.

"I was told I couldn't travel it at night," Randolph returned, watching Arkansaw's changing face.

Arkansaw dipped his oars, pulled a lusty stroke, looked over his shoulder for his landing marks, and laid himself again to his work. He pulled on a little while, saying nothing, his face troubled, his breath coming faster than his labor would permit him.

"Was it Moore, or the nigger woman told you?" he asked presently.

"It was Miss Moore. What did she mean?"

"Oh, I reckon she didn't mean nothin'—only it's mighty dark, maybe."

Arkansaw seemed reluctant to go into the perils of that road, with the dark forest pressing nearer and nearer to its wheel-tracks year by year. Randolph was in no humor to spare him, no matter what his reasons for avoiding the issue might be.

"There are no animals in this part of the country that could do a man damage, I know," he said, "and outside of that I don't see what the danger could be, unless it's thieves."

"They's varmits of one kind an' another around," Arkansaw vaguely held out, leaning to his oars hard on the last stretch.

"Skunks and rabbits," Randolph said deprecatingly.

Arkansaw was making the shore, looking landward as he pulled now with this oar, now backed water with that, coming in with admirable nicety, touching the bank as lightly as a falling leaf.

"Yep, they's worser 'n that," he declared.

"What is it, then?"

"It's ghosties, 'y gunny!"

ARKANSAW went ashore with his oars, and Randolph followed him with the fish. Arkansaw led the way up the steep bank, making no further reply to the last question. At the top he stopped, looked about him with what seemed a questioning distrust, and lowered his voice almost to a whisper when he replied.

"It's the snappin' ghost!" said he, with the solemnity of one passing a precious word in secret conclave.

"I never heard of one," said Randolph, moved to smile by the man's ludicrous sincerity.

"Well, it's there in them woods, all right," Arkansaw said, sighing as one who has passed a peril.

He led on toward the well, and Randolph let it go at that, knowing that he should have the rest of it out of Arkansaw in his own time and fashion.

They put the fish in the trough and sat in the shade, and Arkansaw was sweating a great deal over that small exertion, it seemed, for a man of his toughness.

"I don't reckon you ever did hear tell of a snappin' ghost before, the way you looked," said Arkansaw.

"No, I never did. What kind of a creature is it, where does it come from?"

"Where does all ghosts come from?" Arkansaw shook his head helpless of an answer to his own question. "This varmint ain't a plain ha'nt ghost. It stands up like a man, and it's got a face on it like a man, and legs and arms to it, but it's got a body like a wolf or a dog. Maybe it's some kind of a bat, I don't know. Anyways, it prowls them woods along the river road at night and chases folks, and tries to suck their blood away from 'em, hot and foamin'."

Arkansaw spoke with such conviction that it was plain to see the belief in this monster was as deep in him as the roots of his life. Randolph made inquiry, with polite interest, for more details.

"I don't know just when it first came here, but I reckon it was twenty or twenty-five years ago—maybe longer. Between Moore's place and the head of the Narris is them woods you passed through—you know that as well as I do. They stand there about like they stood when Adam was goin' on all fours, I reckon. That varmint lives in there, somewhere. They've combed them woods over for him with dogs and guns many a time without ever scarin' up hide or hair of him; but he's there; you can gamble your last dollar he's there!"

"But nobody ever has seen him," said Randolph, seeing the story glimmer out as all such superstitions fade upon fearless approach, everywhere.

"Yes, he's been seen," said Arkansaw mildly, not with the asperity of one who held the proof in his hands. "More'n one's seen him, and one man's stood up and fought him and lived to talk about it."

"Who is he? Is he still in this country?"

"Yes," replied Arkansaw, in the same even tone, "he's still here, alive and livin', as the feller said."

"Well, I'd like to talk to that man!" Randolph expressed a challenge of the truth of the tale in the fervency of his words.

"Well, you air a-talkin' to him." Arkansaw let a big sigh free after the words, as if the secret had been a burden, and its confession a vast relief.

RANDOLPH looked at him sharply, resenting a little what he believed to be Arkansaw's attempt to play on his urban simplicity. Arkansaw's solemn face attested his complete sincerity. Arkansaw believed what he had told. Randolph asked for the whole story.

Arkansaw looked about him again before speaking, with sly caution, as if he feared the creature might resent the telling and spring on him from the roadside corn.

"Before that happened to me," he said, "I never took much stock in it myself. I'm not a superstitious man, it don't run in our fam'ly. Up to the time that varmint come hand to hand with me, I put it down to the imagination of folks that was simple in spots and scary all over. But I tell you there's lots of things in this world a man can believe that he never thought he could, just like he can eat dog, I reckon, if he comes down to starvation.

"That was three years ago this fall, when I was doin' a little fishin' over in Skillet Lake. There was a good deal more water in the lake then than now, for it's dryin' up scan'lous, Joel Langworthy says.

"Well, I had a few throw lines I used to go over to tend to morning and night. I'd been over there projec'in' around one evening, settin' my lines and takin' off fish,

and it set in and clouded up and got dark before I hardly noticed.

"I loped off for home, it gittin' darker every jump. I was passin' through a draw over there at the upper end of the lake when I heard something follerin' me in the path, makin' a kind of *flop-flap* like a dog trottin' in the dust.

"I never used to be a scary kind of a feller, but that time I felt m' back begin to shiver and m' hair begin to crawl like you'd turned a whole handful of ants lose in it.

"I knowed it wasn't no dog, n'r no painter, for a painter ain't been seen in this country in my time, but I was so dang scairt I couldn't make m' neck turn to look back of me and see. Wouldn't 'a' done me any good to look, for it was already as dark there as the inside of a jug, and I didn't have no more gun 'n a rabbit. That *flop-flap* was gainin' on me, and I just natur'ly linked out and run, and I run like mammy's two-headed little man, I'm here to tell you!"

"I'll bet you did," said Randolph, interested now, and sympathetic.

"I dropped them fish, and I sailed, but I might as well 'a' run from my own shadow. That thing caught up to me before I'd went a hundred feet, and it'd 'a' downed me, too, if I hadn't spanked up enough to turn around and clinch it as it come on.

"I tell you I bowed up m' neck and spit fire around there for about a minute, as the feller said, and I bawled till I reckon you could 'a' heard me two mile, for I was scairt, I was scairt somethin' scan'lous! That thing stood up like a man, but it was hairy like a wolf, and it growled like a wolf, and its breath was as hot as steam out of a b'iler.

"Say, I tell you I done some straddlin' and gruntin' for about a minute, man!"

"But it must have been a man, Arkansaw—I never heard of a ghost having breath."

"It was a ghost, a downright ghost, I tell you! Wait till you come to it, and you'll see."

THE recollection of his desperate encounter had heated Arkansaw until sweat was pouring down his tough cheeks. The spark of excitement was flaming in his eyes now; he leaned forward, his hands clenched, his muscles set, as if he braced himself for the struggle with his hot-breathed assailant again.

"It clawed and it bit, and lunged at me with its teeth snappin' trying to git me by the throat. I couldn't see it only dim, like you see a fish deep in muddy water, a kind of a pale white now and then when I'd throw it off from me a few feet and set myself for a new tussle.

"We wove and wrassled and tore around there for I don't know how long, for that thing socked its claws in m' boot-heels, as the feller said, and hung on to me like a catamount.

"It never hit like a man—clawed and bit and hung on. We rolled in the road and clinched and broke, and one time it got me down and made a snap at my windpipe. I just had strength enough left in me to push ag'in' its dang face with m' open hand, and, I tell you, that thing had the face of a man.

"I got m' wind in a second, and I flopped it over off of me and was goin' to bust it wide open, but it just seemed to 'vaporate out of my hands like nothin'. Just like nothin', dang my melts if it didn't!"

Arkansaw paused, whether for effect or breath, Randolph could not tell, for he was panting, and he twisted his head with the conviction of a man who had made his case and defied the world to come forward and shake it.

"That certainly was some fight!" Randolph said, in appreciation.

"Some fight! You' right it was. It was a reg'lar cyclone let loose. I was mad clean through by that time; madder 'n I was scairt, and I didn't aim for that varmint to git away without sockin' it another good 'un, anyhow, and I went scramblin' around and crawlin' and grabbin' after, and the first thing I knowed I grabbed right into a bunch of bones

layin' right there in the road! It was a human bone skeleton. I knowed it the minute m' hand felt it, and I had it by its dang old foot. That's what I grabbed into. That snappin' ghost had 'vaporated away to a skeleton of bones in less 'n two seconds, right there in my hand. Now, if it wasn't a ghost, I wisht you'd up and tell me what it was?"

"Did the living part of it come back?"

"I never hung around there to see, I tell you. I busted out of there on a run—land o' little 'taters, how I did run! No train ever traveled as fast as I streaked it home that night."

Arkansaw's shirt was wet at the shoulder blades with sweat, his breath was coming short, as if he had passed through that struggle but a moment since.

But he grinned, and the fright died out of his eyes. Randolph knew that the story had been related with conviction that it was true, and with no attempt whatever to beguile.

Its simple vividness had made a creepy impression on him, for he could see the struggle and its unexpected end as plainly as Arkansaw ever had lived it, whether the assailant had been beast or man.

"It's a strange experience for a man to go through, Arkansaw," he said. "Did you ever go back to see if the skeleton was still there?"

"I took m' gun and went over there the next day, but it was gone. The road was mussed up some where we'd wrassled around, but I never could find a single track but my own."

"Not a track?"

"Not one. A man'd 'a' made tracks, and a wolf'd 'a' made some kind of a mark in the dust, but a ghost wouldn't 'a' made any tracks, because a ghost never was knowed to make 'em."

"No, I never heard of one leaving tracks," Randolph admitted, thinking the tale over from a new point of speculation. Could it be that some wild, witless creature, human in form, bestial in desire, roamed the woods on the dark river's shore? Could this creature have been the wily, still visitor at his chamber window last night?

"Well, dang my melts!" said Arkansaw, starting up from his spell of silence, "if I don't clean them fish for dinner, Mystery—she'll snatch me bal'headed inside of a minute!"

CHAPTER X

POLITICO AND SCHOOLMASTER

MYSTERY GREGG had not put the scythe to the forest of Jimson weeds in the dooryard of her home; for one thing and another had come between her and her intention until Arkansaw had come home, bringing fish for dinner and the stranger who sought the wreck of the *Morning Star* to share the meal.

So Arkansaw and Randolph looked over the weed wilderness as they sat on the porch and talked and watched the slow traffic along the road in front.

Scarcely a traveler passed without drawing upon the hospitality of the well, and as they paused to drink Arkansaw told what he knew of them and their folks, their physical imperfections, and moral shortcomings, their marriages, bereavements, possessions, and expectations. There was a homely humor in the descriptions of Arkansaw that lifted many commonplace clodhoppers out of the ordinary in the eyes of the stranger that long, lazy day, and a softness of charity for the frailties of body and soul which told that he could judge without derision and weigh without damnation.

"What a preacher you'd have made, Arkansaw!" said Randolph, smiling.

"Well, I aimed to be before Maw died," Arkansaw confessed. "If I could git over this dang cussin' habit!" he lamented. "Maw she nearly had me broke off from it, for you know a cussin' preacher wouldn't make his salt in this day and age. Folks wouldn't take to him; he wouldn't make his salt. If I was like that feller, Joel Langworthy, you saw here at the well yesterday evenin', I'd be

whoopin' her up, red-hot—I'd be handin' 'em out hell-fire right on the shovel! That man can talk—he could rope 'em in right and left—he's got a gift."

"A gift of gab?"

Arkansaw was serious; he twisted his head in his wise impressive way, and made a humming noise of depreciation and denial, his purse lips held clenched until he could take his feet from the porch railing and spit. Thus freed he laughed.

"Grandmaw used to tell about a feller that wore such a high collar he had to stand on a stump to spit over it," he said. "Like me, only it's my feet. I never try to spit over my feet 'less I'm a standin' on somepin' high."

"So Joel's got a gift, has he?"

"You' right he has—the whisperin' gift. "He can tame horses with it. He can tame the wildest stud-horse you can fetch him. He's done it more'n once.

"A man that't got the whisperin' gift or a woman, either—can draw people with it, the same as he can animals, if he wants to. Used to be an old woman back in Kain-tucky when grandmaw was a girl that had the whisperin' gift. She was as ugly as a mud fence stake-an'-rider with tadpoles, and she smoked and dipped and cussed, but she could whisper a young man up to her and marry him any time she wanted to. She done it more'n once, grandmaw used to say."

"But Joel doesn't appear to whisper the voters up on election day," Randolph suggested.

"HE COULD if he could be all around at one time—if he wanted to put the strain on his mind, I reckon. Anyhow, Joel he don't want to make a show of his power—he's mighty touchy on it, somehow, and won't even tame down a horse for a neighbor any more.

"Used to a good while ago—tamed a stallion for Dutch Gus, over on Little Sugar, that was dangerouser than any lion that ever was put in a cage. Killed a hired hand, and might nigh bit Gus's leg off. Joel went in the barn alone with him and shut the door. What it was he whispered to that horse no man knows, but d'rec'ly here he come leadin' him out when folks begun to think it was about time to start a wagon off for a coffin.

"That horse he was as tame as a calf after that, and no matter what time of the day or night Joel used to pass Gus's place that horse he'd nicker to him, and come a-tearin' up to the fence like he was meetin' kin-folks if he was loose. Beat anything the way that horse he'd take on after Joel, right along till he died."

"I've heard of Irish horse-tamers who had the knack of saying magic words to an animal and breaking its wild spirit that way, but I never heard it called a whispering gift before."

"That's what it's called here, and I don't reckon one man in a billion's got it. If I had Joel's gift you wouldn't ketch me hangin' around down there in the Narris, runnin' for office and feedin' stock and potterin' around like him."

"You'd be preaching and calling them up to repentance."

"No, I wouldn't—not by forty rods! I'd be up in Kansas City makin' five dollars a day tamin' range horses for them stockyards fellers. You can git ten dollars a day a head more for broke horses 'n you can for range ones, and I bet you they'd be proud enough to fork over five dollars a day to a man that could tame down fifteen or twenty head."

"They could afford to well enough," Randolph agreed, amused by Arkansaw's peculiar blending of shrewdness and simplicity. "Did Joel ever tame any other horses but Dutch Gus's?"

"Yes, he tamed a pile of 'em around here, but he ain't touched one for eight or nine years. He seemed to be kind of ashamed the way that stud of Dutch Gus's took on after him, like he was a half-brother or a blood relation of some kind."

"Sensitive about it," nodded Randolph.

"As a feller with a sore neck. Well, look a-yonder Mystery"—calling into the window—"here comes Hugh!"

"Already?" said Mystery with soft intonation of surprise. "He must have come down on the two o'clock." She was near the window, and must have heard their talk about Joel and the whispering gift.

The visitor was coming forward with a gait too brisk for a dweller in that place. He carried a small bag slung over his shoulder by a strap and a guitar-case in his hand. Off a little way down the path he raised his straw hat to Mystery.

Arkansaw went forward to receive him at the steps, sending his greeting ahead of him in loud words.

Arkansaw presented the visitor as Mr. Atchison, and Mystery took his hard little straw hat and carried it into the house like some precious thing that she feared might blow away, handling it as she would have touched a turkey egg. Mr. Atchison gave it up with a preoccupied and self-distant air, and refused to take off his coat at Arkansaw's solicitation, seating himself solemnly, brushing his long reddish hair back from his forehead with a sound rising from his bosom like a sigh.

HE WAS a man of fair stature, raw-joined and red, dressed in a suit of unbleached linen, which he carried in the manner of a man conscious of setting up a style for which there was no precedent, and doubtful of its reception.

He was a meditative man, with a drawing of concentrative effort about his features which caused him to look as if he considered whistling softly, or as if he had just left off a tune and had not yet composed his face. The hinges of his jaw were prominent, his face lean and studious. He held his chin high, with a little outstraining pose; his eyes were hollow and hungry, with a look in them as of one who had failed but had not surrendered.

Randolph gathered from the conversation that he had been away in the city, and from Mr. Atchison's eyes that he was in love with Mystery Gregg; that he was the schoolteacher in that district, of which Moss Gregg was an officer.

He also remarked of Mr. Atchison that when he was not drawing his face in that contemplative soundless whistle, he sat biting his teeth together as if holding himself to some resolution by driving his will. This dry biting made the muscles lump and swell in little kernels on his hard jaw, and gave him a cast of determination that redeemed his homely face.

The schoolmaster was chasing forty pretty closely, Randolph estimated, and he was such a hard and muscular man that his walk over the hot white road from the station had not even marred his tall white collar, above which he held his chin like a horse looking over a half-door into pastures which he could not crop.

He thawed out into a pleasant and genial man after a little while, and Randolph put his first stiffness down to the sudden coming into the presence of his adored lady, who treated him as if he was a boy. He was a man of large general information and no small learning, and seemingly above both the appreciation and the need of that community.

It was difficult for Randolph to adjust his mind to the limitations of his visit to the Narris country, sitting there among them on the porch in the declining afternoon. It seemed to him that he had come into a part there as naturally as if he had been born to it, and Arkansaw and Mystery accepted him on that footing of peculiar equality with themselves which isolated people usually are slow to accord. Only the schoolmaster seemed apart in his solemn way—a way that made Mystery laugh at him, all out of her character of slow serenity, and play with him with her eyes, and ripple around him like sunny waters around a grim old rock.

Almost at the same hour that he had passed on the day before, Joel Langworthy came driving again to the well in his dusty buggy, which appeared not to have benefited in any particular by the rain.

He drew himself a pail of water, hitched

his team and came in, waving his hand in all-embracing greeting, taking his hat off midway of the path to express his respect for Mystery, and coming on bareheaded and reverently in his exaggerated chivalry.

Joel shook hands with them all, smiling and full of apt words, refusing the chair proffered by Mystery, and seating himself on the steps.

"I've only got a minute to stop," he protested, although he settled his hat on his knee as if he meant to make a comfortable stay, "I just saw you-all up here lookin' so cool and comfortable I couldn't pass without comin' in to say howdy!"

"We'd a took a slight if you'd 'a' passed on, Joel," Arkansaw told him.

Mystery did not add her welcome in words, but there was more in the silence that had fallen upon her at Joel's coming than any spoken greeting could have given him. Randolph marked with surprise that her cheeks had grown pale and her eyes strangely large, as if from fright. But there was that looking out of them which betrayed the adoration of her heart for this extraordinary man.

HE WAS not alone in marking this sudden change in the young woman. Hugh Atchison saw it, and the hunger in his eyes deepened. He drew his chair around a little as if expressing a protest, or announcing to the company that he had withdrawn from it, and took a little blue book from his pocket, which he made a pretense of reading.

But Randolph, watching his eyes, saw that they were fixed over the page upon the fair half-face of Joel Langworthy, whose oiled tongue was capering like a colt in a pasture. Now and again the schoolmaster lifted his gaze to Mystery's face, with dumb yearning, as if he struggled to break the enchantment that held her captive at Joel Langworthy's feet.

Gracefully, in the long practice that had made it an art, Langworthy had settled himself on the steps with the blighted side of his face turned from them.

The talk ran on, from crops and politics to the school, Atchison replying courteously enough when addressed directly, but taking no initiative. Joel flashed his quick eyes to Randolph presently, coming in a politician's way last to the point first in his mind.

"They tell me you've come here to explore the wreck of the old *Morning Star*, Mr. Randolph?"

"I was under the impression that you knew it yesterday, Mr. Langworthy," Randolph laughed, "for news seems to leak out of a stranger here in the Narris before he is aware that he's leaving a trickle behind him as he goes along."

Langworthy's dark face clouded with a flush at Randolph's first words, and cleared with a smile as he proceeded in compliment to the penetration of those insular people.

"Oh, you do us too much credit," he said. "I could have guessed yesterday, if I'd had the curiosity"—he turned his eyes about as if to call witnesses to his guileless and unsophisticated nature—"for when a stranger comes in and hunts up Captain Gregg, after a visit to the Narris, we put two and two where they belong to make four. We've had long experience in it; others have been here on the same business, Mr. Randolph."

Langworthy shook his head and dropped his voice to low pitch, as if he spoke of the dead.

"There is nothing to conceal in my mission here, as I have told Captain Gregg and others," Randolph said. "I have come here in the hope of exploring the *Morning Star* and searching for a key"—he turned with malicious suddenness upon the theme that Moore's expression of the night past had suggested, feeling, somehow, that Joel Langworthy did not wish him well of his quest—"a key that was lost when she went down, and which means considerable to me if I can find it."

"A key?" said Langworthy, surprised out of his polite smoothness; "what a strange thing to hunt for in a wreck!"

Arkansaw turned an astonished glance

upon Randolph, and the schoolmaster lifted his wistful eyes from his pretended reading, Mystery looked up from her contemplative study of the worn boards, flashing a glance at Randolph from her splendid eyes that thrilled him like sudden music.

"Why, I thought, Mr. Randolph—" she began, caught herself blushing in confusion.

"A key," repeated Randolph convincingly.

"I never heard of quite so strange a search," said Langworthy thoughtfully. "Do you think you have much of a chance to find it after all this time—don't you suppose it's rusted away by now?"

"It's a chance that I'll take if I get permission, Mr. Langworthy."

"A key," said Langworthy, turning it over with a sound of strangeness. He laughed and looked up quickly into Randolph's face. "We're a curious crowd down in the Narris, Mr. Randolph, and we'll never be able to take a night's rest again till we know what that key's wanted to unlock. Since there's nothing secret, as you said—"

"Certainly not," said Randolph, fixing his impertinent questioner with grave eyes; "we'll call it the key to the world, and let it go at that."

No change came over the placid features which Langworthy presented to the company, but Randolph knew that he understood.

"Well, I wish you luck in your search for it, Mr. Randolph," he said, "and if you find it, I hope it will let you in to enjoy the ease, the pleasure, the fame, and the consequence which are denied to so many of us in this life."

Langworthy spoke oratorically, with studied inflections and declamatory attemps to polish it off and make it beat like a tune, succeeding only in causing it to sound hollow and insincere, almost ridiculous, in Randolph's ears. The schoolmaster glanced over his page with contemptuous look, shut up his book and put it in his pocket.

Joel shook hands all round again, and parted from them as tenderly as if he was about to embark on a perilous voyage, a reunion after which was most uncertain.

When he was gone Arkansaw went to hitch up and drive to the railroad station after Randolph's baggage, a task for which he had been engaged the day before.

Atchison invited Randolph to walk with him to the schoolhouse, which stood a little way along the road past Moss Gregg's well.

CHAPTER XI

THE BOATS ARE COMING

"I USE the schoolhouse as a study in vacation days," Atchison explained as they set forth; "my little library is there—I do a good deal of work between terms. I want to show you."

"How long have you been here?" Randolph inquired.

"This will be my fifth year," Atchison replied, letting go a little fluttering sigh.

"What do you think of Joel Langworthy by now?"

"Well," said the schoolmaster thoughtfully, holding a long pause after the word while he walked on with bent head, "a man seldom is like the face that he presents habitually to the world."

"I liked him better yesterday, the first time I saw him, than I do today."

"That is contrary to the general experience, for Joel generally improves on acquaintance. In many ways he is a remarkable man. . . . I'm glad it rained last night—it will revive the grass around the schoolhouse."

