BLUE BOOK
JANUARY MAGAZINE
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A FOREIGN LEGION story by Warren Miller
George Worts' The PHANTOM PRESIDENT
A TARZAN story by Edgar Rice Burroughs
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The fascinating story of a lost American boy brought up among the Chinese

By William Ashley Anderson

Little Bill was separated from his American engineer father and fought his way to manhood among the strangest folk of this world. The story of his extraordinary boyhood, and of the last great fight for his rescue, is told with notable power by a man who knows China and the Chinese well. Along with many specially interesting features by Edgar Rice Burroughs, George F. Worts, Seven Anderton, Clarence Herbert New, Warren H. Miller, Arthur Akers, Valentine Williams and others, it will appear,

In the next, the February, issue of—

The Blue Book Magazine

The McCall Company, Publisher, 230 Park Avenue, New York
Poor Martha... Tied to a Failure Like That!

They Called Me A Failure... Until This Little Story Gave Me The Tip That Raised My Pay $4200 a Year

The plant was only working part time, so I was sent home at 3 o'clock on the afternoon when we were supposed to go to my wife's folks' house for dinner. I thought I'd go over there and surprise them. As I went into the door, I could tell that my two sisters-in-law were out in the kitchen, so I thought I'd go out back and meet them unexpectedly.

But I was the one that got the surprise. As I went down the hall I heard my name mentioned. "Fred Norris!" the voice was that of my wife's sister Nellie. "Honestly, I could cry every time I think of poor Martha, tied for life to a failure like that! They're going to be over for dinner tonight—he makes so little I guess the free meal will be a bonus to them!"

I was stunned. Quietly as I could without giving away the surprise, I had even been in the house, I got out. Without knowing where I was going, I set off down the street. At first, I was furiously angry at what Nellie said. But then I calmed down. It was true. It was a failure.

I had to do something about it. Pretty soon Martha would start to thinking the same things that Nellie had just said—and that would be the ruination of our home.

I was still carrying a magazine I had picked up at a newsstand on the way from the plant. I sat down on a bench in the park. A breeze that passed by opened the magazine for me—and I read aloud the story of a dozen men just like me—and as I read, I saw how they had found the way out of their rut of small pay and no opportunity. At the end of the story was an offer—a book, now being sent FREE to ambitious men—the same book that had set these fellows, and thousands like them, on the way to financial ease and real success. I tore out the coupon, filled it in with a pencil, and walked over to the corner drug store for a stamp and an envelope.

Three days later the promised book arrived—but with it came another book I didn't expect. "His Midnight Decision" it was called—and it showed me how one man, whose chances for success and happiness, like mine, were being slowly killed by an ill-paid, futureless routine job, found his success, through the easiest profession in the world to learn—salesmanship. That book blasted the old idea that salesmen are "born"—that you have to have some special knack or gift. It, and the book I originally wrote for, "The Key To Master Salesmanship" showed me, in just a few spare minutes a day, right at home, hundreds of thousands of ordinary men—men without any special advantages or knowledge—men who never even dreamed that they could well, had made themselves into salesmen—had mastered the simple, easy principles used by the great star salesmen of the world—and had raised their pay anywhere from 100% to 700%!

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My Arctic Outpost

The remarkable record of nearly a half-century of constant adventure in the Land of the Long Night.

By CHARLES D. BROWER

OFF and on for the last half century Charley Brower has been Uncle Sam's most northerly citizen. The honor was taken for a spell by his partner and old friend Tom Gordon, who had a house three miles farther north; at another time Charley Klinkenberg camped six miles beyond, towards the Pole. But Klinkenberg moved to Coronation Gulf and Gordon to Demarcation Point—both places farther east but also farther south. That left Brower what he had been earlier—the New World's most distant pioneer.

Brower is what a loyal American likes to think of as a typical American. He is what you might expect of a New Yorker born somewhere around Twenty-third Street when that street was far uptown; he is the logical development of a boy who was admitted to Annapolis but who left that road of gold-braided promotion for the paths of high and free adventure on unknown seas and shores. Meet him at the City Club in New York, and you think him what in a sense he was born to be, a typical successful and genial New Yorker; meet him at the Explorers Club of New York, to which he also belongs, and you will have difficulty in localizing him among that far-traveled company. For he talks Africa, and Australia of the Ballarat days, till you think him a Tropic rather than a Polar man.

I write this to sort of introduce a series of Blue Book articles which I have not read. But I shall read them with eagerness as they come out month by month. For if Charley tells in them a third of what he knows about whaling, pioneering, and about the Arctic, these chapters will be the makings of a source-book on frontiering and high adventure; if he writes with a third of his conversational zest and charm, it will be literature.

But in any case the tale, as the Blue Book unfolds it through the coming months, will be to me the life-story of one of my oldest and dearest friends—and in subscribing myself that, I speak for most of the explorers, whalers, traders and missionaries who have reached or passed the north tip of Alaska since 1884. I speak, too, I am sure, for many captains and officers of the U.S. Revenue Cutter service, for reconnaissance workers of the U.S. Geological Survey, for teachers whom the U.S. Bureau of Education has been pushing up toward Barrow of comparatively recent years, and for nearly everyone else who for any reason has come within reach of Charley Brower's help and his cheer, through forty-eight years.

(Signed)

Vilhjalmur Stefansson.

MORE than fifty years of adventure in all parts of the world are behind me, and as I look back over my forty-seven years in the Arctic, I realize the great changes that have taken place. When I first went north of the Circle, in 1884, the Eskimos were a primitive people, living in the stone age; they hunted the great bowhead whale, walrus, and seals with ancient instruments of flint, bone and ivory, and they were ruled by An-et-koks—the devil-drivers. The natives are now educated, comparatively speaking, and have most of the comforts of civilization.
I was the first white man to travel in winter along the coast from Point Hope to Point Barrow; and I believe I am the only living man, native or white, who has actually hunted and killed Ah-ka-wuk, the bowhead whale, with the old-time weapons. I have taken a keen interest in the natives, and as I lived and hunted with them for nearly two-score-and-ten years, it is natural that I should have had experiences different from those of others.

Point Barrow is the northernmost point in Alaska; and since the year 1884, I have been acquainted with, and helped, I believe, every explorer of note who has worked on that coast. As I look back, I realize that the

list is long, and it includes many who were real men. I like to think of Amundsen as I first saw him when he came to Point Barrow in his little Gjoa, at the completion of his trip through the Northwest Passage; Stefansson, Anderson, Michelson, Rasmussen, Dr. Stuck, Leifingwell, Wilkins, and the many Government men who have accomplished so much in the Far North, have made my home their stopping-place.

The whaling industry created a great change in the Eskimos. In the old days they hunted the bowheads for food, but because of the commercial value of whalebone, up to about 1912, many of the natives became wealthy. Hundreds of whaling ships worked Arctic waters in the early days, and as was inevitable, there were many tragedies. Ships were crushed in the ice, and sailors were carried on the drifting pack. I have seen brave men—of whom the world has never heard—go to their death. The whaling captains, the men who worked their vessels of wood through the Arctic ice, were real Vikings; some of them were cruel and unjust, but they were two-fisted men. I have tried to tell of the men I knew. There are few of us left to tell the story of the early days—long before Nome was heard of.

The country north of the Arctic Circle is a vast one; there is plenty of elbow-room; the climate is healthful, and the Eskimos are the finest race of people I have known. Whenever I have come "outside," my friends have always insisted that I write my autobiography. It is not an easy thing for me to do.

I went to sea at the age of thirteen years, and I realize

that since that time a great deal of ice has piled along the shores. . . .

In the fall of 1883 I landed in San Francisco with our ship ahire; we had first noticed smoke when we were off the Chile coast, and we fought a losing battle for fifty-two days. Time and again the hatches were blown off by the accumulation of gas, and the decks were so hot we could hardly stand on them. When we entered San Francisco Harbor,
of the Pacific Whaling Company, where we met the leader of another party going north. Captain Ned Herendeen was going to Point Barrow to start a whaling station for the company; he had been up there two years with Lieutenant Ray of the United States Army Survey (1881 to 1883), and had seen a good opportunity to whale there in the spring, when the ice broke up.

We sailed early in June, according to schedule, on the Beda, a small schooner under the command of Captain Gage, and headed across the North Atlantic for the island of Atka, one of the Aleutian group, where we arrived in about two weeks and dropped anchor in a small landlocked bay. As the Beda had only run in for shelter, we pulled out as soon as the weather cleared and headed for a small place close to Atka, called Solonos Island. I have never been able to find it on any map. We landed a party of four men, who were to prospect for copper, and then the Beda was headed northward up Bering Sea for the Pribilof Islands. There was a great deal of storm and fog, but we plugged along slowly until, in about a week, we reached St. Pauls, an island with precipitous wind-blowen cliffs.

We had the mail for this place, and tried to land it at the settlement, but the wind was the wrong way, and so we went around to the lee side of the island. The surf was still high, but I had been used to surf landing, and when the captain asked for volunteers to go ashore, I said I would make the attempt. Only two were needed, so the mate and I took the small boat and started for shore. We went through the surf, and as soon as we hit the beach, the men waiting on shore ran into the water, grabbing us on both sides of the boat. We were soon high and dry, and shaking hands with the man in charge.

We were no sooner alongside our ship again, and the boat hoisted in, than we were on our way north through Bering Sea once more, passing St. Lawrence Island, and then through Bering Strait, with Cape Prince of Wales on the Alaskan side and Diomede Island on the left.

Working our way up along the precipitous, foggy coast, we finally made Point Hope on the third of July. Offshore was plenty of ice, but as we neared our destination, we could see a number of ships at anchor, and that encouraged us to keep on our way. As soon as the whalers saw us, they knew the tender, and two ships came out to meet us, piloting us through several small strips of ice, until we finally anchored on the south side of the Point in a good lee.

Hardly did we have the anchor down, when boats from all the ships were alongside wanting their mail and all the news from civilization. There must have been seventy ships lying here, all whalers anxious to work their way northward through this ice, to hunt the bowhead whale. We had mail for everyone; and as fast as they got it, away they went, leaving just the few captains of the company's ships aboard, to settle who should have first chance to
get their coal. That being decided they also went away. We were now north of the Arctic Circle, and day or night made no difference, for it was light all the time. We took the *Beda* alongside the steam whaler *Bowhead* that evening, she being the one that had drawn the first chance. Everett Smith was captain of the *Bowhead* and an old-timer at the whaling game. I got to know him well in after years, and found him a fine man. They had been lucky this summer, getting eight large whales in the Bering Sea, so all the crew felt sure of a pay-day. Fate, however, was destined to treat them poorly. After getting his coal, Captain Smith steamed all the way back through Bering Straits to Port Clarence for an Eskimo and family who were to come to Cape Lisburne, and cook for us.

The *Orca* was the third to get her coal from the *Beda*. She was to take all of our outfit from here, to where we were to put up our station. Our house was all framed in San Francisco, so all we would have to do was to put it together. Every piece was numbered, and with our plans, there would be no difficulty in assembling it. All our party went aboard the *Orca* as well, for as soon as we were transferred, she was to start north and try to break through the ice around the Cape. We were aboard this whaler three days at Point Hope. Then we started on our way, steaming without any trouble as far as Lisburne. As we neared this steep cliff, with its multitude of swirling sea-fowl, we could see what to me appeared a solid mass of ice; as we got closer, however, there were small lanes between the ice as far as we could see. These, the captain told me, were pretty certain to be closed farther in the pack.

The whalers always had a man in the crow’s-nest watching for whales, and it was from there that the officer in charge of the deck conned the ship through the ice. As we entered the ice, the *Orca* twisted and turned, following the leads in the general direction of where we wanted to go, making progress all the time, even if it was slow. As we went ahead, the ice got closer and closer. At twelve o’clock we hardly were making any headway. The man aloft called to the deck that apparently there was a strip of ice two miles wide where there seemed no chance to get through, but that inside this ice-stripe was a lead of clear water.

Captain Colson went aloft himself, to have a look. The Captain decided he could break his way through, and took charge of the conning. Pretty soon we had to stop, as we could find no place to work the ship through. I thought that would end it, so went below thinking that I might get some rest, for we expected to arrive next day. I hardly had my clothes off, when I heard the bell ring in the engine-room for the ship to go astern. After going astern awhile, they rang full speed ahead. I was just getting in the bunk when we struck the ice. I went over backward, and believe me, it did not take me long to get my clothes back on again, and get on deck. I don’t know what I expected to see. I certainly was not what was going on then. No one was in the least excited, and the *Orca* was backing off from the ice ready for another ram. This was the usual way of getting through ice that was rotten and partly broken up. Captain Colson was in the crow’s-nest and working the ship himself. Two men were at the wheel; an officer stood on the break of the poop; and a boat-steerer stood by the bells in the engine-room. Backing off as far as possible, the engine would be reversed, and then we would go ahead full speed, hitting the ice; and if the ice was low, sliding the whole ship out of the water ten to fifteen feet up on the ice.

Sometimes she would lie there and roll a little on one side before sliding back; at others the ice would break with the weight of the ship. Sometimes one blow was enough to break the ice. More often it took several, but we did make progress. Although the ice looked solid, we could always move it some; and after several hours, we got through, and all was clear to our destination.

Watching the *Orca* work her way through the ice that night was fascinating. It had been my first experience in that line, and right there I acquired a great respect for the whaling captains, the officers and their work. Mostly they were men from the Eastern States. All the old whaling centers were represented. And they were men! Whatever else anyone had to say about the whalers up in the Arctic, and there was plenty, always one had to say they were real men.

Captain Colson called the place we were to land Corwin Bluff. It was named for the old revenue cutter *Corwin*. A half-mile south of the bluff was a gully with a small stream of water, and there we landed our stores, the houses and spare lumber. The crew of the *Orca* made short work of this. They had seven boats, and by lashing two of them together, they made a good raft to carry lumber, and on top of the lumber we could pile lots of other freight.

When we had stopped at Point Hope on the way up, we were regaled with all kinds of stories about Eskimos. No one, up to this time, had ever wintered among them; and whenever there had been a ship lost in the Arctic, the Eskimos had always been allowed to do as they pleased, even to ordering the men off the vessels, at times. This had no doubt given the impression that they were a bad lot to get along with, and all the stories that were told about the things that we would have done to us were calculated to make a person nervous. Many things that were told us were imagined, and hardly any had any foundation that I ever could find. Later three families came and built their homes alongside of us, and they were all fine fellows and good workers, when there was anything to do.

While the crew of the *Orca* was getting our lumber and other merchandise on the beach, J. J. and I were off looking at the coal-veins. There was coal everywhere, but the largest veins that we could see were cropping out on the beach. All of them had a dip two ways, one at an angle of forty-five degrees on the face of the cliff, and another pitch downward from the cliff. The largest vein we measured was fourteen feet wide. There were several others that were six to nine feet, and many of two feet down to two inches. Mr. Haverside and I looked them all over as well as we could in the few days we had, while
the crew and carpenters from three of the whalers belonging to our company were putting up the house.

Besides looking at the coal, we measured with a tape-line and staked the whole of Corwin Bluff, as well as the land extending to a small creek to the south. At the latter place we built the house, as it was near good drinking water, and later I built a dam across the brook, and made a good place to take a bath. After surveying all of this land and seeing the dip and pitch of the coal, J. J. came to the conclusion that it would not be feasible to work the veins exposed, to any advantage. The only way we could do anything was from the face of the cliffs, waiting for it to move. Captain Smith tried to get around the Shoals, but took one chance too many, for the ice came together and crushed the ship before she could get out of the way, getting her right amidships where it could do the most damage. Her starboard side was stove in, and the engine-room soon flooded. The Captain told us that she sank in less than three hours, and would have gone down before that if the ice had not held her up. They lost all their bone, valued at about fifty thousand dollars. Most of the crew had shipped in the other whalers, and the rest were aboard the Baleana, who wanted to land them with us, as the revenue cutter Corwin was expected along most any time now and would take them out.

Captain Bouldry wanted to lance my hand, and I was more than willing to have it done. It was certainly in need of it; the relief was so great that I just went to

and as fast as we worked there, the earth above would come sliding down, sometimes creating quite a landslide.

While we were getting the house up, some of the crew from the ships were trying to get some extra coal, but after they had nearly lost a couple of their men, who were buried in a slide, they gave it up, and Haverside determined to go back to San Francisco. The coal we got out later for the house use had to be mined in the winter, when the ground was frozen, and we could haul it home on sleds.

While we were getting all this done, the Bowhead arrived back from St. Michaels with our cook and wife. Joe was a Port Clarence Eskimo, married to a half-breed Russian woman. They had no children. Joe had been cooking for the A. C. Company for several years, and was a fair cook, but not very clean. Marenka was very cleanly around the house and kept things in fine order.

The Bowhead only stayed a few hours and then was off for the north and the whaling grounds. A day or two before this the other ships had gone, and so for a time we were alone. There was plenty to do finishing up the house. I was not much of a carpenter in those days, nor was George or Woolfe.

Working with a chisel, I foolishly used the palm of my hand for a mallet, and soon had a felon in the center of the hand. The flesh grew fast to the bone, and I had a fancy time. For three days and nights I walked all over the country, for miles in every direction, trying to lessen the pain. One morning just as we were about to have breakfast, a steamer hove in sight from the north, and I hoped to get relief from some one aboard. It was the Baleana. She was soon anchored near the station and Captain Bouldry came ashore with Captain Smith, who had been captain of the Bowhead.

The Bowhead had gone north from here a few days before this and found all the other steamers at Icy Cape. The ice was all on the Blossom Shoals, and the ships were sleep sitting there, and when I woke up, the Baleana had sailed, leaving the captain, mate and several of the crew of the wrecked ship with us.

We had not been at our camp more than a few days when two Eskimo families arrived and put up their tent near us. The first was a family of two, a man and a girl of about twelve years. The man, Mittigeh, was a big fellow, so big we nicknamed him Baby; he never left me for any length of time as long as he lived. He was without exception the strongest Eskimo I ever saw. Tootoo, his sister, was a fine girl and always looking for something to do. The other family was a man Unocoluto, his wife Mommungina and two children, both of which had been adopted.

We were glad to have these men from the Baleana, as they were good company. Captain Smith was a crack shot. He used an old Sharps rifle, and while with us was always out hunting. There were no deer around that summer; but every day or so a school of "whitfish" (small whales, sometimes reaching a length of fifteen feet; beluga is the correct name for them) would come along the beach, and they made fine sport for him. He could stand on the bank, and as they swam along, breaking water like porpoise, he would always get two or three
out of a school. They would sink immediately; then our neighbors would take their oonilak (skin boat) and go out to locate them. Being white, they were easily seen on the bottom in three fathoms of water. The Eskimos would take a long pole, and fixing a spear-head to it, soon had their treasure hauled to the top and towed ashore, where they were cut up.

Here is where I first ran into some of the native superstitions; the one I especially refer to was connected with these beluga. I happened to be near when they landed the second one killed; I wanted to start cutting on it at once, as Captain Smith had shot it and told me I could have it; but the Eskimo would not permit me to touch the animal. I tried to find out what the reason was; and finally they made me understand that the She-shooa, as they called beluga, had to have a drink of fresh water before it was cut up. I found out afterward that this applied to any animal that was taken from salt water. Living in salt water, they needed a drink that was not salt. If this was not supplied, their spirit would tell the rest of the tribe, and no more whitefish would ever be taken. Even after the women had brought the water in a small wooden bucket, and poured some of it on the spout hole and spilled some more on his head, they did not want me to cut on the whale, so I left them to do it their own way. After that I always made it a rule not to interfere with them in any of their customs, and I learned a whole lot about them.

In August, about the middle of the month, the *Corwin* arrived from the north, and took away all of our visitors, except one who stayed with us for the winter. By some chance Ed. Black, who had been a former shipmate, had shipped on the *Bowhead*, and was one of the crew that had come ashore with the captain. Black wanted to stay with us, and I, and Haversides, who had come back on the *Balesna*, engaged him under the same arrangement that George and I had, and we were mighty glad to have another man with us.

When the *Corwin* had gone, we settled down for the winter, and soon had all the coal we thought we would need. This off our minds, we had plenty of time to skirmish about and find out what there was in that part of the world. South of the house there was a bluff two miles long, and at least two hundred feet high. This was full of fossil leaves. The whole hill was sandstone in layers, none of which were over two inches thick. These could be taken one from the other just as if they had been piled up. In between each layer were the fossils. They looked to me as if they were leaf veins. I took several boatloads of these up to the house, and the next summer they were taken aboard the *Bear*, by Captain Mike Healy.

I gradually wandered farther and farther from the house on hunting-trips, but although I searched industriously for deer, I never found any at that time. Ptarmigan were plentiful, and later in the fall I got quite a number of plover. Late in August we still had scattering pieces of ice floating around in the ocean and the male eider ducks were coming from the north. By taking our boat, we could make a blind on the ice, and so managed to get quite a lot of them for winter use. We had no icehouse, but managed very well by burying them in the snow-banks at the foot of the cliffs, just above our home.

One morning I had been out hunting as usual and in the creek-bed just north of the Corwin Bluff I came across the tracks of a bear. As I had only a shotgun with me, I did not stay around there very long, but hiked for home. I found the Baby around the house doing nothing, and had quite a time trying to make him understand what I had seen. After getting down on all fours, and grunting like a pig, sticking my fingers out like claws, I managed to get him interested; then, taking my rifle, I at last persuaded him to come along. He did not carry a gun, as he had no doubt thought that I was crazy, but when he saw the tracks in the soft tundra, he was more than eager to get after the bear, and wanted me to let him have the rifle. That I would not do. At first he was going home after his own, but I would not wait, so he finally came along.

The tracks were perfectly fresh, and the bear was traveling slowly, stopping every little while to dig out squirrels. He did not seem hungry, as he never finished any of the places he started on. After traveling not more than five miles, we saw the bear. I think he saw us at the same time. He did not take much notice until we were within a hundred yards of him, and then all he did was growl. I had never shot a bear, and in fact was not a very good shot, but the old forty-four rifle I had carried sixteen cartridges in the magazine, and I wanted that fellow if I could get him. We walked up to within sixty feet of the bear, before shooting, the Baby staying with me and, as near as I could make out, telling me not to shoot. When I did start shooting, I killed it with the third shot. Baby insisted that I keep on shooting, however, as long as there were cartridges in the rifle. We called it a brown bear; since then I have reasons to think it was a Barren Ground grizzly. It was two-thirds grown, and had a good-looking pelt.

Baby seemed as pleased over the getting of this bear as if he had shot it himself, and soon had the skin off, and the carcass cut up. He carried the skin home on his back. Mommungina and Tootoo went out and packed all the meat home. I was a proud man, and strutted around for several days, but that was the only bear I ever saw around there.

We had brought two hickory sled-frames, with steel shoeing, with us; and along in September I had the job of putting them together. Compared with the sleds we
use today, they were crude affairs; but to the Eskimo then, they were wonderful, and probably the first hard-wood sleds they had ever seen. The snow covered the ground by the fifteenth of September, and we were never tired of trying them. Here was where our dog Mark was in his glory. He had, no doubt, worked before I got him; at any rate he was a splendiferous sled dog, and I always used him in the head.

Before the snow was deep enough to travel back in the hills, I went inland with Unocoluto and his family for a two-day hunting trip. The women did all the packing. Everything except the rifle was piled on the back of his wife and daughter. I wanted to carry some of the outfit, but Unocoluto would not let me. All that I was permitted to pack was my own outfit, and that only under protest. We went, as near as I could guess, fifteen miles back in the hills, and camped by a small stream which wound around the foot of a conical peak several hundred feet high, almost encircling it. We had hardly got our tent up when the girl in the party saw two deer off some distance on the side of this hill. I could see nothing, but her eyes were able to pick out the animals long before any of the rest of us could. Unocoluto did not question her, but simply took her word that they were there. He afterward told me that the Toonchrah (Devil) had given her good eyesight when she was a baby.

Unocoluto wanted to go after these deer by himself, so I stayed around camp. He was gone several hours. When he came back, he had killed both of them; and the next day we started to go home again. First, however, we stopped where the deer were, and after cutting them up, buried the meat under moss and rocks to keep the foxes from getting it. A small quantity we also carried home with us, where we arrived that same night quite late.

This trip inspired me with the idea that I could become a wonderful hunter; so a couple of days afterward I started off by myself, taking a small lunch along, as I thought I would be back that same evening. When I had passed the first chain of hills, four miles from the beach, the fog set in. This did not bother me at the time; and never thinking, I just kept on going. But after a few hours, as the weather did not lighten up any, I began to think if I wanted to get home before dark, maybe I had better turn back. So I headed for home—taking, as I imagined, a shortcut. The Lord only knows where I did get to that day. When it finally got so dark I could not see, I stopped, and stayed in one place all night. Next morning I was hungry, so again I headed for home. This time I thought I knew just where the house was, and started to go there. The fog was as thick as ever. Everything looked just the same, the tundra appearing to be one immense plain. Once or twice I walked over the edge of a bank, dropping ten feet or more each time, and once I walked straight into a bluff covered with snow. I was the most curious sensation I had ever experienced, not being able to tell where I was going to land next.

I wandered all this day, never getting a sight of the sun. I suppose I was traveling in circles. When it got dark the second night I was in the bed of a small stream, so I stayed there, and that night kicked a hole in the snowbank and crawled in to keep warm. I even tried to lie on my rifle to keep off the snow as much as I could, but there was not much rest. In the morning, instead of wandering around the hills, I just thought I would follow the stream to see where it would bring me. I knew it had to flow to the ocean somewhere. I followed the thing all that day and into the night. It kept getting a little larger all the time, and finally I came out to the ocean near Cape Lisburne, just as it was getting good and dark.

I could not see a thing. All the time the fog was so thick one could almost cut it. I stayed there all night, being unable to see anything. I slept some, for I had some matches with me, and whittled some shavings from driftwood, and soon had a big fire going. It would not have been half bad if there had been something to eat. I had been there three days without food.

In the morning the weather was fine and clear; I could see the Cape south of me, so I knew which way to go. There were some sea gulls flying up and down the shore. They looked good to me, but they did not fly over the land, so there was no use my shooting at them. With the wind to the east, they would drift away from the land. But all along the beach there were many tom cod that had evidently washed up a day or so before: they were small, about three inches long, and frozen hard. For a time I looked at them and wondered if it would be possible to eat them. Hunger at last got the best of me and I tried them, and they tasted good.

While employed in gathering my breakfast, I happened to look up the little creek I had come down, and there saw a girl coming toward me. As she got closer, I recognized Toctoo, the sister of Mitigera, who had made their home alongside of us since our landing in the summer. She made me understand that as I did not come home the first night, the rest of our crowd were anxious, and in the morning had started the Eskimos looking for me. She had picked up my trail and followed it for two days and nights until she found me on the beach. Toctoo had some hardtack and a can of meat she had carried all the time. I do not think she had anything to eat herself during the time she was out; but she soon filled up on the frozen fish, and we then started home together, reaching there that evening. Toctoo was only, to my thinking, a little girl not over twelve, but she knew how to take care of herself; and although I had come out on the beach, and could have found my way home, that trip was something I never forgot as long as she lived. . .

Baby and I went out every morning to hunt, and hunted all day, but there were no deer around. The last day we were out we saw a small herd, but did not get any. On this trip I wore snowshoes for the first time. All along the willows the snow was soft and deep. Walking all day this way was very tiresome, and when the big Eskimo asked me if I would like to try his sister's snowshoes, I thought it would be fine. It was for a time, but I soon got stiff from using them and was glad to take them off for a spell. But after trying them several times, I got so I could get along quite well, and before the day was over, I could travel at a walk, almost as fast as Baby. When it came to running, that was different. That was an accomplishment I did not acquire for several winters.

Being all out of grub, we had to go home, and when we entered there, we found another family at our place. This lot had come from Point Lay, ninety miles up the coast from us. They reported lots of deer a short day's journey away; all our neighbors wanted to start immediately, so George and I at once thought we would go along. There was nothing else for us to do, so we got our outfit ready and went with them. We had no clothing like the natives were wearing; all the skin clothing we had were some parkas that had been sent us from St. Michaels on the Corwin. These were made in Siberia. They were double, and longer than any made on the American side—warm enough, but very inconvenient to travel in except on a sled. We wore them for a while, the Eskimos making all kinds of fun of them, but we were determined not to stay behind. The Baby went with us as our bodyguard and general factotum.
We saw our first snow-houses on this trip. They were only temporary shelters, and were not the round kind I had seen pictures of in my schoolbooks. Each was made square, or if the party was large, longer one way than it was the other. When this was the case, the door was always in the center of the house, and the sleeping quarters at each end, with a small space between where one could move around, and where the stone oil lamp was always kept. The first step in building these houses was to choose a place where the snowdrift was at least two feet deep. An area of the size desired was dug out; then large blocks of snow were cut. These were ranged all around the hole, placed one on top of another all slanting slightly toward the center of the house. When the wall was up, the top blocks were cut and slanted from each wall, meeting in center and forming a gable-shaped roof. If the house was a large one, there might be three or four pair of blocks forming the roof, and at each end would be one or more slanted to meet those already up.

After the house was built, snow was shoveled all over it and all the holes were chinked full, so there were no openings anywhere. The last thing to be made was the door. This was generally in the center of the house, and snow was cut away from the side until the ground-level was reached; then a door cut through from the outside. After everything had been taken in the igloo and arranged in each end, the last one to come in would cut a block of snow, and taking a dog harness or some other piece of line handy, make it fast to the snow door. Crawling inside, he would haul the door in place, and everything was ready for the night. If the house was to be lived in for any length of time, more pains were taken with it, and a long hall made of snow, the entrance to which was through the top, at the farthest end from the house itself. All that was necessary for ventilation was to cut a small hole in the roof; and if a window was desired, a piece of clear ice, or not infrequently a piece of the intestines of a large seal or walrus, dried, split and sewn together, served this purpose.

Such a place was our living quarters for two weeks. Below-zero weather prevailed, of course, but we were comfortable. Deer there were in plenty. Baby and the rest of the Eskimos got forty or more, but George and I did not seem to be able to connect. George was disgusted and finally quit, going back to the house. I stayed on this hunt some time longer and shot three caribou. On the fifteenth of November I also became tired of hunting, and the Baby and I returned to the station with our meat.
I learned from an Eskimo that to the north there were several native villages; as they put it, there was only a day or two of a dog-sled travel between them, where we would have to sleep out. I wanted to visit these settlements, going clear to the northern point of Alaska, if possible. George, Woolfe and I talked things over, and it was finally decided that I should go. We knew that Captain Herendeen was going to try and get to Point Barrow, where he wanted to establish a whaling station; but we also knew that his outfit had all been lost when the Bowhead went down in the summer. If he was at Point Barrow, all would be fine. I could get food from him for the return trip; otherwise it would mean that I had to live on what I could. There were no charts available, and no white man had ever traveled along the coast in winter, so I did not know what to expect. It was decided that I should take two sleds and three Eskimo men; Baby of course, should be one, if he would go. As soon as I asked him, he was willing, but said he had never been farther north than Kook-pow-rak River, which was two sleeps from where we were located. I talked over things with him, and he mentioned two other men he thought would be well to have with us, one because he was a good hunter, and the other because he had been all the way along the coast and was a good guide even in bad weather. As the Baby put it, he was just like a fox, and could always find his way, no matter what the weather was. This he proved more than once on the trip.

The women around the place fixed some clothing for me out of the old parkas we had. They also made me a pair of sealskin pants, and I thought I was all right for the trip. Chipic, the man we wanted as guide, made no objections to going along. In fact, he wanted to go as he had not been to Ut-ke-av-ie (near Point Barrow) for several years and wanted to trade for a Wolverine skin. Kyootoo, the other man, did not care to come, at first saying he was afraid, as the Innuits at Ut-ke-av-ie were bad people and would kill him, but he finally said he'd go.

Everything was ready to start on the twenty-fifth of November. It was now dead winter, and the long night had begun, with the sun always below the horizon. Sleds had been all overhauled, dog-harnesses made, covers for the sleds, and our provisions prepared for the trip. The principal thing was the dog-feeds, and this I had entirely overlooked. At the last minute Baby mentioned the fact, so we had to delay another day getting that ready. This is where our whitefish meat came in handy, for without that, we would have had to use our caribou meat. Joe, our Eskimo cook, told me that the best thing to take was plenty of beans, so he had boiled a flour-sack full. They were all right when we could get enough one time. They were just boiled and poured in a sack where they froze like a rock. When we wanted any to eat, they had to be chopped off with an ax, and they flew all over the shop. Mostly we had to do this outside, and then we had to go around and pick up what we could find of them in the snow. Woolfe suggested that I take along some pies. I liked that, pies being my long suit, so Joe made some. The first one I got out to eat was frozen so hard I could not have made an impression on it with a file; and when the Baby dropped one, it broke in a dozen pieces like a pane of glass. We learned the difficulties of frozen beans and pies after we had started; and when we had a chance, we swapped most of this off for deer-meat and fish.

