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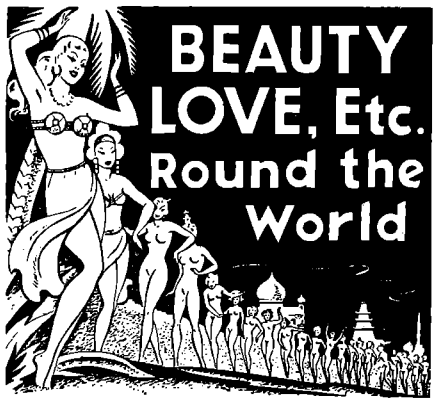

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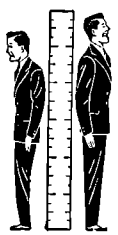

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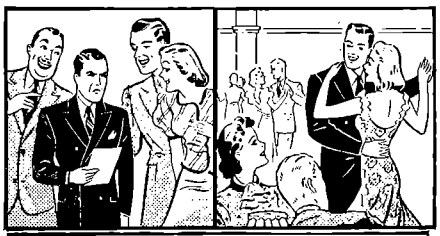

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Volume 309 | CONTENTS FOR JULY 12, 1941 | Number 2

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N.Y.
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President & Treasurer — WILLIAM T. DEWART, JR., Secretary
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE, 111 Rue Réaumur

LONDON: THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD., 3 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E. C. 4.

Published weekly. Single copies 10c; Canada 12c. By the year $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, $6.00. Other countries, $7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896 at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

Printed in U. S. A.

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

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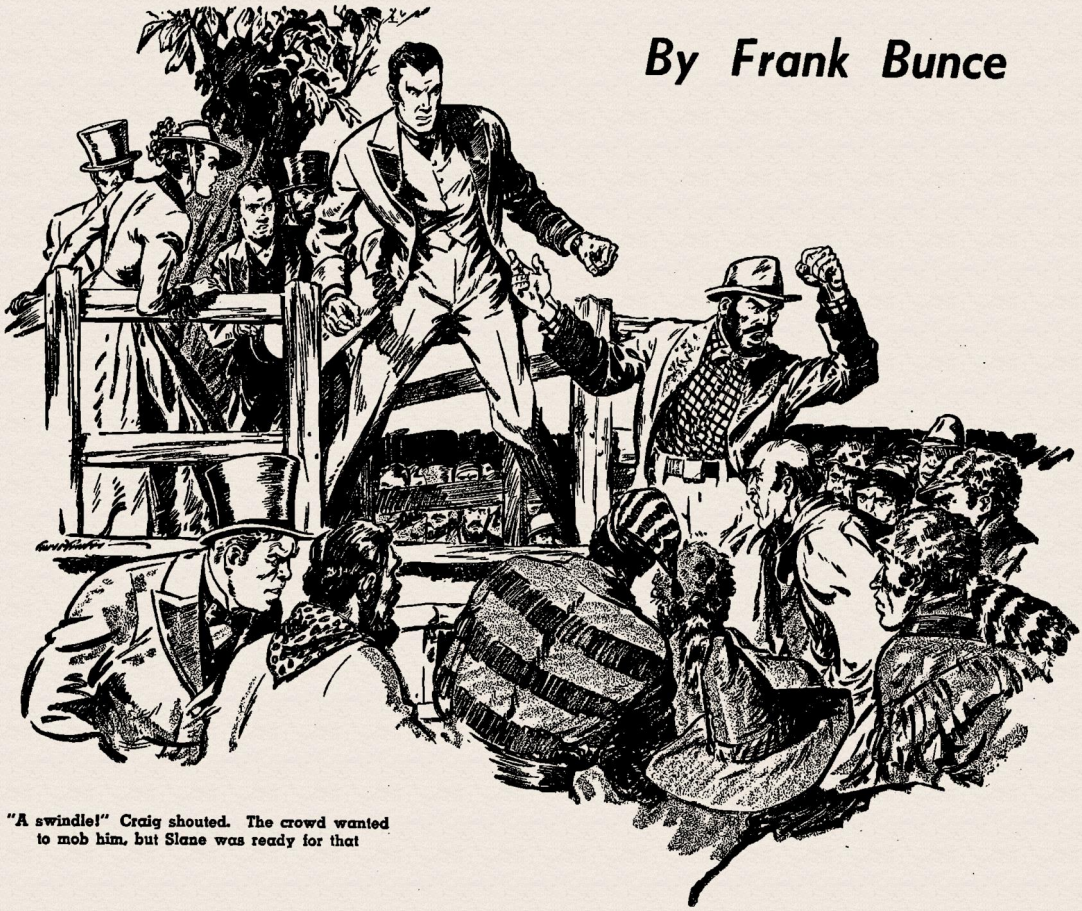


"A swindle!" Craig shouted. The crowd wanted to mob him, but Slane was ready for that

Here are iron men fighting, struggling, sweating to put down iron roads; the turbulent Middle West, thrusting up into the wilderness for its life blood. Beginning a magnificent story of empire building in a young nation—and of a man who would go through anything to build a railroad straight

CHAPTER I

STRANGER BEWARE

TO CRAIG, riding down from the north with nerves worn raw by months of solitude, the turbulence of Lakehead was a harsh surprise. The stub of plank road by which he approached the town ordinarily lay somnolent, neglected; but now it was awake and groaning beneath the sudden burden of scores of wagons that must have come from sawmill outposts remote as Shawano, on the upper Wolf river; days distant by devious corduroys, dubious tote roads.

Craig was bewildered by the spectacle. A month or two earlier, in late April or early May, there would have been excitement enough, when the first timber rafts came up the shore of Lake Winnebago, behind straining grousers. But the lake and rivers were clear of saw logs now; the mills smokeless..

He remained perplexed until the hostler at a livery stable behind the market place offered an explanation.

"Railroad meetin'," the man said. His hand caressed the moist mane of Craig's big-boned sorrel, but the gesture was absent, automatic. The excitement had caught him too.

Craig came erect. A moment before he had been nodding, almost asleep on his feet, but the two words brought him wide awake. "A railroad meeting? . . . What day is this?"

"Saturday. The twentieth o' June, 1855."

THE hostler looked at him curiously, intrigued no more by the incongruity of the question than by the incongruities in the man himself. Craig was tall and

weatherbeaten, with shoulders that would have filled a horse stall—though he was so worn by spare and strenuous living that his cheekbones formed straight, stark ridges over his sunken, bearded cheeks and his gaunt ribs ridged his tight leather shirt.

He wore a skin cap, skin pants and moccasins, and he carried a woodsman's sparse equipment—blanket roll, lean saddlebags, rifle and pistols; but he spoke with the scissored precision of an educated Easterner, and he had an air of accustomed command.

A town man, the hostler decided, or a timber looker. He said. "Don't wonder you ask the day. You been north, where dates don't count. For quite a spell."

"Five months," Craig said.

"Then you ain't heard about this railroad? It's chartered to some company called The People's Railway Corporation, but the big gun's some feller named William Barstow, from Chicago. Mebbe you know him?"

"I've heard of him."

"We all been hearin' o' him, the past few weeks. He's a big man. He's built more railroad than any man this side of the Alleghenies."

"So I've been told," Craig said. He might have added that Barstow was credited not only with building more railroads than any other man in the West, but with wrecking more. . .

He led the sorrel into a stall; and when the hostler had gone for water, Craig took a worn letter out of his pocket. In the light of what he had heard and seen that day, it took on a new significance.

The letter was pencil-scrawled, with a fine disregard for either capitals or punctuation:

dear jeff—you lowdown weesel you to come threw my noo stampin grouns an not look me up—i did not even no you was threw til jackson ward at oshkosh told me you was there in january an headin north—if you had looked me up i could of told you somthin bigg—i hope to gosh this gits to you in time so you kin git back to lakehead no later than june 20 this yr or better earlier—this is plenty bigg so come a whoopin but watch yrself jeff—yrs sincerarily senator mike slane

The body of the letter was clearer now, but at the signature Craig looked with some perplexity. The word "senator" was ferociously underlined. Why? Slane had been his chainman for a season on a reconnaissance of the mountain passes of western Wyoming; and later he had joined a party Craig was leading on a similar mission through Colorado. The man had shown remarkable talents for telling tall tales, playing winning poker, and dealing with marauding Indians; but none, certainly, for statesmanship.

THE hostler came back with two buckets full of water, attended to the horse, then came around the stall to look at Craig's gear.

"You kin leave any o' this stuff with me, you want to," he said. "That rifle you'll have to leave, an' them two pistols. You can't tote guns in town. They's two hotels, the Golden West and the Wisconsin House. The Golden West's likely full up today. You might git in at the Wisconsin House, though it comes high. Wouldn't wonder if it'd come as high as a dollar today."

The hostler was eyeing him sharply, finding it hard to curb a blunt curiosity. "You know anybody around here?"

"One man—Mike Slane. Do you happen to know whether he's in town today?"

"Slane—the Senator? Yeah, he's in town, but where you'd find him—" The hostler paused. He puffed out one cheek with the tip of his tongue, then rolled the tongue around inside his mouth; thinking shrewdly. He said, "Now, look. Ain't no use your chasin' all over town huntin' him. I kin have my boy find him, tell him to look you up at the hotel. What shall I say your name is?"

He swayed back on his heels, a small grin appearing on his narrow mouth; pleased with his own cleverness. But the grin straightened, pinched off abruptly by Craig's response. His eyes shrank, hardened swiftly; he said, in a voice all at once harsh and curt: "Craig! Jeffrey Craig, the railroad man?"

"I've had something to do with railroads—yes." Craig spoke as brusquely, puzzled, stung by the other's sudden change of front. "Is there anything wrong about that?"

The hostler was slow in replying. "Mebbe—mebbe not. Ain't fer me t' say. I run a liv'ry, that's all. I'll take good care your horse and gear, like I would any man's, regardless who he is."

He turned brusquely away. Craig stared after him a moment, in mingled anger and astonishment, then shrugged, picked one of hs saddlebags out of the pile of gear, and walked away down an alley to the street.

BEYOND the market place, that street grew more impressive. Sheds and shanties gave way to stores and shops and saloons with false fronts of figured tin, even of brick and Joliet stone; but these deceived no one. Everybody knew the town was nothing but an experiment yet.

To live, Lakehead had to have something to feed on. It couldn't feed on the land behind it, the prairie settlements south toward Milwaukee and Chicago. Those settlements, still raw from the breaking plow, had all they could do to feed themselves. The new town had to reach northward for nourishment, and that was why railroad talk meant so much to it.

Craig divined this, looking at the people who jostled him in the street and swirled through the tin-walled lobby into the saloon and dining room of the Wisconsin House: red-shirted lumbermen, hunters and trappers in buckskin, and occasional blanketed Indians; merchants and farmers and mill men, in broadcloth and homespun. On the faces of all of them was the same look of flaming expectancy. Craig had seen that look on the faces of crowds before, and heard a name for it. It was *railroad fever.*

A clerk was stooled at a bench in a corner of the hotel lobby. He had a starched, Eastern manner; and he looked scandalized when Craig made known his wants: a room, a bath, a barber. He said reprovingly: "The rate for a room today is five dollars. A bath can be obtained only by arrangement with the porter. Our barber has his shop at the rear of the barrom, but he will hardly care to leave it. He is very busy today."

Craig took out a buckskin pouch, shook out some gold pieces into his hand. He gave one to the porter, laid down another before the clerk, then put down a third and larger coin beside it.

"Would that persuade your barber to leave his shop?" he said.

The clerk blinked. He said, in an altered tone: "I am sure it will. Quite sure, Mr.—"

"Craig. Jeffrey Craig."

Again, the effect of that name was exrtaordinary. The clerk's eyes flew open. He stared, and three men standing nearby stopped talking suddenly to turn on Craig with a look of enmity so instant and naked that it was like a spoken threat.

Craig eased his back against the bench. He said to the three: "Is there any reason why any of you gentlemen don't like my name?" No one answered him. He had spoken quietly, almost pleasantly; but a man with his shoulders had no need to bluster. He went on, as emotionlessly: "Then, don't stare so. It's not polite."

Their eyes fell away. The clerk interposed nervously: "Please, Mr. Craig. No discourtesy was intended, I am sure. It's only—" He made vague, distressed motions with his hands.

"I'm giving you room twenty, rear, left, upstairs—the best we have, except the corner suite, front, which of course is occupied. I'll have a bath brought immediately. If there is anything else—"

"I need clothes. A frock coat, waistcoat, and trousers. I'll not quarrel about cut or fit, except that I want them big enough, and I want them within one hour. If you know of a tailor that could give them to me, I'd pay him well."

He put down another gold piece, and went upstairs. From the landing he turned to look back, and saw the three men and the clerk all looking at him; the latter with a kind of awe, the others with a resentment and suspicion that was the more inexplicable because he was sure he knew no one here except Mike Slane, and that no one else knew him.

CHAPTER II

TAR AND FEATHERS

ROOM twenty, rear left, was a narrow rough-pine cubicle, with a bed, a chair, and one window looking out upon an outside stair landing and a hitching lot. Across an alley, defended by stake fences, were some log and frame houses; and between and beyond them Lake Winnebago gleamed like metal under the strong noon sun.

Southward along the flat shore ran a dirt road that terminated before a big, winged house with a rooted, venerable look, astonishing here, where everything else was new and tentative. By leaning out and looking the other way, Craig could see the squatty, square log courthouse, where a group of men were fashioning a platform, presumably for the speakers at the railroad meeting.

He viewed their activities morosely, wondering whether that project would mean the ruin of his own plans. He wanted to build a railroad, too, and in this country there was only one way for a railroad to go; straight north, into that wilderness he had explored with such fascination that he had almost starved himself to death in the process.

The porter brought a wooden tub, about a fourth full of steaming water. Then he brought two buckets of cold water, and set them down beside it. Craig stripped, tossing each garment out of the window, onto the stair landing.

He poured one bucketful of cold water into the tub, stepped in it, and waited. When his skin had begun to prickle all over, he hoisted the second bucket and turned it upside down over his head and shoulders, then sank down with a sigh of relief into the tepid water; satisfied that he had ridden the room of most of its inevitable fleas.

Afterward, he put on the clean underwear, socks, white, frill-fronted shirt and silk cravat he had packed in his saddle bag through hundreds of miles of wilderness. The barber arrived just as he was finishing. He came no farther than the doorway, from there spinning the gold piece contemptuously in to Craig.

"You keep your damn gold," he said. He was an indubitable Yankee, with a Yankee's independence. "I barber, but my price is two shillin's fer a haircut, one fer a shave. I don't take more, an' I don't play fav'rites. All I come up here for was to see what kind of a man would want to pay fifty dollars for it; an' now"—he looked significantly at Craig's untrousered legs—"I know. He's crazy."

Craig thrust the gold piece back into his hand. "Don't be a fool. I'm neither drunk nor crazy, but it is important that I get a haircut and shave immediately. It's so important that if I had to wait my turn downstairs, it could cost me a great deal mor than fifty dollars."

The barber looked impressed. This was a line of reasoning he could follow. He pocketed the gold piece, said: "Wal, alright. Set here, and I'll go git my tools."

A TAILOR came; a fussy little man who began assuring Craig in a guttural, scandalized voice, that his request was preposterous. Nobody could make him clothes in one hour; no army of tailors could, working like fiends, and still less he, the town's only tailor, with more work ahead—

Craig opened his skin pouch. He let two big gold pieces slide into his palm, and stared down at them thoughtfully. The tailor stared, too, and his expostulations lost their edge of conviction. It was impossible to make clothes in that time, he reiterated, but *ach!* he happened to remember that he had coat and trousers about finished for another patron; a great man, too, with just such shoulders, though more waist, but that could be altered in no time. . .

"I had hoped you might think of something like that," said Craig, and dropped the coins into the other's hand.

The barber returned with shears, razors, hot water. He had about finished with Craig, when Mike Slane appeared; though Craig had a moment's difficulty in recognizing him. The Slane he remembered was an ebullient little man with a cherub's face and an eye like a flaming sword, who made his own skin clothes and wore them until they dropped off.

But now he glittered in a high, gray beaver hat, a frock coat of blue broadcloth tightly stretched across straight, pugnacious shoulders; pink waistcoat, striped trousers and boots that, if not actually shiny, had been shined. He carried gloves and a silver-headed cane, and a glistening red cravat graced his bull neck.

His face, however, was still pink and chubby and hairless as ever, and his one good eye burned with the same joyous battle light. He rushed at Craig, brandishing an alarming ham-like fist, with which he clutched Craig's hand warmly.

"Jeff, you ol' polecat, you! Why, damn you—" he bellowed; and then choked on his own emotion.

Craig said, "Mike! What did you mean by that letter? What are you doing in clothes like that, calling yourself

a senator? And above all, what have you been telling people that they all look at me as if I was something that came out of the ground?"

"I ain't been tellin' 'em nothin'. But I kin name the men that have." Slane turned his flaming eye on the barber, who jumped as if he had been pricked with a knife, and went out hastily. Slane looked grim, suddenly, turning back to Craig:

"JEFF, I got somethin' big for you, like I told you; but it's dang'rous, too. We're up against a bad gang, an' I'm afraid we're too late now to head 'em. I wish you could've come sooner."

"What gang?" Craig asked.

"I'll come to that. But I better take things in order, not to git all snarled up. After I left you in Colorado four, five years ago, I come on up here, to look after a townsite I bought from a land peddler in the Happy Days saloon, in Taos, with most o' my summer's wages. That peddler had said a heap o' fine things about that townsite, but jest one o' them turned out true. He told me it was well watered—an' it was. It laid a mile an' a half due east o' the west shore o' Lake Michigan."

"How long did it take you to trade it off to someone else?" Craig knew his man.

Slane was entirely unabashed. "About two hours. I used it to ante into a poker game, here at The Worser saloon. An' Jeff, that game was rigged."

"That shouldn't have bothered you, Mike."

"It didn't," Slane said promptly. "There was two professional gamblers from Chicago, in this game, teamed up to trim a feller that turned out to be the state senator from this district. It was a fine setup for me. They'd take it from him on their deal, and I'd take it from them on mine.

"I wound up with ninety-two dollars in gold an' silver, seventy-eight hundred dollars in banknotes, an' the senator's hat an' coat an' cravat. The gamblers pulled out then, but the senator was dead game. He offered to bet his senate seat against my winnin's on a one-card draw."

"Wow!" said Craig.

Slane said earnestly: "That draw was on the level, Jeff. What did I want of a senate seat an' a lot o' monkey clothes? It was jest luck that I drawed a king to his jack, an'—"

Craig threw back his head and laughed deeply. "A rigged game for a senate seat! That ought to have been worth watching."

"It wasn't nothin' compared to the game I sat into by takin' that senate seat," Slane assured him. "Down there at Madison, they ain't playin' fer water lots. They're playin' fer this hull state of Wisconsin. They ain't jest after the timber, the stone an' minerals an' the raw land up north. They want the farms people have cleared, the houses they've built, the money they've saved—hell, I guess they'd want the people, too, if there was anything to be made by them."

"They? Who?" said Craig.

"The railroad lobby—the Forty Thieves, some calls 'em. Barstow's the big man among 'em, though he works behind the scenes, in a way o' speakin', from Chicago. Luke Granville, a banker, runs things at Madison. There's others; you'll git acquainted with 'em when you start buildin' your railroad."

"What railroad?" said Craig.

"THE road I got chartered two months ago, an' surveyed an' staked as far north as this county line. It's got a dummy board o' directors, a fake parcel o' capital stock—an' you as pres'dent an' chief engineer!

"It parallels a line chartered to Barstow's gang, startin' at Junction City, on the Milwaukee an' Mississippi, eighty miles south o' here, an' terminatin' at any point on the shore o' Lake Superior, three hundred an' fifty miles north; an' it'll have an equal chance at the biggest land grant in the hist'ry of the Northwest—a million acres from Wisconsin, close to half a million from Michigan—all the even-numbered sections six miles back from the right o' way, on both sides!"

Slane sat down. He unbottoned his waistcoat, leaned back in the chair, his cherubic mouth quirked in a delighted grin seeing Craig's stupefaction. "I tell you, Jeff, I done the slickest job o' vote tradin' on record to git that charter, an' jammered 'er through as a rider to the bill charterin' the lobby's road, fore they knowed what was up. Legislatin' is jest my game."

Craig said slowly: "That explains a few things, Mike. It explains your letter, and why you wanted me back here in such a hurry. But why do people look at me as if I were a horse thief, whenever my name is mentioned?"

"Because to them you are. Horse-thief is mild compared to some o' the names you been called in Milt Wycliffe's paper here, every since your name come out as head of a railroad parallelin' the Lobby's. Milt's another o' Barstow's men, an' he's been tellin' people your line is nothin' but a blackmail scheme, to git a big chunk o' money not to build. People believe him, because he says it in print, an' it's nat'ral to believe what you see in print; an also because he's a brother to the late Judge Davey Wycliffe. You ever heard o' him?"

"No," said Craig.

"HE WAS the best known, best loved man in the Wisconsin territory. He brought the first steam mill here, built the first house that was anythin' more'n a shanty, an' the first railroad north o' Chicago—the M. an' M., joinin' Lake Michigan an the Mississippi. Might be it's as well he didn't live to see what happened to it, after the Lobby got control, or to see his brother hooked up with them.

"You're goin' to be a mighty unpopular man around here, Jeff, until you've showed people that Milt's a liar."

"How can I do that?"

"By buildin' a railroad. That's one argument nobody could answer, not even a crooked editor. It's what you come up here for, ain't it?"

"I'd hoped to. The far West isn't ready for railroads yet. Those routes we surveyed won't be used for another ten or twenty years. And the East—I've been East four years. I couldn't stick it. It's hard to keep your mind on minimums, after you've made stake trails through the Rockies."

Slane nodded sympathetically. "I figgered that. And it would be all the harder fer you to go back to it now, after you've been up north. You saw things there, didn't you, Jeff?"

"I saw incredible things. I saw billions of feet of timber, the finest pine timber in the country, standing untouched, with the whole Middle West at its back crying for lumber to build with.

"I saw granite, and ore beds, and rich bottom lands, all

standing neglected, with the world begging for granite and iron lands to settle. I could see my railroad splitting that wilderness like a wedge.

"But I didn't look to see it paralleling another road, Mike. Two roads would strangle each other."

"There won't be two," Slane said positively. "There won't be even one, unless you build it. Barstow ain't out to build no railroad, Jeff. You'll see for yourself what he's after, at the meetin' this afternoon. But listen, Jeff. Don't make a move, don't say a word, no matter how mad you git."

"Why should I get mad?" Craig said.

"You will," said Slane. "You're a Bostonian; you got to take the world on your shoulders. But you got to keep mum this afternoon. People are set against you already, an' it wouldn't take much to get them ugly enough to give you a coat o' tar and feather's. Or worse. A railroad is a life an' death matter to these people, Jeff. An' they think you're out to bleed their road to death."

CHAPTER III

TO BIND A NATION

THE tailor returned. While he labored with fitting trousers and frockcoat to Craig's narrow waist and magnificent shoulders, Slane's impatience mounted; and as soon as the man was gone, he asked anxiously: "Wal, how about it, Jeff? You gonna build that road?"

Craig took time to reply. "There are a couple of things I'd have to know first, Mike. About yourself. You're not the man I came here expecting to meet. You've changed."

"How?" said Slane. His one good eye was very intent.

"That's what I want to find out. It's important. I'd like to know, first, why you picked me to build this road; and second, what you plan to get out of it for yourself."

"I kin answer that first one by tellin' you somethin' about yourself," said Slane. He was slow, too, in replying. "I remember the first time I ever saw you, Jeff, on that survey with Dodge, in Wyoming. You come fresh from college an' the East, nuthin' but a big, ganglin' kid. Eighteen, nineteen mebbe—"

"Twenty," said Craig.

"Twenty. Not dry behind the ears yet. I took one look at you an' said to myself you wouldn't last two days. One o' these prissy boys, I said to myself, that'd bawl like a baby when the buffalo flies an' mosquitos got workin' on you, an' faint the first time we run into Injuns or rattlesnake country. But I was wrong. You took hell fer a while, but you stuck, an' you didn't do no squallin'.

"You changed some, too. You spread out in the right places an' pinched in in other places, an' you grew a fist that could flatten a mule. But you never got over bein' prissy."

Craig's weatherbeaten cheeks took on a darker hue. "I don't like that word."

"Whether you like it or not, it's what you are. When water was scarce, I've saw you get along on a cup a day, ten or twelve days in a row; but the minute you get back where it is, you got to have barrels of it. You wash in it. You wash your hull hide, every day."

"That's prissy?"

"That's prissy. Clothes, too. Look at yourself. You're wearin' pants an' a coat that was made fer one man, a waistcoat that was made fer another, an' a shirt an' cravat that's been carried around fer months in a saddlebag, but there you stand lookin' like a grand duke. It's all in the way you hold your haid an' handle your feet an' hands. All the tailors in Noo York an' Europe couldn't make me look like that."

"Are you all through?" Craig asked.

"I AIN'T even started yet. What I was gettin' around to sayin' was that you change outside, some, but there's somethin' inside o' you that won't change fer hell.

"I had hopes fer you a while in Colorado. You pulled some real smart tricks, beatin' Donlon's survey to Skytrail pass, an' that made me think mebbe you was acquirin' some hoss-sense; but then, down at Taos, I seen you turn a town man upside down an' swab out one o' Jerry Peters' big brass spittoons with 'im, because he offered you money to bend your location around a little closer to his townsite.

"I ast you, then, why it was you'd cut corners one time, but not the other, an' I remember jest what you said. You said you might bend a code o' morals now an' again, but you'd never bend up a railroad."

"Any engineer would say the same," Craig said.

"Mebbe. But there's the answer to your first question. I want to see a railroad built here, an' the only man can build it is the one that will build straight, even if he's got to walk a little crooked to do it. Now your second question I kin answer without takin' so long. I ain't got a single share o' stock in this road. I ain't never goin' to have. I ain't never put a penny into it, an' I ain't never goin' to take a penny out. Does that satisfy you?"

"Yes," said Craig. "Though I don't understand, Mike. You could be making plenty on the project, and still be staying within the law."

Slane grinned, but the grin was sheepish, almost rueful. "I don't understand it myself. Mebbe it's because I've seen so many skunks lately, makin' plenty but stayin' within the law, that it's made me kind of sick. You know me, Jeff. I'm sharp as the next man. But this is a little different."

His grin was gone. He said earnestly: "Look, Jeff, I been doin' a little travelin' around this state myself, an' I've seen something, too. Not jest what's here, but what could be. It could be a fine place for decent folks to live an' raise families in; or it could be jest somethin' fer men like Barstow an' his Forty Thieves to strip an' plunder. I figgered I'd throw in with the decent folks, for once."

"I see," said Craig; and he stared at the other wonderingly, thinking that for all their old intimacy, he had never really known the man before. This was the voice of the West; that West which had once so confused Craig with its abrupt contradictions. He had seen lawless towns overnight become orderly and law-abiding, and he had been astounded. But now he thought he understood it better.

SLANE grew embarrassed under his gaze. He demanded truculently: "Wal. What're you gawpin' at?"

"I was thinking of something," Craig said. "A while back, a man was telling me about an internal improvements convention held in Chicago a few years ago. There was a glittering list of speakers, including the golden-voiced David Dudley Field, along with a few nonentities,

including some man I'd never heard of from Illinois.

"He was a big, raw-boned Western clown, this man. He wore a thin, short-waisted swallow-tailed coat and pantaloons that fell short of his ankles, and brogans and thick woolen socks. He was homely and tousled, and he had a thin, high voice, and huge hands that seemed too heavy for any very impressive gestures. But he had something new to say.

"All the speakers before him had said the country needed a railroad to the Pacific, so that the tea and spices of the Orient could be shipped straight across America to the markets of Europe. Somebody had said that once, and it had sounded well, and none of them had bothered to think any further.

"None but this fellow from Illinois. He didn't seem to think the traffic in tea and spices would amount to so much. He thought railroads had a bigger function. He thought they meant life or death to the nation; that they would shrink it and bind it together so tightly that no one and nothing would ever be able to pull it apart.

"He had been allotted just ten minutes, and he used no more, but no man that heard him forgot what he said. That man must have been something like you, Mike. He'd looked at the country, and seen it for what it was, and for what it could be. And it had done something wonderful to him."

"What was his name?" Slane asked.

"I forget. A. Lincoln, I think—something like that—of Springfield. Some small-town nobody."

"Lincoln!" said Slane. "Abe Lincoln, of Springfield, Illinois? Say, what in the hell are you talkin' about? I ain't man enough to shine his boots!"

"That right?" said Craig. "Well, I wouldn't know. I never heard of him. How about something to eat, downstairs?"

CHAPTER IV

EYES ON MR. BIG

THE hotel dining room was crowded, though its patrons probably were less sincere than those of the barroom, across the lobby. Most had come in hoping for a glimpse of the great Barstow, for whom a big table, spread with snowy linen and real silverware, had been reserved.

The smaller table not far away, at which Craig and Slane sat down, was spread with a coarser cloth and ware of inferior metal, but even so, Slane was appalled at the sight of so many knives, forks, and spoons. His solution of the problem they presented, however, was brilliant. He ordered a bottle of whiskey.

Craig ordered dinner; and while they waited, Slane pointed out some of the more prominent local figures: mill owners, town men, merchants, and one vast, lion-headed man in calked boots and a flannel shirt, whom he identified as Daniel Wells, the biggest timber operator in the state.

"He'll be our first millionaire ten, fifteen years from now. Either that, or flat broke," he predicted.

Craig nodded absently. He was watching a girl who stood in the lobby doorway, evidently girding herself for an adventure into the dining room. She was alone, and she must have known it was unusual, if not downright improper, for any woman to enter a public place alone; and then, she was probably thinking of all the dangers and difficulties of managing her hoop skirt, that must have been a good yard and a half across at the bottom, in such a crowded place.

She yearned to flee, she burned to stay; but abruptly making her decision, she came in, steering toward a vacant chair at the table occupied by Craig and Slane. Miraculous good fortune went with her; she ran the gauntlet of chairs and tables and staring humanity unscathed, plumping herself down with the same desperate abruptness with which she had gotten under way.

Craig had risen hastily, at her approach. Slane looked up at him with some surprise.

"Where you goin'?" he asked; then saw the girl, and acknowledged her presence in his own way. He took off his hat.

"Howdy, ma'am," he said.

CRAIG knew then that his companion was one of those fabulous men entirely devoid of fear; for if there had been any fear in him, it would have betrayed itself then.

Slane was a frontier man, which meant that he had spent nine tenths of his adult life in womanless wildernesses, and most of the other tenth in womanless saloons. It was likely that not in twenty years had he been so close to anyone feminine as to this girl now; and to make matters worse, she was regarding him with a truculent defiance that would have wilted many a man of wider experience.

But he stared back at her unwaveringly, the habitual ferocity of his eye giving place to a look of frank, pleased interest. He looked at the short, brown side curls and the fat little front curls escaping from under her flat, beribboned hat with a delight and wonder that increased as it dwelt on the pale, perfect oval of her face, with its pert, faintly freckled nose and disdainful blue eyes and dimpled, wilful chin.

He went on to examine her short red jacket, the billowy marvel of her skirts; and finally, with a climax of interest and astonishment, her red-tasseled, green leather slippers.

"Sure purty!" he breathed.

"Sir?" said the girl. Her voice matched her eyes; it was deadly. But Slane was unperturbed:

"Them shoes. They're purty." He appealed to Craig. "Look at 'em. Ain't much bigger'n my big toe. What size you wear, ma'am?"

She tried to kill him with a glance, but failing, said: "Twos—if you must know."

"Twos! Think o' that," he marvelled. He eyed the area the shoes had occupied wistfully, surprised to find them gone, withdrawn under her skirts, while a new curiosity took shape in him. "I'd sure like to see you with 'em off, ma'am. I'd like to see what kind o' feet they'd be, that would go into size twos."

"I have no intention of taking off my shoes," the girl said.

A waiter, in shirt sleeves, with a towel over his arm, brought Slane's whiskey, Craig's dinner. The girl ordered tea. Slane, meantime, sat eyeing her in some perplexity, studying what he should say next.

It was an axiom of conduct with him that a man ought to act friendly, i. e., that he ought to talk to people, but it was becoming apparent to him that talking to a woman was not quite like talking to a man.

A man, now, might have been offered a nip at the bottle —something to take the damn tea taste out of his mouth would have been a pleasant way of putting it. But probably that wouldn't do, with this girl.

Slane was no monster; he had had a mother, female aunts, cousins, neighbors and so on, and under the rust of two decades, certain recollections were stirring themselves. Ladies, he was remembering, did not drink hard liquor, chew tobacco, get into saloon fights, hunt, play poker, or take any interest in politics; which meant, in his view, that they did nothing of consequence, and so what in tarnation would a man talk about, to them?

He pondered the problem a while, and then a happy thought came to him. He kicked Craig in the leg meaningly, and then began trying to make him understand in pantomime that he ought to try his hand with her.

The pantomime was blatant and violent. He kept jerking a thumb, stiff and thick as a bowie knife, at the girl, meanwhile opening and closing his mouth in extraordinary fashion. The girl began to look alarmed, and Craig spoke quickly, to reassure her:

"Please don't be frightened. That's only my friend, Mr. Slane's way of asking me to intervene for him because he can think of nothing more to say. And that, incidentally, is the biggest compliment to you that I can conceive of."

HE STOPPED there, and gave attention to his dinner. The girl fought valiantly against her aroused curiosity, but lost, and said: "A compliment? Why?"

"Because I've seen Mike Slane confronted with some of the most awful wonders of creation. I've been with him on the north bank of the Grand Canyon; we've seen a circle rainbow, watched sunrises from the rooftops of the Rockies. But I've never seen him stricken speechless before."

Slane said "Gawd-awmighty!" softly, in fervent admiration. The girl flushed warmly, much pleased; but she said dubiously: "Is that such a compliment? Or does it mean I'm something awful too?"

Craig glanced up at her quickly in surprised appreciation of a mental agility he had not expected. "Awful, perhaps, though not in the most flattering sense of the word. Overwhelming might be a better word for it. You were being rather difficult, you know."

"Because I wouldn't take off my shoes?"

"No," said Craig. "I'm backward about taking off my shoes at table, myself. But you did look a bit unfriendly. Starched."

"I didn't mean to," she assured him. "Really, I was quite well brought up, though you'd never think it. I'm not supposed to be here at all. My uncle positively forbade it."

Craig looked at that dimpled, wilful chin. "But you came anyhow, to show your independence?"

"I came to see Mr. Barstow. I've heard so much about him that I just had to see him close up. Of course I could see him at the meeting this afternoon, but that wouldn't be the same."

Slane had been listening with some impatience. He felt that the conversation had fallen away from its original high level; and now he saw a chance to put in an intelligent word:

"Who is your uncle, ma'am?"

"Milton Wycliffe. I'm Ann Wycliffe." She smiled at him, tolerant of him now, then looked at Craig. "Perhaps you know him? Or knew my father?"

"No. I'm a stranger here," he said. She waited for him to go on; but at this point there was an interruption.

A MAN had appeared in the lobby doorway, announced by a hush that ran along the tables. Four or five others were with him, but no one noticed them.

He was a big man, six feet tall or more, with powerful shoulders and a waist so lean that his waistcoat fitted it flatly, without a bulge. His face was remarkable for its clear pallor, the more striking in contrast with his handsome black mustache and thick black hair, worn long and curling over his ears and at the back of a broad, muscular neck.

His forehead was wide and high, though slightly recessive; he had the chin of a conqueror, and if there was a defect anywhere it was in the thin, vague mouth, or the eyes which, though large and bold, had a curious opacity, like bits of polished granite.

Mike Slane was watching the girl, chuckling shrewdly as he saw how her eyes grew wide and bright, resting on the new arrival, following him as he and his companions were ushered to the reserved table.

"Yuh. That's him. Barstow," he said.

"Which one?" she asked; then added quickly: "No, don't tell him. Let me guess. I'm sure to be disappointed. No famous man—it can't be that plump little fellow with the apple cheeks and the spade beard?"

"No, ma'am. That's Luke Granville, the banker."

"Don't tell me it's the tall, scrawny one, with no hair to speak of? Or the sinister, dark-skinned man, with the low, leering look?"

Her voice was low, but she spoke quickly, with young eagerness; and her cheeks were slightly flushed.

"No'm," said Slane. "The one's Steve Mitchell, an engineer; the other's Black Jack Gore, Barstow's bodyguard. An' to save you useless questions, it ain't the fussy lookin' runt with the peaked face an' the hangdog air, either."

"I know that," she said, very coldly. "That's my uncle." She took a breath, and her flush deepened. "There's only one left. So it must be he."

She finished her tea, began preparing to leave. Slane looked at her hopefully: "What's the matter, ma'am? Ain't disappointed, are you?"

"Oh, no," she said. "It's only that I don't want my uncle to see me. I've just thought of something. I'm going to ask him to invite Mr. Barstow up for dinner tonight." But she lingered, fussing with her bag, meantime looking at Craig covertly from under lowered lashes.

"Did you come here for the railroad meeting?" she asked him.

"Yes," he said.

He met her eyes.

"You look like somebody who would be interested in railroads," she said, somewhat ambiguously. "Why don't you come out to dinner tonight, too? You could talk to my uncle and Mr. Barstow, and find out all about the railroad. I live in that house out at the end of the lake road. Anybody can show you where it is."

She got up and went out. Craig remained standing, looking inquiringly at Slane, who took a deep draught from his bottle, then rose too, thriftily recorking the bottle and puting it into a tail pocket of his frock coat. He looked at Craig commiseratively.

"It's a durn shame, Jeff, your name ain't John Smith or Joe Jones, so you could go down there an' talk to that girl's uncle an' Mr. Barstow—an' mebbe git in a word with her, too. She's a right sweet filly, once you git her nose down."

CHAPTER V

SWINDLE!

OUTSIDE, they found that the thick flow of horse and foot traffic had taken on direction, now, pointing toward the courthouse square; and a crowd was growing around the speakers' platform.

Craig and Slane attached themselves to its outskirts, but in a few minutes they were completely hemmed in; and by two o'clock, when the first speaker appeared, the audience overflowed the square and filled all the wagons and buggies standing in the street.

The speaker—the mayor of Lakehead—was tedious, and so was the mayor of Fond du Lac, who followed him. The crowd was growing restive when the chubby, apple-cheeked Granville arrived, but they quieted the moment he arose to speak. Something in his manner stirred their apprehension.

He said, in a strong, but troubled voice: "My friends, I have bad news for you. Mr. Barstow will not address you today. And that isn't all. I am afraid there isn't going to be any railroad."

He went on, speaking into a stricken stillness: "As you all know, railroads cost money. Twenty-five to fifty thousand dollars a mile; some eight or ten millions, minimum, for the road we contemplate. Not all this had to be raised at once, of course; and of the sum immediately necessary, I and a few friends were prepared to subscribe a part. The rest had to be raised elsewhere.

"A month ago Mr. Barstow went east for this purpose, and returned satisfied that he had the backing of one of the biggest banking institutions in the country. But less than an hour ago, he received a wire, by express from Fond du Lac, that has altered everything."

The Lakehead mayor interposed anxiously: "You mean they turned him down—won't give him any money?"

"No," said Granville. "They'll let him have money—every dollar necessary for the construction of the road. But there's the catch. It's all or nothing with them. They won't permit anyone else to put a penny into it."

There was a moment of puzzled silence, while his audience struggled to comprehend this. Then the mayor asked: "You mean they want a monopoly on it?"

"That's it exactly—a monopoly! They want to own it all—every rail, every sleeper, every acre of that land grant: one million, five hundred thousand acres of the finest timber, farming, and mineral land in the nation today. Monopoly—why, they'd have a monopoly on most of our state! They'd own it, own us—choke the life out of us with their fat, rapacious, *Eastern* hands!"

SOME words have a magic of connotation far exceeding their literal meanings, and of none was this ever truer than of two the speaker used with telling emphasis: "monopoly", a fighting word in the West, ever since the day of Jackson; "Eastern" that stood for everything effete, predatory, treacherous.

