APR. 20

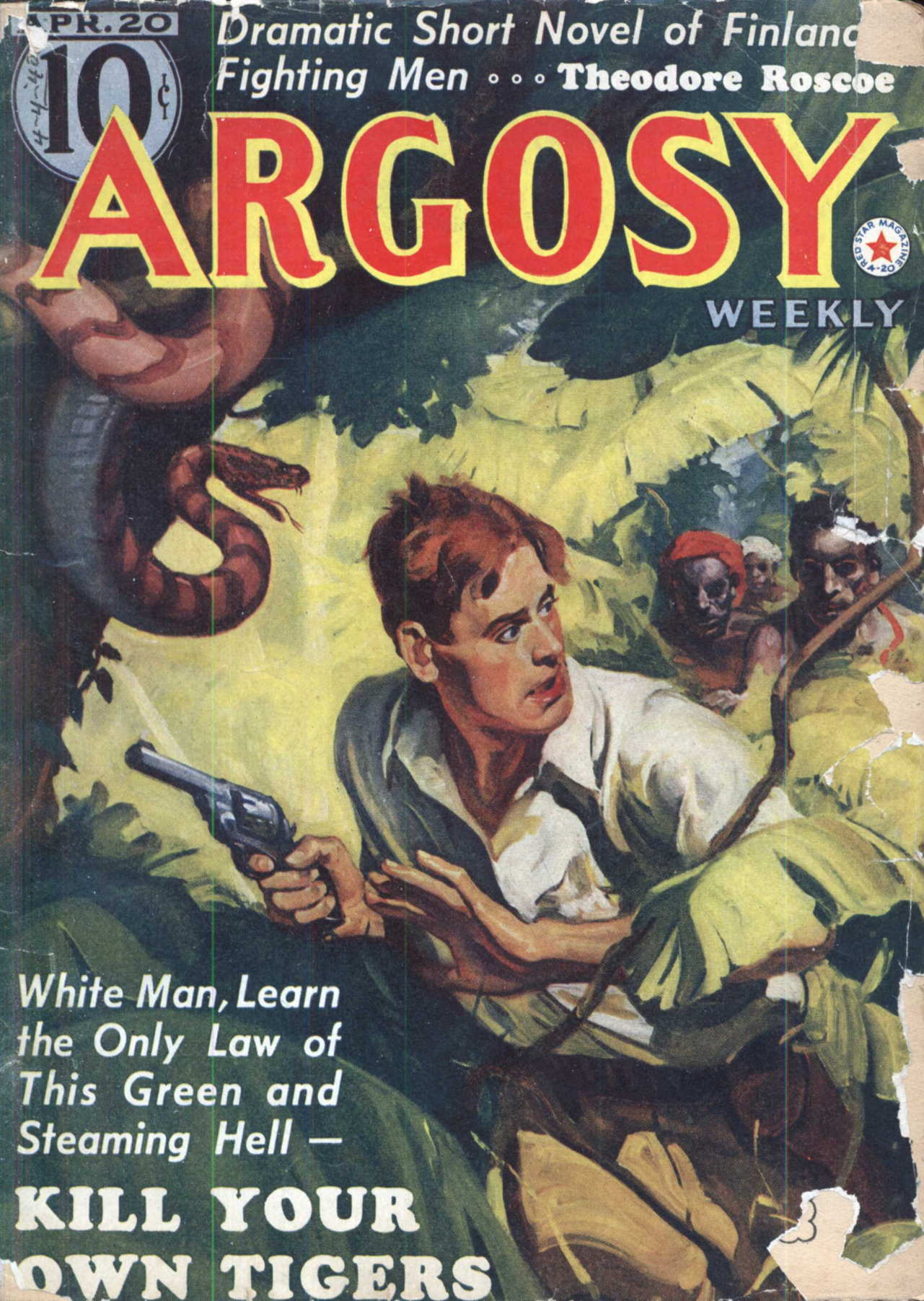
10¢

Dramatic Short Novel of Finland Fighting Men ••• **Theodore Roscoe**

ARGOSY

RED STAR MAGAZINE 4-20

WEEKLY



White Man, Learn the Only Law of This Green and Steaming Hell —

KILL YOUR OWN TIGERS

ACCOUNTING
the profession that pays-

Accountants command good income. Thousands needed. About 20,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. Many earn $2,000 to $10,000. We train you thoroughly at home in your spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeeping knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is personally given by staff of experienced C. P. A.'s. Low cost—easy terms. Write now for valuable 48-page book free, "Accounting, the Profession That Pays."

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION Dept. 458-H, Chicago

NEW TURN SIGNAL

FLASHES from REAR WINDOW—DASH Control

AGENTS A whirlwind seller. Drivers buy on flash demonstration. Dealers buy 3 to 12. Your profit mark-up as high as 264%. Biggest sensation of year. Rush name quick for facts and Demonstrator sample plan. All Free! Rush.

WATCH-MY-TURN SIGNAL CO., Dept. W-355 Walnut Bldg., Des Moines, Iowa

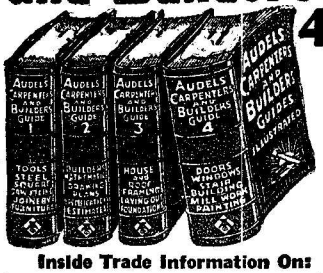
WANTED—MEN

to cast 5 and 10c Novelties, Toy Autos, Ashtrays, etc. Can be done in any spare room, basement or garage and no experience necessary. A rare opportunity to devote spare or full time to profitable work. Apply only if over 21.

METAL CAST PRODUCTS CO., Dept. B

1696 Boston Road **New York City**

AUDELS Carpenters and Builders Guides 4 vols. $6



Inside Trade Information for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Mechanics and all Woodworkers. These Guides give you the short-cut instructions that you want—including new methods, ideas, solutions, plans, systems and money saving suggestions. An easy progressive course for the apprentice and student. A practical daily helper and Quick Reference for the master worker. Carpenters everywhere are using these Guides as a Helping Hand to Easier Work, Better Work and Better Pay. To get this assistance for yourself, simply fill in and mail the FREE COUPON below.

Inside Trade Information On:

How to use the steel square—How to file and set saws—How to build furniture—How to use a miter box—How to use the chalk line—How to use rules and scales—How to make joints—Carpenters arithmetic—Solving mensuration problems—Estimating strength of timbers—How to set girders and sills—How to frame houses and roofs—How to estimate costs—How to build houses, barns, garages, bungalows, etc.—How to read and draw plans—Drawing up specifications—How to excavate—How to use settings 12, 13 and 17 on the steel square—How to build hoists and scaffolds—skylights—How to build stairs—How to put on interior trim—How to hang doors—How to lath—lay floors—How to paint

THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 W. 23rd St., New York City

Mail Audels Carpenters and Builders Guides, 4 vols., on 7 days' free trial. If O.K. I will remit $1 in 7 days, and $1 monthly until $6 is paid. Otherwise I will return them. No obligation unless I am satisfied.

Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....

Reference.....BUCK

FLAME-GUN Destroys Weeds Does Work of 4 Men!

Hauck Kerosene Flame-Gun—2000° F. controlled heat—quickly, easily, economically destroys weeds (seeds and all), brush, other objectionable growths. Keeps roadways, fences, irrigation ditches, orchards, etc., clean. Hundred and one uses. Inexpensive—Safe—Easy to use. Pays for itself in time and money saved. 10 day Free Trial. Write for Free booklet and special introductory price.

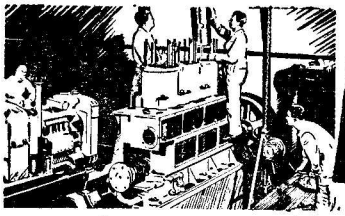
Hauck Mfg. Co., 119 Tenth St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

NEW BENJAMIN AIR PISTOLS WITH MULTIPLE LEVER HAND PUMP FOR TARGET-SMALL GAME-CAMPING-ETC.

Made in U. S. A.

WRITE TODAY

Guaranteed-Accurate-Practical-Economical-Safe-Clean-Quiet. Adjustable Force-Amazing Maximum Velocity. No smoke or fumes. Bolt Action-Hammer Fire-Hair Trigger-Safety Lock-Hand Pump. Single Shot BB $8.50; Single Shot cal. 177 or 22 with rifled barrel $8.50; BB 8-Shot $10.00; Holster $2.00. Also a complete Line of Benjamin Genuine Compressed Air Rifles for BB and cal. 177 or 22. No license required from dealer or factory. Ask for complete specifications and FreeTargets. BENJAMIN AIR RIFLE CO., 887 Marion St., St. Louis, Mo., U.S.A.



Complete, Practical, Profitable

DIESEL Training

—including

AUTO MECHANICS & MACHINE SHOP PRACTICE

No matter where you are or what you do, National Schools now offers immediate training to meet your specific needs. For those seeking immediate shop training as well as for those who cannot give up present employment.

Pre-testing training for you in fast growing Diesel-Auto industry. For 35 years National has helped ambitious men to bigger pay, more job security. Established 1905.

Amazing facts yours for the asking. Mail the coupon today.

NATIONAL SCHOOLS

FREE **Request for Free Literature**

NATIONAL SCHOOLS, Dept. MG-4
4000 South Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, Calif.

Please send me, without obligation, your FREE LITERATURE and information about Diesel-Auto opportunities.

NAME_____AGE_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____STATE_____

ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 298 CONTENTS FOR APRIL 20, 1940 Number 4

Cover by Rudolph Belarksi
Illustrating Kill Your Own Tigers

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President & Treasurer; WILLIAM DEWART, JR., Secretary

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

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE
111 Rue Réaumur

Published weekly. Single copies 10 cents. By the year $4.00; in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, $5.00. Other countries, $7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896, at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A.

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

Complete Short Novel

Death Below Zero

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "Three Men and a Tub," "Remember Tomorrow," etc.

These are the Finns: They move fleetly and in silence to the frontiers of their snow world, their bright knives lifted against the tyrant's legions. They are heroes, and to be one of them the American must first feel the scourge of their fierce loyalty

CHAPTER I

FINLANDIA

AS THEY ranged their skis against the frozen earthen wall and trotted down the icy steps into the dugout, the men were silent. Then, in the underground room, dim-lit by the charcoal burner, snug with its shadowy corners and low-beamed ceiling and familiar scent of pine and earth and leather and furs, they stood together a moment, wordless, gratefully soaking in the security and warmth.

From nowhere the Russians came, to make them prisoners

There was the heavy sound of their breathing magnified by the close confinement of the room—panting, grunts, sighs of relaxation and relief—then the moment of gratitude was gone. One of them, who had opened his mouth to speak, shut his teeth together with a snap.

Relaxation sagged into fatigue. Something dogged and weary came into their faces. Their shoulders drooped. As if by some common impulse, their eyes went to a tier of bunks at the dugout's left. Anger, apprehension, a sort of bafflement, sadness came into their expressions.

They shifted their stares and lowered their eyes and stood helplessly, as though afraid to look at each other, in the way of men embarrassed by emotion.

Then the eldest of the five walked slowly across the room to a corner cupboard, on the door of which eight names were written in blue chalk. Quietly, with the thumb of his great bearskin mitten, he rubbed out *Päätalo* and *Suojanen.*

The group on the threshold broke up. Distributing themselves about the

room, they unlimbered their rifles, removed their hooded snow-cloaks, unstrapped their knapsacks and body harness, unbuttoned their gray woollen tunics; everyone at once active and preoccupied with such things as stiff belt-buckles and hooks.

The white-mustached eldest, who was their officer, had turned hastily from the cupboard and tugged off his mitts to make a business of lighting the little fish-oil lamp.

The men blinked in the smoky light and kept their eyes on their busy fingers. They did not look at each other, and seemed reluctant to leave off activity, each turning to some personal little task as if in want of something to do.

Bjorn, the big Swedish lumberjack from Kiruna, slumped massive and sullen-eyed at the table and, with honing-stone and spittle, began to sharpen his bone-handled knife.

Terjesen, the black-haired little Norwegian, set busily to cleaning his machine-gun pistol.

Tall Reino Harkenen stood stolidly examining a little brown-rimmed hole in the peaked hood of his snow-cape; then, as if it were of no consequence, he tossed the garment aside, walked to the iron stove and busied himself over a pan of ski wax.

Having divested himself of his outer clothing, Vibart, their captain, was writing slowly and with great concentration in a worn, pencil-smudged notebook.

Only Kiv, the youngster from Helsingfors, couldn't seem to find something to do. For several moments he stared vacantly at the cupboard door where two names had been erased from the locker-list; then his features contorted, he wheeled and flung himself face-down in his bunk, clutching at the bearskin covering.

Vibart sighed, tucked his notebook into his tunic and walked over to touch the boy's shoulder. Sympathy in his white-browed blue eyes leavened the wooden matter-of-factness of his speech.

"It is too bad, Kiv. Not only because Päätalo was your cousin. His loss with that of Suojanen will be hard for this regiment to replace. Two of Finland's best soldiers." The captain shook his head. "It is a bad day for our patrol. But courage, Kiv! We shall make the Russian pay for it. We must grit our teeth and go on. *Sisu!*"

IT WAS a word without equivalent in a language other than Finnish—it meant fearlessness and endurance, patience and iron self-will, the ability to carry on in the face of terrible hardship, to fight for one's homeland and against overwhelming odds, to live with honor or die defending one's convictions.

A word born of the heart of Finland, land of the woods and lakes, the Arctic winter and brief golden summer, the evergreen wilderness and the Polar snowline—Finland, the country that minds its business and pays its debts and dies on the frontier of civilization defending Honor, Individualism and Democracy.

"Sisu!"

Kiv said without looking up, "I know. I do not weep. I am tired."

"Ah, tired," said Terjeson, looking over shyly. "Forty miles of patrol in one night would tire Thor, himself. And then to run into that Soviet wolf-pack, and have to fight our way out. A thousand of them! But we left at least a hundred dead. You fought bravely, boy."

At the stove Harkenen said, "The curs! If they had not stumbled into us by demon's luck we could have bombed that Murmansk Railway in half a dozen

places. Three more kilometers and we would have reached the bridge."

Big Bjorn struck the table with the flat of a five-pound hand. "Anyway it should not have happened!"

They looked at him. His pale eyes were bitter under a forelock of taffy hair. His great shoulders were hunched combatively. Jaw thrust angrily, a down-twist of truculence to his mouth, he invited their question.

Harkenen squinted, "What do you mean, Big Bjorn? What do you mean —*anyway.*"

"I mean we shouldn't have run into those Russians. If we'd had an eight-man patrol it would have meant another one to scout in advance. Terjeson wouldn't have had to cover by himself so much territory. His sector is where the Soviet dogs were in ambush. If the American had been with us this disaster would not have happened." Big Bjorn glared around the dugout challengingly. "But where is the American?"

Vibart said placidly, "Why, he's on leave, Big Bjorn. You know he had permission to accompany that group of war correspondents to Lhäteenmäki."

"So. And where was he last week when we attempted to cross into Russia and bomb the Murmansk Railroad?"

"Where? Laid up at the Red Cross station with frost bite."

The Swede nodded dourly. "And was it frost bite that took him off duty the night our patrol made its penetration over the enemy border?"

"Last month?" Vibart lifted his shoulders. "A summons of some kind to General Headquarters. He had been on duty for seventy hours."

Big Bjorn grunted, "Huh!"

Harkenen rounded from the stove, frowning. "Look here, man. What the devil are you getting at?"

"It's plain as the smell of a Muscovite, what I'm getting at. Every time our patrol risks its neck going into Russian territory, the American isn't around. Maybe it's special leave and maybe it's the frost bite. Maybe it isn't. Maybe"—the Swede paused for emphasis—"maybe it's —"

Captain Vibart raised a protesting hand. "Do not say it, Bjorn."

"Coward!"

Bjorn used the Swedish word. For the strange truth is that the Finns have no word meaning coward; they have their word *Sisu,* and for them that is enough.

Vibart's fatherly, leather-weathered countenance was shocked.

"No, no, Bjorn! That is not right!"

The big man's sandy face was stubbornly scornful. His pale eyes sneered through the smoke-yellow smudge of the fish-oil lamp. "You do not speak with full conviction, Captain Vibart. Perhaps you, yourself, have been wondering about this Yankee champion."

THE captain's blue eyes were troubled by this. His own forthright honesty, his stolid Finn nature was not easily suspicious. So now the Swede's sharp indictment disturbed him.

He said slowly, tugging at his walrus mustache, "You should not judge a fellow soldier too quickly, Big Bjorn. It is not a coward who comes all the way from America to help Finland defend her liberty. It is not for us to question a man who joins our army at ten *marks* a week, willing to risk his life for our cause—"

"He did not come from America," the Swede said bluntly. "He came as a soldier of fortune from Spain."

"Would that more of them would come."

"And," Big Bjorn pointed a six-inch

finger, ignoring the captain's comment, "he came out of one of Franco's prisons. He was fighting with the Loyalists of Madrid. First the Spainsh Loyalists. Now Finland. It would not seem the cause, but the fighting that interests our Yankee, eh? Merely a professional soldier, and not too good, I think."

Harkenen spoke out, frowning, "You do condemn harshly, Big Bjorn. Because he had been rewarded three days' leave—"

"It is not just that of which I speak, Tall Reino, and you know it. I repeat, whenever our patrol is ordered to raid Soviet territory he does not go."

"You cannot blame a man for frost bite. Coming from Spain, he is hardly accustomed to our winter."

"Explain then how that night he was supposed to be in hospital our cook, Vapaa, saw him in Lieksa Village talking in a café to little Ingrid of the Lotta Svärd."

"As he said himself, the doctors had dismissed him."

"*Ja!* Dismissed. And from duty also. Especially now that we are skiing into Russia on dangerous raids and faced with those well-trained Komsomol troops from Leningrad led by that Red devil they call the Wolf!" Big Bjorn struck the table angrily. "I say the Yankee is afraid."

Harkenen snapped, "He is not afraid! Give him time. You will see. He is as good a man as any of us in the Lightning Patrol." He tapped the zigzag silver insignia on his tunic sleeve. "I know the Yankee has nerve. So! I skied against him in the 1936 Olympics."

Terjeson spoke in mildly, looking across the bowl of his great curved briar as he applied match to black tobacco, "Yes, it is true he is a wonderful skier."

The big Swede snorted derisively, and Harkenen looked at him sharply. "Is it that you are a little envious of the Yankee's skill, my brave Bjorn?" he asked. "Because he beat you the first day at the front on that ski-race through the woods?

"Come, admit!" He slapped the man's wide shoulder amiably. "Or is it that the Yankee has twice escorted to the coffee house our pretty little Ingrid of the Lotta Svärd."

Harkenen spoke pleasantly, and Terjeson smiled as he puffed his pipe, and Captain Vibart's features reflected his relief—the discussion hadn't become openly acrimonious. His men were battle-nerved, he knew, and suffering that letdown which comes after hours of desperate work and hair-trigger contact with death.

But the big Scandinavian wasn't pacified; his eyes were sulky and at mention of the girl his cheekbones had heated darkly. "Of course," He faced Harkenen, resentful. "Ingrid is also in the matter. Not that I care, personally, whom she goes out with. Let her make dates with a mongrel, for all of me. But who wants the favorite of our patrol bestowing her kisses on a malingerer? The American is afraid to scout the Russian border, I say. He is afraid to meet the Red Wolf. Is it not the truth, Kiv?"

He addressed the query to the boy outsprawled in the bunk; and Kiv raised himself up on one elbow, regarding those in the dugout shiny-eyed.

"Maybe Big Bjorn is right," he said in a choky, constricted tone. "If the American had been with our patrol tonight, we might never have been ambushed. Poor Päätalo might not have been killed."

"There!" Big Bjorn glared at the others, confirmed. "The boy sees it, too.

This Yankee who calls himself a soldier —who boasts of his war record in Spain and brags of winning the ski-jump in the Olympics—where is he when the fighting grows most dangerous? With frost bite. Off duty. Escorting a batch of war correspondents. Romancing with the Lotta Svärd! Especially when the Red Wolf is about."

Vibart gave the Swede a hard stare. His voice was low, controlled; his elderly brow contracted angrily. "I forbid this, Bjorn. In Finland a man's honor is not lightly questioned. Rand no more than mentioned his soldiering in Spain, so that I had forgotten he was there. Nor have I heard him brag of his championship on skis.

"If he has been off duty each time we have raided across the border that is no indication of deliberate slack or cowardice. It is not fair to speak so of one who is not present to defend himself. The Yankee would demand an accounting of you, were he on hand to speak up."

There was a swish of furs in the doorway. A voice spoke out bluntly, "I *am* on hand!"

The five in the dugout stared. At Adam Rand, whose American jaw was set like New England granite, whose fists were knotted into bludgeons at his side, and who looked as if he were going to do a whole lot more than speak up.

CHAPTER II

WHITE GHOSTS AT WAR

FOR a moment the air was electric. The men looked at Adam Rand, and Adam looked straight at Bjorn with an unflinching fixity that held and locked with the Swede's gaze. Nobody spoke. Nobody moved.

Adam then said in a tight voice, "Well, it looks like someone in here has been talking behind my back. It was you, wasn't it, Bjorn?"

"Yes," said Bjorn. "And I am not afraid to talk to your face."

He sat clutching the knife he had been honing—that bone-handled crescent-tipped blade called a *puukko,* the traditional Finnish fighting weapon—and as he spoke his fingers tightened their grip on the knife.

Adam said thinly, "What was it you were saying?"

Big Bjorn started to answer, then paused, carefully laid aside the knife and leaned back in his chair with folded arms. He looked at Adam and spoke deliberately. "I said you were shirking patrol duty. I said when the going was tough you didn't have the guts."

The dugout was tense. Fists clenched, Adam took a step forward. Bjorn pulled a leg back against his chair, assumed a crouch, ready to spring. Then Adam Rand didn't strike out. His eyes, going past the big man in mid-room, touched and fixed on the cupboard on which two of the eight chalked names had been erased. He started inadvertently.

"Päätalo and Suojanen!"

Captain Vibart said in a low voice, "Yes, Rand."

"I'm sorry." Adam turned to direct the words at Kiv. Under his breath he muttered in English, "Hell!" He tugged off his brown fur hat, stuffed it into the pocket of his bearskin coat; shrugged off his coat and turned to hang it on a wall peg.

Then, fumbling a packet of cigarettes from the breast pocket of his tunic, he rounded on Vibart. His eyes were apologetic as he cupped a match-flare to the cigarette and said, "That's too bad, Captain. They were fine soldiers." He looked down at his cigarette. "I heard it from Vapaa just now as I came past

the field kitchen. He said you were ambushed around midnight. Not far from your objective."

Vibart nodded. "We were thirty kilometers within the enemy border."

Harkenen said frankly, "It was a damn close call. We missed you, Rand."

Big Bjorn sneered, "So did the Russians."

Adam wheeled toward the table. Flush crimsoned his throat, cheeks, forehead. Swelled muscles stood out on his jaws. He regarded the Swede steadily with hot blue eyes, then with an effort of control, raised his hand and brushed back his crisp, chestnut hair.

"I'd like to have been with you on that raid. My tough luck to be assigned as interpreter for those news men. I tried to get out of it." He paused, dropped his open hand. "Why don't you like me, Bjorn?"

THE Swede stood up. Six feet nine. Shoulders wide as a door. Huge-chested. His massive, taffy-colored head bowed under the ceiling beams. He said, flat-lipped, looking down, "I think you are a tin soldier. What is the American expression—a stuffed shirt?"

"Why?"

"You Yankees are all the same. You come here advertised as the great skiing champion—the famous soldier who rushes to Finland to be first in the International Brigade—a hero of democracy. I read it in the Stockholm papers."

"I didn't know it was in the papers."

"Yankees do nothing without publicity. Everything is brass bands, like Barnum. We Scandinavians—we fight, we die, we do not have our picture in the papers, we do not come to this war as star performers to make big names for ourselves in a three-ring circus. What is a Communist doing in the Finnish Army anyway?"

Adam clenched his hand. "I am not a Communist."

"You were with the Loyalist Army in Madrid."

"I was fighting for the Spanish Republic. Fighting to preserve democracy in Spain. It was only after Franco with the help of the Nazis smashed the Republican Government that the Communists gained control of the Loyalist armies."

"So now you are fighting against the Communists?"

"I am fighting for Finland," Adam said evenly. "For a tiny country invaded by a gaint. For a people whose democracy is the nearest thing in Europe to that of America."

Big Bjorn's lip curled. "You do not seem to be doing much fighting, that is all. And"—he squinted, remembering—"you talk a lot of soldering for one who deplores the field of battle. Did you not tell little Ingrid that you thought the odds against Finland almost hopeless?"

Adam turned to Captain Vibart. "Everyone knows that," he said calmly. "Ingrid knew what I meant. I said, too, that I thought it was a pity. That for my own part I was probably throwing my life away—what good could I do fighting for Finland when big people in my own country were selling millions of dollars worth of iron and airplane oil to Russia?

"I said the case for democracy was hopeless unless the whole democratic world aided Finland. But I'm here, whether it's hopeless or not. Just as I was in Spain when Madrid was the under dog." Adam lifted his shoulders. "Bjorn seems to take my feelings on the subject as lack of morale."

"Just a tin soldier," said Bjorn.

Adam pivoted and swung. Vibart caught his arm, yanking him back. Bjorn's five-pound fist whisked the tip of Adam's nose just as Harkenen caught the collar and Terjeson tackled the ankles of the lunging Swede.

A chair crashed over backward; the dugout was crowded with scuffling figures; grunts, rapid breathing, muffled oaths; the Swede cursing, "I'll break his neck!" and Adam muttering, "I'll knock the silly block off that Squarehead!" and Vibart, who knew his men, striking at both of them, crying fiercely, "Not in here, you idiots! Inspection this morning! Hotheads! If you want to fight, take it out on the Russians!"

Then, into the dugout, penetrating the close-walled furore, shrilled a high-pitched, whistling *creeeee*. The whistle sound loudened, came in quick sharp spurts, insistent. Instantly the struggling men broke apart. All of them stared at the blanketed door through which the whistling came. Then with one accord they sprang for their rifles, flung themselves at the door and rushed pellmell up the dugout steps.

The Russians were there.

ADAM at first couldn't see very well. In the gray dark of that sub-zero morning, winter in a land of winter, the trench was a canal of icy shadow alive with the vague figures of running ghosts.

Glims of light leaked briefly from dugout doorways as shapeless men plunged up from underground. All up and down the trench these apparitional figures were appearing; wraiths crowding the firing step. Rifles gleamed darkly in the shadowy confusion, knives glinted, here and there Adam saw the white of an eye.

He was not as yet used to this semi-Arctic darkness in which his Finn companions could apparently see like cats, and it took a moment for his vision to sharpen. The polar cold watered his eyes, but the stinging air in his lungs went through him like shock, bracing, electrical, reviving every nerve. He could make out the figures of the running officers, the white-clad Civic Guards, the signalmen spreading the alarm; it was extraordinary with what swiftness and dispatch the trench stood to battle position—how silently the company moved.

Here was no shouting, no jostling, no blundering and indirection. Every man knew his place, and after that first flurry of whistles the trench silenced to a muffled hush, like a crouching animal, waiting.

Adam took his place on the firing step between Harkenen and Kiv. He could feel the tension of the men beside him, but peering across the embrasure, he could see nothing. Then slowly, like a developing film, the terrain came into view—a flat, gray-white expanse of snow sweeping downslope toward a shrub line of spruce five hundred yards ahead, darkness blurring the pine woods beyond, and the sky an overall canopy of low-hanging, motionless smoky clouds.

The snowscape was dim, barely visible in a gloom between day and night. Then as his vision became adjusted to the gloom, Adam could make out two figures crawling in the snow, midway between the trench and the distant spruce.

They wore the white-hooded capes of Finns, and they seemed to be in trouble, clutching each other and floundering awkwardly, bent low as they advanced across the drifts. Then three more, almost invisible in their capes, emerged from the spruce and came running.

Adam's throat tightened. He knew what was coming behind those outpost guards, but as usual the first crash of rifle fire, blazing out from the spruce, came as a startling shock.

Almost instantly the numbness was gone, and, as an old campaigner overcoming a brief twinge of stage-fright, he listened stolidly to the rush of bullets splattering against the outer parapet, humming overhead, kicking up gravel from the back wall. A spurt of snow jumped through the embrasure and stung against his face. The Russians were rotten shots.

Now jets of steady flame were blazing from the line of spruce, echoing through the darkness as a savage mechanical chatter. The Russians were trying to pick off the Finn guardsmen with machine guns. But the guards were going to make it.

The three in the rear, racing low to the snow, caught up with the two who were wounded, swept them forward in their rush and gained the parapet not far from Adam's post. He sighed gratefully as he heard them dropping into the trench. That had been a shave!

But he had little time for thankfulness; the guards were hardly home before the spruce at the bottom of the slope burst into a solid sheet of fire, the snowscape was swept as though by a hurricane, bullets stormed over the trench as though the air were cut through by a flying steel wind, and the Russians were charging up the slope with a wild roar.

ADAM had been in two battles on the Karelian Isthmus, but that had been mostly skirmishing. This was his first experience with a Russian charge. He had heard of these steamroller assaults, but even at Guadalajara had he seen no charge as fantastic.

Pouring out of the spruce, the gray troops of the Soviet came like waves. At the slope-bottom they were running, but as they started uphill they began to flounder in the drifts, breaking through the salty crusts, lifting their legs and churning the snow like novices impeded by snowshoes.

As the front rank slowed, the mass behind pushed them on. They faced the trench squarely and advanced up the slope, rank on rank, boots crunching the crusts, knees pumping, sweeping the drifts with their long clumsy overcoats, moving up like some strange horde of Martian gymnasts on parade.

Halfway up the slope, the charge slowed down to wading pace, the front rank plowing through deeper and deeper drifts. As the Russians sank up to their boot-tops, it looked as if they were walking on their knees; gray lines of legless creatures, their faces blurred in mass; row after row of gray-peaked Soviet helmets in weaving silhouette.

Sluggishly they came on, nearer and nearer, like some slope-climbing, land-obliterating avalanche. The officers shouted. Non-coms drove their squads forward with blows. The men kept up a ululating, long-drawn howl like *"Urrraaaah!"*

In that netherworldish unlighted dawn the sight was appalling. There must have been two thousand men in that oncoming, squalling mass. Adam, clutching his Bofors rifle, watched in a horror of fascination.

The thing was ghastly. Not for the two hundred Finns, entrenched. But for that Russian horde. The stupidity of this mad charge; waves of men swarming forward like senseless animals, coming like a leaderless herd. There had been no artillery preparation. Adam could see no troops covering their flank. He had the feeling of facing

something colossal, brutal and witless like the stampede of cattle thundering toward a cliff.

He thought: "The fools! The poor, crazy fools!" and for a second he almost felt pity. He knew what was going to happen.

It happened.

Flash! That was the battery of searchlights ambushed along the parapet, a half-dozen giant lamps floodlighting the snow-slope below as bright as day. Struck by dazzling streams of light, blinded by the sudden glare, the Russian front rank stalled and staggered as though hit by a fusillade of rifle fire.

Adam could see the stark faces of the Slavs, their stunned eyes; see the gray lines shock backward, the long-coated men twist and turn their heads as if trying to dodge the light-glare. He heard Captain Vibart pass behind him; give a low-voiced command. In automatic obedience, he threw the bolt and took aim with his rifle. Up and down the trench the rifle-bolts made a faint, ugly clashing.

The Russians were squalling forward again. Two hundred yards from the trench. A hundred and fifty. A hundred yards.

"Fire!"

Simultaneous flame-jets slashed through embrasures the length of the trench. One violent, defending crash. Adam saw the Russian front rank fall apart like a shaky fence cut to pieces. Immediately the gaps were filled, only to be again blown apart. The Russian charge stalled. Rows of kneeling men in his gun-sights. A thundering volley that whistled over the trench, a keening tempest of lead. An answering blast from the trench. Then the gunfire steadying into a continuous, deafening din; the *bankety-bang-bang* of the Bofors fusing with the crash of Russian Nagants, the crack of Mauser pistols, the timpani of Nordenfeldt automatics, spurty roar of light machine guns and riveting-hammer pounding of heavy Spandaus.

ADAM fired shot after shot, unfeelingly, automatically, unaware of anything save the blurred gray mass in his rifle-sights. His shoulder ached to the jolt of the rifle-butt; smoke stung acrid in his nostrils; the cold bit into his hands; he was finally conscious of powder fumes and a nearby stench of blood. But he never realized until afterward that the blood was in his own mouth, that the corner of his lip had been slashed, perhaps by a grenade fragment.

There was a bad quarter hour when the Russians were throwing hand bombs, and a number in the trench were hit. Snow and ice flew with blasts of earth across the parapet. Twenty feet distant from Adam the trench went up in an ear-splitting explosion of white fire. He was stunned and sickened, and when the fumes wandered away he saw an officer of the Civil Guard with the side of his jaw torn off, lying dead, and a Finn from the Reindeer Patrol doubled, sobbing, clutching bloody hands to his stomach.

At his left side, young Kiv began to cry; Adam could see the tears washing down the boy's cheek, wetting the butt of his gun. Harkenen, at Adam's right, was swearing luridly; meaningless, blasphemous, hearty oaths. After that Adam did not take his eye from the gun-sights.

He saw the Russian battalion dissolving, melting backward, melting down to gray lumps in threshed patches of scarlet snow. He heard the screams of the wounded and dying as an obli-

gato to the pandemonium of the guns. He saw the terrific explosion as a squad of Soviet suicide bombers, charging forward to throw grenades, stepped on the snow-hidden trigger of a land mine.

Bits of scorched iron, fragments of cloth and fragments of something that wasn't cloth seemed to shower down into the trench for minutes afterward. Adam, tasting blood, was nauseated. The man beyond Harkenen was hit in his right eye, and somewhere out there in that gray, squirming pile-up of Russians a wounded man was caterwauling.

When the order came to go over the top, Adam was glad for the chance of physical activity. He scaled the parapet with the others, rushed downslope with the furious company of Finns. The riddled Russian battalion, unable to face those crescent-tipped Finnish knives, broke and fled.

There was some skirmishing in the spruce with the remnants of the Soviet attack. Adam Rand, Kiv and Harkenen broke up a machine-gun nest in the evergreens; then the all-clear signal was given. Adam had twisted his ankle stepping on a dead arm under the snow. He was limping slightly, and he was the last of his patrol to reach the trench, and he found Big Bjorn in the dugout, scowling and red-eyed, waiting for him to come back.

CHAPTER III

RED WOLF

THE Swede had a crumpled paper in his hand, and as Adam entered the dugout behind Kiv and Harkenen, Bjorn said with a leer, "I was hoping you'd turn up. Do you read Russian, Rand?"

Adam snapped, "Why?"

"This," Big Bjorn held out the paper.

Terjeson, from a bunk, pointed his pipe. "Bjorn says he found that after the battle. Out there in the trench."

"Right in front of our dugout. It was in that meat tin," Bjorn indicated a rusty tin can on the table. "I saw there was a stone tied to the can, and thinking that was funny, I picked it up. This scrap of paper was inside. Looks like a message, and it's in Russian."

Adam frowned at the penciled scrawl.

Harkenen said, "Those are Russians characters, all right."

The men examined the paper curiously, holding it close to the fish-oil light; and Big Bjorn said with a caustic smile to Adam, "I thought you could read Russian since you'd been in Spain with the Communists."

"No, I can't read Russian." Adam was too tired to quarrel with the Swede, and he turned wearily to discard his cartridge belt and rifle; then limped to the stove to warm his stiff hands. The others divested themselves of belts and guns; then, insisted of the usual post mortem of battle and casualties, then stood about the table with Bjorn discussing the strange message he had found.

Voices blurred in Adam's hearing; he was aware of pain in his gashed lip, and the abrupt warmth and stuffiness of the dugout made him a little dizzy. A scent of coffee and roast venison and a cheery voice announcing, "Here it is, boys!" revived him. Arms laden with kitchen-pails, apple-cheeked Vapaa, plump company cook, was in the doorway.

The men snatched for their mess kits as Vapaa advanced beaming. "Nothing like a hearty meal after a little exercise with the Russians. You make hash of the Bear; I make mine with venison."

He always had it ready, too. Adam marveled, for he had seen the plump

Finn on the firing step with the others. Vapaa was a genius. He had been top chef of the largest hotel in Helsinki; he could mix marksmanship with cookery and somehow slaughter Russians and come out of it with a magnificent dinner ready. Adam learned he had other accomplishments.

For Big Bjorn cried, "Vapaa! Just our man. He can speak a dozen languages. Here, Vapaa, you can read Russian. Read to us that!"

The soldiers, greedy over coffee, halted their swigging and lowered steaming mugs as Vapaa pridefully adjusted his spectacles. There was a baited pause. Then Vapaa was frowning at the paper, troubled; when the cook looked up over his glasses his expression altered to excitement.