Leaving the house, we mushed up the coast, making our first camp where the Eskimos were hunting deer. We left the next morning at daylight. There was no sun, of course; but the weather was fine. We made good time along the coast, this day getting to the end of the highland north of Cape Beaufort. As we went north, the hills had been receding all the time since leaving the deer camp; and after the second day there was no way I could tell if we were on the land or ice, except when we stopped, I could discover a small knoll once in a while. The grey light of midwinter makes it hard to distinguish objects at any distance, and as the hours of twilight were few, we made the best time possible. My dog Mark made a good leader, as leaders were in those days. He would follow whoever was ahead, keeping right at heel. As we traveled up the coast, we saw lots of caribou sign, out on the sea ice as well as on the lagoons and land. If we had cared to stop there would have been fine hunting. Fox-tracks were everywhere. If the same conditions were there now, it would be a trapper's paradise.

Just before dusk we stopped to camp, and the natives soon had the snow-house built; this night we used the snow covers for a top. The weather was fine, though very cold. My job was to build the fire, and this had to be outside, as all cooking was done in the open. When the wind was blowing, the first thing was to cut out several blocks of snow and stand them on end, close to each other, to form a windbreak. Sometimes it was a cold-fingered job, but I learned to be quite expert, and whenever we were traveling on the beach and I saw pieces of birch-bark which had drifted in during the summer, I always picked them up and kept them for lighting the fire. These dried and curled pieces of bark would light with a match just like paper, and once alight, would not blow out.

The house finished, we carried all our things inside to keep the dogs from them; the snow-blocks were piled on top of each other five feet high, and the sleds placed on top so the dogs could not reach the hide lashing with which they were put together. The dogs were the greatest thieves that ever lived, and nothing escaped them if left lying around.

We had bean soup for supper, and hardtack, with tea as a side dish. All was well smoked, but no one kicked. I noticed, however, that after the Eskimos had finished their share of what I made, they tackled some of the raw frozen deer-meat we had with us, and I could not blame them. I was a poor cook, and never got any better. They sat in that house and gorged themselves. Frozen deer-meat was not bad. I had eaten it while hunting, and it was not long before I was doing my share.

All this day Kyootoo had been trying to tell me something over and over. He kept repeating, "Ah-kun Nel-la-rog-a-nute took-a-roo!" The first two words I knew, but the last one I had not acquired. All that evening in the snow-house I tried to have the Baby tell me what it was. He showed me a piece of meat, and talked a streak; finally he lay down and shut his eyes playing dead, and saying "Took-a-roo," and at that I got what Kyootoo was trying to tell me. It was that a white man would die—meaning that I would die in the cold
weather. I could not get his meaning for this then, and it was not until I could understand their language that I one day asked the Baby what Kyoocoo had meant. He told me that two years before we had come here, three men had run away from a whaling ship in the summer, and had managed to exist somehow until the cold weather had come. Then two of them had died from exposure. The natives living near Cape Lisburne had found the third one and taken him to their village. He developed pneumonia, and was dying on their hands. It was one of their customs never to allow anyone to die in their houses, if it was possible to prevent it. The sick person usually was put out in a tent in summer or a snow-house in winter, to die or get well as best he could. If by any chance a person did die in the house, it was abandoned.

What to do with the white man, they did not know; so the old An-et-kok, or devil doctor, beat his drum and went into a trance. He told them that the only way for them to do was for four of their women to take him out under We-vok—their name for Cape Lisburne—and stone him to death.

This was done. The man was so weak that he could not walk, so he was taken on a sled to the Cape, and his head mashed in with rocks. I did not hear this story until several years later when Baby knew me well; and he asked me not to tell, as the women were all alive. Since that time they have gone where all good Eskimos go... .

The third day out we crossed a short stretch of land and ran to the village of Kook-pow-rak, on the river of the same name. The houses were all deserted, for the people were hunting a little farther up the coast. We, however, stayed there that night, and next morning started down the river, which empties into the lagoon; and it was not over an hour after we reached the lagoon before we arrived at a settlement. There were eight igloos, and all were occupied. I was the first white man that had traveled along the coast in the winter-time, so the natives were the most surprised people I have ever met. They made us welcome, however, and everything they had in the way of food was brought out for us to eat.

That night all the men came to the igloo where I had my headquarters and wanted to know if I cared to trade for fox-skins. As that was one of the things I was after, they brought around all they had, and we traded all night. Good fox-skins then were only worth two dollars each, and did not take much merchandise to get one. I bought all they had and packed them in a sack to leave with the natives, expecting to pick them up on my way back. Eskimos are absolutely honest, and I knew my furs would be safe.

I wanted to start off the next morning, and as soon as it was getting light called the Baby to get the others up. The day before, Chipic said it would be good to stay here for a few days, as the natives wanted us to visit them, and they would feed our dogs for us. I wanted to be on our way, as I had no idea of the distance to Point Barrow; nor had I any idea of what the coast was like nor of the distances between the villages. As I mentioned before, I had no map or chart of this part of the world, but was just going to see where I would bring up.

When I was all ready to load the sleds, I went outside to help, but on looking at my team I nearly had a fit. As I would not stay and visit with these people, they had taken a very effective way of keeping me for that day at least. The women had gone out in the morning and fed my team so much that they could not walk, let alone haul a load. Every one of them looked as if he would burst. I took it good-naturedly and went back into the igloo to get some more sleep; and if I had eaten all those folks wanted me to I would have been in the same condition as the dogs.

The next morning we started. It was blowing some from the northeast, but not very hard. Our dogs traveled pretty well; they had had nothing to eat since the morning before, and were getting in trim again. Chipic, as usual, took the lead. It was still dark as we left the house but he never was in doubt as to which way to go. As the daylight increased, the wind did likewise, and by the middle of the day it was blowing a gale. The snow was drifting, and we could not see any distance ahead of us. We kept going until long after dark, and then we came to a village on the inside bank of the lagoon. When we arrived, all the people were away hunting. We soon made ourselves comfortable in one of the houses, and stayed there two days cooking that night in the hall of the igloo, and eating in comfort in the house.

All next day it was blowing hard, but along in the afternoon a man and his wife came to the village. They had been inland, hunting. They were out of seal-oil and had faced the storm to come for it. They were as surprised as the others had been to see a white man in the winter. I wanted them to eat with us. They tasted our beans but as they did not care for the salt taste, they fell back on their own meat that they had cached somewhere in the village. I had been bothered with thirst the whole trip, for we were traveling all the time on the salt ice, and there was no way to get a drink. Baby told the woman about it. Next morning, as we were starting away, she gave me a seal flipper to carry water in. The hind flipper had been cut off at the upper joint, the meat and bones taken out, then the skin dried. When going on a long journey, this was filled with water before starting. Every time anyone took a drink, the skin was stuffed full of snow, and carried under the attiga next the body, where the snow soon turned to water and remained thawed. The water did not taste very good, but it was fine when one was thirsty and there was nothing else around.

We were two days to the next village, a place on the mainland just back of Icy Cape. I did not count the houses, but there had been a large settlement at one time. When we arrived, there was only one family at home—the others were all inland, deer-hunting. They had made us welcome by feasting us and feeding our dogs. We only stayed the night and were ready to leave early in the morning. Just as we were ready to start, the man brought me a blue fox-skin and wanted to trade. It was the first one I had ever seen, and did not know what it was. We had a few tin kettles with us. He wanted one of these; as they had only cost the company fifteen cents, I thought I would take a chance. I found afterward that a blue fox was worth much more than a white one.

The sun had been below the horizon for some time now, and the days were short and getting shorter, so it took us two days to reach the next village. All along the sandspits there was plenty of driftwood. In some places it was piled up several feet high, so there was never any shortage of fuel. This wood had to come from hundreds
of miles away—the greater part from the Yukon, probably.

Ka-lum-mik-tow-rah was quite a settlement, and the Eskimos were all at home. Caribou were plentiful all around them, and some of the families had a supply of fish. These they caught inland in the fall and sledded home for the dark days. What a time I had! These people, as soon as they knew I was there, turned out from every igloo in the place and gave me a royal welcome.

We stayed but one night, as the next village was only a little way and much larger. Every inducement was offered to get me to remain. I was even offered my choice of any of their young girls. As I would not accept their offer, they seemed to think I was a very strange white man.

The next village was not more than twelve miles away, and it did not take us long to get there. We no sooner hove in sight, than all the young men and girls came to meet us. They fairly dragged us, sleds and all, to the houses. We all had to stop in the head man's igloo, as he had made ready for us; meat and fish were all set out and waiting, along with the whole population. Arn-ning was the chief's name. He told us if we would stay over two days, he would go to Ut-ke-av-ie with us. This I promised to do, as Kyooctoo was getting more scared all the time, and wanted to stay here.

The village was right on the coast. Back over the hills two miles is the inlet, which extends several miles inland. There are many veins of coal there, some of it right on the surface. One vein I saw was eight feet through, and the Eskimos told me that many of them were even thicker. A large seam of this coal was burning then, and had been for several years. One summer a hunting party had built a fire near the coal and left it; the coal had caught and was burning many years, and may be still, deep in the ground. Although coal was handy, the Eskimos then never used it, having no stoves, nor wanting them.

Our two days were over, and I expected to start early. We did not get off, however, as the women played the same trick as was played before. Everything ready, I sent the natives to harness the dogs. The animals were so full they were unable to move, so I had to stay. I was again offered my choice of any young girl in the village. This was the custom along the coast at that time—a custom now long discontinued.

Next morning we got started. Our host going along with us, we made good time and came to another village some time after midday, just at Point Belcher. The Eskimo name was Se-da-roo. I counted twelve igloos that were occupied, and quite a number of old unused ones. Kea-wak, the head man, was a fine old fellow. He told me that a few years before, there had been many more people, but that they had all died just after the large ship-wreck several years before, some time, as near as I could make out, during the seventies. There was evidence of what he told me along the coast, from Wainwright up above Se-da-roo. Where we traveled on the beach, there were empty casks, hundreds of them; and the hulls of a number of ships were up on the sand, evidently shoved there by the ice. In ransacking the wrecked ships, the Eskimos came across the medicine-chest, and as they had been used to buying alcohol, they imagined anything in a bottle was whisky. They drank everything that was liquid. Many of them died in their houses. Their bodies were still there, and none of the Eskimos would go in to take them away.

Kea-wak told me this; and several years later when I was there in the summer, the bodies were still there, and the houses falling to ruin. Two other villages, one south, and one north of Se-da-roo, had been deserted, almost the whole population having died at that time, and the remainder going to other villages.

Kea-wak also told me that the Eskimos would not eat flour, and did not know what to do with that which they had found in the wrecked vessels; they just dumped the flour on the ice and then used the sacks to make sails and snowshirts. The only thing they wanted in the shape of food was the hard bread and molasses. There was no white man's food that the Eskimos cared for, and it was not till three years later that we could sell them any provisions of any kind.

We stayed two nights at Se-da-roo and then started for the end of our journey. We made quite a procession, and certainly went along faster than at any time since we had started north. The weather was fine and the moon full—a wonderful time to travel, for it was so light we could see everything for at least two miles. Just before daylight we cut across the land and came out on the lagoon back of Point Franklin. As we got on the lagoon, we could see the lights in the village, but did not stop, as it was a mile out of our way.

All this day we traveled up the lagoon back of Peard Bay. Just before coming to the end, Kea-wak left us, going inland. We kept on for two hours longer and camped in a small gully at the end of the highland that comes to the coast. After this we traveled slowly, taking two more sleeps to reach Ut-ke-av-ie. The last day we went very slowly; every little way my fellows would stop and have a talk. They were scared—that is, Kyooctoo and the Baby were, as they were newcomers and from Point Hope. I could understand enough to know that they expected to be hazed a lot, but that there was no danger of their getting killed. Chipic and Arn-ning were coaching them, telling them what they must do, as soon as they reached the village. One man was to follow each of them, and as they got near the village, they were to make a run for it and get into some house before any of the Cog-mul-licks knew they had come. In this way they could stave off the hazing for a time, especially if they had eaten in the house which they expected to enter.

Ut-ke-av-ie is on a bluff fifty feet above the sea. Just before reaching the village, we came off the sea ice and climbed narrow paths to the top of the bluff where the trail led straight to the settlement five hundred yards away. As soon as we had got on the bluff, all four of my Eskimos started for the houses just as fast as they could run. When the dogs saw the village, they too started on the run, but they could not keep up with those scared Eskimos, and soon I was all by myself with the three sleds, so I just hopped onto the one I was traveling with and let her go. As we came over the bluff, the village people saw us, but before enough of them could get out, my fellows were holed up somewhere, and I did not see them again for two days.

Ut-ke-av-ie is eleven miles from Point Barrow, the most northern place in Alaska. At that time it was the largest Eskimo settlement on the Alaskan coast. There
were dozens of igloos, and almost immediately I was surrounded by what seemed hundreds of natives, all talking at once, and laughing good-naturedly. They all seemed surprised to see a white man, and some of the older ones came and shook hands with me as I sat on the sled. Finally one of them asked me to come into his house, and as I had nothing else to do, I left the sled and went with my friend, who told me his name was Oo-shal-loo. In the house my host insisted on my taking off my parka and getting up on the shelf in the back of the room. So, not wanting to let them know I was in any way alarmed, I did so. Oo-shal-loo’s wives (he had two) took my shirt and cleaned the snow from it and soon brought me some muc-tuc (which is the skin of a whale) to eat. I had finished one piece and was just getting started on another, when some one reached over the crowd in the house and grabbed me by the collar, yanking me clear to the middle of the floor. The house was packed full at the time. I dropped my muc-tuc and grabbed for my gun, which was still on me. But—just then I heard a voice saying in English:

"Drop that damned blackskin and come over to the house."

It was Captain Herendeen! After the wreck, they had managed to reach the village in one of the other whalers, and between all the ships had got together an outfit. They were planning to whale from Ut-ke-av-ie in the spring. Their house was a half mile from the village. When I had left the sleds, the young men had taken them directly over there and told him that a white man had come up the coast. The building they were occupying was built by Lieut. Ray of the U.S. Army in 1881, and used for two years as a magnetic observatory at the time of the international Magnetic Expeditions in the Arctic in 1881 to 1883. Herendeen had been there with the outfit as hunter, and had seen that there was a good chance to start a whaling station.

There was plenty to interest me the few days I stayed. All the Eskimos were in the village during the dark days. They were dancing every night. Ut-ke-av-ie had three dance-houses where the Eskimos would congregate and have their native dances. Each place was packed, leaving a small clear space in the center of the house just large enough for two or maybe four to dance at a time. The men, beating the ke-loums, or native drums, sat at the back of the house and sang and beat the tomtom; at the same time everyone in the house usually sang, men and women. It seemed to me as though they danced as the spirit moved them. A man would get up and begin dancing; then a woman would move out from the crowd, waving her arms, moving her body sideways, from the hips up, and shuffling her feet, keeping time to the drums. The man would go through all kinds of antics with his arms moving about, but through it all, they kept perfect time.

Twice I went to Noo-book, the village at Point Barrow, to see the dancers there. This settlement was ten miles away from the house, and a little farther from Ut-ke-av-ie. The first dance at Noo-book was much as those at Ut-ke-av-ie, but the last one was a real show. The Noo-book people had rigged up a white fox-skin and a raven-skin. They were set on a large board and made fast in such a way that they could be worked by some one in the background, who pulled strings. The fox was trying to catch the raven, and the raven would hop all over the board. It was really clever. It was representing some of their old folk-lore, but I could not get the real story.

Just before we were ready to leave, an Eskimo came up the coast from Icy Cape. He had two dogs hitched to an old broken sled, and was on his way to Noo-book to trade with the omakil. All he had was one turquoise bead. The Eskimos of the northern point had two kinds of beads that were equivalent to our money. One was turquoise. Some were as large as the end of a man’s thumb, and others smaller. These they valued highly. They did not know where they had come from originally, but they had been handed down from generation to generation until there was no way of finding out where their ancestors had got them. The other bead that was of value to them was of blue glass with a white heart.

I was all ready to start back on the 14th of January, but on the 13th, along in the afternoon, Kyooctoo came to me looking as though he had been through a threshing-machine. About half the village was along with him, the Eskimos yelling and laughing. Knowing we would start in a day or two, the natives had made him run the gantlet. Baby was let off, as he belonged to another tribe, below Point Hope, where hazing was not customary. The whole village had lined up, and Kyooctoo was made to run between the lines; the women were the worst, some even sharpening their finger-nails to a point, others making small notches in them so they could mark their victim better. All the men did was to keep him in line, and not let him break away, and get into a house until he had finished his run.

I got Kyooctoo all mended up and we started the return trip the 16th of January. We did not make very fast time. Our journey ended the night of January 30. We got in at five that evening and all welcomed me heartily.

(Life in winter quarters evidently proved too tame for Mr. Brower, and he determined on another exploring expedition.)

As the Baby had adopted me as his own, I talked it over with him. The big fellow thought it would be a fine thing to go to the place he was brought up, which as near as I could understand was two days south of Tigera. There he said the Eskimos were all good, that there was plenty of fish all winter, and deer all through the hills; in spring there were plenty of rabbits and ptarmigan. This sounded fine to me. First, however, I wanted to go to Point Hope and see what kind of place that was. When I told Woolfe my plans he immediately wanted to go along. I agreed to take him as far as Tigera; he wanted to do some trading there. This necessitated another sled and more outfit. I was taking another young man with me to help with the second sled. His name was A-wae-lak; he was living at We-vok—a fine strapping young fellow.

Woolfe got Unocoluto to go with him and bring him back from Point Hope. We made We-vok the first night, then rounded the Cape in fine weather and made the village of Tigera two days after, getting in sometime before dark. Unocoluto had a house there and wanted us to stay with him, but as soon as we
arrived, At-tung-ow-rah, the head man, insisted we all come to his igloo, and stay while we were in the village.

At-tung-ow-rah was a heavy, thick-set man, not as tall as Baby. He was thought by the natives to be the strongest man on the coast. He was surely a brute and was considered a dangerous character. Everyone in the village was afraid of him, as he was thought to have power to kill anyone by his devil-driving. At-tung-ow-rah had five wives; four of them he kept in the igloo where we stayed, but his first or head wife was in a house by herself. This head woman ran all the others.

To show me what a bad man he was, At-tung-ow-rah one day asked me to take a walk to the graveyard with him. He wanted to show me where he had four men up on a rack that he had murdered at some time in the past. I went along with him to see the show. His private burying-grounds did not appeal to me, but I did want to see the graveyard. We had seen the uprights as we came along the beach on our way down. I thought at the time they were wood. When I got close to them, however, I saw they were all jawbones of whales, standing upright in the ground. They were small ones mostly, not over ten feet long. To these were lashed the lower jaws of walrus. In the walrus jaws pieces of wood were laid, and on these were other pieces, making a platform, where most of the bodies had been placed. Some bodies were on the ground, where they had been dragged on some old sled belonging to the person, or his family. The bodies were wrapped in sleeping-skins. Whenever anyone died all their personal things, that were in daily use, were left at the grave, as for instance, if it were a woman, her sewing gear, her ool-lu-ra or woman's knife, and sometimes her cooking pots or her personal ornaments, beads or earrings. If a man was buried, his hunting implements, sometimes his kyak, his pipe, or his ke-loun were left. Whatever was left at the grave was always broken so to be of no use to anyone alive. Even the sleds were broken.

At-tung-ow-rah showed me his private rack where he had his men planted. He also showed me where his family were laid out to dry. His father, he told me, had been even a greater devil-doctor than he.

Woolfe left for home after several days here, and next morning Baby and I started south, following along the low sandspit toward a high bluff in the distance. The second day we rounded Cape Thompson in fine weather. Thompson is the same kind of blow-hole that Lisburne is, and is very precipitous, so we were fortunate. The third day the Baby told me we were close to where he belonged. As we neared the river mouth we saw the ruins of what must have been a large settlement.

We camped in one of the old houses that night, and in the morning started up the river. That same night we arrived at a small Eskimo camp—Kee-wel-ing nok—I should think at least thirty miles from the coast. To say that the natives were surprised to see a white man would be to draw it mild; there had never been a white man in this section of the country before.

The houses here were called tulees, and instead of being built partly underground, were built of willows. There were willows everywhere. Most of them were higher than a man's head, and some much taller. The houses were right among the trees; the frames were built of large willow poles, one stuck in the ground bent over to meet another and tied together so as to form an arch. About thirty were used to form the frame, the inside of which was nearly six feet high, and fifteen feet across. Over the poles were laid smaller willows, very evenly, six inches or more in thickness, and over this was a cover of dried grass which was collected along the banks of the river. This made a very warm house, but even then it was not enough, as over all there was an outer layer of snow. I did not imagine that any house could be warmer than the igloos along the coast, with all their oil lamps. In these all that was needed was a small seal-oil lamp for light.

The men were away all day hunting. Every morning they would leave, usually without anything to eat. The women were either working at making clothes and repairing them, or else out snaring rabbits and ptarmigan.

Fishing was done through the ice, mostly with nets in the winter, though some kinds were caught with a jig and others with a line. Fishing through the ice in winter is quite a job, especially when the ice is four or five feet thick. The holes through the ice are cut in the fall when the ice is just thick enough to bear the weight of a man, and are not more than eight feet apart, so as the ice gets thicker the nets can be set with greater ease. After cutting holes in a row long enough to set the net, a long line with a weight on the end is dropped through the end hole, then a stick with a hook at the end is poked through the hole next to it and the line is caught and brought through, hauling enough slack on the line so that the same operation can be done over till the line is through all the holes, the full length of the net, under the ice. Then the net is hauled through the first hole—which is always the largest—and set. Care is always taken to weight the net so that it will not float up and freeze to the ice. If this happens the net has to be cut out, or abandoned.

When I was first in this country all nets were made of deer sinew, and it was a long job spinning the sinew into a long line. The sinew was first torn apart into very fine threads; then it was twisted together, by rolling it on the cheek. When the line was thus twisted it made a ball, this acting as a weight, and when sufficient length was spun on the cheek, the ball was spun around holding the threads in one hand. This twisted the sinew to a size of sail twine. This work was all done by old women who were too ancient to scrape skins or do the other drudgery.

Leaving Kee-wel-ing nok, I easily made Cape Kreuzenstern that same day. Here was a small settlement of two families, and they did not have very much to eat. They had been living on seal all winter, and now that the ice was closed, they had to live on what they had put away in the summer. This meat was all tainted, and I could not keep any of it down.

Starting early in the morning, we rounded Kreuzenstein and kept on down the coast a few miles, where there was a break in the hills. Here we cached our grub on a rack some one had built for keeping dried fish. Traveling inland from here, we approached the valley we were looking for after several hours' travel. As we neared the river, we began to get in timber; though not very tall or large in diameter, it was the first I had seen in Alaska.

We had hardly reached the ice when we saw something black moving from one bank to the other. A-wae-lak got his rifle out first and started for it. It was a land otter, the first I had ever seen. He shot it just as it was trying to get into a hole near the river bank. It was four feet or a little more in length. Putting it on the sled, we started down the river, and in a little while made a house close to the river-bank. It was made of logs, with a log porch. The houses that I visited down in this region were all log houses and looked as if they had been copied from the Russian houses farther south. On the inside, in the middle of the house, was a fireplace made of flat stones, only used when there was cooking to be done; then the gut-skin window, which was in the center of the roof, was taken off to allow the smoke to escape, and the doors opened for a draft. At that, everybody nearly smothered.
The man who owned the house was a fine big native and a relative of Baby. They made us welcome with what they had, rotten fish. I could not eat it, so I had our land sister skinned and cooked that for supper.

In the morning we started for the Nu-a-tok River. We arrived that evening, found another house and stayed for the night. The same thing happened as before; fish there was, but not for me, so I had to go to bed without anything to eat. From there I traveled up the Nu-a-tok one day to another house belonging to an old Eskimo named Pun-nik-pe-rok. He had three sons and their wives living with him. They had a number of furs which I bought.

From this place I decided that we would cross the country to the Koo-buk river and down to the inlet following the shore to where the town of Kotzebue now is. Pun-nik-pe-rok told us the trip would take us two days. It took us three, and three of the hardest days' traveling I ever had or ever expect to have. Most of the time we were traveling through the timber. The snow was so soft and deep that the dogs were buried, and could not pull the sled through it. The only way we could make any progress was to break a trail with our snowshoes and then go back for the sleds. Every morning we would go ahead for several miles tramping down the snow, all three walking one behind the other, and then back on the same trail. This packed the snow so that the dogs were able to get a footing and pull their load. This was the only time I wished I was back in civilization.

At the end of the third day we made Koo-buk river. We saw no one, so started toward the south. The traveling was a lot better on the river, and we made fair time, and arrived at the end of the peninsula which makes the south side of Hotham inlet, in two days more.

There was a rather large village here and the head man was wealthy. On his racks he had many bundles of Siberian deerskins, and several bales of Russian tobacco, besides many furs of all kinds. This village was a meeting-place for the natives from all Kotzebue Sound as well as Tigera and as far south as the mouth of the Yukon.

We stayed only three days. It was along in April, and Baby told me the rivers would soon begin to overflow.

The old chief seemed sorry to have me leave. He certainly was a fine host. The women attended my clothing and he insisted on having our sleds overhauled by his boys. To have offered pay would have been an insult.

The first day we reached She-sho-luk, on the mainland. This was a famous place for white whales, so after trading, many families came for the summer to catch these She-sho, from which the place derives its name.

The next day we picked up my grub left on the way down. I surely was glad to get it. That night when we camped I ate beans and slashjack till I had enough. We made Kneuatum early in the day, kept on going, camping on the beach near the mouth of the river. Many more Eskimos had come in from the mountains while I had been gone. They all had a few fox-skins which they were anxious to exchange for powder and lead.

I only stayed here a day; the snow was getting soft.

In the morning we started early, this time intending to round Cape Thompson. I would not take any chances through the hills. It was fine when we started, but the nearer we came to the Cape, the worse the weather became and late in the afternoon it was so bad we could hardly face the wind. Just south of the cape we found an igloo, where a Point Hope family was camped. Here we stayed, there being no other place where we could find shelter, unless we built ourselves a snow-house. We had hardly got our sleeping gear in the house and started to make ourselves comfortable when two sled-loads, in from Point Hope, also arrived on the scene and decided to stop.

The igloo was not over ten feet square. It had been crowded when we had decided to stay. After the last party came in we were packed like sardines in a can. There was no room to stretch out, so all night we just huddled up the best we could. At daylight I wiggled my way outside, Baby following me. It was blowing harder than ever. To travel would have been impossible; there was nothing we could do but wait. No one seemed to have anything to eat. I was hungry, for we had not eaten the night before, so Baby and I got some beans from the sled. The igloo was so crowded there was no place to cook; the fireplace had been in the center of the house and that was where we had been sitting all night. The only thing left to do was to chop off small frozen portions and then thaw them in our mouths. We finally managed to get something inside of us, and were feeling better. That night when we looked for our bean sack again, it was empty. Everyone that went inside stopped and helped themselves. We had to stay there three days and nights and during that time every particle of food I had eaten, for it is a native custom to share the last food.

When we started that third morning I made up my mind there would be no more camping till we made Tigera. It was some time after midnight when we arrived, and so dark I could not see where we were going, but long before we had reached the village the people knew some one was coming and ran to tell the head man. I don't think that I ever came on a village day or night that some one was not outside looking to see that no strangers arrived without their knowledge.

The Eskimos were getting ready to whale, and At-tung-ow-rah asked me if I wanted to whale in his boat. Whale-watching was something I knew nothing about, so I thought it would be an interesting experience. However, I first wanted to go to the station and get some more grub and ammunition. The chief told me his boat would leave for the ice in six sleeps; if I hurried I could get back before he started. I had arrived at Tigera April 24th. On the 26th, I started up the coast just as soon as it was light. I had the finest kind of weather and made Cape Lisburne village that same evening, a distance of fifty miles. We had traveled faster than we should, as our dogs had had no rest and little to eat. When I reached the village, Baby and I went to Kyooctoro, who was still living there, and borrowed his dogs, to continue on to the house, still twenty-four miles away. We left our team at the village until we returned.

I arrived at the house at ten that night. Everyone was in bed but it did not take long to hustle them out, and Joe had a square meal ready in no time. We talked most of the night, and I told them of my intention to go back to Tigera and whale with the Eskimos.

Next morning I loaded my sled. I had quite a heavy load, for I also took a coal-oil stove and a case of oil, a shotgun and plenty of cartridges for my old rifle. It took two sleds to carry all that I had.

I made We-vok that night, and next morning took our old team and went along to Point Hope, getting there on the 29th. All the Eskimos at We-vok had come along with us, as there was no whaling at that place. The morning of the 30th I sent Baby back to the house with all the dogs except my lead dog Mark, which I kept with me.

At Tigera all was excitement. Whales had been reported and the Eskimos were going on the ice in the morning.
The Arab Guns

The famous Hell's Angels squad of the Foreign Legion here come back to us in a thrill-filled story you will not soon forget.

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

A SOLEMN business lay before Hell's Angels after taps over the grave of Ivan Rosskoff, soldier of the Légion. His official papers had to be turned in; but his private ones were another matter—too sacred to be let drift into the hands of that bureau of clerks up in Marrakesh. It was for his comrades to learn if anyone was dependent on him, to make it their business to follow it up. It was the least they could do for Rosskoff's memory.

The sun was lowering over the mountains to the west, and this unnamed gorge in the Grand Atlas still hung with white smoke from that savage engagement of October 19, 1929, where the Légion had whipped Belkacem's desert cavalry and the Ait Yaçour mountaineers combined. And Hell's Angels were still on the cliff where they had held their galling flank position throughout the action—and where Rosskoff had given his life for Grumbi, their mascot ape, during that last Arab rush on the position. Dead tribesmen lay all about, their long guns lying in the brush where dropped. Down below, the valley floor was strewn with them, and a fringe of dead Legionaries lay up around the saddle where Knecht's column of the Second was now mingling with the column of the Third that had arrived just in time to save the day for France.

Hell's Angels had to report in, soon; but not before they knew how it stood with Rosskoff's affairs. Sar-Major Texas Ike went over the thin packet of soiled and greasy letters. The squad hung over his shoulder silently: Corporal Criswell, Privates Di Piatti, Anzac Bill, the Hon. Geoffrey Royle-Austen, Mora and Calamity Cyclops. The ape Grumbi whined and gibbered near by, grieving over the lost master that these men had so unaccountably put into the ground.

A photograph came to view first. It showed Rosskoff in the uniform of the Imperial Huzzars, in the days of Czarist Russia—younger by fifteen years, proud, full of life and fire, not the disillusioned cynic they all had known in the Légion. And seated beside him, a fine and handsome old lady resembling him in many ways, an aristocrat of the old régime, evidently. His mother, they all guessed, as they craned their necks wonderingly. One human tie that Rosskoff had, anyway. There were no pictures of wife or sweetheart in the packet. But there was a letter, of recent date. It came from a place called Nicolaiev and was from Rosskoff's mother. And written in German!

Ike turned his head over-shoulder: "Hyar, Calamity—you know eight languages. What does it say? 'Tears like pобр o' Ross had one relative, anyhow, alive... His mother, boys."

They nodded solemnly over that sacred word. Some still had theirs, a spot of consuming affection left in their hearts. Some revered a memory and remembered, always, a grave. Jeff was the only one of them who had a sweet-heart to look forward to, the Lady Diana Byrdwood, when his Légion term was over. They all remembered her, during the Rif war! They were each his best man when it came to thoughts of her. But Rosskoff had a mother; and she was still alive, this letter proved.

Calamity was scratching his head with perplexity. That bullet-headed little sharpshooter of the squad knew his German from two years with the largely German regiment; indeed, they were all wondering in the back of their minds how he was to be hidden until this column of the Third went away again. Calamity had been stolen from the Third by Commandant Knecht; so if recognized by anyone in their rescue column, it would be a mighty awkward business all around.

"This here letter don't say nothin', that's the trouble with it!" declared Calamity after a second perusal. "Seems to be just gossip to her son about people. But you can't lay hold to no sense even if you read it twice. This Nicolaiev place is on the Black Sea. I was there once in the ship with Father. Big Soviet prison there—"

"Oh?" said the Honorable Jeff. "Maybe it's in code, what? Try every third word, Calamity, old thing. Being a Czarist, the old lady may be writing him from that prison, eh?"
They all agreed, and Calamity spent some time working it up on a piece of paper. Then he yelped: “My God, fellers! Sense this time, an’ no mistake! Listen: ‘Two hundred lei buys escape. They shot Madame Savaroff yesterday in place of the General. My turn, for you, soon. Can go French steamer Constanza as scullion maid if bribe comes at once. Don’t fail your mother, Ivan!’”