The crowd began an ominous mutter; someone shouted: "He ain't takin' their money, is he? Barstow ain't sellin' us out to them?"

Granville answered, with a touch of reproach: "Sir, your question is almost insulting. I can only ascribe it to a complete ignorance of the character of my friend, Bill Barstow. Why do you suppose he isn't here now? It is because he couldn't bear to tell you that he will have to withdraw the great gift he has held out to you; it most emphatically is not the absence due to guilt. Bill Barstow never sells out!"

There was a quick, emphatic cheer, at this. Craig looked at Slane, puzzled by the direction the speaker was taking, and was astonished to see his companion's one good eye blazing, his seraphic face dark with anger.

"There it comes. Jest like I figgered it!" he muttered.

"What?" said Craig.

"You'll see." Slane looked at him anxiously. "Remember, Jeff, don't lose your temper; don't try to interfere. One peep outa you, an' I hate to think what might happen. Your name alone is enough to set this crowd crazy."

Somebody was saying, from out of the crowd: "Well, what we gonna do? Ain't there any way we kin git a railroad?"

"There is one way, if we have nerve enough," Granville answered. "We can build it ourselves." He waited for that audacious suggestion to take hold upon his auditors, then went on: "I know we haven't much money, any of us. I haven't, as fortunes go in richer communities, and I suppose I have more than most. But though we lack money, we have things. Farms, homes, mills, businesses—we're rich in those."

"What good are they? We can't build a railroad of them," someone argued.

"Yes, we can, if we want to. We're Western people, and there's nothing in the world we can't do." His voice quickened a little; for the first time he made a gesture, and then for the first time Craig realized what a master orator he was.

He put his hands straight out, palms up, clenching the fingers very slowly; with one gesture expressing a philosophy. "We'll show these Eastern money hogs something about finance they never dreamed of. We'll build a railroad from farms and homes and timber holdings. We'll put them in just as we put in fill and sleepers; but when we're through, we'll take them all out again, not only as good as they were before, but better—worth ten times what they were when we pledged them."

He spoke, now, into an utter, absorbed silence: "You ask how that can be done. To you it may seem a miracle, and so it is—but a logical miracle of the science of finance. We mortgage our property for stock in the road, hypothecating the mortgages against credit for labor and materials, retiring them with the dividends we'll begin to receive as soon as the first section is completed.

"In three or four years we'll have a railroad, we'll have it paid for, and we'll still have our property, with its values substantially enhanced by the road we've built. Now who'll be the first to volunteer his property on those terms?"

SLANE'S breath came outward sharply, in a snort of rage. And now Craig saw the point. Barstow's Lobby wanted people's homes and farms and businesses—a whole state; and what better way could be devised to secure it than to have it mortgaged to themselves, with themselves in control of the funds realized from the mortgages?

Even in spite of the fury this aroused in Craig, he could not resist a reluctant admiration for the audacity of the scheme, the beautiful skill with which it had been presented. That master technician on the speakers' platform had played on every emotion of his auditors: their fears,

their prejudices, their vanities and love of gambling and adventure.

And the appeal was the more effective because Granville, instead of Barstow, was making it. Kept offstage, that fine figure of a man towered even larger than on; an incorruptible champion of the West against Eastern greed.

Yet, waiting through the silence that followed, Craig began to think the performance fell short of perfection in one important detail. There should have been someone in the crowd coached to stampede them into action, by the force of example. Now everyone was waiting for someone else to volunteer first. Granville saw the danger, and began exhorting them again:

"Come, friends! Who'll be the first to speak? Who'll come right up here and take my hand, and pledge his cooperation to this railroad?"

No one answered, or moved, and he began to get alarmed: "Friends! You've nothing to lose. You run no risk of foreclosure. Your mortgages will only be hypothecated, not sold. You have my word for that."

In his anxiety, for the first time he struck a false note. To speak of foreclosure, hypothecation—cold legal terms—to a crowd that had been won on an appeal to their emotions was a mistake; to tell these frontier people, accustomed to taking risks every hour of their lives, that they risked nothing, was an even greater.

Men shifted position uneasily, looking at each other dubiously now; made wary somehow—why they did not know.

But then, at just the moment that it seemed he had failed, Granville got what he had to have. A girl's voice, astonishingly strong and clear, said, from somewhere in the crowd:

"Mr. Granville, I'll be the first, since no one else will!" And a moment later, Craig saw Ann Wycliffe approaching the platform along a living lane quickly opened for her, and mounting it, to take the hand Granville stretched down to her. She was painfully flushed and trembling visibly; but her chin was high, her voice firm:

"I have some property. The house my father left me; a mill and farm. I'll mortgage it all for the railroad."

NOTHING, no one else could have been so affecting. It was not alone that she was a girl, young, and appealing, and brave. She stood for something beyond that: the memory of her dead father, the best loved man in the Wisconsin territory, and a pioneer railroad builder.

The response she evoked was immediate and enormous. In a moment a hundred voices were echoing hers, hundreds of men were moving toward the platform.

Granville saw his opportunity and seized it. "Wait!" he cried. "Stay where you are, everyone. We can make this unanimous, without fuss and formality. All those in agreement with Miss Wycliffe say 'Aye!'"

He was answered by a roar that welled up from the remotest limits of the crowd. Smiling, he spread his arms, said, almost facetiously:

"Opposed?"

Craig shouted, "No!"

The moment the girl had spoken, Slane, scenting danger, had put a restraining hand upon his arm. But Craig spoke without thinking, and once having committed himself, he had to go on. Shaking off his companion, he started to push forward to the platform.

The crowd made way for him but stared with shocked, incredulous eyes. Granville came to the platform steps as if to bar his way by force, but withdrew before his implacable advance. He said, in a shaking voice:

"What are you doing up here?"

Craig ignored him, turning to face the crowd. Someone in it spoke his name, tensely, like a curse; and Granville, hearing it, made a startled gesture, then grew still. Dangerously still. But the impulse that had brought Craig there was too urgent to permit him caution.

He said: "I want to stop this swindle—the foulest fraud I've ever seen attempted."

CHAPTER VI

MEET TOM DURSTINE

HIS words bred an abrupt, shocked silence in the crowd. Instinctively, in throwing out that flaming challenge, he had hit upon the one way to fix their attention.

But once won, their attention had to be held by careful, reasoned argument. He supported an unpopular negative, that permitted no appeal to the emotions; and he was addressing men trained to logical thinking—thinking about immediate, concrete problems in their town meetings, about abstractions in the meetings of their settlement literary societies and debating clubs. He resumed, more quietly:

"A great many words have been spoken here today. Some—particularly those of Mr. Granville—have been very pretty, moving words. But don't you think it's time now to pause and examine them?"

Behind him, Granville had stooped to speak to a pair of men, who had approached the platform. Immediately the two set up a clamor: one, the dark-skinned, malevolent looking Black Jack Gore, shouting raucously up at Craig, "Who are you?"; the other, the cadaverous Mitchell, yelling "What's your name?" But he ignored them, going on calmly:

"It is true that this country needs a railroad. No one disputes that. It is also true that monopolies are often undesirable, sometimes dangerous. But the most vicious monopolists I can think of are those who would monopolize your lands, your homes, your businesses and money by just such a device as was proposed here today, meantime seeking to confuse you by attributing monopolistic aims to others—the proverbial thief shouting 'Stop, thief!'

"You've been told of all the benefits you would derive from a railroad you would finance yourselves with mortgages on your property; and there is a measure of truth in that, too. You would benefit, if the mortgage fund were intelligently and honestly administered, the railroad honestly and speedily built; in other words, if the men to whom you entrusted the mortgages and the building of the road were competent and honest men.

"But if they weren't you'd lose everything you have, and get nothing back. You'd be homeless, destitute—the victims of the most despicable wholesale swindle ever devised.

"For your own protection, for the protection of your families, find out something about these men who are asking for your money and your property. Don't take anyone's word for them; don't take the word of any one for any of the others, as you've been asked to do today. Investigate for yourselves."

He had struck home, decisively. He saw that in the faces upturned to him. Doubt stood strongly in them all, and he stopped speaking, confident that he had made his point. Most heartening was the look he surprised on the face of Ann Wycliffe, still standing on the platform to his left. She had a crestfallen air; convinced now that she might have been too impetuous.

GRANVILLE came forward. He had recovered his urbanity; he bowed to Craig, said courteously: "Are you all through, sir?"

Craig nodded; he bowed again. "Thank you, sir. To set your mind at rest, I hasten to assure you that the investigation you suggest has already been made by Mr. Milton Wycliffe, the editor of the local newspaper, and his findings printed prominently in its pages."

He appealed to his audience. "You read that paper. You must have seen the article I refer to, many of you."

"That's right. I seen it myself," someone responded, from out of the crowd, and a number of others spoke up affirmatively. The doubt that had lain so heavily upon them a moment before began magically to clear.

Granville proceeded to press his point: "Everyone connected with this project—Bill Barstow, myself, all the other directors and officers—have submitted cheerfully to the test of pitiless publicity, and come through unscathed.

"But now, sir—" he swung to Craig—"I suggest that you do the same. To begin with, you might tell us your name." Craig did not answer, and he urged: "Come now —your name. It can't be that you are ashamed of it!"

From the foot of the platform steps, Mitchell bawled suddenly: "It's Jeffrey Craig!" The words dropped like a stone into the taut hush that had followed Granville's challenge; and as if they had been a signal, Gore sprang up onto the steps.

"Craig! That skunk! He oughta be lynched!" he cried; and with a sweeping gesture beckoned the crowd to follow him.

It was a shrewd, well-timed effort to ignite the passions of the people; but Mike Slane spoiled it. From behind, he swung a fist to a point just back of Gore's ear, and the man pitched forward and sidewise, plunging off the steps.

Mitchell lunged at Slane, but doubled in agony as that veteran practitioner of the craft of rough-and-tumble met him with a lowered head to the midsection; collapsed as Slane brought the head upward stunningly to the point of his chin.

Gore had risen and whipped a pistol from his pocket; but Craig, from the platform's edge, kicked it out of his hand, and when he stooped to recover it, Slane kicked him neatly in the jaw. This time, he stayed down.

Craig swung around to Granville, but the man was standing stock still, a peculiar, rigid look on his bloodless face—literally paralyzed with terror. The crowd, too, was motionless. So swiftly decisive had been that fight that few of them knew what had happened.

But there was danger. Craig sensed it, hearing his name passed back, in an angry mutter, like a curse, to the outermost limits of the crowd; and he spoke quickly:

"That's right. My name is Jeffrey Craig. You've been told lies about me; but I'm not going to debate that point now. I wouldn't get a fair hearing, under the circumstances. I'm leaving and I don't want anyone to try to stop me."

He started for the steps. To reach them, he had to pass Ann Wycliffe, and she swept her skirts away, with a swift gesture of revulsion. Slane joined him at the foot of the steps. He had lost his hat, and every red hair on his head bristled pugnaciously upright.

Together they walked on through the crowd, which slowly parted before their deliberate but resolute advance, and they reached the comparative safety of the street without a hand's having been laid upon them.

A man had followed them closely, all the way. He was lean, quite tall, with the long, thin nose, alert gray eyes, and long, narrow jaw of the typical Yankee; and he wore the sober Sunday-best homespun of a settler dressed for town. He saw Craig turn to look at him, and said gruffly: "Don't worry about me. I ain't goin' to bother you. I jest come along to make sure nobody else did."

"Thank you," Craig said.

"Don't thank me." The man spoke roughly. "I ain't no friend o' yours. But I do believe everybody oughta be allowed to have his say—even to the stinkin'est skunk alive."

He turned back into the crowd, and Craig and Slane went on down the wooden main street, that had a ghostly emptiness, to the hotel.

SLANE took off his frock coat, and brushed and smoothed it. He looked at a rent under one arm, avoiding Craig's eyes as he said: "Wal. What you aimin' to do now, Jeff?"

"I'll sleep a few hours, then go to the stage office and get a ticket for Milwaukee. From there I'm going East."

"To stay?" said Slane, still looking at his coat.

"No. To raise what capital I can for a railroad."

"You won't git much. Not for a Wisconsin railroad." Slane lifted his head. His eye had lost its gleam; it looked dulled, discouraged. "Listen, Jeff. I done everything all wrong. I shouldn't have got you that charter, I shouldn't have put you up as head of the company. You couldn't build a railroad here now; nobody could, against this setup. They'll have all the money, you'll have nothin' but ten thousand enemies."

"I'd have friends. I'd have that man that followed us out, to see that no one bothered us, and all the others like him. There quite a lot of such people, Mike."

"That feller!" Slane laughed scornfully. "He's no friend o' yours. To him you're nuthin' but a skunk. He believes every lie he's read or been told."

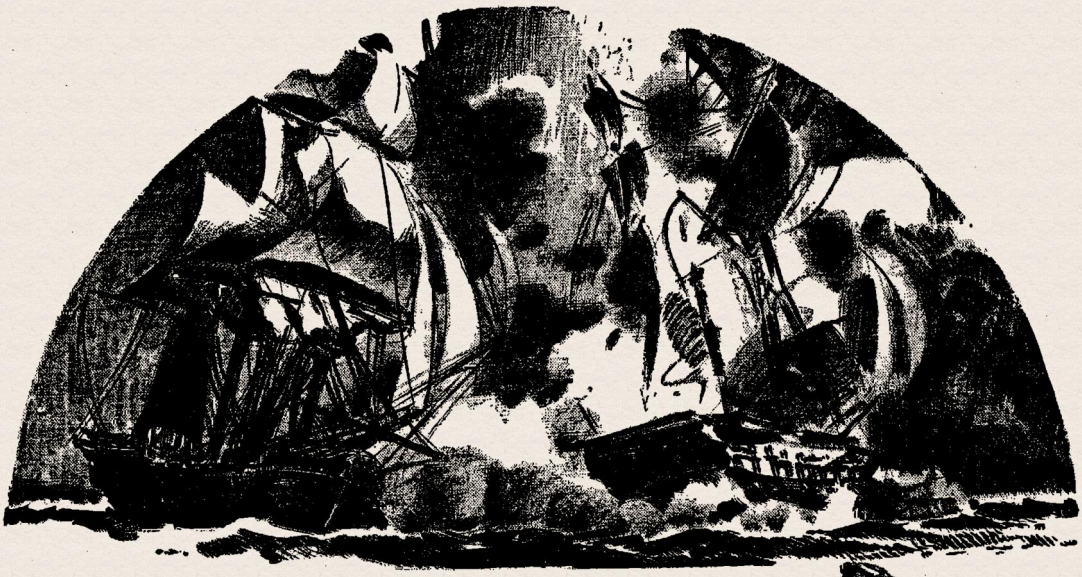
"Maybe. But the important thing is that, even so, he was ready to fight for my right to be heard. And as long as there are men like that in this country Barstow's kind will never own it. They do believe falsehoods they hear or read, sometimes; but nothing they read or hear will ever change their minds about the fundamentals—the Bill of Rights. And that's good enough for me."

"Prissy! Makin' mountains outa molehills," Slane grumbled. But his eye had brightened.

"Well, a'right. Long as you insist on stickin' your head in a noose, I may's well git you acquainted with another feller that's already in it. I mean Tom Durstine, a young feller I hired to survey a right o' way. I expect him back in town tonight. But maybe you won't be up by then? You don't look as if you'd slept for a week."

"I haven't. But I'll be up," Craig assured him, and went upstairs.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Independence

By R. W. Daly

Author of "A Soldier Too Long," "Crowd Sail," etc.

Give a man a ship he can sail, and make him a captain; give a man a tub to fight with—and make him a hero

CAPTAIN PERRY HUNTLEY, R. N., was not a profane man, and that lent emphasis to his words when he first saw his new ship, anchored in the road of Spithead. "Hellsfire!" he roared at his first lieutenant. "Is that the *Clytemnestra?*"

Although fully a head taller than his commander, and a powerful, slope-shouldered Cornishman, Lieutenant Sims was so impressed by Huntley's vehemence, he meekly acknowledged that the captain was correctly informed. He also felt obliged to defend the *Clytemnestra.* "She's a well-found ship, sir," he protested. "Very seaworthy."

"I'd like to lay my hands on the idiot who found her!" Huntley growled angrily, ignoring Sims' plea for tolerance.

The two officers stepped into a waiting longboat. As the oarsmen dragged them closer to the ship, Huntley was hard-pressed to restrain his feelings in front of members of his crew. So this was why he had had his frigate blasted from under him! This was the reward of the Admiralty for his years of service on convoy. "Huntley," the Lords had said, "we're going to give you a ship of the line. You deserve it."

As Huntley looked at the clumsy hulk of the converted East Indiaman, he wondered if the Lords had intended to insult him. An East Indiaman! A huge, slow, flimsy-wooded, gawky East Indiaman! Not even cutting off her high poop could conceal her original design. He blamed his wife's goading for this misfortune.

His friends had warned him when he married her that a rich girl couldn't be satisfied with his small fortune and salary as a captain in the Royal Navy, but he, of course, had known better, because he had honestly told her the limit of his income and asked if she could live within it.

When she accepted on what he thought were his terms, he was the happiest man in England—until he learned that she expected great things of him, and intended to use her family's influence to advance his career. He had stopped that, but he couldn't stop her ambitious nagging. He was a good frigate commander, and knew it. When the chance came to get a ship of the line, he had wanted to refuse, but his wife's desire for prestige and her pretty tears had scuttled his better judgment; there'd be more money, she said.

And this was what he got.

"What's her speed?" he asked Sims.

"I don't know, sir," Sims replied truthfully. "She's had her bottom coppered, though." He hoped that Huntley wouldn't ask what the *Clytemnestra* had been capable of making before she had been scraped and reconditioned for service in the Royal Navy. It was a pity that the Admiralty had been forced to buy her, but the years of blockading Napoleon meant wear and tear on the regular ships of the line and had obliged the Admiralty to seize whatever could be converted into a fighting craft. "She'll be comfortable to live in, sir," he suggested.

"No doubt," Huntley retorted, and was silent. He wasn't thinking of comfort; all he wanted was to serve England as his forebears had done; not with hope of reward or glory, but because there was a job to be done, and done well.

It was a feeling that he had unsuccessfully tried to communicate to his wife; she could not understand, since the world whence she came regarded social position as the most desirable thing in life, and naval captains could obtain a high social position through the muzzles of their guns, because the guns could bring them glory and money.

HE WAS in agony as they approached the ship, and saw that the gundeck was fully six feet above the water, rather than the two or three feet of a regular ship. "What a target," he murmured disconsolately.

As a merchantman, the *Clytemnestra* was admirable; as a fighter, she would be hopeless. Huntley shrugged. He'd probably never have to worry about her in a combat; she'd probably never catch an enemy whom she could force to stand and trade blows.

"I suppose she's got pine quarters," he said sarcastically.

"No," Sims answered. "Fir."

Huntley groaned. Fir splintered almost as readily as pine, and wounds from wood were very painful. As he was piped over the towering side of the gigantic floating storehouse, and stood on the rail for his first glimpse of her decks, Huntley manfully controlled his expression, accepted the salutes of sideboys and officers, and kept his curses to himself. Not even the efficient Lieutenant Sims could make the Indiaman seem more than what she had originally been; not even the checkered gunports streaking the sides could disguise her ungainly lines and make her a man-of-war.

"Ready to sail?" he asked his first lieutenant, glancing at the familiar array of dull-black cannon, of which the *Clytemnestra* self-consciously had seventy-four.

"Ready, sir," Sims replied. He had been outfitting the ship for the previous two weeks, while his captain tried to enjoy life with a wife who persisted in exhibiting him as a naval hero fresh from a stubbornly fought victory over two enemy frigates.

"Come below," Huntley requested, dismissed his new officers, whom he had never before met, and stalked toward the main hatch. At first sight, he thought that his cabin in the stern was approximately the size of the last ship he had commanded. The furniture with which it was equipped seemed to stand in the same proportions of a tea table to Westminster Abbey.

"Stab me!" he said quietly, "can this lumberyard put about?"

"I understand she is a trifle crank, sir," Lieutenant Sims admitted carefully.

The *Clytemnestra* cleared Spithead on the morning tide, and as she headed out into the Channel, Captain Perry Huntley was transformed from a lovable, gentle, capable commander to an embittered, irritable pessimist, who kept the leeward side of the quarterdeck and permitted Lieutenant Sims to maneuver the ship. Under full sail, with a favorable wind, the *Clytemnestra* barely made six knots, and, when persuaded to take an opposite tack, did so in a leisurely way that infuriated a skipper who was accustomed to a smartly handled frigate. He thought unkindly of his wife, wished she weren't so beautiful that he had to worship her, and longed for the tight dexterity of his last command.

On a shakedown cruise to the Scillies, which promised to set a record for slow time, Captain Huntley kept to his cabin and experimented with various combinations of wines to discover which could intoxicate him the readiest. His officers, excluding Sims, were disgusted with him, and wondered if there wasn't another Captain Huntley who had made such a brilliant record in the frigates.

AFTER the *Clytemnestra* had been fairly urged to exhibit her wares, Captain Huntley made his first inspection of her from keelson to topgallant, was heard to mutter a few disparaging remarks, and disappeared from the eyes of the crew until the *Clytemnestra* was off to Portsmouth, when he abruptly emerged and ordered Sims to drag her into the naval base.

He put on his best uniform, went ashore, and stayed there for the best part of a day. When he returned, he smiled for the first time in a week at Sims. "Ease her in," he said. "We're here for a day or two."

Whatever Lieutenant Sims thought about bringing the *Clytemnestra* to berth next to a dock, he thought less about the arduous task of disarming her of virtually all her batteries and re-equipping her almost entirely with thirty-two pounders, the heaviest guns in the Royal Navy. As diplomatically as possible, he ventured to discover Huntley's reasons.

"This tub can carry them instead of tea," Huntley replied tartly, and that was all. If he couldn't dominate his wife, he could at least keep his first lieutenant in place.

When the job of shipping new ammunition was complete, the *Clytemnestra* again went to sea, returning to the Channel, where, as ordered, she picked up a convoy of a dozen Indiamen, whom she was to escort to Calcutta.

The voyage was a long one, and a matter of many, many months. Huntley made the best of a disagreeable future. By the time the convoy passed the Canaries, he was having his officers in to dine with him, while he cheerily commented on the felicity of being able to sail in company with ships that did not annoy one because of their confounded dawdling.

Lieutenant Sims was delighted by his commander's good spirits, because the lieutenant was positive that Huntley was, if not the best, certainly the most thoughtful captain in the Royal Navy, and that was an opinion reached after an association long enough to justify it.

Captain Huntley was one of that courageous band of skippers who dared to presume that a crew of seamen was made up of human beings. His revolutionary convictions did not make him lenient except in the matter of discipline, where psychological punishment was, whenever possible, substituted for physical. If anything, he was a very hard taskmaster, for which, paradoxically, his crew loved him. He gave his men leisure sufficient for relaxation, but not for boredom.

One morning, near the Cape Verde islands, a tiny French lugger had the mischance to run into the *Clytemnestra*, which promptly put a shot over her as an invitation to surrender. After her crew had been taken aboard the makeshift ship of the line, Captain Huntley ordered the lugger to be cast off, and a few minutes later appalled his officers by beating all hands to quarters.

"Mr. Sims," he said, "you will sink me that craft."

And thus the *Clytemnestra* had the first of many gun practices which used up a great deal of ammunition from the magazines and energy from the crews. The officers were scandalized by a waste of money and effort until Sims reminded them of the tremendous amount of their supplies, and indicated the increasing accuracy of the crew.

Except for small ships which she caught to sink and frigates which turned and fled as soon as the *Clytemnestra's* size was discovered, the transformed Indiaman had an uneventful voyage all the way around the Horn and up toward Madagascar. In the waters approaching the Indian Ocean, however, she ran more and more chances of running into French ships of force sufficient to make a contest both interesting and profitable from a prize point of view. As danger increased, Captain Huntley became increasingly affable, until his officers were completely confounded in their judgment of him.

JUST south of Cape Ste. Marie, the *Clytemnestra* flushed an eighty-gun Frenchman. Summoned by beating drums from the enjoyment of his luncheon, Captain Huntley jubilantly went onto his quarter-deck, and leaped as agilely as a midshipman into the mizzen chains nearest the enemy.

Surveying her with his glass, he somewhat regretted that she had the advantages of the wind, envied the classic perfection of her construction—these Frenchmn certainly could build ships—and jumped down again onto his quarterdeck.

Sims came up to him. "I've signaled for the convoy to close-haul on the opposite tack, sir."

Another officer arrived. "Cleared for action, sir."

"Carry on," Huntley said, and detained Sims by the arm.

"Sir?" Sims asked.

"I believe this is our man," Huntley remarked. "We're luckier than I'd hoped."

"I don't understand, sir," Sims confessed.

Huntley explained. "There's a raider loose in these waters, preying on the East India trade. Lloyds has an unofficial reward out for him. I was told to keep my eyes open."

"I see, sir," Sims nodded. "But we look like a hundred-gunner. D'ye think he'll attack us?"

"He will," Huntley promised.

"I'm not sure I like the prospect," Sims said cryptically, and glanced at the brittle bulwarks of the quarterdeck.

Captain Huntley was overly optimistic, for the French commander knew the better part of valor, and resolutely avoided all attempts of the British ship to approach within gunshot. A raider doesn't tackle a ship half again her size, because it is the purpose of a raider to stay at sea as long as possible. The *Clytemnestra* spent a futile afternoon endeavoring to bring the eighty to grips, but the two-decker disappeared into the twilight, and the next morning only Huntley's convoy was within lookout view.

Captain Huntley thereupon lost his good disposition.

He kept to his cabin during the remainder of the passage to Calcutta, and only under the pressure of the admiral commanding at that station did he spend a few surly days ashore, to receive the gratitude of the various merchants who had benefited by his safe escort of the little flotilla.

Inasmuch as the admiral had received a shipment of long-awaited wines and foodstuffs in the convoy, he was interested in the causes of Captain Huntley's taciturnity, and invited him to dine. Captain Huntley, after too heavy indulgence in the admiral's puncheons, was indiscreet enough to confide his disappointment in his ship.

"If I had a cockboat with any lines to her at all, I could have closed with that beggar and blown him out of the water," he said sadly. "All I ask is to be able to get within a mile of him. Surely that isn't too much."

Kindly overlooking the implied criticism of the Admiralty, because he was likewise dissatisfied with the administration of the Navy, the admiral benevolently agreed that Captain Huntley had been most unfortunate in losing an opportunity to make a little prize money, and proposed to rectify the mishap as far as it rested within his power to do so.

"I'll give you orders to hunt him down," he said, and stifled Huntley's thanks by continuing, "It's not altogether a favor. I sent two fifty-gun ships after him earlier in the year. They never came back. They never reached England, either." The admiral savored his wine. "And if you permit yourself to be sunk, so that my reputation is involved, I'll have you broken out of the Service."

"Thank you, sir," Huntley said happily.

TWO months later, his happiness had worn off, for those two months had been fruitlessly spent. Once he thought they had caught up with the raider, although the ship flew an English flag at her mizzen, but the stranger disappeared before the *Clytemnestra* could lumber near enough to fire a hailing shot.

Captain Huntley become a fretful man, and so far departed from his normal self as to have men flogged for the heinous offence of being slack in their reefing of sails. Lieutenant Sims became more hard-pressed to account for the commander's behavior, and was finally forced to avoid the wardroom in the interests of evading argument.

Sims was not altogether a gentleman in the London tradition; he was a rough sailor from a rough family of Cornwall squires, and when he disagreed with a person, he was more likely to settle his differences with fists than with pistols.

At last the *Clytemnestra* was obliged to set her bowsprit for the new British colony at South Africa in order to procure fresh water, inasmuch as the crew began to object to the animal life which infested the water casks. Captain Huntley grudgingly went ashore to pay his respects to the governor, and then wished he had been rude, for the governor had some mail which a dispatch ship had brought from England to be forwarded to India. There was a bulky letter for him, and he well knew the handwriting.

On the way back to his ship, he tore open the packet, to see if his wife had enclosed any trinket, perceived that it was all writing, conscientiously tried to read the first paragraph, and then, wearily, unconsciously, crumpled the voluminous sheets and tossed them into the water beside the longboat.

He frowned at the *Clytemnestra,* cursed her for a flat-bottomed scow, and vowed that he would never again permit a woman to dissuade him from his professional judgment. If it hadn't been for her, he'd be happily cruising in a fast little thirty-six-gun ship that could either catch an enemy or run from him.

And in that moment, he had an inspiration. The simplicity of the solution to his difficulty embarrassed him. He should have thought of it long ago; he would have, too, if he hadn't been preoccupied with trivialities. It took an approach by longboat to his ship to show him what was wrong with his strategy of stumbling along the sea lanes to and from India.

He lithely scampered up the side of the *Clytemnestra,* and shouted for Sims, who, sweltering in the arid South African heat, came half-naked up from his cabin.

"Mr. Sims," Huntley said, "I want you to paint out the yellow streaks about the gunports. With all respect to Lord Nelson, this ship of the line will forego that mark of distinction. Now, send me the ship's carpenter."

Leaving Sims to sling seamen over the side with pots of black paint, Huntley took the carpenter astern to the taffrail. The *Clytemnestra's* officers had long since forsaken any attempt to understand their commander, and were not surprised at anything he did. Not even when the carpenter began to reconstruct the bulwarks on the quarterdeck. It became apparent that the Lords of the Admiralty had accomplished nothing by cutting off the ship's poop, for there it was, as it had appeared the day the *Clytemnestra* was launched.

WHEN, three days later, the *Clytemnestra* again headed for Madagascar and India, she was her old self in all except cargo. Whereas she had previously carried textiles and wrought iron to Calcutta, she was now laden with a different type of iron. Iron that could be shot from seventy-four guns only too eager to disgorge it.

Huntley had his cot brought up on deck, so that he could be instantly at hand when the raider was sighted. He prayed fervently that the tricolor of France would appear at the horizon, and, then one sultry morning the hulking outlines of a powerful two-decker mounted grandly over the gentle arch of the sea.

The lookout shouted her identity, but Huntley obliged Sims to puff up the shrouds until he could see her clearly, for Captain Perry Huntley did not wish to make a mistake. Lieutenant Sims, at various times during his career, had seen enough French ships to know one even under the trifling disguise of an English flag at the main, and returned to report that the lookout had not been suffering from over-enthusiasm.

"She's the raider, sir."

Huntley looked up at his mizzen peak and smiled contentedly. "Be ready to change that tradesman's rag for our battle colors," he said, and went to his cabin for a glass of wine.

When he came up on deck, the *Clytemnestra* was cleared for action, and gun crews stood ready to roll heavy carriages forward and thrust muzzles out the Indiaman's ungraceful sides. Since the Frenchman was still an hour distant, Huntley dismissed the crew below by watches for a few bites of food and a drop or two of drink to warm their hearts, although the temperature glaring off the surface of the sea was enough to make the naked torsos of the gunners glisten with sweat.

Just inside a mile range, the French ship fired a warning gun.

"Heave to," Huntley commanded complacently.

"Sir?" protested Sims. Heave to at a peremptory summons from an enemy warship? That was well enough for merchantmen, but not for fighters.

"Heave to!" Huntley snapped.

The wind, by some quirk of the latitude, was blowing off the coast of Africa so that the two ships, going in opposite directions, were able to proceed at about the same speed. But, as Huntley very well realized, the French ship, if she put about on the same tack with the *Clytemnestra,* would be able to sail twice as fast. Captain Huntley did not want the French ship to put about. Not yet.

Obediently, the hands hauled on the braces and backed one set of sails to work against the others so that the *Clytemnestra* glided to a halt, canvas flapping. Huntley dipped his topsails in token of submission to the Frenchman's wishes, and hoped that all the noble captains of Elizabeth's time would forgive him the indignity in the longer interests of deception.

"Who does he think he's fooling?" Sims asked disgustedly, as the raider curled close enough to the stationary *Clytemnestra* for the English officers to study her trim lines without the assistance of telescopes.

"You forget the number of French vessels in our Navy," Huntley gently reminded his first lieutenant, ignoring the Cornishman's assault upon English grammar. "Pray that he walks into our parlor."

Sims calculated the range. "We could reach him now with everything except the carronades," he said hopefully.

"Wait," Huntley replied. At one time, he would have been willing to settle for a few shots at a mile distance; now he could close to musket-shot range.

THE *Clytemnestra* was silent as the French ship drew abreast of her on the leeward side some three hundred yards distant, hove to, and prepared to send a boat over to visit and inspect her. A dozen times Huntley had to caution Sims sharply, as the latter's impatience drove him to suggest opening fire.

The French ship stopped.

"Break out our ensign, Mr. Sims," Huntley commanded.

Joyously, the signal midshipman hauled down the degrading flag of the merchant service, and lifted the bold colors of the Union Jack. Huntley waited for the precise instant when it nudged the peak of the gaff before he said, "Very well, Mr. Sims, you may fire."

From the first, there was only one outcome.

The *Clytemnestra* rolled two strakes out of the water from the recoil of the mighty broadside which boomed out on the echo of Sims' hoarse shout. Almost instantly, the vigilant French ship responded with a ragged salvo, though not in the same weight of metal. Such was the perfection of incessant drill, Huntley's gunners were able to load three guns to the Frenchman's two.

Disillusioned as to the *Clytemnestra's* character, the Frenchman endeavored to get under way, but Huntley's carronades threw a volume of canister through the eighty's rigging that annihilated the reckless top men who tried to handle canvas, and the two goliaths rested side by side, at a murderous distance, and settled down to fight the battle to the end.

There could be but one end, despite the gallantry of the French crew. Huntley's guns were thirty-two pound-

ers, the raider's largest were only twenty-fours. Each exchange of broadsides meant that an overwhelming preponderance of iron hurtled from the *Clytemnestra* to crash into the Frenchman. It was a question of simple mathematics; of how many broadsides the *Clytemnestra* would have to disgorge before the French were exterminated or vanquished.

Impassively, Huntley let his officers work the guns, and tried not to notice the heavy price he was paying for his victory. Every time a man dropped, he took it as a personal wound, and suffered each injury, although the myriad projectiles did not touch him. The barricades of the *Clytemnestra* were never meant to withstand the splintering impact of heavy cannonballs, and he lost a hundred men in killed and wounded before the exhausted French raider at length struck her flag and ended the menace that had gutted scores of hapless merchant ships. He had his victory, but at a heavy price.

While Lieutenant Sims took a party of marines to assume control of the surrendered vessel, Captain Huntley examined his ship. Every few paces, he halted to study the shambles caused by bits of flying wood. He nerved himself to descend to the surgeon's cockpit, where arms and legs were being lopped off in mad efforts to conserve at least the lives of agonized seamen. His ears ached from tortured screams.

One lieutenant, nursing an arm that had been ripped to the bone by a flinder, awaiting his turn, said respectfully: "Congratulations, sir."

"How's your arm?" Huntley asked curtly. "Bullet?"

"Except for her crew, this isn't a fighting ship, sir," the lieutenant replied.

"I believe you're right, Lieutenant," Huntley said, and left the Surgeon's cockpit. Reasonably, he did not blame his wife for the shambles, but he did blame her for putting him in such a rotten ship. It would never happen again; he'd be master of his own destiny. The Admiralty would have to give him a new ship, and he'd be sure she was a good one.

All in good time.

ON DECK, he had the pleasure of meeting his opponent, a tall, virile, charming Breton, who was looking in horror at the carnage aboard the *Clytemnestra*. He smiled down at Huntley, and after the manner of the sea was chagrined to have been defeated, but delighted to concede he had met his superior.

"Nonsense," Huntley said briskly. "My cannon were half again as heavy as yours. You had about as much chance against me, as our fifty-gun ships must have had against you." He returned the Frenchman's proffered sword. "Any man who has eluded the British Navy as long as you, needn't give me his sword." He took the Frenchman by the arm. "Care for a glass of port?" he asked. *"Vin rouge?"*

The Frenchman thought the suggestion was admirable, and the two captains vanished in the main hatch, leaving Lieutenant Sims, fresh from an examination of the prize's rich hold, to the disagreeable task of straightening up the gory decks of the *Clytemnestra*.

*

It was a golden day in April when the battered ex-East Indiaman at last came into Portsmouth to pay off, and England prepared to welcome another of her heroes. Captain Huntley did not care for the affectionate plaudits shouted in his honor as he strode along the street of the seaport that had known Nelson's tread, for Captain Huntley was going to an inn where his wife awaited him.

His hunger for her nearly crushed the life from her body when he at last had her in his arms. She passively suffered him to express his affection, before she stood back and said,

"I'm proud of you, Perry."

He thanked her, and poured himself a glass of wine from a decanter provided by a thoughtful innkeeper. He waited for her to continue, smiling over the rim of his glass.

At last, she said, "You see, I told you you'd succeed in a big ship. Everyone is talking about your magnificent capture." She got down to business. "You didn't write to tell me of your share, dear."

"Nearly twenty thousand pounds," he said.

She gasped.

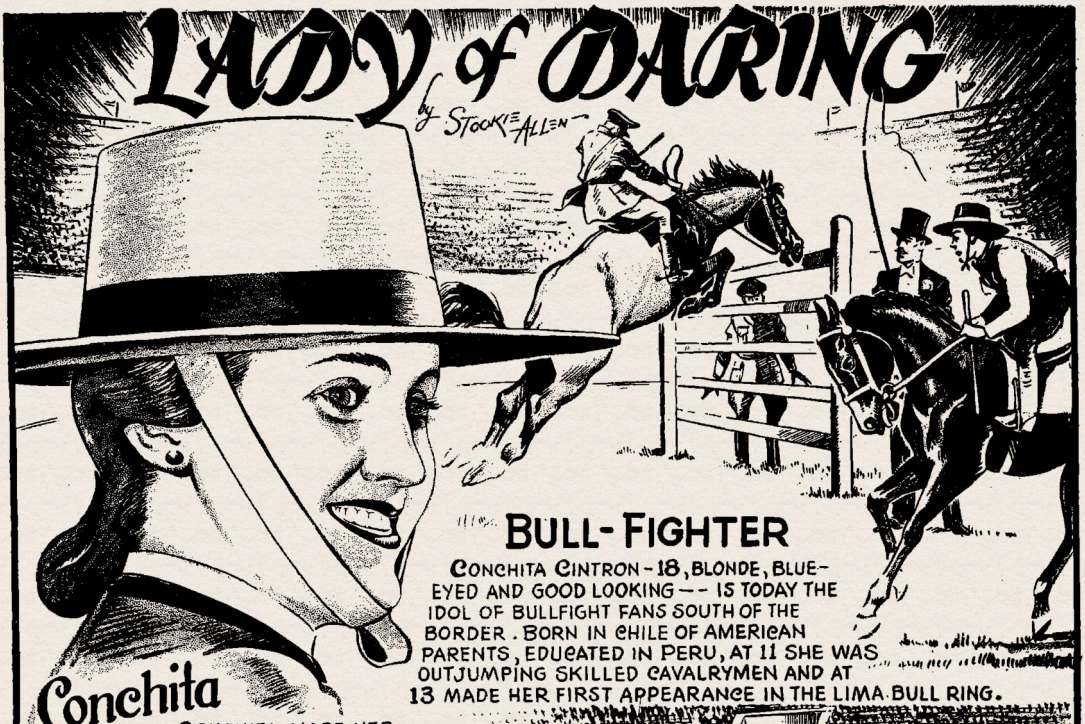
"But I haven't got it," he went on. "I gave it to the purser to distribute to the families of my killed and wounded. They should never have had to fight in a ship like that."

"Perry!" she exclaimed in anguish, sunlight on the pretty distress of her pretty face. He braced himself for the scene which would follow, a repetition of all those which had previously subordinated his will to hers. He could have told her to stop, but permitted her to go on. grinning as he recognized old appeals which had once persuaded him, and in the end she was weeping tears that stirred his smpathy but did not alter his new-won independence.

And, perversely, from that moment, she really loved him.

