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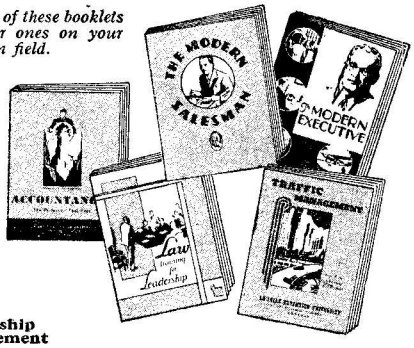

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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 299 CONTENTS FOR MAY 11, 1940 Number 1

Cover by Rudolph Belarski
Illustrating King of Knaves

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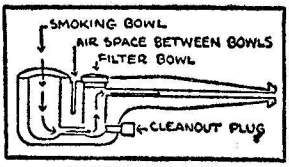

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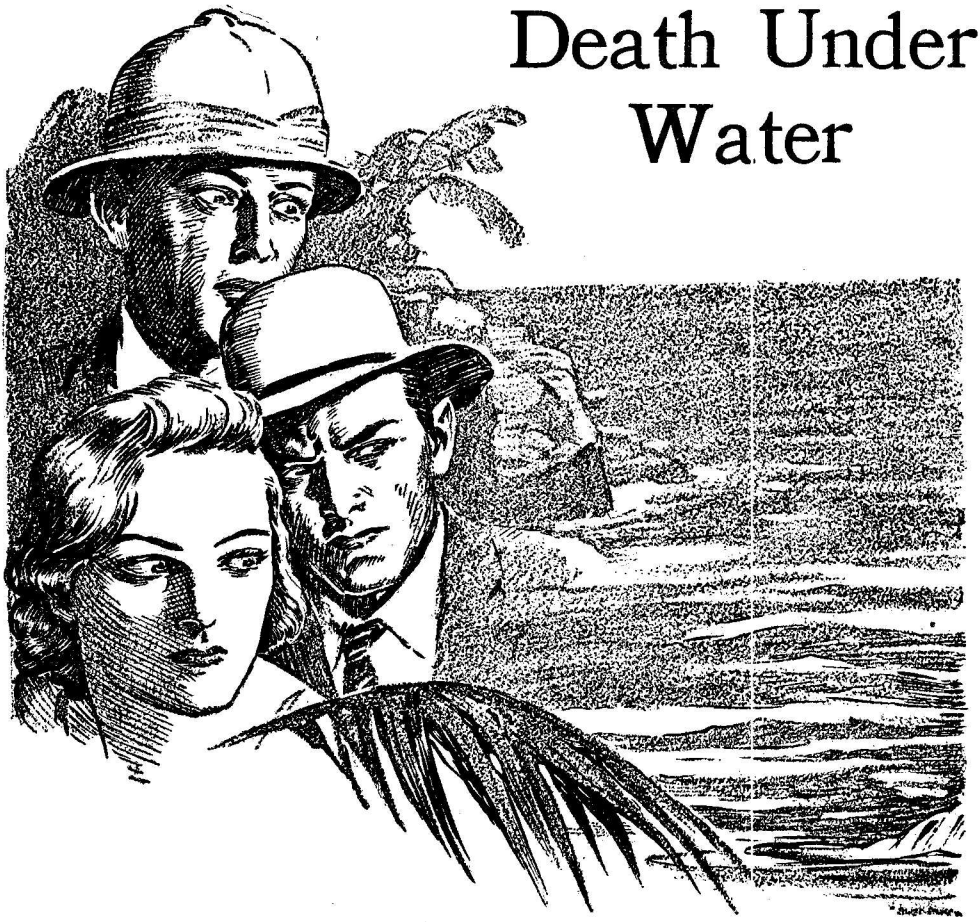


Do you believe that the study of fish is a peaceful one? Then you are invited to this lonely cay on the Bahama Banks, where certain leading representatives of science, surrealism, and café society are giving the sharks lessons in the gentle art of murder

CHAPTER I

BICYCLE BUILT FOR BABY

SO HERE I was, on a rented bicycle, coasting to the gates of Felicity in the dusk. It did seem strange, riding a wheel in Bermuda, when I'd ridden to work on the subway that morning. Still, what's a seven-hundred-mile plane trip in this day and age, when you've got a story that can't wait?

They'll tell you that those big gates have never been closed since the estate was built; that keys to Tony Yates' guest-houses have turned up everywhere from Berchtesgaden to Little America. . . . Not that the place wasn't quiet enough tonight, when I parked my wheel under the porte-cochere of the main house. In fact I followed a cat-foot houseboy through five empty suites and two sunporches without meeting a soul.

Beginning an Exciting New Novel by

WILLIAM DU BOIS

Author of "The Devil's Diary"

"Mr. David had your cable this afternoon, sir. Mr. David will be down at once, sir. If you will kindly sit for 'alf a minute in the study—"

Actually, the room in which that houseboy left me was a cross between den and museum. Blue marlin, magnificently mounted about the built-in bar. Papers neatly stacked on a glass desk between the windows. Encyclopedias under a water-buffalo that was a ringer for my grampa. Lord knows I've my weaknesses, but I am neither a naturalist nor a bookworm. Firmly squelching an impulse to step behind that bar, I sat down at the desk and dove into the news.

New York papers, all of them with today's dateline. That meant that they had been flown down on the Clipper with me this noon. I was still hunting the story I wanted when Dave charged in with a whoop of animal joy.

Probably you've read plenty about the kid brother of Tony Yates. Dave has always been news in his own right, even without those buccaneer millions behind him. Not that you need to be-

lieve all you read in the tabloids, either —especially, when you write for them.

You see, I'd known Dave since New Haven. We had landed our first jobs together—on the old *World*. I'd watched him learn the newspaper game from the ground up, with no help from Tony . . . and, if you'll permit a reporter to use an abstract word, his welfare meant a lot to me.

We'd lost touch for awhile—when the *World* went under the hammer, and I switched to the *Star*. Those were the years Dave had been free-lancing abroad, in more than one sense of the word. Remember the time he crossed Siberia in a jalopy, taking candid-cameras to prove that a Communist can starve even faster than a kulak? Remember the day he was arrested in Naples for giving Il Duce the bird?

We had bumped noses last month at a press-agent's brawl. Yes, he was on his brother's public-relations staff now —and why not? Everyone had to settle down sometime, and plan a solid future. That's when I had learned that he was in love with Elsa Ulrich, the ichthyologist's daughter. Which is a lot more interesting than it sounds, as I hope to prove presently.

"YOU might act a little more surprised," I said. I was looking him over and feeling suddenly very glad that I'd come.

"Shall I turn another handspring, Jack?"

"Seven hundred miles is a long ways for me to fly, just to help out a friend."

"You couldn't say that unless you were sober."

I glanced pointedly at the bar. Dave crossed to it and poured. "So you flew down on the Clipper this afternoon, with Gail and Tony. Why didn't you let them drive you out?"

"I'm not at all sure your brother remembers me. Besides, I wanted to ride out from Hamilton on an English cycle, and get back my sense of proportion. Lastly, I generally get in touch with a tycoon through his press agent—"

"Don't rub that in, please. Where are you staying in Bermuda?"

"Skip the details. Did my cable make sense, Dave? It was filed in a gale of wind this morning."

Dave added a little seltzer to the Scotch. "Of course it made sense. You're after an inside story on Dr. Ulrich." He grinned and pushed me into a chair with a straight right, and a highball.

"I can read you backward, Jack. Item one: The doctor dodges reporters in New York today, just as he sails for Nassau. Item two: Your city desk picks up the fact that he's changing boats in Bermuda.

"So you snoop a little more. Find out that Tony sent me down to make sure the house was ready for the stopover. That Tony himself is flying down with Gail—"

"Skip that too," I said. "Just tell me if you're really in love with Elsa Ulrich."

"What is this, anyhow?"

"A civil question. Give me a straight answer, you roving Don Juan."

"I'd marry her tomorrow, if she'd have me. She's the most—"

"Leave out the adjectives. You used them all up on that alleged countess we were both after in Paris, four years ago. To say nothing of the little girl at Luigi's, and the ingenue in—"

"Did I ever mention marriage to those—"

"So you're honestly hooked at last?"

"When and if Elsa hauls in her line."

"Okay," I said. "I believe you."

Dave sat down beside me on the divan. No two ways about it—he was in earnest now. "Isn't it time you made your point?"

I got up carefully, in case he repeated that straight right. "High time. Suppose I told you that Elsa Ulrich can easily be involved in murder before the week is out?"

CHAPTER II

DON'T MARRY A SURREALIST

GETTING to my feet had been a wise move, all right. Dave was eye-to-eye with me in nothing flat.

"Make sense, and make it fast. Elsa left New York with her father this afternoon. On the *Monarch*. If you've come to make trouble when she arrives—"

"I'm here to help you both, if I can." This time, I found what I wanted on the desk—an early-run edition of an afternoon paper.

"Maybe you'd like to read the story, Dave."

I looked over his shoulder as he read the item—two sticks under a one-column head. You know, the sort of story rewrite slaps together as it comes over the phone, with no time to remember what they teach at the School of Journalism.

A well-dressed man, apparently in the late twenties, was found dead in a studio walkup apartment at 617 West 12th Street this morning by Rhoda Kelley, a cleaning woman employed by the tenant, whom police described as an "unidentified artist".

Detective said the dead man was Adam Foster, lawyer, of Pine Beach, Maine. An auto license was found in a coat pocket, also a passport and various letters. In a secret pocket inside the waistcoat was a business envelope containing over five thousand dollars in large bills.

The cleaning woman told police that the curtains had been drawn on all the windows, and the lights were still burning, when she let herself into the studio with a passkey around nine this morning. Dr. S. J. Kaplan, who arrived in a Bellevue ambulance shortly afterward said that Foster had been dead for several hours.

Pending an autopsy death was ascribed to cyanide poisoning from a spilled highball glass on the floor beside the body. An investigation is already underway to locate the artist tenant who was not present when the body was discovered.

"Well?" said Dave.

"Sit tight, and don't get mad. Elsa's an artist, isn't she?"

"She paints now and then, when she isn't helping her father."

"She painted enough to have two showings at Midtown Galleries. Does she keep a studio in New York?"

"Of course she doesn't. Look here, are you implying that—"

"Take it easy," I said, patiently. "The unidentified artist in that story is a *man*. It's about the only thing that cleaning women was sure of this morning."

"So you covered it for the *Star*, Jack?"

"I was the only reporter the police would let upstairs. Maybe you've been through that block yourself. Brownstones, mostly, and a mews halfway down. 617 is the end of the alley. The usual artist's attic that rents furnished for around sixty a month. Kitchenette and north light included."

I SAW he was getting restless again. Not that I blamed him. "Hurlbut was already there for the Homicide Bureau. You know how tough he can be, when he's in the mood. This morning, he had plenty to swear at, besides nosey reporters.

"Artists' materials everywhere—a finished canvas on the easel—and not a fingerprint in the place. It's obvious that Foster swallowed that cyanide sometime last night—with or without

help. A dozen people could have visited that walkup without leaving a trace.

"If there's any sense to this, Jack—"

"Of course there's sense to it. Can't you see that the studio setup was just a blind for something else? Why, there were pictures from every period on those walls. Phony Rembrandts, a Picasso-once-removed, and Lord knows how many reproductions of Van Gogh. The only first-hand job in the place was that canvas on the easel."

I took a deep breath. "It was an oil whirligig called *After the Storm*. Last winter, it had a prominent place in Elsa Ulrich's exhibit at Midtown Galleries. Perhaps you recall the subject. Fat nude swimmer, floating in a sea the color of—"

"What are you telling me, Jack?"

"So far," I said, "my story has no point."

"Did Hurlbut recognize the canvas, too?"

"Of course he didn't. It was just dumb luck that I spotted it. If the city desk hadn't chased me over to that exhibit last December, when our art critic had influenza . . ."

I tossed the newspapers back on the big glass-and-chromium desk. "These were too early to run photos," I said. "Did your brother fly them down from the airport?"

"I suppose so. Why?"

"Keep up with the procession, Dave. Later editions are going to plaster that surrealist seascape all over New York. You know as well as I that it'll be just a question of time before someone with a memory better than mine comes forward and identifies—"

"All right, Jack. What can I do?"

"You can tell me why you're blushing. Have you any idea how that picture turned up in a Greenwich Village mews?"

"An excellent idea," said Dave Yates. And that's all he said.

I DIDN'T press the point when he went back to the bar and poured us both another Scotch. He was quite calm, long before he sat down beside me again.

"Mind if I make a speech, Jack?"

"I'll try to stay awake."

"That's enough of that. Of course, I'm just a loon to you, with more money than judgment. The point is, I'm admitting you're right. Partly right, anyway. Of course it's a drawback to be born rich, if you can't learn to look over the blinders. But after all, I put in six years at newspaper work. I've some idea what makes things tick."

Dave put down his drink. "That's why I'd back Elsa Ulrich with all I've got. Even if she poured that cyanide highball—which she didn't."

"You're quite sure of that?"

"I've been in love with her for two years, now. Ever since we were all down in Nassau together. Say that obscures my judgment, if you like. At least, it gives me a real reason for wanting to help her, for believing in her."

I took it without interruption. You see, I had just understood why life hadn't hurt him, so far. Dave's armor, in this vale of crocodile tears, was his faith in people, his genuine interest. I suppose that's why he brought out the best in all of us, including me.

"Life hasn't been much fun for her, Jack. Babying an eccentric like Dr. Ulrich. Helping him to outfit all those trips. Trailing along on most of them. Painting was an escape for her. What did it matter, how bad the canvases were?

"I backed both those showings in New York. Elsa thinks it was the dealers who put up the cash, of course. I

want her to go on thinking that. Just as I hoped she'd believe her pictures sold off the nail, on their own merits."

"So you bought up her entire output?"

"At the asking price," said Dave, calmly. "Had them stacked like abandoned bridge-tables in all my closets, the last time I moved. Come to think of it, I was living in the Village myself then."

"The place on Sullivan Street?"

"One or two of the pictures could easily have been lost in the shuffle, when I had my things sent uptown. Probably the janitor sold them for what he could get, at the first antique shop."

"Never mind the rest," I said.

"Do you still think the police will trace—"

"Probably in a day or so. Unless some dyspeptic art critic should recognize the canvas as Elsa's work, and start them baying up another trail."

Dave let out his breath in a long sigh. "It's registered now, Jack. Thanks for coming."

I looked away elaborately. "Not that there's anything to worry about, of course. All you need do is pin that sale on your ex-janitor—and do a little high-speed confessing to Miss Ulrich."

"When you took that Bermuda plane this noon, did you honestly believe that Elsa was mixed up in this business?"

"Would I be here otherwise?"

"When are you going to stop being a cynic, Jack?"

"When I stop working for a tabloid. Don't scowl at me. I had plenty of reason to smell a story. Every city desk in town has been howling over the way you handled Ulrich."

"What's the connection? You know the old man has been afraid of reporters since he was born."

"Whether he likes it or not, Dr. Hubertus Ulrich happens to be front page at the moment. Here he is, resigning from the Tropical Research Society. Accepting a cool two million from Tony Yates for research in the Bahamas. If that doesn't call for a few headlines, when he leaves New York—"

I BROKE that in the middle, and started over. "Why does he pretend to be going south on the *Columbia*, and switch to the *Monarch of Bermuda* instead?

"Why must you come here ahead of time to get the place ready, when Felicity is staffed the year 'round? Why do Tony and his wife fly down on the Clipper instead of taking the boat with their guest of honor?"

"Dust in the eyes of the press," said Dave.

I let it ride when the door opened on a houseboy, a silver salver, and a radiogram. Dave read it carefully before he turned back to me.

"Excuse my bad manners, Jack. You were saying?"

"That I flew down here today on a hunch, at my own expense. George MacDonald is still the toughest city editor in New York, you know. I can't expect him to cover me if I come back empty-handed."

"So?"

"So I'm tagging right along to Nassau. With your permission, I hope."

"You know a great deal about our plans, Jack."

"I know that your brother owns Yates Cay—an out-island in the Bahamas. It's also on the record that he's sunk plenty there—founding a model fish-farm for Dr. Ulrich. Indoor and outdoor aquaria . . . breeding tanks . . . laboratory . . . the works.

"Disregarding Dr. Ulrich's hocus-pocus at the New York pier, I don't

have to be a mind-reader to see that the clan is gathering for the dedication. Isn't it time you had at least one reporter in the offing?"

Dave looked at me steadily. "Shall I turn another handspring?"

"You tell me—am I invited?"

"Of course. Even if I didn't believe in hunches."

"Am I also in on the ground floor?"

"Why not?"

"Remember, I can be very troublesome when thwarted."

Dave grinned in earnest and tossed the radiogram across the desk to me. "One hint, duly registered. . . . Explain that, if you can."

I GLANCED at the blank as casually as I could. A straight message from the *Monarch,* now well out of New York harbor:

MEET ME AT PIER HAMILTON HAVE TERRIBLE NEWS

A. S.

"You'll have to decide it first. Who is A.S.?"

"Don't tell me you've forgotten Zoo-bug Strong? You slept next to him through Biology I-A."

My mind took a back-somersault—coming up on the New Haven campus in senior year, with a memory-book picture of a woolly grind who had done everything but eat in the labs. Old Zoo-bug, the boy who was always there with the right answers, even after a football weekend.

"Don't tell me that honor student is working for Ulrich?"

"Assistant curator," said Dave. "Three years ago, I picked Zoo-bug up in Bryant Park, with fifty cents in his pocket. Luckily, Tony had just been elected a director of the Tropical Research Society, so—"

"Apparently, your brother isn't the only philanthropist in the family."

"To hell with that," said Dave. "What does the message mean?"

"That Strong has uncovered something, and wants to confide in his benefactor," I murmured brilliantly. "Did he seem satisfied with his work, when you saw him last?"

"Perfectly."

"No friction visible to the naked eye?"

"Ulrich thanked me for bringing them an ideal assistant. Zoo-bug went down on both knees to praise the ideal boss."

"No chance that Strong is turning up with figures to prove that your brother is being cheated?"

"Are you suggesting that someone of Dr. Ulrich's standing would—"

"I'm only speaking as a layman. Two million does seem a great deal to spend on fish-tanks."

"It's been Tony's pet charity from the start. Remember, the place had to stand up against all kinds of weather, if Ulrich stayed there the year 'round. . . . Why, that cay was only a sandbar on the Bahama Bank when Tony used it as a fishing camp. They had to strengthen the barrier reef with concrete, lift most of the aquaria on a stone base."

I got up firmly and tucked those New York dailies under my arm. "Do you mind if I read myself to sleep with these?"

"Where d'you think you're going, Jack? You're staying at Felicity, of course."

"My bags are at a small hotel in Paget Parish," I said, with dignity. "Furthermore, until the *Monarch* docks, I am staying out of touch with you, deliberately."

"But I've a thousand questions—"

"So have I. In fact, thirty-six hours will be all too short a time to get them in order."

CHAPTER III

ZOO-BUG AFLOAT

LIKE most graduate rewrite men, I'm usually pretty restless unless I've sent up six columns a day. Here in Bermuda, I wrote just two cables before I kept that date with Dave—and loved it.

One to Mac—full of promises, and polite demands for an expense account. Another to my wife, at her mother's place, thank Heaven, happily convalescing from compound fracture.

After these labors, I settled down and enjoyed the Isles of Rest. Never in my life have I felt so saturated with fresh air and relaxation as the morning I pedaled into Hamilton.

They'd put up the customs barrier long ago on the big tin pier; Front Street was a melee of hacks and hotel runners as the *Monarch* warped in.

I parked my wheel, pushed through to the terrace of '21," and sat down at a corner table. Dave was there already, staring gloomily into an untasted beer. He looked out of breath, and anything but relaxed.

"Sleep well, Jack?"

"Beautifully, thank you. And what have you been brooding over?"

"A fine question, after the start you've given me."

"After all these years? When will you learn not to fight a story until you've tracked down all the W's?"

"Please, Jack—"

"Who — what — when — where — and, if possible, why," I said. "And now we're on the subject, I'm glad to report my paper's blessing on this argosy. To say nothing of my wife's."

"How is Trudy's tibia?" he asked. I passed over the cable.

LOVE TO DAVE THERES NO PRESS-AGENT ID RATHER TRUST YOU WITH

TRUDY

"See you're worthy of that," I said sternly. "How do my interviews line up this morning?"

"Dr. Ulrich left the ship at St. George's, with Elsa. They're at Felicity now."

"No wonder you look so breathless."

"The doctor is resting at the moment. He'll talk to you anytime after eleven. Believe me, that took doing."

"And your brother?"

"Naturally, he's only too happy to smuggle a reporter into the party."

"Isn't he meeting the boat here in Hamilton?"

"Gail's coming in to do the honors. Tony decided to go out to the reefs for a little fishing. He's that way, you know. Less manners than Nero on a morning-after."

I LET that pass, without comment. The pleasures of Tony Yates had ceased to be news some time ago.

"What are my chores after Ulrich? Any visiting firemen worthy of a stick or two?"

Dave sighed. "Von Merz or Alec—take your pick."

"Don't tell me those two headline hunters have joined the picnic?"

"I should have warned you before, Jack. Somehow, I didn't have the heart."

"Must I face them both here at the dock?"

"Only the Austrian. Nash went ashore at St. George's, for a round at Mid-Ocean."

"Good old Alec," I said. "Always the outdoor type. How in the name of

Horace Greeley did that rover boy get invited?"

"On his nerve—with an assist from Tony. Von Merz, believe it or not, is coming down to the cay on his reputation."

"After the names he's called Ulrich in print—and vice versa?"

"Don't take it too hard, Jack. I'll settle for a paragraph on both of them. Incidentally, Alec has asked us both to join him in a drink, after he's finished his golf. It might be a good idea to slip out, at that. Gail has planned a luncheon party for fifty or so—"

"Distinguished gathering for visiting savant?"

"Now do you wonder why the Old Master is lying down for awhile?"

"A baptism of fire, eh?"

"The usual mob is coming in on the *Monarch,* of course. Camping out in the guest houses while we're in Nassau."

"Maybe I should be on my way to Felicity before they—"

"And miss seeing Strong?"

"Strong's your assignment right now. After all, he isn't going to open up with me at your elbow."

Dave sat silent for a long moment, watching the gangways go out from pier to ship.

"Do me a favor, Jack. Stay a while, just the same. I'm afraid to listen to anyone open up." He bounced to his feet briskly. "There's Gail now. It's time you were introduced."

THE Yates surrey had drawn up beside the Furness offices when we pushed through the crowd on Front Street. Tony's current wife looked cool as morning under the white-fringed sunshade—a twentieth-century Diana in a playsuit, a heroine fresh from an English comedy of manners.

Don't ask me what I'd expected, knowing Tony Yates as I did. The usual abandoned harpy, I suppose. Then I remembered that this wife was a lady, Boston brand. I'm using the geographical tag in its best sense, too. It takes more than one generation of selective breeding to produce that ageless poise.

"Would you object to a sidewalk interview, Mrs. Yates?"

"Good Heavens no. Sit up here beside me, it's much more comfortable. Do go across to the pier, Dave, and see if any of these formidable people have come through customs."

"Are you a reception committee of one?" I asked innocently.

"Yes, this was quite my own idea. Tony, as usual, is absorbed in his fishing—or did Dave tell you that? Isn't it amusing, to see Dave end up as his brother's press agent? I'm so glad he picked a college friend to invite on this absurd trip to the Bahamas."

"Why do you call it absurd?"

"Never pick me up on my adjectives, Mr. Jordan. Perhaps quixotic is a better word. You'll admit it is an odd gesture, to present that strange little man with his life's dream—"

I let her talk for awhile. After all, it was copy, even if it didn't quite make sense.

"May I ask why you've decided to accompany the party to Nassau?"

"Curiosity, I suppose. Have *you* ever seen a full-grown shark behind glass before?"

"I've seen them in the open," I said. "Once or twice, I've even interviewed them. By the way, Mrs. Yates, is it true that you landed those marlin I saw mounted in your husband's study?"

"Surely no one wants to read of my exploits at this late date."

"Fifty million dollars is always news," I said. "Especially when the title-holder is presentable."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I beg yours, Mrs. Yates. You see, I'm famous for my rudeness in more than one precinct. Just a technical trick to make people say more than they mean to."

"Why should it interest your readers if I did catch those blue marlin? I'm not the first wife who has taken up fishing in self-defense—" She broke off abruptly. "Yes, I see how the technique works, Mr. Jordan. I'm afraid your sidewalk interview is over."

She said it calmly, too, with a desire to please still present, but permitting her position to be subtly sensed. I got down from that surrey, fast. What's more, I bowed from the waist, a thing I haven't done in years.

"Believe it or not," I said, "that last remark was also the Fourth Estate's idea of gallantry."

Safely across Front Street, I turned back to check on her again. Yes, she looked as much like a lady in an English comedy as ever.

I WENT up the stairs to the customs barrier, passing a hulk of a man with a list to port who was going down, fast. Heaven forgive me, I was almost at the top before I remembered who he was.

He gave the definite impression of escape, though he wasn't exactly running. You could see he was half-seas-over, all right, when he hit the street level, and just escaped reeling into the Yates surrey.

Instead, he cannoned off at right angles, crashed through a maze of carriage wheels, and started up the steep sidewalk of Queen Street at a shambling lope. By that time, of course, I was pedaling after him in earnest.

He didn't even turn, the first time I called, though he must have known he was being followed, judging by the way he jumped on the first wheel in sight, and went scorching down Reid Street in the direction of the post office.

I lost him once again, when a Portuguese fish wagon cut between us at the corner. When I spotted him a second time, he was on Parliament Street, doubling back toward the waterfront. I'd have caught him with time to spare, if my front wheel hadn't struck a stone just after I turned into the downgrade.

I saw the train moving out of the Parliament Street halt before I picked myself up from the dust; saw him jump for the back platform as the engineer gathered speed.

"Zoo-bug!"

He looked down at me from the step —big and shaggy and drunker than any man has a right to be. Especially a spectacled doctor of science in a neat blue suit. I was really running now, keeping pace for a few seconds with that overgrown trolley. When I made one last desperate grab for him, my hands closed on his coat pocket, ripping.

"What sort of reunion is this for the class of '28?"

The train was really rolling now. I was still blowing the gasoline exhaust out of my lungs when Dave caught up to me.

"Were you chasing him too?"

We stood side by side, making identical dabs at beaded foreheads, like a vaudeville team whose act has flopped. "Out of that pier like a jackrabbit, the minute he laid eyes on me," said Dave. "Why d'you suppose—?" He looked at me blankly. "And where'd you pick up that?"

But I had thrown the newspaper on the ground long ago. It registered, all right, or I wouldn't be noting it here; but I already had plenty of New York papers with a dateline two days old.

"I'm the one who's asking questions from this point on," I said.

CHAPTER IV

THE ANONYMOUS SCIENTIST

DR. ULRICH'S eyes dwelt on me a moment. They were candid eyes, and shockingly young in that meerschaum-brown face. The sort of eyes that had no business under sun-bitten eyebrows, above an untidy blizzard of beard. I'm pretty sure they twinkled as they roved over the marlin on that study wall at Felicity.

"But what more can I say?" he asked. You'd have expected at least a trace of accent; but Dr. Ulrich's English was much better than mine. So, for that matter, was his technique in handling this interview.

"You might answer my last question," I murmured patiently.

"But I have answered it."

"Why did you dodge reporters in New York? Why weren't you planning to invite any to Nassau?"

"I don't like reporters, Mr. Jordan. I never have."

"Then what am I doing here?"

This time, I'm sure he twinkled. "Mr. Yates happens to be my host. As well as a stockholder in the newspaper you represent so—so efficiently."

"Has Mr. Yates backed most of your research these past years?"

"My research has been backed by the Tropical Research Society, Mr. Jordan."

I threw down my pencil, and went over to the french windows—staring for a long moment across the lawn at a breath-taking view of Castle Harbor, beginning to gray over now with gusts of rain. Humidity had clamped down on Bermuda in the last hour; that study was hot as a Turkish bath that's gotten out of hand. No one had the right to look so cool, after I'd been grilling him; not even a nut-brown gnome who had spent most of his life on the equator.

"Mr. Yates has put up two million to establish you in the Bahamas. Doesn't that call for a little explanation?"

"Mr. Yates has made the donation without asking questions. Why should you?"

So there we were.

"Dr. Hubertus Ulrich," I read from notes, "who is probably the world's great ichthyologist, has spent over a quarter century in odd corners of the globe, bringing together specimens of tropical fish. Today, this collection is one of the most remarkable in the Western Hemisphere.

"For reasons best known to himself, Dr. Ulrich prefers to continue his work on a remote island in the Great Bahama Bank—its precise location a jealously guarded secret.

"In other words, no reporters but me—and I'll be censored."

"Precisely."

"Then why are you taking a cameraman out with you?"

"For the record. He's flying over from Miami, to join us at Nassau. Needless to say, he is coming at Mr. Yates' insistence. He will be carefully supervised."

"Might I ask his name?"

The doctor consulted a list at his elbow. "James Flagg. Mr. Yates recommended him especially."

"Jim's one of the best," I murmured, wondering if Ulrich knew that Flagg was a newsreel photographer. Still, why should I open up with him, until he returned the compliment?

I SWITCHED my attack abruptly, hoping to throw him for a loss. "May I check the cruise-list you've just

given me? No one left New York in your immediate party besides your assistant Dr. Alfred Strong, your daughter, Dr. von Merz, and Mr. Nash?"

"Why is this important?"

"I'm cabling this interview to my paper tonight, Dr. Ulrich. Surely you wouldn't want me to include any name not authorized by you. Am I right in assuming that Dr. von Merz is inspecting those aquaria on your invitation?"

"Dr. von Merz has had the pleasure of comparing his findings with mine for many years. Could I do less?"

"What about Nash?"

Ulrich made a prayer-book of his fingers, stared down at it intently. "Mr. Nash is a distinguished explorer, in the opinion of several million readers. At least, Mr. Yates has informed me that his books have had that sale. The presence of Mr. Nash might therefore be classed as inevitable."

"What about Strong and your daughter? Do they stay on the island with you, after the dedication?"

"Such is their pleasure—and mine."

I considered taking up Zoo-bug in detail, and downed the impulse firmly. "No one else goes down to Nassau with you but Mrs. and Mr. Yates, Dave, and myself?"

Ulrich closed his prayer-book abruptly. "Isn't that quite enough?"

"What about the rest of your staff?"

"I have only two helpers, besides Strong. Frank Hardy, my laboratory assistant, and London, my black boatman. Both of them are waiting for us on the island now."

I drew circles on my folded copy. "Of course, I don't want to wear out my welcome—"

"Please do not put it that way, Mr. Jordan. Just because I find it impossible to discuss my work with a layman, much less explain it—"

My interview had ended some time ago, of course. I clung doggedly to the fringe of his attention a moment more as he crossed to the french windows opening on the lawn. "At least you can explain why a scientist must pull up stakes and cloister himself."

"Surely that is something only another scientist can understand."

"Such a scientist as Dr. von Merz?"

His face was entirely impassive. "Dr. von Merz is in perfect sympathy with my views. I'm sure he can defend them far more ably than I."

"Suppose I repeat that remark, in his presence?"

Ulrich flung the french windows wide, breathing in the gusts of rainy air with all the relish of a man to whom four walls are prison in the making.

"Go to him, Mr. Jordan. You will find him a welcome antidote."

"You've dodged the press a long time now, Doctor. Don't you realize you've got to tell us *more* than we ask, if you want any peace?"

He beckoned to me to join him at the window. "Look out there, Mr. Jordan. In a few days' time, I shall be down that horizon, enjoying peace in plenty. As for your many readers, I am sure they will soon have wars and the baseball series to distract their attention. Forgive me for being pompous, but I know my place in the cosmos. You see, I am the friend of fishes, not of man."

He was leading me to the door with perfect politeness now, a hand tucked under my arm. Purely from force of habit, I paused for one more question.

"Your plans for the future, Doctor?"

Ulrich spoke, without a trace of melodrama. "That island is my future. I do not plan to return from it."

Back to nature, I scrawled at the bottom of my notes, *and to hell with the human race.*

He smiled gently over my shoulder. "In this day and age—can you blame me?"

CHAPTER V

THE PRESS IS ALWAYS WELCOME

THE rain was coming down in earnest when I crossed the hall and entered a big glass-and-gold living room beyond. Dave got up from the couch beside Elsa Ulrich, breaking one of those electric silences that tell a listener far more than words.

I understood all over again why he had been so breathless at "21". Also, why he was giving a good imitation of a haunted house at this moment.

She was the kind of tall cinnamon blonde who always made you blink a little, especially when she moved about. It seemed incredible that such a big girl could be so graceful. Perhaps that is one of the advantages of learning to swim before you can walk.

All right, I know that's a legend; at least, it's well established that she was born in the Marquesas. They say she inherited her looks from her mother's side—the mother who died in Manila twenty years ago, after the papers had called her everything from an exiled Russian to a queen of Polynesia.

"Did I stay too long with your father, Miss Ulrich?"

"A little. In five more minutes, I should have knocked."

Dave spoke, quickly. "Elsa wants to talk to you, Jack. If you'll both pardon me, I've work to do." He left the room with sophomoric abruptness, hands jammed deep in pockets, not trusting himself to look back.

I took a quick glance at Elsa, and decided on a direct attack. "Are you announcing your engagement, Miss Ulrich—or breaking it?"

"The answer to both questions is no."

