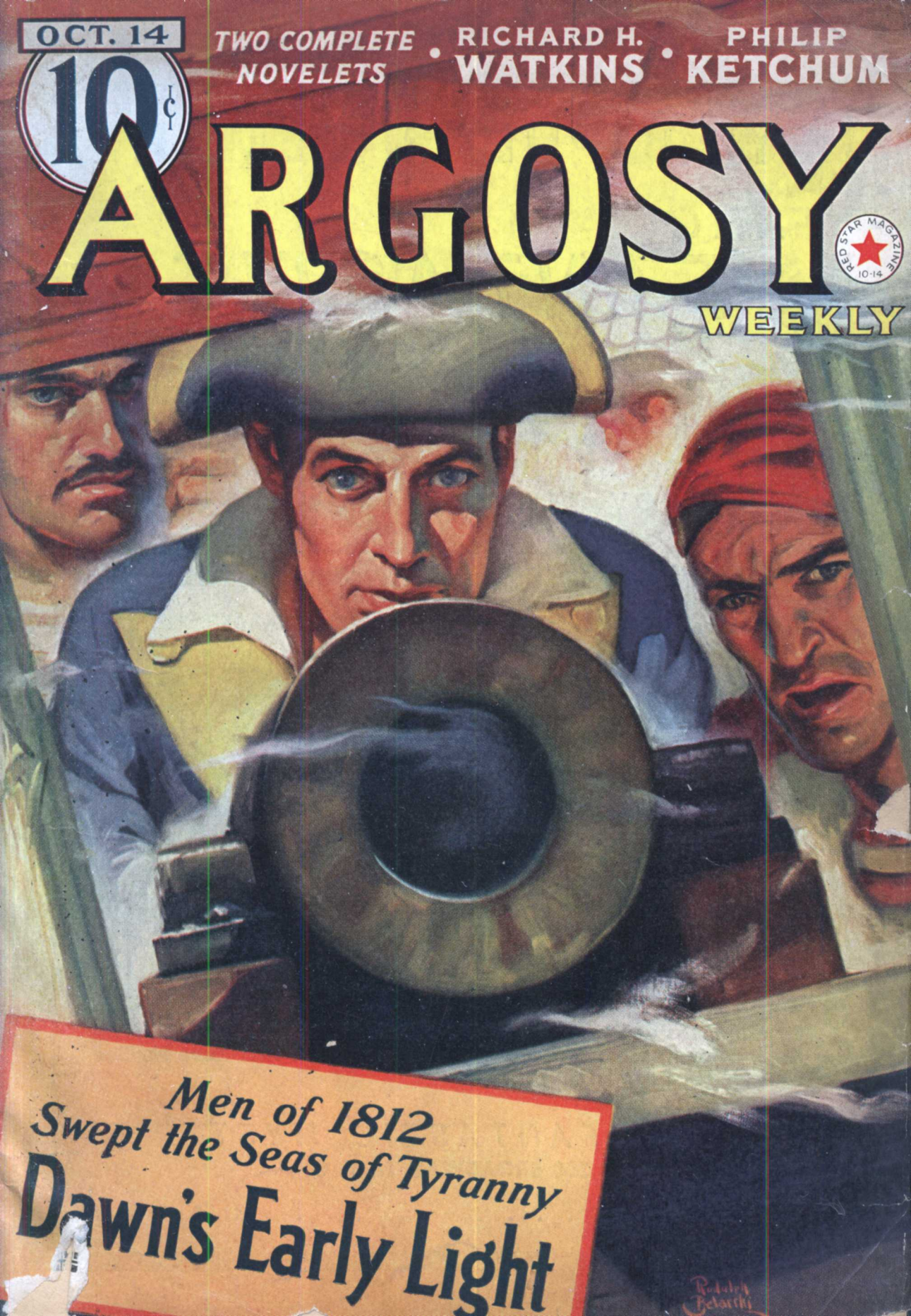
OCT. 14
10¢

TWO COMPLETE NOVELETS • RICHARD H. WATKINS • PHILIP KETCHUM

ARGOSY

RED STAR MAGAZINE 10-14

WEEKLY

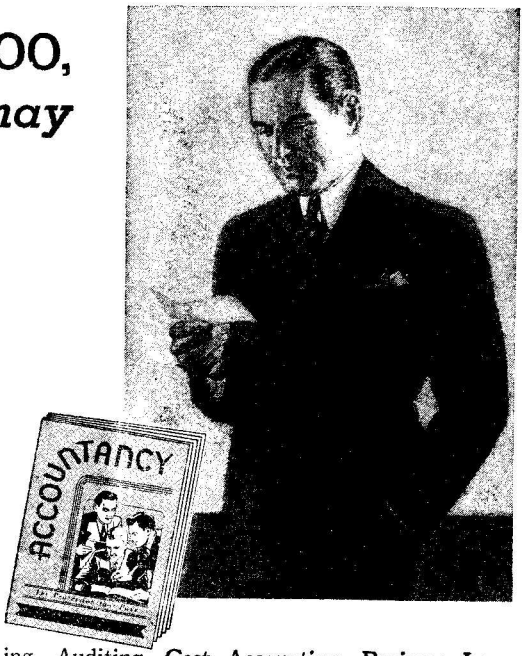


Men of 1812 Swept the Seas of Tyranny

Dawn's Early Light

How Big Is YOUR PAY-CHECK?

If you earn under $3,000, Higher Accountancy *may be the answer for you*



"THE size of my pay-check? What business is it of yours?" Perhaps that's the first reply that comes to your mind.

But—stop a moment. It really *is* our business—to help men just like you. In fact, it's been our business here at LaSalle for 30 years.

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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 294 CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 14, 1939 Number 1

Cover by Rudolph Belarski
Illustrating Dawn's Early Light

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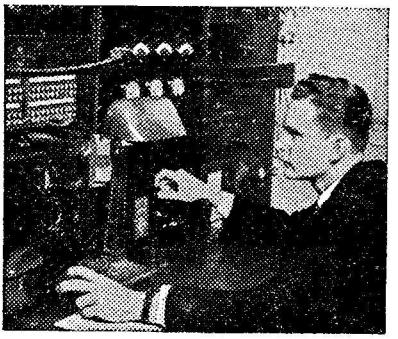

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White Robes of Rebellion

By C. K. SHAW

Author of "The Wagon Whelp"

There's law at Austin—soldiers at Galveston; but down along the lower Brazos, with swamps and forests and rebels between two Yankees and the world, the hooded riders don't wait for law. An exciting novelet

I

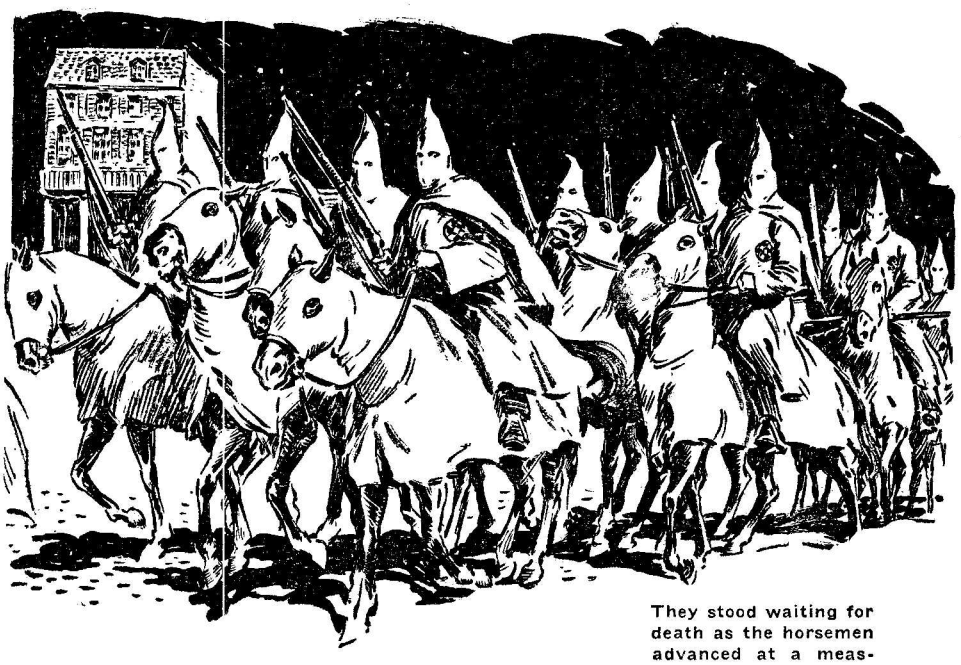
IT WAS an unprepossessing outfit that trailed into the small town of Estacado on the lower Brazos. The wheels of the light wagon rattled, the flanks of the mules caved in until you could hang a hat on their hip bones, and the two men on the seat were as gaunt as their mules.

Dr. Jerry Dalton looked at the town with eyes that sternly questioned the wisdom of their arrival; but Oliver Marsh, a boy scarcely turned twenty, took in the squatty parched lines of Estacado with simmering triumph. He ran an antagonistic glance out over the ears of the mules down the deserted street of the town.

"It looks ugly enough to foster rebellion," he said.

"It isn't in rebellion," Dr. Dalton said wearily, as one who repeated a remark he had voiced many times.

"Killing two agents of the Freedman's Bureau is open rebellion! The South fought us and lost; now the North is the law here. Loyal Union men are being



They stood waiting for death as the horsemen advanced at a measured walk

placed in all important offices. We are not going to tolerate rebellion."

"The two agents before you probably held the same viewpoint," Dr. Dalton said, driving down the street toward a sign that announced the office of the probate judge of the county. "But after a noose presses hard enough on a man's windpipe, what he thinks doesn't cut much ice. Even your ideas will die after you're planted six feet under the sod."

Oliver Marsh turned in a burst of anger. "Dalton, I have listened too long to your pacific talk. I did not come to Estacado to humor these rebels. My word is going to be the law. I shall not forget that my father died in the War against these— these— It's maddening, I tell you!"

The tired mules dropped their heads and stopped when Dr. Dalton guided them from the dusty road. Oliver Marsh leaped over the wheel and walked up the path toward the office of the probate judge. Jerry Dalton followed him into the small, hot office, although the stony eyes of young Marsh tried to drive him back.

Judge Bailey had a nervous eye and a sweaty palm. He had the habit of watching the street, and twice while they talked he went to the door and searched the road both ways.

"Estacado is close to exploding." he said.

Oliver Marsh pierced him with resentful eyes. "You have said that three times. Possibly you have not been stern enough. There is the law at Austin and soldiers in the garrison at Galveston."

"And Austin is Austin and Galveston is Galveston and *this* is Estacado," the judge snapped. "There are swamps and Indian-infested forests and rebels between us and the world. Hooded riders don't wait for the arrival of the law."

"The Ku Klux Klan isn't strong in Texas." Oliver Marsh's tones were tense.

"Outgrowths of it are on every hand. Whether you call them Klan, Knights of the White Camellia, or Brotherhood of the South, the end is the same. A noose is a noose in any language."

Oliver rose. "Dr. Dalton and I will find rooms, wash up and get some decent

food; then you and I, Judge Bailey, will formulate plans to bring this section to its knees. We'll handle men like Solomon Vadder."

"Vadder! He's the most powerful man on the Brazos!" The judge's brows carried beads of perspiration due to the hot morning, but they seemed to grow more profuse and dew-like when he mentioned Solomon Vadder. "I hope you find lodging," he said as Oliver was marching away. "Men from the North find a poor welcome here."

Back at the wagon, Dr. Dalton took up the lines and headed the mules toward the Jabez Pike Hotel. It was a thick-walled place, part sod, part heavy timbers. It seemed the only building on the street to offer protection from the heat.

JABEZ PIKE and his son Ward watched with straight-lipped faces and unfriendly eyes as the wagon drew into the shade of an oak tree near the hotel. Jabez and his son did not need to speak. They knew the men climbing over the wheels were Northerners, probably had fought in Yank armies, and were not in Estacado as victors.

Jabez drew his son back into the hotel to await the coming of the strangers. His nostrils were thin with hate. When he spoke, his voice held a haughty fire and stately drawl of the deep South. "One is just a boy, not dry behind the ears yet. I reckon he's the new agent. The taller one with the muscles sittin' tight against his bones is likely the doctor. He'll be the one to watch."

Ward Pike's eyes raced over the approaching pair. "That young squirt better come with his guns spittin' if he expects to take any taxes off Sol Vadder," he said. He spoke with the flat, nasal drawl of the native Texan.

Jabez Pike looked steadily at his son. Ward was a younger, more reckless addition of his father. Where Jabez simmered, Ward flared.

"Don't forget," the older man said softly, "the new policy of the South. She ain't marching to the tune of *Dixie,* but she's marchin' just the same. Don't forget you now serve your country in a different way There'll be no war talk; there'll be no talk at all!"

Ward Pike clamped his thin lips tightly. "I won't forget. I can hold my tongue."

A girl came running down the open stairway. Nan Pike. Her eyes were an angry brown, her face amber except for the richness of her lips. She fastened slim fingers on her father's arm.

"They've come, the doctor and the agent! In an old wagon drawn by a pair of rattlebone mules. The Yanks!"

Dr. Jerry Dalton and Oliver Marsh stepped onto the deep porch sheltering the front of the hotel. The day was sultry, the hour near to noon. The close, heavy air fostered slow movement. Dr. Dalton paused in the doorway, inspecting the shadowy interior, noting the desk and beyond that the tables of the dining room.

He was dusty and gaunt from his trip, but his inner strength had not been touched. His hands were brown and hard-looking as iron, his eyes were locked in a gray haze. They awaited the signal from Estacado.

Oliver Marsh brushed past Jerry Dalton and up to the desk. He wore better tailored clothes than his companion, and the watch chain across the front of his vest was of large gold links.

"Show us two of your best rooms," he ordered Ward Pike. His voice echoed in the stillness.

"We have no rooms in this building," young Pike answered. "We have rooms in the tent addition at the rear."

Marsh flushed. "That one-floored oven with canvas walls!"

"It is all we have."

Jerry Dalton recalled the judge's words. A Northerner had trouble finding lodging. To go about town and be constantly refused would dig into a man's pride. He considered swiftly.

"I'll take one of the rooms in the tent building," he said to Ward Pike.

Nan Pike's fiery glance swept the gaunt, dusty figure of the doctor triumphantly.

She met his eyes long enough to let him read her disdain.

Marsh swung on Jerry Dalton. "As you like! I intend to have a decent room." He tramped out of the hotel and struck across the street toward a store building that had rooms to let above.

Jerry drove the mules around to the low-roofed building with canvas walls and partitions. Young Pike gave him a room in the southwest corner. Jerry carried in his instruments and boxes of drugs.

The hot air was like a slap in the face. The floor was wide boards not too closely laid together, and no window had been cut in the canvas. A bed took three-fourths of the room, and beside it stood a commode with a white granite pitcher and bowl. Jerry set down his boxes.

"You can leave the door open for air," Ward Pike said softly.

"Thank you, I never use air."

Ward Pike's eyes blazed, but he spoke in the same slow drawl. "I hope you find your room comfortable."

"It will do. I shall probably use it as an office, also. I understand Estacado has no business space available."

"I've heard office space is scarce. There'll be an extra charge if you practice here."

"We will consider that later. This room might be some better than hanging my shingle on the tailgate of my wagon. I am a doctor, Mr. Pike."

They returned to the hotel where Jabez Pike and his daughter still waited.

"This is Estacado's new doctor," Ward said to his father and sister.

Nan Pike arched her dark brows. "Horse doctor, perhaps?"

Jerry Dalton bowed. "I wouldn't object to doctoring horses. In fact I would rather doctor horses than some human beings I have known."

Dalton left the hotel, his gray eyes shedding dangerous lights. The Pikes had not been willing to give him a north room, even in the tent house. Estacado was going to be harder than he'd thought. The South was more bitter now than at the close of the war, and with good cause. The reign of the carpetbaggers was denuding it of every shred of human kindness. Anything that came from the North was something to be suspected and despised.

JERRY DALTON had not wanted to come to the South, but Oliver Marsh had been adamant; and where Oliver went, Jerry went. The kid was determined to have a part in the pressing down of the iron heel upon these conquered states, for his father had died in a Northern charge. Because these states had torn themselves from the Union, war had come; and war had taken Oliver's father.

Jerry had promised the dying man that he would stick close to his son, and he was living up to the pledge. There was lots of good in the hard-eyed youth, if the bitterness over his dad's death could be washed away.

Oliver came from the store building across the street, his eyes triumphant. "I have a room on a cool side of the house," he announced. I arrived just as a guest was giving up the room. The storekeeper tried to tell me he had it promised to another fellow, but I let him know I meant business."

Oliver took two pieces of baggage from the wagon and carried it into the store. When he again appeared in the street, an angry voice followed him.

"The room is not yours. I refuse to rent it to you!"

"Be glad I don't take more severe measures," Oliver retorted. "I shall investigate your store tomorrow to see if you are paying enough tax."

Oliver and Jerry finished unloading the wagon.

"You're a fool to take a room in that tent bake-oven," the kid snapped.

Jerry Dalton smiled, and it did much for his square-jawed angular face. It was like throwing a light on a granite cube. "If you get a bullet in the liver," he said, "I'll doctor you free. I have a feeling I'm not going to be popular, and shall probably get rusty for want of practice. Do

try and furnish me a little something just to keep my hand in."

Oliver saw no humor in the remark. "I'm not living in Negro quarters after my dad died to put these fellows in their places. I'm riding the top wave!"

"The other agent rode the top wave—for a few weeks."

"Jerry, at times you talk like you're afraid. Sometimes I'd like to call you a coward!"

"Maybe this is one of the times."

The level tones drove the flush of anger from the kid's face. "You are not a coward," he said. "You fought beside my dad in the war; beside all the men. You didn't stay back in a safe spot like some of the docs."

"I picked up a shell on one of the battlefields," Dalton said. "Your dad came back for me. He saved me from a Southern prison. I promised him if I came out of the war and he did not, I'd do what I could for you. I will, Oliver, but if you ever call me a coward, I'll lay off my coat and damn near strip the flesh off your bones. I'm staying with you, but I warn you never go beyond a certain limit with me."

Ugly black anger stained the young man's forehead. "Sometimes I think you hate me, Dalton."

"I don't hate you, but I realize you are a conceited pup. You have come into a little power through this appointment, and you are swollen to the bursting point. You forget the South is not helpless. You forget her army still marches, only it is invisible. It rides at night behind masks.

"There is nothing cool or reflective about these hooded riders; they arrive and depart swiftly, administering their lop-sided justice. They are fighting a deadly fight against this brand of highway robbery the North calls law. That storekeeper over whom you just rode roughshod is probably one of the Brotherhood."

Oliver Marsh's eyes were lines of shimmering anger. "I'll ask the sheriff for protection."

"If he isn't a Yankee appointee of the judge, he'll most certainly be one of the hooded Brothers."

"I will send to Galveston for soldiers."

"And they should arrive in from ten to twelve days."

Oliver Marsh wiped the perspiration from his brow. His anger against Jerry Dalton seemed to have vanished. He glanced up the dusty road that lost itself in a grove of oaks, a good spot to hide a group of horsemen.

"Doc," he asked, "how will I go about stamping out this curse?"

II

THAT evening Jerry and Oliver ate in the hotel dining room and were the last men to be served. Jerry was surprised to see Nan Pike waiting on tables; then he recalled that these Texans had lost heavily in the war. Families were striving together, to build up from what was left.

Oliver pushed aside the plate she brought him and demanded specially prepared food. The girl's calm face showed no change. She walked away and Jabez Pike came to say they did not serve food other than that already prepared.

"It will do for tonight," Oliver snapped. "Tomorrow I'll expect potatoes that are not swimming in grease. Grease in this devilish hot climate turns the stomach."

"Tomorrow is another day," Jabez Pike said. "The night is not yet over. Here in Estacado we think only of the passing hour."

After Pike had left the table, Oliver turned sharply to Dalton.

"Why didn't you speak up with me about the food?"

"It isn't really bad."

Oliver ate a few bites and left for his room across the street. Dr. Dalton finished slowly and went out beside the tent building to smoke his pipe. The evening wore away, the streets quieted for the night. Not a third of the windows in the hotel had shown a light, but Jerry was not surprised.

The tent room was sweltering. He ripped away a portion of the canvas and substituted mosquito bar. The heat was still too great to do more than doze. He came from a light sleep to hear a muffled thudding sound. As it grew louder, he knew it for horses walking. He pulled on his trousers, and taking his rifle stepped outside the tent house.

The atmosphere of the town was charged. Dead quiet reigned, but underneath the silence was a tenseness that lifted the hair. A body of horsemen came from the oak grove at the head of the street. They advanced at a measured walk, a soft creaking of leather the only sound beside the clopping of hoofs in the powdery dust.

Still there was no stir among townsfolk, no window- closing, no quick steps across floors. It was as if the town were dead and this were an army of ghosts.

Their march from the grove was unhurried. They drew rein in the street opposite the hotel, and one white-robed figure majestically dismounted. Every man wore a high white hood and a white cape and every horse was draped in white. Two more men dismounted, and the trio turned to approach the store where Oliver Marsh had taken a room.

Jerry Dalton's fingers closed on his rifle and he dropped back, thinking to get closer by rounding the hotel.

Oliver Marsh appeared suddenly at the corner of the tent house.

"They are after us!" he whispered.

Dalton answered in an undertone. "They are well drilled. Their horses move as if they were stepping to the strains of a band. I didn't expect a bunch of night riders to show such form."

"Do you realize that is our funeral cortege?"

"At least it will be well ordered. The three are returning from the store— Ah, they are reporting the bird has flown!"

No audible order was given, yet the body of white-robed figures swung from their horses as one man. They fell into form for an advance, and now they faced the tent building.

"They come four abreast," Dalton whispered. "Nice turn they executed."

"I'm not as steeped in admiration as you!" Oliver snapped; and his hand shot across for the rifle Jerry had leaned against the canvas wall.

Jerry Dalton was ahead of him and hugged the gun to his body, waist-high.

"When the time comes, I'll man this firepiece," he said. "In case you left your room without arming yourself, there is a belt and pistol hanging on the corner of my washstand."

Oliver Marsh swung about to go for the weapon and bumped into Jabez Pike and his son. The keeper of the store from across the street was also there. Jerry Dalton recalled that it was a law with the hooded riders that no Brother should demonstrate in his home town. The townspeople were to show themselves and thereby prove to the world they had no connection with the night riders.

"You better leave the pistol hang where it is," Jabez Pike said in his soft drawl. "There are times the Brothers ride only in demonstration; at such times a stray shot would force them to authority."

Oliver Marsh had stopped dead still; he had expected these men to be wearing hoods. His breathing grew easier and he did not go for the pistol.

"You better lay aside your rifle," Jabez advised Jerry Dalton.

"If it is a demonstration only," Dr. Dalton answered him, "I'll hold fire. If, on the other hand, the Brothers are in a frisky mood and want action, I'll be ready to pass it out."

Jabez Pike evidenced his disapproval by a heavy silence.

THE band of hooded men were advancing now directly toward the tent house, their rifles gleaming in their hands. At the corner of the hotel they halted, though no order was given. They stood for several seconds, then spun and returned to their horses. They mounted as one man, and four abreast, clopped up the dusty road toward the oak grove.

Their going left the town empty. Then as if recovering from a breath-taking blow, Entacado shuddered and came to life. Quick steps crossed floors, echoing out through the open doors and windows. Lamps were lighted.

Oliver Marsh swung on Jabez Pike. "Does this town tolerate a thing like that? Men who ride at night with eyes prying from behind masks!"

"The Brotherhood rides in many towns," the elder man answered with haughty levelness in his tones. "They do not spy. They *know.*"

"They will not continue to ride in Estacado!" snapped Marsh.

"Remember the Brotherhood has long ears," Jerry Dalton said quietly.

Oliver started and looked about. Ward Pike laughed and he and Jabez and the storekeeper moved away. Their steps echoed in the silence that lay between Oliver and Jerry. The youth tried to shake the evilness of the hour.

"At least Pike and the storekeeper are not night riders," he said.

"The Brothers do not demonstrate at home," Jerry replied; and the silence again built up between them.

. . . Next morning Oliver came to Jerry's room before breakfast. His face was lined from a sleepless night and his lips were gripped against his teeth. He held out a paper marked with a skull and a cross.

"A token left me by the cutthroats last night," he said. "I have been to Judge Bailey already and find he also received one. He says it means to get out. He is packing his bags now."

"I've heard a paper so decorated meant to move on," Dalton said. "The agent before you received one, but he didn't move on."

"And he was hanged from that oak by the river. Judge Bailey is taking no chances on such a dry-limb death."

"Are you?"

Oliver Marsh straightened. "I'd stay if I knew they'd swing me up! Judge Bailey is a coward; I told him so. He appointed me to the office of judge in his place, and said to enjoy the honor while I might. He was gray as putty."

"You're looking some blue around the gills yourself."

Oliver's anger flared. "I'm not resting easy! Only a fool would disregard this warning and the appearance of those riders last night. But I'm staying!"

Jerry Dalton's air of disinterest vanished. "I'm glad to see you have the nerve to set your toes square into a fight, kid. Not that I doubted you, after knowing your dad." One of his rare smiles lighted his face. "The Brothers left me one of those papers too, Oliver. Must have slipped it in while I was watching the show. I think I used it to light my pipe with."

Oliver Marsh stared, then he too smiled. "Are you moving camp, Doc?"

"Not this morning, kid. I always do my moving in the cool of the evening. Let's eat."

Oliver busied himself through the day in the judge's office, getting the hang of his new position; and he ate his meals without complaint. That evening he moved into a room in the tent house, offering no explanation for the act.

During the night Jerry Dalton had his first patient. Ward Pike came to the lifted corner of the canvas and told him a Mexican was outside with his son. He said the boy had been carved up with a knife and would die, but the old man was making a row to see the doctor. Did he care to be disturbed with the mess?

Jerry Dalton helped the aged man carry a youth of seventeen or eighteen from an old packsaddle to the tent room. They placed him on the bed and Jerry went to work. Ward Pike brought a big black iron teakettle of hot water and set it on the floor.

"I'll lend you a shovel for digging the grave in the morning," he said. "Or do you give that service?"

Jerry was too occupied to answer, and Pike turned back to the hotel and his bed. Mexicans were not popular with Texans. It hadn't been twenty years since

they fought Santa Anna for their independence, and relatives of the men who had died at the Alamo still carried hate in their hearts.

The old father told Dalton the boy had been slashed up when he had pastured sheep on some land Solomon Vadder had said was not for sheep. A Negro with a long knife had done the job—a Negro that worked for Vadder.

THE lad was still alive in the morning and stubbornly clung to life through the hot day. Jerry Dalton encased him in mosquito bar and did the few things left to do. The leg had been gashed at the thigh, the wound carrying around to the front. Muscles had been severed.

For two days and nights the lad groaned and tossed, then the third day he lay still. The old man returned to the sheep each day and in the evening sat with his son.

"He will live," Jerry said the third evening.

Tears rolled down the weathered cheeks. "Will he walk?" he whispered.

Jerry nodded. "He will walk."

The old Mexican's gratitude shook his slight frame. He slid close to where Jerry sat smoking. "Some day Bernardo might be able to help you," he said. "My house is east at the end of the dim trail. It is dug into the low hill with the trees. A safe place if—" He hesitated, his black eyes burning into the early twilight. "If you should need to hide," he finished in a whisper.

Jerry glanced around; they were alone. "I am glad to know," he said. He wondered what whispers the old Mexican had caught that had made him believe the two Northerners were going to need a place of refuge. "I will remember."

Jabez Pike walked by on the trail from the tent building to the hotel, and the old Mexican glanced at him with lusterless eyes, face as blank as saddle-leather. He whispered again when Pike was safely gone.

"When you walk some day, look for the house of Bernardo dug into the low, brushy hill."

Jerry nodded, "I'll be careful not to bring you trouble," he said.

The old man smiled. "You make my son live—you make him walk."

The boy was moved home in a week. Jabez Pike and Ward came to see for themselves that the youth could move his leg. The boy helped himself some as he was loaded onto the mule. He demonstrated he could use the leg Ward Pike had said was almost cut from his body.

The old Mexican bowed and murmured a blessing on Jerry Dalton. Mexicans, and even the Texans themselves, had always died of such wounds as this boy had had.

Jabez Pike watched the pair disappearing down the dusty road. He turned to Dalton. "I didn't reckon you as much of a doctor, coming to a small town like Estacado. I reckoned, sir, a dose of castor oil or a horse liniment would be all you'd be good for. I was wrong."

His eyes burned from beneath his broad-brimmed felt hat. " 'Pon my word, Dalton, why did you come to Estacado?"

Jerry Dalton returned the gaze for a second before he answered. "I came because I thought Oliver Marsh might need me."

Jabez Pike's lips tightened. "One man will be small assistance if Marsh continues in the path he is treading. An army of men wouldn't be enough."

"But one man would help," Jerry said quietly.

Pike's nostrils thinned. "Perhaps. They say death is easier for having company."

"They say it is," Dr. Dalton replied.

III

DR. DALTON and Oliver Marsh clashed more frequently as the sweltering days dragged into weeks. The taunting eyes and sneering lips of Estacado were pushing young Marsh to the exploding point. He talked less and less to Dalton, being unable to stand the older man's cautious doctrine.

One evening as he and the doctor were eating a wordless supper in the hotel, two men rode up to the door and ordered their horses taken to the stable. They had come from the West and wore guns and knives and carried rifles in the crooks of their arms.

They steamed into the dining room with demands for a quick meal. Their hats were dust-coated and one had two round bullet holes burned through the crown. They leaned their rifles against their chairs while they waited for food.

Ward Pike came to bring their supper from the kitchen and his lips were pressed tight against his teeth as he nodded to their curt orders. Oliver Marsh was leaning from his chair, not missing a move of the strangers, nor a word. They were from Arizona and were on their way north. It came out during their loud talk that they had done a job of tax collecting in southwestern Texas.

Oliver turned to Dr. Dalton. "I could use those two men!"

Jerry Dalton continued with his supper; and not until Oliver was rising to follow the two men from the room did he speak. "Nothing can be gained by hiring men like those. Let them go on north."

A cunning smile framed Oliver's lips. "With that pair, I wouldn't have to be continually listening to your pacifist doctrine; I could crack down on men like Solomon Vadder. Vadder has ignored me as an official and refuses to have his cotton taxed. He also has cattle that are untaxed. I believe I see a way to bring that arrogant devil to his knees."

At the desk, Oliver overtook the two strangers and introduced himself. He said he was having trouble collecting taxes and asked them to come to his office for a talk. Jabez Pike impassively counted out change.

The taller of the two ran cool eyes over the youthful form of Marsh. "I calculate they're puttin' up the same squawk in these parts as around San Antonio. They say they're busted and ain't got nothin' to pay with." He patted his rifle. "I got an answer right here to that argument. My name is Dan Deeds and my friend here is Charley Jones. When we go after taxes, we come back with plenty of dough."

Charley Jones hitched at the gun belt on his thick thighs. "We don't listen to no argufyin' by these rebels," he said darkly.

"We'll continue this talk at my office," Oliver Marsh said, and his tightening lips showed he was feeling the steady gaze of Jabez Pike.

Dan Deeds shifted his lanky body until he blocked Oliver's path. "Me and Jones is in a hurry. 'Fore we waste any time talkin', we'll settle one thing. My pard and me don't work fer no dinky wages; we ain't two-by-four men. We collect taxes on a fifty-fifty basis."

Color climbed to Oliver's forehead. "That is most unusual."

"We is most unusual men. You see the probate judge of these parts and find out if them terms suit."

"I am the judge as well as the agent for the Freedman's Bureau."

Dan Deeds eyed the youth before him to be sure he had not missed any hidden point, and closed an eye at Charley Jones. "I calculate we better help this kid collect his taxes, Charley."

Jones hitched at the guns about his middle. "Cussed if I don't agree with you, Dan," he said.

The two men and Oliver Marsh walked across the street and on to the sign that said *Probate Judge*. Dr. Dalton had been close enough to hear the conversation, but he did not follow them. Considering the terms he and Oliver were on, the kid would probably shut the door in his face.

THE early evening passed to thick twilight and the town settled to a strange hush. Dr. Dalton felt men were talking but he heard no voices. When he approached a gathering, no lips were moving. He met Nan Pike on the trail between the tent building and the hotel, and lifted his hat.

He always did that, but he had long

since given over attempts at conversation. She scarcely recognized him. The one exception had been the morning the Mexican boy had been taken home. For a few moments she had been almost friendly.

Dr. Dalton's patients had so far all been Mexicans. He wondered whether Texans were ever shot up or stabbed, taken sick. He wondered a lot of things as he drew on his pipe, looking into the settling night.

As he walked to the porch of the hotel a team galloped up the road drawing a fancily fringed carriage. This must be another patient.

A big, thick-shouldered man leaped over the wheel and stamped into the hotel. "Where is that damn Yank doctor?" he asked of Ward Pike.

The man was Solomon Vadder. Dalton knew him by sight. The Vadders had come to Texas with Stephen Austin and had fought against Santa Anna and against U. S. Grant. They owned the largest estates on the Brazos, but war had trimmed the family down to two men: Solomon Vadder, the thickly-built oldest son, and Bruin Vadder, a boy in his teens.

Jerry Dalton walked up to Vadder. "I am a Yank, and damn glad of it. I'm also a doctor."

Vadder's eyes gleamed wickedly under the light from the hanging lamp, but he held back the words that rose to his tongue. He jerked his thumb toward the hack. "My brother has blood poisoning. Ward and I will bring him in." He spoke in a nasal key, twisting his vowels and hanging on to his words as if loath to part with them.

Young Bruin Vadder was carried to a cool room in the hotel and Dr. Dalton followed with his instruments and drugs.

"It is fortunate that there was a room vacant in the main building," he said to Ward Pike. It was the first time he had ever mentioned the rooms in the hotel. He examined the leg. It was a deep, ugly gun wound just below the knee, swollen and red. The youth was groaning in half-consciousness. Dr. Dalton turned to Vadder.

"The wound is at least three days old. That's bad in this heat."

Solomon Vadder's face was stoic. "You will have to amputate," he said.

Dalton made no answer. He bent over the bed, his hands moving with sureness. At last he straightened. "I will try to save his leg."

Vadder shoved up close as if the words had been an insult. "He will die if you don't amputate! If you are thinking to let him die, you better reconsider. Nothing this side of hell will save you if—"

Dalton faced him. "Vadder, shut up! You may bully the country, but it won't go with me. Your brother may die; no doctor can say a thing for sure. This is terrible heat and he has been neglected. He might have a shade better chance to live if I amputated, but he would go through life with one leg. I'm not amputating!"

He turned back to the bed; and in the dead quiet which followed he could hear the heavy breathing of Solomon Vadder. The stocky rancher said no more. His burning eyes followed every move of Dr. Dalton's long, brown fingers. Nan Pike was assisting. Dalton's face had lost the fire of anger; it was expressionless. He worked swiftly, cleaning the wound.

When he had finished, he rested a moment. Perspiration glistened on his forehead. He put on a medicated dressing, and drew up a chair to watch out the night. Solomon Vadder drew up a chair also, and the two men began their wordless vigil.

Nan Pike came and went, always having hot water when it was needed. She paused once in the shadow of the hall and stood looking into the silent room. Ward Pike came softly and joined her.

"If Bruin should die," she whispered, "Solomon would kill Dalton."

"And he'd deserve it!" Ward Pike answered. "If Bruin dies, it will be through his mistake."

"And if he lives and is not a cripple?" the girl whispered.

"Accursed Yankee luck!"

Morning found the boy sleeping. He was better. Solomon Vadder rose stiffly from his chair and went down to breakfast. Dr. Dalton gave Nan some instructions and went to his hot tent room for some sleep.

IN THE afternoon, Oliver Marsh and Dan Deeds came to the hotel and asked for Solomon Vadder. Vadder had been a hard man to find, and this was an opportunity to serve him with notice of his overdue taxes.

Dan Deeds kept his rifle at an easy angle while they talked. Vadder tore the paper that was handed him and told them they would never collect the money. He had paid all he intended to pay; he did not acknowledge the exorbitant rates imposed by a carpetbag set of lawmen. He laughed when they threatened jail and said it would not be easy for a Northerner to arrest Sol Vadder.

Dan Deeds shot a last arrow as they withdrew. "Me and Jones will be after that three thousand dollars, Vadder; and when we come for a thing we get it. Better have it out of the bank and save trouble."

Vadder turned to Jabez Pike as they left. "Three thousand dollars! That is fifty percent more than the thieves at Austin demanded. I couldn't sell my entire crop for that."

His laugh was dangerous. As he and Pike passed close to Jerry Dalton, the doctor saw fire blazing in Vadder's eyes. Thereafter Vadder did not appear on the street without his belt-gun, and two men always walked with him. The third evening Solomon asked whether it was safe to take Bruin home. The doctor said the boy must stay another day.

That evening Oliver Marsh and his two gunmen called on Dr. Dalton. Since the coming of Deeds and Jones, Oliver had moved from the ten room to a thick-walled building in the lower end of town. He and his two men shared the house, which they had taken from the owner because he had been unable to pay his taxes.

"I hear you are sending the Vadder kid home tomorrow evening," Oliver greeted Jerry. It was the first time they had spoken in two days, for Marsh now shared a table in the hotel with his new friends.

Dr. Dalton's eyes narrowed and he drew on his pipe. It was evening and a few lights were already burning over the town. Deeds and Jones were standing beside the door, their rifles cradled and ready. "Why are you interested in the Vadder boy?" Jerry asked.

"The Vadder estate owes the government three thousand dollars. That kid is as much a part of the estate as his brother. He isn't leaving Estacado."

Jerry Dalton rose, his face stony in the dim light of the lamp by which he had been reading. "Get out," he said. "Get out of my place."

"You can do me a favor by telling Solomon Vadder that the kid can't go home tomorrow evening," Oliver said crisply. "After Vadder rides home, I will take the kid to jail."

"Have you by any chance usurped the job of sheriff since I last talked to you?"

"I released the sheriff and appointed Dan Deeds to the office. In times of stress the probate judge has to take strenuous measures. Will you do me this favor I ask?"

"I will not. Pitching that kid into a filthy jail might kill him. It takes a strong-stomached Negro to stand the Estacado jail.

"Vadder will realize that. He will be quick to get that three thousand tax money."

"Oliver, get out of my room and take your two hired killers with you. In the morning I shall tell Sol Vadder to throw a guard around his brother."

The thin face of young Marsh twisted with rage. "You would side with a dirty rebel? From now on I'll know how to treat you!"

Dan Deeds shifted his rifle, leaned toward Dr. Dalton. "So you 'low to help Sol Vadder, huh? Help him to rob us? Moves like them is sure to come home to roost."

"I'm not afraid of you, Deeds. Get out and stay out!"

The three men left. Jerry blew out the lamp and walked down toward the Brazos.

Oliver Marsh was heading for bad trouble. Estacado had slapped him back on every turn and his anger was blazing. Jerry couldn't blame the kid for wanting to wipe the sneers from the faces of men like Ward Pike and Sol Vadder. After all, the North had won the war and these two sullen-eyed rebels should know it.

Yesterday Vadder had shot a hole through the Union flag hanging from the office of the probate judge. Jerry would have been glad to help Oliver get at Vadder and Ward Pike in any legitimate way; but risking a boy's life by putting him in a filthy jail wasn't playng the game fairly.

Dr. Dalton returned to his room, and at the corner of the building Jabez Pike met him.

"A sorry deal you've made, Dalton," he said, his voice hot with inner turmoil. "You saved Bruin Vadder's leg and folks were beginning to say that even a Yank could shoot straight. You'd have taken less chance to have amputated, but you didn't choose the easy way. It's a sorry deal you've pulled turning young Vadder over to the law."

Jerry Dalton stood dead still, his mind moving swiftly. "Did Oliver Marsh take him to jail?" he asked.

"Marsh and his new sheriff. You told Sol Vadder not two hours ago the boy could not be moved tonight. Then you gave Oliver Marsh leave to take him."

Pike's voice shook with rage. His big hands half reached out toward the still form of the medico, then drew back. "You're worse than a snake, Dalton! A doctor that sells out his patients is worse than a snake!" He turned and walked up the path.

Jerry Dalton shook himself to life. He took a step in the wake of Jabez Pike, then stopped. The face of a dying man rose before him. He had promised to stand by Oliver Marsh, had promised it solemnly as the light died from a stern face.

It wasn't going to be easy to help the kid now, but neither had it been easy the time Oliver's dad came back through the shells to pack him, Jerry Dalton, from a battlefield. He remembered something Colonel Bowie had said in reprimanding a friend who had failed him in a crisis.

"But you were wrong," the friend had said.

"If I had been right I would have had plenty of friends," the old fighter had shot back.

IV

DR. DALTON carried his rifle as he walked toward the building occupied by Oliver Marsh and the two gunmen. The jail was in the neighborhood, making it handy for the new sheriff. A light burned in the front of the house; but even with the heat, the blinds were tightly drawn.

Dalton moved up to the back door. It stood wide open and he could see through to the lighted room at the front. Oliver and Charley Jones were talking. Dan Deeds was not in sight—probably at the jail guarding young Vadder.

Dalton stepped to the doorway of the lighted room. Jones was sitting on a bunk-like bed, his gun resting beside him. Oliver was tipped back against the wall, only two of the legs of his chair touching the floor. Jones saw Dalton first and reached for his gun.

"Don't," Dr. Dalton uttered the single word, and the square-fingered hand of Jones paused. Dalton's rifle was covering him. Oliver's chair hit the floor and he sprang up.

"Messing into my business are you, Jerry?" he snapped. "That's dangerous!"

"Don't bother to swell up to me," Jerry Dalton replied. "Hand over the key to that jail."

A stir came at Dalton's back, but he dared not take his eyes from Charley Jones. He weaved to the side, but a rifle jammed into his back and the voice of Dan Deeds cracked in his ear.

"Drop that gun, Doc. So you want the jail key, huh? Ain't that funny."

Jones tried again to reach his rifle, but

the voice of Jerry Dalton halted him. "Stay as you are, Jones. I'm not lowering my gun and I'm still having that key."

Anger swept Dan Deeds. "Drop that gun, damn you! You ain't no better than a reb to me, and that's nothin' at all. Drop that gun or I'll let daylight through you!"

Oliver Marsh stepped forward. "Jerry, this man means business."

"So do I. If Deeds gets me, I'll take Jones with me. You are going to find yourself short-handed, kid."

"Stand aside, Marsh," Dan Deeds ordered as Oliver moved closer. "Puttin' this gent where he won't cause no more trouble is goin' to be a pleasure."

"Don't try knocking my gun, Oliver," Jerry said quietly. "Just leave this play to Deeds and me and—Jones."

Charley Jones went gray. He no longer tried to reach for his gun. His eyes were on Dalton's face and he read there his fate should Dan Deeds pull trigger.

"Don't shoot, Dan!" he begged.

"I'll get him 'fore he plugs you."

Jones flared. "You know that's a lie. You ain't carin' if he does get me—it'll mean that three thousand won't have to be split so many ways."

"You never did have much nerve in a squeeze, Charley," Deeds growled.

Oliver Marsh bored into Deeds with hard eyes, but Deeds was centering his attention on Jerry Dalton. The kid reached into his pocket and drew out the key to the jail. He held it in his palm.

Dan Deeds saw it and swore. "Goin' yeller, are you? Well, you ain't handin' over no key. Remember that's part my money you're monkeyin' with."

"Jerry Dalton won't back down," Oliver said slowly. "Three thousand dollars isn't worth a man's life, Deeds."

A snarl was the answer. Oliver took a quick step toward the wall and his hand came up holding a pistol. He jammed it into Deeds' side with a threat. "I'll blow you to Kingdom Come if you pull that trigger."

Deeds' anger exploded like a blast; but slowly he lowered his gun.

Charley Jones laughed. "How about *your* nerve in a squeeze?" he asked.

Jerry Dalton stepped to a position commanding all three men. His rifle was still steady as a mounted cannon. "I'm having that key, Oliver," he said. "I appreciate the move you just made, but I must have the key."

OLIVER MARSH kept his pistol on Dan Deeds and with his free hand extended the key. His eyes were glittery. "Don't think I went chicken-hearted over seeing you cash in, Jerry. This is because I couldn't afford to lose Charley Jones."

Dalton took the key and moved a step toward the outside door. "I figured as much," he replied.

He moved cautiously, still watching both Deeds and Jones. The room was still and tense when a horse pounded up to the front of the building and a man threw himself from the saddle to come running up the trail to the house. A heavy fist banged on the door.

Then Solomon Vadder landed inside, his eyes crazed with anger. Fury had robbed him of caution. A shotgun was in his hands, but he had taken no survey of the room before entering. The gun wavered from point to point as too late he realized his danger. He shouted for everyone to throw up hands.

For a second he blocked Dan Deeds from the steady rifle in Jerry Dalton's hands. A second was all the killer needed. He whipped his gun to line and fired at Solomon Vadder. The big man tottered, half of his head going a terrible crimson. He swayed and fell dead.

As his heavy body thudded to the floor, realization of what this killing would mean flooded the room. Faces went gray. Dan Deeds whispered a curse and banged the door shut.

"It was him or us!" he cried. "He was crazy mad and ready to slaughter every one of us!"

"But will a jury think so?" Dr. Dalton asked the question.

Deeds swung on him. "Marsh is the judge! I'm the sheriff! We won't have no jury!"

Oliver's face was white as he listened to running feet coming toward the house to investigate that shot. "We will have to get out of Estacado tonight," he said. "Galveston! We'll stand trial there."

Deeds blustered. "Declare it self-defense. You're the judge."

"A judge doesn't conduct his own trial, and we will all be held alike for this. We'll start for Galveston tonight."

Men were now at the door. "Open up!" Jabez Pike ordered.

Jerry stepped close to Oliver. "Get out the back way."

Oliver thrust him aside and walked to the door. He jerked it open and faced Jabez Pike. "Gentlemen, a very unfortunate thing has happened. Solomon Vadder just charged us like a mad bull. He is dead now."

Ward Pike and two others surged to the doorway, but Jabez spread his arms to keep them from entering. Dan Deeds was standing with ready rifle and Charley Jones was crouched at the foot of the bed, his gun menacing the door.

"Get back from the light!" Jabez ordered his men. The old man stepped inside, moving so the room was visible to those eyes in the yard. "I know Vadder came here for the key to the jail," he said heavily. "His brother had been moved to a filthy jail. He had been sold out by a Yankee doctor!"

Jabez Pike's voice was harsh with rage. "Solomon Vadder came here demanding the key and you killed him. Now *I* demand the key to that jail! Before you try to fight, remember there are guns enough in the yard to blast an army to death."

Deeds' face creased to cunning lines. "Doc Dalton is holdin' the key, Pike. He won't trust none of us with it!"

