

NOV. 11

10¢

A Thrill-a-Minute SAVOY and FISHER Novelet  
By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

# ARGOSY



WEEKLY



All the fire and fury  
of exciting romance  
in Old California

JOHNSTON McCULLEY'S  
SUPERB NEW NOVEL

**Don Renegade**





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Thrilling heavyweight eight-shot sport model! The crowning achievement of 68 years' experience in building fine firearms! Extra heavy barrel and frame — perfect balance. Two adjustable sights. New design trigger — light, smooth pull. All rim-fire ammunition. Blued finish. For better, more consistent scores — own one!

8  
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methods by our tire  
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28x4.50-20	2.35	1.05	0.35	30x4.25	3.45	1.45	
30x4.50-21	2.40	1.15	0.35	30x4.50	3.65	1.65	
28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25	0.35	30x4.75	3.75	1.75	
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25	0.35	30x5.00	3.95	1.95	
29x5.00-19	2.55	1.25	0.35				
30x5.00-20	2.65	1.25	0.35				
5.25-17	2.90	1.25					
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35					
28x5.25-19	2.95	1.35					
30x5.25-20	3.25	1.35					
30x5.25-21	3.25	1.35					
5.50-17	3.25	1.40					
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40					
28x5.50-19	3.35	1.45					
6.00-17	3.40	1.45					
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.45					
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45					
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.50					
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55					
6.00-19	3.75	1.75					
32x6.00-20	3.75	1.75					
6.00-19	3.75	1.75					

## HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

Size	Rim	Tires	Tubes	Size	Rim	Tires	Tubes
34x7.00-20	\$4.25	\$1.95	\$0.35	34x7.00-20	\$10.95	\$4.65	
34x7.00-21	4.25	1.95	0.35	34x7.00-21	10.95	4.65	
34x7.00-22	4.25	1.95	0.35	34x7.00-22	11.45	4.95	
34x7.00-23	4.25	1.95	0.35	34x7.00-23	13.25	4.95	

## TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Rim	Tires	Tubes	Size	Rim	Tires	Tubes
34x7.00-20	\$3.75	\$1.65	\$0.35	34x7.00-20	\$6.95	\$3.75	
34x7.00-21	3.75	1.65	0.35	34x7.00-21	6.95	3.75	
34x7.00-22	3.75	1.65	0.35	34x7.00-22	6.95	3.75	
34x7.00-23	3.75	1.65	0.35	34x7.00-23	6.95	3.75	

## ALL OTHER SIZES

## DEALERS WANTED

**PERRY-FIELD TIRE & RUBBER CO.**  
1325-30 S. Michigan Ave., Dept. 4101-A, Chicago, Ill.

# BACKACHE?

Try Flushing Excess Poisons  
And Acid Thru Kidneys  
And Stop Getting Up Nights

## 35 CENTS PROVES IT

When your kidneys are overtaxed and your bladder is irritated and passage scanty and often smarts and burns, you may need Gold Medal Haarlem Oil Capsules, a fine harmless stimulant and diuretic that starts to work at once and costs but 35 cents at any modern drugstore.

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## Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fall 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.**

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A genuine leather billfold-card case. MADE TO FIT YOUR LODGE CARD. AUTO LICENSE, PASSES, etc., under isinglass windows ready to be seen at a glance. Holds 5 cards. Masonic emblem stamped in gold FREE. Your name stamped 35c extra. Oldest Masonic supply house in U.S. WRITE FOR FREE CATALOG.

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Get Ready Immediately. Men—Women. Grade School Education usually Sufficient. Sirs: Rush to me without charge (1) 32-page book with list of U. S. Government jobs, salaries, (titles, ages, etc. (2) Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Mail Coupon today sure. Name. Address.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. R247, Rochester, N. Y.



# Do You want to get ahead?...then... Read these 8 letters!

## Two Raises, One Promotion After But 7 Months

Today, after 7 months of study, I have received one promotion and two raises in salary—sufficient to pay the entire cost of the training in a short while. It can easily be seen that I haven't even begun to reap the benefits I expect to get in the next 7 months!  
T. G. Jr., Tex.

## Two Promotions in First Year

At the time of my enrollment about a year ago, I was in our Yakima office in charge of collections. 3 months from that time I was moved to a district office as office manager. 6 months later came my transfer to Lewiston as district manager. My LaSalle training has certainly paid big dividends. And I haven't even completed it yet!  
D. E. W., Idaho

## Clerk Aided by LaSalle Is Now Auditor

Several years ago, I graduated from LaSalle in Accountancy. At the time I enrolled, I was a clerk. At the present time, I hold the position of auditor. I have always found LaSalle training good training.  
W. A. S., Ky.

## University Executive Finds Training Comprehensive and Well-Presented

My work is that of cashier and manager of ——— University's Accounting Department. I am in direct connection with education and, with my background, feel able to judge accurately the worth of any extension course. I have not yet found another as comprehensive and well-presented as that offered by LaSalle, and believe anyone who will put the effort into it is bound to succeed.  
R. M. B., S. D.

## Clerk to Ass't Mgr. in Only 8 Weeks

In less than 8 weeks from my enrollment for your Higher Accountancy Training I was promoted from clerk to assistant manager of the largest A. & P. super-market in central New York.  
T. F. F., N. Y.

## C.P.A. Firm Recommends Simplicity of Training

Many, many times men have asked members of our firm for advice regarding an effective, well-taught accounting course. I have recommended LaSalle invariably. The Problem Method used is an ideal, practical presentation and is so simplified that the average man can readily master the work.  
H. A. S., S. D.

## Easily Pays Tuition by Outside Work

My progress the first 6 months was sufficient to enable me to handle several outside audits which more than paid my complete tuition. Other tangible results have been a raise in salary at my original position, and, later, a change to my present work as assistant budget director for the State of ———.  
V. C. G., ———.

## Skeptic Becomes Booster When Given Raise —Promised Promotion

When I enrolled in your Higher Accountancy 8 months ago, I was skeptical regarding any immediate benefit. Now all doubt has been dispelled. Within 4 months, I received a 25 per cent increase in salary, equal to 300 per cent of my monthly payments to LaSalle. And this is only the beginning, since I have been promised further increases in salary and promotion.  
O. L. F., Ill.

# They are evidence that success and promotion come fast to trained men!

Stop *hoping* for that raise or promotion! Begin *earning* it—in the way that *cannot be overlooked by your employers!*

Isn't it pretty obvious that maybe so far you aren't going about things in the right way? And isn't it equally obvious that the men of those letters quoted above found a more effective way—through LaSalle accountancy training?

Take a tip from these experienced men. Reason it out for yourself! What has worked out so well

for those men—and for thousands and thousands like them—**IS ALSO PRETTY APT TO WORK FOR YOU!** That's just common sense.

Like them, why not investigate? Send the coupon—that's the first move.

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University**  
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INSTITUTION

Dept. 1158-HR

Chicago

I'd like to have your free booklet, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays," about the training that these 8 men liked so well.

Name .....

Address.....

Position..... Age.....



# ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

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Cover by Marshall Frantz

Illustrating Don Renegade

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# Make me Prove

THAT I CAN TRAIN YOU  
AT HOME FOR A

## Good Job in Radio



**I TRAINED  
THESE MEN**



**\$10 TO \$20 WEEK  
IN SPARE TIME**

"I repaired many Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson, and I have made enough money to pay for my Radio course and also my instruments. I really don't see how you can give so much for such a small amount of money. I made \$800 in a year and a half, and I have made an average of \$10 to \$20 a week—just spare time."—JOHN JERRY, 1629 Arapahoe St., Denver, Colo.

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IN 5 MONTHS**

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\$30, \$40, \$50 a Week**

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National Radio Institute, Dept. 9MK,  
Washington, D. C.**



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Dept. 9MK, Washington, D. C.**

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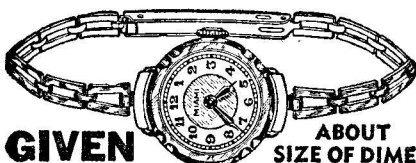
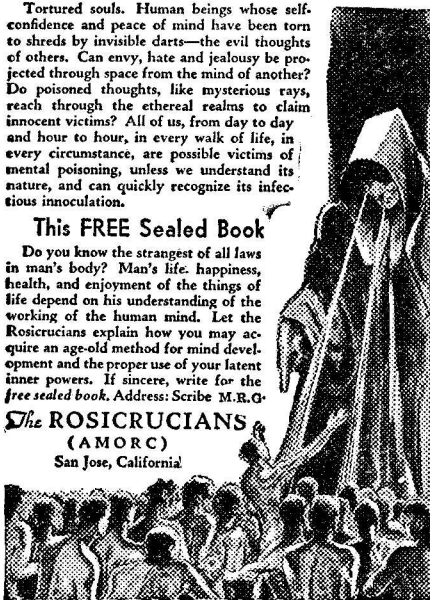
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*The creator of the unforgettable Zorro brings you another great novel of Alta California*

# Don Renegade

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "Black Grandee," "Tainted Caballero," etc.

**Señor Rogue, your raiment is rags, and you have the loud tongue of the braggart. But it may be that your fool's bravery and the good steel in your hand will win you a high Destiny in these wild hills**

## CHAPTER I

### BRAGGART IN TATTERS

**A**S THE purple dusk descended softly upon the shoreline of Alta California at the close of that particular autumn day in the late 1780's, blotting out the scarlet and orange streaks of the sunset on the sea and dropping like an enveloping mantle over the rugged hills, a stranger swaggered through the open door and entered the dingy little tavern at San Juan Capistrano.

By the flickering and uncertain light which came from the reeking torches set in sockets in the adobe walls, and from the broad wicks of the tallow pots on the tables, the fat landlord quickly observed that the newcomer was a large man, taller than most who passed that way, and probably around thirty years old.

The stranger's strong, rather handsome face had that peculiar greenish hue which comes from constant exposure to the sun and salt sea spray. His shoulders were broad and straight and heavy with muscle.





Marcos Zappa roared, "Bring me your skulls to crack!" and seized the first fellow

His chest was thick; his arms were massive. But his hips were lean and his long legs tapering, and he carried himself with that easy, animal-like grace which so often characterizes the natural swordsman.

A single glance sufficed to reveal that here was no roistering young caballero light-heartedly in search of adventure. This man's clothing was dirty, worn and tattered, and his boots were badly down at heel. He wore no sombrero. His black hair was thick and long, and rather unkempt; he wore it banked down low on his forehead and had it fastened there securely with a soiled scarlet-and-gold cloth band which ran around his head.

Stalking to the center of the room, the stranger stood with his feet planted firmly far apart and his fists resting against his hips as he made a swift inspection of the place. His attitude was that of a man assuring himself that no enemies were present. The din of talk in the room suddenly died, card-playing and dicing ceased, men put down their wine mugs, and they all watched him, waiting for him to speak.

He obliged them.

"Señores, my name is Marcos Zappa," he announced. It was a voice such as a man might use on a tossing deck in a storm-tumbled sea.

The few townsmen at the tables bowed slightly.

"Whence I came, and whither I am going when I leave this place is no man's business save my own."

The townsmen bowed slightly again, and some smiled behind their hands.

"When I stroll abroad to take the air," this man who had named himself Marcos Zappa continued, "men who have wisdom keep out of my path. I love to break limbs and hear the bones snap. The knife in my sash exists by drinking hot human blood, and it is always thirsty. Since we now understand one another completely, *señores*, be advised and conduct yourselves accordingly."

**T**HOSE in the tavern eyed him, and some smiled cautiously again, but none made a reply. Boasters were no novelty to the citizens of San Juan Capistrano. Swaggering fellows were always traveling up and down El Camino Real, the king's highway which linked the missions and scattered settlements in a great chain, from San Diego de Alcala in the south to San Francisco de Asis in the north.

But there was something about this arrogant stranger which made it clear that he was not a vain boaster; something in his manner promised that he would live up to his given word. There was an air of mystery about him.

His manner and attire did not harmonize. He suggested a man of good blood, dressed for the moment in rags. So the tavern loiterers did not mock him, but remained aloof and watched him in silence.

Marcos Zappa swaggered slowly across the room to a table and sprawled on the bench beside it. He called for a skin of the best wine, tossing down a piece of gold. He gestured for the fat landlord to serve all the others in the room.

He filled a goblet, held it to the light, then quaffed the vintage, making a grimace. Then he sprawled comfortably on the bench and drank and belched, watching the scene in the semi-dark, smoke-drenched room through half-closed eyes.

Presently, he aroused himself and shouted a demand for food. When it had been placed on the table before him—hot roast mutton on a huge platter, a small roast fowl, a stew of vegetables, a heap of boiled frijoles laced with strips of red and green peppers—he wolfed it down like a famished man, tearing the meat and fowl with his fingers, scooping up the frijoles with tortillas, and washing all of it down with great gulps of wine.

"'Twill serve for a present stopgap," he told the amazed landlord, when he had finished. "If a man be healthy and not a weakling, he needs a light snack now and then between his regular meals to keep up his normal strength. After I have rested for a time, *señor*, I'll require a heavier repast."

"Ah, *señor*! It rejoices me to see a man relish his food," the landlord replied, with enthusiasm.

"When he buys it from you, you mean."

"I have the quarter of a young ox roasting slowly over the pit, and the drippings are rich with fat."

"Only ox meat?" Marcos Zappa asked. "Only coarse food, and nothing of delicacy?"

"Fish fresh from the sea, *señor*, baked with the rinds of wild oranges."

"With strips of smoked pig meat baked in their bellies to give an added flavor?"

"*Sí, señor!* Also a stew of young cabbages and swine's eyes—"

"Cooked in wine?" Marcos Zappa wanted to know, his face beaming.

"Cooked in wine, *señor*—basted with an excellent sherry. Also tender fowls fed on milk and honey—"

"And my poor ears fed with your ceaseless chatter," Marcos Zappa interrupted, suddenly. "Do me a kind favor, *señor*, and for the present take your gibberish elsewhere. Allow me to have some peace and rest . . . and call me when the food is ready."

The conversation was definitely ended.

The landlord gulped and retreated swiftly with the soiled crockery. Marcos Zappa leaned back against the adobe wall to relax and digest his snack.

## CHAPTER II

## ROGUES IN RIOT

HEAVY clouds had scudded in from the sea at nightfall. Moon and stars had been blotted out. Mist and fog swirled and billowed along the coast. It was a night on which furtive men could move about freely and unseen.

Five such advanced toward the tavern from the highway. Four were tattered rogues with bare feet and bearded faces, but the fifth evidently was a gentleman of substance. His fine raiment was hidden by a long black cloak.

They went cautiously along the wall of the tavern building, and the leader whispered for the others to stop and wait. Then he went on alone to the nearest window and peered through. A moment later, he returned to his companions.

"The fellow is there, sprawled on a bench beside the fireplace," he reported. "You cannot mistake him. Do exactly as I have instructed you. I'll be waiting for you at the hut in the coulée. The reward will be rich if you succeed—and punishment swift and terrible if you ever say aught of this affair."

The four touched their knuckles to their foreheads, and the man who had spoken to them slipped back into the darkness. The four lurched to the open door of the tavern and entered.

The landlord's lips curled in an expression of scorn when he beheld them. Here were four rogues good for no more than a single mug of cheap wine each, he judged. Perhaps they would even beg for food. The highway was infested with such vermin these days. Many of them did not desire to go to the guest house at the mission and eat the abundant food of charity there, for the robed Franciscan *frailes* had a disturbing way of asking about the state of a man's soul.

The four sprawled on benches around one of the tables, and the scowling landlord waddled across the room to them, his attitude indicating that he considered it an insult to be compelled to serve such. But

his eyes bulged with astonishment when one tossed a gold piece on the table, and his manner changed instantly and became almost servile.

"Your very best wine, landlord, and your best goblets from which to drink it," ordered the man who had tossed down the piece of gold. He spoke in a loud voice as if to attract the attention of all in the room, and gestured grandly. "Do not offend us by bringing the common mugs."

The landlord bowed until his fat middle was creased, picked up the gold piece and retreated, testing the coin with his yellow snags of teeth. He shrugged his shoulders as he got the wineskin and goblets.

Rogues, dressed like penniless peons, tramping the highway in bare feet, yet with pieces of gold in the pockets of their tattered clothes! No doubt, the landlord thought, they belonged to some murderous pirate crew and possibly were wanted by the soldiery.

THE four gulped the wine and smacked their lips in keen appreciation of it. Then two of them arose and lurched across the room toward the fireplace, and stood before it as if to take the damp evening chill out of their bodies. In a moment, the second pair got up and strolled toward the fireplace also. One glanced toward where Marcos Zappa was sitting half asleep, nudged his companion and laughed.

"There is an evil-appearing animal," he remarked. He spoke loudly, so that Marcos Zappa and all the others in the place could hear.

"He looks like an idiot I once saw in chains in the plaza at Reina de Los Angeles," the other replied.

"The sad cast of his countenance, *amigo*, leads me to the belief that there is a large quantity of native blood in his veins. One of his ancestors undoubtedly must have toyed to some purpose with a bronze native wench."

They toseed up their heads and laughed raucously and with obvious insult, and the two standing at the fireplace joined in the merriment.



Marcos Zappa scrutinized them carefully for a moment from beneath his drooping lids, and got slowly upon his feet. He stretched his arms and flexed his muscles, expelled his breath in a great gasp and drank it in again deeply. Then swiftly he stepped out to confront them.

The fat landlord began moaning and wringing his hands, but he remained in safety behind his counter. He knew what was about to occur. He knew it would be both futile and foolish for him to attempt to prevent it. And he was remembering that the last time there had been a brawl in his tavern the bill for breakage, which he never had collected, had exceeded the day's takings.

"*Señores*, am I correct in assuming that your remarks just now concerned me?" Marcos Zappa asked, in a voice that echoed back from the walls.

"If such is the case—?" one taunted.

"Ha! If that truly is the way of it, *señores*, I feel compelled to take you apart painfully, one by one, and scatter your vital organs around the room. Hybrids of ground owls and rattlesnakes, crossed with the cowardly coyote and with just a dash of skunk!"

They had anticipated something like that, and were ready for it. But, even so, Marcos Zappa was ahead of them and carrying the fight to them. As he finished speaking, he hurled himself forward as if propelled by an enormous steel spring. He gripped the nearest man by the throat and bent him backward across his knee.

But the three others were at him instantly. As they rushed upon him, Marcos Zappa tossed aside the fellow he was throttling, gripped another and hurled him back to crash against the hard wall. He scorned to whip out the knife in his sash, and turned toward his remaining two adversaries with his fists coming up.

"At me, scavenger buzzards!" he roared. "Bring me your heads to crack!"

**B**UT, for the four rogues, this was not an unexpected rough-and-tumble tavern brawl. The affair had been planned

carefully by them. They had come prepared to make a quick end of it. As they charged him again, one brought a short bludgeon from beneath his ragged coat, and struck.

Many a strong man would have gone down instantly beneath that blow. Marcos Zappa only reeled back against the wall, slightly dazed. Now they drove him into a corner and held him there.

Too late, he made an attempt to get the knife out of his sash. The bludgeon descended again, this time with greater force, and Marcos Zappa was stretched senseless on the floor of the tavern with his foes sprawled atop him.

As some of the townsmen—who had been muttering angrily at this treatment of the man who had bought them wine—left their benches and started to advance, one of the four rogues brought out a pistol and menaced them with it.

"This affair is none of your concern, *señores*," he warned. "We handle this fellow at the orders of a certain gentleman of quality who does not wish to soil his own hands. Do not incur a powerful man's displeasure by bothering us. It will be wise for you to remain as you are until we have disappeared."

He gestured with the pistol, and the townsmen fell back against the wall. He gestured again, and the landlord also made swift retreat.

Two of Marcos Zappa's assailants worked swiftly to bind his ankles together and fasten his wrists securely behind his back with thongs. Then, unconscious and bleeding about the head, Marcos Zappa was lifted off the floor and carried out into the night.

**T**HROUGH the billows of drifting fog, the four took their burden to a heavy cart drawn by oxen and half filled with bales of green hides. Still senseless, Marcos Zappa was tossed into the cart, and hides were piled over and around him. The oxen were goaded to action.

A distance down the highway, the cart was driven into a coulée which curved

like a great serpent across the rocky land. Two men walked on each side of the lumbering vehicle, talking in low tones.

Marcos Zappa regained consciousness in time, fought in vain to release himself from his bonds, and finally lifted his voice in rage.

"Scum!" he shouted. "Take away from me these gagging hides! Put me on my feet and let me have but one hand free!"

"Peace, *señor*, and preserve your breath!" one called to him in reply. "We have been as gentle as possible handling a great bull like you. We had strict instructions to do you no serious harm."

"Instructions concerning me? From whom, offal?"

"We are taking you to him now, *señor*, and no doubt he will explain. What he desires with a great hulk like you, we know not, nor is it any of our business. He is a man of much wealth, and no doubt will give you a piece of gold in payment for your cracked head . . . or run a blade through you if you displease him."

"As to that last," Marcos Zappa said, "I have some small skill with a blade myself."

A gust of laughter mocked him.

"Attend me, *señor!*" one cried. "I speak of a blade. A delicate blade in the hand of a delicate gentleman, *señor*. Not a sort of metal bludgeon like a cutlass in the hand of a brute like you. This man's blade is like the darting tongue of a snake. You would be only a lumbering ox before him. You would see the sun flash once from his steel, and that would be the last thing you saw on earth."

They laughed again, then were silent, refusing to answer his questions. After a time, the cart was stopped. It was so dark down in the *coulée* that nothing could be seen. The four lifted Marcos Zappa out of the cart and carried him up from the *coulée*, and to a small adobe hut in which a candle was burning.

Inside the hut, Marcos Zappa was propped up on a heavy stool. Three of his captors held him squirming there while the fourth used more thongs and lashed

his legs to those of the stool, then tied his wrists to his legs. They stepped back and eyed him.

"Any three of you at a time, my bare hands against your knives!" Marcos Zappa raged.

Laughing aside his insults, though their eyes were aflame, the four men left the hut. Marcos Zappa was alone, bound to the stool and helpless, his back against the wall, the candle flickering before him.

### CHAPTER III

#### BLACK DON

THERE was a short wait, during which Marcos Zappa tested his bonds and learned he could not escape them. Then the door was opened and a gust of wet wind and fog rolled in as a man entered the hut. He tossed aside the long black cloak which enveloped him, and stood looking down at Marcos Zappa.

He was in his late twenties, Zappa judged—an arrogant young don, almost foppishly elegant in dress. A blade with a jeweled hilt hung at his side. He brushed a lace-bordered scented handkerchief lightly across his nostrils in an insulting gesture, and his lips curled.

"You will pardon me, *señor*, if my men were compelled to treat you roughly," he said coldly.

"That depends entirely on your explanation of this affair, *señor*," Marcos Zappa replied. "Why have I been attacked and overcome, abducted and brought to this place?"

"I wished to have a private conversation with you, and feared you would not come to a rendezvous in answer to a civil invitation without asking too many questions. There is a need for secrecy."

"After the treatment I have received—" Marcos Zappa began, angrily.

"You will be paid richly for the pain and indignity you have suffered, *señor*, if you decide to meet my arrangements. If you do not so decide, no doubt the voracious buzzards will feast on your carcass back in the hills."

"What is the true meaning of this?" Marcos Zappa demanded. "I know you not. You certainly can have no quarrel with me."

"Scarcely, *señor*. I am particular as to the men I honor with my enmity. I wish to engage you to do a certain thing for me. No doubt the task in itself will amuse you, and it will also prove profitable. I am in a position to reward faithful service well. I am Don Pedro Garcia."

"The name means nothing to me," Marcos Zappa said.

"It may mean much to you before we are done with this enterprise. I have a *casa* in Reina de Los Angeles, and a rancho back in the hills near Mission San Gabriel. I tell you this so you will know that I am a man of substance and able to meet any obligation I contract. You need not trouble yourself to relate to me your own name and social position, *señor*, for I am acquainted with them."

Marcos Zappa laughed lightly. "I think I begin to understand," he said. "This must be a case of mistaken identity. No doubt, Don Pedro, some silly error has been made—"

"I have said that I know you, *señor*!"

"But how can such a thing be possible, Don Pedro? How could a fine gentleman like you, a grandee, know a common clod like me? I am only Marcos Zappa, a stranger in this land, an adventurous rogue—"

"I know well the sort of rogue you are," Don Pedro Garcia interrupted. "I know your history, your real name and identity—and why you do not use that name now. I learned of your presence in Alta California when you were in San Diego de Alcalá a short time ago. I also know how you disembarked from a pirate schooner near here this morning, to spy."

Marcos Zappa laughed again. "You believe that you know so much concerning me, Don Pedro, when in reality you know nothing."

"Enough of this nonsense!" Don Pedro exclaimed. "Must I convince you?"

He made a gesture of impatience and

advanced swiftly to the stool. He bent, his dark eyes gleaming, and touched Marcos Zappa's forehead. And suddenly he wrenched away the scarlet-and-gold cloth band, and brushed aside the thick hair.

On the exposed white forehead of Marcos Zappa—white in contrast to the greenish tan of his face—was a large letter R, with a deep straight line below it, a livid symbol which had been branded into the skin.

"A thousand hells!" Marcos Zappa roared.

"You see, *señor*, I know why you wear your hair long and in such a strange fashion," Don Pedro said. "I know when and where you got that mark on your forehead—the brand of the renegade. Shall we talk business now—*Señor el Renegado*?"

MARCOS ZAPPA expelled his breath in a great sigh and seemed to collapse like a balloon when it is pricked with a pin. His head dropped forward an instant, and when he lifted it again a queer expression was in his face—arrogance trying to win in a conflict with shame.

"Don Pedro, you seem to know," he said.

"I know everything concerning you, Don Felipe Hernandez."

"Not that name, please, Don Pedro. There is a taint upon it."

"I am happy that you remember that, *señor*, for it shows you have a measure of remorse, hence are not entirely beyond redemption."

"You seek to redeem me, Don Pedro?"

Don Pedro Garcia's laughter rang back from the adobe walls of the small hut. His eyes were twinkling when he finally succeeded in stifling his merriment.

"On the contrary, *Señor Zappa*," he replied. "I seek to add to your infamy, for a price. I desire to give you a chance for revenge against the class which has cast you beyond its limits forever. Revenge with a profit in it . . . what more can a man ask?"

"Your words have a certain attraction," Marcos Zappa admitted. "Perchance I



would appreciate it better, Don Pedro, if you told me more concerning it, and released me first from these bonds."

"As to being released--presently," Don Pedro said. He got another stool from a corner of the hut and sat down a few feet in front of his prisoner. "You, Don Felipe Hernandez, scion of a proud and noble family, fell from grace, as our good friends, the *frailes*, so aptly put it. Correct me, *señor*, if I err in this recital."

"Is the recital necessary?"

"Tis better that we have a complete understanding. In a mad moment, it has been reported, you fell violently in love with a native girl down in Mexico--and you on the personal staff of His Excellency, the Viceroy."

"If that be true--?"

"Were that all, *señor*, 'twould call for no more than a smile. Young blood is hot in the spring . . . it was spring, was it not? But you allowed your wild infatuation for the girl to lead you into utter ruin, *señor*. You were not content to take the girl for an hour's pleasure. You grew serious concerning her, made her interests your own."

"And so?" Marcos Zappa questioned.

"You listened to her wild ravings about how her people were being mistreated and downtrodden by the Government, believed her, and helped foment an uprising among the natives. Discovery and capture resulted. Ordinarily, you would have been executed at the end of a rope. But somebody high in authority thought it would hurt you more to be branded as a renegade and turned loose to be shunned by men and women of your caste. So it was done."

"And are *you* done?" Marcos Zappa asked. "Is it necessary to remind me of all this?"

"YOU were driven off the Mexican mainland, exiled, and finally fell in with a company of pirates in Baja California," Don Pedro continued, mercilessly. "And now the proud Don Felipe Hernandez is a pirate, living with scum, a man who loots and slays."

"And so--?"

"So now I can make use of you, *Señor Zappa*. I'll restore you temporarily to the status of a grandee. Before your fall from grace, you had a way with women, were expert with a blade, had all the qualities a dashing caballero should have. Could you exercise those qualities now, given the opportunity to do so?"

"I have forgotten nothing."

"*Bueno!*" Don Pedro cried. "I'll furnish you with an abundance of fine clothes, a good horse, attendants, gold. I'll see that you have forged letters of introduction and credentials, that you are accepted among the best men as one of them. You will go to Reina de Los Angeles, to San Gabriel and around that vicinity. You will be your old self to others--except in name."

"To what end?" Marcos Zappa asked.

"That you may feed your revenge--and feed mine."

"Ha! Now we are getting beneath the rind of the melon!" Marcos Zappa exclaimed.

"Attend me!" Don Pedro ordered. "I became enamored of *Señorita Manuela de Vasquez*, only child of Don Juan de Vasquez. But for some reason her father objected to our marriage, and turned the *señorita* against me also. He desires her to marry a certain Miguel de Gandara, a puny and bloodless man not worthy to touch her finger, and a man of little estate. I, Pedro Garcia, was scorned."

"Such things sometimes occur," Marcos Zappa commented.

"You will again be a caballero, a grandee. You will meet these people. You will exert all your wiles, for which you once were well known, and compel the *señorita* to fall in love with you madly. You will also watch for your chance and quarrel with Don Miguel de Gandara and slay him--"

"Is he so good with a blade that you cannot do that yourself?"

"He is a lout with a blade. But for me to pick a quarrel and slay him--it would be too obvious. And I have to live in this country."

"Anyhow, Don Pedro, your reasoning is in error," Marcos Zappa declared. "If the *señorita* thinks well of this Don Miguel, and I pick a quarrel with and slay him, it will turn her against me and defeat our purpose. She would mourn him and detest his slayer. 'Twould be better to show him up for a weakling."

"Do you this, then: win the love of the lady first, then seek a chance and slay Don Miguel, saying it was because he made a slighting remark about the woman he had lost."

"That would be better, *señor*."

"And then"—Don Pedro's eyes gleamed—"then, *señor*, I expose you."

"How is this?"

"With marriage between you and the lady near at hand, I bring forward proof that you are Don Felipe Hernandez, branded a renegade, an outcast from decent society, a lover of native girls, and a pirate!"

"And so?"

"Do you not see it? The fair *señorita* who spurned me will be held up to mockery. Men will laugh at her for giving her love to such as you. Her arrogant father will be humbled. That will be my revenge, *señor*."

"And I?" Marcos Zappa asked.

"I'll arrange to have you escape from the scene, and give you gold. You will have your revenge also. You will laugh and ride away, with the knowledge that you have humbled the proud even as they once humbled you."

"And they call *me* a renegade," Marcos Zappa said, softly.

"DOES not the scheme appeal to you, Señor Zappa? Have your revenge on the class which scorns you. They have named you a renegade—make the word a true one."

"Why trouble to engage me of all men for this work, Don Pedro?"

"Dolt! Where else can I get the man for the situation? I must have one well born and reared, who knows how to conduct himself in the presence of others well born.

I must have one with a natural attraction for women, one skilled in wooing. I must also have one skilled in handling a blade and known to be quick and fearless in combat.

"There are many such, but they are not renegades, as you are. Not for any price would they do as I desire. But you, already damned and stained and branded—what have you to lose? Nothing! And to gain? Revenge and gold! Moreover, the greater your infamy, the greater the humiliation of the *señorita* and her father when you are exposed by me."

"You are a good man at argument, Don Pedro," Marcos Zappa admitted. "But are you protecting your own interests? Suppose, once engaged in this enterprise, I turn against you and betray our bargain?"

"None would believe you against me."

"That is true—*sí*. You command the situation. The gold you mention?"

"A thousand pieces, when your work is done. All you need meanwhile by way of expense money. And it will be arranged that you rejoin the pirate schooner—"

"But how can you accomplish that?" Marcos Zappa interrupted.

Don Pedro's eyes narrowed. "Some questions are in bad taste at times, *señor*. Simply accept my statement that it will be done. You can rejoin the pirate schooner when your work for me is accomplished. I promise it."

Marcos Zappa thought a moment. "The matter appeals to me for several reasons," he admitted. "It is an agreement, Don Pedro."

"*Bueno!*"

"'Twill be good to be a man of high station again, even for a day. But there are many things to be considered, if success is to be assured."

"Everything is in readiness, *señor*. My plans have been made carefully and are complete. I'll take you to the hacienda of a friend to be fitted with clothes. You can have a few days to practice at being a gentleman again before you begin your work. I'll send a rumor up El Camino Real about a visiting grandee from Mexico view-

ing the country, so your arrival will be expected."

"Then I agree," Marcos Zappa said.

Don Pedro got up and stepped to the door and opened it, and called out into the night. The four rogues came trooping into a adobe hut.

"Take off the thongs which bind him,"

Don Pedro ordered them. "Fetch that skin of wine from the cart and allow him to refresh himself. And, attend me! By your lives, you never have seen this man before, if you ever meet him hereafter. He will be a man of blood and station in deportment and dress, the sort to whom you knuckle your foreheads. He has merely been on a sordid adventure, and now is his proper self again. Be that understood!"

They bobbed their heads and began removing the thongs. When that had been accomplished, Marcos Zappa stood and worked his limbs to get the cramps out of them, and felt of his sore head where the bludgeon had landed. He glared at the four rogues before him.

"Be thankful that a man of blood does not soil his hands on such as you," he said. "Else I'd have at you all four, here and now, and we'd see how far you could get with me, *señores*, without the aid of a bludgeon."

## CHAPTER IV

### SWORD OUT, CABALLERO

FOUR days later, in the late afternoon, Don Marcos Zappa, resplendent in attire and riding a fine black horse with rich trappings, neared the *pueblo* of Reina de Los Angeles.

A lumbering cart had been sent ahead the day before with his personal baggage, which had been acquired for him, as well as the clothes he wore and the steed he bestrode, through the efforts of Don Pedro García. Some paces behind him, on a mule, rode his bodyservant, named Carlos, undoubtedly Don Pedro's man set to spy on his actions.

The four days had worked a great change in Marcos Zappa. He was his real

self again in all but name. He had cared for the skin of his face and hands. His hair had been trimmed evenly and dressed with pomade, but he still wore it down low on his forehead in his strange fashion. The scarlet-and-gold band he used now was a piece of rich weaving studded with native jewels.

He had learned how to carry himself in fashionable attire again, how to talk in a voice properly modulated instead of roaring like a pirate. Again he could be coldly arrogant and aloof. A good blade swung at his side once more, and he had done some practice with it during the four days—enough to convince him that he had not lost his skill.

Letters of introduction were in his saddlebag—though they would have startled the men who were supposed to have written them. He had an abundance of gold. He took some from his money pouch now, and gestured for the man Carlos to come to his side. Carlos urged his mule forward.

"It is time for you to ride ahead," Marcos Zappa said. "Go to the inn on the plaza at Reina de Los Angeles. Order the best quarters for Don Marcos Zappa, and use this gold freely. Let everybody know that you serve a man of wealth and distinction."

"*Si, señor.*"

"And be careful with your speech! Hereafter, it is '*Si, Don Marcos.*' Get you gone!"

The mule disappeared ahead in a cloud of dust, with the arms of Carlos flapping like those of a windmill as he rode. Marcos Zappa jogged along easily, inspecting the country through which he passed.

Cerise and orange streaks in the western sky heralded the closing of the day. Soon the soft purple dusk would come. Marcos Zappa touched gently with his silver spurs and rode at a better speed, for he was eager to reach the inn and make an imposing entrance.

From the top of a hill he saw a dust streak lifting in the far distance, and knew that there Carlos rode his mule. He followed the highway down the hill and



around a bend where high, jagged rocks shut from his eyes view of the trail ahead. He rode around the mass of rocks—and into an adventure.

A FINE carriage was beside the highway, with the horses tangled in the harness. The native driver sprawled lifeless in the dirt. In the carriage crouched a girl, with an elderly man standing over her in a position of defense. Another man, who had been riding a splendid horse but was now afoot, was busy with his blade, trying to stand off three men of rough dress, plainly highwaymen.

Marcos Zappa read the truth of the story in the first glance—a sudden attack on the carriage, presumably the traveling vehicle of a wealthy and important man. No doubt robbery was the motive for the attack. The young caballero who had been riding beside the carriage was doing his best to stand off the bandits, but Marcos Zappa saw that it would not be enough.

Digging with his spurs, Marcos Zappa sent his horse bounding forward wildly. He drew his pistol from his sash. He discharged it as he drew near, but his horse stumbled at that instant and the ball went wild. He tucked the pistol back into his sash and whipped out his blade.

In a cloud of dust, he swept down upon the scene. Now he could hear the *señorita* screaming above the thunder of his mount's hoofs. He shouted to let those in the carriage know a friend was coming.

As he came among them, one of the three highwaymen hurled a stone, and Marcos Zappa felt it brush his arm. His horse shied away from a man he would have run through with his blade, and the blow failed to reach the target. The young caballero shouted a greeting at him, his pale, exhausted face suddenly alight. One of the three highwaymen was fighting the young man with a cutlass, one held a long knife and the third a bludgeon.

"At the dogs!" Marcos Zappa cried. He sprang out of his saddle and charged forward, glad to feel solid ground beneath his feet.

But the three rogues did not turn and try to make their escape. Holding ground, they continued the battle. Marcos Zappa deftly parried a blow from the cutlass and drove home his point—and the three were but two.

He whirled toward the others as they shifted away from the man they had been fighting and toward him. The young caballero lurched after them, his strength almost spent. Marcos Zappa dodged a blow from the bludgeon, but as he lunged at another of the enemy, his foot slipped on a stone.

He shot forward, sprawled, got to one knee as quickly as he could and tried to regain his balance. The man with the bludgeon had retreated a step before the caballero. The one with the knife darted forward and lifted it to strike. Marcos Zappa knew he could not get his blade around in time to protect himself, could not even hurl his body aside to escape the blow.

A blade flashed before his eyes, and he saw the man with the knife reel backward, blood gushing from a mortal wound in his throat. The young caballero had been just in time. And as Marcos Zappa rolled aside and sprang up to turn again to the fighting, the caballero, exerting his remaining strength, reached the man with the bludgeon, and ran him through.

THE rogues were done. The caballero rushed to the carriage, shouting to know whether the *señorita* had been harmed. Spent and gasping, the elderly man guarding her sank back against the cushions of the wide seat.

Marcos Zappa sheathed his blade and went forward slowly. He straightened out the horses and calmed them, pulled the body of the native driver to the side of the highway. Then he caught up his horse and advanced with the reins hooked over his left arm.

The *señorita* was out of her faint, and the alarm of the others for her was over. Marcos Zappa sucked in his breath sharply as he looked at her. The blood was just

flowing back into her face, and her dark beauty struck him. He removed his sombrero and bowed.

"*Señor*, we have not words enough to thank you," the elderly man said.

"I attended to but one of them, *señor*," Marcos Zappa reminded him. "Had it not been for this young gentleman, one of them would have attended to me."

"But my strength was almost spent," the caballero said. "It was your timely arrival saved us all."

"Nevertheless, *señor*, I owe you my life," Marcos Zappa declared. "There can be no question of that. May I venture to hope the lady has not been harmed?"

"'Twas but a swoon, *señor*," the elderly man replied. "'Twas scarce a sight for delicate nerves; the driver was slain before her eyes. Allow me, *señor*—I am Juan de Vasquez, and this is my daughter, Manuela"

"I am known as Marcos Zappa, *señor*."

"Ah! I have heard that name," Don Juan de Vasquez replied. "Word came up the highway that a gentleman of that name, from Mexico, was in Alta California to see our country and perhaps take back word that we are not all barbarians here. You will be welcome at my *casa*, *señor*, whenever you wish to honor us with a visit."

Marcos Zappa bowed low quickly to hide the expression which came into his face. Don Juan de Vasquez and his daughter! The very persons he had traveled here to meet, who were concerned in his scheme. And to have met them under such circumstances would make his future work easier.

He lifted his head and flashed the little *señorita* a smile, and watched the soft flush pass over her face. A girl of rare spirit as well as beauty, Marcos Zappa thought. Carrying out Don Pedro Garcia's instructions was likely to be a pleasant task. It would not be difficult to play the gallant and suitor to such a girl.

Then he turned to the younger man, who seemed to be little more than a boy, and exchanged formal bows with him.

"May I not know, *señor*, to whom I am

indebted for my life?" Marcos Zappa asked.

"I am Miguei de Gandara, at your service, *Señor* Zappa. I am happy if I aided you while you were aiding us."

As he bowed low again, and quickly, Marcos Zappa was fighting himself to keep his face inscrutable. Don Miguel de Gandara! This stripling who had saved his life, and to whom he hence owed an eternal debt of gratitude, was the man he had engaged to slay.

## CHAPTER V

### HIS EXCELLENCY, EL RENEGADO

THE carriage presently was driven on with Don Juan de Vasquez handling the reins and the *señorita* sitting stiff and prim on the seat beside him, seemingly ashamed that she had succumbed for a moment to the excitement of the violence around her.

Marcos Zappa rode at the side of Don Miguel de Gandara a short distance behind the carriage, and tried to keep aloof without seeming to be discourteous. For Don Miguel betrayed an immediate fondness for the man who had rushed to his rescue.

"I reside with my parents on a rancho near Mission San Gabriel, *señor*, and you will be welcome there at any time," Don Miguel said. "May I express the hope that you will visit us soon?"

"I thank you, *señor*, for your courtesy. No doubt I shall remember your kind invitation," Marcos Zappa replied. "I have no immediate plans. I am merely wandering about, seeing the country."

"There have been certain rumors," Don Miguel said, smiling slightly.

"Concerning me?"

"Sí. It is said that you stand high in the estimation of the Viceroy in Mexico, and that he has sent you here to inspect the land and how it is governed. When you return home, it is whispered, your reports and recommendations will receive careful scrutiny by those in high places, and certain changes may result."

Marcos Zappa smiled. "Rumors often are

queer things," he said. Then he said nothing more about it, which naturally made Don Miguel assume that he had guessed correctly and that the rumors were true. Those rumors, Marcos Zappa knew, had been the doing of Don Pedro Garcia, and would open the way well for him.

As they neared the *pueblo*, Don Juan saluted them and turned his carriage aside toward his own house. Don Miguel touched with his spurs and rode madly toward the *presidio* to report the attack on the highway to Capitán Cervera of the soldiery. And Marcos Zappa rode on to the inn at the side of the plaza, where Carlos, his bodyservant, was waiting in front.

The landlord emerged promptly and bowed almost to the ground as Marcos Zappa slowly dismounted and handed his reins to a servant.

"Greetings, Don Marcos Zappa!" the landlord squeaked. "I have had your belongings put into my best chamber, and my native servants are ready to attend you. Food will be ready when you have cleansed and refreshed yourself. Use my humble pigsty as you will."

Marcos Zappa inclined his head a little and strode into the inn, drawing off his riding gauntlets, with Carlos a step behind him and to his left.

**T**HE public room of the inn was large and well furnished. There was a counter in one corner, with stocked shelves behind it bearing jars of honey and olives and dried meats. Tables for gambling and dining were scattered about the room. A huge fireplace in one end had a roaring fire in it.

Marcos Zappa was conducted with ceremony into a large patio and along one side of it beneath the arches, and so came to the door of the chamber which had been assigned him. Candles gleamed in silver candelabra, for the deep dusk had come. A native servant was waiting with an olla of warm perfumed water and soft cloths.

"If there is anything lacking, Don Marcos, you have but to let me know," the landlord assured him.

He bowed low and retired. Marcos Zappa sent the native servant away also, removed his jacket and bathed his face and hands, while Carlos brushed the dust from his attire and wiped it off his boots.

"Cleanse my blade, also, for it has drawn blood and is stained," Marcos Zappa directed.

"How is this, Don Marcos? There was trouble after I left you on the highway?"

"You passed a fine carriage as you rode to town, did you not? Coming upon it later, I found three highwaymen attacking it, and joined in the fray. The highwaymen are dead. No doubt you'll hear much about it later, when the report gets abroad."

"As the servant of such a man, I shall receive much attention," Carlos said.

"See that your conduct is worthy your master," Marcos Zappa warned him.

He happened to turn his head as he spoke, and caught a fleeting grin on Carlos' face. The man gulped and looked alarmed.

"Are you amused at something?" Marcos Zappa demanded.

"No, *señor*."

"That is well. The man who laughs at the wrong time is liable to have his laughter turned to tears. That is a thought to remember."

"It shall be remembered, Don Marcos."

"Go now and see that the evening meal is prepared for me. I'll follow presently."

Carlos bobbed his head and hurried from the room. Marcos Zappa opened one of his packing cases and brought out of it a change of clothing. He attired himself swiftly, fastened a jewel-studded clasp in the lace ruffles at his throat, and put jeweled rings on the fingers of his left hand.

Somebody tapped lightly on the door, and he called a command to enter. The bowing landlord shuffled into the room with a young native girl at his heels.

**T**HE girl was dressed in a single loose garment; she wore necklaces of beads around her throat and had ropes of them wrapped around her wrists and ankles. She was young, shapely, but there was an



expression of alarm in her pretty face now. Marcos Zappa guessed she had been weeping only a moment before.

"This girl is named Rosa, Don Marcos," the landlord said. "She is the cleanest and fairest I could find. She has been well bathed by the servants and her body anointed with perfumes."

"Why bring her here?"

"Ah, *señor*, I think of everything when there is a guest of your importance in my house. The evening is chill, and there is a damp fog. 'Tis true I shall put a brazier in your room while you are amusing yourself this evening. But the heat from a brazier does not penetrate the couch, Don Marcos. And this girl is the best bed warmer I could find. I hope you approve of her."

"She seems fitted for the work," Marcos Zappa replied, remembering some of the strange customs of which he had heard.

"She will have your bed warmed and perfumed by resting in it until you return."

The landlord bowed and retired quickly, for he saw that Marcos Zappa was almost ready for the evening meal and wished to supervise the serving of it. As the door closed, Marcos Zappa smiled at the girl to put her at her ease, and adjusted his jacket.

"So your name is Rosa?" he asked.

