

OCT. 28

CRAWFORD
SULLIVAN

RICHARD
SALE

ROBERT N.
LEATH

ARGOSY



WEEKLY

CAPTAIN JONAH

*A South Seas
Novelet*

*Beginning a Great
New Mystery Novel*

THE STARS SPELL DEATH

By Jonathan Stagge





A. \$2995
5 diamonds arranged nicely. New style ring. 14K yellow gold. \$2.90 a month



B. \$2950
7 diamond Cluster; half carat size, 6 other diamonds. 14K yellow gold. \$2.85 a month



C. \$3250
Bridal Set with 10 Diamonds. Both rings 14K yellow gold. \$3.15 a month



D. \$50
Sworn Perfect Diamond; 2 other diamonds. 14K yellow gold. \$4.90 a month



E. \$1695
Man's Initial Ring; 2 initials and diamond on black onyx. 10K yellow gold. \$1.60 a month.



F. \$1995
Newest style 17 jewel Heart Watch in 10K yellow rolled gold plate with bracelet to match. \$1.90 a month



G. \$2975
Ladies' Bulova watch, 17 jewels; 10K yellow Rolled gold plate case and bracelet. \$2.88 a month



J. \$1995
17 jewel curved watch; fits snug to wrist; 10K yellow rolled gold plate case; leather strap. \$1.90 a month



H. \$2975
17 jewel Bulova Feature for men. Beautifully designed 10K yellow rolled gold plate case with leather strap. Exceptional value. \$2.88 a month



83-Piece TABLE ENSEMBLE
Consists of
73 Pc. SILVERPLATE
Complete with CHEST
8 Pure Linen NAPKINS
LOOM FILET LACE
TABLE CLOTH (60" x 80")
ALL FOR **\$1995**

Send \$1
PAY ONLY
\$1.90 A MONTH
(Small Carrying Charge)
on This
FEATURE
Only

My great feature — an exquisite 83 piece Ensemble.
Service for 8. Silverplate service that includes such extras as additional teaspoons, salad forks and serving pieces. All pieces pure silver on 18% nickel base. 8 pure linen napkins and a gorgeous loom filet lace tablecloth, 60 x 80 in. All these I offer at only \$19.95. Don't miss it — send order today.

I'll trust you

"SEND ME \$1 and I'll send your choice of these Features I picked out. I'll give you a 10-DAY TRIAL and 10 MONTHS TO PAY or Money Back if you're not satisfied"

Our founder, Leonard Wheeler Sweet, won the friendship of thousands of folks everywhere by making it easy for them to own fine jewelry—by giving good, honest value. I'm following in his footsteps—I'll help you own a diamond or watch and give nice gifts. Here are some special values I selected for you—would you like to examine any of them under my Money-Back Guarantee?

I'LL TRUST YOU—tell me what you want—simply put a dollar bill in an envelope with your name, address, occupation and a few other facts about yourself. This transaction will be between you and me—everything will be confidential.

I'll send your selection for approval and 10 days trial. If you're not satisfied that you received good, honest dollar for dollar value, send it back and I'll promptly return your dollar. If satisfied, you pay in 10 small monthly amounts you will never miss.

Just a few words about the suggestions that I show here. Take ring (A), for instance. Imagine—only \$29.50 for this pretty ring. And the Cluster Ring (B)—it looks like a half carat solitaire when worn on your finger. It's a beauty—I'm sure you would like it. The Bridal Ensemble (C) is really two rings for the ordinary price of one. If it's an Engagement Ring you want, I recommend (D)—it's a perfect diamond—I'll give you an Affidavit sworn to by a diamond expert before a Notary Public. Initial Ring (E) would delight any man. It's extra heavy and beautifully designed. My watch suggestions I am proud of. Bulova Watches are fine timekeepers and great values. The Kent Watches I show are priced exceptionally low and are the latest styles. My great feature is the Silverplate Set with Tablecloth and Napkins. I expect this to be one of my popular sellers—because of its exceptionally low price.

These are just a few of the many values I have. Choose here and send your order today, or send for my complete 48-page catalog showing hundreds of diamonds and watches, jewelry and silverware, all offered on my 10-months-to-pay-plan.



Jim Feeney
Sales Mgr.

L.W. SWEET
MAIL ORDER DIVISION
OF FINLAY STRAUS
1670 BROADWAY
DEPT. 719-K NEW YORK

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.

If your pay-check isn't all that you'd like it to be, why not consider accountancy? Why not become a member of this well-paid and respected field? Why not, in short, prepare yourself to earn real money—insure a good home for your family—a new car—an education for the growing youngsters—a bank account for a rainy day . . . these and many more of the precious things in life?

Maybe you're one of those ever hoping for "breaks" that will give you a higher standard of living. Yet that's precisely what most of 30,000,000 other employees in this country are doing.

Not all of them, of course. Here and there you find ambitious men who aren't depending on luck to carry them ahead. They're following a tested path to increased earnings—leaving nothing to mere chance. They're *training* themselves for better jobs—every week spending a few hours in serious but interesting study at home.

Some day, as expert bookkeepers and later as accountants, these determined men will have standing and a considerably larger income—in a profession that pays and pays well.

Why don't *you* do as they are doing—take advantage of LaSalle training? Even though you do not know the fundamentals of bookkeeping now—you nevertheless may have an excellent opportunity to master accountancy. Many others have done it.

Perhaps you're asking yourself, "But don't these others possess natural ability that I lack? Don't I need a special talent for all this?"

Ask rather, "If I do my part, won't I get results, too?"

You will! For all it takes is intelligence, serious study and work—not genius. Under the LaSalle system you solve problems by simple steps . . . from day to day, as an expert accountant does. You use the same basic principles. And when these problems become difficult and puzzle you, you get counsel that could be matched only through personal coaching by a battery of experts in a big accounting house.

In a comparatively short time, you train yourself in Elements of Accounting, Principles of Account-



ing, Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Organization, Management and Finance. The training—complete and intensive all the way—takes you right into C.P.A. coaching if you desire.

Later, when you're an accountant, it may be possible to go into business for yourself as a public accountant and be independent. Or, if you choose to work for someone else as an executive accountant, it will may be for a salary several times that which you draw now.

Write for this FREE book

If you're tired of pinching pennies, investigate accountancy and LaSalle training. There isn't a faster, less expensive or more convenient method to master accountancy. Fill in the coupon and mail. We'll send you our 64-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays."

Then, when you read all the facts, you yourself will be able to judge best whether you have the will to study and apply your best efforts—toward a more secure future.

LaSalle Extension University

A Correspondence Institution

Dept. 1058-HR

Chicago, Ill.

I want to earn a bigger salary—through accountancy training. Send me, without cost or obligation, your 64-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays."

Name

Present Position Age

Address City

In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention ARGOSY.

ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 294 CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 28, 1939 Number 3

The Stars Spell Death—First of seven parts.....	Jonathan Stagge	6
<i>Sinister intruders, those night-worlds, plunging suddenly across the orbit of an obscure country doctor, tracing out the pattern of his doom. Beginning a fine, breathtaking novel</i>		
Legends of the Legionaries—Picture Feature.....	W. A. Windas	25
<i>Lexicon of the Fighting Men</i>		
Captain Jonah—Complete Novelet.....	Crawford Sullivan	26
<i>Ware Skipper Blake! The Fijis call him brother; and he brings a cargo of calamity to the islands of the South Seas</i>		
The Temple Cats—Short Short Story.....	Jay Clark	43
<i>An Argosy Oddity</i>		
The Lonely World—Short Story.....	Richard Sale	45
<i>His dream is to inherit the earth—and that shall be his punishment</i>		
Brother Cowpoke—Complete Novelet.....	Arthur Lawson	52
<i>Take a shyster and a jailbird and a rancher turned sheepman; shake well . . . and you have a brew that will scorch the range</i>		
Men of Daring—True Story in Pictures.....	Stookie Allen	74
<i>Charles C. Miller—Cannibal Hunter</i>		
Farewell Trumpet—Short Story.....	Charles L. Clifford	76
<i>The Regiment adopted Old Corp for comedy; but can a clown receive a twenty-one gun salute—for free?</i>		
The Devil's Diary—Fifth of six parts.....	William Du Bois	88
<i>Smart guy crucified—on his own doublecross</i>		
Boom Goes the Weasel—Short Story.....	Robert Neal Leath	103
<i>Here's what happens in Hollywood when a gifted stooge doesn't get any more gifts</i>		
Lords of Creation—Conclusion.....	Eando Binder	113
<i>In New York's Maginot Line Humrelly finds the key to conquest</i>		
Barrel-head Pinch	Crockett Cooper	24
Argonotes		127
Looking Ahead!		128

Cover by Rudolph Belarski

Illustrating Captain Jonah

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

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

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE
111 Rue Reaumur

Copyright, 1939, by The Frank A. Munsey Company

Published weekly. Single copies 10 cents. By the year \$4.00; if United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, \$5.00; Other countries, \$7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896, at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright and must not be reprinted without the publisher's permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Printed in U. S. A.

Manuscripts submitted to this magazine should be accompanied by sufficient postage for their return if found unavailable. The publisher can accept no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

I WILL SEND MY FIRST LESSON FREE

*It Shows How I Train You
at Home in Your Spare Time for a*

GOOD JOB IN RADIO



J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 25 years

He has directed the training of more men for the Radio Industry than anyone else.

I TRAINED THESE MEN



**Service
Manager for
Four
Stores**

"I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N.R.I. In a few months I made enough to pay for the course three or four times. I am now Radio service manager for the M. Furniture Co. for their four stores."—JAMES E. RYAN, 1543 Slade St., Fall River, Mass.

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

"I am now making from \$10 to \$25 a week in spare time while still holding my regular job as a machinist. I owe my success to N.R.I."—WM. F. RUPP, 611 Green Street, Bridgeport, Pa.



**Owens Shop,
Makes
\$3,000
a Year**

"Before taking your Course I earned about 17 1/2 cents per hour as a truck driver. When I had completed 20 lessons I started service work. During the last year I have made about \$3,000 in Radio. I now own my own shop."—KARL KELLY, 304 W. Calhoun St., Magnolia, Ark.

Clip the coupon and mail it. I'm certain I can train you at home in your spare time to be a Radio Technician. I will send you my first lesson free. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand. Judge for yourself whether my course is planned to help you get a good job in Radio, a young, growing field with a future. You don't need to give up your present job, or spend a lot of money to become a Radio Technician. I train you at home in your spare time.

Jobs Like These go to Men who Know Radio

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay well for trained men. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs with opportunities for advancement. Radio jobbers and dealers employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio; loudspeaker systems, electronic devices, are newer fields offering good opportunities to qualified men. And my course includes Television, which promises to open many good jobs soon.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio is already one of the country's large industries even though it is still young and growing. The arrival of Television, the use of Radio principles in industry, are but a few of many recent Radio developments. More than 28,000,000 homes have one or more Radios. There are more Radios than telephones. Every year millions of Radios get out of date and are replaced. Millions more need new tubes, repairs, etc. Over 5,000,000 auto Radios are in use and thousands more are being sold every day. In every branch Radio is offering more opportunities—opportunities for which I give you the required knowledge of Radio at home in your spare time. Yes, the few hundred \$30, \$40, \$50 a week jobs of 20 years ago have grown to thousands.

Many Make \$5 to \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, in addition to my regular course, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do actual Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training, I send plans and directions which have helped many make from \$200 to \$500 a year in spare time while learning.

You Get Practical Experience While Learning

I send you special Radio equipment; show you how to conduct experiments, build circuits illustrating important principles used in modern Radio and Television receivers,



broadcasting station and loudspeaker installations. My 50-50 method of training gives you both printed instruction and actual work with Radio parts—makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make more money fixing Radio sets while learning and to equip you with a professional instrument for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act today. Mail the coupon for Sample Lesson and my 64-page Book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." They point out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tell about my course in Radio and Television; show letters from men I have trained telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9KK,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

**MAIL
COUPON
NOW!**



GOOD FOR BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON FREE

**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9KK,
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me FREE, without obligation, your Sample Lesson and 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" which tells about Radio's spare time and full-time opportunities and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home to be Radio Technicians. (Write Plainly).

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

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....2FR

In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention ARGOSY.

**A Tested Way
to BETTER PAY**

MIDWEST FACTORY-TO-YOU

SAVES YOU %50
WITH **TELEVISION**
ADAPTATION

PUT THIS 1940
14 TUBE
CHASSIS IN YOUR
PRESENT CABINET
\$19.95
COMPLETE

Here's today's biggest radio value—the 1940 TELEVISION-ADAPTED Midwest — at sensationally low factory - to - you - price. Exciting world - wide reception. Absolute satisfaction guaranteed on money-back basis. ● Send 1c postcard for FREE 1940 catalog. (User-agents make easy extra money!)

30 DAYS TRIAL
EASY TERMS

SEE MIDWEST'S ANSWER TO TRADE-INS!

MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION
DEPT. **63-A** CINCINNATI, OHIO



BIG PAY

WRITING EASY ORDERS
SPARE OR FULL TIME

FREE MONEY MAKING OUTFIT

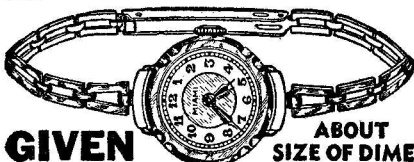
No experience or investment required. Simply show costly self-selling money making outfit (furnished you FREE) and write orders. We deliver and collect. Big advance cash commissions and 33% cash bonus. Gigantic line customized shirts sold factory to wearer. Amazing ONE YEAR guarantee. Sensational half price offer makes easy sales. Write today for your free outfit.

ROSECLIFF-QUAKER CORPORATION
1239 Broadway, Dept. **415** New York

WHAT WOULDN'T YOU GIVE to live a more normal life—unaffected by asthmatic attacks? You can live more happily, more comfortably—in spite of your affliction—if you have Dr. R. Schiffmann's **ASTHMADOR** handy. Its aromatic fumes reduce the severity of the attack—promote normal breathing. Get **ASTHMADOR** today at your druggist's—powder, cigarette, or pipe mixture form. For a free sample, write: **R. SCHIFFMANN CO.** Los Angeles, Calif., Dept. A-12

Life's worthwhile again

DR. R. SCHIFFMANN'S
ASTHMADOR



GIVEN ABOUT SIZE OF DIME

NOTHING TO BUY! GIRLS! LADIES! Send name and Address. Charming Watch or Big Cash Commission. Send No Money. Given for **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** Big Colored Pictures with our well known *White Cloverine Salve*, used for burns, chaps, sores, etc. easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remitting per catalog. **SPECIAL:** Choice of 20 gifts for returning only \$3. Be first. 44th year. Write today for order of Salve and Pictures postage paid.

WILSON CHEM. CO., Inc., Dept. 92-19, TYRONE, PA.

TOMBSTONE

Genuine Marble also Granite. Low Prices. Free lettering. Satisfaction guaranteed. Erected in cemetery if desired. Write us now for FREE Catalog of beautiful designs, also samples of stone.



U. S. MARBLE & GRANITE CO.
ONEGO, A-45, FLORIDA

THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

YOU CAN influence others with your thinking! Learn to impress others favorably—get across your ideas. Let the Rosicrucians show you how to use the power of mind. For free book write Scribe G.D.H. **THE ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)** San Jose, California



EARN EXTRA MONEY at Home



Increase your income at home by new, simple Wentworth Tempera Color method. We instruct you and supply you with work. Write today for FREE BOOKLET.

Wentworth Pictorial Co., Ltd., Dept. 186, Hamilton, Ont.

WATCH FOR THIS MAGAZINE ON THE NEWS STANDS!

15¢ NOW MONTHLY

Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

NOV. 1939

EXCITING!
Starzl - Radiant Enemies

BIZARRE!
Merritt - Conquest of the Moon Pool

STRANGE!
Austin Hall - Almost Immortal

ASTOUNDING!
Serviss - The Moon Metal

WEIRD!
England - Man with the Glass Heart

EERIE!
Blades - Fruit of the Forbidden Tree

STARTLING!
Marshall - World of the Balance

Brand new, — different, — filled with the most unusual epics of imagination that you have ever read. Every story a classic of fantasy by a master author.—Buy a copy today! 15¢ at all good news stands!

RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—all to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured" and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write: CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 28, Bloomfield, New Jersey.

TYPEWRITER Brand NEW!

Only \$19.95 and up
10-Day Trial—Easy Terms
Guaranteed Brand New latest REMINGTON-CASE model only \$19.95 during this sensational sale. Also Royal, Corona and famous Featherweight Portables at real money-saving prices. Also standard full size office models rebuilt and fully guaranteed at 1/3 saving. SEND FOR BIG FREE CATALOG IN COLORS.
International Typewriter Exch., 231 W. Monroe St., Dept. 1020, Chicago

AIR CONDITIONED KUSHIONTRED SHOES!

EARN BIG COMMISSIONS AND YOUR OWN SHOES FREE
AS BONUS WITHOUT EXTRA COST
Steady income all year showing outstanding new Fall line Men's, Women's, Children's Shoes. 200 styles, including wonderful Cushion Sole shoes and amazing Groffex shoes that need no breaking in! \$10,000 Bond guarantees satisfaction. Free shirts, ties, hosiery offers to customers. No pay postage. No experience needed. Give actual shoe samples without cost. Write TODAY for full information, money-making plan and FREE Selling Kit.
KARNERS SHOE CO., 415 BOSTON, MASS.

LAW STUDY AT HOME

Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.
More Ability: More Prestige: More Money
We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degrees of LL.B. Successful graduates in every section of the U.S. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.
LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 1058-L Chicago
A Correspondence Institution

BE A PASSENGER Traffic Inspector

JOB ARE READY—YOU CAN QUALIFY
Easy, home-study course in Railway and Bus Traffic Inspection trains you in a few months and prepares you to earn up to \$135 per month, plus expenses, to start. We place graduates or refund tuition. Interesting work; plenty of opportunities for ambitious men—18 to 50. Write for facts.
Standard Business Training Institute, Div. 5010, Buffalo, N. Y.

ANY BOOK IN PRINT!

Delivered at your door. We pay postage. Standard authors, new books, popular editions, fiction, reference, medical, mechanical, children's books, etc.—all at guaranteed savings. Send card now for Clarkson's 1940 Catalog.
FREE Write for our great illustrated book catalogue. A short course in literature. The buying guide of 300,000 book lovers. The answer to your Christmas gift problem. FREE if you write NOW—TODAY!
CLARKSON PUBLISHING COMPANY
Dept. M59—1255 So. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

Suffer Varicose LEG SORES?

IF you suffer pain and misery of Varicose Ulcers, or Open Leg Sores, send away at once for FREE Booklet "THE LIEPPE METHODS FOR HOME USE." Tells all about this 40-year-old method, praised and endorsed by thousands. Lieppe Methods, Dept. K-32, 3284 N. Green Bay Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Iver Johnson



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

IVER JOHNSON'S ARMS & CYCLE WORKS
63 RIVER ST., FITCHBURG, MASS. New York, 95 Chambers St.

GUARANTEED TIRES! GOODYEAR-GOODRICH FIRESTONE U.S. and Other Standard Makes

World's Lowest TIRE PRICES
Tire users by the thousands all over the U.S.A. vouch for the Long Hard Service of our Standard Brand tires, reconditioned with high grade materials and latest methods by our tire experts. Our 21 years experience makes it possible to offer tires at lowest prices, with legal agreement to replace at 1/2 price any tire that fails to give 12 Mos. Service.
EVERY TIRE GUARANTEED!
BALLOON TIRES REGULAR CORD TIRES
Size Rim Tires Tubes Size Tires Tubes Size Tires Tubes
20x4.40-21 \$2.15 \$1.00 21x4.40-22 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
20x4.50-21 2.35 1.05 21x4.50-22 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
20x4.75-19 2.45 1.25 21x4.75-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
20x5.00-19 2.65 1.25 21x5.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
20x5.50-19 2.85 1.25 21x5.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x5.50-19 2.95 1.25 21x5.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x6.00-19 3.15 1.25 21x6.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x6.50-19 3.35 1.25 21x6.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x7.00-19 3.55 1.25 21x7.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x7.50-19 3.75 1.25 21x7.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x8.00-19 3.95 1.25 21x8.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x8.50-19 4.15 1.25 21x8.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x9.00-19 4.35 1.25 21x9.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x9.50-19 4.55 1.25 21x9.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x10.00-19 4.75 1.25 21x10.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x10.50-19 4.95 1.25 21x10.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x11.00-19 5.15 1.25 21x11.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x11.50-19 5.35 1.25 21x11.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x12.00-19 5.55 1.25 21x12.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x12.50-19 5.75 1.25 21x12.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x13.00-19 5.95 1.25 21x13.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x13.50-19 6.15 1.25 21x13.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x14.00-19 6.35 1.25 21x14.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x14.50-19 6.55 1.25 21x14.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x15.00-19 6.75 1.25 21x15.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x15.50-19 6.95 1.25 21x15.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x16.00-19 7.15 1.25 21x16.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x16.50-19 7.35 1.25 21x16.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x17.00-19 7.55 1.25 21x17.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x17.50-19 7.75 1.25 21x17.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x18.00-19 7.95 1.25 21x18.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x18.50-19 8.15 1.25 21x18.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x19.00-19 8.35 1.25 21x19.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x19.50-19 8.55 1.25 21x19.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x20.00-19 8.75 1.25 21x20.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x20.50-19 8.95 1.25 21x20.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x21.00-19 9.15 1.25 21x21.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x21.50-19 9.35 1.25 21x21.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x22.00-19 9.55 1.25 21x22.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x22.50-19 9.75 1.25 21x22.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x23.00-19 9.95 1.25 21x23.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x23.50-19 10.15 1.25 21x23.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x24.00-19 10.35 1.25 21x24.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x24.50-19 10.55 1.25 21x24.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x25.00-19 10.75 1.25 21x25.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x25.50-19 10.95 1.25 21x25.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x26.00-19 11.15 1.25 21x26.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x26.50-19 11.35 1.25 21x26.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x27.00-19 11.55 1.25 21x27.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x27.50-19 11.75 1.25 21x27.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x28.00-19 11.95 1.25 21x28.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x28.50-19 12.15 1.25 21x28.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x29.00-19 12.35 1.25 21x29.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x29.50-19 12.55 1.25 21x29.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x30.00-19 12.75 1.25 21x30.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x30.50-19 12.95 1.25 21x30.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x31.00-19 13.15 1.25 21x31.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x31.50-19 13.35 1.25 21x31.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x32.00-19 13.55 1.25 21x32.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x32.50-19 13.75 1.25 21x32.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x33.00-19 13.95 1.25 21x33.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x33.50-19 14.15 1.25 21x33.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x34.00-19 14.35 1.25 21x34.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x34.50-19 14.55 1.25 21x34.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x35.00-19 14.75 1.25 21x35.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x35.50-19 14.95 1.25 21x35.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x36.00-19 15.15 1.25 21x36.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x36.50-19 15.35 1.25 21x36.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x37.00-19 15.55 1.25 21x37.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x37.50-19 15.75 1.25 21x37.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x38.00-19 15.95 1.25 21x38.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x38.50-19 16.15 1.25 21x38.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x39.00-19 16.35 1.25 21x39.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x39.50-19 16.55 1.25 21x39.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x40.00-19 16.75 1.25 21x40.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x40.50-19 16.95 1.25 21x40.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x41.00-19 17.15 1.25 21x41.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x41.50-19 17.35 1.25 21x41.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x42.00-19 17.55 1.25 21x42.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x42.50-19 17.75 1.25 21x42.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x43.00-19 17.95 1.25 21x43.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x43.50-19 18.15 1.25 21x43.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x44.00-19 18.35 1.25 21x44.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x44.50-19 18.55 1.25 21x44.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x45.00-19 18.75 1.25 21x45.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x45.50-19 18.95 1.25 21x45.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x46.00-19 19.15 1.25 21x46.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x46.50-19 19.35 1.25 21x46.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x47.00-19 19.55 1.25 21x47.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x47.50-19 19.75 1.25 21x47.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x48.00-19 19.95 1.25 21x48.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x48.50-19 20.15 1.25 21x48.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x49.00-19 20.35 1.25 21x49.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x49.50-19 20.55 1.25 21x49.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x50.00-19 20.75 1.25 21x50.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x50.50-19 20.95 1.25 21x50.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x51.00-19 21.15 1.25 21x51.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x51.50-19 21.35 1.25 21x51.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x52.00-19 21.55 1.25 21x52.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x52.50-19 21.75 1.25 21x52.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x53.00-19 21.95 1.25 21x53.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x53.50-19 22.15 1.25 21x53.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x54.00-19 22.35 1.25 21x54.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x54.50-19 22.55 1.25 21x54.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x55.00-19 22.75 1.25 21x55.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x55.50-19 22.95 1.25 21x55.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x56.00-19 23.15 1.25 21x56.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x56.50-19 23.35 1.25 21x56.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x57.00-19 23.55 1.25 21x57.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x57.50-19 23.75 1.25 21x57.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x58.00-19 23.95 1.25 21x58.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x58.50-19 24.15 1.25 21x58.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x59.00-19 24.35 1.25 21x59.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x59.50-19 24.55 1.25 21x59.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x60.00-19 24.75 1.25 21x60.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x60.50-19 24.95 1.25 21x60.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x61.00-19 25.15 1.25 21x61.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x61.50-19 25.35 1.25 21x61.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x62.00-19 25.55 1.25 21x62.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x62.50-19 25.75 1.25 21x62.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x63.00-19 25.95 1.25 21x63.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x63.50-19 26.15 1.25 21x63.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x64.00-19 26.35 1.25 21x64.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x64.50-19 26.55 1.25 21x64.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x65.00-19 26.75 1.25 21x65.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x65.50-19 26.95 1.25 21x65.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x66.00-19 27.15 1.25 21x66.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x66.50-19 27.35 1.25 21x66.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x67.00-19 27.55 1.25 21x67.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x67.50-19 27.75 1.25 21x67.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x68.00-19 27.95 1.25 21x68.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x68.50-19 28.15 1.25 21x68.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x69.00-19 28.35 1.25 21x69.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x69.50-19 28.55 1.25 21x69.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x70.00-19 28.75 1.25 21x70.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x70.50-19 28.95 1.25 21x70.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x71.00-19 29.15 1.25 21x71.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x71.50-19 29.35 1.25 21x71.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x72.00-19 29.55 1.25 21x72.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x72.50-19 29.75 1.25 21x72.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x73.00-19 29.95 1.25 21x73.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x73.50-19 30.15 1.25 21x73.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x74.00-19 30.35 1.25 21x74.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x74.50-19 30.55 1.25 21x74.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x75.00-19 30.75 1.25 21x75.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x75.50-19 30.95 1.25 21x75.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x76.00-19 31.15 1.25 21x76.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x76.50-19 31.35 1.25 21x76.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x77.00-19 31.55 1.25 21x77.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x77.50-19 31.75 1.25 21x77.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x78.00-19 31.95 1.25 21x78.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x78.50-19 32.15 1.25 21x78.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x79.00-19 32.35 1.25 21x79.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x79.50-19 32.55 1.25 21x79.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x80.00-19 32.75 1.25 21x80.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x80.50-19 32.95 1.25 21x80.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x81.00-19 33.15 1.25 21x81.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x81.50-19 33.35 1.25 21x81.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x82.00-19 33.55 1.25 21x82.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x82.50-19 33.75 1.25 21x82.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x83.00-19 33.95 1.25 21x83.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x83.50-19 34.15 1.25 21x83.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x84.00-19 34.35 1.25 21x84.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x84.50-19 34.55 1.25 21x84.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x85.00-19 34.75 1.25 21x85.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x85.50-19 34.95 1.25 21x85.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x86.00-19 35.15 1.25 21x86.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x86.50-19 35.35 1.25 21x86.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x87.00-19 35.55 1.25 21x87.00-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x87.50-19 35.75 1.25 21x87.50-20 2.95 1.25 34x4 3.45 1.45
22x88.00-19 35.95 1.25 21x88.

Argosy Blue-Ribbon Mystery Novel

The Stars Spell Death

By JONATHAN STAGGE

The great wheel of the zodiac turns slowly in the dark heavens. And below, twelve frightened people obey those flaming symbols of peril and mystery, wondering if it is the sky or man who deals out death. A Crime Club selection

CHAPTER I

A SMALL GIRL'S STAR

I ALWAYS think of it as beginning with the new car. As a matter of fact, the whole incredible murder plot must have started quite some time before that, while the new car was still existing only in the over-optimistic imagination of my young daughter, Dawn.

She had set her heart on my turning in the old battered sedan early in the spring, before the first forsythia buds in the garden had shaken loose their petals, and before my bank balance had recovered from the successive epidemics of Christmas, school fees and Federal Income Tax.

And when Dawn gives her all to a project, she engenders far more efficiency ergs than an entire C.C.C. contingent.

In the face of every sort of discouragement she argued Pride versus Poverty. She battered constantly against my sales-resistance by her childish but insidious prattle of remote control shifting, mechanomesh transmission, floating force engines and all the other heady delights offered by the spring models.

At last I had to get tough with her.

I snarled: "Growing daughters of poor country doctors who have delusions of grandeur usually end up with swift kicks in the pants. So abandon the Delilah tactics, brat. You'll be lucky if you get a new

toothbrush, let alone a new car, until the last instalment is paid on that fluoroscope I bought for my office."

Dawn, who had recently developed a new personality modeled on a Deanna Durbin film, slipped long enough to spit back: "Nuts to the new fluoroscope." Then, realizing that her rôle called for girlish charm, she lowered demure lashes over eyes that would be wreaking havoc in a few years, and said: "I'm sorry, Daddy. I realize finances are at a low ebb. I'll just have to forget it."

But she didn't forget it, of course. She merely took her campaign under ground. For the next week, whenever the radio was turned on, a golden voice was extolling the latest thing in road-efficiency; wherever I moved in the house, I ran into magazines carelessly left open at the most tantalizing advertisements.

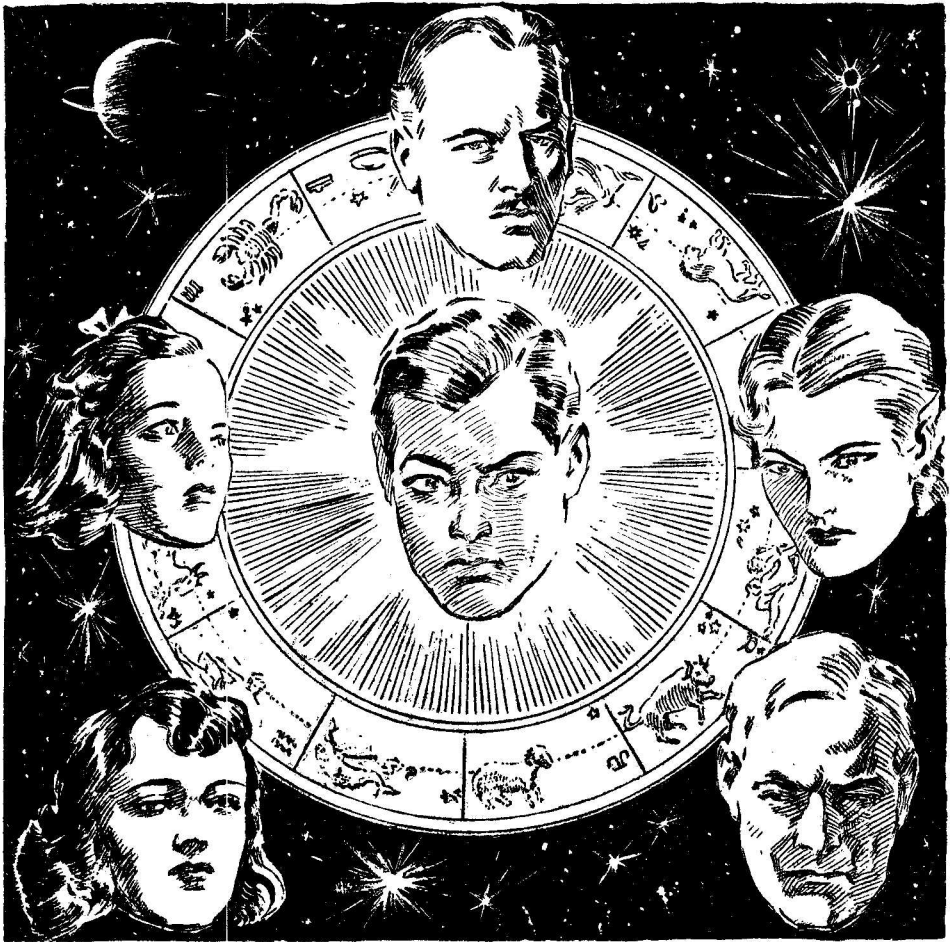
And, as a climax, unsolicited letters from automobile agents in Grovestown began to appear in my daily mail, stating challengingly: *Dear Dr. Westlake, as a professional man, you know exactly how much you owe to appearances . . .*

Unfortunately I knew exactly how much I owed elsewhere—not to mention the fluoroscope.

I also knew that, behind the seraphic expression of my daughter, primly eating cereal at the other end of the breakfast table, lay a diabolical and master-minded duplicity worthy of a Musica.

I often wish now that I had yielded at once to that duplicity and to the siren enticements of the many catalogues which cluttered my desk. If I had bought that new car right away, I might have been saved so much.

I might even have been saved from the



most amazing and the most harrowing experience of my life.

AND I probably would have yielded if Dawn hadn't overplayed her hand. It happened one evening in early April when, returning home on foot from a visit to a near neighbor, I was all but mown down by a gleaming Monarch of the Road which careened around a bend behind me, swirled drunkenly past on the wrong side of the road, and spun out of sight into my own driveway.

To my horror I had caught a glimpse of the occupants of that car. Squeezed into the front seat were a nondescript young man, a dour Scottish terrier which be-

longed to us, a large colored woman whom I recognized as my own cook, Rebecca, and—behind the wheel—my own twelve-year pride and joy, Dawn Westlake.

I dashed madly up the drive after the car, yelling like a fool. But when I reached the house, it was just disappearing through the bushes that screened the other curve of the drive. And Dawn, very aloof and regal, was standing at the front door alone.

"Who-o," I stuttered, "was that criminal who let a moronic chit like you drive his car?"

Dawn shrugged carelessly. "Oh, he was just an agent."

"An agent—of what?"

"An automobile agent from Groves-town. A different one has been coming out almost every day lately." With supreme effrontery, she added: "I thought you must have asked them to come. Rebecca and I felt we couldn't disappoint them so we've been letting them take us for trial runs."

"And I suppose you drove the car yourself and risked your own neck and everyone else's just to keep the salesman from bursting into tears."

At that stage words failed me. Since my wife's death, almost ten years before, Dawn was the only really important thing in my life. And the vision of her, smashed under a car wrecked entirely through her own brashness and the folly of a salesman, made me see carmine and crimson. As soon as I had recovered my breath, I gave her the biggest bawling out of her career and finally, as the most mortifying punishment for a twelve-year-old girl whose dignity was very important, I sent her instantly and supperless to bed.

It didn't break her spirit of course. Nothing could do that. She departed upstairs with the studied pathos of Lady Jane Grey marching to execution. But all the demons of hell were in her eyes.

I am not one of those laudable parents who can mete out just punishment and then feel completely unemotional about the sin committed. Throughout a solitary dinner I remained very shaken. My mind was still running on accidents and sudden death much later that evening when the jangle of the telephone broke the spring stillness of the living room.

When I lifted the receiver, a voice, hoarse and indistinct, but obviously female, said:

"Are you Dr. Hugh Ellsworth of Kenmore?"

I said I was.

"Then you've got to come at once. There's been a terrible accident. An automobile has—oh, please come at once."

"Where are you?" I asked. "Where's the accident?"

The answer was even more indistinct. It sounded like: "On Hill Road, just past

the corner where Townton Road crosses it. You know your way?"

"Sure I know it. I'll be right over."

"For God's sake, hurry." There was a little strangled sob. "Hurry and don't..."

A click told me that my unknown caller had rung off in the middle of her sentence.

THAT call, breaking as it had into my morbid speculations about Dawn, instantly made me think: My God, maybe she's snuck out and taken the car again. The feeling was so strong that I dashed up to her room to make sure she was there.

Her bed was empty.

I was just about to get panicky when a footstep sounded on the stairs and Dawn appeared in the doorway.

"I sent you to bed, brat," I barked.

My daughter merely looked at me from smoldering eyes as I hurried past her.

A few minutes later, when I was backing the old sedan out of the garage, I caught one more glimpse of Dawn. She was leaning out of her window.

"Daddy," she called. "Wait a minute. Wait, don't go—"

"Go back to bed," I yelled. "And stay there."

I swung the car down the drive and headed it to the right in the direction of Hill Road.

I was vaguely surprised that an accident should have taken place at the spot described by the unknown voice on the telephone. Both Hill Road and Townton Road were obscure and very deserted thoroughfares, leading nowhere in particular. But it never occurred to me at the time that there could be anything at all odd about that call. I was too pre-occupied with the unpleasant job ahead of me.

I had, of course, been called out on many car accident cases before. And harrowing, pitiful things they usually were.

After some ten minutes of driving, the lights of the last straggling farmhouses of Kenmore Valley had dwindled into the

darkness, and I reached the thickly wooded country which stretched over the hills to Ploversville. I kept my foot hard on the accelerator, getting the utmost out of the old sedan. At length I reached the Town-ton Road. Another mile or two would have brought me to the intersection of Hill Road and the scene of the accident. I pressed forward.

Then, without the slightest warning, my car gave a wheezy little cough, lurched, rattled and came to a dead, inexorable halt.

Muttering every kind of malediction against the automotive world in general and my own car in particular, I jumped out, took my flashlight from the pocket and lifted the hood. I did this merely as a gesture for, being the least mechanically-minded of persons, I shouldn't have been able to recognize any trouble if I had seen it. There was no possibility that I was out of gas, for I had been filled up when I left Grovestown that afternoon.

I peered and poked and swore, but to no effect.

For the first time I felt one hundred per cent in sympathy with Dawn's extravagant desire to turn in the old black sedan and be assured of "road-dependability." Here was I, stuck in a lonely place, some two miles from my destination where human life might well depend on my arrival. There was little chance of a lift at that time of night.

Either I would have to walk to the scene of the accident, carrying my heavy medical bag, or I could take a short cut across country to the Grovestown Pike where I knew there was a filling station. Someone there would probably have a car.

I chose the second as the lesser of the two evils. Luckily I had hunted over that particular section of the country and knew it fairly well. A hundred yards across a plowed field, a path through the woods would bring me to Mill Lane, a dirt road which wound its way muddily to the pike.

Grasping my flashlight and bag, I plunged forward. The ground was rough and there was no moon. Several times I

tripped and once I walked bang into a barbed-wire fence which ripped my coat.

But at last I reached the woods, found the narrow path and made for Mill Lane. Everything was very quiet. I might have been in darkest Africa for all the sounds of civilization I could hear. Once, miles away across the valley, the harsh cry of a horn broke the stillness of the spring night. Apart from that there was nothing but the dry crackle of twigs beneath my feet.

I had shaken off the path and swung left into Mill Lane itself, when I saw it.

The sight came as a shock because it was the very last thing I expected in this particular place.

CHAPTER II

RED STAR AT NIGHT

TILTED at a crazy angle and half hidden in the bushes, its front bumper twisted against a beech tree, was a car.

For a moment I stood there, looking at it rather stupidly. It was a large black sedan, and it was very completely wrecked.

Gradually things began to make sense. My unknown caller had said over the phone that the accident was on the corner of Hill Road. Either she had been unfamiliar with the neighborhood, or I had mistaken the word Hill for Mill.

This must be the accident to which I had been called. And, by the merest coincidence, I had stumbled upon it.

"Hullo!" I called. "Anyone around?"

My voice sounded weird and feeble in that country stillness. There was no reply.

I moved nearer, my flashlight focused on the machine. It was the same make as my own and almost as antiquated.

With some difficulty I pushed through the bushes and peered in at the window. The sight was not pleasant.

Sprawled over the wheel, his head half through the broken windshield, was the body of a man. The cramped, stiffened position warned me at once that he was beyond possibility of medical aid.

Unquestionably he was dead.

But of course I had to make absolutely sure. Though it was by no means an easy matter, I managed to push aside the lower branches of the beech tree and wrench open the door. Ignoring scratches and bruises, I got my arms under the body and somehow staggered with it to a little clearing where I laid it on the ground.

Although the only illumination came from the frugal light of my torch, I saw at once that the unfortunate man had been dead some little time. His head and face were smashed beyond any possibility of recognition.

There was nothing that I, or anyone, could do for him.

Then something black caught my attention. It was a bag similar to the one I had brought with me. Apparently it had rolled out of the car when I tugged the door free. I opened it, hoping to find some clue to the dead man's identity.

To my surprise it was a medical bag and it contained the usual things a doctor needs for an emergency call.

So he must have been a doctor, too. But what on earth was he doing on the lonely Mill Lane at this time of night? And where was the woman who had informed me of the accident?

There was something exceedingly strange about that woman's phone call.

Had she been some chance passerby who had felt her responsibilities at an end after she had called a doctor? Had she caused the accident and been afraid to take the consequences? Or had she, perhaps, actually been in the car with the man when the crash came, and had not wished her connection with him to be known?

Once again I called: "Is anyone there?"

And once again there was no answer.

But who was this man? I knew everyone in the district for miles around and certainly every physician practising in the neighborhood. He was too heavy for young Lavers of Ploversville and too young for Dr. Hammond. And the car was not the type used by Dr. Forder, the county coroner.

I PLAYED my flashlight on his clothes. The suit was of tweed—a good tweed, though somewhat worn. Oddly enough it had a thread of mustard yellow in it very similar to a suit I had bought in an expansive moment in Philadelphia about five years ago.

I looked closer. Yes, it was a dead ringer for that particular suit to which Dawn had given the unflattering nick-name: The Yellow Peril.

As I raised my head from the inspection, my eye fell on something else which was mustard in color; the license plate on the rear of the wrecked car.

At first I was conscious only that it was one of our own State numbers. Then—gradually—it dawned on me that LR-5566, as a combination, was familiar to me. Very familiar.

There are few people who, if asked out of the blue, could tell you at once the number of their own automobile license plates. I certainly have never been able to remember mine.

But I did know that the number on that wrecked car was at least similar—

I fumbled in my pocket for my wallet and drew out my car license. There, staring at me in neat black type, was that same number: LR-5566.

At first I thought I was seeing things, or that the State Department of Vehicles had made an absurd mistake.

But there was no mistake about it. The black sedan tilted in the dark clump of bushes had the same number as my own car, which I had just abandoned on the Townton Road. And, as I had already observed, it was the same model and approximately the same vintage.

My brain was beginning to spin. I turned back to the man on the ground, stooping over him gingerly. The hair was black—the same color as my own.

Feverishly I folded back the inside breast pocket of his coat. The maker's name was there on the lining, faint but easily distinguishable on a small label. It read: *Harry Wormser, Tailor, Philadelphia.*

That was the tailor from whom I had bought the Yellow Peril!

My hand plunged deeper into the pocket. Envelopes . . . letters that would surely solve this crazy riddle. With hands that shook, I pulled them out and held them in the fanwise beam of the torch.

As I read the inscriptions I felt certain that I had gone insane. A medical bag, a black sedan, my license plates, my suit, and now—this!

It was something out of the wildest realms of fantasy.

From each one of those envelopes which I had taken from the dead man's pocket, my own name stared back at me.

*Dr. Hugh C. Westlake
Kenmore*

They were all letters that had arrived for me that morning, letters that I had read at my own breakfast table.

CHAPTER III

THE HIDDEN STAR

I AM one of the least fanciful of persons, but as I stood there with those envelopes addressed to myself in my hand, I had one of those uncanny notions that come to the unimaginative about once in a lifetime.

A youngish doctor had been killed on a road I might easily have taken. The doctor had been driving a car like mine; he had my license plates, was wearing my clothes and with my letters in the pockets.

There seemed only one conceivable explanation.

That man must be I, Hugh Westlake. I must have taken the Mill Lane and my car had slipped on the bad surface to crash into a beech tree. In short, I was dead, and now, as a disembodied spirit, I was looking down at my own mortal remains.

The fancy was so overwhelming, so inevitable, that I pinched my arm to see if it was flesh and blood. The pinch hurt; the arm was solid.

And then, suddenly and perhaps quite unreasonably, I felt horribly and sicken-

ingly afraid. I don't even know what it was that I feared, but I knew that I had to get away quickly—quickly from that dark, lonely wreck.

Leaving my medical bag by that one which looked so like it, I started to run blindly down the devious length of Mill Lane toward the main road.

Never in all my life has any sight been more welcome than the lights of that service station which, at last, glowed cheerfully ahead through the trees that lined the Grovestown Pike. The two attendants on duty there must have thought I was fresh out of a bughouse when I ran up, panting and dishevelled, to demand a telephone.

But I didn't care what anyone thought of me. I had one fixed purpose and one only—to talk to my old friend, Inspector Cobb of the Grovestown Police. Until I'd had his slant on this whole impossible affair, I wasn't going to make explanations to anyone.

It was a relief to hear his quiet, level tones when, at length, I got through to his home.

"Listen," I said wildly. "I've just found my own corpse in my own car, in my own clothes—in an accident. No, I'm not tight."

He didn't seem altogether to believe me, but he listened patiently to my somewhat hysterical account of the evening's events. Finally he said:

"Is that gas station the nearest place to the accident?"

I said yes.

"Then find out whether the woman telephoned you from there. Stay right where you are till I get out and don't tell anyone anything. I'll notify the necessary people."

"But——" I began.

"Keep your shirt on," he said, and rang off.

WHEN I emerged from the booth the older of the two attendants handed me a steaming cup of coffee. "You look tuckered out," he said amiably. "Accident?"

"Only a breakdown." I shrugged non-comittally, but took the coffee and sipped it gratefully. "By the way, did a woman come in here about an hour ago to telephone?"

The older man shook his head. "Ain't been no dame around here tonight; ain't been nothing 'cept a coupla school kids for free air. Business is lousy."

A blank had been drawn on Cobb's first deduction.

By now I was calm enough to begin thinking about my own car which, if it and I actually existed, was still stalled somewhere along the Townton Road. I described its whereabouts and handed my key to the younger man who, having equipped himself with a towing rope, went off to salvage it.

I had hardly finished the coffee before he was back again, grinning cheerfully.

"She's outside," he said. "Drove her in myself."

"What was wrong with it?" I asked.

The young man winked at me. "Of course, she's an old model. But there wasn't really nothing wrong with her. She just plain needed gas."

"Gas! But I had her filled up this afternoon. Fourteen gallons, and I haven't gone that many miles since."

"Well, she's dry as a bone now and no sign of a leak." The young man looked rather pitying. "I'll fill her up and you'll be all set."

I explained that I wasn't leaving just then, adding quite unnecessarily that I was waiting for my friend, Inspector Cobb. At the mention of his name the young man started grinning again.

"Well, even if Cobb is a pal of yours, I wouldn't let him look too close at that car of yours. You know it's April now and you're supposed to change your license plates by the first of the year."

"But I did change my plates," I said weakly. "On New Year's Day."

"And you filled her up with gas this afternoon," said the young man with pleasant skepticism. "Okay. If you don't believe me, go see for yourself."

I moved to the door. Sure enough, last year's green license plate stared at me from the rear bumper of my car. That was just one thing too much. I stopped even trying to think it all out. I just relaxed and waited for Cobb.

I DIDN'T have to wait long, for within a very few minutes his car swung round the curve leading to the service station. The inspector looked very sane and matter-of-fact as he greeted me and instructed the two men to direct any other officers who came to the scene of the accident.

We both got into our cars and he followed mine to the spot on Mill Lane where I had left the body of the unknown man.

I had half expected to find the macabre tableau had vanished as mysteriously as it had appeared to me. Things, however, were exactly as I had left them.

For a while after we arrived Cobb worked alone, methodically, systematically.

"Too bad you had to move him out of the car," he grunted at length. "But I suppose doctors must be doctors."

In a short time the lonely lane was invaded with cars, officers, photographers with their flashlight bulbs and enterprising reporters from the local press on the trail of a promising news story.

I answered endless questions and waited what seemed like hours before the authorities were satisfied.

At last I found myself alone with Cobb by my own car.

"I guess I won't keep you around any longer tonight, Westlake," he said, his blue eyes twinkling. "Must have been quite a shock finding your own corpse that way."

"But how and who and why the hell?" I asked weakly.

Cobb pulled from his pocket a pipe which he seldom smoked but often played with. His pleasant, rugged face was thoughtful.

"There's one fairly straightforward explanation for it all," he said. "It's a crazy coincidence, of course, your finding the body. But suppose there was a guy, a criminal escaping from justice, for ex-

ample, who wanted to disappear. Suppose this guy managed to steal your license plates, a suit of your clothes and some old envelopes—that's a pretty smart way of vanishing, isn't it?

"Assuming the identity of someone else, a respectable young doctor? Maybe he was planning to start life over somewhere way off in another state and—"

"And he started life over by bashing into a beech tree," I said doubtfully, but slightly reassured. There might be some sort of logical explanation, after all.

"Sure, sure. Probably his nerves were shot; didn't drive carefully." Cobb's eyes fell on last year's license plates on my car. "I suppose those are your old ones?"

"I think so."

"And I suppose you left them lying around somewhere, in the garage probably?" He shook his head reprovingly. "The Department of Highways tell you old plates should always be destroyed."