"This is something!" he exclaimed.

Kiv blurted, "What is it?"

Vapaa traced the penciled scrawl with his finger. He read:

"Will the famous ski champions of the so-called Lightning Patrol of the Lähteenmäki Front dare to choose a champion who would give me the honor of single combat in a meeting at the ruined sawmill on the Soviet Border tomorrow midnight—weapons to be sabers? I will come alone, trusting to the dauntless honor of the Finns.

"Captain Alexi Strov—thirty-ninth Komosmol Division, U. S. S. R.—called the Red Wolf."

IN THE silence that followed, the fried hash in the aluminum pail made a loud sizzling. Then everyone spoke at once. Vapaa: "It is a trap!" Terjeson: "A challenge from the Wolf!" Big Bjorn: "I shall go!" Harkenen: "Wait, I do not think it a trap. I once heard of this Russian, Strov—the best swordsman of the Soviets. But I am better!" Kiv: "I will go myself!"

Vapaa cried, "No, no, boys. If Papa Vibart were here—Papa Vibart will not let you go."

Big Bjorn growled, "To hell with Papa Vibart. He is now at headquarters and doesn't have to know. I will go and meet this Wolf and hew him to pieces." He grinned.

At once there were protests from Harkenen, Kiv, Terjeson: "Why should Bjorn have this honor?" . . . "Let me go!" . . . "The challenge is mine!" . . . Adam Rand added his own voice to the clamor, but his eyes were uneasy, and he was thinking: "Tomorrow night . . . Strov!" He suspected the outcome of this, and he was not surprised to hear Big Bjorn blustering, "All right then, if you will not permit the honor to me. Let us draw lots!"

The others nodded.

Nothing to do but acquiesce; pull up a chair to the table. The men leaned forward eagerly as Bjorn, at table's head, broke matches and shuffled them, keeping his hands under the board. The two Finns drew; swore at the splinters. Terjeson was third, glaring at a two-inch stick. Adam drew last.

Big Bjorn shuffled the two remaining sticks under the table; held out clenched fists. Adam said, "Left." The Swede scowled disappointment, dropping a full-sized match from his right fist. Adam's match, a half-inch was shortest.

It seemed to Adam that he sat there for at least five minutes, with the feel of blood draining out of his face. He could hear the others congratulating him; Harkenen's, "Lucky devil!" Terjeson's admiring, "Kill him for us, Yankee!" Bjorn growling something about Americans always getting a chance at everything, and young Kiv, pounding the table, "We want the hide

of this Wolf!" Then he could hear the chorused words petering out, a final oppressive silence.

He did not break that silence.

Harkenen was on his feet, facing him, a look of doubt in his dark clear eyes.

"What is it, Rand? You do not speak. You will go, of course, to meet this Strov the Wolf—"

Adam's lips felt numb, his mouth stuffed with sawdust.

"No, Tall Reino. I have—I have just remembered. I am to pick up the war correspondents at Lähteenmäki tomorrow night. Orders from Staff Headquarters. I cannot go to meet Strov at the border sawmill."

Harkenen said levelly, "You can get yourself excused from this Lähteenmäki assignment, Rand. A girl—one of the Lotta Svärd—could do it."

Adam shook his head. "Impossible. I accepted it as a favor. As a matter of fact, a favor to Ingrid—"

He got no further.

"Dishonor our patrol to do favors for a girl?" It happened so swiftly Adam had no chance to see it coming. From Kiv. Kiv, overwrought, tortured by the death of his cousin Päätalo. His eyes full of tears; face white with passion.

Lashing out swiftly with his hand, he caught Adam savagely across the mouth. "For you, that! Bjorn was right! A stuffed shirt. Coward. Afraid to fight the Wolf, or even me!"

Blood gushing from his torn lip, his whole face stinging, Adam looked at the boy drearily. In blurred background he saw the hard stares of Terjeson, Harkenen and Vapaa, and Big Bjorn's sneering grin. All Adam said was, "Of course I won't fight you, Kiv." Then pushing back his mess kit, he rose, grabbed his coat and left the dugout.

ADAM reached Lähteenmäki at four in the evening, speeding down into the white valley through a primrose-tinted twilight as clear and crystaline as glass. He coasted down to the outskirts of the village; deadstopped in a spray of snow before a jagged black wall; shouldered his skis and proceeded up the icy, cobblestone street on foot.

Broken and ruptured, the stone walls of Lähteenmäki stood in stark silhouette against the tinted winter sky. Roofless cottages, their yawning doorways spilling little glaciers of debris. Black-windowed buildings, scarred by iron and fire. Everywhere there was ugly evidence of destruction and collapse: shored-up piles of shattered timber; mounds of masonry and smashed glass; chimneys standing solitary where a house had burned; great mounds of rubble, scrap, unidentifiable junk.

A light snowfall had tried its kindliest to hide this vandalism, but the ruin was stark in icy twilight. Adam came to what had been a central square; halted to scan the prospect. An attempt had been made here to clear away the ruin. Walls were propped up; roofs boarded over; a number of the buildings were habitable.

He stood by the corner of a Lutheran church that loomed up over the desolation as a burned-out shell, found himself looking down on the stiff-frozen form of an Eskimo puppy. Adam's jaw hardened. The Soviet bombing planes were more accurate than their infantry. They'd done a good job here.

Moodily he headed across the snowy square, aiming his steps for the two-story pink-fronted inn where the war correspondents were quartered. Then, changing his mind, he tangented toward a little shop tucked in between

a fire-gutted schoolhouse and a deserted bakery. Chinks of light from the blanket-covered windows showed the proprietor to be at home; a bell tinkled as Adam opened the door; he closed it swiftly behind him against the cold and stood peering into the dim-lit glooms.

A brown face, wrinkled as a walnut, squinted at him across a counter piled with drygoods. He was greeted by the gesture of a bandaged hand. A reedy voice piping, "Welcome, soldier!"

Adam saluted. "Greetings, grandmother." He swung a friendly knee on the counter; leaned across the bolts of calico and gingham to ask eagerly, "Now don't disappoint me—did it come?"

"Aye." The old woman nodded. "And here it is, my son, all the way from Helsinki and all of fifty *marks*. But worth it," she chuckled, handing Adam the little package, "if I know who it is for."

Adam tore off the wrappings and held up the little gold compact, snapping up the lid to show the mirror, rouge and powder. "Do you think she'll like it, grandmother?"

The old woman winked. "Aye. And if she doesn't, soldier, she is not the woman I was when I was in the Lotta Svärd."

Adam patted her dry, wrinkled cheek. "Now, now, grandmother, the girls of your day set a mighty high record for these modern Lottas." He snapped to salute. "Long live Finland! Take care of that hand."

He buttoned the gold compact into his tunic pocket and was whistling a little melody of Sibelius as he stepped out into the frosty dusk. Shouldering his skis, he strode across the square, forgetting the twinge in his ankle, almost jaunty on his way to the low-roofed café.

A BURST of singing and radio-music swirled around him as he marched into the taproom. The place was crowded with soldiers, villagers, Civic Guards, ruddy-cheeked Laps and a dozen girls in the uniform of Lottas, that famous organization of fighting women which, since the Russian War of 1808, has stood shoulder to shoulder with the men of Finland in the front line against the invader.

Adam was greeted by shouts from a number of ski-troopers; several of the women waved. But, peering about in the thick tobacco-smoke haze, he could not find the face he wanted, and he looked at his wristwatch, rounded disconsolately, and stepped out into the cold. It had grown bluedark under a sky of indigo glass, and Adam, in precipitate hurry, bumped headlong into the girl on the curb in front of the café.

"Ingrid!"

He caught and held her by the arms, recognizing the trim skirted khaki uniform, belted binocular-case, the pale indistinct oval of her face under the tilted military cap which bore the insignia of the Lotta Svärd Signal Corps.

She answered stiffly, "Adam!" and pushed him off.

Adam didn't notice; he was fumbling hurriedly in his tunic pocket. "Ingrid, I— I haven't any time. But I promised I'd give you something and—here it is." He thrust the compact into her hand. He grinned, "Happy birthday and all that. If you'll meet me back here in an hour—"

"Meet you?" her voice was cutting.

Adam's grin washed out. The girl was standing very straight; in the dimness her eyes shone, like gleams of moonlight on black ice. Adam began, "I thought—"

"You?" she cut in. "I thought you

did not like to meet people. Now when it comes to meeting somebody like a wolf—"

"Wolf!" Adam glared.

"A red wolf, let us say."

Adam took her by the arm. "Ingrid, please!"

"Do not handle me!" She twisted away. "I thought you were here to fight for Finland. I thought you were brave to come here—a real soldier! Not after what Big Bjorn told me!"

Adam said through shut teeth, "So Big Bjorn told you!"

"At the coffee house but twenty minutes ago."

He entreated, "Ingrid, I couldn't go out on that crazy venture tomorrow night under any circumstance. I don't believe that challenge came from the Russian, anyway. If it did, it's a trap. The whole thing is mad. Even if I wanted to—" He broke off; gestured angrily. "Any man who'd go on a hare-brained venture like that isn't a soldier; he's a fool."

"Finland is made up of such fools," the girl said fiercely. "Who go on reckless hazards. Who accept the challenge. Who take up the fight with Russia at impossible odds. But we do not call it foolishness; we call it *sisu*. That is what any Finnish girl demands of a man, Mr. Rand. We would not take a gift to remember the man who is without it."

Wheeling, she flung the gold compact into the snowy gutter; nodded a brusque, "Good evening!" and marched rigid-backed into the taproom.

Adam stood for a moment, staring after her. His eyelids were narrowed savagely, teeth set together, muscles swelling white along his jaws. But he wasn't thinking of the girl. He whispered to himself, "I'll show him—show them all!"

Clutching his skis in a grip that almost crushed the wood, he clicked an about-face, stepped over the frail gleam of gold in the gutter, and strode wrathfully across the blacked-out village square.

He didn't see the two shadowy figures that detached themselves from a shadowy wall and followed him.

CHAPTER IV

LET OUR KNIVES SPEAK

BIG BJORN'S square teeth gleamed ivory-white in the darkness. "She gave him the devil, didn't she? Come on, Kiv."

"Where?" the boy whispered.

"Let's see where he goes. Let's follow him."

Adam was walking swiftly, and the two men had a hard time trailing him. They broke into a trot, their boots soundless in the snow, as he slipped into an alley behind the Lutheran church and set off at a canter.

Adam wove a fleet path among the ruined buildings and dark mounds of masonry and debris. Unconscious of pursuit, he dodged around an unlighted corner, picked his way down a rubbish-blocked lane and came presently to the charred, wreckage-strewn entrance of a livery stable.

Big Bjorn and Kiv saw him look around warily; heard him give a low, furtive whistle. The whistle was answered by the sharp plaintive bark of a dog. Adam melted into the pitchy black of the stable entrance.

Big Bjorn whispered, "The devil! He's ducked into that ruin."

Kiv peered. "He's got a dog in there."

"No." The Swede clutched back the boy. "There is someone in there with him. Listen!"

Low voices murmuring in the inner blackness. The Swede and the young Finn, pressed taut against the wall, listening. Then an astonished exclamation bursting soundlessly from Big Bjorn's lips in a puff of white steam. His fingers gripping Kiv's arm, holding the boy breathless.

The murmuring went on for several moments — Adam Rand's muffled voice answered by basso gutturals from another. Then Bjorn and Kiv crouched in tight reflex against the black masonry as Adam reappeared in the stable door and stepped out into the night, followed by a short, stocky figure clad as a Laplander in sheepskin. Alert, they stood together in a bay of darkness, peering about guardedly; but they did not see the two watchers who crouched in the darkness of the wall.

Adam pantomimed something to his companion, and the sheep-skin-clad figure reached back into the stable and drew out a pair of skis. Together they walked a short distance to alley's end where they stood silhouetted against indigo night and an open field of black snow.

Adam gripped his companion's hand. *"Tovarisch!"*

The reply was a throaty guttural. *"Tovarisch!"*

Adam made a fist and raised a cocked arm. His companion raised a similar fist. Then the peasant figure knelt to strap on skis; Adam shoved for the take-off; in a gust of dark wind, a shadow flying out into the night, the peasant was gone.

Retracing his steps up the alley, Adam Rand passed within a hand-grab of Big Bjorn and Kiv, but unsuspecting their presence, he failed to see them, and he hurried on through the sub-zero dark, making for the village hotel. The Swede and the young Finn trailed him as far as the square where Big Bjorn restrained the boy from drawing his pistol and sending a bullet into Adam's back.

"Wait, Kiv! There is a better way, and—someone is coming."

It was Ingrid, walking solitary, head-down, on her way to the Lotta Barracks. She had sighted Adam Rand striding for the hotel and hastily taken the opposite side of the square to avoid him. She was startled by the two figures prowling around the corner of the church.

"Halt!" Hand to holstered pistol, she made a left-handed snatch for the flashlight at her belt; whipped a covert beam up into the faces of the men. "Bjorn!" she recognized him. "And Kiv—"

The boy's face was white as death. Big Bjorn looked down, ugly-eyed, lips flattened back, showing the girl his teeth.

She was instantly pale. "Soldiers! Why this staring? What is wrong?" And as she saw them flick fierce glances across the square to the hotel where the American had gone, she gasped, "The Yankee!"

Big Bjorn nodded down, snarling. "I told you he was no good."

She said faintly, "He may lack the courage to face an enemy in single combat, but—"

Kiv spat, "It is not that he is just a foreign coward—"

And Bjorn growled, silencing the boy with a jostle, "He is worse than that, my pretty, but leave him to us. Say nothing of this to anyone, on your word, for the honor of our regiment is at stake as well as Finland."

"Finland!"

"So! The American is worse than a coward. He is a spy for the Reds!"

The girl stood as though struck by a fist. Cords tightened in her throat, pinching off a whimper. She clicked the flashlight. Blackout.

HARKENEN and Terjeson, roused from sleep, stood up reluctantly in their blankets in the candle-lit chilliness of the dugout, and looked around bewilderedly, grousing.

"What is this, Bjorn?"

"Look here, Kiv! What? Damn! It is not the Russians?"

"What's the trouble—waking a man! —this is some joke?"

Big Bjorn, bulking over the shaded candle on the table, his shadow huge on the wall behind him, shook his bullish head. "No, Tall Reino, this is nothing funny. Guard the door there, Kiv. If you should hear the captain or that other coming—"

"Eh? Papa Vibart is not to hear this?"

"You will see, Harkenen. This is for ourselves alone, I think you will agree. Pull up a chair with Little Terje. Now then. We must talk and decide quickly before our American hero gets back from Lähteenmäki. We skied like the wind, Kiv and I, to reach here in good time ahead of Rand."

"That?" The tall Finn contracted his brows. "You woke me up to discuss this American? Bah! . . . Terjeson and I were drawing lots—while you and Kiv this evening were in the village—to see who of us goes to kill the Wolf tomorrow night. Since I won from the Norwegian, suppose we now finish the elimination."

Bjorn's grin was wide. "I should have told you, boys. That challenge from the Wolf was a fake."

"What?"

The Swede chuckled at their glares. "A test," he explained. "My own idea. After the attack this morning—the rest of you were off in the spruce—I was detailed to guard the field kitchen with Vapaa. I told the cook of our argument over the Yankee. 'Let us measure his nerve,' I said. At my instruction Vapaa wrote the fake challenge in Russian."

Terjeson swore, "By Thor! you mountainous scoundrel!"

Harkenen thumped the table. "I am a bigger fool every day, but I thought it was extraordinary that a Soviet officer would dare challenge anyone to combat!"

Big Bjorn grunted. "Not a bad test, though, was it? How did you like the way I tricked him with the matches? A long and a short one in each fist, palming the extras, so that no matter which hand he chose he would find himself caught short."

"You grow smarter by the minute, you mastadon. Wait until the champion learns how he was exposed."

"But we are not going to tell the Yankee," was Bjorn's warning. He leaned forward, enjoying the expressions of his listeners. "There is going to be more exposing of this outcast American. Perhaps before we are through, his insides and all his bones will be exposed."

He would have paused in the interest of dramatic artistry, but Kiv, at the door, unable to contain himself, burst out in a voice thinned by passion, "Tell them, Bjorn! Tell them the dog is engaged in espionage."

"So it would appear." The Swede smiled blandly, entertained by the stunned features of the soldiers across the table. "In baiting a mouse, it seems we have caught a rat. Our white-livered champion turns out to be a Red. In league with the Russians! A spy!"

"A spy!" Terjeson whispered.

Gripping the table, Harkenen glared unbelief. "That is a deadly accusation, Bjorn. You have proof?"

"Ask Kiv." Briefly Bjorn recounted the visit to the stable, the rendezvous in the darkness, Rand's parting *"Tovarisch!"* with the unknown skier, the final gesture of the clenched fist.

"SO THEY talked in Russian, if you can believe. Gave the Red salute. Kiv saw it all, too. But I heard some of what was said, for there were once some Russians in a lumber camp where I worked and I picked up a smattering.

"Ah! This expatriate American was giving his comrade a paper. Something that had come from Helsinki. Figure how, if you can!" Bjorn hunched forward, for emphasis. "Something that came from Helsinki to the shop of Grandmother Flom who had delivered it all unwittingly to this Yankee.

"What? A map of some kind. And hidden in the cover of a gold powder case which he was presenting to our Ingrid as a gift."

Harkenen dug his fingers into the Swede's muscled forearm.

"Bjorn! Is this truth?"

"Question Kiv."

The boy struck his heart with a fist. "Every word is true!"

Terjeson muttered, "Our general—Papa Vibart—Ingrid—the American has deceived us all!"

"And does it not all fit in?" Bjorn demanded. "How is it that the Russians are informed every time we make an attempt; how is it they ambush our every move? Someone here behind our line is the informer!" Bjorn pointed at Rand's bunk. "No wonder he did not want to fight the Wolf."

"He will fight me," Harkenen said.

"And me!" Little Terje was on his feet.

Bjorn warned, "Softly. He will fight all of us. That is in my plan."

"What plan?"

"This." Big Bjorn's voice lowered to a whisper. "And Kiv has for his part agreed. This Communist agent has betrayed our patrol. Among us as a friend, he has knifed us in the back. Personally we owe him each something."

"I will kill him," Harkenen said simply.

"Ah," Terjeson mourned, "a traitor, a spy in the Lightning Patrol. We had the best record of all at the front, and it will break Papa Vibart's heart."

"But Papa Vibart will not know. Listen! Tomorrow evening the Yankee goes to Lähteenmäki, supposedly as nursemaid to those war correspondents. At midnight when he starts back from the village, we will meet him on the path. Let us take him then to that ruined sawmill where the fake duel was to have been held. It is ten kilometers from our front line—no one could hear or see us there—the Reindeer Patrol has promised to take over our watch if we go.

"We four, we will hold trial—a drumhead court. It should not take us more than an hour to convict the man—perhaps half an hour to kill him afterward. Altogether we should not be gone more than three hours. When they find the body it will look as if the wolves had killed him."

"Wolves!" Terjeson echoed.

Bjorn made a flat-lipped smile. "But of course we do it with our *puukkos*—our Finnish knives. We will make him duel, comprehend. He has stabbed us in the back as a spy, now we will see if he can stab us from the front. Five minutes each round, we will fight him. I

first. I am expert with this blade, believe.

"I shall play him as a cat with a mouse—a gash across his cheek—perhaps lop off an ear. Then Kiv shall have his turn, leaving just enough for Harkenen. Harkenen will leave enough for Little Terje; and so we shall make him fight — four rounds — eight —a dozen—until his debt of treachery to each of us is paid."

"And his debt to Ingrid is paid," Harkenen was beginning to smile.

"And our good captain will not have to know," Terjeson added.

"And another enemy dies on Finnish soil," Kiv cried, "while the honor of our regiment is restored."

Big Bjorn drew his knife from the scabbard at his belt. Quick-handed, the others followed suit. Four blades rang together in the candlelight; fused in uplifted salute.

"Long live Finland! Death to the spy!"

CHAPTER V

SKI TO JUDGMENT

ADAM RAND skied into the village at his usual hour, and found things not as usual. Whereas yesterday Lähteenmäki had been as a city of the dead, this evening its main street and square made thoroughfare for a close-thronged, swiftly moving procession of men, wagons, trucks and guns.

Out of the twilight of the south they came, a winding shadowy column, hurrying into the night of the Artic North. Adam worked his way along the curb, watching the parade. Infantry—company after company of marching men —a moving river of rifles—faces going by in a blur.

They strode doggedly, forcing themselves forward; their lips compressed, eyes blindly ahead, as men weary but grimly determined to get on. Officers, erect, wooden-faced, guiding the squads with sabers, plodded with the men. There were regulars in full marching equipment, wearing the coal-scuttle helmets of the Mannerheim Line. Fur-hatted sharpshooters, woodsmen from the forest. White-caped Civic Guards. Ski Troops. Heavy-laden machine gunners. A company of Laps. More regulars.

There was no straggling, no singing, no shouting of non-coms. Only the *crump - crump - crump* of snow-caked boots, thousands of hurrying boots, a low vibrant stamping that filled the twilight and shook the village walls with its steady rhythm.

Then a train of rattling ammunition wagons, supply carts, white-painted trucks. Then cannon, field guns mounted on horse-drawn sleds. A dray of anti-tank guns. Mobile anti-aircraft rifles. A battery of seventy-fives on runners, and a canvas-shrouded railroad gun on a long, flat sledge.

Girls of the Lotta Svärd were directing the artillery through, running dispatches down the parade lines, handing out coffee and packets of food to the marchers. Adam looked without success for a glimpse of Ingrid; then remembered it was her night at the telephone exchange While the artillerymen were passing, he managed to cross the square and reach the little shop where Grandmother Flom, bundled in quilting, stood in the door.

"Grandmother!" he greeted her. "Was there anything for me from Helsinki today?"

She shook her head. "Only the soldiers." She pointed. "The troops. But they are for the Russians, and not for you."

Adam said, "They're on their way

up to the Salla front!" and moved on glumly, suddenly depressed, thinking of Ingrid. A skidding staff car almost ran him down, and he jumped back on the curb, saluting a glimpse of helmeted officers robed in sheepskin and bear fur. That looked like General Wallenius.

Adam waited for another battalion of infantry to pass; then, in the darkening dusk, he dodged traffic through a line of ambulances, and gained the entrance of the hotel. Only in time. He was hardly into the doorway when he heard the eerie moaning wail of the village fire-siren. Somewhere there was a shout of, "Air raid!"; the ambulance line stalled; immediately the square was alive with men dashing desperately for cover.

The square was cleared just as Adam heard the planes. He dived into the hotel, crossed a deserted lobby and trotted upstairs to join a group of newspaper men standing recklessly at a balcony window. The writers were strapping on trench-helmets, fumbling with gas masks, swearing excitedly.

Adam pressed against the window and looked up. A drone developed into a roar; the plane swept over the rooftop so low that Adam could read the insignia.

He jumped back, shouting, "You men had better get below-stairs!" But his cry was smothered by a deafening, thunderbolt crash.

ADAM crashed down in a pile of window glass. One of the news men was tumbled twenty feet into a corner. The U. P. writer held a bloody nose. Then all of them there hugged the flooring as the dusk outside was riven by a series of terrific concussions, roar piling on roar; the room lurid with reflections of incandescent fire; the whole building threatening to crumble.

Then, abruptly as it had come, the attack was over. Only the first bomb had landed in the square; the airmen had apparently concentrated on the north-bound road where now a smoking, orange smudge mushroomed across the dusk, enveloping the whole village in an unnatural light.

Adam hauled himself up to the windowsill; looked down on a scene of disaster. Three ambulances were heaped up in a junk pile. A landslide of masonry blocked the square. The outgoing road was aflame with the wreckage of burning supply carts. But the troops were moving again; already the artillery trains were under way; emergency squads were clearing the debris, untangling the traffic, fighting the fire. Looking eastward, Adam saw the planes diminished to black specks, retreating across the horizon.

A voice at his side said huskily, "What are they?"

Adam said, "Chatos. Trying to stop these troops from moving."

The news man's face was sickly. "Wh-where the troops going?"

"Probably up to Lake Kianta."

The news man was scribbling on a pad.

Adam pointed; said harshly, "And you can tell them in New York how that old grandmother down there on the cobbles had her back broken by scrap iron shipped past the Statue of Liberty."

The news man looked up.

"That's democracy for you," Adam said.

He was swearing to himself bitterly as he ran down into the square. Two Red Cross Lottas were placing the broken figure on a stretcher, taking Grandmother Flom away. Adam tugged off his cap as the stretcher-bearers passed; then hurried across to the

Lutheran church to join the soldiers shoveling wreckage.

He worked for five hours with the emergency squads, digging two ambulance drivers out of the debris, shoring up undermined walls, carrying lumber, piling up hills of brick and kindling and plaster. Worked until his arms ached, his eyes burned, his bad ankle went lame. Once in the blackout darkness lit by quick glimmers of flashlights, he caught a glimpse of Ingrid hurrying by. He saw her pretend not to see him, and, as he looked around to speak, her shadow was lost in the shadow-river of men which moved in an endless tide through Lähteenmäki.

On the north road the orange fires had died out; the night was black as carbon. Sometime around eleven o'clock the last platoon of shadow-men went through. At midnight Adam stacked his shovel; went over to the hotel to say goodbye to the newspaper men; then, solitary, weighted with fatigue, he took the lonely east-bound road out of town.

He was thinking of Ingrid, and his wry smile tightened into one of anger as he recalled how the men in his patrol had avoided him that day. Big Bjorn would probably spread that yellow story through the whole regiment.

Adam was swearing as he came to the outlying village wall and knelt to strap on his skis. Then his oaths were choked off by a hand which whipped out of the darkness of the wall and caught him by the throat.

IN THE crush of Big Bjorn's embrace Adam went down. Hands trapped his ankles, smothered his mouth. Face-down in the snow, he was pinned, held fast by the Swede's behemoth weight. Realizing there were four against him, Adam did not struggle; only fought to relieve the pressure on his ribs, gasping for breath. His knife was snatched from his belt, his pistol torn from its holster.

He heard someone mutter, "Stand him up!" Arms wrenched behind him, he was wrestled to his feet.

His heart sickened as he saw tall Harkenen confronting him; made out the dark form of Little Terje and recognized the figure holding a pistol against his side as young Kiv. Harkenen snapped, "Keep your mouth shut, Rand. All right, Bjorn, release him."

Big Bjorn let go his hands and stepped back. Adam's arms dropped numbly to his side and, obeying a nudge from Kiv's pistol, he stood inert. Harkenen said, "Step into your skis." Adam obeyed. The tall Finn ordered, "Strap them on." Adam knelt and straightened.

The tall man threw him a snow-cape. "Put it on."

Wordless, Adam draped the white cloak about his shoulders; drew the monkish hood over his cap. His companions similarly cloaked themselves; then, while Terjeson aimed a machine-gun pistol at Adam, they knelt to put on skis. Finally the Norwegian knelt to strap on his skis; they were ready to go.

Adam, surrounded by the ugly glint of pistols, was ordered to follow Reino Harkenen and hold the trail in the middle of his escort; any trick side-jump or attempt to escape would mean instant death.

Adam nodded mutely stunned by the suddenness of this.

But he knew the temper of these Finns and Norsemen, the cold steel of their determination—knew better than to dissent or ask questions. When Harkenen snapped, "Forward!" Adam went forward.

The men slogged upslope a little way on their skis; then diverged from the direct trail to their sector of the front

and took an off-slope toward the northeast. Harkenen launched himself down a night-filled valley, and Adam held his skis grimly to the tall Finn's track. Kiv and Terjeson hugged close on Adam's either wing, and Big Bjorn was a dozen feet behind.

The snow could not have been better; the night was clear and polar cold. The party sped down the valley through a wind as biting as ammonia, keening under the icy needle-shine of Arctic stars. There was no moon, and Adam, his eyesight periled by the frost of wind-drawn tears on his lashes, had difficulty in seeing the trail.

At a couple of hairpin turns he had close calls. Even after his vision became adjusted to the darkness and he could make out the blue of snow, the black of rocks, the blue-black of fir trees and valley walls, he was hard put to keep on the mark. The party was going a fast pace, skimming through this frozen limberlost, and Adam could not see in darkness like a Finn.

He strained every nerve to follow the lead, calling on his skis for all their skill. An overshoot, a spill, a bad swerve or a plunge into the spruce shrub along the trail would mean a blast of gunfire from the men around him, Adam knew.

Snow-spray stung like shot salt against Adam's cheek. His lips chapped and cracked. His sore ankle burned. But, bent to his skis, he followed each Christie, jump and *telemark*, skidding and weaving after Harkenen's flying shadow, executing each maneuver with exact precision.

Somewhere they shot across the flat-planed expanse of a lake.

Again they were in a forest of evergreens. The men sped as ghosts through the snowy woods, led by Harkenen who knew the trail by heart. A tinsel gleam of stars showed Adam they were heading now straight east. The tall Finn was picking from the darkness every slope and downhill track. They were making record time.

Adam saw to the left, silhouetted, one of the giant watch towers—not unlike the foresters' stations in America—in which the Lotta Svärd girls kept vigil. Adam swallowed an impulse to cry out for help. The tower was too far off, and as it came into eye-range, the men on either side of Adam had closed in with aimed guns.

He saw it pass from view beyond the fir-tops, and he knew they must be close to the Soviet border. Somewhere they must have skied through the Finnish front lines. Adam's desperate hope that they might be stopped by some outpost guard was stillborn. He suspected finally where the men were taking him, and he was not surprised when they whipped out into a broad clearing and he saw ahead the bleak, night-shadowed walls of a ruined sawmill.

But a moment later he was surprised —astounded. Ordered to get off his skis and march into the ruin, he asked, "Do you boys mind telling me now what we're doing here?"

The answer came from Big Bjorn, baleful: "We are going to courtmartial —and execute—a spy!"

CHAPTER VI

COURAGE OF A COWARD

CORNERED in the dark enclosure that smelled of rusty iron and charred lumber, his shoulders pressed against the icy wall, Adam stood rigid, facing his accusers. The four were ranged in front of him, menacingly posed against a background of caverned blackness which enfolded an inky

jungle of broken machinery and splintered timber. Wind moaned through this ruin, and, looking up, Adam saw the roof as a skeleton outlined against open sky and, high above, the needle-point shine of the stars.

The ray of a flashlight took him in the face, and he stared into the white glare, unblinking. "I am not a spy!"

Big Bjorn shaded the flashlight with his hand. "Dog! Liar!"

Harkenen demanded, "Explain what you are doing here in Finland. Talk quickly, Rand."

"It seems obvious I am here as a volunteer in your army."

"In Spain your sentiments were Communistic."

Adam shrugged impatiently. "I thought I explained that."

"We are not satisfied."

"In Madrid I enlisted with the Republican army. It did not become Communist until months afterward. When Franco accepted help from Hitler and Mussolini, Madrid accepted help from Russia. All were tarred with the same brush. I am not interested in any of these dictatorships."

"What are you interested in?"

"The right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," Adam said, "and in helping my fellow man, whatever his race, to keep that right."

Bjorn glowered. "You hate the Communists, then?"

"I hate no one," Adam declared. "If they want Communism that's their own business. Or Fascism. Or if they want to believe the moon is made of green cheese. But when they start stuffing it down someone else's throat with a bayonet, that's another matter."

Bjorn snarled, "See, friends, he won't say he hates Communists."

Anger welled up in Adam's throat. He said hoarsely, "You don't know what you're talking about, Squarehead. These Russians you're fighting aren't Communists. They aren't even Socialists. They're cattle—senseless herds driven to battle by Stalin. You can't hate animals, even when they're dangerous. They're pathetic, horrible, they've got to be stopped, but—"

Harkenen snapped, "You talk pretty loosely for a man on trial for his life, Rand. We want something more than your vague ideas."

"I haven't anything more," Adam told him. "I can't tell you why I'm here in Finland any more that I can explain why I was born. There's no cut and dried definition for democracy. It's a feeling. It has to do with individualism and free thinking and giving everybody a break. I'm willing to fight for such ideas. I'm here. What more can you ask?"

Big Bjorn sneered, "Don't listen to this, boys, he's stalling for time."

In a harshened tone the tall Finn told Adam, "We can ask why you have always managed to get leave every time we were to enter Russia on a raid. We can ask how it is the enemy always knows our movements."

Terjeson said hoarsely, "We can ask why you refused to meet the Red Wolf!"

Kiv whispered, "We can ask about the gold compact you gave to Ingrid—the compact that brought you a secret paper from Helsinki."

"And," Big Bjorn concluded, "what about your meeting last night with that Russian agent, eh? We saw you," he mocked, *"Tovarisch!"*

Perspiration made white frost on Adam's forehead. He braced himself, spreading his hands against the wall. Glinting eyes fixed him; eyes as deadly as the muzzles of aimed guns.

He whispered, "All right. That

peasant you saw was a Finn—a Communist I knew in Spain. He once saved my life in Madrid. When I met him in the village, he told me he'd been trying to reach Russia since the outbreak of the war, and begged me to get him a chart. Under the circumstances—" Adam broke off abruptly. He saw they were convinced he was lying. He pulled a long breath; squared his shoulders. "Suppose I refuse to explain!"

Harkenen said grimly, "Then you will be convicted of espionage."

"Very well," Adam said, "I refuse."

Big Bjorn growled, "It means a death sentence, Rand."

Adam said, "I refuse."

Harkenen spoke in a toneless voice, "Then we, the members of your patrol, having tried you by drumhead court and found you guilty of serving the enemy as a spy, condemn you to death, Adam Rand. May God have mercy on your soul. Give him his knife, Big Bjorn."

STEEL gleamed in the faint-lit dimness; standing frozen there, Adam stared down at the extended blade. He whispered, "You— you're not taking me to General Headquarters—not turning me over to a firing squad?"

Bjorn frowned.

"That is too good for a traitor such as you, Tovarisch Rand. You were afraid to duel one wolf. Now you will duel with four. First with me," the Swede struck his chest, "then with Harkenen, Terjeson and Kiv in turn. Five minute rounds. Five minutes so that each may have your blood.

"Should you kill one of us—but we are experts with the *puukko*—there will always be another to collect the honor debt. Still, you will fight on, like a rat always hoping for his chance. It is fairer than your treachery, is it not? We do not stab you in the back, but in your face. Come, take the knife. You may die fighting, yet. *Tovarisch!*"

"Take the knife!" Kiv drove his Mauser into Adam's groin.

"Take it, Rand," Harkenen commanded. "Expect no more mercy than we get from the Russian who, with your help, invades our soil. But do not force us to shoot you like a dog. At least win our respect by dying like a man."

They were going to kill him. Deliberately, cold-bloodedly. Against four of them, or one of them, dueling with that crescent-tipped Finnish blade, he hadn't a chance. It was a weapon born to the Northman's hand, as the American pioneer grew up with a squirrel rifle.

Adam raised his eyes from the fascination of cold steel. Argument, he saw, was hopeless. He was an alien. Anything he might say would be disbelieved. Their stares condemned him. Blindly he took the knife.

Waited.

Big Bjorn sprang back, drawing his own *puukko*. The others, wary, drew away. Shading the ray with his palm, Harkenen held the pocket-torch, directing a circle of light across the snow-and-sawdust carpeted ground. He snapped, "Ready, Rand!" and in blind reflex, following Big Bjorn's movement, Adam dropped into a crouch.

Simultaneously from the darkness came a cry. "Stop!"

As if on springs the five men spun. To face the muzzle of a leveled Mauser automatic; the white face and fear-widened eyes of the girl framed in the jagged doorway. She moved forward rigidly. Harkenen gasped out, "Ingrid!"

The girl came on slowly, whispering, "Yes, Reino, I was following him, too. I saw you capture him; I trailed you here. Outside, I heard the trial. But I

cannot believe he is the spy and traitor. I cannot let you kill him like this—"

Adam panted, "Ingrid, for God's sake go away!"

Kiv said fiercely to the girl, "He is a spy. He gives no explanation. You have let him deceive you with sugary love making."

"No! Tell them!" she cried to Adam. "Tell them you are not a Soviet agent. Say something, Adam! Can't you see they mean to take your life? Speak to them! Deny the charge—explain!"

His throat muscles were numb. His face felt paralyzed. He whispered, "I explained. They do not believe. But I would like you to know, Ingrid. I am no agent of Russia!"

He broke off chokily. His nerves were fraying under the strain. The dimness swam on his vision, shadows clouded around him, and as his eyes came back into focus he saw Big Bjorn standing giant-like over the girl; Big Bjorn with something bright dangling from his paw.