They came in sight of the school as he spoke, standing back a little from the roadside, the low white building fronted by a broad, deep lawn, tall walnut trees towering darkly cool above its modest roof. It was so unusual for a country school that Randolph stopped in surprise to look again.

White posts supporting a looping chain divided the grounds from the road, and on

either hand shrubs and flowers were grouped in artistic balance. Above it all there spoke first the force of a directing hand, and the new vision that Hugh Atchison had brought into that slumbering community at the river side.

"Of course it wasn't this way when you came," said Randolph conclusively.

"The natural possibilities were present, we improved them," the teacher said, his homely face quickening with modest pride at this spontaneous praise. "The boys take care of the lawn when I am away. I bought them a lawn-mower. The board wouldn't have anything to do with it; suggested a scythe; stood out pretty stubbornly for a scythe, in fact."

Atchison unlocked the door, requesting Randolph to wait outside until he had opened the windows and shutters and let in the air and light. He went banging the shutters back against the weatherboards on one side, back along the other, and appeared in the door presently, perspiring and smiling, host in his own proper domain.

"I employ myself here at times during the vacation, relieving in some degree the monotony of bare walls," said the master. He waved his hand with lofty gesture, his head thrown back, his eyes roaming the interior, but all in the attitude of self-depreciation and reluctant modesty of one who works from the heart.

"Fine!" said Randolph, surveying the bewildering display of chirographic art which the walls presented. "Great stuff, Mr. Atchison, gr-eat stuff!"

The master had turned the walls of the schoolroom, from wainscot to ceiling, into one great blackboard, upon which he had expended his penman's passion for curves, stems, strokes, with a result truthfully amazing.

When the wonders of the walls had been discussed, and Atchison had satisfied himself that his possessions had not been disturbed in his absence, they turned back again toward Captain Gregg's, where, the master explained, he boarded while keeping the school.

RANDOLPH expressed surprise as they returned along the road where the shadow of the corn reached far and broke the last blistering touch of the sun, that a man of Atchison's parts should sequester himself in the backwoods when he might be giving, as well as receiving, more in a bigger field. Atchison let go that soft fluttering little sigh again, which seemed to rise from his lips unconsciously.

"I could have done better. I have just refused an offer with a much bigger outlet, Mr. Randolph, but I've stayed on. A man creates ties, you know; they grow up around him unseen.

"He's not aware of them sometimes until he attempts to go away. Then they assert their hold upon his heart; they twine and pull him back. Many a man has wasted the energy of his life in a quiet place, unknown because he lacked the courage to tear the ties that clasped him."

"That is true. I have known such instances myself. All my life I have been passing the stranded hulks of men who died alive before I was born because they were not brutal enough to break away. It calls for a certain brutality to make a go of it in this world, Mr. Atchison, don't you think?"

"Yes; that is why so many of the unworthy succeed. Ah-h-h, if only the worthy alone could command the passport to success!"

"But the winning of it makes a man worthy, in a way—a limited way perhaps, doesn't it?"

"It opens the door to a man where he could not have passed on his merits without it; success translates the plebian, apothesizes the scoundrel. It is the world's gold-plating which elevated the base to the standard of excellency. No, success alone never made an unfit man worthy—it never can."

"I suppose you are right about it, Mr. Atchison; I never have gone into a philosophical contemplation of it—I've been too absorbed trying to get on the wagon myself."

"You have looked at the note only, without investigating the security. But I am not discounting success; success is every true man's ambition and end. I am an older man than you, Mr. Randolph."

"Not much older," said Randolph, feeling that experience counted for a good deal.

"Several years. And I have not put down the shuttle yet; I am still weaving."

"And there is Joel Langworthy, he is still weaving, but his pattern does not seem to come right. Gregg told me he had been running for office ever since he was able to vote."

"He is an ambitious man—one of the kind to gather the fruits of the earth in the excess of his desserts."

The schoolmaster's face darkened when he spoke of Joel Langworthy in these terms. He was freer now in Randolph's company than he had been on the way over, due perhaps to having admitted him to the fellowship of his art. Randolph believed that Atchison could illuminate the strange character of Joel Langworthy if he would loosen his tongue.

"He impresses me as a man who keeps part of his mind in shadow, as he does his face," Randolph said.

Atchison nodded and walked on with his chin high, his hungry eyes far away from the road that his feet were following. They were almost at the well. As they drew up to it the teacher stopped.

"When a man lives a lie," said he, with grave look into Randolph's eyes, "he must set all the sentinels of his wit to guard that lie like he would watch a jewel. Even at that, in spite of his best care, the world will surprise the lie out of him one day.

"I have stayed on here in this country, Mr. Randolph, as I have said, out of sentimental considerations. But not from that reason alone—far from that alone. There is a piece of stern work for my hand here; there is a wolf that I have set out to strip of his lamb's skin. And I'll do it as sure—as sure as there's truth in mathematics, I'll do it!"

THE schoolmaster's hand trembled on the rope as he finished. He said no more, but lowered the bucket and drew fresh water, drinking as if a fever had fallen on him.

After supper they sat again on Gregg's porch, Arkansaw with his pipe, Randolph in the relief of fresh white linen out of his trunk. The schoolmaster seemed to have picked up spirits. He had grown easy in his way, and voluble at times in his speech, into which he contrived to bring many a sly joke, and light exploration as if for any sign of breach in Mystery's heart wall, which shut him out so completely of all in it that he desired to share.

Gregg had not come back, although he was expected every hour; and while Mystery waited to serve him his supper on arrival, she brought out the schoolmaster's guitar and pressed him to sing. It did not require a world of persuasion to induce him to pitch his melody, for, removed from the blighting presence of Joel Langworthy, and over his first timidity in the presence of a stranger whom he had taken now on the full footing of a friend, the schoolmaster had become almost juvenile.

Yet the solemnity of his face did not change, except when laughter broke its stern surface; and now when he sang he looked away with countenance in grave and ludicrous contrast with the simple, foolish little song. Mystery had requested it.

Caleb Moore came riding to the gate before the song was ended, and beckoned Randolph to him. The old man greeted him warmly. He was glowing with excitement, a look of animation almost as fresh as the vigor of youth in his face. Randolph felt his hand tremble as he leaned from the saddle, and did not know, indeed, whether to allow his own hope to jump forward again in its old strong way, or to prepare to put it out entirely under the damp leaves of disappointment.

It was plain that something had hap-

pened to move the old man as he had not been disturbed in many a year. He looked about in the thickening twilight to make sure that they were alone, and drew Randolph nearer, with a hand on his shoulder, leaning over to speak as close as possible to his ear.

"I had just about made up my mind to decide against you this morning, Randolph," he said, "but since then intelligence has reached me that puts a new face on my affairs. Randolph, the boats are coming back to the Missouri!"

"Commerce-carrying boats, sir?" asked Randolph, his heart sinking, a feeling of pity sweeping over him for the man who had followed a dream so long, he believed, that its fugacious lure had turned him mad at last.

"It's in the Kansas City paper that came today," said Moore; "you can see it at my house. A company has been organized to restore river commerce. The boats are coming back, sir, as I always have said they would. After all my years my hope is not wasted. I'll live to see them, Randolph; I shall be vindicated!"

"This is remarkable news!" said Randolph, strange emotions crowding upon him, strange thoughts.

"After talking it over with my granddaughter, I hastened up to see you," Moore continued. "If anything is to be done about the old wreck, Randolph, it must be done at once. The boats will be back on the river within a month, the paper announces; and when the commerce returns to the Missouri, the Missouri will come back to the Narris—as sure as the judgment of God!"

"It will have to hurry to beat me to it," Randolph declared.

"I HAVE considered it all, Jonathan—weighed it up and down—and I have concluded that an old man on the verge of the grave has no right to stand between you and your chance. Only you must shoulder the risk, and absolve me beforehand of all responsibility for anything that may happen to you in your search for this guilty treasure of the *Morning Star*."

"Whatever danger there is, sir, I assume freely and willingly, and free you of all responsibility for anything that may overtake me. You have warned me, you have advised me against the exploration of the wreck, sir; the danger that's in it only seems to sharpen my appetite for it."

"It's that way when a man goes after money anywhere, lad. But you will remember that at least one life that we know of, and three others as we believe, have been lost in this grim business, Randolph."

"I haven't forgotten it, sir."

"You assume the same risk that they took when you go ahead, for you are going farther than any man, living or dead, has gone. I am powerless to turn any threatened danger, and I want you to believe that I shall be innocent of any disaster that may overtake you in this, Randolph, even to the loss of life itself."

"I release you, fully and freely, from all responsibility, Mr. Moore."

"I'd like you to set it forth in writing, Jonathan."

"I'll do so, sir."

"And hand it to me in the morning, before you begin your work of locating the wreck."

"I'll have it ready, sir."

"You might also specify the terms on which this exploration is undertaken, Jonathan. That I will leave to you, only looking to you to be fair and square in the interest of her who will be the last of my blood and kin when I am gone to my long rest."

"I would propose equal terms, the expense of the work to be shared out of anything that may be found; and if nothing is found, then the expense to be borne solely by me."

"I think you are overliberal in that, Jonathan," the old man said, shaking his head. But through the gloom Randolph could see that his face brightened, and he drew himself up a little stiffer.

"I'd feel like a plunderer on any other terms."

The old man laid his hand gently on Randolph's shoulder with that familiarity of usage that told he had been accustomed to such paternal caress in days past, and there was something in the manner of it that started a pang in the young man's heart. How much had come and gone in that old man's life; how he had defined the blasting stroke of bereavement and sorrow, the loss of consequence and wealth! Strong as an old gray oak he stood yet, a monument of a man among the faulty clay works around his feet.

"Randolph, you're not a business man; you'll never be a business man, as the world interprets that appellation, thank God!" Moore said. "Keep your feet out of that muck, lad; walk in the high places, even if you walk hungry and absolutely alone."

He turned his horse and rode away along the river road, his proud old head carried high, his strong old back as straight as a cathedral wall that carries the weight of centuries without a groan. Randolph stood watching after him as the dusk blended him into the shadows of the trees, and looked after him still when only the faint pluff of his horse's feet on the sandy road came back.

"What a man!" said he. And again, as he put his hand to his forehead, where the sweat had sprung in heavy drops, he repeated: "What a man!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Noise, Please

NOT long ago a New York high-school teacher inflicted an intelligence test on his pupils while a siren screamed steadily and an airplane motor roared. The idea was to discover the effect of noise on students' efficiency; the synthetic racket came from a phonograph record.

One pupil scored seven points better than he did under peaceful conditions. But the rest of the class averaged some three points lower—a significant and disturbing fact. For in this representative group only one person was equipped to meet his future, only one was acclimated to the unpleasant climate of his time. To survive, the generation to come must be able to thrive on the vicious discord of motor horns, guns thundering and the bellow of a dictator's voice.

—*J. Wentworth Tilden*

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

He was beating the man steadily, efficiently, with a truncheon

In Case of Accident

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "Ghost of the Teave," "Midas of the Mountains," etc.

The wise hitch-hiker sticks to the highways, but Freddy didn't—and so he caught a ride on a sedan with no driver that was headed straight for Hades

DIRECTING Freddy to the lower road was the farmer's idea of being funny. "Well, there's a turn-off to your left a little piece along here, an' there's a sign says it goes to Caxton, an' so it will when they're finished with it."

"I see," said Freddy.

"Ought to put up a detour sign. Cars that want to go on to Caxton got to turn back agin after a couple miles."

"Then I keep right on straight?"

"That's it. Only way you'll ever git a lift. No through traffic on the new road."

"Thanks," Freddy called. "Thanks ever so much!"

The farmer did not answer. He was chuckling to himself, but Freddy Hart did not hear this. Freddy trudged on. It was late afternoon, and after dark, as he well knew, drivers weren't likely to stop. If he could reach Caxton by the next afternoon he was reasonably sure he could get a job. So he walked. He was not one of your hitch-hikers whose activities are all hitch and no hike. He wasn't afraid of exercise. Besides, in case any cars appeared he figured he had a better chance if walking than if standing still and merely jerking his thumb.

Unfortunately no cars appeared.

In about half a mile he came to the new road on the left. There were two signs, one, brand new, pointing to the left and reading: *Caxton (Wilsbacher Hill Route) 13 miles,* while the other, which was very old, pointed ahead, and on it was painted: *Caxton, 19 miles.* Freddy trudged straight ahead. The farmer would have guffawed had he seen this. Funny—oh, very funny!

From the very beginning it seemed a forgotten way. This was not merely because of the silence—the busiest highways are sometimes silent for a little while—nor was it just because of the fact that the old and lumpy pavement was abviously neglected: It was only natural that the Highway Department should let this particular road got to pot, as long as they were about to open a new and shorter route to Caxton. No, it was more than that. It was the feel of the place.

Nevertheless he walked on, swinging his arms. He walked five or six miles—it was good and dark by that time—and not a car passed in either direction. Two deserted service stations he saw, but no lights of a farmhouse.

He was a husky lad, and likely enough he would have walked all night, had it not been for the rain. He didn't dare to get his only suit wet. He ducked under a tree.

The rain came in large solemn drops. There was no viciousness about it; rather it descended with a kind of weary patience, a certain formality. But it was persistent and it was thorough. Nobody could say it didn't know its duty.

Soon the tree began to spill water from higher leaves to lower ones, from the lower leaves to Freddy Hart.

He turned up his coat collar, and bolted.

Further along the road, he'd observed a blurred space, a clearing, some sort of building.

Olde Logge Cabin.

As a matter of fact, the logges did not look a bit olde, yet the place was dark and there was about it an air of desolation and premature decay. It had never been much good: now it was getting ready to fall to pieces. Two gasoline pumps rose wanly out of a block of concrete. The paint was peeling from their sides. The hoses had been detached.

The roof's overhang was not sufficient to shelter him, and he backed against the door. It swung open.

He fell. He rose, rubbing his elbows. He cried "Hello?" but echoes were his only answer. He began to prowl.

On top of a wooden counter was a dirty glass showcase, empty except for some broken cigar boxes and cigarette cartons. Three worn tires sagged against a wall. In a corner was a pile of old grease tins, lubricating oil bottles, nuts, tire irons, rusty wrenches, sodden rags.

The place was draughty, but dry.

Underneath the counter were four or five clean burlap sacks. Freddy Hart was not a hobo. He was a young man down on his luck and eager to get a job, who had taken to the road only because he didn't have bus fare. But he was human. The sacks looked and felt inviting. And it was certainly raining like hell.

Five minutes later he was sound asleep.

When he awoke it was to see the strangest sight of his life.

THERE was a light in the place. This was the first thing he knew, and perhaps the thing which had awakened him. Scared, on hands and knees he crept to the end of the counter and peered out into the Olde Logge Cabin.

The light evidently came from a lantern on the counter itself, but there was another light, an electric flash, in the hands of a man who stood in the doorway. He played its beam upon two men and two women who were rolling back and forth in the gravel between the building and the deserted gas pumps.

"Come on," said the man in the doorway. "Call that action? Roll, will you? *Roll!*"

He was about forty years old, lean, small, whippy in his movements. He had the flash in his left hand, while in his right he held two pieces of sandpaper and a

heavy rubber truncheon. He was no farmer, for he wore a sleek brown double-breasted business suit, a belted yellow raincoat, shiny black shoes, a black fedora. Freddy could not see his face.

Another man, large and heavy, bareheaded, extremely blond, came pushing past him from outside. His face was freckled, and the brows over his very dark blue eyes were so light as to be almost invisible. He carried two sheets of canvas.

"Better tack these over the windows. They're boarded up, but the light would show through the cracks. Not likely any car will pass, but there's no sense taking any chances."

"Good idea," muttered the man in the doorway. Then he called outside: "You! Harrison! Come here!"

One of the men stopped rolling and limped into the cabin. By his clothes and face, he might have been a small-town grocer. He looked scared. He was covered with gravel, and his hands were cut in half a dozen places.

"Stand right there," said the man in the doorway, switching the sandpaper to his other hand.

He turned, and Freddy saw his face for the first time. It was a thin, leering and curiously lopsided face: his mouth twisted one way, his eyebrows another, and his knife-like nose wobbled back and forth as though it couldn't decide which way to go. Yet there was nothing funny about that face. It was cunning, and cruel.

"Hold still," he said, and deliberately hit Harrison across the back of the head with the truncheon.

Harrison went "Ugh!" squeezing his eyes shut and tipping forward on his toes. He muttered something and staggered to the far wall and leaned there against it.

The man with the raincoat pocketed the flashlight, dropped the truncheon. "That's enough," he called outside. "The rest of you come in too." He produced a small dark bottle and an eyedropper. "Come here," he said to Harrison. "Tip your head back."

Harrison obeyed, meek as a lamb.

"Stand still! Belladonna."

The blond man had finished thumbtacking canvas over the windows, and when the others came inside the door was closed.

"Listen, Mr. Warenke—"

"Shut up! All you got to do is just what you're told. Anders and I'll do the rest. So long as my name don't come into it, it's an absolute cinch." He snarled at Harrison: "Hold still!"

Warenke certainly was a criminal, an old hand; and Anders the blond might also have been; but not the others. Middle-class, middle-aged, frightened, covered with gravel and mud, they blinked in the light of the lantern.

Warenke put away the belladonna. He picked up the truncheon and handed this to the other male roller.

"All right, Simms. Let's see you go to work on your wife." He chuckled unpleasantly. "Good practice for you."

One of the women turned her back, and Simms began to belabor her with the truncheon. He was sobbing.

"You got to do better'n that! Come on! Shoulders and hips mostly!"

Under the counter, peeking out, Freddy Hart swallowed twice. He closed his eyes and kept them closed for perhaps a full minute. When he opened them again the Simms' had turned about and Mrs. Simms was clubbing her husband, who clung to a windowsill, moaning, his eyes shut. Anders was rubbing the other woman's hands and bare forearms with sandpaper—rubbing them very hard, lacerating the skin. She whimpered in pain.

"Shut up," said Anders.

Harrison cried: "Now listen! You don't have to be as rough as all that! My wife don't have to—"

"Shut up!" he added: "Take one of those razor blades over on the counter there and slice up your hands and face a little. You don't have to cut deep."

FREDDY HART pulled his head in. He sat on the burlap, covered his face with his hands, tried to think. The

rain went on endlessly. Nearer sounds were the scuffling of feet, thin squeals of pain, the rasp of sandpaper, the thud of that heavy rubber truncheon.

"All right."

Except for the rain, then, there was silence. Freddy peeked out again.

Mr. and Mrs. Simms and Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, everyday people, stood in the middle of the room facing Warenke, whose back was to Freddy. They stood in a ragged line; and at the end of that line, gazing down it in disgust, like a top sergeant who gazes at a squad of rookies, was Anders. He held the various instruments of injury, and his mouth was critically canted, his eyes squeezed small, as though even now he was not entirely satisfied with what had been done.

Mr. and Mrs. Simms and Mr. and Mrs. Harrison made a pitiful sight. Their torn clothes were gritty with dirt and gravel; their eyes were bloodshot; they were bruised, cut, battered. Mrs. Harrison was weeping silently.

"Now we'll go over it all once again," Warneke said harshly. "You were driving, Harrison. Anders here started to pass you. He gave you the horn but he wasn't driving fast. Then another car came along from the opposite direction, going like hell. You didn't see what make it was or anything, because he didn't have his lights on, understand?"

They nodded nervously.

"Anders did the only thing he could do to avoid a head-on collision—he sideswiped your car. That knocked you into the fence, and you went right through that fence and down the side of Wilsbacher Hill. You remember going through the fence. You don't remember anything else. That clear?"

Simms quavered: "Wha— what about the fence?"

"We'll fix the fence. Now listen: Harrison, you got a concussion. That's what that bump on your head's for and that's why I gave you the belladonna to make the pupils of your eyes swell up. The rest of you are hurt all over so bad you don't know what you've got. But the big thing is shock. Shock, see?

"You can't do anything, you're helpless, you can't think straight, you can't pick anything up and be sure you're going to be able to hold onto it. The concussion's easy. I've done it before lots of times. Ain't a doctor anywhere can call you a liar. But the rest of you—*shock!* They can X-ray you and tell there's no bones busted, but shock's different. They got to take your word for that—and what the layout looks like.

"The place where your car's going to land is only about half a mile from here, and when everything's all set I'll come back and take you all there cross-country. It don't make any difference if you get your feet muddy. When the rescuers arrive you'll be all walking around the wreck and moaning and yelling anyway. Anders will stay up on the road to wigwag the first car that comes along."

"Couldn't a car"—it was Harrison again—"couldn't a car come along before we got on the scene?"

"It could, but it ain't likely to. From that part of the road we can look back and forth several miles each way, and we'll pick a time when there's no headlights in sight. But if one should come along too soon Anders here'll throw hysterics and keep them from climbing down the hill for a little while. It won't take long for you to get there from here. I know the way."

He put his fists on his hips, cocked his head. His voice was thick with contempt.

"The big thing is to keep your mouths shut—and don't sign anything unless Faber tells you to! And another thing—I told you this before but I want to impress it on you—don't ever mention my name!

"You don't know me, you never heard of me. You people are all right, nice respectable married people. And Anders here's all right too, as far as that goes. No police record. But if once the insurance dicks or the D. A.'s office begins to suspect I have anything to do with

the business—well, that just mustn't happen. I'll fix everything, but I'm never going to appear personally, understand?"

He nodded at Simms, at Harrison.

"You guys are out of work anyway, so losing the time won't mean anything. Your car, Harrison, is covered. All right. You'll get more for it as a wreck, from the accident insurance people, than you'd ever get for it on the used-car market anyway.

"They'll take you to a hospital, of course. When you get out you'll still be all broken up. Shock, see? The liability insurance company will pay the hospital bills and the doctors' bills, but you might as well have to have private nurses for a few weeks after you're out. Your daughter can do it, you said, Harrison? And your sister-in-law, Simms? Good.

"They can put in a bill for twenty-five a week, and Faber will see they get it. That you can keep. And you also keep two hundred bucks apiece out of what Faber collects. We pay Faber ourselves. You don't have to worry about that.

"How much Anders and I will get I don't know. We're taking that chance. Anders carries liability insurance to the tune of ten thousand, and I think we all ought to come out all right. But just let me repeat once more—"

HE TOOK something from under his left armpit. Freddy could not see what it was, but the eyes of the "accident" victims were filled with fright.

"This is going to be my last job in this state, and I want it to go off right. And it will, as long as you people use your heads and keep your mouths shut. But once my name comes into it—well, the insurance people would love nothing better than to get something on me. So my name isn't ever going to be mentioned, now or later, see? Otherwise . . ."

He put the thing away.

"I mean that," he said quietly.

He buttoned his double-breasted coat. He started toward the door. Suddenly he swerved, glaring at Mrs. Harrison.

"What's the matter with you?"

Excepting Mrs. Harrison and Anders, they had all been looking at Warenke. Even Freddy Hart had been looking at Warenke. Now Freddy looked at Mrs. Harrison—and saw that she was staring at him. Her mouth was open. She pointed.

"Look! Behind the counter there—a man."

Eyes swiveled in his direction. Those of Warenke, tiny and dark in that curiously lopsided face, were without any expression. Warenke said "Oh," and unbuttoned his coat again. He walked with small stiff steps to the end of the counter.

"Hello, buddy."