LADY of DARING

by Stookie Allen

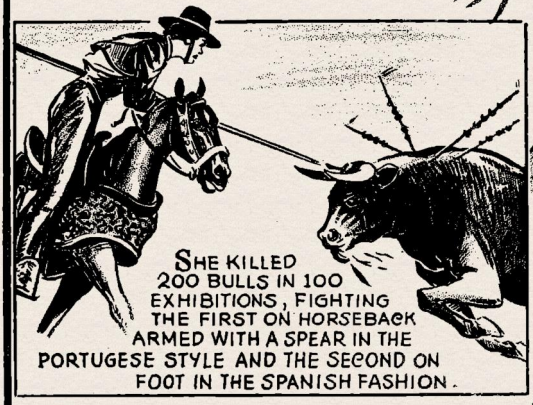


BULL-FIGHTER

CONCHITA CINTRON - 18, BLONDE, BLUE-EYED AND GOOD LOOKING — IS TODAY THE IDOL OF BULLFIGHT FANS SOUTH OF THE BORDER. BORN IN CHILE OF AMERICAN PARENTS, EDUCATED IN PERU, AT 11 SHE WAS OUTJUMPING SKILLED CAVALRYMEN AND AT 13 MADE HER FIRST APPEARANCE IN THE LIMA BULL RING.

Conchita

CONCHITA MADE HER DEBUT IN LISBON AT 15, AND, RETURNING TO PERU, SCORED TRIUMPH AFTER TRIUMPH. IN 1939 SHE WENT TO MEXICO WHERE THE SIGHT OF THE PRETTY GIRL PITTING HER 110 POUNDS AGAINST 1,200-POUND BULLS WITH SUCH COURAGE AND GRACE SENT THE FANS INTO ECSTASIES.

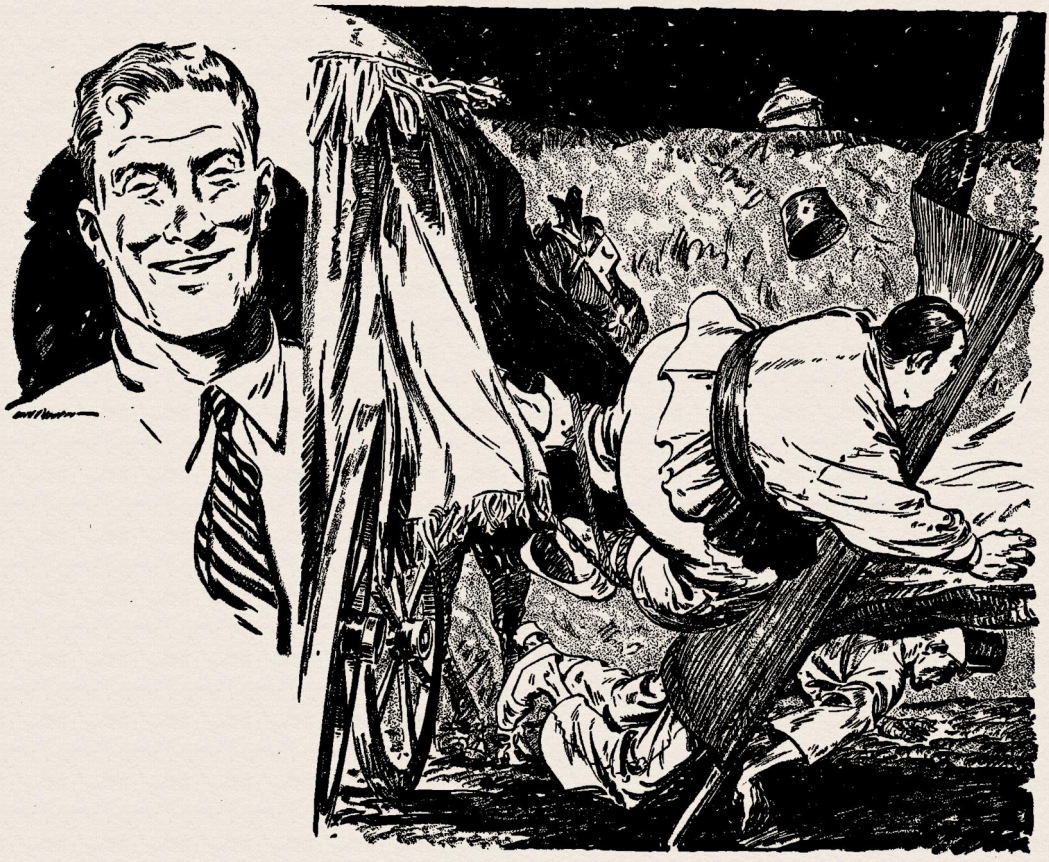


SHE KILLED 200 BULLS IN 100 EXHIBITIONS, FIGHTING THE FIRST ON HORSEBACK ARMED WITH A SPEAR IN THE PORTUGESE STYLE AND THE SECOND ON FOOT IN THE SPANISH FASHION.

THE MALE MATADORS HAVE TRIED TO COPY HER CLOSE IN-FIGHTING STYLE.

SHE TRAINS HER OWN FINE HORSES TO KEEP JUST A FOOT AHEAD OF THE BULL. ONE FALSE STEP WOULD MEAN **DEATH.**

AT TAMPICO, RECENTLY, SHE WON A GOLD CUP FOR THE BEST PERFORMANCE AGAINST 3 OF MEXICO'S BEST MATADORS. EXPERTS SAY CONCHITA IS THE SECOND PHENOMENON IN THE HISTORY OF THE SPORT, JUAN BELMONTE BEING THE FIRST.



Bringing Up Babu

By L. G. Blochman

Author of "Midnight Train," "The Magnificent Babu Dutt," etc.

Summoning Babu Gundranesh Dutt immediately! Portly person most needed to frustrate certain rascalities now progressing well in Calcutta. Must be prepared for eerie tryst in graveyard—and for incidental violence

SMOKE from the locomotive of the Delhi-Calcutta Express swirled upward into the perpetual twilight of the Howrah train sheds. The express was four minutes late at 17:40 o'clock railway time, which was 6:04 in the evening, Calcutta time, but Terrence O'Reilly was in no hurry to get off.

He watched his bearers jump into his compartment for his luggage and bedding roll, saw them disappear into the noisy crowd of half-naked coolies on the platform, knowing that this was the end of his last railway journey in India. In two days his ship would sail for Singapore on the first leg of his voyage home.

O'Reilly stepped off the train at last and made for the exit with long strides, his freshly-chalked topee towering above the turbans that swept past the level of his square-quarried chin in a current of red and blue and green. He was elbowing his way through a Parsee family reunion in close formation when he heard a deep voice with a cavernous accent say: "There's that thick-skulled flatfoot. There goes the red-headed giant with the peanut brain."

O'Reilly whirled. His stare challenged a group of bob-haired Pathans, whose dark looks answered his challenge unflinchingly.

"Who said that?" he demanded.

"*Nai janta, sahib,*" said one of the Pathans.

"Look at him," continued the sepulchral voice from the crowd, "high-hattin' the world because he turned in his squad car for an elephant straight eight. Look at him struttin' just as if he never pounded a ninth precinct beat in his life."

"Oh, disaster!" cried Babu Dutt, and came sprawling out with his incredible burden

O'Reilly's angry scowl became a puzzled frown. He didn't know anyone in Calcutta, and expected no reception committee. He scanned the dark faces in the crowd—until his glance fell upon a blue-eyed, sandy-haired man whose big ears and prominent nose gave him the aggressive silhouette of a swift fighter plane.

"Bill Marston!" exclaimed O'Reilly, pounding the smaller man on the back with a huge, hairy hand. "What in the devil are you doing here?"

"I came to meet you," gasped Marston when he got his breath.

O'Reilly's lantern jaw dropped. "Nice sleuthin'," he said. "I didn't think—"

"No sleuthin' at all," Marston said, with a wave of his hand. "I just wired that Maharajah you were supposed to be workin' for—What's his name? Zarapore?—and he wired back you were comin' in on this train."

"Sure is good to see you anyway, sergeant." O'Reilly beamed.

"Nix on the sergeant stuff, Terry. I quit the force."

"You what?" O'Reilly stopped dead in his tracks. For a man who was going halfway around the world to rejoin the ranks of New York's Finest, this was practically sacrilege.

"I quit the force to start my own private detective agency," said ex-Sergeant Marston. "I been doin' okay, so far. If I crack the case that brought me to this God-forsaken steam-heated dump of a country, I'll be rolling down Easy Street on my private rubber-tired Pullman. But I need your help, Terry."

"My boat leaves in two days," O'Reilly said.

"If we can clean this up, I'll go with you," Marston declared. "Of course I'll cut you in on the take, but it might be sort of messy. I don't want you to say yes without my warnin' you that you might get your pants full of lead, with no comeback. I can't call the local cops in on it."

"What's the spot that X marks?" O'Reilly asked.

"It's a long story, Terry. Let's grab this taxi—if you think it'll hold together long enough to get us across the river."

WITH a great gnashing of gears and squawking of horns, the bearded Sikh taxi driver got his ancient vehicle headed for the floating bridge that linked the rail terminal with the city of Calcutta.

Marston had to shout most of his story to be heard above the din on the bridge. The noise of brakes, gears and horns, the profanity of all the dialects of the Ganges delta, the yelling of passengers and drivers alike was a necessary accompaniment to the clash of motor traffic with the tangle of bullock and buffalo carts, horses and carriages which clogged the span across the muddy Hooghly.

"My client is a big-shot New York financier," Marston shouted in O'Reilly's ear, "and he had the bad luck to lose two hundred grand in bonds. It's my job to run 'em down, which I have, practically. They're in Calcutta all right. One of 'em already turned up. But I can't put my finger on the guy who stole 'em."

"What's the matter with the local cops?"

Marston shook his head. "No go," he said. "The reason I got the case is because the bonds didn't belong to my client in the first place. He borrowed them from a customer of his—without asking permission—to put up for margin in some quick turnover deal in Wall street. Only the market went the wrong way, and the broker did, too—with the bonds.

"My client can't get the cops after the broker without admitting that he was using those bonds himself for purposes which ain't quite proper. So he'd rather pay me than check in at 354 Hunter Street, Ossining, New York. . . . Hey, turn here, driver. We want to go to the Bengal Palace Hotel."

The taxi careened on two wheels as it swung abruptly into the Strand and rattled south along the bathing *ghats*. The steaming mist which rose from the river front was the color of brass in the slanting rays of the setting sun.

"So I been hangin' around the race courses here, because my guy goes for the bang-tails. I been sopping up pink gin in all the flossy hotels and restaurants, because my guy is supposed to be a high liver. I even started lookin' through the flossy cabarets here, but the local dills don't look like they would attract a guy with two hundred grand unless he was travelin' with a ten-foot pole, which I ain't heard he is.

"Anyhow, I can't raise the guy's trail. Either he's wearin' false whiskers or he's gone underground on me. That's why I need you, Terry. You ought to know this crazy country like you used to know the Bowery. How long since you left Manhattan to be bodyguard for this maharajah bird?"

"Nearly three years," O'Reilly said. "Maybe your guy ain't in Calcutta at all, Bill."

"He's here," Marston insisted. "And he knows I'm here. Look at this billy-doo I found in my mail this mornin'. There was a Calcutta postmark on the envelope." He passed O'Reilly a sheet of paper on which the following was neatly penciled in block letters:

INDIA IS A MOST UNHEALTHY COUNTRY, SERGEANT MARSTON, PARTICULARLY FOR PRYING DETECTIVES. THERE IS AN AIRPLANE LEAVING CALCUTTA THE DAY YOU RECEIVE THIS NOTE. YOUR LIFE EXPECTANCY WILL BE GREATLY INCREASED IF YOU ARE ON IT. NO GOOD CAN COME OF YOUR REMAINING HERE. MUCH EVIL MAY.

"Very damned cultured and high-class language," said O'Reilly as he passed the note back.

"This broker guy is very smooth and educated."

"Then he won't go in much for murder or mayhem, except in words. I never saw a swindler yet that did."

"Don't fool yourself, Terry. I looked into this guy before I left New York. There's a couple of sudden deaths that he might have been mixed up in; no evidence to hold him on, but it looked like he might have hired one of those Brooklyn trigger men to clean up a little unfinished business. . . . Here's the hotel, Terry."

Marston watched O'Reilly's bearers unload the luggage. "Pretty swank, ain't you, Terry, with your crew of flunkies?" he said.

"You got to do it India. Custom of the country. Didn't you get yourself a bearer yet, Bill?"

"Not me. I can still tie my own shoe laces. Look, Terry, while you're hosin' off the train dirt, I'll give my chin a quick scrape. Then we'll have a drink and I'll give you all the names, dates and places—if you can show me how to get a decent drink. I've tried every bar in town and they look at me funny when I ask for a highball. I guess they don't make highballs in this burg."

"They make 'em," O'Reilly said, "only they call 'em *chota pegs*."

"What a country!" Marston shook his head. "They go to matinee at six in the evenin' and they don't eat dinner till nine. Well, come down to the room as soon as you're sanitary and I'll give you all the dope. I'm in 370."

O'REILLY was shown to a room at the opposite end of the same floor as 370, just around an L in the corridor. There was nothing particularly palatial about the rooms of the Bengal Palace, he reflected: the usual ceiling fan making lazy efforts to dispell the stifling heat; the usual chameleons stalking mosquitoes on the picture moulding; the usual mosaic floor of broken china imbedded in concrete; the usual mosquito netting draped over the bed. While the bearers were busy unpacking and laying out his clothes, he looked into the bathroom. The shower consisted of a tin dipper and a three-foot-high earthenware Java bath jar.

O'Reilly stripped, and ladled water over his broad, perspiring shoulders. It was a nice break, he mused as he doused his red hair, to find Bill Marston in Calcutta. It would be fun, too, helping him crack his case. They'd have it cleaned up in plenty of time to make the steamer. There wasn't a crook in India who was a match for a couple of New York cops.

He got into a clean suit of whites and sauntered down the corridor to bang on the door of Room 370. There was no answer. He tried the knob. The door was locked. He banged louder, calling, "Hey, Bill, let me in. It's Terry."

Still no answer.

Marston's probably gone down to wait in the lobby, O'Reilly thought. He took the elevator down, but there was no sign of the ex-police sergeant. He approached the desk.

"I'm looking for Mr. William Marston," he told the Eurasian desk clerk. "I guess he's still in his room."

The clerk shook his head. "Sorry, sir. There's no one by that name registered at this hotel, sir."

"Sure there is. The name is Marston."

"I understand quite plainly, sir. We have no Mr. Marston."

"Don't give me those," said O'Reilly. "I was just talking to him. He's in 370."

"There was a gentleman in 370 by the name of Smith," the clerk said, "but he just left."

"Then I'll wait," O'Reilly said. Marston should have told him he was using a phoney name. He probably went out on a hot tip. Funny he didn't stop by for O'Reilly.

"Ot, Mr. Smith won't be back," the clerk said. "He checked out."

"He *what?*"

"He checked out, sir, not ten minutes ago. Paid his bill and took his luggage with him."

"You've got him mixed with somebody else."

"Oh, no, sir. It's the gentleman from 370. He said he was going to the hospital. He didn't mention what hospital, sir, and it didn't seem delicate to ask him. He's done something to his face. Dhobi's itch, possibly. He had it all bandaged up. He—I *beg* your pardon, sir, but I must ask you to moderate your language, sir. After all, this is a public place."

O'Reilly was cussing a blue streak—a bright blue streak with purple stripes, gold stars, and big red exclamation points. He was swearing at himself for not having foreseen dire events on a day lie this. The calendar behind the hotel clerk marked Friday the 13th.

II

A few minutes before noon on Saturday the 14th, a small bandy-legged, simian-faced individual named J. Jay Jimson sauntered into a smelly little pub in Bentinck Street, sat down at his usual table in the back room, opened his copy of *The Statesman* to the racing forms, and ordered his habitual breakfast of gin and ginger beer.

Mr. Jimson—known as "The Weed" to the police of New York, Miami, Louisville, Chicago, and Los Angeles—had been a jockey until the stewards of too many race courses had noted a connection between his friendship with certain bookmakers and the unexplained failure of favorites when Jimson rode them. From that moment on, the ex-jockey divided his time between eluding the long arm of the law, and first-degree burglary, for which he had no mean talent.

He had once taken up picking pockets as a sideline, until a judge in Bombay convinced him that he had no future in the business. He had but recently terminated a vacation on the banks of Tolly's Nallah, where he had been a guest at Bengal Presidency Gaol as reward for his part in certain manoeuvers concerning the safe of the Yezdah Mihr Bank.

As he sipped his breakfast on the morning of Saturday the 14th, J. Jay Jimson was feeling very pleased with himself. First, according to his morning paper, he had picked two winners at the Barrackpore meeting the previous afternoon, both outsiders. Second, during the night he had engaged in homicide for the first time and was pleasantly surprised to find how simple it was and how easy to escape detection. Third, he was about to be paid five thousand rupees for his half-hour's work, and his current employer was due any minute with the money. As he drank, Jimson occasionally looked up from his paper to peer between the faded paper roses on the lattice that separated the back room from the bar and the street entrance of the pub.

He could afford to wait.

At half past twelve his vigil was rewarded. A handsome, suave-mannered man with a touch of gray at the temples, an air of expensive tailoring about his tussah-silk suit, and a rakish fore-and-aft outline to his spotless sun helmet, came in and sat at Jimson's table. Without a word he flicked imaginary dust from the table top with a pale blue silk handkerchief. Then he carefully leaned his elbows on the spot and stared coldly at Jimson.

"Morning, Mr. Boskett," Jimson said uneasily. "Everything went off fine last night."

Boskett continued to stare silently.

"So I guess I get the money you promised me, don't I, Mr. Boskett?" Jimson pursued.

"Why?" asked Boskett.

"Because you promised it to me, and because I got a sure thing in the third race at Barrackpore this afternoon."

Boskett removed his elbows from the table and placed his well-manicured hands on his knees. His lips were thin and very straight. He said: "Tell me exactly what happened last night. Tell me every detail."

"SURE," said Jimson. He drained his glass, wiped the perspiration from his narrow forehead. He didn't know why, but he was feeling a good deal less pleased with himself. Something in Boskett's manner gave him the willies.

"Well, I waited in his room, like you said," he began, "and when he reached to turn on the light, I socked him good on the back of the head. I caught him on the way down, propped him in a chair and socked him again to make sure. He just sat there with his mouth open, cold as a frozen mackerel.

"I pulled off his clothes and hauled on the old whites you gave me and jammed the old topee on his head. Then I pulled one of his arms around my neck, grabbed him under the other armpit, and started him down the hall, leaving the door open for you to come in for the luggage. He wasn't very heavy, so I could sort of let his toes touch to make him look like he was staggering along. He—"

"Just a moment. Did anyone see you?"

"I don't think so."

"You don't think so. Don't you know?"

"There was a Hindu bearer squatting in front of a room about six doors down, but he looked like he was asleep. He didn't say anything. I got this bozo down the back stairs without nobody stopping me, and the first person I talked to was the *gharri-walla* I hailed in the back street. He said, 'What's the matter with your friend?' I said, '*Sharabi hai.*' "

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning he's drunk. The *gharri-walla* laughed and helped me boost this bozo into the carriage. I gave an address on Narkooldanga Road. When we started crossing the bridge, I told the *gharri-walla* to stop because my pal was going to get sick. I paid him off and told him I thought a little walk would sober the bozo up.

"I propped the bozo against the railing, and as soon as there was nobody in sight, I pushed him off the bridge. I heard him splash, and when I looked, he was gone. I guess he sank in the canal."

"You guess?"

"Well, it wouldn't make any difference anyhow. He was dead already."

"How do you know?"

"Well, he must have been, after the sock I gave him."

"What did you hit him with, Jimson—a feather duster?"

"Feather duster, hell! I swung a blackjack. And did I swing it. It would have cracked any two skulls."

"Not a policeman's skull, my dear Jimson. I'm afraid you bungled it."

"Bung—you're kidding, Mr. Boskett." Jimson tried to smile, but the somber chill in Boskett's eyes froze his face muscles.

"You've got the morning paper there," Boskett said. "Turn to page three, fourth column, bottom of the page."

Jimson turned the pages with fumbling fingers, until he located an item which read:

> Attracted by groans coming from under the Narkooldanga Bridge, Constable P. Mookerjee last night discovered a poorly dressed European lying on the bank of Circular Canal. The man had obviously fallen from the bridge and injured his head. He is about thirty-five, has sandy hair and blue eyes, and was without marks of identification.
>
> He was taken to Narkooldanga Hospital and early this morning had not yet regained consciousness. At the hospital he was said to be suffering from a severe concussion but is expected to recover.

"Read that last line again, please," said Boskett in a brittle voice.

Jimson did so.

"Would you like me to give you the five thousand now," said Boskett in the same voice, "or would you rather wait until our friend regains consciousness and starts telling his story."

J. Jay Jimson sprang up. "He won't recover consciousness, Mr. Boskett,"" he said. "I promise you he won't. I'll go out to the hospital right now and finish him off. I'll—"

"Sit down," said Boskett. "Try to remember you're a retired housebreaker, not a motion-picture gangster. You have a record, Jimson, and if there are any detectives standing by trying to identify the man, you'd be spotted instantly. Even if you weren't, you wouldn't have a chance of getting away with murder in a hospital. You have to be a doctor for that, Jimson."

"What do you want me to do then, Mr. Boskett?"

"First of all, I want you to get rid of Marston's luggage which is still at my house. I've gone through it this morning and I have everything I need. You'd better take it to Sealdah Station and ship it to some place in, say, Assam. Ship it to Chittagong, to be held until called for. Prepay it, of course."

Boskett tossed over two booklets of one-rupee notes. Jimson took them, stood up, put on his topee, and sat down again. A blank look, indicating deep and difficult thought processes, crossed his monkey-like features.

Then he grinned. "I think I got an idear," he said.

"Barely possible," Boskett commented. "What is it?"

"Ever hear of the Grand International Detective Agency over on Dharmtolla Street?"

"No detectives," declared Boskett with finality.

"This ain't no regular dick," the ex-jockey explained. "It's a dumb cluck of a Bengali *babu*, a fat, wheezy rube named Dutt.

"Dutt will believe anything, and he'll do what he's told. I won't go near him myself because he might recognize me from that Yezdah Mihr bank job. But I think maybe we could hire him to get our bozo outa the hospital where I can work on him some more."

"Maybe we could," said Boskett pensively. "What did you say his name was?"

"Gundranesh Dutt," said Jimson.

III

HALF an hour later Boskett sat in the dingy room at the head of a rickety stairway at 216¼-B Dharmtolla Street, headquarters of the Grand International Detective Bureau. The staff of the agency sat opposite him, two-thirds behind a spindly desk, one-third on it.

Behind the desk loomed the huge bulk of Babu Gundranesh Dutt himself, his shiny black hair giving off an odor of coconut oil. Perched at his side was the babu's cousin Danilal Dutt from Barrackpore, a wiry little man with a stringy gray mustache and mournful eyes that peered through steel-rimmed spectacles.

"Am greatly fearing, doctor," said the *babu*, shaking his big head until his three chins quivered, "that Grand International is lacking proper equipment for manipulating insane maniacs. Please quote opinion, Cousin Danilal."

"Could perhaps lease straight camisole jacket for short term," said Cousin Danilal.

"You misunderstand me, gentlemen," Boskett declared, crossing his knees very carefully so that the knife creases in his tussah silk trousers should not be disturbed. "This man is not a violent maniac. He has been suffering from a neurogenic form of amnesia, accompanied by fugue."

"Musician, no doubt," said the *babu*. "Am therefore suggesting use of ambulance vehicle, rather than private detectives."

"I may as well be frank with you," said Boskett suavely. "This man has been a patient in my private nursing home for the past year. His family is very wealthy and has been paying me handsomely, not only for his care, but to preserve the fiction that there is nothing wrong with him mentally.

"Last night he escaped, fell off a bridge, and ended up in Narkooldanga Hospital. If I tried to move him back to my nursing home by regular methods, his identity would become known, and his family would accuse me of carelessness not only in letting him escape but in exposing his condition to the world.

"I should be ruined professionally and financially. Not only would I lose this particularly remunerative patient, but my reputation as well. That is why I am prepared to pay generously to have this matter handled by, let us say, extra-legal measures."

"Light of comprehension now dawning," said the *babu*.

"Please give estimate of generosity," added Danilal.

"How does five hundred rupees sound to you?" Boskett asked.

"Quite harmonious," said the *babu*.

"Sound would be improved by addition of slight cash sum for expense outlay," Danilal amended.

"I'll make it five hundred and expenses, then," Boskett agreed. "What are your plans?"

"Kindly furnish name and location of amnesia victim," said the *babu*.

"Let's keep this on a cash and anonymous basis," Boskett said, passing over a newspaper clipping. "This item should be sufficient to enable you to put your hands on the right man."

"Quite." The *babu* took the clipping in his pudgy brown fingers, read it, gave it to his cousin. "Will deliver anonymous gentleman to nursing home this evening time."

"Not before?"

"Operations of such confidential nature require modicum of darkness," the *babu* replied. "Furthermore, preliminary groundworks must be laid out previously."

"In that case, don't bring him to the nursing home. Can you suggest a secluded place for a rendezvous within half a mile of Narkooldanga Hospital, *Babu?*"

Babu Dutt stroked his enormous stomach pensively. "Mohammedan burial ground in Upper Circular Road is quite cozy place at night time," he said. "Likewise quite convenient from hospital."

"Very well, bring the man there at eight tonight. By eight sharp."

"As sharp as possible," said the *babu*. "You are permitting no leeway, doctor?"

"None. You understand how desperate my position is, *Babu?*"

"Quite."

"Do you know what happens when a desperate man is crossed, *Babu?*"

"Desperation is among chief specialties of Grand International Detective Bureau," said Cousin Danilal blithely.

A STRANGE, sinister shadow suddenly hardened the urbane features of Boskett's face. His voice was metallic as he said: "Before I retain you, I must repeat that I shall be compelled to take desperate measures if you fail. In other words, I am asking you to guarantee success, or face extreme personal peril. If you do not have the man at eight tonight—"

"Peril is not object, doctor."

"—I will be forced to take drastic steps to insure your future silence." Boskett reached for his hip pocket.

Gundranesh Dutt arose like a captive balloon that had snapped its cable. His eyes were round, and his lips fumbled with soundless words.

Cousin Danilal, who had not perspired in ten years, broke into heavy dew as he slipped from the edge of the desk and moved crabwise out of the range of possible gunfire.

Boskett's hand whipped from his pocket bearing a wallet. He counted off three hundred-rupee notes.

The *babu* sank back into his chair, his trembling lips melting into a relieved smile.

"Future silence of Grand International is requiring no insurance," he declared emphatically.

"You'll get the rest of the money when you bring the patient to the Mohammedan burial ground at eight tonight," said Boskett. "Do I make myself clear?"

"Quite!" chanted the *babu* and Cousin Danilal in treble duet.

For a full minute after the slamming of the door had punctuated Boskett's exit, thick silence settled over the detective bureau like a dust cloud. The *babu* counted the three banknotes several times with trembling fingers. Cousin Danilal wiped the moisture from his spectacles.

"You are not fearing, Cousin Gundranesh," said Danilal at last, "that perhaps are galloping toward troubled quicksands without proper gum-boots?"

"Countrariwise Cousin Danilal," the *babu* replied. "Case no more difficult than snatching sweetmeats from blind man's baby. You are forgetting intimate friend Dr. Ramchand Gupta, erstwhile classmate during futile examinations at Calcutta University, is now interned at Narkooldanga Hospital."

"*Shabash!* Dr. Gupta is perhaps circumstance altering case. What strategy are you suggesting?"

"Am first sugesting accumulation of strategic materials as per following," said the *babu*. "Item: one stretcher for transporting mental patients to point of origin. Item: one robust rope-cord for maintaining same in tranquil position. Item: one *chaddar* sheet for covering identity of same. Item: one closed *purdah* carriage with horse attached for transit to Circular Road from backside of hospital. Item: two visor-caps for disguising detectives into hospital stewards. Item—"

"Amendment," interrupted Danilal. "Suggest acquiring proper chemicals for completing disguise by correct hospital odors."

"Accepted," said the *babu*. He took pencil and paper and laboriously began making a list.

After watching him for a moment, Danilal asked: "Am interposing point of law, Cousin Gundranesh. You are not of opinion that proposed operations are constituting fraudulent kidnaping?"

"What nonsense, Cousin Danilal. Where is ransom note? How can there be kidnaping without ransom note?"

Danilal nodded his agreement with such irrefutable logic.

IV

TERRENCE O'REILLY, ex-New York cop, ex-bodyguard to the Maharajah of Zarapore, did not sleep a wink on the night of Friday the 13th. For hours he wrestled with a problem that seemed to have no solution.

It was obvious that Bill Marston had been carried off by the man he was hunting, or by his accomplices; but O'Reilly realized with a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach that he did not know the name of either Marston's quarry, or of his American employer who might be able to furnish details. He did not even have a description of the absconding broker, except that he was a smooth article, educated, and apparently a cold-blooded fish. If only Marston had told him the whole story before going to shave. . . .

When he had recovered from his first shock of surprised rage, O'Reilly immediately strode to the main entrance of the Bengal Palace to collar the *durwan*. That gorgeously uniformed and barefooted functionary remembered helping the man with the bandaged face into a taxi—but it was not a taxi regularly stationed in front of the hotel. The man had been alone in the taxi with his bags. No, the *durwan* did not know how to locate the driver. With O'Reilly, he questioned the other bearded, red-turbaned taxi-*wallas* parked at the curb. They were equally ignorant.

The *durwan* promised to help find the man, but it was a hard job. To make it easier, O'Reilly employed the old trick of tearing a ten-rupee note in half, giving half to the *durwan*, and promising the other half when earned.

Next O'Reilly had his things moved from his own room to 370. He hoped to find some clue to the unknown factors in Marston's case, but he was again disappointed. Whoever had made off with Marston and his luggage had done a thorough job. There was not a single scrap of paper forgotten in the wastebasket, not an informative shred abandoned in the closets or under the bed.

While his vain search was on, O'Reilly had sent his bearers up and down the corridor to question the native body servants drowsing on the thresholds of the other rooms. The man with the bandaged face was obviously not Marston—otherwise why should he have wanted to hide his face?—so Marston must have been spirited from the hotel elsewhere than through the main lobby. Had anyone seen him? After half an hour the bearers came back with an old Hindu who remembered vaguely that a bandy-legged *sahib* had gone down the hall with his arms around a friend who was obviously the worse for drink.

"Drink, hell!" barked O'Reilly. Here at last was a clue. "What did the *sahib* look like?"

The Hindu did not remember, except that the sober *sahib* was small and had bowed legs, while the drunken one had large ears and quite a nose. They had gone down the servants' stairway at the rear.

O'Reilly, too, went down the servants' stairway. He followed it into the alley—a blind alley, as far as the redhead was concerned. There were no clues; no one else had seen the bow-legged *sahib* helping a drunken friend.

FOR AN HOUR O'Reilly roamed the adjacent streets, asking questions in his pidgin Hindustani, getting no answers that did him any good. The further he went, the more he was convinced of the hopelessness of his task. He had solved a similar problem when he first came to Zarapore, nearly three years ago, but Calcutta was not Zarapore by a long shot.

A one-man missing persons bureau might function successfully in the sleepy capital of a little native state, but Calcutta was a teeming city of a million population, a great metropolis although a strange one. There were sacred humpbacked bulls blocking the sidewalks and sleeping peacefully on the steps of the main post office and the National Bank of India, but there were also sleek motor cars full of distinguished Europeans in evening dress, brightly-lighted restaurants, crowded trams, bustling traffic. There were broad parks and majestic government buildings, and there were beggars sleeping in alleys, and acres and acres of crooked mud hovels. There was plenty of haystack, and no needle in sight.

The simplest thing would be to enlist the aid of the local police, but Bill Marston had said "no cops." As long as there was a chance of Marston's being found alive, O'Reilly would not gum up his case for him. If, however, the quest seemed to turn into a matter of retribution, rather than rescue, O'Reilly would get Calcutta's red-turbaned khaki-clad police department on the job.

At dawn, as the gray mists crept from the river, slunk past the stone bastions of Fort William, and shrouded the ghostly trees of the Maidan, O'Reilly returned to his hotel. Exhausted and discouraged after his fruitless search, he dropped into bed and fell asleep without even drawing the mosquito curtain.

Shortly before noon, O'Reilly was awakened by his bearer shaking him.

"*Sahib!* Wake up, *sahib!* The *durwan* is here."

The gaudily-coated doorkeeper was talking before O'Reilly got both eyes open. He talked so fast and volubly that O'Reilly's Hindustani was unequal to understanding him. Because the man was brandishing half a ten-rupee note, however, the redhead knew what he meant.

"He says the taxi-*walla* lives in Ballygunj," the bearer translated.

"Bally what?" demanded O'Reilly, trying to wake up.

"Ballygunj is south suburb of Calcutta," said the bearer.

O'Reilly was suddenly and completely awake. He found the other half of the bank note for the *durwan*, then started a sketchy toilet. He dressed without pausing to scrape the reddish stubble from his chin. Look what stopping to shave had done to Bill Marston. . . .

By the time O'Reilly reached Ballygunj, the taxi driver had left for his daily stint. For three hours the redhead chased him from one end of Calcutta to the other. It was late afternoon before O'Reilly caught up with him and engaged him—at double rates—to drive to the place where he had deposited the *sahib* with the bandaged face and the luggage from the Bangal Palace.

O'Reilly took one look and burst into all his Urdu profanity. "*Jangli-walla! Suwar-ka-bachcha! Chor! Bewaquf!*" . . . .

The taxi had stopped in front of a small Moslem mosque.

The driver insisted that this was the place. He remembered being surprised himself—particularly when, as he drove off, he turned around and saw the *sahib* unwinding the bandages from his face.

O'Reilly was not quite convinced, but there was nothing much to do but go on from there. He paid the taxi-*walla*, and began making inquiries. He had no description of the man with the bandaged face, so he asked if there was a *sahib* with bandy legs who lived in the neighborhood. Within five minutes he was directed to a yellow stucco house with green shutters. He rang the bell.

While waiting at the door he quickly inspected the .38 revolver with the gold and mother-of-pearl inlay, parting gift of the Maharajah of Zarapore. It was loaded.

When his fourth ring went unanswered, he decided to make an unorthodox entrance. He circled the house, found a second story window open at the back. A mango tree grew in the compound and although the top branches which approached the window seemed hardly intended to support two hundred pounds of ex-cop, O'Reilly did not hesitate. It would not be the first time he was out on a limb, he reflected, as he disappeared into the thick foliage.

HE SWUNG off an overhanging branch just as it started to crack, slipped on the windowsill, caught the open shutter, and managed to get one leg inside the window before the hinges of the shutter gave way. (Pretty clumsy, O'Reilly, he told himself. It's high time you were getting back to the old beat. This business of riding elephants and wearing gold braid has made you soft.)

He found himself in a bedroom. As he looked around, he somehow felt that he was in the wrong place. There was some dirty underwear in one corner, an empty gin bottle under the bed, and some horse-racing papers on a table. No clues here.

The next room promised little better, although some pongee suits, hanging in a closet, fitted the image that O'Reilly had created for himself of Bill Marston's man.

Then, in the drawer of the night table, he found Bill Marston's service revolver.

He knew it was Bill's gun, because the serial number had been a subject of a running gag while Bill and he were still on the force. There were two 13's in it.

O'Reilly's heart began to beat faster. He had picked up the trail at last. Bill's abductors, perhaps Bill himself, had been here.

Quickly but cautiously O'Reilly went through every room in the house, opening closets and looking in chests and wardrobes. He looked for a cellar, but there was none. Calcutta was built on reclaimed marshland, and cellars would be full of water most of the year. He unlocked the back door, and looked in the compound for signs of recent digging. He was relieved to find none. Then he came back into the house and began going over each room in detail.

In the drawer of a desk he forced open, he found the receipt for a safe-deposit box at the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China. This, too, might be a pertinent clue. It might be the answer to Bill Marston's original problem: Where are the bonds?

O'Reilly's problem, though, was: Where is Bill Marston?

The best way to get the answer to this, O'Reilly decided, was from the men who abducted him. It was very likely that the suave broker and his accomplice with the bandy legs would come back to their house in time. There was no evidence of precipitate flight, no sign that they thought themselves insecure. O'Reilly would wait.

He went downstairs to the room which commanded the front entrance, sat down, put his gun in his coat pocket, and prepared to be patient.

His patience began to wear thin after half an hour. He picked up a newspaper from an end-table beside him and glanced at the headlines. Headlines in British papers didn't make sense to O'Reilly as far as news went, but they were sometimes good for a laugh. There wasn't much daylight left, but enough came through the shutters to read by. O'Reilly moved nearer the window.

At seven o'clock he read the description of the unidentified man with blue eyes and sandy hair who lay unconscious at the Narkooldanga Hospital. He jumped to his feet.

It was quarter past seven before he could raise a taxi.

V

COUSIN DANILAL DUTT, waiting near the emergency entrance to Narkooldanga Hospital, gave the bony horse another handful of hay. The *purdah* carriage, designed for carrying Moslem ladies without exposing them to profane masculine eyes, was parked behind a row of *peepul* trees. Rented for the evening for seven rupees, eight annas, it was a posh affair with green-tasseled red draperies to screen the occupants. As the horse munched the hay, Cousin Danilal wondered what could be keeping the *babu*. He looked at the thick nickeled watch that hung around his neck on a string. It was already after seven-thirty.

At last the rotund form of Gundranesh Dutt hove into view, waddling rapidly toward the carriage. "All is well, Cousin Danilal," the *babu* exclaimed. "Have reconnoitred Dr. Gupta, making consequent contact with mental patient. Same is ensconced in Ward Ten, third floor rear, making slight improvement."

"Is patient still reposing in state of coma?" asked Danilal, reaching into the carriage for the coil of rope.

"Is about to evacuate said state, Dr. Gupta says. However, ropes are not required at present time. Hasten to assume disguise, Cousin Danilal."

The two cousins donned white caps, sprinkled themselves with iodoform, and removed the stretcher from the carriage. The *babu* then reached in for a bouquet of flowers he had bought. The flowers were the key to the babu's strategy. He tucked them under the folds of the *dhoti* which draped his fat legs like divided skirts.

The Dutts marched into the hospital with their stretcher, trailing an authentic odor, even if the huge babu and his scrawny cousin did not make a very well-matched pair of litter-bearers.

At the third floor, the babu left his cousin, the stretcher, and his white cap in the stairway, while he crossed the hall to the ward, bearing the flowers which now smelled somewhat of iodoform. The flowers he gave to the nurse, asking that she get a vase and put them in water. He had previously noted that the water supply was at some distance from the ward. Then he bounded back into the stairway for his cap, Cousin Danilal, and the stretcher.

Dr. Gupta having pointed out the man found under Narkooldanga Bridge as the patient with the big ears, second bed from the door, the *babu* and Cousin Danilal had no trouble transferring Bill Marston from the bed to the stretcher. Marston grunted and mumbled something as they picked him up, but he did not open his eyes. They covered him with a sheet and carried him from the ward.

As they were crossing the hall, they saw a very tall, red-headed Caucasian walking toward them, talking loudly to a dark, bewhiskered doctor. The redhead looked curiously at the stretcher they were carrying.

They ducked into the stairway and started down.

"Were you observing, Cousin Danilal," asked the babu, "that gentleman with red hairs seemed quite interested in patient while passing by?"

"Observed only gentleman's great vertical dimensions and brilliant color of hairs. Please depress your end of stretcher somewhat, Cousin Gundranesh. Patient is propelling self against my dorsal spine."

Puffing slightly and knocking the stretcher against corners while negotiating turns, they were halfway between the ground floor and the first story when they heard shouting. Almost simultaneously a bell began to ring, and running footsteps resounded in the halls.

Babu Dutt stopped abruptly, almost jerking the stretcher poles from Danilal's grasp. He listened. "Am gaining impression," he said nervously, "that perhaps ruse is discovered and pursuit is in progress."

"Am of similar opinion," said Danilal. "Nevertheless, suggest final dash for carriage."