"No agent of Russia, eh?" the Swede's voice was a rumble. "Look at this, then, girl. Do you know what this is? Let us tell you it is a medal—the Order of the Red Star, if you please—a decoration of the Soviet Union. We found it, we four, in this so-called American's knapsack, right there in our dugout this morning."

Through a daze of perspiration Adam could see the girl staring. He whispered, "It was given to me in Madrid. For diplomatic reasons I could not refuse." Then his breath gave out as the shadows shocked together.

He had known it would happen—Bjorn holding the girl's attention and Terjeson creeping around to the side. They caught her in a rush. With one grab the gun was snatched from her hand. Terjeson held her in a grip of iron. Bjorn ran his hands over her uniform, frisking her for a weapon.

INGRID, standing like cold marble, whispered icily, "You do not need to paw me, Big Bjorn. I have no other gun. If I had, I would shoot this traitor through the heart. His Red medal has satisfied me."

"Don't trust her!" Kiv warned. "Tie her up!"

She cried, low-voiced, "Don't be a fool. Let me go."

"To run outside and shriek for help?" Bjorn laughed. "No. You stay here."

"Naturally I will stay. I want to see him killed."

Harkenen pointed, "Go and stand in that far corner, Ingrid. Face the wall and put your coat around your ears. This will be no sight for women. And remain silent. This place is close to the Soviet border. The shot of a gun or any scream from you would bring the Russians."

Adam was deathly sick. He saw the girl fade back in shadow into the far corner as Harkenen instructed; saw her face the wall under a patch of Arctic stars. Harkenen was poised with the flashlight, warning, "The rules of this duel call for silence, Rand, and you will be stabbed through the back at first outcry!" and Big Bjorn was crouching again.

Then Adam was fighting. Desperately. Twisting and turning, leaping and dodging, striving with every nerve of his body to avoid the Swede's knife. Flash, flash, flash, the Swede struck at him—lightning-like strokes aimed to paralyze a man with their speed.

Adam parried, and they moved in a circle, crouching, weaving their heads, jabbing at each other like cats. The blades shimmered, rang together, flick-

ering in the dimness like a play of electricity. Blue sparks flew as steel clashed.

Adam knew the trick of this knife-fighting—to cut the muscles of his enemy's right arm; to slash his enemy's hand. Only when your opponent lost his knife would you make a try at his throat. But Adam wanted only to cut down the other man's knife, beat him off, destroy the power of his fighting arm. From the first he fought defensively, wasting no energy in wild thrusts and rushes, holding back to keep breath and sinew in reserve.

He was no match for the Swede in size, weight or skill, for the big lumberjack handled his blade with an expert's dexterity. Adam's sole hope was to strike a lucky blow. He had been a boxer; his footwork was better than the Swede's; he fought as a boxer, feinting, jabbing, uppercutting with the knife.

Bjorn wasn't going to finish him off; he was only playing, intending to give the others a chance. He was teasing Adam; taunting him; getting in a scratch here, a cut there, a promise to Adam of the deadly slashes that would come.

Around Adam the shadows went whirlpool. He glimpsed Kiv framed in the doorway, pistol in fist, watchful for any attempt at escape. Terjeson and Reino Harkenen standing back. He could make out Ingrid slumped face to wall in her dark corner under the stars; he felt a nausea of horror that the girl should be there.

Then he was aware of nothing save the pound of blood in his ears, the chugging of his breath, the animal gusts of Big Bjorn's breathing, the rustle of clothing and scuffle of boots, and finally, in awful concentration, nothing but the flash of Bjorn's knife.

When that first five minutes was over Adam was as exhausted as if he had fought five years. He was surprised to see blood pouring out of his sleeve. He had not felt the gash, nor could he feel the slash that leaked a liquid warmth down his cheek. He stood panting, limp, aware only that the Swede's crouching hulk was not in front of him.

Then he was looking at Kiv. In the torch ray the boy's face was like a chalk-scribble of hate. A sharp glint of steel in Kiv's fist. Adam heard Bjorn snarl, "Look out for him, Kiv, he's a devil; he slashed my thumb!"

Then Adam was fighting again.

CHAPTER VII

FOR SERVICES RENDERED . . .

ADAM lost all sense of time in the following five minutes. Like fury unleashed the boy came at him, quicker than the Swede, more supple, reckless, wild. He aimed for Adam's face, and his blade went crisscross before Adam's eyes like a razor.

Somehow Adam beat him off, and once he might have killed the boy when Kiv slipped in the snow and Adam sprawled on top of him. But he reflexed his blade from the boy's exposed throat, and he supposed afterward that was why Harkenen and Terjeson did not cut him to ribbons when it came their turn.

The tall Finn overwhelmed him with a dazzling display of thrust, ripostes and parries; no less expert a bladesman was the Norwegian. Adam was beaten to his knees a dozen times by Harkenen's assaults; when he went into the fourth round, he staggered as a man in the bondage of nightmare. Either the dark little Viking or the six-foot Finn could have razored him to a helplessness, and death.

As it was, Harkenen only struck him

once in the shoulder, and didn't follow up Adam's stumble; while Terjeson merely gashed a knuckle of Adam's hand and at the end of the round turned away, belting his knife and grunting, "I've had enough."

Adam fell forward in the trampled snow and lay panting. From shoulder to cuff his sleeve was in fragments. His fist, clutching the knife, was a puffy crimson glove. As he forced himself up on his knees, he saw that Ingrid, in her corner, lay in a huddle, fainted. Harkenen, holding the flashlight, looked away.

Adam heard the tall man say, "It's your turn with the spy, Bjorn, and for God's sake make it quick."

Adam felt himself hoisted to his feet. He opened his eyes. Bjorn's face confronting him was queer. All screwed up with flat yellow lips. The Swede was saying, "I don't like to do this—even to a dirty spy." But he was going to do it. Running his thumb down the blade of his knife. Savoring the steel's keenness.

With a drowning man's last desperation, Adam flung at the man. Bjorn sidestepped, tripping Adam with a boot. Adam plunged down. As his chin struck the packed snow, snapping his head back, he had a glimpse of the doorway. It was crowded with the noiseless shapes of men, and two grinning Soviet officers were on the threshold, covering the scene with rapid-fire guns.

ADAM would never forget that. Or the way the Russians came in—Komsomol troops, well equipped and smartly disciplined—twenty of them to hold the Finnish soldiers powerless, trapped, hands in the air.

Harkenen had cried, "Don't fight, boys—they'll kill the girl!" It was over as quick as that. Bjorn and Kiv, Terjeson and Tall Reino, their hands bound behind them, lined up between two files of bayonets. Adam, for want of rope, lashed arm against arm to Ingrid who was ordered to drag him if he fell.

Heels together, the Soviet soldiers stood at attention, while the long-coated commander spoke in Finnish.

"You captives are through for the duration of the War. Should any one of you raise an outcry for help or attempt to escape your escort, you will be through for longer than that. Any trouble from one will mean death for all. In the interests of the young lady, I hope you will enjoy Siberia."

He clicked in salute, smiled ironically, raised the clenched fist. The second officer barked, "Forward!" Flashlights snapped off; smartly the little company marched out of the sawmill into the starlit silence-frozen night.

And into the maw of a semi-circle of Nordenfeldt machine guns, a hundred Bofors rifles, a trap of bayonets and two companies of white-cloaked Finnish ski troops.

As the Soviet line halted like a jarred string of freight cars, as the officers slowly raised empty hands—the girl's head slumped against Adam's shoulder.

"Thank God they saw my signal; thank God they've come."

Numbly he held her upright. And Captain Vibart was shouting somewhere.

TO a visitor, Lähteenmäki, with its broken walls outlined starkly against the winter twilight of a north-Finland sky, might have seemed as a city of the dead. To the soldier and the girl walking arm in arm down the icily deserted street, it was Valhalla.

At the curb overlooking the square, the girl said, "Be careful, it is slippery here."

Adam grinned, "Do you think I am still in the hospital?" and darted forward, skating on the ice.

Ingrid cried appealingly, "Adam, your arm!"

He returned and put it around her, sling and all. "Beaver!"

"Stop it, Adam!"

"Aw!" He pulled a face.

She smiled, "Later. When we are off the street. Then I will put my arm around you."

Adam grinned, then sobered. "Ingrid, I feel like the devil about the boys."

"Why?"

"They don't get over apologizing. Poor Bjorn goes moping around like a sick Newfoundland dog. I don't know what to do about them."

"Take them out and shoot them. Papa Vibart wanted to. Me with them."

Adam said, "I can't blame them for thinking me a spy. Especially with that Red medal. I don't wonder you were convinced—"

"I wasn't." She shook her head. "I said I was, so they'd let me stay. So they'd leave me by myself in that corner and give me a chance to—to—"

"Signal!" Adam finished for her. He dead-stopped, facing her. "Look here, Ingrid. Why won't you tell me how you did it? I know it wasn't wireless. What was the trick? The boys say you made them promise not to tell."

She looked away. "It's a secret. A military secret."

"Junk! You told the others. Everybody knows except me. If you don't tell me right here and now, I—I'll skate on the ice." He started past her recklessly. "Maybe I'll break my arm—"

"Wait!" She caught him. Her cheeks were pink. "What persistent brutes you Yankees are. I didn't want you to know because—but I suppose I'll have to show you."

Rummaging in her pocket she drew out a circular gold compact, a little compact with a dented lid and broken hinge. She opened it to show the cracked mirror.

"That's how," she said. "The others were all watching you—that horrible fight. I had my flashlight. There was a hole in the roof. I sent the beams across the sky with the mirror. Heliograph."

"Well," said Adam, "I'll be knocked over by a Lotta Svärd!"

"I didn't want you to know; I had to go back and pick it up that night!"

"That," Adam chuckled, "is the first cracked mirror that ever brought me any luck!" Forgetting the ache, he swept her up with his sore arm. "Beaver! And I'll not let go although it's killing me, unless you answer another question I want to ask—"

But she promised to answer it after he got his decoration; and this story ends on that day when he went to Helsinki and stood on a platform with the great of Finland—men like General Mannerheim and Paavo Nurmi and Jan Sibelius—and Papa Vibart kissed him, too, on both cheeks, pinning to his tunic the Order of the Blue Cross.

"For services rendered in counter-espionage, while posing as an agent of the enemy, supplying that enemy with false maps and misleading information—risking his life between the fire of friend and foe, yet achieving an objective that aided in a great victory of Finnish arms—"

His name wasn't in the paper (Adam Rand had seen to that). But the victory was. Perhaps you remember reading about it: the 163rd and 44th Russian divisions trapped and overwhelmingly defeated by the Finns at Suomussalmi.

THE END

Immobile, the redskins poised on the rim, ready to swoop down in attack

By CHARLES MARQUIS WARREN

Author of "Then I'll Remember"

Don't miss this fine new novel

Bugles Are For Soldiers

THE Civil War is over, but bloody fighting goes on in the Indian Territory. Federal forces, struggling desperately to preserve white scalps, include few seasoned Indian fighters. The rest are veterans of the war between the States, officered mostly by West Point graduates who understand only regulation Army tactics. And these tactics have left them helpless against

DEESOHAY, the fabulous Apache, known and feared as the Scourge of the Southwest Territory.

THE ROLL CALL

LIEUTENANT JOHN REARDON, West Point '64, who is losing his command of B Company at Fort Wingate—and a woman's love—because he insisted on fighting the Indians in their own way—and so far has failed.

LIEUTENANT DENNIS ST. JOHN, just out of the Point, who is taking over Reardon's command and the lady's heart. He knows how Sheridan and Sherman made war, and proposes to do likewise.

SCOUT JERRY KITCHEN, staunch friend of Reardon's, whose pride is in his luxuriant golden hair and mustache. His training as scout never included a course at West Point.

PRIVATE BOWIE CRISPIN, who captained a Richmond company at Shiloh. Blaming the lieutenant for his brother's death, and suspecting that the lieutenant knows a damning

This story began in last week's Argosy

secret of his, he has sworn to see Reardon in Hell.

BUGLER STEVIE VANCE, who is redheaded, fourteen, and can never forget the shame of the day when Lieutenant St. John made fun of his bugling.

PRIVATE BURNSTEDT, who has fought on the Border a little too long, and is learning the meaning of fear.

SERGEANT LEMUEL POTTER, veteran of Border campaigns, whose life was once saved by Burnstedt. He is worried about Burnstedt.

PRIVATE RANKIN, who charged 1400 yards with Pickett's Virginians. PRIVATE STOODER, who helped Meade's Vermonters repulse the charge. PRIVATE CARLSON, who hopes he is on his way home to Neosho, Missouri, to see his wife and children. PRIVATE JEAN DUVAL, the guidon bearer.

BEHIND THE LINES

COLONEL "PAPER" CUTTER, Cavalry officer commanding Fort Wingate. He will miss Reardon, but must carry out Washington's orders to replace him.

ANGELA OWEN, who loved John Reardon before her mother and small brother were scalped by Deesohay.

BILL OWEN, her grandfather, who bears no ill will toward Reardon.

IT IS at the Owen place—a small 'dobe near a water hole in Tonto Buttes—that Company B is now encamped, after a disastrous excursion out from the fort. Reardon, lying on his blanket among his troopers, is trying to sleep; but he cannot forget that Angela is playing the gracious hostess to his successor, St. John, in the 'dobe.

He had built great hopes—on his Army career, on Angela—and now he is through....

CHAPTER V

BATTERED BUGLE

SHE had never kissed him again. The detail skirmished with the Indians and John Reardon immediately ordered a retreat through Tonto Buttes. When the column got back to the Buttes Old Bill Owen and Angela had buried Absalom.

They had buried what they could find. He'd ridden out alone to hunt a little. The Indians hadn't come on to the 'dobe house. Too small a party.

She had said quietly, her words as taut as her chalk-white face:

"No. I'll stay. I have to now, don't you see? Someone has to undo this impossible way of fighting, Lieutenant. Your own impossible way.

"If they kill the last of us then perhaps it will awaken those at your headquarters and there will be no more of your kind sent here. No more of those who slink about and run, who fight as cravenly as the Indian himself."

Then her strange tensity had broken and her voice had been a scream. "Go away! Get out!"

She and Bill Owen came into the post occasionally for supplies. She had ignored his attempts to speak with her. She liked this fresh new officer out of the Point, who reminded her of the eager boy John Reardon had been four years ago. She admired his concept of how the Indian should be put down by the heel of military force. She could think of her mother and small brother, of her father, and she could find it easy to agree.

She attended post dances with him and when Reardon asked for a dance she continued to speak and smile with St. John without being aware of the interruption.

And Dennis St. John was as good as his word. He was military. He was Army. He was fresh and clean and new. The Government bribed these young West Pointers into accepting posts on the frontier instead of accompanying the regular army on its mopping-up expedition down South, by dangling swift promotion before their eyes. A junior-grade lieutenant was promptly commissioned first lieutenant once he accepted the post.

That was why St. John ranked Reardon.

St. John had the command stepping.

He took over M Company during Captain Unger's illness, and nobody could help recognizing the transition of M. Even the other three captains, of B, K and S companies, unconsciously stepped up their drills to compete with this soldier.

There were drills and dummy attacks, and soul-stirring defences and counteroffensives on the parade. The officers' wives took to turning out to view these daily maneuvers and applaud from under their faded parasols.

Here was the answer to the problem of the Southwest Territory. Let the Apache now watch out for himself. Here was Sherman marching once more to the sea; here was Sheridan riding again.

And Jerry Kitchen watched and spat, careful not to stain his golden mustache, and said out of the side of his mouth:

"Johnny, wouldn't Deesohay fetch a kick out'n this bootiful drilling? Wouldn't he turn tail and run like tarnation? Wouldn't he?" He spat again, carefully. "Like hell he would."

"But these tactics were successful at Shiloh and at the Wilderness, Jerry."

"Yeah. So I hear. And is this Shiloh or the Wilderness?"

AND the episode of the bugle. Maybe that was military, and maybe it impressed even rugged Paper Cutter; but it had hurt little Stevie Vance, and therefore it angered Reardon and Sergeant Potter and Corporal Casy, and Privates Burnstedt, DuVal, Carlson and what few veteran campaigners there were left in the post.

Because they loved Stevie and admired the stouthearted redhead who'd blown his trumpet—no matter how he blew it—in the thick of some of the most vicious Indian fighting in the history of the Territory.

It was after an uninterrupted two hours of one of those infernally hot troop drills, the command being drawn up in companies front preparatory to dismissal. Stevie stepped out from his place in the staff to sound Adjutant's Call and the lieutenant-adjutant was to read the customary order of the day. The routine was normal.

Stevie loved this. He waited daily for it. It was one time when all the eyes of the post were centered on him, and he lived his moment to the hilt.

He blew the call manfully, his conception of it, and if it cracked a little and went sour, who was the one in the post to care? Every man in the command had accustomed himself to recognize Stevie's enthusiastic substitutes for the regulation calls. Until now.

Lieutenant Dennis St. John could still hear the call as it had been sounded daily on the Plain at West Point. Its sharp beauty was vivid in his mind and he winced at Stevie's valiant but questionable rendition.

He waited it through, turned on his heel, saluted Paper Cutter, and (after a "With your permission, sir") relieved Stevie of the battered bugle. With the eyes of the entire command upon him he placed the instrument to his lips and sounded Adjutant's Call as it should be sounded. It came clear and sharp and thrilling. Then it ceased and the bugle was handed back to the crimson-faced Stevie.

"In the Army," he explained crisply, "there is an old maxim, bugler. 'Never do a thing that your superior can find fault in your doing.' If you're to sound the bugle for the Army you must learn to be an Army bugler."

Stevie could not make the words, "Yes, sir," sound above a whisper. He stood there, rigid, trying to swallow and hide his deep shame.

Old Paper Cutter cleared his throat once or twice and said, "Correct, Lieutenant, but hardly necessary, d'you think? And a bit irregular, which, in view of your recent arrival, we'll overlook. Take your post, sir."

It was St. John's turn to flush and he saluted, about-faced, and took his post. Every trooper in the command could have kissed Colonel Cutter, though most of the ranks were too far away to have heard his exact words.

Stevie still had to sound down the colors before the parade was dismissed. It was a pathetic attempt and he stood there, unnerved, trembling, the notes faltering out and proclaiming the disgrace he felt. Not an eye in the ranks batted, but the awkward embarrassment which can come over enlisted men made them turn silently at dismissal, and walk stiffly toward their barracks.

REARDON walked with St. John. "I suppose I pulled a wrong one," St. John said gruffly. His face was still a little red. "But someone has to snap the laxness out of this post.

"Dennis, it wasn't much of a bugle, was it?"

"What?"

"Sort of bent and dented."

"I don't see what you mean."

"You made it sound pretty fine, though. I haven't heard a call blown like that since the Point. Sets your blood to tingling."

They stopped before St. John's quarters.

"Reardon, what are you driving at? Let me have it."

"It's nothing much." Reardon kicked at a pebble. "Remember that place near the mouthpiece where it looked like the neck of the bugle had been squeezed almost shut? That happened down near White Sands.

"We ran into a bunch of Comanches. Stevie was in the midst of it somehow, blowing for all he was worth. He didn't know what he was blowing and we didn't either. But it sounded mighty good.

"A Comanche fired his gun at Stevie pointblank. From three feet away. The bullet hit the bugle and made that dent. Stevie pulled out his revolver. It was the first time he'd fired it, I think; but he shot the Comanche, and kept right on blowing hell for leather."

"Well . . ." St. John looked down at his boots and scuffed his right toe in the dust.

"And that bashed-in place on the bugle's rim. Y'notice that when you were sounding those pretty notes? It was up near Las Taos. Some Sioux had come down. Sioux aren't anybody to fiddle with. You'll learn that. We were taking it right badly.

"But Stevie was in there blowing his horn, and it kind of made us feel we had the entire Army behind us, even if none of us had ever heard the things that were coming out of his bugle.

"One big buck came at Stevie with his lance and Stevie took it in his arm and reversed his horn and conked that warrior with the rim so hard that—well you saw the rim and it probably doesn't help the tone much. Anyway, it gave me time to get a bullet into the Sioux.

"That was almost a year ago. Stevie had just turned fourteen. I don't guess, what with one thing and another, he'd had time to learn how they blow Adjutant's Call at West Point. . . ."

Reardon moved on toward his own quarters. St. John stood watching him. When Reardon called back, "See you after mess for a little poker," St. John's "All right," was almost inaudible.

. . . Most likely that was why, when they had started out on this scout detail—the last one Reardon would lead —St. John had several times attempted to make up to Stevie. Riding along, he'd tried to teach Stevie how to coax the most out of Adjutant's Call; but Stevie couldn't manage it and was more embarrassed than ever at his inability. After a while St. John, not unkindly, gave it up.

"A routine detail, Johnny," old Paper Cutter had impressed upon Reardon. "Remember that, dammit. No rabbit-brain tricks. This is your last job. You're to instruct Lieutenant St. John, show him the ropes, give him as much dope as you can. That's your sole purpose.

"You're not to run into trouble. A fact. If you authenticate these rumors, that's enough. Anything else will be disobeying orders. Don't tangle with Deesohay. Those are orders."

Reardon had remembered those orders when the column was filing through the Pass. The scouts who had been in the van came galloping back, horses blowing and winded. There were perhaps two hundred Apaches blocking the Pass ahead.

And when the column turned round, it ran into a hundred more coming up from behind and completing the ambush.

It had been nasty. It had not lasted too long, but half of the command had gone down before Reardon was able to cut through the rear with the remainder. He hadn't seen Deesohay among the warriors, or hadn't recognized him if he had. Only because the Indians lingered to scalp the dead had the decimated detail been able to retreat safely.

He dreaded facing Colonel Cutter. To be tactfully relieved of your active duty post was bad enough; to be cashiered was an entirely different matter. . . .

CHAPTER VI

REMEMBER 'ROUND THE FIRE

UNABLE still to sleep, he raised himself on one elbow. This night was the same as the night before, black and shapeless although the stars and a crescent moon glowed faintly silver in the illimitable distance above.

He got up. The thing was, to tire his mind and induce sleep. There were still several hours before midnight.

Some of the troopers, also too tired to sleep, had congregated in the stable. Their voices came in low murmurs and the soft red glow of a small fire inside slanted through the cracks in the stable door.

He picked his way quietly among the sleeping men, spoke a few words to the sentries, who had nothing to report. Then, with a soft rap on the door, he entered the 'dobe house.

St. John was sitting at the table writing out his first reports. He'd get over that sort of thing after a season or two. The light from the lamp gave a pomatum effect to his black hair. He was humming, subdued and abstractly. He looked up.

"Can't sleep?"

"No. Miss Angela?"

St. John nodded toward the door at the left. "Went to bed. Pretty tired. Mentally worn out." He went back to his reports, resuming his soft humming.

Reardon moved to the one window. He looked out and up. There was something intimate about the powdery iridescence of the sky. He would miss the friendliness of these Southwestern nights. The country had come to mean

more to him than just a post of duty. He said half-whimsically:

"April."

"Eh?" St. John did not look up. He went on with his muted humming.

Reardon mused. "A soft month, to be so warlike. The Revolution began in April at Lexington, almost a hundred years ago." He shook his head "Twenty years back, in April, we went to war with Mexico. And they fired the first shot on Sumter just six years ago this month; April." He grinned. "That's about the extent of the knowledge I got out of your books at the Point." With his eyes he tried to penetrate the formless dark outside He stopped grinning. "I wonder if now, with Deesohay making a big thing of it this April—" He stopped and turned.

St. John was bending over the reports and his humming had taken on tune and words. It was this that had caught Reardon. The soft song caught at his heart and tugged gently.

Come fill your glasses, fellows,
And stand up in a row,
To singing sentimentally
We're going for to go. . . .

Preoccupied with his report sheets, St. John's voice trailed off. Reardon waited. It was a verse sung to the tune of *The Wearin' o' the Green* and it was high in the affections of all West Point men who have ever sung it up on the banks of the Hudson. There was a humble eagerness in him for St. John to continue. When he didn't, Reardon supplied softly:

In the Army there's sobriety,
Promotion's very slow
So we'll sing our reminiscences
Of Benny Havens, oh! . . .

HE STOPPED. St. John was looking at him quizzically, and for a moment Reardon felt as though he had no right to sing the song himself. With an effort he got that out of his head. St. John said:

"You still remember it?"

"Yes. Naturally."

"I shouldn't think it natural. The Point had great hopes for you. You would open up this Territory, make it secure for everyone for all time. Deesohay would be ground under by a Point officer, and there would be legends about you. We were proud to have been in the Academy with you."

Reardon looked out the window.

"Sometimes things go wrong." He colored as he sensed the inadequacy of the remark.

"But you disappointed. Yourself. The Point. Us." His tone was kind. "You shouldn't really feel badly. Perhaps it was the Army's fault for placing so high a trust in so young a man."

"How old are you, Dennis?"

"I'm four years younger than you. But that isn't what counts. You didn't carry out the traditions of the service. You're sincere enough. I think it must be that you never understood. You haven't acted as Point-trained officers have always acted under conditions of war."

"Wars change. Systems and tactics that went in the last war won't go in this. It's always like that. Some day they'll get so far they'll have to start all over again; rudimentary fighting."

"You're making little enough sense. This war is no different than the one between the States. Fighting a different race, a different enemy. That's all. Guns still go off. No man is immune to a bullet."

REARDON said softly: "This isn't war, Dennis. Not your brilliant, tactical, gallant war. That's dead. I hope you can see that. You'll need to. This is treachery, hide and seek, slaugh-

ter in a quiet way. We make the rules as we go along. I hope you can find that out."

St. John began folding up his reports.

"That's why I'm relieving you. You haven't the basic foundation for a soldier, really. You don't even believe in the sound tactics of your calling."

Reardon did not answer. He was wondering if, after all, there might not be something to what St. John said. The door opened and Jerry Kitchen came in. He started to speak, looked at St. John, and said directly to Reardon:

"Lieutenant, can I speak with you out here a minute?"

Reardon, ignoring St. John's annoyed frown, stepped outside the door and for a moment listened attentively to the scout. Jerry said finally:

"That's how it is. I know the signs. You know 'em. That's all." The gangling man ambled off to join the group in the stable. Reardon stepped back into the room.

St. John said equably, "I don't suppose that man intends to recognize me as senior officer. He doesn't like me. I don't understand your allowing him the familiarity of calling you by your first name."

"Jerry and I are old friends."

"Certainly. And you can be old friends with an enlisted man too, but there's a certain limit, a tacit distance that he should maintain. As an enlisted man your own brother couldn't address you by your first name."

"This is different. Jerry's not an enlisted man."

"He accepts the Government's pay."

Reardon shrugged. "It doesn't matter. What's important is his report. He's been out. He's found signs."

"Indians?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Only a few. It's always like that. A few first."

St. John stood up quickly. "Good God, man. All the more reason for a patrol. I want two men sent out at once—"

"No. It would only mean two unnecessary deaths. This is the advance guard, so to speak. They won't attack us until the main party arrives. Nor while it's dark. The sentries are enough. Should they come too close before dawn, the sentries would—"

St. John made himself erect. "Lieutenant, be good enough to remember that I am the senior now that the scout detail has officially ended. I want two men sent out as a reconnoitering patrol. At once. That's an order."

Reardon waited for a moment and then said slowly, "Let me choose them, Dennis. I know them."

"Very well. But I want soldiers. Not your civilian Jerry Kitchen."

"If that's an order, very well, Dennis." Reardon walked slowly out of the room.

He walked carefully across the compound, opened the stable door, entered and closed it quietly behind him, leaning unnoticed against it inside the stable.

IN FRONT of the stalls in the center of the stable a small fire was going. Six or seven men were grouped about it. Jerry Kitchen lay stretched in a darkened corner next to Daisy, apparently dozing. The glow in their faces gave the men an eerie look, as though they were a group of bodyless heads suspended in the dark.

One of the faces belonged to Private Bowie Crispin. His eyes were glittering in the light and his mouth twisted unpleasantly as he listened, along with

the others, to Privates Rankin and Stooder.

Private Rankin's Georgian drawl was animated.

"We only come for shoes. That's all we wanted, shoes. We was barefoot, the hull army. We didn't have nohow 'nough clothes to go 'round and we hadn't et but a handful apiece of parched peas for three days, but we didn't pay none of that no mind. We could fight without clothes and as long as the peas held out we wouldn't starve, though we was no ways very strong in the body. But a man's got to have shoes and Gen'l Lee'd heard how there was shoes to be got at that Gettysburg. A fact'ry they had there. All's we come for was shoes."

Private Stooder's customarily lifeless eyes were intent with eager sparkle. His Vermont twang was high with emotion.

"You come for shoes and you got the dang'est battle of yer lives on yer hands. God A'mighty but you did. I just lay there with the rest of the 7th Vermont and watched you come." He glanced around at the circle of bodyless heads. "How them jumpin' johnny-rebs did come. I never want to see no purtier sight. Nor no worse un. But it was something to see."

Crispin's glowering face nodded. His words were sullen.

"That's the way it should be. Two white armies fighting a white fight. And white officers to command. Like me, a captain at Shiloh. None of this skulking around, led by an officer who couldn't stand up and take his place with a buck private in my company of 5th Richmonds."

One of the faces looked eagerly at the man from Vermont.

"Tell us again how they come, Stooder. That's a sight stands retellin'. I wish I'd 'a seen it. Tell us again about them Pickett boys comin' across. Rankin here, he was in it, but he's no mind to shoot his mouth."

"And who's got a better right to hold his mouth?" Rankin scowled. "It wasn't a picnic I like remembering right much." But his eyes took on a light as the recollection came back and his lips smiled faintly.

The glow of the fire licked at Stooder's large angular face, accentuated the eagerness of his expression and brought into relief the geometrical boniness of his jaw and cheeks and forehead, making them slab-like in shadow and light, like the blocks of granite from his own Vermont.

He looked around him slowly.

"There won't be nothin' like it soon again," he said softly. The men leaned forward. "Two days we lay up there atop Cemetery Ridge along the Taneytown Road, and the Rebs' cannon give it to us ev'ry second of the time. Some of them balls which had lost their spin was visible and seemed to be coming to hit us straight between the eyes—but most of 'em fell short, and we could see 'em rollin' back down the ridge. We could've got out and brought 'em back if they hadn't rolled so far. We just lay there, lookin' across the wheat field and that peach orchard and over to where the Rebs was on Seminary Ridge, and wondered when they'd come.

"And oh my God when they started comin'! They come out'n the trees into the wheat, in solid grey lines, kind of hard to see at first. And *marchin'*—not runnin'. Marchin' as proud as if the fourteen hundert yards they'd got to go was a parade ground. Marchin' under that sticky July sun as cool as you pleased, with us up on the hill behind that wall, holdin' our fire till they come in range." Stooder took a deep in-

dulgent breath and he was seeing it again.

"That's it." Bowie Crispin's voice was ugly and coarse. "Marching. Not creeping about like we do here. We're no army; we're a ragamuffin mob."

A LARGE face with a bushy black beard turned to Crispin. It was Private DuVal, the guidon bearer. "Shut your lips, *mon ami,*" he growled. "We know what it is we are. Go on, Stooder."

Stooder smiled with his eyes. "And then they come into range of our artillery. The balls go over our heads and we kind of close our eyes, feelin' sorry, and knowin' we wasn't supposed to. When we open them we could see great gaps in them fine ranks, and it was like somebody was hurtin' us, which I can't understand. It was something to see and something to think on."

Private Rankin said, "I don't like to think on it." But he did. He was smiling. He liked to think on anything which proved him a fine soldier in the face of the others. This he did without ostentation.

"Whatever was you thinkin' of?" Stooder asked, "comin' up like that? There wasn't no hurry to you. You musta had a lot of time to think."

"I was thinkin' how I wisht we'd got them shoes before we had to walk across that wheat. Wheat can be sharp as tarnation and it bites a man's feet."

Stooder nodded. "Then you come close enough for us to give it to you with our rifles," he said. "Couldn't see much of you for the smoke by that time, but you kept a-comin' and I remember the red flags in the white smoke, and then what was left of you come pluggin' up to the ridge and we just wanted to cheer and say, 'Let 'em have the lousy ridge, they earned it.' But our officers didn't look at it like that. So we got up and met you with the bayonet."

"It was the first we seen of you," Rankin said. "Up till then we hadn't seen nothing but that wall. I reckon we didn't have much stomach for the bayonet by the time we got there. We'd left so many on the way."

Stooder nodded. Some of the sparkle had gone out of his eyes. "We didn't fire when you went back. Remember? I guess you never figgered why. We just calculated they was already too few of you left. We kind of yelled a little. Calculated you'd hear and maybe know how we felt."

"Fifteen thousand of us come across," Rankin said quietly. "Five thousand come back."

"Yeah. Yeah, I heard. It was a hell of a mess."

"We never got them shoes."

"A mess. Yeah. But purty. The purtiest thing I ever did see. I never want to see it again."

"Yeah."

Stooder grinned sheepishly. "Crazy as hell, wasn't it? Fightin' like that; me against you. No reason."

Rankin considered this. "No," he said gravely. "Nothin' like that is real crazy. You was afraid we'd get strong and you had to stop us. Somebody's always afraid somebody else'll get strong."

"Maybe it's like that here, though I never thought on it. Maybe the Indians think we'll get too strong."

CHAPTER VII

SECRET FROM SHILOH

THERE was silence, except for the small dry breathing of the fire, the occasional stomp of an animal's hoof. Crispin's voice broke it.

"That's the way it should be. Like at Shiloh. Armies. Organization. Discipline. Not like what we are now. Savages. We're a ragamuffin mob led by a—"

Reardon moved forward. The men jumped to their feet and stood rigid. Crispin's face turned dark and he swore under his breath.

"I've an unpleasant duty," Reardon said. "I want two volunteers for a patrol outside the yard."

Automatically the men's eyes swung to the figures of the two veterans who had been reminiscing of a war that was a war.

Stooder's vacant eyes blinked. He said, "Well, I don't know. . . ."

But Rankin stepped forward smartly. He felt it the wrong time to relinquish the respect these men had bestowed upon him.

"Yes, sir. Private Rankin, sir. B Company."

"Thank you, Rankin."

"Well . . ." Stooder glanced about uncomfortably. "If I gotta, I gotta . . ."

"You don't have to, Stooder."

"I calculate I'd better," Stooder said reluctantly. He grinned. "I done too much talkin' not to."

Reardon smiled. Quickly he detailed the patrol for them. Ride out and up to the rim—the one they'd passed coming here from the desert. It wasn't more than half a mile away. Three-quarters at the most. See what they could, and skyhoot it back. The important thing was to get back safely.

Crispin made a disgusted snort at the "safely." Reardon ignored him. He watched the two men prepare their horses and waved them out of the stable door.

"Luck," he called. They did not hear him.

He turned back. Bowie Crispin must have thought he had left. Crispin was saying heatedly: "—and the respect this ragamuffin shows for ignorant savages is the most ridiculous—"

Jerry Kitchen said, "Hold on, sojer." The tall man had gotten up and now he moved forward and took Crispin by the arm and turned him around. Slowly he rolled up the buckskin sleeve of his left forearm.

"I talked like you once," he said. "I hadn't a mite of respect for a brown-skinned heathen. And then on my first scout one of them ignorant heathen give me this."

He extended his hand. A long deep scar twisted its way up his left forearm. It was an old scar, long healed, but ugly, and you could still comfortably bury two fingers in its depth at any point. Jerry said slowly:

"I allus had a healthy respect after that for any ignorant savage who could throw a axe that straight from sixty feet."

Crispin stared at the scar until Jerry Kitchen rolled down his sleeve and strolled back to his corner. The private swallowed and then shrugged.

"I've seen a bayonet do more harm than that." His tone was defiant but the look in his dark eyes belied the tone.

Reardon walked over to Crispin, and when the men started scrambling again to their feet he said, "As you were," and they relaxed and looked up at him.

He said equably to Crispin: "You seem to bear me some sort of grudge. That's not the way I want it. No officer out here can afford to be on poor terms with the enlisted men."

Crispin's head jerked. He took a backward step, his dark eyes coming alive and snapping. A livid anger suddenly possessed him.

"You see!" His whisper was strident. "You're holding it over my head

already. I knew that. I knew all along you would."

Reardon frowned.

"I don't think I understand. I've been tolerant with you because of your brother's death. He was with me a long time. If it's his death you hold me responsible for, I'm deeply sorry. But I don't think that has anything to do with your animosity towards me."

"You know it hasn't. You know damned well it hasn't! Why don't you call me an enlisted man again? Why don't you tell these men here? Now's as good a time as any. You'll do it anyway. Do it now! It'll give you pleasure to see someone else share your own disgrace before you're cashiered!"

Reardon's voice was cold. "That's about enough. Private Crispin, you—"

"No!" Crispin breathed heavily. His shoulders began shaking and his voice became shrill.

"I won't give you the satisfaction! I'll let them have it from my own lips. I'll be condemned by no one but myself. I have that right. You can't deny me that right."