"*Sí*, Excellency."

"Do not call me Excellency, for I do not merit the title. Why are you so afraid?"

"This—it is that the work is new to me, *señor*. It is the first time I have been called on to do it. My father compelled me to come when the landlord asked."

Marcos Zappa laughed. "It should be a rare treat for you to stretch out your pretty body in a soft bed between fine sheets, and rest," he told her. "Warm my bed well, Rosa, and as soon as I am ready to retire, you may return home."

He went out into the patio, closing the door behind him, and walked slowly and with dignified tread to the main room of the inn. He found Carlos there, standing proudly at the head of a table which bore

the best the landlord possessed in the way of utensils and napery. Seating himself, Marcos Zappa glanced around the room, which was comfortably filled with guests.

**B**OWING and rubbing his hands, the landlord stepped up to the table. "Serve all in the room with good wine, and put it to my account," Marcos Zappa ordered.

"It shall be done immediately, Don Marcos." The landlord clapped his hands and gestured to the watchful native servants, who had heard.

"And what do you have for me to eat?"

"A roast turkey cock with stewed almonds baked in his belly, Don Marcos."

"'Twill do for an appetizer."

"Also a roast of the tenderloin of beef, basted with rare wine. A stew of rice and frijoles flavored with brandy. The salted eyes of fish in wild orange jelly—"

"Ha! Bring them all, and anything else you have prepared," Marcos Zappa interrupted. "Let me begin eating. I cannot slay my hunger by listening to a recital of what you have in your kitchen."

Those in the room saluted him and drank when they all had been served with wine. Marcos Zappa relaxed in the heavy chair which had been draped with soft blankets. A line of native servants brought the food, and he began eating.

The food was excellent, but his thoughts almost choked him at times. It was to this he had been born—the respect of *men*, an acknowledgment of his high position, influence, power, wealth. And for more than two years these things had been denied him; he had lived among uncouth men. Yet, strangely enough, he did not exactly regret those years.

He finished his meal and relaxed in the chair again, sipping good wine from the landlord's best goblet. The soiled dishes were cleared away and fresh candles put in the candelbra. The landlord approached him.

"Your pardon, Don Marcos," he said, "but there is a gentleman who desires to speak with you."

"His name?"

"He says he is a Señor Bardoso, a traveling merchant, and that he met you some time ago in San Diego de Alcala and now wishes to pay his respects."

"Let the fellow approach," Marcos Zappa said.

The landlord turned and beckoned, and a short, squat man dressed in ill-fitting clothes of good cloth, came toward the table, bowing every other step. He rolled as he walked. His face was almost black from the sun. He had a great mop of black hair. There was a scar at the corner of his left eye which caused him to squint in a peculiar fashion.

"May I dare hope that you remember a worm like me, Don Marcos?" he asked, in a ringing voice. "I am Bardoso, the traveling merchant."

Marcos Zappa bowed slightly and smiled. He knew Bardoso well. But he was not a merchant. He was the captain of the pirate schooner which Marcos Zappa had left only a few days before.

## CHAPTER VI

### HER CHAPERON IS STEEL

MARCOS ZAPPA gestured languidly for Bardoso to seat himself at the side of the table, and motioned for a servant to serve wine.

"It occurs to me that I recall meeting you somewhere, Señor Bardoso," he said, when the servant had retreated. And, under his breath and scarcely moving his lips, he added: "But I did not expect to meet you here."

"I am grateful for this opportunity to renew our brief acquaintance, Don Marcos," Bardoso replied, for the benefit of those within easy hearing. And, also under his breath, he said: "I understand everything. Meet me this evening at the pleasure house of Esteban Gonzales. Gentlemen of good blood go there masked."

Bardoso finished his goblet of wine, arose and bowed and backed away as if from royalty. Marcos Zappa rested a moment longer; beckoned the landlord.

"Señor, what and where is the pleasure house of Esteban Gonzales?" he asked.

"It is down a side street not far from the corner of the plaza, Don Marcos," the landlord replied in whispers. "If it is your wish to visit there, I'll have one of my trusted servants show you and your body-servant the way to it. My servant will be discreet. I can furnish you with a mask, also. The play at Esteban Gonzales' place is high at times."

"Are you presuming to advise me to watch my purse, *señor*?" Marcos Zappa asked, lifting his eyebrows.

"Ah, no, Don Marcos! No offense, I beg. That thought was not in my mind, *señor*. I but meant that the play there is high enough to interest a wealthy grandee such as you."

Marcos Zappa nodded that he understood. Men of blood and station seldom gambled in a public inn, except young and reckless caballeros out for a lark. They generally repaired to pleasure houses, wore masks, set aside their real identities when they entered and became as equals to all there.

"I have a fancy to take a stroll presently, *señor*," Marcos Zappa told the landlord. "Your servant may meet me outside the door."

Some minutes later, he got up from the table, put on his sombrero, and strolled the length of the room with Carlos at his heels. Outside in the foggy night the servant met them and handed Marcos Zappa a mask. The native then led the way through the shadows, along the side of the plaza and into a narrow, dark street. Marcos Zappa let his hand drop to the dagger in his sash.

The pleasure house of Esteban Gonzales was a large adobe structure, with entrance through a gate and patio. The servant whispered something to somebody in the shadows, and the gate was pulled open. Marcos Zappa entered the patio with Carlos close behind him.

TORCHES illuminated the patio, in the center of which a fountain gurgled. Blooming flowers scented the misty night.

Carlos turned aside to a corner where other bodyservants were waiting, and Marcos Zappa went to the massive front door and used the bronze knocker.

He put on his mask as he waited. The door was opened, and a man bowed and bade him enter. In the large room, a blaze of light came from scores of candles. Men were playing at tables with dice and cards, others sprawled on couches, drinking and gossiping.

"I am Esteban Gonzales, *señor*," a man beside him said. "The identity behind your mask is known to me. Be welcome to my house, and may good fortune attend you in your play. Since this is your first visit here, it is customary to visit my private quarters and have a glass of wine. This way, *señor*, please."

Marcos Zappa followed him to an adjoining room which was lavishly furnished. He sat where Esteban Gonzales indicated at the end of a heavy carved table.

A door opened, and a girl came into the room carrying a silver tray upon which were decanter and glasses.

"This is my daughter, Anita, *señor*," Esteban Gonzales said.

Marcos Zappa smiled and inclined his head. "She is very charming."

Perhaps seductive was a better word, he thought. He watched her as she poured the wine. Her shoulders lifted so her firm round breasts pressed tightly against the garment she wore. Her hips undulated as she walked around the table. Her black eyes flashed as did the jewels in her tumbled mass of curly raven hair, and her parted red lips seemed to invite a kiss.

Marcos Zappa drank the drink of courtesy with Esteban Gonzales; then the latter excused himself on the plea that other guests had arrived, and hurried away. The smiling girl refilled Marcos Zappa's glass.

"There is a saying, *señor*, that when a man is unlucky at cards he is lucky in love," she said, speaking in a deep rich voice and smiling at him again. "Were I the girl of your thoughts, *señor*, your losses at the card and dice tables would be heavy."

"That is a bold speech, *señorita*, when

we two are here alone and with no *dueña* to watch over us," Marcos Zappa warned, laughing at her.

"Ah, but I have my *dueña* in my garter, *señor*," she said. She lifted the side of her dress slightly, exposing a garter with a gem-studded clasp—and a dagger in it.

Marcos Zappa laughed again. "That *dueña* would frighten away many a suitor, *señorita*," he said.

"It has frightened some and bitten one or two," she admitted.

"What manner of girl are you, to encourage in one breath and threaten in the next?"

"I AM the daughter of Esteban Gonzales, who operates a house of pleasure, *señor*. Yet I am as jealous of my good name in some things as the highest-born *señorita* in Alta California. Even as the one you helped protect today when her carriage was assailed."

"You have learned of that?"

"It is the talk of the entire town by now, *señor*. How little Don Miguel de Gandara is strutting around! He slew two of the rogues, the report says, and you one of them."

"The little Don Miguel, as you call him, saved my life during the encounter."

"I did not know that. He would be the last to say so, *señor*. He is a true caballero and not giving to boasting," the girl replied.

"Then spread the truthful report, that he may be given credit. I slipped and was prone on the ground, and one of the rogues almost had me with his knife. Don Miguel de Gandara used his blade in time to save me."

"He did us all a service, *señor*! . . . Señorita Manuela de Vasquez is very beautiful, is she not?"

"She is so beautiful and so good that her name is not to be mentioned, *señorita*, in such a place as this," Marcos Zappa rebuked her sternly.

The girl's face was stained quickly with anger, and she tossed her head.

"And you know as much, so do not rage

at me for what I have just said," Marcos Zappa added, softly. "It was a just rebuke."

"You are right," she admitted. "I should be angry and hate you, but there is something about you—"

"And there is a dagger in your garter," he broke in, laughing softly. "Do not tempt me to my own ruin. Don Miguel is not here to save me now."

She took a step toward him, approached so close to him that he caught a whiff of the perfume she had touched to her ears and hair.

"I am very swift in my likes and dislikes, *señor*; and I have decided that I like you," she confessed, softly. "I hope you come often to my father's house—and that sometimes you will rather talk to me than play with cards or at dicing. I like you so much at our first meeting, *señor*, that I would give you a word of warning."

"And that—" he asked.

"Capitán Cervera, commanding the soldiers here, is showing much interest in you."

"Indeed?" Marcos Zappa lifted his brows.

"He has been asking many questions, I understand."

She flashed him another smile, picked up the tray, and went swiftly to the door. A moment she looked at him coquettishly, then darted from the room.

## CHAPTER VII

### REMEMBER THE BRAND

MARCOS ZAPPA finished the goblet of wine slowly, then got out of his chair. But the door to the main room opened, Bardoso waddled in and motioned for him to resume his seat. The pirate sat down on the other side of the table and spoke in low tones:

"I have arranged that we'll not be disturbed while we are here. How does it feel to be an arrogant don with plenty of gold to spend?"

"Natural," Marcos Zappa replied. "What know you of all this?"

"I know considerable about it, *amigo*, and it is all right with me. I was approached in the matter of granting you a release from the schooner for a time, to allow you to serve a certain gentleman in some strange capacity. I, too, have been given gold."

"Are you acquainted with Don Pedro Garcia?" Marcos Zappa asked.

"I have held speech with him in my time," Bardoso replied, loftily. "Ask me no more questions."

"But you can tell me what you are doing here in Reina de Los Angeles. And where is the schooner?"

Bardoso bent over the table and lowered his voice.

"As to that, the schooner put into a small bay near the place they call San Pedro. It is only a score of miles from here. I landed, and the schooner put out to sea again. But she will return at the appointed time."

"And you?"

"I am making certain arrangements, *amigo*," Bardoso replied. "Attend me! This is a rich *pueblo*. The warehouses are stuffed and the merchants roll in gold. Some of the great haciendas in the neighborhood are groaning under a burden of wealth also. It would be an act of mercy to relieve them of some of it. It is time we made a great and profitable raid, *señor*, and acquired a real amount of gold and goods."

"Are you mad?" Marcos Zappa asked. "Think of the danger of failure. The soldiers—"

"Ha! Only a score of men and one capitán are stationed here. Suppose they are sent far from the town on some certain matter, and the door left open for us?"

"Suppose I am informed, *amigo*, which is the proper moment to strike, where to get wealth quickly without wasting time, and how to retreat with my men and the loot to this bay near San Pedro without being caught? And suppose I have a very good friend here aiding me in all these matters?"

"Then a successful raid could be accomplished," Marcos Zappa agreed.



"So do whatever it is you are to do for the gentleman, Marcos. I'll time the raid so you can depart with us on the schooner. Meanwhile, I shall have a little fun myself posing as a merchant."

"Be cautious, Bardoso. Suppose your identity and business are questioned?"

"I have a man ready to vouch for me, one whose word will be accepted instantly without question. Now I must leave you, *amigo*. It is not good that we be seen together too much. Let us make this house of pleasure our meeting place when it is necessary that we meet and talk."

"That is agreeable."

"It is a pleasant house, and the daughter is a pretty baggage."

"But she carries a dagger in her garter," Marcos Zappa warned him.

"You have found out that much already, and you not in the house save for a score of breaths? Your speed in such things is remarkable, *amigo*."

Bardoso laughed and lurched from the room.

**I**N A moment, Marcos Zappa followed him. More guests had come to the Gonzales house, and the large gambling room was comfortably filled. Marcos Zappa drifted among the tables, had a short fling with the dice, and went on to a table in a corner for a glass of wine and a bite to eat.

He had come here for the talk with Bardoso. And Bardoso's talk had convinced him of the truth of what he had suspected for a considerable time—that the pirate chief was always so successful in his raids because he knew when and where to strike, that he had private information from somebody on the shore.

He felt a touch on his arm, turned quickly and found Don Pedro Garcia beside him.

"Let us stroll in the patio, *señor*, for a breath of air," Don Pedro said.

They left the big room and entered the patio, walked toward the splashing fountain, talking of ordinary things until they were where nobody could overhear.

"You have made an auspicious beginning," Don Pedro said, then, speaking in low tones. "I arranged that attack on the carriage of Don Juan de Vasquez so you would happen to come along at the proper moment. I knew Don Juan was visiting friends at a hacienda, and timed the affair."

"You hired those three rogues to pose as highwaymen?" Marcos Zappa asked. "They were slain, and one of them almost slew me."

"They met their just deserts," Don Pedro declared. "They had strict orders to run away when you appeared, and on no account to harm you. But no doubt they thought they would profit more by robbing Don Juan. The point is, *señor*, that you met Don Juan and the *senorita* and placed them under some obligation to you. It gives you the chance to commence your work."

"Sí. It also gave Don Miguel de Gandara a chance to save my life and put me under obligation to him."

"Is your honor so great that you cannot forget a little thing like that?" Don Pedro asked. "Remember the brand on your forehead, *señor*. Good clothes and food, gold in your pockets, a chance to mingle again with descent people—they cannot remove that brand."

Marcos Zappa's eyes gleamed an instant, then the fire in them died out.

"I shall forget nothing, Don Pedro," he said.

"*Bueno!* Some time tomorrow, I'll visit you at the inn to make your acquaintance in a formal manner. And an opportunity approaches for you. There will be a fiesta held at Mission San Gabriel in two days' time. There will be merrymaking and dancing at one of the haciendas. At such times, *señor*, the bars of convention are lowered somewhat. You may have a chance to commence your conquest of the *señorita's* heart."

They strolled back into the big gaming room and separated. Marcos Zappa loitered around the tables for a short time, watching the play, then went toward the front door. Esteban Gonzales met him there.

"You do not like my place, *señor*?" he asked.

"Very much," Marcos Zappa admitted. "Now that I know my path here, you may see me often. But I do not feel like playing tonight, Señor Gonzales. I am fatigued after my journey, and am sorry company."

Gonzales bowed respectfully, made an elaborate sweeping gesture.

"My door is open to you at any time. *Buenas noches, señor!*"

"*Noches!*"

The heavy front door was opened, and Marcos Zappa found himself in the patio again. He beckoned for the watchful Carlos to join him. Again they went through the

narrow, dark street toward the corner of the plaza and the inn.

The main room of the inn was thick with smoke from the fireplace. Men sprawled on the benches around the tables, ate, drank and gambled. Marcos Zappa started straight down the length of the room, making for the entrance to the patio, thinking only of reaching his chamber.

But suddenly a man in uniform confronted him, compelling him to stop.

"Don Marcos Zappa?" he asked.

"I am, *señor*."

"I am Capitán Cervera, *commandante* here in Reina de Los Angeles. I desire a word with you, Don Marcos."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

## *Night Time Is Nippon Time*

**O**SCULATION is a nasty word: particularly on the Japanese end of your trip to the Orient. *If* it happens in the daylight. That's law, whether the tourist likes it or not.

In other words, the theme song of dear old Nippon from now on will be, "Just a Kiss in the Dark." Because the authorities there have put a tabu on kissing during the hours from dawn to sundown.

The foreigner can take it or leave it; but if he meets a charming Pitti-Sing at, say, three P.M., takes her into the park, and implants a chaste kiss on her small celestial lips, he is instantly subject to classification as an undesirable. Which means Honorable Deportation. Or in other words, killing two birds with one stone.

Which, after all, is hardly in accordance with the best light-operative tradition of Japanese law, as envisioned by Gilbert and Sullivan. The Mikado (Bill Robinson to you) states the one clear theory of Jurisprudence thus: "My object all sublime . . . to make the punishment fit the crime."

Very well, then. According to this kind of justice, if a man were caught kissing his Japanese cook, say, on the streets of Tokyo while the sun was shining, he should be made to kiss every cook in Manhattan, while riding on top of a Fifth Avenue bus. But according to the rather dull new Japanese conception, he is merely deported.

—Robin Townley

# Help Kidneys Pass 3 Lbs. a Day

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning shows there may be something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

An excess of acids or poisons in your blood, when due to functional kidney disorders, may be the cause of nagging back-

ache, 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 your blood. Get Doan's Pills.



... whipped out his revolver, put it to the side of his head, and pulled the trigger

# No Medals Tonight

**Tiny moment of triumph in the life of a droop who acquired his poker at Wipers, his manners nowhere, and his honor—in an accident**

By **JOHN RUSSELL**

Author of "Where The Pavement Ends," "Three Things," etc.

**W**ELL, Judge, what did you get in the big war?" This was Shanklin, drawling. Nobody paid him much attention. Shanklin was a shell-shocker: we were used to his little spells of strangeness, his occasional lapses from strictly good taste.

These made small account in our hard-worked, stark-living community of seven white men and two thousand coolies at the Tembok tin mines.

"I drew two cards," said Hake, our level-eyed engineer, who was also civil magistrate of the district. "Are you calling me?"

"I drew nothing and I got nothing,"

growled Shanklin. He gave up his idea of running a bluff and chucked in two Queens. Hake showed his five cards with bare openers of Jacks, and quietly scooped the pot.

"There it is," Shanklin observed. "Even a lousy British poker player blows me down! And me that learned mine in the old stone barn at Wipers. . . . Where'd you learn yours, limey?"

"Just there or thereabouts," answered Hake; precise, quietly disapproving, but not offended. Men in pioneer places learn to take it that way. They have to, else everybody would be at everybody's throat.

Meanwhile it was difficult to gauge the exact degree of ill-nature, of potential danger, in Shanklin's mind. He sat back and swabbed his face with a sweat-soaked kerchief.

"That seems to pin the drinks on me. And friends and brethren, I sure need one. . . . *Whew!* whatever possessed any of us to come to this damn country, will anybody tell me?"

He clapped his hands and yelled "Hy-eah!" The first brought our Tamil club

attendant to take orders; the second brought the languid, swaying punkah to new life on its pull-rope overhead.

One drink, Shanklin had said. That was all he took: a single gin *pahit*, such as each of us took with him—a fact which we afterwards remembered. Naturally, it could not affect him. But there was something else. . .

We knew, all of us knew, that Shanklin had been altogether too close to a dynamite set-off on the Lutong lode that afternoon. At Tembok we did some very tough gangue mining, and the setting of the blasts was a highly technical and fussy sort of job.

Because of the carelessness of a Malay assistant, Shanklin had had really a narrow escape. Such things are not good for a man whose nerves have once come unstuck. So we were somewhat prepared, and somewhat more than leniently disposed toward any small eccentricity that might crop out in him tonight.

**B**UT what he gave us—no, we were hardly prepared for that. As in this line of war-talk he had started: a topic strictly taboo among us as a general rule, the way with most veterans. He went barging right along with it.

"I know—it's one of those things 'not done'," he admitted. "But I'm going to tell you guys something, and you'll have to stand for it. I got to get it off my chest. Even if it ain't 'quite British'. Listen:

"Every one of you swabs copped some kind of a decoration in the war—didn't you? Well, I know you did. A cross, or a medal, or just a ribbon to tie in your coat—even though you don't wear 'em."

It happened to be true.

"All right," continued Shanklin, grimly. "Well, I didn't. See? I didn't. And I'll tell you something else: I never went into action without trying for one. Funny thing to confess, ain't it? Well, it's a fact. . .

"I wanted the Medal of Honor, and the Distinguished Service Cross, and the Medaille Militaire. And even the V.C.—

yeah! I enlisted first with the Canadians, y' know; then with the French Foreign, before our blokes got over. I did my darndest for a Belgian Commemorative, and missed out. Why, by Godfrey I didn't even rate a Croix de Guerre!"

"How about that sharp-shooter gad-get?" piped Martin, the only other Yankee among us. "Most of our hell-busters used to jingle one, till they got wise."

It was Martin's well-meant attempt to slack off the tension; but Shanklin paid no heed. The man was shaking. His pupils had contracted: he made a twisting motion of his head, like a wry-neck.

These signs we knew, and we felt very sorry for Shanklin. We were most uncomfortably eager to have him stop talking; we felt much the same distress as if we heard some young girl innocently uttering indelicacies.

Meanwhile he slugged on.

"No, friends and gents, I'll tell you what I was. I was a pot hunter. And all for nothing. A pot hunter. That's what you call a guy who goes out to collect some reward that ought to come to him, if at all, without thinking, in the way of duty.

"Me; I was like those gyps who travel around to amateur games to pick up cheap watches and plated cups: pots!

"And all soldiers are supposed to be amateurs, ain't they?

"Well, that's me. A damn fool amateur. Every time I tried to do something, I couldn't. And every time I could—why, nobody was looking."

I think we would have liked to laugh at that quip, if it would have helped Shanklin. But there was no laughter in the rueful, strained face.

"That's what I've been doing all my life. Taking pot shots at things. Getting nowhere, getting nothing. Looka here: I couldn't get to show a wound-stripe, and I hope to die if I ever so much as killed an enemy! Not that anyone ever saw!

"And listen: if any of you ginks had been on the lode this afternoon, you'd-a been blown to bits. Nothing ever happens to me the way it would to anybody else.



"I tell you I'm a freak. I'm a miss. I'm a Wandering Jew. I'm like one of these Malay haunts in the woods—you think you see me here, and I ain't—I ain't here at all! You fellows don't believe it?"

His voice rose to a scream. He was on his feet. So were the rest of us—scared, but not in the least ready for his next appalling gesture.

**B**Y Godfrey, I'll show you!" he cried, and in a flash he whipped from his thigh a big, blue, old-time revolver, placed it against the side of his head, and pressed the trigger. . . . The click of its hammer falling dead left us transfixed, petrified, in a choked silence.

Before we could move, Shanklin broke the weapon and showed its chamber. It was fully loaded; only one of the six cartridges, the one still in place, showed the nick of the misfire. . . .

With a twisted smile, contemptuously, Shanklin snapped the revolver shut again, pointed it at random toward the outer wall, and fired swiftly—five times.

We were still standing, stricken and bewildered, when Shanklin passed the gun, with a little formal bow, to Hake. Then he clapped his hands and yelled, "Hy-eah!"

The first brought our Tamil attendant, frightened half out of his wits, to take orders. The second brought no result.

The punkah over our heads was continuing to sway languidly back and forth,

but slow: with lessened arc, with no pull. . . .

In a common surge, we all jammed through the door to the outer verandah. On the floor lay the punkah coolie; the pull-rope still held in his pulseless hand.

"Who was he?" asked someone.

"Just a Chink," said Hake, on one knee beside the body. "He probaby has no name for identity—just a number on the company books. . . . Five slugs. That's a pretty efficient weapon of yours, Shanklin."

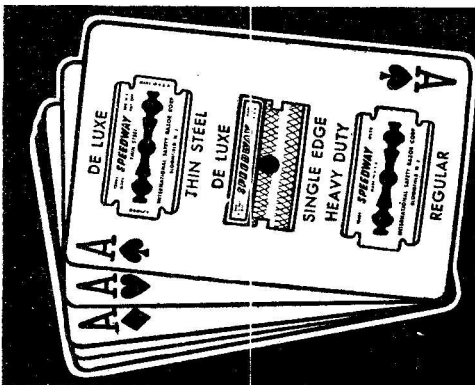
"Yes sir." Shanklin stood at attention; rather pale under his tan, but otherwise quite calm, quite normal, quite himself again. "I'm damn sorry, sir. Must apologize. Fool thing to do. . . . Poor devil! . . . And what," he added, drawling, "what do I get for this, Judge?"

"It was an accident, of course," commented Hake. "Have you a license to carry the gun?"

"Yes sir."

"Ah," said our level-headed magistrate, coolly. "I thought I might have to fine you five dollars. But as it is—with all these witnesses to such a plain case—I'm afraid you get nothing."

"Nothing," repeated Shanklin, nodding. He was contrite enough, looking down at the luckless victim; but we may have wondered, some of us, whether there was not, perhaps, just the passing, momentary gleam of some recondite satisfaction in his eye.





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SHAVES**

**BLADES**

Each one an ace  
Will bring a smile  
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**10¢ A PACKAGE**

*Savoy and Fisher Return  
In a Mile-a-Minute Adventure*

# Chaos Is A Quiet Place

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "Little Rat What Now?" "Flaming Acres," etc.

**Two young men of Manhattan officiate at a pleasant daytime shambles which includes, strangely enough, fireworks. The little fellow pours; the man with the cigar hands out one lump or two. Ladies and gentlemen, we give you—Savoy and Fisher!**

## I

THE terrace was crowded, and Nick sat at a table by himself, his back against the hotel, his eyes half closed, a cigar in his mouth, a glass of cold beer in his hand. In that inconspicuous corner he looked half asleep. His eyes back of ponderous lids were glazed.

It was not that the scene was dull; rather the contrary. The whole world passed Sheppard's—stiff Englishmen, Frenchmen with their supercilious eyes, Syrians, Turks, strange frightened visitors from the upper Nile country whose faces were bright with tattooing; Italians, Germans, occasionally an American tourist gripping his camera, Armenians, scowling Arabs, Jews, Nubians black as tar; Algerians, Greeks, now and then a Japanese.

Among all these were the legitimate natives of Cairo some in kaftans, some in western clothes.

They were business men and beggars, taxi drivers, guides, procurers, sellers of souvenirs, presidents of banks; they were thieves and carpenters, mullahs from the mosques, professors from the university; they were camel drivers, engineers, diggers of irrigation ditches, peddlers, purse snatchers, poets.

Oh, the scene was colorful enough! Yet its very color lent it an aspect lovely and ever-changing but beyond denial soporific.

The smeared multiplicity of details, like the blending of a million street sounds, teased a café sitter out of all thought, as the stars will do when you lie on your back of a clear night and gaze up at them, or as the ocean will do with its lifting and falling waves, or a fire in the fireplace which defies you to read your book.

"*Sabah el ker*. May I sit down?"

Nick with an effort opened one eye. The man who had accosted him was a young Egyptian dressed in very good Western clothes. He had beautiful teeth, and was smiling. The smile was a shade heavy, suggesting an old-fashioned movie villain—a suggestion accented by the slim, silky, almost unbelievably black mustache.

The man wore a tarboosh. He carried an amber *sebha* or string of prayer beads.

Nick let the one eye droop again.

"Help yourself," he mumbled, supposing only that the stranger sought a place to sit. "The durp is crowded, isn't it?"

The young man sat down carefully, elaborately, somewhat like a cat. All the while smiling, he leaned toward Nick.

"You are Mr. Nicholas Fisher, is it not so?"



The room was suddenly filled with them. Big men glaring. Each held some weapon

The eyelid came up again, though without notable alacrity.

"What if I am?"

"But you are?"

"Well, all right, then, I am."

The Egyptian nodded, and drew something from his right hip pocket. He did not raise this thing above the level of the table.

"I would like to have a little talk with you," he explained.

Nick deliberately looked under the table.

"Is it necessary to keep that pointed at me all the time?"

THE smile did not waver. It might have been clamped upon the lower part of the man's face with steel clamps; though never did it overflow to his eyes, which were hard and wary.

"I have heard that you are very swift at drawing your own pistol, and accurate when you shoot. Perhaps this is better so."

"What makes you think I'm going to get sore?"

"Perhaps not." An exquisite shrug. There was something downright eighteenth century about this man's hoity-toity affect-

tations. "But I play safe, as you Americans say. You see, I wish to talk about a certain ginger jar."

"Oh," said Nick. He swallowed half his beer, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He straightened. "Why didn't you say so right away?"

His eyes, despite the heavy-hanging lids, were not idle. Though they were veiled by casualness, there was a wealth of meaning in them as they flicked toward another American seated at a table twelve or fifteen feet away. And that other American got the meaning.

He was a small fellow, as small as Nick Fisher was big; and he was bright, alert, funny of face, monkey-like in his nervous movements, suggesting a monkey too with his tiny beady shrewd eyes and his ageless ugly mouth.

Yet he did not stand out in a crowd. He had a talent for being inconspicuous. You looked at him two or three times before you noticed anything unusual about him. Just now, ignoring his highball, he watched the crowds with childishly eager

eyes. He clutched a guide-book in his lap.

"You know what I speak of?" the Egyptian started cautiously.

"Of course! Mr. Doremus' azure Nankin."

"A costly bit of porcelain, I understand?"

Nick snorted.

"You *understand*? Listen, let's not go beating around bushes. I'm not subtle with the accumulated wisdom of the ages and all that. I'm just a plain American. That ginger jar we're talking about is part of a set Mr. Doremus spent twenty years bringing together. It's got the Jabachs and the Heeswijks wiped off the artistic map. It's the greatest thing of its kind.

"But it isn't complete without that jar somebody stole from Mr. Doremus' yacht three months ago in Monte Carlo. I assume we're talking about the same jar. Now if you know where it is, say so; and we'll start talking terms."

The Egyptian, a man by nature and heritage circuitous, swallowed. But he kept smiling. He clicked his *sebha* in the exquisitely manicured fingers of his left hand. His right hand remained beneath the table.

"I—uh—I only speak for another, you comprehend?"

"I never thought you were the crook yourself. If you were, you wouldn't be here. Well, spill it! How much does your friend want for returning the thing? I'm authorized to make out a draft in Mr. Doremus' name up to a certain amount. I can show you papers to prove this. Never mind what the amount is—now."

"My friend," the Egyptian said, speaking as if his every word were being taken down by newspaper correspondents, "will not hand the object in question to any representative of Mr. Doremus, no matter what his credentials, but only to Mr. Doremus himself."

"**T**HEN your friend's goofy. Mr. Doremus happens to be cruising in the Mediterranean. You don't suppose he's going to put in at Alexandria and come

up to Cairo on a vague tip like this, do you? I do it because it happens to be my business, but I'm not a multi-millionaire."

"You are in touch with Mr. Doremus?" Nick nodded.

"By radio. He's got a swell set on the *Stella*. Got about everything on that yacht except a skating rink."

"Yes, of course I have heard much about the *Stella*." He pocketed his beads and with his left thumbnail stroked his mustache. He was looking at Nick, and all the while fixedly smiling.

A street magician popped up out of nowhere and began to take small gayly-colored flywhisks out of a handkerchief, out of his pockets, out of the table itself.

"See, what have I here? I say mysterious word, *Goobee, goobee, goobee*, out come *manasha*. You got five piastre? I say—"

"Beat it," growled Nick.

A waiter came on the run, and the performer scampered back to the street. His kind weren't allowed on the terrace, but they were thick as flies and twice as hard to get rid of.

"Would you know that jar, if you saw it, Mr. Fisher?"

"Of course I would! That's my business. I've seen the other three and I've seen plenty of pictures of this one. So don't try to pull anything fast."

The Egyptian was puzzled, but he continued.

"Then perhaps if you saw it personally and assured yourself that it was the authentic jar, you could so inform Mr. Doremus and he would come here and get it?"

"I don't see why it can't be turned over to me."

That eighteenth century shrug again. Nick didn't like the guy.

"I am only repeating what my friend has told me to say. Will you look at the jar, Mr. Fisher?"

"Tickled to death."

"You must consent to put yourself in my hands. Not now, but tonight, after dark. You must not be armed or attended



in any way. I shall meet you here?"

"Fine. Right at this table. After dinner."

The Egyptian rose, adroitly pocketing what he had held in his right hand: nobody but Nick could have seen it.

"*Sahida*, my friend. Until tonight."

"Take it easy."

NICK went back to his hotel. He was not staying at Shephard's but at a quieter and more modest establishment far out on Fouad I Avenue. There he had lunch, and afterward went up to his room.

Another glass of beer in his fist, he stood on the balcony facing an empty inner court. Cairo was very still. A muezzin Nick couldn't see was calling the faithful to noontime prayer, but the mutter of traffic was blurred and dull.

After a while he turned back into the room and poured himself the rest of the bottle of beer.

"Hope you saved some for me?"

The monkey-faced American nipped in from the balcony. He had not made a sound. He never did. Nick shook his head.

"You oughtn't to do that, Eddy. Why don't you come in through the door, like a gentleman? Nobody here knows you."

"Force of habit, I guess. This my beer? Thanks."

News that Eddy Savoy was working with Nick Fisher would have dumbfounded the men who knew him of old and now believed him dead.

A product of the New York slums, the diminutive Eddy had never had much schooling, but he was smart as a whip. A package thief, a sneak thief, he had in time been promoted to picking pockets, an occupation at which he had no superior.

But cannons go in mobs, and Eddy had a passion for working alone; so he gave that up; and after a fling at safe cracking, which he quickly realized was passé, he took to separating gauds from fat society women.

In this his success was phenomenal. For years he was indisputably the busiest and most brilliant jewel thief in the United State, and his activities were estimated

to have cost one insurance company, the Great Eastern—which employed the celebrated Nick Fisher—the tidy sum of four million dollars.

Of this, to be sure, Eddy retained very little. Not that he was a spender; but such a crook, if he'd keep out of jail, has his necessary expenses, mostly connected with the fix, and for every tenner he took in Eddy passed out eight or nine in the form of bribes regular or emergency.

Nor, since he worked alone and refused to deal constantly with one fence, did he ever get a good price for his loot. In fact, for all the vast fortune he had stolen, when he finally quit the game in disgust he was very nearly broke.

Personally friendly, Eddy Savoy and Nick Fisher had been for many years professional enemies. But when Eddy gave up robbery the watchful Nick saw no reason why such talents should be permitted to go to waste. In addition, he liked and trusted Eddy. They understood one another. They worked well together.

Nick had his own methods of recovering lost trinkets. The Great Eastern executives let him do pretty much as he pleased as long as he got results—which he did—and never quibbled about his expense accounts. They would have fainted if they'd learned that the wraith Eddy Savoy, whom they supposed to be dead, was actually if not directly on the Great Eastern payroll. But then, as Nick said, what they didn't know wouldn't hurt them.

Yes, they worked well together, these two, Nick being the official agent, the front; Eddy the silent but very active partner.

At home, to be sure, Eddy was still too hot to circulate. He might be dead on the records, but charges stood against him in almost every one of the forty-eight states, not to mention the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

It was not likely that many police departments had thrown away their copies of his fingerprints. There were still hundreds of cops, as there were hundreds of crooks, who would recognize him.

## II

IN FOREIGN countries, however, it was different, and Nick's work took him increasingly to foreign parts. This John W. Doremus business, for example—

"Well," said Eddy, "do you think it's the right party?"

"Must be. That anonymous tip said for me just to sit alone on the terrace at Shephard's until somebody spoke to me."

"The guy," said Eddy, looking at his beer, "is a guy named Saied Hemeda Abo Mossa, but I wasn't able to find out much more about him except that he seemed to be a sort of gambler and maybe a con man. Never had any real trouble with the cops, though they know who he is."

"Where'd he go after he left me?"

"Across Ibrahim Pacha Street and over past the American mission into the fish market district."

"That's a pretty tough section, isn't it?"

"The toughest in town. Little crooked streets, gals and thugs everywhere, smells to high heaven figuratively and literally both. I hate to think what it must be like at night! Anyway our friend Saied Hemeda seemed to know what he was doing, and he finally ducked into a little rabbit-hole of a joint. I thought it might tip my hand to follow him. Anyway I'd already fanned him."

Eddy had a shadow's touch. He could search a man down to his underwear, and the man would never know it.

"What did he have in his pockets?"

"Three boxes of cigarettes—some local kind I couldn't read the name of. One box of matches. Two silk handkerchiefs. A string of amber beads. A gun—"

"Yes, I know. A Browning 6.35 baby hammerless automatic."

Eddy looked at him curiously, but went on.

"That's right. Fully loaded. No loose cartridges. He had a fountain pen, two pencils, a cheap watch and a black leather wallet containing forty-five piastres. He also had an aluminum tube about an inch and a half long and maybe a quarter of

an inch thick, with a copper cap on one end, and it had the initials 'B.S.' stamped in the base."

Nick looked puzzled.

"What would that be?"

Eddy drank a little beer. He seldom looked serious; but he looked serious now.

"Well, I never had much to do with heavy boxes. Little quick ones were my specialty. Bing! and beat it. But I've examined lots of the equipment from time to time, and unless I'm mistaken this thing was a Hercules No. 6 blasting cap with dinitro diazo and phenoxide all ready to touch off a detoning charge of tetryl."

Nick Fisher sat down low, his great arms dangling over the arms of the chair. He shook his head.

"It doesn't make sense, Eddy. There's been something flukey about this case from the beginning. Why should a crook go aboard the *Stella* and only steal one Nankin jar, when he might have had all four and plenty of other things at the same time? Why, that yacht's a floating museum! Some of the greatest art treasures in the world are on her!"

"The greatest art treasures in the world would be pretty big and heavy to carry off under your coat," Eddy pointed out. "And as for the other three Nankin jars, they're much too well known. What would a crook do with those? They're so famous he couldn't possibly sell them. Every art dealer in the world would know them on sight, and not a dealer would risk offending a customer like John W. Doremus."

"No, the crook doesn't mean to sell the thing. He only means to ransom it, as if it was Doremus' daughter or something, and for that purpose one jar is as good as all four—and a lot easier to handle."

"I know all that," Nick said impatiently. "But why, after having done that, does the crook get a tip to me that brings me all the way here from Monte Carlo? Why does he send a spectacular young sissy to talk to me—and to hold a gun on me while he's doing it?"

"Why does this man who has the jar, whoever he is, refuse to carry through the

deal with me in spite of my credentials? Why does he insist on seeing Mr. Doremus himself? And finally, why should his punk carry not only a Browning but also a blasting fuse for a bomb?"

"I give up. Like you say, it smells fishy. I've got an idea you're in for something tonight, Nick."

"I've got an idea that I am too," Nick said grimly. Then he grinned. "But you'll be right after me, won't you, Eddy?"

"Oh, I'll be there!"

SAIED HEMEDA looked almost ludicrously melodramatic when he showed up at Shepheard's that night. Over full evening clothes he wore an opera cape lined with white silk.

"Hello, Dracula."

"*Nisat el ker.*"

"Advertising something?"

"Pardon?"

"Skip it. Have some coffee? Brandy?"

The Egyptian leaned on an ebony stick, his chin against its silver top. For a time he chatted amiably of this and that, but Nick paid no attention and he fell silent. At last, the demi-tasse finished, Nick rose.

"Well, let's go."

Saied Hemeda led the way past taxi drivers, touts, guides, beggars, peddlers. They crossed the crowded street. Furtively, like a couple of men ashamed of themselves, they entered the fish market.

The first thing about it that struck Nick was its silence. Here was no crowded slum section, nor yet a brawling boisterous red-light district. There were no groups of street-corner sports. There was a remarkable absence of honky-tonks.

Not a note of music sounded. No human voice was heard. Windows and doors were closed, and up and down the crooked streets the only footsteps echoing and re-echoing hushedly, as though afraid, were those of Saied Hemeda Abo Mossa and Nick Fisher.

Yet there was nothing desolate or deserted here, nothing hinting the finality of the tomb. Despite the silence, the fish market thudded with life. Nick could feel

it all about him. He could feel it behind the shuttered windows and the closed doors. He could sense it around each corner and deep in the heard of every group of shadows. Though he could see nobody, he knew that people were watching him.

Saied Hemeda paid no attention to Nick until they had walked for perhaps five minutes. Then he suddenly produced the Browning.

"I am sorry because of this. You will please to keep your arms out from your sides—so."

"Hold-up?" Nick asked scornfully.

"I am sorry because of this," Saied said again. "It is my orders. We must be certain first that you carry no manner of weapon."

"You might have asked me," Nick grumbled.

Sly hands began to pass over his hip pockets, around his waist. He started, scowling in nervous impatience.

"Please do not turn," Saied said.

It was creepy, having those hands on him and not being able to see to whom they belonged. A couple of men, he estimated.

The hands covered him thoroughly, even feeling socks, garters, shoes. Then he felt them no more. Still he heard nothing, not even light breathing. Saied Hemeda pocketed the gun.

"Thank you. We will now continue."

A few hundred feet further on Saied explained: "You see, we must be careful that you have no weapon."

"Oh, as far as getting one's concerned," Nick said carelessly, "that's easy enough."

The young man stopped. He looked nervous. His right hand rested on the butt of the holstered Browning.

"What do you mean?"

"Why it's simple. Just—"

NICK FISHER was a big man, as mentioned; and at first glance you might have thought him fat, though if you had done so you'd be mistaken, for it was practically all muscle. He looked, and was,

very strong. But certainly there was nothing in his appearance to suggest speed. On the contrary, he was ordinarily slow, awkward, bear-like in all his movements.

Yet he could move fast, and did so now.

Saied Hemeda, scared, started to draw the Browning. But Nick's right hand, so much faster, closed over the Egyptian's wrist. Nick's tremendous fingers began to squeeze.

The Egyptian went almost white; he swayed as if about to swoon, and from his mouth came little hissing sounds of pain. His crooked fingers grew straight, releasing the Browning, which had been half out of the holster and which now slipped back. The fingers were useless, that many dead sticks. The whole hand, wrist and forearm were useless for the moment.

Nick lifted out the Browning and twirled it by its trigger guard. He released Saied Hemeda and handed him the gun. Dazed, Saied took it in his left hand. His right dangled like a dead thing.

"A Jap taught me that," Nick said negligently. "I don't want your rod, of course. I just wanted to show you how easy it would be to get in case I did want it."

The Egyptian was quieter after that, less cocky, and he no longer swaggered. Indeed he almost stopped smiling.

They went up a dark alley. It was so narrow that in places Nick's broad shoulders brushed the buildings on either side, and looking up at the stars was like looking out of a well. The silken swish of Saied Hemeda's cloak was loud in the night.

There was a heavy door at the end. It was utterly plain, without knob or keyhole. Saied rapped four times upon it with his walking stick, then twice. The door was opened a couple of inches, and against a wan red light part of a man's head was silhouetted. One eye gleamed evilly. Broken yellow teeth showed in a snarl.

Saied whispered to this creature for half a minute, in Arabic, and then the door was fully opened. Saied bowed to Nick.

"After you, my dear Alphonse," Nick said.

Saied entered, Nick behind him. Inside, the light was not much better. It showed the doorman, a sullen hunchback, and it showed also two iramense and very dark-faced men in purple kaftans, one on each side of the door. These men carried knives at their belts, and kept their hands on these.

"Who are your boy friends?"

One of the guardsmen seemed to think that this was an insult, or a threat. He growled, stepping toward Nick, and started to take out his dagger.

**P**ROBABLY the man was only bluffing. But Nick, who didn't feel like taking chances, unhesitatingly kicked him in the shins, and then, as he doubled over in pain, lifted a right and a left into his ugly dark face.

The blows slammed him back against the wall, where he stood blinking, while blood gushed from his nose.

Then his eyes, clearing, flared hate, and he took the blade out. The other guardsman did the same.

Saied Hemeda said something to the doorman, who spoke sharply. The knives went back into their sheaths.

Nick turned to Saied.

"Listen, I didn't come to this part of the world just to have a fight. I can get all of that I want at home."

"I regret this," Saied said, bowing. "The man, he did not understand."

"Well, do you think he's got the idea now?"

"Shall we step inside?"

He pulled a curtain Nick had not previously seen, discovering a room to the left of the entrance. It was a large room—just how large Nick could not see, for the corners were dimmed by darkness. It contained no tables or chairs but was filled with gaudy taborets and divans lavishly strewn with cushions of scarlet, orange, yellow and green raw silk.

On the taborets, inset with all manner of bright stones, were copper and brass

bowls. On some of the divans lay men who seemed to be sleeping. The ceiling was stalactitic, carved olive wood, gilded and giddily painted, and set with bits of glass.

Half a dozen tapers burning in a large shallow bowl of peanut oil on the floor cast an eerie uncertain glow upon the ceiling, glinting against the chunks of glass, but did scarcely anything to light up the rest of the room.

From a couple of crystal tripods the smoke of smouldering incense rose languidly, and mixed with the heavy odor of this was a sharper, harsher, and more penetrating smell.

Saied Hemeda said slyly, "A cake of hashish, crammed with honey and spices? It is very good eating. Or perhaps you would prefer to smoke some in the hookah?"

"Thanks, I'll stick to my cigar."

They walked the length of the room, passing in and out among the divans, and Nick saw that not all of the men were in fact asleep. Many lay with their eyes wide open, displaying, however, little or no expression. One long-legged man, apparently an Englishman, suddenly began to giggle. His high hysterical voice filled the room. He lifted his knees to his chin and rocked back and forth, gibbering. Then he started to scream. The hunchbacked doorman came in and held something to his nose, and he relaxed.

At another door, hidden behind a wall-hanging, Saied Hemeda again gave a signal knock. This door did not swing on hinges but slid back on invisible and utterly silent rollers. Nick stepped into a room not unlike the other but only about half that size and apparently unoccupied. Turning to say something to Saied, he found that his guide had disappeared. Moreover the door had slid back into place.

### III

HE SHRUGGED. He piled half a dozen pillows together and sat on them, knocking his cigar ash into an incense burner. It was none too comfortable

for a big man like him, but it was better than standing.

For a long time nothing happened. Then in a blurred corner a shadow which Nick had hitherto supposed to be part of a divan stirred, yawned and rose. A tall, grave-faced Egyptian walked toward Nick.

He looked as if he knew everything in the world, and didn't care. He wore a loose black silk gown laced with gold thread and a small black-and-yellow turban. His beard, though gray, was not at all patriarchal: it was oily and trig, precise.

