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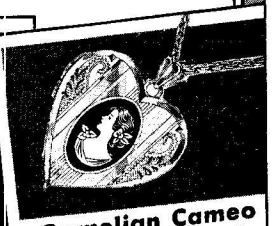

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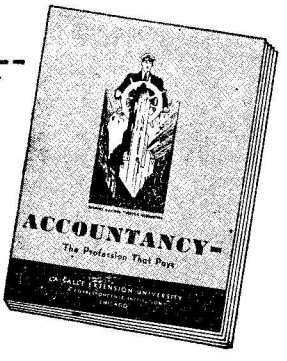

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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

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A **RED STAR** *Magazine*

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Buckshot for Henry

Did you know that the Shame of Arizona has been erased? Well, temporarily. Henry Harrison Conroy is no longer sheriff; but affairs in Wild Horse Valley are dark and bloody, and after a little more prune whisky Henry will be ambling into another mystery

By W. C. TUTTLE
Author of "Henry Hits the Warpath," "Thirty Days for Henry," etc.

Prolog

THE man knelt and carefully scooped up water in a battered, rusty bucket. Then he stood up and looked all around. He was a big man, frowsy and unkempt, but wearing a fairly good suit of gray clothes, pilfered, no doubt, along with the nearly new black shoes on his feet. Myriads of insects buzzed around his head as he picked up the bucket and went toward a small, tumbledown shack, nearly hidden in the foliage at the edge of the swamp.

For several moments he stood in the doorway of the shack, watching and listening. Then, going inside, he built a fire in the crude fireplace. There were several paper sacks and cans of food on the rough table, a bedroll on the crude bunk. Leaning against the fireplace was an old sawed-off shotgun, patched of stock and rusty of barrel, but still serviceable.

Bees and other insects buzzed around the doorway, birds called from the brush, and high in the sky two buzzards wheeled on motionless wings, searching the swamp. A pair of mallards seemed to come in from nowhere, circled the place, set their wings for a landing, but took fright and climbed swiftly, their pinions whistling.

After a while there was a slight rustling in the cattails near the shack, and a man's face appeared. For a long time, only the man's eyes moved, as he studied the shack and the spiral of thin smoke from the rusty stovepipe. Then the man crawled out, looking not unlike a tiger in his striped clothes, filthy with slime and mud. With the stealth of a tiger he came to a crouched position. Inside the shack a pan rattled. After a moment or two the striped man came forward toward the corner of the shack, halting just short of the doorway.

The man in the shack was kneeling at the fireplace, frying bacon, when the striped one leaped. The attack was so sudden that the kneeling man was nearly driven into the fire, unable to make any defense. Two huge hands banged his head against the hearth, and his body went limp.

The striped man got quickly to his feet, listening intently. But there was only the drone of insects, the calling of the birds. The man reached out and picked up the old shotgun. Snapping it open, he noted that it was loaded. With a grunt of pleasure he placed it on the crude table, broke open a can of beans with a rusty ax, and wolfed them hungrily, his eyes on the unconscious man.

Finishing the can of beans, he wiped his smeared face with the back of his left hand. The man on the floor was beginning to twist about, finally to sit up, feeling painfully of his head, a dazed expression in his eyes. He saw the striped one, and understanding seemed to flow back in to his mind. The striped one said:

"Take off your clothes—and be quick about it."

"Take off my—you almost busted my head, damn yuh."

"Start takin' 'em off, you fool, or I will bust it. I'd just as soon take 'em off your dead body, if yuh want it that way."

The striped one picked up the shotgun

Thunder and Lightning stumbled happily in—to face a six-shooter

and carefully cocked one hammer, hunched back against the wall, watching the man remove all his garments. Still holding the gun and watching the naked man, he stripped off his prison garb, tossing it to the man.

"Put it on," he ordered savagely.

FROM somewhere far off across the swampland, came the faint howl of a dog. The man with the shotgun twitched nervously. Bloodhounds! Not more than a mile away. But the water would stop them for a while. The other man did not hear them. He was only a petty criminal, hiding out in the swamp.

Dressed in the prison clothes, he waited for orders from the man with the gun. After all, even if the law did find him, it would not be difficult to prove what had actually happened. The man with the shotgun, fully clad in the other man's garments, edged away from the wall, eyeing the other closely. They were about the same height, same build.

He was close to the other man now, whose back was against the wall. Suddenly the man with the gun lashed out a brawny right fist, landing square on the point of the other's chin. It was a knockout. The man with the gun did not hesitate a moment. He shoved the muzzle of the gun under the unconscious man's chin, and pulled the trigger.

The shack shook from the concussion of the heavy shell. Then the killer knelt down and removed the right shoe and sock of the dead man, placed the shotgun by the body, and stepped over to the doorway. Again he heard the baying of a bloodhound, closer this time. Without a backward glance he stepped outside, parted the cattails and went wading away from the shack.

Less than a half hour later five men and two leashed hounds broke into the little clearing and gingerly approached the

open doorway of the shack, both hounds straining at their leashes. For a moment the men stopped in the doorway. Then they tied up the two hounds and went into the shack.

These men did not question what they saw. One of them said:

"Well, that's the end of Tiger Smith. He was hard, Tiger was. Said we'd never take him alive. Heard the hounds and blowed him damn head off."

The others nodded soberly. One of them, a tall, lean, youngish man, knelt beside the body and looked it over curiously. Another said:

"Your hunch was right—about him mebbe holin' up on yore brother's old shack here in the swamp. Took off his shoe and pulled the trigger with his toe. Figured we was too close, I reckon."

"And took his secret along with him," said another. "They'll never find out where he hid that fifty thousand dollars in gold."

The tall one got up slowly, nodding, and stepped back.

"Must be your brother's shotgun," said one of them, and the tall one merely glanced at the weapon.

"I dunno," he said slowly. "Mebbe I wasn't cut out for this kinda work. Kinda gets a feller, yuh know. Houndin' a man down like this."

"Yuh ain't thinkin' of quittin', are yuh?" asked another.

"Yeah, I'm gettin 'tired of the swamps—kinda. Mebbe go west."

"Well, this ain't no time for ruminations," said the leader. "We'll go and find the sheriff."

John "Tiger" Smith, name known to be an alias, attempted to murder his wife, and escaped with fifty thousand dollars in cash, which she had received on a real-estate deal. Smith shot and killed two officers at Macon, Ga., when apprehended. Arrested later, convicted and given a life sentence, he broke jail at Macon, crippled two guards and seriously injured a spectator.

He was recaptured and sent to prison, where he served two years, mostly in solitary. Then he killed a prison guard and escaped, only to be tracked down in a swamp, where he committed suicide with a shotgun. Finger printing was not exactly unknown, but was not in general use; so Tiger Smith's case was closed.

CHAPTER I

THE POLITE PILGRIM

THE main street of Scorpion Bend was dark, except for what scanty illumination was afforded by the lighted windows. Danny Regan, foreman of the JHC ranch in Wild Horse Valley, came from the hotel, his spurs rasping heavily on the wooden sidewalk.

Danny was mad. For an hour he had argued with a cattle buyer, who finally managed to make Danny understand that King Fisher had undersold the JHC, and that King Fisher had informed him that he would undersell any outfit in Wild Horse Valley, now and hereafter, in order to keep other growers from selling on the open market.

In other words, King Fisher now controlled the market. A fine message for Danny to take back to Henry Harrison Conroy, owner of the JHC.

Danny was still a young man, built like a middleweight, a capable cowman, and not at all adverse to fighting, either with fist or gun. In fact, he was very fast with a hand-gun, and his reputation was well known over the range country of Arizona.

Danny surged away from the porch-post and went striding across the street to the Silk Hat Saloon. He rarely drank anything, but right now he felt the need of a bracer. Then he was going to get on his horse and ride all the way back to the JHC, figuring just how many ways he could kill King Fisher and enjoy each one.

As he entered the saloon he heard voices pitched higher than usual in ordinary conversation. There were five men at a poker table, four of them sitting, while the fifth was standing, leaning on the table. He was a young man, very blond, and wore glasses. His city clothes seemed out of place there.

Danny stopped at the bar. Three of the seated men were from the King Fisher ranch, and one of them was Roy Fisher, son of the man who had made up his mind to be the big boss of Tonto and of all of Wild Horse Valley. The other two were Bob Haney, Fisher's foreman, and Dish Allen, a puncher.

The blond young man was trying to explain something, while the four men watched him stonily. He told them;

"Gentlemen, this isn't at all fair to me. You invited me to play a few hands, and I foolishly accepted. I asked you how much those chips were per stack, and you—"

"We said fifty," finished Roy Fisher. "You didn't think we'd deal cards for fifty cents, do you?"

"It was fifty dollars, stranger," said the saloon keeper. "You've got ten markers over there, and that's five hundred dollars."

The young man choked slightly and there were tears in his eyes, as he said huskily:

"I—I didn't realize, but I haven't that much cash with me. I could write a check, I suppose—"

"Yore check's all right, ain't it?" asked the saloon keeper.

"Why, yes, of course. But I—"

"We'll accept it," said Roy Fisher. "Anyway, Dick will, and he can pay us for our chips. Get the gentleman a pen, Dick."

The saloon man went behind the bar to secure a pen, and the bartender said to Danny:

"What'll yuh have, Regan?"

"A little fun, I reckon," replied Danny, without turning.

The saloon man came back with the pen and handed it to the young man, who started to unfold his check-book.

"Don't sign it, stranger," advised Danny. All the men turned quickly.

"You spoke to me, sir?" queried the young man.

"Yeah," drawled Danny quietly.

"Who sold you a corner in this game, Regan?" asked Bob Haney.

"Keep yore hands on the table—all of yuh," said Danny. "Stranger, you better get out of here."

The young man backed away from the table. "I—I don't understand," he said nervously, realizing what might happen any moment.

"That's all right," said Danny. "You look kinda new, and I'd hate to see yuh get yore varnish scratched off. Me, I know these snake-hunters. They meant four-bits a stack. I know 'em well. Fifty dollars! They don't make that much a month!

"Wait a minute. You owe 'em two dollars and a half. There's ten markers at four-bits a marker. That's five dollars, but yuh can discount it fifty percent for crooked dealin'. Give 'em two and a half, and that's more than they've honestly got comin'."

THE nervous young man tossed the required amount to the table, and went quickly out of the saloon. Danny looked at the discomfited gamblers and chuckled.

"You'll pay for this, Regan," declared Haney.

"Yeah? I suppose you'll take it out in JHC cows. But remember that I don't own 'em, Haney."

"We never stole your cows!" snapped Roy Fisher.

"Matter of opinion, you scrawny sidewinder."

Roy's face flamed, but he shut his lips tightly.

"Go tell yore pa," advised Danny.

"He'll put you and that JHC outfit out of business," flared Roy. "Yuh notice that yuh didn't sell any cattle, don't yuh?"

"Forget it, Roy," advised Bob Haney.

"With a brain like his he could forget anythin," said Danny. "And as far as puttin' the JHC out of business—that's a job, even for the great King Fisher. Wild Horse Valley was a white man's country, until King Fisher came along with all his money and his crooked ideas."

"Yo're sore because Conroy got beat in that election for sheriff," said Haney. "It was time that Wild Horse Valley had a

capable man in there—and not that fat, red-nosed actor. At least, they're not laughin' at King Fisher's candidate, Regan."

"As a matter of fact," said Danny calmly, "King Fisher didn't dare leave an honest man in office. I know Vinegar Bill Hawkins, and he *was* an honest man."

"Meanin' that he ain't honest now?"

"We'll wait and find out, Haney," replied Danny. "Sorry to interrupt yore holdup, gents, but it was a little too raw. *Buenas noches.*"

Just away from the doorway Danny met the young man.

"I just wanted to thank you," the latter said gratefully. "You see, it—"

"I know," interrupted Danny. "They had yuh trimmed like a lamp. Next time, insist on payin' for yore chips, or don't play."

"Thank you, Mr. Regan. You are from Tonto City?"

"Near there—the JHC spread."

"I hope your defense of me will not react against you, Mr. Regan."

"Don't worry about me. Who are you—a drummer?"

"My goodness, no! I never played an instrument in my life."

"Well, that's fine," Danny grinned. "Yo're just a visitor, eh?"

"I am on my way to Tonto City. I arrived a few hours ago, and that stage does not leave until about nine o'clock; so I was merely passing away the time."

"You almost passed away five hundred dollars, too."

"I shall always remember that, Mr. Regan—and thank you."

"Call me Danny and don't thank me. That stage leaves right after the nine o'clock train from the west. They haven't had a passenger off that train since Sittin' Bull stood up, but they always have hopes."

"Are you well acquainted around Tonto City—er—Danny?"

"Lived there since the first hill was built. What's yore name?"

"Albert Marshall Henshaw."

"They'll prob'ly cut yuh down to 'Hen.' Let's walk up to the depot and see the train come in."

"It will be a pleasure, I assure you."

Danny chuckled. "You sound like Henry," he said.

"Who is Henry, if I may ask?" queried Albert.

"Henry Harrison Conroy, the man who owns the JHC ranch where I work. Henry had been an actor most all his life—sort of a funny man, with a red nose—and just about the time his—well, the kind of actin' he was doin' had kinda played out, his uncle died at Tonto City and left him the JHC ranch.

"Henry came here not knowin' a jackass from a juniper tree about cow ranchin', but he learned. They elected him sheriff of Wild Horse county, as sort of a joke, and they've been laughin' ever since. But he made good."

"Is he the sheriff now?" asked Albert.

"No, they beat him this last election. Yuh see, Albert, a rich man named King Fisher, bought out a lot of cattle land, was lucky enough to get control of a couple producin' gold mines, and got enough political power to run things to suit himself. He beat Henry."

"Is King Fisher the sheriff?"

"Oh, no. But he elected the man he wanted—Vinegar Bill Hawkins."

"I heard you talking about him in that saloon," said Albert.

"Yeah, that's right. That thin-faced hombre across the table from you was Roy Fisher, King Fisher's son. And if he's any good, a skunk is a geranium. Well, here's the depot, and all we need is a train."

"Did you ever know a man named James Henshaw?" asked Albert, as they sat down on the platform. "He was a prospector down here."

"No, I don't remember the name. Relative of yours?"

"My uncle. I am from St. Louis."

"Are you lookin' for this uncle?" asked Danny.

"In a way, yes. However, I have always wanted to see the West; so this gave me a good excuse. You see," explained Albert,

"he was my father's brother. My father has been dead quite a while. After my mother passed away, I found some letters among her effects. My uncle mentioned Wild Horse Valley in his letters, and said that he had discovered a rich gold mine.

"He said that he did not fully trust the man who had grubstaked him, whatever that means, and that he had falsified a location notice, after discovering that ore assayed very rich. He said he did that to protect himself.

"He sent my mother a map of the location of this mine, saying that in case she did not hear from him within six months to turn the map over to some reliable party and secure the mine for herself. I know nothing about mining; so I came here to find out what I could."

"THAT'S sort of a queer tale," remarked Danny. "I thought I knew most everybody that prospected in Wild Horse Valley, but I don't remember a man named Henshaw. 'Course, we had a lot of prospectors in here at one time or another. Yore uncle didn't say who grubstaked him, eh?"

"No, he did not say."

"Uh-huh. How long ago was that?"

"About three years ago, I believe."

"Three years. Only been two producin' mines discovered since then—the Yellow Cross and the Golden Streak. They both belong to King Fisher."

"Well, I suppose it is a wild goose chase," sighed Albert. "But I have always wanted to see the West."

"And I've allus wanted to see the East," said Danny. "All my life I've wanted to see a house more'n three stories high, and I've wanted to see the ocean. All my life I've had to save water. Well, here comes that train."

"Somebody on it, too."

The long passenger train ground to a stop at the depot, and three people dismounted from a rear coach. As the train rolled on, the two women and the man walked into the lights of the depot office.

Danny said, "Hyah, sheriff."

The big man stopped short, a valise in each hand.

"Oh, hello, Regan," he said. "Didn't recognize yuh at first. I want yuh to meet Mrs. Hawkins and her daughter, Miss Buckley."

"Mrs. Hawkins?" queried Danny.

"Shore—my wife," chuckled the big sheriff. "I kinda slipped one over on Tonto City, didn't I?"

"Yeah, I reckon yuh did," admitted Danny. Miss Buckley seemed to be a very lovely young lady in the dim lights of the depot office. Danny remembered Albert Henshaw, and introduced him.

"Well, we've got to be movin'," said the sheriff. "That stage is due to leave pretty quick, and we don't want to have to spend the night in Scorpion Bend."

They walked down to the stage depot, where Danny drew the sheriff aside and told him what King Fisher had done. The sheriff nodded gravely.

"No man ought to do that," he said. "Who's this Henshaw, Danny?"

Danny told about the poker game, and the sheriff chuckled.

"They'll love yuh for that, Danny."

"Well, I couldn't see 'em strip that kid."

"I know. Well, I'll pile in. See yuh later, Danny."

As the stage rolled out of Scorpion Bend, Albert told them about how Danny Regan had come to his assistance.

"And I had never met the gentleman," said Albert seriously. "Really, he has a very forceful personality."

"Yeah—and a quick trigger finger," added the sheriff. "Danny Regan is a good man to have as a friend."

"You make him sound interesting," said Joan.

"Don't get too interested, my dear," said the sheriff. "Danny is the sort of a feller that's goin' to ride into trouble one of these days."

"He accused those men of stealing his cattle," said Albert, "and I understand that they hang cattle thieves out here."

"When they catch 'em," said the sheriff dryly.

CHAPTER II

CATTLEMAN CONROY

IT WAS nearly two oclock in the morning, when Danny Regan rode in at the JHC ranch-house. He could see a light in the window of the main room, and there was an odor of coffee in the air.

"Henry and Judge playin' cribbage," he told himself, "and Lightnin' or Frijole makin' coffee to keep 'em awake."

And there they were, Henry Harrison Conroy and Judge Van Treece, clad in long underwear and slippers, Judge wearing an old hat, seated at a table, playing their inevitable game of cribbage by the light of a smoky lamp. Henry Harrison Conroy, erstwhile favorite of the vaudeville stage, edging close to sixty, nearly bald, short and fat, with a face like a full moon, on which grew one of the largest and roundest noses in captivity—and the reddest.

Judge Van Treece, six feet, three inches, thin, bony, with a long, lean face, a shock of gray hair and piercing eyes under thatched brows. Judge had been a Western criminal lawyer, until liquor had ruined his career. When Henry came to Tonto City to take over his inheritance, he met Judge, whose genteel manners, covered by a frock coat, gaiter shoes, and great thirst, appealed to Henry's sense of comedy.

When Wild Horse Valley, in a fit of humor, elected Henry sheriff of the country, Henry, not to be outdone, appointed Judge so his deputy, and Oscar Johnson, whom Judge dubbed 'The Vitrified Viking,' as jailer. The newspapers called them "The Shame of Arizona." But, with the election of King Fisher's candidate, Vinegar Bill Hawkins, the Shame of Arizona was relegated to the JHC ranch.

"We give you good evening, Danny," said Henry soberly, not looking up from a perusal of his cards. "And give us the news, Crier of the Ranch."

"Bad news," replied Danny, sitting down at the table. "Our friend King Fisher has fixed it so we can't sell a cow to a buyer."

"Danny," said Judge reprovingly, "you must have been drinking some of that Scorpion Bend whisky."

"I didn't have a drink, Judge," declared Danny, and proceeded to tell them about the conversation with the cattle buyer. Judge got to his feet and began pacing the room, shuffling his slippers, his old hat over one eye.

"Be seated, Droop-drawers," said Henry. Lightning Mendoza came to the kitchen doorway, wiping some moisture off his scraggly mustache.

"*Buenas noches,* Danny." He grinned, "How the hell am I? Good, you hope and pray. I mak' leetle coffee, eh?"

"That's fine, Lightnin'," said Danny, and went on talking about the dirty work of King Fisher. Lightning said;

"*Por Dios!* Those damn Feesher. Always I'm saying that keeling ees too good from heem. I should have a keek in your pants—I hope."

"All right," said Henry soberly. "Things are bad enough, without your explanation, is the coffee ready?"

"Weethout crim," said Lightning. "Even weethout milk. Frijole forgeet to breeng the can cow."

"All right, let's have it," said Danny.

Lightning produced the coffee pot and some cups. "I'm theenk maybe I keel those Keeng Feesher some day," he stated soberly.

"And get hung," said Henry, pouring the coffee.

"Where's Thunder and Oscar?" asked Danny.

"Asleep," said Judge. "Frijole's sleeping with them. They sampled Frijole's last batch of prune whisky, and—well, it got them—cold."

"Today," announced Lightning, "I find a mommy."

"Whose mommy?" asked Danny. Henry groaned. "Do not go into that again, Lightning," begged Henry.

"You mean a mummy, don'tcha?" asked Danny. "Wastin' yore time, huntin' around old cave dwellin's again, eh? You and Thunder—"

"Theese mommy ees not een cave," said

Lightning. "I fin' the track of beeg lobo, after hee ees keel a colt, and I go in the bottom of Smoke Tree Canyon. Down there I am finding the mommy. I tak' look at the mommy and I am saying, 'Hm-m-m-m, these are somet neeng else, I hope.' "

"PAUSE and reflect," said Henry. "You are going beyond the tale you told us. At least, be truthful about it."

"Go ahead, Lightnin'," said Danny. "Finish the tale, even if it ain't true."

"Theese mommy," declared Lightning, "had hees hands and feet tied weeth rope."

Henry jerked an elbow and upset Judge's coffee into his lap.

"Of all the damnable, clumsy—" howled Judge, leaping to his feet, and grabbing at his sagging underwear.

"There is plenty coffee, Judge," assured Henry, undisturbed. "Lightning, are you sure the mummy's hands and feet are tied?"

"Sure. I theenk eet ees a maguey rope."

"They never had maguey in those days," said Danny.

Lightning shrugged his shoulders. "I theenk so that theese are white man, too."

"My gracious!" exclaimed Henry. "A white mummy. This will startle the whole world. What do you think, Judge?"

"Damn the mummy!" snapped Judge. "Get me some axle grease, I have been burned! And I have never heard of a white mummy, and I do not believe Lightning ever found such a thing."

Lightning shrugged his shoulders. "I show heem to you *manana.*"

"All right," said Danny. "Henry, have you or Judge ever known a prospector named Henshaw?"

Neither of them had. Lightning said:

"I am knowing two prospector name Smeeth. You like that?"

"Not so much," replied Danny.

"Maybe he ees calling yourself Smeeth."

"This mummy wasn't one of the Smiths, was he?" asked Danny.

"*Quien sabe?* His face ees not much from looking at."

"What are all the questions about, Danny?" asked Henry. "And why are you searching for a Henshaw?"

"Oh, I dunno," Danny yawned. "Seems to be one missin'. Let's go to bed; I'm tired. How did yore game come out, Henry?"

"Judge owes me twenty cents."

"Oh, I forgot to tell yuh," said Danny. "Vinegar Bill came in on the train tonight, bringin' a bride and step-daughter."

"A bride and step-daughter?" queried Judge. "That damn maverick!"

"A very estimable gentleman, and I wish him happiness," said Henry.

"I could say the same—if I wanted to lie like you, Henry," said Judge. "I suppose you wish King Fisher well, too?"

"Why not? He won, we lost. It was merely the turn of Fortune's Wheel, Judge. Although as far as we are concerned, it seems that the proverbial wheel is stuck. But we will manage, I assure you. At least, we do not have to trail criminals to their lair, read scathing denunciations of us in the papers, and prove alibis to the commissioners. Out here, we are as free as air, my dear sir."

"Free, yes," agreed Judge gloomily. "I hope things do not come to a point where we must don steel bills and pick gravel with the hens in order to exist."

"At least," said Henry, "we can eat our beef."

"How 'bout my mommy?" queried Lightning.

Judge shuddered in his sagging underwear. "I hope we never get to that point," he said.

"He ees not on a point; he ees een a hole," corrected Lightning.

"Start adoption proceedings in the morning, Judge," chuckled Henry. "The mummy will fit in with our outfit."

KING FISHER was a big man, hard-eyed, two-fisted and tough. Easy living had added jowls to his heavy jaw and inches to his waistline. He owned the Diamond F, the biggest cattle spread in Wild Horse Valley, owned the Tonto Saloon, which he had renamed The King's Castle,

owned the majority of stock in the Tonto City Bank; and in addition to these he owned the Golden Streak and the Yellow Cross mines, both coming into heavy production.

He had moved into Wild Horse Valley little over two years ago, and had set out to gain control of the whole valley. In the recent election his political power had been strongly evident, for the county officers elected were his men; and he was now in a fair way to boss Tonto City and the whole county.

Mrs. Fisher, who knew little and evidently cared less for Wild Horse Valley, spent most of her time at their estate near San Francisco. Roy Fisher, their son, whom King Fisher hoped to make head of his interests in the valley, turned out to be a hard-drinking, heavy-gambling liability.

It was the morning after Danny Regan had broken up the poker game at Scorpion Bend, and Roy Fisher was eating breakfast with his father at the ranch. That is, he was making a pretense of eating, to cover up the fact that he had a decided hangover. King Fisher looked at his son disgustedly.

"Drunk again, eh?" he said coldly. Roy shrugged his shoulders.

"Do we have to argue about it?" he asked.

"Roy you are pretty much of a damn fool."

"All right, all right. We had a run-in with Danny Regan last night."

"You did, eh? What about?"

"Oh, we were havin' some fun with a tenderfoot in Scorpion Bend. We tried to make him believe that he owed us five hundred dollars, instead of five. Got him into a four-bit game. We sure had him covered with goose-pimples, until Regan showed up and got nasty about it."

"I'll have to attend to that young slick-ear," said King Fisher.

"Let him alone—I'll handle my own affairs, Dad."

"You will, eh? You fool, Regan can tie you into a bowknot with one hand, and he can go home and get a gun before you can draw one from a holster. You keep away from him."

"I didn't know you thought that much of him," said Roy.

"I'm not a fool, Roy."

"Meanin' that I am. All right. Did you know that the sheriff is married?"

"Hawkins? No, I didn't know."

"Well, he is. Brought her in on a train last night, and they came down on the night stage. I talked with Steve McCord, the driver, and he said Mrs. Hawkins has a daughter about twenty-three. Pretty, too."

King Fisher smiled slightly. "So Hawkins got married, eh? I knew he went on a trip. Well, he's old enough to know what he wants to do."

Roy said:

"That tenderfoot also came down to Tonto."

"Who is he?"

"Name's Henshaw."

"Henshaw?" King Fisher scowled thoughtfully. "What's his business?"

"Steve didn't know. Damn it, my head hurts!"

"You better go to bed. Take my advice and quit drinkin' whisky and quit wearin' a gun. They don't mix."

"That's good advice from a man who drinks as much as you do, and always carries a gun," retorted Roy.

"I've got brains enough to handle both!" snapped King Fisher angrily. "And that is more than you'll ever have. A few more smart remarks, and you'll go back to San Francisco and stay there."

"Oh, don't preach," sighed the youngster. "I'm goin' back to bed."

"And stay there until you're sober," advised King Fisher, and went striding out of the house. He stopped on the front porch, his brow furrowed in deep concentration.

"Henshaw," he muttered. "That's funny. But that isn't an uncommon name."

With a shrug of his heavy shoulders, as though to dismiss any thought of the tenderfoot, he swung down the steps and headed for the stable.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIOUS MOMMY

HENRY HARRISON CONROY and Judge Van Treece, soaking with perspiration from their descent into Smoke Tree Canyon, squatted on their heels and examined Lightning's mummy. Perched together on another rock were Thunder and Lightning Mendoza, while Danny Regan leaned against a sandstone ledge.

The mummy, if it could be called a mummy, lay in the sand under an overhang of sandstone, where no rain could have reached it and where the blazing sun would strike it for only about two hours each day. Of the face there was little trace. The clothing was rotted away, and both ankles and wrists had been tied with maguey rope. There was a bullet hole through the skull.

"White man?" queried Lightning.

"I believe it was," replied Henry.

"Keeled dead, eh?" said Thunder.

They ignored the question, as they searched the particles of clothing for some identification. Buried in the folds of parchment-like skin at the throat, they found a gold chain, nearly as fine as a thread, and at the back of the neck was a tiny locket of gold. Henry managed to open it with the blade of a knife, but it was empty. However, on the front were the two initials L.L. in block letters.

"If we can find someone with those initials," sighed Henry.

"Some missing person," added Judge painfully. That climb into the canyon had not helped his rheumatism.

"Theese one ees meesing," said Lightning. "How long you theenk before he ees died, Henry?"

"Oh, maybe two or three years. They dry up very quickly here."

"Anyway," stated Lightning, "a copple or two year ago I find mommy een canyon, and the man weeth the glasses in hees eye he ees saying that theese man ees died for maybe thousand year. I ask heem how in hell he can know from those ages, and he says, 'Heestry tell me.' Maybe Heestry can tell us from theese ones. He mus' de dam' smart, theese Heestry, eh—I hope."

"Very," agreed Henry soberly. "Now Lightning, you and Thunder climb out and ride to town. There you will tell the sheriff about this, and guide him here. Do not mention the chain and locket to anyone."

"I cross your heart—"

"I hope I die," finished Henry gravely.

"I hope you die," said Lightning. "Sometime I get those wrong, eh?"

"Maybe I better go," suggested Danny.

"You read my mind," said Henry smiling. "Go ahead, Danny."

THE main street of Tonto City seemed very quiet as Danny rode in and tied his horse in front of the sheriff's office. Usually there were quite a number of people on the main street, but not today.

Danny went into the office, where he found Spook Gilliam, the deputy, sprawled in a chair. Spook was a long, lean young man, with a surprised expression, buckteeth and a perverted sense of humor. As soon as Spook opened his mouth, Danny knew that Spook was drunk.

"Where's Vinegar Bill?" asked Danny.

"Oh, the sher'ff?" queried Spook owlishly. "Well, shir, he's stalkin' his prey."

"He's what?" asked Danny. "Stalkin' his prey?"

"It was like thish," explained Spook, "There was three of us in the boat and the' oars leaked. Well, shir, it sure looked bad. You shee—"

"What happened?" interrupted Danny, "and who is the sheriff stalkin'?"

"Albert Marshall Henshaw. Fact—give em thish day un'er my hand and sheal. How'r yuh, Danny?"

"You mean, the sheriff is after that tenderfoot?"

"Tennerfoot? Not him! He's reincarnation of Billy th' Kid. I had to quit him or losh my job, don'tcha know it? Bad asshoshiations and all that, Danny. Bir's of a feather."

"Yuh mean he's drunk and gone on the prod, Spook?"

"Oh, without reshervation. You shee,"

Spook brightened visibly, "thish mornin' I re-ju-ven-ated him. I helped him outfit himshelf, so that he wouldn't be sho visible. Got'm shome boots, overalls, shirt, hat and a gun. My, my, I shouldn' let'm have that gun."

"You don't mean he's killed somebody, do yuh?" asked Danny.

Wham! From across the street came the unmistakable report of a revolver shot, a decidedly tenor yell, and Danny sprang to the doorway. Out of the King's Castle Saloon came Albert, attired in a flaming red shirt, overalls, high-heel boots and a ten-gallon sombrero. Those high heels were a handicap, along with an overload of rye, and Albert managed to get his legs crossed and did a spread-eagle right in the middle of the street.

Vinegar Bill Hawkins, the sheriff, evidently intending to make a bloodless capture, dashed out of the alley beside the saloon and headed for Albert, arms outstretched to fall upon him. But Albert struggled up to a crouched position just as Vinegar Bill launched his dive, and fell backward.

Vinegar Bill made his dive into space and skidded on his nose in the gravel. Then Albert, whooping with glee at the thought of having a playmate, fell upon the dazed sheriff. In the melee Albert's gun went off again, and there was a tinkling crash as a window of the general store turned into a spider-web pattern.

"Ride'm, cowboy!" yelped Spook.

But the action was short-lived. Vinegar Bill got a strangle hold on the luckless Albert, hoisted him over one shoulder and brought him to the office. Tonto City, relieved of a menace, came out into the open again.

VINEGAR BILL was mad. His nose and hands were bruised and his pride was hurt. He slammed Albert into a chair, tossed Albert's gun to the desk-top and started to berate Spook, when he saw Danny.

"Bring 'em in alive, eh?" remarked Danny soberly.

"Damn fool ort to be killed!" rasped the sheriff. "You, too!" he yelled, pointing at Spook. "Know what that red-shirted fool done? Well, he took a shot at himself in that big mirror at the King's Castle. Smashed it to bits. And yo're to blame, Spook! Don't deny it!"

"I never deny anythin'," protested Spook. "I got 'm drunk and I helped him buy new clothes, but I never pulled no triggers, Bill. He's of age."

"Wha's wrong?" asked Albert. "I am as innochent as—as—as a egg."

"Yo're a damn bad egg," declared the sheriff. "This'll sure cost yuh plenty. I'll bet that mirror cost a hundred dollars, and you'll have to pay for it, young feller."

"You better go have Doc fix that nose," said Spook. "My, my, you mus' have slid long ways on that nose. It's really beautiful, Bill."

"Never mind my nose!" snorted the exasperated sheriff.

"Never mind anybody's nose," said Albert solemnly. "Lettum mind their own."

"You better lay down and go to sleep," advised the sheriff. "And when you wake up, don't pay no attention to Spook. He's the biggest liar in the state, and if yuh foller him, you'll be in jail. That's my advice."

The sheriff mopped his nose and tried to grin at Danny, who proceeded to tell him about the mummy in Smoke Tree Canyon.

"That's damn funny!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Two, three years, yuh say? Well, well, we'll have to look into that. Looks like murder to me."

"And you ain't even seen it," sighed Spook. "That's ability."

"I'll get the coroner and go right out there, Danny," said the sheriff, ignoring Spook's jibe.

"Take plenty ropes," advised Danny. "I doubt if Doc Knowles can get down there, even with ropes."

"Uh-huh. Mebbe I better take Spook along. Sober the darn fool up a little, climbin' down a rope in the hot sun. Says he's been under a strain, runnin' the of-

fice while I was away Nothin' to do; so it must have been mental strain, I reckon."

As Danny turned toward the doorway, King Fisher and the bartender of the King's Castle came in. King Fisher was mad.

"There's the damn fool!" he exclaimed, pointing at Albert, who was nearly asleep in the chair.

"He's harmless now," assured the sheriff. "I got his gun."

"But he will pay for that mirror!"

"Well, that's between you two," said the sheriff. "Let him sober up, King; he won't run away. I've got to go and get a mummy out of Smoke Tree Canyon."

"A mummy?" queried King Fisher.

"Well, I reckon he's pretty well dried up. It was a murder."

"Oh! A murder, yuh say, Bill?"

"Hands and feet tied and a bullet through the head. Spook, go get the horses, while I find Doc Knowles."

"Where's Smoke Tree Canyon?" asked King Fisher.

"Out on the JHC," replied Danny. "Yuh see—oh-oh!"

Albert fell off the chair, sighed contentedly and went on snoring.

"Yuh see," continued Danny, "somebody tied his feet and hands, and shot him off the rim of the canyon."

King Fisher nodded grimly. "Any way to identify him?"

Danny shrugged his shoulders. "Mebbeso; yuh never can tell. Checkin' back a couple years, mebbe we can find a missin' man."

Then Danny walked out, mounted his horse and headed back for the ranch. The bartender went back to the saloon. Spook brought the horses to the front of the office, where he waited for the sheriff and coroner.

"So Vinegar Bill got married, eh?" remarked King Fisher.

"He shore did," agreed Spook. "Got a good-lookin' wife, too. I ain't seen her daughter yet, but Bill says she's a dinger. Her name is Joan Buckley."

"Buckley?" queried King Fisher.

"Yeah. Bill says her father died several years ago."

"How old a girl is she?"

"Oh, I dunno. Mebbe twenty, twenty-one, I reckon."

King Fisher crossed the street toward the King's Castle, as the sheriff and Old Doc Knowles came down the street from the doctor's office.

"Nosey devil," muttered Spook to himself. "How old is she? What the hell's it to him how old she is? I think I'll file on that claim my ownself. Hyah, Doc."

THE bringing of the mummified body of a white man to Tonto City only caused mild interest. It was impossible to identify the body. The doctor could only hazard a guess as to how long the man had been dead, but placed it at not over two years.

"If we can only find that some feller is missin'," said the sheriff. "Henry Conroy says we must find a man who had no friends and no relatives around here—a man nobody would miss."

"So Conroy is workin' with yuh, eh?" King Fisher smiled.

"No, he ain't workin' with me. Two years ago he was the sheriff; so he's kinda interested, yuh know."

"And a hell of a sheriff," laughed King Fisher.

"I guess that's true. . . . First time yuh get a chance, I want yuh to meet my wife and step-daughter, King."

King nodded. "I didn't know you went away to get married, Bill."

"I kinda slipped one over on everybody," laughed the big sheriff. "I went to Denver. Oh, we've been writin' to each other a long time. I'll have yuh up for supper some day, King. She's a fine cook. Her daughter is a mighty fine girl. Her name's Joan Buckley."

"That's what Spook told me. Well, I'll see yuh later."

"When are yuh goin' to invite me up to supper?" asked Spook.

"Oh, some hard winter," replied the sheriff. "Do yuh think I want a feller like you hangin' around her? Unreliable, un-

refined, and anythin' else yuh can think of."

Spook's eyebrows lifted in dismay. "You act like you'd raised her, instead of gettin' her in a marriage deal with her ma."

"It don't matter how I got her. I shore don't want you for a stepson-in-law—not if I can help it."

"I s'pose I should expect that from you, Bill. Sour old rawhider like you. No wonder they call yuh Vinegar Bill. Go ahead and poison her young mind against me. Belittle me to her. But remember this, Bill; some day, when I've got a hunk of two-by-four plank in my hands, and I catch you hung up in a bob-wire fence—don't plead for mercy. Jist take it like a man, and if yore vertebray is found to be six inches shorter than it was, say to yourself, 'Well, I shouldn't have done what I done.'"

"And you'll still be single," reminded the sheriff.

"Uh-huh, that's right, ain't it? Well, mebbe yo're right, Bill. If I was to marry her, I'd have to call you papa."

Spook shuddered visibly. "That'd be awful," he said.

CHAPTER IV

DANGER: VIKINGS

DANNY REGAN had related to Henry and Judge what Albert had told him about the letters from Jim Henshaw, his uncle. This gave those two estimable gentlemen much to discuss over their cups of Frijole Bill's prune whisky, as they sat on the shaded porch at the JHC.

"If that dehydrated human from Smoke Tree Canyon is Jim Henshaw, he had fears that were well founded," declared Henry.

"Exactly," agreed Judge soberly. "But identification is impossible. The initials L.L. are most certainly not the initials of Jim Henshaw."

"Ay t'ink," remarked Oscar Johnson, who was seated on the steps, putting a rawhide hondo on a new rope, "das ha'ar faller might be Larsen, who vars here a coople years ago."

"Larsen," said Judge, "was six feet, three inches tall and would weigh over two hundred. And he went to Chicago with a trainload of cows."

"Yah, su-ure," agreed Oscar, "but he might have coom back, Yudge."

"What was his first name, Oscar?" asked Henry.

"Yulius."

"That doesn't account for the L.L. You do not spell Julius with an L, Oscar."

"Ay give oop," said Oscar. "Ay am not great defective."

"I question that," said Judge dryly.

Henry squinted thoughtfully at his empty cup, but laid it aside.

"If this young Henshaw has a map," he said, "no doubt he will be able to locate that mine."

"And I believe we should cultivate the young man," said Judge.

"For mercenary reasons, my dear Judge? Fie on you, sir!"

"Mercenary, indeed!" snorted Judge. "You do not seem to realize that our income has perished, and that we cannot sell a pound of beef. Are we going to sit here and—er—dehydrate in the sun?"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "Is it that bad, Judge?"

"We are," declared Judge, "facing a panic."

"That *is* serious," agreed Henry soberly. "The only panic I have ever seen was during a summer season, in Syracuse, I believe, when one of Barney South's trained bears was stung by a migrant bee during the act. It was the last stunt, and I was in the wings, ready to follow. I never want to face another panic, if you please."

"This," said Judge, "is a financial, not a physical, panic. Unless we can discover ways and means to break the strangling grip of King Fisher on Wild Horse Valley, we may as well—" Judge drew a deep breath and reached for the jug of prune whisky. "We may as well have another drink, Henry."

"True, my dear Judge, true. What are a few hardened arteries between old friends? Frijole Bill did well with this batch. It has a tang and aroma not found

in commercial liquor. It not only warms the cockles of your heart, but it broils them to a crisp, and the devilish machinations of King Fisher fade to nothing. To you, my dear Judge."

"A confusion to King Fisher and all his tribe, Henry."

"Ay t'ink," said Oscar, "de confusion is on de odder foot."

"And with that sage remark," said Henry, "Oscar Johnson went to the stable and hitched up the buckboard team, while Henry Harrison Conroy prepared to go to Tonto town."

"Oll right," nodded Oscar, getting to his feet. "Ay am de best driver in Vild Hurse Walley, you bat you."