Jabez turned stormy eyes on Dalton. "It would be better if you turned it over peaceably," he said.

Dalton extended the key, his lips tightly pressed. He looked at Oliver Marsh, but the youth was staring straight ahead. Pike dropped the key to his pocket and stooped over Solomon Vadder.

"I'll take him away," he said. "We will consider punishment for this murder later." He strained under his load. At the door, other hands came to his assistance and a slow march was begun toward town. Sound died out. The dragging steps of men carrying a heavy burden remained, then it too died away.

OLIVER closed the front door and faced his companions. "I could have set Pike right about the key, Jerry," he said, "but with Vadder killed, four of us are none to many to stand against the town. I thought it best to keep you welded to us."

"You succeeded very well, Oliver. If I were to show on the street, I'd collect enough lead to sink a battleship. But we can't waste time on idle talk; we must plan on getting out of here. Deeds is the man who killed Vadder; but as you say, we'll all be held."

Deeds scowled. "None of you better try shiftin' the blame all onto me. I saved your lives with that shot." He turned to Jones. "Let's take a look out the back way, Charley." He was gray and his hands shook as he picked up his gun. Jones made a move to follow.

Oliver blocked their path. "Thinking of saddling up and riding north?"

"Don't get gabby, kid," Deeds growled. "The four of us is stickin' together." But his rifle tilted to a dead aim and he signaled Jones to follow.

"Let them go," Jerry said, and Oliver stepped aside.

"They'll ride off and leave us holding the sack," the youth prophesied.

"Not with the guard that's around this house. While Jabez Pike was talking, men were swarming like flies. Only a few left with the body. We're bottled up tight."

Oliver breathed thickly. Suddenly a rifle spat from the back yard and the kitchen door slammed. Deeds and Jones bounded into the room.

"We're surrounded!" Charley Jones cried. "But they don't dare attack us," he blustered. "Not four Northern men. The soldiers from Galveston would wipe them off the map!"

"I don't believe they plan on attacking us," Dr. Dalton said evenly. "The South no longer fights the North in open battle. These townspeople will keep us to this building until the Brothers of the white sheets have time to come from a neighboring town. Then every Estacado man will be on the streets without disguise while we are taken out and hanged. They have managed it that way in other places."

V

A SMOTHERED, rhythmical sound crept through the room where the four men waited. It was like the pulsing of a great heart. Dan Deeds rose from the bed, his face ghastly. He let the sound establish itself for another second before he walked to the lamp.

"It's them!" he whispered, and blew out the light.

They rolled the blinds and watched a cloud of white advancing from the oak grove. There must be fifty in the silent army. When they were yet some distance from the house, they fell into four companies, and the ones going to positions at the rear of the house broke into a trot.

This was no mere demonstration; the hooded riders intended to blast in on their prey from four sides at once. When they came for work, it was known they sounded no warning. No quarter was ever offered.

Deeds and Jones had spent much of the time that had passed in low conversation in the back room. Dalton and Oliver had made no attempt to interrupt their conversation. Now as Deeds drew back from the window, he spoke.

"Me and Charley will take the kitchen. You fellows cut loose to front as soon as anything comes into your range. We'll do likewise at the back."

Oliver stepped close to Jerry Dalton. It wouldn't be many seconds now before the fireworks started. "I didn't figure I was letting you in for sure death," he said. "When I kept still before Jabez Pike about that key, I thought we had only Estacado to buck."

"It's the same either way," Dalton answered. "I didn't intend to run out on you, Oliver." He lifted his rifle. "Get over to the window. Be ready to do what I say. I think Jones and Deeds have planned for us to draw attention to the front of the house so they can escape under the confusion. That can work two ways."

Oliver was kneeling at the window with his gun leveled. The sheeted riders were coming closer. "Hadn't we better stop them?" he whispered.

"Give them one round," Jerry answered. *"Now!"*

With the crack of their rifles, the horses of the hooded riders plunged. From their solid lines, a stream of fire poured at the front of the house.

Jerry stripped two sheets from the bed and thrust one at Oliver. Wrapping these around them, they slid behind the door leading to the kitchen and waited.

Bullets hailed on the front room; and when no answer was forthcoming, men began to appear. They came cautiously at first, then they poured in. Not a single shot had been fired by Charley Jones or Dan Deeds.

Suddenly a clamor rose in back.

"They're breaking from the kitchen!" went up the cry. It rattled above a new burst of firing.

The men in the front room leaped for the door leading to the kitchen. Oliver and Jerry stepped out among them, the darkness of the room hiding the fact that their garb was not the same. The white sheets were enough. Jones and Deeds had made it to the corner of the porch, and were there making a desperate stand. Attention centered on the spot.

Oliver and Jerry cleared the house and crowded in among dismounting men. To try for a horse would bring instant death, for every animal was held by a hooded owner.

Shouts rose from the porch that two of the wanted men had escaped. Oliver and Jerry threw off their sheets and ran for the thicket of timber thrusting up from the river. The noise of their going was swallowed by the last of the gunfire at the porch.

They slid rapidly through the thicket until the quieting of the guns behind them brought more caution.

"Deeds and Jones are done for," Jerry whispered. "Caught in a trap they laid for us."

Horses began galloping through alleys and around buildings searching for the two men who had escaped. Jerry led Oliver in a circle and headed through the brush for the Mexican quarters.

He knew when to leave the river and cut down an alley, for he had made himself familiar with the location of Bernardo's house. As they approached the door, the old Mexican came toward them and spoke.

"I saw the white hoods and heard the firing. Come fast!"

He guided them through the pitch-black interior to the back of the single room and shoved aside a piece of furniture.

"The tunnel," he said. "She leads through the hill and comes up in thick brush and boulders. She safe. Nobody knows but me and my son."

Oliver and Jerry had to crawl on hands and knees; and behind them they heard the piece of furniture being restored to its place. At no spot was the tunnel high enough for them to stand. As they came to the opening on the opposite side of the hill, it grew so small that they were forced to slide along on their stomachs. They came out in thick brush and boulders.

ON THE Estacado side of the hill, horses were still galloping up and down the streets. A glow appeared in the sky showing that the hooded Brothers were keeping stubbornly to their job. Blazes had been started to make their search more thorough.

The commotion at last died away and the sky settled to blackness. For an hour Oliver and Jerry waited; then it was decided that Jerry would try for the mules. If they could get their two mules from the stable back of the Pike Hotel, they stood a fair chance of getting to Galveston. Jerry put down Oliver's suggestion that they both go for the animals.

"You can't go with me, kid," Dr. Dalton said firmly. "One man moves more silently than two. You be down at the twin oaks on the bank of the river. If I don't come, go back to the tunnel and wait for another night. If you have to make it out on foot, you will need all the hours of darkness to carry you from the danger zone. There isn't much time left until morning."

Oliver Marsh gripped his arm. "I'd rather we stayed together, Jerry."

"But we have a better chance this way. If they get me, you hit on for Galveston and the soldiers. Listen, kid. Something has got to be done against this night violence. One of us must reach Galveston and tell the story. The South is getting a raw deal from Congress right now, but she's got to learn she can't take the law into her own hands."

The doctor paused. "If I don't come back, wait in the tunnel for another night and strike out. That is your part, Oliver. When men are fighting a life-and-death fight, they can't pick their jobs. Your dad and I learned that in the army."

Oliver Marsh stiffened at the mention of his father's name. "I'll wait for you, Jerry. If you don't come back—I'll get through somehow tomorrow night."

They shook hands and Jerry Dalton vanished in the shadows.

He took advantage of every scrap of shadow as he moved up to the barn where he kept his pair of mules. The night riders seemed at last to have given over the search. The town was quiet as a tomb.

The barn seemed safe enough as he moved inside toward a peg where the bridles hung. Then a gun reached out from the depth of a stall and settled in his ribs.

"Don't move," came a command. "I

thought you might want these mules."

Jerry obeyed the order to march back to the open. The whistle of his captor brought four men leaping from shelter. They took his rifle and his waist gun, and there was no objection he could make. Threats bristled all around him and the weapon in his back was steady.

The men were not wearing hoods; and from that Jerry gained some comfort. At last the townspeople were striking in the open. They walked him down the alley running back of the Pike Hotel.

Jabez Pike came from the shadow of the building. "Is it the doctor or the kid?" he asked.

"The doc."

"Then I'll use him for a spell. We can't get that bullet lodged inside of Ward. Fetch the skunk up, Pat." Jabez Pike's voice was torn with anger and worry.

Pat Kelly, one of Solomon Vadder's gunmen, urged Jerry Dalton up to the door. The fact that these men were so open with identities showed that they intended to seal all lips before the night was over.

"Get movin' up them stairs," ordered Pat Kelly. "Don't make me clip an ear off just for a lesson."

WARD PIKE was lying on a long table in a big front room on the second floor of the Pike Hotel. His lips were stained with blood, though Nan Pike kept wiping at them with a damp cloth. The smell of antiseptics was in the room. Young Pike had evidently taken lead in the fight with Deeds and Jones. Someone had been trying to locate the bullet.

Nan Pike started from her chair beside the bed when she saw Jerry Dalton. Relief swept her face. "You!" she cried. "I'm glad." The last words came despite her efforts to stem them.

He smiled at her from the corner of his lips. "I always aim to oblige, Miss Pike. When this gunman takes his weapon out of my back, we'll see about your brother."

Jabez Pike had followed them into the room. He nodded for Pat Kelly to take a stand by the door, then drew his own gun and rested it on his knee. "Get to work," he ordered Dr. Dalton.

Jerry washed his hands slowly and thoroughly; then approached the table with narrowed eyes. A bullet had entered Ward's body to the right of the heart and angled down along the spine. He examined the man carefully, then turned to Jabez Pike.

"It's always dangerous going after a bullet lodged beneath the spine; but if the lead isn't removed, he'll die."

"I didn't fetch you here to tell me that. I've seen lots of bullet wounds and know this is bad. But you can do the job!" Old Pike's nostrils quivered. "Get busy!"

Jerry's eyes grayed until they were as lifeless as ashes. "And when I am finished, what?"

Pat Kelly gave a short laugh.

Jabez Pike said, "You'll hang like you deserve. A man that sells his patients out can expect no mercy."

Jerry stepped away from the table. "In that case, on with the hanging. I don't owe you Pikes anything."

Nan's breath burst in a sob and old Jabez shook with anger. "There's lots worse ways to die than hanging, Dalton!" he cried.

"Not to me. Death is death." Jerry turned to Pat Kelly. "Get on with the dance."

Pat Kelly had his long finger wrapped around the trigger. "I'll start him to work fast enough," he said to Jabez. "With your leave, I'll have him beggin' to do the job."

"It's a delicate piece of work, Kelly. If my nerves were put on edge, I should not be able to do the operation."

Dalton stood between them, cool and hard. "I will remove the bullet after you have written out and signed a pass that guarantees a safe passage from the Brazos, Pike. All the time you spend trying to change me is lost; and time is valuable."

He glanced coldly at the form of Ward Pike.

Jabez straightened, eyes flaming. "A

Pike is not afraid to die for the South!" he rumbled.

"Nor a Dalton for the North," the doctor returned.

Nan Pike sprang up. "This is useless!" she cried. "The war is over! It is murder for you to let Ward die, Father—murder!" She met the old man's eyes unflinchingly. "Give Dr. Dalton his safety pass. He'd be a fool if he didn't demand an eye for an eye."

Pat Kelly stepped up. "This man killed Solomon Vadder. He can't go free!"

"The man who killed Solomon Vadder has already paid the price," Jerry said. "Dan Deeds shot Vadder."

"Easy enough to lay the blame on a dead man," Kelly charged.

"I'm telling you the truth."

Jabez Pike turned from his daughter's eyes. "Get to work, Dalton," he ordered. "I'll give you the pass."

Dr. Dalton took a small notebook from his pocket and handed it and his pen to Jabez Pike. "Word it so the bearer won't have any trouble," he said.

"Anything I give you will be worded correctly," the old man shot at him. "See that your knife doesn't slip when you go after that bullet."

"I shall do my best. It is a delicate operation."

VI

OLIVER MARSH grasped the small sheet of notepaper that Jerry Dalton handed him and folded it to a handy size for his vest pocket. He reached for the reins of the saddled mule.

He and Jerry were standing on the far side of the hill lying beside the Mexican quarters of Estacado and the Brazos River. It had just turned night.

"I still say I'd better wait for you, Jerry," the youth said worriedly.

"My patient might keep me in town several days yet. It would be dangerous for you to hang around."

"I'll wait for you at Portville."

"Yes, Portville will be safe."

Oliver mounted and rode away. Jerry hadn't lied in actual word to the kid—just misled him. He had said Jabez Pike had given him protection because of his having saved his son's life. Oliver didn't know the protection was wrapped up in that safety pass he carried in his vest pocket. The pass merely said the bearer was to advance unmolested.

Dr. Dalton sat and smoked and watched the stars come out. In a few hours he would try to slip away. The second mule was saddled and waiting in a brush patch a short distance south. He knew the roads were watched, for it was expected that Oliver Marsh would try to break through to Galveston.

Tempers would boil when the kid produced the safety pass. The pass would be honored; but it would make the going mighty tough for one Dr. Dalton.

It was midnight before Jerry went for the mule. He had wanted to be sure that Oliver was well on his way. He heard no stir as he moved cautiously through the trees; and he had a sudden fear that the mule was gone. He flattened against a tree trunk and listened. Gnats and mosquitos swarmed about his face. He was certain that the clump ahead was where he had tied the mule. Seeing nothing to be gained by waiting, he took a step forward.

It seemed the night was suddenly full of lunging bodies and clubbed guns. He landed two blows before a club from behind folded him to the earth. Searchers had found the mule and waited for him. He was coming back to a realization of things as they dragged him from the thicket and into the road.

"So you didn't leave early this mornin' as you planned, Dalton?" Jabez Pike growled at him when they were in the starlight.

"I was delayed."

"You tricked me out of a safety pass for that snaky Marsh kid."

"I asked you for a pass guaranteeing the bearer safety. There was no trick."

"There'll be no trick this time. You'll hang sure as willows wave!"

They were walking by one of the Mexican huts, the path almost within arm's length of the solid mud wall.

Jerry Dalton gathered his muscles for a leap. He whipped an iron fist to the jaw of the man between him and the hut, and took a leap that put the solid adobe at his back. As the men moved to swarm over him, his hand flashed to his inner pocket and a slim blade of silver leaped to the starlight.

"Stand back! You missed this when you disarmed me." His voice cut through the maddened brains; the snarling men crouched dead in their tracks. Dalton laughed softly.

"This blade is sharper than any razor that ever slashed a throat," he said. "It'll lay any flesh it touches open to the bone."

He worked his feet to balance in the hard earth. Jabez Pike was edging forward, gun lifted.

"I'll blow your head clean off your shoulders, Dalton!" he roared.

"Go ahead," came the cool invitation. "You see, gentlemen, I have a pet obsession against being hanged. I have never wanted to dangle from a limb. If you all hope to return to your families this night, don't attempt to hang me. Cut loose your rifles, but don't step into range of this blade."

Stillness ate into the group. There were five men with rifles in hand; still they hesitated. Jabez Pike began slowly to lower his gun.

"Shooting is too good for this man," he said. "He's goin' to hang!"

"Get your hands up!" The command snapped from the end of the adobe, and with the words, something slithered to the dirt at Jerry Dalton's feet.

OLIVER MARSH stepped into the starlight. "When I open the pot," he said to Jerry Dalton, "drop down and get that gun. I thought you were slickering me on that pass so I hung around to see what your game was. I couldn't believe old Pike would allow both of us to get away alive."

His slim body was stiff and his gun steady. With his left hand he drew a piece of folded notepaper from his vest pocket and tossed it toward Jabez Pike.

"There's your safety pass. Dr. Dalton meant well by getting it for me, but I couldn't use it. This trouble in Estacado is of my making, not his. He told me to lay off the Vadder kid, but I didn't listen!"

"Oliver, we haven't time for talking," Dr. Dalton cut in.

"Dalton was at my house after the jail key when Solomon Vadder came roaring in," Oliver Marsh went on. "Dan Deeds killed Vadder. If Vadder had waited a half hour longer, Dalton would have had his kid brother out of jail and back in bed."

Oliver's words were stinging and unchosen. There was no hesitation, no thought or plan in them. He wasn't asking for mercy; he was stating a fact. While he talked his gun was ready. He wasn't trying to avoid the fight ahead.

Jabez Pike moved out a step. "So it was you, Marsh, that brought about the death of Solomon Vadder! You took Bruin Vadder off to jail without the permission of the doctor!"

"Dalton threatened to warn Vadder, so I moved fast on the kid. I didn't kill Vadder. Dan Deeds did that."

Jabez Pike held up a hand. "I believe Oliver Marsh has told the truth. Dalton, lay down that blade. We do not want death where death is not due."

"And what of Oliver Marsh?" Dr. Dalton asked.

"He'll get justice!"

"Justice!" Jerry Dalton struck at them with the word.

"Estacado is a lawless town, and tonight is as good a time as any for the festering in her heart to come to a head. Tonight this man and I can die without facing murdering riders behind white sheets. A handful of you have been brought to an open fight and that is what will sound your funeral knell.

"There will be an investigation," the doctor concluded slowly, "and a few neu-

trals in this town will speak up and swear to this night's work."

He paused a second, then spoke to Oliver Marsh.

"I'm going to reach for the gun at my feet. If a man makes a move to stop me, let him have it between the eyes."

Young Marsh stiffened. "Go ahead," he ordered.

"Stop!" rumbled Jabez Pike; and the command was for both sides. His men, welded to a solid wall at his back, stemmed the ripple of action that had stirred them. Jerry paused in his slow movement down for the gun.

"We've had enough bloodshed," Jabez Pike said. "If you open this fight, Dalton, you and March will both die."

"We won't be taking the trip alone."

Jabez was standing forward from his men, his body a clean target. His followers waited tensely, ready to move against the cocked gun of Oliver Marsh if he gave the word. But he did not give the word. He lifted a palm toward them as if to hold them back.

"It is better to let both these men go than to have more murder," he said. "Let us order them out of Estacado—never to return."

A sullen silence met him. When they voiced no open objection, Pike turned to Jerry Dalton.

"Get out of town! Never come back!"

Oliver Marsh waited for Dalton to answer. The kid's gun was steady, but his breath was lifting his chest more rapidly. Dalton was cool and decided when he answered.

"We will return, and we will have soldiers enough at our backs to stand this town on its ear. Oliver Marsh made a mistake allowing gunmen to work for him; but Estacado was allowing hooded devils to ride her streets, hanging men without a court. Both sides have been wrong."

Jabez Pike was more sobered than enranged by the words, but defiance was still hot in his voice as he replied. "Violence always begets violence. There is never an end to murder. If we were to kill you both tonight, it would mean that Austin would send another agent. Soldiers perhaps. More bloodshed would follow."

He leaned toward the slender young man holding the gun. "Marsh, if these men at my back withdraw peaceably and allow you to stay in Estacado, will you recall our sheriff to office and suggest to the government at Austin the name of a neutral man for probate judge?"

He turned to still the mutterings of disapproval at his back. "We have had vengeance for the death of Solomon Vadder," he said to his men. "Dalton is right when he says both sides have made mistakes." He turned back to Oliver for an answer.

"I will recall your sheriff," the youth said distinctly, his gun still steady in his hand. "And I will suggest the name of Dr. Dalton for probate judge."

SWIFT words passed among the Estacado men. They forgot their rifles and leaned their heads together. "I reckon we could do worse," someone said. "And it's handy to have a real doc in town."

"He saved Bruin Vadder's leg when he could as well hacked it off," another reminded.

Jabez Pike turned to Oliver. "Estacado will accept Dr. Dalton. We will see you in your office tomorrow."

Marsh lowered his gun. "We will work out a plan acceptable to—all," he said.

Jabez Pike and his men withdrew. Their steps grew more distant and at last died away. Oliver Marsh broke the silence in a shaky voice.

"I never expected to get out of that without a pair of wings."

Jerry Dalton fitted his scalpel into his pocket. "Lucky I brought this along," he said. "Thanks, Oliver, for standing by."

"Jerry, I can see why Dad asked you to stick with me. He knew I was going to need you. From now on you'll find me different. Ten years of knowledge soaked into my skin while I was standing waiting for death."

Dalton reached out for the kid's hand.

"It takes such moments to give us a real perspective on life, Oliver. I received my first baptism on the battlefield."

Oliver and Jerry walked slowly back to the tent house. A light was burning on the second floor of the hotel. Dalton said he would go up and see whether any of the night's excitement had filtered through to his patient.

He went up stairs to Ward Pike's room and found him sleeping. As he was leaving, Nan Pike came quietly along the hall. In the dim light her eyes were shadowed and weary.

"I'm glad they didn't kill you," she said. "I'm—I'm glad you're staying in Estacado."

He took her hand. "I wish we could be friends, Nan."

She did not withdraw her hand. "Maybe we can. The War is over. Good men fought on both sides. Maybe some day the break will heal. I feel tonight that peace has come to the Brazos."

Bonanza for Barkers

SCIENCE has done a lot for science; but in the process the experimenters have turned out a by-product that may be of value to carnival concessionaires and such.

Take the two-headed cow, or the cow with the bulldog face, which can be seen currently at the New York World's Fair. They're billed as nature's mistakes; and so they are. But if you could *breed* a two-headed cow, on order—

Well anyway, they've started breeding three-legged chickens. Not breeding, maybe, but making them—putting them together. A good practicing zoölogist now can turn out chickens with turkey legs, turkeys with duck legs, and so on, merely with a little careful pre-natal carpentry.

Dr. Herbert L. Eastlick, of the University of Missouri, has worked out a very delicate technique for grafting parts of one embryo to another. He clips off the leg-beginnings of, say, a guinea hen; then takes a nick out of a chicken's eggshell, grafts the spare part onto the chicken embryo in some more or less appropriate place, then seals up the shell again and lets nature take its course.

Pretty soon there's a young fowl running around like an animated tripod, with one leg leaning very strongly toward guinea hen.

Precisely what use Dr. Eastlick intends to make of this technique has not been made clear to the lay public. There are obvious commercial possibilities, however, in preparing large-scale supplies to freak shows everywhere.

Crockett Cooper

The men on the tug stood still, watching their captain —and the Xenia

Sea Road

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Author of "Ticket at Twenty," "Sailing Bum," etc.

'Ware coral reefs, and keep a good right fist ready; for things are too tough at sea to lose good men

THERE among the Florida keys one man beside Barry Green himself suspected that Barry lacked something important. Barry had come down too far, with too much travail, to put up with being driven further.

So Barry stood warily on guard, always, when Captain Pete Anson came up over the horizon as he had that day.

From his salvage tug, the *Mary*, Captain Pete Anson hailed Barry Green. His voice carried in over hundreds of feet of light green shoals to the deck on which Barry was working.

"Green! Cap'n Barry Green! Captain!" There was a harsh iron in that title that approached derision. "Captain! Come out here—and get me!"

Silently Barry Green dropped into the rowboat and pushed off. He rowed among half a dozen little keys that were no more than mangrove morasses and out into the deeper water. There Pete Anson's chunky salvage tug lay to with a curl of steam over her funnel.

Pete Anson, with his watch cap over his right eye and a cigar to balance it in

the left corner of his mouth, jumped as that boat slid alongside. He sat down in the sternsheets and jerked a thumb to command Barry to get under way. As Barry pulled the boat Pete Anson stared at him with hard eyes. He always stared like that, did Captain Pete Anson.

"What's your trouble, brother?" Anson asked suddenly. "Drink? Ladies? Or eighteen feet o' draft in sixteen feet o' water?"

Barry Green took two long strokes with the ash oars.

"I have no trouble," he said.

Pete Anson laughed. "I got an idea you have, brother. Maybe my guesses are too polite. How about it?"

Barry pulled the boat.

Again Pete Anson laughed. There was a harsh note in that laughter that jangled Barry's nerves like the screech of a dry block.

But now Pete Anson had forgotten Barry. The rowboat had threaded the shallow channel among the keys and come in sight of the anchored sponge fisherman *Xenia,* from which Barry had come. Pete Anson scrutinized the little craft intently. The last time Pete Anson had seen her his tug had been towing her—dismasted, leaking, and swept toward the keys.

The aged *Xenia* had changed since Captain Anson had picked her up in such a woeful state. Anson had taken her away from her owners in lieu of salvage on boat and cargo and turned her over to a hopeful speculator. Now she was gaudier in her orange-and-white paint than the gaudiest Greek sponger that ever put out of Tarpon Springs, up on the Florida mainland.

Barry Green's own job on her did not show; he had made that wormy, nailsick and dry-rotted little double-ender almost tight below the waterline.

"Huh!" said Pete Anson. "Jesse Nagle's spent some cash on her, huh?"

"Some," Barry Green answered. He gave the bow of the rowboat a dextrous twist with one oar and glided alongside the starboard quarter.

"You wait in the boat," Pete Anson commanded. "I won't be long. Stand by! Hear?"

HE LEAPED aboard the *Xenia.* Though he was a thick-chested, heavy-looking man he went over the rail as easily as a flung rope. Next instant he was clapping Jesse Nagle most cordially on his fat round shoulder.

"You Miami slicker, you, you're a smart fellow," Pete Anson said gaily. "So damn smart your gag might work. I'm throwin' in with you after all."

Big Jesse Nagle's eye, deep-sunken in fat, gleamed at the salvage tug master. He shook with sly, ill-controlled laughter.

"I'm smarter even than that, Anson," he said. "You ain't throwing in with me."

"What?"

"I don't need you now—and I'm taking that ten days' grace you offered on the three hundred I still owe you," Nagle said coolly.

Anson's good spirits vanished in a split second. He scowled formidably.

"You told me when I let you have her for nearly nothin' that you wanted her for spongefishin'," he said. "Why would I want to buck that game? But when I found out—" His scowl intensified.

"It amazes even me, how smart I am," big Jesse Nagle said, still struggling with poorly hidden amusement. "You'll get your three hundred when it's due. Come aboard and see us again, Pete, after we've got her to Key West for the sponging."

Pete Anson went white with quick anger. He shook a fist as hard as a shackle at Jesse Nagle's quivering assortment of chins.

"Spongin', hey!" Pete Anson raged. "You're spongin' all right! I've heard! Spongin' on tourists."

"Well?" said Jesse Nagle. "That's what tourists are for, ain't they?"

Anson's wrath spattered white-hot over ship and crew. His eye raked Barry Green, now the *Xenia's* captain. Barry had been a seaman of a sort, second mate of a coasting freighter, and was therefore a special target for Captain Anson's contempt.

Anson's gaze ranged on to silent, hungry-looking Jim Murdock—who, having run a motor lawn mower, was to be her engineer—and Nick Paulus, former confectioner and restaurateur, who was to become a sponge diver overnight.

"A fine crew you got, you double-timing tipster," said Pete Anson to Jesse Nagle. "They match you right. Not one of 'em could do a spongers' work. A crew of phonies, like your game and boat."

"Us?" said fat Jesse. "Don't hurt our feelings, captain."

Anson growled in his throat at the fat man's derision. "You'll find I throw quite a bow-wave in Key West, Nagle," he said. "You may be looking me up."

"Not me," said Jesse Nagle.

Pete Anson, with an arm and leg over the side, scowled at them all. "Phonies!" he taunted. "I'll fix the lot of you—right!"

He jumped down into the boat with enough force to drive the stern almost under. He tested the tilt of his cap.

"Get going!" he barked at Barry Green. "Take me back to a real ship, you Coney Island captain, you!"

"Phonies!" said fat Jesse Nagle, and winked, as if it were an amusing secret he would keep for them. Jesse, Murdock, and Paulus all grinned down at Pete Anson, unafraid, unimpressed.

Only Barry Green did not grin; only he of that sorry little band of refugees shifted his eyes from the glare of Pete Anson. And he knew as he rowed Pete Anson back to his tug that he, as a seafaring man, should have met this hard-case skipper's challenge. He did not answer Pete Anson though things were said that needed answers.

THAT night at Pedro's Cuban joint on Duval Street, Key West's Broadway, Jesse Nagle bought Barry Green a dinner. It was on the cuff; Pedro had yielded to Jesse's promissory tongue. Although the soup is always the best part of a Cuban dinner, Jesse Nagle did not become expansive until he reached the rum and coffee.

Then he said, "Never tell a man-eating shark you ain't in good health and spirits, with a fat wallet. Anson won't libel us unless he knows I'm broke. But we've got to find out what other kind of a monkey wrench he's going to throw in our jam."

"It will be a big monkey wrench," Barry Green said. "He's hot all through."

"Beyond Anson we're set," Jesse Nagle said. He beamed at the tourists lounging at the other tables and wandering up and down the narrow street outside.

"Look at 'em," Nagle said. "Tourists! Every winter they come rolling down the highway—good old U. S. One. That road starts south way up at Calais, Maine. The tourists an' the road used to stop at Miami. But now Number One runs out to sea on the bridges and it carries the tourists on south till they hit the last key in the Florida chain. They keep comin' till they run out o' concrete. And then they look around for something to do besides drive."

"Or drift," Barry Green added in his own mind. He had drifted, himself, looking for a landsman's job with a master mariner's ticket in his pocket. A landsman's job!

He could still see as vividly as ever, that moment that had told him that he was not for the sea. The stoker was drunk or crazy when he made that weird, howling rush for the welldeck rail and flung himself into the sea. But the young third mate had not hesitated. He had pushed past Barry Green, climbed through the window of the bridge's starboard cab and jumped.

Possibly the third had come to the surface in spite of oilskins and boots. Neither Barry nor the Old Man, busy with lifebelts, engineroom telegraphs and the wheel, saw him. He had been no great swimmer, had the third, not as good a swimmer as Barry Green.

Almost at once, as soon as the three-hour search had proved useless, Barry Green had sensed the hostility of his mates. He had even caught a snatch of talk that the wind whipped his way. "Too

soft," the Old Man had said to the mate with a glance his way. Too soft for the sea!

Barry had admitted in his heart the justice of those cutting words.

It had never occurred to him, good swimmer that he was, to follow the third, or precede him, over the side. In that bitter winter sea off the Virginia Capes, with a gale blowing and night coming on, the chances of being picked up were infinitesimal. It looked like unjustified suicide to Barry Green.

But to a man his fellows had condemned him. And they weren't a bad lot. Barry had accepted their verdict and quit. It had started him thinking.

Thinking, he found, was a dismal business. This harbor job was too close to the sea to suit him. But he had reached the end of U. S. 1 like Jesse Nagle, Jim Murdock and Nick Paulus.

What had kept them moving southward? Was it the pull of the mighty tourist migration that had carried them like dry leaves swirling aimlessly behind the suction of the tourist cars?

"They get here—and what's here?"

Big Jesse Nagle continued his lecture on tourists. "The same old joints, gambling houses, saloons, eating places and movies there are everywhere else. Practically nothing to take the cash off them in a local and picturesque way, like they like it to be done. Nothing but the *Xenia*, tied up to a dock, smothered in flags and flaming with paint, with us yelling and a diving suit showed off on deck.

"Sponge fishing! To see it means they've been places; and two bucks spent educational, like this, will square that six bucks they dropped on the slow-motion horse at Hialeah. Sure they'll bite."

"But how do we show them sponge-fishing?" Barry asked.

"We don't," said Jesse Nagle, working his wink most confidentially. "But we give 'em a little ride. We let 'em see a helmet diver go down for sponges, modern style, and he brings up what we've planted on the bottom."

Again he winked. "Sure it's phony, like Pete Anson said, but it's the way tourists like it and we'll cash plenty."

He levelled a finger at Barry Green. "You can throw your sea chest into the Gulf Stream and settle down, young fellow. This captain's job will bring you home in time for the movies every night. You don't have to take it tough and risky all your life. You don't go out if it's raining or there are any waves around."

Was that what Barry Green wanted? It was all he was good for. "It's the life for a lucky young——"

HE STOPPED. Past the window, rolling slightly, Nick Paulus was walking, caressing his straggling mustache. Beside him walked Captain Pete Anson.

Big Jesse Nagle heaved himself upright. "I'll be back," he said and padded out after them.

Barry Green stared at his hard square hands. He had never thought his first command would be a showboat. A bunch of phonies, Anson had called them; and he was right. Barry didn't know anything about sponging. Nick Paulus had never dived into anything but pastry dough. Jim Murdock had never laid a wrench to a marine engine in his life.

And Jesse Nagle, as Barry had told him that day, would rather do a thing crooked than straight. "Only suckers don't cut the corners," was what Jesse Nagle had answered with great good humor.

Barry nodded slowly. "Phonies," he said.

Big Jesse came looming through the crowd. He had Nick Paulus in tow and pointed to a chair.

The ex-confectioner sank into it, seized his mustache, and smiled happily at them. His face was shining with perspiration.

"Everything Anson ask me I tell him wrong," he said. "Not too wrong, boss, like you said. But wrong."

Big Jesse chuckled. "That's it, Nick. Always let a man pump you. And what did you tell him about money, hey?"

"That time I told him all wrong," Nick

amended. "I told him you had lots of money left—lots, boss."

"That's the one we've got to make stick," Nagle said. "Anson must be framing something in town here, or I'm a sponge fisherman. He'll move faster if he knows I'm cleaned."

"What do you think he's framing?" Barry asked.

Jesse Nagle shook his head. "I never tried the mind-reading gag."

Nick Paulus sprang up. "I find out from Anson," he said, beaming. "I pump him. Divers know about pumps. I do him to a turn—a double turn."

"A double cross, you baker," Jesse Nagle corrected. "Sit down. By this time Cap'n Anson is asking Jim Murdock questions. Jim's got his orders too."

A tinge of sadness came over big Jesse's face. "I've been—well, not crooked—wise all my life," he said. "But that guy Anson——" He shook his head. "He's a natural. It comes easy to him."

Until after midnight they waited for Jim Murdock, the amateur marine engineer. Jesse consumed much rum and, unasked, gave Barry a glimpse of a strange world wherein wits were trumps. When Jim Murdock finally appeared he shook his head.

"Nothing," Jim said. "Anson didn't try to bribe me."

"I'd be disappointed in him if he had, the first night," big Jesse said. "Tomorrow will be different, maybe. Only don't act too honest. Tell him you swiped a lawn mower once to go on a toot. Don't make things too hard for him to pull something fast, any of you."

SHUDDERING with every shot out of her heavy-duty motor the gorgeous *Xenia*, that whited sepulchre of the sea, crept down the narrow channel among the keys at the top of a spring tide with only inches of water under her.

Barry Green had sounded every foot of the twisting way in a rowboat; she touched neither sand nor coral as she left the tiny basin.

Only when she reached the deeper water of Hawk Channel did he tell big Jesse Nagle that the charts had been stolen that morning.

"Well, that's not much, but it's something," Jesse Nagle said with relief. His genial self-confidence was not so pronounced out here on the water. "I was afraid Pete Anson was pulling a deep one. We got to go back, huh?"

Barry shook his head. "I've studied the chart," he said. "I'm enough of a seaman to get us to Key West without it."

"There's a lot of coral around here," Nagle said. He looked uneasily at the light green water through which the bottom showed so plainly.

"I have the pilot book," Barry said. "I can do it. We go on."

"All right, cap'n."

The *Xenia* went ploughing ponderously down Hawk Channel. She left the basin where she had been careened miles astern. Key West crept nearer. Only seven miles were left.

A southeasterly breeze, strong and increasing, was rolling choppy seas against her port quarter and humming through the rigging above her furled, useless rags of sails. That roll wasn't doing the new caulking between her old strakes much good. The bottom had vanished from sight as the seas stirred up the sand.

Occasionally along the line of keys to starboard the windshields of hurrying tourist cars flashed back the sun and the long white bridges. Like them, Barry Green would stop at Key West, the last key, confronted by deep water beyond. It was as much a barrier to him as to those cars.

Of a sudden Barry Green surrendered the wheel to Jesse Nagle, who gripped it tightly with his fat white fingers. Barry took a few steps forward to stare intently at a craft lying off Boca Chica, on the starboard bow. Despite the glare of the westering sun his sea-wise eyes picked her up out of the background of green mangroves.

"That's Pete Anson's *Mary*," he told

Jesse Nagle. "I thought we heard she had a job to northward of—"

"Come and take back this damn wheel," big Jesse interrupted nervously. His hands were sweating on the spokes. "Anson's about where I expected him to be, waiting for us."

Barry looked at him.

"Cap'n Anson finally worked himself up to buying out Jim Murdock on us," Jesse Nagle explained. "Naturally I didn't spread it around that I knew."

Barry Green glanced at their silent amateur engineer. Jim Murdock's head projected out of the companionway into the fresh air. He was somewhat green in the face but didn't look guilty.

"For twenty bucks from Anson"—Nagle patted his own pocket—"Murdock agreed to let our engine go sour and stop off Boca Chica. The anchor'd never hold against a stiff wind. Having no chart would make things worse.

"Anson was going to pass us a line just as we drifted helplessly toward the rocks on the edge of the channel. Then he'd tow us into Key West. He would hang onto the *Xenia* and file a salvage claim that, with what I owe him now, would wash me out. Then he'd start on the tourists."

He chuckled and poked at Barry's ribs. "See? This way I give Anson something to look forward to so he won't libel us. We just hammer on past Boca Chica and into Key West Harbor before he can work up anything fast and dirty. And he's lost a lot of time."

Jesse Nagle slipped out from behind the wheel and pulled Barry toward it. In silence Barry held the yawing sponger to WSW ¾.

THEY put Boca Chica and the little salvage tug abeam. Almost imperceptibly Anson's craft eased toward them. Anson was figuring the breeze was stiff enough to make quick work necessary when the *Xenia's* engine stopped with the rocky Chica reef close under her lee.

But the motor thumped on. Jim Murdock, that green-faced wraith, permitted himself a dry smile as they passed the island. Key West's low eastern shore drew nearer.

The salvage tug lingered astern of them. Barry picked up his glasses, braced the wheel against his leg, and studied Anson's craft. Though the *Xenia* was plunging erratically he made Pete Anson's head out at a window of the pilot house, looking toward them.

Anson let them have a lead of half a mile; then trailed along behind them. Big Jesse Nagle gave way to a subterranean shaking.

"Always let the customer you're working think he's got you fooled," he confided to Barry. "It keeps him satisfied and it don't cost you a nickel."

Barry grunted. He hated all this conniving worse at sea than he did ashore.

A big sea disturbed Jesse Nagle's stance. He grabbed at the wheel for support, with a landsman's lack of reverence for the helm. His Panama hat went flying to leeward. Barry fended him off the spokes and kept her on her course. Jesse Nagle watched his hat alight on a foam-crested wave and then turned a disapproving glance on the sea to windward.

"Am I giving you a break, captain!" he exclaimed. "No more rough stuff for you. We won't take the customers more'n a hundred feet away from the dock when it blows like this. We're going to get there, aren't we?"

Barry nodded. "You and Nick might throw some water out of her," he suggested, flicking a hand toward the pump on the port quarter. "She'll be working a bit of caulking out of those garboard seams."

Jesse Nagle grunted. He glanced aft, toward Anson's tug, and then wavered toward the companion ladder. His bellowing brought Nick Paulus tottering up onto the swaying deck. For a deep-sea diver Nick looked strange. Together they rigged the handle and heaved wearily up and down. The pump poured seething white water overside. It kept coming.

The *Xenia* waddled on. Barry brought her close to the black and white turn buoy and put her on WNW ¾ W for Whitehead buoy. The men at the pump, fat men, soft white landsmen, both, were panting hard now and looking at him.

Barry glanced at Jim Murdock, whose job included keeping track of the water in the bilges. Jim Murdock indicated about nine inches with his hands. Barry ignored the entreating eyes of the men swaying on the pump handle.

The salvage tug came up astern and passed to starboard, not too close. "Anson knows—he's a sap—now," Jesse Nagle gasped.

Pete Anson had his head turned toward them; other heads watched the sponger from the galley and engineroom doors. Long after the tug had swept ahead Anson still looked back at the *Xenia.*

"We'll be in the shelter of the land in half an hour," Barry called to the two laboring fat men.

Their eyes tried hard to tell him they were dying now but Barry refused to understand. Suddenly Jesse Nagle quit pumping.

"That ought to hold her, huh?" he panted; and Nick Paulus, after another half hearted stroke, stopped too.

Barry shrugged his shoulders. This was what happened when a man too soft for the sea took command, even of a showboat.

"Get every shot you can out of her," he called to Murdock. The engineer nodded. Barry turned again to the pilot book. A startled yell from Nick Paulus aroused him.

Nick was pointing ahead, at the distant salvage tug.

"Fire!" he yelled. "She's afire, captain! Look! Fire!"

BARRY caught up his glasses, mastered an erratic lunge of the ship and levelled them at the tug. Men were running wildly about on her deck; and from her engineroom hatch and doorway dense black smoke was pouring. In a low billowing cloud it was swept away to leeward.

A succession of short blasts burst in puffs of steam from her funnel.

There was no other craft but the sponger within sight of her. Barry's taut lips curled a little derisively.

"A gag, huh?" Jesse Nagle queried, instantly combining for deductive purposes Barry's expression and his own natural skepticism. He had to raise his voice against the wind. "The fire ain't so hot?"

The tug had fallen into the trough and lay rocking in the swells.

"Looks like a fake," Barry said tersely. "That hard-boiled salvage gang wouldn't lose their heads that fast. And there's too much smoke, too fast, anyhow."

"What's the idea, then?" Jesse Nagle pressed. "Ashore I could tell you; here you got to tell me."

"The wind's coming up all the time," Barry answered. "Pete Anson must figure that if he can get us to follow him that far down to leeward among the reefs and flats we'll never be able to claw back to Key West against the gale. That means he could step in with a towline and get you good for salvage."

Nagle nodded and wrinkled up his forehead.

"Now how do we cash in on that crosser?" he asked himself aloud.

"Stow that!" Barry Green commanded sharply. His eyes left the smoking, wallowing tug to fix on his own laboring craft. "This is no place to pull smart answers. My job's to get this thing in under the land before her seams—"

He stopped and caught up his glasses. Then he dropped them onto the wheelbox. He bent his knees and squinted across the compass, getting a bearing on the drifting salvage tug. "I wish I had a chart," he muttered. He knew where the deep water was but not all the ground beyond the channel.

Jesse Nagle stared. "Don't let him kid you," he said. "That smoke looks like tarpaper afire to me, too."

"Anson's mind is on us, not on the chart," Barry said. "And that smoke's

shut off his view to leeward. Maybe he's clear of the reef but not by the bearing I get on him."

He looked back at the compass.

A big sea flung its top on board, dousing them to the hips.

"Maybe we better keep our minds on us, too," Nagle bawled, scowling at the frothing whiteness astern.

Barry's hands on the wheel were handling her well enough but he still watched the wallowing tug.

"The sooner we show him we're not biting the sooner he'll cut out the act," he decided and addressed the engineer. "Jim, try to get her hitting a bit faster, will you?"

He turned his head away from the tug and gave a spoke to straighten her out on the course for the harbor.

"Baby!" said Jesse Nagle suddenly. "The spray's flying right over her now!"

Barry's eyes jumped to the *Mary*. He needed only a glance to see what was happening. The tug had drifted into the rougher, hard breaking seas off the end of a reef. The shoal churned up a terrific turmoil of crashing water.

Promptly, as the seas warned him of danger, Pete Anson abandoned his stratagem and his helpless drifting. He kicked her head fast. The tug surged toward deeper water. Then, next instant, she reeled to port. For ten blasts of the *Xenia's* motor exhaust the tug stood rigidly still in the midst of the leaping seas.

Barry knew what that meant. Pete Anson had gotten under way a second too late. She had hit one of the ugly coral heads projecting upward off the end of the reef. Coral! A tough, jagged tearing rock, worse than granite on a ship's bottom.

A BIG sea piled up against the tug and knocked her clear of the coral fang. She floundered into the veil of spray to leeward. Barry, watching tautly, saw that she was drifting again. She had no power now. The coral had finished screw or shaft.

He turned back to meet Jesse Nagle's deep-sunken eyes. "We can't do them no good in this thing," Nagle said smoothly. "We better hell-bead for harbor and send them help."

Barry's eyes were swiveling to the two other phonies, the sick Nick Paulus and the silent Jim Murdock. They came edging aft to the wheel, their eyes roving from the stricken tug to Barry.

Barry had no feeling of fear; at least he wasn't that soft. It seemed to him that he had a good chance of getting the people on the tug out of this mess. But these others on the *Xenia*— If they had stuff in them it wouldn't come out with kicking. They'd been kicked all their lives.

"It's not a gag now," he said. "They're in trouble."

Despite the need for action he waited precious seconds. No use in taking a bunch of cravens downwind to destruction.

Jesse Nagle was unconvinced. But he didn't seem to be scared, either. "This is no coast guard boat," he said. "I don't mind grandstand plays when there's a grandstand to play to or some cash in sight. But how can we—"

"Leave that to me," said Barry. He was looking at the other two. "Just think of the publicity your boat would get, Jesse—rescuing a salvage tug."

Jesse Nagle got it—the twist in it. He grinned.

"Now you're saying something!" he cried. "Come on—let's get going!"

Fat Nick Paulus was twisting his mustache and taking too much time about it.

"We rescue, and I kick that son-a-gun Anson in the face," he said, lashing out with his foot and almost falling on the heaving deck. "He called me a Greek—in the wrong voice. I—"

He continued to talk. For a moment Barry thought Jim Murdock was going to say something. But the engineer changed his mind. He gestured toward the tug with a horny thumb and went back to his motor.

"Right!" said Barry. He found that he had already turned the wheel. The *Xenia*

was plunging toward the reef that had ensnared the tug. "Get back to that pump," he commanded the two fat men. "Make it hum."

Nick Paulus jumped toward the handle. He began to pump, with fine dramatic fervor. Less rapidly Jesse Nagle followed, but he put all the weight of his stomach into the job. The water dragged up from the bilges followed wavetops swashing over the deck back into the sea.

But for all their efforts Barry felt she was none too buoyant when the crazier seas, piled up in shoaling water, began to hit her. The stolid reef maddened the sea. More water and more water swirled over the low rails onto the deck. She was heavy. She was heavier yet when Barry began working her in to the *Mary*.

"Keep that cabin slide closed!" he roared at Jim Murdock. The top of one high sea, roaring into the cabin over that narrow stern, would be enough to start her to her finish.

The engineer nodded. Without hesitation he ducked down the companionway and drew the slide over him, like the cover of a coffin. If she went to the bottom his motor would be poor company but all Jim Murdock would have below.

Jesse Nagle, with his big stomach and rounded back bending rhythmically, was thigh deep in water as the seas swashed over; but his voice, as he bellowed aft at Barry, was full of jubilant life:

". . . Miami papers . . . eat it up! Sponger saves salvage tug! Man bites dog stuff! They'll—"

A wave-crest overwhelmed him. He crawled up off his knees. "A big break." His voice was more subdued.