Freddy rose, dusting his suit.

"Hello," he said. "I was just taking a little snooze."

"That so?" Warenke with his left hand reached for the flashlight on the counter. "Anybody there with you? No, I see there isn't." He put the flashlight back.

"I just came in to get out of the rain. The door was open."

"Oh, the door was open?"

They were all looking at him. He straightened his coat, straightened his tie.

"Yeah. So I just came in. Caught a little nap. But I guess there's no use hanging around. I guess it's going to rain all night anyway, and I might as well get wet now as later."

He started for the door.

Warenke said: "Wait a minute, buddy."

"What?"

Freddy paused, half turning.

"I said wait a minute."

Anders came over and stood next to Freddy, possibly eighteen inches away, watching Warenke. Then for a long time nobody moved. The only sound was that of the rain.

The amateurs had been frightened before; they were close to panic now. They were in the presence of crime, and it paralyzed them. Cheating an insurance company, of course, was not the same thing. Cheating an insurance company was practically being honest, like cheating the government when you made

out your income tax statement or when you lied to customs inspectors. But the way Warenke kept his hand under his coat, and the way he and Anders looked at this young man—that was something different.

"You folks stay here," Warenke said after a while, not ever turning his head or eyes toward them. "Anders and I are going to speak to this kid a few minutes outside."

Simms burst out: "Now see here! We don't want to have any—any rough stuff. We won't stand for that!"

"Rough stuff?" murmured Warenke as though in amazement. "Certainly not. What made you think that? No, no! We're just conducting a little business deal, that's all. You just wait here a few minutes." He jerked his chin toward the door. "Come on, buddy."

FREDDY went. There didn't seem to be anything else to do. He paused just outside the door, reluctant to step into the rain.

"That car on the left, buddy. Get in the front seat."

It was a Chevrolet sedan and very old. Anders climbed into the seat next to him, shoving him behind the wheel. Warenke got into the tonneau. Anders began to search him.

"You won't find much," Freddy said brightly.

They paid no attention. Anders without a word handed back to Warenke everything taken from Freddy's pockets, everything, in fact, that Freddy owned in this world: a toothbrush, a tube of toothpaste, a pocket comb, a nailfile, a handkerchief, a letter of introduction to a hotel owner in Caxton, and an imitation leather wallet containing six dollars, a driver's license and a picture of his mother. Using his flashlight, Warenke examined these articles.

"So you drive a car, eh? Working?"

"No. Looking for a job. That's what that letter's for."

"I see. Know anybody in Caxton?"

"No. Never been there before."

"Where are your folks?"

"Both dead. I've got no home."

"I see," Warenke said thoughtfully. He was silent a moment. Then his head came up. "Anders, go inside and tell them that Mr."—the driver's license gave the name—"Mr. Hart here has agreed to cooperate with us in this little business deal."

"If you think I'm going to get mixed up in any crooked work—"

"Kid," said Warenke, "there ain't any sense committing suicide, is there?"

Freddy was silent.

"All right. Now turn around. I'll tell you where to drive. Anders, you follow us as soon's you've quieted 'em inside there."

They went back over the way Freddy had walked. It was dark and wet, and the road was bad. They didn't pass anybody or see any lights. At the intersection Warenke said:

"Up that new road on the right, up the hill."

"A man told me that wasn't open yet."

"He must have been stringing you. It's been open more'n a month. Nobody takes that other road now except maybe a few old farmers who live around there, and they'd be in bed by this time."

The new road certainly was better, though no broader, being barely wide enough for two cars to pass. It climbed gradually, yet it seemed roughly parallel with the other, older road.

After about five miles of it Warenke commanded a stop. Freddy obeyed; and they sat in darkness, while rain clattered on the pavement and rolled in large oily drops down the windshield.

"That's where we just came from, down there," Warenke said suddenly. "You could almost chuck a stone down on the roof."

Freddy swallowed, and asked: "What do you expect me to do?"

"Nothing at all, buddy. Nothing except what you're told."

After a while another car approached from behind. Freddy was watching it in the mirror. It was stopped about a hundred feet back, and the lights went out. Presently

Anders appeared. He was wearing a cap now, and his coat collar was turned up.

Warenke asked: "Anything in sight, up or down the line?"

"Not a thing."

"Well, we might as well have the bang-bang. Get out, kid."

THEY stood on the far side of the highway while Anders backed his car a short distance and then drove ahead as fast as it would go. When he came alongside the Chevrolet he spun the wheel, and mirror. It was stopped about a hundred feet

"Not bad," Warenke said casually, as an expert, "but you better do it once more. Better scrape off a little more paint."

The screech of steel set Freddy's teeth on edge, the way the sound of a slate pencil or of dry leather rubbing dry leather does to some people. He was almost trembling when the second crash came. He thought of making a break, but there was no cover nearby, no bushes, and Warenke was watchful, never standing too close, never moving too far away.

"That's better. Can you back away now? Good!"

On the right side of the road, the side on which they were parked, was a stout white rail fence. Beyond, Wilsbacher Hill fell away sharply, almost cliff-like, a distance of perhaps four hundred feet. There were no trees on the hill at this point, though there were many stiff ugly upjuttings of rock.

Apparently the two rails of one fence section had been doctored in advance. Warenke and Anders took them out, and Anders with an axe fetched from his car easily split and splintered them so that they resembled rails broken by the impact of an automobile. Then he used the axe on both cars, freely and noisily; but there was nobody else to hear. Besides, there was no wind, and the warm steady rain blanketed sound like a fog.

Once another car came, from the direction of Caxton. The three men crouched behind the Chevrolet. Only the driver was in the other car, and probably he saw nothing at all, for the two "wrecked" automobiles were far over on the side, and the pavement was wet and treacherous so that he had to watch his driving.

"Well, I think we're just about set now."

"Except for one thing," said Anders.

"What's that?"

Anders flipped a thumb toward Hart.

"You still haven't said what you're going to do about Sweetheart!"

"Oh, I got that all figured out. Come here."

They talked in low tones, Warenke out of a corner of his mouth, all the time watching Freddy sideways, while Anders kept his head down, frowning. Anders didn't seem to like the proposition, whatever it was. Warenke became angry. "Well, if you think I'm trusting an ordinary pick-up to keep his mouth shut, when I'm . . ." Freddy could not hear the rest.

Anders shrugged and walked to his own car, while Warenke, smiling a lopsided smile, walked toward Freddy.

And it was then, seeing Warenke coming toward him, that Freddy knew what they were going to do with him.

They were going to kill him.

He knew this as firmly, as definitely as though they had both told him in so many words. He did not for an instant doubt it. How they were going to conceal his body, how they were going to explain his absence to the four nervous victims in the Olde Logge Cabin below, he could not guess and didn't care. What he knew, what he was sure of, was that they were going to kill him.

Warenke came at him with a smile. It was meant to be pleasant, but there was no pleasantness in this man, and the smile in fact was a thin leer, a contortion of the mouth. He no longer held his right hand thrust under a lapel of his coat; but he did not keep it far from there; and the coat was open, so that Freddy could see a leather strap of the shoulder holster.

"Yes, everything's all right now, kid. Listen: You were hitch-hiking, see? And the Simmses and the Harrisons, they

picked you up. Just a little distance down the road."

He was talking only to talk, to keep Freddy's attention. He underestimated Freddy's intelligence. Freddy was paying no attention to what he said. Freddy was listening for Anders.

Rainwater dribbled off the downturned brim of Warenke's fedora, and when he forced that crooked laborious smile his teeth showed yellow.

"You didn't know who they were, see? But naturally you were glad to get the ride. Now they drove along to right about here, and then another car came along going fast as hell, understand? No lights on. And just about—"

He was not a good actor. Freddy caught the glint of anticipation in the small hard eyes, and additionally Freddy heard a pebble crunched behind him. He sprang, swinging a wide right.

IT CAUGHT Warenke flush on the chin and rocked him back on his heels. It hurt Freddy's fist. At the same instant one end of a tire-iron intended for Freddy's head clanged upon the pavement, and Anders swore with pain. Freddy ran.

He was young and he was fast, desperate too, and had his luck been with him he might have escaped. Anders threw the tire-iron, threw it wildly, cursing. It was by mere chance that it hit. But it did. It struck Freddy behind the right knee, and Freddy went sprawling.

He was up again, but by that time they were on him.

One driving uppercut found Warenke's abdomen, and Warenke made a strangled sound and sat down; but this was the end of the fight. Anders caught Freddy from behind, pinioning his arms.

Warenke rose, his face pale with rage. Very slowly he approached Freddy, and his mouth jerked down at one corner, jerked and twitched, while his eyes blazed in fury. His right hand went under his coat —and Freddy squeezed his eyes shut.

It was like a push on the side of the head. It did not hurt. It gave him a curiously light feeling, but at the same time his limbs felt very tired. He did not trouble to open his eyes.

That push again. No, he was not being shot. There was no noise except a dull dogged humming and spluttering. But he wasn't standing up any more. Somebody was holding him.

He heard Anders ask: "Think that's enough?"

"If it isn't," he heard Warenke reply, "he'll get the rest on the way down. And if even that isn't enough I'll take a look in before I go back for the rest, and make sure of the job."

"How 'bout the stuff in his pockets?"

"I'm putting that back now."

Freddy could not feel anybody fumbling at his pockets; but then, he could not feel anything at all, for a little while. He knew now that he had been hit on the head with Warenke's pistol. He knew what was happening when they tossed him into a car.

"Let's get this engine going. It's got to be in high when she goes over. . . . Ah, there we are!"

The car was moving in an idiotic, wobbling way. The left wheels, front and back, were impeded by crumpled fenders.

"How you going to keep those people down below from going haywire when they hear about it?"

"It was an accident. The kid was helping us put this crate over, and he got caught and went along with it. Sheer accident. But that means that if we ever get nailed we might all face a murder rap. That ought to scare the gizzards out of 'em! Catch on? It makes the crash look better, makes their shock more convincing. And it scares them so they won't ever dare to open their traps. And at the same time it fixes this kid so's he never can open his.

"You all right now?"

"Yeah, go ahead and get your own car in the right place. I can jump off this crate in time. I've done it often enough!"

Freddy Hart heard all this, and even understood it, though he did not move and thought that he never could move again.

He knew where he was: he was in the back seat of the Chevrolet. He knew what was about to happen: Warenke was about to drive the Chevrolet through the gap in the fence, jumping off just before it started to tumble down the hillside. But all this did not seem to mean much. Nothing meant much. He was tired.

Not until he heard the car door slam, and opened his eyes to see Warenke, did he really come to full consciousness. Warenke was on the running-board, holding the gas throttle with one hand while with the other he gripped the wheel. Freddy reached behind his head for a door handle. Warenke saw him, and swore. "So you want more, eh?" Warenke released the throttle, reaching for his pistol, leaning further into the car.

The car slipped to the right. It gave a jolt. Freddy released the door, braced his feet. Warenke started to pull his head back.

The car slid to the right; then lurched angrily. All air seemed to be sucked out of it. The floor swung upward.

Freddy heard a scream, or the beginning of one. He pushed open the door. He jumped.

YES, it was like doing the street car company out of a fare, or putting a plugged quarter into the gas meter. At least, so they told themselves over and over again, as they waited in the Olde Logge Cabin and listened to the patter of the rain. It wasn't, they told one another, like real cheating. Nevertheless they were nervous.

Harrison's head ached, naturally. He wondered whether it was possible that he really did have a concussion. Mrs. Simms was worried about the cuts her husband had made in his hands and neck with that dirty old safety-razor blade. He ought to put iodine on them. But of course all he did put on was that reddish-brown stuff Mr. Warenke had left in an old baking-powder can. The more blood the better, Mr. Warenke had said. And he seemed to know what he was talking about.

One source of assurance was the fact that a lawyer was in on the business. Lawyers were smart men. People said that Mr. Faber had some pretty strange clients, but nobody ever denied that he was smart. As long as he was in it they'd be all right. Why, it was Mr. Faber himself who had put the thing to them in the first place, and introduced them to this Mr. Warenke and Mr. Anders. If a lawyer couldn't—

"I hope we haven't kept you waiting!"

Not Mr. Warenke stood there when the door was opened, but a tall man with glasses and a gray mustache. He smiled.

"Just want to take your statements, and then we'll let you go to your doctor. You look as though you need it. I'm District Attorney Alden."

Then into the cabin walked three state troopers—and the young man who had been under the counter. One of the troopers pulled out a pad and pencil. The young man was covered with mud and gravel, and his wet clothes were torn; there was a bandage on his head; but there was a grin on his face.

"No sense holding us up with denials. I'm sure you're all prepared to tell the truth right here and now and save everybody concerned a lot of trouble. Go easier on you afterward, if you do. Because we have a complete case. Anders has escaped, but we've got an alarm out for him. And Warenke's under arrest."

The District Attorney picked up the baking-powder can.

"Been smearing yourself with this, eh? Warenke certainly has faith in the old tricks!" He handed it to a trooper. "Probably chicken blood mixed with dirt. We'll have a precipitin test made."

He did things fast; and almost before they knew it he was shooing them out to a car driven by another trooper, who, he said, would take them home. The women were weeping, but they'd signed their names, as had their husbands. No deception was left in them.

"Insurance people will be delighted about Warenke," the District Attorney chattered on, "but what I'm most pleased

about is catching that rat Faber. I've been trying to get him debarred for years."

"Mr.—uh—District Attorney. What happened to Mr. Warenke?"

"Oh, yes. Forgot to tell you that. He was about to push this lad over the edge of Wilsbacher Hill, in your car, but this lad managed to jump out and run to a farmhouse and telephone me. But Warenke got caught. The belt of his shoulder holster, where he carried his automatic, got hooked in the door handle and he went along with the car. Wasn't killed. Probably wishes he was. Both legs broken, one arm, three or four ribs, Lord knows what else. The man's staged dozens of phoney accidents, but this time he had a real one, and the only damages he'll collect will be most of the rest of his life in jail."

He turned his back on them. He cocked his head, looking at Freddy. His hands were deep in the pockets of his raincoat, his feet were spread wide.

"As for you, my hero, you look pretty ragged out. I should think you would be! I'll take you home myself. Where do you live?"

"Well, as a matter of fact"—Freddy was embarrassed—"as a matter of fact, I don't live anywhere. I was on my way to Caxton when all this happened. I—I have a letter of introduction to a Mr. William Weiss, who runs the Atlas Hotel there."

"Bill Weiss? Old friend of mine! We'll take you to the Atlas and get you properly fixed. I shouldn't worry about that suit. The insurance people will be only too glad to fit you out with a new one, after they learn what you've done."

"Well, wait! This letter, it isn't exactly a letter of introduction. I mean, it *is*, only —I was going to ask Mr. Weiss if he'd give me a job, and maybe at this time of night he—"

"Give you a job? Listen, son, I happen to know that a good portion of Bill Weiss' spare change is invested in the very liability insurance outfit this bunch were trying to gyp. Give you a job? Hell, he'll probably give you the hotel! Come on."

GLAMOUR GUY

Michael O'Dare was Hollywood's handsomest gift to the feminine heart; and one of his least spectacular private amusements was pushing peanuts around with his nose. With Dan Harden for nursemaid, he descended on Paris—and woke up one morning to face a murder charge. An exciting short novel by
FREDERICK C. PAINTON

SAILING BUM

They called Bill Trevenna a professional yachting guest—until a wall of fog and the scream of a steamer's siren gave him a moment in which to justify a lifetime. An unusual short story by
RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—FEBRUARY 11TH

"Come on," I cried. "I'll show you how to fight them." And even the girl took up a sword

The Synthetic Men of Mars

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

This is the chronicle of Vor Daj, panthan *in the service of John Carter, Warlord of Mars; and of what befell them when they went in search of the great scientist, Ras Thavas:*

WE FOUND Ras Thavas a prisoner in the marsh-city of Morbus, as we were ourselves. He had discovered the means of manufacturing indestructible life-tissue, and he had created a race of weird, mal-proportioned monsters, the *hormads.* They, in turn, envisaging the conquest of the whole planet, were holding him captive and forcing him to produce *hormad* warriors in unlimited quantities.

Carter and Ras Thavas managed to make their escape; but I remained behind to be near our fellow-captive, the girl Janai. When Tor-dur-bar, a friendly *hormad* was rewarded for bravery by being given the normal body of one Gantun Gur, called the Assassin of Mars, I persuaded Ras Thavas to transfer my brain to Tor-dur-bar's discarded body, so that I might pass as a *hormad* and have more opportunity to help Janai, whom Ay-mad, the chief ruler of Morbus, coveted.

JANAI liked and trusted Vor Daj, but I dared not tell her that his mind now inhabited the fearsome monstrosity that was Tor-dur-bar. John Carter had promised to bring Ras Thavas back to Morbus after the scientist had cured John Carter's ailing princess; then Ras Thavas, for he alone could perform the delicate operation, would restore me to Vor Daj's body. If they did not return I was doomed to live my life out as Tor-dur-bar.

Vor Daj's true body had been placed in safety in underground vault 3-17; but now it, too, was threatened with the disaster that seemed likely to engulf the city, even the whole planet of Mars. For, with the departure of Ras Thavas, the culture in one of the life-vats had got beyond control. A hideous

This story began in the Argosy for January 7

growth, formlessly compounded of arms and legs and screaming heads that fed upon itself, spread slowly through the palace and escaped into the city streets, destroying all human life that came in its way.

With Janai, and Tun-Gan—the brain of Tor-dur-bar in Gan-Tun's body, rechristened—and three others, we escaped from the city. But we became separated. Janai was recaptured, and I flew back to Morbus to rescue her. By a ruse, I managed to free her from the guard sent to take her to Ay-mad; and, stealing one of the great flying birds of Morbus, we took flight, with no other thought than to cross the Toonolian Marsh and reach safety. . . .

CHAPTER XIX

THE MIGHTY JED OF GOOLIE

SOME time after noon, it became apparent that the *malagor* had about reached the limit of its endurance. It began to drop closer and closer toward the marshes, and presently it came to ground upon one of the largest islands that I had seen. It was a very pretty spot, with hill and dale and forest land, and a little stream winding down to the lake, a most unusual sight upon Barsoom. The moment that the *malagor* alighted, it rolled over upon its side throwing us to the ground, and I thought that it was about to die as it lay there struggling and gasping.

"Poor thing!" said Janai. "It has been carrying double for three days now, and with practically no food at all."

"Well, at least it has brought us away from Morbus," I said, "and if it recovers it is going to take us on to Helium."

"Why to Helium?" she asked.

"Because it is the only country where I am sure you will find asylum."

"And why should I find safety there?" she demanded.

"Because you are a friend of Vor Daj; and John Carter, Warlord of Barsoom, will see that any friend of Vor Daj is well received and well treated."

"And you?" she asked. I must have shuddered visibly at the thought of entering Helium in this horrible guise, for she said quickly, "I am sure that you will be received well, too, for you deserve it far more than I." She thought for a moment in silence, and then she asked, "Do you know what became of the brain of Vor Daj? Sytor told me that it was destroyed."

I wanted to tell her the truth; but I could not bring myself to it, and so I said, "It was not destroyed. Ras Thavas knows where it is; and if I ever find him, it will be restored to Vor Daj."

"It does not seem possible that we ever shall," she said, sadly.

It did not seem likely to me either, but I would not give up hope. John Carter must live! Ras Thavas must live! And some day I should find them.

But what of my body lying there beneath the Laboratory Building of Morbus? What if the mass from Vat Room Number Four found its way into 3-17? The thought made me shudder; and yet it was not impossible.

If the building and the corridor filled with the mass, the great pressure that it would exert might quite likely break down even the massive door of 3-17. Then those horrid heads would devour my body or, on the other hand, if the mass spread from the island out across the marshes, it would be forever impossible to get my body back again. Had any human ever been confronted with so miserable a dilemma?

My thoughts were suddenly called to other channels by an exclamation from Janai.

"Look!" she cried.

I turned to see a number of strange creatures coming toward us in prodigious leaps and bounds. That they were some species of human being was apparent, but there were variations which rendered them unlike any other animal on Mars.

They had long, powerful legs, with knees always flexed except immediately after the take-off of one of their prodigious leaps; and long, powerful tails; otherwise, they seemed quite human in formation.

As they came closer, I noted that they were entirely naked except for a simple harness which supported a short sword on one side and a dagger on the other. Besides these weapons, each of them car-

ried a spear in his right hand. They quickly surrounded us, remaining at a little distance from us, squatting down with knees bent and supporting themselves on their broad, flat feet and their tails.

"Who are you, and what do you here?" one of them demanded.

"We were flying over your island," I explained, "when our *malagor* wearied and came to ground to rest. As soon as we are able, we shall continue on our way."

The fellow shook his head. "You will never leave Gooli," he said. He was examining me closely. "What are you?" he asked.

"I am a man," I said, stretching the point a little.

He shook his head. "And what is that?" He pointed at Janai.

"A woman," I replied.

Again he shook his head. "Ridiculous. She is only half a woman," he said. "She has no way of rearing her young or keeping them warm. If she had any, they would die as soon as they were hatched."

Well, that was a subject I saw no reason for going into, and so I kept silent. Janai seemed slightly amused, for if she were nothing else she was extremely feminine.

"What do you intend to do with us?" I demanded.

"We shall take you to the *Jed,* and he will decide. Perhaps he will let you live and work; perhaps he will destroy you. You are very ugly, but you look strong; you should be a good worker. The woman appears useless, if she can be called a woman."

I WAS at a loss as to what to do. We were surrounded by fully fifty warriors, well though crudely armed. With Tor-durbar's terrific strength, I might have destroyed many of them; but eventually I was sure that they would overpower and kill me. It would be better to go with them to their *Jed* and await a better opportunity for escape. "Very well," I said, "we will go with you."

"Of course," he snapped pettishly. "What else could you do?"

"I could fight," I said.

"Ho-ho. So you would like to fight, would you?" he demanded. "Well you'll get all the fighting you could ask for when you meet our mighty *Jed.* Come along. We haven't got all day, you know."

They led us back along the stream and up over a little rise of ground, beyond which we saw a forest, at the edge of which lay a village of thatched huts.

"That," said the leader, pointing, "is Gooli, the greatest metropolis in all the world. There, in his great palace, dwells Anatok, *Jed* of Gooli and all of the Island of Ompt." He seemed very puffed up about it.

As we approached the village, a couple of hundred people came to meet us. There were men, women and children; and when I examined the women I realized why the leader of the party that had captured us thought that Janai was not wholly feminine.

These Goolians of the Island of Ompt are marsupials—oviparous marsupials. The females lay eggs which they carry in a pouch on the lower part of their abdomen. In this pouch the eggs hatch, and in it the young live and take shelter until they are able to fend for themselves.

It was quite amusing to see the little heads protruding from their mothers' pouches as they surveyed us with wondering eyes. Up to this time I had believed that there was only one marsupial upon Barsoom, and that a reptile; so it was remarkable to see these seemingly quite human people bearing their young in abdominal pouches.

The creatures that came out from the village to meet us were unnecessarily rough with us, pulling and hauling us this way and that as they sought to examine us more closely.

I towered above them all and they were a little in awe of me; but they were manhandling Janai horribly when I barged in, pushing them away so forcibly that they fell squealing to the ground. Whereupon

two or three of them drew their swords and came for me; but the party that had captured us acted now as a bodyguard and defended us from attack.