"Avaunt!" said Babu Dutt.

THEY came out on the ground floor, to face a red light flashing on the wall opposite. The bell was still ringing somewhere in the hospital. They trotted toward the rear exit, halted when they heard excited voices around a turn of the corridor, doubled back.

"Advocate strategic pause for taking cover," said Cousin Danilal breathlessly. "Please investigate door at right elbow, Cousin Gundranesh."

The *babu* opened a door, peered in. It was dark inside, but by the dim, diffused light from the hall he could make out what seemed to be a series of cots, rather higher than the usual hospital beds. Sheeted figures lay on some of them.

"What are you discovering?" asked Danilal over his shoulder.

"Another ward," the Babu replied. "However, patients appear asleep. Lights are extinguished."

"Inside quickly," said Danilal, backing up.

They had scarcely entered the darkened room and closed the door, when they heard voices and footsteps hurrying by.

"What now, Cousin Dani?" breathed the *babu*. "Shall I make light?"

"What nonsense, light! Are there empty beds?"

"Observed several."

"Then let us place mental patient in same, disposing selves likewise in similar postures, in case search invades temporary cache."

"Here is empty bed, Cousin Dani. Lift. There! The bed is quite hard. Seems composed of stone."

"Stone, *be-shakk!* You have found empty place for self? Then grope quickly. Use sense of touch to utmost. Lie flat like prostrate patient, Cousin Gundranesh."

The *babu* groped, stretched himself on an empty slab. It was not at all comfortable. He wriggled his gluteal muscles repeatedly in an effort to find a better pose. He could not get rid of the sensation of cold and hardness. After a moment he whispered:

"Cousin Dani! Am greatly displeased with darkness of this place. Do you not observe eerie weirdness?"

"All darkness is composed of eerie weirdness," said Danilal.

"Not with similar smell," the Babu insisted, sotto voice. "You are not remarking uncanny odors, Cousin Dani?"

"Hush!" said Danilal.

Footsteps passed the door again, hesitated, came back. The door opened a crack. The glaring eye of a flashlight looked in. A beam of light swung about the room, rippled over the reclining figures, winked out. The footsteps retreated.

A whistling sigh escaped the *babu*. "What slender

escape!" he breathed. "You are not remarking slight coldness being transmitted to under parts, Cousin Dani?"

"Feel somewhat chilly from beneath," Danilal said.

"Why are hospitals using beds of similar stone construction? Appears quite unhealthy."

"Contrariwise," said Danilal. "Is no doubt new and modern cold therapy imported from Occident. Was reading recently in Bengalee *Indian Mirror* that American doctors now treating diseases by freezing patients in icebox."

"What strange notions! Shall we leave now, Dani?"

"Advise waiting until hubbub has subsided further."

"You are not forgetting client was threatening bodily injury if delivery delayed beyond eight o'clock?"

"Wait," said Danilal.

THE *BABU* WAITED. He knew Danilal was moving around. He could not see him, but he could follow his movements by the sound of his watch ticking resonantly in the darkness. Suddenly there was a sharp, grating noise. The *babu* sat up quickly, his heart pounding. He saw a dim gray oblong in the wall opposite.

"Come," the voice of Danilal whispered in his ear. "Have discovered window opening quite near from horse and carriage. Quickly, before open shutter is discovered. Which is patient?"

"This one, no doubt," said the *babu*, groping. "Can recognize large ears even in dark."

Danilal had located the stretcher, and they rolled the sheeted figure into it, carried it through the window, and made for the *peepul* trees, behind which the carriage stood.

They somehow got the stretcher poles through the red-and-green *purdah* draperies and wedged them between the seats without spilling the occupant.

The *babu* climbed to the driver's seat beside Danilal, and Dani flicked the horse's ears lightly with the whip. Just as the carriage wheels crunched into the gravel of the driveway, there was a shout, and a flashlight flickered through the trees. Danilal's whip cracked, the horse leaped into a gallop, and Babu Dutt almost tumbled from the driver's seat.

"No acrobatics, Cousin Gundranesh! Kindly keep eyes focused rearward," Danilal shouted into the hot night wind, "for double purpose of giving alarm in case of pursuit or of patient becoming dislodged."

The *babu* re-established his equilibrium with difficulty. Clinging fast to his precarious perch, he twisted what neck he possessed to look back as the curb bounced under the carriage wheels and the street unreeled dizzily behind. They had rumbled across the Narkooldanga Bridge and were passing the gas works when he reported: "Pursuers not yet visible, Cousin Dani. Believe same completely outwitted."

"And patient?" Danilal, grasping the reins with one hand, was still using the whip with the other.

"Patient continues self-contained. However, was remarking while loading same inside carriage that patient seemed quite cold from contact with stone bed."

"Am not surprised," Danilal replied. "Am experiencing continued chill in own bottom as result of similar contact."

He jerked the reins, and the horse turned north into Upper Circular Road. The carriage careened as one wheel caught in the railway tracks, then righted itself.

Danilal slowed down as he approached the Mohammedan burial ground. There was a limousine parked beyond the far end of the low masonry wall.

"Sincerely hoping that client will consider arrival sufficiently sharp," said the *babu* in an uncertain voice.

VI

THE elegant Mr. Boskett and the bow-legged Mr. Jimson arrived at the Mohammedan burial ground shortly before eight o'clock. Leaving Jimson in the car, Boskett made a complete circuit of the cemetery, trying the locked iron grilles, peering over the wall at the cold greenish light of fireflies flashing among the spectral tombs. He walked slowly with both hands in his coat pockets, as if expecting an ambush.

When he returned to the car, he said: "They're late, Jimson."

"Not for Hindus, they ain't late, Jimson countered. "An hour don't mean no more to a Hindu than an electric icebox means to a Eskimo. They'll be along."

"I'm not so sure. I've been uneasy about this all afternoon. I engaged them against my better judgment. There are too many outsiders in this already. If they do turn up with Marston, I shall liquidate all three."

"Hey, now, Mr. Boskett, I wouldn't do that. What can a coupla Hindu dinges and a New York dick do to ya? Suppose you do get a year or two in the cooler? What's that compared to what you'd get for murder?"

"This New York dick has been probing too deeply into my past," Boskett said. "He should have disappeared last night, but you bungled it. The way you talk, I'm beginning to suspect you didn't even try to kill him."

"Naw, Mr. Boskett. That was different. I tried, all right, and I just slipped up by accident. But that wasn't shooting in a public street, Mr. Boskett. That was—"

"Start your engine," Boskett ordered, "and keep it running. We shall be leaving in a hurry." He took an automatic from his pocket, and slipped the safety on and off several times.

"There they are, Mr. Boskett," Jimson exclaimed. "I told you they'd be here."

The gaily curtained carriage drove up and stopped. Boskett thrust his gun back into his pocket, stepped out of the car and said: "After they move the carriage into that blind alley ahead back your car across the entrance so they can't get out. And keep the engine running." He slammed the door.

"Good evening doctor," Babu Dutt called cheerfully from the driver's seat. "You are not waiting long I hope?"

"Were you successful?" Boskett demanded.

"Eminently," replied the *babu*. "Patient is—"

"Drive your carriage into that alley just ahead," Boskett interrupted. "We can talk more quietly there."

Boskett walked beside the carriage with his hands in his pockets. Jimson backed the car across the mouth of the narrow alley just as the carriage stopped inside.

The *babu* and Danilal jumped down and immediately set to work removing the stretcher. It took some time, inasmuch as the stretcher poles were wedged in tight, and there was little room to manipulate them with the *babu's* great bulk also in the way.

Boskett, standing a few paces off, fidgeted in silence as he watched. A faint metallic click seemed to emanate from his pocket.

Jimson got out of the car after a few minutes and came over to see what was happening.

At last Cousin Danilal freed his end of the stretcher

and worked it through the side nearest Boskett and Jimson. He climbed over the feet of the occupant, and lifted the poles from outside. The *babu* then lifted his end, and, panting and perspiring, started the stretcher moving.

With his first step, the *babu* put his right foot into the coil of rope on the floor of the carriage.

With his second step he put his left foot squarely upon the coil.

With his third step he became completely entangled in rope, tripped, pitched forward on his face, upending the stretcher, bowling over Cousin Danilal, and catapulting the occupant of the stretcher into the surprised arms of J. Jay Jimson.

Jimson yelled, "My God, he's dead! He's stiff as a—"

"Shut up, Jimson!" Boskett efficiently intervened, lowered the sheeted figure to the ground. He stripped away the cloth, shone a flashlight briefly upon a brown face fringed with white. He straightened up instantly.

"It's not our man Jimson. It's an old Hindu. I told you there was skulduggery afoot. Stand back, Jimson. I'd rather not shoot you yet."

Starlight glinted on the gun in Boskett's hand.

Babu Dutt raised himself on his elbows, stared into the muzzle of the automatic, and opened his mouth to scream.

• • •

TERRENCE O'REILLY was in no mood for an argument. His square jaw set grimly, and his hairy hands made fists.

"I said 'cousin'," he repeated.

The director of Narkooldanga Hospital gestured apologetically. "I don't doubt your word, sir," he said. "Only I find it strange that the injured man should have so many cousins."

"How many?" O'Reilly demanded.

"Well, several gentlemen telephoned—or perhaps the same gentleman telephoned several times—asking if the man had recovered consciousness, and saying that he believed the unfortunate was his cousin. Then Dr. Gupta says a Hindu gentleman positively identified the patient as a cousin—"

"Hindu gentleman? This man's no Hindu."

"Well, no, but the Hindu said he was Eurasian."

"Eurasian, my eye. No Eurasian I ever saw had blue eyes and sandy hair. Let's have a look at him."

"Certainly, sir. He's right here in Ward Ten."

Just before O'Reilly and the director entered Ward Ten, a stretcher crossed the hall, borne by two Hindus, one portly and one scrawny. O'Reilly looked at it curiously, but the occupant was covered with a sheet.

Just after they entered Ward Ten, the director exclaimed: "Good heavens! He's gone!"

A nurse, returning with a bunch of flowers in a vase, told her story—and the hospital was in an uproar. Signal lights flashed, an alarm bell called the ambulance crews, the staff and nurses were instantly set looking for the ill-assorted stretcher bearers, from maternity ward to mortuary. Although no one had seen them leave the hospital, the search was futile—until, twenty minutes later, a *chokidar* came puffing into the director's office.

"A *purdah* carriage with red and green curtains," panted the watchman, "drove off with—"

"You let 'em drive off?" O'Reilly interrupted.

"I shouted, but no one heard me, *sahib*. So I followed. I ran as far as the bridge, when I lost sight of them. The carriage turned north on Upper Circular Road. They—"

O'Reilly had heard enough. His taxi was still outside the hospital, ticking up the rupees and annas. He dashed from the building, jumped into the cab, and shouted an order to the driver.

The taxi sped over the bridge, roared north on Upper Circular Road, passed the Mohammedan burial ground, the Reardon Street tank, the Sham Bazaar—without O'Reilly catching sight of a *purdah* carriage with red and green curtains. When he reached the Barrackpore Bridge, he decided that no horse-drawn vehicle could have gone any farther in the elapsed time. He ordered the driver to go back—slowly. He would have to start over again, exploring the side streets.

He was a block past the Mohammedan burial ground when he heard two pistol shots in rapid succession.

BABU GUNDRANESH DUTT did not scream at the muzzle of Boskett's pistol. He could not. His vocal cords were paralyzed with terror. Hot and cold shivers raced up and down his spine. His elbows turned to soft rubber.

Then the hot night exploded with a thundering burst of flame—twice.

Something hit the *babu* a stinging blow in the face. He knew of course that he had been shot, probably killed. Yet, paradoxically, he did not collapse. Instead, the pain and impact restored his voice and his muscular reflexes. He arose instantly to full height, bumping his head on the top of the carriage, shrieking at the top of his lungs.

"Help! Murder!" he cried. "All is lost, Cousin Dani! Help!"

Cousin Danilal did not reply. He was, in fact, extremely busy at that moment. When the *babu's* misstep had upended the stretcher, knocked over Danilal, and pitched the strange corpse into J. Jay Jimson's arms, Danilal had retained his grip on his end of the stretcher poles. He still hung on as he staggered to his feet and saw Boskett draw a gun.

An instant before Boskett squeezed the trigger, Danilal lifted the empty stretcher and swung it, brushing Boskett's face, and smashing across his wrist.

The gun had fired twice into the ground, spraying dirt into the *babu's* face, before spinning from Boskett's grasp and rolled lopsidedly under the carriage.

Jimson made a dash for the automatic.

The horse reared.

Babu Dutt, still yelling, sprang from the carriage. He ran—he knew not where, but it made no difference, as long as he was running. But one foot was still entangled in the coil of rope, which paid out exactly ten paces, then jammed in the carriage door. The *babu*, pulled up short, went down again, butting his head into the stomach of the elegant Mr. Boskett, stretching the rope taut, just ankle high for J. Jay Jimson.

Jimson skidded three feet on his chest.

The *babu* was picking himself up just as Jimson hit the rope, yanking at the entangled Dutt foot. He sat down again, this time exactly amidships of the elegant Mr. Boskett.

Mr. Boskett made a sound like the valve of a steam radiator, but it was inaudible above the *babu's* cries.

"Help, Cousin Danilal!" shouted Gundranesh Dutt. "Have captured homicidal doctor! Help!"

"Keep chins up," Danilal replied. "Will attend to same shortly. Am currently engaged."

Scuttling over the ground on all fours, Danilal had snaked the rope end from between the carriage door and the jamb and was taking half hitches around the legs of J. Jay Jimson before the ex-jockey knew what had hit him.

Boskett squirmed desperately to get out from under the *babu,* but he had neither the strength nor leverage to move nearly three hundred pounds of Bengali. He succeeded only in making the *babu* yell the louder.

AT THAT MOMENT the shadow of a colossus stalked into the blind alley, a flashlight in one hand and a revolver in the other.

"What the hell's going on here?" demanded Terrence O'Reilly.

"Huve just foiled murderous homicidal assault."

"Foiled, my eye!" said O'Reilly, shining his light on the strange corpse. "This guy's deader'n stuffed duck."

"Greatly fear was not deceased recently," said Cousin Danilal, making a last knot in Jimson's bonds. "Kindly assist in affixing ropes to second wrongdoer."

"Where's Bill Marston?" O'Reilly demanded.

"Party of that name unknown in this region," the *babu* volunteered.

"Don't give me those," O'Reilly growled. "You're the guys I saw taking Bill Marston out of Ward Ten in Narkooldanga Hospital. Where is he?"

"You are no doubt referring to mental patient," said Danilal. "Regret same was misplaced by error. Due to darkness in ward he—Cousin Gundranesh! Have just solved mystery of stone beds! Alleged ward was perhaps hospital morgue chamber."

"Be-shakk, Cousin Dani! What comical joke! Sincerely hope other gentleman is not being erroneously interred."

"Look, you guys, quit this doubletalk and tell me what you did with Marston."

"I'll . . . tell . . . you . . ." gasped Boskett from underneath the *babu.* "I know when I'm licked. I'll . . . explain everything . . . if you'll get this hippopotamus off me before he cracks any more of my ribs."

"Don't move, *Babu,*" O'Reilly ordered. "We'll negotiate first, and then decide what to do with these skunks afterward. I think I'll drop that bow-legged squirt in the canal, like he did with Bill Marston."

"P-please don't," whined Jimson. "I'll do anything . . . "

Before they left the blind alley, Boskett agreed to turn over the stolen bonds without further ado, if O'Reilly would drop all thought of prosecution. O'Reilly agreed only with the proviso that Marston recovered and also consented. In the meantime, Boskett and Jimson would remain in O'Reilly's custody.

The *babu* and his cousin, satisfactorily explaining their part in the affair, got O'Reilly's consent to help them replace the deceased Hindu gentleman surreptiously in the morgue of Narkooldanga Hospital, in return for Bill Marston intact.

The latter clause, unfortunately, could not be carried out to the letter, for Narkooldanga Hospital was again in an uproar when they returned there.

Bill Marston had regained consciousness shortly after the departure of the Babu and Danilal, and had croaked weakly but insistently for a glass of water. A Moslem orderly, hearing a sepulchral voice emerging from the morgue, had fainted.

An interne and two nurses were working on the orderly when the bass voice from the morgue began demanding where he was and why there wasn't a light, and who put the stones in his mattress.

The nurses started the panic which threatened to become general before the interne investigated and had Bill Marston taken back upstairs to Ward Ten.

The director of the hospital was so relieved to have Marston leave the premises that he was willing to overlook the unauthorized outing of a corpse awaiting transferral to the burning *ghats.*

O'REILLY and Marston made their steamer for Singapore on time. Marston's head was still tied up and he was a little shaky in the legs, but well able to travel. Once the recovered bonds were locked in the purser's safe, the two New Yorkers adjourned to the ship's bar to celebrate their sailing.

"What's that Hindu word again for highball?" Marston wanted to know.

"Chota peg," said O'Reilly. "And the word for two is *do."*

Marston was just learning that the Hindustani word for "six" was *chhe* and feeling very good about it, when two *chaprassis* walked into the bar carrying a floral horseshoe with *Bon Voyage* written across it in red roses.

"O'Reilly Sahib *kewaste hai,"* said one *chaprassi,* handing over an envelope.

"Smile when you call him that," said Marston, whose head had stopped hurting with the second highball.

"It's from Babu Gundranesh Dutt," said O'Reilly, opening the envelope. "It says, 'Kindly accept thanks and best wishes of Grand International Detective Bureau for aid in recent case. Regret not boarding ship for sailing time farewell, but services just now subpoenaed by Bow Bazaar Police Station in re: mutual assault and battery by one Boskett upon person of one Jimson and vice versa, self having become unexpected witness to same while calling in re: Rupees 207, Annas 8, due for detective fees plus expenses—' Hey, what are you guys waiting around for? This ship's going to Singapore."

The two *chaprassis* who had brought the flowers were still standing by. One of them said: *"Das rupaiye manta, sahib. Phul ke-waste dam nikalta hai."*

"What's he want?" Marston asked.

"Ten rupees," said O'Reilly. "The *babu* sent the flowers collect."

He reached into his pocket, grinning, as the ship's siren wailed its signal of impending departure.

Toby laid the old man out on the sofa, while Grace and Henry and honey-chile stood by

The Devil Next Door

Skulduggery, not gossip, is going on over the back fences in F Street tonight. For Toby Shade, Washington correspondent, has a new neighbor, whose technique of diplomacy is to beat up old men

By William Brandon

Author of "Capitol Calamity," "Very Warm for Washington," etc.

GRACE went up the stairs a step at a time, humming contentedly to the lunch tray on her arm: "Oh, I'm going upstairs, Lord. Yes, I'm going upstairs. I'm going upstairs, Abraham. Yes, I'm going upstairs."

She stopped and got her breath. These three flights—old-fashioned, steep, and high—got a little bit harder to negotiate every year.

"Well," Grace said firmly, "I ain't really getting any younger. Nor any thinner, either." She looked down at herself and thought, with resignation, *My goodness, I'm wide enough I almost fill this stairway.*

She went on and reached the top and rested again. *Shoot, I'll be going to glory one of these days and I guess the Lord won't mind a little fat.* She sighed. *Henry don't.* Her old eyes smiled in peace and she went down the hall to Toby's office and opened the door.

Toby Shade lay far back in his chair, his long legs draped over his cluttered desk. He was holding the telephone up to his chin and his eyes were closed. His Indian-dark face turned toward the door and he opened one eye to Grace and closed it again in a slow wink.

Grace edged in with her tray. She whispered, "Where I put it, Mr. Toby?"

Toby swung his legs off his desk. He spoke into the phone: "I'd be glad to do it, Senator. I wish I could. But I can't have a beautiful young girl coming here to live alone with me."

Grace pushed papers and typewriter aside with an arm and tenderly lowered the tray to the desk.

"I might not be safe," Toby said. "Think of my reputation." He drummed the hook. "Hello. Hello. Senator. Hello, Senator! Hello, you fish-faced rubber-gut. Hello!"

He threw the phone back on the desk and grinned at Grace. "He hung up."

"I knowed he had," Grace said placidly. "You wouldn't say a thing like that right to a senator's face."

"You'd be surprised what I'd say to a senator's face. Or anybody else's face, if it comes to that. That's what democracy means to me." He swung his chair up to the desk and lifted the napkin off the lunch. "Cherry pie," he said warmly. "You sit down and rest a while, Aunt Grace."

She sank into a chair, pleased. "Oh, sure, it's Aunty Grace when you get cherry pie." She fanned her shining black face with her apron.

"What's wrong with that?"

"I was just thinking what your mamma used to say, away back when you was little. She bet you never would grow up. She said it was so all over you, just like your pappa was. Now you just taste that pickalilly. See if you don't like it."

Toby tasted it and opened his mouth and stuck out his tongue. "Aaah!"

Grace chuckled, low and soft.

Toby spoke, his mouth full: "You remember Washington during the last war, don't you, Grace?"

"Oh, my goodness," Grace said. "Indeed I do."

Toby chewed thoughtfully. "They built that batch of temporary office buildings for the War Department. Lucky they haven't got 'em all torn down yet. They're filling 'em up again."

"My, my," Grace said.

"Some departments are even having to go to Baltimore to find office space. Whole town's jammed. And as for finding a house or apartment to live in—no shake at any price. That bad the last time?"

"Why, your mamma had at leas' twenty people in this house day in and day out. They wasn't a single flat to be had any place at all. Oh, it was even worth your life to ride on a streetcar. My, *was* they crowded!"

"Well," Toby said, "that's what the senator was just telling me. He wants me to do him a favor."

"Senator who?" Grace asked suspiciously.

"Jonathan."

"Oh, he's all right, then. He's nice." She paused. "Just what do he want, though?"

"Well, there's an old friend of mine, lives out in the senator's home state now. A guy named Duffy. He's got a niece. Tabitha Duffy."

"Mmm," Grace said.

"What a name!" Toby drank his coffee. "Well, she's come to Washington to get a job. She went to the senator and she said her uncle knew me. So the senator passed the buck."

Grace gave him a sidewise look. "What you mean, Mr. Toby?"

"He said she didn't have any place to stay. He said he was already taking care of a dozen like her. He told me she'd have to stay here until I could persuade her to go back home, or find her an apartment she could afford."

Aunt Grace lifted her hands, palms out.

"That's what I told him," Toby said.

"I declare," Grace said. "Why, he know you ain't the kind of a man to go to take care of any little innocent young lady."

Toby frowned judicially. "Well, I don't know."

"Why, that's just scandalous."

Toby leered at her. "How do you know she's innocent?"

Grace opened her mouth and closed it tightly.

Toby moved in on the cherry pie. "Anyhow," he said between bites, "he told me he'd already sent her over, with her luggage. He said you and Henry were chaperones enough."

"Oh, the poor little thing," Grace said. Toby turned his head and gave her an offended look but she didn't notice. "I guess Henry and me *will* be here, but . . ." She shook her head and went, "Tsk, tsk, tsk."

Toby lit a cigarette, grinning. "Harsh words, Grace. Now beat it and let me get back to work. She'll be here before five. Put her in General Grant's room. There's a good lock on that door."

"Mmp," Grace said. She went out with the tray.

WASHINGTON was in turmoil. It wasn't the fault of Washington; it only reflected the tempers of the times, and, possibly, pointed them up a little—which is the function of a capital.

The weight of momentous events hung as heavily over the city as did the soggy early summer heat. Leaders spoke no more in flippant terms; they felt instead that they were giving statements to the ages, and therefore considered their words well and delivered them with a tolling solemnity. Also they seemed to be gripped by an odd belief that nothing was worth saying at this time unless it was sensational; and consequently sometimes let their imaginations get a little too high in an apparent effort, absolutely unintended as such, of course, to take the front pages away from the last thundering sensation before theirs.

There was a grain or two of over-excitement in this, a malady which is no respecter of high places. But it made it tough on a working newspaperman.

It was Toby Shade's task—Toby being a top-flight Washington columnist—to separate the sheep from the goats in this avalanche of stop-press bulletins. It was his task to hint to his readers which sensation deserved their serious concern and which was "dismissed by Committee sources as without foundation." This is known as interpreting. It is a very ticklish job of work. If you interpret wrong very many times you will find yourself without any readers except your relatives and the Berlin radio.

Thus Toby labored until dark getting out his daily sticks, and then, stiff and weary, stumbled his way downstairs to find surcease in a couple of Fish House punches before dinner.

He had forgotten about Tabitha Duffy.

He stopped on the first floor, outside his library door, and shouted for Henry.

In the library, a woman screamed.

Toby whipped around in a violent spasm of leaping nerves. An afternoon of interpreting leaves a man on edge. Nursing his right arm, he pushed open the library door. He had clipped his crazy bone against the newel post. It fanned raw pain up to his shoulder.

A blond girl was standing behind his desk. She was holding both hands over her mouth. Her blue eyes were large and round and horrified.

She took her hands away. "Oh, I'm awful sorry," she said. "I'm just frightfully sorry. I heard myself scream." She had an Alabama accent you could roll like a hoop.

"So did I," Toby said.

HER blue eyes stopped being round but they were still big. They went with her. She was all of a piece; her mass of bright blond hair, those wistful and surprised eyes, her small and altogether lovely figure and her very nice legs and very high-heeled shoes. Even the Southern accent. The blond bombshell from Alabam; the little wide-eyed Southuhn gal who usually came up no'th and picked off the city siren's appointed.

She was a type. She would stand on tiptoe when she was kissed. That was all right, Toby reflected. A guy wouldn't object if she stood on her head.

She said, "You see, I was workin', and I'd just forgot

where I was, and then you *yayelled* . . ." She giggled, looking ashamed. "I just *jumped!*"

"You jumped, I jumped," Toby pointed out, "all square. You're Tabitha Duffy?"

"And *you're* Toby Shade. I know you are. I've been waitin' so long to meet you." She came around the desk and gave him her hands and when he took them she kissed him. Very chaste, very cool, very terrific.

Toby blinked.

"I feel just like you're my uncle," Tabitha Duffy said, swinging back on his hands and smiling at him with an innocent, childlike friendliness. "I so hope you're goin' to like me." She didn't say poor little me, but it sounded like it. Which was all right; on her it looked good.

"Well," Toby said, endeavoring to chuckle in a fatherly manner, "I'll try to. How's Orlee?"

"Oh, Uncle Orlee's just grand. But I haven't seen him for ages. He didn't want me to come way up here all by myself but I told him if the country needed me, I guessed I could do it, couldn't I? And anyhow, I'll show him whether I can get an old job or not. Won't we?"

Toby said uncertainly, "Easy. What kind of work do you do, Tabitha?"

"You just wait a minute and I'll show you. I'm a cryptographer. You go sit down and I'll bring it over. My goodness, you're tall, Toby!" She pushed him into a chair. "I can see you're just tired to death."

Toby sat down. She was getting some papers from his desk. He said, "Did you say you were a cryptographer?"

"Mm-hmm. You know, working out ciphers and secret codes and things like that. I'm going to work in the Government's Black Chamber, or Green Chamber or Red Chamber, or whatever it is, just as soon as I find somebody in the right place to talk to. But I guess you'll take care of all that, won't you, Toby? I don't reckon it's any too easy for them to find people that can solve their secret codes and things, but I like to do it just for fun, but I studied it too, so I don't think I ought to have stayed down there in Carew, ought I?"

She sat down beside him. "And besides, I've always just been crazy to come to Washington. Here's what I was workin' on when you yayelled, Toby. I just got it this afternoon."

She passed him a sheet of stiff, heavy stationery. Expensive stuff. It had been folded once. There was a single line of typing on it:

¿Que se dice hoy de nuevo, Falange?

"It's in Spanish," Tabitha said, leaning across the arm of his chair, her cheek against his shoulder. "That makes it ever so much harder. I found your Spanish dictionary and translated it into English, but that didn't help any at all with the code. It says, 'What one say today of new, Falange?' I didn't look Falange up, because I guessed it must be somebody's name. Isn't it silly? But they never do make any sense until you know what they mean."

TOBY turned the paper over, studying it. He held it up to the light to read the watermark. The engraved letterhead had evidently been cut off, and with it had gone part of the watermark. The coiled tail of a snake was left, accompanied by . . . *ayama.*

He read the typewritten line again. "Where'd you say you got this?"

"I didn't say yet, Toby honey. But it was the most excitin' thing! Senator Jonathan told me your number here on F Street was 1921, so I went there, and it's really three houses down, that huge old yellow brick house on the corner, and I knocked on the door and said what the senator'd told me to—"

"What was that?"

"Why, he told me to say that I'd just come from the offices. Wasn't that silly? But anyway, I went right ahead and said it, to this little dark man that opened the door, and before I could go ahead and ask for you he pushed an envelope in my hand and shut the door. Right in my face!"

"This paper was in an envelope?"

"Yes, and it was sealed, too, but you just wait and let me tell you. So I knocked again, and finally that little man opened the door again, and there was the most *awful* expression on his face, and he literally pushed me right down the steps, whispering at me in the most *savage* way every minute, but I couldn't understand a word he said.

"Well, I was afraid to go back up there again, and I didn't know *what* to do. And then a little colored boy came along and I asked him if he knew where Mr. Toby Shade lived, and he said yes, and I said, it wasn't really in that big yellow brick house, was it, and he said—"

"So he brought you here," Toby said.

"Yes, and—"

"And you opened that envelope."

"But I tried to give it back to that little man, when he opened the door the second time! And he only pushed me—"

"And you decided it was a message in code."

"Oh, everyone says Washington is simply crammed with spies, so I knew— Toby, honey, you don't know what it means?"

Toby hesitated. He said finally, "It says, 'What is the news today?' "

"But I translated it from your Spanish dictionary and it says, 'What one say today of news?' I looked it up word for word."

"That's the Spanish construction of the sentence. It's different from the way we'd say it."

"If that isn't silly! You mean it isn't in any code at all? But what about that upside-down question mark in front of it? That must mean something."

"It's an old Spanish custom," Toby said. "That's the way they punctuate a question."

"You're laughin' at me, Toby, and I don't blame you the least little bit. But I still don't see why that dark man gave it to me so mysteriously and all, and there wasn't a single scratch of address on the envelope either. Do you know who Falange is, too?"

"It isn't a who," Toby said thoughtfully. "It's a political party in Spain."

"Like the Democrats and Republicans here?"

"No," Toby said, rubbing his chin with his thumb and studying the paper, "like the Nazis in Germany. It's the only political party they have in Spain. All the others were dissolved after the Civil War."

"Why, that doesn't sound fair," Tabitha said.

An aged colored man came in, his heelless slippers slapping methodically against the floor. "I heard you holler, Mr. Toby. I guessed you wanted a punch."

"Thanks, Henry." Toby took the drink and stood up. "Grace in the kitchen? I want to see her for a minute."

GRACE was going to town in the kitchen. The stove was crowded with pots and pans and the long table was littered with wooden and crockery bowls and a variety of provisions.

"What is this," Toby inquired, "a regimental kitchen? Where's the banquet?"

Grace turned on him with a long wooden spoon. "You want that young lady to think we trash, Mr. Toby?"

Toby tasted some cake icing. He washed it down with his drink.

Grace waddled to the stove and lifted a lid and stirred briefly. "I only want her to know you get fed good."

The icing went well with the Fish House punch. He had some more.

"Because you don't look it," Grace said firmly, opening the oven and reaching in with an apron-covered hand.

"What I came out for," Toby said, "was—"

"Now you quit spoiling your supper."

Toby left the icing and sat down on a three-legged stool. He sipped his drink and leaned back against the sink. "You know the old Custer house on the corner, Grace. Someone's moved in there."

"Mmp," Grace said, bustling around the stove. "Some kind of foreign folks."

"You get their name?"

"The mailman say they got a letter addressed to—to—" She fished in a pocket under her apron and brought out a scrap of paper. "I wrote it down. Mr. Rafael Careaga." She spelled the name out.

Toby sat up. "You remember Careaga, from the San Silvestran Ministry, Grace. He was here to dinner about a year ago."

Grace stopped and thought. "I guess I'd have to look in my book, Mr. Toby."

"He was the San Silvestran chargé d'affaires. He was kicked out when San Silvestro elected its new administration a couple of weeks ago."

"If they had a cook down there," Grace said regretfully, "I'd know a little something about who they was. But they never a soul around."

Toby stood up and killed his drink. "How long till dinner, Grace?"

"Not a second more'n half an hour, Mr. Toby."

"I'll be back." He went out the back door.

THE night was clear and cool. The stars were bright but the moon had not yet risen. He stood in his back yard for a minute to accustom his eyes to the darkness and then strode over to the low paling fence that separated his lot from his next-door neighbor's. He vaulted the fence and crossed the next yard and took the next fence with an easy Western roll.

At the next house someone opened a rear door just as he entered the yard and he drew back against the fence, waiting. The door was open for a couple of minutes, throwing a narrow pyramid of yellow light across the yard, and then it was slammed shut. The old Custer house was next, on the corner. He reached its fence.

He heard steps behind him; close behind; he spun around, saw a vague flash of white fluttering toward him, and threw up his arms.

"Oh, Toby," Tabitha whispered breathlessly, reaching him.

"What's the matter?" There was alarm in his voice.

"I just wanted to come with you. I've been runnin', keepin' up with you."

"I didn't tell you to follow me. I told you I'd be right back."

"You didn't fool me the least bit, Toby honey. You know that note's a secret message just as much as I do. Only you didn't want me to come along when you investigated."

"That's right," Toby said. "I didn't. Beat it."

She squeezed his arm. "Will it be dangerous?"

He drew a long breath. "Oh, hell," he said. "Come on, I'll go back with you."

Her grip on his arm tightened in panic. He looked around, over his shoulder, and then jumped away from the fence.

A white hand had appeared, clinging to the top of the fence. The fingers worked, the hand crawled along the top rail, like some giant, groping insect.

The fence was less than five feet high; of solid boards, not pickets, as most were in this block. The owner of the hand must be on the ground on the other side. On the ground, reaching up, trying to haul himself up by the help of the fence. The hand slipped, clawed wildly, flopped out of sight.

Toby shook Tabitha off and went over.

A white-haired old man lay on his back and stared up stupidly at him. His right hand was reaching again, feebly, for the top of the fence. Even in the shadowed dark Toby could see blood on his gaunt face.

The old man's mouth opened, wide. A hoarse rattle came from his throat. His arm described foolish circles in the air. He was trying to talk.

Toby picked him up, and when the faint starlight touched and illuminated the aged, beaten face, he recognized him. He said, "Holy cow," and threw a leg over the fence, carrying the man along.

Then Tabitha, standing in stark terror, also saw the old man's face. She screamed.

Toby cursed violently and stumbled, trying to hurry over the fence. He took six inches of hide off his shin and fell to one knee, nearly dropping the old man. He found his feet and ducked his head and ran.

He didn't look back for Tabitha. If the Falangists in the old Custer house had ears they had heard her yayell, and if they opened a window and took a pot shot at her, that was too tough.

At the next fence he stopped, reached over and lowered the old man to the ground on the other side and then went over himself, getting his wind. He stooped to pick up the old man again and Tabitha scrambled over. Something tore.

"Ohh," Tabitha said. She wilted all over Toby as he was straightening with the old man balanced on his back.

"God—bless you, my child," Toby said between his teeth.

"I couldn't help it," Tabitha wailed. "He looked like he was dead!"

"You could make a living with that scream," Toby said. He boosted her away and went on. She ran along beside him, keeping her hands behind her.

Some place, back in one of the back yards they had traversed, a colored boy was howling nervously: "What goin' on back here? Huh? You all go way from here now. Go on!"

THE old man was stretched on a couch in Toby's library. Grace was washing the blood off his face with warm water; Henry was standing by with a bottle of brandy. Toby was watching the old man's wide-open, unreasoning eyes.

Tabitha was standing by the end of the couch, watching everything closely. She said, "Hadn't he really ought to have a doctor, Toby honey?"

Toby and Henry and Grace turned to look at her. Her eyes widened. Toby and Henry and Grace turned back to the old man.

"He's comin' to, Mr. Toby," Grace whispered.

Henry advanced with the brandy. The old man stirred on the couch. His clothes were expensive and well cut, but they could not hide the scarecrow boniness of his aged frame. The old man rolled his head to one side and closed his eyes. His bloodless lips were trembling.

Henry slipped a hand gently under his head and touched a cup of brandy to his lips. "Try jus' a sip of this, Mr. Valdés." Brandy trickled down the old man's chin, and Grace leaned forward to wipe it away with her cloth. The old man swallowed with difficulty. He opened his eyes again.

Toby took a deep breath. His nose quivered slightly. A tingling, electrical sensation was working its way down the back of his neck. His long, sallow hands were unsteady. "Don Carlos," he said huskily.

The old man's eyes turned up to him. After a long minute a wan smile crept onto his battered face. He whispered, "Señor Shade."

Toby shot out a long arm and spun a chair to him and sat down. He waved his hand irritably and Grace and Henry withdrew.

"I found you in the back yard," Toby said, speaking steadily, carefully. "Careaga's yard . . . Careaga's house" He waited. The old man seemed to be hearing him. "You had been held prisoner there, Don Carlos? You had escaped?"

The shaky smile stayed on the old man's face. "I am sorry, Señor Shade. I regret it, how much." His hand groped out and caught Toby's and gripped it in an evidence of sincerity. "You expect such—such a break of news, eh? Finding me like that. I see you do. I see you do. I am sorry." He closed his eyes and breathed deeply. The smile went away.

Toby felt the excitement drain away from him. He knew Señor Don Carlos Valdés very well. He was one of the oldest diplomats, both in years and in point of residence, in Washington. He was the minister from San Silvestro.

A good many of the capital newspaper sharpies thought Valdés was in his dotage; a fumbling, antique figurehead; of no importance. It was true that Señor Don Rafael Careaga, his chargé d'affaires until two weeks ago, had been the real minister for some time. But whether Valdés was in his dotage or not, Toby knew by experience that if the old man didn't want to tell something he would not tell it. You can't break a diplomat's silence.

The old man's eyes opened again. "Thank you," he whispered. "Thank you, Señor Shade. I say at least that. I can say at least that." The smile returned. "Please. May I have a cab?"

Toby turned his head, "Grace! Call a cab." He swung back. His fingers drummed on his knees. His hands were no longer shaking with the tension, the taut-wire expectancy of the break of a five-alarm story. He sighed. "I might go on and look into it, Don Carlos," he said. He couldn't keep all the bitterness out of his voice.

"Yes," Señor Valdés said. "You have the right. Yours is a free country here." The smile flickered a little and went out.

Toby felt again the electric prickling at the base of his skull. Something in the old diplomat's words, eyes, tone—something suggested to him that Señor Don Carlos Valdés wanted nothing better than for Toby to go ahead on his own and have a crack at the story. But wouldn't—or couldn't—say so.

He held down his eagerness. "You can't give me any kind of a statement, sir?"

Don Carlos closed his eyes. "I will say only," he muttered slowly, "it was a personal quarrel, and Señor Careaga, being the younger, got the better." His eyes opened once more and held directly on Toby's face and this time they were not smiling. "That is everything I will say, Señor Shade."

"BUT he didn't tell you anything at all," Tabitha said. Toby paced up and down the library, dragging on a cigarette. Tabitha sat in the same chair, following him with her eyes.

"He told me a lot. For one thing, he told me Señor Don Rafael Careaga"—he stopped and jammed the cigarette into an ash tray—" was really in this house on the corner. For another, he told me San Silvestro was in real danger. For this country, that's important. It's tremendously important." He lit another cigarette."

"I must be awful dumb, Toby honey, but I don't even know where San Silvestro is."

"It's a South American republic. They've had their politics jammed up for nearly a year. Just got them straightened out in the election a couple of weeks ago. Now—" he gestured.

"But I don't see how in the world you can find out a thing, if he wouldn't tell—"

"Hell," Toby blared at her, "I know all of it now. It's my business to know everything. I know what it is. I know I know it. All I have to do is assemble it the right way. All I need is a brain."

He stopped and faced her.

"I know the United States Import Export Bank is loaning fifty million to San Silvestro." He held up one finger. "Can it tie into that? No. Haven't heard a whisper of trouble around it. Slick as a whistle.