"But no one ever does," I put in. "Just the way no one in Kenmore ever locks his garage."

"I know it. That's what makes life so easy for criminals and so difficult for us policemen." He gave a slow smile. "Well, good night. And don't do any more fancy dying. I'm going to need you tomorrow."

And so I drove home, hoping I might be spared any more emotion that night.

BUT in my own house there was plenty of pent-up emotion in the person of my daughter. Dawn, in spite of my futile efforts to send her to bed earlier in the evening, was still up, fully dressed and brooding over a tray set with whisky, soda and some rather watery ice.

Such solicitude for me was astounding when I remembered the bitter resentment she had been exhibiting when I left home. But even more astounding was the fact that her eyes were red and swollen with tears.

My hard-boiled daughter had been crying—a phenomenon which I had not witnessed for years.

In fact, she hurled herself at me and

started to sob madly all over my shoulder.

"Daddy, I—I did try to tell you before you went out," she wailed. "I tried to explain but you wouldn't pay any attention."

"To what, brat?" I asked mystified.

"If I'd known you'd have been called out late at night, I wouldn't have done it. But you sent me to bed and wouldn't get a new car and I was mad." She dabbed at her nose with my handkerchief. "And I thought if the old car didn't seem to work very well, you might maybe change your mind and get a new one. So, after you'd sent me to bed, I snuck down to the garage and I—"

She sniffed noisily.

"I got most all the gas out of the tank with a piece of hose the way they did in a story I read." Her eyes, dewy with tears, gazed at me in genuine regret. "Oh, Daddy, I really am sorry."

In contrast with what had happened that night, my daughter's escapade struck me as irresistibly comic. I lifted her up to hip level and kissed her paternally on the nose.

"You're forgiven this time, brat," I said, trying to retain a shred of sternness. "But any more sabotaging and I'll shoot you right over to an Institution for Delinquent Girls." I set her down and pushed her toward the door. "Now, back to bed. And by bed, I mean bed."

As I gulped down a stiff highball, however, it struck me that my daughter's peca-dillo might well have had serious results. If the accident had not been fatal, Dawn might, in delaying me, easily have caused the loss of precious lives.

Actually, though I did not realize it until many weeks later, my daughter's infantile prank had been responsible for saving a precious life.

A remarkably precious life.

CHAPTER IV

PERIL'S STAR

THE next day I had to go into Groves-town to attend a preliminary inquest and other formalities connected with my

unsettling discovery. Nothing fresh had come to light. The dead man, so grotesquely disguised as myself, had not yet been identified, nor was there any trace of the mysterious woman caller.

Only one really sinister note was struck. The pathologist from Dr. Forder's office maintained that the lacerations which rendered the face unrecognizable had occurred post mortem, though he could not say how long after death.

And since the actual cause of death was a fracture of the upper skull, this meant that one could not altogether rule out the possibility of foul play.

There was, however, a plausible explanation put forward by the captain of the State Troopers. The car had been going at considerable speed when it left the road and struck the first clump of bushes. Afterward, it had rolled until its progress was finally checked by the beech tree. It was perfectly possible that the man had been killed instantaneously at the first impact and that the second had thrown his head through the windshield.

Also, from the alcohol content of his brain, it was obvious he had been drinking heavily.

"If it hadn't been for that," chuckled Cobb when we discussed the thing together afterward, "I'd have been prepared to swear on oath that the victim was my old friend Westlake."

But although he was smiling, I could tell he was puzzled and worried about something. Rather too casually he said: "By the way, Westlake, you told me your daughter had been having quite a few salesmen to the house recently, didn't you?"

"I did," I said grimly.

Cobb shook his head. "Pretty easy for one of those guys to lift a suit of yours and the license plates of the car while he was alone in the house with Dawn and the cook. Strikes me we should check up on those boys. Mind if I call on your daughter this afternoon?"

"Delighted," I said. "And give her the third degree."

And his third degree, when he arrived at our house later in the day, was a masterpiece of tact and efficiency. Without mentioning the real reason for his curiosity, he asked my daughter if she was sure she could recognize the automobile salesman who had come to the house. Dawn's answer was emphatically affirmative. Cobb whisked her off then for a grand tour of the Grovestown car dealers, adding as he left:

"Maybe Dawn could have a bite of supper with Mrs. Cobb and the kids afterward. I'll bring her back alive."

AND he did bring her back alive though it was very late when they reached home. I bundled Dawn unceremoniously to bed, paying scant attention to her shameless propaganda on the marvels she had seen in the various show rooms.

Cobb seemed satisfied with the results of the day's work, but not completely so.

"That kid of yours is pretty smart, Westlake," he said. "Every darn one of the automobile agents had sent a representative out to your house last week and, in each case, Dawn spotted the right salesman. They could all give a good account of themselves. But there was one short."

"Meaning?" I asked.

"Your daughter tells me six men brought cars here, and there are only five automobile agents in Grovestown. We just could not trace the guy who took Dawn and your cook for a trial run yesterday afternoon."

I thought back to that sleek limousine which had almost run me down the day before, and to the brief glimpse I had caught of the nondescript young man who had been moronic enough to let my daughter drive.

"Then you think he was a phony, posing as a salesman just so he, or some pal of his, could sneak the suit and the license plates?"

"That seems to fit. After all, whoever stole those plates must have done it only a short while before you took the car out yesterday or you would have noticed earlier that they were missing."

"Then you think that sixth salesman is the actual guy who tried to assume my identity and ended up in the beech tree?"

Cobb's nod was noncommittal. He took an absent-minded sip of the highball I had mixed for him. "By the way, we've identified the corpse," he said.

"You have?"

"Yeah. Sent the fingerprints to Washington and the F.B.I. wired back a reply. He had a record all right. Illegal entry in 1935 and wanted for deportation as an undesirable. An alien with an unpronounceable moniker and several aliases."

This conversation was making me feel more comfortable. Everything was fitting into so neat and unalarming a pattern.

"Then it looks as if the theory you handed me yesterday is the right one," I commented.

"I guess so." Cobb went on to explain that the man whose body I discovered had been wanted not only by the Immigration authorities, but also by a gang of foreign-born crooks against some of whom he had turned state's evidence. Having been on the spot in Grovestown, it was more than logical that he should have worked out the ingenious scheme of making a getaway disguised as me.

"THE only thing I don't understand," I said, "is why he should have picked on me, of all harmless individuals."

"I don't rightly understand that either." Cobb was looking at me closely and I detected a hint of anxiety in his guileless blue eyes. Then, to my surprise, he pulled out a tin of tobacco and started filling the pipe which he never smoked except in the gravest emergencies.

"I guess you wouldn't have any enemies, would you, Westlake?" he asked, a shade too brightly.

"Enemies? Good heavens, no."

"Or any relatives with an eye to life insurance?"

I stared incredulously. "I'll assume you're sane," I said. "My life insurance would hardly get Dawn through school. And, as for relatives, I have only one ter-

rifying spinster aunt in New England. Oh yes, and a second cousin, son of old Matthew Barker, the famous scientist. His name's Robin and he's just a kid. I've practically never seen him. Why the hell do you ask?"

"Just an idea of mine. Crazy idea. Forget it."

It was obviously impossible for me to forget it under the circumstances. I told him so and demanded an explanation.

He gazed at me in the doubtful, quizzical way with which a doctor looks at a patient when trying to decide whether to tell him an unfavorable prognosis.

"I was just figuring if there had been someone who wanted you removed from the neighborhood without a fuss being made—well, that dead body would have stopped anyone searching for you, wouldn't it? Even I, your oldest friend and a cop at that, would have been prepared to swear on oath that cadaver was you.

"There was the same kind of car, the same license plates. I guess I'd never have thought of checking up on the engine number. And Dawn could have sworn to the suit and the letters—" He broke off with an uneasy little laugh. "But that's all nonsense, of course."

"It's pretty nasty sounding nonsense," I said. "Go on."

"Okay. There are those face wounds, for example. The doctors are certain they occurred after death. Of course, Captain Streeter's explanation holds water, but it is possible the guy was killed first, bashed about so his own mother wouldn't recognize him, and then planted in the car accident later."

"You mean he might have been murdered?"

"Sure. And he might have been dumped there, as I said, to make it look as if you'd gotten yourself respectably killed."

I WAS growing increasingly bewildered and increasingly alarmed. "But isn't that cuckoo? I mean why on earth should anyone go to all that trouble to kill or kidnap me?"

"Of course it's cuckoo. Just an old dick letting his imagination rip." With growing concern I noticed that Cobb had taken a match from his pocket and was actually applying it to his stuffed pipe. "But there is one thing, Westlake, which I haven't told anyone. Maybe it doesn't mean a thing and it's probably just another of those silly coincidences."

He spoke slowly and with obvious unwillingness.

"That woman who called you on the phone and then so mysteriously slipped out of the picture—she said the accident was at the crossing of Hill Road and Townton Road, didn't she?"

"I certainly thought that was where she said."

"And you found the body a mile or two away on Mill Lane?"

"That's right. She probably got the names Mill and Hill mixed up."

"Maybe." Cobb was puffing at his pipe now. "But I kind of wonder about that because there actually was an accident last night at the crossing of Hill Road and the Townton Road. If your car hadn't run out of gas, and if you hadn't walked across country to Mill Lane, you'd have run into it."

I gulped. "You mean there were two accidents?"

"Well, I don't know that it was exactly an accident, but old Joe Briggs was going home down Hill Road last night in his T Model Ford and he saw a big car catty-cornered across the road just on the turn. He doesn't remember the make of car, but he saw a woman get out."

"A woman!"

"Yeah. She stopped him and asked: 'You aren't Dr. Westlake, are you?'"

"He said no and asked if he could help. She said it wasn't anything serious. So he drove on. That's all."

I felt an unpleasant shivery sensation as if a snail were crawling around the back of my neck. "And exactly what do you deduce from that?"

Cobb did not speak for a moment. Then, looking meditatively at his pipe, he said:

"If that body on Mill Lane *had* been a plant, and if the telephone call *had* been an attempt to lure you into some sort of trap, the natural place for the kidnapper to wait would have been the crossing of Hill Road and the Townton Road. wouldn't it? And the logical way to make sure you'd stop your car would have been to have their car catty-cornered across the road."

His voice was so solemn and the situation seemed so utterly wild that my sense of humor overcame my apprehension.

"Really!" I said. "A beautiful, besabbed woman in a sleek sedan waiting to capture me and whisk me off into eternity with a pinch-hitting corpse left behind—really, you must have been reading Oppenheim. Cobb."

"I said it was all a screwy idea, didn't I?" apologized the inspector, but he did not smile. "Anyway, tomorrow the coroner's jury will almost certainly give a verdict of death by misadventure and the case will be closed as far as the authorities are concerned."

"And as far as we are concerned?" I queried.

"We," said Cobb, still without smiling, "will bide our time and—hope for the best."

On that sinister note, he rose, knocked out his pipe at the hearth and took his leave.

CHAPTER V

THUNDER FROM THE STARS

AND so we bided our time. I did my best to forget the incident and the vague apprehensions it had inspired in myself. The story had become such common gossip in the neighborhood that it would have been dangerous folly for my mythical murderers (or abductors) to have attempted anything else for the time being. The publicity, at least, was a safeguard to me.

Tactfully, Dawn allowed the painful subject of the new car to drop. Everything slipped back to its safe, quiet tempo.

That is, until the night of the thunder-storm.

It started just as Dawn and I were finishing supper, probably about ten days after the accident. The first clap of thunder came so quickly after its lightning flash that we both jumped, and Hamish, Dawn's lugubrious Scottish terrier, ran to cover under the couch.

"Oh, Daddy, how swell!" Dawn made a dive to retrieve Hamish and carried him, despite wriggling protests, to the window. "Do you know," she added ghoulishly, "last time there was a real storm, three people in a car were squashed flat by a falling tree? Do let's leave the shades undrawn and watch."

We watched the storm, presumably in the hopes of seeing more innocent inhabitants of Kenmore annihilated before our eyes. It was one hell of an affair; the thunder clattered; the lightning, slashing down like whip lashes, turned our view of the Kenmore Valley into a melodrama backcloth. And soon the rain came, roaring, pounding and splashing against the window panes.

"Isn't it something?" said my daughter with a sort of muted ecstasy.

"It is," I said.

That was the moment when, with true theatrical instinct, every light in the room went out.

Dawn gave a delighted gurgle and rushed out into the kitchen in the hopes of finding our hired man and watching him fix the fuses. She returned with candles and the news that it was John's night out. Being of a strictly non-electrical turn of mind myself, there was nothing for me to do but resign myself to candlelight. I dropped into a chair in front of the cheerful fire and began pleasantly to think of nothing.

But Dawn stayed glued to the window, watching the storm. About five minutes later, she exclaimed:

"Daddy, look. Someone's coming up the drive in a car."

I joined her and over her shoulder saw headlights cutting through the rainy dark-

ness of my modest driveway. I gave an inward groan, fearing some emergency case and an uncomfortable exodus into the storm.

As I watched, a particularly violent flash of lightning revealed the car itself, a large, very expensive looking sedan.

"That," said my daughter, slipping from grace for the first time in days, "is exactly the kind of car our new car ought to be. And look, Daddy—it's got Illinois license plates."

I had noticed that, too. Wondering who on earth could be coming to my house in an Illinois car on that foul night, I moved, candle in hand, into the dark hall. The buzzer sounded and I opened the front door to admit an exuberant gust of wind and rain.

I DID not see the girl at first. She was small and wore a black, boyish slicker which seemed to merge her into the darkness behind. Her hair was dark, too, and she had no hat. It was not until she had moved into the hall and I had shut the door behind her that I really got a good look at her. Then I saw that she was very young, very attractive and drenched to the bone.

"I'm sorry." She looked down at her wet coat with a slight apologetic smile. "I had to keep jumping out to make sure I was on the right road. I was determined to get here tonight. You are Dr. Hugh Westlake, aren't you?"

I admitted my identity.

"Thank the Lord this is the right place." She smiled again, showing small, white teeth. There was something about her. "I left Chicago last evening and never stopped except for gas and to find the way. I was sure you'd be an old fogey. Funny! you're young." She laughed a strange, rather unsteady laugh. "I'm Sydney Train, by the way, and I have to talk to you about something which—well, I guess you might literally call it a matter of life or death."

Nothing she said made any sense nor gave any clue to her mysterious presence in my house, eight hundred miles from her

own home. But, as a doctor, I could see she was in very bad shape. She was swaying slightly as she talked and her lips were almost as pale as her face.

That brought me to my senses. I took her arm and practically carried her into the living room. She didn't protest when I sat her in a chair by the fire and brought her brandy. She just swallowed it and said:

"Guess I forgot to eat on the way. Sorry."

"That'll be remedied," I said and started for the kitchen.

In the hall I found my daughter hovering tensely in the shadows.

"Is she drunk?" she asked.

"Of course not," I said sternly. "Go and tell Rebecca to bring some dry clothes and something to eat—quick."

When the clothes were brought, I withdrew tactfully to my bedroom, leaving my visitor to the ministrations of the female members of the household. As I walked restlessly up and down, I tried to figure out what in heaven's name could have brought this unknown girl post-haste from Chicago to visit an obscure country practitioner like myself.

Medical advice? That was too flattering. True I had written an article some years ago for a medical journal on arteriosclerosis, but Miss Sydney Train was obviously not arteriosclerotic; besides there were a thousand doctors in Illinois who knew more about the subject than I did.

It was only then that I started thinking about what had happened to me a couple of weeks ago. I also started thinking about the unidentified woman who had called me over the telephone to the scene of that fantastic accident—the woman who had never yet been traced. I began wondering about Sydney Train in quite a new light.

I WAS still trying to puzzle it out when Dawn appeared and announced importantly: "She's quite decent now, Daddy. Rebecca's lent her a wrap and is drying her things. She's got the loveliest pink underclothes. They're hanging in the kitchen if you want to see them."

I said quickly: "Have you any idea what she wants, brat?"

Dawn's shrug was nonchalant. "She said something about you being an executioner."

That, I told myself as I went downstairs, was one hell of a reason to want to see anyone.

In the living room I found Sydney Train sitting in front of the fire, very small and excitingly informal in a nondescript purple garment of Rebecca's. She had put down an empty soup bowl in front of Hamish who was polishing it off appreciatively.

"That's better, much, much better." She smiled at me. "You see I'm making myself at home. After all, I am one of the family. At least, I practically am."

Even in the restricted candlelight she must have seen the blank expression on my face, for she added quickly:

"You see, I'm going to marry Robin."

That struck no chord at all with me, but Dawn cut in:

"Marry Robin, how lovely!" Her voice was full of excitement which the idea of a wedding always inspires in her, provided it does not imply a stepmother for herself. "Couldn't you do it here?" She whirled on me. "Daddy, let's have the wedding here."

"Am I supposed to know who Robin is?" I asked vaguely.

"Oh, Daddy, you know you know. He's the cousin I've never seen and whose money you've got and won't let him have until he's twenty-one."

It all came back to me then and I understood what Dawn had meant by referring to me as an "executioner." For a man with so few living relatives I might at least have had a better memory for those who survived.

But Robin Barker had been little more than a name to me—some vague person who was to receive a trust fund under the will of Matthew Barker, an eccentric cousin of my father's who had made me one of his executors, presumably because he had even fewer relatives than I. Except for an occasional letter from the bank

which held the estate in trust, I'd had no reason to think about Robin Barker for years.

And yet his name stirred in me a dim uneasiness which I could not place until I remembered that I myself had mentioned him only the other day to Cobb when the inspector had been asking me those very alarming questions. The dead body masqueraded as me—the unknown woman on the phone—Sydney Train—Robin Barker. Could there possibly be a tie-up somewhere?

CHAPTER VI

THE ALIEN STAR

SYDNEY TRAIN was watching me with a straight, intent gaze which put me suddenly on my guard. Somehow her eyes, dark and beautiful behind smoky lashes, were just a shade too interested.

She said: "You must know Robin Barker, your cousin?"

"Of course. I just didn't put two and two together. You've come to talk about Robin?"

"I have." The girl was still staring straight at me. "Robin is in terrible danger. There's something ghastly happening and—"

"But Robin's only a kid," I broke in hurriedly, seeing that Dawn was listening with quite unholy fascination. "Last time I saw him he was a schoolboy with untidy hair and chemical stains on his fingers who bowed to me like a foreigner and gave me an awful complex by calling me sir."

"Robin will be twenty-one next month." Sydney Train spoke with surprising vehemence. "And he's probably about the best synthetic chemist in America."

I turned to Dawn. "Brat, I think I heard John come in just now. Go help him fix the fuses. After that, bed."

Following my daughter's reluctant exit, I handed my extraordinary visitor a cigarette. "Now," I said, "how about beginning at the beginning?"

She began at the beginning—with herself. There was a soft, spellbinding quality

about her voice which, almost as soon as she started speaking, had me forgetting everything else. She was, she admitted with disarming candor, the very spoiled daughter of a very rich manufacturer of chemicals. She had come out in Chicago the year before last and done all the usual things and thought them rather fine.

She would have gone on being a brainless little socialite, she said, if she hadn't gone abroad last year and met Robin Barker in Vienna where he was studying the aniline industry to which his father, Professor Barker, had contributed so much.

For her it had been the One Romance. Robin had made her realize the futility of the social whirl. Robin had purpose, genius. He had also—and this I suspected was his strongest weapon—a complete and utter indifference to the existence of Miss Sydney Train.

With a certain amount of naiveté she admitted she had chased my young cousin shamelessly and had finally wrung from him a promise that, when he returned to America, he would apply to her father for a position in his Chicago firm.

"He came six months ago," she concluded. "I almost busted Father on transatlantic calls. But I got him over."

I expressed surprise that any young man should need so much persuasion from a girl like her. "He must be something unusual, isn't he?" I asked.

"Oh, no. He's not every girl's money. But—" She broke off and aded suddenly: "Do you believe in the stars? Astrology?"

"The stars?" I echoed. "Good Lord, no. Old Professor Barker was the astrology crank. Don't tell me Robin's inherited that from him as well as his chemical ability."

"No. Robin doesn't believe in the stars. But I do." She got up from her chair, moving to the mantelpiece. Out of the direct candlelight, she looked oddly vague and elusive, almost like a shadow.

"I had my horoscope cast by Maxinus when I was in Austria. It was marvelously true about my past and Robin was in it. I recognized him at once. My whole destiny is bound up in his. That's why I'm

sticking to him. And I'm going to marry him, too. But—but all hell's going to break loose first."

SHE had me stuck then. She talked as if she believed desperately in what she was saying. And yet—perhaps it was my imagination—I had the feeling that all this was a veil obscuring what she had really come to find out.

I inquired politely if there had been any more tangible indications of hell breaking loose to date.

"Certainly. That's why I'm here. I told you Robin was in terrible danger." She picked up a pink china dog from the mantel and put it down again. "It was all fine until a few weeks ago. He got on finely with Father. He was doing good work for the company and he didn't seem to mind the idea of our being married fairly soon. Then, about four weeks ago, everything went—gerfluey."

She turned to look at me over her shoulder.

"It started with Father. He came home one night in a towering rage. That means something for Father, believe you me. He said he had fired Robin, that I was forbidden to see him again, and he wouldn't give any explanation. When I argued, he spat out: 'The young cub will end up with a knife in his back sure as shooting. Keep away from him unless you want one in yours, too.' That's all he'd say."

"And Robin?"

"He was even worse. He went and shut himself up in his hotel and gave orders I wasn't to be admitted." She gave a bitter little laugh.

"Finally I got him on the phone and he said he wasn't going to see me until he had something definite to offer me. Wouldn't stand in my way; you know the kind of stuff a poor man says to a rich man's daughter. Perhaps, after his father's estate was settled, and if I still felt the same way about him, well . . . after that he just plain rang off."

To me there seemed nothing more sinister to that than the implication that

my young cousin, Robin, was not as enthusiastic about Miss Train as she was about him.

"But I wasn't going to let him get away," she was continuing urgently. "I got hold of the hotel detective and put him onto watching Robin's room constantly. He sent me a daily report and everything became more and more mysterious.

First of all his stepmother moved in. She's partly foreign, you know, and not bad looking. After that Robin's rooms were simply flooded with visitors, most of them foreign. At first I thought they were friends of the stepmother, but it was Robin they went to see and they were either threatening him or upsetting him terribly.

He wasn't doing any work and he'd go for days without shaving. I was getting desperate—especially as I didn't know what it was all about."

She moved toward me, coming back into the sphere of candlelight, and I saw once again those steady, enigmatic eyes watching me. "You've got to be interested. You've got to realize there's danger maybe for all of us.

"One day, just over two weeks ago, the detective saw two men come out of Robin's room. They were talking. They didn't see him. He heard them say: '*We've got to go easy with him. He's more useful to us alive than dead—for the present.*' Then the other one said: '*Then we'll have to work through this man, Westlake. There's nothing against eliminating him—if necessary.*'"

Her lashes slid down over her eyes, but she was still watching me. I could feel her gauging the exact degree of shock that her last fantastic remark had inflicted.

INSTINCTIVELY I tried to control my features. But those few words had so abruptly and ultimately forged the missing link between this unaccountable girl, my unaccountable cousin and the weird accident of the week before. I knew then that Cobb's old wives' fears must in part be justified. Something infinitely obscure

and mysterious was working itself out around me, and even more obscurely there was danger for me.

I felt a slight tingling in my spine. It wasn't pleasant, in the light of what had already happened, to think of two unknown men in a Chicago hotel calmly discussing my elimination.

Sydney Train's voice brought me back. Blankly she said: "You do believe me, don't you?"

"I rather do. It's just crazy enough to be true. Tell me, did you get a description of these guys?" I tried to laugh carelessly. "Just as well to know what sort of stranger not to get too pally with."

She nodded. "The detective said one of them was young and built like a wrestler. The other was older and had a purplish birthmark on his left cheek."

"Very attractive," I said.

"I'm grateful to them for one thing," said Sydney Train slowly. "They put me on to you. Robin had mentioned a cousin or uncle or something having charge of the estate but he'd never told me his name."

"I called the bank in New York pretending to be Mrs. Barker. I said I'd mislaid your address. The Trust Department told me you were living in Kenmore. So I decided to hop the car and drive over to see what it's all about."

"You certainly haven't left any stone unturned," I said, impressed by such a display of resourcefulness. "But I'm afraid I can't help you."

She said incredulously: "You can't mean you don't know anything about what's going on?"

"I can mean that." Even if my hunch of a tie-up between this Chicago dirty work and the accident was correct, there was no point in taking Sydney Train into my confidence. "I only saw Robin once many years ago. I've heard nothing from or about him since."

I could tell she was disappointed. I could tell too that she only half believed me. "But these people know you; you're important to them for some reason. I'm sure it's something Robin knows that they're

after—something maybe that his father left." She paused, adding in a strangely penetrating voice: "I think it's something you know too."

I shrugged. "My dear young lady, I assure you I know nothing about your temperamental fiancé; and I know next to nothing about Professor Barker. All I know is that he worked abroad quite a while as an expert aniline chemist. He left a fair amount of money, but it's all tied up in trust funds. No one could be after Robin's money. There's not enough of it."

"But his father, couldn't he have invented something awfully valuable, something people might do anything to get?"

HER face was suddenly solemn with the earnest gravity of a little girl. This constant shifting of mood from aggressiveness to ingenuousness was something I couldn't keep up with.

I said: "I believe old man Barker invented a great many valuable things. But I wouldn't go for any secret formula business if I were you. He was quite an idealist. Never took out patents. He used to say that any invention of his was for the good of humanity and should be given to the world. If he had gone in for patenting his processes the way Edison did, he'd have been many times a millionaire."

"Then I can't understand it," she said half as if she were talking to herself. "If only I could tell more from the stars, I—" She broke off and with the impulsiveness of a child sat down on the arm of my chair, putting her hand on my shoulder. "Are there any papers or anything attached to the record of Robin's estate?"

"I believe there are. There's the will, of course, and a couple of other documents. I never really bothered to read them."

"But you have them here?"

"They're in the safe."

She slid the fraction of an inch closer to me on the arm of the chair. I wondered if she knew just how attractive she was and if she wasn't deliberately capitalizing it.

"Show me those papers," she said softly. "I've come all this way. I'm desperately anxious for Robin. I've got to find out something, anything. Please show me those papers."

She was using some very delicate perfume. I was extremely conscious of it and of her. For a moment I had the sensation that I should be careful, that somewhere a trapdoor was opening to engulf me. Then I thought, what the hell. I couldn't do any damage by reading her the papers. She could hardly snatch them from me by brute force.

I got up. "All right," I said. "I'll get the things. You stay here."

She let her relief be just a little too obvious, I thought. I grabbed a candle and went out of the room, shutting the door behind me. It was only then with a safe distance between me and Sydney Train that I became aware again of the storm. It was still raging, though a little less violently. As I lit myself up the dark stairs, a rumble of thunder sounded and, when it died away, I heard my daughter's shrill voice from the kitchen.

Presumably John and Dawn had only just gotten around to fixing the fuses.

There was something comforting and domestic about the thought of fuses. It brought back a sense of proportion to a world which until then had been peopled only by Sydney Train, her bizarre astrology and her unknown menaces lurking in faroff Chicago.

CHAPTER VII

NOW THE STARS SPEAK

IN MY small office on the second floor I went to the old safe in the corner where I kept my few private papers. I propped the candle on a chair arm at my side and started fumbling with the very elementary combination.

As I did so, I had one of those uncanny sensations, based on nothing, that I was being watched. I could almost feel the intent gaze of eyes behind my back. But I was too ashamed to give way to my

jitteriness and turn around until I had opened the safe and taken out the large envelope marked *Estate of Matthew Barker*.

I did turn then, however, picking up the candle and holding it in front of me.

It was with a certain amount of incredulity that I saw the door, which I had left open, very slowly and silently closing.

Obviously I had not been so fanciful after all. Having hesitated a second, I hurried to the door and threw it open. I stared into the darkness of the passage. There was no sign of anyone.

"You there, brat?" I called.

But there was no answering voice. Indeed I could hear the faint argument between my daughter and John still progressing in the back kitchen.

As I returned to the safe, shut it and went downstairs to the living room, my vague doubts about Sydney Train crystallized into a definite suspicion.

Why on earth should she have bothered to follow me to that safe—if indeed she had?

In the living room she was sitting just where I had left her on the arm of my chair. But I wasn't fooled. Her body was just a shade too relaxed and her breath was coming a little faster than normal.

She said brightly: "Oh, have you got them?"

"Yes," I said. "Surprise, surprise."

I emptied the contents of the envelope on to the table. There was a copy of Matthew Barker's will, some insurance documents and a yellowing sheet of parchment-like paper with German writing on it.

I picked up old Matthew Barker's will and skimmed through the main clauses. There was a trust fund for his second wife, Greta Barker, which had already been taken care of. There was another one for Robin from which he would derive an income of some six thousand dollars a year after his twenty-first birthday. Nice, of course, for Robin, but hardly enough to inspire unknown crooks to any criminal activity.

One clause seemed slightly abnormal. It

was very long and it detailed a list of various very respectable scientific institutions which were to receive all Robert's share of the estate in the event of his death before his twenty-first birthday.

It seemed odd that Matthew Barker should have made such a point of the possibility of his son's dying before he attained his majority. After all, young men of today do not often get cut off in their early manhood.

SYDNEY TRAIN had been watching me with undisguised impatience. I gave her the rough gist of each clause. When I came to the last one, she asked sharply:

"Why did he think Robin might die before his twenty-first birthday? It— it can't be because—" she broke off, her face completely changing its expression as her eyes moved from me to the yellowing sheets of paper on the table. "Look," she cried hoarsely. "Look at that—there. Please, please let me see it."

Rather startled, I picked up the document, expecting it to be something of extreme significance. It was with some disappointment that I read in Matthew Barker's old-fashioned flourishing script:

The Horoscope of my Son, Robin Westlake Barker, cast by Maxinus the Week of his Birth. Not to be shown to him unless he shall have come of Age.

There was something very ominous about that *unless*.

"Don't you see?" Sydney was saying, her eyes gleaming with excitement. "Robin's father had Maxinus cast his horoscope. That'll tell us everything. It'll explain what's happening now. And—and it will tell us what's going to happen later on."

I said with some irony: "It'll only tell us if you're a linguist. It's in German."

"That's all right. I can read German."

She snatched the papers from my hand and held them close to the candle. As she turned the sheets I saw strange charts and figures and a great deal of close writing

in—to me—undecipherable German script.

"Look, look." Her finger was pointing unsteadily at a scrawled line of writing. "There's his mother's death—tragic, sudden—by drowning. Robin told me his mother went down in the *Vestris* when he was a kid."

I wasn't convinced by any of this mumbo-jumbo. And I wasn't going to let her think that I was.

"Look, here's illness!" she was exclaiming. "Robin nearly died of pneumonia when he was sixteen. Why it's uncanny. See, there's where his father marries again. Four years ago, wasn't it? There's his father's death . . . Robin's devotion to science . . . everything."

"Haven't you come in yet?" I asked frivolously.

"Yes, yes, here I am. Good Lord, what a mess!"

She read some rapid words in German, then turned to me, her eyes in the candle-light round and flat as a cat's.

"You don't believe in astrology. Well, listen to this. I had my horoscope cast by this man Maxinus two years ago. That's eighteen years after he did this one of Robin's. Well, from a certain point, his horoscope and mine are practically identical. We come under the same influences. I shall unwittingly involve him in a terrible temptation; there will be the greatest possible danger, crowding in on him from all sides. And . . ."

Her gaze dropped again to the paper. For a moment she stood perfectly still. Then I saw all the color drain from her cheeks; saw a look of blind terror come into her eyes.

"Would you like to know," she asked almost inaudibly, "just why Robin's father put that clause about death in his will?"

I nodded.

"It shows it here. Robin's father didn't want him to read this until he was twenty-one for a very good reason. And—and it all fits. It fits appallingly."

A little shiver ran through the small slender body. She raised a hand to her

face. Suddenly the room seemed cold and fraught with premonition. Outside the last stirrings of the storm sounded like muffled cannons.

"It says it here, she repeated. "There's just a chance that it might be deflected, but it's only a chance. Within a month of his twenty-first birthday, Robin Barker is going to be *murdered*."

It was crazy—just plain crazy. I refused to let myself believe it. And yet, for the second time that evening, I felt

an uncomfortable prickly sensation at the top of my spine.

"And you!" Sydney Train whispered. "You—you are his nearest male relative on the paternal side, aren't you?"

"Yes," I said, "Yes, I suppose I am."

"Then it's the same for you, too." She moved toward me, her lips very pale. Her fingers closed over my sleeve.

Those fingers were very tight.

"It says it here. Robin's nearest male relative is going to be murdered—too."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Barrel-head Pinch

WHEN a cop has to crash through with four bits for the privilege of arresting a cab-driver—there's a new angle on the cost of law enforcement in New York City.

The thing happened this year, and is a matter of record. Patrolman O'Shaughnessy (we're taking liberties with names, but the rest of the story is straight) is a member of the Midtown Squad, the cream of New York's creamiest.

Patrolman O'Shaughnessy was on duty one late summer day when a remarkable person named, say, Cohen, proceeded across an intersection in his taxicab, failing to heed O'Shaughnessy's signal. Letting out a blast of his whistle, the officer pursued the cab for two blocks, stopped its progress, and wrote out a summons.

Whereupon the driver did a rather remarkable thing. He shook his head and said he wouldn't take the summons. Officer O'Shaughnessy said it was either that or a trip to the station house. The hackman, unperturbed, replied that the latter alternative was all right with him, and invited the cop into his cab for the ride.

So—settling himself back in the cushions, Patrolman O'Shaughnessy rode behind his prisoner. The driver, cool as you please, snapped down his flag; and when they got to the station house, he blandly demanded fifty cents cab fare of the officer.

O'Shaughnessy had to pay it, too—getting in return the strictly dubious satisfaction of seeing the hackie fined three dollars for a traffic violation.

—Crockett Cooper.

Backache, Leg Pains may be Danger Sign

Of Tired Kidneys—How To Get Happy Relief

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter

stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait. Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

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



• ENFILADE •

When gunfire sweeps an enemy column from end to end, or his line from flank to flank, that enemy is "enfiladed." This is the most deadly kind of fire. The word comes from the French "enfiler" (to thread) and means the foe is "threaded through from side to side".

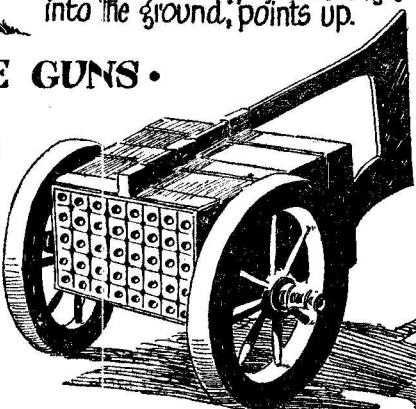
The FIRST BAYONET.

The forerunner of the bayonet was the forked gun-rest of Gustavus Adolphus' musketeers, for it could also be used as a palisade against cavalry, by thrusting it into the ground, points up.



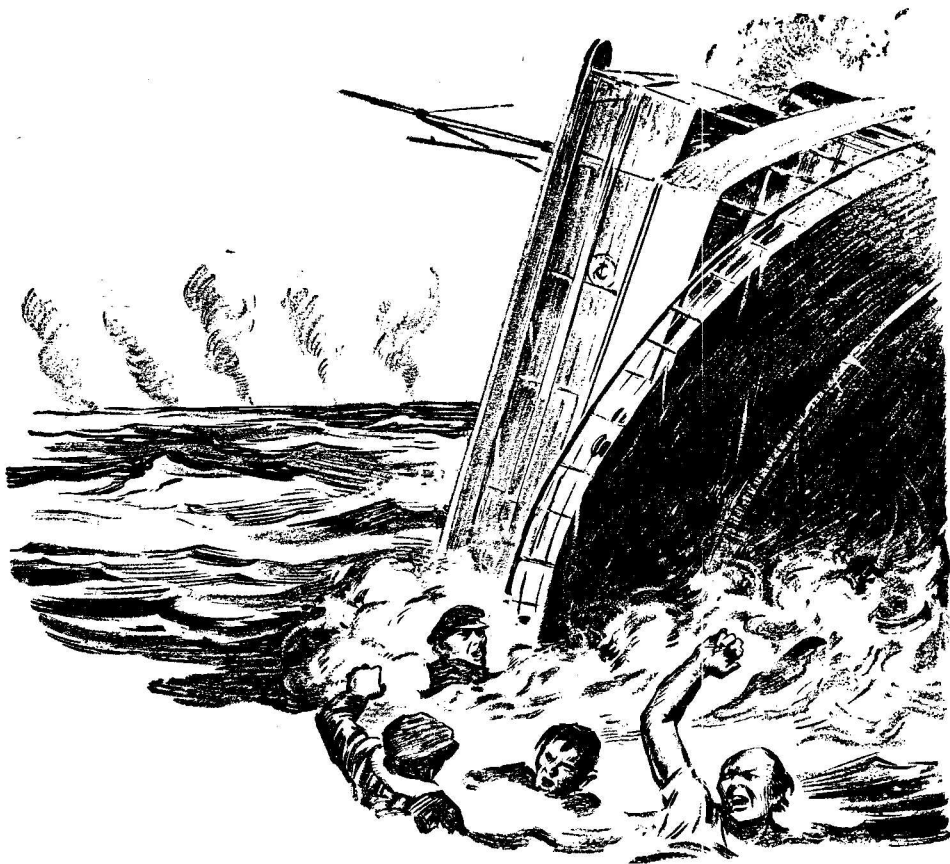
• MACHINE GUNS •

Machine guns are by no means new. In 1409 the German Army had a multi-shot cannon consisting of 40 barrels on a single mount.



• TRAINING HORSES •

First soldiers to train their horses were the Numidian mercenaries under Hannibal. They taught their animals so well that they rode them into battle without reins or bridle, and even directed them by voice alone . . .



Captain Jonah

Presenting the Calamity Trio, a hair-trigger group of rascals disturbing the South Seas with a cargo of one white rat, one concertina, and an assortment of ingenious ways for starting—and finishing—trouble. With particular attention to Pat Blake, a skipper who thrives on shipwreck

By **CRAWFORD SULLIVAN**

Author of "S. S. Sesame,"
"Even Stephen," etc.

I

AT LEVUKA they say the roads of adventure start out from Sophia's hotel. That was truer in the old days when, favored by eastern trades, Levuka was the port of entry to Great Fiji, and Sophia's Hotel was the favorite

brawling ground for seafaring men of every nation.

The advent of steamships made Levuka a ghost town; but the hotel still stands, and the brawling is still conducted by a select group of amiable scoundrels who would have gladdened the late Sophia's hard, cold eye.

In the strictest sense of the word, Patrick Blake was not a scoundrel. He merely drank a little too much and worked a little too little.

The "Orion's" forward part was open as a church door. Kane followed Blake down the side, swooping down like an express train



A radio operator on an American tanker, Pat Blake jumped ship in Suva one day and turned up six months later as the owner of a sixty-foot schooner called the *Walu*. While the government was arguing whether or not he should be deported, the *Walu* cruised from island to island establishing a fine trade in trocha shells.

Pat Blake enjoyed this gay, vagrant life. Sitting in the lounge of Sophia's Hotel, he would have been enjoying it a lot more if Solomon Stone had not appeared before him.

Even in Sophia's Hotel it is not considered cricket to walk up without warning and slug a cash customer on the jaw; but that is what Solomon Stone attempted to do. An expert at dodging blows, Pat Blake was also fairly proficient at dishing them out; and, as Solomon Stone swung,

Blake sidled out of the chair and threw a looping right into Stone's midriff.

Stone emitted a loud *whoof* and bent forward claspings his stomach. A jolting left caught him squarely on the button, causing his expansive frame to be spread-eagled on the mat rug. He sat there glaring at Blake and making spluttery noises.

Pat Blake wrinkled his puggish nose. "I'm surprised at you, Solly," he said. "You an' me being in the same business, we should be friendly rivals—"

"Filthy beggar!" snapped Solomon Stone. "You've been trying to ruin my trade with the natives!"

"Which is better than ruining the natives themselves," said Blake. "Although the government allows us civilized people to corrode our livers with alcohol, selling liquor to the natives is distinctly bottom-of-the-deck. You shouldn't do it."

"I suppose you'll try to report me?" sneered Stone.

"No thanks," said Blake. "If you won't play the game square, I can bust you up in other ways. These Fijians are probably the only unspoiled race in the South Seas. I like 'em, and I don't intend to let some money-grubbing rat shoot 'em full of rot-gut whiskey."

Solomon Stone got up, dark eyes glowing from beneath jungly brows. He was big and sloppy-looking with a shrub of bluish whiskers which always appeared to be moist.

"You're not so righteous," he said bitterly. "You won that ship of yours in a poker game, and now you're trying to run me out of business. I don't know how you got your pull with the natives, but—"

"Salesmanship," Blake cut in. "I used to sell vacuum cleaners."

"Here's some advice," growled Solomon Stone. "Keep out of my territory or there'll be a dead Yank floating in the middle of the Koro Sea!" A flourish of his fist augmented the statement, and Solomon Stone strode from the hotel angrily.

BLAKE finished his drink and went over to the bar. A sandy-haired man sat hunched on a stool drinking a double Scotch and soda.

He had a brown, bland face which seemed to be shining with suppressed laughter. Blake knew that he had just come over from Suva and that his name was Martin Drill.

"Rum sort of bloke, isn't he?" remarked Drill, pointing to the doorway where Stone had made his exit. "Reminds me of a brontosaurus. Y'know, one of those antediluvian things."

"He's plenty peeved at me," said Blake. "I told the natives up at Taveuni not to trade with him, and he had to return with an empty boat."

"How could you do that?" asked Martin Drill.

"It's the power of science," said Blake.

"The power of Buck Jones and Mickey Mouse. When I started trading, I knew I'd have to beat Stone at his own game. Stone sold liquor; so I had to find something better.

"I bought a small generator and a projection machine, rented some film, and gave a movie show in every village. Now my word is law. If I catch the natives buying liquor from Stone, I refuse to show the movies."

"My word!" Martin Drill was so impressed that he bought Blake a drink. "Y' know, I'd like to have a man of your type for an assistant. Would you be interested?"

"No," said Blake flatly. "I'd rather be my own boss."

"This is only for a short time," said Drill in a confidential whisper. "I am on a mission for the crown, and I need someone with your ability. Say the word, and away we go."

"Sorry," said Blake. "I promised Ratu Joni that I'd—"

"The government will pay you five hundred pounds," Drill hastened. "That isn't to be sneezed at."

"With troca shell selling at thirty-eight pounds a ton, I'm doing fine right now," said Blake. "Flip you for the drinks."

Being a stubborn man himself, Martin Drill admired Blake's obstinacy. He also admired the American's confident eyes and square chin, and the way he gulped three fingers of Sophia's poison without batting an eye.

"Tell you what" he proposed. "If you win, I pay you ten quid on the spot. If you lose, you come with me. It's your shout."

Pat Blake could resist anything but the turn of a card or a coin. He grinned approval and said, "Heads."

Drill tossed a shilling; watched it roll around on the floor. When it came to rest beside a spittoon, he found himself looking at the King's profile. Sighing gloomily, he peeled two five-pound notes from a fat roll.

"Thanks," said Blake. "Another drink?"

Drill shook his head. "I have to check supplies," he said. "I'm sailing at sunset. Cheerio."

"Cheerio," said Blake. He was feeling conversational, so he got into an argument with the Australian bartender over the respective merits of Scotch and bourbon. It was long past sunset when he strolled out of the place and made his way toward Harm Jee's, anticipating a plate of steak and eggs.

Such pleasant thoughts were instantly banished when he glanced at the docks. A sheet of red flame was leaping skyward, and black smoke poured from the hull of a slender schooner. Frantic natives scurried across the wharf, yelling, gesticulating and dabbing the flames with buckets of water. A few were just sitting back and enjoying the blaze.

Pat Blake found nothing enjoyable about it, however, for the vessel was his boat, the *Walu*.

II

THE alcoholic haze which surrounded Patrick Blake was quickly dissipated. He sprang into action like a fire horse in a bell factory, racing to the dock.

When he got there, the *Walu's* entire deck space was ablaze, and flames wreathed the mast, gnawing hungrily at wet canvas. One of the natives had discovered an ax and was busily chopping the *Walu's* taffrail. Several others were rigging a hose to a pumping engine and debating the matter at the tops of their lungs.

Blake took the hose away from them, adjusted the base with two twists, and grabbed the nozzle.

"Pump, you *ki-vitis*!" he bellowed. "Pump!"

The natives bent to their task eagerly, and a thin spout of water curved from the nozzle, while a dozen other streams squirted from the rotted fabric, making the hose look like a live centipede.

Blake threw down the hose in disgust. The ship was doomed, but there might

still be a chance to save his personal belongings. Clambering over the fiery stern, he plunged into the afterscuttle. The cabin was a black smoke-hole; and he lit a match, taking stock of his worldly possessions.

A white linen suit, a can of tobacco, three decks of cards and a Colt automatic. He decided to save the gun and tobacco, and was about to leave when he noticed a large black box on the floor. His movie projector. The thing had cost him too much to be abandoned without a struggle. He picked up the heavy box and started to lug it up the companionway.

When he reached the top, a wall of yellow flame blocked his path. He pulled his coat collar around his face and was preparing to plough through when a creaking sound prompted him to glance upward. Its bottom part eaten away, the mizzen-mast smashed into the scuttle, tearing the wood into splinters and enveloping the whole poop with a canopy of smouldering sailcloth.

Blake dodged back in time to escape being crushed by the mastpole. His eyes smarting, he struggled down the alleyway, trying to find the forward deckladder. Hissing slivers of fire gleamed through the seams in the hull, and there was a pervading stench of burning tar.

His lungs seemed clogged; his legs became weighted with lead, and the heavy box slid from his grasp. Dropping to his knees, he crawled the length of the alleyway and pawed at the first step of the forward ladder in an effort to pull himself upward.

Instead of touching wood, his fingers clasped a slender hand. The hand tightened, and Blake felt himself being dragged up the ladder, through the forward companionway.

Reaching the deck, he gulped a draught of fresh air, and the strength returned to his legs. A curling sheet of flame licked his coat; his hair was alive with sparks.

"Over the side, my bully!"

Through streaming eyes, Blake caught a glimpse of Martin Drill's imperturbable

features. Head low, he hurdled the deck rail and hit the water with a sizzling splash.

When he came to the surface, Drill was treading water beside him. They struck out for the wharf, climbed up a shaky ladder and squatted on a piling. The *Walu* was settling fast, as the sea seeped through her burnt caulking.

"I call it a shabby trick," said Drill sympathetically. "In this climate a boat doesn't burn of her own accord. The fire was set by that blighter, Solomon Stone."

"You think so?" growled Blake, twisting seawater out of his scorched trouser leg.

Drill pointed out to sea. Starlight revealed a trim cutter passing the reef under full sail.

"Stone's boat!" muttered Blake. "He fired the *Walu* and then ducked out."

"Lucky I was delayed in sailing," said Drill. "The position I offered you is still open—and I'm traveling in the same direction as Solomon Stone—"

"Don't say any more," Blake interrupted. "I'm ready to leave with you any time."

With a protesting sigh the *Walu's* charred hulk buried her rails in the water. Pat Blake walked away, then went back for a last look at her shriveled mast tip.

"She was a nice ship," he said wistfully. "I won her on a royal flush."

"Buck up," said Martin Drill, turning on the full force of his loquacious charm. "There's a wide ocean ahead, gallons of whiskey in the hold and a jackpot at the end of the rainbow. Buck up, my bully—and away we go!"

MMARTIN DRILL had a cutter called the *Andi Tavaya*. She carried a Fijian crew: tall, husky men from the province of Serua, who spent most of their time on the afterdeck gobbling tinned sardines and *yangona*.

She also had a passenger—an English doctor by the name of Kane, who was bound for Rambi, a tiny island off the east coast of Vanua Levu.

Dr. Kane was short and squat, with

round, droll features and a baldish pate that was camouflaged by several well-distributed locks of reddish hair. He was torturing notes out of a battered concertina when Pat Blake came down the companion ladder.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, making the instrument collapse with a hiss. "I knew that Drill would bring you about. When that man makes up his mind to anything—"

"Dr. Kane is with us at the special request of the government," Drill cut in. "His partiality to Samoan girls has led him into exile. We're taking him to Rambi, where the women grow big and black."

"A fine place for an X-ray specialist," grumbled Kane. "Turning me into an ordinary bush doctor is outrageous!"

"You'd have felt more outraged if they'd put you into His Majesty's jail," Drill remarked pointedly.

Kane grunted; shoved his concertina under the bunk.

Pat Blake glanced out the porthole. The vessel was moving away from the dock, and he could see the twinkling lights of Sophia's Hotel. He sat at the table, ate some tinned beef and poured himself a drink.

"Maybe it's none of my business," he declared, "but I'd like to know the purpose of this trip."

"Of course," agreed Drill. "Y' see, my assistant got the fever the night before we left Suva. I knew there'd be trouble ahead, and I needed the services of a capable white man."

"Okay," said Blake. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Just make yourself comfortable," said Drill, opening one hand in a sweeping gesture. "I'll be back in a moment." Turning, he hurried from the cabin.

"Secretive bloke," commented Kane. "He talks a lot, but you never know what's really in his mind. He's cagey as a fox."