HE TURNED to the suspended firelit faces which stared up at him and leaned forward, his face contorted with a wild defensive ugliness. "All right, you'll have it from me! That's the way a gentleman does it. He doesn't wait for a coward who's being cashiered out of the Army to do it for him. I was at Shiloh, a captain of the 5th Richmond—you've seen my commission signed by Jeff Davis. The Yankees had my battalion surrounded; we were dug in on the side of a hill—a steep hill. The major wouldn't surrender and told them to come take us. He sent that message. It meant a massacre. We knew that. He sent it anyway.

"They were going to come. They were going to leave none of us alive. They said our men had violated the Yankee women in Beloit and burned the town afterward. We hadn't a chance.

"I crawled through a gully—the muddiest gully in creation. Everything was mud at Shiloh. I crawled through. Into their lines. The Yankees took me to their major. They were going to kill me. I told the major I knew of a way into our position that wouldn't cost him a man. I'd tell him if he'd give me his word not to massacre the battalion. He hit me. He wouldn't give his word. But he didn't want to lose men.

"I told him I'd tell him the way if he'd give me his word not to murder me. Why should I die with the rest? I never touched a woman in Beloit. He gave me his word and I told him—"

There were two or three growls from the faces around the fire. Jean DuVal half rose from his seat, his eyes wide and ferocious over his great black beard.

He said harshly:

"*Mon Dieu!* You have the dirty craven heart of a—"

Crispin laughed.

"Yes, I know what you say, what you think. For three years I heard nothing but that. They did not harm me. They kicked me a little. They put me in their prison camp. In Pennsylvania.

"I bought my way. Do you think I don't know it? But I am alive. And where are those who refused to surrender—who were so noble and courageous and stupid? Butchered. That's where.

"I was sent to prison and they would not release me even after the war, though my Virginia wanted them to—so they could try me and execute me. I preferred to be sent here by the

Yankees. And I am here. I am alive. I can breathe and see and hear and smell and feel. Those brave madmen of the battalion—they are below the mud of Shiloh where fools belong.

"The battalion is forgotten, but I am here. And you may all say and think what you wish. I have heard worse no matter what it is. And you have heard my own lips speak of it—not another's. A gentleman does not wait to be denounced by his inferior."

He turned and his wild glance struck at Reardon's eyes. Then he seemed to collapse within himself, the breath going out of his chest, his legs buckling. He sank by the fire, his eyes wide and vicious, and yet half penitent —the eyes of a dog that has bitten the master it hates, and hopelessly awaits the swift death it senses it deserves.

TROOPER DuVAL spat in the fire and moved so as not to be sitting next to Crispin. The men's eyes held on Crispin's face, and then instinctively they all turned to look at Lieutenant Reardon.

Reardon waited until he was certain the pity would not show in his voice.

"Private Crispin, you are guilty of the most disgraceful exhibition of conduct it has been my misfortune to witness. In view of the emergency that makes it impossible to spare the men necessary to place you under guard, I defer the arrest and charges of gross insubordination until we reach the post."

He turned to where the hulking form of the guidon bearer sat cross-legged on the opposite side of the dying fire.

"DuVal, you will see to it that this man does not leave your presence until we return to Fort Wingate. He is to bear arms only in event of attack, and then you will continue to keep him under close surveillance."

The big Frenchman's "Yes, sir!" was an eager growl and he hoisted himself and moved around and stood behind Crispin.

Reardon walked to the door, turned, and looked directly at Crispin.

"In the meantime," he said, "I think you should know that this ragamuffin mob, as you term us, until now has been your salvation. Because we are not considered an army, because we are supposed to lack discipline, intelligence and organization, headquarters in the East does not see fit to adhere to military formality and append a man's history and record to his name on our regimental rolls. Up until this moment your entire record consisted of only your name, birth-date and home.

"Your secret was your own."

Reardon nodded to the men. "You had better get what sleep you can. We're likely to have a heavy day of it in a few hours. See the fire is thoroughly out.

"Goodnight."

He walked out into the dark, closing the door.

For a moment there was silence in the stable. Then Jean DuVal prodded Crispin's back with his knees.

"Come along. Up!" He yanked Crispin to his feet. *"En avant!"* He spat viciously into the fire. *"A votre santé."* To your health," he said, and spat again.

Crispin stumbled forward. He couldn't seem to think straight. The bitterness in him was a mad thing. When the numbness left his mind, he was positive he could manage in some way to kill Lieutenant Reardon. If only Deesohay came and there was an attack. His brain began to form a jumbled prayer. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

SCOUTING PARTY

PRIVATES RANKIN and Stooder halted their horses atop the crest of the rim, where they made motionless silhouettes against the powdery brilliance of the sky.

Rankin looked up. "Funny," he drawled, "how it can be so bright up there and so tarnation black down here. I don't understand much about this country."

The man from Vermont nodded. "But it gets into you," he said. "Maybe even more'n back home. Vermont's a land you can know and get to fancy. It's green and brown. It's got its seasons. You know when you're gonna plow and plant and harvest; you know when you got to curl in for the winter and you can calculate almost to the day when the first heavy snow is due and when it's gonna melt in Spring. But here—there's no predictin' and no knowin'. I can't tell whether this country fetches love from a man, or fear, or just the uncertainty of never knowin' what. Someday it'll be big."

"It's big now."

"I mean another kind of big."

Rankin's horse raised its head and he could feel rather than see its ears stand erect. Quickly he reached out and squeezed the animal's nostrils with his fingers. But Stooder, less alert, was not fast enough and his horse emitted a snort before he could contract the muzzle.

Rankin said, "There must be somethin' to make 'em act up."

"We didn't notice nothin' on the way up. We couldn't see nothin' anyways if it was two feet in front of our faces."

"They tell me these red boys don't made no noise—you can't never notice 'em."

Stooder spat into the dark. "They made enough noise in the Pass."

"Yeah. They had us cold and didn't have no reason to hold back. But those four atop the ravine didn't sound-off none when they got the sergeant."

Stooder stiffened in the saddle and jerked his head to stare back over his shoulder. His whisper was sharp.

"Did you hear that?"

"What?"

"A noise. Some kinda noise." Stooder had to redouble his efforts to grip his horse's muzzle. Rankin's animal shied suddenly and almost unseated him.

Stooder said, "Hell, we're a fine target. I never thought."

Rankin held his breathing. "You hear that?"

"No. Not this time."

"There."

"Yeah. Yeah, I heard that."

As though he had suddenly become aware of danger, Rankin lowered his voice.

"What should we do? Sky-hoot it back like the lieutenant said, or investigate?"

"I don't rightly know. They learned us in the war when we was on sentry or out on patrol to say 'Halt, who goes there?' "

"Yeah. And we was learned to say 'Stand and make y'self known or I fire.' "

Stooder shook his head. "I don't think we ought to say that."

"No. Hell no, we better not."

"This ain't Gettysburg," Stooder said.

"We're a long way from Gettysburg. It's a mite different out here." Rankin jerked his head still. "There it is again. As if somethin's crawlin' on its belly."

"But more than one."

"Let's get off'n this rim."

THEY wheeled their horses and headed down the slope. At its base Rankin reached out, groped for Stooder's bridle and pulled both animals to a halt.

"We ain't seen anything we can report yet. We can't go in and just say we heard a noise. We got to have somethin' to report. I'd be a fine soldier if I said, 'Lieutenant, Private Rankin reportin' and I heard a noise.' 'What was the noise, Private?' he'd say. And I'd say, 'Just a weeny noise, Lieutenant, and I don't know what made it.' "

"Listen!" Stooder said. "That's the sound of feet runnin' on the ground! Naked feet."

"They wear them moccasin shoes. Same thing as naked feet almost. What direction?"

Stooder twisted his head back and forth. "I can't tell where it's comin' from."

Rankin said, "Wish we'd had even them moccasin shoes at Gettysburg. I never have got over havin' trouble with my feet since then. That wheat. And I stepped on a busted bayonet—"

"Shut up. Listen, it's comin' from all around."

"All right." Rankin's drawl was breathless. "We learned enough. They're here. Let's get back. Fast, Stooder!"

Rankin took the lead. The hoofbeats began to thud loudly. There was no other sound.

Stooder heard Rankin's sharp gasp and heard then the sound a meal sack makes when it is dropped to the ground. And there is a different tone to the hoofbeats of a riderless horse. That is how Stooder knew.

He wheeled his horse, galloped back, flung himself off and groped about the blackness of the earth. It was in his thoughts that they must have the eyes of cats to see when he could not see.

The breathing guided him. The pad of feet appeared to have stopped. He whispered, "Take it easy," and put out his hand. A long slender stick was protruding from Rankin's throat. There was a tip of feathers at the end of the stick. He knew better than to try to pull it out.

He said, "All right, here we go," and put his arms under Rankin.

Rankin's whispered words were interspersed with choking. "Go back . . . quick. They don't know nothin' about heroes here. This ain't . . . Gettysburg. . . ."

"No, it ain't." Stooder picked Rankin up in his strong scrawny arms and started for his horse.

Something stung and then tickled him in the back at the base of his spine, and stung him again between his shoulders and again in the back of his leg above the knee. Very slowly he knelt down and rested Rankin on the ground and felt another sting in the middle of his back. The tickling sensation was gone and there was a lot of pain like fire-burns in the places he had been stung.

He had the quick thought that his back and legs must resemble a porcupine's, only the quills had feathers on the ends.

Rankin was striving to gurgle something which sounded like, "You no 'count bull-headed Yank. . . ." And Stooder answered quietly, "You mule-headed lousy Reb. . . ." and as carefully as he could, in order not to weigh too heavily on Rankin's chest, he slipped forward and across the Georgian's body. Then they lay still and felt and knew nothing, both being, at that moment, very far from the Taneytown Road which runs along that small stone wall on Cemetery Ridge. . . .

STYLES, Reardon's orderly, bent down and shook the lieutenant gently but insistently. "It's almost five, sir. You wanted me to wake you."

"Yes. Thank you. Has Jerry Kitchen come back?"

"Yes, sir. Here he is, sir."

Reardon got up, came awake swiftly. He'd relieved Sergeant Potter at twelve and gone back to sleep at four. He'd needed more than the short hour's rest.

"Find anything, Jerry?"

The scout nodded. "They're here, Johnny. A flock of 'em. Maybe the hull Apache nation from the signs."

Reardon buckled on his revolver and saber belt. He said, "It's come at last."

"Maybe. I didn't like the looks of that smoke."

Reardon said, "Rankin and Stooder?"

"I brought 'em in."

"Brought them?"

"Everything except their hair. They'd lost that. We buried 'em beside the stable—deep."

"Did Lieutenant St. John—"

"Yeah. I showed 'em to him. They weren't pretty but all he said was a soldier's a fool to be affected by death in war. But his face was whiter'n hardwood smoke."

Reardon put on his hat and said softly, "I must not be a soldier."

"Come how?"

"I don't like to see them die that way—needlessly. It affects me."

"We're likely to need every pair of hands we got."

"Yes."

Reardon walked toward the 'dobe. "Styles, tell Sergeant Potter I want the men mounted in ten minutes."

"Yes, sir."

Reardon entered the 'dobe, took the blanket from St. John and hooked it on the pegs above the window. Then he lit a candle. St. John sat up. Old Bill Owen rolled over on his blanket on the floor and raised his grizzled head.

Reardon said, "They're here. We're riding out in ten minutes. I'm detailing Corporal Casy and four men to stay with you, Dennis. Counting you and Bill here, that will make seven men to stay with Miss Angela. That will be enough, I think."

St. John got up and began slipping into his tunic.

"You're still forgetting who's in command, Reardon. I don't thank you for giving me the easy spot. I'll take the detail and you'll remain here."

Reardon faced him. "Can't you see, Dennis? You understand how it would be, my staying here with her? She can't stand much of the sight of me. She might not even stay. And she has to."

St. John looked at him. Presently he nodded. "I understand. I'll remain. You're in luck, Reardon."

Old Bill Owen got up. "Why in thunder do ye got to move yer sojers out? What's to happen to my gran'-daughter?"

"Bill," Reardon said, "if the entire troop moves out for combat, Deesohay won't have a thought for this 'dobe—until afterward. And there won't be any afterward—for him. He won't send more than ten of his warriors to investigate here. He'll need all the men he's got. I know Deesohay."

"I hope for your sake you do," St. John said.

Reardon went to the door. He heard a rustle behind him but did not look back. He opened the door and went out. A voice behind him said, "John."

HE TURNED. She had wrapped a blanket about her nightdress. Her hair came low over her shoulders.

When she closed the door behind her he could barely see her. The men were already in their saddles, the horses tossing their heads and blowing. The faint dawn in the east began to strengthen and bring objects to a gray life.

"John, they're here, aren't they? You're about to engage them."

"Yes."

"Will there be danger?"

"You'll be as safe—"

"I mean for you."

His throat worked. "No more than there always is. It isn't bad."

After a moment she said, "This is what you want, isn't it? What you've waited so long for. This is your plan coming to a head at last, isn't it?"

"I hope it is. It isn't just my plan. I haven't taken an unnecessary risk with the men's lives. He would have caught us anyway if he'd the mind."

"But they would not have come here, where you've so patiently taught them to come, would they?"

"Maybe."

"No. No, they wouldn't. John, I want you to know—"

Sergeant Potter came up.

"We're formed, sir."

"Good, Sergeant. Detail Corporal Casy and four men to stand by with Lieutenant St. John here in the 'dobe."

"Very good, sir." He saluted and moved off.

It was becoming lighter now, but still deep gray.

"John, nothing inside me has changed. Please know that. It was the outside, the things I knew to be and which I couldn't change. I wish you luck—with my heart. Know that."

For a second he could not talk around the lump that came up from his throat. He wanted to kiss her. Almost he wished he could be the one to remain with her. Instead, he said:

"Thank you. I'll remember, ma'am. I'll remember every minute."

He touched his gauntlet to the brim of his hat and strode to his horse. He was taut inside and it made him breathless. No barriers were down on his side, until he could prove himself. With the old proof. He knew that. Any other way would have been taking advantage of her, using his danger to soften her. He swung up into the saddle.

The light was strong enough to see her against the doorway. She did not wave. Nor did he. He held the view of her, motionless, in his mind. For a moment he watched Jerry Kitchen scan the grayness of the rim. He looked himself and could see nothing, but waited for the scout to say, "It's clear, Johnny." Then he raised his arm, called "Forward!" and brought his hand down.

The column moved out by twos. For a while Angela Owen watched, then St. John appeared at the door and she went inside with him. Corporal Casy and the four men followed. Only old Bill Owen stood at the doorway, his hand raised to his squinting eyes. Then he too went in, pausing to spit first.

CHAPTER IX

CHARGE!

IN A long rolling canter the column made its way through the dawn almost to the base of the rim. There Reardon halted it.

Looking up, he surveyed the rim with apparent indifference. Its summit looked very high and far away, yet it was under a hundred yards and just a slope. The half-light made it seem more desolate than it was, and somehow sinister. He wondered briefly what was behind the other side of the rim.

Jerry Kitchen sidled his mount up. "They're there, Johnny. I can almost smell 'em. A lot of 'em." The scout fingered his yellow mustache and studied the crest of the rim. Reardon said:

"Jerry, it's come."

The scout gave a quick toss of his head which shook the long golden curls of his hair about his shoulders. He bent his head and inspected his Spencer.

"You been waiting for this a sight of time, Johnny. I've allus believed in ye. I've taught ye most all I know or ever learned. And it's my hope ye make out all right, Johnny."

Reardon reached out and pressed the scout's shoulder. "I know, Jerry. It's now or not at all. I know that too."

The scout looked away. "But I don't like thinkin' back on that smoke. Deesohay's smarter'n most any man I ever heard of."

Sergeant Potter rode up and saluted. "Orders, sir?"

"Yes. At the command forward, the men are to fight their way up the rim. Once we reach the crest, we'll turn and have 'em cold down there. We won't have much trouble breaking through them when they come down, as they won't expect us to ride up at them. Our positions will then be reversed and we'll have the advantage of being able to charge down upon them."

Reardon searched Sergeant Potter's eyes.

"Is that clear?"

The sergeant's expression was inscrutable but there was a twinkle of approval in his eyes. "Yes, sir." He wheeled his horse, saluting, and rode off.

Reardon watched him without seeing him. That was it. That was the maneuver he'd known in his heart would work. He'd nurtured it, discovered its flaws, overcome them, discarded it, gone back to it. It could not fail simply because he would not allow it to fail. Sergeant Potter was riding along the double file column which strung out behind Reardon, giving the corporals their orders.

BLACK-BEARDED Jean DuVal sat his horse beside Private Crispin. The Frenchman had handed his guidon pennon to another trooper. He took the duty of keeping Crispin under surveillance quite seriously. He carried two carbines, one of which he handed to Crispin.

"This is yours, *mon ami*, for a short time. See you use it wisely. I will be keeping an eye on you."

Crispin nodded. He looked at the carbine and then, without turning his head, his eyes slid obliquely and fastened on the figure of Reardon at the head of the column. He muttered softly under his breath.

DOWN the line Private Carlson looked speculatively up at the rim. He had it in mind that nothing coming over from behind that rim would prevent his returning to see Myrna and the kid and the new kid he'd never seen. This was merely an unpleasant duty which had interrupted but not postponed his furlough. He quited the sensitive tossing of his mount's head. He missed the Yankee and the Rebel, Stooder and Rankin, whose customary places in the column had been just ahead of him. It made him a little breathless to think of how they'd looked last night, mutilated and their hair gone. There was some consolation in the knowledge that should the same thing happen to him, Myrna and the kids would never see it and remember him that way.

Sergeant Potter halted his horse beside Private Burnstedt, leaned sideways in the saddle and said quietly:

"I've a notion B Company is going to be right proud of you. I've a notion you're about to find these here red devils ain't any worse'n they always have been —and you've handled plenty in your time. Yes sireee, Burnstedt, I've one hell of a notion you're going to do your best to keep B's record just as high an' mighty as it's always been. I'll be watching sharp to see how you do it."

Sergeant Potter rode on. Burnstedt passed his tongue over his lips and looked nervously up at the crest of the rim. He had a feeling he was going to be sick. Very sick. He hoped he wouldn't. Not here. He kept wondering how he had escaped this strenght-draining sickness in the years before.

The horses chafed skitterishly and down the column there was the faint switch of a tail, a low-voiced comment and answer. The presaging streaks of light in the east came up, giving the slope to the rim a tangible manganese look.

Lieutenant Reardon felt the pressure of Jerry Kitchen's hand on his arm. Jerry was pointing.

"There."

A solitary pony and rider had appeared on the crest of the rim, majestic and motionless. Down the column a murmur made its way and then hushed.

Against the lighting skyline another rider appeared to the left of the first and a good distance away. A group of three or four materialized in the center. Then more, and more, until presently there was a solid line, two deep, looking down.

It was their utter silence which impressed most. Their impassive dignity, their apathetic unconcern—those were things to be expected. But the quiet, the somber, absolute quiet made spines tingle sharply and caused saliva to sour and dry.

Above the immobile heads, feathered lances and an occasional rifle barrel formed a long stockade against the sky. Here and there a war bonnet rose higher than the single feather which protruded from most of the scalplocks. There were still no sound—no indication, even, of coming sound.

Jerry Kitchen spat without removing his eyes from the rim. "Quite a party. All Apaches. Not so many rifles among 'em as I'd 'a thought."

Reardon said softly, "I wonder which is the old man himself."

"I keep rememberin' that smoke," the scout said.

DOWN the ranks the tension grew, the horses snorting and prancing a bit. But the troopers uttered no word. Their eyes were fixed and magnetized by that motionless mass upon the rim's crest.

Jerry Kitchen said, "Well, Johnny. I reckon now."

Reardon nodded. He loosened his saber in its scabbard and unstudded the flaps of his revolver holsters.

"Yes. I reckon now."

He half turned in his saddle, raised himself by pushing down on the stirrups, and let his arm go up.

"Companeee-ee . . . Right front into line!" His tone was parade-ground clear.

Sergeant Potter's voice bawled immediately: "Squads right into line!"

And the corporals rang it out: "Squads right!" down the entire line.

He dropped his arm. Behind him he heard the column swinging to form a long, nervously dancing company front. Very slowly he rode out and took his

position in the center, little Stevie Vance following and keeping his mount a respectful distance behind.

Up there on the crest the silent horde had made no motion. The light was stronger and naked red torsos were visible, lean and muscled and painted.

Suddenly a screaming whoop tore apart the silence and a ball of white smoke mushroomed over a pony's head and floated up and away. Then the immobile mass came wildly alive and began pouring down the slope and a great thunder began to roll.

Reardon eyed it impassively. Whoops and yelps and staccato cries; rifles, lances and bows brandished overhead; sure-footed ponies beating a tremendous roar as the tide spilled forward and downward and closer, like a brownish-red flood bursting and surging over a broken dam.

The long thin line of the detail remained still; no man moving, no man uttering a sound. Reardon allowed himself a moment's fleeting pride; these men, they were green and raw—but they were learning.

He waited. He was surprised at the serenity inside him. The proximity of ruction and death seemed not to disturb him. Then he raised his voice.

"Prepare to fire!"

Carbines came sliding out of saddle holsters and butts were adjusted against shoulders, eyes trained sights on the screaming, plunging wave.

"Aim!"

For a moment he watched it gushing toward him.

"Fire!"

The carbines crashed and riderless ponies suddenly appeared in the brown flood. It was virtually half way down the slope by now.

Reardon raised his arm. "All right, Stevie."

He wondered if this would shock Deesohay. It was a daring execution, but Deesohay was a daring man and might have employed the identical maneuver himself.

"Dee-tail-ll-l . . . For-war-rd!" He snapped his arm down.

BEHIND him Stevie's bugle blasted the cracked lilt of the Charge and immediately there was the sound of hoofs above the roar of the shoeless ponies, desultory and sluggish at first, and then rising to a steady rhythmic drumming as the command broke into a breakneck ascending gallop.

He turned his head and said over his shoulder to Stevie, "Fire at will." And Stevie raised his battered bugle and bellowed out Fire at Will.

Reardon heard the surprised yelping ahead and grinned. They hadn't expected the detail to come up at 'em. Not in the midst of their own charge. He kept grinning and the feel of it was good.

The carbines seemed to take on a voice of their own. Ponies were being abruptly checked, and they reared back, their forelegs flailing the air. The carbines continued to rattle and at this range they took a telling effect. Clusters of riderless ponies milled about in the wavering red line, contributing to the surprise and confusion already created by the suddenness of the detail's advance.

"If panic just comes to 'em," he thought, "we'll not need to bother about-facing on the crest and repeating this."

Out of the right corner of his eye he caught the blue tunics of the line behind him, the set white faces of the men as they crouched forward in their

saddles. For some reason he was impressed with the yellow piping that ran down their trousers into their boots. United States Cavalry piping.

Out of the corner of his left eye he could see that the line extended farther, and on this side was the blue and orange guidon pinnon, snapping, its lance thrust forward like a spear. He got out his saber. They were getting closer now. There was going to be a hell of an impact if something didn't give.

The line ahead suddenly broke, retreated and formed again with some semblance of pattern. Then blue tunics merged sharply with red-brown bodies and there was no longer any order in either line.

Like fitful balls of windblown tumbleweed little groups of blue figures surged back and forth, surrounded by howling men who discharged their rifles and loosed arrows and lances with the reckless ferocity of fanatics.

Jerry Kitchen, the single bullet of his antiquated Spencer having long-since lodged itself in a red abdomen, lashed the gun to Daisy's reins, dismounted and gathered up a bow and a fistfull or arrows from a dead brave. He stood beside Daisy, chewing steadily and launching the shafts with a more deadly accuracy than the Apaches who whirled about him.

Once a brave broke through the circle, brandishing a knife in his hand and yelling in the cracked falsetto of a young buck on his first war party. Deliberately Jerry paused in the business of loosing arrows, reached to his belt and drew out his hatchet. His hand went back and forward in one movement and the hatchet was turning over lazily in the air, once, twice, and split the warrior's face, making a slight popping sound like a melon being halved.

Delicately Jerry bent over, retrieved his hatchet with a gentle tug, and resumed his quiet, impassive handling of bow and arrow. He spat only once.

CHAPTER X

HAND TO HAND

PRIVATE JEAN DuVAL kept his horse carefully behind Private Crispin's mount, and fired deliberately at long intervals, with one eye on the wheeling Indians and the other on the trooper in front. From time to time he shouted above the bedlam:

"All right, Crispin, reload! *Dieu vous garde!* I maintain an eye on you. *Ruse contre ruse!* Make certain your target is a red man."

Crispin scowled. He fired and reloaded cautiously, biding his time, never losing sight of Lieutenant Reardon's position in the fighting.

Jean DuVal felt a slow wonderment coming over him. He had never participated in an engagement of this size. In his previous encounters the cavalry details had outnumbered the Indians. This was different and it was as unpleasant as it was impressive. Clearly, for every trooper who fell, five or more Apaches were dying, but it did not seem equal even so. There were so many of them. It occurred to him to speculate whether, should he be slain, his great black beard would not appeal more to the trophy-minded savages than his sparse hair. He dismissed this conjecture by concluding the Indians were greedy and would take both.

He fired over the ears of his horse and had the satisfaction of seeing a husky buck slump and topple from his pony's back. And then one of them was checking his pony, wheeling it until both animal and Indian directly faced DuVal.

The warrior let out a thin screech,

his painted face grimmacing, and deliberately raised his rifle and took aim at DuVal's chest.

DuVal smiled, bringing his own carbine up for a snap shot from the hip. *Sacré nom,* these savages were infernally slow manipulating a firearm, and uncommonly poor shots once they managed to fire.

He pressed the trigger of his carbine and the click which followed sent a cold breath through his chest. He had thought he'd one left and that was a negligence of which he was ashamed.

He felt the burn in his left breast even as he saw the smoke blossom from the pointing rifle. He knew more than felt himself to be slipping from the saddle and striking the ground with a faraway jolt. He saw the brave spurring forward, a long knife in his hand, the paint crackling on the hideous face as the lips drew apart in a grin.

Ah well, if it were not the manner of death he himself would have chosen, he knew it would bring pleasure to Marie and Françoise and Vivienne. Those three would chatter their delightful red lips loose when they heard the how of it, chatter and laugh and bend their exquisite bodies over the back fences of their yards and proclaim it till the *Ruelle de Murier* in Marseille all gurgled with it. *Attendez! Did you hear how my Jean died? A heathen bullet in his breast and his hair and beard pulled out. Delightful, n'est-ce pas? He deserved it.*

Eh bien, if it gave them pleasure. Three good girls, those. Delicious. And each one his wife. It was true. He deserved their chattered gloatings. He should not have married them all; or more to the point, he should have gone to the trouble of procuring divorces before venturing into each consecutive matrimony and skipping from the *Rue de Clichat* to *Rue des Acassias* to evade the most recent unofficial grass widow. Or he should never have permitted any of the three to catch up with themselves. Or even better: never should he have accepted the yoke of wedlock with any one of them. That way there is a minimum of official inconvenience.

He smiled. And stopped smiling. He was to die now. And his death bestowed a free hand upon Private Crispin. Lieutenant Reardon would receive a carbine bullet in the back.

Jean DuVal exerted a superhuman strength and sat up, blood pouring from his mouth. Someone was lifting the scant hair of his head and there was a sharp tugging burn at the sides of his temples. For a moment the alarm for Lieutenant Reardon was strong inside him, but presently this gave way to the pain of his head and there was a brief puzzlement, and then a winking light far off in a vague grayness and even this light disappeared. . . .

THE blue line was by now fighting its methodical way through the wavering clusters of Indians. Stevie Vance's trumpet continuously cracked out the Charge in flat brass and Stevie himself seemed to have evolved a dexterous art of scuttling his mount back and forth and in and out of the reach of red figures on wiry ponies.

He would blow into his instrument, fire his revolver at a red-brown body and give mighty spur to his animal, darting away and eluding each Apache who would whirl at the sound of the bugle and give brief chase. Stevie kept his campaign hat jammed well over his ears, its brim down all around, and in this manner very neatly concealed the bushy shock of red hair which he meant to keep intact.

Private Burnstedt's horse plunged

viciously on the outskirts of the mêlée. Burnstedt devoted his efforts to maintaining a precarious seat and at the same time hiding his face so as not to see what was going on in front of him.

He had not fired his carbine since that first blast when the detail had advanced. Now it was gone, dropped somewhere when his unguided mount had reared, and he did not miss it. He had been violently sick twice. For some reason the Apaches had not yet turned and concerted attention on him, being more actively engaged with the furious fighting of the rest of the detail.

But twice solitary bucks had come after him, whooping, and each time he had escaped by wheeling his horse and racing for the nearest group of blue tunics. His fear left him breathless and gasping, as though he expected momentarily a severe blow in the stomach.

Noticing Burnstedt's actions, Sergeant Potter dropped his mount back, edged out of the mêlée which had centered about him and Privates Carlson, Lowenstein and Baxter, and rode up to Burnstedt.

There was a nasty lance-cut across the sergeant's forehead, blood making a red smear over his terra-cotta face, and there was a bullet in his right side above the hip which no one but Sergeant Potter was aware of.

He grinned at Burnstedt, his teeth tainted bright red, and held up his smoking revolver.

"Come back to reload. Got a bullet in her yet but I'm needin' more. It's gettin' lice-bit hot work in there. They're stubborn as red hell."

Burnstedt raised his head, his face gray under its burn, his lips shaping a thin bitter smile.

"You come back to see I don't turn tail, Lem. I know."

POTTER took five bullets from his pouch, held them in his hand, started to break his service revolver preparatory to reloading.

"No. I got to reload. I didn't hold no fear you'd be turning tail. I seen you too many times handle worse'n this." His horse shied suddenly at a nearby burst of carbine fire and the bullets dropped from his hand. He checked hard on the reins. "Steady, girl; you ain't green 'round rifle fire, girl."

Burnstedt forced the smile to stay on his lips. "You never had no cause to bother about me afore, Lem. I wish it was that way now. We've handled plenty of them devils together."

"It's going our way now. Better get up and be in on the finish."

"No. I can't do it, Lem. I just—"

"I couldn't hold with seeing a B man turn tail under fire. Better move forward, Burnstedt. It ain't bad now."

"Lem, I—"

A warrior, spotting them, detached himself from a group and kicked his pony in a mad charge towards them. Burnstedt saw him, saw the painted ferocity of the face, saw rather than heard the high unhuman whoops issuing from the green and vermillion mouth.

"Lem," he screamed. "Watch out! That one there—he's coming—"

He dug spurs into his animal, headed down the slope. He turned his head over his shoulder. "I can't stand it no more, Lem. I got to get away. I got—" He squeezed his eyes shut to close out the sight of the oncoming warrior's face. His spurs kicked convulsively at the horse's flanks and the animal broke into a headlong gallop.

Sergeant Potter hadn't had a chance to reload. He flicked his wrist and the revolver snapped closed again. He spun the cylinder until the single bullet came but one chamber from the hammer. He

glanced once at the Indian, saw the warrior drop his reins, fit a shaft and draw back on the bow. Until it was almost double. It was aimed at Sergeant Potter's chest and he shrugged and turned away, calling:

"Burnstedt! Look back here!" It wouldn't do to find Burnstedt with a service revolver bullet in his back, for Burnstedt would still be Company B even though dead, and no Company B man ever took a bullet in his back.

"Burnstedt! Look! Here!"

FOR a split second the sergeant had a very natural impulse to whirl and drop the Indian before the shaft was loosed. But Burnstedt would be clear to the Owens' ranch by the time he reloaded, and Corporal Casy would greet Burnstedt in silence and there would be a field court martial for a B man for the first time.

"Burnstedt!"

For one brief moment Burnstedt glanced over his shoulder. Potter snapped his shot and even from thirty yards could see the hole which appeared in Burnstedt's forehead, small and neat, an inch above the bridge of the nose.

Burnstedt seemed to grin as though he had been relieved of a cumbersome humilitation, and as he flopped sideways from his horse he appeared grateful.

Sergeant Potter wheeled, stretching out his big arms as if to catch the arrow in his hands. It went through his chest, the flint protruding under his right shoulder blade and making a small tear in the back of his tunic. He broke off the feathered tip at his chest and hurled it weakly at the passing Indian. Then very carefully he dismounted and walked stiffly to a scalpless figure in blue. Sinking to his knees he picked up the carbine which lay across the trooper's body.

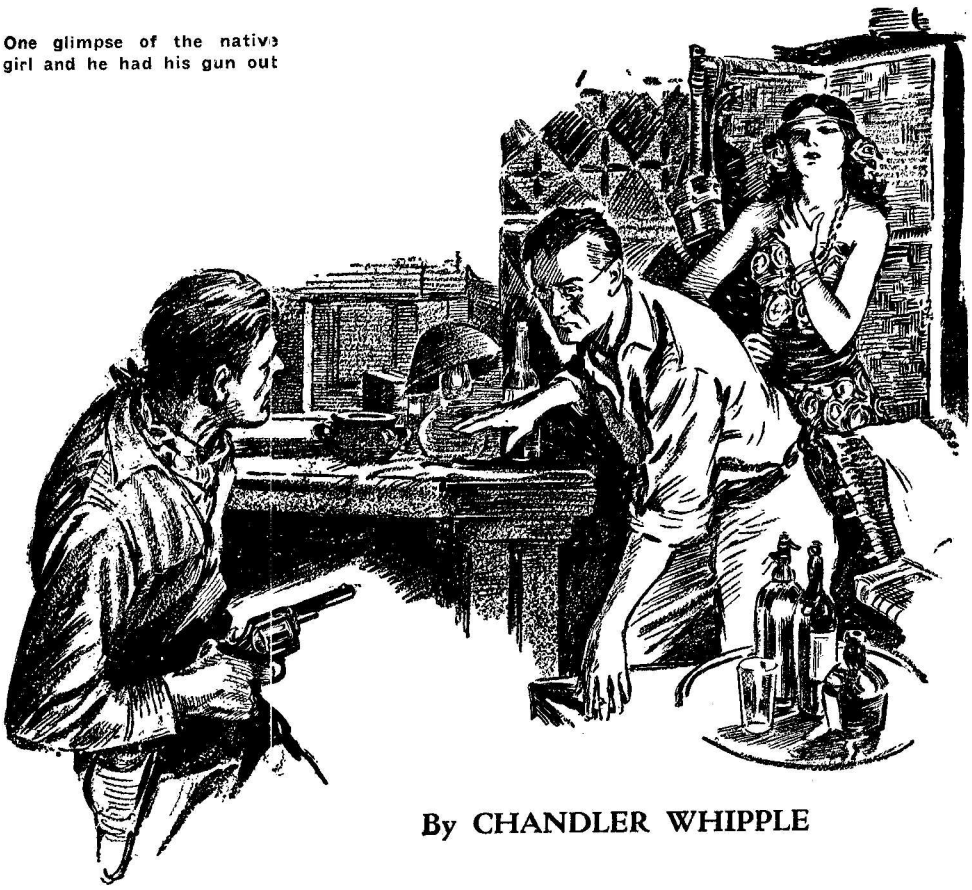
It was an effort for him to level the carbine and steady it, but he was a strong man and he managed it after the second attempt. The Indian had slid off his pony and was running back, the long knife in his hand raised.

Sergeant Potter said, "Greetings from B Company," and his shot tore away half the Indian's abdomen.

Sergeant Potter dropped the carbine and slipped backward so that the spurs of his boots pressed into the small of his back. He looked without blinking at the sun which by now was well above the eastern horizon. After a moment he did not feel the tug of a new pair of red-brown hands which swept off his campaign hat and sought his crinkling crisp gray hair. . . .

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

One glimpse of the native girl and he had his gun out



By CHANDLER WHIPPLE

Kill Your Own Tigers

When a man has spent six months in the jungle, drinking poison with every meal, meeting assassins every midnight—it's time for him to step out cheerfully and shake hands with his horrors

The Board of Directors
The Gamballa Trading Co., Ltd.
Madras, India
Gentlemen:

In accordance with your instructions regarding the Kuva Estate and its superintendent, Mr. Michael Gordon, I took on Tuesday last the packet from Madras, arriving three days later at Jorapore in the Island of Gamballa. I journeyed thence by river steamer to the head of navigation at Memtongha. From this point there is, as you are aware, a road of sorts to Kuva, but in view of the nature of my mission I thought it best to cut overland through jungle and hill country, following only native trails.

I have thus far found the native Denghalese inclined to be friendly and helpful. It is possible, however, that as plain Henry Waring, a befuddled botanist professing utter ignorance of the tea industry, I am more welcome than were my true identity and mission known. To date none has recognized me.

I have today dispensed with the last

of my native bearers. Tomorrow I arrive at the Kuva compound, quite obviously, as Mr. Michael Gordon shall see, a harmless botanist in distress . . .