Oscar was a giant Swede, powerful as a grizzly, and ready at any moment to fight anybody or everybody; but as a driver he had wrecked every vehicle on the ranch and nearly every vehicle in the livery stable at Tonto City. Roads meant nothing to Oscar.

"Some day," said Judge, as Oscar started for the stable, "that Vitrified Viking is going to kill you Henry. He has no conception of proper driving. In fact, he is a road maniac."

"But he gets you there on time, Judge. Four wheels or no wheels, you arrive at your destination when Oscar drives. Well, I must be presentable."

"Why this sudden trip to Tonto?"

"Do you remember what killed the cat, sir?"

"Curiosity, I believe."

"So they say. Well, I hope I have better luck."

WHILE Henry wore overalls and high-heel boots at the ranch, when he went to town he wore a pearl-gray suit, white shirt, bow tie, the latest in oxfords, and a pearl-colored derby hat. He also carried a gold-headed cane. Except for an occasional smile, Tonto City paid little attention to the little, rotund man with the red nose and quizzical eyes.

For once in his life Oscar managed to reach town with all four wheels intact. Oscar's light o' love was Josephine Swensen, maid of all work at the Tonto Hotel. Josephine was over six feet tall, raw-boned, two-fisted. She had stringy blond hair, prominent cheekbones and a large nose. As a fighter, Josephine was a close second to Oscar.

"Be reasonable in all things, Oscar," advised Henry, as he got out of the buckboard in front of the courthouse. "Remember to turn the other cheek, and do not drink too much. I shall be ready in perhaps an hour." "Ay vill be oll right," assured Oscar. "Ay am a yentleman."

Henry entered the courthouse and went to the recorder's office, where he perused the mining records carefully.

"Find what you wanted, Mr. Conroy?" asked the clerk.

"I find a record of the Glory Hole mine, located by a man named Henshaw, Dick. Do you remember him?"

"Henshaw? No, I can't say that I do. We had a lot of locations to put on record at that time. The valley was full of prospectors."

"True." Henry nodded. A further search showed that the Golden Streak, one of King Fisher's properties, had been located and recorded only a short time after the recording of the Glory Hole.

Henry went from the courthouse to Tom South's assay office. South had been in Tonto for several years, and was now handling all the assay work for King Fisher. Henry leaned against a fly-specked showcase full of ore samples, and wrinkled his red nose against the smell of acids, as he questioned the assayer.

"Henshaw?" queried South. "No, I don't remember him—much. It seems to me that he did have some rich ore, though. That was a couple years ago, Henry. I don't remember what he looked like, but I remember that name."

"Was he a large man or a small man?"

"I just can't remember. There was so many prospectors around, and I done work for most of 'em."

South glanced at a clock on the back counter.

"I'm pretty busy on some stuff for Fisher," he said, "and he's due in today."

"Thank you very much, Tom. Good day, sir."

Henry met the sheriff outside the courthouse.

"My dear Mr. Hawkins, allow me to congratulate you," said Henry. "I have been informed that you have a wonderful wife. I wish you both all the best in the world, I'm sure."

"Well, thank yuh a lot, Conroy," said the sheriff. "I didn't know how yuh felt about—well, the election and all that."

"Oh, my dear man!" exclaimed Henry. "I surrendered gladly. In fact, just between us, I was ready to quit. Yes, indeed."

"Well, that's shore nice, Conroy. Yes, I am married. Sorry I didn't get married before. Got a fine woman."

"Wonderful! Good luck to both of you."

"Well, thank yuh again. Yuh know, I was talkin' to Danny Regan about—well, about that cattle buyer, who said that King Fisher wouldn't let him buy your cows. Yuh see, I don't approve of—"

"My dear sheriff! It really doesn't matter. I hold no grudge against Mr. Fisher. Really a fine character, they tell me. Must cultivate him. Now that I am out of office, I must be neighborly—visit around. We are having fine weather, don't you think?"

"Yeah, it's pretty good, Conroy. Well, I must be movin'."

Henry watched the sheriff disappear, and chuckled to himself:

"Henry, you are either entering your dotage age, or you are the biggest liar in Arizona. And I do not believe it is dotage."

HE SAW King Fisher enter the assay office of Tom South, and went down to the general store. King Fisher accepted the penciled notations from the assayer, a pleased smile on his lips. South said:

"Henry Conroy was in here a few minutes ago, asking about a prospector named Henshaw. Didn't he do some work for you at one time?"

King Fisher looked up quickly. "Henshaw? No, I—why, yes, he did, too. Located me in on a mine. Wasn't worth anything, though."

"That was the Glory Hole Mine?"

"Why, yes, I believe so."

"Conroy mentioned it. Said he saw it in the records."

King Fisher accepted the assay reports and walked out. After a few moments of indecision, he went to the recorder's office at the courthouse, where he asked to see the mining records.

"That book is getting popular," remarked the clerk. "Henry Conroy was looking it over a while ago. Did you ever know a prospector named Henshaw?"

"Yes," replied King Fisher gruffly.

Someone came in to occupy the attention of the clerk, and in a few minutes King Fisher walked out. In the hallway he met Vinegar Bill Hawkins. The big sheriff grinned, as he told Fisher about his conversation with Henry Conroy.

"Is he a liar, or is he just plain dumb?" asked Fisher.

"He may be a liar," said the sheriff, "but he is not dumb. Records show that, in spite of what people say about him, he was an efficient sheriff and a smart one. Nobody ever understood him, except Judge Van Treece."

"So yuh think he's smart, eh?" mused King Fisher. "How smart, Bill?"

"Smart enough to take care of himself, I reckon."

"M-m-m, I wonder."

Henry had gone to the buckboard. He was waiting for Oscar, seated comfortably in the shade, when a horse and buggy came down the street. As they passed, Henry recognized Josephine riding with a big man, wearing a black suit and a black derby, at least two sizes too small.

Henry's eyes shifted to the front of the King's Castle Saloon, where Oscar had appeared. He was leaning against the doorway, watching the equipage, which drew up at the hotel. The big man got out and assisted Josephine to alight. After a few moments of conversation the man entered the buggy and drove over to the livery stable.

Oscar was halfway down there when Henry looked again. Henry climbed out, untied the team and got back in the buckboard. Swinging the team around, he drove swiftly to the front of the stable, but he was too late to interfere.

Oscar was backing out of the wide doors, an ankle in each hand, and the ankles belonged to the big man who had squired Josephine. Ignoring Henry's command, Oscar dragged his victim straight to the watering trough, where he immersed him completely, dusted his hands off on his knees and came straight to the buckboard. The man was floundering, clawing his way out of the dirty water, spouting like a whale.

OSCAR had one swollen eye and a skinned nose. He took the lines from Henry, chirped to the team, and they headed for the ranch.

"What happened?" queried Henry.

"Yulius coomed back," replied Oscar.

"So Julius wasn't the mummy, eh?" said Henry, after a long pause.

"Yulius vill be, if he don't stop taking adwantage of Yosephine."

"Oh, he took advantage of her, eh?"

"Va-al, today vas her day off, and Yulius inweigled her into taking a boggy ride. Yosephine has a veakness for boggies."

Oscar drove one wheel over a roadside boulder, and almost threw Henry out of the buckboard.

"Keep your mind on the road," said Henry sharply.

"It is hord to think of love and boulders at de same time," said Oscar apologetically. "Sometimes Ay get so damn mad, Ay yust yerk on de wrong line. By yee, Ay am going to ta-al Yosephine a few t'ings, you bat you."

"Be a gentleman," advised Henry. "Always be a gentleman, Oscar."

"When Ay am calm, Ay am yentleman. But when Ay get mad—to ha-al wit' yentlemen. Ay yust turn Wiking, and feel for fight."

"Yes, I know."

"Hanry, have you ever been in love?"

"Every spring when I was younger, Oscar."

"Not now?"

"At my age, Oscar, there is no spring—only hard bumps."

Oscar caressed his swollen eye and smiled wryly.

"Ay get a few boomps myself, Henry. Two times Ay have had Yosephine olmost to de preacher. Somet'ing olvays bosts it oop. Next time, Ay hope, ve might make it."

Henry wiped his eyes and nodded violently.

"I hope you make it," he said huskily.

"You catch cold?" queried Oscar.

"No, just dust," breathed Henry.

Judge was curious to know what Henry had done in Tonto City, but the fat man merely smiled enigmatically. After supper he said to Thunder and Lightning:

"You two go to Tonto City and find Albert Henshaw, the stranger. He is at the Tonto Hotel, I believe. Ask him to come out here with you. Tell him that Danny Regan wants to see him."

"Are you going to let them have that buckboard and team, Henry?" asked Judge.

"Why not? They can drive as well as Oscar."

"Well," sighed Judge, "as long as everything else is going to the dogs, we may as well smash up the rolling stock."

Thunder and Lightning Mendoza were more than pleased to go to town on the errand. It was a rare occasion for them to have sole charge of the buckboard team. Thunder said:

"You see, my leetle brodder, you amount to sometheeng. You mus' be proud from me—personally."

"Look out for the stomp!" yelled Lightning. "*Por Dios,* you are not driving ships! Stay on the road, beeg mouth."

"You know these stranger we are looking for?"

"I'm never see heem," declared Lightning. "But we fin' heem all right. He leeve een hotel."

"How much *dinero* you got?" asked

Thunder. "I theenk we need dreenk pretty good, eh?"

"I am not having even *cinco centavo.* Theese ees one time we stay sobber."

"You theenk so, my leetle brodder?" queried Thunder. "Een my pocket I have two peso. Wa't you theenk from those, eh?"

"Buena! We 'ave leetle fiesta, eh? Two bottle tequila. Get heem down at Mostano's place—beeger bottle for the money."

CHAPTER V

HOW AM I TONIGHT?

AND that is exactly what they did. They tied the team in front of the hotel and bow-legged their way to Mostano's cantina, where they invested the two dollars in a poor grade of tequila, the potent distillation of the maguey plant. An hour later they found the Tonto Hotel and squeezed their way into the lobby.

Taking off their sombreros they bowed their way to the desk, where Old Matt Corrigan, the clerk, looked them over suspiciously.

"You spik weeth heem, Lightning," said Thunder. "I can't remember your name."

"Sure," said Lightning. "Theese ees how it happened. We are looking for sometheeng wheech ees a stranger to you."

"That sure sounds loco to me," replied Old Matt.

"Hanry send us," declared Thunder. "You know heem?"

"Henry Conroy? Sure, I know him. What'd he want?"

Lightning became inspired. "You got something name ees Hanshaw?"

"Henshaw? Sure. He's up in number twenty-six, I reckon."

"Hanry want heem."

"He does, eh? Well, yuh can go up and talk with him. Right up the stairs and straight down the hall. It's at the far end."

"Gracias," bowed Lightning. *"Mucho gracias.* How am I this evening? Well, I hope and pray. Come on, brodder from mine."

They managed to climb the stairs and reach the long hallway. It was none too light up there, and neither of them could have told a twenty-six from a forty-four, even in the daylight, but they understood, "at the far end of the hall."

Those two bottles of tequila had blunted what little sense of etiquette they had ever acquired; so they did not bother to knock. Lightning merely turned the knob, stubbed his toe on the carpet edge, and they both fell into the lighted room.

"Madre de Dios!" gasped Thunder, on his hands and knees staring into the muzzle of a six-shooter, held by a masked man. On the bed was Albert Marshall Henshaw, tied and gagged, and the room was strewn with clothes, bedding and other of Albert's personal property.

But the masked man did not hold them long in suspense. He stepped past the two Mexicans, jerked the door shut behind him, and was gone.

Thunder and Lightning sat up and looked at each other foolishly. Albert was jouncing on the bed and making queer noises through the towel over his mouth.

"I theenk theese ees a hold-off," said Lightning.

Thunder got to his feet and made a quick inspection of the luckless Albert, who blinked at him furiously. Thunder shoved his big hat to the side of his head and looked around the disordered room.

"I look like eet," he decided, finally answering Lightning's conclusion. "I theenk we must fin' the shoriff, my leetle brodder —queek!"

They bolted out of the room, went onto a balcony, where they practically fell all the way down an outside stairway. Then they went galloping through an alley, neck and neck, heading for Vinegar Bill's modest cottage on the edge of town.

There was a huge sycamore in the front yard, and the fence was heavily lined with poplar trees, screening the house from the street. Thunder and Lightning were nearly to the front gate, which was about fifty feet from the front door, when a shot crashed out.

The two dumpy Mexicans skidded to a stop at the open gateway, and a moment

later a man bumped into them, running at top speed, sending them spinning. In the darkness they only had a momentary glimpse of him, and he was gone.

A woman screamed, the door banged and another man came running. Luckily both Thunder and Lightning were not in his path. As soon as he passed, they got to their feet and headed back for town.

"*Madre de Dios!*" panted Lightning. "Sometheeng happen—bad! You hear those women scrim?"

"You theenk you are deef?" countered Thunder. "Sure, I'm hear. I theenk I got piece skeen gone from both your knees. W'at you theenk now?"

At that particular moment Lightning did not know what to think, so he let the question go unanswered. He merely scratched his head and wondered.

The alarm had been given, and they could hear men running, questioning; so they moved in against a fence and let the group go past. They heard someone call:

"Doc will be here in a minute."

"That sound like seekness," said Lightning.

"Biffore, that sound like shotgun," remarked Thunder. "We better look."

They joined the group and heard a man say:

"Somebody blasted a load of buckshot through Bill's window, while they were eatin' supper, and hit Bill's wife."

"Is she dead?" asked another.

"I reckon so. Doc will be here in a minute. Ain't that a terrible thing?"

"Prob'ly meant for Bill. Nobody knows his wife."

"Yeah, I reckon that's what it was."

INSIDE the house Doc Knowles knelt beside the still figure on the floor, while Bill Hawkins steadied himself against the disordered supper table. Doctor Knowles shook his head and got up.

"I'm awful sorry, Bill," he said quietly.

"Gone?" whispered the big sheriff.

The doctor nodded and picked up his bag. Big Bill Hawkins lifted his agonized face and looked around. There were faces in the doorway and at the smashed window, but they all seemed blurred, indistinct.

"Who done this to me?" he asked hoarsely. "I want that man. The law can't never have him—he's mine, do yuh understand."

"Take it easy, Bill," said the doctor. "You'll find him. Keep your nerve."

Hawkins clenched his fists, raised them high above his head.

"Keep my nerve? Doc, you don't understand. My God, who could do such a thing to me, and to her. She never harmed anybody."

King Fisher shouldered his way into the room, looked at the still form on the floor, and then at Bill Hawkins.

"They told me what happened, and I didn't believe 'em, Bill," he said.

"She's gone, King," said the sheriff slowly. "Nothin' can be done now."

King Fisher shook his head slowly. "Nothin', Bill. But who would do a thing like that? Do yuh suppose it was meant for you?"

"If it was, God knows I wish it had been me instead of her. Doc, will you go into that room with Joan. I reckon she needs yuh."

King Fisher examined the smashed glass, and the buckshot holes in the plaster behind the chair.

"Didn't scatter much," said one of the men. "Buckshot at fifteen feet is shore bad medicine."

Fisher merely nodded.

Thunder and Lightning, sobered now, listened for a while and then went back to the street.

"I theenk the shoriff ees busy," said Lightning. "We turn heem loose."

There was nobody in the hotel lobby, as they went through and up the stairs. Albert had managed to paw the gag loose, but was unable to get his hands free. They cut the knots and let him up.

"We go to get the shoriff," explained Lightning, "but he ees busy biccause hees wife ees keeled."

"His wife was killed?" exclaimed Albert.

"Sure." Lightning nodded. "Just a few minutes from now. Danny Regan ask for me to breeng you home."

"Danny Regan wants me?" queried Albert.

"Cross my heart, I hope you die," said Lightning soberly.

"I really thought I was going to die when that masked man came," said Albert. "I have never had such an experience. Wait until I get some things together, and I will go with you."

Thunder and Lightning got Albert between them on the buckboard seat, and headed for the JHC ranch. They were on the road at least sixty percent of the time, which was very good for them, and they eventually pulled up at the ranch house, with all four wheels intact, and harness on both horses.

Henry greeted Albert warmly, after Danny had introduced them.

"Hell ees being paid een Tonto," declared Lightning. "Albert ees held off by a man weeth rag over your face, and somebody ees keeling the sheriff's wife. My, my, I am all excited over you!"

"What happened?" asked Judge.

ALBERT tried to explain, assisted by both Thunder and Lightning, who clouded the issue badly. But finally everyone understood. Albert had been tied and gagged by a masked man, and the sheriff's wife had been killed.

"I have no explanation," said Albert. "I am completely in a fog."

"Undoubtedly," agreed Henry. "What did you miss after he was gone?"

Albert looked puzzled.

"Miss? Why, I—I—really, I had nothing that a robber would desire."

"What about the letters Danny said you had?"

"Oh, those letters. Well, they are—" Albert reached to an inside pocket of his coat, and a blank expression came over his face.

"They are gone," he said. "I remember, the man had my coat when Thunder and Lightning—er—fell in on us."

"The map?" queried Danny quickly.

"The map," replied Albert, "was in the envelope with the letters."

"Never mind the map and letters," said Judge. "What about the sheriff's wife?"

"She is keel—" Lightning began.

"Shut up," said Judge. "I asked Albert. What about her, Albert?"

"I only know what Thunder and Lightning told me," said Albert.

"And what a mess they can make of the telling," sighed Judge.

"I believe I'll go to town and get the story," said Danny. "I can't believe that someone shot through a window and killed her. It don't sound reasonable."

"You theenk you are lying to me, eh?" said Lightning. "I see everytheeng weeth my own eyesight. I see the hole in the weendow and I see the doctor. *Por Dios*, the man who keel her run over us! W'at more can I ask, you hope and pray."

"Anyway," replied Danny, "I reckon I'll go in and listen to somebody else."

"Should I go back with you?" asked Albert.

"No use of that," said Henry dryly. "You haven't anything left that is worth stealing."

After Danny went to town, Henry said to Albert:

"In that letter you had, your uncle did not mention the man he was working for, did he? I mean, the man who grubstaked him."

Albert frowned.

"No, he did not mention any names, Mr. Conroy."

"But you have lost the map," said Judge. "You had a chance to get rich, if you had kept it."

"I am not worried about riches, Mr. Van Treece," said Albert, "but I am worried about what that man said to me. He warned me to get out of this valley and stay out. He said I would not live but a short time if I did not obey that order."

Henry rubbed his red nose and looked reflectively at Albert.

"Do you believe he meant it?" asked Albert.

"There is only one way to prove it," said Henry.

"Oh, I realize that. But why should I run away? I haven't harmed anyone."

Lightning said, "He who fights and gathers no moss, ees wort' two in the brosh."

"What on earth does he mean?" queried Albert.

Henry shook his head. "Your guess is as good as mine."

"My onkle learned me," said Lightning.

"But what am I going to do?" insisted Albert. "I am not a coward. When that masked man told me what they would do to me, something arose up inside of me, and seemed to say, 'Albert, you must see this through in spite of anything.'"

"Are you sure it wasn't something you ate?" queried Judge.

"No," replied Albert soberly, "that came up later."

"I would not care to advise you," said Henry.

"You see, explained Albert, "I am the last of our branch of the Henshaw family."

"The last of the Henshaws," said Judge. "Well, if you stay, you must take the chance that the Henshaws will *all* be gone, Albert."

"If you do not mind, I shall stay," said Albert firmly.

"Buena!" applauded Lightning. "Weeth all of us and Henry behin' you, you weel otherwise leeve or die, and that ees all I hope. *Viva* Bolivar!"

"Never mind Bolivar," said Henry. "Go help Frijole wash the dishes."

KING FISHER was in a vile temper when he came down to breakfast next morning. He swore at the Chinese cook for being slow, and drank a big hooker of raw whisky. He discovered Roy on the porch, and Roy said:

"I've got to have some money today, Dad."

King growled.

"More money? What for? To pay gamblin' debts, eh? Well, you won't get it and that's flat."

"I only need five hundred dollars. My gosh, that—"

"*Only* five hundred, eh? Well, you won't get a dime. You think I'm made of money, don't you? I think that this is a good time for a showdown, young man. I brought you away from the city to try and make somethin' out of you. Did I? Roy, you're a damn fool, and you'll never be anything more. From now on, you'll draw forty a month, just the same as any puncher on this spread. When you show me you're worth more—but you won't."

"Forty a month!" sneered Roy. "You must have slept badly."

"Forty a month—take it or leave it."

Roy got to his feet, his face gray with anger.

"Take it or leave it, eh? If you think I'm just a white chip in this game of yours, you're all wrong. You can't cut me down to forty a month. Just try to do that and you'll be sorry."

"Well, that's what you've got comin'," declared King Fisher.

"Yeah? Well, you watch my smoke."

Roy walked off the porch and went straight down to the stable, where he found Bob Haney, the foreman.

"What's eatin' you?" asked Haney, noting the expression on Roy's face.

"The Old Man cut me off with forty a month," snarled Roy.

"What was the quarrel about, Roy?"

"Oh, I wanted to settle up a poker debt," replied Roy bitterly. "The Old Man thinks he's a tin god around here. If he does me dirt, I'll sure throw somethin' into his machinery. I know a few things."

"What do you know?" asked Haney coldly.

"So you're backin' him, are yuh? Well, Haney—"

"I'm workin' for him," interrupted Haney, "and don't you forget that."

His voice remained cold.

"I never forget anythin'," retorted Roy hotly. "With both of you against me, I ought to do real well. To hell with both of yuh."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Devil Had a Treasure

By LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH
Author of "One Time a Man," "Rajah Bill," etc.

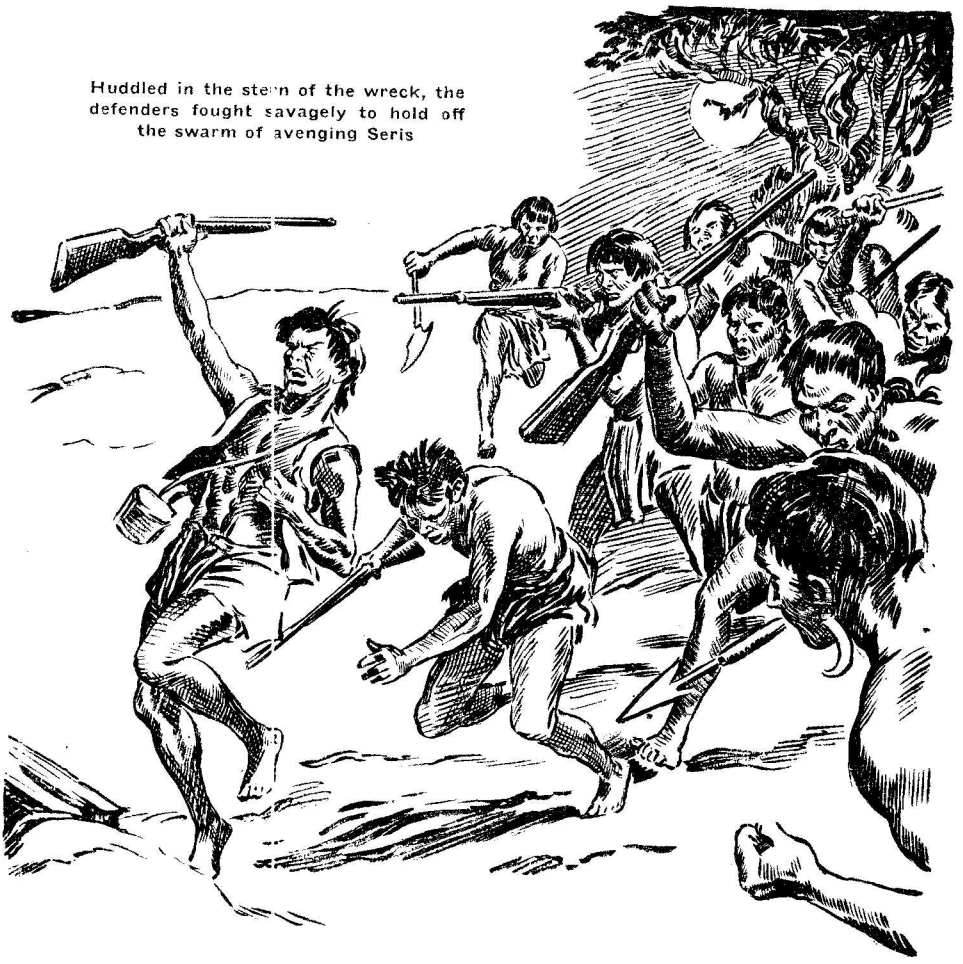
I

THEY baited the proposition with a half-keg of pearls. A good price to pay for an airplane pilot and the use of his ship for so short a time. Too good, Tobiah Wayne thought.

But these old ship records the little Japanese had traded from the Seri Indians seemed authentic enough. And Hiashoto was footing all bills for labor and equipment.

"Three kegs of pearls," Dig Chombers said. "Heavy oak, brass hooped, soaked in pitch, bearing the King's seal and sewed up in sail cloth. You can read about it here in this old marine history." He proffered the book, a smile on his handsome face, a challenge in the bold, black eyes.

Tobiah Wayne—big, good natured and quite homely—motioned the book away. He wondered if Chombers had overheard him joking with Bob, out at the airport.



Huddled in the stern of the wreck, the defenders fought savagely to hold off the swarm of avenging Seris

Maybe that was why they followed him to his hotel room with this pearl offer.

He'd told Bob he was going to spend his two-week vacation looking for a gold mine. It had been just an off-hand remark, made as the two parted. But Bob Jennings, who was a mining engineer of long experience, thought that a first-class joke.

"You find a gold mine, Toby," he roared with laughter, "or any other kind of pay mine in two weeks, and I'll buy a new engine for that freight plane of yours. If you don't, you buy me a new Stetson hat. Is it a bet?"

"It's a bet." Toby grinned.

But he hadn't been entirely joking. Bob Jennings already had a Mexican gold mine, one so rich that he must make these frequent trips to Mexico City to fight against *politicos* who would like very much to own that mine. Toby Wayne flew concentrates and supplies for him. It was a good job, but nothing more than a job.

Bob Jennings also had a daughter who would be considered beautiful north or south of the Rio Grande, or in any other spot on this earth. No unattached young man in his right mind could be around Roberta Jennings very long without wanting a gold mine or the equivalent to toss into her lap.

In the case of Toby, Roberta Jennings couldn't understand why he needed a gold

mine. But Tobiah Wayne was a stubborn, wilful young man with more pride than was good for him.

Toby's eyes moved from Chombers to the little Japanese merchant who had gotten hold of the *Dover Bound* ship's records. "I've read about those pearls," he admitted. "From the Baja California oyster beds, weren't they?"

Hiashoto ducked his head, smile revealing decayed, goldfilled buckteeth. "And they are very fine pearls, Mr. Wayne."

"You Japs should know," Toby said, not trying to conceal his dislike of the other; "you're taking out plenty of them on the quiet."

Hiashoto's smile remained. "My countrymen have troubles sometimes with the Mexican coast guard," he admitted. "But I am not know about that. I am simple merchant here in Guaymas. I trade Seri Indian for these records; I pay for supplies; I take two-thirds."

That was reasonable enough. But there were too many loose ends that bothered the flyer. He had read of at least a dozen old-time ships being wrecked by those sudden, furious storms that break over the Gulf of California.

There was the English merchantman in Chinese trade that had slipped its anchors while the crew was ashore for fresh water. That was back in 1586. A mate and one of the stewards had escaped in a small boat and reached the Spanish mission at Molino.

The Seri Indians, who were cannibals then, if not now, built fires on the decks to roast the crew. No doubt she had burned to the waterline. At any rate they had never found a trace of her, nor of the million pesos of silver bullion, part of her cargo.

HIASHOTO seemed to read this doubt in Toby's mind. "It is unquestioned the *Dover Bound*," he said, in his queer, singsong English. "Mr. Chombers has seen it from his airplane. It was high beached and covered completely by sand. But this tidal wave we have, it washes the sand away. The Indians find this so heavy glazed vase which they trade to me, not knowing of the papers sealed airproof of inner side."

Toby turned his questions on Dig Chombers. "If you're so sure of this, why didn't you fly him down with your ship? Why cut me in?"

Chombers shrugged. "Don't kid yourself, Wayne. You wouldn't have a smell of this, only I caved a landing gear strut yesterday."

Toby believed him. That story was too easily verified for him to lie about it.

"Just one more question," he persisted. "What's your big hurry? You got these ship records from the Indians and dug up this old marine history some place and found out about the pearls, hidden in the after bilge.

"But the sand must have been washed away from that wreck several times during those years she's been there. If the natives didn't find the pearls then there's no reason why they should now. So why didn't you charter a fishing boat and keep all three kegs of pearls?"

Hiashoto sucked a sharp, hissing breath through those rotten-looking, gold-upholstered front teeth. His glance questioned Dig Chombers.

Chombers shrugged. "Go ahead," he commanded. "Wayne's been in Mexico several years. The *politicos* busted him on an airmail contract, so it's not goin' to bother him handing them some of their own medicine."

Hiashoto still seemed reluctant to speak. In the slight pause Toby's ears signaled a message. There was somebody outside the door of his hotel room. Somebody who might have heard everything said.

His eyes moved carefully over Dig Chombers' face. He knew nothing about this big, good-looking American except that he had a late model six-place Samson cabin plane, equipped with hopper for crop dusting, and that he'd been doing some of that work for the Sinaloa planters.

Hiashoto he knew as a man of mystery in the Mexican port town. He seemed to

have an unusual amount of influence in the Japanese colony, seemed to have an abundance of money, yet his little trading post was neglected, its scanty stock undusted. And on ship days when he might pick up a little money from tourists, the shop was usually deserted, doors locked.

Hiashoto spoke: "Our hurry," he said, "is that a Mexican coast guard anchors at Mazatlan three days ago."

"Coming up here after those pearls?"

"That we do not know."

"But you know there's a cutter down there. How?"

Again the Japanese hesitated. "It happens that one of our fishing boats sends a radio," he finally admitted.

"Uh huh. Those boats are pretty well equipped, aren't they? I've heard they all carry fittings for gun mounts."

"I am not know about that. I am simple merchant here in Guaymas."

Toby's sudden movements startled both the other men. He was on his feet, had the bedroom door opened and his gun out. All of these things seemed to have been done with one movement. A man, who must have been leaning against the door, sprawled half way into the room.

"Friend of yours?" Toby inquired.

For a moment the other two remained frozen in posture. Hiashoto made a quick movement toward the side pocket of his coat. Toby's forty-five Colt swung on him.

"Pardon the artillery," he said. "If I shoot there's goin' to be a lot of questions asked by the police. But you won't be answering any of them, my simple merchant friend."

THE man on the floor stirred, turned over and got laboriously to his feet. Immediately his knees caved and he sat heavily on the floor again But it was with a certain dignity, as if the thing had been planned.

"'Tis tha McFedden," he explained with drink-thickened tongue.

Toby stared at him in amazement. He was a man of medium height, with shoulders so broad and thick that he seemed almost cubical. His face was long, had the mournful, wrinkled expression of a bloodhound. The top of his head was egg bald.

But it was the eyes that caused Toby's amazement. The left one, bloodshot from drink, was gray, with a twinkle of humor in it. It met Toby's stare with a straight honesty. The right eye was vivid lavender and its gaze had fixed in placid meditation on the rough plaster of the ceiling.

Dig Chombers' voice cut the silence: "You drunken sot, either you stop following me, or I turn you into the Mex police."

The Scotchman pointed a square, oil-blackened forefinger. "I'll na stop fallerin' ye till I get m' pay. Three weeks' mechanic pay, for which I ha' I.O.U.s wi' your name on 'em, Mister Chombers."

"You'll get your pay, all right, Mac," Chombers said, in changed tone.

"To be sure o' that," McFedden stated, "I'll just gang wi' you on this trip fer pearls."

Chombers frowned, exchanged a quick glance with the Japanese. His face cleared. "Sure," he said. "Sure, Mac. We'll be glad to have you."

"Dinna fool yoursel' now," the Scotchman warned. "'Tis a dr-runk mon I am, but you'll na gang wi'oot me or I'll report this matter o' the pearls."

With this final warning McFedden calmly stretched himself out on the floor for slumber.

Toby had holstered his gun. "Well," he remarked, "looks like we've got our first recruit for the trip."

"Then you'll fly us up there?" Chombers asked.

Toby nodded. "It'll be a good show," he predicted, "even if we don't find pay dirt."

Toby Wayne didn't realize how good the show was going to be, nor that they already had another recruit—grim, invisible: Death.

II

THE *Dover Bound* lay just as Chombers had described it. Sharpened by sand-charged wind and bleached by sun and

salt water, the ribs protruded from the sand like the skeleton of some huge, prehistoric monster.

Hiashoto, sitting in a front seat in the small passenger compartment, pointed excitedly. "Not go further," he shouted. "Seri Indians very bad peoples."

"You can land right beside it," Dig Chombers told the flyer. "I would have landed, only I didn't know about the pearls then."

"I'll pick my own fields," Toby informed him. He circled, dropping altitude. He glanced back toward the big freight compartment. The door was closed but he knew that there were four stupid-faced Yaqui Indians back there, with two Japanese, and complete equipment for getting sand out of the wreckage of the old *Dover Bound*.

McFedden sat in the rear of the passenger cabin, his face mournful beyond description. The drink had worn off, leaving nausea and the black despair of a hangover. He had an ancient double-barreled shotgun wedged between his leg and the fuselage sidewall. At his feet was an old-fashioned paper-and-cloth telescope valise.

He had his glass eye out of the right socket—the lavender one that had so startled Toby—and was polishing it with a bandana handkerchief.

Toby looked over the country a thousand feet below them. To the right were the desolate, sun-scorched hills of western Sonora.

They had already crossed the small inlet of the Rio de Sonora, a river almost dry at this season of the year. Ahead of them only a short distance a mountain shoulder, crowned with rim-rock, came down at right angles, continuing out into the gulf to make a walled headland.

The gulf water was smooth, reflecting the red evening sky, so that Tiburon Island, home of the mysterious Seri Indians, appeared to float in mid-air, a very narrow channel separating it from the mainland. The rib skeleton of the old ship had a perfect setting of desolation: a land of the dead.

Toby came in low, motor throttled to near stalling speed while he studied the ground. The sand had been riffled slightly by wind but there were no hummocks, no brush to worry about.

It would make heavy landing. He had foreseen this and had let some pressure from his balloon tires before leaving Guaymas. There was plenty of weight aft to prevent any nosing over.

Toby dragged the strip again, while Chombers fidgeted impatiently. It was a simple enough landing, but if anything did happen there would be ten men stranded out there with a limited food and water supply.

White dots were scattered about the sand. Those would be rocks, large enough to blow a tire or cave a wheel.

He picked a level strip below high tide line and settled on, three-points, not using his brakes. He turned up onto the looser sand above the tide level, and cut his switches.

With that last cough from the dying engine a thick, ominous silence dropped onto them, as if it were a tangible thing that had been waiting.

"NICE place," Chombers commented uneasily. They had remained seated for a moment, each busy with his own reactions. There was something tremendously impressive about this desolate, brooding land.

"Nice place," Chombers repeated, excitement growing in his voice. He pointed to the old wreck. "There's our millions, gentlemen. Let's get 'em."

Toby frowned his eyes busy. "When did the Seri bring that vase in?" he asked Hiashoto.

The Japanese took a little time to answer. "It was a Yaqui," he said. "The Seri will not come near towns."

"Then it's been a month or more since they found the vase?"

"That is possible."

Toby nodded toward the wreck. "They've been back. The wind would have smoothed those tracks in a day or less."

They exchanged glances.

"I brought a thirty-thirty Savage," Toby said. "And my automatic. Did you fellows bring guns?"

"Look!" Chombers exclaimed.

A native seemed to have materialized from thin air. He was a tall man, his bronze body naked except for breech cloth. He stood on a slight rise of ground a short distance from the wreck.

"Quick! He's alone." Chombers unclasped his safety belt, charging down the passenger aisle. He had drawn a long-barreled revolver.

For a startled moment Toby failed to understand. Then he went after the other in a quick rush.

Dig Chombers was leaning against the ship's fuselage, using his left forearm for a shooting rest. His lips were drawn away from his teeth in a meaningless, snarling smile. "Quit joltin' the plane," he ordered.

Toby caught his shoulder, whirling him. "You murdering fool!"

The Indian had turned and was off with a long, springy gait that seemed effortless, a pace that would hold even with a horse at full gallop. Toby had read and heard unbelievable things about the speed and endurance of these Seri runners. He had heard other things about them that were unpleasant to think of.

The Indian was beyond pistol range. Chombers holstered his gun; kept admirable control over his temper. "You're the fool, Wayne. That lad's off now to tell the rest of his gang about us."

Hiashoto had joined them. "It is too late now, gentlemens. Perhaps we had better get tents up. It will be darkness very soon." The man had an Oriental acceptance of things as they were. But Toby understood well enough that he would have favored shooting the Indian down in cold blood.

Toby worked thoughtfully at getting the Norford secured against any sudden high winds. McFedden helped him with this, while the others pitched tents.

The Scotchman knew his business. He got timbers from the wreck and without orders trenched them deep in the sand as dead-men to secure the wing tips and tail. The pilot dug holes for the wheels. While he was at this McFedden stopped beside him. It was already too dark for Toby to see his face plainly.

"I'd gie all the pearls in yon wreck," the Scotchman grumbled, "fer a wee drap o' whuskey."

"Come on," Toby said, "I know the feeling of a hangover."

He led into the plane's cabin and got a quart of rye from his bag.

McFedden drank deeply. Toby put the bottle back. "What d'you think of this layout, Mac?"

The other removed his glass eye, polishing it thoughtfully. "I ha' na use fer Jops," he stated, "an' less use fer Chombers. As fer the Yaquis I ha' the four of 'em well under-r control."

"Under control?"

McFedden held his eye out for the pilot's inspection. "Ha' ye na considered the sognificance o' this? Ha' ye e'er seen an orb o' sech beauty? Ha' ye e'er, in this whole land, seen a mon who could place his eye at a distance to watch out fer him an' cast the evil spell? I ha' been to great pains explainin' its powers to the sovages."

"Not bad." Toby chuckled. "What d'you say we keep watch on these other birds? I'll take first shift while you sleep off a little more of that bad liquor."

"There is but one mon fer us to watch," McFedden said, after a thoughtful pause. "D'ye na compr-rehend? Dig Chombers is the only one who kens aught o' flyin' or of airplanes. Watch him. If ye are threatened wi' death we must kill him. Fer 'tis one or the other of ye they must have to fly them out o' this place."

. . . That night, despite a watch kept against the Seris, their camp was raided.

MORE exactly, it was the airplane freight compartment. . . . Toby might have suspected Hiashoto, or the little ape-faced Yoksumato of sleeping on duty. The first had taken the ten to twelve watch, Toby the twelve to two, and Yoksumato on

till the rest of the camp had awakened.

But the two Orientals seemed completely unnerved by the loss and, if Toby was any judge, neither of them had slept a wink during the entire night.

Fortunately they had taken their food and water out of the plane. That, at least, was safe. With the exception of a hammer and a few nails, two shovels and an ax, everything else had been stolen; all the equipment that was to aid them in getting sand out of the old wreck.

"All right; let it go," Chombers snarled. "I'll get those pearls if I have to dig the sand out with my bare hands."

Hiashoto's distress seemed all out of proportion to the occasion, yet Toby was certain the man wasn't acting. He appeared to be almost frantic over this loss. Even the sullen-faced Yoksumato showed distress.

This wasn't so with Frank Kiatra, the third Japanese. He was younger than the others and seemed to consider the whole trip a sort of picnic. He was out now by the wreck, gathering a pile of the white rocks Toby had seen the night before when he came in to land.

"Let's keep our shirts on," Toby advised. "Chombers, you and I'll fly back to Guaymas for more equipment. And we'll pick up three or four good rifle shots to keep these Seris away from us."

"An' leave these others alone here?" Chombers demanded. "Give 'em a chance to find the pearls and cache them? Not much, sap-head."

Hiashoto also had immediate objections to this plan. "No, please. That Mexican coast guards may come here at any time."

Toby shrugged. Hiashoto must know that the coast guard couldn't get up from Mazatlan short of a week's sailing. Perhaps he feared there might be some other coast guard cutter plying the coast. One that hadn't been reported to him.

It was more likely that he was afraid Toby would bring in more men of his own race. The thought of those pearls seemed to breed suspicion in all of them.

"We'll take turns on the shovels," Chombers urged. "Those who aren't working will keep a lookout for Indians. We can splice tent ropes, use the water bucket for hoisting sand. Let's get busy!"

Toby looked at the man. He seemed almost crazy with the thought of what they would find in the wreck. Toby could understand that, up to a certain point. He had thought of the pearls; had wondered whether they really were there and if so, the quantity and quality. The old marine history had given a very detailed account of how the kegs were made, how they were protected against the elements. But strangely enough, not a word as to their size. They might be no bigger than a tomato can.

"Okay," he finally agreed, and went into the tent for his rifle.

McFedden followed him, spoke in a hoarse whisper: "I'll keep an eye on *Mister* Chombers," he promised. "Jest ye let out a squawk, lad, if there's any dir-rty work started." He hurried out, his old shotgun under one stubby arm.