BARRY nodded, winking the salt out of his streaming eyes. He found a moment to wonder over what men will risk their lives for. Jim Murdock, grass-cutter, was set on keeping that heavy-duty motor turning over and Jesse Nagle's mind was on publicity for his latest game. Nick Paulus wanted to rescue a man to kick him—if his nerve held.

And he—Barry Green— A rescue, no matter how tough, wouldn't cure his trouble. He still thought he was right about following that man overboard.

The tug had been lost in flying spray but now he saw her. Pete Anson had dropped his anchor. There was visible coral, jagged, tusk-like rock, within a hundred feet of her stern.

The anchor didn't help much in that surging white water. The salvage tug was fighting the chain, worrying and backing away like a frantic dog. Time after time she buried her bow; then heaved it high out of the water till the chain tautened with a wrench.

A couple of men were forward, dragging a tarpaulin and struggling against the green water that inundated the deck. They were trying to sink the heavy tarp under her and slide it aft along her bottom. The idea was to plug the hole by the pressure of the water gushing into her.

Barry surveyed the seas to leeward of the tug, seas that were like tattered rags flying in a breeze. Under her the water looked deep enough—unless she was swept downwind a couple of lengths. The spray was flying high.

With a careful hand he turned the wheel and sent the sponger nosing toward the sandy yellow water.

Of a sudden Anson saw the *Xenia* as he hurried from the foredeck after shouting orders to the two men struggling with the tarpaulin. He stopped dead to stare at her. He raised a fist over his head in savage wrath.

He had wanted to lure the sponger downwind—but not like this. His contorted mouth framed words. He waved them all to perdition. It was a magnificent gesture. He disappeared into the engine-room doorway.

Barry glanced at the men at the pump. Both were still heaving mechanically at the handle. Fat Jesse Nagle, bending, took a hand off the bar to wave it toward Anson.

"Quite a guy!" he bellowed. "Sticking to her!"

Barry did not answer. He looked hard at the dwindling freeboard of the tug. She was settling fast. He listened carefully to the thud of the *Xenia's* motor. It seemed to him that Jim Murdock, working out of sight beneath that closed cabin slide, had managed somehow to step her up a bit.

He eased over his wheel a trifle and kept the *Xenia* edging in closer to the tug. The men on the forward deck of the *Mary* had managed to work the tarpaulin under the anchor chain of the tug. They dragged it down the stem and under her keel. As they started to haul it aft the tug yawed wildly.

A big sea hit the exposed edge of the tarpaulin on the port side. The man there flung a couple of quick turns on a cleat with the line that held it. But the big wave snapped the rope. The tarpaulin vanished under the tug. Next instant it had ripped away on the other side as a foaming breaker buried the bow.

The two seamen, who had thrown themselves flat to hold on to what they could, retreated in a rush.

Pete Anson had come jumping up out of the engineroom in time to witness the loss of the tarp. He shifted his cap on his head, planted his hands on his hips and glared at the sponger ranging closer alongside. Then he lifted his hands to cup his mouth.

"Keep clear!" he roared. "I don't need . . . blasted help! Get out o' here."

Barry made a guess at the present waterline of the tug. And faintly through the back of his mind drifted remembrance of how his brother officers of the freighter had looked at him after the search for the young third mate had failed.

"Well—if he don't want us—" Jesse Nagle said.

Barry gave the boat another sheer in toward the side of the tug.

"Keep clear, you!" Pete Anson shouted.

BARRY GREEN was conscious of the heads of the crew of the salvage tug. The men were standing by, at their stations, but they were looking toward the *Xenia.* These men knew a gone ship when they saw one, and they knew the tug was doomed. But they stood still, watching the *Xenia,* watching Pete Anson.

Barry Green was thinking hard, thinking of this jam and of that last good day of his desperate life. Of a sudden he made his decision. He cupped his hands.

"I'm coming aboard!" he shouted; then gripped the wheel again. He beckoned to Jesse Nagle.

"Come here," he said. "Get set to grab this wheel."

"But—for—" Jesse Nagle protested. "You can't leave us!"

Disregarding him, Barry Green was easing the *Xenia* in closer to the tug. Seas in between them slapped the sides and spouted upward. Barry's little ship had a pitch and descend different from the enchained and restricted plunging of the tug.

Pete Anson stood on her deck amidships, glowering at the sponger. "Keep her off, you!" he shouted. "I'm not deserting my ship. I'll get her to port—or go under with her!"

"I'm coming aboard!" Barry roared back. He was watching Anson narrowly. "I'll give you a hand!"

This time Pete Anson understood. His strained face contorted in an angry snarl. He lifted a threatening fist. Back of his defiant figure Barry saw the set, miserable faces of the crew.

The pitching sponger's side touched the rank of discarded truck tires that served the salvage tug as fenders. The ships sawed at each other, ground together.

"Keep that wheel steady!" Barry commanded Jesse Nagle. He darted away from the helm, toward the rail of the *Xenia.* On the tug raging Pete Anson moved to meet him, with his fists ready. Anson planted one foot on the low rail of the tug and got ready to fling back the boarder.

Barry leaned toward the tug and Pete Anson leaned to meet him. But Barry did not jump. Instead his arm shot out. His

fingers clamped on the wrist of Pete Anson. With all the might in his body he jerked Anson toward the *Xenia*. His body snapped back like a spring.

Pete Anson was pulled off balance. He jumped for the sponger's rail to save himself from dropping in between the two boats. He landed sprawling on her deck.

Barry bent beside him. He swung back his right fist and sent it crashing against Anson's jaw. Pete flattened out on the deck.

"What the—!" Jesse Nagle cried.

Barry jumped back to the wheel.

"Come on, if you're coming!" he shouted to the startled salvage men. "All out o' that engineroom! Pass the word! Jump, you sons!"

The men on the tugboat's deck clung to what they could and shouted to the engineroom. For perilous moments the two ships ground the hapless tires to scraps of hot rubber. When the tug's crew came they came in a bunch, jumping and scrambling too rapidly for the men on the sponger to help them. The impetus of that charge carried them across to the dubious safety of the sponger's deck.

The two ships split apart as Barry spun the wheel. His hand on the throttle for all the power in the motor. He shouted to Murdock, still below. The sponger drifted backward a few feet toward the coral astern; then laboriously regained the distance. Barry babied the wheel. He coaxed the pitching ship toward deeper water.

Swearing, swaying on his feet, Pete Anson staggered backward toward the wheel. Both his hands were clenched.

"Put me back! Put me back!" he raged. "Put me back on my ship!"

"What ship is that?" Barry asked.

Pete Anson looked over his shoulder. Then he swung around, staring. He was just in time to see her funnel go under and white steam mix with white spray.

Pete Anson flung up his hands over his eyes.

"My ship! My ship!" he moaned.

"Well!" panted Jesse Nagle. "That's drama, that is!"

Barry Green looked down at his compass. His hands were steady on the wheel.

BARRY had fresh meat to work the insatiable pump and he used it in frequent relays to keep the water under. Even with Jim Murdock's solicitous ministrations the power to drive her into that living wind was not in the motor.

Barry managed to work her through the shoals and held her in their lee. The reefs broke the back of the seas. That was well, for the wind alone was a match for the hammering engine.

Barry hung on all night. Toward morning the gale eased off to a strong breeze.

As the *Xenia* passed Frankford Bank on her way into Key West harbor Barry nodded toward a shoal.

"Why don't you stick this basket hard aground on that sandbank with the deeper water under her stern and do your educational exhibitioning that way?" he asked Jesse Nagle. "You'd save a lot of money on caulking."

Jesse Nagle was impressed. "I could bring 'em out in a motorboat," he said. He meditated and chuckled at another thought. "Most of 'em wouldn't know she was resting on sand."

He slapped his knee. The idea pleased him immensely. He would be putting something over.

"Another thing," Barry Green said. "You wouldn't be worried all the time about your captain wanting to go down with his ship."

"What's that crack mean?" Jesse demanded.

Barry nodded toward the foredeck, where Pete Anson, cap askew on his head, a lump on his jaw, arms akimbo and thick legs wide apart, was standing. He was a tough, imposing figure of a seagoing man.

"There's your skipper," Barry said without bitterness. "He's better qualified than I am to command this exhibition ship."

Jesse Nagle looked at him shrewdly.

"Pete's got drama—and you ain't," he agreed. "The way he wouldn't quit his ship—that was heroic, that was."

"Yeah," said Barry. "Heroic—or something. That's a word I'd use rather on you and Murdock and Paulus."

"Sure, Jesse said complacently. "We were heroic as hell. We spattered the drama around as good as Pete Anson would on this sponger. But, Barry, I never cross a fellow I work with. Not Jesse Nagle. You can be skipper of the *Xenia* as long as you want."

Barry glanced astern to where the reefs and shallows of the last of the land gave place to the mighty Gulf Stream, hurrying toward the Atlantic. He smiled slowly. U. S. One had led him back to the sea.

"I've learned things in the last few hours, Jesse," he said. He touched his bruised right fist gently. "I'm fit for deep water. There's a job for me on a freighter somewhere and I'm going back now to get it."

During that tough night off the reefs he had come to understand fully that the eyes of the crusty Old Man and the hard-case mate of the freighter had not condemned him for failing to dive into the sea after that stoker.

They had condemned him because he had not knocked out the over-gallant, over-young third before he threw away his useful life in a useless gesture. Things are too tough at sea to waste good men.

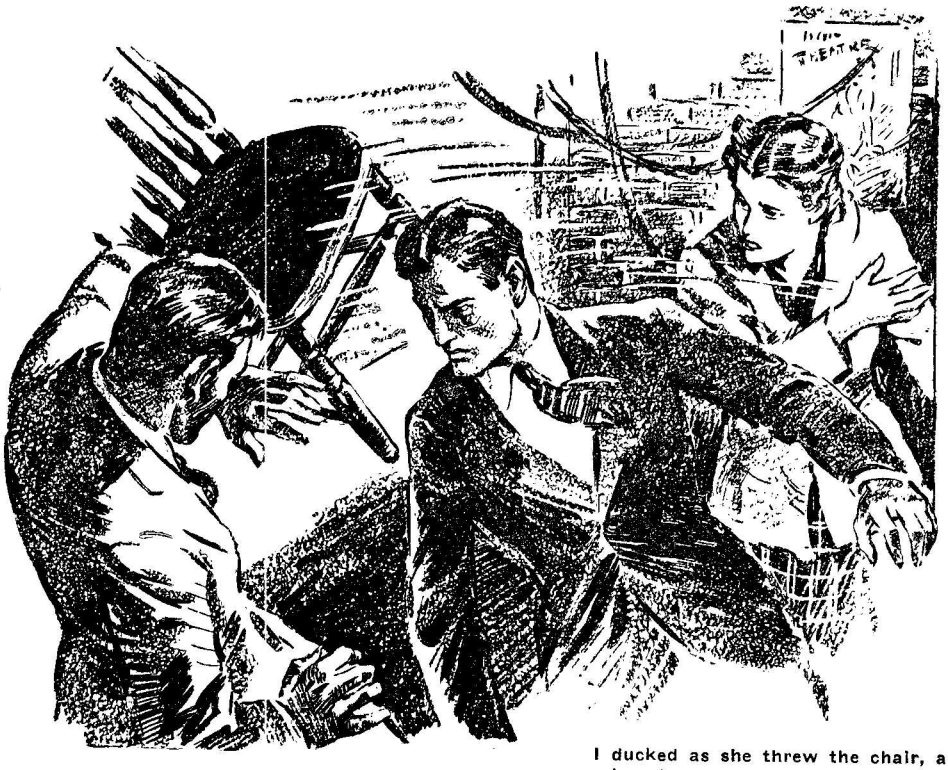
Young Mr. Echo

NINETEEN-year-old Francis Magner has one of the most extraordinary gifts that science has ever come upon. He is a human echo. He duplicates someone else's speech, echoing the words at the same moment that the other person speaks them. It's not lip reading because young Magner does not need to see the other speaker, as long as he can hear him.

Dr. Carleton F. Schofield, professor of psychology at the University of Buffalo, admits that the Magner case completely baffles him. He has tested the boy with complicated scientific terms, and they came as easily and as instantaneously from Magner's lips as from his own. When Dr. Schofield began to recite Milton, Magner rattled off the polysyllables right along with him. Finally, an assistant of Dr. Schofield's talked Polish, Russian and Italian from another room; the boy echo joined in immediately, though he knew none of the languages.

If the scientists are stuck, so is Francis Magner; he discovered his talent only a couple of years ago, and he doesn't understand it either. In fact, he's probably getting pretty sick of it.

—*Charles Dorman*



I ducked as she threw the chair, and it sailed straight for the senator

The Devil's Diary

By WILLIAM DU BOIS

PLENTY of people had reason enough to shove Owen Cary out a fifth-story window to his death. For Cary, the newspaper tycoon who owned the *Star,* had stepped on thousands of faces on his way up; and, even more important, he was soon to publish the confidential diary of Larry Ray, the columnist who at last was going to tell all. But now Owen Cary is dead, and the only manuscript of the diary—seen in his hands a few hours before—has disappeared.

Jack Jordan, veteran reporter on the *Star,* who is telling the story, finds himself too closely tied up in the mystery for his own liking. He's as much at sea about it as anyone, but he realizes that Hurlbut, the smooth, shrewd lieutenant of detectives, suspects him of concealing something. The day after the murder Jordan and his wife, Trudy, are to sail for Bermuda on a month's vacation; and that morning Jack, trailed by a police car, rushes about Manhattan, trying to get some clue out of the innumerable celebrities who wished Owen Cary ill.

THERE are Cary's two divorced wives—Blanche Cary, half-crazy, now a priestess of a wacky religious sect, and Anita Ames, the glittering movie star. Jordan makes a good feature story out of his interviews, but he gets no light on the mystery.

Then there are the people who were terrified over what Larry Ray might say about them in his confidential diary. Rita Arden, the ageless Broadway singer, was scared; equally so was Senator Anthony Parsons. The gin-soaked Hollywood Adonis, Mark Evans, knew that Ray could wreck him. So

This story began in the Argosy for September 30

did Nancy Janeway, another gossip columnist, now on the skids. As for Larry Ray himself, he's in Florida, unreachable.

But the person Jack Jordan is most worried about is Dr. Joseph Piccari, Jordan's best friend. Dr. Joe has bade a brilliant record as a surgeon, and recently he has become engaged to a wealthy society girl. What he fears from Ray's diary is the exposure of his father, old Joe Piccari, who made millions as a rum-king and has now retired, still untouched by the law. Dr. Joe fears, too, that Ray will reveal some of the dubious exploits of his fiancee; and he begs Jack Jordan to help him.

THE last minute that morning Jordan jumps into a taxi to meet Trudy at the pier. He is amazed to discover Nancy Janeway, the columnist, in the cab. Drunk, she has trailed him, and now she mutters that she knows the truth; she claims to have something on Senator Parsons. But Jordan can make nothing of her babble, and leaving her at the pier, he dashes for the gangplank where Trudy is waiting. He never boards the boat. Two detectives grab him, saying: "You might give us a hand with that girl in the taxi. She was shot through the head while you were running to make it." . . .

CHAPTER XIII

FRIDAY AFTERNOON: 3:30

YOU'LL admit that Trudy had a perfect right to faint on the spot; but she bore up beautifully after those first few hysterics. Even though I'd started making notes while Hurlbut's boys still had me by the arms. You see, Trudy has known me a long time, married or otherwise. When I make that kind of nose-dive into a story, she knows better than to grab my coat-tails.

I saw her shudder, just a little, when the *Queen of Bermuda* swung around in midchannel with one mournful, thrilling toot, and churned away toward coral beaches seven hundred miles from a deadline. But she didn't let out a peep, and her chin stayed at the same angle throughout. Swell girl, Trudy.

I'll let you imagine the kind of traffic jam we found outside the Furness Pier. Even with the cops on my side, it was a fight to get through and make my identification of poor Nancy. I learned afterward that we weren't the only people who missed the boat that afternoon.

I was still interviewing the ambulance doctor, when I felt Mac's hand on my arm. Don't ask me when he came into the picture, or how.

"Hello, boss," I said. "Since when did they make you a leg man?"

"Are you in any trouble, Jack?"

"I'm doing beautifully—why?"

"You're needed at the office—that's why."

I folded my thick wad of notes, and clicked my heels. "*Service, mon capitaine*—with a smile."

We pushed out through the police cordon. I saw Mac give the officer in charge a high-sign, and get one in return. So my own city editor had hurried to the spot to make sure I was in the clear. You might almost call it the accolade. Enough to pull any reporter back to his job, body and soul, if I hadn't been there already, on my own.

"Where's your wife?" asked Mac.

I led the way to the pier, and a corner of the empty waiting-room, where Trudy sat, surrounded by our gay-striped holiday bags. . . . Mac can be very gallant when he tries. Too bad Trudy wasn't having any.

"After all, Mrs. Jordan, it's November. You'd have probably found icicles in Bermuda."

"What does Jack have to do now?"

"Just a simple eyewitness story. You begin your vacation within the hour, word of honor."

Trudy just looked at him. I started to put my oar in, and thought better of it. There are times when a newspaperman must let his wife suffer in silence. Mac had already whistled for porters.

We made good time, going across town. So would any taxi, with a cop beside the driver, and a radio car opening a lane ahead. "Start talking," said Mac, "if you're sure it won't depress Mrs. Jordan."

"First of all, I'm not writing you an eyewitness story," I said. "Thank God, the

police know Trudy and I were running for a gangplank when it happened."

"Never mind, you can do the next best thing. Nancy trailed you to the Waldorf, didn't she, when I sent you to interview Anita Ames?"

"You can help there," I said. "Did anyone see Nancy go after me?"

"The doorman put her in a taxi, five minutes after you left the shop."

"Was she tight then?"

"He said she could walk, after a fashion."

"Did anyone follow her from the door of the *Star* to the Waldorf?"

"Not to our knowledge." Mac shot me one of his burning-blue looks. "Who's asking questions about this story—"

"Sorry, boss," I said. "That's all I need for the jig-saw."

"Check. Nancy met you at the Waldorf, and came over to the pier in *your* taxi."

"You mean, I rode over in *hers*. She'd nosed into the hack-line, somehow, so she'd be sure to spot me when I came out."

"Why?"

"Ask Nancy."

"You had lots of time to talk, driving over."

"Sorry—she was too tight to make sense."

NOT that that was strictly true, of course; but I'd figured it was high time to draw a red herring across my trail. That cop up beside our driver had ears, didn't he? Loyalty or no loyalty, I was writing my story my own way. I had the future to think of, not to mention my own skin.

Mac looked disappointed. "You were half way down the dock when it happened?" he prompted.

"So were Hurlbut's two shadows. It was a traffic cop that followed them with the news. Nancy was too blotto to even think of getting out of that taxi. The driver was moving in line, waiting his chance to make a left turn and bring her back to the shop. Naturally, that was impossible, with cars slamming past on both sides—"

"Are they positive that the shot came from one of those passing cars?"

"It's about the only thing that taxi driver can swear to. The ambulance doctor says it was a heavy-caliber bullet, to go through both windows and Nancy's head."

"Sure this isn't bothering you, Mrs. Jordan?"

Trudy lit a cigarette. "Doesn't Mr. MacDonald know I was a registered nurse before you married me, dear?"

"My error," said the city editor. "I won't interrupt you again, Jack."

"With all that back-firing and gear grinding," I said, "the job could have been done without a silencer. However, the police are of the opinion that a silencer was used. Obviously, the shot was fired by a person who could handle a gun as well as a car. When a taxi is doing forty miles per hour, you don't pass at a higher speed and pot someone through a window unless—"

"I've got that much on my own cuff," said Mac.

"All right—here's my personal reaction. If it was a one-man job, the murderer was a dead shot. Singular or plural, he picked up Nancy's trail at the Waldorf—spotted that police car—stayed on their tail-light going over—"

"All right, Jack; you can write the rest." He turned to Trudy now, with an ingratiating smile I knew all too well. "I said I'd let him go in an hour, Mrs. Jordan, and I meant just that. Naturally, I'll see to it that you get a refund on those boat tickets. Just by way of amends—how would you like the *Star* to pay for a pair of seats on the night plane to Florida?"

"Why Florida?" said Trudy.

"The next boat for Bermuda doesn't leave until Tuesday. You want Jack to get the most out of his vacation, don't you?"

He gave me a lightning wink, which I didn't need by now. I sat tight with my fingers crossed, watching Trudy.

"The last plane leaves around ten, Mrs. Jordan—lots of time to catch your breath. You could stop at Jacksonville, say, early

tomorrow. Get a good rest at a hotel. Pick up a jaloppy, loaf down the East Coast to Miami—"

"And interview Mr. Ray en route?" said Trudy.

Mac took it calmly. "You've a smart wife, Jack. She should be a reporter herself."

"Since when does the *Star* hand out free plane tickets, without a motive? But why should you pick on Jack?"

"Because I promised him a vacation, as soon as possible," said Mac, virtuously. "Besides, Ray has always liked him."

"Not that that's a compliment, dear," I put in, gently.

Trudy didn't give an inch. "Judging by my copy of the *Star* this morning," she said, "Mr. Ray has retired from active newspaper work and dropped out of sight in the South. I'm sure he'll be overjoyed to find a reporter on his doorstep tomorrow."

"So am I," said Mac. "Here, read this."

The telegram he handed us had a St. Augustine dateline, and had been filed less than an hour ago:

YOUR WIRE RECEIVED STOP INCOGNITO NO GO EVEN HERE STOP WILL TALK TO ANYONE YOU SEND PEFERABLY JORDAN STOP MAKE IT SOON

RAY

"Well," I said, "it looks authentic."

THE taxi stopped at the main entrance of the Star. Mac jumped out, then put his head back through the open door. "I've taken my job in my hands leaving the phone this long," he said. "Talk her into it, will you, Jack? She's a lucky girl, and doesn't know it."

Trudy and I sat silently, watching Mac disappear through the storm doors. Up front, the cop and driver did likewise. I took Trudy by the hand, and led her across the sidewalk to the shelter of the doorway, where we could talk in peace.

Peace! Funny word in that spot.

For a minute, I thought the cop would follow us, but he stopped at the curb when he saw we weren't entering the building. Not that it was the best place in the world to thrash things out with your wife, with people brushing by every third second. But at least we were out of earshot of the constabulary.

"What hurts me," said Trudy, "is the fact that you really want to go."

"It's a story that may make history," I said, "not to mention my reputation."

"All the story seems to center in New York, so far. Why should you want to fly a thousand miles, just to interview a nasty—"

"Grow up, sweetheart. The New York angle of this case is washed up here and now. Larry Ray has the key to what happens next. Even Mac knows that. I'm sure the murderer knows it, too—"

"You mean, Ray's on the murder list?"

"I mean lots more than that, darling. Columnist Nancy Janeway is out of circulation, permanently. So is the original manuscript belonging to Columnist Larry Ray. So, for that matter, is the publisher. Good work, as far as it goes—not a clean sweep by any means. Not while Ray is alive and kicking a typewriter."

I put the telegram in my pocket. "It's one of those things only a newspaperman can appreciate," I said. "Just believe this. I'll be heartbroken, if you don't let me follow through."

"Of course, if you feel that strongly about it—"

See what I mean? We weren't arguing really, just stating the case again, from my point of view. Remember, we'd missed that gangplank by inches. Remember too that she had five valises full of Bermuda wardrobe. Then show me another like Trudy, if you can.

"Word of honor, Jack, you'll stop working for the *Star*, the moment that interview's filed tomorrow?"

"Word of honor," I said, solemnly.

What's more, I meant it, at the time. Cop or no cop, I kissed her as I handed her in that taxi door. "Get in a nice bath and relax," I said. "I'll meet you in time for dinner."

Not that either of us believed that one. Has a reporter ever been home for dinner on time, since time began?

CHAPTER XIV

FRIDAY AFTERNOON: 4:00

WHEN Trudy drove on east, the cop stepped off our taxi running-board and followed me politely into the lobby. He was polite about getting in the elevator too, and going past the information desk to the city room. But there wasn't the slightest doubt that he'd been sent along by that precinct captain to keep me company. I got the point when I pushed open the gate to the bullpen, and saw Hurlbut sitting in Mac's private office, with his chin on the floor.

"Cheer up, Lieutenant," I said. "I missed the boat, after all."

"I'm sorry about that Jack—really." He motioned to the cop to leave us. "MacDonald is doing some chores in the city room. He thought this would be as good a place for us to talk as any."

"Why aren't you over at the Furness Pier?"

"I'll have my reports on that later." He smiled wanly. "Besides, it's peaceful here. It relaxes me."

From force of habit, I sat down in Mac's witness chair. "You don't look too relaxed, Lieutenant, if you don't mind my saying so."

"I don't mind in the slightest. I've just put in a bad half hour with the Commissioner just because of my naïve assumption that you were the only person in this office likely to stop a bullet. Too bad I picked the wrong reporter to honor with a police escort."

"So that's what you've been doing for me, since last midnight?"

"To the best of my ability, Jack. I'm very fond of you, really. I wouldn't want to see you come to grief, for the sake of a beat."

"Haven't we been over this once before?"

"Exactly. I shan't repeat myself. Surely you've a few words to add to our little talk in my car—now?"

I settled back and did my best to look comfortable. "What really puzzles me, Lieutenant, is the way you keep insisting on my importance in this case. Why won't you realize that I'm just a dumb reporter, who missed my boat?"

"I've been considering that possibility from the beginning," he said. "Of course, I'd been hoping the murderer wasn't so clever."

"In other words, you've been using me as a decoy?"

"Why not?"

"Do you mind if I put down that window? It's beginning to get a trifle chilly."

It was Hurlbut's turn to lean back, now. "Yes, Jack, when I heard of Miss Janeways' murder, I thought at first that the shot had been intended for you. That this murderer suspected you of inside knowledge which must be snuffed out with as little delay as possible."

He sounded frank, now, or as frank as he could ever be. "It begins to look as though I've been mistaken, all down the line, doesn't it?"

"This from you?"

"It begins to look as though Miss Janeway had the inside track."

"Don't tell me that's a possibility you overlooked?"

"Frankly, yes." He waited for me to go on talking, but I sat tight. "MacDonald informs me that she was—well, too drunk to talk when she drove over from the Waldorf with you."

I leaned over steadily to accept a light for a cigarette I didn't want in the slightest. "Funny, isn't it, that she should go to all that trouble to trail me, and then be too blotto to tell me why?"

"Perhaps she had a change of heart at the last moment," said Hurlbut. "Perhaps, like her murderer and myself, she decided that you were just a reporter who couldn't mind his business. That any confession on her part would only thicken the air to no purpose."

SO THAT red herring had turned the trick for me—almost too well for comfort. "Come out from ambush and tell me what you want, Lieutenant," I said.

"Now I'm not going to Bermuda, I'm only too eager to serve."

He flicked open his notebook, reading through the entries a long time, as though he had forgotten my presence entirely. "Would you like to run down the list with me? People who might have committed one, or both of these crimes—"

"Don't tell me you think they were separate jobs?"

"It's a thought we can't discard, so far," he said, gloomily. "At any rate, here's the list, as it stands. You've interviewed several of these names today, personally. Others, you know at least as well as I, if not better."

"Read on. I'll react honestly."

"Well, for a starter, there's Dr. Joseph Piccari."

"Why Dr. Joe?"

"Because he had everything to lose, if Ray should smear his old man in print. Because he dropped out of sight around noon today—"

"Don't tell me that adds up to a warrant."

"Not yet, but it does make a nice pattern in geometry."

"Who's next?"

"Ray's secretary — Daphne Carter. Know her?"

"Almost too well, Lieutenant."

"Well, I've just learned that she didn't fly South with Ray last night, after all."

"You don't mean it?"

"According to present information, a girl was seen putting him aboard the plane at Newark. But there's no positive proof that this girl was Daphne Carter. For all we know, Miss Carter could have stepped out of his car on the next corner, whisked back to that private elevator—"

"That doesn't appeal to me, somehow."

"Nor to me. But it is quite odd that she should have returned to New York, passed last night at her hotel, and disappeared just when we want her."

"Ask me another," I said.

"What about Blanche Carey? Could she have killed her husband for the good of her soul? Or take Anita Ames. Perhaps she snatched that diary for the good of her box-office. Or put Mark Evans up to stealing it for her. Besides being worried on his own account, he's been sweet on Anita for years.

"Or that Levantine husband of Anita's might have hired some gunman to do the job—say, through Joe Piccari, Senior. Did you know that old Joe has a tidy fortune sunk in Green's Hollywood unit? If Ray's mud-slinging puts two of Green's stars on the toboggan, Joe's money toboggans."

"You told me you were talking geometry a minute ago," I said. "Now you're talking Manhattan phone book."

"All right, Jack. Let's have the *Star's* list."

"Senator Parsons is our only new entry."

"Strangely enough, he's the only one in the field who has an iron-clad alibi. At twelve-thirty last evening, he was broadcasting from Radio City. This afternoon at three, he was addressing a thousand people in Brooklyn."

"Why should that let him out?"

"It doesn't. As a matter of fact, I've got him down myself. In a special category labeled 'dark horses.' It includes Mac himself, Rita Arden, Ray—and you."

"Speaking of the cause of it all, have you tried to buzz him in his hideaway?"

"Twice. There's no way to reach him. He's living on some kind of island, and won't come off. Not that I blame him in the circumstances." Hurlbut made his nearest approach to a grin that afternoon. "Do you suppose he wonders if he's gone too far just this once?"

I HESITATED. After all, he was being very fair about what he knew. So fair, he was drawing me into helping him, despite myself. I tossed my largest red herring between us, before I weakened. "Would it interest you to know what I really think, Lieutenant?"

"Try me. It can't make me feel worse."

"Well, I think you've begun your snooping with a fundamental fallacy. No wonder you're thrown for a loss."

"Go on."

"I can say this with impunity, because I've been floundering in the same morass all day, myself. Only my mistake was excusable. After all, I've lived, breathed, and slept that damned diary for weeks now. You should have hesitated, coming in with a fresh viewpoint—"

"D'you mean to say the diary wasn't a motive at all?"

"That's exactly the thought I'm leaving with you. Early this morning, we found our boss dead in the alley. A manuscript was missing from his desk. For the better part of twenty-four hours, you've assumed a connection. Why?"

"That's a rhetorical question?"

"Very. You contend that the person who stole that diary could have done so for two motives—self-protection, or blackmail. Let's break those motives down. All the names we've mentioned so far—and a few thousand others—had every right in the world to be afraid of Larry Ray's manuscript. But how could any one of them be sure of exposure? Or how really damaging that exposure would be? That diary was under lock and key until midnight, I'd stake my life on that. Would you have Dr. Joe, or Evans, or Duncan Green, crashing into Carey's office, throwing the poor old man out of the window on a hunch?

"The same criticism applies to the blackmail motive. I'd be the last to deny that the diary wasn't well worth stealing, if you had a little poison pen technique in mind. But murder for profit is always committed with a definite focus. How could the would-be blackmailer know he'd find the right person libeled—someone who wouldn't fight back? And how much value would the diary manuscript have as blackmail, anyhow? After the blackmailer had committed murder to get it in his possession?"

"Go on, damn you," said Hurlbut.

"Sorry, Lieutenant. I'm afraid I've confused you enough."

"What would your next move be, if you were I?"

"I'd face the fact that Carey could have died for any of a dozen reasons I hadn't even thought of, including suicide. I'd admit that the person involved might not be a murderer at all. I'd even admit that he could have taken the diary—and almost certainly destroyed it—just to make me waste a day barking on a hundred wrong scents. Then, Lieutenant—and only then—I'd permit myself a change of air.

"Go straight to Florida, row out to a certain island in a certain bay, and see how a well-known columnist is enjoying the simple life."

I got up as nonchalantly as I knew how, edging toward the door without taking my eyes off him for one minute. Just then, he looked mad enough to throw the office at me, including Mac's unabridged Rabelais.

"In fact, Lieutenant," I said, airily, "I've just outlined my own *modus operandi,* almost to the letter. If I can be of any further assistance, just drop by my desk. I'm doing a running story on why the police waste time—asking reporters to do their thinking."

Let me tell you, that door closed behind me just in time. Something heavy hit the inside, hard enough to make the panels rattle, accompanied by the sort of language to remind you that Hurlbut had worked his way up from harness, after all. I started to answer back in the same vein, until I remembered I'd brought it on myself. Then I turned up my collar against the breeze, and dove for my desk as fast as I could travel.

CHAPTER XV

FRIDAY AFTERNOON: 4:15

THE same sad-faced cop was perched on a stool just inside the gate that led to the reception room, looking as much out of place as a truck at a dog-race. All the machines were going full blast now, and no one gave him the slightest notice. Cops aren't exactly news in our city-room, any more than libel lawyers, or blondes with a secret to sell.

As you may have gathered, my story on Nancy Janeway's murder really wrote itself, with a few significant omissions, as indicated. It was a relief to deal with cold facts again, like Sergeant Condon's estimate of the size of the traffic jam, and the Bronx address of the taxi driver who had brought us over from the Waldorf. . . .

Jack Jordan, the last person to see Miss Janeway alive, reports that she seemed very depressed during the taxi ride to the pier. She wept in snatches and, on several occasions, seemed on the point of confiding her troubles to him. "Unfortunately," Jordan added, "Nancy's confessional mood never got beyond the hiccup stage."

WELL, all I could do was pray that a certain first-class gunman would read the account of his handiwork in tomorrow's *Star*. That paragraph would improve my own chances of survival, for a while, at least.

Out of the corner of one eye, I saw Mac go into his office just as I was putting on the final cliché:

Lieutenant Hurlbut, whose vigorous handling of the case has won praise at headquarters, told reporters that he hoped to announce an important development in the next twenty-four hours.

I sent the copy to the desk by Ike, and leaned back to comb the cobwebs out of my beard. Not that I gave myself much time to think constructively—with the calls I planned to make before my plane left.

"Hi, Jack," said Dan Crowell, deep in work at my elbow. "Why aren't you on vacation?"

"Call me any name you like. But don't ask me that."

"Sorry, my error," he muttered, crossing out a line. I saw he was talking with only half his mind, as reporters will when they're really working. After all, there's no such thing as complete concentration in the newspaper game. I went back among my cobwebs.

"Funny about Parsons, wasn't it?" said Dan, through a chatter of typewriter keys, as he inked out a line.

"He never got a laugh out of me, Columbia."

"I mean, it's funny a senator up for re-election wouldn't talk to reporters."

I pushed the cobwebs aside, and looked at him in earnest. "Did Mac send you to interview the senator?"

"He did that. Almost got me my first wound-stripe."

"And now, you're writing an interview regardless?"

"This isn't on Parsons. When I came back empty-handed, they sent me on to cover Mr. Carey's lawyer. *He* talked forever. About the will." Dan put the copy into my hands, and got up with a long, luxurious yawn. "It's always nice, don't you think, having ten times more material than you need?"

"Right now," I sighed, "that would be my idea of Heaven." Then I began reading and promptly forgot that Dan was still at my elbow, phoning a girl at Barnard and making a date for his night off.

Of course, that lawyer must have been a lot more guarded in his statements than you'd gather from what Dan had just said. He had to be, until the will was offered for probate. Still, a lot of facts about Carey's financial condition had been public property since he signed over control of his out-of-town interests to a board of directors. So I suppose even a lawyer felt justified in loosening up with a hint or two.

DAN had done one of those "it is understood" stories, and a good job it was, too—with millions looming behind every comma. Carey had left a million to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in addition to his own collections. Another million would probably establish a fund for deserving American painters, who wanted to study French art in its native setting. It was also understood that twenty millions were to be given outright to complete the work of the New York Better Living Association.

"More specifically, to purchase control of the Galway Estates, for the purpose of

erecting thereon a modern slum-clearance project. The chairman of the Association, who could not be reached for comment yesterday, is Senator Anthony Parsons."

Dan looked over my shoulder. "How does it read?"

"Smooth enough, Columbia—red-apple stuff."

"Looks like a red apple for Parsons too, doesn't it?"

"What is this Association, anyhow? Did you look it up in the morgue?"

"Of course I looked it up," said Dan, virtuously. "In its way, the Better Living is the antithesis of the F.H.A. and other cures for chilblains.

"Translate. I'm very tired right now."

"Why, it's really a private corporation, made up of architects, realtors, and a few practical philanthropists," said Dan, smooth as an honor student telling off his dean in a seminar. Its object is to abolish slums, by private initiative—"

"Shades of Herbert Hoover," I said piously.

"They've been trying to buy up the Galway Estates for years. You know, those blocks of old rookeries on the upper East Side? It's the only site in the city limits where they can operate on a large scale enough to show they mean business.

"Unfortunately, the lawyers for the Galway Estates are all gentlemen of the old school, and believe in hard cash. This contribution will just about swing the balance. . . . Incidentally, did you know that Parsons was an architect, before he went into politics?"

Bells were ringing faintly, now. "Keep on talking, Columbia, you've such a lovely voice."

"Ironical, isn't it, that this little present should be in Carey's will all along—and Parsons cursing the boss only yesterday?"

"Who told you he was cursing the boss?"

"The boss himself," said Dan, calmly. "Less than a half-hour before he died. In fact, he called me upstairs to explain his quarrel with Parsons—"

"Say that again, slowly."

"He had a statement to make for the last edition, didn't he? Well, that was it. Of course, I hadn't had time to take down five words before we heard that tap from the elevator—" Dan had taken his copy back from me, and was reading it over, with breathless pride. "Do you think I should have mentioned Mr. Carey's current protégée? The lawyer was very discreet about her, of course. She'll probably be left a small sum. Two or three thousand at the most—"

"That's quite enough, Columbia."

He was still staring after me open-mouthed as I ran for the morgue.

The bells were ringing in earnest, now; and it was Parsons' name that had started them, mentioned in the same breath with Carey's girl. Not that I gave a damn about his last protégée. I'd just remembered that his *next*-to-last favorite had been a young actress named Doris Blake, and that Doris Blake was the girl I'd noticed at the window of Senator Parsons' limousine last evening.

CHAPTER XVI

FRIDAY AFTERNOON: 4:40

TWO of our rewrite men were at the big table in the fileroom, throwing together an obituary on Nancy Janeway from the clippings in her folder. I let that angle ride for the moment, and went straight to the index to look up Doris Blake's number. Her folder was away off in a dusty corner, so I could sit down on an upended wastebasket all alone, and remind myself who she was.

The folder contained just four clippings, but they made a capsule biography in themselves. The first was a two-year-old squib from a drama column:

> **Doris Blake, a newcomer to Broadway, will have a feature role in Sinners at Sunrise, a satirical comedy-drama with music, to be put into rehearsal immediately by Gotham Productions, Inc. Rumor has it that the show's principal backer is none other than Owen Carey, the publisher.**

The second clipping was a feature story from a rival tab, dealing with Carey's other protégées—all legs and nasty innuendo. There was a big picture of Doris Blake, surrounded by stars and question marks, with the caption:

HOW LONG WILL SHE LAST?

Sinners at Sunrise was only a mild success, and Miss Blake's Hollywood reception seems to have been even milder. The third clipping came from *Variety,* and announced that Doris Blake's option had not been lifted.

The last clip, dated two weeks ago, came out of Miss Gossip's column. I opened it with a slightly clammy feeling around the fingertips.

Doris Blake, who starred two years ago in Sinners at Sunrise, but didn't do so well in pictures, is now rehearsing at the Market Theatre, Brooklyn, for the WPA - Federal Theatre's forthcoming production of Whirlwind. I wonder why she gave up Social Register security for the government brand—don't you?

All right, I had something to chew on now. A pretty problem in geometry, Hurlbut would have said; even though a Q.E.D. was conspicuously absent. I went back to the index, and took out Parson's standing obit.

Two and a half columns, with cut. All facts that any high school senior knew. His humble beginning. His adoption. Groton, Harvard, and the Columbia School of Architecture. A success in his own name, long before the depression knocked the bottom out of building. A flyer in municipal politics, a session at Albany . . .

Of course, his real humanitarian phase didn't get under way until after 1929. I don't have to tell you how the senator achieved results for his brave new world. Now, with reëlection just around the corner of next week—and Carey's millions ready to go to work for his pet project—it looked as though Parsons was about to come into his own.

Nancy Janeway had said she could stop him in his tracks, five minutes before Nancy's own demise. But I was assembling facts now, not dissecting them. I read grimly on to the end. His favorite sports were swimming and duck-shooting, his favorite hobby sitting on park benches and talking over problems with people on relief. Praise the Lord, here was the final paragraph in the untidy galleys:

Senator Parsons never married, maintaining bachelor apartments at the St. James while in New York. His Washington hostess, of course, was always Aunt Laura, the same Miss Laura Parsons who gave him her name when she adopted him in boyhood.

So here I was, still on the ropes and gasping for breath. At least, those rewrite men had gone back to their typewriters at last, which meant that I had the morgue to myself, until Pop came in from lunch and his afternoon nap in a movie. I went down to the big center table, under the drop-lights, to see what they'd left on Nancy Janeway, deceased.

REWRITE is always in a hurry. They'd left the contents of that folder sprawled out over all the table. Hundreds of clippings of her column—hundreds of Miss Gossips, some yellow, some new, with a smudged cut of Nancy under each by-line, wearing a page-boy bob that had gone out years ago. I gathered them in a pile, under a paper-weight. It wasn't exactly pleasant, having a hundred dead faces smile back at me out of that sea of print.

The rest was a melee of personal clippings, all out of chronology. Various social notes, with Nancy's name ringed among the list of guests. The story of her engagement to the son of a British bigwig. Another story, telling why Nancy broke off same. The story of her coming out—the date would have startled you, I hope. One more paragraph, falling apart with age:

Among those entertaining over the holidays was Mrs. Albert O. Janeway, who gave a tea yesterday at her home in East 62nd Street in honor of her daughter, Miss Nancy Janeway, who has recently returned from abroad. Among those

present were . . . Assemblyman Anthony Parsons. . . . Rumor has it that the young assemblyman's appearance may have been more than coincidental. Perhaps the rift between our handsome lawmaker, and the equally handsome Miss Janeway has no great depth, after all. Perhaps a name which is being groomed for greater things in Washington will yet be united with . . .

I put the clipping carefully back in the folder, and opened Pop's typewriter. After I'd run in a sheet of copy paper, and typed "Conclusions to Date" across the top, I decided to make a clean sweep. I pulled out my own folder. Every by-line I'd written since I came to work for the *Star*.

I stared for a long time at the yellowed feature story on Rum-Row that had gotten me my first raise (Old Joe had helped me to those facts—incognito, of course). Then I read the story I'd done on young Joe's appointment to Putnam Hospital. I even sifted through the fifty or sixty other run-of-the-mill interviews and the proud by-lines I'd signed to movie reviews, that summer of '32 when the regular critic was in Hollywood. Evans and Anita popped out at me—he in chaps and a rawhide vest, she in a costume that looked like a cheese dream of Pocohontas.

I slapped my stuff back in its folder. This was getting me nowhere fast.

IT GAVE me a jolt to note that both the Piccari folders were in use by the City Desk. Anita, Evans, and Duncan Green had also been borrowed, by the movie department, for a Sunday story. Well, they say scientists can put a dinosaur together from two shin bones and a rib—why not Jordan? I began typing, resolutely.

Conclusion 1: Senator Parsons was the one love of Nancy Janeway's life. Her feeling was unreturned. She became frantic when she noticed his interest in Doris Blake. (Better verify interest; Miss Blake may have been in his limousine last night for the ride).

Conclusion 2: Doris Blake started quarrel between Senator and Carey. The senator feared Doris' past would be exposed in the diary, as well as his own.

Conclusion 3: (very sketchy): Nancy Janeway saw the manuscript of diary, *after* she quizzed me at Miramar.

I yanked the sheet out of the typewriter, and folded it into my wallet, as Mac opened the wire door of the morgue.

"Ike said you'd ducked back here, Jack. What's the matter?"

"Just trying to collect my wits, before I go out into the world again."

He tossed a fat envelope on the table. "Here's cash from the auditor for those plane tickets. I put the order through myself. How's that for Scotch generosity?"

"Did you square me with the law, too? I wasn't much help to Hurlbut just now."

Mac held up two tightly-joined fingers. "The *Star* and Hurlbut are like that, at present. In fact, we've just made a gentleman's agreement."

"*Both* of you?"

"The *Star* is pledged to print straight news, and leave him in peace on both these cases. We are to keep him posted on anything we pick up from now on. Including whatever new light Ray may throw on things, when you talk to him in Florida tomorrow. In return, Hurlbut promises you all the protection you need until your plane leaves—and no more questions you don't care to answer."

"Thanks, Santa Claus, but I'm not sure I like your long white beard."

"It's all on the level—really. For example, Hurlbut told me something I'm burning to print. But I'm spiking it, until he gives the word—"

"Now I'm sure I'm dreaming."

"Do you know that poor Nancy telephoned him around two, and said she had a confession to make?"

I sat tight, and waited.

"She didn't elaborate—just made her announcement, and hung up." Mac sighed deeply. "No wonder she didn't make sense, by the time you got hold of her."

"MAYBE she was being loyal to the *Star* after all," I said, slowly. "Maybe she planned to give us an exclusive and lost her nerve."

"On the other hand, she may have snatched the diary herself. What d'you think?"

"I think we'd both better stick to straight news, MacDonald."

"Well, that's the bargain, from now on." He looked down at the snarl of clippings that surrounded me. "What's the idea, trying to check on everyone at once?"

"Just want to make sure I ask Ray the right questions tomorrow." I got up to put back the files, which took me out of the penumbra of light around the big table. "Incidentally, Mac—what became of the clips on that movie crowd?"

"We're doing a Sunday feature of Green, just to calm him down for the pushing around you gave him. He was oiling mad, when I called him up about it just now. Said he'd bring charges for assault and battery, if he didn't have to fly his wife and Evans out to the Coast immediately—"

"Skip the rest," I said. "Here's something important. Does Hurlbut know about the threats Parsons made to Carey last midnight?"

"Of course he knows. Didn't he work on young Dan Crowell first of all? Dan, I regret to say, hasn't your inimitable technique with detectives."

"No wonder Parsons wouldn't see reporters this afternoon."

"What are you getting at, Jack?"

"Nothing, so far. Just assembling. Sure you've no more chores before I go?"

"Not one, my boy. Just hurry home and make sure that nice wife of yours isn't worried."

"Trudy stopped worrying about me when she took up knitting," I said. "One more question, before you go back to your groove. Supposing I don't want protection until plane time? Do I get it anyway?"

"I'm afraid so, Jack. Hurlbut was very touchy on that point. Says he'd surely be put back in uniform, if anything happens to you between now and ten."

I put my head cautiously out of the file-room door. "Does 'protection' mean that cop in the city room, or are there more outside?"

