

JUNE 22

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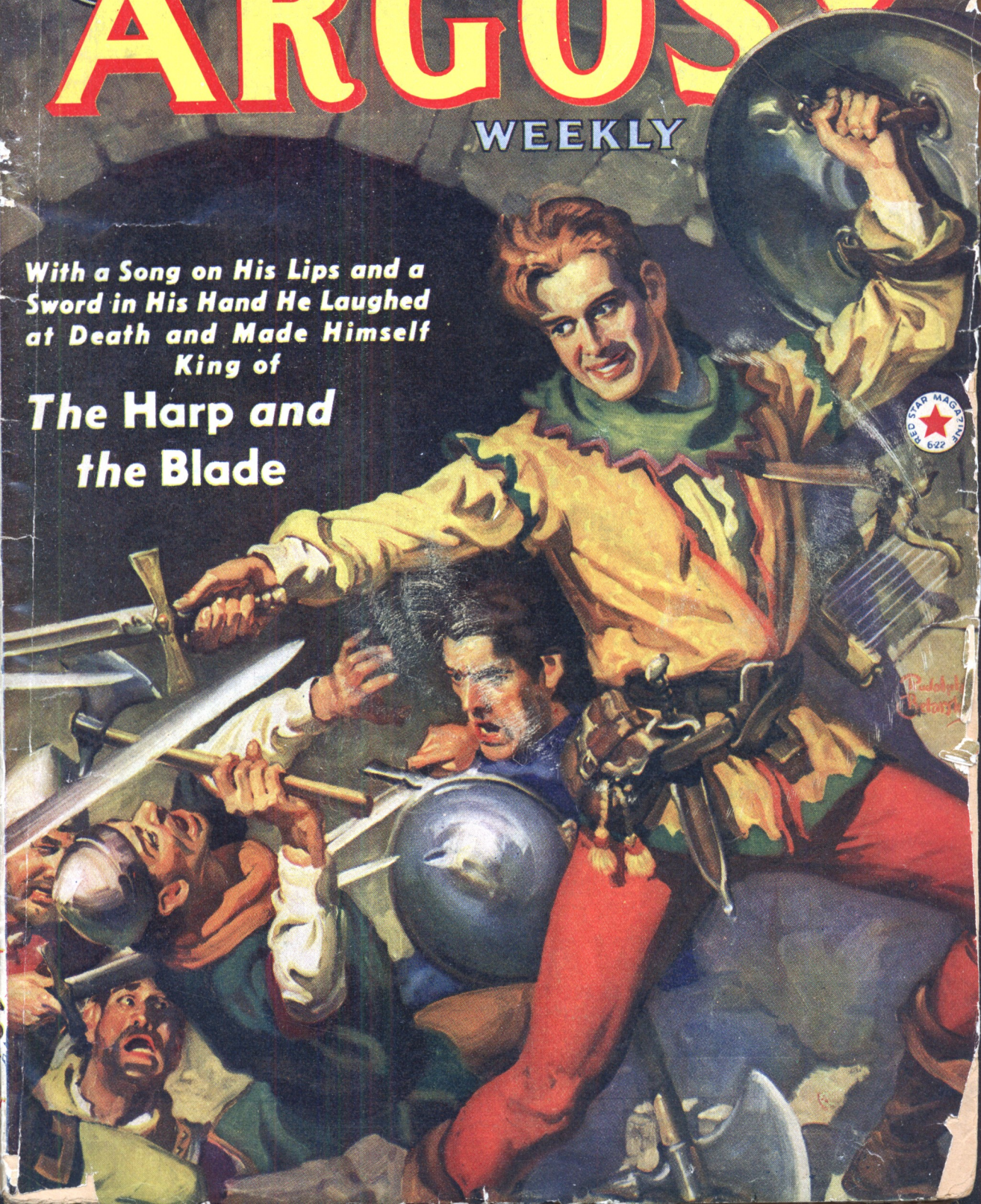
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# ARGOSY

WEEKLY

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Sword in His Hand He Laughed  
at Death and Made Himself  
King of

**The Harp and  
the Blade**



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# ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 300

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Cover by Rudolph Belarski

Illustrating *The Harp and the Blade*

*This magazine is on sale every Wednesday*

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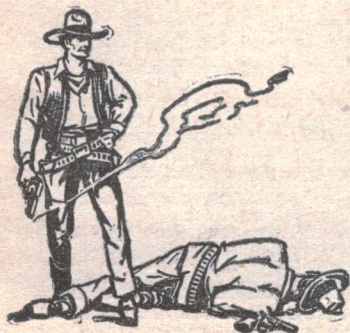
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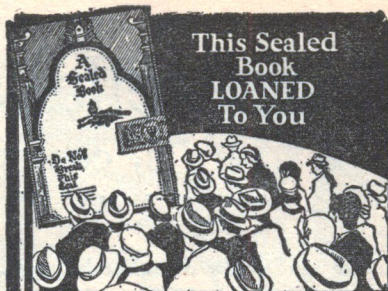
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# Cinderella and the Mob

By CORNELL WOOLRICH

Author of "All at Once, No Alice," "The Eye of Doom," etc.

**This is the real story of what happened the night I went out looking for glamour and met an ice man (who was also a nice man). In fact the whole evening was simply super until everybody started shooting**

## I

THE whole family jumped on me at once. You'd think I was a mere child or something, instead of sixteen. You'd think a person would have some rights on a Thursday evening. You'd think school-work was the most important thing in the world.

You'd think—well anyway, you'd think!

Father said: "Not with that sore throat you've got, young lady! We'll tell you all about the picture when we come home."

Mother said: "And even if she didn't have a sore throat she'd stay home tonight! She's got to study *some* of the time."

And of course Fran, my older sister, who wasn't going with them but was going out with her this-month's beau, had to put her two cents' worth in too, like she always did. "When I was your age—" she started to say.

"Oh sure," I sighed wearily, "back in those Roman times things were different."

But it didn't do a bit of good. They all got ready and they all went out, and there I was stuck with a lot of books again. The last thing I got told was, "Now remember, I expect to find you in

bed when we come home. None of this running over to Betty Lou's house!"

The front door went *bang!* and I was Cinderella again.

I gritted my teeth and opened my history book, but I couldn't see a thing it had in it for a long time, just waves of red. "Isn't something exciting or glamorous ever going to happen to me?" I seethed. "Do I have to be about twenty, and all bent over and rheumatic, before I even begin to live at all?"

And then, like it was just waiting for that much encouragement, the phone started to ring. I knew it was probably Fran's boy-friend calling to find out what was keeping her so long; she was the only one ever got phone calls in our family.

First I wasn't going to bother about it—let him ring—but it kept on until it got annoying, so I went out to it.

"Hello," I croaked, and between what the sore throat had done to my voice and what the family had done to my disposition by leaving me home alone like this, I must have sounded like someone sawing wood.

It was a man's voice, but it wasn't Fran's boy-friend. He sounded sort of—I don't know how to put it—confidential, as if he was talking out of one corner of his mouth and didn't want anyone but me to hear him. He said, "Hello, is this Chicago Rose?"

FOR a minute I was so surprised I just blinked, and then before I had a chance to tell him I wasn't he rushed ahead, as if he was afraid I was going



Something went BOOM right under my face, like dynamite, and I hit the floor and headed out of there

to hang up before he got through saying what he had to.

"Listen, you don't know me, Rose," he said, "but it's all right; Eddie gave me your number. You know, Eddie Dubois back in Chi. He wrote it down for me before I came away; I mislaid it just now, but it didn't matter; I had it memorized anyway. He told me you'd sound just like you do, like you just had your tonsils taken out."

I'd kept trying to tell him, through the whole thing, that he must have the wrong number, but he was talking so fast I couldn't even get one good-sized word in.

And then it started to sound intriguing, so I changed my mind. I looked at it this way: every added five minutes I

spent at the phone meant that much less time I'd have to spend over those poisonous books afterward, so what did I have to lose anyway?

He said: "There's a bunch of us just in and we got a little job for you. Your kind of job, y'know, Rose? The kind of stuff that made you famous in Chicago."

"Oh," I said. Which is a pretty safe word. It was the only one I could think of, anyway.

"You'll get a cut," he went on, like he was trying to coax me.

He didn't say where, but I looked at my arms apprehensively; who likes to have to wear court-plaster? "Well, if it's all the same to you—" I started to say.

"Oh I see, cash on the line ahead of time. Well, we'll do it your way then, Rose." Then he asked, "Are you warm right now?"

I felt my forehead. There *was* a good deal of heat coming up, Father had shaken up the furnace before he went out. "A little," I said, "but not enough to bother me."

"As long as you're not red-hot it's okay. Now listen, Rose, I can't give it to you over the phone, naturally. How's about coming out to your place?"

I looked around me and I rolled my eyes to myself. I could just imagine *their* faces if they came home and found—

"No," I said quickly, "I don't think you better do that." Was I having fun by now! This had the dates of the English kings beat all hollow.

"What's matter?" he said. "Ain't you paying protection these days? Well all right, make it anywhere you say, Rose."

**I'D NEVER** met anyone at all until now, except Betty Lou, and I always met her in Gilman's Drugstore down on our corner, right by the soda fountain. I couldn't make it there, because that fresh Willie Smith that tends the fountain knew me awfully well, and besides I owed him thirty cents for back sodas and he might humil'ate me by asking for it.

"*You* name the place," I said.

"I'll park on Main and Center," he said. "How'll that be? Northwest corner; you can't miss me."

That was all the way downtown, and it kind of scared me for a minute; if they ever found out that I went that far downtown at this hour, I'd never hear the end of it. Even in the daytime that was out of bounds for me.

But I remembered I didn't really have to go; I could just tell him I

would and then never show up, so it didn't matter. "All right," I said.

"I'll tell you how you'll know me," he said. "I'm wearing a very light lid, almost the lightest in town. I'll keep turning it around in my hands, like I was looking at the band."

"Well, uh, did—" I kept trying to remember that name he'd used at the beginning, and couldn't. "Did he tell you what I look like?"

"Eddie Dubois? Naw, only that you're red-headed and an eye-ful."

I glanced in the hall-mirror next to me, covered up a snicker with my hand. "Well I changed that a couple weeks ago. I'm blonde now."

He didn't seem surprised to hear that, as if all the girls he knew were always doing that to their hair. "Oh sure, I know how it is. You just gimme the business, I'll know you."

I could tell he was getting ready to leave the phone, and I knew I ought to tell him that I wasn't Chicago Rose, he'd been speaking to the wrong party the whole time; but I didn't have the nerve now any more, after waiting this long.

The last thing he said was, "Make it as soon as you can, huh, Rose; don't keep me waiting there on the open corner too long, it's not healthy." Then he rang off.

I hung up with a sigh. It had been the most interesting conversation I'd ever had, and I hated it to be over. Now I'd have to go back to those bum books waiting there all over the dining-room table.

I sighed again. I was wishing I really was Chicago Rose; I bet she didn't have to study civics and go to bed at eleven on week-nights.

Then I thought: I *could* be if I wanted to, just for a few minutes. He doesn't even know what she looks like

himself. Or I could just go down there and take a peek at him from around the corner and then come straight back again. And that way, my study time would be all used up and it would be too late to bother with these books any more tonight.

And before I knew it I was upstairs in Fran's room, looking her things over.

I took down one of her old evening dresses and put it on. It didn't fit so good, so I pinned it tight behind me and that made it fit better. But my face looked too babyish sticking up out of it. So then I opened the bureau drawer and found a black crayon I'd watched her use sometimes and made rings around my eyes.

That helped a little, and then I spread on all the powder and rouge she had there, until hardly any real skin showed through anywhere.

When I got through it didn't look so awfully good maybe, but at least it didn't look like me any more.

I found a pair of her shoes and put them on too, because my own all had low heels. We both wore about the same size. They kind of threw me forward, like standing on stilts, until I got the hang of them.

Up to now I'd been just sort of play-acting. You know, like you do when you're twelve, dress-up in grown-up clothes and make believe you're going somewhere. I didn't really think I'd have the nerve to go.

But as long as I was all rigged up like that, it seemed a shame not to go down there and take a peek at him just for fun. Then I could tell Betty Lou all about it tomorrow in class, and we'd have a lot of fun over it.

I knew I'd be back long before they came home from the movie at half past eleven—I'd have to be—but just to be

on the safe side, in case Fran had a fight with her boy-friend and came home early, like sometimes happened, I put a laundry bag full of old clothes under the bedcovers to make it look like it was me lying there all cuddled up. With the light out you couldn't tell the difference.

**T**HEN I went downstairs. I fell down the last three or four because I wasn't so steady on those extra-high heels yet, but what was a little thing like that? I just got right up again and straightened myself out.

I put out all the lights and then I watched carefully from the front door, to make sure none of the neighbors were at their windows or out on the sidewalk just then, to see me come out.

As soon as I was sure the coast was clear, I ducked out. I had my own key, that I used in the daytime to let myself in when I came home from school, so I wasn't worried about getting in again.

I walked fast until I got away from our house, and then I slowed down a little, so as not to attract attention.

What made me get in the cab was an accident. I mean, I made the first block all right without meeting anybody, and then this cab showed up and started trailing along next to me, on account of how swell I was dressed, I guess.

"Cab, lady?" the driver said. That gave me a thrill; it was the first time anyone had ever called me "lady." But of course I didn't need a cab; it was only thirty blocks from our house down to where he'd said he'd be, and that's not much of a walk. So I just shook my head politely.

Then the very next minute Mr. and Mrs. Jurgens, who lived right next door to us, turned the corner not ten yards ahead and started to come straight toward me. There was no chance to get

out of their way. Luckily the cab was still there, right next to me. I gave kind of a sideways jump, and before I knew it I was in it.

The Jurgenses went right by without even looking at me, but before I could get out again, the cab had picked up speed and was on its way, so there didn't seem to be anything to do but go ahead and tell the driver where I was going.

He kind of looked up sharp when he heard how scrapey my voice was, and then I saw him squinting at all the makeup on my face, in the rear-sight mirror. After a while he asked, kind of friendly and understanding, "How's business, sister?"

I didn't know much about business, only what I heard my father say, so I repeated an expression I'd heard him use to my mother lots of times.

"It's been so long since I made a sale," I said solemnly, "that I might just as well give my stock away to the Salvation Army!"

He looked kind of surprised at such a thought, but he shook his head sympathetically.

When we got near Main and Center I said, "Stop in the middle of the block, before you get all the way to the corner." I figured that way I could edge up to it and peak around it without him seeing me.

When he did, I got out and said cordially, "Well, thanks ever so much, it was awful nice of you to bring me all the way down here."

He said, "Wa-a-ait a minute, what is this?" And he started to climb out after me real slow.

I didn't like the look on his face, so I started to back away little by little. Then when I saw him spit on his hands and rub them together, I turned and started going real fast.

But I made the mistake of looking back over my shoulder the whole time, and that way I forgot to watch where I was going. He took a jump and started sliding after me, like on an ice-pond. I gave a squeak and turned away too late.

My whole face went *spiff* into somebody's chest. It was hard, too, like a barrel; I nearly saw stars for a minute.

I got around behind him, hung onto him, and said: "Make him go 'way! I didn't ask him to ride in his cab, he asked *me* if I wanted to."

## II

BY THE time I saw him stoop over to pick up a very light ice-cream color hat he'd dropped, it was too late. He said, "I guess you're Rose, by that voice alone."

Then he laughed and said, "Same old Rose. Eddie told me about that trick of yours of getting out of cabs before they stop, and then when the drivers turn around to collect the fare they find the back seat empty. Only you seem to have gone sort of kittenish with it."

He shoved a bill at the driver and growled: "Geddouda here before I wrap the crankshaft around your neck!"

What a growl that was! Like a sea-lion in the zoo.

Then before I knew what was happening, he had me by the arm and I was all the way over at a big black sedan waiting at the opposite curb. "Come on, Rose, I'll take you around to meet the boys."

"Y-you been waiting long?" I quavered. The only reason that kept it from sounding as frightened as it was, was how inflamed my vocal cords were, I guess.

"Plenty #&!©# long!" he said. I'd heard two of the words before, but the other one was brand-new. Something

told me this wasn't a very good time to tell him I wasn't Rose, that maybe I better put it off a little while, until a better opportunity came.

There were two other men in the sedan, one at the wheel, one in back. He introduced me, but only after we were already under way and I was firmly wedged on the back seat between him and one of the two others.

"Here she is, boys. Trigger, this is Rose. Rose, meet Oh-Johnny."

It seemed a worse time than ever to bring up about not being Rose. But compared to what it was going to be like later, if I'd only known it, it was practically ideal.

I said, "I don't even know *your* name yet," to my original acquaintance. There didn't seem to be any harm in that.

"I'm Blitz Burley," he said, like he was supposed to be famous or something.

They seemed to do their best to be agreeable to me, as if I was someone who might be valuable to them later on. The one called Trigger said, trying to make polite small-talk, "I b'lieve a moll I used to go around with knew your older sister in the Women's Reformatory at . . ."

And the one next to me asked considerably: "Does my shoulder-sling bother you the way we're sitting? I'll move it out of the way if it does."

"Huh," Blitz said scornfully before I could answer, "she probably curls her hair with a repeater every night, don'tcha Rose?"

I didn't exactly know what they were talking about, but the sensible thing to say seemed to be: "I used to, but I found out I wasn't getting the best results that way." So I said it.

By this time we'd gotten where they were bringing me, so we all got out.

There was one pressed close on each side of me, and the one called Oh-Johnny was right in back of me. I don't think they meant anything by it, they were just being sociable, but the only place I could have gotten to by breaking away suddenly from them and running would have been where we were going anyway, so there didn't seem to be much sense to that.

IT WAS some kind of a hotel, but it wasn't a very presentable or tidy one. They went in the side way so they wouldn't have to pass anyone, and up to a door on the third floor. It had an elevator, but they walked up.

Blitz knocked, in a funny way. Two quick ones and two slow ones. The door opened in a funny way too. First just a ribbon of orange showed, as if someone was looking out with just one half of one eye. Then it opened all the way, and we went in one behind the other.

Trigger was going to go first, but Blitz, who had very good manners, knocked him out of the way with his elbow and said, "Ladies first."

"Why?" Trigger asked.

"I dunno; I suppose so if there's a rod waiting behind it they get it first and you got time to draw."

There was another man on the inside of the door just finishing putting something away; I guess it was a handkerchief in his back pocket. There were also two more men in the room, playing cards at a table. I was now surrounded by six of them.

I still thought it could wait a little longer, to tell them I wasn't Rose but just Penny Richards of Thomas Jefferson High School. Maybe till I got outside again by myself, for instance.

There was a clock staring me in the face across the room, and it was already twenty after ten by now. I had less than

an hour left, if I wanted to get back home before the family came in from the movies.

And to make matters worse, I'd lost track of just where we were, they'd driven in such a confusing, roundabout way coming over; I didn't know how long it would take me to get back from here.

I kind of stood there in the middle of them and they all sized me up. This was the first time they'd gotten a good look at me under a real bright light, even Blitz. He slapped his side and said: "I gotta hand it to you dames, I don't know how you do it these days! If I didn't know better, I could eat my hat you were only a twenty-year-old chicken just breaking in. Why, the frill I go around with looks older than you, and she's only nineteen."

"Yeah," another one nodded. "Wudje do, Rose, have the old muzzle lifted on you?"

But they didn't waste any more time over that. They all pulled up chairs and kind of moved in close around me, like they were going to have a conference. Blitz said, "Okay, have a drink, Rose, while we're giving this to you."

First I said yes, because a nice cherry phosphate or something would have gone good right then; all that sticky lip stuff of Fran's had made me feel parched. But what he handed me was tan and tasted like gasoline sprinkled with red pepper. When I got what was left of my blistered tongue safely back inside again I said no, I'd changed my mind, and handed it back.

"She's right," somebody spoke up. "Not when she's on a job."

"All right, now here it is, Rose," Blitz said, sitting down and hitching up his trousers at the knees. "We got a guy all nicely fingered-up for rubbing."

I shook my head hopelessly to myself,

without letting them see me, before he even went any further. Out of that whole sentence he'd just given me, I only knew what the first four words meant.

Of course, anyone knows what rubbing is, in a way. It's when you put the wrong end of a pencil down and push. But it didn't sound like he meant it in that way, somehow.

I suppose I would have known more about it if I'd followed some kinds of movies more closely—they reminded me a lot of some people I'd once seen in a movie—but the kind I went to mostly were Garbo pictures, where they didn't talk that way much.

"He come here from Chicago, and we come here after him," he went on. "He don't know we're here yet, and he thinks he's pulled a curtain down after him. But even so, he's cagey, he's wise as they come. We can't get him out in the right spot where we can get at him easy. And then there's another reason why we ain't dropped him yet."

I knew what that word meant, at least. It's when you stop associating with somebody, snub them. Like when I dropped a girl last year in my French class because she always laughed every time I got up to recite.

"**N**OW, he's gettin' it because he lammed out with the whole haul instead of splitting the way the agreement was. I was doing a little time right then, and a couple of the other boys had a little heat on them, and I guess he thought it was too good an opportunity to pass up.

"Well, he'll find out his mistake. But that don't do us no good, see Rose? First we gotta find out what he did with the haul. If we don't, once we dust him off, we can kiss it goodbye, we'll never see it again. That's where you come in."

What good is it when a person keeps talking and you don't even know what they're saying at all? I had the hardest time not yawning in their faces; I only kept from it by closing my mouth tight and pushing the yawn back, because I knew it would be bad manners; I'd been scolded enough at home for doing that.

The whole thing wasn't even particularly glam'rous, just sort of over a person's head, like some things in civics. I was beginning to wish I hadn't come. It hadn't turned out to be as much fun as I thought it would be.

"Now he's a pushover for a dame. Always has been. But she's got to be his kind of dame, not just any dame at all. Machine-gun slugs can't drag a word out of him.

"But give him his head with a dame and he'll start talking. If she's the right kind of a dame, and he has confidence in her.

"The only thing which has saved him so far is that he goes for a peculiar, sweet, milk-fed type which have gone completely out of circulation; you can't find 'em any more. Enough of 'em have tried to be that way with him, but it don't go over, he can spot a fake a mile away.

"So you can see this ain't going to be an easy job, Rose. He's no fool. The minute a girl acts like she's too wise, he starts putting up his guard. And in a case like this, if he ever tumbles we primed you for this, it'll be curtains for you!"

I couldn't see much inducement in that. What'd I need curtains for anyway, we had plenty at home, on every window.

I looked at the clock. It was quarter to eleven now. I didn't see how I was going to do it, and still get home safely ahead of the family. "About how long will it take?" I asked doubtfully.

"That depends entirely on how good you are yourself, Rose," Blitz said. "If he falls at all, he falls hard and right away—he's that kind of a guy. If he once gets his fur up and starts suspectin' you, you'll never get anywhere in a week."

I thought maybe I better just say I would do it, and then go straight home and not pay any more attention to them at all, once I was out of here. I hate arguments, and some of their faces looked kind of mean.

"All right," I sighed unenthusiastically.

"**N**OW, we know where he's holed up, and we'll plant you where he can't miss you; we got everything worked out.

"The first thing you gotta do, is find out what he done with that haul. Naturally, he ain't going to spill that easy, not even if he thinks you're his kind of a dame.

"So here's how you work it. There was some ice with it. Not much, it was mostly lettuce. But anyway, there was a little ice with it. The idea is, wherever the ice is, the dough ain't gonna be so far away.

"You tease him for some ice. If you've made a dent at all, he'll come across without thinking twice. That'll tell us what we want to know. He wouldn't bank it, accounta it's hot. It's a cinch it's around some place, not very far from him.

"Now the rest of it's simple. He'll wanta take you out. You see to it that he makes it the Jingle Club—" He stopped and grinned at me. "Djever hear of that before?"

"No," I said truthfully.

"No one else ever did either, before tonight. We're opening it specially for his benefit, just for this one night. It's

a dummy, get it? Everything is all fixed, just waiting for you to show up there with him. The waiters, the couples dancing, even the guys playing in the band are all props, so don't be surprised when you see them start easing out one by one, leavin' you all by yourselves.

"It's your job to keep him from noticing what's going on around him. You won't be left uncovered, don't worry. Every knothole will be plugged up with lead. We're doing this thing right. Now have you got it all straight, Rose?"

Straight? It was a complete blur as far as I was concerned; as bad as one of Professor Peabody's dry lectures on a spring day when you're not paying attention.

Just about three or four words out of the whole thing were floating around loose in my head, without any meaning. *Ice. Jingle Club. Rubbing. Curtains.* "Um-hum," I said vaguely.

"Whether you wangle the location of the haul outta him before or after you get to the Jingle Club don't matter, just so long as you wangle it. You be the best judge of that yourself. Soft music and dim lights sometimes help to loosen a guy up too, y'know."

I perked up a little at that, for the first time. "Oh, is there going to be music and dancing there?"

"Yeah," he answered dryly. "First there'll be music and dancing, for a front. Then as soon as you get up from the table for a tip-off that you've got the goods on the haul, there'll just be music without the dancing."

They all sort of smiled at that. But what did I care? If there's one thing I'm crazy about—I started bouncing up and down on my chair. "Oo, I wish I was there already! I can hardly wait!"

He looked encouragingly at the others. "See? She's rehearsing already. Only, don't overdo it, Rose. You almost act too young, you almost act like you was on'y about sixteen. Don't let him spot you for a phoney or—"

I remembered that from the time before. "Curtains," I said placidly.

He rested his hand on my shoulder for a minute. "Babe, you got guts all right."

They all started to shove their chairs back, like it was over. For my part I was glad; it hadn't been a bit interesting.

The last thing Blitz warned me was, "And for Pete's sake, Rose, when you do get up—to go back and powder your nose or whatever the stall is—stand good and clear of that table, or Heaven help you. It'll be wood one minute, Swiss cheese the next."

That was childish, talking that way; how can a table be wood one minute and cheese the next? You'd think a person believed in witches casting spells, like in those children's stories.

They were all kind of waiting, watching me. I didn't know what I was supposed to do next, so I didn't do anything, just sat on there without moving. A look of enlightenment crossed Blitz' face. "Oh, I get it!" he said, and reached in his pocket and took out a bunch of bills. Before I knew it, they were in my folded hands.

"What do I do with this?" I asked, puzzled.

"Okay, Rose, okay," he said soothingly, like he didn't want any argument, and took out some more and added them to what I was holding already. "That ought to hold you. And you can keep whatever ice he gives you."

Now I ask you, what good is keeping ice? In half an hour, all you've got is water.

## III

THEY stood me up and looked me over, turning me around like a top. "Maybe she ought to scrape off a little of that plaster of Paris," one suggested. "She looks kind of weird, like a house-painter's assistant."

"Naw," Blitz interposed hurriedly, "if she takes any of that off, her real age'll probably show through. This way she's just about right; she'll get under his skin. She gives the impression, kind of, of a school kid trying to act grown up."

With that, they all started to get ready to go out. Only instead of straightening their coats around their necks, like most people do, they all started smoothing and patting them down under their arms, like they had on woollen underwear that scratches.

Blitz gave them their final orders. "Okay, boys. Now Trigger and me are going over with her. The rest of you go to the Jingle and get in position. You all know your places.

"Al, you take the pantry doors. Biff, you're in the dummy phone booth, down out of sight. Oh-Johnny, you're down behind the bar. Spike, you take it from above, through the ceiling; we got a sight-hole bored through. Me and Trigger'll seal up the front, once the stooges are out of the way.

"We're gonna have a truck outside dumping coal down a tin chute; you know how much noise *that* makes. There won't be a sound heard."

Meanwhile I was still clutching this bunch of bills in my hand. I thought it would be a good opportunity to get rid of it someplace around the room while their attention was all taken up listening to him; I mayn't know lots of things, but I know enough not to take money from strangers.

I noticed a box with cigarettes in it on a table near the door, so I slipped it in there and closed the lid, when no one was watching.

But after they already had the door open, and half of them were already outside in the hall, the last one to leave must have reached into the box for a cigarette. He suddenly said: "Hey!" and stood there pointing down to the money.

They all moved so swiftly and so silently, like big cats, you could hardly follow them with your eyes. Before I knew it, I was back inside the doorway again, and they were all around me in a ring, squinting hard and holding their hands under their arms, as if they had started to scratch themselves and then forgot to go ahead.

"Y'weren't going to double-iggy us, were you, Rose? Is that why you left this behind?" Blitz asked. His lips had turned sort of white, I don't know why.

I seemed to be the only person in the whole room who wasn't all excited and shaking. "I was going to come back for it later," I explained coolly. If they were going to get that worked-up about my refusing it, I supposed I'd have to pretend to accept it.

They all took deep breaths and kind of relaxed. "Oh," Blitz explained, relieved, "she don't want Brennan to catch her with that much dough on her while she's around him, that's all it is, fellas. He might smell a rat."

We all went down the stairs and out the side way again, me in the middle of the six of them. I kept thinking: "I've *got* to get away from them soon, I can't stay much longer; I'll just get in ahead of the family by the skin of my teeth as it is."

Anyway, I didn't like them much any more. The novelty had worn off. They

were too quarrelsome and touchy, and I only understood about one word out of every three they said to me. I hadn't had a good time at all, the whole time I was up there with them.

**O**UTSIDE the hotel four of them left us, went down to another car standing waiting further down the dark street, and Blitz and myself and Trigger got in the first car.

I had made up my mind that the quickest and easiest way of getting away from them, instead of going into a lot of wrangling and explaining, was to let them take me over to this other man they'd been talking about all evening, whoever he was. It wouldn't take more than five or ten minutes longer, and that way I'd get rid of them, first of all.

Then instead of having two people to get away from, I'd only have one, and it would be a lot simpler. I hadn't pretended to him I was Chicago Rose in the first place, so I wouldn't have to go ahead doing it.

I'd just say, "I'm Penny Richards from Jefferson High School and I was sent here to take you to the Jingle Club so you could get curtains, but you can just go over and get your own curtains, I'm going home!"

And if he didn't like it, he could lump it!

So I just sat still between them on the front seat and bided my time. If Betty Lou could make any sense out of this whole thing, when I told her about it tomorrow, she was better than I was, that was all.

On the way Blitz said, "Y'nervous?"

I thought of how late it was getting to be and what a calling down I was going to get if I ever got caught sneaking in at this hour, so I admitted: "A little bit, not very much."

"Who wouldn't be?" Trigger said. "Until she gets him into the Jingle she's outtalking a thirty-eight every inch of the way, with no one to back her up. He'll drop her in a minute if he wises onto her. It's him or us, and he knows it."

Being dropped by someone I hadn't even taken up with yet wasn't going to worry me any. But like everything else they said, there wasn't any sense to that.

**T**HEY stopped finally around at the side of a great big building with a lighted glass shed over its entrance. I guess it was another hotel; none of these people seemed to have any homes of their own.

"We're just in time," Trigger said. "That's his car waiting there, he'll be coming out in a minute."

Blitz said to me: "Y'know how y'gonna connect with him, don'tcha?" He sounded like I was a telephone wire. "Shoot out around the corner and let his fender throw you as soon as he turns on the ignition. You know how to work it so you won't get hurt, y'used to be in the fake-accident racket in Chi."

"No, I—" I quailed.

Trigger made that pawing gesture under his coat again.

"Just stage-fright," Blitz assured him tolerantly. "She'll be over it in a minute. All right, get out and get ready for your dive, Rose."

They stood me up between them against the building wall, just back of the corner. Trigger kept watching around it. Blitz kept hold of me by the arms. It was dark around there where we were.

Trigger gave a sudden cut of his hand. "Here he comes now."

Blitz tightened his grip, turned me

around and pointed me out toward the gutter that fronted the hotel. "No," I whined, trying to squirm away.

"He's in," Trigger whispered. There was the sound of a motor turning over, out of sight around the corner. Wheels started to slither.

"Okay, you're on the air, Rose," Blitz grunted. He gave me a sudden shove out away from him, like I was a volley-ball. I went staggering out across the sidewalk trying to keep from falling flat on my face, and the big headlights of a car were coming to meet me from the side.

I couldn't stop short of the gutter; the sidewalk was too narrow; and the car and I both got there at the same time.

I remembered something he'd said about grabbing the fender, and as I went down I caught at it with both hands and lay flat on top of it instead of going under it.

The car stopped short—it had hardly begun to pick up speed yet anyway—and I rolled off the fender and sat down on the ground in front of it.

A man with a leathery tan face and silver hair jumped out and came running around to me. "Are you hurt, miss?" he asked, picking me up. Then when he saw I was all right, he got kind of sore. "You should look where you're going; you could have been killed."

"Somebody pushed me," I insisted tearfully. I looked over where Trigger and Blitz had been, but there wasn't anyone there any more.

The doorman, who had come over to us, growled: "Ah, they always say that, Mr. Brennan."

Brennan looked around, said: "Help me take her into the lobby a minute, Joe, before there's cops around asking a lot of questions. I don't want the

papers mentioning my name and address."

They helped me in between them. I looked around over my shoulder just before we stepped through the revolving door. I wasn't sure, but I thought I could make out a slice of ice-cream-color hat-brim sticking out around the corner down there.

I sat down and rested in the lobby for a minute and the doorman brought me a glass of water. Then Brennan stood up, said: "Wait a minute, let's see if I can't square this with you."

I didn't know what he was talking about, and I didn't care.

He sat down over in the corner and wrote something, then came back with a scrap of light-blue paper and tried to give it to me. "Will fifty be all right, just so there's no hard feelings?"

"Fifty what?" I said. Then when I saw that it was a check, like my father brings home sometimes, I pushed it back at him, told him politely but firmly that I wasn't allowed to take money from strangers.

He acted for a minute like he couldn't believe his ears. "How old are you?" he asked.

I was kind of tired pretending I was Chicago Rose by now; I hadn't pretended I was to him, anyway, so I didn't have to go ahead. "Sixteen and two months," I said defiantly.

He nodded to himself and murmured: "You'd have to be, to turn down money like you just did." Then he looked at me kind of skeptically. "You dress kind of old for your age. Well, if you won't take this, can I offer you a drink?"

"Yes," I said eagerly. I almost never seem to get enough refreshments.

He frowned a little and his eyes got squinty. "Come on in the bar," he said shortly.

I'D NEVER been in one before. It was just like a soda fountain, only it didn't have faucets. He whispered something to the man behind it and then he left me sitting there.

"You go ahead," he said. "I've got a phone call to make."

The man brought two of those rotten tan things like I'd already made the mistake of tasting over at *their* place. And then he brought the most irresistible pink malted you ever saw, and left it standing by itself a couple of chairs away from me, like it didn't belong to anyone. So of course I moved off down there where it was and started in on it.

Just when I got down to where the straw was gurgling at the bottom, I turned around and Mr. Brennan was standing there without a sound watching me. "That's another way of telling," he said.