McFedden seemed to be thoroughly recovered from his drunk.

Toby pushed shells into the spare clip of his Savage. Queer, the effect those pearls were having on them. Yesterday they were all more or less friendly and casual about the whole venture.

Now the Scotchman was keeping a constant watch on Dig Chombers, ready to threaten him with death, actually to shoot him if it was necessary for their safety. Chombers had thrown away all civilized restraint in his greediness. The two Japanese seemed almost prostrated by the loss of equipment. Even the four Yaquis were uneasy and suspicious.

There was one of the party that Toby hadn't considered. This Frank Kiatra, the younger Japanese, seemed self-sufficient in his holiday mood. Curious about him, Toby strolled over to where he was absorbed with the white rocks.

Kiatra heard the scuffling of boots in the sand. He turned. He held up one of the white objects. It wasn't a rock. It was a human skull.

"WHAT d'you think of that?" Kiatra asked. It was the first time Toby had heard him speak anything but Japanese.

"It was a white man," the boy continued. There was an eagerness in his voice that puzzled Wayne.

"There are four whiteman skulls. The rest I've found are—Indian. See." He pointed to the cheekbones. He touched his own cheeks. His eyes were bright with interest.

"Have you ever studied anthropology, Mr. Wayne? Say, I've read every book I could get ahold of." He laughed. "My old man almost kicked me out when I wrote a high school paper on the similarity between our race and the North American Indians. That's part reason why he sent me down here to my uncle."

"Hiashoto's your uncle?" Toby asked.

A change came over the boy's face. "Yes," he said briefly.

"Hey!" Chombers' shout came to them. "Where's that other little Jap?"

Kiatra got slowly to his feet. He dropped the skull. Its structure, dried and eroded by the years, broke like delicate china. He walked in silence toward the remains of the old ship. Toby followed and, without knowing just why, he felt sorry for the boy.

Now that his attention had been directed to the skulls he wondered at their profusion and at the other bones, buried so that only parts of them were visible. From the air he had taken these for sea shells. It didn't seem possible that they were from the original victims of the *Dover Bound,* though he knew that they would last a long time in the desert air.

Chombers had stripped to his light undershirt and this was already wet through with sweat. His face was a dull red from his unaccustomed labor. He worked with a concentrated fury, attacking the loose sand as if it were a sentient thing that fought to keep him from the pearls. Once, when the slope caved down on him, he beat at it with the flat of his shovel, cursing it in wild anger.

"Better give that shovel to one of the Yaquis," Toby advised him. "Keep that pace up very long and you'll be having a sunstroke."

Chombers went on with his shoveling, not hearing the warning or being too engrossed in his own thoughts to understand.

Toby went poking about the ship, or what there was left of it. The strake planking of the hull was intact up to a level above the outside beach. Sand had filled this so that only the ribs and a few vertical members remained above.

There was a splintered stump of a mast, besides enough timbers to indicate the old-time high fore- and aftercastles. Some of the deck timber of the poop still remained. All of the exposed wood had a gray, velvety outer crust of disintegration, but under this it was sound. The sand and dry air seemed to have preserved it.

McFedden joined him. "Somebody wi' sense ha' better take charge here," he said. "Yon fool's gettin' the Yaquis all mixed up, shoutin' first this an' then that. The young Jop's a guid worker but the other two— Say, there's something funny there, Wayne. They act like we ha' found the pearls an' had 'em took from us."

Toby nodded. The two Japanese seemed in a daze, and they certainly weren't interested in the work.

Chombers wanted to give orders, not take them. But he worked without plan and as a result was handling twice the sand necessary. As the hole deepened in the stern the slope of dry sand lengthened forward, constantly filling in.

The solution to this was evident. They would have to construct a caisson bulkhead forward, adding to it as the hole increased in depth, keeping it always a little below the digging level.

Kiatra helped Toby and McFedden rip up the few sound timbers from the poop decking to start this bulkhead. The other two Japanese looked on without much interest. Once Hiashoto spoke sharply to the boy in their tongue. Kiatra replied in a tone just as sharp. Toby understood that there was no love lost between these two.

By mid-day Chombers was on the point

of exhaustion. He had been shoveling all morning. His hands were raw with blisters, an ugly purplish tinge was creeping into his flushed face and he was immediately sick after the small amount of lunch that he ate. Nevertheless he insisted on going back to the wreck so he could watch the others.

They had cleared out enough sand now to expose the poop deck from below. The central part was entirely gone. It was as if some tremendous blow had been struck, splintering the timbers in. But there was no sign of this wood in the sand they removed.

The work was slowed up now. They had to bucket the sand out and there was no more deck timber for their bulkhead. The exposed strakes lacked sufficient strength for this, even when triple-lapped. Some of them failed and all the sand they had held back came cascading under the rotten timbers.

Toby climbed out, covered with grit and sputtering with anger. They had used up most of the day and were not much further ahead than when they started. "I'm flying back to Guaymas, tomorrow morning," he announced. "It won't take me more than half a day for the round trip. Then we can go at this in a sensible manner."

McFedden tapped his shoulder, pointing. Three Seri Indians stood motionless, halfway between them and the wall-like headland that jutted out into the gulf. There was a tight, uneasy silence.

Then, cursing, Dig Chombers pulled his revolver, cocked it, took aim and fired.

III

SAND spurted up from the bullet. The elevation was perfect for a stomach shot but he had pulled to the right with his trigger jerk. He emptied the gun like a crazy man, using the double action, hardly aiming at the Indians, who were now loping away.

"Maybe that was a wise thing to do," Toby said quietly, "but I don't see it."

"Who's asking you what you see?" Chombers snapped. "If you knew anything about those Seris you'd be usin' that rifle of yours. Ever hear about the Mexican *rurales* that went after them? Got ate up, horses and men both. They got a religion that worships badgers. D'you know why? Because badgers are devils. And they do what the Seris ask them."

He saw Toby and McFedden exchange glances.

"Think I'm crazy, huh? Well, listen. Nobody can outrun and catch a Seri. Not unless he's got a darned good horse. So what do they do? They coax mounted men to chase them over badger fields. The horses are tripped up and break their legs in the holes. Then Mr. Seri has himself a good feed."

Toby slept very little that night. They had divided their small force into regular guard tours against the Seris. In addition to this he and McFedden maintained their agreed watch on the movements of Chombers, who shared one of the tents with them.

The man was too wrought up to sleep properly. He filled the dark tent with restless movements in his blankets, with the queer moaning sounds of troubled slumber and occasionally a sharp exclamation and muttered gibberish.

Outside there was the constant rustle of gulf waters creaming up over the beach. Then came the night song of the coyotes. The staccato yaps jarred on Toby's nerves. The thin, quavering wails intensified his feeling of uneasiness. He tried to analyze this. It wasn't entirely fear of personal danger nor of the menace of Seri Indians, though he had heard enough about them to know they were bad medicine.

They might be cannibals, as so many well-informed people claimed, but Toby's philosophy recognized no great horror of this. He'd be completely dead before the roasting started and that was a whole lot better than being staked out for the buzzards—a procedure that had once been tried on him.

It was the undercurrents of greed, suspicion, hate—and another, intangible thing—that caused his uneasiness. He tried to

put his finger on this. It wasn't the Yaquis. They were town Indians, lazy and dull, as are most natives who have enjoyed the questionable blessings of civilization.

As for McFedden, he would stake his life the man was sound Just as instinctively he distrusted Chombers. That man was a little too ready with his gun. It was likely that he had a criminal record; perhaps one that had forced him out of the States. But like most petty criminals, his outstanding traits were greed and stupidity.

No, it wasn't Dig Chombers who gave him this uneasy sense of foreboding.

That left the three Japanese. Hiashoto, the leader, had some objective other than the finding of those pearls. Toby was certain of that. But what was it? And why had he and Yoksumato been so distressed over the loss of the equipment?

Come to think of it, he didn't know what had been in the crates and burlap-wrapped objects that he and McFedden had lashed secure in the freight compartment of his plane. Hiashoto had been vague on that point; they were parts of a metal windlass, hoist buckets, rope, axes . . .

Toby had taken for granted that the Japanese understood the problem, knew what sort of equipment they would need.

Perhaps it was some other thing that had caused Hiashoto's distress. Thinking of this Toby remembered an interesting detail. During the day Frank Kiatra, the younger Japanese, had been as cheerful as any eighteen-year-old kid out on a trip. More than that he had seemed to hold himself aloof from the other two, at times quarreling with them.

Toby drowsed off to sleep, thinking of Frank Kiatra, who had been sent away from his United States home because he thought the North American Indian might have an Oriental origin.

THE next morning Juan, their smartest Indian, was not with them for breakfast. His skull had been crushed. And a knife of chipped flint, or perhaps it was a spearhead without shaft, protruded from his neck.

His body hung stiff over the airplane's landing wheel. The Norford's gas tanks had been drained out onto the sand.

"Just the same," Chombers said, "we're goin' to get those pearls."

There was no response from the others.

"Look," Chombers continued, "you think we ought to turn tail and run. You're crazy. Maybe those Yaquis could make the grade —but not the rest of us.

"So we'll wait here for the Mex coast guard boat. And while we're waiting we'd just as well dig those pearls out and cache 'em. Come back for them later."

"I think," Hiashoto suggested quietly, "that it would be better if we divided. Some ones could go out for assistance. Perhaps Mr. Wayne and Mr. Mac."

Toby studied the bland face. "No," he said. "I think Dig's right. We'll stay and wait for the coast guard."

"But, Mr. Wayne," Hiashoto objected, forgetting his careful English, "is not certain coast guard comes this side. Is great doubtfulness."

"Yeah? Well there wasn't great doubtfulness when we started up here. Some way or other, Hiashoto, you're pretty sure that boat's headed this way. With rationing we can last two weeks or more and it'll be here by then."

McFedden held his tongue until they were alone, preparing to bury the Indian's body.

"Lad," he said, "I can na agree wi' ye as to stayin' here, diggin' fer them pearls. I ha' m' doots, lad, that there are any pearls."

"So have I, Mac." Toby nodded.

"Then—"

Toby pointed to the flint knife, deeply buried in the Yaqui's neck. "The Indian touch," he said, with grim smile.

"The dir-rty, murderin' roscals! Bash in his puir head wi' a club, then stab him."

"Uh huh. Killed him with a club then, some time later, shoved that flint thing into his neck."

" 'Twas done afterward! But how can ye be sure o' that, lad?"

"No blood from the wound, Mac. Who-

ever it was didn't think of the Indian touch until later, until they had finished draining the tanks. And you might ask yourself this: would those Seris know how to work the drain cocks on a plane?"

"Then it was Chombers!"

"Nope. Not if you kept track of him as closely as I did."

"Then—"

"Think it over, Mac. Hiashoto doesn't want us to look for those pearls. He wants you and me to start hoofing it for Guaymas. Well, what shall we do?"

"Lad, I ha' changed m' mind. Them pearls're in yon ship."

"Don't be too sure of yourself, Mac."

Chombers was satisfied that morning to let McFedden and Toby take complete charge of the digging. And today he was in favor of making the Yaquis do all the work, grumbling when Toby insisted that everybody do his share.

They trenched outside the hull, exposing strakes that were still sound, prizing them off for bulkhead timbers. This time they built it properly, shoring it against the weight of sand.

They chopped holes on each side of the hull, making inclined trenches and hauling out of these instead of using bucket and rope. The sand level in the stern began lowering steadily under their systematic attack.

It was at this point, toward mid-afternoon, that they discovered the dead.

THEY had trenched all the way around the wreck, searching for good bulkhead timbers. It occurred to Toby that if the poop decking was sound they should find the forecastle head in the same condition.

He was right in this; but in their digging they uncovered something he never would be able to recall without a shudder of horror.

The eleven men, stripped of their clothing, lay side by side in a neat row, barely covered with sand. They were all Orientals; all in the gruesome first stages of putrefaction.

They gave them a decent burial. After that McFedden and Toby kept lookout with the rifle against land enemies, and the equally ferocious sharks and rayfish of the gulf, while they all washed themselves in the shallow beach water.

Death has a grim way of reducing human beings to a common level. It was a sober, thoughtful camp that night, with very little conversation.

Only the Yaquis had any appetite for food. But a Yaqui is born with hunger, lives with hunger and sometimes dies from it. To ignore good food would be to him a thing unthinkable, the absolute cardinal sin.

Toby had called off their watch on Dig Chombers. This situation was more complex than either of them had at first supposed. Unable to sleep he took his rifle and strolled out in the moonlight.

Poking about the old wreck gave him a queer sense of traveling backward through time. Back when this slowly rising coastline was many feet lower than it now was, when this raised elevation was sea level, or very near it.

This wreck might or might not have been the *Dover Bound*, with its storied wealth of pearls and bales of silk from old Cathay. But whatever its name, at one time it was a gallant ship, manned by seamen brave enough to venture out into an unmapped world which their imaginations people with giants, mermaids, and sea monsters that could swallow their ship at one gulp.

Toby moved away, mounted the small rise of ground where they had seen the first Indian. As he sat there, rifle cuddled between his knees, with the ghostly background of coyote song, his mind searched queer, forbidden places.

Undoubtedly the old ship had long been a burial ground for the Seris. And what they had found today seemed definite proof that the tribe was no longer cannibalistic.

His idle gaze came to rest on an object, not a hundred feet over to his right. The body of a dead man, etched sharply on the background of white sand.

Toby corrected the first thought. At least it was the body of a man. It might be a Seri. And he might be alive!

He slipped the safety catch of his rifle. Holding it at high port he advanced watchfully, without noise.

It was Frank Kiatra. He was lying on his back, staring up at the cloudless sky. But he must have been watching Toby Wayne's movements for some time. "Hello," he said briefly, in a subdued voice.

"What's the matter?" Toby asked.

"Nothing."

Toby safetied his gun and sat down. There was silence, broken suddenly by the unearthly, lonely wail of a coyote.

"I think," Kiatra remarked, as if speaking to himself, "that he is Japanese. His parents came from the old country. They are *Isseis,* who believe that that funny little man who wears glasses, their emperor, is a god, descended from the sun.

"But that one who howls out there is a *Nisei,* born in the new country. He asks, why must the little man wear glasses, if he is a god? He says that he will be a good citizen of the new country and forget the old. The old country has gone mad."

"What's all this foolishness?" Toby demanded.

Kiatra turned on his side, to face him. There was subdued passion in the voice. "I am two men. My uncle says I am an *Issei;* that I must join the naval reserve of a country that means nothing to me. I say that I am American."

He motioned toward the distant hill. "So I am out there with that one who howls, telling the world that my heart aches; that I am lonely for a friend."

KIATRA got abruptly to his feet. Toby stood beside him, dropped a hand on his shoulder. "How'd you like a job out in a mining camp?" he asked gruffly.

"An American camp?"

"Belongs to an American. A tough little Irish-American who's the pure quill when you get to know him."

There was a pause. "Forget it," Kiatra said harshly. "The way I've been spouting you'd think I'm a sappy kid with a cut finger." He started to leave, apparently angered at his own momentary display of emotion.

"You're missin' a bet, Frank," Toby called after him.

The other stopped. He retraced his steps, holding his hand out with something. "You think you're so smart. You're missing a bet yourself."

"What's this?" Toby asked, fingering the strip of material the other gave him.

"The rank insignia of a petty officer, naval reserve. It was there in the wreck, where we found those bodies."

"They were the crew of a boat?"

"I wouldn't know. And I wouldn't know where to look for the boat. And I wouldn't know why Hiashoto got out those faked ship's records . . . unless he wanted to make a quick trip up here, and yet be sure the pilot wouldn't talk."

The boy turned and left with quick, angry strides, as if half regretting what he had told the white man.

The flyer's eyes followed him, absentmindedly. Yes, the nearby presence of a boat might explain a lot of things. Perhaps Hiashoto had had those records in his shop for a long time; forged records made up for tourist trade. It was a common enough thing.

Then, needing quick transportation, his oblique Oriental mind had conceived this plan. And it had worked because, on the face of it, Hiashoto had nothing to gain; was furnishing equipment, paying for gas and oil.

But why all the mystery? And where was the boat?

That last question almost answered itself. There was but one place of possible concealment. Sharply now his mind recalled Hiashoto's words, two days before, when they arrived: *Not go further. Seri Indians bad.*

Toby had put it down to nervousness. They were already opposite the narrowest channel separating Tiburon Island from

the mainland. The Seri would already have seen them if they were going to.

The truth of it was Hiashoto feared the white men might see the boat if they went any further north. That seemed logical. It was concealed back of that rocky, wall-like headland.

This was mostly guesswork, of course. But it wouldn't take him long to check on it. Just a short walk around the headland, following the same path that he had observed the Seris take.

He hesitated. These Seri Indians were a queer lot. He had an idea that if left alone they would leave others alone. Probably some member of that boat's crew had gotten jittery and killed one of them, just as Chombers had tried to do on two occasions. Which would account for the massacre.

But if they saw him in the boat, or near it, they would identify him with those men, add him to the list.

He decided to take the chance. The moonlight was bright enough that nobody could slip up on him unawares. And that light would make it a simple matter finding the Japanese boat.

If there was one.

IV

HE ROUNDED the headland. The shore line coved in here. One quick glance, after he'd gotten north of the headland, convinced him that his imagination had run wild. There was no boat in sight.

But he turned eastward, following the rocky shoulder of the hill. As long as he was here he might as well make certain.

Toby had a vague picture in his mind of the sort of boat it would be. There had been eleven men in the crew. That would make it a fair-sized vessel. They were naval reservists, therefore it would be a naval boat: sleek, well cared for.

The boat he found, almost stumbling onto its deck where it lay in a narrow gash of the hill, brought a muttered word of disappointment from him. Even in the uncertain light it gave an immediate impression of age and slovenliness; of general disrepair, of a total lack of importance.

It was unmistakably a fishing boat. The outrig booms were secured with frayed ropes, carelessly knotted. In daylight the hull might show traces of a general paint job but it appeared now to be smeared untidily with mud with here and there an ugly splotch that had been rust-chipped and boot-topped.

Nevertheless, Toby reminded himself, this boat had carried eleven men to this desolate spot for some reason, good or bad. And that reason was important enough for Hiashoto to take considerable pains making a stealthy trip up here.

But why? And what connection did it have with the lost equipment? With the killing of Juan? With the draining of gasoline from his airplane?

After a careful survey of his surroundings, Toby stepped down onto the weathered, unwashed deck. He could feel it give a little under his weight. She was fully afloat.

A short walk around the deck gave him no clue to the boat's purpose, more than it appeared to be at first glance: for tuna or some other sort of commercial fishing. There was a small hatch forward. After a short tussle he managed to lift the cover from this. Leaning far into the opening he struck a match.

He was puzzled for a moment. The whole entrance to below-deck was covered by a second hatch The smell of fish was strong here and the glow from his match was reflected in tiny points by fish scales that had clung to the sides of the hatch and to the second cover. There was a ring-bolt in the center of this.

The match burned out. Toby was a big man. He wriggled a little more of his height over the hatch combing, down into the hole. His groping finger encountered the ringbolt. He tugged and the second cover came out easily.

He lit another match and held it to see below. A sharp whistle of surprise came to his lips. "Well, I'll be—"

He stood up and again searched the country around. Now he was on the look-

out for more than Seri Indians. He replaced both the inner and outer hatch covers.

"With a few fish dumped on that lower cover," he muttered, "they could stand a coast guard search." Toby moved about now with a purpose. He was pretty sure after that what to look for and, to an extent, where he might find it.

But the instruments were pretty well scattered about the ship. He was careful to put everything he found back just as it had been. He was looking for something more important than them.

He found a transit head in a paint locker, in the peak. It was a mountain transit, short-barreled but quite efficient. "Doin' some of their work on land, too," he commented.

He had found the transit in a paint barrel, wrapped in clean muslin. Oakum and a miscellany of rope-ends had concealed it. This gave him an idea. He started jerking the lids off of cans and kegs at a furious rate. . . .

BACK at camp McFedden almost blinded him with his flashlight when Toby lifted the flap of their tent. "Oh, 'tis you, lad," the Scotchman grunted, relief in his voice.

Before speaking Toby listened for a space to Chombers' regular breathing, each breath ending in a plaintive wheeze. He was so sound asleep it would take a pistol shot to waken him.

"Who'd you think it was?" Toby asked McFedden, groping his way through the darkness to sit beside his friend.

McFedden flashed light on his old turnip-shaped silver watch. "One-thirty," he mumbled. "Whist mon, it seems I ha' na slept fer a week. Feerst 'tis thot heathen o' a Hiashoto, makin' his cr-razy talk. Then 'tis you, wander-rin' oot among them Seris, leavin' me to fret o'er your wor-rthless sel'."

Toby gripped his arm. "What'd he say? What'd Hiashoto talk about?"

"An' how should I ken what 'tis? Thot leetle mon talks more an' says less than any I ha' e'er known. 'Tis five thousand dollars, but fer what I dinna—"

"Not so loud, Mac. Listen. He offered you five thousand to do some work for him. But you had to promise not to say . . ."

"An' how did ye ken thot, lad?"

"You just listen and tell me when I'm not making sense. First, take a look at these charts and maps."

Toby unrolled the paint-daubed brown paper, the package he had found hidden in one of the old paint kegs on the mysterious boat.

"Flash your light on this," he commanded. "It's a Mexican chart of part of the Golfo de California—large scale. These are the original sounding contours, most of them way off. These inked in are the corrected soundings. Here's a bottom sample chart. Here's dope on anchorages and harbors deep enough for small naval craft.

"And here—here's the prize of them all; airplane landing field surveys in Sonora and on the peninsula, with data on prevailing winds, condition of ground in wet weather, triangulated measurements of proposed runways . . . What do you say, Mac?"

"I'd say," McFedden suggested, "thot ye ha' better explain a bit more."

"Okay. Tonight, Mac, I looked over a boat that's got just about everything for hydrographic survey. Why, near the bow, under a false hatch cover, they have the very latest for sonic soundings, and an electric leadline winch, leads for bottom samples—everything. Lots of other instruments concealed about and, finally, this mess of charts and maps.

"Well," Toby continued, having difficulty keeping his voice low-pitched, "I took a look over the engineroom. Two Diesels. I don't know much about those engines, but they looked powerful to me. Only they'd had some kind of explosion down there. Maybe a welding tank blew up. That's where this pearl trip came in."

"Gang on wi' ye," McFedden commanded. Though it was dark, Toby knew the other was busy polishing that glass eye.

It was a habit with him when thoughtful.

"There's a radio on the boat. I tried my hand on it, but it's foreign made and too much for me to figure out. They must've sent a coded s.o.s. to Hiashoto, after kedging into this hiding place. Told him the repairs needed.

"He knew about that Mexican coast guard at Mazatlan, knew it was on the trail of this dummy fishing boat and that if they found it there'd be one fine stink made. So he rigs this pearl trip."

"An' thot stuff took from us was—"

"Sure. Not equipment for sand digging. It was repair parts for the boat, all crated or wrapped in burlap. Hiashoto had first guard that night. He took the things out quietly and cached them. When I went off guard at two, he and Yoksumato packed it over to the boat. Only—"

"I onder-rstond," the Scotchman supplemented. "Them Seris had ottacked 'em, previous to our arrival. Killed off the whole bunch an' buried 'em in yon wreck."

"And that's why Hiashoto and the other one looked so sick that first day. Here they'd brought up all the needed repairs. But there was no crew; nobody who knew how to make the repairs. And somehow they think that coast guard may be here in a week or so."

" 'Twouldn't be a hard thing to learn. Sailors talk. But what aboot the puir lad o' ours thot got the flint knife in his neck?"

THERE was silence, while Toby marshalled his thoughts. "Mac," he said at length, "that little fiend didn't intend for us to leave here. If I failed to come back after a reasonable time Bob Jennings would raise all hell until they found me or explained what had happened to me. Hiashoto knows that.

"So," Toby continued, speaking more rapidly as the problem cleared, "he or Yoksumato, or both of them, slip out last night and drain my gas. Poor old Juan catches them at it and gets brained to silence him. When they're all through they get the bright idea of pounding that flint knife into his neck to throw suspicion on the Seris.

"I found a couple of the flint knives around the boat, where the Seris had dropped them during the attack."

McFedden got slowly to his feet. "Lad, 'tis the black plottin' o' the De'il himsel'. I ha' two slugs o' buckshot in m' gun, an' fer the other leetle monkey I'll use m' bare honds. An' guid riddance."

"Sit down, Mac," Toby commanded. "Frank Kiatra's okay. He's like hundreds of others of his race, born in our country and wanting to be good citizens. It's our fault that we're too dumb to tell the good from the bad."

"An' fer thot reason you'd let those others gang on, takin' land, murderin' peaceful folk, plottin', schemin', an' blamin' it all onto their ar-rmy and navy. Ha' ye noticed thot after their ar-rmy takes land them nice innocent people move onto it fast enough."

"Not Kiatra's sort, Mac. Now quiet down and listen. You're goin' to repair those engines."

"I'll na touch 'em!"

"Then how'll we ever get out of here? We don't know for sure about the coast guard."

" 'Tis the truth, lad," McFedden agreed after a short pause. "We'll rope up them two de'ils an'—"

"We will not. You're going over and take Hiashoto up on his five-thousand-dollar offer. You'd better haggle with him a bit first. Ask for seven thousand; ask him how'll you be sure of getting your money.

"Yeah, and before you leave take a shot of whisky. Let him smell it. He'll think you're hitting up the bottle. Tell him I'm drinking, too, and that we've quarreled."

"Lad, I na can see your reasonin'."

"All right, look on the other side of it. Say we tie them up. To be on the safe side we'd have to do the same to Chombers. That guy's rotten to the core, Mac. Twice as bad as the other two because what they do for an ideal, for patriotism,

he'd do for a handful of gold. A skunk.

"So we'd have three men to watch and all the repair work to do ourselves. And further, we can't be sure Hiashoto hasn't kept some of the repair parts hidden away, just in case."

McFedden stood up again. "Ye're richt, lad. Ye ha' a head on them bull shoulders o' yours, though I can na say ye're a Robert Taylor fer looks. The whusky, lad. Dinna ferget that important consideration."

Toby lay down after McFedden had left the tent. Chombers was still sleeping like a dead man. He wasn't accustomed to hard labor nor to the dragging nerve strain he had been under the last two days.

This wasn't true of young Wayne. His mind seemed to throw off sparks like an emery wheel. There were a lot more things he should have talked over with McFedden. He should have warned him to leave some important detail of the repair work uncompleted, so the boat couldn't be moved until they were ready.

And of course they would have to continue digging for the pearls, or pretending to. He should have . . .

Toby slept. And as he slept, tall lean forms gathered about the camp, moving at a half run, pausing sometimes as if to sniff the air. They were noiseless, and their bronze, naked skins merged with the shadows until a watcher might think he dreamed them. But there were no watchers.

THE Yaquis found their tracks the next morning. Toby, awakened, made a hurried inventory of supplies. A quart of whisky was gone from the first aid box. Nothing else had been touched.

McFedden's condition explained the lost whisky. Toby found him in the Norford's freight compartment, dead to the world in a drunken stupor. He had lost his glass eye. The vacant socket glared at Wayne, red and reproachful.

The bottle was Mac's weakness and, not understanding this, Toby had started him off with that one drink.

"What a smart monkey I am," Toby muttered. "Now I don't know what he did last night. And most likely he won't remember."

"Your friend"—Hiashoto's voice came from the cabin door—"I think perhaps he is ill."

There was amusement and great cheerfulness concealed behind that smooth mask of face.

Toby had to cover up. "Yeah," he admitted. "Him and me got on a little bat last night. I passed out an' he kept on drinkin'."

He unlaced and pulled Mac's high-tops, unbuttoned the collar and wrists of his shirt and otherwise made him as comfortable as possible. Hiashoto remained, watching these things, his smile of satisfaction barely concealed. Toby knew from this that the Scotchman had finished the repair work or at least had it nearly completed.

They ate breakfast and got busy with the sand digging. Chombers and Frank Kiatra worked like fury. Toby reflected that they were the only ones who expected to find anything. The three Yaquis didn't know why this work was being done and weren't interested, beyond the hundred pesos they were to receive for the trip.

But when Hiashoto and the other Japanese shoveled Toby took a delight in encouraging them, pretending to be in a fever of excitement.

The hull was narrowing toward keel, making less sand to be moved. "Hurry," Toby called. "Think of those three kegs of pearls, Hiashoto! Dig faster and we will be finished before night comes."

It was an oven there in the stern, under the remains of the old deck. Not a breath of moving air and temperature well above the hundred mark. The two undersized men labored, with Toby's watchful eyes on them, playing the game, waiting for their final triumph.

TOBY left near the start of their shift, to see about the Scotchman's condition. McFedden was conscious but that

was about all that could be said for his condition. He drank thirstily of the lukewarm water Toby brought.

"I'm an aul' fool, lad," he muttered. "I ha' spoiled ye're bonny plon."

"Did you get finished?" Toby demanded.

McFedden panted for breath. "After I left ye, lad, it occurred to me thot another dr-rink would be a braw guid thin'. So I had it oot o' the medicine box. 'Twas but a reasonable precaution, fer there's na tellin' when a mon—"

"Did you repair those engines?" Toby insisted.

Mac's one eye closed wearily. He nodded. "All thot I could, lad. There was some few parts missin'."

"Oh, oh! Parts that either of them would know how to fit in properly?"

McFedden's thoughts wandered. "They ha' whusky there at the boat, so 'twas a merry time . . . no, lad, those two dinna even ken the workin' o' a monkey wrench."

"You're sure?"

"Positive, lad."

Toby brightened. "Well, everything's all right then, Mac."

The Scotchman groaned. "Perhops. Everythin' but the McFedden."

Toby grinned. "You'll live for another drunk, Mac. Where's your spare eye?"

McFedden raised an exploring hand. "Gone!" he wailed in consternation. "I dinna ken . . . ah, bide a wee, I ha' a faint recollection . . . yes, as I recall, 'twas a brilliant plon which I conceived."

He groped in his sodden brain. " 'Twas somethin' aboot the evil eye, lad. But exoctly what I'm na . . ."

Toby chuckled. "Maybe we'll find it, Mac. Anyway, everything's working out to perfection."

A small noise brought his eyes around to the cabin door. Hiashoto was there, teeth showing in a polite smile.

"Oh, hello," Toby said, confused. "I was just talking—I was telling Mac that we're about down to the pearls."

Hiashoto bobbed his head. "I think perhaps one hour."

"Fine!" Toby exclaimed, trying to put enthusiasm in his voice. "Let's finish up."

Back at work, Toby attempted to draw him into conversation, tried to probe behind the mask of suavity. How much of that talk had he heard? Did he have any suspicion that Mac had told about the night's work?

Toby was snapped out of these thoughts by an exclamation from Dig Chombers. While he was away they had uncovered a lower deck and chopped a wide hole in this. Chombers' shovel scrapped over something hard and unresisting. With a shout he went down on all fours, using both hands with a swimming motion to clear the sand.

"It's a metal chest!" he cried. "I've got them! I've got them!"

He looked up, a new expression in his eyes. Crouched as he was he gave the impression of a wild animal, ready to fight others away from fresh-killed meat.

"Look here," he said, "I spotted this wreck when I flew over here last Thursday. I discovered it, see? You get that, Hiashoto!"

"But the papers—those records," the other spoke soothingly, "those were mine. Without those—"

"Nuts! I was comin' back anyway." He licked at parched lips. "Right now we're goin' to have an understanding. You and me split even."

"How about me?" Toby asked.

"You! All you done was—"

One of the Yaquis called urgently from above: "Seri!"

V

TOBY stooped through the hole they had chopped for the removal of sand. There were three of the natives, standing in that poised manner that seemed characteristic of them. They were not more than a hundred yards distant. Their attitudes seemed to bespeak curiosity more than anything else.

"Don't bother them," Toby ordered. "Let me know if they come any nearer."

He crawled back into the wreck. The

picture had changed. Chombers was scraping more sand away. He had already exposed a wide area of rough, dull-colored metal, wider than the top of an ordinary chest.

Queer, plaintive sounds came from him as he extended the area. He prized the remainder of the lower deck away. He worked with a sort of hopeless frenzy. He jabbed at the metal with the point of his shovel, examined the bright spot left in its surface. The shovel fell with a dull clatter.

They were all watching him, held to silence by a common feeling of repugnance. They were seeing the naked soul of this man; a thing to fill them with disgust.

He had his face covered with raw, bleeding hands. "Lead!" he sobbed. "Lead ballast."

The Yaqui watchman spoke from outside. "Seri fallas, he come, Señor Toby."

Chombers' hands dropped. "Seri," he repeated in a dull uncomprehending voice. Suddenly his face twisted into lines of maniacal fury. He whirled and was outside while the others stood rooted with astonishment.

A pistol cracked.

"Stop him! Stop that crazy fool!" Toby leaped to the opening.

Three more shots came in rapid trigger pull.

One of the Indians was down, his body moving with convulsive jerks, his hands clawing at the sand. The other two were already at a distance. One of them, to the rear, was limping badly.

Chombers was on his way toward the first Indian, long-barreled revolver swinging in his fist.

Toby pulled his own gun, lips tight in his bloodless face. He holstered it. Something kept him from shooting Chombers, though at that instant he wanted, more than all else, to plant a line of forty-five slugs down his backbone.

Chombers stood over the writhing Indian. He waited for an instant as if taking fiendish delight in the other's pain. Then he fired, pointblank into the contorted face.

Toby was on him, snapped a quick blow to his wrist.

The pistol dropped. Chombers turned, eyes wild. "Why, you dirty—"

"Get your mitts up!" Toby snarled.

"Sure. Sure, I'll get 'em up, you saphead. Maybe you don't know I used to be in the ring."

His left shot out, caught Wayne in the neck.

Toby covered, elbows close, fists up to protect his jaws. His throat felt as if he had swallowed acid.

A right hook battered his fist, the impact of it carrying through to his head.

"Come on! Come on!" Chombers growled. "I'll cut that homely mug of yours into ribbons."

He charged in, swinging haymakers with left and right. Toby felt the sharp pain of a broken rib. He shot a hard, straight right to Chombers' solar plexus.

Chombers gave back with the blow, but not quite enough. It told. He doubled for an instant, fists dropping.

Toby gave him a one-two. He missed the jaw point with his right. Much too high. The fist scraped cheek bone, thudded into Chombers' eye.

Chombers danced back, moved in and out with quick, killing left jabs. Wayne followed him, taking twice what he was giving, boring into those jabs and right hooks.

The other sidestepped. Wayne, braced against the weight of blows, stumbled forward through the loose sand. He was groggy, out on his feet.

A fist shot into view. He clutched it under the pressure of both forearms against his chest and dove headlong. His skull struck something hard. Chombers screamed with pain.

Wayne shook his head, trying to clear it. His eyes seemed covered with black blotches. He groped, almost blindly, for the other. A fist scuffed his neck. He whirled and put the weight of that movement back of his right swing. It landed in

Chombers' soft stomach with savage force.

He could see now. He struck out, rights and lefts, for the face. As if watching some other person do this he saw the face gradually becoming a pulped, bloody thing.

Somebody was holding his arms. Whoever it was had the strength of a gorilla. He struggled futilely, sobbing with rage and with his sense of helplessness.

"Lad, ye'll murder him!"

McFedden was shaking him like a child. Toby felt suddenly limp; knew that if the other didn't hold him he'd fall to the ground. " 'Sall right," he mouthed. "I'll stop . . . I'm through with him, Mac."

"An' a guid thing," McFedden chided. " 'Tis na proper ye should waste such oncommon ability wi' no pay customers to watch ye."

THEY left that night: Hiashoto, Chombers and Yoksumato. And the Seris came, moving in like shadows.

It was, Toby insisted, entirely his fault. He denied McFedden any share of the guilt. The Scotchman's drunkenness hadn't affected the outcome in any way.

It had been like a game. He had the winning position but had ignored a perfectly obvious point. It was that Dig Chombers possessed enough mechanical ability to complete repairs on the boat.

Toby had left camp after supper that night, taking his rifle, telling them he would be gone for some time, making a round of the camp. That was to give Hiashoto a good opportunity of slipping out with McFedden to finish his work on the boat.

According to their plan McFedden was to pretend sleep or, if he wanted to, actually sleep. They were sure that Hiashoto would call him to complete the repairs when certain that Toby was out of sight.

It was all neatly planned between Toby and the Scotchman. Toby would return to camp after they left. He would allow time enough for the repair work, then slip up on the boat and surprise them; and with Mac's help, tie them up. They would return, make Chombers captive. Then they would all move onto the boat and put out for Guaymas.

An hour later, when he came back, the two Japanese and Chombers were gone, with all of the food and some of the water. The other water containers had been stove in, quietly, so that the Yaquis wouldn't become suspicious.

The luck of the devil had been with them. They must have gotten around the headland just in time to avoid the swarm of avenging Seris who were collecting north of the camp.

McFedden had actually fallen asleep. Fortunately his old shotgun was under the blankets and they had left it, fearing to disturb him. Toby had his rifle and automatic. Those were the only weapons they possessed.

There was no hope now for escape: would have been none even if the Seris hadn't been there to balk any such attempt. The desert heat would dry their bodies out in a few hours. Even though partly sheltered and not exerting themselves, they would be fortunate to last through another day.

They moved their blankets and a few belongings into the stern of the wreck. It was a natural fortress, unless the Seris had high-power rifles. By chopping a hole in the transom they were able to command all the beach, with the exception of a small blind spot forward.

Frank Kiatra was the most cheerful one among them. If he had any fear he kept it well in the background. Toby had part of a box of cartridges for his automatic and two boxes of soft-noses for the Savage, with an extra magazine clip for the latter. He gave these into Frank's keeping and showed him how to notch the rifle bullets to dumdum them.

An excitement seemed to ride the boy as if this close comradeship of danger intoxicated him.

IT WAS Kiatra's fast thinking that stalled the Seris on their night attack. This charge was delayed until the moon had set. But even without that light the

white sand was a background that prevented surprise.

Frank's sharp eyes saw the movement of their massed bodies almost as soon as they left the small fires that they had kindled near the headland.

McFedden and Toby got set. Kiatra was to load and keep ammunition handy for the shotgun.

The defenders held fire until they were very close. McFedden was to hold his until pointblank range.

Toby emptied his rifle clip, aiming methodically, trying to get at least two men lined up for each one of those murderously notched bullets.

The dark mass thinned under its drive. He snapped out the empty clip, handing it to Frank. The second clip emptied under rapid fire, as fast as he could work the bolt and pull trigger.

McFedden stirred restlessly, crouched over his shotgun.

"Hold your fire, Mac," Toby advised, taking a loaded clip from the Japanese. "We'll save that to surprise 'em. It's our only hope, unless the Marines come, or the U.S. Cavalry, like in the movies."

He talked in jerky snatches, working the bolt, selecting the thickest crowd for his aim.

The Seris halted momentarily. Their sharp, animal-like yapping came to the defenders. The line of attack thinned.

"They're scattering on us, Mac." Toby passed his empty rifle back to Frank, drew his automatic. "All right, let's hear that shotgun talk! They'll start circling and we're done for."

Toby heard the double *clack* as McFedden cocked his old shotgun. He squeezed pressure on the Colt's trigger, relaxed it and squeezed again, feeling the kick of recoil.

The confined space was filled with a bellowing roar, with red flame.

Toby choked on the shotgun's fumes. "What in thunder is that thing loaded with, Mac?"

"Black powder," McFedden grunted. "I ha' m' own loadin' outfit fer the sake o' economy." He settled his cheek back onto the worn stock.

Toby's change from rifle to automatic had had its effect on the Indian's morale. The roar of Mac's shotgun added to this. The Seris had no way of knowing how many guns they faced.

But they had courage. Their line gathered, came on in a final rush.

The three Yaquis had their machetes out. In a hand-to-hand fight they would make a good account of themselves.

But the odds were too great and once onto the wreck the Seris could use it for their own protection.

A new element entered into the fight. Toby heard it and stopped firing for a moment. "It's a rifle, Mac!"

It came from the fore part of the wreck. It was the last thing needed to stop the Indians' charge. They broke and fled,

leaving the beach covered with their dead and wounded.

McFedden searched for his flashlight. He threw its beam around the small enclosure then shot it upward as feet clattered against the bulkhead. A small figure was lowering itself into the space, rifle in one hand.

Frank Kiatra turned an impish grin on them: "I am the U.S. Cavalry," he said. "I didn't have time to ask permission."

"Ye leetle de'il," McFedden grunted admiringly, "so 'twas you shootin' from out front."

MORNING brought a sickening spectacle. Toby didn't mind so much the Indians that had been killed outright. It was the poor devils who writhed in stoically silent pain, or those who were still working with arms and legs to drag themselves out of range.

This was Chombers' fault entirely. There was no doubt of it. The footprints they had found that morning had shown plainly that the natives had been all about the camp, and in such force that they could have murdered them with ease. They had left the camp unmolested and in return for this one of their number had been shot down in cold blood, another badly wounded.