His smile was sleepy, his eyebrows white; and rubies, or perhaps they were only spinels, glinted in his ear lobes.

He looked at Nick for a moment in quiet amusement, then bowed slightly and said, "Good evening."

"Hiyah," said Nick.

"You seek a certain object?"

"No hurry," said Nick, waving his cigar. "Whenever you figure you've had enough fun pulling this Mysterious East hooley."

When the man smiled it was if a statue had done so.

"Do you think Mr. Doremus will pay what I ask?"

"That depends on what you ask."

"You will communicate with him?"

"I will after I'm damn sure you've got that jar. But I've got to see it myself first, with my own eyes."

The tall man bowed again.

"So be it. You must wait here for a time."

"I'm a swell waiter."

"It is necessary that I impress upon you the need for remaining quiet. There are those who watch."

He clapped. From out of the shadows, from back of divans, from behind wall-hangings, seemingly in some cases from out of the walls themselves, came men. The room was suddenly filled with them.

In fact there were only seven or eight; but their appearance was so unexpected and so dramatic in the wavering dubious light, and they were such big men and glared so fiercely at Nick Fisher, that they seemed to be many times that number.



Each held some weapon—a poniard, revolver, bludgeon, or automatic pistol.

"Very pretty," said Nick. "When do they start to sing?"

Another clap of the hands, and the men faded into the shadows.

"I did not wish to frighten you—"

"Oh, no!"

"—but I thought it only fair to give you a warning."

"Thanks so much."

"You must remain here until I return. I leave you now."

The tall man, his arms folded across his breast, walked slowly and firmly backward, staring all the while at Nick. The door rolled open. When the tall man had stepped backward over the threshold, the door rolled shut again.

"Hot stuff," muttered Nick.

HE SAT smoking for a long while, not knowing whether he was being watched from the shadows, and not caring. After all, he didn't give a damn what they did or said or sold in this dump. His one concern was to get that ginger jar back, no matter what the price.

Most of Nick Fisher's work, in fact, was something like this. He knew how to shoot and never hesitated to do so if he thought shooting necessary, just as he never hesitated to use his fists. But for the most part, in spite of his reputation, he was perhaps less a sleuth than a diplomat, a go-between, a negotiator with the underworld, which trusted him.

But the Egyptian underworld, he was obliged to admit, was something new to him; and he wasn't sure that he liked it.

"The tall guy show up with the jug yet?"

Nick turned his head, knowing who it was.

"Where'd you come from?"

Eddy Savoy jerked his chin carelessly.

"The place is lousy with hidden doors. I've been ducking around so much it's a wonder I haven't bumped into myself."

"Isn't there anybody back of those divans?"

"Not now. They were just supers. Stage atmosphere. Most of them were out in the next room lying down when you were brought in. Atmosphere again. Some of those guys were real, though. That Englishman who got hysterical—he was a genuine customer."

"How did you know about him? You weren't here then."

"Yes I was. When Saied Hemeda stuck a gun at you and the two bozos fanned you for a gat, I was watching. As soon as they were finished those two guys scampered away. They came here—I suppose to give advance notice that you and Saied were on your way and that you didn't have a gun. So I came in then."

"How'd you manage it?"

"Pretended to be an addict. Not hard."

"How'd you know what the place was?"

"I sniffed several guys who came out. Hashish is practically the same as marihuana, and I've had plenty of experience with marihuana smokers, so I knew the act."

"You're supposed to be lying down in there now, eh?"

"Yeah, but my bunk's a nice quiet one and very dark. I don't think anybody'll miss me. Meanwhile I've been giving the place the once-over, making myself dizzy with all these trapdoors and sliding panels."

"The big room out there is a dope den and I guess it does a regular business. This room is for the overflow or maybe for special customers. And then there's a sort of combined stateroom and office, just back of this."

"The old boy with the gray beard, he's gone. Left the premises—I suppose to get that crockery. I would have followed him except that I couldn't see any way to do that and get back here without raising suspicion; so I struck around."

"Good idea. Now what about this office you mentioned?"

Little Eddy Savoy shook his head.

"I don't like this business, Nick. There's more to it than it originally looked like. If you ask me. You know what I found?"

"What?"

"Well, I found four Webley revolvers, two Colt automatics, six sawed-off shotguns, dozens of boxes of ammunition, and enough assorted cutlery to carve the whole Sahara Desert to pieces. But what really got me worried was—"

He vanished like a wisp of cigarette smoke. He melted into the shadows. Without a sound he had gone.

The sliding door was rolling back. Reddish light shone through from the hashish den. The tall man in black and gold stepped into the room with Nick, and the door rolled shut behind him.

"This is what you asked for, I believe?"

SOME Chinese potter of the seventeenth century was truly inspired when he made those jars. His was an art that is lost, an inspiration that can never be recaptured. Even Nick Fisher, who had little interest in such objects, except as they involved his work, was speechless and for a little while breathless as he held this lovely thing.

It was about seven inches tall, and carelessly slim, the color of a clear Eastern sky reflected in ice. There could be no appraising it, commenting upon it. The thing was simply perfect.

Nick handed it back.

"Yeah, that seems to be the right one," he said. "How much do you want to hand it back where it belongs?"

"I will give that jar to Mr. Doremus himself—not you or any other representative—here, for five thousand American dollars."

Nick swallowed hastily, and took the cigar out of his mouth and looked at it. He hoped his face was straight.

The jar was probably worth five thousand on the open market, but to a man like John W. Doremus, a devoted collector, whose set it completed, it was worth much, much more. Nick had been prepared to haggle, but this first sum mentioned left him agasp. He had intended to start *his* end of the dickering at five thousand.

"Well," he said, shrugging, "I suppose Mr. Doremus could be persuaded to pay

that much. He wants it back pretty badly."

The tall man replaced the jar in a satin bag. He bowed.

"When he is ready to come to me here, you will please inform my friend Saied Hemeda Abo Mossa, who will have tea each afternoon at Shepherd's until he hears from you. Be sure, however, that the police are not informed—"

"Don't worry about that. Mr. Doremus hates policemen and publicity. That's why he brought me all the way over here from New York."

"He may of course if he wishes," the tall man placidly continued, "bring a few friends with him. But assure him that any attempt at violence will get him nowhere."

"Speaking of violence, it might be a good idea if you watched your own step. If Mr. Doremus does consent to come here in person, he will take his customary precautions against robbery or kidnaping. He's a mighty influential man, remember."

"He will not be injured." The tall man bowed once again. "You will smoke a pipe with me, sir, before you go?"

"No thanks."

When the door of the hashish den closed behind Nick the world was all darkness and silence. He struck a match to get his bearings, but he could not see much except bare walls on either side. The match burned his fingers and he dropped it. He started down the alley.

Twice he stopped, thinking that he heard something stir close at hand, and each time he struck a match and saw nothing. Yet he had a feeling that he was being spied upon.

He wished he had a flashlight. Though he moved very slowly, his arms outstretched, his fingertips grazing the walls on either side, his eyes did not accustom themselves to the darkness. He couldn't see a thing except the stars above and at the far end of the alley a shapeless smear of thrice-reflected light.

He was nearing that light when he heard the first real sound. It was a slight hiss, low, on his left. He stepped away from it.

Something soft but very heavy struck

the back of his neck, stunning him. He bent his knees, ducked his head. His hat was knocked off.

He whirled around on one heel, swinging fists into the darkness, but as he did so a slim silken cord or rope slithered around his neck from behind and instantly was pulled tight. His chin was yanked back; blood pounded furiously in his temples; there was a roaring in his ears.

He heard somebody mutter something in Arabic, and he felt hands tearing open his coat. He tried to kick.

HE WAS flat on his back, blinking up at the stars. His neck was bare again, though it hurt. His head sang, his ears pounded. But he was alive, and apparently alone.

No, there was somebody coming toward him from the end of the alley where the light was. Nick did not see the man well, and didn't care. Everybody was an enemy in a place like this. Nick staggered to his feet and stepped toward the shadow, swinging a right hook.

The shadow telescoped, and Nick's great fist only smacked the side of a building.

"Hey, take it easy!"

Nick sucked his knuckles.

"Sorry, Eddy," he blubbered. "How'd you get here so soon?"

"I quit that sink of iniquity right after you did, and I could make out your silhouette, more or less, against the far end of the alley. I saw them jump you."

"They tried to garrot me."

"I kicked one of 'em," Eddy pursued, "in a place where it wouldn't feel nice. But I never got 'hold of the other, though I chased him."

"Knocked all the sense out of me, that rope," Nick rubbed his neck. "Let's get back to the hotel. I need a drink."

Over the beer Nick scowled at the floor. Why, he demanded, all the Arabian Nights stuff? Why the insistence that Mr. Doremus himself appear? Why only five thousand? Why the attack in the alley?

"As far as that's concerned," Eddy offered, "I don't think Saied Hemeda's out-

fit had anything to do with it. Otherwise that hunchbacked doorman wouldn't have allowed me to go outside until it was all over. No, I think it was just a coincidence."

"Coincidence, eh?" grumbled Nick, rubbing the back of his neck.

"It's only natural that a couple of thugs would know about that hashish joint and lay for guys coming out, figuring they'd be all hopped up and not able to make much resistance."

"I suppose so. But that still doesn't explain why—" He looked up. "Say, you never did get around to telling me what the other thing was you found in the office back there."

"I found a small black suitcase," Eddy said slowly, "and in it were four flashlight batteries, a pair of pliers, some copper wire, a phial of sulphuric acid, a small screw driver, two darning needles, a pair of rubber gloves, some sheets of waxed cardboard, a roll of bicycle tape, two alarm clocks—and a little lead box containing what I think is trinitrotoluene."

"Huh?"

"That's long for TNT."

"Oh."

Nick Fisher was silent while his beer flattened and the cigar between his fingers went out. Eddy watched him brightly, anxiously, with small bird-like eyes.

After a while Nick looked up, blinking.

"Chuck me that pad of radiogram forms on the desk there next to you, will you, Eddy?"

The little man did so.

"You going to send for Mr. Doremus?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm going to send for Mr. Doremus."

Next morning Nick found on the pillow beside his head a small Indian *katâh*, or fist dagger, with a grip of gilded steel. It speared a typewritten, unsigned note:

**This could as well have been placed in your heart. Remember—no police!**

He smiled a little, yawned, reached for the telephone.

"Did I get a wireless message last night?  
... Fine. Send it up."

## IV

WHEN a man is as rich as John W. Doremus, who in spite of his semi-retirement remained one of the greatest money czars of history, there is about any place where he lives a hush, an air of breathlessness not even all kings could produce.

And indeed John W. Doremus, though he hated display, was better guarded and in some respects better attended than many reigning monarchs. Getting close to him, getting within shouting distance, was difficult. No ordinary man could rush into his presence. Even newspaper reporters seldom saw him and then but briefly.

He was so very famous, so very important, guarded with such scrupulousness and diligence, that sometimes it almost seemed as if he didn't exist—as if the innermost temple, when reached, would prove empty, the great god Doremus a myth.

Yet he was real. He was a small apologetic creature with a face like a shriveled apple; and he was so rich that nobody, not even he himself, admittedly a mathematical genius, could estimate his wealth.

His yacht was real too, as dock loafers and curiosity seekers of Alexandria were made aware.

Residents of remote South Sea islands at the sight of Vincent Astor's *Nourmahal*, William Leeds' *Moana*, or J. P. Morgan's *Corsair* have been known to throw fits of excitement—supposing, not without reason, that their appearance heralded the beginning of a great new steamship service.

The *Stella* was not like that. It would never be mistaken for a passenger liner. Nor was it, as such craft go, notably magnificent. Nevertheless the *Stella*, complete with contents, probably was the most valuable yacht afloat. For as Nick Fisher had said, she was a floating museum.

The aged multi-millionaire spent much of his time aboard this yacht, and he liked

to have his favorite art treasures with him. There were the azure Nankin jars, for instance; the El Grecos; the priceless Bernard Palissy set; the Gaspard reliquary from Malines; the celebrated Adoration tapestries which John W. Doremus had obtained by outbidding representatives of the Vatican; and other things too numerous to mention.

Mr. Ladd pointed these out to the two Egyptians, who oh-ed and ah-ed politely. Mr. Ladd didn't know what else to do with the guys. He didn't dare be rude, for they had brought letters from various government officials; and they were moreover in full evening clothes and amazing to behold—one, the old one, having a scarlet ribbon across his shirtfront and divers medals suspended from his neck.

Mr. Ladd was the second officer, just now in charge. The old man was laid up with a touch of grip. The owner, attended not only by both the private detectives who bodyguarded him but also by the first officer, the chief officer and three husky deck hands, had with practically no explanation hurried ashore as soon as they docked.

Mr. Ladd subsequently learned that Mr. Doremus and this small army had gone up to Cairo by plane. He wondered what it was all about. It took a lot to lure Mr. Doremus off the *Stella* these days.

MR. LADD didn't like it. He had never liked Alexandria. It wasn't so bad around Ramleh, where most of the Europeans lived, but down here along the waterfront, in the ancient Arab district—

"Shall we go back to the smoking saloon?"

Casey, the watchman, one of two whose duty it was to keep an eye on the art treasures when the *Stella* was in port—the other was ashore on leave—winked at Mr. Ladd as the Egyptians filed out.

"Not missin' any of the silver yet, are you?"

Mr. Ladd grinned, then looked severe.

"Better watch that crowd on the dock, Casey. I don't like the looks of 'em. I wish

Mr. Doremus would consent to ask for police protection in some of these ports."

He went out on deck after the visitors.

The crowd on the dock looked angry. It jostled at the end of the gangplank, where one of the deck hands stood. Mr. Ladd stopped.

"Giving you any trouble?"

"I'll clout a few if they keep it up. How's for letting me strap on one of those automatics from the gun closet? That usually scares the wits out of 'em, just the sight of it."

Mr. Ladd shook his head.

"Orders are that there should always be one kept there and all the others have been taken ashore."

"Say, what's that bunch with the boss going to do, anyway? Start a war?"

"It would be a good idea if you minded your own business," Mr. Ladd said severely. He moved away. "If you need any help, sing out."

Inside the smoking saloon he stopped, shaking his head.

"How the hell did *you* get in? Excuse me, gentlemen."

An imp-like street performer, little and lively, wrinkled his eyes and grinned at Mr. Ladd but never paused in his patter. He was plucking live chicks from the pockets of the decorated Egyptian, who was bored but simulated a polite interest as if he thought this might be part of the American idea of entertainment.

"I say *goobee, goobee, goobee*, see what come! You got three piastre? I say—"

"Hey!" cried Mr. Ladd. "Get out of here! Scram! Beat it!"

The little man paid no attention, and it occurred to Mr. Ladd that except for his line of patter he probably understood no English. Mr. Ladd would have chucked him out personally except for the need to keep up appearances. He yelled for Henry, the steward. Henry didn't appear.

"Damn his hide! He must be shooting craps again! *Ellis!*" Ellis was the sailor at the gangplank. "Come here a minute."

Ellis did not come. The diminutive street fakir skipped to the other Egyptian and

started to take chicks from *his* coattails. He had a whole table covered with cheeping chicks.

"Ellis! What the—"

Mr. Ladd started for the deck. The Egyptian with the orders drew a long lean automatic and cried, "Stop!"

Mr. Ladd turned, marveling, flabbergasted.

"Lead me back to the art gallery," the Egyptian commanded.

The other visitor, Saied Hemeda Abo Mossa of the fixed smile, pointed another automatic at the street fakir, who deliberately picked up a chair.

"Drop that," cried Saied.

"Will you make me?" asked Eddy Savoy.

Saied snapped off the safety catch and squeezed the trigger. He got a click, nothing more.

"No cartridges in it," Eddy explained gayly. "I unloaded it while I was taking chickens out of your coat."

"You speak English!" cried Mr. Ladd.

"American," corrected Eddy. "Don't let that other bozo worry you. He doesn't know it yet, but there aren't any cartridges in his gat either."

"I don't under—"

"Maybe this'll make it clearer," said Eddy Savoy, and threw the chair at Saied Hemeda.

Furniture and visitor went down together, the man vainly trying to shoot his pistol. Eddy jumped right on top of him and slapped his head back against the wall. After that Saied was still, and Eddy took the automatic.

Mr. Ladd, who didn't know what it was all about but hadn't forgotten how to use his fists, floored the man with the medals. Mr. Ladd took that man's pistol. Eddy tossed him a handful of cartridges.

"Never mind asking questions now. I'll explain later. We've got to move fast. Come on!"

The chicks cheeped frantically. From aft came two loud shots, a thud. Footsteps padded on the deck.

"Let's go!"



## V

CASEY had locked the main saloon, where most of the art treasures were kept, and gone outside, meaning to take Mr. Ladd's suggestion and look over the crowd. It was only indirectly a part of his duty to watch the gangplank, but Ellis was his friend and the yacht was almost deserted, making it, so far, a dull night.

It was on the afterdeck that he first saw the boarders. Three of them were bending over the sailor on watch, who appeared to be asleep. They had apparently come from the starboard side, the bay side, which was puzzling.

Casey did not know, then, that they were swarming over the rail like rats, having climbed rope ladders from boats below. He did not know that the watch wasn't sleeping but was stunned by a blow at the base of the skull. All he knew was that these natives, whoever they were, had no business being here. He shouted.

"Hey, you guys! Where did you come from?"

The men turned, and Casey saw that each held something shiny. Casey cursed, reaching for his pistol. He never had a chance. Two of the men fired at the same time, and Casey, feeling as if somebody had kicked him in the stomach, went down.

Ellis heard the shots, but Ellis was in no position to do anything about it. The natives on the dock were behaving worse than ever, the ones in back pushing forward, so that they crowded half way up the gangplank. They looked sore about something; they looked nasty. Ellis, fists on hips, scowled at them.

"Now cut that out, before I start slapping a couple of jaws!"

They would not get the English, but they'd probably understand the tone of voice. Yet they seemed unawed. Two indeed pushed further up the gangplank. These two wore kaftans and tarbooshes, but over their kaftans were western topcoats. From under those topcoats each drew a sawed-off shotgun.

"Step back," one said in English.

Ellis, being no fool, stepped back. He took his time, astounded as he was. Back up the gangplank he went, staring wildly at the muzzles of the shotguns, and as he reached the deck he heard a grunt behind him.

Instinctively he started to turn. Blackness and a great roaring cold void overtook and engulfed him. Just before he lost consciousness he heard Mr. Ladd calling him from the smoking cabin and then he heard the two shots on the afterdeck.

Sparks, asleep in a chair in his cabin, woke up when a sack was thrown over his head and shoulders and he was tied to the chair, right where he was.

The forward watch stood gawping at the onrush of Egyptians. He seemed paralyzed. Without any show of resistance, he let them knock him down and beat him into unconsciousness.

An oiler came up from below and stood at the top of the companionway, blinking in amazement. Somebody hit him full in the face with a sandbag, and he tumbled backward.

Up to this point the raid had proceeded smoothly. No police launch was in sight, no watchman showed his face—they'd been taken care of in advance—and aboard the *Stella* were more than twenty armed ruffians.

As far as they were concerned there had been no confusion. Moreover the business had been carried out practically in silence. The two shots on the afterdeck might, after all, have been caused by the backfiring engine of some small powerboat.

Yes, the rank-and-file had behaved admirably. It was the staff which flopped. The rank-and-file, not knowing what else to do, stood staring at the door of the smoking cabin. Their leaders should have been in their midst by this time, giving further commands.

A CHURNING, a banging, and Nick Fisher, both elbows moving fast, charged bull-like into their midst. When he observed that a raid was certainly imminent, he had stopped to telephone, send-

ing Eddy on ahead; and now, seeing how far things had gone, he was alarmed.

"Get back there, you lousy—"

Many had pistols, and there were also the two shotguns, but orders were to shoot only in defense. Besides, daggers and bludgeons were weapons more natural to these men, and it was with daggers and bludgeons that Nick was met. He faced a ring of them.

"So you want to play rough? Okay!"

His pistol came out. A man nearby raised his knife. There was no time to discriminate, and hesitation would have meant death. Nick fired low, breaking the man's right leg just above the knee, so that he fell screaming in pain.

It had its effect. They melted in front of him as he strode to the forward deck. He saw two sailors there, or engineroom hands, who had come up from below.

"Here, you guys! Let's see if you can—"

Somebody threw a knife, and threw it very well, or else he was lucky. Nick cried shrilly as pain tore up his arm from a pierced right hand, and his gun clacked on the deck.

He stooped, meaning to grab the gun with his left hand, but somebody bumped against him, causing him to stagger away from the spot, and somebody else kicked the gun, which skittered across the deck to be lost in the shadow of the superstructure.

A club caught Nick's shoulder. Another missed his left ear by a fraction of an inch. He spun on his heel, stepping back. A knife came so close that it took a button from his coat.

Two things happened then, at the same time.

One: A small humped figure in a dark cloak scuttled up the gangplank and dived unhesitatingly into a companionway. He had been carrying a small metal box, painted green, which might have been a working man's lunch box.

Two: Eddy Savoy and Mr. Ladd came out of the smoking cabin.

Eddy and the second officer when they appeared on deck were cramming car-

tridges into the magazines of a couple of automatic pistols. Mr. Ladd, though startled and bewildered by what he saw, kept right on doing that.

Not Eddy. Eddy's quick mind saw that there was no time for loading guns. Nick was in danger, immediate danger. Eddy clubbed the pistol he'd taken from Saied Hemeda, and he leaped into the crowd.

He moved mighty fast, and for a little man he could hit mighty hard. There was nothing gentle about the way he charged to his friend's side, nor anything thoughtful or considerate. He simply smacked whatever got in his way.

Nick, clear for a moment, backed to a wall underneath the ladder leading up to the bridge. There was a coil of fire hose there. With his left hand Nick grabbed the nozzle. He yanked out as much of the hose as he could, making the red wheel spin.

Eddy broke an Egyptian nose with the flat of Saied's automatic, kicked another Egyptian in the shins, caught still another in the jaw with an upswung left elbow, and dodged the slash of a knife. He stumbled into the cleared space.

"I gotcha, keed!" he cried, running for the hose reel.

"Attaboy, Eddy!"

The little man spun the wheel wildly.

"You!" he shouted at the two thunderstruck sailors. "Unwind this thing! Come on—move fast!"

As they went toward the wheel, little Eddy Savoy lowered his head and deliberately dived back into the crowd. Men were jostled this way and that, marking his route. Then he was gone.

He reached the amidships section, near the gangplank, just as the humped little man in the black cloak reappeared. The humped little man hastened overside to the dock. He was no longer carrying the metal box. Eddy Savoy darted into the companionway.

On deck Nick continued to do several things at once—and violently. He tugged at the hose with one hand, and knocked aside an Egyptian with the other

fist; he yelled at the sailors to work faster.

One in the crowd, a sort of unofficial leader, decided that things had gone far enough and the use of a pistol was now certainly justified. He snicked out his revolver and fired twice at Nick. He was not a good shot, but Nick made a large target and the distance was inconsiderable. Two other men drew pistols.

A sailor had played out all the hose, and the other sailor turned on the water. The canvas hose sprang to life like an enormous awakened python. The huge brass nozzle leaped and kicked.

Three pistols—but the water got there first.

**D**OWN they went and back they went like that many ten-pins. The terrible stout stream thundered against the superstructure, against the deck; it moved back and forth; it rose and fell as Nick fought with the bucking nozzle; and whatever it touched that was human it quickly swept away.

Even Mr. Ladd went. Nick had not meant to include him, but Mr. Ladd stayed in one place too long, reloading, and there was no opportunity to select this man or that. Mr. Ladd, spluttering in rage, was slapped against the after rail like a wet unwanted rag. But at least he didn't go overboard. Five or six of the men went overboard.

Nick shouted with excitement and joy. It was a glorious feeling to stand there and sweep everything before him. He leaned forward with the hose, the nozzle gripped in his left hand and arm.

The deck before him was cleared now, but Nick was having much too good a time to stop at once. He saw a prone Egyptian try to rise, and promptly Nick knocked him flat with a well directed torrent.

A little man carrying a green box sprang up from below. The stream of water missed him by inches.

"Hey! What's the idea?"

"Sorr. Eddy."

This was on the port side, the dock side. Eddy ran forward to where Nick and the two sailors stood, to the forward deck. He would have passed them, making for the starboard rail, but Nick, dropping the hose, grasped his sleeve.

"Well, we were little late but I guess everything's come out all right. I phoned to have the tall guy pinched and—"

"Let me go, you fool!"

They were good friends, the best of friends, when Eddy hit Nick in the forehead with the box, stunning him. In the same motion Eddy whirled in a complete circle and threw the box out over the rail.

As he did so the world went white and gave a convulsive jump, making everything shudder. The water of the bay seemed to try to leap into the air. The *Stella* rocked crazily, so that not a man was able to keep his feet. Everything went black again. Silence shrieked.

Nick sat up. His clothes were in shreds, his face blistered, his eyebrows singed.

"Wha— What happened?"

Nick staggered to his feet. He stared down at Eddy Savoy, still unable to comprehend the enormous thing that had happened so suddenly. But he was relieved to see his small partner grinning, if a bit wryly.

"Trinitrotoluene," Eddy said, as he rose, "can make an awful noise sometimes."

He cocked his head. Through a silence otherwise tomb-like there came a thin persistent *cheep-cheep-cheep*. Eddy started for the smoking cabin.

"My baby chicks, I'd better take a look at them. I didn't buy them, you see, only rented them. Excuse me."

**T**HEY sat on the terrace and lazily watched the human race go by. They could afford to be seen together in public now.

"Shame about that guy Casey."

"He'll recover. Mr. Doremus has pensioned him and is sending him back to the States. We did shave it pretty close."

"Had to," said Nick. "When they pulled

all that opera bouffe stuff, and then insisted on Dr. Doremus coming in person, it certainly looked as if they wanted to get the *Stella* to put in at Alexandria and to get Mr. Doremus ashore along with his regular bodyguard and at least a few extra men and guns besides.

"But if I warned Mr. Doremus, he wouldn't budge from the yacht, so he'd probably never see his azure Nankin again. If I let him come up to Cairo and arranged behind his back to have the yacht guarded by cops or private policemen, then the raiders would call everything off and telephone Cairo—and once again that ginger jar wouldn't be produced.

"I had to make sure that they were going to raid the ship before I could act. And the only way to make sure was to see it started. I'll admit I never thought they'd take over with such efficiency."

"That old guy at the hashish den was pretty bright at that," commented Eddy. "He figured those forged letters of introduction would get Saied Hemeda and the other baby aboard the *Stella*—as they did—so that they'd get familiar with the layout and be prepared to direct the rough boys when they piled aboard.

"He figured that afterward the bomb would destroy all sorts of fingerprints and other possible traces, not to mention various surviving witnesses who might otherwise pick guys out of a line-up, and best of all, since the art treasures would seem to have been shattered and gone down

with the rest of the ship, it would make the whole business look like the work of Reds, who have been threatening John W. Doremus for years.

"Also, in case of any possible kick-back, he could prove that he was in Cairo at the time of the raid, one hundred and twenty miles away, actually talking to Mr. Doremus himself. If we hadn't taken so many prisoners and got 'em to talk, we never would have had a charge against him. And also if that bomb hadn't been chucked overboard—"

"Funny about that bomb, me forgetting it."

"Funny? That the way you feel about it?"

With his left hand—his right was bundled in bandages—Nick touched his forehead, where the metal box had made a large dark bruise. He grimaced. He sipped his beer.

People hurried past Sheppard's—Italians, Germans, scowling Arabs, Jews, Nubians black as tar, Algerians, Greeks, Turks, frightened visitors from the upper Nile country whose faces were bright with tattooing. . . .

They pulled and pushed and elbowed and kicked; they whined and shouted and cursed; they were rich men, poor men, a great many beggarmen and even more thieves.

"Interesting place, Cairo," said Nick, "but after all, you know, it's a lot like New York."

## "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 invisi-

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.

# Sea Wrack

By BERTON E. COOK

Author of "Reunion in Liverpool," "Stowaway With Death," etc.

Learned judge, can you tell how much it costs to make a hero—to salvage a derelict? Consult your authorities: the black bitter wind, the pitch of malevolent waves

"YES, I do know why you sent for me, Judge. You're the administrator of the estate and the time's come to settle it on me." Herbert Payton, second officer of the *Long Lance* and current hero of the sea, spoke with assurance.

"On you?" Judge Gerrish peered over his specs beneath hoisted brows. "Not necessarily. You ran away. The all-important codicil to this legal instrument specifically states that I shall decide that question."

Payton had been viewing the harbor out the windows. He turned with a changed expression to ask bluntly, "Under what conditions do I inherit my father's estate, particularly the home?"

"That you—ahem—you merit the estate according to my judgment."

"Your judgment! Why yours?"

"You are the sole kith and kin; I was your father's closest intimate for forty-seven years. And you ran away to sea. Had it not been for the sea rescue in the newspapers and your name prominent among the rescuers, the estate would have gone by your default to the other party. I refer to the Colby Hospital."

Herbert Payton left the windows to sit opposite the judge, lean over the big desk



Feet braced, hands up to hold things that were not there, he stood just inside the engineroom doorway

and ask the crucial question: "Judge Gerrish, what do you propose to require of me in return for our family home—and means? What is your price?"

The stony face became stonier as the judge recognized that he had not taken this man by surprise. His open, legal fingers clenched to fists and his gray eyes gleamed.

For his generation had not approved of Herbert's age class, of their wilfulness, their self-assertiveness; and the hour had arrived at long last to exact the penalty for nonconformity to that iron rule of a day that had passed.



"Young man"—as if pronouncing sentence in court—"youth craves adventure and heroics. You are fortunate indeed that your adventure has ended in heroism and in time for the more steady, though prosaic, demands of mature living.

"Your father never shared your Don Quixotic spirit, as you well know; it crossed his plans for your life. He proposed to train you to carry on the large wholesale and retail business that made him wealthy, a great man in his city and his generation, a dependable citizen.

"He made a will eighteen years ago on that premise; you were to inherit all. Your mother died then, you may recall.

"Just prior to his passing, however, we discussed you. Nobody knew where you were, yet your father added to his will a codicil, confident that his son would return. If he did so within thirty-five months from date, said will would be filed. I was to decide whether you merited, at last, the responsibility; whether you had arrived at the age of discretion. If so, in my judgment, I was authorized to grant, or not to grant, you his estate. If granted, the codicil provides that I set the terms.

"Your name in the account of the rescue at sea was called to my attention. The thirty-five months are very nearly run out. I sent for you, rather than wait to see whether you intended to come to town. I have called you here to hear my terms while there is yet time."

Payton's mind raced. He both heard the Judge's drone and mentally organized certain events that already he saw it would be necessary to present in a sort of self-defense.

NOW that the drone ended, he recalled the grimness with which his father had driven him daily to nails by penny-weight, wire by gauge, sandpaper from double zero fine to coarse, copper and brass and galvanized pipe, fence wire . . . all as devoid of color and adventure as a ditch, all drab, all money-grubbing, all . . . good God, he'd give Judge Gerrish an earful to answer his—

But what were his terms?

"Again, Judge, what is the price you exact of me for my home?"

"Precisely the price your father would exact: that you climax your adventures with your recent—ahem—heroics to settle here in the homestead and assume the hardware business."

Payton had hoped for better, but he had not expected better consideration—not from Judge Gerrish. Wherefore he had been assembling recent events, the events that would give the old judge an earful.

"Judge," said he, "it is unjust to dictate when or where a man shall live his life. Not even a father should presume to dictate that. And how well you should know that!"

The judge blinked; he sat bolt upright. He saw Payton coldly return to the window. He thundered at that broad back up there, "Then you refuse to—"

Herbert Payton's deep-water voice reflected off the window pane with: "Am I entitled to my defense? Have I the right to be heard?"

"I—ahem—yes, of course."

"No man, I repeat, has the right to dictate another man's life. You say you've read about our rescue of the *Laplander's* crew. You have referred to heroism and heroics. Well, there was something else aboard the *Long Lance* besides heroics, that night; there was tragedy."

"I've had a secret and personal resentment against the sea for many years, Payton. I do not care to hear—but you asked to be heard regarding the will," the judge said to steer him.

"Exactly, Judge, and what I ask you to hear is this:

•

We called him Old Mess. He boarded us at The Hague along with a consignment of flax and glass. He'd been in the Mediterranean, India, the East. He was tanned almost black; maybe that's why he got on our articles, for we needed neither stokers nor sailors.

He waited on the sailors' and stokers' mess, an old man doing the menial work of the colored boys, and he made an impression on those he served. At first they just eyed him bringing on the grub, then they muttered about him.

The time came, of course, when a frisky young Italian coal passer made a crack at him to start that heartless razzing due an aged white man in the steward's outfit.

The crowd, they say, squelched the coal passer promptly, they pitied the old veteran. Some day some of them would be down to mess boy, too—or worse. And the old guy did his waiting-on okay.

They noticed him in the engineroom doorways. He'd hang there an hour at a time, eyeing the engine's pistons, cylinder heads, revolving crank webs, everything. He'd watch the eccentric rods so closely that one of the oilers tried to get him talking when they met on the stern one afternoon.

But all Old Mess gave him was a presumptuous opinion that the eccentrics didn't sound right or look right or something of the sort—and on top of that a few questions. He did not talk about himself.

The oiler humored him by telling him the *Long Lance* and her engines were twenty-odd years old and ought to be in the bone pile; told him about the circulating pump that never had behaved, and so on. He was dumb to miss the intelligence Old Mess had revealed to him. But who expects intelligence in a has-been?

**W**E'D hardly sunk the British Isles Western when it came on to blow. We ate in racks, we swayed along the passageways.

The second night of it, the chief was the last from the table. He stood in the passageway, picking his teeth and thinking. He must have seen Old Mess then, seen the back of his white poll and his stocky build ahead there, turning into the cross alley.

But the chief was deep in his thoughts. Rough weather took a lot out of the *Long*

*Lance's* power plant these days and this looked to be a long, vicious spell of headwinds; the glass showed it.

That night, when mess men usually lie low after hours, Chief Hanson beheld Old Mess face to face. He was not pickled—no, but he wasn't himself. Maybe the gale had got into him.

He stood just inside the engineroom doorway. His feet were braced. His hands were up in places to hold things that were not there. His eyes were fixed on an imaginary object and he murmured.

The chief watched him awhile, scrutinized him, then he went closer and spoke.

"Why, I remember you!"

Old Mess scarcely heeded. He was on duty, concentrating. He was at the throttle of an imaginary engine, watching the dial for the order for half speed or stop or reverse engine.

"Hey, what in hell's your name?" the chief demanded in friendly fashion, scratching his head and reaching for the old man's arm. "I remember . . . what *is* your name?"

But Old Mess was somewhere else; his mind had skipped, had jumped backward to another day in another ship. Others came to watch him and quiz him and laugh. He's nuts, what? Lookit his gray eyes stare up, what's he seein'?"

(Judge Gerrish yawned.)

Old Mess was nuts, all right, in a mild way; it must have been coming on for days.

Chief told me that the fellow had once been chief on a big coastwise job out of New York. He'd run away as a kid and gone up through the engineroom to become chief with a heavy ticket for all seas.

One day, says our chief, death struck his family. Old Mess's father, a famous surgeon who'd planned that his son would follow his profession, had dropped dead over the operating table and left his estate, a large one, all to Old Mess's younger brother then in college.

He'd punished his favorite son for choosing his own life work, punished him by disowning him with vitriolic bitterness.

(Judge Gerrish half choked in the midst of another yawn.)

That was a blow. Within a week it did strange things to the chief engineer. Within a month he took the throttle from his third assistant in a blizzard on the Maine coast. He got the bells to reverse; instead, he shot her from slow ahead to full speed ahead.

The ship piled onto the rocks below Cape Elizabeth and they broke the chief.

Of course he had to be stripped; he wasn't himself any more. And ever since, he's been roaming the world, now a miserable shell, now as peculiar as our chief caught him in the gale.

Our chief went on to me, "I've heard engineers say that on rare occasions that old duffer will tell you he knew he was doing precisely what the bells did not want done with the engine. Can you fathom that?"

"He'll tell you his father's will—not altogether the money involved but the scolding his father gave him for not becoming a surgeon—did something inside him. He couldn't believe a father could hate his own son."

Next—Hold on, Judge Gerrish. I heard you out, you're going to hear me. Next morning the chief had a talk with the skinny Italian coal passer; the pace was killing him. That noon, the Italian switched to mess boy and Old Mess went firing.

"Cripes, I had to do at least that much," the chief grunted, "and if I've got him below, I may recall his—no, he's signed on as John Smith. That's not his name."

**WE HAD** the gale coming to us, by the law of averages. We had come all the way across the Persian Gulf and out the sultry Mediterranean without five consecutive hours of foul weather. Now our luck was evening up, we were catching hell.

We eased the *Long Lance* over black mountains that rushed her. We cut her through the smaller cross seas and watched

her twist and creak and writhe in her foam. She could fight through if the breaks weren't against her.

It turned cold; it can do that even in August up there on the northern route.

We shivered with the battling old hull underfoot. We estimated how much longer the gale could get worse, how much more this old girl could take without leaks or breakdowns. Fancy a breakdown in there, lolling in the trough, rolling cases of glass cargo about, being smothered, boiled, buried under those black walls coming for us.

By the third afternoon the wind was ripping away the crests. It roared into one continuous hissing, it shrieked in the rigging, it bored into our very souls.

And right into the midst of it, when a man couldn't stand against it, came an sos from a tiny pulp boat. The storm had caught her halfway between the Naze and Cape Race. Her first hatch had sprung open, she was taking in water for'd, was by the head and doomed.

In that gale, mind you. That was the *Laplander*.

I saw the skipper take that call like a blow in the face. Well he might, for we were making slow headway and half expecting anything to happen as 'twas. The *Long Lance* creaked and jangled throughout. But it was an sos and a desperate one.

"We'll go," the skipper decided, "but I'll order no crew into a boat if this holds on—only volunteers."

We headed for the *Laplander* and the *Long Lance* began a new set of motions. She knocked men down companions, rolled men onto fo'castle floors, unhinged a water-cooler.

But they say she failed to get Old Mess off his dogs, down there in her dizzy stokehold. And off watch he'd stand above, in a doorway, eyeing the engine as it rocked and pounded the big shaft around, on the way to rescue seventeen stricken Norwegians—if she made it in time.

Old Mess drew attention because he didn't turn in. He couldn't seem to live out of sight of those p stons. Would the power plant stand up under all this grief? The

second assistant asked him that, just to razzle-dazzle him out of his silence.

"I—eccentrics, old shaft—I wonder," said Old Mess, and he said a mouthful. You see, he knew an up-and-down job as few ever get to know it. Maybe that's why he hung there like a doctor watching a fever victim; maybe he'd observed what others had not.

The *Long Lance* plodded nor' nor'west all night. She went as far up and down as ahead. Her engineers hung to the butterfly, easing her over the crests when her propeller came out and giving her hell when the stern dug deep into it.

She shipped whole seas; her for'd well was a caldron most of the time. She corkscrewed and slid headlong, and fetched up to a near standstill on the long climbs. She gave us all some breath-taking moments.

(Judge Gerrish coughed and looked daggers at that back in his windows.)

**WE FOUND** the *Laplander* by good luck and better navigating because her only light was a smeary oil lamp up the mainmast. Every time it disappeared, we swore it was the final dive . . . The skipper elected to stand by till daylight.

Dawn revealed her wretched state. The fo'castle head was flush with the water's edge. The funnel was gone. The bridge had slewed off, caught somehow in some of the lifeboat gear and strung alongside to leeward in a tangle that could wreck a lifeboat.

"You keep clear of that mess," the skipper warned me when I mustered my volunteers into the boat. "We'll work around to leeward of her as soon as you get clear off us—but for God's sake don't hurry!"

We lowered as far as the maindeck level, sat onto the top of a big sea coming from under the ship, shoved like hell and got away in time.

We swooped downwind like a cutter race. I managed to fetch 'er up before she went round the stern and those poor devils came down lines hung overside at a time when already the *Laplander's* stern hung higher than Haman.

The last four were coming down the lines when I risked a look-around for the *Long Lance*. We rose away up onto a huge sea and I almost swallowed my tongue.

The *Long Lance* had evidently started around to leeward of us, but something had happened. She lay in the trough, lolling her decks under and drifting away into the east.

At this rate, we'd never reach her at all—and if we did get there we'd lose men trying to get back aboard her. I've heard of a lot of things happening in tough moments at sea, but this was the worst situation. . . . Aye, she was blowing off; I could see it when we topped the next sea. Her engine had quit.

We got the Norwegians and stowed them flat. Without telling my volunteers what might lie ahead for us, I headed the big lifeboat for the wallowing old *Long Lance* and prayed like a kid for these men before me, rowing their hearts out, lying in the bottom, escaping one death for—what?

Later, this is the story they told me. The *Long Lance* had started around to leeward when, without the slightest warning, her whole engineroom went silent as a tomb. Not a piece of machinery in that white vault moved.

She slid into the trough right away and began rolling her rails under. She lay at times on her beam ends and the third assistant turned green. While others fought to keep their feet, the chief yelled, "Vacuum or else. . . ." He went sliding down a greasy flight.

He met the landing coming up. He heard noises in his ears—due, he thought, to the jolt he'd taken in landing. But the noises were steam escaping. He saw the condenser squirting steam and yelled through the accumulating fog, "Look to y'r eccentrics, cut the feed, open the atmosphere valve!"

He started for number one, others came below on the run and slide, wrenches clanged and the vault became dense with steam.

And when they got to the last eccentric

rods, there was Old Mess on his knees with a wrench, waiting for the others to open the atmosphere valve so he could set a set-screw.

You see, the eccentric rods to number three are set exactly ninety degrees ahead of the piston so that the steam valve will open to feed steam in over the piston at the right instant. The eccentrics were set with set-screws. One of these screws had loosened, untimed steam had choked that cylinder and the whole power plant had stopped dead.

Old Mess had watched that engine for days—and nights, too. He had long ago been a wizard at meeting engine troubles halfway and this time he beat all hands to the trouble spot. And they let him set the screw.

He knew exactly the right degree, too, and the chief watched him. After beating them all to it, somehow collaring a suitable wrench on the way—he had it coming to him, says the chief.

**THEY** had to chase us downwind, but they got us whole. When she lay to, taking us aboard, they say Old Mess was at the ladderhead to return down into the stokehold.

He turned in the doorway on the top rung. In turning, he was changing that wrench from one hand to the other and about-facing to go down face to the ladder.

In that ticklish instant for him, the ship lurched up a big sea and caught him off balance. She hove him down onto the iron plates below.

Two watchmates tried to pick him up, but he astounded them both by shooing them away—and he still gripped the wrench.

He hobbled back to his fires as if he'd have no one say he wasn't the equal and more of all the ordinary, unlettered stokers this side of Surabaya! He winced on the bar, he grunted over his scoop. He worked twice as hard, what with the ship's resumed motion and the fall he'd taken—and that wrench.

The men reminded him of it. What was

he lugging a wrench for with his hands already full of bar, scoop and rake? He shooed them out of his way.

They joshed the old guy when he limped. One of them got confidential, reminded him he wasn't a strong youngster any more, and tried to lead him to the ladder.

Old Mess stretched painfully to his full, stocky stature. His free hand came up like a piston. The young stoker went backward over a pile of coal and knocked another fellow over the barrow.

Old Mess stared coldly at what he had accomplished. His hands went up to his left side. Then his eyes looked up again to that invisible dial and those hands took their positions at the controls of the imaginary engine.

He was on the engineroom bridge again, watching for the call to reverse engine. Was he reversing this time or did the shock of his father's vitriolic hatred of his own son make him send the ship at full speed ahead to her doom?

Nobody watching the act could guess which he was doing. Nobody presumed, that time, to ask him. The sting of his left fist had silenced his watchmates.

. . . The whole world was learning that we had rescued the *Laplander's* crew eighteen minutes before she took her last dive. We were on our way westward to Boston again, but still bucking the gale. It probably sounds strange to you, but the talk of the men by then was not the rescue; it was Old Mess.

The skipper heard so much of it that he sent for the man. In his cabin he talked for the better part of an hour, plying that solid, inarticulate human conundrum with questions. Had he a license? Had he ever held one? Would he mind being mentioned in the radio story of the rescue of the *Laplander's* crew?

Only this last question drew from him a response, the sole fruit of an hour's cajoling; but it was stunted fruit. For Old Mess turned his gray eyes on the skipper for the first time.

In a faraway, detached manner, he said, "Report? No. When a father hates his



own son . . . no mention." He stirred a bit stiffly, winced and added, "I knew I was doing it, sirs . . . full speed ahead . . . own son . . ."

The skipper gave it up. He did, however, accede to Old Mess's wish; he refrained from mentioning him in the radio story.

When, at length, the wind blew itself out and the seas rounded, Old Mess was back among us. He insisted the tumble off the stokehold ladder had only bruised him; he was a tough knot of muscle and bone anyway, the product of no end of stokeholds and ugly fo'castles.

(Judge Gerrish was sitting forward by now, watching Payton very closely, listening with his mouth agape. But Payton was not looking.)

CHIEF HANSON made it his business to watch the old man after the latter's watchmates complained he was moaning in his sleep, making blood-curdling sounds of misery. And they said he always moved so as to spare his left side.

The chief watched him afternoons, sitting carefully on a coiled hawser aft, and all the while he did his level best to recall Old Mess's rightful name. He became so determined to get that name that he almost resented our nearing port.

The last night out, he waited for Old Mess to come off watch at midnight. He led the weary fellow up to his room and locked the door.

"Now, mister," said he, "I'll see you sit down."

Old Mess obeyed, carefully favoring his left side.

"I thought so," the chief said softly. "Here—no, no, I'm peeling off your shirt."

Underneath the shirt, he found that Old Mess was wearing a tight-fitting, skimpy jersey. It was almost a straightjacket for his bulk. The left side of it was caked to his ribs. The spot was black; it was old, clotted blood and grime.