There was an astounded silence. “Don’t fail your mother, Ivan!” Those final words rang like a clarion call to action in all their minds. But how true to his character Rosskoff had been, even in the face of that appeal! A talker, a dreamer, whose every effort had ended in futility, he had said nothing to any of them about this call gnawing at his heart. And he had done—nothing. There must have been an added sarcasm—that no one had suspected, though, in that last bitter cry of his: “Supreme irony of my life—to have given it for an ape!” And he had died, Russian-wise, in futility, with this supreme mission unfulfilled. Doubtless he had thought it impossible, for the Légion is penniless. It took half a month’s pay to save up enough centimes to buy a stamp for a letter home, with them!

But his executors—as this squad had immediately constituted themselves—were men of a different stamp. Anglo-Saxons, mostly, with whom vigorous action was set going at any cost. All she had wanted was two hundred lei to bribe some guard with. Some friendly steward on the French steamer had arranged for her passage to Constanza and safety with Queen Marie of Rumania. But dispatch it to Nicolaiev by the first mail courier leaving with Knecht’s campaign reports. Their eyes all gradually centered on Jeff, son of an English lord, the only one of them who had even an allowance from outside. Jeff looked troubled. “Certainly, you chaps!” he answered their questioning appeal. “Not a question of it! But dash it, I can’t lay hands on a single bob this side of Erfoud, y’know. Might borrow it from the Commandant, though.”

There was negation to that. This was the squad’s memorial to Rosskoff, not Knecht’s. He could only be a last resort, in case no bright scheme emerged from their combined brains.

And one did; for Calamity had got up and made a brief tour of their sector of the battlefield, which was this little bush-covered ledge. He came back with his arms full of guns, those long flintlock Arab guns favored by the mountaineers in preference to modern arms that required cartridges. Some of them were handsome, with damascened barrels and ornamental stocks inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl, and all of them were picturesque.

“Ever cache any of these, you birds?” Calamity asked them craftily. “Good old Spanish custom, in the Third!” There seemed some practical soldier’s use for them suggested by his grin, but Ike shook his head glumly at the loot, as he growled:
"Naw; the ordnance sergeant, he an' his squad picks 'em all up an' turns 'em in after a fight. Gawd knows what they does with 'em, though! An' 'pearin' like they might leave us a few for trophies at that—seein' as we risks our hides an' gits cyarved up for 'em!"

Calamity grinned knowingly. "I tell you what they does with 'em, Ike. Antiques! You go into the suks in any big town—Rabat, Tunis, Algeris, Fez, don't make no difference which one—and what do ye find in the Arab guy's shop? These same damned guns. Priced at three or four hundred francs, as antiques; an' they ain't one of them was made more'n two years ago! You give a mountain blacksmith his file an' his hack-saw an' a leetle forge with a goatskin bellows, an' he'll make ye a gun in no time. They's allus at it."

PAUSE, while the squad looked at the Arab guns with more interest. They had never thought upon what became of them after the ordnance sergeant had rounded them up after a battle. "Waal," said Ike, "what good is they to us birds an' our three hundred francs, at that? Ain't no one goin' to give us nawthin' for 'em in these parts! An' Chauvigny, the ordnance guy, he'll be out with his gang pickin' up equipment an' turnin' it in afore dark."

Calamity grinned yet more widely. "That so?" he inquired. "How does these guns get to the suks, I asks? Herr Buzzum, the little German trader, he does the trick for the Third. He follows the combat columns around with his lil' ol' two-wheel cart an' donkey, an' buys 'em on the spot off'n our ordnance sergeant. Scared of his life all the time, but he's right there! I don't know what he gives the ordnance sergeant for the loot—but he gives us guys twenty francs apiece for what guns we cache an' sell him later, on the side!" Calamity ended triumphantly.

Explosion of sudden interest in Hell's Angels. Where was this trader now, they demanded breathlessly. Twenty francs a gun! Fifteen guns, and they had their three hundred francs! And Calamity had picked up five right here. Stealing from the Government, this would be, of course; but that trifle was sweet to their souls, as getting back at the penurious pay-office that had the nerve to hand them a miserable franc and a half—six centimes—for half a month's pay!

"He'll be along!" Calamity assured them. "He hangs out up at the poste, back there some thirty mile in those mountains." He gestured toward the head of the valley where the Third's relief column had debouched. "He sees that column startin' out when the aviator brings 'em news of us, an' he hitches up his lil' ol' donkey—"

"Scatter, fellers!" broke in Ike with imperative gestures urging speed. "Down below, whar we plugged that storming-party! Bring up all ye can find, afore Chauvigny's gang gits out here!"

Hell's Angels jumped into action happily, scrambled down off the ledge into the ravines below, and were scouring them for dead mountaineers and their guns. That they would have three crisp hundred-franc notes in hand some-time tonight was a grand and glorious feeling! They climbed back with two or three long, curve-stocked Arab weapons apiece and piled the loot where Calamity had thrown his first installment. Twenty-two of them—for good measure in case Herr Buzzum should display any tendencies to dicker.

"Now, fellers, for a good place to cache 'em," said Ike. "Wont' do here, for Chauvigny an' them will be up hyar, an' mighty suspicious whar all them guns has gone to, him findin' nawthin' but dead bodies. An' Calamity, you'll have to stay with 'em. I'm reportin' you missin'." Calamity agreed to the necessity of that. So long as this column of the Third was around, he had to lie low or some one would recognize him and it would be mighty embarrassing for Commandant Knecht. Transfer back to the Third for him, sure as fate! And Calamity was happy now, for the first time in years, with Hell's Angels for buddies.

The cache took a deal of considering. It could not be too far from the encampment, or Herr Buzzum's fears would prevent him from coming outside the lines in the dark to make the dicker, Calamity pointed out. He had had an eye on the head of the valley all the time, and now gave a chirp of triumph. "Here he comes, boys! Didn't I tell ye?" he cried, pointing.

Hell's Angels looked at their salvation that was bringing them three hundred francs. A rickety two-wheeled cart had got through the mountains somehow, pulled by a pattering donkey. Its lone driver was a hairy gnome of an individual, almost extinguished under a great straw hat, and wore citizen's clothes. He kept looking nervously from right to left as if expecting a pot-shot from out those cliffs all the moment. At sight of the encampment of pup tents going up on the saddle across the valley he flogged his donkey with eager relief.

"Some brave bozo!" laughed Ike as a gurgly chuckle came also from Anzac Bill, to whom fear of any kind was a subject for humor. "But if he's on'y got the money on him, I'll carry the lil' wart in my arms, so no one won't hurt him till we gits ours!"

There was need for haste now, for they all could see the ordnance detail at work down below. Mechanically they were picking up and turning in all military equipment they could find. Sergeant Chauvigny had got his notebook, in which it was all being checked. Hell's Angels decided on some point up on the mountain flank for their cache, a place above the route along which they had come to this ledge at the beginning of the action. The Arab guns were divided, four to each man. With his Lébel strapped over shoulder, Criswell took charge of the ape Grumbli; then for a moment they all stood facing Rosskoff's new-made grave in silent salute. He was gone—poor, cynical, futile devil! But his mother's life was in strong hands now, and the squad gave silent resolve to see her through for him—if they had to steal every sou in the battalion that night to raise the money!

Calamity and the guns were cached up on a tiny escarpment above the trail. It took a stiff climb to get up there, a labor that the laziness of the ordnance squad would never bother with. A store of rations and water was spared Calamity by each man; then the squad marched on in to rejoin the battalion and report.

EVENING, in Commandant Knecht's big marabout headquarters tent. Ike was having a bad time of it, while waiting for his turn. For Chauvigny had got in before him and was reading off his tally of Lébels, enemy guns and equipment of all kinds turned in to ordnance stores.

"And an affair très curieux, my Commandant," he was saying with vindictive emphasis. "Below the flank position occupied by our men on the mountain we came upon more than twenty dead hostiles with no weapons at all! Ou, là là!" Chauvigny rolled his eyes, hinting whatever villainies the Commandant might choose to make of that mystery. "Also, on the ledge occupied by our men, we come upon more dead Aït Ya'cour—"seven of them, to be exact,"—referring to his notes;—"and they too were found without guns, my Commandant!" Chauvigny paused impressively.

Commandant Knecht, huge, jovial, bearded, had been lolling in his chair, rolling a fat cigar between red lips and listening perfunctorily to the ordnance report. A twinkle
came into his warm brown eyes at Chauvigny’s pause, and he sat up.

“Name of God!” he laughed. “Quelle théâtre!” He eyed the Sergeant mischievously. First time the boys had been caught looting; but God knew they got little enough cash, anyhow! The presence of Herr Buzum in camp,—buyer of Arab curios,—seemed to have spread its corruption abroad already.

He flashed the tiniest amused glance at Ike. He knew that Ike and Hell’s Angels had held that flank position on the ledge and had covered themselves with glory in the doing of it. So did Chauvigny, but Knecht was not taking the hint.

“Alors,” he said. “I comprehend, my sergeant. Proceed.” Chauvigny read on from his list, while the Commandant sat in a patient brown-study, not once glancing again at Ike, who stood wooden and solemn, looking on. Once Knecht stirred, as an amusing thought came to him, and he grinned in his beard. Ike could see he was making up his mind about this reported loot, and was hoping it was not going to be too bad.

“Your orders, sir?” asked Chauvigny, having finished his report.

“Nothing. I will attend to the mystery of the guns personally,” said Knecht. Then his eyes gleamed, once, in Ike’s direction. “Place Herr Buzum under guard, Sergeant Chauvigny,” he added. “He is to transact business only with you. No freedom allowed him about camp, you understand.”

Chauvigny understood very well! It was the effective way to block any secret Arab gun sales, on the side, with the buyer of antiques! Ike remained more wooden than ever, though suffering inwardly. Plop! Gone the chance, now, for those three hundred francs almost in hand!

“Dismissed!” said the Commandant; Chauvigny saluted and went out, and they were alone. The Commandant eyed Ike a moment, then burst into a roar of laughter and held his sides as he lay back in his chair.

“Eh? My cowboy! Eh?” he cackled. “But we cannot have the Second thieving Government property, alors! God knows the poor garçons deserve what they can get from Herr Buzum, though,” he relented. “Each trophy was a moment of death for my Légionnaires, a slash, a risk where his life hung on a thread. Ouf! Quelle gouvernement! But I can do nothing else, my Buffalo Bill, can I?” he appealed.

Ike did not say yes or no to that. Those missing guns were pinned fairly on Hell’s Angels by Chauvigny’s report, and the Commandant was well aware of it, though he did not say so. Might as well turn them in, since they could not be sold, and let it be just one of those things that a wise commandant would let blow over without further investigation. But none of those thoughts appeared on Ike’s wooden face. Instead he said, with lips drawn in stern repression: “It was for Rosskoff, sir. He’s gone. Got his, sir, on the ledge, to save that ornery mascot of ours—pore soul! We only jest buried him, sir.”

“Ouf! My poor do-nothing Russian, hein?” said the Commandant, suddenly all sympathy. “You do not know who he was, my sergeant?” he asked softly. “A great lord.
a powerful nobleman at the Czar’s court—once! Parâdel, Russia is a cataclysm to Europe!” Kneckh sighed somberly. “We send his pittance,—every centime of it,—to his mother, the Countess Ybrowska, who is in a Soviet prison in Nikolaiev—.”

“That’s just it, sir!” Ike broke in. “And they’s goin’ to shoot her! Letter on pore Ross says so. Seems she’d fixed up some scheme to escape if he could send her two hundred lewys—some furin’ coin it is, sir, but it means three hundred francs. Anyway, it was too many fer Ross. Looked like a mountain to him, I guess... ‘Don’t fail your mother, Ivan!’ Then was the last words of her letter, sir; but even then he done jest nothin’—but grieve about it all alone, maybe—.”

Ike paused in respectful extenuation of the dead comrade, while Kneckh nodded understandingly over Rosskoff’s failings, and with increasing interest in his eyes at Ike’s disclosures of what lay back of this affair of the missing Arab guns. It was not a looting to swell surreptitiously the squad’s treasure-chest, as he had first supposed. Not by a whole lot!

“They words, sir, went on Ike, ‘kinder got under the boys’ hides. We felt, if we was to do somethin’ for our dead buddy, the least we could do was to send this money for him to save his ol’ mother from the Bolshies. Sorter memorial, like; only we hadn’t a red cent atween the lot of us. But Clamity, he allows this trader is comin’ after the Third’s battle colyum, an’ Clamity says this Herr Buzzum gives a guy twenty francs a gun on the g.t.—.”

“Mon brave!” Commandant Kneckh had jumped to his feet with moist eyes and extended hand, uttering that choking exclamation. He did not need to be told a word more. They gripped hands, both enormous and burly men of the Legion, who between them half filled the tent; and there was love, grim, steel-clad and manly, in that grip. Never was it stronger or more appreciative than at that moment between them!

“Hum!” said the Commandant. “Alors, let us see—” He had tied up Herr Buzzum effectually with that bodyguard of Chauvigny’s set to watch his every move; now, for Hell’s Angels’ sake, to undo that difficulty! “Where are these trophies now, my sergeant?” Kneckh asked.

“Clamity’s with ‘em, sir. Taint healthy fer him around camp jist now, so he’s layin’ low with them guns back thar on the mountain.” Ike waved a hand out the tent door and gave minute directions as to how their cache was to be reached by that trail leading out from the saddle along the left flank of the position.

“Èh bien!” Kneckh mused. “It is I who must sell these guns to the trader, then. Ma foi, pretty example for the commandant of the Second to be setting his garçons! But hold! This is a matter for haste, Sergeant Ike, this letter to the Countess Ybrowska! It must go at once, by the mail courier leaving for Erfoud tonight. We shall consider the transaction of the guns as finished, hein? Et voilà! He had drawn three crisp hundred-franc notes from his wallet. Ike saw them go in an official envelope; then the burly Commandant was scratching a letter of sympathy to Rosskoff’s old mother.

There was rare chivalry in that letter as he read it out presently to Ike. The pen of angels is given to the French in condoling a bereavement; but here was more: The sum enclosed was being forwarded officially as left her by Rosskoff himself, in answer to her appeal. “Don’t fail your mother, Ivan!” And he hadn’t, for all she would ever know! A nugget of pride in her grief. The Commandant was sure a prince, Ike felt, and said so forcibly in his homely cowboy idiom.

“And now to business!” said Kneckh with a twinkle in his eyes. “We must first rescue Herr Buzzum from the clutches of the excellent Chauvigny. . . . Tiens! I have it! —Orderly!”

He sent his compliments by that messenger at the tent door to Lieutenant Hortet, and would that officer report here with Herr Buzzum in person? Ike breathed relief. With that old zou-zou mixed in this, whatever they did would be kept within sealed lips! “And now, adieu, Sergeant!” said Kneckh, putting on his night cape. “It is not for the commandant to be seen leaving the lines in company with Herr Buzzum, eh? I go for the little promenade. It is you who will receive Hortet and this trader person at headquarters!” He gave Ike a prodigious winkle that conferred on him ample discretion on what to do with them. “I shall meet you at the cache later,” said Kneckh, and was gone.

Ike felt that the commanding officer had no business risking himself outside the bivouac lines at night on any business whatever, but he could not see how this secret transaction was to be carried out in any other way. It was reasonably safe, he assured himself. Belkacem’s cavalry had been driven off in confusion, and the survivors of the Ait Yaçour mountainneers had vanished into their hills. They had had enough of it for one day, most likely! A night raid? Possible, of course; but not probable this night.
His reflections were terminated by the arrival of Lieutenant Hordet with Herr Buzum in his charge.

"Morbleu! Where is he, the old-one?" growled the grizzled little old Gaul huffily as he returned Ike's salute and saw that Knecht's chair was empty.

"Search me, Looie!" said Ike cheerfully. "His orders were you to go with me an' that gentleman there."

He pointed at the "gentleman," who broke into lamentations immediately. And then:

"Oy! Oy! That I should be taken to jail at point of guns—iss outrage!" Herr Buzum wailed. He was greatly shaken by all these brusque military doings with his person, Ike could see.

Hordet looked mystified over all this, and was much more concerned over Commandant Knecht's disappearance.

"Name of the devil! He needs a—how you call him, Ike?—a guarjeen, that-one!" he growled some more. "And what is it that we do with this rabbit?"

"Orders was we was to take him up the mountain yander," said Ike hardly, with a wave out the door toward the left flank. "Come along, you!" He laid a huge paw on Herr Buzum that enveloped his entire shirt-front in a wrinkle of cloth.

The hairy gnome squealed his fright. "Nein! Nein! I do not go outside der lines! Pleass, Mister soldier! I protest!"

Ike lifted him with one hand and thumped him down with a shock that shivered his backbone. "Silence! That's money in it fer you, bozo; so shtet yore haid, or I'll muffle it in your pants!" he warned that frightened commercial person grimly.

Herr Buzum whined, staggered along with them out of the headquarters tent. He squirmed as they moved down the tent lanes toward the zariba of thorn bushes under the Saharan stars—would bolt if Ike relaxed his grip in the least! His muffled lamentations broke out afresh as they were challenged by the embuscade sentry.

"Oy-oy-oy! Doan' geeve me up to der tribesmen, pleas!" Ike choked him as a grim laugh welled up in him over that ghastly imagination of Herr Buzum's. The creature was a menace, with his absurd fears, if anything should come up, though. Ike had a grip on his neck-tie now, as the safest hold for prompt measures. Any noise outside the lines was a source of danger in hostile country like this.

They had passed the sentry with Hordet's gruff, "Reconnaissance duty, cabbage!" and were now going up along the trail that led along the mountain slope and eventually reached Hell's Angels' position on the ledge during the battle. It was all eerie and uncanny here: ledges, precipices, boulders, dark blurs of trees—and no guarantee whatever that some band of enterprising tribesmen had not taken it into their heads to come back this night and see what pickings could be had. Herr Buzum shook as if having fits of ague under Ike's paw as they progressed. He started further complaints and protests whenever Ike gave him any breath. And then a stump projecting over a boulder—that looked very like a tribesman's head—collapsed him altogether. A muffled screech, as Ike and Hordet stopped too, with drawn pistols, to make sure; the fellow had fainted away from sheer fright!

Oh, well! Ike laughed as he picked him up in his arms. He would be quiet, anyhow! Ike remembered that he had said in jest that he would do this very thing—carry the son in his arms—but they had to sell him those damned guns, hadn't they?

A low whistle from Calamity above, and they stopped.

"Up with him, Looie!" Ike muttered, and boosted the limp form of Herr Buzum up the shelf with a violence that brought him back abruptly to temporary consciousness. Calamity's hands, reaching down, gathered him in.

"Tiens! Comme c'est bizarre!" growled Hordet. "What's all this, satanic animal? And where is the old-one?"

Hordet commanded the left wing of the battalion, and go a step further into this business he would not, not without enlightenment! He made that plain.

"It's fer Rosskoff, Looie," said Ike. "Kilt this afternoon. Us guys owe the Old Man three hundred francs, what he's just sent pore ol' Rosskoff's mother so she kin git out of prison. He's fixed it so he kin sell this bird some Ay-rab guns, y'see—"

"Name of a pipe!" laughed Hordet. There was not much sympathy for the scheme in Hordet's flinty old hide, but ever since he had deserted to the Légion from the Chasseurs, he had constituted himself a committee of one to look after the Commandant. They had been comrades in the Zuaves during the Kybelle Wars. "But the old-one? Is it that he is out here too? The species of imbecile!" he demanded with scandalized incredulity.

IKE did not know where the Commandant was. Somewhere here or thereabouts, though. He would want to see the thing through for them, with his eager interest in his men; but Ike guessed he would not appear till Herr Buzum was out of the picture, unless they had trouble with him.

Then: "Got it!" comes a hiss down from Calamity. "What did you do to him, Ike? He's limp again, and can't do no business, so I frisked him for the three hundred anyhow."

Ike slapped his thigh and choked back a yell of unholy glee. Calamity was taking no chances! They had the money now; why not just leave Herr Buzum to come to, looking at his loot, surrounded with it? He would know where the secret cache was, anyhow! And he dared not say a word about his missing three hundred francs at Headquarters. It looked fine to Ike.

"All right, Calamity!" he hissed back. "Leave him lay, and gimme the dough. You hunt you another hide-out."

Calamity's arm appeared over the ledge, handing down the notes. Ike grabbed them and turned to Hordet. All they had to do now was to pick up the Commandant, and this night adventure was over—finished in triumph, his satisfied grin told Hordet.

Well, maybe. But just then Herr Buzum, up on the dark ledge, came to. All alone up there, surrounded in imagination by hundreds of diabolical brigands in the dark, the first thing he did was to raise an unearthly and prolonged screech: "Oy-oy-oy! Help! Help!"

It rang and reverberated through the mountains, that shriek of mortal terror. And for once the sardonic gods of the Atlas answered his fears, for shots rang out, yells, heavy volleys detonating over in the direction of the saddle. Came the distant stir and confusion of a camp springing to arms, stentorian shouts of corporals and sergeants falling the men in; the raving whip of Lébels chattering in reply.

"Sacre bleu!" swore Hordet. "A raid! And where in the name of God is the old mec, the old imbecile?" he added in fierce anxiety for Knecht as Calamity came tumbling down beside them with his rifle-bolt snapping shut.

"Forward, infants!"

They hurried and scrambled back along the trail. They had no time for Herr Buzum now! He was bleating like a goat back there, but ahead the black shoulder of the mountain was lit up with incessant flashes, a heavy massed attack on the camp by the tribesmen. It looked like a conflagration as they came out above the saddle. Belk-
The Arab Guns

acem had come back—with a tribe or two of relatives thrown in to help with the revenge, so it looked to Ike! All the shoulder on this side was covered with them, hostile flashes spurtting down a plunging fire from every boul-
der and ledge. The camp below was a rectangle of flame in the night, its companies lying prone behind the zariba and firing back. Zanggg! Whizz! Some of their bul-
ets were ripping by on their way further up-
hill, passing over where Ike and Hortet and Calamity crouched, watching.

"Peste!" growled the old zou-
ou. "No one but Ressot là-
bas! Knecht would have had
out a flanking column by
now! Sapristi, what a
chance for cold steel!"
The old savage whined as he pointed out the chance.

It was true that they three were
bottled up here, with a plentiful
sprinkling of hos-
tiles below them and between them and the camp and there were yet
more of them up
above—one happy
malefactor firing
down into camp quite near them,
not fifty feet away in his lair. But it was also true that
Belkacem had left his own flank unguarded, all his popu-
lation up here on the hill, and enthusiastically shooting up the Légion camp. Hortet’s “chance” was some one to lead out a couple of companies in the dark and come up quietly on the rear of this party—with fixed bayonets. A beauty of a maneuver, and Knecht would have loved it!

"Morte du diable!" grumbled Hortet, peering over his boulder and cursing his luck for being unable to lead out that flank maneuver himself. "They’ll stay here all night if Ressot does nothing but sit tight! Where is that
cow, that herring, that mole, that imbecile elephant?"

He glared about for the missing Commandant, but the chef de
debattement was invisible, for once, during a major action, this
teight. "Pig! Mattress! Disbrag!"

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The slope reeled with men yell-
ing, lunging with the long bayonet,
parrying the yatagan.

Ike pricked up his ears. Whatever the Commandant had been at, there was a plan to it, and it was going forward right now! Furthermore, a gentle buzzing sound had come to his ears from behind, a sound like a walrus
torning. Anzac Bill wheezeed that-a-way—when trying to hold his breath during any tense period of waiting! Ike glanced back over-shoal: The whole trail back of him was packed solid with the Légion! Crisswell, Bill, Di Piatti, Jeff—he could make out their indistinct figures, crouching, with bayonets fixed. Knecht had brought up these amiable reinforcements, it looked like!

"Oui, the Third alone is down there in camp, my Hor-
et," said the Commandant affably. "For the Second...

"Hold!"

He had gripped Ike’s arm and stood for a moment listening. Then—Buddhhrrrrrrrr! It sounded like a distant machine-gun, but it was two companies of the bat-
talion opening fire. They had made that very flank movement Hortet had been honing for, were coming up now on the Sahara side of the mountain in the rear of Belkacem’s party. Ike guessed that the Commandant had been some busy ever since this night raid had crashed in on his camp! He had ordered out that flanking column, first thing, in a dash back to the lines; more than that, he had come back here by way of the valley, bringing more companies with him to entertain their visitors on this side.

"To your posts!" Knecht barked at sound of that small-
arms fire. "Sergeant Ike, you will find your platoon right
behind you! Hortet, you command the wing, là-bas!"

but some of them would get shot, sure, and the Légion could not well spare any of the four present. The two

But Ike could not see anything amusing about it. They might make a dash down to camp, but some of them would get shot, sure, and the Légion could not well spare any of the four present. The two

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He flung an arm back along the trail, and Hortet was off like the wind. "Three minutes more to zero!" Knecht called after him.

Ike and Calamity jumped back a few paces—to land in the middle of Hell's Angels tensed, waiting, ears cocked for the signal. More and more men behind them in the dark, all set to barge in on that sniping-party enjoying itself up above.

Precept! A brief chirp from the Commandant's whistle. The Légion began to move. Up clambered the long dim line, pulling at bushes, worming around boulders, a knee over a ledge, a grasp at a hanging root. The night glittered with half-invisible bayonet-blades, all moving upward silently.

Precept! Precept! That meant: "All yours, Sergeant! Open fire when you think advisable!"

"C'mon, gang!" gritted Ike, quickening the pace. "Remember pore ol' Ross!" A silent, hard-breathing rush; then: Crash!—Crash—Crash—Crash! Bill, then Criswell and Di Platti together, then Jeff, had opened up as their Lébels found enemy flashes to fire at, close at hand now. Scared yells, return shots, alarm-cries from the snipers on this side. Ike's company rushed them vindictively, climbing and firing at once in a charge that encountered more and more resistance as they closed in. Ike could hear nothing from Hortet, but judged that the zou-zou's people were tearing their shirts to get above these birds and deploy across. Then, with the other two companies coming up on the Sahara side—nice sardine-net the Commandant was spreading around Belkacem's party!

Precept! Precept! Precept! "Stop where you are!" The Old Man was with them, not more than a few paces below, and handling the show with his usual consummate strategy. He never wasted a man if he could help it! Ike's crowd dug in and kept up a galling fire. Belkacem's harka was in a state of the wildest confusion by now. That flank attack from down where they had left their horses was ominous enough; but this one, barging in on their other flank out of a silent and peaceful valley, was worse! But there was a third, for suddenly a brilliant line of flashes broke out up above, clear around the mountain face. It came jumping downward on them, preceded by ripping bullets. Hortet had flung his company across up there and was charging impetuously—no one need tell him what to do!

Howls from the tribésmen, rabid Arabic curses, a confused fire in every direction where each man had dug in for himself. But there was no way to retreat now but downward. And the Légion camp was cracking an unfriendly welcome down there! Knecht's net closed in, meanwhile, and pressed on them the necessity of that fatal retreat.

Anything but that! Stubbornly Belkacem's desert cavaliers fell back. Darkness, a confusion of indistinct movement, silhouette of boulder and boulder against the lurid glare of rifle-fire— a night battle was sure a difficult thing to run, Ike thought! They were up to something, but you couldn't see what. Ike heard distinctly the Arabic command: "Swords out!" Then, thrilling, behind him the Commandant's voice: "You must charge, my Hell's Angels! Otherwise they make the escape! Va-v' en!"

Ike jumped high on a boulder and waved his rifle. Below him the whole squad, the entire platoon, lunged to its feet, drove headlong into the heart of that enemy mystery. The slope reeled with men yelling, firing, lunging with the long bayonet, parrying the wielded yataghans. It was all a dog-fight, confusion, the lines losing cohesion in the dark, group-scrim-mages—just two men on the field who knew precisely what they were doing: Knecht, intent on bagging the whole harka, and Belkacem, who had other plans.

Ike saw the flashes in one spot below on the Saharan side suddenly go out like candles. Hortet was raving somewhere over to his right, and his line charged down by the oblique way. Stentorian and urgent commands from Knecht. Ike pressed his attack desperately, but saw his resistance melting away fast. And then it was all over. They had the slope, its dead and wounded, and some prisoners—but the bulk of Belkacem's harka was gone. It had broken through the lines below in a sweeping massed attack—where Ike had seen those flashes go out like candles—had recapTUREd its horses and decamped...

Knecht laughed when the affair was summed up for him some time later by the weeping and furious Hortet. "Eh bien, my zou-zou, one cannot have everything! He's a good one, that Belkacem! I try to break him with a charge by the valiant Hell's Angels, but what would you? Can a dozen men stop two hundred? Ma foi, if there were only enough Arabs in the world, they would rule us all!" he added in jovial tribute to the enemy's valor.

Ike felt that they had somehow failed the Old Man, though he had not failed them, in the matter of Rosskoff's mother. But Knecht pooh-poohed his tentative apologies.

"Prut!" he boomed. "Only a sergeant who is in the thick of it can know how difficult is the charge in the night! You did all and more than I asked of you with the magnificent Hell's Angels, Sergeant Ike! Some other day we will again meet the esteemed Belkacem and take him into camp!"

Soothing, but Belkacem and his harka had had their fun and escaped. Ike was chagrined that he and Hell's Angels had not made a present of him to the Commandant, in return for the three hundred francs so promptly loaned. A gorgeous memorial to Rosskoff that would have been! Oh, well! You could not have everything!

But you could have something, once in a while. Back at Erfoud, in barracks two weeks later, Knecht read Ike a letter from the old Countess Ybrowska, safe in Constanza, thanks to Hell's Angels' dubious traffic in Arabic guns, ably assisted by Commandant Knecht.

The Countess was destitute—existing on the charity of the Queen, in fact; but she was back in the world of kind hearts and human sympathy once more. Her brave gratitude to the Légion and her son for that one priceless boon touched both Ike and Knecht. She would never know how far beyond poor Rosskoff the world's sympathy for her kind reached—into the hearts of his comrades, where it had translated itself into purposeful action: A habit, indeed, with this sentimental old world of ours, if you but give it a chance.
EVEN as charity covers a multitude of sins (a matter, one assumes, for the clergy), so the sea covers a multitude of freaks, misfits and outsizes—a matter, obviously, for a nature specialist like me.

Thus we have disporting themselves in the quiet and retired marine haunts which they frequent, that perambulating ink-container, the giant squid, the hammer-headed shark, the giant ray sometimes called the sea-bat, the manatee or sea-cow, the happy family of sharks,—including the white, the ground, the basking and other notable members of the family, all of whom love their fellow-denizens of the deep,—the whales and the whales, the bottle-nosed dolphin and the John Dory; the eel-fish, the anchovy-sauce fish, and many another.

Of most of the foregoing everyone has some knowledge. For they do not as a rule confine themselves wholly to the deepest parts of the sea nor to the loneliest. But things are otherwise when we turn our inquiring minds to the deeper parts—to those gigantic abysses in the sea-floor whose colossal depths have never yet been plumbed, despite the well-nigh frantic efforts of those immersed in that branch of scientific research. It is at this point that science is reluctantly compelled to step quietly out and Bertram Atkey buts airily in.

It is here in these incredible depths that we find the more remarkable inhabitants of the ocean—for instance, the mighty wedge-fishes, who always work in pairs, one to act as a wedge in splitting the rocks in the crevices of which it seeks its prey, the other to act as hammer to drive its companion well home.

Here too in these profundities dwells the lantern-fish, who distributes free a many-candle-power glow through his hide wherever he goes, and the sea-rabbit, that quaint little furry fish, never yet seen by mortal man, but one or more of which is possessed by the children in every merperson's back yard. There also exists the mouthfish, sometimes called the sea-politician, which is remarkable for swimming with its enormous mouth always stretched wide open to the uttermost limits, though nothing worth recording ever issues from that yawning cavern.