"I believe there's a radio car in the offing somewhere—he didn't say definitely." Mac looked surprised, and mildly pained. "Wouldn't your wife like a motorcycle escort through the Tunnel to Newark? I'm sure it'd thrill me, if I were your age."

"Back to your desk, boss," I said, shaking hands. "I'm going to sit and brood a while longer."

"Don't tell me all those uniforms have you buffaloed?"

"Not quite," I said, "but I've never felt so well arrested since my last visit to Germany."

CHAPTER XVII

FRIDAY AFTERNOON: 5:30

MAC is generally a busy man from one to eleven. I played safe and gave him five minutes to get back to his assignment sheet before I called Ike on the copy-boys' phone.

"Keep your voice down when you answer," I said. "Does that cop at the reception room door look wide awake?"

"As lively as he'll ever be."

"All right, Isaac Newton. I've got to walk past him without being seen. Next time you send out exchanges, be sure to send them by way of the morgue. Do you follow me?"

"Sure thing, Mr. Jordan. I'll come by myself, in five minutes."

"Better bring two stacks for me, just to be sure."

Next I asked for an outside wire and started to call Trudy, until I remembered that our phone was disconnected by now. Poor kid, I thought—a trifle tardily, perhaps—it must have been glum for her, bringing our luggage back to that locked-up apartment. Well, in ten more minutes, I could send her a wire, and flowers with it.

There was just time to call the Federal Theatre Press Department, and make sure they were holding a rehearsal that afternoon in Brooklyn.

Four tall, corded stacks of final extras

were coming down the hall now, with two copy boys under them. I shuffled into my overcoat, and turned the collar well up before I went to the door of the file room. Ike was leading the way, balancing a fifty-pound bundle of newsprint on each shoulder like a veteran. The kid on his heels was having trouble with his two stacks, and looked dumbly grateful when I took over.

Ike and I walked past the mail boxes, straight down the centre aisle of desks, and into the reception room, without stirring a flicker. Too bad I was so busy balancing my paper blinders; we passed near enough to that cop to kick his shins.

In the elevator, going down, I let myself breathe.

"Is the truck waiting, Ike?"

"You bet it's waiting," he said, around his dead cigar. "Do I look strong enough to play Atlas forever?"

Perhaps that will give you an idea how my own shoulders felt, when we dumped those exchanges into the special delivery truck at the mail-room door. Not that I noticed until much later. There was just time to jump in before the driver threw in his clutch. We roared away for the Square, missing mudguards by the kind of margins truck drivers pride themselves on the world over.

I sat on the piled-up newsprint, glad it was dark inside that truck. You see, I'd been crouching in our file room for so long, I'd forgotten there was still something called daylight in the street. Enough, at any rate, for that radio car at the curb to remember me, if I'd been visible.

At the Sixth Avenue light, I dropped down to the street, crossed over to Forty-second, and down to the telegraph office near the corner of Seventh. Wiring Trudy was harder than I'd thought, but I finally managed.

VACATION BEGINS POSITIVELY AT TEN TONIGHT NEWARK AIRPORT MEET ME THERE WITH BAGS STOP WILL BE ON TIME BECAUSE I LOVE YOU

JACK

Once that was filed, I stopped at a florist's to buy roses, changed my mind and made them gardenias, put in a card that said "That man is here again," crossed that out and wrote "From an old admirer." Then I boarded a Brooklyn subway, feeling fairly virtuous.

THE Market Theater turned out to be an ex grind-house in a damp street behind Borough Hall, abandoned by bank nights and burlesque alike. When you can't make burlesque pay in Brooklyn, something is really wrong with show business. At least, that must have been the way the government figured, when it moved in.

I found the stage door without too much trouble, entered without being challenged, and slipped out front to watch the rehearsal mumbled along on the big, bare stage. There must have been eighty people in that company, but I'd picked out Doris Blake before I'd listened five minutes. She was the one who had acted before. Really acted, I mean, not just registered at Equity.

Let me tell you, I'd reached that theater without a moment to spare. You never saw a group of people drop their work so fast when the timekeeper's whistle blew, not even plumbers. In three minutes, that stage was empty as Thespis' tomb, except for Doris and the director, who stayed in a huddle for awhile under the pilot light.

When he put on his hat to leave, too, I got up from my seat and climbed over orchestra chairs to the stage. She didn't even raise her head as I came up. You had to look closely to see the tears.

"I beg your pardon," I said—and meant it, for the first time today.

"Don't mind me, please. You'd cry a little too, if you'd been letter perfect for a month, and still didn't know when your show would open."

"Too bad I'm not your angel," I said,

She blinked, and managed a smile. "Now we're on the subject, who are you?"

"I'll be frank, Miss Blake—a reporter from the *Star*."

Her smile faded. "But reporters stopped bothering me long ago."

"I'm not here to bother you—in fact,

my visit isn't even official. Do you mind if I sit down?"

"Why not? This is government property, and we're still calling ourselves a democracy."

"Will you have a cigarette?"

Doris Blake hesitated, as I held out the pack. "You are going to ask me questions, aren't you?"

"A very few—all of them discreet."

"All right." She leaned over my match, inhaling deeply. "Do you know that's my first today?"

Her tranquil acceptance of my intrusion was making me more nervous by the minute. Even in that merciless light, even after the hard-scrabble, hopeless day she must have put in with those seventy-nine bad actors, her face had the relaxed innocence of a child's. . . . Well, you don't come all the way to Brooklyn just to feel sorry for someone. I reached firmly for my copy paper.

"Let me repeat, this is not for publication," I said.

'I believe you."

"I'll begin with a simple question. Do I look like a detective?"

"No, Mr. Jordan."

"Be careful, then. Because I'm trying to be one at this moment. Purely amateur, of course." I swallowed hard. "Last night, around twelve, I saw you sitting in Senator Parsons' limousine, when it was parked outside the *Star*."

"I SAW you too. You were rushing down the sidewalk as though your life was forfeit. Of course, Tony warned me to keep away from the glass—"

"Might I ask how long you've known the senator?"

"Nearly a year, now. We met at a benefit, of all places. You see, I wasn't too down on my luck to go to parties, then."

"Might I also ask why this friendship isn't—in the open?"

"You're a newspaperman, aren't you?" she said, quite calmly. "You must know what they've been saying about poor Mr Carey and me. Of course, a lot of it is ancient history now—and all of it happens to be untrue. Still, I'm not exactly the sort of person a senator should be seen with when he's campaigning for reëlection."

"Then why did you drive up to the *Star* in his limousine?"

"We had a night rehearsal yesterday, and Tony was speaking on Long Island. He insisted on meeting me afterward, and taking me home. Unfortunately, we stopped on the way for early editions of the morning papers, including yours. You know Tony's quick temper. When he saw himself spread over your front page in red ink—"

"In other words, he decided to have it out with Carey, then and there."

"I did all I could to stop him, but he simply wouldn't listen. You see, he felt sure that Ray had picked up our secret—"

"That you're going to be married, the moment Senator Parsons is returned to Congress?"

Doris Blake let out her breath in a long sigh. "You're a detective all right, Mr. Jordan."

"Let me see how much more I can guess. Naturally, the senator got precisely nowhere with Mr. Carey—"

"You know what sort of man Owen Carey could be, when his mind was made up," she said, quickly. "That's why he closed my show after eight weeks, when I refused to be—well, appropriately grateful. Why he made things so difficult for me on the Coast that I had to let them cancel my contract. None of that matters now, of course."

"But it would matter a great deal if the senator lost his chance to make the Better Living Association pay dividends."

"See? You do know everything."

"Not quite, Miss Blake," I replied, modestly. "Let's see how well I can fill in the gaps. . . . Immediately after his interview with Mr. Carey last night, the senator left you to go on to a special radio broadcast. Thanks to the delay, he had just time to make it. You insisted on getting

out of his limousine at the corner, and taking a taxi home. Once you were free of your fiancé, you doubled back to the *Star,* and took the private elevator to Carey's office, to make a separate plea, on your own.

"When you arrived, Mr. Carey was beginning to dictate a statement to one of his reporters. You tapped a signal on the elevator panel, which gained you admittance immediately. Unfortunately, your ex-backer was just as adamant to your pleas as he had been to the senator's threats. You realized you had made a mistake, from the word go. You left, almost immediately.

"Less than fifteen minutes after your departure, Mr. Carey was found dead in the alley below his windows—"

"Are you suggesting I'm responsible?" asked Doris Blake, quietly.

"On the contrary. Just tell me if I've guessed right, so far."

"So far—yes."

"Can you prove that you were out of that office by one o'clock?"

"No, Mr. Jordan. I took advantage of the crowd on the sidewalk, walked to Times Square and the subway, and—" At that moment, she was as near to breaking down as Doris Blake could ever be. "Do you wonder I've been jumpy as an ingenue all day—waiting for questions like that to catch up with me?"

"Did anyone notice you leaving the building?"

"I don't think so. But how can I be sure? You must have seen me go, for one."

"Not I, Miss Blake. I just have a talent for working backward." I got up politely. "May I close this interview as it began and assure you that not one word will go beyond us?"

We shook hands on that, solemnly. "I still don't know what you're after," she said.

"The truth, Miss Blake. There's always a straight path in that direction, once you get through the blind alleys."

"So glad you feel sure I'm not lying."

"That's easy," I said. "You see, I'm an amateur psychologist, as well as a detective—"

We both looked up sharply, as a door slammed somewhere in the wings.

"Are you there, Doris?"

"Come on stage, darling." She turned to me quickly. "He always calls for me after rehearsals, when he can—"

THAT'S all she had time for. The senator had kicked his way through the flats in the empty wings. He carried a briefcase and walking stick, both of which he dropped en route. Then he slammed his overcoat into the footlight trough, with a gesture worthy of Booth, the Elder.

"So we meet again, Jordan."

I remembered the feature stories describing his long runs in the park, his private gym, the workouts with his personal trainer, who was once welterweight champion of the navy. The senator was taking off his coat now, with dreadful precision.

"This is going to be a positive pleasure."

"Please, Tony!"

From the way he rushed me, I could tell that navy man had done his job thoroughly. And I could tell he'd outlast me from the way he breathed, even if I could spot him fourteen years instead of seven. In other words, it had to be a short fight, or none at all.

I stopped a left hook that made both ears ring, as I went inside his guard, smashing him over the heart with all I had, to straighten him up. When he wouldn't straighten, I let him have a one-two; and when he jabbed right back, I backed out of the clinch to think things over. This was the precise moment Doris picked to throw the chair.

Not that I blame her in the slightest. Women in love are like that, even when it's their man who starts the quarrel. How could she know that Parsons would come after me, throwing a right to my jaw, which I ducked under, just as that chair whizzed into the fight?

It came with lots of power behind it—

and Parsons stopped it with his forehead. I don't know which of us was more surprised when he slumped at my feet.

Doris calmed down in remarkably short order. Remember, she was one of the most sensible girls you're likely to meet from now to the next war.

"Have I killed him?"

"Get me a glass of water, will you? Senators don't die that easily."

Propping him up comfortably in an old armchair, I wiggled his jaw gently, to make sure nothing was broken. His eyelids had begun to flutter even before we dashed the water in his face.

"Why'd you have to join the battle?" I asked. "I wanted to score that knockout on my own. So far, I've never floored anyone higher than an assistant district attorney."

But Doris Blake didn't seem to be listening. She was on her knees beside poor Parsons, applying a cold compress to his forehead. "He could be president, you know," she said, to no one in particular, "if only he'd learn to control his temper."

"Let's make sure he's returned to the Senate first," I said, holding out my hand a second time.

"Is that what you're working for—really?"

"Why not—now I know you're on his side?"

Parsons sat up with a little moan. I went out of there on tiptoe, just as he was opening both eyes in earnest. Once I was safely inside a taxi, I touched my ear tenderly to see how badly it would swell. Not that it didn't deserve to buzz a little, for being at so many keyholes since morning.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRIDAY NIGHT: 7:00

I SAT in the back of a Long Island smoker with a newspaper open in my lap, drawing circles in the white space around a beer-ad. After a while, I took my original dope sheet out of my wallet, tore it to bits, and started over:

Conclusion 1: Nancy Janeway saw Doris Blake go into Carey's office, shortly before one. This would have been the high point in Nancy's bean-spilling. This would have been the club she'd have wielded over Parsons, if she had lived that long.

Conclusion 2: Nancy also intended to pin the theft of that diary manuscript on Doris. In J.J.'s opinion Doris Blake is innocent (Don't ask him why, he said it was only an opinion, didn't he?)

Conclusion 3: If you believe Doris' story (and you do), Senator Parsons is in the clear.

Conclusion 4: Nancy must have been planning to go into Carey's office herself, if she was near enough to spot Doris doing same. The odds that Nancy took the diary manuscript, after Doris departed, (or had an accomplice who did) are therefore much more favorable.

Conclusion 5: Nancy told Hurlbut on the phone that she had a "confession" to make. Nancy was drunk, and desperate enough to hide away in her office all morning. Plenty of time for an accomplice to get jittery, wondering what her next move would be.

Conclusion 6: Regardless of where Nancy's murderer picked up her trail this afternoon, he saw her with J.J. in that taxi going over to the Furness Pier. In other words, J.J. had better follow a zigzag course from now on. Even if said murderer reads J.J.'s remarks in the *Star* tomorrow, will he believe them?

After awhile, I tore up that dope-sheet too, but it was no use. The words kept knocking about in the back of my memory, as much a part of my cosmos as the Gettysburg Address. In fact, they knocked so loudly I heard the conductor call Valley Stream just in time. Crossing the tracks, I got into my nth taxi of the day, trying my best to look unconcerned as I gave the address to the driver. It was the last lead I could think of before I started my marathon to Newark Airport.

We bored through twenty minutes of pitch-black countryside before our headlights picked up old Joe's gateposts. From the road, it looked like the entrance to any well-kept estate. That is, the neatly-clipped hedge on either side hid the barbed-wire perfectly. Of course, the gatekeeper gave the show away, the minute he

put his head out. You could tell he'd been born with an armpit-holster, even before you saw him in profile.

"Back up, till I see your fare."

I put my head through the taxi window. "Hi, Angelo. Remember me?"

He remembered, all right, but it didn't relax him one bit. "Where you leave Pud?"

"Pud? Haven't laid eyes on him today, Angelo."

"You come out here alone?"

"Of course I came alone. What is this, anyway?"

"Sit tight. I phone the house."

Thirty-five seconds later, by my wristwatch, the gates eased open, just enough to let our mud-guards through. The house, which stood a good quarter-mile from the gate, was an exact replica of a hundred tycoon heavens, except that all the windows had iron shutters, bolted on the inside. Standing at the main entrance while I waited for the peep-hole to open, I felt exactly like a freshman of the class of '28, about to flash my first speakeasy card.

"This won't take long," I told my driver. "Maybe you'd better park outside the gate."

"My sentiments exactly, brother."

He must have had his clutch in all the while. At least, I never heard a gear shift as his tail-light whipped out of sight around a curve in the drive. When I turned back to the door, old Joe himself was standing on the threshold, in a flowered smoking-jacket and slippers—paunchy, china-bald, and looking like a composite picture of every contented grandfather in the world.

ALCATRAZ should have swallowed him long ago; and here he was, bouncing and faintly benign, looking as though he'd live to be a hundred and eighty. Time was a dream as he led me by both hands through big, frostily-empty rooms, to the little back parlor he'd always used as a den. You know—fat plush, and that hot, lived-in Latin smell of garlic and spilt wine.

"I expect you, Jack, but not so soon. You make good time."

"Who told you I was coming here?"

"Did I not send Pud all the way to New York to bring you?"

"Pud is a smart retriever, Joe," I said, slowly. "But he must be barking up the wrong trail for once."

His eyes opened wide, as wide as those balloon-cheeks would allow. "You mean—you came here to see me because you *want* to?"

"If you don't mind too much."

"Sit down, Jack, sit down. What do you drink these days?"

"What do you have?"

"What you like. Straight off the boat."

"Stop it, Joe. You're breaking my heart."

"You do not believe this. Must I show you my cellar, uncut since repeal?"

When old Joe laughed, he made the most of it. So would you, if you were a Sicilian, and had all that gold to flash.

He pressed a buzzer. "Just for that, I join you. Who cares for doctors, at my age?"

Funny, how relaxed I felt, in that red-plush armchair, knowing I was probably being watched from all sides, knowing that old Joe could bring a heater into this room instead of forty-year-old brandy, simply by pressing that buzzer twice.

"Now, Giuseppe, what's this hocus-pocus about Pud?"

"Since three, he is parked at your doorstep in New York—with orders to bring you to me."

"Someone should keep you up to date, Joe. I left for Bermuda today—almost."

"Yet here you are."

"The moral's obvious," I said. "If you want to call your soul your own, stay out of newspaper work."

"So you have come for interview?"

"You know me better than that, after all these years."

"Tell me what you want, Jack."

I told him, with illustrations. In fact, I went over all that had happened since the Miramar opening, including my plans

for the future. His eyes retired deeper into their caves with every word.

"So you want I help you play detective?"

"Only I'm not playing. After all, this is for the *Star,* in the end."

"I see, Jack."

"Well, Giuseppe," I said, slowly. "You're still pretty well connected, aren't you?"

His hand hovered over the buzzer, returned to wrap around the bottle. "Have another, my friend, your throat is dry."

I got up. "Thanks. I know I'm intruding now."

"You have never intrude on me, Jack. Sometimes, you ask one question too many, that is all."

THAT was my sign-off, of course. I ignored it. "You've heard all I know, and then some. I've told you my pet theory—that Nancy Janeway had a hand in Carey's demise. Whoever helped her in that little job rubbed her out this afternoon because she—"

"Let me tell you why I send for you," said old Joe.

"High time," I replied, politely. Something had fallen between us, as though he'd dropped an iron screen just back of his eyes.

"It is you who must do me the favor tonight, Jack. I trust you in the past. Is that not one reason you are still alive?"

"One very good reason."

He poured a good four ounces of brandy into my glass. "Listen then, a moment more. Do not be the detective in your friend's house. Help to bring him and his son together."

"But Joe's left for Florida—"

"Then bring us together tomorrow. I fly South with you." He downed his drink. "When I retire, my doctor say, go to Florida. But I think no. Is too much sunshine. Bad for my nervous. Now my son is in Florida—in trouble. Is now another story."

Like most first-generation Sicilians, old Joe's grammar never survived excitement. "So I say to myself, Giuseppe Piccari, perhaps you sit still too long, to forget what trouble is. Is bad for a man, too long sitting, with no fight—"

"Back up and begin again," I said. "Why the sudden rush of paternal love? I thought you'd crossed young Joe off your list long ago."

"When my son leave me to make his own way in the world, I could give him anything. Do you know how much I am worth today? If I name figure, you will not believe. . . . Joe could have what he choose, be what he like. Instead, he go in hospital, pound pills—"

"You should respect him for wanting to succeed on his own," I said. "Look at the service he's done the human race."

"What I care for human race?"

"Doesn't it give you a little glow of pride, hatching a good egg in this nest?"

His brows knitted, and then, he flashed me his golden smile. "Thanks, Jack. As always, you are my friend."

"God forgive me—yes."

"The only friend who can help me, at such a time as this. Because you are my son's friend, too."

The iron shutter had come up between us long ago. Old Joe's eyes were liquid now—a father's eyes. I watched him flip off another straight brandy, in one instalment. Not that I blamed him. Poor old pirate, he had to do something with his evenings. Even Napoleon must have poured himself a few at St. Helena—when his biographers weren't looking.

"Who says I can bring you and Dr. Joe together?" I asked.

"You fly to Florida tonight. You tell me that."

"Florida's a big state. For all I know, Joe's destination and mine may be hundreds of miles apart. From what he said this morning, I surmised he was going straight to Palm Beach, but—"

"He is going to talk to Ray," said old Joe. "This noon, he tell me so himself, by telephone."

I nodded then.

"Keep right on. For the first time tonight, I'm following you."

"HE TELLS me that he has a way to find where Ray is hiding. He says to me, do not worry. Then he hangs up—my son, to which I do not speak one word in almost ten years. So I think, Jack Jordan work for Ray's paper. Jack Jordan also can find Ray's hiding place. That is when I send Pud in car to bring you to me."

"Just what do you think you'll accomplish, trailing Joe to Florida?"

The iron shutter clanged shut between us. "If you are really my friend, Jack, you help without questions."

I stared at him for a long moment. "Regardless of what young Joe's after in Florida—don't you see you'll only make things worse if you—"

A phone buzzed in an alcove. Joe pounced on it, for three minutes of Italian. When he came back to me, he was purring like a cat over cream.

"I think we start for Newark at once, Jack."

"Honestly, Giuseppe—"

He smiled.

"Quite honestly. I go to help my son—who could be more honest? On phone just now was Pud, calling from New York. He say your wife just come out of apartment with bags. He hear her say Newark airport to taxi driver. I have tell Pud to follow her."

He pressed the buzzer twice. "I also tell Pud to make sure Mrs. Jordan do not take any planes this night, unless we come, too."

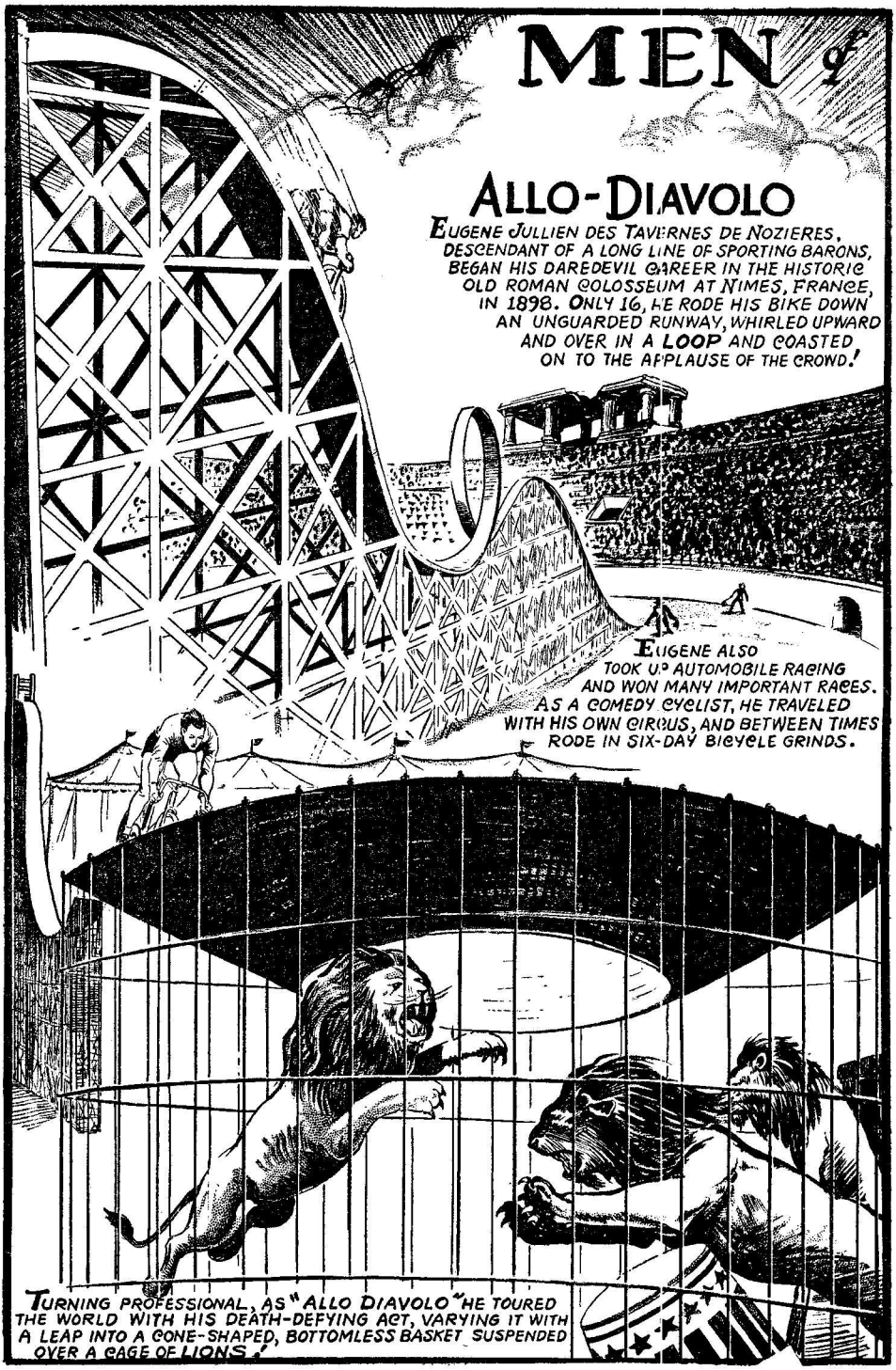
But I was on my feet long ago. So would you have been, with a gorilla waiting for orders at each side of your chair. Another of the boys was already putting Joe into an iron hat, a brown Chesterfield with a velvet collar.

"Well, Jack?"

I looked from one face to another; all of them might have been born without a smile. Then I glanced at my wristwatch. Two hours wasn't too long a time to reach that airport, even with the sort of drivers Joe had at his disposal. I thought of Trudy, sitting forlornly among our bags for the second time that day; I thought of Pud, hovering somewhere in the background. I shrugged, and put my arm through Joe's.

"Lead on, Machiaevelli," I said. "For your sake, I hope I haven't guessed what you're after."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK


MEN of
ALLO-DIAVOLO
EUGENE JULLIEN DES TAVERNES DE NOZIERES, DESCENDANT OF A LONG LINE OF SPORTING BARONS, BEGAN HIS DAREDEVIL CAREER IN THE HISTORIC OLD ROMAN COLOSSEUM AT NIMES, FRANCE, IN 1898. ONLY 16, HE RODE HIS BIKE DOWN AN UNGUARDED RUNWAY, WHIRLED UPWARD AND OVER IN A LOOP AND COASTED ON TO THE APPLAUSE OF THE CROWD!
EUGENE ALSO TOOK UP AUTOMOBILE RACING AND WON MANY IMPORTANT RACES. AS A COMEDY CYCLIST, HE TRAVELED WITH HIS OWN CIRCUS, AND BETWEEN TIMES RODE IN SIX-DAY BICYCLE GRINDS.
TURNING PROFESSIONAL, AS "ALLO DIAVOLO" HE TOURED THE WORLD WITH HIS DEATH-DEFYING ACT, VARYING IT WITH A LEAP INTO A CONE-SHAPED, BOTTOMLESS BASKET SUSPENDED OVER A CAGE OF LIONS!

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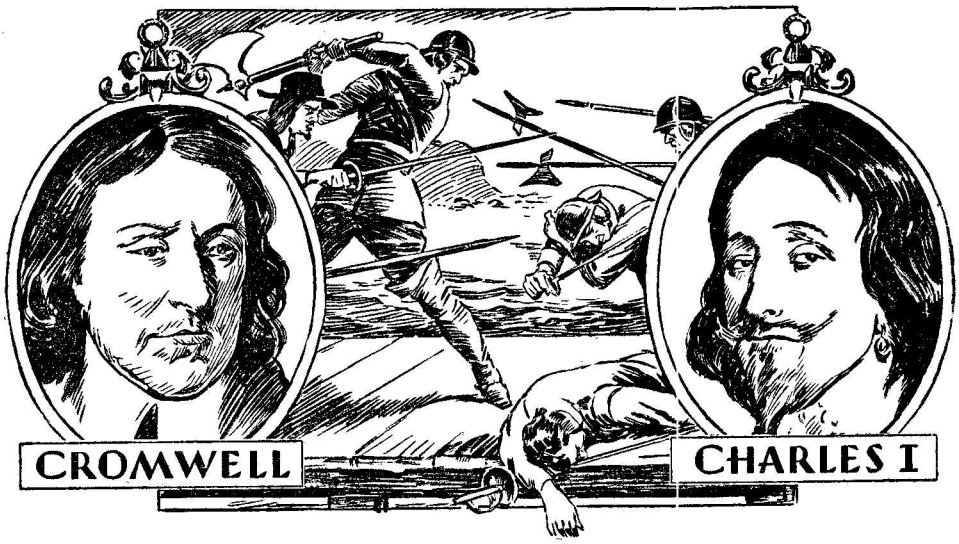


England, Farewell

By PHILIP KETCHUM

Author of "The Long Journey," "The Valiant Arm," etc.

That mystic, invincible axe *Bretwalda*, maker and breaker of kings, makes her last magnificent fight in the land which generations of Wiltons have honored. A complete novelet

I

ALL day the cannonading had continued and toward dusk a small breach appeared in the south wall of the fortifications surrounding Drogheda. Young David Wilton and John Arundel who stood on the bank of the Boyne tidewater, south of the town, heard a shout go up form Cromwell's camp and soon noticed the breach.

"Another day will do it," said Wilton slowly. "Tomorrow we can make our assault."

Arundel nodded. "Tomorrow, David. September the eleventh, 1649. It will be a date which will go down in history."

"Oliver Cromwell has marked many a date for history."

"There was never a man like him, David."

Wilton frowned. He was a tall young man, broad of shoulder and long-armed. His face was thin but square-jawed and stubborn. There was usually a commanding sharpness to his glance but the look now in his eyes was troubled.

"Aye, John," he admitted. "You know full well how I feel about Oliver, but—"

"But what, David?"

Wilton lifted his arm and pointed toward the camp. "You heard that shout which went up a moment ago when the breach was made in the walls. There was a savagery in it which I have never before marked in Cromwell's men. It was like the shouting of hungry wolves."

"We will have to be wolves tomorrow,

David. Drogheda will not fall easily."

"True enough."

"And of all men I know, none is more savage in a battle than you. I recall how men laughed at you for carrying that old battle-axe of yours into the fight at Marston Moor. Yet there were none who laughed at you after the fight was over. With that axe in any press of battle, you are the equal of a score of men. That is not my praise. 'Tis Oliver's."

Wilton shrugged. "Yet after the fight at Marston Moor and more particularly at Naseby, I did not participate in the slaughter that followed. I am no killer of women or of camp followers."

"You are thinking now of Colonel Brand."

"Aye, and of how men in the rage of battle can gorge themselves with a lust to kill. I am thinking of the women and children in Drogheda and of the tone of that shout we just heard."

John Arundel touched Wilton's arm. "Look! Yonder is Oliver."

At a little distance from the camp but quite near to where they stood was a short, stocky figure with thick brown hair and massive shoulders. The man's hands were clasped behind him and he was staring up at the fortifications of the town.

"The Irish leader, Ormonde," Arundel whispered, "boasted that Drogheda could withstand a siege for a month: yet Oliver Cromwell will take the place in two days."

Wilton nodded, staring at the man so loved by many and so hated by as many more.

He wondered whether the world would ever know Cromwell as he knew him—would ever understand the man who had changed almost overnight from a gentleman farmer to an outstanding military genius, who in less than five years time had overthrown a king and had made of England a Commonwealth governed by a committee of the people.

Puritanical in his beliefs, rigid in his code of justice, the man still had a very human side which but few people had been privileged to see

"Oliver summoned the town yesterday," Arundel muttered. "He will offer the defenders no quarter tomorrow."

DAVID WILTON drew a deep breath. He tried to throw off the heavy feeling of depression which had settled over him. Cromwell had turned back to the camp and the sun was down back of the green hills to the west.

He touched Arundel on the shoulder. "Come. We are summoned to a meeting tonight at Oliver's tent. Had you forgotten?"

"Nay, David."

"And forget what I just said. Perhaps I am growing a little tired of wars."

John Arundel laughed. He was of slighter build than Wilton, of a darker complexion. His mouth was wide and generous, his eyes large. "Agreed," he answered. "And now a wager."

"What wager?"

"My sword against yours that I am in Drogheda before you."

"Done," said Wilton. "I have a fancy to that blade you wear."

A score of the troop leaders gathered that night in the space before Oliver Cromwell's tent; and as they awaited their leader, Wilton could sense an undercurrent of excitement in the group.

Here and there a few of them talked of the Irish rebellion a few years before and of the atrocities of that period. They had little regard for the Irish, these men of Cromwell's. In general, they thought of the Irish as a savage, backward race. That much was clear by their talk.

And they had even less respect for the English loyalists who had taken refuge with them.

A great fire burned in the open space before Cromwell's tent and the men who had come to meet with him had gathered around it. Most of them wore steel-brimmed helmets, light steel armor under long cloaks, and boots of soft leather which reached above the knees. Swords were belted to their waists and many of them carried braces of pistols.

They were both old and young; but without exception all were seasoned campaigners. And Wilton, staring from side to side, could read in the faces of these men one measurement for Cromwell's success. They were a grim and stubborn group.

To one side of the circle there was a sudden excitement, the sound of shouting voices, a heavy trample of feet.

"Bring him into the firelight," ordered a sharp, heavy voice. "He is a man I would question."

In common with the others, David Wilton turned that way. Four soldiers dragging the limp figure of a man had come into view. They pulled the man near to the fire, released him and stepped away.

"Whom have you there, Colonel Brand?" called a voice.

"A loyalist caught trying to escape from Drogheda through swimming down the Boyne tidewater," was the answer.

Wilton's eyes jerked toward the man who had made that reply.

Tall and slender was Colonel Brand. His skin was olive-tinted and coarse. A Latin, Wilton thought him, though the man insisted that he was not. His features were heavy and irregular and a mocking sneer was always close to his lips. It broke through to the surface now as he stared down at the crumpled figure near the fire.

"What is this, Brand?" said the sharp voice of Oliver Cromwell.

MEN who had crowded near to the figure backed away to make room for Cromwell. Colonel Brand bowed. He indicated the figure near the fire. "My men caught this loyalist trying to escape from Drogheda. I brought him here for questioning."

"To what purpose, Brand? We know the defenses of Drogheda."

Colonel Brand shrugged. "I was not thinking of that. I was thinking of another matter. A year ago a certain loyalist escaped from gaol. I thought that this man, who is his son, might be able to tell us how the escape was accomplished."

And as he spoke, Colonel Brand's eyes, passing from face to face, came finally to rest on David Wilton.

But Wilton was unaware of that look. He edged forward, stared down at the figure on the ground. He could not see the face; but he was suddenly sure that this man was Roger Huntley, son of Sir George Huntley and brother of Barbara.

A strangely cold feeling ran over his body and his thoughts turned back to the days before Marston Moor and Parliament's break with the king, back to the days when he and Roger Huntley and Barbara had played at childhood games along the river Avon.

A hand clutched at his arm and he heard John Arundel's voice whispering, "Steady, David! Steady."

"You speak in riddles, Brand. What do you mean?" Cromwell demanded.

Colonel Brand leaned forward. "I mean just this. Sir George Huntley could never have escaped from gaol had he not help from some traitor. I think we can pry the traitor's name from this man's lips."

David Wilton lifted his head. He stared at Brand and into his eyes there came all the loathing and disgust he had felt for the man for many a month.

"Have him speak, then," Cromwell ordered.

Colonel Brand drew his sword, bent over the figure on the ground; but at the same moment David Wilton stepped forward, caught his arm, and jerked him away. A cold anger was churning through Wilton's veins at that moment. It showed in the tension of his body, sounded in his voice as he addressed Cromwell.

"It is Colonel Brand's hope," Wilton said bluntly, "that Roger Huntley will give you my name. Brand knew of my interest in the Huntleys. He knew that I went to this man and his sister a year ago and offered to help them. They refused my help. How Sir George escaped I do not know."

Oliver Cromwell's face tightened. "Have the prisoner speak," he said again.

The men around that fire were staring at Wilton with puzzled or antagonistic looks but he gave scarcely a thought to them. Swinging around he bent over the young man lying near the fire. "Come, Roger," he said steadily. "Can you stand?"

With his help, the young man got slowly to his feet. There was a dazed expression in his eyes. His face was pale excepting where blood from a cut in his head trickled across his cheek.

"Your name is Roger Huntley?" Cromwell demanded. "Your father is Sir George Huntley?"

At the sound of that voice, Wilton could feel Roger's body stiffen. He saw the young man's head come up, saw him staring at Cromwell. And then, drawing on some hidden strength, Roger Huntley pushed him aside and cried proudly, "Aye, Roger Huntley is my name, and a good name, too."

Cromwell's scowl deepened and the glow of the fire made his cheeks seem more ruddy.

"Know you this man, David Wilton?" Cromwell asked.

Young Huntley's eyes turned toward Wilton but no sign of recognition came into them. "A Roundhead," he said bitterly. "Had I ever known him I would be ashamed to admit it."

"He lies," Colonel Brand whispered.

Roger Huntley's eyes moved from side to side and in the stern faces of those who stood around him he could easily have read what fate lay in store for him. Yet that seemed to bother him not at all; for his eyes were steady when they turned back to Cromwell. He lifted one arm, pointed at the leader; and as Cromwell was about to speak, Huntley's voice interrupted him.

"You are Cromwell," he cried. "Oliver Cromwell, the betrayer of England, the murderer of your king! As God is my judge the day will come when all people will hate you, when none will dare breathe your name above a whisper. Take care, Cromwell, for the Stuarts are not dead nor is—"

A SWORD blade flashed through the air and its edge struck against young Huntley's neck, just above the shoulder. Blood choked his voice. He slumped over, sprawled out on the ground. For a moment one of his hands twitched, then it was still.

David Wilton glanced up from the young man's body. He saw Colonel Brand wiping off the blade of his sword, heard him making some apology to Cromwell for what the young man had said.

Cromwell nodded but his eyes were not on Brand. They were watching David Wilton. And others in that group, Wilton suddenly realized, were watching him too. Especially Brand who had not put away his sword.

Wilton glanced at Brand, moved around to face him. He felt very calm and very sure of himself in that moment; and in his voice, as he spoke, there was no trace of any emotion.

"Colonel Brand," he said clearly, "this afternoon my thoughts went back to the battle of Nasby. There was one man of our troop who hung back in that fight, who stayed always well to the rear, where he was safe.

"Yet when the enemy had been routed, that same man charged forward and with loud shouts led an attack on the camp followers and women who were behind the king's lines. That afternoon he gorged himself on blood—not enemies' blood, but the blood of women and of half grown youths. You were that man!"

Brand's face had paled. He took a step backwards, looked uncertainly from side to side.

Wilton laughed and his laugh had a grating sound.

"I hold not the death of Roger Huntley against you," he continued. "Death would have been his lot, whatever the circumstances. Yet I do hold against you the cowardly blow with which you took his life; for if any man be taken as you took him, it is his right to a trial.

"And I promise you this, Brand, because I am proud of the name of the

Ironsides. I promise you this in the name of those men who have fallen in honest battle. If you live through the assault on Drogheda tomorrow, I will kill you with my bare hands."

Not a word was spoken in answer to that challenge of Wilton's. He swung about, faced Cromwell, said bluntly, "I will be in my quarters if you wish to see me, Oliver." And then looking neither to right nor to left, he marched away.

II

FROM in front of his tent, David Wilton could hear the drone of Cromwell's voice as he addressed the leaders of his army and he could easily imagine what was happening.

Oliver Cromwell had talked to his men before Marston Moor, before Newbury, before Naseby, before every important engagement in which they had taken part. The man's genius for leadership was not limited to military strategy. He had the power of firing those under him with a zeal and an enthusiasm which was unquenchable.

Cromwell's Ironsides went into a battle, not as an army of men but as crusaders with a God-given mission. Therein lay much of the secret of his success.

A shadow fell across the space in front of Wilton and glancing up he saw John Arundel standing near him. There was a tight, worried frown on Arundel's face.

"Well, John?" Wilton asked.

Arundel sank down on the ground. "You need not have said what you did about having wanted to help Sir George Huntley to escape," he remarked slowly. "Men will not understand that, David."

"What matters it?" Wilton shrugged. "Will my loyalty to Oliver be questioned because I sought to help the man who was one of my father's closest friends?"

Arundel's fingers drew a pattern in the dust. He said after a while, "Oliver will not question your loyalty but others may. And as for Brand, you were over-rash. The man has a following of sorts."

Wilton laughed. "A following of cowards. I am not worried by Colonel Brand. It is something else which bothers me now."

"What, David?"

"Roger Huntley was caught making an effort to escape from Drogheda. I wonder if that means that his father and sister are within the town?"

Arundel shot him a quick look. "And if it should?"

Loud cheers and shouting from the center of the camp told Wilton that Cromwell's speech was over. He listened to the sounds for a moment, then glanced over at Arundel and smiled. "I have a feeling that Oliver will come to see me."

Arundel stood up. "If Sir George is in Drogheda, nothing you can do would save him, David. Oliver is more bitter toward the English who have taken refuge here than toward the Irish."

"I know that, John."

For a moment Arundel's troubled eyes rested on Wilton's face; then shrugging his shoulders the young man turned away.

Hardly had he gone before Oliver Cromwell appeared. Cromwell was unattended. He looked tired and the half-light from the stars deepened the wrinkles on his face. David Wilton stood up. He said quietly, "I expected you, Oliver." And then he stood there waiting for Cromwell's answer.

When it came it surprised him for it was not at all what he had expected.

"David," said Oliver Cromwell, "I would like to see the axe you carry into battle."

Wilton turned into his tent and a moment later came back out with the axe. It was a long-handled weapon made entirely of steel. Curious engravings marked the handle and above the curved, cutting edge of the axe were deep letters spelling the name *Bretwalda*. Three blood-red jewels were set above that name.

"*Bretwalda*," Cromwell muttered. "You told me, I think, that the meaning of that name was 'Ruler of Britain.'"

"Aye, such is the meaning."

"The weapon has been in your family for a long time?"

"Since the days of King Alfred."

OLIVER CROMWELL stretched out his hand for the axe but he made no attempt to lift it. Clasping the handle he stared into Wilton's face. "I am thinking, right now, David," he said slowly, "of a day in Cambridge when a young student came to me and said that he had heard that I considered raising a troop of cavalry. You recall that day, don't you?"

Wilton nodded.

"From that time on," Oliver Cromwell continued, "you have been with me, David. Men call me a great general; yet at Marston Moor when the day seemed lost and I gave the order to wheel and ride to the east, you were in the vanguard of the men when we struck Goring's horse and Newcastle's Whitecoats. There and in every other battle you have always found your way to the place where the fighting was the thickest. In your hands this old axe has well earned its name, Ruler of Britain."

Wilton shrugged. "I but followed you, Oliver."

"And tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow as always."

Cromwell nodded. A faint smile touched his lips and he said abruptly, "I knew of your interest in Sir George Huntley, or perhaps I should say in his daughter. I knew that you did not help him to escape from gaol. I asked his son to speak tonight, knowing what his answer would be, but also wanting to seem to be dealing justly in the matter of Brand's accusation.

"After Drogheda is taken, David, I want to talk to both you and Colonel Brand. Until such time I charge you to remember that we have the Irish to deal with."

Wilton's lips tightened. "The trouble between Colonel Brand and me is of long standing, Oliver. It is a trouble which cannot be settled by words."

"You have heard my order, David."

David Wilton made no answer and after a moment Oliver Cromwell passed the handle of the axe back to him, turned and stared toward the walls of Drogheda.

"The breach should be widened enough by tomorrow noon for an assault," he muttered. "I cannot spend much time on this Irish campaign. I must get back to England."

He looked around at Wilton. "They had their chance to surrender. We will offer them no quarter tomorrow. Here in Drogheda we can break the backbone of the rebellion."

AFTER Cromwell had gone, David Wilton sat for a long time before his tent, staring now and then toward Drogheda. The thoughts which ran through his mind were a curious mixture of childhood memories, of recollections of his life with Cromwell, and of vague and troublesome anticipations of what might lie ahead.

He could realize how important it was to the Commonwealth of England to crush this rebellion in Ireland; yet that order of "No quarter" kept running through his mind. It was not an order which applied to the townspeople or to the women and children who might be with the defenders of Drogheda. He knew that.

Yet after Naseby, even the women and children who had followed the king's march had been slain. And from the temper of the men here in camp, he had the feeling that they would not be too particular tomorrow.

About Sir George Huntley he did not concern himself. If Sir George was with the defenders of Drogheda he had elected to cast his lot with them. But if Barbara were there—

Wilton got to his feet. He crossed over to a blanket-wrapped figure which lay near his tent; knelt at the man's side and woke him. The man sat up, rubbed the sleep from his eyes, stared at Wilton and then asked quickly, "What is it, sire?"

This man was Benjamin Mays. He was past middle age; was short, stooped, almost entirely bald. He had long served the

Wiltons and David knew that he could trust him with his life.

"Lady Barbara Huntley is in Drogheda," Wilton stated. "Just where, I do not know. Yet I have the feeling that she is there."

Mays blinked. "What would you have me do, sire?"

Wilton stared toward the town. Men would be busy there, he guessed, throwing up an embankment behind the opening breach in the walls. If that were true, they might not gain the town through their first assault. There would be a desperate battle beyond the breach.

Looking back at Mays, Wilton said slowly, "Tomorrow, Benjamin, I want you to find Aaron Whitlock and Thomas Blake. Tell them what I have told you. These are my orders. The three of you are to stay in camp until after the first assault, until after the second. If you think that the third may succeed, join in it.

"And after you have gained the town, try to find Lady Barbara. Where she will be I do not know. Perhaps near her father —any of the English loyalists there might know. If you find her send word to me and guard her until I come. You will speak of this to no other men than those I have mentioned. Is that understood?"

Benjamin Mays nodded. "Aye, sire. We will find her."

David Wilton clasped the man's hand. "You can do me no greater service, Benjamin. And now sleep well. You will have need of your strength tomorrow."

THE cannonading of Drogheda was started again at dawn and slowly the breach in the wall was widened. Noon came and the sun passed overhead and started down the western sky.

Now and then puffs of dust from the wall told of a direct hit and each hit brought a cheer from Cromwell's soldiers. Most of them had donned their light armor and had made ready their muskets and pistols. They could not use their horses in this attack, but Wilton could sense a deep confidence in the men.

The wall proved stubborn; yet by late afternoon Wilton felt that the breach was deep enough to risk an assault. Others must have thought that, too, for a quiet fell over the soldiers and here and there a few of the more devout dropped to their knees for a moment of prayer. John Arundel, whose company was near to Wilton's, joined him for a while.

"You have not forgotten our wager," he challenged.

"Nay, I have not forgotten it," Wilton answered grimly. His hand reached up to his shoulder. There, in a leather halter, swung the axe *Bretwalda*. Pistols and muskets, in an affair like this, were good for only one discharge. After that, men had to depend on pike and sword.

A sudden, wild shout went up from the men; and staring over to one side, Wilton caught a glimpse of Oliver Cromwell. He did not hear the order for the assault but he saw Cromwell's arm pointing toward the town and the men back of him surged forward.

The attack had begun.

He started running over the ground toward the breach. Little puffs of smoke from the guns of the defending musketeers stabbed out at them and here and there a man went down. But those in the assault did not fire in answer. They had been well trained not to fire until they were almost close enough to the enemy to touch them.

