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COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL **Arthur Leo Zagat**

ARGOSY

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WEEKLY

"Will your children walk in chains as slaves of the Yellow Horde?"

"TOMORROW"

ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Combined with All-American Fiction

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Illustrating Tomorrow

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A Complete Short Novel

Tomorrow

What will they be like—those Lost Children of Tomorrow, the survivors of Armageddon? How will they live, and who will lead them? Here is a vivid visualization of their fight back to Civilization, an exciting adventure story, and the portrait of fiction's most striking hero since Tarzan, rolled into one

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

Author of "Seven Out of Time," "Drink We Deep," etc.

CHAPTER I

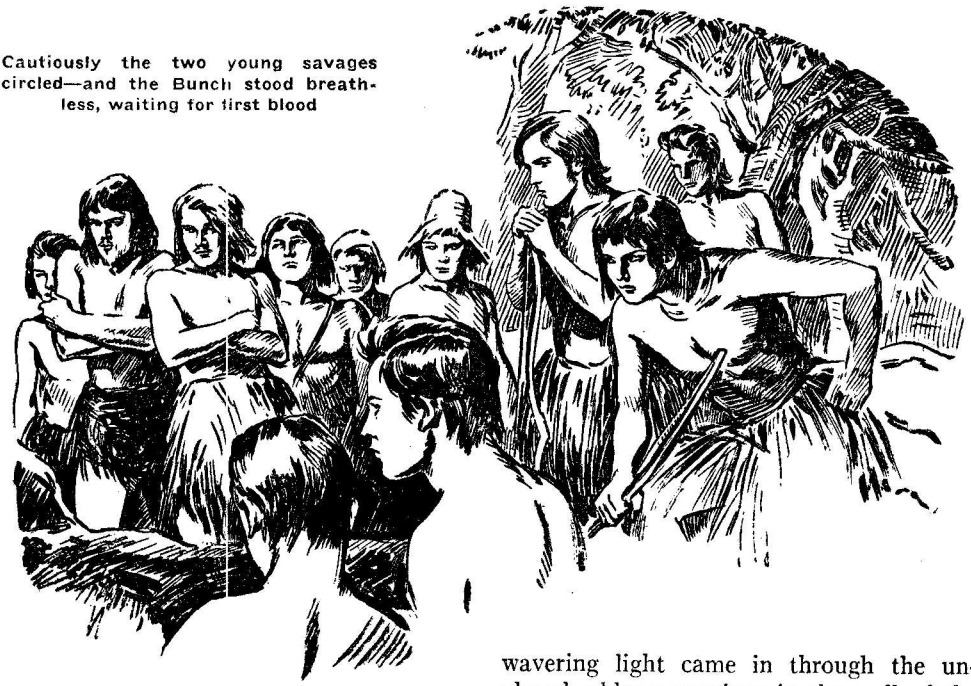
THE LOST ONES

DIKAR was on his knees, his head bowed against the side of his cot, his hands palm to palm. The fragrance of the dried grass with which his mattress was stuffed was in his nostrils, the rabbit fur of his blanket soft and warm against his forehead. Behind him there were two long rows of cots, eleven in each, separated by a wide space. At every cot knelt one of the Bunch, but the only sound was a low drone.

Dikar's own murmur was a part of that drone. "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. An should I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." Dikar used, as all of them did, the prayer they had learned before the terror had come. They had never been taught another.

Dikar stayed on his knees as behind him there was a rustle of lifting bodies, a chatter of voices. One cried out, loud above the others, "Hey, fellers!" Jimlane it was. "Who took my bow and arrows and didn't bring em back?" His changing voice, deep at first, broke into a high squeal. "If I ketch the guy—"

"They're out by the Fire Stone, foolish." That was Tomball. "I seen you leave



Cautiously the two young savages circled—and the Bunch stood breathless, waiting for first blood

em there yourself. You'll be leavin your head somewhere one these days, an forget where. You're sure the prize dumby of the Bunch."

The other Boys laughed, tauntingly. Dikar heard them, and he didn't quite hear them.

He was waiting for a soft hand to stroke his hair, for sweet, low tones to say, "The good Lord bless you, my son, and give you pleasant dreams." He knew they would not come. Hand and voice were vanished in the mists of Long-ago, curtained from Dikar by the dark Time of Fear before which, as he very dimly recalled, everything had been different from what it was now. But always, when he had said his "now-I-lay-me," he waited for them. . . .

"Quit callin me a dumby," Jimlane squealed. "You gotta quit it."

"Who's gonna make me, dumby? You?"

Dikar rose to his feet, sighing, the burden of his leadership once more heavy upon him.

From the blaze on the Fire Stone, a wavering light came in through the unglazed, oblong openings in the wall of the long narrow Boys' House. It bathed with red the stalwart, naked bodies; nut-brown skin under which flat muscles moved smoothly.

Tomball was out in the space between the cots, his bulging arms hanging loose at his sides, his adolescent, chunky jaw black-stubbled, his eyes, too closely set, glittering between slitted lids.

Jimlane faced him and was little more than half his size. Puny, his hairless countenance rashed with small pimples, the kid's upper lip trembled but he stood his ground in mid-aisle as the other advanced, slow and threatening.

"Yes, me," Jimlane answered him bravely. "I ain't scared uh you, you big bully."

"You ain't, huh," Tomball grunted, closing the distance between them as Dikar got into motion. "Then I'll teach you to be."

Tomball had hold of Jimlane's wrist and was twisting it, his shadowed lip curling. The smaller lad's face went white with pain. His free hand twisted, batted at his tormentor's hairy belly. Tomball grinned

and kept on twisting. His victim bent almost double, agonized, but still there was no whimper from the youngster. . . .

Dikar's fingers closed on Tomball's arm and dug into the hard muscle. "No fair," Dikar said. "Break!"

TOMBALL loosed Jimlane, jerked free of Dikar's hold and swung around. "Says who?" he growled, a redness in his black, small eyes that was not put there by the light. He was a quarter-head taller than Dikar and broader across the shaggy chest, and his thighs were twice the span of Dikar's. "Oh, it's you!"

"It's me," Dikar said quietly. "An I'm orderin you to quit pickin on Jimlane an on the other little fellows who don't take your guff." Dikar was lean-flanked and lithe-limbed, his hair and his silken beard yellow as the other's was black, his eyes a deep, shining blue.

"There will be no bullyin here, so long as I'm Boss of the Bunch."

Their code, like their talk, had been preserved unchanged from their young childhood, back before the Days of Fear. Isolated, they had no adult models to copy as they grew to young manhood.

"Yeah?" Tomball said through lips thin and straight beneath their sparse covering of sprouting hairs, and somehow Dikar knew what he was going to say next. It had been coming for a long time and now it was here and Dikar was not altogether sorry.

Tomball said it: "As long as you're Boss." Two gray spots pitted the skin at the corners of his flat nose. "Maybe. But it's time you made room for someone else, Dikar. For me."

By Tomball's increasing unwillingness to obey orders, by his sulking and his endless whisperings with those of the Boys who had to be watched lest they shirk their share of work, Dikar had known the challenge was coming.

He had thought out his answer and was ready with it. "All right," he said, low-voiced and very calm. "I'll call a Full Council tomorrow, of the Boys and the Girls. I'll tell em why I think I should keep on being Boss and you'll tell em why you think I should not, an then the Bunch will decide."

A murmur ran around the ring of Boys that had close-packed about Dikar and Tomball.

"No!" Tomball refused. "It wasn't the Bunch decided you should be Boss in the first place. It was the Old Ones." He paused, and a meaningful grin widened his mouth. "Or so *you* say."

"Maybe," Dikar smiled, surprised he could smile. "Maybe, Tomball, you'd like to ask the Old Ones if they picked me to be Boss when they brought us here and left us. Maybe you'd like to climb down the Drop an ask em whether you or I should be Boss from now on."

The Boys gasped, in the ring around, and Dikar's own skin crawled at the back of his neck.

DOWN, down as far as the Mountain on which the Bunch lived was high, fell the great Drop that fully circled its base. Straight up and down was the Drop's riven rock, and so barren of foothold that no living thing could hope to scale it.

Below, for a space twice as wide across as the tallest of the trees in the forest that robed the Mountain, were tumbled stones as big as the Boy's House and bigger. White and angry waters fumed beneath the stones, and beneath stones and waters were the Old Ones.

Dikar himself had seen these things, from the topmost branch of a certain tree that gave a view of them, but not even Dikar had ever gone out from the concealing curtain of the forest to the brink of the Drop, for of all the Must-Nots the Old Ones had left behind, this was the most fearful; *"You must not go out of the woods. You must not go near the edge of the Drop."*

Thinking of all this as he stared into the red hate in Tomball's eyes, Dikar asked, "Do you dare, Tomball, climb down the Drop an talk to the Old Ones?"

"Smart," Tomball sneered. "You think

you're smart, don't you? You want me to go down there an that way be rid of me. Well, it don't work, see? I'm just as smart as you are."

Dikar spread his hands. "You will not let the Bunch decide between us, an you will not ask the Old Ones. How, then, do you want this thing settled?"

"How? How have you yourself ordered scraps between the Boys settled? Dikar! I dare you to fight out with me, fists, or sticks or knives even, who's gonna be Boss of the Bunch—you or me."

"No fair," Jimlane cried out at that. "I say it's no fair. Tomball's bigger than Dikar an heavier."

"No fair," Steveland yelped. Billthomas yelled, "We cry the dare no fair." But others were shouting, *"Fight!"* Fredalton and Halross and rabbit-faced Carlberger. "They gotta fight it out. It's Dikar's own Rule an he's gotta stick by it."

Most of the Boys shouted, "Fight!"

"Shut up!" Dikar bellowed. "Shut up, all of you," and at once the yelling stopped. But the ring had shrunk till he could feel their breaths on his back and heard little whimpers in the Boys' throats and read their eyes, shining in the changing light of the Fire. "You dare me fight to decide who'll be Boss," Dikar said to Tomball, taking up the ritual he himself had set. "Do you cry a fight between us two fair?"

A cord in Tomball's short neck twitched. "I cry us equal-matched." (By the Rule, Dikar had a right to appeal to the Bunch from Tomball's lying response.) "If you refuse my dare, Dikar, I will cry you yellow, and claim the right about which we scrap." Reading the eyes in the ring, Dikar saw that if he appealed and the Bunch said he and Tomball were not equal-matched, he might remain Boss in name, but Boss in truth he would be no longer. "That is the Rule you yourself have made." Tomball abandoned the ritual. "An you gotta stick by it."

Dikar's lips still smiled. "That is the rule I have made, Tomball. But this over which we scrap is no bird brought down by an unmarked arrow nor question of whose turn it is to bring water from the spring. Who shall be Boss affects not only you and me, but the whole bunch. Is it right that it be decided in the way such small scraps are decided?" Dikar pretended to ask that of Tomball, but his eyes asked the question of all the eyes in the crowded circle, and the eyes had already answered him when Tomball spoke again.

"It is right." Tomball voiced the verdict of the eyes. "It is the only way that is right. You gotta fight me or crawl." There was triumph in his voice, and triumph in his swagger. Tomball had weight on his side, and reach and strength, and he knew he was already as good as Boss.

Dikar knew it too, and his heart was heavy, but he smiled still. "All right," he said. "We fight, Tomball. With bare fists."

THE Boys hurrahed, the sound like the bay of the dogpack when they've brought down their prey under the trees. Even Steveland and Billthomas hurrahed, and though Jimlane was silent his pale eyes danced with the dancing red light of the Fire.

Dikar listened, thinking what Tomball would do as Boss of the Bunch; whether he would let his pals shirk work, whether he would see that the corn patches were weeded, and the watertank cleaned, and the roofs of the Boys' House and the Girls' House kept patched against the rains and the snows and the cold.

It was worry about these things and others like them that weighted Dikar's heart. He knew how painfully he had learned, in the long years since the Bunch had come to the Mountain, all the many little irksome tasks that must be done for the good of the Bunch; and he remembered that Tomball had always scoffed at them.

For himself Dikar would be happy to be no longer Boss. It meant being lonely—for the Boss must have no pal, lest he be accused of favoring his friend over any other. It meant carrying a heavy freight

of care through the day, and lying sleepless through the night, and never knowing rest. It meant assigning the hunters to the chase, whose joys he never knew; to judging the games and never playing them; to punish when Rules were broken but never breaking Rules just for the fun of it and finding the punishment worth it.

"What are we waiting for?" Tomball's growl broke into Dikar's thoughts. "Come on outside and let's go."

"No," Dikar said. "We fight tomorrow, before the whole Bunch. Tonight, now, we sleep. Already it is Bed-Time, an long past."

"I want to fight now," Tomball insisted, standing his ground. "I don't want to wait till tomorrow."

The smile faded from Dikar's lips, and he felt tiny muscles knot along the ridge of his jaw, beneath his yellow beard. "Bed-Time is not my Rule, but a Rule of the Old Ones. Perhaps, when you are Boss, Tomball, you will let the Bunch break it, but I am still Boss, an I do not. To bed, Tomball. To bed, all of you. Right away!"

Dikar's eyes locked with Tomball's, and blue eyes and black held for a long minute and there was no sound in the Boys' House, and no movement at all. Then the black eyes fell, and Tomball muttered, "It's the Old Ones I obey, Dikar, not you," and the ring broke up into Boys hurrying to their cots.

Dikar stood spread-legged, the firelight playing on his tall, well-knit form, his chest moving quietly with his slow breathing, the taut hollow of his belly heaving, his eyes somber as he watched the Boys obey him—perhaps for the last time.

He didn't feel Jimlane's fingers squeeze his. He didn't hear Jimlane's whisper, "I hope you win tomorrow, Dikar. Gee, how I hope you win."

Dikar stood there while the curtains woven from slender withes were dropped over the window-openings, shutting out the red light of the Fire that the Girls tended tonight.

He stood there, unmoving, till the excited whisperings along the walls of the Boys' House had faded, and the scrape of the fur blankets along skin had ended, and there were no more creakings. Then he turned and padded to his own cot, and knelt beside it.

Dikar's lips moved, but the words came soundless. He was sending them out through the wall, past the leaping flames on the great, flat Fire Stone, past the Girls' House into the night-darkened woods.

He was speaking to a Presence there, a Someone he had never seen and never heard, but had always known to be there, because He showed His work in the carpet of the leaves underfoot, in the tall and stately trees, in the wind that rustled through the woods' green roof and the sunlight that shimmered through it.

"I don't care what happens to me tomorrow, Sir," Dikar told Him. "I don't care how much Tomball hurts me, or what he does to me if he wins. It's the Bunch I ask you to take care of. Please, Sir. If Tomball is too strong for me, tomorrow, an he licks me, please make it all right for him to be Boss. Please make him smart enough to be a good Boss. Please make him be a better Boss for the Bunch than me. They're good kids, Sir, the Boys an the Girls, an mostly they obey the Rules the Old Ones left, an You ought to take care of them. You will take care of them, Sir, won't you?"

Dikar's lips stopped moving, but he stayed on his knees a little while longer, his head bent as if he were listening.

He heard nothing but the soft breathing sounds, and the wind's treetop whisper, and the insect chorus of the night.

When at last he stirred and climbed into his cot and drew his fur blanket up over him he was comforted.

CHAPTER II

THE NIGHTMARE THAT WAS TRUE

SLEEP'S deep emptiness claimed Dikar swiftly and wholly, as always it claims one whose weariness is clean and physical.

A voice came into the nothingness, the voice for which Dikar waited each Bed-Time after he'd said his Now-I-lay-me.

. . . Mom's voice it was that came through the open door of the dark room where Dick Carr had awakened. Something in Mom's voice made Dick afraid: tears, and a trying hard to hide the tears, and a smile that he somehow knew hurt Mom more than the tears.

"Take care of yourself," Mom was saying, "and come back soon."

Who was going away? There was only Mom and Dick in the flat, and Henry who was twelve, four years older than Dick, and who took up more than his half of their bed. Dick pushed out to wake Henry, and his hand found only bunched sheets.

Henry wasn't there!

The next minute Dick heard Henry out in the hall. "Sure, I'll come back soon. Don't you worry. This thing will be over in a jiffy, you'll see. We're just being called out because—because the last big drive is on, an' they need us in the rear lines so's all the real soldiers can be free to do the fightin'. There ain't nothin' to worry about, Mom. They can't lick us. Maybe they've licked the rest uh the world but they can't lick the good old U. S. A. We've won every war we were ever in an' we'll win this one—

"Look Mom, I got to run. The radio said for my unit to be at the Eighth Street Armory at eleven o'clock, an' it's four of, now. Goo'bye, Mom."

There was a kiss and the flat-door slamming shut, and then there wasn't any sound coming in through the door at all and the flat seemed awful empty.

In through the window rang the clatter of feet running in the street. Dick heard it every night, listening to the big boys who didn't have to go to bed early and could play in the street after supper. But Dick knew they weren't playing now, because they all ran the one way and after a little while he didn't hear them any more.

Then Dick lay listening to the thunder that had been in the sky so long he usually didn't hear it. The thunder seemed a little louder tonight, and a little nearer, and more scary. The glass in the window kept rattling and that made Dick look at the window and at the square gold-starred flag that hung in the window.

The star was for Pop. It was to show everybody how proud we were that Pop was a hero. Only Dick didn't quite understand why we should be proud when every window in the block had a flag with a gold star, a lot of them even with two or three gold stars.

What was there to be proud about in your Pop being a hero when all the other kids' fathers were heroes too, and their big brothers, and a lot of their sisters too, being Red Cross nurses and working in ammunishun plants that was blown up and all?

Dick wished Pop would stop being a hero and come home.

Mom and Henry said Pop wasn't ever going to come home, but Dick didn't believe that. Dick didn't believe Pop would go away from them forever and ever.

Now Henry was gone away too. But he was coming back soon. He had told Mom he was, hadn't he? He wouldn't lie to Mom, would he?

Dick heard the sound of feet again, coming down the street. The feet weren't running now. They were marching. Dick knew what feet sounded like when they were marching. He'd heard them before Pop went away, when you could hardly hear them for the crowds shouting and the bands braying soldier-music.

He'd heard the feet marching when Pop went away; there were no bands then, and no hurrahs, and there were hardly anybody in the street, only in the windows a lot of women, waving handkerchiefs, and then holding them up to their faces.

Yes, Dick had heard a lot of marching feet, but they had never sounded quite like these. The sound of them feet wasn't nearly as loud as the others.

Dick pushed back the covers and got to the window. The tops of the street lights

were painted black, and the bottoms were blue; so that the gutter was like blue water, deap and awful, and across the street was only a black and dreadful wall.

Down the street came the marchers.

THEY were boys like Henry, some of them bigger and some smaller, but none of them very much bigger or very much smaller. Each had a gun slanted across his shoulder. Not one was in uniform. They were dressed in their everyday clothes, caps and jackets and pants. Some of the boys wore longies, most wore knickers or shorts, and a lot were barelegged down to the socks folded over the tops of their shoes. They were like a bunch of boys marching out of school on a fire-drill.

They were not playing soldiers. They *were* soldiers, real soldiers. The way they marched showed that, straight-backed, not talking or laughing. Their chins were lifted. Their eyes looked far ahead, to the end of the street and the end of the city and farther still, to the dark night out of which came the sound of thunder that never stopped.

Four abreast they marched, four and four and four, as far as Dick Carr could see. And alongside each tenth four marched a man in uniform; a man with one empty sleeve pinned to the breast of his coat: a man whose leg swung stiff so that Dick knew it was not a leg at all: a man whose face was broken so it was ugly and terrible as a Hallowe'en mask.

For a long time the boys and the broken men marched by, to where the thunder rolled and the black sky flickered with a lightning whose flashes Dick Carr could not see. . . .

(And Dikar's dream faded into sleep's nothingness.)

. . . And into sleep's nothingness came a crash of thunder, shaking the ground. It shook Mom's arms that were tight around Dick Carr, and her body against which Dick's face was pressed. Out of the corner of his eye Dick could see the pin on Mom's black breast. The pin was oblong, and it had a blue border, and on the white inside the border there were two gold stars. There were two on the flag in the window now.

Dick was scared, but he wasn't bawling. He hadn't bawled when the siren waked him up, screaming in through the window, nor when Mom and he had jumped out of bed, all dressed like the radio said they should be. He hadn t bawled when, the siren screaming like a great devil in the black sky, they ran in the dark street, and then stopped running because all the women and kids were carrying them along in a rush faster than Dick could run.

No, Dick hadn't bawled even when he and Mom had fallen down the station steps and the old man had dragged them through the big, stiff curtains into the station.

The station was crowded with women and kids, and it was like an ogre's cave. A couple of electric lights made light enough to see them by, but not enough to keep back the shadows that reached out of the enormous black holes at each end of the station, like black arms pawing out to drag the women and the kids into a night that would never end.

The faces he saw were a queer white, and the eyes were too big; and they were sort of hunched, as if thy were waiting for something terrible to pounce on them out of the dark.

It came!

Thunder! Thunder louder than before, thunder so loud that when it stopped Dick couldn't hear himself say, "Don't be scared, Mom. I'll take care of you." But Mom must have heard him, because she squeezed him tighter to her and kissed him on top of his head.

Then Dick could hear again. He could hear a woman say, "That must have been one them half-ton bombs. They tell me they can go right down through a ten-story building, and they don't blow up till they hit the cellar, and after they blow up there ain't nothin' left of the building or anyone was in it. Nothin' at all."

The old man, who stood by the brown

curtain that hung over where the station steps came in, laughed. His laugh was like the cackle of the hens Dick used to hear when Pop used to drive him and Henry and Mom out into the country.

"Yeah," the old man cackled, his eyes kind of wild. "That's right. Ef'n one o' them things hits overhead here they won't even be little pieces of us left ter pick up."

He had on a uniform, but it wasn't like Pop's uniform. It was very faded but you could see it had once been blue. It was ragged and much too big.

THERE was thunder again, not so loud. "Well," said a woman sitting with a suckling baby in her heavy arms. "I wish one *would* hit right over us. That would be God's mercy."

"There ain't no God," someone said. "God is dead." Then whoever it was laughed, and Dick's insides cringed from the laughter. It was a woman in the middle of the platform, and she was standing as still as a rock; her mouth didn't move, and the eyes behind the hair that was down all over her face saw nothing at all. "The End of the World is come and it is too late to repent. We are doomed, doomed—"

Thunder again shattering the laughter, but far away now. The woman who sat next to Mom, with a little girl on her lap and another, brown-haired and brown-eyed and pretty, on the floor alongside of her whispered: "Poor thing, I hear tell she escaped from Philadelphia after it was surrendered. She got through the lines somehow. Did you hear how they went through all the houses that was left and dragged out—?"

"Hush," Mom begged. "Hush. The children—"

The little girl's mother laughed quietly. "The children will know all about it soon. Yours too. Girls or boys, it don't make no difference to those fiends."

"Not mine," Mom said, very low, and she moved a little to show the other woman what was in her hand. It was a carving knife from their kitchen—

"Attention!" A loud voice shouted out of the place where you used to get your change before the subways stopped running. *"Attention, all shelters!"* Dick looked and he saw there was a radio behind the little hole where your money used to be pushed out. *"The raid is over! The raid is over—"*

"It's over," the old man cackled. "And I'm still alive. Eighty-three years old and not dead yet. I allus said I was born ter be hanged."

"—where you are. Remain where you are. Gas-tests are being made. Remain where you are until gas-tests determine that it is safe to leave. Stand by."

"The government should of gave us all gas masks," grumbled a fat lady whom Dick knew. "Like they did in England." She was Tom Ball's mother and Tom was behind her, hiding his face in her skirts.

"Much good that did England," the woman with the baby said. "Much good anything did England—"

"Attention!" the radio shouted. *"Attention all shelters. Important. An important announcement is about to be made. Stand by."*

"Mom," Dick asked. "What is a 'portant annou—what the radio said?"

"News, son. Big news."

"Good news, Mom?"

"Maybe. Maybe we've won the battle. Maybe we're driving Them—"

"Attention! Attention, all shelters. The next voice you hear will be that of General Edward Albright, provost-marshal-general for this area."

"That's Ed Albright," the old man cackled. "I remember when he was a buck private along o' me," the both of us down with dysentery at Key West. In the Spanish War that was, an'—"

"Hush. Hush, you old fool. . . ."

The voice Dick heard now, coming into a quiet so deep he could hear Mom's heart beating in his ear, was thin and tired, awful tired. "Our lines are crumbling. Enemy infantry has already penetrated to the outskirts of the city, south and east. The boys, the young women, who have

fought so heroically, are still fighting, but there is no longer any hope. Word has come that the columns that were marching to our aid have been completely wiped out by a phalanx of enemy planes."

CHAPTER III

AFTER ARMAGEDDON

THE voice stopped, and there wasn't any sound at all. "We are beaten," the voice began again. "But we shall not surrender. We shall not give over the mothers and the children of this city to the horror that has overtaken the other municipalities that have surrendered.

"My people, when our lines finally break, when the enemy hordes swarm in, I shall press a button on the desk before me to set off mines that have been laid underneath the streets. Every soul in the city will perish in that catacylsm; I, and you, and with us some thousands of those who have made this world of ours a hell."

"Good!" yelled the woman with the babe at her breast. "Good!"

Mom's arms were tight around Dick, and she was crying, but her eyes were shining. "We're going to see Henry soon, son, and your father," she whispered. "Isn't that wonderful?"

And then everyone was quiet again, and the tired voice was still talking.

"To die like that will be, I know, no sacrifice to you who have laid fathers and husbands, sons and daughters, on the altar of your country. But there is one more sacrifice I must ask of you, for your country.

"Somehow, in the maneuvering of the past few hours, a gap has opened in the enemy lines, to the north. It is already being closed, but the terrain is such that a small and determined force may be able to keep it open long enough for a few to escape.

"No troops can be moved from their present positions. We have some arms, some ammunition, available, but no one to use them. No one—except you women who hear me. You mothers."

"That's funny," Mrs. Ball sniffed. "We can escape through a hole if we get ourselves killed keepin' the hole open. The man must be crazy."

"If you mothers can keep that gap open long enough, we may be able to take your children out through it, the tots who are all you have left.

"We may—the possibility is infinitesimal—be able to get them away to the hills north of the city. The chances are that they will die on the way. Even if they do not, it is possible that they will be hunted down and exterminated, that Nature, though less cruel than these hordes that have come out of the East and across the continent from the West and up from the South, will finish the work of our foes.

"But there is a million-to-one chance that the children will come through, and it rests with you to choose whether we shall give them that chance.

"I know that it is a bitter choice to make. I know, mothers, that you would rather that your little daughter, your little son, when I press this button on my desk, go with you into the Outer Darkness where there is peace at last.

"I know how dreadful it would be for you to die not knowing what fate awaits your children, and I should not ask you to make the choice save for this one thing.

"This is the dusk of our day, the dusk of democracy, of liberty, of all that has been the America we lived for, and die for. If there is to be any hope of a tomorrow, it must rest in them, in your sons and daughters.

"If they perish, America shall have perished. If through your sacrifice they survive, then, in some tomorrow we cannot foresee, America will live again and democracy, liberty, freedom shall reconquer the green and pleasant fields that tonight lie devastated.

"If you choose to give America this faint hope, if you decide to make this sacrifice, leave your children in charge of the warden of the shelter where you are, and come at once to headquarters to re-

ceive your weapons and your orders.

"We have no way of telling what your decision is until and unless enough of you come here to make the atempt we contemplate feasible. We wait for you. Will you come? Mothers, the choice is yours."

THE voice stopped, and for a long time nobody moved, nobody said a thing. Then, all of a sudden, all the women were standing up. All the women were kissing their kids, and then they were going toward the curtain that hung over the bottom of the steps from the station.

They were pushing aside the brown curtain. They were going up the steps.

They were going fast, fast, and their faces were shining as Dick once had seen a bride's face shine as she walked, all in white, up the aisle.

They were all gone, and in the station there were only the kids, and the old, old man in the uniform of faded blue that was too big for him.

It seemed darker here in the ogre's cave. The dark reached out from the great black holes at the ends of the platform—

A small, cold hand took hold of Dick's hand. "I'm frightened," the little brown-haired girl whimpered.

"Aw," Dick said, squeezing her hand. "There ain't nothin' to be frightened about. I'll take care of you."

"Will you," she asked in a very little voice. "Do you promise?"

"Cross my heart," Dick said, "I'll take care of you, always and always," and somehow he wasn't quite so frightened any more. "What's your name?"

"Mary Lee. What's yours?"

"Dick Carr."

"Dikar," she murmured, and moved close to Dick, and her head dropped sleepily on his shoulder.

He liked the way she said it: "Dikar," so he didn't bother to tell her it was two names. He said "Marilee" in his head, making one name out of her two, and he liked the sound of that. . . .

And a shadow moved across Dick Carr. . . . A shadow moved across Dikar, and he stirred and came fully awake out of his dream, and it seemed to him that someone had passed him, moving silently in the night.

CHAPTER IV

WE MEET IN THE NIGHT

DIKAR lay in his cot, alert. The sloughing of the wind came to him, and the shrilling of the insects of the night and the breathing of the sleeping Boys. There was no sound at all out of tune with the harmony of the dark forest.

Yet Dikar was troubled with an uneasy sense of something wrong.

He tried to quiet himself, tried to find sleep again, sleep and the dream out of which he had wakened. Dikar was desperate to find his dream again, for he knew it was one he had dreamed many times. But always before it had slipped from him in the instant of wakening, and tonight it was still as vivid in his mind as yesterday.

The small boy of the dream, Dick Carr, was himself in the Long-Ago that had been only a mist of gray half-memories as shapeless as the dawn-haze that drifts in the waking forest. The dream had told Dikar something of himself and something of that Long-Ago, and if he could find it again it would tell him more.

But Dikar could not find sleep again, nor the dream, because his eagerness barred the way, and his sense of something wrong with the night. So he sighed and rose from his cot, making no sound.

He groped for his apron of woven leaves and tied it about his waist, and stole to the curtain of twined withes that closed the door, moving it a little to peer out.

The leafy boughs of a great oak made a roof that joined the roofs of the Boys' House and the Girls' House, at the end where they came nearest the woods. Beneath it the Fire was burning low on its Stone, and a little distance away from its heat Dikar saw the two Girls whose task it was tonight to tend the Fire.

The two Girls drowsed, arms about each

other's waists. They had undone their braids, and the hair that cloaked one was black as the night, and the hair that cloaked the other was brown and shining. The black hair swallowed the light, but tiny red glints from the Fire danced merrily on the wavy fall of the brown.

The Girls wore short skirts of plaited grasses, and circlets of woven leaves covered their deepening breasts; but through their cloaks of long hair a shoulder peeped shyly, and a rounded knee, and curve of a thigh.

Now as long as he could recall Dikar had seen the brown bodies of the girls as they busied themselves with their tasks or tried to outdo the Boys in the Games, and so it was strange that tonight these small glimpses should set a pulse throbbing in his temples, and stir his breast with a not unpleasant pain.

It was to the Girl whose hair was brown that his eyes clung, to her knee and the soft swell of her throat, and the pale oval of her face.

As he looked out at her, he seemed to feel a small hand in his, to hear a very little voice asking, "Will you take care of me? Promise?" For this was Marilee, the little girl of his dream. Dikar had forgotten his promise, "I'll take care of you always and always," but now he remembered it.

Remembering, he wanted to hold out his arms to Marilee, wanted to call her to him. He almost did, and for fear that he might, looking at her, not longer be able to hold her name in his throat, he tore his eyes from her and turned them to the Fire. Little flames, blue and yellow and red, licked along the sides of a single log that lay across a great heap of orange-glowing embers. That log will not last much longer, Dikar though. I should wake the Girls and tell them to put more on.

Then he thought, No. Let them sleep. I'll do it myself, and with the thought his look went to the pile of logs at the base of the oak.

. . . To the place where the pile ought to be! There was only one split log there. Queer, Dikar thought. I sent up enough for the night from where we were cutting them in the woods yesterday—A hand slid past the trunk of the oak, out of the blackness behind! The hand took hold of the one log that was left of the pile and drew it back into the blackness.

A muscle twitched in Dikar's cheek, under his beard.

"Oh," Bessalton exclaimed, the black-haired girl. "Marilee! We've been sleepin an the Fire's almost out. Quick."

THEY were running to the Fire, and past it to the oak, and they were looking, dismayed at the base of the oak. "There isn't any," Marilee said, her small face puckered in puzzlement. "You must have put on the last."

"I did no such thing," Bessalton denied. "It was you. You were the last one to put wood on. Remember?"

"Yes," Marilee said slowly. "Yes, I was the last. But there was more here then. I'm sure there was."

"Looks like it," the black-haired girl came back, "Don't it? If I did something like that—"

"Oh what's the use of scrapping about it? We've got to get more up from the place where the Boys were cutting, before the Fire burns out."

"We?"

"I'll do it, Bessalton. I know where they were," Marilee said, and before Dikar could move or cry out, she had gone past the oak and the night had swallowed her. The night out of which a hand had slid to draw away the logs from the base of the oak!

Dikar sprang to his cot, snatched up his bow and quiver of arrows, was back to the door and out through it. Bessalton stared at the Fire; she neither saw nor heard Dikar flitting by. Then the damp, fragrant dark of the woods was about him, and the cool softness of its carpet of leaves was under his noiseless feet, and he was a shadow slipping through the forest.

All the Bunch was taught to move in the woods with the silence of its creatures,

but Dikar's ears, trained to keenness, caught the barely audible sound of Marilee's progress ahead of him, the flick of underbrush against her legs.

He did not call to warn her, because he needed to know who had lured her into the forest, and why. This was a thing that never before had been done by one of the Bunch and Dikar must find out why it was being done.

Moonlight filtered through the foliage overhead and flecked the night with silver. A small beast scuttered away from beneath Dikar's feet. Marilee was well away from the Houses now. She was almost to the place where the Boys had been cutting—

"Oh!" he heard her exclaim, and then there was another voice ahead there. "Hello, Marilee." Tomball's voice. "I've been waitin for you."

Dikar froze, as motionless as the tree trunks about him.

"You've been waitin—" Marilee was puzzled. "Why? Why should you be here, waitin for me?"

"I wanted to see you alone."

"But—but why do you want to see me alone?"

"Marilee." Tomball's voice was curiously thick. "Do you like me?"

"Of course I like you. I like all the Boys."

"Not that way. Do you like me—like this?" Dikar heard the sound of flesh, and he sprang into the little clearing ahead, and Tomball's hands had hold of Marilee's arms, and he was pulling her to him.

"Stop!" Dikar said, low-voiced, and somehow there was an arrow hooked in the string of his bow, and the string was tight, and the arrow was pointed at Tomball's back. The bow was long almost as Dikar was tall, and the arrow sharp-pointed with stone. Loosed, it could go clear through a deer—or a Boy. "Let go of her."

TOMBALL turned on Dikar. Crouched knee-deep in fern there was something about him more animal than Boy. The curling thickness of his lips; the feral look of his black eyes, and the way his neck was tense and corded.

"You—" Tomball grunted. "You again!"

"Me," Dikar said, heavy-tongued with anger. "The Boss. Tomball, you have left your cot before day. You have laid hands on a Girl. For breakin these Must-Nots you are subject to seven days in the punishment cave, with only water and dried corn to eat. What's your excuse?"

Tomball licked his lips, and straightened. "Nothin," he said. "Because you won't give me the punishment."

"Won't I? An why not?"

"Because I'm not here, that's why. Because I'm in my cot, asleep. Halross will say so at the Council, an Carlberger."

"They will lie?" Dikar's brow wrinkled. He could not understand. "They will lie, at a Council?"

"Sure, they will. What are you goin to do about it?"

"But Marilee here will say different, an I."

"Course you will," Tomball grinned. "Why shouldn't you, the Boss of the Bunch an the Boss of the Girls? Why shouldn't you say that I left my cot, and that I laid hands on her, when seven days in the punishment cave on water an dried corn will leave me so weak you'll be sure to lick me, an stay Boss? Will the Bunch believe you, Dikar, when I remind em of that, or will they believe me an Halross an Carlberger?"

Dikar felt sick. That any should lie at a Council, that any should talk as he was hearing Tomball talk, was a new and dreadful thing. "Tomball," he cried. "You're foolin. You wouldn't really say those things."

"Wouldn't I?" Tomball grinned, licking his lips. "Just try me. You're licked, Dikar, an you know it."

Dikar knew it, and he knew that a terrible thing had come among them, and he could not think how to fight it. He was licked—

"Dikar!" Marilee's fingers touched his arm. "Dikar. Hold him here with your

arrow while I run and call the Bunch. When they see Tomball here in the woods, he an his pals cannot say that he is in his cot, asleep." She started away.

"Wait!" Tomball's command halted Marilee. "You can call the Bunch, Marilee," he said. "But when they get here I'll tell em that Dikar drew his arrow on me an forced me to come here. An Halross will say that, wakin from sleep in his cot next mine, he saw this, an that Dikar said he would kill him if he did not keep quiet."

Marilee and Dikar stared at Tomball.

"You can't win," Tomball sneered. "I'm too smart for you, see. An tomorrow you'll find out I'm too strong for you, Dikar. An here's somethin else for you to remember, Marilee. When I'm Boss, you better like me the way I want you to like me!"

He laughed, then, and turning his back on Dikar's arrow, and swaggered away; they heard his laugh coming out of the dark woods.

"What did he mean?" Marilee whispered, coming close to Dikar. He said, 'When I'm Boss'. What did he mean, Dikar?"

Dikar wanted to put his arms around her.

"He meant that we're gunna fight who should be Boss, Marilee. In the mornin, right after Brekfes, you will call a Full Council of the Bunch, an Tomball an I will fight who shall be Boss."

Marilee's eyes were upturned to his eyes, her lips were moist and red. "You must win, Dikar," she whispered. "You heard what he said. You *must* win."

The wanting to take her in his arms, the wanting to hold her close to him, was a great ache in Dikar's arms and in his breast, and a weakness in his legs.

"I heard him, Marilee," he said, deep-throated. "I will win."

And then Dikar turned and ran off through the woods, but he looked back over his shoulder at Marilee once and saw the way she stood looking after him, mantled in her brown hair, and he saw the look in her face.

CHAPTER V

THE OLD ONES

WHEN Dikar got back to the Boys' House and slipped inside, all was dark there, and quiet, and Tomball was in his cot. Dikar put down his bow and arrow, and took off his apron. He lay down again, and pulled up the blanket of rabbit's fur.

He lay staring up at the black roof of the house, trembling a little. It seemed to him that he saw Tomball's face there, black-stubbled and small-eyed and sneering. And then it was Marilee's face he saw, the red lips moist, the brown eyes holding his, telling something her lips could not. And looking into Marilee's eyes, Dikar's eyes closed and the nothingness of sleep received him. . . . And out of sleep's nothingness formed a sky that flared with blue light, and with red, and was streaked with bright yellow that shimmered and faded; and the sky was filled with rolling, endless thunder. Against that terrible sky loomed monstrous black bulks, huge and ominous, hills that overhung a road and a big truck in which Dick Carr was riding.

In the truck kids were jammed so tight they could not lie down, and just could move a very little. Dick was in a corner, so that his back was jammed against the iron sides of the truck, and Marilee was jammed against his side, and her head was on Dick's shoulder, and she slept.

Most of the kids were asleep, in spite of the terrible lights in the sky and the awful thunder. But the old man who was driving the truck wasn't asleep, nor the old woman who sat next to him. Ahead of them on the road were a lot of trucks, and behind them were a lot more trucks, but Dick could tell this only by the noise they made, because none of the trucks had any lights.

Dick knew some of the trucks were loaded high with boxes and boxes of things, but most of them were jammed tight with kids like this one.

"Tom," Dick heard the old woman ask. "Do you think we'll get through?"

"I don't know, Helen," the old man answered. "Only God knows. So you had better pray to God to take us through."

"I can't, Tom. I can't pray any more. I'm all prayed out. God cannot hear our prayers. He has forgotten us, Tom. He has turned His face from us."

"Pray, Helen. Not for you or for me, but for the children in our charge. Pray to God's Son. It was God's Son who once said, 'Suffer ye the little children to come unto Me.' "

"All right, Tom. I'll try."

They didn't say anything more. The truck bounced along, and the red and blue lights flared in the sky, and yellow streaked it, and thunder rolled.

Once the road got steep, climbing up into the sky to what looked like the Jumping-Off Place, and up there against the sky Dick saw things that stuck up out of the top of the black hill. They were just a bunch of broken poles, black against the blazing sky, but Dick knew that once they had been trees. And to one side there was a chimney sticking up, and Dick knew that was all that was left of a house that the trees used to shade.

Dick started to get sleepy. His eyes closed. The old woman woke him up, yelling something.

"Tom!" she yelled. "Tom! Turn into this sideroad. Quick!"

DICK'S head banged against the truck side, and the kids fell against him, and Marilee woke up, screaming, "Dikar! Dikar!" Dick grabbed hold of her, telling her it was all right, and then the truck wasn't going any longer, and Dick could hear the other trucks going past, somewhere behind.

"You caught me off guard, Helen, and I did it," the old man said. "But why?"

"I don't know, Tom," she answered, talking slow. "I saw the sideroad ahead and something told me we must turn off into it. It was like a voice in my ear. No. It was more like a voice in my brain."

"You're all worked up, Helen. You're excited." Tom's back moved, and there was a noise of grinding metal. "Watch out behind. I'm backing up to the highway. As soon as you see a clear space you tell me, so that I can back out and get into line again. If we lose the others we won't know where to—" And then there was a white light in the sky, a light bright as the sun floating down out of the sky.

And there was a new sound in the sky, like a bee, like a giant bee, and it became a roar. An enormous black shape came down under the light, and there was a rattling noise, like a lot of boys were running sticks along a lot of picket fences, but louder, and there were screams and crashes and the rattling noise kept on.

The rattling noise cut off, and the roar faded and became a bee-buzz again and the bee-buzz died away in the sky. There were no more crashes, and no more screams. There was only the rolling thunder overhead, that never stopped.

Old Tom got down from his seat, and went away into the dark. The old woman sat very still, and all the kids sat very still, and nobody moved. After awhile the old man was back, and he was climbing up again to the truck driver's seat.

"Well?" Helen asked, so low Dick could hardly hear her.

"None," Tom said. "Not one of them all. We're the only ones left. If we hadn't turned in here—" He didn't finish.

"I guess," Helen said. "I guess God is still listening, up there above the sound of the guns." And then she said, "Where do we go from here?"

"There's a smashed signpost back there, where this road turns off. One of the boards on it reads, 'To Johnson's Quarry.' Do you remember, Helen, my heading a committee once that tried to stop the Johnson Granite Company from cutting down a mountain. They were defacing the landscape, you recall, and we wanted to preserve the beauties of Nature for posterity."

He laughed. It wasn't pretty, that laugh. "We failed. Recently I heard that they had blasted away almost the entire base of the mountain, leaving only a narrow ramp by which their trucks could reach

their camp at the top. There are probably quarters for the laborers up there, perhaps some supplies. The mountain, as I remember, is thickly wooded and there's a possibility we may be safely enough concealed there, at least for a time."

"If only we can get through to it."

"We can try. This is a State Park we are in. There are woods almost all the way, and nothing to attract enemy patrols." The truck started running again.

(Dikar's dream blurred.)

The thunder faded out of it, and the dark, and there was sunlight, with green trees, and a wide cleared space with two long houses each side of it, with cots and a walless house at one end in which there were big stoves, and a lot of tables. There were a bunch of little kids and there were the two Old Ones.

THE Old Ones made the kids work. Helen made the girls make beds and cook and things like that. Tom made the boys go down the road up which the truck came that first night and hammer deep holes into the hill of rock on top of which the road climbed up to where the trees were. When Tom thought the holes were deep enough he would put fat white sticks into them that he got out of a big red box they had found where the road started to climb up, and little, silvery things on top of the sticks.

When it would begin to get dark, they would all eat, and then the Old Ones would make the bunch all sit around and they would tell them things.

They called this a Council. At the first Council the two Old Ones told the Bunch a lot of things they should do, and they should not do, and these were the Rules. The Old Ones said Marilee should be Boss of the Girls, and they said Dick should be Boss of the Boys, and of the whole Bunch.

Every morning one of the Boys would climb up high in a tree and watch all day if anybody would come out of the woods on the other side of the fields down there where Tom and the Boys were working.

The Boys took turns doing this. One day (and this is where Dikar's dream got clear again) Dikar was sitting on top of the tree. The boys had got through making the holes yesterday, and they weren't down there any more. They were in the front of the house where they slept, and Tom was teaching them how to make bows and arrows. The Girls were in front of their house and Helen was teaching them how to make baskets out of twigs from the bushes in the woods.

Dick was looking at the black smoke, way far off in the sky, that had been there all the time since they came here. He thought about a new Rule the Old Ones had made at Council last night, a Rule they said was most important of all. "You must not go out of the woods," the Rule said. "You must not go near the edge of the Drop."

Wondering why the Old Ones had made that rule, Dick looked down at the edge of the Drop, and at the place where the road climbed up and over it. His eyes went along the road, and across the fields, and he saw someone come out of the woods across there.

The someone looked very little, way down there, but Dick could see he had a kind of dark-green uniform on, and that his face was yellow. Then another one and another one came out of the woods. These were in green too, but their faces were black, and they had guns. All of a sudden there were a lot of them.

Dick yelled down, "Coo-eee! Coo-eee!" and when Tom looked up at him Dick pointed down at the men in the green uniforms and held up his spread fingers and wagged them to show Tom how many there were.

Tom started running into the woods, and then he came out on the other side of them, where the road came up over the edge of the Drop, and he was running down the road. And then Helen was running after him, and Tom saw her. Tom yelled something and she stopped, but she didn't go back.

Tom had a little hammer in his hand.

Dick heard a crack, like a twig breaking, and he looked down and down, and across the fields, and he saw that the men in green had their guns up to their shoulders, and he saw a little white puff of smoke floating away from one of them. Then he saw white puffs come out of all the guns.

Dick looked back at Tom, and just then Tom fell down, but he didn't stop. He was crawling down the road, and Helen was running down it now, running fast.

A lot of cracks came to Dick's ear, and across the fields the air was full of the little white puffs. On the road Helen caught up with Tom and was lifting him up, and then he was leaning on her and the two of them were running down again.

The men in green started running across the fields, stopping every couple of steps to shoot at Tom and Helen, but the old ones got down to the bottom of the road, and around inside of where the road started to climb up out of the fields, and the men in green stopped shooting because they couldn't see them any more, but they kept on running.

Dick could see the Old Ones. They were standing near the rocky wall of the hill the road climbed on, Helen's arm around Tom, and the first of the men in green came around to where he could see them.

Tom lifted his little hammer and hit the rock with it. A cloud of dust hid the Old Ones, and Dick heard a boom, and then there was another boom, and another, and one so loud it filled the whole world. The hill the road climbed on leaned away from the rest of the Mountain, and it started to fall.

It fell slowly at first, and then faster and faster, down on where the Old Ones were, and on the men in green, and the noise was so loud Dick couldn't hear any noise at all, and the air was so full of dust it was like night.

The whole mountain shook, and the tree Dick was in shook so hard Dick had to grab hold of it to keep from being shaken off, and his hands started to slip, and—

(Dikar awoke. . . .)

CHAPTER VI

SHADOWS AT SUNRISE

DIKAR lay in his cot, his eyes still closed, remembering his dream, fitting the things it had shown him into the things he knew, seeing how it explained a lot that had always puzzled him.

It explained the Rule that no fire must ever be made except with wood so dry that it would burn without smoke, and the Rule that no fire must ever burn at night except the big Fire on the Fire Stone, and why the big Fire was set not in the center of the space between the Boys' House and the Girls' House but at one end, where it was hidden from the sky by the spreading leafy top of the giant oak. It explained the Rule that when there was a noise in the sky like a bee buzzing, everyone must run into the Houses or into the woods and stay very still until the sound was gone.

But most of all it explained the Must-Not about going out of the edge of the woods, about going to the edge of the Drop.