After this they kept the rabble at a distance, and presently we were ushered into the village and led to a grass hut much larger than the others. This, I assumed, was the magnificent palace of Anatok.

Presently the *Jed* himself emerged from the interior with several men and women and a horde of children. The women were his wives and their attendants; the men were his counsellors.

Anatok was a pettish, eager little man who seemed much interested in us and asked us endless questions about our capture, and he asked us whence we came.

"We came from Morbus," I said, "and we are on our way to Helium."

"Morbus—Helium," he repeated. He snapped his stubby fingers. "Never heard of them. Little villages, no doubt, inhabited by savages. How fortunate we are to live in such a splendid city as Gooli. Don't you think so?"

"I think you would be very much happier in Gooli than in Morbus, and far more at ease here than in Helium," I replied, tactfully. "Our countries," I continued, "have never harmed you. We are not at war; let us go on our way in peace."

At that he laughed. "What idiots come from other villages!" he exclaimed. "You are my slaves. Don't you see? When you are no longer of service to me you shall be destroyed. Do you think that we want any strangers to go away from Ompt to lead enemies here to destroy our magnificent city and steal our vast riches?"

"Our people would never bother you," I said. "Our country is too far from here. If one of your people should come to our country, he would be treated with kindness. We fight only with our enemies."

"That reminds me," said the leader of the party that had captured us, "this fellow is our enemy by his own words. He said he wanted to fight."

"What!" exclaimed Anatok. "Well, if that is so, he shall have his wish. There is nothing that we like better than a good fight. With what weapons would you like to fight?"

"I will fight with anything that my antagonist chooses," I replied.

CHAPTER XX

DUEL TO THE DEATH

IT SOON appeared that a personal combat was a matter of considerable importance to the Goolians. The *Jed* and his advisors held a lengthy discussion relative to the selection of an antagonist for me. The qualities of a number of warriors were discussed, and even their ancestors as far back as the fifth and sixth generation were appraised and compared.

It might have been a momentous matter of state, so serious were they.

The conference was continually interrupted by suggestions and comments from other members of the tribe; but at last they selected a husky young buck, who, impressed by the importance now attaching to him, launched into a long and windy speech in which he ennumerated his many virtues and those of his ancestors while belittling me and bragging about the short work he would make of me.

He finally concluded his harangue by selecting swords as the weapons we were to use; and then Anatok asked me if I had anything to say, for it seemed that this speechmaking was a part of the ceremony preceding the duel.

"I have only a question to ask," I replied.

"And what is that?" demanded Anatok.

"What will be my reward if I defeat your warrior?" I asked.

Anatok appeared momentarily confused. "Now that is an outcome that had not occurred to me," he said; "but of course, after all, it is unimportant, as you will not win."

"But it might happen," I insisted, "and if it does, what is to be my reward? Will you grant freedom to my companion and myself?"

Anatok laughed. "Certainly," he said. "I can safely promise you anything you ask for; for when the fight is over you will have lost, and you will be dead."

"Very good," I replied; "but don't forget your promise."

"Stop saying that over and over like a ninny!" demanded Anatok. "Aren't you going to tell us how good you are, and how many men you have killed, and what a wonderful fighter you are? Or aren't you any good?"

"Talk proves nothing," I said, weary of his jabber. "My antagonist has boasted enough for a dozen, and he might continue to do so indefinitely without drawing any blood or harming me in any way. He has not even frightened me, for I have heard men boast before; and those who boasted the loudest usually had the least to boast about."

"It is evident," said Anatok, "that you know nothing whatever about the warriors of Gooli. We are the bravest people in the world; and our warriors are the greatest swordsmen. It is because of these attributes that we are the most powerful nation in the world, which is evidenced by the fact that we have built this magnificent city and protected it for generations, and that we have been able during all this time to safeguard our vast treasures."

I looked around at the mean little village of grass huts and wondered where Anatok's vast treasures might be hidden, and of what they consisted.

"I see no evidence of great wealth or of any treasure," I said.

At this, Anatok flew into a rage. "You dare doubt me, you hideous savage?" he cried. "What do you know of wealth or treasures? Your eyes have probably never rested upon anything that compares with the riches of Gooli."

"Show him the treasure before he dies," cried a warrior. "Then he will understand why we have to be such a brave and warlike people in order to protect and hold it."

"That is not a bad idea," said Anatok. "Let him learn by his own eyes that we of Gooli do not boast about our wealth, just as he will learn by experience that we do not boast about our bravery and swordsmanship. Come, fellow, you shall see the treasures."

HE LED the way into his palace, and I followed with a score of warriors pressing about me. The interior of the grass hut was bare, except for a little of dead grass and leaves around the walls which evidently served for beds; some weapons; a few crude cooking utensils; and a large chest that stood in the exact center of the building. To this chest, Anatok conducted me; and, with a grand flourish, raised the lid and exhibited the contents to me as if to say, "Now there is nothing more in the world for you to see; you have seen everything."

"Here," he said, "are the riches of Gooli."

The chest was about three-quarters filled with marine shells. Anatok and the others watched me closely to note my reaction.

"Is that the treasure?" I asked. "These are nothing but shells."

Anatok trembled with suppressed rage. "You poor, ignorant savage," he cried. "I might have known that you could not appreciate the true value and beauty of the treasure of Gooli. Come, on with the fight; the sooner you are destroyed, the better off the world will be. We Goolians cannot abide ignorance and stupidity; we, who are the most intelligent and wisest people in the world."

It appeared that the preparation for the duel was a ceremonious business. A procession was formed with Anatok and his counsellors at the head. Then, following my antagonist, was a guard of honor consisting of about ten warriors. Behind these, I trailed; and would have been alone but for the fact that I took Janai with me.

The rest of the tribe, including warriors, women and children, followed behind us. It was a remarkable procession in that it was all procession and no audience. We marched around the palace once and then

down the main street and out of the village. The villagers formed a circle, in the center of which were I, my antagonist and his guard of honor.

At a word from Anatok I drew my sword; so did my antagonist and the ten warriors with him. Then we advanced toward one another.

I turned to Anatok. "What are those other warriors doing there?" I asked.

"They are Zuki's assistants," he replied.

"Am I supposed to fight all of them?" I demanded.

"Oh, no," replied Anatok. "You will only fight Zuki. His assistants only help him if he gets in trouble."

I turned again toward Zuki and his helpers. They were coming toward me very, very slowly; and they were making absurd faces at me as though in an effort to frighten me. The whole thing struck me as so ridiculous that I could not help laughing; yet I knew that it was serious, for the odds of eleven to one were heavily against me, even though the eleven might be inferior swordsmen.

I thought this face-making business might work two ways, so suddenly I twisted mine—or rather Tor-dur-bar's, for I have no wish to claim it—into a horrible grimace; and with a wild shout, leaped toward them.

The reaction was amazing. Zuki squalled in terror and fled, colliding with his assistants who were also ready to run. I did not pursue them; and when they saw that I had not, they stopped and faced me again.

"Is this the courage of the Goolis?" I asked Anatok.

"Be quiet. You have just witnessed a fine piece of strategy," replied Anatok. "Only you are too ignorant to appreciate it."

Once again they came toward me, but more slowly still; and this time they voiced a kind of war-whoop.

I WAS just about to rush them again when a woman screamed and pointed down the valley. With the others, I turned to see what had attracted her attention, and discovered half a dozen savages such as those which had attacked our boat while Gan Had, Tun Gan, and I had been searching for Sytor and Janai.

At sight of them, a great wail rose from the villagers. The women and children and all but a handful of warriors ran for the woods; and I couldn't tell whether those who remained did so because they were paralyzed with fright and unable to run, or because a sudden access of courage.

Zuki, my late antagonist, was not among them. He and Anatok were racing nip and tuck for the woods in advance of all the others.

"Who are they?" I asked a warrior standing near me.

"The man-eaters," he replied. "After their last raid, we were chosen to be the sacrifice when they should come again."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"If we do not willingly give up five warriors to them when they come, they will attack the village and burn it, they will take our treasure, they will steal our women and kill as many of our men as they can find. It is simpler this way; but it is hard on those who are chosen. However, we have no alternative but to obey, for if we did not the tribe would kill us with torture."

"But why give up to them?" I asked. "There are only six, and we are six; let's fight them. We have as good a chance as they."

They looked at me in surprise. "But we never fight anyone," they said, "unless we outnumber them ten to one. It would not be good strategy."

"Forget your strategy," I snapped, "and stand up against these men with me."

"Do you suppose we could?" one asked, awed.

"It has never been done," another answered. "I am sure it has never been done."

"That is no reason why it can't be done now," I told him. "If you will give me a little help, we can kill them all."

"Give me a sword," said Janai. "I will help."

"We might as well try it," said one of the Goolians. "We are going to die anyway."

The savages were now quite near. They were laughing and talking among themselves and casting contemptuous glances at the Goolians.

"Come on," said one, "throw down your arms and come with us."

For answer, I leaped forward and clove the fellow from crown to breastbone with a single stroke.

The five Goolians came forward slowly. They had no stomach for fighting; but when they saw the success of my first blow they were encouraged; and, in the same measure, the savages were taken aback. I did not stop with the one but pushed on toward the remainder of the savages.

I now met with a little competition; but Tor-dur-bar's great reach and his enormous strength gave me an advantage which they could not overcome, with the result that three of them were soon down and the other three running away as fast as they could go.

At sight of the enemy in retreat, something which they had probably seldom seen in their lives, the Goolians became demons of bravery and set out in pursuit of them.

They could easily have overtaken them, for they moved in great bounds that carried them twenty feet at a time; but they let them escape over the edge of the plateau; and then they came bounding back, their chests stuck out and their expressions beaming with self-satisfaction.

Evidently the encounter had been witnessed by those in hiding in the woods, for now the entire tribe came straggling toward us. Anatok looked a little shamefaced, but his first words belied his expression. "I should be very cross with you for not minding me. But now you see the value of our strategy," he said. "By appearing to run away in fright, we lured them on and then destroyed them."

"You are not fooling anyone," I said. "You are all a pack of windbags and cowards. I saved the five men that you would have given up as tribute. You permitted six savages to rout you and all your warriors. I could kill you all single-handed, and you know it. Now I demand that you reward me for what I have done by permitting me and my companion to remain here in safety until we are able to make plans for continuing our journey."

"You don't have to threaten," he said, plaintively. "It was my intention all along to give you your liberty as a reward for what you have done. You may remain with us or go and come as you please. You may stay as long as you like, if you will fight against our enemies when they come." And he looked so plaintive and helpless that I had to forgive him. He was just like a child.

CHAPTER XXI

CAPTIVES OF AMHOR

THE next day Janai and I went to look for our *malagor* to see if he had recovered; but we could find no trace of him. I assumed that he had either flown away or been seized by the savages, who, Anatok told me, came from another island some distance from Gooli.

I immediately set to work building a boat, and in this work the Goolians helped me a little although they were extremely lazy and tired easily. They were without doubt the most useless race of people I had ever encountered, expending practically all their energies in boasting and making highflown speeches about their non-existent virtues.

Within a few hours after the encounter with the savages, they were boasting of their great victory and taking all the credit to themselves; Anatok claiming most of it for his marvelous strategy, as he called it.

There are lots of people in the world like the Goolians, but some of them are never found out.

I became quite friendly with Zuki in the weeks that followed while we were building the boat. I found him rather above aver-

age intelligence and the possessor of a rudimentary sense of humor which the other Goolians seemed to lack entirely.

One day I asked him why they considered the shells such a valuable treasure.

"Anatok has to have the treasure," he replied, "in order to give him a feeling of superiority; and it was the same way with the rulers who preceded him; and, in fact, with all of us. It makes us feel tremendously important to have a great treasure; but, being a cautious people, we chose a treasure that nobody else would want. Otherwise, warlike people would be coming constantly to steal our treasure from us.

"Sometimes I think it is a little silly, but I would not dare say so to Anatok or to any of the others. All their lives they have heard of the great value of the vast treasure of Gooli; and so they have come to believe in it. They do not question it because they do not wish to question it."

"And they feel the same way about their vaunted courage and the strategy of Anatok?" I asked.

"Oh, that is different," replied Zuki quite seriously. "Those things are real. We are really the bravest people in the world, and Anatok the greatest strategist."

His sense of humor had gone the limit in questioning the treasure. It couldn't stand the strain of doubting the valor of the Gooli or the strategy of Anatok. Perhaps the Goolis were better off as they were, for their silly egotism gave them a certain morale that would have been wholly lacking had they admitted the truth.

Janai worked with me with the boat, and so we were much together; but I always had the feeling that I was repulsive to her. She never touched me, if she could avoid it; she did not often look directly at my face, nor could I blame her. Yet I was sure that she was becoming fond of me as one does of an ugly but faithful mastiff. It made me wish that I really were a dog, for at least then she would have caressed me; but I was so much uglier than even a *calot* of Mars that I should always be repulsive to her no matter how kindly she might feel toward me.

These thoughts made me wonder about my own poor body. Was it still safely hidden in 3-17, or had the door burst open and the horrid mass from Vat Room Number Four engulfed and devoured it? Would I ever see it again? Would I ever again possess it, and animate it with this brain of mine which existed solely for Janai without her being aware of it? It all seemed hopeless, and now that we had lost our *malagor* the trip to Helium appeared quite impossible.

At last the boat was completed, and the Goolians helped me carry it to the lake. They stocked it with provisions, and they gave me extra spears and a sword and dagger for Janai. They bragged about the building of the boat, telling us that it was the best boat that was ever built and that no one but Goolians could have built it. They bragged about the weapons they gave us and the provisions.

We left them still boasting; and set out upon our perilous journey westward through the Great Toonolian Marshes.

VAST expanses of the Great Marshes are uninhabitable by man, and for a week we passed through dismal wastes where not even aborigines could live; but we encountered other menaces in the form of great reptiles and gigantic insects, some of them of enormous proportions with a wing-spread well over thirty feet. Equipped with powerful jaws and rapier-like stingers, and sometimes with both, these monsters could easily have annihilated us; but fortunately we were never attacked.

The smaller reptiles of the marshes were their natural prey.

A week after we left Gooli we were paddling across one of the numerous lakes that dot the marshes when, low above the horizon ahead of us, we saw a great battleship moving slowly in our direction.

"John Carter!" I cried. "He has come at last. Janai, we are saved."

"And Ras Thavas will be with him," she said, "and we can go back to Morbus and resurrect the body of Vor Daj."

"Once again he will live, and move, and love," I said, carried away by the relief and happiness which this anticipation engendered.

"But suppose it is not John Carter?" she asked.

"It must be, Janai; for what other civilized man would be cruising above this hideous waste?"

We stopped paddling and watched the great ship approach. It was cruising very low, scarcely a hundred feet above the ground and moving quite slowly. As it came nearer, I stood up in the canoe and waved to attract attention, even though I knew that they could not fail to see us for they were coming directly toward us.

The ship bore no insignia to proclaim its nationality, but this is not unusual in Martian navies where a lone vessel is entering into potential enemy country. The lines of the ship, too, were quite unfamiliar to me. It was evidently one of the older ships of the line, many of which were still in commission on the frontiers of Helium. I could not understand why John Carter had chosen such a craft in preference to one of the swift new type; but I knew that he must have a very good reason which it was not mine to question.

As the ship drew nearer it dropped still lower; and finally it came to rest just above us. Landing tackle was lowered to us through a keel port, and I quickly made it fast to Janai's body so that she could be raised comfortably to the ship. While I was engaged in this, another tackle was lowered for me; and soon we were both being hoisted toward the vessel.

The instant that we were hoisted into the hold of the vessel, I realized that this was no ship of Helium.

Janai turned toward me with frightened eyes. "Neither John Carter nor Ras Thavas is on this ship," she whispered. "It is no ship of Helium, but one of the ships of Jal Had, Prince of Amhor. I should have been as well off in Morbus as I shall be now, if they discover my identity. It was to get away from Jal Had that I ran away from Amhor in the first place. Oh, help me, Tor-dur-bar. . . . Please."

"You must not let them know," I said. "You are from Helium; remember that." She nodded in understanding.

The officers and sailors who surrounded us were far more interested in me than they were in Janai, commenting freely upon my hideousness.

We were immediately taken to the upper deck and before the officer in command. He looked at me in ill-disguised repugnance.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "And where do you come from?"

"I am a *hormad* from Morbus," I replied, "and my companion is a girl from Helium, a friend of John Carter, Warlord of Mars."

He looked at Janai long and earnestly for a moment. Then a nasty little smile touched his lips.

"WHEN did you change your nationality, Janai?" he asked. "You needn't attempt to deny your identity, Janai; I know you. I would know that face anywhere among millions, for your portrait hangs in my cabin as it hangs in the cabin of the commander of every ship of Amhor; and great is to be the reward of him who brings you back to Jal Had, the Prince."

"She is under the protection of the Warlord of Mars," I said. "No matter what reward Jal Had has offered you, John Carter will give you more if you return Janai to Helium."

"Who is this thing?" the commander demanded of Janai, nodding his head toward me. "Weren't you his prisoner?"

"No," she replied. "He is my friend. He has risked his life many times to save me, and he was trying to take me to Helium when you captured us. Please do not take me back to Amhor. I am sure

that, if Tor-dur-bar says it is true, John Carter will pay you well if you bring us both to Helium."

"And be tortured to death by Jal Had when I get back to Amhor?" demanded the commander. "No! Back to Amhor you go; and I shall probably get an extra reward when I deliver this freak to Jal Had. It will make a valuable edition to his collection, and greatly amuse and entertain the citizens of Amhor. If you behave yourself, Janai, you will be treated well by Jal Had. Do not be such a little fool as you were before. After all, it will not be so bad to be the Princess of Amhor."

"I would rather mate with Ay-Mad of Morbus," said the girl; "and sooner than that, I would die."

The commander shrugged. "That is your affair," he said. "You will have plenty of time to think it over before we reach Amhor." He then gave instructions that quarters were to be assigned to us and that we were to be carefully watched but not confined if we behaved ourselves.

As we were being conducted toward a companionway that led below, I saw a man dart suddenly across the deck and leap overboard. He had done it so quickly that no one could intercept him; and though the commander had witnessed it no effort was made to save him, and the ship continued on its way.

I asked the officer accompanying us who the man was and why he had leaped overboard.

"He was a prisoner who evidently preferred death to slavery in Amhor," he explained.

We were still very low above the surface of the lake, and one of the sailors who had run to the rail when the man had leaped overboard called back that the fellow was swimming toward our abandoned canoe.

"He won't last long in the Great Toonolian Marshes," commented the officer, as we descended toward our quarters.

Janai was given the best cabin on the boat; for they expected that she would be Princess of Amhor, and they wished to curry her favor. I was relieved to know that at least until we reached Amhor she would be accorded every courtesy and consideration.

I WAS taken to a small cabin which accommodated two and was already occupied by another man. His back was toward me as I entered, as he was gazing out of a porthole. The officer closed the door behind me and departed, and I was left alone with my new companion. As the door slammed, he turned and faced me; and each of us voiced an exclamation of surprise. My roommate was Tun Gan, whose brain had been Tor-dur-bar's and whose body had been Gantun Gur's. He looked a little frightened, when he recognized me, as his conscience must have been troubling him because of his desertion.

"So it is you?" I said.

"Yes, and I suppose you will want to kill me now," he replied; "but do not blame me too much. Pandar and I discussed it. We did not wish to desert you; but we knew that we should all die if we returned to Morbus, while if he and I went on in the canoe we at least might have a chance to escape."

"I do not blame you," I said. "Perhaps under identical circumstances I should have done the same thing. As it turned out, it was better that you deserted me, for because of it I was able to reach Morbus in a few hours and rescue Janai when she arrived with the party that had captured her. But how do you happen to be aboard this ship?"

"Pandar and I were captured about a week ago; and perhaps it was just as well, for we were being pursued by natives when this ship dropped down, frightening the natives away. We should doubtless have been captured and killed, otherwise; and I for one was glad to come aboard, but Pandar was not. He did not wish to go to Amhor, and slavery. All that he lived for was to get back to Phundahl."

"And where is Pandar now?" I asked.

"He just leaped overboard; I was watching him when you came in. He swam to the canoe, which I presume is the one you were taken from, and he is already paddling along on his way to Phundahl."

"I hope he reaches it," I said.

"He will not," prophesied Tun Gan. "I do not believe that any man alive can pass alone through the horrors of this hellish swamp."

"You have already come a long way," I reminded him.

"Yes, but who knows what lies ahead?"

"And you are not averse to going to Amhor?" I asked.

"Why should I be?" he asked, in turn. "They think I am Gantun Gur, the assassin of Amhor; and they treat me with great respect."

"Amazing!" I exclaimed. "For the moment I had forgotten that you had taken the body of Gantun Gur. Do you think that you can live up to it and continue to deceive them?"

"I think that I can," he replied. "My brain is not as dull as that of most *hormads*. I have told them that I received a head injury that has made me forget a great deal of my past life; and so far, they have not troubled me."

"They never will doubt you," I said; "because they cannot conceive that the brain of another creature has been grafted into the skull of Gantun Gur."

"Then if you do not tell them, they will never know," he said, "for I certainly shall not tell them; so please remember to call me by my new name. And not Tor-dur-Bar. What are you smiling at?"

"The situation is amusing. Neither one of us is himself. I have your body, and you have the body of another man."

"But who were you, whose brain is in my body?" he demanded. "I have often wondered."

"Continue to wonder," I replied; "for you may never know."

He looked at me keenly for a long moment. Suddenly his face brightened. "Now I know," he said. "How stupid of me not to have guessed before."

"You know nothing," I snapped; "and if I were you, I should not even guess."

He nodded. "Very well, Tor-dur-bar," he said smiling. "It shall be as you wish."

To change the subject, I remarked, "I wonder what this ship from Amhor is doing sailing around alone over the Great Toonolian Marshes?"

"Jal Had, the Prince of Amhor, has a hobby for collecting wild beasts. They say that he has a great number of them, and this ship has been searching the Great Toonolian Marshes for new specimens."

"So they were not searching for Janai, then?"

"No. Was that Janai with you when you were captured? I got only a glimpse of two figures as our ship passed above you."

"Yes, Janai is aboard; and now I am faced with the problem of getting her off the ship before we reach Amhor."

"Well, perhaps you will be able to accomplish it," he said. "They ground the ship occasionally to hunt for new specimens, and the discipline is lax. As a matter of fact, they do not seem to guard us at all. That is why Pandar found it so easy to escape."

But no opportunity for escape was offered us, as the ship turned her nose directly for Amhor the moment that the commander realized that he had Janai aboard; nor did she once touch ground, nor again fly close to it.

Amhor lies about seven hundred and fifty earth miles directly north of the point at which our capture took place, which distance the ship covered in about seven and a half hours.

During this time I saw nothing of Janai, as she remained in her cabin.

We arrived above Amhor in the middle of the night, and we lay there floating above the city until morning, surrounded by patrol boats as a protection and guard for the precious cargo which we carried. Jal Had was asleep when we arrived, and no one dared disturb him. I could tell by little things that I overheard that everyone was very much afraid of him.

About the second *zode* a royal craft

came alongside and took Janai aboard, and I was helpless to prevent it; for they had removed me from Gantun Gur's cabin on our arrival above the city, and locked me in another one in the hold of the ship. I was filled with despair, for I felt that now I should not only never regain my body, but never again see Janai.