Then quite suddenly they were at the wall and clambering through the breach. A volley of pistol shots flung back the defenders and through that breach came the Ironsides, pike and sword ready.

Wilton reached a hand to his shoulder and freed the axe *Bretwalda*. He threw himself forward, slashing from side to side; yet so great was the pressure of the defenders that their progress was stopped and they were forced back to the breach and through it.

Screams, hoarse shouts, the slashing of steel on steel and the rattle of musketry told of another wave in the assault; but this time, just as at first, the Ironsides were beaten back.

III

IT WAS Cromwell himself who led the third assault. Wilton heard his voice while he, John Arundel and a score of others still battled at the breach in the walls. He had lost all count of time.

Before him and outside of the wall, bodies were piled high. Out of the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of John Arundel. Blood streamed across Arundel's face from a cut in his scalp. He had a sword in one hand, a broken pike in the other. He was shouting but Wilton couldn't catch his words.

A huge figure loomed up in front of Wilton but *Bretwalda* smashed the man aside. How many had fallen before that axe Wilton couldn't guess. Behind him there was suddenly the pressure of those charging to the third assault.

Pistol shots mowed down a line of the defenders and Wilton felt himself carried forward. They reached the barricades beyond the breach, were over them and beyond them; and as the defenders fell back David realized that the town had been taken.

No charge could now stop Cromwell's men. They were pouring through the wall, turning to left and right up the narrow streets, rushing ahead toward the bridge across the tideway which stretched through the town.

For a moment, then, Wilton lowered his axe to the ground. He drew a ragged breath, stared from side to side. Not far distant he saw four Irish soldiers who had thrown down their arms and crowded back in a corner made by two houses. They were holding their hands over their heads, crying for mercy. One of them was just a boy.

A group of Cromwell's soldiers ran that way; swords flashed in the air and the four Irish were cut down. Similar scenes were being enacted everywhere. At some points the Irish had elected to fight; and a good many of them, Wilton could see, had fled across the bridge toward the north part of the town.

He thought suddenly of Barbara Huntley and he started running for the bridge. Where he might find her, how he might find her, he did not know; yet from the way the slaughter had started he knew that unless he found her before someone else came across her, he might be too late.

He was unaware that he called Barbara's name as he ran through the streets of Drogheda. Everywhere, it seemed, there lay bodies of the dead. Most of them were the bodies of soldiers; but here and there were the crumpled figures of townspeople, of women and of children.

A hand grasped his arm and jerking around he saw Benjamin Mays. "This way, sire," Mays shouted. "Thomas has found her."

"Barbara! Barbara Huntley!"

Mays was drawing him toward one of the thatch-roofed houses which lined the narrow street. "Thomas saw Sir George," Mays was saying. "He followed him here. At the door, Sir George was struck down. Lady Barbara dragged his body inside."

Wilton jerked open the door. On the bare, earthen floor inside sprawled a man's figure. Lady Barbara crouched at its side. She wore a light gown, gathered at the waist by a red girdle. Her long brown hair had been loosened and fell over her shoulders.

At Wilton's entrance she looked up, then stood suddenly to her feet, straight and slim and pale of face. Her dark brown eyes stared at him with no trace of recognition; her lips were pressed tight against her teeth.

"Barbara!" Wilton cried. "Barbara! Thank God you're safe!"

The girl seemed not to hear him. "Go ahead," she said huskily. "Finish your work, murderer!"

Wilton glanced at Mays. "Fasten the back door," he ordered. "Then see how badly Sir George is hurt."

He moved out the front door, closed it and leaned against it. Save for dead bodies the street was almost deserted. Toward the north there was the sound of battle. There was a hillock that was known as Mill

Mount and there many of the defenders were making a last stand. Near St. Peter's Church the fighting had stopped.

"It will soon be over," Wilton muttered.

But he was wrong. The fighting was soon to be over but not the slaughter. Those who had taken refuge on Mill Mount were to be killed to the last man. Eighty persons who had thought to find safety in the tower of St. Peter's church perished in the flames as its steeple was fired.

All night long and throughout the next day the killing was to be continued as people were dragged from their hiding-places and put to the sword. In all, fewer than thirty persons were to escape alive, and they only to be sold into slavery.

Such was the story of the taking of Drogheda.

IT WAS dark and cloudy the next morning. The sharp tang of fall was in the air and rain fell intermittently. From the doorway of the house in which he had found Barbara and her father, David Wilton stared out into the street.

A score of times during the night his sharp command had ordered looting or searching parties to pass on and skip this house. It was here, he had sent word to his command, that he would make his headquarters. If any of the men thought it strange, no such comments came to him.

Mays had gone off and secured food and water; Blake and Whitlock had reported to him and were inside. Whitlock, who was a doctor of sorts, had done what he could for Barbara's father. With the girl, Wilton had had no further word.

A body of horsemen coming up the street attracted Wilton's attention and a deep scowl came to his face as he recognized that the leader of this group was Colonel Brand. He had not seen Colonel Brand during the assault on the town, had almost forgotten him; but the sight of him now stirred a slow, heavy anger in his veins. Brand, he could guess, must have spent a very busy night. Searching out those who had sought to hide and putting them to the sword was a task in which the man specialized.

Colonel Brand's eyes, shifting from side to side, suddenly marked where he was standing and as the man rode closer Wilton could see that the muscles of his face had tightened and that one hand rested on his sword. He reined up his horse, asked a question of one of the men who was with him. That fellow looked curiously at the house before which Wilton stood, shrugged his shoulders and made some answer.

Wilton stepped out from the door. He said bluntly, "I made you a certain promise, Colonel Brand. I have not forgotten it."

A twisted smile touched Brand's lips. "Nor I," he answered. Then without saying more he touched his horse with his spurs and rode on.

Wilton frowned, moved back to the door. He had thought that by his stepping out that way and reminding Brand of their trouble, it might not occur to the man to wonder why he had selected this particular house. Yet he liked not the memory of the way Brand had looked at the house nor his whispered question to one of those who rode with him.

An hour later a soldier rode up with a summons from Oliver Cromwell. Wilton acknowledged it. Such a summons he knew he dared not ignore. He turned into the house, called Mays aside. "I must go to Oliver," he told him, "but I will not be gone long."

Mays nodded. "I will watch the door None shall enter, sire."

"Sir George?"

Mays shrugged. "He is badly injured I know not what chance he has."

David Wilton felt a deep rush of gratitude for Mays and for Aaron Whitlock and Thomas Blake. They all knew Sir George for a loyalist and none of them could have had any particular interest in the man. They all knew of Cromwell's order that no quarter be given and what it would mean to them if what they were doing was discovered. Yet without any

question at all, they had obeyed his commands.

Wilton said, "Thanks, Benajmin."

HE TURNED to the door, stepped outside and hurriedly sought Cromwell's headquarters. A man at the bridge directed him back to the north part of the town. Wilton turned, and in a few moments came again to the street which he had watched all night.

Up in front of the house in which Barbara and her father had been found there was a crowd of soldiers. They were pressing forward, shouting, yelling. Bared swords flashed in the air and steel grated against steel.

David Wilton ran swiftly up the street, drawing his own sword. He struck that group without any warning at all, struck it with the fury of a man gone mad. His blade, cutting from left to right, mowed a pathway through those men and to the side of Benjamin Mays whose figure swayed unsteadily from side to side and who could now scarcely stand.

Wilton jerked around, parried a blow which was aimed at his head, and ran the man through the throat. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "By whose orders do you attack the residence of one of Cromwell's men?"

He was hoarse with anger.

Several of the soldiers backed away, started running up the street. The others stood a little way off for a while and then one of them answered, "We are but a searching party. We were given orders to miss no house."

"Who gave you those orders?" Wilton barked.

The man hesitated, then said, "Oliver Cromwell."

Wilton was sure that the man was lying. He had a sudden conviction that the summons from Cromwell had been false, that it had been sent by Colonel Brand as an excuse to get him away from this house, that these men had been sent here by Colonel Brand.

"I will answer for those in this house," he said sharply. "Tell Cromwell that."

The man laughed, said something under his breath to the others, and they all moved away.

Benjamin Mays fell heavily against Wilton' shoulder and dropping his sword, Wilton caught the man in his arms. He carried him inside, lowered him to a straw pallet. There was a deep gash in the man's shoulder, another wound in his chest. A red froth showed on his lips.

"I should never have left, Benjamin," Wilton said slowly. "I should have guessed it was but a trick."

"They did not get inside," Mays whispered. "I told you that I would watch the door."

Whitlock came across the room and knelt at Mays' side. A young man was Aaron Whitlock, tall and thin and sharp-featured. He made a swift examination of Mays' wounds, looked up at Wilton and shook his head.

Wilton turned away. There was a mist in his eyes which made it difficult for him to see. Someone stepped up to his side and he heard Barbara's voice saying, "He did that for us, David? Why?"

"Because I asked him to," Wilton answered.

He felt the girl's hand on his arm but did not look at her. Almost roughly he moved on across the room. There was a sag in his shoulders, bitterness in the tight way that his lips pressed against his teeth. He glanced over at Sir George Huntley. The man lay as one dead. There was no possible chance that he could escape. He was not fit to travel. And if Brand had not guessed it before, he could be sure, now, who was hidden here.

Wilton jerked around. He said to Whitlock, "There is nothing you can do for him?"

"Nay, sire. He is dead."

Wilton drew a ragged breath. "Then you and Blake get out of here. Find a place with others of our men. I ask only this. Say nothing about what has happened here."

Whitlock glanced at Blake, shook his head. "I would stay here, sire."

"And I," Blake said gruffly.

FOR a moment a soft smile rested on Wilton's lips and his shoulders straightened. Every line of his body showed the pride that he took in those answers. "You are good soldiers," he said quietly. "I have never known better. Yet what I said to you was an order. Obey it."

"But sire—"

Wilton pointed to the door. "Go—before it is too late."

The two men hesitated for a moment, then turned to the door. Wilton followed them, stood there staring after them. Behind him he could hear Barbara moving about in the room, could hear Sir George's heavy breathing. It began to rain and it seemed that the day had grown darker though it was not yet noon.

He closed the door, turned around and looked across the room at Barbara Huntley. He noticed things about her now that he hadn't seen before. He had thought of her as a girl but she had become a woman. The lines of her mouth had strengthened and there was a fullness in the depth of her breast. She was bending over her father, bathing his head.

As suddenly aware of his regard she looked up and for a moment her eyes met his squarely.

"Why do you not follow them?" she asked suddenly. And then when he did not answer, "What can you think to accomplish by staying here?"

Wilton shrugged. He had no answer ready. Oliver Cromwell, he knew, thought a great deal of him. But Cromwell would never condone his protection of a loyalist. Those who had fled to Ireland, who had been taken here among the defenders of Drogheda, had been marked for death. Sir George Huntley would be made no exception.

Wilton leaned back against the door. "Why did you come here, Barbara? Why did you not flee to France or to the new world across the sea?"

The girl stood up; and as she spoke Wilton could sense the same pride in her voice that had been in the voice of her brother the night before, when he had faced Cromwell at the campfire.

"You forget, David, that we are Huntleys. It is not in us to run away."

"Your brother—"

"Last night he escaped from the town to carry a message to Ormonde. Cromwell has not conquered Ireland and his commonwealth will last only so long as his army of murderers is undefeated."

David Wilton frowned. He could see no point in telling Barbara what had happened to her brother. It was better, he decided, to let her think that he had escaped.

"I heard those men of yours talking together," the girl continued, "but I had already guessed what had happened in this town. Do you think the world will ever forget Drogheda?"

Wilton made no reply. He sought in his mind for some answer to the girl, for words which would picture to her the Cromwell he knew; a Cromwell who loved England and the English people, who sought for them a full measure of justice, who dreamed of a nation ruled by the people for the benefit of the people, and who worked to that end.

Yet he knew that he could never make Barbara see that man. This was an old argument between them. They each saw the man from a different side and neither of them, he knew, would ever accept the judgment of the other.

"Go. Follow your men," said the girl sharply. "Let others, if you will not do it, finish the work here."

Wilton shook his head. "I cannot go, Barbara."

"It is too late to change sides."

"I have not changed sides."

A strangely puzzled look came into the girl's eyes. He was aware of the way that her eyes followed him as he crossed the room to drink from the pail of water and as he then walked toward the back of the house to make sure that the rear entrance was blocked. When he came back

she was again bending over her father and Wilton moved on to the front door without speaking.

IV

JOHN ARUNDEL came riding up the street that afternoon, swung from the saddle of his horse and joined Wilton in the doorway. He wore a thick bandage around his head, no helmet. And though he tried to make his greeting very casual, Wilton could sense a vague uneasiness in his friend.

"Our men have finally cleared out the towers in the wall," he said to Wilton. "Those who were not slain, about thirty, are being shipped to the Barbadoes. Brand and others like him have searched every corner of the town for refugees. You were right in what you guessed might happen, David. It was worse than after Naseby."

"When do we march on?" Wilton asked.

"Tomorrow, perhaps, though a garrison will be left here."

Wilton stared out across the street. The rain had stopped for a while but it was still damp and cold and here and there were puddles of water.

"A little while ago," said Arundel, "I was talking to a man named Whitlock. He mentioned the fact that he had discovered a small skiff tied up to the shore of the tideway. It is just at the foot of this street."

Wilton shot a swift glance at the man standing beside him. Arundel was not looking his way. His eyes were fixed on the ground.

"Quite a nice little skiff, to hear Whitlock talk about it," he murmured. "And as it happened I ran across Colonel Brand. He's been quite concerned that because among the dead they have not found the body of a certain loyalist, Sir George Huntley. He's talked quite a bit about this Sir George. It seems that he thinks the man is still alive and in hiding somewhere in the town."

"Here, perhaps," Wilton suggested bluntly.

Arundel looked around at him. "Aye, Wilton. I think that he has mentioned this house as one place which hasn't been searched. He has also hinted that it is strange that you have withdrawn so from the others. I heard him speak of that to Oliver."

Wilton scowled. He said slowly, "Thanks, John. And now hadn't you better be getting back to your men?"

"You have not asked me why I came to see you. Have you forgotten our wager? My blade against yours that I would be first into Drogheda?"

Wilton unbuckled his sword belt. "Here, John."

"Nay. You were before me. 'Tis my blade you have won, yet I cannot undo the buckle of my belt. I am afraid, David, that you must accept me as well as my sword."

Arundel's words were light but the meaning behind them brought a thickness to Wilton's throat. He lifted a hand to John Arundel's shoulder. "Nay, good friend. There are some dark roads which a man must travel alone."

"I have a liking for dark roads."

"But John—"

"And I am a very stubborn man, David."

THE clatter of hoofbeats came to them from up the street. Wilton jerked around, looked that way. A company of men was riding toward them; and leading those men was Oliver Cromwell. Wilton's hand dropped to his sword, fell away. He watched in silence as the men drew nearer and then stopped, and though his glance took in others of the company he was aware only of Cromwell.

There was a weary, almost a strained expression on Cromwell's face and his usually dark eyes were webbed with red lines.

"I have not seen you since the assault, David," Cromwell said slowly. "I had thought surely to find you at my side last night."

Wilton's lips tightened. He had never lied to this man now facing him and de-

ception came hard. "It was a confusing night, Oliver."

Cromwell's eyes went to the door beyond Wilton. He frowned, rubbed his hands together. Others in that group were also looking at the closed door and Wilton had the sudden conviction that every one of them had guessed what lay beyond it. That scene in the camp the night before the assault and Brand's clever innuendoes had made them all suspicious.

"I have a mission for you, David," Cromwell said abruptly. "I would like to have you report to me within an hour."

"Within an hour?" Wilton repeated.

Cromwell nodded. For a moment his eyes rested fairly on Wilton's face and in his look there was nothing soft or forgiving. All of the sternness of the man was there for Wilton to read.

"Within an hour," said Cromwell again. And then lifting the reins of his horse he rode on and the others followed him.

"He has guessed," Wilton muttered, staring after Oliver Cromwell.

"Aye, David. He was never a dull man."

"Yet he made no attempt to force his way into the house. He did not order me to stand aside."

Arundel nodded. "He has done for you what I doubt that he would do for any other man. He has given you a chance to return to him. David, if you go to Oliver Cromwell within the hour he will greet you with a smile, drop his arm around your shoulder, and never will this incident be mentioned between you."

"But those in this house?"

Arundel did not seem to have heard him. "David," he said quietly, "there are none of us who have served with Oliver who stand higher in his regard than you, on whom he counts more than you, who is closer to him than you. Here in Drogheda he has broken the backbone of the rebellion in Ireland. He will return to England as a conquering hero. The Commonwealth is well established and no man is more powerful than he. There is no limit to what lies ahead of you at Cromwell's side."

"But those in this house?" said Wilton again.

Arundel shrugged his shoulders and fell silent.

"I told you, John," Wilton said quietly, "that it was a dark road that I followed. Oliver's task is well done. He has more need now for diplomats at his side than he has for soldiers."

"Men such as Colonel Brand?"

For a moment the old anger stirred in Wilton's veins but he held it in check. "Men such as Brand run a short course."

Arundel glanced up at the sky. The clouds had thickened, giving promise of an early dusk. "It will be dark within an hour," he muttered.

"Aye, and you must be gone."

"You are forgetting the blade you won and my liking for dark roads. Besides, David, I am a sailor of sorts."

"But John—"

Arundel laughed and there was an easy naturalness to the sound. He dropped an arm around Wilton's shoulder and said, "Come on. I would meet the lady. Surely you will not deny me that."

BARBARA was standing just inside the door and as they entered her eyes went from one man to the other. Wilton caught the impression that she had heard all that they had said. He mentioned Arundel's name and then stood watching the girl, wondering what she thought.

John Arundel bowed in as courtly a manner as if he were meeting Barbara at some ball. He cast Wilton a swift glance and said, smiling, "Now I can understand you better."

Barbara's face was a frozen mask. It gave no indication of her feelings, and when Wilton spoke of the boat her eyes looked steadily at his. They were cool and unblinking.

"I will carry Sir George," he told her. "It is swiftly growing dark. With luck we should reach the boat without any trouble."

Barbara shook her head. "No, David.

Leave us here. My father cannot be moved."

Wilton shrugged. "'Tis a risk we must take."

"No."

Wilton looked over at Arundel and Arundel said, "Whitlock and one other man will be at the boat. We should not delay too long. When Brand hears Cromwell's order he may hope that you will try something like this."

The axe *Bretwalda* stood against the wall. Wilton moved that way. He lifted it and placed it in the sling over his shoulder, moved out to the back door and opened it. A narrow passageway ran along the rear of the house and to a cross-street below. From there it was not far to the Boyne tideway.

He returned to the room, crossed to the side of Sir George. Blood-soaked bandages across the man's chest told of the seriousness of his condition. His face was flushed with fever.

Barbara touched him on the arm. "No, David. Please." There was a catch in her voice: for the first time, it seemed to him, the girl's iron reserve had broken. He looked around at her and what he saw in her eyes made him feel that all of the past five years had been wiped away and that nothing stood between them any longer.

That swift impression gave a sudden lift to his spirits. It was as if the warmth of the sun had made its way through the clouds. Something of that feeling sounded in his voice as he looked over at John Arundel and called, "Ready, John. We'll go the back way."

"Ready, David," said Arundel.

David Wilton slipped his arms under the wounded man's body. He lifted him easily, stood up, turned to the back of the house; and glancing over his shoulder he saw that John Arundel and Barbara were following him.

Though the shadows had thickened it was not yet dark. Wilton could see easily to the end of the passageway as he started down it. He moved swiftly, almost running; came to the side street and turned up it to the crossing. Arundel caught him there, grasped his shoulder and held him back.

"Look," he whispered huskily, pointing straight ahead.

V

OUT of the thick, gray, fog-like shadows came a marching column of men. They were not in orderly file and no leader preceded them. Some carried bared swords, a few had pikes. They seemed in a hurry.

"Around the corner," Arundel said sharply. "The skiff is at the jetty at the end of this street."

"There they are!" shouted a voice. "Take them!"

A chorus of loud cries echoed that command and the men started running forward. Wilton jerked around the corner, raced down the street. He heard Barbara and John Arundel following him; heard the pounding footsteps of the soldiers. They were close, terribly close.

A flung pike grazed his shoulder. He was beginning now to feel the weight of the man he carried. Just ahead lay the jetty, a narrow structure of stone and wood stretching out into the tideway; and near the end of it he could make out the skiff. Someone was raising its sail and the figure of another man stood beside it leaning forward and watching the chase.

Close they were, yet they would not make the skiff. Wilton realized that as his feet touched the jetty. Those who followed them were too close. Before he and those with him could get aboard and cast off, they would be overtaken. Even now the muscles of his back had stiffened against the shock of a blow. Then, sharp and clear, John Arundel's voice came to him.

"Hurry, David! Hurry! I will entertain these men for a while."

The sudden clashing of steel, a loud, piercing scream of agony, and Arundel's mocking laughter followed that cry. Wilton didn't stop though he knew what

must have happened. Arundel, even as he, had realized how narrow their chance; and he had taken the one opportunity that there was to improve it. At the point where the jetty reached out into the tideway, he had stopped and was holding back those who would have followed.

It was Whitlock who stood beside the skiff. Coming up to him, David Wilton called, "Here, take Sir George. Carry him aboard and cast off."

He forced the wounded man's body into Whitlock's arms, turned and caught Barbara's wrist. "Into the skiff," he said almost roughly. "You may trust these men."

Thomas Blake was the man who had raised the sail and now Blake reached out and helped Barbara into the skiff.

"Look after them, Thomas," Wilton ordered. "And you, Whitlock. Lose no time in getting away."

"David!"

The cry was Barbara's. She was standing amidships looking back at him. One hand was raised to her breast. Only a glance did Wilton have at her face; but he could see the fear that was written there, the shocked and numb surprise.

"Cast off," he said sharply to Whitlock; then lifting a hand to his shoulder he grasped the axe *Bretwalda,* turned and started running back along the jetty toward the place where John Arundel still held their pursuers at bay.

The jetty was wide enough so that three men might stand abreast on it and still have room for the movements of their sword arms as they thrust and jabbed at the one who blocked their progress.

As he ran toward Arundel, David Wilton again heard the man's mocking laughter and caught the flash of his sword as it jerked from side to side, now engaging the blade of one man, now the blade of another. He knew something of Arundel's skill with a sword but never had he seen him fight as he was fighting now—grimly, desperately, and yet with a recklessness that surpassed all reason.

He was still a dozen paces away when some man back of those in the front rank suddenly pushed the center man forward. He could see clearly what happened. Arundel's blade whipped over to stop that man, pierced his body—and before Arundel could draw it clear the two men on each side struck swiftly with their swords.

Yet even then, John Arundel did not fall. Staggering back he drew his blade free, slashed to the right and then to the left.

"Back, John! Back!" Wilton shouted. But whether or not John Arundel heard those words, Wilton did not know. The man stumbled to his knees at the edge of the jetty, rolled over and then slid swiftly into the waters of the tideway.

THE cry which passed David Wilton's lips at that moment was a cry such as he had never uttered before. It carried in its tones all of the rage and anger and all of the bitterness and sorrow he felt.

He was unaware of the shock of combat when he came up to the place where John Arundel had stood and slashed his way into those men crowded along the jetty. *Bretwalda* had never felt lighter in his hands, had never moved so swiftly or with deadlier force.

Here and there he saw, momentarily, faces which were familiar to him. These men were not the comrades with whom he had campaigned for five years. These were the followers of Colonel Brand, scavengers in the guise of soldiers.

As Arundel had guessed, Brand had suspected that he might try to escape and had gathered these men to come and watch the house.

Here and there men jumped from the jetty to escape the flailing blows of his axe. Suddenly, just before him, he caught sight of Colonel Brand. The man was trying to back away but the pressure of those who were behind prevented it, for more men had been drawn to the jetty by the sounds of the struggle.

"Remember my promise, Brand," Wilton shouted. "I have not time to use my bare hands on you but *Bretwalda* will do as well."

A hoarse scream tore from Brand's throat. He jerked his sword into the air, trying still to back away. For an instant longer David Wilton could see the man's fear-twisted face, then as *Bretwalda* smashed down it disappeared from his view.

A stabbing sword caught Wilton in the side and a pike-point lanced through his shoulder. Hardly aware of it, he began giving ground, backing up step by step.

A buzzing sound gathered in his ears and the thickening shadows seemed to be pressing against his eyeballs. He wondered whether Benjamin Mays had felt this way as he stood in the door of the house, holding back those who had tried to break in; whether John Arundel had known this feeling in the last few moments of his life.

Yet strangely enough, his arms were not weary; and *Bretwalda,* almost of itself, held back those who would have rushed him. An ancient legend of the axe as told to him by his father flashed across his mind. The strength to wield *Bretwalda,* so ran the story, came not from a man's arms and shoulders but from the axe itself. He had felt that before, but never as clearly as he felt it now.

From the corner of his eyes, Wilton suddenly made out the skiff. It was still fast to the jetty, and the sight of it there was like a sudden, stunning blow. He tried at first to make himself believe that it was some other skiff; but even in that moment he knew that it was not. Barbara was standing at the mast, slim, erect, her dark hair tumbled around her shoulders.

A slamming blow on the head drove Wilton to his knees. He tried to get up but could not. A sharp voice rang out, ordering, "Back! Everyone! Stand back!" And though Wilton could not see the man who gave that command he recognized the voice as Oliver Cromwell's.

While thick shadows crowded around him he heard Cromwell's voice asking questions, the murmured replies of soldiers on the jetty. Then he felt hands turning him over and he looked up into the face of Oliver Cromwell. Cold and stern was the expression in those dark eyes which stared down at him; yet there was a softness in the man's voice when he spoke.

"A great soldier was David Wilton and much do we owe him. One last thing can I do. It was his wish to be buried at sea."

Cromwell removed his helmet and stooping over, lifted David Wilton in his arms. He stepped into the skiff, lowered his body to a blanket, and then straightening up, said bluntly, "I will trust you men to see that it is done."

David Walton had no doubt that he was dying. He felt a moment's gratitude toward Oliver Cromwell and after that he felt nothing for a long time.

WHEN he woke to consciousness the sun was shining brightly and he lay wrapped in blankets on the deck of a boat much larger than the skiff. For a while he tried to puzzle out where he was; then, turning his head, he saw Barbara at his side. There was a calm and peaceful expression on her face and her eyes seemed fixed on a point far in the distance.

"Barbara?" Wilton whispered.

The girl looked down at him and smiled. "We are going to the new world, David. You and I and Thomas Blake and Aaron Whitlock. Three days out of Drogheda this ship picked us up."

Wilton considered that for a moment, then asked, "Your father?"

A look of pain crossed the girl's face. She shook her head. "He died the second day out in spite of all that Aaron could do for him."

Again Wilton was silent for a while, He knew little of this new world across the sea, had little desire to go there; yet it was obviously impossible for him to return to England after what had happened at Drogheda. And thinking of that his mind turned to Oliver Cromwell and a vague memory of that scene in the skiff at the jetty's edge.

"Barbara," he said slowly, "I never in my life told Cromwell that I wanted to be buried at sea. He knew that I wasn't dead, that I wouldn't die. Yet by all his standards, he himself should have finished me."

The girl frowned. "Let us not talk of Cromwell, David."

"Then tell me this," Wilton asked. "Why did you not cast off while John Arundel and I held back those men?"

Barbara's hand closed over his. "Had you really thought, David, that I would go away and leave you?"

Wilton stared up at the sky. Far overhead a white gull was circling. He watched it for a time and suddenly he was aware again of Barbara's voice.

"There is a loyalty, David, more important than loyalty to any king or any cause. It is the loyalty of one soul to another."

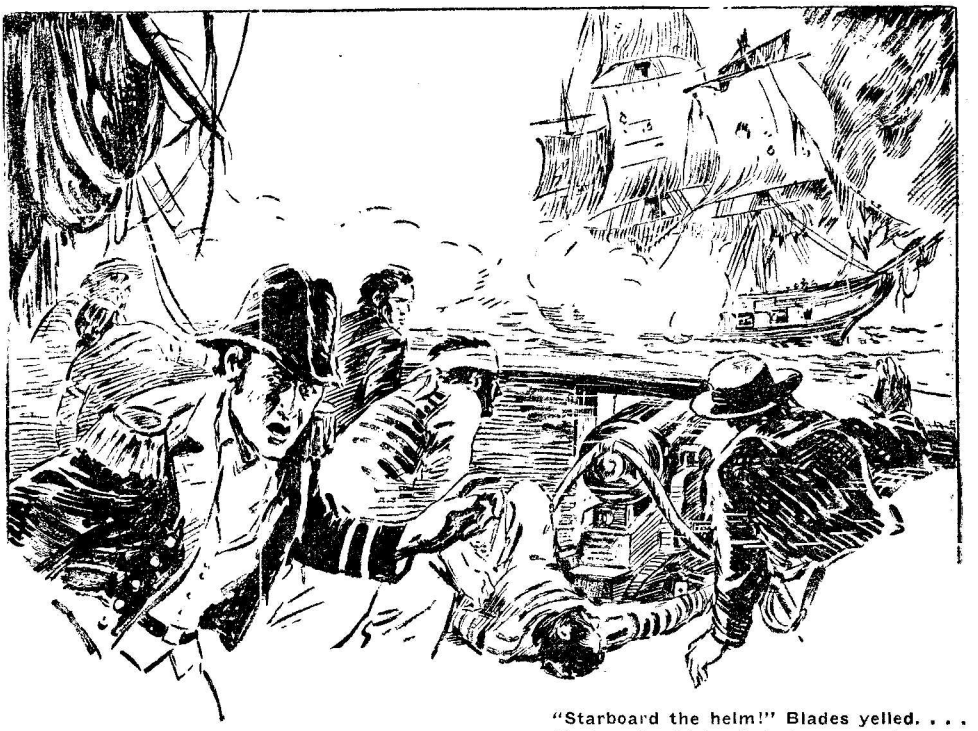
"You are thinking of John Arundel."

"Of John Arundel and Benjamin Mays and Thomas Blake and Aaron Whitlock —and—even Oliver Cromwell. I know that he knew you were not dead by the way he looked at you and by the fact that he had your axe put into the boat. I should not have asked you to keep silent about him."

David Wilton smiled. "We have left him behind us, Barbara. Ahead is a new world and a new life."

A second gull joined the one in the sky and together they circled the ship. David Wilton watched them for a while and after a time he slept.

Another stirring novelet about *Bretwalda*, mystic axe of Britain, will appear in an early issue of the Argosy



"Starboard the helm!" Blades yelled. . . . He heard a high-pitched command . . . a blaze of guns, a crash

Dawn's Early Light

By KENNETH B. ATKINSON

Author of "I'll Bring You A General," "Knight's Gambit," etc.

1812: Roar of cannon, ripping of sails, crashing of proud masts—and the flag was still there. How an American captain made His Majesty's Navy eat scrap-iron and chain shot

THE U. S. FRIGATE *INVINCIBLE*—44 guns—rolled in the trough of a running sea. Captain Blades, standing in the shrouds, moved his telescope a point studying an approaching sail, his high-boned face in silhouette against a pitiless blue sky. Aft, his men sweated with a damaged rudder.

It was late afternoon, August 10, 1813.

Without question the stranger was British, and a man-o'-war. The red-figured ensign snaking from the main truck was the Royal Cross of St. George.

Grimly lowering his glass Blades descended from the ratlines. In a dozen long strides he was at the taffrail where his sailing master, Hogan, bellowed orders at the seamen in the boats below. Beside him in silent contrast stood Mr. Adams, first lieutenant, fresh-faced and twenty-two.

"She's British," said the captain tersely, pointing with his chin toward the cloud of sail.

Eyes met significantly.

Blades glanced toward the boats below.

"When will you be done?" He betrayed no illusions. The rudder had been wrenched loose in a squall the night before.

"Another three hours, sir." Under bushy brows Hogan's pale eyes flashed venom. "Let's be fightin' thim black haythens."

Blades shook his head. "We can't even haul anchor. Anyhow, yonder's no frigate. She's a ship-of-the-line, likely seventy guns."

The Irishman glowered, all his people's hate for the British in his wind-bitten face. "An' behould, a true-born Hogan o' Dundalk atwiddlin' his thumbs."

Blades turned, went below, trying to rid his mind of stinking English prisons . . . losing the *Invincible*. Something choked him. He loved this trim cruiser. He could make her give him anything. By the feel of her deck he knew her moods.

In his cabin he turned over a letter in his sinewy duelist's hands. The water flashed blue through the stern windows and he paused. The envelope, containing his orders, was unaddressed. But on the back, pressed in red wax, was the Navy Department's eagle. It was not to be opened till off Halifax, yet a day's sail north. Again he cursed Commodore Jacoby's cautious secrecy.

"We can't take chances," the latter had told him heavily, finger tips together. "No one must know."

He'd talked on . . . sedition in Massachusetts . . . enemy agents, while Blades brooded on the devious minds of politicians turned commodores.

Now, however, floundering before a powerful enemy, the captain felt no scruple in opening his orders—burning them before he was captured.

He winced. From the first the *Invincible* had been a part of him. With his own money he had bought better food for the gun-decks, special sights for the long 24-pounders. To him the war was personal. He was furious when people didn't care whether Americans were pressed in sight of their own shores.

Late sunlight glowed on the seal. He wasn't of a high-flown imagination; yet the possibilities of his orders for an instant brought a fleeting vision, foreign chancelleries, parliaments. . . .

Awed by a daring inspiration he glanced out toward the British man-o'-war. She was nearly within gunshot.

Abruptly he picked up a quill, dipped it and addressed the blank letter.

To His Britannic Majesty's Foreign Secretary.

A touch of humor in his deep-set eyes, he drew the shadings and flourishes affected by diplomatic secretaries. With close scrutiny a sailor's hand, but good enough. He sanded the ink, put the letter in his pocket.

STOOPING through the door he bumped into Michael, the lame, dwarfed cabin boy whom he'd plucked a month before from the Boston constables. The lad's pinched face was pale. "Sir, they're saying that's a British man-o'-war—" His voice faltered, off key.

Blades gripped his shoulder, felt the quivering muscles and recalled his own midshipman days, running orders on bloody decks. He'd grown fond of this youngster who'd hidden on his frigate, chased for a tavern pickpocket. None such aboard, he'd sworn; later offered him the sea—or jail.

"Do you think—?" Michael went on. He had the wizened look of a gnome. "Do you think we'll be taken?"

Blades lowered his voice confidentially. "Not if there's another way."

On deck, he was in time to see the Englishman come about and belch a fluff of white, erased quickly by the wind. A boom; a cannon ball screaming overhead. To larboard spumed water.

"What orders, sir?" asked Adams, running up.

"Dip the colors."

The lieutenant licked his lips. "You mean haul 'em down?"

"Oh no. Half-way down and back again." He looked up at the star-circled ensign, symbol of all he cared about. "And hurry on that rudder."

Furtively his men watched him. Why weren't the drums beating them to quarters? Blades spread his rusty-booted legs, staring calmly over their heads. His blue coat was faded. A battered cocked hat tilted over his intense eyes.

Covertly he knew they called him "Black Dick," not for his strictness, but for a day off Guadeloupe. Face sooted with gun smoke, cutlass slashing, he had led them boarding. . . . He watched the flag dipped.

No response. Blades smiled a little, picturing the quandary aboard the enemy. Presently her beakhead swung. A hail came shouted down wind. 'What frigate is that?"

The captain knew how to make his voice like battle bugles, or wheedling with flattery. Now he made it insolent, bawling through a speaking trumpet. "United States Frigate *Invincible,* Captain Blades."

The reply was instant and ominous. "His Majesty's Ship *Sphinx,* Captain Brydges. Do you surrender?"

Tersely Blades continued with his phantasy. "Diplomatic dispatches for His Majesty's Foreign Secretary."

Again the British seemed mystified. Finally came another short hail. "We're sending a boat."

The captain watched calmly as a longboat put out, oarblades glinting in the waning sunlight. It swarmed with armed men and his eyebrows bent in surprise at sight of a captain's epaulets in the sternsheets.

Why he came in person was shortly explained by his curiosity and concern. Sword clanking, a saturnine lieutenant at his heels, Captain Brydges clambered to the deck flushed and perspiring. His right sleeve hung empty. Followed twenty red-coated marines to line up along the rail with bayoneted muskets.

In a hundred ports, Blades had seen this florid, gross-mouthed breed. More privilege than intelligence; an appetite for drink and flogging sailors. He saluted, wooden faced. "I regret you felt the need to board us." Blades' tone was silky, slightly injured. "My mission is diplomatic."

Ignoring the salute, the Englishman, arrogant and supercilious, surveyed the officers, the seamen at attention. His little eyes, peering from twin areas of pouchy flesh, returned to Blades whom he looked up and down with curling lip. But the anxiety which had brought him was apparent.

"There were rumors at Plymouth that you Yankees would be suing for peace. You had letters for all His Majesty's men-of-war, of course. Show me them."

"I have the letter to your foreign minister," said Blades, fists tight knots behind his back. Naturally this obnoxious captain would expect the United States to apologize for every ship at sea.

"No papers stating your mission?" There was a muddy cruelty in the Briton's eyes, something in his voice like a cat-o'-nine-tails.

"Why should I?" asked Blades, remembering, as if yesterday, a British flogging through the fleet he'd witnessed at Gibraltar—and that same muddy look of cruelty. "I have the dispatch itself."

"Highly irregular," pronounced Brydges through puffy lips, love of forms and formalities obvious in every thread of gold braid. "Let me see it."

HAUGHTY as a Mohawk chieftain Blades looked the Briton over from his black half-boots and white pantaloons to the royal anchor on his hat. Studiedly deliberate he took out the envelope.

Brydges snatched it, peered at the inscription, the official seal. "I shall have to open this."

"You shall not."

Blades' tone was flat and deadly, and the Briton's eyes flamed as if an upstart powder monkey had affronted him. They met an agate gaze, fought for supremacy and jerked away. Angrily he tapped the letter on his rolled lapel, brows stormy. He looked toward his own ship, and back.

Perhaps it was Blades' stern self-assurance, perhaps the suspected contents of the letter, diplomatic uncertainties. Brydges waxed more conciliating.

"Possibly you're not lying." He frowned importantly. "But it's all too irregular. My duty to my king and country," he went on smugly, "demands that you accompany me to Halifax, where Admiral Sawyer can decide."

Blades breathed easier. For the moment ship and orders were safe. Now to rid himself of Brydges.

"That will delay you and parley between our governments. We could never keep up with you," he improvised smoothly. "Our rudder's shattered and we're fouled with barnacles."

"I shall have to brook the delay. Do you know anything of this letter? These parlies?" Brydges' china-blue eyes studied Blades shrewdly.

"Nothing."

"Well, you wouldn't tell." The Englishman shrugged his gold epaulets. "Consider your frigate under, ah—detention, and set sail as soon as possible."

Blades burned with humiliation. "I appear to have no choice." He held out his hand for the letter.

Unpleasantly sure of himself Brydges stepped back and put it in his inside pocket. "This," he announced, "I shall keep as hostage of your good behavior."

Raging behind a face stiff as porcelain Richard Blades calculated swiftly. Brydges turned away, paunch bulging into silhouette, and all at once Blades smiled.

"Captain," his flashing teeth courted favor, "don't think us poor losers. We must come if you insist. Meantime let's forget our differences. I can't sail till I rig a new rudder. You and the lieutenant have dinner with me."

He signaled to a seaman for chairs. "While we're waiting—a bottle of brandy. Some very special *Étoile.*"

Alert with suspicion, Brydges mumbled regrets, backing off awkwardly.

"Is the captain afraid?" insinuated Blades.

Trapped, Brydges hesitated. Actually he'd run little risk, his heavy batteries covering the *Invincible.* Too, enemy commanders usually exchanged courtesies. In the end, perhaps the *Étoile* decided him.

"We shall be pleased," he condescended.

Excusing himself, Blades went below and called Michael. "Were you a good pickpocket?"

At the twinkle in the captain's eye Michael squared his narrow shoulders. "Pretty good, sir."

Blades instructed swiftly—smoke the lantern glasses in the forward cabin . . . Presently he was back on deck with a bottle and a case of silver cups.

HALF an hour later, mellowed by the spirits, Captain Brydges and his second, Mr. Sellers, followed Blades to dinner, where Adams and the sailing master joined them.

The British captain's pudgy hand seemed lost without a brandy glass. They were no more than seated when he lumbered to his feet, liquor slopping on his fingers. "The King!" he gestured belligerently.

Blades stepped hard on Hogan's toe as he heard the latter's sharp breath. "Your *health,* sir," he said courteously, stared the Briton down and drank.

Dinner progressed. Brydges grew boastful—his mighty ship, his service at Trafalgar. "Nelson gave his life," he pronounced pompously and held up his glass, drank some silent toast. He pointed to his empty sleeve. "I gave this."

"'Twas gin'rous of ye," said Hogan, brittlely sarcastic. Brydges glared and Blades switched the topic, a little tipsily, "I hear Bonaparte—" he hiccoughed—"He's won again at Lützen."

"That butcher!" sneered Brydges. But under the yellow lantern, swinging slowly, he peered at Blades as if speculating on his knowledge of the Emperor. Mr. Sellers, a languid-voiced fellow with narrow chin and white protruding teeth, mumbled of Austria's joining the allies.

"Slow but sure is the just revenge of Britain," he repeated, apparently by formula. Sleepily he blinked.

"To shlow for Naplo—" Blades struggled with his tongue, "—for Napoleon."

Hogan twirled his glass by the stem. "Your fine Wellington'll be runnin' for his life by snowfall."

Brydges, red-faced and coat undone, revealing a corner of the letter, cursed in angry profusion. Running? He had some of the Duke's veterans aboard—to lead the invasion of New York. And he had muskets, munitions.

To Blades the boast seemed too hilarious to be borne. He threw back his head and his laughter filled the cabin. "Those redcoats'll be dead within a month."

Brydges choked over his brandy. "Your filthy Yankee militia! They'll be crushed like reeds—that is if we're still at war," he added, as if suddenly thinking. But Blades refused to let the subject drop. Michael limped in with the pudding and he grew even more boisterous.

"One filthy Yankee," he announced thickly, "can kill a hun-der-erd filthy Englishmen." His fist banged the table, upsetting his brandy with a crash.

Cursing, Brydges pushed back from the glinting pool, while Blades tried to follow Michael's swiftness in the dim light. He merely saw a flash, a slight twitch of Brydges' coat.

Mumbling about the rudder, Blades rose, leaving Hogan and Mr. Adams to entertain the guests. In his after cabin Michael, eyes shining, waited with the letter. The captain broke the seal . . .

He was ordered, Jacoby had written, to cruise off Nova Scotia—at all cost capture or delay any British ship he thought carried soldiery or munitions. In a week Captain Tate with the *Independence* and two sloops-of-war would follow to take command.

Idiot! To imagine he could know by simply looking which British vessels bore troops. As for delaying ships-of-the-line—

He shrugged, staring unseeingly at Michael. No escaping Brydges now; he must stop those soldiers and munitions. Few, but tough as iron, the regulars would be the backbone of a larger Canadian militia. New heart for the enemy, guns to help Ojibway savages burn and scalp along the border, storm down through New York.

Again his eyes returned to the letter, caught a gleam. Swiftly he sought paper and his pen began to scratch.

Finishing, he put the sheet in the envelope and considered. How to seal the eagle?

A button glinted on his sleeve and he turned it in his fingers. Then he moved with decision. He patched the broken seal and pressed the button deep in the hot smear. . . . A sorry looking bird, but an eagle.

"Michael"—the boy was watching curiously—"can you put this back where you got it?"

"I think so, sir."

"Good. There'll be an opportunity."

RETURNING, he saw that Brydges had had little chance to think about the letter. Sailing Master Hogan was taunting the guests wickedly with Irish abuse. ". . . and 'tis the lucky haythens ye are," he was jibing as the captain sat down.

Haughtily the Briton cursed him for a black papist.

Through a long evening glasses lifted, tinkled and were endlessly replenished, though Brydges showed only a spreading net of tiny red lines across his eyeballs.

Blades marveled at his liquid capacity, but when they rose to leave it was no surprise that the Briton stumbled, falling heavily—over his host's foot. Helped up by Mr. Adams and the cabin boy he damned the *Invincible's* rough decks.

The captain saluted blandly as the English officers departed.

The night sky glittered and Captain Blades awaited moonset, an hour after they were under way, before showing that the letter was insufficient security.

Sending all who could be spared below he ordered Hogan to draw away gradually from the *Sphinx*. He explained the content of his orders, his plan to lure Brydges south toward Tate's squadron. "We mustn't gain on him. I said our bottom's fouled and he'll hope to overtake us."

At times the sailing master overstepped his rank. "How do ye know he'll follow us

an' not be headin' straight for the St. Lawrence?"

Blades considered him, listening to the *cheep* and whine of the rigging. Properly skilled at navigation, just the right roughness and physique, but with all the ill-judged impertinence of his race. He smiled. "There's bait in that letter Michael slipped back in his pocket when I tripped him after dinner."

"But—" Hogan curbed his curiosity. Saluting he turned on his heel to direct the helmsman.

Shortly, Blades saw the lights of the *Sphinx* drift slowly off to starboard as they veered from the course. A challenge came bellowed across the water. Where was he going?

Blades lifted his speaking trumpet. "Trouble with the rudder again," he called placatingly.

A pause, an evident consultation. Then: "Get back on the course or we'll put a prize crew aboard."

The captain's lips tightened as he studied the widening gap of dark water. A good broadside could still leave him broken-winged and sinking. From the *Sphinx* he heard the high call of pipes and his spine crawled cold.

Silently the two vessels rushed on, the *Sphinx* veering south to draw closer, battle lanterns sparking into life. Too slowly the interval increased. As Blades stared against the dark a red flash split the night, followed by a heavy boom and scream of roundshot overhead. Men swore softly.

His voice rang. "Royals! Lights out!"

The darkness was convulsed with dim shapes, thudding feet, and shrilling boatswain's whistles. Seamen swarmed aloft and loosed the royal sails. Blocks creaked and the great sheets snapped taut.

Overside the water swashed by; silence from the *Sphinx*. Unconsciously Blades braced himself, the frigate creaking slowly to her roll. Then like magic came flame and a stunning crash—shot tearing through the rigging. Broken spars hurtled to the deck. A shriek from the helmsman ended in a gasp and men running.

Beneath the binnacle blood welled darkly. But there was no time. Blades grabbed the spinning helm and bawled his command.

"Wear full away!"

Safe now to bare the stern. Brydges would need time to reload, couldn't show his starboard guns without losing distance. Blades had his wounded carried to the cockpit—five hit by flying splinters—and took stock. Foretruck gone. Foreroyal and topgallants hanging useless. He had them cut loose. Watching from the taffrail he saw that they were out of range.