Small wonder that they were out to kill and burn and perhaps torture. And that, of course, was exactly what Chombers and the others wanted. That would explain everything when Wayne failed to return and Bob Jennings found this place where they had made their stand. The three renegades could then return to Guaymas after a few weeks, with a cooked-up story of their fortunate escape.

McFedden had slept most of the time during the night, when his gun wasn't needed. Frank Kiatra and Toby shared watches. After that attack, their three Yaquis had quietly faded out of the picture.

Toby didn't try to stop them, didn't blame them at all. This wasn't their fight. And they were desert men who could live for weeks on the moisture found in certain of the cacti, and on the meat of snakes and lizards.

Day and the sun brought a torturing heat. It was hardest on the Scotchman. Several times he crawled outside and was sick. But there was no word of complaint from him.

Once Toby saw him eyeing the pilot's traveling bag that he knew contained almost a full quart of rye. Toby wanted to give it to him; but with this heat, and without water, it would have meant a swift, horrible death.

Toby found himself brooding on this thought of death. What difference did it make whether they died now or later? They were already suffering from thirst.

They talked only when necessary. Before speaking there must be a preliminary of swallowing and moving their tongues about to moisten them. Why prolong the useless suffering?

Between nine and ten o'clock they heard the measured beat of Diesel engines. The boat nosed out past the headland into deep water and stood by for a short time.

Distance gave perspective. They could see now that despite the nondescript color, the ratty gear and clumsy deckhouse, it was built for speed. And they knew it had power.

McFedden shook his fist. "The dir-rty roscals ha' played us fer fools. An' now they stop to laugh at us."

"Maybe," Toby agreed. "But also, Mac, they're sizing up the situation. Before leaving here they want to be sure we're done for. You know the old wheeze about dead men telling no tales."

They watched the boat head out in a southwesterly direction, watched the bow wave mount and its size diminish. At least two men on it were heading toward life, toward more spying. Dig Chombers, he was pretty sure, would never live to put foot on dry land. They had used him, played him for the fool he was.

But for that matter all of them had been dupes for that clever pair. It wasn't a pleasant thought.

Toby found that his mind was moving from one thing to another in an aimless fashion. Early as it was they were sampling the torture that would be on them by afternoon. That's what the Seris were waiting for. They would hold their attack off until then.

Well, more power to the boys. They had it coming to them. What of that vaunted supremacy of the white man that people talked about! This Jap kid was holding up better than any of them. The little devil was actually smiling.

They would save out enough shells for the automatic, so that none of them would fall into the Indians' hands. But why in thunder should they keep up this . . .

McFedden's voice was gentle. "Lad, ye ha' been through a lot these last few days. Sleep a wee bit, lad. Frank and I'll keep the watch."

Toby started to speak. A harsh croak came instead. He swallowed, tried again. "Forget it," he said raspingly. "I'm not sleepy, Mac."

The next instant, it seemed, old Jon Weitz was showing him the ski trophies.

Toby could see the velvet-lined cupboard, could even smell it. Jon lifted them out, one by one, as he had when Toby was a boy. There was the big one on the onyx base, the silver figure of a man crouched on his skis, ready for the take-off jump. There were the cups and vases and the funny little mugs.

All of them silver, *ja*. And he must not touch them, for that would make fingermark stains on the satiny metal.

VI

McFEDDEN was shaking him. "Lad," he exulted, "I ha' waited. Ye was smilin' so cheerful; 'twas na sense wakin' ye till they was here."

Toby reached wildly for his gun. "Where?" he demanded.

"Na, lad." Mac chuckled. "Not the Injins. The coast guard, lad. Yon comes their small boat."

Toby peered through the jagged hole in the old transom. For a time he thought he must still be dreaming. He sniffed the air. Yes, there was no doubt of it. And there was only one source for the smell.

"Mac," he said, "I must be crazy. There's Bob Jennings in the boat. Let's see your pocket knife, Mac."

Mac handed him the knife. "I hope they ha' brought water . . . What d'ye do, lad? Play mumble-te-peg?"

"Sure," Toby cackled, stabbing that ballast metal with the knife blade. "Why not?"

They had water in the boat, all right. And Bob Jennings' presence was explained. This cutter was not that one reported in Mazatlan. It was the *Estrella Blanca,* just commissioned.

Don Lustino had made the break-in run with it as a government observer. And Lustino was the federal deputy with whom Bob Jennings had to do business. Bob had met him the first day at the small anchorage near Los Mochis and had been invited on the cruise north.

Lieutenant Commander Jose Valdero, master of the *Estrella,* waited impatiently while the trio soaked up water and Toby and McFedden took turns with their story.

Toby wasn't very proud of his part in it. Bob Jennings kept a sober face but Toby suspected the older man of inward amusement. It was Bob's oft-expressed theory that, left alone, Toby could get into more trouble in less time than any five ordinary men.

Toby had boasted that he'd find a mine during his two-week vacation. Instead he had sold himself down the river for a cooked-up yarn of pearls by the keg. That's the way it seemed, and Toby wasn't going to drag in any alibis or extenuating circumstances.

Even Valdero had that supercilious, patronizing air of a man with little children. "*Señors,*" he finally interrupted, "I don' spik the English so good. Thas mans have made *tontos* for you, no? I theenk. . . ."

"Careful," Jennings warned. "The big boy speaks Mexican as well as you do. And he won't like bein' called a fool."

"That's all right," Toby said. "I got it comin' to me, Bob." He had been watching Mac's one roving eye. He pulled the quart bottle from his traveling bag. "Hit her up, Mac."

Valdero went into a torrent of Spanish. Could they not understand that this was no time for social drinking? Could they not understand that every minute was precious? That boat had already escaped them three times. This time they must catch it surely, even though all the evidence might have been jettisoned by this time.

Toby shook his head. "I've got all the evidence you'd need. The charts and stuff. Trouble is you won't catch them, Lieutenant. She'll do thirty knots or better, and they've got a two-hour start of you. Ain't that right, Mac?"

Mac had the bottle tilted back, letting the fiery liquor gurgle down a case-hardened throat. But he blinked his one good eye and nodded confirmation.

"So you'd just as well take it easy, Lieutenant," Toby continued. "And while you're doing that you might send your boys out to bring me a couple barrels of gas."

Valdero mopped his face with a green-bordered handkerchief decorated with shamrocks. It was hot there in the old wreck but that was nothing to his inward temperature.

"Consider, *señors,*" he burst out, "you brought two foreign spies up here. You carried for them repairs. You repaired the boat and allowed them to escape. And now you ask that I furnish you gasoline for your airplane. *Señors,* it is a matter—"

"Bide a wee, mon," the Scotchman interrupted. The whisky bottle might have been a crystal ball, the way he was gazing into it with his one good eye.

"I ha' it. 'Twas this guid whusky brought it to m' mind. Ye most onderstand, gentlemen, thot I was watched closely while makin' them repairs. I had difficulty placin' the evil eye wi'oot bein' observed."

Toby sensed that there was more to this than mere hangover talk. "Get to the point, Mac," he commanded.

"Thot boat will na go more than one hour. Perhops less."

"What does he say?" Valdero demanded.

"Go on, Mac," Toby urged. "What'll stop it?"

Mac took his time at another drink. "M' eye'll stop it," he seriously informed them. "Ye ken, lads, there is one main fuel feed line, wi' a bottle-neck division an' smaller tubes leadin' to each Diesel injector. Wi'oot fule they canna function."

"For the love o' Pete, Mac, what'd you do with that eye?"

"I dropped it in the main fuel line. You comprehend the fuel flow'll gradually push it to the division. 'Twill make an excellent ball valve."

"WELL, I'll be damned!" Jennings exclaimed. "Of course it will. And you thought that out when you were drunk! McFedden, I've got a job for you, if you'll lay off the drink."

"Also you've got to dig up a job for Frank, here," Toby informed him. "And now, Lieutenant, do we get the two barrels of gasoline?"

Valdero had understood enough now to be apologetic. "But are you certain their engines will stop?"

Toby pointed to the whisky bottle. "If there was a smooth ball in the lower part of that, larger than the neck and you turned the bottle upside down, wouldn't it stop whisky from coming out? Anyway, stop most of it.

"And it'll take Chombers a long time to find what's wrong, because the eye drops away from the opening when there's no fuel pressure."

After that they could have had the Lieutenant's boat if they'd asked for it. But they agreed to wait for the gasoline until the cutter had gone out to pick up Hiashoto and the others. Toby rather doubted they would find Chombers on the boat. Man-eating sharks were too convenient in the gulf waters.

"Let's get out of here," Bob Jennings suggested, after the Lieutenant's departure. "This place stinks like it had dead men in it."

"It does smell queer," Toby agreed, sniffing the air. "Y'know, Bob, I had a funny dream just before you got here. Anyway, it was funny I should dream about an old man I knew when I was just a kid. Old Jon was quite a skier."

Bob Jennings stared at him. "What in thunder you talkin' about, kid?"

Toby grinned, idly stabbing with the blade of McFedden's knife. "A good Hornet aircraft engine can be picked up for around seven thousand bucks," he drawled.

"Remember, Bob, you're always telling me that gold is where you find it? Well, then a mine is wherever you find it. That makes sense, doesn't it?"

"Yeah. But you don't."

"Why not? You bet me a new airplane engine against a Stetson hat that I couldn't find a mine; any sort of paying mine."

"And you're goin' to buy me a hat, too, kid. A darned good one. Now let's clear out. The smell of this place gives me the creeps."

"I kind of like the smell," Toby said. "It smells just like the cabinet where old Jon used to keep his silver trophies. Bob, there's no mistaking the smell of old silver."

"Then you think this—"

"Is silver ballast, not lead. Try cutting it with the knife. But it's the smell of it, Bob. You can't mistake the smell of old silver."

"But Toby, they wouldn't ballast a ship with silver. That's idiotic!"

Toby spoke as if reading from a history book. "Back in 1586," he said, "an English merchantman, carrying a million pesos of silver, dragged anchor in a storm. The Seris boarded her, killed all but two of the crew and built fires on the deck to roast them.

"She burnt to the waterline, of course. Pitched decks make a darned hot fire, Bob, and added to that was the old-fashioned sterncastle, where the silver was stored. It was hot enough to melt it.

"We're sitting on a million pesos of silver, Bob. That's why I kind of like the smell of it."

"Mon! Mon!!!" the Scotchman exclaimed in an awed whisper, "think o' the whusky thot'd buy."

Toby shook his head. "Naturally a third belongs to Frank and a third to you. But I'm goin 'to see you don't spend it *all* for whisky."

Bob Jennings had been busy with the knife on a small piece broken from the edge. He looked up with a wry smile. "How much did you say that engine would cost me, Toby?"

But Toby didn't answer him. He was too busy thinking of a certain girl, wondering whether she would like his third of this mine.

The Captain Bites the Sea

There is a snide in the affairs of sailors which, if taken at the flood, leads to misfortune—for somebody else

By ALLAN R. BOSWORTH
Author of "Down Went McGinty," etc.

A bottle of pre-war stuff, a fish with false teeth—what more could a diver ask of life?

THE U.S.S. *Tuscarawas* became what the Navy calls a "be-no" ship—beno liberty, beno leave, beno nothing—one windy March day when Captain Elias McGunnigle delivered himself of a windy sneeze, and saw his false teeth fly over the starboard rail.

What Captain McGunnigle said immediately thereafter was unintelligible, and so not recorded. But in the quartermaster's log for 15 March, there is an entry reading: . . . *at 1330, broke out deepsea diving gear and sent Hillman, Patrick J., Gunner's Mate 2C, over the side for a test dive.* . . .

*

At 1330 by the Navy's twenty-four hour clock, Doc Penrose, pharmacist's mate second class, hunched glumly over the rail and spat at ol' davil San Diego Bay. He was a lanky man of long and dour countenance, susceptible to liquor and allergic to any work not conceived in his own mind. On the latter, he would labor tirelessly.

"Well," he said over his shoulder, "he doesn't know it was the sneezing powder. He thinks it's the hay—I saw him shaking his fist at it. Besides, how did I know he'd come barging by just at that time? Anyway, the powder works. I took equal parts of pulverized leaves of *Helenium autumnale* and—"

"Oh, the hell with *Helenium* whaddya-

callit!" growled Guns Hillman. They bolted his helmet down at this point, and his voice sounded metallic.

"I don't care what caused it. The point is that this packet's gonna be a madhouse unless I can salvage his teeth! And it had to happen just when we were getttin' off the old man's list after that last time we were up at mast, and just when we were gonna put in for leave for that fishin' trip. What did you want to make sneezin' powder for? What use—"

They swung his face port shut, and Guns could neither talk nor hear. But Doc was still morosely eyeing the water.

"I don't know," Doc sighed. "Except it was an experiment. Maybe some day I'll hit on something good. Look at Dr. Corkey—look at the cough remedy he perfected. He may get rich off that."

Air hissed into Guns' rubber suit, filling it, making him formidable. A sailor tapped the helmet with a wrench, and Guns clumped his heavy shoes to the side and backed uncomfortably down the ladder. Until the helmet vanished below the deck's rim, Doc Penrose could see the reproach in Guns' blue eyes.

"Anyway," Doc muttered defensively, "it worked. It came all the way up the hatch."

He went below to the dispensary, saddened because he was indirectly responsible for Guns' having to dive. The two usually shared alike, being shipmates in the full sense of the word. But in the matter of combing the bottom of the bay for the old man's teeth, Doc could do nothing; he was not a qualified diver.

Looking out the porthole, he saw the bright chain of bubbles breaking, and knew that Guns was all right. Then he discovered there was a fish on the line he had dropped out the port an hour before, when the skipper still had his dental plates and all was serene.

This cheered him somewhat; he hauled in the fish, which was small and of doubtful edibility, and left it swimming bewilderedly in the bathtub of the sick bay head. . . .

IT WAS the private opinion of Captain McGunnigle that his old friend and shipmate, Lieutenant Commander Corkey of the Medical Corps—who went around tapping unwary persons with a little rubber hammer to test their reflexes—had missed too many transports in the Asiatics.

On the other hand, Dr. Corkey harbored a secret professional belief that the captain—who held collision drill once a week despite the fact that the ship was securely tied to the dock—had not remained under the quarterdeck awnings so much as is advisable while on tropic duty.

Each was inclined to humor the other, and neither spoke his mind. But the crew was not so reticent: it concurred heartily and impartially with the theories of both. Guns Hillman spoke for all hands when he speculated that the skipper and the doctor had been born on a listing deck, where some of their marbles rolled away.

These things considered, it may have been just as well that the old *Tuscarawas* wasn't going anywhere. She was the station ship, lying at a destroyer base dock with a hay field broad on her port beam.

Captain McGunnigle, being a bachelor and a sea dog, lived aboard. Each morning he stalked topside, acknowledged salutations by a rasping cough, and fixed the hay field with a fierce, bushy-browed glare.

Daily he climbed to the bridge and took a few bearings; each Saturday after inspecting the personnel he loudly called the chaplain front and center and requested him to pray for the ship.

But now this routine was broken. The influence of scurvy on maritime history has been the subject of technical writings, while hay fever on shipboard must have been rare even in Nelson's time. Nevertheless, the lowly asthmatic complaint was about to exert an influence of its own on naval affairs.

For the sneeze had alarmed Captain McGunnigle, to say nothing of the annoyance at losing a beautiful and expensive set of teeth. His hay fever usually started in July, and here it was only March.

HE RETREATED to his cabin immediately after the loss of the plates, and began issuing written orders. The first was for Guns Hillman to dive and be careful how he walked on the bottom. The second drastically revised his Filipino steward's supper menu. The third sent his orderly forth with a request for Dr. Corkey to lay aft at once.

The doctor blew in like a breeze, a short and stocky individual with a heartiness of manner and no hair. The Navy cannot always teach a professional man military ways, even in speech. And, besides, these two were old friends.

So Corkey boomed: "Well, skipper, how goes it? Don't you think it's a little close in here?" He opened a porthole that overlooked the hay field. *"Ahhh!* Spring, the vernal season—"

"Am!" roared McGunnigle, leaping to the port and dogging it down. "Am hay ou ere! Am hay hever—*kachoo!"*

"Gesundheit!" Dr. Corkey said brightly. Then he saw that the captain's nose and chin were near a rapproachment. "You're not wearing your dental plates, skipper. Why not?"

The captain gripped the edge of his desk apoplectically. Being a stern man, even with himself, he won the internal struggle.

"Ost em oveh sie, ammit!" he said, and the final "t" was a victory of sheer will. "Corkey, at hay mus go—iss *gotta* go! Buy whole am crop myself—buy it ri dow!"

"H'm!" said Dr. Corkey, who knew very well that the hay was not in bloom. He walked warily around the desk, jiggling the little rubber hammer in his pocket. This was the man who had insulted the mayor of Honolulu by ordering a troupe of grass-skirted dancers off a ship he commanded.

Too many transports.

"H'm! Now, you just relax, skipper. I don't think it's hay fever . . . now, now listen to me! I think it's a general respiratory infection, possibly resulting from that cough of yours. You probably need another bottle of my cough syrup—

"Now, I'm the doctor, you know! Let me see your throat . . . Now say *Ahhhh!"*

GUNS HILLMAN was ten fathoms down for more than an hour. He came up swearing that the mermaids probably had the old man's teeth by now, and were taking them apart to make a necklace.

The ship was in a dither. Captain McGunnigle was in the seclusion of his cabin. The exec had gone ashore, muttering to himself, on some mysterious mission, and there would be no liberty until he returned.

The captain's steward was in the crew's galley excitedly begging a recipe for a soup he had never learned to make; he became hysterical, and the first class ship's cook chased him aft with a cleaver.

And Doc Penrose, jiggling his fishing line out the porthole, had a suicidal eye.

"There's hell to pay, Guns!" Doc said hoarsely. "Hell to pay!"

"You're tellin' me?" Guns retorted. "Doc, I need a drink. Fix me up, will you? Never mind—show me where the alky is hid, and I'll take it straight!"

"There ain't any left—remember? We killed the last of it last night. That's the trouble. Dr. Corkey has ordered me to mix another three gallons of his cough remedy, and I can't do it without the alcohol. And if I tell him the alky's all gone, he'll know it wasn't expended for medical purposes. And if I don't make the cough remedy—"

Doc finished with a groan more expressive than words. Guns sank into the swivel chair at the desk, and laughed bitterly.

"All over a set of teeth!" he said. "All over a sneeze the ship goes nuts, and all hands with it. I wish we was away from here; I wish we was on that fishin' trip!"

Doc Penrose left the porthole, and ran his eye over the rack of bottles as if seeking a swift and deadly poison. But he selected the elixir of terpin hydrate, which, aside from being a highly-regarded cough medicine itself, has a rather high alcoholic content.

"I wish," said Doc as he poured two

triple doses, "that the old man had gone to see his dentist forty times a year!"

THIS was all on a Monday. Next morning at quarters, the exec announced that through the personal generosity of Captain McGunnigle, the hay field adjacent to the yard had been leased for an indefinite period, and now the crew would have its own long-needed baseball diamond.

Three cheers for the skipper. Hip, hip—

But there was a catch to it, the exec added hastily. The crew would have to cut the hay, at no expense to the Government, and on their own time. All together now, men, and show the captain the appreciation due such a thoughtful and generous gesture, and what's a little liberty compared to an athletic field belonging exclusively to the happy ship *Tuscarawas?*

The exec was really wielding the mailed fist of authority disguised in a catcher's mitt. Doc and Guns, who weren't athletic, could see liberty taking the deep six, just like the skipper's teeth.

But they soon discovered they wouldn't have been going ashore anyway. Captain McGunnigle sent Guns a fine-toothed rake and word that there would be no liberty for him until he found the missing molars or dragged the bottom of the whole Bay.

Dr. Corkey breezed into the dispensary, saw the empty jar, and suddenly turned martinet.

"I'll have you restricted, Penrose!" he snapped. "I'll run you up to the stick for wilful neglect of duty! I'll—I'll see that you're busted to apprentice seaman unless you make that cough syrup—*my* cough syrup—before I go ashore!"

Doc was wide-eyed. "Aye, aye Commander, sir!" he said, and very nearly saluted under cover.

There was no safe way to fake the mixture. Dr. Corkey liked to do the easiest part of the puttering with it; he bottled and labeled it in his own room. And he'd be certain to taste it.

After the doctor had gone, Doc Penrose looked through the U.S. Pharmacopoeia for a substitute for alcohol which he knew wasn't there, drank four fluid ounces of elixir of terpin hydrate, and then gave himself over to manning his fishing line.

At 1630, the bugle lifted its hollow mockery. Six married men crossed the gangway in step with snide remarks. Fifty wiser (but sadder) men mustered on the dock and were armed with garden tools borrowed all over the yard.

THE deck crew heaved in on Guns Hillman's life line and air hose, and Dr. Corkey laid below to the dispensary. He found the pharmacist's mate stretched out on the leather settee under the port.

"Hell's fire and rickets!" shouted the doctor. "Penrose, this is insubordination! This is mutiny, I'll—"

"Doctor, sir, I don't feel so good. If there was anybody to stand my watch, I'd turn in on the sick list. It's the backache, sir."

"Backache, eh? Every goldbrick in the Navy says he's got backache, because there are no visible symptoms. Penrose, the Captain is coughing his head off, and you're soldiering on the job. You fill that prescription tonight!"

"But sir, I've got to go with that working party. All hands have to go—except the married men. They went ashore."

Dr. Corkey's rage subsided a little. "All right. But in the morning you'll turn to. I'll have discipline, or know the reason why."

He thumped his palm with the rubber hammer to emphasize this, glared at Penrose, and departed. Guns Hillman was just starting down the ladder three steps at a jump; he nearly rammed the doctor in his haste, and he burst breathlessly into the dispensary.

"Doc!" he panted. "Doc, I found something! Boy, will we make a speed run now!"

"The teeth? You found—"

"Oh, the hell with the teeth! Let him eat soup—whadda we care! No, sir. It's liquor! Pre-repeal liquor—a slue of it!"

"Liquor?" The very word tasted good. "Where is it?"

Guns gestured out the port. "On the bottom. Pre-repeal—some rum runner probably gave it the deep six when a bunch of prohis was after him. Maybe the tide brought it in. Anyway, it's there—must be a dozen bottles. I got 'em cached in the mud!"

Doc became gloomy again. "Well, you got it cached on the bottom, but a lot of good it's going to do us there. There ain't any pockets in a diving suit. And you come up with a bottle in each hand, and what happens? You run into the officer of the deck and it's a court martial for bringing liquor aboard!"

Guns only grinned. "Pour me a shot of that hydrate stuff, Doc. I got it all figured out. Listen. . . ."

They were still deep in the plot ten minutes later, when the chief bosun's mate in charge of the hay detail thrust his head in the door, inviting them to come ashore and swing on a lawn mower. Doc smiled for the first time in two days.

"I'm restricted to the ship, chief," he said cheerfully. "I may even catch a summary court. And Guns—Guns has got the bends from diving so much. Not bad, but he'd better be quiet. Drink your medicine, Guns!"

THE *Tuscarawas* had passed the be-no stage and was well on its way to fulfilling Guns' prediction that it would be a madhouse. Scuttlebutt rumor said there was to be an admiral's inspection Saturday.

This caused a flurry fore and aft; the first lieutenant was swamped by requests for paint chits and brightwork polish, and the exec, who hadn't been near the scuttlebutt, credited the spurt of industry he saw everywhere to a new ship's spirit engendered by the athletic field.

Doc Penrose was unaffected. He spiked the rumor at once, because his informant added that upon hearing about the inspection the old man blew his top and bit the Filipino steward. Unlikely, of course, since the skipper didn't have his teeth. Doc had bandaged the steward's hand a little earlier, and the injury looked like a knife wound.

He knelt on the settee, looking out the porthole. Guns Hillman was just going over the side, throwing himself into the apparently hopeless search with a right good will. His deck crew got the impression that Guns was nuts, too—that he intended to come up with the McGunnigle molars or perish in accordance with the best traditions of the Navy.

And when he sank beneath the surface with only bubbles to mark his going, Doc Penrose let another fishing line out of the port. This one had a half-filled bottle tied to it for a weight.

In a little while there was a jerk on the line, and Doc hauled it in cautiously. A different bottle greeted him: a quart whisky bottle, and no mistake.

His mouth watered; but it wouldn't be like a shipmate to drink while Guns was down there on the bottom. He looked around for another weight to take the line down.

Everything comes in bunches. The regular fishing line went taut and began sliding around in the porthole. Doc fought it in, forgetting even the whisky as he felt the pull at the other end.

It was a sea bass, and it weighed fully five pounds if it weighed an ounce. It flounced from Doc's grasp and skittered over the settee; he was wrestling with it in one corner when he heard somebody at the door and looked around in alarm.

"Doc," said the Filipino mess steward, "thees ban-dage come loose. You feex again, eh? Say, where you catch that feesh?"

Doc got the bass by the gills. "Right out the port!" he grinned proudly. "Some beauty, too.

"Look—I got an idea. You take the fish, and make the skipper some chowder for dinner. And fry up a couple of filets for me and Guns Hillman. What d'ye say?"

The little brown man's eyes shone. "I say fine! I surprise the captain! He don't eat much these days!"

Doc went back to his two-way fishing with the inward glow that comes from

doing good. If Captain McGunnigle liked the fish chowder and inquired its source, the steward would mention Doc's name. And who knew but what special liberty might, at a later date, be approved because the skipper remembered? Even that five-day leave he and Guns had planned. . . .

HE HAULED in bottle after bottle. Bait for the fishing trip. Twelve—thirteen—fourteen. Guns' estimate had been modest.

And then there were three jerks on the line, and that was the signal that the treasure trove had been emptied. Guns was coming up.

Doc concealed the last quart in the storage space beneath the settee cushion, and shipped his fishing lines. For one dismal moment he remembered Dr. Corkey, and the ordeal that was certain to come later in the day; he even dallied with the idea of attempting to substitute whisky for the alcohol in Dr. Corkey's formula.

But not even peace is worth too great a sacrifice. If it came to the worst and he went to the brig, Guns might be able to smuggle him an occasional shot.

There were Guns' diving shoes thumping on the deck, and nobody ever got out of a deepsea rig with a finer disregard for the decompression table Guns came grinning down the ladder with a jubilant rattle of the hand chains; inside the dispensary, his grin going to a chortle.

"Boy, oh boy! What did I tell you? Let me see one of those bottles in daylight, Doc!"

He looked around excitedly in search of his loot from the deep.

"Shut the door," Doc said. "And lock it."

He broke out bottle number one, wiped the mud and brine from it, and held it up to the light. There was nothing quite so lovely as the color of old whisky, aged on the bottom of the sea, rocked in the cradle of the deep.

"Look at that! Look at that!" Guns exclaimed with reverence, and then Doc made preparations for the testing.

He ranged two tumblers on the dispensary counter, and plopped the cork with expert ease.

"Well," said Guns, lifting his glass. "Here's down the hatch!"

"Fire One!" said Doc.

They drank, and strangled, and made hoarse roaring noises like the sound of two blowtorches. Doc jumped for the water tap, and Guns was a close second.

Then there were a couple of minutes devoted to frantic gurgling.

"*Whoosh!*" Guns choked. "Was that—was *that* what we drank durin' prohibition? Or am I—"

"It ain't liquor!" Doc gasped. He sank to the settee, massaging his throat, and his pharmaceutical nose recovered from the shock and began taking the odors apart for classification.

Alcohol and chloroform, *Glycyrrhiza, comp. pulv.*—that was what made the liquid brown—and a variety of other things.

"It ain't liquor, Guns! It's Dr. Corkey's cough compound!"

Guns recovered the full use of speech, and surprised even himself with the vocabulary he had picked up in various ports. It wasn't right, he said. It was in whisky bottles, wasn't it?

"Sure," Doc Penrose moaned. "Dr. Corkey puts up the stuff himself. I guess he's using his own bottles because he's taking some of it ashore for private distribution, and it wouldn't look right in a medical department bottle. Say, by gosh! I can empty all of the stuff into that jar, and—"

There was a loud knock on the door. Doc hastily concealed the bottle, and looked around to make certain no evidence was in sight. The knock grew imperative.

"Doc! Open up. Queeck—hurry!"

It was the captain's mess steward, jumping up and down in excitement, and Doc thought he must have chopped a finger off entirely this time.

The little brown man, still jittering, babbled out a string of strangely accented and shrill words.

"Look at thees, Doc! Son of a gun, damn, but thees is what I find in that feesh!"

Doc stared at the steward's trembling palm. In it, clicking like jittery castanets, were McGunnigle's teeth.

AT 1630, Doc Penrose and Guns Hillman led even the married men over the gangway. Yonder in the hay field, a volunteer working party was mopping up, helping reduce the nation's farm surplus.

Well, some guys liked baseball, and some liked to fish and to take their setting-up exercises at a bar. Doc and Guns were quite happy; the five-day leave would be a cinch.

Down in the skipper's cabin, Lieutenant Commander Corkey left a bottle, freshly filled and neatly labeled, on the desk. He turned at the door and shook the rubber hammer at Captain McGunnigle.

"You take it!" he said. "This is an improved formula. It'll not only check that cough, but it'll build up your immunity to hay fever. Mind me, now, skipper; I'm the doctor, you know."

He had added nothing to the cough syrup. But the psychological effect of what he had just said would probably work wonders on a man who had, unfortunately, spent too much time in the tropic sun. Too bad about McGunnigle, the doctor thought. There was a man who might have been admiral.

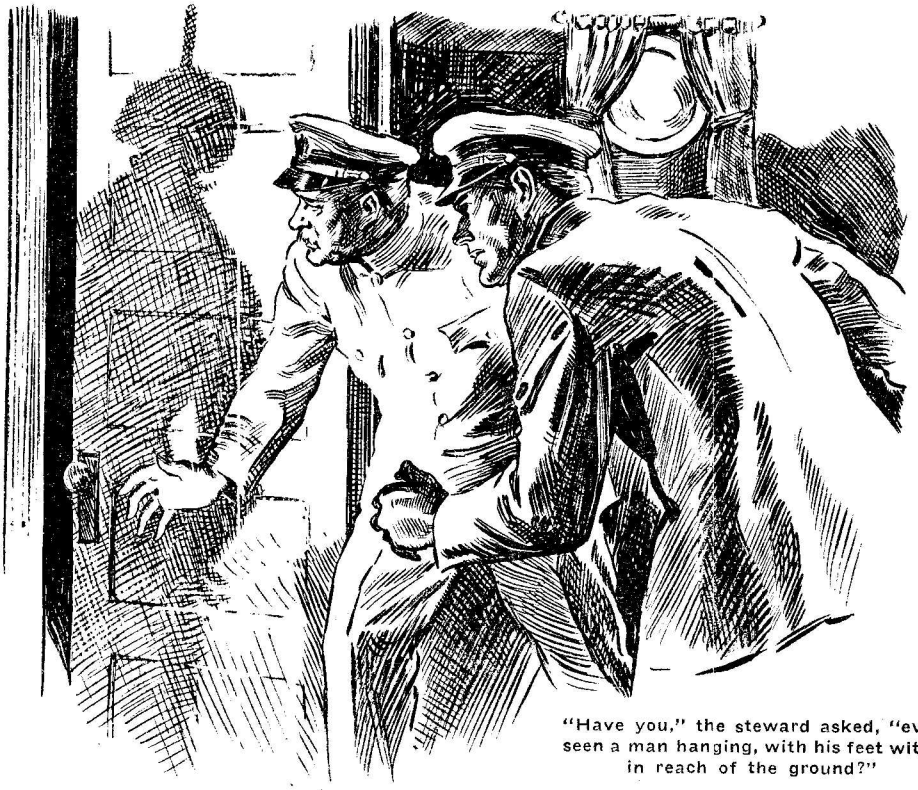
When the door closed, Captain McGunnigle sat for a moment looking at the bottle and thinking how old Corkey went around tapping men with his rubber hammer.

Then he snorted, and said: "Damned old fool!" distinctly; it was a pleasure to be able to sound his D's again.

Suddenly he grinned.

He carried the bottle to the starboard porthole and gave it the deep six.

Destination Unknown



"Have you," the steward asked, "ever seen a man hanging, with his feet within reach of the ground?"

By RICHARD SALE

Begin now this exciting and important story of a voyage on perilous seas

GABRIEL ADAMS, mild-mannered young member of the Federal Museum staff, finds something decidedly disturbing in the atmosphere aboard the Dutch freighter, the S.S. *Apeldoorn*. On his way to the International Congress of Herpetologists and Ichthyologists, which Gabriel claims is just an elaborate name for fish-fanciers, he is making his eighth trip south on the *Apeldoorn*; and definitely all is not as usual.

He misses RADIO OFFICER DEECHEN and CHIEF OFFICER DRAKENSTERG, cronies from previous passages. It appears they were injured just before sailing time, and a description of their injuries leads Gabriel to wonder if they were not perhaps beaten up. He certainly does not care for the taciturn THIMM and the sour-faced STEUBER who have taken their places.

Even more mysterious is the fact that Gabriel is the only passenger aboard. Both CAPTAIN KLINKERT and the cheerful steward, VAN DER DECKEN, try to make light of these peculiar circumstances, but Gabriel is worried. If he, thinks Gabe, were planning to seize a ship for some nefarious purpose, the first two members of the crew he would want on his side would be the chief officer and the radio-man. He can't resist saying as much to Klinkert and van der Decken before he leaves the boat at Willemstad to collect a specimen for the museum. The specimen is a fish believed to have been extinct for fifty million years; but this particular member *ganoid isophilis* family was caught only a day or two before by a Portuguese fisherman off the coast of La Guayra.

This story started in last week's Argosy

THIMM, the radio man, seems oddly pleased to learn that Gabe is leaving the ship; and is obviously disappointed when Gabe tells him he plans to rejoin the *Apeldoorn* at Port of Spain.

While waiting for the *Apeldoorn*, at Trinidad, his precious grandfather-of-all-fish tucked under his arm, Gabriel runs into an odd and extremely pretty girl who calls herself LETTI GAYNOR and claims be the niece of Gabriel's superior at the museum.

Letti exerts every possible pressure on Gabriel to make him change his mind about the *Apeldoorn* and to join her cruise-ship for the rest of the trip to Rio. Gabriel, after a few hours in her company, decides that she is a very charming and accomplished liar; also that she is canny, daring, and very, very dangerous. He finds comfort in the fact that she is so obviously nearsighted.

When all of Letti's cajoleries have failed, she makes the obvious last move. She puts her arms around his neck and kisses him with great firmness and skill upon the mouth. . . .

CHAPTER VI

CHECKMATE, DEAR LADY

HIS first inclination was to withdraw in confusion, but he stifled it, relaxed and did nothing. He did not touch her himself. Her face close to his, those charmingly myopic, eloquent eyes melting with appeal, she kissed him once again with great gusto and released him.

Gabriel said, after a pause for the needful breath, "Not much fun, is it? Like kissing an old rather dry stick." He shook his head. "What a girl will think of to do!"

Letti stood appalled and uncomfortable. It was not what he was supposed to say. It was not what any man was supposed to say under the circumstances. The tender eyes took on a steely tone and her mouth quivered. She did not reply at once. She stepped back a little. "I—I don't know what you mean, Gabriel—"

"Of course you do," he said sternly. "It's been a lot of sport playing the game, and I've enjoyed it. Yes I may say I enjoyed it enormously. Up to and perhaps including the point when you felt it necessary to use sex as a weapon. That is where I get off."

"Don't be stuffy," she said, forcing a note of lightness into her voice. "You were nice to me. So I kissed you. I always kiss people who are nice to me. I'm impulsive, you might say, about people. All sorts of people."

"People you want to sail on the *Santa Rosa* with you? Why do you want *me* on the *Santa Rosa*, Letti? And we can drop all this blather about you being Dr. Kaufman's niece because I don't believe it.

"My dear, you can't see much of anything without your glasses, can you? I noticed them in your purse today. Nearsighted. Yet you tried to tell me you recognized me across that dining-room. I was only a white linen blur to you.

"You had tipped the waiter to tell you when Gabriel Adams came in. I noticed he asked me my name. I don't believe you came in on the *Santa Rosa* at all. Well, that's the way I see it. Do you want to take it from there?"

LETTI GAYNOR sat down against a sloping rock and stared at her shoes without a word.

"Listen to the thunderous roar of silence," Gabriel said. "But there are things you can tell me. How did you know my name in the first place—why were you interested in it—how did you know I was in Port of Spain—"

"Wait a minute," Letti murmured with a shrug. She stood up, came over and extended her hand. "Shake, Gabriel. You win."

Gabriel shook it. "The deception? I'm not so sure. You're still ahead of me."

She said, "No matter what I told you now, you wouldn't believe it. I might as well tell you the truth. It's the fish."

Gabriel looked blank. "What fish?"

"Never mind the four-months-old-expression. I mean the extinct fish, the *ganoid*, the *isosceles*."

"Isophilis," said Gabriel, patient but firm. "You're a very remarkable young woman. Tell me more."

"It's very simple, my boy. The Federal Museum let it sort of dribble out that

the fish had been captured, and that Kaufman had sent you to get it. I happen to represent a man, who wants it too. He was willing to pay me a thousand dollars if I got it ahead of you."

"This is getting weirder and weirder—but please don't let me stop you."

"The job was to find out where it was. My informant didn't know that. So the next best thing was to get a line on you. I called Dr. Emmet Kaufman of the Federal Museum and said I had news for you that was urgent and that I wanted to reach you. He gave me the Queen's Park Inn address. After that it was simple. I just flew down by Pan-American."

"I see," Gabriel studied her. "And how did you expect to get the fish ahead of me?"

"Well—it's embarrassing to say it now because I didn't have much luck—but I thought you might be attracted to me enough to let me come along. I didn't expect you to take me up on the *Santa Rosa* thing, but I thought you might suggest that it would be fun if I went with you, wherever you were going to get the fish."

"AND then beat me out?" Gabriel said. "I was to think you just a pretty girl along with me, and not a designing fish-snatcher, eh? I suppose from a woman's viewpoint that's a logical story. It's so good that I hate to break your heart by telling you that I already own the fish."

Letti groaned, but nicely, and ran her hand through the summit of curls on the top of her head. "Oh, well that tears it then. All this Mata Hari intrigue for nothing. And you never even dropped a hint."

Gabriel smiled. "Am I to assume that your quest was legitimate and that attempts at hijacking are beyond the pale?"

"Gabriel, the fish is legally yours, so that is that. I just lost one thousand dollars. But the trip was nice." She smiled at him provocatively, "And you were nice too."

"Thanks."

"Now that we understand each other, will we dance tonight?"

"Now that we understand each other," he replied heavily, "I don't see the necessity of continuing any relationship at all."

"You *are* an old stick."

"I said so myself."

"And you still don't trust me."

Gabriel said slowly, "I trust you implicitly, Letti. Yes, in one short day, I can trust you with any task requiring deception. You have a perfect flair for fabrication, and you do it *damned* well. But the only man in New York who knew about the *ganoid* was Dr. Kaufman himself, as close-mouthed a clam as ever kept a secret. So if I saw you again, you'd have to tell me still another story, and I wouldn't believe that either. And gradually it would become monotonous. I would be bored and you would get angry, and we'd both despise each other. No—let's leave it on a wasted-kiss note. Rueful, but charming."

Letti's face was flushed with anger, but her voice was steady enough. "You're laughing at me."

"That's the way it is," Gabriel said. "I'll confess that you're completely fascinating. A pistol in your handbag—oh, yes, I glimpsed it—and your spectacles, unused but needed. And the word is *isopholis*, Letti, not *isosceles* which is a geometric triangle. You did the best you could remembering it that quickly. Is that enough?"

"That's plenty," Letti said quietly. She seemed tiny and helpless. And pathetic, until Gabe remembered that was probably the only line of approach left to her. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Nothing," Gabriel replied. "It's obvious you won't tell me anything to enlighten me on all this. And it should be obvious to you that I'm not changing my plans and deserting the *Apeldoorn*—" He paused, electrified. He grabbed her arms and stared hard at her. "Do you know a man named Thimm? Rudolph Thimm?"

Her face remained a perfect blank, but she had too much control of it. Her eyes did not cloud in the slightest. "No," she said. "I never heard of him."

But that was the answer, nevertheless. Only two people besides himself and Dr.

Kaufman knew about the *ganoid* at all. Captain Klinkert and Rudolph Thimm. Klinkert could not possibly have remembered such details from their conversation whereas Thimm had had all the details in writing. It was painfully obvious that this charming little liar was hand in glove with Thimm. The purpose of the ruse not only escaped Gabriel, it flabbergasted him. But all he said was, "Never mind." No pal of Thimm's was likely to turn out to be much of a chatterbox.

He released her and motioned at the footpath. "It's getting dark. We'd better go back. After I deliver you at the Queen's Park, I think it should be agreed mutually that our social relationship has terminated. Don't you think so?"

"That might be a good idea," Letti answered coolly.

She left his side and retreated through the glade along the footpath. Gabriel followed her. Before they reached the greenhouse, a guide picked them up, thinking perhaps the darkness had caused them to go astray. He delivered them back to the Inn. There were no more words. Not even *adieux*. Gabe thought the game was over, which only goes to prove how crazy a bright young ichthyologist can be.