We went back in the lounge and sat down again. He asked me how I happened to be going around, at my age, all dressed up like that and with all those crayon-marks on my face.

"Well, they all went out to the movies and wouldn't take me with them," I started to explain, "so I got sore and went up to my sister's room—"

"I understand," he smiled, "just make believe, like little girls do."

I was going ahead and tell him the rest of it, how Blitz had called our house by mistake and everything, but just then I happened to get a look at a clock across the way and it said 11:25. That drove everything else out of my hand.

I jumped up and started edging away from him. "I'll have to go now, they'll be back any minute."

"Won't you stay just five minutes longer?" he urged. "I always wanted

to have a little daughter of my own, to take her around and show her the sights. We could go some place where there's music and dancing—"

But I started to run without waiting to hear any more. Was I going to get it when I got home! I pushed out through the revolving door and then I stopped short.

Blitz was standing there down by the corner, leaning back against the wall waiting, with his hat pulled down over his face and smoking a cigarette.

I looked up the other way and Trigger was standing up *there*, waiting the same way.

They both saw me, and they both started to take a slow step toward me. But they didn't have time to finish it; I turned around and went in again as fast as I'd come out.

Mr. Brennan was still sitting there, sort of day-dreaming about having a little girl like me, I guess. I went back to him and said: "I guess I will stay a *little* while, after all."

The damage was done now anyway, the family was almost certainly home by this time. The only thing left to do was wait a little longer, until they were safely in bed and had the lights out, and *then* go back.

He brightened right up and said: "Swell! Now, it's no fun here. Let me take you some place where you'll enjoy yourself."

Then he looked at me sort of helplessly. "I don't know much about showing a little girl your age a good time. It's kind of late for amusement like parks or movies. Where would you like to go? I'll take you any place you say."

I remembered that place they'd spoken of, the "Jingle." I wouldn't have suggested it if I could have thought of any other, but I couldn't, and he kept waiting to hear me say

where I wanted to go, so finally in order not to seem a complete fool who didn't even know where she wanted to go herself, I mentioned it.

His eyes got that narrow look again for a minute and he said: "Have you ever been there before?"

"No," I said, "I just happened to hear somebody speak of it."

His face cleared again and he smiled. "Oh, I see, Cinderella wants to pretend she's grown up, just for one night, is that it? All right, we'll see if we can find it and we'll go there."

#### IV

**WE WENT** out and got in his car. This time you couldn't see a sign of Blitz or Trigger around, but when we flashed past the corner I could see that car they'd brought me in still standing there in the gloom, so I knew they weren't very far away.

I was going to tell him all about them—I really liked him much better than them by now—but he seemed so happy to be taking me out as if I was really his daughter, that I hated to spoil his evening for him, so I decided not to. The best way to treat mean people is to ignore them, not mention them at all.

He had a little trouble finding the "Jingle," because no one seemed to have heard of it before tonight, but finally a taxi driver told us where there was a new club being opened, and when we finally found it it turned out to be the one, all right.

It was in a creepy sort of dead-end street, up against the river, and there was a coal truck standing there backed up against a sidewalk grate; but it hadn't dumped its load yet, was just waiting.

We drew up outside and a man with a lot of brass buttons came over and

opened the car door. Brennan said, "Haven't I seen your face somewhere before?" and the man got kind of confused, but told him he must be mistaken.

Then Mr. Brennan turned and looked at me, and asked: "Are you still sure you want to go in?" I could hear music coming out, and the colored lights looked so cozy, I couldn't resist. I told him yes, I'd love to.

"Well, I couldn't be wrong about you," he said to himself; but out loud: "If you've got me fooled, I'm sure slipping and I deserve to be bagged." So we got out and went in.

It was small, but it had the prettiest colored bulbs strung all around, like a Christmas tree, and one or two people sitting at tables all dressed up pretty, and one or two dancing.

It was the first really glam'rous place I'd been in all evening, and when he saw how my eyes were shining and how thrilled I was, he sort of relaxed.

"Why does it have to be that table?" he asked, when the waiter tried to take us over to a certain one against the wall.

"That's the only one left; all the others are reserved, only the people are late getting here," the waiter said.

So we went over and sat down. The waiter asked us what we'd like to have. "Double choc'late soda," I said instantly.

Mr. Brennan sighed, "Ah, Cinderella, Cinderella, everything seems magic to your eyes."

After I'd finished my soda and we'd been sitting there a while, one of those disconnected words they'd used came back to my mind. "Ice." But I didn't ask him for some because they'd told me to, but because I really was kind of dry and sticky. It certainly was close in there.

FOR a minute his face changed and he gave me that same squinty look again, and his hand even went in toward his coat, like those other people's had all the time. Then he said very quietly, "Sure, you can have some ice."

When the waiter brought it, he kept watching my face very closely, like he wanted to see what I'd say about it. Well, all I said was "Thank you," because it was just like any other ice I'd ever had. I looked at it kind of satisfied and started to crunch a piece between my teeth.

He dropped his hand down again and gave me a funny kind of a smile. "I thought you meant the other kind," he said. "I'm so used to—"

"What other kind is there?" I asked him. He seemed kind of silly.

"You wouldn't know about those things, Cinderella. But there is another kind. I've got some of it, and I've got a lot of green money, and there's some men I left behind me in Chicago would give their right arms to know where I've got it. I'm going to let you in on my secret, Cinderella, because I know it's safe with you."

He smiled some more. "We came here on it."

"How could we? It isn't snowy on the streets or anything."

He laughed, chucked me under the chin. "It's in the tires of the car, all packed in cotton wool."

That wasn't so terribly interesting; I couldn't see why they'd wanted to find out so bad. I was going to tell him about them, that they weren't in Chicago at all but right here, and that I'd been with them myself just before I met him; but he went ahead talking and I didn't have the chance.

I've been brought up never to interrupt people until they get through.

When we first came in there'd been

two couples dancing on the floor. Then after a while there was only one. Then there weren't any, but the music kept on playing.

There wasn't anyone sitting at the tables now any more either, and I hadn't even seen them get up to go. But the colored lights shone down mostly in the middle of the room, so you couldn't tell so easily what was going on around the sides.

The music kept sounding thinner and thinner, as if each time there was one less instrument, and then finally there was just one man left, picking away at the piano soft and low. Then before you knew it, he must have strolled outside to rest a while; there was silence. The waiters had disappeared too. We were the only ones left in the place. There was a lull, like when something is going to happen. I couldn't tell, because I'd never been in a lull before.

And Mr. Brennan was so taken up talking to me, he didn't seem to notice anything going on around him. I seemed to have gotten him into a sentimental, reminiscent mood. He was giving me his life story.

"I'm sorry now for all the laws I've broken and all the things I've done, but it's too late. If I'd married and settled down and had a sweet little girl like you for a daughter in the beginning, instead of going after the quick money—"

Then he stopped and looked at me and asked, "Am I rubbing you the wrong way, by telling you all these things about my past?"

"No—" I started to say. But that expression reminded me of something from earlier in the evening. "Mr. Brennan," I asked curiously, "excuse me for interrupting, but what does it mean when they speak about *rubbing* a person?"

"It means to kill someone. But the way I used it just now—"

My mouth opened wider than it ever had before, made a great big round O, and I put both hands at once over it.

He saw something was the matter. "Ah, I've frightened you," he said penitently. "I shouldn't have told you that."

"Curtains," I whispered hoarsely through my hands; "what do curtains mean?"

"Curtains mean a person's end."

"Mr. Brennan, you've got to listen to me!" I breathed, aghast. And I told him the whole thing, everything that had happened from the time Blitz first rang our house by mistake at nine o'clock, until they'd pushed me in front of his car. Or at least as much of it as I could remember.

"I didn't mean to do it!" I whimpered. "I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know what they meant, until you told me just now!"

FOR a minute he was altogether different than he'd been until now. He was like they were, mouth all twisted and white, eyes hard as buttons.

"So they've got me sewed up, have they, thanks to you?" His hand went in under his coat. "Well, I'll go—but I'm gonna take you with me."

"Where to?" I asked wonderingly. "We can't get out—"

He sighed, and little by little his face went back to what it had been like before. He shook his head a little sadly.

"No, I guess you didn't know," he said. "Such thickness couldn't be faked; it must be the McCoy."

"Listen, Cinderella, I've got to go anyway; but they'll let you through. You get up and slowly walk away from the table, like you hadn't just told me.

"I won't give you away, I'll act like nothing was the matter. They might get tired waiting and give it to you with me, if you sit here much longer."

"But that's the signal, it'll begin the minute I do that." I swallowed hard, but I wouldn't budge. "No," I said, "I didn't mean to, but I brought you in here. I'm not going to get up and walk away. I'm going to stay here at the table with you. They'll—they'll have to rub us both, I guess."

"But aren't you scared?"

"Oh, awfully," I whispered.

His hand dropped back to his lap again. "You saved yourself that time," he said. "I would have dropped you before you got a foot away, if you'd taken me up on it. But now I see that you're on the level. That's the last time tonight I doubt you. I guess it's the last time tonight for anything."

We didn't say anything for a minute or two. It was awfully quiet in there; you could hear a pin drop. I had a creepy feeling like eyes were watching me, but I couldn't tell where they were coming from. After a while I asked, "Will it hurt much? I never was shot before."

"We're probably good for another few minutes sitting here," he said, "so let's think this out. Don't look around, Cinderella, just bend your head like you were listening, and I was talking to you like I was before."

"And don't talk too loud," I warned him under my breath. "Another thing I forgot to tell you, there's a hole right over us in the ceiling and one of them's up there."

His eyes didn't go up at all. He just took out a very shiny cigarette case and looked at the inside of the lid while he helped himself to one, then he put it away again.

"Yeah, there 'is," he said quietly. "I can see the rim of a gat-muzzle pointing down through it, right into the middle of my brain."

HE TOOK a careless puff and tasted it with his tongue, and went on: "Now Cinderella, the lights are our only chance. This place was rigged up in a hurry, just for tonight. The wiring is all strung around on the outside of the walls, not covered up; see it? It must be plugged into a master outlet at one certain place, this whole circuit of colored bulbs. Let me see if I can find where that is first of all."

His eyes roamed around indifferently like he didn't have a thought on his mind. "Talk to me," he said out of the corner of his mouth.

"Three times three is nine," I pattered desperately, "four times three is twelve, five times three—"

Right while he went on looking he found time to say to me, "Your lips are shaking, kid. Steady them."

The family didn't seem so awful to me right then; I was wishing I was back with them. But I couldn't get up and go. They'd shoot him.

"I've found it," he said. "Porcelain too, like I hoped. Now I've got to hit it squarely with just one shot, and blow the whole place to darkness. I've got to have a chance to draw and sight. Are you afraid of the noise of a gun, right up against your face?"

"I never heard one before."

"Then lean over me, from across the table, and pretend to be taking a cinder out of my eye. I'm gonna try to aim and fire with your body covering me, so they won't see me unlimber.

"Now listen close, Cinderella. I don't think we can make it, but at least we'll take a try. Throw yourself flat on the floor and crawl along it the minute the

lights go. Don't lift your head an inch, but *swim* for it. You're young and supple, you ought to be able to move fast even that way.

"There's no use trying to get out the front way, into the street. That's where they'll expect us to head for and that's where they'll point their fire. I'll hold mine after that first shot, to keep from showing them where we are.

"We'll make for the back. There must be stairs back there some place, leading up into the building over us. We'll try to get up through it and over the roof.

"Turn your head slow and place the direction you're going in, for yourself, while you still can see. It's that middle opening in the shadows back there, between the dummy phone booth and the pantry swinging door; see it?

"And if you once get out past it okay, don't wait for me. Hotfoot it all the way up, as high as you can go."

Then he said, "Are you ready, Cinderella?"

"I'm ready," I said, clenching my two hands down at my sides.

"Are you frightened, Cinderella?"

I took a deep breath. "I'll let you know after it's over."

He smiled to give me courage. "Then here we go, Cinderella."

He blinked his eye and pretended he'd gotten something in it. I leaned over him, pretending to help him get it out. Once I happened to glance down, and he had a big monster of a black gun out in his hand, wedged between the two of us, right under my chin. It was turned out, toward where that china light-plug was.

The last thing he said was, "In closer, Cinderella; there's someone over us too, don't forget."

So I leaned as close to him as I could, and by then I was nearly crying.

SOMETHING went *boom* right under my face like a lot of dynamite, and all the lights went out. I didn't have to drop like he told me to. I got such a fright when the thing went off right under me, I fell all the way over backwards, flat on the floor.

So then I just rolled over and started wriggling fast toward where I'd last seen that middle back door.

I heard the table we'd been at go over with a crash, and one of the little pieces of ice that had been on it hit me on the back of the neck and made me go even faster.

Meanwhile, the whole place was full of starry flashes, like there was a terrific lightning storm going on.

They came from all over—from behind the bar, from the telephone booth, from the front door, the pantry door, and even from the ceiling.

I heard Blitz' voice suddenly yell in from somewhere outside: "Get her too, you guys, she's ratted on us!"

I was nearly over at the back door by now. I was glad that dress of Fran's I'd borrowed was black and didn't show up in the flashes that kept streaking around me. I couldn't tell what had happened to Mr. Brennan, whether he was down on the floor like I was, or flat up against the wall somewhere.

And then suddenly my head and shoulders wedged in between somebody's straddled legs. He was standing there with his feet spread out, firing over me toward the front doorway.

I was so scared I didn't know what I was doing. I grabbed hold of a leg with both hands, pushed with all my might to try to shove it out of the way. It kicked up in the air, somebody yelled and fell over on the floor right next to me with his whole weight.

Then I stood up, ran into the door with my hands out in front of me to

guide me, flung it open and ran out into a back hall. It wasn't much lighter than in there where we'd been, except for a tiny point of flickering flame over a wall gas-jet.

But at the end of it I saw a flight of stairs and I ran toward them for all I was worth and started up them without waiting for him, like he'd told me to.

I went up one whole flight, and around the landing, and half-way up the next flight; and then I stopped and stood there in the gloom, listening and leaning over to see if he was coming. My heart was going so fast it nearly made as much noise as all that shooting down there.

Suddenly he came out, backwards and crouched over low, and just before he backed away from the door he fired once into the dark, smoking room behind it.

Then he turned and sprinted as far as the foot of the stairs, and there he turned and crouched and fired again, to keep them back, because they'd seen him go and were trying to come out after him.

While he was standing there like that, with his back to the stairs, a shadow suddenly came out onto the landing between him and me—I guess the one that had been planted at the hole in the ceiling over us—and I caught the glint of a gun, raised and all ready in his hand. He pointed it square down at Brennan, at the back of his head.

There wasn't even time to yell a warning to Brennan, because by the time he turned to look up at me, it would have been too late.

Somebody had left a pailful of garbage standing there on the step below me. I grabbed it up with both hands and flung it down there at the landing where he was with all my might.

I didn't even aim it, I was just lucky

I guess. It hit him right in the side of the head and keeled him over sideways, and the gun went off into the ceiling, and eggshells and dirty vegetables poured all over him.

Brennan turned and looked up. "Good work, Cinderella!" he yelled. Then he came running up, and stooped and snatched the gun up without stopping as he went by. He caught up with me, grabbed me by the hand, and started to tow me along with him.

They kept firing as they came up after us, but they couldn't get us in a straight line, because the stairs broke direction every flight and turned back on themselves.

When he'd finished using all the shots in his own gun, he threw it down at their heads and used the one he'd taken from the other man.

**WE** GOT up to the roof door finally.

It was locked, but he fired a shot at it and blew it open, and then we were out on the roof, running across it, scattering particles of gravel as we went.

Once a loose clothesline nearly tripped me, but he had my hand and I managed to stay up.

We skimmed over a low partition ridge between the two buildings and got to the skylight hutch of the other house. They'd come out after us by now and were firing at us from the first roof door. You could hear little things like wasps go humming by your ears.

The hutch here was locked like the other, but this time he couldn't blow it open because the padlock was on the inside.

"I'll get it," he panted, "the wood's rotten. Grab me by the coat if it caves in."

He backed up and took a run at the door, and crashed his whole shoulder into it. It shot in, and if I hadn't

grabbed him by the tail of the coat like he'd said, he would have gone down the whole flight of stairs inside head first.

He swung around and hit the side of the framework. Then he righted himself and we started down through the new house. A lock of my hair fell off, like something had snipped it loose.

A minute later they got to the roof door we'd just come in by, and started firing down at us from up there. But again the zig-zagging of the stairs saved us.

And then, just as we'd gotten halfway down through the house and it looked like we'd be out in the street in another minute, a shot came up at us from *below*.

We both staggered to a stop and looked over the rail. Faces were grinning up at us from below, more of *their* faces. Some of them had been told by the others what we were trying to do, and had come in from the street to head us off. They had us blocked.

Another shot came up through the little sliver of opening, and we both snatched our heads back.

"A whole army," he said bitterly, "just to get one man and a girl!"

"Everyone in there was in on it," I told him. "I heard them say so; waiters and musicians and all."

We couldn't go back either; the others were coming down behind us from the roof.

"Quick!" he said. "See if they'll let us in one of these flats here; it's our only chance."

I turned away from the stairs and ran down the long hall pounding at door after door with the flat of my hands.

"Open! Help us! Let us in—oh *please* let us in!"

He stayed behind there on the landing to keep them back a little longer.

I could hear people behind some of the doors, but they were too scared to open up, on account of all the firing that had been going on for the past ten minutes or more.

Frightened voices jabbered back at me, "Go away! Help! Leave us alone!" And I heard one woman saying frantically—I guess she had a phone in there with her—"Quick, send over all the men you have. There's something terrible going on out here—two people being murdered up and down the halls."

"Shoot in one of the locks—*make* them—" I pleaded distractedly to Brennan.

Something made a clicking sound in his hand. "I have no more left," he said, and he aimed at someone's head coming up, but with the back part of his gun, and then pitched it like a baseball.

There was only one more door left and then the hall ended, and then they'd just come into that corner-pocket after us and shoot us down, slow, over and over and over.

I rained slaps all up and down this door, and all of a sudden it swung in loose; the flat behind it must have been vacant.

"Brennan!" I squealed, "Here!"

And I jumped in there, into the dark. A minute later he scuffed down the hall, turned in after me, and got the door closed on the two of us.

The shooting out on the stairs stopped, and you could hear feet slithering along the hall toward where we were. And in the sudden stillness I heard Blitz' voice say: "It's all right, take y'time, boys. We've got them now, he's out of slugs."

## V

**B**RENNAN said: "See if there's a fire escape outside any of those windows behind us. I'll hold the door

against them until you get down."

I ran from one to the other, flattening my nose against the grimy panes, swallowing dust and cobwebs, peering down. I didn't find one until I'd gone two empty rooms away.

I tugged at the warped window until I'd gotten it up. A shot thudded in there where he was, sounding like it came through wood or something.

I turned away from the window and ran back to him through the dark. "Hurry up, I've found one!"

"Too late, Cinderella," he grunted. He was still holding the door, but he was sagging lower on it now. "Quick, get down it, I still can hold this—"

"I'm not going to leave you up here," I said. "I like you too much for that."

"Game little Cinderella," he coughed.

Then the door swept back, carrying him with it, and about five or six of them walked in, one behind the other. They were just black silhouettes first, against the hall light. Awful things, like goblins in a dream, throwing long shadows before them.

Blitz' voice said, "Bring a light."

Someone turned on a flashlight and shone it on Brennan, making a big moon against the wall for him to die in. Blitz looked down at him where he was lying against the baseboard, and he took careful, slow aim and he fired.

Brennan jolted against the baseboard as if a nail had gone into him. I screamed and ran at Blitz, but they caught me and threw me back.

"That's for dishing us out of our share of the Chicago racket money. Now, where is it?"

Brennan just smiled sleepily.

"All right, you Rose, did he tell you where it is?" They pulled me forward again and threw me at him, and switched the light on me.

"I'm not Rose and I never was!"

"We know that now and it's your tough luck. But did he tell you where the haul is?"

Brennan's voice said brokenly from somewhere in the dark: "Tell them I did, Cinderella."

"Yes," I said into the dazzling torch-light.

"Out with it then, hurry up! Where is it?"

I waited, listening. Brennan's weak gasp came again. "Don't tell them yet—hear me? Hold out as long as you can, they won't touch you as long as—"

He was trying to save my life, I guess.

Blitz snarled, "We'll see how long she can hold out!"

He grabbed my arm, wrenched it up behind my back until I thought I'd nearly faint. I went crashing down on my knees, pinned to him backwards.

Brennan's voice pleaded, "Don't—don't—promise to let the kid go and I'll tell you—"

One of them warned Blitz excitedly, "Come on, we gotta get outta here, don't you realize that?"

"Not until I put one into this interfering brat!" he raged. He let go of me and I tumbled forward on my face and rocked there on the floor, rubbing at my shoulder, looking around at him.

I saw his arm stretch out toward me, and the torch-caught the gun at the end of it and made it shine.

I could hear Brennan trying to reason with them, but I was listening for the sound of the shot, not his voice any more.

THE flash came from too far back behind Blitz, way back in the hallway. Blitz went up on his toes first and seemed to get twice as tall as he was, then he started to come down on me, leaning over more and more, and finally

he fell flat right on top of me and pinned me there.

For a minute a puff of hot breath stirred my hair, and then it stopped and didn't come again.

They must have made the mistake, Blitz' gang, of all crowding into the room around us, to watch and hear what went on, and left the street doorway and the stairs unguarded.

For a minute or two the whole thing started over again, just like before; flashes everywhere and thunder and feet running in all directions trying to get out. I wound my arms tight around my head and buried my face in them.

It didn't last as long as the first time; it ended right away. Lights came in, and there were heavy thuds as guns dropped to the floor here and there.

I raised my head and saw some of them standing with their hands up. Some more came in that way from the other room, with policemen behind them.

Someone was lying still on the floor in there; I could see his feet sticking out.

A policeman's face bent down close and peered at me. "She's just a kid!" he gasped in surprise.

"Mister," I begged weakly, "will you please get this man off me so I can get up?"

"Didje get them all?" somebody asked. "How about them two that got down the fire escape?"

"They're both lying down there in the back yard, now. The first one missed his footing and pulled down a whole section of the rusty thing with him. The second one just went down clean—"

They were bending over Brennan, and I heard him whispering: "—it's all in the tires of my car, just slit them. I know I got no right to ask you boys

favors, but let the kid go home, she's just a little school kid."

Then they told me he wanted to say something to me. I bent down close by him. I could hardly hear him, he whispered so low.

"—always wanted to have a little girl of my own like you—"

Then his face sort of turned empty. I looked at them, not understanding, and one of them said quietly, "He's gone, Cinderella."

I started to cry. I'd only known him a little while, but I'd liked him a lot and it felt like I'd known him a long time.

They didn't let me go straight home, though, even after Brennan had asked them to. First they took me down town with them some place, and I had to answer a lot of questions.

Even then they weren't sure whether they ought to let me go home or not, until one of them, who seemed to be the boss of all the others, happened to hear me say I went to Thomas Jefferson High School.

"I got a daughter goes there too," he said.

"What's her name?" I asked.

He told me, and then he wanted to know, "Know her?"

Did I? "She sits right next to me in French class!" I gasped.

"I don't suppose your family would

like it if they heard about you getting mixed up in a thing like this," he murmured thoughtfully.

"I'll probably never hear the end of it," I admitted.

"Will you promise me you'll never dress up like this again and go roaming around?" he wanted to know.

"Will I!" I exclaimed fervently.

He turned to the others around him, and I heard him say under his breath, "Let's send the kid home and keep her name out of it. Her deposition is just as valid if presented by proxy, and we've got the rest of those guys to sweat it out of. I know I wouldn't like it if it was my own kid."

So they called a motorcycle policeman up to the front door, and I told him where I lived and climbed on behind him, and we went skittering away.

When we got out to the house, I climbed down and hobbled across the sidewalk to our front door. "What's the matter with your foot?" the policeman wanted to know.

"I lost one of my slippers on those tenement stairs, but I never noticed it until now."

"If that don't beat everything!" he said, slapping his handlebar. "Just like she did in the story book!"

Cinderella eased her front door open; Cinderella sure was glad to be home.

## Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

### Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, head-

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Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

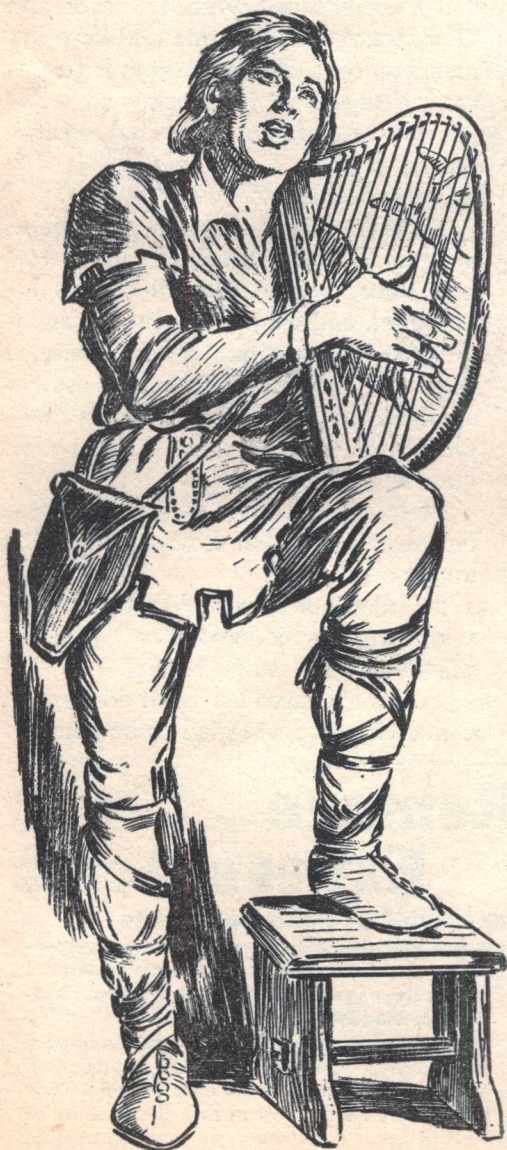
(ADV.)

# The Harp and the Blade

By JOHN MYERS MYERS

## CHAPTER I

BEWARE AN IRISH BARD



"**I**F CHARLEMAGNE was alive," the big Frank shouted, "your lousy princeling would be lucky to get a job as swineherd!" He roared at his own jest, but it turned and bit him.

"He's already a swineherd." The slim, young Saxon was sticking up for Otho, the capable emperor of his own people, "And the pigs he's chivvying are Franks!"

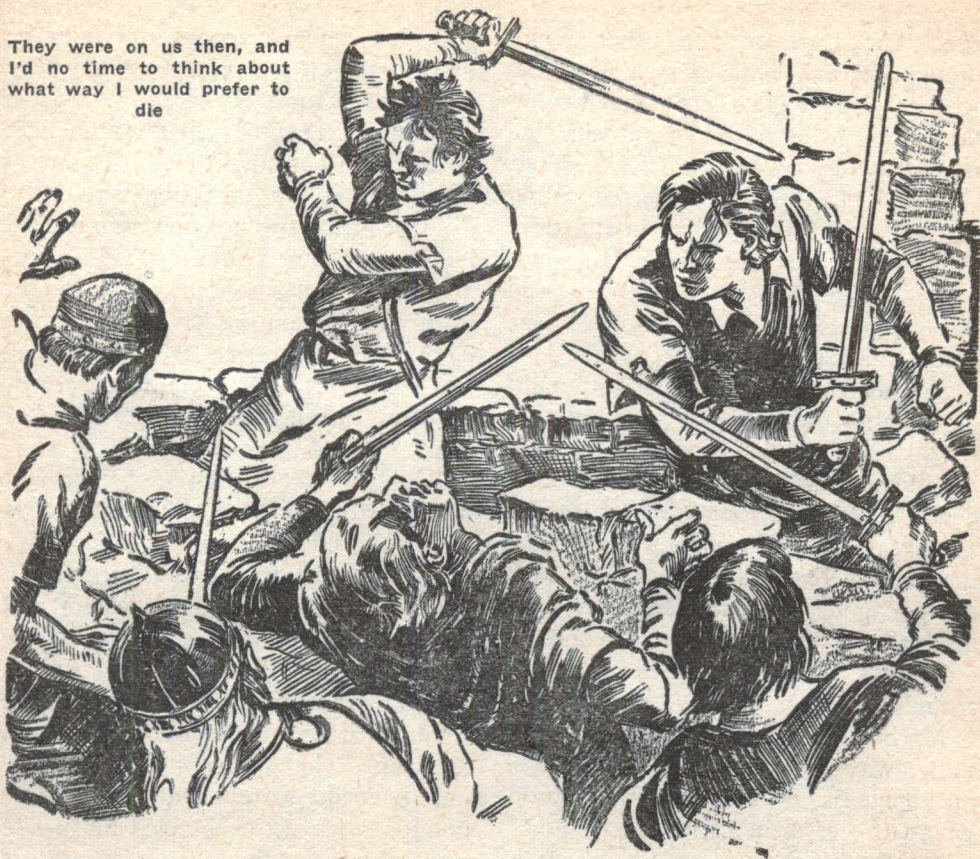
That was fighting talk, too near truth to be said or accepted good-humoredly. I had been bored by their bellowing, but now I looked up from the Ovid manuscript which I had been reading. The stinking little inn had but one window, and we three, the only patrons, had commandeered the two tables it lighted. The others were practically shouting in my ear, but the rest of the room was too dark for my work.

I finished my wine and looked enviously at the large flagon they were too drunk to appreciate. Then I looked more closely at the men. The Frank's face was not too dissipated, nor was it weak or stupid; but it showed that curious arrogance that is not in itself ruthlessness as to other men's rights. It springs instead from a bald incredulity that such rights exist.

The Saxon's countenance was less definite, not marked enough to show how he would be, but he looked like a decent enough lad.

Just then, however, he was talking

They were on us then, and  
I'd no time to think about  
what way I would prefer to  
die



Charlemagne was dead and all Europe dying. But an Irish bard will sing in the face of chaos; and he'll have his long-sword ready for any robber Dane or Frank who would silence the voice of high adventure. . . . Argosy's discovery for 1940

out of turn in view of the fact that he was on Frankish territory. I shook my head. In times like ours it isn't safe to discuss politics with a man who has more than one arm unless he is known to concur. But it isn't likely that he will; what with so many factions there are hardly enough men to go around. And the big fellow was not, I was sure, going to let the matter drop. He was very angry, and I judged him the kind to take his anger seriously.

"Just because you German lice have

beat up on some Huns and Wends," he began ominously.

"And Franks," the younger man taunted. "You may have had an empire once, but what good does that do you, now you've lost your nerve? Otho's kicked you all around the place; and you know the only reason he hasn't taken you over?"

"No, but I'd like to." The Frank was almost sober through sheer force of rage, and I shifted uneasily. He was a dangerous-looking man if I ever saw

one. The boy, on the other hand, though he was being very noisy, was just talking, hugely enjoying having the upper hand in the argument. He wasn't going to stop talking, either.

"No, Otho can't be bothered ruling you," he said with great satisfaction.

"You haven't said why." His companion spoke with alert quietness, and the tensing of his body told me he was ready to act.

I almost intervened. First I thought of warning the young fellow, but that would no doubt have resulted in having them united to punish my impudence. There was something reasonable I could do, however. From where I sat it would be a simple matter to conk the young fellow with the empty flask on my table, explaining to his companion that I, too, could not bear to have Franks insulted.

My hand closed on the decanter, then drew away. I shrugged. It was none of my business if a man didn't know whom to get drunk with.

"Well, it's this way," the Saxon laughed, and I gripped the table, waiting. "Otho doesn't want any washed-up has-beens in his empire. He likes to rule *men*."

He threw back his head, the better to enjoy his mirth; and as he did so the Frank drove a knife in his throat.

**T**HAT was that. It had happened, and I had known it would. There was nothing to do or say now. I watched the Frank draw out his knife, and the blood follow as the corpse collapsed.

The Frank took a long pull at his glass, then looked around for something on which to wipe his dripping blade. My manuscript caught his eye. Probably he didn't know, and just as probably he wouldn't have cared if he

had; but before I could stop him he had caught up a carefully written page and cleaned his dirk on it.

During the murder the life in me had been stilled, but now it awoke in a rush of fury, only in part because of the killing. That page not only represented hard work, but it was vellum, expensive and not easily come by. I caught up my stool from under me as I rose. Though not as big as the Frank was, I'm big enough for most purposes.

"You'll have to pay me for that," I said, giving him a chance.

He hadn't really seen me before; but my face told him the anger my words withheld, and he reacted in kind. Grinning, with the murderer's fire still in his eyes, he crumpled the vellum and reached for another sheet. Probably he never knew what hit him, but it was the stool I swung from behind me. He went down with a gashed forehead and lay still.

It seemed apparent that he would be out for some while. I rifled his wallet for indemnity; then as compensation for injured feelings, I helped myself to some badly needed wine. As I put my cup down the Saxon stiffened with the first onset of rigor mortis, and the uncanny twitching drew my attention.

With the drunken flush sucked from his face he looked younger than ever, and there was a clean, winsome cast to his features that made me wish again I had obeyed my impulse to save him. I cursed the Frank, but I was no friends with myself, either.

There had been no scuffling to speak of. Doubtless it was rather the sudden silence that caused the landlord, a dark, shrewd-faced little fellow, to emerge from the kitchen. He stopped in the doorway and crossed himself, but he didn't cry out. He, like all of us today, had seen too much of violence and

death to be shocked or even especially surprised.

"Both dead?" he asked me.

The quiet impersonality of his voice relieved me of any fear that he might shout for help. "The big one's just knocked out. He killed the other."

He nodded. "I heard 'em quarreling."

"I had to hit him. He was going for me, too," I explained, but he was thinking about something else and not interested. "You robbed 'em yet?"

"The Frank destroyed something of mine, and I saw to it that he paid me back; but that's all."

He started to make up for my negligence, pleased and mildly amused. "Finicky, eh?"

"Maybe." I was in no mood for jibes. "Does it bother you?"

"No, of course, not. I ain't got anything against you. Look, I'll even give you some good advice. Get as far away from here as soon as you can."

**I** THOUGHT he was probably right, but it was getting late, and I didn't want to leave if it was avoidable. "Why?" I asked.

He touched the prostrate Frank with his foot. "A gang of this guy's men will be back here pretty soon. They're just down the road rounding up some cattle and sheep that don't belong to them."

I started rolling up my manuscript. "Who is he?"

"His name's Chilbert, and he runs things around here." The landlord pursed his lips. "He says he's a count, and maybe he is. He came to these parts with a gang a few years back and built a fort. You know how things go now. Anything belongs to anybody that can take it, and nobody but the guy who's being robbed cares. So I guess he's a count, at that. He can make it stick."