IN GAMBALLA, regardless of the day or month, the sun sets at approximately six o'clock, and at precisely this hour young Michael Gordon stepped out upon the terrace that led from the rear of the living room of his bungalow, his pistol in his hand. He'd caught sight of one of the beggars through a break in the shutter, and by the Lord this time he would have it out with him.

He cursed. Did these Denghalese have a sixth sense, or were they phantoms? The fellow had been crouching behind that pitcher-plant, just down the slope; he could have sworn to it. Now, though, a faint breeze waved the plant aside and nothing was behind it.

His eyes swept the whole slope down to the compound wall. Yes, there was a moving shadow there—and there, in that far shrubbery near the wall.

He started down the slope. He had not taken half a dozen steps when the shadows merged with other lengthening shadows and were gone. He stopped short.

"Damn you, if you want me, come out and fight!" he cried.

He heard no sound beyond the whispering breeze. He waited a moment, then slowly turned about and made his way to the terrace. It was no use to try to run them down; the beggars were too fast for him. If they'd only come in daylight, but no—they came each night at dusk like nightmare phantoms, and in the darkness went.

Six months before, when he had come to take charge of the Kuva Estate in the hill country of Gamballa, Michael Gordon had been a handsome young man with red hair and a fighting jaw. "Right out of an adventure cinema," the retiring superintendent had muttered to himself when he saw him. And in truth Michael had thought he faced the greatest adventure of his life.

But in six months the Gamballa country can do things to a man. It was doubtful now if even the young lady in Cheltenham to whom he penned a weekly letter would have recognized him. His hair was long—he dare not have it cut, for he would not trust even Shamra, his Hindu boy, with scissors that close to his jugular—and his jaw was slack from too little sleep and too much whisky. His eyes were bloodshot and his cheeks hollow. In his six months of lonely struggle, Michael Gordon had lost a good thirty pounds.

He paused on the terrace, holstering his gun, and looked back. The compound was almost as thick with shadows now as was the wooded hill beyond. Far below, in the impenetrable jungle, a wanderoo began to chatter. A thousand insects took up the chorus. The soft tropic night was sharp with the scent of lemon grass.

Michael remembered now, with a wry smile that did not quite come off, how once all this had seemed so beautiful to him. There was a time when he had come to this spot each day at sunset, dressed only in his shorts, and gone through his exercises. It had been great fun then; after a day in the tea fields, it seemed to brace him up, give him a keen appetite for his dinner.

He did not know how long ago it was when he had stopped that. It was after he discovered that the skulking phantoms were always there, and because of that. No matter now: These days it would take far more than setting-up exercises to sharpen his appe-

tite for dinner. It would take, to be exact, five whisky-sodas.

WELL, it was time for them. He stepped inside the bungalow, made sure that the door was fast. The night had come again, and with it all its nameless terrors. After his lonely dinner would come more whiskies and then, when his courage was up, he must summon Shamra and send him down the hallway to his bedroom, five paces ahead and no more, with a lighted candle in his hand. And as always he would wonder if Shamra might blow the candle out and lie in wait for him.

Confound it, yesterday he'd discovered he was talking to himself. He mustn't let that happen again. He had to lick this, had to keep his head.

He started across the room toward the whisky cabinet.

Out by the compound gate, a rifle cracked. Michael jumped at the sound and his face paled. He started for the door, then stopped.

That would never do, to go rushing out there in a panic. What would his Afghan guards think of him? Supremacy of the white man, and all that. Because he was a white man and the Superintendent of Kuva Estate, he had to wait—wait here while the Lord only knew what hell was cutting loose out there. He walked across the room and back again, his hands as nervous as his feet.

A knock sounded at the door. Michael shifted slightly the pistol at his belt and called, "Come in!"

Abdul, his big Afghan captain, stepped inside the door and salaamed.

"An Englishman, *sahib*. He is at the gate. He wishes to speak with you."

"An Englishman?" Michael's face brightened. "Why the devil didn't you let him in?"

"But *sahib*, your orders. No one is to be admitted. Only the threat of a rifle stopped him."

"Of course. You're quite right, Abdul. Come, I'll go with you and see what the beggar wants." His voice was almost childlike in its eagerness.

At the compound gate, Michael found two of his six-foot Afghans keeping deferent but watchful guard over a mild-mannered, bespectacled man in pith helmet and tattered khaki. A pack was strapped upon his back, and he carried a walking stick.

"Good heavens," he said as Michael came up, "can't you take these fellows off me?" He stared up at the towering guards. "They positively stifle me."

"They're necessary," Michael assured him. He held out his hand. "Welcome to Kuva, sir. I'm Michael Gordon. You don't know how good it is to see a fellow-countryman."

But Michael Gordon was staring past him through the open gate, then at him in amazement. "Your luggage. Your coolies. Where—"

Henry Waring shook his head apologetically. "You see, I left the road a day's journey back. I'm on the hunt for a rare variety of the rhododendron reported up here. I cut through the jungle with three native bearers. Last night, for some unaccountable reason, the devils deserted me. Took most of my baggage with them."

Michael nodded. "These Denghalese can't be trusted. Come to my bungalow, man; you're just in time for dinner. Good Lord, sir, you don't know what you've done. It's a wonder you came through alive. A night and a day in this jungle, alone—"

They had reached the bungalow. Michael stopped short as a new realization struck him. *"Your gun,* man! Aren't you even *armed?"*

Henry Waring also paused. "Gun?" he said. "Why—" He took his pack from his back, began to rummage in it. He brought forth a magnifying glass, a box of carefully preserved plant specimens, some soiled linen. At last, when he had almost reached the bottom, he grunted.

"Here it is," he said, exhibiting a Webley pistol. "You know, I used to carry it at my belt, but it chafed me. Then I tried a shoulder holster, but the thing was so deucedly heavy it caused me to walk sidewise."

"But you're taking your life in your hands," Michael exclaimed. "You ought to have it handy. You need a rifle in these hills. They're full of black bears, panthers, wild elephants—"

"I suppose so, I suppose so," Henry Waring admitted. "But you know, I'm not an awfully good shot. Generally I find that the noise of the explosion is of more value than the bullet. A revolver, fired in the air, will do as well as anything to frighten wild beasts away."

Michael, as he allowed his guest to precede him, shook his head and was speechless. An amazing fellow, this Waring. Certainly he wasn't timid, and he must know his way around to have gotten here at all. A typical scientist, Michael supposed. Capable in his way, but a bit of a fuddler.

WHEN he had showed his guest to his room so he could wash up, Michael called Shamra and told him to set another place for dinner. Then he opened a new bottle of whisky—he would never drink from a previously opened bottle for fear it had since been poisoned—spilled soda into his glass and set himself to wait.

He was just starting his second drink when Henry Waring appeared, his hair brushed back and his glasses polished, seemingly little the worse for his jungle adventure. "I suppose that was actually a bit of a narrow squeak I was in," he said. "Didn't really think about it at the time. I was mighty lucky to meet up with you, Gordon."

"The luck is all mine," Michael said eagerly. "I feel no end set up having you here. I hope I can convince you to stay on a good while."

He handed Waring a whisky-soda. "That's awfully kind of you," Waring said. He walked over to seat himself in a comfortable rush-bottomed chair. "I shall certainly stop over for a day, then. But after that—"

"Don't sit in that chair!" Michael leapt from his seat, screaming the words. "Can't you see it's right by the window?"

Waring jumped, deftly recovered his whisky-soda, and edged warily away. He looked at the window in puzzlement. "But you've the shutter drawn," he said.

Michael sat down again. The hand that held his drink was shaking. "Doesn't matter," he answered. "The night's at your back. And there's a break in the shutter. They can spot you."

"They?" said Waring, seating himself against the opposite wall.

"These damned natives," Michael said. "They're after me. That's why I've gotten in half a dozen Afghan guards. They've been after me for months. Arrows. Poison. Once I found a hooded cobra in my bed. My God, man, you don't know what I've been through here."

"Good heavens," said Waring. "Why, I was through here some years ago and there was no trouble then. I thought the Denghalese were a peaceful people."

"So I'd been led to believe," Michael said. "Perhaps they are. Perhaps it's all my fault. You see—you see I made a bad mistake."

"Mistake?"

"It happened the first week I was here." Michael had never thought he would admit this to anyone, but the presence of a sympathetic white man after all these months was too much. He took another drink and continued: "I'd been having a little trouble anyway, getting enough coolies to work the estate properly. I was awfully keen to do the job right and I suppose it made me a little edgy. I must have said something wrong. Dashed if I even know now what it was, but this native came at me with his arms swinging."

"Really!" said Waring. "That's odd."

"It caught me off guard. Confound it, I know it's bad business to strike a native with your fists, but you see I used to box a little in school. Used to be quite good. Here was this young chap asuming what seemed like a boxing pose, and I suppose my reaction was instinctive. I lashed out with my right. Caught him neatly on the button. Knockout."

Waring whistled through his teeth. "What happened then? Did they all jump you?"

Michael shook his head. "I was all broken up when I saw what I'd done, but I didn't know the dialect well enough to explain. At first I thought it was going to be all right. This chap came to after a moment and got up. I thought then that he seemed more puzzled than angry. He looked at me and moved away. Then they all crowded together in a mob and started chattering. Finally they all went away, still chattering, and that was the last bit of work that was done that day. Next day I found out that the chap I'd hit was Bortuwaya, the son of the local chief."

"Most unfortunate," said Waring. "Did they leave you flat then?"

"Oh, they came back," Michael said. "Most of them, though not Bortuwaya. But they were after me. I'd be going through the tea fields, and suddenly a crowd of them would be around me, reaching out at me, chattering. I always managed to break away before they could get at me with a knife, but that didn't stop them from trying other ways.

"First off I just noticed that things around here began to disappear. My personal belongings. My shaving mug and my soap. I might have set that down as just ordinary thieves, if that had been all. Next I discovered they were skulking around my bungalow at dusk. Once I saw this Bortuwaya among them, but I could never catch any of them.

"After that the threats began to come. I'd step out in the morning and find an arrow on my doorstep. Or a knife. I'd take it in and stow it somewhere, planning to forget it. But the first time I came in at night to have another look at it and it was gone. After that I never could quite forget, because each time, no matter how carefully I hid them, the things would disappear."

"Good heavens!" said Waring. "Sneaking right into your home. Isn't there any way to keep them out?"

MICHAEL got up and started to pace the floor. "Don't you suppose I've tried locks?" he said. "I've had a wall built around the compound but they can climb it. I've gotten in these big Afghans but they can't watch everything. Good God, man, it's got to

break soon. They can't keep at me like this. I'm ready to fight them if they'll come out and fight. I've sent to the Company for a pair of machine-guns. I only wish they'd come out fighting."

Waring shook his head. "Terrible," he said. "Amazing. Doesn't seem possible that all that trouble could start from the one thing."

At that moment Shamra came to announce dinner. They went into the dining room and sat down. "You know," Michael said, "I was hoping you'd say that. Keeps me from thinking I'm altogether mad. I can't believe it either.

"Something else must have started that young chap off, and I've suspicion that the same thing is keeping them all stirred up. A rival tea company. This is splendid tea land and they want it. They're going to ruin Kuva because I can't get men enough to work it properly. They'd much rather cut my throat some dark night than work."

He paused as a thought struck him. "My word, I suppose I ought even to be suspicious of you," he said with a trace of embarrassment. "You aren't a tea man in disguise by any chance are you, Waring? I suppose I should ask for your papers and all that sort of thing."

"You'd embarrass me awfully if you did," Waring admitted. "I was just thinking of that. Such papers as I have are all in that luggage that the Denghalese made off with. Perhaps you should disarm me or something of the sort."

Michael laughed. "Nonsense," he said. Of one thing he was certain: this fellow wasn't dangerous. He forgot the matter and went on to tell of his troubles at Kuva.

Waring clucked sympathetically and asked questions. With the outpouring of words easing his mind, with the relaxation that Waring's presence afforded, Michael Gordon seemed to be growing younger before his eyes. When they were done with the after-dinner coffee and cigars, he did not even return to the whisky bottle. He rose, passed his hand over his long hair.

"I've certainly talked an arm off you," he said, "and with you no doubt anxious to get off to bed." He hesitated. "By the way, you'll be having the room next to mine—that's off the balcony, too. I wonder if you'll want —want the same arrangement I have."

"Anything you say," answered Waring amiably.

"Well you see, I have one of these Afghan chaps do sentry duty on the balcony all night. Every half hour he wakes me to tell me that all's well. It's the only way I can get any sleep. Of course, I don't suppose they'd likely be after you."

"Shouldn't think you'd get much sleep then," Waring observed.

Michael looked at him sharply. Dammit, after all he'd told him didn't the fellow understand the danger here?

Waring must have sensed his annoyance, for he interposed hastily, "Of course, as you say, they wouldn't be likely to be after me. You're the one who's in danger. Suppose I take my chances and just try to get some sleep."

NEXT morning Waring slept late. He missed the morning horn, and when he came downstairs Michael had already mustered his scant coolie gang and set them to work. He was pacing the floor, waiting for Waring to join him at early tea. Although he had slept better than usual, he was now as nervous as ever.

"Caught one of the coolies trying to sneak to the well," he explained as they sat down.

"Perhaps he was thirsty," Waring observed.

"Thirsty hell. He was trying to poison the water."

Shamra brought in both tea and coffee. "I've switched to coffe in the morning," Michael explained. "Bucks me up more. Too much tea around here anyhow."

"Did you find the poison on him?" Waring asked.

"What? Oh no. Of course he'd gotten rid of it. I'm going to—"

He raised the coffee cup to his lips, sipped, and let out a yelp. He flung the cup to the floor and leapt to his feet, grabbing for Shamra.

"Poison!" he cried. "I'm burning up! You black devil—what have you been putting in my coffee?"

The Hindu boy, eyes wide with terror, eluded his grasp and fled to the kitchen. Michael seized a buffalo whip that hung from the wall and started after.

Waring looked on in astonishment. He got up, knelt to look at the dregs still remaining in the cup, then followed after.

When he got outside Shamra was well toward the compound wall, with Michael in pursuit. The Chinese cook had fled a few yards in the opposite direction, then paused.

With surprising agility for one of his age, Waring raced after the cook and caught him neatly. While he held the struggling Chinese firmly, Waring released upon him a flood of fluent Cantonese. The little cook relaxed a trifle.

Waring looked up then to discover that Shamra had made good his escape over the wall. Michael was running back toward them, the whip still in his hand. "Hold him!" he cried. "I'll get one of them anyhow."

But when he came up, the Chinese had surprisingly slipped away. "They're twisty as a banyan tree," Waring explained apologetically. "I just couldn't hold him. However, it doesn't matter. It was all a mistake."

"Mistake?" said Michael. His face fell.

"The cook explained to me. It was pepper. He ground the coffee after the pepper, forgetting to wash the grinder in between."

"Pepper!" said Michael. "Why—why—" He lapsed into silence.

"It must have been a shock. I don't wonder you were startled," said Waring. "It upset me completely. I think I'll skip the rest of my tea, go for a walk in the jungle. I must find that rhododendron, you know, if it's to be found."

"Certainly," agreed Michael. He was glad to be rid of an embarrassing subject. "I'll send along a pair of the Afghans to guard you."

"No. Please don't," insisted Waring. "Those big fellows would make me nervous. I'd never be able to do any botanical work."

Michael shook his head.

"But you can't go alone. Panthers, poisonous snakes, natives likely in ambush. On second thought, I'll go with you. I remember a grove of rhododendrons down the hill a bit. The big ones. They weren't quite like the usual ones. Perhaps they're what you're looking for. No, don't worry—I've plenty of time to check up on the work in the fields later. Glad to be of some help to you if I can."

They walked through the compound gate a little later. Michael Gordon went first, his rifle slung over his shoulder, the flap of his pistol holster unbuttoned. Waring followed, carrying only his walking stick.

THEY walked down the slope through a veritable paradise. Monkeys chattered in the tops of the Areca palms, and butterflies in hues of unbelievable brightness flew about them through the air that here was thick with the scent of plumiera blossoms. Once Waring paused to thrust at a bright green lizard that thwarted his path, and at the touch of the stick the reptile's head became bright red and his body yellow.

As Michael passed a Bo-tree laden with figs, however, paradise became inferno. There was a faint hissing sound. He leapt back with a cry and reached for his gun. Once and again the Webley roared.

"Good heavens!" said Waring. "What's up?"

There was a thrashing in the grass and then silence. Michael mopped his brow and holstered his pistol.

"Damned tic-polonga," he said. "Deadly poison. You see, you need a gun every moment of the time here."

Waring looked down at the pale brown, ringed snake, still writhing beside the Bo-tree. It was close to five feet long. He seemed to shudder. "You're right, Gordon," he said. "Absolutely right. Loathesome thing, isn't it?"

"I'll keep on ahead and watch for its mate," Michael said. "Might be coming up, you know." He drew the pistol again from its holster.

They had gone but a few yards when Michael heard a grunt behind him. He turned to see Waring beating at something with his stick. Before Michael could reach him, though, he was already done with it and coming up.

"What was it?" Michael asked.

"Another snake," Waring said calmly. "Just a little one. Probably harmless, but I was taking no chances."

Michael did not go back to look, not quite wanting to. Perhaps it was only a small snake as Waring had said—but Michael had seen just enough to be convinced that it was rather the mate of the tic-polonga he had just killed. And Waring had coolly beaten it to death with his walking stick!

He must have known what it was,

too. Confound it, what kind of a fellow was he, anyway? It seemed as if he were secretly laughing at Michael. Could he be deliberately scheming to humiliate him? That business of the thirsty coolie, and the pepper. And now the snake.

Was he really such a cool one, or just a fool? Was there no way Michael could make him understand the dangers which he himself had to face daily? Why, Waring made him feel like an idiot.

All during the rest of their walk, he couldn't get this out of his mind. He was only half conscious of Waring's apparent disappointment at sight of the rhododendrons. Not really a different species, Waring was explaining; just a slight variation in the color of the blossoms, probably due to a difference in the soil. Yes, these were the ones, no doubt. His informant had just been in error. No, it would be useless to hunt further.

On the way back, Waring chattered on cheerfully but Michael had little to say. As they came within sight of the compound gate, Waring noticed a native girl sitting there beside the trail. She was very pretty—the Denghalese often are—and the soft flowing garment of rich stuff she wore showed her to be beautifully formed as well. He took her to be quite young—not more than seventeen—and he saw at once that her eyes were fastened upon Michael Gordon.

As they walked up, she came to her feet and swept toward them, but the Afghan guard outside the portal stepped in front of her and barred her way. He held her arms so that she could not move, but Waring heard her speak to them in the soft Denghalese tongue. Michael cursed and passed on.

"Girl wants to talk with you," Waring observed. "Waiting for you."

"Dammit, I know it," Michael growled. "She's been wanting to speak to me for months. Wants to come inside and talk to me and stick a knife through me."

"On the contrary," said Waring, "I think she's in love with you. These Denghalese girls are as frank as they are pretty, you know. If they like a man they don't hesitate. And the curious thing is, they're more desirable to suitors if they've been loved by a white man."

"Nonsense," snapped Michael. "She's up to tricks. That's Shanrelá, the daughter of the local chief, Memilal. Her bother's sent her to get me."

"Memilal," said Waring quickly. "Is he the chief now?"

They had passed through the gate. Michael whirled. "Do you know him?" he asked.

"Memilal . . . Memilal . . . No," Waring assured him hastily, "that isn't it, after all. For a moment I thought that was the name of a young native I knew when I was up this way years ago. But no, that wasn't it. Something like it, but I've never heard of Memilal."

SHAMRA was reassured enough by Waring's presence to serve them luncheon, although he darted many frightened glances at Michael When they were done Michael offered to take Waring once more through the jungle, but the latter assured him it would be useless. He was convinced that the tree he sought was not to be found, and he'd much prefer that the superintendent do his own work. He himself must be getting on tomorrow, he said, and he'd spend the afternoon with his notes and correspondence.

He was in his room when Michael

left for the fields, but as soon as he had satisfied himself that the superintendent was well away, he slipped out to the kitchen for a talk with Shamra and the cook. When this was done he went outside, made sure again that young Gordon was nowhere in sight, then sought out Abdul, the Afghan captain of the guards, and could have been seen talking to him at considerable length. After that, having despatched a young boy ahead to warn of his coming, he set out alone through the jungle for the village of Memilal, the Denghalese chieftain, a mile and a half away.

When he came in sight of the mud huts of the village he smiled, knowing all was well. For the tom-toms were beating to honor his arrival, and in front of the hut of the chief had already been erected the *Pandal*, the flowered arch of welcome of the Denghalese.

Memilal, a tall and handsome figure in his chieftain's robes, awaited him with open arms. "Oh friend of my youth," he said, "it is good to look upon you again."

"And upon you, oh friend," Waring answered. "And good to know how mighty you have become since last I saw you."

"Yet not one-half so mighty as you, I know," the chief answered politely. "What good fortune brings you to my miserable hut?"

"*I need waste no sly and honeyed* words upon such a friend as you have been," Waring said. "I have come, oh friend of my youth, to discuss with you certain matters concerning the Sahib Gordon and the Kuva plantation."

"So be it," said the chief. "But come, let us go into my hut where we are safe from prying ears."

Waring stayed a long time in the hut of Memilal, yet he contrived to be back in the Kuva compound before Gordon returned from the fields. In fact, he was back in his room and seemingly deep in writing when the young superintendent entered the bungalow. He came out only in time to join him in a whisky-soda.

"Confound it, I hate to see you go tomorrow," Michael said. "Sometimes, frankly, you've made me feel like a bit of a fool, but your presence here has done me a world of good. Feel as if I were really beginning to relax. Can't you make it another day?"

"I'm afraid not," Waring said, "much as I've enjoyed myself. It's a splendid spot you have here."

"It could be," Michael said, and was surprised that he had admitted even that.

The drinks and the company had surely put him in good fettle. He was still smiling at a quip of Waring's when they entered the dining room. There the smile vanished and his face was puzzled.

"What the devil," he said. "Shamra! Can't you count any more? You've put three places at table."

Shamra would have answered, but Waring interposed. "I'm afraid I've taken a good deal of liberty, old chap," he said. "You see, I've invited a guest for our final dinner together."

"A guest? Here?" Michael was still puzzled. "Why of course. Perfectly all *right. But where is he?*"

"All right, Shanrelá," said Waring.

From the kitchen, smiling and lovely in her finest robes, came Shanrelá, daughter of the chieftain Memilal.

MICHAEL started back. "What the devil," he said. "What sort of nonsense is this? Who let that woman in here? Shamra, throw her out!"

"Sorry," Waring said, "but Shamra

is in on the plot. He won't throw her out."

"Why confound it," Michael said, "what are you up to, Waring? I tell you I won't have the woman in here. I'll call Abdul if necessary."

"I'm afraid Abdul wouldn't see it your way," Waring answered. He smiled apologetically. "You see, I've—talked to Abdul."

"You mean to say you've bribed him? You mean— Good Lord, I see it now." Michael reached for his pistol. "What a fool I am. You're no botanist, Waring. You're a tea man. You've come in here to steal Kuva Estate—to get the natives on your side. Why—"

"Nonsense," said Waring. "But don't bother with that pistol, Gordon. You're too good a shot with it. I took the trouble to unload it while you were cleaning up. Come, come—don't be stiff-necked about it. We may as well dine."

Michael stared wildly at the two of them. Shanrelá came up and put her hand upon his arm. "You see, Strong One, it is no use," she said softly. "Come, sit beside me as I have wanted you to for so long."

Michael jerked away. He half raised a hand as if to strike her, then relaxed. "You've got me in a spot, the pair of you," he said. "I don't know what you're up to, but don't think you can frighten me with this nonsense, Waring. I'll sit down and eat even if it's my last meal."

"Good fellow," said Waring. "That's the right stuff."

They sat down. It was not, as might have been supposed, a silent meal. Waring talked glibly, and Michael, lest he appear to be nervous, answered him with equal glibness. It might, except for Shanrelá have been a chatty dinner at a London club.

Shanrelá spoke least of all. Mostly she sat and looked her adoration upon young Michael Gordon, and now and then she would reach out and touch his hand. At first he would jerk away, but eventually, Waring noticed, he ceased to draw away. Perhaps he felt that that too would make it seem as if he were afraid.

Just as they were finishing a knock sounded at the door. For once Michael did not jump at the sound. Shamra went to the door and returned with a note which he handed to Waring. He read it and rose to his feet, obviously excited.

"Confound it, I've got to go. Got to move at once," he said. "This note is from a colleague of mine in Memtongha. Don't know how he guessed I was here, but he says that rhododendron I'm looking for is most certainly to be found on the way here—not far from the bridle path. He's starting out in the morning to look for it himself. I've got to start—got to find it before him or my whole trip is wasted."

"But you can't start at night!" exclaimed Michael.

"Must," said Waring. "You don't know how important this is to me. I'll be all right. Take the bridle path, and have the boy who brought this note for company. Only thing is—" He drew Michael aside— "I must ask a favor of you. I can't leave unless I have your word that you'll remain here and be pleasant to Shanrelá for at least an hour or so. After all, she's my guest, you know."

"The devil," said Michael. "Frankly, Waring, I don't believe this botanist business. What are you up to? How do I know you'll not be up to some harm in that hour?"

"I give my word," said Waring. "You'll never regret it."

Michael thought a moment. "As I see it," he said, "I've not much choice. Very well. You have my word. But you needn't think you can finish with me this easily if you're up to trouble, Waring. I'll follow you up and fight you and your company to the last."

"Splendid. So long as you keep your word, and I know you will. And now I'll be going. I'm sure Shanrelá has much to tell you."

. . . And so, as you can see, you need take no undue alarm over young Gordon's strange letters and his request for two machine-guns, or, for that matter, over the failure of Kuva Estate to produce properly at present. Just forget the machine-guns—as Gordon presently will. Memilal will see that more workers are gathered, and I venture to predict that within a month's time Gordon will have things working smoothly.

The mistake of the retiring superintendent, and a perfectly understandable one, was to neglect to tell Gordon of young Bortuwaya's keenness to learn the white man's ways. He had even learned a little boxing, but not enough but that when Gordon put him to sleep with one blow, Bortuwaya was convinced there was potent magic in Gordon's hand. So did all the rest, and they wanted some.

They tried to get their hands on everything he touched, maneuvered to have him touch their weapons so the magic might be passed on. Some one of them must have concluded that Gordon's setting-up exercises at dusk were a means of inducing the magic power, so they watched him to see just how it went. Even Shanrelá—her greatest desire was to touch the Strong One's hands and to learn from him what magic had overpowered her brother.

Old Memilal was mighty curious about it himself, and he could have cleared the whole thing up if the trouble hadn't happened before Gordon had gotten 'round to making his first ceremonial call upon the chief. As a result, the call was never made, and Memilal was too proud to make the first move.

You made no mistake in choosing Gordon for the superintendency, gentlemen, and to discharge him at this point would be sheer folly. Of course I myself couldn't explain these things to him: it would have humiliated him.

There is a saying that I picked up somewhere in India to this effect: "A young man must kill his own tigers, even though they be but illusions formed by a bright imagining mind." For heaven's sake, give young Gordon a chance to kill his. He is a splendid chap, and I venture to say he'll be done with his hunting soon.

If you still are not satisfied, I suggest that you go back in the files of the company a matter of some twenty-six years. There was a young chap then up in this country who had some trouble with tigers. His name was Henry Wallace. I think he demanded a whole company of Sikhs to protect him.

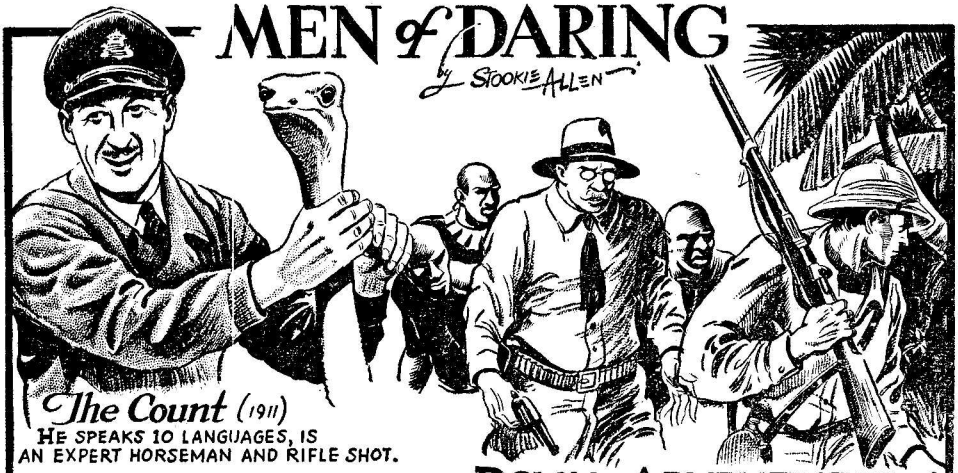
Which reminds me that I'm damned glad to be rid of this pseudonym business. I hope Gordon never finds me out.

With every best wish, I remain,

Very truly yours,
Henry Wallace,
Secretary, the Gamballa Trading Co., Ltd. (And briefly, Investigator.)

MEN of DARING

by STOOKIE ALLEN

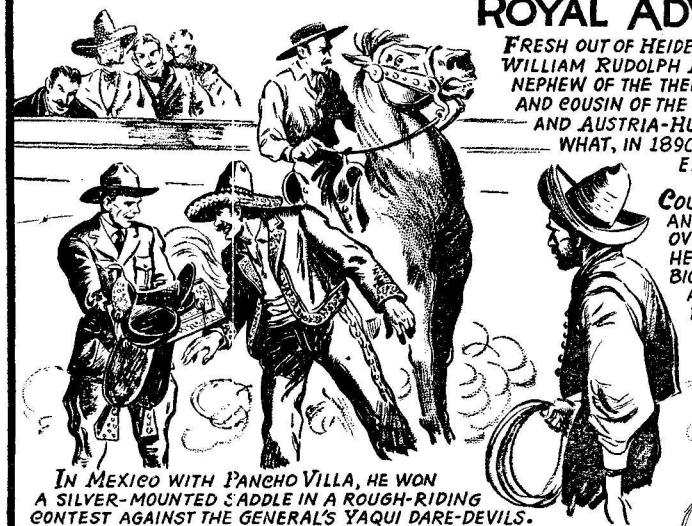


The Count (1911)
HE SPEAKS 10 LANGUAGES, IS AN EXPERT HORSEMAN AND RIFLE SHOT.

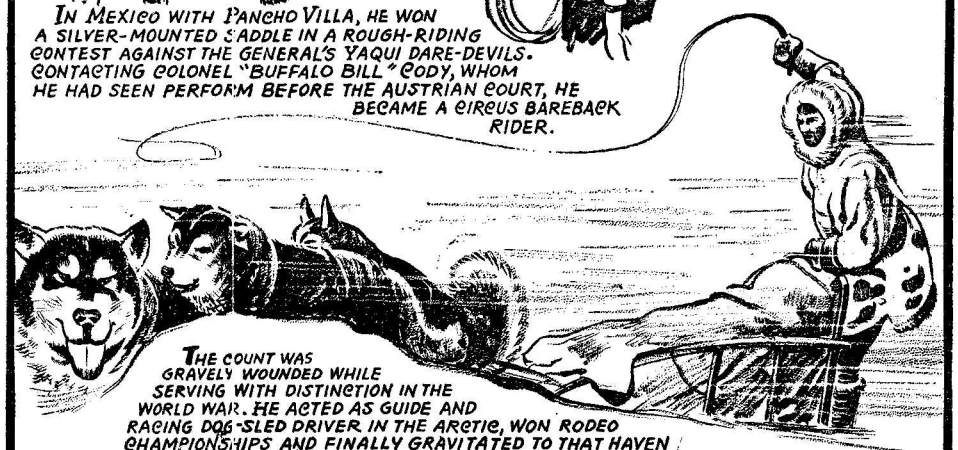
ROYAL ADVENTURER

FRESH OUT OF HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY, COUNT WILLIAM RUDOLPH MARTINOVICH VON ROVINGNO, NEPHEW OF THE THEN KING OF MONTENEGRO AND COUSIN OF THE ROYAL FAMILIES OF ITALY AND AUSTRIA-HUNGARY, WAS EXILED FOR WHAT, IN 1890, WAS CONSIDERED TOO EXTREME LIBERALISM.

COUNT ROVINGNO SOUGHT--AND FOUND--ADVENTURE ALL OVER THE WORLD. IN AFRICA HE GUIDED TEDDY ROOSEVELT'S BIG-GAME HUNTING SAFARI; AND FOUGHT WITH THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION IN MOROCCO.

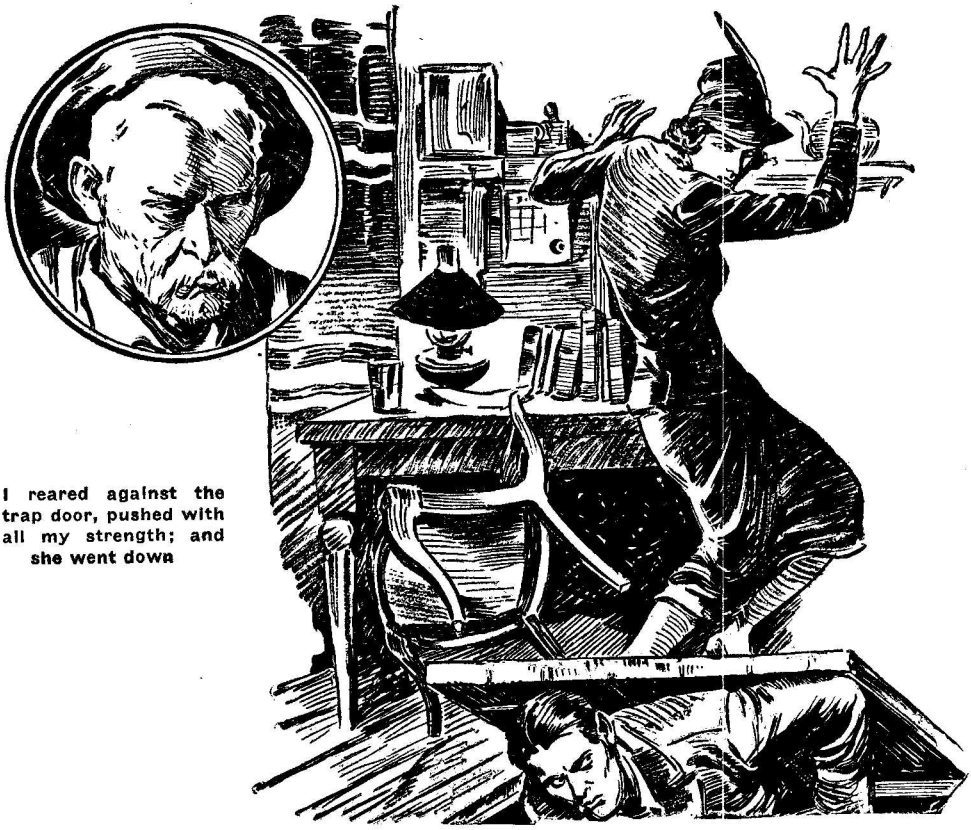


IN MEXICO WITH PANCHO VILLA, HE WON A SILVER-MOUNTED SADDLE IN A ROUGH-RIDING CONTEST AGAINST THE GENERAL'S YAQUI DARE-DEVILS. CONTACTING COLONEL "BUFFALO BILL" CODY, WHOM HE HAD SEEN PERFORM BEFORE THE AUSTRIAN COURT, HE BECAME A CIRCUS BAREBACK RIDER.



THE COUNT WAS GRAVELY WOUNDED WHILE SERVING WITH DISTINCTION IN THE WORLD WAR. HE ACTED AS GUIDE AND RACING DOG-SLED DRIVER IN THE ARCTIC, WON RODEO CHAMPIONSHIPS AND FINALLY GRAVITATED TO THAT HAVEN OF ALL GENTLEMAN ADVENTURERS--HOLLYWOOD--WHERE NOW AT THE AGE OF 70 HE PRESIDES WITH COURTLY AUTHORITY AS DOORMAN AT A BIG MOVIE STUDIO.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week



I reared against the trap door, pushed with all my strength; and she went down

Ol' Crow

"Water'll surely be the ru'nation of the world", he said. But in a crisis his prescription was an impromptu bath from a tin tub—and it worked!

By ROBERT W. COCHRAN

Author of "The Hard Way," "Mortal Formula," etc.

I RENTED the cabin sight unseen because it was cheap and because the advertisement said it was isolated. I wanted isolation, barrels of it. I wanted to get up at ten in the morning and sit in bedroom slippers and dressing gown until bedtime.