And this swift side-glance, as it were, at the marvels and mysteries of the Great Deeps would not be complete were it to refrain from mentioning that amusing little creature known as the leap-frog fish, which plays leapfrog all day long over its own back; the sea-goat, which eats chalk with passionate zest, drinks immense quantities of water and produces far better milk than any New Yorker has ever yet tasted; the music-fish, which twangs like a harp when irritated; and that most amazing crustacean the jigsaw lobster, a melancholy monster which remains in its cave all day solemnly taking itself apart and putting itself together again—never twice alike.
But the lord of this dim and fascinating realm is the Merman—for here is the metropolis of Merdom. Here, for inculcable eons of time, has existed Mermachester, with its teeming thousands of merfolk, the Mecca of all the art, fashion, beauty and talent in the Seven Seas. With a population of just under a million, Mermachester is situated upon the lowest terrace of a mighty slope of craggy rock some miles below the surface—and to any but a dweller therein would seem a dream of beauty.

But many of those who live there think otherwise. There is a strong progressive party on the city council who claim that the place is behind the times, old-fashioned and out-of-date. Among these was that dashing young mermegentleman with whom this story deals—Fintale. But Fintale’s reasons for considering Mermachester one of the dullest holes in the Deep were of a different nature from those of the progressive city councillors.

Fintale did not grieve because the sanitation system was old and out-of-date—it was the social system that bored Fintale. There were few if any of the pleasures of Mermachester which the rich young merman had not tasted—and they were of such a simple nature that already, at the age of twenty-four, Fintale was weary of them.

The merman’s trouble was of a rather complicated nature. At a period when a young merman’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love, Fintale had come to the conclusion that mermaids and mermatrons alike bored him into a trance. They possessed every attribute of beauty but one—variety. They all looked alike to Fintale. They all had golden hair, blue eyes and doll-like complexions; they were all fair, all beautiful, all graceful, and all their tails were the same shape. The babies were but exact copies in miniature of their mermatrons, and the mermatrons were more or less duplicates of their mermatrons, though perhaps more slender.

Now it is a curious fact that, like man, the merman is by nature contrary and never satisfied. Fintale’s grandmamma, a very wealthy and experienced mermatron, to whom he bore his trouble, explained this to him, one evening as she sat upon a seaweed-padded rock combing her hair.

“You are bored, Fintale, my dear boy, because you—like most mermen—possess an imperfect appreciation of beauty. All your life long you have been surrounded by wealth, luxury and beauty. Look at your mother and—me, and the result is that you are oppressed with a feeling of sameness. You swim down Grand Avenue, and you see so many beautiful faces and figures that if you suddenly came upon a black mermaid, with kiney hair, a figure like a manatee and a face like a walrus, you would fall in love with her instantly. You would say: ‘What a little sea-peach she is! A perfect little beauty!’ And you would believe it. Whereas what you would really mean is: ‘What a little sea-change she is! A perfect little variation from the eternal normal.’ And probably you would elope with her! Just because she is different.”

Fintale wiggled a fin unbelievably.

The old merlady nodded her head.

“In a place where every merwoman is beautiful, the ugly one is queen,” she said wisely. “Because she’s different.”

She looked at Fintale shrewdly.

“You want a change,” she said. “Why don’t you and your friend Scalien go off big-game hunting for a time? They say the net-fish are very plentiful this year over in the Great Ooze country.”

But Fintale shook his head.

“There’s no fun in gouging the life out of a few fish, Grandmamma. I want a change.”

The old merlady chuckled.

“Why don’t you marry Gracilis Glyde—she’s had a big fortune from her mother; she will have more from her father; and she says she has the temper of a wild-cat-fish. She would probably make things interesting for you. And she’s only waiting to be asked. She adores you, you know.”

But Fintale shook his head, and swam off to his club. He was very thoughtful that night—so lost in thought, indeed, that when some hours later he leisurely propelled himself home to the ancestral cave, he nearly lost his life to a wandering Orca, or killer whale, which dived like a leaden arrow for him.

He dodged mechanically—one learns the art of dodging very thoroughly in Mermachester; and the killer had to satisfy himself with one of the street-lantern fish which hung motionless in its position along Grand Avenue, now deserted save for a belated reveler or two. (Mermachester was lighted throughout by trained lantern-fish.)

But late though it was, Fintale did not immediately go to sleep on his return home. Instead, he carefully drew the thick portières of seaweed across the entrance to his bed-cave, curiously ordered the little lantern-fish to come and shine over his shoulder, and settled down to read—what, dear reader? Nothing more or less than a copy of the Daily Dope, that famous tablet newspaper, a copy of which Fintale had found, undestroyed, in the wreck of a German submarine. It was dated some three months after the Armistice, and in spite of many missing parts made interesting reading. Saturated and blurred and falling to pieces as it was, Fintale had yet been able to read enough of it to know that life on land was not unattractive. There were restaurants, theaters, motors, the whirl of life; and above all there were those adorable, gracious, vivacious and so widely and beautifully varying creatures—the ladies.

Fintale leaned back, staring entranced at the photograph of a beauty-prize winner which gazed out from the sea-water-sopped page at him. She seemed to squat slightly, and her nose was a trifle out of plumb; her hair was scarbled, and compared with that of the mermaids, it looked as if it had been brushed with a curry-comb. A strong committee of artists and painters had solemnly given their verdict that she was the most beautiful lady in the country, and Fintale agreed with them.

If only he could see these wonderful folk—if only he could get ashore—if only he could be the darling of one of these queens!

“Well, why don’t you take a whirl at it, sir?’” said a voice.

Fintale turned with a start.

It was the lantern-fish who had spoken.

“What’s that?” said Fintale, overlooking the presumption of the menial. “What did you say?”

“Why not go up aloft, sir, and take a look at these land-beauties? You’ve got the time and the means. I know it’s against the law, but if you say you’re going on a big-game-fishing expedition, who’ll be any the wiser?”

Fintale nodded.

“It’s an idea,” he said coldly, for he hated familiarity. “I’ll consider it. You can go now.”

The lantern-fish extinguished itself and swam away to rest, while Fintale settled down—not to sleep but to plan.
Three days later he left Merrimack, equipped for a three-months' big-game-fishing expedition—that is to say, he carried a large, sharp, uncomfortable trident.

Not a soul in Merimack dreamed whither he was bound. It was considered the correct and honorable thing for the well-to-do and otherwise idle young men of Merimack, whether in the capital or the provinces, periodically to issue forth and kill a few monsters. It was held at the bottom of the sea that the menfolk who had the best caves and the biggest sea-parks and so forth, really ought to do something for them. So Finntale had long ago put up a magnificent record in this direction, as he liked big-game fishing for sake of the sport. Nothing, when he was in normal mood, gave him greater pleasure than to introduce his trident into the digestive apparatus of that huge and greatly dreaded deep sea monster the sawfish. This was not the comparatively harmless sawfish familiar to anglers and amateur harpoon-thowers of Florida, Santa Catalina and such places—whose sawfish puts in his fine work with the yard or so of flat horn, studded at the edges with ivory teeth, which grows horizontally out of his face. No—the sawfish that Finntale hunted was the deep-sea circular sawfish, which, by revolving itself upon its own axis at some thousands of revolutions a minute, can and does—if only he catches one at the right angle—snick one in half like a radish.

Finntale had killed hundreds of them—from babies of ten feet in circumference to mammoths of eighty feet round. He may have been something of a mer-net, but nobody ever denied that he had pluck. He was the youngest by ten years of the men who had ever killed one of that other awful sea-brute, the rope- or netfish, the terror of merfolk. This singular and highly intelligent denizen of deeps unknown to all save students like me is a thin, long fish shaped like a piece of boxcord. It is as thick in its thickest part as the thin end of an ordinary beer-pump handle, and in its thinnest part is as thin as the thick end of an automatic corkscREW. The adults are rarely more than twelve thousand feet long and hardly ever less than ten thousand. They know the system of knots, including the granny, the half-hitch, the bowline, the carrick bend and many others. They patiently weave themselves into a comfortably large-meshed net of half an acre or so in size, and cunningly hang themselves up in the lanes among the great gardens of kelp, waiting for something to turn up—usually a pair of mer-lovers. Only the most experienced hunters can hope to kill these. But Finntale had done it. He had come upon a young one who had woven himself up with the wrong kind of stitch and was awkward.

It will be seen, therefore, that the young merman’s departure was in no way remarkable and attracted no comment—excepting a private one from Gracilis Glyde, who bad-temperedly caught her maid a back-slash with her tail when she heard that Fin had gone hunting again.

"Blithely" the young merman shot through the water on his journey. He had thought long about the adventure, and he had carefully studied the faces of a number of men whose photographs had been reproduced in that now perished copy of the Daily Done.

"I suppose each one of those men is the darling of one of those beautiful land queens," he told himself, as he sized through the green water. "And I don't think I need fear to compete with them. I'm sure I'm as graceful and good-looking as they are."

For he was young yet, and he had much to learn. . . .

He came up not far from Bar Harbor upon a strip of narrow beach which ran down to the sea from the stone-built terrace at the bottom of an expensive-looking lawn and garden belonging to a seaside villa, small but very elaborately built. The sunblinds, the flowers and the bright-hued garden-furniture formed a feast of color which delighted Finntale.

He lay for a while in the warm shallows admiring it all. Then he paddled in. A small boy skulking apparently in some sort of ambush behind a boat—presumably for sea-gulls—perceived Finntale and went gray-green, then blackish purple, in the face with excitement. His eyes bulged out until they seemed to be growing on stalks. He pulled himself together with a grunt and deftly planted a catapult pebble on Finntale's arm. The merman uttered a sharp yelp of astonishment, wondering where on earth or in hell the pebble had come from. He took two or three vigorous strokes and came ashore with a run. The boy's nerve failed him and so he went away. He was tired of that part of the beach apparently—at any rate he left it at a speed which Finntale, watching him, thought remarkable for land traveling in one so young. The boy speedily became a dwindling speck in the direction of the town—where he subsequently earned for himself the reputation of being a thorough-paced liar by saying he had seen a man-fish.

Then Finntale's attention was distracted permanently from the fleeing boy, for down the short flight of stone steps which led from the terrace to the sands
came a vision of such exquisite beauty that Fintale gasped with the sheer pleasure of beholding it.

It was she—that queen of whom Fintale had dreamed so intensely, and whom he had come from such an immense depth and distance to find. She was so dazzling that, unused to the land of the humans though Fintale was, he knew instinctively that he was lucky to have come to this spot at the first landing.

She was about to go swimming—evidently an early morning dip. She had given her wrap to a maids at the terrace and came tripping across the sands in the prettiest of bathing suits—a dainty trifle in pale blue and white that cost some sixty-odd dollars.

She did not notice Fintale, lying by the boat, so that he was able to watch her undisturbed. She was, he saw, of quite a different type of beauty from the mermaids. She wore no cap, and Fintale saw that she possessed deep red-glowing hair, very prettily bobbed.

Bobbed hair was a novelty to Fintale—for a mermaid would as soon think of having her tail bobbed as her hair. He thought he had never seen anything so charming.

And her face was perfect—with figuring to match. Fintale was sure of that, quite sure. Had he lived on earth a little longer, he would perhaps have been less frantically enthusiastic. That is to say, he would have been more accustomed to the sight of that bobbed red-gold hair, that flowerlike face, that graceful figure—for Miss Dorene Daream had been a famous beauty for at least five years, and every half-inch of her features, at every angle, was familiar to everyone in the country who had ever bought picture postcards, read an illustrated paper, studied advertisements of soap, fountain pens, memory systems, perfumes, cigarettes, and so forth, been to the theaters or movies, or, in short, seen anything or been anywhere.

Dorene had just completed a long spell of work in "Gosh!" the famous jazz revue, and had now come down, with the swallows, to her villa to recuperate, though it is but fair to state that that overworked individual her publicity manager had told a wide circle of press acquaintances that she had really left town in order to avoid the attentions of his ex-Majesty the was-King of Garlica, who had recently landed in New York with a carpetbag containing a piece of his crown, a telescopic alpenstock, an odd pair of socks, a knuckle of ham and a half a Dutch cheese. Some said he hoped to marry Dorene; others said that he hoped to get the berth of chauffeur with her. Everyone was very much worried as to which was right.

But these things Fintale did not know and would not have understood if anyone had told him of them. All the merman knew was that Dorene was the sweetest thing that he had ever seen—and he wanted only to be her darling.

Dorene was a good and graceful swimmer for a woman—but compared with the lissome mer-ladies gliding dreamily through their native element she was about as competent as a mermaid would be on a bicycle or a pair of skates.

Before she was more than twenty yards out of her depth, Fintale awoke from his dreams with a violent start to the belief that she was drowning. He was sure of it from the way in which she splashed and threw her arms about. He was not used to the human method of swimming—and so, in a flash, he was shooting toward her.

Now it is not to be denied that Johnny Weissmuller is a grand little swimmer; and Annette Kellerman had the gift of getting up a pretty good gait through the water; the seal, too, is good at it; and there are few who will contradict the statement that the salmon is at home in the water; but for really fine work you have got to hand it to the merman. He glides through the waves like a wave—he is one of them, in fact, though faster.

Fintale poured himself through the water at a speed which rendered him indistinguishable from a dolphin. In a fraction of time he was out to Dorene. For a moment she was startled. But there was nothing the matter with her nerves, and she recovered herself in an instant.

"Do you care for eggs and bacon—that sort of thing? Or is—er—seaweed—"
"I entreat your pardon, beautiful lady," said Fintale—English, quite fittingly, is the language used in Merdom. "Do not fear. Fintale is here, and he will save you from drowning."

Dorene looked at him for a moment. She evidently thought he was an ordinary human swimmer.

"Thanks, but I'm not in any danger," she said coldly. "Please don't touch me."

Instantly Fintale swerved clear of her—and then she saw with whom she was dealing. She opened her mouth in a little gasp, inadvertently took in a spurt of water, gasped again, and turning round, headed for the beach.

She landed, Fintale following her.

"How dare you bother me when I am swimming?" she demanded, surveying him. He looked rather effective. The upper half of him was by no means bad. He looked a gentleman—the front half of him, at any rate. His tail, long, extremely graceful and tapering, was really a beautiful thing in dark, glowing green, shot with wonderful living flames of silver, gold and many tints of blue and blue-green, splashed with purple and silver, and over all a shimmering elusive sheen of old rose. It was, in short, some tail, and would have made a peacock depressed for days.

"Why—why—you're a merman!" said Miss Daream accusingly, with wonder in her eyes.

Fintale admitted it, and proceeded to apologize abjectly for attempting to foist an entirely superfluous rescue from drowning upon her.

And here it may be remarked that Fin took from the start an entirely wrong attitude with her. He shouldn't have been meek. It was a fatal mistake. Nor should he have wagged his beautiful tail so very humbly at her. He practically handed himself over to her as a free gift. He was wrong—thousands of men had done that; thousands were waiting to do so. For she was a popular beauty—with the soul of a keen business man and a consuming ambition to retire as soon as she was worth a modest half-million or so. She was in love—for years, with a casual person who kept what he called a poultry farm on Long Island and spent most of his daytime smoking a big briar pipe in the stable doctoring one or the other of an ancient hunter's legs, and his evenings in reading the classics with a large tankard at his elbow. A queer-tempered, good-looking man, who had collected a varied assortment of scrapnel splinters in his arm in 1918, and had retired to meditate and keep hens and study bees and the classics. A pretty good judge of things, on the whole. He treated Dorene much as he might treat a mosquito that was too exquisitely pretty to be killed but was apt to be rather a nuisance buzzing around. She adored him for it. She invariably went to him with a full account of her "part" every time she appeared in a new revue or musical comedy, and used to spend a most thrilling evening listening to him while he told her just exactly what Sophocles, Cicero, Marcus Aurelius and a few old gentlemen of that kidney would have thought of her and her part. For she had real talent, though she was not above utilizing it in revues.

Fintale should have adopted the same tone. Instead of this, he set her on a pedestal as high as the Eiffel Tower—and received in due time, what he asked for....

"Yes, beautiful lady, I am a merman, with your gracious permission," he said.

"Oh, don't ask me," she said, smiling. "Where have you come from?"

He told her about Merdom. "Describe it," she commanded, and when he began, stopped him.

"Describe it at breakfast. Have you breakfasted? Do you care for eggs and bacon—waffles—that sort of thing? Or is—er—seaweed—?"

He assured her that anything would do, and she invited him to the villa. But first she brought him a dressing-gown.

Her maid was surprised to find Fintale on the terrace. "Mr.—er—Merperson has swum over to breakfast," said Miss Daream airily. "Tell them to lay breakfast for two." She followed the maid in, warning her to say nothing to anyone about the poor gentleman's deformity,—his tail,—about which he was extremely sensitive. She sent out a box of cigarettes. Fin tried one, in three puffs brought himself to the very brink of violent illness, and gave up smoking.

Perhaps an hour later he was sitting with Dorene, who was now most charmingly arrayed, on the terrace, telling her about Merdom, and the uniform beauty of the Mermancott girls.

"They are very lovely—but there is not one to compare with you, O beautiful lady. Even the milk-white pearls they wear do not—"

Dorene brightened up suddenly. She did not interest herself very much in things that were out of her reach, and Merdom sounded chilly and not very interesting. Her thoughts were wandering to a man in shabby tweeds probably at that moment engaged in rubbing evil-smelling lotions into a horse's legs—but—

"Pears, did you say?" she inquired.

"Pears—oh, yes, beautiful lady."

"Are there so many pearls in Merdom, my dear man?" she inquired, thinking that Fintale's face reminded her vaguely of a seal's, though rather better-looking.

"The children play marbles with them, beautiful lady," he said.

"What horrible waste! I love pearls—the larger ones." She smiled at him very sweetly. "Do you think they would suit me—pears?" she asked. "A necklace of large pearls—a rope of them. That is, a large rope that would loop round my neck four—no, say six, times."

"Would you like some pearls, beautiful lady?" bleated Fintale.

"Oh, thank you so very much. I can't possibly give you the trouble—I suppose it's no trouble, really—you just pick them up like pebbles, no doubt. If you insist, of course, but don't put yourself out. That would be very delightful—thank you so much. When do you think you will start? Can I offer you anything before you go? No? Very well, I insist on being permitted to come to the water's edge with you. But you really are too kind!"

And so saying, the lady arose vivaciously.

Rather reluctantly Fin did the same. This was rather quicker work than the way they set about things in Merdom.

"How charming it must be in Merdom!" prattled the lady as they crossed the sands. "Do you have—er—diamonds and emeralds and that sort of thing there too?"

"My friend Scaliend's spearhead is made of diamonds, sweet lady," said Fintale. "He is very fond of experi-
menting with his spears. We usually prefer emerald blades, with a heavy gold shaft, and a big rough ball of ruby on the end. They balance better like that, beautiful lady.” He paused at the boat and picked up his trident.

It blazed in the sunlight with all the fires of a rainbow. It was as he said—wedge-shaped prongs of solid emerald, gold shaft and a ruby boss the size of a very large golf-ball.

Dorene Darem gasped, and her beautiful blue eyes changed slightly into a gentle green.

“That is the loveliest thing I have ever seen,” she said.

“That!” ejaculated Fintale, genuinely amazed. “Why, beautiful lady, that is but a rough hunting tool—a thing for use. It is without beauty, being intended for use, star of my soul! Do you love beautiful things—gems, sweet lady?” He hesitated, then took a plunge. “Could you care for one who brought you really lovely gems? Such as the mazuma, that strange and weirdly beautiful stone of scarlet fire, ringed with a flashing edge of green and its center silver white with a sheen that dulls the finest pearl in the sea. A necklace of these! Could you try to care a little for one who brought you that? Or an arm-ring of gleaming black spondulique—that rare and noble metal that is bespangled with little sparkling stars of gold. Would you make an effort to be fond of one who brought you such a bracelet?

“You speak of pearls—pearls with which the mer-urchins play marbles, dearest lady. But what of that grand and hauntingly beautiful sea-gem which is only found among the débris of the rocks which the giant wedge-fish has wedged to pieces—the gaurbalime, which burns with a ceaselessly changing procession of colors—colors that change daily and are never repeated—new colors—marvelous hues that one has never seen before and will never see again. I know where one of these may be found, sweetest lady. Do you think if one brought you a gaurbalime, you could make him your—er—darling?”

Dorene Darem drew a deep breath.

“I could, dearest merman—indeed I could.”

Fintale reverently kissed her hand. His lips were rather clammy, but he did it gracefully—for a semi-fish.

“I will return with all those things in seven days, O gracious one,” he said—and disappeared before she had time to ask whether it was worth while taking his trident with him for so short a time.

She stared at the water for a long time.

“It’s a dream,” she said, presently. “How could I possibly accept jewelry from a thing like a seal?”

But she spent the whole of the next seven days on the beach, and most of the next seven nights...

Fintale returned to Mer-Manchester, secured the deep-sea jewels he had spoken of, and was on his way back, swimming with arrowy speed within the next five days.

Then on the morning of the sixth day he ran full tilt into a gigantic mallet- or bludgeon-fish—another denizen of the extreme depths. This rare beast is built somewhat on the lines of the giant octopus, but is furnished with twelve powerful arms or tentacles, each of which terminates in an oblong block of very hard horny substance, shaped like a large brick. It is normally a very quiet, good-tempered fish, provided that no living thing approaches nearer than

He was homeward bound. The deep sea, and Gracie’s Glyde, in spite of her temper, for me!”

five miles or so to it. But should any hapless creature venture nearer than that distance, the mallet-fish is instantly transformed into a raging demon, its rage and cunning increasing with every yard its disturber draws nearer.

The one into which Fintale ran was large and active, and its clubs were in good working trim. The merman succeeded in destroying the brute, but not until he was bruised in a thousand places and was so studded with big bumps and swellings that he looked like a sea-warthog.

In the struggle he lost some of the gems he was bearing so swiftly to Dorene Darem, but more serious than that, he had to rest for some days before he was able to move. So when eventually he approached Bar Harbor, he was almost a week late.
He bobbed up at a point east of Bar Harbor. It was night. He saw he had slightly miscalculated, glided along on the surface a little distance, assured himself of his whereabouts, and so dived again to return out to sea and farther down the coast. But he was unlucky, for he dived into a salmon net which the proprietors thereof were just about to haul. By no means recovered from the effects of his fierce encounter with the mallet-fish, the unfortunate merman’s frantic struggles were of no avail—they were not sufficiently frantic. He did his best, but it was not enough. He lost consciousness a few moments after being dragged ashore.

DREAMILY he heard the fishermen discussing him, wrangling about what he was, swearing at him and each other; as from a distance he heard voices describing him variously as a sunfish, a bottle-nosed seal, a sea-cow, and lastly, a “mermaidman.” He heard vaguely a harsh voice which spoke of “Lloyd George,” Sells-Floto, Barnum and Bailey’s, the Zoo, and an aquarium.

Then he fainted...

When he awoke next, he was in a species of tank—a cramped homemade affair of wood with a glass top which, had he but known it, had once been the top of a cucumber-frame.

There were three fishermen outside, talking to a fourth man—a hard-faced person, with something remotely suggestive of circuses about him. They were all arguing and staring in at him.

He thought swiftly and wisely decided to lie low for a space—until he heard or saw how things were shaping. He was not kept long in the dark. The discussion was going on hotly.

“I tell you he’s pretty near all in,” said the hard-faced man—the proprietor of a small circus which had chances to be in the neighborhood. “You can’t fool me with no merman—I’ve been used to handling ’em all my life—mermaids too. They’re tetchy things to handle—delicate. Must have salt water fresh from the sea every day—and where are you going to get it when you get to Indianapolis and Des Moines? We got to think of such things in the circus profession, see. These here mermen ain’t easy stock, nobow, and when I tell you that I got the offer of three others at different places in Italy and Spain—mostly imported mermen, we use—you’ll see that I ain’t falling over myself to buy this one. I’ll own that he’s a well-bred merman—very near thoroughbred, I reck’n; but give me a good, stout crossbred ‘un. They last. These thoroughbreds ain’t up to the work. I been in the circus profession all my life, and I know what I’m talking about. He’s worth thirty dollars to me—and I’m not begging you to take it, either. I doubt if I shall get my money back on him. Mermen don’t draw folk like they used to, neither. Forty years ago, you could have got a hundred for him, but times is changed. However, there tis.”

He feigned to move away with an admirable assumption of indifference. The fishermen failed to notice the glittering light of sheer excitement in his hard eyes, and they muttered among themselves.

“I don’t want him really—I don’t want him at all,” said the circus man over his shoulder. “I don’t want to part with no money for him. I’d sooner swap with you. I got a nice little tiger-cub I’ll give you for him—as pretty as a kitten. Or a pair of wildcats. Or I’ll give you a couple of cobras, a diamond-back rattlesnake and a horned singing lizard for him. Or, as I said, thirty dollars. But I’ll do no more. Take it or leave it!”

They took it.

“Look after him for half an hour,” said the circus man, “and I’ll send a tank down for him. Chuck him in a bit of seaweed—fresh, mind.”

And he hurried away.

“If I haven’t made a fortune this morning my name is Merman J. Mud,” he muttered as he went.

But he was wrong.

Fintale had missed nothing of the extraordinary stream of untruths with which the man had hypnotized the fishermen. Unused though he was to the ways of man, nevertheless he was well aware that his new owner boded no good to him. He must escape—and quickly.

The fishermen, talking rudely about the circus man’s ideas of value, slouched off to collect some seaweed, and as they went, Fintale gently forced up the lid of his tank. It was quite simple. He peered out, and to his wild joy perceived that the tank was in a small garden bordered by a channel. The tide was high.

Like an eel, he slipped out of the tank and shuffled across the garden, forcing his way through a row of early green peas.

A woman’s voice suddenly rose.

“Bill! Bill! Quick! That merfish is at the peas—”

Fintale heard a clumping of heavy boots—and slid into the water just as Bill charged down the garden, shouting. The man raced to a boat tied up close by, but long before he pushed off, Fintale was out of range...

He hovered about off the coast all that day, and it was not till moonlight that he emerged on to the beach near the villa of Dorene.

Everything was silent. Fintale stole out on to the beach. Just as he reached the boat, which was still in its accustomed place, he saw two figures moving down off the terrace.

He crouched down in the shadow and watched them.

“And it was here, you say, that merthing came ashore?” said a man’s voice—that of the poultry-amateur from Long Island.

“Yes, dear,” replied Dorene Dareen.

“And it fell in love with you?”

“It said so—practically.”

“And of course you fell in love with it?” There was a touch of sarcasm in the man’s voice.

Dorene laughed.

“Don’t be mad, my dear—the thing seemed half-witted, and its face was like a seal’s. It bleated something about loving me and began to brag about the jewels in the deep seas. So I sent the idiotic thing to fetch some. It promised to return in seven days—but it didn’t.”

“No? And I don’t suppose it ever will. You must have dreamed it, Dorene.”

“Yes,” she said reluctantly. “I must have. But what a beast of a dream!”

They moved on, strolling through the moonlight.

FIN TALE had heard every word—and every word had been an education.

He crouched in the shadow of the boat, thinking, for a moment. Then, in a low tone of bitter fury, he said, “Oh, very well!”—hesitated a moment, and finally slid again into the sea. He was homeward bound. The mermaids no doubt were aplied in their beauty—but they were usually free from any suspicion of being mercenary—and they were less “modern” than Dorene.

“That lovely creature may indeed be a queen—queen of vampires!” he said. “But she’s not for me—no, not for me. I have learned something in the last few days. The deep sea, and Gracilis Glyde, in spite of her temper, for me!”

And with one last glance at the shore, he upended and began his long dive home.
The Black Horse Hoodoo

A deeply engrossing romance of the rodeo arena, by the gifted author of "The Forest Legion" and "Bridges over Purgatory."

By ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART

THE day after tomorrow held little concern for Rus Kennedy, bronc-twister. Tomorrow was the problem that pestered him as he sat humped on the top rail of the board fence flanking the chutes north of the judges' stand, watching the slice of life before him abstractedly.

Within the grounds of Cheyenne's Frontier Park was the swirling, changing, colorful pageantry of the old West, as it has been transferred to the rodeo arena. North of the race-track, near the stands, lazy smoke corkscrewed from sooty, dog-eared flaps atop Sioux tepees, while raw meat cured above sleepy fires.

The crowds in the grandstands scanned programs, bought popcorn, munched peanuts. They had paid to see a show. It was nothing more to most of them. But to the men out in the arena it was a grim battle for supremacy; in the outcome of contests men were made, and men were broken. . . . But there are worse hurts than broken bones.

Rus gazed at the arena with a gloomy but critical eye. A pony race, with squaws riding, dusted around the dirt track, the Sioux yelling encouragement, the crowd mildly excited. A plump squaw in a purple-and-cerise dress, riding a flea-bitten gray, was in the lead at the finish. It was probably an important moment for that Indian girl, Rus reflected moodily—winning a race while the crowd cheered.

Men, the cowhands and professional riders and ropers, slouched around the side-delivery chutes of heavy planking above which humped the judges' wooden stand reached by a ladder with boot-gnawed rungs. Back of these groups of waiting men, in the high-fenced pens, were the milling horses collected for the bucking contests. Some were fine-blooded, intelligent animals gone outlaw. Others were tough, stringy, fighting progeny of wildings, horses that had not been haltered for generations. A minor per cent had been born outlaw—had the hate of man in them from the time they were foaled.

At the south end of the board fence that bordered the race-track were other enclosures where steers were corralled. Near by stood restive range horses. On their backs were denim-polished stock saddles with limber, use-stained lariats coiled near pommels that would not loosen when a galloping thousand-pound steer was snubbed short as he ran. Slow-spoken men in clothes redolent of the range, be-decked with few gaudy gimcracks, stood near by talking in monosyllables or looking appraisingly at the crowd and the action in the arena. These were the entrants in the steer-roping contest—riders who looped uncanny skill into their lariats.

Over all hung a medley of happy racket from the crowd, punctuated by the yelling of pop- and candy-vendors in the stands, auto horns squawking, and the voice in the big loud-speaker horns announcing events and the winners.

Yesterday that crowd had laughed when Soot, an easy-bucking black horse, had dumped Rus in the middle of the hard space in front of the judges' stand. Rus pictured the morrow, when something very different would happen in that arena. Rus would be a part of that too. Hours afterward they would be talking about those moments. . . . Daisy Haney would carry vivid remembrance of what was to happen so long as she breathed.
Rus took a typewritten carbon copy with two signatures on it from the pocket of his faded plaid range shirt. One name signed to it was his own. He studied it while his lean, wind-tanned face screwed into a meditative scowl. He certainly had persuaded Olds to make it binding on both parties.

He hastily folded the paper and shoved it back into his shirt pocket as he saw Sandy Laird striding toward his perch on the fence rail. Sandy was the keenest trick rider who ever performed gymnastics on a galloping horse. If he could have run, Rus would have beat a hasty retreat. He did not wish to chat with her. But the Lairds' little wind-swept homestead adjoined his own snug ranch near the foot of the Wind River Mountains. Decency compelled him to be reasonably neighborly.

Rus realized Sandy was making directly for him. She came striding easily in spite of her high-heeled riding-boots. Her neat wide-brimmed range hat shadowed her slim freckled face, threw shadows around her brown eyes, seemed to make her generous mouth even wider. That mouth touched her features with a homeliness that even her well-shaped head and defiant little chin could not counteract. Her jade-green silk shirt, the corn-yellow kerchief knotted around her neck, and the snug whipcord breeches tucked in the top of her scroll-sewn boots lent a thoroughbred touch to her pliant young figure. Sandy in her arena outfit always reminded Rus of a trim, clean-limbed antelope doe he had seen in a little park bordered by mixed sage and mountain mahogany near the head of the Sweetwater. He looked down at her now, and realized she was just a clean, healthy ranch kid with freckles, a saucy small up-tilted nose, and wide-open brown eyes that looked at a fellow with disconcerting steadiness. Sandy had a baffling way of figuring out other people's thoughts and motives. She asked blunt questions.

"What's the matter, Rus? You sit all humped over with gloom just dripping from you! Come out of it, cowboy! You think because Soot threw you yesterday your life is plumb ruined—is that it?" she asked now.

Rus grunted. "Gettin' threwed too often an' too easy means gettin' threwed clear out of the arena," he growled. "Aint the first time this season I've been tossed by a plow nag that's got lead in his feet and bone in his head. But maybe it's the last."

"I know," Sandy observed sagely. "Soot may have started you into this slump but some one else finished life's sweet song for you. Or you think they have! Daisy Haney's given you the grand bounce because she's so proudly selfish she'll not be seen with a waddy that's not able to ride a merry-go-round horse—if it's a black one."

Rus turned on her angrily. But the look in her brown eyes stopped the speech on the tip of his tongue.

"I thought so," she said softly. Then she turned on him fiercely. "Let me tell you, Rus, that girl's got a heart as big as a woodtick and an intellect as solid and filled with real thinking as a pod full of milkweed seed! If she'd cared for you at all she'd've stuck to you through thick and—"

"Shut up," snapped Rus. He hunched down lower and stared at the spot where a group of punchers milled in the dust. The wild cow milking-contest had started.