"I know Careaga's in this corner house. I know he hasn't got any telephone. Why? There could only be one reason. The things he might have to talk about are too warm for wires. Who taps wires? The FBI isn't allowed to. Then who does? Foreign agents. Gestapo, Ogpu, Ovra, Falange Exterior . . ."

He walked down to his desk, wheeled and came back. "I know it's tied into the Falange. 'What is the news today, Falange?' Not signed Falange. Asking Falange. Written to the Falange."

"Well, Toby, honey," Tabitha said hesitantly, "I'm still way back there. How do you know that what's-his-name hasn't got any telephone?"

"Because he took you for some kind of a messenger and gave you that note. It was innocent enough to have been told over a phone—as far as anyone accidentally hearing it's concerned. But he sent it in a note. It means something. It's some kind of a tipoff. But you won't get it by working it out like a cryptogram."

He saw the brandy Henry had had in for Valdés' use, and he took a drink from the bottle.

"I KNOW what the Falange is. I know what it's doing over here. Especially in South America. It's acting as a mouthpiece for the Nazis. Because the Falangists are Spaniards and can talk to the South Americans in their own language. Because it's freer than the other axis agencies.

"The United States is still officially friendly to Spain. Consequently to the Falange. And wanting to get still friendlier. Because we think there's still a chance Spain can be turned away from the Axis. Same situation as with Russia. Consequently the Falangists and the Communists aren't bothered too much. Consequently the Nazis like to use them. Consequently they're a hell of a lot more dangerous than most people believe.

"Especially the Falangists in South America. They're dropping their party labels down there and working into the local governments. They're encouraging closer and closer relations with Spain. Consequently with Germany.

"They're encouraging barter pacts with Spain. Discouraging trade agreements with the United States. They want South America's raw materials to go to Spain, and possibly on to Germany—not up here.

"But the United States can't put an official chill on that. If the San Silvestran minister asks our State Department whether we'll be sore if they sign a barter pact with Spain, we have to keep still. We're trying to get chummy with Spain for reasons of our own. Can't turn around and insult her right out in the diplomatic open, where she'd hear about it. Even though we'd know San Silvestro would be stabbing herself in the back as well as us, to . . .

"But Valdés has been here long enough to read our mind without asking it. And anyhow, about a thing like that he'd be able to talk. Publicity would be the most beautiful way in the world for him to ask an indiscreet question about

our official opinion, or to clear up some point of confusion for his government back home.

"Why can't he open his mouth? The story, anything except direct quotes, couldn't be nailed to his head. If he's in trouble, why doesn't he use the press? Everyone else does. He knows how. But he . . ."

He stopped talking and looked down at the smoldering tip of his cigarette.

Presently he said, "Come on in to dinner. Grace has made a feast."

"Aren't you even goin' to do anything? I mean, not even tell the police how that poor old man was—"

Toby stared at her. "This is my story, sweetheart. When that house is cracked I'll do it, and I'll know what I'm after. Come on. Move it."

She got up and shrieked and sat down, her face pink.

Toby, at the door, jumped and whirled around, cracking his head against the door jamb.

"I just plumb forgot about my dress. I tore it on that fence, and there isn't anything at all left on my skirt except the front."

Toby groaned, "Oh, hell." He staggered away, squeezing his head.

She giggled. "I think that's the cutest way you say oh hayell, Toby honey. And I'll be right back down. Don't you even wait on me."

THE dinner was excellent. Henry was wearing his white jacket for the occasion. Grace peered into the dining room from time to time. She had decreed candles on the table. They did well by Tabitha: she had put on a low-necked dinner gown of some fluffy, cloudy, filmy stuff that made her look blonder, daintier, and more ethereal than usual, as long as she kept still.

During dinner he had Henry put in a telephone call to Josh Abramson, of the AP bureau in Masas, San Silvestro. The call was completed during dessert.

Toby went into the library. He saw Grace in the hall, looking at him accusingly. He said, "Sorry, Grace."

She opened the library door for him. "Your pappa wouldn't leave a lady in the middle of a good dinner, Mr. Toby."

"He never met this lady, Grace. And you can bring my dessert in here."

He sat down at his desk and took the phone. "Hello, Josh?" He grinned. "Great. . . . You were, hey? No no, nothing big. What gave you that idea? No, nothing like that. I'll tell you, Josh. I've got a piece on the fire about the Falangists down there and I can't get any dope on how they're succeeding with that business of theirs in San Silvestro. . . . What business? Good Lord, you know. That —ah—that Spanish barter pact they've been trying to promote with the new government."

He listened and began to frown. He heard the library door open and glanced around to see Tabitha coming in with his cake and sherbet and coffee.

She whispered, "I said I'd bring it in, Toby honey, as long as I was comin' in anyhow." She sat down, smoothing her voluminous skirt, and watched him brightly.

Toby said into the phone: "What do you mean, the Falange isn't promoting it? Who else would promote it? . . . Valdés? You're crazy, Josh. Valdés is the guy that would kill it. He's in touch with our government. He knows better. Why would he want to give the Falange a foothold in this new administration?"

"I'll bet you find out he's crooked," Tabitha whispered. "Just as sure as you live and breathe."

"The United States what?" Toby yelled. "The United States is in favor of it? Where the hell did you pick up . . . You know as well as I do that's off the elbow. Well, if it's a rumor you know whose rumor it is. . . . Why, the Falangists. All right, the Castelaristas, then. . . Well, it's phoney, Josh. It couldn't come from the Ministry up here. You know old Valdés better than that. . . . Well, tell 'em so. . . . Sure, they'll believe their minister before they'll believe you, but I'll never believe they got any information like that from their legation here."

"Now, Toby honey," Tabitha whispered, "he ought to know better than you, if he's right down there."

"If Careaga was still in his job here I might believe it, but he's out. . . . Well, I think Careaga would cross his grandmother for a dime, that's why. But old Valdés is a different matter. His honor means more than his—"

Toby paused and the sherbet spoon in his hand began to shake and he dropped it back to the dish.

"Don't you be too sure of anybody," Tabitha whispered. "My grandmama always told me not to trust any man."

"Yes, I'm still here," Toby shouted. His eyes were gleaming. "There's some kind of an infernal machine rattling away in here and I can't hear you. Listen, Josh." He leaned forward in his chair and pressed his thumb down on his desk top. "I'll poke around in it up here and see what I can find out."

He hesitated for a fraction of a second and said, "By the way, Josh. Still there? Say, I never knew before today that Valdés and Careaga were related. But I guess all those officials down there . . . They're what? Cousins? Oh, father-in-law. You know her, hey?" He grinned. "Well, let me know ahead of time if she ever comes up here, then." He chuckled. "Okay. See you later."

HE REPLACED the receiver. For a minute he sat still in his chair, squeezing his lower lip with a thumb and forefinger and staring at the melting sherbet. Then he swung around in his chair and got up and strode out of the room.

Tabitha called, "Where you goin', Toby honey? I—" She jumped up and ran after him.

She caught up with him as he went down his front steps. She slipped her arm through his and smiled up at him. "It is a nice evenin' for a walk, isn't it?"

He took another step and then seemed to notice her for the first time. He stopped. "Look, Tabitha—" He let out a deep breath. "What's the use?" He went on. She trotted along beside him, holding her skirt up with one hand.

She said, "You goin' to go walk by that house, Toby?"

"I'm going in."

"But you said until you knew what you were after—"

"I know what I'm after."

The big yellow brick house on the corner was dark, except for a single lighted window toward the rear. Toby hammered on the door. After a long wait an entrance light flashed on over their heads and the heavy door opened.

Tabitha exclaimed, "That's the same little man—"

The door started to slam shut and Toby rammed his foot against it. He lifted his hand and thrust it wide open.

A little dark man with great, soft, olive eyes cried, "What want you here?"

Toby shoved him out of the way. He went on through the entrance hall to a tall, long room, elegantly furnished, lined with solidly framed, gloomy paintings. A small lamp in one corner was lit. He held Tabitha by the hand.

"Señor Careaga," Toby said to the little man.

"He is not here!"

Toby dropped his right hand on the other's shoulder and his long fingers bit in. He lifted and the little man came off the floor.

Toby grinned down at him. "You get him," he said in a friendly tone, "or I'll look for him myself." He opened his hand and the little man dropped and scuttled madly away.

"He said Mr. Careaga wasn't here," Tabitha whispered uneasily. "I don't think we ought to wait, Toby honey."

"He didn't like your looks," Toby said.

"Oh, silly, he'd already seen me twice today. He's the same one that gave me that envelope. I tried to tell you."

Steps approached the room and a chunky, middle-aged man entered, walking quickly, with short rapid steps. His face was smooth and bland; his eyes politely curious.

"Señor Shade, isn't it?" He stopped three paces from Toby. "What do you want here? I am very busy." He saw Tabitha, hiding behind Toby, and snapped. "And who is she? She impersonated a messenger at my door today and securied a confidential message. I demand its return."

Toby felt Tabitha cowering in panic. He said gravely, "I only came to take you to your train, Don Rafael."

"Train?" Careaga flushed and his eyes were sultry. "What are you speaking? What do you want here?"

Toby drew Tabitha out from behind him and headed her toward the front hall. "Go outside and stop a cab. Don Rafael will be in a hurry."

He gave her an additional shove. "Move along." He looked out into the hall to watch her go out the front door and turned back to Careaga. "You won't need a coat. It's a warm evening."

"You fool, you are insane! What do you mean?"

Toby shrugged. "I didn't think you'd want to be in town when I publish my column tomorrow about you. But it's up to you, of course."

"Me? What have you to say about me? I am now only a private citizen."

"It's about," Toby said, "the way you've been sending false reports from the legation down to San Silvestro."

"I am no longer connected with the legation! I—"

"You've got some friends in there yet. You should have; you've been the boss of the joint the last few years."

"And can you prove—"

"You're damned right I can prove. A messenger comes here from your gang at the legation every day and picks up some word to take back. Today that word got in the wrong hands. Specifically, it got in mine."

TOBY jabbed a long finger against Careaga's chest. He said harshly: "You turned bitter when you got the can from the legation, so you threw in with the Falangists. The Castelaristas, they call themselves in San Silvestro.

"You used the contacts you still have at the legation here to forward erroneous reports to San Silvestro. The idea was to confuse the new administration down there about the attitude of the United States on certain matters of policy. Which would work for the benefit of the Falangists. You were selling out your country for your own political future."

Careaga's lips were tight with fury. "Has Don Carlos been speaking to you, perhaps?" The s's in his careful English were sibilant with excitement.

Toby snapped, "No one had to speak to me perhaps. It only takes a nose to smell a skunk. Valdés is your father-in-law. He's an old line aristocrat and he'd rather see his country doublecrossed than one of his family in disgrace.

"But he's still the San Silvestran Minister and he did brace you about those false reports—as soon as he found out about them. He couldn't speak of it to anyone else. You're a member of his family. But he did come here tonight and the two of you blew your tops and started swinging and you took the old man to the cleaners.

"And he took it and kept still. You knew damned well he would. You knew he'd keep on keeping still forever. Because you're one of his family. You know what family means to him—or any other South American blueblood. But it doesn't mean anything to me. I'll spread the story all over the lot. And I mean it."

"Then why do you come to me now? Why do you threaten me with this exposé before you print it?"

Toby's tone changed. He said indifferently: "To give you a chance to make a deal. If you want it. That story will ruin you and it'll ruin Valdés; he'll be recalled. But he's an old man and his future's behind him. Your future is another matter. You might still have a use for it. If you'll go back to San Silvestro—now, right away—and stay there, I'll suppress that story. Otherwise, I'll break it tomorrow."

"That is generous," Careaga said sarcastically.

Toby studied his fingernails. "Take it or leave it. You don't know how generous it is."

"I don't understand your concern for my future."

Toby glanced up. "I'd gladly see it go to hell, my friend. I'm thinking about an old guy who would probably be killed by a scandal in his family; and I'm probably a first-rate chump to let it bother me. But make up your own mind. Only make it up now." He could hear Careaga's rapid breathing. He said harshly, "Your cab's waiting."

"You give me no choice," Careaga answered at last. "What else can I do?"

"Cut your throat," Toby said.

TOBY lounged at his office desk, nursing his telephone. He couldn't put his feet on the desk. Tabitha was sitting there, looking like a slice of the sunlit morning in a brown seater and a yellow skirt.

She was swinging her legs and drumming her heels annoyingly against the side of the desk. She said, "You tell him thanks again for me, won't you?"

"I'll wring your neck if you don't shut up." Toby grinned in contentment and spoke at the phone: "Good morning, Senator. Toby Shade. Yes, she found us all right. Got the wrong address first, though. Very strange. . . .

"The San Silvestran legation? What about it? No, I don't know anything about the San Silvestran legation. Still there, I guess. . . .

"Careaga? Let's see . . ." Toby closed his eyes and grinned slowly "He used to be the chargé d'affaires or secretary or something around there, didn't he? He's been what? You don't mean indulging in some dirty work, Senator? Tsk, tsk. Why didn't you probe him?

"Oh, naturally. Naturally. A U. S. senator couldn't prod around in such stuff. Naturally. . . . I see.

"Of course," he said lazily, "you might have sent someone to Careaga's house at just the time of day a messenger always came from his mob at the legation, so she'd happen to be given a message by mistake, and maybe show it to some guy who—"

"Toby *honey!*" Tabitha gasped and put her hand over her mouth. "Did the senator really do that?"

"Accuse you?" asked Toby of the phone. "Why, you can't accuse a senator, Senator. . . . Why, no, as a matter of fact, I think Careaga's left town. Yes, I think he left last night. . . . I wouldn't know. . . . Story? What story would I get out of what? Why the hell should I get a break? . . .

"Well, she seems to be making out." He opened his eyes and looked at Tabitha. "Do I want to keep her? Well, I don't know. I'd trade her in for something a little more quiet."

Tabitha was looking shyly down at her lap. She raised her head quickly. "Why, Toby Shade, I've been as quiet as a mouse all the time you've been talkin' there. Shame on you."

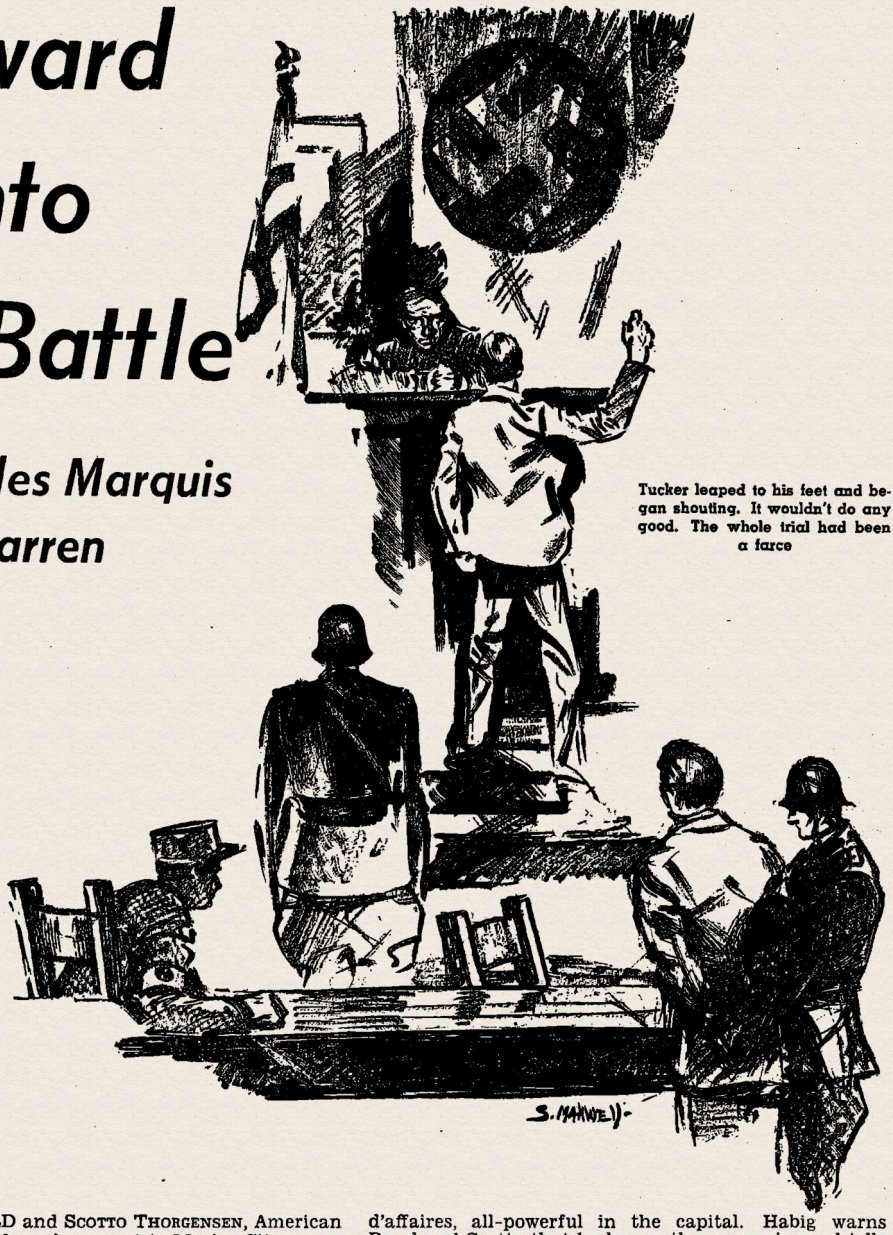
"That's all right, honey chile," Toby murmured, turning away from the mouthpiece. "Don't you fret." He patted her knee absently.

There was a strange sound at his back and he turned to see Grace hovering at the half-opened door. He drew back his hand and sighed.

"Give me that again, Senator," he said. "I was interrupted."

Forward Into Battle

By Charles Marquis Warren



Tucker leaped to his feet and began shouting. It wouldn't do any good. The whole trial had been a farce

RAND MANSFIELD and SCOTTO THORGENSEN, American newspapermen, have been sent to Mexico City on an assignment that is at first unexplained to them. Later they learn that GENERAL SAM THRESHER of the State Department has believed that they might succeed where Federal operatives have failed—in the discovery of the identity of the LEADER, the ace Nazi operative on the American Continent. Not only does the General have faith in their ability and intelligence, but he is of the opinion that they may trace the leader through STEWART MARCHANT, formerly a friend of theirs, now an embittered, American-hating leader of CARLITO TOLEDAREZ' Fascist party in Mexico.

JOE TUCKER, the regular Mexico City representative of their paper, has been instructed to cooperate with them, but they find him singularly unfriendly and reticent. He will not discuss Marchant or his activities, and he is obviously frightened of FELIX HABIG, the Nazi chargé d'affaires, all-powerful in the capital. Habig warns Rand and Scotto that he knows they are spies and tells them their every move will be watched.

HABIG arranges that Rand and Scotto will inherit the Hacienda Santoyo, feeling that the presence there of two American agents will put the place above suspicion. But his plan is balked by the nominal tenant, the COUNTESS VON HOCHENLOBE, who rebels against Habig's orders because of her jealousy of ELSA ERLACH, her secretary, with whom she believes Habig to be infatuated. The Countess will do nothing that Habig commands her until Elsa is removed from the hacienda.

Meanwhile Rand has met and fallen in love with Elsa Erlach, who admits to him that she is not a German but a member of British Intelligence.

At the hacienda Rand also meets ROLF KONSTANTIN, a dissolute aristocrat, who drunkenly boasts that be-

This story began in the Argosy for June 7

cause of a secret mission with which he has been entrusted he is beyond Habig's reach.

RAND AND SCOTTO are made keenly aware of the hostility toward Americans that Nazi propaganda has inculcated throughout the country. Once, they are fired at in broad daylight by an American, JAMES FERGUSON, who is a fanatic bundsman.

Their difficult situation is complicated by the arrival of ARDITH, Rand's estranged wife, with whom Scotto has been openly but inarticulately in love for years.

Rand finds Marchant; but Marchant refuses to recognize their old friendship and wants nothing to do with anything American. And Rand is no nearer knowing the identity of the Leader than before.

The Mexican Chamber of Deputies announces the election of DEL RIO to the Presidency; the supporters of CAZAN, the rival candidate, riot openly. Feeling against Americans is heightened every day; the members of Toledarez' brown-shirt group parade openly about the city.

SHORTLY after Ardith obtains her Mexican divorce, the Americans are expelled from their hotel. The three of them take refuge with JACOB WOLF, a wealthy non-Aryan refugee who is despised throughout the city because of a false brand of cowardice that has been placed upon him. With Wolf is another refugee, ALEXIA HELLSTEIN, who believes in him, and loves him.

Wolf's chauffeur, ENCISCO, attempts to blackmail him, and he also tries to make love to Alexia. Wolf shoots him, as he later shoots three of Encisco's brown-shirted companions who have become suspicious as to the cause of his disappearance.

Wolf admits this quadruple slaying to his guests, Ardith and Rand and Scotto, but they refuse to be upset about it. At length, Ardith bluntly brings up the story of cowardice and announces flatly that she doesn't believe it.

"Because," she says, "you're in a much worse situation at this minute. And you're not even thinking of running away."

Wolf looks at Alexia. "No," he says. "I shall never run again."

Rand approves the attitude, but feels that it grows more hopeless for them all with every passing moment. . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

DEATH BLOOMS IN DARKNESS

RAND had discovered that the simplest as well as the safest manner to venture about the city was to sit on the floor of the tonneau of the Packard. Thus the only occupant of the car on view was Tommy, and Tommy's nut-brown face hadn't so far precipitated a shower of bullets or induced a brown-shirted mob to follow the car.

He sat now, legs hunched, knees rubbing his chin, as Tommy guided the car along Morelos toward the Reforma Boulevard on the way back to Wolf's villa.

He had contacted Frank Dana Brady at the El Patio. The G-man had not yet been able to make headway at the Santoyo hacienda as far as exploring the place by night was concerned. But he was hopeful. José Acuna's family was beginning to regard him as an old friend, and the stray pesos with which he paid for José's liquid hospitality were having effect. He thought in a few nights José would smuggle him onto the hacienda for a tequila visit.

Rand had reported what he was able to learn regarding the happenings in the city. The brown shirts no longer carried wooden imitations of weapons. They were heavily and authentically armed.

They were already astoundingly proficient. And all day the giant field tanks and armored cars and lorries rumbled through the city, to and fro, their destination the huge encampments existing outside the plateau of the city. At nights the drone of planes developed into deafening screams as they carried on a mock but deadly intense bombing of the city.

The United States emissaries, dispatched from Washington to arbitrate and settle the outrages done to American citizens and concerns weren't getting anywhere.

Rand's head rapped sharply against the back of the front seat as the car halted abruptly. He called to Tommy: "We there?"

"Almost, Mr. Rand. The driveway. I stopped to let the car pass that has been following us."

"Following us?" Rand saw a car climbing the road and disappearing over the crest. "Did you get a look at the person driving it?"

"Yes," Tommy said. He looked apologetic. "He had a mashed nose, sir. I think it was James Ferguson."

RAND spoke of the incident to no one until Alexia's simple meal had been eaten and they sat about smoking. Ardith and Alexia washed dishes in the kitchen. Jacob Wolf and Scotto were engrossed in a debate which turned, not on politics, but on the relative beauty of European and American women.

Rand said, "Ferguson knows where we are. He followed us here."

Wolf frowned. They had told him about Ferguson, hoping he could supply some information about the man. But no one seemed to know anything.

Scotto said, "That means one of us will have to stay up each night. And I might as well take the first turn tonight."

Rand glanced at his wrist watch. It was a quarter to eight. He started to say, "I almost wish he would come—" when two sounds interrupted him.

There was a voice in the patio calling, "Rand Mansfield! Rand Mansfield!" loudly; and suddenly this was obliterated by an explosion which seemed to penetrate his brain and rock his head.

Scotto had already moved to the door which opened into the patio. "Don't go out there!" Rand called. But Scotto had opened the door. He stood for a split second, silhouetted against a reddish-white flare which lit the entire patio.

"An incendiary bomb," he shouted. "Watch out. He can see us!" But he continued into the patio and Rand and Jacob Wolf followed him. Down the courtyard Rand saw Ardith and Alexia coming out of the kitchen. Then the steady clatter of a Tommy-gun began and instinctively he threw himself down, calling for the others to do likewise.

James Ferguson stood in the center of the patio, operating the gun. He fired by the light of the flare and stood in front of it so that its lurid glare would not blind him.

He was sweeping the gun into every room giving onto the patio. He spotted the two women when Ardith screamed. His gun turned on them and the shots whammed the stucco above and to one side of them.

"Get down!" Scotto shouted to Ardith. Then he was running toward her.

But Ardith was already sinking slowly to the ground. Alexia had thrown herself prone. As Scotto reached them he stopped for a moment and spun queerly, completely around, then staggered against the wall. He recovered himself and bent down and tried to pull Ardith through the door into the kitchen.

Wolf was crawling toward Alexia. He scuttled in jerky motions, as a crab moves, stopping at intervals to lift his head and call "Alexia!" in a soft anguished voice.

No one but Rand seemed concerned with the man who stood in the center of the patio, the Tommy-gun at his shoulder whaling at the moving figures of Scotto and Wolf.

Rand maneuvered the automatic from his pocket and raised it and yelled, "Ferguson, over here!" as loudly as he could.

For a moment the clatter of the Tommy-gun faltered as Ferguson swung around and leveled it at Rand.

Rand fired three times. Then he rolled to one side.

Ferguson stared stupidly at the roof of the villa. In the weird light he resembled some crimson Mephistopheles opening his mouth to mock the sky. Then his legs gave way and he seemed to fall inward upon himself and lay in a quickly breathing heap.

RAND got up and ran forward. He didn't see until too late that Ferguson still grasped the Tommy-gun and that the muzzle was pointed directly at him.

Ferguson did not have life enough to press the trigger. The gun fell across his knees and his head slipped back and hit the ground. He was dead by the time Rand got to him.

Then, running toward the kitchen door, Rand called, "Who's hurt? Did he hit Ardith?"

The flare had burned itself out, leaving the patio in darkness.

Wolf was standing in the doorway, his back to Rand. He turned slowly.

"*Ja.* Fraülein Porter and Herr Thorgensen are both hurt. The Fraülein seriously I am afraid. Alexia and I were not harmed." His voice sounded weary and very sad.

Rand looked in from the doorway. Alexia had lighted a lamp and Ardith lay on the floor. Scotto bent over her. Now Alexia knelt beside her. She unbuttoned the front of Ardith's dress. Ardith did not move. Her arms were thrown out. Her face was like gray marble.

Scotto got up and turned away. Wolf and Rand, seeing him, turned away also.

After a wait of years Alexia said softly, "She is bleeding. But not swiftly. We can stop that I think. But the bullet must be removed. She must be taken to a hospital at once. It is her only chance."

Scotto's voice was heavy. "No hospital would accept a North American." He sounded as if he was either going to sob or blaspheme.

It was then that Rand heard the sound of the car coming up the hill, and turning, saw the headlights flash along the driveway.

As though from a mile away Jacob Wolf's voice said, "No hospital in Mexico City would accept her. But a hospital in the United States would be eager to help."

"We could only get her there in time in a plane," Scotto said dully. He was bending over her again, holding her hand, watching her face. "But we can't get a plane."

Rand, feeling as if he were intruding upon something personal between Ardith and Scotto, walked away from them quickly and silently, and crossed the patio, hugging the shadow of the villa wall and lifting his automatic and training it on the person who switched off the headlights and climbed hastily out of the car. . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

SEARCH AND ARREST

WHEN he entered the villa with Elsa Erlach some twelve minutes later they had removed Ardith to the flat couch in the living room. She lay breathing quietly and she was barely conscious. The gray of her face had drained white. It made her hair and eyes look very dark. Alexia had attended to her and told them she had retarded the bleeding but Ardith must be taken to a hospital at once.

They had thought of driving her to the Balbuena Airport in the Packard. Wolf had provided Scotto with ample money to hire a plane. Tommy could negotiate the business of hiring. The drawback was the American car. It would bring suspicion.

They stared at Elsa Erlach but made no comment. Scotto kept looking down at Ardith, who had closed her eyes. Alexia had rolled up Scotto's left sleeve and was bathing his arm.

He said without lifting his eyes, "Wolf can't buy himself an extra shirt. But he can hire us a plane."

Elsa Erlach said, "I will drive her in my car; it is German made and has Mexican plates."

Scotto looked at her. His eyes seemed to come alive. "Good girl," he said quietly.

"You must hurry," said Wolf. "I have given Herr Thorgensen the money. There remains nothing but to reach the airport as quickly as possible."

Tommy came running in from the patio. He had been asleep in the loftlike room over the kitchen until the shooting. Since then he had remained in the courtyard.

"There are lights in the colony below. I think they are coming up this way in cars, *señores.*"

Rand went over to Ardith and knelt beside her. He placed his hand upon hers and waited until her lids opened and she looked at him.

"Does it hurt so much?"

She smiled faintly.

"Not so much. It makes me sleepy, darling."

"Sleep then. You're going to a hospital in Maredo. An American hospital. It's at the border, the closest American town. It won't take long. Mr. Wolf is hiring a plane for you. In a few hours you'll be all right. I'm going with you, Ardith."

"No. Your work is here, darling." She opened her eyes wider and looked at Elsa Erlach. "And she is here. I'm not at all jealous." She closed her eyes.

"I'm going with you."

"Please, darling. Scotto will come with me." She opened her eyes. Her voice was very remote. "It will be much easier if you aren't there for me to look at, or think about."

Scotto put a blanket over Ardith and slipped his arms under her and lifted her easily and gently.

Tommy had been out in the patio again. He came to the door and said, "Cars are coming up the road, Mr. Rand."

Wolf said to Scotto, "Drive around behind the villa and take the dirt road which will bring you to the hill's crest. Follow the road down the other side. It will eventually circle into Chapultepec Avenida and you will be able to reach the airport. Do not switch on your lights until you have passed over the crest."

He gave brief instructions to Tommy. At the airport a plane could be hired by a Mexican with no questions asked as long as he produced the money in cash. Unless the brown shirts controlled the field.

Elsa Erlach looked once at Rand as they went out. He could not tell what was in her eyes. Then he heard the sound of her car as it skirted the villa and faded up the dirt road in the rear; and in a few minutes he heard the motors of other cars coming up the front driveway.

He looked from Alexia to Wolf. They smiled at him. They were as nervous as he was. He smiled back. To break the tension he asked Wolf, "Where did you get the money?"

"I told you I am a rich man. The poorest rich man, I think; but rich in money."

"But the Bank of New York was looted last week. They tried to burn it and when it wouldn't burn they brought up howitzers and shelled it."

"My people have learned to develop a sense of the imminent. I withdrew what I could of my account in American dollars four days before the shelling. I have concealed the money in various places about the villa." He did not appear satisfied. He looked very tired and almost resigned.

Rand heard the cars stop. Doors slammed. Voices shouted and suddenly stilled. They had found Ferguson's body.

He knew now who James Ferguson was. Elsa had informed him when she stepped out of the car in the patio.

SHE HAD been working late in Herr Habig's office when the telegram from the Gestapo agents in Austin, Texas, arrived for Habig. Reading it, she learned that their previous information had erred; there were two Fergusons and the one operating the *Kyffhaueserbund* was doing excellent work and had not left Austin in two years. His name was John Ferguson. The Ferguson in Mexico was a "representative" of the American Zinman Oil Company.

Elsa had asked for permission to go shopping, made certain she was not being followed, and had come straight to Rand with the information.

Since Mexico had expropriated the American oil industry in the Republic, she explained, the larger United States companies had maintained "representatives" in Mexico to "take care of" any American who offered to wildcat for Mexico and operate the confiscated oil wells. The companies' only hope to retrieve their lost interests devolved upon the Mexicans' inability to operate the industry themselves. And to insure a lack of cooperation from independent American oil adventurers, the representatives "took care" of them in obvious gangster fashion. Ferguson, evidently unable to obtain any confirmation from the States concerning Rand's and Scotto's activities, had assumed they were down here to pick up easy money by operating oil wells for Mexican interests. His job had been to prevent them.

Rand watched the doorway as a bluecoated policeman and four brown shirts entered. The policeman was old and tired looking and had no pomposity about him. He stood in the background as though he realized his inclusion in the party was merely a formality.

Three of the brown shirts carried rifles. They held them impatiently and looked about as though for something to try their bayonets on.

The other, who was the officer in charge, was a heavy-set, fat-faced, loose-jowled individual whom Rand knew was German before he spoke.

"There has been a murder. Who is responsible?" He looked from one to another as though he were enjoying himself immensely. But his eyes continually returned to inspect Alexia. He had nodded to her upon entering.

"I am," Rand said. "And it was not murder. It was self-defense, as you can see if you will glance at the walls of the patio. The man's gun is beside him."

The heavy-set German shrugged. He did not appear greatly interested. "No, it is not murder. To kill an American is not murder." He stepped to Alexia and made a mock bow. "So now you have involved yourself with Americans," he said. He laughed. "Gestapo!" he said scornfully. "And I believed you. You were very clever."

"Clever enough, Corporal Prager," Alexia said. Her chin was haughty. There was no fright in her eyes.

"Lieutenant Prager," the German corrected. "This is not a democracy. A man has a chance for promotion." He looked at Wolf for the first time and immediately took his eyes away, as though Wolf were too base an object for a lieutenant to regard.

"Now it will be a different tale," he said. "Harboring Americans is not a petty offense."

"They didn't harbor me," Rand said. "The American was chasing me. I turned in here. I do not know them. My car is in back."

Prager's small eyes considered him. "You speak boldly for an American." He moved forward and patted Rand's pockets with his hands. He relieved him of the automatic.

"Go to hell," Rand said.

Prager smiled. He still did not appear concerned with Rand. He kept looking at Alexia. It was evident to Rand that a previous humiliation at her hands rankled him. He was looking for a possible snare in which to catch her

He turned to his men.

"Search the villa."

WHILE they were gone he spent most of the time chiding Alexia. Once Rand saw Wolf's hand move almost imperceptibly toward his pocket and realized that no one had removed Wolf's Luger. But the tall lean man appeared to consider the consequences and his hand moved no farther.

The brown shirts came back and reported excitedly in Spanish. Prager grinned at Alexia. He said, "Rooms have been slept in above."

"Herr Wolf's servants," Alexia said briefly. She was not intimidated.

"Why are they not here?"

"They come and go as they please. When they are not working their time is their own. Most likely they heard the shooting and fled and will not return."

"I have heard servants will not work in this place. I believe one of the rooms above was occupied by the American, who claims he does not know you."

"Believe what you wish."

For a long moment Prager looked at her. Then he said quickly, "And the bloodstains in the kitchen and in the patio by the kitchen door? None of you is wounded. I suppose the servants were wounded, picked themselves up and fled?"

"My wife was wounded by the American," Rand said. "My wife and my friend. They were both with me."

"Where are they now?"

"I sent them by car to the railroad station. They are on their way to Tampico. They hope to take a plane there for Miami."

"Whose car did you send them in if yours is in back? And it is in back. My men have reported it to be."

"My friend's car," Rand said quickly.

"The friend who was wounded?"

"Yes."

Prager scratched his thick jowls. "Your story is in such order that it cannot be true. It is too infallible. I will be interested to learn if the magistrate finds you are lying."

"Then let's get started. You're wasting time."

The first signs of anger came to Prager's eyes but he controlled it by smiling. "You are absolutely right. You are a courageous man, impatient for your own execution." He turned to Alexia, his face suddenly lighting as though an idea had occurred to him.

"Where are the steps to the cellar?"

Rand saw Alexia's eyes lose their defiant light. Her lips thinned. For the first time she was showing fright. He did not blame her. If Prager discovered the brown shirted objects beneath the dirt floor. . . .

"In the kitchen," Wolf said to Prager.

Prager still addressed Alexia. "Where is a lamp?"

"At the head of the kitchen stairs," Wolf said.

"Scum," Prager said. He slapped Wolf's mouth with

the heel of his palm. Then he brought the hand back and cracked Wolf's mouth again with the back of his hand. "I asked nothing of you."

Wolf looked at him and then looked above his head. He seemed immune to personal pain. His lips bled a little.

Prager left the room. They could hear him in the kitchen striking a match, and then the sounds of his feet clumping down the wooden steps. They could not hear him move around below although the floor was thin.

Presently his voice came sharply in a solitary curse. He hollered for one of the men to come down and bring his bayonet.

AFTER a moment they could hear him grunting and they knew he was digging into the dirt with the bayonet. The earth of the graves had been trampled and disguised as well as possible by Wolf. But for some reason the earth over the center of the graves had kept sinking.

Rand felt the chill that had come to his skin. Alexia had her eyes closed as though tired. Wolf's eyes were open but he appeared to be looking at nothing.

There was a shout from below and Prager's voice roared for another of the brown shirts to come down and help dig.

Rand considered making a break for it. There was only one brown shirt with a rifle and the old policeman here. He said in English to Wolf, "While I distract their attention get out your Luger."

But Wolf shook his head. He did not seem concerned. "What will be, will be," he said.

The policeman said in apologetic broken English, "Please not to spoke."

There were excited, triumphant yells from below and then the heavy feet were stomping up the stairs. Prager and the two brown shirts came into the room. Prager's face was flushed. His jowls seemed to shake with his excitement. In his hands he held green bills. Rand could see that they were of twenty-dollar denomination. He held about twenty. The other two men held nearly as many and were staring at them, eyes wide.

"See!" Prager cried. "You buried it. But you did not conceal it successfully. Gottfried Prager earned himself a commission by his astute work for the Reich. Now you understand why. You supposed you had hidden it for good; but here it is in my hands."

He laughed, coming close and peering at Wolf.

"But not all of it," he said. He struck Wolf. "Not even the smallest fraction of it. Where is the rest?"

Wolf made no answer. Prager struck him again. He seemed to gather strength with his fury. He hit Wolf with his closed fist until Wolf sank to one knee. Then he yanked him to his feet.

"You are worth a fortune. Here there is but a drop. But now we know you no longer keep it in a bank. I have not been able to touch you because the money would be lost to us should we lose you. But now it is here. Where is the rest?"

Wolf shook his head. His lips were battered and his cheeks and eyes had already swelled. Alexia called his name softly and put her hand out to him but Prager deflected it.

"We will find out, now that we are certain it is here. I will leave a guard. When I am finished with the American I shall return. We have means of making you people speak."

He spoke sharply to his men. One of them moved behind Rand and pricked him in the back with his bayonet. The other two took obvious possession of the room, sprawling upon the couch where Ardith had lain, but keeping their rifles ready to their hands.

As Rand was thrust into one of their cars he thought of Wolf's fine decoy. It had been clever to bury a few bills a foot or so beneath the surface of each grave. A clever decoy. Prager and his men had not thought to dig deeper.

But a more thorough search would be made when Prager informed his superiors. So what did Wolf's cleverness get him?

As the car descended the road towards the city he concluded that the smartest act Jacob Wolf had performed was the purchase of the Luger. He hoped, feeling ashamed as the thought came to him, that the Luger still contained two bullets. . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

BLOOD IS SPILLED

THE following day the trial of Rand Mansfield, which was held in one of the many low-ceilinged rooms within the Court of the Republic building, could not properly be termed even a travesty of a trial. It was no trial at all.

It was heard by a military tribunal. And Major Pani, who had been appointed by a high ranking officer whose name was not announced, was not of the depleted regular army. He wore a uniform of brown which was obviously new, and of which he was proud and meticulous. He kept brushing his fingers over the black swastika armband on his left arm.

He did not speak English. Nor did any of the witnesses, with the exception of Lieutenant Prager. Besides the soft-spoken, apologetic policeman and the brown shirt who had been one of Prager's men at the villa, the prisoner had never seen any of the witnesses.

There were a good many of them. A few civilian women, a few ragged nondescript peons; but the rest were in brown.

From their fiery flow of speech and gesticulating arms it was evident to the prisoner that they were not specifically concerned with him, but were denouncing and indicating *Norteamericanos* in general. He detected the name Roosevelt many times whereas he heard Mansfield only from Lieutenant Prager. He suspected that none of the witnesses knew his name.