"Do you know what he's up to?"

"Government business," Kane answered. "I've been trying to find out for a week. I've got him drunk nearly every night, but he only spouts nonsense."

Martin Drill came back looking extremely annoyed. "Looks like we're jolly well in for it tonight," he declared. "The glass is below twenty-nine and seems to be dropping more all the time."

"Pass the bottle," said Kane. "The mere thought of a blow makes me seasick. Reminds me of a story . . ."

Pat Blake wasn't interested in the story, so he climbed up the companion ladder. They were out of the harbor now, coasting along on a flat, starless sea which gleamed like oil under the vessel's running lights. A few woolly-headed natives were reefing the sails, and a huge brown-skinned giant clutched the wheel, his features seamed with anxiety as he glared at the glowing binnacle.

THEN the rain began to fall. It came down in a hissing torrent, as if the bottom had fallen out of a cloud. A low moaning wind whisked the water into ruffles, and the man at the wheel became more tense and wrinkled.

Blake stood in the sheltered hatchway, watching rain gurge out the scuppers. If the downpour had only come a few hours sooner, he might have saved the *Walu*.

The wind quickened, and Blake heard the straining murmur of taut canvas. A wave slapped the afterdeck, drenching the man in the cockpit. The Fijian wiped the salt from his eyes; snarled, "*Sal!*" By his tone of voice, Blake could tell that they were in for dirty weather.

"Blake! Close that confounded door!"

Dr. Kane's protest rasped up the companionway. Pulling the door shut, Blake returned to the cabin. Martin Drill was opening another bottle of whisky, and Kane shuffled a pack of cards on the table, gabbling all the while, his small flexible fingers working as fast as his tongue.

"Pick any card," he said, shoving the deck toward Blake. "Show it to Drill, then bury it in the pack. Shuffle 'em all you want. Now—cut the deck three times and pick up any one of the three piles."

Blake did as instructed and selected the middle pile.

"Look at the bottom card," said the doctor, his blue eyes twinkling. "It's the one you picked first. The queen of hearts."

"Very clever," admitted Blake. He clutched the side of the bunk to keep from falling as the ship tried to stand on her counter. "How'd you do it?"

"Kane's a conjurer," explained Drill. "He has lots of tricks."

"Paid up member of the Brotherhood of Magicians," the doctor confided. "Watch this." He produced a pin, drove it into the tabletop with the flat of his hand and pulled it from the table's under side.

"A conjurer," repeated Drill, handing Blake the bottle. "Drink up, my bullies, and let the east wind howl!"

Blake gulped the hot liquid. It made him feel a lot better and seemed to put the ship on a more even keel.

Kane took the bottle away from him jealously. "Best magician south of the line," he boasted. "I can do the Hindu basket trick, rope climbing—"

"Ha!" sneered Drill. "You couldn't hang onto a rope if both ends were fastened to the bloomin' ground."

"That is an insult to my professional reputation," said Kane haughtily. "Unless you apologize, I shall refuse to demonstrate the greatest and most amazing feat of all—*gulli-gulli!*"

"Sorry," replied Drill. "I was not referring to your ability as a magician, but to your repulsive physical appearance, your flabby muscles and protruding paunch."

"The apology is accepted," said Kane, swilling another drink. "Now, to practice the ancient Egyptian art of *gulli-gulli* we must have a distinterested party. Let us adjourn to topside."

"Better not," advised Blake. "The weather's lousy up there."

Kane snapped his fingers, opened the companion, and a cascade of seawater poured in, knocking him to his knees. Drill rescued the bottle, while Blake helped the doctor find his feet. In a wobbling wedge the three men lurched out the companionway.

DIRECTLY before them was the Fijian helmsman, muscular legs glued to the deck, his body shiny as polished sandalwood and a red *sulu* skirt clinging damply to his narrow hips. Frowning into the binnacle, he seemed an epitome of strength and courage—a giant stripped bare against the elements.

"He'll do!" Kane shrilled eagerly. "Now both of you watch closely!"

Staggering up to the frowning giant, Kane rolled back his cuffs and drew a large white rat from the Fijian's frizzy hair.

"*Tevoro!*"

The helmsman's eyeballs bulged like white marbles, and the corners of his mouth jerked in horror. Muscles quivering beneath satiny skin, the man leaped from the cockpit with a fearful shriek.

There was a creaking *whirr* as the wheel spun on its pivot. Caught broadside by a rolling comber, the ship heeled to port, dipping the rail in a slush of tumbling foam. Pat Blake went skidding across the deck on his stomach, struggled to one knee and made a frantic grab at the wheel.

As his fingers clamped onto a spoke, the storm came down full blast, howling out of the east like a pack of belabored ban-shees. It came with lightning in its eyes and thunder in its mouth, slashing, roaring, piling the sea into sleek black mountains with jagged crests.

Before Blake realized what had happened he was wrestling with the wheel, knee-deep in swirling brine. A sail split into tatters, wet rigging groaned, and the ship dived into a black, yawning chasm which crumbled inward when she reached the bottom.

Gasping and spluttering, Blake found a loose rope and managed to lash his belt to a deck ring. A pale sheet of lightning revealed Drill and Kane clinging to the deck-house handrail.

"*Thokamusu tototo!*" Drill bellowed in Fijian. "Reef those bloody sails!"

Only quick action kept the ship from foundering. Pulleys creaked, and men scrambled along the booms like monkeys,

lashing down all loose canvas. The *Andi Tavaya* crawled to the top of a bulbous swell, leaped off into space and landed with an impact that threatened to tear the slats out of her hull.

Twenty minutes of furious pitching made Pat Blake deathly ill. He abandoned his dinner, was doused by a flood of clean salt spray, then stood up to the wheel feeling like a new man. Spindrift flecked his black hair, burned his eyes and nostrils; but neither the wind nor sea could erase his scowl of defiance. Blake liked heavy odds; they made the game sporting.

The storm subsided as quickly as it arose. The fuzzy-headed helmsman came creeping back to his post like a scared cat, and Blake clumped down to the cabin. Drill and the doctor were sprawled in their bunks, wet, exhausted and drunk.

"A fine mess you made with your *gulli-gulli*," said Blake acidly. "Nearly sank the ship."

"The idiot should have known better," added Drill. "If there's anything a Fijian hates, it's a rat. Furthermore, he regards it as an insult for anyone to touch his hair. You can imagine how the poor devil felt when he saw Kane pull a bloomin' rat out of his hair! No wonder he went balmy."

"It should have been a chicken," sighed Kane. "*Gulli-gulli* is really done with a chicken."

"Just let me catch you pulling any more wild life out of your sleeve," glowered Drill. "Dammit—why did I have to be cursed with a rumpot conjurer?"

Pat Blake pulled off his shoes and flopped back on the moist bedclothes. Only a few hours ago his life had been calm and pleasant; but now everything was turned topsy-turvy. His boat lay on the bottom of Levuka harbor, and he was on a mysterious mission with two genial but dissolute madmen.

It was a dizzy collapse of fortune, and he owed it all to one person, Solomon Stone. Thoughts of revenge flitted through his mind, but they were vague, drifting thoughts, conducive to sleep.

An antic sea slapped at the vessel's free-

board, the lantern swung in its gimbals and a soggy white rat snaffled contentedly at the overturned can of corned beef.

III

BY DAYBREAK the ocean was calm, and shortly after noon the cliffs of Taveuni loomed above the port bow. Bright mountain streams poured over the sheer headlands, spraying an angry surf with veils of gossamer. The sky and sea were like parallel panes of blue crystal, and a few puffy clouds huddled around the green peaks of the island.

Coasting past the south point, the *Andi Tavaya* veered into a broad bay which looked as if it had been scooped out of the cliffside with a huge shovel. Scattered along the sandy shore were yellow houses made of bamboo and palm fibers, white shells gleaming from the tips of their ridgepoles.

Five immense canoes lay on the beach, each one constructed with a double hull—scooped-out tree trunks which were bound together with platforms of lashed planking.

This was the village of Matakau, where the natives still practiced the ancient art of boat-building. Small outriggers darted toward the ship's side, ovoid paddle tips flashing in the sunshine.

"Why are we stopping at Matakau?" asked Pat Blake, gazing across the bay. "I thought you were heading for Rambi."

"The storm took us off our course, so I decided to pay old Ratu Joni a visit," said Drill. "Isn't he a friend of yours?"

Blake nodded, and Kane poked his head out of the companionway, blinking at the sun with bleary eyes. "I told you to stay below," Drill told him sternly. "Don't move out of the cabin until you decide to get rid of that infernal rat!"

"But he's a pet," protested the doctor. "If you had a pet—"

"It wouldn't be a rat," snapped Drill. "Think I want you scaring these villagers to death?"

"'Mere man dressed in a little brief authority—'" growled Kane. He huffed down the ladder, cursing under his breath.

Blake and Drill climbed into one of the outriggers, went scooting over the reefs and across an emerald lagoon. Ratu Joni met them as their boat nuzzled the sand. He was a tall, stalwart man of about fifty, his bushy hair streaked with gray and a few deep wrinkles bordering his wide mouth. He wore a white *sulu* and a well-scrubbed shirt that fit too tightly about the chest.

"*Mbula!*" Blake gripped Ratu Joni's hand as he uttered the greeting. The entire village flocked to the shore, and there was general handshaking all around.

"We have been expecting you," said Ratu Joni. "The people of Korovou sighted your ship early this morning."

"Korovou is many miles from here," said Blake perplexedly. "How could you have heard from them—"

"The blighters are clever," Drill interrupted. "They hear of everything the instant it happens."

Blake gave a curt nod. He remembered the great wooden drum up on the mountainside—a tree trunk hollowed in the shape of a trough. News traveled fast on an island grapevine of these booming *lalis*.

"My subjects have been looking forward to your arrival," Ratu Joni told Blake. "They have collected many shells, and they are eager to see the shadow people."

"The shadow people have been destroyed," said Blake soberly. "Solomon Stone destroyed my ship and my camera."

RATU JONI spat upon the ground and uttered an exclamation of disgust. "That devil Stone was here only this morning," he muttered angrily. "He offered to sell my subjects whisky; but we would not accept it. He is a bad man."

"This morning," mused Martin Drill. "Hmm. I thought he might be bound in this direction. Which way did he leave?"

"He sailed up the coast," was the reply. "When my subjects refused to give him shells, he cursed much. Then his men dropped fishlines in the lagoon, and my people laughed for they knew he would find no fish. In a short time he sailed away emptyhanded."

Blake and Drill exchanged curious glances as the chief led them to his house. Custom compelled them to stay for the usual *yangona* presentation and for a dinner of boiled fish and *dalo*, so it was nearly twilight when they returned to the ship.

"So Solomon Stone has become a fisherman," said Blake thoughtfully. "That's a funny angle."

"And one that we can't afford to overlook," replied Drill. "We're sailing up the coast—tonight."

Entering the cabin, they found Kane snoring in his bunk, a brown bottle clutched in one hand and a beady-eyed white rat perched on his shoulder.

"You'd never believe it," Drill sighed, "but there lies one of the best medical men in the business. There's lots of good men buried here in the tropics. Madness, maybe, but the color and smell of these islands does something to your blood."

"There's a flavor about the place. It's hot, sticky and rains weeks on end; but just when you're about to chuck everything over, you see a sunset that looks like the end of the world or you hear a gang of Fijians singing in the moonlight—Hell! I'm burbling. Let's have a drink."

Skirting the reef-strewn coast, the *Andi Tavaya* sailed northeast toward the adjoining island of Ngamea. Months of trading in this vicinity had acquainted Pat Blake with every shoal and reef, and he stationed himself near the bows, peering intently through the night.

They were running without lights, gliding over lumpy ground swells, within the sound of roaring breakers. As the ship rounded a headland, Blake saw something twinkle in the distance like a shining jewel. He took the night glasses from Drill and stared at it for several minutes.

"That's Stone's boat, all right," he muttered. "She's anchored inside the reef. The lights are all aft."

"Nice night for fishing," remarked Drill. "See anything else?"

Blake shook his head. "Think we ought to run up and find out what they're doing?"

"Better wait," advised Drill. "I'm out for bigger game than Solomon Stone."

In a little while a heavy bank of rain clouds settled over the coast, and a three-hour downpour obscured Stone's vessel from sight. Having dumped their burden, the clouds fled to the nearest mountain peak, leaving the sea sprinkled with starlight. When Blake looked through the glasses again, Stone's boat was far up the coast.

"Do you believe they saw us?" he asked.

"No," said Drill. "And we can't take a chance on being seen, either. I suggest we anchor in this bay until tomorrow afternoon. I don't believe Stone will travel very fast, and we can catch up with him by nightfall."

DR. KANE was still asleep when they returned to the cabin. "I think it's about time we had a showdown," said Blake grumpily. "After all—"

"You've been jolly decent," admitted Drill. He poured a drink, leaned on the table and motioned for Blake to pull his chair closer.

"Until we ran across Solomon Stone I was groping in the dark myself. Y'know, in case of a war, these islands would have to depend entirely on the British fleet. The admiralty has issued charts on all the main sea lanes, but the coast of Fiji is still pretty much a secret."

"Now, if the fleet were guarding Viti Levu, it would be essential for the enemy to have some knowledge of the coastlines, for these waters are probably the most treacherous in the world. Y' see?"

"Sure," nodded Blake. "They'd have to know every reef patch."

"A strange steamship flying the British jack has been sighted several times off Taveuni and Vanua Levu," Drill continued. "The government believes that she's been taking soundings."

"Soundings—" Blake wrinkled his nose thoughtfully. "Why, that must be what Stone is doing with his 'fish lines'!"

"It does look suspicious," admitted Drill. "And it's an easy way for him to

pick up extra money. But Stone's vessel is no steamship—and it's the blasted steamer we have to identify."

"You intend to trail Stone, figuring that he'll eventually lead you to the other ship?"

"Precisely," agreed Drill. "If that fails, our only other hope is to wring a confession from him."

"I suggest a lingering torture," said Blake, brightening considerably. "Something with boiling oil in it."

"Not so loud," cautioned Drill. "I'm hoping to get rid of Kane before the trouble starts. If he knew what was in the air, we'd never be able to put him off at Rambi. We'll have our hands full with Solomon Stone and the mystery ship. Kane's presence would only make the difficulty threefold."

"Kane isn't such a bad sort," protested Blake.

"He likes to meddle in other people's affairs," said Drill firmly. "I don't intend to be saddled with a meddlesome medico."

Dr. Kane continued to snore peacefully; but one bright blue eye opened, giving Drill a cold twinkly stare.

IV

THE *Andi Tavaya* lay at anchor until the following afternoon, when she set sail once more, still following the coastline.

Martin Drill's tactics were simple. If he were taking soundings, Solomon Stone would be compelled to travel slowly. Therefore, the *Andi Tavaya* could remain anchored most of the day, catch up with the other vessel after dark and keep on her trail without being noticed.

At eight P.M. Blake again sighted Stone's ship. She was under full sail beyond the jutting crags of Thurston Point, her bowsprit aimed at the ridges of Nggamea, which lay a mile and a half away. A ceiling of low clouds obliterated the starlight completely, and the *Andi Tavaya* clipped across the strait under a pall of darkness.

"We're lucky to find him so easily," commented Blake.

"By Jove!" gasped Martin Drill, his long fingers squeezing Blake's shoulder. "It's happened sooner than we expected! See it?"

The lights of a large ship glimmered faintly on the lee side of Nggamea. Blake stared through the glasses intently, searching for her outline. "Can't see anything definite yet," he said. "One thing certain—Stone's boat is heading straight for her."

A cold raindrop struck him on the forehead, followed by a furious torrent that splattered on the deck like hail. When he glanced around, Drill was bouncing up and down with excitement, waving his *topi*.

"Another stroke of luck!" exclaimed the Englishman. "With a good heavy rain we can sneak up under their very noses. Righto?"

"Can't see two feet through the stuff," acknowledged Blake. "I've had a few tough scrapes in that bay. Only a few people know it, but at low tide—"

The wheezy sound of a concertina shrilled up the companionway, causing both men to stiffen. As the sobbing notes became louder, Blake scuttled into the cabin and found Kane compressing the instrument fondly, while a lantern guttered low behind the covered portholes.

"Cut it out!" rapped Blake. "That noise is a dead giveaway!"

"Put it down, or I'll break your blasted neck!" barked Martin Drill, snatching at the concertina unsuccessfully.

"A man with no music in his soul is little better than a beast," retorted Kane blowsily. "I've suspected a bestial nature in you for a long time, Drill."

"One more squeeze on that stomach pump and your suspicions will be verified," Drill threatened.

"We've just sighted Stone and another ship," explained Pat Blake. "We don't want 'em to spot us."

Kane exchanged his concertina for a half-empty bottle, and his pumpkin face displayed signs of interest. "I like you, Blake," he said. "You have the manner of a gentleman. Mr. Drill has the manners of a hyena."

Crossing the strait between Taveuni and Nggamea was only a matter of minutes, and when Blake came back on deck he could see the red port light of the steamer clearly. Keeping dangerously close to the reef, the *Andi Tavaya* passed around to the vessel's starboard. Cluster lights hung over the steamer's main deck, and Storm's boat was being moored near the accommodation ladder.

"Suppose we could get a little closer?" ventured Drill.

"The port side's dark," said Blake. "Better go around there."

THE *Andi Tavaya* traced a wide loop, cutting across the steamer's bows. Drill ordered all sails lowered, and the heavy blanket of rain allowed them to drift unnoticed within a few yards of the big vessel's towering hull.

A Jacob's ladder dangled from the bluff midship section—placed there, evidently, to accommodate Storm's sailboat from either side. Blake and Drill both spied it at once, and their thoughts were identical. Snuggled against the steamer's hull, the *Andi Tavaya* was concealed perfectly, and the ladder offered a temptation too strong to resist.

Rain slatted down in a roaring deluge as Blake fastened the loose ends of the ladder to the *Andi Tavaya's* gunwale. He was coatless, and an automatic pistol bulged from the pocket of his tattered trousers.

"That's it," said Drill approvingly. "Now, up we go—"

"Hold on," said a crackly voice. "I'm going with you."

Blake stepped back; saw the dark bulbous blur that was Dr. Kane. "Want to ruin everything?" Drill hissed. "Get back to the cabin!"

"No," said Kane. "I maintain that the three of us should stick together. Three heads are better than—"

Drill raised his fist threateningly.

"Oh, very well," sighed Kane submissively. "While you're gone I'll practice on my concertina."

"You wouldn't?" Drill's voice was like an electric spark.

"On the concertina," Kane declared firmly.

"Let him come," Blake cut in. "We can't waste any time." Grasping the rope ladder, he swung upward. Drill followed at his heels, and Kane clambered up last.

The midship deck was deserted, and as Blake crawled over the rail, he noticed a life preserver bearing the name *Orion*.

Drill and Kane had barely reached the top when the clacking of footsteps sounded from aft. Blake ducked into an unlighted alleyway, and his two companions squeezed in beside him. An instant later, three men rounded the corner of the deckhouse.

In the center was Solomon Stone, cork helmet tipped back on his greasy head. The other individuals were ship's officers in white uniforms with lots of gold braid. Pat Blake needed no second look to tell that they were Orientals.

His heart suddenly gave a thumping leap. Stone had paused and was turning into the alleyway where he was hidden. Drill and Kane stopped breathing. Blake's hand froze to his gun handle. Another step and Stone would brush his shoulder.

"This way, Mr. Stone." One of the officers pointed to a lighted companionway farther forward. Stone grunted; entered the other entrance instead, and Pat Blake resumed living.

Convinced that no one was in sight, Blake finally crept from his hiding place and ascended the bridge ladder. Crouched by the charthouse window, he could hear the man on watch pacing the deck above. The dreary downpour continued unabated, swamping the *Orion's* gutters and obliterating everything beyond the range of her deck lights.

Martin Drill edged up beside him, and Kane squatted near the ladder. Within the charthouse, Solomon Stone and his two Oriental friends were poring over a large map pinned to the table, their voices plainly audible.

"I've managed to take soundings along the whole coastline of Taveuni," Stone was saying. "The information you wanted is all here in my notebook. You want to go over it with me, Captain Wilson?"

"Please," said a stocky, gold-braided man with a face that resembled a carved Buddha. "Lieutenant Thompson and I are most interested."

"Wilson and Thompson," Blake whispered. "Fine names for two riceballs."

Drill nudged him in the ribs, and they saw Stone take a leather-bound notebook from his pocket. The uniformed officers bent over the map interestedly. "Here's Vuna Point," said Solomon Stone. "The contours of the land are—"

"Stick 'em up!"

PAT BLAKE thrust one leg through the open window, and a black automatic glared over his brown fist. Solomon Stone wore the surprised expression of a goldfish; the two yellow men merely turned and stared with sharp, slant eyes.

"Sorry to bust in like this," said Blake. "But we figure the British government needs that notebook more than you do."

Stone's bewilderment increased when Martin Drill appeared in the forward doorway, armed with a revolver, and Kane hauled his rotund body over the window sill. Advancing with a dignified but uncertain gait, Kane took the notebook from Solomon Stone's hand.

The big man munched his lips sullenly, his fingers working back and forth as if itching to tear the doctor apart.

"Mr. Stone had better come along with us," announced Martin Drill. "The other two jokers can enjoy the privacy of that small closet."

"You are making a grave mistake," said the slant-eyed captain. "You will never leave this ship alive."

"I'm trembling," sneered Blake. "It's funny how guys always make veiled threats when they get in a tough spot."

"The closet, please," said Drill impatiently. His tone changed to a harsh cry of warning. "Blake!"

Spinning on one heel, Blake saw a narrow yellow face glaring at him beyond the open window. Drill's warning came barely in time, for a slug howled through the space that a moment before had been occupied by Blake's head.

Blake pulled the trigger with swift precision, and his bullet snapped the assailant's shoulder blade, sending him to the deck in a moaning huddle.

Almost instantly there was a clattering hubbub in the alleyway. Someone shouted in gibberish from the upper deck, and a shrill whistle sounded aft. The two gunshots had aroused the ship, and the lid was off.

"Run for it!" blurted Kane.

He was halfway to the bridge door when Solomon Stone brought him to the floor with a flying tackle. Blake and Drill both rushed to his aid, but before they could reach him, the after door banged open, admitting two yellow-skinned officers with automatics.

Kane gave a wriggling jerk and rose to his knees, clenching the leather notebook in his right hand.

"Drill—" he bawled. "Quick!"

Martin Drill made a hurried grab for the notebook, and Blake saw him snatch it from Kane's hand. A gun crashed, and Drill bolted onto the bridge.

"Catch him!" yelled Solomon Stone. "He's got my papers!"

Blake tried to follow, and a bullet screeched past his ear. He slashed a pot shot at the two officers, scooted out the forward door and ran straight into the arms of three sinewy Malays.

His left fist zipped up, landing with terrific force on an oily chin. The first man folded quietly, but the other two jumped on him like overgrown leeches, hooking their bony arms about his neck and girdling his waist with spidery legs.

Carrying the Malays with him, Blake staggered to the bridge ladder, lost his balance and plunged headlong to the main deck.

The bundle of twined arms and legs split apart as it hit the planking. Blake had the

wind knocked out of him, but the two Malays bore the brunt of the impact. Kicking the nearest man into the scuppers, Blake gained his feet and started to run for the rope ladder.

"Halt!"

Clutching the rail, Blake whirled. Solomon Stone was framed in a companionway, backed by armed men in white uniforms. The men appeared to be Mongolians, and they carried regulation army rifles. Blake raised his hands and saw the shadowy outline of a mast moving slowly away from the *Orion's* port side.

He was trapped; but Martin Drill had escaped with the leather-bound notebook.

V

IT WOULD have been easy for the *Andi Tavaya* to slip unnoticed into the shrouded night, if the night had continued to be shrouded. Instead, the rain ceased as if turned off from a spigot, and the dense layer of clouds split wide apart.

Pat Blake usually enjoyed the capricious weather of the South Seas, but now he cursed it heartily as the *Andi Tavaya's* sails gleamed like white wings against a sparkling sky. She was well away, clipping toward the narrow entrance of Vivili Bay, when the *Orion's* men spotted her.

A blast of rifle fire racketed over the water harmlessly.

"Follow her!" shouted Solomon Stone. "Run her down!"

Bells jangled, and Stone grinned vindictively as the anchor chain rumbled over the cat. "Drill won't travel very far this time," he told Blake. "We'll have him back on board before morning. Take this man to the brig."

They ushered Blake to a small compartment up in the forepeak and clanged the door tight. "Welcome," said a crisp voice. "I was rather expecting you. Where's Drill?"

"On the *Andi Tavaya*," replied Blake. "They didn't get him."

"Good man," said Dr. Kane approvingly. "Have a drink?" He stuck a metal

flask under Blake's nose. Blake waved it away and sat on a wooden bench disconsolately. Malay seamen shouted from the fo'c's'le head as they hurled lead lines into the water.

"If the rain had held out, Drill might have had a chance," said Blake. "They'll soon track him down on a small patch of land like Nggamea."

"Drill's a shrewd bird," said Kane. "Too bad he has such a vile disposition."

Blake gazed through the barred porthole. The *Orion* was pulling into the bay, and the *Andi Tavaya* could be seen bobbing at anchor near the shore. The hook rumbled down again, and two lifeboats loaded with men struck out from the *Orion's* side. Solomon Stone's sailboat led the procession, stopping alongside the *Andi Tavaya*.

"What do you make of all this?" asked Blake. "The skipper looks like a Jap, the crew's Malay, and they carry a gang of armed Chinese. To make things more confusing, they all use English names."

"A clever method of espionage," said Kane. "If they're caught, no one can place the blame on any single country. Now as I was saying—"

BLAKE paid no attention. Kane evidently did not realize the gravity of the situation. Looking at the world through inquisitive prairie-dog eyes, the doctor seemed to regard everything as an amusing farce staged solely for his benefit.

But whether Kane realized it or not, they were in a fix. Blake had seen enough to know that the *Orion* was a floating barracks commanded by men who would kill smilingly.

Pumm . . . pumm. Pumm. Pumm—

From the black hillside came the low, vibrant sound of a *lali*. Since there were two or three native villages on Nggamea, Blake thought nothing of the drumbeats until an entire sentence formed in his mind subconsciously.

Someone was thumping out a message in Morse Code. Springing to his feet, Blake listened intently. "It's Drill!" he ex-

claimed. "He wants us to make some sign if we hear him!"

"I don't hear anything but a bloody drum," said Kane.

With sudden inspiration Blake lifted the bench and smashed it into splinters against the bulkhead. Kane's shirt was dry; so Blake ripped it off unceremoniously, emptied the whisky flask over it and placed it in the center of the floor.

A lighted match set the shirt burning with a bluish yellow blaze, and slivers of dry wood soon made a sizeable bonfire. Arms straining, Blake swung the metal porthole cover back and forth with irregular jerks, causing a faint pinpoint of light to blink from the *Orion's* bow. The drumbeats continued.

"It worked!" Blake gasped. "Drill's spotted our signal." Sweat streamed from his forehead as he tugged again at the porthole cover.

"How long does this last?" Kane coughed. "You must be sending a blasted weather report."

Blake let the iron cover clank back with triumphant finality. "Drill's on the hillside at a native village," he said, wiping his face with his elbow. "If he can keep from being captured until tomorrow—"

The hollow crack of a heavy caliber rifle sounded over the water. Gripping the porthole bars, Blake sighted flashes of gunfire on the gloomy hills. "They're after him already," said Kane, stamping out the fire. "Bet you half a crown he doesn't make it."

"You're on," said Blake. Stretching out on the steel floor, he tried to get some sleep, but all that night the muffled thunder of drumbeats echoed in his ears.

A STREAK of daylight slanted through the porthole, and Blake sat up with a start. Kane was on his back, snoring lustily.

Blake nudged the doctor with his foot. "Wake up," he said. "Someone's coming."

The steel door clanked open, revealing the trim, shark-mouthed Oriental

called Lieutenant Thompson. "You will follow me, sirs," he said, bowing stiffly.

Four armed Malays escorted them to the bridge, where the captain and Solomon Stone were seated at the chart table. Stone stroked his moist chin, tapped the end of a pencil on the table and said, "I won't mince words. This is a foreign ship, and there's a firing squad aboard to take care of spies. However, if you care to do some explaining—"

"Be glad to," said Blake. "I'd like to explain that you're anchored in British waters, no war has been declared and the *Orion's* going to have one devil of a time sneaking out of here. If you think you can bluff me, you're mistaken."

Stone growled under his breath, and the slant-eyed captain cut in. "There will be no bluffing," he stated. "I know the risks I take, and my actions must necessarily be those of a desperate man. Your life depends on whether you answer a few simple questions."

"You'd better question Martin Drill first," said Blake.

"We have not yet located Mr. Drill," replied the captain. "It is only a matter of time—"

"We'll wait," said Blake.

"Unless you talk now, I shall—er—be forced to take strict action." The captain had a suave purring manner.

"I'll leave it up to Dr. Kane," he answered.

Kane straightened his dirty coat; an action made ludicrous by the fact that he wore no shirt. "My opinion is this," he said calmly. "I'd tell 'em to go to hell."

Solomon Stone slammed the flat of his hand on the table. "You've made your own decision!" he snarled.

"I can give you one piece of information," Blake told him. "Before Drill left Levuka, he sent a wireless message to the New Zealand battle fleet. I imagine most of the fleet is cruising through the Koro Sea at this moment."

The captain smiled faintly. "In your own words, Mr. Blake: it is strange how

men make veiled threats when they find themselves in a dangerous predicament. I am not impressed."

"Ridiculous," rumbled Solomon Stone. "There's not even a trading vessel within miles. The New Zealand battle fleet—rubbish!"

"Take them away, Lieutenant," sighed the captain.

Two wiry seamen grabbed Blake by the arms, rushing him to the bridge. He started to struggle, but a gun muzzle jabbed him in the ribs. A line of riflemen stood in a double line on the main deck—iron-jawed Mongolians in spotless white.

"The blighters evidently mean business," gulped Kane.

Pausing at the top of the bridge ladder, Blake stared toward the mouth of the bay anxiously. The men at his side tightened their hold and half-dragged him down the ladder. Blake moved reluctantly, knowing that once below decks he could expect nothing but a hail of lead and a quick trip to the bottom of the ocean. As long as he could see clear blue sky there was a chance—

VI

A LOOKOUT squalled loudly from a cab on the flying bridge; a bell bonged up forward, and more men popped from every hole and scuttle. Solomon Stone shuffled down the ladder, his greasy face twisted with rage.

It was then that Blake saw it.

Far to the south, barely visible over the horizon line, was a feather of smoke. A second plume appeared, this time a few degrees to the east. Soon a third came into sight, followed by a fourth and fifth.

Five pillars of dense black smoke—the kind produced by a steamer under forced draft. The ships seemed to be traveling in battle formation, heading straight for Vivili Bay.

"The fleet!" gasped Stone. "They've sighted us!"

A windlass rattled, an engineroom tele-

graph jangled noisily and the captain barked orders to the men in the wheelhouse. All eyes were turned seaward as the *Orion* nosed toward the bay's entrance, her propeller grinding at top speed.

Dark eyes snapping, Solomon Stone seized Blake by the collar. "By the time they overtake us it'll be too late to save your skin!" he flared. Reaching into his pocket, he withdrew a small revolver and brandished it at Blake's temple.

Blake's mouth became a hard, tight line; his arms were pinned in a vicelike grip by the two Malays. He listened to the swishing water and watched Stone's quivering bluish jaw.

As Stone's forefinger tightened, the *Orion* slammed her bow into the porous but adamant structure of a coral reef. The terrific shock buckled in her hullplates and seemed to splatter men in every direction.

Pat Blake was hurled forward; his arms whipped free and one elbow thwacked Solomon Stone's chest. The revolver went off in the air and twirled into the sea.

Toppling backward, Stone whapped the deck with his shoulders, tried to get up, and took a smashing uppercut from Blake. One blow was all that Stone needed. It jerked his head back and sent him rolling against the deckhouse.

Her foreward part open as a church door, the *Orion* proceeded to sink. She settled quickly, heeling over to port, so that it was impossible to lower the starboard lifeboats. Since the port boats were already lowered and tied to the accommodation ladder, the ship's hull squashed them under the surface immediately.

On a deck scattered with frantic, bawling Orientals, Blake and Kane were forgotten. Exchanging their guns for life preservers, the lieutenant and his men leaped from the after end and bobbed about in the bay.

Pulling Kane behind him, Blake raced aft; but when he reached the end of the midship deckhouse a thundering explosion tore out the hullplates like a fist rammed through cardboard.

Crawling to his feet, Blake found himself standing upright on the deckhouse bulkhead. Kane's pudgy nose was bloody, and he sat on top of a porthole glowering. The *Orion* lay at a forty-five degree angle.

Blake leaped for a stanchion above his head, caught it and hoisted his lean frame onto the starboard hull plates, which were now in a horizontal position.

There was a sizzling sound as water poured into the *Orion's* funnel.

Dropping to his stomach, Blake lowered his arms and pulled Kane up beside him. The ship grated, shuddered; but continued to rest on her side.

WITH a guttural yell Blake pointed shoreward. Nothing could be seen of Solomon Stone's sailboat except two masts protruding above the water; and scudding toward them under full canvas was the *Andi Tavaya* with Martin Drill at the helm.

Kane gurgled incoherently; Blake shouted through cupped hands. Drill sighted them and turned his vessel toward the *Orion's* bulging stern.

Clambering over the horizontal taffrail, Blake grasped the *Orion's* logline and lowered himself hand over hand. When his feet touched the dripping propeller, he swung outward and plumped down on the *Andi Tavaya's* deck.

Kane followed him, swooping down the line so fast that he seemed to bounce off the propeller blade. He hit the sailboat's deck thumpingly, his fingers lacerated by the steel cable.

Martin Drill kicked the prow of his ship seaward, coasting over the submerged reef.

"You're a positive genius, Blake!" Drill gave the wheel to a native and pumped Blake's hand enthusiastically. "Those light signals—how did you work it?"

"With a bottle of whisky and my shirt," grunted Kane. "I don't see anything so dashed remarkable about that. It was the fleet that saved us—"

"Fleet?" jeered Drill. "Take a look at your fleet now!"

Straight ahead the five smoke clouds appeared blacker than ever. Drill shoved a pair of glasses into the doctor's torn hands. Holding them up gingerly, Kane saw the long, low hulls of five double canoes—war canoes with tipsy sails and decks of lashed planking. In the center of each deck stood a wooden receptacle which resembled a washtub; and from these tubs smoke was pouring in great sooty gusts.

"I knew Ratu Joni wouldn't fail us," said Blake. "I was only afraid he wouldn't get the message straight."

"Why must you blokes be so damned secretive?" grumbled Kane. "I might have been shot without knowing that I was about to be saved."

"That's what the signals were for," said Blake. "I told Drill to have the natives send a message to Ratu Joni by their own method."

"The message was sent across the strait and relayed down the coast of Taveuni," Drill added. "And some people think these Fijians are dumb!"

"But I don't see the point of it," insisted Kane. "You could tell Ratu Joni to set out in his canoes with tubs full of firewood; but how in blazes did you know that the *Orion* would hit a reef?"

"Because I knew that the level of the bay drops about twenty feet at low tide, making passage impossible for a ship of the *Orion's* size," said Blake. "I was certain they'd head for open water the minute they sighted the smoke. The tide was high at midnight, so I knew it would be low this morning."

MARTIN DRILL glanced back. "I suppose most of them will swim ashore," he said. "But they can't go very far. I scuttled Storm's boat the minute I saw the *Orion* pull her hook."

"Those rats were clever," mused Blake. "We never did learn their nationality."

"We may never learn it," returned Drill. "I doubt that Stone knew what country

he was working for. We'll stop at the Savusavu wireless station after we've dropped the doctor at Rambi—"

"I've made a decision," said Kane abruptly. "I'm not going to Rambi."

"You'll jolly well go there and like it," snapped Drill.

"May I see that notebook?" asked Blake. "The one with Stone's soundings in it."

"Notebook? I don't have it."

"Kane handed it to you," Blake insisted. "Everyone saw him—"

"Is this the item in question?" said Kane, pulling the leather-bound notebook from his coat pocket.

"You've had it all the time?" stammered Blake.

"I can be secretive, too," nodded Kane. "You merely *thought* you saw me give it to Drill."

"That blasted conjuring again," said Drill.

"You could appease the government and have me reinstated at Suva," said Kane unctuously. "You need this notebook as evidence; so I'll make you a bargain. Do we go to Rambi or Suva?"

"All right," said Drill. "You win."

"Mr. Drill is a complete rogue," said Kane. "He'll do anything to gain an end—even to stealing motion picture cameras."

A quizzical look crept over Pat Blake's face.

"You've got five hundred pounds coming to you for this work!" said Drill hastily.

"And I'll see that the government gives you a new ship!"

"But what was that about the motion picture camera?" Blake persisted.

"I've got *your* camera," Drill told him gayly. "I rescued it from the *Walu*."

"You couldn't have," said Blake. "I had the camera case in my hand when—"

"It wasn't in the case."

"How do you know?"

"Because I took it out and filled the case with chain—just before I set fire to your ship."

Blake's eyes widened. "Then it wasn't Solomon Stone—"

"I needed your help," admitted Drill. "It was the only way I could think of to make you join me."

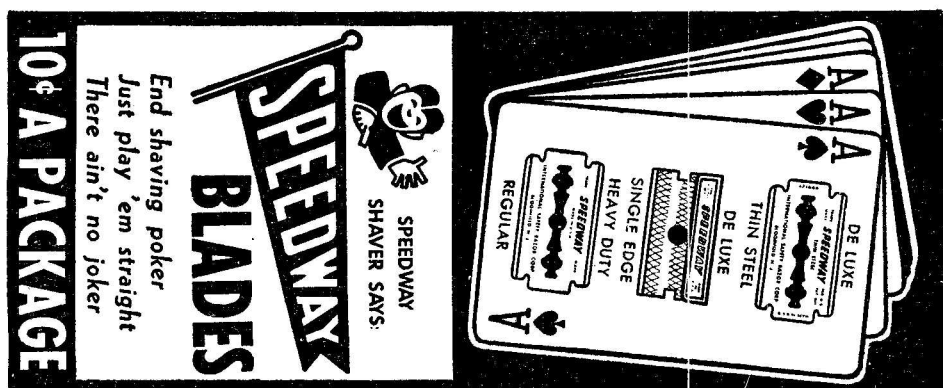
Blake scowled at the bright dancing sea. The big canoes could be seen plainly and Ratu Joni waved a greeting from the boat in the center.

"Kane's right," said Blake, wrinkling his nose. "You're the damndest scoundrel in these islands."

He offered his hand, and Drill shook it vigorously. Kane ducked into the cabin and reappeared with a bottle under his arm and a white rat on his shoulder.

Drill broke the bottle-top over the rail. "Comrades again," he said, lapsing into the old roistering manner that made him sound like a combination of Captain Kidd and Tom, the Jolly Rover. "Drink up my bullies, and away we go—"

He looked at Kane and added as an afterthought, "—to Suva!"



The Temple Cats



An Argosy Oddity

By JAY CLARK

THAT'S a sight for sore eyes," I told Olav, looking at the green ahead. The "sore eyes" part got out before I stopped to think.

Olav doesn't like cracks about eyes. He looks like the yellow-headed Vikings they write about—all six feet five inches of him—except for his eyes. One of them is crossed and the other has a regular tic which makes you want to wink back at him all the time. This time Olav didn't notice the boner.

"Sure is."

We'd been beating our way around in a typhoon for a week somewhere in the thousand islands southwest of the Malay Peninsula. By the time we got out of the storm we needed water and repairs to take us to Saigon, so we put in at the first sizable island we sighted. Most of them were atolls barely visible above the water line. This one stuck a green head high above the ocean, foretelling water and possibly fruit.

There was a perfect half-moon of a harbor, sheltered and inviting. We waited after we dropped anchor for the usual out-

riggers to swarm out from the shore. In ordinary places there are dozens of them. None came. The narrow band of white beach was deserted except for some small animals which came and went in the edge of the jungle. We took it for granted that they were pigs.

There were no drums; no human sounds. At the end of an hour, I put out for shore with Olav and four of the crew and a boat-load of empty water casks.

There was something queer about the stillness of the place. Even the birds were still—if there were any birds. I didn't see any. There was no movement of any kind on the beach as we came in.

We found the water in a hurry. There was a clear stream running into the bay not a hundred feet from where we beached the boat. We followed a sort of path up through the jungle for a couple of hundred yards and found a place to fill the casks.

I began to feel cold while we were filling them. There were other empty casks lying there, as if some other ship had put in—and left them behind.

None of us talked much. Gray-headed Wally, the bos'n's mate, usually chattered his head off, but he kept looking over his shoulder and around at the jungle without so much as opening his mouth.

"Ay don' like it," Olav finally broke the silence. We'd been together for twelve years and I'd never heard the big Swede say anything like that before. "Ve got a bad place."

"We'll take a look around when the boat's loaded," I said. I sent two of the men down the path with the first casks. They should have been back before the next two started—but they weren't. Olav and I waited for a long time and none of them came; then Olav went down to round them up.

I waited alone until I got jittery. Finally I yelled for them. It wasn't far to the beach; they should have heard me, but

nobody answered. I rolled another full cask down the path to the boat. It was loaded with the ones I had sent down; but the men were gone. I hoisted the water into the boat and looked around, loosening my gun so I could get at it in a hurry.

There were no signs of struggle on the beach—only the footprints of the men leading back up into the jungle. There was another path there, only a few yards from the one we had taken up the stream. Before I started in, I pulled out my gun and held it ready for anything. Five men just don't walk into a jungle and vanish without any reason.

I FELT something suddenly pushing at my legs and jumped back as I looked. There was an ordinary tomcat, probably dropped off some ship which had paused at the island. The relief of seeing something alive and harmless made me want to laugh out loud. It kept pushing against my legs and making little moves toward the beach as if tempting me to go back. I tumbled over it as I went on. It was the biggest, yellowest tom I ever saw.

Suddenly there was a cleared space ahead of me. I could see the light shining down into it before I got there . . . and then there were more cats around my feet. As I reached the edge of the clearing I had to stop or step on some of them. Then I literally froze to the spot.

In the center of the clearing was a little temple.

I couldn't tell you now how it was built, or even what it looked like, but I was suddenly certain that I would find my missing men in that temple.

But between me and the building were cats—dozens of them, maybe hundreds of them. Rank on rank of silent, staring animals, watching me. I never saw so many cats, all sizes and shapes and colors. Several of them were pressing against my legs—not rubbing, but always in front of me.

The big yellow one was always there, hindering me; but with each step I took I was more certain that I would find Olav and the sailors in the temple.

A dozen feet from the steps of the entrance I was surrounded by the animals, passing back and forth in front of me: a shifting, silent horde. I tried to yell for Olav and the others but no sound came. My throat felt dry and tight. The cats moved away from me and settled down in a big circle. I felt as if I were in the middle of a mad nightmare.

As I started toward the steps again the big yellow tom, twice the size of the others, leaped ahead of me and turned in the entrance, bristling, ready to jump at me fiercely. I raised the gun in my hand—then I dropped it and ran for the boat, my feet heavy with terror. As I pointed the gun I had seen the big cat's head for the first time.

One eye was crossed . . . and as I looked, the other had dropped in a quick, fluttering wink.

"I TALKED WITH GOD"

(Yes, I Did — Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invi-

ble God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 79, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 79, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

The Lonely World

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "Journey to Judgment,"
"River Rising," etc.

For the ruthless man, this most terrible curse: The strong shall inherit the earth in its fullness, and it shall be of no value to him. Utterly no value. And this is how it happened

JOHN THURBER stared across his desk at the broken man who sat opposite him. His eyes held contempt which had brewed through the years to such a fine distillation that the very essence was there—supercilious and frank contempt.

There was arrogance in the line of jaw; power had put it there firmly. There was injustice in the set of mouth, which was born of justice untempered by pity and mercy.

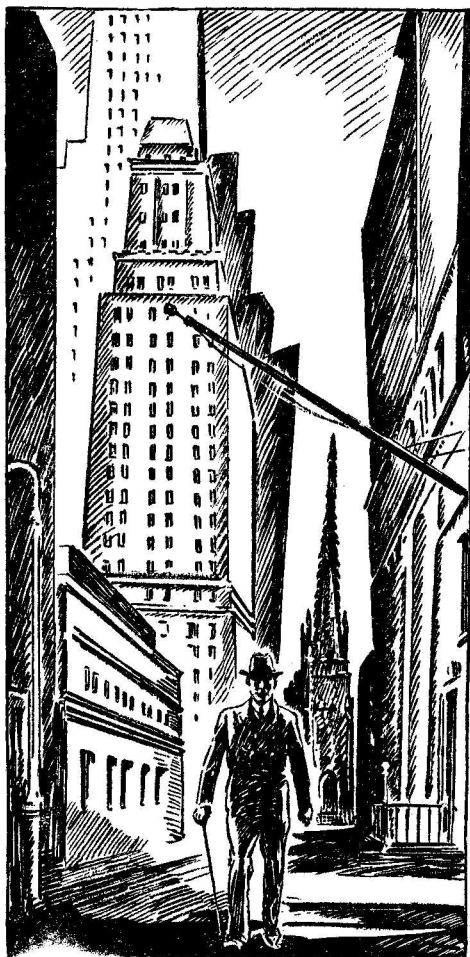
John Thurber said coldly, "Really, Ames, it's damned poor taste coming out here to my home. These things should be considered at the office. Furthermore, my secretary handles all such minor matters."

The man called Ames looked as if he had not slept in weeks. He was thin and very gaunt; there were horrible lines on his face, and a strange deathly pallor in his cheeks, and there was a grisly edema under his eyes. He was crushed to death, but still alive. His hands were shaking, and in his eyes was a thin quavering plea.

"Please, Mr. Thurber," Ames whispered hoarsely, "you're a big man; I only want a minute, only to explain—I've been going crazy—"

Thurber turned his clock on the desk so that its face stared into his visitor's. "Five minutes," he said. "Not a second more."

Ames tugged at his collar, the sweat



New York was cavernous, empty. There was no life at all, anywhere, save his own

pouring down his face. "Mr. Thurber, for God's sake. This merger—you're cutting me out of it. If you don't take me in on this merger, my business will be gone, ruined!

"I'm only a little fellow in the industry; I'm not rich. But this business is my own; I built it up by myself; I'm proud of it. I don't want it to die, like that, at the snap of your finger."

"You're a rotten business man," said Thurber coldly. "If you were good, you'd be in the merger. This world isn't built for men like you, Ames. It's built for men who can survive, who don't have to

depend upon others to live. Two minutes gone."

"Mr. Thurber," Ames cried, pallid, "there's more in life than ruining a man's business and taking his life from him. I'm married, I have three children, fine children.

"And the little fellows like me, you'll force out, you'll strangle us with your octopus. There's more in life than that. It isn't the sort of world in which you can live alone. You've got to live with people, love thy neighbor as thyself; you've got to—"

He broke off, seeing the look on the other man's face.

"Really, Ames," said Thurber, sighing, "you're not going to quote Scripture at me, are you? You've wasted three minutes without presenting a single firm reason why I should even give you two minutes more. That's damned poor stuff—about the wife and children, I mean."

Ames' mouth was suddenly savage. "Do you know what it means if you ruin me? It means death for me, death! I'll be penniless, with no means of support for my family except insurance. Oh, I'm a rich man dead! It means I'll have to kill myself so that my wife and children can have money! You think that's no reason—"

Thurber's eyes were steely. "Mr. Ames, in my opinion, you would be much better off. This world isn't built for weaklings. It's built for men, men who can fight and survive, and the meek shall inherit the earth when it's no damn good any more. You're a poor sport, you are. Bested by a better man, so you come whining and begging and playing upon my sympathies—"

"You'd do the same!"

"I would not! I've trained myself in this life, Ames, to live by brain and strength and courage. I don't need a living soul in this world. If everybody disappeared off the face of the earth tomorrow, it wouldn't affect me. I'm self-sufficient. You think I'm a smug egotistical—"

"**W**AIT a minute," Ames said quietly. "You can stop. I was the one who had the five minutes. They're up. You don't have to tell me what I think you are. I have my own opinion."

John Thurber jerked his thumb at the door. "You know my answer, Ames," he said, very quietly, for he was angry and did not want to betray the fact that a man like Ames could make him angry.

"I knew it before I came," Ames said. Color had returned to his face and he looked a little better. "Still, it was worth trying, not for my own sake. I'd roast in hell before I'd ask you a favor for myself. I came only because of my obligation to others."

"And I," said Thurber proudly, "have none. Good night, Ames."

Ames stared at him, then shook his head. He said compassionately, "You poor fool." And then he turned and went out.

John Thurber sat there at the desk for a moment, and catching sight of himself in a wall mirror directly across the room, he realized that he was smouldering with resentment, and showing it. He lighted a cigar calmly as his wife came in; and when she saw his face, it had relaxed.

"Did he go, John?"

"Eh? Oh. Yes, yes, he's gone. I thought you'd retired."

Mrs. Thurber was a small meek woman, with sad eyes. "It's the children, dear," she said. "You didn't see them tonight. You haven't seen them for two days. Don't you think—"

"I'm very busy, Ethel. Have to clear up a lot of things here tonight before I take the plane for Chicago in the morning. This merger—"

"But young Bill was asking for you."