She turned on him with a defiant little gesture. "Look here, Rus Kennedy," she said sharply, giving him a yank that partly turned him to face her, "you've got to confess to me why an easy pony like that Soot stacked you in the dust yesterday. You're a better rider than that! What's gone haywire with your riding? Is it something that happened last year when you got thrown from that bronc, Pitch Dark?"

Rus turned slowly to face this girl whose words cut to
the basic situation like a keen-edged knife. She had hit dead center with that question.

"Soot threw me," countered Rus doggedly.

"Now, Rus," protested Sandy, "you might as well lie to your mother as to me. Pitch Dark—the remembrance of last year when he knocked you cold and cracked your ribs, and ripped open your arm with his teeth—was the thing that beat you yesterday. I said, don't try to lie to me," she continued earnestly as Rus started to protest. "Remember that the reason I'm running the ranch, and the reason Scotty Laird—my dad, who used to be one of the best bronc-pleasers in America—is limping and crippled around and still paying doctor-bills that we can't afford to pay, is all due to that same black devil, Pitch Dark. That horse has laid his hoo-doo on you. I know! My own father has had that same queer fear of that outlaw for several years. It was stamped into him when Pitch Dark smashed his bones. It was stamped in you the same way."

She paused, eyeing him keenly.

Rus Kennedy stared at the open arena. In his thoughts there was a memory of that day when Scotty Laird had tumbled from Pitch Dark; how Laird had lain crumpled and hoof-trampled in the ambulance. Sandy's father now hitched along and dragged one leg when he tried to walk. There had been other men crippled by that horse, too.

WITH the wiry sharpness of an etching another vision flooded in. Vividly he lived over the moment, a year past, when he had been down in the dust, with Pitch Dark poised above him—hoofs flailing through the spurt ing dust, nostrils red, teeth flashing as the horse reached to tear flesh from bones. Hurting through that nightmare haze had come a horseless battering-ram, ridden by the pick-up man—and then the vision was blotted, as a sweeping, thrashing hoof of Pitch Dark had knocked Rus unconscious.

With uncanny accuracy Sandy Laird had probed to the truth. He was branded with the fear of a black horse. Each time he rode a black from the chutes it seemed he was not riding the horse actually under him; from the first jump any black became Pitch Dark—a demon that threw him in the dust, struck at him, came with gleaming bared teeth to rip him to pieces. The 'ride was over then—the phantom of the killer bronc', the vision of those smashing seconds when the outlaw had pawed him, put him in the dust.

Vaguely he sensed that there was something beyond this fear of the black horse; some strange, inherited fear, bequeathed him by ancestors of centuries past when these forgotten men had faced infuriated beasts with puny arrows and ineffective javelins, or had run in searing terror from creatures of the jungle. Pitch Dark had torn open some latent scar of racial terror, and it would not heal. No matter how many blacks that year—easy ones. Other riders wondered at first, then tagged him, and finally whispered to each other that the game was gone for Rus Kennedy. There always would be blacks among the bronc's. Daisy Haney had branded him a has-been rider.

Now that he had decided to keep the contract with Olds it didn't matter to Rus whether or not she was right. But before Daisy had lashed him with her tongue he had carried an idea in a corner of his heart—a precious idea that some day Daisy might quit the rodeo game. Rus would quit too. Beyond that had been a half-formed idea that Daisy would be bossing his ranch near the Wind River Mountains. There would be more acres under fence, some pure-bred bulls, a new barn, a better house, babies. . . . Suddenly Rus Kennedy laughed bitterly.

"Must be something funny," observed Sandy Laird.

Rus turned toward her; he had almost forgotten her for the moment. Darn Sandy, anyway—she saw too much with those wide brown eyes! Her head worked with too much keen precision.

"Something funny?" asked Rus, puzzled for a moment.

"That was a nice care-free laugh, Rus," she remarked sagely. "You're too good a man to be shot to pieces because some light-headed rodeo queen herds you out of her life. Buck up! Snap out of it! Sorry I can't work up any teary sympathy for you. But what you need is something in the nature of a swift kick to jolt you, rather than some one to weep over you. I might loan you the right sort of well-placed kick if you say so. No?"

Rus grunted. Sandy Laird had no way of knowing how badly he had been defeated when Daisy Haney had blown that ranch-home picture to shreds. Rus had been desperate when he had persuaded Olds to make out that contract. He was goaded now by some dogged determination to finish what he had started.

"Near time for my trick riding," said Sandy, sliding off the fence. She stepped over to face Rus, laid her gloved hands on his knees. "Rus, I'm not forgetting the time you brought over that quarter of beef the winter after Dad was hurt, nor how you put shingles on the shack when he and I couldn't have done it alone, nor the day you brought over your own crew with some of our strays that had mixed up with your range stock and then how you turned in and branded our critters complete and proper. Rus, you're a good boy—you're too good for Daisy Haney. You must cheer up. If there is anything in the world I can do for you, boy, I'll do it!"

He looked down into her freckled face. Sandy Laird meant that, Rus reckoned. She would do most anything for him. Homely tike, Sandy, but a good scout—true to a friend, even if he did get dumped in the dust by a third-rate cow-horse.

Rus wondered why she was biting her lip so hard when she turned and started away toward the horse barns.

HE wondered too who would look after those things on which the Lairds might require help. He would not be there to take care of them. He suddenly thought of his own ranch. Who would take care of that? Donaldson, his foreman, and the other puncher, Murdock, could ride herd on things, but who would care a hoot how things went?

There was that cousin in Dennison, Iowa, who was his nearest kin. Rus rebelled at the idea of the cousin inheriting the cow ranch. They had never liked each other, even in their boyhood days.

His thoughts swung back to Sandy. She was a game fighter, all right. It was hard grubbing on that little homestead. Rus knew she hated the rodeo game, but she rode at every one where she could get a contract, for it brought money to farm through the winter. When the season was over Sandy Laird shed the brilliant habiliments of the arena, donned copper-riveted pants, range shirt, and scuffed boots, and ranched. The idea that no one might think to help her with such things as shingling or the roundup pestered Rus.

He watched the movements in the arena with a professional slant to his eye, but his regard was superficial. His inner thoughts were a jumble of the disliked cousin running his cattle ranch, and enjoying the little stake he had worked hard to develop into a real ranch for Daisy and himself, of Sandy Laird fighting the war of range life without a whimper, and of the smashed wreckage of a dream of a ranch home near the Wind River in which Daisy Haney had figured. . . .
Rus slid his lanky, muscle-corded body from the fence. He clumped toward the exit of Pioneer Park.

After all, he had no license to worry. He would be out of it all after tomorrow. He wondered why the devil a man who knew he was going to be killed while a crowd held its breath expectantly was so inclined to get stirred up over such things as who would inherit a ranch, or how a brave, freckle-faced girl and a crippled old puncher would get along on a dry-land homestead.

Evening came, then night crept over the plains while lights blazed in Cheyenne and crowds milled on the sidewalk or hurried out to Frontier Park to find tenderfoot excitement in replicas of old saloons or gambling-halls serving near-beer and dealing in stage-money.

Rus Kennedy remained in town. He showed his way into the back room of Frontier Headquarters. There was no paper money here except that guaranteed by the United States Treasury. Cards turned, dice clicked, money changed hands, cigar- and cigarette-smoke filled the high-walled old room. Bunched in the room were many of the male stars of the then heaxes. It was their exclusive retreat where those who belonged to the copper-riveted fraternity flirted with the vagaries of luck and chance. A few of the girls drifted in, watched the games, perhaps bet on the turn of a blackjack card, and drifted out. The men milled and shifted from one game to another.

Rus had thought that he could dismiss with a gesture the problems that had come to face him that afternoon. Before Sandy had talked to him he had been thinking so miserably of how Daisy Haney had ripped his desire to live out of him and how well he had laid his plans to escape this life, that he had not been concerned with problems of others.

He wandered out on the street, turning over schemes by which he might help the Lairds without their upsetting plans he might make. Scotty and Sandy were both proud. If that cousin would contest any will Rus might make, the Lairds would not fight back. Probably if they should find that Rus had willed them his property they would refuse to take it. He knew well their fierce aversion to charity and if they declined to accept the terms of any will, he would not be present to force the thing through by some new scheme. Whatever he did must be so final that no one, not even Lairds themselves, could upset it.

Rus jostled through a crowd around a stand. He stumbled up a stairway to a dance-hall above a store building. He edged into the shadow near the door among the milling punchers and townspeople. He saw Daisy Haney swinging in the arms of big, dark-eyed Curly Dixon. Just seeing her there in another man's arms made Rus feel as if some one had kicked him in the pit of the stomach.

He turned and shoved his way outside. He realized he had not eaten, and when he saw a "hot-dog" stand, he laid down the price of soda pop and a wiener sandwich.

A HAND touched his arm, and Rus turned to face Sandy.

"Gettin' supper," replied Rus. "But you can join in. Here, have a hot-dog."

"Rus," she said sharply, "you mean you've not eaten anything until now? I thought grown men had more sense—but I guess you haven't. Here, we'll go over to the Mayflower and get you a steak. Come on! You'll get sick eating this stuff instead of a real meal."

She tugged at Rus' arm. He looked at her, wondering a bit. Women were funny with men—bossing them around about what they should eat or wear! He could not fathom why Sandy Laird cared a hoot in a whirlwind why he had not had a full meal. He started away. Sandy laid her hand on his sleeve again.

"Won't you please take care of yourself, Rus?" she asked. There was some obscure quality in her voice that sent his temper surging.

"No," he snapped shortly. "Damn it, leave me alone!"

He shoved through the crowd. She did not follow.

US shoved roughly through the mob toward the capitol grounds, and found a cool spot in the cottonwood-canopied grove. Tangled ideas were swirling in his head like whirlwinds on heat-baked desert stretches. All were hazy, but inspiration had suggested a plan for handling the problem of the cousin inheriting the ranch. . . .

Rus walked back toward the center of town with determination in his stride. He sought a snug room where glasses held something stronger than soda pop. He downed one, then another. The thing he had determined to do needed the false courage of potent spirits to keep him from backing out. There was trickery about it, but it was a sure winner; it would certainly beat that cousin out of a chance to grab the ranch that Rus had hoped to share with Daisy Haney.

Fragments of talk came to him. Something familiar caught his attention.

"They are going to put Pitch Dark in the arena tomorrow afternoon," declared a red-faced puncher. "I saw it in the Post this evening. Great stunt!"

"Some one honin' to get killed, I reckon," broke in a sandy-haired kid from beyond Saratoga. Rus recognized him; he had worked on the K Lazy B one summer.

"Nother job for the ambulance."

"But I thought the management had decided that they'd not risk puttin' that outlaw into the contest," broke in a third puncher bedecked with rodeo finery.

"No contest," said the first man. "Special stunt. Some crazy galoot—unknown rider, it says—is goin' to ride Pitch Dark blindfolded."

"Blindfolded! The hell!" Voices jumbled, trying all to talk at once. "That's what I said," came the voice of the red-faced puncher. "I read it in the Post tonight; an' I ast Tim Olds over to headquarters, an' he said—"

"Get his neck cracked if—"

"Only Tim Olds knows who it is that's goin'—"

"Of all the cock-eyed ways to commit suicide this is—"

Rus threw down another glass of the colorless fire that the bartender served from an unlabeled bottle. He bought it for whisky, but it was raw, inflaming stuff. He turned from the bar—caught more of the argument in the group that clustered tightly around the red-faced puncher.

As Rus walked out into the street again, he told himself that their chatter did not interest him.

At a news-stand Rus bought a paper. Plastered over the first page was the announcement that on the morrow Pitch Dark would be turned loose in the arena with a blindfolded rider on his back. It was to be a mystery surprise stunt. Rus read hurriedly.

"Ought to draw a crowd," the newsdealer commented.

"Yeh," agreed Rus. "Ought to."

"He won't last long," commented the newsmen.

"Reckon not," agreed Rus. He thrust the paper in his pocket. The story he had read interested him but mildly. His own problems, just ahead, cried out for his attention.

Some of the smoldering recklessness that lay hidden in the liquor he had taken suffused Rus. He started toward the dance-hall. He had decided he must talk to Sandy Laird now.

He fought his way up the steps, shoved through the mass at the door, bought a ticket so there would be no question about his right on the floor. He reached the jam of humans around the perimeter of the dance-floor. Searching, he looked directly into the wide blue eyes of
Daisy Haney. She stared at him, then turned deliberately away. Rus smiled sardonically.

He walked by her without again glancing at her; he felt her eyes on him, questioning. Then Rus saw Sandy Laird at the far end of the hall. She was in a neat little brown suit tonight. She looked more like a woman in these clothes, thought Rus. Less like a supple kid than when clothed in breeches and shirt. He walked directly to her. The music started.

"Dance, Sandy?" he said, offering his arm. She stood up, a question starting from her lips. A pink-gowned fat woman propelled by a determined little man with bald head and a droopy mustache, careened into them. Sandy was thrown abruptly into Rus Kennedy's arms. He felt for that brief instant the warmth of her body close to his, the caress of her hair as it touched his cheek. There was an odd breathlessness in that instant that startled Rus, made him feel slightly unsteady, a thing the liquor had failed to do.

Her question was lost. For a moment they forced their way through the dancing crowd.

Then Rus talked, his mouth close to her ear. Only once she stopped him.

"You've been drinking, Rus," she declared. "You don't mean this!"

"I'm in my right mind," Rus assured her. "I know what I'm saying. You said this afternoon you'd do anything for me. Here's your chance, Sandy! Now listen..."

Again he argued earnestly. The dance ended. She had not replied. The dance started again. Sandy Laird dared not look at Rus Kennedy, but she could not escape the words he poured into her ear... Before the dance ended Rus guided Sandy Laird through to the door.

Green lights flashed in Daisy Haney's blue eyes as she saw that exit; she was snappy to Curly Dixon for the rest of the evening and Dixon, striving to please this acknowledged queen among rodeo queens, was puzzled, then hurt, and finally grew snappier and crabbled himself.

CHEYENNE was filled with one of the biggest crowds it had ever seen, the next morning. The special trains from Denver were loaded. Some reckless daredevil was going to try to ride Pitch Dark while blindfolded. It meant a killing there in the arena. A man with his full sight could barely elude the killer horse when once thrown to the ground; a man with his eyes blinded stood no chance at all.

The crowd, firmly convinced as to what would happen, streamed toward Frontier Park, filling the stands and spilling over into the area around the track. They were eager to see the killing.

Tim Olds, the lanky, sorrel-haired arena boss, squinted over the crowd from where he sat a blaze-faced bay. Tim knew who was going to ride Pitch Dark—or rather try to. At the moment he was touched with misgiving. He had tried to argue against this proposition, but it had been the other fellow's proposal. Tim grudgingly admitted this stunt ride had filled the stands.

Pitch Dark was in the corrals. It had not been altogether the decision of the management that no life and limb should be risked that had kept the man-killer out of the regular bucking contests. Wild bronc's were the regular fare at Frontier Days—the wildest the more welcome. But a goodly group of the most fearless riders in the game had agreed that it was next to courting a siege in the hospital to allow anyone to leave the chutes on the blood-crazy black, and had so advised the officials. They were not afraid, only sensible.

Just when Pitch Dark as a drawing-card had seemed doomed for this show, this chance for the spectacular mystery ride had walked into Tim Olds' office on two perfectly good legs and Tim had allowed the other man to argue him into scheduling this freak stunt. Now Tim wondered if he had been foolish to spread the news so widely. Rus Kennedy might not show up!

Then Tim Olds discarded that idea. Kennedy had signed the contract without a flicker of protest. He had not come back to try and get out of it. Rus Kennedy's word was good; his signature on a piece of paper amounted to a guarantee.

"You must want to die," Tim had observed as they had exchanged copies of the typewritten agreement.

"Might look that way," Kennedy had replied, eying the lanky arena boss steadily. "I've got a good reason for offering to do this. I'll ride that horse or die in the—Well, I'll have a try at it!"

Tim Olds had grunted and accepted a brilliant mystery attraction. He thought he knew why Rus had proposed this. Olds had heard the gossip. Kennedy wanted to show he was not afraid to ride the worst outlaw in the arena even if he did get spilled. Olds decided the blindfold was merely a grandstand gesture.

During the forenoon he had not seen Rus, and now halfway down the program he had failed to find him. Tim Olds rode around the end of the chutes. He could not inquire for Rus, or the rumor of who was going to ride Pitch Dark blindfolded would run over the park like a prairie fire. That was one of the big secrets of the game. The rider and his name were to be a mystery—until afterward.

It was back of the Sioux tepees that Tim Olds found the mystery rider, sitting with his back to a little stack
place of quiet back of the Sioux village. All of the old poignant hurt and bitterness Daisy had thrown into Rus when she had lashed him with her tongue after Soot had dumped him came back to torment him. Rus congratulated himself on having thought up this idea he had proposed to Olds.

The night before he had tricked Sandy Laird—and if he didn't go through with what was ahead of him now he'd be a dirty lowdown hound! He never would have played that trick on Sandy if he hadn't been sure Pitch Dark would kill him. Besides that, there was the crowd; and the matter of the contract with Tim Olds.

He was going through. A fleeting remembrance of Sandy in his arms stabbed at him. He cast it from him angrily; he had done that more than once since the night before.

He hurried now, around the track toward the chutes; he dodged behind cars; he hoped he would not meet anyone he knew. He glanced at the crowds, then ahead to the chutes. He saw Tim Olds and a knot of men around a gate in front of the chutes. He knew his saddle was in there, cinched to Pitch Dark. The burlap was still keeping the identity of the mystery rider a secret. He had left that saddle with Tim Olds the day before to have that mask put on it so there would be no give-away of the mystery until the last minute. He wanted this last ride in his own saddle...

Rus Kennedy hurried on. This business of getting kicked to death was like drinking down some disagreeable medicine; he reckoned that it would not take long. Pitch Dark was certain to clip him one on the head first jump—that would make him unconscious. After that he would be out of it, unless the soul that the horse would kick out of his mangled body could be there standing at one side watching how they acted when they found who the blinded rider had been.

There was no question in Rus Kennedy's mind. He had sought this method of making one last play. He was game to see it through. He wanted Daisy to be sorry—and to remember.

A reckless, defiant mood gripped him; he was anxious to get it over with now. The crowd was yelling. They would get their money's worth, all right! They had come wondering if Pitch Dark would get his man. They would find out.

Rus slid between two cars parked by the fence, slipped past the pop stand, sidled along the corrals back of the chutes.

He stopped. Sandy Laird stood in his way. She was not in her riding togs. Rus wondered why.

"Rus—" she began. There was some quality in her voice that sent an odd emotion racing through him. "Rus,
tell me: Are you—is this why—” She stopped, her voice trailing miserably. She held out her hand. In it was the duplicate of the contract he had signed with Tim Olds two nights before.

“Where did you get that?” he demanded; his voice was rough, harsh.

“From the pocket of the shirt you wore yesterday,” she whispered.

“Where did you get my shirt?”

“In the room,” she said. “Rus—Rus, you can’t! You must not do this!”

Rus Kennedy looked into the girl’s eyes. Some giant force there caught him, held him, swaying. He turned away from her. She caught his sleeve.

“Listen to me,” she cried. “I tell you, I’ll not let you, Rus! You’ve got to listen to me. You’ve got to!” Those words were half sob, half command. They cut deep into the soul of Rus Kennedy, twisted him until there was a catch in his throat. There was something in Sandy’s voice he had never heard in the voice of a woman speaking to him. Yet he knew what it was. He jerked away. She caught at his sleeve again.

“Rus—Rus, listen,” she was saying. “You can’t—you must not, Rus. You owe something to me, Rus. Last night you—Oh, listen to me, Rus, please, please—”

On top of the judges’ stand the electric announcing system bellowed. Rus heard it dully.

“Now,” bawled the great voice of the horn, “comes the most spectacular feat of the show! The masked unknown, the hooded marvel, is to ride the man-killer Pitch Dark. This horse has killed—”

“Rus, I’ll die if anything—Oh, you can’t risk it!” cried Sandy desperately. “I’ll not let you! I forbid you!”

He jerked away. He had seen Tim Olds beyond the corner of the corral. He stumbled toward Olds. Rus heard a little cry behind him, a cry that wrenched his heart. Sandy Laird was a good little sport. She really cared. And he had tricked her—like a scoundrel!

Rus hurried toward Olds.

“Horse is in there,” said Olds. “It’s going to surprise ’em.”

“Shore is,” agreed Rus. His voice seemed far away. He reached inside his shirt and slipped out a pillow-case. He turned and looked back to where he had left Sandy. No one had seen, no one had paid attention to that moment when they had stood there while Rus Kennedy saw the truth in her eyes, heard it in her voice.

She was huddled on the ground, a forlorn little brown heap. She was sobbing, the storm of her emotion shaking her slim body.

Rus strode back. Olds stood watching. He felt drama surging around these two, and was puzzled. Rus stooped and touched the girl. She looked up, eyes streaming.

“You cheated me,” she sobbed. “You’ve broken my heart, Rus! Go away—don’t touch me! I hate you, hate you!” She shook off his hand.

For a moment Rus stood irresolutely above her. Then with a whirl he turned toward the chutes.

He piled over the plank barrier and poised, ready to drop into the saddle. The gatesman on the chute saw his face. Rus heard him swear in surprise. The electric announcer bellowed more drivel about the masked marvel riding Pitch Dark. Rus caught one good look at the quivering horse below him. Pitch Dark crouched, ready to go hurtling into the arena, his whole body tense, filled with the hate of the man-scent, the man-touch.

With a jerk Rus pulled down that masking pillow-slip over his head. He dropped into the saddle. He heard the gatesman swearing again. The saddle, unveiled when Rus jerked the burlap from it, confirmed that glimpse the gatesman had had of the masked marvel.

But only that gatesman and Olds knew—and Sandy back there crying her heart out as she crouched on the dusty ground.

“Watch chute Number Three,” bawled the electric voice of the big horns. “Watch chute Number Three.”

“Cut her loose,” snapped Rus. His knees tightened. He felt the horse squat, quivering, under him. Then he heard the gate swing free, and out of the high-barred stall the horse leaped.

Swaying, plunging, diving, the black demon shot into the open.

The crowd around the chutes scuttled.

Up, down, hitting the dirt with feet spraddled, Pitch Dark bounded and weaved. He turned end to end. He reared, up, up, until it seemed he would topple over.

Rus Kennedy instinctively caught each sway of the big black’s body. He was weaving as the horse weaved. He was catching the jolts, as the horse came down with the force of a battering-ram.

Slaming the ground with his feet, the horse dived into the unseen ahead. Rus had the impulse to snatch the pillowel from his head so he could see. He heard the rising tide of yells, calls, shouts, as they went careening out from the chutes. Mingled with the shouts of the spectators was the grunting squeal of the man-killer under him. Surging up, in the dim whiteness of that blinding hood coming down with the driving power of a collision—swaying again, whirling. The saddle under him seemed cinched to a cyclone mad with killing. Yet every time he came down Rus Kennedy landed astride the saddle.

He was fighting, fighting! He must stay on!

Some great triumphant force seemed to start down near his boot-heels and climb up to engulf him; some triumphant mean of fighting mastery caught and irresistibly held him.

He was mastering this horse! He was fighting through!

He was sticking in the saddle without pulling leather, sticking in spite of the blindfold that obscured his vision. Things were not going as everyone had expected.

With a sweep he threw up his hand and jerked off the mask.

The end of this ride would bring a real surprise. There would not be a bunch of pawed clothing, bloodstained and crumpled with what was left of a man inside of it, dragged from the field in a clanging ambulance.

He caught the hazy outline of the stands. The yelling came clearer now to his ears. Shouts were welling up into a roar in the stands, a roar that was sweeping over the field, a flood of sound that momentarily beat with ever-increasing force. He could not see the stands. They were hazy and reeling as the horse fought and swayed. But he knew spectators were on their feet, hats waving, throats horse from the shouting.

Rus Kennedy laughed a wild, crazy laugh—the laugh of a man pardoned from death.

He yelled exultantly. And Pitch Dark threw every last bit of fight, of devilish ingenuity into his final desperate effort. They went careening in dizzy, diving leaps over the arena, slamming up, slamming down, and still Rus sat the saddle in triumph. His arm was free. Again he yelled wildly.

For there had been no vision of this horse leaping to kill him when he had come plunging out of that chute; there was none of that phantom of fear that had thrown him from the saddle on the backs of easy-buckling blacks! Instead there had been the vision of that little brown form huddled back there on the ground, the one that had sobbed
heartbrokenly, and stormed at him that he must not ride.

He knew that never again would he face that mental terror of black death that had haunted him for months when he had ridden horses of ebony coat. Instead, there was something in its place. That something was the face of Sandy Laird. He had to ride—so he could go back to her!

Whirling, kicking, grunting in thwarted anger, the big black went hurtling back toward the chutes. Rus saw the crowd scatter before him. He heard a fresh roar start as the pick-up man reached him, lifted him clear, swung him to safety.

The next moment he was the center of milling, charging wild riders, ropers and bronc-peaters. They swarmed down on him like bees. He fought toward the fence. He barely stopped to shake a hand that had not been extended to him for months. He saw Curly Dixon shoving into the mass and behind Curly was Daisy Haney. There was a wide smile on her pretty face.

Rus turned from them impatiently; eagerly he sought one face, one figure—and it was not Daisy’s. Rus jammed his way toward Sandy!

He saw her by the chutes. At the moment he realized that she had understood the last desperate frontier of despair that had caught him and thrown him into the mad ride. Rus sensed too, as he saw her there, that Sandy would not have to be told why he had triumphed.

“Great ride,” cried Curly Dixon, parrotlike, for many others were saying the same. He slapped Rus on the back in new-found camaraderie.

“Oh, Rus,” burst out Daisy, “that was wonderful! Simply wonderful!” She laid her hand on his arm. Rus jerked free. He suddenly found Daisy shallow and irritating.

He saw tears in Sandy’s eyes as he reached her. He hoped she would not cry in front of this bunch; he wanted her to be brave. Rus knew they were tears of joy. Some new understanding existed between them. He realized this, but he could not explain it.

“We’re goin’ home, partner!” said Rus hungrily. He grabbed both her hands. “Let’s get out tonight. We can drive it before sun-up. We’re both goin’ to live on that ranch. I thought last night when I stamped on you and married you, that you’d certainly get it after Pitch Dark did his stuff today. An’ then I realized jest before I straddled that bronc’ that you maybe needed me, even more’n the ranch. Somethin’ happened—and I rode him, because I was thinkin’ about how much I wanted to come back an’ be with you.”

“But, Rus,” protested Sandy, her face tearful, her eyes lifted to try to read his own. He wanted to kiss her then, but that cheering crowd still milled around them.

“Rus, you went out there to get killed by that horse because—”

“But I rode him because I wanted to come back,” broke in Rus.

She cried then, cried from happiness—and her head sought Rus’ shoulder while his arms enfolded her. But she smiled gallantly as Rus lifted her chin and kissed her before everyone in the arena, kissed her not once but several times.

Tim Olds, looking down at a check with three figures on it, wrinkled his brow and pursed his lips. He glanced to where a new wedding-ring glinted on Sandy’s finger. Slowly he turned toward the judges’ stand, as he tore up the check.

“That ain’t enough money fer a real honeymoon,” he mused as he tossed the paper away. “I’m goin’ to double it, by gosh!”
The stars had vanished, the air was murky, and in the pilot-house Lou Divine was using the searchlight—questing to starboard and larboard for his marks, so that the banks and trees of the shores on either hand were shot with the beams of untimely day, and Sundering the upstream darkness with a long shaft of tremulous white.

Now and then he shut it off—until a blaze of lightning dazzled him and he resorted once more to the lamp. The roll of thunder was incessant, the play of lightning high above the northern horizon was continual, as the storm bore downriver.

The mate mounted the texas stairs, stumbled forward to the pilot-house, opened the door and stepped inside.

There was no glimmer of any kind in that house. Pilot Divine, grasping the spokes and peering out over the raised breast-board of the forward window, with cap pulled down against the breeze, could be seen only by the lightning-flashes. The cub pilot, a freckled nervy youngster learning the river, sat upon the bench. Mike sensed Divine bristle at the opening and closing of the door.

“Well, what’s wanted?”

“It’s me, Lou—the mate. I didn’t like to shout up to you. The Captain’s powerfully sick. We found a doctor aboard and he says the old man’s got to be put into a hospital in the quickest time possible.”

“Sorry to hear that,” said Divine between his teeth, as he wrested at the wheel, and held her. “But I can’t talk to you now. You ought to know better than to bother me by coming in here at this time.”

“Yes,” replied the mate. “But I had to come to tell you, Lou. The Captain’s got to be landed at a hospital inside an hour and a half. If he isn’t, he’s a goner, the doctor says. There’s a hospital over there at Nestor, just ahead. We’ll have to try to make the Nestor landing.”

Divine half turned. “No, we won’t—not tonight, while I’m on watch at the wheel!”

“Maybe we’ll be abreast of Jackson’s Crossing shortly, won’t we?” Mike pleaded. “You know that cut-off that the King used to use. You’ve been through it, Lou. You can do it again. This is a case of life or death.”

The boat shook to the impact of the wind. The thunder was deafening, and the first scud of rain volleyed against the house and in above the breastboard.

“Yes, I know Jackson’s Crossing and I’ve been through it—but I’m not going through it tonight,” growled Divine. He added: “I’d like to help Captain Nuckolls—but he’s only one man, and I’ve three hundred men, women and children depending on me while I’m at the wheel. If I did get this boat through between those two towheads and into that chute without snatching the stacks out of her on that upper bar, I never could fetch that landing in that current and this wind. The chute’s mean enough, at best. I’d have to risk piling into the bank; and I won’t do it.”

“By God, something’s got to be done!” the mate swore.

“Are you aiming to give the pilot orders, Mr. Mate?” Divine said levelly.

“Yes sir. While the Captain’s laid up I’m running this boat for him.”

“You’re not running the pilot-house or anything else on the roof of the texas, and neither is he.” Divine tersely laughed as he squinted ahead into the rain-riven path of the searchlight. “Captain Nuckolls set out to give orders to the wheel once before. You remember what happened, don’t you?”

“When?”

“On the Bald Eagle, to King Jackson,” Divine snapped. “I’ll be no King Jackson! Shut that door behind you and go down where you belong.”

The mate wrathfully backed out. As he staggered for the stairs he encountered a man just coming up and was hailed with the exclamation:

“King Jackson’s down on the main-deck!”

By the blaze of lightning he saw the wet slickered figure and white, anxious face of the “mud clerk,” or second clerk, his watch partner, who evidently had come seeking him. The pilot’s words blown through the doorway had struck the clerk’s ears.

“How do you know?”

“He passed aboard back at Dubuque while I was checking freight. The old man’s worse, Mike: the doctor wants to know what you’re going to do. Is it Nestor? We’re almost opposite Jackson’s Crossing. Judas!”

The two clung to one another, for footing. The thunder and lightning and lash of rain were overpowering.

“Divine won’t take the chance,” the mate gasped. “But we’ll make that crossing. Get King Jackson. Tell him he’s wanted up on the texas at once.”

The mud clerk scuttled down the stairs and across the hurricane deck and down. Following, to cover in the lee of the texas, outside the shutters of the Captain’s state-room, Mike could hear, at times, Nuckoll’s groans and the muffled, reassuring tone of the doctor; and he caught the music and laughter of the main salon underneath the roof—while the Pride of Quincy, with her stacks spewing red-hot cinders and tugging at their stays and all her frame throbbing to the mighty revolutions of her engines driving the churning wheel, bucked the rough water and the gale
and the volleying rain—and Divine’s searchlight swept the
glistening expanse of tossing river and storm-thrashed
wooded shores. It rested for a moment upon islands ahead
off the starboard, as if considering them; it probed a black
channel between—the narrow channel of Jackson’s Cross-
ing; then abruptly swung away and was dosed, as though
it had seen enough.
To judge by that, Lou’s decision was unchanged. But
Jackson’s crossing would soon be abeam! Now, was the
King coming? Would the King come at the bidding of a
mud clerk, sent by a mate? And what would he say, if he
came?
The mate fidgeted. In there the doctor was waiting be-
side a dying man. Where was the mud clerk? Had he
failed to locate the King, or to persuade him? Likely
enough. And, stirring from shelter, Farley impulsively
bolted for the texas stairs again. Pending the arrival of
the King he would wrestle with Divine once more.

AGAIN he was inside the pilot-house. He heard Di-
vine’s angry growl:

“What are you after now?”

“We’re going to make that levee,” Farley hotly replied.
And then the door behind him furiously opened and
closed and the challenge broke: “Who wants me on the
texas, and why?”