CHAPTER XXII

CAGED

AFTER Janai was taken from the ship, it was lowered to a landing stage and made fast; and shortly thereafter the door of my prison was opened, and I found myself confronted by a detachment of warriors in command of an officer. They carried heavy chains, and with these they manacled my hands. I did not resist, for I no longer cared.

When we reached the ground I attracted considerable attention, before I was hustled into a ground flier and whisked off down a broad avenue which led to the palace grounds.

These ground fliers are a common means of private transportation in many Martian cities. They have a ceiling of about one hundred feet and a maximum speed of sixty miles per hour. In Amhor all north and south traffic moves at ground level at intersections, east and west traffic passing above it. East and west traffic is compelled to rise above north and south traffic at each intersection because there is a short runway inclining upward to a height of about ten feet at each intersection, ending in an abrupt drop at the intersection. These inclines force all east and west traffic to rise above the north and south traffic at intersections.

All vehicular traffic moves in but one direction on any avenue, the direction alternating, so that half the avenues carry traffic in one direction and the other half in the opposite direction. Left turns are made without diminishing speed by the simple expedient of rising above both lanes of traffic. The result is that traffic flows steadily in all directions at an average speed of about fifty miles an hour. Parking accommodations are frequent, and are found inside buildings at a level of about sixty feet above the pavement. North and south pedestrian traffic moves without interruption in either direction on both sides of north and south streets at the ground level; and, similarly, on east and west streets through underpass at street intersections.

I have gone into this matter of traffic control in a Martian city in some detail, and perhaps tediously, because of what John Carter has told me of the congestion and confusion in traffic handling in earthly cities, and in the hope that the inventors of our sister planet will be encouraged to develop ground fliers similar to those commonly used in the cities of Mars.

The palace grounds, which were our destination, covered an area of about eighty acres. The avenues leading to it were lined with the palaces of the nobility, just beyond which were the better-grade shops and hotels. Amhor is a small city, and the only one in the principality which might claim the dignity of such a title, the others being but small and widely scattered villages.

The chief business of the principality is the raising of *thoats* and *zitidars*, the former the saddle-animals and the latter the mammoth draught-animals of Mars. Both are also raised for food; and Amhor exports preserved meats, hides, and other by-products to Duhor, Phundahl, and Toonol.

Amhor is the mecca of the stockmen from the country, hard-riding, profane, belligerent men; good spenders, always provided with plenty of money. So it is withal an interesting city, though one may scarcely enjoy it from the inside of a cage in a zoological garden, which is exactly where I landed a few minutes after I was driven through the rear gate of the palace grounds.

HERE, upon both sides of an avenue, were cages, pits, and dens containing specimens of a wide variety of Martian

animal life, an exhibition of the *fauna* of a planet which must have been instructive and certainly was entertaining and amusing to the crowds that passed along the avenue daily; for to this part of the palace grounds the public was freely admitted during daylight hours.

A unique feature of the zoological display of Jal Had, Prince of Amhor, was the inclusion of various types of Martian humans.

In the cage at my left was a huge green man, with his ivory tusks and four arms; and at my right was a red man from Ptarth. There were *thoats* and *zitidars* and the great white apes of Barsoom—fierce, hairy monsters closely resembling man, and the most feared of all Martian beasts.

Near me also were two *apts*, arctic monsters from far Okar. These great beasts are covered with white fur and have six legs, four of which are short and heavy, and carry it over snow and ice. The other two grow forward from its shoulders on either side of its long, powerful neck, and terminate in white, hairless hands, with which it seizes and holds its prey. The head and mouth, John Carter has told me, are similar to those of an early hippopotamus, except that from the flat sides of the lower jawbone, two mighty horns curve slightly downward toward the front.

Its two huge eyes extend in large oval patches from the center of the top of the cranium down either side of the head to below the roots of the horn, so that these weapons really grow out from the lower part of the eyes, which are composed of several thousand *ocelli* each. Each *ocellus* is furnished with its own lid, so that the *apt* can close as many of the facets of its eyes as it wishes.

There were *banths, calots, darseens, orluks, siths, soraks, ulsios* and many other beasts, insects and men, including even a *kaldane*, one of the strange spider-men of Bantoom.

But when they turned me into my cage, I immediately became the prize specimen of the exhibition. I must admit that I was by far the most hideous creature in the zoo. Perhaps in time I should have become proud of the distinction, for I attracted far more attention than even the most appalling of the horrid beasts that Jal Had had succeeded in collecting.

Gaping crowds stood in front of my cage, some of them poking sticks at me or throwing pebbles or bits of food. Presently an attendant came with a sign which I had an opportunity to read before he attached it near the top of my cage for the benefit and instruction of the audience:

HORMAD FROM MORBUS. A MANLIKE MONSTER CAPTURED IN THE WILDS OF THE GREAT TOONOLIAN MARSHES.

I had been in my cage for about two hours when a detachment of the palace guard entered the avenue and chased all the spectators out of the zoo. A few minutes later there was a blare of trumpets at the far end of the avenue, and I saw a number of men and women approaching.

"What now?" I asked the red man in the cage next to me.

The fellow looked at me as though surprised that I had the power of speech. "Jal Had is coming to look at you," he said. "He is going to be very proud of you, because there is nothing else like you in the world."

"He may learn differently in time," I said, "and to his sorrow, for there are millions like me and their leaders are planning to overrun and conquer all Barsoom."

The red man laughed at that, but he would not have laughed if he had known what I knew.

THE royal party was approaching, Jal Had walking a few paces ahead of the others. He was a gross-appearing man, with a cruel mouth and shifty eyes. He came and stopped before my cage; and as the others approached and stopped behind him, I saw that Janai was one of them. She looked up at me, and I saw tears forming in her eyes.

"Splendid," said Jal Had, after he had examined me curiously for several moments. "I'll wager that there is not an-

other specimen like him anywhere in the world." He turned toward his companions. "What do you think of it?" he demanded.

"It is wonderful," they replied—that is, all but Janai. Then Jal Had fixed his gaze upon her. "And what do you think of him, my love?" he asked.

"I think a great deal of him," she replied. "Tor-dur-bar is my friend, and I think that it is a cruel shame to cage him up like this."

"You would like to have wild beasts roaming free around the city, then?"

"Tor-dur-bar is not a wild beast; he is a brave and loyal friend. But for him, I should have been long since dead; and though perhaps I had been better off, I shall always appreciate the dangers and hardships that he endured for me."

"For that, he shall be rewarded, then," said Jal Had, magnanimously. "He shall receive the scraps from the royal table."

Now that was something. I, a noble of Helium, to be fed with the scraps from the table of Jal Had, Prince of Amhor. However, I consoled myself by the thought that the scraps from his table would probably be far better fare than that ordinarily served to the beasts of the zoo, and I could easily swallow my pride along with his scraps.

I yearned for a word with Janai, but of course there was no chance for it.

"Tell me something about yourself," demanded Jal Had. "Are you just a freak, or are there more like you? What were your father and mother like?"

"I had no father and mother," I replied, "and there are many more like me, millions of us."

"No father and mother?" he demanded. "But some sort of a creature must have laid the egg from which you hatched."

"I came from no egg," I replied.

"Well," said Jal Had, "you are not only the greatest freak I ever saw, but the greatest liar. Perhaps a good beating will teach you better manners than to lie to Jal Had."

"He has not lied," said Janai. "He has told you the truth."

"So you, too," he demanded of her, "think I am a fool? I can have my women beaten, as well as my animals, if they do not behave."

"You are only proving that you are the fool," I said. "You have heard the truth from both of us, and you do not believe it."

"Silence!" shouted an officer of the guard. "Shall I kill the beast, Jal Had?"

"No," replied the prince. "He is too valuable. Perhaps later I shall have him beaten." I wondered who would have the temerity to enter my cage to beat me, who could tear an ordinary man limb from limb.

Jal Had turned and walked away, followed by the members of his party; and when they had left the avenue, the public was once more admitted; and, until dark, I had to endure the gaze and insults of a loud-mouthed rabble. Now I realized with what contempt caged beasts must look upon the human beings which gape and gawk at them.

AFTER the crowds were expelled from the zoo, the animals were fed, for Jal Had had discovered that beasts in captivity thrive better if gaping crowds are not watching them at their food; and so his animals were allowed to feed in peace and in such solitude as their cages afforded. I was not fed with the others, but shortly afterward a slave boy came from Jal Had's palace with a hamper filled with the scraps from his table.

The boy was goggle-eyed with wonderment and awe as he approached my cage and looked at me. There was a small door in the front of my cage near the floor through which the food could be passed to me; but the youth was evidently afraid to open it for fear that I might seize him.

"Do not be afraid," I said. "I shall not harm you. I am not a wild beast."

He came closer then and timidly opened the little door. "I am not afraid," he said; but I knew that he was.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"From Duhor," he replied.

"A friend of a friend of mine lives there," I said.

"And who might that be?"

"Vad Varo," I replied.

"Ah, Vad Varo! I have seen him often. I was to have taken service in his guard when I finished my training. He married Valla Dia, our Princess. He is a great warrior. And who is your friend that is his friend?"

"John Carter, Prince of Helium, Warlord of Mars," I replied.

Then indeed did his eyes go wide. "John Carter, you know him? Who has not heard of him, the greatest swordsman of all Barsoom? But how could such as you be friend of John Carter?"

"It may seem strange to you," I admitted, "but the fact remains that John Carter is my best friend."

"But what do you know of John Carter?" demanded the red man in the adjoining cage. "I am from Helium; and there is no creature like you in the entire empire. I think you are a great liar. You lied to me, and you lied to Jal Had, and now you are lying to this young slave."

"I have not lied," I said.

"You do not even know what John Carter looks like," taunted the red man.

"He has black hair and grey eyes, and a lighter skin than yours," I replied; "and he came from Jasoom, and he is married to Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium. When he came to Barsoom, he was captured by the green men of Thark. He has fought in Okar, the land of the yellow men in the far north; and he has fought *therns* in the Valley Dor; the length and breadth of Barsoom, he has fought; and when I saw him last, we were in Morbus."

The red man looked surprised. "By my first ancestor," he exclaimed, "but you do know a lot about John Carter. Perhaps you are telling the truth after all."

The young slave had looked at me with rapt attention.

"So you have seen John Carter," he said. "You have talked with him, you have touched him. Ah, how wonderful!"

"Some day he may come to Amhor," I said, "and if he does, tell him that you knew Tor-dur-bar, and that you were kind to him; and John Carter will be your friend, too."

"I shall be as kind to you as I can," he said, "and if there is anything that I can do for you, I shall be glad to do it."

"There is something that you can do for me," I said.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Come closer, so that I may whisper it to you." He hesitated. "Do not be afraid; I shall not harm you."

Then he came close to the cage. "What is it?" he asked.

I kneeled and bent my lips close to his ear. "I wish to know all that you can learn about the girl, Janai; I mean, what is happening to her in the palace of Jal Had, and what is going to happen to her."

"I shall tell you all that I can learn," he said; and then he took his empty hamper and went away.

CHAPTER XXIII

PRINCE IN A ZOO

MONOTONOUS days came and went, relieved only by conversation with the red man in the adjoining cage, and by visits twice a day from the young slave from Duhor, whose name was Orm-O.

Quite a friendship developed between the red man from Helium and I. His name was Ur Raj; and when he told me it, I recalled having met him several years before. He was from Hastor, a city on the frontier of the empire, and had been a *padwar* aboard one of the warships stationed there. I asked him if he remembered an officer named Vor Daj, and he said he remembered him very well.

"Did you know him?" he inquired.

"Intimately," I replied. "In fact, there is nobody in the world I know so well."

"But how could you know him?" he demanded.

"He was at Morbus with John Carter."

"He was a splendid officer," he said. "I recall having a long conversation with

him when the grand fleet came to Hastor."

"You and he discussed an invention that you were working upon that would detect and locate enemy ships at a great distance, identifying them by the sound of their motors. You had discovered that no two motors gave forth the same vibrations, and you had developed an instrument that recorded these vibrations accurately at great distances. You also introduced him to a very beautiful young lady whom you hoped to take as your mate."

Ur Raj's eyes went wide in astonishment. "But how in the world could you know of these matters?" he demanded. "You must have been very intimate with him indeed if he narrated to you the gist of conversations that took place years before with a comparative stranger."

"He told neither me nor any other about your invention," I replied, "because he promised you that he would not say anything about it until you had fully developed it."

"But then if he did not tell you, how could you know these things?"

"That, you may never know," I replied; "but you may rest assured that Vor Daj never abused your confidence."

I believe that Ur Raj was a little in awe of me after that, believing that I had some supernatural or occult powers.

The slave boy, Orm-O, became quite friendly, telling me all that he could learn about Janai, which was little or nothing. I gathered from him that she was in no immediate danger, as Jal Had's oldest wife had taken her under her protection. Jal Had had several wives; and this first wife he feared above all things on earth. She had long objected to sharing the affections of Jal Had with other women; and she did not intend that the number should be increased, especially by the acquisition of so beautiful a young woman as Janai.

"It is rumored," said Orm-O, "that she will put Janai out of the way at the first opportunity. She is hesitating now only because of the fear that Jal Had, in his rage, would destroy her if she did so; but she may find a way to accomplish it without bringing suspicion upon herself. In fact, she has several times recently received Gantun Gur, the Assassin of Amhor, who recently returned from captivity."

THIS information caused me considerable concern. Of course, I felt quite certain that Gantun Gur would not kill her; but that would not keep Vanuma from finding some other means, if she had determined to destroy Janai. I asked Orm-O to warn Janai, and he said that he would if he ever had an opportunity.

The danger threatening Janai was constantly on my mind, and my inability to aid her drove me almost to distraction.

Sometimes we had dull days at the zoo; but as a rule there was a steady stream of people passing along the avenue between the cages, and almost always there was a little crowd gathered in front of my cage when the avenue was not jammed by those who came and stood looking at me for hours at a stretch.

There were always new faces; but there were those that I had learned to recognize because they came so often; and then one day I saw Gantun Gur in the crowd.

He shouldered his way toward me, eliciting much grumbling and some hard words; but when someone recognized him and his name was passed around, the spectators gave way before him, for no one wished to antagonize the Assassin of Amhor.

"*Kaor*, Tur-dur-bar," he said, coming close to the cage.

"*Kaor, Gantun Gur*," I replied. "It is good to see you again; and I wish that I might speak to you privately."

"I will come back," he said, "after the visitors are expelled. You see, I am something of a privileged character in Amhor and around the palace."

I thought that the day would never end, that the visitors would never leave. The hours dragged interminably; but at last the guards drove the public out, and the carts containing food for the beasts were wheeled down the avenue. Then Orm-O came with his hamper of scraps; but there was no sign of Gantun Gur.

I wondered if he had again deserted me, or if his boasted privilege was a myth. I was particularly anxious to see him, because I had finally evolved a plan which I thought might prove beneficial for Janai. I asked Orm-O for some word of her, but he only shook his head and said that he had not seen her for days.

"Perhaps Vanuma has had her destroyed," I suggested, fearfully.

"Perhaps," he said. "The last I heard was that she was not treating Janai so well as she had in the beginning. Some say that she whips her every night now."

I couldn't imagine Vanuma or anyone else whipping Janai for she was not the type to take a whipping meekly.

It was almost dark and I had given up all hope of Gantun Gur, when I saw him approach my cage. "*Kaor,* Tor-dur-bar!" he said. "I was delayed; no less a person than Jal Had himself."

"Whom does he wish killed now?" asked Ur Raj.

"He only wished to be certain that I was not planning on killing him," replied Gantun Gur. "Do you know that I would rather be what I am, head of the Assassin's Guild, than to be Prince of Amhor? My power is unlimited; everyone fears me, for while I am known all of my assassins are not; and even those who might plot against me fear to do so lest my spies learn of it."

"You have come a long way from the laboratory building in Morbus, Gantun Gur," I said, with a smile. "But tell me, does Janai still live? Is she well? Is she safe?"

"She lives and is well, but she is not safe; she never can be safe in Amhor. At least her life will never be safe as long as Vanuma lives. Of course, I do not need to tell you that neither I nor any of my assassins will destroy Janai; but Vanuma may find someone else to do it, or even do it herself in desperation; so I have come to the conclusion that the best thing that I can do is to have Vanuma assassinated."

"No, no," I objected. "The moment Vanuma were out of the way, there would be none to protect Janai from Jal Had."

"THAT is right," said Gantun Gur, scratching his head. "I had not taken that phase of the matter into consideration. As a matter of fact, it would not be so bad for Janai for then she would become Princess of Amhor; and from what I have seen of Jal Had's other wife, Janai would rule undisputed queen."

"But she does not wish to marry Jal Had," I said. "Vor Daj loves her. We must save her for him."

"Vor Daj," said Gantun Gur, "lying as one dead in the pits beneath the Laboratory Building of Morbus, certainly surrounded and perhaps long since devoured by the horror that spreads from Vat Room Number Four. No, no, Tor-dur-bar, while I admire your loyalty to Vor Daj, I think that it is wasted. Neither you, nor I, nor Janai will ever see him again."

"Nevertheless, we must do what we can to save Janai for him; for I, for one, have not given up hope that Vor Daj some day will be rescued."

"Well, have you a plan, then?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "I have."

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Get word to Vanuma, even if you have to tell her yourself, that Jal Had has learned that she is attempting to hire assassins to destroy Janai, and that he has sworn that if Janai dies, no matter what the cause, he will immediately destroy Vanuma."

"Not a bad idea," said Gantun Gur. "I can get that word to her immediately through one of her female slaves."

"I shall breathe more easily when I know that you have done it," I said.

I certainly slept better that night than I had for a long time, because I felt that, temporarily at least, Janai was safe. It was well for my peace of mind that I did not know what the next morning was to bring.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

The Eye of Doom

By CORNELL WOOLRICH

In India, in the year 1757, a French private plucked a great jewel from the God with the Diamond Eyes. But, fleeing in the night, he carried away with him the curse of the dying priest: "Despoiler of the god, for your sacrilege the atonement unto all generations shall be death. . . ." In the whirl of Fate's wheel both Europe and America saw the Diamond Eye and the doom that slept within it—and now its disaster is stalking again

4—THE EPISODE OF THE GOLDEN CAT'S-PAW

London, 1939

MAXINE MURRAY stepped out of the lift, hurried down the hall toward the door inscribed: *Watts and Fraser, Barristers.* "Did it come yet?" she blurted out before she was fairly inside.

The switchboard girl stared at her in amazement. "Did what come, Miss?"

"I'm Miss Murray, of the Puss-Kat Club. I—Mr. Watts has been expecting a package from America for me. He promised to call but I just couldn't stand the suspense another minute."

The phone-girl's arched eyebrows expressed her opinion of Americans and their helter-skelter ways. "Couldn't say, I'm sure," she drawled. She plugged in a cord languidly: "A Miss Murray here, sir, asking for a package from Amurrica. . . . Yes. sir, I'll send her in."

In the inner office a lanky young Englishman, typical solicitor type, was having tea at his desk. He rose immediately.

"Ah, just in time, Miss Murray. Join me?"

"Hello, Mr. Watts. No thanks—do sit down and finish." She took a chair and leaned forward eagerly. "I've been counting the boats for the past three weeks, haven't been able to sleep planning what I'd do with it. The *Queen* docked last night—don't tell me it didn't come over on that!"

He crinkled his forehead. "Oh yes, the legacy arrived, Miss Murray. It's in the office safe right now."

"But why are you acting so disillusioned? You promised to call my flat the moment it got here. I've been waiting all day."

"I didn't have the heart," he said, letting his spoon drop back on the tray. Then as she stared wordlessly, his honest face showed concern. "Miss Murray, try not to be too disappointed. My colleague and I have already examined the contents of

the pouch, and—well I'm sorry to say the whole bequest isn't worth a continental."

"O-oh!" She slumped back in her chair and let her arms fall limply.

"Here, see for yourself—" He came back with a padlocked pouch, dumped its contents out. "It really wasn't worth the expense of sending over. And it's very fortunate that you didn't borrow on it to make the trip over there personally, as you wanted to do at first. That lawyer in the States had no business cabling us to locate you and all that, and thereby arousing false hopes on your part, without waiting until the estate had been examined and appraised." He flicked several packets of yellowed bonds with his thumbnail.

"And you're quite sure none of them is worth anything at all?" she asked forlornly.

"Absolutely certain. They're not even known, not listed in Wall Street— or anywhere else. Confederate bonds, shares in forgotten mines, in railroads that are no longer in existence. One issue in particular, they told me, was blotted out as far back as the Black Friday panic in New York. 1876, wasn't that?"

Maxine Murray just held her forehead expressively.

"AS FOR the so-called jewels, the trinkets and heirlooms that impressed you when you visited Logan Manor as a child—here they are, you can see for yourself. Simply a lot of junk. They would dazzle a child, of course, and probably account for the unwarranted legend of vast secret wealth that attached to Mrs. Logan all her life in that small town. You yourself recalled it when we first notified you, if you remember. There's where the trouble came in. It simply shows how little rustic gossip of that sort is to be relied on."

He paused, drew in a deep breath. "The thing to do is to look at it sensibly. After all, until we contacted you several months ago, you didn't even remember this eccentric old lady's existence. You probably hadn't thought twice about her in all the years since you'd come away from home. Well then, let's put it this way. You're really no worse off than before. Just a bit let down, I daresay, as anyone would be."

She managed to smile up at him quizzically. "I'm not so sure about that. Only two nights ago I turned down an advantageous offer to go to Australia. Told my agent I was coming into a fortune, didn't have to worry about my next engagement."

"Oh, I say, I *am* sorry!" He spoke so sincerely that her smile broadened. "If there's anything we've done here in this office to mislead you—"

"Oh, it's not your fault. How could it be? You simply showed me the cable. I had no business letting my imagination run wild, counting my chickens before they were hatched." She'd gotten over it by now. "Well, no use crying about it. At least Mrs. Logan meant well. No doubt she really believed she had something of value to bequeath me."

She began to finger the ornaments one by one. "Here's her wedding ring. And look at this thing! Did you ever *see* anything like it before in your life? What on earth—"

"Meant for a brooch, I should say, judging by the setting and the cross-pin behind it."

"Yes, but look at that crystal sticking straight out of it like a unicorn's horn. If that were only a diamond, now—"

The barrister joined her in laughing. "Yes, if that were a diamond it would be a different story." He turned it this way and that. "I'm not an expert on precious stones, myself, but it looks like a chunk of quartz, judging by its size alone. Probably backed with silver to make it gleam a bit. What a curious old character this Mrs. Logan must have been, to hang onto stuff like this."

"My mother, whose girlhood chum she was, told me she'd never been quite right in her mind after Major Logan's death. He was killed by a runaway team less than a week after their marriage. Stopped all the clocks in the house, kept the blinds

down, left his things just the way they'd been—that sort of thing, trying to make time stand still." She stood up, held out her hand. "Well, I won't keep you any longer, Mr. Watts. I've got to get back and sing for my supper. Thanks for your trouble, and next time I'll know better than to build castles in the air just on the strength of a vague cablegram."

"What shall I do with this stuff, Miss Murray? Do you want to take it with you?"