Further examination convinced the chief that the man had two, possibly three cracked ribs. The chief tried to sound gruff

about it all, but he failed—and that was his good fortune. In there where nobody could witness it, he became gentle and solicitous. He dressed the sore, he talked the sympathy he felt.

And Old Mess became another person. He responded much as an injured dog responds. His gray eyes lost their impersonal stare, his mind ceased to dwell in that other-world mold.

"Several minutes after the change came over Old Mess," says the chief, "I myself went below and got his battered traveling bag. Confronted with that sudden situation, he almost yelped; but I told him frankly what I was after."

"What say? My identity?" Old Mess asked querulously. "My—my chief's license is still in its frame. Away down in the very bottom. . ."

Herbert Payton wheeled on the judge. He found him taut as a wet line. The face of the law had somewhat changed during the recital and now the lips moved as if Judge Gerrish made words that he hesitated to voice out loud.

"Judge, do I have to tell you? Old Mess's rightful name is Llewellyn—"

The judge raised protesting hands. "I know, I know,"—and his voice trembled before a flood of memories and emotions. "Where is my brother?"

"In the Marine Hospital in Boston."

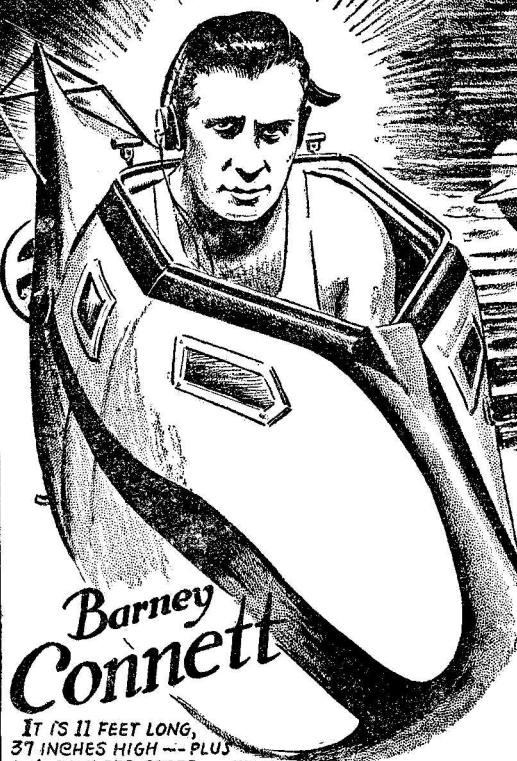
"That is bad; he is too aged to be firing boilers. He is getting old . . . like myself."

Herbert Payton restrained himself because he beheld the judge, not as the unbending personification of the law, but a broken man trying to collect himself with dignity.

When he got around to speak again, his voice became surprisingly gentle. He spread his palms flat on the desk, stretched back at arm's length and said: "Well, Herbert, my boy, let's attend to your estate. I'll go back to Boston with you."

"Yes, of course you're going back."

# MEN of DARING by STOKES Allen



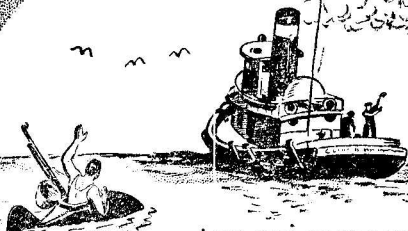
**Barney  
Connett**

IT IS 11 FEET LONG,  
37 INCHES HIGH -- PLUS  
A 4-FOOT PERISCOPE -- WEIGHS  
1000 POUNDS; IS POWERED BY AN ELECTRIC  
MOTOR AND TOOK BARNEY 6 YEARS TO BUILD  
FROM OLD AUTO PARTS AT A COST  
OF \$4,000.

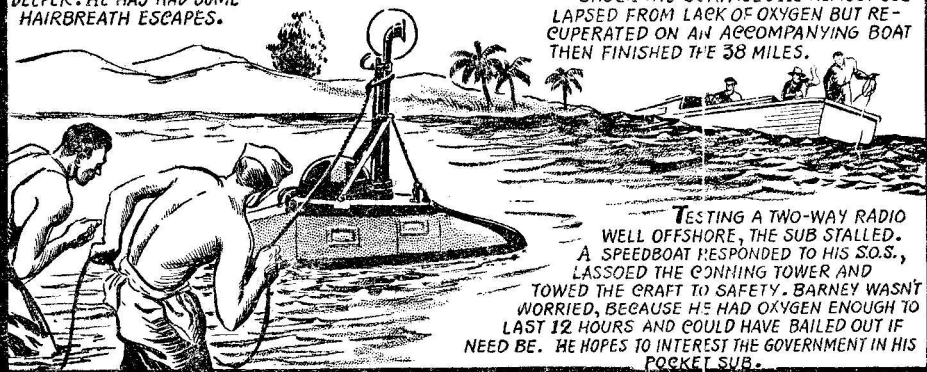
BARNEY  
OPERATES IT STRETCHED OUT ON HIS STOMACH  
LIKE A SARDINE AND HAS MADE OVER 300 SUCCESSFUL  
DIVES TO A MAXIMUM OF 31 FEET, ALTHOUGH IT WILL GO  
DEEPER. HE HAS HAD SOME  
HAIRBREATH ESCAPES.

## Sea-Going Sardine

WHEN BARNEY CONNETT WAS A BOY HE  
HEARD THE RHYME ABOUT THE WISE MEN  
WHO WENT TO SEA IN A BOWL, AND THE IDEA  
STUCK. TODAY, A 34-YEAR-OLD ME-  
CHANIC, HE IS INVENTOR, OWNER AND  
OPERATOR OF THE WORLD'S SMALLEST  
PRACTICAL SUBMARINE.



LAST YEAR HE MADE HIS  
WILL AND STARTED ACROSS  
LAKE MICHIGAN, CRUISING 3 FEET  
UNDER THE SURFACE. HE ALMOST COL-  
LAPSED FROM LACK OF OXYGEN BUT RE-  
COVERED ON AN ACCOMPANYING BOAT  
THEN FINISHED THE 38 MILES.



TESTING A TWO-WAY RADIO  
WELL OFFSHORE, THE SUB STALLED.  
A SPEEDBOAT RESPONDED TO HIS S.O.S.,  
LASSOED THE CONNING TOWER AND  
TOWED THE CRAFT TO SAFETY. BARNEY WASN'T  
WORRIED, BECAUSE HE HAD OXYGEN ENOUGH TO  
LAST 12 HOURS AND COULD HAVE BAILED OUT IF  
NEED BE. HE HOPES TO INTEREST THE GOVERNMENT IN HIS  
POCKET SUB.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

# WOMEN of DARING *By STOOKIE ALLEN*



## THAT GIBSON GIRL!

YEARS AGO, WHILE RIDING WITH HER COUSIN, CAPTAIN HENRY GIBSON, OVER STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN, SHE SUDDENLY MADE HER FIRST JUMP WITHOUT EVEN WARNING THE CAPTAIN.

TODAY—THIS BEAUTIFUL GIRL IS PROBABLY THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS CHUTE JUMPER.

**Alice Gibson**

IN HER STRATOSPHERE EQUIPMENT.

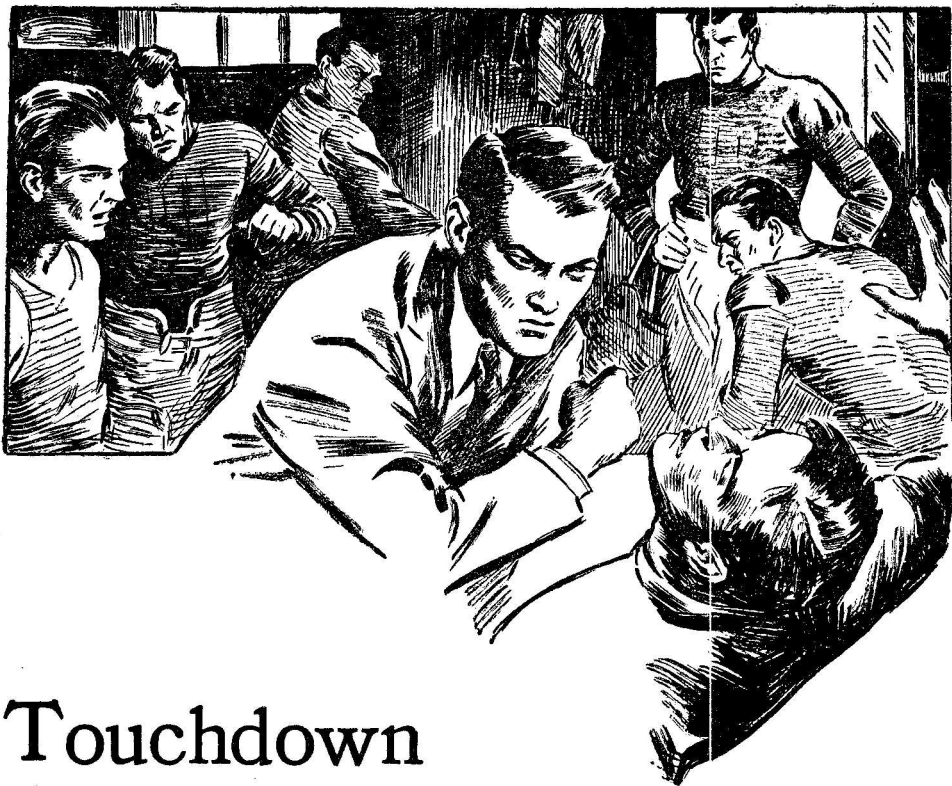
SHE HAS JUMPED FROM 15,000 FEET—AND IS NOW PLANNING A LEAP OF 32,000 FT. OVER 6 MILES!

IT WILL TAKE HER HALF AN HOUR TO GET BACK TO TERRA FIRMA.

ARMY OFFICIALS ARE LENDING HER ALL KINDS OF ASSISTANCE. SHE WILL WEAR A SPECIAL SUIT CONTAINING OXYGEN TANKS AND A MASK TO ENABLE HER TO BREATHE IN THE STRATOSPHERE.

RECENTLY, SHE BROKE HER LEG BUT CLIMBED IN A PLANE THE MINUTE SHE LEFT THE HOSPITAL—FOR ANOTHER JUMP. AND SHE ONCE HELD A JOB AS A MANNEQUIN.

Coming soon: Baron and Saegert—Hackmen Heroes



# Touchdown Broadway

Jerry's fist only traveled about eight inches, but that big lineman went down hard

By JUDSON P. PHILIPS

**Start now this exciting novel of racketeers in pigskin**

**J**ERRY LANNING'S pro football club, the Americans, is headed for the rocks, simply because it has no box-office appeal. Unless the team starts pulling crowds, Jerry will be forced to hand it over to Alfred Saxe, Broadway racketeer, who holds a heavy mortgage. Moreover, Jerry's financial collapse will mean that he cannot marry the lovely Valerie Jones.

Duke Maguire, ex-sports-writer, ex-alcoholic (who is telling the story), sees that Abe Feldman, the Americans' greasy pub-

licity man, is doing a sour job; and Duke realizes that what the team needs most is a headline player, a big name. So he talks Jerry Lanning and Val Jones into taking a trip to Vermont in search of Roy Rivers, greatest halfback in the country.

**T**HE trio finds Rivers, a strange, tight-lipped boy who admits that Rivers is not his real name; and he agrees to sign up for the season—at a salary of \$17,432.67! He will not explain why he wants that huge and queerly precise sum; but Jerry Lanning takes the gamble and signs the contract. Thus if Rivers does not deliver, Jerry is at the mercy of Alfred Saxe. . . .

**This story began in last week's Argosy**

## CHAPTER VI

## INTRODUCING THE TYPHOON

**T**HAT week was one continuous whirlwind. It seemed as though we'd clicked with a bang. Naturally, after the party, there were pictures of Rivers, and articles by all the boys. Jerry ran ads in the papers every day announcing the debut of the Texas Typhoon on Sunday.

From the Stadium came the reports that Rivers was quite a guy in his football rompers. He was a passing fool, the boys said, and when it came to punting he was a second Tipton; he could angle 'em out of bounds as accurately as a guy throwing a baseball. I wanted to get to see him work, but business got so heavy I stuck around to help Miss Miller in the office.

Of course we were high. The advance sale was brisk and active, something that had never happened to the Americans before. Up to now the fans had known they could just go to the Stadium and take their pick of seats.

"We've done it, Duke!" Jerry told me jubilantly. "The way things are going we should have thirty thousand customers there on Sunday."

Jerry was off on that, but I guess being off didn't make him sore. The advance was over twenty thousand, and I figured there'd be double that number and more when the whistle for the kickoff sounded. Feldman was doing his usually cheesy job on publicity, but the kid's name had that box-office magic.

"If Rivers doesn't break a leg or something, we're in," I said. I rapped my knuckles on the table. I'm not superstitious, but still there is no use in running risks.

**T**HERE was one big thing that might have gone wrong and that was the weather. Your college football enthusiast isn't bothered by a spot of rain, but the pro fan is different. However, the next day was about as perfect for football as any I ever saw. There was a high, blue sky without a cloud. It was just cool

enough to make playing conditions ideal, and not so cold the customers would be uncomfortable.

I got there early and walked around, feeling good. Before game time there must have been forty-five thousand cash customers on deck. Jerry and Val, sitting in a box near the fifty-yard line, were swamped by friends congratulating them and wishing them luck.

I decided to go up into the pressbox to watch the first half, and make sure the boys were properly enthusiastic. Typewriters were clattering when I arrived and I noticed quite a few of the first-string boys. This was a big-time event, not only because of the Typhoon, but because the Badgers were contenders for the playoffs, too, and therefore the outcome of this particular game might be significant.

I was about to say something to Jim Travers when a roar went up from the crowd. The two teams had come out on the field; the Americans in their purple and gold outfits, the Badgers in dark blue with white helmets and white stockings. I took a seat in the corner of the box and settled back to enjoy myself.

The loudspeaker system began announcing the lineups. There were names on that Badger team that every football fan knows well. They had George Murphy, a great passing and kicking fullback; Corcoran, Felton and Graves who fill out a classy backfield; Kiki Crouse, all-league center; Baylor, Dunnigan, Tuck Smith, Chapman, and a half dozen other crackerjack linemen. Each one of 'em got a great hand as the announcer gave out their names.

Then came the dope on the home forces. The line first—Szymanski, Emms, Kowalik, Harris, and the rest of the boys I'd seen last week.

"And in the backfield," the announcer bawled, "three of the famous Four Jugglers plus a new addition . . . a player we have all come here this afternoon to see . . . the great Texas Typhoon, *Roy Rivers!*"

The crowd shook the steel beams with shouting and applause. The names of



Matuzak, Ganzmueller and Gabrowski were lost in the tumult. The crowd refused to let up until Rivers stepped out from the Americans' bench and acknowledged the cheering with a wave of his hand.

Most guys seem bigger when they get into football clothes, but somehow Rivers looked on the frail side to me. Maybe that was because I was rooting for him so hard. He did a little practice punting that had the customers ooh-ing and ah-ing. There was certainly plenty of drive in his toe.

Then came the big moment. The officials were in the center of the field. Szymanski, the A's captain, and George Murphy of the Badgers joined them and the coin was tossed. Murphy called the turn and elected to receive. The two squads huddled around their coaches for a minute and then ran out onto the field to a burst of cheering that did my heart good.

Matuzak set up the ball for the kickoff and big Szymanski limbered up his leg. A shrill whistle from the referee . . . a moving wave of purple and gold . . . and then the leather went arching back to the goal line where George Murphy waited, one hand raised to shield his eyes from the sun. He had it, cut sharply to the right, and started up the field behind rapidly forming interference.

**I**NSTINCTIVELY my eyes were fixed on the big number 11 on Rivers' back. He went downfield very fast under that kick. I saw him sidestep a hard block thrown at him by one of the Badger forwards, knife his way through the interferers and bring Murphy down hard despite a jolting straightarm. The kid could certainly tackle. Murphy'd only gotten to his own eighteen yard line.

"Murphy carrying . . . tackled by Rivers," the press announcer droned.

The kid had tasted blood on his first play as a pro, and the crowd loved it. I leaned forward. Though I didn't realize it at the time, I was gripping the rail of the pressbox so my fingers ached. Rivers danced back to his position at defensive left half.

Ducky Porter uses a five-man line when the play is deep in the other team's territory. That put Harris, Szymanski, and Gabrowski up behind, with Rivers and Ganzmueller, the two halves, back a bit and on the wings, and the safety man fairly deep.

On the first play George Murphy started a sweep around Rivers' side of the line. Harris and Szymanski shifted over to meet the rush and Murphy's blockers were smeared, but Murphy was still going. The Typhoon came in like a streak of light. Murphy tried to spin out of the tackle, but Rivers had glue on his fingers and the Badger back went down with only a two-yard gain.

I gave Jim Travers the eye. "Boy, when he hits 'em they stay hit," I said.

Jim nodded. "He looked good on those two plays."

Corcoran tried an off tackle slant that failed and then George Murphy fell back to punt. Rivers and Ganzmueller faded to protect Matuzak, the Americans' safety man. Murphy got off a beauty, far down the field and toward the sidelines. Matuzak raced over and took it on the dead run like an outfielder. Ganzmueller removed one of the Badger ends and Matuzak started upcountry.

I guess everyone was watching that run, but I happened to glance back at Rivers. As I did I saw Chapman, the other Badger end, throw a block that doubled the Typhoon up like a jack-knife. Rivers wasn't anywhere near the play. As he went down, Dunnigan piled on top of him and I didn't have to be a mind-reader to know that Dunnigan's knees must have cracked the kid's ribs.

I was on my feet. "You big bum!" I shouted. "You can't get away with that!"

But he did. Apparently the referee hadn't seen it, though it was about as flagrant a piece of unnecessary roughness as I'd ever witnessed. The Typhoon got to his feet, rather slowly I thought, but he didn't make any protest. He trotted down the field to where Matuzak had been thrown out of bounds.

Jim Travers looked over at me with a wry grin.

"That's not playing the game," I said.

"It's playing this game," Travers said.

Well, the Americans went into a huddle and then Harris came out over the ball. There was a shift, Harris snapped the leather back, and the boys began the complicated hocus-pocus of Ducky Porter's system. Suddenly I saw the ball go bounding crazily along the turf. Someone had muffed an assignment. Rivers, like a flash, was after the fumble and managed to fall on it a split second ahead of the diving Badger end. They'd lost fifteen yards on the play, but Rivers' recovery had been brilliant.

Then I saw Matuzak, the A's quarterback, standing with his hands on his hips, looking at Rivers. I felt little beads of sweat on my forehead. Matuzak was telling those forty-five thousand customers just as clearly as if he had put it into words that it was Rivers who had bawled up the play.

ON THE very next play Rivers was given the ball on a straight off-tackle thrust. There was no hole where he went, Dunnigan bringing him down with a tooth-rattling tackle. But there had been a hole between guard and center—a hole you could have driven a truck through.

Matuzak gave Rivers a hell of a clout across the shoulders as he got to his feet. In dumb show the Americans' quarterback was indicating that the Typhoon had once more bungled his assignment.

Jim Travers looked over at me again and his face was set. I don't think I had quite caught on yet, but Jim had. There was a sudden letup on the clacking typewriters. The volume of noise from the crowd diminished. Rivers had dropped back to punt.

Ganzmueller was protecting the Typhoon's kicking foot, but he over-shifted as Chapman charged in and Rivers never got the kick away. It landed squarely in the middle of Chapman's chest and the Badger end fell on it.

"Gee, he was awful slow trying to get that one off," one of the young writers said.

"You damn dumbbell," Jim Travers said, between his teeth.

Then I knew what was up, but it took me a little longer to get so I really believed it. Rivers' own teammates were giving him the business! Oh, it was smart. Probably not one in a thousand fans got wise. Even some of the experienced writers there in the press coop missed it.

On the attack the three members of the A's backfield had thrown their timing off just enough so that Rivers looked bad. Linemen didn't open holes where he was supposed to go, but made it seem as though the Typhoon had muffed by opening a big hole somewhere else. When he kicked, the Badger forwards shifted through on him before he could get moving.

After that first blocked kick the visitors went straight to a score on four plays. The climax was a pass, apparently into Rivers' section. I happen to know that Ducky uses a zone defense against passes. I happen to know that Rivers shouldn't have faded to cover that pass; it was Matuzak who should have come up. But they made Rivers the goat.

Ducky sent in the second stringers then and the A's began to play football again—the excellent brand of football Ducky had taught them. But toward the end of the second quarter, the starting backfield reappeared and everything went haywire. When the gun sounded to end the half there couldn't have been ten people in the place who were of any other opinion than that the Great Texas Typhoon was a colossal flop.

## CHAPTER VII

### DIE FOR DEAR OLD BROADWAY

I DON'T think I was ever so burned up in my life. I was shaking like a man with palsy when I barged out of the press-box and headed down the ramp toward the exit that led to the Americans' dress-

ing room. I was going to find out about this. They couldn't do this to Jerry! I didn't give a hoot in hell about Rivers, except as it affected Jerry. And this was the rankest kind of doublecross.

I don't know exactly what I would have done when I got to the dressing room. As it turned out I never had a chance. Just as I reached the door someone brushed past me, nearly knocking me over. It was Jerry. His face was the color of ashes, and I saw that frosty, murderous look in his eyes that had been there the night I first met him.

I just followed him.

He swept into that dressing room. The players were sitting on the benches in front of their lockers, getting ready to put on clean dry jerseys. I didn't have time to spot Rivers. Jerry looked around him, and then made for the door of Ducky Porter's office. He flung the door open with a bang and went in.

Ducky was standing by the windows, his back to us. His pipe was clenched between his teeth, unlit. He didn't turn around, but stood there, his hands in his pockets, staring out the window.

"Porter!" Jerry's voice was like a pistol shot.

Ducky faced about slowly, his shoulders drooping. He looked licked.

"Before God, Jerry, I had nothing to do with it," he said. "If I'd known that was what they were planning. . ." He stopped.

Jerry's breath made a whistling sound. "They're making a deliberate flop of this thing," he said.

"I know," Ducky said, hoarsely.

"Why?"

Ducky shrugged. "They don't like him, Jerry. They're sore because he's drawing a salary bigger than any two of 'em put together. They think if there is any loose change lying around they've earned it."

"You knew all that before the game?"

"Oh, I knew, Jerry. I didn't want to bother you. I didn't dream they'd do a thing like this."

"Why aren't you out there giving 'em hell?" Jerry wanted to know.

"It won't do any good," Ducky said. "They've made up their minds."

"And how are they going to like being branded as a bunch of rats in every paper in the country?"

Ducky sighed. "You won't be able to get away with it, Jerry. They've been whispering about the kid all week. That he's a swell-headed stuffed shirt. That he held you up. That he hasn't got what it takes. Half the writers came to the game with that in mind. I'm sorry, but this is the works, Jerry. The kid's done for—and you're stuck with him."

Jerry stood there, breathing hard, and then he turned and walked past me again and out into the locker room. He looked right at me but I'll swear he didn't see me.

In the locker room he went straight up to big Szymanski who was sitting in front of his locker. Szymanski rose reluctantly to his feet. He towered a good six inches over Jerry.

"You're captain of this club?" Jerry said.

"That's right, Mr. Lanning."

"You're appointed to that position with an extra five hundred bucks because you're supposed to be a leader."

Szymanski didn't say anything.

"You knew what was going to happen out there this afternoon?" Jerry's voice was harsh.

Szymanski's broad mouth twitched at one corner. "Yes, I knew, Mr. Lanning," he said. "Rivers won't do. He's not the kind of guy we can get along with. As long as he's on the club things aren't going to click. You might as well know that."

"So things aren't going to click," Jerry said, kind of soft.

I'd seen him punch before. This one didn't travel over eight inches, but it lifted Szymanski clean off his feet and sent him crashing against a locker. There was a trickle of blood running from the corner of his mouth as he got slowly up.

Then Jerry hit him again. There was a hole in his smile where a couple of teeth had been. This time Szymanski didn't get up.

"That's only a mild taste of the kind of beating you mugs have given *me* this afternoon," Jerry said. He turned around to Ducky Porter who stood, gaping, in the door of the office.

"Rivers keeps playing," he snapped. "Keep him in there if they swamp us."

"But, Jerry—!"

Jerry was gone.

**I** WOULD have died for Jerry Lanning, and I nearly did the second half. Poor Jerry, he'd gone into that locker room swinging against odds no one could buck.

They weren't quite so brazen about the way they tossed Rivers in that second half. They were a sullen, dogged crew, without any spark or dash. Rivers got no help. He kept pounding away against a stone wall, because the line simply didn't open up any holes. On defense he was brilliant. Toward the end they had to lead him off the field, groggy, punchdrunk.

But it was sad. Some leather-lunged fan had started to kid him early in the half.

"Come on Rivers! Die for dear old Broadway!"

The Typhoon's apparent non-performance got to be a joke—the kind of joke throwing Christians to the lions must have been back in Rome. A sport crowd can be pretty cruel when they get riding a guy, without really knowing the facts. Thumbs down on Rivers! That was the general feeling.

All we could do was sit there and watch a fine dream shrivel up and die. There was something hysterical in the crowd's attitude. Jerry Lanning was popular and they seemed to take Rivers' failure as a direct blow at Jerry. It was, but not the way they thought of it. When Nick Niles, the trainer, helped Rivers off the field there were catcalls and boos. It was pretty tough medicine.

I went down to Jerry's box just before the end of the game. The friends who had been crowding around him an hour ago were conspicuous by their absence. Jerry sat in his seat, rigid, staring out at the field. Val, deathly pale, a suspicious wet-

ness on her lashes, was holding on to his arm tight. I leaned over them.

"Let's get out of here, lugs," I said. "There's nothing more to see."

At first I thought Jerry hadn't heard me. But abruptly he stood up and started for the exit nearest the box. I walked with Val, and I could feel her shaking as she clung to my elbow.

"Too bad, Jerry!" some fan hollered, when he saw Jerry in the aisle.

"Tomatoes are cheaper, Jerry!" another one shouted.

"Why not hire Shirley Temple?" a drunk suggested.

Jerry never looked to right or left. His shoulders were back and that square jaw of his was jutting out, but he never said a word, never looked at anyone.

Just as we reached the exit Val glanced back at the crowd in the Stadium. They were still having a field day, laughing and booing the Americans.

"Damn them!" Val said, bitterly. "Damn them for a bunch of stupid sheep." She was shaking, and her face was a way I'd never seen it before.

"Take it easy, kid," I said.

She looked up at me and she wasn't trying to hide the tears now. "Have we just got to sit here and watch Jerry take the count?"

I took her by the arm. "We'll find something to do," I said, and wondered what the hell it would be.

**WE** TOOK a cab downtown to the apartment. I have never seen two people suffering as Jerry and Val were, and yet there wasn't anything to say. Trying to be cheerful under the circumstances would have been playing the Pollyanna act with all the stops out. No good. It was a swell time to get drunk, I thought.

You couldn't get around the facts. Jerry had put all his chips on this one guy's coming through and he'd lost. The tough part of it was that it wasn't because his judgment had been at fault about Rivers. Rivers could play football and play it plenty. If he'd been given a chance out

there today he might have come through with a bang. It wasn't his fault, and it wasn't Jerry's. Those mugs on the team had been bitten by some kind of a bug and it was too late to call the doctor.

When we got to the apartment Jerry went straight to the cabinet in the corner and brought out a bottle of Scotch.

"I think this is in order," he said.

"Me too?" I asked hopefully.

"You too," he said. "And if you should happen to get potted, Duke, I'll be right with you."

If Val had been any other kind of girl, she might have protested or said something about liquor being no way to solve a problem. Val knew better. She just poured herself a stiff one.

Jerry lifted his glass and looked at Val. For the first time that afternoon he smiled. It was a tight little smile that did things to me. "Well, darling, we took a shot at it anyway. It was a good try."

"We're not done yet," Val said, stubbornly.

"You can read our obituaries in the morning papers," Jerry said.

Did you ever get tight to forget about something? It doesn't work. The more you try to forget the more you remember. Finally we had got pretty far into the second quart and the only result was that my face muscles were stiff and when I said anything it was very precise and cautious. But I could still hear that jeering crowd . . . still see the Typhoon pounding himself uselessly against the Badger line . . . still see the sullen, angry faces of the players in the locker room when Jerry confronted them. Then I saw that gap in the Szymanski's smile again and I felt better and poured myself another slug.

The next thing I knew it was tomorrow and I had that dark brown taste in my mouth. When I got pulled together and went out into the front room for breakfast, Jerry was already smoking with his coffee. Spread out on the floor all around the table were a mass of crumpled newspapers. I gave Jerry a questioning look and he just shrugged.

"The works," he said.

The newspaper accounts were pretty much the same.

RIVERS' DEBUT A FLOP. . . TEXAS TY-PHOON FAILS IN PRO ATTEMPT. . .  
RIVERS GOES FOOM. . .

Joe Wilgus of the *Mail* had a very serious-minded piece about how the pro game had grown so fast that college stars could no longer be expected to make the jump to stardom overnight. He said it was becoming just as unusual as seeing a kid break into the big leagues in baseball without minor league experience. He said he was sorry for Jerry. That didn't help.

THERE was just one piece that made sense and Jim Travers had written it. I read:

"The Typhoon flopped. Forty-five thousand fans who came to cheer the former college flash remained to give him a Bronx jeer. On the surface it certainly looked as though Jerry Lanning had bought himself a grade-A gold brick. But this reporter came away with a feeling that he had just watched the old rabbit trick.

"Rivers had everything on defense. He tackled cleanly. He never let up for an instant. On offense he ran hard with the ball and got nowhere. However, it might be well to point out that Tuffy Leemans himself can't run through a stonewall. A back is only as good as his blockers. And let it be said here and now that Rivers' blockers stank!"

"That's telling 'em," I muttered.

"Four of the Typhoon's punts were blocked before he could get them away," Travers went on. "That's where the rabbit trick came in. Anyone knows that the way a magician pulls his stuff is by attracting attention to something else. On the first of those blocked kicks like all the rest I was watching Rivers and I thought he was slow.

"The next time I watched his blockers. Ganzmueller missed the incoming end cold on that one. Nobody could have gotten a



kick away. The next time Ganzmueller did a fine job of taking out a Badger player who didn't have a chance to block the kick and letting the key man through.

"Your reporter got to thinking. He got to thinking that in reality it was not Rivers who looked bad, but that it was Rivers who had made the rest of the team look like a bunch of bums—and a bunch of double-crossing bums at that!"

"At least one guy caught on," I said to Jerry.

"One lone voice in the wilderness," he said dryly.

"It's something to hang on to," I said. "If Travers got the real lowdown he'll play it up. He likes you, Jerry. He'd like to see you get a break."

I tried to make it sound convincing—give him hope in what one sports writer could do.

Jerry sighed. "Do you think the rest of the experts are going to admit that they didn't tumble to the truth? Ducky was right. It's no soap, Duke."

I was pretty sure he was right, too, and I didn't look at him.

"If I were in your boots I'd give the bum's rush to that whole lousy outfit," I said.

"I've got to put a team on the field next Sunday or lose my franchise," Jerry said. "Don't you think I'd like to fire 'em? But I can't. I haven't the dough to get new players, even if it were possible to whip a team into shape by Sunday, which it isn't. No, Duke. I've got to play the cards I'm holding, and they aren't winners."

Just then the doorbell rang and I went and opened the door. It was Sam Feldman, looking smug and self-satisfied. He brushed past me and went in to join Jerry.

"Well, that was a tough break, Jerry," he said. "I'm afraid it turned out just the way I figured, though."

Jerry's eyes narrowed. "You mean you figured the rest of the gang would give him the works?"

Feldman looked blank—too damned blank, I thought. "I don't get it," he said.

Jerry was still studying him.

"You mean to say you don't realize that the team deliberately set out to make Rivers look bad?"

"Why, Jerry, you're crazy!" Feldman said.

"Oh, sure," I said. "They fought their little hearts out for Rivers, but he just didn't have it."

Feldman's cigarette wagged up and down. "You must both be punchdrunk," he said. "If I were you, I wouldn't spread that kind of a story around. It's pretty close to libel." Then his eyes fell on the paper I'd been reading. "I get it. You went for the line that dope Travers handed out."

"Of course Jerry doesn't know anything about football," I said. "He hasn't got any eyes to see with. And he didn't get Szymanski to admit it between the halves, and he didn't knock Szymanski for a loop."

Feldman looked horrified. "Is that on the level?"

"On the dead level," Jerry said.

Feldman began to strut. "That's bad . . . very bad," he said.

I put my hands in my pockets to keep them out of trouble. "The master mind at work," I said.

Feldman stopped in front of Jerry and spoke earnestly. "I don't know what to say," he told him. "But if that's true, Jerry, I can only warn you not to spread it. You wouldn't get a baker's dozen to the games if a story like that got around about the team."

"They don't draw flies as it is," I said. "Why not give 'em what's coming to 'em?"

"You can't afford it!"

Jerry sighed wearily. "I know," he said. "They've got me, Feldman. We play in Chicago Sunday. Run your usual line of publicity. Don't play Rivers up particularly. We'll just have to see what happens."

"I think you're very wise," Feldman said, and there was enough smugness in the way he said it to turn a stronger stomach than mine.

And that was a fair sample of the cards that Jerry was holding—for a finish game.

## CHAPTER VIII

## IS IT HERO OR HEEL?

**J**ERRY always made the road trips with the club, but for the first time since he owned them he didn't go West with the Americans. I guess he didn't want to sit through that kind of thing twice.

During the week I tried to talk some sense to him.

"Go to the team and put your cards on the table," I urged him. "They're a bunch of dumb mokes. Maybe you can show them that it's not Rivers they're hurting but themselves and you."

Jerry was stubborn. "I don't crawl on my knees to anyone, Duke. They know how I feel. I think I made that pretty clear."

"Then go to Rivers and get him to let you off the hook," I said.

"I made a bargain with him. I've got to stick to it."

We talked in and around those two points all week and I got just exactly nowhere.

Finally Sunday came around again. Nobody had mentioned it, but Jerry and Val and I all hung about the apartment. I knew at two-thirty someone would turn on the radio to hear the broadcast from Chicago. I got to playing a game with myself, betting on who it would be.

At exactly two-thirty Jerry got up from his chair. "There's no use being childish about this," he said, and switched on the dials.

The announcer was just giving the line-ups and we settled back to listen. Ducky Porter was starting his second team, which I figured might be a smart move. The announcer said there was a good crowd, "a good many of them anxious to see if Roy Rivers is really as bad as the reports from New York indicate."

For the whole first quarter that game was a dog fight. The Chicago outfit was throwing in the works against Ducky's second stringers, and they kept the ball

in scoring position most of the time, but couldn't push it over. Just before the end of the quarter, after the Americans had taken the ball on downs on their own eighteen yard line, it happened.

"Here comes the moment we've been waiting for," the announcer said, his voice sharpening. "Ducky Porter is sending in his regulars. Big Szymanski and the rest of the first-string line, and his ace back-field. And yes . . . Rivers is in there at left half; he wears a big number 11 on his back.

"Now we'll have a chance to see this ex-collegian in action. Chicago fans have a healthy respect for him after the way he ran wild against Northwestern last year. They're inclined to think that Rivers just had a case of jitters in his disastrous debut last week.

"Well, here go the Americans into their huddle . . . gold helmets together in a close circle. Here comes Harris out over the ball. It's a single wing to the right with Rivers back . . . they shift . . . it's Rivers, his knees pumping like pistons. He's going in there off tackle—oh-oh!

"Bill Branch brought him down hard on that one. The Americans' interference was piled up badly on that play. There was a big hole inside tackle but Rivers failed to cut in. Well, we'll see . . . we'll see. They're back in a huddle again. Mat Matuzak gave Rivers an encouraging slap on the back as they put their heads together.

"Here they come. Harris is over the ball. It's a single wing to the right again—Rivers and Gabrowski back. The ball is snapped! It's one of those double triple what-have-you's of Ducky Porter's. It's Gabrowski . . . no, Rivers has it. Hold it! Fumble . . . fumble! It's rolling back toward the goal-line. Rivers is after it . . . so is Bill Branch.

"They're piled up there. We'll have to wait till they untangle before I can tell you who has the ball. It looked like Rivers by an eyelash. Yes—yes, it *was* Rivers. But they lost plenty on that play. The ball is on the one yard line . . . make

it one and a half. It's third down, and a long way to go."

I didn't have the heart to look at Jerry or Val. I kept dragging on my cigarette and staring down at the design in the carpet.

"It's Rivers dropping back behind his goal-line to kick out of danger," the announcer said. "He's standing deep in his own end zone, his hands outstretched waiting for the ball. Ganzmuller is to his right, protecting that kicking foot. Harris is over the ball. Here it comes.

"It's a bad pass! A very bad pass! Rivers had to jump up in the air to pull it down. He's trying to get it off. . . . Bill Branch is on him. He swept past Ganzmuller like a man beating a traffic light. It's blocked! It's blocked! Bill Branch is on it! Oh boy, what a whale of a game Branch is playing. It's a touchdown for Chicago. Branch came charging in there and—"

Jerry was on his feet. He switched off the dial. None of us said anything.

I READ the reports out of Chicago the next day and they were pretty much a duplication of the stories of Rivers' first game. He tried awfully hard, but he didn't have the hang of the pro game yet. Maybe in a year or two! By that time Jerry would be selling ice cream from a wagon.

Jerry was very quiet and didn't talk about the mess at all. I knew he was trying to figure out just what to do. I knew he would break an arm to clear his nose to Saxe in December. There was only one way to manage that—crowds at the games. And there weren't going to be any crowds to watch the Typhoon.

When you're in a smashup you try to salvage as much of the wreckage as possible. At least that's the way I figured it. I didn't tell that to Jerry but I did corner Val that afternoon.

"Ten thousands bucks would make a lot of difference to Jerry right now," I said.

Val laughed. "And how!"

"I'm not proud," I said. "I suggest you

and I go have a talk with Rivers. He must see the whole deal is a frost. Maybe he's not quite so tough as he made out. After the beating he's taken he may be willing to settle."

Val frowned. "Settle?"

"Sure. Tear up his contract and give Jerry back about ten G's. That will leave him amply paid for the two games he's played. And when I say 'ample' I mean about ten times more than he was worth."

She waited a moment, looking down at the floor; and then she said hesitantly: "Jerry wouldn't like it."

But I was pretty sure I could make her see it my way.

"If Jerry won't help himself then somebody has to do something for him."

After several minutes of silence she made up her mind. "All right, Duke, I'll go to see Rivers with you."

RIVERS was staying at a downtown hotel and when we sent up our names we were invited to go to his room. He looked a little battered up when he opened the door to us. There was a patch of adhesive over one eye and a cut on his left cheekbone. He still had that manner that didn't tell you a thing about what was going on behind his cold gray eyes.

"Hello," was all he said.

"We'd like to talk to you," I said.

"Sorry, there's only one chair," he said. "One of you will have to sit on the bed."

He was certainly living simply for a guy with seventeen-odd thousand bucks in his jeans. Val took the chair. Rivers and I shared the edge of the bed.

"Things are pretty tough," I said.

"Yes," he said. The way he said it didn't mean anything in particular.

"The Chicago game didn't go any better than the one here."

"Worse," Rivers said. He couldn't seem to keep his eyes off Val. She was awful cute, in a tweed suit with a bunch of violets pinned to her furs. I decided to turn the floor over to her. I knew if I was Rivers I couldn't turn her down.

"What's really wrong, Roy?" she asked.

Rivers shrugged. "The boys on the team have elected to give me the business. They're doing a good job."

"Why?" Val asked, quietly.

"To tell you the truth, I don't know," said Rivers, looking puzzled. "Everybody was okay for the first day or two of practice and then it went sour. Somehow they heard the details of my contract with Mr. Lanning. They were sore about that because they claimed they'd been stringing along at small salaries until Mr. Lanning got on his feet. There were doing all right—contenders for the title. They thought if there was any extra money they should have it. In a way I don't blame them."

"I see." Val kept her eyes on his face.

"Then they got the idea that I held Mr. Lanning up. That I was personally responsible for pulling a fast one on him. I don't know who started that line of talk, Miss Jones, but that got them down on me plenty. I guess Porter tried to reason with them for Mr. Lanning's sake, but they seemed to figure the quicker they got me out of the picture the quicker things would break right." His lips tightened into a firm straight line.

"So?" Val prompted.

"I'm just not quitting, that's all," Rivers said.

Val nodded. "I don't blame you. If anybody tried to give me that kind of a going over I'd stick it out to the last ditch—if I were the only one being hurt by it."

He looked down at his big hands, avoiding her level stare.

"The one who's really getting taken in this situation is Jerry," Val said.

I couldn't sit back any longer. "Why not let him off the hook, Rivers? You've played two games. Turn back ten grand to Jerry, tear up your contract, and give him a chance to pull his chestnuts out of the fire. Seven thousand, four hundred and thirty-two dollars and sixty-seven cents is pretty elegant pay for two ball games."

Rivers kept looking at his hands. "I'm sorry," he said, kind of unsteadily.

"You mean you won't do it?"

"I can't," he said.

I was about to pop off but Val silenced me with a gesture.

"You must have a reason for being so hard about this deal, Roy," she said. "Your original demands were pretty incredible. I don't think you're the sort of person who would stick a knife into a man who's down and twist it."

HE SQUIEMED unhappily on the edge of the bed. "I'm sorry," he said again. "I—I wish I didn't have to be tough. But Mr. Lanning accepted my terms. I'm living up to my end of the deal. It's not my fault that things have turned out as they have."

"We admit that," I snapped. "But that doesn't have to turn you into the Great Stone Face."

He raised his head then and I saw that his eyes were hurt, clean through and deep. "I can't do anything else," he said. "I can't because none of the money is left."

I gaped at him. "You've gone through seventeen G's already!"

He nodded. "All I can do is carry out my end of the bargain. I'm sorry." The way he said it I knew he was.

I looked at Val and she at me. This was defeat. I had just one shot left.

"Listen," I said. "The gang are sore at you because you got paid so much. You say you've spent it all. Well, I know it hasn't been on riotous living. Maybe if you'd give out why you had to have that dough they might change their attitude toward you. What is it, the mortgage on the old homestead? An old mother or a crippled sister who needs an operation? Some gag like that might do the trick."

The color had drained out of his face and he looked sick. "I'm sorry, Maguire," he said. "My private life is my own affair. I'm living up to my end of the deal. That's all I can do."

I was starting to burn again. "You said you changed your name? What is all this? Are you on the lam? Did you rob a bank? For God sake, Rivers, give! Dish out something we can work with."

He stood up, and when he spoke his voice was shaking. "I can't help you," he said. "I wish I could. I don't like being heel. But there it is. Please—there's no use talking about it any more."

Se we went out.

Out on the street I said to Val: "Look, Val, I've been a good boy for more than two weeks. I think after that little session I shall go quietly off and into the bank. Would that spoil a beautiful friendship?"

She put her hand on my arm. "I wish that kind of thing would do me some good," she said. "I'd join you. Run along, Duke. The friendship will remain intact."

Which is how I happened to be barging up Broadway by my lonesome. After stops at a couple of bars, I began working out an idea. I would walk uptown from Forty-fourth Street, having a drink in each bar I came to. I figured that I ought to just about make the Park that way.

But I was wrong. In the third bar I ran into something that sobered me up cold. I had gotten to the mahogany and ordered a Scotch. While I waited I turned to look around the place. At a table in the corner there were three guys I knew. One of them was Al Saxe, smiling his oily smile. Another was Zipper Collins, his pointed teeth glittering in the light. The third one was none other than our sterling publicity man, Mr. Sam Feldman.

They had just been served and it was Feldman who raised his glass. "Here's to crime," he said, "and may it continue in the same hotsy-totsy fashion."

## CHAPTER IX

### DEAR DOUBLECROSSER

ONE of the reasons my nose is bent and the center knuckle on my right hand is out of line and there is a long

scar up near the hair on the right side of my forehead is that when I dive into a situation I usually do it without stopping to figure out the odds or the eventual advantages to myself.

My first impulse when I saw dear little Sam Feldman staging a celebration with those two rosebuds, Saxe and the Zipper, was to wade in and start breaking the place up. I remember thinking the first thing I'd do would be to take a poke at the Zipper, not only because he was a guy I'd planned to take several pokes at before long, but because he was the guy with the gun and was a little quick about the way he reached for it.

Afterward I put a little gold star in the book next to my name because I didn't for once act on impulse. I turned my back on those three babies quick and bent over my drink. I was sobered enough to do some thinking, and I did it at high speed.

I'd never thought much of Feldman's publicity stuff, but I'd figured he was just a dope. Now I had a different slant on it. From what Rivers had said it was plain someone had deliberately started the trouble on the team. And someone who knew all the details of Rivers' contract. There were only three people outside of Jerry, Val and myself who knew those terms: Rivers, who was a clam, Ducky Porter, who certainly wouldn't have used his information that way, and Feldman. Feldman! Feldman, sitting there having a high old time with Saxe and Collins, two guys out for Jerry's hide.

Right then everything seemed clear as daylight. Feldman was working for Saxe. That's why he'd been so steamed up when he first heard Jerry had signed Rivers. He was afraid it might work! That's why he'd stayed so jittery. All his concern for Jerry was the bunk. He'd been afraid Jerry might pull himself out of the hole he was in, and that wouldn't have suited little Sammy and his real employer, Saxe.

You may wonder what Saxe and company would want with a bankrupt business. Well, that was simple enough. The franchise in New York was worth a lot of

dough. If Saxe could turn owner by foreclosing his note, an amount that was maybe a third of what he would have had to pay in the open market for the club, it was gravy. Then by sinking a little cash in the club he'd have a real money-making proposition.

That's all there was to it. Simple as taking candy from a baby—after first kicking the baby a good one, right in the face.

It was a well-planned steal. With Feldman to report on all Jerry's plans and gum up the publicity, Saxe was doing fine. Rivers had seemed a danger so Feldman had spread a little judicious propaganda and the Typhoon turned out to be a bust. It was a swell scheme. It was just peachy. And there wasn't a damn thing to do about it legally.