He filled the dead man's cup and drank moodily. "I suppose you think I'm a thief."

"And a corpse robber," I said.

"It'd be no use to the lad now." He shrugged. "As for Chilbert, he and his men never pay me for my wine. He burned my first place because I cursed a bit when he wouldn't pay the score."

My harp twanged deeply as I picked it up. "Won't Chilbert get nasty when he finds his money gone?"

He smiled cunningly. "After I've hidden the loot I'll make a bump on my head and lie down. They'll find me unconscious, then I'll tell the count how you frisked him."

I started to get angry, then laughed instead. "Get me a skin of wine," I said, putting down a coin. "I may need something to keep the chill out tonight."

He was back in a minute. "Too bad about the lad."

"Yes," I said, my conscience itching again. "Who was he?"

"Oh, one of Otho's men sent down to look the situation over, I guess. Boys shouldn't be used for such work. They can't help strutting as if they'd made an empire themselves."

As I passed Chilbert I dropped my Ovid by his unconscious head. "What did you do that for?" the innkeeper asked.

"He paid for it," I said. "Didn't he ever tell you he was fond of poetry?"

The landlord's all but emotionless acceptance of things was in its way as oppressive a part of the inn's atmosphere as its normal stench, the smell of blood, and the presence of death. Outside there was the freshness of early summer in a green land, and in spite of the fact that I didn't know where I would sleep that night, it seemed well to be traveling again.

## CHAPTER II

## DARK AND DESOLATE LAND

FROM force of habit I started toward the amiable nag I had purchased after landing at Nantes a few days before. But there were two other horses hitched near it, both of much greater beauty and far fewer years.

Moreover, one, at least, was short a master. There was a trim, little mare, undoubtedly the Saxon's, and a tall, powerful bay with lines promising speed as well as endurance. I gasped at my good fortune. The landlord might not have understood the difference between stealing money and taking the legitimate spoils of war, but it was clear enough in my mind.

The horse was uneasy while I was arranging my gear, and I saw from his hide that Chilbert wore spurs and used them roughly. I didn't try to be too friendly, but let him get the smell of me before I mounted. "This is your lucky day," I assured him, adding as a courteous afterthought: "And mine, too."

Down below us to the right, visible in small, shiny patches through the trees, the Loire ran. To the left there were a few fields, one or two small ones under cultivation. Beyond was unbroken forest banked on low hills. Our road ran east and west, parallel with the river. It was mucked over from recent rains, but it was firmer and broader than most roads, at that. Some say Charlemagne had it made, some even that the Romans built it. It was very old.

While I was making sure my harp wouldn't chafe my mount, I saw a group of horsemen ride into view a few hundred yards to eastward. East was my own direction, but after one look at them I resignedly headed the bay

back whence I had come. Meeting Chilbert's men while straddling his horse was no part of my plan.

As I had seen to it that the Frank had paid handsomely for the Ovid—worth it, though, if he could read, which was unlikely—I was no longer short of funds.

That was a good thing, for with that part of the valley closed to me I was forced to take a circuitous route that would not lead past the valley monasteries where I had counted on exchanging poetry and scholarship for hospitality. That is, if I happened to strike abbeys where the monks could read. With many of the abbots fighting landholders who had not even bothered to take orders, literacy was playing an increasingly minor role in the religious houses.

The tree closed over the road to make the air fine and cool. I looked back to make sure there was no pursuit, then as I rode on I pondered the changed state of things. They say that in other days there were kings strong enough to order their realms, laws that guarded and controlled men, and a priesthood that as a body strove earnestly for learning and a reasonable amount of godliness. I had travelled much in my thirty years and was yet to see any of those things.

They say even that there was once peace in my own land of Ireland, but that I found hard to credit. Some scholarship was still left there, but most of the great schools were wrecked by the Danes. Not that the Danes were worse than anybody else, if they could only get over the idea that a book was something to burn.

**D**ISSOLUTION was the story the world over, but in France, where Rome had ruled and after that Charle-

magne, things were worst of all. There were Danes again, of course—what part of the earth didn't have them, except perhaps Denmark and Norway?—but their depredations were for once matched by those of Moorish pirates in the south.

Then Otho and his Saxons were grabbing off chunks of territory to northwards; a great push of the Huns was driving lesser savage tribes west against the Franks; and there was much doubt that the Spanish Goths could keep the Moslems from flooding across the mountains again.

As for the empire itself, all that was really left of it was the Isle de France, a territory a good man could spit across with a favoring wind. The rest of the domain was picked to pieces and fought over with disorganized viciousness. Anybody who could claim even a one-eyed dwarf as a follower tried to set himself up as a baron.

I was glad Charlemagne didn't have to know what had become of his people, and I was saddened to think how rogues like Chilbert were taking the place of Roland and the other great peers as counts of France. Many claimed that the ill state of the empire was a sign of fulfillment of the old prophecy that the world would come to an end in the year of Our Lord one thousand. That was a good fifty years off, so I did not worry too much.

Although I had continued to take things easy, there was still no sign of pursuit. Chilbert, whom I had not sized up as a forgiving man, was either too sick for vengeance or else he despaired of matching his own horse. I had been looking for a road running north, but when I found one at last I gazed at it uncertainly.

It was little more than a set of wheel ruts and might not go very far. A little

ways up it, however, the forest was broken by a clearing in which a squat, frowsy man was grubbing over a small grain-field. A stranger was an enemy in those parts, so he started to run lumberingly as I approached to question him.

Having expected something of the sort, I got the jump on him, and herded him up against a haystack where he hunched, panting, hating and frightened. He probably connected all men on horseback with Chilbert and his ilk.

"I'm not going to hurt you," I said. "I just want to know where this road goes."

He relaxed. "I don't know."

"But you live here!" I protested. "Does it peter out soon or does it go on?"

His eyes were vacant with ignorance and a horrible want of curiosity. "I don't know. I've been up it a ways. It goes farther than that."

I tried another tack. "Any strangers ever come down the road?"

"Sometimes. Not often. I don't know where they come from."

At least he had told me that the road was not just a dead end, and I didn't want to retrace my way west any further than I had to. I decided to chance it.

My planned itinerary had called for following the Loire up to Tours, then cutting north to Louis' capital at Paris. After that I had thought of trying my luck at Otho's court, where it was said a good poet was always welcome.

FOR the next hour or more I pushed my horse ahead briskly; the road led us through a seemingly endless and unbroken forest. When I finally did come out into the open, even the final phase of dusk seemed almost dazzling.

It was no man-made clearing. It stretched into the woods and out of sight behind a hillock which in turn slanted down to a stream running at right angles to the road.

I dismounted and drank, noting how my long face and long, fair hair were caricatured in the slightly rippled water; then I rose to look the situation over.

I had to rest some time, and the meadow's thick heather offered the best bedding I was apt to find. But the place had a feeling about it that made me somewhat uneasy. I was half-minded to go on, but the foolishness of riding in weary aimlessness through the dark was apparent.

Oh well, I thought, it wouldn't be so bad with wine for company. I had a pull at the skin, felt immediately better, and started following the stream in search of a likely place to camp.

I skirted the base of the first hill, and it was then that I saw it. A dolmen stood on the second hill, two tall upright stones capped by a large slab, within a ring of smaller standing stones. I had known there was something queer about that meadow.

Some say it was giants that built the dolmens and some that it was done by magic. Of course, all those things—dolmens, cromlechs and standing stones—are very old, and maybe there's not much power connected with them any more. But they make me uneasy; they invariably give me the feeling that unseen eyes are all about, watching without friendliness.

It wasn't good there at all, but, though I myself could bed down anywhere, the chances were I would not soon find a place where there was as good forage for the horse.

So, letting him amble where he would, I set about making a fire. Then

with my back turned carefully to the thing up on the hill, I proceeded to encourage drowsiness with long draughts of wine. It didn't take very long in my weary condition. I soon wrapped my cloak around me and settled down in the heather.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GNOME FROM YESTERDAY

MY FIRE had gone out when I was awakened by the howling of wolves—not just moon-baying, but the cry of the pack on the trail of something. I felt as chill and naked as a worm with a hen's eye fixed on it. They might not be after me, but if I waited to make sure it would be too late.

There were stars but no moon as yet to help me locate the horse, so I gave that up. The cry came again, seeming surely to come from the road I'd been on, and I peered around wildly.

The trees by the stream were small, easy to shin up, but offering no perch on which to wait out a siege; and among the great trees of the forest I might look in vain on a dark night for one I could climb. There was the dolmen, however, a dark bulk against the sky. I caught up my sword and wine and sprinted for it.

All along I'd had the fatalistic feeling that I couldn't avoid that thing. I hoped that any powers that still watched over it wouldn't mind.

Tossing my weapon and the skin up to the cross rock, I got a toe-hold where a stone was weathered, reached up and pulled myself on top. I was just about in time, too. I had hardly stopped panting enough to have a drink when the lead wolf ran out of the night. About fifteen others followed.

They switched from the horse's scent to my fresher tracks as I had been afraid they would do, but it was all to the good once I had found haven. I put the wine down and laughed. "No wolves served," I told them.

The pack leader looked up, growled, and jumped. But that was just swank, of course. He was three feet short. They all yapped a bit and nosed vainly around, then sat whining expectantly, as if they thought the next move was mine. "I'm not coming down," I remarked.

After a while they saw that I meant it and went off, sniffing for signs of other game. Nevertheless, I stayed where I was. They had given me a nasty minute, and I was taking no more chances in that vicinity.

It was chilly on that stone without my cloak, so I didn't try to sleep. Instead I worked on the wine, speculating as to how far out of my way the road I'd chosen would take me and into what sort of community it would first lead.

All places were upset and lawless and all roads perilous, but not for me as a rule. My harp and my poems gave me a general passport of good will. That was natural enough, too. With everything from empires to ethics being fed to the hogs, poetry was the one sound thing left. Even the Danes, who systematically destroyed most things, made and liked good poetry, though their taste was limited.

I could make poems with varying degrees of skill in four languages and recite them in seven, so I could go almost anywhere and find an audience. Irish I was born to, and Danish I had learned early from the Norse who'd settled on the Irish coast.

Latin had been the only language permitted at the monastery school, and

French I had learned to be handy with in the course of two previous sojourns among the Franks. The others, English, Welsh, and Pictish I had acquired for recitative purposes as needed.

**I** WAS thinking about my craft when suddenly I heard voices.

Staring anxiously at the part of the forest the sounds appeared to come from, I saw flickering lights moving toward me. Fiends making a night raid was the first and only explanation that occurred to my startled mind. I wanted to run, but if they really were fiends they could catch me anyhow; if not I was as safe where I was as anywhere.

In a moment or two the lights emerged into the meadow and began weaving more or less directly toward the dolmen. I groaned and sneaked my sword out of its sheath. I might accomplish nothing, but at least I would make the effort.

There were, I could by that time count, a dozen torches, and the bearers were chanting to a rhythm that was not quite music. It had something of the quality of plain-song, though it was divided into shorter phrases.

Straining my eyes to see what kind of thing was doing all that, I saw that the leading figure, their chief or priest, had no torch. He carried a wand and nothing more; but the rest—little, hairy creatures dressed in skins—all had either a spear or a club. They could have been gnomes, but if they weren't that I was damned if I knew what they were. I held my breath, expecting to be discovered; but a torch, though it gives good light, also casts black shadows; and none of the creatures came very near the dolmen.

Instead they started to weave in and out among the circle of standing stones. I had just been flattering myself that

I knew all languages spoken thereabouts, but I could make nothing of their words. They continued repeating their chant, and as nothing ill was happening to me I got interested and started to analyze the verse form.

It reminded me of certain Pictish poems, and at the thought I almost snapped my fingers. Trim one of those ratty elves up a little and put a trifle more clothes on him and you'd have a Pict, if you wanted one. Many of their words closely resembled Pictish.

Suddenly the leader left the circle, marching up to the dolmen to stand right beneath me, and as he did so the others ground out their torches. In the abrupt want of light after the glare I could see little, but I could hear him intoning urgently in a high, sweet voice. He hadn't spoken ten words, either, before his feet glowed like phosphorus.

For an instant I was stunned; then I turned to look behind me. The moon had just peeked above the horizon and was striking directly between the upright stones that supported the rock I was on, to light up the little man beneath me.

It rose swiftly then, picking his body more and more strongly out of the dark and making his shaggy white head startlingly bright and shining. How he had so timed it I didn't know, but the effect was as if he had called the moon up over the edge of the world. It was the most impressive single thing I had ever seen.

**J**UST when I thought I would be discovered, however, and was trying to calculate how they would react, the ceremony was over. They turned away and made silently for the forest through the coldly smoldering heather. But my relief had scarcely had time to

set in before I heard a slight scratching sound. The next moment the old man's head popped up over the rim of the slab.

Seeing me, he almost fell backward in his fright and amazement, but I collared him, held a hand over his mouth and dragged him up. If I let him yell I'd probably have Picts throwing spears at me for the rest of the night.

"It's all right," I told him, hoping he would understand the Pictish words I was using. "I was chased up here by wolves, and I'm going away in the morning." Then as his friends had disappeared I let him go.

He had recovered his poise and sat up, giving a slow and careful examination. "You're not one of us," he finally observed, "but the speech you used was ours, though there were a couple of words you said twistedly."

"I learned it from a people—" I looked at the moon to make sure of my direction and pointed northwest—"who live on an island off there." Now that the excitement was over I felt cold again. "Have some wine?"

He was more than willing, and when he finally took his mouth from the nozzle, things were on an amiable social plane. "These men who talk like you," I said when I had drunk in turn, "fashion a brew out of heather which tastes milder and can make a man drunker than anything I've ever had."

He smiled and then grew thoughtful. "They must be of our people, though I didn't know there were any left except ourselves. But we used to own the world."

"Yes?" I said politely.

"Oh yes. I remember."

I was startled. Rome had been a long time ago, before Christ even. "How old are you?" I asked.

He put his hand on the rock. "As old as this."

I understood then and nodded. Among the Picts the man who conserves the old knowledge and wisdom of the tribe is believed to have lived always. Well, it would be some while before day returned, and maybe I'd learn something interesting from the fellow. I passed the wine again. "You must have had quite a life."

THIS remark seemed to please him. "I have. I've seen everything in the world come and go. First my people were here, and I had them put up the stones because there were powers that should be honored. Then as I say we ruled everything until men came who looked like you and talked like this—" Here he astonished me by speaking words that sounded something like Gaelic.

"Well," he went on, "they were here a long time, and those of us they didn't kill lived as best we could. We thought nobody could defeat them, but a new people finally did. They spoke like this"—and though the words were slurred they were in Latin—"and were great builders. But they made it harder for us than the others because they cut down the forests." He stopped and chuckled.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"Well, I'm still here, and they're gone; or if there are any of them left they don't know it. The language they spoke and the things they made and knew are no longer theirs."

"Meanwhile," I pointed out, "the Franks have come."

"Yes, and Bretons." He nodded. "We have been crushed as never before because of their wars on our land, but maybe they'll kill each other off."

"They try hard," I admitted. "Still

you're getting weaker all the time." I was not drunk, but I'd taken enough to push discussion solely on its merits without too delicate a regard for feelings.

He didn't take offense but smiled pensively, fingering his great, moon-glowing beard. He looked as though he might actually have been as old as he said he was. "Perhaps I'll die," he spoke again finally, "but if I do everything really good will die with me. After my people are gone nobody will ever really know how dawn holds life in check when the mists rise white above the heather, or how the trees move and change shapes at night.

"They won't know how a friend's eyes can look, warm over the ale, or how the beauty of one of our girls—for there are no others of any worth—can stir a man. They won't know how fine a thing it is to be of the land or be honored in the tribe."

I shrugged. "I suppose all peoples feel that way."

"Do they?" he challenged. "Then why do they all come here, leaving their own lands, often leaving their tribes or, yes, even their women behind? You, for instance, who are you?"

"Finnian. An Irishman."

That meant nothing to him, but he wasn't interested in details. "You're from somewheres else, too. What are you doing here?"

"I'm a bard," I explained. "I travel around singing wherever men will pay to listen."

"Won't they listen in your own land?" he enquired with a suggestion of a sneer.

"Of course." In spite of myself the thrust injured my professional pride. "I am welcome anywhere."

"Why not stay home in that case? Isn't the land good?"

"It's all right," I said, "but so are a lot of other places."

THAT seemed to annoy the old fellow, and he snorted. He was getting into the spirit of the thing and drank without invitation. "Do you like it where your own gods aren't worshipped?"

"Why as for that, they make it easy for us these days. Word's got around that there's only one god for all people everywhere."

"Drivel!" he snapped. "You don't care about your land or your gods. Why don't you at least stay and stand with your tribe?"

"Oh, the clan's getting along all right." I shook the skin and felt relieved as it gurgled encouragingly.

"A man who lives away from his own country and people," he stated, "doesn't live in reality. He knows nothing that is really happening, nor is he truly a part of life. He is merely suspended in it."

That caught my attention, for in a purely general sense I had found it so. "Possibly that's why I like it."

For a little, old man he certainly could hold a lot. "You like nothing that's worth anything to a man!" he scolded when he had wiped his mouth. "You travel alone, don't you? I suppose nobody wants to be seen with you!"

"You seem to like to drink with me," I pointed out.

"I do not like to drink with you! I just don't hold it against the wine if the company's bad." He released the skin grudgingly. "What's your woman doing while you're running all over places you don't belong?"

"I haven't got one and don't want one."

I expected another outburst, but the

statement seemed to leave him speechless. Hunched forward, staring at me, he was an eerie and angry figure swaying a little in the moonlight.

At length he said: "Always after the others leave when the moon ceremony is over, I sit up here to wait for signs. I had thought that you might be a good omen, but you are bad."

He was leaning forward, peering fixedly at my face, and though I met his eyes I was not happy. All my uneasiness about the stones and their makers came back with a rush. This was the servant of those wild, old powers, and he had become malevolent toward me.

"You care for nothing," he accused again. His words were coming a little thickly, but he knew just what he wanted to say. "You serve nothing and help nobody!"

As he said that my mind inevitably went back to the Saxon youngster, and I felt shame again that I had not so much as stretched out a hand, no, not even spoken a warning.

THE old Pict was leaning so close by then that I could smell the wine on his breath; and he got it! Whether it is done by magic or not, there are some men who can reach into another's mind and pull his thoughts out whole. That man was a priest of an ancient, strange race, probably versed in wizardry, too, and he read me out.

"You let a man die today because you couldn't be bothered!"

"It wasn't my business," I muttered.

He saw he had me on the run and that increased his sense of power. "You think nothing in life is your business!" he howled. "But I'll make it so things will be!"

For an instant I merely shivered, then pure, scared rage made me pull

myself together. I shoved his face so hard he fell over backward; then I caught up my sword. "You try to curse me, you damned hob-goblin, and I'll chop you up for dogmeat!"

Far from being taken aback, he defied me in a voice crackling with vindictive glee. "If you don't believe in any gods, what are you worried about?"

"I'm not worried," I blustered lamely. "I just don't like to be cursed."

"You're not worth a good curse," he informed me, sitting up as I took the point of my sword away from his throat, "but I'll put my will on you."

"Go ahead," I said sullenly. "Not that anything will come of it."

"Oh yes it will!" I waited alertly, ready to kill him if he voiced anything that sounded as if it might be a spell, but he only looked at me hard and said: "From now on, as long as you stay in my land"—here he swept an arm to include all directions—"you will aid any man or woman in need of help."

That didn't seem so bad, and my relief was mixed with mortification at having been so afraid. In the past couple of minutes, however, I had become nearly sober and thus conscious of the chill and the stiffness in my weary muscles.

Rising, I stood with my back to the Pict, stretching and looking hopefully for some sign of dawn. There are limits even to the elastic hospitality of inebriety, and after having threatened to kill a man, you could not—or I could not—go on drinking with him. I hoped he'd take the hint and go away.

When I heard a slithering noise, therefore, I didn't turn immediately. I waited awhile and then looked around to find the slab empty—completely empty. He had taken the last of the wine with him.

I spotted him then, a blur just merg-

ing with the apron shadow of the trees. My first impulse was to leap down after him; but I'd never find him, and the Lord alone knew how many other raffish demons he could conjure out of ratholes or whatever other appropriate places they lived in.

I stood and howled my fury like a child. "You thieving night crawler! You bat's louse!"

All I got in return was laughter and the valedictory retort, which undoubtedly gave him a great deal of satisfaction: "I didn't think you'd care."

I fretted out the nub of the night, growing more miserable as it waxed progressively cooler and the wine ebbed in me. Then with the first light I plodded through the cold, dew-soaked heather, to find another unpleasant surprise.

Some rodent had gnawed its way into my srip and eaten my small stock of provisions. I looked at the dolmen and shook my fist. All that would be needed to make disaster complete would be the loss of my horse. Thoroughly disgusted with an ill-run world, I started to search for him.

## CHAPTER IV

### SING FOR THE BROTHERS

A LITTLE scouting around showed me that the bay, whether or not he had been stampeded by wolves, had strayed north up the road. By that time I was so accustomed to bad chance that I would have suspected trickery if anything pleasant had happened. That wine-stealing Judas of a Pictish wizard was doubtless responsible for everything, and my only recourse was to get out of his domain.

Feeling much put upon, I wrapped my saddle and smaller belongings in my cloak and slung the whole over my

shoulder. My harp, which I usually so carried when afoot, I tucked under my arm.

Walking thus loaded didn't help my hunger or my disposition, but it warmed me up in short order. My burdens were not too heavy, but they were awkward; and a long-sword wasn't designed for a pedestrian. In consequence, though the new sun was soon lighting a very fair day, I wasn't favorably impressed. I don't suppose I'd gone more than three miles before I caught sight of the horse, but it seemed as if I'd been walking for a week.

When I called wheedlingly, the animal looked up from some young shoots it had been nibbling and trotted a ways further. Restraining the impulse to run in pursuit, I put down my things and commenced stalking. The horse teased me for more than a mile, but, finally perceiving that it was not going to be allowed to eat in peace, it yielded.

After retrieving my gear, which had not, as I had half-anticipated, been somehow stolen, I pushed on at a stiff pace. With a horse under me my appetite no longer seemed likely to prove mortal, and I regained much of my lost good humor.

Till well past noon I passed nothing of man's save a couple of burned-down shacks, but that didn't much matter. I was traveling in fine, new country on a fine, new day, and the road could be counted on to take me somewhere. Even the food problem wasn't insoluble. As I told the bay with a cheerfulness he might have thought in bad taste, I could always eat horse meat.

The road had been dipping into and out of a series of small, shallow valleys, and from the top of one of the dividing hills I at last saw what looked to be an abbey. My surmise was correct. In another half-hour or so I rode into

a wide sweep of fields under cultivation, with a monastery, possessing on closer inspection many of the aspects of a fortress, as its hub.

Whether the force came from piety or arms, strength was present. There was an air of settled prosperity rarely found; and the peasants didn't run at sight of me or even appear concerned beyond a natural curiosity.

AS I APPROACHED the abbey gates I examined the place with interest. It was a genuine stronghold all right, and no doubt needed to be. There was a huge, iron knocker, but just as I was about to dismount and use it, a long, raw-boned monk appeared on the top of the wall and looked me over leisurely.

"Good afternoon," he finally said. I liked the looks of his rugged, weather-reddened face, but his tone was not encouraging. "Have you business at St. Charles?"

He spoke in Latin, which proved that I had found a monastery where some tradition of learning was remembered. After turning my horse so that he could see my harp, I answered in kind, asking courteously for entry.

"Another minstrel," he said without inflection.

"No," I corrected him with a touch of pride, "a maker." Then, as that did not appear to impress him sufficiently, I added: "And a scholar."

"You don't look like a priest," he pointed out.

Several comments occurred to me, but I refrained from giving voice to them. "All cannot be fathers of the Church," I answered instead. "Some of us Christians have to content ourselves with being merely sons."

He grinned at that, and I began to hope that we might get on. "H-m-m.

Then where are you from, Christian?"

"I'm an Irishman and don't care what wolves eat what part of the empire. Now speaking of eating, that's something I haven't done all day." While making this remark I took the precaution of shifting my wallet so that the coins in it chinked musically.

His face became broodingly solemn. "You will be welcome to the hospice, my son," he said after a fitting pause for consideration.

Once I was inside he pointed out the guest house to me, then led me across the court to the stables. But things were not to my liking yet. The meager food of the hospice would serve in a pinch, but the monks were a hearty, well-fed crew. Their table, I judged, would be worthy of an appetite such as mine.

"What's your name, father?" I asked my guide, who was appraising the bay with an expert's eye.

"Clovis."

"I'm Finnian and, as I've told you, a bard. When the fathers gather at the refectory couldn't I show my gratitude for the abbey's hospitality—in addition, of course, to my contribution for the poor—by reciting for them?"

He gave the horse a final, approving pat. "Have you poems worthy of these holy premises?"

"Oh no, not worthy," I said cautiously, "but possibly acceptable."

He rubbed his chin, and the sleeve of his gown fell back to show a big scar, not long healed. If that hadn't been made by a sword there would have been no use in his telling me so, for I wouldn't have believed him.

"I haven't the authority to give you permission," he said, "even though I think gratitude is a very fine thing." That man and I understood each other perfectly. "But if you should come to the refectory when the bell rings, you

could make your request of the prior. Father Walter, our abbot, is not expected until somewhat later."

I CAUGHT a little sleep but made sure to be ready when the fathers filed in to dine. Father Clovis was friendly enough to present me and to state my purpose to the prior, a small, alert, old man, who looked at me with some dubiety.

"What had you in mind to offer us, my son?" he enquired.

The monks were a noisy, cheerful lot; and they had reason to be. My mouth watered at sight of what was being set before them. "I know poems of all sorts, the works of others as well my own poor efforts." I hesitated, then threw out a feeler. "The tale of a holy martyr might be too discouraging to weaker servants of God."

"That's sometimes true, my son."

The brothers, I observed, were not confining their talk to religious matters. "But good counsel," I pursued, "can be contained in other things as well as in sermons."

"An interesting observation," the prior commented, looking more cheerful.

I knew them then. "I will give you," I said boldly, "a shocking song about the fate of a monk at St. Sulpice."

Poking libelous fun at the inmates of another abbey is one of the oldest and most reliable tricks in the book, provided one is certain of his audience. All that's necessary is to pick out a rival monastery, preferably one in the vicinity, and make the necessary trifling alterations in the rhyme scheme. The prior's eyes gleamed, but his face did not otherwise change. "We are willing to profit by the mistakes of those at St. Sulpice. Proceed, my son."

He rapped for silence, and I saw that

the monks quieted instantly. There was discipline there for all the general air of rough and ready casualness. While I announced my intention, I was fitting the name "St. Sulpice" into the poem. Then I struck a couple of jaunty chords on my harp and began:

*A sacristan at St. Sulpice  
Admired his virtue without surcease  
And, being mentally undersized,  
He shortly was self-canonized;  
But he did not come  
To Halidome,  
A fact at which he is still surprised.*

I played a little running tune before the next strophe, while I looked around. They were encouragingly attentive.

*He lived on weeds and cockroach soup  
And roomed with a he-goat with the croup,  
Then celebrated these foolish facts  
With vilely worded, mile-long tracts  
Whose vomitous cant  
Showed just how scant  
Piety is in a show-off's acts.*

*At St. Sulpice, though, wits are dim:  
They loved this prig and boasted of him.  
No one could equal him, they agreed,  
At saving sinners by word and deed—  
The Devil, they claimed  
Could be so tamed  
By that old ass that he'd say the Creed!*

*When Satan heard these words he laughed  
And came to challenge the mad monk's craft;  
But he, too witless to be afraid,  
Produced the latest tract he'd made,  
And the Devil winced  
At grammar minced  
And words strung out in a fool's parade.*

*Satan whistled and shook his head.  
"Well, St. Sulpice is the first," he said,  
"Abbey in which I've ever been—"*

I had counted on that line for a laugh, and I got it.

*The rest have never asked me in—  
But I've never yet,  
Wherever met,  
Failed to detect a cardinal sin.*

*"Pride," said Satan, "is what you've got,  
An excellent sin: It tops the lot.  
And I'll take all your tracts, what's more,  
For though I've tortures by the score  
I never had known,*

*Till just now shown  
By you, the agony of a bore."*

*That sacristan of St. Sulpice  
Is frying now in his own thin grease,  
While Hell's most stubbornly hardened souls,  
Who'd scorned to notice white-hot coals,  
All writhe and sigh  
And, unmanned, cry  
At having to read his monstrous scrolls!*

THEIR applause was generous but not in itself nourishing or thirst-quenching. I managed to catch Father Clovis' eye and raised my brows pointedly.

He winked and rose to the occasion. "Perhaps, father," he addressed the prior, "the learned poet would consent to share our small meal and entertain us again after dinner."

"If he so wishes, he is welcome," the other answered, and after thanking him I made dignified haste to occupy one of a number of vacant places. It was grand food in unlimited quantities; and I had just the appetite to cope with it. Having completed a manful job, I filled my glass with their white wine, which I had found especially good, and sat back to hold up my end of the conversation.

It promised to be a pleasant evening, for if, to judge from their discourse, the fathers did not run to profundity of scholarship, they were good fellows of reasonable education. The complexion of affairs changed in a minute, however. A priest followed by six other monks entered, and we all rose in greeting.

It was then that I saw what gave the place its air of having a backbone. The first monk was the abbot, a broad-shouldered man with a strong, calm face. He himself said little, falling heartily to eating, but the turn of the talk was more businesslike after his arrival. It was evident from the words

of the other newcomers that they had been on a scouting and skirmishing expedition. I had been right in appraising the place as one part fort, one part house of God.

I was eventually conscious that the abbot had finished and was looking at me with his keen, wide-set eyes. "Who are you, my son?" he asked bluntly when I met his gaze.

"Finnian, father. An Irish bard."

They were all looking at me now, Father Clovis sardonically, the rest with curiosity or suspicion. It was a time when all strangers must account for their presence plausibly. "I landed at Nantes a few days ago. My plan was to go to Tours," I told him.

His sonorous voice grew deeper. "You are sadly off your path then."

I held his eyes steadily. "I had to change my plans, father."

"Why?"

It was dangerous, for I couldn't know what alliances anybody around there had, but I decided there'd be a larger percentage of risk in evasion. "There's a man south of here called Chilbert who doesn't like me. I'm trying to skirt around his territory."

His eyes widened slightly.

I had said something then, for the monks stared at me or whispered asides to each other. The abbot thought it over and rose abruptly. "Come with me, my son. I'd like to talk to you."

## CHAPTER V

### THE ABBOT WEARS A SWORD

WITH a regretful look at the wine I followed him out and along the cloister till he entered a room which proved to be his study. There was still sufficient daylight to illuminate it, complete with desk, shelves for parchment items, and a pair of chairs. He chose

the one by the desk, and at his gesture I took the other.

"How well do you know Count Chilbert?" he wanted to know.

"Not at all and yet too well," I replied, the wine impelling me toward breeziness. "He wants to kill me, a familiarity I try to discourage from strangers."

He didn't laugh, and under the pressure of his waiting eyes I told him exactly what had happened, omitting only exchanging my old nag for the bay. A priestly garrison might well commandeer such a fine horse for the good of my soul.

He nodded when I had finished. "The count's a cruel scoundrel, but he's a powerful figure hereabouts."

I shrugged. "I was given to understand he had plenty of followers. Otherwise I wouldn't have given his domain such clearance."

"I thought possibly," he hinted, "that you might have heard something about his general activities while you were in the vicinity."

"I might have had I been interested. As it was I heard nothing beyond the usual story these days. Everything's falling to pieces, and thieves are plundering the ruins."

He brooded, seeing a long way. "If some of the thieves are strong enough to protect what they take," he said at last and more to himself than to me, "it will mean some sort of stability. If the process of chaos could be stopped for just a moment something could be done to form a basis for rebuilding."

"Your thieves," I remarked, interested enough to provoke further discussion, "will merely try to take from each other when they're got everything else. Then where's your stability?"

As he answered I could feel the depth and passion of the man. "Chaos gathers

speed from its own momentum and never ceases of itself. It must be stopped by force of will."

He paused, but I knew he would go on. He was in the mood to talk, and I was obviously an attentive listener. "I'm a father of the Church," he said, taking a new tack, "and I hope not too unworthy a one. Originally, however, I did not take orders because I had any imperative call to holiness. But as a young man my crops were harvested by wandering outlaw bands three times running. Twice, also, my house was looted and burnt, and I had no recourse—no law or power to which I could appeal. It was too commonplace even to excite comment.

"Only the Church, even though much of its strength has lately been worn away and dissipated, seemed to have the will to hold anything together. My wife was killed in the last raid, so I joined the order here. There are many in the Church these days for similar reasons."

I kept silent. He wasn't asking me for sympathy; he was telling me, and probably for a purpose.

"**B**ECAUSE we are a united body and care enough," he went on, "we've been able to keep the wolves away. I'm abbot now, and I try to encourage learning and other proper functions of the monastery, but my largest task is to make sure that on our lands men can work and live in a normal manner."

"You've got some very capable looking assistants," I remarked, thinking principally of Father Clovis.

"I've needed them," he grimly declared. "Now, as I started out to say, some of the robber chiefs are finally discovering that the pickings are getting poorer each year. As a result

they're seizing what lands they think they can hold for their own. This means a settling of some sort; to protect the revenue of their realms they will eventually have to establish some kind of order within them."

"But wouldn't an up and coming count like Chilbert think highly of rich, well cultivated lands like yours so conveniently near his own?"

"Yes," the abbot nodded, "but we're too strong to be conquered with ease. He will leave us alone if we will pay him for protection. He aspires to hold everything up to Normandy, and he may achieve it. He's a man of considerable ability."

The vision of Chilbert's ruthless face came before me unpleasantly. "Isn't there anyone strong enough to stand against him?"

"There's a young fellow called Conan—a Breton. Though I'm not quite sure what he wants yet, he comes of good stock and is, I think, all right. Nevertheless, he has returned comparatively recently after having been away since boyhood, and I don't yet know how capable he is or what a following he can eventually get."

"If you even think he's all right," I commented, "that puts him way ahead of Chilbert. Why don't you throw in with him?"

"I'm not throwing in with anybody yet," he said flatly. "I'm waiting to see who is strong."

"You mean to say you'll let a swipe like Chilbert seize more power when you might be able to check him by joining with a better man?"

He flushed, but his glance remained steady. "I'd like to see a good man rise to the top, but my first job is to look after the abbey."

"I suppose so." To my surprise I felt partisan about the matter and a little

disappointed in this man, who had made quite an impression on me. Though God knows it wasn't my habit to pass judgment on moral issues.