CHAPTER VII

THE WOMAN INTERVENES

AFTER dinner, Gabriel repaired to the broad veranda where most of the guests were sitting and talking in the cool breeze off the gulf.

He waited until nine o'clock, watching the moon beyond the dark hills, but Mr. Clements Leeds did not put in an appearance. Gabriel went into the lobby and asked the desk clerk if there had been any calls for him. There had been none.

From the desk, he telephoned the Atlantic Limited office himself, but could not raise them. Gabriel felt uneasy and annoyed, for he wanted to take care of the risk-policy and forget it. He didn't feel actually that there was any necessity for insuring the *ganoid,* for although it was extremely valuable, it was not valuable in terms of dollars and cents.

It was a rare find, but he could take care of it well enough. Confreres wouldn't give a thought to purloining it. That was ridiculous. He smiled, thinking of Letti's childish story.

The idea wasn't to speculate in dollars and cents. Ten thousand dollars wouldn't repay the loss of the fish, and at the same time, the fish wasn't worth that much. But Dr. Kaufman was the boss and wanted the policy, and where was Leeds?

Frustrated, Gabriel called the Customs House and asked them when the *Apeldoorn* was due to arrive, thinking that they would have heard by wireless.

"The S.S. *Apeldoorn,* Royal Dutch Lines?"

"Yes, please."

"She has already arrived," said the customs house. "She dropped anchor in the Gulf at eight-thirty this evening."

"That's good news. Early, wasn't she?"

"Yes."

"Do you suppose it would be possible to board her tonight? I'm one of her passengers, left her at Wilhelmstad and planned to pick her up here. I'd like—"

"I'm certain it will be impossible to board her this evening," said the customs house, very stern and official. "No one is being allowed aboard, and no one aboard has shore leave. Port authorities are aboard her now in response to a wireless from her master.

"I can't tell you any more than this. But I'm sure you can go out to her first thing in the morning. She's lying due west of the Customs House, about a half mile offshore. Mud deposits make the Gulf shallow in here, y'know, and her draft won't let her come in too close."

"I know," Gabriel said, burning with curiosity, "Thanks." He replaced the telephone, biting his mouth. What on earth did Captain Klinkert want the Port Authorities aboard for? What had happened?

It was well after nine. He nodded good night to the desk clerk, remarked that

he was checking out early in the morning and would like his bill ready then, and went upstairs to his room.

He unlocked the door and went in.

THE electric light showed him that his things were not in order. The twin doors opening onto the small balcony that ran around the inside square of the Inn were open. He was sure he had not left them that way.

Gabriel stepped through them hastily, standing on the balcony. It was quite dark out there; the light in his room cast a yellow blanket of light over his white-clad form.

To right and left, he could see nothing. Whoever it was, had gone.

He returned to his room, closed the doors and ran to the packaged *ganoid*. It was intact. It had not been touched. The twine had not been tampered with at all.

He thought next of his bag. He had left it, closed, on the floor of the closet. He opened the closet door and received a shock.

The bag was open, and although his things were still in it, they had been messed about thoroughly. On top of his clothes was his leather manuscript-case with his reports for the Rio congress, and his credentials from the Federal Museum. The case was open, the papers disturbed, but nothing had been taken.

Gabriel sat down on the edge of the bed and worried. They weren't even being careful. And he hadn't the mistiest notion who *they* were.

Gabriel telephoned downstairs. "Has anyone been in my room today?" Trying to sound merely normally angry, as if he suspected nothing beyond the incursions of a hotel-thief.

The desk clerk said, "The maid cleaned it, Mr. Adams."

"I locked the door," he snapped, warming up to his impersonation of an irascible American tourist.

"Yes, but she has a passkey. Is anything wrong?"

"I don't know," Gabriel said. "I think perhaps—No, I'll think it over." He slammed down the receiver, rather hoping that *they* had been listening in.

Nothing had been stolen. When he was sure of this, he repacked his things, frowning furiously. The maid hadn't touched his bag, certainly. Why would she? Letti Gaynor? But how had she got in?

He called the desk clerk again. "Is the room next to me unoccupied?"

"Yes," said the desk clerk. "The room on your left. Mr. Adams, is anything wrong? Has there been a theft? I'll call the police—"

"Nothing's wrong," Gabriel said. "I've thought it over. I must be mistaken. I don't want a fuss. You can skip the police." He hung up.

So Letti—Letti being his nearest approach to an idea of *they*—could have gone through the unoccupied room, onto the balcony, and into his room from the balcony. He wondered whether she would have had the courage for a job like that. It was a man's sort of work.

And the evidence pointed to the fact that someone had attempted to establish his identity and profession, nothing more. But already Letti knew all that. She'd known it when she'd struck up the acquaintance.

He became worried about the fish and decided to unwrap it to make sure it was safe. This he did, swearing at the knots, for he had tied them tightly. He finally shed the twine, unfolded the paper and then pried up the edge of the box which came easily; the Customs men had already done it once and broadened the nail holes.

Isopholis Orthotomous was still there. Gabriel lifted off the cover completely to stare at the fish, fascinated.

The taxidermy job was amateurish, of course, and yet the fish retained a brusque realism. It was five feet long, looking not unlike a short-nosed gar, or a barracuda. But the mouth of savage teeth put the barracuda's to shame; the teeth were large and myriad in both jaws.

Finally it was the head which set the

fish off from contemporary fish. It was plated with hard shining scales of an enamel-like substance called *ganoin;* its function was akin to the helmet of a knight of another day. This same *ganoin* was apparent in the rhombic scales of the fish.

It was a ferocious-looking thing, as a barracuda is ferocious, but it looked more sinister, which is a pretty good trick, too —the barracuda being roughly the Bela Lugosi of the finny family.

GABRIEL turned, startled, at the tap on the door. He started to force the lid on the box again, then stopped. "Who's there?"

"Letti." Her voice was soft and low.

"For heaven's sake," he said exasperated. "Haven't we had enough of that? I've had my bedtime story, and at this hour the ludicrous products of your imagination are quite—"

"I've got news for you," Letti said. "Please, Gabriel, I swear I'm telling you the truth. Of course you don't believe that —but I must see you. Something terrible has happened."

Her voice was urgent now; it held a thin note of hysteria. Her quick breathing was audible.

Gabriel didn't like it. It was late, the Inn was quiet. There was too much trouble possible. Scandal, if nothing else, if he should be caught with a woman in his room. Of all women, this one. What would Dr. Kaufman say? What would the Congress of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists say? "Get out of here!" Gabriel snapped. "I'm going to call the manager—" That sounded merely hysterical and ridiculous, so he shut up.

To his horror, he saw the door opening.

Letti slipped in with alacrity, slammed it shut. It was rotten luck, but in the excitement of finding his room disturbed earlier, he had forgotten to turn the key. Eyeing Letti with mixed apprehension and appreciation, his worst fears were confirmed.

She was in a nightdress, with a sleek satin robe over her. Her eyes were shining strangely and she was quite pale, panting with excitement; her mouth was quivering. It took nerve. It took lots of nerve. She began to scream.

Gabriel tried to stop that. He moved toward her, appalled, then paused. It would only be worse if he touched her. She might prove what she so obviously intended to charge. "Get out—get out—" he said. But she cringed into a corner, terrified now of what he might do actually in reprisal for the trickery; when she screamed again, it was in earnest. She was afraid of him.

Gabriel stood stock-still, shivering with rage and frustration. There was nothing he could do, not a damned thing! It made him furious, left him cold and empty. If he attempted to flee—if he touched her—

And then, from the darkness of his adjoining bathroom, a clear crisp voice emanated, reassuring and warm. It was the voice of another woman, casual, cultured and beautiful. "My word, what on earth is all the racket?"

She came in, and Gabriel saw her for the first time. Letti Gaynor saw her too, and gasped sharply. There were no more screams.

She was tall and graceful, lithe, her hair golden, her face oval, plaintive and lovely. There was a faint sardonic touch around her mouth, and her chin was firm. Somehow, she did not startle him. Nothing could have startled him after Letti's cries.

She was playing it straight, having heard every word, having deduced the deception, and Gabriel, with a prolonged inhalation, joined her instantly.

"It's amazing," he said. "This sweet young thing claims I seduced her. Or something. Messy."

The mouth became more jocular as it broke into a slow, splendid smile. "Isn't that a little ridiculous, Gabriel? I mean, with your wife in the same room? Rather difficult. Who is she? Why don't you call the police?"

"Her name is Letti Gaynor, and she took me by surprise. I haven't been able to move. But it's an excellent idea—"

CHAPTER VIII

THE WITNESS IS DEAD

LETTI GAYNOR flashed through the door and was gone. Gabriel went to the door and looked down the hall. But she had disappeared. Some one was coming up the stairs. Gabriel took a quick glimpse.

He stepped back into the room. "Desk clerk coming up—noise—" he said quickly.

She was still unruffled. "Leave the door open as it is. I've been visiting with you. I'll take care of the rest." She spoke quietly. Gabriel could barely hear her.

The next moment, the perturbed face of the desk clerk appeared in the dimness of the hall at the door. He knocked rapidly and called to Gabriel. "I had a call downstairs—some one was shrieking here—" He saw the tall girl and he looked surprised. She smiled at him and his face sagged, relaxed. "Hello, Miss Leeds. I didn't know you were up here."

"I'm terribly sorry," Miss Leeds replied. "I'm afraid I caused all the trouble, Monty, but it was the biggest mouse I've ever seen, and I can't stand the creatures—"

"Don't blame you for running up," Gabriel said. "She nearly turned my hair white."

"Oh well," said the desk clerk. "A mouse!" He laughed soundly in relief. "It sounded like a murder! That's quite all right. I'm sorry to have bothered you."

"Think nothing of it."

"Good night."

The instant the clerk disappeared, Miss Leeds said urgently, "Did she get away?"

"She has a room in the hotel."

"Then, seriously, I'd telephone the police and do something about it. The little beast was in earnest, she could have made trouble for you. It's a nasty thing to be mixed with."

"I can't call the police," said Gabriel. "I guess she knows that. She'd like me to call them because that will hold me up and keep me in Port of Spain. I haven't any intention of remaining here. I'm going out tomorrow. That's all I ask of anyone."

"Was that it?" said Miss Leeds. "I knew it wasn't blackmail. She'd have bargained with you. It turned my blood cold when she started screaming. I mean, I was in there, all unsuspecting, worrying about my own predicament, and then—well, my word! It wasn't pleasant! You're Gabriel Adams. I heard her call to you."

Gabriel nodded, having a quiet sigh. He looked at her in awe. "And what is my wife's name?"

"Leeds."

"I know that. I heard Monty."

"Merrill."

Gabriel liked it. It suited her. "You're a very lovely woman. You know that?"

"Yes," Merrill replied wryly. "I work at it. Very hard."

"You're English."

"I was born in Burnley, but I came out here with my Dad when I was very, very young."

"I hope," Gabriel said, "you don't think I'm getting unnecessarily inquisitive, Merrill. But you've put me in an awkward situation. On the one hand, I'm in the hole to you. Honestly, I'm grateful to you for the wonderful entrance. Bernhardt never made a better one."

"Thank you." She nodded, appraising him.

"On the other hand," he continued, "what the devil were you doing in my room, having searched my luggage, perused my private papers and generally acted like a common second-story burglar?" He searched her eyes, but they were cool gray and imperturbable. She looked amused.

"You're not really angry," she said.

"How can I be? But that doesn't mean I don't want to be. I've been pushed around ever since I flew into this burg and I'm getting tired of it. I may look like one of those passive souls who keeps letting destiny stick out a foot and trip me and do nothing about it, but that isn't so. I'm getting sick of it."

MERRILL LEEDS seemed not to have heard him. She came over to him and stared down at the armour-headed *paleozoic*

who reclined on his starboard side in the box. "Have you a cigarette?" she asked.

Gabriel gave her one, took one himself, lighted both. "What's this, the fish you wanted bonded?"

"Yes," said Gabriel. "How do you know about that?"

"Oh, really, I thought you'd assumed the answer by now. I'm Clements Leeds' daughter."

"You are? That makes it even worse. I don't get it, none of it, at this point. I've been waiting for your father to write this risk and he never showed up. I called again tonight and couldn't reach him. The office was closed."

"Well, Gabriel, I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, but I'm almost certain the chances of insuring this fish are nil."

Merrill cocked her head slightly and went to the open door and shut it. Then she returned and sat down and tipped the chair back slightly against the wall, watching him. There was something tomboyish in the act.

Gabriel frowned at her and crushed out his cigarette in a tray. "You mean that? I can't insure the *ganoid?*"

"I'm 'fraid not," she said. "Nor anything else you have with you. Nor yourself. What did you call the monster—a *ganoid?* Never heard of it. And after seeing the thing, I haven't an idea why you'd want to insure it anyhow. You can catch barracudas like that any day of the week."

Gabriel sighed heavily, not inclined to be indulgent. "This particular fish has been believed extinct for the last fifty million years, yet it was caught, netted alive off Cayo Grande last week."

"Well, well," she replied with a glint in her eyes. "I know I'm supposed to be awed and impressed, jaw agape, eyes popping, what not. But while it's a rare scientific find, no doubt, the ugly thing is a phantasmagoria come true, and it's probably just as well the world has been spared the sight of it for that long. Pre-history has always left me apathetic anyway because its emphasis was always on discord."

"Nonsense," Gabriel said.

"Oh, come on now, that toothy torpedo didn't evolve those bony patches on the skull to keep the dampness out?"

"Merrill, you're a very clever girl. But you can stop dragging these verbal red herrings around and tell me the truth. What's wrong with me? Why can't this fish be insured?"

"I only know that Dad said that if you were sailing on the S.S. *Apeldoorn,* there was to be no policy, and if you were not he'd be glad to take care of you."

"It's a pleasure to hear an honest answer," Gabriel said. "Now take it from there. Why were you in my things?"

"Because Dad asked me to check on you and see if you were really an American with a travel bug, or whether you were someone else with possible ulterior motives. Obviously, you're the former."

"What business is it of your father's who I am, since he has no intention of concluding a policy with me?"

MERRILL LEEDS left the chair and put out her cigarette. She was close to him and she met his gaze with frankness. "Do you know a man named Cumstock aboard the Dutch boat?"

"Yes. Second officer."

She nodded. "The answer to your question lies somewhere between my father and Second Officer Cumstock. I only knew that Dad received an important air mail letter from Cumstock which had been sent from Santo Domingo, Dominica."

"Before our call at Wilhelmstad," Gabriel said. "We put in there overnight on the way down. But Cumstock is a friend of mine. He wouldn't have any question about me."

"I've done you an honor by telling you this much," she replied. "I don't usually talk so much, but you've a fine aptitude for naïveté which cries for a woman's protection."

She laughed cheerfully. "I'll let you out from under my wing now and say good night. I don't think Letti will bother you again although she's certain to use her sense and know I couldn't possibly be your wife

I'm happy to have met you, Gabriel, and perhaps some time we may meet again."

"Wait a minute," Gabriel said, panicked. He caught her elbow and brought her around. "You can't—just go off like this."

"Why not?"

"I've only met you."

"How nice of you. But the fact remains you're sailing in the morning, and I live here. Can't pull the facts together."

"I'm only going to Rio," he said. "I'll be coming back."

"Are you making love to me?"

"I didn't mean that," he said. "I'm not sure what I do mean, only I'm terribly grateful to you for this good turn, and it seems wrong for you to go off without my —well—doing something in return. You don't understand. That was a very nasty situation."

"I understand," Merril Leeds said. "I don't imagine anything would be more horrible to a respectable archeologist than to spend a night in the local gaol under a charge of attempted seduction or whatever the girl had in mind." Her voice was dry.

"You couldn't have looked over my papers very well," Gabriel said. "I'm hardly an archeologist."

"Oh well, whatever the status is. It's eminently respectable, you must admit."

Gabriel decided to smile. "And a waste of time, from your tone of voice, eh? We can't all be world beaters. I like my job. What do you do?"

"Just about the same as you," she said. "Nothing, respectably."

He winced. "But you appear to lend your father a helping hand now and then. There's one thing about this whole business that I'd like to know. This letter that your father got from Mr. Cumstock. It concerned my ship, obviously, the *Apeldoorn*. Was it so important as to warrant your behaving like a second-story man in preference to just asking me outright for my credentials?"

She said, at once, "Yes, it must have been. Dad advised me to use discretion and secrecy. He was quite disturbed and while he didn't reveal anything to me—as he wouldn't, if you knew him—I know him well enough to guess that there is a possibility of serious trouble with the ship."

"I CAN corroborate that by telling you Mr. Cumstock is a sober, serious, and completely God-fearing gentleman who hasn't a sensational bone in his body, and wouldn't think of getting in touch with a Lloyd's man unless he had definite evidence of something dire," said Gabriel. "Putting two and two together, I get a picture of a possible scuttling. Am I right? Wouldn't your father be protecting his company from payment of insurance losses if the *Apeldoorn* were to be sunk premeditatedly?"

"I really must go," she said, refusing to reply.

Gabriel sighed. "I suppose so. Well, this was the most exciting entrance and the most alacritous exit of my life. I hope you give me the chance to do you right someday."

"Goodbye," she said. She went to the door and opened it, throwing back her head. Her hair flashed brilliantly in the light. "Were your people Biblical? Gabriel is such a quaint name. I kept looking for the last trump when I went through your things."

"I refuse to fight with you," Gabriel said. "You're too beautiful."

She paused there. "Maybe there's hope for you, despite the musty archives!" She flashed a smile. "You're very nice, really. Stuffy but nice. Take some good advice, Gabriel?"

"I'm open-minded."

"Don't sail on that ship."

"That seems to be the consensus of opinion," Gabriel remarked, watching her sharply. "You're not first with the thought. I suppose you mean that after all, you and I could have good fun in Port of Spain and I could always get a plane for Rio when I had to? My charm, today, goes beyond bounds."

"Only a moment ago, you refused to fight," she said shrugging. "Goodbye." She

went out and closed the door quietly behind her.

Gabriel didn't like the finality of the clicking latch. He went to the door and opened it, but the hall was deserted and he could hear her going down the stairs. He closed the door and locked it, puzzled.

By midnight, Gabriel was sure that he would not sleep. It wasn't only that the darkness was unfriendly, his conscience bothered him. He pictured her again, standing by the door before she left, and he was sorry that he hadn't been nicer, for he couldn't get her out of his mind. He'd given her very little for her aid.

Nevertheless, something was wrong. He felt crowded. Outside, the cicadas noised metallically, and once he heard the voice of a hook-beaked toucan which brought home Letti Gaynor's screams vividly. At twelve-thirty, by his watch, the telephone rang and he sprang to it gratefully and turned on the light.

"Mijnheer Adams?"

"Yes," he said. "Is it you, Hans?"

"Ja," said van der Decken. He spoke in a surge of excitement. "Captain Klinkert asked me to call you up and tell you we were in. There has been trouble, *mijnheer,* lots of trouble. They wouldn't let us off the ship. That's why I'm so late."

"Where are you, in the lobby?"

"Ja, you want me to come right up?"

"Come ahead," said Gabriel. "What's wrong?"

"A terrible thing," van der Decken said hoarsely, "Mr. Cumstock is dead!"

"Dead?"

"Hung by the neck in his own closet. I'll come right up to see you."

Gabriel slowly and thoughtfully replaced the receiver on the hook and got out of bed to unlock the door. His face could have been chipped from stone.

CHAPTER IX

NO INSURANCE

HANS VAN DER DECKEN was enjoying himself. He would have been horrified if Gabriel had suggested it, for the steward was not aware of it himself. But despite the dark fires behind his eyes and the unsteadiness of his voice, despite the paleness of his usually pink skin, he was enjoying the circumstances. The simple fact was that the Dutchman was no longer bored. One landfall at least had been different.

"Sit down over there," Gabriel said, locking the door behind the steward. "You're shaking all over."

"Ja, mijnheer. But not all over. My hands only. I noticed it when I tried to light a cigarette. But we have had excitement, you missed it all by leaving the ship."

"I've had a mild share myself," Gabriel said, returning to the bedside.

Van der Decken lighted a cigarette and coughed on the smoke when he inhaled too hard. *"Wat is er?"*

"Never mind" Gabriel replied. "You tell me what happened to Cumstock. I'm going to get dressed while you talk. I can't sleep a wink anyway. I've been trying but it's no good. I've got too many things on my mind and none of them make sense. You tell me about Cumstock, Hans, and don't skip anything."

"Cumstock was a good man," said Van der Decken. *"Het spijt mij.* It was a very quick thing. I still do not understand it. I don't think Captain Klinkert does either."

"Tell me what happened," Gabriel said. "Never mind what you think. When did it happen?"

"When? Tonight, not six hours ago. Poor Cumstock, he's still warm!"

"It happened after you dropped anchor?"

"No, before that." Van der Decken crushed out his cigarette nervously. He had only puffed it twice. "We must have been forty miles or so west of the Dragon's Mouth, *mijnheer,* when it came time for Cumstock's watch, and he did not put in an appearance, *neen.*

"Captain Klinkert called me and told me to wake up Cumstock and tell him to hit the bridge. So I went to Cumstock's cabin and there was no answer."

"You went in."

"*Ja,* I went in, but still there was nothing. Maybe I was stupid, but if you don't see a man in his room, that is no reason to look for him in his closet, *is het?* So I reported to Captain Klinkert, that there was no Cumstock."

He took a breath. "Well then, Captain Klinkert said, 'He will be along. He is somewhere else and late. But Cumstock did not show up.

"Captain Klinkert became impatient then, and angry. 'Come along, Hans,' he said to me, 'We find this lazybones!' But we could not find him and no one had seen him. Then Captain Klinkert got worried, and we went back to Cumstock's cabin.

"The only reason we opened the closet was to see if he had left his cap in there, which would have meant that he was not on deck."

GABRIEL ADAMS waited while van der Decken paused, seeing the whole thing again, as the expression on his face testified.

"It is a terrible thing to see a hanging man," van der Decken whispered. "We didn't expect it, anything like it. We opened the door. I let out a yell and the captain cried *'Hoe jammer'* and we both stepped back."

"How did he do it?"

"He was hanging there from a clothes hook," said the steward. "Cumstock was a little man, but even so, it's a wonder the hook held him. He'd taken his belt and tightened it around his neck and looped it over the hook. His tongue—"

"Never mind that," Gabriel hurriedly tied his tie and slipped on a jacket. "Just tell me this, Hans. You said it was a suicide. Are you sure it was? Did you find the slightest clue on the spot that might indicate it was a murder? Did Cumstock leave a farewell note?"

"Cumstock left nothing," van der Decken said evenly. "And there were lots of funny things I didn't like. I saw Cumstock after dinner when it was beginning to get dark and I said to him that we would be in at Port of Spain soon enough and would he like to go to a cinema with me? He said no.

"He apologized—he was a courteous man—and he said he had important business ashore, the minute he landed. If he planned to commit suicide, *mijnheer,* would he have said that? Wouldn't he have just said yes, he would go to a cinema? Why should he tell me a story if he was going to hang himself?"

Gabriel shrugged. "I don't know. That's not enough. You can't explain the function of the mind of a suicide."

"Well then," said van der Decken, "Captain Klinkert pointed to me that Cumstock's feet were touching the floor of the closet. 'My God, Hans,' the captain said, 'would you have the nerve to let yourself strangle when your feet were touching the ground like that and you only had to straighten your legs for air?' "

Gabriel stared at the steward, aghast. "Are you trying to tell me that Cumstock hung himself with his feet touching the floor? That's impossible."

"But he did."

"Impossible! No man could do it. He'd have to get up off the floor and kick a bucket or a stool. There's no man with the kind of iron nerve that would stop him from straightening his legs in his struggles. Good God, Hans, it—it couldn't be done—not possibly—not by a maniac. The instinct of self-preservation would—"

"Ja, that is what Captain Klinkert said. 'The instinct of self-preservation.' That is why he wirelessed the port authorities and asked for an investigation. He didn't say murder, but he didn't like suicide either."

"What did the port authorities say?"

"THEY'RE finished, that's why they let us off the boat. They gave a verdict of suicide. What else could they give? If some one else killed Cumstock, how was it done?"

"With the same belt by a strangler."

"But then he would have had to lift the corpse into the closet."

"You said yourself Cumstock was a

little man. He couldn't have weighed more than a hundred and twenty-five pounds or so."

"No one was with him, no one saw him after dinner, except me. I was the last one to see him alive."

"That isn't so," said Gabriel, "or else you'd be the strangler yourself. The truth of the matter is, Hans, that Mr. Cumstock was murdered because he was in possession of a secret. Time will tell if I'm right. I know for a fact that he sent a letter—airmail to Port of Spain from Dominica. I have good reason to suspect that it wasn't a trivial letter, but an important communication. That being so, why didn't he wireless directly?"

"I don't know," said van der Decken. "Why didn't he?"

"The only reason I can think of is because he didn't want the radio officer to see what he was saying."

"Thimm!"

"Yes," Gabriel said coldly. "Thimm." He picked up the telephone and called down to the desk. "Would you please connect me with the home of Clements Leeds? I don't know where it is, and I don't know the number."

"I'll get it for you," the desk clerk said.

Presently, Gabriel could hear the operator ringing. There was a long wait and no one answered. Finally a voice said, "Hello, sah? Residence of Clements Leeds."

"Is Mr. Leeds home?"

"No, sah."

"Miss Merrill Leeds?"

"No, sah."

"Who is this?"

"John, sah, the house-boy."

"Thanks," Gabriel said shortly, and hung up. He called the desk again. "Monty—is that your name?"

"Yes, Mr. Adams."

"Has Miss Letti Gaynor checked out?"

"Yes, sir. Before midnight."

"Did she leave alone?" Gabriel asked.

"As a matter of fact, no," replied the desk clerk. "A gentleman called for her. An officer from one of the boats outside, I guess, for he was in uniform."

"What did he look like?"

"I really couldn't say, Mr. Adams. I see so many people—"

Gabriel thanked him. "I'm checking out in a few minutes," he said, and hung up. He looked at the steward. "I'm going out to the *Apeldoorn* tonight and go aboard."

"*Ja, mijnheer.* That was what I had in mind when I came up to the Queen's Park. I thought maybe you would want to go back on ship."

Gabriel nodded. "It's all very odd. There's something wrong, Hans, something terribly wrong. I wish I knew what it was. Thimm wanted me off the freighter. I'd swear to it on the Good Book.

"Letti Gaynor tried to have me off. Merrill Leeds told me I couldn't have my fish or even myself insured if I went aboard. What is it? The Cuban was safe enough, he only took passage to Santiago. But no one else made the trip, no passengers."

Gabriel's voice had grown hollow. "It's almost as if the *Apeldoorn* was destined for trouble."

CHAPTER X

THE DISAPPEARING MR. LEEDS

"TROUBLE?" van der Decken said. But that is crazy! Why should she have trouble? She is a fine boat!"

"She has sea cocks."

"But there is no sense to it, there is no sense to all this you have said. I don't understand it—I don't know these people you speak of. Who would profit if she sank? Only the Royal Dutch Lines. They'd collect her insurance, but it would be foolish to attempt that.

"The Lloyd's people are very clever and seldom fooled, and besides, the *Apeldoorn* is an A-1 ship. She makes money. It would be a loss, insurance or not, if she sank. Not only that, but I can't believe my company would do such a thing."

"Companies do strange things when they need money."

"I can't believe it, *mijnheer,* not such a story. It is preposterous. It would make Captain Klinker accessory to a scuttling,

which is ridiculous." He pushed his cap back on his head. "It would make the whole crew—they would have to buy off the crew for silence—"

"Not if you all drowned."

"Gabriel, *goede heme!*, you are barking up the wrong tree, believe me."

"I know it, Hans, but I'm only probing, and something is wrong, you admit that?"

Van der Decken shrugged. "I admit it might be so. But after all, Cumstock could have taken his own life. He was a quiet man who minded his own business. How are we to know why he did it? He might have had reasons."

Gabriel sighed heavily. "There's one man knows the answer to Cumstock," he said glumly. "Clements Leeds. And I hope to heaven I can lay hands on him before we sail. You take my bag, Hans, and I'll carry the fish. We're going back to the boat."

He paid his bill downstairs, and called a cab and they left.

On the waterfront, at Marine Square, Gabriel had the driver take him and van der Decken to the building where the Atlantic Limited office was located. There was a pale light in the window of the office, which was on the second floor behind an ornate railing of a balcony. Elated, Gabriel told the steward to wait with the cab.

He himself tried the bell of the office but received no answer. He moved out into the street and called up to the lighted window, "Leeds! Mr. Leeds!"

Almost instantly, a policeman materialized in the shadows, looking trim and neat in his dark trousers, white-jacketed, and with a white pith-helmet on his head. "Here, here now," he cautioned, "what's this noise, sir?"

"Light up there," Gabriel said. "No one answers. I was calling—"

The policeman glanced up. "That's only the night light, sir, there's no one there."

"Oh," Gabriel said. He returned to the cab. "No one there, Hans. We might as well take the launch out." He paid the driver. Hans van der Decken joined him on the street, and they walked along Marine Square to the landing stage.

"*Mijnheer,* this man you called to—he is the one who knows what happened to Cumstock?"

"Yes," said Gabriel tiredly. "But I haven't even met him since I set foot on this island. Lord knows where he is now."

"What did you say his name was?"

"Leeds. Clements Leeds."

VAN DER DECKEN'S eyes narrowed and he tugged at his chin. "There was a man came out to the *Apeldoorn* tonight with the port authorities, named Leeds."

"Are you sure?" Gabriel cried, electrified.

"*Neen,* I am not sure, but it sounded—"

"What happened to him? Did he leave the ship with the port authorities?"

Van der Decken shook his head. "No, he stayed and talked with Captain Klinkert for a long while, and then I came ashore on leave with the others myself."

Gabriel tried to repress his uneasiness. "Who came ashore in your boat—did Steuber and Thimm come, leaving Leeds behind?"

The big Dutchman said:

"Steuber came ashore, but not Thimm. Captain Klinkert wanted Thimm aboard ship."

"All right," Gabriel said. They had reached the *landing plaats*. "Let's go out. There's the launch."

They went out across the black waters, for there was no moonlight and the stars did not have the power to show the way.

Though the sea may be beautiful by day, by night it is tangibly black and awesome. With little freeboard, Gabriel could have thrust his hand over into the phosphorescence of the wake.

He had always found water overwhelming at night. Swimming for a lark in such black water once had given him the scare of his life, for his imagination conjured horrid things, and black water had the feel of slime.

Across the gulf, none of her bulk visible, they identified the *Apeldoorn* by her anchor light on which they made their bearing. At her beam, presently, they ascended the

boarding ladder to her decks. Mr. Swanson, fourth officer, checked them in.

"May I see the captain?"

"*Neen, mijnheer.* Captain Klinkert has retired with orders not to be disturbed. He has had an exhausting night. In the morning?"

Gabriel said, "It's important, Mr. Swanson."

"Surely it can wait, Mijnheer Adams. I don't wish to be rude, but the captain—"

Gabriel shrugged. "All right, it can wait. Perhaps you can tell me yourself. Was there a man named Clements Leeds aboard?"

"The man with Captain Klinkert? Was his name Leeds?"

"I'm asking you."

"I don't know," said Mr. Swanson. "There was a man with the captain, short and heavy, with gray hair and glasses, but he is gone now."

"He went ashore?"

"*Ja,* he went ashore some time ago."

"You saw him go?"

"*Ja,* he went. I saw him go. I signaled for the launch to come out and get him."

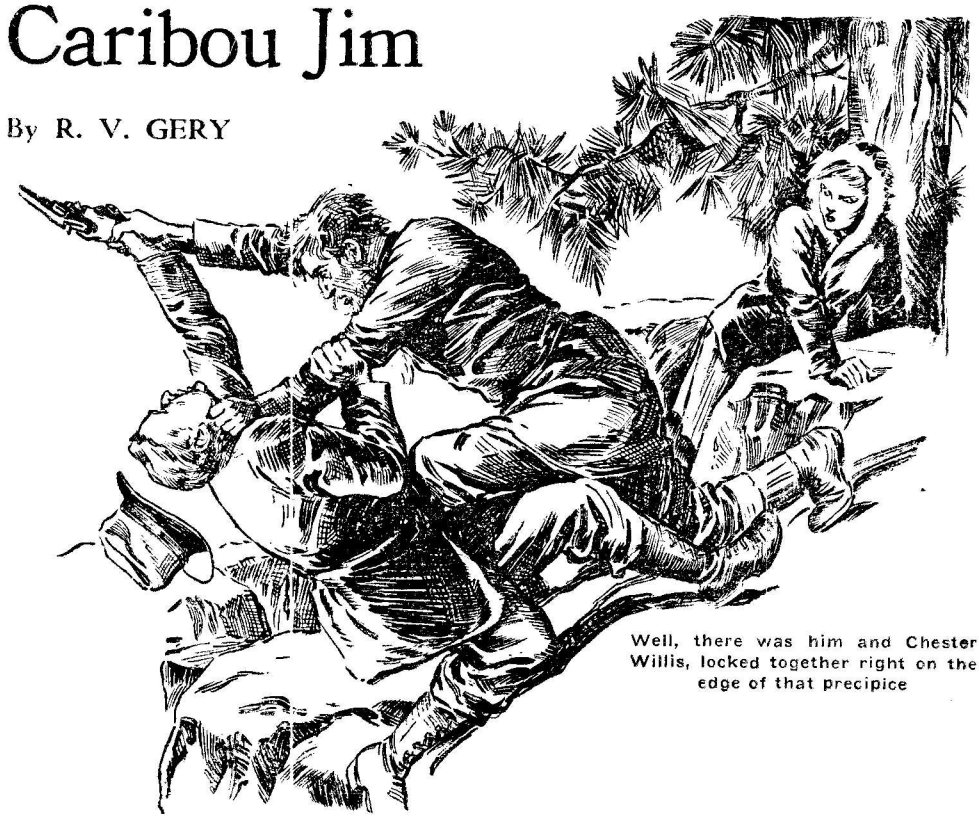
Gabriel and van der Decken exchanged glances. Gabriel murmured, "I'll say goodnight to you both. It's nice to be back aboard again. I always feel that way with the *Apeldoorn.* No matter how crazy things seem ashore, there's a permanence about this gray lady that reaches into a man's heart."

He paused for a moment. "I hope it lasts." He turned and went along the deck and then disappeared amidships as he went below, his *Paleozoic* trophy beneath his arm.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Caribou Jim

By R. V. GERY



Well, there was him and Chester Willis, locked together right on the edge of that precipice

Now look what happens to a man that stays away up in the North for thirty years, and never forgets why it was he left home. Not even when he's headin' for the looney-bin, and facin' a gun

1

MISTER, what's that? You want to know somethin' about old Caribou Jim and his yarn? You got a nerve, mister—you sure got a nerve.

Say, take a look back of the house there. You see a girl around? You passed her, goin' to the village just now? You did, eh? That's Elma—and if she's gone, and you got some tobacco, why I don't mind openin' up a little to you, if you got to have the story.

Yeah, the tale of old Caribou Jim; it'd sort of even things up a bit to tell it, maybe, to a stranger.

Well, I got to think. I got to begin at the beginning, and that's fifty-six years ago, down in the States yonder. Montana, yes. . . . So there was a kid born down there, name of Jim.

Pretty ordinary sort of a kid, I guess—father kept a livery, mother an Ioway girl. Kid ran wild, like the rest in them times, fishin' in the creek, shootin' squirrels in the cottonwoods, cloddin' cats around back yards. Red hair, freckles—No, there wasn't anything off line in Caribou Jim; not then.

Nor in the other fellow. You know who that was, I guess. Chester Willis is him, to be sure, and he was, let's see, a year older'n Jim. People better fixed, too, runnin' the store in town. Chester's dad

had been a colonel in the war—that's Abe Lincoln's war I mean—and his ma was a lady.

Maybe that gave Chester a sort of a queer beginning for Montana; I wouldn't know. But, except in just the one thing, Chester wasn't so almighty different from any of us.

There was that one thing, though, and don't it beat all how it turns out, in the end. I dunno where Ches got it—from his ma, I wouldn't wonder—but he was all-fired bound he was goin' places. Right from the time he started in school, he was goin' places some day, young Chester.

Well, that don't matter, either. Get-up-and-git's all all right in a youngster, any place. Trouble with Chester was, he wasn't particular. Did he want somethin', he went and took it. He was just that way—a snatcher.

Let's see. I guess I c'n remember a time, once when they was all about ten or so, this Jim (that was called Caribou later) and Chester Willis and Charlie Dockery, and the rest of the bunch was up in the woods one day, six-seven of them, with an old squirrel gun of Chester's dad's, and a pocketful of shells, hunting. Squirrels and chipmunks and gophers; groundhog now and again—most anything that came along.

Well, rules was, turnabout with the gun, and everybody keep what they knocked over. Was a cent bounty on gopher-tails, even then; and Ike Lamson, the tailor in town, did him a little trade in pelts on the side; he'd give up to a quarter, maybe, for a pretty squirrel skin. Nice pickings for a young feller in them times.

WELL, I dunno how it was, but Caribou had the gun, and he saw somethin' onto a branch of a tree. Matter of fact, it was a lynx; and what the fool thing was doin' there I wouldn't know. No more than I know why Caribou shot him, spang through the eyeball, first crack. Anyway, that's what happened, and so here's the lot of 'em, starin' at it.

"Yow!" says someone. "Lookit the lion!"

"Naw," Caribou says. "It ain't, neither. It's a lynx—I seen a guy with one before. Boy oh boy," he says, sudden, "I wonder what Ike Lamson's goin' to cough up for this feller."

Wasn't nobody knowed, and they stood there, having it this way and that, and then Chester goes silent for a minute.

"Look," he says, "that's my dad's gun, Jim."

Just like that, but there wasn't no doubt of what he meant. They all turned on him.

"Huh?" Jim says. "Suppose it is, what about it?"

Chester was starin' at him—I can see him now. "Halves is about it, fellow," he said. "That's fair."

Well, you can figure out what was said then. Plenty of things, and it wasn't only Caribou either that talked. And this Chester, he stood there, giving them the eye and drawing patterns in the dust with his toe; and finally he just says, "Gimme the gun, you!" in a kind of dry whisper, and walks off with it. The rest looks after him.

"Well, the dirty, low-down—" says Charlie Dockery. But Caribou only grins. He was a fool then, Caribou, same as he was all along.

"Never mind him," he says. "C'mon, let's pelt this here old cat, and see what Ike is gonna do about it."

So they went to work and skinned the thing, and Caribou stretched and pegged it, and that evening down he went to Ike Lamson. Ike said he'd go ten dollars, maybe, for a good, clean specimen, and Caribou pretty near fainted. Ten dollars, by jiminy!

He'd forgot Chester. That night the pelt went, pegs and all. Clean out of the shed Caribou'd left it in. And while he was still sort of gaspin', somebody comes up from the store and says, "Nice bob-cat that boy of Willis's knocked him over, huh?"

Caribou like to died, right there. He stood with his mouth open, as if he didn't believe what he'd heard—and then he went a-running, down street.

Chester Willis was on the store steps, counting greenbacks. He looked at Caribou, and Caribou looked at him. Chester was a

head taller and maybe ten pound heavier, but Caribou went at him, just the same. He was hoppin' mad, right through.

Mr. Willis come out and separated 'em. "What's all this?" he said.

"He stole my pelt," says Caribou, thick, and "Didn't, neither," says Chester. Willis looks from one to another of 'em, fingering his goatee. "Chester," he says, "you told me you shot it."

"Did, too," says Chester. "Don't listen to any of 'em, Pa. They're just jealous. Look," he says, "think I'd lie to you, Pa?"

Get that, mister? Do Willis say yes, and him a Civil War colonel, it don't look like he's done much of a spang-up job, rearing a boy; and what's more, Chester's mother, that was a lady, she'll pretty near die of mortification. And Chester, that was eleven years old, knowed all that—knowed it well enough to bluff on it.

Mr. Willis tugged his goatee, for fair. And as for Caribou, he was feeling just then what he'd to feel some more later on—all blank and kind of whirrin' inside.

"He never!" says he. "I'll fix him."

Would have, too, I guess—only Willis went G.A.R. on him, right away.

"Boy," he says, "that's enough. My son's word is good enough for me. I'll be thankful for you to get off my stoop."

And Caribou went. Sure, he went. It was all over town in an hour how he'd been slicked out of a sawbuck by that Chester, but d'you know what? Folks just grinned, that's all. They'd a high notion of smartness, back in them days.

WELL, I reckon that's as good a beginning as any, in this here tale of Caribou. He and Chester went on living in the same town after that, with Chester going on the same—tongue in his cheek and a grin on his face—till they was growed men.

Yeah, often and often they tangled, with Caribou always on the short end of things; looked like he was always about two jumps behind, when it come to thinking.

And then, the way things go, there had to be a woman in it.

Lucy Gray was the girl they locked horns over. She came into town with her parents, on the train from east, some place. Caribou drove her from the depot, and right there, he says, spring started for him—in December, in Montana. He said, Caribou Jim did, he'd go further with that acquaintance, or know why not.

Well, pretty soon he did know why not. Chester Willis was why not.