“Now who in hell are you?” Divine flung back, over his
shoulder.

“I’ve brought King Jackson to help us run that Cross-
ing, Lou,” the mate answered.

“Jackson! He’s aboard, is he? All right—he can get
out of this house and so can you!”

The King spoke. The lightning showed him poor and
unshaven and with his clothing soaked.

“What crossing?”

“Jackson’s Crossing—your crossing, King,” said the
mate. “The cut-off to Nestor that you used to save time.
The Captain’s deathly sick and we’ve got to put him and
the doctor ashore for the Nestor hospital. Mr. Divine
won’t risk the boat. Either you take the wheel or I’ll take
it and you coach me. You know that crossing if any man
does?”

“And you both know I’m pilot here,” Divine roared.

“I’ll give you one minute to clear the house!”

“I’ll give you one minute to turn over that wheel, or I’ll
choke you off it!” the mate bawled.

“Hold on!” the King warned. “I’ll go back down!”

“I’ll not hold on!” Farley’s hand clapped heavily upon
Divine’s shoulder and hurled him aside. “The Captain’s
got to be put ashore.”

“You strike the pilot and seize the ship, do you?” Di-
vine panted, struggling for position again. “If we both live
out this night I’ll see you in irons for the Federal pen!”

“Watch sharp there!” The King had felt the boat in-
stantly fall away; he and the cub sprang for the spinning
wheel. The King was first. The searchlight was off, but
in a silence punctuated by the thunder-crashes and the
quick breathings of mate and pilot and frightened cub, he
brought her round by pilot’s sense.

“Take this wheel, somebody,” he appealed. He waited,
while he coaxed the boat upon her course, through the
night, into the storm. Every instinct of his profession
forbade him to drop the spokes until he was relieved. “If you
want to try the crossing I’m willing to stand by, if I’m
asked to.”

“Nobody else shall take that wheel,” the mate declared.
“We’re going to save the Captain’s life, King. Put her
through—and for God’s sake find your marks! You’ve
no time to lose.”

Divine turned about and sat down upon the bench.

“You’ve seized the wheel from me,” he said. “Very
well. Pile us up. I wash my hands of the whole affair.”

The King abruptly jerked the jingler for the half-speed
bell, and the boat’s way slackened.

“Tou see I can’t leave the wheel,” he appealed again.
“Take it. Or do I act cub? Shall I try the crossing, Lou?”

“If you’re fool enough to wreck another boat. But I
warn you!” And Divine repeated: “I wash my hands of
the whole thing.”

“Do it, King! You can. We’ve got to save the Cap-
tain,” the mate implored desperately.

Would he try it? Dared he try it? The boat was barely
holding her own against wind and current, while he hesi-
tated. He asked:

“What boat’s this?” Either he had not noticed, or he
had forgotten—the mud clerk had roused him from sleep
under the warm boilers.

“Pride of Quincy,” the mate answered hopefully.

“A good boat, but you have to meet her mighty quick
as she swings or she’ll run away with you,” the King com-
mented. He said: “Water’s at nine-foot stage and falling, I
believe.”

“Yes,” Divine at last grudgingly replied. “And that
means there’ll be scant four on Saddle Bar of the crossing.
You’ll snatch the stacks out of her, for she’s drawing four
and a half.”

The mate scarcely breathed. With sudden decision the
King jingled the full-speed bell. The boat shivered and
plunged ahead. Something of his old confidence appeared
to have infused him, from the touch of the wheel spokes.

“All right. I’ll make the crossing. It’s worth trying if
that’ll save the Captain.”

“You will!” Divine muttered. And sarcastically added:

“Thank God, the mate’s not at the wheel, anyway.”

“Just where are we?” The King signaled down the en-
gine-room tube for the searchlight, and flooded the dark-
ness on the starboard quarter. The light dwelt upon the
island directly opposite—the lower towhead. Assuredly
there was no time to lose. “I see,” he murmured. “We’re
off the crossing.” Ever so gently he shifted the helm, half
spoke by half spoke, and the gale and the rain began to
churn the house from a new angle. He was going to
try it!

The breast-board was up, and Divine had also let down
the head-board until only a slit of outlook remained, to
serve the pilot’s eyes. The mate stood erect and squatting,
the better to see; Divine, with cupped hands defiantly
lighting a cigar, stayed where he was, dourly sitting in his
corner, upon the bench. The cub seemed glued in the
other corner.

THE storm was in its zenith—thunder, lightning, wind
and rain. A tornado had crossed the river, below, and
the Pride of Quincy was in the suck of it. Like a
panicky animal ridden by fear she shied from the vivid
bolts, the slam of the rollers breaking against her hull and
gunwales, and those terrific gusts tearing at her upper
works. In the play of the searchlight across the white-
capped black water the sheets of rain looked like a myriad
glinting arrows—borne upon the wind the long drops hissed
through the window-slit and weather sashes of the pilot-
house and spattered from wall to wall.

Gripping the wheel, the King called down the speak-
tube:

“We’re going to make the crossing. Stand by to crack
it to her when I give the word. We’ll need all she’ll take.”

The answer was a fresh spew of cinder sparks from the
tall stacks as the firemen below decks rattled the slice-
bars. The stacks vomited billows of sulphurous smoke as
the coal was fed into the blinking furnace doors. Straight-
ened by the wind, the smoke was whipped far to le'ard while, fast to the wheel, the King, holding her steady with hand and foot, worked her into the east.

Thus, buffeted by the quartering seas and gale, with her taut tiller-ropes creaking and her driving paddles pounding, under billowing stacks the Pride of Quincy, fighting the rudder, a terrorized horse fights bit and spur, gradually headed for the Jackson's Crossing cut-off into Pig-eye Chute.

The channel between the two towheads opened little by little to the shifting searchlight. The rays, tinsel'd with the sheen of the rapid slanting downpour, flickered upon the bending trees of the island points, gleamed upon the dark, heaving current within the crossing's maw, and now and then penetrating on, flashed upon the troubled surface of the chute and upon the wet sand and snaggy water-line of the mainland bank.

The mud clerk was occasionally to be glimpsed on watch upon the hurricane-deck, beside the bell forward of the stacks. The electric vigor of the storm seemed to be waning. The lightning center had traveled southward, to illumine the zenith there with broad glares, and the thunder had become sullen and muttersome. The deluging downpour somewhat relaxed, but the suck of air was still ferocious, and the racing waves, no longer flattened by the flails of the rain, ran higher, so that the careening boat staggered.

It looked as though in ten minutes more they would be into the crossing. In the searchlight focus, the opening and the guardian towheads, with the lower one crouched a little inshore, loomed large and ugly. In the pilot-house not another word had been uttered, when, holding her true to her course with masterful allowance for wind and current, the King shattered the tense silence with a question:

"Who is the Captain?"

The mate started. The King did not know—had the mud clerk not said? The silence tensed again, awaiting the reply. The King testily challenged:

"Who is he, I ask?"

Divine said—and softly laughed:

"Why, Nuckolls—your old friend Captain Nuckolls, King. He's the patient under the texas, for Nestor."

The King gave a sharp ejaculation; with hardly a pause between he jerked the stop bell and the backing bell. The Pride of Quincy plowed sluggishly on with paddles idle, and then shivered to the drag of her engines in reverse. In the searchlight the towheads began to drift upstream and the entrance of the cut to close, while the King vigorously twirled the wheel to waltz her away from danger. He again ejaculated:

"Bill Nuckolls! Nuckolls on the Pride of Quincy?"

He rang the slow bell, for go ahead. "I've straightened her out. Take the wheel, Divine. Good night. I'm going down—and Bill Nuckolls can go to hell!"

The mate sprang for him.

"No! We know he broke you, Jackson. But forget that, can't you? He's a man; he's got a family; he's in that state room sick as a dog and only the hospital and the knife'll save him. You started in to run that crossing—" he said you could and would. Do you quit now—and let a man die?"

"Man! Supposing I'd had a family? And you ask me to take this boat and those passengers through that crossing in a night like this to oblige Bill Nuckolls again?"

From his corner Divine cried out as he started up:

"Watch sharp! She's falling away! You can't hold her with a slow bell, King! Ring full speed and give me that wheel or you'll wreck her anyway! I'll take her on." And he added: "There'll be no crossing tonight and I knew it."

But something of the changes of direction and of the uncertainties in the pilot-house must have communicated itself to the texas cabin, for from forward the mud clerk was hailing through trumpeted hands:

"Hello, in the pilot-house! The Captain wants to know what's the matter up there. Who's at the wheel?"

The King pulled the jingler for full speed and throwing the wheel over answered instantly:

"Tell Bill Nuckolls he's going into the Nestor crossing with King Jackson at the wheel."

The King's voice expressed such triumph and new, grim determination that the mate chilled. With a mutter Divine settled into his corner; his cigar winked uneasily. What Captain Nuckolls, helpless in his berth underneath the pilot-house, would think when he received that message, who could say? He knew the crossing; the animus of Jackson, so inexplicably at that wheel, he could only guess.

But the Captain seemed to have lapsed into a merciful semiconsciousness, for no further word from him was passed up.

"I told Nuckolls that my day would come!" Jackson asserted gloatingly.
Fearful suspicion clutched the mate. The suspicion seemed to permeate the pilot-house—to stifle the quick breathing of the cub in his corner, and to mark time in the glow of Divine's cigar, in the other corner. There should be no struggle for the wheel, however, at this critical juncture.

The music from below, where the passengers bravely sported, welled into the night like an exorcism of evil, and the King was holding upon his marks as though he intended to go through.

Barring accident of wind, wave, rudders or engines, upon this course and with that steady hand he would go through. But in these final spasms of the storm never had the gusts, striking abeam, been more nasty, nor the rapid rollers so high, nor the night, turbid with rain, so black. Now at full speed ahead the Pride of Quincy, shedding meteoric sparks, ablaze with light from boiler-deck and furnace-doors, smashing the breakers with her weather gunwales and ever urged on by her sixteen-foot buckets, in the wake of her cleaving searchlight charged for Jackson's Crossing into Pig-eye Chute.

"Get me a cup of hot coffee, somebody, with a pony of brandy in it," the King ordered. "You'd better wait, King," Divine ventured. "Remember that other time."

"Fetch me up that coffee and don't forget the brandy," the King snarled. "Tell the next board what you please—but I tell you I'm half frozen."

Sure enough, his teeth were chattering. Divine and the mate had on their storm-cothes, but he was standing to the wind and rain and was sopping wet. Yet to what bitter deed might he not be nerving himself? Nevertheless the cub darted out obediently, and the door slammed behind him.

The lower towhead went dancing downstream; the cut-off channel again opened—the Pride of Quincy's gleaming cyclops eye shone upon the near shelving point of the upper towhead and dissolving the darkness beyond glimmered upon the chute and the farther bank.

The cub bolted into the house with the steaming, redolent cup of coffee. The King, poised at the wheel, jerked the handle of the engineer's bell and briefly clapped his lips to the speaking-tube:

"Crack it to her!"

With hand and foot clamped to the spokes he reached into the gloom for the cup, and hastily gulped. The engine-room had heard the order; the engine-room obeyed. The stacks roared. They erupted with a livid stream of cinders and chunks of fiery coal hoisted upon the forced draft of the blowers. The Pride of Quincy quivered to the spur and lunged for the goal. The cut-off channel swiftly widened, the towheads waited almost stationery.

"By Henry, either he'll tear the bottom out of her, or we'll go through like a bat out of hell!" Divine muttered to the mate.

They were in! They were in! No! Divine, the mate, the cub, exclaimed together. The searchlight feebly sputtered, and died. Except for the spouting stacks, the lurid flare from the furnaces, the faint shimmer from the main cabin chandelier lamps reflected through the hurricane deck transom sky-lights, and the lanterned red and green sidelights at the chimney tops, the boat was plunged into darkness with distances revealed by only the flicker of pale lightnings.

Divine, instantly on his feet, cried out:

"The dynamo's gone, King! Shut off! Set her back! You'll never make it."

The cup shattered upon the floor. The King's voice rang imperiously.

"Yes, I'll make it!" The engine bells jangled. He shouted into the speaking-tube: "Shut off those blowers. Give her half speed. Shroud those furnaces. Fix that dynamo if you can, but stand by on the jump for the bells."

He chucked the head-board up.

"Yes, sir," from below the chief engineer's reply sounded thinly.

The King bellowed to the mud clerk on watch: "Shroud those hurricane transoms!" and fiercely barked over his shoulder, at Divine: "Damn you, douse that cigar!" But Farley the mate already had dived for the door. The mud clerk struck the bell for the deck-hands, and Divine obediently stepped upon his cigar.
At reduced speed the *Pride of Quinncy*, with every out-shining light save her signal side-lights blanketed or shuttered, stole on. The mate stationed himself forward, beside the bell, with his watch partner posted back a little aft of the stacks, forward of the Texas under the pilot house, to serve as messenger when necessary.

The King at the wheel was bent upon running the crossing in the old-time way which took the eyes of a cat and the senses of a bat; or else he had a different end in mind.

The music from the salon had ceased—in his darkened stateroom Captain Nuckolls lay perhaps vaguely pondering, while the doctor kept vigil.

The gusts had tapered off, the rain was a heavy drizzle, the stridor of the rushing river washing gunwales and near shore-line beat menacingly, and the lightning flares from the south, broadly sheeting the starless sky, the turbid river and the drenched land in dazzling white, left the blackness denser than ever. They showed the upper tow-head to larboard, for the *Pride of Quinncy* was creeping into the cut.

She glided on and on; in spite of her clacking paddles, her jarring engines, and her hoarse exhausts, the mumbles of the thunder and the splashing of the water, she appeared to move amid a breathless silence.

She was in! She was in, with the King steering her by feel rather than by any sight of stern marks or bow marks.

She was in—but too far up—she slackened, she faltered—she shied, she smelled danger and protested through exhausts growing hoarser. The floor underneath the mate's soles shuddered and seemed to hang back—the revolving paddles now fluttered, now floundered—by the Eternal, she was shoaling!

From the pilot-house the voice of Divine sounded:

"You're too far up, King! You're shaving the townhead too close! You're on Saddle Bar!"

"I know where I am for this wind and current. Do you want me to hang her up on that other towhead?"

"But you're shoaling! She drags her bottom! Feel her? She knows it if you don't."

"Don't talk to me, sir."

"Look out!" Divine persisted. "You're square on the Bar! Do you mean to kill her along with the Captain?"

Then—"Set her back! Put your wheel over! Snatch her! Snatch her! Man, you can't get through in this water!"

For the *Pride of Quinncy*, resisting, and fighting her rudders, had faltered and had sent an invisible bow wave crashing over the unseen shallows.

"I'll take her through if she has to go by land! Stand away!" The engine-bell jangled full speed. The King's words in the tube came with energy: "Crowd her! Crowd her! She's in four feet—but she'll make it!"

The stacks roared again. The escape pipes quickened, the paddles churned and the entire boat shook. She moved, she lurched, she hung, grating; she canted. Frenzied cries rose from salon and staterooms; the rousta-bouts below were bleating. She pivoted upon the saddle ridge beneath her and turning free fled like a frightened animal right athwart the crossing. She was out of control, now, and running madly with the wind and current through the pitchy night.

The engine-room shut off the blowers. The King had cramped the wheel hard down, for the drag of her rudders could be felt. As if through clenched teeth he snarled into the speaking-tube while again he viciously jerked the bell:

"Keep her full speed!"

She was running wild! They were lost! He was crazy! No; it was the only thing to do. He had to have steerage-way; and to try to set her back in the midst of this blind flight would throw her into that lower towhead before she could be checked.

All the boat was in a turmoil. With a cruel shock and a rasping of branches her stern swept through the point of the towhead. The plank buckets slashed into the trees lining the water-edge. The passengers were shouting and screaming; but she swung on into the clear: She was headed now—Lord knew where—until, on the instant, the searchlight burst into life.

The King had turned her in just in time. She was into Pig-eye—and securely in. The beam illumined the chute before them and the bank, safely to starboard: and the gangplank derrick was lined squarely against the upstream path.

The beam fell upon the Nestor levee, at the head of the chute, and upon people clustered there, aroused by the tokens that a boat was attempting Jackson's Crossing in a night like this.

The King steadied her. The storm had dwindled to a fresh breeze, for the rain had ceased and the clouds were rifted.

Jackson rang for half-speed—and under the first stars he held her up the chute, for the landing. He stepped upon the whistle-pedal and the sonorous, triumphant blasts of the *Pride of Quinncy* echoed from shore to shore.

The mate yelped at the mud clerk:

"Will you please get a litter up into the texas, for the Captain, Mr. Jones?"

To a slow bell the King brought her in. The gangplank dangled shoreward—and before the darkly upon the land of it had jumped with the snubbing-line, the doctor with Captain Nuckolls in the litter emerged from the texas.

The doctor called back from the top of the stairs:

"Captain Nuckolls wants to know who made that crossing for him."

While the paddles gently turned, keeping the boat's nose in, the King replied:

"I did—King Jackson!"

The darkly had sprawled ashore, the gangplank touched, the litter and the doctor filed down it. The mate looked at his watch. An hour and twenty minutes. Well, they had made it.

He glanced up to the pilot-house. "All clear, sir."

From the ledge Divine waved his hand. The mate struck the bell. "What're you sittin' on that line for?" he bawled.

The darkly came galloping as the plank rose and in the engine-room the backing bell jingled.

The mate ran up into the house. The King was just saying: "Here's the wheel. Straighten her up. I'm through."

Divine took the wheel, pronouncing:

"By all that's great, sir, you've done what no other man on the river could have done—or would have done! And I tell you, King, if Nuckolls or I have anything to say about it, you're on the river again to stay."

Jackson had sunk upon the bench. His face was in his hands, and his shoulders heaved; he was sobbing. . . . The storm had passed from the river and from his heart.
The Phantom President

An austere executive genius is put forward for the Presidency by the political powers—and a genial rascallion who happens to resemble him is employed to make the campaign speeches and win the necessary votes and popularity. And then—the murder in the rascal’s past rises up to threaten disaster.

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Illustrated by Joseph Franké

The Story Thus Far:

"AFTER all, Blair," said Ronkton, "it isn’t a question of your fitness. We know you’re a business genius—the cleverest practical economist in America. We are fully aware what your brain in the White House would do for the country. You are mentally perfectly equipped for the Presidency. But that is not the point—the point is, Blair, that never has a man, woman or child called you Ted or Teddy."

Senator Pitcairn suggested that Mr. Blair could be built up. "Look what a few Indian feathers and a couple of cowboy hats did for Calvin Coolidge! And remember how the people warmed to Hoover when he brought that kid to Washington who saved the children in that Colorado blizzard."

"We can’t dress Blair in Indian garb or have him suddenly begin entertaining heroes," Ronkton objected. "He’s not the type for that—he’s the aloof mental type."

That very night the fascinating rogue came upon the scene—Peter Varney, who had discovered that he bore a remarkable resemblance to Theodore Blair and had capitalized that resemblance by selling a check supposedly signed by Blair. And out of this chance meeting grew a fantastic and daring scheme: why not run Blair for the Presidency, employing his double—a man of exceptional warmth and personal magnetism—to make the necessary public appearances?

They knew that Blair could never win the votes of personal popularity—he had not even been able to win the love of the one woman he’d ever cared for: beautiful Felicia Hamilton, who indeed liked and admired him, but somehow held aloof. They knew that Varney was a rascal—there was the check episode, and his association with another shabby character, Jimmy Carlyle. They did not know then, however, that only that day Varney had snatched a pistol from the hand of Kate Ingals’ husband and struck him down with it—leaving fingerprints on the barrel. . . . (And they did not know that a mechanic in Steel City, who had lost a hand in the shops, was nursing an insane illogical grudge against Theodore Blair.)

They did learn of some of these things later, but only after they were committed to the venture. For Detective Murchison of the homicide squad found several people who thought they had seen Blair at the Ingals’ house on the night of the murder. Of course Blair could easily prove an alibi. And Kate Ingals steadfastly maintained, under questioning, that the murder had been committed by a client crazed by stock-market losses, a man who in no way resembled Blair.

Of course, they realized this affair gave them a hold over Varney. They could send him to the chair if he proved recalcitrant; indeed, Ronkton privately decided to have him put out of the way when his usefulness was over. And Varney claimed to have disposed of Carlyle. Had he killed him too? (The story continues in detail.)

CABLES lying like great black snakes in the ooze at the bottom of the Seven Seas suddenly were gorged with quick flickers of electric current. Telegraph wires stretching over deserts and rivers, forests and plains, valleys and mountains, set instruments to clacking in thousands of offices and shanties. The etherial void throbbed to impulses discharged from night-wireless stations. The printing-presses of the world, from Moosejaw to Madagascar, from Moscow to Malaya, labored and brought forth the tidings that Theodore K. Blair, the American industrial wizard, had heard the call of his country and was answering. He had resigned the chairmanship of the board of the Universal Corporation and was prepared to serve his country and the world in the greatest crisis in history. As an earnest of good faith, he had sacrificed the most prominent business career in America. His hat was in the ring. If the nomination for the Presidency of the United States of America on the Prosperity ticket were tendered to him, he would accept it.

In politics nothing is a certainty. But the man who controlled the most powerful political machine in the world was making Blair’s candidacy a very real possibility.

Harvey Ronkton, big boss of the Prosperity Party, set wheels in motion within wheels. State bosses received their instructions and passed them along to city and county bosses, who in turn relayed the word from on high to the smallest hamlet, the meanest ward.

Theodore K. Blair for President! If you want prosperity back, nominate Theodore K. Blair! If you want unemployment and crime abolished, industry put on its feet, the prohibition riddle solved, and taxes lowered, nominate Theodore K. Blair! If you want to save the nation, if you want to prolong our
civilization, nominate Theodore K. Blair! So ran the message. Theodore K. Blair’s sandstone mansion on Pershing Boulevard became a citadel—and the throbbing nerve-center of the nation. Harvey Ronkton set up his headquarters there. From there he would conduct all but the final phases of the campaign. A modern general, he would direct the battle by remote control. The entire floor of a large office-building was leased. Here, Ronkton installed his public-relations counsel and a large staff of assistants, stenographers and telegraph operators. A private telephone wire connected Ronkton’s suite in Blair’s house with these busy offices. No one was admitted to the house except Ronkton’s field marshals: Niles De Kay, the boss of the Middle West; and Senators Burton Melrose and Thaddeus Pittcairn.

Carpenters, plasterers, plumbers, electricians and painters worked in day and night shifts to complete certain alterations on Theodore K. Blair’s house. A large drawing-room adjoining the library was remodeled into a suite of living quarters. It consisted of two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a sitting-room. The suite had only one entrance—a door built into one of the library walls.

While they worked, the man who would share the suite with Mr. Blair was secreted in one of the rooms of Mr. Blair’s old quarters on the third floor, devoting from fifteen to eighteen hours a day to memorizing photographed faces and committing to memory a staggering mass of data. When the new suite was finished, Peter Varney and Theodore K. Blair moved in and proceeded with their work. It was absolutely necessary for Peter Varney to know not only every man and woman Blair knew, but to be thoroughly familiar with the terms which Blair was on with each and every one of them, and to acquire as well Blair’s mannerisms and to acquaint himself with his tastes.

Blair’s butler Jerrido served the two men, attended to their food and clothing and acted as their chambermaid. The only other men admitted at any time to the suite were Ronkton, De Kay and the two Senators. Ronkton’s political echo, Melrose, and the boss of the Middle West, stayed on for the microphone test. Then they departed, Melrose for Washington, De Kay for Cleveland, each with important orders from Ronkton to execute.

As it was impossible for Blair and Varney to go to a broadcasting studio for the test, the necessary equipment was brought to Blair’s house and set up in the library. The microphone was plugged into an amplifier circuit, the entire hook-up being similar to that which is used in recording voices on motion-picture film or phonograph records.

Harvey Ronkton, Niles De Kay and Senators Melrose and Pittcairn sat in a row in front of a loud-speaker from which the voices of Blair and Varney, speaking alternately, would issue. A “mixer” adjusted the apparatus and gave Jerrido instructions on operating dials which regulated the sound volume. The “mixer” retired, with the engineers, from the library, and the door was locked.

The purpose of the test was to determine whether or not Blair’s voice had sufficient warmth and color to be satisfactory for broadcasting purposes. If not, Varney would have to double for him on the mike.

The “mixer” had left with Jerrido a typed list of sentences and a verse of Poe’s “Raven” to be used in making the voice test. Jerrido gave this to Blair when he carried the mike, with its long extension cable, into the sitting-room. He came out and closed the door as far as the cable would permit.

Blair was to speak first. The four Senators, anxiously waiting, heard, through the loud-speaker, first the rustle of the papers in his hand, then his deep voice:

“Six—sixty-six—six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six. Sister Susie’s sewing six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six socks for six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six sick soldiers.”

Niles De Kay and Harvey Ronkton looked at each other.

“As warm and friendly,” the Cleveland man said, “as ice cubes falling out of a refrigerator.”

“There’s a rasp in it,” Senator Pittcairn said. “I don’t understand that rasp. You don’t hear it in his real voice.”

“Try adjusting those dials, Jerrido,” Ronkton suggested.
The man was secrèteted in Blair’s old quarters, devoting fifteen hours a day to memorizing photographed faces.

He went to the door and told Blair to try it again. Blair tried again, and Jerrido tried changing the dial adjustments. But no matter what the adjustment, the magic of the amplifying circuit succeeded only in intensifying the coldness of Blair’s voice.

“It’s as congenial,” Ronkton announced, “as a wind blowing off a glacier.”

Blair read the verse from Poe’s “Raven.”

“And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrifted me—filled me—with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating:
‘Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door.
That it is, and nothing more.’"

“That,” stated the boss of the Middle West, “won’t win votes. Jerrido, tell Varney to take a crack at it.”

The rogue’s deep voice presently boomed from the repeater.

“Six—sixty-six—six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six. Sister Susie’s sewing six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six socks for six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six sick soldiers.” There was a faint chuckle. “Sister Susie suffered seriously from shell-shock. Or were these six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six sick soldiers one-legged men?"

“Damnation!” Ronkton growled. “That’s it.”

Varney read the verse from the “Raven.” There was, undeniably, richness and warmth and color in his deep voice. The magic of the amplifying circuit intensified it, as the circuit had intensified Blair’s coldness and his faint rasp.

The four men went into the little sitting-room. Blair and his double were standing near the microphone. Only because Peter Varney still held in his hand the paper from which he had been reading was it possible to tell the two apart. A very close inspection would have discovered a sparkle in Varney’s eyes, a cold light in Blair’s. They were dressed identically. Even Varney’s mannerisms, as their association lengthened, were becoming more and more like Blair’s. But he was not losing his identity. There was an air about him, an indefinable magnetism, which he would never lose, and which, no matter how long the association continued, Blair would never acquire.

Blair quietly asked how it had gone. He spoke carelessly, as if it really didn’t matter. But it did matter. Not that it would be impracticable for Varney to double for him on the mike, in making campaign speeches. Such an arrangement would be advantageous, because it would free Blair for more important matters. It was his pride that wanted their answer to be favorable. He sometimes felt that he couldn’t stand being told once more how much warmer, how much more magnetic, was the rogue’s personality. His secret suffering was, of course, very little to pay for the good he would do, if he were elected, for the country. But there were times when his patriotism, his clear thinking, his whimsical attitude toward the whole fantastic situation, were of little help. He envied everything about the rogue: his warmth and magnetism, his debonair quality, his richly glamorous past.

Ronkton bluntly gave him their verdict. An insensitive man, the big boss never troubled to save Blair’s feelings.

“Blair,” he said, “your voice is about as warm as a couple of icebergs grinding together.”

“There’s a rasp in it,” Senator Melsrose echoed. “It almost makes your teeth ache.”

Senator Pitcairn, closer, perhaps, than any living man to Blair, tried to save Blair’s feelings by saying that the adjustments might have been wrong.

“How did Mr. Varney’s voice,” Blair asked, “come through?”

“Perfectly,” answered the big red-faced man from Cleveland. “Mellow and warm—reeking with personality.”

“Then the adjustments,” Blair said, “must have been all right. That settles it, doesn’t it?”

“I suppose so,” Ronkton regretfully affirmed. “Of course, there’s enough similarity between your voices so that you could, in an emergency, go on the air.”

Senator Pitcairn suggested that this might arouse suspicion. He added that complications were inevitable. His antagonism to the idea had never been entirely overcome. Blair was his idol. He realized how deeply Blair was hurt. Blair’s humiliation, his courteous attitude toward this scoundrel with whom he was forced to live on equal terms, his sportsmanlike attitude, infuriated the Senator.

“There are the talkies,” he said. “In the natural course of events, they’ll be shooting first Blair, then Varney. The same applies to impromptu radio speeches. It’s dangerous.”

Ronkton, declaring himself to be a hardened radio fan, argued: “A man’s radio voice is different at different times. The adjustments may be wrong. He may be tired, or have a cold. He may be nervous. No. Blair’s and Varney’s voices are enough alike. Varney will have to make
the important campaign speeches. If I can get Blair the nomination, I'm going to have a hook-up of practically every broadcasting station in the world. We don't want a hundred million radio fans frozen in their chairs.

Niles De Kay announced that he was leaving for Cleveland in the morning. "I've got to lubricate the machine. When is Varney going to make his maiden appearance in public?"

"In a few days," Blair said.

Ronktom asked Varney how he felt about it.

"I feel as if I'd known these people all my life."

The ruler of the nation's politics looked at him thoughtfully.

"You've got to tone that smile down, Varney," he said.

"We want your personality to come out by degrees. Don't forget that every eye is on you. Everybody will be staring at you. It isn't as if Blair were excited over this. The fact that he may become President hasn't turned him into a giggling schoolboy. Keep in mind that Blair is as emotional as an oyster."

"What worries me," Senator Pitcairn said, "is that the least slip will ruin everything."

"It worries me too," De Kay admitted.

Senator Melrose confessed that he couldn't sleep nights, and when he did sleep, he had nightmares in which some man who looked like Calvin Coolidge stepped up and exposed the conspiracy.

"If Blair," Ronktom said, sighing heavily, "were only more like Varney."

Blair, no matter how hard he tried, could not grow accustomed to these thoughtless hurts. Busily grinding their axes, the four politicians continually said tactless things and persisted in regarding him as a cold, nerveless machine, as impervious as chromium. They did not know how badly he felt about this voice test. They did not know how envious he had become of the rogue's charm, his romantic past—or how he detested him for being such a scoundrel—or how he hated him for being so necessary.

"Gentlemen," he said, with his faint smile, "we can safely put our faith in Mr. Varney."

CHAPTER XIV

The rogue made his first formal appearance in public as Theodore K. Blair under the chaperonage of Senator Pitcairn. This was Blair's idea. People were accustomed to seeing him in public with the Senator, and Pitcairn was well acquainted with most of his friends.

Varney genially declared that he would like to have the Senator "ride herd" on him indefinitely. He was being compliant only because the emergency called for it. He had been shut up in Blair's house for upwards of a month, studying Blair and photographs of Blair's friends. He knew them all, and he hated them all. He hated being shut up in that quiet, dignified house with piles of stuffy photographs. He hated the tedium.

"Who's this, Mr. Varney?" Blair would say.

"Jacob Finster."

"What do you call him?"

"Finster. I played golf with him once about a year ago. He manufactures insulated wire. His hobby is collecting old violins. He likes to talk about his son Horace, who plays left half on the Princeton team."

"That's right."

Irresponsible, a victim since childhood of the wanderlust, Peter Varney hated this part of his job; and he hated the cold, precise, brilliant Blair. He hated Blair's unfailing considerateness. He hated him because Blair was the substance and he the shadow. And he knew that, underneath his courtesy, his kindliness and his dry humor, Blair detested him. What he did not guess was that Blair was envious of him—would have delightedly exchanged places with him.

VARNEY'S first venture from the big sandstone house gave him the feeling of a prisoner who has just been released. He was as exuberant as a schoolboy at a picnic. This was what he had taken the job for: the excitement, the thrills, the danger. He lived for thrills.

At Blair's suggestion, Varney and Senator Pitcairn walked down Pershing Boulevard to Parkside Drive and back. They passed the very tree under which Senator Pitcairn's limousine had been delayed by the fateful thunderstorm. They were tailed at a respectful distance by a bodyguard of three secret-service men whom Ronktom's influence had obtained from the Department of Justice.

The Senator and the rogue had progressed only two blocks down Pershing Boulevard when Pitcairn said: "Watch your smile, Varney. Who's this?"

Varney looked at the tall, thin man in gray approaching them. "Harold Tompkins," he said promptly.