He was tired and angry, but not frightened.

From where he stood behind the prisoner's rail Rand could see the spectators who half filled the room. In the last row a solitary man sat, listening to the proceedings and occasionally nodding to Rand. It was Joe Tucker and the newspaperman's presence somehow imparted a feeling of security to the prisoner.

He heard out all the witnesses and then when Major Pani arose and addressed him in Spanish he thought he was being formally asked if he had heard the testimony of the witnesses and if he had anything to say in regard to his own defense.

He lifted his face and said, "I've heard the testimony but I haven't understood any of it. I demand the right of counsel for my defense; an American counsel—"

The cheering in the room cut off his words. He looked at the spectators. They had risen to their feet and were shouting and waving their caps and hissing him. It was as though the impact of the major's words had just reached them and their delayed enlightenment was voicing itself in this demonstration.

Lieutenant Prager held up his hands and stood nodding his loose-jowled face until silence was restored. Then he turned to the prisoner. He was smiling pleasantly.

"It is evident you did not understand the major's verdict. It is my privilege to inform you." He scratched his left jowl with his thick hand and set it to quivering. "You have been tried by a military court and found guilty of treason. Therefore you are to be returned to prison and

shot by a firing squad within the hour." He raised his right hand and clicked his heels, the smile dissolving from his lips. *"Heil Hitler!"*

THE spectators caught up the words and shouted them until they seemed to bounce from the low ceiling and careen against the walls and beat against the prisoner's head. As he stood staring at Prager, the prisoner's jaw dropped open.

"Heil Hitler!" The crowd was making a game of it to see who could yell the loudest.

Joe Tucker had made his way up to the bench and was now leaning forward, shouting in Major Pani's ear, his arms jerking in angry gestures, his face angry and red. Major Pani smiled uncomprehendingly and brushed at the swastika sewed to his arm. Then Joe Tucker stepped to Lieutenant Prager and hurled his words against the tiny ears of the German.

Under Tucker's accusing finger his heavy face grew as red as the American's and he scowled and pushed the newspaperman away. But Tucker persisted. He shook his fist under Prager's nose and turned on his heel.

Prager had become livid. He watched Tucker go over to Rand. The crowd, curious, had suddenly quieted. In the silence Tucker's shouted words to Rand could have been heard three *avenidas* away.

"That German swine can't get away with this. It's another move to antagonize the United States. I'll get you out of this. I'll go over the dirty lying pig's head. I'll go to Del Rio. They can't murder an American cit—"

Tucker's small blue eyes narrowed in a frown and his mouth twisted and became thin before Rand heard the flat report of the Mauser pistol in Lieutenant Prager's hand.

He had fired at Tucker's back from four paces. The anger had drained from his face and now he smiled as he replaced the Mauser in its holster. Tucker fell forward and lay prone, his body slanting down the three steps which separated the judge's rostrum from the main floor.

The spectators recovered from their shock and began to roar. They demanded that the prisoner be treated in the same manner. They moved out of their rows and tried to get at him. Several of the brown shirts brought their rifles to bear on him.

But Prager shook his head at them, smiling, and Major Pani admonished them with his finger and they subsided.

The prisoner stared at the body of Tucker and saw the life flow from it in a little convulsion which caused it to roll down the steps and lie on its side on the floor.

The prisoner was deadly white. The man on the floor had been an American. A fellow reporter.

They led him from the room and he kept twisting his head to get a last look at Tucker. His lips formed words which Lieutenant Prager, leaning against the rostrum and rubbing the folds of flesh under his jaw, made out to be "Thanks, Joe. Thanks anyway . . ."

HE SPENT half an hour in the cell before the squad came for him. He was alone but he could not seem to regulate what few thoughts came to him.

He thought of Elsa Erlach and wished he could see her. He kept hoping Frank Dana Brady would show up; but Brady didn't have any idea where he was, and one man would be helpless in any case.

Mostly he saw the picture of Joe Tucker lying on the courtroom floor. Joe Tucker who didn't want to take chances that would bring an end to life.

But there wouldn't have been anything Joe Tucker could have done. You couldn't obtain an audience with President Del Rio at a moment's notice. And there was no American Embassy at present. The American emissaries in the city were busy smoothing things over with Toledarez and trying to keep the United States out of a war. They wouldn't want a war-inciting incident such as this brought to their attention at this time. . . .

The brown-shirted lieutenant of the squad opened the cell door and beckoned to him. He got up and went out into the corridor and took his place between the soldiers. There were only four of them. It occurred to him that the German *Ersatz* economy had irrevocably penetrated Mexico when they cut down on their firing squad.

Rusty iron doors opened before them, swung closed with dull clangs when they had passed. Prisoners in other cells spoke to him encouragingly; then they hooted when their curious eyes discovered he was a *Norteamericano*.

He couldn't get his thoughts working, even now. They moved in a jumbled order inside his head, mechanically, as his feet moved. He was a little frightened. They said the best way to die was to be shot; but they also said that no way of dying was pleasant unless you were very ill and racked with pain and disease.

They came to a halt in front of a huge iron door and waited until a jailer outside turned a key in the lock and swung the door open.

Sunlight poured into his eyes and he noticed two things at once: that the street in front of him was not the courtyard in which the executions were carried out; and that this squad carried pistols in holsters but no rifles.

It was stupid of him, he thought, not to have noticed the absence of rifles before. He had never heard of a firing squad executing a man with pistols.

They put him into a waiting car. It was a long brown car with swastikas and Mexican eagles painted on its sides. The lieutenant, who was young and brownly handsome, sat on one side of him, a soldier taking his place at the other side. Two more climbed into the seat beside the driver. The remaining soldier saluted by hoisting his right arm and muttering an accented *"Heil Hitler,"* and returned through the iron door to the prison.

THEY drove rapidly through streets with which he was not familiar. But at intersections he looked down the *avenidas* and from blocks away could make out the solid brown masses of troops. Now and then he saw lumbering metal monsters whose camouflage caught the sun dully as their caterpillar treads propelled them jerkily along.

The young lieutenant was talkative. He spoke both German and English. He had, he said, been schooled in both languages during the three years he had spent at the School of Infantry in Berlin.

The troops were massing, he explained, because the government was annoyed at the persistent reports of Cázan's smouldering rebellion up in Monterey. It was thought that the army might strike out for Monterey at any time to crush out signs of mutinous fire.

The lieutenant remained stubbornly silent when Rand asked where he was taking him.

It wasn't until the car actually reached the driveway that he realized they had come by the circuitous route to Jacob Wolf's villa, the route which Scotto and Ardith and Tommy had taken on their way to the airport.

He was led into the living room. There were ten or twelve brown-shirted soldiers in the room, leaning on their rifles and watching the two figures who stood in front of the empty hearth.

Alexia Hellstern and Jacob Wolf stood side by side facing Lieutenant Prager. Superimposed upon the swollenness of Wolf's face from last night's battering were the marks of fresh violence. Even as he was led into the room Rand saw Prager strike Wolf in the mouth.

"Assassin!" he shouted. "Speak. So far it has gone

gently for you. If you do not loosen your tongue it shall be pried loose."

He struck Wolf again but the tall man appeared to notice neither Prager nor his violence.

Rand was led before the crude table which stood in the center of the room. He looked down at the man sitting behind the table.

Under the visor of the brown cap the thin bitter face of Stewart Marchant lifted to his. Marchant's eyes had the raw dank look of cold ashes.

"I had you brought here," he said slowly, "because obviously you are a friend of this man Wolf, whether you repeat your denials or not. If you can persuade him to reveal where he has hidden his money you shall benefit. Perhaps I shall be able to have your death penalty commuted to imprisonment. I cannot guarantee it. But your effort will do you no harm."

Rand said, "I can do nothing that Prager hasn't already done."

"You can reason with him. He will listen to you. He cannot escape death in any event, not since we have discovered the bodies in the cellar. But he can escape a most unpleasant manner of death. Also, we shall spare the woman."

Rand turned to Wolf. "You heard?"

Wolf regarded him patiently and shook his head.

"Perhaps it would be better for Alexia," Rand said.

"I do not want it better," said Alexia.

"There is no money," said Wolf. His words were slurred by his swollen lips. "They have demolished each room in their search. They have found nothing. There is nothing here. If there were we should not reveal it; but there is none."

RAND had the idea then, that Wolf was speaking the truth. An American bank would not retain a fortune the size of Wolf's within its vaults in a city of such brutal unrest. Wolf himself probably knew that the greater part of his money had long ago been transferred to the United States. But this he would not reveal to Prager or Marchant. He preferred to let them think they had obliterated the fortune when they had demolished the bank with their shells.

As if in confirmation of Rand's thoughts, Jacob Wolf said to Prager, "You should have remembered the money when you shelled the American bank. You did not rob me. I had no use for it. You robbed yourselves."

Prager's thick face went brilliantly red. His rage escaped his mouth in audible bubbles of sound. His short arms reached for Alexia and he crooked one arm about her neck, drawing her to him and forcing her to her knees. His right hand drew the Mauser from its holster and he pressed its muzzle under her ear.

"You see?" he shouted. "You see how it is that I make you speak?"

No one in the room knew that Prager would shoot. Probably least of all, Prager himself. The Mauser made the same flat ugly sound it had made in the courtroom when he had shot Joe Tucker.

As though she had suddenly become too heavy for him to hold, Alexia sank from the crook of Prager's arm and slipped gently to the floor, lying upon her back, her knees doubled beneath her, her head turned so that the ugly side rested against the floor. Her profile was relaxed and soft. Her eye was closed.

JACOB WOLF looked down upon her. He stood like a tower rising from her head. He was shaking his head from side to side, slowly. Suddenly his hoarse shout filled the room and he leaped at Prager, his hand fumbling in his coat pocket.

His impetus carried his shoulder into Prager's thick chest, spinning the German around. Prager took a step backward, turning as he did so, and fired while Wolf's Luger was only midway from his pocket. The bullet pushed Wolf several steps backward but he fell forward on his face at Rand's feet.

For a moment there was silence except for Prager's weighty breathing.

Then Marchant said, "Now his money is lost to us for good unless in tearing down the villa we discover it."

Rand stooped and picked the Luger from the floor at his feet. He said, "I've been waiting, Prager," and fired twice and Prager lifted his staring eyes from the figure of Jacob Wolf and fixed them upon the ceiling. They remained wide open and gazing at the ceiling after he had dropped to his knees and then to the floor on his back.

Rand heard the startled intakes of breath around him and saw the rifles that came to bear on him and heard Stew Marchant's dry brittle command, "Put up your guns."

Marchant stood up. He limped around the table to Rand and his thin face was punctured by a smile.

"Now you've done it. What you get now you deserve. I do not think you will be so fortunate as to stand up before a firing squad now." He seemed pleased. "You've killed a German officer in Mexico's army. You've murdered a soldier of Mexico's ally."

Rand looked at him. "He's not the only Mexican ally I'm going to murder." He pointed the Luger at Marchant. His finger contracted against the trigger but nothing happened.

Marchant's thin lips pushed away his smile. He spoke quickly and hands seized Rand from behind, taking the Luger from him.

Marchant addressed the soldiers. "Herr Habig shall devise a means of dealing with this assassin." Then, realizing that he had spoken in English, he translated his words into Spanish. The soldiers growled their assent.

Three of them took Rand out and thrust him into the swastika-marked car. Two of them sat beside the chauffeur and the other climbed in beside Rand. After several minutes Marchant limped out and got in on the other side of Rand. The car began to move. No one spoke. To Rand it was obvious there was nothing further to be said.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TOWER OF THE VOICE

THE body hung by a rope that reached from its neck to the heavy bough of a tree arching the gravel road. The road led from the International Highway up one of the hills toward the white villa of the Santoyo Hacienda.

Rand stood still, feeling the saliva sour in his mouth as he gazed at the bloated, contorted brown face, the dangling legs, the securely fastened hands behind the naked white back.

"He makes an impressive warning, doesn't he?" Stew Marchant said. He prodded Rand's back with his Mauser. "Move along." Rand walked slowly, feeling the pressure of the gun at his back. As yet he and Marchant could not be seen from the villa.

He wondered how long Frank Dana Brady had been hanging from that limb. He did not turn around but he could still see the dangling figure. Brady had stained only his face, hands and feet. The chest looked chalk white in its nakedness.

Marchant prodded him and said, "Turn off here."

Rand entered the lime orchard which came to the edge of the road. There was a vague sweet-sharp smell about the trees although they bore no fruit.

"Keep on going." Marchant said.

When they could no longer be seen from the road Marchant sat down at the base of a tree and said, "Sit down. We'll have a long wait."

Rand sat down. He didn't say anything. He had said nothing when Marchant dismissed the car and the soldiers half a mile down the Highway and proceeded the rest of the distance on foot. Now he looked at the Mauser pistol covering him and waited for Marchant to speak.

Marchant said, "Your G-man doesn't look so smart strung up there, does he? He wasn't at all smart. He made a grave mistake."

Rand had no answer. He watched the Mauser.

"He made the mistake of discovering who the Leader is," Marchant said. "No one who sees the Leader lives very long. Very few see him."

Rand looked at the pistol and said, "Do you know who he is?"

"I think I do. That's why I've brought you here."

He leaned over and placed the Mauser on the ground near Rand. "It seems to bother you. Pick it up. It's loaded."

Rand picked it up. He got to his feet, keeping it on Marchant.

"Sit down," Marchant said.

He remained standing.

"I wouldn't have let you have it if I didn't think you'd be interested in what I have to say, and be sensible about it," said Marchant. "Nor would I have saved you from a firing squad twice simply to kill you myself. The gun is evidence of my good faith, isn't it?"

"Is it? Have you any good faith, Marchant? A man who'd sell out his country, his beliefs, his wife?"

"You're not smart, Rand. You saw what happens here to men who aren't smart. You saw it hanging from a tree."

"I'm smart enough to get rid of a double-crossing scum I used to think was an American and a friend of mine."

Marchant grinned.

"You fire the Mauser and you'll have half a dozen whitecoats here in two seconds."

"It'll be worth it."

Marchant shrugged and rubbed the leg that carried the old wound. "Sometimes it hurts," he explained wearily. "When I'm excited. Or if I use it a lot. The walk was too long." He glanced up and smiled. "You looked very incensed and valiant. Sit down." He stopped smiling.

"I didn't mind you and Scotto so much. You could think I was a heel and it wasn't good but it was all right. It was letting Eleanor think it that hurt. No man has a right to treat his wife the way I have. But she couldn't know; it was too fantastic for a woman to know and conceal. There would be times, especially under strain, when she might have talked. She would have blurted it to you and Scotto, for instance, the night you came to our place."

Rand said, "If you're trying to make me believe you've been kidding since you've been in Mexico, you're wasting your breath."

Marchant said quietly, "It's a thing no man on earth would ever kid about. It's a thing I've worked for two years to discover. It's a thing that's made me sell out my country, lose Eleanor's love, take orders and kicks from German and Mexican animals I wouldn't wipe my feet on."

He looked away from Rand. "You remember my telling you about the man who put the rats in the garbage can?"

"Your father."

"Yes. My father."

He looked directly at Rand. "You see, I believe my father is the man the Nazis call the Leader."

THERE was no expression on the silver face of the night. It was cold in the lime orchard and Rand wanted a cigarette. But lighting a match was risky.

Across from him, apparently asleep, Stew Marchant lay. He could not rationalize Marchant's evident lack of excitement. He could hardly keep his own body motionless. He had not thought when he first entered the orchard in front of Marchant's gun, that tonight he would see the Leader; flesh and blood, not a crisp, cultured voice from a radio loudspeaker.

Stew Marchant raised his head and said softly, "It's nearly time. You'll hear the sound of their plane. They fly out from the city."

"I wish they'd hurry."

"You might be damned sorry they did."

"It's just this waiting."

There was a contemplative silence.

"Rand?"

"Yes."

"Can you remember this: George Braddock's savings account in the Corn Exchange Bank in Los Angeles?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Repeat it."

Rand repeated it.

"Don't forget it. It's important."

Rand shifted his weight and lay on his back looking up at the silver tips of the lime trees against the powdery indistinctness of the moon. Marchant's voice came softly. "In case anything goes wrong with me tonight—"

"That's bad luck."

"—tell Eleanor about that savings account. It belongs to me. It will take care of her. The money I've made here has been considerable. They don't respect you, Germans or Mexicans don't, unless you take advantage of graft. But I've saved it, managing to send it up to Los Angeles before Habig prohibited money leaving the Republic. I thought it would be better if it appeared I was going through with my retaliation against the States because I believed in what I was doing; not because of the money I could get out of it. That's why I made Eleanor live with me in that dump."

He raised his head, listening. "I think I hear it."

"Hear what?"

"You'll tell Eleanor?"

"Yes."

"You'll tell her about me? How it really was?"

"Yes, I will. But it's bad luck to think something might go wrong for you. It invites it. And something might go wrong for me."

"No. I've worn my luck thin. Spain and here. I'm not due again. If anything goes wrong for me it'll be for keeps."

"I'll tell Eleanor," Rand said. "I hear the plane," he added.

Marchant was sitting erect. His head was cocked. He was holding his breath. "My God," he said softly.

"What is it? The plane?"

Marchant said, "I don't believe it. I don't believe we're too late. They couldn't have started without my knowing anything about it. We can't be too late!"

Unaccountably Rand's skin began to tingle.

"What is it, Stew?"

"You hear that noise?"

"Yes. The plane's coming closer."

"There are two noises. You learn in Spain how to distinguish 'em. There's a sort of way of telling. One's a high sound: the other's a low sound. The high sound is the passenger plane. It's coming here. It'll be here in a minute or less. The low sound is from a flock of motors. A good way off. Bombers and fighters, I'd say. They're circling around. They're not heading in any direction

yet. You know what they're circling above? The thing that gives that noise a low tone. A *Panzer Divisionen.* An armored division on the move."

HE STOOD up. He swore softly. Then he said, "Follow me. And give me the Mauser." Rand followed as quietly as the shadows and the uncertain footing would permit. He heard the passenger plane's motor reach a crescendo above him and then switch off. He saw the shadowy bulk of the bird glide over the rim of a hill and knew the plane was landing.

And once again, as he reached out a hand to steady himself against the limping figure preceding him, he thought of the strange, blighted fate which had twisted the pattern of life for Stew Marchant.

He wondered if it were a wise move on his part to trust Marchant simply because of what the man had told him while they had lain in the lime orchard and Rand had listened to the quiet rush of bitter words from his old friend.

Marchant had not voluntarily quit his job on the *Record* to fly for Franco in Spain's civil war. He had been forced by his father just as he had been compelled to change his name when the older man discovered that Stew was not in accord with his father's activities for the Nazis.

He had had to leave the United States because he constituted a menace to those activities and he had chosen to combat them in the only manner he found himself now capable of: fighting for the opposition in Spain. He did not fly for Franco. His father had spread that report to prevent his re-entering the United States. There was no one to confirm Marchant's denial other than the few, scattered, returning members of his flight squadron. And the rolls of all defeated units in Spain had been confiscated by the victors.

He had come to Mexico because it was in the Republic that his father was now concentrating his work. He had labored long and arduously, to all appearances a disillusioned bitter expatriate who had renounced his American citizenship because it was denied him. He had risen high in the Nazi organization, as had Quisling in Norway and Dr. Seyss-Inquart in Austria. Nationalities were not permitted to handicap a Nazi as long as he was consumed with a loyalty, respect and devotion for the Reich. And Marchant proved he was possessed by these qualities.

His father was apparently pleased and did not interfere; but he had never become certain that his father's suspicion had been completely allayed.

He had cultivated an acquaintance with the Countess Nata von Hochenlobe, visiting her regularly and eventually making ardent love to her in the hope that he might covertly evoke information concerning the Leader. But the Countess, he believed, had become mad. Jealousy and the fact that she was ignored as a house servant is ignored, accounted for her insanity, he surmised.

But although he obtained no usable information from her, his visits permitted him a certain freedom of the hacienda. That freedom had been limited by the Gestapo agents who posed as the Countess' attendants, and so he had not succeeded in entering the barnlike structure concealed in the *ahuehuete* grove. But during the course of one of his frequent night prowlings he had stumbled upon what he believed to be the entrance to an underground passage leading from the edge of the *ahuehuete* grove to the building in the center of the grove.

Concealed by brush and bamboo, recently-built wooden steps descended into a narrow excavation in the ground. At the bottom there was a shoulder-high door which he had found locked. On subsequent visits he had tried a variety of skeleton keys until he had found one that would unlock the door. The one chance he'd had since then to explore the dark passage which led away from the door had been frustrated by the sounds of the Gestapo agents' voices at the other end. He had just had time to lock the door, rearrange the brush concealing the opening of the excavation, and make a hasty disappearance when the whitecoated men climbed the steps carrying the still body of a man.

"They took him to the entrance of the hacienda and hanged him to the limb of the tree there," Marchant explained. "He kicked a lot. He'd been unconscious when they hanged him but I think strangulation brought him to. I watched but I couldn't help. They stood around until he didn't kick any longer."

"Brady," Rand said.

"Yes. Your G-man had evidently stumbled upon that passage and been discovered in it. No doubt he got a glimpse of the Leader. It's risky to go through that passage. It's where we're going tonight. I hope we'll fare better, or perhaps a bit longer, than Brady."

NOW, as he made his way in the darkness behind the limping formless figure, edging their circuitous route behind the wattle-walled, thatched-roofed huts of the peons who worked the hacienda, Rand wondered why they should hope to fare any better in that passage than Frank Dana Brady had.

A sound took hold of his ears and set the skin at the nape of his neck to tingling. It was thin and weirdly high; a wailing sound, he thought, such as the dead might make if the dead could make a sound.

Marchant had stopped. Rand came up behind him, whispering, "What is it?"

Marchant's answering whisper held no tone of fright.

"Don't pay attention to it. It's a woman. She's in front of one of those huts. Four or five days ago Habig had every male member of the family of José Acuna put to death. She's the widow. She'll wail like that for two hours each night for a month."

They moved on, making interminably slow progress in the darkness. Rand did not disclose to Marchant that José Acuna had been the peon whose hospitality Frank Dana Brady had made use of in order to explore the hacienda at night. Such a revelation held little importance now.

Gradually, as he moved, the gathering resonance of the deep hum which Marchant had described as the noise of a moving armored division, reached Rand's ears with an admonitory steadiness that was in itself mechanical.

And then huge shadows, blacker than the night, rose before them and he knew they had reached the edge of the *ahuehuete* grove before Marchant's whisper told him, "Here. Stand still until I get the brush moved from this hole."

He worked carefully, picking up the sticks and bamboo one at a time and making no noise. Finally he said, "All right; I'll go first." And then, without moving, said, "Wait a minute. Look."

"There. Above the tops of the *ahuehuetes.* Sight along my arm."

Rand sighted along Marchant's upward pointing arm. Presently, against the dull powdery silver of the sky, he saw it. And even as he watched it continued to thrust itself upward until it seemed it would puncture the sky.

WHEN the tower's upward motion finally ceased, he estimated its height to be well over six hundred feet, and probably, due to faulty perspective in the darkness, much higher than that. It was small at the top, swelling to a large middle section and tapering again toward the base that was concealed in the grove.

An identical tower ran up silently not fifty feet from the first. When its motion had ceased it was as though two giant fingers were being held in mute significance against the sky.

"Vertical antenna towers," Marchant whispered. "The largest that have ever been invented. They work like a telescope. Machinery shoots them up or telescopes them into the building through the roof. I don't know whether they're collapsible or whether they fit into shafts dug in the ground."

Rand murmured.

"Then this is where the Leader broadcasts."

"Yes."

"And in English because it reaches the United States?"

"Exactly. A million-watt transmitter. Think of it. That's more power than has ever been packed at one time. It's why no special directional antennae have been able to locate it. It blankets all wave-lengths. Watch your step. I'm going down. I'll hold up my hand to guide you."

There were five or six steps. When he had reached the bottom Rand lifted his hand and tried to arrange the brush over his head.

Then Marchant had opened the door and was whispering, "This way. I'll lock it after us. Careful."

Once the door was closed Rand could hear an incessant vibrating hum which pushed against him more penetratively than the distant noise outside had done.

Dynamos, he thought; and remembered the incongruity of electric lights in the Santoyo villa, a place remote from any power lines or spot from where electricity could be inducted.

Marchant showed the way, moving painfully slow and guiding himself by hugging the right wall. Rand followed, the smell of the wood wall pressing into his nostrils with a singularly sweet fresh odor.

The passageway was not wide. By reaching out he could touch the opposite wall with his fingers. Beneath his feet the floor was a series of loose planks and at intervals he slipped off them and they would raise and settle with a soft sound and Marchant and he would stand rigid, waiting, before they moved again.

Because there was absolute blackness it seemed to him that he had come a great distance. He could tell by the feel of the wall that the passage did not curve. He tried counting his steps, his breathing, in an effort to estimate how far they had come and how far they must have to go.

Marchant's whisper was sharp.

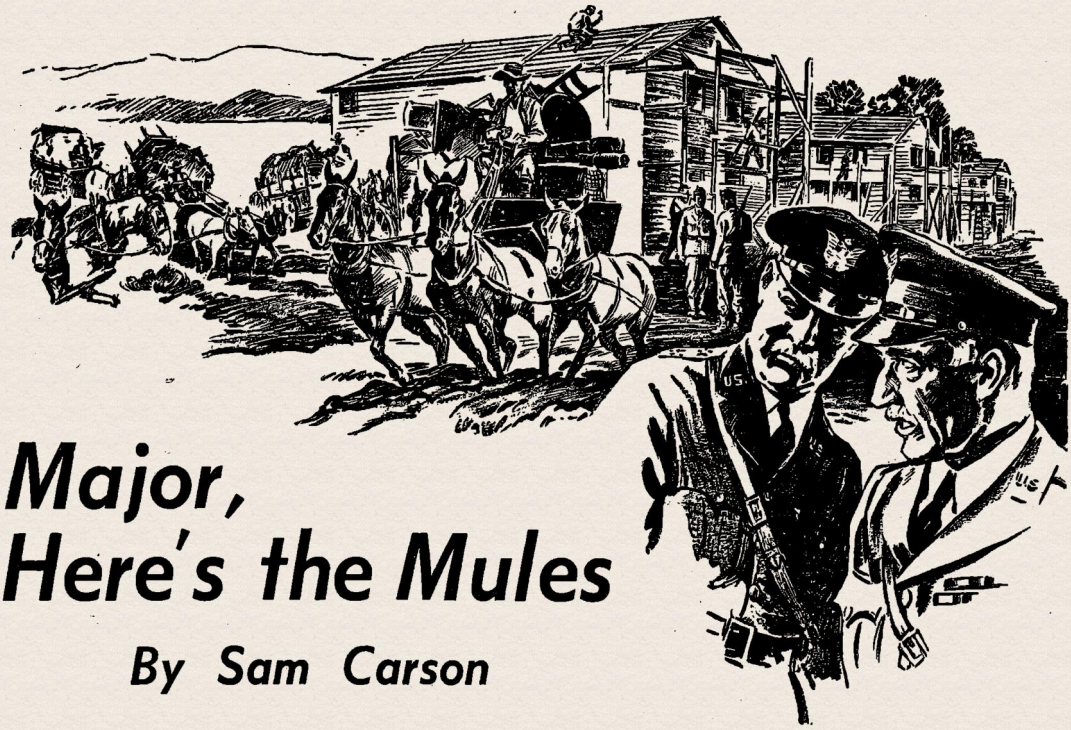
"Easy!"

Half a dozen yards ahead there was a small square of light. It was yellow light, slanting through an aperture in a door which reminded Rand of the little slide-traps that used to be in speak-easy doors.

Pushing close to the wall to prevent the shaft of light from touching their bodies, they inched their way until they stood on either side of the square of light.

Marchant appeared to be waiting until his heavy breathing subsided. Then he edged his face to one side of the aperture and looked in. Rand saw his face wince and heard his quick intake of breath.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Major, Here's the Mules

By Sam Carson

Introducing Pvt. Cowpoke, who didn't know a general when he saw one, and hadn't heard about the Army being mechanized. But he had the strategy to out-maneuver flood and storm and chaos

Driving a four-mule hitch, Montana Setters led that makeshift caravan into camp

SEVEN inches of rainfall in three days, a row of bad breaks affecting contractors and the deadline for early summer maneuvers at hand, qualified Camp Maylon for a Grade A headache.

Here was the cantonment—created to house some seventy thousand-odd guardsmen for weeks and located for convenience to Tennessee flat land between hill country and mountains—most completely outflanked by the weather. Salina River and Waller Fork rushed out of coves, to overspread terrain adjoining the camp proper.

To make matters worse, the branch railway line from the main line at Lacey was so soft no crew dared operate a locomotive the two and one-half miles. And so, as flood waters crept up to menace the two highways feeding Camp Maylon, Major Forrest Robbins, camp quartermaster and acting commander, eyed calendar, clock and lowering clouds this midafternoon, and his soul was filled with anxiety.

Yes, it had rained, was raining again, and according to radio advices, the weather was due to continue its abnormal procedure for twenty-four more hours. "And if it does," Major Robbins told Captain Holland, his undisturbed adjutant, "we're sunk."

Captain Holland signed an order detailing a dozen men to help linemen restore service on the southern high line, thumbed through a sheaf of complaints from the warehouse officer and answered his superior, all at the same time. "We have twenty-four hours left," he said. "Then we wecome four trainloads, plus two brigadier-generals. And," he added, "including Horsley." What officer didn't know that warhorse!

Major Robbins groaned. "The fire chief in person," he muttered. "Look, Holland. Lacey yards are choked with material. The branch line is soft, and the wooden trestle is unsafe in the bargain. With this pressure and the Salina rising. It's eight miles, and a mountain climb to the Waller mine branch. So that leaves us the concrete to Lacey, and a bridge with weak abutments."

"How about the highway to Waller?" Holland inquired, signaling to Sergeant Wiggs across the room. Wiggs promptly took a telephone call. The sergeant, like the adjutant, was efficient, and also silent about his work.

Major Robbins shook his head. "We'd have to re-route cars from Lacey clean to Waller junction, and that's forty odd miles. Then they'd swing up the mountain top to Waller. Take two—three days with this jam on the main drag. No, Holland, we'll try and work it over the concrete to Lacey, and with light trucks only."

"We haven't many pickups, or one tonners. Plenty of big babies and cats."

"Plumbing short here, blankets and cots shy there. Transformers waiting to be hoisted. Mud roads waiting stone. Food in cars, or sidetracked up the way."

Major Robbins continued his monologue, till he saw a six-footer, in high-heeled boots, wide-brimmed hat and oiled raincoat. The man had a guitar case strapped across one shoulder. Atop the other was a blanket roll, rolled astride a horn saddle.

"My sainted grandmother," said the adjutant. "Now anything can happen."

MAJOR ROBBINS stared at the newcomer, who dripped rain and dropped mud in his passage from hall to orderly room. He stood there, his bronzed face grinning widely. "Howdy, Cap'n," he announced, addressing the major. "Reckon this is the place to sojer."

"I'll say it is," Major Robbins agreed fervently. "With the marines. What's your business, may I ask? This is a military reservation."

"The name is Setters, but folks mostly call me Montana. Account of it's my home—Montana. Been dude ranching, if yuh know what that is. Feller in 'n Illinois artillery outfit wrote me they was moving down here and gimme an invite to join up. He used to dude ranch some. So when he wrote, I kinda started."

Major Robbins glanced at Captain Holland. Sergeant Wiggs winked slowly at an open-mouthed orderly. "So you brought your riding gear along, eh?"

"Shore. Reckon yuh got hawses in the field artillery. Never heard tell anything else. Sa-a-ay, what goes on down in this country Dry as powder back home."

"Somebody forgot to turn off the sky spigot," Sergeant Wiggs put in. He spun around at a buzz. "Camp headquarters. What! Yeah, I'll notify the major."

"Now what?" Major Robbins demanded.

"Coupla towers on the south power line tumbled. Along the swamp above Waller Fork."

"That," Captain Holland murmured," marks a new high for an easy two brigades. They'll have to use candles, and do without those pretty refrigerators in our kitchens—"

"What candles?" Major Robbins asked.

Captain Holland already was doing things with his telephone. "As long as this thing works," he observed, "there's hope. Jenkins—emergency. Get this call through." He regarded Major Robbins. "About the power line—"

Major Robbins turned back from the window where he had a view of the tall wooden poles bearing current from the south. There were two gaps in that row. "Skip it," he snapped. "Takes a special crew to work in that water. I'll go over and find Daniels, the contractor."

During all this, Montana Setters had been observing, in silence. Now he spoke. "Reckon if yuh'll tell me how tuh find the stables, I'll put away my plunder."

"Brother," Sergeant Wiggs spoke grimly, "I've forked horses in the light field artillery, lead, wheel and swing. I've stood to heel at the stables and played chambermaid. But—there ain't any more horses. Not in the artillery. They're mechanized outfits now."

Major Robbins was going forth to deal with many trying problems. But he stopped at the door at sight of Montana's face. "The sergeant's right, Montana," he said gently. "We're streamlined. That's why I put in a stretch with the old three-inch guns. Horses and men, Montana. Now, it's men and gas. Sergeant Wiggs, take Montana up to the permanent detachment's building. And stick around, Montana. We've still got men and guns."

"Shucks, Cap'n," Montana spoke sadly. "I'm always sticking my neck out. Reckon I figgered wrong. Seems like hawses and guns have to go together. Lookie, Cap'n, if yuh had hawses now, yuh'd do some hauling yuh can't with trucks."

"Mules, front and center," Captain Holland spoke from the rear of the orderly room. "Well, I've located candles. If we need 'em. And here's a new telegram from General Horsley. He's due—high noon tomorrow. And he expects this camp to be ready."

Major Robbins' comment was interesting but entirely unprintable as he plunged into the quagmire just outside.

IT WAS a fine mess, Major Robbins reflected, as he rode the few miles to Lacey ahead of the hastily recruited convoy of light trucks. Salina River spread over bottom lands, crawling up sides of the highway fill leading to the bridge. Now he could see the logs, dead trees, serpentine of cornstalks and lesser debris. Beyond the flood Lacey's buildings loomed vaguely in the rain mist.

"It would have to be," the major spoke aloud, "with schedules made up for the maneuvers."

There would be tanks and trucks no sane man would trust on Salina Bridge till the waters subsided. And there would be brass-hats entirely willing to blast the advance camp detail even if nature were to blame.

Well, he reasoned, they'd move food and bedding and trust to luck and a break in the weather. So the light trucks moved to and fro till night came, and with it a fresh storm. Major Robbins drove ahead with his task. Around ten o'clock he foregathered with fellow sufferers in the orderly room for coffee. Sergeant Wiggs answered an imperative buzz from camp central. He stiffened, forgot his poise as he let out a yell.

"Span's giving on the bridge. They're closing it. Water's coming up again."

A crackling roar, hot on the heels of a vivid flash, gave emphasis to the announcement. Major Robbins sat down, rubbing his face. "Damn the luck," he groaned. "If we could have lasted through the night—"

It was this moment that Montana Setters, squatting on a chest in one corner, chose to unlimber his guitar.

"Take that damned thing out of here," Captain Holland fairly shouted. He wasn't unperturbed now. His eyes were bloodshot and his beard was showing.

"Who—what? The music box?" Montana looked pained. "Shore, Cap'n. But I recollect one time we had a cloudburst. Had a time. Some folks drowned, and a lot of cattle was lost. But we didn't furget how to sing. Done it while we worked. Helps a heap."

"Well, we're busy tonight. If we need music to ease our pains we'll send for you," Captain Holland retorted. But he grinned at Montana, and the latter put away his guitar.

"Cap'n," he put in, "if yuh had wagons now, couldn't they skin acrost that bridge?"

"Got none," Major Robbins said briefly. "Nor stock to pull 'em. Wish we did have a few skinners and teams. Well Jackson—" He glared at the road and building contractor who entered wearily, shedding rivulets.

"I got an idea, Major. Waller Fork's over its bridges between here and the mountain, but it'll go down first. Hours ahead of the Salina."

"Well?"

"Look. I think the railroad will coöperate and make up an extra, to get over the mountain and Waller Junction. I'll line up my cats and trailers. Minute the water goes down, we'll take off to Waller Mines and unload."

"Halfway around the state, and we're less than four miles from everything we need," Major Robbins said. "Jackson, go ahead. But let this be a lesson. Never fool with a camp not centrally located. As an experiment, Camp Maylon is a headache."

"But we're in the center of ten counties picked for a model war," Captain Holland mocked. "And we've contracted to do battle, as of the tenth of this month. And that's next Sunday. Jackson, you're a man after my own heart. There's likely to be a small bottle in my effects. You'll need it this night."

AT daybreak, when Jackson's fleet of caterpillars and trailers were finally across the danger zone, more disaster materialized. Softened by the unprecedented rains, a warehouse foundation sank.

Sleepy-eyed men were impressed into service to move perishable goods. Another emergency detachment tackled the power-line problem as the Salina subsided several feet. Major Robbins conferred with a highway department crew at the bridge leading into Lacey. Yes, the engineer in charge decided, the span would hold. But he limited weight to three tons over all.

"Precious lot of good that does for us," the major told Captain Holland, back in the orderly room. "Nothing much heavier than a car is worth a hoot."

"At least the men can unload at Lacey and march out," the adjutant suggested. "And Jackson will come through with his cats."

It was Wiggs again, who broke fresh bad news. "Five hundred feet of concrete paving out," he announced.

"Where?" demanded major and adjutant together.

"This side of the Waller's Fork bridge. Washout along a fill. Caved after the cats went through."

"That does it," Major Robbins cried. "Now Jackson's holed up, when and as he starts back off the mountain. Three miles from camp. Holland, we're trapped."

The captain silently agreed.

Montana Setters, minus offending guitar, stood in the doorway. He didn't speak as this conversation on ways and means was continued. Then Major Robbins had an idea. "Phone Waller and tell Jackson to come off the mountain with everything he's got. We'll put everybody in camp to unloading. We'll horse the stuff—what we can handle—across to our trucks on this side. If that concrete slipped, it's still in position. But tilted. We'll load light and risk it."

A motorcycle patrolman came by and said the concrete was badly tilted, and two sections broken too badly for a cat even to chance it. "Take a four-horse drag to make it," he added.

"Cap'n." Montana was speaking. "Hear what the officer said? A four-horse drag could make it. And fr'm Lacey too."

"Sure." Major Robbins was worn threadbare. "We'll just dig up fifty, or even a hundred teams, with competent skinners and stout wagons. Sergeant Wiggs, rout out the drivers. The whole detail."

"Gosh, I'd shore like to help," Montana exclaimed. "If it's drivers yuh need."

"Brother," Sergeant Wiggs fired over his shoulder, "the major means truck drivers. How the hell you think we could dig up teams?"

"Well," Montana replied thoughtfully, "this here country looks like it's populated with farmers. And farmers still kinduh stick to hawses and mules."

Sergeant Wiggs snorted. "Try and find some then, wise guy. Try and find 'em." He bent to his job.

As for Montana, his grin faded. "Shore," he said gently. "Shore I kin find 'em."

Unnoticed he slipped out.

IN THE hectic hours of that eventful morning, Montana Setters was most thoroughly forgotten. That is, till a phone call came in from Lacey. Captain Holland answered.

"This is Marlow—the hardware man," a voice announced.

"Cap'n," Sergeant Wiggs cried at his side, "the macadam's busted through with a string of them light trucks."

"And we just wanted to check up on that order for rolling stock," Marlow's voice put in over the phone.

"It's okay," Captain Holland shouted. "Whatever it is." He slammed the phone, joined Major Robbins. "Hell popping and some dumb merchant worries me about a requisition," he fumed.

They found Sergeant Wiggs' report all too true. The newly macadamized road, leading in from the concrete highway, had softened. The light trucks had gone down, hub deep, the foremost canted with part of its load toppled off. The road was blocked. Around the truck wheels soft mud oozed.