By this time, Chester was five-six and twenty, and too big for that Montana town already. He'd notions outside of that, and a slice of money to back 'em, and—like I said—he wasn't particular about the way he acted.

He got some place all right. But first away, thirty years ago there, he got Lucy Gray.

He tooken her away from Caribou, without so much as a by-your-leave. One day, Lucy was settin' on the sofa in her folks' house with Caribou—and next, the door was shut, slam in his face. Lucy wasn't seein' him, nor her ma; but her dad was. He told Caribou goodbye.

Never mind what he said, neither. One of them things about a man that it ain't much use denying; girls' parents are goin' to believe 'em, no matter what you say.

So Caribou run across Chester Willis again. He just stood there on the doorstep, looking at the knocker and not seeing it. He wasn't seeing nothing. He says to himself, fellow, fellow, he says, this here's the time, it's gone far enough, I ain't havin' any of this. And he turns on his heel and goes down town.

Looking for Chester, sure. Chester was in the rotunda of the hotel, talking to some biggity guys from St. Paul. He see Caribou, and grinned again. Caribou walked up to him.

"Louse!" Caribou says, and lets go. Down goes Chester, the back of his head across a brass cuspidor. There's plenty blood and shouting.

"You killed the man!" says one of the St. Paul guys. "I see you do it."

"Yeah, you too," says Caribou Jim, and pastes him one. And with that he runs

out into the night, and away from there.

Sure, away. They didn't never see no more of Jim in that town. There was a bug eating at Caribou Jim, and it drove him. Except that there was two hundred dollars gone from the livery safe, they didn't get a glimpse of him.

Sure, there was a warrant swore out against him, for damagin' one Chester Willis and somebody from St. Paul, but there wasn't any warrant goin' to catch Caribou. He'd gone, like smoke. . . .

Yeah, you may say so. He was drove, Caribou, by somethin' that had warrants lookin' silly. He knowed, there in the hotel, that did him and Chester tangle again, there'd be only the one way to it. He felt killin'—like a bug, gnawin' his brain. He got out.

II

OVER the line, sure, into Canada. It was thirty years ago, this, and the prairies weren't no-wise like now. There wasn't no automobiles, nor radio, nor airplanes—mighty few railroads, either, in Saskatchewan there. A thousand mile was a thousand mile, back then.

Caribou Jim kept on goin', for that and more. A thousand mile he made, headin' north.

Why north? Mister, come again—I dunno. Except that maybe it was empty there. Emptier and emptier as Caribou went on. It took him all of a year, before he looked around one day and found he was in a place he liked.

Spring was coming in, and the little blue crocuses shootin' in the snow already. In the rivers the ice was givin' great cracks and groans, stirrin' before break-up. The lakes was purely blue-and-white, and there was birds, millions of 'em, flyin' overhead and feeding in the sloughs. A wind come up, out of the south, whispering.

Caribou sat him down on a rock and took off his hat and scratched his head. He was a wild-lookin' guy by now, particular after spending the winter, some place, with a band of Nitchies in their tepees.

But somehow or other, that morning there in the sunshine, he felt light all at once, as if what had been driving him had dropped away. For the first time in a year or better, he saw things straight.

He saw that there was a place called Montana somewhere, where something had happened—he'd forgot what, and anyway he didn't care. This Montana place was a long ways away. He didn't want to go back there. He wanted to stay here, up in this country, by himself.

"Aw, skidoo!" says he, aloud, and brushed Montana off of him like a fly. "You lay offa me."

Then he thought, that's crazy, talking to yourself, that's what crazy people do. "You ain't crazy, Jim," he says, right out. "Don't you let them kid you you're crazy."

And he went on, sitting on the rock there and saying "Crazy!" about a hundred times. He'd been talking to himself for months, matter of fact, and here was the first time he'd noticed it.

Where was he? Mister, I wouldn't know *where* he was that first morning. But it was north; far north, because the sun never got up more'n a couple of inches in the sky, and the days was short. I guess if you figured he was between Bear Lake and the Coppermine, some place, couple of hundred miles one way or the other, you wouldn't be a lot out.

Thirty years ago, this was, remember—before Labine and the others made the Bear Lake strike, or there was any airplanes to fetch and carry. Up there, you was on the edge of the world still.

So this Jim, he set and considered, with his hat off and smilin' to himself. And by and by it come to him that he was hungry, for it was quite a while since he'd seen the last of the Nitchies.

"Great jumpin' Caesar!" says he. "That's a good one! Euchred, by Joe!"

Well, it sure looked that way, because it don't matter whether you're crazy or sane, you can't live on air. This Jim, he certainly looked blue, on the rock there.

And then he saw somethin'. There was a little river right before him, and across

it the land rose in a slope, sort of, to a ridge. The slope was dotted with juniper and buffalo-bush, just beginning to show green, and there were things moving in it.

A lot of things—just brown-gray shapes, shifting slowly across the country, in twos and threes, and sixes, stopping and going ahead and then stopping again. This Jim rubbed his eyes; he figured he'd got the liver complaint, or some such.

But he hadn't. No, sir. What he'd got was his first sight of the caribou on the move, and mister, they was millions of 'em. Leastwise, that's what it looked like.

"Holy cat!" he said, rubbering at them. "Whaddyou know?"

WELL, there's where this Caribou Jim got his name. Thirty years ago, that was, and he stayed right with them all the time afterwards.

Maybe I don't have to tell you about the caribou, hunh? What I mean, the way they move, back and forward across the north there, following the feed. The Nitchies live on them, right along, fresh meat in summer, froze in winter.

But they don't do what Caribou Jim did. And that's move with the herd, back and forth, year in and year out. I dunno, but I guess there's mighty few men done that, mister. Not the way Caribou acted. . . .

Like I said, he was thinkin' of Chester Willis, back home. Matter of fact, he wasn't thinkin' of a whole lot else, for thirty year. And that's a long while. Chester Willis, and Lucy, and the dirty stuff Chester'd dished out for him, way back there in Montana across the line.

He was thinkin' of Chester, and keepin' clear of him. Because he knowed, Caribou did, that next time it wouldn't be a bust in the jaw he'd hand Chester. That'd be killin', that time. . . .

And then, one day, this policeman catches up to him. Away south, this was, on the shore of a big lake, and the man got his trade wrote all over him.

Caribou had heard of these Canadian policemen before, and right away he knowed this was bad. Did the policeman find out who he was, back to Montana he'd go, for bustin' Chester and that biggity St. Paul fellow. And after that, likely there wouldn't be anything for him to do but make a clean job of it with Chester.

So he decides to act simple. Wasn't so very hard, I reckon, seeing what Caribou was gettin' to look like, by now; whiskers down to his waist, and a raggedy suit of skins. He starts smiling very silly and clawing at his whiskers and carrying on, like he was really and truly off the rails.

The policeman, he was a hard-lookin' outfit too, come up to him.

"Who're you?" he says. "What in thunder you figure you're doing, chum?"

Jim lets on he's weak in the head, playing with a tame caribou calf he'd got, and drooling in his beard. The policeman tries him again, frowning.

"What's your name?" he says. Caribou giggles and says the first thing that comes into his head, and that's John the Baptist. The policeman looks kind of puzzled for a minute, and then he grins.

"Well, I dunno," he says. "Maybe you got somethin' there, too, brother—leastways if looks goes for anything. All right, come on and let's have some tea and a smoke. I got to think about you. . . ."

BUT Caribou he wasn't falling for no such line, although the sight of a billy of tea pretty near killed him and the scent of tobacco drove him wild. He took the old calf with him and he went walkin' among the caribou, that didn't take no more notice of him than if he was one of themselves.

The constable watched him for quite a while, and then he come out after him.

"Look," he says, "if you understand me, chum. I was goin' to take you in, because there's places all fixed up to take care of your complaint. But now I dunno; there's these fellows . . ."

And he points to the caribou, that are all around, feeding, and every now and again lookin' up at him, suspicious-like. Old Jim, he just giggles again, although his heart's goin' ker-thumpity all the while

for he's scared of bein' took in after all.

He goes over to where a big bull's standing, he'd named George, and slaps him on the rump, and George nuzzles him and licks his hand for the salt taste of it. It must have been quite a surprisin' sight, that, I reckon, for the constable just gapes.

"Gorm!" he says. "You're some kind of a bloomin' miracle, anyway. Now listen," he says, "I'm going to say something. You stay here, savvy? With these chaps, eh? Watch 'em good, and see they don't come to no harm. They're worth plenty to the government.

"And look, every so often I'll be along, or someone else will, to see you're making out all right. Got that, chum?"

Well, Caribou had a hard time keeping his face; but he nods and points to the herd and then to himself and talks a lot of nonsense, and finally the policeman seems to figure he understands.

"All right," he says. "I guess that's all. Be good, and I'll be seein' you."

And with that he goes off in the canoe, but not before he'd told his breed paddlers to leave stuff on the shore—a sack of flour and a side bacon, and tea and tobacco and matches.

Caribou Jim let him get out of sight for an hour before he went after them. He was scared they'd see how his hands was shakin'.

You try doin' without simple little things like tea and so forth for three-four years, and see what you feel like, mister. Well, Caribou Jim felt just that way, I guess. For maybe a half an hour he forgot even Chester Willis. Yeah, so help me he forgot even Lucy Gray.

III

WELL, sir, that's the way old Caribou Jim got his job, as you might say. And for a long, long while he kept it, watching the herd, happy as a king, without anybody asking him any questions, and every now and again a load of provisions left for him here or there by the constables.

He hadn't got a single worry, except to remember to act silly when anyone came along, and that came easier and easier as time passed.

There was days when he'd just sit in the sun, singing, and composing crazy rhymes inside his head, nothing else. Or making chains of the crocuses and flowers, or going ring-a-rosy around a tree or a bush, telling it a story, until he come to himself, shivering all over and red in the face.

"Lookit, Jim," he said to himself. "Lookit. Do you act thisaways, and one day you'll forget them caribou, and then they'll put you in that place . . ."

He meant the place the constable had told him about—the loony-bin—but I guess if he'd have known what place he was really headed in for, he'd have been more excited. Eh, mister?

Well. One day he saw somethin' that made him sure his brains *was* addled, proper. He was down on the flats in the summertime, by the big river, when he saw it, and stood there gawping.

He'd heard it, first—a sort of a roarin' sound, but he didn't pay much attention to that, because now there was often sort of roarin' sounds in his ears. But when he saw the thing, up there in the sky, he certainly thought he was crazy.

He'd never dreamt of anything like that before, in all his life.

"Holy Joe!" he said, like the farmer at the circus. "I don't believe it."

But there it was, and in a minute he knowed it, too, for the caribou had seen it and heard it, and mister, them animals lit out of that. It took Jim best part of a week to find 'em, and more than that to get near 'em, they was that put about.

"Gorm!" says he, mortified. "Somebody's playin' the fool in my country."

With that, he sees a couple of the constables, paddlin' on a river, and hails 'em—which is what he most generally didn't do. They comes ashore, and Caribou asks 'em by signs what this affair might have been. The constables looks at one another.

"Oh," says one. "I know. That was just an airyplane, Jim. Ain't seen one before, hunh? Well, they won't hurt you none, and I guess the critters'll get used to 'em."

They gave him some tobacco, and went off, but not before Caribou'd heard them talking. "Hundred mile an hour," says one. "Ten hours from Edmonton. It'll make a difference in here, all right . . ."

Caribou stood for a long while, thinking. His head was pretty good that day, and he could add two and two. And he knowed right out that this was trouble; he wasn't six months or a year away from things any more. He began to cry, at that.

"Judas!" he says. "What'll I do now?"

If it hadn't been he'd got to eat, and that he was scared of being caught and put in the loony-bin, he'd have quit the caribou right then and gone off again, north and north, trying to escape again. But he couldn't do that, or so he figured—and in the end he went off into one of his spells again, and stayed there.

Yeah, he stayed there a while, this time, he don't know how long. Seemed to him he'd never been any other way, in the end, and he just wandered with the herd, back and forth, while the sun came up in the sky and went down, and came up and went down, like a jumping-jack. I figure, now, it must have been years, maybe ten years, he was that way.

But still he stuck with the caribou. By this time he didn't know no other place to go.

And then, at the end of a mighty long while, come the day when somebody hit somethin' there on the shores of Bear Lake.

YOU know all about it, mister—more'n I do, more'n old Caribou does, to be sure. But it was gold they found there—gold and silver and, what's this, radium, lyin' in them islands and beaches he'd been over a million times.

Old Caribou, he didn't make out to understand what it was, but there was people there, lots of 'em; people comin' in on these here airplanes. Buildin' huts and camps and all manner of affairs on Bear Lake there . . .

'Course, it sent the caribou off and away. They weren't no ways liable to get used to them things, after all, and that constable had been all wrong. They kept wide of the place, and Caribou went with them.

But after a while, maybe some more years, he began to get all-fired inquisitive about these guys.

He'd sneak off, now and again, and lie up in the little hills by the lake, talking to himself and lookin' down at what was going on there. Planning on what he'd like to do with the whole shebang, did he get the chance . . .

And that was too bad, mister, because one day what'd he do but fall asleep—he slept right easy, now, different from what it had once been. When he woke up, there was a couple of fellows standin' there, surprised-like.

"Jeepers!" says one. "What's this—Methusalum?"

Could have been, I guess, the way Caribou looked just then with a long gray beard down to his belly and in them skin rags. But anyways, he wasn't stayin' there arguin' the point. He up and ran, and them two after him.

But he'd forgot he wasn't a youngster any more, and the others were. They caught him in fifty yards and grabbed him.

"Look," they said, "how come, dad? What you doing here?"

Couple of nice young boys they was, in miner's clothes, but Caribou Jim didn't know nothing about that. All he knew was, he wanted to get away out of that. Like an animal in a trap, he felt, and he commenced to struggle and cuss and squall like all get-out.

So the two youngsters, and I guess they're not to be blamed, with all that gold and stuff around, took and marched him down to the mine-workings by the lake and into a shack there.

A big man was working over some papers and he looked up, inquiring, sort-of.

"Found him over yonder," the two boys said, while Caribou went on, somethin' wicked. "He's either nuts or just pretendin' to be. What'll we do with him, boss?"

Well, the mine man was put out, quite some, seein' this raggedy stranger hangin' around his workings, and he commenced

to ask Caribou pretty short who he was and what the hell, and so forth.

But Caribou, he allowed he wasn't doin' no talkin' at all, not him; and he was just castin' his eye around, wild-like, lookin' for a chance to skip out of there, when all at once he stopped.

Yes, sir, old Caribou he stopped, and he blinked, and he went limp in those boys' grasp.

"Hey, s'matter, pop?" says one of them. "Ain't feelin' so good, huh?"

"The pore old skeesicks is starved," the other says. "He's all skin and bone . . ."

The mine foreman's busy and he can't be worried any more. "Okay," he says, "take him away and give him a meal—and a wash, too, I guess. He needs it."

So they took Caribou out and down to the cookhouse, and fed him beans and bacon, and a big drink of coffee, and Caribou he ate and drank and never knew what he was doing. You see, he'd saw somethin', up in the shack there, and the thing was still flarin' before his eyes, like it was wrote in letters of fire.

There'd been papers on the foreman's desk, and one of them was turned about, so that Caribou could read what it said. Wasn't much, neither—just the three words, but they jumped out at Caribou, same as I said, and pretty near keeled him over altogether.

Chester Willis, President, was what they said, mister, that's all.

WELL, Caribou sat on a bench in the cookhouse, shovelin' grub into himself, like it was concrete into a mixer, and tryin' to get his head clear.

It was all cloudy and muzzy; he didn't know where he was, or how he'd got there, or what he'd been doing. Matter of fact, last thing he remembered was that airyplane and the caribou runnin' away from it—and when that had been he didn't know either.

All around, it was a facer for Caribou, and no wonder either, maybe. Because them three words on the paper there had knocked him sensible again—or part sensible.

He was back again where he'd been in them early days, and his head was full of Chester Willis.

Only Chester Willis wasn't a thousand miles and a year's travel away, now. He was somethin' to do with this mine, and the fellow behind the desk over there. And that changed things—yeah, you might say it changed things a whole lot for old Caribou, mister.

He sat there, blinkin' and tryin' to catch up, and the two boys watched him.

"Creeps!" says one, thinkin' Caribou didn't hear him. "I never see nothin' like it."

Caribou looked down at himself then, and he sure felt ashamed. After you been bummin' around the Northland with a herd of deer for thirty year you ain't nobody's fashion-plate no, nor sweet-smellin' nosegay neither.

Gosh, says he to himself, this here'll never do.

Because, lemme tell you, mister, right there Caribou Jim knowed somethin'. He knowed that him and Chester Willis wasn't done with one another yet, for all he'd tried his best to get clear of him. He knowed they'd meet up before so very long, somehow—although what was fixin' to happen then was still beyond him.

So he had to get himself ready for that meetin', as you might say.

"Gents," he says to the boys, with a sort of lopsided grin, "I'll be obliged to you for the loan of a cake of soap."

IV

WELL, now, that's the way it went—Caribou Jim and the gold-mine on the edge of Bear Lake there.

They took him on, sure. He was a handy kind of an old geezer to have around, knowin' what he did of that country. And he worked and made himself pleasant, until in no time at all he was part of the outfit. And figured plenty on Chester Willis.

He pretty soon got wise to that guy and his doings in all these years. He'd lit out of Montana long ago, and gone east—and by all accounts, the way Caribou heard

it, he'd done pretty good for himself. That's puttin' it mildly, as I guess I don't have to tell you; but Caribou didn't get the whole of it from the men at the mine.

All they said was that Willis was president of this company and half a dozen other ones as well, and that he was a big shot.

But Caribou knowed, from the way they said it, that Chester Willis was Chester Willis still, when it come to money matters. What I mean, he'd skin his own grandmother for a nickel, and whistle while he was doin' it.

Caribou wondered, some, about Lucy Gray, but he couldn't find anything about her, naturally. The mine men wouldn't know, anyways, and besides, Caribou had to be careful. He wasn't anxious for anybody to know what was goin' on in his mind.

No sir, he kept his thoughts under his hat, and studied around.

It had been spring when he come to the mine, and it wasn't long before the airplanes began to show up. They was here, there, and everywhere, it seemed to Caribou—little ones that went scoutin' around with prospectors, out north and east to the Coppermine and big ones that come a-roarin' in from the south.

You bet your life Caribou studied them big fellows. Where they come from, down towards the sun some place, was where Chester Willis was. Bein drawed up here, slow but sure. Caribou knowed that, deep down inside him. It couldn't be no other way, not after all these years.

So the spring went along and summer came in, and the lakes and rivers opened. Caribou Jim saw a motor launch come along, towing scows with supplies and lumber and all manner of machinery. He stood looking at it, fingering his beard that had been clipped a bit now.

"What's that?" he said.

"Crusher," they told him, grinning. "Now we won't be long . . ."

Well, Caribou didn't know anything about that, to be sure. He wasn't no mining hand, so he just hung around, doing chores and watching them fixing the machinery and building a queer-looking affair with the lumber. After a while he got mighty interested, because he'd never seen anything like this fandangus before.

And that's how come Chester Willis pulled a surprise on him and took him unawares.

IT WAS one evening, late, and Caribou was down by the building with his fool mouth open, I guess, rubbering at a couple of the fellows tinkering with an engine—he never could get over them *phit-phit* engines, all his time—and he never took no notice of the plane landing. There was lots of them things around, anyway, and this once he figured it'd be all right to let one go.

It wasn't. Somebody let out a yell for him, down at the landing float, and he come to himself.

"Hey!" the boss calls. "C'm'on down here, pop, and give a hand with this stuff."

That was just part of Caribou's job, and he went along, never dreamin' of anything. And right there on the landing was the man he'd come a thousand miles and better to get away from, and spent thirty years with the caribou as well.

There wasn't no doubt about it. Jim knowed him, the second he clapped eyes on him, although he'd altered quite some, to be sure. He was big and stout and he'd the look of a fellow that had done pretty good for himself, like they'd said.

And he'd that other look, too, the one men get when they've had their own way a long while and been on top of the heap too long.

But it wasn't them things Caribou Jim saw in Chester Willis. He looked beyond that, and he saw he hadn't changed none. He was still the same shifty, crooked article as he'd been over that bobcat pelt forty year ago. Caribou remembered Lucy Gray, in a flash.

But he didn't say nothing, nor look different. He'd drilled himself for this, Caribou had, and he took and toted Chester's bags up to camp, just like he was any ordinary roustabout.

And in there, in the dining shack, Caribou Jim took it, smack between the eyes. Lucy Gray was sitting there, her hands folded in her lap, waiting. Yeah, Lucy Gray, no less.

Caribou Jim dropped the bag he was carrying. His eyes bugged, and he said somethin' under his breath. And then the woman turned a little, and he saw it wasn't Lucy Gray after all, but somebody that was Lucy Gray's livin', breathin' image, the way she'd been all them years before.

Caribou Jim, he just stood for a second by the dropped bags, and then he went out, quick. He went blunderin' on into the bushes and scrub—and then he sat down on a rock, just the same as he'd done that time, long ago, and scratched his head.

"Damn!" said Caribou. "Damn it to hell, who'd have thought of that?"

You see, he knowed very well that this was Chester Willis' daughter—Chester's and Lucy's—and the notion of that pretty near shook him off his rocker. First off when he'd seen Chester, he'd figured that this was it, the pay-off, the time, and that it was him and Chester now, at last, and anything went.

BUT now? No, sir, it wouldn't do. It wouldn't work, not with that girl around. She loved the scum, likely enough, said old Caribou, and she was Lucy's kid, after all. He growled to himself, sittin' there, like a bear that's been robbed of a honey-tree.

Then he got up and went back in the twilight—it was near midnight, but you know what it is, up there—to the camp. It was dark, with everyone asleep, and the big plane riding at anchor by the float.

Caribou stood with his hands in his pockets, scowling at it all; but then he pricked up his ears.

They was good and sharp, Caribou's ears, after all that time in the wilds, and there wasn't much they missed. This time it was a little sound that took him a while to place. But when he did, Caribou's mouth dropped open, and he made a queer surprised noise in his throat.

That sound was a woman cryin'.

Caribou stayed where he was for maybe a minute, listening, and then he began to move, tip-toe, walkin' the way he'd learnt, out there with the herd. Slow, and stealthy, and his mouth was still a round O with his thoughts—until he was outside the hut.

Sure it was a woman cryin', all right. No doubt about that, mister.

Well, Caribou he just dodged into the shelter of the building and stood waiting. He knowed this wasn't goin' to be all—he'd hear some more in a minute, and he figured it was up to him to do just that. No, he wasn't ashamed, not a bit, of hearin' anything—not with Chester Willis.

But what he did hear was a caution. Seemed that this Chester was awake in there, too, for here he comes all at once, in a low, hard voice; but Caribou got it all right. Sure he got it.

"Shut up!" says Chester Willis. "Quit sniveling there, or I'll attend to you." . . .

Yeah, I guess that's so. I guess old Caribou, he could have gone right in and done it then, early that morning, when Willis was asleep. He could have, to be sure, but he didn't. Too much like screwin' a chicken's neck—and that wasn't just the way he felt about Chester.

So he waited. He knowed, Caribou did, that his chance would come.

HE WAS around next morning, breakfast time, when Chester Willis come out of the hut, goin' to breakfast. He looked fatter and more satisfied with himself than ever, in daylight; and Caribou thought yeah, yeah, fellow, it's time at last—it's time that look came off of your puss.

And then he saw the girl—her name was Elma it seemed—and that only made it worse.

He had to go off behind the half-built crusher and stand there, biting his fingers.

Well, and then the driver of the plane come up to him—a friendly little guy with a cigarette in his mouth. He was fumblin' in the pockets of his flying-suit.

"Got a match, old-timer?" he says, and

Caribou hands him one, and they get to talking. Caribou, he was kind of curious about the machine—he'd never seen one close before—and the driver took him down and showed him it.

"Gosh!" says Caribou. "Dang me if I knowed the consarned things was that big!"

He was squintin' in through the door, and certainly the inside there looked as big as a box-car. The driver grinned.

"Sure," he said. "She's a nice job—carry a couple of tons if she's asked to."

"You don't say!" answers Caribou, polite.

Now I ain't sayin' anything about that little bit of talk, I ain't sayin' anything at all—but it's a mighty queer thing, mister, that about half an hour after that, Caribou hears the mine boss talking to Chester Willis.

"Yes," he says, sort of answering a question, "there's some new country out east here, towards the Coppermine; but it's rough, Mr. Willis, and I wouldn't recommend it in the plane."

"We'll go," says Chester Willis. "Have Manson be ready after lunch. They were talking about that place in Edmonton . . ."

Well, there was another scrap of talk, like, to make Caribou prick his ears again. And by and by, along in the middle of the morning, he got somethin' else. A startler, too.

He'd seen nothin' of the girl, except that time just around breakfast. She was shut up in the sleeping hut there, alone, seemingly, while Willis was going around the camp, poking his nose into things and acting the big shot. But then, while Caribou was bucksawing poplar logs for the cook, he looked up and there she was, standing by him.

She'd a letter in her hand, and she looked—well, as if she'd seen a ghost.

"Listen," she says in a whisper, "will you—will you do something for me?"

Caribou straightens up and says yes, sure he will, what's on her mind; and she gives him the letter.

"Get it mailed," she says. "On the next plane, or anywhere except with us. I don't want to—"

Well, just then there's voices and she slips back in the hut again, leaving Caribou Jim still holding the letter, and staring down at it. Know what, mister? That letter was addressed to the police—the Commissioner of the Mounted, back in Edmonton here.

Caribou whistled, and shoved the thing in his pocket. That was certainly a fine one, after what he'd overheard last night—Chester Willis callin' the kid down like a mule-driver, and the kid cryin'. He said to himself, listen, there's somethin' bad here, there's somethin' worse'n I figured . . .

So, he done it. Yes, sir, old Caribou done it. He took the letter in his pocket and went off a piece into the woods, and he opened that letter there.

V

WELL, from then on I guess you might have said his movements was his own concern. Anyway, they didn't concern anybody around the camp there, because there wasn't anybody could find him.

Old Caribou had gone, vanished, skedaddled. The mine boss wanted him around dinner time, and raised no end of a stink because he wasn't on hand, and there was

fellows running around and calling for him to beat the band. But no, he just wasn't there.

"He's gone off, same as he come," says one of the boys. "The old coot's crazy, anyway."

Caribou could have reached out and touched 'em, almost, but he didn't. He was lyin' doggo, under a pile of sacks in the back end of that airplane, wondering when they'd come along and get goin' on this trip of Chester Willis's.

He was quite cool an' collected now, although he hadn't never been up in a plane before. He knew what he knew now, about Chester Willis, the louse, and Lucy, and this kid that was Lucy's daughter. He knew, now, that he didn't have to argue with himself any more about dishing out Chester Willis what was comin' to him.

If he'd stuck at it before, he wasn't doin' it now, what I mean.

So there he stayed, under the sacks, until he heard them comin' down the float —Chester Willis, and the girl, and the mine boss, and the pilot. The girl was hangin' back (and no wonder, said Caribou!) and Chester was bullyin' at her, quiet.

"You'll come along," he says, under his breath, "or I'll know the reason why, miss."

I guess the pilot and the mine boss both of 'em heard him, but it wasn't none of their business. They didn't say nothing, and the girl got in the airplane, and they started.

Well, now, I guess I ain't goin' to claim old Caribou wasn't kind of disturbed by that plane business. I guess first time's kind of troublesome for anybody, ain't it? The noise and the swayin', and the feelin' you left your stomach some place else, all of 'em are mighty odd, and Caribou felt 'em. But he'd plenty to do, thinkin', without worryin' about what his stomach was doin' to him.

Yes, sir, he'd a whole lot to mull over. You see, there'd been a deal of things in that letter Elma'd wrote to the police. Bad things, that made out Chester Willis to be plenty worse than even Caribou'd figured.

And little Elma was right to be scared for herself; she was dead right, she'd got her reasons.

Only, there wasn't anybody hereabouts except Caribou that'd believe her, not for a minute. In this airplane and at the camp there, Chester Willis was the big noise, the high man, and no one'd say boo to him, not they.

He knowed that, Chester Willis did, and that's why Caribou was watching him. He was fixin' to pull something, the dirty hound—and Caribou was fixin' to stop him. Only, Caribou didn't just know what it was that was in Chester's mind.

They went roarin' and bellerin' along for maybe an hour that way. Caribou couldn't see out, o' course, bein' where he was, but it was east, all right, he could tell that by the sun.

And then the mine boss pointed out the window, ahead and down, and Chester Willis nodded. The girl hadn't said one word all the time—hadn't moved, even. She just sat there, slumped, like she was paralyzed.

And the plane come down. It just slid out of the sky there with its engines quiet at last, and Caribou wondered where for crime's sake they was going to land. And then there was a bump and a swoosh, sort of, like water makes, and in a minute here they were, floating easy.

"Run her ashore," says Chester Willis. "We'll take a look around."

So the pilot, he done things to the engines again, and the plane went skittering along and grounded. They all got out—all except Caribou, that is—and Chester Willis hands the girl down.

"Come along now," he says, most polite. "This is a bit of the real North, Elma."

Just as nice as pie, and yet he'd what Caribou knowed he had, deep down there in his rotten soul. They'd gone then, all four of them, and Caribou poked his head up for a look around.

It was a lake he'd been a hundred times, from away back—and over there, on the little low hills across it there was something that made him blink.

The caribou were there, feeding, a flock of shadows that moved across the brown hillside. Jim looked at them for a minute, and then he grinned, and nodded.

"Sure," he said. "Stay around, fellows—here's where you're goin' to see somethin'!"

And so he hopped out of that plane and into the bush.

WELL sir, old Caribou he moved right fast, now. Yes, you may say he traveled, in them bushes there.

You see he knowed, now, what this Chester Willis was playin at. Chester hadn't brought this here kid out thisaways for nothin', or just to look at the scenery, or for gold. Not him, says Caribou to himself. Not that devil.

So he followed them, and that wasn't difficult, neither, and pretty soon he see somethin'. Chester and the girl's gone one way, and the mine boss and the pilot another.

"Oho!" says Caribou. "Like that, hunh?"

Because that made it sure—dead sure. Caribou he worked closer to them, Chester and the girl, and they was headin' for a bunch of rocks croppin' out. Chester's got a dinky little toy hammer in his hand now.

"Aha?" says Caribou.

So they go on the rocks, and there's a swell drop-off off one side of them. Chester stands right there, with his hands on the girl's arm. She knows what's comin' now, Caribou can see, because she tugs away from Chester.

Caribou can hear him talkin' to her, jollyin' and joshin', the scum—and then she screams, and Chester he claps a hand across her mouth and pushes her. And then—well, then Caribou steps up.

"Louse!" says Caribou. Just the same as he'd done in that hotel thirty years ago. "Louse—turn around!"

Chester turned around, and mister, you ought to have seen his face. He recognizes Caribou, right under all the whiskers and wrinkles; oh, he recognizes Caribou all right.

"You!" he says.

He can't say no more, because there ain't nothin' for him to say. Not now; it's too late and he knows it well enough.

"You bet!" says Caribou. "Drop that kid, d'ye see? I know what you're figurin' on, fellow. Drop her, d'ye hear?"

Well, the kid flops right there, and Chester stands lookin' at Caribou sideways. Caribou, he's pretty full of himself by now, because why? He's got Chester where he wants him—or that's the way he thinks.

"Louse!" he says. "What you do to Lucy?"

You see, Caribou knowed now the way things was. Lucy'd had money, and the way it was, she'd willed it to the kid—after Chester had done what he had done to her.

"Yeah," Caribou says, "you killed her, louse, for her money. And she crossed you up. . . . Oh, maybe you didn't wring her neck, or chuck her down some place like this, but you killed her all the same. That's the truth, ain't it?"

Well, Caribou was enjoyin' himself, real swell. Chester looks pompous.

"You're crazy," he says. "You better be careful what you're sayin'."

He's got some bluff back.

"Damn you!" says Caribou. "I'll be careful, all right!"

Meanin'—well, I dunno just what Caribou did mean, that very minute. But Chester figured he knowed. He put his hand in his pocket and mister, here he is with a gun.

A gun, yeah, mister! And what d'you know about that? Caribou hadn't had dealin's with guns, much, all these years. He kind of blinked for half a second . . .

And then he went in. He had to, to be sure. They said so didn't they, at that trial of inquiry or whatever it was in Edmonton. Sure, he went in, hell-bent, just the same as on them store steps, at home long ago.

Only this time he wasn't tryin' to pound Chester none. Yes, sir, old Caribou's killin' ideas, what he'd been fightin' all these years, was come back to him.

It was kill or be killed with Caribou,

that minute. I ain't denyin' it, mister—I'm proud of it. And they agreed in Edmonton there it was so, didn't they?

Well, there was him and Chester Willis, locked, right on the edge of that precipice, Chester with the gun, murderous, and Caribou, I guess, pretty murderous too.

I ain't sayin' Caribou didn't have notions, back in his mind there, of puttin' Chester where he'd tried to put the girl. I ain't sayin' he wouldn't have done it, and been glad. But seemingly, it wasn't to be like that.

No, sir, Caribou wasn't goin' to be let do it, let kill Chester. Because why? Because that gun went off, in Chester's fist—I guess he didn't know much about them things, anyway, him—and that's all there was to it.

He slumped down on the rock with a bullet through his brain, a bullet his own dirty fingers had fired. And that was the end of him.

And Caribou stands back, pantin' and pop-eyed, just as the mine boss and pilot come a-runnin'.

WELL, I guess that's all. Old Caribou, he's a free man, yeah—kind of queer, they make out, I guess, but free. And Elma's with him, sort of a daughter, down here outside Edmonton again.

And as for Chester Willis, he's got what was comin' to him—comin' from the day when he was a little smitchy boy, back in Montana there, always bound he was goin' places, no matter how he got there.

Well, he's gone places all right. And don't you go figurin' Caribou's sorry, either. He'd have sent him there himself, that mornin' on the rock there, and been glad of it. . . .

Hey, go easy there, mister. Don't you say a word, now; here's Elma comin', and she don't know a thing of what's been goin' on in Caribou's mind all this while. She ain't ever to know, see?

. . . It's sure a nice day, ain't it?

The Return of Doolan

By WILLIAM J. NEIDIG

The colonel was there, and the doctor, and the orderly, and a man named Johnson. Everybody was there except Doolan; and that was simply because Doolan didn't know where he was

HE DID not remember his name, this man toward the top of the burrow, but his partner below called him Doolan. Some soldier had clapped the name on him. The man below had drawn the name of Dugan. They were two of a kind.

The burrow may have opened in France, perhaps in the hills beyond Cierges. Doolan did not know where it was. The month may have been July. He did not know.

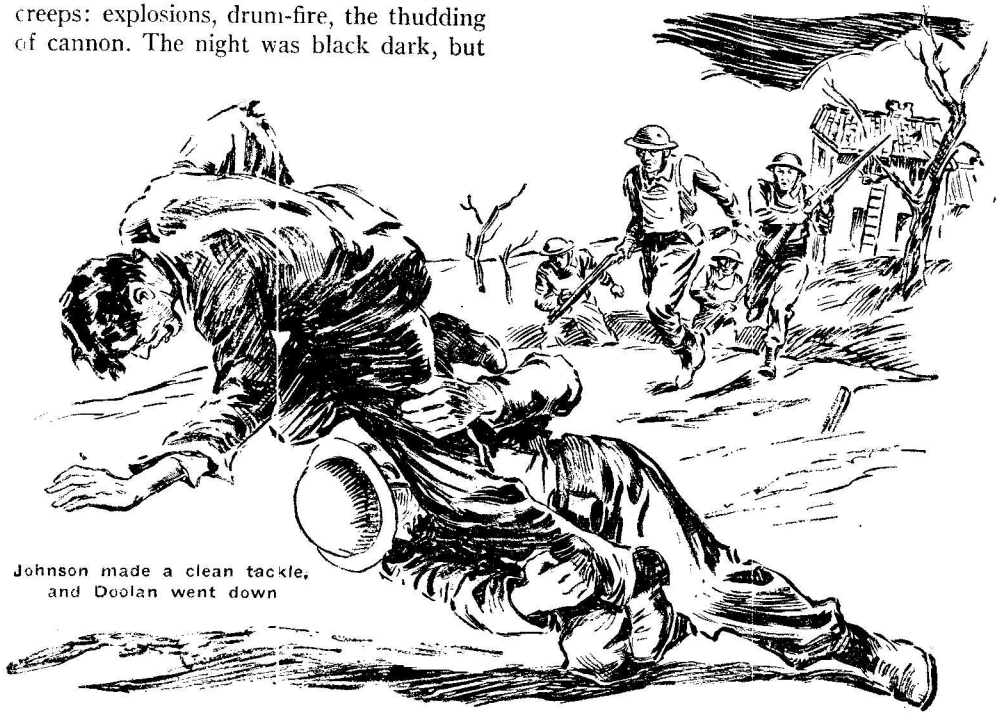
What held him in his burrow was a new set of sounds. Some of these gave him the creeps: explosions, drum-fire, the thudding of cannon. The night was black dark, but a man not in uniform learns to be patient.

Eventually the sounds fell away, and he began parting the grapevine cuttings overhead.

He was only a bagful of bones, this Doolan, and not much of his best was left; but the bones in the bag had lime in them, and the ears of him could have heard a whisper from the hill to the river. Otherwise he would have died all over the end of France. The everlasting Doolans.

He listened—cautious, but ready, too. When a stick fell into his eye he winked it out. When he slipped he climbed back. He knew better than to hurry. The Doolans live close to the ground.

He moved the roof to one side, twig by twig; then he reached through with his arm-bones, found a hard place for his hands, and edged himself out.



Johnson made a clean tackle, and Doolan went down

Doolan did not put back the grapevines, but crept off into the protection of a hedge. He had to stop presently to smother a withering cough. The Doolans do not cough delicately, like the Dugans, but explode as if they were shells.

The struggle left him in a sweat. When he had stifled this danger he again crept forward, weakened, but pleased too.

The incident might have ended badly had his cough broken loose, for as he crept along the hedge he heard the tramp of approaching men on the further side. Soldiers were out, looking for their wounded. Or was it their dead?

"Nothing here!" spoke up a harsh voice an arm's length away.

Meanwhile the moon had risen, driving through the battle haze, so that when he reached the hill ahead he could see a great breach in the hedge, made by a tank.

The breach worried him; but when he stumbled upon a discarded coat just beyond, abandoned by some one fleeing for his life, he stopped to go through its pockets.

Among the articles he found in them was a box of matches. The impulse took him to light one of these, to see it burn. His judgment was a little touched.

After a while he reached a flat where horses were fed and watered. Three nights before he had salvaged some of the spilled grain, in spite of the press of drivers. Tonight the flat was deserted, and birds had cleaned it of grain.

He should have thrown up his hands at this point; for he already knew that now he could not hope to obtain food in this region. Instead he wandered over toward an elbow in a road he knew of, in a ravine beyond a tiny ridge. He thought he would look at the traffic he heard there.

The errand brought him into sight of a sandwich booth that had been set up for soldiers—brightly lighted, with counter in front and a stove behind, on which rested a scow-bottomed coffee pot and a great covered tin kettle. A pan filled with rolls stood on a box near the stove, a stock of cigarettes on another.

The noise of distant gunfire still rose and fell. It became unimportant. The traffic on the road likewise.

CREEPING forward, he watched the girl in charge, as she lifted a tanned roll, slit its fat throat with a knife, ran a spoonful of piccalilli into the gash, and then added a red-hot from the covered can. That delicacy went to a soldier.

Doolan was obliged to wait until the last soldier disappeared into the night. Then, boldly entering the booth, he pointed to the rolls in the pan.

"You're not a soldier," said the girl in English.

He did not understand her; but he did make her understand his needs. The cigarettes he did not get; but because his face showed the white bone through the skin she laid the two rolls before him, each with full piccalilli and each with a juicy length of red frankfurter buried in its tender meat.

He did not act as badly as she had expected. He had found a slide-rule of some value in the coat on the hill. Thrusting this across the counter, he snatched up the rolls and ran.

He was not taking chances. He had to have the food; Dugan needed it; he himself also. But he had tried to pay.

The burrow into which he descended was an arm of a cave, a lower entrance of which a peasant had shown him. Upon the floor at the further end smouldered a handful of coals. He crossed at once to these and nursed them into flame.

Then he went over to where Dugan was lying, gave him his roll and began eating his own. He waited until Dugan was through; then, reaching down, he shook him with all his strength. The time had come to move on.

An observer would have said of the two men that they were of the same height and age. Doolan was the more slender. It was his will that gave him his strength.

"No, no, Doolan. I can't, honest, Doolan. Leggo. I'm done."

The blood of Dugan flowed in his veins

like a backwater, so that he had no strength of voice, but spoke in a drone framed in whispers. Doolan did not even know that what he had heard was language, and continued shaking him.

"I can't. I can't. I can't, Doolan. Lemme be."

Dugan would not and could not rise; but presently his resistance ceased, obedience having become easier. But he continued his verbal protests for a long time.