"My error. Somehow, I felt that you wanted to speak to me about Dave."

"I wanted to ask you a very general question, Mr. Jordan. Aren't you ashamed, sometimes, of the way you make a living?"

"Decidedly — when my interviews really don't feel like talking."

"My father was at great pains to avoid the press in New York. Why did you have to follow us here?"

I tried the frontal attack again. "Is that why you were quarreling with Dave?"

"You're very observing, aren't you? Frankly, I don't know whether to treat you with contempt, or caution."

"Why not be honest and tell me the real reason you dislike me?"

"You may believe this or not, but my father is a completely disinterested person. Divorced from reality, ever since I can remember. Wanting nothing from this world but solitude, and peace."

"Precious commodities today, Miss Ulrich. In fact, I'm not sure you can buy them at any price."

"They are still worth fighting for."

"In a word—I've spoiled a perfect record?"

"If it gives you any satisfaction—yes. Our plans were well made. We left New York without annoyance—"

"And here I am. Will you submit to the inevitable?"

I WAS glad to watch the beginnings of a smile. Elsa Ulrich had the sort of face that should welcome gaiety.

"Now I understand why Karl went for a swim just now. He said he must be at the top of his form for you, Mr. Jordan."

"Dr. von Merz is always in top form when he meets the press," I said, drily.

"Will you entertain me in his absence?"

She was really smiling, now. "I suppose I've no choice. Dave's deserted me in a huff because I—spoke my mind about you."

"And now I illustrate your point perfectly. Remember, this is an interview."

"Please—I am not important."

"Daughters of famous men are always important when they photograph as well as you. Suppose I begin by asking you a simple question. How do you enjoy *your* contact with civilization?"

"Please," said Elsa Ulrich.

"Remember, you've been your father's constant companion, ever since you both put to sea in the *Cygnet*—wasn't that the name of the one-lung tramp he was using ten years ago? Now the *Cygnet's* been sold for scrap iron, and the doctor is retiring among his collections. Can't you see there's a news-point in the fact you plan to share his solitude?"

"Have you any objections?"

"Not if you have a good reason for giving up the world."

Elsa Ulrich crossed those miraculous legs, and stared thoughtfully at the toe of one cork-soled espadrille. "I wonder if I dare be sincere with you . . . My father is sixty-seven, Mr. Jordan. He will need me, in his retirement, more than ever."

"With Dr. Strong, and two assistants to handle all the routine? With hurricane-proof living quarters, and—"

But Elsa has already risen abruptly. "Never mind. It was probably a mistake to tell you that."

"On the contrary. If you'll pardon my vulgarity—every word you've said will make excellent publicity for your next show."

"Who told you I paint?"

"Don't misjudge me entirely, Miss Ulrich. I'm not always a dictaphone. In fact, I covered your last exhibit for the *Star*—the one that included such subjects as *Tahiti Dawn, Sunset, Fugue in C-Minor, After the Storm*—"

If I had touched her, she didn't betray it by a flicker. "I remember that notice now. It was quite fair. At least, you did not follow in the others' wake and damn what you could not understand."

"You plan to go on painting in the Bahamas?"

"I shall do nothing else."

"And when you have canvases enough for another show?"

"I shall ship them north to my agent. He has had remarkable luck with them so far."

"Does this mean you've closed your New York studio for good and all?"

"I never had a New York studio," said Elsa Ulrich. "Most of my work has been done at sea. On the deck of the *Cynget,* in fact. I expect to be quite at home on Yates' cay."

"Painting your father's collections?"

"Why not? Would you care to see what I'm working on now?"

I followed her into a sunporch, controlling myself with an effort when she led me to the easel in the corner.

"Don't be polite, please."

This one was gray-blue, without obvious beginning or end. A head in a noose of ticker-tape—or was it seaweed? White blobs, congealing into pen nibs. Red blobs for fish—or petrified nightmares.

"What's the title?" I asked, faintly.

"Paradise Beach," said Elsa Ulrich.

"Perhaps I should make a confession. When I covered your last show, I was pinch-hitting for a critic with influenza."

"Never mind. Tell me what you really think."

"I think you should marry Dave. And that isn't a *non sequitur.*"

"Do you say that as a loyal friend, or as a reporter?"

"Both, I'm afraid."

Elsa Ulrich glanced at her wristwatch, and spoke crisply. "It's time I showed you to Karl's room, Mr. Jordan. He should be up from his swim by now."

SHE left me discreetly at a bedroom door, after von Merz had bellowed permission from within. He was just coming out of a shower when I entered. Obviously, my appearance had been timed to the minute.

No, he hadn't changed a bit since he came out of Brazil. A trifle gayer, perhaps; a bit more astigmatic behind those thick lenses. He still oozed unctuous *joie de vivre,* and looked dapper as a chimpanzee fresh from the barber.

I know I've dismissed him as a headline-hunter, pure and simple. Still, most reporters will admit that people hit the front page because they belong there. Take the time he descended the Amazon from headwaters in Peru, collecting everything from Inca art to *piranha.*

Didn't three museums fall down and worship him when he distributed his collections? Or the time he challenged old Ulrich on the shark-bites. Of course he had the right to exploit *that* to the hilt.

Don't ask me why I could never decide if he was a first-class zoologist, or a second-class charlatan. Or if all this high-pressure activity wasn't camouflage for something else. Don't compliment me on my foresight, either. I'd laughed at his strutting pretensions for years, the same as anyone.

I was chuckling inwardly now, watching one houseboy whisk his yachting coat from an oversize wardrobe trunk, while another settled a sunburst bathrobe around those simian shoulders.

"Come in, Jack, come in. You know my door is always open to the *Star.* Will you join me in a drink?"

"Not in working hours."

"You are looking baffled this morning. Was my honored colleague as opaque as ever?"

I said:

"Dr. Ulrich confined his interview to one statement: He's retiring, permanently, in the Bahamas. Said you'd be glad to explain."

"Surely the statement explains itself."

"Don't tell me you'd be content to drop out of sight like that."

Von Merz strode to the dresser, admired himself briefly, and stepped into razor-creased flannels. "Perhaps it is something only a scientist can understand, Jack."

"Are you quoting him, or vice versa?"

"I am saying that Dr. Ulrich has a magnificent opportunity to complete his life work. That my reverence is exceeded only by my envy."

HE SPOKE for awhile in that vein, enlarging on the wisdom of Yates' choice, his own humble pleasure at assisting in the dedication. I sat through it patiently until the hall door closed on the last of those houseboys.

"Let it ride, Doc," I said.

Von Merz looked mildly pained. "What do you mean?"

"The *Star* can play that angle up from the fileroom. Just tell me what you're after, personally."

"Must you always be so mundane?"

"Are you pretending you'd sail a thousand miles just to get your face before a movie camera?"

"No, Jack."

I flipped open the notes I'd made on Ulrich. "What's the stunt this time?

Are you going to reopen that old argument about the shark-bites?"

"I see you have an excellent memory."

"Oddly enough, I can't remember which side you were on. Was it you, or Ulrich, who claimed a shark wouldn't attack a human being who knew how to handle himself under water?"

"That was his side of the argument." Von Merz bent close to the glass, knotting his cravat with elaborate care. "I took exception by pointing to the records of my last expedition. Two Kanakas, lost off the Samoan reefs—"

I looked again at my notes. "According to these jottings, the doctor is nursing a sixteen-foot hammerhead on that cay—in a private tank all its own. One of the largest ever taken alive. Sure you aren't planning to challenge him to a demonstration?"

"Please, Jack. Let me make a clean breast, for once. It was a good story for both of us, while it lasted. The vulgar *Elasmobranchii*—the tigers of the sea. A clear picture in the common mind. Of course, I lost both those boys to the barracuda, that year in Samoa—"

"Stay right in the open," I said. "You've admitted you had some reason for wangling this invitation."

"A very dull one, I'm afraid. Once I had the honor of adding a new genus to the family of coral fishes, the *Scorpaenidae*. The Ulrich collection of this family is virtually complete. With his permission, I plan to devote a month to their study."

"So you intend to remain awhile on the cay?"

"Only if it is agreeable to the doctor, of course. Poor old man, the excitement of New York has bewildered him a little. Naturally, I shall wait for an opportune moment to make my request."

"Who are you asking—Ulrich, or Tony Yates?"

Von Merz turned pointedly back to his mirror, brushing his eyebrows down energetically from his forehead. I was hitting a stone wall now, of course. I hit it one more time, regardless.

"Don't leave me whistling in the dark outside your ivory tower. You know you can stay on that island till doomsday, if Yates gives the word."

"I think we have both said more than enough. I also trust you will be careful what you print."

"Extremely. For example, I won't point out how cozy it would be for you, if our philanthropist cut you in on a piece of that sandbar, by changing the deed-of-gift in Nassau."

Then I went out of that bedroom, backward. So would you, if Dr. Karl von Merz had whirled on you from his mirror, with a heavy silver hairbrush in his hand.

CHAPTER VI

INTERRUPTION BY A BANSHEE

IT WAS just under one o'clock when I came down the stairway to the lower hall. People were already pouring through into the glass-and-gold reception room for Mrs. Yates' luncheon —sleek, expensive people who looked as though they might have just stepped out of a rotogravure.

Maybe they had, at that.

A houseboy informed me that Mr. David was waiting for me on a side porch, but I asked for a telephone first. After all, if this had to be a chiselers' picnic, I might as well sample all the courses.

The telephone was in an alcove off the hall, well out of harm's way. I asked first for the Mid-Ocean Club, then for the bar. Alec Nash was on that wire

before I had had a chance to give my name.

"So the rain drove you in after all."

"Hello, Jack. I was on the point of calling you."

"Just confirming a luncheon date you made with Dave," I said smoothly. "Are you still in the mood, or is it too comfortable where you are?"

"Didn't Dave tell you it was important?"

"To your next book—or to us?"

There was a short, stifled pause at the far end. "Are you talking from Felicity, Jack?"

"Naturally."

"Then I won't elaborate. Someone might be listening on an extension."

"If you're going to make a mystery of this, after the morning I've put in—"

"I'm lunching at Tom Moore's in a half-hour. Join me and find out for yourself why I'm ringing off now."

I started to shout back at him, but there was no point in cursing a dead wire. Not that it was the first time Alec Nash had done that act to impress his public.

WHEN I found Dave, he was seated at a bridge-table on the side porch, knee-deep in scrapbooks.

"Are we safe from the wolves in this corner?"

"Reasonably. I've already asked Gail to excuse us both, so we can slip out when we like. That is, if you've made a clean sweep."

"I've talked to everyone but your brother, if that's what you mean."

Dave stared down at a mass of mimeographed release-sheets. "Then you must have a story."

"At the moment, I've five of them—all shooting at a different ending."

He listened without comment while I blue-printed my last three hours, including my telephone conversation with Nash.

"Of course Alec is going to keep after you, Jack. Hasn't the *Star* syndicated his last three books?"

"Fair enough. He's a guest here. Why would he pass up this gold-plated luncheon to hole in at Tom Moore's with a reporter and a press agent?"

"Is that a rhetorical question?"

"Very. It has several answers, all of them phony. To hell with that white-haired adventure boy. Let's take up the real people, in order.

"Why would a lady like your brother's wife, who obviously has no business outside a drawing room, plan to go down to this forsaken little island, just to watch Jim Flagg photograph a hammerhead shark under glass?

"Why does Dr. Ulrich refuse to answer the simplest questions about his future? Why is his daughter fanatically determined to stay with him on that out-island, when she's obviously in love with you?"

"Did Elsa tell you that?"

"Elsa told me nothing; she didn't have to. Even you must see that she's covering up on something."

I dropped that angle, and tried another. "How many of those questions can Strong answer, when we track him down?"

"I can answer the one on Elsa right now. She's been devoted to her father since childhood. She knows how he suffers from people, especially when he's working. Until she can be sure all bridges are burned to the mainland, until the last unwelcome guest has left that cay—"

"Which brings us naturally to von Merz. Did you know he planned to linger among the aquaria for a month or so, perfecting his knowledge of the *Scorpaenidae?*"

"Then Elsa will stay on. . . . Why did you say she was in love with me? She thinks I'm just a reformed wildcat, coasting on my brother's reputation. She says she wouldn't consider—"

"Never mind what anyone says right now, Dave. Just tell me how to catch up with Zoo-bug."

"I called the terminus at St. George's. The conductor on that train reported that Strong got down at the Mullet Bay halt, jumped a bicycle, and back-tracked through the rain."

I said:

"Zoo-bug seems to have a weakness for using other people's bicycles."

"If he doesn't turn up here soon, I'm mentioning that fact to the police."

I crossed to the veranda rail to see if the storm showed any signs of lifting. "When is your brother due from his deep-sea haul?"

Dave's voice dropped a tone. "He came in with that squall, Jack. In fact, he's in the study now, clearing his mail. We can go in when you like."

"I'm asking you two questions first. Answer them straight, or I'll pitch you into this flower bed. First, has Tony Yates seen Zoo-bug's radiogram?"

"Of course he hasn't. Why should I worry him until—"

"Don't you think it's high time he was worried a little now?"

"I suppose so. Will you show it to him, or shall I?"

"Nothing would give me more pleasure—if you'll let me bring up the subject in my own way. . . . Second question, much more tactless. Were you telling the truth about that picture the police found in West 12th Street?"

"What's the connection?"

"Yes or no, Dave."

"Yes, damn you."

"Come along, then," I said. "Let's try to strike a spark from the tycoon."

YOU'VE seen Tony Yates at the wrong end of too many triangles, business and otherwise, to need a description now. He was standing at the open french windows of the study, looking out across the rain-swept lawn—still in his fishing clothes, a hat like an old volcano pushed back on his graying curls.

When he heard our steps, he turned quickly on the points of his toes. He still looked like a sportsman, too, in spite of the Chinese-idol chassis, the sparrow pockets under his whisky-bright eyes.

"Sit down, Jordan. What can I do for you?"

I sat down.

"Put it the other way around, Mr. Yates. You know what business I'm in."

"I don't have to say how welcome you are, do I? Of course, I'm salving my conscience, pretending you're a college friend of Dave's. Ulrich accepted my donation in the Bahamas on condition it be developed without publicity of any kind. Believe it or not, I've kept my bargain, so far."

"Why?" I asked, rudely.

"Because it amused me to stake someone to an island all his own. If there's such a thing as pure science, can't we have pure generosity, too?"

I made dutiful notes, feeling his hard blue eyes fasten on my flying pencil.

"Dave here will tell you I should have my head examined. Ten million people on the dole—and I buy an old man a sanctuary for his pets. Of course, this particular old man is his best girl's father—"

"Shut up, Tony," said Dave.

"Shut up, yourself. It's my money, isn't it?"

I was taking notes in earnest, now. This was copy in any school of journal-

ism. Was it important how much I believed?

Tony banged the desk with one fist, and threw a fish-scale boot over the edge with a fine disregard for varnish. "Of course, if I can pick up a few dividends along the way—like a roving reporter—"

"Or a newsreel cameraman flying over from Miami?"

Bullseye!

Yates' chin went up, the old fighting stance that had made him famous at directors' meetings since melon-cutting became a fine art. "Did you tell Ulrich that Flagg does newsreels for a living?"

"I don't give out facts when I'm on an interview, Mr. Yates. I take them down."

He nodded.

"Good boy, Jordan. Can you blame me for getting my dividends, with no hurt feelings?"

"Does that explain Alec Nash, and von Merz?"

"Why not? Alec's books never sell less than a hundred thousand. A chapter on Yates Cay, with a candid-camera or two, will certainly do me no harm. As for that Austrian zoologist—well, I thought it would do no harm to get a reaction from an expert in another field."

"Would you be telling me all this, if you didn't own stock in the *Star?*"

Yates chuckled in earnest. "Probably not. Isn't it a comfort knowing you can ask me anything you like, and get a straight answer?"

"Perhaps I could even risk telling you a thing or two when the interview's over?"

I watched him carefully, but he still remained at ease in that swivel chair, one sea-stained boot pointed toward the ceiling.

"Try me," said Tony Yates.

I TOOK my signal from Dave, and spoke slowly. "Suppose I mentioned a possible short circuit in this—this insulation you're providing for Ulrich's future?"

Dave rose abruptly, and crossed the room to light a cigarette in the frame of the french windows. He spoke, without turning. "I should have mentioned this myself, Tony—long ago."

Tony didn't budge. "You were talking of short circuits, Jordan. I'm not much good at parables before lunch."

I said:

"How would you like to see a radiogram that Dave received—"

Believe it or not, that was the precise moment the wail rose through the rain-soaked cedars at the foot of the garden.

Like many big men, Tony Yates was deceptively light on his feet. Perhaps that's why he was at the french windows one jump ahead of me, as the wail repeated.

It was a sound old as time. Primitive as the Neanderthal man's first despair. It can still wrench me out of bed with one hand on the light-switch, when it echoes through my dreams.

I looked for Dave, but he had crossed that lawn on the hot-foot, long ago.

"Dobie," said Tony. "My head gardener. Thank God, Gail is serving cocktails on the other side of the house."

Dave had the man by both arms when we scuttled into the shelter of the windbreak at the cliff's edge. Dobie was a tall, weedy Negro, blue to the gills and still whimpering a bit as he led us to the flight of stone steps that snaked down the cliff to the sea.

The beach was gray, and empty as the moon. The rain, still falling lightly, had wiped out horizons and leveled the light surf to a whisper.

Then I saw the sack bobbing in the

shallows, still half awash with the tide. Zoo-bug's face looked gray as that gray morning. He was dead, all right—dead as only the drowned can be.

CHAPTER VII

GRAY BEACH

TONY YATES and his gardener beached the body with no help from me. When I stumble on a picture of that sort without any warning, I photograph first, and pitch in afterward.

Right now, I was busy remembering a half-moon of sand, hemmed in on three sides by cliffs. It was really more cove than beach, with coral outcroppings separating it from open water. The tide was setting in strongly down the shore, from west to east.

Even in that hectic moment, it was pretty obvious to me that Zoo-bug's body had been tumbled here by the current. Nothing that floated could have rested long on the bottom, with that tide setting out to sea.

The rain had stopped abruptly, as though someone had turned off a tap at the source. It made your flesh prickle, watching day burn through those clouds and turn that sand pink as an ad man's dream. Somehow, the sunlight made that blue bundle on the shore look even more forlorn.

There were no obvious bruises, and no signs of violence. Just a very dead young man, who looked totally unprepared for what had overtaken him.

Tony was pulling Dave out of the shallows now, shaking him back to some semblance of calm.

"No one must touch him, Dave. Not until I can get the ambulance up from Prince Edward."

"I've got to see how it happened."

"You can see that now. Pull yourself together."

"For all we know, he may have been hurt before he—"

But Tony was already scrambling up the steps, on his way to a phone. "He's pretty dead, that's the main thing. The rest is up to the law."

By that time, of course, I was busy chasing that black gardener, also halfway up the cliffs like a homing cat. Dobie's story was simple enough. He had been on the beach all morning, raking seaweed. At first, he had mistaken Strong's body for a piece of driftwood. When the color of the clothing had attracted his attention, he had waded into the tide-rip to investigate. Thirty seconds later, he was doing his banshee act on the steps.

I let him escape on that note, hooked a firm arm through Dave's, and marched down the cove to the western end. Here we climbed over a saddle of coral limestone until we were stopped by a business-like wire fence that marked the limits of Tony's property. There was nothing beyond but a tangle of bay-grape, dropping down in broken ridges to a long sweep of empty beach beaten flat by the rain.

WELL, Dobie's story at least made sense at the moment. I jumped back to the sanctuary of our private beach again. Dave followed me, after a little more scouting. I was glad to observe that the spurt of activity had calmed him somewhat.

"Sit down a minute, fellow. Here, with your back to the water. I won't have much time to tell you this, so I'm going to say it fast. You think Zoo-bug was murdered, don't you?"

"What else can I think?"

"All right, Dave. So do I. . . . Wait now—you aren't going to fly off any more handles today."

But Dave was on his feet long ago.

"At least, I can see if he was knocked out, or—"

"Suppose there isn't a single mark on him. How will you explain your meddling to the coroner, when he rolls up in that ambulance?"

Dave subsided grimly. "Right as usual, Jack. Any more good advice?"

"Well, you might wrestle briefly with your conscience, and decide what to do with that radiogram."

"I suppose we'll have to turn it over to the police."

"And sit in Bermuda for the next month, while they make up their minds *you* didn't hold Strong's head under?"

That brought him to his feet at once. "But it doesn't seem ethical to withhold—"

"Never mind the abstract words," I said. "Not that I wouldn't swear in any court that Alfred Strong was murdered by drowning—rather early this morning, to judge by the way the body turned up in that tide-rip. I think the job was done somewhere along that strip of beach west of Tony's property. Don't ask me why, but I'm also convinced the killer will go aboard the *Columbia* with us tomorrow."

"And you want to sit tight on that?"

"Until I can prove at least part of it."

We walked back to the concrete steps in silence. "What about Tony?" asked Dave, without quite looking at me.

"What about him?"

"We were on the point of spilling the beans to him, when we were interrupted. Someone's got to finish the job."

"Naturally. I'm sure I can make him see things our way. That is, if you'll trust me."

"Of course I'll trust you, Jack. It's mighty decent of you; point out these angles—"

"Skip all that, for the moment. On an assignment like this, I'm a dictaphone pure and simple. If I've time to spare, I try to keep my friends, too."

Then I got down to brass nails in earnest. In fact, I was still talking when the law interrupted—a black constable, respectfully escorted by Dobie, bearing a sheet over his arm, and orders from Prince Edward Hospital to stand guard. The coroner, it seemed, would hardly be out from Hamilton before two-thirty.

Time on my hands.

Well, that was all right, too. I went up the steps fast, with Dave in tow. No time to worry about that youngster keeping his chin up now. It was going to be a busy half-hour, no matter how you looked at it.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

King of Knaves

They were slugging each other, grunting and gasping, when the new king came in with his men

By E. HOFFMAN PRICE

Author of "Red Sea Jonah," "Message for McTavish," etc.

In Afghanistan, even a politician may at last understand when a water boy walks next to God

SNOW blocked all the passes of the Hindu Kush, and the wind that howled down from central Asia hammered them tighter. Certainly they were closed too tight for Kurt Schmidt to get to Berlin before spring.

Conway, muffled in sheepskins, huddled near the glowing brazier of camel dung, and watched his assistant fumble with the dials of the radio. He wondered whether Schmidt would come to his senses when the snow melted and the caravans came from Kashgar.

Rock chinked with mud: and a roof of turf. A greasy rug hung by the fringe and part of the time kept out the wind. The hovel smelled just like the other hovels of that village. Conway wanted to smash the radio, but he was afraid he might then have to shoot Schmidt. In three more months a man would go crazy, listening to that nightmare of propaganda.

"For God's sake, turn it off," Conway said. "Or tune in on some music or something."

Schmidt scowled a little more intently. There was a crackle, a sputter, a whine. A purring of Russian . . . then France was on the air . . . an Oxford

accent mush-mouthed the ether . . . Conway gritted his teeth, and with bare hands plucked an ember from the fire. He set it on the bowl of his long-stemmed pipe. The moistened tobacco fumed, pungent and fragrant. Conway was thinking, "Lord, if I had a Chesterfield . . ."

He was all out of cigarettes, but Schmidt was not out of batteries for that radio which was the size of a woman's overnight case. It had come from New York, by way of Karachi, and then through the Khyber Pass, on the back of a two-humped camel.

The customs collectors in Kabul had levied twice its valuation in India. The freight to the eastern mountains of Afghanistan had doubled it again. When he sent for that radio, Schmidt had wanted to hear all the President's addresses.

But while he was prospecting, Schmidt's politics had changed a lot. Whether it had been meeting King Dost Muhammed in Kabul, whether it had been an ingrowing sense of the wrongness of things; or whether it was that war talk had finally become war—that made no difference.

The thing that did count was that Schmidt was going to quit and go to Europe to put a king back on a long-vacant throne. That was purely a personal matter; but breaking a contract, that was somthing else. Conway had to cure Schmidt of this outrageous mania. If only to protect his own standing, for desertion would reflect on his leadership.

He said to himself, "I got all winter to do it in. Unless I go nuts first myself."

THE greasy once-red rug stirred. A gust from central Asia came through. Conway's breath became whiter and his fingers stiffened. Schmidt was listening to a German broadcast and didn't notice the pie-faced man who came in.

He said in Pashtu, "Greeting, *huzoor*. I have just run out of tobacco. If your highness gives me just a pinch, until tomorrow, when a trader comes to town—"

Conway considered. If he gave Bacha Sakao just a pinch today, he would have to give him some the day after, and on every other day until spring. Also, every other mountaineer in the valley would drop in for tobacco.

He looked at Bacha Sakao for several seconds, and offered him the stem of the pipe.

While accepting this hospitality, the burly mountaineer could not be begging, and Conway could think it out. The choice was delicate.

He might keep his tobacco and get his throat cut in the spring, when an avenger of Afghan honor could ride beyond the king's reach. It was not merely a matter of being on guard against good natured Bacha Sakao. Almost anyone in the village might decide that the refusal of tobacco was an insult.

Bacha Sakao was harmless enough. A thick-lipped lout. Greasier, darker, shaggier than most of the villagers. Also, lousier and poorer. Like his father before him, he sprinkled the square during the hot summer market days so that dust would not offend the merchants and the gentry. He would have been a street sweeper had any Afghan street ever been swept; as it was, a street sprinkler was the lowest the village had.

But Bacha Sakao had very bright intent eyes, and an impressive nose; the lout had initiative, being the first of the villagers to come begging.

No one but a foreigner could possibly

offend the honor of a street sprinkler, Conway decided. Likewise, it seemed safe enough to say to Bacha Sakao, "Smoke this with me, there is no more in my house."

Then Conway was ashamed. If the Khan came down from his mud palace on the cliff and asked for tobacco, neither Conway nor Schmidt would refuse. Just why was he ashamed of thinking: "He's only a street sprinkler, to hell with the beggar"?

Conway did not know; but he was. So he said, "Smoke, brother, while I find tobacco for you."

Schmidt grumbled, "Throw him out, he's lousy! And shut up, I can't hear with all this static!"

"I'd rather listen to him than that propaganda. Sure, *he's* left Doorn and gone to Barcelona, so you're walking out on me!"

Conway took a sheaf of golden brown leaves from a bundle. Each was nearly two feet long, and as broad as two hands; there were big brown freckles, showing the full ripeness. This was from Persia, and it had a scent like no tobacco Conway had ever smoked. He would have liked it had there been some American cigarettes in the village.

Bacha Sakao shook his head. "That is too much, *huzoor*."

"Take it!" It was too much, but he had to spite Schmidt.

"No, Excellency. All my friends will take from me. Give me a few leaves, and none can beg or steal. You will have more, and I will have more."

"So that's it?" Conway grinned and enjoyed that novel experience.

Bacha Sakao left without any thanks. Schmidt growled, "You damn fool! We'll run short."

"No. That fellow's smarter than I thought. He'll protect our supply for himself. It'll last until spring."

"Animal cunning." Schmidt spat. He had an arrogant face and held his head higher than necessary. "Human refuse! Fellows like him are what spoil democracies."

The repeal of the arms embargo, faithfully relayed and dressed up for short-wave circulation, had not helped Schmidt's temper, nor had it helped Conway's. He said, "Look at the human refuse that's running your *vaterland,* old pal."

Schmidt snorted and snapped the switch. Too much static, and the batteries might run out, finally.

"That's just it. Still too democratic. All I can say for a dictator is that it's a step in the right direction. An evil, a stench. Yes. But it makes the way for a king. And a king is next to God. So I go home in the spring."

This was old stuff, by now. Conway's nostrils flared. "That Bacha Sakao—he'd make a better king than that gutless, outmoded relic you're backing! And he'd be a better dictator. Listen, is a paper hanger any better than a street sprinkler?"

Both men rose. They flexed their hands into big fists. Without quite stamping the dirt floor, each secured his footing, glanced from side to side to pick the heaps of equipment to avoid. Pack saddles; geologist's hammers; chests of ore specimens; charts and survey reports of Afghanistan's wealth, to be submitted to the first progressive ruler the country had ever had.

Conway relaxed. "Cut it out. What difference does it make? You're breaking a contract in the spring; to meddle in a war you think is your party. But, if this shack gets knocked down around our ears, we'll both freeze before then. Pipe down, Kurt, be yourself."

Conway turned away.

Kurt Schmidt shrugged, grinned

sourly; then he seated himself, and spun the dials again. "But I still say, a king is next to God."

WHEN spring came, Conway and Schmidt had not killed each other, nor had they even tried to. Neither had Bacha Sakao begged all the tobacco, for he left early, when only a seasoned mountaineer could get through the pass.

The Khan said proudly, "He always spends two months robbing caravans before he comes home to sprinkle streets."

Schmidt was in better spirits, but just as stubborn. Conway was resigned to the ruin of all their work. Before another engineer could come from the States or from England, the contract's time clause would automatically cancel it.

No doubt the king would remember this. He would have half the survey, and without paying for any of it. The company would hold the sack.

Schmidt was sorry, but he said, "They need me at home. I head for the border when the pass is open."

But the Shinwari tribes revolted in the south. About the same time, Bacha Sakao, now a long way from home, started a revolt of his own. All these rebels were protesting against a king who had forced infidel customs on his people; such as making men wear hats in Kabul, and making women unveil their faces like harlots.

Because of the European war, Schmidt's passport would not take him through British India, even if he were not murdered by the Shinwaris around the Khyber Pass. His chances of going north, and then home by way of Russia were not much better.

"But I will try," he said.

"All right, Kurt. And I'll go with you to the border. So you won't be murdered between here and there."

If Schmidt suspected that Conway was playing for a chance to convert him before he crossed the border, the big German did not say so. He merely said. "*Ach,* and now see! This *schweinhund* of a Bacha Sakao! Maybe you were right, giving him tobacco, or he would have cut our throats before he sneaked out of the village."

Conway rather approved of Bacha Sakao as the march toward Kabul became more and more difficult. The spreading revolt might keep Schmidt in Afghanistan more certainly than any persuasion. Maybe when that last battery was out, and Schmidt heard less of Europe, he'd stay.

The King sent a platoon of cavalry to guard his "protected" on their enforced trip to the capital. These tall, bearded fellows were members of the only regiment in the country which had uniforms that fit. Moreover, each trooper wore a silver medal which he had won for not deserting or mutinying for three years.

Schmidt, who did not know this detail as Conway did, twisted his mustaches and said, "Now see. A *king's* soldiers. And that Bacha Sakao calls it a revolt. That pig, of all people against these fine men."

For ragged mountaineers to revolt did seem silly, not heroic. But before the two engineers reached Kabul, they met the sorry rabble of routed soldiers that the Shinwar tribesmen had failed to massacre. Schmidt refused to believe they were regulars.

Conway said, "Kurt, it won't be too much fun in Kabul. Bacha Sakao has taken advantage of the Shinwari trouble. With all the troops occupied down south, he might surprise the capitol, and take it."

Kurt Schmidt flung back his head and roared. "That street sprinkler? That louse-infested ignoramus?"

Conway answered, 'He had sense enough to protect our tobacco supply, but the king did not have sense enough to protect a good thing, and now look at the mess."

THE next day they reached Kabul. Just over the crest, they saw the walled town for which kings have competed ever since one king could raise enough men to drive out whoever was in possession.

An ugly city of cubical mud houses and flat mud roofs; but Alexander had ruled there, and so had Baber who later became the first emperor of India.

Genghis Khan and Tamerlane had taken Kabul. The British armies had been massacred in there, and so had two British ambassadors.

Kabul was a king's prize and a king's doom; whoever holds Kabul rules Afghanistan. It has always been that way, and now another, a modern and enlightened Dost Muhammed was facing the test. Schmidt thought that the king would hold the city.

Conway said, "He won't. Rebels have taken Herat and murdered the governor. Now if Kandahar falls, he's through."

"Rumor!" Schmidt snorted.

But that night, in the big, untenanted European style hotel that is Kabul's ugliest spot, they learned that Herat had indeed fallen. Hairy mountaineers armed with all kinds of weapons had routed three regiments of regulars. Though everyone was now revolting, one heard more and more of Bacha Sakao.

The Water Boy was reported in every corner of the land. Thus far, no one believed he could be in two places at once, but it hurt official morale in Kabul. Conway was glad. Since revolt kept him and Schmidt from their work, the contract was automatically extended.

Whenever Conway heard the name of Bacha Sakao—and the capital discussed him more each day—he understood a little better why he had not refused him tobacco that freezing night.

A man with initiative enough to leave a sheltered village long before the snow melted, and organize a revolt to break in a dozen places at once, had more force and imagination than showed on the moon face of him.

King Dost Muhammed Khan received the two engineers, laughed heartily and promised to blow Bacha Sakao from the mouth of the old cannon in the plaza. The king drank his brandy-soda, another modern, non-Muslem touch. He was handsome enough in his gray tweed suit and scotch grain brogues.

But when they left the royal presence, Conway was thinking, "The king was worried."

A week later, he learned how worried. The fanatical patriarchs who asked the king to repeal the edict that forbade beards, turbans, and veiled women were marched to the cannon.

Accidentally, Conway looked from his window as they pulled the lanyard. He did not look as the other *mullahs* were lashed, one at a time, to the muzzle of the old-fashioned gun.

Schmidt said, "The iron hand. Nothing else can rule fellows like these. Imagine democracy here!"

Conway answered: "They can forgive pyramids of skulls. They understand lopping off a thief's right hand. They understand it when the baker of shortweight loaves is baked in his own oven. But they cannot understand a

king who goes against the beliefs of his people.