"What do you call him?"

"Hal."

Mr. Tompkins showed every indication of pausing for a chat. His broad smile remained. His path, if they had not stopped, would have taken him between them. He put out his hand and exclaimed, "Hello, Mr. Blair! Haven't seen you since I heard the news. If they nominate you, you can count on my vote."

The rogue, dimming his smile, shook hands as Blair had taught him: a firm, very brief squeeze, a quick re-possession of his hand.

"Thank you, Hal. It's very kind of you."

"Not at all. It's purely selfish. I want to see this country get back to normal, and I know you're the one man who can do it—if these foxy politicians don't tie your hands and feet."

Mr. Tompkins gave the Senator a sly smile and looked back at the rogue with sparkling eyes.

"It's done something to you," he said. "I don't think I've ever seen you looking better. There's a look in your eye, Mr. Blair. Senator, if you had anything to do with this, I'm proud of you. Of course, you saw how the market's been going up on the strength of it. Is the Fusion Party going to give you much of a battle?"

They talked politics for a few minutes; then Mr. Tompkins went on.

"How did I handle it?" the rogue asked in a low voice. "You heard what he said about your eyes."

"Wouldn't Blair show a little excitement?"

"No. He is absolutely imperturbable. Remember your smile. Make it colder."

The rogue disobeyed, smiled genially. "Senator, I don't think you like me. I think you're prejudiced."

"I detest you. The man in this limousine is going to speak to you. Who is he?"

"Julian Strauss. Banker and philanthropist. I am on several charity committees with him. We call each other Mister."

The Senator and the rogue bowed to Mr. Strauss. In the course of an hour's stroll, Varney identified fourteen of Blair's acquaintances, including three women. He recognized all but one—a man who had, since the photograph Blair had of him was taken, grown a mustache. It was, aside from that, a thoroughly successful adventure. The rogue remembered faces, names and facts. But the Senator was not satisfied.
Giving a detailed account of their walk to Blair, he commented: "Varney is overeager. He acts as if he is going to thump every man he meets on the back."

Waiting alone in the little sitting-room, Blair had visualized that walk, had seen his friends meeting the rogue. They would comment on the change in him. They would say that Blair had suddenly become a human being. It was as if his ghost, a cold and clammy thing, were skulking in the little sitting-room, while his real self, a man of warmth and geniality, was out there on the street. It had given him a panicly feeling. He saw a future behind locked doors, skulking, while Varney circulated among his friends and made new ones. The time might come when he must remain always behind locked doors, hiding as if he were a criminal, while an actual criminal represented him. All they wanted of him was his brain. Damn his brain!

Hiding there, while the Senator and the rogue took their walk, he had come the nearest so far to a feeling of martyrdom. He was almost sorry for himself. But not quite. Whatever sacrifice he might have to make was worthwhile.

He envied the rogue as he had never envied him before. The excitement of having walked on thin ice was in Varney's eyes. Blair hated him almost enough to strike him. But his smile was kindly.

"We mustn't forget," he answered the Senator's criticism, "that Mr. Varney's job is to create the impression that I have a warm, magnetic personality. Let people comment on the change in me. It's what we want."

THE hard work continued; every day, the Senator and the rogue went out together. They lunched in popular restaurants. They took walks. They went for drives. Varney met more and more of Blair's acquaintances. The tally, kept carefully by Blair, numbered more than seventy when an incident occurred that they had all been dreading. All but the rogue! He had anticipated it; he had looked forward to it as a test of his resourcefulness. It took him into dangerous waters. He had spent most of his life looking for dangerous waters.

He and Senator Pitcairn had lunched at the City Club. They were walking toward the steps which led to the street when a voice said: "Hello, there, Mr. Blair! Hello, there!"

The Senator and the rogue turned. A tall, wide-shouldered, black-haired man was advancing on him with eager smile and outstretched hand. He was about thirty years old, darkly tanned, good-looking, well-dressed. He looked like some one of importance.

Varney, permitting his hand to be seized and shaken, tried to place him. He was certain he had not seen this face among those piles and piles of photographs. A quick side-glance informed him that Senator Pitcairn was puzzled too.

The rogue gazed smilingly, almost fondly, upon this unfamiliar face.

The tanned stranger, releasing his hand, exclaimed, "You remember me, of course. I'm Dan Fairfax."

"Oh, yes," Varney said. "Yes, yes, yes! Of course. Dan Fairfax."

He felt the Senator's elbow prodding him. The Senator was warning him to be cautious, to go easy.

Mr. Fairfax beamed. "I know you've been busy, so I didn't call you up."

"I understand," the rogue said.

"I thought you would. Well, we're all ready to go ahead, Mr. Blair. We're all set."

"That's fine," the rogue said.

"All we need is your O. K., Mr. Blair. Considering how busy you are now, I realize it's a very trivial matter. Of course, to all of us, it's pretty important."

The Senator nudged the rogue again. Just then Mr. Fairfax was joined by another young man. This one was likewise tall and tanned. He wore a small black mustache. He looked prosperous. The two of them together looked like polo-players or yachtsmen.

"You remember Bill Towne, of course, Mr. Blair."

"Of course, of course," the rogue said jovially, and shook Mr. Towne's hand. Who in the devil was Bill Towne? Senator Pitcairn pointedly cleared his throat.

"Well, what about it, Mr. Blair?" Mr. Towne asked.

"Well, I don't know," the rogue answered.

"Don't you think," the Senator put in, "that you're pretty busy, Blair, to bother—"

"But after all," said Mr. Fairfax, "it's such a trivial matter, isn't it, Mr. Blair?"

"We mean," Mr. Towne elaborated, "trivial to you. Of course, it's pretty important to us."

"That's true," the rogue thoughtfully said.

"After all," Mr. Fairfax said eagerly, "it's just a simple little yes or no."

The two young men looked at him eagerly.

"What," Mr. Fairfax asked, "is the answer?"

"Blair—" the Senator began sternly.

The rogue's warm smile flashed. "Yes!" he said.

Delightedly, the two young men thanked him. In the limousine, homeward bound, Senator Pitcairn uncorked his fury. He called the rogue a damned idiot.

"You did it deliberately. How do you know what they wanted?"

"Why wasn't I posted?"

"How do you know what you're letting Blair in for? Why weren't you noncommittal? Why didn't you stall them along?"

"Haven't I proved to your complete satisfaction how resourceful I can be in emergencies? Didn't I get away with it?"

"Why didn't you say no? Why didn't you put them off?"

"As far as I am concerned," the rogue amiably answered, "the experiment was a complete success."

Blair listened with his faint smile to Senator Pitcairn's indignant account of the affair.

"They're a couple of flyers," he said. "They want to establish an airport on the other side of the river. I had them and their scheme investigated. They are impractical enthusiasts, and the scheme is worthless. We have two excellent airports and don't need another. The one they propose is certain to fail. They wanted me to back them."

"How much?" the Senator asked.

"Five hundred thousand."

"And you," Pitcairn shouted at Varney, "said yes!"

"But I didn't say it in writing, Senator."

"You damned scoundrel! Blair never goes back on his word! He will have to go through with it. That idiotic yes of yours will cost him a half million dollars!"

"Ah, but Senator, wasn't it worth a half million to prove that I can handle any emergency? Deep down inside, Senator, aren't you really proud of me?"

PITCAIRN, with reddening cheeks, with veins protruding from his temples, looked at him and answered freezingly: "I have nothing but the utmost contempt for you. There isn't a decent, honest drop of blood in your veins. Blair has been the soul of kindness and consideration in all his dealings with you. You have no sense of gratitude, and no sense of sportsmanship. You aren't a man. You're a jackal."

The rogue regarded the Senator with one eyebrow slight-
ily elevated. It gave him a wry, droll expression. He shook his head sadly.

"Senator," he said, "I’m almost beginning to suspect that you don’t like me. Blair, what do you say? What do you think of me?"

The martyr, with his faint, curious smile, replied: "Mr. Varney, I’m convinced that you are capable of meeting any emergency." That ended the matter.

It happened so unexpectedly that Peter Varney had no time for preparation. He saw her, recognized her and betrayed his recognition before he could stiffen the muscles of his face and ignore her.

Senator Pitcairn had walked out of the tailor shop ahead of him. The news that Theodore K. Blair, the multimillionaire presidential possibility, was inside the shop had attracted a crowd. It was necessary for the Senator to push his way through to the limousine at the curb.

Varney, a few feet behind him, suddenly saw her face in the crowd. She was not more than five feet from him. His eyes, sweeping across faces, alighted on hers: met her hard blue eyes, caught the brightness of her honey-yellow hair. He was a split-second too slow for that emergency. His eyes widened, gleamed, narrowed. Then his resourcefulness rushed into the breach. His eyes went vague, his face stony. He did not nod or smile or betray himself in any way. But it was too late. He had betrayed himself.

Her voice cut like a lance across his angry confusion.

"Wait!"

The rogue pushed on past her. Senator Pitcairn climbed into the tonneau. He started to follow. There was excitement, milling, behind him. A hand frantically clutched him by the elbow.

Hysterically she cried: "I’ve got to talk to you!"

With one foot on the running-board, he turned and looked down into her flushed, lovely face. "I beg your pardon, madam—"

"Oh, but—"

"There must be some mistake."

He got in. The footman closed the door and sprang up beside the chauffeur. As Varney settled back beside the Senator, the limousine started.

Senator Pitcairn said impatiently: "You cut that woman. Why did you cut her?"

The rogue dried his forehead with a handkerchief. "That’s the trouble," he said hoarsely. "I didn’t cut her. I gave myself away—for a fraction of a second—before I could snap myself together. But it wouldn’t have made any difference, anyway. She saw me. Sooner or later, she was bound to see me."

"Who is she?"

"Kate Ingals."

"The wife of that—"


Senator Pitcairn groaned. "It means the end of everything," he observed.

Varney made no reply. . . .

Dusk had fallen when the big limousine rolled under the Blair porte-cochère. Ronkton and Blair were waiting in the library. Ronkton, with the indispensible fraction of a cigar in one corner of his large rubbery mouth, was pacing the rug with his head thrust forward, his hands clasped behind him. Blair was seated at his desk with his elbows on the gold-mounted blotter, his fingertips pressed together.

Both men were pale with anxiety. But whereas Ronkton had a disheveled look, with rumpled hair, Blair looked cool and calm.

When Senator Pitcairn and Varney knocked, Ronkton unlocked the door and let them in.

"That woman—" he began, the moment they were inside and the door was locked again.

"I know," the rogue said wearily. "I saw her."

"She’s been telephoning at five-minute intervals for the past forty minutes! She’s hysterical. She wants to come up here. I suppose you know what this means."

"It means," Senator Pitcairn said, "everything is over."

"Why," Ronkton angrily demanded, "didn’t somebody think of this contingency? Why didn’t somebody anticipate it?"

"Who talked to her?" the rogue asked.

"Jeriedo. Blair and I listened in. She’s frantic."

"I’m glad," Senator Pitcairn said, "it’s all over. It was too dangerous. Something like this was bound to come up sooner or later. It’s fortunate that it came now, rather than later."

Ronkton swung out of his beaten path and bore down savagely on Varney. "You damned numskull!" he said. "It’s your miserable rotten character that did this. He became raspingly sarcastic. "The gay Lothario! ‘Ah, gentlemen, my past has buried its dead!’ Believe me, your past is going to bury you. I’m going to turn you
over to the Springfield police. I'm going to be there, in person, in a front-row seat, when they electrocute you."

Heavy-lidded, the rogue looked at him. His face gleamed with sweat. Gone was his debonair manner, his charm. In his extremity, he appealed to Blair. He walked rapidly to the desk and softly pounded on it with both clenched fists.

"Blair," he said, "for God's sake, think of something to do. It can't be as bad as it seems."

Blair dropped his hands, with laced fingers, to the blotter, and looked up. His eyes were as clear as freshly-frozen ice.

"It isn't as bad as it seems."

"Oh, no," Ronkton said with a fox-bark; "it's worse."

"You anticipated it," the rogue said.

"Yes."

"Well, what's to be done?"

"The only thing to do," Pitcairn said, "is to chuck it. It was always a mistake."

Blair settled back in his chair. "I think," he said, "we're inclined to swing to extremes. We jumped, in the first place, without measuring distances. We were over-optimistic. Now, at the first threat, we're swinging the other way."

Pitcairn said defensively: "Perhaps Ronkton, Melrose and De Kay did. You can't say I did. I know you didn't. Your feet have never been off the ground."

"Go on and tell me," Ronkton said defiantly, "that you see a way out of this."

"But I do."

"I knew he would!" the rogue exclaimed, still bending, white and sweating, over the desk. It took him only a moment to reach—for an instant!—sublime heights of re-
spect and admiration. "We can depend on Blair's marvelous brain."

The three men stared hopefully at Blair.

"I had Mrs. Ingals investigated," he said crisply, "the day following her husband's murder. She sums up as a familiar neurotic type: over-sexed, spoiled, self-indulgent, highly romantic, highly emotional. She has had at least four liaisons since her marriage, including the one with you, Mr. Varney. She is difficult to handle, but you can handle her."

"What does she want?" Pitcairn asked.

"Her beautiful, golden-hearted knight!" Ronkton sourly answered.

"What do I do?" Varney snapped.

"Tell her to meet you some distance from her hotel. You must not, of course, be seen by anyone, if it can be avoided. Remember that she is being watched by the Springfield police. There is no question that she is being trailed by detectives. Keep it in mind.

"Tell her to go back to her room for the call."

"You mean, she knows who I am?"

"No. She thinks you're Blair," Ronkton said.

"She is stopping at the Beacon Hotel," Blair went on in his cool voice. "Tell her to meet you some distance from her hotel. You must not, of course, be seen by anyone, if it can be avoided. Remember that she is being watched by the Springfield police. There is no question that she is being trailed by detectives. Keep it in mind. Have her get into your car and go through dark streets to some dark place."

"Roosevelt Park."

"That will do. Talk to her there. Be careful."

"Shall I take the roadster?"

"That would identify me. Take a taxicab. Some one from the Springfield police force will come to see me, anyway."

"How do you know that?" Ronkton muttered.

"Don't be such an ass," the rogue said impatiently.

"Blair thinks of everything. What shall I say to her, Mr. Blair?"

"It was the first time in their acquaintance that he had employed that prefix."

"Be very gentle with her. Be tender. You can even be loverlike. And keep in mind that she can be handled only through her emotions, her sense of the romantic. Tell her you are probably going to be the next President of the United States. Tell how vital your election is to the nation, the world. Embroider that. Make her see the romance in her helpfulness."

"I understand," the rogue said. "A woman will give her life for you if she thinks she's protecting you."

"That's it. Throw yourself on her mercy. You are a lonely man, beset by enemies. The weight of the world is on your shoulders. Play that for all it's worth. When you've got her in hand—beg her to go abroad, out of your life, for the next five years. Promise her anything. I don't think she's a blackmailer. I think, from what I
know of her, that all this emotional disturbance has given her a really passionate infatuation for you."

"Hell," the rogue said, his assurance restored, "I can play tunes on that!"

"If she needs money, we'll give her plenty. No sum is too large. If she won't go abroad, suggest that she live in Washington. Intimate that you can manage to see her there at rare intervals. But play that as your last card."

"That means," Pitcairn interrupted, "another White House scandal."

"I don't see it, Senator. I think Mr. Varney can handle this."

"Oh, it's too dangerous," the Senator said. "The Springfield police, if they're shadowing her, are very apt to see Varney with her—in other words, you."

"The fact that you're with her," Ronkton amplified, "is a dead give-away."

"I can handle them."

"It's too much for me," Ronkton said wearily, Blair gave him his faint, mysterious smile. "Let Mr. Varney and me handle it."

"That's what I say," the rogue burst out impatiently. "We've handled it perfectly so far, haven't we? Just leave everything to us."

CHAPTER XV

UNDER the circumstances, it was hard for Peter Varney to keep cool, to remember that he must be considerate, gentle, even tender with this troublesome woman. He had had many love-affairs, but his heart had never been involved. He played with women as he played with danger. The moment he lost interest, he stopped playing. He could be very brutal with a persistent woman. He had been brutal with many women. Because he was heartless, and because of the habit pattern, it was going to be hard to be gentle, or loverlike, with Kate Ingals.

He watched her coming down the sidewalk, a slim woman in the black of mourning. The black dress made her look slender. She was walking rapidly, taking small steps. Her feet were small. Her hands reminded him of white moths. All her eagerness, her nervousness, had concentrated in her hands.

She halted on the sidewalk and looked at the taxicab. He looked out the back window, but saw no one who might have been following her.

He called softly: "All right."

Kate Ingals caught her hands together. She saw that her eyes were wet. Her slim body bent at the waist. She cried softly, "Oh, darling!" and ran to the cab. Varney held open the door and said gently: "Get in. Please don't make a scene."

She said again, with a sob: "Oh, darling! Oh, my darling, darling!"

The taxicab started. The driver had his instructions.

The widow of Chester Ingals, the moment the door closed, threw her arms fiercely around the rogue's head and pulled his face to her breast. It was hot there, and hard to breathe, because she was holding him so fiercely. Her breast jerked with sobs. Varney endured it and remembered Blair's instructions. He could have murdered her—with his bare hands.

"You must forgive me," she was saying. "I can't help myself. If you only knew what I've been through! Oh, my darling, darling. But I don't care. We're together again. That's all that counts. I didn't know I could love anyone so. My darling, my sweet!"

Her stiffened fingers were like hooks raking his back.

She pulled up his head and, holding him by the cheeks, kissed him. With little moans, she kissed him, his eyes, his mouth again. She fiercely shook his head. Her mouth was wet with her tears. He tasted the saltiness on his lips.

"Oh, darling, darling, darling! Say you don't hate me."

"Of course, dear, I don't hate you."

"You aren't furious at me?"

"Of course not, dear."

"I'm the happiest girl in the world. In your arms again! Put your arms around me!"

He did. In the hollow of his arm, she looked up, adoring, into his face, ran the tip of a finger along the edge of his lower lip; compulsively cradled closer. Her tear-stained face, in the flitting light of a passing car, was beautiful.

"The police were so cruel, so horribly cruel."

"I'm so sorry, dear."

"They said you weren't in Springfield that night. Oh, you're clever. You're so marvelous. Aren't you really angry?"

"Not in the least, honey. I've missed you too."

"If I'd dreamed who you were, darling?"

"Let's be careful," he whispered.

"Oh, yes, yes; we must be terribly careful. I understand. But you were cruel, too. You should have told me. You know how I adore you. But I can't think of you as anyone but Peter—my Peter Varney."

"Shh!"

"Yes, sweet. I'll be careful. You know you can trust me."

"My future, my very life, is in your hands."

"You love my hands."

"Yes, honey. I love your hands."

The taxicab stopped. They were under trees, near the lake in Roosevelt Park. The red beacon, on her hotel, flamed and died, flamed and died, like some mystic fire in the still water of the lake.

They got out and walked to a bench, well beyond ear-shot of the taxi-driver. The darkness of a moonless night was relieved by the glow of the city. Peter Varney, in selecting the bench, had kept eavesdroppers in mind.

THE widow of the man he had killed caught his hand tightly as they sat down.

"We have got to face this," he said. "We have got to be sensible."

"I can't be sensible. I feel delirious. Do you smell those flowers? I'm so proud of you. I'm absolutely awed. To think that you—I can't even call you that. You're Peter. You're my darling, darling. Isn't it heavenly to be together again?"

"Kate, we have got to face the facts. This country of ours—"

"Damn this country of ours!"

"The whole world is looking to me."

"I won't have it. I won't have anybody but me looking at you. I'll scratch the world's eyes out!"

"Kate, please listen. We have got to submerge ourselves. You have read the papers. I resigned the chairmanship of the board of the Universal Corporation, so that I might be—"

"I've read the papers. And when I saw your picture, I was simply bewildered. I'm still bewildered. All that matters is—"

"Kate, I'm depending on you to help me. If you love me, you'll gladly help. I am a very lonely man. It means that I must sacrifice four years of my life. It is your patriotic duty to help me in this affair. I am giving up
everything so that I can help the country. Unless you will help me, Kate—"
He paused. She was silent, looking up at his face.
"Your voice!" she breathed. "You don't know, darling, what it does to me. It's like angels singing."
"You didn't hear a word I said!"
"What difference does it make? Go on talking. Just let me hear your voice again—your wonderful voice."

HARVEY RONKTON, Senator Piteaín and Theodor K. Blair were waiting for him in the library. Blair unlocked the door to let him in.
The rogue looked tired. His face was gray and moist. His mouth was slack. On both sides of it and above it were smears of lip-stick. His hands were deep in his coat pockets.
"Well?" Ronkton said.
The rogue lifted the lid of a silver humidor, selected a cigar, bit off the end and lighted it.

"Well," he repeated listlessly, "it seems to be three o'clock in the morning. There used to be a waltz—I think I heard it the first time in Buenos Aires."
"What happened?" the Senator snapped.
The rogue looked at Blair, then at Ronkton, then at the Senator. He pulled his right hand out of the pocket and held up his closed fist.
"Watch carefully," he said drearily.
"For God's sake," the Senator chittered, "stop this nonsense. Tell us what happened."
"Gentlemen, I shall illustrate it—graphically!"
He opened his fist and tossed upon the table beside the humidor a bright key to which was attached a red fiber disk.
"A key?" the Senator barked. "What does that mean?"
"Her hotel key," Ronkton grunted. "It means she still loves him."
"One of the symbols," Blair said dryly, "of our advanced civilization. What did she say, Mr. Varney?"
The rogue lifted his shoulders and sighing, let them fall.

"She's difficult," he said. "She's difficult as hell. I've got to see her again."
"You mean," Ronkton barked, "she wouldn't listen to reason."
"She wouldn't listen to anything."
"And she's apt," Ronkton said, "to spill the beans at any moment."
"No, she won't spill the beans. I pacified her for the time being. We're safe. She won't talk. But I've got to see her again. You anticipated this, didn't you, Blair?"
"I did. She has been through a terrific emotional experience. About all she wants right now is love, isn't it, Mr. Varney?"
"That's right. I did my best. Damn her!"
"Were you followed?" Blair asked.
"I don't know. I don't think so. I had my hands full. I'd like to kill her!"
"No more murders," said Ronkton.
"I'm in favor of calling everything off," the Senator said irritably. "It's out of our grasp, but you won't admit it. There's too much will-power and not enough calm reason being used."
Blair quietly disagreed with him.
"Don't tell us," the Senator snarled, "that you and Varney are capable of meeting this emergency. I'm sick of hearing that."
Blair nodded understandingly.
"I'll phrase it another way: I can't think of any man more capable of handling this dangerous woman than Mr. Varney. I think we can safely leave the situation in his hands. She isn't after money, is she, Mr. Varney?"
"No. All she wants is me."
Blair smiled. "Perhaps we can arrange to let her have you."
"I'd rather be dead."
"You can't imagine," the Senator said, "how much pleasure it would give me to arrange that."

CHAPTER XVI

THE attitude of the chief of the Springfield Homicide Squad was that, though a king can do no wrong, his misdeeds must be given a certain perfunctory attention. Dan Murchison entered Theodore K. Blair's library with an embarrassed air and profuse apologies. The big, red-faced detective was accompanied by a little round dumpling of a man, who waddled quaintly, was presented by Mr. Murchison as Mr. Orlop and addressed by him, when the occasion required, as "Doc." Mr. Orlop carried a small black tin box in one hand. It was assumed, until later, that he was Dan Murchison's assistant.

Blair introduced the two men to Harvey Ronkton and Senator Pitcairn, and took an unfair advantage by seating himself at his great desk. The impressiveness of the desk gave him a status. He wanted Dan Murchison to stay on the defensive.

The chief of the Springfield Homicide Squad was evidently in great distress. His face was red and shiny. His blue eyes, always slightly bloodshot, looked strained. He fidgeted with his hands, and frequently cleared his throat. It was evident that Mr. Murchison was overwhelmed by his own temerity in questioning this mysterious figure in the world's largest affairs, this genius, this fabulous wizard who was very apt to be the next President of the United States.

"I feel terrible," he said simply, "for having to come here and ask you questions, Mr. Blair."
"I'm sorry you do, Mr. Murchison. I want to help you in every way possible. I want this cleared up. Go right ahead and question me."
"Well, the whole point is, Mr. Blair, that one of my best men swears he saw you in Springfield getting on a bus for Green Plains on the night Chester Ingals was killed. He used to be on the force here, and he knows you very well."

"That can be cleared up very simply," Blair said. "At the time when Chester Ingals was murdered, I was sitting just where I am now, discussing a political question with Mr. Ronkton and Senator Pitcairn. Senator Melrose and Mr. Niles De Kay, of Cleveland, were here also."

The detective nodded. "You certainly couldn't have better alibi witnesses, Mr. Blair."
"But it isn't a question of alibiing myself, Mr. Murchison. I want this mystery cleared up to your entire satisfaction. Let's have your questions."
"Yes sir. Aside from your being seen on the afternoon of the murder in Springfield, you've been seen several times, here, at night, with Kate Ingals. That's what gets me. You've been seen necking with her, Mr. Blair."
"It's incredible, Mr. Murchison."
"It certainly is, Mr. Blair. I've been up against mysteries in my time, Mr. Blair; but I've never tackled one as tough as this. It's just as if there were two of you, Mr. Blair."
Blair bent forward.
"What you've been saying, Mr. Murchison, tallies perfectly with my own beliefs. I know that there is a man who superficially resembles me. I know that he has impersonated me. This must be the man you're looking for."

Dan Murchison nodded eagerly, but his expression betrayed a lack of conviction.
"Yes sir. But it doesn't seem possible that any man could have as much of a likeness to you as all that. What did Bill say to you, Doc?"

Mr. Orlop, who had been staring all this time in silent fascination at Blair, licked his lips and said: "Bill said it was T. K. Blair. He said he knew T. K. Blair. He said there was no question about it being T. K. Blair."

T. K. Blair leaned back in his chair and put his fingertips together.

"Mr. Murchison," he said, "this fellow who bears such a remarkable resemblance to me, this man who you claim was in Springfield on the night of the murder—"

"He calls himself Peter Varney."

"This man Varney, you are quite convinced, aren't you, committed the murder?"

"We certainly are, Mr. Blair."
"If I'm not mistaken, this man Varney left his fingerprints on the barrel of the gun with which he killed Chester Ingals."
"Yes sir. They're his fingerprints, all right."

"Well, doesn't that make the problem exceedingly simple? If I am trying to hide behind an alibi, if I am really the man who killed Chester Ingals and the man one of your detectives saw that afternoon in Springfield, then my fingerprints must be on the barrel of that pistol."

"Yes sir. That's just what it boils down to."
"Then why not take my fingerprints and compare them with the murderer's?"

Dan Murchison beamed. "That's just what I was hoping you would say, Mr. Blair. That's why I brought Mr. Orlop, here, along. He is my fingerprint expert. Are you sure you don't mind having us take the prints?"

"Not in the least."
"Get busy, Doc."
"Okay, Chief," responded the little man cheerfully.
Mr. Orlop opened the little tin box. He removed from it a pad of white paper, a tin slab, a tube of printer's ink, and a small rubber roller. Inking the tin slab, he requested Blair to press his fingers lightly on it, then on the paper pad.

When this was done, Mr. Orlop took from his pocket an envelope from which he extracted a sheet of white paper on which there were other fingerprints. With lowered brows, he compared the fingerprints.

“Well?” Murchison growled.


The big detective groaned. “Thank God for that!” he said. Then, with rising exuberance: “Of course, Mr. Blair, I didn’t, even for a moment—”

“I understand,” Blair said.

“You can count on my vote, Mr. Blair!”

“I’ve always voted the Fusion ticket,” Mr. Orlop said.

“But I’m going to swing. I’m voting for you too, Mr. Blair.”

“Thank you, gentlemen, thank you.” Murchison’s mouth suddenly became grim. “We’re going to catch that fellow who’s impersonating you, Mr. Blair.”

“Be sure you don’t arrest me by mistake.”

“Better not do any necking in the park,” Murchison said with a laugh.

Blair smiled faintly. When the detectives had gone, Senator Pitcairn angrily stated that this was the end.

“What are you going to do? Every man on the Steel City police force will be gunning for Varney in an hour. How can he see that woman again?”

“He has her fairly well in hand. She hasn’t called up in several days. At least, he’s made that much progress.” He locked the library door and called Varney. When the rogue came out, Blair asked him if he had been listening.

“Yes; I heard it all. It puts us in another spot. I’ve got to see the woman once more. She’s wavering.”

“I won’t feel safe,” Ronkton said, until she’s on a ship bound for Europe. But you don’t dare see her again.”

“I’ve got to see her once more.”

“I think it’s useless,” the Senator said. “They’ve been watching her. They’ve certainly seen you pick her up in taxicabs. By changing cabs several times, you’ve avoided being traced back here. But I insist that our whole scheme was cooked the minute that woman entered the scene. The police must suspect something.”

“They can’t prove anything,” Blair said.

“Ugly rumors will get started.”

“One more talk,” the rogue said, “would fix it. She’s on the verge of giving in. I’ve got to see her just once more.”

“But you don’t dare see her!” the Senator cried.

Varney looked at him speculatively. He nodded. “Yes,” he said, “that’s true.”

“If you haven’t broached the subject of money,” Blair said, “tonight might be the logical time. I will give her two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. More, if necessary.”

The rogue turned slowly back to the window.

“All right,” he said quietly. “I’ll manage it.” His voice had the coolness, the calm sureness, of Blair’s.

The telephone rang. Blair waited for Varney to go to the extension in the sitting-room before he picked up the receiver.

“Hello,” he said cautiously.

“Hello yourself, darling?”

BLAIR waited. Was it Kate Ingals or Felicia Hamilton? He hadn’t been seen or talked to Felicia in weeks. She had been West on a flying-trip, piloting her new plane in some kind of reliability tour for women.

“I’m dying to see you, T. K.” It was Felicia!

“I’m dying to see you,” Blair said. “When did you get in?”

“Just this afternoon. And I’m simply perishing to hear the truth about these thrilling rumors.”

“You mustn’t believe all the papers say about me. I’m undergoing what the politicians call a building-up.”

“I didn’t mean that. I meant this nice, eligible girl you were looking for.”

“You know who she is, Felicia.”

“But I don’t! And I’m burning up with curiosity. I didn’t dream you had it in you. It isn’t like you.”

“What isn’t like me?”

“Necking in Roosevelt Park,” she said with a soft laugh, “and in taxicabs.”

A feeling of sickness settled in Blair’s stomach. “Oh, no,” he said. “You’re joking, Felicia.”

“I think it’s terribly funny,” she said, “but I’m not joking. I’m just dying to know who she is. You must be loosening up.”

Blair gripped the instrument. “There’s some mistake, Felicia. You know I don’t go in for that sort of thing. You couldn’t have seen me necking in Roosevelt Park or anywhere else. It must have been some one else.”

“Oh, it wasn’t I. It was Dad. He saw you plain as day. He was crossing the park in his car a couple of nights ago, and saw you and this nice, eligible girl. Necking! He couldn’t believe his eyes. But there was a streetlight.”

“I want to see you,” Blair said.

“Why, certainly, darling. When?”

“I’ll be right over.”

Blair replaced the instrument. Senator Pitcairn, who had been listening in on another extension, hung up the receiver. Varney came out of the sitting-room.

“You heard that,” Blair said.

“Do I have to repeat,” the Senator asked, “that we are fools if we go any further with this?”

Ronkton, pacing the rug, said: “It’s too late, Senator. We can’t back out now without being exposed. The Ingals woman would spill the beans.”

“Varney could take her out of the country with him.”

“With the police,” Ronkton said sarcastically, “acting as a guard of honor.”

Senator Pitcairn patted his perspiring forehead with a folded handkerchief. “Blair,” he said, “how are we going to get out of this?”

The three men looked at him. He was still sitting at his desk, bent forward, with his chin on his fist, staring at the opposite wall.