I wanted to shave for Sundays and holidays only. I wanted to putter around, be my own boss, drink black coffee whenever I liked, and, if there was any time in between doing all this, I wanted to write a book.

That was the only reasonable excuse I could give for being there, was to write a book; but I had to forget a lot of things before I could get my mind on writing.

The advertisement had been right; there was isolation, miles of it. When the car that conveyed me ceased its spluttering there was a pall of silence that even nature respected.

The driver of the car and I made

three trips from the road up to the house before we had the last of my possessions in my new abode. "Th' spring," the man said, "is a step or two over that way." He pointed in the direction of a path that went snakelike through the weeds.

"Thanks," I said, paying him. I stood on the porch that rose above the incline of the hill like a balcony on a skyscraper, and watched my driver crank his clamorous motor to life, and heard, long after he had passed from view, his noisy departure.

When silence was restored I brought my thoughts from the past to the present and reëntered the cabin, determined to get things in order before nightfall. Because it seemed the thing to do, I took my typewriter from the case and set it on the sturdy table in the center of the living room.

My back was toward the door. When I turned, it was to find a mournful pair of brown eyes studying me anxiously.

"Hi, doggie," I said. It must have been the kind of welcome he wanted, for he came forward, nose twitching. I was on the point of protesting his advance when another dog, a duplicate of the first, entered; and after him, in quick succession, three more.

I might have been a part of the furnishings for all the regard I received from the five inquisitively sniffing brutes.

"A man's home is his palace," I said, addressing them collectively. "Get out."

The nearest dog extended a bony head and surveyed me, wrinkling his nose. Satisfied apparently that I was harmless, he reared on his hind legs and investigated audibly a cardboard box containing food that I had thoughtfully placed on a rack of low shelves.

I scuffled my feet along the worn boards. "Get out!" The dog completed his nasal inventory of the cardboard box and dropped on all fours. He began to sniff with interest the wide cracks in the unmatched floor.

The other four came nearer, their noses pointing the box of food with mathematical precision.

SUDDENLY, as if upon a given signal, the five animals stopped, motionless. In the soft silence I heard a *thump-thump-thump* of wood against wood. One dog looked at me and started to wag his tail as if courting my friendship, but the approaching sound apparently dissipated even that much affection.

The floor beneath me vibrated a trifle and a shadow darkened the doorway for an instant before the figure came into view. I blinked once and looked again; but he was still there, and the mop of hair on his face jerked as he said, "Git!" and turned to spit over the porch railing.

The dogs scuttled across the floor to the accompaniment of scraping claws, and almost overturned the man as they crowded past. He hastened the departure of the final one with a well-placed prod of his peg leg.

"You the book man?" he asked, his eyes roving up and down my figure like twin bobbins.

"I write," I said, "if that's what you mean."

He nodded and said, "I'm Ol' Crow."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Crow." I deliberated offering to shake hands, decided against it, and asked, "Are we neighbors?"

"You ain't married?" he asked, and squinted beyond me into the tiny bedroom, as if intimating that I was concealing something from him

I was considering how best to an-

swer without having to give any details, then or later, when he went on, "Reckon you call us neighbors. I got a clearin' over that way a piece." He nodded vaguely in the general direction of somewhere else.

I had a sudden inspiration. "You must be the handy man."

His peg leg came up and flicked a fly from the sockless ankle of his other foot before he said slowly, "I'm right handy; reckon you might call me that."

"Well, Mr. Crow," I said, "my name is Harmon. Suppose you get a pail of water from the spring and then we'll see about getting things straightened out."

"Ain't nobody calls me Mister Crow," he said derisively. "Just Ol' Crow suits me. Last feller was here didn't like me. Though I ain't holdin' it ag'in him. He was a Yank. You a Yank?" he asked abruptly.

"I am neither Jew nor Greek," I said with what I hoped was finality.

He shook his head uncertainly; then as he started towards the kitchen, "Well, so long as you ain't a Yank I reckon we'll get on."

By the time he had returned from the spring I had discovered a tin bathtub. "You might fill this," I said, "and then sweep the place thoroughly. It needs it, certainly."

"You ain't aimin' to take a bath." It wasn't a question, it was a statement.

"Is there a law against bathing?" I said, resenting his tone.

"Ain't no law," he said seriously, "but it surely'll sicken you."

"Suppose you bring me some more water, and let me be the judge as to how often I must bathe."

I heard the muttered word, "Furriner," all but smothered in the mass of beard; then he turned at the kitchen doorway and said hopefully, "It ain't Satiddy. Ain't no one takes a bath but on a Sattidy."

I thought of the absent "Yank" and wondered whether his initiation had been similar to mine.

At last, in about twice the length of time that I could have done the same chores myself, Ol' Crow had completed his tasks. It was late afternoon, and I was afraid that if he didn't leave soon he would expect to stay the night or for supper at least.

"You never did say if you was married." He came to the living room door and waited as if anxious to get this point cleared up.

I folded the letter I had been reading and replaced it in the envelope.

"That's right," I agreed. "I didn't"; and met his eyes deliberately.

But my bluff didn't work, for after thirty seconds he said, "Well, is you or ain't you?"

His eyes dropped from mine to the letter in my hand, and I knew I would have to keep my personal papers out of sight unless I wanted him to go through them.

I could have given him a direct answer and perhaps put an end to the discussion there and then. I could have, but something about his subtle stubbornness got under my skin, and I decided it was neither the time nor the place to wash family linen, so I said, "Good night, Crow, I'll expect you in the morning."

"Humph," he grunted, and swung about on his peg leg like a weathervane. The porch boards creaked beneath him and I heard the departing *thump-thump-thump* as he descended the steps.

A dog yapped as if it had been prodded not too gently in the ribs, and then the silence that had been my ex-

cuse for renting the place settled down again.

I AM sure that it could not have been thirty minutes after daybreak when I was awakened by the sound of an ax blade striking wood. The sun was not yet up, and with a muttered curse on all ambitious people I pulled the covers over my head and tried to ignore the disturbance.

Perhaps I succeeded, or perhaps it ceased; anyway, I dozed off, and was startlingly aroused by a crash in the neighborhood of the rear porch. I thought of earthquakes, even mountain slides, and remembered how insecurely the tiny house clung to the hillside.

Then I arrived at the obvious solution: Ol' Crow had deposited an armful of wood none too gently on the back porch.

I looked at my watch; it was six o'clock. Six o'clock, and I remembered the picture I had in mind the previous night of sleeping until ten. In slippers and dressing gown I stalked into the kitchen. Crow was stirring something in a bowl.

"Wait a minute." I knew I was letting my irritation get the better of me. "I'll do my own cooking. All I expect you to do is to bring in wood and water when I need it and get provisions from the store in Maryville."

"I cooked for the Yank," he said without pausing in his stirring. "Tain't a mite of bother; got to cook my own vittles anyway."

I felt suddenly weak. "You mean," I said, "that you take your meals here with me?"

"Breakfast'n dinner," he explained, his quick eyes studying me. "Supper I eats to home, 'cept mostly I don't eat no supper."

I counted ten to myself; then I said with calm deliberation, "Listen, Crow. I came here because I wanted to get away by myself. I'm tired and sick of cities and city people. Street cars, subways, el-trains, telephones, radios, movies, plays—I came down here to get away from all that. I'm fed up."

Crow couldn't know that I had given him every excuse but the real one.

He stirred for a moment when my outburst ceased; then, as his spoon dropped little ovals of cornmeal onto a hot greased pan, he said deliberately, "If you was single I'd tell you to get hitched. If you was hitched I'd tell you to get yourself deevorced."

"Did you give advice to the Yank, too, when he was here?" I hoped my voice sounded as chilly to him as it did to me.

"Some," he said, and turned the little ovals over with an experienced hand, so that an inviting odor assailed my nostrils. "Wimmin was plumb pisin to him," he concluded.

I hesitated. If I went back to bed, undoubtedy the old man would eat every one of the appetizing things he was frying. If I stayed, most certainly he would appear at this appalling hour every morning and disturb my rest.

He settled the question himself by scooping three cakes onto a plate and sliding it along the oilcloth-covered table. "Coffee'll be ready in a minute." He took up the bowl of batter.

"I can't eat till I've washed." I know he caught me looking at the plate of steaming brown cakes.

"Wash!" he exploded. "Hell's bells, didn't you take a bath last night? You ain't got dirty just layin' in bed, have you?"

"Listen, Crow," I said. "I wash because I enjoy the feel of a clean body, not because I'm dirty. Can you understand that?"

"You're wus than the Yank," he said decisively.

"Yank or no Yank," I said, "I want a tub of clean water every afternoon. Every afternoon," I repeated.

His mouth hung open an instant and a little spiral of smoke rose from the burned batter he had neglected. He shook his head slowly as if the thing were just a little bit too stiff for him to swallow. At last he spoke.

"Well, I'm fixin' to die," he said in amazement. "Ain't you?"

It was the first time I had encountered the words so phrased and demanding an affirmative, and I thought perhaps the wisest course would be to let the matter rest where it stood.

I FOUND that by the artful process of demanding that Ol' Crow clean out the debris of the previous day's fire each morning, I could so far overcome his aversion to water that he would at least send his hands hastily through a rinsing process.

At the end of two weeks I had sweated out three chapters of my book, three chapters that I knew perfectly well would have to be later scrapped.

It's the strangeness, I told myself, knowing all the time that it was nothing of the sort. It might have been the loneliness, for in all that time I had seen one drummer, one native from farther back in the mountains, and Ol' Crow; but I knew it wasn't the loneliness.

I had formed an unspoken agreement with my handy man; he filled without remonstrance my tub each evening, while I got up at six and ate uncomplainingly the breakfast I found steaming on the table.

On one point he was still curious: he might have been an anxious father with an overripe debutante on his hands, so persistent were his efforts to establish definitely my marital standing. What had started as a whim became an obsession on my part; for the more persistent he was, the more reticent I became.

"Ain't fittin'," he said upon one occasion. "A man as troublous to hisself as you shouldn't have a woman."

"If you had one," I countered, "perhaps she might see you got a bath."

"Bath!" His whiskers trembled with the violence of his indignation. "I ain't put soap on my body in fifty year. I uster go swimmin' in the creek. Can't do that now; my dern peg leg gets stuck in the mud."

There was another occasion when he came in to find me staring at a blank page in my typewriter. "Worry'll cause a man to sicken quicker'n anything," he said pointedly. "I mind one time Press Tollins over to Turkey Cove got a warrant out fer me fer stealin' one o' his hogs. Didn't know nothing 'bout it till I come in one evenin' and found Press and the deputy sheriff a ropin' the hog right there in my own pen. I set out in the brush fer ten minutes a worryin' and a worryin'. Once they got that hog to court I was as good as in jail."

"Well"—I was watching his peg leg scratch reflectively the calf of his sound one—"did you go to jail?"

"Naw," he chuckled. "That hog lit out with Press holding onto the rope. Seems like he couldn't let go; it had got wropped around his hand or somethin'.

"The deputy he commenced shootin'. Me, I had my squirrel rifle with me, and I took a crack, when I got my sights right. Pretty soon the hog dropped and I come runnin' out of the woods, carryin' on 'bout them killin' my hog.

"Press says, 'Ain't yore hog; got my brand still in his ear.'

"'Whar,' I says, is any brand?'

"Well, they both looked, but the place where th' brand had been was shot plumb out. I made Press pay me three dollars fer that hog. Worry don't help no one; you got to act. I al'ays been a man fer action."

"So," I said, "you shot the brand out of that hog's ear with your rifle."

"You can't prove it," he said with quick belligerence.

IF I WASN'T able to do any writing, at least I found time to regret my past folly. I saw that what had been a feeble attempt to forget was having the opposite result: I could do nothing but remember.

I'll stick it out, I was thinking this particular morning; if I end up by being another Crow, I'll stick it out.

Crow had come and gone, his morning chores finished, and I had settled down to what I hoped was a few hours' productive work, when I heard the *thump-thump-thump* of his advance. I hadn't realized that it was raining until he pushed open the door and bobbed in, water trickling down the smooth wood of his hand-whittled leg.

One of his lean, melancholy dogs dived through as he was shutting the door, and to my surprise he allowed it to stay. "Water," he prophesied, shaking himself with the quick, smooth rhythm of an animal, "it'll be the ru-nation of the world."

"I'm busy," I told him, and turned back to my keyboard.

His peg leg came *thump-thump-thump* across the board floor, but I was determined not to be disturbed and refused to look up. Water trickled down my neck and under the collar of my dressing gown. I pushed back my chair and collided violently with the old man's body.

Nor could I ignore the animal-like smell of his much worn clothes as I rose and glared at him. I waited until his eyes had focused on mine before I said slowly, "I won't need you today, at all. I've had breakfast, there's plenty of wood and water, and I'm trying to work."

"I could tend the fire," he suggested hopefully. "Jigger'll lay right still."

"I wasn't thinking about Jigger," I said. Then the rain increased on the roof and I relented. "All right, stay, but if you say one word, one word, mind, out you go."

I went back to my typing, conscious of the sodden figure that stood at my back. I made no effort to write until I heard the creak of the boards and the thump of his leg as he went to a chair.

I tried to catch up where I had been interrupted, wrote two lines, X'd them out, sat motionless for perhaps five minutes striving vainly to discard the past for the present.

Even Crow wasn't fooled by my feigned concentration. "Stuck, huh?" There was that "I thought so" inflection in his voice. "Maybe it's the rain," he said sarcastically. "Water'll be the ru'nation of the world. The Yank couldn't paint in the rain. Wimmin was pisin to him, too."

"Shut up, or get out." Apparently even Jigger came to life at my outburst, for a moment later I heard his head thump back to the floor with a contented sigh.

I moved the carriage, indented for a paragraph, and sat. I heard Ol' Crow's chair squeak and could feel him watching. I wrote v-b-n-m, f-g-h-j, r-t-y-u, through three full lines and paused again.

Ol' Crow asked, his voice only a whisper, "Could I borrow the loan of five dollars?"

IT WAS the last straw. I ripped the paper from the roller and crushed it into a ball. "Five dollars," I said; "it's always five dollars. Do you think I have a fortune?"

"Good writers mostly has. Course if you ain't got five dollars . . ."

"I was to pay you twenty dollars a month," I charged. "I've been here less than two weeks, and already you've received fifteen."

"It ain't like I wanted it for myself," he said beguilingly.

I put the cover on my machine to keep out the dampness and faced him. "All right, let's have it."

He hung his head. "I was wantin' it fer a woman."

If he had told me he wanted it for the king of Sweden I wouldn't have been more surprised. "I don't believe it," I said impulsively.

He put rusty brown hands to the side of the chair and heaved himself erect. I knew just by the expression in his eyes that he had been offended. All my ranting had cascaded from his indolent good nature, but I had never called him a liar before.

"All right," I said quickly, "I'll give it to you, but if you've got one ounce of sense under that mat of hair you'll steer clear of getting married."

The warning apparently struck him as humorous, for he chuckled noisily. "Me, I ain't gettin' married. I got two lawful wives now."

"Two!" I said. "That isn't possible."

"Ain't it now?" He was encouraged for a moment, then he shook his head. "'Tis too. Ain't lived with neither of 'em fer ten year, but we was spliced up right enough."

I gave him the five dollars; and though the rain had not let up, he headed for the door. "Reckon I'll be goin' in to Maryville."

"You old idiot," I said, "don't you know better than to walk seven miles in a rain like this? You'll die of pneumonia."

"Like enough," he admitted with an air of martyrdom, "but I got to go. Business." He snapped his fingers and Jigger came reluctantly forward.

I watched them go out into the downpour, and presently from the east window I saw their bedraggled figures straggling up the yellow wound in the earth that was the road.

It at least offered me the opportunity to get some work done. I read for the eighth time the chapters I had written. It was stale, dead. I got out a letter from my publisher dated a week before and tried to use it as a goad. It was no good.

Finally I went to the leather brief case on the makeshift dressing table and took out Pam's picture.

Because the old man had so patently tried to pry my life from me, I had taken particular pains to keep at least the part that included Pam from him. I was in fact a little pleased the way I had succeeded, until I saw the dirty fingerprints on one of Pam's envelopes, the one that held the last letter I had from her.

There was a Reno hotel under her initials in the left corner. It had been this letter that had sent me seeking forgetfulness in the mountains.

IF I COULD have put hands on Ol' Crow at that moment I would certainly have throttled him. But I couldn't, and as the day waned my rage cooled, so that by the time he returned late that afternoon my anger had so far subsided that I was able to think up suitable remarks to wither him.

I had hardly looked for him back before the following day, but he came

in staggering under a sodden burlap bag filled with groceries. Not staple groceries, either, but delicacies.

When he came into the kitchen where I was getting supper I said, "Do you usually go through people's private papers, and read their letters?"

"Mostly," he said unperturbed, "I don't bother. Ain't much worth readin'. Take the Yank; I wouldn'ta licked a stamp fer him. I like you," he ended, his eyes twinkling.

"I'm to feel flattered that you thought my correspondence interesting enough to wade through," I said, determined not to be sidetracked.

"Ain't no use gettin' riled," he said urbanely. "I work fer a man, aim to look after him."

It was a hopeless argument, so I contented myself with saying, "Suppose you confine yourself in future to less personal things than my correspondence."

"You're as techy as a rattler what's just shed. Get that writin' done?"

I said, "No," and realized for the first time that I had neglected to restore Pam's picture. She smiled at the two of us cheerily from the living room table.

Ol' Crow followed my eyes and said with enthusiasm, "Pretty, ain't she?"

"Yes," I said, "she's pretty, and I'm pretty much of a fool or I never would have let her get away from me."

"'Lowed that's how it was." Ol' Crow stumped forward and retrieved the sizzling ham from the hot stove. "Too dawgone stubborn to tell her that, ain't you?"

"Stubborn! She was the one that walked out, I didn't. I waited in that darn lonesome apartment for her to come back. Do you think she came?"

Ol' Crow shook his head vigorously. "Ain't no woman woulda come back after they seen you kissin' that other gal like she says there in the letter."

"But that didn't mean anything." I sliced bread and gave it to Crow to fry in the hot grease. He went to the back door to rid himself of the perpetual tobacco cud.

"Know that myself," he agreed. "Got two legal wives. Reckon nobody'll handle a woman better'n Ol' Crow. Aim to set you right in this ruckus."

I was already seated at the table when something about his final words seemed too ominous to overlook. "Set me right," I said. "Everything's right as rain now."

Crow sucked at his mustache ends and asked casually, "How long'll it take to get here from that place in Neevada?"

"Ne . . ." I just looked at him for a minute.

His eyes met mine, twitched away, and came back. "Well," he said defensively, "you wanted to write a book, didn't you? 'Low a man can't write 'less his mind's on it."

"Book be blowed, you half-witted, meddlesome old reprobate. If Pam wanted to believe that I was falling for that black-haired little vamp, that's her business, and I'll never ask her back, not the longest day I live."

"What I figured." Ol' Crow held his coffee cup to his lips and strained the contents audibly into his mouth. "'At's the reason I spent 'leven dollars last Monday on one of them telegrams askin' her"—he pointed to the picture—"to come down here. I signed your name to it," he said a little uncertainly.

I GLARED at the old man and he glared back, but there was a twinkle in his eyes that I couldn't wholly ignore. Pam, I thought, coming here. But she wouldn't come, not on the flimsy argu-

ment put forth by an illiterate old matchmaker.

But would she come? He had signed my name to it. Were not all telegrams pretty much alike after the operator's key had ground them out? I still refused to let him derive any satisfaction from his deed.

"All right," I said finally, "you instigated this affair; you can manage it. Personally, I'm not here, understand? When Pam comes—if she comes—you can tell her that I've gone to Borneo or Siberia or some nice quiet asylum where doddering old bigamists won't meddle in my business."

It was a good bluff, but I didn't quite get away with it. The thought of Pam dropping in on me was too alluring to be ignored. "What did you say in the telegram?"

"Well . . ." Crow got up and went over to the stove to refill his coffee cup. I should have reminded him that supper was not included, but he would have seen through that too.

"Well," he said again when he had resumed his chair, "I told her how much I missed her and how sorry I was, and—and—"

He actually blushed; I saw the color where the skin showed between his beard and hair. "I told her that she was the only woman I had ever loved or ever could love. You can say right much fer 'leven dollars," he concluded.

"Try saying it to her face when she comes," I warned.

"Reckon I can handle her." He considered a moment. "I done learned a heap 'bout women."

"Starting from here, you can forget all you've ever learned. Pam's different. That's why I married her in the first place: she always does the unexpected. As likely as not she'll have you sent to jail for forgery when she finds you brought her all the way back here on a wild-goose chase."

"Pretty eyes, ain't they? I knowed a gal once had eyes like that. She was a stomped down good 'un, too."

. . . Ol' Crow had just finished preparing lunch the following day when I heard the clamorous Ford that served as a taxi from town. "I'm going to the woods," I said, when I saw the passenger, "and so long as Pam's here I'm going to stay there."

Ol' Crow said, "Ain't no fun reefin' around out there alone. Whyn't you crawl under the house floor? Then you can hear what she says and be comfortable."

Hesitation has ruined many a better man, and I hesitated then until it was too late to make a dash for the woods without a fair chance that Pam would see me. The old man already had the trapdoor open in the floor, and because there seemed nothing else to do I scuttled through.

The ground was loose and dry, like sand, and the floor was but a scant two feet above my head. Light came in streaks through the cracks.

I heard Crow thump-thump across to the door. Then Pam laughed, and I almost crawled out of there from the very joy of hearing it. Ol' Crow's words came clearly in answer to a question of Pam's that I didn't get. "He's done lit out. Aimed to go to Bor-nee-o or some such place. Reckon you'd as well come in and set a while, ma'am."

"Probably I had." Pam's feet sounded just above my head, and then I heard the catch in her voice when she asked, "You mean he's really gone? But he wired me . . ."

I wondered whether she was as disappointed as her voice sounded.

"Lit a shuck." Ol' Crow's voice was a little too pleased to make me feel

entirely comfortable. It seemed to me that for a man who had been so determined to get Pam and me back together he was accepting failure remarkably well; too well, in fact.

Pam's heels clicked above me. "My picture! Did he really go and leave that?"

"Left in such an almighty hurry it must have slipped him." Crow was apparently enjoying a good joke all to himself, for he could scarcely speak for the chuckles that welled up in him. I remembered with misgivings the tale he had told about shooting the brand from the hog's ear.

I WAS growing uncomfortable just trying to imagine what new scheme he could be developing when I heard a crash, and a moment later a deluge of water cascaded through the cracks of the floor.

If I hadn't been so wrought up over Pam's possible arrival I would have seen something suspicious in the tub of water he had filled without protest that morning.

The torrent poured down on me, getting into my mouth and eyes, and I snorted loudly. The only thing to do was to get out of there fast; I did.

I reared a back against the trapdoor; and though it moved, it refused to open. I thought at first that the old fool had fastened it. Then I humped my back and pushed upward with all my strength.

Ol' Crow said in an oddly subdued voice. "Water'll surely be the ru'nation of the world."

Pam cried, "Don!" and I lifted her to her feet from where my final heave on the door had landed her.

It seemed like as good an opportunity as I would ever have to show her how much I had missed her. She didn't seem to mind the water and I forgot it after the first kiss.

Crow cleared his throat so many times that at last I shifted my head so I could see him. He was making signs with his hands, perfectly obvious signs warning me not to tell Pam about not sending the telegram; but I pretended not to see.

I could not let him have a complete victory, even though I owed him a considerable debt. But he kept on wigwagging at me furiously.

"What's the matter, Crow?" I said finally. "I won't need you any more today."

Pam said, "You're a nice old man. I like you. What is it you want?"

This was more than I had expected. Pam was so impulsive that if he told her I hadn't sent the wire she might walk right out on me.

Crow's eyes sought mine triumphantly; he saw the opportunities the situation offered. "She's sure a stomped down good 'un," he said, wagging his head. "Could I borrow the loan of five dollars?"

I glared at him. "Get out," I said, but I was careful to give him the bill first.

We heard the thump of his wooden leg retreating down the steps, and suddenly, with just the two of us, I was bashful. "Pam . . ." I said, and stopped, for he came back, *thump-thump-thump;* then he was in the doorway.

He looked at us, with a gleam in his eyes, and said:

"Reckon you ought to get that book writ now."

"He's cute," Pam said when he had finally gone.

"You're cute," I said, "darling."

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

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

• CLICKING GLASSES •

The custom of touching glasses as a toast was originated by the gladiators of Rome. The professional fighters (but not the slaves) would, before entering the arena, drink each other's health, each pouring a little wine from his own cup to the other's, as proof that none was poisoned..

• TRUMPETER •

As late as the 17th. century trumpeters were not regarded as soldiers, nor could they be employed as such. An agreement between nations stipulated that they should be "unarmed, save for a sword, the point of which must be broken off."

• FIRST PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERS •

The first professional soldiers of historical note were those in the army of ancient Assyria.

•HATBANDS •

When a knight rode into a tournament, he often wore his lady's favor bound around his helmet. The modern hatband is a relic of this old custom.

Doc Pickering spread the checks in a fan. "Why should all this money be mine?"

By JACK BYRNE

$1000 Every Thursday

CHAPTER XIX

DOC ENIGMA'S PRESCRIPTION

IT WAS an excellent morning even for the Commonwealth of Virginia, where Spring habitually abandons her guise of fickle jade to promenade the countryside as a mannered, smiling lady of leisure and ease.

The sun surveyed the tilled fields and the straggling brooks and the blue-green hills with a mild unclouded eye. A small wind was polite among the roadside trees, and the rabbits hopping across the highway had only the most benign regard for the limousine with the damyank plates that purred through their privacy.

J. G. Galway thumped his breastbone. "Nothing like it. I told you a little country air would pep you up."

"I don't know where you got the idea I wasn't feeling well," said his grandniece. "I'm perfectly all right. I'm splendid. Do you want me to yodel for joy or something?"

"Too bad I couldn't get in touch with young Harwood," he said thoughtfully. "Seems a shame we couldn't have him in on the windup."

"Are you going to start that again?"

"He had you going, didn't he, Susy? He hit you pretty hard."

The first installment of this five-part serial, herein concluded, was published in the Argosy for March 23

"I can handle my own affairs, thank you. Will you *please*—"

"All right, honey. Don't get your hair up. All I mean is—well, you're about the only real big problem I got left to solve. You're going to have to get married some day, you know.

"You'll have a lot of money and a lot of things to run, and you'll need a good level-headed husband to help you out. I've never butted in on your personal affairs much before, but it seems to me—"

"Perhaps you could organize a nation-wide contest," she said, "to choose the lucky fellow. You could make them buy your papers in order to vote."

"Now, now—"

"Or you could rig things up like you're trying to do at these nominating conventions. Maybe you could swap me to the chairman of the Minnesota delegation in exchange for thirty votes for Dewey or Taft or Vandenburg. You're the Great Organizer, aren't you? You're always boasting how you fixed this or arranged that."

"Now listen, honey. . . ."

His arm went around her shoulder and she leaned against him. "Oh, Uncle Josh, I'm so miserable," she said. "I threw myself at him. I practically begged him. And now he'll never come back; I know he won't. He's such a stubborn, mulish, pig-headed, obstinate fool!"

"Don't you worry, child."

"He'll hide himself out there in Oklahoma and marry some silly girl—"

"No he won't, Susy. I'll take care of that."

She pushed away from him. "Don't you dare!" she cried. "Uncle Josh, if you go prying and scheming after him I'll—I'll . . . Oh, please, don't you see I can't have you do that?"

"Awarragh," he temporized.

"I'd rather never see him again. I guess he's not the only one who has some pride. Let him stay out there with his Pawnee princesses and purple shirts. He's just a—"

"Yes, a mulish, stubborn, pig-headed dolt."

"He is not!"

J. G. Galway sighed. "All right, honey, have it your own way. We'll just forget about him, huh? Pretty country down here, isn't it?"

EVEN at forty-odd miles per hour the big burnished car maintained a stately somnambulance. They swept up a long slope and a green valley opened out below them. Farmhouse and barn and silo, the darker squares of cultivation against the green of woodland and pasture, the distant moving figures small and slow—

Susan drew a deep breath.

"You were right," she said. "I do feel better now. Aren't we almost there?"

"Next town or the one after. They said we could make it easy before noon."

"Uncle Josh."

"Huh?"

"This Doctor Pickering. Why are you afraid of him?"

"Me?" He chuckled. "Me afraid of Doc Pickering? What gave you that fool notion? Why I'd make two of the doc. He's mild as milk, the doc is. wouldn't harm a fly. He was always complaining, I remember, about the way a bit must hurt a horse's mouth. Said there ought to be a more civilized way of doing it."

"You remember a lot about him, don't you?"

"Maybe I do. Doc and I used to argue a lot in the old days—friendly

you understand. We jawed back and forth about most everything. He had the education the rest of us lacked and I may have—yes, I guess I still do have a lot of respect for the doc.

"Funny, isn't it—a fellow I haven't seen in thirty years? He was a queer duck in some things but most ways he was considerable of a man."

"What made you decide, though, to handle him yourself as you put it? There's something strange about that."

"What's strange? I had to be in Washington anyway, didn't I? It's a fine day for a little drive, isn't it?"

"Yes, but—"

J. G. Galway wrinkled his nose. "Can't a man have a little harmless whim?" he demanded. "Matter of fact, I used to think about Doc a lot, even after I came on East. I'd think about things he'd said. One of the things we used to argue about was money, and the more I thought about his Katy Belle business the more I wondered what Doc would say and how he'd act with all that dinero dropped in his lap."

"But he hasn't cashed a single check. How do you account for that?"

"That's what I aim to find out," Galway said. He reached for the speaking-tube: "What's this, Payson, a detour? What are you heading up here for? . . . Oh, I see. Another couple of miles, eh? Well, take it easy then. It doesn't look like much of a road."

"No twinges from the toe?" Susan asked.

"I hate to walk with a cane," he said. He smiled. "I never did like these doggone city dudes."

"I'm going to buy you a pair of spats and a silk hat for your birthday," she told him, "and ruin your reputation as the worst-dressed millionaire in America. You'd really be a handsome figure of a man, you know, if you'd admit that styles have changed since 1910 and let some honest barber take a workout on your glory crown."

"Mnaaah," said the rugged individualist. "It's bad enough to have 'em paw your face and mess around. I've been cutting my own hair for over forty years."

THE road wavered and curved along the course of a noisy little creek. The limousine rounded a bushy bend and huffed into a reluctant crawl past three small houses, a false-front store, a square solemn structure of concrete. It subsided grudgingly before a neat edifice of brick, the lone badge of enterprise or dignity that the straggling street could present.

Grogan (bodyguard) opened the door. "This must be it," he said dubiously. "Anyway, it says Pell's Run Bank on the window there."

"I can read. Find out which is the doctor's house."

A hoop-rolling boy and a Walker hound had appeared to admire the glistening equipage but both fled at Grogan's grim approach. He paced along to the curious group that had gathered on the store porch. Three arms semaphored his answer.

"What a lovely little church," Susan said as the car rolled briefly on. "I'll bet I can point out his house. It's the white one with the picket fence."

"The roof could stand some shingles," said J. G. Galway. "Guess you picked it all right." He leaned to peer out as the chauffeur maneuvered a parking position behind a vintage sedan. He scowled when Grogan offered his arm to ease the descent.

"You stay with the car," he ordered, flourishing his cane. "Come on, Susy. It won't take long to settle this."

She had found the latch of the white

gate and was opening it when J. G. whispered gruffly, "There he is at the door. Let him speak first."

Susan saw a white haired man no taller than herself. He was polishing his glasses as he came out across the vine-shaded porch and now he fitted them on. He smiled and gestured.

"Hello there, Jonas," he called. "Long time no see, as we used to say."

"Doc, you old sinner—"

They grinned as their hands met and each man frankly measured the other. Mild as milk: Susan recalled the expression. The smooth round face of John Page Pickering, M.D., was gentle, but behind the mildness of his eyes was a lively intelligence. The wrinkles he had were lines of humor and content. His hand was strong, his body quick and graceful in the little bow he made.

"Miss Susan, I am delighted. I regret to see you in such evil company, but please come in." He held the screen door. "Did I catch you limping there, Jonas? Something wrong?"

"My ankle," said J. G. Galway. "An old sprain, that's all. Well, Doc, I guess you know why I'm here."

"I've been expecting you for almost two months. Oh, wait—I forgot Hamp was working in the parlor. I suppose the office will have to serve. Here, Miss Susan, this is the easiest chair. Sit down, Jonas, and tell me about this deviltry you're up to with the Katy Belle."

THE office held its faint clean smell of medications despite the breeze that swayed the curtains. It was a plain bare room, and Susan thought she could see a footworn path along the carpet that led to Doc Pickering's desk.

In one corner was a padlocked supply cabinet and a variety of paraphernalia lined the wall shelves. (There's fancier equipment than this, Susan thought, in the little room off J. G.'s office.)

"Would you mind if I sit over here out of the way?" the doctor asked. "This old swivel contraption is pretty well used to me. How about it, Miss Susan, can you stand my pipe?"

Susan produced a cigarette but did not light it. Her interest was held by J. G. Galway, who was endeavoring to appear at ease in his chair that faced the desk. The man who bullied board meetings seemed to have parked his usual dominance with his car outside.

He wrinkled his nose and frowned; but these usual vocal stimulants had no avail here and now.

"Well, Jonas—"

"You mean to say, Doc, you'd have known me after all these years if I just walked in?"

Pickering smiled. "The form changeth," he said, "but not the nature of the beast. I'd recognize that hungry look of yours at the bottom of a mine shaft. You forget, too, what a famous man you are. They've had your picture even in our little local paper. You'd just put up the money for some scientific expedition, I believe. Archaeologists in Yucatan or something like that."

"They're still down there," said J. G. "I'm financing 'em for three years." He chuckled. "You'd hardly believe that, would you Doc, if it hadn't been in the paper? You used to say I had no more interest in culture than a blue-nosed jackass."

(What in the world is he up to? Susan wondered. Is he gloating or fishing for compliments or what? Was this self-conscious patient at the doctor's desk the fire-swallowing J. G. Galway?)

"I expected nothing less," said the little doctor. He turned, smiling. "I was one of the first publicly to proclaim, Miss Susan, that Jonas Galway was a man destined for the toga of greatness.

"My announcement was an aftermath to a poker game in the shack of one Benito Sanchez — remember, Jonas? Your uncle won the last big pot with an aces-up full house. I didn't mention, of course, that one of the aces he held was the same one I had just thrown into the discard, but I distinctly remember heralding that unless someone shot him young he would one day be a leading politician or a famous captain of industry."

J. G. shook his head. "Still the same old joker, eh, Doc?"

"Was he really a common cardsharp, Doctor Pickering?" Susan asked.

"A man who couldn't rig the deck had no business in that country," J. G. said quickly. "You had to protect yourself out there, especially in the clinches."

"That's right, Miss Susan," the doctor agreed. "They prided themselves on being rough and ready, that's a fact. I don't believe there was a single one of us, for example, who raised any considerable rumpus when your eminent relative here originally whipsawed us out of the Katy Belle. We considered it just a part of the game, that's all."

"That was a pretty sharp letter you wrote me though, Doc, as I recall."

The doctor winked at Susan. "As chairman of the grievance committee I had to enter some formal complaint. I give you my word though, Jonas, I hadn't given the thing a thought for more than thirty years when your first check appeared in the mail. I—well, I—it certainly was a surprise."

"Nothing wrong with the check, was there?" J. G. asked quickly.

"Why no, no."

"You could have used it, couldn't you?"

"I guess so, yes."

"Then why in thunder," growled J. G. Galway, pressing his advantage, "didn't you cash the fool thing?"

THE little doctor met his glance briefly, looked fleetingly at Susan, and was evidently relieved by sight of the graying Negress who signaled from the doorway.

"All right, Zilla," he said. "Are you two about ready for lunch?"

"Now hold on!" J. G. commanded. "Let's get this straight. You knew I had a finger in that check, didn't you? Isn't my money any good; is that the way it is, Doc?"

"If I had any such feeling," said Pickering, "how could I ask you into my home?"

"Maybe you thought it was charity, then. You were too confounded proud—"

Pickering made a quick evasive gesture. "I used to be proud," he said, "but now I chiefly pride myself on the fact that I have a little wisdom."

"Then why in the devil—"

The doctor bowed. "May I have the pleasure, Miss Susan. Come and eat, Jonas, and save your questions. Hamp has some juleps frosting if you're still a drinking man."

"No alcohol," said J. G. grimly. "Haven't touched it in months. Can't say I'm hungry, either, but I'll sit down."

"There's a lunch kit in the car that contains all his diet dishes," Susan said maliciously. "His specialists have him walking—that is, limping—the chalk."

"Aha!" The doctor nodded. "So that's what's wrong with his ankle, eh? Maybe I'd better have a look at you

professionally later, Jonas. Have your kit brought in, if you want, but I don't think a julep and one normal meal will kill you."