He guessed what I was thinking and took me up on it. "There are two ways of looking at such a matter. Perhaps if I were a saint I'd fight blindly for universal good, even if I were convinced that nothing would be gained by my efforts. Being a lesser thing, I prefer to struggle for only the limited good that I believe to be attainable." He drew into himself a moment before he concluded. "There is a chance that even a saint might think something is better than nothing."

"Very likely," I conceded. He was doing his best in difficult times, and I was sorry I had been critical. "Just the same, I'm glad I won't be here when Chilbert's kingdom comes."

"You know from what I have told you," he said after another pause, "that I'm not anxious for him to succeed. Nor is it inevitable that he shall do so." He was looking at me earnestly, and I knew by his next remark that he had taken due note of the sword scar on my left cheek. "You're used to weapons, and you seem to nourish a strong feeling against the count yourself. Conan can use and will, I believe, reward experienced men."

So that was what he had been driv-

ing at! "And if he gets enough of them," once again I couldn't repress the slight taunt, "you might feel justified in being his ally."

"Exactly. Well?"

"No, father. It isn't my affair."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE IMMINENT DOGS

**A**FTER a farewell salute to Father Clovis I headed north again early the next morning. Once I had ridden through the abbey's fields, the forest closed in again, and I saw no more signs of habitation. The sky, mostly clear when I started, was overcast before noon with steadily thickening clouds. The air, though, I decided that it wouldn't rain for some hours, possibly not until night.

I had dismounted to drink at a spring when I first heard them coming. All morning I had met nobody except a lone wood-cutter, but these were riding men—several, to judge by the sounds and voices.

Having no reason to anticipate trouble with anyone coming from the north, I wasn't especially concerned. None the less, I climbed on the bay and got off the road west, where there chanced to be less undergrowth. Thus I was still in sight but had comfortable

**USE SPEEDWAY BLADES**  
**FOR FAST, SMOOTH, ECONOMICAL SHAVES**



room for maneuvering in case of need.

There were five of them, all well armed. The leader was somewhere in his thirties, a medium-sized man with black hair above a jolly, bearded face. Talking busily, he didn't see me until he was all but abreast of me. Then at his command they all halted and sat staring at me. I had nothing to say.

"You're a stranger in these parts," the leader announced.

"Yes," I said pleasantly, "and one whose only interest in these parts is to get out of them."

His face was no longer jovial. "You're a liar!"

That was rude, but I wasn't going to do anything about it when he had four men with him. I waited.

"You're one of Chilbert's men," was his next accusation.

I thought the attempt would be futile, but I made one more effort to arbitrate. "I'm not his or anybody's man." I touched my harp and deepened my Irish accent as I went on. "I'm just an itinerant bard, and your lousy, local quarrels don't mean a damned thing to me."

Paying no heed to my statement, he edged his mount toward me, and I pointedly backed away. "That's Chilbert's horse," he said harshly.

I had been wondering what had sicked him on me. "It was," I acknowledged.

"He might lend it to a friend scouting for him." The fellow jerked his head and his followers deployed on either side of him. "But he'd never give that horse to anybody."

I swung the animal in question around. "We traded. Moreover," I pointed out, seeing that he had made up his mind to credit nothing I said, "I made an excellent bargain. I doubt if you can catch me."

**B**UT he was for trying. They all surged toward me at his word, and the bay swept away through the forest. We made fine speed, for the great trees were wide apart and the brush trifling. Dodging occasional low branches was the only real excitement in the business, as they never had a chance of catching us. Nevertheless, they were hard to convince and didn't give up until, without especially pushing himself, the bay ran completely out of their sight at the end of a couple of miles.

Soon afterward I breathed him, listening to make sure they weren't catching up. At the end of some minutes there was still no sign of them. "Nice work!" I told the horse appreciatively.

It was only then that I realized my new predicament. Here I was wandering under a sunless sky in a country where landmarks meant nothing to me; the only possible way of retrieving the road was the laborious one of retracing my own tracks. And did I really want the road under the circumstances? Suppose this man decided to cut me off both north and south. What to do in that case?

The best course seemed to be to wait over in the woods in the hope that the next day would bring a sun to guide me. But my mount and I would need water, and I had passed neither stream nor spring on the way in. Resignedly I started to wander in search of one or the other. If the road was still directly back of me, which it probably wasn't, north would be off to my right. I had to set some course, so, facing that way, I rode.

I fared slowly, for when going nowhere a man feels foolish to hurry. I was feeling sulky now. It was bad enough to be forced from my original

route for being Chilbert's enemy. To be hounded from my alternate course for being his friend was an irony too annoying to amuse me.

In about an hour I found a spring, but I didn't abide by my original and sensible plan of staying beside it. It was then only early afternoon, and I was far too restless to face waiting out the day in philosophic inaction. Therefore, after letting the horse forage, I went on.

It wasn't for several hours that I encountered the first real break in the trees, but when I did it was a big one. A long while ago it had been a huge farm, and though stretches of it were badly overgrown with brush, other sections had patches of tall grass scattered through the weeds. The horse could do well there.

I rode toward a likely looking portion, but stopped as I heard dogs bay in the woods downhill to my right. They were heading my way, the next few yelps told me, and I felt much cheered. The hunters would undoubtedly be glad to share with me after the kill, and I could learn my whereabouts from them.

Following the course of the chase by the baying, I nodded contentedly to myself. The quarry should break into the clear shortly.

**S**OONER than I expected the quarry did. It was a man. Emotionless with surprise, I watched him wade through the brush and up the hill on a line that would pass me closely. He wasn't really running any more, though he was still trying. Twice he fell.

He had a bare sword he was using as a staff, leaning on it heavily as he plodded forward, head down. He was quite near when he first saw me and halted, swaying. He was too tired to

have much expression, but I knew what he was thinking. If I was an enemy the game was up.

Except that he was big, brown-haired, and fairly young I couldn't tell anything about him. Maybe he was the kind of man who should be chased by dogs, but I gave him the benefit of the doubt.

"No enemy," I called.

He still didn't move. He was too exhausted to speak, but he pointed at my horse with his empty hand.

I cursed to myself. A fine animal like the bay could bear double for a while, but unless there was some refuge fairly near, the pursuers would catch us, which included me. And if they killed him, as they presumably meant to do, they'd probably finish their job by killing anybody they found with him.

A moment passed, and he remained where he was. Once he had stopped he couldn't force himself to go on again. I saw him turn toward his pursuers, waiting.

Miserable with indecision, I shook my head. Meanwhile the baying of the hounds had taken on a horrible quality, now that I knew what they were after. They would soon be out of the woods, too; and I had better get away from there if I didn't want to watch the fellow torn down before my eyes. "Oh well, hell!" I swore bitterly.

"Look," I said after I'd boosted him into the saddle and scrambled up behind, "if you know any good places to go take us to the nearest!"

I was glad that I had traveled leisurely all afternoon. The bay retained strength enough to carry us, big men both, at a good pace. I looked behind as we started and saw the first dog break out of the trees, nosing the trail. Very likely the hounds would have a difficult time figuring out what had hap-

pened to their quarry at the point where he'd mounted. They might have to wait for the men to straighten them out, which would give us a little extra time.

My unwanted companion appeared to know where he was taking us. I would have liked to know myself, but he had no breath to spare for speech. We cut across fields toward the forest at a long tangent, and my physical discomfort as I bumped along astern of the saddle was only equalled by my uneasiness and disgruntlement. For a man who tried conscientiously to stick to his own concerns I seemed to be getting into an awful lot of trouble.

The pack cry of the hounds had dissolved into puzzled yelps, but as I looked back for about the fifth time, riders came over the rise. They shouted at sight of us, and the dogs started whooping over the new scent. The bay was doing wonderfully considering the load he was bearing, but they were perceptibly gaining.

"Have you any friends close by?" I asked the man in front of me, but he shook his head.

Reaching the forest, we skirted it while he searched for something. This turned out to be the hardly noticeable remains of a road, and we swung into it, threading through trees, slapped and scraped by the branches. The horse stumbled once and slowed to a canter. We goaded him on, but he never regained his full stride. He wouldn't be much use to us soon.

**N**O DOUBT it wasn't actually so very long before we emerged into another spacious clearing. I only know we eventually did, and that I looked hopefully for a fortress. Instead, there were only the ruins of a great stone building and an oppressive air of desolation. As we passed the old house

to go down the slope beyond, I saw that the dogs had us in sight again.

I was about to tell my companion that we might as well turn, find a corner of the ruin, and die as best we could when he halted our mount in front of an arched stone vault in the hillside. The front wall had fallen, but it was otherwise sound, with a narrow front two men might defend—for a while, at least.

He slid from my saddle and lunged toward the vault, motioning for me to go on; but once having thrown in with him I could not leave him to it. Unloading my belongings, I hit the bay so that, lightened of us both, it hastened out of the way of the imminent dogs, to disappear in the nearby fringe of wood.

I watched the horse vanish, then reached the vault in time to be ready for the first hound. In his excitement he leaped right on the point of my sword; I threw him off and watched him kick out his life. I was tired of being chased by dogs, and killed two more with savage pleasure. After that the rest decided to wait for the men and stood around barking and snarling.

Seeing the situation was temporarily in hand, my companion had disappeared in the gloomy rear of the vault and so was not apparent when the first rider arrived. He looked at me and at the dead hounds; but the bay was not in sight, the swathe in the weeds showed he had gone on, and I was no one he knew.

He lost a minute by staring.

I jumped him before he could come to any conclusions. "Are those dogs yours?" I roared.

He was a bulky, hard-faced, red-haired man who didn't like to be roared at, but he was still uncertain. "Yes," he said surlily.

"Well, if you want any of 'em left," I snarled, "teach 'em to tree what they're after."

A group of three more joined him as I said that. "He's probably the fellow who picked Conan up," one suggested.

"If he is we can run him down later," the red man said, "but Conan's the one we're after, and if he's riding the horse alone now he has a chance of getting away. Get the dogs going."

More horsemen had joined them during their brief council and still more appeared as the hunt streamed away. "We may be back for you," one of the first men called to me.

I knew they'd be back. It wouldn't take them long to find that the bay was riderless, but I could use the short reprieve. Unbuckling my sword, I commenced stacking the loose blocks of stone to form a rampart.

A loud splashing told me that there was water in our refuge, which was good news. In another minute my ally reappeared with dripping hair. He started to help me, but I waved him aside.

"Rest up," I ordered. "You'll get plenty of exercise pretty soon."

He sat down and for the first time since I met him he spoke. "I've had some exercise already."

**H**E WAS a fine looking chap now that he wasn't gasping like a fish on a sun-hot rock. He had a long, powerful body topped by a long, exceedingly keen face, weathered but clear-skinned under his mop of light brown hair. His age, I judged, was about the same as mine, and he looked no more like a Frank than I did. Both from his name and appearance I picked him for a Breton.

Putting another block in place, I

straightened and pointed to my scrip. "There's food in there. You'd better eat something if your stomach's stopped jumping."

His eyes followed my gesture and he nodded gratefully.

"Thanks—and for the other thing, too. I'm sorry you didn't go on."

"There wasn't much sense in going on," I answered truthfully. "The horse was spent, and they would have had to follow me to make sure I didn't go for help."

"Yes." He moved his sword out of the way and reached into my scrip. "I shouldn't have got you into this, but I wanted something to put my back against."

I knew how he must have felt with those dogs getting steadily nearer. "Don't blame you," I said.

He took a huge bite of bread and meat, swallowed and took another, thinking hard. "Maybe," he said after he'd gulped down a third, "they'll let you go if I explain that you're a stranger who doesn't so much as know who I am."

"They won't listen," I told him. Besides, I'd begun to remember how the abbot had spoken to me of a man named Conan. There couldn't, I reasoned, be many men so called thereabouts who were important enough to be hunted by a small army. And I knew who was chiefly against him. "Are those lads Chilbert's by any chance?"

He nodded. "Oliver, the red-haired stench, is one of his chief lieutenants."

"Then they'll soon know," I said, "that I not only tried to save your neck but took you up on Chilbert's own pet horse."

He stared at me. "Why of course, it was! How the devil did you get hold of it?"

"I liked it better than my own." I might have known, I thought, that Chilbert would continue to haunt me. That man had been fatal to me from the first.

My little wall was now nearly waist high, and I stopped there. "You're Conan the Breton, with power in these parts," I said. "Is there any chance of friends finding you?"

"Not enough chance to bank on. Not in this fix."

He shrugged, not bothering to ask how I knew about him. "They'll start looking, soon, I suppose. I was on a wolf hunt, lost the others, my horse broke a leg, and I got lost myself, what with no sun to go by. Then I ran foul of Oliver. I managed to hide from him first, but he got the dogs. My men won't know where to begin looking."

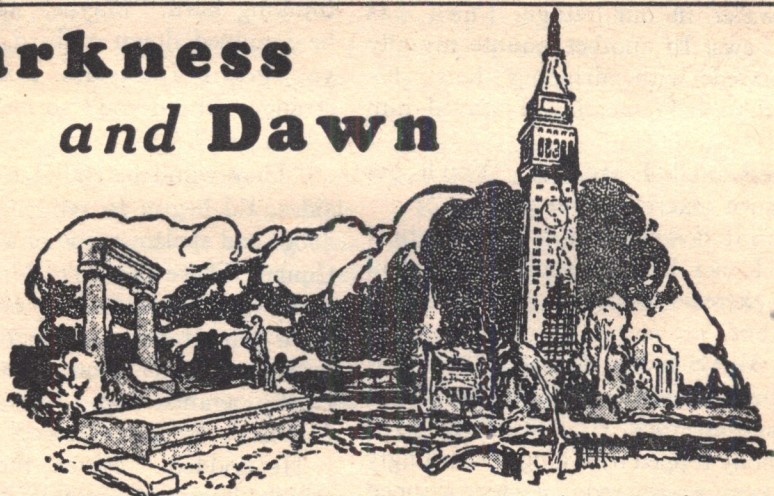
I went to get a drink, then returned to listen. "They're coming back now," I informed him.

He rose to stand beside me. "What's your name?" He put his hand on my shoulder when I told him. "Now we'll show them that it's one thing to corner and another to kill." He had recovered his wind, and the respite had given him time to call on the reserve strength of a mighty frame. In spite of the weariness he must have felt, he looked very capable indeed.

I cut my cape in two and we each wrapped a half around our left arms to give them some measure of protection. We had just finished when they all came in sight—one of them, I saw with regret, leading the recaptured bay. Oh well, I told myself, I would soon have no use for horses.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

## Darkness and Dawn



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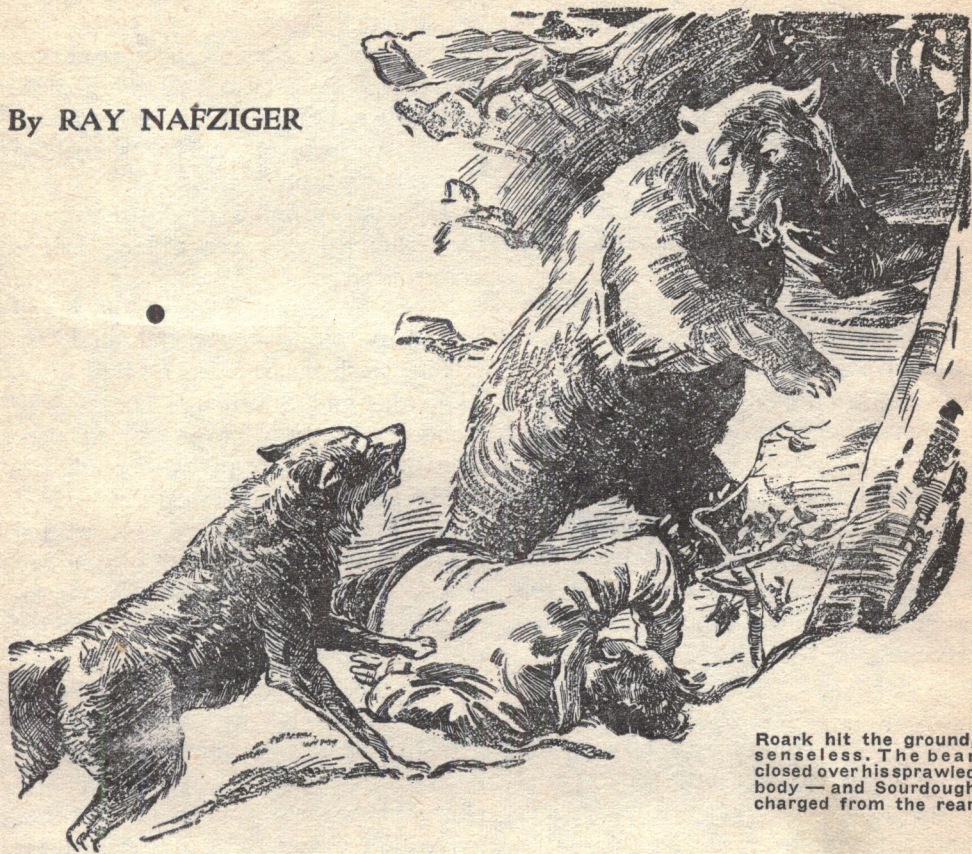
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# Just Call Me Wolf

By RAY NAFZIGER



Roark hit the ground, senseless. The bear closed over his sprawled body — and Sourdough charged from the rear

All right, I was an apartment dog. But don't get me wrong, cowboy. When you sneer at my fine city ways, better remember my name's Sourdough, and it only takes a little of the brawling West to bring out the husky in me

**S**OURDOUGH shook himself hard, as if to cast away memories of the baggage car he had shared from Chicago with an anti-social Chow.

Then planting his big feet on the cinder platform, straining powerfully against his leash, the husky sniffed hard and critically. Something was wrong with the air out West. It had a queer sagey flavor.

Unnatural was the word for it. Nothing like good old Chicago air.

A dark-faced man in blue jeans and with a red blanket draped over a pur-

ple sateen shirt, his hair in two long braids, passed. Sourdough bent to sniff at a pair of buckskin moccasins, and promptly the Indian cocked his right foot for a kick.

That was before he looked down to find not a cur but a blunt-headed wolf, innocently regarding the cocked foot. A Wolf certainly, except for the cottony tip of the tightly-coiled bushy tail and the white splashes on neck and forelegs.

"Hay-soos—" exclaimed the Indian; and dropping the traditional dignity of his race, he leaped across the track.

Towed by his leash, Sourdough ambled after the tweed skirt of his mistress toward a battered station wagon. Sliding from under the wheel was a tall young man wearing a huge hat, a leather jacket and boots with the sort of high heels women affected.

The boots carried the same smell that you got in the park when a horse passed.

"Miss Travis?" he was inquiring. "Your uncle asked me to fetch you and your baggage to the ranch. I'm his partner, Jack Roark. Tad didn't mention livestock. Or I'd have brought the horse trailer."

Sourdough was too ignorant of horse trailers to be insulted. He reserved his opinion of this stranger, however. His greeting to Helen had been none too cordial. Which was unusual; men so fortunate as to have opportunity to greet Helen did it with tremendous enthusiasm.

Silently the cold fish loaded a young mountain of baggage into the car and turned to Sourdough. "There's still room for you," he said as if deeply astonished. "In you go, Call-of-the-Wild."

Sourdough obligingly hopped in. It wasn't bad. He was big enough to stretch his head comfortably through the open window.

THEY rattled away into open country, swooping up and over and around rolling hills, to drop finally into a town. The houses, all like brown shoeboxes, were decorated with strings of red peppers. The one street was not only unpaved but trenched as if for war.

"Peña Blanca," said Jack Roark, suddenly assuming the role of guide, and recklessly leaping the station wagon from ditch to ditch. "They don't

care how many axles or necks you break here."

"No more than you," remarked Sourdough's mistress. "If we bounce any higher, Peña Blanca will be treated to the spectacle of our heads sticking through the roof."

The goof slowed a little at that, until they rumbled up over a long bridge across a river.

"The Rio Grande," he said then and socked the accelerator to the floor.

They flashed past a dozen rough-coated ponies and Sourdough stared back wonderingly. In Chicago horses were seen only on bridle paths, decently attired in bridles, saddles and riders.

A long-eared unknown animal hopped out from under the spinning wheels. Sourdough tensed. That creature he knew was something intended to be chased by dogs.

The unpaved road dived suddenly into a deep trough with unkempt grass and small trees. Sourdough barked. He liked parks. They began crossing and recrossing a stream of some fluid that looked like water. Each time the wheels splashed whatever it was, Sourdough yelped in excitement.

His mistress addressed Jack Roark. "I think he's thirsty. Would you mind stopping?"

The driver halted reluctantly, muttering some nonsense about pioneers who had traveled Death Valley before it had been furnished with drinking fountains.

Sourdough descended and with his bushy tail wagging fast, approached the stream of colorless fluid. It couldn't be water of course; water came from faucets. Lowering his big head he sniffed suspiciously and then reached out a testing paw.

"Look at him," said the girl, chuckling. She had a nice laugh, gay, musical.

"Yeah, look at him," echoed Jack Roark. "The big tourist. What does he want—a straw?" Sourdough's mistress closed her red lips in a tight line.

Sourdough hesitated. This queer stuff smelled like water, looked like water and felt like water. There remained one last test. Lowering his head he began a loud lapping.

It was water all right. A pipe must be broken somewhere. In Chicago a plumber would be on the job.

His thirst satisfied, he stuck his head into the nearest clump of bushes. Without any warning whatever, a flock of overgrown sparrows whirled up from under his nose. Sourdough fled, heaving himself back into the station wagon.

Roark's slow grin stirred his mistress. "What do you expect?" she snapped. "He was flown from Alaska when he was just a puppy and he's been cooped in a Chicago apartment all during my aunt's illness. He's a city dog. Quail and creeks are new to him."

Jack Roark quit smiling and looked at Helen pretty close. "I guess you've been cooped up a little too long in that apartment yourself. A winter in the mountains will be just the thing for you."

"I'm staying only two weeks before going on to California," she stated coolly. "Two will be quite enough, I think."

Once more the car resumed its mad dash through the park, climbing through a forest of huge trees which Sourdough identified easily. Small ones of the same variety had been quite common in Chicago at a certain time of the year. Christmas trees.

**I**N A clear space ahead sat two log houses, one new and one old. Beyond where the water ran from the

broken main was a cluster of pens and small buildings.

The car stopped under two arching trees and a dog about half Sourdough's size plummeted from the porch of the old house to begin a furious barking. A mixture of Shepherd and Airedale if genealogy interests anyone.

"Sourdough, let me make you acquainted with Little Dog," said Jack Roark, easing out of the car.

Sourdough, pleased at meeting a fellow canine in a strange land, jumped to the ground, where Little Dog promptly bit him on a leg.

Sourdough emitted a startled yipe and hoisted himself back into the station wagon. Below Little Dog leaped up and down frantically.

"Come down and fight it out like a dog, you big tourist!" he barked hoarsely.

Uncle Tad Travis, a nice old white-mustached man who had visited them in Chicago, appeared. Sourdough's mistress flung her arm around him and kissed him.

"How's the filly?" Uncle Tad asked, meaning Helen. "And how's the Siberian elephant?" he asked, meaning Sourdough.

Coaxed from the car, Sourdough accompanied uncle and niece into the house, trotting nervously on one side of Helen and then on the other as Little Dog followed aggressively.

In the guest room a log in a corner fireplace gave out a cozy warmth. A heavy black-and-gray Indian blanket covered the floor. Thin blue-and-white striped ones had been hung at the windows.

"It's lovely!" exclaimed Helen. Women, Sourdough had learned as a puppy, laid undue importance on decorations and furniture.

"Those Chimayo blankets on the

windows were Jack's idea," said Tad Travis. "For a rough range-raised cowboy he likes things comfortable and pleasant."

He waved a hand to indicate the new house of logs across the yard. "Ain't that a dandy cabin? Jack built it last spring for a Santa Fé girl he got engaged to. But she turned up her nose at living on a ranch, and the romance fell flat. Right now Jack's a little sour on girls."

"No?" exclaimed Helen unbelievably.

UNINTERESTED in small talk, Sourdough hoisted his forefeet on a chair and looked through a window. From the pole pens was coming a tumult almost as loud as that from a busy avenue, and he jumped down, whining eagerly to be let outdoors. He went no farther than the big porch, however, sitting on it watching, as he had observed the city from his twelfth-story apartment lookout.

Horses and huge awkward-looking beasts with horns were racing about, with Little Dog barking and chasing after them. Bells jangled and men yelled.

Birds, red in color, a hundred times as big as a sparrow, raised a cackling racket. Another bird, a blackish monster with a scarlet throat, made loud gurgling noises.

Sourdough sniffed, stirred uneasily and turned. A strange creature, dirty white, its bearded face just above the level of the high porch floor, was staring impudently at him. In the air was a pungence he guessed was not entirely unassociated with the queer animal.

Next instant the beast agilely leaped to the porch and trotted jauntily toward the husky.

Sourdough dropped his tail and raced

for the closed door. Turning his back was bad strategy. A small cyclone with a rock for a head struck him. His terrified yelp brought Helen.

"It's only a silly goat," she comforted him. "Uncle Tad, I thought this was a cow ranch."

"That ornery pest keeps my blood pressure up to normal," explained Tad. "Git, you imp!"

Again Sourdough watched the corals where Little Dog continued nonchalantly to drive and harass horses and the horned lumbering monsters. Never had Sourdough dreamed that such D'Artagnan audacity could exist in the canine kind.

When Little Dog returned panting and deposited himself on an old Navajo rug before the living room door, Sourdough, the humble hero-worshiper, advanced, wagging a friendly flag. Little Dog loftily ignored him, as if he had measles or worse.

Night was falling. Intently Sourdough listened to the slow rush of the wind through the pines, the sleepy tinkle of a bell, the hushed murmur of the creek, and observed with distrustful eyes the deepening darkness.

Only one street light, a feeble affair, hung in the sky. A strange country indeed into which he and the filly had journeyed.

"Whoo!" The noise, loud, blood-curdling from the Christmas tree by the porch sent him galloping toward Helen's room, past Little Dog whose head was still pillowed calmly on his paws. Sourdough dragged to a shamed stop; and while he steeled himself against a repetition of the horrifying cry, he was called to supper.

Afterward, well stuffed with beef bones, he lay in the living room at Helen's feet, his slitted eyes on the flames in the rough stone fireplace, tri-

angular ears cocked to the sputter and pop of cedar logs.

"Way he's looking at that fire," remarked Jack Roark, "it's making a big impression on him. That's natural; generations of his sledge-dog ancestors must have watched camp fires."

"The filly's looking at that fire pretty hard herself," Uncle Tad observed slyly. "There's a few generations of open-fire-watchers behind her too. A California gold-rush great-grandfather and a grandmother that ran a Arizona mining camp newspaper single-handed.

"Why not forget going on to the Coast, Helen? Lot of room in these mountains for a little girl to grow up."

She shook her head. "The sledge-dog strain has run out in both Sourdough and me," she returned. "We're just a pair of hopeless city softies."

But when she took Sourdough to her room the husky promptly scratched at the door and, let out, curled up on the porch.

"All right, you big roughneck," said Helen. "Sleep outside and get pneumonia."

**P**EOPLE got up early on a ranch. At daylight Little Dog was busy escorting the clumsy horned beasts to the lot where their offspring were penned. Jack Roark brought in a bunch of loose horses. The goat walked up and down the steep slope of a shed roof.

Sourdough whined eagerly. It had dawned on him suddenly that out West dogs didn't just watch life from a high apartment window. They took an active part in it.

One deep excited bark, and jumping from the porch, carrying his head high, he loped in among the big horned creatures.

His arrival began an immediate bovine riot. With a mad bedlam of bells

and bawls the monsters charged him. A great black-and-white beast knocked him to the ground where a mob of her mates hooked him and slobbered over him.

Regaining his feet, he raced madly, tail lowered to half-mast, for the safety island of the porch.

Unfeeling laughter arose, Jack Roark's and the choreman's at the corals, the man cook's from the kitchen. The goat blatted.

Muddy, battered, he watched the scene of his humiliation where Little Dog dashed about, expertly restoring order. Sourdough couldn't understand it. What was this power that only Little Dog possessed?

The cook appeared in the kitchen doorway with a pan of scraps. "Chicky-chick-chick," he called; and a lot of the big red birds came running.

To the husky the scraps smelled like breakfast. Ravenous after a night in the open air, he galloped over, with chicky-chicks scattering before him wildly. One that ran squawking with outspread wings directly under his nose, pushed a button that brought to life a shallowly buried instinct. A single movement of the big jaws, and the chicky-chick's head was snapped completely off.

"You blasted pot hound!" the cook bawled and grabbed up a mop handle. "You've killed the best layin' hen on the ranch." The mop thwacked against Sourdough's ribs in a rain of blows.

He retreated, but it was no panicky flight; and when he reached the porch he drew back his lips in a toothy snarl.

The cook turned pale. Helen, who had been aroused by the clamor, emerged.

"Sourdough!" she called sharply. "How dare you? What's got into you? Killing chickens and growling at a man! . . . He's usually the best-natured

thing," she apologized to everybody in general.

Sourdough drooped all over. A scolding from the filly was worse than a dozen mop sticks.

Jack Roark returning from the corals stopped by the porch. "Did my ears deceive me?" he asked. "Did the tourist actually show enough spirit to snarl? Don't kill it. Fan it to life. Maybe he'll get the idea that he's got to fight for himself."

"But I don't want him to learn to fight," said Helen sharply.

Jack Roark bent over Sourdough and ran his hand down the big shoulder and leg muscles. "Fighting's what these muscles and his jaws and teeth are made for. It's natural in him to fight, the same as in all of us. Maybe we do ours in more civilized ways, but still it's fighting. And win or lose, we learn."

He waved at the house he had built for the girl who had refused to live in it. "That," he said with a wry grin, "is a fight I lost."

"But you learned?"

"And how! I've got to learn to savvy women; Sourdough has to learn to savvy chickens and cattle. He'll have to learn that those cows think he's a wolf—not a dog. They always will. That's because they don't reason. They're all instinct. You can't argue with 'em no more than you can with—"

"—with women?" she finished for him when he hesitated.

"Not all women," he said generously. "I'm taking the extra horses over to turn them on their winter range this morning. I'll saddle a horse for you if the ride won't bore you."

"Why should it?" she returned, a glint in her eyes. "And even if it does, Sourdough and I will find it instructive."

**D**RIVING horses, thought Sourdough (as he observed Little Dog recklessly make laggards jump either by barking or by nipping their heels), was simple.

When a long-legged bay stopped to snatch a few mouthfuls of grass, Sourdough, wanting to be helpful, loped in close, head high and tail with a jaunty kink, to deliver two stern barks.

Disaster came in the shape of a hard hoof that scraped over Sourdough's left eyebrow, flattening the bone so that always afterward he would wear a slightly quizzical look. Stunned, he lay down to brush one paw gently over his eye.

Helen dismounted and threw herself by his side, while Roark left his saddle to make an examination of the husky's head.

"Didn't hurt him bad," the rancher said. "And he won't forget that horse hoofs pack dynamite."

"Oh, you and your 'he won't forget this and he'll learn that!'" snapped Helen Travis. "Sourdough didn't come out here to go to school. No wonder that—"

Roark looked at her thoughtfully. "No wonder that girl didn't want to move into that new cabin?" he asked. "Well, maybe you're right. Maybe I'm just a stick?"

He was asking a question and Helen answered it. "Yes," she said frankly. "Decidedly yes."

It sounded as if the two were quarreling the rest of the way to the winter horse range; but Sourdough had his own worries. Meekly he trailed a safe distance behind Helen's mount, making further observations on the heel-nipping art.

Closer watching revealed that when Little Dog bit a horse, it was always

when the animal was moving. And with his head carried so low that kicks whistled harmlessly over it.

After three miles Sourdough picked out a stiff-legged old mare to experiment on, slipping in with his head low, using the quick slash that came from his wolf ancestry.

It worked. The mare gave a tremendous jump and broke into a mad gallop. Jeepers, he had it! Back came the kink into his tail.

It was a long trip for a city dog; and back on the porch again, the worn rug before the living-room door invited Sourdough's stiffened, weary body. Little Dog doubtless considered it his private bed, but Sourdough saw no *Keep off—This Means You* sign. Gratefully he flopped.

Little Dog was paralyzed for a moment by this breach of property rights; then he charged. Sourdough's good nature had been endless, but weariness and sore feet had frazzled it badly. He met Little Dog's snarling rush with one angry bark and the ferocity of a wolf. His greater weight and size balanced Little Dog's experienced years.

Growling canine insults, the two bit and slashed, broke, to close savagely again. Little Dog, knocked from the porch, bounced back at once with undiminished confidence. No dog had ever whipped him. His favorite hold was what wrestlers might have termed the Bear-trap Clamp.

He got it after a few seconds of battle, teeth crunching down on the bones in one of the city dog's forefeet in a bulldog grip. In the light of past combats, it was all over except for a lot of agonized yelping.

Instead of yelping, Sourdough fastened his powerful jaws on the back of Little Dog's neck. Lifting him from the porch floor, shaking him to and fro.

The Bear-trap Clamp failed. Little Dog's teeth came unfixed. Again the dogs clashed with an angry uproar that filled the canyon.

Once more the Shepherd-Airedale got his pet hold. Again Sourdough broke it, throwing Little Dog sailing from the porch to land half-stunned. Sourdough dropped on him.

**H**ELEN TRAVIS and Jack Roark found Little Dog lying on his back, his paws waving helplessly. Sourdough limped back to the porch, lay down on the old rug and began licking his bloody foreleg.

"Look at the poor dear," wailed his mistress. "If it isn't cows, it's horses, and now your mean-tempered dog. But of course you'll say he's learning to fight and this is where he belongs and that he'll be much happier here. Who in his right mind could be happy in country like this?"

"I couldn't qualify as right-minded of course," said Roark, "but I'm happy. You might be, too, in time. You look a lot like that grandmother who ran the mining camp newspaper. Uncle Tad has her wedding picture. She knew a rocky trail lay ahead of a pioneer couple, but she knew where she was going and wasn't afraid of anything she might meet on the way. Can you say that much?"

"No," she admitted reluctantly, "I can't. Grandmother Travis was a wonderful woman. She was certain of herself and was unafraid, even when she was left a widow with three small children in a rough mining camp. Sometimes I wish I were like her. But I'm not."

She had been holding Sourdough's paw in her soft hands. Just holding it. Sourdough withdrew it. If she wasn't going to do something about it, let him

at it. His rough tongue gave first aid.

"Give yourself a chance to find out if you are like her," Roark urged. "This country is a good place to get acquainted with yourself. Why not stay all winter? For your sake and Uncle Tad's and Sourdough's. And even, although that's not important, for mine."