"Bottomless," Major Robbins whispered. "If they had sense to send the engineers and equipment first, instead of infantry and artillery—"

A train whistle from the main line reached his ears. "Troop train," he said. "Old Horsley would be aboard."

He had scarcely finished when the first truck, the canted one, completely overturned.

"We'll have to wait, till the train unloads," Major Robbins said finally. "I'm licked, Holland. I'll have to take it, whatever Horsley and the other brass-hats feel like dishing out. We'll need several hundred men to throw up an emergency road. And we need more rock."

He noted a lone horseman coming up the macadam. The rider was pushing his mount. Major Robbins stiffened. "That cowman," he exclaimed

Montana Setters it was. He straddled a saddle horse. He was grinning as he pulled up. "Cap'n," he shouted, "I got 'em loading a batch uh cars at Lacey."

"Got who loading what?"

"Oh, there was a batch uh cars left—didn't get routed to Waller. Groceries. Stoves. Blankets. All sorts uh stuff. We're loading wagons."

In Major Robbins' mind there flashed a picture of probably a half-dozen wagons and teams. Well, Montana wouldn't hurt, and no harm done. He nodded. "Fine. That's all right, Montana." He dismissed Montana from his mind, as he studied the trucks. "Sergeant," he shouted to a noncom, "better round up a detail and unload."

"Looks like yuh need a corduroy road, Cap'n," Montana observed. "With all this scrap lumber—"

"Hell and damnation," Major Robbins roared. "Holland, let's get every man available. A corduroy road! That's it. We'll string scrap lumber clean to the highway. It'll hold on top of the crushed stone."

"Cap'n," Montana shouted. "I got another idea."

But Major Robbins was plowing through mud toward his office. "Keep it—or use it," he yelled. He could be tolerant of this man who wasn't even a rookie yet. Montana had given the answer. The other trucks could get in—whenever they got their loads transferred at the Waller's Fork bridge. But when? "I wonder," Major Robbins said to himself, even as he organized.

DIRECTING the endless rows of mud-caked men who were putting down timbers, Major Robbins consumed the sandwiches and coffee that someone thrust into his

hands. By phone he knew the second troop train was in. Horsley was due any moment now.

To cap it all, a backlash of weather brought a thunder-squall, driving rain and wind. The worst damage was to wires. All lines were out save the power circuit to Lacey. And it was in this setting that columns of water-soaked men, bearing packs, came stumbling over the corduroy road.

Captain Holland arrived. "To keep up your morale," he said grimly. "If Horsley isn't in front, he's hiking somewhere close. He would."

"I sent my car and the station wagons," Major Robbins pointed out.

"You don't know Horsley the way I do," the adjutant retorted. "And there he is. Turn out the guard."

"Stand by to be barbecued," Major Robbins said. "No, Holland, I'll take the rap. You'd better take over the job of assignments. You and Wiggs, if he can be spared." With that he stiffened, saluted the tall, grey-haired figure with clipped mustache who trod the plank road like a buck private.

Brigadier-general Horsley's blue eyes were dangerous. He seemed about to explode. "As I feared," he snapped. "A mess. Don't you men even know how to handle trucks? Or is that a mystery maneuver?"

Major Robbins made hasty explanation, as commanding officers of the troop columns arrived, none of them in an enthusiastic mood. "Cut off eh?" the general officer said. "I promised this camp would be ready. It isn't. You say we're even shy food!"

"But, sir, it's on the way."

"On the way! Man, your trucks can't make it, evidently. Not from Lacey. And with a washout the other end, and the camp roads breaking down—bah!" He frowned. "A helluva way to advertise our preparedness."

"Yes, sir," Major Robbins agreed.

Brigadier-general Horsley was talking to an infantry colonel. "Go to headquarters and billet your men. I presume the permanent detail can feed everyone. In a way, surely. And meet me at one sharp, regimental and unit commanders. We've got to take over."

That last sentence gave Major Robbins an icy chill. He realized how easily a report from Horsley could damage his career. For if the guard regiments had to be requisitioned, no explaining would help much. Major Robbins knew full well that his fate was in the irate camp commander's hands. Brooding over this, he paid no heed to an unusual sound coming from the rear of the columns. The men in the lead units started off again. Major Robbins watched them trudge by. Then he heard a yip.

In behind the moving columns were wagons, and no service train in many a decade had looked like this one. There were farm wagons, some painted, others with rough, unpainted beds. Men in overalls, farmers mostly, held the lines. And each wagon was piled high. In the lead, handling a four-mule hitch, was Montana Setters.

"MY sainted aunt and the jack of spades," Major Robbins said fervently. "That stuff—it's from the cars at Waller. That's not a load from Lacey!"

He made out Jackson, the contractor, sliding from a wagon seat. "Got everything important," Jackson announced. "We're sitting pretty. Fifty-one wagon loads and we made it across the break in the road."

Major Robbins was bewildered. "But you—you had the big trucks and the cats, and you were across Waller Fork How'd you round up the wagons?"

"Didn't you send 'em? This Montana says you did."

"Huh? What's that?" General Horsley took a hand. "A helluva bunch of wagons and teams, and nobody knows who did what?"

"I can assure the general no officer of Camp Maylon authorized all this," Captain Holland put in quickly.

Major Robbins stiffened. "Pipe down," he said from a corner of his mouth. "I'll take the responsibility sir," the major told Horsley. "If there's any blame—"

"Blame?" the older officer's mustache wiggled. "Who said blame? Blast it, if I have to give way next week to major-generals, will I skin anybody's hide because there's at least one man here with the sense and guts to get something done when the chips are down."

"In that case," Major Robbins spoke softly, "the gentleman with the four-mule hitch gets the medal. He acted on his own iniitative. How he did it, I don't know. I didn't know there were that many teams and wagons within ten miles. I didn't know he had gone to Waller Fork Bridge. Instead, I figured he had a handful of wagons and was over at Lacey. General, the gentleman is a future private of the Illinois National Guard. His name is Montana Setters."

"Huh! Montana?" The brigadier-general wheeled on Montana. "What part of Montana?"

"West side, Cap'n. Us Setters was always circulating. Yuh from Montana?"

"Born in sight of Helena. Make way, you cow-hazer. Come on, Robbins." So saying, Brigadier-general Horsley climbed up beside Montana. As Robbins clambered to the vehicle, his superior officer chuckled. "Give me those lines. Haven't touched a four-horse hitch—well, a four-mule hitch—in many a day."

Forthwith, he erupted words—words with which the mules seemed entirely familiar. Captain Holland and sundry officers of varying rank stared, and then they grinned. Enlisted men began to yell. Jolting along the plank road they went. And General Horsley's comment, during the first hundred yards, was to the effect that he could stand a good bite of eating tobacco.

"Got yuh," Montana said. He produced.

"Damned good mules," the general said. "Robbins, I'll put these regimental officers to work. You just sort of concentrate on straightening out this mess. Been catching hell, haven't you?"

"Pretty much," Major Robbins agreed.

"Well, I'll let you in on a secret. I'm getting another star to sport around. Major-general. I'll stay as camp commander, but keep it under your shirt. You've done damned well. Here, you leather-faced cow-nurse, take over."

Montana grinned. "Cap'n, I'd like to work fur yuh."

"H-r-rumph. I'll bet you brought a guitar along."

"He did," Major Robbins chuckled. "And I was fixing to ask for Montana for my very own."

"I'd better take him," Brigadier-general Horsley said. "Headquarters. He needs his ears pinned back, and I'm the man to do it, if he's going to be the soldier I aim to make out of him. Montana, we're streamlined down here. But what you can do with mules, you can do with machinery." He sighed. "All the same, I want somebody around. Somebody who still knows which end of a horse is his head."

Montana let out a yip and shook the lines. "Get along," he bellowed. "Gangway army, here come mules."

There in the saloon Henry, tattered and weary, confronted the murderer

Three Guns for Tonto

By W. C. Tuttle

ELECTION time approaches in Tonto City, and HENRY HARRISON CONROY, the sheriff these many years, is being violently attacked by BIG JIM HARRIS, the most important man in the county, and by JAMES WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW PELLY, editor of the Scorpion Bend *Clarion*. Their candidate is one CASH SILVERTON.

Then disaster descends upon Henry and his ever-present deputy, JUDGE VAN TREECE. In Scorpion Bend, where they have gone to fetch the Shoshone Mine payroll from the bank, they are overpowered by bandits; and CHARLES H. BAKER, the banker, is compelled to open the vault.

The robbers escape with the payroll.

BUT by a fantastic accident they don't keep it for long. In the excitement immediately following the robbery, FRIJOLE BILL CULLISON becomes entangled with an unknown man, and when Frijole finally gets to his feet he picks up a bag that he thinks is the grain sack he was carrying. The next morning at the JHC ranch he discovers that the sack contains the stolen payroll.

Frijole and his partner SLIM PICKENS bury their great wealth, but they are spied upon by those two maniac Mexicans, THUNDER and LIGHTNING. So Thunder and Lightning proceed to dig up the payroll and rebury it to their own satisfaction. Finally, however, Frijole and Slim realize who has doublecrossed them; they force the Mexicans to reveal the new hiding place—and then the four discover that the loot has vanished. Now, at last, Sheriff Henry is informed about the dubious and involved behavior of his henchmen.

MEANWHILE, there has been another addition to Henry's ill-assorted band of retainers. This is a five-year-old boy named BUCKSHOT, whose uncle, one FRED LANGLEY, was mysteriously shot in the sheriff's office. Before he was killed Langley explained to Henry that he had spent his life searching for a man named FRANK ELKINS, who had framed him into a prison stretch. Elkins, who is Langley's brother-in-law, is now in Tonto; but Langley never had the chance the discover his present name.

With a man murdered right in the sheriff's office, Big Jim Harris and the Scorpion Bend *Clarion* are hot and heavy after Sheriff Conroy. Big Jim shortly will re-open the Tonto bank, and to manage it he has engaged Charles Baker, whose Scorpion Bend Bank failed because of the payroll robbery.

The first installment of this three-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for June 28

THE violence is not yet finished. The stage is held up, and only by accident the driver, TONY DUNHAM, is killed instead of Henry Harrison Conroy. Then DANNY REGAN, the foreman of Henry's ranch, is attacked by masked riders; he shoots down one of them, but when he returns to the scene of the battle, the body has vanished.

The next day Danny learns that the man he shot and probably killed is the brother of his girl, NELLIE ADAMS. Both Danny and Nellie, who is Big Jim Harris' niece, have received anonymous notes warning them to see no more of each other; and now Danny is in a state of baffled fury and anguish. But Henry comforts him with a promise to clear everything up. Says Henry, "Old Sherlock Conroy is on the loose." . . .

CHAPTER XI

NEVER GAG THE JUDGE

SHORTLY after Danny left the office Big Jim Harris sauntered in. Henry greeted him cordially, and Big Jim sat down.

If you came to ask me about what is in the *Clarion,*" remarked Henry, "I can truthfully say that I haven't seen a copy today."

Big Jim laughed and shook his head. "Our friend Pelly was kinda vicious this time."

"Not my friend, sir," said Henry. "How much are you paying him for attacking me, Harris?"

"Payin' him? I never paid him a cent. The man works for the interests of the tax-payers."

"That statement," said Henry, "is very amusing."

"Well," drawled Big Jim, "I'm not interested in the *Clarion.* Have you any news on the bank robbery? The Commissioners are anxious for action."

How is your nose?" countered Henry.

"To hell with that!" snapped Big Jim.

"I second the motion," said Henry. "By the way, haven't you a nephew named Steve Adams?"

Big Jim looked keenly at Henry for several moments. "I have. What about him?"

"Do you know where he is at present, sir?"

"Right now," replied Big Jim slowly, "he may be in Wyoming, Nevada, or possibly in New Mexico. I am not positive."

"He was working for you at Silver City, was he not?"

"Why, yes, he was there for a while. What is this all about, Conroy?"

"Oh," replied Henry quietly, "I am merely following my latest hobby "

"Hobby? What do yuh mean? What is your hobby?"

"Oh, picking up a loose end, here and there."

"Don't make sense," growled Big Jim, getting to his feet.

"They never do, until you get them all together, Mr. Harris."

"All right, all right." Big Jim walked back to the doorway. "I came here to ask a question and get a civil answer—and all I get is a lot of foolish talk."

"Ghastly, isn't it?" said Henry soberly.

Without replying, Big Jim left the office and went up the street. Henry was chuckling and rubbing his nose when Judge came in, leading Buckshot by the hand, and carrying the latest edition of the *Clarion.*

"Hello, Uncle Henry," called Buckshot, as he climbed up on a corner of the desk. "How are yuh today?"

"Bless your heart, I am fine, Buckshot."

"Uncle Judge ain't—he's mad."

"My goodness! And why is Uncle Judge mad?"

"Look at that front page!" snorted Judge, flinging the offending paper on the desk. "That editor rates a horsewhipping, Henry."

Henry spread the paper on his desk. Across the top of the page in huge block type was the following heading:

CRIMINALS RULE WILD HORSE VALLEY!
Futile Efforts of Sheriff's Office Are an Insult to Decent Men; Editor Assaulted and Manhandled in Retaliation for Revealing the Truth; Newspaper Office Wrecked by Vandals

"Not bad," murmured Henry. "Not bad at all, Judge Only a declaration of war could have carried a bigger heading."

"Damn it, Henry, do not jest," snapped Judge. "Read what he says."

Slowly Henry read the two column front-page editorial, an amused smile on his moon-like face. At times his brows lifted slightly, and he thoughtfully rubbed his nose. Finally he put the paper aside and smiled up at the golden-haired boy.

"Did you have a nice sleep, son?" he asked.

"Oh, sure," grinned Buckshot, but added, "Until Uncle Judge swore and woke me up."

Judge snorted, got out of his chair and walked to the doorway.

"I never can understand you Henry," he said wearily. "You can read *that*—and still smile. I can't. Damme, my blood boils!"

"The acid in it, Judge, said Henry. "That is why you have rheumatism."

"Acid! Henry, are you a man or a mouse? A man would ride to Scorpion Bend and shoot the hide off the writer of that article."

"I," said Henry quietly, "must be a mouse, sir."

"Damned if I don't believe you are! Why, that editor would not dare write a thing like that about any other person in this state."

"Very likely no other person deserves it, Judge. Most of the article is true. Of course, it could have been put in better English. The man is crude in his wrath. He repeats himself.

"In no less than five places in that single article he says that I am without enough brains to know good from evil. One statement of that kind should be sufficient. In three separate paragraphs he calls you a doddering old imbecile, creaky of joint and rheumy of eye. Once should have been enough. He really should have an intelligent person edit his stuff."

"My God, Henry!" snorted Judge. "You only criticize the writing—not the gist of the thing. Hundreds of people are reading that right now. They will believe it, too. If you allow that man to live and not make a publshed apology, we shall all be laughed out of the state. You will not get a single vote in the election. And you—you laugh!"

"Uncle Judge acts mad," said Buckshot.

"Uncle Judge," said Henry quietly, "is not acting, son."

HENRY knew that Tonto City was reading that paper, and he also knew that in the minds of many people he had lost all chance of ever being reelected. They were watching and waiting to see what he might do about it. Western editors had been horsewhipped for much less.

But Henry's pokerface told them nothing. Outwardly he was smiling, genial, bowing to the bartender at the King's Castle, as he took his drink. Henry was too much of an actor to show the world his feelings Judge was bitter over the thing; so bitter, indeed, that Henry kept away from him.

Instead of going to supper with Judge and Buckshot, he saddled his horse and rode out to the ranch. Neither Frijole, Slim, nor Thunder and Lightning had read the paper. In fact, Thunder and Lightning could not read,

and Slim and Frijole were only able to do so by hard labor.

They discussed the missing money. The four men were eager to find it and turn it over to Henry, but they had no ideas on the subject. They went into detail as to how they had hidden the money, trying to figure out who could have seen Lightning and Thunder bury it. Henry had already questioned Oscar closely over the events at Scorpion Bend, and what Frijole, Thunder and Lightning told fitted in with Oscar's story.

It was nearly midnight, when Henry rode back to Tonto City. He stabled his horse and went to the hotel, where a lone kerosene lamp burned on the hotel desk. Slowly he went up the stairs and down the dark hall to their room. The room was unlocked. He carefully closed the door behind him, lighted a match and went straight to the table where the lamp stood.

As the light flared up he looked around. On the bed, without any covers over him, lay Judge, roped and gagged, flat on his back, blinking painfully at Henry. Buckshot's little bed was empty, the covers flung aside.

With trembling fingers Henry managed to get the gag out of Judge's mouth. He had been struck on the head, and there was a swelling the size of a small egg. Judge lay there, working his lean jaws, while Henry cut the rope loose.

"What happened?" Henry demanded. "Where is the boy?"

"Boy?" muttered Judge. "Boy? You mean Buckshot? Why—" Judge sat up and looked at the empty bed.

"Who was here?" asked Henry.

Judge felt of his sore head and shook it gingerly. Finally he said: "Henry, I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I do not, sir. I put Buckshot to bed, and went to bed myself. I have a faint memory of someone being in the room; I thought it was you. Then I must have been hit over the head. Later, I must have awakened and believed I was in the grip of a terrible nightmare, in which I was gagged and bound. But the boy—"

Henry looked blankly at him, his mind a whirl. Then he began to stare around the room, and his glance went to the tumbled clothes on Buckshot's bed. Against the blue of a blanket was an oblong of paper— an envelope. Quickly he seized it, tore it open and took out the folded sheet of paper, which he held closer to the lamp. The note was printed in pencil, and read:

WE'VE GOT THE KID. DO NOTHING. ANY FURTHER INVESTIGATION BY YOU AND YOU'LL NEVER SEE THE KID AGAIN. DO NOTHING. WAIT FOR ORDERS.

IT WAS unsigned. Henry read it aloud to Judge, who sank back on his pillow, staring at the ceiling.

" 'We've got the kid,' " he muttered "My fault. I should have locked the door. Damn their souls to hell!"

"We have never locked the door before," said Henry huskily. "Who would suspect that they would harm Buckshot? You are not to blame."

"But how could they come right into this hotel and do a thing like that, Henry?"

"Simple, Judge. They came up the rear stairway and entered this room quietly. They knocked you out, very likely gagged the child, and went back the way they came, when the coast was clear. It is a dark night. By now they are far away. There was little danger of being seen."

"I can see that now, Henry," groaned Judge. "But what do they mean when they order us to do nothing, and say that any further investigation by you—what investigation, Henry?"

"Investigation of that Scorpion Bend robbery—and the murder of Tony Dunham, not overlooking the murder of Fred Langley. Judge, they are so frightened right now that they have stooped to kidnapping, hoping we'll drop everything in order to save that boy."

"Wouldn't you, Henry?" asked Judge.

"To save Buckshot," replied Henry seriously, "I would agree to stand on my head for the rest of my life. Judge, we must play the game their way and wait for something to develop."

"You mean—not make any effort to find him?"

"Do you want them to kill the child, Judge?"

"Henry, are you so gullible that you can believe that they will ever return that boy to us? His life means nothing to them. If the men who took him are responsible for the killing of Fred Langley and Tony Dunham, do you think they would hesitate to kill that boy?"

"I do not want to think along that line, Judge. Do you want to have Doctor Knowles examine your head?"

"My head is all right, sir. I shall use a hot towel and a little patience And further than that, sir, an examination of *my* head should be conducted by a number of psychologists, rather than by a country doctor."

"I merely meant the exterior, Judge. Well, there is nothing we can do tonight. The die is cast, as they say. We must face tomorrow with a smile."

"I do not beileve I shall ever smile again," said Judge.

"Few, if any, will notice the change, Judge. Brace up, man! Those men are so frightened that they will do anything to stop us."

Frightened of *you,* Henry?"

"Judge," said Henry, "you must not believe everything you read in the *Clarion.*"

CHAPTER XII

CRAZY WOMAN CANYON

WORD quickly spread next morning about the kidnapping of Buckshot, but neither Henry nor Judge said anything about the note. The office was besieged by people who wanted to help find the boy. John Campbell, the prosecutor, together with the three commissioners, came to the office for a consultation.

"Hangin' is too good for them," declared Big Jim Harris "This valley is goin' to get such a bad reputation that nobody will want to live here. I suggest that we make up a posse of a hundred men and search every possible place in the valley. What do you think of that idea, John?"

The prosecutor shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not, Jim. We might be riding with the men who did it. There must be a reason behind this. Men don't kidnap a child just to be kidnapping. There must be a ransom reason for it. Even if it were revenge against Henry or Judge, those men will let it be known. My suggestion would be to wait for a word from them. How do you feel about it, Henry?"

"I believe you are right, John."

"Well, all right," sighed Big Jim. "I'm a man of action, myself."

"I believe they will communicate with us," said Judge wearily. "It is difficult to analyze their reasons for taking the little boy, unless they are trying to force us to do something against our will."

"Do something?" queried Big Jim. "Well, I don't know about that, but I do know that everyone in this valley has asked that you *do something.* A bank is ruined by theft, murder is committed, but nothing is done about it And now, a little child is kidnapped—and I suppose nothing will be done about that."

"We are not in the habit of issuing bulletins on our daily findings, Mr. Harris," stated Henry coldly. "You merely suspect that we are and have been idle all this time."

Big Jim laughed shortly. "I'll believe different when I've got proof."

"I wonder if a reward would do any good," said the prosecutor. The county hasn't much money for such things."

"A suitable reward would be out of the question," said Big Jim.

"I do not believe we need a reward," said Henry.

"Why not?" asked Big Jim quickly.

Henry smiled thoughtfully. "We will not go into that at present, Mr. Harris. Just give me a few more days."

"That suits me," said John Calvert, one of the commissioners. "Henry has surprised us several times, and I'm willing to be surprised again. How do you feel about it, Al?"

"The same as you do, John," replied Al Rose.

"Thank you for your confidence, gentlemen," said Henry. "I am very sure that in a few days Mr. Harris will agree with you."

"I'm not," growled Harris, "but I'm outvoted."

After they were gone Judge looked dismally at Henry.

"Poker," he said, 'Just plain poker, Henry. You haven't a damn face, nor an ace, and a pair of deuces would look like a royal flush in a hand like yours. And yet you sit there and bluff them into believing you have something to work on. Henry, I take off my hat to you. But what is the use?"

"I guess I am just a born liar, Judge. Perhaps it is my sense of the dramatic, or the fact that a Conroy never admits defeat. And," Henry paused for a moment. "And still, I may be right. By Jove, I may be on the brink of a great discovery."

"And," said Judge, "do not forget that every moment you totter on the brink, Buckshot is in those scoundrels' hands. Last night, when he said his prayers, he said 'God bless Uncle Judge, and God bless Uncle Henry.' Then he said, "Uncle Judge, where is Uncle Henry?' I said, 'God knows, I don't.' Then he said, 'You know where he is, God. Amen.' "

"A grand, little lad," said Henry quietly. "I wonder if we shall ever know his right name. A swell little trouper, Judge. Nearly old enough to go to school, too. We must provide for him—for the future. Neither of us have anyone to inherit our earthly belongings."

"Mine?" queried Judge.

"At least, you might leave him a memory of a smiling face, Judge."

"I've got along with this face for over sixty years, sir."

"And show the effects of it, Judge."

HENRY walked up to the new bank, where Charles Baker, who was to take charge, was directing the work of reconstruction. He greeted Henry cordially and expressed his sympathy over what had happened. Henry seemed rather indifferent, and evaded Baker's questions regarding his opinion of the kidnapping mystery.

"Do you suppose they will ask a cash ransom for the return of the boy?" he asked.

"No, I do not," replied Henry.

"Well—uh—why would they take him?"

"A cash ransom idea is out of the question, Mr. Baker. In the first place, he is not my son, not even by adoption. In fact, he is not even related to me. We do not even know his right name. Would any man pay a large sum of money for the return of the child under those circumstances? True, I am fond of the little boy. But if the kidnappers expect a large sum of money for his return, I am very much afraid they are doomed to disappointment."

"I see," mused Baker thoughtfully. "They haven't made any demands yet?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Have you made any attempt to find him?"

"Not physically. How soon do you expect to open this bank?"

"In about a week, I believe."

"I was just wondering," remarked Henry, "just how much faith the public will have in this institution. You must remember that this bank has failed twice, and the recent failure in Scorpion Bend may have a bad effect on depositors."

"I believe the people will have absolute faith in this bank," declared Baker. "They will know that Jim Harris is behind it."

Henry's brows lifted slightly, but he made no comment.

He went back to the office, where he rummaged in his desk, until he found an old letter written to him in longhand by Big Jim Harris. It was merely a communication regarding county business, and was signed by Jim Harris, as chairman of the commissioners. Henry put the letter in his pocket and leaned back in his chair, his brow furrowed.

Danny Regan, Frijole Bill, Slim Pickins, together with Thunder and Lightning, came to town. They had heard about the disappearance of Buckshot, and were anxious for more news.

"Lemme at 'em!" roared Frijole. "I done heard about it, Henry, and I'm ory-eyed. Of all the danged things I ever heard about! Where do yuh reckon they're holdin' that kid, huh?"

"Calm down, Frijole," advised Henry quietly. "We have no idea where they took him."

"I like to keek heem in your pants," declared Lightning. "Those damn leetle keed, I'm like heem too much."

"Thank you very much," said Henry. "I know you are all loyal."

"Loyal—hell!" snorted Frijole. "I'm jist sore."

"Ain't there anythin' we can do, Henry?" asked Danny.

"Just wait, Danny. Nothing can be done—not at present."

"Well, you jist turn me loose," said Frijole. "I'll turn this whole valley upside down, and I'll betcha I'll shake out that kid. Old Frijole ain't been on the warpath since Geronimo was a pup, and I kinda hanker to open 'm' tonsils and howl like a wolf. Didja ever hear me howl like a wolf, Henry?"

"Thank you—no, Frijole. Your word is sufficient."

"I can shore do her. Learned it from an Apache."

"Has Oscar been out at the ranch?" asked Henry.

"He was out there last night," replied Frijole. "Somebody told him what was in the *Clarion,* and he's goin' around mumblin' to himself about what he's goin' to do to that editor."

"My goodness, he did plenty!" exclaimed Henry. "I hope he keeps away from there."

"When it comes to Oscar Johnson," said Slim, "the best you can do is to hope."

Judge came to the office a little later. He seemed in a nervous frame of mind.

"I get the fidgets, sitting around, Henry," he declared. "There is not enough action to suit me."

"Good!" exclaimed Henry. "We are going to saddle our horses and take a ride."

"A ride? On horses, Henry? My rheumatism has been—"

"To horse!" interrupted Henry. "And do not talk to me about your rheumatism, sir."

"I merely mentioned it, Henry. Naturally, with the pain I suffer, it is always uppermost in my mind. And riding—a saddle—"

"Will do you a world of good, Judge. Come with me."

FOR the next ten minutes their little stable was filled with grunts and groans as they saddled their horses, but they finally rode forth. Judge detested chaps and boots, and in a short distance his overalls had pulled up

to his knees, exposing his lean shanks, his feet clad in elastic-top gaiters. No two men ever looked less like peace officers.

"Whither?" queried Judge, after they left the road and headed into the hills.

"Oh, just hence," replied Henry, leading the way.

"Have you—er—developed an idea, sir?" asked Judge, fending a mesquite limb away from his head.

"I have the small beginnings of one, sir," replied Henry. "One would have to use a powerful magnifying glass to identify it, but it is all I have. Judge, do you remember the old El Segundo mine?"

"Yes, I remember it. I believe it now belongs to Jim Harris. It is out near Crazy Woman Canyon. But what has that to do with your idea?"

"Very little, I am afraid, Judge. Still, one must start somewhere, mustn't one?"

"I give up!" snorted Judge. "What has an abandoned mine got to do with things? Henry, you don't suppose that Buckshot is there, do you?"

"Nothing as simple as that, my friend. I merely ask about an old mine, and you get hysterical."

"Well, all right. I still do not see the idea."

"As I said a while ago, sir, it is microscopic."

They followed an old trail that led to the mine, and both riders were weary when they reached the huddle of decrepit shacks. Smoke was trickling from an old stovepipe, as they came into the opening on the side of the hill.

"By gad!" exclaimed Judge. "Someone living here, Henry."

"Yes, I knew there was. It is a Mexican, but I do not know his name. Harris hired him to look after things."

Two little Mexican kids appeared in the doorway of the shack as the two men rode up, and a moment later a middle-aged Mexican stepped out. He did not seem friendly, but he managed to smile.

"*Mucho caliente,*" observed Henry. It was indeed warm out there.

"*Si, si,*" replied the Mexican. "W'at you want, eh?"

"Have you any water?" asked Henry.

"Sure." The Mexican dipped a gourd into a barrel, just inside the shack, and one of the children brought it out to Henry.

"*Gracias,*" Henry smiled. "What is your name, my little man?"

"Chico," said the youngster. Henry tossed him a half-dollar, and he pounced on it like a hawk on a quail. Henry tossed another half to the little girl, who almost fell off the rickety steps to get it.

"*Gracias, señor—gracias.*" The Mexican smiled widely now.

"So your name is Chico," said Henry. "What is your last name?"

"Hernandez," said the youngster. "My seester ees Chiquito."

"Nice names," Henry told them heartily. "And what is your father's name?"

Both children looked to their father to answer that one.

"I am Juan Hernandez, *señor,*" he said.

"Thank you. You are the caretaker of the El Segundo mine?"

"*Si, señor.* I leeve here."

"Well, that is nice. Thank you for the water, and *adios.*"

As they rode away, the two little Mexicans were still standing on the porch, waving to them.

"OF ALL the asinine missions!" snorted Judge. "You order me to ride with you in all this heat and over all these damnable hills merely to borrow a drink of water from a Mexican."

"Borrow?" queried Henry. "I paid well enough for it."

"Fifty cents a swallow. But what good came of it?"

"My dear Judge, I cannot answer that question. I merely wanted to know the name of the Mexican."

"Good gad, you could have found that out in Tonto City!"

"Granted, sir, granted. But I wanted firsthand knowledge."

"Well, I hope you are satisfied, Henry."

"Oh, perfectly. In fact, I feel that the trip was well worthwhile. The next thing I must find is a Mexican I can trust."

"Why not use one of your own—Thunder or Lightning? Or don't you trust them?"

"Thank you for the suggestion, Judge. I trust them prefectly, but for obvious reasons they will not do. Better than an honest Mexican would be one so dumb that he could not answer a question."

"Poco Vasquez," said Judge.

"Poco Vasquez! The very person!"

"Dumb enough," said Judge. "A perfect example of a singletrack mind, if there ever was one. I saw him this morning, helping swamp out the King's Castle Saloon. He does odd jobs for Big Jim Harris."

"Excellent, Judge—excellent. You take a load off my mind. Poco Vasquez it shall be."

Judge examined his companion narrowly and in silence for a moment or two.

"But what in the world is your idea, Henry?"

"The idea," said Henry, "has grown until it is nearly visible to the human eye, but not quite, Judge."

"I hope it is more sensible than it sounds."

"It positively is not, Judge. It is hair-brained, full of flaws, and might blow back and ruin me. But, as I said before, it is the only one we have. My old friend, I dare not tell you what it is. You would never be a party to it; so it is better that you do not know."

One of the first persons they saw after stabling their horses was James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly. He was with Charles Baker, inspecting the new bank. No doubt, he was going to give it some much-needed publicity.

Oscar was half-asleep on the office cot. He said:

"Yah, su-ure, Ay saw de editor. He came down ha'ar. He say he vants some trut' about de kidnapping of Buckshot. Va'al, Ay got oop and Ay said to him, 'Ay vill give you something to print,' and den he vent avay yust like a yackrabbit."

"No wonder," said Judge dryly.

"Ay vill say he ain't," agreed Oscar. "Ay saw Eric today. He vars limping around, vit two black eyes."

"Limping with two black eyes?" queried Henry.

"Yah, su-ure," Oscar laughed. "He apologized to me. He say he is sorry he took Yosephine from me, and Ay can have her back vit his blessing."

"Well, will you be fool enough to take her back?" asked Judge.

"Only on an agreement," declared Oscar warmly. "Ay am no fool."

"What sort of an agreement?" asked Henry curiously.

"An agreement," said Oscar soberly, "that she vill vistle before she svings."

"True love—but with reservations," chuckled Henry.

"It is clear," Judge remarked, "that romance often differs from the poet's conception of it. It is not altogether bliss. It is even dangerous."

"Freeholey left a yug in de back room," suggested Oscar.

"Well, my goodness, what are we waiting for?" asked Henry quickly."Bring the cups, varlet."

"This is no time to celebrate, Henry," said Judge.

"Bring only two cups, Oscar," called Henry.

"Never mind!" called Judge. "Bring all three, Oscar!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE BIG GUN

POCO VASQUEZ was a little and skinny half-Mexican, half-Yaqui, and usually half-starved. He only had two ambitions in life. The first was to earn enough money to buy some tequila, and the second was to make enough money to buy some more tequila. He squatted beside the stable doorway, while Henry explained just what he was to do. Poco had a pinto horse, nearly as thin as its owner.

"I want you to get this all clearly in your mind, Poco," explained Henry. "You will ride to the Circle H ranch. You will find Cash Silverton and give him this letter. For this I will give you five dollars."

Henry showed him the five silver dollars and the Mexican's eyes sparkled. That was a lot of money to Poco Vasquez.

"Geeve now?" he asked.

"I will give you the money when you come back. Ride to the Circle H ranch, give the letter to Cash Silverton, and come back here. If Cash Silverton asks you who sent the letter, what will you tell him?"

"Qien sabe?"

"All right. If he asks you if Big Jim sent it, what will you say?"

"Si, si. Beeg Jeem. You Beeg Jim."

"You are almost letter perfect, Poco. Come right to the office when you get back."

"Muy pronto. Adios."

Henry watched the Mexican ride away, sighed and leaned against the stable wall. "I wish," he said aloud, "I knew a Yaqui god I could pray to for the safe delivery of my message—but I don't."

James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly stayed all night in Tonto, and when Henry went back to the office he found him in there, talking with Judge about the kidnapping of Buckshot.

"You have met Mr. Conroy, have you not, Mr. Pelley?" queried Judge.

"I have," said the editor.

"He has," Henry agreed.

"Mr. Pelly wants the story of the kidnapping, Henry."

"You may tell him, sir," replied Henry. "I was not there."

"Just what do you wish to know, Mr. Pelly?" queried Judge.

"I want a complete story of the kidnapping, together with any clues left by the kidnappers. I mean, of course, a description of the clues. I want your opinions as to why it was done, too."

"Wouldn't you like to know who did it?" asked Henry.

"Why—er—yes, of course!"

"So would we," Henry told him. "Judge can tell you the story, but there were no clues. I—"

HENRY hesitated. On the floor, nearly behind the half-opened door, was an envelope. Slowly he got out of his chair and picked it up. On it was penciled: HENRY CONROY, SHERIFF.

Judge and Pelly were watching Henry. He opened the envelope and examined the one sheet of folded paper, on which was printed:

> WE WANT THE MONEY FROM THE SCORPION BEND BANK. THAT MONEY IS ON YOUR RANCH. DIG UP THAT MONEY, WRITE YOUR RESIGNATION AS SHERIFF, AND WE WILL BE READY TO MAKE THE TRADE. YOUR RESIGNATION WILL MEAN THAT YOU HAVE THE MONEY FOR US. THEN WE WILL COMMUNICATE WITH YOU AGAIN. DISOBEY THIS ORDER AND THE KID DIES.

Henry read the note, without a change of expression, and went back to his chair. "Sorry to interrupt, gentlemen," he said quietly. "Go ahead with your story, Judge."

"The story is common knowledge," said Judge. "Mr. Pelly has heard it a dozen times, and I have nothing to add."

"Then," suggested Henry quietly," suppose we talk about Mr. Pelly's editorial in the last *Clarion.*"

"I do not care to discuss it," said Mr. Pelly quickly, getting to his feet. "I am here merely to write up a story of the kidnapping and the opening of the new bank. Good day."

James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly lost no time in getting away from the office. Henry took the note from his pocket and handed it to Judge.

"It must have been put under the door last night," he said, "and when you opened up, it was shoved back."

"My God!" gasped Judge.

"Rather interesting, don't you think?" asked Henry. "All they want now is that money and my resignation."

"But we haven't the money, Henry!"

"And so," added Henry dryly, "the joke is on them."

"Joke? They will kill Buckshot, and we cannot do a single thing to prevent it. Don't you realize that, man?"

"Perfectly, Judge. They want that money, they want my resignation, and then they will return Buckshot—we hope. But above all things, they want that money, and that is the one thing we cannot furnish."

"Damn 'em!" muttered Judge. "I knew they would ask the impossible."

"The only thing we can do now," said Henry, "is to get Buckshot back—without the money or the resignation."

Judge, pacing up and down the office, halted and scowled. "You think of the most impossible things, Henry."

"Very well. If you can show me how we can get that money, Judge, I will not try to get him back otherwise."

"One of us must be crazy!" snorted Judge, and went striding out of the office. Henry leaned back in his chair. The poker face was gone now. There was no one to bluff, except himself, and deep in his heart he felt that he had been bluffing all along. He still had his one slender thread of hope, but it was mighty weak. It all hinged on his hunch.

He went out to the stable, saddled his horse and rode out to the ranch, without saying a word to Judge. It was Saturday, and everyone in the valley would be in Tonto City. By going to the ranch he could avoid questions and conversation. Henry Harrison Conroy wanted to be where he could think. But for this trip he had belted on his forty-five Colt, and had taken a liberal supply of ammunition.

BIG Jim Harris sauntered down to the Corcoran home that afternoon. He had seen little of Nellie Adams since she started teaching school in Tonto City. After all, she was his niece, a very pretty young lady, and it was time for him to make a few plans for her.

He found her under an old oak in the front yard, reading a magazine, and he felt that her greeting was none too cordial. He sat down beside her.

"Everythin' going good at the school?" he asked.

"Very good, thank you, Mr. Harris."

"Why not call me Uncle Jim?" he queried.

Nellie produced a folded piece of paper and handed it to him. "Will you tell me why you wrote that, and were ashamed to sign your name?" she asked.

It was the note she had received, warning her not to have anything more to do with Danny Regan. Big Jim flushed slightly, started to deny it, but Nellie stopped him.

"It is your writing," she said.

"Well, I'll tell yuh—" He looked closely at her. "Have you seen Regan lately?"

"If you mean, did he show me the note he got—yes."

"You told him I wrote it?"

"I told him it was not your writing."

Big Jim sighed with relief. "Regan is one of Conroy's outfit," he said, "and I won't have you trailin' with any of that gang. I'm goin' to put them out of business, and I—well, I figured you was seein' too much of him, Nellie."

"Is that any of your business?" she asked coldly.

"Yo're my niece, and Regan is my enemy. The two don't mix."

"After all," said Nellie quietly, "I am of age, and I have no reason to feel that you are my guardian."

"I got yuh this job, didn't I?"

"Yes, that is true. Still, that does not give you the right to warn me against seeing a young man, just because you do not like him. You even threaten to take my job away from me."

"Yes, I can do that, too, young lady. But not if you are reasonable. Maybe you have overlooked the fact that Big Jim Harris is goin' to boss this valley. Before I get through with my plans, my word will be law around here. I've got plans for you, too."

"Oh, you have? That's fine!"

"Gettin' sarcastic, eh? You don't need to take that attitude. If you don't believe I can do what I say, go right ahead and see Regan."

"Perhaps I will. But if I do, I shall tell him you wrote that note."

"What good will that do yuh? What can Regan do about it?"

"He might," she suggested, "make you sign your name to it."

"Is that so? Go ahead and tell him."

Big Jim got to his feet and looked down at her. "Yo're a foolish girl, if yuh ask me, Nellie. Maybe yo're just ignorant, I dunno."

"Maybe it runs in the family, Mr. Harris. But before you go, tell me where I can get in touch with Steve."

"Steve?" Big Jim's face hardened. "I dunno where he is. Wyomin', New Mexico, Colorado—mebbe. What do yuh want him for?"

"I thought he was working for you—at the Circle H."

"He was. Steve is pretty much of a wild devil, and he don't stay long in one place. You may hear from him some day."