"For heaven's sake," John Thurber said, "I've enough to handle right now without worrying about him. I'll see them tomorrow night when I get back. I'll—oh, tell them I'll bring them a present from Chicago—something fine, something expensive. And get to bed yourself, Ethel. I've told you time and again not to disturb me when I'm working."

"It's always tomorrow," she said, in a timid show of defiance. "Haven't you ever thought there might not be a tomorrow?"

His voice was icy. "Please, dear, don't be asinine!"

She lapsed meek again. "Good night, John. Have a nice trip." She went out. He could hear her go up the stairs and turn into silence.

He stared after her, turning his cigar over in his hand a few times. Then he put it in his mouth and went to work on the data before him. It was after midnight when he finished and went to bed.

WHEN the sun struck his eyes, John Thurber awoke the next morning with a startled jerk. Hastily, he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and glanced at his wristwatch. He had a cold shock. It was eight-ten. He had told Harris, his valet, to call him for seven o'clock. The plane for Chicago was to leave at eight-fifteen. He could never make it now.

"Damn the fellow," Thurber growled. "He's fired! Can't trust the smallest details to anyone. . . . Harris! Harris!"

His voice rang against the walls. The moist-eyed valet did not put in an appearance. Thurber rose, angry, and stalked out of the room, picking up his dressing robe. He went into the upper hall, and bellowed down the stairs. His own voice came back to him. Harris did not show.

Thurber paused and frowned. Odd. Not a sound in the house. He shrugged and went back to his room. The house was equipped with monitor communicators, with the master control in his own room. By a flick of the switch, Thurber could send his voice to any or all rooms of the house, including the garage.

He flicked it now, opening the servants' quarters channel, and he said, "Harris, come up here at once. Anna, I'll be here for breakfast. Tony, have the convertible ready to take me down to the yacht club. I'm going to take the commuter in." He flicked the switch.

Harris did not show up, and Thurber

had an idea that the valet wouldn't. But still—why didn't some one come? He searched in his closet and found a suit, and after a while he found underwear and shoes. His bath wasn't drawn, so he took a hasty shower and dressed.

His temper was brittle as glass by the time he finished. Damn the tie. He never could tie it as Harris did. And Harris—he'd see Harris didn't get another job in New York, going off without a word that way.

When he left his bedroom, it was certainly too late for Chicago that day. He went downstairs to the study and picked up the telephone to call his office and tell them he would be in. There was no clicking on the wire, no surge of electricity. It was dead. No voice of central, with a smile. He banged the pedestal impatiently and then hung up in a fury.

"What the devil is wrong around here?" he snapped.

He stormed into the diningroom, ready for his breakfast and his morning newspaper. The diningroom table was a glistening waxen mirror. There was no food on it.

That was the last straw. His face grim, John Thurber invaded the kitchen and the servants' quarters. He found no one. Everything was in immaculate order the way it had been left the night before. No orange juice, no coffee percolating, no morning paper.

His back tingled a little, and a chill coursed his spine. He rubbed the back of his neck, trying to look calm. He turned and went upstairs again and strode to his wife's room. He walked in without knocking. Her room was neatly arranged, bed made, no sign of night things. But Ethel wasn't there.

"The children—" he thought.

Gone like their mother. Bill's crib was all arranged. No toys on the floor. Janet's bed was made.

"Have they gone crazy?" Thurber said. "Has everyone in this house gone crazy?"

Once, a year before, he had struck his wife; and at that time, made bold by pain

and fear, Ethel had spoke of leaving him. The thought came back to him. Left me? In the dead of night without a sound, taking every servant, without the slightest warning? It was impossible.

He got his hat and went out to the Portico and whistled down at the garage for Tony and the car. But he saw the garage was locked, and there was no sign of Tony. He knew his eyes were popping a trifle and that his face was reddening, but he stalked back to the garage. He finally found the right key on his ring.

He unlocked the garage, puzzled and unsure of himself. He climbed into the convertible and then backed it out into the street, noticing that there was little gasoline in it. Thank heaven he had some cash on him anyhow, ten dollars or so.

He drove down the esplanade to the gasoline station at the corner of Main and Maple, and he pulled in and stopped at a pump. No one came out. It was getting late; his watch told him that. He tooted the horn violently, and finally left the car and went to the station house.

Door locked. No one inside. Pumps locked. No gasoline.

Well, there was enough to reach the dock.

HE DROVE down Main toward the Sound. And as he drove, he became aware of strange things. They did not come upon him suddenly because he did not want them to. His orderly mind would not credit them yet, and so they had to creep upon him insidiously.

The signal lights at the intersections were not working. He did not see a single automobile in motion. Soon he realized that he had not seen a living soul. There was not a sound.

That was it, that was the strange thing—the silence. Just his car, roaring down the street, disdainful of police; but no other car sounds, no whistles in the bay, no song of birds, no shrill voices of children on their way to school, no mournful blow of whistle from the railroad station.

Is it a holiday, he thought, something national? Did some announcement, some word, come over the radio last night? Did they forget to tell me? Why didn't some one tell me?

There, then, was his boat. He parked the car and went down the slips to the *Make*. Fifty feet of sleek mahogany-hulled commuter, with a luxurious cabin, and two five-hundred-horsepower motors capable of pushing her fifty miles an hour.

If you knew how to run them.

Out on the Sound, nothing had changed. There was the blue water, and beyond, the green hills of Westchester. From where he stood, he could see the reaches of the Whitestone Bridge across the East River.

But no boats plied the waters.

There wasn't a soul at the yacht club. Feeling stupid and awkward, he clambered aboard the *Make*. "Captain Miller!" he called; and getting no reply, he yelled it. No answer. From his own key ring, he found the key to the cabin door and went in. He searched the boat thoroughly, but Captain Miller was not in his cabin.

He stared at the controls. He had never run the boat, but he had seen Miller do it. You started the motors and then you pushed the clutches in to go forward and back to reverse. "Always wanted to drive this thing," he said. "Damn Miller! Damn them all, I *will* take her in myself!"

He had no trouble in starting the engines. They turned over very well. He advanced the throttles of the two engines and reversed the ship; and in backing out he moved so fast, he crashed into a small sailboat beyond him and split it in half, sinking it.

Panicked, he threw the clutches ahead, spinning the helm, and the boat moved out of the slip into open water. Now watch the buoys, he thought. Let's see, one goes to the right and one to the left, but which is which? Did the black can go on the right or the left? The reef off there—Miller was always talking about it.

He made the channel by pure luck and stepped up the engines. He was a little

frightened at the way they took hold.

In the East River, he began to sweat. He didn't know the way. It seemed so simple when he was sitting inside: down under the Triborough and then the Queensborough and what not. But alone, he found himself in a dead-end bay near Flushing.

He turned, his heart pounding, wondering at the depth, and he went back. He steered into the Harlem River by mistake; and realizing it suddenly, he turned again and almost took off the whole side of the *Mako* on a coal barge which was moored by the side of the river. But he made it, beating his way back into the East River again.

From there on, it really was easy; for the channel was well-marked and there was only one way to go.

He had already started to worry about docking. It was so simple when you sat in the cabin and came into the dock at Wall Street. You just glided in and there you were. Then, "I'll be ready to go home at 3:30, Captain." And, "Yes, sir!"

TODAY he was taking her in alone. And he was taking her in fast. He found the dock all right; but even though he cut the engines down awkwardly the boat still scuttried along.

There was a tide running, a four mile current going out to sea. He had seen it at Hell Gate and had not understood what it meant. Instead of coming up on the tide, he swung the *Mako* into the dock going down.

Too fast, too fast; he pulled on the clutches to reverse, but forgot to step up the engines. The port engine stalled, and the boat began to swing. He forgot the helm. She yawed and crashed into the dock on the forward quarter. He could hear the wood there grind.

Wildly, John Thurber leaped to the dock and landed in a heap; but he climbed to his feet, his heart pounding. The boat was already off the dock beyond reach. She was rapidly filling. He saw the cruel gash in her quarter.

He stood there, fascinated by the sight as she sank. Her mast, where his owner's flag should have been flying, stuck up out of the water.

Thurber turned away, upset, and faced the city.

New York was a strange city. No sound came out of it. There was the skyline; there the towering buildings, the peak of the Empire State, the sword of the Chrysler, the bulk of the Center. And yet—a curious fact. Coming down the river in the morning, he had often looked upon the patterns of escaping steam which went up from those buildings.

No steam this day, no smoke; nothing that moved. No flags, no horns, no cars. *No people.*

Thurber felt nothing then, for the numbness of realization was seeping through him with the same lethargic effect that an injection of morphine might produce. Vaguely, in the back of his head, he blamed himself for this whole illusion. Nothing was real; he was seeing it so. Actually there are people, he thought, but I cannot see them. It must be me. You can't change life with such a sweeping stroke.

Be calm, he thought. Be calm and stern. Go about my business in the usual way. There is some explanation of all this. Mustn't get silly about it. Ignore it, proceed as if it were just another day.

But his heart screamed, *Something is wrong! And if something is wrong, it is wrong for eternity!*

That was a cold thought. To walk in the tomb of eight million people alone until the day you died. The last man on earth? No, the *only* man on earth. That was the specter before him. The only man.

At his office building, there were seven open elevators; no elevator boy. He stared at the controls. For all the years he had been coming and going, and had watched those boys take him up and down, he did not know how to run a cage. Curious how little one sees.

But it was easy to learn. You tried it once and you knew which direction the

thing would travel in. He got in and tried it. and nothing happened.

No power.

He had forgotten. Other men turned the power on for him so that he could go up. He stood there, shivering in the elevator, remembering other men. Other men grew his food. Other men brought it to him. Other men ran his trains, handled his money, created the great things which he bought and sold without ever seeing.

Alone, alone. All the money in New York was his. There was enough food in stores to last his lifetime. Enough cars with gas in them to take him across the country a hundred times and back again. There were boats, luxuries.

He thought of Ames, and shivered. Why should he think of Ames? Ames was dead and gone. Ames would have shot himself by now, killed himself for some of this dead money which lay in banks and vaults. Of no early value now.

Yes, Ames was gone. But so was Ethel; so were young Bill and Janet. Where—where?

"It's a farce, a mad crazy farce," he sobbed. "I'm insane; I must be. Why should I be the one left? It isn't possible!"

I don't need a living soul in this world. If everyone disappeared off the face of the earth tomorrow, it wouldn't affect me.

John Thurber choked. There was Ames standing before the eyes of his mind again, and himself talking, blustering, big, red-faced. I said that, he thought savagely; I said those words.

THE farce had gone far enough. The pretense of walking up to the office, that dark and gloomy office without life—he couldn't stand it. He wanted to be home. Home. He wanted to be there, right there, when they came back, Ethel and the kids. They'd come back.

Please, God, they'll come back.

He wandered through the empty canyons of the city, his own footsteps noisy in the silence of the tomb. He went timidly through the great bulk of Pennsylvania Station, hoping against futility that there

would be someone there, a train for home. But it was dark and ominous in that great place, the trains black and silent upon the tracks, the power gone. Yes, he thought, the power is gone, and power is not force but men.

I want to go home, he said.

He had no boat, he had no train. But there were cars. He searched out the empty cars which stood parked in some streets. They were all locked. There was a way you could start a car by crossing wires. He didn't know it.

He was tired. He walked the empty desolate streets, too horrified to marvel. That horror budded in him all the time, growing. He could feel its petals choke his heart as they unfolded.

Here's luck! A car, unlocked. An old runabout. He stepped into it quickly and turned the starter. It took hold. The engine growled. How noisy and thunderous it was. You would have expected the buildings to topple down like the walls of Jericho at the sound of it. He drove off.

In southern Queens, a tire went flat. There was no spare. He got out discouraged and began to walk. Perhaps he could find another car—but he didn't. Not one that was unlocked. He walked. I can walk from here. I can do it; I know the way.

The day was passing, that long, long day. And each succeeding day would be longer yet. He walked, growing tired, trying to stay sane, crushing the weight in his chest and the tantalizing sob in his throat.

Once he cried aloud, "Ames, Ames, don't do it! Don't do it yet! I can stop it all tomorrow when they all come back! Hear me and don't do it!"

And then he threw his hand across his mouth, and popped his eyes. Talking to himself; not good, not good.

Dusk swept across the sky and brushed the sun aside. No lights along the way, and the darkness was as thick as iron and just as heavy. . . .

He stumbled now and then, for he was

really tired. He struck matches to see the names of street intersections. And when he reached Sands Hill, his watch told him it was nearly midnight. The town was dark. Wearily, he turned down Maple Street and reached his own home.

He stood there in the street and wept, unashamed.

"It's a dream," he whispered, hoping. "It's all a dream . . ."

He unlocked the front door and went in. The house was dark. He found a flashlight in the kitchen. He was hungry but he couldn't eat. He turned the light on and went through the house methodically, each room, and he found them the same, empty, just as he had left them that morning.

That morning, so remote now. He was to have flown to Chicago. Chicago was a million miles away now. And he didn't care.

He undressed slowly, trying to act casual about it. He put on his pajamas. And when he had finished, he broke once and screamed, "Ethel! Ethel!" His voice answered itself as it will when it is alone.

He crawled into his bed, exhausted. When his face touched the pillow he could contain himself no longer. He broke wide open and cried salty tears into the pillow, blubbering like a small boy, his lower lip extended, his face a grotesque sight to see.

"It's a dream!" he wailed once to the starlit heavens above his open window. "It's all a bad dream! Tomorrow when I wake, they'll all be back, all of them, Harris and Ethel and the children and Anna and Tony and Miller and—and Ames!"

Something wouldn't let him believe . . .

He beat his fist into the pillow to affirm it. "Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow!"

Most Soldiers Die Broke

Ed Migrane, soldier-of-fortune, didn't want to die that way. He fought for the side that paid the most. When **Ed** learned that there was a war right here at home—a ruthless war between law and crime—he hurried home, to land right in the middle of it **and make a pile of jack playing on both sides.** Follow the stirring adventures of **Ed Migrane** in the first of a knockout series of stories entitled

A HEADACHE for BUTCH

a story that packs a wallop by

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

By all means read it and the other fast-action fiction by "Grade-A" authors in the **December** issue of

DOUBLE DETECTIVE

NOW ON ALL NEWS STANDS.....10¢



Joe and Shyster reached for their shoulder guns as the guard fired. Bart felt a bullet scorch his neck

Complete Novelet

Brother Cowpoke

By ART LAWSON
Author of "Epitaph in Red"

Home's no place for you, waddy. They'll run you down alleys, call you jailbird; and your own brother won't speak to you. But you're smart when you learn that cattle and cotton don't mix

I

BART MCLEOD rode into Indian Wells with the first red of sunset, astride a lean roan horse that wore a Mexican bridle and carried a hand-carved California saddle on his strong back.

Birds of a feather were Bart and his

mount, Geronimo—rangy, hard, fast; alert and wary; broken to the long, dark trails and given to wearing hammered silver on their working clothes.

They had come from far beyond the horizon; yet neither man nor horse showed any other signs of the days and nights of steady travel than for a tightness around Geronimo's girth and a film of red Brazos dust.

Geronimo sensed first that something was wrong. He lifted his head, his nostrils flaring; and Bart reined him in, sitting motionless as an Indian. A minute passed; then from town a strange procession wound into view.

In the lead was a rickety old surrey that had been converted into a hearse and

loaded with a black-painted cottonwood coffin. Following were two buckboards, the first with two men, the second with a man and a woman; and trailing along behind were the townsfolk, the cowboys, the curious strangers.

Bart McLeod had come half a thousand miles to say goodbye to his father and had arrived too late.

He waited until the procession turned up the hill; then rode toward town, dismounted, and followed on foot. Beside the grave, men moved aside to let him pass, hardly concealing their surprise as they recognized him. And Old Doc Haskins who preached on Sundays and patched up people's bodily ills on week-days only nodded briefly as he went on with his eulogy:

"... the finest man this country ever saw or is likely to see. Old Sandy might have been as ornery as a she-cougar with kittens and as close-mouthed as a Piute. But folks, when any one of you was in trouble you could go to Sandy McLeod and know he would help you out. You knew Sandy would give you time or brains or money. Yet some skunk went and shot him in the back . . ."

Bart McLeod glanced up from the coffin, across the grave. His twin brother, Bob, dropped his eyes, quicker than a flash of gunflame. Standing beside him, Molly O'Hara watched the setting sun through unshed tears. Next to her was Nat Lee, known to everyone as "Shyster," looking as innocent as a deacon before the plate has been passed.

One of these three, Bart believed, knew who had shot Sandy McLeod.

Doc Haskins droned on:

"So, folks, Sandy McLeod is on his way over the Great Divide to be with that fine woman who was his wife. Sandy'll be happy where he's going, so we don't need to feel sorry for him. We had just better feel sorry for the snake who plugged him. He'll get caught, sooner or later . . ."

Bart's eyes were on the coffin again. "Pop," he muttered, "you kicked me out of the house. You had me tossed into the

pen. You made an orphan out of me, Pop, before you died. But, before I'm done, Pop, you're going to come back to shake my hand."

"What did you say?" Doc Haskins asked.

The coffin had been lowered, the first shovelful of sandy earth thrown in with a muffled thump. Bart turned to Doc Haskins.

"I was sayin', Doc," he said, "you made a fine speech. I wish the old man could have heard it."

"Maybe he did," Doc said. "There's no telling what a dead man hears."

"Or what he sees," Bart answered. "I get you, Doc. And I wouldn't be surprised if dead men could talk. They don't make any noise—but you can hear them just the same." He tapped his head with a lean brown finger. "In here, Doc, if you're listenin'."

THE crowd was slowly drifting down the hill. Some had moved as if to speak to Bart McLeod, hesitated, then left. Now only Shyster Lee, Molly O'Hara, and Bob McLeod still stood beside the grave with Doc Haskins and Bart. They were all facing the west where the last rays of the sun painted the sky a dusky red.

"Bart," Doc said, "I think you and me savvy each other. How about joining me in a drink to Sandy's happy hunting over yonder?"

Bart McLeod gripped the oldster's hand, a warmth within him. He had come home expecting to find only enemies, to be cast out again as pariah, and had found a friend.

"Okay, Doc. But first of all I better say hello to my brother." He stepped up to the silent trio, nodded to Molly and Shyster, held out his hand to Bob. "Hello, Bob!" he said.

Bob McLeod's eyes held Bart's, but Bob's hand remained stiffly by his side. These two men who looked so much alike—except that one had put on weight while the other was down to bone and gristle—seemed to be born of different parents.

Bob had much of his father in him—the solid, unforgiving, unforgetting. Bart was more of his mother—fast to anger, quick to laugh it off. Yet in the years he had been away he had learned the control that held him now.

"I can't shake hands with you," Bob said. He turned on his heel, took Molly O'Hara's arm. "Come on, Molly. Come along, Shyster."

The rabbit little lawyer's eyes shuttled over the group. "But we got to have Bart there, Bob," he said. "We got to, to make it legal."

"Then tell him to come," Bob said, and without another word walked off down the hill with the girl. Shyster hesitated. Doc Haskins poked Bart's stiff back.

"Go along," he said. "You got to face it, kid!"

Bart followed Shyster Lee to town and the law office, looking about him at the changes time had made on Indian Wells, hardly listening while the lawyer explained why both brothers had to be present at the reading of their father's will.

The old horse barn, Bart noticed, and the saloon that had been next to it had apparently burned down recently and a fancy, two-story structure put up in its place. *Longhorn Bar* was the printing over the batwing doors—*Joe Bledshot, Prop.*

There were some new boards in the walk before Charlie Bean's store, and beyond that a new livery with doors that ran on a track and a sign proclaiming it to be *Okay Corral. Everything for your Horse. Joe Bledshot, Prop.*

Almost afraid, Bart glanced across the street at the combination chapel and hospital run by Doc Haskins, wondering if that, too, would bear a sign—*Joe Bledshot, Prop.*; and the little place brought a smile to his set lips. The awning sagged even more than it had in the old days; a window was broken; and what little paint had been left on it six years ago had completely vanished. That was one spot in town where Bart could feel at home.

Shyster passed the swinging doors of the *Longhorn Bar*, turned to his left at

the end of the building and climbed an outside stairway to the second floor. There in gilt letters on his door was his name.

Inside, Molly O'Hara and Bob McLeod were sitting on a bench. Shyster Lee rubbed his hands together, smiled, sidled around behind his desk and crouched down like a spider over his papers.

Bart picked out the big, leather-covered easy chair in the corner near the street, settled down into it. He stole a look at his brother and Molly O'Hara. Bob grimly stared toward the desk. Molly's Irish eyes snapped.

"This is a lot of foolishness!" she said abruptly. "Why should I be here? I have no business being at this meeting!"

Maybe the old man left you the Muleshoe!" Bart drawled from his corner.

Bob breathed deeply before answering. "As I've told you, Mary, we should have a witness to this meeting. Mr. Lee and I chose you. Since you are soon to be mistress of the Muleshoe as well as of the Lazy B we felt that you should be present at the reading of the will."

"It seems to me," she said, "that you should have a completely disinterested party—and not me."

"That's where I come in," Bart said. He was beginning to be amused. "The old man crossed me off the books six years ago when they locked me up in Huntsville. Likely he crossed me off before that and just forgot to mention it. So I'm the disinterested party." His voice was the same drawl, his eyes not lifting from the toes of his benchmade boots, when he spoke to Shyster:

"Okay, Shyster, get on with yore reading. I'm in a hurry to get back to the hills. It's too damn cold in here."

Shyster Lee cleared his raspy throat. "Boys, as your father's attorney—"

"Cut it short!" Bart said. "I've got things to do."

"Hummmpph!" Shyster Lee was not used to being interrupted. He fumbled with his very legal-looking document, cleared his throat again and began, "Your father's will reads as follows: 'I, Geoffrey McLeod of

Indian Wells situated in Palo County, State of Texas, being of sound mind and body and cognizant—"

"Listen, Shyster," Bart cut in. "Stop that stuff and get down to the meat so I can get out of here."

Shyster Lee wrinkled his narrow forehead, lifted his beady eyes. Bart was still watching the toes of his boots. Bob shrugged impatiently. Shyster gave in.

"O KAY," he said. "It's not quite regular doing it this way. But it's legal enough. You two were only supposed to be here when the will was unsealed. It doesn't matter whether you read it or not, though, as your advisor, I would suggest that you both do so."

"This may be a surprise to you, but I gather that you both expected that one of you would be cut out entirely."

Bob's chest expanded. He looked quite satisfied. "I told Father that was not quite fair," he said, "but he insisted. After all, I really built up the Muleshoe while Bart was cracking rocks over in Huntsville and—"

"Building wagon wheels," Bart cut in. "The rock-crackers are at Rusk."

"Mr. Lee"—Bob pointed his remarks—"tell Bart I'll give him the pick of ten horses and fifty cattle. It's the least I can do for a brother. And he should be able to build up a spread on that."

"Tell him thanks," Bart said.

Molly O'Hara stood up, stamped her small foot. "I can't stand this. I won't stand it. I'm going!"

"Wait a minute!" Shyster Lee spoke evenly, unhurriedly. "You people got mixed up somewhere. It says in this will: 'I leave everything I own, lock, stock and barrel, including all my personal and real property, all my cattle and horses, to my son Bartholomew, for reasons of my own.'"

Bob McLeod, usually slow to movement, leaped across the room, ripped the paper from the lawyer's hands. His disbelief turned to anger. The will dropped to the desk in stunned silence. Then Bob stamped from the room. Bewildered, Molly followed.

Bart watched them go. When the door slammed shut he said, "Shyster, you can read all the wills you want, but my old man never left me the Muleshoe. My old man never forgave me and never would, for what I done. There's a skunk in the woodpile somewhere."

Shyster Lee shoved the paper over towards Bart.

"Read it," he said.

Bart took the paper, shoved it into his pocket, turned to the door. Shyster Lee's suave voice stopped him.

"Incidentally," he said, "my client, Joe Bledshot, still holds a paper of yours, an IOU for something like nine thousand dollars. Your father knew about this, of course, and I had it in mind that possibly he gave you the Muleshoe in the hope that you would pay off your honest debts and start out with a clean slate."

"I like the way you put it," Bart said.

"As your legal adviser," Shyster cut in, "may I suggest that you cannot give away, sell, or otherwise dispose of your ranch or any of its effects without first paying Mr. Bledshot. I can read the law to you, if you are interested."

"Thanks!" Bart tossed a silver dollar across the room. It landed musically on Shyster Lee's desk.

"What's this?" Shyster asked.

"That's yore pay," Bart grinned, "as my legal advisor. You're fired, Shyster."

"Now Bart—" Shyster stood up. The drawer in front of him, Bart noticed, was open just enough so that Shyster could get at the gun inside if he wanted to. Shyster's hand was on the edge of that drawer. "I want you to know that I am still your father's representative—or rather the lawyer for the estate—until everything is settled."

"I'm glad to know that," Bart said. "Then maybe you'll go over to see Joe Bledshot and get him to take that spare zero off that note I signed six years ago."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Shyster said.

"If you don't, Joe will. I owed him just a little more than nine hundred—not nine

thousand—and that's all I'm going to pay up."

"In court," Shyster said, "you'd have a difficult time proving that, Bart. I have seen that IOU, and it's legal. It reads—"

"I know how it reads," Bart cut in. "But tell me this, Shyster: how's that dollar read? Heads or tails?"

"Tails!" Shyster said after looking down.

Bart stepped up to the door. There he smiled back at the little lawyer. "Fine!" he said. "If it had been heads I'd have had to take Joe first."

Shyster stiffened. Bart McLeod still smiled. Then, without explaining further, he opened the door and vanished into the night.

II

BART McLEOD had been breaking horses for an outfit in the New Mexico Territory, down by the border, when the whispering of the leaves told him that his father had been bushwhacked.

An outlaw on his way to Mexico had passed the information on to Bart. He had picked it up from a friend of his up the trail a bit, who had heard it from an ex-convict Bart had known in Huntsville. That's the way news travels up and down the owlhoot trails, and the outlaws call it the whispering of the leaves.

So Bart had saddled up Geronimo, filled his saddle pockets with beans and bacon, and headed straight back for Texas, hoping to get there before the old man died. In the eyes of the law Bart had paid for his youthful foolishness which led him from gambling to rustling—and into Huntsville Penitentiary. But no amount of jail would ever make his father forgive him.

He had to do something for Sandy to make the old man take him back into the family. Maybe catching the bushwhacker would turn the trick.

It had looked very easy from the distant Territory.

Now Bart sauntered up the main street of Indian Wells, keeping close to the buildings, passing alleys only after making sure

there was no ambush. Five years in the pen plus a year with a wild border outfit make a man wary.

Beyond the Okay Corral near the old cottonwood hangtree, Bart turned right, crossed the road, came back the other side behind the buildings to Doc Haskins' place. He waited a moment making sure that Shyster had not had him followed; then knocked on the door under which showed a pencil of light. When Doc Haskins opened up, Bart had ducked back into the shadows.

"It's me, Bart McLeod. I want to see you, Doc, but I don't want anyone to know I'm talking to you."

Doc stuck his head out the door. "Funny," he said aloud. "Thought I heard something." Then he whispered, "Out the Fort Worth Road. I'll go first. Light a cigarette when you ride by. Give me half an hour."

Doc pulled in his head, closed the door. Bart retraced his steps to the old cottonwood, returned to the boardwalk and came back through town, his high heels clicking on the planks, his spurs ringing.

At the Longhorn Bar, Bart turned in through the batwings. It was Monday night, and the place was almost deserted. But Joe Bledshot was there, sitting at a corner table with two other men who were strangers to Bart, smoking and drinking. Shyster Lee was not around.

Bart stopped by the table.

"Hello, Joe," he said.

Joe grinned; stood up holding out a hand which Bart chose to ignore. Joe had gotten soft since Bart last saw him, heavy around the middle. But his black eyes were still sharp and his thick features canny. Joe had the perfect poker face; he covered up Bart's insult deftly.

"Glad to see you back!" Joe smiled with his lips and teeth. "I heard about the Muleshoe, Bart. Tough on Bob. But your old man owed it to you after sending you down to Huntsville for five years. None of us ever believed he should of done that, Bart."

"Only Pop and Bob and me," Bart said.

"I got what I had coming to me. Was a little surprised, though, when Shyster told me I owed you something like nine thousand dollars."

"I wouldn't worry about that," Joe said. "I always had faith in you, Bart. You'll pay up when you get the chance. No hurry—no hurry at all. I don't need the cash, Bart. Any time's okay with me."

"Maybe I better pay up in a hurry," Bart suggested, "before you add another zero and make it ninety thousand."

"Hell, Bart—"

Joe Bledshot could twist his face into any expression. First he had shown generosity; now he was hurt because Bart would accuse him of altering an IOU.

"I wouldn't do anything like that. You were playing pretty wild that last night. You just forgot, that's all. People forget lots of things when they're in the pen. The walls kind of chase the memory out of your head and you dream of the outside world as being nicer than it really is. I didn't bother you when you were in the pen, Bart, and I'm not pushing you now."

"Thanks," Bart said again. Very carefully he took a silver dollar from his pocket, laid it down in front of Joe Bledshot. "I always pay my debts, Joe. Here's a starter."

He moved his hand from the coin and Lady Liberty looked up at Joe. Bart watched the other man's eyes—saw them blink, glaze—then Joe was smiling at him as inscrutable as ever. Shyster Lee had been over here all right, and Shyster had told Joe about the dollar Bart had tossed onto the desk.

"If it had been heads I'd have had to take Joe first."

Joe and Shyster had talked that over. Bart could tell that by Joe's eyes.

Now Joe said, "Glad to see you feel that way, Bart. No hurry for the rest."

Bart said, "Be seein' yuh, Joe. And don't worry—I'll be paying in full pretty soon."

His back tickled as he left the gambling and drinking place. Joe Bledshot would not hesitate to shoot a man through the

shoulderblades. Joe would only wait until it was convenient.

Bart felt a lot better when the batwing doors slatted behind him. He had made no threats—but Joe and Shyster would be doing some thinking. That's what he wanted.

He walked down to the rack where he had left Geronimo, shortened the latigo, and headed for the Fort Worth road. . . .

THE matchlight showed Doc's face as if it had been carved from pink marble. Bart said, "Okay, Doc. Let's ride on a piece."

Doc reined back into the road. The two horses loped easily along through the pecan groves that lined the river to the spot where Walnut Creek cut in from the west. There Bart pulled in.

"I don't know, Doc," he said, "if I'm being followed or not. When we're through maybe you better go back some other way."

"What have you been up to?" Doc asked.

It was too dark for either of them to see the other's face.

"I've been worrying people," Bart said.

"Some people ought to be worried."

"These people been needing it a long time. Doc, do you know who killed my old man?"

"No, I don't, Bart. I don't know and I haven't the slightest idea, unless it was those farmers."

"What farmers?"

"There's farmers moving in since you went away. They're coming up the valley. Planting cotton and corn. This is good cotton country around these parts. Some of the best in the world is on the Brazos River bottoms. And folks are saying that you can always sell cotton for a good price—when you never can tell what's going to happen to beef prices."

"I heard that, too," Bart said. "But what's it got to do with Pop?"

"A couple of farmers planted the lower quartersection of his land. When he discovered it they said they had just made

a mistake. Sandy chased them off, burned the cotton. They said they were sorry. But maybe they shot him just the same."

"Where was Bob?" Bart asked.

"He was around. He wanted to lease that land. But Sandy wouldn't have anything to do with it."

"Humph," Bart said. "Things are fitting together. When'd that happen?"

"They planted it last spring. Sandy burned it a month ago."

"Anybody else want to plant his land or buy it?"

"I don't know, son."

"Doc"—Bart spoke very slowly—"Pop was sort of set in his ways. He wouldn't want to grow cotton when he'd been in cattle all his life. Just like he never would want to forgive me after he once made up his mind I was no good."

"When I got caught running off some of Pop's cows he had me sent to Huntsville for five years. And when I got out he said I no longer existed as far as he was concerned. Do you know why I stole his cattle, Doc?"

"To get some money to buy some more whisky. You were pretty wild, Bart."

"I was wild enough and I could use some money for whisky. But I rustled that bunch to pay up Joe Bledshot. I owed Joe pretty close to a thousand dollars, some for liquor, some gambling, some for cash he loaned me. He had a buyer for those cattle and told me he'd call it square if I delivered them. If I didn't, he would tell Pop. And Doc, I was scared to hell of Pop in those days."

Bart was silent for a moment. Doc did not cut in.

"So do you know what he done when I was in Huntsville? He got me to sign a note for that money, then added another zero onto it. Turned nine hundred into nine thousand. Then he got Shyster Lee to fix things so I got the Muleshoe. He got Shyster to stick my name in where Pop wanted Bob's."

"Just covering his investment," Doc said.

"You might put it that way. Anyhow,

Joe has that note Shyster and he fixed up and I have the Muleshoe. I don't know where all this cotton business comes in, but it would be pretty nice for Joe to get the Muleshoe for nine hundred dollars. It would be a real bargain for Joe."

"It would be fine," Doc agreed, "but if you mean to say he figured out a scheme as crazy as that to get hold of the Muleshoe I'll have to see the county commissioners and have you sent up to the nut-house."

"It's not so crazy," Bart said. "I've seen nuttier things. As soon as they got the will changed everything was in their hands. Nobody's going to believe me if I say they raised that note. I'm a jailbird, Doc. Nobody's going to believe me at all."

Bart was silent for a moment. "The old man wouldn't sell the Muleshoe. He wouldn't leave it to me, either. They fixed that will, Doc. Up in Huntsville I worked in the wagon shop making wheels. I got to be pretty good at it. You get the hub, put spokes around it and then whittle the felloes to fit. Around all that goes the tire. A spoke or a felloe is a pretty crazy-looking thing. But stick them all together and you've got a wheel that works. I'm not so nuts, Doc."

Doc was moving around on his horse, working on his saddle bags. After a minute or so a cork popped.

"Bart," Doc said, "I brought some Old Crow along so we could have that drink we promised ourselves. You figure Joe Bledshot plugged Sandy?"

"Him or Shyster—or they hired it done."

Starlight glinted on Doc's bottle. He was holding it out to Bart. When Bart reached for it their fingers touched. Doc said:

"Luck, Bart. If your father is listening in he's having a big laugh."

"Maybe so," Bart said.

He tipped up the bottle, and the whisky was warm in his cold, empty stomach.

BART rode up to the Muleshoe ranch house at dawn. There was a big Conestoga wagon out front and the sight

of the wheels sent a shiver through Bart's spine.

He never again could look at a wheel without thinking of Huntsville—without shuddering at the thought of the granite walls that held him in, the guards, the heavy boots, the work that was so alien to a man brought up on the open range.

Wheels would always remind him of those five years he spent there with never a word from his family—never even the briefest note from Molly O'Hara who had once been his sweetheart . . .

And then, suddenly, he realized that the wagon was loaded with furniture. He rode closer, looked into the wagon, and was surprised to discover that this furniture was new, most of it, not more than a few days out of its wrappings. It was store furniture, shipped in from the East—not the comfortable old handmade hickory and rawhide and split oak that his mother and father had furnished the place with in the old days. Something was brewing.

He slipped out of the saddle, led Geronimo over to the hitchrack, threw the reins over the bar, then stepped up on the porch. As he did so, his brother Bob came out carrying a heavy smoked-oak dresser on his back, minus the drawers.

Bob went past him, bent low under his burden; hoisted the dresser into the wagon, climbed in after it, shoved it over against the rest of the furniture. Bob did not see Bart until he was on his way back into the house again.

"Mornin', Bob."

Bob was sullen. He would have walked past Bart if Bart had not grasped his elbow and swung him around. Bart's face was hard, almost expressionless.

"Too bad we haven't got our interpreter here," he said. "I'd like to find out something."

Bob did not speak. His eyes held Bart's, and in them was defiance, hatred. Bart fought for control.

"Where you going with that furniture?" Bart asked.

"It's my furniture," Bob said, "and my business where I'm going with it."

"It's my wagon," Bart said, playing his brother's game.

It was like slapping Bob in the face. Bart knew it. When they were only kids Bob had been fiercely proud, almost pig-headedly independent.

"Then I'll take it off!" Bob said.

"No you won't!" Bart still held his brother's elbow. "You won't touch my wagon. You won't touch a thing on my ranch. If you do, I'll run you in for trespassing."

It was too much for Bob. The muscles of his cheeks grew hard. "Damn you, Bart. You came back and stole my ranch. You've stolen everything I've worked for. You—a lousy jailbird . . ."

It was music to Bart, his brother's cursing. If only his father had sworn at him before sending him off to jail six years ago; if brother Bob had cursed him blue behind the ears instead of looking so damned proud and pious! If only they had licked him to doll rags, the Hell that had been Huntsville would have been easier to bear. This was more like it.

Bob broke away; his fist flashed up. Bart ducked. He swung a fist, and the feeling of it biting into Bob's jaw was good . . .

III

BOB McLEOD reeled back against the porch, shook his head like a bear, charged blindly. He was heavier than Bart by a good fifty pounds, but they were of the same height, same reach.

Two powerful men, well over six feet; one just slightly soft, the other lean as rawhide; one as powerful as an ox, the other a wild longhorn.

And when Bob McLeod roared in, his brother Bart was ready for him. He danced aside, smashed at Bob's face, struck his upflung arm, then stopped a wild haymaker from Bob's left.

Bart went backward from the power of the blow, felt the blood singing in his ears. Bob was still coming on. Now they stood there in the ranch yard where they had grown up to manhood, where they had

fought their childish battles; stood only two feet apart, slugging, blow after blow while the world spun around them.

Bob's hands were not as hard as Bart's; but the power behind them, those added fifty pounds, made his knuckles into bone-crushers; and the beef on his body served as protection against Bart's fast punches.

Bart's head snapped back; his fist cracked again against Bob's chin. Now he could not see what he was doing, and his breath burned in his lungs. His heart crackled like a machine gun.

If he had been fighting anyone else in the world he would have clinched for a few seconds' rest. But six years of hatred was in this fight—six years that had to be burned out before either one of them quit!

It was as startling as being doused with cold water for Bart to discover suddenly that they were on their knees, still slugging. He tried to get to his feet, fell backward. It was a struggle to right himself and when he was back on his knees again Bob's gory fist was coming for his face.

He had to take it. He had to give just as good in return—and he brought it up from his toes. Bob's fist arrived first. Bart did not even feel his knuckles connect with Bob's cheek.

Then he could see through the haze again and Bob, still on his knees, was back against his heels, his fists up. Bob swung, fell over on his face. Bart rolled onto his side.

"Okay—Bob," he said. "Ready to shake? Ready to be pals?"

"Jailbird!"

Bob came up out of the dirt. "Damn you, Bart . . ."

Bart tried to get out of the way but found himself anchored there, nerveless, unable to move, unable to even put up a guard.

Six years of hatred—maybe six years of regret. The bitter pill of losing everything gave Bob the strength that Bart had lost in the long trip back home.

"Damn you," Bob said. "You won't steal her, too!"

It felt like the kick of a mule between the eyes . . .

BOB was gone and the sun was high and hot when Bart crawled over to the old pump. Every muscle in his body ached as if red-hot pins had been driven into them. The *scream* of the pump-handle rasped his eardrums.

Then the water came, cool and refreshing; and as he sluiced his chest and arms and let the coldness of it run over his head he began to laugh.

Bob, good old Bob could hold a grudge just as long as Sandy ever did. The old man had died without forgiving his son and it looked as if the brother would go to his grave still hating. Yet it made Bart McLeod laugh.

This was coming home, this was what it meant. Just like the old days when Bob would get sore because Bart had ridden his favorite horse without asking Bob's permission. Just like when they were kids and Bob would go around all day looking glum until they fought it out and shook hands.

Only Bob had studied up a lot on this pig-headedness since they were buttons. One fight would not wipe out a six years' grudge.

Bart drank deeply of the cold water. He stumbled into the house, found some of his father's whisky, took a good shot of it. Then he opened a can of tomatoes, ate that. It made him feel better, gave him the strength to hunt up some meat, fry it and stow it away with some warmed-over beans he found on the kitchen stove.

Now the pain did not matter. It reminded him of Huntsville when the screws beat him up for some minor infraction of the prison rules. When it was all over it almost felt good to hurt so much. It reminded you of how much worse you felt when the guards were kicking in your ribs with hobnailed boots.

It was crazy to feel that way—feeling good because you felt so terrible. Maybe Doc was right. Maybe he ought to go up to the nut-house, beg them to let him in.

He went outside, took Geronimo down to the barn, unsaddled him, fed him some oats and hauled a pail of water.

"Pals, ain't we, Geronimo?"

Geronimo wagged his ears. When Bart had picked him up on the border, Geronimo was wild, spur-scarred by his former Mexican owner, vicious. But Bart had treated him right, and Geronimo would die for his partner.

Bart wandered out of there, light in the head and a little dizzy. In the yard by the ranch house door the Conestoga still stood, half loaded with that new, cumbersome furniture. Bart pulled the tarpaulin back to cover the shining varnish.

So Bob had bought all that stuff, had he, for his new home and his new bride? So pretty little Molly O'Hara was going to grace all that terrible smoked oak. Bart shook his head. Bob must have ordered that before the old man was shot. Sent away to a mail order house for it. Bob must have been planning on marrying Molly for some time.

Bart had not meant that Bob couldn't have his furniture. Sure he could take it. Take the wagon, too. He had only said that to make Bob mad enough to take a poke at him. They could fight it out and make up, then, just as they had done when they were kids. But Bob had licked him—and still hated him.

There was something about the place that gave Bart the creeps. No life. No cowboys. This was the time of the year that everyone would be heading out for the fall roundup, but Bart had seen the chuck wagon still in the barn. The roundup had not started on the Muleshoe. The whole place was dead.

He found himself back by the pump, took another deep drink, walked around to the north side of the old ranch house that his father had built of virgin cottonwood logs. From there you could see the river, winding between its red banks, very low this fall. Dotted along it were little bunches of cattle, lazing in the sun or standing knee-deep in the brick-colored water.

Bart, stiff from the long ride, aching from the beating, began walking down there to limber up and to look closely at these steers and cows that were now his property.

The wild grapes were ripe, metallic purple, along the creek. The pecans were thick down here, the ground covered with nuts, a couple of wild hogs rooting among them, getting fat. The pigs ran when Bart crashed into their feeding grounds; and cows sitting in the shade of the big trees, chewing on their cuds, lumbered off as he approached. Muleshoe, most of them, a couple of strays from the Lazy B and a scattering of others.

It was very peaceful down here, and it was strange to Bart that men would kill to own land along this river. Then he broke from the grove and the lower part of the Muleshoe was spread before him: ripe, flat country along the river, the banks in spots higher than the flats behind them, the great river bottom brown with sun-cured grass.

It was good to see again.

Then Bart came to the place where the ground was black, where stubs of burned cotton bushes stood in neat rows. To burn down like that the cotton must have been ripe; the first picking must have been made before Sandy discovered what was going on down here.

Bart pursed his lips, looked around. You could not see the ranch house from here. A roll in the flats, covered with post oak, sprinkled with cedar that was black against the sky, hid this area from the headquarters of the Muleshoe. If any farmer wanted to make a mistake and plant on Muleshoe ground, this would be a fine place to do it.

But it couldn't have been accident. There was no sign of a shack, burned down or otherwise, in this corner. To farm it, a man would have to live here or row across the river every day on his way to work and back home.

Bart had found one more spoke to his wheel—and wondering where it fitted in he turned toward the ranch house. . . .

HE WAS not suprised to find two horses at the rack, their heads drooping in the late afternoon sun; but he had not expected to find Shyster Lee and Molly O'Hara waiting there on the porch.

Molly said, "I'm hunting for Bob!"

Shyster said, "I've been looking all over for you, Bart. I've got some things to go over with you."

Bart ignored that. "I'm scouting around for cowboys. Seen any?"

He had come upon them with his back to the sun. Now, closer, and facing them, he thought he could not suppress the laugh that welled within him. As if he had dropped a curtain from in front of himself, they both saw his puffed eyes, his cut lips and the bruises on his cheeks.

Molly raised a hand in a little gesture, abruptly dropped it again to her lap and tried to put down the concern that showed so plainly in her Irish blue eyes. Shyster was pleased.

"Looks like you'd found a whole bunch of them," Shyster said, "and all hostile."

"I got dragged," Bart lied. "Tried to rope an old red bull down there, and he yanked me all over the place. Don't ever try to rope a red bull, Shyster, from on foot. It ain't safe."

"Have you seen Bob?" Molly asked.

"He was around this morning," Bart said, "loading furniture on that wagon. But when I wasn't looking, he went away."

Molly stood up impatiently. She said: "I've got to see him!"

"When you do," Bart said, "give him my regards. Do you know where he was going with this furniture?"

"No I don't!" she said.

Bart wondered why they had to talk that way. Once they had been pretty good friends, Molly and he, and he did not believe she was the kind to get snuffy because the ranch was in his hands instead of Bob's. Molly had a place of her own, down yonder, unless the bank had gotten hold of it.

He wanted to know whether Bob was moving over there; but he couldn't ask her outright—not with Shyster here, anyway.

"Are you riding back to town pretty soon?" she asked the lawyer.

"In a minute," he said. "I've got to talk to Bart. It's private."

Molly moved away toward the horses. She was slim and graceful, yet strong. She'd grown up a lot in these past six years. Gotten to be more of a woman than a girl. And Bart liked the way she had turned out, in spite of the enmity between them.

Shyster pulled him back to the problem on hand.

"I've been talking to Joe," he said.

"That's no news."

"Joe's upset," Shyster said. "Joe told me you accused him of raising that note. It made him unhappy."

"I'll bet it did."

"He said he always treated you decent, never pressed for payment. But now that you're not showing any gratitude and are publicly saying he's crooked, he'll have to collect immediately."

"How soon is immediately?"

"I persuaded him to wait until noon tomorrow. I tried to argue him out of it. Bart, but he won't be moved. He says if you don't pay up he'll libel the Muleshoe."

"Thanks for telling me," Bart said. "What would you suggest?"

"I'd suggest you see Joe right away and make a settlement."

"I take that as legal advice," Bart said. He held out a hand to Shyster, and Shyster took it automatically. "Here's yore fee!"

Shyster yanked his hand away. In his palm was a silver dollar, tails upward. Shyster could not keep the color from flooding his face.

"Damn you," he said. "I don't want your money."

"I always pay my debts," Bart said evenly. "Cash and carry. Joe tell you I started paying up that money I owe him?"

Shyster turned on his heel and stamped away. Over his shoulder he said, "If you are going to keep on being a damn fool it's your own funeral."

"Tell Joe to come to it," Bart said. "Tell him I'm sorry I hurt his feelings."

BART sat on the porch until Molly and Shyster had vanished in the haze by the river, then went inside again. In his father's office he found a bottle of good Scotch whisky, poured out a drink and proceeded to enjoy it. The alcohol stung his lips but dulled the pains in his joints.

The old man's desk was very neat. There were a pile of papers on one corner, a ledger book in the middle, newly sharpened quill pens and ink and some stubby pencils. The ledger book was open and Bart found himself reading the entries:

10 sacks oats—\$1.05 a sack—\$10.50

1 case tomatoes—\$3.20 a case—

Bart turned over the page. Those were ordinary entries of a regular ranch. He turned over another page, came to "Pay-roll."

Mike, paid off three months' wages, one extra, \$160.00

Pecos, paid off two months' wages, one extra, \$120.00

There were other names, some of which Bart recognized as old timers who had been on the Muleshoe since he was hock-high to a burro. Some were new. But all had been paid off last night, with one month's extra wages, and the entries were in Bob's firm handwriting. So that's where everyone had gone. Bob had fired the whole bunch. Had he done it before or after the funeral?

Bart poured another drink, slammed the book shut. *Cotton*, written on the top of the pile of papers, drew his eye. He picked the papers up, started to read. *2,500 acres, 1,000 bales at \$40 a bale, \$40,000.00.*

Bob had written that and put on the two zeros for cents to make the forty thousand look better, just as if it didn't already look too good. Under it he had written *Cottonseed* with a question mark following. Below that was, *Cattle. Pasture and feed enough for about 350. Worth \$6.00 each . . .*

That did not look so good. Bart knew that you could pasture four hundred cattle on the Muleshoe without leasing any school land and that in a good year they were

worth a lot more than six dollars each. A good fat steer ready for market would be worth more than that right now; but take them as a whole, especially this year which was very tough, just about six dollars each would be right. It was very interesting.

It was one more spoke to his wheel. As a cattle ranch the Muleshoe had seen its best days. Sandy, set in his ways, had tried to pull it through. Bob had been interested in Cotton. Cotton had killed the old man.

Bart began to wonder if that will had not been a true one after all. Had the old man seen the writing on the wall and passed the ranch off to Bart just as a final gesture, stuck him with a cotton farm, knowing Bart would die if he couldn't ride a horse and chase a wild steer?

Nope! Pop wouldn't do that.

Bart tucked that slip into his pocket behind the copy of the will. He lifted the bottle for another drink. A sound, fainter than the gurgling of the whisky, drifted into the darkening room. Bart swung, flinging the bottle with all his strength at the front window.

Glass crashed, tinkled. Boots pounded on the hard red earth. And Bart, his gun in his hand, followed the bottle out the window.

The marauder was gone before Bart hit the ground. Running stiffly, Bart circled the house. Hoofs rang at the far side and Bart turned in his tracks, headed back the way he had come.