Helen shook her head. "Even Sourdough will be anxious to leave in two weeks," she predicted.

"Not Sourdough," he said; and he was right. For Sourdough, with Little Dog as tutor, entered with bungling zest into all the winter activities of a mountain ranch.

Together they followed Roark and Helen in rides along the canyons, and together they killed a skunk and were banished from the porch.

Nights while Jack Roark and Helen Travis and Uncle Tad sat before the fire, the two dogs chased coyotes that yapped insults, killing one who discovered too late that ranchers had begun domesticating wolves. Together they put a bobcat up a spruce and kept it there all of one cold night.

Once they followed a trail with a disturbing musky odor, over which before they lost it Little Dog barked himself hoarse with excitement. It was, he declared, the last word in trails.

Roark and Uncle Tad, when they found the remains of a fat yearly and huge tracks near it, talked about the return of a stock-killing black bear that had visited them a year before and evidently had liked the flavor of their beef.

**A** WET snow came at the end of the second week of the visit. Snow was nothing new to Sourdough; he had seen streets and car roofs heaped high with it.

But here, clinging to cliffsides, piling inches deep on trees until their boughs

were weighted low, lying everywhere a soft soothing carpet for sore feet, snow was something else. It wakened latent instincts in Sourdough; stirred his blood.

Toward noon when the sky cleared a little Helen and Roark rode up-canyon. Sourdough followed, frisking about, lapping up snow, rolling in it playfully. Little Dog, too staid for such puppy-like buffoonery, scouted ahead, expertly sniffing tracks—rabbit, squirrel, coyote.

At a set of huge footprints with a musky scent he raced up a side canyon, bursting into an uproar only a mastodon should have inspired. Jack Roark slid his rifle from its scabbard and spurred after Little Dog, shouting back, "Our stock-killing bear!" as explanation to Helen.

In the brushy, steep little canyon, Sourdough's long wolf lope brought him alongside Little Dog just as they came in sight of the quarry, a huge black animal shuffling along rapidly.

Little Dog's barking became more frenzied, while Sourdough raced in silently for the first slash at the bear's hind quarters. The bear bellowed with pain and whipped around with a lightning-like swipe of huge claws.

Sourdough had leaped back but it opened his eyes. This jasper was dangerous.

Little Dog took the next bite when the bear fled again, and then it was Sourdough's turn. The bear charged them this time, snarling and champing his great jaws; then ran once more, until, harassed beyond endurance, finally he put his back to a low cliff.

Jack Roark, crashing through the brush on his horse, yelled encouragingly; and inspired, Little Dog rushed in to take his favorite hold, clamping tight on a big hamstring. It had always

worked with wild cattle and with dogs.

Now a giant paw without effort slapped him loose, sent him rolling down the slope. The bear, his little eyes blood-shot with anger, followed to finish his tormentor.

Roark had quit his horse and was running closer, to make sure of a shot that would endanger neither dog. The rifle crashed now at short range, barely checking the animal, who was on the rancher next instant, one big paw slapping him with terrific force in the shoulder, sweeping him from his feet.

Roark hit the ground fifteen feet away, senseless. Toward his sprawled-out body the bear charged while Sourdough struck from the rear, powerful teeth closing on a hamstring with a rending tear that nearly parted the tendon.

The bear bawled; whirled from the man. Sourdough retreated to charge in again as the animal turned back. "Wear out the big buzzard," the wolf in Sourdough advised him. And, "Keep him away from Roark," the dog in him was saying.

Blood from the bullet wound was gushing from the bear's chest, carmining his glossy fur. His back once more to the cliff, the bear faced the dog, keeping up a mad champing of his jaws, growing visibly weaker.

Sourdough's snarling became louder. "Come on, Little Dog; get in on the finish of this. It's good. We got him; he's going down. No, he's up again. Yah, you big elephant, come out where I can get at you."

And when there was only a big black hulk on the snow, to make sure it was really lifeless, Sourdough went into worry it savagely. "Get up! Get up, you! Get up and fight!"

Then, panting and triumphant, he returned to Roark, lying crushed and

still on the snow. Little Dog, badly mauled, was crawling toward his master. The filly, who had come up in time to witness the last of the battle and had dismounted from her frightened horse, now ran up.

**K**NEELING, she rubbed snow on Roark's face and at the back of his head. The rancher's eyes flickered open for only an instant. Blood was seeping through his shirt. His right arm was bent back. Maybe his skull had been fractured. Maybe worse. And it rested on her to take care of him.

Snow was beginning to fall again.

Both horses had fled, and anyway she could not have hoisted Roark into a saddle. Nor was there help at the ranch. Uncle Tad had left with the cook and choreman to cut wood.

Sourdough sat down and whining softly, pawed at Roark. "Come on, cowboy, get up and look at the big slob. We finished him. He just couldn't take it." Then he tugged helpfully at the collar of Roark's heavy sheepskin coat.

"Sourdough," murmured Helen, and wept miserably into his rough fur. "I'm so darn helpless. If grandmother were here, she'd know what to do. She'd—"

"Why, Sourdough! You're a sledge-dog. If we had a sled, you could pull Roark to the ranch, couldn't you?"

Sourdough went over to worry the bear again, growling to himself. In Chicago they wouldn't let such dangerous brutes run around loose. Which was why Chicago was fit for only Chows and poodles.

When he returned, Helen had dragged alongside Roark a big fir bough broken from the tree by the weight of snow. With a slight bend near the break, it had a decided sled-like shape. Its slick needles would be a substitute for runners—she hoped.

The gold-rush great-grandfather and mining camp newspaper grandmother were coming out in her. She unfastened Roark's chaps and unbuckled the chaps' belt around the branch to hold the man in place. The rancher's thick belt, looped through the husky's heavy collar and tied to the butt of the limb, would have to serve as harness.

"Now, Sourdough!" she urged. He didn't understand but obligingly he lunged forward, while the girl helped by tugging on a projecting stub. The limb and its burden jerked forward a few feet.

Sourdough began to get the idea. With his tail curled tight, he planted his big feet solidly and pulled. The sled, once started, gained momentum on the snowy slope. Little Dog hobbled painfully after them.

When they reached the trail the horses had broken, Sourdough had better footing. He needed it. The spreading branch caught repeatedly in brush. Together he and the filly tugged and panted, rested, and tugged and panted again. But Sourdough's tail never lost its curl; the girl's voice never lost its resolution.

At the ranch she backed the station wagon against a cut bank, piled two mattresses into the baggage space and pulled Roark on them. Little Dog needed the attention of a veterinary; she placed him on the front seat beside her.

Sourdough let out a protesting bark and galloped madly after the speeding car. It was hopeless. They had deserted him. From the porch his howl lifted again and again, heart-brokenly.

In the afternoon Uncle Tad Travis returned, and finding the note Helen had left, drove away in the truck. The choreman and cook went up to skin the bear and returned to nail the out-

stretched hide on the side of the barn.

Since Sourdough considered that he had practically killed the monster single-handed, it should have been a lesson for the milk cows; but the stupid creatures still bawled and charged him. He gave up. They'd never learn.

He waited all the next day for the station wagon to return, and the one after that and a lot of other days. Uncle Tad came back after a week and made a big fuss over Sourdough. Then it snowed for days, piling deeper and deeper in the canyon, heaping up drifts in which Sourdough wallowed until he was weary. Nights he howled mournfully at the one street lamp in the sky.

A BIG truck labored along the canyon one afternoon to back up to the porch of the new unused cabin. Men carried in a lot of furniture and then the truck went away.

Uncle Tad drove off the next morning; and once more, except for the choreman and cook, Sourdough was alone. Again he howled dismally.

At dark the station wagon, tire chains clattering against the fenders, reappeared. The filly was at the wheel; Jack Roark sat beside her.

Sourdough went mad. Roark climbed stiffly from the car, a thin ghost, one arm in a sling. Little Dog barked a greeting from the back, adding the dry observation that he was surprised to find any ranch left, with only a tourist dog to look after it.

Sourdough let the crack pass. The filly's arms were about his neck. He whined softly. He had been afraid that she had left him for good; maybe had gone on to California.

Roark squatted down in front of him. "You don't know how fast I had to talk so you could stay in this country, old fellow," he said.

"It was a fight. Harder than the one you put up against that bear. Women are mighty stubborn. All instinct. Only one thing saved us—she finally admitted that she was homesick for the canyon."

Then using but one arm, he swung the filly from the ground and carried her across the porch and through the door of the new house. Sourdough cocked his head to one side at that, bewildered.

Little Dog, with Sourdough following, limped toward the corrals. There Little Dog barked a warning to the milk cows that he was back, and after an inspection of the stables, returned to the porch of the old house and curled up on the rug.

Sourdough's hackles rose but the growl died in his throat. It would be hardly gentlemanly to dispossess a convalescent.

Besides, for some reason the filly and Jack Roark were still in the new house. Smoke was rising from a newly-lighted fire.

He could see the two through the uncurtained windows. They were engaged in one of women's favorite indoor sports. Rearranging furniture.

Trotting through the snow to the porch of the new house, he found a rug before the door. A Navajo much thicker and warmer than the one Little Dog lay on. While he sniffed its woolly odor, a freezing wind slid a cloud of snow across the porch. He ran out his tongue at the skittering particles, then after the customary three canine turns made himself into a tight ball on the rug.

Contentedly he rested his big head on his paws. It would be some time, he guessed, before he and the filly went on to California.

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The fanatic Swahili danced around the white man's head

# Demon of the Sand

By GARNETT RADCLIFFE

Author of "The Jest of Hamarath," "The Haji's Miracle," etc.

*Hola, moon; bola, stars! Behold the head of the Devil himself, whom I have just slain. I say this, and only Allah knows that I am not mad*

AN AFRIDI PATHAN who has run amok is no spectacle for gentle eyes. Sepoy Afzuz Khan, crouching on the top of a sandy eminence in the center of that awful wilderness called the Kala Maidan (Black Plain), looked more like a wild beast than a human being.

His uniform hung in rags, he had

lost his *pagri*, he was unshaven, disheveled and filthy. From a gash on his temple blood had flowed down his cheek and matted his beard. His clothes were clotted with blood and sand as if he had been rolling on the floor of a slaughter-house; his hands were coated with the same mixture; and his eyes glared like a maniac's as he bent forward to spit on the white thing lolling on a patch of darkened sand before him.

As he did so he threw up his arms in a crazed gesture and howled so that his voice sounded through the moon-lit

stillness of the Black Plain like the yelling of a trapped jackal.

"*Holà*, moon! Behold the head of Rin Tin, the Demon of the Sand.

*Holà*, stars! This is the head of Rin Tin, he who wails at night and steals the forms of men.

"I, Afzuz Khan, have slain him. Because he had bewitched my *sahib* I slew him with bullets blessed by Allah Himself and hacked his head from his accursed body.

"Let all the creatures of the night come nigh and marvel. Rin Tin the Evil One is dead. I, Afzuz Khan, Chosen of Allah, Descendant of Saints, Deliverer of Men, Smiter of Wickedness have destroyed the demon. Never again will he stalk the Kala Maidan with backward-twisted feet.

"Here is the head of the *shaitan*. I slew him because he stole the form of my *sahib* that was my blood-brother. *Holà*, Rin Tin! Does my voice reach you in Hell? I spit upon you . . . *So . . . And so . . .*"

The object of his execration took no more notice than if it had been the rounded stone it resembled in the moonlight.

It was the head of a white man with close-cropped fair hair and little military mustache stuck upright on the sand. His eyes were closed as if he were asleep. Drained, calm and marble white, the head looked like a piece of broken statuary as it faced its tormentor.

Afzuz Khan reached forward with his Khyber knife and pricked its cheek.

"Wake up, *Shaitan*," he howled. "Ho, ho! You are the most cunning of all the devils, but not cunning enough to deceive Afzuz Khan. You who thought to trick me by taking my *sahib's* form! When morning comes I will take you to Fort Balla, kicking you along the ground before me."

SUDDENLY, he paused and glared round like a startled animal. A sound that would have been inaudible to anyone save a hill-bred Pathan had caught his ear.

The man who had caused the sound was cursing the loose pebble he had inadvertently kicked as he lay in the shadow of a boulder not thirty yards distant. He was a thin, bearded, sharp-featured man wearing the smart uniform of a *havildar* of the Baluchistan Police. That he was a veteran and a *bahadur* was shown by the double row of medal ribbons adorning his chest.

From where he lay Afzuz Khan would have been the easiest possible target. But Afzuz was obviously mad and therefore under the protection of the gods. Had the *havildar* shot him he would have been jeopardizing his own hopes of Paradise.

Moreover, it would have been a waste of good Government ammunition. The Pathan had no apparent weapon save his knife, and the *havildar* had three companions all armed to the teeth as he was himself.

Strange as was the spectacle he watched, it occasioned little surprise to the *havildar*. This was the dreaded Kala Maidan, a land of death, desolation and terror, where madness was a common complaint.

It had a sinister reputation of being haunted by djinns, ghosts, goblins, ghouls and devils, of whom Rin Tin, the spirit of the sand was the most terrible. The *havildar* himself had heard Rin Tin wailing at night and had seen strange tracks where he had walked on his backward-twisted feet. And he had heard stories of how Rin Tin could occupy the bodies of men.

He hadn't occupied the body of *that* man. By the moonlight the *havildar* had recognized the head. It was the head of

Captain Stanton Sahib whose nickname in the Furious Gomal was the Wolf Sahib on account of his reputed strength, cunning and daring.

And the Wolf Sahib had come to an ignominious end. He who could shoot straighter, ride harder and track down an outlaw more cunningly than any other white man north of the Indus, had been murdered by his own trusted orderly. Murdered and mutilated because in his madness the Pathan believed Rin Tin had occupied his body.

The story was plain. All that remained was to find where Afzuz Khan had hidden the *sahib's* body and his gear.

The *havildar* put two fingers in his mouth and imitated the hunting call of an owl. It was the prearranged signal for his men scattered round the hill to advance.

THEY came over the sand fast and silently as if they were wolves themselves. Afzuz Khan, seated cross-legged on the bloodstained sand with his eyes fixed on the head as if it mesmerized him, was unaware of their presence until they were almost on him. Then with a catlike bound, he was on his feet, a huge fantastic figure in his bloodstained uniform, with his knife glinting in the moonlight.

"Begone, devils!" he yelled. "I know you for what you are. You have come to take the head of Rin Tin to unite it again with the body. Begone, I say. In the name of the Prophets and the Saints—"

He foamed at the mouth and his eyes rolled. The *havildar*, his rifle at his hip and his finger ready on the trigger, walked toward him and spoke quietly.

"We are no devils, but men like yourself. What we have come for is to see what manner of man it is that has slain

Rin Tin the Terrible. *Shabash*, Pathan! For this great deed you will doubtless earn Paradise."

Afzuz Khan slowly lowered his knife. But his voice was still threatening.

"Stand your distance. How am I to know that this is not another trick of Rin Tin? And I must guard the head until the Wolf Sahib comes to claim it."

"Of course you must," the *havildar* said gravely. "And doubtless the Wolf Sahib will come soon for his head is valuable even above ordinary heads. Till he comes, however, you need have no fear of us. As you see I am a *havildar* of the Baluchistan Police and these are three *sepoys* from my company."

"You lie! What should men of the Baluchistan Police be doing in the Kala Maidan? Only djinns and devils come to this place. You are Rin Tin in another guise."

The knife swung up, but the *havildar* spoke without moving.

"We are not devils. We were sent to the Kala Maidan to perform our duty. Most likely it was for the same reason that the Wolf Sahib himself came here. To hunt Gul Din the Mohmand *dacoit* and his band of robbers."

Afzuz Khan gave a cry.

"Gul Din! Yes, he was the reason that brought the Wolf Sahib to this place. May he and his seed be accursed for ten thousand years! A tale came to Fort Balla that that Mohmand dog had captured the headman of a village that is under the protection of the British Raj and had tortured him to death to make him disclose where his money was hid. Therefore the Wolf Sahib took the trail for vengeance that led him here . . . And you also are hunting the Mohmand?"

The *havildar* shook his head which in the East signifies assent.

"Truly. We hunt Gul Din, the tiger of the Black Plain, who is dreaded from Abbotshah to the Balla Pass and from Kurnai to the Oxus for his cunning and his strength. And did your *sahib* dream he could take that one with only you to help? Then he must have been mad!"

The Pathan's eyes flashed.

"Beware how you speak of the Wolf Sahib in my hearing. Had it not been for the evil sorcery of Rin Tin he would have killed or captured Gul Din, who is no tiger but a cowardly jackal who lives by robbing the old and weak.

"Never could Gul Din have escaped the Wolf. Had he not a magic rifle the like of which has never been seen in India before? It was double-barreled like a shotgun with a gleaming foresight and rifled to fire ball-cartridge.

"Also, he had an ivory-plated pistol, small but of great virtue, which could spit bullets faster than a grasshopper can beat its wings. With those and the service rifle I carried and a large store of ammunition and a bag of hand-grenades . . . But what cause is there for merriment in what I say?"

ONE of the *sepoys*, a giant with a pockmarked face, had sniggered. The *havildar* shot him a furious glance, and he spoke humbly.

"I meant no offense, Pathan. It only crossed my mind that with all those wonderful weapons your *sahib* might have defied Rin Tin himself."

"His weapons were no avail against sorcery. How can a man fight a demon that has possessed itself of his own body? Were I to show you the body you would see that the feet are turned backward, that the skin is mottled green like a snake's, that the hands are like the hands of a crocodile and that it has a tail like the tail of a monkey."

"A strange sight indeed." The *havildar* smiled. "So strange I can scarcely believe without seeing it with my own eyes. Is it near here?"

The Pathan looked vacantly at him.

"I cannot remember. When I try to think back it is as if a swarm of bees were stinging my brain. I had a fall when we were climbing a cliff. Not a great fall, but I struck my head against a rock. . . . I was saying? What was I saying?"

Again the *havildar* answered, his green eyes, bright and hard as a snake's, fixed on the Pathan's face

"You were telling us where you had put the body. Doubtless it is where you and the *sahib* made your last camp. After you had hacked off the head you left it there together with the gear you had with you?"

"I remember. The bees inside my head are quieter now and I can think. We had come to this place, the Wolf Sahib and myself, following the trail of Gul Din. Ten thousand curses on that Mohmand dog! May his seed perish, and—"

"Never mind Gul Din," the *havildar* said. "It is the body we would hear of. Where have you left it?"

The Pathan went on unheeding. His eyes were fixed and staring as if he were visualizing horror.

"I fell as I was climbing a cliff. It was Rin Tin himself in the guise of a loose stone who had tripped me. While I lay unconscious he took possession of the body of the *sahib*."

"Not at once did I know the truth. When I opened my eyes I thought it was the *sahib* who had raised me in his arms. *Wah*, the cunning of Rin Tin is great! While he bathed my head he jested with me in my *sahib's* voice, calling me a clumsy camel and telling me my head was so thick it had split the

rock it had struck. Thus did the demon trick me, pretending he was the *sahib* I loved.

"Most foul deception!

"When I had recovered we continued on our way. It was very hot and there was a swarm of bees inside my head. And it seemed as if the rocks became faces as we passed. Faces that smiled and winked. And then I heard a voice in my ears whispering to me that the man behind whom I walked was no man but Rin Tin himself.

"That whisper I could not ignore: it spoke the miserable truth.

"The voice bade me look at his feet, and when I looked my heart stood still for they were twisted backward. Then I saw that the hand holding the rifle was the hand of a crocodile. Only his face and his voice were the same. When he turned to speak to me it was as if an evil vision vanished and I knew myself with my *sahib*."

"**WE** CARE nothing about that," one of the *sepoys* cut in. "What we want is you should show us where the body is."

The *havildar* cursed him in an aside.

"Be silent, you fool. Let him tell the story after his own fashion. . . . Yes, Afzuz Khan. What happened next?"

The Pathan rambled on as if he had heard nothing.

"When the sun sank and darkness fell upon the Black Plain I knew for a surety it was Rin Tin with whom I walked. But I gave no hint of my knowledge. If Rin Tin was cunning so also was I.

"I spoke to him as if I believed he was still the Wolf Sahib. That night we made camp in a deep cave and I ministered to his wants as always. By no word or deed did I let the demon guess that I knew the truth.

"When he lay down on the camp bed I had prepared I went outside and prayed for strength and guidance. And a voice spoke to me telling me what I must do.

"I went again into the cave and I loaded my rifle without making a sound. There was light enough for me to see Rin Tin. His face looked so like the face of my *sahib* lying asleep that my resolve almost faltered. But then the voice spoke to me again telling me if I did not destroy the demon he would steal my body also.

So I put the barrel to his chest and fired. It is hard to kill a demon. He sprang up shouting in the voice of my *sahib*. And what he shouted was that it was Gul Din who had crept into the cave to murder him.

"Ay, he was clever, but I saw his hands were the hands of a crocodile beating the air while the blood ran down his body, and I fired again and again until the cave was thick with the smoke. At last he lay still.

"But the voice cried to me that the demon was only shamming death and that if I would destroy him utterly I must sever his head from his body. Then I took my knife, and I cut the head off, and I carried it up here as the voice commanded so that all the world could see that Rin Tin the Evil Spirit of the Sand was dead. Behold the head! It is the head of Rin Tin the Evil One who has been slain by Afzuz Khan the servant of the Wolf."

The *havildar's* eyes passed him to the gruesome face that seemed to shine with a light of its own on the blood-stained sand. He spoke gravely.

"To me that head looks like the head of the Wolf Sahib. Cannot you give us proof of your story by showing us the body also? Did you leave it in the cave when you made camp?"

The Pathan looked at him stupidly. Suddenly he gave a great cry.

"Would you see the body of Rin Tin? Follow me and I will show you where it is. And then I must carry it up here and burn it together with the head so that no trace of Rin Tin the Evil One may be left."

**H**E BEGAN to run down the hillside.

As he ran he leaped and tossed his arms while wolfish howls tore from his throat. His knife was in his hand, a silver sickle in the moonlight.

"He will lead us to the cave," the *havildar* cried. "We must follow this fool who is under Allah's protection."

But the impatient *sepoys* were already running after their man.

They followed him at a short distance. Down the hill he led them and then across a strip of level *maidan*, his shadow capering ahead as he leaped and howled. Presently he was swallowed by the black shadow of a cliff, but they were guided by his howls.

When they came up with him he was standing with outspread arms before the V-shaped mouth of a cave. As they ran up he menaced them with his knife.

His cry spoke of madness.

"Back, fools! I tell you death is in that cave. If you see the body of Rin Tin the Evil One you will surely perish."

They pushed him aside and entered the cave. A shaft of moonlight showed them it was like a shambles. Blood glistened on floor and walls; blood oozed from the huddled form upon the camp-bed.

A rifle lay by the bed, another lay upon a ledge of rock. The *havildar* grinned when he saw them. Then he turned to the bed, seized a blood-stained blanket and flung it back.

A face grinned up at him. It was bearded, devilish, horned, with yellow eyes like a basilisk. Rin Tin himself? The *havildar's* yell of horror was echoed by the *sepoys*.

From the entrance of the cave came Afzuz Khan's voice, now mocking and charged with laughter.

"Behold your brother, Gul Din! You Mohmand goat who thought himself a tiger! Take this from the servant of the Wolf."

A small black object fell in their midst. And then it was as if Hell had burst in that cave with a sheet of red flame and a crash of falling rock. A man moaned, and then all was silent. The hand-grenade had done its work. . . .

Afzuz Khan ran back to the top of the hill as if Rin Tin himself were at his heels. He dropped before the white man's head and began frantically to dig away the sand. The head raised its eyelids and spoke in a weak whisper.

"Afzuz Khan, you rascal? What the—?"

"Praise be to Allah!" Afzuz cried. "My *sahib* still lives! Keep still, *sahib*, and in a few moments I will have you clear. You had a fall, *sahib*. You struck your head and became unconscious. Gul Din the Mohmand and his companions were on our trail wearing the uniforms of the patrol they murdered. I had to trick them. Gently, *sahib*, while I raise you."

With an effort he dragged the white man from the loosened sand. Afzuz Khan bent over him. Yes, he would live.

"Better to be buried for a short time than for ever," cried Afzuz Khan. "By feigning madness and with the aid of a goat's blood I have saved my *sahib* from the tortures of Gul Din!"

By CRAWFORD SULLIVAN

Author of "Sulcide Sid,"  
"The Horrible Hornbills," etc.



Out of the bathysphere  
charged the Bilge and Bin-  
nacles—to set the ship  
a-rocking

## Move Over, Neptune

Clear the seas! The Bilge and Binnacle Club is carrying fireworks to China; and the whole Pacific shudders while these lunatic mariners make disaster look like happy horseplay. A hilarious novelet

### I

ON THE day after Chinese New Year Tug Raffin and Little Clancy were sitting in East Bay Park watching the swans. The park is one of those flowery places full of squirrels and little children, and a nice spot to spend a quiet Friday afternoon—especially if you are like Little Clancy and have a hangover.

As the warm sun beat down on his head, Little Clancy stretched sleepily, unaware of five sinister-looking Orien-

tals who were glaring daggers at him from behind a hedgerow.

"What a night," he sighed. "Fire-crackers poppin' all over. Lions an' dragons whoopin' up an' down the street. Lots of egg foo yung an' sam jing. What a swell time!"

"You didn't try any rough stuff?" Tug Raffin asked suspiciously.

"Course not," was the righteous reply. "I was with Rat-line Sam."

"So I heard," said Tug. "I suppose you and Sam spent the night in some gutter?"

"We slept in a very fancy heathen temple off Argyle Alley," Little Clancy declared importantly. "Sam accidentally broke the window, an' we crawled in."

Tug shoved his seaman's cap back, and a lock of straw-colored hair drooped over his bronzed forehead. "I don't trust you or Rat-line Sam," he said. "The minute I let you out of my sight you get into trouble."

"There wasn't no trouble," insisted Little Clancy. "Just good clean fun."

Tug arose and walked down the gravel path, Little Clancy scuffing alongside. The five Orientals followed them silently, keeping well hidden behind trees and hedges.

They have a nice zoo at East Bay Park, and Tug wandered past the cages, pausing now and then to look at a leopard or a wombat. Little Clancy trailed behind, a cigarette drooping from his lips. He sniffed disdainfully as Tug halted in front of a cage which bore the label, *Felis leo*. Snoozing behind the bars was an uncommonly big and shaggy lion. Little Clancy picked up a pebble and bounced it off the lion's nose. The lion awoke, glared at him sullenly.

"You shouldn't do that," said Tug. "It isn't right to tease dumb animals."

Little Clancy was in a cantankerous mood. "I don't like lions," he stated. "They give me hay fever."

Tug went on to the bear pits, and Little Clancy stood scowling at the lion. The beast got up, opened his mouth in a cavernous yawn. Little Clancy's hand dropped to his coat pocket and came out clutching a small Chinese firecracker. Impulsively he touched the cracker to his cigarette and tossed it into the lion's mouth.

THE huge jaws clamped down just as the firecracker exploded. Rolling over on his head, the lion kicked his hind

feet into the air, then crouched and roared at Little Clancy horribly.

Immediately panic spread over the entire zoo. Monkeys started to chatter, a peacock screamed, the zebras brayed, and a big purple emu went into a gabbling fit. Before Little Clancy could move, two of the zoo guards came bounding at him, one to each arm.

"The red-headed punk—" snapped the first guard. "He fed Ajax a firecracker!"

"Hold him, Mike," instructed the other guard. "I'll bust his jaw."

"Not so fast, boys!" Tug Raffin approached, his rugged features carved into a stern frown.

Around the vicinity of Fort Street everyone knows enough to stand aside and look respectful when Tug frowns, for he is a very tough seaman to tangle with. The two guards knew nothing of this, and besides they were extremely vexed with Little Clancy.

Lashing out with his right fist, the first guard hung a stiff one on Little Clancy's chin. Tug retaliated with a short, piston-jab punch which sent the man sprawling. The other guard let go of Little Clancy and began to yell for help. The lion continued to roar; the peacocks, zebras and emu raised a terrific bedlam, and several policemen on the park beat came running.

Tug Raffin had no desire to become involved with the law, so he heeled around and raced down the path at full tilt, Little Clancy shagging behind. They reached the outskirts of the zoo, circled the duck pond and plunged into a mass of thick shrubbery in the center of a sunken garden. For a long time they lay in the undergrowth while police whistles blew all over the park and a squad car whined in the distance.

"You cluck!" Tug growled. "What made you do it?"

"I dunno," said Little Clancy regretfully. "I seen that big ugly mouth yawnin' at me an' I couldn't resist. I guess I got a mean nature." Then he brightened. "But Ajax wasn't hurt bad."

"I read a yarn once about a guy who pulled a thorn out of a lion's paw," said Tug. "The lion never forgot it."

Little Clancy seemed perturbed. "You mean that Ajax will always remember who gave him the firecracker?"

Tug nodded and would have carried the discussion further if he had not seen a bald yellow head appear over a hydrangea bush. More heads popped up on all sides, until they totaled five. The owners of the heads were husky Chinese, and their smouldering slant eyes convinced Tug that they had not come to inquire about a laundry ticket.

"It's them Tong guys!" gulped Little Clancy. "They must've followed me—"

Tug was puzzled, but he stood up and frowned at the ring of Chinese boldly. "What do you fellows want?" he asked.

"Him." The man behind the hydrangeas pointed at Little Clancy. "He steal *chingchow-pi* from Chinatown joss house."

"The guy is nuts," said Little Clancy. "I didn't swipe nothin'."

"I will vouch for him," added Tug earnestly. "We're honest, law-abiding seamen—"

"You tellee big lie," said the Chinese. "You steal um. Now you die, chop-chop!"

THE ring of Orientals tightened, and several slender knives appeared from under the loose shirtwaists. Tug eyed the long blades disapprovingly, for if there is anything he hates, it is fighting with cutlery.

Lunging at the nearest Chinese, Tug knocked him rigid, grabbed him under

the arms and commenced to whirl him round and round. The whirling began just as the other Chinese darted forward, and two of them were bowled over by their revolving comrade.

Little Clancy found a flat rock and hammered the fallen men to sleep under a lilac bush. With a final spin Tug heaved his victim into the mass of pink hydrangeas and turned on the two remaining Orientals. Dazed by the sudden turn of fortune, both men ran.

Tug caught one, laid a looping punch to his ear and left him draped over a clump of tea roses. Little Clancy chased the last man through the zinnias, gave him a vicious kick in the calliopsis and brought him down in a bed of pansies. At that moment a police whistle shrilled, and a blue-coated officer loomed over the horizon.

Tug and Little Clancy scooted under a bamboo bridge which spanned the duck pond, standing knee-deep in water while a flock of greedy ducks paddled around them squawking for bread crumbs. Policemen barged down from all directions. Tug held his breath until he saw that they were busy rounding up the five Orientals.

"Mistreatin' the animals and fightin' in the public gardens!" exclaimed a stout Irish gendarme. "Sure, an' I hope the judge gives the gang o' ye ninety days!"

A crowd had started to gather, so Tug and Little Clancy mixed in with it and watched the policemen bundle their five prisoners into the Black Maria. "That was a break," said Tug softly. "The cops never saw us."

"Yeah," Little Clancy nodded. "Wonder what those octopus-eaters were griped about?"

"I know what happens when you and Rat-line Sam go on a bender," replied Tug. "What was it you swiped?"

"Nothin'," insisted Little Clancy. He took a knife-like sliver of green jade from his pocket and manicured his nails with it absently. "We had an argument with those guys last night, an' there was a little friendly tussle—"

"Always fighting," snapped Tug. "It has to stop!"

As the police wagon rolled away, they strolled from the park and headed for the Bilge and Binnacle Club.

## II

IF YOU ever happen to be in the vicinity of Fort Street and feel the need of a drink, the best place to go is Istvan Karamoz's saloon. Not that the drinks are any good, but there is usually plenty of excitement because Karamoz's place is the headquarters of the Bilge and Binnacle Club.

The clubroom is way in the back—you go through the saloon and through the pool room and down a narrow hall. Most everybody agrees that the clubroom is fixed up very classy, for it is full of comfortable cots, and there is a real Wilton rug on the floor, which Joe Lemon picked up at Epstein's Salvage Shoppe.

The walls are covered with interesting pictures from the foyer of the Sixth Avenue Burlesque, and Little Clancy's stuffed fish hangs above the doorway.

The Bilge and Binnacle Club is purely a social organization, intended for men of top-notch character and strong morals. It was founded some years ago to promote good-fellowship and brotherly love among the merchant seamen of our western coast. Tug Raffin is president, and under his leadership the Bilge and Binnacles have gained respect all up and down the waterfront.

The incident in East Bay Park took place on a Friday, and on the following

Monday Tug called all the members together for a meeting. They sat in front of the big oak table and listened while old Rat-line Sam read the minutes.

Lined up on a bench were the four Zymanski brothers, who are built like ten-ton tanks and have bushy black whiskers. Joe Lemon and Bottlenose Billings were there too. Little Clancy sat in the back, chewing on his jade nail file.

"And in conclusion, lads," said Rat-line Sam, stroking his fluffy white mustache, "I want to tell ye about the time we lay in the roadstead at Apia in the good ship, *Lazy Ralph*. A hurricane come up—"

"Make him shut up," said Joe Lemon peevishly.

"Yeah," added Little Clancy. "We've heard that yarn a hundred times."

Tug rapped for order. "I have important business to discuss," he declared, motioning Rat-line Sam to a chair. "You guys have been getting into a lot of trouble lately, and it is things like that which give the Bilge and Binnacles a bad name. I propose that we pass a rule forbidding any member of this club to indulge in a fight."

"Yess!" exclaimed the Zymanskis in unison. "Down wit fightink!"

"You can't pass a rule like that," protested Little Clancy. "It ain't constitutional."

"No," agreed Bottlenose Billings. "Besides, we never get into a scrap unless someone socks us first."

"When that happens," said Tug, "you should turn the other cheek."

"Those Alma Street stevedores never go for the cheek," said Joe Lemon. "They smack your jaw and then kick you right in the breadbasket."

"We must shame them by setting a good example," Tug insisted. "All in favor say 'Aye.'"

"Hoy!" The Zymanskis raised their hands unanimously.

"That's not fair," groused Little Clancy. "You know darn well that since the Zymanskis learned to read the newspapers they've been pacifists. You got us outnumbered five to four."

"We dun't like fightink!" said the first Zymanski. "It ain't refined."

"Look," said Bottlenose Billings. "Everybody knows that one Zymanski looks exactly like another, and that their combined brain power is about equal to that of an undernourished sheep dog. Why not count 'em as one person? To give 'em four votes is like stuffin' a ballot box."