Nothing to do about it any other way, from the look of things.

But believe it or not, I felt good all of a sudden. At least we knew what we were up against. We weren't fighting an intangible thing like "the psychology of the public." We were up against three high-binding crooks. You can get your teeth into that kind of a fight.

Or, more exactly, you can get your fists and feet in.

However, I needed more proof before I went to Jerry so I paid for my drink and slipped out of the bar without my three pals ever knowing I had been there. I headed back downtown for the Edgemont Hotel this time where most of the Americans stay when they're in town. I wanted a little conversation with someone who could confirm my suspicions for me.

AT THE hotel I asked for Szymanski, the big guard who was captain of the team. When I got to his room he was stretched out on the bed reading a detective story magazine. He glanced over the top of the magazine at me and his eyes weren't exactly friendly. His face still looked like a stretch of No-Man's-Land. He hadn't had the gap filled in his teeth, and his mouth was swollen and bruised.

"I want to talk to you," I told him.

"I didn't think you came up here to invite me to a dance," he said. Well, things were certainly starting out in a friendly way.

"At which point the orchestra plays the opening bars of a number and we go into a soft-shoe turn," I said. "Let's lay off the gags. Are you still being sore at Jerry?"

He lifted a huge, hamlike hand and gently felt of his mouth. Then he grinned. "I guess not," he said. "Boy, that baby can punch!"

"He's only just begun to slug," I said. I didn't bother to explain whether I meant that literally or figuratively. I left it for him to figure out however he wanted to.

Szymanski went on grinning. "Maybe I ought to start ducking." He shifted his huge body to a more comfortable position. "I feel sorry for him," he said. "but he pulled a bad boner over Rivers. He didn't figure the angles properly. He didn't figure how we'd feel about it."

I let that pass.

"Incidentally," I asked, casually, "where did you get your dope on Rivers' contract?"

Szymanski frowned. "Why, everybody knows about that."

"That's strange," I said, "because it was meant to be a secret. I was wondering who let the cat out of the bag."

He frowned, and you could hear his brain turning over slowly. "Well, I remember Sam Feldman talking about it for one," he said. "Say, by the way, aren't you the guy who dubbed me 'The Ape Man'?"

"So what?" I said. And I got ready to move fast—toward the door.

"Nothing." Szymanski grinned, "only I thought it was good."

That relieved me, but it wasn't getting us anywhere. So Feldman talked over the terms of Jerry's contract with Rivers?"

"Yeah, I guess he did."

"I suppose he felt it was a shame you boys shouldn't have a slice of the melon, too?"



I was getting hot; I could tell that right away.

He nodded slowly. "Well, yes, I think he did figure it that way."

I knew he wasn't going to hold out on me now, so I went ahead in a straight line. "I suppose he thought it was kind of a dirty deal after the rest of you had been stringing along for peanuts?"

"That's the way we all figure it," said Szymanski. "Besides that, this Rivers certainly put the hooks into Jerry. He had Jerry where he wanted him and he gave him the business. Seventeen grand! Hell, my salary is less than half of that. It was highway robbery, Maguire, and Rivers deserves anything he gets."

I said:

"I guess Feldman agrees with you."

"I guess he does."

I lit a cigarette and stared at the big guy for a minute. "But you'd like to see Jerry come out on top, wouldn't you?"

"Sure I would. He's a good egg, in spite of taking a sock at me. But he isn't going to make it with Rivers. Rivers is washed up, and he had it coming to him."

I stood up. "Well, I guess that's that," I said. "I was just curious. I wondered where you guys got your dope on Rivers' contract."

"It had to come out sooner or later," Szymanski said, with a shrug. "And Rivers would have to be Houdini to justify giving Jerry that kind of a rooking. What's more, we don't like a guy that sets that kind of value on his services. We don't like him, and I guess we've fixed him for keeps."

"I guess you have," I said. But I didn't feel bad about it. I was beginning to see an out. If Rivers would come across with the reason for his demands and I could show this gang that Feldman had been deliberately doublecrossing Jerry, we had a chance.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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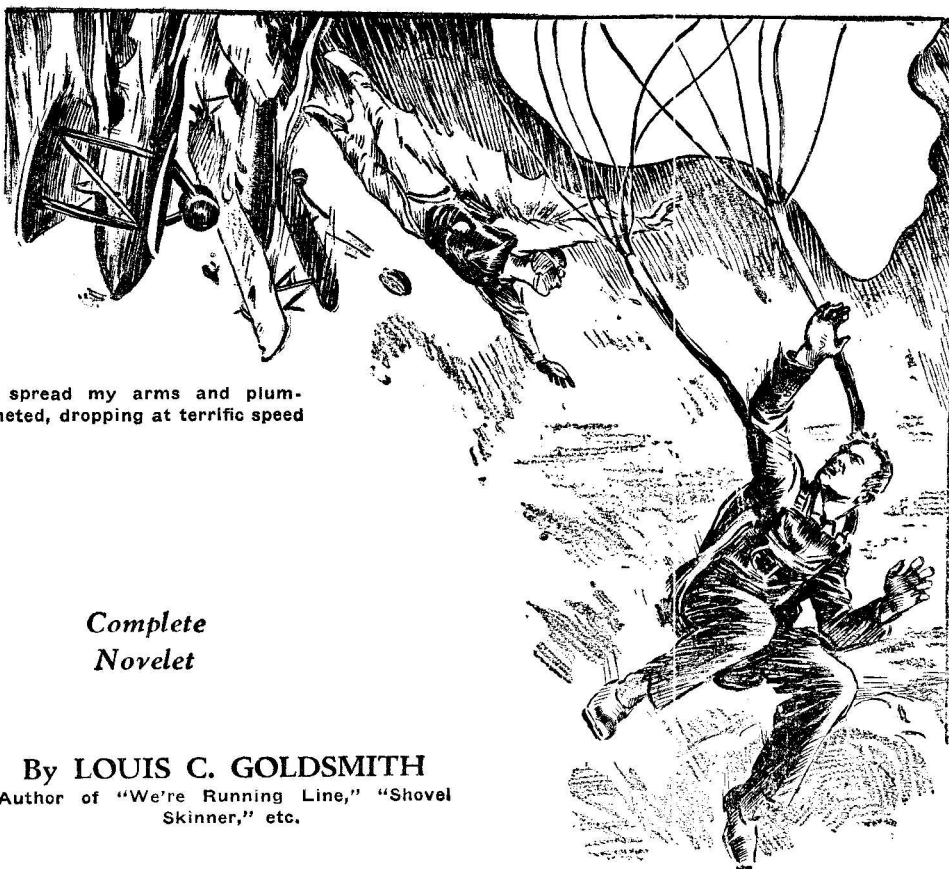
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I spread my arms and plummeted, dropping at terrific speed

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# He Flies Through the Air—

Have you met the young man on the flying trapeze, who floats through the air with the greatest of ease—except for murder, mayhem, and memory

## I

**I** WAS so near to success—or failure—with my plan that old Parker's words whipped my mind into an agony of fear. His sudden, unexpected outburst brought an uneasy silence over the group of flying people, as if they actually credited him with supernatural sources of information.

It was the old primitive awe that we feel for the insane. Parker wasn't violently out of his mind, but that blow he had got-

ten from an airplane propeller, years before, had left him seriously unbalanced.

"There's murder in the skies," he proclaimed suddenly in a wild, croaking voice. He stood facing the west, pointing at clouds that were a deep, sunset red. "Murder and grief and blood!"

The desultory conversation stopped. Old Parker made a wild figure, silhouetted against the blood-red sky, and there was silence and we waited as if something terrible was about to occur.

The spell was broken by Clyde Wen-

n's inane cackle of laughter. "You mean robbery and loot, Parker," he said and turned to the others. "These bank robberies. . ."

Chilly Dean's voice cut in like a whip. "But up, you damned fool!" His black, hard eyes menaced the group. "You tie these robberies to this air circus and we'll have the cops in our hair. How about it, bird?"

He appealed to me. I am certain now that there was a deliberate purpose behind that question.

Everybody in the air show calls me bird because of my stunt, though my real name is Eric Spath. At least that is the name I took on becoming a naturalized citizen. I didn't answer Chilly's question. I told the truth I didn't like Dean. I had caught him one night trying to see into my truck.

They were all looking at me now, these other people. Draim Stewart's eyes were on me with that close, intent look that I had seen in them before. She is a very beautiful girl. Her brother Barnard Stewart, flies my plane when I do the bird stunt. I left them, a small group of pilots and mechanics who were still loitering on the airfield after the day's flying.

I passed the line of airplanes toward the small grove where we were camped. Some of the pilots of Hortman's Air Circus stayed at hotels; but most of them had their own cars—some with trailers, some with tents—following the circus. That was the cheapest way and, in my case, the only way.

I had to have my truck—it was an old school bus remodeled, with windows tightly boarded—because this bird stunt did was but the means to an end.

Tave Hager, refueling pilot for the endurance ship, was standing near the open door of Paul Hortman's *Roadliner*, one of the biggest, best equipped auto trailers I have ever seen. The light from it struck across Tave Hager's coarse, black, straight hair, accentuating the dropped bridge of his mutilated nose, the downward slant of his cynical mouth. The door closed and Hager

was an obscure shadow in the deepening twilight.

"Hello, Tave," I called.

He hadn't seen me. He stopped and I sensed the tenseness of his attitude. "Oh, it's the Bird," he said then.

"When's the next refueling?" I asked, merely to be saying something friendly.

"What's that to you?" he demanded curtly and passed on by.

That was the attitude they had toward me. One of suspicion, almost hate. Perhaps this was because I talked very little and would allow no one inside my truck. It had been this way almost from the time the air circus started, in the middle states.

Paul Hortman was manager of the circus and the ace flyer. It had been his idea; though Frank Parcell and Al Chalmers, piloting the endurance plane, had already been in the air fourteen days when Hortman sent out the call which gathered to him the most hardened, most reckless and undoubtedly the best stunt flyers in the country.

I went on to my truck, but stopped a moment before entering it. Old Parker's words came back to me. *Murder and grief and blood*. Some one should put a stop to that, I thought. I remembered the derisive answer that Clyde Wenton had made about robbery and loot. That was bad, too. So far no one had connected the series of bank robberies with Hortman's Air Circus.

I heard Parker's cracked, shrill voice again and frowned in anger.

"THERE'S things I could tell," Parker shouted. His words were clear, distinct in the quiet evening, though he was some distance away. "I ain't blind by a long ways."

His voice didn't come from the direction of the airfield now, so he must have left the group there. It might be the old fool was talking to himself. I had heard him shout that way sometimes when there was no one near him, while he was working on Paul Hortman's car or the trailer.

Hortman paid him a small salary and

the other pilots hired him to grease their cars and do minor repairs. I have often noticed that pilots, who live by virtue of machinery, hate the very idea of working with it.

This is not so in my case. I do all the repair work on my *Skyking*. And of course I wouldn't allow anyone to work around my truck.

I unlocked the rear door of the truck and resolution was strong in me. I had too much to lose here. Somehow the crazy ravings of old Parker must be silenced before it occurred to outsiders to connect the bank robberies with Hortman's circus.

There was a light pounding on my truck door two hours or more later. I was just getting absorbed in the new design of my leg web.

It would be wider now without the reinforcing strips that had made the old one so clumsy. The heavy, long-fiber silk cloth that I had had made especially for my purpose would take this strain. I regretted not having enough for the arms and decided to have this made as soon as I could get more of the fiber. I could afford it now.

The knocking was repeated, urgently. I slipped my small Luger and a flashlight into my pockets and turned the lights out before the opening the truck door. I closed it, making sure the spring lock had worked. I stood there, blinded for a moment by the outside darkness.

It was Draim Stewart's voice. "How long have you been in there?" she demanded. She seemed terribly excited, almost hysterical.

"A long time," I answered. "What has happened?"

"Murder—I think." Her words were very low. "Have you seen Barnard?"

"I've been busy," I said. My eyes were accustomed now to the darkness. The girl was dressed in a light sports suit and I could see that she was trembling with cold, or perhaps excitement. Instinctively I reached my hand to touch her, quiet her. She jerked back.

"Come," she ordered.

I followed her, through trees that were already damp from the ground fog that so often settles here on clear, summer nights. Called marsh fog, it is sometimes no deeper than twenty feet. We pushed on past Wenton's tent that was no more than an awning, slanted from the side of his car. All the others in camp seemed to be asleep.

Draim Stewart paused and motioned me ahead of her. I stumbled and almost fell over the body.

It was face downward. I saw the oil-stained leather jacket that old Parker wore. I saw another thing and immediately snapped off the bright cone of my flashlight. I stooped over the body, pretending to examine it while I got the handkerchief from my pocket and wrapped it around the metal handle of the knife protruding from his back.

After that I could use my flashlight freely. I turned the body over, putting my fingers to the neck pulse. There was not the slightest flutter. The eyes were wide and staring. "Parker is dead," I said, looking at those faded blue eyes.

It may have been the pressure of my fingers on his throat. His mouth opened suddenly and blood ran from it in thick, horrible black clots. Draim Stewart screamed and ran, still screaming. I was left alone, crouched over the dead body of crazy old Parker. I thought, looking at him with pity, "You will never speak again."

**M**Y TURN in the air circus comes immediately after the fake refueling of the endurance plane. That was one of the many stunts Paul Hortman used for getting people into the airfield enclosure so that he could collect admissions from them.

It is a weakness of flying exhibitions that they are done where people can see without paying for the privilege. But this wasn't so in Hortman's circus.

Frank Parcell and Al Chalmers had been in the air for a month now with their huge, two-engined cargo plane. They had

catwalks out to both engines for small repairs. The engines were throttled to bare flying speed most of the time. They could fly with one engine completely dead and they had comfortable quarters on the plane.

There was no reason why they could not stay aloft for weeks longer, and every hour they added increased their publicity value to our circus. For this and for the fake refuelings Paul Horton gave them free gasoline, oil, and service.

Chilly Dean stood at the loudspeaker mike. He had a quick tongue that could whip the crowd to hysteria. "The refueling plane is taking off," he announced. "The pilots reported trouble with their left engine on the last contact. Let's hope it isn't serious. There he goes. . ."

Hager's motor roared as he gunned out for the take-off. He had, in his plane, five gallons of water in a special dump tank and a fake cloth hose so flimsy that the slightest pull would tear it apart in case it got tangled with any part of the endurance plane.

He climbed and the endurance ship lost altitude to meet him. The so-called refueling would be done at such a low altitude that only those who paid admission would see it in detail.

Then came the sensational part. Hager released water from the tank, while the hose was still dangling over the forward part of the endurance plane. They were only a few feet from the ground now, squarely in front of the grandstand that had been used in last year's air races.

"Gasoline!" Chilly Dean shouted over the loudspeakers.

Barnard Stewart grinned at me. "Flaming death booeey," he derided. "But it sure drags in the customers."

I like Barnard Stewart, perhaps because his character is so different from mine; impulsive, friendly, ready for anything, never counting the cost of his impulsive acts. He is a large man, though not quite my height. I think he is a year or so younger than I am, though the age difference somehow seems greater.

The pretended refueling completed, one of the endurance pilots sidled out along the catwalk toward the left engine that was supposed to be giving trouble. In the cockpit the other pilot worked expertly with mixture control and ignition.

Flame and black smoke coughed from the exhaust stack. Chilly Dean shouted over the loudspeakers and the crowd stood up, tense, waiting for the crash. That was real showmanship!

Nobody wanted the ship wrecked, I suppose, but if it did crash they wanted to see all the horrible details of it.

"Our cue," Barnard said, as the endurance plane swept by. He pushed the goggles down over his eyes. I climbed into the rear cockpit, clumsy with my seat-back parachute and the bird outfit.

I was still thinking of old Parker's death and of the police visit that took up a good bit of the night. Fortunately I had had ample time to bury the knife. In another spot I had buried my chest of confidential papers and designs. It was all right then for them to search my truck and it was a simple matter explaining the presence of odds and ends of material.

As we gained altitude I drove all these thoughts from my mind, preparing for that nerve-racking task before me.

The ground fog had melted away, with that clock-like promptness characteristic of it, and now the sky was perfectly clear. The altimeter slowed as Barnard flattened his climb, waiting for our final cue. Below us we saw Gregor in his imitation old style Wright plane, making those curious maneuvers possible in restricted space because of his low flying speed.

Then the big rubberized cotton balloon started aloft, tethered by its mooring line.

That was to give me wind direction. A small elastic rubber balloon, such as is used by the Weather Bureau, would have suited the purpose as well. But this was another bit of showmanship. Paul Horton was a genius at such things.

To me, at this altitude, the balloon was a tiny gray circle; but I knew that on its side, in huge yellow letters edged with

black, were the words, *sounding balloon*, and hanging from the balloon the wide advertising banner, telling of my act.

I watched the slant of mooring line as it paid out. There was a very light wind from the south. I tapped Barnard's helmeted head and pointed in that direction but he was already turning, to fly south and give me leeway against the drift of wind. It was in the contract that my act, at least the latter part of it, must occur directly in front of the grandstands.

I climbed over the cockpit cowl and stood on the outside step of the fuselage, careful to keep myself sideways to the propeller blast. Barnard Stewart watched me, his eyes seeming queerly wide behind the large transport goggles. I nodded and felt the ship skidding away from me.

Then, with arms stiffly to my sides, I dove outward into space.

## II

THAT afternoon, after the show, a boy came with a note from Hortman, asking me over to his trailer. It was such things as that note that made all of us like Paul Hortman. Most men in his position would have sent me a curt, verbal order to come over.

Hortman was busy in the small dark-room which he had partitioned off the rear part of his big trailer. He was an enthusiastic amateur photographer, and a very good one. We watched during that magic space of time while seemingly blank oblongs of paper became pictures in the developer; all of them fine ones, too.

"I'll have a complete pictorial history of this tour," he said, pouring a drink for us back in the lounge section of the trailer. "It's being a big success, thanks to you boys."

"No more than to you," I reminded him. "That combat flight you and Barnard put on is a sensation." I added: "Parker's death isn't going to help the show."

He shook his prematurely gray head, staring absent-mindedly at the whisky

glass. "Eric," he said, "it was the most brutal, uncalled for murder I've ever known. That poor old man wouldn't have harmed a fly."

"He talked too much," I replied shortly.

There was a keen look of inquiry in Hortman's glance.

"Four men have been killed in those bank robberies." I spoke, without thinking. "Last night," I explained, "old Parker made some insane remarks about blood and murder, and of things that he could tell."

Paul Hortman considered this and gradually his face cleared into a smile. "By George," he exclaimed, "those robberies have hedged around us, haven't they?" Suddenly he came to a decision, reaching for the telephone which he had with an outside connection.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Eric," he chuckled, "this is too good to miss." He was smiling, waiting for his number. "Nobody's thought of that angle before."

Aghast, I had to sit there helplessly while he called every newspaper in the city, pointing out that our show had been nearby when each of the robberies took place.

"Darn 'em," he said, when he was finished, "if you want to keep something from the newspapers they bound you to death. But give 'em a hot angle like this and they call you a publicity bound."

I turned, at the sound of Dave Hager's voice. He stood at the side of the trailer, a scowl on his battered, ugly face. "Hortman," he said, "you sure got a lot of squirrely ideas." He left, apparently too angry for further words.

Paul Hortman smiled after him, shaking his head. "A pretty tough bunch of boys," he mused. He glanced over at me. "You're a pretty hard customer yourself, Eric, for such a young fellow. You know we're from the same country, don't you?"

I didn't like this turn of the conversation. "I'm an American," I said.

"Oh, sure," he admitted. "I'm a naturalized citizen myself. I'm not ashamed



though that I flew on the other side during the war." He was silent, studying me. I felt uncomfortable. "You're a deep one," he remarked. "There's things milling around in that good-looking head of yours."

HE POURED another drink, still watching me. I wanted to get up and leave but he spoke again, thoughtfully. "Y'know," he said, "if somebody had plenty of money he could start the same thing here they've got in the old country. The right man could rule the world with the resources of this country back of him."

He was still watching me, trying to see what was in my mind.

I got up hurriedly. "Why did you send for me?" I demanded.

"Oh, yes, of course." He went forward to the dining table and came back with a large canvas sack. It was heavy, by the way he carried it.

"Here's the money from ticket sales," he said. "Take it into the National, on Trade Street, for me, Eric. I've got to be here when Tave goes up for the actual refueling. That's all right," he added, noticing me glance at my wristwatch, "I've made arrangements with the bank for a clerk to accept it after hours. Get a receipt for it."

I paused before leaving. "Tave Hager didn't like your idea of calling the newspapers," I suggested. "What if they pull out with the endurance plane?"

Hortman smiled. "They can't. Weinberger broke his sponsorship agreement with them. They've got to stay with us or end the flight."

"Who's Weinberger?"

Hortman shook his head, as if he couldn't credit such ignorance.

"Old Weinberger? Wealthy meat packer, retired and trying to be a sportsman. But according to Tave he's a cheap welcher. Got the boys started on this flight and then demanded all the publicity money they made. So they appealed to me and I organized this air show

around the endurance flight. They'll stay with us, don't worry."

I was pleased with this. So long as the endurance plane stayed with us our show would continue. Nevertheless I felt the pressure of time upon me. It seemed as if I had to succeed this year or drop my plan completely.

On my way into the city I stopped at the first drug store to call a merchant in Chinatown who had handled some previous business for me. He recognized my voice immediately because of our former dealings.

"That ship not land yet," he told me and hung up without further words. You can always trust a Chinese to be close-mouthed.

The rest of the way into the city I thought of what Paul Hortman had said about that idea of ruling the world. Hortman had too much imagination. Or perhaps he was trying to trap me into making some foolish comment. I thought of that as I watched the gray-haired bank clerk stack the silver money and leaf rapidly through the bills, counting them for the receipt.

I was standing there, my back to the door, when they came in.

The bank clerk looked up from his task. He said, in a surprised voice, "I thought I locked. . ." Then he made a quick movement toward a spot under the grill-guarded counter. I saw a round hole appear in his forehead. The back part of his head seemed to explode, like a melon, filled with bloody fragments.

There was a muffled pistol shot back of me. . . .

A POLICE officer had a tight grip on my arm. "I was trying to stop them," I explained, dazedly. I ran my free hand over the back of my head and he lunged for it, thinking perhaps that I was trying to get a gun.

I showed him the blood on my hand. "See, they struck me."

His beefy face was near mine. "Oh, yeah?"

A crowd of people had gathered around the bank entrance. One of them shouted: "You dumbbell. He's hurt! He tried to stop 'em. Chased them clear out here to their car."

"And tried to get in with 'em," the policeman said.

A small man in civilian clothes stepped from the bank entrance, took my arm. "I'll handle 'im now, Pat." He raised his hand to signal and a small black car wedged its way in through the traffic. "Airfield," the man said, and motioned me ahead of him into the car.

There was a casualness about his manner but he kept a distance between us in the rear seat and his right hand was in the side pocket of his coat. I was sure he had a gun there.

"My name's Jones," he said, in a friendly way. He was undersized, and his freckled, snub nose gave him a small-boy look.

"Am I under arrest?" I asked.

His sharp gray eyes considered me. He shook his head. "Don't know what we could arrest you for, Spath. I called Paul Hortman out at the airfield. He said you were banking some money for him. Maybe you'd like to tell me what happened in the bank."

"I don't know," I said. "I was struck from behind." I showed him the bump on my head, that was throbbing now.

He nodded. "That's real," he admitted. "Now," he continued, thoughtfully, "let's see what happened. You entered the bank alone, with this sack of money—"

"I was the only one to enter the bank," I interrupted, "but there was a man who tried to come in at the same time. He wanted to deposit some money, he said, but the clerk wouldn't let him into the bank."

The detective's eyes narrowed. "That was one of them! He must have wedged the lock while he was talking with the clerk, so the others could get in. What'd he look like?"

"He had very thick glasses, was dark complexioned, had a black mustache. . ."

Jones stopped me. "Faked get-up. Those were the things he wanted you to notice. Same way with the others. You saw them shoot the clerk?"

"I saw the clerk shot," I said, picking my words carefully. "I didn't see them; didn't know they were in the bank."

"You knew they blew in the back vault?"

"It seems as if I remember the explosion," I admitted. "They struck me just a moment after shooting the clerk. Everything was muddled in my head. I . . ."

"Yeah"—the detective's voice was dry—"you chased them out to their car. . . Funny thing, Spath, is that you were almost in the car when they swerved away from the curb an' you fell out."

I started to speak.

"Now wait a minute," Jones stopped me, "I'm not saying we don't believe your story. I'm just telling you how it looked. And there are some other queer things besides this one robbery. For instance there are three other robberies that happened in the same towns where your air circus was.

"Which doesn't mean a thing, maybe," he went on hurriedly, "except that they were all handled so smoothly and they all ended in blank trails, just like these guys had jumped into a hole and pulled the hole in after 'em.

"And another thing," he continued, "is this Parker guy that was murdered. Hortman's pretty mad about that and he keeps tryin' to stir the newspapers up and that makes it tough for us dicks. And here's the thing that gets us, Spath. That Stewart girl swears she saw a knife in old Parker's back; a knife with a metal handle. But when we came out there's no knife around."

"I left the body immediately after Miss Stewart," I said.

"And went to call Hortman?"

"Not immediately. I was looking for Miss Stewart . . . seeing the murdered man upset her badly. I was worried about her."

"How long before you called Hortman?"

I didn't answer that right away. "It was quite a while," I finally admitted. "I couldn't find Miss Stewart."

"Plenty of time to get rid of the knife."

I started to speak but he stopped me. "Now I'm not trying to do anything but find out about that murder and these bank robberies, Spath. If you can, you'd better help me."

"Why do you group them together?" I protested. "What connection does Parker's murder have with the robberies, and what proof have you that the robberies weren't committed by different gangs?"

THE car was stopped momentarily by traffic. A newsboy hopped onto the running board in answer to Jones' beckoning finger. Apparently the detective had lost his immediate suspicions of me; for he used his right hand in paying the boy, leaving the gun in his side pocket.

He spread the newspaper between us, then suddenly laughed. "There's one for the book!" he exclaimed. "That robbery less than an hour old and I was expecting to read about it in the papers."

He rolled the newspaper and thrust it in his pocket. But not before my eyes had caught a name and fragments of a minor headline:

... WEINBERGER KIDNAPED, WIFE DISCLOSES—WEALTHY RETIRED MEAT PACKER

That was all I read before Jones folded the paper.

He was answering my question: "It's like I said, all these robberies end in blank trails and not only that but the first two hauls they got some currency with recorded serial numbers. Not a one of those has leaked back into circulation so far as we know."

"Well, that means they must be hangin' onto the whole take, because they don't know which bills can be identified and which can't. An' that means they're well organized and well financed."

"And where does Parker come in?" I asked, wondering if they knew what the old man had said before he was murdered.

"Probably no place," Jones admitted. "And then again he might've known something and been shut up."

I gave him a quick glance. He must know what Parker had been shouting that night. I was glad when we pulled into the grove of trees and up to Paul Hortman's trailer. There were two men there, apparently about ready to leave. Hortman's voice was raised in anger.

"Get this straight," he told them, "If that endurance plane is landing any place at night I want to know about it as much as you do. But you'd better be damned sure of your facts before you print anything."

The two men left as we were getting out of the detective's car. Hortman was still gruff with anger when he invited us into his trailer.

Chilly Dean was there, the eternal cigarette drooping from his loose mouth. He said, "Well, well, Bird, I hear you've been robbin' some more banks."

"Keep still," Paul Hortman commanded. "Get onto the telephone and call the airline traffic offices. Find out if any of their two-engined planes had a forced landing on the night of the eighth. Those two reporters think we're pulling a fast one with the endurance plane."

He turned on the detective. "Hello," he said, "what's this foolishness about Eric?"

Chilly Dean was busy on the telephone while Jones and Hortman talked. I watched a satisfied smile come over Dean's swarthy face as he cradled the receiver. He lit his cigarette.

"Eastbound schedule on Kramer's field two hours, night of the eighth, weather delay," he recited. "Which kills any rumor about the endurance ship landing."

"That does it," Hortman nodded his satisfaction. The expression was a favorite with him. "I knew blamed well those boys wouldn't double-cross me."

Hager may look like a thug but he's okay."

"Sure," Chilly agreed, and went over to turn on the radio.

"Now look here, Jones," Hortman went on to the detective, "you're stretching your theories pretty thin when you try to drag Eric into that bank robbery. Your idea is that when he left here he telephoned his gang lieutenant. Well, if he did, it must be a pretty well-organized gang, ready to act at the drop of a hat. They didn't have much time to get set for the robbery. But even if we grant all that, Eric didn't have to make a getaway in their car."

He paused, to let that statement sink in. "He was down there on legitimate business for me. He's got a bump on his head to prove they struck him. All right. All he had to do was pretend complete unconsciousness, play the part of an innocent bystander. The very fact that he got up and chased after them and was pushed out of their car, proves that he had nothing to do with the robbery."

### III

JONES nodded a grudging agreement to this reasoning. He was about to speak when the radio came on, a news announcer speaking: "... ransom note demands the staggering sum of one hundred thousand dollars, in currency notes of fifty dollars or less. And that, people, is a lot of money even for a man of Weinberger's wealth."

The announcer's voice became more crisp.

"But here are the unusual features: no warning was made against calling the police in. Apparently these kidnapers are pretty certain that their hideout cannot be located. Further than that, they make no objection against currency of consecutive serial numbers.

"And still further and still more puzzling is the method of collecting that huge ransom. At two o'clock tomorrow morning a car with one driver is to start

cruising a forty-mile stretch of the coast highway, south of the city. . ."

Chilly Dean yawned and turned to another station.

"Let's have the rest of it," Hortman said.

There was some delay while Dean searched for the former station.

"... a small red flare, placed in the center of the highway. Leaving the ransom money the driver is to depart immediately.

"Now here's the joker. A hundred thousand dollars, in fifty-dollar notes, is quite a bundle of money and there is only one practical way of carrying it out—by car—and over that whole stretch, we are informed, there is but one means of escape with a car—the coast highway.

"Now we are wondering what the police and state troopers are going to be doing at each end of that forty-mile stretch of highway. . . . Here's a flash from Hitlerland. The *Fuehrer*, in a speech . . ."

"Turn it off," Jones said disgustedly. "Between the newspapers and broadcasters us cops haven't much chance. What's the use of the boys blockading the highway with that yap tellin' the whole world?"

Paul Hortman was pouring drinks. "Anyway, it's not your headache, Jones. Come back here in my darkroom and I'll show you some color stuff that'll knock your eye out. Ever play around with a camera?"

They moved to the small room. Chilly Dean raised his glass. "Here's to crime, Bird," he proposed. His face sobered. "On the level, Bird," he asked in a low voice, "did you find a knife in old Parker's back?"

Anger rose in me, like hot lava. I dropped my glass and lunged for him. He twisted sideways from his chair and was out of the trailer in one leap. I followed, in silent, killing rage. Barnard Stewart was coming around the side of the trailer. Dean sidestepped by him and Stewart braced himself to stop me. "Eric!" he said.

The sharp surprise in his voice brought me to my senses.

"What's that louse been doing now?" he asked, a hand on my shoulder.

I shrugged, not answering his question.

"Shorty Marks told me you were over here. A little Chinese or Jap brought this note for you." Barnard handed me a sealed envelope.

I opened the message. Fang's son, who is well educated, must have written it: *Successful negotiations, it read. Should be able to make delivery in two days if ship gets in.*

I thanked Barnard and tore the note into small pieces.

"You're not getting mixed up in the Chinese war, are you, Eric?" Barnard asked, half joking.

I nodded my head toward Hortman's trailer. "I'm getting mixed up in something," I told him shortly.

Barnard's face became very sober. "I'm afraid there is something wrong, Eric. Draim wants me to stop flying your ship, wants me to quit the circus entirely."

I had been fearing this. "I think she's right, Barnard," I counseled him, against my own inclinations. "Why don't you?"

"For one thing I'm building up flying time for an airline job. Another thing . . . damn it all, Eric, I like you! And Draim used to like you. It was more than just liking you, Eric. What is happening here, anyway?"

My voice almost betrayed me. I was in love with Barnard's sister. "You'd better take Draim's advice, Barnard," I advised him. But I knew from the set, stubborn expression of his face as he left, that he wouldn't quit flying my plane.

Jones and Paul Hortman stepped down from the trailer. Jones must have been interested in photography because they were talking in a professional way about camera filters.

"Are you through with me?" I demanded of Jones.

"Get off your high horse, Eric," Paul chided. "Jones just wanted to be sure about you. By the way," he spoke to the

detective, "those kidnapers don't have to use the highway."

"What d'you mean?"

"Boats, man! That highway parallels the beach. They could take the ransom money away in a power boat."

"Where's the telephone?" Jones almost shouted in his excitement. "You've really got something there and the boys may have overlooked that bet."

There was another thing they had overlooked. The heavy ground fog.

THE next morning I had an encouraging letter from Colonel Bronton, retired Air Corps officer. He considered my plan worth serious consideration and suggested that I get in touch with an officer in active service.

They were not entirely satisfied with present methods, he wrote, and would embrace any idea that had promise. If I could get the active service back of me I would have a powerful ally.

This morning the ground fog started breaking at ten o'clock, patches of blue sky widening as the sun burned it off. This type of fog is one meteorological condition that can be figured with almost mathematical certainty. With clear skies, a temperature inversion and a few other factors, anybody with a small fund of weather knowledge can predict its occurrence.

I was working on my plane about lunch time, when Barnard Stewart came over with an extra edition newspaper. He pointed to the headlines, grinning.

"One hundred thousand dollars vanishes," he read. "That's a lot of money, Eric. They had the road blockaded at both ends and boats patrolling off-shore. But the kidnapers slipped through. You could have cut the fog with a knife, it was so thick."

Barnard leaned against the fuselage, rapidly skimming the paper.

"Here's where they slipped up!" he exclaimed. "The kidnapers warned against the use of a light when the ransom was delivered, but late this morning the

driver was able to identify the spot where he left the money. Off the road, near the edge of the beach, brush had been cut, presumably to form concealment for a number of men.

"They found three forty-five caliber automatic or sub-machine gun shells, unexploded, lying in the grass. But no footprints leading toward the beach or across the beach."

"Easy enough to brush those over." I pointed out the obvious.

"Sure. But the state police were prepared for that. They had three bloodhounds from the sheriff's kennels. The dogs led them away from the beach, up across the highway and to the edge of a small creek. The officers took them back and circled with them all around the beach but there was no scent."

"So they didn't get away by boat," I said, amused by Barnard's deductions. "They got into the creek and waded."

"Sure. With a big sack full of currency!"

"Maybe they buried the money."

"All right. Then the dogs will find it. All they've got to do is run them up and down each side of the creek. They couldn't bury paper money very long in water without ruining it. I'll make a bet, Eric. Ten dollars they get them or the money before nightfall."

"I'll take that bet," I offered. "Make it fifty dollars and I'll give you two-to-one odds."

I won the bet.

The next morning, early, Peter Weinberger was found by a man from a tourist camp, several miles north of Ocean Beach. Besides the light summer clothes he had worn at the time of being kidnaped he had on a sailor jacket covered with white stains of sea water.

He was wandering about in a dazed manner. Both arms had scars from a hypodermic needle. Evidently he had been kept under the influence of some drug like morphine during the whole time of his captivity.

It was all a vague, horrible dream to his

mind. He recalled hearing the splash of water on several occasions and remembered dimly the tiny, oblong room in which he had lived. During his early babbling he referred several times to "the coffin." This was evidently a bunk, so confined in size that he had imagined, or dreamed, that he was buried alive.

THAT night I visited my friend Lie Fang, the Chinese merchant, and thereby drew the net of evidence tighter. Unknown to me I was shadowed by Jones' men. I lost them on the trip out to old Sebree's mill, but they took young Fang for questioning.

It was this same night that Charles Bronson disappeared.

Up to this time I think public opinion unconsciously favored the kidnapers. Weinberger wasn't a character who would attract public favor. He had been divorced four times, each time on the grounds of cruelty or unfaithfulness. There had been unpleasant publicity about this. It was known also that he had broken his contract with the endurance flyers and every day now they became greater heroes in the public mind.

The feeling seemed to be that anyone who could take a hundred thousand dollars from Peter Weinberger was just smart.

The case of Charles Bronson changed this entirely. Bronson owned a chain of newspapers and had been active in public life, fighting for the common people. Public opinion was up in arms now, demanding that an end be put to this reign of kidnaping terror.

The newspapers were full of it the next day. One editorial demanded that the state militia be called out, though they already had three companies of CCC boys, with innumerable police and special deputies searching the area now spoken of as the Forty-mile Zone.

It seemed utterly impossible that anyone could have escaped from that area on foot, and it would have been impossible for the kidnapers to escape by car with



the money. The bulk of traffic that night had been diverted inland over county roads and all other cars had been thoroughly searched.

That ransom was carried away by power boat or still remained in the Forty-mile Zone. Everyone was agreed on that point.

Opinion favored the power boat, since the evidence Peter Weinberger had given—that he had heard water splashing, that he wore a seaman's coat stained with salt water, that he had been kept prisoner in a narrow cabin in the confines of a small bunk—indicated the use of boats in this kidnaping.

... I very nearly killed myself that day. This for two reasons.

The first was that some one had carelessly pulled the rip-panel on our sounding balloon. This rip-panel is an emergency device used to deflate the balloon almost instantly in case of a sudden, high wind.

I had done my stunt the day before without the balloon but today there was no wind on the ground and a fairly heavy northwest wind aloft. There is no way to detect wind drift aloft in a short air-plane flight.

Three Army observation planes had just finished a neat bit of formation flying and landed. Hortman had asked Major Lee Clinton, in charge of the flight, to stop over a few days and add this extra touch to our air show.

I watched the dust form up back of their propellers as they taxied off the field. It hung motionless in the lower air so I pointed for Barnard to skid me off over the center of the field.

We had a good crowd. I could see the white expanse of their upturned faces as I stood poised on the fuselage step, holding my arms so the propeller blast wouldn't catch the silk webbing of my bird gear. I nodded to Barnard and felt the ship skidding away.

For a brief time I seemed to be hanging motionless in the air with the ground surging up toward me at express speed.

Then, carefully, I extended my arms and scissored my legs out to stretch the web fabric. I caught the pressure of it in straining shoulder muscles.

Then I was flying, literally flying; and I don't believe there is anything quite as exhilarating as that.

With the excess speed from the first free drop I made my loop, as advertised. Really it was not a loop, but a steep wing-over, such as a bird does when it turns suddenly, climbing, wings vertical to the ground. I have never done a true loop with my bird gear and doubt that it can be done.

It was evident to me immediately that I would be drifted southeast of the field, so I turned to the northwest, gliding; and there below me and half a mile ahead, was the endurance plane.

That was the second reason for my almost killing myself. Looking at the big cabin of that plane an amazing idea came to my mind. I remembered then that rumor the two newspaper reporters had picked up—that the endurance plane was making landings at night on unfrequented fields.

It was climbing, after its fake fueling stunt, and this slowed its speed considerably. I had a thousand feet altitude of it. I straightened my legs for a dive.

There was no engine noise, so I could hear the dry, rustling sound of the wind around my body and extended arms. I wanted to try and see inside that plane. If it was making furtive landings there was a reason. I thought I knew the reason.

The big ship turned, presenting the silvery disks of its propellers. It was done so abruptly that I had little time to think. Those propellers could make mincemeat of me in a split second.

I folded my arms, diving. I looked upward just once as the retracted landing gear slithered above me. Then I jerked the rip-cord of my parachute.

It was a close shave. In spite of my first glide the wind had drifted me to the south edge of the field. I was directly

over the high-tension electric line that crossed there. Twenty-two hundred volts!

The pilot chute flipped out, dragging the main chute. The bare copper wires seemed to leap up at me. The main parachute bellied open with a crack of taut fabric.

I reached up to my shroud lines, gathering them in to spill wind. One edge of the parachute barely grazed a copper strand of that silent death.

The next instant I struck the ground.

#### IV

I WAS pretty badly shaken that night, though physically I had only a few bruises and scratches from the experience. Things like that are hard on the nervous system. And, too, I had the uneasy feeling that I was being watched all the time, that a net of circumstantial evidence was being drawn about me.

Jones, the detective, had me over in a police sedan that afternoon, questioning me about my relations with Lio Fang. They had learned from young Fang that his father had received a telephone call from me the day of the last bank robbery. He didn't believe my story, though he pretended to.

"You were calling him about a shipment of raw silk?" he repeated when I had finished.

I nodded. "Long fiber silk, direct from China. That from Japan is so adulterated as to be useless for my purpose."

"What purpose, Spath?"

"I can't tell you," I said.

He looked at me steadily, curiously. "Y'know, Spath," he said, "I could put you in the clinker right now." He added, thoughtfully, under his breath, "but I'm not goin' to. I suppose you went to Lio Fang's last night to get the silk fiber?"

I nodded. "You've had me trailed?" I asked.

"Yeah. An' the damned fools lost your track when you went out the back way. But we know you rented one of those U-drive cars. Where'd you go?"

"Out to the south edge of town. There's a man who owns a small weaving plant, a man named Sebree. He installed one of the first modern weaving mills in China. It's a hobby with him now, the weaving of good silk and linen fabric."

Jones threw his hands in the air. "Am I crazy!" he exploded. "Am I dreaming all this? Murder and bank robbery and kidnaping, and now a lot of gibberish about silk cloth! Where's it all tie in?"

"Maybe it doesn't tie in," I suggested.

A crafty smile moved his lips. "Guess you're right, Spath. Well, that's all. I just wanted to know what you were about last night. Just checkin' things up, y'know."

I left him, knowing that this wasn't what he really thought. He was simply giving me enough rope to hang myself. But I had no intention of doing that.

THE pathway back to my truck passed by Barnard Stewart's trailer, where his sister kept house for him. She taught school in the winter but spent the summers with him. They were twins, and inseparable. Perhaps the death of their parents had had the effect of drawing them closer together.

They were about the only friends I had in this air circus crowd. As I have said, the others had no liking for me. So I was pleased when Barnard called to me, asking me to come in.

But I saw immediately that something had happened. Draim Stewart barely nodded to me as I entered.

I studied the smooth oval of her face as she was lighting the patented gas lamp that hung in a gimbal over the table. Her eyes seemed black in the artificial light, though I knew they were a deep violet color. Her face—the controlled, sensitive mouth, the sculptured nose—had that quality that makes the difference between mere prettiness and true beauty.

"Eric," Barnard said, his voice cold and hard, "I've always liked you. And the last few days I've been blindly loyal to you, against the advice of my sister."

He paused. I looked from his angry face to the cold, set beauty of Draitm Stewart.

"Well," Barnard continued, "she finally told me about that knife. Since then I've been thinking about a lot of things that before this I thought weren't any of my business."

I moistened my lips. "What did she tell you about the knife?"

"She described it. And the description exactly fits that of the knife you used to carry, to free yourself of the bird gear if anything went wrong. Now what about it?"

I cleared my throat. "It's the same knife," I admitted.

His face went white. "Then you murdered old Parker?"

I shook my head in denial.

He studied me, his face working. "Eric," he said finally, "this thing is driving me crazy! You're . . . I've thought of you almost as a brother. Eric, you're doing something here besides this bird stunt. I've known that for a long time but I thought before that it was none of my business. Now I think it is."

My voice sounded strange. "I can't tell you what I'm doing, Barnard. But I can tell you something else, in confidence, that may explain things a little. I'm a German, or I was one."

He seemed to stiffen in his seat.

I continued. "My father flew in the last war. His plane was shot down . . . by an American pilot."

"And you—"

"No," I said, guessing his thought, "I didn't come over here with any thoughts of vengeance. It made no difference who shot him down. That is war. The thing is, it was during the last part of the war and he had a parachute. It opened all right. But it lowered him into No-man's Land. The artillery was busy . . . and that area had been shelled heavily with mustard gas."

Barnard's voice was low. "He died out there?"

I nodded. "Neither side dared go out to rescue him. But if he could have di-

rected that parachute a bare quarter of a mile either way he might have been saved. At least he wouldn't have died such a horrible, lingering death."

Barnard took a deep breath. His hands, on the table, were tightly clenched. I heard a soft exclamation of pity from Draitm Stewart.

"I had studied English," I continued, "so, when things began to change over in Germany I came to this country. I expected to return. I thought the people would come to their senses; realize where they were being led. All of the time I worked on my plan. Then I met Colonel Bronton, now retired from the Air Corps. He was very good to me. I decided to become an American."

Draitm looked at me.

"And you're making this bird gear—"

I stopped Draitm Stewart's exclamation. "There has been nothing said about a bird gear," I told her.

"Nothing, you understand? The thing I am working on will be purely for war time, when a trained pilot is worth a hundred, two hundred thousand dollars. That is the way they look at such things. It is a secret, to be put away with other war secrets; to be used only in emergency of war."

"And you are going to give it to America?" It was Draitm who asked the question.

I didn't answer her. Looking from the trailer window I had seen a tiny shaft of light near the door of my truck. They followed me in that quick rush I made toward the truck.

The door had been jimmied open. I saw that at a glance, even in the dim light. Then there was a subdued, frightened cry from the dark interior. A body lurched through the door.

*"Dead man! There's a dead man in there!"*

Even as my arm swung I recognized the loose, swarthy face of Chilly Dean. He fell, still muttering of the dead man. But Barnard and Draitm Stewart were too far back of me to have heard this.

"NOW," Jones exclaimed, "that's the screwiest yarn I ever listened to." Chilly Dean's black eyes were signaling me. He was reclining in a canvas chair, in Clyde Wenton's tent.

"It's true, though," he maintained, holding his left jaw, where I had struck him. "All my fault. I saw Bird comin' down the pathway, near Stewart's trailer. I thought it'd be a good joke, poppin' out on him that way, yellin' 'kidnapers' . . ."

Jones turned away in disgust. "Pull that on me, you two-year-old, an' I may plant a couple of slugs in you. No wonder Spath knocked you out." He glared at Dean and at me, shaking his head. "Damn it, somehow that story sounds fishy; it even smells fishy."