About now Brydges would be opening a sealed letter. And the snare within. Richard Blades told himself, was baited well.

Yet he stood long, staring out beyond the phosphorescent wake; later slept brokenly, dreaming of Brydges turning back to send his redcoats wielding bloody scalping knives. But at dawn the *Sphinx* still plowed after them, sails pink in the sun.

A day and a half the chase continued, the *Invincible* now running in contempt or faltering artfully to make Brydges blaze away with his bow chaser, the balls splashing astern.

The second morning sails swam over the horizon. Tate's squadron? A brief scrutiny through his glass and Blades was reassured. Brydges showed no sign of giving up.

The captain faced the wind. From the west.

TWO hours later, up to the squadron, Blades, with Adams and the sailing master, watched signal flags break out aloft the *Independence*. Tate, senior officer, was giving his commands.

"Anyhow," observed Blades, "we'll have the weather gauge." Adams looked slightly pale.

The little pennants, daubs of bright color, fluttered upward. The *Invincible to take her place behind the Independence.*

Blades wore around and took his place in the line. Behind came the sloops *Firefly* and *Yellowjacket*. The *Sphinx* was trying

to beat to windward, gain the weather gauge herself. "But we can sail closer hauled," Blades' thoughts ran comfortingly. "We'll keep that advantage—offset a little Brydges' 36-pounders." Then Tate signaled again.

At my lead wear to starboard across enemy's course.

"He's wantin' to give Brydges a chance," observed Hogan acidly. "Divil a fine business *this!*"

Blades frowned. "Obey orders! Mr. Adams acknowledge that signal."

Inwardly he boiled. Giving up the weather gauge! Tate, he remembered, was a political appointee, his experience in fighting trivial and flimsy. True, Brydges must advance into raking fire, guns idle. But theirs was inferior artillery. Tate would gain a few raking broadsides at the cost of doubling the *Sphinx's* power to maneuver.

He cursed with a gloomy precision. To windward the ships could lick past the Briton like a scorpion, every barb dealing poison, and curling back repeat the deadly work. If only Bainbridge or Decatur, those artists with the long guns, commanded the *Independence!*

He shrugged, turned to the first lieutenant. "Mr. Adams, beat to quarters."

To rattling drums partitions were removed, furniture buried in the hold, hammocks netted atop bulwarks—to stop musket balls. Sand was sprinkled on the decks, gunports lifted, guns unleashed and tompions taken from the muzzles. Aloft they shortened sail, clewed up courses and hung the yards with chains.

To catch splinters they spread a net from mainmast to mizzen. It made a slanting sunlit pattern on the quarter-deck where Blades waited alert and poised to open fire.

Bearing down, the *Sphinx* came frowning, long shadows under bellied-out sails, still beating to windward.

She was but half a mile off, and Tate hadn't yet turned across her course. Blades felt a rush of hope as the flagship ran up new signal flags. But his lips compressed tight as he spelled out the command. *Fire at sails and riggings.* The *Independence* was finally turning, sails squaring.

"Depress your metal," Blades yelled at Adams, choking with exasperation. Tate was leaving the *Sphinx's* fighting men untouched; trying to cripple the ship herself.

The *Invincible* followed on around and gun crews leaned on their pinch bars, pulled out the quoins to lower the breeches. Tate's 24-pounders roared and holes dotted the *Sphinx's* sails, spars disengaged themselves, falling lazily. Adams was at the captain's elbow. "Shall I fire?" Blades nodded.

Giving up the weather gauge had taken Brydges full of surprise. Before he could come about, bring his batteries to bear, in her turn the *Invincible* was on him.

"Blo-o-o-w your matches," the cry sounded down the decks.

"Take off your aprons."

"Fire!"

The frigate jerked with a shattering roar. Through the smoke Blades saw a British yardarm fall, its sail crumpling like paper. "Reload!" his voice was hoarse. "Scrap-iron and chain shot."

Ahead Tate turned south, showing starboard guns and leading the squadron into U-shape. Kicking white spray the *Sphinx* rushed toward the bend scornful of the sloops. The *Invincible* was quiet, save for screeching blocks, guns rumbling back into battery.

Blades turned to Adams. Unconsciously his hand, on his sword hilt, was jerking out the weapon, slamming it back in its scabbard. "Fire again when she overtakes us."

Her figurehead showed—an armored Mars. Brydges, he knew, would not aim at sails. His shoulders ached with waiting. Fragments of the past came together in his mind; climbing the shrouds on his first man-of-war—the *Philadelphia,* it had later burned at Tripoli—a day of battle on the *Constitution.*

Firing handsomely, the two sloops crossed the Briton's bows and turned, clearing Brydges' guns. But the latter was intent on the frigates which had lost ground maneuvering.

Blades, to ease his nerves, pulled the plugs of wool from his ears, inspected them and put them back. Then the *Sphinx's* towering sails were opposite, the captain felt a sting of air against his cheek. Flame and smoke leaped toward them with a roar, instantly blotted out, answered, by his own batteries.

THE *Invincible* shuddered. Screams rose from hatchways. Searching human targets, the *Sphinx* had fired on the downward roll, her heavy balls smashing into gun ports or through the hull along the water line. Again he cursed Tate. Shooting at sails! At windmills!

Squinting into acrid smoke he called harshly, "Mr. Adams! The carpenter! Have him plug those holes."

Adams, boyish face startled, sped away, leaping over corpses. . . .

Forty minutes and a standoff.

Hounds of Triton! How long could they continue? Blades stepped up on a shattered carronade, eyes raking about. Crippled, *Independence* wobbled with a shot through her rudder-post. Burning sullenly, *Firefly* and *Yellowjacket* pillared up black smoke. The *Invincible* was a bloody abattoir—half her batteries out—only hope now her sails, still standing, drawing wind.

But if evil chance had maimed Tate, he'd been incredibly successful in crippling his enemy aloft instead of striking at his men. *Sphinx* had lost her foremast, sky gaped through riddled sails, masts tottered unsupported. Only blazing guns showed the life still in her. Blades stepped down unable to suppress a surge of admiration.

Playing for position now, he needed all the genius of his sailing master.

If the *Sphinx* limped toward the floundering *Independence,* Blades was on her bows to pour in a few round shot, slipping off before the Englishman could come about and fire.

Yet Brydges held the odds.

Sucking on a lemon to assuage his throat, Blades paced the quarter-deck, feverish with holding off the inevitable. Parry as he would Brydges' lunges, the latter grilled him constantly at long range, mercilessly accurate.

Adams came up with a worried face, pantaloons splashed red. "We're making water, sir, despite the pumps. Do you think—?" His voice ended dead and Blades saw his eyes widen.

"Look!" He pointed with a shaking hand. "He's signaling *withdraw.*"

The captain turned his haggard face toward the *Independence.* If Tate was giving up— He cursed silently, squinting against the smoke. Through the rifts he saw the signal flags. His heart raged.

Withdraw? When he wasn't through with Brydges?

Wheeling, he clamped Adams' arms as if to beat him against the mast. "You lie! You didn't see any such signal. Do you understand?"

The terrified boy nodded and abruptly Blades was calm, patted Adams on the shoulder. A cold purpose had invaded him. Tate, the fool, had let the British gunners go, ordered him to fire at sails. Very well. His jaw hardened. They'd shoot every stick from that haughty deck.

"Hogan! Quick, man!"

The sailing master hurried forward.

"Close in at once."

Hogan's eyes gleamed.

The air rang with commands, feet pounded the decks.

Under full canvas they headed for the *Sphinx,* slowly wallowing toward the *Independence* with another load of flame and iron. Through the yellow haze she loomed grotesque and stark, foremast gone and shreds of sail flapping.

There would be a short interval of waiting. For a moment in the swirling smoke Blades saw again the yelling Moslems at Tripoli. That was long ago. Woodenly he took another lemon from the box by the mizzenmast, and cut off the end with his dirk.

At their posts, matches flaring, the gunners stood waiting. They had their orders. Gun muzzles looked upward, gorged with star-shell and chain shot. Richard Blades

spat out a seed, glanced toward the *Sphinx*. Beneath his feet groaned the pumps.

One could perhaps count to three. . . .

FROM the Briton burst orange flame. The air vibrated, rose to a screaming crescendo and exploded as his own guns roared back. There was a quick wild instant of round shot flinging heads and arms, smoke and shrieks of pain.

But above the *Sphinx* there was another noise, a great cracking, and Americans forgot shattered bodies to cheer as Brydges' mainmast toppled like a falling pine, dragging sails into the sea. Frenzied little dots of figures cut with axes at the wreckage. Then the scene was yellowed out in smoke.

"Starboard the helm!" bawled Blades, eye measuring the Briton's bows for a raking broadside. Remnants of gun crews heaved with sponge and rammer. The helmsman swung the wheel—and the wind shifted again, quartering off the beakhead. Brydges, who had dropped astern, began to come ahead, wreckage now cleared, drawing parallel with the *Invincible*.

Through the smoke sun filtered on the shredded remnants of the *Sphinx's* sails. Blades heard a high-pitched command, followed by a blaze of guns, a crash. His mind told him that the ships had fired together, and he felt stinging driven particles like sharp glass against his cheeks—a numb blow in the shoulder.

He was spinning, falling to the deck.

The sanded planks he felt first, then the shocking pain above his armpit. He found he could still curse. The face of a sailor swam overhead. Hands lifted him. Hands pulled a wooden splinter from his shoulder.

Shrilling throats below deck, the lazy roll of the *Invincible*, told him what Brydges' broadside had done.

Lieutenant Adams came running.

"We're sinking—" He gulped. "You're hurt, sir!—We can't hold out ten minutes."

"I know, I know, we're sinking. Keep quiet!" Blades wasn't looking at him. Horribly his shoulder ached. But the wind—it was even stronger now—seemed a cooling drug against his face. He was gazing at the *Sphinx*. "Look!"

The enemy's remaining mast, rigging shot away, was tilting, strained by the remnants of sail bellied out by the wind. Tiny figures, like maggots crawling on a skeleton, struggled to furl the tattered canvas. The wind blew harder.

The mast toppled—fell—and the little figures disengaging from the yards waved puny arms falling. . . .

Blades whipped his men to final effort, cast overboard all dismounted cannon. Those they could fire were shifted to larboard. Overbalanced thus the frigate listed sharply, but the gaping holes were lifted above water; pumpmen checked the flood.

This done, Blades came about to occupy position aft the *Sphinx's* stern. Methodically he pumped shot through her poop windows. Ten minutes and she struck her flag.

LATER, the next week, Captain Blades leaned against the rail listening amiably to his sailing master.

Luck, Hogan labeled their recent success. Brydges should have sunk them all.

The captain, his arm in a sling, stared across blue water toward the *Sphinx*, rolling in tow of the *Independence*. He privately agreed.

"Ye were lucky, too," Hogan warmed to his subject, "to have Brydges follow us away from the St. Lawrence."

"There was bait," Blades reminded.

"Bait!" Hogan spat to leeward.

"The letter," Blades went on, "introduced me as an emissary to Napoleon, who frightens Englishmen more than you do, my friend. There was reference to American coöperation with France. It was me he wanted when he read that."

"Faith! But it was addressed to the King's minister," objected Hogan.

"So I pointed out in the letter," answered Blades dryly. "I said it was to quell suspicion should we fall into British hands."

Here, deep beneath the earth, lay the city of Lillamra

Lords of Creation

By EANDO BINDER

HOMER ELLORY, brilliant young twentieth century scientist, slept for three thousand years in a time-chamber, and awoke in the year 5000. To his amazement he discovered that the world had returned to the Stone Age. The earth's supply of ores had been completely exhausted; the inhabitants of North America lived a primitive existence.

Dwelling with a tribe called the Noraks, Ellory becomes fast friends with John Darm, the chief, with wise old Sem Onger and the young warrior, Mal Radnor. They call him Humrelly. Soon he realizes that his feeling toward Sharina, lovely daughter of John Darm, is something stronger than friendship. But Sharina is betrothed to Mal Radnor.

ELLORY learns that all the tribes of North America live in a kind of bondage. In the land of Antarka civilization still flourishes, and the Antarkans, patrolling the continent in their rocket ship, exact supplies and tribute from the Noraks. Ellory sees the Lords of Antarka seize certain Noraks for slaves; he sees the beautiful, aloof Ermaine, Lady of Lillamra, who commands the rocket ship; and he is disgusted by his friends' calm submission to this fiftieth century feudal barbarism.

In the ruins of New York Homer Ellory discovers a bit of intensely radioactive metal. He finds ferrous oxide, too, and from this he begins to fashion metal weapons. For now the Noraks are at war with their enemy—the Quoise. Armed with these strange new swords and led by Ellory, the Noraks win a magnificent victory — and Ellory is proclaimed Warlord of Norak.

THIS victory suggests to Homer Ellory a vast scheme for liberating all the tribes from their bondage to Antarka. He persuades the Noraks to extend their conquests, so easily achieved with metal weapons; to enroll the captives in a huge army. At last he manages to convince the various tribes that

This story began in the Argosy for September 23

united they can defy the Lords of Antarka. With the war-cry "Freedom from Antarka", the juggernaut army sweeps triumphantly across North America.

Once the Antarkan rocket ship descends from the sky, and Lady Ermaine, sensing the danger of this conquest, forbids the use of metal weapons. She is intrigued by Homer Ellory, realizing that he differs from the Noraks; and she sees that he is struggling against the fascination of her beauty. Cryptically she warns him against dreaming of revolt. But after the Antarkans return to their land, Ellory continues to augment his huge army of liberty. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

EMPIRE

ELLORY stood in the shadow of ancient Chicago's towering ruins, and realized he was master of America.

Six months had gone by, since he had left New York. The last half of his invasion had been carried on by riders, bearing messages that were half ultimatum, half lure, to all the states west of the Mississippi.

Join the Federation, or be attacked! Secondly, the Federation would down the might of Antarka!

The two factors were irresistible. Like sheep they flocked to his banner. Fast horsemen were already returning from the distant tribes of former California, overlooking the broad Pacific. They, too, swore fealty to the cause, and to Humrelly, the great Lord from the Past.

The assemblage grew as the days passed. Ellory, rapidly formulating plans for the future, had called a grand conclave of his new empire, here beside the silvery waters of Lake Michigan.

There was a sudden clatter of hooves from the east and a party of horsemen resolved itself into John Darm, Sharina and Sem Onger, escorted by a metal-armed troop.

Jon Darm, dismounting, grasped Ellory by both shoulders.

"I can hardly believe it yet, Humrelly!" he exclaimed. "We rode eight days, from Norak, through the lands of ten other tribal people. It would have been suicide, before your coming. Now, everywhere we went, we were greeted in friendship. They do not simply fear your might. The cry 'Freedom from Antarka' has lodged in their hearts. You have given us a single mind. You have truly unified this great state, of which I am—*president!*"

Jon Darm glowed with pleasure at Ellory's start.

"President!" he echoed dazedly. "Where did you—"

"Sem Onger told me of your twentieth-century government. We will institute a similar system. I am proud to be the president of the reborn United States of America!"

Ellory turned away for a moment, tremendously moved by this echo from the dead past. Then he nodded eagerly.

"You've done exactly as I wished, Jon Darm. We must look far ahead. After the yoke of Antarka is shed, a greater task remains of rebuilding civilization. We will need a wise beneficent government, over the whole world!"

"And you, Humrelly, will be its guiding star!"

Sharina's voice chimed softly.

Ellory turned to her, aware that he had been avoiding her eyes. She had been staring at him, half perplexed, after greeting Mal Radnor. Ellory had noticed, out of the corner of his eye, the young chieftan's reserve with her. Now he stood with a faint, resigned sadness in his eyes, a look Ellory had seen more than once. If only, Ellory reflected, the tyranny of the heart could be attacked as directly as the tyranny of Antarka!

"Thanks, angel," Ellory murmured.

Angel! Another's angelic beauty rose in his mind, confusing him. He couldn't think of any more to say, though the girl waited. To his relief, something else broke the strained silence.

Old Sem Onger had sidled up, groaning. "Eight days upon a horse's back is tyranny, too. Ah, for the strength of youth again!" At their smiles, he added belligerently: "Not that I'm getting old. Why, a man's in his prime at seventy!"

"Some day," mused Ellory, half to himself, "there will be vehicles again—autos, trains, aircraft."

"I have stolen some of your thunder, Humrelly," interposed the garrulous old scholar. "In my odd moments, between the sword making at the ruins, I devised an iron plow. What do you think of that, Humrelly?"

He grinned delightedly, like a child who had outwitted its parent.

Ellory simulated a jealous astonishment, for the old man's pleasure.

"Good!" he exclaimed earnestly. "You have both feet on the ground, Sem Onger. At times I dream too much."

Suddenly he looked into the clear, warm sky.

"Sem Onger, tell me something. What's happened to the weather since my time? I was taken out of the crypt in April. Here it is January, and it feels like August! And June, in the latitude of Norak, was like Florida. Ten months of summer! When does winter come?"

"Winter?"

"Yes. Cold and whipping winds, and snow."

"Snow?" Sem Onger stared. "There is no snow here, Humrelly. That occurs only in the far north. You would have to travel north on a fast horse for two weeks, to find snow. And little of it there."

Ellory was stunned. That would be northernmost Canada and Alaska. No winters, such as he knew, in the temperate latitudes! New York, Chicago, Winnipeg, enjoying Florida weather all the year round! Had the Earth's axis tilted, during the age he had slept? Another mystery for him to investigate, when he had the time.

"I've been awaiting your arrival," he addressed them all. "This afternoon, after you've rested, I'll speak to the representatives of our new nation."

ELLORY stood bareheaded before the assemblage, his strong, tanned face bathed in bright sunlight. Back of him sounded the soft *lap-lap* of the lake's emerald green waters.

He suspected that the lip of land to the side, stone-heaped at its end, had once held the Adler Planetarium. The twentieth century people had viewed its artificial canopy of stars, the same stars that the fiftieth century saw in its skies.

In this one thing, three thousand years had meant nothing.

Before him, in an expectant semicircle, stood the Noraks, elbow to elbow with the envoys of most of the tribes inhabiting central North America. Back of these, in orderly columns, their veteran army of one hundred thousand stood at ease, marshaled by a staff of officers. Back of them, many perched on the ruin heaps for better vision, were perhaps a million citizens of the middle west tribes, come to witness this stupendous occasion.

All eyes rested on Homer Ellory with a look of awe, as peoples had always looked on great leaders and liberators. Moses, Mohammed, Charlemagne, Washington—Ellory felt his kinship with them, at this moment. Less than a year ago he had crawled from the crypt, a bewildered living fossil from a past age. Now this!

He was known from the Atlantic to the Pacific, through the grapevine of rumor, as the Lord of the Past. Most likely, he decided, they looked on him as a semi-divine visitant, sent by higher powers. So much the better, for the present.

"Citizens and envoys of the United States of America!" he began, his voice slightly tremulous. "Though I achieved my aim of unity through the sword, my purpose has been more than military conquest."

He came right to the point.

"Matters of government can come later. United now in purpose, we can defy the tyranny of Antarka. That will be the first concern of this federation of your tribes. Freedom from Antarka!"

He had raised his voice. Taking the cue, the mighty crowd hurled the three words to the skies, with a thunder that shook the ground. Irrelevantly, Ellory wondered how many decibels of sound-energy had been released.

That was all the oratory Ellory wished to use. He went on, in lower tones, speaking directly to the envoys. The crowd would hear later, and all the peoples throughout the land, by repetition.

"The Antarkans are due in another month, for their usual visit. We'll declare ourselves then. It won't do to just ask for freedom. We'll have to take it. Not one youth, girl or shipload of supplies will be yielded!"

He looked around slowly. "Any discussion?"

The envoys looked at one another. The democratic institution of the council chamber, and free discussion with those in power, was new to them. Finally an envoy stepped forward, half sheepishly, but Ellory nodded encouragingly.

"The result of that," he ventured, "will simply be attack. Their airships and their terrible weapons will destroy our cities. Many lives will be lost!"

"Cities can be evacuated beforehand," returned Ellory, in accordance with the campaign he and Mal Radnor had discussed for long careful hours. "And cities can be rebuilt. Besides, how many airships have they?"

"Just a few dozen," spoke up Sem Onger.

"You see?" said Ellory. "You have many cities. They have a few ships. That is why unity among us will defeat them."

"But they are cruel, heartless!" objected another envoy, bolder now. "They will hound us till we relent—"

And then the council of rebellion waxed in deadly earnest. Ellory and Mal Radnor had an answer for everything. Gradually the skeptical, fearful attitude of the envoys changed to wholehearted accord.

ELLORY arose finally, as twilight shadows descended. "Of course it will not be easy," he summed it up. "Nothing worth while is won easily. When the first Antarkan slaveships land, secret forces must be ready in every capital, to capture them. Do not kill the Lords. Take them alive, as hostages.

"If the Antarkans begin a campaign of aerial destruction, it would take them years to finish it. In the meantime, they will lack necessary food supplies. If they force more food tribute from other tribes over the world, they too will revolt, eventually.

"Our spark will light the fuse! It may take years and years, yes. But sooner or later, the Antarkans will be faced with one glaring fact—that they must defeat us, if they can, on the ground. And there, we have won. All wars hinge on one factor, numbers. We can put millions of warriors in the field, to their thousands. Even their superior weapons cannot overcome our tremendous manpower!

"After the initial declaration of our independence, a month from now, we will see what they do. If they send a ground army immediately, Mal Radnor and I will face them a million strong. If that is not enough, two million—three million—ten million! The Lords of Antarka cannot win!"

The first conclave of the reborn United States of America was over. Ellory was sure of himself. Only one thing disturbed him, as he walked with Jon Darm and the others to a village for a night's rest. An Antarkan ship suddenly appeared overhead, circling suspiciously. Ellory ground his teeth. With millions of square miles of land to soar over, on their idle cruises, must they always accidentally spy out these crucial gatherings? Would they land to investigate the huge crowd? It would be hard to explain that away.

But the Antarkan ship soared away again, as though indifferent to the antlike doings of their thousand-year subjects. Undoubtedly they had seen many abortive revolts, and feared nothing. But this time . . .

Ellory smiled grimly into the sky.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GLEAMING SHIP

THE Great Day dawned clear and cool, a month later. Ellory was back in the Norak capital, on the Hudson,

awaiting the coming of the Antarkan slave-ship. All over America, the other Stone-Age people were waiting . . . waiting.

It was a tense, grim moment, with the fate of two civilizations, one present and one future, in the balance.

At last it appeared, at the appointed hour of noon, soaring down grandly. Ellory quailed suddenly. The gleaming ship represented a great science. A science of power. Pitted against it were the Stone-Age people, with little more than their lives and courage.

Could they hope to win this giants' battle?

He looked at the fighting men back of him, hiding in the shadows of buildings, faces earnest, muscles tensed. As suddenly, courage oozed back into him. They must win, with a thousand years of hatred against the lordly Antarkans as their best weapon.

The thundering craft rolled to a stop in the city square. To their eyes, nothing would seem amiss. They would step out, expecting Jon Darm to yield his tribute in lives, as before. They did not know of the five thousand Norak troops concealed in every building. The Antarkans would be captured before they had a chance to think. Their ship too.

Ellory tried to picture the look of dismay that would come over the lovely features of Ermaine, Lady of Lillamra.

"I hope she isn't hurt," he found himself thinking.

The ship had landed and the rocket blasts died. Ellory waited, trembling as with a fever. When would that hatch open?

But it didn't open, even after a minute. An ominous wonder pierced Ellory's mind.

"Jon Darm, listen to me!"

Ellory jumped. The Lady Ermaine's voice, rolling over the square in tones amplified to stentorian volume.

"We are not stepping from our ship! Your plans are known. We know of your concealed troops, waiting to rush out to seize us. We know the plot of revolt, throughout the land!"

Ellory groaned. Beside him, Mal Radnor's eyes were stunned, unbelieving. The fighting men in back muttered bewilderedly.

The amplified bell-voice went on, her tones reproachful as though she were speaking to children.

"We offer you pardon, Jon Darm. You will be wise to accept. Have your troops file away, in full view. Then deliver to us ten youths, as usual. Also, the man known as Humrelly! We will then pretend you never planned the revolt, and will not take steps of retribution."

The voice hardened.

"Attack the ship, if you wish. Our weapons will teach you better. Then, later, we will raze your city! All over the land, the same will happen!"

Ellory tried to think rationally, in this awful moment. Tried to weigh possibilities, but his mind was an agonized blank. Jon Darm, in the Royal House, was waiting for Ellory's decision—and Ellory had none.

Suddenly he realized that he had jumped up, was running and shouting. Dimly he was aware that he had become what the twentieth-century psychologists labeled a maniac.

"Freedom from Antarka!" he was bellowing, waving his sword and lunging toward the ship.

Ellory was never to have a clear conception, afterward, of the following minutes. Flashes of scenes came to his eyes, like lightning stabs in a dark night. A scene of thousands of armed Noraks converging on the ship. Another of livid flames shooting out among them like demon's tongues. Men dropping, screaming, skin and flesh burned black. Bodies piling like cement sacks, around the square.

Ellory lurched on drunkenly, half his clothing burned away, his skin on fire. His sword handle heated, burned his palm, but he gripped it tighter. He lurched on. . . .

He was down suddenly—his legs rubber, his lungs breathing pure fire. His senses faded, slowly, as though he were wrestling against Death itself. Dimly, his swollen

eyes saw an incredible vision—an angel's face bent over him. Two angel's faces—Sharina and Ermaine.

Strong arms lifted him, a little later. Motion. A muffled throb under him, smooth flight . . . utter darkness, then, like a curtain.

ELLORY sat up on soft covers, groaned with pain, then leaned back on his elbow. His right leg, chest and head were bandaged. He could feel the coolness of salves under them, soothing his burns.

He looked around, his eyes clearing. He was in a small cubicle, plush-lined, lying on a bunk. One person was in the room with him—Ermaine, Lady of Lillamra.

She looked across at him coolly, from her seat, apparently having awaited his return to consciousness. Slumbrous blue eyes, spun platinum hair, snow-white skin—she was almost unreal, inhumanly perfect. A flawless gem, cold and untouchable. And yet, somehow, she was alluringly feminine.

Ellory fought off a spell of staring.

"Where—" The one word was a hoarse croak.

"You're in our ship, on the way to Antarka," she answered him. "As a guest." Her eyes said "prisoner". "You've been unconscious for two hours. Your burns are not serious, however. A few days and the salves will heal them."

"What happened? What happened?" Memory, more painful than the burns, came to Ellory.

"Your little revolt failed—utterly." Her voice held no anger or reproof, little emotion of any sort. "You and your men attacked foolishly. Bravely, I suppose you'd call it. Our flame-guns must have cut down a thousand before the rest saw the better of it. You were the ringleader, Humrelly?"

Ellory declined to answer that.

"How did you find out about the revolt?" he queried, sunk in despair.

"We observed your lakeside gathering a month ago. Suspicious, we caught an outlander several days later, questioned him. Under some persuasion, he told all he knew. You see the futility of it now, Humrelly?"

"I don't!" he snapped, with returning spirit. "How do you know your other ships—"

"They were all prepared, as we were. When they report, in Antarka—"

Wild hope surged momentarily in Ellory. "They haven't communicated with you yet, by radio? Then maybe—"

"Radio? What is that?" She was mildly curious. "We have no long-range communication means."

Ellory stared. No radio! Their science went down a peg in his estimation. The girl stared back.

"You were the leader, Humrelly. Tell me, you're an Ancient, aren't you? A man from some past age. Lord from the Past, the man called you."

Ellory hesitated, then shrugged. The secret could not be concealed further.

"If you must have me say it, I am," he grunted briefly. "Twentieth century."

"Old reckoning, of course. That's—um—three thousand years ago." She said it calmly. "I suspected it from the first moment I saw you, almost a year ago, in Norak. Your manner, your spirit, your accent. Then, down in Thakal, I was almost sure of it. I also suspected your plan, introducing metal weapons, federating the Outland people, defying us. Defying our—tyranny?"

"Is that what you call it yourself?" he snapped. "Why didn't you investigate sooner if you suspected?"

"For the excitement of it," she drawled, toying with the sparkling blue diamond at her throat. "Sometimes life in Antarka is dull. A breath of danger, even under our indulgence, is a slight diversion."

ELLORY glared at her. Behind that beautiful, haughty mask reposed a mind queerly different from any he had ever known. A mind that saw the Stone-Age as a vast playground perhaps, a stage set for her enjoyment.

"I suppose my fate, as arch- conspirator, is—the ultimate?"

She shrugged. "There will be a trial. If you hadn't attacked like a madman, you would have earned leniency. When the attack came, I told the gunners to save you."

"For the hangman!" muttered Ellory bitterly. "What happens to the others? Jon Darm—"

"Another chance for him. But his city goes. There will be the usual hunt after a revolt—a few cities burned down, Outlanders chased to the hills, here and there. The usual lesson. Down in our safe little world, we will gossip about it for a while."

Her voice went to sheer boredom. "I wish you had made it just a little more interesting, Humrelly. I gave you the chance. I could have reported you to the Outland Council much sooner."

Rage at her untroubled, superior tone shook him.

"Pretty high and mighty, aren't you?" he blazed. "Well, I'm not so sure it's over yet!" He went on recklessly. "Several hundred tribal states, and I don't know how many millions of people, can't be downed so easily—united! They've been aroused. They sing a chant of hate, a thousand years of it. I've told them how to down your power, even if it takes years and years. I've told them!"

The girl smiled.

"You told them. Yes, Humrelly. But they forget easily, like children. It is advanced reasoning, to them. Your spell held them for a while. Without your leadership, the federation will fall apart. Each noisy, self-centered little state will crawl into its own shell, to exist as it did before you came."

Ellory bit his lip. Devilish logic, and sound. The whole sucess of the rebellion had depended on Ellory, on the clear cold reasoning and planning of a mind at least equal to the Antarkans. The Stone-Age people had followed Ellory as the twentieth century might have followed a demi-god from some mighty, forgotten civilization that knew all things. Left to themselves, now, the Outlanders would forget his clear-cut mission, drop back into the tribal traditions of the past thousand years.

The Outlanders! Ellory rebelled against the term, as used by the Antarkans. It meant serfdom. Privileged lords speaking contemptuously of their slaves.

"You know," Ellory said bitingly, "you're tyrants. Worse than any in history. You're part of the rottenest, vilest, cruelest, most vicious mishandling of the masses known!"

He watched her, hoping to disturb her complacency in some slightest degree, as revenge for his own hollow failure.

"Behind your beautiful mask, you're a depraved creature. That's what I think of you!"

Her azure eyes were level, amused.

"You *do* think I'm beautiful! You said it down in Thakal. You said it with your eyes, in Norak, when you first saw me. You say it now."

"Beautiful, yes—but vicious!" Ellory replied.

FOR just a moment anger flicked from her eyes. But her voice remained calm, without malice. "You have a wild tongue, Humrelly."

"In my time, we spoke our minds," he retorted. "As well hang me for a sheep as a lamb. I'll tell all your Lords down there the same thing—tyranny in any language under the sun!"

She laughed.

"I'm afraid you're an idealist, Humrelly. We're realists. Those in power enjoy the good things of life. It is their good fortune. Why sacrifice it? It entails little real hardship for the Outlanders to supply us with servants and food. They still eat and live and love—"

"Good God, how can you be so smug about it?" exploded Ellory. He paced the narrow cabin, unmindful of his burns. "Bad as your tribute-taking is, without reciprocity, your sin of omission is still greater—not lifting one little finger to

better ther lives. Letting them go on in Stone-Age backwardness. The privileged have the responsibility of helping those less fortunate. It's the first law of civilization. You could do something for them—"

"Exactly what?" The words, soft, nevertheless cut sharply.

"Give them something of your science, your knowledge, your material things—" He stopped, groping for expression.

"The material supplies of Antarka are limited, Humrelly. Barely enough for our small world. Spread among the rest, they would get useless bits of metal, coal, machine-woven cloth. This is a threadbare time Humrelly, not like your lush Twentieth century. If the fault lies anywhere, it rests upon your time and the directly following age, with your traditions. What of your great senseless wars, lavish was of nature's bounty? We're what we are because of that!"

Ellory avoided her eyes.

"All right," he said more quietly. "But you still can't whitewash your social tyranny over the world. Secondly, have you ever tried to break the deadlock? The ocean is full of metals, crammed with them. Radioactivity, atomic power are possible sources of new power. Have you looked ahead? Have you tried anything?"

He faced her lidded eyes. A faint unfathomable smile rested on her lips.

"You're a dreamer, Humrelly, aren't you?"

"Dreams are the stepping stones of progress," he said tritely.

She was still watching him.

"I like you for it, Humrelly!" she declared candidly. "There hasn't been such a one as you for a long time. You say disturbing things. You are impractical, emotional, foolishly optimistic. Yet you aren't a fool."

"Thanks!" he grunted dryly. "Now that I've been psycho-analyzed, would you mind getting out? I'm tired." His nerves were jangling.

"I disturb you, Humrelly?" she queried, with a meaning he ignored.

"When do we arrive at Antarka?"

She glanced at a crystalline time-piece on her wrist.

"Three hours since we left Norak. We'll be there in seven more."

"A thousand miles an hour?" he gasped.

"In the stratosphere."

SHE opened a door to the rear, glanced in. Turning, she said, "There's a visitor here I think you'd like to see. She's over her hysterics now."

She beckoned to someone beyond the doorway.

Sharina entered, her face tear-stained. With a little cry, she darted to Ellory's arms, choking back sobs.

"Sharina!" Ellory looked at her in amazement. "How—"

"When you had fallen and the firing stopped in the square," explained Ermaine carelessly, "she ran to you. When we took you in the ship, she struggled so violently to get in that I permitted it."

She looked at them, arms about one another. Expressionlessly, she left.

"Sharina, you shouldn't have come," Ellory murmured, patting her shoulder. "Don't you realize that I'm—"

"Mal Radnor," she whispered. "He's dead! I saw him die, burning—"

"Mal Radnor—good God!" Now Ellory remembered seeing him crumple at his side during that mad attack.

The young chieftan's sturdy face rose in his mind, his constant companion for long months. Strong bonds of friendship and mutual respect had grown between them. Ellory looked at the girl. Even she hadn't been a separating force.

"He was a martyr, Sharina," Ellory said huskily.

She moved out of his arms. "I came along, Humrelly, to be with you to the last."

"To the last! You know then?" he asked gently.

She nodded. She was staring at him, waiting for him to go on, it seemed. Ellory found himself comparing her with Ermaine. Sharina, sweet, simple, lovely

as a flower. Ermaine, alluring, exotic, exquisitely fragile as rare porcelain. But beneath that cold beauty was what? Was there any feeling there?

In a sudden tide of feeling against the arrogant girl of Antarka, Ellory tried to shake off the confusion in his mind. He took a step toward Sharina. Now, with Mal Radnor gone, he could declare himself.

"Angel, I—"

And then, abruptly, he stopped. Confusion again, with the patrician features of Ermaine dancing before his eyes. The past events overwhelmed him. Weakness from his throbbing burns stole into his body.

"It's all such a mess, Sharina!" he moaned, sinking to his couch. "I've failed so miserably—"

He was only aware that her soft hand stroked his forehead tenderly. Then he passed into troubled sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

LAND OF ANTARKA

SIX hours later, again awake, Ellory accepted Ermaine's invitation to look about the ship. She gave him a cape-like silken garment to throw over his shoulders. His burns had quieted. His mind was dulled, somewhat, to the recent horror of the massacre. He refused food, however. Food could not fill the emptiness he felt within him.

Sharina accompanied them. She clutched his hand half fearfully as Ermaine led them before a crystalline port. Sheer nothingness lay below, till the eyes met the atmospheric haze, and blankets of clouds over Earth.

"Fifteen miles up," said the Lady Ermaine casually.

The ship's ovoid cabin, supported by its wide triangular wings, was a sealed, warmed pocket within its metal shell, divided into a dozen small rooms. Fore and aft were larger spaces, control room and storage hold. The latter Ellory viewed stonily—it had carried thousands of youths to Antarka—but the control room held his interest.

A half dozen silken-clad men sat before a wide panel of dials, gauges and levers. It was faintly reminiscent of the giant experimental trans-oceanic planes of 1940. But this represented their full development, with stratosphere range and rocket motivation. This Ellory had so eagerly looked forward to, when he had crawled out of the crypt.

Ermaine was at his side.

"What fuel do you use?" queried Ellory, watching the rhythmic spurting of flame from the wings' hind edges, propelling them forward smoothly.

"Gasoline and liquid air," Ermaine informed him. "More energy per weight than any other chemical combination."

Ellory was just a little startled, and disappointed. He had expected it would be some astounding new fuel. In 1940, gasoline-liquid-air rocket propulsion had been in the near future. Again, curiously, the science of Antarka fell in his estimation.

"Your weapon?" Ellory indicated one of the numerous tubular devices clamped to swivels that could swing them out through open portholes.

"Yes. Little metal pellets of highly-volatile gasoline are shot out by a spring mechanism. Heat of air-friction causes the liquid to expand, bursting the shell. The vapors instantly ignite, in the air, forming a ball of fire."

Quite horrible and effective, as Ellory had seen.

"It has a short range?" he guessed.

Ermaine nodded.

"A hundred yards. But it is all the weapon we have—or need. We do not need the monstrous guns and bombs of your time. We do not have wars in Antarka." She smiled at him.

"In that, we are truly civilized, aren't we, Humrelly?" She went on: "As a matter of fact, we can't afford wars. One good one would be our end. Antarka, whatever else you may think it, is a land of peace."

"And tyranny," Ellory muttered.

"Look—Antarka approaches!"

ELLORY had felt the floor under them pressing upward for some minutes, and the forward thrust of the ship diminished. They were gliding down toward Earth, the tremendous pace of the stratosphere cut down by air resistance.

Antarctica, land of the South Pole!

In Ellory's day, it had been a cold, frozen, bitter wilderness usurped by unbroken ice. Now it was open brown land, with only a crown of glistening ice about the South Pole itself. It looked vaguely like a vast doughnut floating over the vaster seas.

"Earth's axis hasn't tilted," Ellory said thoughtfully. The sun was low on the horizon. "But climate has changed radically since my time, Lady Ermaine."

She nodded. "Emergence from the last Ice Age."

"Of course!" Ellory snapped his fingers. That theory had been gaining ground in 1940, he recalled. Slowly but surely, the average temperature was rising, from the minimum of the Ice Age twenty-five thousand years or so ago. Massachusetts had been a bitter land to the Puritans of 1700. Boston had become comparatively balmy in 1940. Now, in 5000 A. D., those latitudes were Floridan.

And Antarctica, also the Arctic, after these three thousand years, had finally won free from their eon-long prison of ice.

Below the clouds now, the ship passed over what Ellory surmised was Ross Sea, the outjutting crags of Admiralty Range, and the South Magnetic Pole area. A tall, cratered peak must be lonely Mount Erebus. Then over a mountain range and down into little America, where Byrd, an age before, had struggled against the elements.

The elements had been vanquished by time, since then. There was a city now.

Ellory was again disappointed. He had expected a forest of spires, skyscrapers, row on row of buildings. He had been yearning to see such, in this age that had elsewhere leveled all man's works to the ground. Instead he saw only a dull, metallic object, like a shield lying there. Yet it was huge, perhaps a mile across.

"Our city is underground," Ermaine explained, smiling at his rueful perplexity. "That is its metal cap. Though the land is clear of ice, the climate here is quite bitter still. It snows often. Underground, it is snug and warm. And down there, easy to reach, are the coal and metal veins."

Landing on the broad metal plate, the ship halted beside a huge drome and was then wheeled in by little auto-tugs. Ellory's sense of hearing was titillated by a familiar *chug-chug,* that of a gasoline combustion motor. Surviving mark of the 20th century! He felt almost proud in that thought.

The Lady Ermaine, wrapping a cloak about her, stepped out toward a low housing. Following, Sharina and Ellory shivered in the bite of chill, polar air. Entering a heat-tight door, a smooth-dropping elevator took them below the metal cap's level. They stepped out again into warmed air that had the instant taint of city life to Ellory.

He looked around eagerly.

A new world. Or rather, an old, old one of three thousand years ago! For a moment, in broad detail, it was the twentieth century again, the heart of New York, or Chicago, or Paris. There were the clang, bustle and murmurous undertone of an active mechanical community. Ellory's senses dizzied, as if he had been shot back in a time machine to the age he had left.

But then, taking in detail, the heady illusion left. It was a city such as had not been known or dreamed of in 1940. They were treading a metal bridge, from the bank of elevators, that overhung a deep well. Ermaine led them close to the railing, pointing down for them to look. Ellory gasped.

DOWN and down the sheer central pit went, as if to the center of Earth. Evenly spaced were the metal floors of successive levels. They were pinned solidly to columnar metal posts running from top to bottom of the beehive city. Ellory gave

silent tribute to the engineers who had conceived this gigantic project, balancing those tremendous weights between post and pillar.

"Does it amaze even you, Humrelly, who knew the colossus of ancient New York?" The girl of Antarka showed the faintest pleasure at his surprise. "There are twenty levels, resting on bedrock a mile below. The city is not wide, no more than a half-mile. The levels are suspended between rock, at the circumference, and these pillars. The whole is built symmetrically around the central elevator well, giving us short, easy transporation down and up. It is like, Humrelly, one building of your time on a grander scale, sunk into the earth."

Ellory had already made that comparison in his mind. A super Empire State building, plumbing the depths instead of piercing the sky.

"Our reasons were two," Ermaine continued. "One, the saving in building material. Fifty percent of our wall-space is furnished by mother earth. Secondly, the easier access to deeply buried coal and metal deposits. The rise of Antarka, out of the Dark Time, is based wholly on those deposits. But I will explain more fully some other time. Come."

They traversed the metal bridge.

Sharina clung fearfully to Ellory's arm, averting her eyes from the depths. To her, this first glimpse of metal-and-power civilization was pure shock. She tip-toed, as an original Stone Age creature might have at the top of a twentieth-century skyscraper, fearing to shake apart the magically hung structure beneath.

The metal bridge led to the true floor of the first level, and beyond were receding tiers of sub-levels, each like the floor of a hotel. Steps, slanting ramps, and outside elevators connected all with the "ground" level. Walking lanes pierced back and back to the limiting rock walls of the narrow city. Living quarters of a variety of bungalow-like houses clustered about areas that shone green with grass. The perfume of flowers wafted in the air. Brilliant sun lamps sprayed down their actinic rays on these park-like spaces.

Ellory drew an admiring breath. The Antarkans had fashioned a miniature elysium, combining the best of mechanics and imported nature.

"You think well of our city?" Ermaine inquired, laughingly. "Humrelly, your face is more eloquent than your tongue could ever be!"

Ellory tried to frown.

"Exquisite exteriors often hide dark things," he retorted meaningly.

Then he did frown, blackly.

A stream of Antarkans ahead, in their resplendent silks, resolved in his eyes. Most were walking leisurely, like lords in some higher life. But sprinkled among them were some in wheeled chairs. Pushing their indolent, blond occupants were darker-skinned men, dressed in drab cloth.

The Stone Age men, in one aspect of their servile capacity to the Lords of Antarka! The reminder tightened Ellory's lips, so that even the magnificent building they approached a few minutes later failed to stir him.

"My home," Ermaine remarked.

ELLORY stared. The Taj Mahal in its heydey could not have matched this grandeur. Golden cornices, argent silver eaves, gleaming white marble—it was creative art frozen in stunning beauty.

"We have most of the gold and silver, treasured by the ages, here in Antarka, for ornament," said Ermaine, slightly boastful.

Ellory turned. This building stood out. All the others faded by comparison. He looked at the girl.

"Yours?" he repeated.

"Yes. I'm Lady of Lillamra, didn't you know? First Lady of this city. Wait—what would you call it? Queen, I think."

"Queen?"

Ellory recalled then the deferential air of the Antarkans who had passed. They had nodded to her as respectfully as Sharina's people nodded to any of the Antarkans.

"And you would call this my palace," she resumed. "Come. You are my guests. Understand, Humrelly, this is a great honor. You deserve a prison cell!"

She searched his face for appreciation that he stonily withheld.

Later, in a dining room hung with flowing drapes, the three sat before a sumptuous banquet table. Ellory smiled cynically. In the twentieth century, criminals sentenced to die had enjoyed a last meal of their choice.

"Tell me of your interment, Humrelly," urged the Lady of Lillamra. "And of your former life in that great, strange time of which we know so little."

Ellory talked mechanically, eating little. The recent collapse of all his plans and work for so many months weighed oppressively. And how few were the hours remaining to him? This was all mockery, refinement of torture. His golden fork dropped from nervous fingers finally.

"When will the so-called trial be held?" he demanded bluntly.

"Trial?" Ermaine, Lady of Lillamra, smiled slowly. "You have been on trial since we left Norak!"

Ellory stared.

"I am your judge and jury," the girl of Antarka continued. "The Outland Council have agreed." She looked at him and Ellory felt like a puppet dangling on a string. "I defer the final decision for the present."

She arose.

"You are both tired and distraught. Tomorrow you will feel better. I'll show you our city and our life." She paused. "Well, Humrelly? No thanks for the reprieve? The others would have put you to death summarily."

"Thanks—for nothing," Ellory went on, watching her enigmatic eyes. "Does the leopard change his spots?"

The shaft went home, as he could see in the slight frown on her brow.

Sharina and Ellory were led to adjoining rooms in a long hall. A man came to Ellory's room, to dress his burns, applying fresh salve. He was an elderly Outlander, evidently trained by the Antarkans in the healing art. He was well-groomed, sleek and well-fed, and had a certain urban air that spoke of a calm, secure life.

"How long have you been here?" queried Ellory.

"Thirty years, since I was twenty," the man responded without emotion.

"Do you like your life here? Speak freely. I'm an Outlander, like yourself. Are you treated well?"

"Yes, I am treated well." He looked around the room guardedly. "But I hate it!" he said dully. "We all hate it. We work only for them!"

"Have you tried to escape?" Ellory ventured.

"Escape!" The tones were hopeless. "There is none. After thirty years, I know that. The metal cap of the city seals us in. Lords guard the few exits, day and night, with guns."

He shook his head sadly, leaving.

Ellory lay on soft cushions, surrounded by the luxury of Antarka, thinking. Ermaine planned toying with him, that was obvious. She would try to break his spirit. Beneath her veneer of beauty she was calculatingly cruel. He trembled with hate for her. Hate? He wasn't sure. He wasn't sure of anything any more, in this mad world of the fiftieth century.

He sank into the unrestful sleep of mental, physical and spiritual fatigue.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CAVERN CITY

DAYS passed swiftly. Ermaine told first of the rise of Antarka. "A thousand years ago—eleven hundred to be exact—civilization was at its lowest ebb. As you may know in part, Humrelly, your age ended about 3000 A.D. A thousand years of that wasteful era left nothing for the following. No ores, coal or oil. Mankind dropped to the bottom.