But the ambusher or spy, whoever it was, had been chased before; he doubled back even as Bart had done. When Bart caught sight of him the man was roaring down the slope a good fifty yards away, flat on his horse's back and heading for the river.

Steadying his Colt across his left forearm, Bart took careful aim, fired. His first shot missed; so did his second, he knew; then the man was out of range, and it would be only foolish to try and catch him. By the time Bart had Geronimo saddled the fugitive would be lost in the

brakes around the river, and in the darkness it would be impossible to trail him.

Bart went back to the front of the house, studied the ground around the broken window. There were heel prints—cowboy heels—and the faint scuff of a spur. Broken glass was sprinkled everywhere. Some fifteen feet away the whisky bottle lay on the ground, unbroken by some miracle, but spilling its amber liquor over the ground.

It was so dark now that Bart had to strike a match to complete his search. He grinned with satisfaction as the light sparkled on a glass splinter, making a ruby of the drop of blood on its tip.

Bart hadn't caught his man but the glass had branded him.

Bart circled the house again, went down to the barns, searched them but found nothing unusual. He saddled up Geronimo; then before climbing into the seat he fed the horse a handful of oats, patted his rough neck.

"We got a wildcat by the tail, Geronimo. We got a ranch that's no good. Bushwhackers, robbers, crooks. We got nothing we want and everything we don't have any use for. Let's chuck the whole shebang. You and me for the hills."

Geronimo wagged his ears, reached with his lips for more oats.

"I kinda thought you would try and start an argument," Bart said. "Okay, Geronimo, we'll start blowing things to pieces."

IV

BART McLEOD rode directly to Doc Haskins' place, hitched Geronimo to the post so that Doc would know he was back in town, then went across the street to see Shyster Lee.

Shyster was in his office, sitting there behind his desk, the top drawer opened about six inches; and when he saw that his visitor was Bart McLeod he quickly picked up a pencil and held it poised over some papers.

Bart had learned not to miss a thing, and he knew that the pencil was a flag of

truce hiding an armed and hostile battery.

"Lo, Shyster," he said. "Looks like you and me are always bumping into each other."

"Looks like you had bumped into something a lot bigger and tougher than me," Shyster said. "That red bull sure dragged you into a mess of something."

"It did," Bart agreed. "A mess of statistics. Ever get scratched up on some statistics? They're worser than Spanish bayonet."

Bart settled in the low easy chair. From there he could see Shyster's head and chest, but not his hands. He knew that his own head was just enough higher than the top of the desk so that Shyster could lay a sixshooter out of sight on the mahogany and blow a hole through Bart's skull, without Bart seeing a thing. Bart felt a tingling in the roots of his hair. It would keep him on his toes.

"A mess of statistics?" Shyster encouraged him.

"Sure!" Bart smiled though it made his mouth hurt. "You got any idea at all who shot my old man?"

"I haven't," Shyster managed to keep his eyes level and Bart admired him for his control. "They say it was those farmers he kicked off his lower quartersection. But the farmers have vanished."

"Humppph!" Bart stretched his aching muscles. "It couldn't be that Pop and Bob got into an argument? They were both sort of hot-headed!"

Shyster looked horrified. "But Sandy was shot in the back. Your brother would not—"

"Bob," Bart said, "knows how to hold a grudge longer than anybody. He was fixing on getting married. He figured he'd get the Muleshoe when the old man died. Pop wanted to run cattle and Bob wanted to plant cotton. With the two of them being so pig-headed that looks like good enough reason for me to start an argument."

Shyster blinked.

"Bob tell you he wanted to plant cotton?"

"Nope." Bart shook his head. "Bob ain't talking to me. He's pretty sore about me getting the spread. Look what he done to me, Shyster. Beat me up without saying a word. I was lying about that bull."

It was obvious that Bart's bruises and cuts had been given him by somebody whose heart was in doing a thorough job. Besides, Shyster had seen Bob McLeod go into Doc's office that afternoon and Bob looked pretty much cut up.

"I guess you're pretty sore at him," Shyster suggested.

"I guess I'm plenty mad," Bart agreed. "But don't you get the notion that I'll testify against him in court. His testimony put me in Huntsville for five years. But I'm not like Bob. I'm not talking against him, seel!"

"Of course you're not." Shyster tried to look fatherly. "You were saying something about statistics?"

"Oh, yeah!" Bart took the piece of paper he found on his father's desk and spread it out on his knee.

"I've been out of this cattle business for a long time, and I just discovered some bad news. Cattle are worth only about six bucks a head. You can run only about three or four hundred on the Mule-shoe. With state land being settled you can't lease enough extra land to make it worth while running a ranch. It's a tough life, Shyster, and I'm going to get rid of my cattle. I'm going to start planting cotton."

Shyster said very quickly, "You'll lose your shirt a lot quicker planting cotton than you will raising six-dollar cattle. And you can't eat cotton. There was money in it last year but in another couple of years it will be down to ten dollars a bale. Everybody's planting cotton. First thing you know you'll be seeing cotton bales stacked in the streets, and you'll be looking at them from the poorhouse window."

Bart shrugged his shoulder and said, "Hell, Shyster, you make a gloomy picture of my scheme. I kinda thought with cotton I could pay off Joe and still keep the ranch."

"If you told that to Joe he'd laugh at you so hard he'd have a bellyache for a week. This talk of cotton is just like those oil wells down in east Texas. You can grow cotton and pump oil, but what are you going to do with it?"

Bart stood up lazily. He smiled at Shyster Lee.

"I'm going over and make the proposition to Joe, anyway."

"It won't do you no good."

Bart was still smiling when he said, "Thanks, anyway, for the advice. What's the fee, Shyster?"

"No fee. Glad to talk to you any time—if you'll be sensible."

"Charity?"

"No," Shyster said. "I just want to get things settled between you and Joe." He dropped the pencil. Bart's manner had put him on guard, and the talk of the fee was beginning to frighten him. Bart's voice suddenly lost its easy drawl.

"Close that drawer, Shyster!"

SHYSTER LEE'S hand went under the table top and stopped as if it had hit a granite wall; for he was suddenly looking down the sights of Bart's forty-five. His face masked. Then, holding his hands up, he pushed the drawer to with his elbows.

Bart dropped the forty-five back into its holster. He leaned over the desk.

"You just gave me a lot of good advice," he said, "and I shore appreciate it. Maybe you'll tell me now who those two farmers were who planted cotton on my old man's land."

"I don't know," Shyster said. "I never even saw them."

"Farmers dumb enough to plant on somebody else's land are too dumb to shoot a man in the back. But fellers smart enough to plant somebody else's land are something again. Did you put them up to it? Or did Bob? It wasn't any mistake, Shyster. I looked it over today."

"I don't know," Shyster insisted. "I don't know anything."

"Bob must have been in on it or that

cotton wouldn't have grown big enough to burn. Bob knows every square inch of the Muleshoe land and he keeps his eye on every grain of dirt. But that cotton had already been picked, except for the second or third picking. It was drying up when the old man burned it. Did Bob get you to hire those farmers?"

"I don't know anything about it," Shyster said. He was sweating, and the moisture showed on the palms of his small hands which he still held up. "Maybe Bob did do that. He wanted to plant cotton and Sandy wouldn't let him. Everybody said that cotton wouldn't grow down there."

Bart said: "You've got rabbit blood in you, Shyster. All a man has to do is scare you and you spill everything trying to cover yourself up. You just admitted you knew what was going on down there in the lower quarter."

"I didn't admit a thing," Shyster said. "I didn't say a thing."

"Not much! Only that you knew about it and probably knew that the place was planted and they grew almost half a bale to the acre. They could sell that half a bale for twenty bucks. On the same acre they could feed only about an eighth of a cow worth six dollars and get only about six bits out of it per acre. I guess you didn't know anything about it?"

Shyster Lee trembled to the heels of his English boots. He shook his head and said shrilly:

"I'm telling you, I don't know anything at all. I'm just repeating what everybody knows."

"I suppose everybody knows you fixed that will, and that Joe fixed that rou, figuring nobody would take the word of a jailbird and that I wouldn't know that land worth only three dollars per acre for cattle was worth ten times that for cotton. So when you had everything ready you fixed Pop, too! Isn't that so, Shyster?"

"Your brother Bob—" Shyster crawled. "What you said about him—he must have done it. Bad temper!"

"My brother Bob ain't that smart. You done it, Shyster!"

"I'll have you in court for slander!" Shyster yelled.

"You won't," Bart said coldly, "until somebody else hears me say the same thing. I learned some law up there in Huntsville, just as I learned how to make wagon wheels. Did I ever tell you about that? You put a lot of crazy looking pieces of wood together, you put an iron band around them, and a piece of iron in the middle, and you've got a wheel that works. I've been doing just that since I got home last night."

Shyster had not dared move his hands until Bart turned his back on him and walked toward the door. Then he reached for his gun. Bart was almost at the threshold when he heard the drawer squeek, and swift as a mountain cat he swung on his toes. The sight of Bart's forty-five froze Shyster again.

"Drop it!"

Shyster's fingers laxed. His hands came up. The gun rattled in the drawer.

"And that clinches it!" Bart said. "If you didn't know nothing about it, you wouldn't try plugging me in the back. You'd wait until you'd collected Joe Bledshot's nine thousand dollars plus."

He backed out of the door, slipped the gun back into his holster, tossed a silver dollar to the desk. It rang, bounced, landed dully on a pile of papers only inches from Shyster's nose.

"Yore fee, Shyster! Heads or tails?"

Shyster Lee's throat was dry. His eyes bulged.

"Tails!" he rasped.

BART MCLEOD walked over to the far end of town where Sally O'Hara lived. He wanted to talk to Bob and thought he would find him there, but the old Negro servant said she had not seen him and that Sally had gone to bed.

The street were deserted when Bart walked back toward the center, and he kept close to the shadows. One thing puzzled him. As he passed Shyster Lee's office he saw the lawyer's profile silhouetted against the drawn shade.

A man as scared as Shyster had been would not sit that way. He would turn the light down and go into hiding.

Thinking about it, Bart cut around the back alley to Doc's rear door. Doc let him in, gave him a drink.

Bart said, "I got something to show you, Doc!"

He took out his father's will, laid it open on the table under Doc's brightest light.

"Look, Doc," he said "Look real close and you'll see something interesting. That's Pop's signature, all right. It's kind of stiff, but it's his. Shyster wrote the rest of the will to get in all the whereases and because Pop was pretty nearly paralyzed from the shot in the back and couldn't write anything more than his own name."

"But that doesn't prove anything," Doc said.

"It does, if you study it." Bart pointed at his name. "Bartholomew is a pretty long name, longer than Robert. Shyster did a good job of taking out all the Roberts. He must have some of that new liquid remover. But he put Bartholomew into the same space. It's not written so free and easy as the rest of the will. It's sorta cramped."

Doc said: "I take it all back, Bart. It just looked too crazy for me. I've been thinking about what you said about wheels. You've got the whole thing put together now but the tire."

"Shyster Lee's making that," Bart said, "and Joe's helping him. I got them so scared, Doc, they'll spill something important pretty soon. They think I'm going to shoot them. But I'm not—not until I can make it stick, anyway. Or until they plug me first. I couldn't prove this. But they think I'm a killer and dangerous, and the more they think it the more worried they're going to be."

Bart handed the will to Doc. "Doc, I want you to hang onto this for me. Hide it someplace. If anything happens to me maybe you can show how the names were changed and fix things up for Bob. You know what he was doing? He was moving his new furniture off the Muleshoe. It's ter-

rible stuff, but I guess Bob likes it. It's just the kind of furniture a farmer would like."

Bart was at the door. "Douse your lights, Doc, I'm going back outside. I saw a pretty funny thing just before I came in here. Shyster is sitting at his window so the light throws his shadow on the shade. But the shadow doesn't move at all. It's like a shadow cut out of cardboard. Shyster is up to something and stuck that thing in the window so I'd think he was still at home. I'm going to find out what's up."

"Maybe somebody shot Shyster and propped him there."

"It's too straight for that." Bart grinned. "Fixing that will was the biggest mistake those boys ever made. They just didn't know my old man. Once he made up his mind he never changed it. But those gents didn't know that."

Doc turned down the light. "Son," he said. "Sandy's listening in now. He and your mother. You'll hear him talk up pretty soon. He mightn't have changed his mind when he was living. But he's going to change it now. He's going to forgive you."

"Thanks, Doc!"

Bart stepped out into the darkness, and as his silver spur tinkled with soft music on the earthen walk, the sound of a shot rang out. There were two more shots and then silence; and Bart, lying on the ground, realized abruptly that none of them was directed toward him.

V

HE CAME to his feet, running low. This Tuesday night hardly anybody was in town. The Muleshoe cowboys who had been let go by Bob McLeod had already started to drift to new ranges. Cowboys from other outfits were busy with the fall roundup.

But when Bart stepped into the opening of the alley at Main Street, he saw townsfolk poking their heads out windows, looking down by the Okay Corral. The

light still burned in Shyster's office, and Shyster's silhouette still shadowed the curtain. It had not moved.

Bart edged out onto the walk. There he straightened up, strolled casually across the street to the Okay Corral. It was from that neighborhood that the shots had sounded, two from one gun, the third from another. The sharp odor of burned powder stung his nostrils. The barn boy, holding a lantern, was leaning over a sprawled body by the big, rolling doors.

"You killed him!" the boy said.

Bart's Colt was in his hand. He jabbed the muzzle under the boy's nose. Terrified, the boy dropped the lantern. Before the light snuffed out, Bart saw the beads of sweat gathering on the kid's forehead.

"You smell burned powder in that barrel?" Bart asked.

"No—listen, mister, I—"

"Who told you to say I shot him?"

"They'll kill me. They'll . . ."

Bart was kneeling beside his brother. Bob was still alive. The one bullet that had struck him had ranged high.

"It was me they wanted," Bart whispered. "They didn't want you. Damn it all, Bob . . ."

"That Bob McLeod?" the frightened barn boy asked.

"Who did you think it was?"

"He come in here," the kid gasped. "He said he was Bart McLeod. He said he was hunting for Joe Bledshot and Shyster Lee. I didn't know. I thought he was Bart. I don't know them two."

Bob was talking. Bart leaned closer to hear.

"Sorry, kid! Was down to the Longhorn. Figgered they were gunning for you. Figgered I could even things up, maybe, those five years in Huntsville. Figgered you wouldn't think I was such a skunk, Bart, if I plugged them for you. Barn boy signaled Shyster."

The barn boy was backing away. Bart snarled, "Stick around kid, or I'll plug you."

Bob whispered, "Will you shake, kid?"

Bart took his brother's hand. Bob! Old

Bob talking that way. Bob trying to square things after hating Bart so long. That scrap in the ranchyard—like when they were buttons. A good fight and they'd make up. Bob couldn't hold a grudge as long as the old man.

"Damn it, Bob . . ." he said. "Damn it . . ."

Then he straightened. Old Doc Haskins was scouting down the street with a lantern and his black bag, looking for the victim of this latest shooting.

"Tell him to come over here," Bart said to the kid. "And if you tell anybody you seen me I'll kill you sure."

He backed away into the alley between the Longhorn Bar and the Okay Corral. There he could keep his eye on the kid and on Shyster Lee's outside staircase, and everybody would be too busy around the front of the barn to look for him right away.

The kid's voice cracked. "Hey, Doc Haskins! Hey! It's McLeod. Somebody plugged him. Over here, Doc."

Doc started running. From the Longhorn Bar came Joe Bledshot followed by a little group of hangers-on. Shyster Lee, with much show, banged the door of his office, clattered down the steps. Other people gathered around Doc and his patient.

Shyster said in a loud voice, "Bob McLeod must have done it. He was pretty sore at Bart. Bart got the ranch in his old man's will. Then Bart beat him up this morning. Bob must have been laying for him."

It sounded pretty crazy to Bart until he realized that in the darkness Shyster Lee had not taken a good look at his victim. Shyster Lee had given himself away.

Bart started forward, his gun ready.

He was too busy concentrating on Shyster. The faint rustle behind him failed to warn him. The barrel of a six-shooter swished down, striking sickeningly against his skull.

Stars danced. Lanterns whirled before his eyes. He went down on his knees, then fell on his face, and before he passed completely out he heard someone yelling:

"We got the killer . . ."

BART McLEOD had been in jail before. He had been in this one once for disturbing the peace, and at the time had thought it quite an impregnable Bastille. But that was before he went to Huntsville.

A good can opener, he figured, would bust this jail, or he could pick the lock if he had a hairpin. But Bart very seldom carried hairpins.

He sat on the edge of the bunk and listened to Shyster Lee. Shyster was saying, "He ain't dead yet, but he's dying. When he's dead, you'll hang. It's a case, Bart, that even I couldn't beat. I even couldn't get you out of the noose. There's too much evidence. Motive, everything."

Shyster hesitated for emphasis. "You can't even plead self-defense. Bob was hit twice and only fired one bullet, himself. Hit once in the ribs over the heart. The second shot went through his hat—while he was falling."

Bart said, "Run along, Shyster."

Shyster looked very wise. He glanced around, then whispered through the bars, "I still got to take care of the interests of my client, Joe Bledshot. Joe tells me he'll put up the cash to bribe the guard here, if you'll sign over the Muleshoe to him. That spread'll be no good to you with hemp around your neck."

Bart said, "You tell Joe to go climb a tree."

Shyster coughed. "It won't do any good for you to tell anybody what I just said. Nobody'll believe you." Bart did not answer.

Shyster went on, "Joe says he'll cancel that note of yours and offer to pay for defending you if you'll sign over the Muleshoe. But we'll bribe the guard to let you out because you haven't got a chance at all in court. The Muleshoe isn't worth as much as Joe will lose by the deal. But Joe's generous."

Shyster paused.

"Joe's the kindest man I ever knew," Bart said. "Tell him that."

Shyster said: "Once Bob dies there'll be a necktie party organized. Folks liked

Bob in this town. You better make up your mind in a hurry."

"I got my mind all made up," Bart said. "You and Joe can both climb a tree."

"Now I don't call that gratitude," Shyster said.

"Neither do I. Beat it, Shyster."

Shyster went away, promising to be back after Bart had had time enough to think things out. But Bart was having none of it. He knew Shyster wouldn't even have to bribe the guard. Somebody had gotten the regular caretaker too drunk to carry out his duties and a special man had been put on in his place.

The new guard, Bart had noticed, had little cuts on his face, cuts that might have been made by broken glass spraying on him when a bottle was flung through the window.

Bart found that very interesting. That man must have been sent out to the Muleshoe to bushwhack him in such a manner that Bob would get the blame. He had failed because Bob was not there and Bart had discovered him.

That guard would not need a bribe, nor would he have to think twice to plug Bart in the back when he had let him out. Probably he had already been carefully instructed: let Bart out, then kill him while attempting to escape. But Bart didn't like the idea.

WHEN Molly O'Hara came to see him that afternoon, Bart asked, "How's Bob?" He kept his voice impersonal; and he didn't look at her too closely.

"He's—he's still unconscious." She was very pretty in her grief. But Molly O'Hara was a girl with guts. She knew how to stand up when everything was against her.

"Doc and I don't believe you shot him," she said. "Doc said you could have—you were out of his place long enough to do it—but that you didn't. And I believe him."

"Thanks, Molly," Bart said.

Now he could add Molly to his list of friends. Molly, Bob, and Doc. That was a lot of people to have faith in a jailbird.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" Molly asked.

"Sure," he said. "Get me a piece of paper and a pencil."

Molly went away. When she came back the guard with the cut-up face was with her.

"You can't write on that paper," he said. "There must be a rule against it."

Molly pushed herself between the guard and the bars, handed Bart the paper and pencil. The guard tried to grab them but she had been too quick. Bart grinned.

"I'll come in there and take it away," the guard said.

"You come in here," Bart offered, "and I'll bash in your head. Maybe I'll do it with a whisky bottle."

The guard blinked. His face was still raw. "Okay," he said, "you can write a letter but I got to read it. Maybe you're writing for somebody to send you a saw."

"That's just what I'm doing," Bart said. "Catalogue Number 10,037 A."

"Dear Doc Haskins," he wrote. "I figure I'm a goner. Please settle with Shyster Lee, otherwise known as Nat. Also with Joe Bledshot to whom I owe money. If there is anything left of the Muleshoe I want it to go to Bob's fiancée, Miss Mary O'Hara. Sincerely yours, Bartholomew McLeod."

He handed it to the guard, who read it and said:

"That don't look dangerous."

The guard gave it to Molly.

"Take it to Doc," Bart said. "And thanks a lot, kid."

When she had gone, Bart said to the guard, "Tell Shyster I want to see him."

BART fiddled nervously, sitting on the edge of his bunk. Night had come. Everything was fixed with Shyster Lee. At two o'clock in the morning, the guard was going to let Bart out of jail, take him up to Shyster's office.

Bart had insisted that he sign the papers after he was actually out of the jug, not while in it; and Shyster had finally agreed. So that was the arrangement.

Bart was jittery. He didn't think he

would get out of this alive, but there was a fighting chance and he would take it. If he ended up a dead man in the morning, Doc, with that letter and the altered will, might be able to keep the Muleshoe out of Shyster's and Joe's hands. That letter Bart thought of as a sort of will of his own.

The guard unlocked the door. "Okay," he said. "And don't get bright. I'm walking with this gun in your short ribs."

Bart went ahead, warily, the six-shooter prodding him along. The town was asleep. The guard took Bart by the back way to Shyster's office. The alley with the staircase was so dark Bart could hardly see the steps. He went up, slowly. The door was open and Shyster said, "Come on in."

Bart was in the middle of the room when the door clicked closed. The gun still poked his back. The guard said, "Don't move, cowboy." Somebody was shuffling around the office, doing something Bart could not figure. Then a match struck. It glistened on Shyster's sweaty face as Shyster put the flame to a lamp.

Mexican blankets had been hung over the two windows and newspaper stuffed under the door to keep the light from showing through the crack. Shyster had been very careful that nobody know of this midnight meeting.

Now the guard stood by the door and Joe sat in the big chair and Shyster went around behind the desk. They all had guns, all but Bart who was in the middle; but only the guard kept his trained on their prisoner.

Bart grinned. "Got those papers ready, Shyster?"

The lawyer nodded. "I got them right here," he said, "and I want to warn you not to try anything funny. We'll plug you if you do, and toss you out the door and tell everybody the guard caught up with you down there in the alley. We'll tell everybody Molly must have stolen a key when she was in the jail today and passed it on to you."

"You boys never forget anything," Bart said.

Shyster looked proud, but very much

afraid. Joe was as stolid as an Indian. Shyster said, "Come over here and sign it."

Bart went up to the desk. He took the paper and pen, leaned over. The pen bent.

"I can't write standing up," he said.

Shyster looked at Joe. Joe shrugged.

"Okay," Shyster said, "come around here and sit down."

Bart eased around the desk. "I don't know why I'm doing this," he said. "Joe shot my old man. And you—" he looked straight at Shyster—"shot my brother."

He said it quietly, and he saw the little lawyer flinch, then get his control quickly.

"I was up here all the time," Shyster said. "I was right here."

"Don't pay any attention to him," Joe cut in. "He's baiting you, Nat."

Bart was behind the desk now. There was a big wastebasket there and a piece of cardboard stuck out the top of it. Bart did not dare reach for it, so he pointed.

"You should of stuck it on a rocking chair, or something," he told Shyster. "It didn't move at all. That's howcome I knew you were around the barn some place. You thought that you killed *me*, didn't you?"

Bart sat down in Shyster's chair. "You figured on framing Bob with it. Very neat, Shyster. Too bad we both looked alike to that kid."

"Don't listen to him," Joe said.

Shyster growled: "You better hurry up and sign that."

The guard said, "I want first shot at him. He nearly ruind my face."

Joe was becoming irritable. "Shut up," he said.

Bart picked up a second pen, squared off to write his name on the bottom of the deed passing the Muleshoe over to Joe Bledshot. He wrote the "B" before he broke that pen.

"Damn it!" he said, "I busted another pen. Got any more, Shyster?"

There were no more on the top of the desk. Bart pulled out the top drawer, his forehead furrowed. He did it very casually . . .

VI

SHYSTER screamed: "Get him!" The guard did not wait for a second order. He pulled his trigger. Joe and Shyster were scrambling for their shoulder guns.

Bart felt a bullet scorch his neck just as his fingers closed over the butt of the six-shooter Shyster always kept in his top desk drawer. He fell back as he gripped the gun, rolling right out of the chair onto the wall.

On the way over he shot once at the guard. On his back he aimed straight up for Shyster who was standing almost directly over him. The guard ran in and Bart let him have one more bullet.

Then the room was silent except for Shyster's moaning and gurgling sound just beyond the desk. Shyster had collapsed like a deflated balloon.

Now Joe began shooting, methodically. Bart could not see Joe and Joe could not see Bart; but Joe put three bullets through the desk. Two of them were lost in the drawers; one came on, hissing past Bart to dig into the wall.

Then the guard loomed up again over the desk and Bart had to shoot at him once more. The guard fell against the desk, his gun clattering as it bounced on the finely polished hard wood.

A sudden terror swept over Bart. That six-shooter—was there another shell in it? Had that been the gun which Shyster had used to plug his brother? Had Shyster reloaded it? He couldn't wait to find out.

He was lucky, though. He did not have to see Joe. Joe was in that leather chair and it was so low a man of Joe's weight could not get out of it with much speed. A man Joe's height could not see a gun poked over Bart's edge of the desk.

All a man had to do was lay his gun on the desk top and pull the trigger. Bart shot with his gun barrel flat against the mahogany. Shyster had reloaded the gun.

It seemed as if hours passed before Joe grunted, before his pistol clattered to the floor.

Bart was in a hurry. He yanked Shyster

back up, set him in the swivel chair, and Shyster grinned at him even as he held his hand over his stomach to keep the blood from spurting.

"Shyster," Bart said, "I'm not through with you. I'll beat you cockeyed if you don't speak up."

Shyster Lee was beyond fear now. He knew a better man when he saw one. He knew when he was licked.

"You're too good for me, Bart. Too smart. My idea. Fixed it with Joe. Fixed that will. Fixed that note. Fixed everything. But Joe shot Sandy. Didn't like that, I didn't. I shot Bob. Thought it was you. Those dollars—tail's up. Me first . . ."

"Okay," Bart said. "Thanks, Shyster. I got to leave. Anything I can do to make it easier for you?"

"Whisky," Shyster gasped. "Lower left drawer."

Bart found the whisky, held the bottle to Shyster's lips.

"IOU, Bart," Shyster said. "Top drawer!"

Bart looked in the top drawer, found the IOU, put back the Colt. He closed the drawer, returned the whisky bottle to its place, then catfooted out of the room. He dropped down the rear of the stairs, headed back for the alley. The shooting was bringing men in their nightshirts, running.

Bart managed to slip back into the jail without being seen. He went straight to the cell, pulled the iron door to. The click of its lock was music.

WHEN Bob was better they let Bart out of the jug. Nobody paid much attention to him. He was only small time now. What Bart had done paled into insignificance in Indian Wells against the conjectures of what had happened between Shyster Lee and Joe Bledshot and that guard to shoot themselves up that way.

Joe must have had a falling out with Shyster. He came up with that gunman of his and they shot Shyster's desk to splinters. But Shyster got them both. Shyster must have been some scrapper after all.

Bart didn't have anything to say about that. He wouldn't know what had happened. After all, Bart had been locked up in jail that night.

He went straight over to Doc's place. Molly was there reading to Bob. Bob looked very pale and thin, but there was fight in him and the fever had gone.

Bart said, "Did Doc tell you how that will was fixed up, Bob? Shyster done it. Shyster shot you and Joe shot Pop. You saved my life, Bob."

Bob flushed. It was hard talking to your brother after all these years of silence.

"That wasn't anything," he said.

"I guess my life wasn't worth much," Bart admitted.

"You know he didn't mean that!" Molly said spiritedly.

"Bob," Bart said, "I'm taking up that offer you made of ten horses and fifty cattle, if you still mean it."

"Nothing doing," Bob said. "You and me are going into partnership."

"Not me." Bart shook his head. "That's cotton land, Bob. And I'm a cowboy."

Bob didn't argue with him. He had heard the same thing from his father.

"I guess you know best," Bob said. Suddenly he added, "I'm a fool, Bart. I planted that cotton on the Muleshoe. It grew so fine I boasted about it. I wanted to prove to Pop it was cotton land. I guess I had him convinced. And Shyster as well. Joe Bledshot was convinced, too. That's why he killed Pop. It's kind of my fault."

"Forget it!" Bart said. "Pop's plenty happy where he is, now." He held out his hand. "Be seein' yuh," he said. "I'm heading out of here."

"So long!" Bob said.

Molly O'Hara's lips trembled. Impulsively she kissed Bart.

"Goodbye," she said.

BART McLEOD, sitting easily in his fine California saddle, rode along up the trail letting Geronimo do all the work. Bart felt good inside, though a little empty.

You couldn't have everything, Bart said

to himself, and he was pretty lucky to have what he had. He was alive and kicking, and scuffling up the dust in front of him were those fifty fine head of cattle and ten good horses.

Bart sang:

*It's yore misfortune and none of my own,
Whoopie ti yi yo, git along little dogies,
For you know Wyoming will be your new
home . . .*

Nobody would ever raise cotton in Wyoming. And now that the old Mule-shoe was going to be planted Bob could have it. Bob would like to be a planter.

Bart rode on while Geronimo kept his eyes on strays and chased them back into the herd. Bart was singing, "I'm only a lonesome cowboy . . ." when Geronimo pricked up his ears and snorted. Bart turned in the saddle.

There was a rider—a woman—coming up fast in the dust left by the drifting herd.

Geronimo, figuring Bart would like to talk to her, stopped. She was smiling, and her Irish eyes were full of defiance.

"Hello, Molly," Bart said. "Where are you going?"

"To Wyoming."

"But I thought you and Bob were going to marry all that furniture," he said.

"We're not," she said.

"But Bob . . ."

"He understands," she said. "I told him. He feels fine about it."

"You told him what?"

"I told him I was born on a ranch and I'd die on one and I'd never make a farmer's wife." She stopped smiling now. She was ready to fight an Irish fight. "Mind if I ride along a piece with you? Maybe I could help you herd these cattle."

The two horses, side by side, walked on toward the herd.

Bart said, "Don't mind if you do, Molly. I could use a hand . . ."

HAVE YOU MET LESTER LEITH?

If you haven't had the pleasure of meeting this fast-moving detective character in one of **Erle Stanley Gardner's** exciting, action-crammed mystery yarns—**then believe us—it's high time you do something about it. What to do?** Why, go to the nearest newsstand—buy a copy of the **October 28th DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY** and read of **Leith's** latest dramatic, thrill-filled adventure in a **four-star** story entitled

A Thousand to One

You'll enjoy every word of it! What's more—you'll enjoy the other stories—true and fiction—by "Grade-A" authors in this issue. Don't forget! Make a date with D.F.W. today!

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

Oct. 28th issue now on sale

10c per copy, \$4.00 per year

MEN of

PHOTOGRAPHER OF CANNIBALS

"CANNIBAL" MILLER

THE BOY MADE HIS FIRST EXPEDITION INTO THE JUNGLE-- WHICH CAUSED A TERRIFIC UPROAR-- AND RECEIVED HIS FIRST CAMERA AT AN EARLY AGE. HE SOON MADE FRIENDS WITH THE SAVAGES AND WAS INITIATED INTO THE IMO, THEIR DREAD SECRET BROTHERHOOD.

THERE HAVE BEEN FEW DULL MOMENTS IN THE LIFE OF CHARLES G. (CANNIBAL) MILLER. CHARLIE WAS BORN IN SAMARANG, JAVA. HIS FATHER, A DUTCH ARMY CAPTAIN, WAS TRANSFERRED TO DUTCH NEW GUINEA TO STAMP OUT HEAD-HUNTING AND CANNIBALISM. THEY WERE THE FIRST WHITE FAMILY TO SETTLE THERE.

EDUCATED AS AN ENGINEER IN HOLLAND, MILLER RAGED AUTOS, BOATS AND MOTOR-CYCLES AND FOUGHT THROUGH THE WORLD WAR AS A FLIER IN THE FRENCH AVIATION. AFTERWARD HE BARNSTORMED AND TESTED PLANES AND SPEED-BOATS. HE BET EVERYTHING HE HAD ON A HORSE AT 100 TO 1 IN THE AUSTRALIAN DERBY. WHEN IT WON, HE WENT TO HOLLYWOOD AND BECAME A CAMERAMAN.

BUT HIS HANKERING FOR THE JUNGLE REMAINED. ONE DAY, MISS LEONA JAY, YOUNG SOCIALITE, INSERTED AN "ADVENTURE WANTED" AD IN A NEW YORK PAPER. THE AD BROUGHT HER NOT ONLY ADVENTURE, IT GOT HER ROMANCE. MILLER ANSWERED THE AD, LED AN EXPEDITION TO DUTCH GUIANA. HE AND MISS JAY WERE MARRIED IN SAMARANG AND SPENT THEIR HONEY-MOON TAKING PICTURES OF HEAD-HUNTING CANNIBALS.

THE AD
 Wednesday at Thursday
 16th St. communicate with
 116
 Young woman weary of the social
 hokum seeks action and hardship.
 Will join scientist or hunter in trip to
 remote or primitive regions. Can finance.
 -J. 732.
 PLANET W - Heartbroken your
 Forgive everything.
 WILLIAMS

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

DARING

by STOKES
ALLEN

WITH A SMALL BODY OF MALAYS AND JAVANESE CUT-THROATS AS BEARERS, THEY ASCENDED THE MERAUKE RIVER IN NATIVE CANOES, RECORDED NOSE-BORING CEREMONIES AND DODGED ARROWS. IN THE RAIN FOREST, THEY CUT THEIR WAY THROUGH BAMBOO THICKETS ALIVE WITH VENOMOUS SNAKES (4 OF THEIR BOYS DIED OF SNAKE-BITE), WERE BESET BY LEECHES THAT GOT INSIDE THEIR CLOTHES AND IN SECONDS WERE BLOATED HORRORS.

MILLER PRACTICED MAGIC WITH FIRECRACKERS, FLASHLIGHT AND MATCHES TO AWE WITCH-DOCTORS; AND TO SAVE THEIR LIVES AND SECURE BOATMEN FOR THE RETURN TRIP, HIMSELF LED A HEAD-HUNT AGAINST A NEIGHBORING VILLAGE THAT YIELDED A HARVEST OF 60 GORY TROPHIES!

Coming Soon: Jimmy Lynch—Auto Buster



With a wild buck the big scout car almost struck them. Flames leaped up from its back seat; a smoking, twisted figure was behind the wheel . . .

Farewell Trumpet

The whole regiment is riding today. For it's highest military honors to Old Corp—Old Honest and Faithful—who got what he wanted by the simple process of sticking to his guns

By **CHARLES L. CLIFFORD**

Author of "The Last Crusade,"
"Class Ring," etc.

THEY stood there a moment in front of the restaurant of the tourist camp—Old Corp and his granddaughter, Josie Ewing.

The two of them had been on the road for many tired, hungry, heartbreaking days; but there remained a natural neatness about the girl. Her russet hair hung smooth against her neck with a clean, polished brightness. Her brown eyes, large, warm, were incongruous in her thin, tanned face. She was thin, but the grace and vigor of her body were undefeated.

The old man's eyes were shining as he stared at the distant flag above the army post. He breathed gustily. The girl watched him with tired eyes.

"You sure you remember the number, Corp?"

He looked at her slyly. Nodded.

"But you got to be sure. It's W60237. Oh Corp, say it as you go along!"

Corp smiled. "That's it!" and he started bravely off toward the flag, repeating it like a prayer.

Behind her the restaurant screen door twanged, and the waitress stood holding a dime out to Josie Ewing. "What's this for?" she said.

Josie's face colored and she shuffled back from the waitress. "Your tip."

The waitress stood unchanged. She wore a green smock and her hair looked like an oversize wig: gilt, smooth, it winged down into a knot on her neck no larger than an egg.

"I'll tip *you*," she said. "Come back in here."

She pushed Josie into a chair at a table. "You, Jockey!" she called to a pinched-faced chromo working behind the bar. "Number One! And use your bat, hear?"

She sat down and ran her eyes over the girl at the table. "That coffee you and the old man had ain't food. I seen you when you rolled off that beer truck last night. How far you come?"

"We picked up the ride at San Antone."

"But you come further?"

The girl made no reply.

"Call me Myrtle," the blonde said. "Who you lookin' for?"

"Nobody."

"Listen," Myrtle said, "I ain't what they call an eve-dropper. But that old man of yours ain't no cricket either. He's a *radio*. I heard him talking at what you called your breakfast. You're looking for some soldier by his serial number."

"No," the girl said in a hard voice. "We're just hiking toward the coast."

Myrtle put her elbows on the table and her eyes set. "Listen. I got a mania for butting into people's business. If you give me the lowdown, maybe I can help you, kid."

"No," Josie said. "There's nothing to tell."

"Aw right, kid. You eat what the Jockey brings you. Get some flesh on that doll face of yours. We need another hopper. They come and go here and none of them worth the space they fill. Joe, guy runs the place, told me to find another blister. They got me on the run here so bad I dream every night I'm one of these here Mexican jumping beans."

"We're moving on," Josie said.

Myrtle gave a resigned shrug. "Okay."

The chromo came with a large platter. "You get that into you," Myrtle said. "This here's what we call breakfast in Texas. And that there—" she jerked her head at the little man—"what we call the Jockey. Claims he was a rider at all the big tracks but the stewards banned him for rough riding. More likely for breaking dishes."

The girl stared at the food. Then she threw her face into her hands and broke into shaking sobs.

"That's all right, kid," Myrtle said. "Get it out of your system. Then go up and sleep it off."

LATER old Corp came up the hill, excited, talking to himself. Myrtle had been watching and hailed him. She thought: "I bet two beers will shake it out of him. I ain't hurting anyone: I always been a regular guinea pig to help people. I got to know. Or I can't sleep good."

"Hi, Pop," Myrtle called. "I been talking to your granddaddy. We become friends. My name's Myrtle. She's asleep. But I got some beer samples here and I want your advice on the flavor."

Corp grinned. "Old Soldier's advice, hey?"

"That's right. Say, what have you been up to all morning?"

Corp winked wisely.

Myrtle lowered her voice. "You can tell me anything. I don't repeat, like the slot machine said to the guy."

Corp chuckled. "True enough. But I do. Repeated every hitch as a private—except part of one I was a corporal. Reason I'm called Corp. Boys up at the post said it was a world record."

"Here, try this canned stuff; we want to compare it with the bottle kind," Myrtle suggested. Corp made the comparison, frowning pleasantly. "Both good!"

After Corp had made a more exhaustive test, Myrtle nodded encouragingly. "Now you tell me the whole story, Corp. Me and your granddaughter become friends this morning. I'm going to help you find this guy you're looking for. You can trust me. And call me Myrtle."

A look of relief came into Corp's faded eyes. "Say, that's fine, Myrtle. I hate to be muzzled when I'm drinking beer. They was agin beer at the home."

"Then let's have the works, honest and faithful," Myrtle said, leaning forward in her chair.

Corp was charmed. "Why that's my motto, Myrtle: old honest and faithful. Got it on all my discharges from the army. Ten of them."

"Gee! You must of served in the Revolution. Go on; let's have it."

"It's young Bud, Josie's brother. He lit out from home after a fight with Harry."

"Who's Harry?"

"Flora's husband. He hit him bad and we didn't hear from him for months and then we got this picture. Bud in an army scout car. He sent it in the letter. Bud said he'd never leave us know where he was or under what name he enlisted. Only clue we had was the number on the scout car 'cause Bud said he had a pal post the letter in San Antone and he wasn't anywhere near there."

"The old man shook his head. "Diddly-doo, but it was awful! Bud's ma, that's Flora my daughter, just wasting away crying for Bud. Doctor said if we didn't find him soon she'd maybe die. Just crying, 'Bud, Bud, Bud,' all the time."

Myrtle frowned. "So the two of you been searching the army for the scout car with that number? Looking for Bud?"

Corp grinned triumphantly. "And that ain't all! But that's a dead secret!"

"Not from *me*?"

Corp swallowed some beer from the can. "Both excellent!"

"So you was in the soliders' home?" Myrtle said casually. "You get a physical disability, Corp?"

Corp brightened. "Wonderful one! Had doctors around me when that remount pitched me on my head like I was a general. Funny."

Corp shook his head in wonder. "That one little fall closed my career. I'd had dozens worse than that. Day Taft was inaugurated, young horse I was riding carried the mail with me from the White House to the Potomac Bridge and throwed me agin a concrete railing. All it done was tore my blues. Parade ones though. Tailor made."

"That was tough," Myrtle said. "Corp, what you been doing for money?"

Corp seemed to be puzzling over the beer. "I got my bonus."

"How'd you get out of the home?"

Corp smiled happily. "Why, Harry says come on home the day I got it. 'Corp,' he says, 'you old diddly-doo, you, we're going to double and treble that bonus of yours. Put her to work for you.'"

"But he didn't have you to live with them before you got it?"

Corp looked at his glass, thinking hard. "Didn't have room before, Harry said. And then I used to chew a lot. Harry didn't like that. And I was what he called illiterate. Harry didn't like that."

"But Harry liked it when you got the bonus? How much you get back out of it?"

"Josie knows. She can tell you."

"I bet she can. Where's Flora now?"

THE old man frowned thoughtfully. "Flora? Why she's with Mrs. Holtz. Night Harry hit Bud and Bud liked to kilt him—Say, you ought to heard that Bud. Called Harry a crook . . . and words I wouldn't even say to you, Myrtle."

"Not even to me, hey? Harry Bud's stepfather, or real?"

"He's Flora's second husband. Jack Ewing, pop to Josie and Bud, got killed on a pole. Linesman he was for the electric company."

"I guess Harry got the insurance on that. Put it to work for Flora I imagine."

"That's right," Corp said eagerly. "See you and Josie been talking like old-timers."

Myrtle nodded. "She's a fine kid. She trusted me. I'm only sorry you and me can't be real friends like that, Corp. Funny, you're the only soldier never trusted me. I'd almost believe you never been a soldier just from that angle alone." Myrtle sighed sadly.

Corp gulped. "I never said I didn't trust you, Myrtle. But, being a woman, you got to swear."

"I swear," Myrtle said promptly, and when Corp had finished his eager whispering, she as promptly betrayed him. She got up from the table. "How's the beer?"

"The bottle beer's got a little more flavor than the canned," Corp said, staring at them importantly. "Funny, ain't it?"

"Awful funny," Myrtle said. "Jockey," she called, "bring a couple fresh ones. Mr. Joe showed up yet?"

"Not at the post or paddock," Jockey called back.

"He means not at the bar or court," Myrtle explained to Corp. "Sounds like a lawyer, but it's race-track talk. Keeps him happy. Now Corp, you test these new ones while I phone. Got to do some ordering."

Corp called after her: "Can I chew? I never did since that night Harry asked me home. He said it was illiterate. So I kind of promised."

"If you can you're good," Myrtle said; and she went to the far end of the room and called the first sergeant of Headquarters Troop. She talked in a quick, low voice to Sergeant Hauser and, after telling half of her story, argued sternly with the unconvinced sergeant.

"Look, Bung, I'm sorry for them. Jest think, for months they been hitch hiking all over the country looking for one lousy scout car with this number on it. The old man tells me a sergeant in your outfit caught him with the picture while he was comparing it with the cars in the Pool this morning and like to run him in the guardhouse."

"There's a law about taking pictures like that," Hauser said gruffly.

"He didn't take it. This fool kid grandson sent it in a letter. Only clue they had where he was in the army was this number on the car. And the mother's dying and they got to get the kid back. Now they found the right car in your troop, they know he's here."

Hauser growled, "All they got to do is get him a discharge on minority or dependency. Nothing to it."

"But the old man says they'd try him for fraudulent enlistment and give him two years in the pen. He used a false name and lied about his age. That's why they been so cagey about looking for him."

"That's stone-age stuff. We got dozens

of mama's darlings gettin' out to get their nose blowed every week these days."

"Say, that's swell, Bung. If you can only get a look at that picture now."

"It's right here on the captain's desk. The captain got a great laugh out of the old fellow this morning. Looked over all his discharges and gave him the run of the troop. There's one John in this picture not in the troop. He must have just jumped in to show off when they took it. I can check that easy enough."

"Bung, just for me do it! There's the best steak in Texas in it for you."

"Is that all? Do what?"

"That ain't like you, Bung! Now listen, find this kid. Ought to be easy if you got the picture and he's a recruit. And keep it under your hat. I'd sure like to surprise the old man. He's a wonderful old guy. He's my beer taster and he's a honey."

Sergeant Hauser laughed loudly into the phone. "What I call a job! Okay, Myrt, I'll settle for a steak. But it better be tender than the last. Be seeing you."

Myrtle returned to the table where Corp was smiling to himself as he chewed contentedly and carefully measured beer from the can and the bottle into the same glass. He grinned up at her. "I'm mixing them. Maybe get the virtues of both."

"You decide prompt, Corp, and give me your findings verbal later. I got to get to work. Then you go up and see Josie. I fixed it so she got a job here. Five a week and found for you both. But don't tell her we had this talk, hear? Big laugh and surprise later when we locate Bud."

Corp nodded. "Okay. Josie's funny about beer. Says it hurts my head. Diddly-doo! Can you imagine that!"

"Not if I try hard," Myrtle said. "Okay, Jockey, the corporal's made a complete test. Take it away."

Corp got up, grinning sheepishly. Started toward the door.

"By the way, what's this diddly-doo mean, Corp?"

Corp grinned and shook his head. "You know. A guy gets at loss for a word. Or wants to cuss, and ladies present."

"I see." Myrtle watched him walk gayly toward his cabin. She stood on the steps outside and when he had passed from sight she took a deep breath and expelled the air violently. "Harry," she said softly. "Harry, you double-barreled Diddley-doo!"

JOSIE EWING had been working at the Blue and Gold almost a week. She served at tables inside and carried hamburgers and drinks and hot dogs out to the parked cars. She was businesslike and polite. Her rare smile was strictly official, as were the few words she exchanged with those who tried to date her up.

The nickel phonograph she thought would drive her mad. It never seemed to stop. The past weeks of near-starvation, the torture of plodding under the sun, the intermittent jarring trucks had worn her nerves ragged.

And now that they had at last found the car of their search this suspense was the worst of all. Corp was acting so strangely. When each day she'd greet him eagerly after the hours spent in the post, ask for news of Bud, he'd make a terrific grimace and shake his head in warning.

"Shhh! We got to go careful. If they find he's a fraudulent, it's two years and a kick. Disgrace. I got my eyes open and soon now I'll locate him quiet and make him ask for a furlough."

What could Corp do up there all day? When she asked, pleaded with him, he'd work himself all up about those scout cars. The most beautiful one, he insisted, was W60237. It seemed that he'd been accepted as a sort of mascot by the platoon, and rode in his favorite all morning at drill and worked on it, polishing and admiring it, the rest of the day.

The only cloud in the sky of his dreams seemed to be a sergeant. He didn't like Corp around his cars. But anyway, he was just one of these military diddly-dooos, Corp said, and the captain had told him to lay off.

"But Corp! What about Bud? Ma may die before we find him!"

Corp would frown. "Well, we were looking for that car, wasn't we? And we found it, didn't we? Gosh, Josie, she's right up there now in that end stall, slick as a mockingbird; shining like a new dime."

Tonight he'd said that; and Josie, unable to keep the tears back, got up and walked out the door. "Yes, Corp," she said, feeling utterly weak and lost. "We found it."

When she started the evening's work she saw that the big sergeant was there again. Myrtle told her his name. It was Miles, the only one of the scout car crews who didn't seem to want the old man around.

"I wish he'd keep Corp away," she thought; but she hated him for making the old man unhappy, and when each night he doggedly tried to talk with her she was short and cold with him. Yet there was something about his steady, serious way of going about it that was not like what she'd encountered with the other men. There was no kidding; nothing rough.

Tonight she had to wait on him. It was payday and Myrtle had her hands full at the other end of the room. "Listen, Josie. I want to talk to you. Out of this place," he said quietly.

"You want dinner? Or just beer?" She stood unwavering. Not looking at him, her voice without a shred of emotion.

"Ask anyone around this post," he said in a low, hurrying voice. "I never chased a woman. Save my pay and mind my business. You're the first girl I ever wanted to know or go out with. I could tell in one look you're decent and honest and good."

His hard brown face deepened with color. His big hands twisted on the table top. "I know I sound like a fool. I never said anything like this to a woman before. But I never felt like this. I was never in love. I got to say it because maybe you'll be gone tomorrow and I'll never find you again."

"You want beer or dinner?"

"I'll take some beer," Sergeant Miles said. "One of those cans."

The place was filling with soldiers. There was a crowd at the beer bar and the booths along the wall were jammed. The phonograph never stopped.

SERGEANT HAUSER of Headquarters Troop came in and Myrtle had the Jockey set him up a table in the corner. She stood with her hands on her hips, looking down at him. "Can't hear yourself think in this dump. Sounds like a riveters' convention. Well, Bung, what you got to tell me?"

The sergeant cleared his throat. "When I phoned you it was like I said. I looked at the picture the captain took off the old man and looked over all the last recruits. Just turning to duty. This kid went to E Troop. Going under the name of Dalton?"

Myrtle smiled grimly. "Jack, eh?"

"That's right. How'd you know?"