"Sitt down!" rumbled the second Zymanski. "It iss already settled. No more fightink!" To prove his point he raised one massive fist and bopped Bottlenose Billings on the top of the head.

**A**LTHOUGH Billings is by no means as hot-tempered as Little Clancy, he dislikes being bopped on the head—especially when such an action knocks him to his knees, which are tender. Winding up a steaming left, he sailed into the Zymanskis and dropped two of them under the table. The third Zymanski picked up a chair, swung it at Billings' noggin and hit Joe Lemon instead.

"Scuttle 'em, lads!" Rat-line Sam bellowed his war cry and jumped into the fray joyously.

Little Clancy climbed aboard the fourth Zymanski's shoulders and yanked out large handfuls of hair. Joe Lemon arose, kicked a bushy face which peered from under the table, and was immediately flattened by a flying lampstand.

Tug Raffin hammered on the table for order.

The Zymanskis usually get started slowly, but in the long run it makes no

difference, since they are practically indestructible. Billings cracked them down with regularity, but they kept popping back up and leering through their whiskers. In desperation he chased one into a corner and jumped up and down on his stomach. Billings was doing fine until someone threw Little Clancy at him, and they went down together.

"Belay 'em, men! Haul down their mains'ls!" Old Rat-line Sam was under full canvas and having the time of his life. Armed with a bed slat, he went around swatting every Zymanski within reach, and once he larruped Joe Lemon for good measure.

Tug Raffin remained aloof as long as he could. Several Zymanskis had Joe Lemon under the table and were trying to feed him a thirty-watt light globe when Tug interfered. Using his famous one-two punch, Tug leveled off the two Zymanskis in short order.

Joe Lemon was rather groggy and tried to gouge his benefactor in the eyes, so Tug cooled him also. Rat-line Sam had gone slightly berserk by this time and was hurling everything he could find at the scrambled pile of arms and legs in the corner. The floor was strewn with broken furniture, bed springs, pillow feathers and the remnants of Little Clancy's stuffed fish.

"Stop!" Tug shouted. "You want to ruin the joint?"

"I see no harm in it," said a smooth, oily voice. "The outcome might be rather amusing."

Tug Raffin pivoted. Joe Lemon returned to life, his sour face puckered with hate. The Zymanskis bristled, Little Clancy sneered, and Bottlenose Billings just looked gloomy. Every eye was riveted on the dapper, gray-clad figure which stood by the door.

"Sink me!" muttered Rat-line Sam disgustedly. "It's Simon Sligg!"

IF THERE is one man whom the Bilge and Binnacles despise, it is Simon Sligg, the shyster lawyer. He was standing there, his mouth curved down at the corners in a peculiar shark-like smile and his gray fedora tipped to one side of his head stylishly. His eyes were gray too, cold and fishy, and so was his skin. He carried gray gloves, a cane, and his shiny shoes were encased in pearl-buttoned gray spats.

"I have come," said Simon Sligg, "to offer you men a rare proposition—the chance of a lifetime."

"We don't want it," replied Tug gruffly. "We've been fooled by your crooked deals before."

"This," continued Sligg unctuously, "is an opportunity for each of you to make three hundred dollars cash. A rich client of mine has purchased a steam vessel, and he needs men to sail it for him."

"Where's he goin'?" asked Little Clancy.

"To China," said Sligg. "The ship is being loaded with a cargo of hardware—bathtubs and plumbing. He expects to dispose of the cargo at a good price."

"I've been to China," said Bottlenose Billings. "Where I was they could have used a few bathtubs."

"Exactly," Sligg beamed. "It should be very easy for you men to handle a ship like the *C. P. Dasey*."

"That scow!" said Joe Lemon tartly. "I thought she was busted up ten years ago."

"She is in fine condition," Sligg assured him. "In fact, her sister ship is being outfitted for a trip around the world."

"You have our answer," said Tug harshly. "Get out."

"Aye," chimed Rat-line Sam. "Under weigh!"

Sligg's fishy glance roved from man to man. "In that case," he mused, "I shall be forced to report how Sam and Little Clancy broke into the Chinese Temple, assaulted the caretakers and stole a valuable piece of property."

"We didn't steal nothin'!" retorted Little Clancy.

"I know many things," Sligg continued smugly. "I know that Billings and Joe Lemon put a stink bomb in the Bijou Theater on bank night, and that the Zymanski brothers destroyed Tony Boggio's peanut wagon."

"That," hissed the Zymanskis, "iss a lie!"

"You haven't anything on me," said Tug.

"Only that you committed mayhem on a guard in the East Bay Zoo," was the reply. "Make up your minds, gentlemen. You either go to China or to jail."

"I've been to both places," said Billings, "and I vote for China."

"He's got us," Tug admitted grudgingly.

### III

NEXT morning the Bilge and Binnacles met Simon Sligg at the entrance to Pier 64. At Sligg's side was a very Eastern-looking individual in a yellow mandarin coat and funny blue silk shoes.

The man had a round, bland face with lots of teeth which seemed to blossom out when he smiled. His eyes were set wide apart, with a pudgy little nose in between, and his ears flapped out like a pair of Chinese fans.

"Gentlemen," Simon Sligg announced. "I want you to meet your employer, Lui Chang."

Lui Chang bowed. "This humble person happy to make acquaintance of il-

lustrious sailors," he said with a toothy grin. "Which is exalted captain?"

"I hold the master's ticket," said Tug. He tried to stare Lui Chang down, but the man returned his gaze like one of those googly-eyed children who peer over the backs of seats in movie theaters.

"Lui Chang is unworthy of your kindness," said the Chinese, finally relaxing his stare. "Lui Chang is miserable ignorant dog."

"Don't let it get you down, Looie," said Little Clancy comfortably. "We'll learn you a few things."

They entered the dock shed and saw a black bumptious hull squatted at the wharfside. The *C. P. Dazey* looked like an arthritic old dowager ready to go on a tear. Her steam pipes were rusty, her plates creaked, but she had a shiny coat of fresh paint and seemed prepared to take the Pacific Ocean in stride. At least that is what Tug Raffin thought as he inspected her.

"Quite a sturdy little vessel, eh?" said Simon Sligg, seating himself in the saloon mess. "You'll make the trip in no time."

"First we want the money," said Tug bluntly. "Three hundred bucks apiece."

"Ah, yes," said Sligg. "Mr. Lui will write you a check."

"No checks," said Tug. "We want the dough in cash."

"Lui Chang is the wealthiest man in Chinatown," said Sligg, highly amused. "I investigated his bank account thoroughly. His checks are good as gold."

"We like cash," Tug insisted.

"So happy to oblige." Lui Chang took a mountain of green bills from the lining of his coat and peeled off twenty-seven century notes.

A twinkly light appeared in Little Clancy's eyes. He reached for the money, but Tug slapped his hand away. "Rat-line Sam is treasurer of the Bilge

and Binnacle Club," Tug declared. "He'll take care of the money till we reach port."

Simon Sligg handed Tug a long envelope. "Here are your sailing orders," he said. "I'll be back to discuss them with you, so don't sail until I return." He clamped on his gray fedora, twirled his ebony walking stick and departed.

"Sligg very good man," said Lui Chang. "Good friend to poor Chinese."

"All of Sligg's clients are poor," said Joe Lemon cynically. "Especially after he gets through with 'em."

On deck the winches whuffed and clattered as cargo was lowered into the holds. The cargo was crated in great wooden boxes with stencils on the sides reading, *Thirty galvanized wash basins, ten bathtubs*, and so on. By nightfall the after hatches were battened down, but stevedores were still loading a few boxes up forward. Tug put Rat-line Sam on deckwatch and went into the chartroom.

HAVING no one to talk with, Rat-line Sam became lonesome, so he went over to the Mariners' Tavern and purchased a quart bottle of McGillicudie's Scottish Dew. A few drams of this gave him quite a lift.

He clicked his heels, climbed onto the bridge rail and rocked to and fro singing an old salt-water chanty. It was then that a green truck wheeled onto the wharf. The driver got out, glanced at the name on the ship's bow and yelled, "Who's in authority here?"

"I am, lad," said Rat-line Sam fog-gily. "I'm an authority on most anything."

"Some cargo for you," snapped the driver. He unlashed a sturdy crate about five times the size of a piano box from the back end of his truck. "Tell your winch-monkeys to put this aboard," he ordered. "An' come an' sign for it."

"Aye." Rat-line Sam took another swig from his bottle and lurched down the ladder. When he got to the bottom of the plank, the truck driver shoved a metal-backed pad at him. He fumbled with a pencil, scrawled his name laboriously. By the time he had finished, the crate was being lowered into the forward hold.

Rat-line Sam's legs were rubbery as he climbed back up the ladder, but he felt supremely happy. He stretched out beside some warm steam pipes amidship, killed the bottle and was about to heave it at a bollard when a donkey engine chugged up the track on the pier.

The engineer stuck a smudgy face out of the cab. "This the *Daze*?" he asked.

"She is," replied Rat-line Sam. "An' the sweetest little craft that ever slid off the ways."

"I been lookin' all over for this tub," muttered the engineer. "Get that blasted thing off my flat car!"

Rat-line Sam tried to bring his eyes into focus. On the flat car was a metal object shaped like a globe and large as a one-story building. "Blow me down," he grunted. "I sailed the seas for forty years, but I never seen a thing like that."

"You ordered it; now you got to take it!" fumed the engineer. "The screwballs I run into!"

A steel loop protruded from the top of the sphere, making it easy to swing the object aboard at the end of a hook. The cargo hold was full, so Rat-line Sam had the stevedores set it next to the bulkhead, just below the bridge. The donkey engine chugged away, and the stevedores hustled off to dinner, leaving the booms up and the globular object hitched to a cable. Rat-line Sam went around locking the manhole covers.

Heading aft, he thought he saw a number of shadowy figures slink from the steering-machine house. He yelled

at them, but they vanished like phantoms. The after well-deck was a black tangle of ropes and cables. He clumped across it, peering through the darkness woozily.

"Nobody around," he decided. "Must have been my imageenation."

He locked up the rest of the manholes and climbed back amidships to stretch out beside the steam pipes.

TUG RAFFIN found him there an hour later. "A fine thing," said Tug severely. "I trust you to watch the deck, and look what happens. I believe you are drunk."

"Aye," admitted Rat-line Sam. "Re-voltin', ain't it?"

A shrill whistle called Tug to the rail. He saw a pint-sized man in a sheepskin coat strutting across the wharf like a bantam rooster. "Get that sardine can outa here!" the man shouted. "You only paid for this berth till six o'clock."

"We're waiting for Mr. Sligg," said Tug politely. "We'll pull out as soon as he gives the order."

"Always the same old eephus," snarled the man. "Why don't you tramp skippers leave when you're supposed to? I got no use for chisellers."

Rat-line Sam wobbled to the edge of the deck, clutching his empty bottle. "Chisellers, are we?" he blazed. "Why, you scurvy shad-faced swab—"

"Chisellers," repeated the man, thumbing a gleaming badge on his chest. "Seagoing Shylocks."

Rat-line Sam hurled the bottle with a vengeance. It clonked the man squarely on the forehead, and he sank to the dock like a pile of wet wash.

"Now you've done it," said Tug heatedly. "That guy was an officer. Go tell the Zymanskis to build up some steam. We're leaving!"

Entering the deckhouse, Tug found

a card game going on in the saloon mess. Lui Chang sat stiffly on the edge of his chair, and around him were Little Clancy, Billings and Joe Lemon.

"Greetings," said Lui Chang. "Your gracious companions honor unworthy Lui by teaching him noble game of five-card-draw."

"I called you," said Joe Lemon, scowling. "I got three aces."

"So sorry," said Lui Chang. "I hold four miserable twos."

Little Clancy chewed on his jade nail file violently. "I never saw such luck," he grumbled. "That guy Looie has won every pot."

"On deck, men," Tug ordered briskly. "We're pulling out."

"A little stud this time," said Billings. "Everybody in."

"We're sailing right away," Tug repeated. "Rat-line Sam just knocked out the pier inspector."

"Good for Sam," said Joe Lemon. "Who didn't ante?"

"Listen," said Tug exasperatedly. "When that guy comes to, he'll have every cop in town after us. We can't wait for Simon Sligg. We must leave at once!"

Bottlenose Billings dealt the cards calmly. "Okay," he said. "King bets."

There are times when Tug Raffin reaches the limit of his patience. Lifting Billings by the scruff of the neck, he gave him a quick kick in the pants. Billings sprawled over the table, scattering cards and matches every which way.

The action merely annoyed Billings, but it made Joe Lemon angry since he had kings wired back to back. Arising to his full height, Joe Lemon picked up a dish full of cigarette butts and tossed it at Tug's head. The dish missed its mark, and in another second Joe Lemon was reclining against the wall wondering what hit him.

"I'm skipper of this ship," said Tug, dusting off his knuckles. "Next time I give an order, I want you guys to jump!"

"Yes, sir." They all followed Tug onto the midship deck, and in a few minutes the *C. P. Dazey* was ready to sail.

SINCE Tug has a pilot's ticket for the harbor, he took the ship out past the breakwater and then turned her over to Little Clancy. For several hours the vessel thumped along at a good six knots, her stubby snout digging up spray and her plates squealing joyfully.

"Hey," said Tug, leaning over the bridge rail. "What's that big round thing on the welldeck?"

"Search me," Little Clancy replied from the wheelhouse. "Rat-line Sam said it was part of the cargo."

Tug made his way to the welldeck and inspected the giant globe wonderingly. It had a heavy glass window on one side, and opposite the window was a small watertight door with screw clamps. He was about to unscrew the clamps when a bright jet of flame leaped from the *C. P. Dazey's* midship section. Every light on the ship flickered out.

Rat-line Sam gave a lusty yell on the boatdeck, and Tug scuttled aft like a bee-stung whippet. Fire was spewing out of the engineroom skylight, licking at the funnel while billows of smoke lifted lazily into the sky. Joe Lemon and Bottlenose Billings charged out of the deckhouse in their nightshirts. Down in the engineroom's depths the four Zy-manski brothers were howling like par-boiled devils.

Although the Bilge and Binnacles enjoy nothing so much as a good fire, it is doubtful if they ever seriously thought of putting one out. Snatching a metal extinguisher from a bracket, Joe Lemon opened the engineroom door, and a blast

of flame poofed out at him. He gave the extinguisher one squirt and dropped it on the upper catwalk. The cylinder rolled around gushing chemicals, bounced from one level to the next and finally hit something with an audible thud. From below came the anguished cry of a stricken Zymanski.

"You ought to be more careful," said Billings chidingly. "Them extinguishers are expensive."

Tug Raffin took the whole situation in at a glance. The oil-covered catwalks were all ablaze, but the chief danger was a fiery petroleum pool on the engine-room floor. "Go rip up the forward hatch covers," he ordered. "Drag the tarp'lins back here."

Joe Lemon and Billings hustled down the alleyway and returned loaded with heavy canvas. Rat-line Sam had dropped a long firehose down the engineroom skylight and was working at the number two pump. The hose jerked and coiled like a white reptile, salt water gushing from its blackened nozzle. Most of the oil-film had burned off the catwalks, but the metal was white-hot.

"All right, men," said Tug. "We'll take the canvas below."

They picked up the tarpaulins and hurried across the upper catwalk. Bottlenose Billings was last, and as he started down the ladder, the writhing fire hose clipped him behind the ear. He keeled over in a gush of spray, carrying Tug and Joe Lemon with him. Enveloped in flapping canvas, they barreled down the ladder, followed the path of the fire extinguisher and ended up in front of the telegraph dial. The Zymanskis unwrapped them, and Tug got to his feet shakily.

"Quick!" snapped Tug. "Unfold the canvas!"

A tarpaulin was dropped over the burning patch of oil, and Billings

jumped up and down on it enthusiastically. Another canvas went down, and in a short while the fire was completely smothered. A few flaming patches here and there were whipped out with rags, leaving the engineroom in darkness.

"Close shave," Tug said. "If the oil in the shaft alley had caught on, we'd have been goners."

"It was thiss!" hissed one of the Zymanskis. He lit a lantern and showed Tug a burned wire leading from the generator. "It caught on fire the erl."

"A short circuit, eh?" mused Tug. "Very strange."

He returned to the maindeck, went into the saloon mess for a drink of water and found Little Clancy seated at the table playing freeze-out with Lui Chang. A candle burned on the buffet.

"You're supposed to be on watch!" Tug thundered. "Why have you left the wheel?"

"The steering engine busted down," explained Little Clancy. "I meant to tell you, but you were busy with the fire."

"There's two wheels," said Tug. "Why didn't you steer her from aft?"

"The after wheel don't work either," said Little Clancy, shoving a handful of matches to the center of the table. "I foxed you this time," he told Lui Chang. "I got four jacks!"

"So sorry," was the silk reply. "I hold four contemptible aces."

"Oh, my," sighed Little Clancy. He stared at the table sadly as a pair of tapering yellow hands raked in the matches. "Lucky Looie!"

#### IV

**I**T TOOK five hours, a Stillson wrench and six yards of baling wire to fix the steering engine. This done, the *C. P.*

*Dazey* churned resolutely through a calm sea. Tug was dawdling with his afternoon coffee, gulls whizzed around the masthead, and everything was quiet and peaceful when—at exactly four PM—the propeller dropped off.

The Bilge and Binnacles gathered on the poop deck and gazed over the after end gloomily. "I have a sneaking suspicion that something is rotten in the woodpile," said Tug. "All these things could not happen of their own accord."

"No," rumbled the Zymanskis. "It iss sabotage."

"You mean somebody *fixed* this egg-beater so she'd fall apart?" asked Little Clancy.

"Right," nodded Tug. "It was planned by Simon Sligg."

"We should have knowed better than to trust that swab," grumped Rat-line Sam. "What'll we do now?"

"We have a spare propeller," said Tug. "By flooding the forward hold we can lift the stern out of the water and fasten it on."

"Soch smartness," acclaimed the Zymanskis. "In Russia they would make him commissar."

Tug and Little Clancy went forward to open the sea valves. Pulling several planks off the number one hatch, they descended into the hold. The place was pitch dark, and the stale air smelled of green pine. Suddenly a strange, gamey odor met their nostrils.

"Owf," said Little Clancy. "D'you catch that?"

"Yes," said Tug. "It seems to be coming from over there."

Little Clancy followed his nose and paused beside a tall, oblong crate. A pocket flashlight revealed that this crate was somewhat different from the others, having collapsible sides and a sliding door on one end. Little Clancy tried the door; it slid upward. Crouching on his

hands and knees, he poked the flashlight into the interior. An eye stared back at him—a cold yellow eye.

"Well?" said Tug impatiently.

Little Clancy's face had a jaundiced hue; the flashlight jittered in his hand. His mouth moved, but the only sound which came from his frozen larynx was a rodentlike squeak. He backed away from the box on all fours, the eye following him hypnotically. To Little Clancy it looked like The Eye of Retribution.

A shaggy, dun-colored head protruded from the doorway—a head that rightfully belonged behind the *Felis leo* sign in the East Bay Zoo. Tug watched, transfixed with horror, as the animal licked his chop and made straight for Little Clancy. It was Ajax all right, and he appeared to be out for revenge.

WITH one pounce he had little Clancy flat on the floor. The flashlight went clattering, and Tug scooped it up hastily, turning the beam full into the lion's eyes. Ajax was sitting squarely on top of Little Clancy, his plumed tail swishing. He blinked into the light and commenced to wash his face.

This seemed ominous, although Tug could not remember whether lions washed their faces before or after meals. Being strictly a seafaring man, he had never stood toe to toe with any animal larger than a bilge rat, and the situation put him in a first-class quandary.

Ajax lalloped his big red tongue against his paw and scrubbed the upper part of his left ear, regarding Tug with an air of tolerance. To run away was definitely beneath Tug's dignity, and to remain inactive during a crisis was against his principles. After some consideration he approached Ajax from the rear and kicked him soundly on the hunkers.

The animal gave a roar and leaped

about ten feet into the air. Tug was prepared to duck out of sight, when, to his amazement, the beast scabbled over a heap of boxes and sprang through the open hatchway.

"He's gone." Tug breathed a sigh of relief and lifted Little Clancy by the collar. "How do you feel?"

"Terrible," was the feeble reply. "I feel like a pressed ham."

"That brute is loose on deck," said Tug. "I must go warn the others." He gave Little Clancy the flashlight and left him standing groggily in the hold.

At that particular moment the rest of the Bilge and Binnacles were in the saloon mess playing poker with Lui Chang. Rat-line Sam had just dealt out the cards when a peculiar tenseness settled over the room. "Avast, lads," he chuckled. "What makes ye so quiet?"

Joe Lemon gripped the edge of the table. "Don't look now," he said, "but there's a lion standin' right behind you."

"Aye." Rat-line Sam twisted his snowy mustache calmly. "Reminds me of a time back in Ninety-four when I was sailin' a barkentine out of Capetown—" He stopped short, leaning on the table with his elbows. "Begee pardon," he inquired. "Did you say 'lion?' "

"The biggest one I ever seen," declared Joe Lemon. "Right behind you."

Rat-line Sam turned slowly, and his bushy eyebrows jumped halfway up his forehead. Scooting around the table, he swished out the opposite doorway.

"Be calm, gentlemen!" Lui Chang lifted his hands high. "Exert noble self control—"

The Zymanski brothers piled on top of one another in front of the exit. A long arm reached out of the scramble and fastened itself to the mahogany buffet. Breaking loose from the wall, the buffet teetered on its front legs, an

avalanche of glassware spilling from the shelves. It went over with a rending crash, but the Zymanskis had bulged through the doorway, and the only casualty was Lui Chang. The buffet was quite a formidable piece of furniture, and it smacked Lui Chang to the floor, pinning his shoulders securely.

When Tug Raffin returned amidships, he found the Bilge and Binnacles huddled on the boatdeck. "You guys had better watch out," he cautioned. "There's a—"

"We seen him," gulped Joe Lemon. "He's in the saloon mess."

IN a few seconds Ajax stepped from the alleyway, his tail proudly erect. Hanging from his clamped jaws was the remnant of a yellow mandarin coat.

"Gosh," gasped Bottlenose Billings. "He ate Looie!"

The beast gazed at Tug disdainfully. Prancing across the deck, he padded up the bridge ladder and decided to take a nap in the chartroom.

"One thing is clear," said Tug. "We've got to get rid of that lion."

"We could shoot him," suggested Joe Lemon. "If we had a gun."

"It's a cinch!" Little Clancy came galumping from the forward weldeck breathlessly. "We got plenty of guns—thousands of 'em!"

Tug's bronzed features wore a look of alarm. "Take it easy," he murmured understandingly. "You've had a bad shock."

"I ain't crazy," Little Clancy asserted. "I just pried open three of them boxes in the hold, and they didn't contain no Chinese plumbing. They was full of rifles!"

"Rifles?"

"An' ammunition," added Little Clancy. "I'll bet the after hold is full of 'em too."

"We'll find out," said Tug. "Follow me."

They traipsed to the after welldeck, and Tug unlocked one of the manhole covers. As the steel disk clanged back, a faint scuffling noise sounded below. Rat-line Sam leaned over the manhole, cocking his head to one side. "There's more animules down there," he exclaimed, "*alive!*"

Before Tug could slam the cover down, a thin gray hand clutched the rim of the hole. Everyone stepped back in stunned surprise, for the head and shoulders which followed were undoubtedly those of Simon Sligg.

V

SIMON SLIGG did not appear to be in a gracious mood. His fishy eyes narrowed, and his mouth looked more

than ever like a shark's maw. Reaching under his coat, he drew a small pearl-handled revolver.

"Put up your hands," he said menacingly. "I will shoot the first man who makes a wrong move."

"You can't shoot us all," Tug reminded him. "That pop-gun only holds six slugs."

Sligg stamped on the deck, and five Chinese emerged from the manhole, each carrying a rifle. "It's them rice-balls!" shrilled Little Clancy. "The ones who jumped us in the park."

"I bailed them out of jail," said Sligg. "Knowing that they desired revenge, I enlisted their aid. It made them very angry when I told them that you had sold the *chingchow-pi*."

"We never sold anything," said Tug perplexedly. "We don't even know what you're talking about."

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"They steal him," said one of the Chinese, fingering his rifle anxiously. "Now they die."

"First we must find their accomplice, Lui Chang," said Sligg in a crafty tone. "March forward, gentlemen—"

"Excuse me," Bottlenose Billings cut in. "I'm supposed to be on watch in the fireroom. The boilers—"

"You will go with the others," snarled Sligg, flourishing his pistol. "March!"

The Bilge and Binnacles marched. Sligg herded them onto the forward welldeck and sent a rifleman in search of Lui Chang. "How did *that* get aboard?" he demanded, pointing to the great steel ball which stood near the bulkhead.

"Some lubber brought it on a flat car," said Rat-line Sam. "Said it was part of the cargo."

"You fool," said Sligg. "This is a contrivance for exploring the bottom of the ocean. It belongs to the famous naturalist, Hayworth Gribble. It is called a bathysphere."

"A bathysphere?" mused Tug. "Sure. They had a picture of it in the paper."

Sligg unscrewed the door clamps interestedly. "Quite a gadget," he said. "This is the largest bathysphere ever constructed—"

"Lui Chang!" The rifleman scurried from amidships excitedly. "Him in dinin' room—dead!"

"We could have told you that," said Joe Lemon. "He was ate by a lion."

"A likely story," sneered Sligg. He opened the door of the bathysphere. "This is just the place to keep murderers. Enter!"

"Count me out," said Billings. "I better go take a look at the—" Slig prodded the pistol in his ribs. He wriggled through the small doorway, and the Zymanskis crawled in after him.

Tug was the last to enter. "You'll regret this," he said darkly. "You can't move the ship without our help."

"Who wants to move it?" chuckled Sligg. "Why do you think I put shorts in the wiring, loosened the propeller and weakened the steering engine?"

"Well?" Tug kept his eye on the revolver.

"Because I never intended for the cargo to reach China," said Sligg in a low voice. "Lui Chang wanted to help the Chinese army by sending them American guns. I arranged the deal with Eric Mendelbaum, who makes electric shooting galleries for beer parlors. He had a lot of old rifles on hand, and I bought them at a reasonable price. They look like real guns, but they shoot a beam of light. The ammunition is filled with sawdust."

"You loaded the ship with that junk?" Tug asked incredulously.

"Only the top layer of cargo," said Sligg. "The rest of the boxes contain scrap iron. Lui Chang didn't know the difference, but I might have been in serious difficulty if the ship had ever reached China. I hired those five men to disable the ship so she would fall apart in mid-ocean. We sneaked aboard last evening to finish our work, and Rat-line Sam locked us in the hold."

"What happens now?" inquired Tug.

"I intend to scuttle the ship," said Sligg. "As soon as some other vessel comes in sight I will open the sea cocks and signal for help."

"We've been tricked," said Joe Lemon. "Tricked by those guys with their fake rifles!"

"My revolver is very real," Sligg assured him. "Good day, gentlemen!"

He slammed the door in Tug Raffin's face and screwed down the watertight clamps. Pulling on his gray suede gloves, he walked over to the winch and

jerked the lever. As the derrick became taut, the black globe was lifted from the deck. The boom swung around, and the ball dangled from its tip like a Christmas tree ornament. His fishy eyes glinting, Simon Sligg let the cable whine through the pulleys.

The bathysphere hit the water with a resounding splash, and the Bilge and Binnacles descended to the bottom of the sea.

**SQUASHED** between two Zyman-skis, Tug saw the daylight disappear like a fading emerald. The downfall ceased gradually, and everyone sat quietly gulping stale air. Tug ran his hand along the curved wall, fumbled with a valve, and oxygen hissed up through the waffle boards in the floor.

"Well, men," he said solemnly. "It looks like this is the end."

The steel globe suddenly bounced sideways as if hit with an immense croquet mallet. The shock was accompanied by a muffled roar.

"Golly," said Little Clancy, removing Joe Lemon's forefinger from his right ear. "What was that?"

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," said Bottlenose Billings, "the *C. P. Dazey* just exploded."

"Huh?" said Little Clancy.

"I left the furnace burners going full blast," explained Billings. "That would be okay, but someone busted the safety valve on the boilers. I tried to tell Sligg about it."

"We are in Davey Jones' locker for good," murmured Tug. "Sligg couldn't pull us up now if he wanted to."

After a while the hissing sound diminished, telling them that the oxygen tank was running low. Rat-line Sam lit his pipe, and Joe Lemon passed around a can of Copenhagen. Nobody felt like talking. It was Tug who first noticed

that the bathysphere was swaying gently. Soon a faint light became visible through the window.

"I'll be blown!" said Rat-line Sam.

A bright, white moon popped into sight; stars twinkled in the night sky, and they were dangling high above the sea. As the globe spun around, a ship swiveled into view, her forward deck directly below.

Tug pointed to the familiar bow. "Billings was wrong," he said. "She didn't explode after all."

"Yeah," said Little Clancy. "They're swinging us down to the deck."

"You men be ready," Tug ordered. "If the door opens, I'll jump out first. You follow and slug the first guy you see. Sligg only has one good gun; he can't plug all of us."

"Ain't you the optimist," said Joe Lemon tartly. "Sligg wouldn't risk lettin' us out."

The sphere clunked onto the deck. Tug crouched by the narrow door, his ear to the wall intently and the hot breath of the Zymanskis on his neck. For a moment he thought he could hear voices. His heart thumped like a kettledrum. The door clamps were being unscrewed.

"Ready, men," he said tensely. "Come out fighting!"

## VI

**AS** THE door hinged open, the Zymanskis gave a mighty shove, and Tug hurtled from the aperture like one of those snakes which jump from trick whisky bottles.

He hit someone with a dreadful impact, his head sinking to the ears in a fleshy stomach. Arms and legs churning, he crawled onto his enemy's prostrate body, dug both hands into a pulpy throat and hammered the man's skull

against the deckplates. The moonlight fell upon a gasping florid face. The man was a total stranger.

He blinked up at Tug through steel-rimmed glasses, his thick lips working violently. Tug stopped choking him and removed his knees from the man's stomach.

"Make them stop—please!" gasped the stranger. "They will hurt somebody!"

He was alluding to the Bilge and Binnacles.

Primed for battle, the Bilge and Binnacles tumbled from the bathysphere and rolled into action vigorously. A lot of men were standing about the deck, and the Zymanskis battered them down with vigor and dispatch.

Little Clancy lifted an uppercut to the first chin within reach, Rat-line Sam went around cracking heads with a stanchion, and Bottlenose Billings was busy jumping up and down on everybody who was horizontal. Joe Lemon fell over a deck ring, and Billings jumped on him too.

Their white-hot fury cooled in a few seconds, and they all realized they had made some kind of a mistake. Simon Sligg and his five Orientals were no place in sight. Instead, the deck was littered with such well-known waterfront characters as Barney Tupponce, Dish-face Charlie and Johnny Kedge. It was very bewildering.

In a spirit of good sportsmanship and forgiveness Little Clancy picked up the man he had just knocked down, endeavoring to shake his hand. The man was Barney Tupponce, and since Barney is quite a low-brow Limey he gave a throaty snarl and jabbed his two forefingers at Little Clancy's eyes. Sidestepping, Little Clancy knocked Barney Tupponce groggy, and the Zymanskis stuffed him down a ventilator.

A whistle blew, and more men came pouring from amidships, outnumbering the Bilge and Binnacles five to one. Tug Raffin met them at the welldeck ladder.

"Stop!" he commanded, raising one hand authoritatively. "I am captain of this ship. I demand that you—"

With one surge they steamrolled him to the deck, kicked him in the jaw, walked on his chest, ground their heels into his stomach, yanked out handfuls of yellow hair, belabored him with clubs and swarmed over him like rats over roquefort. This made Tug rather indignant.

Now as a rule Tug Raffin is exceedingly even-tempered. He will sometimes sock somebody in a good-natured way, but only when he feels that the party concerned deserves a lesson. Once in a while, however, he really gets indignant. On these occasions it is well to look for the nearest bomb-proof shelter.

**T**UG snapped to his feet with three men clinging to his shoulders. He pulled two of them off and flipped the third one over his head. His fists turned to tight knobs, and he ploughed across the deck, scattering destruction like a whirlwind.

Cutting a swath through the enemy, he saved Little Clancy from being tossed overboard, leveled off several persons who were trying to strangle Joe Lemon with a length of cable and prevented Rat-line Sam from being beamed with his own stanchion. Bottlenose Billings trailed behind jumping up and down on anybody who still showed signs of animation, and the Zymanskis finished off the job by stuffing the victims into the nearest ventilator.

The man with the steel-rimmed glasses was halfway into the ventilator when Tug rescued him from the Zymanskis' clutches. "Explain yourself," Tug

ordered. "How did you and your gang get aboard my ship?"

"This is my ship," countered the man. "I am Hayworth Gribble, the famous naturalist."

"You own the *C. P. Dazey*?" Tug said skeptically.

"No," said Gribble. "But this is her sister ship, the *T. G. Dazey*. I am taking her on a world-wide expedition to study tropical flora and fauna."

"And I'm beginning to catch on," said Tug. "The lion and that bathysphere thing were delivered to us by mistake."

"Exactly so," said Gribble. "When I heard they were allowing people to throw firecrackers at poor Ajax, I decided to remove him to the San Diego Zoo. Upon learning of the error in delivery, I tried to follow you. Luckily, I sighted the *C. P. Dazey* just as she exploded. Only the front part was afloat when we pulled alongside and grabbed the bathysphere cable. She sank in a short time."

"You rigged the cable onto your own winch and hauled us in," said Tug. "And we thought—"

"You thought, gentlemen, that you had beaten Simon Sligg!"

He ambled down the ladder looking sinister indeed, his shark's maw drooping into an inverted smile. He rubbed the rim of his gray fedora with his gloves, as if trying to erase a spot.

"Blast my eyes!" grumped Rat-line Sam. "I was hopin' the swab had drowned."

"No," said Gribble. "Everyone was saved."

"But the *C. P. Dazey* went down with all her cargo," Sligg smiled. "I am a rich man, and no one can prove that I did not earn my money legally. Yesterday afternoon I deposited Lui Chang's check for ninety thousand dollars!"

"What a swindle," said Tug. "The

minute Lui Chang teamed up with you he was behind the eight ball."

"So sorry to disappoint sagacious Sligg," came a disturbingly familiar voice. "It is written: Man who stand behind eight ball can keep hand firmly on side pocket."

"It's Looie!" gaped Little Clancy. "They told us you was dead."

"Natural mistake," was the reply. "Ketchup from sideboard fall on Lui and look like blood. Then noble lion sit on Lui, squeezing out breath."

"Ajax is so affectionate," explained Gribble. "I used to let him sit on my lap when he was a cub. He never outgrew it."