"Me? Me climb that toe-nail ladder up that chimbley? Whadda you think I am? A six-legged red ant?"

Nevertheless he did climb it. His will was weak, Doolan's strong. He climbed the ladder, toe-hold or what, ahead of Doolan, crawled forth into the wrecked vineyard, and a moment later, with Doolan's knotted fingers clamped on his arm, rose to his feet.

The path selected by Doolan consisted of the two parallel tracks left by the tank that had breached the hedge. Now and then Dugan's protests would again burst forth languidly, in his whisper-framed speech, but Doolan's will kept him going.

After a while they stumbled upon an obstruction, placed in their path since the passage of the tank.

"Lookut, Doolan! Some guy had a crack-up."

Doolan held back from the wreckage; and when his foot struck a crushed boche helmet, he sprang away from it. But a moment later he returned and gave the helmet a savage kick with his heel. He knew helmets.

Then he tightened his grip on Dugan's arm and walked him past the plane without swerving an inch.

Later Dugan began making too much noise.

"No, no, Doolan! I can't! My legs won't hold me!" Or he would cry out in a raised, strained voice: "No, no, no! You can go to hell! I tell you I won't!"

Snatching up a handful of clay, Doolan clapped it upon the babbling lips, and the words fell away into sputterings. Again Dugan found it easier to struggle forward than to resist. Those who travel with Doolans are like that. Bad roads are good for them.

The bad roads were probably good for Doolan.

They stumped on thus during the rest of the night. Dawn was beginning to break in the east when they climbed their last hill.

Just over the top stood a ruined hut. Doolan took possession of this, found hay, made a bed in a corner. Then he lay down.

"CORPORAL of the Guard, Number Six!" sang out a sentry in the camp below, after a debate within himself.

When the corporal arrived, the sentry said: "Will you rest the edge of your eye on that one-room-and-bath on the hill across the way and tell me what you see?"

"I see what's left of it," the corporal replied.

"Lookkut the window, Corporal."

"If you call that a window you're a door. What about it?"

"There! Did you see that flash of light?"

"Tin," said the corporal.

"Anyhow it moved. It looked to me like glass—like a field-glass. It's just last week we lost that spy. Remember what the captain said when the truck ran over Jim Flynn? Twice in two days, he said. That's too often, he said."

"I'll swipe a bi-nock and take a shot at that window."

The corporal stalked off to hunt a binocular. Number Six did not see him further; but later he inferred that his suspicions had reached the O.D., for he saw a sergeant and two soldiers set out from camp.

Meanwhile Doolan was becoming uneasy. He had not dreamed that a hut on a hill as secluded as this could look down on so many soldiers. The little valley swarmed with uniforms.

One of the treasures he had found in the coat was a pocket field-glass. It brought everything nearer—too near, at first, although later he grew used to the nearness.

But he did not get used to the soldiers. They seemed to have boiled up out of the ground like ants. He watched them from behind a fallen timber.

He saw the sergeant's squad when they set out from camp, but he did not guess their object until they began climbing the hill. Then suddenly he saw it.

He glanced at Dugan, who lay asleep in the corner. There was no awakening that man in time to escape.

It was an ancient animal instinct down underneath somewhere that now took charge of his actions. Without an instant's hesitation he ran to the door and burst from cover, turning his head to see if he was pursued. Wild animals will sometimes act so to save their young.

The soldiers at once gave chase. The hut was forgotten.

The sergeant rapped out: "Get that man, Johnson!"

His next backward glance showed Doolan his own danger. The man Johnson had at once handed his gun to a companion; he was big and fast, and gained from the start. The country was new to Doolan, hiding places few, his reserve of strength small.

At first he wished his pursuers to gain; but later when he tried to draw away he found he could not. A tricky side-step failed, as did a straight-arm he had somewhere in his muscles. Johnson made a clean tackle. Doolan went down, into the soft ground of the slope.

"Here he is," said his captor. "Now what?"

Doolan felt himself dragged to his feet.

"The O.D. wants to talk to him. He's a spy. He looks like he come straight from Deutschland."

THOSE in the room beside Doolan included Colonel MacGregor, acting as officer of the day; Doctor Gerard of the medical corps, who was a captain; an interpreter named Hirshfeld; and the squad that had made the capture. The intelligence man was away.

An orderly at a table at one side was typing some kind of a paper upon a machine that would not space the lines evenly.

"Is this the spy?"

The command of the present reserve unit, A.E.F., had become exceedingly touchy about German spies. The great September offensive was already being planned. It could be carried out only through secrecy. Any foreknowledge of movements by the enemy might be fatal.

Sergeant Jones replied: "This is him. You said, fetch that guy to you fast. You said you wanted him alive, but I dunno."

The prisoner stood rocking on his heels, his eyes everywhere. He had splashed water over his head and face at the brook, and had sponged off his bleached arms, but the clothes of him were torn and caked with the soils of two nations, and his physical bearing was an irritation.

"We caught him with the glass, sir. He broke and run, like a fox or something. Johnson had to drop him with a tackle."

The colonel picked up Johnson. "Tell me."

"That postage-stamp didn't run much, Colonel. I don't know why he tried. He was hid in that residence all right, and he broke cover all right, out the front door, and he made me tackle him all right, after trying out a straight-arm on me."

The sergeant said: "He hasn't spoke a word since we taken him—not one. Mebbe he's a dummy. I dunno. I never seen a Boche dummy. Mebbe he's run away from the army."

"If that's the German army, God help them. Can't be army—where's his uniform? Civilian clothes. Field glass. Hiding out above an American camp. Never would have been discovered, if he hadn't swung his glass into the sun. So thin, he might be a man cut out of paper. That's why they used him. They know we're sentimentalists. What did you find in the shack?"

"I didn't stop, Colonel. I'm going back."

"Do so, and report."

THE surgeon Gerard had been slow in speaking. "Do you know, Colonel, that man doesn't understand."

MacGregor shot out a sharp question. "Where are you from, prisoner, and what's your name?"

The man was a spy. MacGregor had the reputation of being a hard judge, in the matter of spies. It had been his logic that ripped the sawdust out of that spy story last week. What can an army do, if its movements are known in advance? One spy can send a thousand brave soldiers to their graves who otherwise would have lived.

"You don't understand English? Try him in German, Hirshfeld."

"I did, Colonel. He's no good. He don't know Dutch or frog or dago or anything."

"Deaf?"

"He might be, at that."

"What do you think, Johnson? Can the man hear?"

"Yes, sir. He can hear. He heard me pounding down my feet behind him, because he sidestepped at exactly the right time. If I hadn't been watching he would have had me."

MacGregor inspected Doolan from the top of his sorry head to his teetering toes. He did not miss the thinness of him, nor the weary droop of his defiant shoulders. But he remembered also that Doolan had been caught using a glass upon this camp.

"You can hear. You heard Johnson. What good would you be as a spy if you couldn't hear? You're German. You understand German. You understand English also. If you're a spy you would have to understand it—otherwise what good would you be? You were caught spying upon this camp."

The surgeon Gerard found himself more and more puzzled by the prisoner's eyes. He noted idly that MacGregor's eyes might also have been described as hostile. The prisoner had the look of a trapped fox.

"I'm waiting. I'm not a court-martial. I'm a military officer, asking you questions. You're German. I can send you to a detention camp, or I can hold you for trial as a spy. Who are you, and why are you here?"

MacGregor sat back. The prisoner still seemed not to have heard him. Gerard noticed that the roving eyes returned again and again to the table at which the orderly was working.

"Colonel, may I make a remark? That man is a mental."

MacGregor snapped: "I asked you a question, prisoner."

Again the prisoner made no reply. Gerard was now watching him more closely. There could be no doubt about it—the swaying figure under arrest had become absorbingly interested in some difficulty the orderly was having with his typewriter.

The orderly was not a seasoned typist, but like all beginners leaned heavily upon his machine. This was now causing him trouble. He was obliged to throw away another spoiled sheet.

"Very well. Then I'll ask you my other questions. Will you look at these items on the table, Johnson? Did these all come from the prisoner's pockets?"

"Yes, sir—all except the glass."

MacGregor did not mean to be unfair. He was protecting his men. As for Doolan, he heard the words as sounds. To him they meant nothing. But that typewriter on that other table—that thing fascinated him. He could not take his eyes from it. Why it did so he did not know. The orderly's struggles with it fascinated him.

"Prisoner, these things were found in your pockets when you were arrested. Where did you get them?

"Item: one match box, German made. Where did you get that match box, prisoner?

"Item: the matches in it, also German made.

"Item: one pair of field glasses, German made. Good glasses, these. They ought to be—they came from Jena. Officer's glasses, in your possession. If you're an officer, where's your uniform? If not, where did you get them?

"Item: one cigarette case, German made.

"Item: shoes, shirt, clothing—all German made."

There was something bizarre about MacGregor's questioning, logical though it

might be. MacGregor, seated behind that table in his colonel's uniform; on the table that poor plunder stripped from an orphaned coat; Doolan swaying in front of it all, his shoddy garments heavy with loam, and showing the rents inflicted by barbed wire gardens, every bone in him indifferent, every interest of him centered upon an ordinary lame typewriting machine made in America.

The surgeon again spoke up. "That man really doesn't understand you, Colonel. I've been watching him. He isn't here."

"All German made," repeated MacGregor. "I'm speaking to you, prisoner. What are you looking at?"

IT WAS at this point that Doolan began replying in his own way to the bombardment of questions. He had been standing in front of the table, swaying back and forth like a reed. Suddenly he walked over to the typewriter.

Gerard said: "A mental case, Colonel. Let me have him."

After that it was chiefly the surgeon who asked the questions. MacGregor did ask: "What's the matter with that typewriter, orderly?" although it was not his affair. The orderly replied: "Line space is out something awful. I don't know what's the matter, Colonel. Just chills and fever. I figure it's the mosquitoes. It writes like the washing on the clothes-line."

Meanwhile the surgeon had slipped over behind Doolan to await what the man would do next.

"Give him a sheet of paper, somebody."

The orderly gave him a sheet. Gerard bent over him. "Put it into the machine, prisoner."

But it was not paper that Doolan was needing. Instead of inserting the sheet, Doolan began looking for something—at first on the table, then on the floor.

"What are you hunting, prisoner? What is it? What do you need?"

Gerard laid his warm fingers on the thin ones to guide them. Doolan shook them off. He tried turning the platen; then the variable line-space button took his eye, and he began pushing it in and out, delicately, over and over.

Gerard said: "I'm not so sure he's crazy."

Doolan abruptly left off his twirling and fingering and opened the drawer of the table.

What he had been looking for was a screw-driver. When he had it he turned to the machine and began removing a shield on the carriage, held by two screws. The removal of this uncovered a wheel, with a spring device near one edge. He tightened a screw in this; then he replaced the shield.

The orderly said: "Why, he's a repair man! He fixed it!"

"Yes. Yes. But he couldn't do it again. He told me something I had to know. Repair man, machinist, engineer — does it matter? Something flashed out in him."

Again he turned to Doolan, knowing the uselessness of words, but speaking half to himself.

"I have to know more. You've been through trouble, stranger. Who are you? You've lost your speech. How much else have you lost? You had a pencil in your pocket. Can you write? Write me your name. Any word. Try it."

But the pencil at the moment meant nothing to Doolan. Even when Gerard placed it between his knotted thumb and forefinger he did not write, but sat on edge on the orderly's chair like a plate.

"Did you notice, Johnson? Is he left-handed?"

"Right-handed, doctor. He chucked his glass a mile, just before he tried that straight-arm."

"No good. No words in him. That tells me something, too."

He stood back looking at the wreck in the chair.

"You're an awful sight, stranger. You look like a man dug out of a grave. You're in German war-shoddy, caked with clay. But your hair is clean; your face is clean, and your hands and arms.

"That tells me something. Your eyes are not dead. Your hands aren't much, but they handled that screw-driver. Your fin-

gers have been whanged out of shape. You have a split nail."

Suddenly he stopped. "I'll be damned!" he cried. He was looking at the prisoner's knotted fingers.

HE TURNED to Johnson. "You spoke of a straight-arm this man tried to slip over on you. Are you sure it was a straight-arm?"

"I ought to be, doctor. It took me in the jaw. That guy has played football. I noticed it again, when I dived into him. You can feel the difference when your shoulder drives into an old player. His bones don't fight you."

Gerard looked gravely at Johnson; but his question was meant for the ears of every one in the room.

"Since when did football become the national sport in Germany?"

Johnson looked at his shoes, wondering where his good sense had gone. MacGregor opened his mouth to speak, but there were no words.

The surgeon leaned down over the German war-shoddy parcel that was Doolan, very gentle now, and lifted away the pencil.

"I want to ask another question of my patient, Colonel, but I can't ask it here. I need to know the answer. I'd like to ask it before you. Lend me the prisoner for ten minutes, and your ears for five, and lend me Johnson."

"Why Johnson?"

"Johnson, spread out your hands for the Colonel. Yes, flat on the table. That's it. . . . Why Johnson? Because Johnson and this poor devil in the chair have hands that are very much alike."

"Why not here?"

"There isn't room. In the open."

"Not football hands, doctor? Surely you can't speak of football hands."

"No. No. Not football hands. What you might call sandlot hands. Some call them American hands."

MacGregor's face lighted. "Why, yes, you may have Johnson. The prisoner, too. Also my ears. I'd like to hear that question."

AGAIN Doolan felt the surgeon's warm fingers on his thin ones, removing the pencil. He did not know why Gerard removed it so gently, nor why, when he swept his fingers along the bleached wrist, the tenseness of muscle and tendon eased away.

All he understood was that Gerard wished to take him somewhere, and that he was a friend.

They were approaching an open field, on which a crowd of soldiers had gathered. MacGregor did not go with them further; but Gerard and Johnson pressed through the crowd to a man they addressed as Casey, standing apart, who seemed to have authority. This man held in his hand a small, round, dark object.

"Oh, Casey! Could I have . . . ?"

"Sure you can, doctor. . . . Sure. . . . Oh, sure! I'll lend him a glove. Anything in the house. Just turn him loose and tell somebody what you want done."

"Johnson knows."

Doolan felt himself transferred into the care of the soldier who had captured him. Gerard made the matter clear, and Johnson became a friend.

"Don't expect too much," Gerard said. "A man can play baseball without making any splash at all."

"I'll go easy with him, doctor."

Johnson seemed to be well known on that field. He called out something, and a man came over. Somehow it all seemed right. Doolan received a glove, which he slipped over his thin left hand. For some reason he began pounding into it with his clenched fist.

Gerard said: "No German ever would have done that."

He said it to MacGregor. MacGregor grunted.

Doolan was the only man on the field who was blind to the sensation his appearance had made. He was unbelievably thin; he was not in uniform; the civilian clothes he wore had been borrowed from Charlie Chaplin; he had not shaved since Seicheprey.

He was also the only man on the field

who did not know that Doctor Gerard, for some reason of his own, had brought him here for a test.

Johnson said: "I size you up for the infield, buddy. How about trying for second? Don't be scared."

He had told Doolan not to be scared, which was what Doolan was least in danger of being, after all he had seen.

But Doolan did not understand his words, and let himself be placed in a cleared space near a canvas bag. After Johnson had left him there, standing apart, something within him made him walk over and touch the bag with his toe.

Johnson said softly: "It's there, buddy." Doolan was beginning to affect him also.

Gerard said: "Did you see that, Colonel?"

It was at this point that Sergeant Jones, pushing through the crowd, reported to MacGregor that the squad had returned from the shack on the hill with another prisoner. He had taken the man to the hospital, but the doctor was away. No, the prisoner wasn't wounded—only sick.

"Leave him there," said MacGregor. "The doctor will be free in two minutes."

Doolan did not see the sergeant and did not know of the litter, but after that the something within him refused to tell him what to do. Johnson found a bat and laid down an easy grounder toward him. Doolan stood idly watching its sluggish progress into right field.

A second grounder, even slower, did not even attract his eye.

Johnson walked over to where Gerard was standing.

"We must have been wrong, doctor, about his fingers. You saw him. He don't know a ball from a blackout."

Gerard shook his head. "We weren't wrong."

MacGregor said: "Your shells are all duds, doctor."

"Keep at him?" asked Johnson.

"Throw him a couple, Johnson."

Johnson went back to the plate and tossed out a ball that any small boy could have caught. This time Doolan watched it, but he made no attempt to catch it.

Something inside Johnson now revolted. Snatching up another ball, he cried: "A bit of pep over there at second! If you can't see 'em easy look at a fast one!"

This time the something inside Doolan took over control. The ball left Johnson's hand at terrific speed, coming high, but straight for him.

And then it happened.

MACGREGOR forgot about the man on the litter outside. Gerard threw up his own hand, as if he were out there instead of Doolan. Johnson let out a yell, because he couldn't help himself: "Duck it!"

The thing that happened, happened when Doolan saw that ball coming. It happened to him alone. His body forgot its strained pose. With a movement astonishingly swift he shot up his hands, received the ball, whipped it against his chest.

And then, impelled by what looked like resentment, but was not, he shot the ball straight back to Johnson.

"Atta boy!" some infant in the crowd sang out.

Gerard said: "Did you see that, Colonel?"

This time MacGregor did not grunt. "I saw it."

"No German in that play, Colonel. That was all U.S.A."

"You don't have to tell me!"

Johnson shook his tingling fingers. "I needed a glove more than he did, that fella. Now lend me that bat again for a second, will you, Casey?"

The rest was pure surplusage, carried out to save Doolan's life. For Doolan had become twenty Doolans. What he had become was the craziest second baseman east of the Atlantic Ocean. He shifted his feet, his hands, his shoulders, his blazing eyes. Right became wrong, wrong became right.

Doors began opening within him: inward, outward, first floor, top floor, all over the place. Soldiers in uniform became related madly to each other and to himself. Slapping his fist into his glove, he danced about like a dervish.

Johnson gave him a fast grounder, and Doolan ate it up.

"Nice hands," said Casey.

Johnson did not reply. He could not have talked to an umpire at that moment. Nice hands!

Again he sent down a fast grounder. Doolan scooped it to the soldier who was playing short. The ball went to first, then back to Doolan, who lined it home.

"He makes 'em look easy," said Casey.

He said that of Doolan.

Another man asked: "Who is he, Johnson?"

Johnson turned away. "Just a guy from back home," he said. "Just a sandlotter I know from back home. He got lost on a hill over here. The doctor found him."

He lined the next ball through the box.

It was this batted ball, far to Doolan's right, and hard-hit, that really opened the gates of heaven. Doolan saw what was coming as the ball left the bat. With a burst of speed Johnson did not dream he had in him he charged over past second, made a backhanded stab, came up with the ball, and without regaining his balance, snapped it to first—fast, true, in time.

"Oh, you sandlot!" came a cry.

But Doolan's happiness was short-lived. He gave an answering yell, as if to dare the batsman to try him with a harder. Johnson stripped his life of joy by stopping the practice.

"That's enough, buddy. Obliged, Casey."

He had to go out to second to loosen his man from the field. Doolan felt his touch upon the shoulder and understood. The game at once became meaningless. By the time he had stripped off the glove his knees were shaking until he could hardly stand.

Gerard was on hand to help lead him through the crowd.

"Where to, doctor? Back to the O.D.?"

"Lord, no! The O.D. says, see America first. Take him to the canteen for a sandwich, while I run over to the hospital and have a look at a sick man. They just brought in this man's partner. Then fetch him along. I'll be in my office there."

JOHNSON showed Doolan into the doctor's office in time to find Dugan still fast asleep. Doolan showed no surprise at seeing him there. He had brought along a red-hot from the canteen. Walking up to the litter, he began shaking the sleeping man. The surgeon did not stop him.

In the end Dugan opened his eyes and broke out into whisper-framed protests.

"Lemme be. Lemme be. I will not. No, no, no, no, no! Leggo my arm, you mutt. I don't wantta sit up."

But Doolan had his way. Dugan did sit up, and he ate what was given him. Probably he always would, for Doolan.

Gerard said: "I had already guessed it. Two of a kind, even to their knotted fingers. Two sandlot boys from home, each whanged on the head by spent shrapnel, and each with a bone pressure. One has lost the use of words; the other, the will to act. Nothing wrong with either that we can't cure in no time."

Johnson said: "They ought to have names, guys like that. Will they remember their names, doctor?"

"Oh, yes! Their names, their regiment —everything in their lives up to their injury. But after that, nothing. We know they must have been captured and they must have escaped. That's all we shall ever know."

•

Doolan? Doolan? You ask what has become of him? The name stands in the way. Nobody today knows any one named Doolan. But if you will turn to any newspaper file of the right date and read the press dispatches, you will recognized Doolan instantly, and possibly Dugan too.

New York, July 28. Eddie Doolan, veteran keysacker, has been signed to manage the Gray Sox for the remainder of the season, replacing Casey, now a vice-president. Jim Dugan, former outfielder, and Bud Johnson, catcher, stay on as coaches. All four fought with Pershing in France.

Doolan will be remembered as the young prize-winning typist who turned to pro baseball before the war.

Yaqui Gold

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

CHAPTER XX

ONE GOD IS A GUN

THE following morning a white flag fluttered from the bullet-proof cockpit of the hydroplane, and when Wayland stepped to the gap in the barricade, a man and not a machine gun rose into the opening. He yelled through a megaphone, and his words were not clear; but his signs and gestures left little doubt that this was the predicted parley.

"Cover me, just in case, Herb. But don't shoot unless you're sure, or it is finish for me."

He glanced over his shoulder, and saw Lorela's white face and colorless lips. He forced a smile, and started down the path, unarmed except for his pistol. Once on the ground, among the remaining burros, Wayland headed through the *tules*. The gradually sloping bottom was crushed rock with a coating of silt. This told him that a large amount of debris had been dumped from the tunnel, and that the slope of the old heap was further out, and much steeper.

When he was waist deep in water, he felt the bottom fall off; only a few *tules* now screened him. However, he was still a poor target, and at the first sign of a machine gun swinging into line, he could duck into the water. The hydroplane motors roared, the propeller blast sent a long streamer of spray behind her, and then the power was cut; she coasted nearly to the middle of the lake, and then wheeled so that she faded away from the besieged camp.

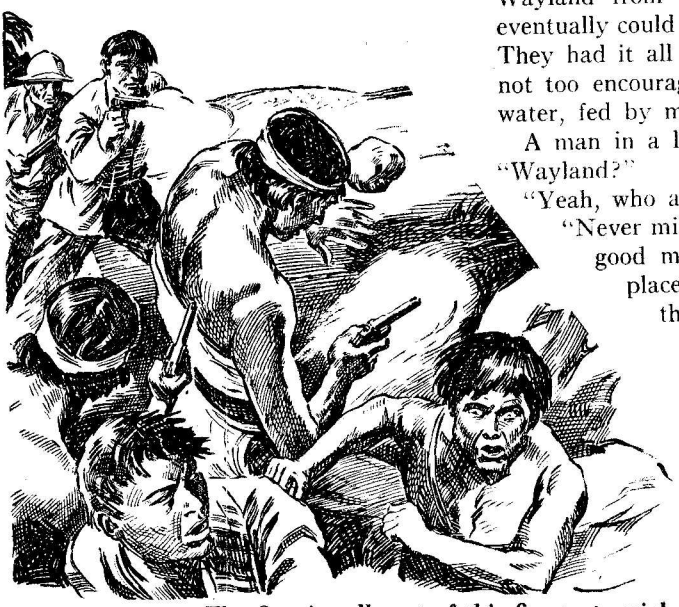
The men in the plane had risked a shot into their props, but they could well do so, since machine-gun bursts could keep Wayland from retracing his course, and eventually could blow him out of the water. They had it all figured out, and this was not too encouraging. Neither was the icy water, fed by melting snowcaps.

A man in a leather helmet hailed him. "Wayland?"

"Yeah, who are you?"

"Never mind that, pal, but it takes a good man to set 'em down in a place like this. We come to get that red crate you cracked up, and figured maybe you'd like to get out of your hole in the wall."

Smooth, though loud-mouthed. At least four others were behind the pilot; the hydroplane was large enough for half a dozen, along with



The first installment of this five-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for July 27

artillery and supplies. She was big and bullet proofed, either a borrowed government plane, or else a registered cabin job for an amateur pilot, and actually used for smuggling.

No one could shoot her out of the air; no one, that is, flying less than a heavy pursuit plane with a one-pounder. That was Wayland's guess as he groped for words and swallowed his wrath at the cool assumption that he would welcome an exit and would trust those who offered it.

Wayland surprised the pilot by answering, "How much do you want? What is your deal? Who's the boss, and why is he hiding?"

A moment of silence; heads, shadow blurred, came together in a huddle in the cockpit. Then a taller man rose. The distance and the light made any sure identification impossible, but the dark hair and the assured poise of the head, the man's stance rather than any shadow-blurred feature, made Wayland sure that this was Corey Ledgate. When he heard the voice, impressive, resonant, and clean in its enunciation, he was certain.

"We want all ore specimens you have found, and a quit claim on anything you have filed, or hope to file, in this part of Mexico. We have a suitable form written out, and you and Doctor Frayne and every member of your party must sign it."

"Sounds like Ledgate of Dennis and Ledgate broadcasting! Big hearted, huh! You promised me and Keller ten percent for finding the Tiopa, and now look! Go ahead and smoke us out if you want to, maybe you can knock us off, but you can't get us to sign away what we have earned. Where is that partner of yours, that grafter Dennis?"

"Wayland, you are as hot-headed and unreasonable as ever," Ledgate said wildly. "We came to help you, and you begun shooting at us."

"Where's Elmer Dennis? I want to parley with both you fellows to be sure it is official."

"Ah . . . I am sorry, but Mr. Dennis was detained in Guaymas. We are redecorating the Silver Tower. And by the way—we are particularly eager to make room for Señorita Lorela. She certainly fooled us!" He laughed and it was good-humored, mirth. "We need her. Her successor was . . . ah . . . not quite satisfactory."

WAYLAND began to wonder at Elmer Dennis' urgent business in Guaymas. There was nothing illogical about that, and Ledgate always had personally handled all cases where tact and finesse and carefully considered speech were needed.

Wayland had always damned Elmer Dennis as the plug-ugly of the partnership, but now he began to wonder, and his old convictions wavered. On this, the first flight to the site of the Tiopa, how could Elmer Dennis remain in Guaymas?

Wayland said, "I'll have to ask Dr. Frayne. He doesn't trust either of you fellows worth a damn. Now, before I do that, tell me what is due in case we don't play?"

"I'm disappointed in you, Wayland," Ledgate said, more regretful than angry. "It was not honest, discovering this location in a plane we hired you to fly, and then joining forces with our competitor, Doctor Frayne. You must meet us halfway. If we do not help you, how do you propose to get home? With hostile Indians, there is no way out except by hydroplane."

Ledgate gave his hands a dry washing. Wayland let his shoulders sag, and his face lengthen. "One thing more before I tell Doctor Frayne. We want half a break—how about that ten percent you promised me and Keller?"

"No," firm, resonant, final. "As I said, with no amendments. You betrayed our confidence, and we grant no concessions, Wayland. Except a chance of escape from savages."

Wayland now had the chance for which he had been playing; he said, "All right, we won't sign. You're white people and you can't let us starve, and you can't murder us. Or is that your game, after all?"

"Here's what we can do. We can fly back to Guaymas and file a claim and let

you walk. And that is just what we will do, if you are stubborn. Your signatures are not indispensable."

This was the frank avowal that Wayland had expected from the start; this was what Ledgate would probably do, after the members of Frayne's besieged party had signed away all their rights.

"I'll take it up with the boss," Wayland answered, and turned his back on the plane. "And before we give you an answer, we'll dicker with the Yaquis to see what kind of break they'll give us."

Ledgate's farewell laugh indicated that he already knew how the Yaquis on the ledge would deal with stranded prospectors. Dripping and shivering, Wayland stumbled through the mud and *tules* and then made the climb up the face of the cliff. When he was behind the barrier, he hastily dried himself, and as he thawed out beside the small bed of coals, he reported the interview, and his suspicions.

"When that slick talker slipped and said if we didn't play ball, they'd fly back to Guaymas, file, and to hell with us, he wasn't fooling. And if you ask me, he could and would doublecross us if we dickered. He was so glib about that final threat that I'm betting he had it in mind from the start."

Keller frowned. "Then why bother to talk at all?"

"That's just the question, and here's the answer." Wayland glanced sharply from eye to eye. "They intend filing, and they have it figured out how they can. By just getting us to surrender and then making sure the Yaquis settle us. Quickly, so there's no chance of one of us reappearing to raise a stink.

"Every one of us. One survivor, and their filing can be upset. All that talk about our signing away our claims in eye-wash, to get us off our guard, to keep us from taking some desperate chance, a chance that might get one, two of us back to the coast alive."

"Payday, huh?" Keller muttered.

Frayne said to Yacupaz, "Can we risk it tonight?"

He shook his head. "Tomorrow, maybe *señor*. If there is no flash light tonight to stop me."

"TOO late." Wayland's voice was level, his words clipped. "The minute we're missed, they'll take after us by air, catch us in an open spot on the east slope, cut us down. Or haul Yaquis over and ahead of us, to bushwhack us before we hit the plains. One play left, only one."

"What is that, *jefe?*" Lorela asked.

"Everything else is so bad that this crazy notion seems sane," he answered. "I'll go to the village, and parley. Make a monkey of Jalana, show her up for a fake, tell her stooges that these fellows are bringing into the mountains the very thing the Indios fear—predatory whites, armed with machine guns."

"Oh, you're crazy, Don, you—"

"No, he ain't crazy; he's got something."

She turned from Keller and to Chayoga: "What do you say?"

"Victory celebration in the village makes his plan not too crazy, *señorita*. Daring makes a Yaqui admire a crazy plan more than a sensible one."

Yacupaz said, "That is right. A chief talks to the gods, and often he says things that seem mad. That is why he thinks of a good plan, when wise men think of plans that fail."

Lorela saw that she had not a chance. She turned away, and Tula went with her. Frayne said, "I agree with her, but I won't ask you to reconsider. It is insane, but if you fail, you'll only be a few hours ahead of us."

Keller was shaking his head slowly. "Boy, you sure poke your chin out. Ain't you got any consideration for your pal? You know I got to go with you."

"You don't, Herb. No use your going."

"I got to. I don't know why, but I got to, and I'm scared sick."

"Then you better stay, you big chump."

"No. Got to go. You didn't dump me that time they ran us down the river."

So Keller followed Wayland down the path, and Chayoga went as interpreter.

Whether Jalana's faction would or would not parley remained to be seen. As they crossed the dam, Keller squared his shoulders, and stretched out with a firm stride.

When the hydroplane crew hailed them, Wayland answered, "We're parleying now. To see if it's worth dickering with you fellows. While you're taking the first two of us back to Guaymas, they may clean up the rest of us."

"Good luck!" A man in a helmet shouted.

They swung down the slope, and near enough to the spillway for Wayland to see that his dynamite had not been disturbed. Once at the foot of the embankment, they splashed through the Bavispe, and went up the other side. Then came the painful ascent of the path to the village. Several squaws stared at them, and went on with their fuel gathering. That they were thus occupied indicated that the villagers did not expect hostilities.

Halfway up the steep path, Wayland said to Chayoga, "Those women must have taken us for men from the plane."

"They know me."

"No matter. They think you're parleying for us, going up with the enemy to see Jalana on our behalf."

"*Ay-ah!* That is right! I see now. Who has seen you face to face except a few scouts, perhaps?"

"Jeez, Don," Keller muttered, "I never thought of that. But it won't last long."

"Won't have to. Keep 'em interested, keep 'em wondering, and they'll put off killing us until we spill our story. Curiosity, see?"

"Yeah, killed the cat, I dunno, Don."

Chayoga said for the benefit of his two companions, "The cat is Jalana, *señores,* and with three of us, it is shameful if someone does not kill the cat."

CHAPTER XXI

CURSE OF JALANA

WHEN he reached the high shelf, Wayland realized that his calmness came from the fatalism of desperation. He understood now how a condemned man goes to the chair without struggle.

Dogs came out, yapping, and Chayoga kicked them aside. By night, he and his companions would have been cut down before they reached the foot of the path, but by day, when no stranger would be insane enough to approach, there was no one to stop them midway. So, feeling like a man who has faced death in a dream and yet knows that he is not dead, Wayland looked about him. He was tired from the climb, weary from seeing each plan blocked midway—weary of the load of enforced leadership.

Flies blackened the brush huts. Flies swarmed about the naked brats, flies buzzed about the women whose wiry hair glistened with bear grease. Some of those women wore tattered calico skirts stolen long ago in lowland raids, others were dressed in buckskin, patched and patched again. From this grim soil a matriarchy had blossomed, and small wonder. Hags though these grimy women were, they looked capable of seizing power and holding it.

Men loafed, for with hunting, and trying to kill Frayne's party, they had done their stint. Just as ragged, as hungry, as vermin ridden, they still were not as repulsive as the women. The lean grimness became them, and they had much of the old chief's dignity, for all their ridiculous mixture of blue denim overalls, buckskin shirts, army breeches stripped from murdered soldiers, red flannel undershirts of great antiquity. Each man, hair bobbed and with a greasy rag bound about the brow, needed only a bar of soap and clothes somewhat better matched, and he would pass muster with the best of men.

They were armed, and they leveled their weapons as they rose, but amazement at seeing Chayoga made them hold their fire. The *capataz* did not halt, nor did Wayland or Keller. Chayoga said to the nearest Yaqui, "We come to deal with the woman who rules you. A woman rules us also, and so we are brothers."

This made their faces change, which

Wayland saw when he lengthened his stride and came abreast of Chayoga. He did not understand the Yaqui language, but he could feel that something more than astonishment had checked immediate violence. Chayoga added a few words, and a tall man called Istiqua stepped forward.

His eyes met Wayland's. The flat-faced Yaqui regarded the angular face of the American; both were thin, and each read the hunger and hardship that had lined the other.

"I speak Spanish," Istiqua said, haltingly. "You three come alone?"

Wayland smiled a little. "Alone. Is that hard to believe?"

He said this because he saw that Istiqua hardly credited his eyes, and Wayland's courage grew a little more; he felt the aliveness of one who has another card to play, and who may live to play it. That he still lived was a promise.

Unwittingly, Wayland seconded Chayoga's biting lead when he asked, *"Señor,* where is the witch who rules all these men?"

The faces behind Istiqua hardened. "Who says a woman rules us?" he countered angrily.

"I do not see Yacupaz whose friend and guest I am. Why does he not come to greet me? I do not bring Yacupaz a present, because all that we have is his for the asking."

Red-eyed ones still groggy from *tizwin* crowded forward, growling. Istiqua and an old man half-turned and said, "Be quiet; let him talk! They are only three, there is time."

Chayoga whispered, "Hit hard, *jefe!*"

Keller looked straight ahead, and would not wipe off the sweat that trickled into his eyes and down his cheeks.

THEN Jalana came from her cave, a hundred yards further along the ledge. She had her staff, and the snake rattles on it whirred and buzzed as she hobbled along. Her bald head and sunken face and leathery throat rising from between hunched shoulders made Wayland think of a vulture perching on carrion. The other women scattered, snatching their brats out of the witch's path.

"Kill them, kill the *nakhai,*" Jalana screeched.

"Kill me too!" Chayoga's voice came from the depths of his chest. "I am one of you, and who strikes me strikes himself, and then there is less strength in the tribe. Strike when they are not under my protection, but today I am accountable for them."

"Yacupaz forbade them to leave the lake," one of those behind Istiqua muttered, looking for justification.

"Where is Yacupaz?"

Then Wayland resumed command and took a pace toward the witch. This put Keller and Chayoga behind him. It would not be prudent to rush these white madmen, and no one of the Yaquis wanted to be first. More practical to get all and give nothing; the folly of facing three good pistols at close range was apparent, and there was no hot impulse to make them reckless. After all, a woman ruled them, and they were ashamed.

Wayland said to the witch, *"Señora,* they say that you speak Spanish, so listen to me before I kill you, which I can and which I will do, before anyone can touch me."

She stared a moment, shocked by insolence beyond precedent. Then she spat at him, made as if to strike him with her staff. "What do you want?" she screeched, when she found her breath. "You fool, I'll have you skinned alive and burned with hot iron!"

"All in good time, *señora.*" Wayland became pleasant, for he knew now that the witch had lost ground, since her people had seen not only two whites but also a Yaqui who was not afraid of magic. "All in good time, but first explain to your people, explain to these men you rule, these women who fear your spells, why you promised that the Golden Goddess would come to them?"

"Hai! He knows, he brought her!" Jalana began to cover up by changing the

subject. "So that we can kill all the *nakhai!*"

"The *nakhai* in the flying boat, too?"

"All, all!" she croaked. "All!"

"You are a liar, and you—" He half-faced the tight-mouthed men. "You are fools, for she is selling you into the hands of those *nakhai* down on the water. We came as friends of Yacupaz. They who live on the water, they came as your enemies, your enemies but the friend of Jalana. She has sold you."

"How, sold us?" one demanded.

"Who shot at the silver bird that swims on the lake? *Nakhai*, and you hate them, and still you did not shoot. They are our enemies, and your friends. Why are those *nakhai* welcome? Because this witch betrays you, turns you against friends who come on foot, holds your hands so you do not strike enemies who fly."

As Wayland paused, Cayoga whispered, "*Jefe,* that has hit them. Those who do not understand Spanish listen to those who do."

There was a muttering, and he had to wait for it to subside. What few teeth Jalana had showed in a snarl. She was shaking, eager to strike, but unable to pick a mark.

Wayland prodded her with further logic: "Men in metal birds bombed your villages! Men in metal birds drove you from the rich fields of the Tepe Suene! Men in metal birds have killed so many of your men that now women rule those who still live.

"Not only a woman, but a traitor, welcoming a flying enemy!"

"They aren't enemies!" the hag screeched. "They've not hurt—"

Wayland's voice drowned her out. "How does she know? Unless they are her old friends, her secret friends, how can she say that they will not kill you all as they tried to kill us with fast-shooting guns? Can they not fire on you as they did on us, a hundred shots while a man winks his eye?"

"*Aywah!*" old men muttered. When Jalana's young and drink-primed clique wanted to rush the three bold strangers, the elders said, "Be quiet. These men talk sense, hear them before we take their guns."

"What would you do if that silver bird flew over you and shot at you?"

Someone answered, "No more than you did! Hide in the caves!"

"Wrong! Look—this witch is a traitor! She did not tell you what to do. I will tell you, I can do something and I will do something to finish that silver bird. Even in the middle of the lake, I can get it."

"How?"

"In my own way." He turned to the witch. "Now curse me! Strike me dead, strike me blind! Call fire from heaven to burn me! Make my limbs wither. Curse Chayoga. Curse Yacupaz, curse him so he dies over in that cave where my friends live. Yacupaz is alive; your treachery and your magic could not kill him."

He gestured to the small black spot in the face of the cliff, a mile away. He repeated his challenge: "Curse me, curse Chayoga, prove your power. And if we do not die when you speak, then you must die, for which of these men and women will fear you or feed you if they see that your look does not kill, and that your word does not harm!"

The sun was dipping. The men swayed on their feet, pressed closer together, a solid mass with one thought, and one query. They wondered which of Jalana's curses would strike. Here was a man defying the lightning, and they could already smell the brimstone.

SHE raised her hands, shook the rattles of her staff, and began to chant, a high wailing that seemed hardly made of words; it was malice set to music. The sound made Wayland shiver. Fury blazed from those half-closed eyes, twitched in that wrinkled face. Here was something in human shape that had no human quality left, except spite and hatred and greed for power; these, and the cunning, and the bitter will to take.

This hag had upset stately Yacupaz, inciting young fools to do the bidding which was beyond her shaky hands. Wayland began to understand why fanatics, hypnotized and frightened, had done her will. Chayoga was shrinking, and so were the tribesmen. At first tense from curiosity, they now recoiled so as not to be too near when the *nakhai* collapsed from cramps, writhed from fires gnawing inside him, or stared without any longer seeing the sun,

She was nearer now. She was so close that she sickened Wayland. This mummy was a mockery of all human things he had ever seen. It was not the grime, not the creeping vermin, not the wrinkled leather stretched over jutting bones that revolted Wayland—not these as much as the unhumanity of the witch. He wanted to draw his pistol and shoot her down; he wanted to trample her with his boots, trample out whatever blood she might have in her.

He knew well why ignorant mountain women drew their children from her glance and path. He knew why men remembering her malice from childhood wanted none of her wrath. This was a curse, and he must face it, unmoved. If he let his horror prod him to striking, he would lose.

But she did not touch him. She halted, frothed and slobbered, and her upraised arms dropped. She crumpled, burned out by her rage which had not affected her enemy. No one came near to pick her up.

Wayland turned his back, and walked away.

Chayoga followed him to the end of the ledge. No one struck or spoke. The big Yaqui's voice shook when he said, *"Jefe,* I was afraid."

Wayland had to plant his feet carefully for the first dozen steps of the descent. "She saved us from them, Chayoga."

"I did not fear *them!"*

Keller had nothing to say until they were halfway down to the floor of the *barranca.* "I feel dizzy and it ain't something I et."

Wayland's laugh was shaky. "Hang on, we haven't started yet. When they snap out of it, things are going to happen."