"I jest know my human nature, Bung. It couldn't be nothing different by what I heard of that kid."

The sergeant was drumming his fingers on the table, not looking at Myrtle. Myrtle said, "Then, way I understand it from what you said over the phone, he can get immediate discharge account of dependency and being a minor? They won't punish him or nothing?"

Sergeant Hauser still stared at his drumming fingers. "Yeah, that's what I told you. The other day."

"Even the fancy name won't be held against him?"

The sergeant cleared his throat again. "If it wasn't adopted to hide a crime," he said slowly. "Something else again if it was."

"What you getting at, Bung?"

Hauser looked up at last. "Myrtle, this kid some kin of yours?"

"You was to do me a favor, no questions asked. You never got a bum steak from me or a short beer, did you, Bung?"

"I never did. Something happened, Myrt, since I talked with you. Take a look at this and then forget it. I got a copy from the top sergeant of E Troop."

He held out a typewritten sheet of paper. Myrtle read it in an undertone, her face grim. It was headed Office of the Adjutant General, Washington.

A comparison of the fingerprints of Jack L. Dalton, 7384899, who enlisted May 8, 1938, at Ft. Medwick, Texas, has been made with those on file in the Department of Justice, which reports as follows:

'Subject as Billy Kidd arrested P.D. Appala Texas April 12, 1938. Charge: homicide: jailed.'

The latest report received concerning this soldier shows him assigned Cav. Ft. Midwick, Tex.

At enlistment the soldier answered all parts of question 5 on enlistment record in the negative.

Take such action as you consider proper.

Myrtle dropped the paper and eyed the sergeant stonily. "What's question five?"

"They swear they've never been arrested or jailed for a crime and so forth."

"They got the kid in the mill?"

"Looking for him. He got paid at noon. Been gone since. Maybe somebody tipped him. I'd butt out of this if I were you, Myrtle."

Myrtle drew herself up grandly. "I don't let friends down. I might of let down a couple of fresh men. But I stand by a regular guy like him in trouble."

"Well, you keep him out then if you feel that way. This is going to be tough."

And Myrtle, thinking swiftly, decided on just that thing. This was terrible. Bad enough for poor old Corp and the kid sister. But if the old lady was in the shape Corp said, this would kill her. Better never to hear from the kid again. . . .

MYRTLE sighed deeply. "Maybe you're right. I don't butt into any army law, believe me. You want beer or a steak, Bung? I got to get to work or they'll have *me* in for murder."

"I got to be back for a smoker at the troop," the sergeant said, rising. "Sorry it turned out that way, Myrt. Awful tough."

Shaking her head, Myrtle made off to

answer insistent calls for service. Bung Hauser looked around the room and had a thought as he saw Sergeant Miles sitting alone staring into a full glass of beer. He hailed him and sat down. "You're from Texas, Pete. Ever hear of a place called Appala?"

"Yeah. Northwest part of the state. Been through there, that's all. Why?"

"Well, something funny happened. No harm telling now. And you're a friend of Myrtle's."

"Myrtle's a square shooter."

"An E Troop John she's interested in is in a jam. A recruit; fraudulent enlistment and wanted for murder in Appala. Calls himself Dalton. E. Troop got a fingerprint report on him today from Washington. Must have broke jail in Appala and thought he'd get away by enlisting."

Miles grunted. "So you told Myrtle so she can tip him? You're a fine soldier, Bung."

"Myrt doesn't know him when she sees him. That's the funny part."

"Says Myrt. That dame's smarter than you and me put together, Bung."

"All right. A guy as sour on the world as you've been lately, no use explaining to him." Bung Hauser got up. "Coming to the smoker, Pete?"

"May be up later."

Hauser waved to a few friends and hurried out. Pete Miles sat staring down at his beer. Every now and then his somber eyes would follow the graceful figure of Josie Ewing as she hurried from table to table, her face inscrutable. Pete lighted a cigarette; smoked half of it.

Then, with a jerk, he got out of his seat and went to the telephone that hung on the wall near the end booth. He pressed his palm to the ear away from the phone and jammed the receiver close to hear above the noise of the place.

His face was ugly with irritation. And his voice was harsh as he snapped his words into the mouthpiece. Once he turned, saw that stumbling new arrivals in the booth were recruits, and snarled, "Quiet, you Johns!"

The fight started as if a grenade had exploded in the end booth. Sergeant Miles had just finished his call and he moved fast. Duty to stop this. And he already felt an ugliness toward those noisy recruits. He saw a tall, fair-haired soldier tearing in toward another who had just smashed him back against the wall.

He saw Josie Ewing, caught in the uproar, desperately try to swing clear a tray to avoid contact with the two. Saw the lanky recruit shove her aside, and Josie fall crashing against an overturned table. He heard Myrtle's husky voice calling, "Jockey! Jockey! Get Joe!"

Out of the yelling voices came Joe's. Almost complacent. "Leave the sergeant handle it. We don't want no law in here."

What Joe meant was let Sergeant Miles handle it, which at that moment he was literally doing. Miles struck the gangling recruit flush on the jaw and he landed hard and lay twitching on the floor. There was blood on his face and his fists had fallen apart.

Miles lifted Josie Ewing and held her with his arm around her slender body "You hurt any?" he said; and as he looked down at her the fighting light went from his eyes.

Josie leaned partly against him, one hand bracing herself against the overturned table. He could feel the steady trembling of her body. Her face was like white stone. She kept staring with horror-widened eyes at the bloody face of the young recruit on the floor.

"Let's break it up, men," an M.P. said, pushing briskly through the crowd. "You," he said to a gaping private, "give me a hand and we'll get him up to the guard-house."

"No!" Myrtle said, her voice a fierce protest. "The other guy hit him first. I seen it. Jockey, you and Joe take him up to my room and wash him up. We'll send him back to barracks later. He won't get in no more trouble."

The M.P. looked at Sergeant Miles. Miles shook his head. "I hope I killed him. He hit *her*. Killing's too good for him."

He drew Josie closer to him and glared about him.

Myrtle said, "He hit her accidental."

She pushed closer to a big black-haired recruit who was looking down at his late antagonist with a sheepish grin on his face. "Ain't that true, soldier?" she appealed to him.

He nodded dumbly. "I guess it was as much my fault as his," he said to the M.P. soldier. "I said Texas was ten times as big as New York and then we got to pushing each other. His beer went on my new breeches and I hit him. But we didn't mean to cause all this trouble."

The boy on the floor groaned and stirred as the Jockey mopped his face with a bar rag that had seen its worst day. Josie Ewing sank through Sergeant Miles' supporting arm and knelt on the floor, her hand wavering, at last touching the fair wet head. The M.P. squatted down trying to see her face. "He hit you, girl?"

"No," she said so low that they could hardly hear her. "He never touched me. I just slipped trying to get away from them." And her fingers moved through the tousled hair. "Bud, oh Bud!" she said and broke into great sobs.

SERGEANT MILES drew back. He was aware that Myrtle stood beside him and he stared stonily at her. "So that's it? I've certainly been a prime sap. I never even saw that John around here and she's been probably meeting him every night."

Myrtle nodded eagerly. "I know how you feel, Pete. But you can't account for things like that. Give her a break. Be a man about it."

Miles stood shaking his head. "But that skinny, baby-faced, twenty-one buck a month John! A girl like her!"

"Call the M.P. off, Pete. You're too big a man to be spiteful."

Still shaking his head, avoiding looking at Josie Ewing, who still knelt on the floor, Miles called the M.P. off. Myrtle whispered to the Jockey. "Take him up to Josie's cabin. He's a friend of hers. You stay there till she comes up."

She held Josie back as the boy, supported by Jockey, stumbled toward the cabins. Outside, in the dark beyond the parked cars, she said swiftly, "Where's Corp?"

Josie was shaking with excitement. "He's at the post. At a smoker."

"Look," Myrtle said, talking swiftly. "I know the kid's your brother and the whole story. Pumped it out of Corp. I'm for you, kid, but keep Corp away if he shows up. He's liable to talk out of turn."

"Oh, Myrtle! I'm so happy. I'm glad you know. Can't we just go to the colonel and tell him? Bud's just a kid. Couldn't they just let him go home? See Ma and then come back and take his punishment? I got a letter today and she's awful low."

Myrtle stood very still, looking at the white blur of the girl's face. She drew in a deep breath. "We could of, kid. And I thought I had it in the bag. But today something else came up. Bad news. You only got a minute with Bud. He's got to get the train from Boynton, leaves in about an hour. Jockey'll drive him in Joe's car. I'll get a civvie suit from Joe. And I got a little cash saved up I'm gonna loan him."

"Bud's wanted for murder, Josie."

Myrtle put both arms around the girl and stifled a desperate moan against her billowing bosom. "There. I know it's tough. But we'll get him back to his ma. You beat it now and run Jockey down here."

Myrtle watched the girl stumble toward the lighted cabin. She sighed, shook her head savagely and went back into the restaurant. She saw Sergeant Miles staring gloomily at a glass of untasted beer. "If he catches wise," she thought, "we're sunk. Like Corp says, he's a regular military diddly-doo."

"Why'n't you at the Smoker, Pete?" she asked carelessly.

"Because I'm drinking beer here," he growled. "Listen, I got some news for you. I—"

"You're missing a good party," she said abruptly and went back to find Joe. Later she came out and busied herself with her

duties, answering the clamoring for service with a savage efficiency and thinking, Good thing that M.P. didn't know the kid. They must have the word out. I hope that Jockey don't ball things up like he done with those race horses. . . .

JOSIE came in, her eyes desperate, and drew Myrtle aside. In a frenzied voice she whispered. "Oh, Myrtle, he won't go! I couldn't do anything with him. Says he's going to stand up to it like a man. Wouldn't squeal on a pal if they hang him, he says."

"That all comes from reading these cheap romances," Myrtle said. "Stories how the hero never squeals. But they never hang them in those tales. Here in Texas they do. Pal did it?"

"They were together on a freight and a trainman got killed. They broke out of jail after they were arrested and got separated. Bud thought he could hide in the army. And all Corp's talk had him filled up with it. First he was going to mine gold in Mexico, but he said there was still adventure here on the border."

"He's got a wonderful imagination," Myrtle said. "A wonder he can't see that rope. If he ever talks on the stand they'll hang him sure. He still up there?"

"Says he's going to wait for Corp. Then give himself up."

"Tell him about your ma?"

"He says it would disgrace her if she knew the truth. Wants me to write after they sentence him and say he died like a brave soldier in action against the Mexicans."

"That won't please the Mexicans," Myrtle said. "He sure has been reading a lot of them romances."

"Oh, Myrtle! He's only a kid. All we got," Josie began to cry. Myrtle could see Miles watching them. Voices were calling for service. "Get Miles another beer," Myrtle said.

"I wouldn't wait on him if I lost my job," Josie said. "And now I'm going to need it worse than ever."

Outside car horns began to blow and

men began running to the door and looking out the windows. "Now what?" Myrtle asked. "I hope we don't have no more fights around here tonight. My nerves are shot."

"Fire! Fire at the post!" an M.P. yelled into the room. "Get going, all you men. Back to barracks."

Joe's voice rose above the clamor. "Don't leave them get away without paying. Get busy, you girls. Where's that Jockey?"

A siren wailed, its moan rising and falling into the night.

"Hey, give way there! Leave me out!"

The dull boom of the post reveille gun shook the night and there was the distant sound of frantic bugles.

The room emptied with a roar. Outside the road echoed with running feet and the calling voices of men. Bud Ewing came into the restaurant. His lips were puffed and one eye was discolored. He blinked in the lights. He stood staring at his sister.

"I got to go now. It's my duty."

"They'll run you right in the mill," Myrtle said. "That's *their* duty."

"I'm going with you," Josie said. "Oh, Bud!"

"Swell chance to make a clean getaway, Bud," Myrtle reminded him. "With all this fire excitement. You still got time to make that train."

"I took an oath when I enlisted," Bud answered. "I ain't breaking it deserting."

"You broke it when you took it," Myrtle said.

"That ain't the same," Bud said. "I could name you heroes who gave a wrong age. And I wasn't guilty of that record."

"All right, Dick Merriwell."

Sergeant Miles stood watching. "You, soldier, hear that gun? You belong with your troop. Ever hear tell of fire call?"

"I'm on my way, Sergeant," Bud said.

"I'm going with you, Bud," Josie said.

"Even got to follow him to a *fire*!"

Sergeant Miles sneered. "Fire on the post isn't any place for you. He can come back after if you can wait that long. I've got a car out there. Come on, you John."

"I've got to go," Josie said. "Please let me go with you."

Sergeant Miles gave the recruit a long look. "He sure must have a lot that isn't on the surface. All right. Let's get going."

THEY drove fast and in silence toward the fierce red glow in the sky over the army post. At the top of the hill they met guards blocking the road. "Motor Pool," one of them answered Miles' harsh question.

He jammed the throttle down hard. "My outfit. Been worried about those rattle-trap sheds. Hope they got them all out."

"What do you mean, Sergeant? All out?" Bud asked.

"Cars, scout cars. If that machine gun troop hay goes up down at the end of the line it's going to be too bad. And looks to me like it has. We got to stop here. You, soldier, go join your troop."

He jumped from the car and headed for the ring of sentries who patrolled the fire zone. Hoses were already blasting at the roaring line of motor sheds, and the high flames, crackling, made an eerie over-tone to the shouts of the men.

A great red fire truck, gaudy in the unnatural light of the flames, kept up a steady, deep pumping. Officers in white mess jackets, alarmed from the dinner tables or the movies, ran up, reporting; or stood waiting with their troops. The fire marshal in a dress shirt and evening trousers moved swiftly about the big hoses, directing the streams.

Sergeant Miles plunged into the thick of it checking on his platoon. "We got four of them out already; parked up by the parade ground," one of his drivers shouted close to his ear. "Feeny's got one coming now. Boy, look at that! It's in flames. Hecker's got the extinguisher on it, though. They'll make it."

The scout car, streaming smoke and flames, rocked up the corral toward them, the driver holding his head out for air and the man standing on the seat beside him working a fire extinguisher frantically. Water and auxiliary extinguishers soon

killed the flames, leaving a following pall of smoke. Sergeant Miles sprang on the running board of the car.

"We just got her out," Feeny panted. "Your car got caught by that machine gun hay blaze. No chance getting her out. Place is just a mass of flames."

"We got to get her out," Miles snarled. "Hey you, Moulton, Feeny! Come with me."

The two soldiers ran with him toward the last shed. Billows of smoke and flame blasted them. Great sparks hit their faces and they choked as they held their hands over their eyes. Two other men banged against them, stumbling frantically away from the blazing shed.

"Ain't no use," Feeny said. "Can't even get near." Miles grabbed him by the arm. "You're her driver. Why didn't you get her out at first?"

"I was in there, Sergeant. I couldn't get her started. You know she's hard to start. And that old man was gettin' in my way. Flames just drove me out. I ain't made of asbestos. I got to breathe."

"Old man? What old man?" Miles asked ominously.

"Old Corp. He's always hangin' around my car. Captain said it was okay. He must of beat it out the back. Fire coming right through."

"Might have known," Miles groaned. "Letting an old fool like that tinker with your car. You're likely to get a general court out of this. You will if I got anything to say about it. Give me that coat. Here, wrap it around me."

The driver stared, his eyes wild and red in the glare of the fire. "You must be crazy."

"Here! Here, Sarge! I got this wet in the hose. I got myself all wet. You follow me in. I'm soaking wet, see?"

Miles stared at the dripping Bud. "Behind your ears, anyway. Put those sacks around my head. Then all you clear out of here because I'll be coming fast if I come."

"Stick close to me. I got an extinguisher here, too," Bud said.

Miles glared at him. "You keep out of this. We don't want to be turned out on a Saturday afternoon for a funeral."

"I got to go," Bud said. "See, I killed a man in Appala. I'm the toughest guy here. Jest a fire don't stop me. They'll hang me anyway. So what the hell?"

Miles stood back and stared at the child's face trying to look tough. "Well, I'll be a—! What's your name?"

"Jack Dalton, E Troop," Bud said proudly.

"Hey, look out!" Feeny yelled. He grabbed Sergeant Miles by the arm and hurled him to one side. There was a crash of falling timber and a new roar to the fire in the shed. A wave of flame swept out and a choking veil of smoke smothered them. "Hey, *she's coming out!* You must of left the clutch in and the heat started her."

WITH a wild buck the big scout car almost struck them. They leaped aside as it rocked and roared onward, whirled shrieking to the right and tore through the corral fence as if through so much paper. Then it faltered; and the flames licking up from its back seat were caught by the night air and leaped high with vicious color and life.

Bud sprang after it and squirted the extinguisher into the front seat. Miles dragged the smoking, twisted figure from behind the wheel. Beat the fire from him with the wet sacks.

The driver stood staring in wonder. "I don't know how he ever got it going. I swear I done everything I knew."

Old Corp blinked up at them. His face was black and he couldn't move. A captain doctor bent over him and said to a litter man: "Get him up to the hospital, quick! . . . Have to keep away, young lady," he said to Josie.

Josie, kneeling, crying, was trying to touch the old man's face. "Corp! Corp! He's my grandfather. Oh, Corp!"

An officer's wife, a young woman in evening clothes with a scarf over her shoulders, put an arm around Josie. "You come with me. You can see him at the hospital."

She said to the surgeon: "Is it bad, Bill?"

The doctor nodded sympathetically. "You go with her."

Corp got his mouth to working. "How's . . . how is she? Little old . . ." He looked imploringly at his granddaughter. "Josie . . . I forgot her number. Oh, Josie . . ."

Josie, her lips trembling, said: "W—6—0—2—3—7, Corp."

The litter men secured Corp gently. The doctor said softly to Mrs. Moller, "He won't last long. Better take the girl right up. That smoke and fire tore him to pieces. It's amazing that he can talk."

The woman drew her breath in sharply. Bud bent over Corp. His smokesmudged face wore a big grin. "Know me, Corp?"

Corp's mouth twisted. "Sh! Sh! We have to talk in private. Shh!"

"I told the sergeant here," Bud said, pointing to Sergeant Miles. "He's turning me in."

"I forgot—her—number, Bud. I'm—ashamed. But—remembered how—to start—my little beauty. Got to—drive her—at last—didn't I?"

"You drove her good, Corp," Feeny said, his voice thick. "Better than I could."

"Ah," Corp muttered. "Tomorrow—you can—shine her up—good as new . . ."

"Get along there!" the doctor said to the litter men.

Sergeant Miles touched Josie's arm. "Come on," he said.

Bud said, "I'm turning myself in, Sergeant. You might as well get the credit for my arrest."

"You get back to your troop where you belong," Miles growled.

Mrs. Moller watched for a moment and then walked slowly toward the hospital. "I'll wait for you up there," she called to Josie. She smiled faintly and pointed toward the hospital. "But please hurry."

Josie turned to Miles. "You hit him once tonight. You might as well finish it up."

Her lips trembled and she put a hand up to her mouth. Then she swung toward him, tears bright in her eyes in the glow of the dying fire.

"You can get him good now. For murder. You can have him hanged. Maybe they'll promote you for it." She turned, sobbing, and at a stumbling run made for the post hospital. Miles and Bud followed.

"It ain't the sergeant's fault," Bud pleaded. "Just his duty."

Josie backed up to the hospital porch as at bay, her mouth working. "His duty to let an old man like Corp do his dirty work, too?"

Sergeant Miles took her fiercely by the shoulder. "Shut up! Now listen. I phoned Sheriff West of Appala back there at the Blue and Gold. I did it because I like Myrtle and thought she was mixed up in it."

He jerked his head savagely at Bud. "This John's in the clear. They picked the other fellow up in San Antone last week and he confessed to the killing. West will have a confirmation wire to his troop commander in the morring.

"So," Sergeant Miles said slowly, harshly, "I'm turning your boy friend over to you."

Bud stared, then a big grin widened his face. "Oh, boy!"

JOSIE lifted her hands to her heart, dropped them. "Oh, wait!" she called to Sergeant Miles. But the big sergeant was moving toward the porch. "I'm going in to see a real guy," he said.

From the shadow of the porch a woman's voice called: "Your grandfather! Please hurry!"

Inside, at a dressing-room door, a medical sergeant blocked their way. Mrs. Moler nodded. "His granddaughter."

Josie dragged Bud after her, hurrying. "He's my brother," she said, her voice choking. Miles pushed in with them, ignoring the medical man.

Old Corp was lying on a hospital cot, his face seared, blackened. He tried to grin at them. "Hi—Josie . . ."

"Oh, Corp!" Josie sobbed.

At the door there was whispering, increasing loudness of voices. Myrtle, her

hair loose and streaming, her coarse makeup smudged by tears, pushed the medical soldier aside. "Skip that noise, soldier! When I start a thing I see it through."

She rubbed a hand over her eyes and tried to smile down at Corp. "Well, old-timer! They tell me you're a regular hero!"

Corp's reddened eyes lighted. "You see me bring my car out, Myrtle?"

"Just heard about it and I run all the way up here to congratulate you, Corp. They tell me you was like a four-alarm fire chief."

Josie Ewing moved close to Sergeant Miles. He felt her hand against his, and he looked down into her wet eyes. "Was that a lie you told the pill-roller? About Bud being your brother?"

Josie lifted her eyes to him and her hand tightened in his big fist. "It's the truth, Miles," she said.

Sergeant Miles' heart seemed to stop beating for good. He took a deep breath and his arm went around Josie Ewing. He felt her head come close and rest against his shoulder. Old Corp was watching them, his reddened, fading eyes stopping on Miles. The sergeant nodded dumbly.

Bud whispered, but his whisper sounded like a shout: "Josie, the colonel's here!"

The colonel, smoke-smudged, hatless, stood over the bed. He was about to speak when old Corp sighed. "Myrtle?"

"Yes, Corp."

"Know what the medical boys here said? I—get me a fighting soldier's funeral. Flag at half mast . . . a big volley . . . a whole squad escort . . ."

"Swell, Corp."

The colonel's voice was low but very clear in the still room. "You get the whole regiment—mounted—as a hero should . . . Corporal."

Corp had to work hard to speak again. He moved his eyes—hard to move them so that he could see the colonel. "With—with—the scout cars—too?"

"With all the scout cars."

Old Corps gave his last smile. "Ah," he sighed. "Diddly-do-o-o."



The Devil's Diary

By WILLIAM DU BOIS

WHEN someone shoved Owen Cary out of a fifth-story window to his death, a number of people took a long breath of relief. For Cary, owner of the *Star*, was about to publish the confidential diary of Larry Ray, Manhattan's Man-at-the-Keyhole; and the murderer removed the only manuscript of that hush-hush classic. Then, before the mystery could be cleared up, Nancy Janeway, another gossip columnist, was shot through the head. She'd claimed she could name Cary's murderer.

LARRY RAY has sought hermitage on an island off the coast of Florida; and now the *Star* sends Jack Jordan, who is telling the story, down there to interview the columnist. Before he leaves Manhattan, Jordan checks up on all the murder suspects: Owen Cary's two former wives—Blanche Cary, priestess of a wacky religious sect; and the glamorous movie actress, Anita Ames . . . Senator Anthony Parsons . . . Mark Evans, Hollywood's gin-soaked Adonis . . . Doctor Piccari, the brilliant young surgeon . . . and his father Old Joe, an ex rum-king now in comfortable

retirement. But Jordan gets no light on the mystery.

When Jordan and his wife Trudy arrive in Florida, they find that several of these celebrities have gathered there, determined to reach Larry Ray. Anita Ames and her husband, Duncan Green, Mark Evans and the Piccaris, all visit Ray on his island retreat. Jack Jordan does, too—and somebody



This story began in the *Argosy* for September 30

takes a potshot at him. But he learns that Larry Ray is re-writing his diary; that the first installment will name the murderer of Owen Cary. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

SATURDAY AFTERNOON: 5:00

WE DROVE a good two miles up that road before we caught sight of the house, with its high white coquina walls and Spanish Renaissance trimmings. Daphne was expected, all right; you could tell by the way they snapped to attention at the gate-house.

You've read about those grounds, of course, and the Carrara marbles, and the genuine wrought-iron gates old man Lake brought over piece-meal from Madrid, long before Franco dropped his first bomb. I won't stop to describe them now; somehow, I wasn't in the mood for wrought-iron gates at the moment.

Daphne parked under a poinciana tree a good hundred yards from the portecochère. "I'll be back in five minutes," she said, "so don't wander. Remember, Mr. Lake keeps private detectives on the premises."

"Is that one now?" I asked, pointing rudely.

But Daphne had already started for the house when young Joe appeared in the driveway. For a minute, it looked like a head-on collision, without quarter. Then they both slowed up, just long enough to exchange a few words. Daphne went in by a side door and Joe stopped dead, staring after her as though he'd give a great deal to follow. When he finally noticed me—still seated obediently in the roadster—he came up almost eagerly.

Joe had changed his clothes since I saw him last. Now he was wearing forty-dollar sport shoes, fawn colored tropical worsted, and a topaz tie to match—all of which went wonderfully with those broad shoulders and melancholy eyes. Well, why not? Wasn't his richest patient due from the North any hour now?

Let me tell you, I made some fast decisions while he covered that hundred

yards of millionaire's driveway. Here I sat, with a story in my pocket that seemed too hot for anyone to swallow. Should I offer it to him on a silver spoon, and watch his reaction? Or should I salve my conscience and keep it to myself, even if his name was at the head of Hurlbut's list?

Then I got a good look at Joe's face, and saw I wouldn't have to do much talking. He was bursting with news of his own.

"Hello, glass-of-fashion," I said.

"Do not laugh at me please, Jack. Not when I have something important to show you."

There wasn't a soul in sight, and the big house behind us looked empty as Wall Street after hours. But Joe hesitated ever so slightly before he opened his wallet and gave me a note. A very short note, written in block letters on stationery from the Casa de Mar.

"Five minutes ago, this was left for me at the gate-house. I stood in the hall reading it, when you drove up—"

I handed it back to him. "Sorry, my Sicilian is a bit rusty."

Joe almost laughed as he translated:

"Dear Son: This morning I saw him. All goes as I said it would go. From this moment, he leaves us in peace. Your father, G.P."

I STUDIED that note over his shoulder while he read. Probably Pud was responsible for the block letters. The initials were Old Joe's, all right. Someone had taught him to sign his name at one stage in his career.

"Keep right on translating," I said.

"Why must you always pretend to be so stupid?"

"So I can listen in comfort," I said. "Your dad made a deal with Ray, is that it?"

"What else can I think?"

"Is that what he promised to do, this morning at the hotel?"

"He thanked me for my—my effort to protect the family name," said young Joe,

unsmilingly. "He said it could do with a little protection. He said it was the father's job, not the son's. Then he drove off after you. Then he leaves this note for me."

"Thanks, Joe," I said. "The jig-saw fits, now."

"You saw him when he left the island. Did he look happy?"

"Happier than you've ever looked since you went into society."

He let that pass. "Then you would say he had succeeded where I failed?"

"Wouldn't you?"

"A clean slate for the Piccaris?"

"Clean as a kindergarten blackboard—unless the original manuscript turns up. And if I know your dad, he can handle that for you, too."

• "Stop it, Jack. You are making me feel very young again."

"Make the most of it, Doctor," I said. "Marry your bank while you can, if that's what you really want."

"Is that the best you can think of me?"

"Stop me if I'm wrong," I said.

"You must know I am not in love with Claire."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Would it be news to you that I have never loved anyone in my life but—Daphne Carter?"

"Not exactly," I said. "It might surprise her a little, though."

"Perhaps," said Dr. Joe. "So far, it is a risk I have not cared to take."

"When did you catch fire?" I asked.

"A year ago. The first time she walked into my office. Oddly enough, it was the day after I operated on Claire. Ray had sent her. He wanted the story, with background. I considered it my duty to show his secretary the door—"

"Don't let it die," I said.

"Perhaps I did my duty on that occasion a bit too thoroughly. The next day, Daphne returned on her own time—to inform me that I was not human."

He writhed a little, then went on resolutely. "I tried to explain the circumstances, of course. She was not impressed. In fact, she called me a museum piece,

worth careful study. She has studied me ever since. Sometimes she permits me to express myself. Sometimes, she laughs—"

He really broke it in the middle this time, and stepped out to the driveway, just as a car roared by on its way to the house—an off-white Rolls only slightly shorter than a city block, piled high with the sort of luggage wage-slaves dream about, after they've read themselves to sleep over a travel folder.

Gardner Cummings sat beside his daughter in the tonneau, his white mane defiant in the breeze. Both of them saluted Dr. Joseph Piccari as they passed. Dr. Piccari returned the salute, with grave politeness. Not that I blamed him, either. I suppose it was a lot to pass up, just for love.

"You'd better hurry in," I said. "She'll never forgive you for not meeting the train."

I watched him go up the driveway. So did Daphne, who had emerged from that side-entrance sharp on cue as an actress in her first important rôle. Once again, a head-on collision seemed inevitable.

Then Daphne passed him without a word, climbed into the roadster beside me, and slammed the door. Joe paused under the porte-cochère, looked back at us once, then followed the Cummings luggage into the house. He didn't resemble a museum piece at that moment. No self-respecting mummy ever had such a droop to his shoulders since they laid King Tut to rest.

CHAPTER XXV

SATURDAY AFTERNOON: 6:00

THERE was a coppery sunset color to the west when we turned into the pock-marked macadam for the second time that day. Twilight didn't improve the look of that dense scrub in the slightest—or Cedar Island itself—or the bay, which had turned copper-sulphate to match the sky. Daphne coasted to a stop at the road's end, and sounded off on her horn; but the draw had started to drop before she cut her motor. This time, Ray showed

himself briefly in the fading light before he stalked out of sight up the path.

I put my hand on the door, as Daphne reached to open it. My voice sounded strange in my ears. It was the first word either of us had spoken since we left the Lakes. "If I told you I felt like a cad at this moment, would you believe me?"

"No," said Daphne.

"Will you come back to St. Augustine with me, while you've got your health?"

"The answer is no, Jack."

"Suppose I stay with you?"

Daphne answered that by breaking my grip on the door, and stepping out to the road.

"Your keys are still in the car," I said.

"You've been a good escort, Jack, even if you are a double-crosser. I don't make my escorts walk home from rides."

"What shall I do with the car?"

"Leave it at the Ancient City Garage. Tell them to send it back for me with a mechanic, at nine-thirty sharp. Bear down on that hard, please. A half-hour isn't too long a time to make my plane."

"So you trust me that far?"

"Is it too large an order?"

Our eyes met on that. I'm sure we were thinking the same thought, even then. So sure, I didn't try putting it in words. "*Pukka mem-sahib*," I said.

Cheerio," said Daphne, dolefully.

She had walked across the bridge; the draw had whispered up after her; and I found that it was getting dark too fast for comfort. Holding Daphne's remark about pioneers and Indians before me like a shield, I went out of there as fast as a car could travel. Cad or not, I'd left her safe—at least, until nine-thirty.

I found the police station without asking, parked carefully on the right side of the street just outside, and sat for a long time under the wheel, getting my story in order. At least, it would be a relief, to tell a story straight from the beginning.

THE desk sergeant was very polite when I gave my name and connections. So polite, in fact, that he broke off

his cross-word puzzle in the middle and went in to announce me personally.

One look at Chief Willis told me that we spoke the same language. He had the sort of easy drawl that never got excited, yet there was authority under the accent, which I wouldn't dare to imitate.

"So you were shot at, Mr. Jordan?"

"You've heard me through—do you want a deposition to that effect?"

"Did Mr. Ray send you to me?"

"Mr. Ray thinks it was a bumble-bee," I said.

"You understand that makes my position rather—"

"I understand perfectly," I said.

"Mr. Ray's living out there; you're safe in town. If he don't reckon himself in any danger—"

"Have it your way, Chief," I said. "He just happened to be keeping his secretary after dark. I've known Miss Carter for years. I couldn't go back to my hotel without reporting."

"Funny thing, Mr. Jordan. Everyone who's lived on Cedar Island seems to have been a little queer, in his way. Right back to Mr. Parks, who owns the place. He's the one thought of that drawbridge. Used to keep it up, weeks on end, and wait for the tide to row over to the Municipal Pier for his provisions—" He came back to the present, with a smile. "What you want me to do now?"

"I want you to know someone's watching that island with a gun in his pocket. The rest is up to you."

"Would you be satisfied, if I sent a couple of deputies to patrol that road to-night?"

"I'm satisfied now," I said, getting up to shake hands warmly. "All I really want to soothe is my conscience, and that's well taken care of."

Not that it was strictly true, of course. Just the same, I did feel easier in my mind when I climbed back into Daphne's car again. Suppose we say the calm before the storm, and let it go at that?

It was pitch dark under the old oaks in the Plaza. A newsboy jumped on my

running-board with a copy of the local gazette, but I waved him off as the traffic light changed, drove straight past the Ancient City Garage without a quailm, and parked the roadster in our hotel driveway, just behind Yvonne.

Lord forgive me, it didn't register that every beldame of our rocker brigade had her nose in that same gazette as I went through the lobby of the Casa de Mar. The desk clerk scarcely looked up from his copy when I asked for my room-key. . . . Mr. Piccari and valet had checked out an hour ago. Mrs. Jordan, however, was upstairs now. Had I seen the big story in the *Evening Bulletin*?

I'M ASHAMED to admit that I snatched the newspaper from his hand. Did I say that one Eddie Barnes, local news editor, had outdone himself when Ray leased Cedar Island? This evening, Eddie was doing a balloon ascension, and scattering star-dust. He had printed an extra, with a three-column cut of Ray. The story was under a banner, in type that was only a trifle smaller.

LAWRENCE RAY the world-famous COLUMNIST, who joined our winter colony yesterday, informed your correspondent that he would be sending a completely rewritten version of his famous MYSTERY DIARY north tonight. Mr. Ray has chartered a plane in Jacksonville to call at Alcazar Field at ten sharp ready to wing his latest NOW-IT-CAN-BE-TOLD to an eager editor in New York.

And here is REAL NEWS. Our twentieth-century Pepys has hinted that his REWRITTEN OPUS will contain information leading positively to the solution of TWO MURDERS that have baffled the best minds of the NEW YORK POLICE from the beginning!

The master of the rapier pen-thrust received your correspondent on his island retreat early this morning. Visiting him at the same time were that meteoric Hollywood producer DUNCAN GREEN; Mr. Green's wife, the glamorous ANITA AMES; and that other member of the screen's greatest love-duet, the no-less-glamorous MARK EVANS. Mr. Ray, who sported a beachcomber beard and a portable typewriter that had survived several wars . . .

But I was already running upstairs, looking for Trudy. When I heard her humming through the closed door of our bedroom, I stuffed the newspaper in my pocket, and walked in as nonchalantly as I could. My wife was standing at the mirror, putting the finishing touches on her best outfit.

"Still waiting lunch, darling?" I asked.

She didn't even turn away from her makeup. "Your white tuxedo coat is hanging in the wardrobe," she said, severely. "Put it on."

I started to obey, quite mechanically. Trudy rarely addresses me in that tone of voice—just so I'll know she means business when she does.

"Where are we going, if I may make so bold?"

"Dr. Piccari just called," said my wife, around a lipstick. "Kirby Lake III is giving a party and we're invited."

"Dr. Piccari telephoned you here?"

"Yes, Jack. What's so unusual in that?"

"Keep right on, dear," I said, "you're doing fine."

"HE WAS very nice about it," she said. "Very nice indeed. Seems there's a big houseparty out at the Lakes—howling for local color. Seems they're throwing the affair at a place called the Patio. Do you know where the Patio is, darling?"

"Not yet, but I shall. You know how I love asking questions."

"Everyone's going, Jack. Movie moguls and millionaires—"

"So?" I said, knotting a black tie at the glass.

"Why didn't you tell me half of Hollywood was staying in this hotel? I'd have watched the door all morning for an autograph." Trudy handed me my hair brushes. "Why are you frowning at yourself in the mirror, Jack?"

"Bow ties always bring out the beast in me," I said.

"Sure you don't mind going? You know I wouldn't miss a shindig like that for the world."

"What about our vacation?"

"Tomorrow's time enough for that. Yvonne needs the rest. Of course, if you don't want to go—"

"Certainly I want to go. I haven't needed a drink so badly since I flunked freshman English."

"You sound so breathless, darling. Sure you don't want to rest a minute before we—"

"Rest? With an interview to file?"

"Good Heavens, Jack, don't tell me that's still waiting to be done?"

I grabbed both her arms, and pulled her close. "Love me, Mrs. Jordan?"

"Enough to sit here all afternoon waiting, without one complaint. If that doesn't prove—"

"Will you prove it all over again? If I promise to get you to the party on time, will you sit very quietly at the curb with Yvonne, while I stage a bout with Western Union?"

The telegraph office was only two minutes drive from the hotel. I left Trudy sitting beside our jalopy's wheel, without daring to look her in the face again.

No one was on hand but the clerk, when I pushed through the door. I asked for a typewriter and a quiet corner; I laid my facts in a row and glared at them for a moment. Then I swallowed my pride and went to the phone-booth on the wall.

"*Evening Bulletin*? I'd like to talk to Eddie Barnes."

"Speaking."

"This is Jordan of the New York *Star*, Mr. Barnes. I'm in town to interview Larry Ray. Perhaps you remember bumping noses with me on the road this morning."

"I remember, all right."

"Would you mind if I asked you a few questions about that swell story you—"

"Course I'd mind, Jordan."

I choked down what I really felt like saying, and began all over. "Mr. Ray gave me certain angles on his future plans too, you know. I thought we might get together and—"

It was a novel sensation, all right, hearing that sub-editor hang up with all the

weight of six thousand readers behind him. Not that I blamed him in the slightest for feeling his oats at the moment. I sat down at the typewriter, and dispatched a bulletin to Mac:

JORDAN ST AUGUSTINE

RAY STATES POSITIVELY NAMING CAREY AND JANEWAY SLAYER OPENING CHAPTER NEW DIARY STOP SAYS CARTER FLYING NORTH WITH MANUSCRIPT TEN TONIGHT STOP LOCAL PAPER HAS PICKED UP STORY TOO APPARENTLY FROM RAY HIMSELF STOP SCREWIEST INTERVIEW OF YOUR FAITHFUL REPORTERS CAREER FOLLOWS MORE

Then I unlimbered that old Remington, and sawed wood.

A picture post-card moon was shining down on the bay when I rejoined Trudy and Yvonne. In fact, it was light enough to read a newspaper—only a newspaper was the last thing I wanted to lay eyes on at the moment.

CHAPTER XXVI

SATURDAY EVENING: 9:00

THE Patio was one of those flossy outdoor night clubs left over from the last boom, and still pretending prosperity is just around the next bend in the road—instead of a four-bit tourist camp. It stood well back from the Dixie Highway, beside the country club; you took one turn for the Patio, another for the first tee. There was a winding, palm-bordered drive, and gateposts straight out of the Alhambra. The Patio itself had everything, including a rumba band you could dance to, after four drinks.

The party itself turned out to be society in a sporting mood, and loving it. Of course, Gardner Cummings and his host had stayed away; you wouldn't dare mention old Kirby Lake and the Patio in the same breath. The rest of the Lakes' house-party had appeared en masse. After all, Kirby III was on hand to shepherd them, which would give dignity to any orgy.

Old Man Lake had built his hacienda in, St. Augustine, when Palm Beach was still a mangrove swamp, and saw no reason for moving today. Naturally, Kirby III shuttled back and forth as business demanded—fitting both pictures perfectly. I've interviewed him too many times not to know that he's nearly forty. He still had an undergraduate quality about him, for all his vice-presidencies and tilts with the Senate. You know—solid as a Phi Beta key, and gold-plated with the same flawless taste.

It gave you a sense of protection, to find him standing in the Patio entrance, serene as a policeman at a carnival. In fact, it was he who made us welcome, and started Trudy dancing with one of the wolf-cubs of Wall Street. Then he poured me a drink that sent courage tingling right down to my toes.

After the second toe-warmer, I decided to stop being a reporter for the next hour, and mingled. Don't ask me why, I had a hunch that mingling might prove safer, before that evening was over.

I danced with the lovely Anita, who had thrown her false front into the palmettoes long ago and become a simple Frivolity Girl again. I danced with young things, obviously A.W.O.L. from finishing school, and with a lady who had been divorced in three languages. I even tried to bow to Duncan Green, and got a baleful snub for my pains. . . . When I finally cut in on Trudy, she was still glowing with it all.

"I feel like a girl again, darling."

"I noticed you dancing with the great Mark Evans just now—is that why?"

"Why not?"

Someone tapped my shoulder.

"Would you mind changing partners?" asked Dr. Joseph Piccari.

HE HAD whirled Trudy away into the crowd, and I found myself waltzing with Claire Cummings. "Ever see a wife stolen so quickly before?" I demanded.

"The doctor moves fast when he makes up his mind." She waltzed almost too perfectly. It was as easy as dancing with a moonbeam—only lots more interesting. "Of course, if you'd like to call him back—or sit this out?"

"Aren't we doing well together?"

"Very."

If you must die, Jack Jordan, I thought, let them play you out with music. "Perhaps you don't realize that you're dancing with your first reporter?"

"On the contrary," said Miss Cummings, sunnily, "cutting in on you was my idea, not Joe's."

"Keep on talking, please," I said. "With that music, it's like poetry."

"Joe doesn't believe my camera-smashing days are over," she said. "I thought this would be a—well, a dramatic way to convince him."

"Joe is a very conscientious doctor," I said. "When he sets out to cure a patient, he stays on the job till the end. Sometimes, beyond."

"This party was my inspiration too," she continued, as though she had not heard my last remark. "That is, I talked Kirby into it. Right down to inviting those movie people. Joe thinks parties are bad for me. I wanted to demonstrate that I can stand anything—"

"Including me?"

"Including you," said Miss Cummings, resting her cheek cozily against mine.

Kirby III cut in with his blandest smile. She went to his arms from mine, melting into the waltz-rhythm again without losing a beat.

Joe tracked me into the bar, just as I was holding out my hand for a glass. "Did you enjoy your waltz?"

"For a guinea pig—very much indeed."

"I enjoyed watching you, Jack. You waltz wonderfully together."

I nodded toward the dance floor. "She looks well with Kirby III, too," I said. "In fact, there's a girl who'll fit in anywhere that fun is selling. Better practice staying up late, Doctor, and cancel all morning appointments."

"Shut up," said Joe briefly, and went to cut in on Kirby III.

Perhaps I'd over-done my mingling act. No doubt about it, things were hitting me a bit too fast, including alcohol. I put that fourth highball down untasted, and went to the side door for a breath of air—just in time to see Larry Ray get out of a taxi and whisk up the blue-and-white-flagged walk that led from the driveway to the main entrance.

I SAW him pause just inside. I saw him beckon to a passing waiter. Then he lit a cigarette, and strolled casually over to sit on a bench beside the fountain. I stepped out of the light, just to play safe, and counted seconds by my wristwatch. Kirby III was strolling out of the main entrance now, just as casually. I waited for him to sit down beside Ray on the bench, but all he did was beckon as he passed. Thirty seconds later, and they had both disappeared around the side of the building.

I started to follow them, quite instinctively. Then I looked once more at my wristwatch. It couldn't be nine-fifteen so soon—but it was.

Yvonne coughed protestingly as I kicked her awake—coughed again as she exploded into low gear and lurched off down the driveway. Ray's taxi was still loafing along as I passed, wide open.

The back-track to town seemed very dark, now the moon was under a cloud. When the cloud moseyed on a little later, I found I could drive without lights. Somehow, that made the trip seem a lot cozier—especially after I'd parked Yvonne in the driveway at the Casa de Mar, and switched to Daphne's roadster.

Of course I used lights again going over the bridge, and part way down that two-lane highway to the turnoff. When I saw I'd have the road to myself from then on, I flipped off the switch and drove by the touch-system. It was lots darker in the scrub, but I was doing a good thirty when they shouted at me to stop. Let me

tell you, I'll write a testimonial for Daphne's brake-bands any day you like.

They jumped my running-board from either side. One of them was a lanky cracker who looked round-shouldered from the pull of the gun at his hip. The other was the desk sergeant I'd given my card to earlier this evening.

"What's the idea, Mr. Jordan—driving without lights?"

"Just making sure you boys were on the job. Any other traffic so far this evening?"

"Only a few cars on the Ocean Drive."

"Sure no one turned off here?"

"Positive. We been parked by the turn-out mostly, since eight. Drove back and forth, 'tween here and the island, two or three times, just to check—"

"Good work," I said. "Do you mind if I pick up Miss Carter on schedule?"

"Not if you put your lights on, Mr. Jordan. I know this is pretty far south for you, but we got traffic rules just the same."

EVERY lamp in that cottage was burning when I sounded my horn; they were still blazing away when Daphne let down the draw and hurried over, ready for her plane from fur coat to briefcase. I had already backed, of course. As she jumped in beside me, I let out the clutch. We were in high and doing sixty before she had a chance to see my face.

"Hurry, can't you? You're ten minutes late."

I sniffed a little.

"What's ten minutes to a good driver, lady?"

"Hello, Jack," she said, quite calmly.

"Thanks," I said.

"For what?"

"For not screaming. I've left two cops in the bushes somewhere along this route. I'd like to stay friendly with them as long as possible."

I heard her draw in her breath sharply. Naturally, I was driving much too fast to take my eyes off the road.

"You don't leave many stones unturned, do you?"

"Did you think I'd leave you on that island without some kind of watchdog? After all, I had a story to file—people to watch—a wife to amuse—"

"Poor Jack—you have had a day."

"It isn't over yet," I said. "Which way is the air field?"

"Straight out the Dixie Highway—a mile beyond the golf-links, according to Mr. Ray."

"In that case, we've time to burn. Couldn't you be just a little grateful, and open your briefcase first?"

"Not very well when the lock is sealed."

"Suppose I opened it regardless? What would your next move be?"

"Try me."

"At least, you could quote a few pages from memory?"

"For the last time, Jack—"

"Easy, now—that was pure force of habit. Was it Ray's idea—wasting all that kerosene on an empty cottage?"

"What are you getting at now?"

"I'm asking you to tell me when Mr. Ray left the Island—and how."

"You win, Jack. He crossed the bay about an hour ago by rowboat."

"I'm sure that's very interesting. Why didn't he take you along?"

"He didn't say. Perhaps he thought I couldn't swim, in case of shipwreck."

"Perhaps," I said, slowing down just enough to ease through the City Gates without damaging the coquina. After all, those Gates are well over three hundred years old, and I had no intention of colliding with history this evening. As things stood, I was doing well enough keeping out of the way of the present.

AT LEAST, Ray had given Daphne a straight dope on one particular: that landing field was just a speedometer mile beyond the links. An empty emergency field, innocent of caretaker or floodlights.

"Three minutes of ten, Miss Carter. How's that for service?"

"Where's my plane!"

"Better write the factory," I said. "Something tells me it hasn't been assembled yet."

"What are you talking about? Didn't Mr. Ray order a special—"

"Did he really? From the Jacksonville airport, just for you?" I was really excited, now. "Where's the beacon light and the ground crew?"

Someone had parked smack in the middle of that bumpy meadow with his headlights dimmed. I drew up beside him.

"Just to settle an argument—have you seen any plane this evening?"

"Not so far, mister. Who are you?"

I told him, none too politely.

"Thought I knew your voice. I'm Ed-die Barnes."

"All right, Barnes—this is Miss Carter beside me. You promised her a plane in tonight's *Astonisher*. Give, Barnes, give."

"Doesn't this field have a caretaker?" asked Daphne.

"Sure does, miss—off and on. I phoned his house tonight, just before I drove out here," said Barnes. I noticed with a certain sadistic glee that his voice had begun to squeak already. "Seems he's been at sea with the shrimp-fleet since Monday—"

"Back to the Patio, Miss Carter," I snapped.

We were on the Dixie Highway again, almost before Daphne had had time to protest. Let me tell you, I got the biggest lift of the evening out of the way Barnes tore after us. Not that I was in a hurry, really, when I came through those termite-ridden gateposts, and pushed into the crowd gathered just beyond. I knew, by now, exactly what I'd see—before I found myself looking down at him.

Daphne screamed, just a little. Just as any girl would, if she stumbled on her boss lying face-down with a nicely cracked skull. Then the crowd parted, and it was my turn to sing out. The Piccaris, father and son—with collars ripped, and dirt smeared on their beautiful tropical coats—had started back to the Patio, between two cops.

CHAPTER XXVII

SATURDAY EVENING: 10:30

WHEN I found Trudy, she was one of the procession following the prisoners back to the Patio. No one paid much attention when I slipped an arm through hers, another through Daphne's, and detoured them into the bar—empty for the moment, praise Heaven.

I pushed a jungle of empty glasses out of the way, and spread my copy paper. This was a rush job, and I forced myself to concentrate on it completely. Any moment now, I knew I'd be answering questions; that meant I should ask as many as possible first.

"Sure you don't mind talking, darling?"

"Not unless Miss Carter minds listening."

I gave Daphne's shoulder a reassuring pat. She still quivered, a little, but seemed able to take it when she sat down between my wife and me, still hugging Ray's briefcase.

"Help him all you can, Mrs. Jordan. He has a story to write."

"So I gathered, when he left without saying goodbye."

"This is a moment for facts, Trudy," I murmured, "not editorial comment."

"I didn't see it happen, if that's what you mean. No one did. Dr. Piccari just came staggering up the road with his clothes torn. Then they grabbed his father—"

"Start at the beginning, and keep it chronological," I said.