"Worse than that, they cannot understand a king who does not lead his own soldiers. So this one is through."

IT HAPPENED sooner than Conway expected. It happened just in time to keep Schmidt from slipping out of Kabul to march north. Schmidt had enough courage for two men, and he might have reached Russia. But when a battery of six-inch guns shelled Kabul one night, German firmness listened to reason.

But Schmidt was furious.

"Schweinhund! He has artillery—listen!" The gray-haired engineer cocked his head. Another salvo; the rumble of projectiles; no mistaking that sound. "Someone is giving Bacha Sakao guns to drive out the king. No, not Russian guns."

Whoever furnished the artillery had done a job of it. Schmidt, now thoroughly partisan, paced up and down, fists clenched, jaw set. He cursed the garrison that made a feeble sally. He cursed the king's gunners whose answering shots burst way over their mark.

Then a cream-colored Rolls Royce with silver plated fenders rolled across the plaza. There was enough moonlight for Conway to see; and now the market place, roofed with long dry withes, was afire from shell bursts.

This was the king's car. The unveiled woman was the queen who had disgraced the nation by appearing in Paris with face and shoulders bare, like a Peshawar dancing girl.

When the gunners saw the car pass, they quit their batteries. The infantry fled from the trenches outside the city. Véry lights popped, red-blue-green, and this seemed to be a signal; for at once the Water Boy's heavy guns ceased firing.

Some commanders marched their regiments out, to meet the bandit; others, the faithful ones, tried to overtake Dost Mul ammed's Rolls Royce. But he could not afford to wait for hitch hikers.

Conway said, "There's an up-to-date king for you! Like the one you want to put back on the throne at home. Sending soldiers out to fight, and staying under cover until it's time to run.

"Listen, you blockhead, I'm telling you, you pig headed *landsmann!"*

Conway was bubbling over. Now that the king had checked out, the contract was blown up. There was no more use handling Schmidt with tact, there was no more chance of persuading Schmidt to do this duty. So Conway poured out what he had stored up for months.

"You chump, there's a king for you. One of the skulkers who finally made people see that kings are a fraud."

"You—you—*verdammte."* Schmidt was choking, red-faced; neither he nor Conway heard the drumming of hoofs, the ragged volleys fired as salutes to a conqueror, though they both raised their voices to outshout the noise.

"Sure kings used to be next to God! Because they went out in front. But that's centuries ago. When did any modern one get on the receiving line for a slug or a jab in the guts with a bayonet, or a saber smack over the conk?"

Schmidt was now purple and stuttering. So he hit Conway, and Conway laughed and hit back.

They were slugging each other, grunting and gasping and stumbling about, half blind and all blood-smeared from streaming noses when a dozen men in dirty sheepskins came in with the latest model pistols and rifles.

THE dirtiest of them all was Bacha Sakao. He stood there, watching. Schmidt and Conway both finally woke up. The bandit laughed, doubled up laughing. At last he said, "I will not kill either of you foreigners! You used to give me tobacco."

He said to his guard, "They are on my head. Now, if this isn't the palace, where the devil is it?"

The two battered engineers cooled down during the encounter with the captor of Kabul, who automatically became King of Afghanistan. There was something about him that was not funny. All Schmidt could say was, "He stinks."

Conway said, "That's *lèse majesté.*"

This was so absurd that Schmidt laughed. "*Auch noch!* That, a king!" He thrust out his hand. "This is foolish, quarreling. Now, you know that lousy fellow. You can get me an escort to Russia. There is no more contract; what does he care about minerals? You will persuade him for me."

Conway said, "Kurt, I'll try. On the level."

But he was not sure just how to talk to a self-made king. He was particularly uncertain when he heard four volleys the next morning, and learned that four merchants had been overheard saying, "Water Boy."

For some days, Bacha Sakao was too busy to receive Conway. The new king had to raise money, for the old one had taken with him whatever he had not squandered. His army, revolting for lack of pay, gave the bandit-king food for thought.

(*Please turn the page.*)

So Conway and Schmidt heard Bacha Sakao's finance department at work, and often saw evidence of it.

The dogs of Kabul now wrangled over the severed hands of money lenders and merchants who did not think the new ruler's credit was a good mercantile risk. In the public square, an avaricious old man was standing in a pit exactly chin deep. Every hour, a soldier dumped in another shovel of earth; he was now buried to the waist, but his son, standing by, still could not remember where the family treasure was.

The next day, Bacha Sakao hanged the *mullah* who had plotted against King Dost Muhammed Khan. "You betrayed one master, you would betray me as well," the new ruler said.

Schmidt thought that this all proved something: "My friend, you see now what happens when it gives a king from the ranks of the common people. Granting that underhanded dig at our hereditary ruling houses—that contemptible implication of cowardice—you still do not see things there like we have seen here."

Conway shrugged. He said, "This man, after all, still is more of a king than any Hapsburg I know of or you can mention." But he did not know how he could prove this; and he had heard so much of Schmidt's politics that he wanted to prove his point.

He seemed far indeed from proof when they were summoned to audience, and Bacha Sakao—now called Nureddin Ghazi, Conquering Light of the True Faith—said to him, bluntly, "You are on my head, and you will therefore stay in Kabul. That is an order."

It seemed that he had a spy system worthy of a king. The engineers had never discussed the matter except in English, and in private, as they called it.

Conway said, "That is kind of your majesty, but we wish to go to Russia. At our own risk, you understand."

Bacha Sakao said, "No man can take a king's risk from him. What would people say in Herat or Kandahar if my protected were robbed or killed? I would have to lead an army to punish them, and I have too much work here. So I will shoot either or both of you at the first attempt to leave."

This kingly sentiment was too positive for argument. It is true, Bacha Sakao did not look regal. He sat on the tiled floor of Dost Muhammed's bathroom.

He liked this room. Whenever he pressed the button, there was a rush of fresh water. The Holy Koran orders washing in running water, when it is available, before prayer. This was the one thing about the old regime that he liked. All the other modern touches were blasphemous.

WHEN the two left the presence, Schmidt's triumph was greater than his wrath. "Democracy, the people's choice, has found its level, my friend. Look where he washes."

Schmidt took that very seriously. Conway did not. He grinned and said, "Anyway, he knows that no man can carry a king's risk for him."

"You will see." Schmidt predicted. "You wait. It gives revolt. This fellow is a bandit. Look. The old man is now buried to the chin. I wonder if he really has any money?"

Conway did not want to look. He did not hear the grandson nor grandfather, for the finance department of the Conquering Light of the True Faith was plucking out a hoarder's beard, a tuft at a time, and the miser was noisy about it all.

The Water Boy often sent for Con-

way, asking him about banking, finance, communications of "Feringhistan"; but particularly, the folkways of monarchs. He was a lonely man, this Bacha Sakao, and the only one he could consult without losing caste from displaying ignorance was Conway.

But Schmidt was right. Presently there was revolt. Now that women went veiled again, and men wore turbans so that they could decently touch their foreheads to the earth when they prayed, people remembered their ravished finances.

And whoever had furnished munitions to upset an over-ambitious and over-progressive Afghan king now decided to get rid of the convenient bandit and install a conservative kinsman of the monarch who had run out.

This made no sense to Conway, who did not understand international politics; it made little more to Schmidt who, like every European, does have a shrewd knowledge of all politics save in his own country. But that was how it happened.

A cousin, Ayyub Khan, came from India. He had money. He had guns. No one stopped him at the frontier, an unusual circumstance. Helpful, though not unusual, was the new Shinwari revolt. Any Shinwari tribesman will personally start a revolt for fun, a handful of cartridges, or a loaf of bread.

So Ayyub Khan took the field, and all Afghanistan, starting with the south, rose against the bandit.

"A new king, a legitimate one," Schmidt said. "If he recognizes this contract, its details will have to be revised, and you can get another engineer. It will be no reflection on you that I quit. He will help me north."

However, it was not this easy. Bacha Sakao sent his guard for the two engineers. This was to protect them. He explained very carefully, while his followers evacuated the city:

"You have been my guests for so long that whoever is against me will now kill you, and blame it on my men. So you go with me as long as I have a place to go."

Conway and Schmidt rode east under guard. After a few days, they learned that Bacha Sakao was still in Kabul, using up the last shells he had. All too many had been wasted during the coronation fiesta.

But he covered the retreat as long as he could. Stubbornly, Bacha Sakao defended each pass, but was blown out of each one in turn.

WHEN he finally caught up with the fugitives from Kabul, he was stunned to see how few there were. He had come to the capital in odorous sheepskins; he had left in silks, though these were torn and dirty from mountain warfare.

He was no longer fat. His eyes were haggard, and there was gray in his shaggy beard. Little remained of the rear guard.

"Where are the others?" he asked an officer who was standing near Conway's shelter.

"There are no others, *huzoor*. Only these men from your village. The others have run away. Some went to make peace with your enemies while you guarded the passes to cover their escape."

Conway nudged Schmidt, who was looking pleased. "Wipe off that grin or I'll knock you cross-eyed! Look at the man's face. He *looks* a bit like a king, now."

Schmidt quit smiling. He shook his head and frowned a little. Then he snorted. Derision strengthened some-

thing that had lagged a moment.

"Where do we go now, *huzoor?*" the officer asked.

Bacha Sakao said, "Let us go home, to our own town. I have not been home since I became king." He pointed at the bales of loot from Kabul. "These things will prove that I am a king."

The officer passed the word to the men, and they brightened. They said, "Verily, Ayyub Khan is afraid to follow us into our own mountains."

There was music that night, and the weary handful sang in the teeth of the autumn wind that now whined from the Hindu Kush. The Water Boy had been king all summer.

Schmidt said, "The stinking beggar is taking us as prisoners to show his friends how big he is. He knows Ayyub Khan will chase him all the way to Turkestan. He's lying to these blockheads."

"Someone has to lie to them, or they would fall along the way and be cut down when the cavalry catches up. This man is dirty and ignorant, but he is doing his best. Shut up, Kurt, even if he is keeping you from your what-you-call-duty."

The Water Boy drove his handful, day and night. Maybe he could win. If snow fell in time, the pursuit would have to turn back.

Finally the village in the valley was sighted. Bacha Sakao led them out at sunrise, and with music. For some days, no enemy had been heard. He had outmarched the pursuit, for the time. When the Water Boy sent for him, Conway knew why.

"Ride with me, my infidel friend," he said. "When my kinsmen see that I have ambassadors from Feringhistan with me, they will know I am still a king."

It made Conway blink and choke a little when the saddle drums rolled, and the ragged volleys of musketry were fired in the mud-walled village to welcome Bacha Sakao home. He no longer wondered why the fool wasted time he could use in escaping.

The town turned out. Women leaned from the parapets of mud-walled houses. Bearded mountaineers fired pistols into the air, and others broke from the crowd to do impromptu sword dances in the path of the returning conqueror.

There was a day of feasting. Every man's beard was greasy as his hands and his garments. The town reeked of mutton fat. Of spices. Of burned gunpowder. And every woman had new gowns made of loot from the palace in Kabul.

Bacha Sakao who had once sprinkled the streets now lived in the Khan's palace up on the cliff that commanded the village, and the Khan was proud.

Conway and Schmidt were guarded guests.

The second day's feasting was interrupted when shrapnel blossomed like a puff of cotton against the lead colored sky. Balls spattered against the cliffs, and then the far off *pop-pop-pop-pop* of artillery was heard.

That stopped the fiesta. Men ran around yelling. Sheep were driven to shelter. Women started fires so that hot water and hot oil could be poured on heads of the raiders. They did not understand modern war.

Bacha Sakao looked once at the lead-colored sky, once at the pass that the snow had not blocked. Then he smiled a little at Conway and said, "I could not have escaped them anyway, and I am glad that I had time to stay here and rest."

A sharp eye could just see other mountain batteries arrive and get into

better position. They were well beyond rifle range, and commanded both exits of the valley. They could not only level the houses, but cover the advance of the men in the pass and cut off escape from the town.

Another volley peppered the town. The *sardar* in command knew that with all his advantages, it would be no picnic, mopping up that crowd of mountaineers. Meeting them on their own ground, hand to hand, would be costly. So he sent a courier, and the defenders did not fire.

CONWAY was near the Water Boy when the messenger read the offer that the *sardar* made; Bacha Sakao had never learned to read.

Resist, and we blow your village around your ears; we will cut you down to the last man, woman, and child, and you know that we can do this and that we will do this. But surrender, coming alone to our lines, and our lord the king, Ayyub Khan, promises you your life, and the lives of all the village and of whoever followed you.

The elders and the Khan heard this and they said, "You can go over the mountains, through a pass they cannot hit with shells. We will hold them back, we can."

Another said, "These infidel ambassadors. We will slay them if Ayyub Khan's *sardar* does not spare you. His face will be blackened."

The Water Boy raised his hand. "That would blacken my face, not his." Schmidt had been holding his breath; so had Conway, and they both sighed. "And you men do not know as I do. You do not know how cannons are used. I have used them and I have seen them work. So I surrender."

"A kinsman cannot surrender and ask us to stand by."

The Water Boy seemed to grow in stature. "I am no longer your kinsman, for a king is next to God. All of you have looted where you could, but only I have taken a throne. What I have had is what few men have won and what else in there for me to do?"

"They will kill you!" someone shouted. Others grumbled, "That son of a lewd mother, that Ayyub Khan, how good is his oath? Do not believe him."

Once more he raised his hand, and there was silence. "This thing must be done my way. Lay down your arms. And these two ambassadors are on my head."

He did not speak to the two engineers, or even look at them in passing. He walked out into the courtyard and mounted his slim-legged Turkoman horse. They watched him ride down the steep path to the valley floor.

The men on either side of Conway forgot that he was an infidel whose touch was not quite clean; they jammed against him, and against Schmidt, and no one spoke.

The Water Boy sat straighter than he ever had before. The courier galloped on ahead. Bacha Sakao was half way across the brown plain when he must have seen something that the man on the walls of the *khan's* palace could not see, for he was beyond rifle range.

The Water Boy drew his saber, and held it as on parade. Then the blade dropped, and he crumpled in the middle. The horse bolted, dragging Bacha Sakao for a few yards, until his foot pulled free of the stirrup.

The Water Boy lay there until men came from cover and cut off his head; that, and his body, both trophies to prove to all rebels that a new king ruled.

The army in the pass began to retreat, for there was no longer any need

to take the village. Men cursed and fired from the mud walls, but the range was too great; and an old man said, "He did what was to be done, and who can carry on a blood feud against a king?"

Later, Conway and Schmidt rode to overtake the army. When they passed the place where Bacha Sakao had been shot down, as he must have expected, Conway said, "I think you're right, Kurt. A king *is* next to God. Whether you got that line from them, or whether his spies heard you say it, it's right. I pull in my horns. I'd follow a king myself."

"So you're convinced?"

Conway nodded slowly.

"Sure I am. After meeting the first king for a number of centuries who shouldered the load that justified his existence. The first one who didn't hide behind his people."

"You see," Schmidt said, triumphantly, "the tradition lives."

Conway replaced the sheepskin cap he had lifted. "But you don't see, so I'll tell you. This first king to face an enemy's guns in the past couple centuries was a street sprinkler. Now that you know where to find the right type, good luck when you get home!"

Kurt Schmidt looked back at the red ground and did not know what to say. All the way across the valley, he was trying to think of one who had led his men right to the firing line.

He still did not have any answer when Conway said, "In a week, you'll have your choice. In Kabul."

MEN of DARING by Stookie Allen

HIGH-WIRE DAREDEVILS

THE GREAT WALLENDAS ARE THE 3 BROTHERS-- JOE, HERMAN AND KARL-- WHO, WITH KARL'S WIFE HELEN, FORM A PYRAMID WITH A PAIR OF BICYCLES AND A CHAIR AND RIDE A TIGHT-WIRE AT THE VERY PEAK OF THE "BIG TOP." THEY NEVER PRACTICE "UPSTAIRS"-- TOO RISKY.

ARISTOCRATS OF THE CIRCUS, THE WALLENDAS HAVE NEVER USED A NET (EXCEPT THE SOMEWHAT FUTILE HAND NET THE PROP MEN HOLD) IN FOUR GENERATIONS ON THE HIGH WIRE. CUNEGONDE, THEIR GRANDMOTHER, WALKED THE WIRE AT 70!

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO HELEN ANSWERED THEIR AD FOR "A GIRL WITH COURAGE." THE MOST DANGEROUS PART, SHE SAYS, IS WHEN SHE GROPES FOR KARL'S HEAD WHILE DESCENDING. ONCE, WHILE MOUNTING TO HIS SHOULDER 65 FEET UP IN MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, SHE FAINTED. JOE CAUGHT HER JUST IN TIME. THEY HAD TO LOWER HER BY ROPES.

KARL'S DAUGHTER DOES A GOOD JOB OF BALANCING AT 4!

IN SCHENECTADY A GUY ROPE PULLED AND THE WIRE SLACKED OFF. JOE HELD ON BUT THE OTHERS FELL 30 FEET INTO THE HAND NET. THEY SUFFERED ROPE BURNS BUT WERE BACK ON THE WIRE IN A FEW DAYS.

Mr. Madison's Wars

By THEODORE ROSCOE
Author of "Then Placid John Adams," "Three Men and a Tub," etc.

James Madison

He was an undermuscled little half-pint, that fourth President of ours; but he'd stood off all comers from cold feet to the Grim Reaper, and thrown them for a loss. Then, when his Britannic Majesty and his Satanic Majesty appeared to join forces, he ran for the first time—but it was a two-way Marathon!

I

NOT so long ago, back in 1815, the postman delivered in the City of Washington one of the wackiest letters ever delivered in the United States in that or any other year.

Get the writer's opening description of himself. Quotes:

> ***With the aid and assistance of Divinity, and in the reign of our sovereign, the Asylum of the World, powerful and great monarch, transactor of all good actions, the noblest of men, shadow of God, King of Kings, possessor of Great Forces, emulator of Alexander the Mighty, Emperor of the Earth, to wit: the Sultan of Arabia and Persia, Conqueror son of a Conqueror, Mohammed Khan (may Allah end his life with prosperity while his reign be everlasting and glorious)—I, his humble and obedient servant, actual Sovereign Governor and Dey of Algiers, submitted forever to the orders of Mohammed Khan's noble throne, am Omar Pasha (may my country remain happy and prosperous.)***

Try to brag all that in one breath! Omar, if we're to take his own word for it, has quite a backing (the assistance of Divinity plus the might of Mohammed Khan) and is quite a guy.

We'd like to read his autobiography. Did the possibility of writer's cramp keep him from penning one—imagine his version of *Mein Kampf!*—or was there some other reason?

The letter continues without pausing:

> ***To his Majesty, the Emperor of America, its adjacent dependent provinces and coasts and wherever his government may extend, our noble friend, the support of the Kings of the Nation of Jesus, pillar of Christian sovereigns, most glorious among the princes, elected amongst many lords and nobles —the happy, the great, the amiable James Madison, Emperor of America (may his reign be delightful and glorious, his life long and prosperous); wishing him long possession of his blessed throne, long life and much happiness, Amen.***
>
> ***Hoping that your health is good, I inform you that mine is excellent, thanks to the Supreme Being to whom I constantly address my humble prayers in your behalf.***

Well, that's certainly nice from the eloquent Omar. Apparently he's mistaken the Amer can system of government for some kind of imperial monarchy, but being an Arab he probably

doesn't quite fathom the meaning of "Republic"; whatever he thinks sounds flattering, to say the least.

Letters to our first three Presidents, as a look at their mail will show, were too often addressed in less congenial tones. Remembering the calumnies, criticisms and complaints heaped on the desks of Washington, Adams, and Jefferson—well, James Madison couldn't help warming to this correspondent from far-away North Africa.

Alas, he soon cooled off!

The writer, in true Arab solicitude, discussed the weather. When he finally finished that topic (doubtless fearing there wouldn't be room for his historic missive in our American archives) he got down to business.

He had been, he admitted, very happy to receive our American ambassador, Stephen Decatur, who'd just arrived in Algiers with three warships and a treaty. Our ambassador, Omar assured President Madison, was a charming man. The three warships were pretty.

But the treaty, which said America wasn't going to pay any more tribute to Algiers, just wouldn't do. Would Emperor Madison please send over another treaty right away—a treaty which

Fiery dragons whizzed past him; everything was dust and panic and noise and confusion. It was like the end of the world

allowed the Algerians their privilege of kidnaping and ransoming American seamen—in which case the solid friendship between Algiers and the U.S.A. would continue.

Having come to the point, Omar signed brusquely off:

I hope that with the assistance of God you will answer this letter immediately after you have had a perfect knowledge of its contents. . . .

Requesting only that you will have the goodness to remove your Ambassador as soon as possible, assuring you that such removal will be very agreeable to me. These are our last words to you, and we pray Allah to keep you in his holy guard.

Written in the Year of the Hegira 1231, corresponding to April 1815, and signed in our well-beloved city of Algiers.

Omar, Son of Mohammed,
Conqueror and Great.

YOU don't believe it? You can read it in the American archives, or Ralph Page's *Dramatic Moments In American Diplomacy,* wherein the historian recommends it to all later practitioners in international piracy and blackmail as a model of its kind.

Hitler and Capone have nothing on old Omar; and as the historian points out, the letter is a masterpiece because Omar was a seafaring man. Think of the temptation to use stormy language!

Why, since the Fifteenth Century the Algerian pirates had had a free hand in the Mediterranean. The racket was a winner: the Corsairs merely grabbed whatever vessel came sailing through Gibraltar and snatched the cargo and crew. While the sailors groaned in Algerian dungeons, the Dey wrote nice letters to the governments concerned, demanding ransom.

France, Spain, England, all those European countries paid (fighting among themselves, they didn't have time to wipe up the coast of North Africa) and when American ships started navigating, the United States paid too.

It seems strange to recall that Uncle Sam once put up with such high-handed capers on the part of those Arab hoodlums; but we paid, and through the nose. Up to Madison's time the kick-in was more than seven hundred thousand dollars. Captains cost four thousand dollars. Cabin boys, two hundred dollars.

Visit Algiers and you can still see the holes where many a Yankee sailor starved in chains, waiting for ransom to arrive. If it didn't come he was fed to the sharks. The Dey of Algiers wanted his money on the dot, and more than one poor cabin boy was dunked in that Mediterranean shark-pond when the mailboat was late.

The mailboat was often as not late because our forefathers, swamped with Revolutionary War debts, didn't have the money to pay. They couldn't beat up Algeria, either. Tripoli and Tunis had joined the Dey's mob, and altogether they called themselves the Barbary Pirates.

In 1800 our Navy boasted one first-class warship. Our one admiral, who might have done something about it—John Paul Jones—was dead.

The Algerians had dozens of pirate ships and dozens of pirate admirals. Their ships were fast and murderous as barracudas. Their sails clipped over the seas like the fins of man-eaters.

In hiding, they'd lie in wait at the entrance to the Mediterranean (where the German subs and raiders are lying in wait today) and they'd pounce on a merchant ship like sharks on a minnow. In 1793, just for instance, the Algerians kidnaped one hundred and five Americans.

This was a fine state of affairs, and to make it worse the insatiable Algerian Dey wangled a bonus treaty by which he was to get twenty-one thousand dollars extra as a Christmas present annually.

Congress finally woke up out of the fog and authorized the building of three frigates, and the little Navy attacked Tripoli. But Jefferson, fearing a Napoleonic invasion, had to call the Navy home, and Uncle Sam had to keep on paying.

That made the old Dey laugh, and he kept on raising the ante. Our forefathers had to take it.

Anyhow, the old Dey got fatter and fatter, and his Barbary batch had everybody buffaloed. Their knives were sharp and their whiskers fierce, and there was the mystery around them that surrounds all Moslems.

Yes, Omar had become such a first-class bugaboo that Christian mariners jumped overboard merely at the whisper of his name. His racket was going like a house afire. Safe in his pirate's roost, surrounded by his vast Corsair fleet, he was doing a holiday business.

Then figure his astonishment when there arrived in the harbor of Algiers the aforementioned Stephen Decatur, carrying, instead of the annual Christmas gift, a treaty which said the U.S.A. wouldn't pay him another red cent.

That from his favorite Santa Claus. What a nerve! What a gallon of gall! Here was this skinny hayseed Uncle Sam suggesting the racket was over. This Stephen Decatur with his three picayune warships daring to sail right into Algiers harbor and cock a snoot at the Dey!

Who was this James Madison who dared send over such an envoy? By the beard of the Prophet! it was said this Madison weighed less than a hundred pounds and was the shortest man who ever went to Washington.

The Dey puffed himself up to the size of a Barbary bull. Turban and scimitar included, he weighed about five hundred pounds. Uh huh, it was Omar the Conqueror—he with the backing of Divinity plus the mighty Mohammed Khan.

Then and there he wrote to Mr. Madison that beautiful letter requesting the immediate removal of Ambassador Decatur and the prompt continuance of ransom payments and Christmas gifts.

He was right about Madison's jockey-weight size which made him the smallest President of the United States then or since.

But there were a lot of things he didn't know about James Madison. He didn't know James Madison was a shorthand expert and hated long, flowery letters. He didn't know that some day a great avenue in the biggest city in the world would be named after this James Madison. He didn't know that his prospective shake-down victim was called in America "the great little Madison."

And he didn't know (too bad for him) about Mr. Madison's Wars.

WHEN Dolly Todd was widowed, twenty-six and pretty as a cameo, she wrote to all her friends, "Who is the man Colonel Burr introduced me to last night?"

Dolly's mother ran a genteel boarding house which entertained the best people, but a girl couldn't be too careful. The answers, however, were reassuring. "That is the great little Madison."

Dolly, so history tells us, took to coming down the front stairs whenever Mr. Madison arrived; and often, al-

though she wasn't a great reader, she wore a studious look on her face and had her finger in the pages of a book.

But, as the gossip columns might have put it, who was this "great little Madison" who so easily sparked the famous belle who was later to win the blue ribbon as the most charming First Lady of American History?

Well, forty-three years before he'd been a little shrimp, no bigger than a minute, not at all the kind of kid whose father assures him, "Son, some day you may be President."

No sir, he was so small the learned doctors didn't think he could survive.

It was no fault of theirs that he did. Medicine, too, was an undersized infant in 1751. Although there were a few able physicians like Dr. Benjamin Rush, who campaigned against yellow fever and later signed the Declaration of Independence, the average family doctor knew little more about medicine than that famous quack, Spot Ward.

Healers like Dr. Perkins, who could cure anything with a pair of magic tweezers, roamed the country. It was the heyday of such grifters as Cagliostro, alchemist, necromancer and palm-reader, whose miraculous powers were the talk of Europe till he landed in jail on a charge of impersonating the Almighty.

Germs raced all over the place undetected, and the public relied on bleeding, prayers and goose-grease.

A modern mother would faint at the doctoring given a 1751 baby. You were either born healthy and you lived (comma), or you were born sickly and you died (period).

The doctors looked down on small Mr. Madison and wagged their powder-wigged heads. In their birth certificates they put a big period. Minute-sized Mr. Madison looked up and saw that period. What? Finished already? James Madison clenched his fists and kicked his heels on the pillow, and opened his mouth and squalled, *"Naaah!"*

So Mr. Madison's first war was against germs. Right from scratch he was fighting and kicking fiercely, determined to beat off the thousand and one deadly enemies that assailed all early Americans.

The colic knocked him out, and the crib tried to smother him, and the Virginia malaria got after him, too. The doctors were as dangerous as anything, and it was an uphill fight all the way; but when he was old enough to toddle he was still alive.

You can bet there was something pretty stubborn in this miniature Mr. Madison.

Well, then he found himself in another war. One day he went exploring down to the road, and some boys from the neighboring plantation called him Midget. He didn't know what that meant, but he guessed it was pretty uncomplimentary.

When the boys added, "Sissy!" he charged the enemy. There was a barrage of sticks and stones and persimmons, and Mr. Madison got a beaner. He never told his father where it came from, and that's why there's no record of it in the biographies; but small boys have been picked on since Adam tried to steal his first apple, and you can wager it happened.

All his brothers were bigger than he was, and the skirmishing went right on —families being the same, then as now. Then there were reading, writing and arithmetic, and the professor with the hickory stick behind the chair: tough enemies for any boy.

But James Madison was getting used to enemies; he figured he couldn't compete in athletics, but he could be plenty

athletic mentally, and he'd have to do his fighting with his head.

So he began to train his head as a boxer trains his muscles, and he went after the toughest books he could find. A war with books can be a harder fight than an occasional alley scrap, and Madison got in there and slugged.

He flattened the schoolbooks in apple pie order, and went fighting right along.

"WELL, James Madison, are you quitting your education?" The professor glared one morning through his square-rimmed spectacles. "What do you mean, drawing pictures while I lecture you on English history?"

Mr. Madison, perched on the edge of his chair, held up his slate indignantly. "No sir! These aren't pictures."

"Hieroglyphics! Crude Indian signs! What? Can't you listen without making those bird-like scratchings?"

"Scratchings!" James Madison's turn to glare. "It's a system of writing I've invented. My own device, sir. Quicker than longhand. I've been taking notes on your lecture."

"Notes, indeed. Those indecipherable scribbles are quicker than handwriting! Perhaps you can read to me these notes, Mr. Madison."

"Yes, sir. You named all the wives of Henry the Eighth. You said all the kings of England, including George Third, ruled by divine right."

"So you can actually read those funny curleycues! Humph! What do those scrawls and dashes at the bottom say?"

"That's my own comment, sir. It says I don't believe that kings rule by divine right. Would the Almighty appoint a wicked monarch like Henry the Eighth? Or was the approval of divinity a story invented by the rulers themselves, to scare the common folk into letting them keep power?"

"Good heavens, James Madison, who put such thoughts in your head?" You can imagine the professor's popeyed stare. "Why, that sounds like the treasonable talk one hears in the ale houses these days. Fie! A boy shouldn't ask such questions!"

Well, that anecdote is apocryphal, which means it isn't in the history books; but young James Madison did invent his own shorthand, and there was plenty of such talk in the American colonies at the time, and you can be sure that James Madison was as full of questions as anybody who has a brain.

He went right on asking questions and knocking the stuffing out of easy answers. He was fighting with his head, you see, and he had the sort of mind that punctures fiddlefaddle as a needle punctures a toy balloon.

Quick and sharp as a rapier his mind was, and his fight to win honors at the College of New Jersey—called Princeton today—is not apocryphal. He almost killed himself battling the books, and the doctors sent him home to die.

That made him mad. He was sick of being told he was going to die. He made an end run around the Grim Reaper that hasn't been equalled by a Princeton quarterback since, and he chalked up a record.

He lived longer than all our Presidents save one, and he didn't go off the field till he was eighty-five.

Beating that college death-sentence gave him confidence, and after that he was ready to tackle anything that came along. The Revolutionary War came along, and you can imagine James Madison being first at the recruiting office, and the recruiting sergeant looking him up and down and saying he didn't need a drummer boy.

Drummer boy! Maybe he was too

small for the army, but he could enlist his brains for the fight. And his brains were the kind that made plenty of havoc for the British.

No patriot got farther out in the front line than James Madison; his attacks on tyranny make history to this day. He wrote speeches and documents and protocols enough to swamp any tyrant, and he won himself a seat at the Continental Congress.

Nobody noticed him much, he sat so small in his chair, except Jefferson, who knew a good man when he saw one. Then the other delegates wondered how the devil he wrote things down so fast. No other patriot could write American history with such speed; they marveled at his shorthand, and told him to write the Constitution.

II

THE Revolution was over at Yorktown, but our Republic had to be established, and the struggle to found a democracy was tougher than beating Cornwallis on the battlefield. James Madison pitched in like a Trojan.

What battles in Congress! What political wars! Those old Generals Stupidity, Self-Interest and Prejudice were the enemies, then, and mascot-sized Mr. Madison went right into the trenches after them.

First, he opposed the establishment of a ruling church like the one in England, voting for religious freedom and independent thinking. Like Adams and Jefferson, he was accused of being an atheist, but he knocked General Prejudice for a loop.

General Stupidity reared his wooden head at the Constitutional Convention, and James Madison slapped him into splinters with brilliant argument, meantime taking down all the records in shorthand. Self-Interest tried to kill the Constitution, and James Madison slapped him down, too.

And meanwhile he found time to write our Constitution, besides.

He had to fight like a tiger to get it ratified. Patrick Henry, for one, didn't think it would work. Madison standing up to answer Patrick Henry was like David standing up to answer Goliath; for everyone knows what a brilliant patriot Henry was, the best orator of his time with a voice like thunder under the sky.

But James Madison answered with verbal slingshots that had great old Pat Henry tonguetied with admiration. Singlehanded, little James Madison stood up and won the battle for our Constitution.

So people slapped him on the back and called him "Father of the Constitution" and "the great little Madison," and those were pretty big titles for a fellow of Madison's weight.

He might've retired with the championship, then, and settled down to run a nice, quiet business, but he didn't.

His private affairs were in bad shape, too. People forget that government salaries were mighty thin for some of those early patriots. The average statesman who doesn't take graft (that's the difference between a politician and a statesman) could earn twice as much in big business.

James Madison didn't get royalties on the Constitution; and neglecting his private business to write it, all he got was behind a financial eight-ball. He had to ask his father to pay his bills, and then enemy politicians said he was a ninny who couldn't manage his own affairs.