"What were you saying about me?" Sligg asked sharply.

"Chinese very cautious with money," replied Lui Chang. "Keep hands in pocket—even when clever crook offer to obtain guns for beleaguered countrymen."

"YOU paid me the money," said Sligg. "I deposited your check yesterday afternoon, a minute before the bank closed. I know the check was good, and there's no way you could have stopped payment on it until the following morning."

"Check drawn on Chinatown National Bank," said Lui Chang. "I own the bank, and I left word not to honor check until radio message from me gives okay. Such action very simple when you own bank."

"It's a good thing we were paid in cash for this job," said Tug. "We've got *our* money, anyway."

Everybody suddenly looked downcast. "No we ain't," said Rat-line Sam. "Looie won it all from us at poker."

"You—gambled my share too?" Tug faltered.

"Yeah," said Little Clancy.

"I am always lucky," said Lui Chang. "However, I will make bargain. I will return money if you will return *chingchow-pi*."

"Sure," agreed Little Clancy. "But what is it?"

"*Chingchow-pi* means 'heavenly worship stone,'" said Lui Chang. "It is particle of flawless jade with inscriptions copied from ancient tablet in Sianfu. It is very sacred."

"Sink me," said Rat-line Sam. "He's been usin' it for a nail file."

"That's why those five tong-babies were after me," said Little Clancy. "Sligg told 'em I had sold it."

"I still have the last word," growled Simon Sligg. He drew his pearl-handled revolver and pointed it at Lui Chang's face. "You will go to the ship's radio operator and send a message to your bank telling them to make that check

good instantly. If this is not done, I shall blow out your brains!"

As Sligg spoke, a large benevolent-looking lion padded up behind him and placed both forepaws on his shoulders. With a wild shriek Sligg crumpled up like a paper bag, the gun dropping from his grasp.

"Golly," said Little Clancy. "It looks like Looie is lucky again."

They walked away, leaving Ajax seated comfortably on Sligg's stomach. Tug glanced back once, but all he could see was a pair of gray spats and a crumpled fedora.

"That," he said sagely, "is what happens to guys who take too many gambles. I hope you will profit by experience."

The Bilge and Binnacles all nodded wisely and then went aft to resume their poker game in the saloon mess.



**KILLERS,  
THIEVES and  
BLACKGUARDS,  
—BUT**

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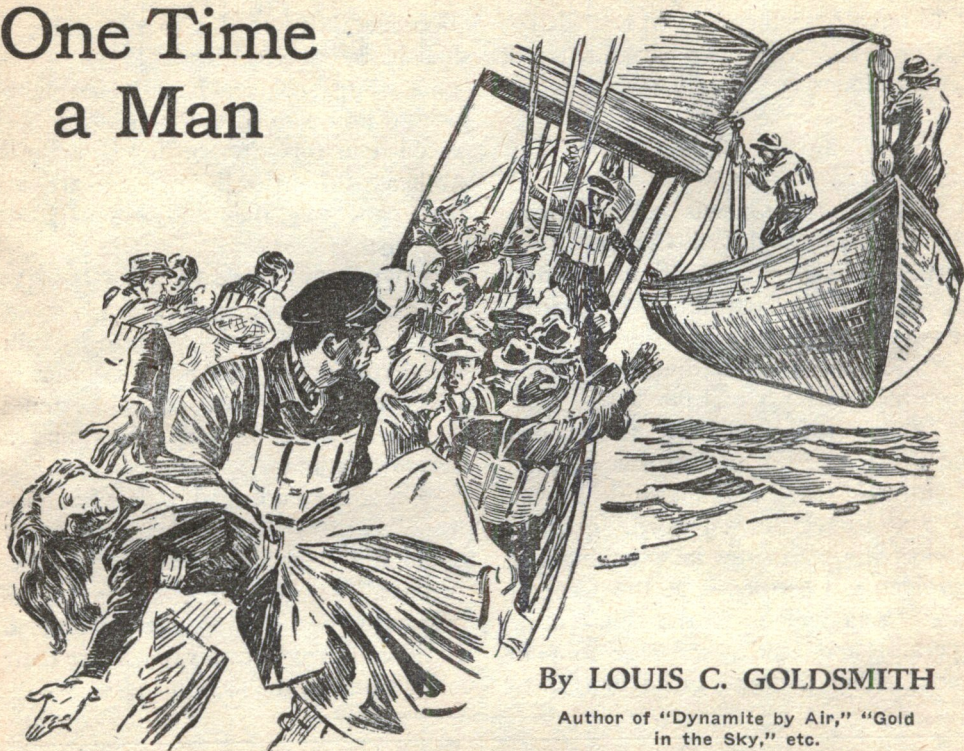
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# One Time a Man



By LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH

Author of "Dynamite by Air," "Gold  
in the Sky," etc.

Because an American ship was torpedoed in the spring of '15, another ship remained afloat in the spring of '40. And behind this was only a ghost, bent on fulfillment

## FOREWORD

*One time a man died. Only there was a closed door, and the man could never be really dead until he had opened that door and gone through.*

*The door was on an American freighter—no, it was on a pigboat (which is the name Americans have for a submarine). Or maybe it was somewhere in his mind.*

*But the wraith of that man had to cross the ocean twice, and forge a chain cunningly, before the door could be found and pushed back. And two wars had to be fought . . .*

*Here, one by one, are the links of his chain.*

THE fog showed breaks occasionally, only to curtain again the wallowing freighter in a dark, unreal world. It was a shallow fog, but

very dense when they were in it. It might hold on until afternoon.

Through a freakish rift Paul Wiggin saw the stars, paled by growing dawn. Then it was on them again. The huddled passengers became a darker gray. Objects close on the forecandlehead dimmed.

Up there the two British seamen, manning a small foredeck gun, kept warmth in their bodies with quick, limited pacing of the steel deck; with a sharp swinging of their mittened hands. There was grimness in the way they hovered near the gun breech.

Paul Wiggin felt a sardonic amusement with this. Despite his own youth

those two seemed like small boys, playing at war. He felt tolerant, with his own wisdom.

Let them play. This was A.D. 1915. The world had grown too wise to continue to destroy itself with wars over an Austrian archduke.

There was a moist chill in the air so that he was grateful for the warmth of his mackintosh and glad to be without the bulk of that silly life jacket that would have prevented him buttoning his coat.

This was the third morning the stewards had called him and his wife and the ten other cabin passengers out of warm berths, to stand in the forewaist of the tubby little freighter, waiting for imaginary submarines to strike.

HIS wife snuggled closer to him, for warmth, and because they were very much in love. "Scared, Paul?" she asked, wrinkling her nose; knowing very well how he adored that insolence; lifting her lips with an invitation.

He smiled down at her pretense of being frightened. He bent and kissed her and felt the smooth cheeks, cool and moist with fog dew.

"Scared of what?" he asked, aware that nearby passengers were watching them, and not caring if they were.

"The horrible Huns," she whispered, and giggled. "Isn't that what the John Bulls call them?"

"Like Eric and Karl and Hans . . . in Wilhelmshaven! Perhaps Karl is now eating Belgian babies, Lydia."

She put slender, protesting fingers across his lips. "Don't even say that, Paul. Weren't they darlings? Eric and his Prussian monocle and that devastating bow. He paid you such a nice compliment, Paul, just the day before we left for Norway. He said you spoke German better than some Germans.

"And you know, Paul, I could love that big bear of a Karl . . . if I wasn't so terribly in love with you. Would they have submarines here, Paul?"

"Of course not, dear. We're just grazing the coast of Ireland, heading westward."

"Then why . . .?"

"Listen, sweet"—he spoke low, because of the Canadians—"you've just heard the English side of all this rumpus. They're making the most of what Kaiser Wilhelm said about under-sea warfare. He really wouldn't turn his submarines loose torpedoing merchant ships. Especially those headed *away* from England. Naval ships; that's different."

"But, Paul, they've already torpedoed them."

"Munition ships, Lydia. We're not carrying munitions. And we're headed for the good old U.S." He bent to kiss her again, on the forehead.

They had been married a year but he still felt a thrill at even touching this frail, composed little person. She was his wife; she loved him as surely as he loved her; as surely as the sun rose in the east. Yet this knowledge left him always wondering at his good fortune . . .

"... *port bow, sir. Very near!*"

"*Stand by on the rafts. Boat crews to stations.*"

"Paul— Is it . . . They're loading the gun!"

"Probably a log. Where's your life jacket, honey?"

"*Can't spot it, sir. How many points off the bow?*"

"Paul, I didn't bring it this time; the life jacket. You said they wouldn't torpedo . . . Paul. *Paul*, don't leave me!"

"*We see it, sir.*"

"*Lay on it. But hold your fire, Wilkins.*"

*"It's a torpedo! See the white foam behind!"*

*"Women and children first, gentlemen. Steady all! I'll shoot the first man who starts jamming things."*

"Paul, where are you! I won't go. My husband went through that door, just before the explosion . . . that door that's closed. He's coming right back. With life jackets. I tell you I won't leave till my husband . . .!"

*"Pick her up, Trotter. Put her in the stern. There'll be room for your husband in the captain's boat, Mrs. Wiggin. Lower away, men . . . steady on that bow fall."*

. . . opened fire on the first officer's boat with a small caliber deck gun. The sole survivor from this boat, Charles Trotter, A.B., recounted modestly his heroic but futile efforts to keep one of the passengers afloat during those terrible hours that followed the torpedoing. The passenger, a young woman, apparently American, was without life jacket.

According to the last Admiralty reports there were only two Americans aboard the English ship; Paul A. Wiggin and his wife, Lydia Frances Wiggin. Mr. Wiggin had been completing studies in marine architecture in Germany at the outbreak of the war. He had since been in Norway and Denmark with his wife.

Because of a low fog which persisted until late into the afternoon rescue boats were unable . . .

*England: 1915*

**F**UNNY duffer, Wayne. Can't make him out. But I'll swear he's no German agent—not this man Wiggin."

"No. Of course not. Passport's in order, though it's been jolly well soaked. You don't suppose he's one of those Harvard johnnies who . . ."

"I had that in mind, Wayne. No doubt of his education. Some of those boys came over for ambulance service, in '14. So he had time to get up front and shell-shocked . . . forgets his name

and everything. Amnesia, y'know. Then he's lost in the hospital shuffle. Poor devil! I'll vouch for him, Wayne. Been working in the shipyards five months."

"But why submarines? Damme, he's just getting settled down on light cruiser design. Admits he doesn't know anything about submersibles."

"Curiosity, I suppose. These big fifty-crew subs would fascinate any good marine engineer. Remember, he's a Yank. Could pull out on us any time. Beastly shame to lose a man like that, even if he is slightly—er, a little off his bean."

"Very well. I'll sign the transfer. With the sinking of that American windjammer and their oil steamer, the *Gulflight*, these Americans may be coming in with us. Not that they'll be any help, aside from furnishing a better supply base . . . and financial bucking up.

"Yanks can't fight. Never could. Maybe Indians . . . frontiersmen, eh, with flintlocks. Jolly good joke, that. They'd find war was different here."

*America: Peace—*

"Wiggin pressure bomb, sir."

"Barry, how many times have I told you about damned crackpots! Every nut in the country lies awake nights trying to imagine a death ray, flying torpedoes or . . ."

"But this is Paul Wiggin, sir. You've heard of him. Worked in the English yards during the last war. He's one of the foremost submarine—"

"Why in thunder didn't you say so? Let's see those drawings. Hm-m-m. Looks like an ordinary ash can to me. Just another depth bomb."

"It's the firing mechanism, sir. Here're detail drawings."

"Sperry Corp's been working on one of those . . ."

"But this is so very simple, sir. Simple as a mercury barometer."

"Okay. Send him in. But listen, Barry. The U.S. is trying to build pigs that'll float. This man's for sinking 'em. That's all I've heard about his inventions: sink, sink, sink! Let's have a float man next, Barry. Give the pig boys a break."

—and Preparation

"I'm a dirty-necked gyrene if that old son-of-a-gun don't give me the willies, Joe. Them eyes of his ain't human."

"That Wiggin guy, huh? He's pressure bound, Chuck, deep-dumb, screwy. Notice how his head keeps jerkin' up and down all the time?"

"Old age, kid. Didn't you see the white hair? You'll be that way, too, kid."

"Yeah. In a hundred years. But I won't be talkin' to myself. On that crash dive yesterday he sticks his skinny neck up the tower. 'Could be jammed,' he says. 'Could be. Gallons of water. Tons of water! I'll try it.'"

"Oh, that. He means, try it out with a model sub. In the naval laboratory, Joe."

"Yeah? But does he? Down in the motor room, other day at moorings, he kept foolin' with the brushes. 'Enough spark in the average brush arc,' he says, to himself, 'to explode a fulminate of mercury cap. Use a condenser on pickup line.'"

"Oh, that's safety precautions, Joe. That's just figgerin' out what *could* be done to a pig."

"Well, I'd rather have a big, friendly cobra down at station with me."

"It's his eyes, Joe. Them damned eyes of his!"

"Yeah, I know. Same thing with me. But he savvies pigs though, Chuck.

Knows more about 'em than a whole 'V' crew put together."

"Yeah. How to sink 'em, damn him!"

1939: *Mein Kampf*

"WELL, Mr. Wiggin, this comes as a surprise to me. Why, for the first time since the World War our experimental departments are going to have all the money they need."

"Yes, sir. I judged that would be the case, sir."

"And now the War's starting over there . . . What's the matter, Wiggin? Pay?"

"No, sir. You've been very fair to me in the matter of pay."

"A vacation then. Take a vacation, Wiggin. Get some of the pigboat carbon out of your lungs. You've been almost living in them."

"I'm sorry, sir. I'm just—leaving."

"Well, now. Look here, Wiggin. We'll call it a leave of absence, for an indefinite period. Come back when you're good and ready. . . ."

"Sir, I won't be coming back—ever."

*Paul Wiggin: Wraith*

"No such man as Paul Wiggin? You're crazy, Mr. Howard!"

"No, I didn't say that. There *was* a Paul A. Wiggin, marine architect. Both he and his wife were drowned off the Irish coast, spring of '15. British freighter torpedoed."

"Some way or other this man got his passport. The real Paul Wiggin would have been forty-eight, in July. This civilian staff technician is at least seventy years old. That was what first got the F.B.I. interested in his case. No, really I guess it was that peculiar head jerk."

"That bobbing of his head. Yes, that was annoying."

"Worse than annoying. It was a symptom of a pretty serious mental condition. Remember that ear trouble he had?"

"Hospitalized for a month with that."

"Yes. With the aid of artificially applied irritants. We had him under mental observation. He talks to himself, you know. Sometimes in German; *perfect German*. He worked in the English shipyards during the World War. Undoubtedly German sabotage, though his English record—what we could get—gave no indication of this. Very clever."

"What about that head jerk?"

"A tic. That's what the psychology sharks call them. Most of us have them, at times. Small, involuntary muscle twitchings that indicate a mental repression; an impatience to do something that can't be done immediately."

"But with his other symptoms . . . well, frankly, he's a monomaniac. A dangerous one, too. You'll be interested in these rough sketches and notes we found in some of his old papers. Don't know how he could've been so careless."

"This looks like part of a bulkhead gasket."

"Yes. Made out of a toluol base explosive. Nice little thing to have in a sub's emergency door, eh? Here's something else nice, too. Vacuum cup bomb, with automatic timer. Stick it any place on a sub's wall. Oh, he's figured out a fine collection of wrecking tools."

"What's this life jacket drawing?"

"That? Well, we haven't figured that out, yet. It's a German design. But you'll agree the rest of this is enough to justify us in—"

"Arresting him? Certainly. But you'll have to catch him first, Howard. He left us eight days ago."

"Oh oh! Well, don't worry. We'll

pick him up. We got a lead from him on code names of three other German agents: Eric and Karl and Hans. One thing helps untangle another, in our work, you know."

### *England: The Closed Door*

"**N**OW watch the old Yank when I slam it, Bert. Watch 'im! Hit drives 'im fair crazy, havin' a door closed quick behind 'im."

A stubby little man with four bars and a propeller insignia on his soiled jacket closed in on the two oilers, as one of them slammed the bulkhead door. "Now wot goes on 'ere?" he demanded.

The two cockneys turned, to find themselves trapped by authority.

"Lawds, Chief, it ain't nothin' but a little joke, sir. It's old Wiggin, sir. 'e cawn't stand to have a door slammed behind 'im."

The chief swelled up until the purple veining of his nose and cheeks seemed on the point of bursting. "Since when?" he exploded, "has an engine-room been . . .?"

The door, opening violently behind him, sprawled the oiler headfirst into the chief and bowled the officer backward onto metal decking.

For the next ten minutes that portion of the engineroom of the British passenger-freight ship *Northstead* was blue with profanity, gleaned during a lifetime on the sea.

In a way this was fortunate, because it directed attention away from the American, Paul Wiggin. Undoubtedly if the chief had seen him during that first half-minute he would have had him put in irons, pending delivery to the first madhouse ashore. . . .

Paul Wiggin sat on his upper bunk, in the blackgang fo'c'sle, his feet dangling over the side. He was study-

ing an old photograph; studying it with such intensity that Albert Jenkins spoke twice and had to paw his leg to attract attention.

"Thanks, matey, fer sawyin' you was sick. The chief was fair set to put me an' Ross into the clinker."

The American's abstracted stare gave the oiler a queer feeling. "I *was* sick," Wiggin said, finally. His head was jerking again. He knew that he shouldn't be talking this way. "It always makes me sick when a door slams. It frightens me to death . . . I was killed that way."

"You was—!"

Paul Wiggin couldn't stop the words, now that they had started flooding from inside him. "It was in a little white room, with two berths . . . there was an explosion. It jammed the door."

"An' you was killed!"

"No," uncertainly, "not then. They forced me into a boat. Then I died."

"You—oh, so you died, eh? Sure, matey. Sure. Wot's that picture you got there, matey? Sawy, she's a beaut! Your daughter, eh? Maybe your granddaughter."

"No . . . I don't know who she is. Her name's Lydia. It was because of her that I died. . . ."

Paul Wiggin saw that the man was edging away from him. He had noticed them doing that often during these last few weeks. Paul Wiggin knew, somehow, that his time was getting short.

It would have to happen soon if he was ever to get that door open. But he continued talking, mumbling to himself: "They built a big driftwood fire on the beach . . . I couldn't find her. Not any place! So I walked away. And walked and walked, until finally I died. . . ."

"I must open that door!"

WHEN they started zigzagging, and posted two crow-nest lookouts, Paul Wiggin prepared his life jacket. He mustn't give any one a chance to examine it; not even pick it up.

A fifty-pound life jacket would bring comment. People were already looking at him strangely. The man who bunked below him had moved to an extra berth, across the fo'c'sle.

Paul Wiggin knew that the chief engineer was keeping an eye on him. He might be put ashore in England. Then he would never get the door open.

They sighted one submarine. Paul Wiggin was on duty in the boiler room when it happened but he knew about it as well as if he had been on deck and seen it himself. In a modern steamer, engine telegraph signals are relayed to the fireroom to keep steam up with the turbine requirements.

Both relays clanged and swept around to *Full Speed Ahead*.

Oil jets and pressures were opened. The deck shivered beneath the high speed turbines.

*Stop.*

The deck was still. Men with oil-streaked, sweaty faces exchanged glances. They seemed to be counting; measuring time. 'Fish' were aimed for the engineroom; invariably.

The starboard dial swung to *Full Speed Ahead*. A low, combined exclamation sounded above the din of machines. The port dial had jerked to *Full Speed Astern*!

"Pull the gas outta her!"

"Pull and be damned. Keep your eye on that water glass!"

Men clung to stanchions; to anything they could grab, as the deck heeled up with that propeller-wrenched turn.

Then it was *Full Speed Astern*.

"The old man'll back into Liverpool."

*Full Speed Ahead.*

They held that for an hour, then slackened to normal. Men shouted inane jokes; laughing hugely to cover the deadly fear that had been on them.

Paul Wiggin went glumly about his duties. This might happen a dozen times before his chance came. He must be patient. He had been patient for so many, many years!

They unloaded cargo, and a few passengers they carried, in Liverpool. There weren't many passengers from New York to England these days. But the decks were crowded as they steamed north to Glasgow. Most of them were Americans; refugees from the war. They picked up more passengers in the Scottish port.

Information seeped down to the blackgang quarters by way of stewards. Accommodations of the three passenger classes were crowded to the limits. They were even sleeping on cots, in the public rooms.

They left Glasgow in the dead of night. All of the porthole glass was daubed with black paint. No smoking was allowed on decks. Grapevine reported to the blackgang that a new submarine proclamation had been made by the Central-Eastern powers.

A few hours out of Glasgow they changed to a southerly course. Everybody's nerves were on hair-trigger . . .

**P**AUL WIGGIN was off watch, huddled on the additional life rafts forward, when the shot went over their bow. It was aimed so low that its passage made an explosion in the air. The gun that had sent it echoed the explosion some place from the black water ahead of them.

It was the darkest part of the night; just before dawn.

Paul Wiggin hugged his weighty

life jacket. The time had come! He had known that it would, sooner or later, if he could stay on an unconvoyed ship.

Torpedoes cost a small fortune. But more significant, they are bulky, weighty things. A pig, operating far from its base, runs out of them; conserves them at every opportunity.

He felt the forward shifting of his body as the ship's propellers were reversed. Another shot crashed through high deckhousing, aft of the chart-room. It was a heavy gun; six-inch at least.

Paul Wiggin hugged himself again, with rapture. That meant a big pig, big as a U.S. "V" class or larger.

The ship lost the small sternway it had gathered. That second shot, through the radio room, was proof enough that the submarine gunners could see them to shoot accurately. The next shot would puncture the ship below waterline; a delayed, high-explosive, to blow its guts out.

Paul Wiggin listened for the sound of oars.

He was waiting in the shadow when they boarded. He tried to count them, but that was difficult. Perhaps ten men altogether. They were hoisting something onto deck. That would be the explosives for sinking her; the thing he was most interested in.

He heard the captain's expostulations; the guttural English of the submarine officer: there were no munitions about this ship! Perhaps not, but it was an English bottom. It could and would carry munitions. They must desert ship immediately.

When the submarine crew left the merchantman its captain would have just thirty minutes before going to the bottom.

Paul Wiggin followed one group, at

a distance, when they went below with the explosives. He crouched, unseen, back of a rag barrel in the boiler room while the rest of the blackgang filed out.

There was no resistance, no arguments. The ship would be sunk, one way or the other; by gun or blast. They would have a chance in the open boats. The other way there was no chance for them at all.

Two men, one of them a petty officer, remained to set the blast. It was placed against the ship's side, not ten feet from Wiggin's concealment. The others cleared the engineroom.

They didn't bother searching for skulkers nor even drawing the short Lugers strapped to their hips. No sane man would hide himself away in a doomed ship. And resistance would mean suicide.

Paul Wiggin drew his revolver and waited. It was a short-barreled, heavy-caliber gun, with a silencer. It was worn, from endless rounds of target shooting. Wiggin knew that it would hit exactly where he held it and he knew that he could hold it exactly.

They were stretching the blast fuse; measuring it carefully with a steel tape for exact timing.

As he waited, ready to shoot them down in cold blood, his mind checked each item of a chain of events which would follow. Suddenly his mind caught at the one fatal defect in his plans. It was so obvious that it seemed impossible he could have ignored it!

Wiggin pushed his gun back into its spring shoulder holster. He had failed! After working and scheming for so many years he had overlooked one small, but very important item. *He could not attack two of the submarine party at once.*

He could shoot both of them from

his hiding place. Yes, very easily. The condenser pump noise would hide the lesser noise of his silenced gun.

But that would defeat his own purpose. No boarding party leaves a ship in order without making a quick roll-call, or at least a count-off. With one man absent, a search would be started.

The officer spoke: "*Noch sieben Minuten!*"

Seven minutes until the blast was set! Wiggin's head was jerking, violently. He knew that when those two men left the boiler room he would go insane. The door in his mind would remain closed . . . forever.

"There are many passengers aboard, sir. It is a sad necessity."

The officer swore. "Americans. The treacherous swine stab our leader in the back. You are ready?"

"It is ready, sir."

"Very well. When you hear my whistle from above, you will light the fuse."

WIGGIN'S head stopped jerking. Of course. That seven minutes was the time remaining for them to have that blast *ready* to light. There might be unexpected complications in getting the ship's papers, in rifling the purser's vault. When that was done the signal would be given; the fuse lit.

He drew his gun. After all, everything was working out according to plan.

Time might be short. He must act immediately, for it would take him a little while to get into this man's clothes. He measured the other coldly with his glance. The dungaree uniform would be a little large for him, across the shoulders. He lowered steady sights, centered on the man's head.

"It is a sad thing," the other said, under his breath. His voice barely

reached the American. He was crouched over the split fuse end, a handful of matches lying ready on deck. "Perhaps many of them will die in the small boats. Perhaps all of them . . ."

Wiggin's gun wavered; lowered. He couldn't shoot this man down in cold blood. Unwittingly the German had saved his own life; had pleaded his own case before the judgment of that hidden gun.

Stealthily Wiggin moved from behind the rag barrel. He leaped, the gun swinging downward, onto the German's head. . . .

The American paused occasionally in dressing. He had felt the German's pulse. He was alive; very much alive.

He compared his own life jacket with the German's. He had copied it from photographs in naval files. The two were almost identical.

He read the man's identification tag over and over, memorizing all of it, repeating his new name, aloud: "Alfred Kruntz . . . Alfred Kruntz . . ."

He bent and cut the fuse, where it entered the sacked explosive, concealing the cut end. He was ready.

A whistle shrilled from above. Wiggin stepped to the boiler room door. "Ja! Ja!" he shouted. He came back and struck a match to the useless fuse and held it until the tiny powder train jetted.

He dragged the German's unconscious body and locked it in the caged machine shop. He mounted the narrow metal stairway from the engine-room, his face eager. He would soon have the door opened.

THE submarine's deck was lined with crew, who helped get the boat up and collapsed and stowed. They were all smoking, sucking it deep into their lungs to store the remembrance of it

for the underwater hours ahead of them.

Dawn was graying the choppy water. Here, close to the surface, the wind was chill and wet with wave spume.

The *Northstead* loomed in the gray threat of the sea like a huge ghost ship. Small boats dotted the water between them and the ship. There would be the same swarm of boats and rafts on the other side, getting distance between themselves and the doomed ship.

Leagues of open, windswept ocean separated them from the nearest land. Gunwales were low in the water, so that the boats shipped waves at times and had to be bailed constantly.

Women, shivering in their drenched clothes, sat quietly on the thwarts. Some of them had babies, holding them close, trying to keep warmth in their bodies.

This was war. Not the old, barbaric kind of warfare; it was civilized war.

The commander steadied his night binocle on a fog bank to the east. It was very near. There was the chance that at any moment a destroyer might come charging out of that screen. There was that risk. They must wait until the blast fired, but they would stand by with hatches closed, prepared for crash dive.

"To stations!"

Alfred Kruntz moved toward the forward hatch with a group of men. He knew his station. It was sewn on the tab on his uniform. The after battery room. It was one of the last places he would have deliberately chosen.

But he was prepared for that, or for the galley, even; for any station on a submarine. That was the purpose of his life jacket.

It was dimly lighted below. Bright lights make a greater pull on the batteries and that, in turn, is a drain on

Diesel fuel—fuel that must be replenished by horribly deep dives to reach a blockaded base.

Alfred Kruntz found his surroundings familiar, though he had never been in a German pig, nor in any underwater boat as large as this one. He saw, without a flicker of surprise, the folding wings and pontoon of a tiny seaplane, resting beneath a hinged davit hoist. That was exactly where it would have to be.

A submarine is one of the most compact, intricate machines that mankind has ever attempted. Its basic design and principle of operation are necessarily universal, granting the same means of power, the same weight and strength of materials. Its weight displacement, its location and stowage of important functions would be the same whether built on earth or on Mars.

He loitered as much as he could, until he was the last man in the line moving aft. He was in the battery room, now. The others, all but one, continued onward through another bulkhead door. They were the engineroom crew. Their door thumped closed against the gaskets.

All submarine compartment doors are closed and secured on a dive standby. How well Alfred Kruntz knew this! How many, many times he had gone through these same movements! Then, he had been Paul Wiggin.

The other man in the battery room growled a surly order. The nerves of Alfred Kruntz were tuned to the breaking point, alert to catch the significance of anything and everything. The other man was his superior in rank. That was apparent.

He obeyed the order, swinging the forward door. It was dogged four ways, with a centerscrew tightening everything. He put his weight on the

screw wheel. The door moved tightly against the gaskets.

"*Verdammtter Esel!*" his companion snarled. "You move as one who is dreaming, you chicken-hearted poet." He stepped to the wall telephone, to report to control. "Stern battery room ready, sir."

ALFRED KRUNTZ waited until the man's finger moved from the transmitter button. For the second time that day his gun arm whipped downward and struck. He caught the limp man and with the same movement shoved his body to one side.

He bent, jerking floor plates. Under his feet were the batteries; endless banks of them.

He moved in a fury of activity. His time was so short! They would allow perhaps ten, fifteen minutes after the blast was due to go off, before the heavy deck gun would start pounding the merchant ship.

The passengers, out there on rafts and pitching small boats? Alfred Kruntz gave them scarcely a thought. He must get the door open . . . he must open the door!

His eyes checked wall valves. That one, with the coiled small hose, was to bring distilled water for the batteries. Submerged, and with plenty of time, it might serve his purpose. With deck awash it was useless.

He darted toward a blanked valve, thrust a finger into its brass throat; tasted the finger. Salt.

His mind saw the chemical formula, as if it were written in burning chalk on a blackboard. Salt water and sulphuric acid. Salt water from the ocean; sulphuric acid in the huge storage batteries: *chlorine gas*.

He wrenched the valve open, stepped aside as water shot across the room.

How long would it take before the level reached battery ports?

His trained, marine-engineer's mind estimated the width and curvature of the compartment. At the same time he moved to the forward bulkhead door, took horizontal and vertical measurements with handspans, to locate the center, tightening screw.

He measured the same distances off on the blank face of the engineroom door and marked the spot.

From his life jacket he took a metal sphere with a timing snout on one side and a vacuum cup on the other. He squeezed it tight on the marked spot, not pulling the safety pin.

He moved to the forward door. He could open that with a few turns of the wheel. But it must remain open! From a pocket of the life jacket he took a copper cube. He pressed it in carefully against the center hinge arms. Fulminate of mercury is such a delicate, powerful explosive!

He sniffed the air, then glanced downward. Thin, gray gas was seeping up through the deck openings. There was a low sound, like the humming of myriad insects. That deadly chemical formula was in operation.

It hugged the floor; rose quickly to his ankles, to his knees. He took a small, oil-silk face mask from his jacket; snapped the elastic bands around his head. He ran his tongue over the impregnated mouth pad. He snapped the spring clip over his nose. One breath of that concentrated gas would drop a man like a rifle bullet.

Alfred Kruntz waited until the gas level had reached his chin. He stepped over then and pulled the safety pin on the bomb that held by vacuum on the engineroom door.

He waited, gun in hand, his head steady as a rock now; his strange eyes

blazing with feverish excitement.

His body quivered under the blast.

Gas flowed into the engineroom; a rolling movement of horror.

*"Du lieber Gott!"*

A man leaped for the wall telephone. Alfred Kruntz dropped him, with a single shot, and whirled toward the forward door. His time was short. Not even a canister gas mask could protect against such an awful concentration of the fumes.

He wrenched the door open, swung it hard against the small fulminate of mercury bomb, planted in the hinge.

He paused for an instant in the deserted officers' quarters; heard the sharp crack of explosive, saw the door sag. He waited longer, while the gas flooded toward him with horrible, reaching fingers. He placed another copper-shelled cube, jerked another door. . . .

The gas pursued him through the boat, like some awful monster of another world, hungering for life.

*"Donnerwetter nochmal!"*

He was in the control room, crowded with men. At the commander's shout they turned from instruments, dials, switches, levers. The officer jerked his pistol. Alfred Kruntz had reached the next door in the interval of stunned surprise. He had the patent dogs loose. His arms went numb.

Dimly he heard two sharp cracks of the gun. A white-hot rod of pain stabbed through his chest. The door was open. He was through it. His mask was clogged, so that he couldn't breathe. He jerked it from his face and saw the red blood he had coughed.

HE WAS in the forward battery room, tugging at the door. He sagged weakly. He was dying again. The door was still closed! *The door.*

He pitched forward into the torpedo room.

"*Gott in Himmel . . . wie geht's?*"  
What is it? What is happening?"

"Abandon ship. The commander orders—abandon ship!"

He was alone, flattened on the deck, tramped by stampeding feet. A pool of blood formed beneath his mouth; spread.

The inner torpedo ports were ahead of him. The bow of the submarine . . . *the door.*

Slowly, he pulled himself erect, arms looped weakly over the great cylindrical barrel of a racked torpedo; a torpedo too precious to spare in sinking the merchantman. Too precious to use for the killing of two thousand men and women and children.

Vivid, orange stripes of paint radiated from the nose of it. It would be a warhead torpedo, of course. That nose was solid with high explosive.

He was dead, already. But even in death he must get that door open.

He was leaning against the warhead, fumbling in the life jacket. Another vacuum-cupped bomb. He was too weak to push it against the smooth, curved metal of the torpedo; to exhaust air from the vacuum cup. No matter. He could hold it in place.

He pulled the pin. Two minutes while fire ate along the spiraled powder train; reached the detonator. Two minutes. He was already dead.

He leaned back, whipping his body with a last, desperate spark of will power, holding the bomb against that torpedo warhead, facing the torpedo tube bulkhead: the bow of the submarine.

\*

. . . Suddenly he was back in the

white, clean cabin of a ship. There was a faint trace of perfume in the air. The perfume he had purchased for her when they were in Paris.

The life jackets! He must get them and get back on the foredeck, where she was waiting for him. Not that the submarine would really torpedo a passenger ship. That was unthinkable; English propaganda. This was 1915. People were civilized now.

*The door! It's jammed! Lydia . . . my wife! I am coming, Lydia. . . !*

Two minutes. The powder train flared into its detonator . . .

\*

. . . *FLASH.* Regarding the NORTH-STEAD incident . . . only one life was lost. A member of the engineroom crew; name not yet verified.

The blast planted below decks, which almost certainly would have meant the death of nearly two thousand persons, was averted by some unexplained flaw in the time fuse. A member of the crew discovered this, after they had all stood by two hours in the life boats.

The explosion, that opened the entire bow of the German submarine, plummeting it in a final death dive, will probably always remain one of those unexplained mysteries of the sea. . . . Wait a moment . . . the name of the lost man was Paul A. Wiggin, according to passport found in his belongings. Though feeble-minded, according to his officers and members of the crew, the man was considered harmless . . . perfectly harmless.