J. G. Galway sniffed the hallway. "Fried chicken," he breathed. "Well, Doc, you're the doctor. Bring on your prescription."

"As part of the treatment," Pickering said thoughtfully, "I'd recommend absolute elimination of business talk while the patient is feeding. I would further advise a trip into the fresh country air immediately following the meal. Can you spare a few hours, Jonas?"

"What do you mean, Doc?"

"You asked me a question in there, a question I've been asking myself for weeks. I still can't tell you the answer, Jonas, but if you'll come along this afternoon I may be able to show you—well, I can't explain it, but I wish you'd come along."

The Galway brows formed a formidable hedge, which the doctor ignored.

"Will you go, Jonas? Can you spare a few hours, Miss Susan, with a book in my little back garden?"

She gave him a smiling curtsy and took his arm.

CHAPTER XX

PUDDLE-JUMPER CLINIC

THE little car scampered breathlessly along, jouncing and careening at the rutted curves and plodding the narrow straightaways. The afternoon sun was still young and affectionate.

"That ark of yours," said the doctor, "would have frightened the livestock and sent half of my patients into hiding. We're accustomed to the simple things down here."

J. G. Galway ahemmed. "I've got an electric horse," he said, "that don't buck half so good. It's a real nice country around here, though."

"Good soil, good water," the doctor agreed. "A good stock of people too, if only—"

He shrugged. 'There's a better road I could have taken but I've followed this old route through all the years. There's the chief reason yonder."

J. G. glanced at him sharply. "Graveyard, huh?"

Doctor Pickering applied the brake. "I was a very sentimental young man," he said reflectively. "I was very lonely when I came back here from the West. I amused myself with all sorts of odd fancies."

"What do you mean, Doc?"

"I used to say to myself when I passed this place, 'Doctor Pickering, there's the book where your final record will be written, carved in the lasting stone.' I gave the old field a personality and made it my enemy. When I'd go by in the morning I'd shake my first.

"'All right,' I'd say, 'you got old Vickery last week but I'm still going to beat you out of Grummer's wife and O'Shay.' When I came driving back I'd sneer across or turn my head aside, depending on the day."

Pickering put the car in gear. "I have three or four calls to make. Nothing urgent. We branch off to the left there. I have quite a considerable section of country to cover but I usually try to show up in each district at least once a week.

"They get so they expect you to be dropping around at a certain time, you know. Doctor Graill used to call on this particular settlement but I've been handling it since he passed away."

"How long has that been, Doc?"

"Oh, three or four years."

"These roads must be tough in the winter."

"The winters aren't so bad here. I can always get through in the sleigh."

(Half my size, Jonas Galway thought. In the old days I was the tough one, whang leather and whalebone. I could trail a packhorse to perdition and back. I could carry the little doc under my arm.)

"At your age—I mean, Doc, isn't it about time you were sitting back by the fire and writing one of those best-seller doctor books?"

"If I could find some keen young fellow—" Pickering paused, smiling. "When are you retiring, Jonas? When do you plan to place the crown of the Galway empire on another brow?"

"That's a different proposition. What I want to know is how you're fixed for money. You got a good income put away?"

The doctor peered along the road. "I want to stop in for a minute over there at the Mooty place. . . . I've got my home and my health and my job, haven't I? Hamp and Zilla would pamper me to death if I gave them the chance. I'll admit I don't have to worry as much as you do about income tax—"

"That's another thing," J. G. growled. "What do you think of those idiots in Washington? How do you stand on politics?"

"That's one disease I don't treat, Jonas. I've dosed Republican stomach aches and snipped Democratic tonsils out. Lumbago pains one just as bad as the other, I've found. . . ."

THERE was a place where the road vanished and the coupe had to wade along the rocky bed of a creek. They climbed a path to a hillside shack where newspapers were the mural of walls and ceiling—J. G. Galway noted the masthead of one of his own—and the homemade chairs had been curiously contrived from the flattened tin of cans.

"Here's a man who was ruined by government interference," the doctor had murmured as they approached. "Luke ran three stills in the prohibition days and made an elegant living."

The interior was a low single room of smoke and smells with a decrepit stove the hub of existence. The immediate inhabitants were a wrinkled crone in a rocker who coughed intermittently but never spoke, a faded angular woman who has suspended her weekly washing to greet them, and an infant penned by a chicken-wire barricade upon one of the three beds.

Children of graduated size were to appear from shy hiding, however, at later intervals. J. G. Galway estimated the total roughly at ten blue-eyed, tow-haired offspring (Eleven, counting the prisoned baby.)

Doctor Pickering was cheerful. He called the children by name and seemed to know the words that made them laugh. He spoke of old times to Grammaw as he touched the stethescope to her chest, bringing brightness to her sunken eyes and inspiring a toothless smile. He made the mother demonstrate in detail how she prepared the feedings for the baby. Teeth and throats were examined, small chests thumped.

"I'm also ex-officio county health officer," he explained to Galway. "If they didn't limit the exhibits at our local fair to produce and livestock I'd show young Anse here at the next one. Feel that muscle. See how straight he stands. You wouldn't think this was a boy who was fighting off pneumonia only three months ago, would you?"

Anse was lean, hard-bodied, perhaps twelve. "I ain't missed a day at my exercises," he said. "I'll be able to chin myself more times than Vern before the summer's over."

"That's the boy! And I won't forget what I promised. I saw one in a catalogue the other day that had seven blades."

He had a mysterious package for Mary Lou, the eldest girl, and the two conferred secretively about it. J. G. Galway and the children were then shooed outside to wait the doctor's appearance five minutes later. A cortege of youngster trailed the visitors to their car.

"BETTER be careful of that foot, Jonas," Doctor Pickering said, smiling. "I watched you coming down the hill and you forgot to limp a single time."

J. G. frowned down at his Achilles' member. "I forgot about the doggone thing," he growled, "You know, Doc, I was thinking about what you said back there. Why not have a regular fair or exhibit for youngsters? Give prizes and certificates for the healthiest kids instead of for the biggest squash or the best preserves or the fattest sow."

"The 4H Clubs are going something like that. There are various health organizations—"

"I mean something big. Have local and state eliminations and then a big national show. Divide 'em into classes and hand out some real prizes—a thousand dollars, five thousand. Get the papers backing it and the civic organizations and schools. You put the right bunch of men behind a thing like that—"

"I've dreamed a hundred such dreams, Jonas," the doctor said. "Science and industry, and education move forward with the years, shaping a better world, and some day we may produce a generation that will be in tune with it. But now the best we can do is patchwork."

J. G. Galway stared out at the moving tangles of brush and rock and tree and vine and made no answer. They passed brown fields that were rich with green growing.

"Yes," said Galway at length, "I suppose you might say that our youngsters are the most important crop we raise. That boy back there, the sulky one—Vern, wasn't it?—reminded me of how I used to look: That boy's got the same chance I had and a bigger, better world to grow in."

"If he lives," Doctor Pickering said. "He might have a chance to amount to something if his lungs hold out."

"What do you mean?" Galway growled. "That boy's not sick."

"Not yet. The grandmother has been dying for two years of tuberculosis. I've managed to establish a routine of elementary sanitary precautions but—Oh, it's a pathetic business. Every one of those children with a susceptible heredity, cramped and crowded, undernourished. I dread what I may find in the next set of X-rays."

"But, Doc, can't you put her away? Aren't there laws and public institutions for a case like that?"

"I'm afraid our rural counties are still backward in certain respects. So are some of our laws. You can jail a man for attempted suicide by gun or poison, I understand, but you can't punish him legally for the neglect, carelessness, the ignorance and fear that expose him to other deaths that are slower but just as certain."

Jonas Galway pursed his lips and sucked in his cheeks. "What did you give that girl, Doc?"

"Tooth powder, brushes, antiseptic. She's my assistant in charge of oral hygiene. I've promised her some books if she sees that the others brush faithfully."

J. G. brought forth a leather case and gnawed off the end of a cigar. "I'm not supposed to smoke these," he said. "Have one?"

"I usually light up my pipe on the trip home. I want to drop in at the little store here and say hello and there'll be only a couple of stops after that."

"Tell me something, Doc. What is it you're trying to prove by bringing me out here? I know some people are rich and some are poor. There's healthy ones and sick ones, the happy and the sad. That's the way the world goes, I know that."

"This is my world that I see every day," Doctor Pickering said. "The people and circumstances of it make me think what I think. I didn't expect you to enjoy what you found in it, but I thought it might be good for your soul."

"I've seen hard sledding," said Galway. "I've pulled my belt tight many a time."

Doctor Pickering glanced at him, with a little smile.

"In the last ten years, Jonas? In the last twenty?"

"I worked hard for what I've got. I've given my share to the arts and sciences and the public weal. The business taxes I paid in the past ten years would—"

"Would what? You don't have to defend yourself to me, Jonas. It's your money, it's a free country, do whatever you want."

"Who's defending himself?"

"Do you want to stay here at the store while I make these other calls? I'll be gone perhaps half an hour."

"Why don't you say I can't take it with me?" J. G. Galway grumbled. "Come on, come on, let's finish what we started."

CHAPTER XXI

SALUTE TO A CEMETERY

AT THE small store a one-time connoisseur of brandy drank the first soda pop he had tasted in years, strawberry flavor. He sat on the shaded porch of a comfortable farmhouse while a loud lady—she wore a mechanical earphone—told her latest symptoms to Doctor Pickering and the surrounding countryside.

"She has the constitution of an elephant," said the doctor as they drove away. "She has been ailing for twenty years without ever knowing a day of sickness in the entire period. She'll live to vote in 1960, barring accident."

The final stop was a clean white cottage. A flagstone walk led to the vined portico. Shrubs grew in symmetry and the turned earth of a small garden was arrayed at the rear. A young woman opened the door.

"Oh, Doctor, I'm so glad you came. He's been . . ."

She smoothed back her dark hair, narrowed her eyes against the sun. She was still a pretty girl but the emotion that keyed her voice had strained her too thin. Her hands were fluttery.

"Hello, Jane. This is Mr. Galway, an old friend: my lay consultant of the afternoon, so to speak."

"Oh. I thought perhaps—"

"No, my dear. Not this time. Mr. Galway is a specialist in another line. What new foolishness is Ben up to now?"

"He insisted on going over to Carabine's this morning. He was digging foundation, hauling timbers, and they had to bring him home at noon. He says it was a touch of sun, of course."

The doctor surrendered his hat to a boy of five who pounced upon him from ambush. He carried the child to a small

neat living room and said mildly, "Better lie down again, Ben. What's the sense in being bull-headed?"

The dark young fellow who sat on the couch acknowledged Jonas Galway with a brief nod of challenge. He submitted sullenly to the pulse-taking and the pills from the smaller black case. His wife retrieved the discarded quilt and spread its bright patchwork over his legs.

Doctor Pickering returned the stethoscope to his pocket. "Take it easy for a few days, Ben," he said. "You'll be all right."

"Go on and say the rest of it," the patient muttered. "Give me the good old lecture, Doc. How does it start, Jane? She'll recite it for you in case you've forgotten."

"Oh, Ben, please . . ."

"Ben teaches at the central school down the road, Jonas," the doctor said. "He's supposed to show the youngsters how to use the brains God gave them. Most of the time he's a smart, sensible young fellow."

"There's a new angle for you, Jane. Add that to your little repertoire."

"Things have been going pretty tough for Ben," Pickering went on, "and like a lot of young fellows he can't wait until they straighten themselves out. He's a go-getter, Ben Westcott is. He's always ready to grab the bull by the horns and wrestle it out."

"Bedside philosophy," jeered the man on the couch. "Sugar coated, like the little pink pills. It's easy to talk."

"We'll go into that another time when you're rested up. The chief thing I want to say right now is this: don't take it out on Jane, boy. You're not the only sufferer in your particular Hell. Jane has this situation to meet the same as you have. The weight of all your problems and worries rests on her shoulders too. Don't make her the target of your frustration, Ben. She wouldn't scold if she didn't love you."

The girl knelt beside the couch. "He doesn't mean it, Doctor. He's tired. He doesn't eat enough and he hasn't been sleeping well."

WESTCOTT gripped her hand and some of the desperation went out of his eyes as he looked at her. He touched her fingers to his cheek.

"But what am I going to do, Doctor Pickering?" he asked. "What could any man do? I went over to Carabine's because—all right, honey, you may as well know it now—because I heard yesterday that the school board is cutting down this fall. They're dropping three from this district, according to the reports. Admit it, Doctor! You've heard the same thing."

"I heard some talk, Ben."

"Sure. And you know very well I'll be the first one dropped. I'm from out of the state, I'm new, I've wrangled with them about equipment and policy —No, there's not a chance.

"I didn't forget about the old ticker, Doc. I've done a little building, I can handle tools, and they said Colonel Carabine needed help and the job might last into the winter. I wanted to see—I thought maybe I could stand it."

"You will be able to stand it in time, Ben," said the doctor. "You're a young man and your cardiac system will compensate. Right now, though—"

"But Doc, it's right now that's important!" His emotion edged his voice. "There's the money I borrowed, the bills I owe, there's Janie!"

"Is she outside?" Pickering asked.

Mrs. Westcott nodded. "She's been painting almost continually since you brought her the new outfit. You shouldn't have—"

"How is that new plan of exercise going? Does it tire her? Can you notice any improvement?"

"I—sometimes I can. I'm not sure."

"We'll go out and have a look," said the doctor. "Mr. Galway is something of an art expert. About the school, Ben: I've already talked to two members of the board and I'll give you my word you have nothing to worry about on that score. I'll explain the situation before I go. Come on, Jonas, this way."

The artist on the east terrace was professionally equipped with easel, smock, and a smear of color along her cheek. She turned her wheelchair to face them, a smiling child with coppery pigtails and a quick, merry voice. She gave J. G. Galway a cool polite hand.

Doctor Pickering gave her water-color sketch a cyclopean scrutiny. "Hmmmmm. The contours of the landscape are familiar but I don't seem to recall those castles and dragons. What's that animal in the corner?"

"It's a railroad," J. G. Galway said.

"I had it a Ferris wheel at first," said the artist, "but it got in the way of the clouds."

"Well, come on now, Jonas, and tell us what you think about the chromatics and the composition. Was Michaelangelo or Rembrandt doing much better than this at the age of eight? You go ahead and criticize while I see how much Janie has improved since last week."

J. G. GALWAY talked about dragons instead. His eyes were always aware, however, of the doctor's deft hands and he could not repress an involuntary grimace at sight of the shrunken calf, the pitifully distorted ankle.

In swift embarrassment he realized that the child had been watching him.

"I—what was I saying?" he growled.

"I don't like to watch it either," Janie told him. "Mother says to pretend that nothing's wrong and never notice it and pretty soon the doctor's friend will make it the way it used to be. It doesn't hurt, you know."

"I think I left my cigars in the car," said J. G. Galway, turning away. "Goodbye, Janie. I—I'll wait for you out front, Doc."

He sat in the coupe and frowned at his reflection in the windshield. He chewed his unlighted cigar and shifted uncomfortably. He did not speak when Pickering came out to join him ten minutes later. They drove a silent mile.

"That was an ugly thing, John," said J. G. Galway at length. "The poor sweet little devil—you might have spared me that."

"We had six cases in the last outbreak," said the doctor, "one a grown man. We were able to pull two of them through. There's a respirator at the county seat and we managed to get Janie there in time.

"Her father—it was exposure and exhaustion and worry that brought Ben down. He mortgaged the house and borrowed what he could and almost killed himself keeping the child alive. Yes, Jonas, you're right—polio—infantile paralysis—is an ugly thing."

"What was she talking about, some friend of yours who'd make her well?"

"There are several specialists, notably Gieske in Baltimore, who are doing some remarkable things in corrective surgery. The operation must be performed before the paralytic condition distorts the growth and functions of the contributory structures.

"Ben's desperation is based on the belief that one of these fellows might perform the miracle of making his daughter normal again if he could beg,

borrow or steal a few thousand dollars in the next few months."

"Damn you," J. G. Galway snarled, "you know where the money could be found."

"That's true. But as a physician I also know that prevention is often more important than cure. Janie is alive, otherwise healthy, and many thousands of others have conquered greater handicaps than hers and gone on to live useful, happy lives.

"I know that an ambulance and respirators might have saved the four others who weren't as lucky as Janie was. If there had been a well-equipped hospital within a hundred miles Janie might be dancing now. What about the other Janies of next month and next year?

"Do you see what I mean, Jonas? Are you beginning to know my answer to the question you asked?"

"Can't you show a little speed?" said Galway. "That wind is turning cold."

THE little car rocked and bounced, a coracle in a whitecap blow that seemed to chart her erratic course from the variable compass of J. G. Galway's jutting cigar. The shadows were stretching thin along the roadside.

"Do doctors still amputate with a jackknife?" Galway asked. "Suppose a man is dying. A fast new car would get you to him in half the time."

He frowned at the doctor.

"These roads aren't built for speed, Jonas, and neither am I. When a doctor rides he carries more lives than his own in the car. A wrecked machine means two patients, two emergencies, perhaps more. There's also a selfish consideration."

J. G. lifted a mocking brow.

"My thoughts," the doc explained, "are my sole remaining luxury. To go burning down the highway from patient to patient would steal my pleasure away. In my little old puddle-jumper I'm forced to amble along. I can feel God's wind instead of a manufactured one. I can see trees and growing things, not a rushing blur. I can smell the smells and hear the sounds.

"I learn that Farrow's planting rye this year, that Smith's tobacco needs some rain and Jones will have a skimpy melon yield. I can watch the new crop of colts and calves and lambs at pasture."

"Ummyaam," said J. G. Galway. "Yes."

"It's a little world," the doctor said, "but my thoughts fit easily in it. You, of course, on the other hand—"

"You don't have to hit me with a board," Galway muttered. "There's two ways of looking at things, is that what you're trying to say? Through one end of the telescope you see ants on a far-off yellow rock, but through the other end it's humanity you see and the facts of living."

"I didn't mean exactly that but I'll accept the amendment. Well, right up here's where we turn off. Didn't take us so long, did it?"

"Slow down, Doc. Whoa a bit. Haven't you anything to say to your old friend the graveyard today?"

Doctor Pickering stopped the car at the edge of the road. He tamped his pipe, smiled thoughtfully. "I've been using a human sounding-board this afternoon. Did I make sense, Jonas?"

"Some, Doc. I—you see, back in the city they gave me a big reputation for hair-trigger judgment and deciding things. Shall we buy this or merge that or take such-and-such a position—they come to me with all those questions and I blat the answers right back.

"It's like you say though, that's just instinct. When a problem comes up outside my routine I don't like to face it any better than the next man. I guess you know what's on my mind, don't you, Doc?"

"How many millions, Jonas?"

"I can't exactly tell. I make money and lose money every hour. Say seventy or eighty, barring some crazy inflation and provided I live a few more years."

The doctor smiled. "You always were a hard nut. You'll hit the four-score mark."

"But now's the time to plan," said J. G. Galway. "I want to do the right thing, the best thing. I've got to make up my mind."

There were willows in the small cemetery, willows that moved with the soft wind. The iron gate had a faint sad creak. Hours of daylight were still to follow, but the prodigal warmth was faded from the sun. These last long rays had only their false surface glitter.

"My book, Jonas," said the doctor, pointing. "I wonder how many blank pages remain. There are records in there of decisions I've had to make, and even now it's difficult to say, 'This one was right, that was wrong.' There are lives I was able to prolong, and I know now it might have been better if my hand or my medicines had failed."

Galway nodded. "I know, I know."

"We can merely guess, Jonas. There's no system of success when you match coins with Fate. When I was a younger man—"

Galway snapped his fingers. "Young Harwood!" he exclaimed. "He'll certainly be there by now. I—what did you think of Susan, Doc?"

"I thought of the daughters I might have had when I saw her."

"I wanted the name to go on. Susan has the brains and the judgment, and I thought I could teach her—" He shrugged. "It looked like the sensible way to handle the whole thing."

"You never did like men who passed the buck," Doctor Pickering said. "I have that same feeling about it. I once drew up a set of regulations to guide me in the event that two or three emergencies should develop in the same five minutes."

"Sounds sensible enough. Did it figure out?"

"It merely complicated the guesswork. Who can diagnose the seriousnes of an ailment by telephone?"

J. G. considered in brief silence. "But how did you handle it," he asked, "when a situation like that came up?"

"There weren't so many of them," the doctor said. "I did the natural thing, followed my instinct. I played my hunches, that's all, as the poker table taught me. When the cards fell wrong I blamed it on the cards. . . . Shall we go on back? What time are you planning to leave?"

"I'll leave," said Galway's growl, "when I've settled matters with you. That's how I do business. Do you think that cook of yours could steal a couple more of those chickens and fry 'em up for supper?"

CHAPTER XXII

DOC FILLS A FLUSH

THE limousine waited faithfully at the doctor's white gate, a sleek mechanical mastiff, tireless in patience. Fifty pace up the street, crouched at bay, was a disreputable brown terrier of a car that eyed the approaching coupe with hostility and set up a yapping of horn as J. G. Galway alighted.

"Is that the young man you mentioned?" the doctor asked.

"Look at the way he comes gallop-

ing," said Galway. "You'd think I was trying to beat him out of a board bill. Where's Susan? Can you see her in the car?"

"No, I think he's alone."

"Mr. Galway—" Thomas Harwood slowed his last five strides to a certain dusty dignity. "Very well, Mr. Galway, here I am. I came chasing after you, if that's what you wanted. I've been waiting three hours and nineteen minutes. All I've got to say—"

"Just a moment, Harwood," J. G. said sharply. "Is this a business or personal matter?"

"Strictly business, sir. I've come to—"

"I don't discuss my business on the highways," the great executive barked. "This is Doctor Pickering. Mr. Harwood is the attorney for the Katy Belle, Doc."

"Formerly the attorney," Harwood corrected. "How do you do, Doctor. I merely wanted to—"

"Mr. Galway has had a rather tiring ride," the doctor said. "He has put himself in my care temporarily, and I'd suggest you continue your talk where he can be more comfortable. Won't you come in?"

"I—thank you, I don't want to intrude. If Mr. Galway will give me just two minutes—"

"Oh, come along. Hamp, you rascal, what have you got that's tall and cool? What's all the grinning about?"

"Nuthin', Doctuh John. I got that wall all fixed now."

"All right, we'll go there. Where's Miss Susan?"

Hamp chuckled. "I was comin' to ansuh the do' fo' this gennelmun heah when she come flyin' down the hall. I dunno whut the rumpus was about but they didn't talk two minnits befo' he go glumphin' ovah to his cah an' she go back to the gahden. She say she won't talk to nobody nohow fo' nothin' whatsevah."

"Flaaah!' said J. G. Galway, pausing at the door. "I'll find her."

"I—we—that is, I tried to apologize," Harwood said. "I'll wait on the porch if you don't mind.

"Oh no, come in! I doubt if Mr. Galway will feel like talking before supper."

"Harwood"—J G. Galway's voice boomed through the screen of the door —"I won't discuss another thing until this Katy Belle business is straightened out. That's my motto, one thing at a time. There's the man that's holding us up—Doc Pickering. I've talked to him till I'm hoarse. It's up to you, Harwood, to finish what you started."

"That's fair enough," the doctor said. "Shall we go in? If you fancy the julep, Mr. Harwood, I believe you'll find that Hamp's concoction is something really special."

"But I—"

Thomas Harwood found himself persuaded into a room that was comfortable and old. The little doctor chatted for a moment, then left his guest with an album of pictures that were still remarkably clear. Harwood stared moodily at the flounces and faces of women who had doubtless been reared to a proper respect for the male of the species.

(They would treat their husbands with punctilio and suitable awe. They would blush faintly and shyly veil their eyes when the head of the household addressed them, murmuring "Yes, Thomas," or "Just as you say, my love.")

He studied the sideburns and manly mustachios of dashing soldiers and other stern proud fellows who would handle a flighty female with the same

firm fist that controlled a recalitrant steed.

"I EXPECTED to find they had to rope and tie you," Susan said. "As far as I was concerned you could have camped out there in your silly car until Christmas. You're just stubborn enough, Thomas Harwood."

He had risen quickly and his frantic clutch missed the album as it slid from his knees. He batted at it with his free hand, missed again, and pawed at the seat of his chair to balance himself. Said chair was a rocker, and the back of it promptly delivered a solid thump upon his forehead.

He rubbed his injury and glared at the girl in the doorway.

"Laugh!" he said.

"Well, perhaps it was my fault," Susan said. "This afternoon, I mean. I thought my uncle had arranged—that he had sent for you because . . . Does it hurt?"

He knelt to collect the prints that the elusive album had spilled upon the rag rug. "I beat my head with a hammer," he said, "as a part of my calisthenics every morning. I still can't understand what I said to make you mad. I was only trying to apologize."

"Apologize for what?"

"I—I just went haywire out there in Portland. I shouldn't have called. I made a fool of myself and I'm very sorry."

Susan touched a picture with her toe. She bent to rescue another. Harwood kept his eyes upon his task but he was aware that she knelt across the rug. He saw her moving hands assemble the scattered squares.

"You retract what you said that night?" she asked. "You didn't mean it?"

"I had no reason to speak that way to your uncle. He was perfectly right to call me a hysterical schoolgirl."

He was filing prints and photos helter-skelter in the album. He collected the pile Susan had gathered and dusted his hands. Some atmospheric pump, he had the feeling, was extracting the oxygen from the room and replacing it with silence as waxen and fragile as the flower petals beneath their glassy bell.

Susan said quietly, "I'm talking about what you said to me that night. Do you apologize for that?"

"No," said Harwood, and he raised his eyes to her face.

She held the last stray photograph like a prayerbook in her hands, and it may have been the slant of the red sun between the curtains that made her seem obscured in a shining haze, the cathedral penitent from some forgotten picture.

"No," he said, "I'm not sorry that I love you, Susan."

SHE was motionless. He heard the whisper of her breath. The thoughts he could not express before were suddenly regimented in instinctive words.

He said, "I've toured the country with Katy Belle. I've seen the way that money works. Your uncle—there's a great tall golden wall that I'm not hero enough to climb. There are too many winds you have to fight when you ride on J. G. Galway's coattails."

"I know about that," she said, "but what about the prisoner behind the wall? Do you just ignore the way she feels and what she wants to do? Isn't it important at all that I love every stubborn bump on your head, Thomas Harwood?"

"I—don't be a fool! I'm no Cousin Lionel. I'd rather be a bumblebee than the sparrow riding the eagle's back. Every man has his own row to hoe, and

the Galway millions would grow too fat and fast for mine. You've got too much, Susan. You—be sensible!"

"I'm the most sensible woman you know," she said. "Did you ever read the Bible—the pillar of salt, Lot's daughters? What about me? I breathe and eat and sleep like other women. I have my dreams. Do I have to wait for some maharajah to ride up on his elephant and match my uncle million for million?"

"You're only twenty-three," he said stiffly. "When you grow up you'll know I was right."

"When *I* grow up!" she mocked. "I've never heard such petty, childish, nonsensical folderol as you keep spouting! You and your prim little copybook maxims! You and your barefoot boy pride and your stilted theories! Oh, I could—"

Her voice faded. Her hands opened in a gesture of futility. "Hold your hats, boys! Will we ever talk five minutes without ending in screams and sulks and insults?"

"That's exactly what I meant," said Harwood. "We may as well face the inevitable."

"Why you—" Susan sprang up. "You mealy-mouthed—"

"I'se sorry, folks"—Zilla hovered at the doorway—"but I don't care whut nobody says I jest cain't keep things hot much longuh. I already tol' Doctuh John—"

"We're coming right away, Zilla." Susan had turned away from Harwood and her toe thumped ten distant taps upon the floor before she glanced back over her shoulder. "You might try to be human at dinner," she said. "We're guests, you know."

He rubbed his forehead. "But listen, Susan, can't you see what I mean? Here, I'll take that photo—"

"Never mind." She replaced it in the album, shrugged when he turned back the plush cover to glance at it.

"But Susan," he groaned, "I just can't be—you wouldn't want a lapdog."

"You might offer the lady your arm, sir," she said. "It is the custom in these parts and a very charming one."

"All right," he said with husky intensity, "will you come with me right now? Will you marry me, Susan—tonight, tomorrow, as soon as we can? Will you put your arm in mine, like that bride in the picture, and go where I go and risk my luck? Will you let me go in and tell J. G. Galway to keep his money, that you're taking what I have to offer?"

"What other basis could there be?" she said.

"Susan! Will you, Susan?"

She said, "Give me your arm. I want to see how your face looks in the candlelight across a table."

THOMAS HARWOOD refused the doctor's cigars. He said, "Mr. Galway, there's a very important matter I feel we must discuss. If I could see you in private—"

Susan was shaking her head. Old Galway looked at him with eyes that were infinitely wise. The little doctor maintained his grave thoughtful smile.

"Let's all go sit in your office, Doc," said Galway. "It's comfortable there. We can move quick enough if a patient drops in."

The dinner had been absent-minded, Harwood's impression ran, and now there was an undercurrent of secret transactions, vague impendings. The gentle pressure of Susan's fingers on his arm as they left the room said, "Hush, wait, let it happen."

He sat in a straight wooden chair, facing the little doctor across the cone

of light that made his desk a glowing island in the room.

J. G. Galway harrumphed. "A few bottles and chips and a deck of cards and we'd have a poker layout," he said. "All right, Harwood, he's yours. Go get him boy. I almost talked a tonsil off and never softened him."

Harwood turned the pages of the Katy Belle portfolio and a phrase was in his mind. "The meek shall inherit," he thought, glancing across at the doctor's gentle face. Pickering smiled and took a square black book from a drawer.

"My accounts," he said. "I'm a poor accountant." He opened the book and spread the blue checks in a fan. "Tell me the story, Mr. Harwood," he continued. "Why should all this money be mine?"

Harwood sketched the technicalities as J. G. Galway nodded. "It's a simple legal transaction," he ended. "If you will execute that form—"

"I begin to see," said the doctor. "My original impression wronged you, Jonas. It's not amends, not charity, but rather a preferred disbursement. Is that correct?"

"I'd rather see you have it, Doc, than those corn-cure quacks in Washington."

"There can't be any complications so far as you're concerned, Doctor," Harwood said. "The money is yours without strings. Your signature on the checks will end the whole matter."

"End it for whom?" asked the doctor. "No thank you, young man. I must ask to be excused. I beg to decline the nomination."

"But I don't see—" Harwood

(*Please turn the page*)

glanced at J. G. Galway. "Is there some personal reason?"

"In a way," Galway said. "The doc, you see, is getting along in years. He's got enough money to do him, he's comfortable, he's enjoying things as they are. What could he do with a thousand extra dollars every week?"

Harwood smiled. "There are all sorts of luxuries: a bigger house, a finer car, travel—" He hesitated. "Wait, I'm beginning to understand. He could use it for the happiness of his relatives, his friends, for charity."

"I haven't chick or child," said Doctor Pickering. "Hamp and Zilla are provided for, and my friends are men and women like myself. As for charity —where shall I begin?"

"The trouble is, Harwood," J. G. explained, "our friend is a philosopher. He doesn't want to hit-or-miss. He wants to do the greatest good, to plant his seeds where the biggest crop of happiness will grow. Listen! He took me to a shack out in the hills . . ."

He told the story of the afternoon ride in pithy word and laconic phrase. Harwood nodded understanding.

"But that poor little girl!" Susan cried. "Surely, Doctor, you could have—"

"He answered that, honey," Galway said. "For every check he's got there's two hands, four hands reaching. There's the problem too, of whether cure or prevention is the best thing. There'll be others sick and maimed next week, next month, next year."

"THAT'S all very nice theory," said Harwood, "but it's like that metaphysical stuff—what is it?—how many angels could sit on a needle's point? By the nature of his calling a doctor must be a man of decision. You must have developed a certain amount of confidence in your own judgment, Doctor Pickering."

"I've been accepting the responsibility of my own affairs for many years," the doctor said. "If this new problem were of my own making I imagine I'd find a way to solve it. My hands are trained to do the best they can. My head has its special knowledge.

"Give me a scalpel to use—yes. But don't give me the power and responsibility of another man's money, don't ask me to use a tool until you've shown me how to work it."

"Tell him about the graveyard, Doc," J. G. suggested. "Tell him about your list of regulations."

The little doctor smiled. . . .

"I see." Harwood nodded reflectively when the story was told. Susan was watching him, he saw, and her eyes were shining. "I had an experience on my trip—it doesn't matter. The point I want to make, Doctor, is that the sum of these payments over the years might total a considerable amount. You might relieve those of your patients now in actual distress and still have money for respirators, an ambulance, a small hospital if you want."

Doctor Pickering's finger traced the amount on a blue check. "Yes, I know. A hundred thousand—two hundred—Pell's Run and all the communities around would have reason to be grateful, wouldn't they? They'd remember John Page Pickering, M.D., and count him a great man."

"Go on," growled J. G. Galway, "say it!"

"You've done most of the talking, Jonas. I may have mentioned that our county is a small place, a dot on the map, a pore in the network of a vast body.

"There's illness and ignorance in the county beyond and the ten beyond that.

There's suffering and poverty in this town and that city. In every state there's needless disease and anguish and death.

"This is the condition of fact I must face when I weigh the wisest use of this money you gentlemen so generously bestow on me. As you say, it is a considerable sum.

"I want to straighten as many legs, heal as many wounds, rout as many fevers and infections—in short, to buy the greatest amount of health and happiness that my thousands can be made to afford. Is Pell's Run—as a true humanitarian I must ask the question—is this the place to start?

"Do our Pell's Run pains bite deeper than other pains?" he asked. "Are the children I would help more worthy of help than millions I have never seen? Are the lives I might save more important than other lives?"

J. G. Galway leaned his clenched fists on the table. His face was fierce and haggard in the light, his jaw a grim bony jutting. His deepset eyes moved from the doctor to Susan and his lips relaxed in a faint fond smile.

Susan's elbows were planted wide and her hands framed the oval of her face. She returned his gaze steadily.

"Are you listening, honey?"

"I'm listening, Uncle Josh."

"Do you see how the cards are falling, Susy?"

She nodded.

"Shall we call the bet, Susy? It's your stake too, remember. Shall we see him and raise him? Do we shoot the works?"

"You never were a piker, Uncle Josh." She was smiling and her eyes shone in the light. "The works!"

He leaned to touch her arm. His long gnarled fingers gripped her slender hand. "Okay, Doc," he said, "suppose instead of picayune thousands you had millions behind you—sixty, eighty millions? What would you do with money like that?"

THE doctor was staring at the checks before him. "I—Don't rush things, Jonas. Think it over first. There's too much at stake to let impulse decide."

"I ride my hunches, Doc," said J. G. Galway. "It's the only system I know. Impulse—why for years I've tried to find the way to put my house in order. Maybe I've been going at it wrong. Go ahead, Doc, what would you do?"

"It's hard to be God," Doctor Pickering said slowly. "If I had the power of millions—Well, there are the easy, formal ways to use it. I could endow universities—"

J. G. Galway shrugged.

"I could imprint my name on the arts. I could build fine stately museums and store them with the inspirational treasures of the past. I could collect the trophies of the great craftsmen, the artists."

Susan smiled. "But can you dig a straighter ditch with a silver shovel?"

"There's science and research too," the doctor went on. "This skeleton or fossil might hide knowledge we need, and we might know more about ourselves if we found how many parts ape were in our ancestors.

"There's the sun and tides to be harnessed, the sky realms to chart, the secret of the green in grass to be disclosed. Perhaps we could track down the essence of being, the why and whence of the ultimate atom."

"But we already have our great foundations," said Harwood. "There are organizations better equipped—"

"Damn it," J. G. Galway growled, "I already admitted I was wrong. I'm

not hunting the easy way." He glowered around the table, beetle-browed.

"There's some fine big handsome monuments in that graveyard down the road, all chiseled with flowers and tooled with pretty angels, but the names of the men on the plain little markers meant just as much to me. If I once had some notion of painting my signature across the sun—

"No, I don't want that. I don't want to be remembered in plaques and cornerstones or a new kind of rhubarb named in my honor. But maybe—maybe, I say—there's something that you *can* take along when you go. You've shown me what it is, Doc. Now tell me how and where and how much my money can buy."

The little doctor drew a deep breath.

"I think," he said, "I'd invest in bellies and brains. I'd put my money into a scheme for helping this crop of humans, and the next and the next, grow healthier bodies and happier minds. I'd try to accomplish my aim not through book and laboratory and test tube, but rather I'd carry the fight against sickness and ignorance straight to the source.

"But how, Doctor?" Susan asked. "You have a plan?"

"I HAVE a dream that recurs," he said. "The men I know—the average of them—are aware of their bodies chiefly in pleasure and pain. It requires the crisis of a deep wound, an intolerable ache, the severe impairment of a faculty, to make them seek expert opinion upon the priceless mechanism.