They were down there, in the woods across the space of tumbled stones at the bottom of the Drop, beneath which the Old Ones lay. Dressed in green, with black faces and yellow faces. They were in the woods, and in all the far country Dikar could see when he climbed the tall tree. If They saw any of the Bunch come to the top of the Drop and so found out that the Bunch lived on the Mountain, They would come and do to the Bunch what, in his dream, They did to all the kids on that terrible night in the Long-Ago.

Dikar knew now how the Bunch had come to the Mountain, and he knew now that the Bunch could not always stay here on the Mountain. Some day he must lead the Bunch down the Drop, down into the far, green country that stretched away, fold on fold, to meet the sky. And now Dikar was glad that he was Boss of the Bunch, so that he would lead them—

But after this morning he might be no longer Boss!

Dikar remembered that he must fight Tomball over who should be Boss, and he remembered what Tomball had done and what Tomball had said last night, between dream and dream. Dikar threw off his blanket and leaped from his cot, and all down the length of the Boys' House bronzed forms leaped from the cots, and curtains were raised, and the sun streamed in.

But the Boys did not laugh in the sun, and they did not laugh and play jokes on one another as they ran, behind Dikar, out through the door in the wall away from the Girls' House, and through the woods to where a stream leaped from a ledge overhead into a pool below, and ran brawling out of the pool as if eager to reach the edge of the Drop and leap again over it, and smash itself on the tumbled rocks below.

The Boys did not shout as they sprang after Dikar into the icy pool, and none swam near him, and none joined him when he climbed on the stone where the stream came down, and stood there, letting the stream batter him.

But when tingling with the cold of the waters, with the lash of the spray, Dikar ran back through the woods to the Boys' House, little Jimlane came up to run beside him.

"Dikar," Jimlane panted. "Oh, Dikar. They're sayin' Tomball is sure to beat you. They're sayin' he's too strong for you. An' a lot are sayin' it's a good thing, that they're tired of you being Boss, and that when Tomball is Boss we won't have to work all the time, an' we'll have more time for Games, an' for—an' for playin' with the Girls."

Dikar ran along, and from his lithe limbs the drops spattered, shining in the sun, and under his yellow beard his jaw-muscles hardened, but he did not speak.

"An' Tomball says he's goin' to fix me when he's Boss," Jimlane whimpered. "An' I'm afraid, Dikar. I'm awful afraid."

Dikar looked down at the little fellow, and he saw the frightened eyes in the pimply face, and the gray, quivering lips. "Don't worry, kid," he grunted. "Tomball won't win." But Dikar wasn't sure.

SOMEHOW brekfes was over, and the Bunch was gathered in a circle in the space between the Houses, the Girls on one side and the Boys on the other, and Marilee sat in the Boss's Seat beneath the giant oak, her brown hair still unbraided, mantling her, her small face color-drained. Dikar stood before her, and Tomball stood by his side, and Marilee was speaking.

"You fight," Marilee's clear, sweet voice said, "over who shall be Boss of the Bunch, an the Bunch will obey as Boss the one who wins. You fight with bare fists, an' you fight fair. You begin when I say the word, you end when one is beaten." Her brown eyes were on Dikar's, and her eyes told Dikar that he must not be beaten. "That is all."

Dikar turned away and walked toward one end of the cleared space about which the Bunch stood murmuring. The grass was cool under his bare feet, and springy.

Marilee had ordered it carefully raked, so that there would be no branches to trip the fighters, and no small stones to bruise them if they fell. Many twigs and leaves and small stones had been raked out of the grass, and so calm was Dikar that he even noted how the stones had been put in a great circle to mark the bounds of the space in which he must fight, and how just beyond the circle the Boys and Girls stood tight-packed.

Dikar came to the end of the space, and turned, and across the space he saw Tomball turning. Fredalton was whispering something in Tomball's ear, and Tomball nodded, grinning with his thick lips.

"Fight!" Marilee cried out.

Dikar started going back toward Tomball, and Tomball came to meet him, half-crouched, his black-stubbled countenance scowling fiercely, great pads of muscle across his shaggy chest, his hairy belly in-drawn.

Dikar moved lithely across the raked grass, his beard shining yellow in the sunlight, his limbs dusted with yellow hair

All at once Tomball was very close, and Tomball's fist struck Dikar's cheek, and Dikar's cheek knotted with the pain of the blow, and his head rocked.

But Dikar's arm jarred with the blow he had landed on Tomball's chest, and then Dikar no longer felt any pain. He stood breast to breast with his enemy, his fisted arms were clubs that pounded the dark face and the hairy body he hated. There was a salt taste in his mouth that was very pleasant, and there was joy in the blows he gave, and joy even in the blows he received.

He made no effort to guard himself from Tomball's blows, nor did Tomball try to guard himself from Dikar's. They fought like the beasts fight, eager only to hurt, eager only to pound the other to submission.

And over them washed the shouts and the screams of the Bunch.

INTO a red haze that was all that was left of his vision, Dikar flung arms so heavy he barely could lift them. Somewhere in the haze was a darker bulk that moved about, and it was at this Dikar flung his arms. Sometimes Dikar found it, more often not, and when he missed the weight of his arms pulled him off balance, and he would start to fall, and somehow not fall.

Sometimes Dikar would be struck, out of the haze, and he would sway on his legs that had no strength in them, and almost go down; but he did not let himself because he must not, though he no longer knew why.

And out of the haze came an endless thunder of shouting.

Dikar pawed once again at the vague bulk that was his enemy and missed, and swayed, and in that instant the bulk struck him, and Dikar's legs folded, and he sank. His sight cleared, and lurching at him came Tomball's red-bathed body, Tomball's distorted face. Somehow Dikar threw a heavy arm at Tomball and struck him, so that as Dikar settled to the ground Tomball staggered back.

Tomball did not fall, but was steadying. Dikar, sprawled on the grass, knew that when Tomball had steadied he would come in again to finish Dikar, and Dikar did not care—

"Dikar!" he heard a high, clear voice above the endless roar. "No!" *Marilee!* "No, Dikar. No!" and suddenly Dikar cared desperately that Tomball was beating him, and his fallen body trembled as he tried to get up, but he had no strength—

"Oh up, Dikar," a voice squeaked, and Jimlane's pimpled face swam over Dikar, close to Dikar's face, and Jimlane's hand was tugging at Dikar's hand to pull him up. "You can lick him now, Dikar." Dikar came up with the pull of Jimlane's hand, Jimlane's fingers closing Dikar's hand into a fist. And Tomball, grinning through the red that masked him, lurched in to beat Dikar down again.

Dikar lifted a heavy arm and flung it at Tomball, and Dikar's fist fell on Tomball's brow. Tomball crumpled and lay, a still heap on the grass, with Dikar swaying above him, arms hanging by his sides, in his ears a deafening roar.

And out of the roar came Marilee, her cheeks rosy, her eyes alight. "Oh, Dikar."

That was all she said, but Dikar straightened, feeling the strength flow back into him, hearing the hurrays of the Bunch clear in his ears, knowing the hurrays were for him.

Marilee took hold of Dikar's wrist to lift his arm and cry him the winner.

The color fled from her cheeks and from her lips, and the light went from her eyes as they fell to Dikar's still-fisted hand.

Dikar's eyes went down to where Marilee's eyes looked, and they saw what Marilee's eyes saw. In his fist that had pounded Tomball down was clenched a stone, and there was blood on the stone, Tomball's blood.

Dikar knew now why Jimlane had closed that hand into a fist, why Jimlane, tugging him up, had said, "You can lick him now." Jimlane had—

"Dikar," Marilee sobbed. "Oh, Dikar,"

and then Marilee was lifting Dikar's arm so that all might see what was in Dikar's fist, and the hurrays stopped, and there was a throbbing hush.

Marilee's voice was loud and clear in that terrible hush. "I cry Dikar no fair. I cry Tomball the winner of the fight. I cry Tomball Boss of the Bunch."

Marilee threw Dikar's arm from her, and it was as if she threw Dikar from her, and she turned away. Dikar thought he heard Marilee sob, but she walked away from him head high, back proud. Dikar's mouth moved but no words came out of it, and he knew there was no use of his saying that he had not known the stone was in his fist.

A strange, low sound came from the throats of the Bunch, and it grew louder. A stone struck Dikar on the shoulder, and another, and Dikar saw that all the Bunch was bending to pick up stones, lifting them to throw them at him.

"Run!" Jimlane screamed. "Run, Dikar," and Dikar turned and ran, the stones falling about him; ran, staggering, straight at the hating faces of the Bunch, and the Bunch opened a path for him, and Dikar ran into the woods, the stones spattering about him.

Dikar ran in the dim woods till he fell, and he crawled till he could crawl no longer, and he lay still in the woods, and a sick nothingness took him.

CHAPTER VII

THE FAR GREEN LAND

DIKAR lived in the woods as the beasts live, and as the beasts' hurts heal so did his. He set snares for the rabbits and the birds that were so plentiful in the woods, and cooked them over his little fires. He found sharp-edged stones, and used them as knives to make a bow for himself, twisting and drying the gut of the rabbit for string, and he made arrows, feathering them, and a quiver out of the bark of a birch.

He hunted with his bow and arrows, and he lay long hours on the mossy floor of a clearing near the top of the Mountain, watching the little creatures of the forest play, looking sometimes into the great, beautiful eyes of the deer peering out at him from the brush, watching the birds chirp on the tree boughs above him.

It was spring and always the small woods creatures played two by two, and the deer went two by two, and the birds; and seeing this, Dikar would think of Marilee.

Yes, Dikar's hurts healed but the ache within him did not heal.

Sometimes Dikar would climb to the tipmost branch of a tall tree that stood on the very top of the Mountain. He would stay there till dark, gazing at the far green land that stretched, fold on fold, away to where the sky came down to meet it. He would think of what he had dreamed the last night he was Boss, and of his thought that some day he would lead the Bunch down into that pleasant land, and his heart would be heavy within him.

Spring warmed into summer, and summer deepened.

Every night Dikar would slip through the woods till he came to where the trees were black against the red glow of the Fire, and he could crouch behind the trunk of some tree and look out into the space between the Houses. He dared not do this till just before Bed-Time, when he knew most of the Bunch were in the Houses and there was little danger of one coming upon him.

Dikar would hear the drone of their Now-I-lay-mes, and he would kneel and say his own with them. With his palms together and his eyes closed, it was almost as if he knelt by his own cot in the Boys' House, almost as if he were still one of the Bunch.

After his Now-I-lay-me was said, Dikar would stay there, listening to the talk of the Boys or the Girls whose turn it was to tend the Fire.

What Dikar heard made his heart heavy. As he had feared, Tomball was letting the Bunch break Rule after Rule,

was favoring his pals and laying double work on those he did not like, was shirking many of the little things that Dikar knew were needed if the Bunch was to be warm and comfortable and safe when the cold came, and the snow.

One of the Rules Tomball allowed to be broken was the Rule that none must leave his cot after Bed-Time. Dikar would see Girls come out of the Girls' House and slip off into the woods, and he would see Boys do the same. Often they had not yet come back when Dikar tired of watching had gone back to the shelter he had woven for himself out of twigs.

One thing troubled Dikar above all others. He never saw Marilee tending the Fire. That she was never one of those who went into the woods after Bed-Time pleased him, but it was strange that her turn never came to tend the Fire.

ONE night Dikar heard the reason. He heard that, the day he was stoned, Marilee had said that she no longer would be Boss of the Girls, that she had made Bessalton Boss in her place on the promise that she would free Marilee of the duty of tending to the Fire, or of any other duty that would take her away from the other Girls. And that this was because Tomball wanted Marilee to go into the woods with him, and Marilee feared him.

Dikar's throat grew thick when he heard this. Growling, he rose from his haunches to stride out into the light of the Fire and call out Tomball to fight him, not with fists, but with bows and arrows, and knives, in a fight to the death. His rage blinding him, Dikar was caught in a bush he did not see, and before he could get free he heard something else from the tongue of Jimlane, who was tending the Fire with Billthomas and had spoken of Marilee and Tomball.

"If Dikar was Boss again, things would be different, but there's no chance of that, because the minute he shows up the Bunch will stone him again, the way Tomball was ordered, and he would not get away again."

Dikar went cold, remembering the way the stones had spattered about him, and was very still in the bush.

"The Bunch wouldn't stone Dikar," Billthomas said, very low and looking about with frightened eyes, "if you spoke out. Tomball's orders or no, they would not stone Dikar if they knew that it wasn't Dikar's fault he fought no fair."

"I dare not tell them." Jimlane's eyes went big in his white face. "You remember how I told you, an how you said yourself the Bunch would stone me if I told."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I couldn't rest, an I went to Tomball an told him, an Tomball beat me till I could hardly walk. That was the time I said I fell into a hole in the woods, you remember. An after Tomball beat me, he told me that if I said a word to anyone else he would kill me, an he would kill anyone I told."

"He did!" Now there was fear in Billthomas's eyes, too, and in his face. "You should not have told me, Jimlane— If Tomball finds out I know." His voice was still low, but there was a scream in it—

"If only," Jimlane sobbed, "Dikar could some way come back and protect me while I told the Bunch—"

"What's the use of all the ifs?" Billthomas broke in. "Tomball's made sure Dikar would be killed before you had a chance to say anythin. The best thing we can do is forget about Dikar, like everyone else has."

"Yes," Jimlane whispered. "I guess so. Dikar isn't one of the Bunch any more, an he will never be again."

"Never again," Billthomas agreed.

Now indeed Dikar, rigid in the dark, knew that he was disowned by his kind. He must live out his life alone, a wild beast in the woods—

And then, perhaps from some unseen Presence in the close-crowding dark, perhaps from within Dikar, a thought came to him. He was no longer one of the Bunch, and so he was not bound by the Rules of the Bunch. He was not bound

by the Must-Nots that the Bunch must obey. There was something for him to do, and no Rule to say that he must not.

He drifted off into the darkness, silent as a shadow. But there was no sleep for Diker that night.

ALL that night, and all the next day, Diker was busy, cutting down long vines from the trees, testing each one for strength. He plaited the vines, never stopping, never resting, till by nightfall he had made a rope long enough for his need.

When dark came Dikar hung his quiver of arrows over one shoulder, and he hung the great coil of green rope over the other shoulder, and he followed the sound of a stream through the black forest till he came to where the woods ended and there was a little space between the edge of the woods and the edge of the Drop, where the stream leaped out into the night.

Here Dikar paused, and laid the rope down, and passed its end around the great trunk of a tree that grew beside the stream, and fastened the rope with many knots, and pulled on it with all his strength to make certain that the knots would hold.

Dikar bent, then, and lifted the coil of rope that he had made from the vines, and carried it to the edge of the Drop, and let it fall into the dark.

At his feet the rope tautened, and quivered, and below him there was the sound of its unwinding coil thumping against the high, sheer rock of the Drop, and the sound of the stream's waters, falling down and down into sightless blackness. And then the rope at Dikar's feet was no longer quivering, so that he knew the coil was all unwound.

Dikar bent again, and lifted the rope, and moved it over so that it lay in the water where the stream leaped out over the Drop, so that when the sun rose again, all the length of the rope that hung down the Drop would be hidden behind the falling waters.

Then, without pause, Dikar had hold of the rope with his hands, and he was over the edge of the Drop, and the icy waters were rushing about him, were battering him, were fighting to break loose his hold and send him hurtling down into the dizzy dark to smash on the rocks below.

Dikar could not see and he could not breathe, and his hands were slipping on the wet rope. He caught a leg around the rope, and slid. He could breathe again because he hung between the rushing waters and the rocky face of the Drop.

Dikar went down and down, endlessly, down into the black and dizzy darkness, down to where the great stones lay tumbled, and the waters raged between them, and the Old Ones slept.

THE sun was high in the sky, but Dikar was concealed in the leafy shadow of a treetop where he lay outstretched along a thick bough. He was peering at a sight that made of his skin an icy, prickling sheath for his body.

The tree was at the other end of the woods through which Dikar had loped after finally crossing the belt of immense stones that lay about the Mountain where the Bunch lived. Some time in the night, sounds ahead, and moving lights had alarmed him, and he had climbed the tree to wait for what the day would show him.

Dikar, as comfortable there as on his mossy bed in the Mountain forest, had slept longer than he intended. Into his feet had come the sound of marching feet, and he had thought himself back in his dream of the night before his fight with Tomball. But his eyes had opened and the marching feet had still sounded in his ears, and then Dikar had seen those whose feet made the sound.

The tree in which Dikar wakened was at the edge of the woods and the edge of a great, flat field. Not far from the tree wires stretched, one above the other, twice Dikar's height. Fastened to thin poles, the wires ran away on either hand as far as Dikar could see, and the wires were thick with long, sharp thorns that would tear a Boy's flesh to bits.

Beyond this set of wires was another

set just like them, as high and as wickedly barbed, and between the two sets of wires stood, far apart, figures out of Dikar's dream.

They were dressed in green like the men in the dream who had run across the fields that now were covered with great stones, shooting at the Old Ones. Like those, their faces and their hands were black, and like those they carried the shiny sticks that Dikar now remembered were called "guns."

But the sound of marching feet came from inside the second fence. A great crowd of people were marching out of some long, low houses that were very much like the Bunch's Houses. Just as Dikar spied them, they stopped marching and stood in a long, straight line in front of the houses.

They were pretty far away, but Dikar could see them, and he could see that they were very thin, and they were dressed in ragged clothes that hung loose on them. He could see that their faces were white, and that their eyes were sunk deep in their heads, and that they were all stooped over as if they were very tired, although it was only early morning.

A voice yelled something, and the white people turned, so that the lines faced Dikar. Dikar saw that the one who had yelled was different. His face was yellow, and he was dressed in green, but there was something different about his green clothes, and he had no gun.

There were other men in green standing around in there. Some of them were black-faced, and some yellow-faced, some had guns and others didn't. One very big one only had green on below his waist, above that he had nothing on. His body was as yellow as his face, and his muscles were bigger than Dikar's muscles, or even Tomball's. He was holding something in one hand. It was long and thin and black. His other hand was against a thick post beside which he stood.

The man in the different green clothes yelled something again, and then Dikar saw two black-faced ones come out of a smaller house to one side, and between them was a white one who was so weak they had to almost carry him. They came to the thick post, and they shoved the white man up against the post with his face to it, and they tied his arms and his legs around it, and then they tore off his clothes above the waist, and stepped away.

The yellow-faced man yelled a lot to the white people. Dikar could hear him, but he couldn't make out what he was saying. When he finished he made a sign with his hand to the big yellow man.

That one lifted the long, thin thing he held, and it looked like a snake. And he lifted it above his head and it straightened out, and then it came down across the back of the white man who was tied to the post. Dikar heard the crack it made, and he saw the red mark across the white man's back.

And the yellow man lifted the thin, snakelike thing again, and brought it down again, and there was another crack, and another red mark across the white man's back.

Dikar was sick, seeing that. And then he wasn't sick. He was mad. He wanted to yell out, "Stop!" but he remembered his dream now, remembered what the guns could do, and he knew that if he yelled the men between the wires would see him and shoot him down.

Crack, Dikard heard, and *crack* again, and now the back of the man tied to the post was all red, all shining red. But Dikar was on his feet, on the tree branch. He was pulling taut the string of his bow, and an arrow was laid across it.

The big yellow lifted his arm again, but when it fell there was no crack. The big yellow was falling, and the feathers of an arrow were sticking out of his back. Just the feathers.

Dikar didn't see any more, because he was swinging through the treetops, a brown and naked Boy flashing through the tops of the trees, fleeing the death from the guns that he recalled were swifter and farther reaching than any arrow.

Whether the men in green ever thought to look for him in the treetops Dikar never knew.

FAR away from the place of the thorny wires, Dikar lay on his belly in the tall grass that covered a hill, and he looked down through the grass at a place where two roads crossed.

There stood a pole, high as a tall tree, but there was no bark on it, no branches nor leaves, and because at its top five or six cross-sticks were fastened, and a lot of wires ran from these cross-pieces to other cross-sticks at the top of another pole far away down one of the roads.

Dikar was looking at a rope that hung taut from one of the cross-sticks at the top of the pole. Dikar was looking at that which weighed down the rope and kept it taut.

The thing swung back and forth, back and forth, very slowly in the wind, and rags fluttered about it in the wind, and the rags were no grayer nor dirtier than the thing was. And Dikar saw that the thing once had been a man.

. . . Dikar came to a place where there was a House all of rock, and it was three or four times as high as the Boys' House, and ten times as long. The window openings in the wall of this House were very high and very wide.

Dikar saw a lot of people in there, and there were white men and women. These were thin and gray and sunken-eyed as those in the place with the wires, and they were pushing around things piled high with heavy loads, and they were so weak they could push the things only slowly. And there were men in green standing around, and these had little guns hanging at their waists, and they held black, snakelike things like the big yellow one held.

And Dikar saw a white woman stumble and fall, and he saw one of the men in green raise the thing he held and bring it down on her, again and again till, all bloody, she pulled herself up on the thing she had been pushing and started pushing it again.

And the other men in green laughed, but the white people just kept on pushing, all stooped over and weak, their eyes like the eyes of the woman in Dikar's dream who stood in the subway station and said that God was dead.

. . . Dikar went far and wide that day, a brown shadow flitting through the fields and the woods, a silent shadow none saw. Dikar saw many things that day, and the more he saw the heavier his heart grew within him. For Dikar knew that the white-faced men and women were his people and that this green land belonged to them and to him, and that the black men and yellow men were they whom the voice in his dream had said, "have come out of the East to make this world a Hell."

Yes, Dikar saw the Hell they had made.

. . . The sky darkened and the night crept out of the woods, and Dikar lay belly down in tall grass of a field near the woods, head buried in his curled arm, thinking. Last night he had known that he would never return to the Mountain where the Bunch lived, and now he knew that he could not stay in this land that had seemed so pleasant when he had gazed at it from his tall tree in the forest.

Neither there nor here was there place for Dikar. Nowhere was there place for him—

Fingers clutched Dikar's arm, bruising fingers. Dikar rolled over but the fingers held, and there was a growl of words Dikar could not understand, and in the sunless dusk Dikar saw green-clothed legs, and a green-clothed breast, and a black, fierce face goggling at him.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE TOMORROW

DIKAR kicked at the black man's legs, and he saw the black man's hand dart to the little gun at his waist. Dikar kicked again, wrenched loose, exploded from the ground.

Dikar's one hand caught the little gun, his other smashed into the black, goggling

face. Somehow the black man was on the ground and Dikar was atop him, and Dikar was clutching the black throat with one hand while the other was smashing the little gun down on the black man's head, smashing and smashing and smashing.

When Dikar fled into the night-shrouded woods he left behind him something that had legs and a body and arms, but nothing that was anything like a head.

Deep in the woods, Dikar found a little cave. He crawled into this and lay there a long time, shuddering. But after awhile he stirred, and he became aware that he still held in his hands the little gun, and he sat up, his eyes widening with a sudden thought.

Dikar hid the little gun under a pile of rotting leaves, and he went out of the cave and prowled about till he was certain that no one was anywhere within sound of hearing. Then he went back into the cave with certain things he had picked up and he made a fire, and by the light of the fire Dikar studied the little gun until he had made out how it worked.

Satisfied at last, Dikar put out his fire and buried it with wet earth, and left the cave. That night Dikar traveled far and fast, but careful to leave no tracks by which he might be traced.

Dikar was going back to the Mountain, and he must not leave any trail the men in green might follow.

ONE more night Dikar stole down through the dark forest to the Houses of the Bunch, but this night it was long after Bed-Time that he did so. This night Dikar did not crouch behind a tree, looking out at the Fire, but crept, noiselessly, along the wall of the Boys' House that was away from the Fire till, under a certain window opening, he came to a stop.

Dikar listened, trembling a bit, and all he could hear was the whisper of wind in the trees, and the shrill of insects in the night, and the soft breathing of the sleeping Boys. Dikar lifted, slowly, slowly, till he stood upright. The ground here was banked against the wall so that, standing, Dikar's belly was level with the bottom of the window.

Slowly, he ran his hand over the sill, and touched the curtain of woven withes and moved it aside. And then he was peering through, and a fleck of red light was dancing on a sleeping face, and the face was rashed with pimples.

Dikar breathed again. He had remembered right. This was Jimlane.

Dikar got his other hand through the window, and then it was tight over Jimlane's mouth, and Jimlane's scared eyes were staring up at Dikar.

"Listen," Dikar breathed. "Listen to me, Jimlane." Dikar spoke so low that barely he could hear himself, but by the look in Jimlane's eyes he knew that Jimlane heard him and understood.

After awhile Dikar stole away, and for the first time since Tomball had challenged him, Dikar was smiling.

THERE was green all about Dikar, the dancing, leafy green of the top of the giant oak in which he had spent the rest of that night. He was still smiling when he awoke, but peering through the leaves at the Bunch where they chattered, cleaning up after Brekfes, there was a flutter of some small muscle in the tautness of his belly.

Across the space between the House Dikar spied Marilee talking with Bessalton. Dikar saw how thin Marilee had grown, and how wan her little face, and how her fingers plucked endlessly at her short skirt of plaited grasses, and Dikar's smile faded.

Tomball strode up to the two Girls, black-stubbled as ever. His belly was overlaid with fat, but it was still shaggy with hair, and Tomball's grin was still leering.

Tomball put a hand on Marilee's arm, and Marilee shrank away from him. Under Dikar's yellow beard little muscles knotted to ridge his jaw, and there was a growl in his throat.

Tomball laughed, and then from behind the Boys' House came the loud words of

a scrap. "He's mine!" Jimlane's voice piped, and "I say he's mine," squealed the thin voice of Billthomas, and around the corner of the Boys' House the two came, and between them was a half-grown fawn, with a vine wound around its brown neck and trailing, broken, from it.

Jimlane had hold of the fawn's head and Billthomas of its hind legs, and each tugged as if to take it from the other.

"It was caught in my snare," Billthomas piped.

"You lie," Jimlane squealed.

And then Billthomas straightened and cried out. "It's you who lie, Jimlane. I dare you to fight out with me, bare fists, whose snare he was caught in, and whose he shall be."

Tomball's deep-chested laugh came to Dikar's ears, but Jimlane's voice, breaking from squeal to bass and back again to squeal, was answering Billthomas. "You dare me fight whose the fawn shall be?" it said. "Do you cry a fight between us fair?"

And Billthomas: "I cry us equal-matched," and all about were cries of "Fair. Fair. They're equal-matched!" and the Boys and Girls of the Bunch were running from all over, and crying, "Fight! Let them fight!"

And then the Bunch was crowded in a great circle, and the fawn was tied by the vine about its neck to the Boss's Seat, and Tomball, grinning, was seated in the Boss's Seat, just beneath the oak, and Bessalton was seated beside him, mantled in her black hair, and Jimlane and Billthomas stood before them while Tomball spoke to them.

But Dikar's look was on Marilee where she stood in the crowd, her two long brown braids coming down over her shoulders, her deepening breasts beneath leafy circlets.

Dikar's eyes drank thirstily of Marilee till Tomball was finished speaking and Jimlane and Billthomas were walking slowly, each to their end of the cleared space where they were to fight. Jimlane reached the end of the circle, turned—

The little gun jumped in Dikar's hand, and the fawn, just beneath him dropped, wet-redness streaking the brown neck.

A Girl screamed, high and shrill, and then Dikar was shouting: "Stay where you are or I'll kill each of you as I've killed the fawn. I'll kill the first one that moves."

"Dikar!" Marilee cried, and then she was silent, and all were silent and unmoving, the Boys and the Girls in their jammed circle, Tomball in the Boss's Seat.

"Jimlane," Dikar shouted down into that hush, "tell the Bunch how the stone came into my hand with which I struck Tomball when we fought who should be Boss."

Jimlane, white of face and big of eye, but standing straight, cried out. "I put the stone in Dikar's hand, when he fell at my feet."

"Did I know you put the stone in my hand?" Dikar shouted from the tree.

"You did not know, Dikar. You were blinded with your own blood, an numbed with Tomball's blows, an you did not know there was a stone in your hand."

A MURMURING ran around the circle, and a growl, and Dikar saw that the Bunch did not quite believe that he had not known he was striking Tomball with a stone, though they had agreed to fight bare fist.

"Jimlane," Dikar shouted. "Have you ever told this thing to anyone?"

"I told it to Tomball," Jimlane cried, "and Tomball beat me for saying that you did not know you fought no fair, an Tomball said that if I spoke to anyone else he would kill me, an kill the one to whom I spoke of it."

"You lie!" Tomball shouted, starting from seat. "You lie, dumby!" Jimlane screamed with terror of Tomball, but Dikar's shout beat down Jimlane's scream.

"Back!" Dikar shouted. "Back to your seat, Tomball, or you die." And Tomball went pasty white under his black stubble, and he slumped down in his seat.

And Dikar leaped out from the oak bough on which he stood, and came down,

spring-legged, in the clear space around which the Bunch was jammed, and held aloft the little gun.

"This is the thing that kills," he shouted. "Without it I cannot kill," and then he flung the little gun from him, flung it hard so that it went up on the roof of the Boys' House and stayed there.

"Now I cannot kill," Dikar shouted. "No more than any of you."

"Stone him," Tomball yelled. "Stone him, Bunch. He is none of us and we will have none of him." And Dikar saw the Bunch stoop to pluck up stones. Spraddle-legged, bronze-skinned in the sun, he saw this, and his heart within him died, but he would not move.

"No!" It was a high, wild cry in his ear, and it came from Marilee, and Mariless was beside Dikar. "I cry no fair. I cry the Bunch no fair, all of you against this one."

"He fought no fair," Tomball shouted, "an so has no right to call for fairness. Stand aside, Marilee, and let the Bunch stone him."

"I will not stand aside," Marilee answered. "Be you Boss or not, till you tell the Bunch why you said you would kill Jimlane if he told his tale to anyone, an would kill anyone he told the tale to. If you still thought Dikar had fought no fair, why were you afraid to let the Bunch hear Jimlane's tale and judge for themselves?"

Now Tomball's little eyes seemed to have grown even smaller, and his mouth was drawn very tight.

"She's right," someone yelled. "Why, Tomball, did you not let us judge for ourselves?"

"Jimlane lies," Tomball answered. "He never told me this tale, and I never—"

"It is you who lie," Dikar cut in. "I say you lie, Tomball. I cry you a liar, Tomball, an I dare you to fight me whether you lie or not. I cry that I fought fair, an I dare you to fight me whether I fought fair or not. I dare you to fight me who shall be Boss of the Bunch. I cry us equal-matched, an if you refuse to fight me I will cry you a liar and yellow an not fit to be Boss of the Bunch an not fit to be one of the Bunch. Will you fight, Tomball, bare fists?"

There was only one answer Tomball could make. "I fight you bare fists, Dikar. I fight you here an now."

AND then they were fighting, were clubbing at each other with fisted arms, lips drawn back from white teeth, eyes hating. But Dikar was gaunt and hard-bitten, and toughened by the life he had led since he'd been stoned from the Bunch, and Tomball was fat and slow, and short-winded, and so the fight did not last long. Dikar beat Tomball down, laid him rolling at his feet, and there was scarcely a mark on Dikar when he stood above his beaten enemy and heard the shouts of the Bunch.

"Hurray for Dikar. Hurray for the Boss. Hurray and hurray and hurray."

Dikar scarcely heard the hurrays. He was peering about for Marilee and he saw her, and he motioned commandingly for her to come to him. She came to him, her white and slender body shining in the sun, her eyes shining more brightly than the sun, and then she was beside Dikar, and Dikar's arm was around her, and he was holding her close to his side.

Under the thunder of the hurrays, Dikar spoke to Marilee. "Marilee," he said. "In the time I have been alone in the woods I have learned many things, an one of the things I have learned is that each creature has his mate, the birds an the small beasts of the woods, an the deer. I learned that He who made all things meant this to be so, an meant that we too, each of us, shall have his mate. Marilee, I want you for my mate."

He was looking down into her face, and now he waited, with a tightness growing in him that was both keen happiness and fear.

Marilee's red lips spoke. "Oh, Dikar. This that you have learned only now, I have known always. Dikar, always I have wanted you for my mate."

A great joy leaped within Dikar, and he raised his hand and roared, "Shut up! Shut up, all of you." And the hurrays died away, and the Bunch was hushed, and Dikar was talking into that smiling hush.

"There are many things I have to say to you, an many Rules I shall have to change. All this will come later. Just now I have something to say, but not to you, though I wish all the Bunch to hear it, all the Bunch, an Another."

Then, in that hush, Dikar turned to the giant oak, and to the forest beyond the oak, and his voice was low, and slow, and awed.

"You Whose voice is the whisper of the wind in the trees, an the ripple of the water in the streams an the song of the insects in the night! You, who watch over us by day, an by night! You to Whom we say our now-I-lay-mes at Bed-Time! Sir! Look upon me and upon this girl, an hear me. In your sight an your hearin I take this Girl to be my mate, an none other than this Girl, an to You an to her. I promise that all my life I will take care of her an let no harm come near her. I promise that all my life she shall be bone of my bone an flesh of my flesh, all my life an all her life, an always an always."

"Hear me, Sir!" Marilee's clear, young voice rang out. "I shall be this Boy's mate, an none other's, an he shall be bone of my bone, an flesh of my flesh, always an always."

And it seemed to Dikar that a soft hand stroked his hair, though it might have been the wind. How could it be the wind, though, that said in his ear, in sweet, low tones, "The Lord bless you, my son, an the Lord bless my daughter."

Dikar had climbed to the tipmost branch of the tallest tree in the forest, and Marilee had climbed there with him. For a long time, clasped in each other's arms, they had gazed out on the green land that stretched, fold on fold, to the sky, while Dikar told Marilee of his dream that was not a dream, and of the terrible things he had seen down there.

"Some day, Marilee," Dikar ended. "I shall lead the Bunch down there. I have to, because down there is the America of which the man spoke, an this is the Tomorrow he talked about, an we are the children of yesterday who will reconquer those green and pleasant fields for democracy, and liberty, and freedom."

And all at once there was a light shining on the land down there, a great and golden light that cast no shadows.

There will be a further account of Dikar and the Bunch, of how they went down to the world below their Mountain.
***Watch for* CHILDREN OF TOMORROW,**
to appear in Argosy soon

Without warning the water rushed down on them

Wild River

Don't miss this great story of Boulder Dam—the biggest and most dangerous job ever attempted —and of Speed Foley who fought the river and the men and himself . . . to become a man. Start it now!

By JOHN STROMBERG

THIS is the story of Boulder Dam—back in 1931 they called it Hoover Dam, remember?—the biggest thing that man has ever tried to do, and about the most dangerous. It is the story of the dam, and of the snarling Colorado River that people said could never be tamed, and of the men who swarmed like fragile, invincible insects to do the job that was impossible.

It is also the story of Speed Foley, who tells it—a pug-nosed young graduate of the Colorado State Engineering School—of how the river and the rock and the steed and the concrete battered and shaped him and moulded him into a man.

It starts on a warm Spring evening just before graduation when Speed, cocky from his last triumph on the college diamond, is taunted by Buck Naylor into claiming he has a job on the dam. The fact that Naylor, working on the dam as an engineer, was bragging about his job and making an impression on Speed's girl, Janet Collins, had a lot to do with it, too.

At any rate, Speed knows he has to make good on his boast.

AFTER weary weeks at Denver of trying to get a job on the project, he is advised to go on out to the dam-site. He arrives in a gaudy yellow flivver, is directed to Hagtown where the job-seeking wanderers camp; and swiftly gets into a fight with one Sam Breck who is sore when Speed asks to borrow a bucket.

Speed doesn't know that Breck is at the end of his rope; that Breck's wife is sick and about to have a baby; that Breck's money has run out; and that only the day before Breck's bucket was stolen by a sneak-thief. Breck, on the other hand, resents

This story began in last week's Argosy

Speed's clothes, his flashy car, his general air of well-fed sleekness.

When the state police had separated them, Speed's wallet is missing. Hot-headedly, he accuses Breck and makes an enemy for life.

Speed, his flivver stolen, is down to his last nickel when, through Professor Collins, Janet's father, he gets a job as helper to Danny Henderson, top hard-rock driller on the dam.

DURING the months that follow Speed begins to realize the vastness of the dam and the unrelenting menace of the angry river. For the first time in his life he catches a glimpse of the world beyond his home-town and his campus.

The hard-rock men are tough and bitter; most of them distrust Speed because the Foleys are, and have always been among the "haves," while the men count themselves in with the "have-nots." Speed begins to dread the harangues of Mendel, a Ph. D. who bitterly resents doing an unskilled laborer's job, and whose tirades are couched almost entirely in capital letters: Government, Capital, Labor, System. . . .

Speed has almost constant trouble with Breck, whom he has not recognized, and whom he is aware of only as a man who bears him an inexplicable grudge.

And so a year passes. Speed has toughened up; he has absorbed a lot of information without quite realizing it; he has deeply changed. One day he passes Janet on the streets of Las Vegas and she does not know who he is. . . .

CHAPTER VII

BRIEF REUNION

I HEARD Buck Naylor say, "That's Foley, Janet," as I galloped at her; but I saw her gray eyes widen, saw her shrink a little, and I tried to laugh it off—half naked, mud-encrusted, clumping in rubber boots.

"Not Frankenstein's monster! Gosh, but I'm glad to see you! When did you blow in?"

"Last night. About six o'clock," she said.

"Why didn't you let me know?"

Naylor admitted handsomely, "My fault. I thought you were on swing shift; we came down to meet the transports, but you'd gone."

"I bet it broke your heart," I said, and saw advantages in being an engineer. "I mean, why didn't you write that you were coming?"

Janet told me nervously, "My—father decided suddenly. He had to run out to California to give a lecture, and he—thought he'd come this way and see how things are coming on. How are they?"

"Fine," I said. "We're 'way ahead of schedule."

But she didn't really want to know. Buck Naylor was amused, indulgent—standing there in trim white riding pants. He said, "Well, sweet, I'll see you later. I must be shoving off."

I jeered, "I hate to see you go."

But it was strange to be there with her in that sandy street where transports poured out heavy-footed men, who stared to see her talking with a stiff—that slender, modish girl. I asked her awkwardly, "Have you had breakfast?"

"No. I—thought we might—"

"Hold everything!" I said, and ran; and suddenly I had to laugh—Speed Foley, clumping in rubber boots.

I had to stand in line to reach a shower, and I shouted merry greetings to the waiting stiffs. They were surprised. I bellowed, "They were only playing leap-frog," in the shower, and I whistled while I shaved.

But the whistle faded before the mirror. It had been a year since I had noticed; and my face was freckled yet, but it was not the cheerful face that I remembered. When had those tight, ugly lines cut past the corners of my mouth? When had I got so thin?

I needed a haircut, and my eyes were queer with loneliness. My only street clothes were cheap hand-me-downs, bought in Las Vegas, not for social purposes. I wasn't popular with daughters of construction stiffs.

I HAD to take her to a restaurant, and I had seldom been there. Restaurants were patronized by engineers and office men and tourists, not by stiffs. The waiter stared when you ordered steak and eggs

and fried potatoes and a quart of milk for breakfast.

Janet ordered orange juice and toast and coffee, nervously. I told her, "Very bad for you."

"What is?" said Janet.

"Orange juice. It gets a grip on you."

"I know," said Janet. "I've been warned. Too late, too late! Sometimes at night—oh, I can't tell you! It's too horrible."

"Remember, I am your physician, not a man."

The old familiar foolery was meaningless; I saw her watching me with clear, gray, troubled eyes. I begged, "What is it, kid?"

"You hate it here," said Janet.

"It's a job."

"Manual labor?"

"Somebody's got to do it. Why not me?"

"I can't believe that they all hate it."

"Sure they do. Construction stiffs hate everything."

"Buck says you're always having fights."

I tried to grin, but felt the corners of my mouth draw tight. I said, "Construction stiffs are not exactly lily-fingered. We're not engineers."

"You are," said Janet soberly. "Have you put in your application to the Service?"

"No."

"Why not?"

I didn't know what to say. The Civil Service was the only thing that could save any Government activity from politics, and yet . . . I wasn't proud of being a construction stiff, and yet . . . It wasn't work I hated, and it wasn't stiffs. It wasn't even engineers. It was the System settling down on me.

I hated thinking; it was hard. But sometimes, afterward, I knew why I had done a thing. I said evasively, "Plenty of time. There won't be any examinations till the list runs down, and it's still full."

There wasn't anywhere to take a woman in the morning; not for stiffs. I had to ask, "Where are you staying?"

"On the Hill."

Snob Hill, we called it; only Administration men lived there. Quality Row, for Company executives, was on the slope.

The sun beat on the town; the girl's clear face was red with heat, down in the town. But on the Hill a little breeze was blowing. There were flowers. There was grass, with cool, sweet sprays of water playing on it. There was water now for grass, but only on the Hill. I hadn't been there since the day I'd driven past in my vanished flivver.

THIS was the very house; the sloping lawn was lovely now. These were the steps where Buck had lounged at ease, nursing a cup of tea, waiting for Janet—nibbling a sandwich when I could have murdered him to get it.

Janet asked me properly, "Will you come in? I'd like you to meet my hostess."

Properly, politely in the desert, I said, "Thanks, I'd like to, but I've got to get some sleep."

She hesitated, and her gray eyes searched my face. "Of course. You must be tired."

"Thank you for coming down to breakfast."

"Thank you for the breakfast."

"Hell!" I said, and took her in my arms.

And suddenly we had to laugh. There was no strangeness. There was shade on the veranda, and the street was empty in the morning. There were vines and flowers. There was fresh, young, living grass, with water shining on it.

Janet scolded me: "What makes you be that way?"

"What way?"

"So—hard."

That was all right. No fellow minded being hard.

She said, "My father didn't have a thing to do with coming here this time. I made him come."

"Then you don't have to go tomorrow?"

"Yes. He's due in California. But I made him come this way. I had to see you."

"Gosh," I said.

"Your letters. They—they didn't sound like you. They sounded like—"

"I know," I said. "A stiff."

The sense of being smothered in a swarm. The heat, the mud, the ceaseless hammering of noise. The river roaring past you, snatching a man away sometimes; and a man was nothing. Other men swarmed into the empty places. . . . That was strange; not this. The Hill was clean and quiet, and a little breeze was blowing.

"You're so thin," said Janet.

"I'm all right," I said, and was.

"You've got to get some decent clothes. And keep your hair cut. Pay attention to your looks."

"I know."

"And let my father know when you put in your application to the Service. He can recommend you."

"Sure," I said, not thinking, only feeling, and content to feel. It rested me.

A lady's voice said, "Oh! I'm sorry."

"You're not half as sorry as I am," I said, and laughed. And Janet laughed, presenting me:

"This is the young man I was telling you about."

The lady's eyes were friendly, but too kind; my shoes were shabby and my hair was long. The lady murmured, "Oh, the young engineer."

"I'm not an engineer. I'm just a stiff."

The girl explained, "He means, he isn't in the Service yet. But he is, too, an engineer. We went to school together; he was in my father's classes. He's just—"

"Slumming?" I inquired. "Don't let her kid you. I'm a driller's helper, and a good one, too. Because I need the money."

"Well, you needn't get stuffy about it," flared the girl.

"I'm only helping you apologize for me. . . . She means, I'm putting in my application to the Service. Then I'll be respectable."

"Don't be a snob!" cried Janet.

"Me?" I said. "I live down yonder."

"So glad to have seen you," said the lady, murmuring, and vanished.

"Now you've done it!" wailed the girl.

"Done what?"

"I wanted her to ask you to tea."

"I'm not ashamed of being a stiff."

"Who said you were?"

"Then why did you apologize for me?"

"I didn't! Oh, what made you be so rude?"

"I wasn't rude."

"You were! Her husband's in the Service!"

"Yeah."

"Well, what's the matter with the Service?"

"Nothing, if you like that sort of thing."

"What sort of thing?"

I didn't know. Wild words poured out of me.

"A JOB where you can't lose and you can't win. Protected by red tape, and your hands tied with it—trying to keep the politicians off your neck. The Chief himself. He wanted to give me a job. He got me the job I've got. But he couldn't hire me. Why? Because he's got to keep his peace with the politicians—let 'em use the little jobs for plums. The rules protect only the standard jobs. Yeah, standard. By the time you're sixty, if you're lucky, you'll be making half as much as a good baseball player."

"Oh," said Janet.

"Yeah," I said. "The Chief himself. After the years it took him to learn his job. After the beating he took to learn this river. Living in deserts. Dragging his wife around, or living without her. Seeing his men picked off. This river is no joke. And what does he get?"

"I suppose he's told you," said the girl with irony.

"He doesn't know that I'm alive. But the scale is standard. Junior engineer so much, assistant so much, engineer so much, and senior so much, and then chief so much. And then what?"

Janet said uncertainly, "Oh, money."

"What do you live on? Tell me that!"

"My father doesn't make much money."

"No," I had to admit. "Professors don't."

"They're public servants too."

"I know," I sighed—the words gone

out of me, the rage gone out of me. I wasn't talking about money. Drillers' helpers made almost as much as junior engineers.

The girl said soberly, "Buck said you'd changed."

Wild words boiled up again; I fought them. It was true. I said, "Who hasn't, in this place?" But instantly I knew the answer. Naylor hadn't changed. Those dark and handsome fellows never changed. They didn't mind the heat. They didn't feel the pressure of the swarm. They lived in peace and dignity, with grass.

I said, "I don't know what's the matter with me. Tired, I guess. I better hit the hay."

"Of course you must."

"What are you doing this afternoon?"

"A tea. I told you."

"And tonight?"

"There's a dinner for my father."

"Do you have to be there?"

"I'm afraid so."

She was in the grip of a System too. I said politely in the desert, "Nice to have seen you," and held out my hand.

She slapped it—hard. She blazed at me, "Snap out of it, you lame-brained idiot! Who ever told you you could fix the world to suit yourself? You used to be a fair third baseman, and could make a touchdown once in a while if you had plenty of blockers, and could shoot a basket if your guard fell down and broke his neck. And here I find you trying to play Hamlet!"

Bawling me out, the way she used to do. I had to laugh. I knew I had no brains. But I had arms.

"That's better," said the girl.

"I'll say it is," I sighed. A radio was playing somewhere in the morning, and the music came from Denver, Colorado, only a thousand miles away. The desert reached only a couple of hundred. Somewhere, yonder, there was still the smell of pines, the high, free air of mountains.

"Come for me at nine o'clock," said Janet.

"Oke!" I said, and galloped down the Hill—Speed Foley, late of Colorado U.

That afternoon there was a baseball game. The teams were organized; everything, now, was getting organized in Boulder City. There was quite a crowd. I saw the Big Boss of the Company, and wondered vaguely why he'd told me to stick around. I hadn't yet discovered what third-basing had to do with a job like this.

The baseball wasn't very good, but I still played—like the old-timer old Pete Foley liked to tell about, who kept on bucking a crooked wheel because it was the only one in town.

CHAPTER VIII

ROUGHNECKS MUST FIGHT

SAM BRECK still played. He wasn't fast; his legs had stood too many years around machinery, on floors that shook to the measured beat of engines. Fast reactions were not needed there. Good eyes were needed, and he had them. Strength was needed; he was strong.

Sam Breck could hit. Three times that afternoon he reached third base, or almost reached it. Twice I slipped out of the way and tagged him—kidding him. Oh, I remember now! I didn't bother to block him off the bag; I knew he couldn't slide. He tried to crash me, but I stepped out of the way and tagged him—grinning. And he couldn't slug me, with the Big Boss there.

The third time, though, he whaled the ball so far that it would certainly have cleared the fence if there had been a fence. A fielder chased it. Nobody ran to relay the throw; I had to run out to meet it. Breck came pounding around second, and the coacher waved him back, but he pounded on. Nobody covered third; I had to race him to the bag.

He beat me to it. And was he triumphant! Puffing like a locomotive, panting so that he could hardly speak, he glared and jeered me, "Think you own the earth!"

I grinned and told him, "Only this part of it. Just take a chance, big boy, if you don't think so."