He stood, undecided, his feet planted wide apart.

Clyde Wenton was there in the tent with us. He broke the silence. "I see," he said, rustling the newspaper he had been holding, "that the boys're goin' to collect ransom for Charles Bronson, tomorrow."

He spoke as if the deed had already been accomplished. "In daylight, too," he added. "Boy, they'll have the Forty-mile Zone swarming with cops."

Jones shook his head. Evidently he had already read the paper. "Can't do that," he muttered. "They gave warning they'll murder Bronson if there's a single man enters the zone."

Wenton chuckled. "They sure have you cops buffaloed. Anyway, you have enough fellas so you can surround the whole place. If they get away with this money you boys'd better get a job on the farm."

Jones said nothing. I knew that he had that same thought in mind. And of course they would surround the place, with men strung out a few miles from the highway and a cordon of boats waiting off-shore in case they tried this time to take the money out that way.

Fog was already setting in; but in daylight, even with the fog it would be difficult, practically impossible for a boat to get past the tightly-drawn line. The Coast Guard boats had been augmented

by volunteers from the fishing fleets and by privately owned pleasure craft.

When Jones left the tent Chilly Dean followed him closely, as if not wishing to be around near me. I watched them separate, Dean taking the path toward Hortman's trailer. On sudden decision I followed. I still had that half-formed idea about the endurance plane and I felt sure that if there was anything to it Paul Hortman was the man I should talk with.

I knocked at the closed door. Hortman opened it.

I saw Dean back of him, a half-filled whisky glass in his hand. He set this down hurriedly. "Well," he said, as if he had been on the point of leaving, "I'll be runnin' along, Chief."

I moved aside, so he could get down the trailer steps.

"Remember, Chilly," Hortman reminded him, "Freder agreed to scatter those handbills from his plane for twenty dollars. You'll be leaving before the air show, so I told Marks to handle the loudspeaker mike. That note I got from Jones will take you through the Forty-mile Zone."

"They'll search that car down to the lock washers," Dean grumbled.

"Let 'em search," Hortman grinned. "If anything unusual happens, call me long distance. We may be able to use it for advance publicity."

"We're moving on?" I asked, after Dean had gone.

"Right," Hortman snapped. "The crowd's falling off. Besides, all this robbery, kidnaping and murder is beginning to get me. What do you want, Eric? I'm busy on some photo enlargements."

I stepped into the trailer, closed the door. "It's about Weinberger's kidnaping," I began.

"Well, what about it?" Hortman asked.

SOMEHOW that short, commonsense question made my idea seem a little foolish. I was sure that if I stated it in so many words he would laugh at me.

But what I said brought a quick, intent look into his eyes.

"Everybody thinks Weinberger was held captive in a boat, off-shore," I said.

"That's right," he admitted. "No doubt of that. The seaman's jacket with salt stains, sounds of water splashing, small cabin and bunk—all seem to point that way."

"And yet all those things could have been faked," I stated. "I'll bet I can tell you right now where Weinberger was held captive; where Charles Bronson. . ."

A hard fist thumped the door.

Paul Hortman opened it and Tave Hager came in, scowling at me. "We're leavin' you tomorrow, Hortman. You and your screwy publicity ideas."

"But Tave," Hortman exclaimed, "haven't I given you every service you asked for?"

"Yeah," Hager growled, chin jutting, "can't a hell of a lot we didn't ask for. You got cops all over us."

"Listen, Tave," Hortman said earnestly, "everybody was going to notice how those robberies always happened near our show. Better we pointed it out than to have the newspapers stumble onto the idea. As a matter of fact all but one of the city editors had already thought of it, or said they had. But because I pounded it at them they refused to run any comment on it."

Hager's fists were clenched at his sides with anger. "That's what you say."

"Who's going to pay for your servicing, Hager," I asked, "if you take the plane away from our circus?"

"We got plenty for that now."

"Where did you get it?" I watched his face.

"Look here," he said, "I don't have to answer your questions, Spath. I've signed up with a big cigarette company. I've—look, Hortman, I want to talk with you in private and get things squared up to leave tomorrow."

Paul Hortman said wearily, "I'll see you later, Eric." He laid his big, friendly hand on my shoulder. "By the way, the

rip-panel on our big balloon is still leaking at the stitches. We'll use a rubber one for tomorrow."

Under Tave Hager's scowling gaze I left the trailer. It seems strange to me now I didn't realize that I had practically stamped the seal on my own death warrant.

THERE was a light in Barnard Stewart's trailer. Moved by impulse I knocked. Draim Stewart opened the door a bare crack; then, seeing who it was, swung it wide open.

"Just in time for some goodnight coffee," she said cordially.

"What in thunder happened at your truck?" Barnard asked. "Jones got there about the time we did and hustled you over to Clyde's tent."

I kept my eyes on the spoon, swirling it in the coffee. "Dean's curiosity got the better of him. I didn't want to get him in trouble so I told Jones it had happened up on the pathway and I'd been carrying him to my truck."

"For some reason," I added, "Dean agreed with me and put a few fancy touches of his own to the story."

Young Stewart shook his blond head. "Eric," he said, "I can laugh at it all now, since we talked with you. But still it's all crazy. What would he be doing in your truck?"

I had been wondering about that myself. Nothing had been disturbed inside the truck. I had given it a quick look over with my flashlight before I left with Jones to go to Wenton's tent. And I wondered, too, about Dean's frightened exclamation about a dead man in the truck.

I put all this aside for the moment. "Barnard," I said, "I think I know who kidnaped Weinberger and where they kept him."

Barnard held his hand up, laughing.

"I'm too blamed sleepy to listen to any more crime theories. You kidnaped him and held him in your truck and it's almost midnight. So let's quit."

I laughed with them and stepped out into the thick fog. Barnard stood at the doorway. "This stuff won't clear out till noon," he said. "That's the latest forecast from the Weather Bureau."

As I walked along the path, slowly because of the dense fog, the sound of motors came to me. It was the endurance plane in its endless, aimless circling of the sky.

They were high above the fog layer. I knew how the earth looked to them in the starlit night; a tremendous expanse of white, with mountains pushing up through the fog-like islands in a white ocean.

They had been in the air for more than a month, as thoroughly isolated from the rest of mankind as space travelers or antarctic explorers.

There was a curve in the highway where it bordered the path. As I reached that point an automobile swung around the curve, headlights making a white luminous glow in the fog.

A man stood at the edge of the path. I could see that black shadow of his raised arm. I knew, instinctively, that he had a gun leveled; that he had been waiting there to kill me.

Disconnected thoughts jabbed in my brain. It was Tave Hager. I was positive of that. He had heard me tell Hortman that I knew where they were keeping Bronson. Another man stood a pace or so back of the killer. Chilly Dean? Most likely.

There was no time to escape; no time even for coherent thinking. Just those strange, revealing mental flashes. They came to me instantaneously, even as I moved.

What I did was purely reflex action. I leaped for him, arms extended. It was a crazy thing to do. The distance was too great for me to reach him before he could pull the trigger.

Everything happened at once, it seemed. My boot struck against a small boulder at the side of the path. The gun muzzle blazed as I shot forward, onto my face. I was sprawled full length on the

ground as the report crashed in my ears.

"That does it! Now clear out and get that gun hidden before the cops find you." The voice was heavy with an attempt to disguise it. Without thinking I was trying to place the voice as belonging to Tave Hager. I was certain it wasn't his and yet there was something about the words that dinned familiarly in my head.

I don't know how many plainclothes officers were scattered through the camp. They were around me while I was still getting to my feet, brushing the small gravel out of scratched palms.

"What happened?" one asked me, throwing the beam of his flashlight into my face.

I shrugged. "Nothing much," I told him. "This is one shooting that you can't very well hang onto me."

## V

I WANTED to tell the police that night about the endurance plane; but Frank Jordan, the other detective in charge, wasn't listening to anybody. He had a new theory now; that there were two rival gangs involved in this case. It sounded idiotic to me.

Those words spoken by one of my would-be killers still kept repeating themselves in my mind. Familiar as it seemed to me, I couldn't place the voice. I was too tired. And yet those words contained the key to the whole mystery!

I would have slept in late the next morning. I certainly needed the rest. But someone started banging my door about eight-thirty. Half-dressed I pulled back the table with which I had barricaded the door.

"My name's John Henderson," a man said, extending a card. He was tall, gray-haired, well-dressed and had an air of knowing what he was about. I was still half asleep. Another promoter or insurance man, I thought.

He spoke in a nasal Yankee drawl. "I've been watching this bird act of yours, Spath," he said, giving me a



shrewd look through silver-rimmed glasses.

I thought I knew what was coming. My inclination was to slam the door in his face.

"I judge you weigh about a hundred eighty," he continued. "Strong as a bull, too, eh?" He seemed to be conversing with himself.

"Now what has that got to do with my bird act?" I demanded.

"Why," he said, surprised, "it's got a thunderin' lot to do with it. You know that. Mind if I look at your bird outfit?"

"Certainly you can't see it," I snapped.

He sighed, with gentle regret. "You know," he continued, "I had a pair of field glasses on you when you almost hit the high-tension line. It gave me an idea. Could you land safely with that bird outfit if you didn't have a parachute?"

His words startled me. With field glasses a trained observer might learn my secret of extending the wing ribs and tips. And that, with camber control, was about the only way in which my gear differed from half a dozen other purely circus outfits.

Fear of this possibility forced me to a quick decision. These exhibition flights would have to stop right now. And some way, by hook or crook, I must get the attention of someone in the War Department who had influence and who had an imagination.

For the last three years I had been writing to the Department. But my letters were ignored, or answered by some minor clerk.

"You know," Henderson continued, "if you could land that bird outfit, without a parachute, I might have a good proposition. . . ."

I stopped him. "I'm not open to any proposition," I told him. "Now beat it!" I flipped his card back at him and slammed the door.

Inside there I had a momentary feeling of panic. Perhaps it was more than stupid curiosity that had caused Chilly Dean to break in, the night before. If so he certainly hadn't had time to examine the bird outfit, locked in the metal chest,

where I kept all my detailed drawings. Nobody must see those. Nobody but the staff of the United States War Department.

I had buried the chest the night of old Parker's murder and had left it hidden while the police made a thorough search of my truck.

I sat down on a stool, trying to fit the fragments of this puzzle together. I was positive that first Weinberger and now Bronson were kept hidden in a sound-proofed cabin on the endurance plane.

The sailor jacket, salt stains—all those things that Weinberger had recalled—were just so many herrings dragged across the trail. The endurance plane had landed at night and the kidnap victims, drugged to the hilt with morphine, were loaded on. And there they remained, their prison in full view, circling the sky, while the ransom was collected.

How did they collect the ransom? That was beyond me. There they had seemed to do the impossible. Anyway, it meant the presence of several ground men in the gang.

I thought I could pick them out. Tave Hager, of course; Chilly Dean; Clyde Wenton, wingwalker; and Shorty Marks, who was supposed to be a mechanic. The latter was a dope fiend. I had seen the needle scars on his arm.

I remembered suddenly that Chilly Dean had a pass from Jones that would allow him to travel the notorious Forty-mile Zone. But that pass wouldn't exempt him from a thorough search at the blockaded ends of the highway. There I ran against a blank wall in my reasoning.

In some manner they must have concealed the first ransom money within the Forty-mile Zone. And they would do the same with Bronson's ransom today.

NONE of these things concerned me directly, yet they were all operating to defeat my purposes. I went to the rear of the truck to get Colonel Branton's letter and there I saw Chilly Dean's "dead man." The night before his frightened

cry that there was a dead man in my truck had puzzled me.

It was the stuffed dummy, exactly my size, that I used in cutting and fitting and shaping the wing webs of my bird suit. In the darkness it could easily be mistaken for a real man.

My Luger pistol was in the drawer of the work table, with the letter and other papers. I pulled the slide to see that it was loaded and slipped it into my pocket.

Colonel Branton had advised me to talk with some active service officer and try to get him interested in my invention. Major Lee Clinton, in charge of the three Army observation planes now on the field, was the logical person for me to talk with. I had already sounded him out warily on the subject. He was a hard-headed little man, devoid of imagination, but it seemed that I must do something and do it immediately.

I found Major Clinton in the Army reserve hangar. They were preparing to leave that day for San Diego, as soon as the fog thinned, so they had the planes out giving them a preliminary warm-up.

"Hello, Spath," Clinton greeted me. "You damned near killed yourself yesterday with that bird rig."

It was a poor beginning for what I had in mind. "I'd like to talk to you about that, Major," I said. "In private."

His face showed surprise. "About that birdman stuff?" he asked, doubtfully; but he motioned with a jerk of his head toward the empty hangar office.

"What's on your mind?" he inquired, when we were in the office.

"This will be considered confidential?"

"Sure. Sure. Go ahead," he snapped. He had a short, clipped manner of speech.

I took a deep breath and plunged in. "That bird gear of mine," I stated, "is to take the place of parachutes."

He was going to speak, but I stopped him. "A parachute," I continued, "is a poor enough life-saving device even in peace time. They dump pilots down in rivers, trees, buildings, high-tension lines . . . all sorts of danger spots. You have

only slight control over them, by pulling the shrouds to spill wind."

Clinton nodded agreement to this.

"In war from now on," I said, "parachutes will be practically useless. There'll be no more fair-play stuff for airmen. The ground command won't stand for it. When a pilot is forced to bail out the enemy flyer will have strict orders to shoot him down. It's in the same line with poison gas and bombing cities—absolutely merciless."

Again he signified agreement.

"All right," I went on; "with my bird gear I've got a glide ratio of five-to-one. From five thousand feet I can glide almost five miles. And I can close my arms for a free drop any time. I'd be a pretty hard target to hit."

For a moment interest showed in his face. But immediately it faded. "You can't land with it," he objected.

"I can almost land with my present outfit," I told him, "and in a few days I'll have some specially woven silk fabric that will allow for greater wing area with less reinforcement. I'll be able to land with that. Come on over to the truck and I'll show you the whole thing."

He followed me, with reluctance.

"What's the matter?" he asked, when we reached the truck.

**I** POINTED to the open door. "Last night a man jimmied the spring lock and got in. Later I put a hasp and padlock on it. Now that's been forced."

The truck was in disorder, as if some one had given it a hasty search. But my chest was still locked.

I opened it and hastily donned the bird gear, zipping the stout canvas sleeves of it around my arms; fastening the leg bands.

"Wait a minute," Clinton ordered. "Where do I come in on this? Why're you showing it to me this way?"

"I'm going to show you the whole thing," I told him. "How I get wing camber by the tension of my arms, how the ribs telescope. . . all about it. Then I'm

going to ask you to write a letter for me to the War Department."

"Nothing doing," he cut in. "That's a damned good way for an officer to lose file numbers—butting into things. If—"

Loud voices outside the truck stopped him. Jones, with another detective and two police officers in uniform, came into the truck. Paul Hortman was with them.

"Here he is," Jones snapped. He stood looking at me as if he hated the sight.

"Spath," he said, "you've got the gall of Satan himself. You've already explained yourself out of a bank robbery and a murder. Now try to explain this away."

For a moment I didn't see what Jones had in his hand. I saw only the accusing stare that Hortman gave me.

"Here are six fifty-dollar bills," Jones said. "Two of them have the serial numbers from one of the bank robberies. The rest were in the ransom money paid out by Weinberger's friends. We found 'em here in this truck."

For a moment I was stunned. "You found them here. . . ?"

"Here in this truck," Jones repeated.

I stood there like a cornered animal. Outside, on the airfield, I heard an airplane motor roar into life. Hortman glanced at his wristwatch.

"Well?" Jones demanded.

"Chilly Dean must have left them here," I said, wearily. "I lied to you about meeting him on the path. I know now why he backed me up in the story. I found him here in my truck last night. That's why I struck him. I thought he was simply curious. But he was in here planting those bills."

Paul Hortman shook his head in disbelief. "Eric," he said, "you're the last man I would have suspected. Why, this ties you in with the whole thing."

Anger came to me; and desperation. "You thick-skulled fools!" I shouted, "the whole thing's right before your eyes and you can't see it. Charles Bronson is held captive up there in the endurance plane, right now."

## VI

THEY stared at me as if I was crazy. But the first incredulous smile left Hortman's lips. He said, slowly, thoughtfully, "It might be true, at that."

"What d'you mean?" Jones demanded.

"That endurance ship. There's been a rumor of them landing at night."

"Why didn't you say something about it?"

Hortman shrugged. "An airliner was forced down the same night in question. We thought that explained it." Hortman's face became animated. "By George," he exclaimed, "it all fits in perfectly. That was the night Weinberger was kidnaped!"

"Get 'em down then," Jones demanded, as if it would be as simple as stopping a car.

"Wait a minute, now," Hortman cautioned him. "This may be just a wild guess. If they weren't guilty they could raise the devil with us for spoiling their flight."

"Then what in thunder—"

"Keep still," Hortman commanded. "I can fly up there, but there's no way to get inside. . . I know: I'll take Clyde Wenton along. He's a wingwalker. That's one of his stunts; changing planes in the air. How's that?"

"Good! And make it snappy. They may be getting away with that ransom right now." Jones pushed Hortman through the door. "And if they won't let Wenton into the plane we'll know they're guilty. We'll get orders for Major Clinton to force them down with his planes."

"That does it," Hortman agreed. He started toward the field on a dog trot.

Jones whirled on me. "Get outta that damned bird suit," he commanded. "We're goin' to put you away where—what's the matter?" he demanded. "What the devil's wrong with you?"

I hardly recognized my own voice. "Bronson," I said, "isn't in the endurance plane!"

"Nuts!" Jones snatched handcuffs from his hip pocket. "That's just—"

"Raise your hands. All of you!" I commanded, whipping the Luger from my jacket pocket.

They must have seen instantly that I was prepared to shoot. Reluctantly their hands came up. Jones was red with anger. "You won't get to first base on this, Spath," he bellowed.

"Jones," I said, "we haven't an instant to lose. As you say, they may be getting that ransom right now. Give me ten minutes of freedom and do what I say and I'll turn Bronson over to you."

He gave me an astonished, searching look. "Will you hand that gat over, too? Right away?"

I nodded.

"We can't lose there," he decided. He extended his hand for the gun. "I promise."

"Come on." I led them through the grove at a run.

The door of Hortman's big trailer was locked. I had expected that. "Blow it in," I commanded. "Shoot the thing out."

There was a critical moment. Then Jones nodded assent. The policeman leveled his thirty-eight service revolver. Wood splintered as the lock buckled under the smashing slugs. Inside, the door to Hortman's photographic room was also locked. This time they didn't hesitate. But with that second door broken in Jones made a grab for me.

"You're not so damned smart, Spath. I've been in here a dozen times with Hortman."

"You fool! Look around," I ordered. "With this photographic stuff put away in the cabinets, and in dim light, wouldn't this room look exactly as Weinberger described his prison? Look for that place he called the coffin. A box or chest of some kind, big enough to stretch a drugged man out in full length."

"Here!" one of the policemen shouted. "The drawers on this center cabinet are fakes." He stooped, putting the lift of his shoulder under the top. The other policeman moved to help him. But the catch had already snapped.

I heard one of them shout, "It's Charles Bronson, sure as hell!"

Jones' grip on me loosened. I jerked my arm free and leaped for the door. Knowing that Hortman was leader of all this gave me the pattern for fitting the whole puzzle together. I knew now how they had spirited the ransom money from that closely guarded Forty-mile Zone. And I wasn't going to let them get away with it again.

Draim Stewart told me later that I resembled some strange other-world creature as I raced toward one of Clinton's Army planes, my bird outfit whipping out behind me.

THE finding of Charles Bronson was the only thing that saved me from being riddled with bullets before I could get that big observation plane up.

They thought at first he was dead. Shorty Marks, a drug addict himself, had the newspaper owner filled full of the stuff. Bronson wasn't a gross brute of a man like Weinberger. He almost died from the effects of that repeated drugging.

Fortunately I didn't have to take off blind. The combination of sun and a light north wind was sweeping the fog southward of the field. It was always the first place to clear.

Cars were already beginning to arrive with spectators for the show. They didn't see an air show that day. At least, not a show that had been planned. But what they did see was spectacular enough. I expect, for the most sensational-minded of them.

Paul Hortman had already collected the ransom and was slanting down toward the field from a great altitude. I climbed steeply, hoping that he would land, but almost certain that Shorty Marks or some other confederate on the field knew by this time the game was up and would signal Hortman away.

Hortman made an easy swing to the north. The field was almost all clear now. fog banked up over the south end and stretching for miles beyond.

I knew what I would do in Hortman's place: what almost any trained pilot would do if pursued. Head southward, keeping in the fog, flying by instruments. Nobody could find him there. He could change direction and alter half an hour, climb above it and head eastward, where it would be clear.

Perhaps he already had a car hidden miles away, waiting for just such an emergency as this.

I was flying at five thousand, a thousand feet above Hortman, when I saw Marks' blue sedan dart across the field and onto the highway. That was the warning signal. But nobody on the ground would suspect it until Marks had put miles behind him in his getaway.

Immediately Hortman swung to the south. I jammed stick and throttle forward. This ship had three times the power of anything I had ever flown. I saw Clyde Wenton lean forward and point me out to Hortman. The next instant I had cut my throttle, was dragging my wheels over his centersection.

My sudden appearance out of seemingly nowhere must have startled Hortman. Momentarily he lost his nerve. He kicked full rudder, carted his stick. His plane swerved northward, away from the fog bank.

But there lay his only refuge and he knew it. In a few minutes other planes would be taking the air. By sheer weight of numbers they could force him down.

His ship was lighter than mine. Worse than that I was in a stall, after checking the speed in my dive. Again he canted the stick, then jerked it savagely into a vertical turn.

I knew that I was on the verge of a stall spin. But anger lashed me. Another minute and he would be screened by the fog. He would be free of pursuit. And a man of his diabolical cleverness would make the most of that opportunity. They never would catch him.

He or Chilly Dean had murdered Parker. The old man had learned something of their secret. Hortman had en-

gineered those bank robberies; was responsible for the people killed in them. He was master mind in the kidnappings. He had tried to throw the blame onto me. I simply couldn't let him escape.

The giant engine, with throttle opened, shuddered my plane with its power. Hortman had told me that with enough money the proper man could make a hell of the whole world, as it had already been done in Europe. I realized now that he had dropped those same hints among the air circus people. That was why they were suspicious of me; hated me.

**T**HE full realization of it was enough to drive a man crazy. I think I must have been insane when I jerked that big, half-stalling plane up into a vertical above him. For a bare instant the motor held it by sheer horsepower. Then the control stick went slack in my hands, the rudder pedals beating a loose tattoo against my feet.

The ship's nose dropped with that first sickening plunge of a spin. I sliced downward, completely out of control. Hortman's plane seemed to leap upward toward me.

Wenton scrambled frantically onto the seat, tumbling himself overside and pulling the rip-cord of his parachute. I had a brief glimpse of the white silk blown back by the propeller blast, tangling in the vertical fin.

The metal wing of the Army plane crashed through linen fabric.

I don't recall jumping clear of the wreckage. It must have been instinct that made me spread my arms and legs. The shock of that first shoulder strain brought my mind back to focus.

Hortman must have jumped before the ships came together in mid-air. He was cool-headed enough to hold off pulling his rip-cord until he was well below the wreckage. The white spread of his parachute was easing him toward the ground. I straightened my legs to dive. The idea was firmly implanted in my mind that I must capture him.

I had told Major Clinton I could make a bird outfit that could be landed. I was confident I could. But there were grave doubts in my mind about the present gear.

A birdman can't land as you land an airplane. It must be done exactly as a bird lands. At the last split second, within a foot or two of the ground, the legs are doubled back, spread. That throws the feet downward. Outspread arms kill forward speed at stalling. I had practiced it many times at high altitude.

I flattened my glide. I saw Hortman's feet strike the ground. The parachute collapsed about him.

Instantly I luffed up to brake forward speed. Too soon! I was falling; falling dead weight. I heard Hortman cursing frantically below me. Then something dragged me into oblivion with a horrible, numbing shock.

**T**HEY wouldn't even let me talk for a whole week. The fat, jolly little doctor laid the law down as soon as I regained consciousness.

"Son," he told me, "you've got a compound fracture of the left leg, a bone cracked in your wrist, six ribs cracked or broken and a collarbone the same. And that's not even mentioning small things like cuts and contusions. So you're going to stay in the hangar for a while."

He stood looking at me as if I was some kind of a zoo specimen. "Gosh!" he said, "I wish you could tell me how it feels to fly—really fly." Then: "You're not to worry about a thing. Weinberger sent you a case of champagne and dictated a letter of thanks to you for saving his hundred thousand. But Charley Bronson has deposited a cool twenty thousand-dollar reward to your credit. And he's footing all the bills and his newspapers are still raving about you."

I thought it was all foolishness, this idea of not talking. But after one trial I was content to lie there quietly, looking up at the big floral airplane suspended above the foot of my bed, a card

hanging from its propeller: *To a real flyer, from the circus crowd.*

That gave me a nice, queer feeling. But nothing to equal the bouquet of sweet peas, fresh each day. There was no card. But the nurse told me who was bringing them. "She's as pretty as an angel," the nurse added. "I suppose you know what angels look like, Birdman? Now, don't talk!"

I rebelled finally, on the seventh day. "You send for Draim Stewart," I threatened, "or I'll start shouting."

The doctor grinned. I guess my time of silence was up anyway. He motioned to the nurse and almost immediately Draim and Barnard Stewart and Jones came in. And behind them, to my surprise, came the tall, gray-haired man—John Henderson.

"Look Bird," Jones said immediately, "I'm going to talk fast and get a couple of questions answered and then clear out. We got the whole bunch of 'em. You probably know who they were. Even got the fella back east who was getting rid of the money."

I started to speak, but he stopped me. "Hortman wasn't afraid of serial numbers because he'd worked out a photographic method of changing them. See? It's darned hard to counterfeit a bill, but it's different with the serial numbers. And hardly anybody pays any attention to them as long as they're not hot numbers."

"We sweated the whole thing out of Shorty Marks by cutting his dope rations," Jones continued. "Each time the ransom was collected Chilly Dean was stopped and searched on the highway. So were four or five hundred other cars. It was impossible for us to detour all the state highway traffic."

"And all they found in Dean's car were some motor parts, odds and ends of things that might be used around airplanes, and two tanks of compressed hydrogen. Full or empty: the boys didn't know, didn't give them a second thought."

"So all he had to do was hide his car



near the spot, inflate the sounding balloon, and stick a flare out to signal for delivery of the ransom. He held off doing that until it was time for Hortman to fly over. Then he tied the ransom money to the balloon and turned her loose.

"Hortman circled around at a high altitude above the fog, so his motor couldn't be heard or would be confused with that of the endurance plane. And Clyde Wenton, riding with Hortman, hooked it."

I nodded. I knew it had to be that way. "What happened when he hooked the balloon?" I asked. "It must have given him a jolt."

"The loop of rope he hooked was tied to the pin-panel. He hooked her—zowie, the whole top of the balloon ripped off. Any more questions?"

I shook my head.

"All right then. Where's your steel-handled knife Dean used in murdering Parker?"

I grinned. "Buried about a foot under the left front tire of my truck."

"And how'd you know it was Hortman? What made you change your mind all of a sudden about the endurance plane?"

"Hortman told me," I explained, to their astonishment. "He told me the night before, when Chilly Dean thought he had killed me. And he told me again, just as he was leaving, supposedly to search the endurance plane. He said, 'That does it.' I've heard him use the expression dozens of times. Guess I was too tired for it to register that night."

JONES motioned to the others. "Your witness," he said jauntily, "though I should bop him one while he's down, for scaring us all to death with that last bird stunt. By the way," he added, "your flying boots darned near ruined Hortman's face."

He left, giving me a friendly, mock salute at the door. I wished they would all leave. All but Draim. But apparently

they had rehearsed this whole thing, to make the most of their allotted time and save me as much as possible.

John Henderson stepped forward. "I'll do the talking," he said crisply. "You can just nod. The other day I handed you my card and you threw it into my face." He smiled. "If you had read it you would know that I'm from the United States War Department.

"Colonel Bronton has been raising Ned with us for the last year over your bird idea. I was sent out to look it over. I saw you actually make a landing with it. Trouble is, Spath, you've got to have something that any man of normal strength can use. D'you think that's possible?"

"Of course," I said. "It'll take a lot of experimenting, but—"

I saw Draim Stewart's face go white. Her eyes were pleading with me.

"But what?" Henderson snapped.

"But you'll have to get somebody else to do the experimenting. It's no kind of a job for a married man."

He smiled.

"Didn't know you were married. But that's all right. We'll take care of the experimenting. You hand your stuff over to us and take a civil service engineering job in the Department. You've already done the worst of it. And you needn't be so darned secretive about it. The U. S. is big enough so we don't have to hide that kind of thing away like dirty pack rats."

"Time to leave," the nurse called, from the doorway.

"I'm not going to leave right away," Draim said firmly.

"But he's already talked too much!"

Barnard steered John Henderson toward the door. "Run along," he commanded the nurse. "Those two have a lot to say, but they can say it without talking."

They didn't make sense, those words. But the nurse seemed to understand. I heard the door close very softly. Draim was smiling as she leaned over me.



For an instant I saw his face—  
and its crab-like brand

By JONATHAN STAGGE

## The Stars Spell Death

**T**HE night that Dr. Hugh Westlake is summoned to an accident he comes upon a wrecked car—with a dead man at the wheel. The doctor is amazed to discover that the corpse wears a suit of his clothes, carries letters addressed to Hugh Westlake. Then investigation of the mystery by Inspector Cobb reveals that the dead man was a wanted criminal: that Westlake was apparently called out in order that he could be abducted. The disfigured corpse would undoubtedly have been accepted as the doctor's, if the plot had succeeded.

A few days later Westlake (who is telling the story) receives an unexpected visitor at night. She is Sydney Train—engaged, she says, to Robin Barker. Robin is a cousin of Hugh Westlake's, whom the doctor has not seen in years; the young man's father was a celebrated chemist, and he left Westlake in charge of his estate until Robin should come

of age. In a few weeks now, Sydney Train says, Robin will be twenty-one.

**T**HEN the girl explains the fantastic reason for her visit. A fervent believer in astrology, she demands to see the horoscope of Robin Barker which is in Dr. Westlake's keeping. Therein, the doctor finds, it is prophesied that Robin will almost certainly be murdered within a month of his twenty-first birthday; that his nearest male relative—Hugh Westlake—will also die. To support this astrological hocus-pocus, Sydney Train tells Westlake that Robin Barker, a brilliant chemist himself, is continually in the company of certain mysterious foreigners. One of these men can be identified by a purple birthmark on his face; he has been overheard to remark that "Westlake may have to be eliminated."

The next day, the girl leaves as suddenly

This story began in the *Argosy* for October 23

as she has come, and the doctor discovers that she has stolen the horoscope. By now Hugh Westlake, impressed in spite of himself by these portents of disaster, has begun to worry about the safety of his twelve-year-old daughter, Dawn—and about his own. He is disturbed by the sudden appearance of strangers in quiet, rural Kenmore. The genial and yet somehow mysterious Dr. Heller, with his badly crippled son, has become a neighbor of Westlake's. For some inexplicable reason, a Mrs. Ralston, another newcomer, has warned Hugh Westlake against Dr. Heller. Finally there is a strange fisherman who stands watch continually on the Westlake home.

ON THE advice of Inspector Cobb, the doctor invites Robin Barker to spend his twenty-first birthday in Kenmore. Young Barker accepts, asking permission to bring his step-mother, Greta Barker. Soon they arrive—friendly, capable-seeming Robin Barker and Greta, a cool, beautiful woman. Then, while they are out walking with Dawn, Dr. Westlake receives a phone call from Sydney Train. She asks after Robin, begs the doctor to watch over him. But when Robin Barker returns, he exclaims in amazement that he has never heard of Sydney Train in his life. . . .

## CHAPTER XV

### SMALL STAR OF COMFORT

IT WAS an incredible moment. Robin was staring at Dawn and me as if we were mad. Even Greta's blue eyes had lost their amused tolerance and were framed by little lines of perplexity. My daughter, whose sentimental nature had been outraged by this denial of romance, completely omitted to close the broad "O" of her mouth.

I suppose I should have been prepared for that final evidence of Sydney Train's inaccuracy. Almost everything else she had told me seemed to have been proven false. It was logical that her claim of engagement to Robin should be just another of her devious ruses to win my confidence.

And yet I had associated Robin and everything that surrounded him so completely with Sydney Train. It seemed impossible that the entire story of my cousin, his danger and his difficulties should have

come from a girl he did not even know.

Something had to be done to break that constrained silence. I banished Dawn to the kitchen and suggested that the Barkers might like a cocktail before dinner. They both agreed hastily and I took them into the living-room and made them old-fashioned.

None of us spoke until we made a semi-circle around the fire, nursing our drinks. It was then that Robin, his eyes coming to mine with anxious curiosity, asked:

"What did your daughter mean just now about my being engaged to marry this Sydney Train? What the hell is it all about?"

"Yes, Hugh." Greta looked down the smooth line of her legs into the core of the fire. "It is rather intriguing. Aren't we going to be told?"

I had planned to make that first evening purely social. It seemed unfair to share my anxiety with them while they were so newly under my roof. But that telephone call and its aftermath had forced the issue out into the open.

Fingering my glass, I gave them an exact account of everything that had happened since my discovery of the corpse that was so nearly mine, through my experience with Sydney Train, down to my latest encounter, with the solitary fisherman.

I only omitted, on Cobb's advice, all reference to the horoscope.

Robin listened in aggressively uncommunicative silence. Greta, her legs curled beneath her now in her chair, watched me, her face, like a little girl's, mirroring with its expressions each change in the narrative.

FINALLY she said: "But Hugh, how unheard of! And you think all this has been happening because of us?"

Robin swallowed what was left of his old-fashioned and put the glass down on the floor. He shot a quick glance at his stepmother.

"It's an amazing story all right," he said. "How much of it is just coincidence

and how much isn't, I couldn't say. But"—his mouth went grim—"I think I know now who this Sydney Train is. Don't you, Greta?"

"You mean Annabel?" she queried.

"Sure. It's obvious." Robin shrugged. "Now I know what she said and how she acted, I would have known it was Annabel even if she hadn't told you she was my ex-boss' daughter. Everything she's done is exactly typical."

I remembered how Cobb had told me the day before that Mr. Scruggs, president of Scruggs and Dodge had a daughter Annabel. "Then this Sydney Train is Annabel Scruggs?"

Robin looked slightly surprised that I knew as much as I did. "Must be. She plays around with being an actress. I knew she'd changed her name because Scruggs doesn't look so hot in electric lights. But I never knew she called herself Sydney Train. She's a crazy sort of a girl, makes her own life into much more of a drama than anything you see behind footlights."

He paused. "Most of the facts she told you about me are true, but they have all the Annabel trimmings. I did meet her abroad; she—she did make out she was stuck on me for a while; she did persuade me to come back to America and wangled that job for me in her father's chemical company; and I have recently left the firm.

"But I was never engaged to her and all this talk about sinister foreign plotters, unknown menaces and conversations overheard by hotel detectives looks to me like something she picked up on tour with a third rate road company of Bulldog Drummond."

Robin told me then, quietly and soberly, his version of the story I had heard from Sydney Train. He had worked with Scruggs and Dodge for six months in their department for manufacturing aniline dyes which, as in the case of his celebrated father, was his particular specialty. He had enjoyed the work and, apparently, had managed to avoid any direct clash with the insistent Annabel.

There had been no trouble until the company, as part of the country's Be-Prepared-for-War program, had gone into armament production. Mr. Scruggs had wanted to switch Robin from aniline dyes to explosives. Robin, who shared his father's hatred of all things connected with destruction, had refused to be transferred. There was a quarrel with Mr. Scruggs and Robin quit.

MY COUSIN gave a short laugh. "All this business about Mr. Scruggs saying I'd end up with a knife in my back and forbidding Annabel to see me was just so much—Annabel. I did move to a hotel where Greta was stopping. I did tell Annabel quite emphatically that everything which hadn't ever been between us was over.

"But her line about foreign agents gang-ing up on me"—he threw out his hands—"I can see where she and her detective got that from. Father was even more famous abroad than he was at home, you know, and I've taken on a bit of reflected glory.

"While I was on the market, as it were, quite a few representatives from foreign firms did come to the hotel and try to persuade me to go back to Europe. But I wasn't interested. I've got my own line of research and I'm crazy to start up independently. That's all there is to that."

It all sounded so comfortingly reasonable.

But I had lived too long with my doubts and fears to be so speedily convinced that everything was normal except for the ravings of a neurotic girl.

I asked: "And what about those foreign representatives who came to see you? Did one of them have a purple birthmark on his left cheek?"

Robin grinned. "You're thinking about the man who's going to eliminate you? I wouldn't worry about him. All Annabel's stories have to have a villain."

"Then there wasn't even any man with a purple birthmark?"

"If there was I don't remember him."

"Nor do I," put in Greta. "I was there with Robin most of the time. And I'm terrified of birthmarks. I certainly would have remembered. I'm sure you haven't any reason to worry, Hugh. What Robin says is right."

"But I can't see it," I said stubbornly. "If all this is just a fairy tale, why on earth did the Train girl rush half across the continent in a car and scare the daylights out of me?"

"You don't know Annabel," said Robin grimly. "It's not that she's a phony. She believes every word of these dramas she builds up. She's nuts over astrology the way Dad was. There's a man called Maximus who reads the stars. He's her God."

He lit a cigarette, the assured smile still twisting his lips. "Probably her horoscope told her something awful was going to happen—and she just went right out and was darn well going to prove her horoscope was right."

He had scored a big point for commonsense there. I almost told them then of Sydney Train's sensational prophecy from his own horoscope. But Cobb had advised me against it and he had me well trained.

I TRIED to slip into their way of thinking. "Then you really believe I've been building up imaginary menaces? How about that car accident? It fitted perfectly into the pattern the Train girl had worked out."

"But it also fitted perfectly into the theory put forward by the police, didn't it?" asked Greta, serenely smoothing back her blond hair. "It could easily have been a criminal trying to hide from the police by taking your identity."

"I guess it could," I said dubiously. "And the rest? The curious neighbors?"

Greta smiled dazzlingly, leaned forward and patted my arm. "Aren't neighbors always curious? And, if that old Dr. Heller was one of your suspects, I really think you're rather hard on him. He looked to me as if he couldn't harm a fly."

As I refilled their glasses, there was a long, oddly dead period of silence. Every-

thing had been said and everything had been explained. The bubble had been burst. Now there seemed nothing left but the clean, hygienic smell of soap.

I should have been immensely relieved. But I wasn't. Perhaps I was clinging morbidly to a dream of danger for the self-importance it had given me.

Or maybe my sense of impending doom did not leave me because of the expression I had caught on Robin's face.

Now that he had finished speaking, now that he did not know I was looking at him, my young cousin had relaxed from his casual registration of commonsense. He looked pale and exhausted and terribly unsure of himself.

And, as I moved toward him with the glasses, his eyes flickered for one second to Greta's. I was sure I had not been intended to intercept that glance.

Robin's eyes had been questioning, uncertain and unmistakably—frightened.

I rather thought that Mrs. Barker was frightened too.

## CHAPTER XVI

### STRANGE PURPLE STAR

DAWN came in at that moment to announce dinner and dispelled the queer illusion of something vital and intangible hanging in the balance.

"I hope you'll like dinner," said my daughter to the room in general. "It's something special—a surprise."

Dawn's surprise turned out to be some uneventful but pleasant baked fish. While we ate it, a rather forced joviality dominated the dinner table. Robin was hearty; Greta gay and charming with Dawn who, despite her blanket suspicion of all attractive women in my life, had obviously fallen for her like a set of skittles. I myself was loquacious too and slightly light-headed, as if the vague menace of the past weeks had actually been puffed away.

I attributed some of my exhilaration to the presence of Greta Barker sitting across the table from me. The soft light from the silver candelabrum made her marvelous

blond hair shine with a brilliant luster, giving it what seemed like an independent life of its own. My wife's hair had been like that in the days when women had worn hair and brushed it themselves.

I was just wondering if Greta could possibly be over thirty and realizing, against all appearances, that she must be, when Dawn caught my eye, smirked knowingly and asked:

"Like the fish, Daddy?"

I said yes I liked the fish very much.

My daughter's smirk broadened into a grin. "And he said you said he couldn't catch any."

"Who couldn't catch what, brat?" I asked vaguely.

"Dan Leaf." Dawn paused to devour some green peas. "That's the surprise. He brought these fish over this afternoon. He caught them in Kenmore Creek just at the bend where he fishes."

I stared incredulously. Robin too was looking at my daughter, and I thought I detected once again a flicker of uneasiness creep into his eyes.

"These fish were caught here in the creek?" he asked. "They're — they're darned good. But I'd have said they were lake bass."

No one took the matter any further than that. But I went on thinking about it and, after dinner was over, while the others adjourned to the living-room, I slipped out into the kitchen.

Much to the ebony disapproval of Rebecca, I demanded to be shown the heads of Dawn's "surprise" fish. They were produced from a pot in which Rebecca had been keeping them, presumably for some primitive banquet of her own. I stared at them lying clammy and popeyed on the kitchen table.

I am something of a fisherman. At least I had been on enough fishing expeditions with that wily old angler, Inspector Cobb, to be able to recognize at least the more elementary breeds of fish.

One look at those heads was enough. Robin Barker had been right. The fish which the anomalous Dan Leaf claimed

to have caught in the Kenmore Creek were, in fact, lake bass.

And lake bass could no more have existed in that small, swiftly running stream than an alligator or a sperm whale.

I TRIED to cope with this latest and almost ludicrous development. The solitary angler might, of course, have been indulging in a mild practical joke. But, there again, he might easily have tried to palm bought fish off on me in an attempt to make his continuous presence at the creek's edge seem reasonable.

In any case I did not like it. I had been morbid enough to look at the paper that morning and had seen from the horoscope chart that we were only just out from under the sign of *Pisces*.

Fish, of any sort, were far too astrological to be welcome around my house.

I had returned to the hall on my way to the living-room and the others when a buzz at the front door deflected me. I found Inspector Cobb, fulfilling his promise, standing on the doorstep.

He couldn't have come at a more welcome moment. Without even letting him remove his hat and coat, I pulled him into the deserted dining-room and gave him a swift outline of everything new; of Sydney Train's call, Robin's story, even of the unaccountable fish.

He laughed at the fish.

Then his face went grave. "You think this Robin Barker may be holding something back from you?"

"It's not exactly that. I merely got the impression they're both more scared than they admit and that, maybe, they're sitting on the fence, wondering just how much they can trust me."

"In that case"—Cobb's shrewd eyes fixed my face—"I'd sit on the fence with them for a while." He smiled. "And don't forget it's all right for them to know I'm a policeman by profession, but tonight I'm just dropping in for a drink as one of your expectant fathers." The smile was a grin. "And I guess it won't be long now. The missus will be dating you up soon."



I took the inspector into the living-room then and introduced him to Robin and Greta Barker. For some reason I had expected the conjunction of Cobb and the Barkers to precipitate some major development. I was completely wrong.

The inspector was pleasant and cheerful and disarmingly harmless. He made a few cracks about his own imminent paternity, told a few homespun anecdotes and, at about ten o'clock, rose to say good-night.

The Barkers, who had been equally uncontroversial, expressed polite pleasure at having met him.

And that was that.

As I took the inspector to the front door, he said: "Seem like nice people. And she looks like a million dollars."

"I wouldn't get too fond of them," I said with a sort of jaundiced frivolity. "Before you see them again they'll probably both be murdered—with me thrown in as a bonus."

Cobb looked reproachful. "Don't tell me you're getting on edge," he said. "Seems like everything's quieted down rather well to me. By the way, I checked on the Hellers. He's listed in the Medical Directory all right—a Canadian just retired from practice. And I found a newspaper account of the boy, Brian's airplane accident."

"Thank God someone's who they pretended to be. How about the fisherman?"

Cobb laughed out loud. "Don't you worry about the fisherman." As he went out of the front door and stepped onto the drive, he added with a certain cryptic satisfaction, "I don't think you'll be seeing him around any more."

**W**HEN I returned to the living-room the Barkers were ready for bed after their long drive. In about quarter of an hour, they said goodnight and disappeared upstairs to their rooms.

I did not feel sleepy. After they had gone, I poured myself a highball and sat down in front of the dying fire.

The whisky sent a mild glow through my body and I began to feel extraordi-

narily elated, far more so in fact than I had in weeks. This day, to which I had looked forward with so much foreboding, had presented me with nothing but a raft of silver linings.

I had ordered a new car. My cousins had arrived and turned out to be thoroughly pleasant, normal people. Robin had been able to give me a perfectly sane account of all the Chicago incidents which, passed on to me through the theatrical medium of Sydney Train, had seemed so fraught with sinister significance.

As I leisurely finished my highball, it seemed to me that all my doubts and fears had been so many neurotic day-dreams. Of course there was no vast international intrigue weaving its devious web around Kenmore. Of course that strange accident on Mill Lane had been nothing more complicated than the lonely end of a small-time gangster who had tried to assume my identity; while the arch-villain, the man with the purple birthmark, had never existed at all except in the over-exotic imagination of Miss Sydney Train.

In fact, there was no villain to the piece unless it was the chameleon-like Annabel Scruggs herself who had managed to give me a couple of nervewracked weeks and who had dramatically stolen that dramatic, six-thrills-for-ten-cents horoscope.

I leaned back in my chair visualizing a serene, uneventful future stretching smugly before me. In a few days Robin's birthday would come; I would settle the estate; the Barkers would take their amicable departure; I would have the money to pay for the new car; and Dawn and I, driving around in our beautiful dove-gray sedan, would win the respect and awe of my practice.

All very pleasant.

The fire had almost gone out. A vague chill had descended on the room, a chill that I sensed rather than actively felt, for the warmth of the whisky kept me comfortably insulated.