Up on the ledge, the tribesmen were beginning to mutter. The spell was breaking. Wayland wondered when a pursuit would start. Only dissension among the factions could stop an attempt to finish the three madmen.

Chayoga said, "If they see us run, we will tempt them. Walk slowly, *jefe.*

"What're they gabbling about, Chayoga?" Keller asked.

"Too many voices I do not understand."

Wayland halted, pointed skyward, and then went on, saying, "Wasn't a buzzing in my ears after all. I did hear a motor!"

A blue plane was circling over the *barranca;* the same blue and chromium plane that had brought Jalana's hostility to a head, some days previous. Wayland laughed bitterly at the thought of the hydroplane's crew needing reinforcements.

Keller said, "Guess those heels radioed for someone to bring gas bombs or dynamite or something to blow us out."

"That's what's making the boys upstairs chatter, Herb."

The three had reached the floor of the ravine, and now they were skirting the wall, going downstream toward the crossing. The gleaming hydroplane was still visible above the *tules* along the dam. Some of the crew thrust their heads up from the cockpit.

They gestured at the blue plane, though its engine now masked their voices. Then Keller, still concerned about the Yaquis in the village, glanced back at the steep path. "Here they come," he yelled, catching Wayland's arm. "The whole pack!"

Wayland sprinted for the bank of the Bavispe. He bent double, weaving in and out among the intervening boulders that dotted the *barranca* floor. For the moment, he could make better time than the mountaineers racing down a breakneck slope.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MAGIC THUNDER

AS WAYLAND plunged into the icy Bavispe, the Yaqui horde swung toward the lake. "It's the new plane," he

gasped. "We've got a chance; they're waiting to snipe it."

The current flung him against rocks, and spray half-choked him. This was not the best crossing, but he had to get to the further bank before the Yaqui's interest in the plane ended. He clung for a moment to an outcropping tongue of rock to catch his breath, and used the chance to look up and back.

One of the men in the hydroplane had binoculars trained on the circling plane, which was now low over the lake, as if the pilot was trying to pick a place where he could set her down. The Yaquis had begun to snipe. The passenger in the circling plane leaned down, gesturing.

Those in the hydroplane made answering signs that meant, "Go back. Don't try to land." They pointed at the red crate Wayland had cracked up in the *tules* along the dam. The passenger tapped the pilot's shoulder, leaned over, gestured again, indicating that he understood, but still insisted on landing.

Low now, losing speed; the pilot was trying to set her down on the *tules,* trusting to them to slack her speed and support her wings enough to give him and the passenger a chance to jump and get ashore. This could be done, but the plane would end with little worth salvaging. Wayland had tried such a landing, and still did not quite know how or why he had survived.

Then he yelled, "Look!"

The machine gun thrust its snout through the hatchway of the hydroplane. Its venemous drumming was sharp above the sputter and backfire of the throttled engine. Chunks flew from the wing of the blue plane, and a second machine-gun burst chewed bits from her fuselage. The pilot gave her the gun and set her on her tail, but he was asking too much; she could not take it. She stalled, spun, and gunfire followed her into the *tules.*

For an instant, she seemed like a winged rocket, poised on her tail, ready to take off; then she fell, twisting, and landed almost athwart the dam. A man crawled up, then slid back among the *tules.*

Wayland, scrambling up the bank toward the spillway, yelled, "Keep down, they'll plug you!"

He knew the man could not hear him, that perhaps he was already riddled with slugs. But Wayland was beyond reasoning now; he cursed as Jalana had cursed him. The Yaquis, still afraid of the Lake of the Gods, did not come nearer.

Wayland clawed his way up the steep embankment and reached the place where he had set the dynamite. His cigar lighter would not work, for water had drenched it. He tore the waterproofing from the fuse hidden up there, and fired his pistol so that the flame would lap the end of the pigtail. The fuse sputtered. The next instant he was rolling down hill, bruised by the savage rocks, plunging down to escape the impending blast. Then he saw a man crawl from the *tules.*

"That way!" Wayland pointed at the smoke puffing from the earth where the dynamite was planted. "Watch out—get away."

The big blond man's slime-smeared face changed; he scuttled back into the *tules,* and dragged a man out. It was the pilot, limp and helpless.

A first moment of incredulity had kept Wayland from recognizing the big man, but when he looked again, and yelled, he had to believe that he saw Elmer Dennis, floundering, slipping, struggling to get a Mexican pilot further from the spillway. But for the *tules,* the current would have swept them both over the dam.

Wayland yelled, "Dennis, you fool, roll him over the bank, quick! Slide, slide!"

Yaquis were now on the flats, along the village side of the Bavispe. They could have fired at Wayland, but they did not, either because they mistook him for one of Jalana's allies, or because they knew that he was against Jalana. Wayland had no time for thought or guessing. He had no time for the extraordinary fact that Ledgate had turned a machine gun on Dennis, his partner.

The pilot slid over the edge, and then Dennis lurched after him. Both were

wounded, and the exertion had taken what strength Dennis had left. Chayoga and Keller came up the steep incline, and they met Wayland just as he blocked the rolling bodies of his former employer and the leather-helmeted Mexican.

"Get 'em further away!"

THE Yaqui shouldered the Mexican, and Keller helped Dennis to his knees. But just then the earth shook, and a man could not have kept his footing even on level ground. There was a deep rumbling, and an abrupt compression of air hit Wayland as though a volley of medicine balls had landed against him from every side. Acrid smoke gushed, and earth mushroomed up. Rock fragments screamed, and when the rumble ceased echoing, chunks of stone began to clatter against the boulders of the flats, and crashed against the distant *barranca* walls, and spattered into the river.

The rumble of dynamite had scarcely stopped when the lapping and rushing of water became louder. Mud and boulders poured over the spillway, for the bottom had been blown up, and the flood could now bite into the rammed earth and rocks it had not been able to touch for two centuries.

The Bavispe was rising. Its foam was now coffee-colored. The Yaquis, stunned by the blast, recovered enough to yell and scurry for cover. High flung fragments of rock still thudded. One or two of the Indians had been struck down, but no one had time to pick the victims from the rising water. A white madman had faced a witch's curse, and now the earth thundered, and the Lake of the Gods cut deeper and deeper into its dam; the effect was cumulative, for with the deepening of the cut, there was a faster rush, a more certain grinding and tearing.

Wayland scrambled up to the crest of the dam. A great chunk crumbled off, fell into the gap, momentarily blocked it, and showered him with mud. The hydroplane's crew, having ducked for shelter from falling rocks, were coming up again. They were pointing at dents in the armored fuselage and cockpit. A propeller blade had been broken, and the big hull was heading for the break in the dam.

The closer she came, the more she responded to the current. Out in mid-lake, a man could still swim clear, but near the gap, it was like a mountain torrent. The roar and rumble of water falling into the pool at the foot of the spillway shook Wayland, and he could feel the earth shudder. The hydroplane's drift became faster. He could almost distinguish the faces of the shocked crew.

Five of them, and their machine gun was of no use here. One shook the pilot, pointed at the other prop, the good one. One engine could pull her clear. That one sputtered, skipped, then roared, and the backlash kicked up a comet's tail of spray. She was not far from the *tules*, and she heeled until the wing on the inside cut water, drenching the men in the cockpit; they had not closed the hatch.

She was pulling clear, but wrath made Wayland move. They had hounded him, planned his death, planned the butchery of Frayne and Lorela and the *tamenes;* they had shot down an unarmed plane. So he drew his pistol.

Because of the crescent curve of the dam, he was directly facing the plane when he poured heavy slugs into the prop. He could not miss the circle of those fast-spinning blades. Before his gun was empty, the engine began to race, to scream; flame poured from the exhaust ports, and the air became heavy with hot oil.

The roar turned into a clattering as of anvils shaken in a concrete mixer; no ice-cold engine, throttle jammed by a panicky pilot, could last long. Bearings let go. Blue smoke enveloped the whole plane, and flying con rods and pistons splashed far out into the water on either side. The cripple slowly slacked up, the current overcoming what speed she had.

WAYLAND forgot the Yaquis on the other side of the Bavispe, and stood in full view, fumbling fresh cartridges into

his pistol, shouting furious, meaningless words.

He was half mad, and he knew it, but he could no longer control himself, for all those terrible days were claiming their due. Chayoga and Keller came running, and when he felt their hands on his arm, he thought that they were trying to drag him away from the edge of the ever-widening gap. The rush of water was so loud that he could not hear their shouting in his ears. He could only feel Chayoga's breath.

They spun him about to face the cliff. A girl with copper-colored hair was running through the brush and toward the crescent-curved dam; the sinking sun made gilded lights twinkle in her hair, and it put gilt on her arms and throat and bare legs.

Frayne and Tula were at her heels, and the *tamcnes* trailed along, but Lorela had a head start, and what moved her was greater than what drove those who came after her.

A cleft between two peaks let sunset spotlight her and Wayland. The Yaquis came from their side, racing along the dam, and toward the boiling brown gap of water. It was lower now, for the lake level had fallen off. The hydroplane wavered, twisted, somehow escaped the powerful suction, and fouled along the bank. Luck, the blind quirk of whirlpools, the drag of *tules* had kept her from blocking the gap and breaking in two, or shearing her wings and diving headlong with her crew into the boiling Bavispe.

"Don, come back! Come back before they shoot you!" Lorela caught him with both arms. "How did you get away?"

She was crying and laughing. He twisted her arms from his neck, held her away from him, and said, "They won't shoot! This blast got them! The Yaquis. Look at them, dancing and hooting around!"

Frayne and Tula closed in. The stocky Mexican woman said, "*Ay de mi!* Your skirt, it is ruined, quick, take mine—"

Wayland thrust her aside. "Easy, Tula! You need yours, and she's got a bit of hers left. Let her look, it's her show. *Look!*"

A thin black snake of Yaquis twisted down the steep trail from the village. Frayne still had his binoculars hanging from his neck; he had been watching, trying to see the parley in the village. Wayland snatched the glasses, raised them, exclaimed as the bobbing villagers poured into the flats and then milled around.

"Jalana! They've got her!"

"Let me look!" Lorela reached for the glasses.

Wayland held them away. "You can't see her any more, they're tramping her flat. They're pointing at you. The fellows on the other side of the gap, the ones close to us, have passed the word."

"What word?" Lorela now had time to notice that the Yaquis who had come running toward the stranded hydroplane were pointing, yelling. Some had backtracked to join the far-off group around on Jalana. "What do you mean?"

"Golden Goddess," Chayoga said. "First the big noise, the metal bird powerless in the water, the big flood. Then you come along with white skin and bright hair, the Golden Goddess on our side. Jalana cursed us, and we did not die, and now her friends die instead. Jalana's prophecy goes against her, and she does not live."

CHAPTER XXIII

BEHOLD THE GOLDEN GODDESS

THE men in the hydroplane could have defended themselves. They could have used their machine gun, but when they saw the Yaquis who ran down the dam, they took it for a rescue party until a moment too late.

When they realized, finally, that Jalana was not protecting them, the knowledge was useless. There were no sounds that could be heard above the water; but the Yaquis recklessly slid down the bank through mud and *tules,* and swarmed over the plane that shifted as the water fell away beneath its tail.

"Let's get out of here," Wayland said. "Chayoga, how come they're not afraid of the Lake of the Gods anymore?"

The *capataz* chuckled. "*Jefe,* you jest, pretending to ask me for knowledge. Why, except that you made a fool of Jalana, and did not die when she cursed you? Right away, the dam breaks with much noise. Does that not prove that your medicine is so strong that you do not even have to speak a curse? You told them these men were enemies, that you would destroy them, and look!"

Wayland stopped and looked at Chayoga in frank bewilderment.

"What! Did I say that, up there?"

Chayoga shook his head. "It is possible, *jefe,* that you do not remember, or maybe the gods were speaking with your mouth. These ignorant fellows think it best to kill people you do not like, since you can destroy a sacred lake, and make its waters cripple a flying boat."

"So that's it! Well I'll be—" Wayland's voice trailed off dazedly.

They had not gone far when Dennis rose, trying to lift his half-conscious pilot. His face was cut and bleeding, and slime from the *tules* coated him from head to foot.

He said:

"You saw what they did, huh? All right, maybe you will believe me. I came out here to try and stop Ledgate. When he saw me, he knew I was through with him, and he couldn't trust me to keep my mouth shut, so he fired on me and Miguel."

"Ledgate, eh?" Wayland's mind was still scattered from fast motion and shock.

"Right," Dennis went on, square chin jutting out as he challenged someone to dispute what he felt was an incredible story. "Ledgate and Ybarra, his pet cutthroat, and Harper, that alien smuggler. Hydroplane belonged to a pal of Harper's. They had to hustle him out of a dump in Mazatlan and sober him up enough to bring them up here.

"That's how come I snitched Harper's little blue plane, and Mike here—" he jerked a thumb at the groggy Mexican pilot—"had guts enough to bring me out."

"Let me get it straight," Wayland said when two *tamenes* had taken charge of the Mexican pilot. "You finally got qualms about wholesale murder, after we'd horned you out?"

Dennis eyed Lorela. "You played me for a sucker right from the start. But I made this damn-fool flight to give you half a chance for your skin! I saw this coming, but I couldn't believe it until Ybarra and his gang went into a huddle with Ledgate, and then I knew better than to squawk. And then—well, I came anyway."

Lorela smiled, and let go the hold she had on Wayland's arm. "Elmer, I'm sorry for the tricks I played on you, but I had to. And I don't think you came out here just for me. I think, somehow, that you'd have done as much for any white people about to be tossed to savages."

She spoke sincerely.

Dennis stopped, and eyed his former rivals for a moment. His grin was twisted, and he shook his head. "Well, maybe you're right."

They let it go at that.

Not long after Frayne's party reached the refuge in the cliff, a handful of wild Yaquis came from the village, for they could cross the Bavispe above the draining lake. Istiqua led them. They came empty-handed, and when they halted, they called for Yacupaz.

The old man stepped out through the barricade, and looked down on the rebels. "Here I am, among my friends, my new tribe."

Istiqua said, "We were crazy. Come back with us, we do not want the sun to set on a tribe that has no chief. We killed Jalana, and the dogs are eating what is left of her. Her magic was not good, and she could not curse this *nakhai* chief when he called her a traitor who sold her people to the man in the flying boat. Now we ask you to forgive us. You are our father, and your wisdom is better than her magic."

The Indian's tone was urgent, eloquent with pleading.

"You will respect my friends?" Yacupaz gestured to those who stood behind him. "These friends who came on foot and in peace—you will not try to rob them?"

"They are our friends because they are your friends. They have proved themselves. And no one is alive in the flying boat—we have proved ourselves."

So Yacupaz said to Wayland, "Tonight my people must see that I forgive them. Tomorrow, we will talk about this hole in the ground, and you will tell them how many blankets and knives and hatchets it is worth, how much food and seeds and tools for working our old *mesa* you can give us. Maybe it is true that the army no longer wants to kill us; maybe we have been blind and backward looking."

Then he went down the path to his people, and they set him up on their shoulders and carried him to prove their penitence.

ALL night long Wayland and Lorela listened to the rumble of the draining lake. Tula slept, and so did the *tamenes*, but civilized nerves could not relax after long suspense and peril. Dennis squatted beside his courageous pilot, Miguel, who slept feverishly.

After long frowning into the small bed of coals, Dennis said to Lorela and her father, "Sure, we played a hard game. Scattering your porters, fixing a few officials or army officers to block you, maybe roughing you up a bit. That's business. You met me before, I don't pull punches. But that was man to man, Doc. And I was sore at Wayland here, walking away with my *prima donna*. And our outfit was losing money.

"You can see how— Well, look. We were in a spot.

"We spread out too fast, and playing for the tourists coming down the West Coast settled it. We had to cage that Tiopa, or make chumps think we had caged it."

He was still defiant, ill at ease, embarrassed by the hospitality he had to accept in behalf of Miguel. Wayland said, "I saw you trying to pull Miguel into the clear. Where'd you find him?"

"What's that to you? Another Spick that thought he could fly, and wanted to make a bit of change, and didn't mind flying a stolen plane. I stole it. We conked the watchman, not too much, but enough."

"That's what I meant," Wayland said. "Just another Spick, and you stuck by him. I don't think you're quite the heel I thought you were."

"All right, make me feel good!"

"I'm not rubbing you, Elmer. I was working for you, I damned you along with Ledgate. In fact, I took you for the number one slug. I realize now that Ledgate made a fool of me, with his big talk about ten percent in the Tiopa. You tried to talk him out of it, and so I thought you were the rat.

"I see it differently now. I don't doubt that Ledgate chiseled on that red plane that let me down. I guess I asked for it."

"All right, all *right*. Now Lorela, you give me some honey."

"Don means it," she said.

He was still defiant. "So what?"

"Just this," Wayland explained. "I didn't go through with Frayne just for money, but the fact is, I end up earning an interest. I'll cut you in on a fair slice of my share, because I know you're all right. You tried to kick back at Ledgate. He needed kicking.

"Yes, I will speak evil of the dead. I would, even if I had personally settled him, instead of the Yaquis. That swindler has met payday, and the slate is clean; and if you play it right, your cut will more than keep you off the beach."

AT FIRST Dennis could not believe it. Not until Frayne said, "This is a queer tangle, we could argue until judgment day and not straighten it out. I pried Wayland loose from you fellows. I was against the wall myself, thanks to your late partner's theft of my notes on the Tiopa. I was about licked.

"But your man Wayland got me through where even Chayoga was stumped. Who owes who and what is beyond my figuring, but I respect Wayland's view, and what he says of his interest goes for mine. Your partnership interest, as survivor of your

firm, is valuable to us. We can use your good will in developing the Tiopa. Your Mexican connections—the above-board connections, I mean—can help us, just as much as we can help you."

Dennis grumbled, "All right. Making me earn it, I guess I'll take it. That'll square me for a redhead making a dope out of me."

Keller was nodding, but now his head jerked up and he blinked. "Huh? Only a sap'd trust a redhead. Don, you better, dip her black again."

"I think," Frayne said, "that before we divide the Tiopa, we might as well wait until we inspect the tunnels."

"That's right." Keller was wide awake now. "But listen, Lorela, how come you bleached yourself this afternoon?"

Lorela said, "I got weak-kneed. I knew Don was going to get killed, and I thought that maybe my red hair could save more than myself, so I was ready to work at being the Golden Goddess. And when all the disturbance broke, I just went wild. I had no idea I was arriving just in time to clinch Don's curse."

"That water is not roaring so much," Frayne said. "Let's get a little rest; we'll need it for tomorrow."

The following day proved Frayne's theory about the mine. The drained lake's bottom was deep in silt, but reaching through it was ruined masonry, and the crude smelter from whose retorts the ingots had been poured. There was the *arrastra* where the rich ore had been crushed by mule power, and water logged timbers and corroded spikes showed how in the old days a hoist tower had brought ore from the upper tunnel, where the man in armor had perished with his loot.

They went down hopefully, encouraged by all they saw.

Near the bottom of the lake, a silt-floored tunnel led into the mountain. Soon it was apparent that the Jesuits had scarcely touched this lower part of the lode when their expulsion from Mexico compelled them to abandon the mine. Frayne and Wayland came out with ore samples that left no doubt.

"I wouldn't dare to guess how far that vein reaches," he said to Wayland, "but it justifies my trouble. All we have to do is go back and attend to the paper work. Dennis' Mexican connections will help."

An hour later, the remaining burros were loaded with supplies for the return trip. Yacupaz and his elders had come from the ledge to give his friends guides and hunters.

"My people," he said, "are waiting to see the Golden Goddess go home. They are moving their families from that cramped ledge down to a better place. They no longer fear the spot where the Lake of the Gods was.

"They do not fear the *nakhai,* for they know now that while some are evil, some also are good. So when you come back, my people will work, not as slaves, but as free men, to help you find gold, and earn the things we need to keep from starving."

As the caravan wound up the steep trail, ragged women and lean men crowded forward, chattering and pointing and whispering. Wayland marched beside Lorela's burro, as though unwilling to trust the sure-footed beast with its burden.

"Head up, honey," he said, "and smile real pretty. It's not every day that you leave town with a pocket full of Yaqui gold and a send-off as a golden goddess."

"Silly! They're not cheering, are they?"

"No, they're awed. Like the natives in my town'll be, when they get their first look at you."

"In an open car?"

"Uh-huh. What other kind? An open one, with shoes tied to the back bumper, and rice all spattered over it."

Then came a yell from the rear; Keller shouted, "Say, Don, what do you think? I got my camera back; they had it in the witch cave. They gave it to me for a present!"

Frayne laughed, nodding at Wayland and the girl. "If you were as high in the air as those two are, maybe you could use it."

The White Lamb Sahib

In India (and elsewhere) there should be this saying: Before calling an Englishman a sheep, it is advisable to examine his wool from all sides

Argosy Blue Ribbon Short Short

By GARNETT RADCLIFFE

Author of "Demon of the Sand," "The Haji's Miracle," etc.

SINCE all things, including the British officers of native regiments, must go by comparison, it was hard lines on Filgate he should have had Buck Hogan as his predecessor in command of D Company of the Royal Pathans.

For Buck Hogan had been all that Filgate was not. A pirate of a man, a big black son-of-a-gun from the County Kerry whom the Pathans from Subedar Nur Din down to hulking Sepoy Mizzan Ali, the reformed dacoit, had worshipped.

They'd loved him for his joviality, his recklessness, his ready fist and his ready laugh, and they would have followed him through the gates of Hell and beyond.

So when as was only his due, Hogan had been given accelerated promotion and selected for a course at the staff college, Filgate had had, as it were, to step into the field-boots of a popular hero.

Unluckily, nature had not designed him to wear those boots. He differed from Hogan physically as well as mentally. He was small and his flaxen hair gave him a childish appearance. Also, he was gentle, timid and conscientious, whereas Hogan had been a jovial character who gave not two hoots for anybody or anything.

D Company watched him very critically that first morning he took them on parade. And (apart from the shirkers who flattered themselves that life was going to be much easier under this little *sahib* than it had been under their late commander) they were offended. They felt as might feel a class of tough schoolboys who find themselves placed under the supervision of a school ma'am.

Hulking Sepoy Mizzan Ali summed up popular opinion after parade.

"Are we children to be given such an officer?" he grunted. "He is no *jewan* (proper man) such as Hogan Sahib was. He is but a little white lamb wearing a sahib's uniform."

In native regiments where the rank and file find English names difficult to pronounce, nicknames for the British officers are common.

Some are complimentary, some are derogatory. The one bestowed upon Filgate by Mizzan Ali was distinctly one of the latter variety. It underlined the difference between him and Hogan who had been known to his men as the Elephant Sahib.

He might have rid himself of the name had he only had a little more experience of Pathans. A touch of the iron fist, a spot of illegal field punishment and plenty of doubling about in the sun with full packs must have made the *sepoys* revise this estimate of his lamblike disposition.

But Filgate didn't believe in rough stuff. His notion was that by kindly, fair treatment he could win the respect of his men.

He would have succeeded with British troops. But Pathans are an unregenerate lot, tough as steel, appreciative of stern discipline, scornful of softness and apt to mistake kindliness for weakness; and the result of Filgate's treatment was to make them more convinced than ever that their new commander was only a white lamb.

They believe accordingly, with the result that the colonel, who knew all that went on in the regiment, took Filgate aside one evening after mess.

"Look here, Filgate," he said, "D Company isn't pulling its weight. It's gone to blazes since Hogan left. What's the trouble?"

Filgate made no attempt to deny the charge. He was only too miserably aware how true it was.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "The men seem to have taken a dislike to me for some reason. If you want me to hand over to someone else—"

The colonel massaged his chin. He had had the same idea himself, but against all evidence he still believed in Filgate.

"We'll wait a bit and see how you get on" he said at last.

WHILE the question of Filgate's retaining the command of D Company was still in abeyance, something happened to incite the whole of the Furious Gomal.

Thanks to the negligence or corruption of a *chaukidar* (watchman) twenty-five Government rifles of the latest pattern disappeared from an armory at Abbotshah. On the north west frontier the loss of one rifle is a serious matter. Twenty-five was nothing less than a calamity.

Gomal Intelligence got busy; their spies, some of whom were British officers disguised as tribesmen, sallied forth in scores. From village to village they made their dangerous way, gossiping, bribing keeping their eyes and ears open for any clue.

It was a British officer dressed as a Baluchi shepherd who at last located the rifles in the Mahsud village of Pur Than. He passed word to the authorites, and the authorities (possibly on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief) decided that a company of the Fifth Royal should have the honor of recovering the stolen property.

And it so happened that D Company was the only company available to send.

"Anyway," said the colonel, trying to look on the best side, "it will give Filgate a chance to get to know his men and vice-versa. He'll be out in the wilds, running his own show with no one to interfere. And I'm prepared to wager he'll have them in hand when he brings them back."

"If he ever *does* bring them back," the second-in-command said gloomily. He had nothing against Filgate except that he just didn't consider him the right stamp of man to handle Pathans.

D COMPANY received the news with mixed feelings. As Pathans of the Bungi Khel they were delighted to have the chance of having a slap at their detested Mahsud cousins.

On the other hand they didn't trust the "White Lamb Sahib," to allow them to do themselves justice.

Had it only been Hogan Sahib who was leading them. They spoke wistfully of how the Elephant Sahib would have handled this matter. He'd have razed the village, shot every Mahsud he couldn't catch, suspended the headman from the lintel of his own hut with his toes barely touching the ground, and would have left him to dance until the rifles were produced.

A proper man Hogan Sahib—almost as proper as a Pathan.

But they couldn't see the White Lamb Sahib acting like that. If he couldn't cope with his own men, how much less could he cope with the Pur Than Mahsud, the craftiest tribe in the Gomal, a tribe notorious for their cunning and their skill at telling lies?

Especially when the said Mahsud had as their headman old Shere Gul, the cleverest of them all. Shere Gul's nickname was the Fox, and his deceitfulness was a by-word from Balla to Abbotshah.

The absurdity of opposing the White Lamb Sahib against the Fox was so manifest that Nur Din, senior *subedar* of D Company, felt constrained to have a private word with the adjutant.

"*Sahib,*" he said, "the recovery of these rifles is going to be no easy matter. If I may speak straightly Filgate Sahib has neither the experience nor the widsom. Shere Gul will fool him as if he were a baby. Could it not be contrived that some

other *sahib* take command for this expedition only?"

He was voicing the wish of the whole company. And though the adjutant told him off for presuming to criticize the ability of a British officer, he secretly sympathized.

Since the Fifth Royal are old in the Indian Army List and held high in the esteem of all who knew them—especially their enemies—the less said about D Company's march to Pur Than the better.

They meant to show their resentment at being commanded by a White Lamb, and they did. They did it in subtle ways difficult to check.

For instance, when they numbered every man contrived to make his voice sound more or less like the bleating of a lamb. More or less except in the instance of Sepoy Mizzan Ali who simply opened his mouth and gave vent to a prolonged, unashamed *"Baa-aa."*

Even the *odedars* (n. c. o. 's) thought it funny to give their orders with a sheep-like intonation which did not help the cause of good discipline.

The actual marching was disgraceful. In vain did Filgate ride up and down the column shouting till his throat was sore. D Company grinned in his face and sang a song composed by Mizzan Ali which concerned a white lamb of dubious ancestry and doubtful morals.

To sing that song was not a military crime that could be punished, but it was very trying for Filgate who had to pretend not to know his nickname.

HE WAS relieved when they neared Pur Than which, for a Mahsud village, was large and prosperous in appearance, standing on the summit of a hill and surrounded by a twelve-foot wall.

Although it was unlikely the Mahsud would offer any active resistance to such a strong force, he was taking no risks. A quarter of a mile away he extended the company into open formation and dispatched a platoon under a *jemidar* to the rear of the village.

There was no sign of any ambush. Instead, as they neared the main gate a deputation of the village elders came out to meet them.

It was headed by the redoubtable Shere Gul himself, a dignified Shylock-like figure in the white robes of ceremony. Venerable, bearded and vulpine, he salaamed to the ground before Filgate.

This was an unexpected pleasure, he said. It was years since he had had the honor of welcoming a *sahib* of the British Raj to his humble village.

His manner was so frank and friendly that it pained Filgate to have to explain this was no friendly visit. Twenty-five Government rifles had been stolen. They were reported to be hidden in Pur Than. What had Shere Gul to say to *that?*

Shere Gul's answer was a blank stare. *Rifles?* he repeated. *Rifles?* Was the *sahib* making a jest?

"It is no jest," said Filgate sternly. "I have information those rifles are in Pur Than and I have come to demand their return. Also, there will be a heavy fine to be paid by the village to the Raj."

"Twenty-five stolen rifles in Pur Than!" Shere Gul repeated. The joke seemed so good he had to share it with the other elders. "Hark to what the *sahib* tells me! We have twenty-five Government rifles in Pur Than!"

The elders looked at one another like so many Fagins and wagged their hands. Their laughter made Filgate feel foolish.

"This is good news the *sahib* has brought," one graybeard cackled. "Since we have twenty-five rifles we are wealthy men. I wish to Allah though I knew where they were hidden!"

Shere Gul turned to Filgate. His smile was fatherly, almost pitying.

"Sahib, I am afraid you have come to the wrong village. There are no firearms in Pur Than saving some sporting guns for which we have permits. Perhaps some lying dog of a Pathan—" he looked at Subedar Nur Din—"has invented the story to make trouble between us and the Raj."

"So we're lying dogs, are we?" Subedar Nur Din growled. "Beware what you say, Mahsud pig. If the *sahib* gives the order we'll burn the village about your ears."

Shere Gul made a scornful gesture.

"What care I for your threats, Pathan! The *sahib* will not give the order. The *sahib* is wise and just and knows when a man is speaking the truth.

"*Sahib,* don't let this Pathan jackal sway your judgment. I will swear with my lips on the Koran and kneeling on the grave of my father that those rifles are not in Pur Than."

Subedar Nur Din caught Filgate's sleeve.

"Don't listen to him, *sahib.* A Mahsud's oath is not worth the hum of a mosquito. If the rifles are not in Pur Than they are hidden in a cave or buried in the ground."

"Your words are like the stench of a dog's vomit, Pathan," Shere Gul cried. "Leave the questioning to the *sahib.* It is for him and him only to decide.

"*Sahib,* you *must* believe me. By the beard of the prophet, the ashes of my ancestors and the Black Stone of Mecca, those rifles are not in Pur Than, nor are they hidden in any cave or buried in the ground. May I never enter Paradise if I have spoken a lie."

There was a deep-throated mutter of assent from the other Mahsuds. Tempers were rising; the situation becoming strained. From right and left the *sepoys* were edging in with their fixed bayonets. From the village tribesmen were hastening to stand behind their chief.

FILGATE lit a cigarette to give himself time to think. He knew his men were watching him eager as a pack of hounds. He felt he was poised between the devil of D Company's contempt and the deep sea of Shere Gul's cunning.

But was it cunning, or was it genuine innocence? Those tremendous oaths! Surely no Mussulman, not even a Mahsud, would dare to utter such blasphemy!

"*Baa-aa*" called Sepoy Mizzan Ali, who was one of those who had edged near the dispute. "There is a little white lamb who has lost his mother."

As the sides of the hill crowned by Pur Than were dotted with sheep tended by the women of the tribe, no one could have proved he was not making a perfectly innocent observation. But Filgate flushed darkly.

He turned to Shere Gul.

"I am not satisfied you speak the truth. We will keep a watch on the village and tomorrow when the men are rested we will enter and make a close search. If there is any opposition I will take it as a sign of guilt and act accordingly."

Shere Gul shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will, *sahib.* Since the rifles are not there we have nought to fear. But since these Pathans are all thieves and rascals, I would ask you to be present yourself while the search is being made. And if there is any looting or any damage is done, I will claim compensation from the Raj."

"Very well," said Filgate, but Subedar Nur Din turned away and spat on the sand. Not thus would Hogan Sahib have handled this affair!

BUT if the rifles really were in Pur Than, they must have been hidden with amazing cunning.

All the next day the Pathans searched the village and its environments with more zeal than consideration. They thrust their bayonets into walls, they examined the bottoms of wells, they dug up every likely spot, they invaded every privacy.

It was a dirty tedious business and productive of a great many "incidents" with furious Mahsud housewives that almost led to bloodshed. And they were not rewarded by finding so much as one sling swivel.

When there was nothing left to search Filgate returned to his tent. He was worn out, weary, depressed. He knew his men felt they had lost face to the Mahsuds and were blaming him. It would be a semi-mutinous company he would have to march back.

The sight of Subeda· Nur Din looming in the tent entrance did nothing to console him. He knew Nu· Din had come to say "I told you so," and he was right.

Nur Din gave a perfunctory salute.

"Well, *sahib*," he said, "we have failed just as I thought we would. It's a pity you allowed yourself to be tricked by that fatherless son of a Mahsud snake. Now our name is blackened and I foresee great trouble with the men.

"Wah! had only Hogan Sahib been in command! He wasn't a *sahib* to be deceived by lies and flattery. He'd have made Shere Gul produce those rifles, or—"

There comes a time when the gentlest worm must turn. Filgate overturned his chair as he sprang to his feet.

"Shut up!" he roared. "What do I care what Hogan Sahib would have done, and who are you to dare to offer me advice? Your business is to obey orders and not weary me with your chattering. Do you understand?"

He burst out of the tent leaving Nur Din to stare after him open-mouthed.

"It might have been Hogan Sahib himself who spoke!" the Pathan muttered.

FILGATE was already repenting of his outburst. After all, Nur Din had only meant well. He decided to take a walk to cool his head and his temper.

Obsessed with his gloomy thoughts he took a track that meandered round the hillside out of sight of both camp and village. It was a relief to get away from mocking eyes. A relief not to hear—

"Baa! . . . Baa! . . . Baa!"

Filgate flashed around with his fists clenched. By heavens, this was a bit too much! He'd teach that humorist—

But then he saw whence the sound was coming and had to laugh at himself. On a ledge below the track a big ewe had wedge herself between two rocks and was calling plaintively for assistance.

D Company had not destroyed all Filgate's kindly instincts. At some risk to life and limb he climbed down to the ledge and lifted the struggling, bleating creature from the trap.

SIX o'clock next morning found the camp struck and D Company standing in column ready to march off.

Sulkiness brooded over them like a cloud. Standing "easy" they leaned on their rifles and scowled at the Mahsuds.

All Pur Than had risen early to watch the departure. Shere Gul himself was there, grinning like a triumphant fox.

It was like a retreat, a surrender. The Pathans fidgeted and longed for the order to march.

At last Filgate appeared. But even then their shame was not quickly ended. For he made them slope arms ten times before he was satisfied.

Shere Gul smiled and stroked his beard while the children jeered from the village wall.

"I will now inspect the company," Filgate told Subedar Nur Din.

He went very slowly down the ranks, staring into each scowling face. Not a dirty button did his eyes miss.

He stopped longest before Sepoy Mizzan Ali. He looked him up and down from the peak of his turban to his boots before he gave his verdict.

"Is this a soldier, Subedar Sahib? To me he looks more like a camel that has been rolling in mud. A stupid, ugly, knock-kneed camel with green teeth . . . ."

D Company held their breath. This was a new White Lamb Sahib.

Filgate returned to the front of the company and mounted his charger. He looked around, saw Shere Gul and beckoned him to approach.

The Mahsud came eagerly. He had a long list of things he claimed to have been stolen or damaged by the Pathans during the search ready in his hand.

Filgate waved aside the list. He spoke loudly, and when D Company heard his words they thought he had gone mad.

"Salaam, Shere Gul," he said. "This is the White Lamb Sahib who addresses you."

"The White Lamb?" Shere Gul repeated.

"Yes, and before I leave Pur Than I must say farewell to the sheep who are my kin."

Shere Gul's mouth fell open, his eyes bulged and his face turned the color of mud.

"*Sahib,* I don't understand," Shere Gul gasped. "What is this talk of sheep?"

"It's the talk of the White Lamb Sahib!" Filgate's voice was very harsh. "Don't move, Shere Gul. The kin of the White Lamb are coming to his aid."

He called up a *jemidar* and gave an order. The man gaped at him. Then comprehension jumped into his eyes. He ran back to his platoon, and in another moment the *sepoys* had grounded their rifles and were scattering across the hillside.

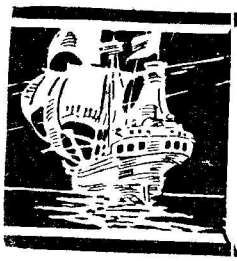
With yells and stones they rounded up the sheep while the Mahsud women screamed abuse. At a gallop they drove the flock to where Filgate was. Big shaggy ewes for the most part which ran clumsily as if gravid with lamb.

But fecundity was not the reason. Suddenly a roar of laughter went up from D Company such as had surely never been heard in Pur Than before.

Shere Gul's disgruntled face was the last straw that broke the back of discipline. The ranks bowed like corn in a high wind. As the bleating ewes surged round their knees men rocked and bellowed, smote each other on the back.

For beneath each ewe, muzzle to the front and barrel to the rear, secured by cords and almost hidden in deep fleece, there was a Government rifle. Shere Gul's hiding place had been disclosed.

And Filgate, listening to the cheers and laughter, was very content. He knew that he had won. He would be the White Lamb Sahib to the end of his career, but it would be a title of love, honor, and respect.



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

WELL, here we are back from a bit of vacation with a few remaining sun-blisters and the feeling that this is, in many ways, a nice summer. The things we've been hearing about ARGOSY!

For instance, this young lady we got to talking to: a lady of considerable charm, intelligence, and wit, as was at once apparent. Said she:

"ARGOSY? Of course—you're always ahead of the procession with such things as those stories by Forester. *Everybody* knows— Well, wait. There's one stuffy fellow I know who read Captain Horatio Hornblower in book form, raved about it, and asked me where it was first published. When I told him, he looked baffled; said, 'ARGOSY? ARGOSY? Impossible!'

"But that only shows," concluded this young lady of charm, intelligence, and wit, "how little this fellow gets around in the best current fiction." We beamed agreement and bought her a soda (which, most unfortunately, we can't do for all our enthusiastic readers.)

Very cheering, too, was an article in the *New York Times* magazine section a few weeks ago. It appears that life in the New York City subways is not all dankness and darkness and nerve-strain; for did not one change-maker confess that in one week (when not busy making change) he had read through "Gone With the Wind" and a copy of ARGOSY?

We would not think of making comparisons. We would merely point out that this man obviously knows a best seller (and a good yarn) when he sees it. And that, ARGOSY, unlike GWTW, comes around fresh and new every week.

NOW here is more encouragement from one of our long-standing friends. We're particularly happy about the reference to the Cochran story; for we thought it was a dandy ourselves, and have been anxious to get some reader reaction. In fact we think this correspondent has picked a list of winners (though the final judgment, in all cases, *has* to be yours). So here is

MRS. W. T. McCLURE

I've read your magazine for years—since I was a kid of twelve—as Dad was an avid fan even before I came on the scene. Your magazine is really good.

Especially did I like C. M. Warren's two stories. "Then I'll Remember" was excellent, as was "Bugles Are for Soldiers." This last Argosy (June 8) has a fine story by Robert W. Cochran, "One Less To Feed." Stories like these are what make yours my favorite magazine.

It seems unfair, after all these years of enjoyable reading, not to throw bouquets which are so richly deserved. So here is my bouquet (not poison ivy, either) and keep up the good work.

I also liked the last Smooth Kyle story, "The Sun Sets at Five." I like everything Jim Kjelgaard writes, too. I'm very much interested in the old pre-Druid rites described in "Maker of Shadows" by Jack Mann. I have studied a bit of old Druid law but this seems even more interesting. Could you give me the names of some reference books on this subject?
CHATHAM, N. J.

Unfortunately we haven't a bibliography on pre-Druidical rites close at hand as this is written; and Mr. Mann is (we believe) in England, hard to reach. We'd be glad to have suggestions from other readers who are students in this field.

LOOKING AHEAD!

MINIONS OF MERCURY

Arm in arm they float through the air, Mark and Omega. They're heading out to Detroit, where they have urgent business with a tyrant; and very soon they will be forwarding their cause of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness by means of off-hand daring and assorted miracles. A fascinating new novel of the future by

WILLIAM GRAY BEYER

WILDERNESS WAY

Calling Richman's Lode! Handsled Burke has returned to the Northland, in search of hard cash and harder fighting. With Two-Horse Swen he's trekking to the Mystery Mountains, and beyond them lies peril, set in platinum. A vivid and exciting short novel by

C. F. KEARNS

FORGOTTEN ISLAND

The cast included The Constable, The Native Girl, The Murderer—and *Birgus-latro,* the crab who should be named Death That Walks Sideways. By

ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—AUGUST 31

Beat the war drums

Sound the scalp halloo, gather the warriors!!

WHITE EAGLE

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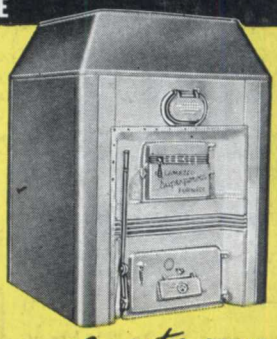

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