It was only a baseball game, and not a good one, but he took no chance; he hugged that bag as if his life depended on it, though his team already had a six-run lead. The next man walked and then stole second, and the catcher boldly pegged to second, knowing that Breck couldn't run. Breck didn't try. Nobody out; he stayed right there and waited for a hit.

And sock! The next man whaled it down the third-base line. Breck started with the crack of the bat, and had to duck as it whistled past his ear. I managed to get my meat hand on it, and it stuck. My foot came down right on the bag, and I had to laugh. I saw Sam Breck still struggling to reverse as I whipped to second. Out, out, out—a triple play!

Sam Breck got drunk that night. Oh, I can understand it now! His team had won, but he had nothing much to celebrate.

Sam Breck was often drunk, that first year, though he seldom showed it much. The man could carry a lot of liquor. That was lucky for Sam Breck; the Big Boss would have fired him in a minute. Not that Sam Breck cared especially, I guess. He had no wife. He worked because he didn't know what else to do, and still had sixteen empty hours a day. Many a time, since then, I've thought of it—how little anybody knows of what goes on inside a man. I thought Sam Breck was just a tough guy.

And he thought I was a rich man's son. Remembering another June—that night in Hagtown, at the end of the road, his hope gone and his flivver resting on its rims. Me breezing in, thinking it was a picnic, asking him for a bucket when his only bucket had been stolen. Socking him when he was too weak to fight—wearing him down when hunger had already worn him down. Many a time I've thought of it.

The river roaring in the night, and Leila screaming that you were a bum because she was too weak to bring your son into this sorry world.

THE mess hall had a cooling system now. It wasn't very hot outside; only a little above a hundred, after the sun went down, and sometimes it got up to a hundred and twenty-five. I ate with zest. I didn't mind the arguments that night; I didn't keep my eyes fixed on my plate.

I looked men in the face and grinned. I was myself again, Speed Foley.

Breck was scowling across the mess hall, and I gave him a friendly wave, but he kept on scowling. Maybe he thought I was cocky. Maybe I was, at that. A triple play! Not many men live long enough to make one. Breck still scowled as I sauntered out, but I grinned at him. I felt like getting along with everybody. Janet was in town.

Cleopatra, who thought they maligned her,
Resolved to reform and be kinder.
'If, when pettish,' she said,
'I should chop off your head,
Won't you give me some gentle reminder?'

Janet would be at dinner for a long time yet. The recreation hall was vast and crowded. I could start tomorrow making friends; tonight I wanted to be alone. I strolled into the desert, and the stars were beautiful. I didn't mind the heat, remembering the high, cool peace of summer snows.

I heard unsteady feet behind me, and I turned. "You killed my wife," said Breck.

The man was obviously drunk. I said indulgently, "I didn't know you had one."

"Haven't," said Sam Breck, and slugged me in the stomach.

Not in the stomach. Low; Sam Breck was practical. He hadn't come out here to box with me. Sam Breck heard Leila crying, heard a far-off river roaring, and this time he didn't miss.

The muscles of my thighs jerked short; my abdomen constricted, and I fell. I saw feet coming at me, and I couldn't move. I couldn't breathe. I didn't feel much after that first flare of pain.

I'd heard of "the boots," but I couldn't realize that it was happening to me. I only hoped I could stay alive. The feet stormed at my middle, but I'd fallen doubled up. They shifted to my face; I

could feel my head jerk, and I knew my nose was broken, but you didn't die of a broken nose.

The feet stopped coming, and I knew I was still alive. I knew Sam Breck was a dirty louse.

I knew Sam Breck was gone, and started trying to get up. I didn't make much headway for a while. But presently I noticed that a light swung over me from time to time. The desert where I lay was just outside the bend of the highway where it swung and headed for Las Vegas, and the headlights hit me when an automobile swung. My eyes fixed on my wrist watch —rather a handsome thing, a present from my father on the day I became a man. A more expensive present than a small-town lawyer could afford.

I didn't think of that. I saw that it was almost nine o'clock, and I got up.

MY LEGS were all right; they could carry me well enough if I balanced my body on them; it was only when I staggered that I felt much pain. So I went carefully. I tried to wipe my face, but the blood kept dripping from my chin, and I had to turn my head in the lighted street. Stiffs jeered me, idly, as I passed; I guess they thought I was drunk. I'd had a good many fights and never been hurt till now.

I got to the dormitory and cleaned up as best I could, and thought I looked almost decent—thought I'd be all right if I kept out of the light. My nose stopped bleeding, and I managed to change my clothes —put on clean khaki pants and a white shirt. I didn't bother with a coat. My hand-me-downs were ruined, but it didn't matter. Janet knew I was a stiff; she knew I had to go on shift at eleven that night.

It was nearly ten when I got up the Hill, but the dinner wasn't over. I could hear the voices in the dining room. Too dizzy to care much, I rang the bell. A butler came—not much of a butler; only five feet high, but he was proud. He knew I was a stiff.

I said with effort:

"Biss Collids."

"Sorry, please. All family at dinner."

"Tell her Bister Foley."

"Sorry, please."

I shouted, "Go add tell her."

Janet ran into the hall. Behind her, disapproving, very handsome in a cool white dinner coat, his smooth skin very brown by contrast, came Buck Naylor.

"As I live and breathe!" said Buck.

"I've got doe tibe to listedd to your breathig," I said rudely. . . . "Sorry, Jad. I'b late."

"You're hurt!" cried Janet, running at me, and she almost knocked me down. I had to clutch the door-jamb.

"Drunk," said Buck severely.

And the dinner-party swarmed about my ears, and I was frantic. I protested, "Doe. I've had a fight, that's all."

"It seems enough," said Professor Collins. "Hadn't you better have some medical attention, boy?"

"I'b sorry, sir. But Jadet told be dide o'clock."

He murmured, "And they say the ancient faith is dead."

A lady cried, "I'll call a doctor."

"Coming here," said Buck, "the shape you're in!"

"Shuddup," I cried, and pain shot through my ribs. How could I get along with everybody if Buck Naylor kept on shooting off his mouth? I hadn't realized that it would be like this. I'd only meant to say goodbye to Janet, unobtrusively.

Men said, "This way, old man," and dragged me to a bathroom, and I knew I had no business to be here. I'd thought my face looked almost human after the bleeding stopped, but now my nose had really begun to swell; the bruises had begun to blacken.

In the mirror of that brilliant bathroom, under lights less merciful than dormitory lights, I saw myself by contrast with those well-dressed men. They propped me on a stool and dragged my shirt off, and I saw a battered stiff. I hated all those kindly people.

LIQUOR was taboo on the Reservation, and my involuntary host was high in the Administration, but he told me openly, "Drink this." He tried to put me at my ease; he said admiringly, "I'd give four dollars if I had those muscles."

I said humbly, "You don't need 'em. You've got brains."

Janet was blocked away by the shoulders of tall men. I heard her whisper, "Is he badly hurt?"

Buck said indulgently, "Just punch-drunk. You can't kill those shanty Irish."

It was true. My grandpa had no parlor manners, but he certainly was tough.

The doctor came, and he paid small attention to a broken nose. He prodded me in painful spots and said, "I'll have to put you under observation. . . . Call an ambulance."

I vaulted off the stool and cried, "Doe, doc! I got to go od shift!"

"The hell you say. Sit down before I sock you."

"That's beed tried," I said, and tried to grin.

"I'll say it has."

"By experts. I'b all right. Go od ad sock be, but dod't call that abbuladze. I got to go od shift."

"Where do you work?"

"Id the diversiod tuddels."

"And they can't go on without you?"

"Sure they cad. But Daddy's got to have a helper, ad he's used to be."

Buck Naylor murmured, "Daddy's little helper."

There was a commotion in the bathroom. I could feel it; men were grabbing at me. I was hitting Naylor in the face, not hard, but rapidly, repeatedly. And Carlton Naylor didn't live by instinct, but —you can imagine.

Even as a freshman, I'd been always in his hair. And he'd been doing well in Boulder City; he'd been promised his promotion to assistant. On good terms with his superiors, invited often to important houses, as he was tonight. They asked him as a partner for nice girls like Janet. All these other men were his superiors, and it had been a pleasant evening—till I blundered in and moved the party to the bathroom.

Naylor hit me once, and that completed the destruction of a pleasant evening.

Janet cried, "You ought to be ashamed!"

"I am," said Buck. What more could he have said? But they still blamed him. I could hear. I wasn't completely out; you know, the shanty Irish.

His important host said coldly, "We'll excuse you, Naylor, if you can't control yourself."

The doctor snapped, "Are you insane? Hitting a man in that condition!"

Janet's father told him, "That's unworthy of you, Carlton."

So I went to the infirmary. And Janet came to see if I was still alive before she drove away to California, but I gathered that she thought it served me right. She thought I was a roughneck.

CHAPTER IX

TREACHEROUS ROCK

DANNY only said, "Who done it, kid?" I scowled and acted big. "I'll 'tend to that," I said.

I tried too soon. I hit Sam Breck the minute I laid eyes on him, and Sam Breck knocked me cold. He couldn't put the boots to me this time; the thing was public. But the time was past when you could hit a man in public just because you felt that way. Breck paid a fine, but I was the aggressor and I went to jail.

Old Danny got me out in time to go on shift. The little man said fretfully, "I wish you'd do your fightin' on your own damn time. I'm tired of workin' with a green helper."

Danny never worried about the System. Danny called the Big Boss of the Company by his first name. I saw him do it; and the Big Boss once had been old Danny's helper, and he must have known that any man who lived in thunder could read lips, but he didn't turn his back when he spoke to me.

"How's the kid comin' on?"

"So-so," said Danny.

"Hurt much, was he?"

"Seems to be all right"

"Pretty fast, is he?"

"Fair," said Danny.

"Maybe this job's a little heavy for him."

"What you drivin' at?" said Danny, glaring.

"I could use him as a signal punk."

Then Danny made me proud, but still I didn't know that they were talking about third basemen.

"Frank," said Danny, "you keep foolin' around here, and I'll bend a drill over your damn head."

And he kept me humping. Speed, speed, speed! Twenty or thirty feet a day the jumbo rode into the rock.

The first of the great diversion tunnels broke, or the bench did. There was still the bottom sixteen feet, the invert, to be drilled and blasted out, but other men could come behind and do the finishing; old Danny's place was out in front. The Big Boss moved him to another tunnel, and you couldn't tell the difference. The same size—three times bigger than a railroad tunnel. Almost the same length—four thousand.

Bigger than any in the world; and these were only four of fifty assorted tunnels men must drive before the Colorado could be tamed.

Up from the roofs of two of them shot the fantastic rifle-bores of the great spillways—up eight hundred feet, sucking the eye into dizzy spirals, up to a dot of light where the top of the dam would be. The savage cliffs were honeycombed with tunnels. And of course men died, but you got used to that. Your hands no longer shook when the siren screamed. With all the precautions in the world, a job like this cost more than money.

The biggest job in the world; men had to invent machinery to do it—faster and faster as they learned.

The last of the great diversion tunnels was completed, ready to receive the river, but there still remained a ticklish job to do. The Big Boss came and said, "I hate to ask you, Danny. That rock's bad."

"I never seen no good rock," grumbled Danny.

"Plenty of younger men to do it, but they haven't got the feel. They'd get their feet wet sure."

"Well, I ain't washed mine lately, anyway."

"Thanks, Danny. Take the best damn helper on the job."

"What for?" said Danny scornfully. "The kid'll do. . . . How 'bout it, kid? You need a bath?"

I nodded. What else could I do? The Big Boss told me soberly, "I hate to send a kid."

"I'm not a kid," I said. "I'm the best damn helper in the world. . . . Huh, Danny?"

"Go to hell," said Danny Henderson, and grinned.

THERE was no place called Hagtown now. The flat, dry wash where the battered cars of bums had gathered was deserted; only a few abandoned flivvers rusted there—Sam Breck's, no doubt, among them—and a few shacks rotted slowly in the desert air. The river would take care of them.

A temporary railroad curled along the rocky slopes and down through temporary tunnels to the river, to a factory—the Lo-Mix plant. That too would be abandoned. It supplied the concrete for the lower levels, but a greater plant, the biggest in the world, was being built a thousand feet above—the Hi-Mix. Men might tame the Colorado, but they couldn't tame the force of gravity.

A factory to be abandoned—that was nothing in the scale of things.

A trestle stilted out over the river, waiting. Presently an endless line of trucks would hurry out and bury it, rushing a temporary dam across the river. Then another temporary dam. Between these two, a greater dam would rise, footed with steel and faced with concrete, rubber-jointed to the timeless rock. But temporary. Just

a coffer-dam. Its only purpose was to shunt the river into the giant tunnels.

Wing-dams waited to relieve the pressure, and the arch-dams were already mined with dynamite, ready to be blown up and let the river in. Below the dam-site, then, another coffer-dam would seal the Colorado off; and then the real job could begin—the soaring wall that men imagined here, tall as a mountain and more solid than a mountain, that should stand as long as the mountains stood.

All else was temporary. Even men.

ONE of the fifty tunnels ran under the river. Not a big one; only six feet high. I had to stoop to keep the rock from scraping off my hat. But Danny walked erect into the little tunnel, and his withered face was grim with discontent. That rock was bad.

Under the cliffs it was sound enough, but under the river, pounded and saturated a million years, in many places it had broken beyond the line. Under the deepest part of the river, where we set the drill, a vault had broken out of the roof, and water was coming through it in a steady rain. You walked in water, heard the seep of water under enormous pressure, felt the dull, slow throb of pumps on the heavy air.

The roar of the river didn't penetrate down here. Only the grinding of the rocks that bumped along its bottom, over your head.

You dragged the air-hose in, coupling it as you went, and every length cut off escape. Three hundred feet of dripping rat-hole lay behind you when you reached the spot the engineers had marked. You lugged the air-drill in and set the tripod, pointed the machine straight up and set the first short drill. Old Danny calmly fed it up to the roof and pulled the trigger, loosed its thunder against the rock that held the river off his head.

Eight feet of rock, the engineers had estimated. They could measure with their transits to this point in the vast maelstrom, moor a barge with steel and push a steel rod down, holding it rigid against the power of the water till it struck the rock; and they could feel the rock and measure to it. But they couldn't know what seams, what faults, what weakness lay inside it. Engineers were human and their hands were blind.

Old Danny wasn't human.

He could feel the rock as if he probed it with his fingers. He was changing the force of the hammer-blows every instant; and his gimlet eyes were vacant, his attention focused in his gnarled and calloused hands. The steel sank safely to the chuck in the dripping roof.

He pulled it down and nodded, and I changed the drill.

No need to flush the hole; a stream of slime ran out of it and changed to water. In the silence that wiped out the lonely thunder of the drill, a shard fell out of the roof and splashed five feet away. I shivered. It was cold down here.

Not really cold. But water trickled off your helmet, down your back. Hard hats, like everything, had been improved; they made them out of fiber now, like turtle-shell, cooler than steel and lighter. But not even steel could keep the river off you if the rock came down.

Five holes would be enough to drill—one in the middle, to relieve the up-thrust of the tunnel walls; four slanting outward, to break upward against the weight of the river. These must be full depth. You dared not spring them with a little dynamite to make them hold more dynamite, and they must hold enough. One shot was all you got in a place like this.

The first hole was completed, and the second, and the third. Water was pouring off our helmets, and I watched old Danny's face. No use to watch the rock; no human eye could see what might be happening inside. Only a little cloud of mist hung there against the roof, whipped by the flying steel.

The blur of the chuck was rising slowly into the mist. It paused, hung motionless. Old Danny's mouth contracted in a spasm of discontent.

The little man said crossly, "Damn it. Run!"

THERE was no time to run. There was only a frozen instant when the clatter of steel in the rock had grated and choked, when water had spurted around the drill, too strong to be whipped into mist; and the steel was jammed in the sagging rock.

Water exploded in sheets, a suspended curtain of water, hiding old Danny's face; and the wires broke and the lights went out and the moment stayed on the dark forever. Grinding and cracking, the rock roared down on old Danny Henderson.

Instinct had hurled me backward, that was all.

My lungs gulped air and my hands flung out as the water slammed me down. I felt no pain of the rock; only a black and mindless violence. It whirled me against the roof, and the rock raked me to the bone—my back, my skull. I turned face up by instinct, fighting the rock that tore me, clawing the way the water took me; but it went too fast. The bones of my right hand broke. My head hit a projection, and concussion starred in my bursting brain, and the air escaped from my bursting lungs.

My last thought was a dim discovery. A man could breathe in water like a fish.

I didn't know I drowned. I guess my limpness lessened the impacts when the water whirled me against the rock, and my lessened bouyancy let me sink down from the jagged roof, let the wild water take me with its own wild speed. They say I shot half out of the water where it boiled into a greater tunnel, where men waited anxiously. They snatched at me and missed. I bobbed away in the swift current, shooting toward the lower portal, toward the river; but men raced along the slippery, sloping sides of the great invert and plunged in and risked their lives to drag me out.

I lay face down, head down on the sloping concrete and was sick. Somebody was on my back, and the weight was painful. I began to struggle. Somebody helped me get my head up, and I saw a lofty, smooth, electric-lighted vault, like a cathedral; and I recognized it, but I didn't know how I came to be there.

Violence had deadened pain.

I saw my own flesh dripping red like beef, and thought it was a tourniquet that hurt me, and I tried to tear it off; but they prevented me. Was that my hand? It didn't look like a hand. It wouldn't act like a hand. I saw brown water boiling up out of the little tunnel, sliding away down the great invert—not enough for what I began to remember; and the memory was in my muscles, but the first-aid outfit wouldn't let me go.

The Big Boss told me, "Take it easy, kid."

His eyes were queer; his big, good-humored, fattish face was pinched. He'd been old Danny's helper once.

I told him dully, "Danny. He's down there."

"I know," said the Big Boss of the Company.

The stretcher bearers took me out. The way was all familiar, but I'd never made that journey on my back. I saw a soaring portal, great steel columns holding a mighty gate of steel over the portal; and that gate, once dropped, would never rise again.

I heard the roar of the river, but I didn't see it. What I saw was calm, eternal sky over the desert, over the blind black cliffs.

The skips went up and down as busily as ever. Men still hung on the rock like spiders, crawled on the rock like flies and swarmed like ants in the level places, around machines. They hardly noticed the stretcher as it went by. Only another stiff on his way to the hospital. Some other stiff would take his place, and the job would go on the same as ever.

The job went on.

A touch of a switch exploded the arch-dams, and the river spread into the great tunnels, and its violence decreased. In thirty hours the rushing trucks threw the first temporary dam across it. That was

in November, when no flash floods came; men hurried to forestall the floods. The coffer-dams were vital now. The clatter of air-drills sounded yet, and would sound yet for years, but the drills no longer led in the battle.

Danny's part of the job was done.

CHAPTER X

WHERE A MAN DIED

THE merciful dullness of shock was dissolved in pain, but the sounds of a city in the desert came through the windows just the same. Often I started up at the noise of transports, thinking that it was time to go on shift, that Danny would bawl me out if I was late; but I only hurt myself. I tried to think, but only remembered.

The man in the next bed died, but it didn't matter. There was another man in the bed next day.

My father came from Colorado, but he couldn't help me much. Pat Foley, who had always been so humorously sharp and sure, was queerly diffident. I though he was subdued by the scale of things.

"How do you feel, son?"

"I'm all right." I didn't want any sympathy. I wanted somebody to tell me what it was all about.

You couldn't pity old Danny Henderson. That grim runt had beaten percentage a long time. It had caught up with him at last, but he had finished the job he'd gone to do. He'd let the river into the little tunnel. . . . Ants did that. You stepped on one, and he never knew where your heel came from, but he died digging; and the rest of them went on working at whatever was in their ant-like minds.

I tried to tell my father about Danny, and could only describe a human ant. He tried to cheer me up, chatting about Colorado, but those years were gone. Four thousand hours inside the rock had cut them off.

This was the great November of 1932; Pat Foley, a good Democrat, spoke warmly of the election, but I didn't care who was President of the United States. Joe Mendel, the Ph.D. who worked in the timekeeper's office, came to see me, and spoke warmly of the Forgotten Man, but he didn't mean Danny Henderson. Danny had always had a job.

"At the subsistence level," said Joe Mendel bitterly, but he had never spoken a dozen words to Danny Henderson. Joe liked to argue about Workers, and old Danny had only worked.

"A product of the System," said Joe Mendel, but I couldn't see that it made any difference. The System or the Government—there still would be a lot of men at the bottom whose importance was their numbers, and the river and the rock would kill them just the same.

The Big Boss came and told me cheerfully, "Well, kid, you're hard to kill; I guess I'll have to give up. I'll have a softer job for you when you feel like working."

"Thanks," I said. I didn't feel like thinking about a job.

"I've just been talking with your father about your compensation."

"Sir?" I said. "What for?"

"You're pretty well bunged up."

"You didn't do it."

"Sure I did. I sent you into danger, and the Company's responsible. We'll make it right."

"I see," I said, hiding the plaster club that once had been the hand of a good third baseman. "I suppose you'll make it right for Danny too?"

"We're willing to be fair. But I was going to talk to you about that. We may have a little trouble about Danny."

"Surely not," I murmured. "Surely you can fix it up with money." But the irony evaporated into mere impertinence; this big man carried an awful load. I told him wearily, "I'm sorry, sir. I only mean that I don't want that kind of money."

"I know how you feel, kid. Money can't bring Danny back. It can't pay you for what you took in the line of duty. Money can't buy guts. But it's damned lucky," said the big man gravely, "that some men

have got 'em, or we'd never get anything done."

"I know. But I don't want it."

"Sure you do. You talk it over with your father; he's a lawyer, and he'll tell you it's just business. For our own protection," said the Big Boss, and his little, bright blue eyes broke into their incorrigible twinkle. "We prefer to settle with you while you're young and foolish, not ten years from now, when you find out what your life is worth."

I WONDERED what a man was worth when he was dead. I said without much interest, "How do you mean about Danny?"

"His daughter refuses to settle."

"Huh?" I said, remembering that solitary man. "Has Danny got—did he have a daughter?"

"Several of 'em," said the big man, twinkling, "if you count 'em all. Danny was quite a papa in his younger days. He had one family in Mexico and one in Guatemala, that I know of. This one's legal, though, and white. She lives in San Antonio."

"She refuses to take money?'

"Far, far otherwise. This Arizona shyster has got hold of her. Why can't all lawyers," said the big man plaintively, "be decent like your father? This bird is a buzzard. He can smell an accident from here to Phoenix; by the time we notify the relatives, he's got his arm around their necks, giving them big ideas. We think he's got somebody planted in our office. Haven't you heard from him?"

"Who, me?"

"Nobody been here trying to pump you?"

"No," I said, and then thought of Joe. "Why should they?"

"You're the only one who knows where Danny died."

I said without much interest, "How do you mean?"

"Where was he when it happened?"

"Standing by the drill."

"West of it?"

"East of it."

"Are you sure? Think carefully."

I didn't have to think; if I closed my eyes I'd see it on the dark. I said, "What difference does it make?"

"That setup was exactly on the State line. the question is, was he in Arizona or Nevada when he died?"

"Who gives a damn? He's dead, I'll swear to that."

"We don't dispute the fact. We don't insist that they produce the body."

Lost in the rock, the river roaring over it.

"We're willing to settle on the usual basis—what he might have earned with a normal expectancy."

And Danny was already old.

"Plus an allowance for mental anguish —though this daughter," said the big man, twinkling, "wouldn't have recognized him if she'd met him in the street. Her mother threw him out before I knew him. But will you believe that he supported the old woman till she died, and still sent money to this daughter?"

"Yeah," I said. "What use did he have for money? Far as I could see, he never did anything but work."

"It makes a case, all right—especially in Arizona."

"Does it matter where?"

"I hoped he was in Nevada."

"Why?"

"State politics. Nevada's fair with us; we're spending a lot of money in Nevada."

"Oh," I said. I wasn't interested in politics.

"But Arizona's been against the project from the start. She thinks she's getting gypped out of her water rights."

"I know."

"Refusing to sign the Compact. Blocking construction of subsidiary dams. Getting injunctions, forcing delays while every suit goes up to the Supreme Court. She can't block this, because it's a Federal contract, but she sure can tear small pieces out of our pants. We're only a corporation. I won't say her compensation

laws are aimed at us, but I will say they're stiff."

"I see."

"If it were only this one case, I wouldn't care much. But this shyster makes a living sticking us. And if you're right—if that's where Danny died—we're stuck."

"You are if they put me on the stand."

"You can refuse to testify."

"And go to jail?"

"You're in Nevada. They can't make a witness come from another State. They'll have to wait till we find the body. That'll be quite a while, and probably this daughter needs the money. Probably she'll settle."

"Oh."

"It's only a matter of inches. Maybe he jumped one way or another."

"No," I said. "The drill was in the way. The tunnel was too narrow. He—stood there and took it."

BUT the price of Danny's life was little in the scale of millions, and the Big Boss of the Company had work to do. He rose and touched my bandaged shoulder with a friendly hand. He sighed, "I'd give a hat to know just how that shyster gets his information." But I wasn't interested in earning hats that way.

Joe Mendel came, and he was casual. He said, "I hear the cossacks have been at you."

"Yeah?" I said.

"Trying to get you to change your testimony."

"Yeah?" I said. "What testimony?"

"About Henderson. Didn't they try to make you say he was on the Nevada side?"

"What if he was?"

Joe cried in swift alarm, "You said he was behind the drill. East of it!"

"How do I know which way he jumped?"

"You said he had no chance to jump!"

"I didn't swear to that."

"You'll have to, though. I hear his daughter is bringing suit. They're sure to call you as a witness."

"Where? In Arizona? They can't make me come. I'm in Nevada."

"They can make you sign a deposition!"

"Yeah? You seem to know a lot about the law. And care a lot. How come?"

Joe countered wildly, "And you seem to have been bought. How much?"

"More than a hunk of damaged beef is worth," I said, and grinned; I knew Joe Mendel pretty well. "They're wondering who's spilling information around the office, Joe. Come out from behind that bush. Who wants to know?"

Joe tried to stall: "I'm wandering how they treat members of their own class."

I knew my class by now. Bourgeois. Not quite a peasant and not quite a gentleman. I'd even learned to pronounce it since I'd known Joe Mendel, but I didn't mind. My grandpa was a cowman and my father was a bush-league lawyer and I'd always lived in a little town.

I pinned him down: "You seem to hear a lot around the office. Didn't they tell you that?"

"They didn't tell me anything. I'm not in the counsels of the mighty!"

"But you snoop at the keyhole?"

"Call it what you like," said Mendel stiffly. "Tell them what you like. I won't deny it."

"No," I said in weary wonderment, "I don't believe you would. You'd let them burn you at the stake. I think you're cockeyed, but I give you credit, Joe."

"And I," said Mendel, bowing, "don't believe that you can bring yourself to perjury."

"I can refuse to make a deposition."

"Then they'll get you for contempt of court."

"My settlement will pay the fine."

"I see," said Mendel bitterly. "You're really selling out?"

"That's a swell crack," I sighed, "from you."

"At least I have the courage of my convictions?"

Mendel had no sense of humor. He believed that all was fair in war, and he knew which side he was on. I had to tell

him listlessly, "Oh, skip it, Joe. I'm only kidding you."

My father came again from Colorado, and said cheerily, "The doctor says I can take you home if you feel like it."

"Sure," I said, and let it go at that.

CHAPTER XI

HOMECOMING

THE valleys of the Western Slope were deep in quiet snow—behind the mountains, between the ranges, hidden from east and west. They never argued about the System in that little town. My mother cried a little when she saw me, but she soon got used to having me around the house. My friends were young; I could remember the gay pattern of their talk. They called me Speed. I'd been away from Colorado only eighteen months.

It hardly seemed that I had been away at all. They asked me about the desert, and I told them it was hot, but they had never seen a thermometer that registered a hundred and twenty-five. They knew the Colorado only where it rose. They knew it watered the peaches of Grand Valley; but they'd never seen Black Canyon, never heard a river roaring over an old man's bones. They talked about gay things that I remembered.

But they presently forgot that I had been away, and spoke of things I didn't know; and sometimes I forgot to watch their lips. They didn't know that I was deafened by the silence of the snow.

They'd never heard the thunder of the drills. My father asked me, "Son, whatever in the world possessed you to take a job like that?"

"I had to get some kind of job."

"I could have helped you get a decent one."

I tried to goad him into familiar roughness. I demanded, "What's indecent about manual labor?"

"Nothing," said Pat Foley mildly, "but it doesn't pay much, and it doesn't take an engineer's degree. You haven't told me how you came to do it."

"Oh," I said, "I—kind of took a dare, I guess. One of the fellows had a job there, and he thought I couldn't get one."

"Fellows?"

"You don't know him. Naylor. But he always had my goat."

"Has he still got it?"

"Huh?" I said. I hadn't thought of it. I said, "I seldom see him any more. He's Civil Service."

"Did he get the girl?" inquired my father.

"Sir?" I said.

"You heard me. Girl. Young female of the species. Cause of most damfoolishness among young males."

Damfoolishness. Black Canyon cracking into the earth, and a river that could cut the mountains down. Sucking the water out of seven States. Robbing high Colorado of her snows and Arizona of her precious rains, piling them up in flash floods—fifty thousand feet a second, ripping the guts out of California, while the farmers prayed for rain. Wasting the land and water into the unreturning sea.

Killing the men who tried to tame it. I said harshly, "So you think the Project is damfoolishness?"

"Oh, not the Project. You."

But I knew that. Maybe the Project was worthwhile for the men who had the vision, but it couldn't mean much to a human ant.

THE snow was good that year on the Western Slope, and there were skiing parties; I was gay. Too gay. My legs were a little wobbly yet, but I'd grown up on skis. I wanted speed, the sense of going somewhere, and I shot down slopes that were not cleared for skis. Too steep for skis. Avoiding trees, I fell and struck my crippled hand on a buried rock. My friends made a fuss about it—thinking I was brave. They hadn't seen the rock come down on Danny Henderson.

My mother cried. She wailed, "Oh, sonny, sonny, what have they done to you?"

I thought she meant my hand, and I

grinned and told her, "Nobody pushed me, lady." It was not important. I would never again be a good third baseman, anyway.

But I was restless in my father's house. A letter came from the lawyer in Arizona, and my father would have answered it; he would have said his son was not disposed to testify in Arizona. Not disposed to make a deposition, either. If the Arizona lawyer didn't like it, Patrick Foley would have said in legal terms, he might take any steps that he saw fit—and see how far he got in Colorado. But I put the letter in my pocket and said absently, "I'll think it over."

I got out my safe, slow snowshoes, and I climbed remembered trails into the forests, but I saw the desert yet. I climbed to timber-line, above the trees, but could not find what I remembered. Trying to get high, see far—ten years from now, when I might know what my life was worth.

To whom? I'd never seen old Danny's daughter. If she needed money, she could take a settlement. My father said that it was fair.

I asked him, "Why are you against the Project?"

"I?" he said, surprised.

"And Grandpa too. I've read reports of Commission hearings."

"Oh," he said, "your grandpa's got his shotgun out for anything that smells like progress. All I've fought for is a fair division of the water."

"They've allotted Colorado more than we can use."

"You mean the Western Slope. You mean right now. But a time is coming—"

"When?" I said, intolerant. "The seven States all seem to have boom fever. Talking like California!"

"Yes, but California's ready now to use her share. And more. All she can get her hands on. She's preparing to do it, too. And once she uses it, the rest of us can whistle for it. That's priority. That's law, when it comes to water."

"She certainly can't come up here and get it."

"She can stop us using it. She'll have priority, and all we've got is future needs."

"How far in the future?"

"Maybe I won't live to see it, but you will. The Eastern Slope is Colorado too, and Denver's growing. First she'll take the Fraser—"

"What?" I said, for the Fraser River was cut off from Denver by the Great Divide itself. The year was 1933.

"That job's already under way. And even that won't be enough. Not long. What then? The Colorado."

"How?"

"Though tunnels!" said Pat Foley, glowing to a vision—how bold men might change the destiny of rivers and defeat the ranges that divided east and west.

BUT tunnels were no novelty to me. I knew it could be done—if you poured men and millions into it. I heard my practical, hard-headed father talking like a real-estate promoter, and I knew that it was coming even to the Western Slope. I said with strangeness, "Then you're not really against this reclamation stuff?"

"Why should I be?"

"So—big. The Government in business."

"Ask me one thing at a time. Of course it's big—too big for private enterprise. Concerns too many States. I think a lot of it is too ambitious; it may be a hundred years before we find a use for all that power, and a huge monopoly like that can be an awful thing in the hands of politicians. But the Colorado's got to be controlled."

"Then why were you so sore when I got a job there?"

"Sore?" he said, his voice too gentle yet.

"You told me to come home."

"I said I could help you find a decent job."

"You didn't answer my letter."

"It was a pretty cocky letter, you'll admit. And I'll admit I was a little sore; but not at you. Because I knew you'd reached a point, and there was nothing I

could do about it. If you ever have a son, kid, may he be an acrobat."

"You weren't ashamed of me?"

"I damn near bust with pride, if you want to know. Not many kids would take a job like that and then stay with it if they didn't have to."

I got up abruptly and stood staring out a window. Gentle snow was falling on the Western Slope of Colorado, covering the trees with white—the stubborn, vital spruces, that were always green. I said, "And all this time I've thought you were through with me."

"I am," said Patrick Foley. "After all, you're nearly twenty-four years old."

"I mean," I said, "I mean—"

My back was turned; my father's voice came faintly through the far-off thunder of the drills:

'The ostrich is a foolish bird
With scarcely any mind
He often runs so very fast
He leaves himself behind.'
'I know,' I said:
'And when he gets there, has to stand
And wait around till night,
Without a thing on earth to do
Until he comes in sight.'

No need to worry about a job; I knew that I was welcome in my father's house. I had a little money in the bank. I would have more—as soon as the doctor pronounced me cured; Pat Foley was too good a lawyer to conclude a settlement before he knew the full effect of a client's injuries. The price of suffering and terror and a broken hand. Maybe of silence too.

You couldn't support a man on that kind of money, and a man could keep his mouth shut just so long. I asked my father, "Can I have the car a couple of days?"

"What for?"

"A couple of days," I said, and grinned. I wouldn't have minded telling him about Janet, but there wasn't anything to tell. A gal I'd gone to school with, kissed a few times, been bawled out by many times—because I never knew where I was going, but just went.

CHAPTER XII

ALL WANDERERS RETURN

RABBIT-EARS PASS was open the day I started, and I went fast. Berthoud was open. Rocketing over, I saw snowplows sitting high and lonely in the mountains, and I had a sober thought about machines. You cursed them sometimes, but you seldom realized how helpless you would be without them. You could never get to Janet in the winter if the snowplows quit.

Yet old Pete Foley had never depended on machines.

In his younger days, before the roads came through—even the railroads; all the history of this country still was spanned by the lives of men still living—he had crossed these mountains at any season. If the snow was deep, he left his mules and carried his own pack. He had no use for pavements; when they came too thick, old Pete retreated into the desert, wrapped the last frontier around him and defied the modern world to come and drive him out.

Well, it was coming. There was nowhere now to hide from men and millions. Even I, Al Foley, could remember when these roads were empty in the winter, but there was a lot of traffic now.

I roared impatiently down icy slopes where careful drivers shifted gears and kept their brakes on; I'd grown up in mountains and with one foot on the gas. Sane drivers cursed me, thinking I was from the School of Mines.

I slowed as I drove through Denver; I could not afford to get arrested now. Leaving the city, though, I opened up again. Pat Foley's car had never been expensive, and was far from new, but it could still do eighty in the flat.

Sane drivers cursed me, thinking I was from the University. They didn't know that I was twenty-four years old and on my way to see a woman. I felt old.

I drove into Arapahoe, and saw the glacier shining there above that shabby and familiar street.

But I came to a full stop at Twelfth Street as the law required. I drove up Twelfth, and grinned because it suddenly was Broadway. Twelfth had shifted two whole blocks. I'd gone to school in Boulder, Colorado, four whole years and never thought of that.

The men who had begun this quiet town had not expected it to climb the foothills. Broadway curled around the campus and then shot away to Base Line, that was once the boundary between great territories—Kansas and Nebraska, when there was no State called Colorado; but I stopped before a chapter house.

The fellows were very tender about my crippled hand. The older ones had known me as an elder, and the younger ones had only heard of me—Speed Foley. I felt old. I telephoned to Janet, saying soberly, "It's Al."

And her voice sounded queer: "Al who?"

"Foley," I said, and wondered why I'd come so far so fast. "Didn't you recognize my voice?"

"I didn't expect to hear it."

"Oh," I said.

"You never write letters any more."

She didn't know. I couldn't tell her over the telephone. I stammered, "Well, I've—just been working, and there wasn't much to say."

"You know how long it's been since I heard from you?"

"Four months."

"And eighteen days," said Janet.

"Oh!" I said. "I—have you got a date?"

"I'd break it if I had."

"Hold everything! I'll—be right up!"

I SKIDDED blithely into the drive. Professor Collins heard my feet on the porch, and came to the door, protesting, "Glad to see you, Alfred, but the house is not on fire."

"Is Janet home?"

"I seem to remember having seen her somewhere."

No bad scars were on my face, and he didn't notice my crippled hand; he treated me like a schoolboy yet, and I was grateful. But the woman cried at once, "Oh, Al! I didn't know."

I said impatiently, "A tunnel just fell in. How are you? Stop! Don't tell me. Let me guess." I held her at arm's length by her slim shoulders, hungrily. "Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," said the girl too brightly. Tell me about it. Were you badly hurt?"

Right there, I can see it now, the humble beginnings of wisdom hit me like a ton of brick. Sunk to the ears in my own troubles, I'd expected everything out of my sight to be going along as usual, just waiting for me to come and ask for sympathy. But Janet's face was thin, her gray eyes big, dark tiredness under them. I begged, "Snap out of it, wild woman. Tell me."

Janet's father sighed. "She's fretting about me. Don't let her, Alfred. You'll excuse me? I've got work to do."

"He hasn't!" cried the girl. "He's on vacation!"

"Huh?" I said. "In the middle of the school year?"

"Quite all right," said Professor Collins, nodding; and the study door went shut.

The girl said dully, "They're afraid it's cancer."

"Oh," I said.

"He's got to have an operation. They're afraid his heart can't stand it, but it's got to be done."

"Oh, kid."

"That's why he thinks he's got so much to do. Because he's—sure it's got to be done now."

"The darned old pessimist," I said. "He hasn't changed a bit."

"I know," said Janet. "But the doctors are afraid."

"They don't know everything."

"I don't know anything," said Janet drearily.

And I'd been thinking of myself. I took her in my arms and said, "Neither do I. But he's a tough guy. That's why he's a pessimist. The rest of us pretend that everything's all right—when we know it

isn't. Never has been. Never will be. When we know that our one hope is the toughness of the human race. It had to be tough to get this far."

"But men do die," said Janet.

"Sure they do. They all do, if they live long enough. But they don't do it every time they think about it Every time their women folks get scared."

"I'm scared."

"So'm I, and always have been."

"You?" said Janet.

"Sure," I said, suddenly I knew that it was true. "I'm human. Able to imagine things. Convince myself that everything's against me. That the worst has got to happen, just because I'm me. Because I'm so important that the world has just been building up to get me, or so triflin' that I can't have any luck, I don't know which."

And it was true. I'd thought that I was puzzled and bewildered, when I'd only been afraid. When no man knew the answer. When there was no answer but the toughness of the human race. It had to be tough to turn out men like Danny Henderson, and men who bore responsibility as if it were a joke, and men who went on working, quietly, because they thought it had to be done now.

MY HAND would never be much good for baseball, but my arms could hold a woman yet. She sighed, "Oh, Al, you're such a comfort." But my flash of wisdom was used up; I had to fall back on wisecracks."

"Leprosy in person," I said cheerfully. "Your father probably will die tonight, and you're a louse, but what the hell? I'm getting to be a pessimist myself. I got to brood about a woman, and I don't know any nice ones, so I brood about you."

She told me gravely, "You've grown up."

"I'm nearly twenty-four," I said with dignity.

"I'm twenty-two, and I've been acting like a child."

"Oh, no, you haven't. Kids think everything is jake; it's only when we reach a point that we begin to realize, and we get scared."

She touched my damaged hand with tender fingers. "Tell me about it. Is it very bad?"

"It creaks a little."

"Was it serious—the accident?"

I had to admit, "It wasn't exactly funny at the time."

"Was anybody killed?"

"One man," I said, and the thing fell into proportion. "By the way, that's what I came to ask you about."

"Ask me?"

"I happen to be the only one who knows just where this man was standing. Which side of the state line."

"What did you want to ask?"

"It makes a difference in the damages. The Company has offered a fair settlement; if I tell what I know, it'll cost 'em more. But this man's daughter probably won't get much more. Her lawyer is a shyster, and those guys look out for Number One."

"Why bother about it, then?"

"I can't be forced to testify. But if I do, I'm in bad with the Company; and if I don't, I'm in bad with the stiffs—the hired hands."

"What do you care? Surely you're not going back."

"Oh, I don't know. That's one place where I know I can get a job. I can't just keep on loafing. Drifting."

That was it! I'd stumbled on the word. If you only drifted, you were in bad with yourself.

"What kind of job?" said Janet.

"I don't know. They said they'd have one for me."

"Have you taken the Civil Service exams?"

"There haven't been any."

"What?"

She didn't believe it. I was about to tell her, "Ask your father." But her eyes were clear and sweet, unshadowed now by her own trouble, and the faint, unfalter-

ing, unhurried clicking of a typewriter came through the study door. Maybe there wasn't any answer, but a man could walk right at the thing he feared, and see what happened—take it on the chin and hope his chin was tough.

The way to make a woman forget her troubles was to talk about your own. I said, "Forget it. Tell me what to do."

"Must you do anything?"

"Well, they can't make me."

"Then I think you're silly to worry about it."

"Thanks," I said, and let it go at that, for Janet was a woman and she couldn't know; she'd never felt the pressure of the System. But I had to keep talking. "What do you hear from Buck?"

"That's funny," said the girl.

"What is?"

"I asked him about you and he said you were all right."

"I am," I said, and was.

"Only a week ago. How long were you in the hospital?"

"Well, I wasn't a week ago."

"He didn't even tell me you'd been hurt."

"He wouldn't know," I said, and grinned. "A stiff is beneath the notice of a Civil Service man."

What Naylor said was simply not important; Naylor was a thousand miles away. My mind was clear at last—empty of any thought whatever; and somebody had to be thinking about Janet, maybe soon.

You never could get back into a place that you remembered. Something kept on moving. It you tried to go back, you drifted into aimless eddies, going nowhere —while the strong, deep current dragged a woman down. Her eyes were brave and gay a little while; her mouth was sweet. The fragrance of her hair against my face was like nostalgia, and my heart beat strongly now.

The fellows at the chapter house expected me to sleep there, but I didn't feel like being a legend now. I rocketed across the hills that night, and told my father the next day, "I'm going back."

Pat Foley snorted, "You're a hog for punishment."

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "I hear that eels get used to being skinned."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Pond, Lillie

IF YOU have not yet pondered the case of Miss Lillie Stoate, it is high time you did. For Miss Stoate has earned her place in the headlines with a peculiar gift: She is a rainmaker. Scientific weather men regard this talent rather dubiously, but the fact remains that Miss Stoate delivered the goods in Florida.

They had a lengthy and disastrous drouth down there not long ago, and finally the worried citrus-growers called in Miss Stoate, a resident of Oxford, Mississippi. Her technique is quite simple; she just sits beside a large body of water and waits for results. Well, she sat on the shore of Lake Reedy for a few days, equipped with an umbrella, and one evening it started to rain. Then Miss Stoate put up her umbrella and went away. Of course the Weather Bureau people talked loudly of low-pressure areas; but we, for one, believe implicitly in the powers of Miss Stoate. It is not clear just how she wheedles the elements, but we like to think she talks to them quietly, like a nurse with a fractious child.

—*Peter Kelly*

J. Edwin, like a fleet turkey buzzard, dashed through the first-night crowd

The Spitting Image

By DALE CLARK

Author of "Hollywood Bite," "The Liar and the Mouse," etc.

Hollywood had learned to be wary when J. Edwin Bell radiated his species of sweetness and light; so as soon as he began adopting stray orphans, the town prepared for the neatest fraud of the year

ABOVE Hollywood Boulevard the lights glittered against the ebon sky like diamonds on a jeweler's velvet. Seven beams of silver from seven giant floodlights crisscrossed a thousand feet overhead. The tall front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre wore scintillating necklaces and tiaras of electricity, and also the words:

WORLD PREMIERE! MOGUL FILMS PRESENT JAN ERBE IN PIRATE GOLD! ALL STAR CAST! PERSONAL APPEARANCES TONIGHT!

This appeared to be no over-statement. On the contrary, most of the film colony was putting in personal appearances. Swank limousines purred to the curb and discharged tail-coated directors, producers, and actors; likewise lovely ladies in ermine and sable. The flashbulbs of the press photographers ringed the outdoor microphones with their firefly radiance. Literally dozens of celebrities paused in front of those microphones before surrendering themselves to Mr. Grauman's beautiful usherettes, who were all fetchingly clad in pirate tunics, brief trunks, imitation leather boots which came almost to their

rounded knees, and wooden cutlasses which bumped against their pretty thighs.

Most of the crowd, however, never got as far as the usherettes.

The crowd stayed behind the pavement ropes, kept there by vigilant Hollywood policemen. They elbowed, craned, stared, and stood on tipe-toe and were happy for a glimpse of Myrna Loy or Errol Flynn walking from a limousine to the theatre doors. For this was a Hollywood opening —and only in Hollywood is it considered a popular entertainment to just stand on the sidewalk and watch somebody else going into the show.

Far from the lights, the limousines, and the cops was the Boy.

"Shine?" the boy pleaded. "Only a dime! Shine 'em up, mister?"

He was a very small boy—a half-pint sized edition of street waif, with his elbows poking out of his tattered jacket and his knees protruding from his pantaloons. He had a mop of carroty hair that needed cutting, a freckled face which needed washing, and two small feet that needed shoe leather. For even in the vaunted climate of Hollywood, California, the sidewalks on such a January night can chill most unpleasantly under a boy's naked toes.

"Shine, mister? Shine 'em up, lady?" He was not doing a rushing business, this boy.

"Shine, mister?" His wiry figure darted forward, for he had suddenly espied a likely client; that is to say, a well-dressed guy. In fact, the guy was *very* well-dressed.

TAILORED in Bond Street garments, a malacca stick in hand, this gentleman advanced briskly toward the Hollywood opening. He was tall, albeit stoop-shouldered, and his thin figure was topped off by a derby carefully adjusted onto his narrow skull. Also, he wore a monocle. The monocle's black cord dripped down his sallow cheek, paralleled his sharply beaked nose, skirted the corner of a thin-lipped mouth, dropped alongside the scrawny and out-thrust neck, and finally found mooring on his exquisitely fitted lapel.

Here, in fact, was J. Edwin Bell, talent agent extraordinary, descending on the outspread feast of Hollywood luxury like a vulture in search of prey.

"Shine, mister?" The boy flung himself in front of the prospective customer. "Only a dime!"

Mr. Bell waggled his stick. "Gangway, brat!" he said gratingly.

His voice might have warned the boy. And so might J. Edwin's face, perched atop his skinny neck, the sharply beaked features having much the greedy look of an ancient turkey buzzard.

Only, the boy's eyes were fixed hopefully on Mr. Bell's patent-leather footgear, and not on his face at all.

"A nickel?" he implored. "Shine 'em for a nickel, mister?"

Whereat, those patent-leather feet halted in mid-stride. "A nickel, hey?" breathed the talent agent, and his optic concentrated thoughtfully behind its monocle. For Mr. Bell was not the guy to pass up a profit, however small.

In his professional career as a flesh peddler, retailing actors and actresses to the studios on a commission basis, J. Edwin Bell had learned to talk in large, round figures. Vocally, he could toss a thousand bucks around like cigar coupons.