"What's 'beginning' for you, Jack? Were you still here when Mr. Ray arrived?"

"Just leaving to pick up Daphne."

"You should have stayed a little longer. Things got very interesting, right after he put in an appearance."

"Not really," I said.

"No one seems to remember just when Mr. Ray arrived, but he was right here in this bar a half hour ago. I saw him myself when he came in. He was with Kirby III, talking and laughing. At least, Mr.

Ray sat down by himself and started him, right there in the entrance, Mr. Ray sat down by himself, and started eating pretzels. One drink was all he'd have time for, he said.

"Naturally, there was a big crowd around him right away. Mr. Ray was talking and joking with everybody. Of course, some of the people didn't like it much—Mr. Ray crashing the party, I mean. Kirby III seemed to like it less than anybody, except maybe Dr. Piccari.

"The two of them kept Miss Cummings out on the floor every minute, just so she wouldn't learn what was going on in here. They even started rounding up a party to go on to some Minorcan restaurant. That's when Miss Cummings said she'd just have a stirrup cup before she'd leave the Patio—went into the bar—and found out what she was missing. Next thing we knew, Mr. Ray was dancing with her—"

"That's entertaining the press with a vengeance."

HOW am I going to get things straight, if you interrupt me?" said Trudy. "They say Miss Cummings asked him to dance, and not vice versa. Apparently, Dr. Piccari didn't realize that at the time. He'd been out on the driveway, seeing about automobiles for this little junket they'd been planning. When he came in, there Miss Cummings was, cheek-to-cheek with that pale creature, dancing like mad.

"Dr. Piccari didn't pause one second. Just made a dive for Mr. Ray's collar, and pulled him outside. Of course, the place was in an uproar right away. Kirby III clucking at everyone like a big fat hen, and Miss Cummings laughing and laughing, and saying how funny it was, for Joe to be breaking cameras for a change.

"By that time, even her friends were saying she had had one stirrup cup too many. Anyhow, they got her outside fast and into a car, before things really began to happen.

"Most of the men followed the doctor and Mr. Ray outside. So did a lot of the ladies, if you must know. I mean, we all peeked, as discreetly as we could. They were standing quite a ways down that blue-flagged walk, expressing their opinion of each other.

"Of course, we couldn't hear it *all*—but Dr. Piccari kept insisting that Mr. Ray leave at once. Mr. Ray said he'd be a you-know-what if he'd stir a step until a certain person called for him in a car—"

"Did he mention that person's name?"

"He said that Dr. Piccari knew well enough what person he was talking about, and that the doctor was a triple-dash so-and-so to keep up the Sir Galahad act any longer. Then he gave Dr. Piccari a punch that sent him rolling in the flower bed, and started back for the dance floor.

"Some of the men wanted to close in on the battle, then and there. But Dr. Piccari was on his feet right away, grabbed Mr. Ray around the middle like an empty gunny sack, and carried him off into the dark, bodily.

"Dr. Piccari said afterward that he meant to take Mr. Ray right out to the main highway, where he could thrash him in peace, and keep on thrashing him until he promised to get out and stay out. But he was seeing so much red at the time, he blundered into a path that leads off into the palmettoes—a kind of shortcut that goes to the golf course. All it did was bring him out to the driveway again, just this side of the gateposts.

"Everyone whooped and yelled and thought it was wonderful. Even the men who had started to close in before admitted that Dr. Piccari should be allowed to get that punch back—with interest.

"Well—

"Then they decided they'd better see how it was going, and set off after them. Someone who knew the geography of the place led the way down the road. Others—who had drunk too much to care about geography—just ran along the path the doctor had taken, and got their shins cut in the scrub.

"**WE ALL** heard Mr. Ray and the doctor grunting and cursing and hitting each other. Then we saw them, at the bend in the road, just this side of the gateposts. Apparently, the doctor had stumbled somewhere along the path, chased Mr. Ray right out to the road, and resumed the fight there. We all saw Mr. Ray come reeling down the road toward us in the moonlight. Maybe he came a dozen paces before he fell—with the doctor right after him.

"He swears that someone hit Mr. Ray on the temple just at that moment, and dropped him in his tracks. Anyhow, there he was, just as you saw him. Lying on his face, with a broken skull, and everyone crowding 'round to see. Except Miss Ames, who fainted.

"The doctor was standing over the body with blood on his face and his coat-sleeve ripped. Then those other people, who had come out by way of the path came running up, dragging old Mr. Piccari along by the collar—

"Old Mr. Piccari said he had arrived in his car. You know, Jack, the touring car he hired for us in Jacksonville? It was parked a little ways up the Dixie Highway with its lights out. Old Mr. Piccari showed them where it was, quite peacefully, after they'd grabbed him. He said he'd told the driver to stop and had come ahead on foot to see how Mr. Ray was making out at the party."

"Who was the driver?"

"Why, Jack, you must remember him. The same man who flew down with us—that big-jawed Italian with the funny nickname. He had a gun, too. Old Mr. Piccari had to speak very strongly to keep him from using it—"

I held up an inquiring hand for silence. "Please, darling—did they arrest Pud too?"

"They arrested all three of them. The Chief of Police was just making the doctor and his father walk over the ground when you arrived. Mr. Piccari's chauffeur didn't have any ground to walk over, so they kept *him* in a police car."

"Are they being questioned now?"

"No. You got here too late for that."

"Then why did they walk them back to the Patio just now?"

"To get them away from the crowd, and whisk them into that police car along with Mr. Piccari's chauffeur. If you ask me, they're all on their way to jail by now."

"Don't tell me what to ask you, darling; I've enough ideas of my own."

I kept those ideas to myself, however. Eddie Barnes had just put his head into the bar. "Careful," I said. "Everything you discuss around here seems to find its way into print."

"So that's where you've been, Jordan? Don't you know the Chief wants to see us both?" He looked doubtfully from Daphne to Trudy. "Wasn't one of these ladies in that red roadster, when you drove out to Alcazar Field?"

"Mr. Ray's secretary—can you guess which is which?"

"The Chief wants her too. Are you coming?"

"Of course we're coming. I've an edition to catch."

"Wait," said Daphne, faintly. She went behind the bar without another word and poured a whisky for each of us. Or maybe it was rum—I wasn't tasting at the moment. We drank it down at a toss, without toasts. Then we followed Eddie across the dance floor.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SATURDAY EVENING: 11:00

TRUDY stayed right with us to the door marked *Manager Private*. They were still working on people inside; a nervous young cop made us wait our turn. When they did open up for us, the Chief just smiled at Trudy, and sent her out to join the others in the lobby. I gathered that my wife had already told the law what she knew—and more.

I'd expected everything from a sweat-box to a backwoods third degree. All the Chief did was wave Eddie Barnes' nervous

sputter into silence, ease Daphne and her briefcase into the one armchair that cubby-hole boasted, and hand out cigarettes.

"Seems you and Eddie drove in here mighty sudden a few minutes ago, Mr. Jordan. Course, I wouldn't expect him to make sense at this late date. Suppose you try to pinch-hit for him."

After I'd recounted my moves that evening, play-by-play, he nodded to Daphne, who told her side with commendable self-restraint.

"Don't forget to explain why Mr. Ray wanted you to leave all the lights burning," I said.

"He didn't tell me why."

"The Chief might also like to know what message you delivered at the Lakes this noon—and to whom."

She threw me a veiled look. "If it's of any real interest—Mr. Ray had had two messages from Kirby Lake III, requesting a meeting. This morning, right after Jack interviewed him, he sent me out to the Lakes to say he'd be glad to talk to Kirby III at nine tonight. He left it up to Kirby III to name the rendezvous. Kirby III chose the Menendez Bar, in West Augustine." She turned to me. "Any more suggestions?"

"Not at the moment."

Willis looked up from his own scratch-pad. "Before we leave that aspect of the case, I've sent for Mr. Kirby already. Seems he went home just before the—the fracas. Strange behavior for a host at his own party." He turned to me. "Do I understand that you kept Mr. Ray's roadster, just to call for Miss Carter at ninety-three?"

"You also know why, Chief. I might add that your watchdogs were quite efficient."

"Maybe they were watching the wrong road," said Willis. His eyes were on the ceiling when he spoke, but I knew better than to speak while he was thinking aloud. "Weren't you a little surprised, Miss Carter, when you saw Jordan under the wheel, instead of your mechanic from the garage?"

"Only for a moment," said Daphne. "You see, Jack is still working for the *Star*. He thought it was another chance to ask a few questions. That's the one temptation he can't resist."

"Your Mr. Barnes was parked at the landing field for the same purpose," I put in quickly.

"How about it, Eddie?"

"Someone from the *Bulletin* had to see if a plane was going to stop there," said Barnes.

"Answer the gentleman, please."

"All right, there *were* a couple of people I wanted to clear up."

"No fooling, Eddie? Judging by that story you ran tonight, there's nothing about Mr. Ray and his affairs you didn't know."

"And now we're discussing the *Bulletin*," I said, "what's the genesis of that story, anyhow?"

Barnes looked at me defiantly. "Chief Willis is running this inquiry, not you."

"I'll ask the question myself," said Willis, easily. "Wasn't it a pretty hot story for the *Bulletin* to print, unless you could verify it?"

"YOU don't think we'd put out an extra on a rumor, do you? I went out to the Island this morning with Mr. Green's party. Mr. Green had made a business appointment with Ray, and was kind enough to ask me to come along. Ray let down the bridge for us, and took us all into the cottage at once."

Eddie was getting more belligerent by the moment. "Every word I printed was a direct quotation. Mr. Green will back me up on that. So will his wife and Mark Evans."

"How come you didn't mention in your story that Mr. Green was here on business?"

"Because it didn't have any bearing on the main point, as far as I could see."

"Facts, Eddie, are often more important than our finite brains can realize," I said.

"All right, they didn't tell me what the

business was about. I was asked to step outside while the four of them went into a huddle." Eddie Barnes subsided gloomily. "Besides, Mr. Green asked me, as a personal favor, not to play him up in the story."

"Don't tell me you're on two payrolls. Barnes?" I said.

But Chief Willis had taken the inquiry back into his own hands. "Those movie people are waiting their turn," he said. "I don't mind if they wait awhile longer, either. In fact, I've got the rest of the night to clean up Mr. Ray's business appointments today—those he kept, and otherwise."

"Accept my apologies, Chief," I said. "Guess I was playing around in a blind alley all my own."

"Nothing to be sorry for. I guess a New York newspaperman has as much right to all the facts as Eddie. Specially one who's by way of being a colleague of—what's lying out there on the road. . . . By the way, Jordan, do you want a look?"

"No, Chief, but I would like your version of what happened." After that last remark of his, I figured it was as good a time to ask as any.

"Thirty people have told me they saw Ray knock Dr. Piccari down just outside this building. The same witnesses saw the doctor give Ray a football tackle and carry him off into the dark. After that, there's a hiatus of anywhere from one to four minutes. Pick your witness for the timing."

"Someone heard punches being traded down the road. Someone's curiosity got the better of him, and the whole pack, drunk and sober, started out to look."

I got to my feet sharply. "Did anyone actually *see* those punches being traded?"

"No one'll swear to it, so far. Twenty at least will swear they heard fighting on the road. The whole crowd insists they saw Ray reel into the moonlight, with the doctor right after him, and go down with a fractured skull. Dr. Piccari claims the final blow came from someone else."

"And I suppose *you* connect that final blow with Dr. Piccari's father?"

"Any good reason why I shouldn't?"

HE HAD lowered his voice instinctively when speaking of Old Joe, like a small boy who'd just held up Jesse James with his pop-gun. I slumped into my own chair, beginning to feel almost as tired as I must have looked. Just the same, I was respecting that Chief more by the minute.

"Could I have Old Joe's story, just for the record?"

"Old Mr. Piccari says he went over to the Island this morning to talk business with Mr. Ray—along with most of our winter colony. Only *he* was quite frank about the nature of that business, leaving out details until he'd seen a lawyer.

"Apparently, Ray had threatened to cast certain slurs on the Piccari name," the chief continued, smiling at his own melodrama. "Old Mr. Piccari said his son was afraid those slurs might affect his future prospects, to say nothing of Mr. Piccari's own liberty. So he solved the dilemma by going directly to Ray and making a proposition.

"Not just an or-else, either. I'm afraid Ray hadn't told Eddie here the whole story. We know now that he was anxious to leave St. Augustine as quickly and as secretly as he could. Piccari agreed to make that easy for him, if Ray would agree to stop slurring.

"They arranged to meet at the Municipal Pier at eight-thirty sharp. Ray was to row over from the island with the tide. Piccari was to park with his driver, and be ready to hurry Ray to Jacksonville, in time to catch the plane north.

"Ray stepped out of that rowboat on the dot. Piccari saw him coming and sent his chauffeur down to give him a hand with what little luggage he had.

"The first hitch developed immediately, when Ray insisted on driving to the Menendez Bar—apparently to keep the date with Mr. Kirby Lake that this young

lady has just mentioned. They were at least a half-hour early, and Piccari says Ray slugged several whiskies down while they waited.

"Everyone in the bar was talking about the big party at the Patio, and after the fifth or sixth slug, Ray decided to go out there for his business talk with Mr. Kirby. What's more, he called a taxi to take him, declining to drive up to the night club in his present company. When he left the Menendez Bar, he instructed Piccari to follow in twenty minutes, and wait for him, just outside.

"This joins up with what you saw, Jordan. In fact, we could easily believe most of the story to that point, including Ray's determination to stay with the party until Piccari turned up to take him on to Jacksonville.

"From that point on, of course, we're up a tree. Piccari claims he drove up on schedule—heard whoops from the Patio grounds—told his chauffeur to park just outside—came up the road on foot for a little private checkup—and stumbled on the body.

"Speaking from my point of view, Mr. Jordan, I can't help thinking he walked up that road just in time to see his son taking a beating, and mixed in on his own."

I nodded.

"Of course, that's quite reasonable," I said. "So's Old Joe's story, including the finale."

"Not to me. In the first place, why would he trust the promise of a man like Ray?"

"Why indeed?" I said:

"Old Joe had ways of making people keep promises, even people like Ray. All he had to do was get to Ray and let him see he meant business."

"Put it the other way 'round. Why should a man like Ray make a deal with Piccari?"

That, I decided, was easy.

"Because he's juggled dynamite like that all his life. Ray happens to be the kind of character who'd always feel safer with an outlaw than a cop—"

I BROKE off, as Willis looked up again at the ceiling. He was still listening, with perfect politeness, but I could see it wasn't registering. After all, there are some things you can never explain to the law. Such as the fact that there are stronger arms in this country, and have been, ever since we took it away from the Apaches.

Of course, it was possible—just barely possible—that Clifford didn't know as much about the life and times of Giuseppe Piccari as I did. Or again, maybe he didn't want to admit certain things—even to himself.

I let that pass, naturally.

"Which are you charging with the crime," I asked. "Father, son, or both?"

Willis came back from the ceiling; smiled politely and shook his head.

"You'll have to ask the judge about that tomorrow, Mr. Jordan. Both Piccaris and that chauffeur stay in jail until morning, I can tell you that. And no one sees a lawyer before this town has slept on it, either."

"Could I talk to them for a few minutes now?"

Willis smiled. "You know better than that."

"I've got to call my editor in New York within the hour. I want my facts complete."

"Have I held out any, so far?"

Maybe he had, but I wasn't mentioning that possibility. It would have done a lot of no good.

"My apologies all over again, Chief. Just clear up one more point for me—that lethal blow. You say Ray died of a fractured skull. How does that tie up with a fist-fight on soft ground?"

"It doesn't. Whoever killed Mr. Ray smacked him just once, behind the ear—with a golf club. A niblick, with the handle broken off short. It was picked up on the road near the body."

"By whom?"

Willis held out for a second or two—building up suspense maybe.

"By Anita Ames, that movie star. Course, she flung it away when she saw what it had been used for."

"No wonder she fainted on the spot," I muttered. "May I see that club, just for the record?"

The Chief shrugged, then gave me a quick look.

"Not without going outside. We put it beside the body until the coroner gets here."

I decided to let that drop—for the moment, anyway.

"Are you hanging the club on the Piccaris, too?"

"I said it had a broken handle, didn't I? That made it short enough to go under anyone's coat."

"Then anyone else at the party could have hit Ray with it."

The Chief looked doubtful.

"Provided anyone could have gotten close enough. The fight took place in the middle of a moonlit road, remember that. Remember too that those drunks came out to investigate, in a group. Suppose one of them had run on ahead with the intention of mixing in. Wouldn't the others have noticed, long before he got to the road—let alone within striking distance?"

That appeared to be the works. I might have gone on talking that way longer—but what was the use?

I got up as casually as I could, and put out my cigarette in Daphne's ash-tray. "It looks like a case, Chief, I'll admit that."

"If you want to get to a telephone, Mr. Jordan, I'll excuse you for the moment."

"Maybe you won't—after this," I cried, snatching the briefcase from Daphne's lap, and jumping across the room with it, away from all of them.

There was lots of sealing-wax on the lock, but no key had been turned. I'd disgorged the contents on the desk before any of them could stop me. Larry Ray's mystery diary—second draft. Five hundred-odd sheets of blank copy paper, no more.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Boom Goes The Weasel

"Keep your eye on the ball, honey," the girl said sweetly



By **ROBERT NEAL LEATH**

Author of "Hell Child," "Karpen the Jew," etc.

Be good, fall guy, and let who will be clever. That's the surest way to get the brush-off from a Hollywood studio gateman. Then Danny thought of a new angle, and the results were strictly sensational

DANNY cautiously scouted the elaborate lobby. Nobody here except the reception clerk. He started across and then suddenly the lobby also contained the manager.

"Er—Mr. Martin!"

Danny knew that tone. Sort of surprised-like. Purry. As though the meeting was accidental. It didn't fool Danny a bit. The manager was an immaculate little man, but with his silken voice went a pair of Frigidaire eyes.

"Er—Mr. Davis," Danny said. "Good morning."

"I suggest Tuesday," Davis purred.

Danny reddened. He had a farm-boy face, fresh not long ago but now somehow pulled out of focus by strange lines and readjusted planes of sophistication. With a wild impulse he wanted to slap Davis down. Instead he choked.

"Yes, indeed. Tuesday!" Davis said.

In Hollywood they don't wait for the rent. . . .

Danny went on out. A town car was waiting—new, sleek, and long.

"Hello, Herbert," Danny said to the chauffeur.

Herbert touched his cap to Danny all right. Got the door smartly open. Accepted Danny's weekend kit and his big, sloppy, expensive bag of golf clubs. But Herbert was a burly ape and he'd always worked for his living. First at prize fighting—now this. They started.

Herbert said over his shoulder, "Jojo's got a hangover. He won't play but nine holes, and them not till after lunch. Tough, huh?"

A faint but flat and amused contempt in his voice.

"Is it?" Danny said, suddenly on edge.

"Maybe you could double the bets," Herbert said, "or else take all nine holes instead of the usual seven."

Danny felt his hands gripping his own legs like talons.

"Sofny boy," he said in an even way, "are you getting cute?"

"Oh, no!" Herbert sounded elaborately innocent and aggrieved. "No, *sir*!"

Jojo owned the car. Danny sank back. He felt sick inside, and crawly and wild. Some other time, perhaps, he could return and settle with Herbert. Settle with all the separate rats who had spent the last three years kicking Danny around. But not today. Today Hollywood had him licked. Herbert knew it, and so did everybody else. Today Danny had to get some dough. He was down. But not quite out. That was the part Hollywood did *not* know. Danny had the letter right in his hip pocket. He took it out and read it again. His Dad wanted him to come home. And Danny was going to do it. Take a sneak and a fade. All he needed was railroad fare.

TO REACH Jojo Gamma's place you go up Benedict, past Lloyd's and Laemmle's, and turn left across a bridge and between two huge stone gateposts which are covered with red roses.

Inside, there is beauty—expensive beauty. Acres of lawn and flowers and oranges. Jojo has a private nine-hole golf course. He has little guest houses scattered here and there, and his own house sprawled in sunlight on top of the highest of his rolling

hills. He has stables and a winery and a teletype machine which is connected with his office at Supreme Productions, but no telephone.

He has one full acre of exquisite hybrid carnations, ten thousand books in his library, plenty of underwear, and fried breast of chicken for breakfast every morning. He is almost always desperately lonely, although Jojo's place continuously fills with people.

The people think Jojo is a genius because occasionally they can understand what he is thinking about; they feel positively he is a great genius because he makes so much money; and they know he is a regular guy because at forty he has been married five times.

Danny had his usual room. A small one, toward the back of the manor. He was glad to see it again. Nearly two months, since the last time. He was slipping. No, he had already and definitely slipped. Probably Jojo was tired of golf. Or tired of him, Danny.

Danny glanced at his watch. Ten o'clock in the morning. The gang, the real Saturday mob, wouldn't start arriving before one. Morosely Danny shed his clothes, climbed into brief trunks. . . . He felt a vague but sharp resentment when he noticed the girl.

She wore olive oil and Hollywood sunglasses with startling white rims and a white silk-and-rubber bathing suit which left her little short of naked.

She'd been lying full length in the grass beside the pool with her eyes closed, and burning and sweating. But she must have heard the soft slap of Danny's *guarachas* because she raised herself on elbows, holding the loosened top of her bathing suit up, and took her glasses off.

There was a towel spread behind her, where her head had rested, and Danny saw she had brown hair with golden streaks in it, bleached that way by the sun. Hair bobbed long and turned under at the ends and very clean and brushed and sophisticated. She had incredibly long eyelashes and the customary vivid lip-

stick. He couldn't guess her age accurately. Maybe twenty-six, maybe eighteen. She looked exactly like at least two hundred other luscious, on-the-make girls Danny had met in the past three years.

He tested the water with one foot and said hello at her. She didn't reply at once, inspecting his trim hard wedge of build.

Then: "Who *are* you?" she demanded brightly.

They're always bright, and pert, and a trifle insolent, meeting new men. Especially men they meet on producer's estates. Danny told her.

"Oh," she said.

There was recognition in it—and a little disappointment. Sure. Why be polite to Danny Martin? At once Danny's fury was back again. But he couldn't explode it now. Not today.

"Danny Martin . . ."

She nodded, remembering as they always did. His name had been in the papers, the columns, often enough, God knew. Even in Winchell's.

"You can sometimes hit a golf ball more accurately than anybody in the world," she was saying, inwardly amused. "You break the record on nearly every course you play. You lick all the professionals. Provided you're not in a tournament. You blow up in tournaments. You may sit down here beside me, Danny Martin," she pertly added, "if you must."

Well, a guy can take just so much. Then perhaps some more. But meantime he might stand above a girl and snap his lighted cigarette viciously at her bare long legs.

Which Danny did.

As she gave an outraged yelp of pain, he took two steps to the pool and dived.

"DON'T waste your time, honey," Mildred said. Mildred looked young, too. But not so young as Celia. Mildred was pulling a comb through her tawny permanent.

"Were you watching me from the window?" Celia said.

Mildred ignored that. She had cream all over her famous face. She had wham

and plenty of it. She said pleasantly now, "Danny Martin's a cheap chiseler. And our plans for you do not include—"

"I know," Celia said dully.

She went into the bathroom and peeled her suit off and took a warm shower. Sure she knew. She was supposed to grab somebody important. With marriage, preferably, attached. But not necessarily marriage. A contract was just as good; perhaps better. Mildred was arranging everything, giving her every chance, really. Suddenly Celia was frightened—panic-stricken.

"Mildred!" She used the name, even yet, with difficulty.

"What, honey?"

"Are we broke?"

They couldn't be broke, actually. Six years ago Mildred had paid tax on nearly four hundred thousand dollars. Poverty was inconceivable. And yet . . .

Why had they sold the house, the cars—nearly everything—before that last futile jaunt to England? Why had they come back to a mere apartment? It was two years since Mildred's last picture and last husband. And Mildred had no sense. Even Celia could see that Mildred was a brainless, tricky, open-handed, lovable fool.

"What a question!" Mildred's laughter was silver chimes and tinkling crystal. "Mildred Marr broke! Take an aspirin, honey, and a nap. The sun must have made you feverish."

"B-but—"

Mildred came about, on the bench in front of the frilled French dressing table. Her legs, in their sheer stockings, were long and excellent.

"But what?"

"Mr. Gamma is between wives. We've been here three days. Living here unchaperoned. At the convent the sisters told me—"

Again Mildred's silvery laughter interrupted her. Mildred seemed extraordinarily amused. Her eyes sparkled and were big. Celia was more than a little awed. Mildred could do that to her and always had been able to.

"Jojo's a pal, honey," she explained

patiently. "From a long time back. He wanted us, so we came. Theater people are like that."

But Celia's heart was knocking. She knew something was not right.

"And we belong to the theater, don't we?" she asked steadily. "For always. We've got to have the best, and the most expensive, of everything."

Suddenly Mildred seemed ready to cry. An act, perhaps, but Mildred's nerves must have been extraordinarily taut.

"Haven't I been good to you, honey?"

"I know," Celia said. "It's all right."

SHE meant she knew what was expected of her. Grabbing Jojo Gamma. Chiseling off Jojo the rest of their lives. First life was simple, then mysterious, then confusing and fast, and at last life was hysterical, the way it was now.

These were the things Celia especially remembered, the dear things of childhood:

The old white shining house where she'd lived so happily with Amy and Charles. The respectable brass plate beside the door: *Charles Dorrance, M.D.* New Hampshire it was, a village—though not, Celia was given to understand, her birthplace. They'd moved here when she was two, from that New York which was not among her early memories.

She did remember the hints of spring-time; snow still melting in the forests, but the maple sap beginning to run; the fine smells, and farmers boiling maple sap down in the sugar sheds, letting her drink the sap sometimes. She remembered the good steamy smell of the cows, and the trips back to the village after Charles had wrapped her again in a bison skin beside him in the flivver sedan and then fought the slush all the way, and the view of the church after they'd arrived. Such a little church it had been, but with such an excellent sky-pointing steeple, very important there at the end of the village common, and the whole church so shiny white with uncounted coats of God-fearing paint.

Then school. And the other children

whispering, pointing, making friends. The exciting, confused information that the glamorous and perfumed lady who descended upon Amy and Charles and Celia at least once a year was not only Celia's big sister, but the famous film star Mildred Marr. With a strange, saturnine new husband nearly every visit.

Then, suddenly, when Celia was twelve, Mildred had come and taken her. She remembered clearly the *Ile de France* in the days of its greatest glory—the flunkies, the food straight out of the *Arabian Nights*, the magnificent suite. (But Celia, for vague reasons, was not allowed to leave it and roam the boat.)

Then there was the docking, the strange French train—and Paris. (But only a glimpse of Paris, as the taxi hooted and scooted importantly across.) Finally, the convent. Years and years of blue-gray uniform dresses; of soap and books and little-girl brawls, of trips to museums, the nuns always shepherding and watching. She recalled the time when Mildred had come with an unlovely red nose, to tell her that both Charles and Amy had been killed by that funny little train, at home.

Abruptly the convent was over, too. Mildred had made a second descent into her life, this time to pluck Celia away from the sisters. At first it had been exciting and marvelous. The grand hotels, the spas, the traveling and cafes. Vienna and Venice. Perfume, and incredible evening dresses. And through everything and over everything the knowledge of excitement.

Then the first time she'd seen Mildred tight on champagne, letting that quiet dark man kiss and paw her in the shadows of a London balcony, everything had changed.

London. Mildred wasn't working very much. She did one picture and went back to the Continent. Returned for one picture more. They were spending huge sums of money. Mildred always had. Everything was so very gay. Then the decision: a return to Hollywood—in the grand manner. Almost at once they were on a boat, the *Queen Mary*, then a plane. Mildred's rush had been breathless that trip. She couldn't

make herself realize she was thoroughly washed up. Or could she?

CELIA put on her new silk dirndl, the one which had no buttons below the waist and showed her legs and the matching pants. She brushed her hair while Mildred dressed. Suddenly she hated Mildred with all her heart—Mildred's eye-shadow and lotions, her men and drinking and everything about her. They went down to lunch.

Most of the gang had arrived now. Lunch was rarebit, champagne, root beer, rye toast, green onions, iced grapefruit, baked pork chops, scrambled eggs, and raw unpeeled tomatoes. All off a buffet. There was straight Scotch for those who insisted, but no soda. Danny began to fill a plate.

"Danny," Jojo said beside him, "turn around and get presented to Celia Marr. Mildred Marr's kid sister."

Of course Danny had turned. He bowed. "I know the little witch," he said. "I burned her with a cigarette. I hope it hurt."

"Two blisters. One on each leg," Celia said viciously. "You'll pay, mister."

Jojo looked from one to the other. From the strangely sophisticated farm-boy face to the girl's hot brown eyes. Jojo was handsome, nervous; he seldom slept well; his eyes were brilliant. He ran his tongue between his lips.

"You've met each other," he observed. "But look. Danny, I'm introducing you all over again. Understand?"

"Sure," Danny said. He did, too. Because in Jojo Gamma's house you could go for any girl you saw, except one. The one Jojo personally brought up. That one was Jojo's new one, or would be. Danny gave a wide grin—personality plus. But then he spoiled it. He said: "The same old oil, eh? The same old gag! Everybody in the world knows she's your mother!" . . .

Somehow Celia got away. Physically, she walked. But spiritually, she crawled. Of course Danny Martin had spoken the truth. Celia had guessed it, been sure, a long time. She was trembling all over. The

big mirror in the bathroom she shared with Mildred showed two red spots on her cheeks. I hate him! she thought. Hate him, hate him, hate him! Abruptly she knew how she might get even.

THREE years ago, Sid Powers of National Supertone had known what he was doing, all right. Forty-eight college men—one from each state—for the movies. It meant publicity, enormous publicity, at comparatively small cost. Each college man got a three-months' contract, plus a one-way ticket to Hollywood. All forty-eight college men turned out that dumb.

For Sid Powers, as publicity chief of National Supertone, dealt in golden dreams. Than which nothing on the face of the globe is easier to sell, particularly when you seem to be not selling the dreams but giving them away, with railroad tickets and three months of money as bonus.

Sid had known the figures. Known that only by a miracle would even one of his forty-eight suckers make the grade. But why worry about that? Why worry that forty-eight fresh kids would taste their first bitter defeat, and perhaps remain bitter and dissatisfied the rest of their lives, unable ever again to grasp the realities of thirty-dollar jobs in department stores, assembly plants, dairies, dental laboratories—after Hollywood's magic? Nuts! If you can't deliver you've got to take it, and if you can't take it—the hell with you!

Thus Sid Powers' philosophy. And so Danny Martin had come down from Oregon Agricultural College.

Sid Powers had been putting over a picture—*College Capers*

FEATURING DANNY MARTIN—OREGON'S
OWN—IN HIS FILM DEBUT!

That had been the way the advertisements read. Different names on the advertisements, in each state.

College Capers had gone over with a bang, on curiosity appeal. The picture itself was terrible. But there were still forty-eight contracts with three-month

options, all of which definitely were not taken up. Forty-eight golden dreams, broken into corroded fragments of brass. Sid Powers said he was terribly sorry; that is, he said this whenever he was privately cornered by one of the forty-eight. Not for publication.

Danny's contract expired with the rest. But Danny didn't worry. His dream was more golden than ever. Because, meantime, he had got his break.

It had happened at Riviera. Somebody—an assistant cameraman—had suggested golf. Danny never played, but he accepted the invitation because he figured he might meet some important people, accidental-like and in a social way. Social ways are more important than just meeting people. He explained he'd never played before. Explained it modestly, and afraid. But then he whacked out the low score of his first foursome—a score so very low, indeed, that the pro flatly refused to believe Danny was new.

But there is nothing to golf, really, except an ability to feel how the head of of the club is swinging, and to bring the clubhead down and let it strike the ball at a specific point, with a specific and planned velocity.

And at this Danny, it immediately became apparent, was miraculous. Perhaps it was due to his training with an ax. Felling trees for the new corral, or chopping wood for the stove, you've got to keep your eye on the point you want to hit, else you won't hit it; and maybe you'll chop your foot off, instead. The weight of the ax-head is a definite thing which you must control, because if you don't the penalty is not a lost golf stroke or two, but maybe a wooden leg.

ANYWAY, Danny could play golf. Not well, but spectacularly. Good golfers hit straight and stay out of trouble. Danny could hit straight, but only, it seemed, after he'd gotten in trouble first. Then came the miracles.

There was, for example, the time Danny was playing Girard with Weissmuller and

MacAdam and sliced his drive on the narrow tricky seventeenth. Plunk!—into the bottom of the barranca. But Danny stamped round till he found his ball and smacked it out of eight matted inches of wild barley, crazily through a crotch of a tree and up and up; and it hit the flag, ran down the pole and wedged itself in the cup for an eagle two. There was the famous Screwball Tournament at Lakeside, when every lie had to be played regardless of impossibility. A bar had been set up in the middle of the fifth fairway in the shape of a temporary shed, and of course Danny's ball alighted inside the shed. But Danny hit it anyway, caromed it off a wall, and made the green. Then there was Pebble Beach, two feet of water, and . . .

But you get the idea. Legends began to cluster round Danny's name. Awestruck citizenry followed him about, to see what nutty impossibility would happen next. And of course the big shots of Hollywood had taken him up by this time, for the same reason.

To Danny's undoing. He had to eat. Of course the big shots came through with jobs. Jojo Gamma, and Schenck; and Selznick, Zanuck, Berman. They all tried him at all sorts of jobs. But Danny simply couldn't act, or write. Nor had he any of the highly specialized trainings and abilities required in the technical departments. He had no sense of plot or drama which might have fitted him into direction or cutting or reading.

He was just what he looked like—a trim farm boy who was lost from his farm.

It became much cheaper for the big shots to pay Danny's way by playing him for money. Which became tiresome. Because legends, notoriously, require constant shining, constant replacement with bigger and better legends. Danny spectacularly but unofficially broke several course records. Sports writers, hypnotized by watching some of the Martin miracles, started calling him the greatest golf phenomenon since Montague. They started egging him on to prove it by grabbing some titles. And

titles really should have been the next step in Danny's progress. The only way he could keep his legends new.

So Danny had tried. Give him credit for that. But he couldn't deliver. In the strain, the savage tension of tournament play, his miracles refused to happen. His was not the champion's heart, his not the killer's blood. He had not been made for fighting other men. There are, thank God, many Dannys in this world.

But, since he still had to eat, at this point Danny Martin had become a first-class heel.

ON THE first tee, Jojo said: "Twenty bucks a hole?" Danny looked inquiringly at the other two members of the foursome.

Max Allen was a chunky short man, a dress designer who smoked cigars incessantly. He said, "Make it fifty."

"Suits me," said Dr. Stein, who also was short, but young and bull-necked strong as well. He was the director who had turned out five box-office smashes, one after the other—*Rabbits Always Run* being the last.

Danny's pulse raced. Fifty times nine times three. Taking every hole he stood to win thirteen hundred and fifty dollars.

"We want two strokes a hole each, handicap," Jojo said.

Danny screamed. "Not even for my old grandmother!"

"Okay, okay," Max Allen said. "One stroke per hole."

Danny compromised. He gave them six strokes on nine holes—one stroke on each hole except the three par-threes. Jojo's course paralleled and criss-crossed a barranca. The first hole was three hundred yards of open fairway, plus another hundred and fifty pitching across the ditch to the green.

Dr. Stein teed a new ball and smacked it. He got nearly two-fifty on that one. Max Allen stepped up and topped his drive but it jumped out of the rough. Jojo hit, but that was all; he would need a fine spoon to make the green. Danny felt quite relaxed. He had his eyes on the ball and the

club head was coming through to the impact and—

"Here I am," a cool voice said. A female voice. And there was that awful, indefinite sound of a ball struck but not struck fairly. There was that moment when you dare not lift your head, but you know the ball has gone haywire.

Danny looked up. He saw the result of a toe-end slice—his ball making nearly a right-angle curve in the air, hitting the turf, bounding merrily, taking a dive, smacking into the exact middle of the ditch, half burying itself in sand.

"Oo-ooh!" said Celia Marr, aghast. "I'm so sorry. Perhaps I shouldn't have spoken just then."

"Perhaps," Danny said.

She had cost him one hundred and fifty dollars, at least.

"May I walk around with youse guys?" Celia said.

Jojo laughed. "Positively," he said.

Danny's caddy took his clubs into the ditch. Danny studied the situation. Between his lie and the hole was a row of trees, Italian cypresses, along the top of the barranca. Danny thought that with luck and a terrific hit he might take a four-iron and clear the trees and light on the green. He tried it.

His ball rose well, but not quite well enough. There was a sickening thud. Distantly the ball dropped, lazily, from branch to branch. When Danny reached it he found it resting innocently against the actual trunk, grinning at him. He poked into the tree and got the ball out and put it in his pocket.

The second hole was an easy three par, with one trap in front and one on either side, which promptly engulfed Max Allen and Jojo. Dr. Stein took his six-iron and topped his ball, but it went whizzing straight out, bounded once, reached the lip of the front trap, seemed to gather itself and thumb its nose, and leaped over. Danny put his own ball easily on the green, hole-high, about four feet from the cup.

"Good," said Celia.

Max Allen and Jojo managed to blast out of the sand, but it took them three strokes each. Dr. Stein was a nutty putter. He used only one hand. He seemed hardly to glance at the cup, then negligently slapped his ball and it rolled twenty yards and sank for a birdie two.

Celia said, "Now don't be nervous, Danny, honey. Just relax."

Danny was imperceptibly shaking. He lined his ball up and stroked it. The ball rolled straight for the cup but stopped on the lip. You could have blown it in with one sharp puff.

The green was very silent.

"You didn't hit it hard enough," Celia said brightly.

DANNY could have killed her. Her sun-streaked beautiful hair, he reflected, would look unusually fine dangling straight down—behind a broken neck. But he couldn't see her very well. The red film of rage. People were always writing about that film. Till now Danny had thought it was something writers made up.

But on the seventh fairway his vision cleared slightly—and his mind. He recognized that cold, tight feeling in his middle as knowledge that he had lost three hundred dollars—which he didn't have—and that he must win the next two holes to break even coming into the ninth; that he must win the ninth also if he was to grab even the minimum hundred and fifty dollar profit which would let him sneak out of Hollywood with his tail between his legs.

His seventh drive had been good. About two-sixty. A niblick ought to put him safely across the barranca again, and on the green. He accepted the niblick. But Celia stood behind him, clasping her hands, mockingly admiring him.

She cooed, "This isn't one of those baddy-baddy tournaments, honey. Just you take your time. And remember to look at the ball."

But it *was* a tournament. The most important Danny had ever played.

Danny swung. He missed the ball completely.

"Dear, dear," Celia mourned for him. "You peeked. You looked up, just before you tried to hit it. Try again, honey."

Blindly Danny tried again. The ball rose slightly, dribbled, then dived into the ditch.

Very calmly Danny turned. "Are you getting off this golf course—or do you get a club sunk in your skull?" he asked through his teeth.

"Well!" said Celia indignantly. "Well! And here I was, just trying to help!"

Her skirts swished. She was gone. Marching, her entrancing nose in the air, back toward Jojo's house.

The eighth was a terror. Short, but across an abyss. One hundred and eighty yards of pure, unadulterated abyss. The green resembled the filled-in top of a volcano. If you came down on it from above, with back-spin, you were okay. But if you missed the green you were just plain out of luck. You were in the soup, practically for keeps. Number eight was an easy par-three if you hit it, and maybe a difficult twelve if you didn't.

Danny concentrated on his ball. Focused his eyes desperately, upon that rearmost point of the ball's surface where he wanted contact. Three hundred and fifty dollars minus. Even winning both this hole and the next, he'd stand fifty short. As from far away he heard the impact. Knew, numbly, before he'd lifted his head that he'd dubbed. Probably his ball would be lying in the wash—some eighty feet straight down from the green.

It was. It also was lying in the middle of a mesquite plant. Danny's spirit collapsed. But he jerked his spirit onto its feet again. That, however, didn't help his golf.

AFTER the ninth they climbed the hill toward the house. Danny had lost every hole. Celia was waiting at the top, on the grass of the first tee. She had a bucket of bottles of beer packed in ice. She even had a bottle opener.

The day was very hot. All the men were

slick with sweat. Celia looked entirely cool and relaxed and feminine.

Danny said, "Whose idea was this?" She didn't fool him, even a minute.

"Mama's," Celia said. Her glance stabbed him. Her nose went proudly into the air. She looked at Jojo. "Mama," Celia said distinctly, "believes that a girl to catch a man should cherish him, like. Sort of as a sample."

"So you're after Jojo?" Danny said with a harshness that startled even himself.

She kept on smiling. "Yes. Do you mind?"

"Not in the least!"

Jojo said sardonically, "Thanks."

Max Allen drank some beer. "How did we come out?"

Dr. Stein had been keeping score. He got it out. "Danny owes—"

"Three fifty," Danny said. "Settle for me, Jojo, will you? I—I'll need to write a check."

Jojo always was calm. He produced an untidy little lettuce-head of bills and paid off. But he also brought out his wallet and found a blank check in it and held the check out to Danny, together with a pencil.

Just that, without words.

He'd never done that before. Of course, Danny had almost never lost. But maybe Jojo was fed up. His reputation was very bad and inartistic about people who owed him money. His eyes were queer, somehow remote. Danny hesitated. But all of them were looking at him. Celia, especially. And he felt that infuriating farm-boy pinkness about to come into his face again. So he took the check in a hurry.

"What's the date?"

"August thirteenth."

Danny bore down on the pencil.

Jojo looked at the check after Danny had finished scribbling all over it, then put it away without saying anything.

"My, that's a lot to lose on a game," Celia said.

Wildly Danny wanted to slug her. To hurt her any way he could. He didn't think of any way at all till the dancing started that night.

OPPORTUNITY to dance was nothing unusual, because Jojo liked jam sessions. All the musicians Jojo used in his continuous super-colossal musicals had standing invitations to his home, and Jojo himself was pretty wacky with a trumpet. It was after the jam had been going a while, really swinging and hot, that Danny got his idea.

Celia was, he saw at once, a natural swing-time cat. She could no more help responding to the music than a hungry man could spurn a butter-smoking steak. Tonight she wore an evening dress of white cotton with a shortish, heavily and gaily embroidered skirt. She danced with anyone and everyone, her face flushed, eyes bright, her clean, sun-streaked hair flying. He saw the music had made her 'drunk in a way alcohol never could.

The little tramp, he thought viciously.

So he danced with her himself. Then took her outside, under a moon-dark palm, and kissed her. Hard. He'd kissed plenty of Hollywood tramps, and that was the way you did it. No nonsense.

From behind his trumpet Jojo had seen them slip away. Danny didn't care. His check was no good. He was finished—and savage. His mind, tormented with the problem of the rubber check, had recognized defeat. Jojo could, and undoubtedly would, make trouble. But, meantime, Jojo himself could be made to squirm. By chiseling in on Jojo's girl. Jojo's new, young, music-drunk, ambition-drunk girl. A kiss, that's all you needed. Wasn't she human? Sure she was!

But something was going wrong with that kiss. She smelled somehow like flowers, but also she had a definite little-girl smell, and her lips, astonishingly, were timid, honest, little-girl lips that seemed no more educated to kissing than a bunny-rabbit's.

Danny didn't believe it. An act, it was. Probably her thoroughly bad mother had given her lessons. He bent her head back and her lips relaxed; he felt her heart beating wildly against the thin linen of his polo shirt. She pushed him away and just stood there.

Just stood there, that is, except for starting to cry. Great tears started rolling down her cheeks and she did nothing about them. She just stood there in the moonlight with her hands clasped below her flat little-girl middle and let the tears go, while her eyes were big and fixed, scared-like, and just urgently fixed upon Danny Martin.

Danny was going to remember the look in those eyes for a long time—oh, a very, very long time.

"That was the first time," she whispered at last in a small voice, "in all my life—that I ever kissed back."

IT ALMOST got Danny. But not quite. Danny was tough. Hollywood had made him so. He grunted there under the moon and stars, within the seep of the swing-hot music. He grinned.

"You're actually trying to put that one over? Actually! That you've never really kissed before, honey?"

He leaned on that pretty heavily.

Maybe she heard the undertones. But her eyes stayed big. "Yes, Danny," she said quietly, in a very small and female voice.

And all of a sudden Danny Martin felt washed and clean again. The way he used to feel in Oregon, when he'd been a kid. His way opened up, and he knew what he had to do. Even though it meant never seeing her again. He grabbed her by one hand, and swiftly marched. Till he stood before Jojo and Jojo's swinging trumpet.

"Can I see you a minute?" Danny said.

"Sure."

Jojo led them into his huge library. Mel-low tiers of books reached to the ceiling. Self-respecting books. Maybe Danny would be that way, too.

He said, "That check of mine."

"Postdated to Monday," Jojo said.

That was right.

Danny said rapidly, "A postdated check is not a check in California but a promissory note, provided you can prove the

postdating. You can't chuck me in the can, Jojo. What else will you do?"

Jojo seemed weary. He said gentiy, "Nothing, Danny."

He'd been broke himself—desperately. A dozen times.

Danny knew that; everybody did.

"Will you give me a job, Jojo?" Danny said.

Jojo's eyelids lifted. Suddenly there were wrinkles on his temples. "I could, but you wouldn't care for it."

Of course Celia was still there. The girl with the passionate, the incredibly innocent lips. Taking it all in; knowing the finality of Danny's defeat. Danny refused to meet her glance.

"Why not?" he demanded instead, harshly.

Jojo said, "This job would be prop boy. Or gate keeper. Or working in the labor gang."

"I'll take it," Danny said. "I'll pay you off at five bucks a week, Jojo."

It didn't seem hard to say at all. The words even sounded natural as they came out. Honest words.

The producer's wrinkles seemed to disappear. His face smoothed all out. He saw that Danny still had Celia's hand.

"And then what, Danny?"

Danny stuck his jaw out. "Then I'm going home. A farm in Oregon. Three hundred and sixty acres of second growth timberland. Plus a trout stream and some good alfalfa. And a chance to build the best dairy in the state."

"A farm, Danny?" someone was saying. Gladly. Almost crying it out. And Danny turned then, and saw the someone was Celia. The girl he had kissed. But now a shining Celia.

Of course he knew he would have to court her very carefully, with violets and movies and candy, because after all she was truly so very young. But he knew too that he was seeing everything he would ever need to see, in any girl's eyes.

"Yes, baby," Danny Martin exultantly said. "A farm."

Lords of Creation

By EANDO BINDER

CHAPTER XXVI

TO CAVERNS BELOW

MAL RADNOR appeared around the bulk of a tumbled stone wall, shouting. By the dust over his clothes, he had just slipped from his horse after a hard gallop. He ran up, his face tense with some serious revelation.

Another piddling border war, thought Ellory half in disgust. They'd ask him now to defeat the enemy, as he had once before. Now, at this moment, when his whole being strained to forge ahead to a much greater goal.

But Ellory was wrong.

"Humrelly—escape!" gasped Mal Radnor, coming close. "They're after you—kill you!"

Ellory's breath caught. "The Antarkans!" he groaned.

Somehow, then, Ermaine's cover-up had failed. The Outland Council, knowing him to be alive in the Outland, had come after him, to end the reign once and for all of the man from the past who was their sworn enemy. A still more terrible thought came to him—had Ermaine, swinging all the way back, betrayed him?

"No, no!"

Mal Radnor was half screaming, breaking into Ellory's thoughts. "Not the Antarkans. The Quoise and Jendra and others of the neighboring tribes. News of your return must have leaked to their ears. A great mob of them swarmed past our capital, demanding your head!"

Ellory stood stunned.

Mal Radnor went on. "They call you a false prophet, Humrelly. They blame you for starting the revolt, bringing down the heavy hand of Antarka. They lay at your feet all their recent suffering and



loss of homes and loved ones. It's a rabble, a blood-thirsty mob, more dangerous than an army. We are trying to hold them off. They are approaching the ruins now."

Mal Radnor's eyes became pained. "Even, Humrelly, even some of our people have joined the mob!"

Ellory's mind swam. The very people he had tried to save from an age-long serfdom now demanding his life.

"You must be saved, Humrelly!" Old Sem Onger's voice rose quaveringly. "He must, Mal Radnor! If he dies, a whole new world dies with him. The woods—across the river. We'll hide there—"

"No!" Mal Radnor shook his head hopelessly. "They would beat the woods for days, drive us out like wild beasts. A sailing ship? No, the Quoise have ships as fast—"

Ellory took command himself. "The ruins are as good as anything to hide

The first installment of this six-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for September 23

in. If we can find an underground passage—" He was already thinking of a former subway tunnel that might lead to a forgotten corner.

The three men stiffened.

Over the still air from the north came a low clamor that rose in volume. A cloud of dust swirled at the horizon, marking the path of the vengeful mob.

"Hurry!" panted Mal Radnor. "If they once sight us—"

THEY ran deeper into the bones of dead New York. Everywhere their eyes darted, seeking a safe hiding place. Ellory knew it could not be an ordinary one, for the great mob would scatter and search, for days, if necessary. He knew the unrelenting mood of a mob on a witch-hunt, from past history.

A subway tunnel, half caved in! He leaped for it. They scrambled down a fill-in of loose gravel. Thirty feet beyond, the darksome cavern ended against solid debris from floor to roof.

"Out! No good."

Ellory led the way back to light. They had lost precious minutes. A glance to the north showed a body of tiny figures, like black ants, swarming toward them. Their blood-curdling yells might have been those of merciless Apaches on the warpath, three thousand years ago.