Did that floor James Madison? Not a bit! It was just another handicap to overcome. It's true the average man

supported by a wealthy parent doesn't amount to a hill of beans. With rotten health to boot, James Madison could have easily become a panty-waist, pill-swallowing hypochondriac.

He might've lolled around taking snuff and writing the milksop romantic poetry of the era. Or more likely he could've turned into a society darling, a fox-hunting Virginia snob.

No sir, he was a fighter! Instead of giving in to such handicaps as a number five shoe and financial trouble, he went straight on looking for new wars to win.

Even when a New York debutante gave him the run-around (did she think he was too small, or his income?) he kept scrapping. He forgot Miss Floyd, as our history books forget her today, and he set out to win the belle of all the town.

He stood at five feet two and weighed a hundred pounds—a colossus of a man!—in 1794 when Colonel Aaron Burr introduced him to beautiful Dolly Todd.

STANDING by the punch bowl, he sized up his chances and surveyed the field. There was Aaron Burr, pale, tall and handsome, a little cavalier in his booted perfection, posing with an elbow on the fireplace mantel.

Gilbert Stuart, the famous portrait painter, with the suave air of the connoisseur and successful artist.

Dapper Dr. Greenwood, long notable as the maker of George Washington's false teeth.

Gallatin, the young financial wizard.

Preble, the crisp young officer who had a future in the Navy.

All those others who bowed over Dolly's hand: young officers back from frontier posts in Pennsylvania; smart New Yorkers; rich Boston scions; distinguished, debonaire or celebrated, all of them. Gad! what made him presume he had a chance?

Written the Constitution? What girl in the world would want a beau called the "Father of the Constitution?" What was a seat in Congress compared to fighting Shawnee Indians in the unexplored Northwest?

He thought, "I haven't got a chance!" and when dashing Major Monroe joined the group about Dolly —sporting, handsome Monroe with the glamour of a Revolutionary bullet still in his shoulder—James Madison's heart sank to his boots.

If only he had a constitution instead of having written one! Besides, he was almost forty-three. Lordy, did he dare—

Well, he saw Dolly's mother looking straight at him from a corner of the room, and he began to waver. And then Dolly was moving toward him, her cheeks pink from all the compliments around her, a book in her hand and that look of contemplation on her face.

James Madison's knees were giving out. He had a glimpse of himself in the wall-mirror; perspiration on his forehead, neck linen awry. His cue—confound it, it was the smallest in the room—was sticking straight out at the back of his head.

For the first time in his life he wanted to run, and he thought of beating a retreat around behind the punch bowl.

Then he pulled himself together. Was he going to give up like a coward? Dash it! he'd never run from anything before. He was scared as he'd never been in his life (if you've ever been a bachelor, you'll know) but he squared his shoulders and set his two-ounce jaw and swept off his three-cornered hat, ready to throw it into the competition.

"Evening, Miss Dolly. I mean, Madam. I mean Dolly." (How the devil did one address a beautiful widow?) "I—would you care to accompany me outdoors for a breath of air?"

"La! The candles do make it warm. I'd be happy to."

Everybody was looking as he offered her his arm, and he felt just like a French royalist on his way to the guillotine. But he kept his chin up, even when he tripped on the carpet near the door and Dolly's mother snorted. His hand fumbled so at the knob he was sure the girl would think he'd had too much punch.

Out on the porch he'd thought it would be easier, but it wasn't. He was hot and cold all over, as if he'd had an attack of malaria. But nobody could say James Madison was afraid.

"Dolly—" It took a heap of nerve just to begin.

"Yes?"

"Dolly, we've only known each other six months, but—"

"But what?"

Well, he'd had tough speeches to make before—standing up in front of the Continental Congress, and that time Patrick Henry—but this time he just couldn't seem to get it out. It stuck in his pocket like something glued. He'd written it down, you understand, knowing he'd never be able to say it but he'd have to read it.

Then it came out of his pocket with a yank that almost sent him off balance over backward.

"Landamercy! James Madison, what funny writing!"

"Funny writing?"

"On that piece of paper. What is it?

"That? Oh, that!" he gulped at the paper. "Why—it's something I just wanted to—to show you. It's—it's shorthand."

"James Madison, is that why you asked me out here—to show me a piece of shorthand?"

"Eh?" And then his whole life seemed to pass before him. He saw himself beating the doctors at the cradle, the bigger kids at the front gate, the professor, that college death-sentence, the Tories of the Revolution, the enemies of democracy.

He straightened himself up to five feet two and he didn't care whether they called him the Father of the Constitution or not; he wasn't going to back out now, no matter the handicaps or whatever the competition.

"No, ma'am! Dolly! I came out here to say—"

"I accept, Jimmy darling. You're so wonderful! I'd just love to be called Dolly Madison!'

NOW if this were a Hollywood story, it would fade out here with a blur of soupy kisses, whereas in real life your average man would have settled down to live happily ever after and grow a paunch.

They swamped James Madison with presents and gave him a seat in the Virginia legislature. The weather was delightful—Dolly made lovely juleps—life was easy as a rocking chair in the cool white mansion at Montpelier. Lord knows, a fellow who's written the Constitution and married Miss America has done enough.

But the rocking chair didn't get James Madison. Not much! James Madison was a fighter, and his latest victory put him in fine fettle, ready for the very next thing that came along. That was long Tom Jefferson, riding over breathless from Monticello in his gig, and the proposition he put up to James Madison was a test for anybody.

"Jim"—he put his hand affection-

ately on James Madison's shoulder, and looked down, anxious—"I know you've done more'n your share in laying the foundations of this country, but a Republic has to keep going once it's started, and America needs your help."

"What's wrong?" said James Madison, quick, like the fighter he was. "Where?"

Jefferson shook his head. "John Adams says he's going to retire after the Presidency, bitter about politics as he is, and—well, we can't ask George Washington to take the responsibility again, so the boys have asked me to run for President, next election. If I'm elected will you be my Secretary of State?"

"Secretary of State!" said James Madison, giving a gasp.

"It's the devil of a job, Jimmy, most important in the Cabinet," Jefferson admitted. "You'll have the whole confounded international situation on your hands, and the international situation is getting terrible. There's those pirates in the Mediterranean, and there's the British. And Napoleon's going to make trouble as sure as anything."

"The pirates, the British and Napoleon!" James Madison echoed.

"The pirates are kidnaping our sailors, and the British claim they own the Atlantic Ocean, and Napoleon's certain to try and invade us through Louisiana. It all comes under the Secretary of State, Jimmy, and it's a whale of a job and a thankless job," said Jefferson.

"Big and thankless," James Madison echoed.

"Cynics will say you took it because you're ambitious. They won't see that an ambitious man would pass the buck because of the blame; and whatever you do, there'll be a heap of blame," said Jefferson.

"Trouble and blame." James Madison nodded.

"There's nothing in it for you, and you won't have a minute to yourself," said Jefferson. "Napoleon; the British; those pirates—they're cannon balls, red-hot cannon balls!—and you've got to juggle them all at the same time. Drop one of them, and America may be finished. I know you won't want the job," said Thomas Jefferson.

"Who's first?" said James Madison, thinking of the pirates, the British and Napoleon, and rolling up his bantam sleeves. "Wait till I call Dolly and tell her I'm going to be Secretary of State. How soon do we begin?"

That was the fettle he was in, and he tackled that job of Secretary of State just the way he'd tackled everything else. Keeping those red-hot cannon balls in the air would have exhausted many a giant, but it didn't exhaust James Madison.

For eight long years he juggled that international situation—the State Department brought America through in safety—and when he leaned back finally to get his breath, it was like an armistice on a battlefield.

JEFFERSON was right about the job's being tough; the office had been like a hornet's nest. That brush with Napoleon had been close, but Louisiana was now marked "American Territory." The seas weren't closed to American shipping, and Yankee traders still coasted the Mediterranean.

Of course everyone hadn't been satisfied. When Jefferson bought Louisiana instead of fighting for it, politicians had shouted misuse of public funds, and the New England papers had cried havoc, and William Cullen Bryant had written a poem telling Jefferson to resign and go wade in his

swamp. Such were the opinions of poets and politicians.

The Britons were still bullying American seamen, threatening the three warships in the United States Navy with their eight hundred. The British people wanted justice even if their rulers didn't: the new Ambassador Erskine was promising adjustment of marine laws and reparation for the attack of the H.M.S. *Leopard* on the U.S.S. *Chesapeake*.

But big business men in Boston favored truckling to London, fearing loss of British contracts. Such were the opinions of Bostonians and big business.

Captain Preble and young Stephen Decatur had distinguished themselves in the Mediterranean by kicking the bottoms out of the pirate fleet of Tripoli—such a daredevil stunt that Lord Nelson, the great British admiral, declared it the bravest naval exploit of the age.

Lord Nelson went on to say, "There is in the handling of those American ships a nucleus of trouble for the navy of Great Britain," and because of that famous quotation, James Madison had summoned the tiny navy home to build it bigger.

Pacifists deplored such naval action, and war-mongers said it hadn't gone far enough. Such were the opinions of preachers and army men.

But you couldn't satisfy everybody, and James Madison knew he'd done a good job. He tore 1808 from the calendar, and was just reaching for his hat to go home to Dolly, when Jefferson burst in to hand him the toughest job of all.

To hand it thus:

"Congratulations, Jimmy Madsion! We've just nominated you for our next President!"

III

RIGHT off the bat there was the Creek War. Then the war with the Shawnees and Tecumseh. Then wars on the edge of Florida and Louisiana, in the Northwest Territory, the whole frontier afire with Indian Wars.

Right off the bat there were political wars—sectionalism! The South refusing to aid the West; New England refusing to aid New York; all shouting against each other in Congress, and Massachusetts threatening to break away from the nation.

Right off the bat there was fighting with British frigates at sea; and in Washington, James Madison found himself up against Mr. Copenhagen Jackson.

This Mr. Copenhagen Jackson (never to be confused with our Andy Jackson or Stonewall Jackson) considered himself the biggest figure in America at the time. Priggish, proud and something of a Pimpernel—a cross between a snob and a conspirator—he stepped elegantly off the boat from London to replace the friendly Ambassador Erskine.

His instructions were to undo the good work of the previous British ambassador, to show the Americans a thing or two, and to put James Madison in his place.

He started by writing down his opinions for the historians; Washington was a miserable, one-horse town, and the natives were astonished at his elegant carriage, a Landau barouche.

"Madison," he wrote, "is a plain and rather mean-looking little man of great simplicity of manners." He was amused, he said, by the clumsy social life in America, and he said Dolly Madison must have been good looking when she was a bar maid.

He finished off with, "Our country has been made . . . the instrument of these people's cunning. I wish to teach them not to presume on my patience in a similar manner."

Such were the writings (you can read them in the records today) of that famous British ambassador, Mr. Copenhagen Jackson; and James Madison must have looked mean, for a fact, when confronted by that snob-nosed cockalorum.

With all those wars on his hands he didn't have time for fancy diplomacy and varnished heels, and it didn't take him long to find out Mr. Copenhagen Jackson was a heel.

Mr. Jackson drove up to the Executive Mansion one night in his wonderful Landau barouche, and requested an interview. All gold braid and furbelows of court dress, he was ready to give James Madison that lesson in presumption, and the interview is historic.

"The British Ambassador to see the President."

"Send him in."

A clack of polished boots—a stir in the doorway—Mr. Copenhagen Jackson bowing from the hips—a polite nod from the little figure in Republican black.

"Ah, there, Mr. President"—you can picture this Jackson's stare climbing James Madison's five-feet-two like a sneer—"my compliments and those of my government. You are looking well this evening."

"I would like to return the compliment, sir. Have a chair?"

"Ah, thank you, thank you"—lounging down with crossed leg; arranging handkerchief in lace cuff. "And now, Mr. President, may I dispense with formality and get straight to the matter in hand?"

"The straighter the better, sir. We Americans have neither the time nor the inclination for much formality."

"Indeed." Mr. Jackson's smile of lofty understanding dusted the map-littered table, the dispatch-cluttered desk, the battered waste basket, threadbare carpet and ink-stained escritoire of the homely office. "I quite understand how busy you must be. The frontier. The Indians. Haw."

"And the high seas," James Madison added. "The high seas."

"THE high seas precisely. Mr. President. It is of those seas I wish to speak. It seems our previous British ambassador was a little too previous.

"In giving you the impression that England was going to revoke the rule which gives British warships the right to search American vessels for deserters from the British Navy, my predecessor acted without authority.

"I am empowered by my government to disavow this action. Also, unless America lifts the recent boycott on British goods, there is to be no reparation for the *Chesapeake.*"

"But the former British ambassador assured me—"

"He acted without authority of the home government, Mr. President. England shall continue to search your ships for British deserters."

"Our ships are manned by Americans, sir! If a few deserters from the hard life of the British Navy join up with our merchant marine, it is scarcely the fault of our government. And it is American sailors who are shanghaied into your Navy, instead."

"I shan't argue the point, Mr. President. My navy operates within British marine law. In this respect, may I review the *Leopard-Chesapeake* affair. H.M.S. *Leopard* signaled your ship to stop. The *Chesapeake* refused. Quite

legal for the *Leopard* to fire upon your vessel. Some American sailors—a pity, I am sure—were killed, but had your ship obeyed orders this accident would not have occurred."

"American seamen, Mr. Jackson, are not given to obeying British orders. Furthermore, this unwarranted attack took place in American waters. All of which is beside the matter, Mr. Jackson. The point is, the previous British ambassador promised a proper settlement."

"And I repeat he was acting without proper authority."

James Madison held himself in by scratching little dashes and curleycues on a pad. Mustn't lose his temper with this popinjay. The man's attitude was almost as insufferable as that of his government.

"Then, Mr. Jackson, your government now refuses to accredit the promises of its previous ambassador?"

"We do not admit to those promises, Mr. President."

"I am afraid," James Madison said, holding himself in, "that the United States will find this intolerable. Great Britain offers a settlement, and we accept it. Then next week England withdraws the offer."

"I insist our envoy had no right to make such an offer!"

"Your government has no other explanation, then?"

Mr. Copenhagen Jackson was annoyed. Really, this undersized fellow's questioning of the British government was rude. As he wrote afterward in his official report, *Madison is obstinate as a mule, and he takes his stand on our former ambassador's arrangement which he denies our right to disavow. I took it up in a style that brought him in some degree to his senses.*

"Let us not mince words, Mr. President. You know very well that the former British ambassador exceeded his authority. In effect, his offer was a fraud on our home government. Take care we do not think you were a deliberate party to this fraud!"

"Party to a fraud?" said James Madison, scratching shorthand like fury to repress an explosion. "Mr. Jackson, this country does not go in for diplomatic frauds. But we are not unaware of the diplomatic trickery of the present British Government.

"Too often you make promises on Thursday only to break them Friday—make agreements which are later to be disavowed—sign treaties only with the intention of tearing them up should they come to prove embarrassing."

"Really!" Mr. Copenhagen Jackson rose from his chair. "But I think it is the present American Government which lies. I am sure you were well aware that our former ambassador had no right to make full agreements with you. You would hold us deliberately to a fraudulent reparation!"

Rigid-jawed, hard-eyed, an exclamation point of iron, the mean-looking little Mr. Madison was on his feet.

"I will hold you personally to nothing, Mr. Jackson! The American Government does not accept such insinuations from a foreign ambassador. Any further communications from your government will be accepted only from another envoy. You will remove yourself from Washington immediately, and kindly remove your Landau barouche with you!"

So it's down in history that Copenhagen Jackson removed himself and his Landau barouche, taking time out only to write: "I came prepared to treat with a regular government and have had to do with a mob and mob leaders."

He didn't remove himself far enough

for James Madison, though. He removed himself to Boston, Mass., where our history books regretfully recall how he was wined and dined by the pro-British faction and kissed by anti-Madison politicians.

Some weeks later James Madison received a startling piece of news. Mr. Copenhagen Jackson was promising the Boston politicians that if New England broke away from the Union they'd get plenty of British help. Mr. Jackson's agents were making similar suggestions in Louisiana.

"Dolly," James Madison told his wife, "that man Jackson has got to go!" And he wrote a note in shorthand faster than he'd ever written anything before: a note deporting Mr. Jackson and his Landau barouche back to Europe, and warning England that such underhand diplomacy would bring stern reprisals.

Receiving his walking papers, Mr. Copenhagen Jackson lifted his nose. "It will all end in talk only, of which these Americans are mighty fond," said Mr. Copenhagen Jackson.

But the voices that talked were guns. It all ended in the War of 1812.

IV

THEY called it Mr. Madison's War —when it was going badly. When it was going well they called it the War of 1812, or something dignified like the Second War of American Independence.

But mostly it went badly, and along with calling it his war, they called him not "the great little Madison" but "withered little applejohn" and "pore wee Jimmy."

James Madison found himself fighting the hardest war of his career, the strangest, cockeyedest war in American history.

To begin with the war was ridiculous; one clear-thinking English diplomat could have settled the thing with a pen. But Copenhagen Jackson's elevated nose was typical of the English Tory government, too haughty to deal with a homespun Republic.

Pride refused concessions to a smaller country. Great Britain made thundering gestures, biting off her nose to spite her face, you might say; Clay and Calhoun thundered back; then when concessions were made, the mailboat was late, and the war was on. They called it Mr. Madison's War.

Did you know New England almost seceded from the Union? There was James Madison fighting to free the seas, and New England, which did most of the shipping, not caring whether the seas were freed or not.

What, cried the ship-owners, were the losses of a few sailors compared to the business losses they'd suffer in a war!

Ship-owners have never been too solicitous of their crews, as anyone knows who's been a sailor (up to a few years ago a seaman's quarters on a merchant ship were worse than a bed in a flop house) and those New England shippers didn't give a hoot about their seamen.

They refused to buy Liberty Bonds. They sold arms to the British; smuggled supplies to the Redcoats in Canada. Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut refused to mobilize the militia.

Yes, sir, they called a convention at Hartford and threatened to break away from the United States. They called it Mr. Madison's War.

Along the Great Lakes they called it Mr. Madison's War, too. The British began invading from Canada, and the American army fell back. Transports bogged down; Congress couldn't

raise funds; soldiers deserted their posts; undisciplined troops ran away.

The Secretary of War slept in bed till noon and mislaid dispatches. General Wilkinson, commander-in-chief, took so long reporting from New Orleans to Buffalo that Major Monroe declared he must've crawled there on his hands and knees.

While Wilkinson fumbled the ball along Lake Ontario, the British captured Detroit—our Detroit commander was courting a plump widow in Boston—and his second in command promptly handed the British Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin.

The Indians broke loose from New Orleans to the Ohio. The Mississippi was bottled up. The American generals didn't know what to do. They called it Mr. Madison's War.

The British laid an Atlantic coast blockade, and sugar sold at twenty-seven dollars a pound in Philadelphia. Coffee vanished from the tables in New York; society ladies went without Paris hats and parasols. Butchers shut their doors. Bakers sold out. Candlestick-makers failed. They called it Mr. Madison's War.

But where the odds were heaviest, our Navy gave a good account of itself. You bet it did. It wasn't any bigger than James Madison's hand, but it grabbed right out to take the British whale by the throat.

U.S.S. *Constitution,* first crack, knocked the stuffing out of H.M.S. *Guerrière.* U.S.S. *Wasp* stung the life out of H.M.S. *Frolic.*

Then U.S. sloop *Essex* shot up H.M.S. *Alert* before *Alert's* crew knew what had hit her, and the Tory Admiralty woke out of that shock just in time to hear that U.S.S. *United States* had massacred H.M.S. *Macedonian,* and the tiny American Navy bid fair to sink all eight hundred warships of Britain's fleet.

THE British Navy got mad at that, and sent an Armada that floated like an iron wall around the United States. They stopped our gunboats, but they'd never heard of privateers.

Privateers? Fast little ships of American pine, low-hung, racing-rigged, narrow in the beam. Out of our beleaguered ports they dashed like whippets to attack a herd of Great Danes.

They went through the British blockades with the speed of wind and light, taunting the big frigates with their spray. Armed sometimes with but a single gun, they sailed rings—yes, rings!—around the British warships; dashed out into the Atlantic and laid a counter blockade around England.

Prize after prize fell to these unexpected raiders; great battleships were raked by their wildcat claws; merchantmen were scuttled from China to Cape Horn; British cargoes captured.

They captured Wellington's pay-money for the British troops leaving Waterloo. Gold dust from Africa and rare freight from the West Indies. They captured the British admiral's pants. They called it The Second War of American Independence.

Well, James Madison didn't care what they called it as long as they won it; and he pitched in as if it were all his own war, for a fact. He fought to keep New England in the Union. He fought to get action from Congress. He fought to keep his Cabinet together.

For two years he fought like fury against overwhelming odds, but he couldn't win a war as big as that single-handed. The news got worse every day, and finally came a message that the British had landed an army to attack Washington.

"Dolly"—James Madison drove his small fist into his palm—"we've got to win! America can't go on forever taking orders from European countries. We'll never be a united nation till we stand up on our own. The British must never capture our nation's capital!"

"Jemmy, Jemmy," she patted his arm. "It's almost nine o'clock. Please don't worry. Please come up to bed."

He looked at the flag draped over the trophy case—the battle-flag taken from the *Macedonian*. "If only the army would fight as well as the navy! Our troops are in terrible condition. The young officers blame the older ones, calling them sluggards, and the old ones call the young ones untrained and insubordinate. I don't know what to do about General Wilkinson. There's a petition to have him removed, and—"

"Jemmy, you can't go on like this, working day and night—"

"Did you ever hear of such a war? It remains for a Quaker militia captain to beat the British along Lake Ontario, and the Governor of Ohio to whip the Indians. If only my whole army were made up of Friends and governors.

"And that wild fellow, Andy Jackson—they call him a frontiersman who's always fighting duels—let him duel the British, I say. I'm going to promote all those men, and every jealous old gaffer in the army will complain—"

"Jemmy, please come to bed. You're worn to skin and bone."

"They've got to forget personal glory, Dolly. They've got to forget sectionalism. We must all stand together and fight for a single cause—the United States of America.

"But New England's selling out to Great Britain. Nobody's supporting the Treasury.

"Ah, these business men and anti-democracy politicians—they'd have me surrender the country tomorrow for five dollars! Surrender the United States? Never!"

"Jemmy, you haven't slept for a week. Are you coming—?"

James Madison paused to set his jaw and roll up his sleeves. There were dark circles under his eyes and he was tired enough to drop, but they called it his war, and he was going to win it.

"In a little while, Dolly, in a little while. Will you put some fresh candles on my desk? And open that window? Lordy, what a hot night, even for August."

"Oh, Jemmy—and I've made you a new nightcap—"

"But I've got to write all those letters, Dolly. And three state papers, and instructions to our ambassador in Russia, and twenty-five army dispatches, and a note thanking Commodore Perry for his victory on Lake Erie, and a speech to the Printer's Guild, and an appeal for volunteers and an address to Congress.

"But I'll hurry. I'll do it in shorthand."

WELL, he wrote and wrote and wrote, but he couldn't seem to get anywhere even with shorthand; for every time he answered one dispatch another popped up, and most of the war news was bad.

Midnight, the candles guttered low, and the curtains hung like dishrags in the hot dark of the window. Everybody else in Washington could be abed, but not the President.

Yes, Secretary of War Armstrong was snoring in his four-poster, and Commander-in-Chief Wilkinson was asleep somewhere in a tent, but the

British were somewhere near the capital, and James Madison was on the job like a sentry, as he'd been on the job every night since the war began.

He was fagged. Mighty fagged. His little cue hung limp; lack of sleep bleared his eyes. The weight of all America was bowing his shoulders, and despite shorthand his fingers suffered writer's cramp.

But nobody could say James Madison wanted to throw up the sponge. When his eyes bleared and prickled, he thought of George Washington's vigil at Valley Forge. When his fingers ached he thought of Adams and the Declaration of Independence. When his shoulders bent under a world of responsibility, he thought of Jefferson saying, "The Tree of Liberty must be watered with human blood."

No, he couldn't ease up on this war a minute; for he wasn't fighting germs, now, or an inferiority complex, or ill health, or against Greed, Stupidity and Prejudice—he was fighting all those wars put together, and he was fighting for the United States of America. His pen scratched on and on and on, and one candle after another melted away.

Off across the town the night-watch called; some horsemen galloped up Pennsylvania Avenue; a detachment of militia marched past the President's window, all out of step and singing.

Oh say, Bonny Lass, would you live in a barrack—
Would you marry a soldier and carry his wallet?
Oh yes, I will do it and think no more of it—
A soldier I'll marry and carry his wallet—

James Madison listened to the voices fade away; the tramping died out; the capital was quiet—then there was only the scratching of his pen. At last he put it down and looked up wearily.

Go to bed? Why, it was dawn. He walked tiredly to the window for a breath of early morning air; raised his head at a rumble somewhere in the sky. It was going to storm?

"Mr. President! Mr. President!"

He hadn't heard the door burst open behind him, and he spun around dizzily, startled by the man there, thinking, "Too much quinine!" Then he shocked wide awake as he recognized his mud-spattered visitor.

"What is it, General Winder?"

"They've landed in Chesapeake Bay! They've captured Bladensburg! The British are coming! The British are coming!"

NOW one version has it that Winder kept right on going, right through Washington and so on out of American history. Another has it that he scrammed only as far as Virginia (he was in charge of the capital's defense, you'll remember) where he blamed it all on Secretary of War Armstrong. As well he might, for after it was all over Major Monroe found Armstrong hiding in a barn, which was pretty thin conduct for our fat Secretary of War.

Never mind those two! We do know about James Madison. First he called for his Cabinet, then he called for his carriage, and he took the Bladensburg Road straight out to the heart of battle, as he'd always charged the enemy since the day he was a mite.

As the carriage swerved and careened up the sandy road through the forest, he could hear the swelling gunfire. His Negro coachman wanted to turn back, but James Madison wasn't that kind.

Someone told him the thunder he'd heard at dawn was the exploding of Chesapeake gunboats blown up by the Americans to keep them from the British.

The battle roar grew louder, and James Madison cried at the coachman to lather the horses. He hadn't been told the British were that close to Washington. Frantic citizens had been digging trenches for a week, but Armstrong hadn't believed the Redcoats would attack overland.

They were attacking overland, all right: James Madison could hear them coming, and all at once he stood upright, aghast, in his carriage. Figures were bolting across the roadway ahead, throwing down their muskets in flight.

Men came bounding like rabbits through the woods. The ground all around was littered with discarded powder horns, canteens, ramrods, drums and knapsacks and bayonets and cast-off equipment.

James Madison had expected to see Redcoats running; the coats of those fugitives were homespun!

"Good God, sir!" James Madison shouted at his aide who was riding alongside. "That can't be American militia. They're retreating!"

Cannon crashed somewhere ahead; the horses reared; and before the aide could answer, another squad of militiamen came pouring out of the forest, fleeing pellmell past the carriage.

"Stop! Stop!" James Madison cried, beside himself, but his voice was too small to penetrate the din, and the runners went by in high gear.

James Madison, who'd never run from anything, couldn't believe his eyes. He yelled at his driver not to spare the horses, and the carriage went bouncing and careening smack out into the battlefield. Through clouds of dust and gunsmoke it careened until the coachmen pulled up sharp on the slope of a valley where James Madison could see it all.

Across the valley the Redcoats were lined up in martial array, their ranks moving slowly toward a ragged, gray line of Americans that fired in panic and fell back. Behind the Redcoats, Bladensburg village was burning, sending up a pillar of smoke.

On a hill behind the Americans, a company of brave sailors from the blown-up gunboats held their ground, firing three cannon at the oncoming British parade. Cannon balls whistled across an intervening creek.

Smoke belched from the iron guns. Grapeshot whined. Muskets banged. Bugles rang brazen from the British line, and there was a wild yell as Redcoat skirmishers rushed the creek bridge and American militia fled for dear life.

That yell came from James Madison, standing up at five feet two in his carriage. "Where's Winder? Where's our commander? Those sailors aren't afraid! Why are our soldiers running?"

No one heard him. If anyone did, he didn't have the breath to reply. At valley bottom, five thousand Americans were hollering in panic, and as the Redcoats charged, the panic became a rout.

Captains threw down their swords and dashed for cover. Cavalrymen clutched their mounts about the neck and were gone with the wind. The militia's ragged line broke into five thousand separate pieces.

Only the sailors with their salvaged cannon held their hill; the army went by James Madison in one terror-stricken stampede.

James Madison stared in a daze of horror and anguish, for it wasn't an army breaking up around him, but the United States of America.

"Fly! Fly!" As they rushed by the carriage, the militiamen wheeled and pointed shaky fingers. "They're coming! Fly for your life!"

"But they're only the Redcoats!"

James Madison's voice was like a dented toy trumpet trying to defy the crack of Doom. "They're Redcoats, and you're Americans! Stand your ground! Stand and fight!"

He looked around wildly for a sword, a flag, anything to stop the rout. "Fight! Fight!" he wailed. "Fight for your United States of America!" But there wasn't a shred of Old Glory anywhere to be seen, and cries of terror drowned him out; and whether we like to remember it or not, those American soldiers of the War of 1812 went right on running in panic.

BRITISH bullets crooned over James Madison's head, but he wasn't afraid of bullets just then. It was the terror on the faces of those soldiers that appalled him—those men whose fathers had fought the Revolution. Had the spirit of '76 become a ghost? Had the cradle of liberty bred a race of sheep?

It was a bad moment for James Madison when he saw his army running like that; but then he saw something worse. Something that made him think his brain was playing mad pranks with his eyes. He saw why five thousand militiamen were running from the Redcoats as if they were devils unleashed from Tophet; and he wanted to run himself!

Out over the British line arched a streak of green fire—a streak of green fire that whizzed high in the sky and dragged a tail of bright sparks through the sunshine. Zooming and looping like a bat it came, all flame and smoke and a noise such as he'd never heard.

Straight over James Madison's head it whistled, for all the world like Haley's comet; and when it landed in a squad of Marylanders beyond the carriage, they howled and fell on their faces.

Instantly it was followed by another whizzing monster, this time a red one that lashed a long tail of crimson smoke. Then the air was alive with the hissing, whizzing things; they rushed across the valley like a horde of aerial lizards—green, orange, purple, scarlet, blue.

"Meteors!" a soldier screamed at James Madison. "They're firing comets at us! They carry them in their knapsacks! The British are shooting stars!"

Well, it was pretty terrifying, even to James Madison. Grape or cannon balls wouldn't have moved him, but meteors!

The cue stood up on the back of his head. They weren't meteors, either, but more like fiery dragons, and when they landed on the ground they jumped and scuttled around like frenzied snakes.

In the air they made a fizzing, rushy whistle, leaving a wake of staggering fumes. *Whiz-whoosh! Whiz-whoosh!* you could hear them coming. Some flamed up a mile in the sky, and some zigzagged close to the ground, whiplashing through grass and underbrush. He saw one chase a soldier across a briar patch like a hoopsnake after a sparrow.

The sweat broke on James Madison's forehead as it would on anybody's when you see something you've never seen before. He turned to ask his aide what it was, but his aide wasn't there to be asked.

"It's the end of the world!" his Negro coachmen wailed. "Yes suh, Mistah President, it's Judgment Day!"

All over the valley the fiendish things were flying. All over the valley the American army was running. It was like that chaos the Seventh Day Adventists said was going to overtake the world, but it seemed worse than Judgment Day to James Madison, for it looked like the end of America.

He saw his Negro driver jump so fast he appeared to vanish in midair, and there was one of those monsters flying straight at the Presidential carriage—a winged dragon with a gushing, fiery tail.

Lucky James Madison was short, for it wasn't in him to duck. Right over his hat it whistled—five feet three, it would've got him!—and swerved like a demon to dive at three militia captains towering behind a split-rail fence. The horse reared and nighed in terror. James Madison pawed and strangled, enveloped in a funnel of nauseous pink smoke. Black Sam caught the reigns to save the carriage from turning turtle, and after that James Madison never quite knew what happened.

HIS eyes were full of tears from the fumes. His nose stung with a smell like powder and burnt paper. Everything was dust and panic and noise and confusion; and when he came to his senses, there was his coachman back on the driver's seat whipping the horses—soldiers clinging to the whiffletree—two Cabinet members hanging on astern—and the carriage going like hell and maria back to Washington.

Do you think James Madison liked that? But the American army was ahead of him, and he couldn't go back and fight the British single-handed—not an army with wizard artillery that fired meteors and winged monsters.

It was touch and go with that barrage behind him, and he reached the capital just in time.

Dolly had set up a meal on such plates as the servants hadn't buried, but there wasn't time to eat it. The militia had fled, and most of the citizenry, and those Redcoats with their infernal bombardment were coming up Pennsylvania Avenue.

"I'll stay!" James Madison swore to Dolly. "Run into the woods with George Washington's picture, and have someone save the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence! I don't care if they've got all the terrors of the zodiac to bombard us with. The stars in our flag are more to me than all the comets in the sky! I'll stay and fight them all!"

Dolly looked at the little man standing there in bitter despair, and then she looked out of the window at the horde of redcoated invaders. They resembled the troops of Mars, and they showered the housetops with those fiery comets as they came.

"You can't stay and be captured!" she cried. "You're the President of the United States—the head of your country! And you've always said one's head was what was important, James Madison, for if one lost that, all was lost!"

She was taking George Washington's picture out of its frame, and James Madison ran to help her. William Morris darted in from somewhere with the Declaration of Independence in his hand. "Mr. President, we've got to run for it!"