"No, hardly." She riffled the ornaments under her hand. "Wait—on second thought I *will* take this oddity, this dunce's cap of a brooch. If I shine it up with a bit of cloth I may be able to wear it in my hair at the club tonight. I've been needing something to finish off my costume." She dropped it into her handbag. "The rest you may—" She spaded both hands down toward the wastebasket beside his desk.

He went to the door with her. "Goodbye, Miss Murray. Sorry about this. If there's any way in which we can be of further service—"

"No, thanks," she called back cheerfully on her way out to the lift. "One inheritance like this is enough."

II

"AN AMERICAN," the maharajah's secretary answered his question. "Quite a pretty piece too, isn't she?"

"I was not thinking of that, although it is true she is charming," Sir Hari Duggarawath remarked in his clipped Oxford accent, adjusting his monocle and looking out across the club-floor. "I am interested in that bit of *decor* she is carry out about in her hair. Have you very good eyes, Ramm? Can you see it from here? Watch when she turns her head about—there."

"Of course I can see it. How could I miss it? If it was any bigger it'd make a fair-sized headstone." Mr. Johan Ramm stopped eating to center his polite brown gaze upon his employer: "Why do you keep following it with your eyes like that? You're not thinking it's real, are you?"

The maharajah did not answer for a moment. He was a plump, brown, placid little man, and the jeweled turban above his evening clothes served only to give him a sort of comic importance. He smiled inanely and waved a fat hand.

"Does it matter?" he said.

Johan Ramm shrugged. By now he had become accustomed to the cryptic ways of royalty. Another of those stupid whims, he thought, remembering frantic chases in pursuit of out-of-season delicacies, a glass slipper, some silly piece of bricabrac. Another scavenger hunt with His Highness pointing the quarry and Johan Ramm to attend the dirty details.

He kept his handsome face expressionless but a spark of anger burned within him. Mr. Ramm was tall and suave and sartorially impeccable. His lean features had enabled him to pose as a Latin personage upon occasion, and his bearing sometimes confused new acquaintances into believing that he was the great man and Sir Hari the humble servant. A natural error, Mr. Ramm would have said, for Johan Ramm had polished his wits and his personality in Chicago and Shanghai and Cairo, among other ports of call, and therefore made his brain sharper than that of any fat little kingling who buried himself in the back-of-beyond for eleven months of the year.

"It is hardly logical," Mr. Ramm said drily, "that any one would wear a *real* jewel of that size around the floor of a night club. Why that girl doesn't earn more than— Oh, come off of it!"

Sir Hari smiled blandly.

"Whether anyone would or would not is hardly the question. Nor how much the young lady's wages are. Logic is not your forte, Ramm. As you know, I am not entirely inexperienced where diamonds are concerned." (His collection was famous all over the world.) "Let me explain why I think it is not paste nor glass, even judging from this distance. Now the whole object of paste is to imitate, pretend to be the real jewel, isn't that so?"

Another of his damned lectures, Ramm thought. He rested his chin on palm and feigned a mild interest.

"Imitations of smaller stones have some chance of passing for the real thing," the maharajah went on. "But when a thing is that size, what is the point in making an imitation of it, when it would not be believed anyway? Secondly, it is rather dull, do you notice? Just winks dimly once in a while. as though it were all encrusted. There again—dull imitations are never made. The whole purpose of paste is to reproduce the dazzle, the flash of the real stone. A dull imitation defeats its own purpose. So I say again, that ornament our young lady is wearing so casually in her hair has every chance of being a real diamond."

"You could talk a beach-pebble into the Kohinoor," Ramm said grudgingly. "All right, suppose it's real? Why are you so interested? Haven't you enough diamonds already?"

"More than I know what to do with. But those are mere diamonds—" said the maharajah enigmatically. "She is coming around this way again. We will resume the topic later." He became very interested in eating a dessert that had been standing untouched for the past half-hour. "Don't let her see you staring," he hissed beneath his breath.

MAXINE MURRAY swayed by them with scarcely a glance at the two dusky faces dimly visible in the twilight gloom beyond the perimeter of the blinding spotlight that accompanied her. She was too busy giving an erratic lilt and variation to an old ballad, swinging the melody out:

"When a body
Meets a body
Coming through the rye—"

The maharajah peered after her as she swept on along the polished floor that gave her reflection upside-down as though she were gliding on a mirror. His face was expressionless.

Ramm tried to resume the discussion. "What'd you mean just then: the ones you've got already are *mere* diamonds? First you argue the brooch on her is a diamond, then you make it sound like another kettle of fish."

The maharajah shuddered. "Stop using those stupid American expressions," he said. He waved a plump hand. "There is too much smoke in this place."

Evidently His Highness did not wish to continue on the subject of diamonds just then, and Johan Ramm had learned long ago to respect these conversational moods. A wise man knows when to keep his mouth shut.

Maxine Murray had finished her number, was taking bows. The applause was cordial but not overwhelming. The English are reserved even in their night-clubs. Then too, they were just a little puzzled. Swing, of all the musical and terpsichorean phenomena that had come over from New York, was the hardest for them to grasp. She retired, the supper-entertainment came to an end and general dancing began.

The maharajah sat impatiently drumming his fingers on the edge of the table, as though waiting for something. Suddenly he stopped, as though the something had taken place. He got up with deceptive aimlessness, but when Ramm made a move to follow suit, he motioned him to remain where he was. "I—ah—think I'll stretch my legs a bit. Sit here, we're not going yet." He flung down his ruby-clasped cigarette-case as an inducement for the other to remain.

As soon as his back was turned Ramm not only helped himself to a cigarette, but emptied one entire compartment of the case into his pocket. This was such a long-standing custom by now, he thought no more of it than if they had been his own.

He lounged around in his chair, puffing away complacently, and noticed that Maxine Murray had appeared again. Not to entertain this time, but to have a bite by herself at an unobtrusive little table against the wall. She had thrown a cloak

around her gown to escape attention, and the ornament was no longer in her hair. She read an evening paper while she munched.

Sir Hari returned a few minutes later, casual as ever, but with a childishly smug expression on his face. He took out his monocle, polished it, hitched his head at Ramm to draw a little closer.

"What's up?" the latter asked bluntly.

The maharajah made a deprecating gesture. "Nothing. Why should anything be up? I simply strolled a bit to stretch my legs. I—ah—I lost my bearings, wandered into some passageway or other back there where I had no business to be." He smiled slyly, "You know how stupid I am sometimes. I opened the wrong door by mistake—an empty dressing-room belonging to that young lady over there. She had left her most unusual ornament behind on the dressing-table. I couldn't resist studying it a moment, to satisfy my own curiosity and settle our little dispute once and for all."

JOHAN RAMM was beginning to grin broadly, as if he were discovering a hitherto unsuspected kinship with his employer.

"It is indisputably a genuine diamond," the maharajah went on, tapping a fingernail on the tablecloth to emphasize the point. "Of very great age, very crudely cut, practically no polish at all. But I have seen too many in my time not to know one, rough or polished."

Ramm gave a low expressive whistle. "Let's have a look," he said.

The maharajah instantly stiffened, stared over at him coldly. "Hold on," he said resentfully. "Do you think I helped myself to it?"

Ramm saw he'd made the mistake of applying his own standards of conduct, hastily tried to repair the blunder. "I was clowning," he mumbled apologetically. "Can't you take a joke?"

"I don't care for that brand of humor. I admit it was cheeky of me to handle the thing without the owner's knowledge, but there's a vast difference between doing that and appropriating it." Sir Hari helped himself to a cigarette from the case he had left on the table, saw that it had been half-emptied, but made no comment.

"I'll tell you what I want you to do, Ramm," he went on when he'd regained his temper somewhat. He glanced across the other's shoulder. "She's finished at the table, gone inside again. There's another show yet, so she won't be going home for a bit." He reached inside his dinner-jacket, brought out a billfold. "I want you to go back there and look her up. Not just yet —wait till I've gone back to the hotel. I want you to buy that brooch for me. But be careful how you go about it. Leave me out of it entirely. As soon as they hear the word 'maharajah', they imagine that the Bank of England is walking around on two legs. Let her think it's for yourself. Don't appear anxious—just casual, take-it-or-leave-it."

Ramm counted the banknotes that were thrust at him, tucked them away in his own pocket. "Suppose she holds out for more than this?" he said craftily.

The maharajah sighed, like a man who is used to paying double for what he wants. "Then give her what she asks, if you have to. I'll cash a check at the hotel for the balance. I must have that stone. See that you get it for me."

"You've as good as got it already," Ramm drawled, lidding one brown eye.

The maharajah stood up. "And remember," he drawled, "none of your little tricks. You amuse me, Ramm, and you are valuable in your way; but I should hardly call you indispensable. This stone you will secure is so flawed that it has no great commercial value. I merely happen to want it for certain reasons of my own."

His bearded body-servant rushed up with his cloak and stick. Johan Ramm stood at attention and bowed his employer out. He reseated himself, called for the bill, smoked a thoughtful cigarette. Then he made his way casually to the flap-doors at the rear of the club. He signalled a

page-boy. "Here's a shilling, boy. Take me back to Miss Murray's dressing-room. Business, not social."

Maxine's smile faded when she opened the door and saw a stranger. "Oh—when he said 'business' I thought it might be my agent. I don't usually receive people back here."

"This won't take a jiff," said Ramm cocksurely.

"Very well, come in. There's a chair."

HE CROSSED his legs as though he owned the place, began swinging one foot back and forth. "Pretty good pair of pipes you've got," he said patronizingly. His eyes were busy scanning the dressing-table. The ornament had vanished again; she must have put it away just before he came in. He smiled:

"No offense, but how would you like to take ten pounds for that odd-looking brooch you had in your hair out there just now?"

The girl gave him a long searching look. "What's odder than the brooch is your coming in here like this and offering to buy it," she said finally. "Would you mind telling me exactly why you want it?"

"Hard to say. It caught my eye just now and—well—" He floundered badly; he hadn't expected to be cross-questioned.

"And whenever anything catches your eye, do you rush right up to owners and make an offer? I mean, if you see a car on the road that you fancy, or a man riding a fine horse in the park—"

"No, of course not—" he faltered.

"Then why did you do it in this case?" Her eyes snapped. "Is it the brooch you want, or is it your sly little way of suggesting we might be friends? In either case the answer is 'No!' I choose my own friends and I'm not exactly a pauper. I may have to work here for a rather meager living. I may have to walk to and from my work to save cab-fare, but that doesn't mean I'm reduced to peddling the very fastenings off my hair to the first cheeky young toff that walks in here! I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mr.—whatever your name is, but I'm not selling that brooch or anything else to you. Run, do not walk, to the nearest exit." She threw the door open.

"No need of going up in the air about it," he tried to soothe her. "Twenty pounds, then—"

"Didn't you hear what I said? I didn't like your Valentino hair the moment I set eyes on you. Either get out of here or I'll have the porters show you the bum's-rush!"

"All right, goldilocks, all right," he bowed insolently, sauntered past her. "Turn your valves off, I'm going."

He went to a phone-booth in the foyer, rang the Dorchester House.

"Did you get it?" Sir Hari wanted to know eagerly as soon as he got on.

"Not quite, but I've got a very good chance," Ramm said calculatingly, staring high up on the booth-wall before him.

"Why not? What's the matter?"

"Well, here's the thing, Your Highness. She's willing to sell, but she's a sharp one. It'll take a good deal more than you planned—"

The maharajah's voice dropped desolately. "Oh, then she knows how valuable it is. The way she left it lying around, I didn't think she did."

Ramm winked expressively at the wall. "She knows all right, never fear. Pretending not to give a damn about it is part of her little game to attract potential buyers. Then once she's whetted their interest, up goes the asking-price. See what I mean?"

"Well, give her whatever she wants then. I've telephoned long-distance to my viceroy at home since leaving you, and—well, never mind why now, but there are certain developments which make that brooch important."

Ramm leered at the instrument before him. ("Wonder why you want it so bad, old boy? Think I'll hang onto it myself a bit first, and try to find out.") Aloud he said: "I told you before you'd get it, and get it you shall. It will merely mean a little time and patience, and more money

than we thought, that's all. She'll come around."

As soon as he'd rung off, he called another number, glancing furtively over his shoulder to make sure no one was loitering outside in a position to overhear. He said in a guarded voice: "Hello, is this the Red Domino? Alf Jenkins there? Just tell him an old chum wants to speak to him. . . . Hello, that you Alf? This is Ramm. . . . Never mind that 'Gentleman Jack' stuff, I chucked that name long ago. Any of the old crowd there with you? Smithers? All right, he'll do. Now look here, I've got a little job for you boys. No, no breaking and entering—nothing like that. A simple little job and five pounds apiece. You get out in front of the Puss-Kat Club and watch the door. No later than twelve. There'll be a girl come out, dunno where she lives, but I do know she'll be walking to wherever it is. I'll be standing there in the foyer with my back to her. When you see me spin a lighted butt out into the gutter, that'll be the girl you want. Keep your eye on her and clean her. Not that she'll have anything, couple of bob in her purse, piece of glass she wears in her act maybe, but bring along whatever you find. I'm just doing it to settle an old score. Meet you at the Red Dominio later. Carry on, now!"

BUD GORDON, fed up with jollying the plump barmaid and drinking ale, swung out of the pub, turned up his coat-collar against the chill mist, shoved his hands deep into his pockets, and struck out toward the docks, where the *Aurora* was moored. He decided that London had been sadly overestimated as a city in which to spend any length of time. Big as it was, he'd found less to do with himself than in many a smaller port. Not that he was disgruntled about it, for he was an even-tempered, uncomplaining sort of chap; he simply felt he could have spent his time to better account had he stayed aboard and turned in early.

He had a considerable distance to go, but it never occurred to him to do anything but walk it, clammy as the air was. He was in no danger of losing his way. He had an infallible sense of direction, even in a town he'd never seen before. London, most tortuous of cities to the average newcomer, held no difficulties at all for him. Only, of course, he was ignorant of the street- and district-names.

He was striding along a narrow dingy thoroughfare, that he knew would bring him to a broader, more populous one eventually, which in turn would lead him down to the river, when what sounded like a strangled cry came from somewhere just ahead. It stopped short as though forcibly restrained, and as he came on he could hear the scrape of shifting feet on the pavement, two or three pairs of them.

A voice whined: "She bit me 'and!" And once again that same stifled scream sounded.

But by that time Bud Gordon had bolted ahead and rounded a corner, which gave onto a shadowy lane. Three intertwined figures were weaving back and forth in the uncertain light, as in a weird dance. The middle one was a girl.

Gordon lowered his neck and shoulders and charged. One of the men turned to take him on. " 'Ullo. 'ere's company; 'ang onto 'er, Bert, I'll settle with 'im!" He swung out at Gordon. "Now then! Dincher ever learn to mind yer business?"

Gordon didn't waste breath in repartee. He swerved his head aside, took the blow over one shoulder, and his own fist shot straight upward from nearly waist-level. His adversary was jolted back with the drive of it. He went buckling over, kicking Gordon inadvertently in the legs as he flattened out. Gordon vaulted over him and went at the second man. But the latter hadn't waited. He had wrested something from the girl and was already in full flight up the alley. Gordon chased him to the upper end of it, changed his mind and came back again, to make sure the one he had already dealt with didn't molest the girl further. But the flattened one had scrambled crab-wise to his feet and now he made off in the opposite direction.

The girl leaned against a rough wall, fingering her manhandled throat and apparently unable to decide between self-possessed indignation and frightened tears.

"Brave pair of lads, those two," Gordon remarked scornfully.

The matter-of-fact calmness of his voice seemed to have a steadying effect on her. She took a deep breath. "Yes, weren't they? I always thought London was so safe at night. I never heard of anything like that happening here before."

"You'll run into footpads in any large city," he said tolerantly although only a short while ago he had been ready to knock London himself. "They hurt you?"

"They got my bag." Then as he took a belated step to go after them, she made a gesture of dissuasion. "Don't bother. Only a few shillings and a cake of rouge in it. Not worth calling a bobby about. They tore my shirtwaist, too. Here, this'll hold it together until I get home." She shifted an odd-shaped brooch from the front of her blouse to the shoulder, closing a large rent. "I tried to tell them I hadn't any money. I would have let them have the bag without any fuss if they hadn't frightened me by jumping out like that. Well, I guess I'd better be on."

"You'd better let me walk the rest of the way with you."

"Yes, I wish you would. I'm not naturally scary, but I'd probably imagine a boogy-man in every dark doorway after what just happened." As they walked along she introduced herself. "I'm Maxine Murray."

"Bud Gordon," he said, touching his cap.

She glanced up at its visor as they passed beneath a street-lamp. "*Aurora.* Steamship?"

"No, yacht. Raymond Dahlhouse's skiff."

"I've heard of him. Pays for his cigarettes with hundred-dollar bills."

Gordon didn't commit himself, but she could read strong inner disapproval of his employer's notoriety by the way he briefly shut his eyes. "You're not English?"

"Biloxi, on the Gulf Coast. But that was y'ars and y'ars ago. And you're not either."

"If the States are good enough for you," he grinned, "I guess they're good enough for me too."

She stopped before a typical rooming-house. "Well, here's the wealthy Maxine's luxurious domicile. I'd ask you up for a cup of tea, only you don't know my landlady. They got my key, too; I'll have to wake her up and I'll catch it!"

He stood edging his cap around self-consciously. "Would the invitation still be open if I dropped around sometime, in the afternoon?"

She crinkled her nose at him. "I think so. Try it sometime and find out for yourself."

HIS lean jaws shaved almost down to the bone, his shoes polished like mirrors, Bud Gordon walked back and forth in front of a sweet-shop two days later, bashful as a schoolboy, trying to summon up courage enough to go in. This was navigating uncharted waters, as far as he was concerned. After three tries he finally pushed inside, stepped up to the counter.

"Er—I'm not much on shore-manners," he said embarrassedly to the counter-girl, "wonder if you'd help me out. When you're going to a girl's house for the first time, is it all right to take along some candy?"

The clerk's coquettish attitude didn't help to make him feel any more at ease.

"Depends on who's doing the calling," she simpered pointedly. "I'd say it'd be quite all right—in this case. *I'd* like it, if I were the girl."

"Fair enough," he said, easing his collar as though it felt constricted. "Then just ladle out some of this stuff and box it up." He escaped outside finally with a deep breath of relief.

A hatchet-faced middle-aged woman was standing on the doorstep of Maxine Murray's house when Gordon finally arrived in sight of it, talking to a tall and dapper

individual, who had pushed his bowler-hat far to the back of his head in disgusted frustration. Gordon caught a glimpse of darkly handsome features and the flash of a silver ring on a lean finger. As the dapper man turned and strode off he pitched something into the gutter. Gordon made out a room-key lying there as he came up.

"You'll 'ave an 'ard time reaching 'er there," the landlady called out after the departing applicant. "It ain't just around the corner, you know!"

"I'll locate her, don't you worry!" the handsome gentleman promised truculently over his shoulder.

"Miss Murray?" said Gordon, stopping the landlady as she was turning to go in.

"What, another one? There was a gent just arsking for 'er a moment ago. She's gone to Austrylia—left yesterday morning to play with a show down there. Went real sudden, she did, too."

Gordon was staring after the bowler-hatted man. "He one of her friends?" he murmured half-aloud. "Thought she had better taste than that—" He raised the candy-box to fling it irritably away.

" 'Ere! Not on me front walk!" warned the landlady sharply. "I just got through sweepin' it."

He changed his mind, ungallantly shoved the box at her instead. "Here, take 'em yourself then!" and strode off scowling, hands deep in pockets.

"Gorblimey! And at my age, too!" She stood staring after him, open-mouthed.

"There's one of your room-keys lying over here," Gordon called back, giving it a hearty kick. And to himself, "That's what I get for straying off my course!"

III

Australia, 1939

THE proprietor of the Bon Ton cabaret, in Sydney, came rushing into the windowless cubbyhole without the formality of knocking first, although it was, technically at any rate, a dressing-room. He had an enormous pot-belly and great hanging jowls, and both vibrated as he stopped short just over the threshhold, staring with disapproval at the bowed-down figure under the cheap tin-backed mirror, head buried between arms.

Behind him a blast of raucous laughter mingled with the clink of glassware and the tinny clatter of a piano. He kicked the door shut with his heel, to insure privacy for his displeasure. He tugged at the tongues of his split-open vest, trying to pull them down over a circular width of pink-striped shirt.

" 'Ere, wot's this?" he snarled. "Wot's this me fine lydy, eh?" His jaw locked and his little pig-eyes glinted malevolently. "Cryingk again, eh? Place ain't good enough for you, I daresy. Is this wot I pays yer fer? Why aincher never out there when I wants yer?"

Maxine Murray raised her head, touched the corners of her eyes with one finger. "What do you want now?" she said, choking back a sob. "I just got through out there a few minutes ago. You didn't hire me to sing continuously."

He banged a great ham of a fist on the improvised dressing-table. "I 'ired yer to sing when yer needed, that's wot I 'ired yer for! And that's right now! Don't give me none of yer lip, me duchess! You get out there farst as ever yer can, or you can clear out! Go a'ead, clear out, no one's stopping you!"

"You know I can't clear out!" the girl said bitterly, touching a soiled powder-rag to her chin. "You know I'm stranded down here, without any friends or money. But if you had any manhood in you, any decency at all, you wouldn't overwork me like this!" She stood up, turned away from the table. "All right, I'll go out there and sing! I'll sing till I drop!"

He changed his tune when he saw she was ready to obey him, began to wheedle and whisper cajolingly. "That's the girl! There's a party of swells just come in, off some bloomin' yacht in the 'arbor. Spending money like water, they are, and very took with the plyce too. Just go out there and keep 'em going. Be nice to

them. If they arsk you to sit with them, you know what to order—champyne. But chynge your face. Brighten up a bit. They're 'appy, they're 'avin' a 'igh old time, they don't wanter see no weepy fyces. Smile!"

"How's this?" She grimaced distortedly from ear to ear.

The irony was lost on him. "That's it! Now go ahead, give 'em all yer got!"

Maxine crossed the smoke-filled outer room, with barely a glance at the hilarious slumming-party in evening-dress that occupied a long table in the rear. She stopped beside the wearied piano-player.

"What again?" he groaned. "My fingers are coming off, and nobody's listening anyway."

"Sorry, Tommy, it's not my idea. Run through them in the usual order, starting with *London Bridge is Falling Down.*"

He gave her a chord and she walked out into the middle of the room. The noisy group at the long table quieted a little momentarily to look her over.

A GIRL in a wispy green evening-dress was resting her chin on the shoulder of a tall blond young man. She placed her hands over her ears. "Another of those songbirds of the Antipodes," she said loudly. "God help our eardrums!"

Maxine flashed her a dangerously sweet smile. "It will be pretty awful," she agreed, "but what did you expect in a dive like this—Lily Pons?"

The blond man struck his thigh appreciatively and led the roar of laughter that went up at the comeback. His features were pleasant and would have been attractive except for the sagging lines of dissipation. His face was well known to the Broadway tabloids—Mr. Raymond Dahlhouse, son and heir of the Chemical tycoon, and more familiarly known as The Clown Prince of the Playboys.