I let my thoughts stray to Greta Barker. I thought of the burnished hair, the beautiful, mobile lips, the smooth, exquisite

curve of her throat. Yes, she was certainly an attractive woman. The most attractive . . .

The chill was more noticeable now. Gradually, in some curious, unphysical way, it seemed to be concentrated at the back of my neck.

And, as I suddenly stiffened in the chair, I had the vivid impression that something was happening to me that had happened before.

Vague panic stirring in me, I struggled to pin down that sensation of the eerie to something tangible. Then I remembered.

I *had* felt this way once before, that night in my dark office when I had been opening the safe and had felt so strongly the influence of invisible eyes staring at me from the shadows behind.

And now—

My fingers tightened on the cold glass of my highball. I was sure, with the blind unreason of instinct, that someone was there in the room behind me, someone who had no right to be there.

I spun round in my chair.

The room behind me was empty. But I was staring straight at the screenless, uncurtained window.

For an instant I did not believe what I saw. It couldn't—I refused to let it be true.

And yet there was no mistaking the reality of that thing outside of the window—in front of me. And its reality sent my rosy thoughts of security scattering like dead leaves before a tornado.

In those few biting clear moments, I could see the thing in the minutest detail; the white, masculine face distorted by pressure against the pane into a grotesque travesty of a mask; the dark hat tugged down concealing the eyes.

And the pale surface of the cheek which was half turned toward me—the cheek with the grayish skin and, scrawled across it, the long purple stain like the image of some weird, heraldic crab.

Outside that window, peering furtively in at me, was the face of a man with a purple birthmark.

## CHAPTER XVII

### IT IS THE CRAB STAR

FOR one second I sat in my chair, staring in a sort of frozen horror at that face pressed against the window. Every ounce of my attention was fixed on the strange, crablike naevus which splayed across the cheek.

And stupidly, almost hysterically, I thought: *Cancer*, the Crab—the seventh sign of the zodiac.

The horoscope again. . .

Then, with the indistinctness of a nightmare, the face blurred, faded and disappeared into the thick blackness of the garden beyond.

It had been there; it had gone almost as soon as I had taken in its unmistakable reality.

And yet the memory of it lingered, lingered in the prickly crawling of the hair at the back of my neck and in the jerky irregularity of my breathing.

Just a few seconds before I had convinced myself that everything was all right, that the mysterious man with the purple birthmark and all he stood for had been nothing but a figment of Sydney Train's existence.

He hadn't existed!

And now, at this most crushingly ironic of moments, I had seen him with my own eyes.

My first instinct, after the initial second of shock, was to dash out into the dark garden in haphazard pursuit. It was an impulse that I was wise enough to control. The night was moonless; I had no gun, no flashlight handy; nor had I any desire to expose myself unarmed to a man who had already expressed his willingness to eliminate me.

It would have been senseless folly to give chase.

With a return to commonsense I immediately thought of Robin. Whatever it was that the man with the purple birthmark had been planning to do around my house, it had, almost certainly, some connection with my cousin's arrival. I should

go upstairs right away and make sure that Robin was all right.

The door to my cousin's room was not locked. I pushed it open onto darkness. My fingers shaking, I fumbled for the light switch and snapped it down.

It was with immense relief that I saw Robin was there—and safe.

My cousin lay asleep in the bed, one strong, pajama-covered arm sprawled over the pillow, half hiding his face.

I crossed to the bed, gripped his broad, athletic shoulders and shook. He stirred sleepily, opened his eyes, stared with blank absence of recognition and then was suddenly very much awake.

**H**E PUSHED himself up against the pillows. "What the hell's happened, Hugh? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I have," I said breathlessly.

I told him what had just taken place downstairs.

"I thought you should know right away," I said.

Robin Barker was staring at me, his lips half parted in astonishment. But I could tell that he paid me the compliment of believing me.

"And I spent the evening trying to convince you everything was jake and there wasn't a guy with a birthmark," he said at length. "It's—it's pretty incredible, isn't it?"

I agreed.

He scratched his jaw reflectively. "Matter of fact when you told me all the things that had been going on around here lately, I wasn't as optimistic as I made out. I don't think Greta was, either. It was just that it all sounded so—so phony."

"But you're beginning to believe it now? You think Sydney Train talked more sense than you gave her credit for?"

"Looks as if maybe she did."

"Listen, Robin, are you sure none of the men who approached you from those foreign firms had a birthmark on his cheek?"

"I don't remember any. Perhaps I didn't notice. But I don't remember." Robin's

young face was very solemn. "But what the hell do you suppose he wanted anyway, creeping around the house, peering in windows?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"You think all this business is linked up somehow with my twenty-first birthday, don't you?" His blue eyes searched my face as if he felt he could learn more from my expression than my words. "If that's so, if all this talk about foreign powers and what not is true, it can't be me they want; it must be something about father. Couldn't he have left something with you, some chemical notes or some sort of document they might be after?"

"There aren't any papers here with me, nothing but the will and"—I was watching him as intently as he was watching me—"and a horoscope."

"Whose horoscope?"

"Yours."

He snorted. "You mean that crazy chart Dad had Maxinus draw up when I was born and then wouldn't ever let me see. Well, no one's going to creep around houses to try and get any horoscope."

I didn't contradict him.

There was a flat, awkward pause.

At length, pulling myself together, I said: "In any case, this has gotten beyond the sitting down and waiting stage. I'm going to call the police."

"The police?" Robin echoed. "You won't get anywhere calling the police, will you? If you just report a face at the window in the abstract they'll think you're tight or having hallucinations." He paused. "Wait a minute, aren't there garden beds all around outside the living-room windows?"

I said yes.

"Then he probably left footprints." My cousin got out of bed, pushed his feet into bedroom slippers and threw a bathrobe over his shoulders. "Come on. At least, if we find tracks, we'll have some sort of evidence to make the police take us seriously."

That made sense, of course.

Robin looked impatient to be going as

if he needed something definite to do to keep his thoughts from sliding down unpleasant channels. I led the way down-stairs.

**M**Y ONLY flashlight was in the garage. The night was dark and moonless as we hurried around the house and it took quite a while for me to fumble with the rusty lock on the garage door. But at length I opened it and found the flashlight.

Close together behind its spreading beam Robin and I moved over the lawn toward the window at whose sill I had seen the macabre intruder crouching. A broad garden bed stretched rich soil between us and the window.

I flashed the torch downward, hoping rather futilely that we would find nothing.

It was almost better to believe myself the victim of alcoholic delusions than to have definite proof that the man with the birthmark did actually exist and had, so short a time before, been separated from me by the mere thinness of a glass pane.

"Look. Someone's been here all right."

It was Robin who spoke first. And as I bent forward too, I saw the blurred, indistinct impressions of feet leading from the edge of the lawn right up to the window. Beneath the window itself, all the soil was pressed flat. A second, equally vague trail showed where the man had retreated.

My cousin grunted. "No one's going to be able to identify them," he said. "Too messed up. But at least we've got something definite." He stared belligerently into the darkness around us as if, at the drop of a hat, he would be ready to lunge into the bushes and start a free-for-all with anyone.

Then, with a slight shrug, he said: "Well, I guess, since we're supposed to be the things these guys want to capture, there's no point in handing ourselves to them on a silver platter. Come back inside and call your policeman while I make sure the place is properly locked and bolted."

We went into the house together.

While Robin clattered through the house locking windows and bolting doors, I called Cobb. In the sober light of reason there seemed very little I could tell him and very little he could do for me. But I felt it had to be done.

The inspector's sleepiness changed instantly to grave attention as I told him what had happened.

**T**HE man with the birthmark, eh?" he said sharply. "You're sure you weren't just imagining things? You both saw those footprints?"

"Of course."

He didn't speak for a moment. Then he said: "So things are working out the way we planned, aren't they?"

"Too damn well for my liking," I said. "It may be great fun for you to concentrate vast international menaces around my rural residence; but it's not so hot being inside the residence and waiting. What do you think he was after anyway?"

"The horoscope. Or your cousin. Or you. Or all three," said Cobb comfortingly. "But at least he let you see him, Westlake. He's made a false move. And that's something."

"But not enough for me. What are you going to do? Aren't you going to comb the neighborhood for him? He must be around somewhere, and God knows he's easy enough to spot."

"Sure. I'll have all districts notified first thing in the morning. But there are such things as automobiles, you know. He's probably a hundred miles away by now."

He added: "But there's one thing I can do right away. I'll send up a man to keep guard at the house and—"

"No, thank you," I cut in. "I'm not that much of a sissy yet. Robin and I, as adult males, are presumably capable of taking care of ourselves."

"Okay," Cobb's tone was dry. "If that's the way you feel, good luck to you." The amusement left his voice and he sounded more solemn than I had ever before heard him.

"But listen, Westlake. Watch your step,

don't try anything smart and report to me the instant you see that man with the birthmark or anyone around the house again. I'll have a cordon of police up there so quickly it won't be funny. I've had your corpse on my hands once already; I'm not going to let you be murdered again."

He rang off.

I found Robin trying to latch the kitchen window. He glanced over his shoulder and said: "What did the police have to offer?"

"Not much. Cobb just said to watch our steps and take care of ourselves."

"Hardly need a policeman to tell us that," Robin struggled irascibly with the window lock. "This is the worst fortified house I ever saw. A baby could break into it."

"I hope," I said feelingly, "that if a baby breaks in, it won't have a purple birthmark."

We went upstairs together. Robin paused on the landing, his face very grim.

"I'm sorry about this, Hugh. I seem to be causing you a hell of a lot of fuss and bother."

"That's all right," I said with a grin. "I'm getting used to it."

He hesitated, then, laying his hand on my sleeve, he said: "Please don't tell Greta what's happened tonight. I think she has more than an idea that everything's pretty precarious. But I don't want her worried more than I can help—not yet."

I went to bed with that ominous "yet" still echoing in my ears.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MINIONS OF THE GOLD STAR

THE day before Robin's twenty-first birthday dawned fine. I opened my eyes onto warm sunshine. But, after last night's experience, my thoughts were not sunny. In twenty-four hours the estate would be settled. Before that time the crisis of this incredible thing, whatever it was, would almost certainly up and hit us.

This, I felt, would be the crucial day.

As I went downstairs to breakfast my mind was uneasily full of speculations about the man with the purple birthmark.

But the first thing that happened seemed to be on our side. Just as Robin and Greta and I were sitting down to breakfast, Dawn appeared with the news that the solitary fisherman was not at his post.

"I went to thank him for the fish," said my daughter rather petulantly. "And yesterday he said he'd be here this morning for certain. I hope he hasn't caught a cold."

I thought of Cobb's cryptic smile the night before when he had said there would be no more trouble from Dan Leaf. Had he, somehow, managed to cope with this minor mystery?

In any case, it was a relief to feel that there was at least one less pair of curious eyes watching us.

After breakfast Robin and I went for a stroll in the garden with Hamish plodding after us. By tacit consent we neither of us made any reference to the incident of the night before nor to what it implied.

But, only too obviously, it was uppermost in both our minds. And it seemed to throw up a barrier of constraint between us.

To me there was something unnerving about the very blandness of the morning. Kenmore Valley seemed like one of those exquisitely calm landscapes one sees in nightmares which are made terrifying by one's own obscure knowledge that soon something ghastly is going to take place in them.

It would all have been so much easier to take if I had had the slightest conception of what form the next development would assume or from what direction it would come.

Robin and I were standing by the bank of the creek, looking along it toward the place where Dan Leaf had fished, when infuriated barking from Hamish heralded the arrival of Brian Heller's Doberman pinschers.

The two large dogs had never before

deigned to pay us a visit. But that morning they came bounding exuberantly over the lawn and the flower bed and, in spite of Hamish's querulous protests, gamboled and pranced around us.

Robin played with them idly, throwing sticks for them. After a few minutes, he managed to inspire in them an almost morbid passion. Both of them jumped up at him, scrabbled, barked and tried to lick his face.

Soon they became rather too overwhelming and I tried to make them realize the moment had arrived for them to go home. But they did not take the hint. When I walked in the direction of Cedar Hollow and called them, they just looked sheepish and squatted at Robin's feet.

Finally we both had to walk them home up the creek.

**W**E FOUND Dr. Heller pottering in the garden. He looked as pink and pleasant as ever. Although he had met Robin the day before, I introduced my cousin again and the three of us chatted amiably.

Just as we were taking our leave, the French windows of the library opened and the uniformed nurse came out wheeling Brian on the stretcher.

Dr. Heller's benign face clouded over. "Brian is still asleep, Dr. Westlake," he said to me. "Last night we gave him a fairly heavy hypnotic as Dr. Smith prescribed. At least he is getting some rest at last, poor boy. I only hope it will prove beneficial."

The nurse wheeled Brian past us and carefully arranged the stretcher so that the boy's face was in the shade and his body in the sun. I crossed to his side. He looked smaller, somehow pathetically helpless, wedged in that heavy, cumbersome cast. As I stood there, he stirred uneasily in his sleep, his eyelids flickering, and gave a stifled groan.

"How's he seem, nurse?" I asked.

The nurse smiled. "He's been sleeping nicely, Doctor, but he's a little restless now. I think he has bad dreams."

I could sympathize with him.

Robin and I had quite a time with the Doberman pinschers again as we left. Dr. Heller had finally to shut them up in the house to keep them from pursuing us.

It was a Saturday and I did not go into Grovestown to the hospital that morning. Dawn and Greta, inseparable buddies by this time, had decided on a shopping expedition. Instinct warned me against letting anyone leave the house that day; but it seemed a little too fantastic to keep a woman and a small girl from driving twenty odd miles into a policed and civilized metropolis.

After they had gone and while I was coping with my office patients, Robin went up to his room to work on some aspect of his research.

The last of my patients departed around noon, and I strolled out again into the garden. I was considering having the rhododendrons in the front pruned back when I heard footsteps on the drive. I stepped out of my involuntary concealment behind the bushes and ran straight into a man and a woman.

The woman was the girl with the chestnut hair who had accosted me in the road two days before. She wore the same green jacket and plaid skirt and the same heavy brogues. The man with her was rather plump and pale with prematurely thinning hair. I noticed a faint dusting of rice powder on his cheeks and jawl as if he had not given himself time to shave before paying me this visit.

**T**HEY both looked nonplussed at my sudden appearance. But the girl forced her determined red mouth into a social smile.

"Good morning," she said.

"Good morning, Mrs. Ralston," I said.

She seemed startled at my knowing her name. But she indicated the man with her and said: "My husband. Charlie, this is Dr. Westlake."

Charlie smirked awkwardly, started holding out his hand and then abandoned the whole idea.



There was a pause.

Mrs. Ralston said, "We thought we'd drop in to see you since we were passing." Then, as if feeling she had to elaborate on the theme, she added: "We're just down here for a short time. We've rented the Talbot house. My husband"—she paused, looking directly at me—"my husband works for the chemical firm, Scruggs and Dodge in Chicago."

I tried not to show how much Scruggs and Dodge meant to me. I said, "He does?"

"Yes," volunteered Mr. Ralston and then looked awkward again.

Mrs. Ralston, who seemed to be the moving spirit of the family, continued: "We've—we've been told you have a cousin staying with you, Dr. Westlake. Robin Barker."

"I have," I said, not making it any easier for her.

"We know him," said Mrs. Ralston rather lamely. "And we thought it would be nice to see him again. He used to work for the same firm as my husband, you know."

"Yes," I said. "You would like to see him now?"

Mrs. Ralston looked at Mr. Ralston. She said brightly, "Yes, it would be—I mean we'd be delighted."

Distinctly on my guard I took them to the house and dumped them in the living-room. I went up to Robin's room where he was sitting scribbling intently in a notebook. I saw diagrams and complicated looking formulae.

"There are some people downstairs who want to see you," I said.

I told him what the Ralstons had said and what I had already learned about them from Cobb.

"They make out they're from Scruggs and Dodge," I said. "Do you suppose they're phony?"

Robin's young face had gone very grim. "No, they're genuine all right. He's one of the head chemists there. Worked under father abroad for a while and then I worked with him in Chicago."

"But what the hell are they doing vacationing in Kenmore?"

He shrugged. "Haven't any idea."

I said, "Well, you better come downstairs and find out."

Robin shut his notebook emphatically and said: "No."

Surprised I asked, "Why not? If they're on the level and—"

"In the first place," explained my cousin stubbornly, "I never liked Ralston anyway. In the second, I'm completely through with Scruggs and Dodge. And the sooner they all of them realize it, the better. Tell them I'm out." He laughed unamusedly. "Tell them I've been murdered by foreign spies; tell them anything you like."

I didn't argue with him because I was beginning to realize that Robin Barker was the type of young man who made up his own mind.

Feeling myself in a predicament out of which only Emily Post could wriggle gracefully, I went downstairs to the Ralstons.

THEY were both of them sitting on the extreme edges of their chairs. They looked at me hopefully.

I said, "I'm sorry. I can't find Robin. He—he must have slipped out for a walk."

It didn't sound convincing. And the Ralstons were not convinced.

Mrs. Ralston blurted, "That's not true, is it? He is here and he doesn't want to see us."

"I—" I began.

"It's all right. We expected it." Mrs. Ralston tossed her chestnut hair. "He's guessed why we're here. I told Charlie he would be difficult."

Charlie shifted in his chair and said: "My dear, really, you—"

"Oh, it's best to be frank with Dr. Westlake." Mrs. Ralston registered frankness. "Please let me explain everything to you. We're not exactly here on a vacation. That is, the firm sent us. You know your cousin left the company because he had a quarrel with Mr. Scruggs. Well, Mr.

Scruggs is a rather quick-tempered person and, of course, he's first and foremost a business man. He didn't really appreciate what a chemical genius Barker is."

"Really?" I queried politely.

"Yes. He thinks rather that people in the firm can all of them be regimented, told to do this and that for the greatest possible efficiency, you know. Robin didn't fit into that pattern. But my husband realizes what an enormous asset he was to the firm. He's made Mr. Scruggs see that Scruggs and Dodge really need him. And—and we got permission from Mr. Scruggs to come down here and see whether we couldn't persuade him to return to the company."

I stared at her and she stared back, defying me to see through the unflinching honesty of her eyes.

I said without conviction: "This is very flattering for Robin. In these days with work so scarce, large companies don't often go to such trouble to persuade a very young man back into the fold."

"Precious few research chemists of his caliber to be had," put in Charlie unexpectedly. "Precious few. Worth any amount of money to the firm. I told Scruggs so. Willing to wager my reputation that boy will produce a million-dollar product within the next few years."

"And you're positive enough to come all the way to Kenmore and rent an expensive house without asking the price just on the off chance that you'd be able to talk him around?" I added bluntly. "Mr. Ralston, let me be frank too. Is it really Robin's ability you people want? Isn't it something else, something you think he owns or knows about that the company's crazy to get hold of?"

THAT question, pieced together as it was from various theories with no evidence to back them, had a remarkable effect upon the Ralstons. A slow flush diffused Charlie's rice-powdered cheeks. His wife, much less easily fazed, merely tightened the already forbidding line of her young red mouth.

"I don't know what you're talking about. It's just that both Mr. Scruggs and Mr. Dodge are very eager to have Robin Barker back with the company." She paused, twisting with savage abstraction the finger of one of her gloves. "Well, I'm afraid we've been taking up your time. I'm very sorry."

She rose. Charlie, like a plump shadow, rose too. I conducted them to the front door and down the drive.

As we reached the gate, Mrs. Ralston stopped abruptly and held out her hand. Once again her eyes, which asked so much more than they told, fixed on my face.

"You wondered why I'd been waiting outside your house for you the other day, didn't you?" she asked. "It was just that I wanted very much to meet you. I did use that incident of the man with the dog as a chance to introduce myself. But—but later I felt too shy to tell you who I was."

Mrs. Ralston could not possibly have looked less shy as she added: "Please, Dr. Westlake, do try to use your influence with your cousin. This is terribly important to Charlie in his job. You see, he was the one that convinced Mr. Scruggs how much the company needed Robin Barker. It would be such a great feather in his cap if he could bring him back."

She paused, adding firmly: "Please tell your cousin Mr. Scruggs is more than willing to come to any compromise about salary. You can tell him too"—she drew herself up as if she were about to deliver her most telling thrust—"you can tell him that Mr. Scruggs has given us permission to say that he is prepared to waive all objections to your cousin's marriage with Annabel."

"I'm sure he'll be glad to hear that," I said, thinking that probably they had chosen the worst possible bait. The ramifications of Sydney Train's confused, one-sided romance with Robin had become far too baffling for me to keep up with.

The Ralstons were both looking at me expectantly. When I said nothing more, Mrs. Ralston took my arm impulsively and said:

"Please, Dr. Westlake, try and get him to come round to our house. We'll be there any time of night or day if he calls up first. And it's not only for Charlie, you know. It's for your cousin too. In the long run, if he comes back to the firm, there'll—there'll be far less danger for him."

With this unconventional remark the unconventional Ralstons took their leave.

## CHAPTER XIX

### STAR IN THE AFTERNOON

AT LUNCH Robin seemed withdrawn in himself and reluctant to talk. He made no reference to the Ralstons' visit and I followed his lead. What light badinage there was began and ended with Dawn and Greta, who had returned from their secret shopping expedition in Grovetown and seemed thoroughly entrenched in each other's affection.

In fact, Dawn felt so strongly that later in the the afternoon she drew me out into the hall and announced in a pontifical whisper:

"Mrs. Barker is the nicest person I ever met."

"Is she, brat?" I asked, privately delighted for, in a qualified way, I was beginning to feel much the same way myself.

"Yes," said my daughter deliriously. "She bought me an ice-cream cone, a jig-saw puzzle and three popsicles."

A rhapsodical description of each individual popsicle was cut short when my daughter saw through the window a boy on a bicycle coming up the drive.

"A telegram!" she whooped and disappeared through the front door.

In a few seconds she was back, flushed and important, holding out to me a yellow envelope.

I took it, opened it and read:

AM ARRIVING THIS EVENING MUST BE THERE  
FOR ROBINS BIRTHDAY TOMORROW STOP  
CANNOT EXAGGERATE NEED FOR CAUTION  
PARTICULARLY TODAY STOP AM BRINGING  
WHAT YOU ASKED FOR

SYDNEY TRAIN

My first reaction was to marvel at the

Train girl's ability to cover territory. Chicago . . . Kenmore . . . Cleveland . . . Kenmore . . . She certainly got around.

My second reaction, tinged by uneasiness at her warning, was surprised excitement at her implied promise of returning the horoscope. Of course, if there were some clue concealed in it, she might easily have deciphered it by now and obtained whatever it was she and all the rest of them were after. In this crazy snark hunt, which seemed to be patronized by so many rival factions, Sydney Train might well reach the destination first.

But at any rate I would have the actual papers of the horoscope in my possession by tomorrow. I would, unless something unforeseen turned up to balk me, be able to fill to the full my role of executor and, by handing over the horoscope to Robin, make myself eligible for my two-thousand-dollar legacy.

DAWN, whom I had forgotten, was still there at my side, peering inquisitively over my elbow.

"It's from Sydney Train," she exclaimed excitedly. "Is she coming the way she promised?"

I looked up vaguely. "Yes, brat, she's coming. She'll be here tonight."

Dawn looked pleased and then doubtful. "I like Sydney Train, but she's a little hard to understand, isn't she? She arrives out of the blue and disappears in the middle of the night. She says she's going to marry Robin and Robin says he doesn't even know her." She added thoughtfully, "Yes, she is a rather unusual lady."

"Are you telling me?" I echoed.

But my daughter had lost all interest in Sydney Train or my opinion of her. Once again she was at the window, staring down the drive with an expression of rapt ecstasy.

"Oh, Daddy!" she sighed. "Look—did you ever see anything more beautiful in your life?"

I went to her side. Swinging majestically up the drive, its streamlined body flashing

in the fading sunlight, was a brand new dove-gray sedan.

With some embarrassment, I realized what had happened. Tomorrow was Sunday and my surprise present for Dawn which had been ordered for Robin's birthday was being delivered a day early.

While my daughter watched its progress toward us entranced, I had to choose between having my surprise spoiled or resorting to some ruse.

I chose the ruse. With a casual shrug, I said: "It is a nice car, isn't it? Belongs to one of my Ploversville patients. You run away and do your jig-saw puzzle; I'll have to fix this man up."

My daughter's face fell. I could tell that a hope, maintained for one wildly optimistic moment, had been crushed. With a rather wistful sniff she withdrew to pursue some indeterminate occupation of her own.

The new car drew up at the door; the salesman stepped out. To his startled discomfort, I dragged him into my office, talking to him with doctorial solemnity about a sore throat he did not have.

Safe in the office, I explained my peculiar behavior, and, when the coast seemed clear, sneaked the man out again, had him drive the new car into the garage and gave him the key to the old black sedan which he was to take away for its turn-in value. I backed Robin's car out onto the drive and safely locked the dove-gray sedan away from Dawn's prying eyes.

It was with some satisfaction that I saw the salesman rattle off down the drive in the battle-scarred old sedan. Ever since the night when I had stumbled upon the false corpse of myself and my automobile on Mill Lane, I had developed an antipathy to that ancient black car.

Perhaps a new and more peaceful régime would be inaugurated with the dove-gray sedan.

NOT wishing to cope with any leading questions my daughter might subject me to if I returned to the house, I strolled down to the vegetable patch to

inspect the early planting of peas. They seemed to be doing nicely. But they hardly suited my mood. Leaving the vegetable patch, I strolled back along the creek to the rather gimcrack summerhouse I had enthusiastically built several years before.

An early jasmine vine trailed thin branches across the window overlooking the creek. Surprisingly it was in bloom and its faint perfume, coupled with the sunlight and the sparkle of the creek water, brought with it a certain romantic tranquility.

I did not hear Greta Barker's approach until she was there in the summer house with me. She dropped onto the rather too rustic window seat I had constructed and gazed through the window, appreciating the spectacle of the spring evening with a sort of voluptuous laziness.

"It's lovely here, Hugh," she said slowly. "Almost it makes me want to run away for ever from the messy life of cities. I rather hate cities. So many people so close together, they warp your sense of proportion, make you do things which, here where you're on the outside looking in, seemed fantastic and—almost wicked."

She spoke as if my presence there with her in the summer house was no barrier against the spoken flow of her thoughts.

"If I hadn't married Matthew Barker I'd probably never have had to know American cities. Perhaps I should not have married him; perhaps I should have stayed at home."

She smiled at me with an intimacy which was as easy as it was fleeting. "But I was so young and he seemed so wise and exciting, too, because everyone treated him with such tremendous respect."

I was flattered that she felt me enough of a friend to talk to me this way. I was interested, too. I had known so little of the strange May-December romance of old Professor Barker.

"You met him in Austria, didn't you?" I said.

"Yes. I am Austrian. At least, my mother was English. It was she who taught me to speak her language. But always I have thought of myself as Austrian." Her

mouth moved in a little rueful grimace. "Now there is no more Austria. And there must be thousands like me. People with no country and yet with a deep yearning for one. Either we have to live with the past that is dead or—we have to make new loyalties."

SHE half-turned to face me on that narrow rustic seat. "You are so fortunate. You belong to a young people which can still keep its place in the world without subterfuge and deceit. And you live out here in the country. Life must be very peaceful for you, isn't it?"

"Not so peaceful at the moment," I said drily. "But on the whole I guess it's pretty—dependable."

A little sigh slipped through her half-parted lips. "A house in the country, a daughter to watch grow up, a garden— isn't that what we all want really? I know it is what I want." Her eyes, which had held a kind of tender sadness, suddenly crinkled at the corners. "My dear, that sounds like a bid for a proposal."

"I wish it did," I said, half joining in her mood, half meaning it seriously.

She shook her head slightly and put out a hand to touch the jasmine. "Oh, no, you wouldn't want me for a wife. I'm far too involved and introverted and all the other unpleasant adjectives. But it's amusing to regret. One can get so delightfully mournful."

A gesture broke her mood as if it had been a fragile crystal ball, and she started to talk with humorous affection about Dawn.

Greta Barker was one of the few women I had met who have the same elusive charm in broad sunlight as they did by candlelight. Beneath the cloth of gold hair, her face with its cool, sea-blue eyes and serene mouth never settled into one expression. It was as if she had the faculty of observing and appreciating every tiny change of scene or mood around her and made no effort to keep her face from mirroring the trend of her thoughts.

There was never anyone whose eyes con-

cealed less; and yet she was a constant mystery because one felt that her thoughts had an individual quirk beyond the normal powers of interpretation.

As if suddenly tired of the topic of Dawn, Greta Barker let it drift away and said: "So tomorrow, Hugh, you settle Robin's estate. I do hope everything will be all right."

That was the first reference she had made to the fact that things might be far from right. I wondered if Robin had told her about the man with the birthmark whom I had seen peering through the window the night before. I rather thought not.

"You know, Hugh," she said, "the money that will come to him tomorrow is going to make a great deal of difference. He's terribly keen to start on his own independent research. Of course, this won't be enough to provide him with a really good laboratory. But it makes a beginning possible."

THE mercurial blue of her eyes registered a brief tenderness. "He's a rather wonderful boy. Until recently when I went to be with him in Chicago, I'd hardly known him at all. You'd never think to look at him that there was all that great talent cooped up inside."

"He's Matthew Barker's son," I said.

"Yes. And in so many ways." Greta's lips half parted in a slight, reflective smile. "Hugh, there's something I want to ask you. Among the papers Matthew left in your keeping, is there a horoscope made out for Robin by Maxinus?"

The abruptness of that question brought part surprise, part suspicion. "There—there is," I said.

"And you've read it?"

"I have."

Greta said: "One night, over a year after our marriage, Matthew read me that horoscope. He believed, you know. He believed in the stars. Robin's horoscope was one of the greatest tragedies in his life. You see"—she turned to face me and one of her beautiful hands moved to my sleeve—"he did believe what it said. He did

think Robin was doomed to—to come to a violent end.”

Rather awkwardly I asked, “And you believe it too?”

“Of course not, my dear. I’m far too mundane a person to be frightened by the twelve signs of the zodiac. To me it’s all just a pitiful and a rather cruel comedy.” She was not smiling. “But there are millions of Matthew Barkers; millions of Annabels too. If any of them were told that his horoscope prophesied his murder, his whole life might be crippled. That’s why I take that horoscope seriously.”

The oblique sun slanted through the open window of the summerhouse. It seemed trapped and somehow made substantial in the gold thread of Greta’s hair. I was very conscious of the reality of her fingers on my arm.

“That’s why I’m going to ask you to do something for me, Hugh. I said Robin was his father’s son in many ways. I am afraid, deeply afraid, although he would never admit it himself, that there’s something in him that’s inherited Matthew’s superstitious belief in the unknown.

“I’ve seen it several times. It’s stupid, but, for example, he won’t ever walk under ladders and—Hugh, I’m sure it will worry him terribly if ever he sees that horoscope.”

Her hand was still on my arm. “Don’t give it to him tomorrow. Destroy it. Or if you don’t like to do that, give it to me. I’ll take care of it. If ever he should need it, I’ll see that he gets it.”

There was an urgency in her voice that I had never heard there before. And, in spite of myself, I was carried away into her mood.

I had been suspicious of her, as I would have been of anyone who broached the subject of Robin’s fateful horoscope. And yet what she said made perfect sense. That yellowing, parchment-like document was unwholesome; it might so easily make Robin’s life miserable to read what it held in store for him. Wouldn’t it be safer for all of us if the wretched thing were destroyed?

“Give it to me now, Hugh.” Greta was saying. “We can tear it up together.”

I stared rather dazedly. I blurted, “But I can’t give it to you. I don’t have it. It was stolen weeks ago. Sydney Train took it.”

“She took it!”

“Yes. But she’s coming here tonight. Perhaps—”

I broke off as very suddenly my daughter stepped into the summer house.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE STARS DON’T LIE

**D**AWN, her mouth open in astonishment, stared at me as if I’d been a Gray Monk or a Hooded Horror.

“Why, Daddy, how on earth did you get back?”

“Get back from where, brat?”

Dawn glanced from me to Greta in what seemed like speechless confusion.

“But that telephone call,” she stammered. “I answered it first on the upstairs connection. The woman said . . .”

“What woman?”

“I don’t know. She just said she was one of your patients and you’d asked her to call for you. It was Robin she really asked for. I just answered it; then I got Robin.”

I felt one of those sudden, motiveless twinges of alarm. “What are you talking about? What did this woman say?”

“I don’t know. At least I didn’t till Robin told me later. He talked to her. And he told me. The woman said your car had broken down and you were stranded at her house. She told Robin you wanted him to go right away and pick you up.”

“But I—I wasn’t out at all!”

“You weren’t? I thought I saw the old black sedan going off down the drive. I—” Dawn broke off, staring wide-eyed. “What was it all about? Why did that woman pretend you were there when you weren’t?”

I looked at Greta. Her face had gone very pale and she was sitting stiff and straight on the seat like a statue of herself carved out of ivory.



My voice, behind the careful veneer of casualness, sounded harsh and strange. "When did this call come through?"

Perhaps Dawn failed to notice the harshness in my voice; perhaps it wasn't there at all, except in my imagination. Her answer was entirely casual.

"Oh, about a half an hour ago. I didn't know you were here. I did some of my puzzle then I thought I'd come out in the garden and look for Greta."

"You don't know who this woman was or where her house is?"

I'm afraid I snapped it at her. Whatever poise I'd had was slipping.

"N-no. Robin just said she'd called and he better go right away and pick you up."

"And he went?"

"Oh, yes. He went straight away. I saw him off, driving his coupe down the drive."

**M**Y DAUGHTER'S ingenuous gaze moved once again from me to Greta. There was a sudden, troubled anxiety in her eyes and I could tell that, with a child's uncanny intuition, she had picked up some of the invisible currents of apprehension that charged the atmosphere of that little summerhouse.

"Why, Daddy, what's the matter? Why—why are you frightened? Is something going to happen to Robin?"

I couldn't bring myself to look at Greta. Feverishly I felt in my pocket for the key to the garage. I said: "Of course nothing's happened, brat. It's just someone pulling a belated April Fool's Day gag. Listen"—I thrust the key into her hand—"run off and open the garage. Maybe you'll find something there you'll like."

My daughter's face relaxed in a dazzling smile. "Oh, Daddy, it's not—"

"Hurry. Go off and find out for yourself."

In a flash Dawn had rushed out of the summerhouse.

For a long moment after we were alone, neither Greta nor I spoke. She had risen. We stood there, gazing at each other.

I was thinking: A few weeks ago an unknown woman had telephoned to me and I had dashed out into the night to an accident which had been far more dangerous to me than I could ever have dreamed. By luck alone I had come back from that expedition unharmed.

A woman's call!

Now an unknown woman had telephoned Robin. She had told him a story that was obviously, terrifyingly untrue. But he had accepted it just as I earlier had accepted that other story.

Robin had dashed off in his car—to what destiny?

I said wildly, "He's crazy to have gone." For a moment I tried to convince myself that this was so; that Robin should have looked here for me, checked on the call—done *something*.

"He's crazy," I repeated foolishly.

"How crazy, Hugh?" Greta's face still had the stark lack of expression of a statue. "It was such a plausible story. How was he to know you had not gone out? Your car's old; it's broken down before. It—"

Thoughts were swirling in my mind. I heard, as if on some faint, supernatural victrola of memory, the sharp, urgent voice of Sydney Train saying: *There's danger for Robin, terrible danger. It's here in the stars. The stars say that before his twenty-first birthday . . .*

"But it's not true," I exclaimed. "It's—it's a trap."

"Of course it's a trap." Greta Barker had moved forward and her hands, taut and trembling, were gripping my arms. "We know it's a trap. But what can we do?"

Well, what *could* we do?

I was conscious of nothing but her face with its tragic, helpless eyes and its red, half-parted lips.

"Last time they tried to get you," she whispered. "They almost succeeded. And now this has happened. They've managed to lure him away. They—they've got Robin. . . ."

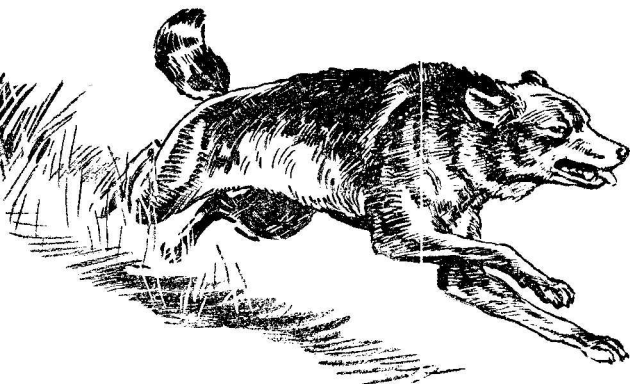
TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



# Outlaw Dog

By SAMUEL W. TAYLOR  
Author of "Hi, Roscoe," "Eight Ball," etc.

He ran desperately, favoring his lame foot, lunging ahead of the vengeful pack. But what he feared most was the men . . . and their guns



He had fought a wolf to the death, could outrun anything on four legs. But now he had only three legs; they hunted him as they had harassed his master. And his only link to life was—an empty tobacco sack

**W**HEN the man went to prison, the dog ran wild. It became a sheep-killing dog, a scourge of the White Horse country, an outlaw, with a price on its head.

Those who glimpsed it declared it didn't look like a dog any more. That latent something that always had been far back in its eyes had blazed out during the three wild years. It was all wolf now, they said.

It paused at the brow of a hill among the greasewood, studying the moonlit ranch buildings below and smelling the danger. The night breeze brought the scent of

many dogs, a whole confused medley of dogs smells.

A truck and a number of cars were parked in the yard. The outlaw sensed this would mean another chase. There had been, last winter after a light snowfall, a relay of horsemen whooping on his trail for two days.

He knew the whip-crack of rifles and the snarl of ricocheting bullets. He knew traps. He knew that he never could eat anything but meat freshly killed.

He couldn't have known the great amount of luck that had kept him alive

through three years. And perhaps he was unaware of just why he didn't leave this country and its persecution; just why he kept returning to this ranch where the man had been.

A shift in breeze and a new, irresistible scent—female.

The outlaw crept down the moonlit slope on his belly, a great tawny beast melting into the greasewood hummocks. A wolf-like dog with a deep white scar on its face. The yi-yi-yowl of a coyote came from some distant hilltop and immediately the chained hounds at the ranch began yapping.

The outlaw flattened. A man came from the house and yelled at the hounds. He went back in, and the outlaw crawled toward that scent.

The scent was in a little draw running between the hill and the buildings. But also there was man scent. With his nose to the ground he made a twenty-foot circle of the lone bush bearing the scent. The man scent was strong. Man had trampled the ground. He spiraled a bit closer, lunged away, nosed in again, creepingly. . . .

The leaping bite of the trap. The outlaw dog sprang high, lunged back, plunged forward, flung himself in a radius around the chain stake. He snapped at the cold steel jaws. He plunged against the chain, clawing dust, shaking and rolling. His only sound was a low snarl. The outlaw dog had not barked for three years.

LATER that night a rattling car stopped before the ranch. A man got out, and said, "Thanks, Ed."

"You could come along and bunk with me," the driver said.

"Thanks, no, Ed."

The car rattled along the winding road among the greasewood, and the man crossed to the ranch house and knocked. Old man Bishop opened the door, saying, "Come on in." And then as the other entered into the light: "Oh—why hello, Bert."

Bert was sort of gray-faced now. Not so husky. A fellow who'd had funny no-

tions about sleeping outdoors; a queer, lonely, drifting sort of fellow—prison must have been hard on him. But his big frame was still there, still straight as ever, though some of the meat was gone. And his eyes were okay.

"Hello," he said, and nodded to the men in the room. They nodded, briefly. "I just got out," he said. "I just got out and I heard—. I got here as fast as I could. I come to get my dog. He'll be all right, with me back here."

The old man looked at Bert a bit, and then said, "You'd better eat something. I bet you ain't had supper."

"If you'd hold off this hunt for a few days," Bert persisted. "I could ride out alone in the hills and get my dog. He'd be all right, with me back. I'll guarantee it. I'd kill him myself if he ever touched another sheep. But he wouldn't, with me back. He'd be all right. I could ride out by myself a few days, and my dog—"

"You'd better get something to eat," the old man said. "Ma will fix you something. She's in the kitchen. We can talk maybe later, Bert."

The old man took Bert into the kitchen, and then came back to the front room. Besides the two hands and the Government trapper, there were eight others come to bunk for the night and get an early start in the chase.

The old man looked from one man to the other, and they looked at him. Nobody said anything. There wasn't anything to say. They all knew the story about how Bert went to prison on account of that dog.

If there'd been a stranger there, they might've whispered—so Bert eating in the kitchen couldn't hear—parts of the story. But Claire wasn't there to give her version, nor Clay Lee his.

It was always Bert and his dog. Neither separate. Both a little wild, both a little queer, both with the something in their eyes that—well, in a dog they called it a wolf look.

Drifters. Looking past the mountains. Chasing—what? Drifting on the wind from nowhere into the White Horse coun-

try, a great wild husky man and a great wild tawny dog. Independent, indifferent, commanding an instinctive begrudged respect and hatred from cowards—much alike, this man and this dog.

And then Bert got ideas, maybe, about settling down.

He was working as a hand on the old man's ranch, and Claire was the old man's daughter. Nineteen, a happy mouth and lovely eyes, dark hair that caught sparks from the sun. He might've settled down, but for the dog. There was the trouble with Clay Lee, but the dog was at the bottom.

Somehow, there was a distrust between the girl and the dog. Jealousy? Why call it anything? That was strictly a one-man dog.

But still, it must have troubled Bert some. He got to leaving the dog at the ranch when he went anywhere with Claire. The dog would lie where he told it to, never moving until he returned.

A well-trained dog, despite the look in its eyes. Didn't know how to beg or play dead or shake hands or "speak"; but it could work either cattle or sheep—big difference there—from hand signals, and it didn't need many signals; and when Bert ran out of tobacco while fixing fence in the hills, he tossed the empty sack to the dog and said, "Go on home, old timer," knowing the dog would be back with a new sack tied to the collar in a couple of hours. A well-trained dog.

CLAY Lee was also going with Claire. Tall and lean with a wide thin mouth; dark, immaculate, a bit flashy; handsome in his way, which wasn't Bert's. Clay Lee's father owned more sheep than anybody in the White Horse country.

One night Clay Lee came to visit Claire, and when he found she was out with Bert he slammed out of the house without even passing the time of day with Ma and the old man a minute or two.

And as he stomped out, the great dog was lying by the porch steps where Bert had told him to.

The old man looked at Ma a bit after the door slammed, then picked up his paper and pulled his glasses down from his forehead. Then he cocked his head to look over the glasses, and began saying, "I'd say that Clay was—"

He never finished saying it, because of the shot outside.

The dog was lying in the yard; it appeared dead. Clay Lee had teeth marks on his leg to prove it had nipped him. "I just walked by and he grabbed me," Clay yelled. "He just grabbed me. I got my gun out of the car—"

"He kicked that dog to get bit," Bert said when he got back with Claire. He spoke softly, too softly; and that's all he said then or later.

In court, Clay Lee testified in a wheel chair with his leg stiff out before him in splints. He swore that Bert came after him that night with a gun. There was his leg to prove it.

Bert was just a hired hand, a drifter. He might have realized that whatever he had to say wouldn't stack up against the word of Clay Lee. And there was that leg of Clay's for everybody to see.

Some people wondered what Bert's side of it was. But Bert didn't make a defense. With Bert in prison, the dog ran wild. Claire married Clay Lee after Bert had been gone a year.

Whispering, so Bert wouldn't hear in the kitchen, the men who'd come to bunk for the night and get an early start in the chase might have told this story to any stranger. But there was no stranger, and so they said nothing at all.

Things were a little tight in this silence, and then they got tighter, because as Bert's chair scraped back from the kitchen table there came the sound of car tires out in the yard, and everybody suddenly remembered that Clay Lee was coming for the chase. In fact, Clay Lee had arranged for the hounds.

From the kitchen Bert's voice was asking Ma couldn't he help with the dishes; and footsteps sounded outside on the porch.

Bert came in from the kitchen just as

Claire and Clay Lee came in the front door. Claire now with some thin little lines around her mouth, Clay head and shoulders above her, leaner than ever, his wide mouth a bit thinner, and swinging his stiff leg.

It was a situation nobody craved. The men began small busy-work like cleaning their fingernails or digging at their pipes. Bert's voice came, loud in the silence, though he spoke softly: "Hello. Hello—folks."

Now the pressure should have been on Clay Lee, to answer. But he said, "Hello, Bert"—easy and natural and a bit superior. Claire, however, stopped rigid in the doorway, her face white and with a small overtone of expression that put a slight edge to Clay's voice as he said, "Ain't you going to say hello?"

"Bert, he come back," the old man said rather loudly. "He come back after his dog."

"Just in time," Clay Lee said, with that edge to his voice. He had his temper, and he hadn't liked what he saw in Claire's face as she looked at Bert. "We'll have that damned sheep-killing cur by tomorrow sundown. I'll hand the carcass to you personal, Bert."

**B**REAKFAST before daybreak. Steak, fried potatoes, bread and coffee. "Better go lift them traps," the old man told the Government trapper. "Don't want none of the hounds crippled up."

"And we won't need traps no more," Clay Lee said. "Them hounds will do the trick. And the whole valley will be out, at station and chasing."

In the purple light of morning, when they were leading saddle horses from the stable, the old man said to Bert: "You don't have to come along, you know."

"It'd be better than sitting waiting."

The old man put a hand on his shoulder. "Bert, this dog has gone bad. It's no good any more. Once a dog starts killing sheep—once a dog goes bad—" The voice trailed off as he realized the possible double meaning.

"But you see, I wasn't here," Bert said. "If I'm here, if the dog's with me. That dog'll do anything I tell it to. It'll stay in nights. Now that I'm here—"

A shout, and the Government man running into view around the stack yard. "You want a scent to start? Here's one—one of old Scarface's toes! Must've stepped half on the trap jaw and half on the trigger, and almost got thrown clear. But I got a toe. If I had a little more time with my traps—"

... The outlaw dog saw them coming a long way off. He was lying licking his left forepaw, against a yellow bluff which made his tawny coat invisible.