Again and again they came down to shadowy caverns, holes in the ground, dark spaces beneath crumbled walls, but none offered real hiding against thousands of pairs of eyes through long hours. Ellory felt the chill of approaching doom. He found himself praying to the soul of dead New York, city that once had harbored him and his race—praying for one last service from it.

They fled perhaps a mile to the south, losing precious moments each time they examined some likely concealment. The mob, spread in a long line that left no loophole open, gained slowly, peering into every crevice. Ellory shuddered as their full-throated cries resounded behind them.

He lost hope. He estimated they were

within a couple of miles of the narrowing end of Manhattan Island. On both sides, rivers. Ahead, the wide Atlantic. Back of them—death.

Sem Onger stumbled finally, falling back, clutching at his chest. His old heart could not stand the frantic pace much longer. Ellory went back, supporting him.

"I am a drag to you!" gasped the old seer. "I am old, useless. Leave me here. They won't harm me. Your young legs will gain on them—"

Silently, Mal Radnor and Ellory took Sem Onger by either arm and half pulled him along. That mob would tear him apart, for it was well known to them that Sem Onger had supplied Ellory's conquering army with the invincible metal weapons. And Mal Radnor, co-leader, was no less marked for death.

They stumbled on, with Sem Onger's old legs buckling under him. Ellory weighed considerations. Soon they would be sighted, by some pair of searching eyes. Once that happened the end was within minutes. In God's name, what could they do?

Desperately, he turned for the next pile of masonry, into a lower space that might once have been part of a department store bargain basement. They scrambled down, darting to the deepest shadows a few dozen feet beyond, before the space ended.

"Don't make a sound when they come. Don't breathe!" warned Ellory. "This is our last chance.

"And a poor one!" whispered Mal Radnor hopelessly.

Ellory pondered a moment, then took out the lead-foil wrappings that held the formulae of the radio-wax. He had stuffed these in his pocket, before the chase. He shoved them into Sem Onger's hand.

"You keep them, Sem Onger," he whispered. "Guard them. Hand them down to other generations, as you would a priceless heritage. Maybe sometime in the future, they will fulfill themselves. This is all that matters, not our lives!"

He stood up. "Come, Mal Radnor. We'll lead them a merry chase away from here!"

MAL RADNOR sprang up, but the old seer clutched Ellory's coat, holding him back. "Humrelly, listen to me!" His voice had become eager. "A vision has come to me. I see you and Mal Radnor descending into a tunnel that connects with lower ones. Down and down they go, to perfect safety from our pursuers. I see it plainly—"

There was a strange, glassy stare in the old man's eyes. Ellory looked at Mal Radnor, startled. Was Sem Onger close to death, babbling in half-delirium?

The old seer glanced at them.

"I'm not befogged!" he cried half angrily. "The vision is one of memory, not hallucination. I saw it a moment ago, before we descended here. That other tunnel is a thousand feet beyond. I remember this section of the ruins clearly now. When I was young, I stumbled on the tunnel, explored, found the lower caverns. Strange things lay there. I came back eagerly the next day, but could not find the place again. Only now have I found it, after all these years!"

His bony hand squeezed Ellory's arm. "You must believe me! I swear it is escape!"

He did a strange thing—stooped and rubbed dirt in his silvery hair till it was dark. Then, thrusting the foil-wrappings in Ellory's hands, he leaped away before the younger men knew what he was about. They sprang after him, but a new strength seemed to have flowed into the old, shaky limbs.

Sem Onger scrambled up the slope, out into the open sunlight, screeching at the top of his lungs. He looked back once, pointing beyond, to the tunnel he had told about. Then he raced on, fleetly as a youth.

The van of the searching, yelling mob spied his flying figure. With a whoop of triumph they gave chase. They would not find out till they came close that he

was not Humrelly, though his dirt-darkened hair and incredible bounding run gave that illusion.

For a moment then, Ellory stood motionless.

But only for a moment. Now was the time to reach hiding, during the precious seconds Sem Onger was giving his life for. Crouching low, the two men scurried across the open space to the tunnel Sem Onger had told them about. Would it lead them to secure hiding? Or had the old seer's mind and memory played him tricks?

It was a subway cave-in. Dark, it seemed to stretch interminably. Hope rose in Ellory. They stumbled over rotted ties and crumbled masonry.

A darker passage loomed at the side, and it slanted down.

A HUNDRED yards beyond, and perhaps fifty feet down from ground level, the narrow passage opened into a large corridor. It was pitch dark, cold and dank, and their breathing magnified hollowly, as if the corridor pierced underground endlessly.

Mal Radnor fumbled in his coat pockets and withdrew a candle, an item the fiftieth-century people always carried. The scrape of his flint against the wall rumbled loudly. In flickering candle glow, they moved on slowly.

Ellory stared about.

Concrete lined, the fifteen-foot arched passage seemed as solidly constructed as his crypt had been. Along the central floor ran a narrow-gauge railroad track, the metal rotted to red oxide. Every fifty feet the smooth wall was broken by an exit. These led to what had once been staircases winding upward. Little remained of them save skeleton frames of stubborn steel.

Ellory, almost forgetting the mob above ground, found himself trying to piece together a puzzle. What was this subterranean system part of?

Further along, at regular intervals, there were niches in the walls. Behind what had

been metal shields, now heaps of rust, lay more heaps of metal-rot—and in one, bones. A hundred feet beyond they stepped through a jagged metal plate so thick that time had eaten through only in places. It had once blocked the passage off.

Overhead, at intervals, were ceiling pockets that might have originally held huge fans to circulate air. This had been a veritable underground community at one time. A bomb-proof shelter perhaps?

A wide passage drew Ellory.

A dozen feet beyond, Mal Radnor's candle gleamed from crockery and porcelain plates, dust covered. A kitchen. Another side passage was large and debarked into a horseshoe-shaped enclosure along whose floor ran a trunk-line of the main rails. Ellory saw, among littered debris, an upright cylinder green with the verdigris of centuries.

That glimpse struck the chord of memory. The pieces of the puzzle slipped together—almost.

CHAPTER XXVII

ANCIENT THUNDER

"MAL RADNOR!" Ellory's voice was tense with wonder. "Do you know any history? Of New York particularly? Any of the latest wars before its downfall?"

Mal Radnor shrugged.

"Only that before the Dark Time there was an attack from across the ocean. The enemy took over much southern territory. They swarmed north. This city stood them off, it is said, for many years. Then it fell, finally."

Invasion of North America, from Europe! Ellory filled in the details himself. The southern states occupied. Armies marching north, with cannon and guns. A deadlock at New York, for years. The last piece slipped into place . . .

"New York's Maginot Line!"

Ellory said it aloud, stunned at his own explanation.

America had built a Maginot fortifi-

cation, as a last stand. It ran, perhaps, from New York City through New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Probably by 3000 A.D., with temperature rising, the bulk of what had been the American population had migrated into northern states and all through Canada.

That could be the only explanation for this stupendous underground network, with a train system, kitchens, ventilation, machine-gun niches, and staircases and elevators leading to surface turrets. From here, the besieged army had hurled shells against the advancing horde. Troops had concentrated here, scurried out to desperate attack, while New York was bombed down, tower by tower, by the enemy flyers. At last, cut off without supplies, the lines had fallen.

Such, perhaps, had been the story.

But the enemy, whoever it was, had had short triumph, for soon after had come the complete collapse of that age. Dr. Unknown, who had discovered the glowing-wax, had watched the last of mankind's precious power supplies dwindle, and had withheld his secret wisely.

For Mars alone would have benefited, in that mad time.

"WHAT is this place?" Mal Radnor shivered. "Did people once live here?" He stared about him.

"Lived and died here," responded Ellory, "without knowing why!"

That, he reflected, was a fitting epitaph for his age that had gone mad with war-fever.

"There is no pursuit by the mob," Mal Radnor continued, eagerly. "We can stay down here days if need be, till they go."

Ellory nodded and strode on, curious to see the rest of the giant network.

The air felt dryer gradually. Ellory surmised they were going away from the river-edge, into the solid bedrock of central Manhattan. The metal track in the main gallery showed a better state of preservation. Metal staircases were less oxidized. Elevator shafts were almost in-

tact, cages jammed. The armored shields in the niches stood upright. Behind them, machine guns were recognizable, part of the precautions against invasion.

Here and there were rows of pressure tanks, whose contents, probably emergency oxygen, had long escaped. An artesian well occupied a corner, and shelves of tinned food, some of which might still be edible, gave indication of how well stocked and self-sufficient this subterranean maze had been. Ellory even recognized enfiladed photo-electric apparatus in up-slanting corridors—mechanical sentries. All these things he had read about, in 1939, as Europe threw fortified lines across its many borders, expecting war.

But the Maginot Lines of his time had never been so mighty, so painstakingly intricate, so time-lasting as this underground line built in a later period. Ellory saw a half-shattered switch-board over which hung the frames of large screens—television. He counted nine human skeletons in a corner, as if they had been herded there and shot.

Ellory's thoughts, lost in the past, abruptly returned to the present reality.

He was looking at a swiveled machine gun whose barrel was only slightly iridescent with thin rust. The air was dry here, and low in oxygen, as the dimming candle and their laboring lungs testified. For centuries upon centuries it had been this way, preserving metal from the bite of water rust and oxidation.

"Let's go back," gasped Mal Radnor. "The air here is bad."

He tugged at Ellory's arm, but the latter shook him off.

He was staring at the machine gun, and at the long clip of cartridges trailing from the breech to a box. Trembling suddenly Ellory swung the armored shield aside and pulled at the gun. It came forward, though its tripod wheels were frozen with rust. They were not of the magnificent steel of the gun itself. It was a somewhat strange looking design, a thirtieth-century model perhaps, but otherwise quite twentieth-century.

Ellory pointed the gun down the length of the corridor, tense with anticipation.

With his finger on the trigger, he hesitated. What mad thing did he hope—that the gun would work after two thousand years? Perhaps the gun, but what of the ammunition? Surely that had deteriorated to worthless powder. Or, contaminated by time, it might blow him to shreds at the first burst.

Ellory pulled the trigger.

Rat-tat-tat-tat. . . .

Thunder and lightning had leaped from the muzzle. Far down the hall there was the vicious spat of steel-jacketed bullets against concrete. Ellory eased up almost instantly on the trigger. Then, above the rolling echoes that filled the space, he shouted:

"It works, Mal Radnor! Did you see—it works! It's incredible, but it did. Either the thirtieth-century people made superlative guns and ammunition, or I'm a fool for luck. Mal Radnor, where are you?"

Ellory strode to a niche and pulled his trembling, pale-faced companion from the refuge he had dived into.

"What terrible magic was that?" Mal Radnor stuttered.

"The magic of sudden death! And we're going to show that mob some of the same. Carry that box, Mal Radnor—"

A HALF-HOUR later they emerged into sunlight, panting under their load. Parties of the mob were searching all about for them. A head turned in their direction. A shout went up. From all sides, the rabble converged on the two young men standing beside the strange machine.

Setting the gun firmly on its tripod, Ellory kneeled, aiming.

"This is for the death of Sem Onger!" he yelled. "And for your blind, stupid chase!"

He pressed the trigger.

For the first time in an age, there came the sharp deadly bark of a gun. The front line of the mob went down like cut grass. Those in back pressed forward,

not quite comprehending what had happened. Another line went down as Ellory sprayed a leaden hail among them.

Then, awed by the thunders they heard, frightened by the sight of bodies strewn in rows, the rest of the mob broke and fled.

Ellory watched them flying away, driven by the devils of fear. Then he looked at the half hundred men he had mowed down. Most of them were moaning and trying to crawl somewhere. He had shot low, at their legs.

Then he looked at the gun. His eyes were as steely as the barrel that shone in the hot sun.

Mal Radnor was sitting on his heels, moaning as though he himself had been hit. Ellory shook him.

"Snap out of it. I had to do it, Mal Radnor. They aren't dead, or even dying. They deserved it—" Ellory stopped. Then suddenly he shouted: "I'll be back—"

He leaped back into the underground passage that led to what had once been a vast arsenal.

When Ellory emerged again, it was after two hours of wandering in the underground labyrinths. Now he scarcely noticed the scene before him.

Jon Darm was there, with a thousand hastily-armed troops from the barracks of Norak. They had come for belated rescue. They stayed now, administering to the wounded. Sharina darted among them. Mal Radnor kneeled nearby, beside a reclining figure whose chest rose and fell in sharp gasps.

It was Sem Onger, still alive.

Ellory sprang forward, kneeled also, grasping the old man's bony hand. He was in a pitiful condition, his clothing torn, his flesh bruised. He had been beaten terribly by the mob, Mal Radnor muttered in explanation, when he had refused to reveal Ellory's hiding place. He was close to death.

"Sem Onger—"

The pale, watery eyes looked up at him, lighting dimly.

"Humrelly!" The cracked tones were

weak, but joyful. "I have been waiting for you—to see you once more. Ah, grieve not, my son. I go, but you remain. You and the new world!"

He panted for a moment, clutching at fading strength. He went on eagerly. "There will be a new world, Humrelly—promise me that!"

"I promise," Ellory murmured.

The dimming eyes peered into his closely.

"You are not just humoring a dying old man. I see something in your eyes, Humrelly. You have found something down there. You have found radium, perhaps?"

Ellory hesitated a second, then nodded. "I have found radium," he said. He added mentally, "Or the means to get it."

Sem Onger made a last effort to speak, his voice a faint whisper.

"Then you will lift this poor age to some of the glory of the past! You will give them machines and metal and all the things they need for a great civilization. The mistakes of the past can be avoided. Mankind can live as one, united in aim and deed. It is not just a dream, Humrelly. I see it now! I see—"

Whatever he saw, in the strange borderland between life and death, left a peaceful happiness on his face. For now the hand that Ellory held went limp.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SPEAK WITH GUNS

JON DARM'S voice broke the hush, presently. "What did he see, in the end? What strange dream—"

Ellory arose.

"Not a dream!" His voice, strong and confident, rang out over the ruins. "Listen to me! I'm going to make that dream come true. I'm going to keep my promise to Sem Onger. I'm going out again—empire building!"

It seemed almost sacrilege to speak thus over the dead form at their feet, whose death had come from a similar venture. All eyes were on the man from the past, in stunned amazement, even those

of the wounded men who had come to hunt him down.

"With guns this time!" Ellory went on. "There are hundreds of these machine guns down there, rifles too. Thousands of them. And thousands of rounds of ammunition!"

"That many of them?" Mal Radnor looked skeptical. "Are you sure, Humrelly?"

"I saw them! And I went through only a small part of the caverns. They lie in forgotten corners, some half buried among crumbled walls. There's a taint of poison gas in the deeper corridors. Probably at one time the whole place was flooded with poison gas. And so thoroughly that for years after none could enter, till they were abandoned and forgotten." Ellory shook his head. "I'm not going to theorize how it happened. Those weapons are there, waiting for us to use!"

He grasped Mal Radnor's shoulder. "We'll train a special gun corps. We'll sweep to victory as fast as we can march!"

His words tumbled out. He gave his listeners no chance to object.

"Then, a fleet is going to Europe, across the ocean! The Maginot Line in ancient France! The Siegfried Line of Germany! Unearthed, they'll yield more weapons buried and forgotten. Equipped with these, no force can stand against us. We'll conquer the whole world, this time!"

Mal Radnor caught on more quickly than the others.

"You mean, Humrelly, that this time the whole world will stand against Antarka—"

Heads jerked up at the name. The recent abortive revolt was in all minds. Was the madman from the past suggesting another futile campaign against the Lords of a thousand years?

But the madman from the past had a still more breathtaking idea.

"No," he answered Mal Radnor. "The whole world will not simply stand against Antarka. It will attack Antarka!"

There was a chorus of gasps. Ellory looked around. The incredible idea struck

instant hostility. Ellory realized what he had done—asking for loyalty when he had so recently abused it.

Jon Darm stared as though at a maniac.

"I forbid you, Humrelly," he said sternly, "to speak further on the subject. If you persist, I will have to imprison you!"

Mal Radnor stepped quietly to Ellory's side.

"I am with you, Humrelly!"

"Then you too will be imprisoned, Mal Radnor!" snapped Jon Darm. "And your marriage to my daughter cannot be!"

Sharina moved toward the young chieftan, defiantly, but Jon Darm held her back.

"They have gone mad, those two. Young and headstrong, they would bring greater vengeance on our heads, from Antarka. Humrelly, though he is from a great past, has not the powers to defeat Antarka. It is a mad, mad thought—"

Ellory stood helplessly.

Except for Mal Radnor and perhaps Sharina, all the others thought the same. Attack Antarka, eight thousand miles away, impregnable in the metal-sealed subterranean vaults—it was absurd, on the face of it. But only on the face of it! If he could demonstrate the true power of the ancient weapons. . .

AS IF in answer to his prayer, a low drone sounded from the sky. Ellory stiffened. All eyes turned upward. It appeared—an Antarkan ship. The patrol ship that had been haunting this vicinity, the spawning ground of the last revolt. It lowered and circled, obviously looking with suspicion on this congregation of Outlanders in the ruins of New York.

Ellory was already flying toward the machine gun.

He threw himself before it, swung the muzzle skyward, squinted his eye. Could he bring the ship down? He must! In one stroke, it would insure the loyalty of the Outland. The news would swing to all the tribes, in all the world, that Humrelly, Lord of the Past, had smitten an

Antarkan ship from the sky.

Ellory began squeezing the trigger. Then he suddenly paused, as a terrible thought struck him. What if Ermaine were aboard that ship?

But he stood hesitating for only an instant. Then he pulled the trigger, his lips pressed together. A bigger issue was at stake than the fate of one Antarkan girl, even though he loved her desperately.

In lightning calculation, Ellory aimed for one wing. There was a chance of crippling the ship without causing complete destruction. The *rat-tat-tat* of machine-gun fire cracked through the air, voice of a weapon absent from Earth for an age.

The ship was close, within two thousand feet. Ellory couldn't miss. His sights zig-zagged across the left wing in a pattern that must strike a vital spot.

The ship's occupants apparently took no alarm. Guns were unknown to them. One more half-circle the ship made.

Then suddenly a cough of the steadily throbbing rocket roar. More coughing. Smoke from the left wing. A trickle of flame at the wing-edge as leaking gasoline caught fire. The ship faltered.

Like a wounded bird, it fluttered for the ground. With great skill, the pilots banked, averting a tailspin, and utilized the last of their momentum for a landing in the nearest open space. At the end, out of control, the gleaming craft skidded over the ground, nosed into a pile of rock, and upended. Fire began to lick eagerly around the wreck.

Ellory was already there when six men scrambled for safety. An instant later flame sheets swept over the mass. The men came forward, dazedly unharmed.

"No others are left in there?" Ellory screamed.

"No. Just we six," answered one of the Antarkans.

Ellory stumbled back with them, exhausted by his fear. If Ermaine had been in there—he knew it now—he would have leaped to share her death.

Then his spirit leaped. The Outland

had struck its first new blow against Antarka. The first offensive blow in an age!

"Our craft strangely failed," continued the Antarkan. "We can't understand it. We are lucky to be alive, however." His voice became imperious. "You will immediately equip a sailing vessel to return us to Antarka."

Ellory smiled a slow, twisted smile. He turned to Jon Darm.

"Your prisoners!" he said simply.

And back of him the awed assemblage paid homage with their silence. Humrelly, Lord from the Past, was once again champion of a world against tyranny.

CHAPTER XXIX

ANTARKA, SURRENDER!

BY A curious timelessness, the following eight months passed like a queer dream of night to Homer Ellory. It was eight months of incredible upheaval and change. It was part of the vast drama of man's destiny. Ellory rode the steed of conquest again, and a wild steed it was. He despaired at times. The task was so huge, so uncharted. His goal so paradoxical—to bring brotherhood, peace and rising civilization to a world by means of war.

And with him, through every episode, rode the vision of Ermaine. Yet now each step he took, driven by a mental lash that knew no mercy, separated him further from her and all she believed.

Ellory and Mal Radnor planned carefully this second time.

Deciding against a time-consuming march through America, they led their legion down the eastern coast. Ships were the thing they needed. Their conquering course met no slightest hitch. Bullets outclassed arrows, clubs and spears by a stupendous margin. Opposing armies scattered at the first roar of guns.

Ellory had trained five thousand Norak troops in the use of rifles and machine guns from the lost Maginot Line. They accepted the magic of the thundering

weapons in surprisingly short order.

The Atlantic states were refederated in a month. All their sailing ships were conscripted, loaded with supplies, and gathered for an ocean voyage. Trim vessels they were, as good as any of the pre-steam era of Ellory's time. Each carried two hundred fighting men, besides the crew.

Before the grand departure, a patrolling Antarkan rocket plane bore down to observe. At Ellory's signal, all guns within range blasted out. The Antarkan ship came down in flames, burning its crew.

No slightest hint must reach Antarka's ears. If the Antarkans eventually grew uneasy over these missing patrol ships, they would send more—to the same fate. They must not know. It was a grim, merciless game now.

Though it proved again that Ermaine was not aboard the ship shot down, Ellory was weak and ill afterward. How many more times would he have to go through the agony of it?

At last the fleet leaped from the shores of America.

In the flagship at the van, Ellory looked back at two thousand vessels, bearing almost a half million warriors. About ten thousand were armed with rifles from a previous age, all that the underground arsenal and the rust of time had yielded. He hoped to arm twice that many, at the Maginot and Siegfried Lines of Europe.

The long ocean voyage, with no outlet of action, tore Ellory's nerves to shreds. At times the ships were almost becalmed. Again a storm's fury lashed at them, sinking several. He cursed the sea and sky and wind, aligned against him, and thought longingly of days gone by, when great liners had so easily slipped across in four short days.

It took two months.

The fleet anchored in a harbor of what had once been Belgium. A fusillade of bullets cleared the docks of their belligerent owners. While the army disembarked, Ellory trembled in a fever of impatience.

"We'll strike directly for the Maginot

fortifications of my time," he told Mal Radnor. "Then we'll federate the coast, commandeer all ships. We'll have to work fast. Only three months left now before the Antarkans come for their usual tribute. We must be well on our way toward Antarka before that day. As we have instructed, all tribes will give up the tribute without question, allaying suspicion. The actual news of our attack on Antarka won't come soon enough to let them prepare any great defense."

Mal Radnor nodded.

"I know we will succeed this time, Humrelly!"

Ellory grasped his friend's shoulder. "This is the third time I've broken up your marriage with Sharina!" Then, more seriously, "Sem Onger's spirit guides us, on to the new world—"

He broke off, above, another Antarkan ship was hovering, observing.

Ellory himself jumped to a machine gun, pumped lead into the sky, along with his trained gun crews. The ship dove, a firebrand. Ellory stood stolidly until an orderly came, reporting that the crew of five Antarkans were dead—all men.

Ellory relaxed, breathing again.

"You suffer much, Humrelly," Mal Radnor murmured "You love Ermaine more than you can say."

"But not more than liberty, and the new world," Ellory returned quietly.

THE march to the inland goal, with five thousand picked men, was brief, rapid, with the thunder of guns clearing the way magically. Going by compass and atlas, Ellory recognized the Maginot Line by a long line of broken concrete pillars—tank traps. Finding no entrance to the caverns below, after a day's search, Ellory set his men to digging with iron shovels he had had made at Norak. They struck a side tunnel.

Curiously, Ellory had no doubt he would find preserved weapons, and stores of ammunition, as at New York. Various factors had worked to that end. Bombings had sealed all exits and entrances. With

the collapse of civilization, men had quickly forgotten these hidden chambers. Or perhaps legends had warned of a frightful death in them, before time had settled poison gases. They escaped rifling by man and corrosion.

In fact, Ellory's heart leaped at the wealth of armament disclosed. Tens of thousands of rifles, hundreds of machine guns, great chambers of unused ammunition. They were all of the thirtieth-century design, marvellously efficient and deadly, showing that to the last the traditional powers of Europe had fought bloodily, as they had for thousands of years past, before Ellory's time.

But those guns would only be used once more.

Ellory swore that solemnly as he stood in the shadows and ghosts of his civilization. After these weapon relics had served their purpose, they and all they represented would be destroyed. God help him in that resolve!

Suddenly his eyes gleamed.

He saw a small cannon, a futuristic model of the early French .75's, beside it a pile of unused shells. Further search uncovered a dozen more of the guns. These, too, Ellory brought to light, with dozens of strong men hauling them up on rawhide ropes.

And later, mounted each on a ship, they became a symbol of military might. At each harbor, during the conscription of Europe's merchant marine, one shell was sent screaming over the harbor city, to explode deafeningly. The coastal tribes hastened to bow down to Humrelly, Lord of the Outland World.

And such he was already, in theory. His fame had gone before him. One direct campaign across Eurasia would have made it fact. But the coastal tribes supplied him with all the ships, men and supplies he needed for his Antarkan campaign.

Events narrowed down to that climactic issue.

Ellory's fleet of five thousand ships and a million men sailed from the coast of

ancient Spain, a week before the Lords of Antarka were due to exact tribute.

Majestically, the great armada headed into the open sea, turned south for far-away Antarctica.

THREE months later the frowning shores of Antarka loomed into sight. The morale of the men was low, drained by the long monotonous voyage. Perhaps a hundred ships had slipped away and gone back, during dark nights. The men on those left, with powerful Antarka in sight, lost courage in proportion to their nearness. Ellory knew this by the way ships hung back.

He cheered aloud when three Antarkan aircraft swung down. They circled, astonished at this great fleet of Outlanders.

There was the burst of machine-gun fire. Two ships became flaming comets, one escaped. Now the secret was out, but Ellory was satisfied. A rising cheer rolling over the waters from his ships. The two Antarkan eagles brought down had restored morale. A million men had but one thought—to attack the tyrants who had ruled for a thousand long, oppressive years.

But attack came from Antarka first—a dozen great ships spitting down fire balls. A dozen of Ellory's ships burned to the water's edge, but they reached Davey Jones' Locker no sooner than the twelve twisted, crumpled masses of metal peppered with bullet holes.

High overhead, an observing rocket craft raced back to report. They would carry incredible news—that the Outlanders had some amazing new long-range weapon. And for the first time in a thousand years, Antarka would quake with fear.

A more concerted aerial attack came before the fleet had made harbor. Fifty Antarkan ships swooped over the fleet, at such speeds that guns could not be aimed. But neither did the fire-balls hit their marks. Most of them hissed into open water.

The Antarkan fleet swooped again, more slowly, gauging their range. The speed

that allowed Antarkan gunners to hit Ellory's ships also allowed machine-gun bullets to retaliate. Twenty Antarkan ships in flames plunged into the sea. The price to Ellory was thirty vessels, which he could well afford.

"Try it again!" shouted Mal Radnor, on the deck of the flagship. "It isn't so easy, is it, Lords of Antarka? Not as easy as burning down our defenseless cities, or dropping fire-balls among our fleeing people? We bite back now. Try it again, fools!"

And they did, stupidly.

Ellory almost wished he could tell them not to. They could not realize they were up against a weapon that outclassed theirs. Ten more gleaming, metallic ships joined those already sunk to the bottom of the sea. The remaining drummed back toward Antarka.

Now perhaps they realized the formidable forces against them—and the doom awaiting them.

Of that, Ellory himself was sure.

Their short-range weapons could not match his guns. They had a limited number of aircraft. They could withdraw into their cities, yes, but could not last a siege forever, dependent as they were on Outland food supplies. Superior manpower they had at present, if they sent out armies, but bullets would even the score much more rapidly than their fire-balls, limited to a hundred-yard range.

EVENTS moved forward with the incredible swiftness of a dream. All things had come to a head. The future of mankind swung on a single pivot.

Homer Ellory was that pivot, by the queer destiny that elevates one human being and gives him Jovian power.

Ellory felt that suddenly and was afraid. What if something went wrong? What if Antarka fought to the last? The weapons Ellory had were limited. The Maginot and Siegfried caverns had been stripped. There was no chance of fading more later, with Antarka aroused.

Everything depended on this campaign.

Nerves tightened, Ellory steeled himself. A chant drummed through his mind. Smash Antarka flat! Smash at it with all he had, as quickly and brutally as possible. Force victory while he had the whip-hand. In Ellory's age, military theory had called it a *Blitzkrieg*—lightning war.

The campaign lasted exactly ten days.

Ten days from the moment Antarka was sighted till the Outland army marched on Lillamra. Ten Days That Shook The World, Ellory thought, borrowing a phrase from his own century.

Ellory had picked Lillamra City as his first objective because he knew most about it. And it was Ermaine's city. Avoiding attack there first, Ellory would be letting his heart sway his mind. Such was the verdict he had made, though it brought him agony to think of her life endangered.

The harbor gained, the army landed, Ellory quickly organized the march on Lillamra, with half his forces.

Machine guns were loaded into small wagons, dragged by men. The Norak riflemen, best-trained, took the van. Behind, in larger wagons, reposed the gleaming bulks of the small cannon, their long barrels silently proclaiming their terrific power. In this fiftieth-century world, they were the most powerful weapons in existence.

It was a strange thought, for the weakest of twentieth-century armies, from the tiniest of comic-opera principalities, would have routed his motley, untrained horde in an hour. One great cannon, speaking from Antarka, would have blown his ships from the harbor. But Antarka, with all its science, was powerful only in contrast to the primitive Outland. Against twentieth century armament, Antarka was weak and defenseless.

BUT Antarka struck before they had marched ten miles inland, toward Lillamra. First another aerial attack. Fully a hundred craft roared over their heads, dropping not just fire-balls, but cloudbursts of burning gasoline, from their

wing tanks. Whole columns of Outland men writhed and shrieked in the torment of flame.

It was a sickening sight. Ellory felt the sudden panic that assailed his men. For a moment, complete rout seemed imminent.

But then the staccato crack of rifles began to sound, joined by the harsh rattle of machine guns. One Antarkan ship nosed down, then two—five—a dozen.

Ellory smiled grimly.

Aerial attack was a costly proposition to the Antarkans. Having no long-range weapons or bombs, they could only strike from close quarters.

Decimated by half, the attacking fleet left and Ellory led the onward march, leaving the wounded for the follow-up corps.

"I don't think they'll try much more attack from the air," Mal Radnor told Ellory. "Half their total fleet must be gone already."

There was a glow in his face. Ellory tried to realize how he must feel, he and all the other Outland men, seeing the thousand-year power of Antarka slowly crumbling away before their eyes.

A wave of men next came from Antarka, from Lillamra City. Silken-clad Lords of Antarka, gaudy capes wrapped tightly around them against the polar cold. They came on without formation, in a body, with a certain lordly air, as though still skeptical of the attackers' powers.

They never had a chance to use the fire-ball weapons in their hands. Before coming within its range, a hail of bullets sliced through them. It was sheer slaughter, under the slanting rays of a six-month's sun. They fled, no longer lordly, back to their underground city, like frightened rabbits.

Ellory spoke to the image of Ermaine in his mind.

"You asked me once to make it interesting! Is it interesting enough for you now, Ermaine?"

The image seemed to take life of its own, look at him in hate and horror.

"I will hate you forever for this, Humrelly. Forever and ever!"

That was the price he would pay.

CHAPTER XXX

LORD OF EARTH

ANTARKA was broken now. Ellory knew it. The Outland army, chanting the old cry "Freedom from Antarka!" knew it. Down in buried Lillamra, and the other cities, cowering and trembling, they must know it too.

It snowed and grew bitterly cold. Fingers and lips were blue. Antarka sent no more open resistance.

"Siege!" said Mal Radnor. "It is their last resort. They can last nine months, with stored food supplies." He shook his head worriedly. "Perhaps in that time they will devise a new weapon—"

"We won't give them the chance," Ellory returned quickly. "We'll storm Lillamra!"

"But the metal cap—"

"We'll pry it open—with that!" Ellory pointed to the cannon.

Mal Radnor had never seen its full powers displayed. "Will it do that, Humrelly?" he queried dubiously.

"Watch and see!"

Mal Radnor did see. And all the Outlanders. And all of Antarka, through the eyes of a scouting ship hovering high.

They saw shell after shell batter against the metal cap of Lillamra City. Ellory found the range by trial and error, with the big target shouldering up plainly against the horizon. Shell after shell. The metal shield of Lillamra clanged like a great bell. It must be deafening to those within.

Ellory kept it up grimly, inexorably.

The shield was not armor, simply a metal skin. Cracks began to appear in the smooth metal sheet, visible even for miles. Little black dots showed, where shells had battered through.

Lillamra lay exposed to attack.

Ellory's men swarmed about the gaping holes in the metal ceiling. Lowering raw-

hide ladders, they clambered down to the first level. Antarkans stood dazed, not firing a shot. The final cannon bombardmen had obviously snapped their last thought of resistance.

Curiously, the Outland invaders crowding on the first level were also dazed, silent. They stared about, awed at the thought of being there, not as slaves or underlings, but as conquerors. A thousand years of history culminated. The tables reversed. One race falling, another rising. They could only stare at each other, realizing this stupendous change.

And then, suddenly, Mal Radnor had raised his hands, shouting. In answer, a thunderous cheer burst from Outland throats.

Ellory realized with a great lift of joy, that they were cheering for him. It was his supreme moment, the one he had been destined for the instant he emerged from the crypt. The other cities would fall, or surrender, as Lillamra had. In his mind he heard the crash of the colossus of Antarka. It was over!

At last Ellory spoke, realizing he must forestall sack of the city, and future bitterness.

"Antarka has fallen. Never again will it exact tribute. But there must be no senseless reprisal. I appeal to you, men of United Earth. Take over the city quietly. Do not destroy. Do not molest the Antarkan people. In the new world, they will live and labor with you and for you. I, Humrelly, swear it!"

His wish was law, he who had led them to victory. The city was taken over quietly. Under Mal Radnor's command, Outlanders hastened down to occupy all the lower levels. There were some wild, jubilant shouts, but these men were still in awe of what they saw. There were happy greetings, too, as Outland slaves met their rescuers.

SOME sixth sense made Ellory whirl suddenly, toward the palace building. His breath caught in his throat.

She was approaching, and this was the

moment Ellory had dreamed of, and dreaded.

Ermaine, Lady of Lillamra, came forward. Imperious, erect, she stopped before him as though she, and not he, were master of the city. Her loveliness, hidden from him for long months, had the impact now of first-seen beauty.

Swiftly the drive and elation of the past campaign left him. He could not clear his mind of a sudden, huge despair; for he had destroyed the world that belonged to this woman—whom he loved.

Ellory stood there, voiceless, his body cravenly weak. Like a schoolboy stricken by stagefright, he wanted to run away. How could he face the accusation in her eyes?

As in times of stress before, his mind became a temporary blank. During his short but tumultuous sojourn in the fiftieth century, he had stirred the brew of war, sure that he was right. He had bloodily conscripted the Outland world, certain of the reason for it. He was conquering Antarka now, his goal a shining light ahead. All these things had gleamed clear behind the clouds of doubt.

But now, before Ermaine, he was sure of nothing save that in her eyes he must be a destroying monster. And for a long moment he fought against the desire to turn tail and slink away.

But then, wretchedly aware that hundreds of eyes were watching, he gripped himself. Had they noticed? Had they seen his knees knocking together and wondered why Humrelly, who had commanded legions of warriors, scattered armies, brought a world to its knees before him, smashed the thousand-year rule of a powerful race—why the virtual Lord of Earth should now be trembling before a girl?

He found himself speaking, in a dry emotionless tone.

"Lady Ermaine of Lillamra, I take over your city in the name of United Earth. Your people will not be harmed, I assure you. They will have a place in the new world, as citizens of United Earth."

She stared at him without a word. He searched her eyes for a hopeful sign, for some small flicker of understanding. Did he see only accusation there, everlasting hatred for disrupting her world? But what more could he expect?

Useless, now, to think in those terms. He could only speak for those who had fought with him.

"First of all, I want all the radium you have at hand," he went on, still tonelessly. At the slight lift of her eyebrows, he explained: "I have the means of producing unlimited metal supplies, through radium. And power. Metals and power; civilization. For the whole world."

Now her eyes mocked him. Though she remained silent, he could almost hear her taunt:

"Still the dreamer, Humrelly?"

"But I make my dreams come true!" he half cried. "Ermaine, listen to me! I didn't just come to conquer, for the barbaric glory of it. Nor was it just the tyranny of Antarka. The purpose above it all is a higher sort of civilization. Perhaps higher than Earth has ever known before!"

He went on passionately. "Do you know what I want most from Antarka—technicians, engineers, scientists! Alone in the Outland, with my new process, it would take me a lifetime even to get started. I might die before I had made the first useful engine. But with all the skill and technical knowledge of Antarka at my back, I can launch a new metal-and-power civilization within my lifetime. That's why I came to conquer—for help!"

Appeal crept into his voice. All the people, Antarkans and Outlanders alike, were listening in wonder. Ermaine stood, expressionless.

He plunged on.

"Don't you see, Ermaine? You almost saw, once before. The Outland being lifted from backwardness—and Antarka from decadence! All mankind striving toward true civilization, with all the mistakes from the past to benefit from. A

united society without wars or tyranny, without maladjustment for any minority. Call it an ideology or a dream, or anything you like, but it's a goal to strive for. That's the whole meaning of life—"

Ellory stopped.

He had said everything he could, and it did not appear to be enough. What did it mean?

Words and dreams, nothing more. Why go on? He had struck no spark here, among Outlanders and Antarkans. They would go on hating one another, warring, bickering . . .

"STILL the dreamer, Humrelly!" This time Ermaine had spoken aloud. Ellory started—and then he felt the weight of despair. In those four words, she had given him her answer—told him he was a fool.

Yet her tone had been strange, soft, moving.

Ellory looked at her, saw that there were tears in her eyes. He took a swift step forward.

And then she was in his arms, sobbing against his shoulder.

"I wanted you to come back, Humrelly! And I knew you would! I hated Antarka, and everything in it, after you left. I almost came to you, except for foolish pride. I knew you were right. Every passing hour told me that."

Incredulous, he held her there.

She broke away from him suddenly. Proudly she faced her people. Her bell-voice rang out clearly.

"I go with Humrelly, out into the new world—as First Lady of United Earth!"

Ellory glanced at her quickly, and for an instant he frowned, hearing that last phrase. Then his face cleared in a slow smile, and he stepped toward her, to take her in his arms again.

Back of them, though they hardly noticed, Outlanders and Antarkans were looking curiously at one another, as if suddenly aware that above all they were fellow human beings.

THE END



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



IF YOU are running a magazine concerned solely with fellows who plunge young women into steaming cauldrons, you can be reasonably sure that all your readers have a fondness for horrors. Otherwise they wouldn't buy the magazine. So you can go right ahead increasing the temperature of the cauldron, and everybody will be happy. The editor who publishes only fiction of a special sort—detective or Western or fantastic—has the comforting assurance that his public likes his speciality.

But it's different with us; we are infinitely more vulnerable. One week a letter will commend us on a recent Western story and demand more of same; the next week another reader will savagely dispose of that Western and beg to know why in heaven we don't eliminate that cowboy-and-Colt stuff, so that there will be more space for stories about the Australian bushmen. We could not satisfy all our readers if every published story were a masterpiece in its field; and that's why ours is the perilous and violent life.

Speaking of readers' opinions, we have several score-cards on hand this week. You know, ratings and such; take a look at them and then write out your own. . . . The first series was not signed, and so we have decided, after some thought, to call our correspondent

X

August 26th issue. Order of Merit as follows:

Philips: Kid Miracle
Alexander: Early American
Rathjen: Crash Man
Key: Saltwater Scramble

Mann: The Ninth Life
MacIsaac: River Rogues
Short: Hurricane Range
Sylvester: Run, Captain, Run

Illustrations, including cover: four pointed guns, three fist fights, two crashing planes, one boat sinking in flames, one attacking lioness . . . My aunt glanced at the illustration, then handed "Kid Miracle" back to me without reading it. "Psychological story, my eye," she snorted. "It's about a fist fight."

September 2nd issue. Order of merit:

Sale: Mosquito
Horn: Men with No Master
Jones: Blood of the Albacore
Kirch: Ghost Ball
Price: Guns for Ethiopia
Taylor: Hi, Roscoe
MacIsaac: River Rogues
Short: Hurricane Range

Illustrations much better than usual. . . . A wee bit less emphasis on baseball, please, though these stories are good. Don't forget about science fiction. Historical stuff is good. Keep it up. A little Oriental flavor would be welcome. Is it necessary for the longer serials to be written on automatic typewriters? Have the writers of humorous stories gone into a coma? But mainly, congrats for a swell magazine.

September 9th issue. Order of merit:

Cochran: Hero, Remember
Taylor: Don't Laugh Now
Horn: Men with No Master
Obets: Red Stallion
MacIsaac: River Rogues
Short: Hurricane Range
Zagat: Bright Flag of Tomorrow

Illustrations not as good as last week, but above your average. The quality range of your stories was broad this week, including one of the silliest and two of the thrilliest stories you have printed recently.
Beulah, Michigan

AND now for another grading. One thing about it puzzles us: the gentleman below lists the ten worst stories of the year, numbering them. But we can't figure out whether Number One or Number Ten is considered the very worst. It's extremely disturbing.

W. WALLACE LLEWELLYN

Here are what I consider the ten best and ten worst stories in ARGOSY for 1939 so far.

Ten best:

1. Calling Doctor Kildare
2. Seven Footprints to Satan
3. Steamboat Gold
4. Maximilian's Men
5. Costello Learns to Take It
6. Package for Paris
7. Crusader
8. The Wonderful Lamp of Thibaut Corday

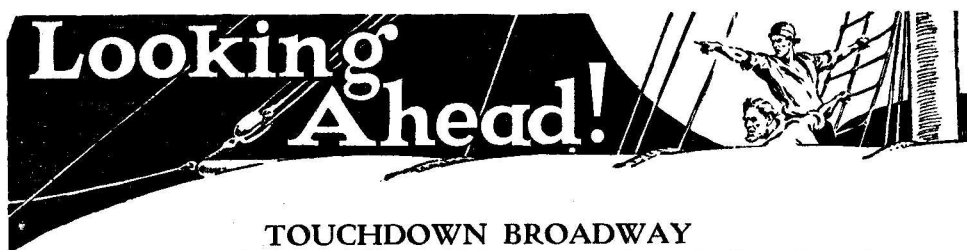
9. The Man Next Door
10. Snake Head

Ten worst:

1. Rider of the Rifle Rock
2. Help! Murder! Police!
3. Red Commanders
4. Two Tall Men
5. Thirty Days for Henry
6. The Eye of Doom
7. Black Grandee
8. East of Fiji
9. Rifles at the River
10. The Wingless Wonder

Is "River Rogues" a reprint? I wish you would tell us readers if a story is a reprint or not. I don't mind reading reprints, but I don't like to be fooled into thinking that an old reprint is a new story. So how about that?
San Jose, Cal.

About reprints, Mr. Llewellyn—"River Rogues" is not one. Sorry you have been confused about that.



TOUCHDOWN BROADWAY

A short cheer for the pros, folks—and lay your cash on the line! Come into our amphitheater and watch these All-American heroes march, march on down the field again—to the glory of box-office and to the tune of *Forty-second Street*.

Beginning a fast, exciting new novel of racketeers in pigskin, by
JUDSON P. PHILIPS

LET 'EM EAT SPACE

So it seems these two lads, Ham and Slim, are left out on a planet with nothing but a practically empty bottle and the acquaintance of an octopus. Only he isn't an octopus at all, but a rock, or a worm, or maybe an ameba. Anyway, he is a swell egg; he comes out fighting when the Earth is threatened by a fate slightly better than death. A wacky novelet by the author of "Minions of the Moon,"

WILLIAM GRAY BEYER

COURSE OF EMPIRE

Remember that great battle on the Plains of Abraham, when Wolfe wrote in blood the story of magnificent English discipline? Here, then, is the rest of the story: how the victory was made possible by a man whom Wolfe had broken and dishonored. He was a Wilton; and by his side, at the last, was the axe of British centuries—*Bretwalda*. A vivid, stirring novelet by

PHILIP KETCHUM

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—NOVEMBER 4



Your new KALAMAZOO has everything

**New Styles • New Beauty
New Features • New Values**

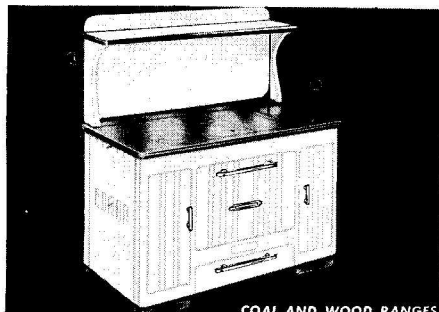
FACTORY PRICES*

Coal and Wood Ranges from..	\$49.60	Coal and Wood Heaters from	\$39.65
Gas Ranges from	\$59.80	Oil Heaters from	\$39.50
Electric Ranges from	\$89.75	Furnaces from	\$79.80
Combination Gas, Coal and Wood Ranges from	\$98.50		

*Prices at the Factory



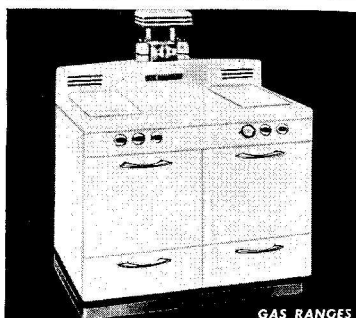
ELECTRIC RANGES



COAL AND WOOD RANGES



FURNACES

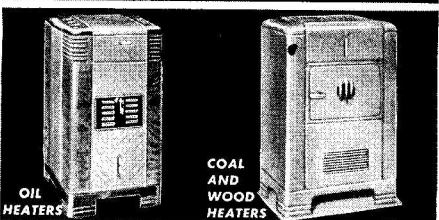


GAS RANGES



COMBINATION GAS COAL AND WOOD RANGES

Over 170 Styles and Sizes—Glorious new Electric Ranges, trim new Gas Ranges, smart new Combination Gas, Coal and Wood Ranges, modern Coal and Wood Ranges, handsome new Oil Heaters, Coal and Wood Heaters, and sensational new Furnaces.



OIL HEATERS

COAL AND WOOD HEATERS

You're tired of old style stoves—you demand change—you seek new beauty, new elegance, smart streamlined design and every last-minute accessory and feature. You're through with yesterday—you're ready for tomorrow. And so is Kalamazoo with advanced 1940 models.

Mail Coupon—A thousand thrills await you in this new FREE colorful Kalamazoo Catalog of Factory Prices, just off the press. It's America's stove style show and price guide. It's all that's newest and best in Ranges, Heaters and Furnaces.

A Bookful of Modern Miracles—Mail Coupon now. You'll find new excitement in cooking—new

ideas for your home. You'll find dazzling new surprises in minute minders, condiment sets, clocks, lights, porcelain enameled ovens and new type door handles. You'll find new ways to prepare better foods with the "oven that floats in flame."

Factory Prices—Easiest Terms

—You won't believe your eyes when you see these Factory Prices. You'll say "It just isn't possible." But it is. That's because we sell *direct from factory to you*. No in-between profits. You'll marvel at the easy terms, too—as little as 14c a day. 30 days trial. 24 hour shipments. Factory Guarantee.

Mail Coupon. Get this beautiful New Catalog—the greatest in our 40 year history. Save the way 1,400,000 Satisfied Users have saved—at **FACTORY PRICES**.

Over 250 Display Stores in 14 States.
Send for address of Factory store nearest you.

Mail coupon today for NEW FREE CATALOG

Kalamazoo Stove & Furnace Co., Manufacturers
99 Rochester Avenue, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Dear Sirs: Send **FREE FACTORY CATALOG**. Check articles in which you are interested:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Combination Gas, Coal and Wood Ranges | <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Ranges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coal and Wood Ranges | <input type="checkbox"/> Coal and Wood Heaters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Ranges | <input type="checkbox"/> Oil Ranges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oil Heaters | <input type="checkbox"/> Furnaces |

Name
(Print name plainly)

Address

City.....State.....

**"A Kalamazoo
Trade Mark
Registered
Direct to You"**



“Son, you’ve got the makin’s of a man!”

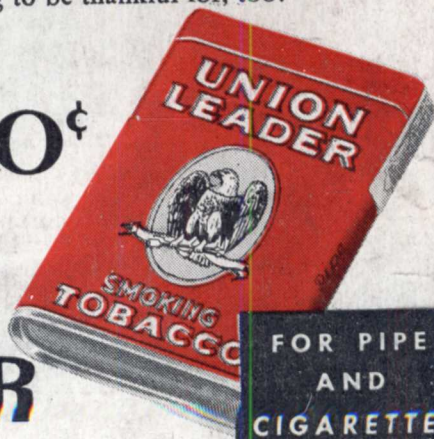
IT does me good, Son, to see you takin’ to Union Leader. *There’s a tobacco a man can tie to!*

In my time, I s’pose I’ve tried a hundred brands, but I always come back grateful-like to Union Leader. For there’s no substitute for what Union Leader puts into that big red tin:—flavor-filled, hill-grown Kentucky burley . . . aged to make it mellow-mild . . . processed to rule out annoyin’ tongue-bite.

Me—I like Union Leader burnin’ cool in my pet pipe. But I can see how you young fellers enjoy those crisp, fresh cigarettes

that Union Leader makes! Yes sir, and on a young man’s pay, that 10¢ price is something to be thankful for, too!

10¢



UNION LEADER

THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKE

Copyright, 1939, by P. Lorillard Co.