"For nine hundred years—savagery. Only a legend remained of a strange land to the south, blessed with buried treasures. Your age, luckily, could not brave the icy breath of Antarka. We've found ruins,

though, of abortive mining camps. They tried and failed."

Ellory nodded.

"They talked of exploiting Antarctica in my time even."

Ermaine resumed.

"A sailing vessel blew accidentally to the coast of Antarka, eleven hundred years ago. The Year One, by our calendar. Improving climate had at last driven away the hoarding ice, they found. And they found lumps of black matter that burned, other lumps that melted and formed the miraculous, almost mythical metal."

"Just as in the original Stone Age," murmured Ellory. "Your ancestors, then, were pure savages, like the rest."

She nodded. "They—"

Ellory interrupted. "They were just lucky, in finding Antarka. Sharina's ancestors might just as well have been the ones. And you, today, would be in her place, she in yours. By what divine right do you Antarkans today lay absolute claim to the last of Earth's metal and coal?"

"In your time," countered Ermaine shrewdly, "did the rich yield their places to the poor?"

"Go on!" he snapped.

"The civilization of power and metal sprang up again, in Antarka, naturally. However, food could not be grown in the wintry land. Two courses lay open. It was wiser, those early Antarkans decided, to build cities near the coal and metal and import food, than to build cities near food and import coal and metal."

"A rule of economics we should have applied more in our age," confessed Ellory, thinking of the cotton mills of New England, remote from both coal and cotton.

"The cities were hollowed out and extended downward, level by level, through many years. Ten such cities came into being around the coastline of Antarka, at the ten sites nearest the best deposits. They were limited from the start. Another problem arose—population. Birth-rate control was instituted. It might have been wiser in your time, Humrelly—"

He conceded the point with a vexed nod.

"In one short century all this was accomplished," Ermaine resumed. "All the planning, building, inventing of legendary machines, rebirth of science. It was a sudden renaissance, inspired by black coal and hard metal. You see, Humrelly, mankind hadn't really lost all its knowledge. Much of it was recorded in scattered monasteries and forgotten temples. But his tools he had lost. The uprise of Antarka was sudden, swift, like a flower blooming in the desert."

"And the same thing could happen over the rest of Earth, given power and metal," Ellory's eyes shone a little.

Ermaine arose.

"Well, that is all of the story."

"All?" Ellory rose to his feet also. "But you've left out one entire phase—the serfdom of the Outland, as you call it!"

"Oh that!" Ermaine waved airily. "It's such a minor thing."

Ellory glared. Outside, for a thousand years, the less blessed people had had to reshape their whole philosophy of life, to conform to Antarkan standards.

"I weary of this talk," Ermaine continued. "Some other time. By the way—" She faced them both. "The reports have come in. The rebellion failed everywhere in your empire, Humrelly. The lesson is being administered. Your Norak capital was burned down."

Sharina caught her breath.

"My father?" she asked timidly.

"He's safe, little Outlander. We allowed evacuation of the city. Come, I will show you the lower levels."

Ellory followed with a seething desire to take Ermaine's slim white neck in his powerful hands and choke all the arrogance out of her. Yet, could he blame her? A thousand years of tradition ruled her mind. Only blood and sword had ever changed tradition, as with the unfederated tribes.

A SWIFT descent in the yawning central elevator pit took them down to the eleventh level. "The lower ten levels," Ermaine explained, "hold our workshops, machinery, metal refineries, laboratories, etc."

On several successive days, she guided them through the wonders of her city.

Ellory felt the breath of the twentieth century in what he saw. The rumble of machinery was music in his ears, after the pastoral, unfulfilled silences of the outer world. Level after level was crammed with the sonorous discord of laboring metal and subservient power. Looms quite similar to those of 1940 wove fine, patterned cloth. Spinning, grinding lathes turned out metallic paraphernalia.

Ellory thrilled. Machines in the service of man!

But then he frowned, seeing that fully half of the personnel tending the machines were ruddy-skinned Outlanders. The blond, slim Lords, in their role as workers, moved levers and watched gauges, their white hands and clothing hardly soiled. The Outlanders, grimed and active, fed the machines and carried heavy materials.

Another level was quieter.

Here a chemical industry reigned. Raw materials, also from Antarkan deposits, furnished acids and important reagents. Huge vats bubbled. A variety of plastic products was known to the Antarkans. Artificial silk trailed endlessly from spinnarets. Coal-tar extractions gave dyes, medicines and the hundred-and-one other variations of its complexity.

At the mining levels, lower down, great caverns led beyond the rock walls, to coal and metal veins. Little trains pulled by chugging engines emerged with their all-important cargoes.

Ermaine, a little distastefully, took them on a ride into one winding passage. Miles beyond, in a beamed chamber, miners were drilling out coal with compressed-air hammers. They were all, Ellory noticed, Outlanders, with a spotlessly clothed Antarkan superintendent in charge.

Somehow, to Ellory, it was all quite twentieth century, not much more advanced in technology or method. Except for their rocket ships, only one thing struck a unique note—a giant mechanical lung for the subterranean city.

An enormous conduit led from the upper surface down to bedrock, with outlets at each level. He could hear the low whine of colossal fans, sucking down the fresh air, thrusting it out for human lungs. At the opposite side, another conduit reversed the process, shoving used air out into the upper world.

Ellory suspected that the average purity of air was better, because of the steady current, than it had been in the canyons of New York.

"WELL, Humrelly," Ermaine asked when he had seen all, smiling at him, "does it impress the man from the mighty past that knew these things all over the world?"

Ellory nodded grudgingly. But again, something lurked in his mind, as it had when he first viewed the metalless world outside the crypt.

"Where are the generating plants? Do you produce electricity by steam-engine, steam-turbine, or what?"

"Electricity?" Ermaine stumbled over the word a little. "You mean battery current? We don't use that. Gasoline motors run all our machines. Gasoline is our power staple. All crude oil is cracked down into gasoline. All coal is hydrogenated to oil, and similarly cracked down. Gasoline gives us heat, light and power. What is the need of electricity?"

"No electricity!" gasped Ellory. Antarkan science dropped again in his estimation, a great drop this time.

But then, he reflected, electricity was really unnecessary, in this compact community. Gasoline could be piped to every corner of the city with little effort. Electricity had become the dominant factor in the twentieth century only because it was the best way to ship power.

His thoughts rolled on.

"Now I see why you don't have radio. But you have mercury-arc lamps, for your gardens. And how did you amplify your voice, in the square at Norak?"

"Mercury vapor, highly heated by gasoline jets, shines with ultra-violet light. My voice was amplified by sending it through

a vibrating series of pipes delicately pitched to the human voice."

"Organ-pipe principle." Ellory nodded. He laughed suddenly. "Man, could I show you some things, with electricity! You don't have telegraph, telephone?"

Ermaine shook her head. "No. Many of your twentieth century secrets have escaped us. Records are so incomplete."

Ellory was more amazed each second. Antarkan science was badly spotted with blanks.

"But how do you communicate with the other cities—only by going there?" He laughed again, thinking of clumsily written messages going back and forth.

"In other words," he went on, "you have twentieth-century machinery, with only eighteenth-century modes of communication. Not what I expected after the wonders you've shown me." His tone was mocking.

Ermaine however appeared only slightly nettled.

"You still have much to learn, Humrelly. It's true that we have no telegraph or telephone. You must tell me about them some time. But from the little we know of them, I should say that we do quite well with our own devices." She smiled.

"We have something similar—sonophone, we call it. Solid matter transmits sound-waves much more readily than air. The rock stratum between cities carries voice messages. We have developed a way to speed them a hundred miles a second. I'll show you."

She led them to a sound-proof chamber and sat before a great hide drum, enclosed in glass. Straight metal pipes pierced from this sounding board deep into the rock wall of the city.

"Lady Ermaine calling Queemarlan. Connect me with Lady Tassan."

"Queemarlan"—Queen Mary Land, Ellory surmised, the coast of Antarctica about a quarter-circle away. Strange how the past left its impress on the future, in man's language.

They waited; then—

"Yes? Is that you, Ermaine?"

The voice came back, low but distinct, after an interval of thirty seconds, through the medium of fifteen hundred miles of rock. Ermaine smiled at Ellory in triumph. He, in turn, was wondering how thunderously earthquakes must register at times, in this rock-borne phone system.

FORGETTING her companions for the moment, Ermaine began an interchange of half-personal comment. Ellory grinned. Just like two girls of his day chatting over the phone. It was a little queer, though, because of the thirty-second blank intervals of transmission. Little of their conversation meant anything, until suddenly the distant speaker said:

"Still heart-free, Ermaine? Kalor didn't mean anything after all? Lillamra still needs a Lord! There are little rumors here that the rebel leader—Humrelly, is it?—has been in your company long hours and days. Tell me, Ermaine, what is he—"

The voice clipped off as Ermaine snapped tight a voice-shutter, in vexation. A scarlet flush had leaped into her marble-white face. She regained her composure instantly, but excused herself from further touring of the city that day.

As they walked back to the palace, Ermaine turned her eyes from the strolling crowd to Ellory.

"Notice how the passing girls watch you, Humrelly," she observed casually. "Married ones, too, I'm afraid. You cut quite a figure in our style. Be honest, Humrelly, you like our clothing?"

He looked down at his costume, ran fingers over it. Like it?

He did. He had been given an Antarkan costume the first day, to replace his half-burned Norak outfit. The feel of silk and trim cut lines had grown pleasant. The colorful style was such that on a slight man it was foppish, but on a sturdy, broad-shouldered frame it looked well. Ellory's six feet topped the average Antarkan height by a half-head. He thought now of the Norak broadcloth with a slight repugnance.

"No," he lied stubbornly, with her eyes

on his. "This style is too lacy to suit me. I like the simple Outland clothing better."

"Even on me?"

Ellory was forced to make the comparison out of the corner of his eye. Sharina, refusing Antarkan dress, in plain dull white, covering her from neck to ankle. Ermaine in creamy rose and regal purple, contrasting vividly with her whiteness of complexion. Rounded lines were accentuated by a short, clinging skirt, and her legs were silken-clad.

"Clothes are like beauty—skin deep," quoted Ellory, but he saw the mocking glint in the Antarkan girl's eyes, as she left them in the hall.

Sharina lingered before going to her room, staring with a strange air at Ellory.

"Humrelly, you *do* like these clothes!" she accused sadly. "You are beginning to like all the things of Antarka—"

"No," muttered Ellory. "The clothes maybe, but not what's underneath. Sharina"—he grasped her shoulders fiercely—"you don't think I'd ever be disloyal to Norak and all I've fought for!"

Sharina averted her eyes.

"Ermaine is interested in you, Humrelly. I know; I'm a woman."

Ellory laughed grimly.

"Nonsense, angel! Don't you see her game? Dangling me, enticing me with the good things of Antarka—cat and mouse. Making me suffer. Then, when the trial is over, when she tires of the sport—"

He smiled gently. "I'm doomed, Sharina. Never forget that. That's why I'm sorry you're here—"

Sharina ran for her room, but not before Ellory had seen the tears in her eyes. He slept little that night, his thoughts a squirrel-cage.

Doomed! Doomed! The word reverberated dully in his mind.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Like animals they fled across the rooftops, slipping and sliding in the treacherous snow

Danger Flowers

Violets in a blizzard and pale primroses—these and the frightened eyes of a flower-girl who was not at all what she seemed led John Court into proscribed company and deadly peril . . .

By DOUGLAS NEWTON

VIOLETS in a blizzard . . . As the blowsy woman offered her basket, John Court laughed. "Weather for snowdrops, surely?"

Startled, the woman's eyes flicked to his, and he realized that not only had he spoken in English but that she, an ignorant, East European peasant, had understood.

Her eyes, an unexpected clear gray, were terrified, defiant—and young. Though her ragged sheepskin coat, clumsy top boots and hairy hat gave her a bulky, misshapen look, she was not a woman but a girl. And she wasn't blowsy. That was the effect of deliberately untidy hair and smudged cheeks. Beneath the sudden terror of her face he saw that there was something else underneath, something—well, very like her New England violets.

It was gone in a flash.

The face grew heavy and dull. Muttering in *patois* she drifted on so naturally that John Court wondered if he had been mistaken. Especially as he had time to note that she could have sold him snowdrops—if she had really understood. Behind the mass of violets she had a bunch or two, yes, and primroses and early orchids too—quite a New England posy. But did *that* mean anything?

Tingling from the shock of those clear eyes in so drab a getup, he watched from his sheltering doorway as she wandered away. In spite of the snow flurries that were whirling through Hochhausen's Square of Our Iron Leader, people were still about. She accosted these in a way so businesslike that John Court might have decided that she was the flower girl she seemed had it not been for the man shadowing her.

He was short, with a body like a bloated pear on matchsticks, a cropped and jowled head like a smaller pear on top. He was following the girl with so much skill that John Court would not have known it had he not been struck by the unctuous self-satisfaction of the man's face and seen by his fixed glance that the girl was the reason for it.

That smirk was so nasty that John Court in Hochhausen on an affair of international re-insurance, with no business to interfere, felt impelled by the fear and appeal of the girl's eyes to fall in behind. So the three of them, moving when the girl moved, pausing when she tried to sell her flowers, drifted toward the east side of the great square.

When they reached the shut-up Church of St. Casper, by the poor quarter, the girl got her first customer.

Most of the hurrying people had shown no desire to look at flowers in the snow. Now a muffled-up, oldish man paused as she thrust her basket at him; he hesitated, peered, and after some bickering, bought a bunch of primroses. That was odd, in a land where people thought a primrose was nothing but a weed.

ODDER things followed. The girl went on and the buyer of primroses followed her. He tried to behave as casually as the girl, but he advertised himself at every step. He was so badly scared. He kept darting frightened glances about him, yet was such a novice that he failed to see the pear-shaped expert behind him.

The girl was cleverer, yet even she gave herself away. Her pretense of accosting people was gradually abandoned, and when she turned out of the square in the direction of the river, she gave it up altogether and went slouching at an increasing pace into the poor quarter.

So the four of them plunged through streets growing narrower and dirtier, between houses older, taller, and more foreboding until, abruptly, the girl stepped aside into one of those deep arches that penetrate European buildings like caves in a cliff.

It led into an ill-lit cobbled yard from which a dozen doors gave admittance to the houses around. The girl went straight to a door on the left, the primrose buyer following on hesitant feet. The pear-shaped man paused under the last shadows of the entrance to watch while John Court crept just far enough under the long arch to see what happened.

The girl opened her door with a key and went inside. The primrose buyer had an attack of fright. He hesitated, looking wildly about as though fearing a trap, then with an effort, nerved himself up and approached the door. It opened at once to his touch.

The pear-shaped man waited several minutes after the door had shut, then sauntered across the cobbled yard, pretended to put a paper through the letter box of a far door and, as idly, sauntered back —but his sharp eyes took in everything. As he came, John Court, his eyes now accustomed to the gloom under the arch, sought cover.

He had no intention of mixing himself in any sort of trouble, he merely felt it due to the girl with American eyes, to warn her she had been followed; but here he reckoned without Pear-shape.

True he entirely overlooked the deep recess in which John Court hid, but instead of leaving when he reached the street, he halted. He stood for so long staring this way and that that John Court began to get nervous and upset. Presently he lifted an arm and beckoned, and a moment later a very big, and very stolid policeman joined him.

"IN HERE, quick," Pear-shape rapped out, and as the policeman began to bristle as all officials in this land did at any civilian affront to their dignity, the other snarled: "Jump to it—*you.* It is an order. I am Obertruppführer Stitz of the Iron Corps. See this? . . ."

He must have shown a badge for the big policeman was at once all cringing meekness.

"Who lives in number seven of this block?" Stitz went on.

"Number seven—*Herr Oberst?* Why, only Olga Braunter, the flower-seller."

"Alone? What do you know of her?"

"Alone, yes. I know her to nod to, and, of course, through the house supervision regulations. There is nothing against her. She is poor. She has valid papers from her village in the North . . ."

"Yes. Yes she would. But how long has she lived here?"

"Eight months, *Herr Oberst.* Lack of money drove—"

"Ha! Eight months!" Stitz said with gusto. "And you have noticed nothing questionable in those eight months?"

"Nothing. She has many men friends, but that is not unusual with a girl of this quarter . . ."

"What sort of men? Well-dressed?"

"All sorts—but yes, as you say, many well dressed. Yet that is—"

"And you have seen them come—and go? Regularly?"

"Yes, *Herr Oberst*—or, maybe, not so often leaving her. My beat is a long one and—"

"She would know the length of it as well as you." Stitz's voice was exultant. "What streets back onto her house?"

"The Zillethalgasse," the policeman was anxious. "But she cannot get out that way. A blank factory wall, twelve feet high it is and without door or break bars that way."

"So, this door here is her only exit? Be sure, it is important."

"There is no other way out. I am sure, *Herr Oberst,* have I not inspected her abode as regulations . . ."

"Good! Good!" Stitz was grimly satisfied. "Stand here then and watch her door like a bulldog. No one must leave—neither her nor her men friends. Understand? Fail, and heaven help you."

"I'll see to it, *Herr Oberst* . . . But—what is her crime?"

"Dangerous enemies of the State, plotters, rich men, Semites, 'Black Moles' (priests) and others have been escaping from the country by way of this town . . ."

"'The Non-Stop Service!'" gulped the policeman.

"So, even you have heard of it. But note, it has been going on for seven months, and you say this woman has been here eight. . . . Even you may see the connection."

"Impossible! She is only an ignorant country woman."

"Who, strangely, always sells primroses to those we have marked down just before they vanish from our grasp. She is clever, but I, Stitz, have watched her at it. She sold them to Sieber just now. He is in that house with her."

"The millionaire chemist!" gasped the policeman.

"Whose factory and millions we mean to sequester as soon as we are sure where he keeps his secret formulas— Yes, that one, no less. Guard him and that house well, *Wachtmeister,* I go now to telephone for men to surround and search the place."

HE WAS gone. The policeman moved to the edge of the courtyard and stared at the flower-seller's house with scared eyes. John Court knew why he was scared. He was himself.

Only last night an English insurance man had told him about this *Non-Stop Service.* It was the latest and cleverest of the escape organizations for helping those persecuted by the government to get across the frontier. It worked so brilliantly, had snatched so many of their choicest and richest victims from under the very noses of the police that whispers of its reputation had spread throughout the land.

The police were furious at their own

helplessness to check or even trace the organizers. They threatened the swiftest vengeance on anyone even remotely connected with the organization should he—or she—ever fall into their hands.

John Court, knowing all this, knew how dangerous it would be even to seem linked with the thing. The horrors of the third-degree, of beatings in concentration camps, of violent death, would be the lot of anyone suspected as much as Stitz suspected this girl.

He realized that the wisest thing would be to slip away while this policeman's back was turned; indeed it was his duty as the sober member of a reputable firm belonging to a foreign country.

He saw that quite clearly. Nevertheless he found himself strolling past the startled policeman into the courtyard. Foolhardy of him, yes, but being American, he could not forget the terror of the girl's eyes when he had spoken her own language . . .

He headed straight toward the last house and tried to seem offhand. The policeman scowled and hesitated. His orders were to stop anyone coming *out* of the girl's house, and he feared to depart from the letter of instructions. Only when John Court swerved abruptly to the girl's door and knocked, did he take a step forward: "What do you there?"

"Eh?" John Court pretended surprise. "But—only paying a little visit to my Olga."

That made the man hesitate again, and, hearing a click, John Court thought all was well. But he reckoned without the girl's need of caution. Not the door but a barred Judas hole opened at face level and clear gray eyes stared into his. Conscious of the policeman he said softly in English: "I want some snowdrops after all."

"The American," gasped an English voice.

"Remember I am—and listen. They're onto you—you and the man who is with you. They even know about the primroses. Get away at once."

"Primroses," she choked, "what do you mean?"

"If you don't know, I don't, but I'm telling you you were trailed here by a man named Stitz. I saw him and followed. He's collecting men now to raid your house, so hurry . . ."

"But you . . . How do you . . .?"

HE GROANED seeing too long an explanation ahead. But the policeman saved that. At the sound of English his suspicions quickened. At the name Stitz he went into action. Drawing a wicked rubber club he strode toward John Court, shouting: "Here you! Silence and turn about. You are arrested . . ." His hand also came down on John Court's shoulder in a savage grip.

It was the grip of that hand that made John Court forget he was a law-abiding citizen. Something he could not control rose within him, he wheeled like a flash, his left fist chopping at the man's jaw. The policeman rocked on his heels and John Court prepared to run.

But if stolid in mind the policeman was quick in action. Even as he staggered his rubber truncheon slashed and John Court took a crack on the head that, but for his hat, would have knocked him cold. As it was he fetched up with a crash against the door and the policeman stepped forward to finish him.

As the club swung the door gave way behind. He felt the whistle of air from the club as he fell on his back. Then, before the policeman could recover, a heavy basket full of violets caught him in the belly and while he staggered hands plucked John Court inside and the door was slammed.

A moment later John Court found himself looking up into the face not of a blowsy woman, but of quite the loveliest girl he had ever seen, and she was asking if he were hurt.

"Not so bad." He managed to smile. "Thank heaven for derbies."

"If you can talk," she said crisply, "tell me what happened."

John Court felt it almost a pleasure to lie there looking up at a face so attractive, but he managed to give her a quick sketch of what had happened. She listened steadily, and if she was afraid she hid it well.

"Thank you," she said at the end. "You've done me a very great service, but"—her eyes twinkled—"you must have hated to mix yourself in this."

"Most unprofessional—but aren't we *all* rather unexpected?" He smiled pointedly at the very smart tweed walking suit she now wore. "Yet will even that save the flower girl?"

"It'll help." She smiled back. "Can you walk now?"

"Yes! Yes!" a shaky voice from the front door cried in broken English. "It is time we used your way through the cellars, Miss Harven. Men have come into the courtyard. Men of the Iron Corps."

THERE was so much fear in the voice that John Court turned to stare as he got to his feet. He saw the man who had bought the primroses, Sieber, the magnate. The light of the Judas hole through which he looked, shone on a face as handsome and dignified as an ancient prophet's; but it was not only pallid but working with terror.

"Yes, Herr Sieber," the girl said calmly. "We start now. Come—Mr. Mr. . . .?"

"Court. John Court. But wait a minute. Does your way through the cellars lead into the Zillethalgasse?" The girl nodded. "I was afraid so. Stitz has thought of that. He'll have men there."

Sieber wailed with a strange abandon and collapsed nervelessly into a chair.

"It is no good!" he cried through chattering teeth. "We are caught like rats in a trap. It is folly to attempt escape—it will give them extra excuse for brutality. I know them. Better if I open the door . . ."

"Pull yourself together," John Court snapped, sickened by the cowardice of the man no less than anxiety for the girl. "Being afraid only makes things worse. We all are . . ."

"Oh, yes . . . I am sick with fear." He smiled wanly at John yet with a strange dignity. "Only you mistake me, sir. I was trying to say that if I remain here to confront them, even to parley with them through this peephole, I might delay them long enough for this young lady and you to get away. I'm sure Miss Harven has many resources—and there is no reason why you should suffer, since I, alone, am the one they seek."

John Court could only blink at a courage that could rise so startlingly above such a fear. Miss Harven laughed softly: "No need for any to stay, Herr Seiber," she said. "There is a way by the roofs. Come quickly."

"But can I reach them?" Herr Sieber said with a wry dolefulness, finding it hard to stand on his shaking legs. "This craven flesh—it simply paralyzes me."

"I wish I were half so good a coward." John Court laughed. "But anyhow, I'm strong enough to help."

He hooked his arm round the old man and they climbed up through all the floors of the tall, dark house. They went rapidly, for though John Court had to half carry Herr Sieber, his body was frail and light. Nevertheless they heard the hammering of the Iron Corps on the street door as they reached the attic.

"Is there really a way?" John Court asked, as, producing a flashlight, the girl revealed the featureless and windowless loft. "That policeman swore he examined the place and found none."

"The better for us," the girl said and, dropping to her knees where roof beams and slates came down to the floor, she worked with her hands. A moment later they saw the gleam of snow as a section of the slates swung back.

SCRAMBLING through they found themselves in a valley between two steep-pitched roofs. As the girl pushed the slates back in place they heard, between gusts of wind, crashes and splinterings from below.

"They're using axes," the girl said. "Thank goodness you warned us in time,

Mr. Court, and we had this way of escape."

John Court wasn't so sure of that. He feared the snow would give them away—the snow which had dropped from the roof to the attic floor as the girl opened the slates. Their footprints in the snow would make a regular trail, too. Yet it was no time to worry over such things. This was plainly their only chance.

They shuffled along between the roofs, turned right through a similar valley across the end of the block, and, by making use of the steep corbie steps of an inner wall, climbed over a roof ridge into a valley on the further side.

They were striking riverward, but were soon so entangled in a maze of roofs, gables, parapets and dormers, that they seemed utterly lost. Yet the girl, following a route arranged long ago, went forward calmly enough.

John Court was anything but calm. For him every step was frightful. Heights made him desperately sick, and these were worse than any he had met—black, yawning, fearsome and hellish with the wind and blinding snow.

As they had climbed the corbie steps the wind had seemed to leap at him over the ridge, clawing at his body like a wild beast, whipping snow into his eyes and face to loosen his grip as it tried to tear him off the slippery bricks.

The threat of falling into the roof valleys had been bad enough, but when a turn of their way brought them to a broad outer gutter, poised over a black and terrible void, with no more than a shin-high parapet as guard, his nerve reached breaking point.

The wind whirled and plucked at him, the snow bewildered him, the sickening nausea of the drop robbed him of all self control. He knew that one slip on the icy surface beneath his feet would pitch him spinning into that sheer, black abyss . . . And because he knew it, he slipped. Fear acts that way. . . .

Unnerved he took too wide a step, stubbed his foot against the parapet, his heel slid from under him, he began to fall.

He knew he was lost and must have shouted, for Herr Sieber turned about and in a way that seemed utterly reckless, flung himself at Court's falling body, bearing it back against the slope of the roof.

"Sorry to be such a fool," John Court panted. "Heights play the devil with me—I don't think I can go on."

"Can we help such things, my friend?" Herr Sieber said. "It is the way our bodies are made—only you should have told me. See, stand up now, but take hold of my coat. Shuffle forward rather than stride, and keep your eyes fixed only on my shoulder. That and the contact will make you feel safer."

He must have felt John Court's puzzlement, for he said:

"Strange creatures, aren't we? Down there my body was water at the thought of physical blows from men you had no fear of facing. But up here—I am as brave as lions, simply because heights do not affect me."

As he grasped Herr Sieber's coat John Court realized that bravery is but a matter of chance and circumstance after all—though that was not going to help him much—for worse calls were to be made upon him. And soon.

IN THE wind and whirling snow the girl had not noticed his plight and had gone straight ahead. She had done it so quickly that, at the crucial point of their rooftop flight, they might have lost her, had she not left a deep trail between roofs where the wind had piled an unusual thickness of snow. As it was she had not only had to wait but had begun to retrace her steps as they came up.

"This is the one dangerous bit," she cried, pointing to the parapet that barred their path. "Dangerous, yet because of that it makes things safer for us. There is a narrow alley between this house and the riverside warehouse ahead. It makes a gap of about four feet."

"What! We've got to cross that at *this* height?" John Court groaned.

"Yes, there's no way down from these roofs for hundreds of yards, and even then we'd be a long way round from the river. That's why we'll be really safe, once we're over that gap."

"But—but how *can* we cross?" John Court gasped as he peered ahead. "That warehouse is nothing but sheer wall and it goes up ten feet higher than us. We can't possibly get over and up."

"We can. Everything has been thought out. A strong cord runs between the houses. By pulling on it we bring down the end of a rope ladder. There are hooks on both parapets to hold it safe. And it's quite strong, for it is made of special mountaineering rope. It's only a matter of keeping your head on the part that sags over the alley."

John Court's knees seemed to give under him as she spoke. He saw himself trying to negotiate that sag over the alley. Even then he could feel the gap yawning black and terrifying, like a bottomless fissure, feel his nerveless hands clinging to those frail, icy cords that would sway and twist in this horrible wind . . . feel the snow dazing and numbing him. He said hoarsely:

"I can't do it. It is utterly beyond me."

"You must," the girl cried in surprise at hearing the objection come from him and not Herr Sieber. "It's our only chance."

"Will it bear two?" Sieber asked quickly. "Yes . . . Then I will come behind you, Herr Court—hold you on. It will be all right, a matter of moments only."

"I daren't. I'd lose my head, let go. Then both of us—" began John Court, and stopped. The girl and Sieber were abruptly lit by harsh, white light. They heard a shout from the man behind the torch.

JOHN COURT had been right in fearing that the snow would betray their escape; several men had just turned into the roof valley behind and were floundering toward them, shouting in ugly triumph. And yet it was almost a relief. Court cried:

"Over that ladder both of you. I'll hold 'em. Sharp now—it's the best way out after all."

He didn't wait for protest but dashed back along the gutter between the roofs, crouching, scooping up snow, swinging his arms like a windmill. He was almost elated. Miss Harven would see he wasn't *all* yellow.

A man shouted and the torch went out. A moment later there was the blaze of a pistol shot and a bullet went screeching over. John Court answered it promptly—with a snowball.

An absurd weapon, yet snow packed tight and then swung through the air windmill-quick, becomes as hard as stone. The leading man felt it so, anyhow. He must have got it in the face, for he let out quite a screech as he flopped spread-eagled against the snow-packed slates. He even yelled that Court was throwing bombs.

The rest of the men scuttled back to the turn of the roofs and waited for the explosion—that gave the girl time to pull down and fix the ladder. When no explosion came, the men seemed to grasp what really had happened and came on again.

They fired over the first man still crouching against the roof in fear of his life. But Court had gathered several hard balls into the crook of his elbow and he let fly, so thoroughly flurrying their aim that the shooting stopped.

The man on the roof sprang up again and dived straight at Court, but John was ready for him, he punched out quick and straight as he flung forward, and the man went down again and stayed down.

Then another, towering against the snow, thrust his way forward crying out to the others to leave this to him. They had to, in fact, or shoot him in the back. One of them, did scramble up the snow-heavy slates and click on a torch to light the field of battle.

Court tried to stop this new assailant with punches, but he was too big. He flung himself onto John and both hit the slates with a crash.

John scrabbled up a handful of snow

and rammed it against the man's face; he spluttered and backed, and John got free.

But the other was a bear. He closed again, grabbing and flailing with knees as well as arms—there seemed too many cudgels of bone striking John to be just one pair of fists.

For a mad minute or two they fought and wrestled and slugged; slithering on the icy surface, bumping now the steep roof to the left, now that to the right, and bouncing back to fight again. It was a wild, threshing flurry of battle, and quite early Court knew that he hadn't a chance on such terms.

The man was stronger than smart, and he knew it. His one idea was to get a good grip and squeeze the fight out of Court. He bored in solely with this aim, ignoring body punches, and gouging wildly. John knew that by sheer weight and muscle the other would murder him; but at the same time such obvious tactics might give Court a chance.

The other's one aim was to get John at close quarters—so John went close. So close that he was able to slip his toe well behind the man's heel. So close that the man whooped with joy and flung out his arms for the crushing grab.

And at that moment John drove with every ounce at the chin—and toe and blow did the trick. The chap went over with so resounding a crash on the slates that they seemed to splinter under him.

JOHN crouched in the torchlight expecting a fusillade of shots. Instead he heard yells and, high above them, Sieber crying, "Back, Herr Court. Jump . . ."

He jumped more by instinct than anything, and as he did a wave of snow swept by him, the fringe of it striking him and filling eyes, ears and nose with its clammy powder. Only as he jumped back did he grasp what had happened, for, instead of a roof thick with snow he saw only a steep slope of black slates to the left. The fighting had so shaken the roof at this point that the snow had broken loose and come down in a small avalanche.

Not only that, the thud loosened the snow from the roof on the right. A moment later it surged down in a giant wave onto the mass already in the gutter, so that in a flash the valley between the roofs was piled head high with snow.

Through the eddying particles John saw shapes floundering and fighting to get clear of the white mass. But already somebody had gripped him from behind, was dragging him back. He felt ropes under each hand, saw rungs. Automatically reacting to the shouting in his ear he began, frantically, to climb.

He didn't have time to think of the black drop beneath, or the swaying of that spidery ladder in the gusts. Excitement obliterated all other sensations, for a voice was shouting and shouting from the body pressed against his as he mounted: "Quick! Quick! Quick! They'll catch us . . . Hurry . . ."

Before he realized it the girl's hands were under his shoulders, pulling him over the parapet while Herr Sieber half-lifted him from behind. Then he was sprawling in the gutter beyond, watching Sieber snatching a knife from the girl's hands and cutting the ropes of the ladder with sure, quick strokes.

"All right . . . nobody hurt," Sieber cried as John Court stumbled to his feet. "They are only just free from their snow-bath. But some seem going back—Miss Harven—Miss Harven, will they be waiting for us . . .?"

Once again the voice that had been so steady on the roofs, broke into frightened quavering at the dread of human brutality waiting for them below. A strange change, but John Court who had broken down before heights now understood. The girl had understood all the time it seemed for her voice came calmly:

"It's all right. We'll be well away before they can get down or round to this warehouse—or even telephone . . . Come."

Down a short roof valley they ran, onto a wide leaded flat where a hooded door stood up in the middle. She had the key that opened that. She had keys for all

doors. *The Non-Stop Service* deserved its reputation for thoroughness.

Down through floor after floor of what seemed a deserted building they ran: down through even the ground floor. Reaching the cellars they crossed to a door that let in the sound of moving water even before the girl unlocked it. Beyond, almost level with the sill was the swift-flowing river. Above them was the floor of a wharf, the piers of which concealed them from the stream beyond.

Again everything had been thought out. The girl pulled on a rope and a skiff floated into view. They got in after locking the door and let the current carry them silently down stream.

Now, for the first time in an eternity, John Court could take a full, long breath.

FOR a long way their course was beneath the wharves, for, as on the roofs, the girl was able to thread her way through what seemed a forest of piers and narrow openings even in the dark; until, having gone at least a third of a mile, they crept out under a high bushy bank with the town of Hochhausen behind them.

They remained quiet in the boat until they drifted round a bend, when the girl bade them get out their oars. They pulled down stream for an hour. John Court asked:

"Are we to row all the way to the frontier? It must be a full five miles away. And, even then, they'll be on the watch for a small boat like this."

"You can stop rowing then," she said, and he thought he heard a laugh in her voice; and as she steered them close to the bank, "Will you pass this flask to Herr Sieber—and these sandwiches?"

"You think of everything," Court said after he and Herr Sieber had drunk the reviving liquor and begun to eat.

"Yes, even to timing," she answered, and now her voice was exultant. "Here comes our way through the frontier."

Distantly, coming after them, Court saw the lights of a vessel moving on the river; heard the thudding of a motor. "You're sure?" he asked anxiously.

"By time-schedule—and the arrangement of her lights," she laughed. "She's an ordinary motor barge—from a neutral port. She was searched and cleared this afternoon, in readiness to take Herr Sieber. She's unlikely to be searched again by the frontier guard—but even if she is we'll be safe, though I fear you must leave your luggage and good reputation behind for good, Mr. Court."

"I will make that good," Herr Sieber said quietly.

"Thank you." Court laughed. "But I don't think it will hurt me professionally —and you've made me feel proud to do what I've done Miss . . . but haven't you another name before Harven?"

"Elizabeth," she said. "I'm glad you are glad, John Court. I owe you much. Stitz and his Iron Corps would have been very—ugly."

The barge came on. It was a vessel with a glass shed over the tiller—a river-barge. The girl flashed her torch in a signal and they rowed alongside. A rope was thrown, a ladder. Without slackening speed they clambered aboard.

A man with no more than a word to Elizabeth Harven left the deck of the barge for their boat, cast off and began to row it back to Hochhausen. Not even the detail of a missing skiff was neglected.

Beside the stoic man at the tiller there was only one other on deck. Without a word he led them down into the very bowels of the barge, through a tunnel cunningly left in the cargo, until they reached a small chamber beautifully concealed by a false bulkhead.

"I'm afraid I'll have to join you in here," the girl said softly.

"I was afraid you wouldn't, Elizabeth," John Court said, and his hand closed over hers as the door shut them in. So they sat in darkness, until a knocking on the bulkhead told them they had crossed the frontier into freedom.

In that nightmare scene Shepherd struggled with the cripple

Remember Tomorrow

By THEODORE ROSCOE

STRANGE legends surround the Château de Feu, that crumbling monument standing in the Red Zone, where the fighting had been bloodiest during the Battle of the Somme. Here in this war-torn valley, the natives whisper, the buried soldiers cannot sleep at night; they must arise from beneath their poppies to battle ceaselessly. Peasants have been killed mysteriously in the Forêt de Feu, shot, mangled by hand grenades—victims of an army of ghosts?

BILL SHEPHERD cannot believe this, yet he himself has found a dead peasant, strangled, apparently, by a German war gas. When Bill first arrives at the *château* he has inherited, old Madame Landru, the caretaker, cries out, "The undead have returned!"—mistaking him for his brother who died in the *château* during the Somme battle. By queer chance a group collects at the *château,* refugees from a storm—an Englishman, a German, an Italian doctor, a Russian professor, a French girl and a French bus driver. Madame Landru mumbles, "Once more they invade the *château.*" And Shepherd finds himself wondering crazily whether they are the living or the dead.

Then when he has managed to convince himself that all this talk of the undead is rank superstition, organ music rolls suddenly through the *château.* Strains of *The Watch on the Rhine,* of the *Marseillaise,* of the Italian national anthem, of *God Save the King!* A strange broadcast, the group thinks—and then the terrified caretaker tells them that there is no radio in the Château de Feu. . . .

This story began in the Argosy for September 16

CHAPTER XXIII

VIGIL LIGHT

THEY stared at Madam Landru in a pall of silence. The hush that had enveloped the *château* after that last booming pæan of pipe-organ music was ghastly. Thunder rumbling over the broken roofs only emphasized the inner stillness.

Then Bill Shepherd said hoarsely: "You say that wasn't a radio in your rooms back there? There's no radio in the place?"

"Jove, Shepherd!" Fielding added. "They wouldn't broadcast that Russian national anthem, anyway!"

"There is no radio," Madame Landru droned. "That organ you heard, *messieurs,* is here in the *château."*

Archambaud made a clutch at his wife's elbow. "Name of God!" he said hoarsely. "The organ in the chapel!" He broke off, choking. His eyes were bulging with fear under the salty sheaf of his forelock; his dobbin's face was lead gray.

Madame Landru was nodding, staring straight ahead of her in a trance of mystery. *"Oui,* that was the organ in the chapel. The chapel that we have not entered in twenty-three years. The organ that we have not heard since 1916."

"But who was playing it just now?" Bill Shepherd cried. "Where is this chapel, old woman! Who put on that organ concert?" It couldn't have been the wind, or the dog. Or remote control from anyone in the room, or an illusion on his hearing—these others had heard it, too. "Where is it, and who was playing on it—*you?"*

"Not I! The chapel is at the far end of the ruined wing—on the ground floor. I was in the kitchen with Archambaud. Did you think he or I could play music on a pipe-organ? *Non,* that was an instrument for a master—an organ your father had installed from an ancient monastery. The last time I heard it played was when a German general was here."

"He had been a musician at Salzburg," Archambaud whispered. "I remember! *Sacré Bleu!* he was drunk and went to the chapel to play a military march. He was killed on the organ-bench by a sniper who spied him from the forest."

"Perhaps it was he we heard just now," Madame Landru droned. "Returned from the past to finish his interrupted concert. One of the un-dead dead who roam the Forêt de Feu. One of the Forgotten of God!"

Bill Shepherd couldn't take that. Not after the puzzles of midnight had been solved so patly. This was no time for the ghosts to come back; he couldn't let his reason go once more askew. There was an answer to this organ music as there'd been an answer to everything else. A jar couldn't start a pipe-organ as it had started a long-silenced clock: someone had entered the chapel and deliberately played the thing—someone flesh and blood, with human hands.

The little group by the fireplace were looking at him in dumbfoundment; Bill Shepherd walked to the big table and, firm-handed, picked up a lamp. He was in no mood for any more spectral visitations and mediumistic capers.

"Archambaud! Get going! You're taking me to the chapel!"

The horse-faced caretaker was having difficulty with his legs. His knees had contracted the ague, and he seemed afraid to let go of his wife's support for fear of falling down.

Bill Shepherd snapped, "You too, Madame Landru! Quit the act! Somebody played that organ, and it wasn't any spook. We're going to end these stunts around here right now."

He had hoped, even expected, that the crazy old woman might own up to having started a Victrola—that she would explain how some loud-speaker attachment, or amplifiers installed in the château during the War, had magnified the sound. Or the insane creature had sneaked to the chapel and played the organ, herself—a madcap lunacy inspired by the haunts in her brain.

Instead, staring like a somnambulist, she freed herself of her husband's clutch and paddled off down the kitchen passage. They followed her in an uneasy party, in-

stinctively bunched together, Bill Shepherd shoving the reluctant Archambaud in front of him, the others bringing such lamps and candles as they could lay their hands on.

HALFWAY down the passage, the old woman opened a door—Bill Shepherd had not noticed it there—and led them into the windy glooms of the great main hall. There were exclamations from the others who had not seen this vast chamber before, muted murmurs of surprise at the shadow-veiled scene of old destruction.

Bill Shepherd hurried the old woman with a word, and they crossed the trash-littered floor, skirted the broken staircase where the suit of armor stood in its somber solitude, and passed through a portal under the sagging mezzanine.

There was a long, empty corridor where the cobwebs hung like Spanish moss and their footsteps sank in carpets of stale dust. In sharp suspicion, seeing no tracks in this gray sediment, Bill Shepherd wondered if the woozy-eyed old slattern was purposely taking them the long way around. The *château* was as complicated with corridors, passages and halls as a rabbit warren. They took a side passage, and hurried through rooms as bare and fusty as abandoned catacombs. Conceivably, if she were trying to scare them, Madame Landru would lead them on this tour. Again she was mumbling about the phantoms of the forest who left no visible track.

"Phantoms hell!" Bill Shepherd thought, angering. Hallowe'en was over. The only phantoms in this wretched manse were the lady with the goitre and her imbecilic husband. Undoubtedly there was a direct connecting passage between this chapel and the kitchen, and the tracks would be Archambaud's wooden shoes or the old woman's cat-footed slippers.

"The chapel," her voice droned back. "There it is. That door ahead."

The party jolted to a halt in the narrow corridor. The doorway ahead was dimly seen as a Gothic arch framing a church-like interior, the chancel rail of a shrine visible in a blue dimness such as might have been cast through a stained-glass window. Bill Shepherd saw this blue shine came from the altar of the shrine. The subdued blue haze was crepuscular.

Archambaud gasped, "Somebody has lit a vigil light. There has not been a candle in that shrine since your father visited the *château* before the War—*Sacré Dieu!*"

Bill Shepherd thought it was a nice effect. Whoever was staging this flummery knew the tricks of theatrical lighting. He wasn't fooled. He'd been behind the scenery tonight; this setup was an anticlimax.

He snapped, "No you don't, Madame Landru. I'll go first!" Elbowing her aside as she started forward. He didn't want to give her a chance to stir up the dust with her skirts or whisk away any betraying sign. Advancing to the dim-lit door with swift, unhesitating strides, he thrust the lamp through the shadowy portal and stepped across the threshhold.

Then he stood quite still.

The others came up behind him; the whole party jelled.

In the hush of blue dimness, the chapel interior was as empty, as still, as a crypt. The little vigil light on the altar burned steadily in its cup of blue glass, lighting the empty niche above it. The saints were gone; the chapel was bare of furnishing; only slivers of glass remained in the casement of the Gothic window which was boarded over. But the organ was there, dominating the backwall with its wing-spread of pipes, like a creature of fantasy enthroned there in the shadows, the arms of its mahogany console on its knees, its tiers of yellow teeth dully gleaming, its pinions reaching to the ceiling. It was draped with cobwebs, and ghostly. Gilt had peeled on the pipes; the woodwork was tarnished; mice had nested in the music rack; the organ-stops and keys had warped crookedly.

But someone had been on the organ-bench playing. Someone who had torn the gauze of cobweb from the manuals, swept the thick gray dust from the keys, kicked

the rat's nest out of the foot bellows. Someone who had left a track!

There was a door at the back of the chapel. The track came in, went to the shrine at the sidewall, then to the organ console, then out through the door the way it had come. It was plainly stamped in the heavy carpet of dust. To Bill Shepherd it was worse than if there had been no track at all. It was a very clear footprint. Made by a left shoe!

"The man who played that organ had only one leg!"

The cry had barely blurted from his lips when from the room overhead there came a muffled crash. The ceiling trembled, and some flakes of plaster came down. There was a dragging sound, and then—all in the chapel heard it—the sound of someone moving off, *stamp, stamp, stamp.*

CHAPTER XXIV

SKELETONS, ATTENTION

FACES at the chapel's threshhold were blue-complected in the light. Aghast, they listened to that one-legged stamper go crutching away.

Gabrielle Gervais sobbed, "Who's that?"

One of the men behind her groaned, "The organist!"

Madame Landru droned, "The Forgotten of God! The Forgotten of God!"

Distant in the kitchen, the dog began to howl. Bill Shepherd spun about, snarling. "Keep your shirts on! This is a trick! Someone's trying to scare me out of here, and I won't scare! Madame Landru knows who it is!"

Madame Landru made the sign of the cross on her goitre. "I do know, *c'est ça!* On my faith! As God is my witness, I have seen this maimed spirit in the forest. It is one of those killed in the Battle of the Somme. One of the dead who—"

Bill Shepherd cut her off furiously, "He's making for the east wing! Don't let him get away! I'll take this back passageway. The rest of you get back to the main hall. Fielding! Take Putinov, and head him off at the marble staircase!"

But Fielding and the Russian had already gone. The Italian doctor, Herr Kull and Marcel Tac were retreating with Archambaud down the corridor. Bill Shepherd, racing for the little door at the chapel's rear, found Gabrielle Gervais at his side.

"Go back! Stay with the crowd!"

"Non! I'm coming with you!"

They left Madame Landru, grimalkin-eyed, in a swirl of dust. Charging through the chapel's back exit, Bill Shepherd saw a short hallway, steps ascending into darkness at its end. A one-footed track went up the steps. He swerved, handing the girl the oil lamp.

"Keep behind me! Mind your footing! There'll be holes in the floors and all sorts of rubbish up there. That fellow may be armed."

He paused to snatch up a big spindle of wood, a bannister spindle smashed out of the stair-rail. Hefting this adequate club, he mounted the narrow staircase three steps at a time, halting at the top to cough his lungs free of dust, wipe spiderweb from his eyes and wait for the lamp. A girl in this damned hide-and-seek was a nuisance. He didn't want her with him; couldn't leave her behind. Whatever was the motive of this organ-playing stunt, it was something more than a practical joke—someone nuts or up to skulduggery—and this four-story ruin was a dangerous place to play hare and hounds.