In private life, however, when handling his own actual cash, Mr. Bell was a little less liberal. In fact, he was a little less liberal than an octopus which has got all eight tentacles wrapped around some toothsome morsel. Hollywood rumor held that J. Edwin squeezed his dough so hard that his fingerprints had changed to $ marks.

"Well, go ahead, my boy," decided the flesh peddler. "And don't be stingy with the polish!"

The boy wasn't; neither did he spare the elbow grease. In a trice he had whipped the grimy wooden box off his shoulder and planted that on the sidewalk. Deftly he turned up Mr. Bell's elegant trouser bottoms. He daubed, brushed, rubbed. Flushed, breathing hard, he straightened from the gleaming patent leather.

"Yes, sir! Okay, sir?"

J. Edwin grunted. "Got change for a quarter."

"You bet!" The boy sounded positive about this. Nevertheless, it took considerable dredging in his pockets to find a dime, a nickel, and five pennies. A guy with exactly twenty cents to his name would be a fool indeed to entrust it all to one pocket, wouldn't he?

"All right!" snapped the flesh broker. He seized the change, hastily tossed a coin into the lad's grimy palm, and hurdled the shoe-shine box as he plunged away.

The boy grinned. He picked up his box, slung the strap over his slight shoulder. He looked at his quarter fondly. Looked at it again. Then, tested it between his teeth. Finally, he flipped it onto the top of his box.

"Hey!" he gasped. "Hey, mister!"

Mr. Bell heard, and he paused not. On the contrary, he urged his lank form with all possible speed out into the pavement. He dived through the traffic lanes, and reached the cordoned area of safety.

"Mister!" It was a last, choked cry before the crowd surged in and swallowed the boy. A fat woman bumped him aside. A man trod on his bare toes. Let us absolve them of intentional cruelty—another limousine had pulled up to the curb.

"It's Jan Erbe! The red haired one! Oo-h, ain't he handsome?" gushed the fat lady. And, "That little runt behind him is Gus Lennox, the producer!" cried her companion. Under the circumstances, how could they have eyes for the barefoot bootblack they trampled?

Meanwhile, Mr. Bell grinned in relief as he reached the roped-in space where no street waif could follow. He was just in time to witness a slightly unfortunate incident. Jan Erbe and Gus Lennox were at the microphones when a girl in a cheaply furred cloth coat managed to slip under the ropes.

"Mr. Erbe!" she cried. "Jan! Aren't you—?"

A policeman seized the girl and thrust her back into the crowd before Jan Erbe even looked around.

"Autograph fiend!" sneered J. Edwin Bell. With a shrug, he dismissed the girl from mind, as now he had already forgotten the bootblack.

The boy hadn't forgotten Mr. Bell, though. Far out on the fringe of these glamorous happenings, the boy stood with silent tears running down his grimy cheeks. In his hand the urchin clutched Mr. Bell's counterfeit two-bits.

THE next morning the boy bootblack crawled out from under the steam pipes in the basement of a Vine Street building. He hoisted himself through a broken window and proceeded to mingle with the morning crowds. "Shine, mister? Shine 'em up?" After a fruitless hour of this, he wandered dispiritedly into an alley behind a high red brick wall on a side street north of the Boulevard. He put two fingers in his mouth, whistled softly.

There came an answering soft whistle. Then a face appeared above the wall. It was a twelve-year-old's face, surmounted by a closely cropped thicket of black hair.

The bootblack grinned wanly. "Hi, Mickey."

"Hi, Red. Whatcha doin' back here?"

Red shifted the shoe-shine box on his shoulder. He kept his eyes on the bricks, refusing to meet his friend's gaze. "Say, Mickey. What'd they give you for breakfast this morning?"

"Doughnuts and apple pie," said Mickey. "Aw, watcha' s'pose? We had the same ol' mush 'n milk! Why?"

The bootblack rubbed his toe on the alley cobblestones. Embarrassed sound quavered in his throat. "Listen, Mick. You think you could slip me a bowl of that?"

Mickey stared. "Cripes! Why don't you buy you some breakfast?" he asked curiously. "You wouldn't catch me eating anybody's ol' mush if I was out of here and had a job like you got! I'd slam-bang into a restaurant and have me the biggest stack o' wheats and syrup you ever seen!"

"Can't," Red said sadly. "I only earned two-bits last night, and some old buzzard socked me with a phony quarter."

"Mickey!" This voice was shrill, and feminine. "What're you up there for? Who're you talking to?"

Mickey gasped, "Old Lady Mattson!"

The carrot-haired bootblack was off with the speed of a frightened young fox. Breathless, he rounded a corner and leaped into the back of a jolting truck. The truck carried him westward. Red watched the passing scenery, not caring much where he went so long as it was in the other direction from Old Lady Mattson. Presently, however, he sighted the tall white walls of a motion picture studio.

"Might as well try here," he thought. "Some big shot might even slip me a dollar for a shine. They say money don't mean a thing to them birds."

He hopped off the truck and stationed himself in front of the Mogul Films Corporation main gate. He had barely done so when a cab pulled to the curb and unloaded its passenger.

"Hey!" gasped Red. "There's the guy! The dirty chiseler!"

Logically enough, indeed, the business of peddling talent had brought J. Edwin Bell to the Mogul lot at this particular moment. Red did not perceive the logic, but he saw his chance.

"Shine, mister?"

Mr. Bell didn't need a shine, and he said so.

"Only a nickel, mister!"

"Chase yourself," snarled J. Edwin.

"Please, mister! I'll shine 'em for a penny!"

The flesh peddler hesitated. Strictly speaking, he still didn't need a shine. He wouldn't need one until tomorrow, really. But if he accepted this offer, then he wouldn't need one until the day after tomorrow. It took Mr. Bell a bare split-second to figure this out, and to glance swiftly at his wrist-watch.

He had ten minutes before his appointment with an assistant casting director. Therefore Mr. Bell consented to park his lank figure on a bench placed outside the gate as a convenience for weary sight-seers.

"KEEP your filthy rag away from my socks, do you hear?" said Mr. Bell from behind his newspaper. The front page seemed to be all about a couple of birds named Hitler and Mussolini. J. Edwin did not see any way to cut himself in for ten percent of their take, so he didn't waste time scanning the front page. Automatically, he turned to the theatrical section. His monocled stare roved down the syndicated column called *Hollywood Winks.*

A moment later he was frowning thoughtfully over an item:

> ***. . . following Erbe's sensational success in Pirate Gold, Producer Gus Lennox plans to cast the new star in a revamped version of David Copperfield. Catch is, early scenes in the story deal with the hero's boyhood. "Just any red headed kid won't do for the part, Lennox has informed his casting department. We want a boy who actually looks like Erbe." Presumably an army of talent scouts will scour the nation for the lucky youngster who comes nearest to filling the bill.***

"Lucky," muttered Mr. Bell, "and how!" A job like that one promised to be worth at least a grand a week. The flesh peddler's mind easily figured out that his take on that would be one hundred iron men each and every Saturday. Swiftly he made mental inventory of the would-be child prodigies among his list of clients. Regretfully, he realized that none of them looked even a little bit like Jan Erbe.

Even as this bad news dawned on him, Mr. Bell became aware of worse. He felt an odd sensation in the vicinity of his right foot. It felt something like stepping on a native California cactus plant—and then, immediately afterward, it felt more like being fanged by a native California rattler.

"Yowie!" yelled J. Edwin. "Yippee! Ow-wow-ouch!"

So saying, the cuticle vendor leaped frenziedly off the bench. People in the vicinity of the Mogul gate were thereupon treated to an unusual spectacle, a performance in the nature of an Indian war-dance. Only this dance was performed by a resplendently tailored individual whose

derby hat fell off and revealed a few wildly waving locks of silvery hair ruffled by the Hollywood breeze. Hopping like an Apache, Mr. Bell flung himself in several circles around the bench.

Meanwhile, shuddering sounds split his thin lips. "Water! Help!" shrieked the flesh peddler. "Police! Call the fire department! Pour on water!"

These outcries became muffled as J. Edwin ceased hopping around on one foot, and started rolling around in the street instead. Rolling and cursing acridly, Mr. Bell had both hands engaged in clutching his right shoe. He looked for all the world like a guy trying to wrestle himself by means of a toehold.

"Hey!" The bluecoated cop on gate duty came barging onto the scene. "What's wrong here?"

A carrot-haired bootblack stood watching the affair, his freckled face alight with a dreamy grin.

"Gosh!" he breathed innocently. "It looks like somebody gave him a hot foot, don't it?"

At that moment Mr. Bell managed a final, desperate twist, and a patent leather shoe came flying through the air into the cop's outstretched hand. Sure enough, a thin curl of smoke spiraled from the matchwood thrust into the shoe's welt.

"Huh?" ejaculated the bluecoat. "Say, this shoe's half shined! *You* give him the hotfoot!"

Too late, Red tried to twist away as the officer's other hand gripped his shoulder.

"That's right! Pinch him!" yelped J. Edwin Bell, staggering toward the culprit with murder in his new monocle-less eye. With his trousers creased in numerous wrong places and his person decorated with with street dust, Mr. Bell was much less the example of a well dressed Hollywoodite. He looked, in fact, like something a farmer might put out in the cornfield to frighten away crows.

"Let me at him!" the flesh broker continued grimly. "I'll bat his ears down! I'll break every bone in his body!"

"Whisht!" said the cop, who was staring interestedly at the boy's jacket collar. Certain threads had been plucked from the garment, leaving an identifiable design of less faded cloth. "Happy Hour Home, eh?" the officer cried. "So ye ran away from the orphanage, did ye? Well, yer going straight back there—in the paddy wagon, me bucky!"

"Orphanage, hell! He's more likely escaped from San Quentin!" muttered J. Edwin, whipping the monocle up to his eye and focusing a wrathful stare upon the youth. As he did so, the flesh peddler's thin form stiffened slightly. His lips sprang apart in surprise, and bleating murmurings commenced deep in his scrawny throat.

"GREAT Snakes!" mumbled the talent agent. "An orphan! Ah—uh—ahem! Well, this changes matters. Officer, you won't have to call the paddy wagon. You see, I was born and raised an orphan myself. So naturally, my heart bleeds for this poor little tyke."

And Mr. Bell wiped an imaginary tear from his beady eye.

Red gasped unbelievingly. "You mean you're going to let me go?"

"Not quite," said J. Edwin, grinning. "But I'll hire a cab and take you back to your orphanage myself, personally!" So saying, the flesh peddler endeavored to look as innocent as a guy feeding peanuts to pigeons.

This didn't deceive Red even slightly. Small boys, like stray dogs, are apt to be pretty keen judges of human nature. Especially when human nature is equipped with collars to fasten around their necks.

"Like hell!" muttered the maverick of the Hollywood streets, recoiling. "All you want is a chance to bust my bones—you just got through saying so! No, sir, I'm going in the paddy wagon!"

"Here, lad, mind yer tongue!" the cop rebuked him. "And why sh'd ye be traipsing around in the paddy wagon at the taxpayers' expense when here's a foine gintleman willing to take ye home in a cab?"

Red sniffed. "Aw, you dumb Irish cop!"

This diplomatic remark decided the bluecoat. "Hi, hackie!" he bawled, flagging a cab out of the traffic. "Pull yer heap in here!"

Thrust into the cab, Red cringed into the farthest corner of the cushions with dire apprehension on his freckled features. He had the wan look of a victim destined for the torture wheel, the rack, and the Chinese water treatment. "Whatcha going to do?" he quavered. "Skin me alive?"

Truth to tell, J. Edwin Bell toyed with this suggestion and found it altogether pleasant. Always ready to bury the tomahawk in the other guy's skull, the flesh broker had the sweetly forgetting and forgiving nature of an incensed elephant. Mr. Bell groaned as he inserted his foot into his shoe again, and told himself that Red would pay through the nose for his blistered epidermis.

Only, J. Edwin preferred to collect payment in hard cash.

Therefore he kept his skinny hands to himself—and likewise his thoughts. And Mr. Bell's thoughts right now were practically as larcenous as train robbery. But more legitimate. For J. Edwin had never stolen a dime in his life—provided there was a legal way of removing the dime from somebody else's pocket.

Ultimately, of course, he would kick this bootblack back into the gutter where he came from. "But first," Mr. Bell promised himself grimly, "comes the payoff. Hot dog!"

The cab halted in front of the red brick wall of the Happy Hour Home, and shortly thereafter J. Edwin marched his twelve-year-old captive through a door that was marked: *Mary Mattson, Head Matron.*

MARY MATTSON turned out to be a lantern-jawed female with steely gray eyes that got even steelier as she turned them onto the flesh peddler and his youthful companion. "Well!" she said. "I don't know how to thank you for bringing Bobby back to us!"

Never slow on the uptake, Mr. Bell got the idea at once. Namely, he judged that the red-headed brat was as welcome as a killing frost in a citrus grove. Thus encouraged, Mr. Bell leaned toward the lady eagerly. "Bobby, eh?" he breathed. "What's the rest of his handle?"

"Beer," the matron admitted distastefully. "Bobby Beer."

"His parents, I suppose, are both dead?"

"Naturally. This is an orphanage."

J. Edwin's vulture-like head bobbed in satisfaction. "And has he any other living relatives?"

"Not that anybody knows about," Mary Mattson said glumly. "He was brought to us by a girl named Dorothy Gordan, a friend of his mother's. She couldn't raise him, and nobody else is legally responsible."

"Quite so," murmured the flesh peddler. "Then there'd be no objection to anyone adopting him?"

The matron stared. "Who'd want to?"

For answer, Mr. Bell turned to the twelve-year-old. His thin lips stretched in what he fondly imagined to be a smile, the talent agent intoned surprisingly, "Well, son? How'd you like to be *my* little boy?"

Red stared at him with the hunted eyes of a trapped animal. He seemed rendered speechless by the suggestion.

The matron's jaw sagged. "Well!" she gasped. "I guess it could be arranged! Of course, this is a private charitable institution. You'd have to make legal arrangements—sign papers and so on. I can't just give you the boy. It'd take a day or so, I dare say."

Mr. Bell's voice purred. "Oh, naturally. But in the meantime you wouldn't object if I took the lad out for a few hours today. I—er—want to shop for some satisfactory clothes for the little darling!"

"The who?" ejaculated Mrs. Mattson. "Oh! Well, it's your money if you want to spend it that way!"

It was Mr. Bell's money, indeed, and the flesh peddler's pockets were generally lined with blue when it came to spending a dollar on somebody besides himself. To-

day, however, in a burst of liberality he rushed the semi-dazed Red into an ultra-fashionable Turkish Bath parlor in the Wilshire district.

"Here!" J. Edwin ordered the attendant brusquely. "Wash this kid up! Give him a bath, a shampoo, and a haircut! Manicure him! Clean his ears! Take his measure and send out to a department store for some glad rags! And," he added warningly. "don't let him get away from you. He's a wild and woolly maverick, and you'll probably need two other guys to help you get shoes on him!"

LEAVING the lad to the attendant's mercies, Mr. Bell put himself into high gear toward his own office. Reaching it, he bawled instructions to the girl in the ante-room to get Mogul on the wire —and quick.

"Hullo, casting?" exclaimed the flesh broker as he grinned into the instrument on his desk. "Yeah, Bell speaking. Never mind that appointment I broke today. Get a load of the big news. I got a coming juvenile star that looks so much like Jan Erbe he might be Jan's younger twin brother! Same eyes, same hair, same everything! The only difference between them is the kid's freckles—and freckles don't photograph through a panchromatic make-up!"

Excited questions tinged pleasantly in the receiver which J. Edwin cradled against his sallow cheek.

He laughed unmerrily. "Never mind his name. This kid ain't listed with Central Casting, or anywheres else. He belongs to me personally and exclusively, and the only way you can even get a look-see at him is to get Gus Lennox to okay a screen test. So hop to it, and call me back!"

The cuticle vendor shoved the phone back into its cradle, an anticipatory grin curling his lips. Probably that wild and woolly little maverick of the Hollywood back alleys was worth a thousand bucks a week to the guy who could lasso and brand him. Not ten per cent of a thousand bucks, but the entire grand. Because Mr. Bell, if he adopted the brat, would be legally entitled to the kid's earnings. And if the screen test proved a floparoo, why naturally Mr. Bell wouldn't want to adopt the young hyena at all.

Therefore, J. Edwin grinned and rubbed his thin palms in an ecstasy of pleasure. In fact, he was still shaking hands with himself over it when the door flew open and a girl rushed into the office—a blond, pretty girl in a cheaply furred cloth cloak.

"Mr. Bell?" she gasped. "Are you Mr. Bell?"

Icy foreboding gripped the flesh peddler, bringing a cold dew onto his forehead. "I am, and so what?" he demanded warily.

"I'm Dorothy Gordan," the girl explained. "You know, Bobby's mother's friend. I mean, I'm the one who took him to the Happy Hour Home in the first place. I just went there, and Mrs. Mattson told me you were planning to adopt Bobby—and I came here to tell you that you can't!"

Mr. Bell's optic narrowed behind its monocle. "Why not?"

"Because you can't. Because at last I've found one of Bobby's genuine blood relatives," the blonde declared breathlessly.

J. Edwin's skinny hand froze on the edge of his desk as he braced himself against the blow. "Relative?" he echoed thinly. "Mrs. Mattson said he didn't have any!"

The girl nodded. "Yes, I told her that. But Bobby's father had a brother—the boy's uncle. Only he was on the stage somewhere, and I didn't know where to find him. In fact, I only learned the truth last night by accident. In front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre, that was."

The flesh peddler winced. And Dorothy Gordan's voice went happily on, confirming his darkest suspicions. Eyes sparkling, she declared:

"Jan Erbe is that uncle! I knew it the minute I laid eyes on him. I suppose he just changed the spelling of Beer to Erbe, so it'd sound tonier for a movie star."

Mr. Bell knew it, too. They could spell it upside down, or in Sanskrit if they

wanted to, but the resemblance between the red-haired star and the carrot-topped waif was too close to be merely accidental.

"Huh?" he mumbled. "Does Erbe know this yet?"

Miss Gordan shook her blond head. "No-o. I didn't have a chance to talk to him last night, but—"

"Did you tell Mrs. Mattson?" J. Edwin demanded hoarsely.

Again she shook her head. "I didn't want to arouse any false hopes, although I'm sure Jan will want to adopt Bobby himself."

J. EDWIN BELL didn't doubt that, either. Because, who wouldn't want to adopt a thousand-berries-a-week orphan? Mr. Bell wasn't easily licked, as a rule, but now as the phone rang his thin fingers clutched it with the wild grasp of a drowning man grabbing a straw. "Hullo?" he said dismally.

"Good day, Bell!" came the voice over the wire.

"Huh? What's good about it?"

"Plenty, you lucky horse-thief. Mr. Lennox says to bring the kid over for a screen-test right away! He'll sign a contract today if it looks good, because he wants to start shooting *Copperfield* while the public is burning hot for another Erbe picture."

"Right away!" gasped J. Edwin. "Today!" He dropped the phone and pinned a lack-luster stare on the blond Miss Gordan. Grimly, he reflected that she would look nice as the central character in a trunk murder. Why couldn't she have been run over by a truck on her way to his office?

This dame was in his way, and he had to get her out.

Quick like a fox, the skin broker's wits raced cross-country to the solution. Cross-country is the word for it, because Mr. Bell's idea took a large flying leap clear across the Mexican Border.

"You!" exclaimed the talent agent. "How'd you like to have a job in the movies?"

"Me?" Miss Gordan's eyes widened incredulously.

J. Edwin Bell wagged his head. "Yeah! Listen! That phone call was long-distance from a Mogul Films director on location down in Ensenada. He wants me to rush him a beautiful blonde to play a bathing beach bit. The girl he hired in the first place got bit by a tarantula, and she can't photograph in a bathing suit with her leg swollen up!"

"But Mr. Bell—"

"You don't need any experience! You're blond, and you're beautiful. I'm giving you a break on account of all you done for Red—I mean, Bobby. See?"

The girl's eyes were troubled. "I—I can't go. I've got a job in a cafeteria, and—"

"Utsnay!" J Edwin Bell sneered. "What's a job compared to a career in flickers where you might wind up being another Garbo?"

"I know. But on this job I only get paid every two weeks, and payday isn't until Saturday." Dorothy Gordan sighed. "I'm so broke I can't quit the cafeteria because at least I get my meals there!"

"Oh!" The flesh peddler gulped painfully. His skinny hand moved, slowly, toward his pocket. After a few false moves, similar to a gopher poking a head from its hole, Mr. Bell's wallet actually popped out into broad daylight. From it he drew a pair of twenties.

"Here," mumbled the agent dully. "I'll stake you."

"Why, thanks " cried Dorothy Gordan. "Thanks a million! Only," he hesitated afresh, "what about Bobby? If I'm going out of town for a few days—"

"Leave it to me!" cried J. Edwin Bell. "Ain't I just proved I'm your friend? Here—report at this address. Rush it!"

The blonde left, leaving Mr. Bell to mop several large drops of sweat from the bald summit of his narrow skull. He exhaled in loud relief. To reach Ensenada, the girl would have to take the train to San Diego and thence a motor bus across the Border. Chances were she wouldn't

even find out until tomorrow that there wasn't any film company on location in Ensenada.

"Besides which," reflected the cuticle vendor, "all I got to do is slip words to the Immigration Office about her being an undesirable alien. They'll hold her at the Border until she proves she ain't, before which I'll have Red screen-tested and adopted. And she or Erbe or Gus Lennox himself can't do anything about it!"

Whereupon, Mr. Bell set out rapidly in the direction of the Turkish Bath parlors.

"That'll be one hundred smackers, even money," stated the attendant.

Strangling sounds spluttered from J. Edwin's startled lips. "A hundred fish! What in Hades for? I left the kid to be washed. I didn't tell you to gold-plate him!"

The attendant grinned. "Yeah? Well, that suit of clothes on him set us back five finnifs, besides which there's shoes, socks, shirts, undies, and also he ordered a two-dollar lunch brought in!"

"Two-dollar lunch?" wailed Mr. Bell. "Great Snakes! I could feed a whole orphan asylum for a week on that kind of cash!"

J. EDWIN'S adding-machine mentality reckoned up that he was already a hundred and forty bucks to the bad, not counting taxi fares—but he felt repaid as he led the remarkably renovated Red into the costly splendor of producer Gus Lennox's private offices.

In his former dirty and ragged condition, the boy had looked a lot like Jan Erbe. Washed, pressed, and shined, he offered such an utter similarity as to bring Gus Lennox up out of his throne-like chair.

"Jumping Jehoshophat! It's uncanny!" breathed the wrinkled little film executive. "He's practically an identical snapshot of Jan Erbe taken years ago, only in fact more so! Now, if he could only act!"

"Try him and see," grinned J. Edwin confidently.

"I'm going to," declared Gus Lennox, hastily following his fifty-cent Havana out of the door and across the Mogul lot. Swiftly he ordered the French make-up expert to doll Red up like David Copperfield.

"Bien joli, eh?" The expert nodded, twirling his black mustachios. *"Mais, oui! Alors!"*

Red scowled. "Hey! What's he swearing at me for?"

Mr. Bell grinned. "It's okay, kid. Go with him." Watching the make-up man hustle the twelve-year-old through a doorway, J. Edwin heaved a sigh of pleasure. "Well, Mr. Lennox? Am I right or am I right? You might as well start making out the contract immediately!"

The little producer waved his cigar royally. "Sometimes, Bell," he admitted, "I think you got the most genius of any agent in the business. If only the stork didn't forget to bring along the morality clause with you! Meaning, Bell, you got the talents to be a big shot here in Hollywood if you didn't also have the talents to land you out in Alcatraz sooner than later."

"Don't kid yourself," said the flesh peddler. "This deal is on the level. Why, I love that boy like my own son! In fact, I've practically—Holy cow! What now?"

Whirling violently, J. Edwin Bell plunged toward the make-up room. His speed was inspired by several thunderous crashes within, accompanied by shrill boyish yells, and likewise accompanied by a torrent of French.

"Espèce d' idiot!" the make-up expert was screaming. *"Mon dieu! Petit salopard —fils d'un chameau!"*

Hurling the door open and himself inside, J. Edwin ducked just in time to avoid being crowned by a flying jar of cold cream. The make-up man, however, forgot to duck. His torrent of French choked suddenly on a large mouthful of the cold cream.

"Hey!" bellowed Mr. Bell. "You imp of Satan! What's going on here?"

Barricaded behind a chair, a pot of rouge clutched in one small fist and a pair of scissors gripped in the other, the

twelve-year-old stood his ground firmly.

"I ain't a girl, and I ain't a sissy!" he proclaimed belligerently. "I ain't going to let that guy powder my face! And I ain't going to dress up in any monkey clothes, either!"

Mr. Bell's narrow face turned the color of a Technicolor sunset. Wrathy sounds boiled out of him. "Oh, yeah! You listen to me! You're going to have that make-up on you, and that wig, and that Copperfield costume. Or I'll skin you alive!"

"Like hell!" said Red. "Like hell!"

Gus Lennox loomed in the doorway, dangerously. "So?" he intoned grimly. "Maybe you ain't heard, Bell, but this role calls for a refined boy. It ain't a part for a savage like you maybe borrowed from the zoo."

"I'll zoo him!" promised the flesh peddler, glaring at the boy. "I'll tame him, if somebody else will get that scissors away from the little guttersnipe!"

"Oh, baloney!" said another voice. "That's no way to handle a kid. You got to show a little intelligence and understanding."

So saying, a large and red-haired young man strode into the make-up department. Using one hand, he brushed J. Edwin Bell aside, he snatched the chair away from in front of Red with the other. Then, employing both hands, he proceeded to tear the chair apart. He did this with the careless effort an ordinary guy would need to open a package of cigarettes.

"There!" said the young man. "Now, sonny, would you call me a girl—or a sissy?"

Red blinked, shook his head.

"Okay," shrugged the other. "But I let Frenchy here powder my face and dress me in monkey clothes. In fact, he's going to do it right now. Because I'm Jan Erbe, and I'm going to take this screen test with you—if you'll be a sport about it!"

ONE hour later, a voice announced, "Cut! Rush this stuff! Mr. Lennox wants to see the test right away!" Whereupon, the camera stopped grinding and Jan Erbe slapped the twelve-year-old's shoulder.

"Nice going!" approved the star. "I'll be seeing you again, I bet. So long, kid!"

And Mr. Bell fetched a deep sigh of relief up from the bottom-most cells of his lungs. For Jan Erbe hadn't commented on the kid's extraordinary resemblance to himself. Hadn't asked the kid's name, or where he came from.

"Go get yourself dressed, Red," the flesh broker ordered. "I got some business to transact with Mr. Lennox here. You can wait in his office for us."

Whereupon, J. Edwin stole away and secreted himself in the nearest phone booth. There he dialed the Happy Hour Home. The kid had a tongue in his head, and Mr. Bell wasn't running any risks which involved Red reciting his adventures of the day into Mrs. Mattson's ears. Maybe she'd tried to cut the orphanage in for a part of his salary if she found out the brat was going to act in pictures.

"Hullo," said the flesh peddler. "Say, that's boy's got just a touch of fever. I'm taking the little fellow to a doctor right now, and I guess I won't bring him back to the orphanage tonight. It might turn out to be something contagious."

The matron's voice sounded relieved. "Well, that's fine! That's very thoughtful of you, Mr. Bell. But I guess you wouldn't have to bring him back anyway. You see, I've got the adoption papers ready to be signed."

"What?" gasped J. Edwin.

"Yes. I happened to think about Judge Lawrence after you left. He's a director on our Board, and when I told him I'd vouch for you personally he was willing to cut through the usual red tape and let you have Bobby right away."

"That's great! I'll be right over!" cried J. Edwin Bell. As he knifed out of the phone booth, however, Mr. Bell reminded himself that he didn't want to adopt Bobby right away. Not until he had Gus Lennox's name signed on the dotted line at the bottom of a contract.

Therefore Mr. Bell hastened toward the

projection theatre on the Mogul lot. Gus Lennox was already there. In silence, the flesh peddler and the producer sat through the filming of the screen test.

It was good. It was even very good. Out of the corner of his predatory eyes the wily Bell placidly observed the producer's poker face. Lennox wasn't fooling him any more than a piece of cardboard property steak.

There was money in the air and Mr. Bell could smell it.

When it was done, Mr. Bell spoke first. "Twelve hundred a week.'

"Eight," said Gus Lennox.

J. Edwin grinned. "I'll split the difference. The boy's legal guardian wouldn't take a penny less."

Gus Lennox looked interested. "By the way, who *is* the legal guardian?"

"You'd like to know!" sneered the flesh broker. "You could contact him and chisel me out of my ten percent—I don't guess!"

The little producer glowered angrily. "Seems like the sooner I sign that contract the quicker I don't have to be insulted by a crook like you. So come on!"

GUS LENNOX'S cigar led the way out into the golden California afternoon. The glowing sunlight, however, was practically an arctic chill compared to the hot triumph which surged through Mr. Bell's interior.

It was a warm and golden glow that nestled snugly behind his belt like the aftermath of a nourishing meal.

"A thousand bucks a week!" enthused the talent agent, strictly to himself. "And I own that brat the same as Bergen owns Charlie McCarthy! It's like finding dough in the streets. Only better, on account of how many wisenheimers I'm going to give the merry ha-ha!"

Thus brooded the flesh peddler, until abrupt and alarming sounds came to interrupt the peaceful afternoon.

"Great shuddering snakes!" voiced J. Edwin. "What's that? An earthquake, or a war you got here?"

Gus Lennox halted, listened briefly, and diagnosed the uproar in three crisp words.

"That damn kid!" he bellowed.

Mr. Bell broke into a run. He wasn't really in any more of a hurry than Gus Lennox, but nature had equipped J. Edwin Bell with the longer legs, more suitable for rapid and energetic locomotion. Locomoting furiously, Mr. Bell followed his ears to Sound Stage Four, and there burst through a huddle of shrieking, shouting chorines, assistant directors, and gripmen.

"Hey!" quavered the flesh peddler. "Is he gone crazy? Somebody stop him?"

As he spoke, Mr. Bell's monocled stare was flung aloft; in fact, halfway to the lofty ceiling. They had a camera up there, mounted on a crane for the purpose of shooting bird's-eye views of the stage. Moreover, in order to take such shots from a variety of angles and distances, the crane was movable.

It wasn't only movable—it was moving. Indeed, it was weaving patterns in midair like a punch-drunk monster in a horror pix.

Cold horror came to establish legal residence in J. Edwin's brittle bones. The law of diminishing returns was setting in like a Klondike winter. He shuddered to think what this would cost him.

"We can't stop it!" someone shouted into J. Edwin Bell's ear. "The controls are up there where he is!"

"Red!" yelled Mr. Bell frantically. "Come down off that! You'll ruin your clothes. That suit cost me fifty bucks!"

"Fifty!" shrieked Gus Lennox, arriving rapidly. "That camera cost me five thousand! Bell, you're responsible for this!"

J. Edwin watched five thousand dollars worth of camera miss a steel catwalk by inches. The next moment his lank figure bolted up an electrician's ladder. Never over-supplied with physical courage, Mr. Bell had no intention whatever of risking his own life or limbs; at least, not for the sake of a twelve-year-old brat. It was merely that he didn't intend to adopt a five-grand bill for damages along with

the kid. Wherefore, the flesh broker sprinted rapidly along the catwalk.

Repeating its previous maneuver, the crane came swinging past. All Mr. Bell had to do was reach out his arms and grab both the kid and the camera. Having grabbed, he hung on for dear life. A long moment passed before he realized that the movement had stopped.

"All right, Bell!" shouted Gus Lennox. "They pulled the master switch. Come down off there!"

Red was already sliding down the arm of the crane. J. Edwin Bell released his strangling grasp on the camera—and simultaneously, released a part of the mechanism. And, as the flesh broker started down the crane, he was followed by a gushing torrent of 35 mm. negative.

Mr. Bell struck the floor somewhat roughly. Sitting up, he waved his arms and combed several yards of twisting, white celluloid out of his scant silvery hair. There were more yards of it around his neck—in fact, Mr. Bell looked more than slightly like a may-pole, half wound.

"Hey!" he spluttered. "Help!"

Gus Lennox loomed over him. "I'll help you!" shrieked the producer, eyes aglitter with rage. "I'll help you die an easy death, you rat! Look at that film! It's ruined, it's fogged, it's worthless! A whole day's shooting! Fifty chorus girls at fifteen dollars a day, besides the overhead I got here, and you go fog the film!"

J. Edwin Bell clambered to his feet. Cowering from the irate producer, he thrust a bony forefinger toward Red. "Take it out of his salary!" gasped the flesh peddler. "It's all his fault! He—he—huh?"

And J. Edwin's jaw sagged. Mechanically, he shrugged aside another dozen yards of celluloid confetti, in order to get the monocle re-adjusted to his eye.

"You?" he gulped. "You *here?*"

EITHER Miss Dorothy Gordan was there, or else her ghost had a very loud and determined voice. "Yes," said the blond girl grimly. "I'm here! There wasn't any film company on location down there, and so I came here to find out about it, and I was lucky enough to meet Jan Erbe coming out the gate and I told him the whole story. And he wants to adopt Bobby. And, Mr. Bell, you're an awful crook to get a girl to give up her job and rush off on a wild-goose chase like that. If Jan didn't want me to help him take care of Bobby, I'd keep your darned old money!"

But evidently Jan did want her do exactly that, for she hurled a handful of bills and silver at the flesh peddler.

Her lovely face was lovelier in her aggressive wrath.

"There it is!" she exclaimed. "Except the money I spent on cab fare."

"Cab fare?" echoed J. Edwin Bell. "You took a cab all the way to Ensenada? And got back this quick? And had money left over? You're crazy!"

The blond stared blankly. "Ensenada?" she breathed. "I thought you said Encinitas! So when you gave me forty dollars and told me to get there quick—"

Gus Lennox interrupted hoarsely. "Who's this Bobby? What this about Jan Erbe? Why doesn't somebody tell me these things?"

Miss Dorothy Gordan started to tell him. So did Jan Erbe, who was standing beside the blond girl. But J. Edwin Bell did not pause to listen to any more explanations —or to make any, either.

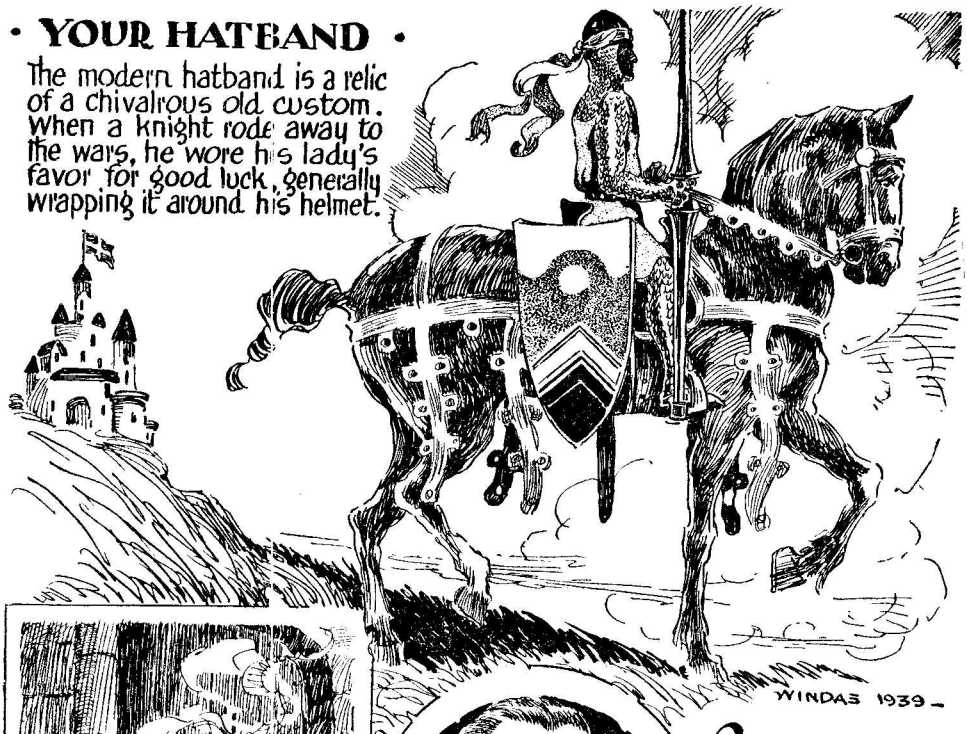
Mr. Bell hastily separated himself from the ruined film, and started putting one long leg out in front of the other. Traveling in long, jack-rabbit leaps Mr. Bell passed rapidly through the Mogul main gate. He wanted to put a lot of distance between himself and that red-headed kid before something more and worse happened. He wasn't heading toward the Happy Hour Home, either. He lammed in the other direction, which happened to be toward the thriving village of Encinitas, California.

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

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

· YOUR HATBAND ·

The modern hatband is a relic of a chivalrous old custom. When a knight rode away to the wars, he wore his lady's favor for good luck, generally wrapping it around his helmet.



· HOIST WITH HIS OWN PETARD ·

A term meaning one who is destroyed by his own weapon; defeated by his own arguments. In earlier days, a petard was a bomb, used to blow open the gate of a besieged castle. Attached to a plaque, and hoisted up to the gate-lock by a bipod and tackle, it was set off by a fuse.

·first ARTICLES of WAR·

Present military laws are based upon those laid down by King Gustavus Adolphus for his Swedish army.

· MINE WARFARE ·

Is by no means new. Caesar's legions used such operations by digging a tunnel under enemy walls, supporting the walls with beams of wood. When the tunnel was deemed large enough, the beams were set on fire, and as they weakened, the now unsupported walls would collapse.

Fish Ain't Got No Brains

By RICHARD SALE
Author of "The Judas Tree," "The Rebels Are Coming!" etc.

You will want to meet Matilda the porpoise, who proved dramatically that her heart belonged to Pop

AT LACONIA, Florida, on the through highway toward Miami and Key West, a lot of money had built a home for fish. It was an aqueous zoo of such magnificence and grandeur that most of the people who looked upon it had to admit that a fish, if he had any brains at all, certainly would be grateful to somebody for being plucked from the perilous seaboard offshore and placed in the comparative safety of the tanks.

Not that all peril was gone. In the same huge tank, there were many species. The idea behind the project was that life would continue in the tank as it had in the sea. That was well and good, but a smart fish could live a lot longer in the tanks than he could at sea. After a week of dodging his enemies, he could come to know how many, the habits and feeding times, and good places to hide when you had to hide.

"Yes," Pop Shannon said to visitors when he could get an ear, "I reckon a fish could live to a ripe old age in these tanks, if he had him some brains. But shucks, fish ain't got no brains, and don't let anyone ever tell you they has."

One of the visitors once said, "But look here, Mr. Shannon. I read in the newspapers recently that a porpoise is one of the smartest creatures alive. Certain ichthyologists and scientists agreed that the I.Q. of a porpoise is higher than that of a cat or a dog or even a monkey. They seemed to agree that the porpoise rates second in intelligence only to man himself."

Pop Shannon just grunted. "Man and boy, mister, I've fished these waters for twenty-odd years and I've seen a lot of fish in that time. And it just goes to show you that you can't believe everything you read in the newspapers. Porpoise smart? Well, they'll jump out of the water and look mighty spectacular. I guess maybe you seen the pictures of Matilda standing on her tail, eh? I wouldn't say that was so smart.

"It so happens she likes mullet, and if some one holds a mullet out of the water where she can't get it, she just comes up after it. It don't take any brains to be hungry."

The visitor said, "But I've heard other stories about the porpoise too. There must be something to it, Mr. Shannon. Why is the porpoise regarded as such a good-luck sign by sailors? They say you should never kill a porpoise or it'll bring bad luck."

Pop Shannon spat. "Yet they never hesitated to kill one when they ran out of food."

"Is it true that porpoise will come up behind a tired swimmer and help push the man to shore? I've read that, too."

"Bosh. Most likely he'll come over close to get a good look at you when you drown. Fish can't think beyond their bellies, mister. Listen, if fish was so smart, how could I get down there? Sure, I put on a diving helmet and I got right down in the tank. What for? Oh, most everything. Cleaning up the tanks. Feeding fish for the benefit of the cameras at the portholes. Publicity pictures, you know. Now you don't

In the great tank the shark and the porpoise swirled above him

think that me, Pop Shannon, in his right mind, would go down into them waters if a fish had a brain, do you? Why, I'm just as good a morsel for some of 'em as a mullet. If they had brains, they'd scent it, they'd come after me.

"Lord, mister, have you seen the ten-foot blue shark down there? Why, I can walk right under his nose. He'll come sniffing over and I'll slap him in the beak with a stick and he'll scatter like a scared angelfish. And all the time he could rip me apart and make a nice meal for hisself. Naw, mister, fish ain't got no brains at all."

POP SHANNON should have known. For twenty years he had been a guide and boat captain for wealthy sportsmen. Up and down the Florida keys, westward to the gulf for tarpon, east to the Bahamas for blue marlin, south to Cuba for giant mackerel sharks, north to Nova Scotia for giant bluefin tuna. He'd sailed them all in his forty-four footer, and he was a genius at finding the fish feeding. His fees had been high, but he had guaranteed fish. And the legend grew that Captain Pop Shannon could find a sailfish before the sailfish found the bait.

So when the two millionaires, John

Willison and Hugh McCamber, spent a half million building up the Underwater Zoo, as it was called, the man they wanted to care for it was Pop Shannon. He knew fish.

Pop was fifty-eight when he took over the Underwater Zoo. He was not in charge of administration; he was in charge of the fish. Catching them alive, disinfecting them, keeping them happy, putting them in the tanks, feeding them, and watching out for them. It was Pop's job to keep screwballs like that kid from Vermont in hand. The kid had arrived at the Underwater Zoo with tackle to go fishing. He was pretty sore when Pop told him to pick on an ocean to find his fish.

The Underwater Zoo was a miracle in concrete. Doubtless, you've seen pictures of it by now, if you haven't actually seen it yourself. A giant building, open at the top, in a huge circle, the concrete studded with portholes at different levels. At the lowest level, you can see marine life on the bottom. Moving up, you can follow the fish at the various levels, watch the loggerhead turtle, a mammoth beast, casually snap a seventy-five pound amberjack in half. But he can do better than that.

"Saw him clip a six-foot sand shark like a pair of scissors," Pop Shannon told a visitor. "He's quite a powerful boy, that loggerhead." And inside, from a platform, you could see the fishes feed. You could see Pop stand by the stairs with a mullet and wave it over the surface, and the next thing, Matilda, the lone porpoise would stand on her tail and take the mullet right from his hand, looking as though she were grinning all the time.

Pop with his white hair and leathery lined face, his gray eyes sunk back in their sockets from squinting across the sunlighted sea, eyes that could spot surfacing fish a mile away. Surely he was old enough to know better.

It used to bother young Sherman. His full name was Wallace Sherman, and Pop liked him even if the kid was green around the ears when it came to fish. The "kid" was thirty. Sherman was a scientist and had been engaged by the Underwater Zoo officials because of his knowledge of fish ailments, disinfectants, bacteria and whatnot. Sherman was the man who kept the fish healthy, segregated sick ones from the well ones, and toned up newcomers generally. The institute wanted only the finest specimens. Sherman either had to make them fine or discard them. He had a healthy respect for fish, and he and Pop Shannon used to argue all the time.

"FISH are plenty smart, Pop," Sherman said. "I don't see how you could have spent so many years catching them without getting an inkling of their wisdom."

"Oh, bosh," Pop Shannon said. "You science boys is all alike. Fish smart! Ain't so smart that they couldn't be caught. If they was so smart, they wouldn't even be in the tank. Fish is onery and dumb and always hungry. Look at the bluefish. Eats all he can and goes on killing just to be onery."

"On the other hand," Sherman said. "I'll bet you never scared a tuna school and had them turn toward shore. They were smart enough to head for the open sea, always."

"Sure. So smart that I could always count on them turning east and run ahead of them until they was dumb enough to take the lure. Why, boy, them tuna is so dumb, they all stand around a-gape when you hook one of the lot. They think it's very interesting. I've caught as much as thirty tuna in the same school just by having 'em stay around watching the fellow with the hook in his mouth."

"Yeah?" Sherman said. "And what of the big ones who have sense enough to head into the rocks and cut the line that holds them?"

"Just blind luck. They go to sulk, not to cut the line. Look at that dawgone blue shark in the tanks. If'n he was smart, why doesn't he go for me? He could take me apart when I'm down there."

"He will, one day," Sherman replied.

"You're entirely too casual with him, Pop. Oh, you hit him with the stick and scare him, but he's just waiting for the day you don't have that club. Or maybe you'll fall or something. Don't ever go down there with an open cut. When that baby smells your blood, he'll figure you're wounded, and he'll go for you faster than the Orange Blossom Limited."

"He's too dumb. He's scared of me and the helmet and the bubbles."

Sherman smiled thirly. "You can't kid me, Pop. You think they're smart. Matilda, for instance. Why, you're crazy about that porpoise, and she's crazy about you. That porpoise thinks you're the number one boy in the world."

"Shucks. Just 'cause I always got a mullet in my hand and her belly is always empty."

"Don't kid me. You play with her as if she were your own daughter, and you try to teach her tricks. I'll swear she knows her name. Go on, just go up there and call her and I'll bet she'll surface. You know she's got more brains than most of the people who gape at her. You must know it or you wouldn't baby her as you do."

Pop Shannon got red in the face. "Me baby her? Me baby a brainless hunk o' fin and tail! Well, I like that! She's dumb, they're all dumb, and I never did see the fish that had some brains and I'll maintain so till my dying day."

He very nearly kept his word. He maintained it up to his dying day. But he didn't die on that dying day, and when the day was over, he stopped maintaining it, and the way you could be surest of getting him riled, even to violence, was to mimic his words of a previous time and tell him about brainless fish. He'd all but swallow you alive.

IT HAPPENED early in March, before a very large gallery. Pop wouldn't have tried to show off except that the gallery expected some excitement, and Pop Shannon, for all his age, was vain enough to try to supply them with some.

The exodus from Miami was on. Everybody was returning to the north to see the spring come in. There were two places that the tourists stopped over to see: the *ancient* relics of St. Augustine, and the Underwater Zoo of Laconia. On this particular day, it was the largest crowd the tanks had ever accommodated. Everything was going along fine, the fish were all performing nicely, and then somebody complained about the windows on the west side, on the bottom level.

Even then it might have been all right, except that Pop overheard. He instantly said, "What's wrong with them windows, mister?"

The man looked embarrassed. "I didn't mean to complain really," he said. "You people can't help it. There's grass growing on the glass, that's all. I suppose the sea water does that. Makes it difficult to see in right around here and that porpoise was chasing a little fish."

"That's algae," said Pop Shannon. "Kind of a bacterial growth from the water." Sherman had told him that. He frowned heavily. "Just the same, that window should be cleaned. All the windows are supposed to be kept clean all the time. You stay here and I'll go down and wipe it off. You have to scrape it—"

"Go down?" said the man. "You're not going down there now?"

Pop Shannon puffed out his chest a little. "Sure, why not?" he said, knowing the answer the man would make.

"But there's that big loggerhead in there," said the man. "He's very dangerout, isn't he? And that shark—good Lord, that shark is ten feet if he's a foot. You don't go down with all the fish in there. I thought you transferred them to another tank before you cleaned up this one."

"We clean and fix right in there amongst them," Pop replied.

"But, my word, man, that shark! He's nothing to play with. And those other fish, they bite, don't they? That barracuda—"

"That's a Mexican barracuda. He don't bite unless he's hungry and he ain't hungry."

"Won't the shark bite?"

"Would if he had brains. Mister, there ain't a fish born what has brains. That's why I can go down there."

"You really go down unarmed?"

"Sometimes I take a club," Pop Shannon said.

"Oh," said the man, as if the club solved everything.

His tone stung Pop who snapped, "But a man don't really need a club or a prong or anything. You just stand here and watch and I'll go down there and wipe the glass off your window and pull that shark's tail for you."

Pop undressed in his office and slipped into a pair of trunks and called young Sherman. "What's up?" Sherman asked.