Maxine began to sing. Dahlhouse kept interrupting her through the whole number, but it was the sort of interruption a performer likes. "Say, she's good! Listen to that, will you? What's she doing in this hole-in-the-wall?" And when she'd finished: "C'mere, little lady, here's something for your trouble." He thrust an American hundred-dollar note into her hand.

She glanced down coolly, asked: "What's the matter with it?"

Another roar went up, Dahlhouse joining with the rest. "That's what this party's been needing all along," he cried, "New blood. I'd like to have her on the boat with us."

"I knew this was coming," the girl in green said waspishly.

"Why not?" Young Dahlhouse began to appraise Maxine as though she weren't standing less than a yard away. "She's got looks, talent, sense of humor, refinement—"

"At Nagasaki he wanted to kidnap a geisha," the girl in green complained to the brunette across the table. "At Apia he collected that Samoan dancer. In New Zealand it was a Maori chief and his whole family. I only hope we don't put in at the Cannibal Islands!"

Dahlhouse had enough champagne in him to stick to his point. Her opposition probably solidified the whim, whereas if she'd kept quiet he might have forgotten it in another five minutes. "It's my boat, isn't it? I'm going to ask who I want aboard. Anybody that doesn't like it, they know what they can do."

The brunette leaned over behind his back to warn her fellow-guest in an undertone: "Shut up, you fool! You'll queer yourself. Besides, he hasn't asked her yet."

Dahlhouse caught the last part of it. "No? Well I'm going to ask right now. C'mere, babe. Would you like to sail on my yacht with us, as a member of the party—?"

"Just one happy family," the girl in green sneered.

"Where to?" Maxine asked, ignoring her.

"I don't know myself yet. Wait a minute—here's my captain. He bothers about things like that for me—"

But Gordon had come in to report. He didn't see Maxine at first, just walked over to Dahlhouse, touched the visor of his cap.

"Gordon, where's the next stop on our itin—itin—oh you know what I mean," Dahlhouse said thickly.

"You get the angle, don't you, Gordon?" the girl in green put in crudely, hitching her head sidewise.

He turned to look, stared at her in sudden recognition. Maxine glanced casually at the *Aurora* in gold letters on the headband of his cap and recollection came to her. She remembered London and a walk home through the misty streets.

"Hey, I asked you a question," Dahlhouse insisted.

Gordon turned back to him again. "Goa, in Portuguese India," he answered slowly.

"Oh yeah, now it's coming back to me. And after that Suez, and after that Marseilles, and after that—home." He was addressing Maxine. "How about it? Don't pay any attention to these mopes. Nothing under handed about it. I just happen to like your style, that's all, and what I like, I want around me. You come along as a guest, on an equal footing with anyone else. Sing for us at night, under the Indian Ocean moon." He tried to raise his champagne-glass to his lips, missed connections, and its contents flushed down his shirt front. "What-d'ye say?"

She seemed about to refuse for a minute. Then she turned and saw the porcine bulk of the Bon Ton proprietor outlined dimly through the smoke-haze. She turned swiftly to Dalhhouse again, almost pleadingly. "Yes, I want to get out of here terribly," she said in a trembling voice. "Yes, I'd like very much to come, Mr. Dalhhouse."

"Did you ever play in stock?" the girl in green bit through clenched teeth. Bud Gordon was standing there with his eyes fixed in silent appraisal on the hundred-dollar note that was still gripped in her fingers.

"Thass fine," Dahlhouse said, on the verge of a crying jag now. "You don't belong in a place like this—see that right away, with one eye closed. Get your things and come right along with us. We're leaving with the tide to morrow morning. Isn't that right, captain?"

Gordon's eyes flicked over Maxine as if she weren't there at all. "That's right, Mr. Dahlhouse."

"And just to make the invitation binding—" He slipped another hundred-dollar-bill into her hand, tightening her fingers over it.

The girl in green hissed to the other, "Get him out of here before he persuades the piano-player to join our happy throng."

"Yeah, or runs out of hundreds."

MAXINE turned and ran back into the dingy dressing-room, oblivious of what anyone thought or said. It was like being released from a nightmare.

The bull-necked proprietor had the audacity to swing the door open behind her a moment later, as she was getting her few belongings hastily together. "So yer quittin' arter all I done for yer?" he whined.

"Yes," she flared, whirling around on him. "And let me do a little something for you in return!" She picked up an unlidded tin of cold-cream and flung it full in his face. "Take that out of my week's wages!".

When she came out again, a small battered grip swinging at the end of her arm, the Dahlhouse party had already left to go down to the dock. Bud Gordon was standing alone at the upper end of the bar, staring grimly down into a whiskey and soda. He didn't appear to see her until she started to walk by him, then without turning his head he said quietly: "Congratulations."

She stopped, put the grip down. "What do you mean by that, Captain—Captain—?"

"Don't waste time trying to get a mere captain's name straight, when there's a multimillionaire in the offing."

She stared angrily. "You sound as though I— You think you've got me pretty well typed, don't you?"

He swivelled around, leaned on his elbow against the bar. "You didn't refuse his—tips, did you? I've seen him hand them out halfway across the world. Someday I'll see a girl refuse one of them, and I'll take off my hat to her." And with studied meaning, he pushed his cap so far down on one side of his head that it covered one eye.

She flung her arm out angrily, motioning around the room. "Look at this place! Do you think I want to stay here? Do you know what I've gone through here? The show I was with folded up somewhere in Queensland. I didn't have a roof over my head or the price of a cup of coffee when I walked in here. This offer is a godsend to me! I want to get back home!"

"You'll get as far as Goa, and then he'll drop you. You'll be worse off, you won't even be in a white man's country."

"I'll take my own chances! Whatever happens later, at least he's giving me a break now! Why should you resent it? Am I crowding you?"

He looked at her moodily. "You've got that way about you that fools people. That fools a fool like me, anyway. The kind of a girl you seemed to be that night I met you in London—well, she wouldn't go aboard a yacht with those people, no matter how badly she needed to get away. There's something worse than singing for longshoremen—to my way of thinking, anyway—and that's being a lush-worker, chiselling from an habitual drunkard. Like those other two you saw with him tonight."

Maxine's face was drawn and pale.

"I ought to slap your face for daring to talk to me this way! Well whether it disillusions you or not, Mr. Captain know-it-all Gordon, I'm sailing with your employer on the *Aurora*."

"I expected you to," he said cuttingly. "Hit 'em while the hitting's good. More power to you. All right. I'll grab you a cab and tool you down to the harbor."

"I wouldn't ride in a cab with you if—"

He finished for her, satirically. "If I was the last man in the world. I've heard that before somewhere or other. Have it your way, then I'll ride up in front with the driver." And as he picked up her grip for her, "Got everything? Sure you didn't forget your pick and shovel?"

"NEVER saw nothink like it," the fat proprietor of the Bon Ton was still relating to anyone who would listen, two nights later. "One minute she's in 'ere down to 'er last bloomin' penny. I go in there that very syme night it 'appened and I find 'er cryink 'cause she's so down'earted. Then in they blow—pop!—and hoff she goes on this swanky yacht. So 'elp me! Didn't she, Alf? And d'ye think she thanked me arter all I done for 'er? She throws a bloomin' tin of cauld cream stryte in me fyce, if yer please—!"

A waiter elbowed his way through the ring of spellbound auditors. "There's a lad down there arsking for that Amurrican girl we 'ad 'ere, boss. Wot'll I sye—?"

The proprietor trundled down to where the newcomer stood puffing on a cigarette. He was dark and dapper and his voice had a faint foreign slur in it: "You have a blonde American girl by the name of Murray working here?" he asked, peering up under his hat-brim.

"We did 'ave. She's gone now."

Johan Ramm flung his cigarette down with such force that the coal exploded in a geyser of sparks. He spoke a couple of guttural words.

"You seem to want 'er sort of bad," suggested the proprietor.

The half-caste burrowed his head into his arms across the top of the bar, went on growling muffled curses through them. He looked up again. "D'ye know I come all the way out here from London after that girl?"

"Wull, you'll 'ave a bit farther on to go then, me bucko," said the proprietor unfetelingly. "She's on 'er way to India, on a yacht with some rich people, nyme of—of Dahl'ouse, I think I 'eard them sy."

"Raymond Dahlhouse?" said Ramm alertly. "What port, d'ye know? Bombay? Madras?"

"None o' them." The proprietor scratched his chin. "Wait a bit. 'Ere, Alf, what was the nyme of the plyce they said they was going?"

"Goa."

"Goa," relayed the proprietor. "Never 'eard of it meself, but that's it."

Ramm poked an excited finger into the proprietor's pink-striped shirt. "Look here, tell me something else. While she was working for you, did she—you didn't happen to notice a pin on her, about this shape and size? The reason I'm asking, see, is that I want to make sure it's the same girl."

The proprietor pinched two fingers together to illustrate. "With a great big spike of glars coming out of it? Oh yus, yus, she 'ad that on every time she come out on the floor. Y'd think it was vallyble she 'ung onto it so! All she 'ad, I daresy."

"That's all I wanted to know!" Ramm snapped. He stopped at the first cable-office he could find after leaving the Bon Ton, drew out a blank form and engaged in a great deal of laborious composition. Finally he shoved the result over the sill at the clerk. "Send this collect, and make the sparks fly!"

His Highness the Maharajah of Maipur,
Maipur State,
India.
Missed our friend. She is at sea on way to Goa aboard Raymond Dahlhouse yacht. Suggest you make acquaintance of party and offer hospitality before they leave again for next place. She still wears her hair the same way. Cable some money. Am taking the next plane up from here myself. Ramm.

IV

India, 1939

MAXINE MURRAY was leaning over the rail of the *Aurora* staring pensively at the shore-lights of Goa glimmering like fireflies across the greenish-white phosphorescent roadstead, when a muffled tread passed along the deck behind her. The brilliant disk of the moon cast the yacht's shadow shoreward. She turned, saw the white blur of a shirt and the glow of a cigarette-coal. It was Bud Gordon, coatless in the insufferable heat.

"Terrible, even out here, isn't it?" she said involuntarily, though an instant before she had fully intended to keep silent.

He stopped short, surprised. "Oh—I didn't know you'd stayed aboard. I wouldn't have ordered the deck-lights turned off if I'd known—"

"Leave them that way for a change. I like it dark, it's cooler." She added reflectively: "You try to save all the expense you can for him, don't you, even though he throws his money away all the time?"

He didn't answer the remark. "How is it you're not ashore with the others?"

"They're sampling the city's night-life and that's no treat to me. I've worked in too many of those places to get any kick out of pub-crawling."

He just grunted, half-turned to go on again.

She made a half-formed gesture toward him in the dark. "Won't you stay and talk a minute—even though I'm a parasite, a gold-digger? I'm lonely—" Then as though repenting the appeal, "Sorry, I forgot. We're enemies."

He moved over to the rail, rested his muscular forearms on it, stood there parallel to her but the length of a deck-stanchion away. He blew smoke thoughtfully downward and watched it winnow away.

"I'm making you do this. You don't really want to."

He didn't answer.

"I can't make you out," Maxine went on. "You're civil to Marge and the other girl, and I'm not doing any more than they are—"

"You don't hold it against cats for thieving cream; that's their nature, they don't know any better. But when someone who does know better—well, it's harder to make allowances, that's all."

"I see your point—" She stared down at the dark sea, shook her head as though unconvinced. "A man like you doesn't care so greatly whether a girl is ethical or not—

there must be more to it than that." She changed the subject abruptly. "Are there sharks in these waters?"

"I wouldn't go in for a dip if I were you. . . . Well—I've got some charts to go over." The faint gleam of his broad, white-shirted back receded down the deck.

She made a furious sibilant sound with her breath, turned and ran up the other way toward the companionway that led to the cabins, marked by a dark-red bulb.

A few moments later a dark shadow, silent as a fish underwater, approached the anchored yacht from the direction of the shore. Now it was swallowed up in the shadow of the larger craft. There was a faint scraping sound of wood against steel, a warning whisper somewhere at the water-line, a creak from the Jacob's ladder that awaited the merrymakers' return. A figure crept stealthily up the ladder, scanned the deserted deck, then stepped aboard. The intruder crouched low and darted furtively on soundless native slippers toward the red bulb of the companionway.

The stairs inside, and the below-deck passageway that gave into the various cabins, were lighted. The intruder descended, turned into the first cabin-door he came to, closed it after him. The mirror inside, as he touched the light-switch, gave back the reflection of Mr. Johan Ramm.

HE CAME out again in a moment or two, leaving the cabin a shambles behind him, and darted into the one next-door. A heavy tread sounded outside while he was in there. He quickly snapped out the light, edged up behind the door, fumbled in his clothing for the hilt of his thin-bladed knife.

The footsteps went on by. He eased the door open on a crack, peered out, saw the back of one of Gordon's crew go by. He shut the door again, and counted slowly to one hundred before he put on the lights and resumed his task of dismantling the cabin.

He had worked his way to the end of the short passage—all the cabins opened onto it—and was rifling the last one of all, when there was a faint scream outside the open porthole, sounding as if it had risen from the surface of the water itself. Instantly, from the opposite side of the ship, where the moon threw its shadow, came a low-pitched but unmistakable whistle of warning.

Ramm could hear bare feet running along the deck directly over him now, and a shout of "Man overboard! Sharks!" Other footsteps, rubber-soled, joined them. There was a pause, and then a gun boomed.

A voice said hoarsely: "Here, take this and keep them off if you can! I'm going in after her!" There was a heavy splash almost immediately afterwards, so near at hand that a jet of spray sprinkled through the low porthole.

Johan Ramm didn't wait to hear any more. He doused the cabin-light, whisked out and up the companionway, and crossed the deck like a shadow. It was as deserted as before; the sounds came from around on the other side. The gun went off a second time as he plunged out of sight down the Jacob's ladder.

A moment later a native skiff shot out of the yacht's protective shadow into the phosphorescent glare of the moonlight. It darted shoreward with remarkable speed, leaving a trail of carbonated bubbles in its wake as though it were coursing over mineral water.

A short while later Bud Gordon shouldered the door of the last cabin Ramm had invaded. He staggered in dripping, holding Maxine in his arms. She was badly frightened, but unhurt. She kept staring at him peculiarly through the trickle of water that dripped from her taffy-colored hair.

He set her down on the divan, pushed his own hair back out of his eyes, and blew spray off his upper lip. "You all right?" he grunted.

Her eyes wouldn't leave his face. "Yes, I didn't go down. It was just the—well, one minute they weren't there, the next they were coming up behind me from all directions like—like arrows."

"What'd you go in for?" he demanded roughly. "You want to lose a leg?"

"No," she said, still staring. "I went in because it was the only way I could test you out. Remember I told you I couldn't figure why you were so dead-against me, more than the others? Well now I can. You're in love with me. That's why you're so sore at me—and yourself, because you hate to admit it!"

"Why, you—!" He buckled his arm threateningly at her as if he were going to let it fly backhand. "So I'm in love with you, am I! Well, try to make something out of it!" He banged the cabin-door after him so forcefully it nearly sprang its hinges.

She crossed her ankles and hugged her arms around them, smiled meditatively. "He said 'Oh, darlin', are you all right?' when he came up next to me, but he doesn't remember it any more," she murmured softly.

It was minutes later before she noticed that the cabin had been ransacked, drawers pulled out of the dresser, her belongings scattered over the floor. "Thieves from the harbor," she thought unconcernedly. Nothing much mattered, compared to the discovery she had made; she didn't have anything in here worth taking, anyway.

She set about ridding herself of her wet bathing-suit, reached up to the shoulder-strap, unfastened the brooch she had used, for lack of anything better, to hold the strap together where a button was missing.

IT WAS the red-headed girl, Marge, and not Dahlhouse for once, who discovered the roulette-wheels in the Portuguese hotel where they had all stopped for cooling drinks to break the monotony of sight-seeing on the following afternoon. She came flying excitedly back, high heels tapping across the tiled floor, fingers clawing the air in an exaggerated gesture of avarice. "Ray!" she shrieked. "Gimme money, quick! Your favorite fruit! Roulette—right back there!"

There was a stampede after her. An instant later the big circular wicker table was deserted except for six gin-slings and Maxine Murray, fanning herself demurely with a palm-leaf.

Dahlhouse came back for her, dragged her along with him by the wrist. "C'mon, my proud beauty. Why do I always have to coax you?" He thrust one of his usual hundreds, tightly folded, into her hand. "Here's a stake."

"Mr. Dahlhouse, I can't keep doing this! They all give me such lower-than-dirt looks every time they see you—"

"You never saw them turn one down themselves, did you?" he said with one of his rare flashes of insight. "Give the wheel a little flutter—it won't bite you."

She left him a moment to get the bill changed into local currency at the hotel-desk. By the time she had rejoined them in the gambling room, she couldn't find a place at the main table; a gallery had formed around the Americans like a solid wall. She edged up to a second, slightly smaller table among a number of strangers. On the third spin she hesitantly put down a handful of *escudos* on the first numbered square within reach, which happened to be the 17, red.

She had never played roulette before; not only that, she didn't even have an accurate idea of the exact sum her wager represented. She kept her eyes on the blur of the spinning wheel. It crystallized into sharp outlines, the ball clicked. A languid voice intoned in two languages: *"Vinte-dos, negro* — twenty-two, bluck." Her little sheaf of *escudos* were raked in.

Maxine thought she had remembered closing her bag after taking out the first sum; when she returned to it to take out more, it was open again. But its contents were untouched, just that brooch she was carrying in it had fallen partly out of its own weight. She thrust the bauble aside, took out a second handful of notes and placed them on the same square. Again the bank raked them in.

She dipped in for more money, found she had no more. As she was turning to move back from the table—she was pinned there by those pressing behind—a well-bred

voice said: "Pardon me, may I be of any assistance?" She looked up quickly, but instead of the Englishman she had expected, a native nobleman in brocaded satin jacket was extending a well-filled wallet.

"No, thank you, I couldn't do that," she said, taken aback.

"Don't take it personally. It is simply that your system interests me. I would like to enable you to continue."

"But I haven't been using any system that I know of!"

"Well, unconsciously then, you have been following the most sensible system I know. That is, to play the same number consistently until it finally comes in. You are bound to win eventually, you know, but it takes patience and a very elastic bankroll."

"Then why don't you try it yourself?"

"I would like nothing better," he sighed, "but unfortunately I am not in Europe now. It is politically inadvisable for me to be seen gambling in my own country. Allow me to introduce myself, the Maharajah of Maipur. Now please use this for your wagers."

The girl paled.

"But I have no security to offer, in case I lose it all. I can't just take your money and—"

"Oh well, if it will make you feel more comfortable," he said with elaborate indifference, "any nominal belonging or—ornament—will do."

She flushed embarrassedly, turned out the contents of her bag. "But I haven't even anything of that sort of any value. . . . Only this old brooch, and of course that won't do—"

He pursed his lips. "Why not?" he said, scarcely looking at it. "Anything will do, just as a token that the money is borrowed and not gifted. It is the betting-system that interests me." He drew the brooch slightly toward him along the edge of the table, allowing it to rest there.

"Well, here goes, then." She placed the entire sum he had advanced her on the same square as before: the seventeen, red.

THE maharajah's fingers, drumming tensely on the edge of the table, underscored the whine of the whirring wheel. They shifted over toward the brooch, then back again, like a pianist playing the scales.

"There was a click. A pause. *"Diez-e-siete, colorado;* sev-ven-tinn, red." A haymow of currency suddenly reared itself over her original bet. The rake kept pushing toward her now, not pulling away.

The maharajah was smiling composedly as she turned toward him, open-mouthed. A thread of moisture glistened on his smooth cheek. "You see?" he said, speaking with a little difficulty. "A very good system to follow. I don't suppose you would care to try it out any further? It would be interesting to see just how often—"

"With this antique still as your only security?" She didn't want to gamble further, but it was his stake after all. "Very well; I know it's considered poor sportsmanship to quit while you're ahead—" She put the entire windfall back on 17, red, once more.

"You will break the bank if you win," he purred.

"And if I don't, I'll be just where I was before."

"Except that you won't have the brooch."

She stood with her face turned away from the croupier, looking at the maharajah instead. "I can't bear to watch. It gives you a choked sensation in the throat."

His eyelids drooped nearly closed; he was looking down at the brooch between them. There was a click as the ball dropped home. A pause. "Seventeen, red." A gasp went up.

The maharajah looked slightly paler than before, when she had returned the original amount he had backed her with, put the rest in her handbag, and almost as an afterthought, dropped the brooch in on top of it.

"Won't you come in and meet my friends?" she said. "I see they have left the tables already. Perhaps they aren't as lucky as I am."

"Ah yes," he answered suavely. "I was told Mr. Dahlhouse's yacht was in port. Even here in India we have heard of him, you see."

When the introductions had been made, the maharajah joined them at the round wicker table. After Maxine's phenomenal run of luck had been exhausted as a topic of conversation, Dahlhouse observed to the maharajah, "No offense, but can't you do something about the climate here? That's the only thing I've got against the place."

"I suppose you expect to hear me say that weather-conditions are unfortunately beyond my control," the latter smiled affably. "However, it so happens that I *can* do something to relieve your sufferings. Why not be my guests for a few days in Maipur? It is just overnight from here, and yet you will find yourself in a different world. The hill-country, you know. Cool at nights, I can assure you. I could arrange a tiger-hunt if you would be interested, Mr. Dahlhouse?"

"Ah," said Dahlhouse, his eyes lighting up, "count me in!"

"And the ladies?"

"Brrh! No tigers for me," one answered quickly. "I'd rather stay here and put up with the heat."

"Open a charge-account for us in the bazaars before you go, Ray, that's all we ask," the redhead suggested facetiously. "We won't even miss you!"

"And the third young lady?" asked the maharajah, peering intently over at Maxine.

"It sounds exciting," she answered. "Yes, I'll come."

"Aren't you afraid of getting clawed to pieces?" sneered the redhead.

"Sure," she answered demurely, "that's why I'm going."

Dahlhouse brayed with laughter at the thrust. "Listen, Sir Hari," he went on familiarly, as though he had known the other all his life, "if there's going to be any hunting, you'd better let me bring my captain along. He's a dead-shot and I'd feel a lot safer with him on the next-elephant-over. Why, I've seen him hit a bottle in the water at a distance of—"

"By all means," answered the maharajah blandly, without paying much further attention to what he was saying, now that his main object had been achieved.

V

THE maharajah's private limousine met them late the next day at the little wayside station that was the only stop the coastal train made in his domain. A tall man in a pith-helmet stepped forward as they stood staring curiously about on the station-platform. "Mr. Dahlhouse and party? I'm Johan Ramm, his highness' secretary, sir. If you'll be good enough to step into the car, I'll have you up at the residence in a jiffy."

"What about equipment?"

"His highness will put all you need at your disposal," Ramm assured them.

As they started off, Maxine turned to peer at him curiously. "Didn't I once run into you in London, at the Puss-kat Club, Mr. Ramm? Your face is strangely familiar."

"No miss, hardly likely. I haven't been in London for years—"

"I could have sworn—" she said doubtfully, but didn't pursue the subject further.

"I feel cooler already," Dahlhouse said, as the high-powered car began to climb slowly but steadily along a winding gravel-road that led up into the hills. "Why so quiet, Bud?" he asked Gordon jovially. "Hate to be separated from your ship for even a couple of days, don't you?"

"Captain Gordon will probably brace right up as soon as the hunt itself is under way," Maxine said wickedly, "without my company."