Dolly rolled up the portrait and tucked it under her dress, and just in time they got out by the back door. How they reached the woods in the very nick; how James Madison and brave Dolly concealed themselves for three days in a pine-screened hut some seventeen miles from Washington, while Morris hid the Declaration of Independence in a haymow; how the Redcoats entered the capital with such wizardish ammunition as the American militia had never beheld; and how Admiral Cockburn, the British commander, sat down in the Executive Mansion and finished James Madison's supper, then gave orders to burn the

town—all that is one of the bitterest and least read chapters in American History.

Yes, our militia ran away and left the President and his wife to save themselves, and the Redcoats took Washington like troops down from Mars, and Cockburn himself set fire to the Executive Mansion—you can find all that in your history books.

But you can't find this. Maybe you can't find it because, as this story has it, all the records were burned in that history-making fire.

BUT you don't need any record to tell you James Madison's feelings that night out there in the forest, homeless with his wife—his house, his capital and his country in flames behind him.

You can picture him in the doorway of that hut watching the crimson sky, while the tears rolled unchecked down his face.

Over Washington the sky was like a heating stove lid, its crimson flush spreading over the night. The heart of America was in that pyre, and it seemed to James Madison as if his own heart were going to ashes.

Dolly came over from the crude hearth where she'd brewed some tea, but James Madison just couldn't drink it. He could only stand there heartbroken with his face all pinched, while the tears splashed down into the cup.

"I can't drink it," he told Dolly miserably. "I'm sick. I've always been an invalid. I feel that I'm going to die."

"Then go out there and chop some wood, quick!" said Dolly, practical. "You've malaria chills coming over you, and you'll need a log fire. Chop some wood, quick, while I make up a bed."

"I couldn't swing the axe," James Madison groaned. "I'm not strong enough. Look at the size of me. I'm not big enough to cut down a tree."

"Then drink this tea while I do it myself," said Dolly. "Come on, Jemmy! Bundle up in this blanket and drink all of this tea."

"Don't bother over me." James Madison shook his head. "I'm not worth your trouble, Dolly, and I've never been. You're beautiful and wonderful, and you should've married someone else. I'm not good enough to touch your hand."

Well, Dolly Madison stood back at that, never having heard such talk before. "James Madison," she demanded, "what's come over you? You're no more an invalid than you've ever been. As for size, you're the biggest man in America right now! And I won't have my husband telling me I should've married someone else."

James Madison shook his head, small and sad. "Don't you see I've lost the war?" he groaned. "At least I've lost the country's capital, that's the same as losing the war. I've beat germs and books and won elections and debates and all the other fights I've ever had; but this time I've lost, and—and I've never lost a war before."

He sighed deeply.

"No, you've never lost a war before!" said Dolly Madison, squaring back. "And maybe it's just the thing right now you need. Listen to me, James Madison! No man can really call himself a winner until sometime he's been beaten. No fighter can really rise up until he's been once knocked down. All those other victories were easy for you because you'd never lost a contest.

"No man is worth his salt who's never once been licked. It's a licking that shows a man he can really take

it," said Dolly Madison. "You've got to lose once before you can learn how to win."

JAMES MADISON saw the truth in that, and drank his tea—a whole pot of it—shamefaced at his outburst. "I ought to be hanged like Guy Fawkes!"

He jumped up and swung his arms. "There's Washington burning and I sit sniveling—a man my size and fitness with a grand wife and a grand country to fight for. Clear the table, Dolly, and fetch out all those state papers I brought.

"And get yourself some sleep because we're going to be busy tomorrow. You'll be packing up, and I'll be fighting at the head of my army, and I promise you in three days we'll be back in the Capital!"

So he was writing shorthand like anything when Dolly went to sleep with a smile; pawing through his papers and documents and dispatch cases, signing official orders and penning a new call for volunteers.

Frogs chirped outside, and there was the tramp, tramp, tramp of the loyal sentry on guard, and after a while he didn't even hear the random shots of enemy search-parties hunting for him. But all at once he jumped up.

"My notes on the Constitutional Convention! The Bill of Rights! I've forgotten my notes and the great Bill of Rights!"

He didn't yell it out, but he cried it out in his mind, stunned by the disaster. Yes, he'd left them back there in the capital. The only records of the great convention, and the very bulwark of American democracy—back there in that blazing, burning town.

Why, right now the Redcoats might be throwing them on the bonfire. Right now they might be crumbling into ashes. It seemed to James Madison as if that were the last straw, and he stood there staring at the fire-reddened sky, sick at heart all over again.

Then he stiffened up with a snap. Maybe the looters hadn't found them yet. Maybe they hadn't yet been burned.

"Sweet Land of Liberty! If there's a chance—!"

James Madison looked over at Dolly, smiling in her sleep, and he knew that smile of confidence was for him. It said he wasn't any invalid or a midget, either; it said he was the biggest, toughest, winningest fighter in America.

You can't find this in the history books, because history books don't tell things like this; but this story has it that James Madison grabbed for his hat like a bobcat, and tiptoed out like a panther, and came up behind his scared sentries so swift and silent they thought he was a mountain lion.

He told those loyal sentries to guard Dolly with their last ounce of vigilance, and he slipped off into the woods without saying where he was going. Soon as he was in the timber, he wrapped himself in his cape and ran.

He'd never been an athlete, but his small legs flew like Olympic champions, and they carried him bee-line for Washington where the night was as red as Hell's doorway and the dreams of American democracy were bellowing in a nightmare of flames.

Well, the nearer he got to the capital, the madder he got. At the Redcoats for setting it afire. At the Americans for abandoning it. At himself for forgetting the records of the Constitutional Convention and the great Bill of Rights.

Pretty soon he could hear the flames. He could smell the smoke of burning buildings and national monuments and

flags. He clenched his fists and set his jaw, racing through the forest like a miniature wild man.

VI

NOW all around him the trees were scarlet. Smoke stung his eyes. The town ahead was like a range of volcanoes, embers and firebrands raining down. He could see the Chesapeake spread out crimson as a bay of blood, and the Navy Yard bellowing like a blast furnace.

The Treasury Building was going like a stove, and the brand new Library and Capitol were erupting great towers of fire.

Every once in a while one of those blazing red dragons would soar up over the housetops to set some roof aflame. James Madison wasn't afraid of them now. Every evil constellation of astrology could have been falling, and he wouldn't have cared a fig.

He ran those seventeen miles to Washington as if in seven league boots instead of number fives, and he reached the edge of town just as smoke started pouring from the upper windows of the Presidential Mansion.

He paused then only because the outskirts were alive with Redcoats who rushed about with guns and torches, shooting glass out of windows and setting matches to everything combustible. In the smoke and flame-light the scene looked hotter than Dante's Inferno, and a lot of that heat came from under James Madison's collar.

He halted to smear his face with dirt and ashes; then he pulled down his tricorn and rewrapped himself in his tattered cape, and legged it for the Presidential Mansion.

Two Redcoat sentries caught him and let him go, saying, "Blimy, it's only a boy!" That made him madder than anything yet, but it was a lucky mistake. It got him into town and past the fire-lines.

He streaked around by a path he knew and reached the Executive Mansion's back door. Nobody saw him, and if those Redcoats had, they'd never have guessed it was the President.

The back hall was stifling with great sluggish wallows of brown smoke, and the fire was eating its way upstairs with a sound like a thousand hungry demons at a banquet. The flames were chewing up the woodwork in the right wing, too; but the executive office wasn't yet consumed, and James Madison raced along the corridor with his cape over his face.

A crashing gallery almost buried him; it was touch and go under a roaring staircase, and his boots were frying on his feet when he reached the office doorway.

Staggering across the threshhold, he found the Bill of Rights scattered over the floor; but his shout of joy choked to one of despair, for nowhere did he see his notes to the Constitutional Convention.

American History would be nothing without those notes; he had to find them, and he searched the office desperately. Blisters were swelling on the ceiling, and the walls were browning like a cake; his cue was scorching yellow, and he was blinded and suffocating when he finally had to retreat.

Out in the hall, he started blindly for the rear exit. Then he heard voices at the front of the house—British voices! James Madison turned and deliberately ran that way.

They were in the dining room: the British admiral, all gold lace and braid; the Redcoat officers with their medals, swords and side-whiskers. Pulled back in an ambush of smoke, James Madi-

son peered into the room with stinging eyes.

Staff officers and admiral were arguing in highpitched Oxford accents. On the table, strewn with the remnants of James Madison's supper, was a vast pile of papers. James Madison wanted to cry out when he saw them.

"I tell you," Admiral Cockburn was shouting, "they must be important or they wouldn't have been in that lockbox! But what are they, by Jove! General," he scooped up the papers and handed them to a red-coated general, "what do you make of these documents?"

The general peered, frowning through lorgnettes. "I'll tell you what I make of them, Admiral. Code!"

"Hieroglyphics," exclaimed a colonel, nodding excitedly. "That's what those are. I agree! Written in cipher!"

JAMES MADISON listened in astonishment to the cries of surprise and bafflement from the British staff.

"We can't stay here much longer trying to solve them," the red-coated general cried. "What is your opinion, Admiral Cockburn?"

"Well, I'll tell you," the admiral thundered. "I've been trying all along to remember where I've seen characters like these, and it's just come to me. In the Barbary States, by heaven!"

The general's mouth flopped open like a frog's. "In the Barbary States!"

"Certainly, you fool! This is written in Arabic!"

"Why so it looks!" gasped the general. "Arabic!"

"Of course it's Arabic. Don't you think I'd know Mohammedan writing when I see it? Look at those queer quirks and curleycues! By Heaven, General, we've found something important!"

The admiral shook his fist at the papers. "Look at the volume of those documents. Page after page! And see those official seals? It's a treaty, an alliance of some kind, that's what it is! These Americans have made a secret alliance with the Barbary pirates!"

The general stared. "Good Lord, Cockburn—"

"Exactly! It means all those American privateers will have bases in the Mediterranean. Why, if those Arab pirates join up with the American Navy, we'll never be able to beat them. Maybe right this minute they're setting out to attack England. Maybe they're on their way over here."

The admiral clawed through the papers wildly. "That's what this Arabic writing means! That's the only thing it could mean! I tell you, General, we've got to move, and move fast!"

The general saluted excitedly. "We can't hold Washington!"

"No! We must withdraw from Washington at once and attack the American naval base at Baltimore. If we can destroy the naval forts there we'll break the American sea power at home, and we can meet this new enemy in mid ocean with our fleet. It's our only chance, if they've signed up with those Arabs—"

"Then I'll give orders to attack Baltimore immediately."

"Without delay!" the admiral thundered. "And we'll use the same ammunition that defeated the American militia today. What a joke on these ignorant clodhoppers! Stampeding them with missiles that couldn't kill a soul! Scaring them to death with—"

Upstairs a roof crashed with the roar of Armageddon, but James Madison heard the admiral's concluding word, and the roaring in his ears then was from the bombshell that word touched

off in his heart. It isn't nice to learn that you've been fooled.

But even so, James Madison had the last laugh.

Cockburn and the generals came rushing out of the dining room like madmen. Stumbling over each other to get out of the burning mansion and spread the order for an immediate attack on Baltimore. They never saw the President of the United States crouching there.

Nobody saw him as he sprang into the dining room to pick up the notes of the Constitutional Convention—notes written by James Madison in his own system of shorthand—and nobody heard the last laugh he gave as he dived through the window and off through the night to warn Baltimore and tell the Americans to stand fast in the face of any British bombardment.

ALL that *might* have happened. For the pay-off, you know of course what *did* happen. About the rainstorm that came up that August night and put out the fires in the capital, saving enough of the Presidential Mansion so that later it was rebuilt and painted white to hide the smoke-blackened walls, ever after to be called the White House.

About the British attack on Baltimore, and the heroic defense of the town.

About the all-night bombardment of Fort McHenry where the Americans stood like rock while the Stars and Stripes floated defiant above the ramparts, and aboard a British frigate an American captive, watching the battle, wrote the words of our national anthem to the tune of an old song—

And the rockets red glare
The bombs bursting in air—

Yes, all that you know. Stubbornly the fort held out. Baltimore wasn't captured. The British fleet sailed away.

Three days after the Capital was burned, James Madison and Dolly were back in their home, rebuilding from the ruins. And not long afterward the British people—the democratic British people who'd never wanted the war in the first place—were forcing their Tory rulers to sue for peace.

Our Navy (without the Arabs) had beaten Cockburn's fleet all hollow. The peace was signed at Ghent; and two weeks afterward, since the news hadn't yet reached America, that wild man Andy Jackson smashed a British army of eight thousand into two thousand dead men at New Orleans—the Americans losing seven.

Mr. Madison's War was over. People called it the War of 1812, and The Second War of American Independence. James Madison didn't care what it was called as long as it was won.

"And it's won!" he told Dolly, hugging her like a bear. "The Union has been preserved, and America's found her place in the sun! From now on we'll be best of friends with Britain. At last we can have peace."

He beamed and looked at Dolly and hugged her again.

"Yes, Jemmy," she sighed—and the year was 1815—"at last we can have peace. I'm giving a ball tonight; the Monroes are coming, and Mr. Clay and John Calhoun and Daniel Webster—I do hope they won't argue—and we're going to have punch and seed cakes and such a grand party.

"Oh, but I forgot to tell you. The postman left a letter a little while ago—I put it on your desk. It's from away over in Africa, but it looks just like your shorthand. It's addressed in such funny writing!"

With the aid and assistance of Divinity, and in the reign of our sovereign, the Asylum of the World, powerful and great monarch, etc.—

To His Majesty, the Emperor of America, its adjacent dependent provinces and coasts and wherever his government may extend, etc.—

Requesting only that you will have the goodness to remove your Ambassador as soon as possible, assuring you that such removal will be very agreeable to me.

These are our last words to you, and we pray Allah to keep you in his holy guard. Written in the Year of the Hegira 1231, corresponding to April 1815, and signed in our well-beloved city of Algiers.

Omar, son of Mohammed,
Conqueror and Great.

●

From James Madison, President of the United States, to Stephen Decatur, Commodore U.S.N., American Embassy, aboard U.S.S. *Washington*, Harbor of Algiers.

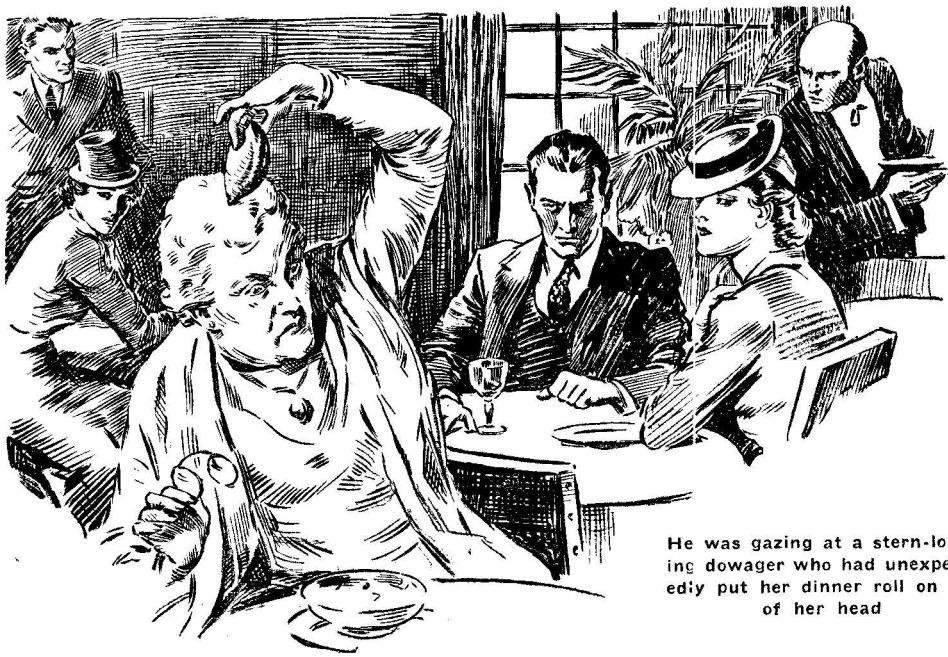
(Transcribed in shorthand and not found in history books)—

My dear Commodore Decatur:

I am recipient of a letter from the Dey of Algiers refusing to agree to our treaty which cancels all further ransom payments and tribute to the Barbary Pirates. He asks your removal and threatens war. You will naturally remain where you are and use your own judgment in establishing freedom of the seas.

P. S. If you would panic the Algerian troops who will not be as familiar with such objects as are navy men, try bombarding them with sky-rockets. Do you get me, Steve?

Steve got him, and we got Freedom of the Seas.



He was gazing at a stern-looking dowager who had unexpectedly put her dinner roll on top of her head

The Playful Powerhouse

By WILLIAM TEMPLETON

Author of "Nymphs, Professor," "Mr. Primrose Goes to the Devil," etc.

Stand on your head. Say "Uncle." Recite Hiawatha backwards. Now—Oops! Sorry! Excuse it please; I was just practicing on my new will power. It gets away from me sometimes

"WHAT'S wrong with you, Harry Salter, is that you haven't any will-power. Not to speak of. That's the root of your trouble. . . . Are you listening?"

Mr. Salter paused for a moment before turning the page of his novel, shrugged, and continued to follow the course of true love.

His wife made a movement of exasperation. "You haven't the will power of a— of a"—she searched for a suitably withering comparison— "of an ant."

"I doubt if any of us have," Mr. Salter murmured.

She swept aside the interruption. "You've allowed yourself to be trampled on ever since I've known you."

Mr. Salter put his finger between the pages of his book. "Perhaps you're right, Agnes."

But his agreement did not satisfy her. She could sense that it was unflattering, without quite knowing why. "For ten years you've accepted the same absurd salary without protest, and for ten years you've come home and done nothing but crouch over the fire reading those idiotic novels."

"If it were a better fire I shouldn't have to crouch.'

"We can't afford a better fire. Not until you do something for yourself."

"What would you like me to do?"

"Take up Pelmanism or something, anything that'll give you a little will power."

Mr. Salter considered this for a moment. "I suppose it could be strengthened," he said. "There was a game we used to play when I was a boy. . . ."

"What are you talking about? What game?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing at all, Agnes. It was just a stray thought. It wouldn't interest you."

BUT Mr. Salter thought about it quite a lot during the next few days and it interested him more and more. It was a simple little experiment that had been made several times at parties.

An ordinary door key was threaded on a piece of string and allowed to hang free. Someone then stood on either side of it and concentrated on making it swing more in his own direction than in his opponent's.

It was, presumably, a contest of wills. It had fascinated Mr. Salter as a boy. As far as he could remember, he had always emerged victorious, the key moving just slightly out of the vertical towards him.

"That proves," he thought hopefully, "that I have quite a satisfactory will, even if I have allowed it to lie latent for a year or two."

He would have been satisfied with this deduction without putting it to the test had he not overheard a surprising conversation between his wife and Mr. Ammersham, his employer.

On outside work, he came home early one evening, opened the front door quietly and, entering the hall, heard voices in the living room. Ammersham was pleading with Agnes to leave Salter and run away with him.

She made no attempt to hide her preference, but her morals were evidently sound. "I'd like to, Tom," she said. "You don't know how happy I could be with a man like you who knows his own mind, and who has achieved something in the world. But no matter how spineless Harry is, I couldn't desert him. I married him with my eyes open and I must try and carry the cross without complaining."

"I respect your scruples, Agnes." Ammersham's voice was pompous. "But if ever you have reason to change your mind, remember I am waiting for you."

All this came as a great shock to Mr. Salter and he stood wide-eyed for some seconds without moving. Agnes considered him a cross! Ammersham wanted her to leave him!

He felt that, in his place, Ammersham would have thrown open the door and demanded an explanation; but at the moment he wanted more time to work out the situation for himself.

Perhaps Agnes's dissatisfaction with him was justified. Perhaps he could be more strong-willed. . . .

He returned and banged the front door as if he had just entered. Unruffled, Agnes came to meet him. "Oh, Harry," she said, "Mr. Ammersham came in a few moments before you. He brought some work he wants you to attend to tonight."

"It was very good of him to bring it himself," said Mr. Salter quietly.

. . At the first opportunity he set about strengthening his will power, beginning with the only exercise which he could think of. He once again attempted to draw a suspended door key

out of the vertical without touching it.

It needed only a moderate, or even illusionary, success to induce him to search about for similar experiments. People began to remark on the oddness of his behavior. Hitherto he had been amiable and talkative. Now he became suddenly morose and taciturn.

"Poor chap," they said, "he's worried to death about his wife and Ammersham." The fact that now when they greeted him he seldom responded confirmed this in their minds.

They were unaware that, at the time, his whole attention was probably concentrated on moving a matchstick a few inches across the table or on causing a petal to fall from a vase of flowers.

MR. Salter began to care less and less for the scorn of his wife or the ridicule of his friends. Many of his experiments were proving excitingly successful: he had managed to open the lid of a small box without touching it, and, more spectacular still, had held a match in the air and willed it to burst into flame without friction.

It concerned him less than it might have done that Ammersham had reprimanded him for wasting time: during the interview he had twice caused the man's glasses to slip from his nose.

From time to time Mrs. Salter continued to protest against his indolence and lack of will power. He felt that the day was approaching when he could show her just how formidable his will power had become.

"My good woman," he said at last, "you don't know what you're saying. Look at this." He stared for a moment at the window pane and her scorn changed to a yelp of dismay as it suddenly cracked down its whole length.

She ran to stare into the courtyard, but finding there no small boy who might have thrown a stone, turned slowly to her husband and asked ominously, "Did you do that?"

"I did," he said with pride.

"Do you think it's funny?" she demanded.

"I think it proves my point."

"That'll cost money. Breaking windows is an expensive hobby. I think you must be crazy."

"But you're not asking how I did it," he said hopefully.

"I'm not interested in your conjuring tricks," she told him angrily. "I'd thank you to make them a little less destructive, though. If you had any ambition or will power you'd be doing something to better yourself instead of sitting there playing stupid, childish tricks."

Mr. Salter did not argue. The strain of the demonstration had left him exhausted, and his wife had been unimpressed.

Undaunted, however, by her lack of appreciation, he continued to practise these exercises of will, successfully performing more and more difficult feats. From the other end of a room he could now pull chairs away from under people as they sat down. Five times in as many days he had brought Ammersham to the ground in this way, and had several times contemplated attempting the same thing with a concert pianist.

He realised the malicious element that was entering into the experiments, and tried to curb it. But while it was easy to think of ways of embarrassing people, like tipping their hats over their eyes or upsetting their teacups, it was less easy to find ways of using this power for good.

"A sad comment on human nature, my own in particular," thought Mr. Salter as he allowed himself for the

last time to withdraw Ammersham's chair.

The phone beside him rang and he lifted the receiver. It was Agnes speaking, telling him to have dinner in a restaurant as she intended being out all evening. Mr. Salter was suddenly conscious that Ammersham, who could overhear the conversation, was smiling slyly.

As he replaced the receiver the thought passed through his mind that he would quite like to see Ammersham drop dead. It was only then that it occurred to him that he might be able to influence people's actions in a small way if he concentrated hard enough.

He furrowed his brow and looked across his office desk to the pretty typist opposite whose nimble fingers were playing rapidly over the keys of her typewriter.

Miss Danelaw sighed and drew another completed page from the machine. She began to read it through to detect any errors: then gave a gasp of astonishment, looked quickly across at Mr. Salter, blushed and returned her eyes to the typed sheet. On it over and over again she had written, "Mr. Salter is wonderful. Mr. Salter is wonderful. . . ."

AT THAT moment Ammersham bustled out of his private room. "I want you to take a letter, Miss Danelaw," he said. She crumped the paper in her hand and inserted a fresh sheet.

Ammersham drew forward a chair for himself, looked at it suspiciously, reconsidered his decision to sit down, and remained standing. "Messrs. Retlaw and Burgess. Dear Sirs. . . ." Miss Danelaw began to type.

"What have I said so far?" asked Ammersham complacently when he had dictated a few paragraphs.

"You've said—" The typist glanced at the typed sheet. On it was written, "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay. Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay. Mr. Ammersham is a fat pig. Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay. . . ."

She snatched it from the machine with a gasp of dismay.

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Ammersham.

"There's something wrong with the machine," she said. "I'd better take it in shorthand first."

Watching the girl's confusion Mr. Salter became contrite. He approached her as they were leaving the office. "I'm sorry," he said.

"Why? What had you to do with it?"

"I willed you to type what you did. I was so interested in the experimental angle that I overlooked the danger to you."

"Oh," she said, and walked with him for some distance in silence. "I think you ought to control yourself a bit."

"Yes, I know," he said gladly, relieved that she was taking it so calmly. "Would you have a meal with me and let me tell you how sorry I am?" Then, as she hesitated, he added, "I'll control myself."

During the next hours Mr. Salter enjoyed himself more than he had done for a long time. He took her to a place with a discreet orchestra and good food. There was no one to give him indigestion by nagging him.

His companion was charming; she had understanding and respect for him. He warmed to her smile and began to explain his theories and experiments to her.

"You see," he said, "I don't know yet how much power I have. I can do quite a lot of interesting, but rather useless things, such as moving inanimate objects like that drum."

He looked at the drum in the orchestra for a moment and it began to roll across the dance floor. The horrified drummer pursued it and returned sheepishly with it to the platform, looking as if he wanted to hide it under his coat.

"AND today," continued Mr. Salter solemnly, "I found that I could control people's actions to some extent."

Miss Danelaw followed his gaze to a stern-looking dowager who had unexpectedly put her dinner roll on top of her head. The waiter was trying to look as if there were nothing unusual about this.

Mr. Salter was glad that Miss Danelaw took the exhibition seriously. "It's a wonderful gift," she said.

"It's nothing but hard practice really," Mr. Salter told her depreciatingly.

Mr. Salter was beginning to realise that. "The trouble is," he said, "it runs away from me. I do things that might get people into trouble. Like making you type that about Ammersham being a fat pig."

"Well, I do sympathize with that," she said mildly, "although I didn't see any need for the exuberant "ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay."

"That's what I mean," said Mr. Salter. "It just crossed my mind. It might have been anything. I'm scared to strengthen my will power any further."

Miss Danelaw gave this its merited consideration. "It would be a pity," she said, "to stop before you've done something to help yourself. . . . Do you think you could influence people without being in the same room with them?"

"I could try," he said helpfully. "Shall I concentrate on making Ammersham stand on his head wherever he is?"

"No, don't do that," she said quickly. "He might be in his bath." She remained silent, considering the problem. Mr. Salter waited trustingly. The dowager began to blow bubbles in her wine-glass.

Miss Danelaw glanced across at him reprovingly. "We must do it properly," she said at last. "Tonight, after you've gone home, will you concentrate on making me write something about which we can compare notes tomorrow at the office?"

"All right," he agreed. "You don't know how grateful I am to you. I needed someone to give direction to my life."

"I've been terribly interested," she said, "and I've enjoyed my supper very very much."

She smiled dazzlingly on him as they parted. He felt unexpected tears start to his eyes and said goodnight hurriedly.

"Don't forget," she called after him.

His wife had not returned when he arrived home. The thought that she was with Ammersham troubled him less now. He sat down, closed his eyes and began to concentrate.

ON THE following morning Miss Danelaw laid a sheet of paper on his desk. On it she had written, "Miss Danelaw is wonderful. Sing hey nonny. She has lovely eyes. Pom-tiddle, pom-tiddle, pom-tiddle. She has glorious hair. Hallelujah."

He looked across at her. "I suppose that is what I was thinking. It's—it's rather a song of Solomon, isn't it?"

She grinned at him. "A little less anatomical, fortunately," she said.

"Can we discuss it at supper tonight? I have to dine out again."

"All right," she agreed. "I think I've got an idea."

He turned and found Ammersham

at his desk with the paper in his hand. Ammersham was staring at it in perplexity. "Does this mean something?" he asked.

"No," said Mr. Salter, "nothing at all."

Ammersham replaced the paper on the desk, eyed Mr. Salter for a moment and went into his room without saying anything further.

"He feels safer there nowadays," whispered Miss Danelaw.

The supper that evening was even more enjoyable than the previous one. Mr. Salter realized how exceptionally happy he was in this girl's company. It was some time before she introduced her idea.

"Mr. Salter, you must forgive me for mentioning this, but things aren't quite all right with you at home, are they?"

"No," he admitted, "not quite right." The wine had loosened his tongue and he was glad to confide in her. "My wife prefers another man."

"It's Mr. Ammersham, isn't it?"

"Yes." He looked at her. "It's common gossip, is it?"

She ignored his question, asked her own instead. "Why does she prefer him?"

He was glad that she had said that. It restored his self-esteem. "She thinks he's got more drive than I have, more will power."

He sat back and smiled at this amusing thought.

"I see," she said slowly. "That's why you started practising in the first place?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, now everything will be all right."

He looked questioningly at her. "I don't see that at all."

"Our experiment last night was a success presumably. You managed to make me write what you were thinking. In that case you can probably make your wife do the same. My suggestion is that you concentrate on making her write a letter to Ammersham telling him that she never wants to see him again."

For a moment or two Mr. Salter stared at her, pondering this.

"You think it's as simple as that?"

She nodded.

"I think it might be."

"Well—" He looked at her and hesitated.

She smiled at him. "Have supper with me next time and you can tell me if it's been a success."

It took several days for Mr. Salter to make up his mind about it; then for a complete afternoon he neglected his work, stooping over his desk with his eyes closed, concentrating harder than he had ever done before. . . .

At home his wife, finding that she had at last come to a decision, sat down and wrote a letter which she would leave for him.

> Dear Harry, I know the step I am taking will be a great shock to you, but I find that I can't live any longer with a man who has so little will power. I'm sorry, but the decision had to be made, and it's better for both of us. Perhaps you'll see that some day. I've gone with Tom Ammersham. I hope you'll be happier without me.

When Mr. Salter reached home he showed no surprise that his wife had gone, but went straight to the mantelpiece for the letter, which he pushed unopened into his pocket.

He stood for a moment looking round the room, suddenly smiled with satisfaction and went whistling into the street again to keep his appointment with Miss Danelaw.

If You But Wish

The ancient Armenian crouched over his brazier and Tyler saw himself in agony

By ROBERT ARTHUR

Author of "Footsteps Invisible," "Blaze of Glory,"

He is a decent man, correctly behaved, commonplace. But beware him, for there is a savage hidden deep within him, and that savage commands a terrible loyalty

●

Short Fantastic Novelet

I

FOR a man who prided himself on being a better-than-average good citizen, Henry Tyler was in a surprisingly unpleasant humor.

The trouble was, he hadn't wanted to pay this visit of inspection to the old Devers mansion, a rococo three-story structure, turreted and minareted in the best bad-taste of the '90's, situated

in a swampy, wooded section well outside the limits of Shore City.

The house had been deserted for years and given over to dust, spiders, cobwebs and shadows. Local superstition insisted that the place was haunted. From time to time passersby had reported having their hats knocked off by showers of stones seeming to come from its closed windows, and through those same windows faint, misty blue radiances could sometimes be seen after nightfall, drifting slowly through the house.

Occasional visitors had heard knockings on the walls, creakings on the stairs, and mysterious footsteps overhead—all phenomena calculated to discourage prospective purchasers.

Whether the house was genuinely haunted or not Henry Tyler did not know. He did know that the belief it was had effectually ruined all its value and made its management a white elephant for his firm, which was Nelson and Tyler, Real Estate.

Consequently when George Nelson, his senior partner, had that morning suggested that he run out to look the old place over, he had protested that it was a waste of time. If the old hulk burned down, he had argued, nothing was lost. Personally, he didn't care what happened to it. The ghost, if any, that haunted it was welcome to it.

Smiling oddly, Nelson had urged him to go anyway, and rather than make an issue of it Tyler had given in.

But the vexation caused by the argument was still pricking him as he stood now in the hallway of the old house and stared in angry indignation at the ancient Armenian he had just discovered encamped in the living room. The old man was making some kind of mumbo-jumbo over a brass brazier filled with glowing coals.

He had seemingly been there for sometime. A rude pallet of cloth was spread in a corner, and some personal belongings had been unwrapped. Beside the brazier stood an old brass bottle. And about it and the man, Henry Tyler saw, an odd pattern had been drawn in chalk on the floor.

The fellow was as old as the hills, his face wrinkled like a desiccated prune, his skin the color of mahogany as he bent above the glowing coals, oblivious of Tyler's entry. He seemed harmless enough, but Henry Tyler's inner irritation made him speak with unpleasant self-righteousness.

"Say!" he exclaimed loudly. "What the devil are you doing here? You know you're housebreaking?"

The old Armenian turned. But he did not answer. Bright, shoebutton eyes flashed. He laid an urgent finger to his lips for silence, then turned back, to cast a powder on the coals. Instantly a column of pale smoke rose to the ceiling, filling the room with a sickly sweet scent.

Coughing, Henry Tyler strode forward into the room, grasped the kneeling man's shoulder, and hauled him unceremoniously to his feet.

"I asked what you're doing here!" he barked. "And I want an answer!"

THE old man moved away out of his grasp, straightening with dignity. The column of smoke coming from the brazier wavered and died. The brass bottle, inadvertently touched by Tyler's shoe, fell over and rolled a few inches with a hollow little clanking noise.

"I am here by invitation," the other said, his English as good as Tyler's. "But now I shall go. You have defeated my efforts by interrupting me. There is no use of my staying longer."

He stooped and picked up the brazier,

seeming unmindful of the heat of it, gathered up the brass bottle, and proceeded to collect his other belongings. Taken aback by the speech and uncertainty of his next move, Henry Tyler stood and watched him.