"Going down and scrape off algae," Pop said. "Guy couldn't see through a window. By glory, I think he thinks I'm scared to go in there without a stick."

"You take a stick," Sherman said, "in case old dorsal fin gets curious. And watch that loggerhead. Here, I'll help you with the helmet. And Pop, while you're down there, see if you can find the Alison tuna. He was sulking on the bottom yesterday. Maybe he's sick."

"Maybe he ain't no more," said Pop. "He wasn't more'n twenty pounds, and those big boys get hungry." He nodded. "I'll take a look."

"Here's a prong for you."

"Ain't taking anything down," Pop said. "That fella—"

"You take the prong and stop acting like a kid. I know you'd go down without any weapon, so why bother about some rubbernecked tourist. Take the prong."

AT THE rim of the pool, Sherman lifted the helmet onto Pop's shoulders. The helmet was a self-contained unit weighing about forty pounds. No airlines were necessary. Nor was a lifelife necessary either, since there was a ladder built right into the sides of the tanks which went down to the bottom. Sherman hit the helmet with the flat of his hand, and Pop started down. All around the rim, the spectators watched with interest. When the water closed over his head, cold and invigorating, Pop was in a soft green world, glowing with eyes which were the portholes all around. He could see pretty well—almost any point in the tank. But it was a big tank and you couldn't watch all of it.

Matilda found him right away. He saw the big porpoise come rushing over to him. She whipped by him and around him and then stuck her graceful snout into his hand, looking for a handout of fish. Pop chuckled and said, "Not today, Matilda. I got work to do." Matilda looked as though she were laughing. She dashed about him playfully and hit him in the back, nearly sending him headlong on the bottom. "Dawgone!" Pop grunted. "That lady sure is playful today."

Suddenly he saw her leave him and go flashing up to the surface where a mullet struck the water. That would be Sherman feeding her for the amusement of the upper spectators. He, Pop, was amusing those at the portholes right now. He passed close to one porthole and say a face watching him, in wonderment. He waved.

It was green and darker down below as he stood on the bottom. Warily he watched and waited until the giant loggerhead swam past, effortlessly, over his head. The big turtle usually paid no attention to him, but you never could tell. Just like that, he might turn and bite you in half and go on his way again.

Pop carefully avoided a bevy of shrimp walking the bottom and then pushed slowly around the tanks toward the west side where the windows had been clouded. Overhead, the blue shark circled, then descended a trifle. Pop waved the prong at the shark, and it instantly retreated to the opposite side of the pool. In the center of the bottom there was an old wreck, an artificial wreck, of course, and Pop thought he saw the tuna lurking in it. He wasn't sure, because there were several gay groupers around the hole, but a large yellow fin stuck out. He reminded

himself to come back and have a look.

Outside, looking in, a girl said, "Why, it's like being a lion tamer, except with fish."

"Yeah," said her companion. "I wonder if these fish ever get wacky like lions and take it out on the tamer."

Pop Shannon reached the west ports and started cleaning off the algae with a scraper. Faintly, dully, he could hear splashing. "Matilda jumping for mullet," he grunted. "Sure can hear her up there." A curious bonito swam over his shoulder to see what he was doing, but vanished when he waved a hand. He finished up the job and waved to the man outside who had first complained. The man waved back, frantically.

Pop turned. Above him and slightly behind, was the shark once more, much closer this time. It hovered there without a move. He knew it was watching him. Pop walked slowly toward it and raised the prong to teach the shark a little lesson. The shark had had lessons before. He was gone like a turning shadow.

By the false wreckage in the center of the tanks, Pop paused and poked the prong gently into the darkness where the Alison tuna sulked. The tuna showed, swam lazily away and turned back into the hole. Pop grunted. The tuna looked all right. Probably just moody. And then Pop felt a sharp nip on his right naked elbow.

He turned as a bluefish darted off like a bullet. "Damn killer!" Pop snorted. "Don't feed 'em enough, eh?" He glanced down at his elbow, saw the cut of the bluefish's tiny cruel teeth. A stream of gray was filtering out of the cut. Underwater, blood is not red. It is gray.

Pop saw the blood and knew one thing instantly. He had to get out of the tank. He started running. He put his head down and ran, using his hands to balance himself. It is a fact that a man can run faster on the bottom than he can swim on the surface.

Lured by the scent of the blood, the barracuda darted out of the green depths opposite and slashed at the arm. Pop yelled at the bite, a long raking cut. He turned, saw the blood pouring out, dirty gray now and he knew he was in trouble. The barracuda slashed back again, but this time, Pop jabbed with the prong and impaled the barracuda through the body. The fish jerked the iron prong out of his hands and sank to the bottom.

A GREAT shadow fell over Pop Shannon as he ran for the ladder. He tripped and fell and stared up. Above him, motionless as death, hung the blue shark. The blood scent was just reaching the shark's nose. He began to churn the water and flail wildly, darting to and fro with speed which staggered the imagination.

The shadow turned green, then pale white as the belly turned up, and in cold horror, Pop saw that ten feet of muscle and terrible teeth bearing down on him like an express train. He could see the mouth, the shark mouth which goes beyond belief in the ferocity of those triangular white teeth, double-rowed. In blind panic Pop clawed at a dead stick which lay on the bottom and he struck the pointed nose with everything he had.

Stung, the shark rolled away, like an airplane, and cut a long circle before coming back.

The second thrust was worse. He came close to Pop's body, forcing Pop down on his knees. Pop could hardly see where he jabbed the stick, for his helmet was pushing his head off to one side with its weight. The stick was wrenched from his hand. He saw it jutting from the blue shark's mouth as the shark whipped over him and cut back at terrific speed.

The elbow continued to bleed. Pop felt weaker. He was gasping for breath, and he had an idea that the jig was up. At a porthole, he saw the white face of a woman, screaming wildly, her eyes big as saucers. He thought, in that split second, how odd it was to be in here, no more than five feet from her face, yet the shark could not touch her. Vainly he wished he were out there looking in.

Across the tank, he saw the shark turn.

Simultaneously, he looked up at another shadow. It was the porpoise, Matlida, lying on the surface by the feeding platform. No more mullet. That meant someone had yelled to Sherman. Sherman would come down with the pole.

The shark came back, and Pop knew Sherman couldn't get there in time. Pop buried himself in the sand as much as he could his strength waning quickly from the exertion. No chance. No chance at all unless a fish had brains.

"Matilda!" he sobbed. "Matilda!"

The porpoise dropped down like a stone.

Pop always wondered if she had just happened down or if she had heard him call. Certainly it was a fact that the porpoise would answer her name when called. And it was also a fact that water carried sound very well indeed.

Now what? Pop thought. The water seemed icy, he could hear his heart pounding up into his ears. From his elbow the blood had started to slacken, but the blood scent was all over the place.

Matilda stuck her nose into his hand docilely and hung there. The shark did not pause but swept across the tank with a faint flicking of its sinister tail. Matilda turned, saw the shark. With a faint whip of her own tail, she rose. She met the shark and shouldered him off. The shark veered to the side, completed a somersault in the water and started back.

Pop saw an astonishing thing. The porpoise didn't wait for the shark to come. Instead she started for the shark like the bullet fired from a high-powered rifle. Matilda was hell bent for election and when she reached the shark, she was traveling at close to her top speed. She made no move to get out of the way, but crashed broadside into the big belly. She weighed nine hundred pounds.

Pop Shannon, amazed and suddenly weak with relief, saw the shark twist in midwater and then sink slowly down to the bottom of the tanks and lie there motionless.

The blue shark was out cold.

The water suddenly grew even more liquid before Pop's eyes. He saw Matilda swim back, playful once more, none the worse for the terrific blow she had dealt the shark's belly. And then Pop fainted.

HE CAME to again when fresh, clean air struck his face and he found Sherman hauling on his arms and pulling him out of the tanks while Matilda pushed at his legs playfully beneath the surface. Sherman, who was a big boy, picked him up and carried him into the administration rooms. Pop couldn't say anything for a long time while he fought for his breath, but presently the weight lifted from his chest and he felt a lot better. Sherman had bandaged and treated the slash of the barracuda on his arm.

"Fish ain't got no brains," Sherman mimicked grimly.

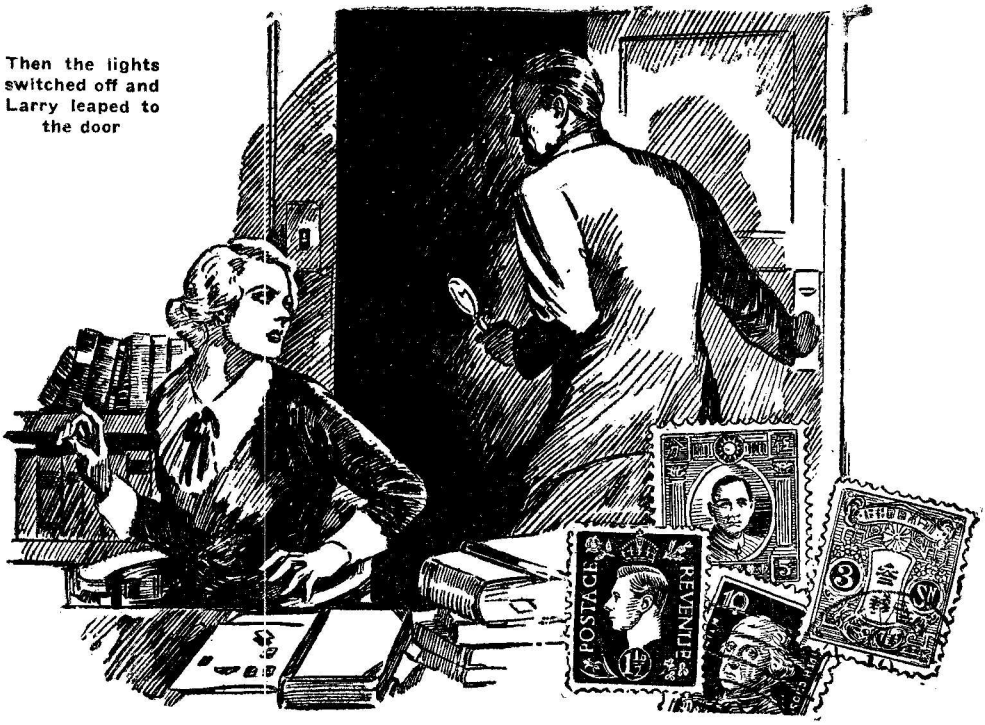
"Don't say that," Pop Shannon said. "I never want to hear that again. Matilda —the way she hit that shark—"

"You think that was something?" Sherman said. "That shark will be all right. He'll feel that punch for the rest of his life, but he'll live. How do you think you got topside, Pop? I didn't go down after you. I was starting down when you stuck your head up and there you were. I hauled you out. *That porpoise pushed you to the surface as if you were her own baby.*

"She nuzzled right under you and lifted you up with her nose. She looked worried if I ever saw a look of worry. If you had a heart you'd go give her a mullet just to let her know you're all right. I'll bet she's still on the surface, waiting to get a look at you to make sure. Fish ain't got no brains indeed!

"Son," Pop Shannon said in a small voice, "if'n you ever hear me say them words again, you can draw and quarter me and throw me to the loggerhead for bait. Get me a mullet for Matilda."

Pop is still in one piece; he must have kept his word.



Then the lights switched off and Larry leaped to the door

Cancelled in Red

By HUGH PENTECOST

AS FAR as Inspector Bradley could see, the chief difficulty arising from the murder of Max Adrian, the successful and extremely crooked stamp-dealer, was the plethora of suspects. Nearly everyone along Philately Row, it seemed, had been swindled at one time or other by the wily Max. And few of his victims denied that they had both the reason and the desire to kill him.

Ignorant in matters pertaining to rare stamps and their collectors, Bradley is forced to depend a good deal on Larry Storm, whom he does not quite trust. Larry, Bradley realizes, has lied to him more than once; and Bradley is sure that Larry is trying to cover up for someone.

As a matter of fact, Storm is seeking to protect not one but two of his friends. The first is Lon Nicholas who, the afternoon before the murder, had stormed in Adrian's office, threatened and pulled a gun on him. Larry arrived in time to take away Nicholas' gun. He left Nicholas in his apartment with Bones, his office boy, to keep an eye on him. Later Nicholas evaded Bones' vigilance, and Bones dashed down to Adrian's office building to watch out for him.

After the murder is discovered, both Bones and Nicholas' gun are missing. Nicholas himself turns up late that night, drunk, and unable to remember where he had been or what he had done.

The second person Larry is trying to shield is the lovely Lucia Warren, daughter of another of Adrian's victims. It was Lucia who found Adrian's body, in his office at seven-thirty that night. Confused and frightened, she hurried away. When she remembered that she touched the gun that was lying on the desk and possibly left damaging fingerprints about the room, she phoned Larry, who promised to help her.

This story began in the Argosy for May 6

When he arrives at Adrian's office, the police are already there; but the gun Lucia said she saw is missing. Larry goes to warn Lucia, but Bradley follows him and warns him not to interfere.

IT DEVELOPS that Paul Gregory, secretary and agent to the millionaire collector, Jasper Hale, was also at Adrian's that night. He arrived, he says, a little before seven, was hit over the head, presumably by the murderer, and lay unconscious until after Adrian was killed. He too had hurried in fright from the room, and had summoned the police.

Larry reasons that the murderer must have been hiding in the office when Gregory got there, waited until after Lucia had left, had then taken the gun and escaped. But Larry cannot understand why he should have hung around for over thirty minutes. What was he looking for?

Larry and Bradley interview Howard Stevens and Ezra Luckman, both collectors with grudges against Adrian. Then after he has left Bradley, Larry receives word from the eccentric Mr. Julius, who had promised to help hunt for Bones, that he has found the boy in Luckman's apartment.

Sure now that Luckman is the murderer, Larry rushes to Bradley with the news, only to be told that Luckman has been killed with the same gun used on Adrian.

He turns on Larry coldly. "And now, Mr. Storm," he says, "we'll stop playing games and you'll come clean . . .!"

CHAPTER XVIII

NOBLE MR. STORM

LARRY'S hand was not quite steady as he held a match to his cigarette. There were little beads of sweat on his forehead and the palms of his hands were damp.

They were back in Bradley's office. This was a new Bradley who stormed up and down the room. This was a white-faced Bradley with all the gentleness and humor gone out of his eyes.

"I killed him," Bradley said. "Might just as well have stood in front of him and shot him down in cold blood. God help me, I let you and all the other charming people in this case lull me into a sense of security. I couldn't take the idea seriously that people would kill each other over little bits of colored paper. I was afraid for you, because you were messing around in the case with the typical clumsiness of an amateur. I let myself forget about everyone else. The commissioner ought to have my shield. He ought to send me back to Canarsie to pound a beat!"

"But Bradley, how did it happen? Where did you find him?"

"Near the reservoir in Central Park," Bradley snapped. "One of the Park Patrol stumbled over him. He'd been dead a couple of hours when they picked him up. That was at four o'clock this afternoon."

"But why!" Larry said. "Luckman had that boy of mine. He must have been in this up to his ears! If I hadn't seen him with my own eyes, I'd think you were dreaming. You're positive it wasn't suicide?"

"Of course I'm positive. No gun anywhere—no powder marks around the wound. He was shot from some distance away. And with the same gun that killed Adrian; our ballistics expert proved that beyond a doubt."

"But if Bones didn't catch him at the scene of the murder, why did he kidnap Bones?" Larry wanted to know.

"Your guess is as good as mine," said Bradley. "Murder breeds murder, Storm. People get to know too much and a killer has to protect himself. He can only be hanged once. If I were to guess—and incidentally I'm through guessing—I'd say that Mr. Luckman knew too damned much. People don't hold rendezvous in Central Park in the middle of a winter afternoon because they like to be outdoors. Luckman knew who the killer was, tried to blackmail him, and got the business. That's what I'd say if I were guessing."

"But Bones," Larry said. "Why was he holding Bones?"

"Maybe you can tell me that!" Bradley said. "You found him! You must have had a reason for looking in Luckman's apartment! What about that, Mr. Storm?"

Larry shook his head. "I didn't find him. It was Mr. Julius. We had been talking about Bones' disappearance just

before you arrived this morning. The old boy had the notion of making a house to house canvass of all the people who had any reason to hate Adrian. I didn't think much of the idea. However, it worked. Mr. Julius wouldn't tell me the details, but I'll get them from him."

"I'm going to do the finding out from now on!" Bradley said. He walked over to his desk and sat down. His pipe had long since gone out. "And I'm going to begin with you, Storm. You've been holding out long enough."

"I haven't been holding out," Larry said. "At least, nothing that mattered. I've already told you about Lon Nicholas. He didn't do it, Inspector. He certainly didn't kill Luckman. He has been at my apartment all day."

"How do you know?"

Larry's tongue moistened his lips. "Why—why I just left him. He told me he hadn't been out of the place."

"That's just ducky!" said Bradley. "I suppose you expect the murderer to admit cheerfully that he spent the afternoon in Central Park?" He brought his fist down on the desk. "Well, we'll soon find out how he stands up under a grilling. I've sent a couple of men to your apartment to pick him up. You admit he has a gun. It'll be interesting to see what the ballistics expert makes of it."

"He hasn't got the gun any more," said Larry wearily. "He lost it, lost it yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, he lost it!" said Bradley. "Sure. He lost it somewhere where he could conveniently find it when he needed it again. Maybe that's why you came to Adrian's office last night . . . to cover up for your little pal, Lon."

"It wasn't Lon," said Larry. "I—" He stopped abruptly.

"SO IT *was* the girl!" Bradley said. "Have I got to drag everything out of you, Storm? You went there to cover up for Lucia Warren. You were going to get rid of her fingerprints, only thanks to the fact that Gregory notified us, I beat you to it. Well, I've got 'em. I know she was there."

"Yes, she was there," Larry agreed. "You see, she had come downtown to see me, and we missed connections. She—"

"I'll get that part of the story from her personally," Bradley interrupted. "She's on her way down here, too. What I want is your story! You came to Adrian's office to destroy evidence. Well, you got there too late. You expected to find a gun there, but it was gone. No use denying it. You stumbled around over that mistake like a spavined horse. She told you there was a gun on the desk, didn't she?"

"Yes," Larry admitted. "She went to see Adrian, and found him dead. The gun was on the desk. She picked it up. I wasn't going to take the gun, Inspector. I was just going to wipe her prints off it, and the phone and desk."

"Mercy, but you're noble," Bradley said. "You take a header for a good looking dame and you're willing to risk going to the chair yourself to cover up for her. Do you let every woman you meet push you around like that?"

Larry shook his head, doggedly. "She didn't kill him, Inspector. I believe her story. Damn it, I've explained to you that Adrian dead was no use to her at all. He'd cheated her out of nearly a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. She wanted restitution, not revenge. With Adrian alive, she had a chance of getting something back."

"You mean she could prove he'd cheated her?" Bradley demanded.

Larry shrugged. "We didn't have the evidence—courtroom evidence. But we might have gotten it."

"Maybe that part of her story is a lie, too, Storm! Maybe she just fooled you into helping her with her collection because she wanted someone to lean on when she broke into the big-time with murder!"

"Oh, nuts!" Larry said, impatiently. "Can't you get it into your head that she was the last person in the case who wanted Adrian dead? And what are you trying to say—that she kidnapped Bones and put him in Luckman's apartment, and then

walked out into the Park and shot Luckman?"

"Maybe she and Luckman were in cahoots," said Bradley. "Maybe they had a falling out over the division of the spoils."

"What spoils? You've said yourself that nothing was taken from Adrian's office."

"*I* didn't say it," Bradley contradicted him. "Louderbach said it. How the hell do I know if he's telling the truth? In a cockeyed business where you don't take inventory of your stock, how can anyone tell what's gone? If Adrian stole valuable stamps from the Warren dame, you don't suppose he catalogued 'em, do you?"

"Probably not."

"Then we don't know if there were any spoils or not," said Bradley. "We do know, however, that your friend Lon Nicholas doesn't remember where he was at the time of the murder. And we do know that your other friend, Miss Warren, was actually at the scene of the crime, either when it took place or almost instantly afterward, and left her prints all over the joint. And we do know that you, bighearted Larry Storm, were willing to stick your neck out a mile for her.

"Well, maybe I won't be quite as gullible as you. Maybe I won't believe that your pals are all sweetness and light when they get through talking to me. And maybe, Mr. Storm, I'll begin to have ideas about you if things don't check. You know I could have you thrown in the cooler for trying to suppress evidence, don't you?"

"That's a nice bluff, Bradley," Larry said. "I didn't suppress any evidence. You *think* I went to Adrian's to help Miss Warren. But I didn't actually destroy any evidence."

"You didn't tell the truth about why you'd come to Adrian's did you?" demanded Bradley. "You knew a murder had been committed and you didn't notify the police! You kept the fact that your office boy had been kidnapped to yourself! Why, damn it, you could rot in jail if I had a mind to put you there!"

A uniformed policeman stuck his head in the office door. "The Warren dame is here, Inspector," he said.

"Show her in," said Bradley. He pointed the stem of his pipe at Larry. "You're staying. We'll see how these two stories jell."

LUCIA was wearing the silver-fox coat and the little black hat with the nose veil. She was pale, so pale that the scarlet lipstick had given her mouth a queer, hard look. When she saw Larry getting up from the chair beside the inspector's desk, she drew a sharp breath and came quickly across the room to him, ignoring Bradley, who remained slouched in his swivel chair.

"Larry, I've gotten you into trouble!" Lucia cried.

Larry took her hands in his for a moment. He looked exhausted and discouraged.

"I wish it were as simple as that, Lucia. Things have taken a rather bad turn. There's been another murder."

"Another murder! But who?" She glanced from Larry to Bradley, anxiously.

"A man named Luckman. I'm afraid I never got around to telling you about him. He was a customer of Adrian's. I—"

"If Mr. Storm doesn't mind," Bradley cut in, "I think *I'll* conduct this interview. Sit down, Miss Warren. I hope Mr. Storm will advise you that the time has come for you to put your cards on the table."

Lucia took the chair which Larry had vacated. "He told me long ago that the only thing I could do was to tell you the exact truth," she said.

Bradley's eyebrows went up. "That surprises me! Mr. Storm's game has been played under a different set of rules up to now."

"He was only trying to protect me, Inspector," Lucia said.

"You and one or two others," said Bradley. He leaned back in his chair. "I want the whole story from you, Miss Warren."

Larry had gone to one of the windows and was looking down at the lights on the street below.

"What Mr. Storm told you at my apart-

ment the other night is true, Inspector," Lucia said, in a low voice. "I had every reason in the world to want Adrian alive. He had cheated me out of a large sum of money. Mr. Storm was helping me to get it back."

"Go on," said Bradley.

"Last night I had an appointment with Mr. Storm at his office, for six. Somehow we missed connections. I waited for him, going some place for a cocktail and then returning. Still Mr. Storm hadn't arrived. I—well, I was pretty angry about what Adrian had done to me. I hadn't realized the truth until that afternoon when Mr. Storm explained just how Adrian had managed to swindle me. I decided to face Adrian with it, so I called his office for an appointment. He told me someone was coming to see him at seven, but that he'd be free at seven-thirty."

"That seven o'clock appointment must have been Gregory," said Larry, without turning away from the window.

"Thanks," said Bradley dryly. "Well, Miss Warren?"

"I had dinner at a little restaurant somewhere near Adrian's on Nassau Street. At seven-thirty I went up to his office. When I got there I—I found him dead." She paused, her lower lip caught between her teeth. Bradley showed no sympathy.

"Go on," he repeated.

"I went into the private office where he was. On the corner of the desk I saw a gun, and foolishly I picked it up and looked at it."

Bradley leaned forward. "What sort of a gun?"

"I—I don't know. I mean, it was a pistol, or a revolver, or whatever you call them. I don't know what kind it was."

"Do you own a gun yourself, Miss Warren?"

"No, I've never owned a gun," Lucia said.

"It isn't a good idea to deny it if you do," Bradley warned her. "My men are going over your apartment right now. If you have a gun . . ."

"I haven't!" she insisted.

Bradley shrugged. "Go ahead. You picked up the gun . . ."

"Then I put the gun down. I realized the police should be notified. I went around to the telephone and started to dial. Then, I, well, frankly, I was terrified, Inspector. I ran. I began to see that I wasn't in a very good position. I had quarreled with Adrian. I—well, people might think . . ."

"So what did you do?" Bradley's voice was stern.

"I TELEPHONED Mr. Storm. I told him Adrian had been murdered and that I was in trouble. I asked him to come downtown and he said he would."

"Big-hearted Larry," said Bradley.

"He came," Lucia continued. "I told him just what I've told you. He—we—we saw no reason why I should be mixed up in the murder. I hadn't killed him. I didn't know who had. So Larry agreed to go up and wipe my fingerprints off the gun and the telephone. But he got there too late, Inspector. Since he didn't actually *do* anything wrong, you can't arrest him, can you?"

Bradley ignored her question. "You didn't see anyone else in the office or in the building?"

"No."

"There wasn't anyone lying unconscious on the floor of the waiting room when you went in?"

"Good heavens, no, Inspector!"

"Did you notice a bottle on the receptionist's desk—a strange looking liqueur bottle with a piece of a tree in it?"

"No, I didn't."

"You mean it wasn't there?" Bradley's voice was sharp.

"I—I don't know, Inspector. I didn't see it. Of course it may have been there. I walked straight to the door of Adrian's private office. I wouldn't have noticed it when I left. I was running."

"When you ran you didn't take that gun with you?"

"I left it just where I found it," Lucia said.

"How do you account for the fact that there wasn't any gun there when I arrived?"

"I don't know, Inspector. Larry thinks that—"

"I don't care what Larry thinks," Bradley said. "I want to know what you think!"

Lucia spread her hands in a little gesture of bewilderment. "It can only mean that there was someone there after I left and before you came."

"That would seem to clear you," said Bradley.

Lucia smiled at him. "I'm afraid it does, Inspector."

"Like hell it does! We have only your word for it that there ever was a gun there!"

"But why should I lie about that, Inspector?" Lucia protested.

"Because it would clear you!" Bradley said. "Did you know Ezra Luckman?"

"I never heard of him till Larry mentioned him just now."

"What were you doing this afternoon—all afternoon?"

"I haven't been out of my apartment today till your man came for me," she told him.

"I hope you can prove that, Miss Warren?"

She shrugged. "The elevator operator and the doorman at my apartment building should be able to vouch for me."

"Sure," said Bradley. His anger and irritation were apparently mounting. "Sure, they'll know just what to say, without a doubt. Haven't you forgotten to mention this time that you left a catalogue of your father's collection on Adrian's desk?"

"I had forgotten for the moment," said Lucia. She seemed to be in better control of herself than she had been at the beginning of the interview. "But I did leave it, Inspector. I put it down on the desk when I started to telephone. When I ran out I —I simply forgot it."

"You're sure you hadn't seen Adrian, talked to him about it, quarreled with him and . . ."

Larry turned around from the window. "You're bluffing again, Bradley. Miss Warren has admitted that she was there after the murder. She's told you what she did. She's explained how her fingerprints happened to be there. She has an alibi for this afternoon. What more do you want?"

"I don't like it," Bradley said. "It's so pat, so perfect—fits like a glove. Damn it, why did you plan to conceal all this? Why did you persuade Mr. Storm to endanger himself by attempting to obliterate evidence?"

"I guess I hadn't thought it out very clearly," Lucia said. "At the time I was pretty badly frightened, Inspector."

The inspector stood up. "I'm going to ask you to wait here, Miss Warren, until the men who are searching your apartment report to me and I have your alibi checked."

"I'll wait," Lucia said.

"You don't have to wait, Lucia," said Larry. "He hasn't a shred of evidence on which he can hold you. I think he's exceeded his rights in getting a search warrant for your place."

"You should have been a lawyer, Storm," Bradley said angrily. "I've half a mind to—"

The uniformed officer stuck his head in the door again. "Nicholas is here, Inspector."

"Hold him till I'm ready to talk to him," said Bradley.

"Okey, Inspector. And," the man added, "they've found the gun!"

Bradley gave Lucia a triumphant glance. "So they found it, eh?"

"They're almost certain, Inspector. The ballistics man hasn't tested it, but the caliber checks and two shots have been recently fired from it. It's on the way down here now."

"Well, Miss Warren, how do you explain that?" Bradley asked.

Lucia was twisting her gloves into a tight knot. Larry went quickly over to her.

"I—I can't explain it!" Lucia whispered.

"Hey, Inspector," said the uniformed man, "it wasn't the boys at Miss Warren's that found it. The gun was in Ezra Luck-

man's top bureau drawer. It beats all how it got there, after him being shot to death about a mile away in the Park."

CHAPTER XIX

WHILE THE GOLDFISH WATCHED

BRADLEY stood staring at the policeman for a minute. Then he seemed to make up his mind. "Hold Nicholas as I told you," he ordered. He turned to Lucia. "I'm going to let you go for the time being, Miss Warren. We've got to get some of these facts straightened out before we can act intelligently."

"Hear, hear!" Larry said softly.

Bradley gave him a baleful look. "You're none of you in the clear," he warned. "You've all acted outside the law in this case. You're to stay where I can get hold of you at a moment's notice. Now, get out!"

Grinning, Larry took Lucia's arm and led her from the office. Outside his smile disappeared and he sighed heavily.

"Thank God, you seem to be out of that for the moment," he said. "Now how did that gun get back to Luckman's *after* he was shot with it? And how did Bones get there?"

"Bones?"

Larry gave Lucia's arm a little squeeze. "So much has happened that you haven't heard, Lucia. I'll have to take a day off to tell you about it."

"Why not come back to my place with me now?" she suggested. "If Bradley's men have left anything of it, I have some Scotch, and we could send out to Longchamps for some dinner."

"No can do," he said, wearily. "I'd like to. But I've got to call on a client of mine—Mr. Julius. He has a lot of information I need about Bones."

"Couldn't I go with you?" Lucia asked. "Will it take so long? Afterwards we could go on to my place as I suggested."

Larry looked at her and smiled. "The siren song is irresistible. Besides that, you may enjoy Mr. Julius. I'll tell you about things on the way."

Mr. Julius lived on Eighth Street near Wanamaker's in another brownstone house. As Larry and Lucia rode uptown in a taxi he told her about Bones' disappearance and his subsequent recovery by Mr. Julius. He told her about Luckman, and Stevens, and Gregory, and Slick Williams, and the other people who had become involved in the case.

"So you see why things are so twisted up," he concluded. "It looks as though the murderer had fallen into a nest of observers when he went to Adrian's. Perhaps the crook next door heard him and made tracks for the open spaces. Gregory encountered him—to his misfortune. Poor little Bones must have stumbled over him. And Luckman must have known something—known plenty, if it was necessary to get rid of him."

They got out of the taxi at Mr. Julius' house and went into the foyer. Mr. Julius' card was stuck in the brass bell-plate. Larry rang the bell and then lowered his ear to the speaking tube.

Presently Mr. Julius' voice came through with such volume that it nearly split Larry's eardrum.

"Well, who is it?" shouted the old man.

Larry put his mouth to the tube and shouted back as loudly as he could. "Storm! Got to see you."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

THE front-door catch began to click furiously. It continued clicking long after Larry and Lucia had climbed to the second floor and rounded the turn toward the third. Mr. Julius lived four flights up. By the time they reached the top they were breathless. Mr. Julius stood in the open door.

"Too many cigarettes," Larry panted. "This is Miss Warren, Mr. Julius."

"Heard of you," said Mr. Julius crisply. "Modern generation has no stamina. Those stairs keep me young. Well, great Scott, Storm, show the lady in."

Larry and Lucia preceded Mr. Julius into the apartment. Once inside the door

they both stopped, staring around them with awed expressions. Mr. Julius' sitting room was something to behold. A gas log, which had removed most of the oxygen from the air, burned with a sickly blue flame in a false fireplace. Directly in front of the log was a large, old-fashioned black leather sofa. There were no bookcases in the room, but hundreds of books had been stacked around the walls in teetering piles. Some of the piles had fallen over.

Newspapers from weeks back were scattered on the chairs, tables and floor. Directly over the fireplace hung a reproduction of Rosa Bonheur's Horse Fair. But the most prominent object in the room was a huge glass aquarium standing on a table behind the couch. It was filled with growing green stuff, moss, stones, and a labyrinth of catacombs in and out of which swam a horde of goldfish. There were so many fish that collision seemed inevitable.

"Like it?" Mr. Julius' voice broke in sharply on their inspection.

Larry swallowed hard. "It—it's very homey," he said.

"It's charming!" Lucia managed to say.

"No frills," said Mr. Julius. "I always say no frills, no affectations where a man lives. Have the things you like. Always enjoyed sitting on that sofa at the Union Club. Finally persuaded 'em to sell it." He chuckled. "Then I gave up my membership. Joke on 'em. Sit down, you'll like it!"

They sat down, side by side. The couch was undeniably comfortable.

"I can offer you some port," said Mr. Julius. "Never keep hard liquor. Bad for the kidneys."

"We're only stopping for a minute," Larry started to protest.

"Naturally," snapped Mr. Julius. "It's my bedtime." He disappeared.

Larry and Lucia exchanged glances. "This is incredible," said Larry.

"But Larry, he's lovely. You mean he actually found Bones?"

"He actually did," said Larry. "I'm here to find out just how."

Mr. Julius returned with the bottle of port and three glasses. He poured the drinks cautiously, evidently judging by some invisible measuring mark on the glasses. One taste of the wine and Larry knew that this was an experience. It was superlative. He said so.

"Believe in having nothing but the best," said Mr. Julius. "But they rob you nowadays." He cleared his throat. "Well, I suppose you want details?"

"I'm going to give you some first," Larry said. "Luckman's dead—murdered. Killed with the same gun that was used to murder Adrian."

"Humph!" said Mr. Julius.

"They found him in the Park near the reservoir. Later they found the gun in Luckman's own bureau drawer."

"They *what?*" shouted Mr. Julius. Lucia jumped.

"They found the gun in his apartment, in the top bureau drawer."

"And he was out in the Park?"

"That's right," said Larry.

"It makes everything very complicated," said Lucia.

"That, my dear young woman, is a decided understatement," said Mr. Julius.

HE STOOD for a moment, frowning at the gas log. Absently he picked up a thin, wafery biscuit from the table and crumpled it into the aquarium. There was frantic excitement in the fish world.

"My story is simple enough," he said. "Visited a dozen people—Stevens, Gregory, that clerk of Adrian's among 'em. Finally got to Luckman's house. Don't mind saying, the more I thought of it the better I liked Luckman as a suspect. He's the type, Storm. Shrewd, cool, and he'd bear a grudge behind that smile of his. Well, when I got there he wasn't in.

"Finally roused the landlady," Mr. Julius chuckled. "Put on an act. Said I had an appointment with Luckman. Said it was an outrage for an old man to be kept waiting. Combination of bullying and bribing finally got me into Luckman's rooms to wait for him. The boy was there. That's all there is."

"What time was that?" Larry asked.

"About five," said Mr. Julius. "I'd decided that would be my last visit of the day. Beginning to get hungry. Well, I saw the boy was drugged . . . got a doctor. Then phoned you. Naturally, I talked to the woman again. Scared the liver out of her! Oh, she talked. Said she hadn't seen Luckman all day, but she'd heard him moving around in his rooms about four."

"When?" Larry asked, quickly.

"About four. Why?"

Larry put down his glass and reached for a cigarette. "That's interesting because they found Luckman in the Park about four, and he'd been dead for some time."

"Hmmm," said Mr. Julius, scowling. He was staring at the sickly blue flame. "Murderer has plenty of nerve, by heaven! Must have brought the boy and the gun to Luckman's apartment. Must have known his ground, known he wasn't likely to encounter anyone in the house. Landlady lives in the basement."

"But why?"

"Got a soft streak," said Mr. Julius, matter-of-factly. "That's proved by the fact he didn't kill Bones. Wanted him found somewhere, selected Luckman because he'd killed Luckman. No one to explain. Gun thrown in to make it confusing."

Mr. Julius wagged his head sagely. "Better to find the gun than to have the police searching everywhere for it. Police have everything now. Two bodies—the gun that killed 'em. Bones is back. Nothing to search for. No one pawing over belongings. Oh, the police have the facts—but no wits to use on 'em."

"They're pawing over my belongings right now," said Lucia.

"Fools!" said Mr. Julius. He crumpled another wafer into the aquarium.

Larry's tone was exasperated. "I suppose you can put all the facts together and supply the answer?"

Mr. Julius' eyes twinkled. "Not quite. But I can use my brain, instead of holding my head and moaning. Said it before, Storm, and I say it again. This is a stamp murder. What's been done about stamps? Nothing. All they've done is badger Miss Warren here and your friend Nicholas."

"Well, the facts have been a little misleading to Bradley," said Larry. "Lucia's prints *were* in the office. Lon *was* running around with a gun screaming for Adrian's blood."

"Man Bradley's a fool," snorted Mr. Julius. "What was taken from Adrian's office?"

"Nothing," Larry said.

"How d'you know?"

"Louderbach says so."

"Rubbish!" said Mr. Julius. "Moral certainty Adrian robbed Miss Warren here. A hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth, you said. Where are they? Substantial haul, isn't it? Would Louderbach know about 'em? Of course not. Adrian wouldn't let his clerk know he had a fortune in stolen stamps. Why don't you go over Adrian's stuff, Storm . . . hunt for 'em? If they're gone—well, the murderer must have taken 'em. They'll come on the market sooner or later. Then you've got him!"

"It's an idea," said Larry.

LUCIA leaned forward. "But, Mr. Julius, isn't it very unlikely that Adrian would have kept the stamps he stole from me at the office, where Louderbach might come across them?"

"Had to keep 'em somewhere," said Mr. Julius. "Office—home—safety deposit box. Bradley can get you access to all of 'em."

"It would be one hell of a job," said Larry. "He probably has a quarter of a million stamps in stock."

"What do you want?" Mr. Julius demanded. "Think the murderer's going to confess? You've got to do some work!"

"But I'm sure Larry would never locate them," Lucia said. "And the time and energy . . ."

"If he finds 'em, you can put in a claim," Mr. Julius said. "Unless there's no justice left in the world, you'd get 'em back. Pay Storm a fee, by all means."

"I couldn't ask him to spend the time."

"I'd like to get the guy who manhandled Bones," said Larry. "It's worth a try. I think Bradley'll see that."

"If he can see anything," said Mr. Julius.

Larry smiled. "How do you figure Luckman in this?" he asked Mr. Julius.

Mr. Julius made an impatient gesture. "Great Scott, Storm, don't you ever think? Obviously Luckman stumbled on the truth about Adrian's murder, or the boy's disappearance, or both. Tried blackmail. The murderer played along with him, arranged to meet him in the Park for the payoff, and shot him. Then took the boy and the gun to Luckman's room. Result—everyone has a headache."

"It must have taken amazing nerve to kill Luckman in broad daylight in the Park," Lucia said.

"Not much danger," said Mr. Julius. "Damned cold today. No one walking for pleasure. Pick a spot behind a few convenient evergreens. The shot! Cars backfiring all the time. No one would pay any attention. Murderer is a cool one—but he's a sentimentalist too, Storm. Returning the boy involved great risk; had to have a watertight story to tell if he were caught. I'd have killed the boy myself."

"Mr. Julius!" Lucia exclaimed.

"He wouldn't step on an ant," Larry laughed. "But Luckman ran risks too, Mr. Julius, quite a lot of risk for a little money."

"Who said anything about money?" snapped Mr. Julius. "Keep telling you this is a stamp murder. Concentrate on stamps, Storm. Might be revealing. Might solve the whole case." He stood up abruptly. "Work to do before I go to bed. Goodnight. Use your head." He turned to Lucia. "Got a hunch things will come out all right for you. Think you'll get your father's stamps back if you can make Storm do any work."

Larry and Lucia got up from the couch.

"We're very grateful to you, Mr. Julius," Lucia said. "The port was delicious."

"Naturally," said Mr. Julius.

"I wish I could believe there was anything to gain by examining Adrian's stock," Lucia added.

"Nothing to lose at any rate," said Mr. Julius. Then, unexpectedly, he put one of his gnarled hands on Larry's shoulder. "Don't forget," he said, "there's more than one gun in the world."

Larry looked at him, puzzled.

"Your killer doesn't wait to let information get into circulation," said Mr. Julius. "Didn't give Luckman any time at all. If you find out something important, be ready to act."

BRADLEY'S men had done an extraordinary neat job at Lucia's apartment. Larry couldn't see that anything had been disturbed, although Lucia pointed to several things that were not quite in their proper places. But there was no confusion.

"Very considerate, our Bradley," Larry said.

Lucia had already removed her hat and coat. She knelt before the fire to light it. "You sit down, Larry. I'll make you a drink and send down for something to eat. What would you like?"

"Scotch," said Larry grinning.

"I mean food, silly."

"Scotch," Larry repeated. He sat down on the chintz-covered sofa.

"Put your feet up, relax," Lucia ordered. She disappeared into the kitchenette. Larry could hear her struggling with ice cubes, and presently she came back with a couple of highballs.

"This is solid comfort," Larry said. Then he added: "You should have brought the bottle. I'm going to be serious about this for a while."

"I'll bring it in a minute," Lucia told him as she disappeared once more.

Larry lit a cigarette, leaned his head back against a soft cushion, and sipped his highball. He had nearly drained the glass and was on his second cigarette when Lucia returned, carrying the bottle and a silver bowl of ice cubes on a tray. She had changed into a flame-colored taffeta housecoat.

"My mother used to have an evening gown that sounded like that," Larry said. "I can remember her coming in to kiss me goodnight before she went out to do the town."

Lucia sat down on the sofa, quite close to Larry. A faint scent of jasmine floated in his direction. "Tell me about your family," she said.

"They're nice people," said Larry. "That's why they never see me."

"How did anybody like you ever happen to go into such an odd business as selling stamps?" Lucia asked

"My family were nice, but poor," said Larry. "I had to go to work when I was sixteen. I did everything from selling magazines subscriptions to unloading freight on the docks. There came a time when there wasn't any work and I needed money badly."

"Like me now," said Lucia.

Larry tossed away his cigarette. "I'd been mildly bitten by the stamp bug when I was a kid. Between us, my father and I had spent about two hundred and fifty dollars over a period of ten years. I decided to sell the collection. I got exactly seven dollars and eighty-three cents for it. Came the dawn! I figured that any business where you could sell goods at such a high price and buy them back at such a low one was worth looking into."

"Then selling stamps is a racket?" said Lucia.

"It can be made into a first-rate one," said Larry. "Everybody who collects stamps is mildly insane. Any kind of collecting is a mania. Reputable brokers have tried to stabilize the business by putting out catalogues which give the buyer an idea of fair prices. But stamp collecting is a luxury. You buy at top figures, and if you're forced to sell, you take anything you can get—which is usually a rooking."

LUCIA didn't answer at once and they sat looking into the fire. Then Lucia spoke abruptly. "I wish you wouldn't waste time going over Adrian's stock." She reached out and covered his hand with hers. "I can't see that it will do any good. I've accepted the fact that I can't salvage anything now that Adrian is dead. I'd feel terribly guilty if you were to put in all that time on my account."

"But I won't be doing it all on your account, darling," Larry said. "I'm trying to track down a murderer."

"I know," Lucia said. Her shoulders moved in a convulsive shiver. "I—I wish you'd give it up. It's Bradley's job, Larry. Bradley may bluster and threaten, but he isn't going to arrest me. So there's no reason for you to run risks."

"Lon's not out of the woods," Larry told her. "And I have a little account to settle for Bones."

"But Larry, the murderer didn't hurt Bones. And Lon hasn't been arrested; there's no real evidence against him."

Larry shrugged. "Maybe it's just the soldier of fortune in me," he said.

Lucia's hand tightened on his. "Larry, please be serious. Mr. Julius was right. It's dangerous. If you should stumble across something to incriminate the murderer he might—might not give you a chance to use it. Let the police run those risks. Larry. That's their job."

Larry smiled. "And if anything happened to me, would you grieve, darling?"

Lucia looked down at her left hand which was clenched in her lap. "I couldn't bear it," she said.

Larry sat up. His shoulder touched hers. "Hey!" he said.

Lucia just sat, looking down at her hand.

"Darling," Larry said lightly, "I'm afraid you're going to be kissed. It has been lo, these many years since a woman's heart beat with concern for me."

There was nothing trivial about the kiss. Lucia's arm went around his neck and held his lips against hers for a long moment. Then the telephone rang. Lucia pulled quickly away from him.

"Your nerves are jumpy," Larry said. "It's probably just the milkman inquiring whether to leave one quart or two."

It wasn't the milkman. It was Ellen. Her voice sounded very cool and distant when Larry took the phone from Lucia.

"I'm sorry to keep breaking in on your club meetings," she said, "but Bradley's here. I think it would be a very good idea if you came home. He seems to want to talk to you."

"Right away," Larry said. He put down the phone and turned to Lucia. "Apparently Bradley never sleeps. It should comfort the taxpayers." He sighed. "I guess I'll have to go." He walked over to the chair near the hall door, picked up his coat, and slipped into it.

Lucia came over to him. She reached up and put her hands on his shoulders. "Larry, please promise me you'll drop this. Promise me you'll tell Bradley everything you know, and then step out."

Larry grinned at her. "Darling, nothing can happen to me now," he said, laughing. "At last I have something to live for."

"Larry, please; can't you be serious?" Her voice was unsteady. "Leave Adrian's stamps alone. Forget the case. I'm frightened—frightened for you."

Larry reached forward and touched her cheek with cool fingers. "Look," he said, seriously, "I can take care of myself."

CHAPTER XX

TESTIMONY BY BONES

BRADLEY sat on the edge of Bones' bed in Larry's guest room. Ellen stood at the foot of the bed, looking down at the white-faced boy who was trying hard to smile. He was still groggy from the drug.

"Gee, Ellen, I let Larry down," he kept saying. "I didn't mean to—honest, I didn't mean to!"

"You did fine," Bradley said gently. "And when you get over feeling so rotten maybe you can tell us just what happened."

"Inspector Bradley's working with Larry on the case, Bones," Ellen said gravely.

"Mercy, yes," Bradley drawled, "I'm working with Larry on the case. And we're anxious to know just what happened, Bones."

Bones twisted his head back and forth on the pillow. "That's the trouble," he said miserably. "I don't know what happened." He reached his hand up to the back of his head and winced. "Except somebody hit me."

"I didn't discover that he'd been hit till he woke up and complained about it," Ellen told the inspector. "He's got a bump on his head the size of an egg. But I don't think it's serious."

Bradley nodded. "And where were you when you were hit, Bones?"

Bones gave Ellen a questioning look. She nodded reassuringly. "You can tell Inspector Bradley everything," she said. "He already knows what you were doing, Bones."

Bones looked up into the inspector's friendly face. "After Lon got away, Ellen sent me down to Adrian's office to see if he'd show up there. I was waitin' in a little cafe just across from Mr. Adrian's. I didn't see Lon—but I saw some other people."

Bradley's eyes contracted slightly. "Well, that's fine," he said. "Who were they?"

"Well, sir, there were quite a few people goin' in and out of the building all the time. Naturally I didn't know them all, Mr. Bradley. But about a quarter of seven I did see Mr. Gregory go in." He glanced at Ellen. "Mr. Hale's secretary, you know. He stayed quite a while. I figured he must be in Mr. Adrian's office, on account of there aren't any other stamp dealers in the building."

"He was there," said Bradley. "We know that."

Bones shifted on his pillow, and looked at Ellen again. Evidently he was reluctant to go on.

"Did you see Miss Warren go in, Bones?" she asked quietly.

Bones sighed. "Yeah, I did, Ellen. I didn't know if I ought to tell that. I

thought maybe Larry would be sore if I got her mixed up in this."

"When did you see her go in?" Bradley asked.

"Well, sir, I guess it must of been nearly half-past seven when Mr. Gregory came out and went into the corner drug-store. It was right then that Miss Warren showed up and went into the building."

"I see."