Ramm stuck his hand out the open car-window, pointing to a wide expanse of velvety blue-green that was becoming visible below them as they ascended. "See that? That's all jungle. There's where your tigers are. Practically trackless, most of it. And when we get up a little higher, you'll be able to see the sea. His highness' terri-

tory takes in a strip of coastline along here, where the ruined city of Mitapur used to be."

Something flashed in the setting sun at the end of his pointing finger, and Gordon's eyes, drawn down to it from where he had been staring out along their guide's arm, saw a silver ring with a flat, highly-polished head. The glitter touched a chord in his memory.

The maharajah was waiting to greet them in a large open courtyard surrounded on three sides by a rambling stucco building. His retinue was gathered around him and ceremonial torches were ablaze, for the swift tropic dusk had already fallen. His hill-residence turned out to be a group of detached wooden guest-bungalows scattered at varying distances around a main building or compound, which included garage, stables, and commissary.

Inside, they had the rare experience of being served with Martinis and canapés that London couldn't have improved on, while reclining on cushions on a mosaic floor.

JOHAN RAMM sought out the maharajah in his private quarters shortly before midnight.

"Have our guests retired, Ramm?"

"Yes, all fagged-out from the train-trip. I turned over the nearest bungalow to Dahlhouse, put the yacht-captain in one of the intermediate ones, and installed the girl in the one highest up and furthest from here, explaining that it had the best view and caught more breeze."

"Perfect. That's just the way I want them situated."

Ramm smiled thinly. "What are your intentions, Sir Hari?"

The maharajah gestured with his cigarette. "Of course, it would be tactless to speak of concrete intentions. However, let us contemplate *possibilities*. Don't you think it is *possible* a fire might break out in that farthest-off bungalow, say tomorrow night. You can see how difficult it would be to save anything in it, it is so far-removed from the water-supply. There would be no time for the occupant to rescue any of her belongings, certainly not a mere trinket—"

"You want that brooch very badly, don't you?" Ramm drawled.

"It is no longer a case of wanting; I *must* have it. There were riots today in the bazaars down in the capital. Agitators are working my subjects up against me. I have been too modern for my own good, spent too much time in Europe. The only thing that can save me, that can strengthen my hold and renew my popularity, is to play upon their superstitions. I must show them that their gods are supporting me—"

"But why just this certain diamond? You have others."

Sir Hari's plump face was etched with thoughtful lines. "It is the size of it," he said. "I recognized the importance of that from the first. Did you know I was a student of our native folk-lore, Ramm? Whatever my personal belief in such things, politically I cannot afford to flout them. There is a story of an image of the fire-god in Mitapur whose eye was stolen from it, a diamond much like this. He who restores it will be blessed above all men; what is more to the point, he will hold these people in the hollow of his hand. And so tomorrow night the fire-god will reveal himself to me, in that hill-bungalow. I will have the revelation well-advertised. And when the ashes are sifted afterwards—lo! a miracle. The legendary eye of the god. I will build a new shrine—the old one was swallowed up in the jungle long ago. No more unrest, no more mutterings against me in the bazaars."

He chuckled in his throat.

"Tomorrow night then?" Ramm asked.

"Yes. That will give me twenty-four hours to lay the ground-work for the coming revelation among my subjects. You will be able to obtain waste and oil from the garage. Be very careful how you go about it; this fire must seem to be a supernatural visitation. Goodnight."

Johan Ramm went out, helping himself absent-mindedly to one of the maharajah's cigarettes from a box near the door.

"So that's what was back of it all the time," he muttered. "Not just a diamond—political pull. And if someone else should turn up and return their bloomin' idol's eye—that man would have the pull instead. Could I get away with it? Why not—the Brooke family's been ruling Sarawak for a hundred years. I wouldn't have to last that long, just long enough to feather my nest. Then hop a plane some night—" He kissed his fingertips mockingly, "Here's your country back, folks, thanks for the use of it."

He threw down his cigarette in sudden determination, trod it out, looked around the compound. The pin-points of light behind the lattices of the maharajah's private apartments had already gone out. He started toward the garage. "Tomorrow night, hell!" he muttered grimly. "Tonight's the night!"

THE distant howl of some jungle-creature on the still night-air first put the idea into Gordon's head. It was far-off and he wouldn't have lost any sleep over it himself, but it occurred to him that Maxine might be nervous up there alone in that exposed bungalow. After all. one of the brutes might just take it into its head to prowl around a human habitation. Wouldn't be the first time such a thing happened in India. There was an old Colt's revolver that he'd been carrying around for years aship and ashore with him; he decided to take it up and leave it with the girl. Stubborn to the bitter end, he refused to admit to himself that the chance of having a word alone with her had anything to do with it. As a matter of fact, if he hadn't had the gun for an excuse, he probably would have found another—matches or the loan of a needle and thread. or something.

He found the Colt at the bottom of his duffle-bag, pocketed it, came out of his bungalow, and started up the hill—in his usual footgear, canvas sneakers without socks.

Clumps of small fir-trees and scrub-pines screened her bungalow until he was nearly at the crest of the rise. There was no path or road as such, simply a sort of rut that in the rainy season must have formed a perfect spillway. But then this place was not used in the rainy season, anyway. The Oriental sky was a jewelled tapestry of stars, he'd never seen so many even out at sea, and the air was nearly as cool as back home on an early Fall night, just before the frost set in. He was thinking of Maxine back home with him on a night like this, wondering if he'd ever have the nerve to ask her, when there was a muffled clash of tin from the underbrush just ahead and some sort of vague light began to glow out. For a minute he thought she'd lit the lamp in her bungalow, but the glow was too irregular.

He broke into a run. The bungalow came into sight, and he was just in time to see a man's figure outlined for an instant under the veranda-shed. It was a tall man, and he rested his hand against one of the veranda-posts, pausing to look back inside. Now, as the light through the screen-door brightened, something flashed on one of his fingers. Gordon remembered the maharajah's car that afternoon, and Johan Ramm pointing out at the sunset jungle.

He yelled "Hey—what are you doing there?" and bolted forward. The dim figure leaped from the veranda, slipped around the corner of the bungalow. There was a brief crackle of underbrush, then all other sound was swallowed up in the increasing roar of the flames.

It was more important to get her out of there first; Gordon knew who'd done it now, anyway. He turned back, plunged inside. Maxine was just starting awake, coughing dazedly under a tangled mesh of mosquito-netting that had already ignited at one edge from the criss-cross lines of fire. Gordon ripped away the flimsy cloth, trampled it, lifted the girl and carried her out.

HE TOUCHED her bare feet to the ground just beyond the veranda. "I'll see if I can get some of your things," he said, and went lunging back again. The

back wall of the house was a solid curtain of flame now and the heat was punishing. He snatched up a dress and a pair of shoes, and came out again with his eyes stinging. He was ready to turn around and go in a third time, but Maxine held him fast by one arm.

There was a bang like a gun and a blazing roof-timber sagged V-shaped down into the room.

She struggled into the dress over her night-gown. "What did I do, leave the lamp on or something?" she asked.

"No, you didn't leave the lamp on." He decided not to frighten her for the present by telling her what he'd seen.

"Well, I didn't have anything much in there anyway. A couple of extra dresses, and a bottle of perfume Ray bought me at Batavia, and that glass thingamabob. No, wait a minute—" She looked down at the neckline of her dress. "I remember pinning it on this dress when I took my things off. Must have dropped off in there. Never mind, it's not worth anything anyway."

He took her by the arm. "Come on. We'll just have to let the fire burn itself out, I guess. Funny that the servants aren't swarming around. . . . I'll turn my place over to you and bunk up with Dahlhouse for tonight. But first there's someone—I want to see."

He handed her the revolver at the door of his own bungalow. "Keep this with you."

He went down to the compound, looked around. Sleep and silence and darkness prevailed; the fire had evidently not been noticed down here. A slight pinkish halo up at the top of the hill was all that could be seen from this distance.

He woke up one of the maharajah's sleeping foot-soldiers in a doorway, ascertained where Ramm's quarters were. He tried the door first, without bothering to knock. It was bolted fast, so he thumped his fist against it.

A bolt slid out with amenable haste and the door opened. Johan Ramm was the perfect picture of a man awakened from deep sleep, pajamas, tousled hair, and all. Gordon pushed him out of the way, closed the door, then turned and caught the half-caste by the throat.

His voice rumbled deep in his chest with pent-up rage. "What's the idea setting fire to Miss Murray's bungalow—and with her in it—you dirty thieving murderer? Answer me! What'd you do it for?"

A small native coffee-table went over as Ramm tried to free himself. "I don't know what you're talking about! I've been asleep in bed here for the past—"

"You liar! Hold your hand in front of that lamp! Hold it out or I'll bust you apart!"

Ramm thrust it out. The middle finger flashed in the lamplight, not once but repeatedly, it was shaking so with fright.

Gordon narrowed his eyes to murderous slits. "Sure. I knew it was you anyway."

Johan Ramm quailed as he saw him roll up a fist. "Now listen—now see here—"

"So you don't want the maharajah to know, huh? Well, I won't wake him up at this hour of the night, but he's going to hear about it the first thing in the morning, you can bet your bottom dollar. And if he don't kick you off his payroll and out of here, I'll do it myself! Until then, here's a night-cap!"

His fist pounded out, sent Ramm spread-eagling back across the tiled floor.

DAHLHOUSE, accustomed to late hours even on a tiger-hunting expedition, was still sleeping when Gordon got up the next morning. He dressed quietly without waking the other man, slipped out and went over to the other bungalow, his own former one, to see how Maxine was getting along.

She wasn't in it.

He turned around and went down to the compound again. It was all pink and blue in the early sunlight, like a confectionery palace. Some of the maharajah's humbler subjects were stirring already. He saw some of the household women scrubbing clothes on flat stones beside a small stream, met a stableman coming up with brimming buckets of water.

"Where girl? You know—girl?"

The man showed his teeth, proud that he knew a few words of English "Mem-sahib go horse-ride in joongle."

"In the jungle! Alone?"

"With Sahib."

It must be Ramm. Dahlhouse was still asleep; he was the only other white man in the party. Gordon's face got a little tighter, but he gave no other sign of excitement. "Saddle me a horse, quick! Which way did they go?"

The man gestured vaguely to the west, to where mists were already streaming upward from the blue-green moss-bed Ramm had pointed out yesterday. "Let horse loose. Horse follow others."

"She'll never come back alive!" Bud Gordon thought, throwing his leg over a fine black mare the stableman had led out for him. "That devil!" He smacked the sleek rump with his bare hand, started cantering down to the small stream that ran by the compound, and kept along beside that until the jungle-walls had closed in on both banks and nearly met overhead, like a great tunnel.

Maxine and Johan Ramm had come this way before him. An occasional horse-dropping, hoofprints in the soft soil at the creek's edge, slashed creepers, and broken fronds—these signs pointed the trail. But he couldn't go very fast without risking being unhorsed or strangled by one of the tenacious vines or lianas frequently laced across the stream-bed.

After about three-quarters of an hour's splashing and stumbling, half in the stream-bed, half on its slippery banks, the horse whinnied and pricked up its ears. Something or somebody just ahead! He rounded an unexpected bend in the stream and came upon a motionless tableau.

RAMM was sitting perfectly still, his horse's head turned as though he had coolly waited for Gordon to overtake him. Maxine was on another mount so close beside the half-caste that their stirrups were touching. Her hands were held out of sight, and she was arched helplessly over toward Ramm. His open hand was pressed over her mouth to silence her. All Gordon could see were her eyes. They were rolling mutely upwards. He didn't understand the message in time, spurred angrily forward to free her.

Something dropped heavily from the leafy covert overhead, unhorsing him. He went rolling into the stream-bed with a native groom on top of him. There was a knife in the attacker's hand and now the blade was menacing Gordon's throat.

"Well done," said Johan Ramm. "Tie his hands, Bikar."

His wrists were lashed tightly, and a moment later the groom had flung him unceremoniously back on his horse. The brown man kept the reins in his own hand as he remounted his own, which had been tethered out of sight.

"Now come on," Ramm said, leading Maxine's horse after him by the bridle. "We'll go in a little deeper—where a shot isn't likely to be heard."

Gordon said, "What's the idea? You can't get away with this."

"This is the idea," chuckled Johan Ramm. There was a glitter as he removed some object from his waistband, tossed it up, deftly caught it in the hollow of his hand again. Gordon recognized that brooch he had seen on Maxine so often. "And as for getting away with it—don't you think it's likely that if two greenhorns like you and the little lady went riding too deep in the jungle you might lose your way and never come out alive again? Your horses will find their way back in a day or two—and everyone'll be able to read the signs."

"You murdering rat," Gordon gritted.

It was high noon when Ramm finally drew up in a sun-spotted glade, walled at one end by a sharply-upthrust mound, almost cone-shaped. "This is a good place—the old temple ruins. They're scared to come too near here—haunted by the gods." He reined-in the girl's horse and the groom did likewise with Gordon's. They pulled their two captives off the saddles by main force. Ramm took an automatic out of a holster hanging by his saddle, broke it,

blew into it meaningfully, clapped it shut again. "Tie our horses so they won't bolt," he ordered. "Let the other two shift for themselves." The groom led two of the horses to the upper end of the glade, threshed about among the cane-brakes.

Bud Gordon had been working desperately at his bonds the whole morning. He'd undone them long ago, but kept the cords around his wrists. No mere native groom could expect to show a seaman anything in the way of insoluble knots.

"Right here and now?" he asked quietly, shifting closer to the girl.

"Right you are," Ramm assured him remorselessly.

"Let's see what kind of a man you are," Gordon improvised. "The condemned are always given one last cigarette before they die. I haven't had a smoke all morning."

"All right," said the half-caste accommodatingly. "If she can stand the strain of waiting, so can I." He took out one of the maharajah's monogrammed silk-tips, thrust it between Gordon's lips, still holding the automatic warily.

"There's a lighter in my jacket-pocket," Gordon said hopefully, still keeping his hands behind him. He had managed to catch Maxine's eye for an instant and to gesture her toward the moss-covered mound that reared behind them.

RAMM had taken out the oblong lighter, was holding it up carelessly. Gordon knew that lighter well. He was counting on its habit of flaming defectively when its fuel-content had been agitated too much, as now by his long horseback-ride. "Just push the little thumb-catch down," he instructed.

A fan-shaped gush of thin flame pinwheeled between their two faces. Gordon blew out his breath with all the lung-power he could master. It deflected it straight into the brown eyes of Johan Ramm. The half-caste gave a scream as he jolted back, momentarily singed and half-blinded. Gordon's hands whipped out, ripped the automatic out of his relaxed grasp muzzle-first. It exploded through his cuff, burning his wrist, but he did not even feel the pain. He was too intent on his own left fist that smashed into Ramm's face and knocked him flat.

"The groom, Bud!" Maxine screamed. Gordon twisted around and saw the second man at the far end of the clearing. He was unslinging a rifle from one of the saddle girths.

"Get behind that mound," Gordon shouted. He snapped a shot at the groom that gashed the bark of a tree just behind the man's head, then stumbled after Maxine around the slippery uneven base of the massive protuberance, which seemed to be partly rotting logs, partly hewn blocks of granite, and partly topsoil.

"Give me that rifle!" Ramm was yelling to the groom. "You don't know the first thing about handling it!"

The two Americans were out of sight now. Bud Gordon knew how slight their chances were in a duel of automatic versus rifle, but there was a ray of hope at least. He was a crack shot and he knew he would not miss if Ramm could be lured within range. His fingers gripped tight on Maxine's arm as he led her among the vine-tangled ruins where a number of peculiar monoliths reared upright, like thick headstones.

"Get down behind one of those," Gordon warned. He tried to climb up the rear of the chief one, to get the drop on Ramm who was stalking them from the other side. Its smooth, mossy slope defeated him, sent him slipping down again.

At the same instant the rifle boomed out, the sound echoing around them with a vibrant roar. The bullet thudded not far above Gordon's head and a black fissure, like a snake, leaped halfway up the protecting bulwark and unravelled into a spidery network of cracks. Some loose earth and little stones went cascading down. Gordon drew back, mystified. He began to work his way warily sidewise among the upright and fallen monoliths.

But Johan Ramm, close up under the front of the tumulus, must have seen him first. The rifle boomed out again, sent

chips of stone flying sickeningly close to Gordon's concealed face.

Then there was a sudden explosive crack —a sound that didn't come from the rifle. Bud Gordon heard Ramm's voice shrill out in a scream and caught a glimpse of the man's distorted face and his arms upraised as if to ward off attack from the sky above. The whole top of the mound seemed to have shifted out over Johan Ramm, while its base, around on the other side, reared up into the air like an overturned pedestal. A moment later the whole mound disintegrated into a flux of cascading boulders that leveled itself with a rumble like heavy artillery. The ground shook sickeningly and a great haze of dust blotted out the whole glade.

WHEN the dust had finally dissipated into a brownish haze they could make out one of Ramm's legs protruding motionless from a heap of rubble. The moaning sound they heard was the voice of the groom, rendered helpless by abysmal superstitious terror, wailing and beating his head to the ground at the far end of the clearing.

Bud Gordon wet his lips. The towering mound, he saw now, must have been some great idol of the temple that the jungle ages had mossed over. Ramm's bullets had brought it toppling down upon him.

The wailing groom had vanished into the jungle. They found the tethered horses and mounted. Neither of them spoke until they drew rein at the edge of the clearing for a final glance behind.

"What did he want with that brooch of mine?" Maxine asked, mystified.

Gordon shook his head, equally baffled. "I don't understand the whole thing, myself, from beginning to end."

He touched her hand and they rode away. Behind them the ancient dust settled and a silence reigned in the jungle clearing where the eyeless idol had reclaimed its own.

THE END

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

★ ★ ★

THIS being one of those days when inanimate objects assume all too animate a personality, wriggling and jumping out of the hand that seeks to grasp them, hiding under desks, or smashing into fragments at a glance, it would probably be better to get to the mail without further ado. Otherwise it will undoubtedly leap out of the window. Or blow up. Or something.

First to meet the eye is the following postal card from a correspondent in the Ozarks who shall be nameless:

I hav a shorte story riton on the first dayse off the ozarks i would like to hav publishe plese giv me your termse
—, Ark.

CONSCIOUS that we are probably missing an American epic, we have reluctantly decided to give the above mentioned manuscript the go-by. Another penner of postcards is obviously keeping a vigilant eye on our interests:

SAUL WINER

Charlie Chaplin is making a new movie. It will be based on an old ARGOSY story: "The Man with the Magic Face." You may remember it.
Brooklyn.

AS FAR as we can make out from the public prints the theme of the new Chaplin picture is rather similar to that of "The Man with the Magic Face"—a dictator's double taking the ruler's place. But as far as we know, aside from that likeness the two stories have no relation with one another.

And now we must stop—what we feared has happened. The remaining mail *has* just leaped out the window.

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29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
28x5.25-17	2.85	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.59
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
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Size	Tires	Tubes
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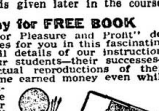

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Every hour, day and night, 4,080 people are disabled through sickness and accident. You never know when tragedy strikes. **The Policy of the Century** comes to your aid at the time of your most dire need—at a time when you are down, financially handicapped, unable to care for your loved ones.

THE POLICY OF THE CENTURY

WILL PAY YOUR BILLS

YOU RECEIVE

$7,500.00 Accidental Death, Or

$7,500.00 Accidental Death Or LOSS OF HANDS, FEET OR EYES

$25 For Each Week For DISABILITY From ACCIDENT

$25 For Each Week For HOSPITAL

$100 EMERGENCY ALLOWANCE

COST TO YOU ONLY $1 PER MONTH

The United Insurance Company of Illinois, a legal reserve insurance company which has paid millions of dollars to policy holders, offers you the new "CENTURY" Policy. This company is not an association or assessment company. Old, reliable. It is approved by state insurance departments. Be safe! Costs only $1 per month. Just mail coupon.

INSURES MEN AND WOMEN

The new "Century" Sickness and Accident Policy insures both men and women with the benefits shown here. Also many other liberal features outlined in the policy.

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

Anyone between 16 and 75 can apply. No medical examination. No agent will call.

SEND NO MONEY Remember you do not send one cent—just mail the coupon below. Don't delay—do this today!

MAIL COUPON NOW FOR COMPLETE DETAILS

CENTURY POLICY DEPT., INC., UNITED INSURANCE COMPANY, SUITE U-65 ELGIN TOWER, ELGIN, ILL. — NO AGENT WILL CALL

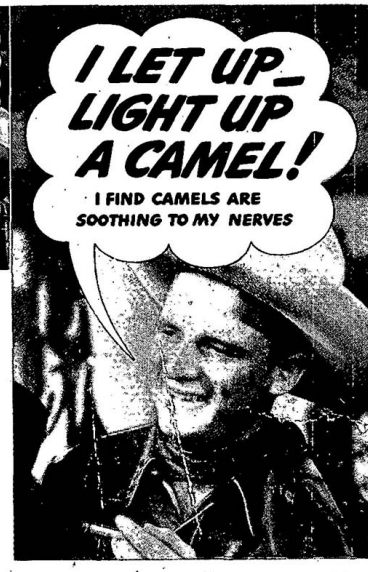
Please mail me at once complete information how to get the "Century" Policy for my Free Inspection without obligation.

Name.....

Address.....

"You bet Stunt Riding is a strain on the Nerves!"

says Carl Dossey, CHAMPIONSHIP COWBOY AND RODEO STAR



"RIDE 'EM, COWBOY!"... and Arizona's Carl Dossey *does*—with the brilliant rodeo horsemanship that's won him two bareback championships in California, and a high-point cowboy title at the big Cedar City (Utah) show. He's pictured above in a breath-taking stunt at New York's Madison Square Garden. No room in *this* performance for tense, jittery nerves! Later, over a Camel, Carl explains his way of sidestepping nerve strain... a pleasant way you'll want to adopt.

MUCH CAN BE LEARNED ABOUT NERVES BY OBSERVING THE DOG

THE English Springer Spaniel (*above*) is speedy, agile—an especially good gun dog. He has a highly developed nervous system remarkably similar to our own... sensitive, high-keyed. But, unlike many humans, this dog doesn't ABUSE his nerves. When a dog feels tired, he rests INSTINCTIVELY! We often let will-power whip us on, deaf to the warning that nerves are getting frayed. Yet how much more pleasant life can be when nerves are rested now and then. Pause frequently... LET UP—LIGHT UP A CAMEL! You'll welcome Camel's mildness—rich, ripe flavor. Smokers find Camel's COSTLIER tobaccos are soothing to the nerves.

NO DOUBT about the nerve strain in Dossey's life. But often we don't realize how tense nerves can get in every-day occupations—perhaps in your own. Miss Ferril (*below*) avoids nerve strain as so many smokers do ... by letting up—lighting up a Camel!

"ACCURACY IS VITAL in my job," says Elsie Ferril, who works all day at an adding machine. "My work requires intense concentration. I can't afford *jittery nerves*. So, when I feel nerve tension coming on, I let up—light up a Camel. I find this a pleasant way to soothe my nerves."

Smokers find Camel's Costlier Tobaccos are SOOTHING TO THE NERVES

Smoke 6 packs of Camels and find out why they are the largest-selling cigarette in America