"Here by invitation, huh?" he snorted, to cover up his own confusion. "Whose invitation? Yours? Broke in looking for something to steal, more likely, and trying to brazen it out!"

"I came for a purpose," the ancient told him, standing now in the doorway with his belongings slung in a pack across his shoulder. "There is one in this house whom I came to take hence, and would have, had you not come. You have earned his gratitude, and you may regret it. Gratitude can be a great responsibility."

Henry Tyler stared at him. A prickle of apprehension was stirring along his spine, caused by what he did not know. It was true that as he had hauled the old one to his feet, something had stirred in the room like a breeze suddenly set free. Dust had whirled, cobwebs fluttered, and the shades rattled. And now he was aware of a peculiar impression that he was being inarticulately thanked for something.

He could not define it. He had an odd feeling, as if a large dog were frisking about his feet, barking in pleasure and looking for a stick to fetch.

A completely silly idea, for the room was empty save for the two of them. But it, and the whirling dust, upset him.

"Go on!" His voice was harsh. "Get out! And don't let me see you around here again or I'll call the cops."

The black eyes flashed again.

"I obey." The other's tone was obsequious. "Nor will the honored master of this house see me again, much as he may some time desire it. There is nothing now that anyone can do for him. He has bound to himself one whose pleasure will be to obey his wishes, and he alone must bear the weight of such a burden."

Then he was gone, leaving Tyler to wipe his brow and draw a long breath of relief. Maybe he had been a bit brusque. But after all, when you find a tramp likely to set the house on fire . . .

He shrugged, and though he was not much inclined to it, finished the quick survey of the house he had begun, peering into a few rooms on the ground floor. Nothing was much different from what it had been, six months before. A couple of windows were broken, and someone had scattered pebbles and leaves and twigs around here and there—kids, probably, sneaking in—but nothing of importance.

The grounds outside, darkening fast in the creeping shadows the surrounding trees cast at twilight, were a depressing tangle of weeds and flowers gone to seed. There was nothing about them worthy of note. Henry Tyler shrugged again, and hurried back to his coupe, parked at the gate.

II

AS HE drove back into Shore City, his good nature, on which he rather prided himself, returned. Once or twice, conscious of an uneasy feeling of being followed, he had glanced back over his shoulder. But no one had been in sight, of course, and he had been able to laugh at his own folly.

By the time he strolled into Nelson's half of their office, having left his hat in his own section and answered a phone call, he was completely himself again. Nelson, who was an older man, turning stout, with shrewd gray eyes,

oked up as he entered, and Tyler ncied he saw a hidden gleam in his rtner's eye.

"Well, I went," Henry Tyler said. he place is still there, if that's what u wanted to know."

Nelson lit a cigarette. A grin spread er his face.

"Did you meet my friend there?" he ked. "Old Muskiadies?"

Tyler looked blank.

"Your friend?"

"The old Armenian I sent out there couple of days ago," Nelson told him, e grin broadening. "A professional ost layer, no less. He came around d told me he'd heard we had a unted house on our hands, and in- ted that in three days or less he uld have a dispossess served on the irit and send him on his way, bag d baggage—if spooks have baggage.

"He claimed to be a hundred and ven years old, and able to raise or any kind of ghost you can name. e learned his art from an Arabian gician to whom he was sold by the rks as a boy, he said. He wasn't ask- g much, so I took him up Didn't you d him there?"

Henry Tyler still looked blank as tried to collect his thoughts.

"A ghost layer!" he exclaimed, stall- g for time. "You're kidding!"

"Kidding? Far from it." Amiably lson puffed out cigarette smoke. he old bird sounded authentic. *He* d that the spirit haunting the Devers ce was what he called an elemental sorts—a masterless spirit force of ne kind—that had wandered in. Ac- ding to him, the spirit isn't harm- , just filled with mischief, like a ppy.

"It hasn't any intelligence—under- nd, I'm still quoting Muskiadies. It's d of a second cousin to the boys we've read about in the Arabian Nights, the djinn. They were smarter but filled with the devil, so Solomon sealed 'em up in brass bottles and heaved 'em into the sea to keep 'em out of mischief.

"This fellow that's been bothering us, Muskiadies said, probably had a master who died, thereby releasing it. Then it just wandered about until it hit the Devers house, and there it stayed.

"Sometimes these wandering elementals take a fancy to someone and attach themselves to him. More often a professional like Muskiadies runs across them and takes them in tow, he told me. He said he'd do what was necessary to coop this one up in a bottle, where it would be safe and out of mischief.

"If it was a little more intelligent, he said, he could make a slave out of it and get it to do simple tasks—like the djinn used to obey their master's wishes, you know. This one would do the same, Muskiadies claimed, if there was any way to make it understand what was wanted of it.

"Like a big, friendly, dumb dog, it's willing enough, but just hasn't got the necessary savvy for us to communicate with it. Muskiadies might be able to, he admitted, and there were some levels of thought where a *rapport* might be effected, but he didn't go into that.

"It was a dangerous subject for the uninitiated to tackle, was all he would say, and everything would be much better all around if our spirit were just cooped up safely.

"I asked him if he couldn't take less than the fifty he was asking, but he wouldn't. He said something that impressed me. 'Dangerous servants are these mindless things, for only death can part them from a master to whom they have been attached.' So I paid

him, and sent him out to try his luck."

Nelson ground out his cigarette and beamed at Henry Tyler.

"Isn't that a yarn for you?" he asked delightedly. "Something to tell the boys at the Chamber of Commerce luncheon next week. Worth every cent of the fifty it cost me. And if Muskiadies really does chase away the spook, that's so much gravy. You did find him there, didn't you?"

Henry Tyler shook his head with an effort. He liked to boast that he was always a truthful man, but somehow he couldn't quite bring himself to tell how he had chased the old Armenian, Muskiadies, away.

"Not when I got there," he muttered. Then he mustered a smile. "Afraid he was just spinning you a yarn, George. Just taking you for fifty. Ha ha! Imagine you going for a tale like that!"

"Oh, I don't say I believe it," Nelson told him, rising and reaching for his Panama. "As I say, I did it for the kick I'll get out of telling the boys. Anyway, we'll wait and see if anybody reports having stones chucked at them, or observing blue lights doing rhumbas through the rooms. If everything stays quiet—well, maybe I wasn't so dumb after all.

"I'm through for the day now, Henry. I'll leave you to lock up. You'll be over on the boardwalk tonight, won't you? You haven't forgotten that the beauty-contest finals are this evening, and I'm one of the judges? Ha!"

He dug an elbow in his partner's ribs and laughed jovially as he went out. Henry Tyler watched him go, and somehow could not join in the laughter.

AS SOON as his partner was gone, Tyler went into his own office and closed the door. Their secretary was gone for the day. He was quite alone—or was he? He glanced sharply abou as if expecting to find someone ther There was no one. But he did not fe much assured as he sat down an tipped backward in his swivel-chair.

Nervously he lit a cigarette and ble smoke forth in short, quick puff Elemental spirits—second cousins djinn—a slave to obey all wishes—was all bunk. It had to be.

But suppose it wasn't? Suppose was true. Suppose he *had* attached a elemental spirit to himself by rescuin the thing from the old Armenian's bo tle—an unseen, invisible servant . . .

Abruptly he threw his cigarette ou the open window. There was an eas way to find out. He frowned hard, a if concentrating upon something.

"I wish," he said slowly and di tinctly, "for the best Havana cig made."

And he held out his hand.

He was almost disappointed when remained empty. He blinked and tri again.

"I want"—he varied the formula- "a Scotch and soda."

Again nothing happened. He ma one last test.

"Bring me"—maybe the form of t wish had been wrong—"my hat."

He tried to make it something sir ple, something even a primitive int ligence could grasp, but his hat r mained on top the filing cabinet. Tyl shrugged and rose.

"Nothing to it," he said aloud, a there was relief in his voice. "Eith George fell for a tall yarn, or t thing's so dumb it's the same as no existent, in which case it doesn't ma ter. Hell, I'm being childish. It's a t yarn and I'm going to forget it."

And he did forget it. Henry Tyl rather fancied himself as a norm

thy person, and when he put ething out of his mind, it seldom rned to plague him. That evening n he strolled over to the board- k along the ocean and made his way ugh the crowd jammed around the d where the judging of the annual ity contest would take place, the nts of the afternoon no longer both- l him.

He had had a good dinner and nged his clothes, and was in a pleas- frame of mind as he watched the ceedings leading up to the chosing Miss America for the year. The ges, among whom George Nelson conspicuous, sat at the rear of the form, and the ten finalists in the petition paraded slowly across a o of velvet carpeting in front of n, clad in the scantiest of bathing s and the brightest of smiles.

Henry stood only a few feet from platform and eyed the ten young es with somewhat constrained ad- ation as they passed. Then the ges went into a huddle, from which emerged to announce that blonde curvesome girl whose ribbon pro- med her Miss Eden Falls was the ner.

Miss Eden Falls came forward to e for the photographers with the runners-up—Miss Pacific Coast, a and stately brunette, and Miss Gulf te, whose hair was dark red gold whose figure seemed to Henry er far nearer perfection than the ner's.

As the judges were awarding the , an odd and embarrassing thing pened. Miss Gulf State's rubber hing suit suddenly burst asunder and from her, so that for an instant stood and smiled out at the crowd a state of natural beauty that was ath-taking.

It happened while Henry Tyler was staring straight at her, and he blushed crimson before he could take his eyes away. Then the quick-witted girls who had not won prizes, but were standing in the background, came to her rescue. They formed a close circle about her, and amid the buzzing murmur of the crowd they escorted her to the grateful concealment of the contestant's dressing rooms.

HENRY was still conscious of a vague embarrassment, as if he was somehow at fault for having seen the incident happen, when later he met Nelson and they stopped at a nearby bar for a glass of beer.

"Funniest thing I ever saw," Nelson chuckled, blowing foam from his lager. "*Blip*—and it was gone like that. Like having a blowout. Those rubber bathing suits are dangerous. Yes sir!"

He chuckled. Henry joined in weakly. The trouble was, it hadn't gone like that. He, who had been closest of all, had probably seen better than anyone else what had happened. The strap of Miss Gulf State's suit had apparently snapped. Then the suit itself had ripped before and behind, as if pulled off her in two pieces.

It was odd, but as his partner had said, rubber bathing suits were tricky.

Henry finished his beer, and then they said good night. Nelson went for his car, and the younger man strolled homeward through the quiet streets—far off the noisy boardwalk. Shore City was as quiet as a small town.

He was sauntering past a corner only a block from his apartment when an approaching beat cop nodded.

"Evening, Mr. Tyler," he said, and Henry recognized him.

"Hello, O'Rourke," he answered pleasantly. O'Rourke was the night man

for the precinct, and a couple of times had given him tickets for overnight parking outside his apartment. But he had deserved them, and he would not have dreamed of holding malice against the man for doing his duty. "Nice night."

"It is that," the bluecoat agreed. And then the second odd incident of the evening happened. O'Rourke, still ten feet away, staggered as if he had received a violent blow in the face. He stumbled backward and fell to the sidewalk, where he sat as if dazed.

Henry Tyler ran forward to help the man to his feet, O'Rourke's mouth was bleeding, and he spat out two teeth as he stood groggily upright.

"Somebody hit me!" he gasped. "Somebody hit me when I wasn't looking! Where is he? Where—"

He whirled about, but there was no one in sight save themselves.

"You saw it, didn't you, Mr. Tyler?" the cop demanded, his face purple with fury. "Somebody jumped at me from out of that doorway and slugged me while my head was turned. Where did he go?"

Henry Tyler gulped. Somebody had certainly slugged O'Rourke in the mouth but—well, it was strange, but he hadn't even caught a glimpse of the attacker.

"He—he was too quick for me," he stuttered. "He got away while I was helping you up."

O'Rourke shook his head balefully, dabbing at the blood on his lips.

"One of the McGregor boys, I've no doubt," he said grimly. "They've been laying for me since I slapped Homus McGregor in jail for gambling and disturbing the peace last week. Well, thanks, Mr. Tyler. I'll handle this myself. Good night."

"Good night," Henry Tyler echoed, as the cop stamped away on his roun and hurried homeward. Probably it w as O'Rourke had said: Some ener had taken advantage of their convers tion to punch the cop and run. But was strange neither of them had se him.

He puzzled a little over the matt as he climbed into bed. Then sleep ove came him and he forgot it. His slu bers were quite untainted by any appr hension.

III

THE next day was fine. Henry Tyl breakfasted, bought his usual da paper at the corner, and in the best spirits got his car from the garage.

It was Saturday, and since he wou need some cash over the week-end, stopped at his bank on his way to t office. There he made out a check f twenty dollars, got it after a short wa in line, exchanged a pleasant word wi the cashier, and as he turned awa noted a large pile of packaged gree backs at the cashier's elbow, well wit in reach of an arm thrust under t wicket.

Henry Tyler felt no impulse to reac however. He had never wanted an thing that belonged to someone el he had once boasted, and certainly had never felt any desire to steal. E someone else among the score of m and women in line before the thr open wickets was less scrupulous a more daring.

Henry Tyler had just stepped o onto the pavement when a hullabal broke out behind him. He heard t cashier who had served him shoutin Then the harsh clangor of an ala gong broke out.

The guard inside the bank door i mediately swung it shut in Henr

ırtled face. Someone brushed against
n—at least, it felt as if someone had,
ough he saw no one—and he looked
out wildly for a place of safety, his
st reaction being that a holdup must
in progress.

Then the alarm ceased. After a mo-
ent the bank guard swung the door
en again.

"Some guy reached in and pinched
thousand bucks, right from under
e cashier's nose," he told the real
ate man, apparently pleased by the
citement. "Dave turns his head away
and zip, the bills are gone. Worked
e lightning, the fellow did.

"Funny thing, nobody noticed any-
e close to the window at the time
cept a dame who couldn't 'a' done
because she had both arms full of
ndles. They're searching 'em inside
w, looking for the money."

Thanking his lucky stars that he
d been outside, not inside and not
oject to unpleasant questioning and
tention, Tyler got into his car and
pped on the starter. As the motor
rred smoothly into life, he reached
o his pocket for a needed cigarette,
d his fingers touched something un-
miliar. A horrible suspicion crossed
mind. He jerked his hand out as if
had touched something hot—

And stared at two packages of new,
sp greenbacks.

ACH package was marked *$500*. In
all he held a thousand dollars in
hands. Undoubtedly it was the
ney snatched from under the cash-
's nose. But how had it gotten into
pockets?

Perhaps it had been slipped there by
thief, frightened and wanting to
rid of it. Or perhaps he had hoped
be able to take it from Tyler later.
any case it must be returned. Henry
was half out of the car before a sec-
ond thought stopped him. Would they
believe him if he said he did not know
how the money came to be in his
pocket?

They might. But to return it now
would certainly mean questioning, ex-
planations, unpleasantness; it would
take up his time, subject him to an or-
deal he did not at all fancy. He could
not just keep the money, of course, but
he could return it by mail in an un-
marked envelope and save himself a
lot of unnecessary trouble.

He thrust the money quickly into the
dashboard compartment of the car,
then pulled away from the curb and at a
greater speed than was normal for him
headed for the office.

That almost brought disaster.

He would have seen it sooner, that
car which cut across his path after he
had turned onto the new boulevard, if
he had not still been so agitated over the
mystery of the money he had found in
his pocket. As it was, he just missed
a collision by making a desperate swing
off the road, across a low curb, and
into some unimproved pasture.

He braked to a stop, the sweat cold
on his forehead, and turned to see the
car that had almost hit him—a large
gray roadster with a beefy man at the
wheel—approach the curve he himself
had just rounded. And as he watched,
the roadster suddenly swerved, left the
road, crashed against a large oak, rolled
over twice, and brought up against an
outcropping of rock, upside down.

Henry Tyler leaped out and ran to
render aid. Another passing car stopped
and the driver reached the wreck with
him. Flames were already curling forth
from the motor of the overturned vehi-
cle, and they were barely able to pull
the unconscious driver free before the
whole thing was a mass of flame.

They laid the beefy man on the ground some distance away, and Henry saw that he was not dead, though one arm was undoubtedly broken and a bad gash in the forehead was bleeding plentifully. With the rapidity peculiar to disaster a crowd was forming about them, and in a moment a motorcycle cop pushed through it to take charge.

As the only actual witness, Tyler told what he could. He pointed out his own car, and the officer nodded.

"Forced you off th' road, huh?" he stated rather than asked. "Then he had a blowout, just when he didn't need one. These guys are killers. They deserve what they get."

Henry Tyler opened his mouth to protest that the unconscious driver, though careless, had not been entirely at fault. Also that he had heard no sound of a blowout. But he did not utter the words. He was too agitated to get into an argument now. As soon as he could he pushed through the crowd, got his own car back on the road, and hurried on to the office.

NELSON was out with a prospect when he got there, and Miss Simpson was busy. Grateful to be able to close his office door behind him without having to talk to anyone, Henry sat down shakily in his swivel-chair and reached for a lower drawer, where he kept a bottle and glasses—not for himself, but because a well-timed glass of Scotch often clinched a sale.

Now, though, unused to excitement and vaguely upset by the queer coincidence that so many odd things should happen so close together, he needed something strong and fiery. He gulped down two ounces of Scotch, straight, and followed it hastily with water from a cooler.

Then he began to feel better. Things took on a clearer perspective. Logic re asserted itself, and told him that Fate in her own haphazard way, was merely crowding into a few hours natural in cidents that might easily have hap pened to him at any time over a perio of years.

A second gulp of whisky finished th process of restoring his nerves, and b the time Nelson returned at noon jubilant at having sold an expensiv house to his prospect, Henry Tyle was quite normal except for the sligh aroma of alcohol that tainted h breath.

George Nelson caught the odor an chuckled.

"Drinking in the morning, Henry! he asked jovially. "Be careful or you be turning into a full-fledged roué b fore we know it."

He laughed again, boomingly, an got Henry's hat, tossed it to him.

"Henry," he declared. "I'm feelin good. So come along. We're going shut up shop, go to my place for lunc and shoot eighteen holes of golf afte ward. Who wants to work all t time?"

Henry Tyler let himself be persuade without much resistance. For o thing, there wasn't a more normal m in the world than George Nelson, n one whom life treated more unevenfully. And Henry felt the need of no mal human companionship. Though h nerves were restored by the liquor, a he had lost the haunting feeling th he was in some way responsible for t odd things that had been happenin around him since the previous evenin he welcomed the idea of spending t afternoon with George.

So, driving his own car, he follow his partner out to Nelson's home Inlet Beach The house was on a r that overlooked the water; and they a

the porch with Nancy, George's
e, a pretty woman about Henry Ty-
age, quite a bit younger than her
band.

he had a pleasant laugh and nice
, and the fact that Nelson's home
so comfortable and attractive,
ry realized, was due to her. Be-
d this he had never consciously
ught about her. The fact that she
another man's wife made it im-
sible for his thoughts to go further.

he lunch was good, and in George's
ming recital of his morning's sale,
Nancy's cheerful conversation,
ry Tyler's spirits rose again. When
rge went upstairs to change into
rts clothes, he stood inside, by the
ng-room window, looking out at the
te sails of boats in the bay below
chatting with Nancy.

t was almost the worst shock Henry
er had ever experienced to find
self, without warning, holding
rge's wife in his arms.

One instant they were talking to-
ner, companionably. Then, suddenly,
arms were about her and she was
ling into his face.

"Why, Henry!" Nancy Nelson said
singly. "You *are* human, after all! I
er thought anybody could really be
good as you pretended to be."

She threw back her head and looked
him archly.

"You're a surprising man, Henry,"
said in a soft voice. "All of a sud-
something seemed to draw me to
. To push me to you, like a strong
d against my back. I couldn't help
self. Not even—if I had wanted to."

Henry Tyler found himself unable
answer. It was as if he were frozen
shock. He had not planned this. He
not known it was going to happen
il it had happened. He had not even
sciously lifted his arms. Some force
outside himself had lifted them for
him, had placed them around Nancy
as she came toward him.

And then a step on the stair cut
through his dazed thoughts, made him
turn his head. George Nelson was
standing at the head of the stairs, gaz-
ing grimly down at them, and all the
good humor was gone from his face.

"Well!" he said, in an ugly tone.
"And how do you explain—"

The next word was never uttered.
He took a step forward to descend, and
as he did so, his feet shot out from
under him. He fell heavily, and crashed
down the whole length of stairs in a
tangle of arms and legs, coming to rest
at last on the living-room floor with an
impact that shook the house.

And he lay there quite unmoving as
Henry Tyler, still with his arms about
George's wife, stared ashen-faced at his
former partner.

Former, because Nelson's neck was
broken, and he was quite dead.

THAT night Henry Tyler sat a long time at the window of his apartment, half a block from the boardwalk, before he went to bed. He could hear the sea booming on the beach, though he could not see it because of the rambling old wooden hotel that was in the way.

Or was it just inside his head, that hollow thunder? He didn't know. He couldn't seem to think. He had drunk the better part of a quart of whisky in the last few hours, and it had small effect on him. From time to time, dazedly, he passed his hand across his face.

After the instant in which he had known that George was dead, there had been several hours of confusion during which he had had no time for thought. It had been necessary to call a doctor for Nancy, who had become hysterical,

and then to notify the police, since the death had been accidental. The medical examiner had come, and for the better part of the afternoon Henry Tyler had had to answer questions.

But it was almost worse when it was all over. Because then there had been nothing to do but to come back to his apartment and suffer the full effect of the nervous shock that activity had held off.

Worst of all was the shame and remorse which assailed him. Shame at himself for having been capable of making love to another man's wife. And remorse, because certainly Nelson's anger when he had seen them in each other's arms had been the cause of the mis-step that had made him fall.

Or—had it?

The thought brought him bolt upright. Had anger made George Nelson fall—or had something else? He had not simply slipped; he had seemed to lose control of his feet altogether. As if they had been swept out from under him by an invisible force; just as a force had pushed Nancy into his arms, had placed his arms about her. . . .

Henry Tyler wiped his face. Sweat was running down it. The night was hot. Absently it occurred to him that if the old hotel opposite his window were not there, he would be getting the sea breeze now. It was one of those vagrant thoughts that come and go without conscious volition, and he dismissed it impatiently.

What, he groaned inwardly, was happening to him? Had he become suddenly a jinx, a Jonah, leaving behind him a trail of accident, destruction, and death, through which he came unharmed? Was there any way he could be responsible for these things that had happened? No, of course not, logic told him.

But still that heavy, oppressive se of guilt remained. Could what happened be connected in any way v yesterday's occurrence at the De house, his run-in with the old Ar nian?

No, that was fantastic too. Not of these strange incidents had bee thing that he would have wanted happen, that he would not have vented if he could. Then what—wha

But his thoughts would not rem coherent. Somewhere in the dista he heard the scream of fire engines ing through the night. Faintly he aware of someone screaming. But the whisky was making itself felt, he had only enough clarity of m left to know that he was very, v drunk.

He rose and staggered over to bed, vaguely aware that the shrill fire apparatus was closer. Then flopped down on the yielding surfac the bed, and knew nothing more u morning.

HE WOKE late the next morn from drunken sleep, feeling w than he had ever felt before in his His head ached and his eyes v blurry. It was late—almost noon—he had never slept so late or heavil his life before. But the rest had d him little good.

It had been shot through with ni mares in which fire engines went da ing past, and flames mounted to sky, with the sound of pumps fra cally *chug-chugging,* with men women crying out in terror, with soft and ominous roar of fire ea through old wood.

But now his room was quiet, cool. He could be thankful for that breeze laden with the salt tang of ocean was billowing his curtains

brushing across his face. A sea breeze—

Henry Tyler sat bolt upright, a surge of terror driving away all thought of his headache. The old hotel was between him and the beach. His room did not get the breeze off the ocean. But it was getting it now!

And when he had reached the window and frantically pawed aside the curtain, he saw why. Where the building had been was only a wide expanse of charred and blackened rubbish, beams tossed helter-skelter, iron pipes rising grotesquely into the air like a dead man's ribs.

His nightmares had been based on reality. During the night while he slept too deeply for any sounds to waken him, the rambling old structure a hundred yards away had burned to the ground.

And so now he was getting the breeze he had so absently thought about just before he had gone to bed. . . .

IV

HOURS later, red-eyed, unshaven, Henry Tyler sat in the New York apartment of a man he knew and tried to keep his voice steady as he spoke.

In his pocket was a Shore City extra whose screaming headlines told the story of the previous night's fire. The origin of the conflagration was a mystery, but its results were not. Seven people had died in their sleep, and two of them had been children.

Henry Tyler had dressed, gotten his car, driven blindly to the station and taken the New York train because a horrifying thought had come to him, and he knew only one man who could confirm it or—he still clung desperately to the hope—convince him that it was unfounded.

"Look," Henry Tyler was saying, his mouth dry and his throat tight, "the reason I'm here is to find out about something. I want to know, can—can a man somehow be a thief and a murderer at heart without knowing it? Can he, all the time he thinks he is a good man, really be wishing for awful things like fires and wrecks to happen?"

His friend, whose name was Kramer, and who was an assistant professor of psychology at Columbia University, did not at once answer. Henry Tyler knew that the tall, dark man with whom he had gone to college was puzzled both by his appearance and his question. But he had had to come, and he had to ask it. Dear God, he had to know.

"Well," the psychologist said at last, "no—and yes." He lit a cigarette, blew out a plume of smoke, and seemed to be mentally phrasing his thoughts. "Tell me, Henry, have you ever heard of the subconscious?"

Henry Tyler nodded.

"In his subconscious mind," his friend went on, "every man is still a savage. It is there that all the instincts and desires of the beast in all of us are buried. The subconscious mind is a seething ferment of wishes and desires that the conscious mind is always on guard against, preventing them from escaping or expressing themselves. The subconscious mind is primitive and unrestrained. It knows no laws and no morals.

"That's why I answer your question yes—and no. In his subconscious mind even the best of men wishes for monstrous things. But that doesn't make him any the worse. It's the conscious mind that counts."

"Then—" Tyler swallowed, and the effort hurt his throat—"a man might almost be in a collision, we'll say. And though he knew he himself was partly at fault, in his subsconscious mind he

might hate the other driver for endangering him, and wish for him to have an accident to punish him."

"Precisely," Kramer agreed.

"And—" Henry Tyler could not repress a shudder now—"a man might be caught making love to another man's wife, and his subconscious mind might wish for the other man to—to fall down a flight of steps and be killed?"

"The most normal reaction in the world for the subconscious." The psychologist grinned. "Though consciously he might only be ashamed of himself. Is that all you wanted to ask me, Henry? I can tell you a lot more, if you're interested. Be glad to. I have a date right now, but if you want to wait—"

"No." Tyler shook his head and stumbled to his feet. "Thanks. That's all. I—I've got to get home."

He turned, found the door, hurried out, oblivious of Kramer's inquiring gaze. Then he was on the street, hurrying blindly along, his mind churning over and over and cold horror riding his shoulders.

HE *HAD* been the cause of all the odd things that had happened in the last forty-eight hours. That girl and the bathing suit—his mischievous subconscious had wanted that to happen. O'Rourke—in his subconscious he must have wanted to slug O'Rourke ever since the cop had given him the parking tickets. Similarly without knowing it, he had wanted to plunge a hand into the teller's window at the bank and snatch a fistful of money.

In his subconscious he had wanted the driver of the gray coupe that had endangered him to have an accident; he had wanted to make love to Nancy Nelson. With primitive savagery, his subconscious had wanted George Nelson to die when he discovered them. And last night, he had wanted the old hotel gone so he could enjoy the breeze.

Henry Tyler groaned aloud, unmindful of the curious gaze of people about him. It was clear now, all of it. The thing had begun with his visit to the old Devers' mansion. The old Armenian's tale to George Nelson had been true.

By his interference he, Henry Tyler, had won the gratitude of the elemental that Muskiadies had been trying to imprison. The thing—bodiless, formless, almost mindless—had attached itself to him. He was its master, it his slave—a slave he could not control, could not communicate with.

Its mental level was too low for it to understand orders, or apprehend the wishes of his conscious mind. But through some diabolical freak of fate, the primitive mind of the thing was attuned to and could understand the thoughts of the equally primitive subconscious mind. And like an obedient dog, the elemental sought to please him by carrying out all his subconscious wishes.

Henry Tyler groaned again. His face was gray-green with horror. The invisible elemental had, because he had wished it, ripped off that girl's bathing suit, had slugged O'Rourke, had robbed the bank and put the money in his pocket, had wrecked the gray coupe, had pushed Nancy Nelson into his arms, had yanked George Nelson's feet out from under him so that he broke his neck, had set fire to the old hotel last night.

And Kramer's words had removed all hope he might have had that this was the end, that no more would happen. There was, it seemed, no limit to the diabolical things this subconscious mind might wish for. At the next

moment, anything might happen. Throughout his life his guilt would continue to grow enormously. He would be responsible for countless and terrible crimes because there was no way of ridding himself of his frightful servant. Always he would be tortured by the thought that whatever happened was the result of his own desires.

By now Henry Tyler had covered a score of city blocks in his stumbling flight, and sheer physical fatigue was beginning to tell upon him. He slowed his pace, then stopped altogether, to lean pantingly against the black marble exterior wall of a shop.

He was on Fifth Avenue, somewhere in the Fifties, in the heart of the luxury shopping district. His distraught gaze fell on the show window beside him, and he saw that he was outside a jewelry store. Within the window, guarded by a steel grillwork behind the glass, a single jewel was on display. A diamond as large as a tangerine, with an orange glow in its heart, cascading golden light across folds of black velvet.

Beneath it, in chaste lettering, a card announced: *The Eye of the Sun. Property of the Maharajah of Delpore. 373 carats. May be purchased.*

Henry Tyler, the conscious, thinking Henry Tyler had no need for a diamond of any sort, but the greed of the savage subconscious had already transmitted its wishes. The shop window crashed inward with a shower of glass as Henry looked at it, the iron grill work split open as if a giant hand had been forced through it, and then Henry Tyler was staring stupidly at the Eye of the Sun, glinting goldenly in his fingers.

Somewhere close by a police whistle shrilled. Heavy feet pounded toward him. Henry jerked his head up, saw the approaching bluecoat, and automatically started to run.

Then he checked himself. A thought had flashed through his mind, like a cold arrow transfixing him. What had old Muskiadies told George Nelson?

Dangerous servants are these mindless things, for only death can part them from a master to whom they have been attached.

Only death . . .

But he could not continue to be the author of death and disaster resulting from the dreadful gratitude of the elemental. He could not. If there was only one way to prevent it, to cut short this trail of terror he had begun . . .

HENRY TYLER knew he had no choice. He had to end this awful thing now, in the only way he could. The on-rushing officer had his hand on the butt of his gun. Henry Tyler turned and flung the great diamond straight at his face.

The bluecoat ducked the stone and yanked out his gun. He was so close Henry could see the compression of his lips, the tightening of the muscles around his eyes as he took aim.

Then Henry Tyler closed his eyes and waited.

The roar of the revolver made him open them again. Over his head glass splintered and crashed. The officer's face was a queer mixture of surprise and apprehension. The shot had missed by yards, and now he was holding the gun high over his head, apparently struggling against an unseen force to bring it down again.

But it got away from him. It seemed to twist out of his fingers and go flying off through space, over the rooftops across the street while the cop stared at Henry Tyler in absurd confusion.

Then Tyler knew his plan was no

good. Consciously he had wanted the shot to hit him, to kill him. But his subconscious had wanted it to miss. And it had missed. The elemental had seen to that. It would have made no difference if a dozen cops had tried to shoot him. They would all have missed, their revolvers thrust aside, torn from their grip, sent hurtling skyward by the faithfully obedient slave.

So now he ran. A force behind him like a strong wind pushed him, and he fled through the crowd, around a corner through an alley, and was in the clear before pursuit could be organized.

Safe, he dropped to a puffing walk. He had failed. But he had another idea, desperate but sure to be effective.

He scurried south on Sixth Avenue to Thirty-fourth Street, and there turned back to Fifth. Then he was outside the Empire State Building; it towered skyward above his head.

Without pausing Henry Tyler entered and trotted through the black marbled corridors to the observation-platform elevator. He paid his dollar, entered with a small group of innocent trippers from the Middle West, and was shot upward a thousand feet and more, to emerge into the wind-swept open high above Manhattan.

Swiftly, paying no attention to the view or to the sightseers already there, he made a circuit of the observation platform, peering downward at the city that lay below him like a detail map. A breeze tore at him unnoticed. The roar of the city, muted to a dull and distant grumble, rose up to him. He did not hear it. His mind was closed to every thought but one.

It took him only a moment to pick the spot. Below him the downward rush of the building wall was broken only once before it reached the street. No one was close, no one was looking. He scrambled to the top of the guard rail, poised a moment, and leaped outward as far as he could.

HENRY TYLER, as he fell, felt almost calm. If the only way he could break the bond that held the elemental to him was by dying, it was better that he die. And in a moment it would be all over. He opened his eyes and found himself turning slowly over and over as he descended, with the streets below passing across his vision in alternation with the blue of the cloudless sky.

The wind that had been wafting swiftly past his face as he began to fall was growing now to a howling gale. The straight, gleaming flank of the building seemed to rush past him, like a great arrow shooting heavenward. Each turn of his body brought the street below enormously closer.

The wind was carrying him clear of the setback below. Thirty-fourth Street was beneath him, wide and clear and momentarily traffic free. He could even see the point at which he would probably strike. It swooped up toward him, magnifying incredibly, and with only an instant remaining to him he closed his eyes and unconsciously braced himself.