Bones touched the back of his head gingerly. "I—I begun to get the jitters when she came out, Inspector. She acted kind of crazy. She almost ran up the street and then I saw her go into a cigar store. Mr. Gregory had acted funny too. He walked like he was dizzy or tight, and he kept puttin' his hand up to the back of his head. I guess I must of been nuts to think it, Mr. Bradley, but I began wonderin' if maybe Lon had got up there without my seein' him. The way Mr. Gregory and Miss Warren acted, I thought maybe he was up there, and there was some trouble. So I decided to go and see for myself."

"You had plenty of nerve," said Bradley.

"Well, sir, I knew how Larry felt about Lon. I knew he wanted to do everythin' he could to keep Lon out of trouble. And it was m-my fault he was loose."

"Well, did you go up to Adrian's office, Bones?" Bradley's voice was mild.

Bones shook his head. "I never got there, Mr. Bradley. I started up the stairs. I guess I was kind of scared. I remember I was whistlin', kind of to keep my nerve up."

"I do the same thing sometimes," said Bradley. "Now, for instance," he added dryly.

"Well, that's the last I remember," said Bones. "Something hit me over the head —and then I woke up here."

Bradley was silent for a long time. "You didn't recognize anyone but Gregory and Miss Warren who went into the building?"

"There was no one else I knew, sir."

"Do you think, if you saw any of those other people again, that you'd recognize them?"

"Gee, Mr. Bradley, I don't know. I wasn't payin' any particular attention. I was just lookin' for Lon. I recognized Miss Warren and Mr. Gregory; but I don't know if I paid any attention to anyone else, enough to recognize them."

"Do you know Mr. Ezra Luckman by sight?"

"I don't, Mr. Bradley. Who is he?"

"The tense of your verb is incorrect," said Bradley. He stood up. "Look, son, you get some sleep now. In the morning you'll be fit as a fiddle. Maybe I'll invite you down to headquarters then to look at some pictures—just in case you might recognize someone else you saw last night."

"I'd be glad to come, Mr. Bradley," Bones said. He looked at Ellen. "I'll go to sleep, Ellen, if you'll wake me up when Larry comes. I want to explain to him how I happened to let him down by lettin' Lon go. I . . ."

"You can talk to Larry in the morning," Ellen said. "He understands all about it, Bones."

"And he's not sore?"

"No, you little dope, he's not sore," said Ellen affectionately. She stooped over him, smoothed out his tangled red hair, tucked the blanket under the edge of the mattress, and switched off the light.

"Goodnight, Bones."

" 'Night, Ellen."

ELLEN joined the inspector who had retreated to the living room. Bradley stood with his back to the fire, stuffing the bowl of his pipe with tobacco from the red tin.

"That kid's pretty crazy about Storm," he said.

"Bones would do anything in the world for Larry," agreed Ellen.

"You, too," murmured the inspector.

Ellen looked down at the table beside Larry's chair, and meticulously straightened an ashtray. "I like working for Larry," she said. "Never a dull moment."

"Does he know you're in love with him?" Bradley asked casually. "Or hasn't he time for anything as trivial as that?" he added.

"Aren't you doing some pretty fancy guessing, Inspector?"

"No," said Bradley. He lit his pipe and stood there, rocking back and forth on his heels.

"It amuses Larry to be seen around with attractive women," Ellen said. "He's not serious about them."

"You whistling too, now?" Bradley asked.

Ellen looked at him and grinned. "Don't tell me you're getting ready to give me fatherly advice, Inspector? My job is being Larry's secretary and I make myself as indispensable as possible to him in his business."

"But you wish his business didn't involve the Warren girl," Bradley said.

"Larry isn't ready to settle down yet," said Ellen. "When he is, and there's any competition from the Warren girl or anyone else, little Ellen may start throwing her weight around."

"I'd like to be on hand when it happens." Bradley chuckled.

"I'll let you know to what hospital and to whom to send flowers," said Ellen.

At that moment they heard the sound of a key in the front door lock. And then Larry came into the room looking very pleased with himself. "Well, Inspector, still at it, I see." He glanced at Ellen. "How's Bones?"

Ellen's voice was crisp. "He's asleep. I told him you'd see him in the morning."

"Fine. How about a little scotch, Bradley? Would you mind getting some ice, Ellen?"

"I would," said Ellen. "I'm tired. I'm going to sleep on the couch in Bones' room in case he needs me. You look pretty bright and gay. Try doing something for yourself." She walked out of the room and left the two men alone.

"Now what is that all about?" Larry asked.

Bradley smiled. "I think," he said, "she's throwing her weight around."

"What for?"

Bradley, still rocking back and forth on his heels, reached slowly into his hip pocket and took out a clean white handkerchief. "Better wipe off the lipstick."

LARRY took out his own handkerchief and rubbed at his lips. He looked at the bright stain on the linen. "Damn," he said. Then he walked over to the sideboard and began mixing a couple of highballs. "We'll do without ice," he said.

"You," said Bradley calmly, "are a sucker."

"How so?"

"Maybe when this case is over I'll give you a demonstration," said the inspector.

"I'm not up to riddles tonight," Larry said. He came back from the sideboard with the two glasses. "What's new?"

"First of all," Bradley said, "I've placed Lon Nicholas under arrest for the murder of Max Adrian."

"Bradley, I had a higher opinion of you than that," Larry said sharply. "Why any half-wit—"

Bradley interrupted. "I didn't say I thought he was guilty. As a matter of fact, I don't. I checked his alibi for today pretty carefully. I'm sure he never left your apartment. Therefore, he couldn't have killed Luckman. And Luckman and Adrian were killed by the same person. Ballistics men have checked the gun. There's no possible doubt of it."

"But why—"

"We've got a killer running around loose who seems quite prepared to strike again if we get warm," said Bradley. "If I arrest someone, he may think we're satisfied . . . giving up. As you said, your friend Nicholas is a perfect fall guy. He has a motive. He'd made one try at it. He had a gun which is gone and which we can say is the one we found in Luckman's rooms. He can't remember. It's perfect. It will satisfy the press. We'll hold Nicholas for a few days, and meanwhile the murderer may think he's out of danger."

"I see. But it's pretty tough on Lon."

"He needs a little time to think things over," said Bradley. "He acted like a lunatic and he deserves a little trouble."

"Now what?" Larry asked.

"I wish I knew," said Bradley unhappily. "This case is lousy with clues, Storm—none of 'em any good. We have a gun, *the* gun! We have a bottle with which someone was slugged, with no fingerprints on it! We have the safe in Adrian's office, opened by the murderer—no fingerprints! We've got lots of nice little clues to help incriminate Nicholas and your girl friend, but I don't want either of them. Too easy. We've got motives galore. Almost everyone who ever dealt with Adrian has a motive. It's lovely. I've always wanted a case with plenty of clues. Well, this is it, and it gives me a pain!"

Larry sat down. "I saw old Julius after I left you." He told Bradley about his visit. "He keeps stressing the point that this is a 'stamp murder.' There is something in that, Bradley. He seems to think that if an expert went over Adrian's stock it would bring results. For example, if we found stolen goods, it might point to someone we haven't considered at all. Or, if we find stuff missing, it might help clinch the case against someone who now has the missing items in his possession. It would be quite a job, but it might be worth while."

Bradley smiled. "It's a good idea. As a matter of fact, the reason I came here tonight was to ask you if you'd act as expert for the police department. You'd be paid well, of course."

Larry frowned. "I've been thinking about it," he said. "There are some angles I don't like. For instance, if I should unearth something that would add to the case against Lon . . ."

"You can forget about him," Bradley sighed. "He didn't kill Luckman. He's in the clear, except for publicity purposes at the moment." He looked at Larry. "Do you expect to find something of that sort?"

"I already have," said Larry. "That stamp I showed you last night—the British Guiana Number 16 with those letters penciled on the back? Remember, I explained those letters represented a dealer's code?"

Bradley nodded.

"Well, it just happens that was one of the stamps stolen from Lon. Those letters, OLHH were part of Lon's code—the word 'hieroglyph'. We'll probably find more of Lon's stock there. Although they're not all marked with his code. The one in the Fargoe collection wasn't. But since he's in the clear . . ." Larry shrugged.

"How about the Warren dame's stamps?"

"We can put in a claim for them, if we find them," said Larry. "Frankly, I'd like the job."

"Then it's yours," said Bradley. "You can go over Adrian's stuff and Luckman's, too, if you think it'll do any good. Incidentally, will you mind if I give it out to the press? I mean, tell them you've been engaged to expert for the police department? We have to have *some* news for them!"

"Why should I object?" Larry grinned. "Publicity is publicity. But be sure to spell my name correctly and give the right address—64½ Nassau Street!"

CHAPTER XXI

HEY, RUBE!

LARRY, Ellen, and a somewhat wobbly Bones arrived at the Nassau Street office the next morning a few minutes past nine. In the dark corridor outside the office they found someone already waiting for them. It was Mr. Paul Gregory. He still wore a patch of adhesive tape on the back of his head, and he was holding his hat in his hands, twisting it round and round by the brim.

"I have to see you, Mr. Storm, at once!" he said.

Larry unlocked the office door and let the others in. In the light he saw that Gregory's face was gray and that his

eyes were red-rimmed from lack of sleep.

"I haven't got very much time, Gregory," Larry said, "but I'll see you. Come inside." At the door of his own office he turned to Ellen. "There's a violet-ray lamp at Adrian's; we won't need to take ours. Just my glass, tongs, and the books."

"You want the Gibbons catalogue as well as Scott's?" Ellen asked.

"I think not. But you'd better bring Sanabria's Air Post Catalogue."

He joined Gregory in the inner office.

"I'm afraid I haven't anything to report on the Green Bear," Larry told him. "This murder case has rather upset things. I did make a good many inquiries, but I haven't had any luck to date."

"I was afraid of that," Gregory said. "I—I don't know what I'll do if I haven't got it by tomorrow. Mr. Hale is a hard man. He'll probably have me jailed. But I want to thank you for not saying anything about it in front of him the other night."

Larry eyed him curiously. "I'm damned if I know why I kept still," he said. "Perhaps it was because I thought sooner or later you might come to me with the truth."

Gregory groaned. "You're going to find it out for yourself," he said, "if this is so." He took a folded newspaper from his pocket and handed it to Larry.

"Well!" said Larry. "I haven't had a chance to see this yet."

His eye ran down the left-hand column of the front page.

NICHOLAS ARRESTED IN STAMP MURDER; HAD THREATENED FIRST VICTIM; NO ALIBI

Stamp Expert to Examine Victim's Collections

Following the arrest last night of Lon Nicholas for the murder of Max Adrian, Nassau Street stamp broker, the police announced that they had engaged Mr. Lawrence Storm, of 64½ Nassau Street, to make an expert examination of the collections of Adrian and Ezra Luckman, the two stamp enthusiasts who were murdered within less than twenty-four hours of each other with the same weapon. It is believed that conclusive evidence against the killer may be obtained by an examination of the victims' stamps. . . .

It went on with a rehash of the details of the two murders and of Lon's arrest which had been in the evening editions. Larry handed the paper back to Gregory.

"It's true enough," he said. "I'm about to start for Adrian's now."

GREGORY looked at Larry with frightened eyes. "Then, there's nothing for it but to tell you exactly what my situation is, Mr. Storm."

"It might save everybody a lot of trouble."

Gregory nodded. "I had hoped it would never be necessary. I—you see, I have my mother and my sister's family dependent on me. I need this job with Mr. Hale. I—oh, I might as well come out with it, Storm. I have been robbing Mr. Hale."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Larry. "And getting away with it?"

"It's not as bad as it sounds," said Gregory miserably. "I mean, my motives were not—not . . . It's an old story, Mr. Storm. The market. I needed money, bought stocks on margin, and . . ."

"Blooey!" suggested Larry.

"I lost," admitted Gregory. "That is, my stocks went down. I needed margin if I wasn't to be wiped out."

"So you stole a stamp."

"Yes, I took an item I thought Mr. Hale wouldn't miss for a while. He was in Europe at the time. I thought I could replace it before he got back. I took it to Adrian to sell, knowing he wasn't particular about the source of his purchases. That's where I made my most terrible mistake."

"Blackmail?" said Larry.

"Oh, God, it's been awful, Mr. Storm! Adrian would insist on my getting him a certain stamp. Most of the time he'd give me one of inferior quality with which to replace it. Unless Mr. Hale examined things closely he wouldn't notice. But

finally Adrian didn't bother with replacements. He began asking for stamps I knew Mr. Hale would miss. The Green Bear was the last one!"

"I see."

"Then fate played me an ironic trick, Mr. Storm. My investments prospered. I made a lot of money. I saw that if I could replace the stamps I'd stolen I'd get out of the hole I was in. But Adrian wouldn't sell them back. He wanted to keep me in a spot. I was useful to him that way. I did manage to get some replacements elsewhere. But my back's to the wall now, Mr. Storm. I knew you'd find some of those stamps, that they'd be listed in your report, and Mr. Hale would find out."

Larry shrugged. "I'm sorry for you, Gregory, but you deserve what's coming to you. I don't see what I can do about it."

Gregory lifted his shaking hands and finally managed to extract an envelope from an inner pocket. "Mr. Storm," he said, in a voice that was almost a whisper, "I have here the inferior duplicates of about a dozen of Mr. Hale's stamps. Would it be worth ten thousand dollars to you to replace these stolen stamps with these and—"

Larry stood up so quickly that his chair fell over backward with a crash. "Get out!" he ordered.

Gregory's eyes blinked. "But, Storm, it doesn't mean anything to you. You'll only be helping to return property to Mr. Hale which is rightfully his. I—"

"Get out!" Larry repeated.

"Why should you want to ruin me?" Gregory cried. "I've never done anything to hurt you. I only want you to—"

Larry took a step toward Gregory. "You asked for this!" he said. He gripped Gregory by the shoulders, spun him around, and sent him stumbling out into the office beyond. He came up hard against Ellen's desk. There he turned and pointed a shaking finger at Larry.

"I won't forget this, Storm," he said.

Larry started for him again, but Mr. Gregory wasn't having any more. He scuttled hastily across the office and out the door.

Ellen, who had been collecting books from the safe, watched Mr. Gregory's hurried exit, and then turned to Larry. "What big muscles you have, Grandmother," she said.

WHEN Larry and Ellen, armed with books and equipment, arrived at Adrian's office about three quarters of an hour later they found Bradley waiting for them. The inspector was sitting in the swivel chair in Adrian's private office. Rube Snyder, his bull-necked assistant, was standing by one of the windows. Bradley gave them a genial wave of greeting.

"How did you like your press notices?" he asked. "Spell your name right and everything?"

"They were fine," said Larry. "I could have made ten thousand bucks this morning as a result of them." Briefly, he told Bradley about Gregory's visit. While he was talking Louderbach, glaring suspiciously at Larry from behind his thick-lensed spectacles, came into the room. He listened to Larry, and then interrupted before Bradley could comment.

"I still contend it's madness to permit a stamp broker to examine this stock unwatched!" he said. "I think I have a legal right to safeguard my late employer's interests by being present."

"Your faith in me is touching," Larry drawled.

"But he *is* going to be watched," said Bradley mildly. "I'm leaving my assistant here with Mr. Storm."

Louderbach shook his head. "As if that would suffice! Do you think your man will be astute enough to detect any manipulation that might occur? I tell you, Inspector, I—"

"Go away, little man," murmured Bradley.

"You needn't think I shan't protest about this procedure," Louderbach said. "You're endangering property that is part of a valuable estate by turning it over to

this man Storm. Storm just wants a chance like this to plant evidence against Mr. Adrian. He wants to prove that Mr. Adrian robbed Miss Warren and you're giving him the opportunity to falsify evidence. You have no right to—"

The inspector turned wearily to Snyder. "Rube!" he said.

Rube hunched his shoulders and took a step toward Louderbach. "Scram!" he said. It sounded like the roar of an angry bull. Mr. Louderbach scurried from the room.

"You see!" Bradley smiled. "Rube is invaluable, particularly for frightening babies in perambulators."

"By the way, why are you leaving Rube here?" Larry asked.

"Not taking any chances," said the inspector. "I don't want you disturbed. It's just possible someone may not like this idea."

"You expect someone to break in here in broad daylight and take a pot shot at me?" Larry laughed.

"Luckman was killed in broad daylight," said Bradley. He got up from the chair. "I've had Louderbach open the safes, the desk drawers, the closets—every place anything could be kept in here. All the stock books and loose stamps have been piled on the desk near the door of the Inspection Room.

"Incidentally, we've also been through Adrian's apartment and I've had his safety deposit box opened. There were no stamps in either place. Everything's here. Adrian had a lot of ready cash salted away. Looks as though he was set to leave town in a hurry if the going got tough."

"Trust Adrian to leave no loop holes. This may take several days, unless we're lucky," Larry told him.

"I've got plenty of time," said Bradley. "If you want anything, let me know."

IT WAS a monumental task that faced Larry and Ellen. Larry settled himself in the big overstuffed chair in the Inspection Room. Ellen had drawn up a table and chair close by. The work was tedious and detailed. Larry began taking each stamp out of the first stock book, examining it, commenting on its condition and probable worth. Ellen wrote down his comments and checked with the lists which Louderbach had supplied.

Time passed rapidly. It was well after one o'clock when Rube came in from his post in the outer office.

"Ain't you goin' to knock off for lunch?" he asked wistfully.

Larry glanced up at him. "You toddle off and feed your face, Rube. When you come back, you can bring us some sandwiches and coffee."

"I can't leave you. Orders," Rube said.

"Go and eat," said Larry. "You can lock the outer door. Nobody can break in. Only if there's a fire, don't forget to come back and let us out!"

Rube looked doubtful. "You think it'll be all right?"

"I know it will," said Larry. "Now run along."

They heard him plodding across the waiting room and later the sound of the key turning in the front-door lock. Larry went back to work. He took stamp after stamp from its slot, held it up to the light, turned it over in his fingers. He talked in a voice that was beginning to grow hoarse, giving Ellen the details. Sometimes he made a casual remark about an item.

"Look at this one," he said, holding up a pale orange stamp. "The corner was torn off but they got it back on with some kind of sizing so that it looks in perfect condition. It's a honey of a job. Done by an artist—in Europe probably, and quite legitimately."

Rube came back in about an hour. He had sandwiches and cartons of coffee. Larry and Ellen stopped long enough to eat and smoke a cigarette.

"It's funny," Ellen remarked, "that we haven't found any of the Warren items. Unless Adrian has them hidden somewhere that Inspector Bradley didn't check, we should have. We've been through a lot of U.S. stuff."

"He may have put them with some of the cheap junk, where no one would be expected to look," said Larry.

They went back to work, hour after hour. It grew dark and the lights were switched on. Once Larry came across another of Lon's stamps with the code penciled on the back. This was placed to one side. Once he found an item he was almost certain must have come from Jasper Hale's collection. Finally he encountered the famous Green Bear itself. He grinned mirthlessly.

"What our friend Mr. Gregory wouldn't give for this!"

It was about seven o'clock when Rube reappeared. "Ain't you ever goin' to eat?"

"Not for a while," Larry told him. "Go get your supper, and bring us something in again. Bring a bottle of scotch with you."

"No liquor," said Ellen. "Not while you're working. Your fingers will get clumsy."

"For God sake, Ellen, I know what I want! Here's some dough, Rube. Bring some scotch."

"No liquor!" said Ellen placidly.

"Ellen, please stop managing! I . . ." He gave up.

"Rare hamburgers this time, Rube, and plenty of hot, black coffee," said Ellen. "You can get plastered when you've finished, Larry—if you ever finish."

He glared savagely.

"In two or three hours we'll be through these inventoried ones," said Larry. "Then tomorrow we can tackle the loose stock." He sighed. "If *is* strange we haven't found any of Lucia's stuff. Thing's a bust so far."

Rube went away, and they heard his key turn in the lock. Larry bent over the books. There were lines of fatigue around his eyes, but he seemed to work with unabated energy.

After a while they heard the key in the lock once more. Larry glanced at his cigarette case which stood open on the table beside him. It was empty.

"Hey, Rube!" he called out. "There are some cigarettes in my overcoat pocket. Bring 'em in, will you?"

Rube didn't answer, but there was the sound of creaking shoe leather as footsteps slowly crossed the waiting room. Larry, examining a stamp through his magnifying glass, suddenly looked up.

"Rube!" he said sharply.

Rube didn't answer. Abruptly the lights in the waiting room went out.

Larry sprang out of his chair. Ellen stared at him, open-mouthed. She had never seen him move so fast. Two strides took him to the door of the Inspection Room where he flicked off the light switch, plunging them into darkness. Then, quickly, he was at Ellen's side. His fingers bit into her shoulder and he pulled her roughly off the chair in which she was still sitting.

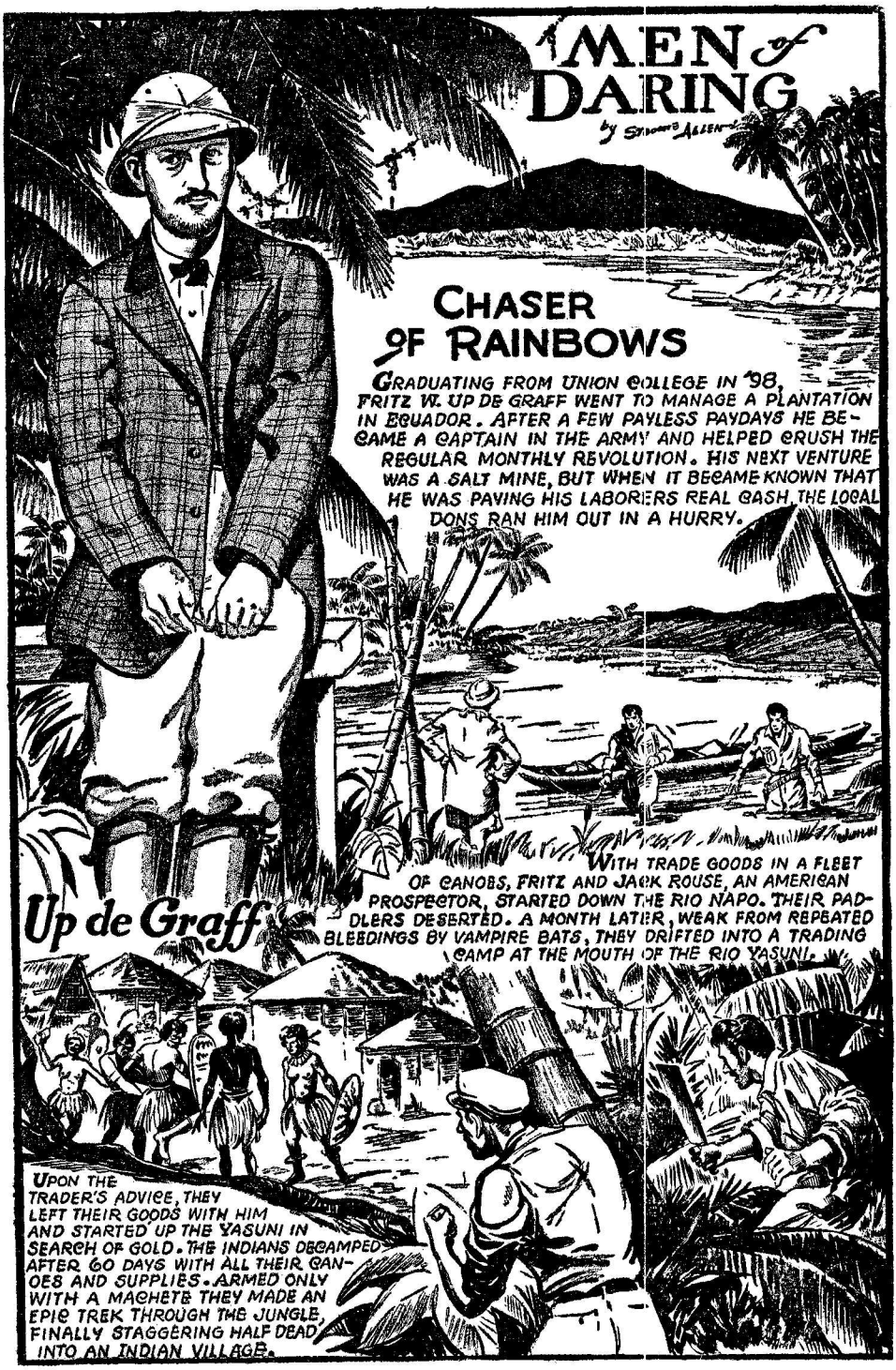
"Larry!"

"Get down behind that desk, and stay down!" he whispered.

"But, Larry, what on earth . . ."

"You little idiot! That's not Rube in there!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



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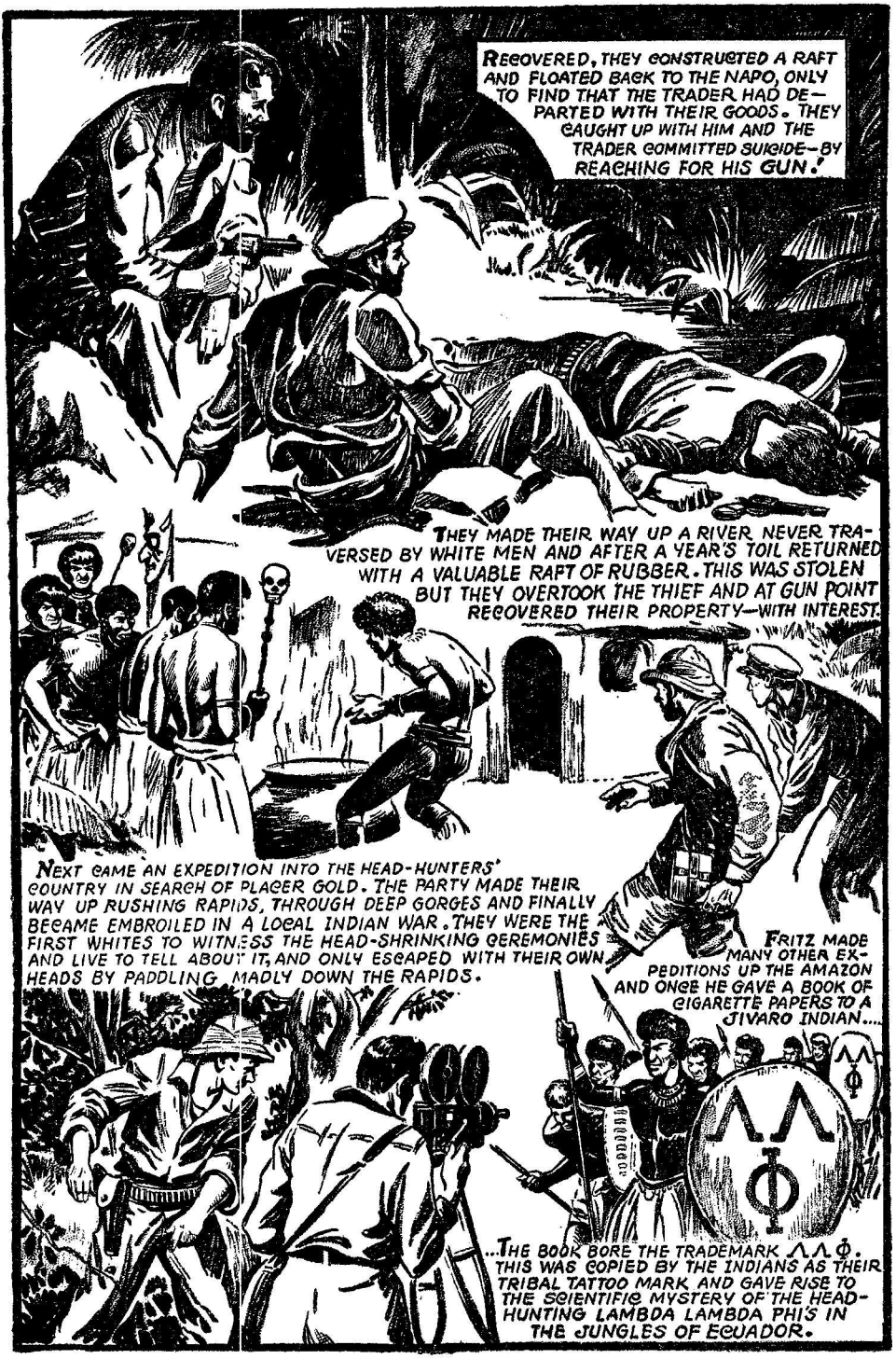


Coming soon: Hannes Schneider—Ski Wizard

"Come on, you yellow heathen," Itching Foot said. "We got to move him quick"

Itching Foot's Itching Palm

By HOWARD R. MARSH

Author of "The Davis House—Very Red," "Off the Record," etc.

The rotund proprietor of the Davis House takes his feet out of a pail of water long enough to turn a shooting into a highly moral Bonanza

ITCHING FOOT DAVIS blinked at the old thermometer hanging on the porch post and saw that the red tongue of it registered 120 degrees. He grunted his disgust. It was too hot to rock his chair, too hot to move, almost too hot to think. And he must think, think fast and think hard, even if the heat from the desert smote him like the breath of a fire dragon.

He stared out over the vast waste of the Mojave Desert which undulated in gray-green waves of encelia and greasewood to the High Sierras. His blue eyes, deep-set in the squint-furrows of an old desert man, idly watched a flock of turkey buzzards swoop and soar a mile to the south. Normally he would have been concerned with those black V's of the carrion birds swinging against the pale blue sky —they meant death. But this morning he was too deeply occupied; he was trying to think.

His great bulk shifted restlessly in the rocking chair and the porch floor of the old Davis House creaked protestingly. He passed a hand, ham-like and leathery, across his pink bald head. The hand came away dry; the furnace-like heat wouldn't even let a man perspire. He blinked again at the thermometer and wished he hadn't; the red vein now registered 122 degrees.

"Wong Tong!" he cried, and his voice had the dry shrill rasp of a buzz-saw cut-

ting a hardwood knot. "Wong Tong!"

From the interior of the old desert hotel sounded the pattering of bare feet and an intoned answer: "Coming, Mr. Boss Davis, Wong Tong coming."

In the doorway of the Davis House appeared an ageless Oriental, weazened and brown as a dry lemon. A pair of overalls, many sizes too large, and a black alpaca shirt, hanging to his knees, formed his entire costume.

"What Mr. Boss Davis want, why not?" he asked, staring at the huge old hotel proprietor who was gasping in his chair.

"Water for my feet," Itching Foot ordered. "My chilblains are gettin' terrible. . . . Damn the chilblains! Damn me for havin' 'em! Chilblains with the temperature at 122. Chilblains in the middle of the desert. I'll bet there ain't another man in the whole blessed world who's got chilblains like me. . . . What you standin' there for, you damn' yellow heathen? Bring two pails of cold water."

"Two pail cold water, Mr. Boss Davis?" Wong Tong asked. "One pail cold water. One pail what Wong Tong al'ays bling."

Itching Foot Davis glanced down at his pink feet with their large veins. "This morning you bring two pails," he said, "and don't talk back! This morning I got to have two pails because I got to get comfortable so's I can think."

WONG TONG trotted through the darkened hotel toward the kitchen, whence came the sound of an old pump creaking and the rattle of tin. He appeared in a moment, his narrow little shoulders bent as he carefully carried two pails of water. He put them in front of his boss, stooped and lifted one huge pink foot into each pail. Then he squatted down beside Itching Foot.

"Wong Tong help Mr. Boss Davis think, why not?" he said. His face immediately set in thoughtful lines; his little slit-eyes became smaller; he pressed his two claw-like hands to his protruding cheekbones. In his way, he was a very skinny but very intense Buddha.

Itching Foot Davis stared at his factotum and for a moment his moon-like face was creased by a grin. The little Chinese was so intent, so serious. Then, "Why, hot diggity dog, Wong Tong," Itching Foot cried, "you don't even know what you're thinkin' about!"

"Help Mr. Boss Davis think," corrected Wong Tong. He removed one hand from his cheek and waved it across the desert road, which was white and ankle-deep with alkali. "Over there two people need all the best think of Mr. Boss Davis and Wong Tong."

Itching Foot stared out after the waving yellow hand. Diagonally across from the Davis House were two little desert shacks, weather-beaten, paintless, forlorn.

"You're a smart little heathen," Itching Foot admitted grudgingly. "That's just what I was thinkin' about."

"Please state problem slow and clear," Wong Tong said. "Then answer will come clear and easy."

"Over there in one shack," said Itching Foot, "is Marcia Pelham, the prettiest, sweetest, swellest girl in a year of Sundays. She and her mother are starvin' over there, and they can't move away because Marcia has to live on the desert where it's dry. In the other shack is Young Mac MacDonald, a straight-shootin', hard-workin', red-headed kid. The blessed damn' fool is tryin' to make a livin' on cattle, but he's busted higher'n a kite. The bank owns his cattle and his land and his pants and suspenders. So he's starvin', too. And all he wants in the world is to marry Marcia, but he can't do it and be fair with her, flat on his face like he is."

"No hurry," said Wong Tong. "He been down in love with Miss Marcia for twelve-ten month. Mebbe she love other man—Mr. Buck Francis—more than she love Mr. Young Mac."

"Not on your life!" exploded Itching Foot. "But that's the hell of it. Along comes that big bozo, Buck Francis, major-domo at the Lazy K. He's got sixty dollars a month, regular. He wants Marcia the worst way. Crazy as a 'phoby skunk about

her. So what does he do last Saturday? He rides in and tells Marcia and Widow Pelham that he's come into a lot of money. A huge fortune, a big pile. Right now he's goin' down to the valley to get it, and then he's comin' back to get Marcia and Widow Pelham and take 'em away to a life of ease."

"Velly nice for Miss Marcia."

"Like hell it is! All the time her heart's with Young Mac. I'll bet a million it is. But she and her mother can't starve here any longer, so she'll take Buck Francis. That's why I got to think hard and think fast, before he comes back with his money."

"Mr. Boss Davis and Wong Tong also starve to death velly soon," complained Wong Tong. "No guest in Davis House for five week now. We got no money, we starve soon."

"Shut up!" shrilled Itching Foot. "I'm not afraid of starvin'. What I got to do is to get Young Mac some money so's he can marry Marcia."

"Mr. Boss Davis velly soft on Mr. Young Mac and Miss Marcia," Wong Tong said disapprovingly. "Mr. Boss Davis go velly soft."

"Sure I'm soft about 'em," Itching Foot said. "They're the nearest things I ever had to children of— Shut up! I'd do anything in God's world to make 'em happy."

"Mr. Boss Davis is Justice of Peaces," intoned Wong Tong. "Mebbe Mr. Boss Davis make Young Mac deputy sheriff and hundred dollar a month, why not?"

"Sure I'm Justice of the Peace," Itching Foot said, his great round body swelling visibly. Then he subsided. "But a Justice of the Peace can't do any appointin'. I already thought of that. Young Mac'd make a swell deputy, young and strong, and plenty of nerve. But I can't appoint him. All I can do, I guess, is to watch a couple of young kids starve to death for each other out here on this sun-baked pavement of hell, until Buck Francis comes along and takes little Marcia away with him."

Wong Tong stood up and flapped his arms like a gaunt crow. "Mebbe none of us starve any more if we go down see dead man," he sing-songed.

"See dead man?" repeated Itching Foot.

Wong Tong waved his arms down the road which wound tortuously southward. "Down there," he intoned, "is dead man. See buzzards? One dead man down there. Dead man and dead horse. Velly dead. Down there under buzzards."

"What—what—"

"Man been dead two-three hour now," Wong Tong announced calmly. "Wong Tong watch him die from upstairs window. Mebbe dead man has pocket full of moneys and so nobody starve and everybody get married, why not?"

THE little cavalcade raced southward from the Davis House, and it was a comical cavalcade. All the livestock Itching Foot possessed he had with him at that moment. Under him was a mousy little burro, bony of hip, gaunt of rib, no bigger than Itching Foot himself. Next came Wong Tong on an even smaller burro, whose silvery nozzle and eyes rimmed with white hair gave it an appearance of perpetual curiosity. Wong Tong was leading a third burro, a pint-sized animal, but the most frisky of the three.

"Why didn't you tell me about this sooner, you damn' heathen?" sputtered Itching Foot, motioning with a ham-like arm ahead of him at the soaring vultures. He began to mimic Wong Tong. "Man die two-three hour ago."

"Too hot for Mr. Boss Davis' chilly-blains," said Wong Tong. "By and by sun get cooler. By and by we go out get corpse."

"You yellow devil!" declared Itching Foot. "Look! Some of the buzzards are down! That's bad!"

From beside the road ahead of them ten or twelve turkey buzzards, their repulsive gory topknots glistening, skidded along the ground in their awkward attempts at take-off. They had been gathered around a mesquite clump and in the mesquite clump—

"Look!" shrilled Itching Foot excitedly, pounding his bare heels into the burro's ribs. "A man, sure as hell! And a horse!" He raced his burro closer, lowered his legs and the burro seemed to run out from under him. Instantly he was stooping over a warped figure on the ground.

"Hot diggity dog!" cried Itching Foot. "It's Buck Francis! Sure'n hell, it's Buck Francis."

His huge hand went under the man's leather vest and flannel shirt, felt for the beat of the heart. When he withdrew his hand it was stained with blood. Itching Foot stared at the stain and whirled on Wong Tong.

"His heart's still beatin'! He's alive. Come on, you yellow heathen, help me get him on my burro."

The little Chinese did his part gruntingly. It was hard work. Buck Francis was a big man, tall and heavy, but Itching Foot and Wong Tong got his limp body spraddled on the burro's back at last.

"Hurry!" ordered Itching Foot, supporting the man's head and shoulders. "If he ain't dead now, he's sure dyin'."

"Just one minute," said Wong Tong. He disappeared into the mesquite thicket and immediately re-appeared. "Even horse not dead," he said. "I come back by and by for horse."

"What you got in your hand?" demanded Itching Foot.

"Suitcase," said Wong Tong. "Very heavy suitcase. I carry it for dying man, why not?"

THE procession moved back to the Davis House. Old Itching Foot, leading the burro and supporting the head of Buck Francis, suffered the agonies of the damned as sand and cactus bit into his bare soles. His three hundred pounds were too many for his burning, itching feet; the sun was too hot to be endurable, the air too dry and lifeless. He drove himself along, his breath short, his heart pounding. Behind him, astride one burro, leading the other, and constantly complaining about the weight of the suitcase, came Wong Tong.

"We put honor guest in Blue Room," announced Wong Tong, as the cavalcade approached the Davis House. He had long since given each of the four bedrooms of the desert hotel a fancy name. "Sheets in Blue Room al'eady dirty," he explained, "and Mr. Buck Francis can bleed on them okay, why not?"

On the bed in the Blue Room the long, heavy body of Buck Francis, majordomo of the Lazy K, was placed. Itching Foot straightened, gasped breath into his aching lungs, then whirled on Wong Tong.

"Water!" he said. "Brandy! Bandages. Iodine."

"Water, iodine, blandy, bandages okay, quick, and neetsfoot oil and two pail cold water for chillyblains, al'eady now quick."

"Now," ordered Itching Foot when Wong Tong had returned with almost everything he could find in the kitchen, "go get Mrs. Pelham and tell her to come over to help me. Then find Young Mac and send him to Indian Wells for the doctor. Pronto, you damn' heathen!"

Itching Foot dropped water, spoonful at a time, between the swollen, cracked lips of Buck Francis. Occasionally he added a drop of brandy. Already he had examined the wound in the man's body. The left shoulder had been pierced cleanly with a bullet of large caliber. The wound had re-opened in moving, but now the bleeding had almost stopped.

"He's a tough enough hombre to live through this," thought Itching Foot Davis. "But another hour would sure have finished him."

The eyelids of the man on the bed flickered, flickered again, then opened. Shadowed far in the depth of the black eyes was fear. "Don't let 'em get me," he muttered in semi-delirium. "They'll hang me! Don't let 'em get me."

"So there's been some dirty work," thought Itching Foot. Aloud he said, "Quiet, Buck, quiet. I'll take care of you. No one'll get you. More water, Buck? You can take a whole swallow this time."

"Gee, you're a swell nurse," rasped Buck Francis, trying to force his cracked lips into a smile at old Itching Foot. Then the haunted look returned to his eyes. "Don't let 'em get me."

Wong Tong pattered into the room. "Mrs. Pelham, she sick in bed with heat, she no can come," he announced. "Mr. Young Mac down Jaw Bone Canyon, chasing circles around cattles. Miss Marcia out with paints and paper to paint cactus and coyote. Everyone gone, no more to do. Okay. Wong Tong go out and keep watch of million dollar."

"Million dollars!" demanded Itching Foot, aroused by the controlled excitement in his factotum's voice. "Million dollars?"

"Yes, three-four million dollar," Wong Tong said. "Wong Tong keep watch."

He turned and pattered into the kitchen. Itching Foot Davis lumbered after him. In the doorway he stopped. His mouth dropped open, his mild blue eyes popped, and his single tuft of gray hair raised like a question mark.

In the far corner of the room Wong Tong had opened the suitcase which he had carried from the desert. Bulging from it, tumbling from it, clattering from it, were neat packets of bills, rolls of paper-wrapped coins, hundreds of loose bills and sacks of loose coins. Over it all Wong Tong crouched, his little yellow hands fingering the currency, stacking the coins. He was like a genie from the Arabian Nights, little and yellow and gloating. He glanced up slyly at Itching Foot Davis.

"You go back and dlip-dlop water in mouth of man. Wong Tong take care of big million dollar, why not?"

ITCHING FOOT DAVIS understood matters now. He stood in the doorway of the Blue Room and gazed back sorrowfully at Buck Francis, who was muttering and moaning on the bed, in pain as acute mentally as physically.

"I understand, Buck," said Itching Foot gravely, "but I guess the sheriff wouldn't. You just had to have that money, didn't you, so you could marry little Marcia Pelham? A girl like that does funny things to a man's insides and his morals. After you told her last Saturday about your fortune, well, damn your heart, you thought you had to get it. So you held up the bank at Victorville, eh?"

The wounded man groaned.

"Check, Itchin' Foot," came the muffled answer from the bed. "I'd gotten away with it, too, only someone plugged me from the bank door as I was ridin' away. . . . God, I did want that money. But just for Marcia."

"From now on," ordered Itching Foot, his voice rising, "you leave little Marcia out of this. She ain't for you. She's for a better man. She's for Young Mac."

No answer came from the bed.

"If I can save your weak neck from the sheriff," continued Itching Foot, "that's a lot more'n you deserve. . . . You say the posse wasn't close after you?"

"No. I swung up the Cushenberry grade, toward Big Bear and Old Woman's Springs. That threw 'em off the track. Then I circled. But I was all in from loss of blood, and my horse had twenty-eight hours straight. We went down together."

"Your horse is okay," said Itching Foot. "Wong Tong took out water and then brought him in. We're goin' to use your horse. I think we are. Only I got to think some more."

"Mr. Boss Davis now can think hard," came a chant from the hall. "Two pail cold water on flont porch by locking chair."

"Wong Tong, go out again and try to find Miss Marcia or Young Mac MacDonald."

"Mr. Young Mac already on flont porch waiting, Mr. Boss Davis, okay."

"Good! Now, Wong Tong, get me that suitcase! Pronto!"

Itching Foot waddled wearily out on the porch. Automatically his eyes sought the thermometer on the post. It registered 118. That made him feel better. He turned to Young Mac MacDonald who was standing against the post, his sombrero in his hand, his eyes inquiring.

ITCHING FOOT DAVIS thought once more that here was the very man for Marcia Pelham, a tall, straightforward man with clean-cut jaw, honest eyes. A little young and boyish, perhaps, with his mane of unruly copper-red hair, his easy smile, but a man for all that. Yes, a desert man, sun-baked, sand-blasted, beaten by the desert, but too tough-fibered to know that he was beaten. Itching Foot hesitated a long moment, seeking words. At last he spoke.

"Young Mac," he said, "you know how much I like you. You know I'd give half my old hide to help you. Now I think I got a chance to do it. At the same time I'll be helpin' someone else, a poor simple-minded bozo who couldn't stand temptation. If you trust me all the way, Young Mac, I think I can do a lot for you. Do you trust me?"

"Of course I trust you, Itching Foot," Young Mac said, a hesitant, bewildered grin on his lips. "I trust you like I would my own father if I had one."

"Then it's okay," said Itching Foot. He raised his voice. "Wong Tong, bring that suitcase. . . . Young Mac, this suitcase is full of money. Stolen money. It's got to go back to the bank at Victorville it was stolen from. The sheriff's out lookin' for it too, and you can give it to him. But this is the way you got to do it. Listen careful!

"You ride south until you meet the posse lookin' for bank robbers. You turn this suitcase over to them. You tell 'em that yesterday when you were ridin' your cattle in Jaw Bone Canyon you came sudden on a fellow hidin' in the brush. He took a pot-shot at you so you shot back. With that he jumped on his horse and rode hell-bent to the south.

"But you was mad, so you chased him. You fired some more at him. You saw this suitcase drop off the horse, and maybe the fellow threw it away because he thought he was goin' to get caught. Anyway, the fellow got away, so you went back and picked up the suitcase and now you're takin' it back to the bank. Got that straight?"

Young Mac nodded quickly. "Sure," he said, "that's an easy story. But I hate—"

"You said you trusted me," reminded Itching Foot. "The way I figure is that you'll get a big reward for returnin' this money. Then you and Marcia can—can—anyway, you'll be kind of a hero and get a reward which'll sure be a help. And you won't be doin' anyone any harm.

"Fact is, you'll be helpin' a crazy galoot from goin' to prison. It wasn't his fault anyway. It was the fault of that pretty little—well, I ain't sayin'. Now you brush up on that story, so you know the exact spot where it happened, even the rocks and the thickets. Tell about the hoof tracks you made yesterday when you was out with your cattle. Make the story good and make it stick." Itching Foot stared at the young man anxiously. "Sure you can do it, Young Mac?"

"Sure I can do it," said Young Mac. "Only one thing. My poor old nag would never get far. I rode hellity-larrup all day yesterday and most of today. He's only a bag of bones anyway, never gets any oats."

"That's all right," Itching Foot said. "There's an extra horse out back. It's all in too, but it's had a pretty good rest in the last two hours. It'll carry you all right." His voice rose again in a yell. "Wong Tong, get the horse out back and bring it around. Young Mac's takin' the suitcase back to the bank where it belongs. And remember, you yellow heathen, you never saw that suitcase, you never saw the money in it."

Wong Tong sighed, wistfully rolled his eyes to the heavens and folded his yellow little hands in front of him.

"Wong Tong never see a million dollar," he said. Suddenly he brightened. "Lot of men come riding up road from south," he said. "Guess mebbe it is bank president, vice-president, sheriff and United States army looking for million dollar. Many men come riding hell's bent up road."

FOR one of his tremendous size, Itching Foot Davis moved with remarkable agility. His huge, lumbering body was everywhere. He got Young Mac on the horse and started him south with the suitcase of money to meet the approaching posse. He and Wong Tong carefully carried Buck Francis to the kitchen, lowered him through the trap door into the vegetable basement, put burlap bags and the kitchen table over the trap door. They hurried back to the Blue Room, gathered the blood-stained sheets and thrust them up the chimney of the fireplace in the front room.

Hesitant footsteps sounded on the front porch of the Davis House, the screen door opened and Mrs. Pelham entered—a wistful little woman in a wrapper.

"Mr. Davis! Mr. Davis!" she called. "What's the matter? I was sick but I had to get up. When Marcia saw Young Mac riding down the road with his suitcase she thought he was riding away, going to do something rash. So she caught Young Mac's horse and she's gone after him."

"That's okay," declared Itching Foot. "She'll be just the one to convince the sheriff that Young Mac's story is true. Sure, she's so pretty and innocent that when she tells the sheriff that Young Mac ain't been away from close by, it'll make his story perfect."

He grinned to himself, satisfied. His plans had been well made. Surely they would work out happily. Buck Francis would be saved. Young Mac would get a big slice of reward money and with it he could pay off the bank, buy some better cattle, some horses. After that he and little Marcia could get married and—

"Wong Tong!" called Itching Foot. "Bring a pail of cold water on the front porch. I got to sit out there and look nat'ral when the posse comes up. Hurry up! They're 'most here!"