"They come unwillingly to the doctor then, not for cure, not for knowledge of themselves, but to banish the ache, to repair the surface damage.

"Ten million cases of severe sunburn every Fourth of July," Thomas Harwood said. "A jackass has more sense than that."

Doctor Pickering nodded. "They are afraid of doctors, of the simple mysteries inside themselves. Only a zany would tank his car with water and expect it to run, yet not one-tenth of the nation is properly fed. Only a zany would attempt to solve the problem of a stalled motor by painting the hood, yet how many millions of dollars did our enlightened American civilization spend last year on nostrums, cure-alls, rejuvenators, mumbo-jumbo remedies?"

"Horse salve!" J. G. Galway muttered.

"I'd start with youth," the little doctor said. "The young crop is the future, the seed and the promise of what is to come.

"We can start them growing tall and straight, teach them how to draw their strength from the earth and the sun. It means work, organization, resources, a wide-spread plan; but it might—it *can* be done.

"In this dream of mine," he said, "I saw infirmaries on wheels that carried the fight against infection and disease along the roads, that brought the message of health to every doorstep.

"I saw doctors and nurses who did not wait for pain and suffering to come to them but who went crusading into the enemy's lair.

"I saw clinics building up alongside of every school: not mere stations for diagnosis but true hospitals.

"I saw rest-camps and food centers. . . . It was a mighty dream."

"My contest, Doc," said J. G. Galway. "That's how we'd dramatize, that's how we'd sell the idea! We'd work through the schools at first. Each kid would have a health card, a list of ratings every week.

"We'd post awards for the healthiest

schools, the healthiest districts. We'd have a monthly honor roll for the ones that showed the most improvement. We'd run news about it in all the papers. We'd work on local pride. And once a year there'd be a national exhibit with whacking prizes and medals and citations galore.'

"Health scholarships," Susan said. "Prizes for the mothers, too. Get the women of the country working with you and the battle's well begun."

Doctor Pickering's gentle face was glowing with his eagerness. "Not scholarships at college, Jonas," he cried, "but financial aid for youngsters like Vern Mooty. Give them a boost through high school Give them feet to stand on and face their new horizons.

"I can see it working; I can see a finer new breed of doctors growing in the world, a concept of public health that will spur nations and governments to greater ideals, a generation grown a hundred years beyond the last one."

"LOOK," said Harwood. He drew rapid lines on paper. "Here's the way it will start. We will bracket the country like this. We will choose six key locations as regional headquarters and fan out from there. The first step is to select a board of experts—"

"Here," said J. G. Galway, "gimme that pencil. Here's the way we'll work it out. We'll— Hey, what's the matter, Doc?"

Doctor Pickering had covered his face with his hands. His shoulders were shuddering, and his eyes were misted when he looked at them. "Do you mean it, Jonas?" he asked. "Is this—is it real?"

"Damn it," J. G. Galway roared, "where's your telephone? Get Hutchins, get Gambrill, ring every attorney I've got. I want 'em all in Washington by noon tomorrow.

"Mean it? I'll tell the doggone world I mean it, Doc! You know my fiscal set-up, Harwood. How long should it take to get this new scheme rolling?"

Harwood stood up. "Mr. Galway," he said, "there's a personal matter—"

"How long, confound it?"

"Well, you'll have to change the beneficiary of your trusts. It depends on how thorough a liquidation—"

"A month? Three months?"

"Perhaps. I only wanted to say, Mr. Galway—"

"Can you put us up for the night, Doc?" J. G. asked. "Patients or no patients, you've got to drive to Washington with us first thing in the morning. We'll get things started from there.

"Susy, honey, get Fosdick on the phone and I'll tell him what I want arranged."

"Listen, Uncle Josh, please!" Susan stood beside Thomas Harwood and held his arm. "I want to tell you—that is, we want to say—"

But her great-uncle was frowning over at Doctor Pickering. He reached out to touch the blue checks, the loot of Katy Belle's accidental treasure. "What about these, Doc?" he demanded. "How do we stand on this little deal, you and I?"

"Why I—whatever you say."

"Tell me one thing, Doc, and cross your heart. These checks—you used to know me pretty good, didn't you? You knew if you didn't cash these checks there was a mighty good chance I might hop right on down here to find out why. You wouldn't call them a blue chip ante, would you, in a little poker game you thought you might arrange?"

The doctor met his gaze, his face

as expressionless as the professional mask of any gambler.

"If it was poker, Jonas," he said, "the game was played with a straight deck. There was no holdout up my sleeve. More than that, it was the first poker game in the history of Hoyle with not a single loser and a hundred million winners."

"I'll shake on that," said J. G. Galway. "Pardner, put 'er there. We'll give that crowd in Washington something to open their eyes. We'll—"

He stopped suddenly, jerked erect in his chair. "Great jumping rattlesnakes!" he whispered.

"Will you listen just a moment?" Susan begged.

"We wanted to tell you," Harwood said, "that Susan and I—we love—We're going to get—"

J. G. Galway roared. He leaned back in the chair, stretched his long arms wide as if to embrace the room.

"Ohhohohohoho!" he roared. "Ahhahahahaha! Their faces—hawhaw—when they hear it. Ohmyohmyohmyohmy! Let him have sixty-seven terms, haha! Let him tax and tax, oh glory be! Let him spend a million billion—"

He clutched his midriff and bent his head, shoulders heaving.

"Uncle Josh!" Susan cried. "Oh Doctor, please, what's wrong?"

"There's nothing wrong, honey," said J. G. Galway weakly. "Ohhohohohaha. Everything's all right. Huhhuhhuhhuhhuh—it's perfect.

"By fixing things the way they are—oh dear, my side!—what a beautiful beating we'll give those buzzards when they start to figure my taxes out!"

THE END

The bullet threw Dalkirk into the swollen torrent

None But The Coward

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "The Sea Ghost," "Salaam to the Thief," etc.

He came out of the Indian jungle with a fortune strapped around his waist, and the earth seized him, tested him by flood and violence—and freed him of the curse of loneliness

THE weight of the gold coins strapped about his waist and under his armpits kept him from crossing the river. The coins were gold *mohurs,* star *pagadeas, mahmudis,* all of them obsolete but almost pure. They weighed as much as Dalkirk himself. Because of them the mud shoals sucked hungrily at his feet.

His horse had thrown him, wallowed in the mud, then scrambled to shore. That was all right. The exhausted little tat pony could go its own way. It was too small a beast to ride double, to carry both Dalkirk and that unseen rider—the gold. Dalkirk could get another mount across the river where a caste of hereditary grooms and grass cutters supplied horses for Englishmen who came to the Kulnoor jungle in search of big game.

Across the Jangarh River he would have the protection of the district police. But on this side, since he was in

a native Indian state instead of British India, he had to carry his gold hoard hidden as if it did not belong to him—as if he were a thief with loot gotten by blood.

With his saddle slung over his shoulder, he trudged across the caked mud and forded the first channel. He was astonished at the cold as the water swished up over his puttees, for the air all about was so hot it made his skull sing. By the time it took him to wade across, the waterway was twice as wide. He knew that far up in the Kulnoor hills the monsoon had broken for he could smell water in the hot wind. In a few hours this dry rustling jungle would be a swamp.

He kept on, tramping heavily toward the center of the mile-wide river bed. Now the mud was cracked in an intricate mosaic, powdered with dust. But the monsoon floods had already seeped under the deceptively solid surface. His feet poked through the crust and he felt the ooze like a buffalo's mouth ruminating its cud.

With the first touch of panic he dropped his saddle, jerked his foot free of the ground and tried to run. He went at a jolting trot, clip-clopping in the mud as if he had shod hoofs. At each step he saw the ground all around him quiver in rippling circles. Even the air, like something solid, rippled and twitched.

The dark jungle on either shore wavered in the heat and beyond it a black cloud like a mountain range moved before the monsoon.

The monsoon of that year struck India on the Malabar Coast at the usual time, which is early June. But because of a storm in the Arabian Sea it swerved from its course and introduced the rains into north-west India much earlier than expected.

The flood came, not slowly and naturally, but of a sudden like a dreadful miracle performed by God. Already the sound of the rains seemed to vibrate in the dryness everywhere. But this, Dalkirk knew, was due to the wind in the *pipal* trees. The *pipals* when rustling, always sounded like babbling brooks. So did those birds, the tree pies, gurgling in their throats like a water pipe.

Dalkirk shuddered at these strange illusions when he found himself knee-deep in the mud. He pulled one leg up, but the effort unbalanced him and he rolled to one side, plunging his arms up to the elbows in black ooze.

He struggled, got up, fell again as if something were beating him down with a cudgel. The blows fell on one spot in the small of his back where the cummerbund in which he had sewn his coins had chafed a sore. Right there the sun hit him steadily with strokes as measured as his own pulse.

When he managed to stand up, thigh-deep, he saw a native boy driving his buffalo out of the river bed. He called to him. The boy would not come, but it was doubtless he who sent the white girl down to the river.

DALKIRK saw her on the shore, a slim figure in khaki, tethering her horse. His panic left at the sight of her. Now that he stopped wallowing around in the mud and had time to think, he decided affably that there was no reason for panic in the first place.

Deep in ooze, his feet had touched bedrock. He was a prisoner, yes, but there was no danger until the water rose. Even then he could take off his jacket and his cummerbund and shoulder holster and throw that gold away.

The mud would swallow it and digest it and no man would ever see a

single piece of it again. Nevertheless, since he could save his life, there was no reason for hysterics.

He could save his life, surely, but it would mean a life of drudgery. To throw away this treasure he had found in an ancient Sivite temple was to throw away a king's living. Perhaps the river mud, or, so to speak, the river gods, had contrived to pose the question to him very clearly: Which did he want, his life or his gold?

It depended on what his life was worth. He would have to go back to his clerking in the revenue secretary's office. It meant long hours, miasmic heat, eye flies, speckled mosquitoes, the hopeless dream of England and home. It meant writer-babus pestering him with reports like the eye flies. He dreamed of those reports and figures and entries every night: Land Revenue, Opium, Railways, Tribute.

He dreamed also that he might be a deputy commissioner and thus be the head of a revenue office himself, before he was an old man. Salt, Stamps, Excise, Finance Relief, Irrigation, Opium —it was the endless wheel—like that bullock beyond the office veranda trudging on a ramp drawing water forever.

But here was his gold which meant escape from the wheel. The hoard was his by right of his own labor, every coin of it, no matter what the river *mahoos* ordained. He had hunted the jungle for it, dug for it, translated many dried, cracked papyrus leaves for it.

His right extended back to that time when, after much computation, he saved Ramgad's ruler an appreciable sum in assessed tribute. The old *gaekwar* of Ramgad, as a reward had given him the concession to excavate in the abandoned temples—a concession that wasn't worth two *pice* as far as the *gaekwar* believed.

But now Dalkirk must abandon all rights to his treasure if he decided to save his life!

The stark choice made him think instead of struggle. For a definite reason he thought of what a *sadhu* had told him when he was translating those papyrus leaves. "A rich man is as lonely as a king unless he has a mate to share his wealth."

The girl stood there twenty feet away from him as he shouted to her to stay back. "You can't get me out! You'll need help. Get someone else."

She took another step toward him. "Someone's coming. He went for a rope."

"All right then, stay where you are. Just stand there." His voice was as cheery as if he had said, "Just stand there and let me look at you."

SHE had a thin face strangely lighted by a sky that was white hot in the west, black as ebony on the other horizon. The same contrast played in the bright curls under her pith helmet.

He tried to think what she would be doing there in the Kulnoor jungle. A girl like this, dressed in khaki riding blouse and jodhpurs, with a high-caste horse, was not apt to be a missionary's wife or the daughter of a clerk in a Bombay trading house.

This one looked like the other class —the daughters of I.C.S. wallahs or army officers who come out to India to visit their fathers. Perhaps she was on a hunting party and had become separated from the others.

In wondering about her, Dalkirk completely forgot his own predicament. He even touched his mud spattered topee and gave her a friendly grin.

"You don't seem very worried," she

said, "for a man who's in quicksand."

"I can get out, if I want," he said truthfully. But it sounded queer. She gaped at him.

"You're a pretty brave man. I've seen cattle caught in the river. And men too. They go crazy." Her eyes glowed as she stared at him. He seemed to have something that men and beasts lacked.

She was still more astonished when he asked, "Who's that man?"

A white man had left his horse and was coming across the mud shoals with a rope-vine.

"Whoever he is," she said, "he'll help you out."

"Yes, but," he insisted sharply, "who is he?"

Although the question seemed absurd to her, it was of vital importance to Dalkirk. Ever since he had come from those temple ruins in the mountains he had avoided all contact with humankind. He was not so concerned about meeting the hillmen of the villages, but there were some Englishmen who knew him and knew where he had been. He was like those water buffalos that treat the natives with indifference but at sight of a white face and a white topee grow skittish and dangerous.

"I was riding with him," the girl said. "We're on a hunting party up at the Heath's."

"But," Dalkirk said anxiously, "isn't he the fellow who owns the sandalwood factory across the river?"

She was astonished at such a question at such a time. "What has that to do with his saving your life?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all," Dalkirk said quickly. He kept his fears to himself. There had been ugly rumors in the Presidency about this man, Jack Malloy, hastening the death of a step uncle, impatient for his inheritance. Only rumors spoken from houseboy to *ayah* to cook to *chuprassi*.

Jack Malloy waded through the first channel which was now coursing deep with brown water. He came out of it with his riding breeches barely splashed —an immaculate image but with legs of mud. He was a good-looking devil despite the thickness of limb and neck and lip. His teeth were so gleaming white they seemed false and his eyes gleamed in the same way, but darkly.

He said, "In quite a hobble, aren't you, sir? Here, catch this!"

Dalkirk caught the cast rope-vine and hitched it under his arms. As Malloy tugged, Dalkirk stretched out. The ground sucked loudly, gave him up.

"I SAY, but you're heavy!" Malloy exclaimed. "A big fellow. Look at that chest. Big as a bison."

They started to walk but Dalkirk staggered, reaching for the girl's outstretched hand.

"Here, let me help you back to shore," Malloy offered.

Dalkirk put up his hand quickly, frantically, despite himself. "No, I can walk, thanks."

He caught the girl's eyes staring at him. Then he saw the eyes of the man.

The latter said, perplexed, "Look here, aren't you Bob Dalkirk?"

"No! My name's Thomas. Hal Thomas!" Dalkirk shot back excitedly.

Malloy stared askance at him as they walked. "There was a Dalkirk in the revenue secretary's office," he said. "Went off to the jungle hunting some queer sort of treasure."

"I said my name was Thomas."

"Of course. My mistake. You look like Dalkirk, but he had a different way of walking, as I remember. He walked in a way that made him taller than you. And he was slimmer."

They reached the water channel which in that short time was boiling dangerously, unfolding brown fans across the dusty mud beaches. All three stopped.

"Looks a bit deep," Malloy said. "Better give me your arm, sir."

Again Dalkirk threw the man's hand off nervously and stood back, glaring at him like a mongoose watching for an opening. Malloy muttered, "What's the matter? Afraid of my touching you? A sore arm perhaps?"

Even the girl gasped. This was a strange man, one who feared the touch of his fellow men, even though he seemed to have no fear of death. She saw him turn and start to wade into the channel. He sank deep, as if he had stepped into a sink-hole. She ran to him and helped him scramble out, but Malloy stood apart this time, his eyes glittering and hungry. He licked his thick lip. He saw that this man who carried some mysterious weight, also carried a Luger pistol.

Dalkirk caught that look as soon as he was out of the sink-hole. His head lowered, his fingers involuntarily crept to his holster.

Malloy was frightened. His hands made an indefinite gesture as if he were lifting them in surrender. "I say, don't get into a funk, Mr. Dalkirk, I—"

"So you insist my name's Dalkirk?"

"No, really, I—"

Both men had forgotten the flood. So had the girl. But the flood came, this time in a fearful wall of mud and ooze and rolling logs and dead things. The carcass of a hog deer rolled up on the mud lump at the very feet of the refugees. They scrambled to higher

ground. But the girl who was nearest the sink hole was swept off her feet.

She tried to get up after that comber of muddy water had gone on, filling the two water courses on each side of them, leaving them on an island. Clearer water dashed over her as she got to her feet and then a small malignant ripple in the tide swept her out again.

"Jack! Help me! I can't get out!"

Jack Malloy stood high on the caked mud of the island, his face drawn and white as if pipe-clayed, his upper lip twisting. He gave a slight palsied shake of the head. It meant that no man in the world could jump into that tide. It was suicide even for a fine swimmer like Malloy himself.

Dalkirk threw off his jacket and his belt and the great weight it carried. He jumped in.

He got to the girl and found the water lifting him from his feet. He felt gloriously light and free. But then she threw her arms about him, thin hard arms like liana vines, and both went down. The tide itself tossed them up, like a cat playing with a mouse, wanting it to live.

Dalkirk struck out, heading for the island which was a narrow strip of mud lump a mile long, stretching down the river. He almost made it, when his muscles began to ache and loosen. They went down again, but as his lungs started to pulsate like a heart, his feet struck ooze, then shifting mud. Light swam in the water like myriads of jellyfish. Then the lights went out comfortably.

WHEN he came to, he was on his back staring up at a Brahminy kite circling in the sky. His eyes roved sideward where a thick dark figure stood over him. Malloy's nose was like a kite's beak. He had the belt and holster. He had the coins.

And of course, he had Dalkirk's mud-smeared pistol.

Dalkirk saw all this but his mind was on something else. He murmured, choking, "Is the girl out of it all right?"

He saw her then as his head lolled. She was sitting up, propping her wilted sopping body with two slender arms. He remembered the astonishing strength of those liana-like arms clinging to him as if until death. Her face now was turned up toward Jack Malloy. She looked at him bewildered. For that moment she seemed more rapt in her study of him than in the rising river.

"Let me help you, Alice," Malloy said, going to her.

She lifted her hand as if to push him away. "No, I'm all right, please. I don't need you, Jack."

"But look here, we've got to get off! I'm stringing these two logs together with vines."

She hung her head, groggy and sick He gave a shrug and finished his work. When he had the logs bound together he strapped the belt and holster on one end. The water rose as he was working. It came up lapping Dalkirk's shoulder where he lay. He struggled up and sat as the girl was sitting, stunned and incredibly weak.

The water, rising, floated the logs. One end of the makeshift catamaran where the treasure was strapped, sank some inches below the surface. Malloy went to the other end and straddled the logs, and now the craft floated evenly.

Although dizzy and dazed, Dalkirk understood well enough that the raft could hold only those two weights—the man and the gold. Perhaps the girl understood it too, for she saw Malloy

give her a perplexed look, his eyes shifting quickly to the raft and back again to her, as if estimating her weight.

The wild, desperate look in his eyes showed what he was thinking. They were murderous thoughts. He was thinking of the desperate chance he would take if he went off alone on that raft, leaving these two to drown.

He would have to explain to the world beyond the river that he had made a heroic attempt to get ashore and find help. This would work if the two he left behind did not live to tell the tale. When they found Dalkirk's body, the gun wound in his arm would be rubbed out by time and water and the tropic heat. It all depended on their chances of getting ashore. One last frantic glance at the flood assured him that they had no chance at all.

It would be murder, and so cold-blooded that he had to stammer something. "Come on! It may hold us both," he snapped at the girl. "But I doubt it. What are you staring at me for? Confound it, I said, come on. I'm giving you a chance."

"I'm not taking it," she said in a level voice. "Im staying with this man."

Dalkirk struggled to his feet. He hurled himself lurching drunkenly toward the water's edge. "You let her take that raft, you jackal!"

Malloy drew his gun—the gun he had purloined. "Better stay back, Dalkirk!" He straddled the logs, clinging with one hand, lifting the gun with the other.

But Dalkirk splashed on, reaching for the end of the nearest log. He staggered as the Luger pistol roared brutally almost in his face. It was as if the weight of the lead slug knocked him backward as it cut his arm.

He'd expected that.

WHILE the girl helped him back to dry ground, Dalkirk glared wildly at the man floating off. There was a shoal a few furlongs down the current where the river turned. Debris and the carcasses of animals were heaped there by the current. Malloy would land there without need of paddle or pole. His idea was a good one, it was correct. The current would certainly float the raft to that shoal and toss it ashore with the rest of the flood's debris. Malloy had his life, and he had Dalkirk's fortune.

The revenue clerk's office, the eye flies, the bullock in the compound trudging at the well wheel. Reports and entries: Opium, Salt, Military Receipts. Deduct Provincial Deficits, Opium—Dalkirk saw it all in a feverish mad rotation.

He saw Malloy floating on, triumphant. For a moment the robber was mired in a submerged mud lump, and he did not make the mistake of getting out to push. He merely waited till the river rose and carried him on.

That steady rise of the river was what concerned the two who were marooned. The water in both courses closed in on their mud island like two lips. When the girl had finished doctoring his wound, Dalkirk staggered to his feet. They must find some more logs. But everything had been floated off, except a few sticks of bamboo, some rotted flowers, a swollen mass of flame-of-the-forest boughs whose natural glow had smouldered out.

Nothing more could be done. With his wounded arm, there was no hope of trying to help the girl ashore by swimming, even with the current taking them to that shoal down-river. They stood helplessly staring across the great stretch of water which was no longer two river courses but one.

"We can't do much but wait until someone comes for us," he said with mock cheerfulness.

"There was a pariah boy with a buffalo," she said, trying to imitate his voice. "He'll bring help."

He made a forced nod in encouragement. But his eyes had a dark smart glint. The hillmen, even if they did come, would not dare to put out with a raft in that torrent.

Standing knee deep, holding hands, they resigned themselves to what was surely coming. It did not seem to matter much. Dalkirk had found that out just a little while before, when he saved her and sank into a simulation of death. They might have philosophized about it, but instead they talked of lesser things.

She said she was thinking for some reason or other of the English children at the school up in the hill station where she taught. They would be waiting for her to come home from this tiger shoot in another week.

"This hunting party at the Heath's," Dalkirk said in a tight voice. "When do you think they'll miss you?"

"Dinner time, I dare say. Not before. They knew I went out after tiffin for a ride with—with him."

And that would be much too late, Dalkirk thought, glaring across the river that was swelling hatefully, visibly, like a cobra's hood. He saw Malloy half a mile away now, freeing his raft from a tangle of bamboo flotsam.

"You were riding with him. Did you and he—"

She cut him off. "He proposed to me. I wanted to know him better." She said this as if to say, "I wanted to test him. And I have."

They were silent, thinking how futile all these words were. Malloy was tested, but he was better than they would be when they were both drowned. The water, smooth over the lump where they stood, lapped their thighs. She clung harder to him.

HE WAS thinking to himself. "If she taught in a school, she's no richer than I. She's poor, so am I. What a life we could have had together, if I'd kept that gold! Having the gold all to myself made me a pariah. It was no good. It's like the priestly *sadhu* said: I was as lonely as a king. But with a mate to share it—"

He laughed softly, a dry, wild chuckle in the back of his throat. He must be going mad to think of such things now. He had not only lost his gold, but it was a certainty that he would also lose his life. The tragedy of it turned his thoughts to the girl in his arms. He must talk to her.

But his talk was senseless. "Jove! It would have been fun!" There he was on the same tack. "It would have been a bit of all right, never having 'em lord it over me, never worrying about provincial balances, rupees, writer-babus shooting questions at me all day long! Like little brats pestering you with questions. I dare say teaching's no better."

"And I was thinking of the same thing," she said.

Neither of them was thinking of death.

He put his good arm around her and looked at her face which was radiant and heated by the low sun. The water was above their thighs, up to their waists. When they leaned against the current their faces touched and he kept his lips against her cheek. That was when she thought for the first time of the death that was ready to sweep them from their feet.

She got her breath and gasped out,

"I don't want to die!" Without voice, but as if she were screaming, she said it again, "I don't want to die now!"

"Why think of that? Why say it? We aren't afraid, either of us. You didn't say it till now."

"Not until I found out"—looking at him breathlessly—"what it means to stand here, facing it out—with you!"

Both of them knew now that every moment was precious. He said gently, "We're still here together, aren't we—both of us safe together? The river's calming down. Before it gets over us, help will come."

The water was high enough for them to feel its buoyant influence. They might float here were it was smooth, Dalkirk reflected, but below the island where the current would take them, it was like a rapids. The river had spread far enough so that both shores were now the jungle. Above them, the range of monsoon clouds, higher than Everest, moved closer.

Terrified the girl burst out, "It's coming! It's close! You mustn't die—"

It was a timely stroke of the jungle gods that death came to the other man, Jack Malloy, at the very moment she spoke these words. It was not exactly a coincidence, for she had just seen Dalkirk looking down the river toward Malloy, and she thought how one was to live and the other one—a man like Dalkirk—was to die.

She followed his tense gaze. The raft was stuck again. But it still looked as if Jack Malloy's plan would succeed. When the raft floated it swept on and landed just where he estimated—on the shoal at the turn of the river. But it landed in two different parts. The flood, roaring in monstrous swells, had tossed the logs sideways, then rolled them.

Malloy clung floating upside down, his body and head under water so that Dalkirk and the girl could only see his hands. When the river rolled the raft up again, Malloy was gone. They caught one more glimpse of him reaching wildly for the bloated carcass of a *sambhar*.

But he missed it.

The logs floated on until they were horsed up on the shoal at the river's bend. Malloy's body, doubtless, would turn up there sooner or later.

THE river was vaster than ever, but consequently it was smoother, for the flood no longer roared through the two channels. The current spread its force. But the very expanse of it, moving without limit or known depth, made the girl shudder.

She jumped at that one desperate hope again: "The pariah boy told me you were trapped in the mud. He watched me come down to you, then he drove his buffalo up that ride toward the village. He'll tell the headman that some white people were in the river bed, that a man was in quicksand—a white sahib, a pukka sahib—you!"

Rather than give her an inkling of his own lost hope, he said, "Of course. You've hit it! They could build a big raft if they came for us! The river's smooth enough now. They could pole it and keep out of those rough eddies that caught Malloy. They'll use ropes."

Inch by inch the flood crept up their bodies. It was an eternity—this waiting for the current to drag them from their footing, waiting for the sudden journey down to those rapids, and death.

But as they still swayed with the movement, spraddle-legged, their bodies bent against the tide, they saw a small dust cloud on the village road.

It was a strange red glow, strange because the whole sky except for a rift in the west, was inky black.

The girl knew what it meant, for she half screamed, "We're going to live!"

Dalkirk stared hard. What she said made him think of something more than the saving of his own life. He glanced down to the shoal and its piled debris and saw the log, indistinguishable in the dusk except for the belt ringing it. A fugitive shaft of sunlight slanted through the dusk, picking it out. The belt even at that distance was as clear as the ring they cut around a teak tree that is marked for felling.

In a voice as softly triumphant as hers, he said, "Malloy strapped my coin belt on one of the logs. I can see it. The log landed over there."

"You mean it's the treasure you threw away to save me?"

"It's what I found up in the Ramgad *ghats*. An abandoned temple, a concession the *gaekwar* gave me, a fortune, and it's right there for me to pick up." He gave a grunt and said the rest to himself. "But it's gone, as far as you and I are concerned."

"You wouldn't give it up to save your own life when you were in the quicksand. But you gave it up and threw it in the mud when you saved me! You didn't know me!"

"I know you now; I'm glad I did it."

They clung fiercely to each other. That sunshot dust in the jungle marked the coming of a crowd of hillmen from the village. There was but one remote chance that there would be time enough.

But Dalkirk said, "Yes, we're going to live! You and I together!"

WE HAVE a bit of information that seems to us significant. When Theodore Roscoe went to work on his story, "Death Below Zero," he knew the Finnish word *sisu* meant courage, hardihood; but he did not know the antonym, the opposite of *sisu,* and he needed it, he thought. So he called up the Finnish consulate in New York and asked their help. "But we have no such word," he was told. "You can say: The man who is afraid; but there is no word for coward in the Finnish language." Having read the papers, most of us can understand why.

We cannot escape the black shadow of war this week. One of our most distinguished authors, a Mr. Chidsey, sends in a prescription for the virulent disease that now affects the world. But he writes from the golden isles, a land immeasurably distant from concentration camps and cannon, and we're afraid his prescription is not practical.

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Faint and badly blurred, the news reaches us out here. A few chaps have radios. The Englishmen have cleared out, and some of the natives are in uniform; but of course you can't fool me; it isn't real.

Because— Well, it stands to reason. Why should anybody want to fight? *Why,* I ask you? If only the big shots of Europe could be sent out here to Tahiti, we'd stand 'em a drink or two, and slap 'em on the back, and chuck a feast for them—and there wouldn't be any war.

Now take Tamatu out there, giddy in a new blue and white *pareu,* picking frangipani blossoms with which to weave a *lei,* and giggling when she looks up and sees me watching her—take Tamatu. Don't you suppose that if she were given a chance to poke Goering at any point along the world-famous waistline, and sling a wreath of those same frangipanis around his neck, and dance a bit for him—don't you suppose that he'd forget all about *la guerre?* Well, you've never seen Tamatu dance, or you wouldn't be so skeptical.

And a little past her, down toward the road to Papeete, is Teave, who is supposed to be trimming my hedge of false coffee but who, in fact, is squatting on his hams and staring Tahiti-fashion into blank space, thinking, delightfully, about nothing whatever. If Comrade Stalin ever happened to hear Teave strum a hot *ute upaupa* on his *guitare,* do you really think Comrade Stalin would give a second thought to the Finns? Nonsense!

If it comes to that, the big shots of the United States would do well to spend a few months or a few years in these parts. No society with a fancy name ever thought of a better method of reformation. For nobody commits any crime here—it's too much trouble—and they'd soon get out of the habit.

I sit here, a *tiare taporo* behind each ear, and gaze in the other direction, away from Tamatu and Teave, into the shack, and I see among the bookcases my friend Teraitua has made for me, two large ones holding nothing but books about crime.

Now I'm proud of this collection, certainly the best crime collection in the South Seas, probably the best anywhere south of the Equator. There are books on toxicology, books on psychiatry, on drug addiction, crooked gambling, micro-analysis; books on fingerprinting and other methods of identification, on penalogy, on ballistics, on explosions and explosives, on sabotage, handwriting, necropsies, codes, the best methods of reconstructing mutilated corpses; ponderous tomes on Criminology with a capital "C"; biographies and autobiographies of celebrated detectives, confidence men, bandits, racketeers, police administrators; case histories; records of famous investigations and famous court cases; copies to 'way back of the *British Police Journal* and the *American Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology.*

Yes, I'm proud of this library. But it bewilders me a bit. Why do people outside, in the

rest of the world, act that way? Here in Heaven it's difficult to understand.
PUNAAUIA, TAHITI, SOCIETY ISLANDS

WE don't know why, either. But we know that Mr. Chidsey is lucky to be in heaven. . . . Our next correspondent is eager for more of the "Tomorrow" stories. It's pleasant to announce that Mr. Zagat has finished another and you'll soon have it.

JO KLONDIKE

I always read your magazine for relaxation from my school duties. I have waited patiently since August for a story of the Bunch of Tomorrow by Zagat. I think these are some of the most entertaining stories and after reading Argonotes I see that many people are of the same opinion. So hustle one out and end my eager waiting.
HARRISBURG, ILL.

THEODORE MAHAFFEY

Jack Mann has made another hit with his "Maker of Shadows." This is the same idea that Austin Hall used in his "Almost Immortal" once published in ARGOSY. However, Mann has worked out a good novel with it and not trod on Mr. Hall's rights either.

I look forward to more stories by Jack Mann, Eando Binder, C. S. Forester (if he can be induced to shoot for another best-selling trilogy), Richard Sale and especially Edgar Rice Burroughs.
EL CENTRO, CAL.

Looking Ahead!

BOWMEN'S BANNER

You will remember young Robin the Bombardier, companion of the masterless men, expert in the use of that Devil's fire called gunpowder. Today Robin marches across the broad fields of Normandy, following the Black Prince to battle; and soon he, with his brimstone weapons, shall find a special sort of warrior's glory. Beginning an exciting new novel by

ROY DE S. HORN

GOLDEN SWORD OF SAMARKAND

It was a gift of the great Khan, a token of honor. But a young Genoese merchant had to learn from Tamerlane himself that a man is worthy of his sword only when he has made of it a weapon; when the brave gold glistens at last with a butcher's blood. A short novelet of burning valor by

ROBERT CARSE

RICE FOR THE COMMODORE

He's in again (in *trouble*, of course!)—that freckled imp who believes in smart figgerin', strategy, and safety last. Readers will please bring their own armor to this four-alarm riot call which starts, and somehow ends, with a group of amateur social problems called, happily, the Black Hand Avengers. Bullets and knives for refreshments, in this novelet by

CHARLES GREEN

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—APRIL 27

Old Line Legal Reserve LIFE INSURANCE

ONLY 77¢ PER MONTH (at age 21)* per $1000.00 of Insurance

Give THEM this Protection!

THIS *Special*

MODIFIED "4" WHOLE LIFE POSTAL POLICY

COSTS NOW ONLY **HALF** THE PERMANENT RATE FOR THE NEXT 4 YEARS

This policy is offered especially to meet today's conditions. It gives you about twice the insurance protection *now* that the same money ordinarily buys, yet it is a full Legal Reserve Life Insurance Policy with all Standard provisions; cash and loan values; Automatic Premium Payment Clause and *Guaranteed 9½% Dividends!*

Assure a college education for your children! Provide a last expense fund! To pay off a mortgage; or own this policy for any other purpose for which insurance can be used!

GIVE YOUR LOVED ONES PROTECTION MAIL THIS QUICK ACTION COUPON NOW!

HERE ARE LOW RATES AT YOUR AGE

Age		Age		Age		Age	
21	$ .77	30	$ .97	39	$1.29	48	$1.87
22	.79	31	1.00	40	1.35	49	1.95
23	.81	32	1.03	41	1.39	50	2.04
24	.83	33	1.06	42	1.45	51	2.15
25	.85	34	1.09	43	1.51	52	2.27
26	.87	35	1.13	44	1.57	53	2.39
27	.90	36	1.16	45	1.64	54	2.53
28	.92	37	1.21	46	1.70	55	2.66
29	.95	38	1.25	47	1.79		

Monthly rates shown in table are one half permanent rates beginning the fifth year.

A further saving is made by paying premium annually or semi-annually.

*Owing to low rates at which this policy is offered, the minimum amounts issued are: ages 21 to 45, $1,500; 46 to 55, $1,000. Larger amount may be applied for.

Thousands are buying insurance this money-saving way from Postal Life of New York. Delay may be serious. It takes less than 30 seconds to fill in this coupon.

Organized as a Legal Reserve Life Insurance Company under laws of New York State in 1905

POSTAL LIFE
OF NEW YORK
has paid more than
$50,000,000.00
to its policyholders and beneficiaries during thirty-five successful years.

If this policy does not fit your needs. Postal issues other standard forms for men and women, ages 10 to 60.

FILL OUT AND MAIL COUPON TODAY

Postal Life Insurance Company,
511 Fifth Ave., Dept. M-615,
New York, N. Y.

Mail me without obligation complete information about your low cost Modified "4" Whole Life Policy at my age and Postal's method of doing business direct.

Date of Birth _____

Occupation _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____

Now you can take beautiful indoor shots like this!

Sensational New Synchro-Flash Candid Takes Prize Winning Shots...Anytime...Anywhere!

Here's the most amazing camera news in years! An all-purpose candid that enables you to take indoor as well as outdoor pictures . . . night-time as well as daytime photos in any kind of weather! No more waiting for the sun to shine...or the rain to stop! The versatile new UNIFLASH is ready 24 hours a day! You can't miss—for there are no complicated gadgets! And you're sure to get prize-winning shots of needle-sharp, deep-focus quality that will stamp you as an expert! Magnificent 8" x 10" enlargements!

UNIVERSAL CAMERA CORP. New York · Chicago · Hollywood

CHECK THESE STARTLING NEW FEATURES!

1. AUTOMATIC BULB EJECTOR
No burned fingers. Push button; bulb pops out.

2. MAGNI-FIELD VIEW FINDER
Magnifies the view. Gives more brilliant outlook.

3. POSITIVE SYNCHRO-FLASH
Guaranteed—Shutter must open to flash bulb.

Univex UNIFLASH

INDOORS OR OUTDOORS...NIGHT OR DAY

BETTER PICTURES——OR A NEW ROLL OF FILM FREE!

Complete ONLY $4.95

WITH DETACHABLE SYNCHRO-FLASH UNIT

By the Makers of The Famous 1000th Second Speed Mercury

AT ALL GOOD DEALERS THROUGHOUT THE U.S.A. AND CANADA; OR SEND $4.95 TO THE UNIVERSAL CAMERA CORP., NEW YORK, N. Y.