But in that instant something happened. A giant hand seemed to seize him, something closed about him, his fall was checked as if he had dropped onto enormous cushions of pneumatic rubber. For a split second the invisible force upheld him. Then his feet touched asphalt with scarcely a jar.

As he stood there, mechanically taking note of the bug-eyed surprise on the face of a paralyzed passerby who had been watching his fall, Henry Tyler knew what had happened.

He had wanted to commit suicide.

But his subconscious mind had been eager to live. And the blindly obedient slave who was his had saved him from this death just as it had saved him from the policeman's gun.

Just as it would save him from any violence that might be attempted against him, even by himself. If he tried to fire a bullet into his brain, the gun would jerk aside. If he tried to stab himself, something would grasp his hand.

He could not even die, save by old age or the mischance of disease. He could not even die! He was doomed to live, to be the author of every horror known to the dark depths of a man's subconscious mind. All because he could not prevent his own wishes from being fulfilled.

Terror and despair closed in upon Henry Tyler. About his head a gale seemed to be raging, in which loud laughing voices howled senseless mirth in his ears. And then, quite unknowingly, tormented beyond human endurance by the horror that was in him, Henry Tyler found the other way out.

Within his mind something made a soft sound, like the crackle of a fuse blowing out. The storm he had felt battering at him was gone. Smilingly he began to walk, straight forward. When they caught up with him, he had bumped into a street light standard, and unable to find his way around it, was still moving his arms and legs like a man walking.

They led him away, and he went peacefully, still smiling, chuckling to himself softly, mindlessly, quite like a new born baby.

St. John blew that bugle more beautifully than anything that could be imagined

Bugles Are for Soldiers

By CHARLES MARQUIS WARREN

CHAPTER XXI

THE UNSEEN TRAP

JUST before dawn a scouting detail of some forty Indians returned. They reported to Deesohay's lodge and then retired to their separate wickiups. Another party, even larger, rode out silently to take their place. The scouts had brought no word. The soldiers had not been sighted or the encampment would not have remained so quiet.

During the heat of the following day a few of the Indians amused themselves by working on Private Carlson.

His resistance was obviously waning and his soft pleading cries brought delight to his tormentors.

Apparently they were not allowed to touch Reardon or Jerry Kitchen. They left them alone except for curious stares

The first installment of this five-part serial, herein concluded, was published in the Argosy for April 13

at Hair of the Sun and the Wise Eagle, who until now had been merely formidable names and not to be thought of as tangible flesh and blood.

Noon came and dragged on.

The encampment appeared lethargic and there was no apparent suspense either in the manner of the Indians or the hourly change of scouts who came up through the rocks of the pass to this table-top and were replaced.

Jerry Kitchen craned his head and looked at the sun.

"I make it three o'clock easy," he observed. He spat and his cold stare forced down the inquisitive glance of an Arapahoe buck who was gawping at him with something akin to wonder.

"They'd 'a got here by now," Jerry said equably. "They're not coming, Johnny."

Reardon said, "I'd kind've thought." As an after thought he added: "I'm damned glad. It's a relief."

"It won't be a relief when they start in on us. They'll make up for losin' a squadron of scalps by takin' it out fancy on you and me."

"They'll have to do better than they did yesterday."

"They will."

Once more Reardon's eyes sought the narrow defile in the rocks on top of this side of the pass. He was above the defile and could search the patch of open country that he saw.

There was no movement. He had looked at it so many times today he knew it by heart, and the barest trace of movements would have been discernible to him no matter how many miles distant. They would have come that way had they come at all.

HE FOUND himself looking at Angela. They had her and St. John on their feet, forcing them to look at the things they were doing to Private Carlson.

Angela's eyes were on the ground. Her tall figure dropped a little at the shoulders. St. John gawped at the procedure in stupefied fascination. His face was a sickly saffron and his head nodded gently as if he were either about to go to sleep or lose his mind. His breath was still blasting; it came from his nose like someone was pounding him on the back.

Jerry Kitchen's head raised.

"There's horses comin'," he said. "It ain't time for the next scout to come in."

Reardon began to feel funny. He couldn't hear anything. But he kept still.

Jerry said, "It ain't soldiers. It's Indians. They're ridin' funny. It ain't natural."

Ten minutes later they came in. They rode up in front of Deesohay's lodge and dismounted. As though each one had received a personal message, Indians came bounding out of wickiups, yelping, and converged on the new arrivals.

"That's what made them ride funny," Jerry said. "See what I mean?"

There were about sixty Indians in the returning scout. Nearly half of these had the bodies of men thrown over the bare backs of their ponies.

There were feather-tufted sticks protruding from the bodies and the dead men wore blue tunics with yellow piping down the trousers. They had been scalped. The top of their heads were like red gapes against the sunlight, with little halos of flies hovering about each head.

"They used arrows," Jerry announced, "so's not to make a noise. You know who them poor devils was, Lieutenant?"

Reardon nodded.

"The advance guard," he said dully.

"They're comin', Johnny. I allowed they would. Old Paper Cutter's comin' and he must be comin' like a bat outa Hell. Look at them critters hustle."

The entire camp seemed distorted with running, howling confusion. Guns, bows, lances appeared in hands. Ponies were led out from behind wickiups and milled about stupidly while their owners darted into the shelters, to return with paint hastily daubed on their chests and faces.

AND then everything became suddenly transmuted and there was order and quiet. Deesohay was on his pony, magnificent in vermillion and yellow and black. He spoke briefly in a low voice, wheeled his animal and held up his hand. Then he dropped it.

There was a roar of voices and the mass became a mounted horde following its tall leader through the rocks and descending into the pass.

After a while nothing was left but the echoes of their war whoops, and in a few moments even these died and there was a silence as loud as the whooping of a moment before.

The three Indians who had been left to guard the captives were the only red men in the camp, and they evinced their disgust by throwing handfuls of dirt into the faces of the men before them.

After a while they tired of this and after pantomiming to Angela and St. John that they would receive an arrow through their breasts if they so much as made one move, the Indians squatted together and talked in low tones, evidently losing interest in the captives.

Reardon said softly, "Jerry, they're riding in to it unaware. They'll never know what happened. Deesohay will have his men hidden so that Cutter will be all the way into the pass before things break loose. They'll get him like they got me in that other pass."

"Lieutenant, you think it's your fault, don't you?"

"I know that."

"You're wrong. I set 'em to come here. It ain't worrying me so much. I'll be dead too. Sojers sign up to die. They got it comin' to 'em, and ought to have better sense than to sign up. Me, I ain't got any sense at all. That's the way it is."

Reardon's eyes found Angela. She was looking at him. The smile she gave him was weary and strained. He tried to smile back. He was thinking of what she had said in fury, seemingly years ago, that there had to be something like this to electrify the people who could do something about it—who would send the right kind of officer and soldier out here to combat an element they knew only vaguely through romantic press stories and Currier and Ives lithographs.

He was thinking that that necessary awakening was at hand. He wondered if it was in her thoughts at the moment.

And then he felt another glance upon himself. He turned his head slightly and it was St. John staring at him. St. John's face was twisted, his cheeks white and gaunt. But Reardon had never seen his eyes like this.

They were no longer vapid. The old arrogance had come back in some measure. He was looking queerly at Reardon.

"They'll be coming soon now," St. John said. The Indians glanced up, shrugged and resumed their conversation. "They'll be trapped as we were trapped before."

"Yes."

"Have they hurt you very much?"

"It could be a lot worse."

"They've hurt you. I never saw anything like it. I watched." His eyes went over Reardon's face and hands and bare chest. "I couldn't have stood it."

"If you had to."

"No." St. John looked away but the arrogance was still there, a little more pronounced. He would never get over that. "They didn't bother to hurt me."

"They're saving you and Angela. Ransom means a lot to an Indian."

"No. They didn't consider me worth troubling about." His voice raised suddenly in a bitterness that swept through him. "I wasn't soldier enough for them to bother about!"

ONE of the Indians turned around, raised himself and struck St. John in the face with his fist. Blood came from St. John's lips and they began to puff immediately.

St. John looked at the Indian and his eyes were gleaming and queer, almost as if he were thanking the Indian.

Reardon said, "Take good care of her," and St. John looked at him and nodded.

Apathetically, as though he expected nothing he had not seen a thousand times, Reardon's glance went back to the narrow defile in the rocks, and abruptly every aching tendon in his body came alive and taut.

"Jerry."

"Yeah."

"Look. Through that crack. Can you see?"

"Nup. It's outa line for me. What?"

"They're coming.'

He could see it. In spite of the dread that crawled in his stomach, a certain moving pride possessed him and he found it difficult to swallow.

It was a long way off but he could make it out clearly.

His eyes hung on it, focusing as it came nearer. He wanted to shout out and he didn't know if it were with pride or warning. It came creeping on, a long thick blue line starred with pennons which had a proud erectness to their thrust. It seemed to crawl, to stop, to move with infinitesimal slowness, yet he knew the column to be galloping.

St. John was standing up and following Reardon's gaze. His face was set in strange, scrupulous study as though he were judging a body of cavalry deploying on parade.

Now the three Indians were watching and their faces depicted none of their reactions.

Angela alone did not rise. She sat facing Reardon, watching him. There was a serenity of expression about her, as though an endless waiting had been got through and something dreadful but to be endured were at hand. She looked as though a smile from Reardon would set her to screaming.

He could differentiate horse from man now. He could see the glance of the low-hanging sun on metal equipment. Almost he could hear the cadence of the hoofs.

He wondered if they would ride that gloriously, that magnificently, if they knew what they were riding into. He gauged them by himself and concluded that they wouldn't. They were soldiers, not fools.

Suddenly it came on him like a dive into icy water how sorry he felt for them. It was not only that he blamed their predicament on himself; it was the fact that they were so completely unaware, and would be slaughtered without ever having a chance.

There would be a whooping as an avalanche of arrows, lances and bullets raked them; their horses would rear and churn and throw them and tram-

ple them; a red wave of yelping, firing savages would come leaping down from the rocks on either side, inundating them before there was time for more than one pitiful, scattered volley of carbines.

He felt sick and closed his eyes.

But he opened them immediately and saw that the column had come very close and in a minute would pass out of sight below the bottom of the defile through which he watched.

By now he could make out faces under the campaign and forage caps. By God, they hadn't even got their carbines unslung. They had no way of knowing that their advance guard wasn't showing the way far ahead.

St. John cursed.

Then he cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted as loud as he could. Even he knew the futility of this gesture. His voice couldn't be heard by them. One of the Indians fitted an arrow to his bow and drew it back, centering the flinthead at St. John's back; but before he could loose it, the indifference bespoke more conclusively than the arrow that St. John's shout was useless.

By the time the column was close enough for a man's voice to reach it, it would have thundered into the pass beneath, and all the shouting in creation would be of no avail.

CHAPTER XXII

FAREWELL TO ARMS

PRIVATE CARLSON sagged against his post and muttered in a thin colorless voice. He was having a hard time. He did not know about the advancing column, and he did not care.

Reardon could not explain the mixture of emotions in his breast. As the blue line neared he could feel his heart seem to pick up the column's cadence and gallop with it.

It was like standing on top of a high hill and waiting for a predicted end of the world. You felt fear and dread, and a disgusting horror, yet there was a mysterious thrill and a half inclination to disbelieve.

Private Carlson seemed to come to himself. He opened his mouth and croaked weakly.

"What's up, Lieutenant?"

"They're coming."

"The squadron?"

"Yes. The whole outfit. Coming for us."

Carlson strained to follow Reardon's eyes, but it was too much for him.

"I can't see 'em, Lieutenant. Are they close?"

"Yes. Almost here."

"But they'll be . . . won't they?"

"They might fight through."

"Like hell," Jerry Kitchen said. "Not a mite of a chance."

Carlson appeared to consider. In the face of his pain nothing made much sense.

"In another minute," he whispered finally, "they'll all be dead—like me. But they won't look like me." He wondered if his scalp were still intact. His whisper grew stronger with the new curiosity. "Lieutenant, can you make out if I still got my hair? I can't seem to tell if my scalp's on or off. Ain't that kind of funny?"

"It's still there, Carlson. You're all right."

"I'm all right" Carlson again raised his head to see if he couldn't catch a glimpse through the crack in the rocks. The effort strained the buckskin thongs tight against his raw body and he promptly fainted, his head and arms and knees sagging.

THE Indian with the ocher-painted face glanced at him, went over near the blanket where the bodies of Crispin, Casy and Stevie Vance were lying, and picked up a clay jug filled with the water which they had not dispensed to the captives throughout the blistering day.

He walked over and emptied the jug in Private Carlson's face and Carlson came alive, dripping, and tried to lick some of the moisture from his face with his tongue. The water dripped down his body, wetting and cooling it. He moaned a little.

The column had passed out of sight beneath the defile and had virtually reached the pass by now. But still a human voice was useless.

Reardon saw that Angela's lips were moving and her eyes were raised; he guessed she was saying a prayer and wondered if he ought to.

He didn't feel like it. He could offer one up for those men who were riding into destruction beneath him but it wouldn't help. It wouldn't turn their course.

He guessed you had to say prayers a long time in advance before they became valid and did any good.

For a moment he thought of his four years at West Point and how things had been there and how they had turned out here. It made him feel a little sad but mostly it embarrassed him.

There was a hall there, a most wonderful hall, and many times he had gone to gaze on the illustrious dead of West Point, men who had gone down the way soldiers should go down in battle. The Revolution; 1812; the Seminole and Mexican Wars; the Blackhawk; and now he supposed there'd be new names, names of those who'd gone down in the last war, regardless of which side they'd gone down for.

He had not been ashamed of the hope he'd had as he looked so many times at those imposing lists of names. A man is ashamed of no honest emotion.

"These be the men who kept the faith, who lived and loved thereby; who fought the fight, who kept the faith, who died as men should die."

It had done things to him, as it probably had to many others. He grinned a little, and the grinning hurt him physically, as he thought of the other tablet, apart and down the wall from the rest, with its sardonic inscription. Three words and a date: *Major-General —— Born 1740.* The name and date of death omitted.

He guessed it was ridiculous to compare himself with Benedict Arnold; disobeying orders and engendering the massacre of a Territory Post Squadron was insignificant enough compared with the major-general's abortive transaction, but it came to him and he thought about it and ending here like this was such a far cry from the expectations they'd had for him and he'd had for himself.

It made him want to cry and smile at the same time, very gently with a humble disappointment. It hurt him more than the knives he'd felt, or the burns, or the slow loss of his finger nails, or the ashes rubbed in the wounds of the peeled skin.

HE COULD hear the roaring cadence of the hoofbeats now. The thick blue line would be dashing in. The sweat stood out in large drops on his forehead. The thongs contracted against his body as he stiffened it and drew his head back as though to ward off a blow.

Then a strange voice was saying quietly, "It's you. You are what they

meant at the Point and always have been. Only I couldn't see it."

He looked and saw that the words were coming from St. John. St. John was facing him, his face transfixed so that only his lips moved as though they were divorced from the actuating power of the man himself and were operated by someone pulling strings.

"I saw them do things to you that no human being should do to another. You held on because you thought it would give Cutter a chance. You could have died easily enough. I know enough to know that. But you were giving Cutter time. You were carrying out orders—the orders which brought you out here. Destroy Deesohay. You held on. You weren't asked to do it."

St. John's words were very low but Reardon could hear him clearly. Angela had turned to look at him. The three Indians continued to watch through the defile though there was nothing there now.

'"Intrepidity beyond the call of duty in action.' That was in the books too, John. You had all of it. That was what we saw in you though we didn't know we saw it. I'm the one who was wrong. Are you listening?

"You told me you hoped I'd see it. I hope I have. You have done more than duty or tradition required of you. You've disgraced yourself and your name and the Academy where you were trained. And all that you knew."

St. John's eyes were very bright.

"You've got to stay here, and be a mark for the new ones to shoot at. This country needs your kind, in order that more may be modeled after you. That I know."

He looked obliquely at the Indians beside him and then he looked at Reardon and a smile brushed his lips. He said swiftly:

"What I am about to do is merely in the line of duty. So many of us are like that. We do what we are required and nothing more; because we can't see anything more. It's a pity." He nodded briefly as though in friendship. "I know now there'll be legends about you, John. As we used to think there'd be." His voice was suddenly a whisper. "We'll be proud to have been at the Point with you."

And then very quickly he moved, and moved three long steps before the Indians turned to see what he was doing.

CHAPTER XXIII

ONE LAST CLEAR CALL

FOR a moment he was bending over the blanket where lay Casy and Crispin and Stevie Vance. Then he had straightened and was running.

He ran cleanly, as a runner who knows he has his hard sprint ahead of him. He ran between Jerry Kitchen and Reardon, heading up the steep sweep of the hill at their backs. By twisting his hand until the pain of it was breathtaking, Reardon could see him run.

"Good boy," he said softly.

Jerry was looking too. "By God," Jerry said. And then he said again, "By God!"

It was surprising how little panic came to the three Indians. It took them a moment to recover from their first bewilderment. Then they started to run after him, calling.

But almost at once they realized the uselessness of this and they stopped and began deliberately fitting arrows to the guts of their bows.

Reardon saw St. John raise his right arm as he ran, saw the rays of the sun glance and sparkle and then he heard it.

It came out sharp and high, staccato

and infinitely thrilling. He could see the cadets on the Plain at the Point listening to it, the Corps drawn up in that long line. Perhaps they were bareheaded. He could not be sure. But he knew the Corps was listening, as it always had.

At first it was Adjutant's Call, and Reardon hoped Stevie could hear. Stevie had never mastered it like this but he felt sure Stevie would share the same thrill that bit so deeply into Reardon and tightened his throat as he listened.

Stevie's bugle had never sounded this way, but Stevie was B Company and would not resent it. Reardon had the quick thought that Gabriel's horn would be about like this, singing out from the distance, ringing its voice in a clarity so sharp as to be beautiful.

St. John had changed it to the Cavalry Charge and the lilt of it seemed to echo and careen, searching out the hills and the desert and the sky and painting them with its tone.

He was stumbling now.

The three Indians were releasing their arrows with deliberate precision, thudding them into his back, driving them clear through so that their feathered tips festooned his back and conveyed the brief impression that a highly colored war bonnet fell from his shoulders.

Reardon said again, "Good boy," softly, and then he heard the notes falter as each arrow drove home.

St. John slipped, fell, climbed wearily back on his feet, the notes spluttering. But once more they came high and clear as though he had gathered a great final strength—and then he was on his knees and Reardon knew a dead man was blowing the bugle as it dwindled and coughed and faded into nothing but echoes which seemed a long way off.

HE WAS vaguely surprised to hear that the echoes weren't echoes, but other bugles, four or five of them, sounding somewhere below. And the noise of the hoofs had ceased. The column wasn't coming in.

He smiled in spite of the hurt of smiling. *Know that, Dennis; the blue column isn't coming in.*

"By God," Jerry Kitchen said. "They heard him. They heard the hootin' son of a devil."

There was an interminable minute of silence. Nothing on the face of the earth was alive. Then a war whoop slid up to its human pitch and a single shot cut the still air. It didn't sound like an ambush war whoop. It came again. It sounded angry.

Abruptly there was a volley; a roaring, coordinated volley of carbines such as could come only from trained troops. It was repeated, after an interval, and came again and again.

The whooping increased, taken up by hundreds of throats, and sporadic shots buffeted the even roaring of the carbines. Then the heavy drumming cadence of hoofs took up and Reardon knew the column was coming in, but coming in this time with their heads up.

Two of the Indians bounded forward through the encampment toward the entrance where they could see what was going on.

It was their intention not to miss any of the fun if it were going their way. There was a harvest of scalps to be had down there.

The third darted up the hill and bent over St. John.

Reardon found himself wishing St. John could know that his scalp was coveted. He thought that maybe, up until two minutes ago, it hadn't been.

Private Carlson was dying, and it

occurred to him that all he had to do in order to free himself from the post was to shake his shoulders and legs, and the buckskin bonds about his body would loosen and drop.

He did so. And the thongs immediately became loose enough to permit him to disengage himself and step free. He was so surprised that he stood two feet away from the post and surveyed it as though it had been an animal whose jaws he had pried open and escaped from.

It pleased him that he even knew the reason he could walk free. It was that water they had doused over him. Moisture makes buckskin soft and stretchy. He remembered that was why they didn't use it in the Army even though rope was so hard to get out here.

Now that he was free he didn't quite know what his next step should be. He hadn't thought that far ahead.

He had a general idea that he ought to start walking in the direction of Missouri if he were ever to reach Neosho. He'd have to rest somewhere along the way and see if he couldn't get something to stop this bleeding. The outside didn't count; it was the bleeding inside that he knew was dangerous. He couldn't feel it but he was aware of it as you know your nose is bleeding before you feel the warmth. They'd batted him considerably with the flat sides of their tomahawks and he guessed that was what had started it.

HE TOOK a step and then he saw the Indian coming down the hill. He thought he had better not try to run or that would tap a well inside him and he'd bleed to death.

He stood still, swaying a little, and watched the hatchet that the Indian had taken from his belt.

From a great distance he heard Reardon's sharp "Duck, Carlson!" but they were just two words which didn't make any sense.

However, they had the ring of a command and instinctively he moved to obey an order he couldn't rationalize. He imagined the lieutenant had told him to proceed against the enemy and he started forward.

The Indian had gauged the distance and thrown the hatchet while Private Carlson remained stationary; he hadn't expected the soldier to walk into it.

Private Carlson therefore spoiled its spinning trajectory and the handle instead of the blade thudded against his chest. It cracked whatever ribs he suspected of being still intact, and its impetus knocked him down.

The scalp yell broke from the Indian's throat and he humped forward, knife in hand. He reached down and grasped Carlson by the hair.

Carlson looked gravely up at him and said, "It's a long way to Missouri, Myrna. Too long. . . ."

He sagged oddly, not forward or backward, but sideward as a man does who falls from a horse, and lay on his side, his knees doubled up and pressing his stomach as if to dam an overflow which had stirred within him.

The Indian had to get down on his knees and he was that way, engrossed at his task, when the blade of his own hatchet found the base of his neck.

He sprawled forward over Carlson, and Angela felt a quiver run the length of her body as she let go of the handle. She did not think of what she had done, only that she had been able to do it. She walked slowly to Reardon and with ponderously clumsy fingers loosened his bonds.

Then she sat down and gawped foolishly at her crossed legs.

Reardon found he could take no more than three steps from the post, so he looked at Jerry and said, "Just as soon as I can get the stiffness out."

"Sure, Lieutenant. I ain't in any hurry. Like I said, they haven't done much to me."

Reardon sank slowly to the ground beside Angela. Weakly he put out his hand and closed it over hers.

She was laughing, seemingly unable to stop, and the laughter set off little convulsions in her stomach and made the cords in her neck stand out. She kept on laughing.

When he looked at her eyes they were wet and the tears were dropping freely down her cheeks.

He said weakly, "It's all right. You hear? It's over now and it's all right. Everything is."

She didn't stop laughing although she tried to nod.

He didn't know whether it was all right or not. The noise had quieted but you couldn't tell. It might be ended and it might be just a pause.

He could smell the stench of smoke and black powder. It was sharp and almost stimulating. The confusion of sound seemed to stop altogether. He could hear no yelling, no whooping.

Usually you could count on a good deal of yelping when Indians realized they had won. He figured the entire fight had not taken over thiry-five minutes.

Jerry Kitchen was facing the entrance of the encampment and he said, "Here they come."

CHAPTER XXIV

GOOD SOLDIERS ARE MADMEN

REARDON felt too tired to turn. He focused his eyes on a spot fifty feet up the hill. He could see the soles of St. John's boots, the toes pointing up at queer right angles. The insteps of the boots were free of dust and still new and shiny.

Jerry said, "They took a licking."

He's lying up there above me, Reardon thought. He and his new boots and that broken up bugle. He blew it even better than the time he embarrassed Stevie. He's so new and with new ideas. He said he'd learned and I wonder if he did.

I wonder if any of us do. It was a pretty way to go down. Most soldiers would like to go down like that, and seldom do. I guess I'd like it. I guess I would. But the longer I live the better I like living. My God, I'm a mess. I look worse than I thought.

Jerry said, "Yeah, a hell of a licking."

The light of the sun on the hill was weak and red. It caught the soles of the boots and they seemed to glisten.

Jerry said, "When you lose that many men it's hard to tell who wins and who don't."

Very slowly Reardon turned his head and shoulders and looked.

The column was riding through the rocks at the entrance. He could see their heads coming up first, as though someone were pushing them from beneath, and then the chests and hips, and finally the legs straddling the animals, until horses and riders ascended into full view and moved into the encampment.

There was something about their double file which told of the absence of men. Even when the gaps in the files are closed up you can tell that the men filling them are merely filling them.

There were a lot of men. They were still coming through the entrance when Colonel Cutter and officers at the column head dismounted in the center of the encampment and started running

toward the three people at the base of the hill.

He could hear their saber chains and scabbards clanking as they ran. They appeared winded and tired. He watched them with indifference.

Paper Cutter's face was wet with perspiration, very red and very dirty. He was trying to wipe it with his handkerchief but not doing a good job.

There was a cut in the midde of his forehead which didn't bleed much but there it was. It fascinated Reardon. It seemed so very neat and precise. He wondered how the old man had got it.

Cutter was shouting as he ran.

"Who blew that bugle? We nearly ran into it. By Harry, we nearly did."

Then he saw Angela and he made for her and bent over her, ascertaining for himself that she was all right. She had stopped laughing. She nodded gravely to him and her eyes pointed out Reardon.

An officer whom Reardon recognized as the post surgeon examined her quickly, and pronounced her all right except for severe shock. It was a little funny. Severe shock! It sounded like nothing at all. . . .

PAPER CUTTER was looking at the bodies on the blanket. He did not bend over to inspect them. He could see enough. He was swearing quite loudly.

Then he walked over and stood in front of Reardon, looking down at him. He looked at Reardon's face and chest and hands. "My God," he said. He seemed to be getting his breath back. "My God." He closed his eyes for the space of a second. Then he opened them. "Pritchard, get over here quick. See about him."

The surgeon knelt beside Reardon, his medical kit open on the ground. He was splashing alcohol of some sort on the upturned expressionless face, on the chest and arms, and very gently on the fingers. The sting sickened Reardon, then hurt viciously, then seemed to revive and stimulate him. By this he knew he was fainting.

"I'm fainting," he said equably.

The surgeon had to get his ear close to Reardon's lips.

"What's that, Lieutenant?"

"I'm going out."

The surgeon pressed something under Reardon's nose and things became relative

"There."

"Yes. Better."

Behind him he heard the familiar sounds of cavalry dismounting; leather creaking, boots shuffling the ground, horses trampling and snorting, equipment clanking softly. It was pleasant and vastly reassuring. The smell of smoke and powder seemed to have drifted away. The odor of tobacco reached the nostrils and that was like having an old friend say hello.

The surgeon was smearing some kind of salve over him and then he was being bandaged. It took some time.

The surgeon was saying, "He'll do He'll get along, I think."

Paper Cutter blew raucously through his red nose. Then his voice roared, as if he were finding relief in an explosive tirade which had smoke and heat but no burn.

His words came only partially to Reardon; disobeyed orders, half a detail wiped out, not to mention the terrific loss the squadron had taken just now, never get this many replacements, three officers lost.

Cutter would make the dispatches to Headquarters burn with the antics of a half-baked commissioned officer whom they'd found tortured half out of

his mind. By heaven he would. A fact.

He'd also recommend a company for the same madman he thought should be cashiered. The madman had somehow taken that other madman. Deesohay. By heaven he had.

Captain Parker died twenty minutes ago in the pass and that left B without a commanding officer. Paper Cutter was certain B would suit Reardon quite well. B's complement was filled with harebrains who had no better sense than Reardon. By heaven they hadn't. A fact.

Yes, he'd see to it himself that Reardon took over B if Reardon weren't cashiered. By heaven he would.

Reardon's eyes lifted to the hill. He said, "St. John blew the bugle. He's up there."

PAPER CUTTER turned and lumbered up the hill, standing and looking down upon St. John. He took quite a time. He didn't take his hat off. He moved his head up and down seeming to nod.

Once he reached out and curiously touched one of the feathered tips of the sticks. Then he ambled down the hill and blew heavily through his great red nose. After a while he asked, "They get him after he blew it?"

"While he was blowing it."

"By heaven." Paper Cutter turned and looked again. "They'll give him a plaque at the Point for this. In the Hall. I'll see they do. By heaven. While he was blowing it."

Nobody added anything to this and there was a contemplative silence which Jerry Kitchen's bland voice finally broke.

"If it ain't any trouble I'd like to be cut down from here."

The troopers had tethered their horses and were going methodically through the encampment. Here and there, on the outskirts, fires were beginning to spring up as the wickiups and lodges were set off.

The men moved wearily without much interest in the proceedings. This had been the temporary camp of a war party and there was hardly any loot. It had been difficult down in the pass to judge by the men's apathetic manner.

Reardon said, "I think I can walk."

"No," the surgeon said.

"Jerry, help me. I have to get down there."

Jerry helped him up. He put his shoulder under his right arm and supported him. He was quite gentle. Angela came to the other side and slipped her shoulder under the lieutenant's left arm.

"No," Reardon said.

"I want to," she said. "Please. I know what you want to do. I want to be with you."

The surgeon said, "You're a damned fool, Lieutenant."

THEY started through the encampment, Cutter walking behind them, blowing through his nose and swearing. He did not follow them down. He shrugged and remained with the other officers who were directing the destruction of the encampment.

Enlisted men were bringing up wounded figures in blue tunics and carrying them to Deesohay's lodge. The surgeon headed towards the lodge after saying to Reardon, "You ought not move. You're worse than you think. They did things to you that you don't even know about." He walked toward the lodge, grumbling. Those Indians had probably done something to Lieutenant Reardon's mind.

The floor of the pass seemed a long

way down. They held on to him carefully but he seemed to be getting along all right.

"Easy, Johnny boy," Jerry Kitchen said. "There's no hurry."

"Yes there is."

The way he said it made Angela and Jerry Kitchen glance at him quickly. His eyes were very bright and he looked odd, swathed in those yards of white bandage. But that was all. He was walking steadily, if slowly.

There a great many dead horses in the ravine. But there were more dead men. White and red.

"I ain't seen this many at one time," Jerry Kitchen said solemnly.

They were everywhere, twisted and inert, little clusters of the thicker in some spots than in others, as though here a burst of stubborn fighting had taken place, and here only a man had dropped.

Most of them were Indians but there were many in blue tunics. Too many. One man sat on the belly of a fallen horse, clumsily trying to bandage his right forearm. He held a strip of the bandage in his teeth and patiently tried to wind the other end around the blood stained skin of his arm. Somebody was calling "Oh," over and over, and it was hard to tell whether it was a white man or an Indian.

A burial squad moved among the figures, picking them up and carrying them off somewhere. They paid no attention to dead Indians. There was the sick smell of blood over everything.

A young officer and an aide were going about, kneeling beside some of the fallen men. Reardon recognized the officer as the new assistant post surgeon. He worked quickly, and after he attended the wounded most of them sat up and looked vaguely about.

A few of them got shakily to their feet and plodded upward toward the encampment. Some men came down with stretchers made of blankets and poles, and piled those of the wounded unable to walk onto the stretchers and carted them to the table-top.

Everything was quiet and sluggish. Nobody said anything. Nobody seemed to have anything to say.

The girl and the two men moved slowly about. Jerry Kitchen said:

"It's creepy, huntin' among the dead like this."

CHAPTER XXV

LAUREL AND BOY

THEY found him up among the rocks of the other side. He had a bullet hole through the bridge of his fine nose, and from his sprawled position this high up had evidently fallen before the first carbine volley.

Most likely that was why the fighting hadn't lasted any longer than it did; they'd been used to his guidance for a long time and it must have left them helpless and confused to lose him so early.

His face had not relaxed. It looked bitterly cruel and disappointed. The blood from the bullet hole had caused the paint on his cheeks and mouth to run and it made him look ludicrous and unneat and took away some of the cruelty, leaving mostly disappointment.

Reardon bent stiffly and took one of the feathers from the scalplock.

He held it in his hand and closed his fingers over it. For a moment he wondered if he ought to take along the scalp, but he let the thought go. That would be the savage way. He wondered if after all he hadn't come to be half savage himself.

The assistant surgeon came up and saluted.

"You all right, sir? I'm Mason. I see you've been attended to."

"Pritchard. He's above. Thank you."

Mason eyed the girl curiously but reserved comment. He also looked at the big figure of Jerry Kitchen, stained and painted and accoutred as an Indian. But again he said nothing.

Reardon kept looking at the feather in his hand. He wished Mason would go way. He was feeling sick at his stomach.

"It was nasty," Mason said. "I can't understand it. This is no way to fight. Ambushes. Savages. It was all right five thousand years ago. If it hadn't been for that bugle we'd have ridden into it and never known. They don't teach these things at the Point."

He was a first lieutenant, yet he had saluted Reardon, almost impetuously. He recognized a senior officer when he saw one, regardless of rank. He was a nice boy. Eager. He looked with disgust at the figure sprawled with its chin on the rock.

"Look at this one here. Fine-looking devil. But look at his face. An animal. The brains of a beast. He never knew why he was fighting.

"Somebody way back told him scalps were valuable. Probably never even saw Deesohay, and yet he died for him. That shows what brains he had. And why we descend to their level and fight their way is a mystery to me. It isn't"—he searched for the word, a little embarrassed—"honorable."

"How long since you left the Point?"

"Last year, sir."