He waddled out to the front porch and shaded his eyes, looking down the road. A sudden high-pitched cry of agony was wrenched from him. Down there, less than half a mile away, his plans, his hopes, were all being blown to pieces in a blast of guns.

He saw it all clearly, far too clearly, long before the sound of the guns reached his ears. Young Mac was riding toward the sheriff's posse, riding rapidly. Behind him, going as fast as the horse would carry her, but still losing ground, was Marcia Pelham. The sheriff's posse separated suddenly, dropped into the creosote bush on each side of the road. One of the more nervous men fired at the approaching horseman. It was a signal for others to fire. With the clearness that was awful in its pain, Itching Foot saw Young Mac throw his arms in the air, saw the suitcase fall to the road, saw Young Mac topple in his saddle, then pitch headlong. His sombrero rolled a few feet, his head was deep in the alkali; he twitched for a few moments and was still.

"Lord in heaven!" cried Itching Foot. "They recognized the bandit's horse! They saw the suitcase! They thought sure he was the bandit and that Marcia was chasin' him. They shot him down. Lord in heaven! It's my fault—he trusted me. He said so."

He raised his stricken face and stared down the road once more. Little Marcia Pelham was galloping wildly forward. She had jerked a little snub-nosed revolver from her belt and she was firing wildly at the posse, a gallant, futile figure with hair flying, eyes blazing. Numbly Itching Foot thought, "At least it proves how much she loves him." Then Marcia reeled and went down and her horse galloped wildly away, leaving her warped near Young Mac in the alkali dust.

Back on the front porch Itching Foot Davis lowered his gray-topped old head to the porch railing because he couldn't endure to see any more. He tried to keep back the sobs.

THE doctor from Indian Wells was anxious to be on his way, but old Itching Foot Davis hung on to his horse's bridle, there in front of the Davis House.

"Just say that all once again," the old hotel man pleaded.

"Sure! But I got a confinement case way over at Oresburg, so I got to hurry. That young fellow, Young Mac, is plenty shot up, but he's tough and strong and has lived clean. Just keep his wounds antiseptic and he'll be up in three weeks. The girl, Miss Marcia, wasn't even shot. Her horse was hit and threw her. Concussion, that's all. Bad headache for a couple of days, then all right. All they both need is rest. Now, s'long! I'm going!"

"One thing more," begged Itching Foot. "What would you do if you had a man who was shot through the left shoulder.

The doctor looked at old Itching Foot curiously. What was the fat old desert man talking about? Young Mac wasn't shot through the left shoulder. "Well," he said, "it's a funny question, but I'd keep a man like that quiet and cool. I'd keep his wound clean, keep him from moving around. Wounds out here under the desert sun don't hardly ever get infected."

"Thanks, Doc," said Itching Foot, and he grinned inwardly as he thought how cool and quiet Buck Francis was being kept down there in the vegetable cellar under the kitchen, afraid to stir for fear of bringing the sheriff on him.

As he reached the front porch Sheriff Stalker came out, followed by six of his posse.

"Well, we'll be going, Itching Foot," the sheriff said. "Some of the boys went over in Jaw Bone Canyon and they saw plenty of tracks where the bandit had been, but there was cattle over there too, and the boys couldn't follow the trail. The bandit will probably try it again sometime and then we'll sure catch him. S'long, Itching Foot."

"Not so fast, not so fast!" shrilled Itching Foot. "You ain't goin' yet, Sheriff! You just think you are. You got some things to settle first. You and your damn' posse shootin' up Young Mac, shootin' him full of holes. The doctor just told me jus' now that the boy will be likely sure to die. And the girl, too. Shootin' at her! Why, I could run you out of office for shootin' at a girl like that."

"But—but we didn't shoot at any girl—"

"Shut up!" shrilled Itching Foot, his voice rising higher. "You killed a fine young man and you probably killed the girl and now you're ridin' away, merry as you please. Ain't that swell?"

"The boy don't look so bad to me," Sheriff Stalker said, "and he'll get reward money. There was forty thousand dollars in that suitcase and the bank is sure to give Young Mac at least two thousand of it."

"Two thousand dollars!" scoffed Itching Foot. "Listen, Sheriff, don't you know a brave man and a real man when you see him? You're goin' to give a man like Young Mac who fights a bandit and returns a suitcase worth forty thousand, you goin' to give him just two thousand measly dollars? Or are you goin' to give him a big honor and some money to live on? A man like that would certainly make a swell deputy sheriff for this county."

"I HADN'T thought of that," Sheriff Stalker admitted. "But say, that's a swell idea. Then he can't talk about our shooting him down. Probably the girl wouldn't say anything either. Besides, he looks to me like a strong young fellow, and we haven't got a deputy sheriff around here. Sure, I can make him deputy sheriff beginning next month."

"See that you do," grunted Itching Foot, turning inside the hotel. "If you don't, I'll laugh you out of your job!"

The voice of the old hotel man trembled and quavered, apparently in mighty rage. His face was red and the veins on his forehead stood out. His body shook convulsively. Sheriff Stalker stared at him anxiously. Maybe the old man was going to have a stroke, a cerebral hemorrhage.

"You'd better go inside, Itching Foot," he said. "Go in and quiet down before you blow up."

Itching Foot Davis nodded. He put both hands over his mouth and waddled blindly through the front door. He kept going until he reached the kitchen. His face was

almost purple now. He dropped his hands. Laughter erupted from him in high, shrill squeaks. Tears ran down his face. He gasped; he held his huge stomach in his arms and rocked back and forth.

Wong Tong hurried to him anxiously. A wise glint came in Wong Tong's old little eyes and maybe—one could never be sure—a glint of mirth.

"Wong Tong, you yellow little heathen, let's see you dance!" shrilled Itching Foot. "Dance! Buck Francis is safe. Young Mac's goin' to get two thousand dollars reward money; he's goin' to be deputy sheriff at a hundred a month; he's goin' to marry pretty little Marcia and they're both goin' to be our neighbors and never starve again, and he didn't have to lie, and—what'd you say?"

Wong Tong had been mumbling and whispering to himself at a great rate, his voice just low enough so Itching Foot couldn't understand his gibberish. The talon-like hand of the Chinese was deep in the hip pocket of his over-size overalls; his yellow fingers were tight around a packet of new five dollar bills, held with a paper band.

"Wong Tong and Mr. Boss Davis not starve either," Wong Tong had been telling himself, as he fingered the money. "Wong Tong borrow money for Mr. Boss Davis. Borrow money from suitcase bank for Mr. Boss Davis. Buy many vegetable with money. But mustn't let Mr. Boss Davis know."

"What're you mumblin' about?" demanded Itching Foot.

"Wong Tong just thinking how Mr. Boss Davis get smeared with luck."

"Luck?" Itching Foot piped. "Luck? Say, it ain't luck. Bless your little pink heart, it's brain power. Remember how hard I thought? Now I got to go in and tell those two youngsters all the good news."

He started inside.

"No hurry," intoned Wong Tong. "They velly busy now patting each other by the cheeks around the bandages. You go sit on front porch with two pail cold water and think hard some more, why not?"

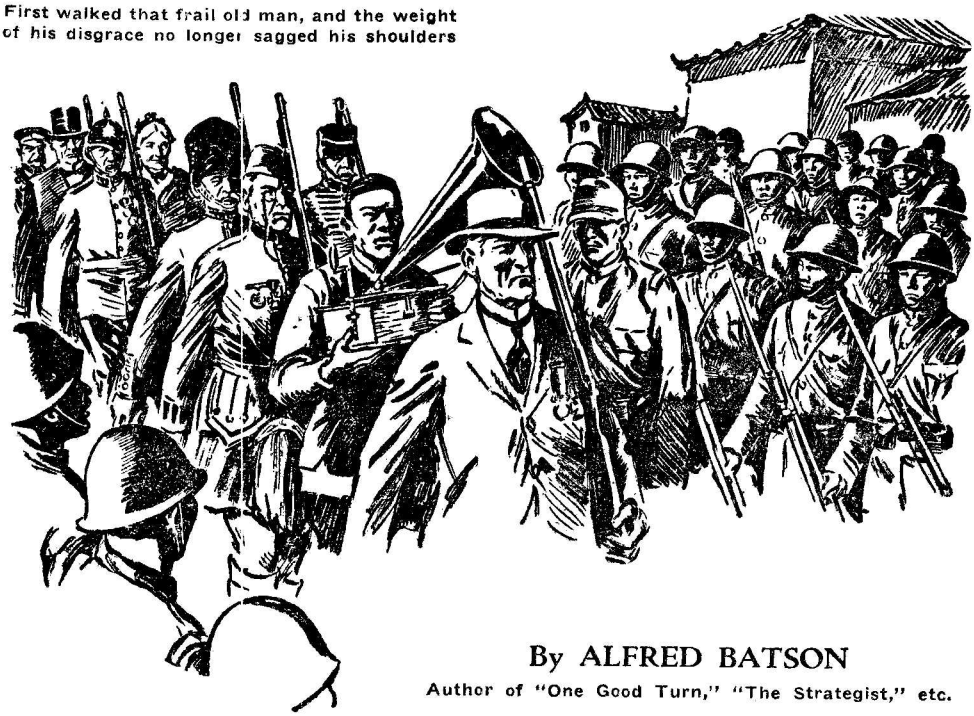
Death by Air

THE people who are frenziedly convinced that this country is about to be invaded by dangerous foreigners in dark shirts or, for that matter, by Martians, had better give some attention to the *anopheles gambiae*. The latter, if they descend upon us, will come by air, and they will bear a weapon more destructive than guns. The *anopheles gambiae*, you see, is a particularly malevolent brand of mosquito.

The insect belongs in Africa, but last year it arrived in South America, an undetected stowaway; and immediately it set about spreading malaria. In the Jaguaribe Valley of Brazil ninety percent of the inhabitants were infected, and the mortality rate rose as high as ten percent. For the *anopheles gambiae* is the most dangerous of all mosquitoes; it breeds prolifically and rapidly; and the disease it bears is of an extremely serious type. Scientists say that there is some possibility of the insect spreading up through South America and eventually reaching this country. However, it is probable that, while alarmists warn us against the noisier menaces, a few unnoticed men in laboratories will plan a sound defense against the threat of the mosquito.

—*Albert George*

First walked that frail old man, and the weight of his disgrace no longer sagged his shoulders



By ALFRED BATSON

Author of "One Good Turn," "The Strategist," etc.

Glory Hill

They were a mere handful of ancient die-hards, marching under a banner lost thirty years before; yet before them the guns of Nippon fell silent

THE white-haired, lobster-faced orderly who brought my drink clicked his heels with a smartness I'd never found equaled in any officer's mess from Aldershot to the Sudan.

I put it down to an old soldier's servility and dismissed it, giving my attention to Col. L. E. B. Crofts of the 1st Battalion, the South Devon Borderers, as he came across the lounge, a tall man and assured, his uniform creased to perfection, his cigar of the best.

Contrasting with him in my mind's eye was a wraith I had met in a down-at-heel hotel half the world away. Hesitant, furtive, no longer young, this one had borne the unmistakable brand of an Ishmaelite, a seeker after anonymity in surroundings far from the beaten track of tourists or extradition papers. I was sorry for him but something tense and smoldering in his gaunt eyes warned me against saying so. He was that kind, the proud kind, and I liked him for it.

And it was because I could learn nothing of his past beyond that he had once been in this regiment, that I was now on the trail of the story he would not tell. That and to do him a favor.

"You spoke yesterday of medal collecting," Crofts said after a perfunctory greeting. "Have you any of ours?"

"I've never been able to buy one."

He looked oddly relieved as he rose, started out. "I promised to show you . . ." and he led me along the hall to a room whose walls were mottled with medals. On the far side hung the thing that made my blood pound—a frame reversed.

Meanwhile Crofts had thawed slightly, as though this Valhalla of the South Devons contained a potent magic. "You'll probably think us a fantastic lot to cherish these, but—" and he broke off with a wry smile which said more pointedly that words that the laity couldn't be expected to understand. He got straight to it:

"Albert Rich, first man over the wall in relieving Lucknow. . . . This is Michael Oates, he brought poor Gordon's final appeal from Khartoum. . . . All we know of this lad is that his name was Plummer, he died at Corunna. . . ."

When we were next to the frame that had held my eyes riveted, a hand slipped in my pocket and I waited. But Crofts would have ignored it had not I turned it around. My reward began with the Mons Star of the Old Contemptibles, ran through the Great War issues and ended with the medal and bar for the Persian Gulf. On the back of the first was *Pte. G. Faley, S.D.B.*, and on the rim of the last *Major George Faley, S.D.B.* That told a lot. The wraith had come up the hard way, up from the bottom.

"We rescued them from a loan shop," Crofts said. And that told something more.

"They're only campaign awards." I tried to minimize it.

"They're South Devons," he retorted sharply. "We don't fancy our medals knocking about."

I tried another tack. "What's the story of the man?"

"No story. He wasn't cut out for soldiering."

Before I could contradict him a bugle sounded. He sprang toward the hall. I took after and on reaching the veranda found the battalion drawn up by the flagpole base, my host in the van flanked by a score of alert, clean-cut underlings.

THERE was a flourish of trumpets. Drums beat a slow ruff. Swords flashed and a thousand bayonets snapped to the "Present." Now I was no stranger to color ceremonies, but of a sudden I realized this wasn't a ceremony, rather it was a routine observance at sundown. Yet these men were putting into it a proud reverence beyond the rule book's stipulating. And when I heard the measured, slow strains of the national anthem as the colors inched slowly down into waiting arms, I found myself involuntarily aping the orderly who was standing behind me, his spine rigid, his lips twitching.

Then came what custom decreed should be the regimental tune. The first notes reached deep down inside me and brought a lump into my throat, for I'd heard them before. But until this moment I hadn't known what they were.

When the colors were borne past I felt an odd hesitation around my heart. I'd seen them before, also, but at a distance then which blotted out the details I was seeing now. There were four distinctions, rare for any regiment, the cross of Malta, the sphinx of Egypt, the Assaye elephant and the castle and key for Gibraltar; the scroll which bore the motto *Cede Nullis*—Yield to None—and the gold embroidered battle honors that crowded the facing until I had to look again to discover it was green. They started with Emsdorff, the first awarded any British regiment, then Tangier 1662-80, and down the years to Archangel 1919, two score or more.

And abruptly I caught what had been evading me all along. What I'd taken for standoffishness in Crofts was pride, the same pride I'd taken for servility in the orderly, an esprit de corps that went deeper than King's Regulations and was written on the souls of these South Devons beyond the power of time to erase.

It was in that moment that I understood much that had puzzled me about the wraith in exile.

Finally the band played a slow step. The men moved off toward their barracks. I returned to the lounge and when Crofts

came in handed him a small plush-covered box, sealed and bound.

"Faley sent it," I said simply.

His face went white. "Faley? You've seen Faley? When? Where?"

"It's all right," I assured him. "You'll be proud to hear it. You'll turn the frame around."

He swallowed hard. Then he nodded. "I'll get the subalterns. I'll send Dugan with a drink. Wait!"

With that he was gone.

The white haired Dugan watched my long draught with undisguised concern. Eventually I put the glass down. "Did you know Major Faley?" I asked abruptly.

"Aye, sir. Why, 'im an' me an' th' colonel'd be the only ones lef' o' th' ol' crowd if 'e didn' 'ave 'at trouble."

"What trouble?" I asked as casually as I could.

"Why, sir, a detachmen' o' us wuz rushed from Inja t' Palestine under Major Faley t' keep peace an' order. But when we gets there there ain' no peace an' there ain' no order f'r them Arab 'eathens is makin' the 'oly Lan' like the other extreme. Naggin' an' snipin' fit t' drive a man daft, they are, an' one night in a blindin' rain they comes at us 'ell bent. When it's over we discovers they got our colors!"

I leaped to my feet. "They got what?"

"Our regimen'al colors, th' firs' we lost in three 'undred years. Now us Die 'ards, as we're known by, don' take 'at, sir. We 'ad the wind up fer fair an' wanted to go at 'em. But Faley, 'e says 'no.'"

"So what followed?" Whatever he was about to tell me I took to be of small consequence, for I knew a chapter he didn't. Yet the story was beginning to dovetail.

"Why, when 'e realize wot 'appened, an' 'im in comman', 'e disappears. Walks out cold, 'e did. Three weeks later 'e's back lookin' like 'ell. But by that time orders 'ad come through givin' 'im th' boot. We never seen 'im from that day on. I never un'erstood it, for 'e wuz a real sojer's sojer . . ."

He interrupted himself when suddenly we heard a crowd coming along the hall. Crofts entered at the head. Introductions were made and they found seats. Then Crofts nodded to me.

WHERE this took place is immaterial (I began). The important thing is *what* happened. That the location was China only proves that fate knows no boundaries. I was at Hankow when my paper recalled me to Shanghai. No tears were shed on my part for the Chinese would soon be retreating and the Japs advancing. Any foreigners caught in between, well. . . . So I started, over the only road open, South, by train, to Hong Kong.

Scarcely were we underway than we stopped. A bridge had been bombed. Everyone piled out for a look-see, but the bridge was up ahead and all we saw was an expanse of dun colored, tilled fields. The sole break in the monotony was a hill about a quarter mile away. Hill, did I call it? It was a thousand feet high if an inch and its sides were perpendicular.

"Kim-shan," the conductor said.

Now Kim translates "phoenix," the bird that arose from its ashes. That word was to be prophetic. Shan is "mountain." I'd heard of the place, a one-time summer resort that had lost favor when more accessible places became popular. But what interested me at the moment was that it caught every breeze in the Yangtze Valley.

"Have got hotel?" I asked.

The conductor gave a hesitant nod. So the train went back to sweltering Hankow and within an hour I was wishing I'd been aboard. Instead, I was half way up Kim-shan. I dropped my bag, plumped down for a breather, and looked back at the most God-awful footpath I'd ever seen, a maze of ruts, tree roots and boulders, on the rim of an abyss. And so narrow that a pebble starting at the top would be an avalanche at the bottom.

Above me was an abrupt turn and beyond that whatever Kim-shan might hold. Within another hour I knew it didn't hold much, a ramshackle two-story ruin marked

Great World Hotel. Also, showing briefly through the trees, for the place wasn't twenty acres in expanse, there were several foreign style bungalows, built, evidently, by the original Old China Hand. The place was forlorn and desolate and vaguely eerie.

Night was coming on and I'd made my choice. So I went up the steps and into the lobby. A weazened Chinese was behind a counter and a woman looked out startled from the dining room. "Business goodie?" I asked.

"Velly velly goodie," the man said as he thrust the register forward. "Me boss. Me name Ling."

I bowed, shook my own hand native fashion and studied the book. The last name entered was that of one George Paley, the date two months previous. The name next above was the same George Faley, but the date was the summer before. "Mr. Faley," I thought, "is consistent. He likes solitude."

I signed. Old Ling took my bag. We went upstairs and into a room, not much but clean. I washed in the cracked basin and stretched out for forty winks. It might have been forty-one but I was awakened by a weird noise from below. I hurried down and what confronted me was as fantastic as everything else—a half-dozen white haired foreign couples picking their way out of the darkness like ghouls in a Dore etching, the men in dinner coats of the Victorian era and the women in gowns of a vintage more ancient.

Lanterns and canes were in their hands and when they crossed the lobby to the dining room I saw supreme self-sufficiency in their faces. They passed within ten feet but not one of them saw me. You've got to know the Old China Hands to appreciate them. You see, they were die-hards, the breed that hate everything about China but hate more the thought of ever leaving. A stranger is suspect to that clan until the second generation.

BY THE time they had finished eating I had the story. They were Hankow residents who had been ordered to safety by the Chinese. With characteristic obstinacy they came a dozen miles to their old summer places on Kim-shan and refused to budge further. Only an Order in Council from Buckingham Palace could have moved them. Ling laid in a heavy stock of provisions and was making his first profit in years.

I was on the porch watching them leave an hour later, when suddenly a racket came from above. It screeched, shrilled, piled up to thundering heights and gritted off into nothing. Finally I placed it—a phonograph record worn to the bone.

A moment after it stopped an apparition appeared at the top of the stairs, peered around cautiously, then started down. He was another patriarch, stooped and frail to the point of emaciation, his whites long strangers to a pressing iron and his shoes far beyond their prime. I can't say he scuttled, but he moved as though he was expecting somebody behind him any moment. The signs were obvious and like the popular conception of a remittance man, this one clutched a bulging, battered carry-all.

"That," I thought, "holds the money."

What Ling thought I didn't wait to ask. He hadn't flicked an eye during the pantomime; he didn't speak when I hurried past on the trail.

Yet a strange thing happened as I ate. The more I watched this lad when he wasn't watching me, the more I refuted my snap judgment. His hands were too splendidly shaped to belong to a murderer and his gaunt cheeks didn't look like those of a bank president in retirement with the depositor's cash.

When the tea came I introduced myself. I *hadn't been a tabloid reporter for nothing,* and pariahs fascinated me.

Talk? I got him to talk, of Chinese politics, the weather, the way the Japs had looted and pillaged foreigners and of how all the equipment in the world would be unavailing in the long run against an inborn tenacity and unity in the Chinese. And what was I doing on Kim-shan and how long was I staying? Meanwhile he

hugged that brief-case as though it held the Golden Chalice. An hour later when he got up to leave he knew everything about me and all I knew about him were two words—George Faley.

Hell! I'd guessed them already.

My solitary breakfast was interrupted the next morning by a voice from the clearing out front: "Form fours! By the right—wheel! Slo-pips," and, *"Boo hau Nippon."*

I got there on the double and what I found gave me another shock. It was a Chinese kid with a paper hat on his black knob of a head and a wooden sword in his fist. Old Ling was on the porch grinning. "Me son. Me son."

"Who man talkee he say, 'Down with Japan'?" I asked.

Ling shrugged. But I knew. And I knew something else. Faley had been a soldier.

That night as the die-hards vanquished their meager dinners in lordly isolation we felt the first flying scud of the typhoon that was building up from a zephyr. A droning overhead broke on the quiet, then a series of shattering, crashing detonations. I was in the lobby killing time until Faley should appear, but the deluge sent me sprinting for the dining room windows. The streaks of yellow-red flame in the distance boiled my blood. It cooled when from behind me came this:

"I say, Archdale. That's the first night bombing of Hankow, what?"

"Possibly," Archdale drawled. "I wouldn't know."

That was the setting and underneath my laughter I admired them. Their conceit was marvelous to behold.

Scarcely had they left than the phonograph blared away. Then he came down, his eyes sparkling as though the discord was his appetizer.

I mentioned the record. He liked it—that was why he played it. No, there was no name on the face. Yes, it was the only record he had. So I switched to my hobby, British medals, to manoeuvre him into opening up. What I got was "Really," and "How interesting," and "Fancy."

What he got out of me was that once free of China I was going to Bermuda. He glanced up abruptly. "Bermuda! What a coincidence."

"Why? Have you been there?"

"Oh no."

"Do you know people living there?"

"Not a soul."

"Are you planning to go there?"

"Not the slightest possibility."

I gave up.

Beginning that night the bombing of Hankow became continuous, as infallible as Faley's phonograph, as sight of the brief-case that was never out of his hands, as the aloof detachment of the die-hards. Grotesque, you say. Nothing was grotesque on Kim-shan, because everything was.

THE following morning the kid, Faley and I were wandering around the plateau when suddenly we saw the remnant of a Chinese army struggling west on the flat below, sans equipment, sans everything but the desire to flee. When I turned around shortly to say something, Faley wasn't in sight. Nor was he present at lunch or dinner. Ling didn't know what had become of him. The die-hards had trouble recalling him. When they did they weren't any help.

But he turned up later that night, in the flickering lights of the porch, his clothes dust-covered and his face showing the weariness of a man done in.

"There's going to be trouble with the Japs," he said, brushing aside my questions. "A train is going down as soon as the moon is high. Perhaps the last train. . . ."

I got the drift. "Good," I said. "I'll pack chop-chop."

He placed a restraining hand on my arm. "And you're going to Bermuda?"

That made me smile. "Bermuda or heaven. I've had enough of somebody else's war."

He coughed a little nervously, hugged the brief-case a little tighter and looked away. Finally he seemed to reach a decision. "Do me a favor," he said rather

than asked. "My old regiment, the South Devon Borderers, are at Prospect Camp. The O.C. is Leslie Crofts. Look him up and give him this."

And he pressed a small, cloth-covered box in my hands.

I was nonplussed. "What's the hurry?" I asked. "We can talk on the train. Let's clear out—"

"The others are staying," he cut me off.

Well, I could understand why. I said, "Let them. You're no die-hard."

"Not that kind. But I'm staying." I didn't get it, then.

Before I could tell him how crazy he was a fleet of huge Jap bombers cut a black swath through the stars. Behind it came another. Then another. By the time the fourth was over us the first was unloading above Hankow, the earth was trembling and I was in my room throwing that black box and everything I had into my bag. I strapped it and came down in three jumps.

I got outside and was making tracks across the clearing when the waitress rushed from the head of the path, screaming like a woman possessed. It took Ling, the kid and me to get out of her that soldiers were down below—Nipponese soldiers. That started Ling. The kid rushed away and got a chopper while his father howled and shouted.

I remember Faley coming up and standing there, a bent, solitary figure, pitiful rather than helpful. Then I saw the die-hards filtering from the bungalows, a huddled group of old people who'd been so long away from reality they didn't know it when they came upon it. But they did know without being told that, isolated as we were, anything could happen and the world would never hear.

Something did happen. I heard my name, and turning, found Faley. "Follow me, and show some life. Archdale, Pascal, Townsend, Robinson, Sturge and Eve, you come along also. The ladies are to douse all lights but in the kitchen. Blind the windows there and put some food together."

That was the way he took over, with a snap and a suddenly assumed leadership that jolted us into action. And I noticed as he led us across the clearing that he seemed taller, his shoulders were braced and a score of years lifted from his back. He was a new man.

HE LED us to a half dozen *pukai*-wrapped bundles that, on being uncovered, produced dull glintings in the moonlight. His voice came in staccato bursts: "Inside, on the double, now . . . I'll assemble them. Chinese were glad to throw them away . . . couple of thousand rounds. . . ."

That's the way it went. He had those machine guns set up in a twinkling and he had Archdale and me lugging them down the path to the turn, one on each side, the third back in reserve. Under his guidance we tugged and pushed together rock barriers, as another crew felled trees and made rope-suspended stone-drops on the rim of the precipice overhead.

He was everywhere, working harder than any of us. I think a sixth sense told him he was approaching the apex of his life. We didn't say much. But you can bet we appreciated his foresight in going down on the flat that afternoon and carrying those bundles back.

Finally he posted guards. Then he sent the others, the older ones, home. Well, they went. I was in the kitchen catching a bite shortly after when they returned.

"Mr. Faley," Townsend spoke up. "We're ready for orders. What shall we do?"

I rubbed my eyes and looked closer. I had good reason to. The men were in what was left of old uniforms! Old uniforms, mind you, on Kim-shan.

Townsend in the blue, gold encrusted tunic of the 13th Royal Hussars, Queen Mary's Own; the rheumatic Pascal in the scarlet doublet of the Royal Scots; Eve in the scarlet tunic of the Life Guards, the oldest cavalry regiment in the army.

I just stared. . . .

I didn't notice that the uniforms were moth-eaten and outgrown. I saw only that

when the pinch came those lads rose to it. The infection spread. The result was that those without uniforms appeared with something as significant: all had the medals for the Boer War, the King's and Queen's, one had Natal 1906, another Tibet 1904 in addition.

There was something touching about it, something that tugged at my heartstrings. Those old men and their womenfolk were magnificent. I'd called them die-hards before, but from that moment I left out the hyphen. When Faley discovered that he and I were without identification, he found a small American flag some place and pinned it over my heart.

"Where are your medals?" I asked him. "Weren't you in the big show?"

He evaded answering. "Come on. The sun will be up soon. Things will happen."

Well, plenty happened, too fast for my orderly recounting.

First a long string of trucks appeared on the flat below from the south. They stopped around a circle of fires that had been blinking down there all night, and in another half hour a dozen or so squat little men with rifles at the ready were laboring up the path. Oh, we were there, behind the guns, behind the stone-drops, everywhere, our throats taut and our hearts pounding. No sooner were the little brown cousins close in than Faley stepped out from behind a gun and held up a hand.

The leader of the Japs held up a hand, too, but there was something in it that looked like an orange, only black. Then without a preamble, without a word, he let go. The others aimed their rifles in the same motion. Then a very unlooked for thing happened.

There was a vicious *brr-brr-brr-brr* and one by one those Japs either crumpled in their tracks or were knocked off the side by the fury of the onslaught. Who was it? Ling's kid, and yelling like a demon, *"Boo hau Nippon! Boo hau Nippon!"*

Like a crazy person . . .

Faley dodged the grenade. It hit behind him, bounced and went over. Half-way down it went off.

TO SUM up the day is a job beyond me. To bring in the small touches, like those old ladies coming down to us with food and tea, their Victorian skirts pinned up around their knees and encouragement in their voices; or the men, suddenly young again when they discovered that modern machine guns need no lengthy instructions to run, that killing had been made simple—all that would take hours.

But for us on Kim-shan the fat was in the fire. We had to go on.

The high spots were the long periods when the Japs racked their brains to get us out. Once they opened with artillery, until they came to see that all the shells in Japan couldn't knock down a miniature mountain. Again a plane roared overhead with two guns spitting. But Faley drove it so high it resorted to bombs. Yet hitting a small spot like ours was hard, damned hard. They found it out when the first bomb missed us but raised frightful havoc among their own men on the plain.

Meanwhile more trucks had been rolling in, and tanks. It was a column on the move and in a hurry. But everything stopped at the foot of Kim-shan.

Why? I didn't know then, but I think from what followed that Faley had an idea. Faley had a lot of ideas, as things turned out.

It was around noon during a lull that a single, unarmed soldier appeared under a white flag. Now some strange things have happened in the Chinese-Jap war but nothing stranger than this.

Faley went out to talk with him. When he came back, he said, "We've got to identify ourselves. They want to know who we are." That was Oriental psychology I couldn't savvy. Nor could I figure how we were going to comply. But Faley could.

He sent the kid back to the Great World for a long bamboo pole. When it arrived he dipped into that brief-case of his and brought out what looked like a small, multi-colored table cloth. A moment later it was waving over us. Get it?

That was what he'd been hugging all

along. What I'd thought was money was a flag. From where I crouched behind a gun all I could make out was a Maltese cross, a sphinx, an elephant and a maze of gold wording. I didn't savvy it then but the die hards did. They began to cheer. And when Faley came down to me, he said, cryptically: *"Cede Nullis.* Yield to None. Better to have it go this way than be looted of it."

Well, I didn't go into that for good reasons. There was a snorting and a roaring down below and a tank started up, jolting over the boulders, rearing and bucking in the ruts, but coming. When Faley thought the time ripe he gave Eve a signal. The ropes on the stone-drops were cut and the juggernaut met with an avalanche that sent it over the side. There were no more tanks.

Oh, we had them. We could have stayed there forever. Until suddenly I realized that our food was limited, our water about done. I don't like to dwell on the next few minutes.

Another crowd of men started up that tortuous footpath. We let them get so far before we gave it to them; the artillery started again but soon saw the folly.

Then a number of officers appeared under that white cloth. They stood at a distance and had a parley. I listened and my brain did handsprings.

THEY were driving on Hankow, racing another column from the north, but they couldn't go on without mopping up as they went. Those were their orders. The attack on us had been a mistake for which they apologized. What were our terms for coming down?

"A guarantee of safe conduct on the honor of your Emperor," Faley snapped. "Then a train for Hong Kong. We aren't surrendering. We're evacuating with the full honors of war. Otherwise we'll remain. We have food enough for six months and two million rounds of ammunition."

The Japs accepted after a conference, and it didn't take us long to get in line.

Line? Horatius didn't leave his bridge, but we left Kim-shan, that flag up ahead, then Faley, his chin in and his chest out, color back in his wan cheeks and a new snap to his walk. Twenty years were off his bent shoulders. After him came old Ling carrying the phonograph. It was blaring away at that same tune we'd heard inside the Great World, the only record he had. Then the women, me and the men. It was a sight to stop your heart. When we reached the bottom my heart did stop.

The Japs stood around, open-mouthed, thousands of them. It may have been the discovery that though they outnumbered us, yet we'd beaten them. It may have been veneration for white hair, or perhaps they were squelched by the way we took our cue from the die hards and walked through them without seeing them, aloof, smug and superior, the women with their dresses pinned up as though fearful of contamination, the men with contempt in their faces. Or again, it may have been the burning-eyed, stiff-spined figure at our head.

But whatever, they lived up to their word. By the time we reached the rail line the trucks were roaring away toward Hankow. Then Faley smiled, for the first time.

Catch on? If we had surrendered to them at the outset they'd surely have been rough with us. But when we stood up against them they respected us. I guess life is like that.

The flag? He told me about it when it was carefully put back in the brief-case. He'd gotten it in the desert outside Palestine. He had a thumping fight but he got it. Then he'd found he was in disgrace with his regiment for walking out and going after it. So he'd headed for anonymity, planning to return it once he'd justified himself in his own eyes, and once he'd lived up to the glorious tradition that was behind it. He had his pride, too, the pride of the die hard boys, the South Devons. . . .

"And now," I said to Crofts, "what's in the box?"

"I know what should be in it," he shot back. Then he broke the seals. We crowded around him and a score of voices shouted

in approval when an insignificant bronze cross on a dull ribbon lay revealed.

"I always felt he'd send his Victoria Cross back," Faley said huskily. "The spirit of a regiment like this is a hard thing to kill."

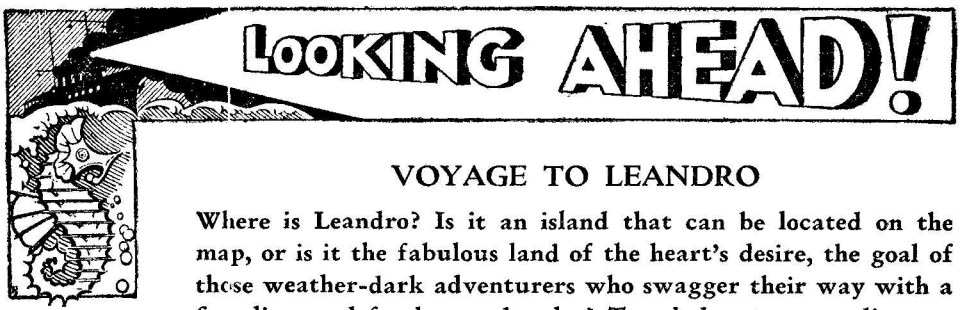
SIX months later I stood on the Prospect Camp parade ground, Bermuda. Down the field a thousand bayonets glinted in the sun. Suddenly the band crashed out in that same wild medley I'd heard on Kim-shan—the regimental tune of the South Devon Borderers.

They came swinging along with a thrilling precision. When they were abreast of the flagpole they swung toward those regimental colors I'd last seen half the world away, the first battle flag lost in three hundred years. Now it was back. Again.

But their eyes and their salutes were for a frail yet soldierly figure in front of me, wearing a long string of medals that started with the Victoria Cross and ended with the medal and bar for the Persian Gulf. Oh, that march past and the tribute that went with it wasn't according to King's Regulations, but the South Devons are a fantastic lot—their colonel had told me so.

What did I do, hearing that lilting, pounding music, watching that little man being honored, thinking of the long honorable tradition he'd kept unsullied, trying to hold my heart steady and swallowing hard? I did what you'd have done unless you were made of stone.

Sure, and I wasn't ashamed.



VOYAGE TO LEANDRO

Where is Leandro? Is it an island that can be located on the map, or is it the fabulous land of the heart's desire, the goal of those weather-dark adventurers who swagger their way with a fine disregard for law and order? Two lads set out to discover the truth, to voyage toward a new horizon. Beginning a distinguished first novel by

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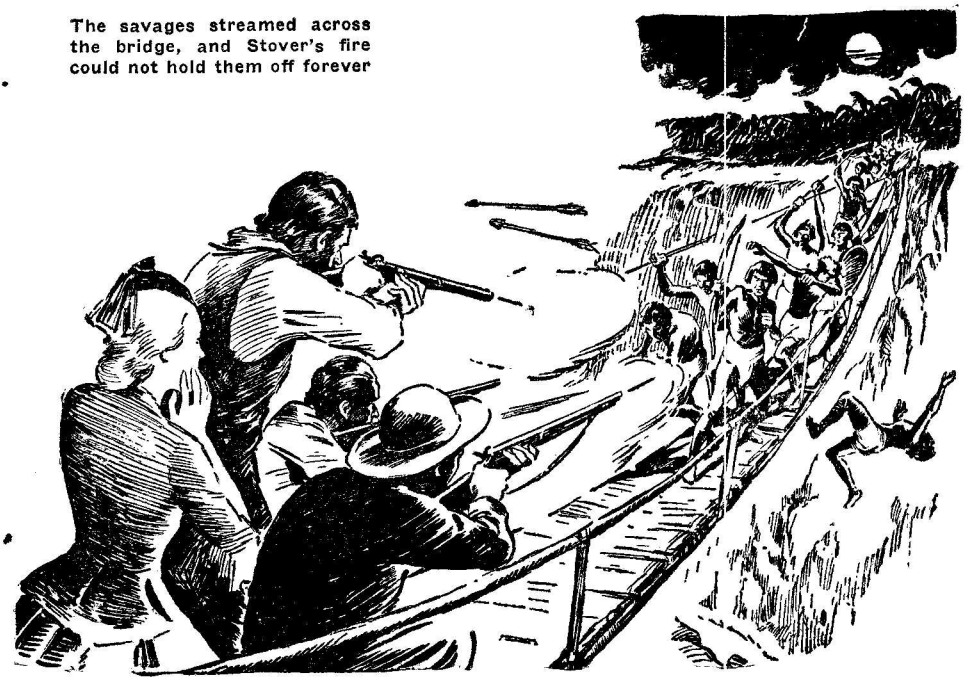
The savages streamed across the bridge, and Stover's fire could not hold them off forever



The Golden Woman

By FRED MacISAAC

THIS is the tale set down by Robert Ames of Boston more than eighty years ago. Here he narrates the incredible adventures of the Company of Jason, that gallant band of young New Englanders who, in 1850, set out for the California goldfields on the bark *Golden Fleece*.

On board the ship, however, the young men forget to dream of gold in their admiration for the beautiful Laura de Lorme, once the morganatic wife of the King of Barnheim. The captain, too, presses his attentions upon her; and because she prefers the company of the young adventurers, he plans a revenge against them.

THE Company of Jason and Madame de Lorme go ashore to hunt for a few hours on the wild coast of Patagonia—and there the captain of the *Golden Fleece* leaves them stranded. It becomes apparent at once that Ames and Enoch Stover, rivals in their infatuation for Laura de Lorme, will be the leaders of the band. With several others they set out to hunt wild game; but when they return to camp they find that their companions have been attacked by the savage Patagonians. Some have been murdered with the bolas; the rest, including Laura de Lorme, have been carried away.

Stover and Ames are determined to rescue Madame de Lorme and their companions. So they march blindly into this savage land; they lose several of their number in a fierce battle with the natives; they suffer the countless torments of the wilderness. But at last, high in the mountains, they find the chief village of the Araucanian nation. Here Antoine de Tourneus, a strange, fat little Frenchman, rules the Indians; and he assures the band that their companions—and Laura de Lorme—are safe.

The first installment of this three-part serial, herein concluded, was printed in the Argosy for May 13

All too quickly his treachery is revealed. Madame de Lorme, whom he loves, he holds a prisoner; and the Company of Jason he throws into chains, daily to toil in a silver mine with other unfortunate captives. For weeks the men stumble through their terrible labors, without hope of escape; and then finally Laura de Lorme broachs a plan to Robert Ames.

ANTOINE DE TOURNENS has held a mesmerist's power over the Araucanian warriors, and they have believed him to be a magician. But recently the Araucanians have been defeated by a Chilean army; and de Tournens knows they will soon return to revenge themselves upon him for his false magic. So now he has promised Madame de Lorme that he will give freedom, arms and wealth to the captives, if they will protect him in his flight to a seaport.

The men agree, for it is their only chance of escape. Armed, they slay the Indian guards, and with Antoine de Tournens and Laura de Lorme they set out in the night for the hills. At the next dawn, however, they see far down in the valley below them the flashing spears of the Araucanian army, returning to avenge itself upon de Tournens. . . .

CHAPTER XV

SILVER SADDLES

STOVER rode up to Lynch and myself as we gazed down from the wide ledge. "There must be four or five thousand of them," I said. "Thank God we have a good start."

"Not many horsemen among them," Captain Lynch said. "But on these trails men afoot can make almost as good time as cavalry. Their endurance is amazing. I suppose the village drums have notified them of de Tournens' flight—and they'll be after us like a swarm of wasps." He shook his head glumly.

Just then, Laura de Lorme's voice summoned us to her side.

We rode over to join her and de Tournens, who broke into rapid French, which Laura translated for us swiftly.

"He says it is certain that the Indians will pursue but if we push on at top speed we shall reach an Inca suspension bridge before they overtake us. We'll destroy the bridge, and that will force them to make a wide sweep round the mountains. De Tournens calculates that this will give us a lead of two or three days—more than enough to reach safety in the Argentine. His Majesty wants to thank you all for your courage and loyalty. You will be amply rewarded."

"Look here, ma'm." This was a Yankee named Browning who had been in the mines for a year. "You tell this Frenchy that the King-business is finished, over. He's no better than the rest of us, now. He'll be lucky not to get his throat cut."

De Tournens understood the import if not the words of this threat; and he grew livid, his little eyes gleaming ominously.

I drove my horse between Browning and Madame Laura.

"We'll all get our throats cut if we quarrel," I said. "Those Indians down there will be up here in a few hours."

He grinned at me. "Guess you're right, Ames," he said. "But I'm a democrat through and through—and this 'His Majesty' business makes me hot."

De Tournens muttered something to Laura de Lorme. She raised her hands for silence.

"Men," she said loudly and clearly. "Attention please. Each of you will receive five thousand dollars at Buenos Aires, where His Majesty has sent his treasure, if you serve him as a loyal and faithful escort. Let us go on. We shall breakfast further on."

The men expressed decided approval at the mention of food, and our march was resumed with good will.

I rode at the rear where the greatest danger lay. Our pack animals, heavily laden, would delay us so that even foot soldiers with the stamina of the Araucanians would travel faster than we. It was fortunate, I thought, that we had so good a start.

Rankin, who had taken his place beside me, grinned at me crookedly. "Looks like the de Lorme woman gets along pretty well with this king," he observed. "I thought you and Stover were her favorites."

"It is her privilege to favor who pleases her," I said sharply. But I was annoyed and jealous all the same. I could understand how she had found it necessary to flatter him with her smiles and graces when she and the rest of us had been his captives. But now that he was virtually our prisoner, I saw no reason for it. Unless his company pleased her, as much as it seemed to. And that was a good deal more than I liked, I freely admit.

OUR Company of Jason was composed of gentlemen to whom the plighted word was sacred. But the others, except for Captain Lynch, were little better than the scum of the seas—rough by nature and doubly dangerous now because of their hatred for the renegade white whose life depended upon their good will. They might be kept under control by the promise of reward waiting in Buenos Aires. Personally I had no faith in the promises of de Tournens. However our only hope of safety lay in making a common front against the enemy.

As the head of our line rounded a curve in the path I saw that Enoch Stover was riding beside Laura while de Tournens was in front with his black amoot. Stover and Laura de Lorme were talking earnestly.

"You see," I said to Rankin, "perhaps she does prefer one of us to this Frenchman after all." Small comfort in that, to me. . . .

He shook his head somberly. "Listen to me, Ames," he said. "I've seen females like that one many a time. And her kind ain't for you—or Stover, either. She lost all the money she had—and now she's after de Tournens on account of that treasure he's always reminding her of.

"It's a golden bait for a golden woman," he said. "And she's smart. She'll get what she wants, use it, and then go on to something else—something better. De Tournens may have had them Indians mesmerized—but the de Lorme has got de Tournens under *her* spell, and don't you forget it." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Kinda funny at that," he reflected, "the way that Frenchman pulled up his stakes so sudden-like. He had those natives under his thumb, and he could have stood losing one battle. Personally, I think Laura de Lorme persuaded him to return to Europe with her, where they could spend what he'd got already."

He saw my expression. "Buck up, son. There's plenty of women with yellow hair in this world. But this one's dangerous. . . ."

I interrupted in fury:

"I can't believe that she's nothing but a cheap adventuress." I said angrily—angry because, in reality, I half suspected he was right.

"Well, we've seen how chummy with de Tournens she is. She knows that we gave up a chance of rescue to help her out. And has she done the least little thing to make things easier for us? Did she save us from working like slaves in the Frenchy's mine?"

"She was helpless," I declared. But I remembered how she sat on that couch when we first entered de Tournens's salon and how at sight of her we forgot to guard our weapons, and had submitted to losing them without a struggle.

True, she had spoken a warning but it had come too late And, I thought how last night she had cajoled me on his behalf. Though, of course, his interest was hers and ours as well. And she had repeated his orders to slay his trusting Araucanian warriors. That was necessary, I knew. But I couldn't forget how cool and unemotional she had been—how utterly unlike the soft and delicate creature I had imagined her.

"Five thousand dollars a man," continued Rankin. "That's a fortune to distribute among us. When we take him into Buenos Aires he'll just laugh at us and she'll laugh with him."

"I can't believe it. I can't. . . . And it's our lives we have to consider, not any reward."

He lowered his voice. "I don't believe he has any treasure hidden in Buenos Aires. What money he has, is with us. I

dropped back, an hour ago, and examined the pack on this mule I'd leading. Know what's in it? A hundred pounds of silver brick. Twelve hundred pounds of silver. Tell me how much money that may be."

I made a quick calculation. At a dollar an ounce, there would be no more than twenty-five thousand dollars on the pack mules. I told him this and his face fell. Then he laughed. "At least it's in hand," he said. "Ours for the taking."

"Rankin," I said earnestly, "Don't breathe a word of this. Let them believe a fortune awaits them in Buenos Aires. We shall have a stiff battle on our hands in a few hours. We cannot survive if there is discontent among us."

He nodded solemnly, and mumbled something disparaging about Stover, whom he could not tolerate. I tried to pacify him.

"I admire Stover," I said flatly, and meant it. I was convinced he was my firm friend and I owed him my life.

"Have it your own way," he said with a mocking grin.

UPON a wide space on a mountain top we made a brief stop for breakfast. Fires were made, mutton was broiled and washed down with the potent Araucanian wine. There was bread, also—and bread was still a luxury to us.

Laura de Lorme sat apart from us with de Tournens, wrapped in her fur mantle, but she threw me a friendly smile when I caught her eye.

Stover came over and dropped down on the ground beside me. His handsome face was flushed and triumphant, and I had rarely seen him so exhilarated. I thought once more what strange power this golden woman had over us all—and whether for good or ill, I could not say.

Nor, when she smiled at me, did I care.

"Madame de Lorme," he began, growing sober, "thinks it is imperative that all we of the Company of Jason should stick together. She is counting particularly upon the two of us, Bob. She detests de Tournens, you know—and when the time comes, she expects us to protect her."

"Does she now?" I snapped.

He looked at me queerly, then he went on. "Madame de Lorme is certain that we can keep this scum"—he gestured toward the ragged crew—"in order until after we've had it out with the Araucanians. Then, with safety in sight, they might very well turn on de Tournens. They're not much apt to forget how he treated them, I should think."

I could see no harm in telling him of Rankin's discovery. Either I trusted him completely or not at all—and within a few hours we might be fighting for our lives, side by side. I repeated what I had learned of the silver packed on the mules.