"Watch out for the flooring, and stick close," he advised snappishly. "I don't mind telling you, if I get my hands on this organist there may be a scrap."

She murmured, "Please be careful."

He grunted, gripping the bannister spindle. Someone ought to get their head knocked off for trying to scare a lot of storm-marooned people at half-past three A.M. He'd been through too much hazing tonight to take this organ-playing stunt in good humor.

"There's the track. Looks like he stumbled over that heap of plaster and fell down here. Must've been up here listening when we rushed into the chapel. Come on!"

The lamplight wavered on ahead of

them, showing the way. The one-footed track went through a series of empty bed chambers, out into a rubbish-heaped hall, then hopped up a flight of broken stairs to the third floor. Bill Shepherd had hoped it would go down instead of up. Voices were calling, feet were running somewhere on the floor below in the direction of the main hall, a faint hue and cry in the *château's* catacombed stillness. Bill Shepherd saw where the one-legged man had circled back, frightened by the chase below, stopped to judge the location of his pursuers, then gone up the stairs hippity-hop.

Motioning to the girl, Bill Shepherd mounted into the third-floor darkness. In the blackness at the stair-top, he listened. *Stamp, stamp, stamp.* There is was fading off in the dark to the right, a number of rooms away—the hump-thump of a man on crutches—a sound immortalized for nightmare terrors by Robert Louis Stevenson's grisly Long John Silver. Bill Shepherd's calloused nerves were not shaken by it now.

He shouted down the stairwell, "Hey, Fielding! Up here, everybody! He's up here on the third floor!"

THE faint stamping sounds quickened in flight. Seizing Gabrielle Gervais by the wrist, Bill Shepherd yanked her after him, raced down the wreckage-strewn corridor in hot pursuit. Through the rooms where the ceilings had fallen and the walls were shot full of holes. Around the trash piles of smashed furniture. In and out through the heaps of tile and débris and bathroom fixtures and uprooted plumbing and crashed chandeliers.

It seemed a long time ago he had passed through these ruins, pursuing the howls of Theophile, the dog. He had been unnerved by them then; he wasn't afraid now.

He snapped at the girl, "Steady that lamp! Don't be afraid here! This floor's all right! I've been over it before!"

Whoever that bird on crutches was, he was moving fast and knew this flooring, too. The one-legged footprints were spaced about four feet apart. You could see interjected marks where the ferrules of the crutches had dug in. The crutches avoided pitfalls, and the footprint hopped nimbly over gaps in the floor. The one-legged man knew the *château.*

If he was a man with one leg. Bill Shepherd didn't voice this thought to the girl. He'd been tricked once too many tonight, and he wasn't going to fall again. The idea could be quicker than the eye. He wouldn't lose his innate agnosticism this time. Things were not what they sometimes seemed. He had written a murder story one time about a killer who left crutch-prints and the track of a single shoe. Scotland Yard and the readers had been baffled. But the killer had had his right leg hitched up under his greatcoat, and when he got back to Limehouse he threw away the crutches and walked off like any biped.

"If I nail him," Bill Shepherd panted, "duck, and yell your head off."

Gabrielle Gervais whispered breathlessly, "Who can it be?"

Bill Shepherd didn't bother with that. Time to wonder at the showdown. He had his own ideas about some of this night's hocus-pocus now. This organ-playing was too stagy. Madame Landru's jitters too jittery. And another angle—before that organ-blast, everyone by the fire had made a brief exit, at one time or another, from the room. Easy enough to meet someone who might be waiting for you in the passage. Who? Bill Shepherd, wanting to find out, towed the girl so swiftly that she stumbled. Luckily he caught the oil lamp. As he ran on, he was certain of one thing. The fellow ahead of them wasn't any wraith.

They could hear the footstep pounding up a stair.

Bill Shepherd set his jaw. That top floor was a hazardous place. He told the girl, "He's trying to reach that stairway at the end of the wing. The one that goes down to that tunnel Fielding and Arnoldo discovered—the tunnel under the forest!"

"Mon Dieu," the girl gasped.

"We've got to stop him. I don't want to mix it under there!"

They raced past the room where the great black arm of a tree reached in through the window; Bill Shepherd fairly yanked the girl's arm loose on the stair-flight. The track hopped off through the maze of the shell-smashed mansards, and Bill Shepherd had to follow more slowly for these undermined attics were as perilous as scaffolding. Rain swept in through great gaps in the roof, turning the plaster-mounds to slippery cement and threatening the lamp. A boom of thunder brought down a shower of slates. The girl stifled a cry of fear, dodging the slates and trying to shelter the hissing lamp-chimney with her elbow.

Bill Shepherd muttered, "You shouldn't have come."

"Non, non." She shook her head. "I was afraid for the light. Are you going on? Then I am with you."

He found a second to privately admire her gameness. Her lips were white, and her eyes were scared to death, but she didn't hang back. They clawed through the jungles of fallen roof timber, climbed the bricks of shattered gables and wormed between the pyramids of broken lumber where the foot track hippity-hopped. They came out into an enclosed attic-like room full of night and wind, a quarter of the mansard where the roof and gables had held and the floor remained secure.

Bill Shepherd did not remember this end of the wing. The brick facings of a great, flat chimney squared up in the center of the chamber; in the darkness under the eaves beyond he could see nothing. He could see no footprint crossing the floor. He signaled the girl to listen. Only the downpour of the rain; gusts of wind. No other sound.

Bill Shepherd hunted the floor with uneasy eyes. Loss of tracks and the dark-eaved silence warned him of ambush. He gripped the heavy spindle in his fist, calling, "Come on out of there! I know you're back there!" peering at the darkness under corner eaves.

He said from the side of his mouth to the girl, "He's pulled himself under the eaves somewhere, careful to hide his footprint." Squeezing her arm with his left hand, he edged her into the room, watching the corners, vigilant, wary. Under his breath, "When we get there, stand with your back against that chimney. Keep the lamp high. If he makes a dash from any corner, I'll get him. I'm going to scout there at the back."

He placed her against the chimney bricks; stepped away from her, ready to spring. What was that sound? Somewhere, barely audible on his hearing, there was in the room a queer, asthmatic whistling, as of someone wheezing through clenched teeth. He had not heard it at first. Now, as his hearing sharpened, it became more apparent. It wasn't like human breathing. More like the thin, elfin *wheee* of a whistle on a peanut wagon.

A quick-moving floor-shadow warned him. Head down, he spun.

Only in time to see the handle of a crutch as it lashed out from behind the brick chimney, shattered the oil lamp in the girl's upraised hand and smashed the attic into pitch darkness.

"DUCK! Duck!" he cried at the girl. He sprang at the chimney blindly in the dark. The girl's stifled scream was smothered under a sound of scuffling. The queer wry whistling loudened in Bill Shepherd's ears. He was afraid to strike out for fear of hitting the girl; couldn't seem to locate her in the blackness.

He never quite knew what happened. Something cracked against his forehead like a flying broomstick; flung backward by the blow, he lost balance, sprawled under the eaves. Sounds faded, and he lay stunned. Through a haze of numbness he sensed a fierce struggle going on in the dark; tried to shout to the girl to run. The queerish whistling added to the confusion of his dazed senses; then he thought he could hear a voice in guttural German, a low sob from the girl, the sound of her dragging feet and the muffled one-legged

stamp of the unseen assailant departing from the room.

He strove three times to reach his feet before he accomplished his balance. He knew they were running, and he groped across the floor in drunken pursuit. Somehow his hands remembered his pocket lighter and he lit the small flare and stumbled around the chimney toward a corridor of shadows at the back.

Then, without realizing how he had come there, he discovered himself in the chamber under the tower. Footsteps seemed to be fading overhead. Elevating the tiny light, he made out the back wall where Fielding had seen the bat. The sealed wall had been broken through. Large chunks of plaster were scattered before the aperture which looked as if it had been breached by a pick-ax. Dust rolled smokily from this yawning portal and the light gleams picked out an inner stair.

Shepherd had no time for astonishment. Lowering his shoulders he charged into the tower; went up the stairway in headlong chase after the sounds of climbing feet and the eerie thump of crutches. His head was clearing; the pain of the blow sharpened his senses. Rage at this antagonist who had struck him from the dark had burned through the first shock of fear; he wanted only to get his hands on the man and rescue the girl.

Sounds on the stairway above him had quit. With no thought of caution for himself, he charged up at the waiting darkness. Stumbling across the last step he sprawled on the stone floor. He picked himself up, panting, grabbing blindly into the blackness. He was at the top of the tower, he knew. The air was stale and smelled of bats. Then green lightning flooded through a barred window; he saw himself in a circular stone-walled room. The room was empty!

Thunder seemed to be crashing about his head. Lightning flared again into his face. He rushed to the window, gripped the mossy sill, thrust his head through the rusty bars and looked down. A bright play of aerial electricity revealed a sheer fifty-foot drop to the ground below, no handholds where a climber might have descended. The he saw something else.

In the forest below a file of small figures were running. He made out the Russian, Putinov, the little bus driver, Doctor Arnoldo and Fielding.

He shouted, "Help! Fielding! Up here! Up here in the tower!"

Fielding looked up once, then dived into the trees after the others. Thunder blacked out that momentary glimpse, and whether the Englishman heard him or whether his cry was drowned in the rain, Bill Shepherd could not tell. He turned and glared about the tower room, cupping the lighter in his palms, straining to see by the futile gleam.

No door apparent save the one at the stair-top. The single window barred. The dust-carpet on the floor had been swirled by hurrying feet; gave no clue to the egress of his assailant and the abducted girl. Where could they have gone? They might have been absorbed by the shadows swimming under the high conical ceiling.

Peering up, he stumbled over something sodden, heavy. A body—! No, a canvas bag. A soldier's kitbag left there in the spider-webbing and dust. He bent with the lighter. The bag was weather-beaten, stained; some infantryman of 1916 might have stowed his duffle up here for safe keeping. Initials dimly printed on the canvas. *S.H.* Or—he tensened in a crouch—reading upside-down, *H.S.* He exhaled, "Hugh's—?" But there was no time to speculate over an old canvas bag.

HE BEGAN to explore the walls. His groping hand tore loose curtains of cobweb; encountered a nest of wires. A dusty switchboard! A shelf of electrical apparatus and dead batteries! The tangle of forgotten wireless equipment? This long-sealed turret had once been a wireless station? He had no opportunity to wonder.

Clawing through the snarl of lifeless wires, his fingers must have touched some hidden mechanism; to his astonishment the switchboard on the wall swung inward, and, losing balance, he was nearly pre-

cipitated down a black ladder of stairs. A secret exit!

Without pausing, he stepped through the trap, started in pitch darkness down a circular stair flight secreted in the tower wall. Where could it lead? The *château* seemed as honyecombed with escapes as the Tower of London.

In black ambush below, that organist might be waiting. A broken step might plunge him three stories down to the ground. But Bill Shepherd rushed on down through the darkness, unhesitating.

He fell the last dozen steps, tumbling, caroming off unseen walls, landing in a smothery cloud of soot at the botton. A dungeon? A wine-cellar? He glared into blackness, cursing silently, clenching empty hands. Loss of his cigarette-lighter was a disaster that he had no time to repair. In his precipitant descent, he had gained in the chase and as he picked himself up, in what seemed to be a passage, he thought he could hear sounds of running ahead of him.

He shouted into the blackness, "Garielle! Gabrielle!"

There was no answer. Hands in front of him to fend any obstacle, he pursued the sound of fleeing footsteps, banging into sharp turns, bruising his elbows and shoulders against smooth concrete walls.

He did not know how far he ran in this unlighted corridor. He was aware, suddenly, of a freshening of the air, then wind in his face, and the steady drumming of rain. Rounding a turn, he plunged out through a screen of underbrush, found the storm in his face. A blaze of lightning silhouetted trees against the sky; he was in a winding trench that zigzagged head of him and burrowed off through thickets and underbrush.

He followed the trench, splashing through deep channels of water; came to his dismay to a fork where a shallow communication ditch joined this larger earthwork. In the swirling rain and dark, lit only by blue flares overhead, he was unable to discern any track. He ran on blindly keeping to the deeper trench.

Could this be the old trench he had seen earlier that evening when he, Fielding, and the Italian doctor had followed a dead man's trail to a ghoul's grave? He didn't know. He shouted Fielding's name, shouted to the girl, receiving no answering echo.

Slowing to a walk, he moved on helplessly. Could not tell how far he was from the *château,* but he knew that he must be in the forest well beyond the little German burying ground. Then he stopped in quick alarm. There was a figure at the trench-turn directly ahead.

He could only see the dim outline, a man standing motionless in the black rain. He recoiled in a crouch, grabbed into the unseen weeds around him, hunting a weapon or missle. His fingers closed on something —the broken hilt of a rusty sword. Inching forward, lifting his feet stealthily from the mud, he advanced on the motionless figure. Lightning flared across the sky, witch-blue in the sheeting rain; trench and forest leaped into view, and he saw the man.

A SCOTCHMAN! A Guard of the Black Watch posted at the bend of the trench. His posture was slovenly; his uniform hung to his knees in blowing rags; his rifle leaned against the trench wall beside him; in that flare of lightning Bill Shepherd saw the sentry's face was turned toward him fixed in a grin. A Lady from Hell to scare any German raider all the way back to Berlin. One of the dead of the Red Zone, indeed. In uniform and upright, posted on sleepless guard, a human skeleton.

Bill Shepherd went by this bogle at a leap, and the Scotchman collapsed with a little clinkle of bones. Bill Shepherd did not stop to aid him to his feet, but went rushing down the trench in a cloud of water and mud. The trench turned abruptly; he was halted again. Not by any skeletal guard this time. By a light.

It streamed like swamp-fire from the wall of the trench ahead—lamplight shining through a dugout door. He crept along

the muddy wall, clutching the broken sword. There was no sound from the dugout; the muddy mouth was curtained with rags of canvas and the light came palely through this moth-eaten drape of camouflage. He crawled up on the crumbled firing step, put his eyes to a rent in the moldy canvas.

The dugout scene was a stage-set from *Journey's End,* revived for one night in the Forêt de Feu. The players were not there, but the scenery awaited the overture. Candles guttered on a table fashioned of planks and wooden boxes. There were bunks piled with tousled bedding; tunics, underwear, khaki britches, cartridge belts, even a gas mask hung shabbily from a row of hooks along the wall. Fire-coals smouldered in the stove made of a black tar-barrel; the air was dank with smoke and a smell that might have been compounded of tobacco, wet grass, and stale socks. Bill Shepherd found himself gulping at sight of an unwholesome pan of beans and a platter of half-consumed hash on the table.

That skeletal Scot could not have been interrupted from his dinner! Bill Shepherd had lost some of the *sang-froid* which had fortified his pursuit of the one-legged organist, but he was not to be panicked as he had been in the middle of the night. If there was food on that dugout table, some flesh and blood diner had been eating it, someone who had been inhabiting this trench in the forest.

He stumbled on in the rain, pausing at intervals to shout for Fielding, Arnoldo, Putinov and the others to follow him from wherever they were. Then as suddenly as he had found himself in it, he was out of the trench, breasting through a thicket of brambles on a path that led toward what looked like, screened by tall saplings, an abandoned stable.

Lightning blazed in the rain, and he glimpsed the building clearly—a small stone barn, roofless, vine-grown, isolated here in the forest. A haze of yellow lantern light outlined the barn window. Someone was there. Tightening his grip on the rusty weapon he had picked up in the trench, he scouted forward, aware now of the murmur of voices. Voices in German! Then a husky-throated protest in French!

He had found the girl!

CHAPTER XXV

SECOND WORLD WAR

SWIFTLY he advanced up the path, scouting the dim-seen barn with eyes narrowed to the rain, nerves throbbing, every sense alert. A voluble outburst of German reached his ears; a harsh-spoken, *"Nein, nein, nein!"* Then untranslatable French from the girl. One word detached itself from the low-voiced volley. *Espionne!* Bill Shepherd halted in his stride. The word stabbed into his brain, a verbal electric shock. That word had to do with espionage—spies!

"My God!" He had to grip his lips to keep from crying out.

Spies! In this fantastic jabberwok tonight, he had run the whole gamut of mystery-plot possibilities from Arson to Zombies; how the devil had he overlooked Enemy Spies? Espionage! It might explain every one of tonight's incredible angles. Might explain the recent murders in these woods, the ineffectuality of the police, the presence of these assorted and strangely various foreigners.

He saw now that their reasons for arriving at the *château,* their glib definitions of themselves might have been too pat. Suppose Fielding . . . suppose the others? . . . why had they scattered when he yelled for help? . . . where were they now? All at once the woods around him were full of agents and counter-agents, secret service men, foreign operators.

The Forêt de Feu was within cannon distance of Belgium. Europe on the edge of the next war, precariously balanced between Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier and Mussolini, these old battlegrounds behind the French frontier were probably crawling with spies.

He wondered, "The girl, too?"

Behind that wall, she was talking vehemently. "I am not engaged in counter

espionage! You are making a mistake! I have never betrayed the Germans!"

The words came clearly, and ended on a sob. Bill Shepherd glared at the faint-lit window of the stable, swallowing lumpy oaths. She had never betrayed the Germans? He gasped inwardly, "What the hell?" She was in this, all right. There were a couple of Germans behind that stable-wall, and one was accusing her of double-crossing. He could read angry accusation in the man's guttural snarls. Was it that fellow, Kull?

Another German was haranguing, *"Nein, Herr Leutnant! Nein! Gott in Himmel, nein!"* Bill Shepherd was able to translate the answer to that. "Do not be a fool, Fritz. I do not like to do this, either, but duty is duty. This woman has been cheating us all along."

Bill Shepherd's throat-muscles tightened. So that was it! A little game of spies. Arriving unexpectedly at the Château de Feu, he had probably blundered into a rendezvous of some kind. This forest, tabooed by the local peasantry, was a nice base for operations. The girl was in on the game.

He had wondered, climbing the stairs going up into the tower, why the girl hadn't put up more of a scrap. Probably knew her one-legged abductor. He should have suspected that, but the crack that fellow had dealt him with the crutch had knocked him almost senseless, and he'd been pretty punch-drunk until he'd reached the open air.

He reached up and touched the lump over his temple. The lump throbbed viciously. Bill Shepherd put his teeth together. He was almost up to the barn. His assailant would pay for that crack on the head. He'd give him a couple of extras, compliments for Hitler and the Gestapo.

Clenching the broken sword, he crouched under the window. Too high to permit him a view of the stable within, and he couldn't risk chinning himself on the sill. There were two of them in there; his only chance would be a rush. He thefted along the wall, tense with caution. The downpour had thinned suddenly to a sifting brume; he could hear the voices in the stable clearly.

"You are making a mistake, *Herr Leutnant*. It will give us a bad name if you do this thing. They will blame the Fatherland. Let the woman go." It did not sound like the voice of Herr Kull.

The answer did not sound like Herr Kull's voice, either. Half gurgle, half snarl, it came in a guttural passion. "Duty is duty. I have my orders. The woman is guilty. The sentence against her has been passed."

The voice choked out. To Bill Shepherd's straining ears came that thin, eerie, peanut-whistling sound he had heard in the dark of the *château* mansard. The wheezy whistle made his teeth grind like the squeak of a rusty castor or the scrape of a file. It stopped, and the guttural voice repeated with finality, "There is nothing you can do about it, Fritz. The sentence has been passed."

Gabrielle Gervais sobbed, *"Ah, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!"*

There was a despairing cry of *"Lieber Gott in Himmel!* The man is going to shoot!"

Going to shoot! Leaping forward, Bill Shepherd rounded the corner of the barn in full career, raced around the wreckage of an overturned wagon, charged madly through the stable door. He skidded to a dead-stop across wet straw.

"Good God!"

HE WOULD never forget the scene that paralyzed him there. The roofless barn full of cloudy mist. The streaky black shadows; the hand lantern spraying out yellow gleams from one corner. The figures posed like people playing a charade. Gabrielle Gervais standing against the backwall, her face in her hands. Five feet off and directly facing her, the one-legged man, his crutches braced to hold him upright, a rifle at shoulder-level, aimed to shoot the girl through the head. And in the corner opposite from the lantern, a man Bill Shepherd thought was sitting upright

on the floor straw, his hands on the floor at either side, fingers spread flat as though he were trying to push himself up on legs that refused to stand.

These men were in German uniform, shabby tunics of field gray. The rifleman on crutches wore the scuttle-shaped helmet of German infantry; the soldier seated on the floor wore the goblet-shaped helmet of the Prussian cavalry Uhlan.

The girl backed against the wall—the soldiers in German uniform were enough to stun Bill Shepherd and rob him of power to move. Then with another shock of horror, he realized the German on the floor was a man without legs—the half of a man—head, arms and torso helplessly fastened to a little wooden platform which moved on roller skates.

This half-man wanted to get out of the corner, but the wheels of his platform refused to budge in the straw; he was panting heavily, face contorted with the effort to move himself, perspiration streaming down his jaws. He was like a human bust trying to throw itself from a shelf, and his struggling chilled Bill Shepherd.

But the one-legged rifleman on crutches was worse. As Bill Shepherd skidded almost to the middle of the barn to a stop, the one-legged man spun around with a hop and a twist; throwing up the rifle to draw a bead on Bill Shepherd's heart.

Bill Shepherd's heart was coated with ice. Not from the rifle aimed to kill him. Not from this German's face which contorted with hate and scribbled from mouth to ear by a livid, purple scar. Not from the source of that faint, elfin whistling—the little silvery button above the collar of his tunic—the peanut whistle imbedded in the wattles of his throat.

Bill Shepherd's heart was ice-coated because the rifle leveled at him was rusty-barreled, dirt-choked, with a mossy stock. Because the German tunic was a coat of fragments, the tarnished buttons clinging by threads. Because the coal-scuttle helmet was dented and fire-scorched, the crown full of little holes.

Once more the words of Madame Landru went tolling through his head. "The dead have not yet died in the Red Zone." Again the night went flittergibbet and reason was askew.

Aiming the rifle left-handed, the one-legged man pressed a finger over the whistle-hole in his throat, and addressed Bill Shepherd in savage German gutturals.

"Halt! *Wer'st da?* How dare you interrupt the execution of a spy!"

"She is not a spy," the half-man in the corner cried hoarsely. "You are making a mistake *Herr Leutnant!* A terrible mistake!"

"She is a spy, and the death sentence has been passed," came the wheezy answer. "You can see for yourself by looking at her. I was there in Brussels when Von Bissing passed the sentence. She is Edith Cavell!"

GABRIELLE GERVAIS cried, "He thinks I am a spy. He believes I am a woman named Edith Cavell—!"

Bill Shepherd yelled at the one-legged man, "Who are you, what are you doing here?"

The half-man in the corner cried desperately, "Quiet, *Mein Herr!*"

The girl screamed, "Take me out of here! I think I'm going mad!"

Bill Shepherd thought he was going mad himself. He stared at the gloomy visitation before him, at the moldy rifle, the scarred face, the threadbare uniform, wondering if it were possible to charge at a phantom. The whistle-throated man was grinning, the button in his neck creeing like a bos'n's pipe. He stifled the whistle with his finger and leered.

From the side of his mouth he said, "Regard this, Fritz. An American. So they're in the war at last."

Yes, Bill Shepherd was in the war at last. It was 1916. He was in a shell-torn barn. An execution scene. But the soldiers were dead; the trenches were dead; the girl herself was a specter out of the past. A nurse! On her own admission. And these German soldiers were carrying out the brutal orders of a General von Bissing long

resting under his memorial monument.

Bill Shepherd clutched his eyes with his left hand and grasping his rusty sword, flung himself at the one-legged man. The rifle took him a glancing blow across the jaw; he went acrobating across the stable, landing a-cropper on the human bust of the Uhlan.

The half-man went over on his dreadful little platform. The girl screamed. The one-legged man whistled like a peanut wagon; grabbed his throat and gargled a laugh. Then, sitting up, in a daze of horror, Bill Shepherd beheld a new phantasm framed in the roofless stable door.

The man had arrived there like a conjuration out of the weeping mist. Another soldier. An officer in faded khaki. His British tunic trim on square shoulders, a Victoria Cross on his breast, the tabs of a Captain marking his rank, visor of an officer's cap aslant over his eye. He was balanced there on crutches; his left leg gone at the hip, his sleeves empty, both arms amputated just below the shoulder. He had no face! Merely a black mask with holes slit for lips and eyes.

The voice from the mask was hoarse, clipped, commanding in English, "Gustav! Fritz! What's going on here? Who is this girl? Who is this man?"

The half-man cried, "Herr Kapitan! Gustav believes he has captured a spy! He believes this girl to be Edith Cavell!"

The black-masked officer started violently back on his crutches. Bill Shepherd stared at this British specter stupified. He now saw behind this incredible figure a group of figures even more incredible—four more apparitions from the past, deformed in the gloom, who had gathered there as if at some wizard's signal. The noseless man in the Cossack's astrakhan—the one-eyed creature in the uniform of the French Chasseurs—the hunchbacked cripple who wore the feathered hat of the Italian Bersaglierie—the *poilu* with steel hooks wing-like at his shoulders—this group might have been the mutilated escort of all the Unknown Soldiers killed in No Man's Land during the War.

GABRIELLE GERVAIS lay on the straw in a fainted huddle. Bill Shepherd's constricted throat could not utter a sound. His brain seemed to swell like an empty balloon. He heard the black-masked officer utter a harsh word of command. The one-legged man with the whistle in his throat lowered his rifle reluctantly.

The British officer was saying, "You know you ought not to pick up those old guns, Gustav; they are liable to go off."

"I thought the girl was Edith Cavell," the man said wheezily. "I had orders to shoot Edith Cavell. The girl looks like Edith Cavell."

The black-masked British officer said to Bill Shepherd, "Get up young man." Tapping his forehead significantly, "Gustav means no harm. The poor fellow has lapses. Do not be afraid of him, the gun is useless, a relic he picked up somewhere. Do not be afraid of us," the voice sounded ironic, bitterly humorous, "you can see we are unarmed."

Bill Shepherd swayed dizzily to his feet. He stared at the British officer, at the mutilated figures framed in the stable door. Could there be some reason behind this fantastic charade after all? Was his vision sane?

There seemed to be sanity behind the armless captain's black mask. The clipped British voice was self-assured, in command of this ghastly situation. The apparitions behind the officer made no menacing move.

The legless Uhlan beside him was muttering in a relieved way, "*Herr Gott,* I'm glad the captain has come. On this cursed platform of mine I am too helpless to cope with Gustav when he has these spells." He apologized mournfully to Bill Shepherd, "Gustav is as good a man as any of us when he can forget the past. The thunder tonight, that is what upset him. They left me with him in the dugout. I could not stop him when he decided to go to the *château.* He cannot forget the War. That is the trouble with us Germans." The man brushed a sleeve across his forehead. "This conscience we have about the War."

Gabrielle Gervais was pulling herself to her feet, brushing straw from her face. She grasped at and clung to Bill Shepherd, gasping, "He forced me to go up into the tower. Made me come here with him. He said he would return and shoot you if I did not come. Then when we got here to the barn he said I was Edith Cavell, that I was a spy he had had orders to shoot from his commanding general in Brussels."

"That is right, *Herr Kapitan,*" the legless Uhlan said. "Gustav brought the girl here from the *château.* I had come here to get my horse. I was going to ride into the forest to your headquarters tent to tell you Gustav had run off. My horse was gone; it must have become frightened in the storm and escaped from its tether. Then Gustav came into the stable with the French girl. I could do nothing with him. Then the American civilian arrived."

Bill Shepherd said hoarsely to the black-masked officer, "I demand to know the meaning of this. What are you doing here? What are you and these miserable men doing here in the Forêt de Feu?"

But before he could get an answer to that enigma there was an interruption from the night. The one-eyed Chasseur in the stable door cried, "Somebody comes!" The Punch-and-Judy Italian in the feathered hat swerved clumsily around. The French *poilu* gestured his steel-hook arms. The Cossack rounded in a limpy about-face, challenging, "Who goes there?"

THEN four more figures arrived in the gloom. Fielding. Professor Putinov. Doctor Arnoldo. The little Fiat-driver, Tac. They were there on the stable's threshold as ghostly, white-faced, dumb-founded as Bill Shepherd had been on his own arrival at this scene. Fielding cried, glaring from the grouped deformities to Shepherd, "Well, I'm damned! Who are these men? What the devil—!"

The black-masked British officer rounded smartly on his crutches. "Nothing is wrong here. Everything will be all right. We are only here for tonight to spend a last evening in the Forêt de Feu."

A crackle of lightning, splitting across the sky, sent a resounding thunder-clap through Bill Shepherd's brain. All at once he was shouting, finger aimed at the black-masked officer before him.

"Bertrand sent you here! The lawyer! He pulled this out of his sleeve! A plot to scare me away from the *château!* He's trying to get control of the property! He hired you and these masquerading panhandlers to come here!"

The voice behind the black mask rasped like a file on iron, answering Bill Shepherd's blurted accusation.

"Masquerading panhandlers! You don't know what you're saying. The Uhlan at your side was decorated by the German Crown Prince himself. Poor Gustav, badly shell-shocked, was one of the greatest heroes in the German Army. These men behind me whom you have called panhandlers were all decorated for valor in the Battle of the Somme.

"Colonel Stefanovitch in the Cossack's shako was Russia's first ace. This Chasseur," the officer gestured an empty sleeve, "led the first cavalry charge on the Forêt de Feu. The *poilu* you see here once captured a machine-gun nest in that *château* single-handed. This Bersaglierie officer was an observer sent here from the Italian front. As a Marconi expert he detected the German wireless station secretly located in the *château's* tower. These are the men you have called panhandlers."

The armless figure came to attention on its crutches with a snap. "We were not sent here by any shyster lawyer."

It seemed to Bill Shepherd as if his mind had ravelled out like a string of yarn from Madame Landru's dowdy knitting. Once more the plot was burst. The jabberwok had returned. And at this climax the night itself seemed to explode. There was a blast somewhere in the forest like the Last Day. A red flare of fire spouted up over the trees, lighting the woods like the eruption of a volcano. Something whistled down the sky with a sound like the one-legged man's breathing amplified to an aerial shriek. The whistle ended in a crash.

A blast of light spurted from the underbrush not far from the stable. Iron fragment sang through the air. Unseen missiles hammered against the stable wall; there was a shower of pebbles and earth-clods; the detonations were deafening, banging away in the night like a succession of slamming iron doors. Those in the barn were thrown to the ground.

And the black-masked British officer was shouting, "Take cover! Take cover! The lightning has struck an ammunition dump! The whole forest is mined!"

The black sky seemed to come down crashing; the earth was rocked with a series of violent booms. Shrapnel tore bright holes in the sky overhead, flashing like splashes of quicksilver; the forest was livid where a pillar of fire mounted high above the silhouetted trees; the bombardment was on, and it was the Battle of the Somme.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MINES AWAKE

THEY were running. Out of the barn and through the underbrush and down the trench where Bill Shepherd had met the bony guardsman. Slipping and crying out and falling headlong in the stagnant water. Racing to escape the shell-bursts, the spurts of fire that blasted red holes in the blackness around them, the crashing sky bombs that lit the forest like rockets, spraying the trees with volleys of steel.

Running with his arm about the girl, Bill Shepherd expected momentarily to be blown to pieces. Doctor Arnoldo, little Tac, Putinov and Fielding were running directly ahead of him, their heads down, arms over their eyes, bumping and colliding on the zigzag turns.

Behind Shepherd came the armless officer, moving swiftly on his crutches, shouting to direct the way. He called to Bill Shepherd, "The dugout is not far! It should be ahead of us there! Do you need help with the girl? I do not see very well—"

The voice behind the faceless mask was lost under a din of explosions. That volcano in the forest's heart was erupting like Vesuvius. The whole wet sky took fire. The mist was red. Crimson smoke rolled over the woods like sluggish fog. Rockets criss-crossed high above the forest, soaring up like Roman candles. Sky bombs smashed pink holes through the storm-clouds, bursting like red electric-light bulbs hurled against a cosmic roof.

The aerial barrage echoed *cracketty-crack-crack-crack!* Lower booms made the heavy ground-roar of cannon. Shells landed in the thickets near the trench, *whiz-bang!* There was a deep-bellied *whoom* that sent up a distant pillar of earth and shook the ground. Sticks, pebbles, bushes, clods of turf rained down into the trench for what seemed a dozen minutes afterward. In volcanic light the trench walls were stained vermillion, the water made a channel of blood.

Close by, there was a tremendous crash. Bill Shepherd hurled Gabrielle Gervais against the trench wall; gripped her tight. His eardrums rang like gongs. He was blinded, for an instant stunned. Not too stunned to hear the winging flight of iron birds that swept across the trench; the *thud-thud-thud* of fragments spattering the earth wall at his back. There was a smell of scorched metal, burnt powder—a smell like electrocution. He was aware of the masked officer's voice, as calm as though confronted with unimportance.

"That one must have been close."

Bill Shepherd opened his eyes to make sure. Yes, the officer was there. Upright on his crutches, his cap cocked and rakish, no more concerned with that shell blast than he might have been by traffic at a street corner. He turned to beckon at those coming behind him, gesturing a sleeveless arm.

"Are you all right, boys? It's that old ammunition dump, by the sound. The Fifty-first Artillery must've left a cache of shells under there, and figured the Germans would've carted them off. I'm worried more about the German mines—"

His voice was drowned out by another basso *whoom*—another tower of earth that

soared up into the red sky and came down in a hail of clods.

A voice shrilled from around a bend in the trench, "We are coming, *Herr Kapitan. Ja, ja, ja,* those are our mines."

Around the bend of the trench came the freakish squad—the noseless Cossack, the hook-winged *poilu,* the humpbacked Italian in his feathered hat, the one-eyed Chasseur and the one-legged German with the whistle in his throat. They were bunched together, a dreadful huddle of figures that might have stepped out of some horrible *Guignol*—the noseless Cossack and the one-eyed Chasseur carrying between them the Uhlan on his little platform of boards and skates.

Through a crashing of shell bursts, the black-masked captain was crying, "Where is the dugout? These damned eyes of mine—"

The half-man on the platform cried, "Around the next bend!"

SOMEHOW Bill Shepherd got there. He tore aside the canvas curtain; flung Gabrielle Gervais down the steps into the arms of the English painter who, with Arnoldo, the bus driver and the Russian, had gained the dugout ahead of him. Then, without quite knowing why he did it, he waited at the dugout entrance for the armless, masked officer.

The man was having trouble, struggling to extricate a crutch which had sunk below his weight in the mud. Bill Shepherd sprang back down the trench; yanked out the crutch with a cry. Seizing the officer about the waist, he dragged him to the dugout door, assisted him down the mossy steps.

"Thanks," came the voice through the mask. "Keep away from the door. Shell splinters. Otherwise bomb-proof. Rest of your party safe?"

A rataplan of explosions filled the underground chamber with din. The ceiling beams trembled. Earth slithered down the walls. The candles on the improvised table guttered.

Bill Shepherd saw Gabrielle Gervais, sitting in a rumpled bunk, smiling in fear, her features like frozen wax. Doctor Arnoldo slumped panting in a corner, mouth open, hands hanging limp, black eyes darting from side to side. Fielding was gripping the table, holding himself very stiffly, his expression tight-lipped, bleak. Professor Putinov, beside Fielding, was going through a mechanical pantomime of washing his hands, his face sickly.

When the near explosions stopped, Bill Shepherd was surprised to hear his own voice going. "That organ at the *château!* It was that one-legged German playing it! Don't be afraid; these fellows aren't ghosts! We can handle the lot of them. We—"

A hoarse-throated scream cut him off. "Did you think we were afraid of ghosts? *Sacré nome de Dieu!* An ammunition dump blowing up out there, and he thinks we are afraid of ghosts!"

Marcel Tac! Bill Shepherd had forgotten him. The little Fiat driver was under a bunk. There was a nearby crash, and the Frenchman's head disappeared like a turtle's, flicked back under cover. He began to wail like a baby, "Aaaah! Aaaah! Aaaah!" kicking his heels and beating his hands in the dirt.

Gabrielle Gervais sobbed, "He's been hit."

"Hit!" the man under the bunk screeched. "No, but I am going to be! Cannot the rest of you hear those shells out there? They will kill us! Blow us to pieces!" His screaming went soprano. "Don't let them kill me! Don't let them kill me! Ah, God, don't let them kill me!"

The armless officer wheeled on his crutches. Through the faceless black mask his voice cut like a whiplash. "Put a stop to that! Somebody shut up that man!"

Bill Shepherd managed to say thickly, "Tac! That's enough of that!" Crossing to the bunk, he yanked the squirming Frenchman out from under by the scruff; jerked him to his feet. "Stop screaming! There's a girl here—"

It wasn't convincing, because a deafening blast sent something whistling in

through the dugout entry; there was a thud on the rear will; the ground shook under him, and he could have screamed, himself.

Marcel Tac's mouth flapped open, and he went, "Waaaaaah!"

"Hit him!" the black-masked officer commanded.

Automatically obedient, Bill Shepherd slapped his palm hard across the little man's terrorized face. The bus driver staggered back; plopped down beside the French girl; put his elbows over his eyes.

"He'll be all right," the officer snapped. "When I was first out here I did some screaming myself. The damned noise. It takes about six months to get used to it."

"Six months!" The cry was from Professor Putinov. His face was tinged ptomaine-green. "You do not think these shells will be exploding for six months?"

The masked officer gave a dry, harsh laugh. "I was out here when they lasted that long. This is just some old ammunition that got mislaid in these woods. There wouldn't be enough to last half an hour."

BILL SHEPHERD started at the clutch of Fielding's steely fingers on his arm. The Englishman's grip was like a tourniquet. He was behind Bill Shepherd; and he shouted into Shepherd's ear, in a pandemonium of detonations his voice hardly as loud as the metallic shouting of a telephone receiver: "For God's sake, man, what's happening? Those ghastly devils in the barn—who were they?"

"I don't know!"

"Who's this masked officer?"

"I don't know!"

"Shall we rush him?" Fielding's fingers squeezed meaningfully; he was yelling at the top of his voice, but tremendous explosions which seemed to be landing on the dugout roof reduced the yells to tiny echoes. "We can nail him—make him talk! What?"

Bill Shepherd yelled across a distance of three inches, "I don't know who he is, or where he came from!"

Fielding yelled back, "He was near the *château!* We saw him from a window! We were chasing him in the bush when you waved at us from the tower! Let's grab—" Bill Shepherd didn't get the rest of it.

There were five ear-splitting crashes on the dugout roof like gigantic blows on an anvil. The room shook violently, dim and deafened, befogged by an in-sucked draught of brown-black fumes. Raw earth slithered down the walls, poured from a crack in the ceiling timbers.

Everybody rocked, swayed. Professor Putinov grabbed at the table. In a corner, Doctor Arnoldo went down in a crouch. Bill Shepherd saw Gabrielle Gervais sitting with her fingers in her ears; little Tac with his head under a blanket. The masked, armless officer had swerved on his crutches; he seemed to be watching the dugout entry. Bill Shepherd had caught at a bunk-support to steady himself; Fielding was clinging to his arm, still yelling.

He couldn't hear the Englishman's voice. But Fielding was game. Ready for action. Didn't want to die like a rat in a trap—Bill Shepherd caught that much of the man's meaning. Then, his ear-channels clearing of the ringing, he was aware of shouting in the dugout entry. Figures at the top of the steps creating a diversion.

The freakish soldiers! Grotesqueries in the bomb flares and smoke-fog. The masked officer was gesturing an empty sleeve at them. Had any of them been hit? The one-eyed Chasseur was laughing. *"Non, mon capitaine!* This is funny! It is nothing!"

The masked officer roared, ordering them to come down into the dugout. They jostled and cried out at the dugout entry, yells smothered by fiery blasts in the red night behind them.

Bill Shepherd was aware that Fielding had released his arm; staggered back. "No, no! Don't let them come down here! Those beastly horrors!" The Englishman's voice rose shrill. "Clear out of here! My God! I can't stand the sight of you—"

In the candle flutter Fielding's face was twisted in nausea. He reeled to the back of the dugout, his hand over his eyes.

But the creatures in the dugout entry did not come down the steps. Pandemonium behind them had blanketed Fielding's outcry; doubtful if they could have heard or understood the artist's words. Shells were blasting, the masked officer was raging, "Get down in here, you fools!" But they scuffled on the upper threshhold, delaying to shove the Uhlan forward on his little platform.

It was terrible to hear Fielding's horrified cries, "I can't stand the sight of him! Take him away!" Squealing through his fingers from where he stood against the dugout's rear wall, face in hands.

The half-man couldn't hear it. Torso bent forward, he was shouting down the steps at the masked officer. *"Herr Kapitan! Herr Kapitan!* You must come up out of there! This trench is mined! Torpedoes linked by buried fuse! We can see the explosions coming! Quickly, *Herr Kapitan!"*

"Torpedoes!" The masked officer about-faced on his crutches. "Everybody out! This trench was mined! The shells have touched off the fuse-line! Up top with you! Into the woods!"

Bill Shepherd cried, "The *château!* The trench leads to a tunnel into the *château!* Gabrielle! Everybody! Run for the *château!"*

"No!" was that commanding roar. "If these mines are going up, it means that *château* goes up with them! The Germans would have mined the *château!"*

"German mines? German mines?" Professor Putinov might have just waked from nightmare to discover the dream real. Rushing for the dugout steps, he went by Bill Shepherd in mad stampede, his mouth open in a bawl. "I knew the Nazis were behind this murder! That swine, Kull!"

It struck Bill Shepherd as a blow between the eyes.

Where *was* Herr Kull?

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Looking Ahead!

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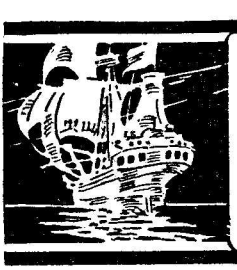
COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—OCTOBER 21st



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

THERE is a little matter to be straightened out between us and the *Cosmopolitan*. Our big and beautiful colleague is publishing Max Brand's latest Doctor Kildare story, and the editors have announced that the now famous young doctor "stepped from *Cosmopolitan* to the screen." Well, in no time at all we began to get plaints from our militantly loyal readers—one of which we publish below. With more vigor than accuracy they accused the *Cosmopolitan* of all sorts of dark dealings. So now we present the facts.

Cosmopolitan did first introduce Doctor Kildare—by way of a story called "Internes Can't Take Money," which was later made into a movie. The first and second stories of the present Kildare series, however—"Young Doctor Kildare" and "Calling Doctor Kildare"—were published as serials in ARGOSY. You see? *Cosmopolitan* has a perfect right to claim the fascinating doctor, and so have we. Our irate correspondents must subside; but it's fine to find them so alert in our defense.

Here are a couple of them, speaking in one voice.

MR. AND MRS. ALBERT BARTHEL

My husband and I have read the ARGOSY for the last fourteen years and have always liked the stories.

We felt proud when so many ARGOSY stories were made into moving pictures. Having read ARGOSY so long, we feel a personal interest. "Fast and Loose" and "Young Doctor Kildare" boosted ARGOSY plenty in our regard, and we wondered why ARGOSY wasn't mentioned in the moving picture preface.

But when *Cosmopolitan* came out with this statement: "Re-enter your favorite young miracle man of modern medicine in an adventure that has all the elements of a first-class mystery thriller. Here is our first full-length novel about that Doctor Kildare who stepped from *Cosmopolitan* to the screen"—we were plenty burned up and decided to ask how come ARGOSY doesn't claim introduction of "Young Doctor Kildare"?

Will you tell us?

South Bend, Indiana

NOW we are going to let you in on an extremely interesting discussion of Westerns. The gentleman below is both an enthusiast and a perfectionist; he loves Westerns the way they are, but he wants better ones. Furthermore, he wants us to sit on the heads of several of our more distinguished authors. It's the sort of idea that most editors like to think about anyway.

R. G. TOURNEY

I have been reading Western stories in a half-dozen different magazines for twenty years, and I still love 'em. Also, I don't think there is any question that ARGOSY publishes the best Westerns of any magazine.

But now I'm going to kick a little. Your top Western writers, like Luke Short and Bennett Foster, know what they are talking about, all right; they know the country and the way the people live there. From the detailed stuff they put in, I'm inclined to think they have been cowmen themselves. But all of them work the same old plots—and mostly the same old characters—over and over again. You can tell just about what is going to happen in every story, especially when you have read as many as I have.

Now I know an ARGOSY story has got to be fast and exciting; but why can't these writers get a little more originality into their stories? There is plenty to write about in the Old West and the New West; and these fellows could write it, too, if they would stop and think a little. Why don't they give us some real characters? My gripe is that I have read plenty of B Westerns but never an A one, and I don't see why somebody shouldn't write it. Sit on their heads until they do it.

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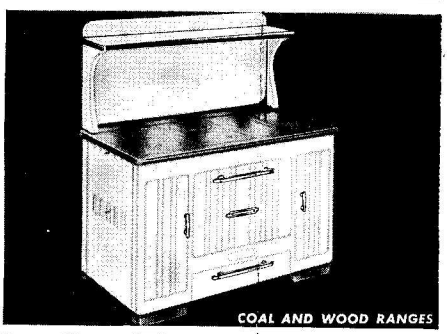
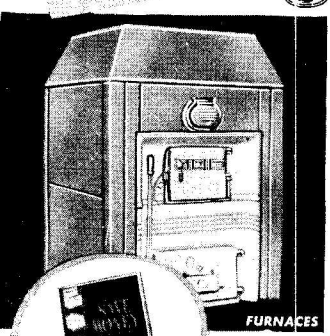
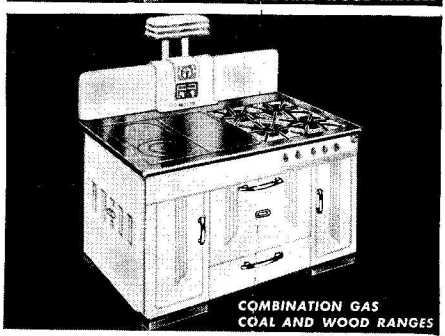
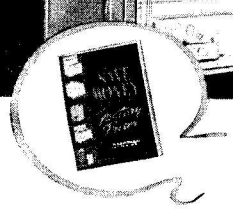

COAL AND WOOD RANGES


FURNACES


GAS RANGES


COMBINATION GAS COAL AND WOOD RANGES



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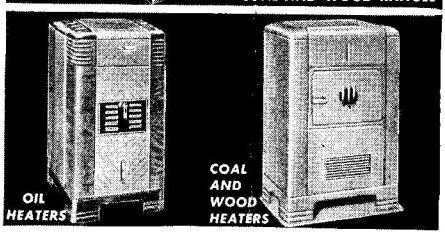

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