THERE was silence. Reardon looked down at the figure which had the brains of a beast. Mason, thinking he had talked too much, colored. He said self-consciously:

"I'd better get on with my work, sir. We've a lot to do and it's about sundown. We're burying the enlisted men here. The officers we are taking back to the post for burial. It would be impossible to take them all. A shame. But that's the best we can do. They won't mind so much now."

Reardon said, "St. John is up there. You'll take him back of course. And there are three others. Enlisted men. Corporal Casy, Private Carlson and Bugler Vance. I want them taken back to the post, Lieutenant. My responsibility."

"But my order—"

"I want them taken along."

"Yes, sir." Mason's face showed his perplexity. Instinctively his hand went up to salute, and then he seemed to realize that he ranked the man he was saluting. He reddened, but let his hand go up in completion of the salute, swung around and hurried off.

Reardon said, "I feel a little funny. I think I'll sit down." He sat down slowly beside the figure on the rock.

Alarm was in the girl's voice.

"John, what is it?"

"Nothing. I feel a little winded." He looked at the feather in his hand. It was greasy and limp.

Angela's eyes caught those of Jerry Kitchen.

"Quick," she said. "Bring someone down with a stretcher. We'll have to get him up to Captain Pritchard. Please hurry."

Jerry looked down at Reardon. His voice came gruffly soft.

"You ain't going to do anything funny, Lieutenant. We'll get you fixed in a jiffy. I wouldn't want you to do anything funny."

Reardon kept staring at the feather.

"I'm all right. Can't you see?"

Jerry ambled off. At the base of the bluff he broke into a run, his voice

bawling. "Bring one of them pole-blanket contraptions down here. And quick."

VERY gradually it occurred to Reardon that he was free. Being free meant that his work was done. And he wondered if it were. He wondered if this weren't just the beginning of his work, if the completion and success of this mission weren't merely the opening for many others.

There was so much to be done, such a short time to do it in, and so few who were fitted or interested. He felt the pressure of Angela's fingers on his good shoulder. He tried to look at her. She was a long way off. She was saying something to him. He listened intently.

"Put your head against my shoulder. You're too tired to sit up. The effort weakens you."

He did so. He felt better for doing it. It was as though she had taken some of the weight he carried within him to herself. And then he knew that was as it should be and as it would be.

He felt something queer happening inside. A glow came over him, offering warmth.

"Angela?"

"Yes."

"I feel fine. Inside and out. The way a man should feel but seldom does." He drew in his breath quietly.

"I'm glad you feel that way, John. I was hoping you would. You've earned that feeling."

"*We've* earned it."

"Yes."

"I'm glad you're here."

The answer came softly.

"I'll be here. With you. A long time."

And that too was as it should be. As it had to be.

He knew they wouldn't leave, wouldn't go anywhere and be apart from this. Some men built bridges and others came along and walked over them. There was a lot of difference. It was important. He wondered if he would be cashiered.

Then they were carrying him and it was good to be lying out straight and the slight swaying motion seemed to ease the effort of thinking and breathing. He thought he'd just close his eyes for a while.

Angela walked behind. Once she said, "John," because she had thought to speak to him and hear his voice.

But his eyes were closed and he needed the sleep. There would be the years in which to hear his voice, the years that would enter and become a part of them both.

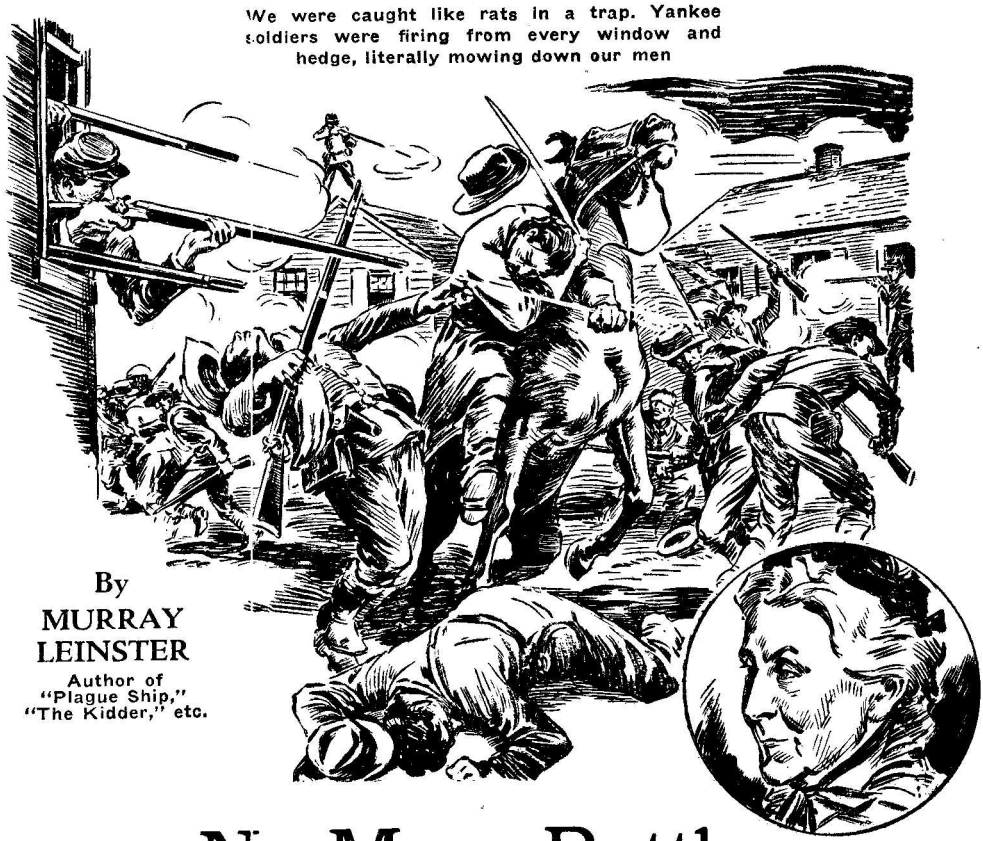
The twilight sent long fingers of shadow to grasp the upward path and she stumbled a little. Then she discovered that it wasn't the shadows that made it difficult to see, but the wetness in her eyes which blurred things and made them faint.

She lifted her hand and brushed away the wetness and at once the path became more distinct. . . .

THE END

WATCH FOR DR. KILDARE!

A new story beginning in the June 1 Argosy



We were caught like rats in a trap. Yankee soldiers were firing from every window and hedge, literally mowing down our men

By
MURRAY
LEINSTER
Author of
"Plague Ship,"
"The Kidder," etc.

No More Battles

Weep no more, Miss Lizzie. Your soldier's home from the wars; his accounts with Jeff Davis and the Confederacy have been squared, and his peace will be your peace forever

MISS LIZZIE tripped gaily on her way through the patch of woods. It was a hot August morning—so hot and so humid that even at nine o'clock the dew wasn't all off the grass.

Miss Lizzie beamed at all the world. She was always friendly to everybody—except of course the Yankees, because they had wrecked all the world and the Confederacy and still held poor Mr. Davis in a dungeon down at Old Point Comfort—

But today she felt so happy that she almost believed, even she positively believed, that she would have spoken politely to a Yankee cavalry officer! And nobody could go on further than that.

The woods thinned before her. Rolling fields, that shimmered in the heat waves. The rail fence, with its clumsy stile for passage over it. Miss Lizzie put her empty basket on the other side. She looked searchingly all about. Her eyes were a little bit faded, nowadays,

and the hands that gathered her voluminous skirts together were thin and blue-veined.

But Miss Lizzie was still just as modest as a lady ought to be. She looked very carefully indeed before she essayed the stile. But she was an active old lady, too.

She landed on the other side not even out of breath, and shook out her skirts again, and began to trip along the path to Tom Holmes' place. He was a sort of connection of Miss Lizzie's. His sister had married Miss Lizzie's nephew Sammy. The one who—

Miss Lizzie carefully put away the thoughts that inevitably came. She would not think of those things now. Right now she was happy. She could tell Tom, of course.

Tom had acted as her nearest male kin ever since he'd come back from the war, even though he was only the brother of her nephew's wife; and Tom had told her that Sammy was dead.

He'd been sympathetic and he'd been kind. When everybody else told her that the Confederate Government bonds in which her father had put his entire fortune were worthless, Tom told her to hold on to them. And he'd advanced money to her to live on until the dividends began to be paid again.

It was a great relief to be able to tell Tom. Miss Lizzie's eyes sparkled with mischief. Three or four times she'd felt so sure that Sammy was on his way back—so absolutely positive—that she'd mentioned it. And people looked embarrassed or tried to reason with her.

Only Tom had listened. But he admitted that he was sure that Sammy had been killed. It was his manner that was satisfying.

Privately, Miss Lizzie could not understand how Tom had let his sister marry again. It seemed improper; so improper that she resolutely refused to think about it.

Instead, she went tripping on toward Tom Holmes' house to borrow some cornmeal and sugar and a little tea too, if convenient, to be paid for—of course!—when things got cleared up and dividends on the bonds of the Confederate Government began to be paid again.

She saw his house clearly. She smiled brightly, in anticipation of the effect of her news. But then she saw a cloud of dust down by the gate. Somebody riding up. Several riders.

Then another cloud of dust, farther away. There were horses in the house-yard. Sunlight glinted on sweaty hides and glittered on bits and bridles. A lot of people in the yard.

A MOMENT'S panic came to Miss Lizzie. Maybe they'd heard! She faltered and stood still, and all the pink went out of her cheeks. If they had heard. . . .

Stark terror came into Miss Lizzie's eyes. She almost turned about and went back to her own house. But she realized that she wasn't sure, and she could find out. She could go on to the house and see.

She went on. But now she did not beam. Her eyes did not sparkle. She looked very anxious and very frail as she toiled down the foot-path next to the tall corn.

It was good corn. Miss Lizzie was a lady, but she knew good corn when she saw it growing. She felt a sort of pride in Tom Holmes, as a connection of her family if only by marriage, because with all the world toppled about his ears he had set to work and learned how to grow good corn.

The gate to the house-yard. The

strong, leathery, sweaty smell of horses and men and tobacco-smoke. Men by the well, talking impatiently. They spoke to Miss Lizzie, lifting their hats. She was relieved. If they'd known her secret, it would have shown in their manner.

She went daintily across the grass to the porch. A dozen men on the porch. Tom Holmes with them. He greeted Miss Lizzie cordially. This was his house.

He had on riding-boots. His air, like that of all the others, was grim. Miss Lizzie suddenly noticed shotguns leaning against the house-wall. She realized that every man she saw was armed.

More men were coming. Puffs of dust showed along the road for a long way.

Miss Lizzie again felt almost faint. But Tom Holmes said:

"I'm glad you came over, Miss Lizzie. Things have been happening fast, but I was just going to send over for you. Will you do me a favor?"

"Of course," said Miss Lizzie brightly. But she was frightened. Her secret —"Don't tell me you're going hunting in August!"

"We are," said Tom Holmes, grimly. Miss Lizzie remembered irrelevantly that he'd been a captain in the Confederate Army. "You've heard about that crazy darky people have said was running about in the woods."

"I haven't heard" said Miss Lizzie. "Not a word. Why?"

"There's been talk about him for nearly a week," said Tom. "Nobody's seen him close to, but he's dangerous. We're going after him with the dogs, today."

Miss Lizzie's faded eyes widened.

"Now, Tom!" she protested in a clear, reproachful treble. "You aren't going to hunt him down! Before the War gentlemen wouldn't have thought of doing such a thing!"

Tom led her inside the house.

"He's dangerous," he said soberly. "I want you to stay here and keep my wife company today. You live alone and everybody knows it. He might know it too."

"You men!" said Miss Lizzie, shaking her head. "You never did know how to handle darkies. I've lived by myself ever since the War ended. I'm not afraid of any darky!"

"This one's dangerous," said Tom. "Worse than dangerous. He's crazy, apparently; and he killed Major Pendleton last night. It looks like he did, anyhow. So we're going to hunt him down."

"Killed Major Pendleton?" said Miss Lizzie. "That's dreadful!"

She shook her head and compressed her lips.

"You'll stay here?"

"Until the evening," agreed Miss Lizzie brightly, "but I must be home before dark."

TOM said patiently, "That's just where you mustn't go. Until we catch that darky it would be too dangerous for you to stay there alone."

Miss Lizzie's eyes sparkled. She laughed a little. It had been said, years ago, that she had a very musical laugh.

"But I'm not alone now, Tom," she said mischievously.

Tom looked at her.

"What's that? Not alone?"

"No," said Miss Lizzie brightly. She sat down—but very erect, as a lady should sit—and beamed at him. "That's what I came over to tell you. I know you'll consider it strictly confidential. Tom—Sammy's home!"

"What?" Tom's voice was almost fierce.

"Yes!" Miss Lizzie nodded four or five times in succession, her eyes dancing. "I know you told me he was dead, Tom. And I know that everybody thought I was cracked when I spoke of feeling that he was on his way home. But I was right. Do you remember when I said I was sure he'd been at the house while I was away?"

Tom Holmes' eyes were stern; were savage.

"Go on, Miss Lizzie." He went suddenly white. Miss Lizzie knew that he was thinking that his sister had married again, believing herself a widow. She felt a remote, detached regret. But she had always resolutely refused to think about that, and she refused to think about it now.

"Tell me about it."

"Why—he came home two days ago," said Miss Lizzie happily, "and you remember that he—was in some trouble."

The phrasing was delicate. Miss Lizzie was able to think of the phrase only, and shut her mind to the facts it referred to. "So naturally he doesn't want me to mention his return. But of course I know I can trust you, Tom."

Tom Holmes said harshly:

"Go on, Miss Lizzie."

"So I'm telling you, in strictest confidence of course," said Miss Lizzie in her thin, happy voice, "and I wondered if you'd let me have a little cornmeal and sugar and perhaps a little tea too if convenient, until I get my dividends and can repay you. I have to cook for Sammy too, now, you know."

Tom Holmes' face was quite white. He said in a shaking voice:

"But—but Miss Lizzie! Do you mean he's actually there? That—that you've seen him? And—"

Miss Lizzie laughed indulgently.

"I haven't actually seen him," she confessed archly, "but I've talked to him. He stands in the darkness and whispers through the window. He's there, Tom."

Tom looked at her queerly. Slowly, the color came back into his cheeks. Then he said:

"Oh, I see!"

"He's very bitter," said Miss Lizzie, lowering her voice. "He's ashamed to show his face, even to me."

Her voice rose again, lilting. "But after all, I said to him, a great many people, even gentlemen, have done things that they regretted afterward, and I was sure that you would intercede for him with the War Department in Richmond, and if necessary I would seek an interview with Mr. Davis to ask a pardon. So I'm sure that sooner or later—"

"Yes," said Tom. His tone was no longer harsh. It was very gentle. And Miss Lizzie remembered confusedly that Mr. Davis was now in prison, kept there by the Yankees. She was disturbed by the contradictory fact.

But Tom understood. He said sympathetically, "I see, Miss Lizzie. And of course I'll keep it in strictest confidence, and anything I can do will be done. We'll talk it over later. But you'll stay here today with my wife, won't you?"

"As long as I'm home by dark," said Miss Lizzie comfortably. "I'll want to put something out for Sammy to eat. Isn't he silly, not wanting to come into the house? Not even wanting me to see him?"

A voice called outside. *"Tom! Tom! All ready to go!"* Tom looked relieved, somehow. He moved toward the door.

"Remember," said Miss Lizzie gaily, "what I've told you is in strictest confidence. Not a word to anybody else!"

"Not a word," agreed Tom soberly.

THEN he was gone. Miss Lizzie listened to the hoofbeats of many horses, going down toward the gate. Dogs made noises among the hoofs. Miss Lizzie went tap-tap-tapping through the house in search of Tom's wife.

She found Martha in the kitchen, superintending the two colored servants who—alone of all the Negroes who had lived on the plantation—had remained in Tom's service. Martha looked as if she had been crying, but she tried to smile.

"Good morning, Miss Lizzie."

"Good morning, child," said Miss Lizzie brightly. "I've come a-begging." Then she explained, "Only until my dividends come, of course, but it's dreadfully tedious waiting."

"Tom's gone off," said Martha. She swallowed. "Somebody—killed Major Pendleton last night. Did you hear?"

"It's really dreadful," said Miss Lizzie without interest. She put down her basket and sat down comfortably. Then she said happily, "I just told Tom, and I know I can tell you too. Sammy's home!"

Martha turned and stared. And Miss Lizzie, beaming, told her story. How she'd had a feeling for a long time—a very long time—that Sammy wasn't dead. No matter what Tom said.

Tom believed it, of course. She wouldn't for an instant believe that Tom would stoop to deception in any form. But somehow she'd had a feeling that Sammy was alive and sooner or later he would come back.

And two nights ago, sitting all alone

(*Please turn the page*)

in the house, she'd heard his voice. He whispered, from somewhere out of doors. His voice was faint, but she heard him.

He wouldn't come in, and he insisted that she shouldn't come out. But he was hungry. If she'd put out a plate. . . .

And she'd done it, and sure enough next morning the plate was clean. As clean as if he'd licked it. A stray dog couldn't have licked it cleaner!

Martha hesitated, and then asked awkwardly whether Miss Lizzie had heard the details of Major Pendleton's murder, the night before. It seemed that a crazy darky, who'd been seen off in the woods—

"It's dreadful," agreed Miss Lizzie brightly, "but do let me talk about Sammy, Martha! I'm so happy that he's home!"

MARTHA'S expression was very queer. She led Miss Lizzie to the front room and sat down to listen. Her fingers worked restlessly. And Miss Lizzie chattered brightly in the front room with the horsehair furniture and the family portraits on the walls.

Presently Martha seemed not to be listening, but to be thinking of something else. And suddenly Miss Lizzie noticed that Martha was crying quietly.

"Oh, my!" said Miss Lizzie, in remorse. "I'm so sorry, Martha! I've been wearying you with my happiness—"

"Not at all," said Martha, trying again to smile. "But you see, Miss Lizzie, Major Pendleton was killed last night, and I was so fond of him! He was almost like my own father, and he was Tom's commanding officer in the Army, and he saved Tom's life in that dreadful affair at Piney Point. It—it seems so horrible that he should be dead and—and in such a horrible way!"

Miss Lizzie remembered confusedly the gathering of horses and men and dogs in the yard outside. They had gone off to hunt down a crazy darky. She'd been frightened for fear they'd heard that Sammy was back.

Now she tried to listen while Martha told her the actual cause of their assembly.

She leaned forward, and her eyes were conscientiously intent while Martha, dry-throated, told her of the finding of Major Pendleton's body after his buggy had come home empty with bloodstains on the seat.

And how the Major was found lying beside the road with many stab-wounds and the marks of sooty fingers about his throat, and other sooty marks—incredible and horrible to think of—where his murderer had beaten him insanely with his fists as he lay there dying.

Miss Lizzie tried hard to listen, and indeed some parts of the story did stay in her mind. But with Sammy's homecoming so fresh in her thoughts, her attention insensibly wavered. She was thinking of that when Martha stopped.

"It's dreadful," she said comfortably, when the voice ceased. "Really dreadful. . . . Martha, have you any mending that needs to be done? Tom asked me to spend the day here, and I'd rather be busy."

She sat presently with the mending, sewing with fine and delicate stitches and concealing defects with the expertness come of the years of the War.

She was quite content. At lunch she spoke interestedly of the mending and of the high prices of cloth and even sewing-thread, and mentioned Sammy only twice. During the afternoon she napped upstairs and then sewed again.

But as sundown drew near she grew frankly restless.

"I have to be home before dark," she

said firmly. "I promised Tom I'd keep you company while he was gone, but I have to cook something for Sammy. And if you can spare some cornmeal and sugar and if convenient a little tea . . ."

Martha tried to detain her—Martha, whose eyes were red from silent tears—but Miss Lizzie was determined. If Tom had not come riding in just at dusk, his face very grim, Miss Lizzie would have gone stoutly off into the darkness all alone, with or without the supplies.

As it was, she stayed to supper. Tom would walk home with her. At the table he said briefly:

"We caught him."

"The crazy darky?" asked Miss Lizzie brightly. "The one who killed Major Pendleton?"

"We caught a crazy darky," Tom answered somberly. "The one who's been sighted two or three times. I don't see how he could have killed the Major, but it couldn't have been anybody else."

Martha looked at him uneasily. He shook his head.

"We lodged him in jail," he told her, "to go to an asylum. He is really crazy. No question about it. It's a good thing he's put away. He didn't know what he was doing. Nobody'd be safe."

MISS LIZZIE said interestedly, "Soot. Martha was telling me about soot-marks on the Major's throat and face. What was the darky doing with soot, Tom?"

Tom blinked.

"That's so. . . . I suppose he'd washed. No sign of it, though." He frowned to himself, thinking. He could not seem to settle the thing in his mind.

Presently he said, "That is queer. He was dirty enough, but he certainly wasn't sooty."

He was frowningly abstracted, after that, until Miss Lizzie said resolutely, "It's getting late, Tom. If you'll walk home with me—"

"Certainly, Miss Lizzie." Tom pushed back his chair. "Is your basket ready?"

"I'll fix it," said Martha. "You come and help, Tom, while Miss Lizzie puts on her bonnet."

Miss Lizzie tied her bonnet-strings while Martha and Tom went away. Presently she went in search of them. Martha was saying in a low tone,

"She really believes it, Tom! I could have cried, hearing her. But she was perfectly all right otherwise. Tom, you don't think—"

Miss Lizzie heard Tom say evenly, "I shot him myself. There were hundreds of Yankees about, but I saw him and I shot him down myself! If I hadn't seen him fall, do you think I'd have let—"

Miss Lizzie tiptoed away. She had no idea what Martha and Tom were talking about, but a lady does not eavesdrop. She adjusted her mittens. She was waiting contentedly when Tom came, carrying her basket. They walked together down the steps and across the house-yard.

"I'm sorry to insist on going home," said Miss Lizzie apologetically, "but I have to think of Sammy. He'll come late, but he will want something to eat."

Tom did not answer for a hundred yards or more. It was hot. It was one of those August nights when the air is so humid that instantly after sundown the dew begins.

In the starlight, already all the grass looked whitish as if frosted. Actually, every grass-blade was coated with a myriad globules, each of which reflected all the stars.

Once they passed under a sapling growing near the fence-line, and there

was a slow, irregular drip from its leaves.

Miss Lizzie talked absorbedly of Sammy.

"Miss Lizzie," said Tom, gently, "I think you ought to hear the details of what happened to Sammy in the war. I never told you."

"Why, no, Tom, you never did," said Miss Lizzie brightly.

They came to the stile. Tom put the basket over and fairly lifted Miss Lizzie to the other side.

"IT WAS at Piney Point," said Tom reluctantly. "We were in bad shape, just then. We were half-starved and half-clothed and we were even short of powder. Our only chance to get supplies was to capture them.

"And there was a big depot the Yankees had built up, and it wasn't guarded as strongly as it might be. If we could capture it, we'd have a chance to go on fighting. If we didn't, things looked bad.

"But we'd have to take it by surprise or we'd have no chance. It was life or death for us, that raid, but Major Pendleton wouldn't have our ranks weeded out. He trusted every man as he trusted himself, he swore."

Miss Lizzie did not speak. This was war-talk. She knew war-talk. But she thought in hopeless confusion of Sammy, and of the war, and glorious victories and of defeats that nobody would quite believe in, until suddenly everything was all over.

"We showed ourselves at Briggs' Ferry," Tom went on quietly, "to mislead the Yankees. There was a little fighting there, mostly an affair of pickets. Just to show we were there. And in one of those little fights, Sammy went over to the enemy."

Miss Lizzie made a little sound.

"We weren't sure," said Tom. "Sammy wasn't a good horseman. Some said he spurred over into the Yankee lines, yelling something they couldn't catch. Some said that his horse bolted and he couldn't get control of it. It bolted into their lines with him and they made him a prisoner."

Tom Holmes walked onward. He carried Miss Lizzie's basket through the dew-drenched night.

"But most of us believed," he said grimly, "that Sammy was loyal. He might be taken prisoner, but he'd never tell our plans, though the Yankees paid a high price for treason.

"We had to believe in Sammy. We didn't dare disbelieve, because if we didn't capture arms and supplies we were licked. So we risked our lives on his loyalty. There was nothing else to do."

They came to the end of the open fields, Miss Lizzie and her escort. The pine thicket surrounded them.

"You know what happened, Miss Lizzie," said Tom. "The Yankees laid an ambush. They occupied a little village and took away the people. They packed every room in every house with soldiers.

"And our scouts passed through that village and saw nothing wrong. We had a dozen miles to go, and the Yankee depot would be ours. We rode into the village. We packed its single street from end to end. Five hundred of us.

"And then there was a shot and a bugle call—and you know what happened!"

Miss Lizzie was silent as a stricken thing is silent.

"We were caught like rats in a trap," said Tom Holmes, dispassionately. "We had no chance. They even had cannon, loaded with grapeshot. Major Pendleton was at one end of town. He charged

all the way back, all the length of the street, with Yankee soldiers firing at him from every window.

"We got away, he and I and thirty-odd others. But before we left, I saw Sammy. He was there with the Yankees. He had a Yankee uniform on. He was shooting at us. His old command. His friends. His neighbors.

"Major Pendleton saw him too. We tried to get to him. We couldn't do it. But he saw us, and he saw we'd recognized him, and he saw me aiming at him. And he tried to run.

"But I shot him down. I saw him fall. And then those of us who were left fought our way out of that village."

There was the loom of Miss Lizzie's house ahead. The clearing. The draggled, neglected garden and the outbuildings. They walked toward it quietly. Miss Lizzie caught her breath.

"But—but Tom," said her clear treble, a trifle unsteady. "He has come back! He has talked to me! So—so you must be mistaken about having killed him. Maybe—maybe you're mistaken about the rest."

Tom shrugged and said no word. He walked with her up to the door. The grass was white with dew.

THEN Tom Holmes stopped short. The grass was not uniformly white. There were streaks, marks, stripings of dark on it. Foot prints and stride-marks in the dew. Miss Lizzie saw what he looked at.

"It's—Sammy, Tom," said Miss Lizzie brightly. But the brightness was false. Suddenly she said pleadingly, "Go on home, Tom. I—want to talk to him. He said something about going to Texas. I'm going to ask him—"

Tom Holmes' hand was on the cap-and-ball revolver at his hip.

"Very well, Miss Lizzie."

He turned. He walked with stiff long strides across the lawn. He vanished into the pine thicket.

A little later there were sounds of movement in the thicket. Not loud enough to alarm Miss Lizzie. Just loud enough to warn anybody else who might be in hiding.

Then a dark figure moved from the pine thicket again—leaving dark streaks on the grass—and whispered outside the one window in the house in which a light had appeared.

Miss Lizzie's voice came out, clear and happy and anxious. The dark figure whispered and whispered, urgently. Miss Lizzie pleaded. The whisper was insistent.

The dark figure backed away from the house. In a very little while the light in the window went out.

Miss Lizzie emerged once more, carefully locking the door behind her. She marched resolutely through the darkness, again headed for Tom Holmes' house.

The dark figure, deep in the shadow of a tree, watched her go.

She went through the hot and humid August night with a distressed yet resolutely bright expression on her face. She came to the stile and climbed over it.

It was at about this time that she heard the sound of shots somewhere in the darkness. Two—three—four shots. She considered distressedly that somebody was probably shooting at chicken thieves. She hoped that nobody was hit.

She went on to Tom's house. He hadn't returned. Martha said that he was probably down at the stables and exclaimed at the saturated hems of Miss Lizzie's garments. She took Miss Lizzie upstairs for dry things.

A long time later—a very long time later—Miss Lizzie heard Tom come in. And this was hours after her arrival and

she was then in one of Martha's nightgowns, so she could not go down.

But she threw a shawl around her shoulders and went to the baluster of the stairway. She heard his voice, low-pitched and grim.

" . . . Sooted himself so he'd be taken for a darky at a distance . . . not recognized . . . probably planning to come after me tonight . . . getting even because we'd seen him and he could never come home. . . . He's dead now, though, and buried. . . ."

Miss Lizzie did not know what Tom was talking about, but she was full of her news. She called gayly:

"Tom! Tom! I talked to Sammy, and he's left for Texas tonight. And he says you were mistaken about seeing him in uniform or shooting him. It must have been someone who looked like him!"

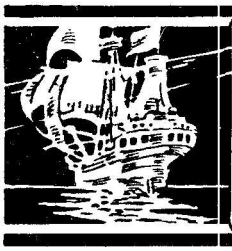
A sudden silence in the hallway below. Miss Lizzie, greatly daring, poked her head over the balustrade to look down. Tom's eyes were stern, but when she beamed at him he smiled gravely.

"That's fine, Miss Lizzie!" he said gently. "I'm certainly glad to hear it!"

Then Miss Lizzie saw him clearly. Her eyes sparkled and her cheeks were pink with delight.

"I'm dreadfully happy!" she said gayly. "Terribly happy! Dear me, Tom! You've got soot all over your hands. . . . I think it's so nice that we know Sammy's all right and on the way to Texas! Now I won't have to worry about him any more!"

And Miss Lizzie, beaming, tripped happily back to the bedroom Martha had given her for the night. She slept soundly, marvelously content.



Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

THIS morning our secretary went briefly mad. We caught her at it in her office; she was tossing batch after batch of letters into the air and watching with glassy eyes while they fluttered softly down. She seemed to be murmuring a sort of chant, and after a moment we made it out. She was whispering, "Here, Mr. Hastings; here, Mr. Hastings—boyoboyoboy!" We crept out without disturbing her.

Our secretary is all right now, though a little pale; but the cause of her derangement is growing steadily. Mr. William Hastings started it when he asked for identification of a certain serial. The story turned out to be Otis A. Kline's "Swordsmen of Mars," which began in the ARGOSY for Jan. 7, 1933. Oh, we're sure of that. So far we've had some thirty letters, and while a few of our correspondents felt that the novel in question was by Edgar Rice Burroughs, the overwhelming vote went to Mr. Kline. And Mr. Kline agrees; he wrote in, too.

Now we're really grateful to the readers who have come to the aid of Mr. Hastings; but we can't possibly answer all those letters personally. Nor have we the space to publish more than one of them. So we must content ourselves with a public announcement of our sincere thanks to:

Edwin J. Baldwin, Martin Torik, Miss Elizabeth O'Neil, A. A. Schrum, Clarence F. Kier, Bill Mitchell, Vernon C. McIntire, Miles Cerny, Edward Au Buchon, John Weisenberger, Rudolph J. Celman, L. J. Schneider, Stanley Haynes, Francis J. Graff, P. J. Perkins, George Hamer, E. Winslow Baxter, Victor Kamens, George W. Frederick, Frederick Foster, William Robinson III, Mrs. M. Friend, E. W. Bushbaum, Theodore Mahaffey, Edward T. Davis, A. L. Prindle, Howard W. Hennigar, W. E. Sunderland, John A. Waller, Grant V. Wallace. (And they're still coming.)

HERE'S one of Mr. Hasting's innumerable allies. We chose this letter to print because it is not concerned with the Kline story alone.

G. G. GRANT

I wonder how many ARGOSY fans will write to inform you that "Swordsmen of Mars" began in the Jan. 7th, 1933, issue of ARGOSY and that a sequel called "The Outlaws of Mars" appeared the same year starting with the Nov. 25th issue.

Reader William Hastings' accurate recollection of the essential points of this very fine story, extending even to the cover illustration, is a real tribute to the quality of ARGOSY stories.

My own introduction to ARGOSY came through a friend who gave me a complete set for 1919, 1920 and 1921. Since then I've been a silent shipmate. Now I feel that I should get in my two-bits worth at least once every twenty years.

My favorites during that time have been as follows.

"The Conquest of the Moon Pool," "The Ship of Ishtar" and all others by A. Merritt
The John Solomon stories
"Peter the Brazen" by Brent
Singapore Sammy and Gillian Hazeltine by Geo. F. Worts
Jimmie Cordie stories by Wirt
The Venus and Mars stories by Burroughs
The Radio Man stories by Farley
"The Blind Spot" and "Spot of Life" by Hall and Flint
Handsled Burke and Two-horse Swen
No-Shirt McGee

To me these have been the icing on the cake

that has been dished up by Packard, Challis, Bedford-Jones, Adams, MacIsaac, Brand, Seltzer, Zagat, Chase and every other author who has been able to get more than one story in the mag.

One thing I miss. What has become of the argumentative experts who used to put us right on all the fine technical points? I disagree with those who feel the technical features of stories need not be as accurate as possible. The use of accurate facts to promote plausibility is the very thing that distinguishes our authors from those writing for a host of other magazines. We silent ones who don't know a thing except what we read in ARGOSY get a real kick out of Argue-notes.

Looking Ahead!

WATERED GUNS

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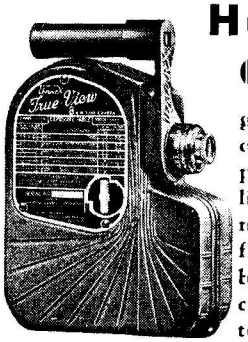

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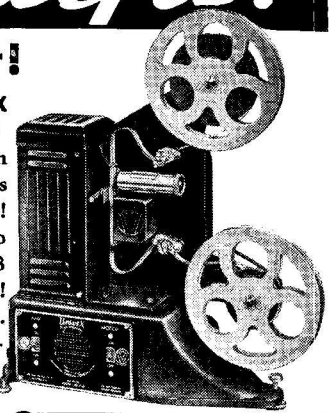

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