"You are wrong, Bob," he said. "There *is* treasure in Buenos Aires. Madame de Lorme has learned that much for certain. For years de Tournens has been trading with the Argentine—shipping silver in by his Indians in exchange for horse, grain, furs and the like. But since the Indians hadn't the slightest idea of the value of silver, he has always managed to deposit huge sums, over and above what he needed for trade, in Buenos Aires banks.

"He has long known that his Indians would turn on him if he should fail them even once. Consequently, he has had his plans made for years."

"De Tournens must be mad," I said, "to have told anyone all this—even to Madame de Lorme."

"He is mad," he said. "About her. . . ."

CHAPTER XVI

THE BATTLE AT THE BRIDGE

ALL that day we marched, painfully climbing into higher altitudes. The Company of Jason rode flank to flank between Laura and de Tournens and his men. We had rationed out the ammunition, discovering that we had fifteen cartridges apiece for our ten needle-guns.

In any lengthy engagement the Company would be helpless. We cursed the glib salesmen who sold us these guns for which fresh ammunition was impossible to obtain. There was plenty of powder

and bullets for the muzzle-loaders and, in case of casualties among their owners, we would take over their guns.

I had posted a rear guard and, as the sun was setting, his outcry made us look back.

Many miles in our rear and thousands of feet below we saw a band of Indian horsemen coming round a shoulder of the mountain. There were footmen, too, who ran beside the horses, and, as the minutes passed, we could see, strung out far below, an army.

Stover frowned and I saw his lips moving.

"We have been at least sixteen hours en route with only about two hours, all told, for stops," he said. "We were seven hours away when the Indians arrived in the Valley. I do not think they are more than four hours behind us now."

"Ask de Tournens how far it is to this bridge," I told him. Stover rode forward.

"We should be there by midnight," he reported a moment later.

I had a plan. I picked out three or four fellows and told them to find likely rocks in the steep slope above us, to dig holes at their bases and mine them with powder.

"Lay a fuse and we'll try to block up the trail behind us," I said. Stover approved my plan and volunteered to supervise it. We moved on a safe distance and presently heard a crashing explosion that sent a mass of rock and loose earth tumbling down on the trail.

When I rode forward I found Laura and de Tournens waiting for me. The Frenchman gestured magnificently.

Laura smiled. "He says that you are a true general, a Napoleon," she told me.

"It may delay them an hour or two," I said. "Further on we'll explode other mines."

We blocked the trail in three other places within the next ten miles; and, weary to the bone, camped at a likely spot, ate and drank and took an hour's rest.

By moonlight we continued our march. Laura had promised at dinner that, once we were across the supension bridge, we need have no further fear of the savages.

Hour after hour we wound our way through the lofty, silent Andes.

Stover agreed with me that our obstructions could not do more than delay the savages. "It's likely," he said, "that we have made the trail impassiable for horses, but footmen will be able to climb over the barriers and, if they come in thousands, it's the bridge or death for us."

We judged that it was about eleven P.M. when we rounded a turn and in the bright moonlight saw that the trail behind us was alive with Indians.

They saw us too and the war whoops they gave voice to shattered the silence of the night. Their shrieks and bellows were taken up by the echoes and tossed back and forth across the canyon. Almost immediately a shower of arrows came flying at us.

FORTUNATELY the savages were a couple of hundred feet below us and their missiles were spent and harmless by the time they reached us. The Araucanians broke into a run, and we lashed our mounts forward as fast as we could go. It was a race now for the bridge and the footmen, even weary as they must have been from their forced march, were grimly apt to catch us ere we reached it.

An hour passed and still we could hear the howls plainly even though the Indians were for the most part invisible on the lower windings of the serpent path. That they were gaining on us despite all our efforts, was plain.

And then suddenly we debouched upon a shelf of rock—and there, a quarter of a mile ahead of us, was the bridge. It certainly resembled no bridge that I had ever seen or imagined.

The earth itself seemed to have split down into the lower world in a mighty rift that had cleaved the very mountains. From the brink on our side to the opposite edge spread a bottomless pit at least three hundred yards wide, and sagging sickeningly above it, less stable than a hammock in the breeze, stretched what de Tournens had

described optimistically as a bridge.

The moon was directly overhead, throwing a light almost as bright as day. We urged our animals forward for a closer inspection.

It was built, so we were told, hundreds of years before when the Incas had sent armies down deep into Araucanian country, with hordes of unhappy colonists, to occupy cities like those inhabited by King Otalié the First of Araucania.

On the brink were huge stone piers to which had been made fast three thick cables made of aloe-fiber, each a foot thick. On these ropes were laid a wooden path about three feet wide consisting of sticks firmly lashed together covered with coarse grass matting, which had rotted in many places. Two aloe-fiber ropes, very thick, ran along as railings.

It sloped down in the middle; its center must have been twenty or thirty feet below its edge; it rocked in the wind.

While we stared at this miracle, the yelling of the Indians sounded nearer.

While, frankly, I feared to set foot on the thing, I feared our pursuers more. "They'll be on us before we're across," I shouted. "Captain Lynch, you're a soldier. Take command."

His face lighted up "Attention," he commanded. His eyes roamed over us. "Here," he cried. "You and you and you" —picking out men he trusted least—"you ride your horses. Each of you lead a mule across. Let the lady and de Tournens go first. We others will keep them off. Leave all guns on this side. When you're over, come back for our horses. After you have ridden them across, join us and we'll retreat to the bridge in good order."

The last half mile to the bridge had been on the down grade and we saw the first of the savages already at the top of the incline.

"Come on, men. We'll use that pile of rocks for shelter," he cried. While some of us looked longingly at the bridge, we dismounted and followed him.

We took up a position about a hundred feet from the bridge where the ledge was not more than fifteen feet wide. High rocks on either side of the path gave shelter for those with muzzle-loaders to reload. Twelve men had been detailed to assist in crossing of the bridge and there were more than a score of us to defend it.

"Keep cover, as much as possible. You men with the needle guns, fire when I give the word," commanded Lynch. "You others hold your fire. By the time you have fired the breech-loaders will be reloaded. These savages like to draw a volley and rush in before the guns can be reloaded. This time it won't work."

AND now down the trail came the Araucanians, as brave in battle as the ancient Romans, men who died gleefully if they could kill a foe.

"Take careful aim, breech-loaders," said Lynch. "Aim at their legs and you'll hit them in the stomach. At what distance are these needle guns accurate?"

"Two hundred yards at the most," said Stover.

Arrows were dropping near us, spent. In a moment, death-dealing arrows were striking nearby rocks and bouncing off. There was room for only half a dozen savages abreast and they were wedged in a solid phalanx.

"Needle guns, fire," commanded Stover.

There were ten bright flashes, ten stunning reports multiplied by the echoes and ten heavy bullets ploughed into the mass of savages. The whole front line and several in the second line fell, but those behind, waving spears, shouting and screaming, came on steadily.

We were reloading.

"Muskets," snapped our commander.

With a crashing roar a dozen muskets were discharged. The astonishment of the savages was obvious. Down went eight or ten—they were only a hundred fifty yards distant. And, believing our guns were empty, all of them paused momentarily and those in the rear sent a shower of arrows.

It was only a couple of seconds that they hesitated. Then the charge came on again

but the needle guns were ready and a third volley stopped it.

By the time it resumed, the muskets were ready and when they were fired, the needle guns spoke again. Those in the front ranks turned their backs and endeavored to retreat while the Indians who hadn't come into battle, surged forward. The guns of those crossing the bridge lay ready for an emergency.

Some of the savages were pushed over into the chasm. Others succeeded in scrambling up the precipitious side of the mountain and then the phalanx was again in motion.

I heard an oath from Lynch. Two of our men had lost courage, dropped their weapons and were running for the bridge. Lynch snatched one of the pistols from my belt and fired, shooting one of them in the back.

Quaking in our shoes, we obeyed the command to breech-loaders and fired into the mass a hundred yards away.

It staggered them. The muskets poured in another volley. The Indians hurdled the bodies of the fallen and came on, screeching weirdly. There must have been a thousand of them; their line extended back to the top of the slope.

"Use the spare muskets," shouted Lynch, snatching one up. A second musket-volley stopped the savages at eighty yards and another burst from the breech-loaders sent the foe into panic. The Araucanians turned. Hundreds of them spun round and attacked their own comrades with knives and spears. For a moment we gaped at the spectacle of a pitched battle between the panic-stricken van and the oncoming warriors in the rear guard.

And then we poured volley after volley into their naked backs. The tide surged away from us. The Araucanians were in full, squalling flight.

Lynch stood up and gazed toward the bridge. "Our one chance," he cried. "Back to the bridge-head. Most of us will get across. The horses are all on the far side."

But as he spoke there came from above the whirr of an arrow and to our horror and dismay, the noble Irish-Chilean fell, an arrow through his eye.

FOR a moment we were as panic-stricken as the savages had been. Stover shouted: "Steady, men. Pick up the guns and run for the bridge. Quick!"

As he spoke an arrow sped by his head and another hit a rock beside me. Some of those who had climbed the side of the cliff had found perches from which they were potting away at us.

We hated to leave Lynch lying there, but we had no choice. We rushed for the bridge. The rascals were too cowardly to return after their last trip.

The first of our party was running out upon the bridge. Stover grasped my arm. "They'll kill them all with their arrows," he said. "Will you stay with me—and help cover their flight?"

More than anything in life I wanted to follow the others out on the swaying bridge but I realized I couldn't. Here was the test. Stover hadn't failed. So, with my heart in my boots, I smiled at him and said, "Of course."

We each had a needle gun and a musket. For the muskets we had no ammunition but we had five or six cartridges left for the breech-loaders.

We squatted at the bridge head.

Already the enemy had discovered our flight. They had begun another, more cautious, attack, firing as they came. Arrows were falling short in front of us. The Indians were coming down the trail. We fired two shots into them, quickly reloaded and fired two more. The fugitives were halfway across the bridge. But the savages were within a hundred yards. We dropped two more. That made six.

For some unknown reason, the Indian advance stopped. Hordes of warriors were still pouring down upon us from the upper path. De Tournens said, afterward, he supposed that the Ulman in command had passed word forward, after the failure of the charge, to wait until he arrived. At any rate, the delay gave us a breathing spell.

We glanced anxiously across the bridge. Men were clustered at the far end and we heard loud, angry voices. Then we heard something more ominous—the sound of chopping. My blood froze. They were trying to cut loose the bridge!

And then came a shrill cry. Laura de Lorme, her golden hair flying like a banner behind her, had run out almost to the middle of the bridge.

"No—no!" she cried shrilly. "Stover! Bob Ames, come quickly."

"You first," said Stover.

I pushed him ahead of me. "Go on. Go on, won't you!"

There was an open battle on the other side. Muskets rang out. Fists waved. And suddenly we saw a bright flame.

We ran across the swaying bridge; and the Indians, roused from their strange inactivity, surged forward and sent arrows flying into the chasm.

Laura was clinging to the rope balustrade and screaming her defiance. One of the cables was in flames.

In a moment, Stover was in the middle. In another he was holding Laura in his arms. At his heels, with arrows whizzing dangerously close, I followed.

The fire rushed out along the cable; suddenly one side of the bridge sagged. Several Indians, who had stepped out from the bridge-head rushed back whooping in terror. Grasping the thick balustrade, I steadied Stover who managed to grip Laura with one arm and pull himself along with the other.

The planks ahead of us were flaming. Stover reached the fire as four feet of pathway dropped into the abyss. The further cable burned through and hung, dangling; the floor tilted almost vertical.

"Catch her," Enoch shouted, and tossed her over the gap to the Jasonians on the bank. She landed like a feather in their arms.

"Straddle this, you fool, as I do," I growled, fearful lest he make no further attempt to save himself. I had thrown a leg over the thick cable which formed the balustrade and was edging myself forward.

As I spoke, the flooring of the bridge fell completely away. Flames leaped up and scorched our legs.

Stover clung to the cable just in time, got astride of it and we worked our way precariously to the opposite side where eager hands were stretched out to grasp us.

And suddenly a golden avalanche fell into my arms. Laura had rushed into my embrace.

"I was so afraid," she cried. "They wanted to cut you off on the other side. The beasts!"

De Tournens, it appeared, in an agony of fear, had commanded his negro to set fire to the bridge as soon as the defenders of the other side were nearing safety.

"There is no chance of preserving those two," he had declared. "They must be sacrificed for the lives of the greatest number."

The Company had protested loudly. But de Tournens had been supported by some of the others, and the negro was actually setting fire to one of the cables when Laura de Lorme had rushed out on the bridge, willing to throw her own life away to save ours. The contrast of the Frenchman's craven treachery with Laura de Lorme's heroism made me hate him and love her the more.

De Tournens had immediately ordered the negro to put out the fire but several of the ex-captives had tried to stop him. Then the Jasonians had attacked them with clubbed muskets and fists and feet. The delay enabled Stover and myself almost to reach the opposite side before the fiber cable burned off and the flooring caught fire.

As we stood safe and sound on terra firma, we saw the line of fire rushing across the chasm. Within five minutes the bridge fell flaming into the mighty cleft in the Andes. Laura's hand pressed mine fiercely. I saw her eyes sparkling with tears.

And upon the opposite bank stood the Araucanian army hurling futile threats at its fugitive king and shooting equally futile arrows. The danger was over. Dissension ceased when we reached safety.

Rankin slipped up beside me. "Well,"

he remarked in his usual mocking tone, "it's not as if this was a lane of traffic. We're safe enough now."

CHAPTER XVII

COUNTER-CONSPIRACY

GRIMLY we reckoned up our casualties . . . Captain Lynch; James Barnes, killed by a knife-thrust; Hicks, whose head had been smashed by a stone; one or two others I had scarcely known. There were several men who had suffered arrow wounds; and others with bloodied heads and battered faces they had received in the fight at the bridge-head when the Company had prevented the ex-slaves from destroying the bridge before Stover and I got across.

As a matter of fact, the more pugnacious in both factions seemed disposed to continue the brawl; and only Stover's firm discipline kept them from flying at each other with any weapon they could seize.

Laura de Lorme, de Tournens and his negro had withdrawn a little. I plunged to Stover's aid.

"Have you all taken leave of your senses?" I shouted, wild with rage. "Worthy! Lower that gun at once." Sullenly, he obeyed.

"Those hounds wanted to burn the bridge at your backs," he muttered.

"I know that," I said. "But we can't risk a fight now. Later, perhaps, we'll get our chance to pay them off." I said it merely to calm Worthy and the more quarrelsome of the Company, but my threat had the effect of calling forth an angry mutter from the other faction.

With Stover at my side, I stepped up to them. "Listen, you fools," I shouted. "We have escaped so far, by God's mercy. Stover and I stayed behind to save all of you. We were willing to die if necessary, to hold them off until you were safe over here. If they had rushed us they would have been across the bridge before you could have destroyed it—and not a man of us would have survived. I do realize, you may be sure, that destroying that bridge was a military necessity. Neither Stover nor I bear any grudge.

"So now that we are all safe," I finished, "let us, in heaven's name, have no more of this useless quarreling. We aren't at Buenos Aires yet by any means."

"Good man," Stover murmured, and clapped me on the back. He turned to the rest. "Come, all of you. There's no malice felt. But those devils behind us may find a way to overtake us even now, so let's all pull together. And now"—his voice grew solemn—"let us get down on our knees and thank God for our deliverance." He turned to Laura de Lorme. "I think we should all appreciate it, ma'm, if you would say a few words of prayer and thanks."

The whole company kneeled. Laura de Lorme, more beautiful than any woman I had ever beheld, seeming almost exalted in that moment, stepped forward. Her head was raised, and the golden pennant of her hair billowed about her shoulders. Her breast rose and fell with the gentle stir of her breathing.

Gravely and beautifully, she spoke the Lord's Prayer, and then in the fullness of her heart she began to sing the *Adeste Fideles*. Her voice was high and pure and exquisitely sweet.

She sang in Latin; presently one or two of the men began in halting tones to follow her, using the English words. Others joined in. Slowly, the sound grew firmer, deeper, and swelled to a mighty chorus; the mighty crags of the Andes caught it and filled it with what seemed divine echoes until the sound was of a mighty angel chorus singing in unison with our lady.

The moon bathed the scene in pure silver. Picture us kneeling there in that argent luminance, on the brink of a chasm hundreds of feet wide and endlessly deep—bearded men, ragged and bloody, heads bowed—and that sacred melody echoing and reëchoing against the ageless rock.

From across the abyss, the drawn-up savages watched us silently, their close-packed bodies gleaming darkly in the moon-drenched night.

ALL too soon the song ended. Laura de Lorme bowed her head, and for a long-drawn moment there was unbroken silence. Slowly, almost in embarrassment, the men shambled to their feet, and stood uneasily about, uncertain of what to do next.

I forgot my fatigue, my recent peril. I felt as refreshed as if I had eaten and drunk and slept an untroubled sleep.

I think I was the first to speak.

"As long as they can see us," I said, "they will be vengeful. So let us move on and camp out of their sight."

The men nodded respectfully. I think that marked the moment when I became their leader, with Stover as my aide. De Tournens was reduced to the rank of a private among us. And of us all, he was the least worthy.

We climbed into our saddles and rode for two hours. When we found a suitable place to camp we made our fires—for the first time without anxiety that they be spied by hostile eyes, and de Tournens' negro prepared food for us all.

None of us had the slightest trouble in finding slumber that night, nor did we delay in seeking it. I slept in dreamless security until the dawn roused us. We made careful preparations for the resumption of our journey.

Stover questioned de Tournens about our route, and was told that we must follow the Inca trail for three days. Then we would reach a river-gorge, along whose edge we would find a second trail, which would take us down to the Argentine plain. There we would encounter our first settlements.

As before, de Tournens rode beside Laura, with his negro on her other side. Neither Stover nor I had any opportunity to converse with her during the day or in the night encampments.

Apparently the prayer and the song at the chasm's brink had ended the hostility between the Jasonians and the former slaves of de Tournens. I had no anticipation of further trouble with them. You can imagine the relief in that. I did not particularly trust de Tournens but he seemed helpless enough at present.

Our calvalcade strung out a hundred yards or more as we moved slowly along the mountain trail; Stover rode as advance guard while I brought up the rear. Shortly after our stop at noon I noticed that Rankin's horse and pack-mule were dropping back. Finally I rode up to him and asked him what the trouble was. He shrugged.

"I want a word with you, Ames."

"Fire away."

"There's a Cockney named Bunty—a trouble-maker. That riff-raff who wanted to burn the bridge with you and Stover in the middle of it. They seem to listen to him. They have a plan and they've sounded me out. I don't mind saying it won't work—but I wouldn't trust 'em out of my sight."

"What are you talking about?"

"Until they are out of these mountains," he said, "they will behave themselves. But once on the plains, they know they have only to ride northeast to reach Argentine cities. In short, they scheme to settle their quarrel with the Frenchman by cutting his throat, then to do the same with us. And draw lots for the lady. I'm not the only one who has a squint at the packs on those mules, it seems."

"But—"

He grinned at my consternation. "They take no stock in de Tournens' promises," he continued. "They believe he has all the silver he owns with him and it's better to split it twenty ways than thirty."

I was silent for a moment. "Do they know anything about our route?"

"Yes, de Tournens told one of the Frenchies that we arrive in three nights at a river and follow it down to the plain."

"Did they tell their exact plan?" I asked.

"No, they sized me up as one of their kind and were hinting around to find out if I'd throw in with them."

"How could they believe you would?"

"Well, in the mines and in that jail, I got pretty friendly with some of them. You and Stover sort of gave me the cold

shoulder for Captain Lynch, you know."

"Bunty is the little man with the broken nose and bad teeth, isn't he?"

"That's the laddybuck."

"Keep your mouth shut. I've got to study this out."

After half an hour, when we came to a wide place in the trail I galloped to the head of the line, exchanged a few words with Madame de Lorme while de Tournens watched me with rancor in his black eyes. Then I rode on to Enoch ahead. I told him what Rankin had said. We discussed the situation until we finally arrived at a plan of action.

As I dropped back I exchanged a few words with such Jasonians as were not riding within hearing of the other faction and finally made a signal to Rankin to join me as soon as he could. Then I rode back to the end of the line.

WE MADE camp that night on a flat expanse where there wasn't a stick of wood to be found. It was bitter cold and most of us lacked enough covering to keep the chill out of our bones. After eating cold food we lay down, our weapons by our side. Usually it was our custom to find a comfortable place apart for Madame de Lorme but tonight the lady had to content herself with a place among the rest of us.

For the first watch I had selected Rankin and Bunty, the leader of the conspirators. Stover and I lay side by side and counted off the dragging minutes. I was in a fever of excitement and suspense. Our lives depended on the next hour. Worthy and three or four others of our company also pretended slumber. The night was dark with clouds behind which the moon had taken refuge, only peeping forth occasionally as if to satisfy herself that we still were there.

At the end of an hour and a half Stover and I rose and crept toward Bunty who stood on the trail, his hands upon the muzzle of his gun.

Thirty feet distant stood Rankin. Like two ghosts we moved upon Bunty. We were behind him, a few feet distant, when the moon suddenly reappeared, its light almost blinding. Swiftly my hands closed around Bunty's throat. Stover rushed forward and struck him on the head with the butt of his gun. Without a sound he passed into unconsciousnes and we let him fall. Immediately our companions rose to carry out the rest of our hastily contrived plan. They moved silently among the sleepers, taking from each his musket or rifle which they carried to a place we had agreed upon.

In five minutes I approached Laura de Lorme and touched her shoulder. She sat up, startled, then, seeing me, she smiled sweetly.

"Wake de Tournens," I whispered. "Explain to him that we have frustrated a plot against his life. Bring him to where Stover and the others are. Also the negro."

In a flash she understood, nodded, crept to de Tournens and whispered in his ear. A moment later we nine Jasonians stood at the edge of the camp in martial array. I fired a shot from one of my pistols.

INSTANTLY the sleepers waked, grasping madly for the guns that were no longer within reach. Their horror-struck faces in the bright moonlight gazed upon us blankly, and then in terror as they saw Rankin among us and realized what had happened.

They cursed us luridly, calling us traitors and murderers. Seeing us unmoved, they changed their tone and began to beg for their lives.

"Tell them what we have decided, Enoch," I said.

He stepped forward.

"Men," he said, "you will obey us or you will be shot. Lay your powder and bullets on the ground. We are going to part company."

His voice was calm and even; it told them, I think, the firmness of our intentions more than any loud accusations could have done. They gaped at him helplessly and said not a word.

"We know what you planned, gentlemen," he said icily. "We shall be kinder

to you than you intended to be to us. We give you your lives—for what they may be worth." His tone dripped scorn, and he was every inch the aristocrat that they so hated. "Now stand over there, if you please. Twenty paces—march!"

He waited, unmoving, until they obeyed. Then he nodded, almost primly, like a schoolmaster.

"We shall leave you sufficient food to reach a settlement. But no weapons. And no horses. Do not mistake me. My friends and I have no more cause to take de Tournens' part than you have—but we promised to see him safely to the coast. We intend to keep that promise."

He turned his back on them, ignoring their protestations of innocence. At his signal, the rest of us mounted, leaving two of the Company to keep them back at gunpoint while the rest of us made our departure.

We left them two-thirds of the food, which seemed fair enough—and within half an hour we had cleared the camp, and been joined by the members of the Company who had remained behind.

None of us, I believe, ever saw them again. I have never heard what became of them.

It was their lives or ours, and I do not see how we could have acted differently. If we did wrong, may the Lord forgive us.

FOR two days we followed the ancient trail without incident. On the second afternoon we came to the gorge-fork and stood on the brink of a deep canyon at whose bottom ran the silver ribbon of the river.

To our surprise, we spied tents below us at a distance of a few miles. There were men on horseback. I could see the sunlight glinting on the points of lances.

De Tournens, Laura de Lorme and the negro rode up beside us. I did not especially notice it at the time, but afterward I was vividly to remember their exact positions. The black was on the outside, Laura de Lorme on the inside, and de Tournens between them. Usually it was Laura de Lorme who rode in the middle; and why de Tournens had changed this arrangement I could not guess, unless it was to give Laura de Lorme a place of greater safety.

The other reason did not then occur to me. . . .

I had turned away from them after speaking a few words of what we had spied below. Then I heard Laura de Lorme gasp. After the gasp came a scream of horror, and I spun around in my saddle.

De Tournens' horse had reared suddenly and, whinnying wildly, had crashed into the side of the negro's mount.

For a moment I was frozen. I do not see how I could have prevented the tragedy, in any case. It seemed to happen very slowly, but I suppose it was all over in a very few seconds.

I shall never forget the look on Laura de Lorme's face—nor the wild animal cry that tore from the negro's throat as his horse scrambled for footing, lost its balance, and toppled, hoofs thrashing madly, into the gorge. The negro stayed in the saddle almost all the way down, and the bodies of horse and rider crashed into the rocks below at very nearly the same instant.

My first concern was for Laura de Lorme. I rode swiftly to her side and drew her horse back. "No—don't look," I said. She swayed a little in her saddle, and leaned against me for support.

I did not have a chance to observe de Tournens' face. I wish now that I had. . . .

De Tournens muttered something in French. Stover told me later that his words seemed oddly detached. "A most regrettable accident," or something of the sort, they were, with the brief statement that he should miss the servant who had been loyal to him for fifteen years.

Stover paid little attention and joined Laura and me. "It couldn't be helped, ma'm," he said in even tones. "And it might have been one of us."

She nodded gravely. "You are right. I—I'll be all right in a few moments." But her voice sounded hollow, and if I

hadn't been an utter fool I should have known that she was frightened—very, very frightened—of something.

Stover and de Tournens rode ahead. I tried to think of something to say to Laura de Lorme that would take her mind off the accident.

"There is some sort of military camp down there." I pointed. "We've reached trail's end at last."

She smiled wanly. "I see it," she said. "But I cannot quite believe it."

I gave the word to go forward. We continued for about half a mile and reached the ledge where Stover and de Tournens were waiting for us.

As always when close to her—and this was the first moment we had been alone, remember, since leaving the bridge—I found myself completely within her spell. I knew too that it would always be so as long as I lived.

I did not speak. There was nothing I wanted to say. The adventure was over and I didn't want to think of what might lie ahead. The possibility that Laura de Lorme and I might move into different worlds was something I could not face.

Stover raised his hand as we came up. "Company of Jason," he said, addressing us all. "We gave our word to escort de Tournens to safety. This we have done. Those soldiers below are Chileans. What they are doing here we shall soon learn, but no doubt they will be friendly to us.

"Our recent host"—and here he favored de Tournens with a distinctly acid smile—"fears however to fall into Chilean hands. For this I cannot say I blame him. There is a price upon his head in Chile.

"Consequently he wishes me to tell you that on these pack mules is twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of silver which he will freely divide among us in addition to the reward already promised, if we will aid him to deceive the Chilean officials as to his identity. He asks us to tell the commander down there that all of us are escaped prisoners of King Antoine—and to let him pass as one of us."

Laura de Lorme, I am sure, was about to speak. She bit her lip and raised one hand. Then she remained silent.

"We don't care a hoop about them Chile-beans," Rankin said. "This silver is in hand—and I'm a-thinkin' it's all the money we're likely to get. Sure, Stover. We'll do one more favor for His Royal Majesty."

The others agreed and it was settled.

I couldn't help wondering, though, what it was that Laura de Lorme had wanted to say.

CHAPTER XVIII

BON VOYAGE, MADAME

IT TOOK us a little more than two hours to descend to the plain and arrive within sight of the camp. A sentry challenged us. The stern effect of his command to halt, though, was decidedly marred by the way he goggled at Laura de Lorme. Plainly a golden-haired goddess was the last thing on earth he had expected to see—and that she should turn up in a company of filthy, bearded, bloodstained men made the whole thing utterly impossible of belief.

Still gawking, he turned and led us to his commanding officer, who evidently had spied our approach and was waiting for us.

A bugle had sounded assembly and the troop—we discovered later that it was a detachment of cavalry escorting a party of surveyers and cartographers—was drawn up on foot.

The captain aided Laura de Lorme to dismount. The rest of us got down and grouped ourselves around her.

"*Señora and señores,*" the captain began. "I am honored and delighted to see you. Let me welcome you to our camp."

Laura de Lorme smiled graciously as he dropped to one knee and kissed her hand. She might well have been in the court of Barnheim, surrounded by courtiers, from the cool elegance of her behavior.

She explained briefly who we were and made a concise and rapid account of our adventures, supplemented by a few words

from Stover. The captain listened attentively, expressing surprise, admiration, and the proper emotions with the volatile play of his Latin features.

Suddenly I became conscious of tension. I looked swiftly at Laura de Lorme and saw once more that pallor of face, that hesitation. But this time she had decided to speak. I waited, breath held.

Rigid as an automaton, she took a single step toward de Tournens. Stiffly she raised her arm and stiffly she pointed it at him.

"Captain," she said very clearly, very slowly, "I denounce that man. He is Antoine de Tournens, the self-styled king of the Araucanians. Your government has set a price on his head. You have only to take him!"

I stared at her amazed. Her cold hard tone and the theatricality of her gesture disturbed me bitterly. Her arm fell and she stepped back, her bosom moving unevenly, her eyes unwilling to meet mine.

Meantime de Tournens had uttered a growl of rage and started for her as if he meant to strangle her where she stood. Quicker than the rest of us, the captain drew his sword, leaped forward, and held its point at de Tournens' chest. Furious, helpless, and even a little pathetic in that moment of betrayal by the woman he worshipped, he stood there, unable to speak. I have never seen a human being so utterly stunned.

Rankin growled in my ear: "She's given him away, eh? I knew it—I told you the miserable sort of thing she was. . . ."

I swung around on him, my fist clenched. I think I would have struck him down if Stover hadn't grabbed my arm.

Soldiers took de Tournens away. His face was a dirty gray; his lips were working but no articulate sound came from his throat. All his authority had fallen from him. His walk was already the sagging gait of the condemned, his eyes bore the look of a man in living death. With so few words, had she destroyed him.

I kept telling myself that she must have a reason, trying to defend her. But she refused to look at me as the captain offered her his arm, bowed gallantly, and led her into his tent.

"What does it mean?" I demanded.

He nodded. "After our agreement, I cannot understand it. It means, of course, that the silver will be confiscated. We shall be left without resources but that doesn't worry me. Damn it—I believed in Laura. She knows they will hang him or cut off his head. How could she?"

The officer returned. "You gentlemen are our guests," he declared. "You have performed a great service to the Republic of Chile. She will know how to show her gratitude. I feel honored in offering my poor hospitality to these so brave North American gentlemen. I am eager to hear the story of your amazing adventures from your own lips. We shall all have dinner with my officers in an hour. How may I serve you?"

Stover smiled. "If you could loan us razors and provide soap and hot water you would be doing the greatest possible service. And we are greatly in need of civilized clothing."

The captain, whose name I never was able to pronounce or write, proceeded to supply us with what we needed. When we were called to dinner in his tent—which was hardly large enough to accommodate us all with three officers and a surveyor and a geographer—we no longer looked like tatterdemalions.

It was a cheerful meal. We had wild goose properly cooked, good wine, bread and other delicacies untasted by us for ages. And, to our great delight, the dinner ended with coffee, the first in a long time.

AN ORDERLY whispered then to the captain who bowed to Stover and said, "The *señora* has recovered and wishes speech with you and Señor Ames. This way if you please."

We found Madame de Lorme sitting on the edge of the cot in her army tent. She had managed to fix her hair and she was arrayed in the green and gold uniform of a Lancer which was most becoming to

her blonde loveliness. I admit that I gazed upon her with a certain amount of rancor despite her brilliant smile.

"My two good friends," she said. "I presume you despise me yet for what I have done."

"We pledged our word to de Tournens," said Stover stiffly.

"*I* did not," she said quietly. "Yet I would not have denounced him, knowing that it meant his death, if he had not committed a last atrocity. My friends, he purposely drove his horse against the horse of the African. It was murder. I could no longer trust him. None of us could."

We stared at her dumbfounded.

"I saw him," she said vehemently. "And I understood why he did it. That black had been his faithful servant for many years—his assistant in the charlatanry by which he made his living on the stage, his companion in the mummery by which he befuddled the ignorant Indians. Yet he murdered him remorselessly."

"But why?" muttered Stover.

"Because he saw the military encampment. He knew that the presence of the negro would establish his identity. Without him de Tournens might pass as one of the escaped slaves of King Antoine. With him, he was sure to be found out. So he killed him. As he would any of us. I acted to save us all."

I felt like a fool. I could only stammer apologies.

"*Madame,*" said Stover, "Forgive us. You were right in denouncing him."

"Thank you," she said, smiling. "Furthermore, had an attempt to pass him off as one of us been detected, I think you all would have faced a firing squad."

"*Madame,*" I said. "I believe you are the wisest woman in the world, as well as the most beautiful."

She gave each of us a hand. "And I am truly fond of you both," she said warmly. "Please believe that—always."

TO RANKIN'S great distress, the pack-mules with their treasure departed for Santiago during the night, along with the wretched Frenchman who had made himself a king. I presume they hanged him immediately upon arrival in the Chilean capital but I have never heard definitely.

He was a most remarkable man, a wierd mixture of daring and cowardice, both a romantic and a craven figure. Enoch and I were curious about his alleged magic powers and we later questioned Laura about them.

"He boasted to me that he could bow anybody to his will," she said with a smile. "But I saw no evidence of his skill as a mesmerist. He did have a certain ability as a magician. He performed for me several perplexing tricks. The negro was always at hand when he worked his magic and I suppose he had much to do with the success of the illusions."

That night we slept on cots, the first beds we had known since leaving the *Golden Fleece*. We remained a day and another night with the Chilean soldiers. There was no sign of the mutineers we had abandoned but we told the Chilean commander about them and he promised to keep an eye out for them.

When we resumed our march, we had troopers to guide us to the nearest frontier-town; we traveled, too, with the assurance of the Chilean commander that we would receive a reward of $50,000 posted for the apprehension of King Antoine, which consoled Rankin for the loss of the silver.

The remainder of the journey was blessedly uneventful. At the first Argentine hacienda we came to, the *haciendado's* wife supplied Madame de Lorme with proper garments and presented her with a palfrey trained to a side saddle. She was pleased as a child when she rode forth, but I thought that she had been even more charming dressed as a boy in her brilliant Chilean army uniform.

In good time we rode into the large and brilliant city of Buenos Aires. Having escorted Madame de Lorme to the finest hotel, the *Palace*, then we secured quarters at a modest inn and, leaving our companions there, Stover and I visited the establishment of the Minister of Chile.

Madame de Lorme had assured us that she would have no trouble securing funds once she reached civilization and that she would provide for us until we no longer needed assistance.

A swift courier from Santiago had already informed the Minister of that republic regarding us and he welcomed us most cordially. De Tournens had arrived in Santiago and was awaiting trial, he informed us, while he had been assured that the reward of fifty thousand dollars for his capture would be paid us speedily.

After dining that night, we held a council. As each of us would receive an equal share in the de Tournens reward we were unanimous in our determination to return to Boston.

ENOCH and I shared the same room and sat up long while Stover tried to persuade me to leave the golden prize to him. Stover was certain that his parents would receive Laura as his wife. She would enjoy a good home and every comfort. I, being a penniless orphan could give her no such assurance; yet considering our associations with Laura de Lorme I could not but think that she had bestowed more favor on me than upon my friend. Enoch, of course, scouted this doggedly.

In the morning came a letter from Madame de Lorme inviting us both to visit her at three in the afternoon.

We were ushered into a fine large salon furnished with gilt chairs and tables. There, upon a blue and gold divan, sat Laura, once more a great lady, in billowing crinolines. Without rising, she extended a hand to each of us. Enoch kissed it gallantly and I did likewise.

"My dear, dear friends," she said warmly. "It's such a joy to see you. Sit down please. I have interesting news."

We seated ourselves stiffly and self-consciously. In some subtle manner she had made us feel that we were no longer on the old familiar footing.

She smiled at us very sweetly however. "As you already know," she began, "I am a person rather well known in the world and my departure from Pernambuco on the *Golden Fleece* was reported to persons of influence. So, when the rascally Captain Perkins sailed his ship into the River Platte, the British Ambassador sent on board for news of me. Upon being told that I had been taken captive by Patagonian savages who had refused ransom, he reported to the Argentine government which descended upon the ship and found my gold and jewels in the possession of the scoundrel. He is at present in jail and it is my intention to see him hanged."

As she spoke her face assumed the same forbidding expression as when she had denounced de Tournens to the Chilean cavalry officer. Even loving her as I did, I was momentarily repelled.

"In his strong box was found the funds deposited by your Company of Jason. These will be returned to you," she added.

"That's good news," I declared.

"So," she said; "your Company may proceed to California on the *Golden Fleece* —but with a new and honest captain."

My friend and I exchanged glances. We had the same thought.

"And you with us, *madame?*"

She smiled enigmatically. "As I am once more a woman of means, I shall refuse any share of the Chilean reward for the capture of de Tournens. I have had my revenge—"

"Revenge?" I cried.

She lifted her hand imperiously. "No questions, please. Your Jasonians will divide the entire reward among yourselves."

"But should we decide to go to California, you will accompany us?" Stover demanded.

Laura's eyes grew misty and she shook her head slowly. "My dear friends," she said softly. "I do not care, now, to see California."

He rose. "Then we shall not go," he asserted. "Without you—it is not to be considered."

"I cannot go," she said simply.

Enoch stepped close to her and dropped on one knee—I envied his gallantry and

his audacity. *"Madame,"* he said, "you are aware that both Ames and I adore you. Will you state which you wish for husband, here and now? The other will take defeat bravely."

"Alas," she said blushing and sighing, "it would be hard to choose between you if it were possible to wed either of you. I am older than either of you and— There is someone else. . . ."

She touched her eyes with her handkerchief. Enoch stumbled to his feet. He was deadly pale. My heart was twisting inside of me.

"He is a man who has sacrificed more for me than man has ever sacrificed for a woman," she said in a low tone. "For his sake I left Europe—to make his throne secure, for he is a king."

She lifted her chin and her eyes met ours.

"Since we sailed from Pernambuco, my king has lost his throne. He awaits me in England. There is no longer any obstacle to our marriage. I sail on the next ship for England, my dear, dear friends."

It was Stover who first found speech. "We congratulate you and His Majesty," he said. "We apologize for our temerity." His voice broke. "And now, *madame,* we shall take leave of you."

Laura de Lorme rose, came to us and kissed each on the cheek. She was weeping.

I think I shall always remember that moment, for the brilliant sunlight slanted into the windows just then, and she was crowned with gold. We turned away.

WITHIN a few weeks, the Company of Jason was rich. Chile paid us the reward after impounding the treasure of de Tournens. Six of us then decided to go on to California—one of them—Rankin—found much gold; two returned penniless; and three we never heard of more. Stover, Worthy, myself and one other took passage to Boston after we had escorted Madame de Lorme to the ship which carried her to England.

When we arrived home Enoch found his father dead and a business awaiting him. I invested my stake in the firm and when Enoch was thrown from his horse and killed five years later I became its head.

Once a year, at Christmas, both Enoch and I had received a card from the queen of the dethroned King of Barnheim. When I wrote her of Enoch's death, I received a note of sympathy from her which I shall always treasure. No word came from her on the tenth Christmas and months later I learned that she was dead.

It is not my intention to marry—I have seen no woman who can compare with that great lady to whom I gave my youthful heart. Being a man of mature years I realize fully that Laura de Lorme was not for such as Enoch and myself. I am able to look back along the lane of years and see her as she really was.

Laura was by no means a good and noble woman—she had a quality of vindictiveness that was unwomanly, and a guile surpassing our youthful understanding. And yet she was a great and generous woman. Her faults fade as I recall her standing on the burning Inca bridge, ready to die with Enoch and myself.

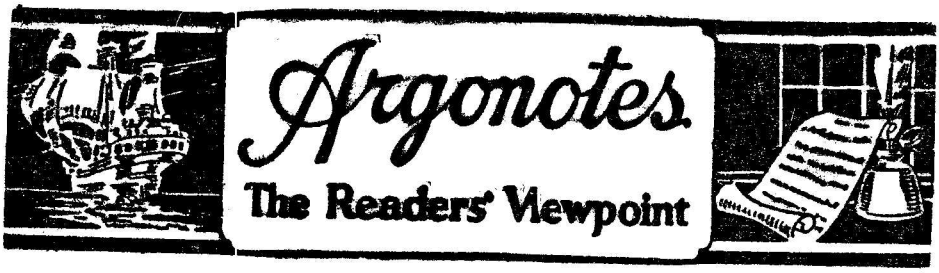
I do not question, now, that she made use of her charms to beguile Antoine de Tournens. A remark she made after she had betrayed him to the Chileans convinces me that she had been his mistress. The circumstances condone such a sin—I do not hold it against her memory.

She played Enoch against me and me against Enoch to serve her ends—for that I cannot blame her.

As I write I can see her before my eyes, young and lovely as she was then—a woman who had no scruples against using men for her own purposes. I feel sure, however, that she truly loved the King of Barnheim, made great sacrifices for him and, I trust was happy as his throneless queen.

Not a stainless woman, not a good woman according to our standards, but a great woman, a brave woman and, in my opinion, the most beautiful woman who ever lived. God rest her soul.

THE END



MAYBE our conception of the job that ARGOSY must do has been wrong. We've considered the book as pure entertainment—not necessarily as giddy as that sounds, of course—and as relaxation. The old elm out in the backyard whose shade you could lie under when the day was hot and you were tired. The favored corner by the fireplace where you could settle down in your slippers and an old tweed coat, and forget that it was raining outside.

As far as we know we haven't consciously avoided looking at the world of today, but we also haven't made any particular point of dwelling on the sickening tragedies that are piling up around that poor bewildered animal, mankind. We thought we might give you a place where you could get away from all that for a little time each week.

But the reader whose letter follows seems to think otherwise. We are cowards, purveyors of rose-colored glasses—a kind of cross between and a pink lemonade and a marijuana cigarette. Comes the revolution, and we will be, it appears the first to go. And in the opinion of our correspondent we will probably mount the guillotine platform with a smile on our weakly imbecilic face, vacantly humming "Happy Days Are Here Again" until the End. . . .

J. H. CALDERMAN

What are you running in that day nursery anyhow? I've been reading your magazine for a long time with rapidly mounting disgust at your shilly-shallying tactics. The day of escapist fiction is over. The intelligent man and woman of today wants red meat even in his pap—he doesn't want to spend a dime a week for blinders. Or haven't you got the nerve to hold the mirror up to life? If you've got a spine, use it to stand up with. For ——— sake, stop sitting on it.
The Bronx, N. Y.

WELL, it's up to you . . . and we *do* mean you.

With stories like "The Man with the Magic Face," "Karpen the Jew," "Tomorrow," "Sandhog," "Wild River," and a hundred or more like them, we believed that we'd found the happy medium between entertainment and the realistic view. If we've been wrong in our proportions, please let us know. Leave us, anyhow, have a good fight about it. This column has been too darned peaceful ever since the Second Civil War died down.

CONSIDERABLY less aggressive in tone is the letter that follows, shedding as it does a lovely aura of affection and kindliness all around us. We bask, and invite you to listen to:

CLYDE A. WYLIE

Will you permit a temporary shut-in who hasn't a typewriter handy to join the circle and kneel at the shrine of his boyhood idol?

I have just read Edward J. McCormicks' contribution to Jan. 7th Argosy and I'd love to shake his hand. Only I prefer adventure to detectives. I've pounded pavements too many days—and nights—and I know too many detectives.

I have read the letters of men who have read ARGOSY for ten, twenty and twenty-five years, under its different titles and have found but one who has belonged to the family longer than I.

Way back in the early 80's—can't say which year now, but I was a wee tad of a kid then, and I am sixty-two now—my brother and I found a copy of "The Golden Argosy" in the shade of an alder bush beside a woods road in

northern Michigan. It's a trunk highway now, straightened, graded and surfaced, but I can still show the spot in the side of the road where that "Golden Argosy" reached up and gathered me into the family. And I have never left it—the family, of course, I mean.

We couldn't carry the magazine to the house for mother was from a strict old-fashioned New England Methodist family, and such "trash" wasn't permitted under our hungry, youthful eyes, so we smuggled it up into the haymow of our log stable and literally read it to pieces.

It was a long time, during those hard pioneer years before I was in a position to spend money for magazines but as soon as I could I began buying and reading "ARGOSY All-Story" and I have been a faithful follower ever since.

I won't say that I like all the stories, for I don't, but somebody likes the stories which don't appeal to me and we all make up ARGOSY's vast family just as—my brother doesn't care for the skirl of the Scottish pipes and I love every squeak of drones and chanters but that doesn't bust up our family, see?

I really miss some of the earlier writers—can't name them now, but I miss them just the same.

I met Edgar Rice Burroughs in one of his first Martian stories while I was pulling a work train in southern Oregon in 1915 and I have followed him ever since through "ARGOSY All-Story" and ARGOSY. Am still at it.

Like E. J. Mc. I think that "The Ship of Ishtar" was a wonderful story and if I were as fortunate as he was I'd read it again, for while I have always liked stories of the mystic, fantastic and probably impossible, "The Ship of Ishtar" in some way, especially appealed to my imagination and has stuck in my memory all these years.

You may not be able to use my contribution but you will at least know that one of your oldest admirers has shown up from obscurity and that the old ship ARGOSY has been his first and only love.

Portsmouth, Va.

ALSO an eager dispenser of approbation as another old friend, to whom we now offer the floor, a beneficient smile, and a large segment of the Shirt off Our Back. . . .

EDGAR L. NORRIS

This is my first letter to the ARGOSY or any other magazine. I've read the ARGOSY for many years—so long I don't even remember how I happened to start buying it.

You have published many stories that I liked and many that I didn't; but I like ARGOSY for its clean, wholesome variety. So why complain if I don't like a few of the stories.

A few of the recent stories that I have liked are:

Nonstop to Mars—JackWilliamson
Lost Harbors and many others by Allan V. Elston
The Axe Bites Deep—Philip Ketchum
Synthetic Men of Mars—Burroughs
Nor'easter—Dickinson
Rifles at the River—Foster
Seven Out of Time—Zagat
Help, Murder, Police—Adams
Sailing Bum—Watkins

These are only a few of the ones I liked. Others I cannot remember but I do recall characters that I like to see often, such as No-Shirt McGee, Henry Harrison Conroy and the Judge, Joel Sloane, Dave McNally, Doctor Kildare, Jim Daniels, Dan Harden! And others which I would like to see more often.

As for changes in the magazine policy I have only one thing to say and that is that if I were in ARGOSY's editorial position I would only hope to do as well as the present editor does.

And now for a few special requests. Let's have some more stories such as "Ship of Ishtar," the Costello stories, "Hand-sled Burke," "Lost House," fantastics and anything else that happens along.

And so I'll sign off (hoping that this misses the waste basket) with a toast to ARGOSY as it has been, is, and we all hope will continue to be—a clean, fine interesting magazine which I always read from cover to cover with pleasure.

Washington, Penna.

COMING as it does from a reader with the name the next correspondent has, his sole complaint seems a pretty strange one. We may be captious, but isn't it a little like a man named Berry not liking fruit?

KARL KLONDIKE

Compliments on the way you are dishing up the fantasy stories. I thought you would never get started, though.

Also orchids to Roscoe for "The Man Who Hated Lincoln," and for his letter in Argonotes. Especially the last two paragraphs. I heartily agree with A. Roberts that Roscoe is one of the best in the business. Have him write often and more often.

But there is one thing wrong with Argosy now. Too much No-Shirt McGee. Please put him on the old-age pension and retire him from active duty.

Harrisburg, Illinois

FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT

Send Coupon
Don't Pay Until Relieved

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

HERE'S HOW TO RELIEVE IT

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to kill the germ; so you can see why the ordinary surface remedies are unsuccessful.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. It peels off the tissue of the skin where the germ breeds.

ITCHING STOPS QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected parts with H. F. night and morning until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days. Be sure to consult a specialist if the case is severe.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief; especially if you are one of those who have tried for years to get relief from Athlete's Foot without success.

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us $1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.

GORE PRODUCTS, INC. M.
860 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a complete supply for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you $1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

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