"Was Steve ever around here?" she asked.

"You mean here in Tonto City? No, I don't think so. Why?"

"Oh, nothing—I just wondered."

"What are you drivin' at, Nellie? What about Steve bein' here?"

"I don't know," she replied. "Mrs. Corcoran told me that the other day when Danny Regan came here to ask me about that note, he saw Steve's picture in the house. Mrs. Corcoran said his face turned white, and he acted as if he had seen a ghost. She said his voice was hoarse, when he asked her who that man was. Then he hurried outside, and I met him at the gate."

"Seen a ghost, eh?" muttered Big Jim. "Why would Steve's picture look like a ghost to him? Foolishness. Steve never was down here, not as far as I know. Forget it. Well, I'll be seein' yuh."

BIG JIM turned and walked out through the gate, and headed back for the King's Castle, grim-faced as he strode along. He needed a big drink of whiskey and a chance to think things over calmly.

The town was crowded with people, the hitch-racks filled. All the games were wide open at the King's Castle, and the long bar was jammed. Business was good, but Big Jim was not happy. Down in his heart was a feeling that everything was not all right.

Many people visited the new bank, watching the finishing touches. Charles Baker was there, pointing out the improvements, boasting that at last Tonto City would have a real banking institution, where the money would be safe.

Oscar Johnson and Slim Pickins, followed by Thunder and Lightning, roamed the town, having a drink here and there. James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly was still in town, but he managed to keep away from the quartet from the JHC. There was plenty of conversation regarding the editorial in the *Clarion*, and Mr. Pelly was not exactly flattered by some of the outspoken criticism of his masterpiece. He would be glad when it was time for the stage to leave for Scorpion Bend.

He sought Big Jim Harris in the King's Castle Saloon and told him he was just a little afraid of Oscar Johnson & Company.

"They follow me around all the time," he complained.

"Yo're pretty much of a coward, ain't yuh, Pelly," remarked Big Jim. "You can write things all right, but yuh ain't got the nerve to back 'em up."

"You told me that I would have protection," reminded the editor.

"Then yuh better crawl into a hole, until stage-time," snarled the big man. "I can't be bothered with you now."

James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly was sensitive. At least, he thought he was, and this debuff was too much. He had promised Big Jim full support of the *Clarion* in this campaign to defeat Henry Harrison Conroy; but if this was the way Big Jim felt about it . . .

So J. W. L. Pelly, feeling rather heartsick, went to the bar and ordered rye whiskey. It was the first drink he had ever bought over a bar, and after the strangulation period was past, he felt quite elated.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SHERIFF RIDES ALONG

FRIJOLE BILL CULLISON could hardly figure Henry out. Henry had planted himself in an easy chair on the old porch, where he sat most of the afternoon, saying nothing, even ignoring the fact that a jug of prune whiskey and an empty cup were within reach.

"The man needs a doctor," decided Frijole. "Ain't normal a-tall."

Old Bill Shakespeare, the rooster, minus most of his neck feathers, and with only one tail feather left, perched on the porch railing, but failed to elicit a smile from Henry.

"Mebbe he's mournin' about the red-headed kid," suggested Frijole to himself, as he went about cooking supper. "I shore don't blame him a bit. What wouldn't I give to git my hands on that kidnapper! I'd shore bust his mainspring real quick."

Henry answered the call to supper, but he had little to say. Frijole watched him, a scowl between his eyes, but he did not speak either. Henry went back to his seat on the porch as soon as supper was over. Frijole remarked to his pots and pans:

"He acts jist like a man who was fixin' to kill somebody. I've seen gunmen act thataway, jist before they cut a six-shooter swath. But if I was him I'd spend my time practicin' shootin', less'n I was aimin' to do the job with a shotgun."

The old clock over the fireplace had just struck eight o'clock when Henry came back into the house. He buckled on his gunbelt and turned to Frijole.

"Which is the best way to get to the old El Segundo mine on Crazy Woman Canyon?" he asked.

Frijole looked curiously at him. What on earth did Henry expect to find in Crazy Woman Canyon, he wondered?

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "I'd go up the old wash, back of here, cut over to the rim of Smoke Tree Canyon, foller that around to that open ridge and foller that ridge until yuh cut what's left of the old road to El Segundo. I dunno what in hell you'd—"

"I wish you would saddle my horse, Frijole."

"Yo're danged right. But if yo're goin' over there, I'd shore like to go with yuh, Henry. You act like you've been stewin' up somethin', and I'd—"

"No, Frijole, I shall go alone."

"Well, yeah—course, yuh know what yuh want best."

"Thank you, Frijole."

"Oh, yo're welcome. I'll have the hull on that bronc in two minutes. But I don't see—" Frijole hesitated. Henry smiled for the first time that afternoon, as he said:

"Neither do I, Frijole."

"Uh-huh, I see. Well, if you ain't comin' back thisaway, I figure I'll go to Tonto."

"Why, of course. By all means. No, I—I very likely will not come back this way."

Frijole watched Henry mount and ride past the corrals and into the old drywash, where Thunder and Lightning had hid the money. There was plenty of starlight. Frijole saw him disappear at last.

"I dunno," he said. "Beats me—him actin' thataway. Goin' to Crazy Woman Canyon at night. I wonder if he's lost his mind—or is jist losin' it. Looks spooky t' me. Well he's old enough to know what he wants—or he's gone loco over the loss of that kid. Mebbe that's it. Dawgone it, I better go to town and tell Judge and the boys."

IT WAS a long, hard ride to the old El Segundo mine from the JHC. Henry had never been over that route before which made it doubly hard. In the darkness he had trouble in finding the open ridge but once on it he was able to follow it to the nearly obliterated road to the mine. It was nearly eleven o'clock when he was able to discern the old mine buildings.

There were no lights. He rode in close tied his horse in a thicket of piñon pines and made his way to a point about a hundred feet from the cabin occupied by the Hernandez family. There he sat down behind some brush. A crescent moon peeped over the hills casting only a feeble brightness.

Henry stretched his cramped legs and wondered just what degree of damn fool he qualified for. With only a hunch so far-fetched that he even marveled at his own foolishness, here he was, sitting behind a brush-heap watching a shack in which every occupant was peacefully sleeping. Somewhere a coyote lifted its voice in cackling protest to the moon and Henry's reflections went back to his days and years in vaudeville when he knew only the paved thoroughfares of cities.

With his back against the bole of a piñon, he alternately dozed and watched the shack.

"What a fool, what a fool!" he told himself. "Thank the Lord, I am the only one to know what I am doing."

Midnight passed, one o'clock, two o'clock. It was colder now. A breeze swept across the hills. Judge would be in bed sleeping warmly. He would suppose that Henry was out at the ranch. Everyone in the world was probably comfortable, except Henry Harrison Conroy, the fool who had a hunch.

Henry's eyes scanned the star-lit skyline, and his shoulders suddenly jerked away from the piñon. It might have been a deer. Too large for a coyote or a lobo wolf. Something had come over that ridge. He crouched forward, ears alert for the first sound. It came a few minutes later, the sound of hoofs on hard ground. Then he saw the dark bulk of two riders, coming up to the front of the shack.

He heard the creak of a saddle as a man dismounted, followed in a few moments by the sound of someone knocking on the door. After a time there was a light in the window, and he saw more light as the door was cautionsly opened. He was unable to hear the conversation. Evidently both men had gone inside. Henry crawled closer.

Finally the door opened and he heard a man's voice say:

"You go to Tonto and tell Big Jim that everythin' is all right."

Then one of the men came out, mounted his horse and rode away.

Henry got to his feet, stretched his cramped muscles and began moving toward the lighted window. As he came up close to the house he could hear voices in the shack. Juan Hernandez was arguing in a high-pitched voice, while the replies of the other man were merely low mumbles.

Henry had had plenty of time to plan out his attack. Gripping his forty-five Colt in his right hand, he stepped gingerly up on the rickety porch. His very weight seemed to jar the shack, and with two quick steps he reached the door, intending to kick it open. But he stepped on a round object, throwing himself off-balance, and he pitched forward, hitting the door solidly with his left shoulder.

The flimsy door crashed open and Henry went sprawling across the threshold. He heard a woman scream, and caught a flash of the two men in the lamplight. A man yelled out a curse, and a bullet ripped across Henry's left shoulder as the man backed against the wall, shooting down at him.

Henry was unable to get in position to shoot at the man. He merely lifted the gun in his general direction and pulled the trigger, just as the man fired his second shot. But Henry was lifting from the floor, and that bullet tore into the floor under his right knee.

Henry heard the crash, as the man went down, and the woman was crying, *"Madre de Dios! Madre de Dios!"*

Henry got to his feet, choking a little from powder fumes. Juan Hernandez was backed against the wall, holding his wife behind him. On the crude bunk, along with the two Mexican children, was little Buckshot, dirty of face and wide-eyed.

"Uncle Henry!" he cried. "Uncle Henry, I knew you'd find me!"

Then quite suddenly his face broke into wide grin.

"My little man," said Henry quietly, "I thank you for such faith."

Henry took the lamp and stepped over to look at the man. One glance was sufficient for him to realize that the man would never get up again. It was Cash Silverton, candidate for sheriff.

Henry put the lamp down and looked at Hernandez.

"Por Dios, I know notheeng," wailed the Mexican. "Those men breeng the leetle one and say we mus' keep heem for w'ile. I am only poor *Mejicano, señor."*

"You have nothing to fear, my friend," said Henry.

"Gracias, gracias, amigo. I am only poor—"

"I believe you said that before, Mr. Hernandez. Buckshot, your face is very dirty, but it is the finest sight I have ever seen. Are you all right, my boy?"

The child nodded.

"I'm all right, Uncle Henry."

"All right, Buckshot; we are going back to Tonto City. Come."

Juan Hernandez and his wife stood in the doorway of the shack, watching Henry mount his horse, with Buckshot in his arms.

"Vaya con Dios!" called Juan Hernandez.

"Go with God," translated Henry "Judging from my luck, I came with Him, too."

IT WAS well after midnight when Judge stumbled into the office and lighted a lamp. Judge was well liquored, but not inebriated. His face was lined with worry as he flopped in Henry's chair. All evening he had watched and waited for Henry, not having any idea where he had gone. Just a few minutes ago Judge had accosted Frijole, who had confided—rather thickly, of course—that Henry was somewhere in Crazy Woman Canyon, probably hunting for owls.

Judge looked up as John Campbell, the prosecuting attorney, came in.

"Have you seen Henry?" he asked. Judge shook his head.

"Where do you suppose he can be, Judge?"

"John, I have no idea. I'm worried, I tell you; more worried since Frijole said he was out at Crazy Woman Canyon. Damn it, John, a man of Henry's age has no business out there at night. Hunting for owls, indeed!"

"Who said he was hunting for owls?"

"Frijole Bill. The idea is ridiculous!"

"Judge, what on earth happened to Pelly, the *Clarion* editor?"

"Has something happened to him?"

"Didn't you hear them—or are you deaf? Oscar Johnson got an accordion, Slim Pickins has a violin with only one string, and they are playing the music, while James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly campaigns for Henry Harrison Conroy."

"No, John!"

"They have visited every saloon and store in Tonto City tonight, except the King's Castle. Big Jim is wild about it."

"But Pelly, John!"

"Pelly," said the big lawyer, "is drunk as a fool and steady as a clock. He says that Big Jim turned him down; so from now on he is going to work for Henry Conroy."

"It sounds impossible, John. But they surely will not go into the King's Castle."

"With Oscar Johnson leading, Judge? That Viking would go into Hell and defy the Devil, especially with that accordion. I am naturally all for peace and order, but I should hate to miss seeing them invade that place. Right now Big Jim is running a big draw poker game, and there is plenty money on the table. Mr. Charles Baker is also in the game, and, judging from his handling of a poker hand, the man has not always been dealing through a cashier's window."

"If we only knew where Henry was," complained Judge. "John, I am afraid something has happened to him."

"Judge, I feel that I am being kept in the dark on this kidnapping deal, and I believe it is time for you to tell me a few things."

"You promise to not tell, John?"

"I'll do my very best, Judge."

It did not take much time for Judge to give Campbell an outline of things, including the ransom demand.

"But that money isn't on the ranch, John," declared Judge. "We have no idea where it is. They demand Henry's resignation and the money. If you can see a way out —God bless you. I can't."

"Queer doings," muttered the lawyer. "I had no idea. Then the kidnapping connects up with the bank robbery. Hmmm."

"And the murder of Tony Dunham," added Judge. "They meant to kill Henry. And Henry thinks the same gang killed Fred Langley."

"Well, well! And do you think that Henry, single-handed, is trying to best that gang, Judge?"

"He is just that sort of a fool, John."

"No wonder you are worried. But what can be done about it, when we don't even know where he went? Going to Crazy Woman Canyon doesn't make sense, Judge. There is nothing out there, except the old buildings of El Segundo mine."

"I know it. Henry took me out there with him yesterday. Went clear out there to merely find out the name of the Mexican living there."

"To find out his name? Why did he want to know the Mexican's name?"

"By gad, I'll bet that is where he went again tonight, John!"

"But why would he go out there again?"

"I—I don't know," confessed Judge wearily, "unless he forgot the name and went back to learn it again."

"Big Jim Harris still owns El Segundo, doesn't he?"

"Yes. This Juan Hernandez is the caretaker."

"Judge, you don't think that Big Jim Harris—"

"Our leading citizen?" queried Judge soberly.

John Campbell shook his head and walked to the doorway. Up the street came Oscar, Slim and Pelly, with Thunder and Lightning bringing up the rear. Their music was scarcely melodic, but they surely made enough noise. Lightning was carrying a cardboard sign on a broomstick, on which was crudely lettered in shoe polish: WE WANT HENRY!

Judge came to the doorway and watched them. Oscar started singing:

"Ay vars born in Minneso-ta, den Ay came to Nort' Dako-ta,, ridin' Yim Hill's big, red vagon, Yudas priest, Ay feel for fight!"

"Viva Enrique!" shrilled Thunder and Lightning in unison. *"Viva Enrique."*

"Heading for the King's Castle, Judge," said Campbell. "We should be in at the kill."

"The law *should* be represented," said Judge wearily.

There was quite a crowd following Oscar Johnson & Company. Most of them had heard that the *Clarion* had gone pro-Conroy, and they wondered what Big Jim Harris would do about it.

BUT Jim Harris was not in there to meet them. Just ahead of the procession, entering the saloon, was Sid Mercer, the man who had come to the Hernandez shack with Cash Silverton and Buckshot. He flashed a signal to Big Jim, who dropped out of the game and took Mercer to his private office at the rear of the saloon.

Big Jim closed the door and faced the tired cowpuncher.

"We're all set, Jim," said Mercer. "Cash and the kid are at the shack, waitin' for further orders."

"Cash and the kid are what?" gasped Big Jim.

"Like you ordered in that letter," explained Mercer, "we brought the kid to the Hernandez shack tonight, and Cash is—"

"Good God man, what are you talkin' about?" demanded Big Jim.

"Why, the letter you sent to Cash today by that dumb Mexican. The kid is at El Segundo."

"Letter by a dumb Mexican—the kid at El Segundo? Sid, I don't know what yuh mean. I never sent any letter to Cash Silverton."

"Yuh didn't? Cash said it was yore writin', Jim."

Big Jim's usually florid face was gray in the lamplight. "This letter—what did it say, Sid?" he panted.

"Why, it said somethin' had gone wrong and for Cash to take the kid tonight to the Hernandez shack at the old El Segundo mine, and for Cash to stay there until yuh got in touch with him."

"And you took the kid there?"

"Sure. We thought it was all right, Jim."

"We've been tricked!" gasped Big Jim. "I never wrote any note. Wait! Conroy! That's who done it! Sid, we've got to do somethin' mighty quick!"

"Want me to go out there and warn Cash?"

"Too late! You don't think they'd wait for that, do yuh? No, we've got to frame somethin'—fast. If they get Cash, he might talk to try and save his own neck. That kid might recognize—"

"We all wore masks around him, Jim. You know that. Tonight me and Cash didn't wear any. He said he'd dump the kid over the edge of the canyon if anythin' went wrong. Our best bet is to hightail it out of this country."

"And leave everythin' I've built up here?" snarled Big Jim. "I'll beat 'em. They can't put any deadwood on me. Nobody can prove that I done anythin'. That kid couldn't have recognized me at the ranch. Listen!"

Oscar Johnson & Company had taken over the King's Castle, and James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly was on a table, addressing the crowd in favor of the reelection of Henry Conroy. Pelly was crosseyed from liquor, but his speech was straight, mainly intelligible.

"Who's that, makin' the speech?" asked Sid Mercer.

"A dirty skunk who turned against me," snapped Big Jim. "I'll make him wish he'd never turned. But to hell with him. We've got somethin' bigger than a drunken editor to figure out."

Big Jim was without a coat, and now he picked up his gunbelt from the desk and buckled it around his waist. It was heavily studded with silver ornaments, and the buckle was a huge wolf's head, done in silver and gold.

You can't shoot yore way out of this, Jim," warned Mercer. "If we had some of the boys from the ranch—"

"I know. I should have kept a bunch of 'em down here. Hell, yuh never know what'll happen. Listen to that damn fool out there, makin' a speech for Henry Conroy, right in my own saloon. I've got a good notion to go out there and wring his neck!"

Suddenly everything went quiet. There was not a sound in the saloon. Big Jim, tensed against his desk, stared at the closed door. Then a big cheer went up; a cheer that fairly rocked the Kings' Castle, followed by a flurry of voices.

"What's goin' on out there?" Big Jim muttered. "C'mon Sid!"

CHAPTER XV

WHO GOT ELECTED?

BIG JIM flung the door open and went crashing into the crowd. Still he could not see what was going on, so he clawed and shoved his way ahead. Finally, by main strength, he reached the center of the roaring mob, just as Henry Conroy, hatless, his shirt torn, face scratched and bleeding, lifted Buckshot to the top of the bar.

Big Jim and Henry were not six feet apart, facing each other. Men were jostling, asking questions. James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly was still on the table, crouched over and trying to balance himself, as the crowd jostled against his platform.

"You found the kid, eh?" Big Jim's voice was husky.

"Yes, sir," said Henry quietly. The crowd was silent now.

"Good!" croaked Big Jim. "Good work, Conroy."

"Cash Silverton is dead—out there in Juan Hernandez's shack, Jim," said Henry.

Silverton—dead? Who killed him?"

"I killed him," replied Henry flatly. "We shot it out, Jim."

"Why—I—"Big Jim's lips twisted, but no sound came.

"And yellow enough to talk, before he died," lied Henry.

"Talked? Talked about what? I don't know what yuh mean."

"Talked about the robbery of the Scorpion Bend Bank, the murder of Tony Dunham. Dying men say things, trying to clear their conscience, I suppose. He said you were the ringleader, Big Jim Harris."

"Me?" Big Jim laughed, but without mirth. "You can't prove a damn thing, Conroy. You know you can't. I don't believe Silverton talked. You damned red-nosed bluffer, you're lyin'."

"Am I?" asked Henry quietly. He shifted his eyes and looked at little Buckshot, who seemed to be very weary, but alert.

"Buckshot, you spoke about a big man who was with the gang that stole you from your room. Do you see that man in here?"

"That man," replied Buckshot, pointing at Big Jim.

"The kid lies! He never seen me in that gang!"

"Had a black mask on his face," said Buckshot. "I cried and he slapped me."

"Crazy talk," said Big Jim hoarsely. "Kids imagination. How could he identify a masked man, anyway?"

"That belt buckle," shrilled Buckshot. "That big dog's head, Uncle Henry; I remember that."

BIG JIM'S nerve broke then. With a surge of his huge body he threw the crowd back, as his right hand flashed to his holstered gun. In the same instant the table crashed over, flinging James Wadsworth Pelly on top of Big Jim; and the editor's clawing arms caught the big man around the neck and his flailing legs prevented Harris from drawing his gun.

Then, right over the upset table, dived the huge figure of Oscar Johnson. His mighty arms flung Pelly aside, and he seized Big Jim in a bear-hug. The surge of the crowd tore the long bar from its moorings, glasses crashed to the floor, and the bartender came over the top, like a white-aproned monkey.

"A rope!" yelled somebody. "Get a rope!"

Henry grabbed Buckshot off the bar and quickly passed him to the dazed Judge, over the heads of the milling men. A moment later Oscar came to his feet, and he stood looking down, his huge shoulders hunched, arms flexed.

"Pick him oop!" he yelled. "Back oop, you fallers, before Ay bust you von!"

The crowd shoved back. Henry managed to get in beside Oscar. Big Jim was lying senseless on the floor.

"Ay yust skveesed him, Hanry," said Oscar, panting a little. He had Big Jim's heavy belt in his hand. It had been torn in two like a piece of cardboard.

"All right, men!" snapped Henry. "Pick him up and carry him down to the jail. Will someone please get Doctor Knowles?"

"Let's hang the dirty pup!" roared a voice. "No use wastin' money on a feller what's done what he done, Conroy."

"There is still law in Wild Horse Valley," replied Henry.

"I'd tell a man, there is!" yelled a voice," and we've still got a hell of a sheriff! You get my vote, Conroy."

The crowd moved back, giving the men room to take the unconscious Big Jim Harris to jail. James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly was leaning against the bar, a trickle of blood from his chin and cheek, his shirt nearly torn from his body.

"What a story!" he breathed. "What a story!"

Charles Baker, the banker, disheveled from the crush of the crowd, came to Henry, panting.

"Terrible!" he gasped. "All my hopes and future gone! I had no idea what sort of a man he was. Believe me, I have had my lesson. But thank the Lord, it is all over. Right has prevailed."

"Mr. Steve Elkins," said Henry quietly, "you seem a trifle upset."

THE banker stared at Henry, his eyes quivering as if he were looking into a bright light. His tongue licked at his dry lips, and the muscles of his jaw tightened.

"Elkins?" he whispered. "No—no, my name is Baker. You know my name is Baker. Everybody—"

"Everybody, except me, knows you as Baker. But your name is Steve Elkins, and you murdered Fred Langley in my office."

"No, no, I—"

Henry had his Colt .45 in his hand. "Danny," he said quietly," will you take the guns off Mr. Elkins? "You will likely find one in each coat pocket, and there is a possibility that you will find one up his right sleeve."

A moment later Danny said, "Henry, you must be a mind-reader."

"No," smiled Henry, "I am merely a practical magician. Now, if you will kindly remove Mr. Elkins' collar, you will find a triangular scar on the back of his neck. It happens that the other day I saw the gentleman working in the new bank, and the day was so warm that he had removed his collar. Thank you, Danny."

"Henry!" snorted Judge. "Do you mean to say that you have known for several days that Baker was Elkins—and did nothing about it?"

"You mean, I presume—*said* nothing about it," said Henry dryly.

The prisoner was white-faced and his body wavered. He said:

"If I—if I talked, would it help me?"

"It usually does, Elkins," replied Henry. "No doubt you know most of Big Jim's activity. For instance, you and Big Jim framed to break the Scorpion Bend Bank. You *had* to be in on the deal, or they would never have known about that payroll. You had been stealing from the bank, and you had to do something before the bank examiner arrived.

"Big Jim wanted that money to open this bank. But circumstances ruined that, when your men lost the money. Who was the man who was selected to murder me, but got the stage driver instead?"

"Cash Silverton," whispered the prisoner. "Big Jim wanted you out of the way. Big Jim framed the kidnapping of the boy. He wanted to force you to resign. He believed the money was hidden on your ranch."

"You wrote the ransom notes?" asked Henry.

"I was not implicated in any way, except that I knew the details. I killed Langley because I knew he was going to kill me, if he could."

The men came trooping back from the jail, headed by Oscar. "Doc is trying to fix him oop," announced Oscar.

"Well," said Judge," everything is cleared up except finding that money—and I do not believe it will ever be found."

"What money, Yudge?" asked Oscar.

"The money that was stolen from the Scorpion Bend Bank, Oscar. A grain-sack, containing thousands of dollars, mostly in currency."

"A grain-sack?" queried Oscar. "Va'al, Yumpin Yimminy! Ay have got it, Yudge! It is in my var-sack, onder my bonk at de ranch. By Yudas Ay vondered what it vars."

"You have that money?" gasped Henry. "Oscar, you—why didn't you say something about it?"

"Ay didn't know what to say," replied Oscar. "Ay knew it vars a lot of money, and Ay wondered why de owner didn't start yowling about it."

"Where did you get it?" asked someone.

Oscar's eyes slowly scanned the faces around him. Against the wall were Thunder and Lightning, and over to his left stood Slim and Frijole, listening anxiously. Oscar grinned slowly, as he said:

"Ay just found it in de road."

"You—you wonderful Viking!" breathed Judge.

"Big brute," observed Buckshot. "I like him, too."

STEVE ELKINS was staring at the little boy, his jaw tightly shut. Henry took him by the arm and said, "We better be going, Elkins."

They walked past the crowd and out into the clean, cool air of the street. Elkins said quietly:

"Conroy, I—I don't know what you know, but if you know anything—don't ever let the kid know."

"Elkins," said Henry, I rarely tell things that affect anyone. You need not worry—the boy will have his chance. Did you know Steve Adams?"

Yes, I know him, Conroy. Big Jim said he was afraid you might connect him with Steve—after that incident at the ranch. Steve is all right. Danny Reagan's bullet didn't kill him. I—I hope that will close the incident. It was the only one Steve was mixed up in."

Who was the man with Steve?"

"Cash Silverton."

"Quite a man," sighed Henry, as they reached the office.

Doctor Knowles was working over Big Jim Harris, who had several broken ribs and a dislocated shoulder. He swore at Henry, who nodded pleasantly and locked Elkins in a cell. Danny was there. He met Henry in the hallway.

"Steve isn't dead," whispered Henry. "He will be all right; so we will forget it."

"That's awful nice of yuh, Henry," said Danny with feeling.

"Yes, I'm a nice man," agreed Henry wearily. "I am just what that man in the King's Castle said about me—a hell of a sheriff."

"And you'll keep right on bein' a hell of a sheriff, Henry. Nellie won't even have to know what happened."

"True, my boy—unless you tell her. Ah, who have we here?"

It was James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly, at least partly sobered. He looked at Big Jim, looked at Henry and sighed deeply.

"I am staying for another day," he said quietly," in order to get all of the story. I have been so busy campaigning, you know—"

"Sorry I was not here to see it all, Mr. Pelly," said Henry," but I had a job of work to do."

"I undertsand, Mr. Conroy. Wild Horse Valley will build a monument to you for this night's work."

"Ghastly, isn't it?" Henry smiled.

"Conroy!" called Big Jim painfully. "If you'll loan me a gun, I'll do the county a big favor."

Sorry, Mr. Harris," replied Henry," but suicide is not my idea of enforcing the law."

"Suicide, hell! I want to kill that damn editor!"

OVER at the hitchrack Frijole, Slim Pickins, Thunder and Lightning mounted their horses. In a couple of hours it would be daylight. As they rode out of town, Slim said:

"Damndest thing I ever seen, Frijole!"

"Not me," replied Frijole quickly. "I 'member one time down in the Injun Territory, me and Paw-Paw Bill was runin' a freightin' outfit. One mornin' I says to Paw-Paw Bill, I says—"

"I know exactly what yuh said," interrupted Slim. "I've heard that story so many times that I even know the names of every horse yuh had in the outfit. Yo're jist tryin' to belittle Henry, and yuh can't do it. Nossir, I take off m' hat to that red-nosed rannahan—he's top-hand in my outfit."

"Belittle Henry?" snorted Frijole. "Beelittle *him?* Slim,

you know that ain't true. Gimme a couple weeks with Henry, and I can make him the saltiest gun man in Arizony. And the smartest, too, I'll betcha. Why, we thought he didn't know nothin'—and look what he done."

"I'm like for asking one question," said Lightning.

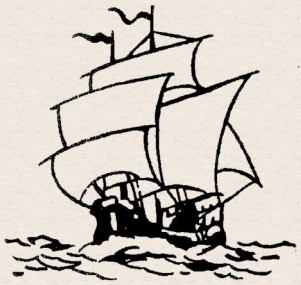
"Well, Lightnin', I reckon yo're entitled to one question," said Slim quickly. "Cut her loose, feller—we're ready to answer."

"*Mucho gracias,*" said Lightning. "Een those saloon ees too much noise for leestening. I'm onnerstand that Henry keel those Seelverton and find those leetle keed, wheech ees name from Bockshot. Then he ees put those Beeg Jeem een jail for sometheeng—I hope. Then he ees poke hees gon in those man's belly and tak' heem to jail—I theenk. All that ees all right weeth me, but I'm like for know what happen."

"What happened?" snorted Frijole. "Why, yuh just said what happened. What else is there that yuh don't understand?"

"I'm like for know theese. Who got elected sheeriff?"

THE END



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

THERE is a story connected with Stookie Allen's *Lady of Daring* which might amuse you. When Mr. Allen sent in the drawing of Conchita Cintron's exploits, we were immediately disturbed by the extraordinary appearance of the bulls—particularly the one down in the lower right hand corner. They had a nightmare quality about them, and we became convinced that Mr. Allen simply didn't know what he was about.

Now the closest we ever got to a bull was two pastures away. But like everybody who has read Ernest Hemingway we feel tolerably familiar with the ancient and gaudy sport; and the more we looked at Mr. Allen's bulls the more indignant we became. Why, the man obviously didn't know his way around a bull-ring. So we wrote him a sharp note, asking him please to make those creatures presentable. Then we sat back, feeling well satisfied with our acuteness.

Well, the drawing came back, and the bulls had been modified to some extent. But it was Mr. Allen's mild little note that shook us; we will never take up cape and sword again. Here's why.

STOOKIE ALLEN

This is a very, very unusual bull. It is what is known as the Andalusian big-headed bull—a very rare animal indeed. I have shortened his neck, but if the Andalusian Society sees this, my goose is cooked. They are very proud of the peculiar looking necks on their bulls (the fiercest of all the bulla fambly!).
Hollywood, Calif.

THE next letter is from quite a young reader, a member of that generation which Mr. Offord defended with such valor in these columns.

BENNY TARVER

I didn't know you would accept letters from anyone but old-timers in your Argonotes until I read a letter from a fourteen-year-old girl. I'm only thirteen, but I've been reading your magazine for three years. (There were times when I had to stop because I'd get behind on schoolwork, but I'd always start again.)

I wouldn't read your magazine if it wasn't for Argonotes, especially Mr. Offord's (both of them) discussion of the younger generation trying to conceal the new large-sized book. But don't worry about the younger generation. I ought to know, I'm one of them.

While most boys want to be aviators, policemen, firemen, adventurers, etc., all I want to do is write stories, especially for you. I have no kick coming, and neither should anyone else; your authors are the best, and their stories teach me a lot about history. (For example, "Drums of Khartoum.") The only thing wrong with your magazine is that there should be more of it.

When I learn to type, you'll sure have a pest. Until then—*Adios, amigos.* (Remember that New Mexico is in the United States. I do not have a brown skin, and I do know what an automobile is.)
Las Cruces, N. M.

WE HAVE directed our secretary to remind us ten years from today of the name Benny Tarver. We shall be surprised if it is not appearing in ARGOSY by then; if it isn't, we are going down to New Mexico—quite possibly in an automobile—and find out what Author Tarver is up to.

Here is a compliment for a new author of ours.

CHARLES WELLS

Just a line to compliment you on a grand story, whether the *Post* likes it or not. I mean "The Devil Let Loose." I had seen the author's name in another magazine and got yours to see if he was equally good. He was better.

I have been in Java and elsewhere and the stuff was okay. Also it was not like the same old hokum. I like a story that has a little question in it to leave with the reader. The old line of bunk is worn out. This was fresh and it suits me.
Los Angeles, Calif.

HERE'S a note from a veteran reader, who feels that the old days were best. But he is still with us, and apparently plans to remain.

FRED W. BUDING

I have been a constant reader of ARGOSY since 1898—about 43 years—and I don't think the new ARGOSY compares favorably with the early 1900 issues, either the authors or style of magazine.

When you first brought out the present magazine I thought I would have to quit an old standby as the type was so small I could not read it, but you enlarged the type so now I can still read it without a reading glass.

I sure miss the real authors like Burroughs, Talbot Mundy and many others. Some of the new authors are fair but they are not Burroughs or Mundy class *yet.* But they are just pups yet and may grow.

I have written you many letters in the past but none were printed in the Argonotes.
Allyn, Wash.

ABOUT Mr. Buding's two favorite writers: Talbot Mundy, of course, is dead; but Edgar Rice Burroughs is still active, and we take this opportunity to announce that we will be publishing a new Burroughs novel within a month or so. That ought to please Mr. Buding and a good many other people.

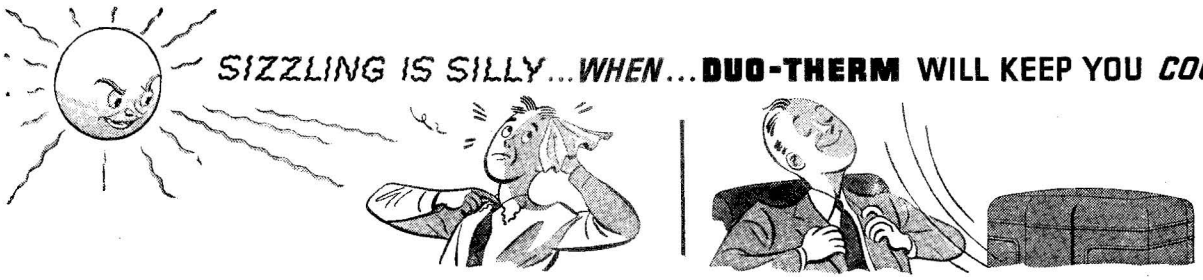
Well, Then—

Here you are!

ARGOSY announces a new TARZAN novel

by
EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Beginning next month



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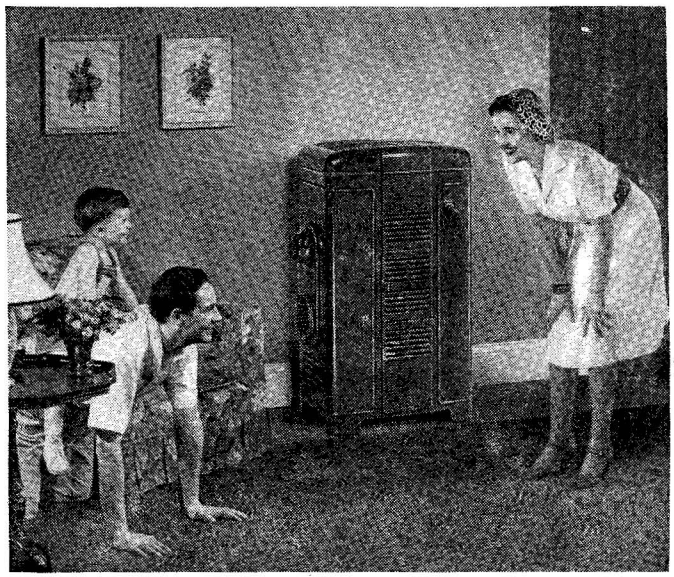

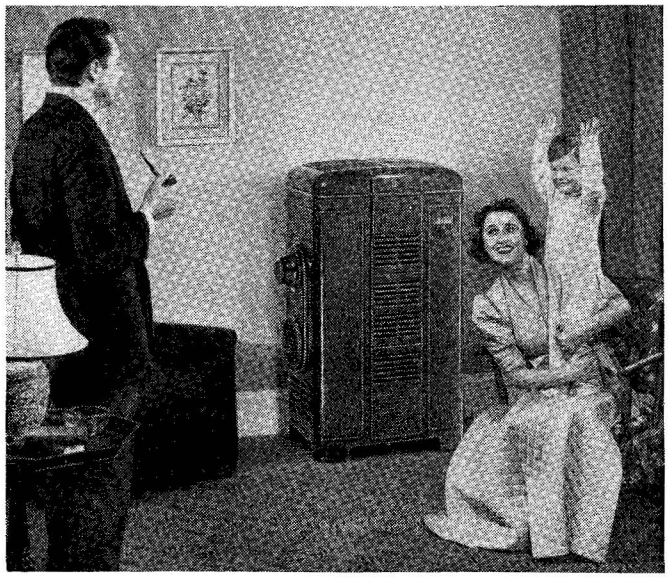

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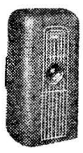

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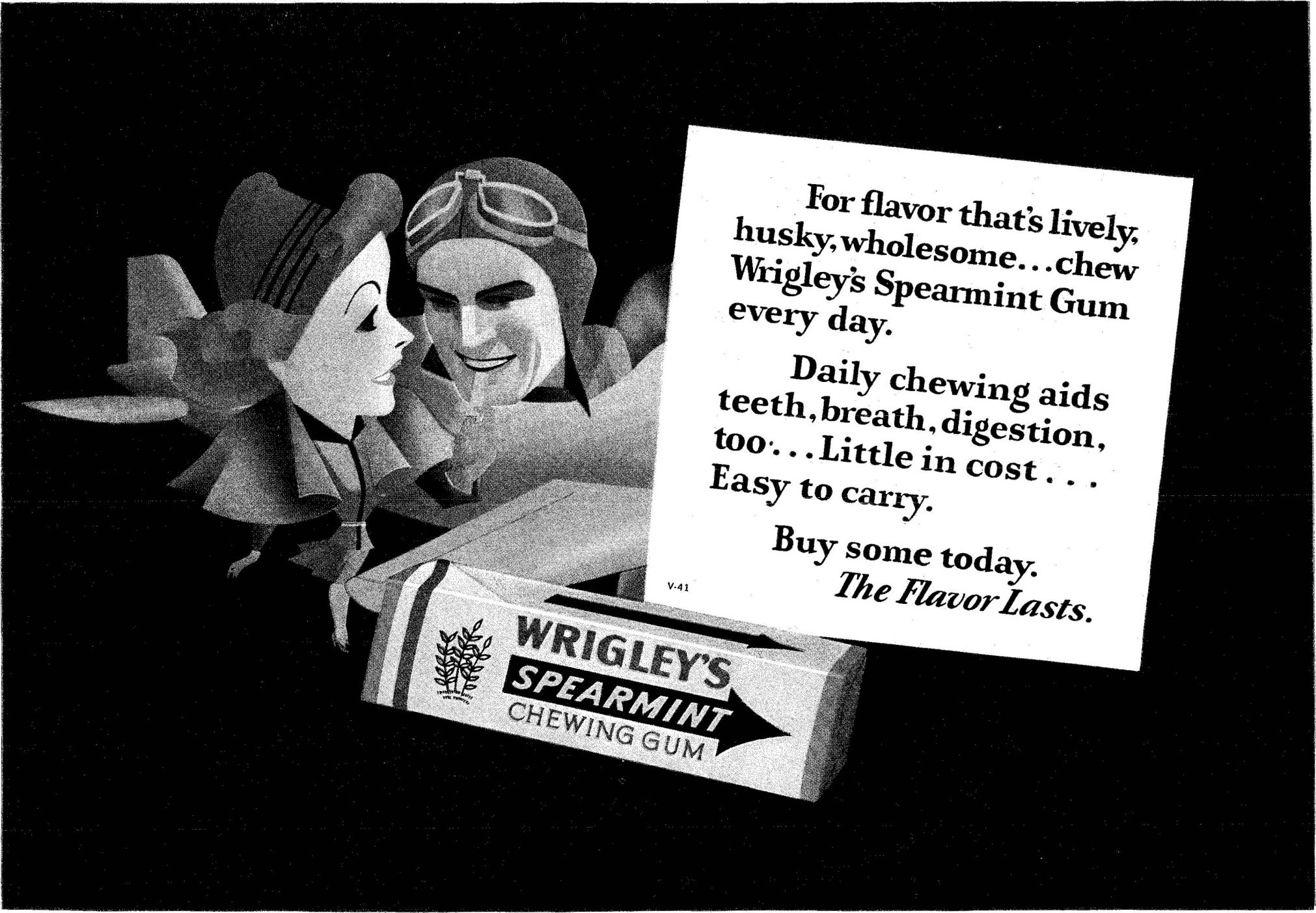
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