The ship has not been thoroughly searched. He may yet be found alive. . . .

And now, folks, we'll have a snappy, zippy, foot-tempting little piece of music from . . ."



# Dr. Kildare Goes Home

By MAX BRAND



"Stand up, Dr. Kildare!"—Jimmy sat stunned, until Davison and Whalen boosted him violently to his feet

**D**R. JIMMY KILDARE, assistant to the great diagnostician, DR. LEONARD GILLESPIE, is taking a brief leave of absence to form a clinic in the doctorless town of Medwick. But:

The men he persuaded to go with him—DOCTORS MARTIN "MIDGE" WHALEN, BEN CONNOR, SIDNEY GARFIELD, SAMMY DARNELL, and JACK DAVISON—are discouraged and ready to quit because of general opposition to their methods of disease prevention. Fly in the ointment is

GEOFFREY WINSLOW, town banker and leading citizen, who alone can persuade the townspeople to contribute to the support of the clinic. With the sinking of the town into obscurity, he has become more irascible; and now, impatient with the methods of the young doctors, he is about to let them down. And this would be tragedy—

For JOAN DAVISON, Dr. Jack's wife, is soon to become a mother; poverty and worry have already made serious inroads on her

health, and it is doubtful that she can survive more discouragement. Jack Davison is frantic; and the other young doctors, utterly without funds, are turning against Jimmy Kildare.

**H**E HAS other problem: NURSE MARY LAMONT, who is devoted to him but who feels that, because of his absorption in other things, they will never be happy together.

WILLIAM CAREW, son of the hospital superintendent, and his sweetheart, MARGUERITE PASTON, who have resolved to die because DR. CAREW will not consent to their marriage. Only young Kildare can save them.

Old DR. STEPHEN KILDARE, Jimmy's father, who has worked himself to exhaustion trying to heal the sick in Medwick.

Jimmy has complicated matters by telling

The first installment of this four-part serial, herein concluded, was published in the Argosy for June 1

Geoffrey Winslow that he is a victim of pernicious anemia, will die before the following Monday. He has called at Winslow's home; insisted on doing what he could for the banker. But Jimmy's colleagues have little faith in him, and he thinks they may be right.

NOW, having given his father a sedative to induce much-needed sleep, he watches the old doctor through the long night. He has just learned from his mother that Mary Lamont visited at his family home in Dartford, and there met BEATRICE RAYMOND, the sweetheart of his early days.

He has a note that Mary left for him here, at the Lancey house in Medwick, warning him that William Carew and Marguerite Paston are going to their death. But that which tortures him most through the night is Mary's sentence:

*I wonder if there's anything important—really important—between us. . . .*

## CHAPTER XV

STAND UP, KILDARE!

THERE are two entrances to the town hall at Medwick. One is at the ground level and through it the townsfolk alone may pass. In more than a hundred years, it is said, no one except the men of Medwick have set foot upon that floor. None except the men of Medwick have sat on the speakers' platform at the end of the hall.

The second entrance gives upon a narrow stairway which leads up to a visitors' gallery where strangers as well as the women and children of the town may gather. On important occasions, even this gallery is cleared, and the minds of Medwick meditate their own affairs strictly by themselves.

In this gallery, today, sat Kildare with his five doctors like a small island surrounded by the females of Medwick. He and his men were so unpopular that a little open space was left around them on the ranged seats.

Since Kildare was in the front row of this balcony, he was plainly visible

to all except those who remained standing directly under the gallery itself; and everyone, now and then, looked back and up at the strangers and many smiles and chuckles were exchanged until the presiding officer entered.

This was Winslow—Geoffrey Winslow, leading citizen and town banker—who appeared with a heavy suitcase in his hand and walked up the central aisle with a brisk step. His manner and bearing were so full of vigor that people stood up to stare at him.

And then the heads were sure to turn and leer at Kildare in the balcony; for the Monday prophecy was known to every person in the town.

Winslow climbed the steps to the speakers' platform, deposited and opened his suitcase, which seemed to be filled with papers, and then stood over against the small Franklin stove which warmed that end of the hall. Its grate was open and showed a mouth filled with yellow fire.

Winslow approached the stove and extended his hands toward the heat of it; at the same moment the whole audience rose, instinctively, and broke into a hearty applause of cheers and hand-clapping. This noise Winslow acknowledged by turning his stern head and nodding briefly at the crowd.

After this he lifted his hand, secured instant silence, and then stepped to the lectern which stood toward the edge of the platform.

"My friends," he said, "we will come to order. I am glad to be with you. I hope it will not be the last time in spite of what has been said about next Monday."

A good, hearty booing followed this remark, though there was not a sign of a smile on the face of Winslow.

He rapped for order and said: "Will someone move to dispense with the

reading of the minutes of the last meeting?"

This was done. The men of Medwick sat back and waited for their leader. Still many an ominous or sneering glance was turned up toward Kildare, in that prominent first row of the balcony.

Winslow went on in a brisk, sharp way that was characteristic of him: "Since the thought of death was forced upon me, it caused me to think over what I should do in my last days."

More laughter interrupted him here, and he had to whack his gavel down to gain silence once more. The women near Kildare were staring at him as if he were a strange animal.

"It occurred to me," continued Winslow, "that although I've spent my life in our town and tried to be a just man, still a great many people would be relieved when I died."

There was a tumult of many voices that called out: "That's not true! . . . That's not a fact, Mr. Winslow . . . We can't listen to this sort of thing . . ."

"Nevertheless," said Winslow, "it is true. No man can enjoy being in debt, and too large a percentage of Medwick owes me money."

This remark secured a very deep silence indeed.

**T**HE fact is," said Winslow, "that as I meditated on the thought of death, I discovered that I did not mind dying so much as I minded having people happy because of that death; and this put me to thinking out my affairs in quite a different way.

"I'd never looked at the business of the world so clearly as when I seemed about to leave it. For the first time, it was clear to me that enough money to house and clothe and feed a man should also be enough to content him;

it gives him a free mind, and that freedom is what we ought to pursue and envy and aspire toward.

"I remembered, then, that I have enough invested capital left to take care of me and my family even without the debts which are owed to me in the town. So I decided that when I came here today, I would tell you people of Medwick that you helped me to build up my little fortune, and that it is only right that part of it should go back to you.

"I have here in this suitcase the only records of money owing to me from the people of Medwick; and I now blot out those records."

With this, he picked up a double handful of the papers in the suitcase and thrust them into the mouth of the Franklin stove.

The great heat and the opened draft caused the dry paper to go up in roaring flame at once, so that Winslow was able to dip out one mass after another of the bills until his suitcase was emptied except for a small sheaf of papers which he reserved in his hand.

The second or the third portion of the bills had gone up in flames before the bewildered people of Medwick understood exactly what was happening. A woman in the balcony cupped her hands at her mouth and yelled through this trumpet: "Mark! Mark! Oh, Mark Williams! There's our barn and cow come back to us! Oh, Mark Williams! Oh, Mark!"

There was no laughter to greet this outburst. Single voices and then a whole chorus broke out. Men stood up on the floor of the hall and waved frantically to their wives in the balcony; and the wives nodded and waved back in an ecstasy. Many of them burst into loud weeping.

Long after Winslow had finished this

sacrifice, the tumult still continued. Several men ran out of the meeting house to carry the great tidings to their families. More would have gone, except that the sergeant-at-arms barred the door and stood guard over it.

"What is it, Jimmy?" asked Davison, close to his friend. "Has the old boy gone out of his head?"

"I don't know," said Kildare. "I've never seen anything like it."

"Sounds like he had religion."

"He's had religion all his life," said Kildare. "I can't make this out."

The sight of Winslow standing erect at the lectern with the small sheaf of papers remaining in his hand gradually brought the audience back to attention. When, by degrees, the uproar had died out, Winslow was saying:

"I excepted a few of the debts from the crowd. Because I think that there are some of you who can well afford to pay a part of your debts, at least."

"The fact is that I have a purpose of raising a new building in Medwick. It is something which we have needed bitterly for a long time, and I propose that we shall make a united effort to that end."

"To begin with, I want to know whether either Mr. Reed or Mr. Minter, of the building firm of Reed and Minter, may be here."

"Here sir"—"Here, Mr. Winslow," said two men, standing up.

"If I cross out half of your debt, my friends," said Winslow, "and let you turn in the rest in the shape of bricks and cement, do you think it will be fair?"

"More than fair, sir," said Minter. "We haven't a right—"

"Nobody has a right but Medwick; nobody has a real claim on any one of his fellow townsmen," said Winslow. "What we are, the town has made us."

And now that Medwick is weakening, we are going to rally to her support, are we not?"

THERE was another great shouting at this; but people waited in excitement to learn the full purpose of Winslow, and the shouting died down almost at once.

"I want other help," said Winslow. "Mr. Brace, are you here? Oliver Brace?"

A fat man arose, helping himself up on the back of the chair in front of him.

"Kind of winded, Mr. Winslow, but still mostly here," said Brace.

"We want a slate roof on this building," said Winslow. "Your debt is canceled if you'll put it on for me."

"Why, God bless you," said Brace, "I'm the happiest man in Medwick, even if I have to cover a roof from here to the river!"

"What's the building to be, Mr. Winslow? What's the building to be?" voices began to call.

Winslow crumpled the rest of the bills in his hand and tossed them into the open mouth of the stove, now filled with charred mass of friable carbon.

"There's no use in making bargains," he said, "because I know that we're standing together in this work, shoulder to shoulder, and shame will make the men work, whether they love Medwick or not. Now, I want to tell you what the new building is to be, the thing which we most seriously need. It's to be a hospital, my friends, to take care—"

A shout broke in upon him. Instant silence followed.

"We are going to take care of our young and our old," said Winslow. "We've been careless and slack too long. We've been too proud of our town and its merits. But now we're going to take

care of Medwick and of all the people in it.

"We're not going to use our own prejudiced opinions but we're going to use opinions of professionally educated men, who know what they're talking about. When they tell us that Medwick is up to standard, we'll relax a little.

"Until that time we're going to keep working, in the knowledge that hard times cannot last forever, and that if we make Medwick fit for better things, better things will come to her."

He paused and took a visible long breath. There was at each pause the excited shout and then silence.

"For doctors," said Winslow, "we want the best that we can find, that is to say, the best we can find at a price we can afford to pay. Five dollars a head is enough to insure a minimum of good medical service. I'm asking someone to propose that the town be taxed ten cents a head a week. Do I hear such a motion?"

It was made and passed in a moment, a very loud moment of roaring responses.

"Now I must tell you," said Winslow, "what gave me my second chance at life, what brought me here to cancel the debts that have been burdening you, and what makes me ask you to work with me shoulder to shoulder in giving to our town a proper medical service.

"My friends, I sat in my house slowly dying, yesterday, and I had given up all hope of life when a man came to me whom I had blocked, cheated, and made small of; and yet his only crime against all of us is youth.

"He risked his own career to help us. He insisted on doing us good when we refused him. And in spite of my insults and my contempt he forced me to listen to him yesterday evening; he forced his treatment on me; he gave

me back life as if by a miracle. . . . Stand up Doctor Kildare!"

AT THIS sudden appeal, Kildare sat stunned; but Davison on one side and Whalen on the other boosted him violently to his feet.

This stroke of the spotlight full upon him made Kildare hang his head like a backward child being reproved by a school teacher; but this awkwardness was something which the men and women of Medwick were able to understand perfectly. Modesty is the most charming of all virtues to Americans.

The voice of Winslow, higher and more dominant than ever, went on: "This man brought to us his associates, chosen young doctors full of energy, too honest to flatter us, insisting on telling us the truth.

"We called it witchcraft, but it was only honest science which is more interested in preventing than in curing disease. We laughed at these brave and generous young men; we have kept on laughing at them; but since my life has been given back to me, I'm asking you to let them help you as they've helped me.

"They are the staff for our hospital. My friends, do you accept them?"

Nothing could have bewildered the people of Medwick more than this sudden transition of villain into hero.

But they were too accustomed to the third acts of melodramas to be entirely surprised by it; and in fact Winslow had so staged the speech that it was very like a stage effect that he offered now to his townsmen.

They were already on their feet both in the gallery and on the floor of the meeting house. A murmur that began to rise among them now broke out in heartier applause than ever greeted the fall of a third act curtain when the

heroine is saved, the villain foiled, and the hero triumphant.

Davison, as the uproar grew, began to laugh hysterically. When at last they reached the street, a tide of smiling faces and happy tumult accompanied them even to the door of the Lancey house.

The noise brought Joan Davison's frightened face to an upstairs window; and only by degrees the full, happy comprehension dawned on her.

She hurried as fast as she could downstairs where the corps of young doctors was coming into the hall, slapping each other on the shoulders, and laughing like children.

Only Kildare was as grave as a face of stone among them. The girl pushed by her husband without a glance and went straight toward the interne.

## CHAPTER XVI

### LOST LADY

IT WAS early afternoon of the day, when Kildare got back to the hospital and reported at his office.

"What are you doing in street clothes?" demanded Gillespie. "Climb into your working togs and get up to Operating Room Number 7. There's a beautiful double mastoid about to go on there, and I want you to see it. . .

"But you had some luck out there in Medwick, didn't you?"

"Luck?" said Kildare, a little bewildered.

"Why, certainly," growled Gillespie. "You find your villain out there with pernicious anemia, and a big injection of liver extract turns him into a different man over night. Is that luck, or not?"

"How do you keep in touch with everything as closely as that?" asked Kildare.

"I'll tell you how," said Gillespie. "It's a rare gift, and I'll tell you about it. As a matter of fact, it's something that only God can give you. Do you know what it is?"

"No sir," said Kildare.

"I'll tell you, then. God gave me two eyes, two ears, and a damned long nose—and I use God's gifts. That's all there is to it. . . . Now get up to that operating room."

"There's one more thing that I ought to do, sir."

"Stand on your head, or what?"

"Dr. Carew wishes me to—"

"If Carew wants you, that's enough for me. Run along about his business and then get back here as fast as the Lord will let you. We've lost days, Jimmy. We've lost whole days, and time is the only thing that can't be bought and paid for!"

He went on into the other office in time to see Mary Lamont coming through the opposite door, wearing street clothes. The sight of him stopped her. Something rose in the heart of Kildare and almost reached his lips in a rush of words. He choked it back.

"Molly Cavendish said that you needed me for some emergency work?" she asked, distant and strangely judicial.

"Did you have to come a long way?" he wanted to know.

"It's all right, if there's really an emergency," she said.

"I knew they'd do something to us," said Kildare, watching her.

"Do something? Who?"

"Young Carew and the girl. Whoever is wrong, you and I know that they're right. I suppose there's only one way of being right. Is that it, Mary?"

She was silent, either because she did not wish to hurt him or because her mind was not entirely sure.

Kildare interpreted himself. "They

can't live without each other. But I can live without you and you without me. That means we're wrong?"

She was silent still.

"It's queer," said Kildare. "I can see through other people, sometimes, but I never can see through you. I can't tell what's in your mind, now. I haven't the foggiest idea."

"I don't think talking does much good," she said. "We know each other's ideas too well."

"I can see something now," said Kildare. "You're trying to be insouciant, but all the while you're a bit frightened. Isn't that true?"

"Yes," she said.

"Well, I'll say nothing more to frighten you. I want you to help me find Marguerite and young Carew. How well did you get to know her when you called?"

"I couldn't get to know her very well. She doesn't live in my world, Jimmy."

"She won't die in our world, either," said Kildare. "No matter what the newspapers may think, I want to go to her room now. Will you go along?"

"Jimmy—"

"Yes?"

"I'm afraid of it."

"Why?"

"I suppose you'll run them down. There's a sort of bloodhound in you that never misses a trail. But you won't find them living, Jimmy. I know you won't, and I'm afraid of it! Please don't make me!"

"I can't make you do anything," said Kildare. "We'll just drop all this."

"No, I'll come."

"You look sick."

"I *am* sick."

"Then you stay out of this, Mary."

"No. Nothing could keep me out of it, now. I'll be all right. I just had to say it, I suppose."

"Will I ever understand you?" asked Kildare.

"I don't think so," said Mary.

THE janitor of the tenement house knew Kildare. That was why they got the key so readily to the room of Marguerite Paston. The janitor said: "Why you wanta get into her room, Doc?"

"You don't want to know that," said Kildare.

"All right," said the janitor, "I didn't even ask."

He went up the stairs before them and opened a door.

"Do I hang around and keep my eyes open?" asked the janitor.

"No, you go away and keep your eyes shut."

"Okay," said the janitor. "Drop in and see Dick Loring on the third floor, some time, will you? He's kind of red and swole up. Maybe from the gin, or something."

"He makes his own, doesn't he?"

"Yeah; what do you think?"

"I'll drop in on him, some day," said Kildare.

"Thanks," said the janitor. "It don't do no good to a house to have the mugs croak in it. It gives people ideas, I dunno why."

Then they were alone in the room. It had a steam radiator, a narrow chest of drawers, an iron bed, two chairs, an oblong of matting beside the bed.

Kildare stood in the middle of the floor and looked around him. Down in the street a newsboy was sing-songing an extra, his voice like the crow of a rooster.

"Look in the closet," said Kildare, and went over to the bureau.

"There's an old hat and an umbrella in here. That's all," said Mary Lamont.

"There's a lot of lingerie in the

bureau, still," said Kildare. "Handkerchiefs, too, and all that sort of thing. . . . Are there any shoes in the closet?"

"Yes. I didn't see them before."

"She didn't try to move out everything."

"No, only what she'd need before—"

"Don't get soft, now. Remember you're a trained nurse."

"I won't get soft," said Mary Lamont, taking a quick breath.

Kildare pulled a small snapshot from the back of a drawer, where it had slipped into a crack. It was a good likeness of the heads of young Carew and the girl, close together.

He stood back with the picture in his hand; into his absent mind the crowing voice of the newsboy kept entering.

"I've got to get something out of this," said Kildare.

"How can you?" asked Mary Lamont.

"I don't know. We've got almost no cards, here, so I've got to play this one big."

"You can't buy a dollar's worth with a nickel, can you, Jimmy?"

"Sometimes," said Kildare.

He sat down and stared at the picture.

"I'm the one who did it to them."

"Jimmy! No, no!" she cried.

"I did it to them," said Kildare. "I could have made Carew understand before they went back to him. But I took it for granted. If I ever take anything for granted again . . ."

"Jimmy, it isn't right for you to suffer like this. Nobody could say that it's your fault."

"Everything is your fault, it you could have prevented it."

"That sort of thinking will drive you crazy."

"That's the way I'm going to keep on thinking, though."

"You stay here and keep on looking," he commanded, going to the door.

"Jimmy?"

"Well?"

"I don't want to be alone in this room. I can't breathe in it."

"You stay here and make yourself like it. I'll leave the door open. I've never seen you act up like this before."

"I won't act up any more," she agreed.

**H**E WENT down to the street and said to the newsboy who was still crowing: "Seen Red?"

"Sure, Doc," said the newsboy. "I seen him go into Slater's for a hot-dog. Red eats about twenty hot-dogs a day."

The scrawny figure of Red was perched on a stool at the lunch counter of Slater's munching a hot-dog that dripped yellow mustard.

"You like that much mustard?" asked Kildare.

"Hi, Doc! Sit down and have one on me, will you?" demanded Red, leaping up.

"No, I won't have anything. Take it easy. Like that much mustard?"

"No," said Red, "but it's free."

"How was Christmas?"

"Lousy," said Red.

"Why?"

"I've grown up out of tin. Tin junk don't make no Christmas for me, no more. And the kind of Santa Claus we got in our place don't carry nothing else. Not on twenty a week he don't."

"Look at this picture," said Kildare.

"Yeah?"

"Ever see them around here?"

"Nope. . . . She's got a kind of a look, ain't she? Moving picture star or something?"

"No, Red, take another think. What's the worst thing that you see on the street?"

"A run-over cat. They kind of squash out."

"What's the next worst?"

"I dunno, Doc. The spoony loonies, maybe?"

"The couples that go strolling around?"

"Yeah, or sitting. They got a kind of a gone look like they been hit on the head. Walking or sitting, they dunno where they are."

"Look at these people again. Remember them now, walking together?"

"Doggone me if I don't, now. Walking close together, dead slow. They were different."

"How different?"

"They didn't lean on each other. They acted like they had two pair of feet. They didn't keep grinning at each other, either. They looked straight ahead, as if they were going somewhere and there wasn't no hurry. Are they a pair of dopes, too, like the rest of them?"

"The worst dopes you ever saw," said Kildare.

"You wouldn't think it," said Red.

"I'm hunting for them, Red. Help me?"

"Whatta you think?"

"All right. Scram. Here's a dollar for expenses."

"I don't have no expenses, when I'm working for you."

"Get some of the other boys to help out. It may be a long trail, Red."

"I'll get my gang," said Red.

"And don't stop because your feet get tired."

"My feet don't get that way."

"Take this fifty cents, anyway. When you and the boys get thirsty, I mean."

"It don't look like real money to me," said Red.

"All right, Red. When you come back, you'll find me at Mike's."

"They don't leave me come in there no more," said Red.

"They'll let you come in if you ask for me."

"Sure they will," said Red. "So long, Doc."

KILDARE went back to the room of Marguerite Paston. He found Mary Lamont highly excited and a little frightened still.

"A girl went into the door across the hall," she said. "She was wearing a coat like Marguerite's."

"Did you speak to her?"

"Oh, no!"

"Listen to me, Mary. People in places like this don't bite if you speak to them."

"I don't mind them—when they're in the hospital," said Mary.

"You'll get over minding them outside the hospital, too," said Kildare, "or else you'll never amount to a damn."

He turned back as he reached the door.

"You've got tears in your eyes," he said. "Did I hurt your feelings?"

"No," she said.

"Why the tears, then?"

"I'm catching a bit of a cold, I think."

He turned slowly and went on across the hall. When he knocked at the door a voice sang out: "Hey—come in!"

He opened the door. The girl lay on the bed with her knees hunched up. Her face was obscured by the comic section she was reading.

"Jeez, you're getting polite, Barney," she said. "Knocking at the door and everything. Take the weight off your feet."

Kildare sat down. He lighted a cigarette.

"Gimme one, too," said the voice from behind the paper. "Bring any beer?"

"No," said Kildare.

She lowered the paper, slowly. She eyed Kildare thoughtfully. She was very thin and very pretty. Careless use of the lipstick made her mouth seem clumsy and wet.

"What's the gag?" she asked.

Kildare pointed to the red-checked coat that lay across a chair.

"Did she give it to you or did you borrow it?" he asked.

The girl said nothing. She kept on surveying him, without altering her position.

Kildare offered her a cigarette. She took it. He gave it a light and tossed the match away. He sat down again.

"Loan or gift?" asked Kildare.

"What are you talking about, bozo?" she asked.

"The girl across the hall," said Kildare.

"I dunno any girl across the hall," she said.

"She knew you."

"Yeah? A lot of people know me, not including you."

"She used to talk about you."

"Did she?"

"Yes."

"That was a waste of time."

"She didn't think so."

"This one across the hall, what did she have to say about me?"

"She said that you weren't too hard to break."

"How break?"

"Break down."

"Maybe you think so."

"When I saw you in her coat, I thought you might talk to me about her, a little."

"I dunno who you mean," said the girl. "Where are you going?"

"Across town a ways."

"Why don't you go there, then?"

"Mary!" called Kildare.

Mary Lamont came to the open door.

"Hey, what is this, anyway?" asked the girl.

"Close the door," said Kildare. Mary came in and shut it behind her.

"How do you do?" said Mary.

"I don't do so bad," said the girl.

"What are you birds after, anyway?"

"What's your name?" asked Kildare.

"Sadie."

"SADIE never saw Marguerite," said Kildare. "She never borrowed or took the coat. She doesn't know anything."

"Are you a female dick, Mary?" asked Sadie.

"No. I'm a nurse in the hospital. This is Dr. Kildare, Sadie."

"So what?"

"I thought you might have heard of him," said Mary. She smiled. Sadie did not smile back.

"As long as you're here, you might as well sit down," said Sadie.

"No. I don't want to bother you. . . . We're not here to make any trouble."

"Not much. You're here just for fun, aren't you?" asked Sadie.

"No, we came here to ask you about Marguerite's trip," said Kildare.

"I don't know nothing about any trip," declared Sadie.

"I wondered how long you thought it would last," said Kildare. "Or do you think that she'll ever come back?"

"From where?" asked Sadie.

"Does she intend to die?" asked Kildare, gently.

"How would I know that about whom?" cried Sadie. She jumped up and hooked a thumb at the door. "Barge out of here, you mugs, will you? How would I know about anybody dying?"

"Shall I tell you?" asked Kildare.

"Yeah? What could you tell me?"

"Will you go back to Marguerite's

room for a moment?" asked Kildare.

Mary Lamont went out, quietly.

"It don't matter whether we're alone or not," said Sadie. "I don't want you to hold my hand, Flat-face. But go on and tell me what I would know about anybody going and dying?"

"Because you've thought of it for yourself, Sadie, haven't you?" he asked.

The answer remained on her parted lips, unspoken.

He went on: "So even though Marguerite didn't say anything to you, you knew what she had in mind, didn't you?"

Sadie took breath.

"Did she go and do it, poor kid?" she whispered.

"I don't know," said Kildare. "I'm trying to find her, Sadie. Will you help me with anything you know?"

"Who *are* you?" demanded Sadie.

"I'm nobody," said Kildare. "I'm only an interne in the hospital."

"Wait a minute," said Sadie. "Are you, maybe, the Doc?"

"Some of the people call me that," said Kildare.

"Sure, you're the Doc," said Sadie. She went over to Kildare and faced him closely. "Why be dumb?" she asked. "Why not tell me from the start? Sure you're the Doc. You talk the way they say you do. You don't want anything except to help her, do you?"

"That's all," said Kildare.

"Gimme another cigarette," said Sadie. "I wish I had a drink, too. I need one, when I think about that poor gal. My God, Doc, she's the only one that's like herself."

"I think she is," said Kildare.

"ALL I know is this," said Sadie, "I met up with her a coupla three times in the hall and she smiled at me. She's friendly, that's what she is.

"Then we started talking a couple times. She found out that I didn't have any extra heavy coats, so she slipped me this for Christmas.

"It's a funny thing. Bar none, it's the first thing that any *woman* ever gave me.

"And then the other day she gave me this and asked me to mail it not later than today—this is Thursday, isn't it? To be sure and mail it not before today, and not any later."

She opened her purse. She took out a handkerchief, unfolded it, and took out an envelope.

"Wanta look?" she asked.

"No," said Kildare.

"She wouldn't mind *you* seeing it," said Sadie.

"Not before Thursday, not after Thursday," murmured Kildare. "Then I suppose that this is the day, Sadie?"

"The day for what?" she asked. Then, as realization came to her, she drew breath through her teeth, hunching up her shoulders and wincing.

"I didn't think of that," she said.

"You've helped me a lot," said Kildare, holding out his hand. "You've given me a time limit."

He went back to Mary Lamont and said: "It will happen today. Before night comes, I suppose. If they arranged a day in their own minds, they wouldn't wait till the darkness, do you think?"

"No," said Mary, shuddering. "They wouldn't wait for a winter night."

"I don't need you, now," said Kildare. "I have to do the rest of this alone."

They went down to the street together.

"Half of the afternoon is gone already," said Mary. "*What* can you do, Jimmy?"

"Spend some time waiting," said Kildare. "Will you be in the hospital?"

"Yes. Jimmy, if I ever thought that you weren't—weren't—I don't know how to say it, but I was wrong!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE HANDS OF KILDARE

THE rain cleared off a little later, so that the ending of this December day promised to be as bright as summer.

There was less than an hour before sundown when Mike kicked open the door of the family room where Kildare sat alone with his thoughts and said: "Here's the worthless young rat, Doc."

Red came in with a swollen and rapidly purpling eye.

"How did it happen, Red?" asked Kildare.

"Over there on the East Side, I tell you what they got," said Red. "They got some good straight lefts! Before I could get at that mug, he stuck me in the eye with that left so often that I thought I was bumping my head against a wall.

"But finally I got inside and softened him up till he would talk. It was *him* that showed me the rest of the way to the water."

"To the water?" repeated Kildare sharply.

"Yeah. To the East River. That was the last time that anybody noticed them. Over where those barges are all tied up in rows, you know?"

Kildare got there as fast as a taxicab would take him.

"One of the kids seen them walking right along here," said Red, pointing down a street. "Then nobody seen them no more. They didn't take a dive in the river, did they, Doc?"

"Wait here," said Kildare, and went toward the barges.

Rusty-sided, big, shapeless, they crowded together like tethered animals. Each had its small caboose and from some of these wisps of smoke went up, and there was a random odor of cookery to blend with the smell of the sea.

People as battered as the barges appeared from the doors of the cabooses when Kildare asked questions. But no one had seen two youngsters such as Marguerite Paston and the boy.

He went on to the outer row of the barges, and to the one farthest west in the line. He had to move carefully; for there was plenty to stumble over, and the westering sun flamed straight in his eye, turning crimson above the horizon.

He saw, beyond the caboose, two figures against the sky. The wind fanned to one side the skirt of the girl; then the feet of Kildare stumbled and came down hard on the deck.

When he looked up again, the pair were standing on the extreme bulwark of the barge, balancing uneasily with the sway of the waves. They clung close together, looking anxiously behind them toward Kildare.

He knew that they were one step from the end of their journey. He dared not move nearer; he hardly dared to speak; he could only take off his hat so that they might recognize him.

It seemed to him that each instant, as they stood wavering there, was the last; and with every motion of the barge on the tide they appeared to be throwing themselves into the current.

The girl had stretched out a hand toward him. He could not tell whether it was in greeting or in a last farewell. . . .

AN EAST wind had brought the winter back on Manhattan when Kildare reached the office of Dr. Carew that night.

Old Carew, standing up slowly behind his desk, rested his weight on his hands and stared speechlessly for a moment; Kildare stood with his head bowed, looking at the floor.

"It was no good, Kildare?" stammered the old doctor.

"I wonder," said Kildare, "even if I'd succeeded—would there have been any use?"

"Use? Isn't there use in life, man?" demanded Carew.

"Not if it means being jibed at and held in contempt and despised openly," said Kildare. "A life like that isn't worth anything."

"It wouldn't be such a life, Jimmy," said Carew. "I've learned where I was wrong."

"Can a man learn that, all in a moment?" said Kildare. "Can you learn to understand a boy like your son, and his pride, and all that makes him different from you and me? Have you ever treated him as man, instead of a child?"

"I can learn," said Carew. "I could begin now, Kildare, if God would give me some hope of seeing him again."

"But you'd need patience with him," said Kildare. "Cold-blooded horses don't matter, but if you flog your thoroughbred, he'll jump over a cliff."

"I know it now, Jimmy."

"He can't be left to schools and teachers entirely. He has to be understood," said Kildare. "He can't be treated as something less than a human being."

"I've been wrong," said Carew. "God knows how terribly I've been wrong."

"Have you ever," said Kildare, "had one close, human conversation with him? Have you ever been tired and unhappy in front of him—as my father has been, in front of me?"

"No," murmured Carew. "I've been no use to him; and he's been no use to me. . . . But are you tormenting me

for nothing, Jimmy? Is there any shadow or ghost of hope that I ever can see him again?"

Kildare stepped back to the door of the anteroom and opened it.

"I sent your secretary away, sir," he said. "They're waiting for you and a new chance in here, Dr. Carew."

Carew ran like a boy from behind the desk, across the office to the anteroom door. He had a frightened, hunted look.

And Kildare saw young Carew, against the wall of the anteroom, putting the girl behind him, as if to stand between her and a hostile force.

Carew must have understood that gesture, also, for he gave a strange cry and hurried forward with his arms outstretched.

Kildare shut the door soundlessly behind him.

WHEN Kildare reached the office of Gillespie again, he was in hospital whites. He found the line stalled in the big waiting room.

"Go in soft and easy, Doc," said Conover. "Dr. Gillespie is sitting and thinking. You know what that means."

In fact Gillespie did not look up until Kildare was half across the room.

"Poor Walter!" said Gillespie. "Poor Walter Carew! . . . God forgive you, Jimmy. You've handed Carew something to think about the rest of his days, and shame himself with, too. But he'll have to thank you for it. . . ."

"It's a queer thing, Jimmy, that your hands don't look any bigger than they did yesterday, and yet they've had three lives in them! . . ."

"Now go get those Livingston reports—on the run, Kildare! We've got to make up time; we've got to make up time!"

As Kildare left for the inner office,

he heard Gillespie muttering: "God pity all fathers; God pity all sons!"

In the inner office he found Mary Lamont, also back in hospital whites.

"But what about your vacation, Mary?" he asked her.

"Do I help you here, Jimmy?" she asked.

"God knows you do," he said.

"Then don't talk about vacations. I know what you've done—"

She choked.

"But do we know any more about one another than we did before?" he asked.

"No. I suppose not," she said.

"Will we keep on wounding one another and misunderstanding?"

"Probably."

"To the end of time?"

"To the very end," said the girl.

"And you'll wish I were different

and that everything were different?"

"Perhaps I shall."

"Gillespie was saying something, just now," murmured Kildare.

"I don't care about Gillespie. What are *you* thinking?"

"God pity all men; God pity all women," said Kildare.

"Is that what Gillespie was saying?"

"I don't know. Perhaps. I don't feel that I know much of anything."

He stood looking at her.

"Kildare! The Livingston reports, damn it!" roared Gillespie from the next room.

"Here they are," said the girl, quickly.

"Thanks," said Kildare. He took the reports, the clumsy, sprawling pack of cards, into his arms, and the girl with them.

THE END

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# Argonotes

## The Readers' Viewpoint



**Y**OU can see what they've done to us this week. They've brought in a foreign element, and here we are barricaded at the top of the page and protesting violently. In the future we shall see that Looking Ahead is put in its place.

We've just about room enough for a gentleman who has been reading ARGOSY for nearly thirty years and hasn't yet found anything in it that displeases him.

**WILLIAM A. HARTY**

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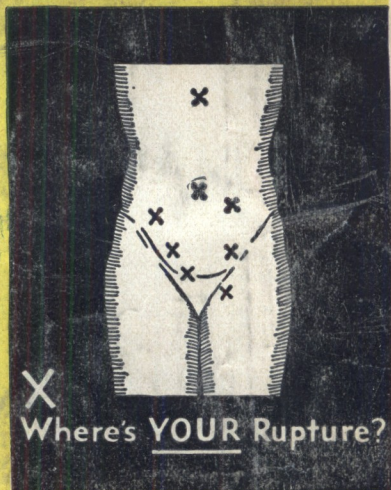
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**C. E. BROOKS,**  
Inventor

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