The sun was not up, but the eastern mountains were edged with silver. There was the wide valley, grown with greasewood and stunted sage, with the ranches spotted on the foothill plateau of the eastern mountains, and the farms bordering the river to the north.

The hounds were moving across the valley, and behind them came a body of horsemen. Out in the middle of the valley was a sheep wagon, with the gray wool of the herd looking like smoke against the greasewood.

The outlaw let the hounds get within half a mile before he slipped up a crease of the bluff and ran along the rolling hill-tops. He touched his lame paw gently every second step. By the time the hounds came up over the hill and began yapping at sight of him, the outlaw's injured paw was able to stand the full weight.

He always had outrun everything. There had been a close shave when some men in an old car chased him across the level valley floor; a badger hole and a thin tire had saved him then, and taught him to keep out of the valley except at night.

He leaped down into a wide wash and ran along the bottom easily, confident in his cunning. He knew the things he could outwit and the things he must avoid. He must avoid men, guns, traps, poison; but he could make fools of a band of hounds. He could run their legs off while he crouched resting.

THE hounds piled down the steep yellow walls of the wash and raced up the bottom, on the trail. The outlaw was perhaps three hundreds yards ahead now, not extending himself. There was but a small twinge now each time his wounded paw struck earth.

He ran along the wash bottom watching the perpendicular yellow walls. Ahead was a round-topped boulder, the wash mushrooming on either side of it. The outlaw put on a burst of speed for the first time, bounded atop the boulder and then leaped, twisting, again.

He barely made the top of the wash, and scrambled with hind paws clawing the yellow earth. He scrambled up into the brush and, belly low, glided up the hill and rested, watching, from beside a gnarled juniper stump that was bleached the color of his tawny coat.

He lay licking his paw and heard the hounds come up the wash and mill around the boulder, yapping. It was warm in the early sunlight, and the outlaw lay taking the sun and resting while the hounds leaped around the boulder and rushed up and down the bottom of the wash for the scent.

Presently the riders came around a hill into sight. Two men climbed into the wash. They tossed a hound up on either side. One of them caught the trail and soon the whole pack was running up the hill. The riders began looking for a way across the wash with the horses.

The outlaw was rested, but as he arose from beside the juniper stump the wounded paw was full of fire, and the leg stiff. He ran on three legs at full speed, touching the stiff leg every other stride and flinching.

A bullet ricocheted from a rock and then came the whip of a rifle report. The outlaw went over the crest and found himself at a disadvantage downhill. The hounds topped the hill at full cry and bore down the slope.

The outlaw cut around the hill, favoring the lame leg on the upslope, and the hounds cut across the trail, gaining on

him. The outlaw headed uphill again, counting on his powerful rear legs, and held his own to the summit.

On the crest a bullet greeted him, another, a yelled curse. He swerved back onto the down slope. By this time his lame paw was worked free of the stiffness and most of the pain, but he had been running desperately and was as tired as the hounds. And a certain fear was coming.

He was the greatest dog of all. He had vanquished every challenger, had survived a fight to the death with a gray wolf drifting down from the north, had outrun everything that ran on four legs.

But now, he was not himself. He had, after a rest, but three legs. The outlaw pushed on with all his great strength and speed, perhaps realizing that no longer could he play his old game of hide and seek. He must get away, for rest no longer helped him. Rest stiffened that leg and put fire in the paw.

The sun was becoming hot and a thirst grew on him. A strange intolerable thirst. Drawing gradually away from the hounds in great strides, he headed for a water hole.

Two men were at the water hole. It was a small spring in a hollow. Grass was at the bottom, beaten out by sheep trails except for hardy tufts, and lank rabbit brush was on the slopes.

The men lay atop a low hill commanding the hollow, waiting, as the sounds of the hound pack came closer.

"If old Scarface stops for a drink—"

The other man shot. "There he was! There he was! Sneaked in from the rabbit brush and—there he is!"

THE outlaw felt an ear begin to sting when the numbness wore away. Now he ran wildly, with terror. The hounds had cut through the trail as he veered north after the shot, and were running hard on sighting him again.

The two men at the water hole were now mounted and pounding along west of him, driving him back toward the valley. The outlaw bore north as much as



possible, toward the river over there.

The intolerable thirst was gnawing at him. It was very hot, with no air stirring. He still had the great speed to draw gradually away from the hounds.

He bore down a greasewood slope on another wash, went up it a few hundred yards, climbed the opposite bank and came back along it to a point just beyond his point of entry.

He gathered himself and cleared the wash at a leap, flattened in the brush and lay there without moving while the hound pack came pounding along the hot still trail, went over the lip of the wash not twenty yards from him and ran sniffing along the bottom.

The outlaw crept to the trail and backtracked up the hill. Over the hill, he trotted along his backtrail.

A horseman was before him, yelling and pulling a rifle from saddle boot. The outlaw cut west, then immediately north as he sighted the two men from the water hole.

But the hounds were north. The outlaw bore east, streaking through the greasewood while rifles cracked.

When he reached the yellow bluffs, there was no way to go but down into the wide valley. It looked peaceful, empty but for the herd of sheep in the middle. But the dog knew the valley meant danger.

"We've got him," the old man stated when the riders were filing down the yellow bluff. The outlaw was running straight east across the floor of the valley with the hounds strung behind. "They can see the chase for miles, from the ranches, and there's men ready at every ranch. There'll be a circle around that outlaw inside of two hours."

Bert said nothing. He had not opened his lips all morning. The riders scattered out to the west, and moving specks appeared from the ranches along the eastern foothills. There was a huge circle within two hours. Within another hour a tight circle.

Then shooting. Then yelling. Then cursing. And one man whooping; one man

laughing. Bert whooping and laughing and screaming.

"You seen it! You seen it! You seen that dog of mine! You see him run into that herd of sheep and scatter it hell-for-breakfast! You seen it run past the circle with the sheep—!"

"Shut up, Bert," the old man said. "There's men here who won't appreciate your point of view."

THE outlaw dog made the eastern mountains, and, bearing north, lost the hounds at the river. The men turned back at sundown, tired, irritable, cursing.

"Say, where's Bert?" the old man said at supper, looking around the table. "There was so many— Didn't Bert come back with us?"

Nobody knew anything about Bert.

"Might've stopped at a closer ranch for the night," one man offered. "He'd be plenty tired and saddle sore, not riding in three years."

"More likely run off with the horse," Clay Lee said. "Kiss a good saddle-horse goodbye."

Claire seemed about to say something, but didn't. But when the saddle-horse came back during the night, with the girth loosened and the bridle reins looped over the horn, she was the one to rise out of bed and see it out the window in the yard, and she cried, "Bert sent the horse back! Bert sent the horse back!" as if it were a personal triumph.

The bed creaked as Clay got up. "He's found his sheep-killing dog and is skipping out. It won't do him no good. That dog's an outlaw. Bert can't get that dog out of the country. I'll see to that."

"Why don't you leave him alone? All he wants is a chance. The dog will be all right with him. Haven't you done enough to them?"

"Haven't I done—? Now, wait a minute. You taking that jail-bird's side?" Their figures were but blurs in the dim night light from the window. Clay put a hand on her shoulder and the fingers tightened, trembling a bit. "You taking his side?"

"Well, if you hadn't kicked that dog in the first place—"

"Who says I kicked that dog?" he broke in, shaking her.

She seemed on the verge of flaring back at him, but suddenly was contrite and conquered. "I'm sorry, Clay. Don't, you're hurting my shoulder." Claire wasn't the kind to make a fight.

Mumbling, Clay went out to put the horse up. He was touchy on the subject of Bert and the dog. He'd won; he'd put Bert behind bars. But still he was touchy, because a little of the valley's idle gossip had drifted back to him.

People had been curious to know just how he got shot in the leg. No gun was presented in court. People said that maybe Clay's gun had fired the shot, and they wondered how come that gun got mixed up in the fight, unless Clay produced it in the first place.

It made Clay touchy.

**B**ERT had stayed in the mountains when the others turned back. He was sore and galled from the saddle, but he didn't seem to mind.

He rode across the breeze in the night, and whistled in a wild and peculiar way; he rode up and down slopes and along ridges, over rocky going and through brush and trees, always cutting across the breeze, and whistling in that wild way through the night.

And then seemingly there was no sound; but he slipped off the horse and out of the brush came a great tawny shape, shaking and wagging and whining and nuzzling and rushing and leaping and slobbering.

The outlaw dog. Like a big overgrown awkward pup. Jumping and licking and whining. And for the first time in three years barking.

The man laughing and gasping and yelling, playing with the dog like a kid, finally getting tired of the skittish horse and setting it loose after easing the cinch and looping the bridle reins over the horn.

"Old timer! Old timer! . . ."

The big wild drifting man with tears

on his gray cheeks, laughing and mauling the dog and wrestling with it like a kid. Together again, dog and man. After the three years.

Presently lying as they had done many the night, where they could feel the breeze against their faces and smell the free growing world and look up upon the white stars.

It was as the man had dreamed when he had turned restlessly on an iron cot with the whitewashed walls crowding in and the air stained with the prison smell. The great dog lying curled beside him, its peace broken only by occasional whimpers of ecstasy as the happiness swelled up and it had to lick at him or nuzzle his hand for release.

. . . "Too bad you folks can't stay another day or so. We don't see enough of you lately," the old man said to Claire and Clay the next morning.

They were having breakfast, and Clay spoke with his mouth full and a little stringer of syrup oozing over his lip. "Work can't wait," he said. "I wouldn't of laid over here last night except for this dog business. I'm dropping into town to see the sheriff personally, today. Bert ain't going to sneak that dog out of the court-try."

Nobody said anything to that; but Claire looked at her husband quickly.

Then there was the scratch and whine at the kitchen door. Almost immediately the two ranch dogs set up a din. The old man went to the door muttering, and then he almost left his boots sitting on the floor as he jumped back.

The great tawny outlaw dog was crouched on the porch, eye-whites showing, ears back, lips lifted from fangs, belly low, trembling all over. It was paying no attention to the two yapping ranch dogs, and they were keeping out of range.

After that first jump, the old man began backing from the door, very gingerly, feeling behind him with stiff spread fingers. He spoke in a tight grunt, as if he were lifting a hayrack out of a bog hole as he said the words.

"Get me a gun."

Clay Lee's chair scraped back and he bumped his stiff leg on the table getting up. He edged into the front room for a gun.

The great dog crept in through the kitchen doorway, ears back, fangs showing, trembling.

"Wait! Wait!" Claire was crying out. "Look! The handkerchief around his neck! Bert sent him! Bert must be out in the hills hurt!"

Then the outlaw managed a single squeaky bark, and a stiff quiver of the tail that might have passed as at least a try for a wag. Something fell out of his mouth and he took it again and raised his muzzle to the old man.

"HURT? Bert's all right!" the old man said. "That dog's got an empty tobacco sack. Bert sent him back for a sack of tobacco." And then the old man added softly, in a wondering way: "And the dog—*come*."

The old man looked at Claire and at Ma in an awed way. The dog coming back at Bert's order, after being wild three years and after just having been chased. Tired, pain-racked with the missing toe, hunted for three years, and yet coming back.

What had it gone through? And Bert, out in the hills, waiting. Out watching the horizon and waiting. What was Bert going through?

"Bert sent him!" Claire was saying, half laughing and half crying. "Bert sent him to show us! Bert is showing us the dog will obey him! Can't you see? Bert is taking this chance to show everybody—"

The old man was shaking his head slowly.

"A sheep-killing dog," he muttered. "Don't never . . . always bad. Once a dog—"

"But what a dog! It come *back* here! After all that—And with Bert with him, he won't be feeling wild.

"What the devil? Bert only asked a chance. He said he'd kill the dog himself if it ever looked at another sheep. A chance is all he asked for. I guess I've lost as many sheep as anybody else, and me—"

"Ma, get that dog a sack of my tobacco. I'm going to do some telephoning!"

Clay was in the front room, waiting at a window with a cocked rifle in his hands. From the kitchen came the sound of the telephone crank grinding.

"Clay." Claire's hand was on his arm. "Clay, put that gun away. You've got to give that dog a chance."

"Get out of here."

"If you shoot that dog, I'll take the sack of tobacco out in the hills myself. And I won't come back."

Clay lowered the rifle, turning and looking at his wife.

"Oh. So that's how it is?"

"That's how it is. Put that gun away."

"So that's how it is," Clay said. But he put the rifle on the pegs over the fireplace.

When he turned back, Claire faced him, and her eyes met his. She was breathing a little quickly, but her voice was quiet.

"Let's forget this, Clay. I'm your wife. I'll try to be a good one."

But Clay had to fling a last, "Whyn't you wait for your jail-bird?"

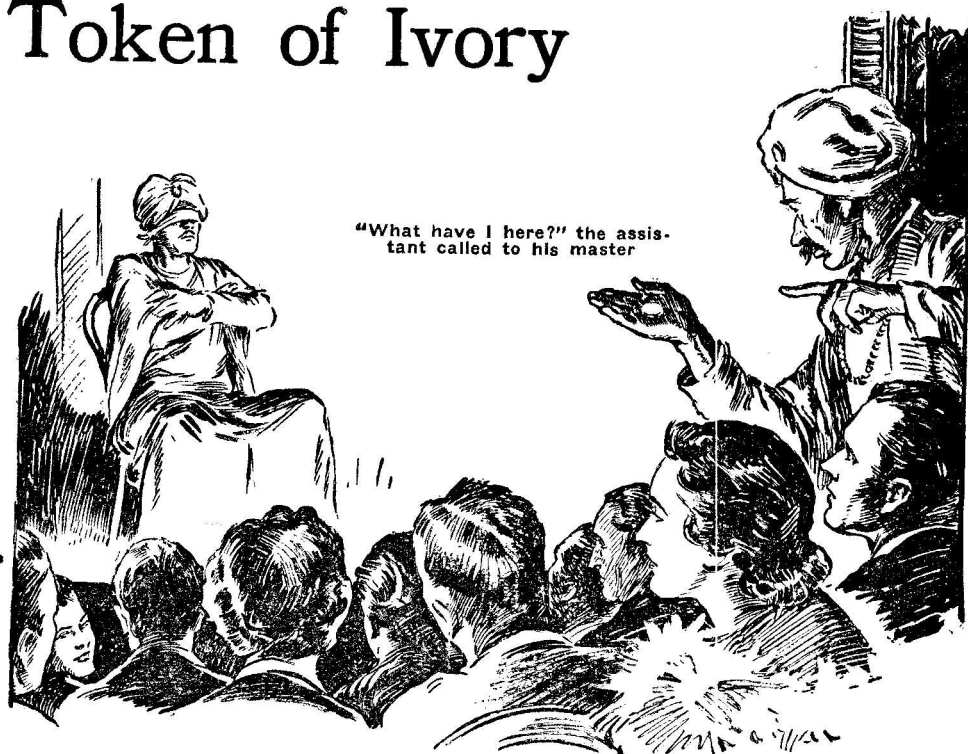
"I wonder," Claire murmured softly to herself.

She was at the window, watching the great free running dog streak through the greasewood. She wanted to cry, but she couldn't. You don't cry when you realize you don't measure up. You're just heavy inside and it's hard to breathe.

If you measure up, if you've got the trust and that certain faith, you'll go through hell, and wait forever, regardless. She'd realized seeing Bert last night. . . . But she hadn't waited.

She stood watching the great bounding dog running free under the sun. When it was out of sight she turned back to the room, and it seemed very small and dark.

# Token of Ivory



Daulat Das, you claim to read the mind. But can you read an invisible message wrought in ivory that imperils two continents? An unusual short story . . .

By WILLIAM FOSTER ELLIOTT

THE Hindu mind-reader was sitting blindfolded on the stage and describing various objects as his assistant took them from members of the audience. The smoothness and accuracy of the team were making a big hit with the crowd. San Francisco had not seen the act before.

"What do I hold?" the assistant called.

"It is a watch," replied the man on the stage.

"Will you describe this watch?"

"It is a man's wristwatch of seventeen jewels, white-gold case. The strap is newer than the watch. The crystal has been cracked."

"What else can you see?"

"The watch is three minutes slow."

The girl who sat beside Cameron stirred uneasily in her seat. She was slim and dark; she wore tailored tweeds and carried a silver-fox scarf. Cameron glanced toward her as she moved; she caught him, smiled easily and said: "They put on a good act, don't they?"

"Very. I've been trying to figure how they signal, but no luck so far."

"Are you sure it's all signals?"

"Of course. You don't believe in actual thought-transference, I hope?"

The girl hesitated. "Well, not just like writing and posting a letter, you know. Still, there are things. . . In Benares once I—"

"What have I?" the mind-reader's assistant called. In his progress back from

the stage he had come to the third row in front of Cameron and the slim, dark girl.

"It is a letter."

"Kindly describe this letter."

"It is written with green ink upon paper of a violet shade. There is no date. It begins: 'Darling Daddums, Thank you so much for the cheque. I will be home—'"

Brief confusion developed as a pudgy man with a very red face snatched his letter from the assistant. The audience rocked and howled.

"For example," said Cameron, "that could have been a plant. Or a very easy guess; a man of that type would be sure to get such letters."

"But not to exhibit them in public, I think. If he is not what you call a plant, then he made a bad mistake. But the Hindu was not mistaken."

Cameron was going through his pockets. "I wish I had something unusual to give this chap," he said. "I'd like to try—"

"Would you?" said the girl. She reached into her handbag and took out a small leather case. From the case she extracted what looked like a disk of ivory about the size of a silver dollar. "Hand him this, then. Quick, before he passes by!"

The assistant had paused by Cameron, who had his regular aisle seat. The latter swiftly passed over the ivory disk, and heard the man who received it draw in his breath sharply. Cameron looked up, but the dark face beneath the turban was expressionless and turned toward the stage.

"Now what do I have?" the man called. His accent had thickened in a peculiar way and Cameron was aware of a tension behind the voice. Out of the tail of his eye he saw that the girl beside him was straining forward in an ecstasy of attention.

"YOU have," began the man on the stage, "you have. . . ." He hesitated. When he spoke again his excitement was clearly perceptible. "It is a small disk of ivory."

"Will you please now describe this disk of ivory?" The assistant's speech had become almost guttural.

"It is the size of a silver dollar. It is yellow and worn, and appears to be of great age. On the face of the disk is carved the image of a man. A snake coils about this man and lifts its head before his face. There are words carved beneath these figures. They are—"

"That is correct!" the assistant said loudly. It was the first time he had used this expression, and Cameron was aware that for some reason the man on the stage had been deliberately cut short. The three sharp words echoed in his mind: "Dot iss correctd," said the echo. Cameron was wondering. . . . Then a dark hand hastily replaced the disk in his, and from several rows behind them they heard again: "What do I hold?"

"Look at it if you want," said the girl in a low voice.

Cameron looked. The appearance of the ivory disk was precisely as the man on the stage had described it. The carving was exquisite in detail; even the tiny scales of the snake were visible where time and handling had not worn them smooth. The words beneath the figures were in characters unknown to Cameron. But he was sure the work was Indian.

"What do you think now?" the girl asked, as he handed the bit of ivory back to her.

"That something very queer has just occurred. And that you know a lot more about it than I possibly can."

She put the leather case away in her handbag. The mind-reading turn had come to an end amid vociferous applause from the crowded theater. On the stage, the last act of the bill, a team of acrobats, swarmed in from the wings and rapidly formed a pyramid whose apex was a muscular young woman in g-string and brassiere.

"Yet I don't know as much as the Hindu and that other man," the girl said.

"That other man interests me," said Cameron. "What do you make of him?"

Before she could answer an usher stopped beside Cameron and held a small envelope toward the girl. "For you, miss," he said. She opened the envelope and took out a piece of notepaper. Her dark brows drew together as she read what was written upon it.

"What do you make of *this*?" she said, handing him the note.

Cameron read:

*Daulat Das would be grateful to the young lady with the disk of ivory if she would kindly permit him to examine it in person. Would she be so gracious as to visit his humble dressing-room after the performance? She is expected to bring the friend who is with her if she wishes to do so.*

• The writing was small, exotically shaped but highly legible. Something in the formation of the letters suggested to Cameron the inscription upon the ivory disk he had recently examined. He read the message through again, to gain time; he was trying to understand the hidden factor that ran through the series of events which had begun with the first appearance of the disk. But there was not enough to go on.

"This may not be my business," he said; "but if you'd like me to act for you in any way I shall be glad to do so." He took a billfold from his pocket, found a card and gave it to the dark girl. "There is something about this I don't quite like. I wouldn't want to see you go back there alone—if you are going."

The legend on the card was: *Basil Cameron, Attorney and Counsellor at Law; Suite 1231-37 Pacific Building, San Francisco.*

"Thank you, Mr. Cameron," she said after the barest glance at the card. "I am Elizabeth Norton."

She seemed to reflect, studying him meanwhile. He was large, sandy and dependable looking. His clothes were good; his address one of the best in town. She thought he must be about forty, successful, and—she came inevitably back to the word—dependable. He could see most of this going on behind her clear brown eyes.

"I believe I'll accept your offer," she said at last. "To be honest about it, I haven't given myself much choice. Oh, I could walk out of the theater without paying any attention to this—this summons. That wouldn't be very intelligent, though, would it, Mr. Cameron?"

"That's exactly what I think it would be."

"After I deliberately asked for this? . . . Well, the show's over. Shall we act upon my impulse?"

THEY stumbled along a dark and narrow passage and up a short flight of steps to the stage. Farther back, behind a tumult of collapsing scenery and hustling men in overalls, they came to another passage where the mind-reader's assistant stood before a dressing-room door. He opened it, bowing low, and as they passed by him into the room Cameron was able to see that though the man's face was dark, the skin of his chest was unusually fair.

The mind-reader rose from a chair before his dressing-table as Miss Norton and Cameron entered. He had removed his heavy, brocaded robe and put aside the monumental turban. Divested thus of his theatrical trappings and wrapped in a simple garment of white linen, he had shrunk to smaller than average size.

But the aquiline yellow face, black opaque eyes and dark hair snowed with gray at the temples combined to assert an unusual intelligence and vitality. There was a mask here, and behind it a real force, as Cameron, habituated to swift analysis by years of courtroom work, instantly divined.

The man bowed to them. "I am deeply honored, Miss—?"

"Norton. This is Mr. Cameron."

"Ah, Miss Norton. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance also, Mr. Cameron. Will you not sit down?"

They seated themselves on flimsy chairs of the sort generally provided in theater dressing-rooms and at funerals.

The mind-reader said, "My request was



informal, I am aware. But I was much disturbed by the impression I received from the object which you, Miss Norton, submitted to my assistant. I will not—what is your metaphor?—beat over the bush. My interest is very great to know how you came by this object, Miss Norton, and if it is what it purports to be.”

“I will be equally frank,” said Cameron easily. “I am acting here as Miss Norton’s advisor. My first thought would be: by what right do you question her?”

“By no right, Mr. Cameron. Let me repeat that I request only. Surely it is plain that you and Miss Norton are quite at liberty to refuse. You were also quite at liberty to disregard my invitation to come to this room.”

“What is it you want to know, Mr. Daulat Das?” the girl asked.

“Merely, in all humility, if I may see that ivory disk which you carry and enquire where and how you acquired it.”

“I can’t see any reason why you shouldn’t see it,” Cameron said, “especially as you claim to have seen it already, through the mind of your assistant. But I advise Miss Norton to tell you nothing. You will concede, I suppose, that we know nothing of you and your purposes.”

But Elizabeth Norton was fumbling in her handbag for the small leather case.

“Here you are,” she said, handing Daulat Das the disk. “But I do agree with Mr. Cameron that before I give you any information I should know why you ask for it.”

Daulat Das carefully examined the trinket. It was very still in the small room; Cameron could hear the regular breathing of the still-turbaned assistant who stood behind him by the door.

“Miss Norton,” said the Hindu at length, “this is of an immense interest. I believe this carving to be of great age and of an authenticity unquestionable. But are you fully aware of what you carry so casually?”

“I believe I am,” the girl said coolly. “Are you, Mr. Das?”

“To convince you that I am, I will

offer for this small piece of ivory five thousand dollars.”

“Why?” said Cameron.

“Ah, I am a collector, Mr. Cameron. To me the antiquities of my native land are precious.”

“It’s nice to know I have something so valuable,” said Elizabeth Norton, holding out her hand for the disk. “Also to learn that you, too, appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Das; but I haven’t the least idea of selling.”

She arose from her chair and Cameron followed suit. The Hindu also got to his feet. He said in a strained voice, “If you should reconsider, Miss Norton, you will be able to reach me for the rest of the week at this theater.”

“I’m not likely to reconsider the idea of selling.” She paused, and then added with an apparent significance that was wasted on Cameron: “But if I should see this thing”—she tossed the disk lightly on the palm of her hand—“*from a different angle*, I’ll see you at once.”

Daulat Das appeared suddenly relieved. With effusive compliments and farewells he bowed them to the door. But there Cameron stopped and said abruptly: “Would you mind telling me, Mr. Daulat Das, where you acquired such a remarkable command of English?”

“Remarkable? I fear it is very poor, this command. But I was at Cambridge for some years.”

“Cambridge?” said Cameron politely. “I was wondering about the idiom. So it is Cambridge. Mr. Das, I must repeat my word ‘remarkable.’”

WHEN they stood on the sidewalk in front of the now empty theater, Cameron took off his hat and said rather coldly: “Well, good night, Miss Norton. I suppose you have no more need for me.”

She looked at him and smiled. “Are you being old hat because I haven’t told you everything? When did I have a chance to do that?”

“You didn’t. I’m not being old hat, as

you call it. But you certainly didn't need me in there—"

"I couldn't have got along without you in there," she said seriously. "You were perfect. You've no idea how perfect you were!"

"I haven't any idea about any of it," said Cameron morosely.

"You soon will have. . . . Isn't that the St. Francis Hotel just up the street? Take me there and order me a drink while I telephone. Please. And don't be stuffy."

When they were seated in a corner of the bar with Scotch and soda before them, she said: "My brother'll be here directly. I caught him in his room. We're stopping here, you know." Then she buried what Cameron was beginning to think a decidedly charming nose in the tall glass.

The man who strolled in a few moments later with every appearance of casualness was slim and dark like his sister. "Hallo, Liz," he said. "How d'you do, Mr. Cameron?" He sat down, said, "Scotch and fizz" to the waiter, took some papers out of his pocket, selected one and handed it to the lawyer. "Introduction of sorts," he said. "More on tap if necessary to carry." He screwed a monocle into his right eye. "Jolly place, this," he observed. "All sorts and kinds. . . . Ah!" He applied himself to his drink.

Cameron read a short letter addressed to the British Consul at San Francisco. It directed that dignitary to furnish whatever information and assistance might be required by Capt. Godfrey C. B. Norton, V.C., D.S.O., who was traveling On His Majesty's Service. So much was routine; Cameron had seen a number of letters of the kind. But when he came to the signature at the end the lawyer stared, read it again and looked up to find Norton regarding him cheerfully through the monocle.

"Looks like swank, don't it?" he said. "Uncommonly handy, though, here and there. Even your local constabulary are usefully impressed."

"Our local autograph collectors would be, too. Now—"

"Oh, ah! Hasn't Liz fed you the plot?"

"Not yet. I have been hoping you would."

"Oh? Well, it's not too complex. But political no end. Fortunately, the political part's not my job. Point is, this ivory dingus Liz has is badge of an organization. A very badly wanted organization. So Liz and I are looking 'em over. D'you follow me?"

He gazed blandly at Cameron. "No," said the latter, "I don't follow you at all."

Captain Norton signalled a waiter. "Scotch and sodas around," he said. "Well, you see, this ivory dingus is bait. We dangle it in front of suspected members. Only members in good standing know what it means. They rise; we hook 'em. Daulat Das rose."

"Where do I come in?" Cameron asked.

"Show you in a moment," said Norton, returning to his apparently bored contemplation of the crowded room.

"Godfrey," Elizabeth said suddenly, "I heard in Benares if you had one of these things, all you had to do was put your hand on it, say the right words, and you'd get what you were looking for. Think it would work?"

"Can't say. Don't know the right words. D'you?"

"I think so." She lowered her voice. "There's a man behind you listening. Order another drink and go on acting stupid."

**B**Y THIS time Cameron was wholly bewildered and more than a little angry. What the game was he did not know; but he felt certain that in some way he was being made the victim of a useless mystification. "I think, if you will excuse me—" he began stiffly. But Norton said quickly in a low voice, "Wait a minute, old man; this is going to be good."

At that moment the girl produced the ivory disk from her handbag under the table, stared at it a moment and then looked slowly at Cameron. "You're skept-

tical about mind-reading," she said. "How about prophecy? If you are so certain about April 20, 1940, what's in a little thought-transference to bother you?"

She handed him the disk, and he took it staring, quite at sea about what was required of him. He turned to Captain Norton; that bland young man regarded him fixedly through the monocle and asked pleasantly: "Really, what's a little matter of now or then? All relativity, anyhow—what?"

And then it suddenly flashed into Cameron's mind that April 20, 1940, did mean something to him. It meant something important, something about which, in the rather recent past, he had wondered and speculated. It was the closing date on those airplane contracts. But the connection with these Nortons, their ivory disk . . . Absently he turned the disk over in his hand, and there faintly visible in pale blue lines upon the smooth yellow surface of its reverse side, he read the date *April 20, 1940*.

He heard a new but somewhat familiar voice saying beside him: "Your pardon; but is it permitted that I speak of the date to which *mademoiselle* has referred?"

It was a tall, blond young man who bowed stiffly from the waist as he addressed Norton. "Permitted? Of course," said Norton. "Sit down."

The young man drew up a chair and placed himself at the table between Norton and his sister, opposite Cameron. The lawyer, now actually beginning to fear for his own sanity, glanced down at the disk which he still held face down in his palm. The pale blue tracing of letters and figures had disappeared; the yellow surface of the old ivory was smooth and unmarked.

Then Elizabeth Norton said rather sharply: "The date? What date is it you wish to discuss?"

"Your pardon; it is the date upon the disk."

She took it from Cameron's limp hand and passed it to the newcomer. Norton was watching all this with an air of

slightly bored detachment. "You can see there's no date on it," Elizabeth said.

The man bowed slightly. "I did not expect to see it here," he said calmly. "Nevertheless, I have seen—"

Captain Norton dropped the monocle out of his eye, caught it before it could strike the table, and said: "I say, let's get down to it. No good all this talking. Where's Daulat Das?"

"I have come to take you to him," replied the blond young man. "In Post Street I have a car waiting."

Norton rose. All at once he seemed to be in a hurry. He pushed between tables, the others following, and presently collided with a burly man who had blundered into his path.

"Why in 'ell don't yuh look wher'yer goin'?" the burly man asked belligerently.

The shorter and slighter Norton hardly paused. "If you'd keep your bloody eyes open," he said in passing, "other people wouldn't have to give you so much steerage-way."

"Is that so?" roared the big man. "You come back here and I'll show you—"

But Norton was well past now, saying over his shoulder: "Follow me out if you want to argue the point."

As they passed through the lobby of the hotel Cameron drew close to Elizabeth and said softly: "I know you want me with you in this. But why?"

"So you'll be on our side," she said.

"But I *am* on your side—as far as I know where I am."

She said, "You'll know exactly where you are in a few minutes."

Then they were in a large black car—rented, Cameron thought—and heading west out Post Street.

THE house was among the trees by the edge of the Presidio Reservation. Out here, the fog hung low and thick. They could see a tall flight of steps and a dark doorway. Then the blond young man opened the door and they passed through a dimly lighted hallway into a large room scantily furnished.

Daulat Das stood awaiting them, and as they entered he again bowed low. His black, opaque eyes glistened in the hard glare of an overhead cluster; his white robe shone whiter than ever. "The honor was expected," he said with light irony. "Still, I am honored."

"No more diplomacy, X-3," said Norton. "We've come for orders."

"Orders? I had supposed you were getting those from Mr. Cameron."

The blond man who had brought them to the house struck in with a new air of authority. "The field of Mr. Cameron has been different. But now, since he has read the message on the disk, it is plain that the fields overlap. Now as to orders. Naturally there are none for Mr. Cameron."

"But you," he included Norton and his sister in a sharp glance, "will report to X-7 at Seattle next Monday. More definite instructions will reach you by telephone at the hotel."

"How about Zimmermann in Oakland?" said Norton easily. "I haven't been able to get through to him."

The other took some papers from his pocket and selected one. "This," he said, "should arrange that."

Norton suddenly leaped back, covering the blond man and Daulat Das with an automatic pistol he had produced as if by magic.

"All right, Trietschke! All right, Ram Singh! Reach 'em high. Cameron, go over 'em for weapons. Don't miss anything!"

The bewildered Cameron obeyed. Each man yielded a pistol and the Hindu a long knife besides.

"Now Cameron," said Norton, "step over to the wall there. Switch the light off and on, once, fast. . . . That's right."

The Hindu stood expressionless, though his eyes glittered like a snake's. But the German was furious, flushed and quivering with rage.

"Gott!" he said thickly, "You can't do this! You—"

"I have, though," Norton said calmly.

They heard the front door open and the sound of heavy steps down the hall.

Two men came into the room; the one in the lead was the burly man who had got in Norton's way when they were leaving the hotel.

"Got a predest for you, Smithers," Norton said without looking around. "The white one has some papers in his inside coat pocket. Handle 'em both with care, though. And have the house well searched."

"WELL, Cameron," Norton said, "you've just seen a kidnaping. What do you think of it?" Then he smiled.

"Don't you mean an arrest?"

"Well, hardly. That comes when we've got 'em to Canada by plane. You're a lawyer. What chance have I got to arrest anybody in this country?"

Cameron looked around the room; in the strong overhead light it seemed bare, common, anything but mysterious. Yet the lawyer could not doubt that he had just been through an experience which comprehended melodrama, international intrigue, danger and—he even suspected—something in the nature of black magic.

But he tried to be a good sport about it. "What chance have I got," he asked with half-humorous resignation, "to find out what really has been going on this evening?"

"Oh; an excellent chance. Liz here's good at exposition. Ask her. I'm going to have a look around the rest of the house."

Cameron turned to the girl. "I suppose my stupidity amuses you," he said with a touch of bitterness.

But she said quickly, "On the contrary. You have had nothing to go on. We had to see that you didn't have; we had to keep you moving so fast you couldn't give the show away. I hated to do it, you were so decent about offering to help me. But . . . well, you have seen how it worked out."

"Yes, I've seen that. I haven't seen my connection with any of it."

"Mr. Cameron," she said very seriously,

"during the last two years you have done a good deal of legal work for Porten Gesellschaft. Can you say now that the date April 20, 1940, means nothing to you?"

"Yes!" Cameron exclaimed. "Of course! It's the expiration date on all the airplane contracts I've been handling. But does that mean—?"

She nodded.

"I'm afraid it does, Mr. Cameron. It also means all the reasons why we had to use you tonight and not let you know you were being used. You were our introduction and guarantee without knowing it. These people knew about your work for Porten Gesellschaft, and they took it for granted you were in on everything."

"Do you mean to say I'm generally supposed to be dealing in international plots, spying and all that kind of thing?" he cried indignantly.

Now she smiled.

"Oh, no; not generally. By a few people, yes. And don't speak with such disgust of 'spying and all that kind of thing.' What would you call Godfrey and me?"

Cameron silently tried to digest this.

At the moment he felt most inclined to call Elizabeth Norton an exceedingly interesting person. Interesting, that is, in quite a special way. To him.

Elizabeth Norton said gently, "The chief difference between a spy and a patriot often is simply that the spy has got caught. Isn't that so?"

"I'm afraid it is. But—"

"You Americans," she went on, "respect Nathan Hale as one of your great patriots. But to the British who hanged him he was simply another spy. Isn't that so?"

"Yes—but I didn't mean quite that. I'm disgusted with myself for not having seen what undoubtedly lay beneath those plane contracts. I have been very stupid all the way around."

She said, "No, not stupid. You Americans don't have to look so far beneath the surface of every business deal. You are lucky."

Cameron shook himself a little, as if to put aside a burden. "Tell me about that ivory disk business," he said. "From the beginning, now!"

"OH, THAT!" she said laughing. "Again, very simple from the inside, but hard when you have no clue. The disk was once the badge of a secret society in India. The society dealt in political assassination. When Godfrey and I were in Bombay we discovered that the Indian branch of a certain modern espionage organization had adopted the old disk as a mark of identification for a few of the leaders. They also made one improvement." She smiled at him.

"You mean the appearing and disappearing letters?"

"Yes. Can you guess how that's done?"

"No."

"Soda water brings out the color for a minute or two. Alkaline reaction or something. Godfrey discovered it by accident when he spilled one of his perpetual highballs. That really was what tipped us off to the whole story. It's amusing, isn't it? to realize that so much knowledge can come from a bad habit."

Cameron began to smile a little. "One thing more," he said. "How did you happen—or did you only happen—to be sitting next to me at the theater this evening?"

Elizabeth Norton laughed cheerfully. "That happening," she said, "was brought about by bribery and corruption. I must say, though, your habit of taking the same aisle seat every Monday night made things much easier."

Captain Norton came in. "Everything explained?" he said. "Not so bad, after all, was it, old chap?"

"Pretty bad. But I think I can put most of the pieces together now. Oh, there's one thing: this Trietschke—I have a feeling I had seen him somewhere before he came to the table tonight in the hotel."

"So you had. Not long before, though. He looks a bit different blacked up."

"The mind-reader's assistant!"

"The mind-reader's boss offstage. Damned clever chap. Only failing's typical German one—overconfidence. He brought Ram Singh over here to work with him because the mind-reading act is such a perfect cover-up. I say, shall we shove off?"

On the curb, Cameron detained the girl a moment while Captain Norton was getting into another large black car.

"I live out this way," he said. "I think I'll walk home; there is a good deal to think about. Shall I see you again?"

"Do you want to—after tonight?"

He lifted a hand—dropped it.

"I want to very much—because of tonight."

She said softly, "I can't tell when or where. Godfrey's a hard boss and he moves fast. But I will let you hear from me when I can."

Cameron looked at her for what seemed a long time. But he could not see much

beyond the white blur of her face; the fog was too thick. He said suddenly, like a little boy: "Is that a promise?"

"I say," Norton called from the car. "shake a leg, Liz."

She started.

"It's a promise," she said, and put out her hand.

Cameron held it a moment; then she was gone, climbing into the car. In his hand she had left something, a small, hard, circular object.

Cameron started out on foot through the fog. Presently he came to a street light and paused. The object in his hand was an ivory disk about the size of a silver dollar. There was carving on the face of it.

"I'll be damned!" said Cameron aloud. Then he chuckled. "She said she wanted me on her side," he reflected. "I guess this puts me there."

He went on slowly up the hill toward home.

# LOVE PROBLEMS?

If you have one . . . or know of one . . . why not tell it to

## ALLIE LOWE MILES

Mrs. Miles, *beloved of hundreds of thousands of radio listeners*, has listened to the love stories, the trials and tribulations, of countless men and women. What she has gleaned from this experience she has written for you, in a *new department* called, "**YOUR LOVE AFFAIRS**", which will be a regular feature of

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# Argonotes

## The Readers' Viewpoint



**A** FEW weeks ago we declared a Ladies' Day in these columns; and then we sat back, prepared to enjoy the soft voices of the gentler sex and the gallantry of the gentlemen. That was what was needed, we thought with satisfaction; the ladies would dress the department up prettily, and it would lose its curious resemblance to a battlefield.

Well, it turns out that we were laboring under an extraordinarily naïve illusion. We thought our correspondents would at least park their weapons outside, knowing there were women present. But they didn't. Not only do they arrive fully armed, but they start in firing away at the ladies. This, we guess, is life as it is really lived, without any veneer of romance; and actually we are not much disturbed about the War of the Sexes that seems to be starting in Argonotes. What occurs in the letter below may not be chivalrous, but it's going to be interesting to watch the counter-attack, if there is one. Is the lady armed?

**DON WILKINS**

So Mrs. John Mitchell likes Roscoe; well, that's her privilege. It's a well known fact that many women are emotionally unstable and such will find Roscoe's hysterics just lovely. I continue to maintain that his grotesquely exaggerated style and inadequately explained "mysteries" are balderdash.

About "The Ship of Ishtar", I agree with E. N. G. It was "falsely dramatic" and failed its reputation. But "Seven Footprints to Satan" still is mighty good entertainment. Most of your recent fantasies are superior to "The Ship".

I dislike reprints as I consider they cheapen the magazine. However, if the policy is to be continued, here are a few I would like to read again: E. Phillips Oppenheim's "Mr. Marx's Secret", Tom Galton's "As He Was Born",

Arnold Bennett's "Hugo", George Allen England's "Darkness and Dawn", Mabel Ostrander's detective stories, Gaston Le Roux's French mysteries, Florence C. Jones' translations of French crime stories, especially "Red Nights of Paris."

All these appeared in ARGOSY, *All-Story* or *Cavalier Weekly*. Can you remember them, Mrs. Mitchell, or aren't you an "old, old reader?" Oh, and I must mention James Francis Dwyer's "White Waterfall".

Yet I'm more interested in the new, good lively ARGOSY yarns, and don't sever allegiance if you occasionally publish a dud. ARGOSY's wide range of well written fiction is a constant adventure. "The Ringer" is the latest example, and the utmost in originality.

CHICAGO, ILL.

**E**QUALLY welcome to these pages is a comparative newcomer whose letter follows. We are—as shouldn't we be?—aware of the definition of "Argosy," particularly in its more complimentary phases.

N.B., Mr. G., the sequel to "The Ninth Life" will appear in the ARGOSY for the ninth of December. We think it's an even better story than "The Ninth Life"—and we're sure you will, too.

**ANTHONY GIANNICO**

I wonder how many of your readers know what the word ARGOSY means. I was informed by Webster that it meant "a large richly freighted merchant-vessel", and believe you me, that's just what ARGOSY is. I think you ought to capitalize more on your excellent title.

I am only a new reader, but from now on a steady one. The story that sold me on your magazine was James Francis Dwyer's "When the Dyaks Dance", and "The Ninth Life" by Jack Mann sealed our friendship forever. Well, that's about all I have to say for now, except that I want to thank you for the enjoyment your magazine is bringing me.



# Looking Ahead!

## THE GOLDEN BONEYARD

Calling all snarks! American space-sailor makes good on Planetoid 104 (or is it Asteroid 666?) And the recipe for success is this: get thrown in jail on every planet; wreck the ship's gravity control; etherize the captain; run away with the most gorgeous brunette in all Cosmos; and blow up a holy mountain. And the wages of such celestial knavery will be a chair of sugar to ride upon, potato-sacks full of golden rings. . . . A super-screwy complete short novel of scientific centuries-to-come, by

DAVID V. REED

## BOMBS OVER CAIRO

From the playing fields of Eton comes a simple-minded Britisher to plumb the most sinister enigmas of the East. And without calling any of our characters any names, we may say that the whole thing revolved around a pomegranate.

A great story by

JOHN RUSSELL

A MASE McKAY story by CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON, and fine fiction by JOHNSTON McCULLEY, JIM KJELGAARD, JONATHAN STAGGE, and OTHERS

## COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—NOVEMBER 18TH

Statement of the ownership, management, etc., of ARGOSY, published weekly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1939. Required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933.

State of NEW YORK  
County of NEW YORK SS.

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared WILLIAM T. DEWART, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President of the Frank A. Munsey Company, publisher of ARGOSY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in Section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager are:

Publisher—The Frank A. Munsey Company, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—George W. Post, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor—Albert J. Gibney, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Business Manager—Harry B. Ward, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the Owners are: (If a corporation give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

The Frank A. Munsey Company, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

C. W. H. Corporation, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

William T. Dewart, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Mary W. Dewart, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

William T. Dewart, Jr., 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Thomas W. Dewart, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Mary Dewart Gleason, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:

None.

That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 2nd day of October, 1939.

GEORGE H. BOLLWINKEL

Notary Public Nassau County No. 118

Certificate Filed in New York County No. 455

New York Registers No. 1-B-276

Term Expires March 30, 1941

SEAL



**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



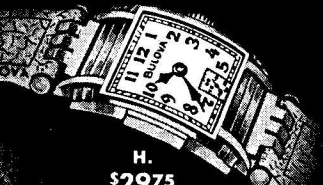
**F. \$1995**  
Newest style 17 jewel Heart Watch in 10K yellow rolled gold plate with bracelet to match. \$1.90 a month



**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 fillet lace tablecloth, 60 x 80 in. All these I offer at only \$19.95. Don't miss it — send order today.

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**"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.

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**MAIL ORDER DIVISION**  
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**1670 BROADWAY**  
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*"Thanks  
to Uncle Sam"*

—tobacco's better than ever!

... and Luckies always take the  
better grades!" says Ray Oglesby,  
tobacco auctioneer  
for 8 years.



**BENJAMIN HAWKS** of North Carolina shows Auctioneer Oglesby his fine tobacco seedlings—grown by new U. S. Government methods.

**RAY OGLESBY** in action. Among *independent* tobacco experts like this famous auctioneer, Luckies are the 2-to-1 favorite over all other brands.

**Q. WHY HAVE TOBACCO CROPS BEEN BETTER?**

A. Because, even though crops vary with weather conditions, Uncle Sam's new methods of improving soil, seed and plant-food have done a fine job.

**Q.** Do Luckies buy this better tobacco?

A. Yes, indeed — *independent* experts like Ray Oglesby tell you that Luckies always *have* bought the choicer grades of each crop. In fact, that's why Mr. Oglesby has smoked Luckies for 11 years.

**Q.** Do other tobacco experts prefer Luckies, too?

A. Among these skilled auctioneers, buyers and warehousemen, Luckies are the 2-to-1 favorite.

Try Luckies a week. You'll find them easy on your throat, for the "Toasting" process takes out certain harsh irritants found in all tobacco. You'll also know why... **WITH MEN WHO KNOW TOBACCO**

**BEST—IT'S LUCKIES 2 TO 1**



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Have you  
tried a  
**LUCKY**  
lately?