“I’m going to see Miss Hamilton.”
Ronkton growled: "Is that the solution?"
"Your feet," the Senator said, "are off the ground, Blair."
"I don't give a damn. I won't have her—"
"Wait a minute," the rogue stopped him. "You can't go out, Blair. Only one of us can go out at a time. I've got to see Kate Ingals. That's urgent. Felicia can wait."
Blair sprang up. "I'll be damned if she can wait. I'm sick of this rotten business."
"Where," Varney asked, "is that marvelous brain? You'd better let me handle this. I'll see Felicia, and I'll see that woman too. I know how to handle women, and you don't. I'll straighten things out with Felicia, and I'll get rid of Kate Ingals, too. I'm the only one of us who can pull our chestnuts out of the fire."
"What could you possibly say to her?"
"I could spike these rumors she mentioned. I'll take her somewhere to dance. Some place where lots of people will see us."
"I won't have her dragged into this."
"But these rumors must be spiked. She isn't being dragged in. It won't hurt her reputation. She's scenery."
"He's dead right," Ronkton exclaimed. "A rumor of this kind will spread over the country like wildfire. We can't afford nasty rumors. You must be kept on your pedestal."
"Let me work on Felicia," the rogue urged. "I'll begin tonight. I'll keep on working until I get her consent to announcing an engagement. That will spike the rumors."
For the first time since the night they had met, Blair let his hatred show in his eyes. "No," he said. "I won't tolerate that. We'll draw the line right there. I won't have this fellow laying his hands—"
"Easy!" Ronkton barked. "I don't want to lay my hands on her," Varney said. "But this must be done. I know women, Blair. I know how to make them say yes. You've tried for years to make Felicia say yes. All you got was no."
"It boils down," Ronkton said, "to this: do you want this election, or don't you?"
Blair, his fury under control, was already thinking into the distance. Looking at Varney, he knew that he could depend on Felicia's sense of discrimination. She was utterly unlike these other women with whom Varney's past was strewn. Felicia would, in the beginning, be amazed and perhaps captivated by the rogue's impudence and audacity. But she would, though not penetrating to the truth, intuitively distrust and dislike this counterfeit of himself as heartily as he did. A little of Varney would actually heighten, in her eyes, his own sterling qualities. A little of Varney would cure her forever of wanting him to change his nature.
"You'll have to watch your step, Mr. Varney," he said. "Miss Hamilton is a clear-headed young woman. Key yourself down. Restrain yourself."
That, he complimented, was the essence of fairness.

"Watch your smile," the Senator warned. "Don't go there and leap from chandeliers to mantelpieces, like Douglas Fairbanks."
"I know my way around, Senator."
"Don't let go too suddenly," Ronkton warned. "Work up to it. Tonight of all nights, Felicia would watch Blair like a hawk."

The rogue said impatiently: "There's got to be some change. If I act like a human icebox, I won't get anywhere."
"Just take it easy."
"I know how to handle women. You don't call her anything but Felicia, do you, Blair?"
"That's right."
CHAPTER XVII

RECLINING in the tonneau of Blair's new limousine as it sped along Parkside Drive, Peter Varney tasted for the first time in his life the intoxicating ambrosia of power. He was faced, it was true, by the threat of the electric chair, but tonight was his night. He was the man of the hour. The fate of great men and the destiny of nations hinged upon his resourcefulness. He went so far as to see himself as the man upon whom the fate of civilization depended.

The thrill was in this sense of power. He felt no degree of obligation, as a man of destiny, to the great men, the nations, the civilization for which he was—this one exalted night in his life—responsible. He was not in the least interested in the fate of great men, nations, or of civilization. The thrill was that he, Peter Varney, in the shadow of the electric chair, had such imponderable power.

A slip-up would send twenty-five thousand volts raging through his body; a slip-up would shatter the sanctity of the world. There must be no slip-up.

"Just for tonight, perhaps, I have more power than any man who ever lived. Because I know how to handle women!"

Varney liked the irony of that. This combination of power and jealousy gave him a feeling of excitement that he had never before enjoyed. It was going to be difficult to restrain his exultation, not to be exuberant.

But his expression, as the Hamiltons' butler relieved him of topcoat, hat and stick, was wooden.

"Miss Hamilton is in the drawing-room, Mr. Blair."

"Hi, T. K.!' a girl cried. She came running out to meet him. Varney, who had studied her photograph among several hundred others, met her with the coldest smile, the dullest eyes, he could manage. She was beautiful and vivid and sparkling. Her dark hair, her deep windshield, her electric dark eyes, were strikingly set off by her white satin dinner gown.

His acquaintance had not included many aristocratic women; but he was not awed in the least by Felicia Hamilton. According to his creed, women were all alike. All they wanted was love. Meet them on their terms, and you were their master, from slaves to princesses.

He catalogued her jewelry in an instant. Five inches of emerald bracelets on her left arm, a string of graduated pearls about her neck. Total: about two hundred thousand dollars.

Possessing both his hands, she was looking up, laughing up, into his face.

"You old necker!"

"Felicia!" he said.

"Tell me about her!"

"She's really very charming."

"Then you do admit it?"

His warm smile flickered a moment, was suppressed.

"All I admit is that I needed a few lessons. I couldn't come to you as a bungling amateur."

"Theodore, what's come over you?" She wasn't smiling any longer. Her eyes had a puzzled look.

"Can't you guess, Felicia?" Were his eyes glowing with delight over this luscious young thing? Eyes were controlled by thoughts. He must think colder thoughts.

"You seem so different!" she cried.

"I am different.

"You look so much happier. You look like a man in love!" He gave up looking for cold thoughts. "I am a man in love. You know that.

"With that nice, eligible girl."

"With this nice, eligible girl."

A laugh started and died in a gargle. "Theodore, you can't fool me! When you threw your hat in the ring, you threw away your inhibitions!"

He let his smile out a little. "I was going to suggest that we go somewhere and dance."

Felicia widened her eyes in mock horror. "Oh, T.K.—not that, not that! Don't say you've gone in for dancing?"

"On the contrary, I've become a divine dancer."

"Did the nice, eligible girl teach you?"

"Not she. Another."

"Ah! There are others?"

"I tell you, Felicia, I am a changed man."

"Don't tell me you've taken up drinking and smoking! I know you have. I can smell smoke!"

"Grab a wrap," he said. "We're going.

ONCE in the limousine, he took her hand, and wondered if Blair had ever taken her hand. She told him she simply couldn't get used to his new self.

"You've been taking lessons from an expert. All these girls! T.K., you're only trying to make me jealous."

The rogue told her he'd stoop to anything. "I'll make you marry me if I have to dress in red feathers and roll peanuts down Parkside Drive with my nose at high noon."

"You know very well I'd marry you at once. Where are we going, darling?"

"South Seas. A desert island. We'll dance on the beach in the moonlight and twine flowers in your hair. We'll swim and eat coconuts and love."

"T.K.," she wailed, "I can't stand it. To think that one little necking-party in Roosevelt Park did all this!"

"Who said there was only one necking-party?"

She withdrew her hand from his. He had made more progress with Felicia in fifteen minutes than Blair had made in five years. . . .

The River Inn was the most fashionable roadhouse in the vicinity of Steel City. Varney, following Felicia to a table, took care to bow and smile to people with whose faces he had laboriously become familiar.

He had made up his mind not to dance too well. But the music was heavenly; and Felicia, with her slim, lithe body, was born for the dance.

They had not gone around once when she lifted her face and looked at him with eyes no longer sparkling, but
him of consolation. He knew Felicia too well. He knew Peter Varney too well.

They would go to some night-club or roadhouse. What would happen in the limousine as they came and went? This was a form of martyrdom that he had not reckoned on. Bursts of fury were followed by new levels of anguish, by reckless attempts at self-assurance. The cycle was repeated, hour by hour. He had forgotten the precariousness of his position; the threat to his candidacy, to the nation. Driven into a corner, he was reduced to these primitive feelings of a jealous lover.

It was after two o'clock when Varney knocked on the library door. White-faced, tortured of eye, Blair let him in; swiftly closed and locked the door and stared at him, panting.

"Well?" he whispered. "Well, what happened?"

The rogue looked weary too. He looked as though he had spent a ghastly evening. He dropped to the arm of a chair with a faint groan, lifted his hands in a futile gesture that somehow gave Blair a feeling of intense satisfaction.

"I convinced her you don't love anybody but her."

"What happened? What happened?"

"Nothing much. We talked. We went and danced."

"Did—you touch her?"

"Did I what?"

"Did you touch her with your hands?"

"Didn't I say we danced. Can you dance with a woman without touching her?"

Blair bent close to this face, which, with such awful eventualities, was identical with his.

"Did you make love to her?"

"Wasn't that why I went there? Blair, for God's sake, keep your head."

"Did you kiss her?"

"Didn't I have to?"

"So you kissed her! You kissed her!"

"I kissed her good night. Everything is fixed. It won't take long. You see, I know how to handle women. She'll fall. Any of them will fall if you handle it right."

Blair sucked in his breath. His right fist went back an inch. It relaxed. His hand opened.

He said in a thick voice: "You can tell me the details in the morning—in case I should meet her."

The telephone rang. Blair straightened up and looked at his desk. His eyes were dull, stupid.

"That's probably Felicia," he said. "Take it."

"You'd better," Varney said, "be ready on an extension."

The rogue went to the desk and picked up the telephone.

Blair, with sickly thumping heart, listened.

A man's deep voice: "Hello! Mr. Blair!"

"Yes," Varney said.

"This is Dan Murchison."

"Oh, yes; Mr. Murchison."

"I hope I didn't get you out of bed, Mr. Blair. But it's pretty important. You weren't around the Beacon Hotel about a half hour ago, were you?"

"No," Varney answered. "I've been here, in this very room, for the past hour and a half. Why?"

"One of my men swears he saw you in the halls within the past half-hour."

"Perhaps," Varney said, "it was that rascal who resembles me. Why? Is anything wrong?"

"No, Mr. Blair—except that I can't make head or tail of all this. There is something very phony about it, and I am not going to quit until I get to the bottom of it. My chief says I have muffed this case. If it takes me the rest of my life, I'm going to clear up this mystery."

CHAPTER XVIII

A MAN in torture paced the floor of his library for six hours. Early that evening, Blair had sent Harvey Ronkton and Thaddeus Pitcairn away. He wanted to be alone with his suffering. He wanted no one to share his desolation. Left alone, he tried to convince himself that Felicia's exquisite discrimination would save her from being attracted to that filthy scoundrel. But the wretched man could not convince himself. His intelligence robbed
"I wish I could help you."
"I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Blair."
"Don't hesitate to call on me at any time, Mr. Murchison."

The rogue and Blair replaced their receivers. Across the room, they looked at each other.
"I'm not worrying about that flatfoot," Varney said.
"What did Kate Ingalls say?"
"She's going to France. She fell in line when I said a bank draft for a quarter million would be delivered to her in New York she'd promise to go abroad. She's leaving for New York tomorrow morning. She'll go as soon as she has her passport."
"For five years?"
"No. She refuses to stay longer than six months. But she promised to change her entire set-up, let the Paris beauty experts make her over—change her face and the color of her hair. They're clever at that. She'll come back under a new name."

"We'll take care of that when the time comes."

The rogue walked slowly toward him, with his hands in his coat pockets. He stopped a few feet away. One of his eyebrows was elevated. His face, but not his mouth or eyes, seemed to smile.
"I promised her," he said, "that I'd marry her one month after I'd been elected President."
"Was that necessary?"
"It was the only way out. She has sunk her claws into the idea of being the first lady of the land. As you say, we can take care of that when the time comes."
Blair, looking at him, said nothing. And Varney, sensing that he was furious, laughed.
"I must admit that I'm proud," he said, "of my night's work. You gave me the job of saving your hash, the party's hash, the nation's hash. We were all in a precarious position. I kissed Felicia and I kissed Kate. The situation has been saved."

CHAPTER XIX

THE situation had been saved. The Prosperity Party, restored once again to an even keel, sailed valiantly on. With Harvey Ronkton at the helm, it duly entered the port of San Francisco with twelve hundred delegates and as many alternates aboard.

Harvey Ronkton took a suite of rooms in the St. Francis Hotel. The Prosperity convention began. Delegates, alternates and newspaper writers listened to inspiring keynote addresses. While the speeches and cheering went on, the oligarchy which ruled the Prosperity Party remained in Ronkton's suite and made political bargains as astutely as horse-traders.

There was the inevitable deadlock. After the tenth ballot Harvey Ronkton began snapping his whip and the opposition began to weaken. Ronkton was on his seventeenth mile of perambulatory cogitation when, on the twelfth ballot, Theodore K. Blair was named the Prosperity's choice for President. The nation, the world, perhaps even our civilization, were saved! Provided he won the election.

Jerrido brought the news in to Blair, who was alone in his library. The hero-worshipper's eyes were damp with emotion.
"It is an honor to be the first to congratulate you on your nomination, Mr. Blair."

"I am also honored to have been nominated by acclamation. May I say, Mr. Blair, that this is the most wonderful moment of my life?"
"Thank you, Jerrido," Blair said listlessly. He was waiting for Peter Varney. The rogue was somewhere dancing with Felicia. Almost every night he went out dancing somewhere with Felicia. It was politically necessary. The rumor that Theodore K. Blair had somehow mysteriously been involved in a man's murder and an affair with his widow, had swept the country. That rumor must be offset by a clean, wholesome rumor.

The rogue came home shortly after midnight. His face was flushed. His eyes had a feverish look.
"Well," he said, "congratulations."

Blair, seated at his desk, asked his habitual question:
"What happened tonight?"
"Didn't you hear me?" his image asked irritably. "She's going to marry you."
"Did she say so?"
"That's what she said when I kissed her good night." Varney put his hands on the edge of the desk. He looked tired too, as tired as Blair.
"Damn you," he said. "She's the only woman I've ever cared about. And she's going to marry you!"
"Oh, no," Blair said. "She doesn't love me. She loves you."
"Good God," the rogue said, "what difference does it make? You're getting her, aren't you? I got her for you, didn't I? She's going to be your wife, isn't she?"
"No!" Blair whispered.
"But she said the engagement could be announced!"
"I won't let it be announced. I don't want her."
"You fool," the rogue said in a shaky voice. "You poor, egotistical fool!"

He wanted to say more, but the look in Blair's eyes stopped him. Varney backed away from the desk. He expected that look to be followed by a murderous attack. He knew Blair hated him enough to kill him.

But Blair did not leave his chair, and the look went away. He said, in a controlled voice, that they would discuss it in the morning. Varney gave him a dubious look, then went into their living-quarters. Hours afterward, Blair still sat at his desk, with fingertips pressed together, ordering his thoughts. He had rejected the impulse to kill the rogue, as he had rejected Senator Pitcher's suggestion that the rogue be killed before or soon after the election. He would not have this man's blood on his hands. The problem now was not Varney but Felicia. Her pride, her reputation, must be salvaged. Even if his very election were in the balance, he would not let her be sacrificed. He saw clearly into the future. Yet he could not feel sorry for himself. He might be the greatest living martyr, but he was still denied the comfort and support of a martyr's emotions.

Peter Varney was also looking clearly into the future. He had not been deceived. He knew what was in Blair's mind. He knew how convenient it would be for Blair and the Big Four to have him out of the way before or immediately after the election. Since the conspiracy began, he had wondered how it would work out the other way round. If he could safely, quietly kill Blair immediately after the election, Peter Varney would be the next President of the United States . . .

In his tiny cellar workshop next to the coal-bin, Martin Drum was welding the stainless steel palm to the wrist of the new hand.
He was a tough old hellion, and led a one-man rebellion which freed his town from dire oppression.

By

BUD LA MAR

Illustrated by Henry Thiede

Damsite Goes on the Prod

"I'm a-settin', smokin', and recollectin', on the doorstep of our cabin overlookin' Celestial City, when I'm brought out of my evenin' dreamin' by a powerful commotion in the brush below.

"Ho-ya! Phil Fuller, you old slow-footed horsefly! Ho-ya! Are you there, you old varmint?" a bellerin' voice rings among the mountain slopes, and lookin' down to my right I see Damsite Davis on his horse Tallspieces a-tearin' along a steep point, holdin' a bottle high above his head and wavin' his hat in the other hand. The old locoed renegade is plumb turned loose of all his senses—and up he comes clatterty-bang, cursin', whoopin' and screamin', tossin' himself in every dang-fool attitude which can be assumed on horseback after two drinks of Caribou Calkins' strike-nine poison which he calls whisky.

"Yes, I'm here," I hollers back. "But I wouldn't of been, had I knew you war comin' home in that condition—you old pie-eyed loon!"

He pulls up at the corral, leaps to the ground and makes for me, lookin' wrathful and shakin' his bottle.

"I aint come all the way up hyar from town this early on Saturday night to have my pussonal habits critizized by an old retired horse-thief like you, Phil Fuller!"

"I aint axed you to come at all!" I replies, shakin' my finger in his whiskers. "I don't give a hoot if I never see yore old sin-bespattered ugly face again! Damsite, you're a disgrace to cremation, but since you're here, you just as well give me a tickler of that tobacco-juice liquor."

He hands me the bottle and I takes a few cautious swallows from it. "Herumph!" I says. "A pint of this in a man's gullet and he'd see hell-sarpents and Gila monsters ten foot long! It's an awful ornerity mixture and no mistake. Herumph!"

"It aint so bad," says Damsite. "The fiery taste of brimstone fire is only the red pepper in it." Then he guzzles a couple of inches, corks the bottle and sits down.

"Phil Fuller," he declares in a grave tone of voice, "this hyar nest of iniquity which they call Celestial City is just about to curl up and die if— By gad, sir, I aint a-going to stand for it!"

"What's bitin' you, now?" I asks.

"I got reasons to be on the prod!" replies Damsite.

"You remember I told that dad-busted old pot-bellied tarantula, Judge Brandy Clark, never to show his side-wheel whiskers in Celestial City again?"

"Yep, I remember you tellin' him. He sorts agreed to it too. What with you pushin' a shotgun ag'in' his belly, he didn't have much choice."

"Yeah! Judge Clark! Who in blazes ever told that old draggle-tail kangaroo he was a judge? Fined me ten dollars and costs for gettin' up in court and callin' Limestone Lawson names—and I paid 'er too, cash on the barrel-head! But when court was over I said to the old sanctimonious Airedale: 'If you ever rattle yore bunions in this town again, you fiddle-faced old polecat, I'll ram this hyar slayin'-instrument down yore throat and blast yore insides all-over Hell Valley!' And I hope to eat a rusty six-shooter if he aint comin' back hyar for another term of court this comin' week! I aint a-goin' to have it!"

Damsite took another drink, wiped his whiskers with the back of his hand and glared at me like I was the cause of his troubles.

Me and Damsite have been partners for some years. We sorta settled here to spend the rest of our days in peace and quiet, after a long life of shootin' and slashin' up and down the Western plains, but up to now we aint had much rest. This dang' community is like a wasp-nest with a fire under it. Never before has a ornerier set of human varmints congregated at a wide spot in the road for the
purpose of wadin' the sloughs of iniquity. Celestial City is a rough and tough desert seaport, forty miles from nowhere and right on the edge of the jumpin'-off place. The six-shooter and the double-barreled shotgun rule the land and if it wasn't for the fact that everybody is mostly all too owly-eyed drunk to shoot straight, this den of human coyotes would of been exterminated long ago.

"Well," I says now, "what are you goin' to do about it?"

Damsite scratches his nose and squints one eye; then he starts cacklin' to himself like something was ticklin' him inside. "Phil," he says, lookin' mysterious, "Court will proceed without interference for two days; but on the third day hell will bust loose among us, and you don't need to ask me no questions. All I got to say is: 'Beware!'"

And careful as I might, not another word could I get from the old sand flea. He drained his bottle, pulled off one boot, and staggered to his bunk, and two minutes later you would of thought somebody was drivin' a livyer up and down the walls of our cabin. I had to make-me a bed in the corral, so as to get away from his snorin'.

I thought it over for a spell before going to sleep and although I couldn't figure out what Damsite aimed to do, I knew him well enough to be sure it would be something which could be termed of momentous proportions.

A couple of days later, on ridin' into town I saw a big crowd gathered in front of Caribou Calkins' saloon. Everybody seemed to be pretty much excited over something.

"Did somebody get shot this early in the afternoon?" I asked Shirt-tail Sykes.

"No," says Shirt-tail, "they aint; but they'll be shootin' soon enough—bear in mind what I'm tellin' you! Look at that!" And he pointed at a piece of paper with some handwritin' on it, nailed to a porch post. I pushed my way closer to the sign and it said on there:

BRANDY CLARK—you old windbag!
Talk warnin—
I tol' you stay out ov hyere aint I? Now listen you better do all your tin hoarn judgin in 2 (to) dais and I won't do nuttin' but the 3rd dai look out I ame to raise Hell.
You no who rit this
Bewair!

I walked up to the bar and ordered a Gila monster cocktail and while Caribou was mixin' it, I looked sideways and saw a Limestone Lawson, Peavine Pritchett and Skimmer Thompson talkin' to each other in low tones. Them three old renegades aint no friends of mine and me and Damsite have had several set-tos with 'em in the past. When they saw me, they came up to the bar and started talkin' louder, so's I could hear 'em, I guess.

"It's come to a pretty pass," announced Limestone Lawson, "when an honest judge elected by the people can't come here and dispense justice accordin' to the constitution, and laws of this fair country."

"That's what I say!" boomed Peavine Pritchett. "I hate to think that the Pilgrim Fathers have laid down their lives in vain in their fight for freedom agin' the bloody tyrants. By gad, boys, I hate to see it! Give me a drink, Caribou."

"I think I know who this 'you no who rit this' person is!" added Skimmer Thompson, castin' a sidelong glance at me. "And it's up to us lawful citizens to get together and string up this poisonous centipede which has r'ared its ugly snout in our peaceful land."

"Them's my sentiments!" yelled Limestone, bangin' his glass on the bar.

"Me too, by gun," joined in Peavine. "I am a lover of freedom, so I am. Hurrah!"

Well, this kind of talk made me pretty sore. I flung my glass to the floor, stamped over to the tree and glammed on to Skimmer Thompson by his shirt collar. Then I pok'd him in his paunch right hard with my six-shooter.

"Skimmer," I says to him, "I don't like you none too well; you got a wart on yore nose and the sight of warts makes me want to slash and cut. I'll relieve you of yore affliction, free, gratis and for nothin'!" Sayin' which, I pulled my gun and was about to blow off the wart when Skimmer grabbed my arm.

"Yaaaow!" he hrowled. "Halp, boys! Stop him!"

"And as for you," I said to Limestone, wasn't the gun in his direction, "I don't care for the way you part yore hair. I think I'll—"

"My God, Phil, don't do it!" yelled Limestone, tryin' to force his pin-head into one of Caribou's brass cuspidors.

"Can't you take a joke? We was only jokin'!"

I had a flash of Peavine passin' out of the door. He was
crawlin' on his hands and knees and lookin' back at me over his shoulder, a look of alarm in his little gooseberry eyes.

"Well, of course," I said, "if you were only havin' some fun, don't let me disturb you. Boys will be boys, I know. Well, so long; see you later!"

Out on the street, I run into Wing-ding Gillis, Danny-mite Dobbs and Holey-socks Smith.

"We just seen Sheriff Onhandler," said Dannymite Dobbs. "He's shore mad on account of that sign. He's bringin' in a pack of deputies from Glory Hole to keep peace in Celestial City during this term of court."

"Yes," joined in Wing-ding Gillis. "And I don't know as I care a hell of a lot for them kind of tactics. We don't need no law officers from that stinkin' Glory Hole. I ain't even shore we need any term of court."

"I'll bet you them ornery skunks in Glory Hole invented this court business to cause us trouble," added Holey-socks Smith. "Let 'em tend to their own pot and we'll look after ours. I'm not for even lettin' 'em set foot within a mile of town."

"You tell Damsite we're with him!" put in Dannymite Dobbs. "We'll show them Glory Hole upstarts who's runnin' this village!"

When I got back to our place, I found Damsite stretched out under a tree in the yard. He had a big old cow-horn in his hand and once in a while he would blow a long mournful blast on it.

"What you goin' to do with that thing?" I asked him.

"Who, me?" he says, a blank look on his face. "Oh, I don't know, Phil—I sorta kind of figured I ought to take up some kind of musical instrument to occupy my time. I am gettin' pretty good on it too. Listen!"

"Whooaaa-haooo-oooo!" went the blame' thing, and I had to stick my fingers in my ears to keep from bein' deafened complete.

"Shet up, you old lunatic!" I yelled at him. "One more toot from that blowhorn and I grind yore good eye with a boot-heel!"

"Don't be threatenin' me, Phil Fuller!" says Damsite, bristlin', and he gives another toot just to show his independence.

Never had Celestial City seen such a crowd as attended this term of court. The word had gone out for a hundred miles around that they would be big doin's if Judge Clark stayed in town over two days and people dropped everything and came in to see the fun. They come on horseback, in wagons and afoot.

One man drove all the way across the mountains on a bicycle and even old Pine Ridge Peterson, the prospector, made an appearance pushin' his two old burros, Axle and Grease, ahead of him. We hadn't seen the old pack-rat for four years and thought he'd finally dried up complete, but there he was, chipper as a chickadee and ready to challege anybody to a guzzlin' bout. How he ever heard about the oncomin' events is more than anybody could ever figure out, but he knew about it and offered to bet five hundred dollars in dust that Judge Clark would proceed with his judgin' on the third day, regardless of opposition. He found plenty of takers and this sorta started the bettin' till the whole town was divided into two camps, one side with their money laid on Damsite and the other side backin' the judge.

Brandy Clark came in town in a buckboard, escorted by Sheriff Onhandler and four deputies from Glory Hole ridin' their horses all around the wagon. The whole party dismounted in front of Caribou's saloon and went inside to lay some of the dust picked up on the trip. Damsite and me were standing up to the bar when they came in and when Brandy saw us he kinda stopped and hesitated, a look of alarm on his buzzard face, but he felt safe enough with his bodyguards all around him and came on the rest of the way.

The Sheriff came over to where we stood and engaged us in conversation.

"Boys," he said, lookin' worried, "this dang' town is about to explode. I shore do wish you wouldn't touch it off. Yes sir, I'd shore hate to have to get rough."

"Don't blame me for it," said Damsite. "I gave that scuttlefish standin' that fair warnin', didn't I? If he packs up his duffel bag and leaves before the sun rises Saturday mornin' he's as safe as a babe in his cradle; but if not—"

What the hell are you goin' to do, you blamed locoed pelican?" demanded the Sheriff.

"That, Mister," answered Damsite, "aint none of your dad-busted business. You'll just have to wait along with the rest of the audience for the big show."

"I think I better lock you up right now."

"Try it, you ol' animated sea-cow," said Damsite, layin' his hand on his gun. "I never did think much of you, nowow."

Onhandler saw that besides Damsite, he would have to deal with me, and several other boys who'd ranged themselves in strategic positions. He put on a sick grin, and returned to his party.

Court was held the next day in the old Palace Building, which had served as a theater, saloon and dance-hall when Celestial City was booming, but now only used for special occasions such as political ya-hoo rallies, and other sociable get-togethers which most allus wind up in a big fight. The Palace was erected in the center of town at a place where the street sort of widens out formin' a large open space which is called Death Plaza on account of so many tough customers dyin' there with their boots on after meetin' in mortal combat with other hellions of the same nature.

The morning was spent in gettin' things put together and oiled up so the law could proceed to grind out justice without too many squeaks and hitches. By one o'clock in
the afternoon everything was ready and the first case to be took up was Baldy Boyles versus the Widow Almira Jones. Baldy the butcher was suin' the widow for damages which she had done by wreckin' his butcher-shop because he had sold her a chunk of bull's neck instead of the prime rib roast she'd asked for. Exhibit A was the chunk of meat, which did sorta look ancient by now, and Exhibit B was Baldy's place and he cast several remark. Damside did not come in the courtroom. He spent most of his time around Caribou's saloon, drinkin' silently by himself. The next day found Damside missin' from the town. I looked for him high an' low, but it wasn't no use; the old scorpion had faded from the scene like a breath of fresh air, but his absence caused more comment and shakin' of heads than if he'd been drunk and shootin' up the town. By evenin' Celestial City was in such a state that a single shot fired in Main Street would of caused a stampede.

The sinful three, Limestone, Peavine and Skinner, traveled from place to place in a body, droppin' a word here and there and stirrin' up the pot to a boil. Judge Clark and his bodyguards retired early, not lookin' any too pleased with the situation. There was a flurry of last-minute bettin' and everybody settled down to wait for the oncomin' day and whatever it would bring forth.

EVERYBODY who stuck his nose out of doors the next morning did so with caution. I never did see such careful people in all my life. Nervous looks were cast in every direction. Every human abroad was ready to scuttle for cover at the first sign of danger and hopin' that they would be given sufficient warnin'.

Nine o'clock came; Brandy Clark, escorted by his pack of hell-hounds, was seen to walk briskly to the Palace. Nobody breathed in Celestial City until they had entered the courtroom and the doors had shut behind them. Three of the deputies came back out and began walkin' around Death Plaza, castin' nervous glances up and down the streets and keepin' their hands close to their artillery.

At noon the whole town began breathin' easier. There hadn't been a sign of Damside Davis and his backers were mutterin' under their breaths that he had quit on 'em and that they'd lose their money by default. Dannymite Dobbs even suggested sendin' out a searchin'-party, but I said to him: "Dannymite, just sit tight on your shirt-tail. There's a storm in the air. I can smell hell-fire a-brewin'." And he said, "I reckon you're right, Phil. Damside is a man of his word. He said there'd be some doin's here and by gum, sir, I am willin' to bet a new saddle agin' a dead mule's tail that something will take place. But I shore do wish I knew what the old warlus is cookin' and when he's goin' to blossom out with it."

"Me too, Dannymite," I said. "I'm feelin' as nervous as a wild colt with a wasp up his nose!"

Court started again at one o'clock. Brandy Clark thought that Damside had been bluffin' out by his display of outside force and the court ordered the court-room which didn't sit any too good with some of us Celestial City citizens. He would of said more, but Holeysocks Smith rose up in the audience and said: "I beg yore pardon, sir, Yore Honor—I aint tryin' to appear disrespectful to this hyar kangaroo court, but I want to say this, Brandy Clark, you old toothless, hypocritical grinnin' hog out of hell, I wouldn't no more trade places with you now than I would try to ride a black-bellied bear in a hay-fork saddle."

"Mr. Smith," piped Brandy, "you're fined twenty-five dollars for contempt of court!"

"I aint a-goin' to pay it!" replied Holeysocks firmly. "Throw that man in jail, Mr. Sheriff," ordered Brandy. But Holeysocks, who was feelin' brave from one too many Gila monster cocktails, pulled out his gun and started wavin' it in threatenin' gestures.

"Stay what you are," he bellowed to the Sheriff. "Onhandler, you bald-headed, night-ridden boll-weevil, you take one step this way and I'll tell this gathering of bone-snappin' hyenas all I know about you, you dirty sneakin' hog-thief! Why, back in Missouri, you—"

"Shut up," howled Onhandler. "Keep yore trap closed, Holeysocks!"

"Mr. Sheriff," put in Brandy, "I fine you fifteen dollars."

"Who, me?" choked Onhandler, lookin' wild-eyed and red in the face. "By gad, I—"

But at this very moment a strange sound drifted into the courtroom through the open windows. All arguments ceased and everyone present strained their ears. Again the strange noise was heard, louder, and comin' nearer.

"My Gawd, Phil, what is it?" whispered Dannymite. "Sounds like the whangdoodle a-mournin' for his mate."

"It sounds more like a hell-tiger, roarin' for blood, to me," I said.

"Wha-oo-oo-oo!" went the thing outside. "Oo-ee-ceee!"

Then from different parts of town, various other noises joined in. And there wasn't no mistake about what made them new noises. They were dogs howlin'; little dogs, big dogs, hound-dogs and every other kind of dog which could be imagined and some which couldn't. And in less than a minute Celestial City had become a city of a thousand dogs, all runnin' for one place; them what could howl, howlin' and the rest yappin' and barkin' like mad.

"For goodness' sakes, Mr. Sheriff," squealed Brandy Clark. "Kindly explain the meaning of this hullabaloo!"

"How the hell do I know what it means?" yelled back Onhandler. "Sounds like a company of coon-hunters have jumped out an elephant by mistake!"

Brandy rose from his chair, a wild look in his eyes; he cupped both hands in front of his mouth and squalled: "Go stop that noise!"

Onhandler rushed for the door, followed by all present, includin' the jury, lawyers, defendants, witnesses and Brandy Clark himself, bringin' up the rear.

Death Plaza had become the stampin'-grounds of the biggest and loudest dog-reunion ever held this side of the Rio Grande. I never saw nor heard so many dogs before and I hope I won't again. In the center of the howlin' pack was Damside Davis, astraddle of his horse Tallspieces. He was blowin' his cow-horn till you would of thought he'd bust a blood-vessel any minute.

The three outside deputies had tried to get at him, but the dogs had kept 'em from it. The whole canine population of Celestial City was growin' wilder every second from the tootin', and when Damside saw Brandy standin' outside of the Palace Building he let out an extra wild toot and charged across the open space, surrounded by the wild army of yappin' hounds.

The mayor's petition of Celestial City scuttled for cover. Most managed to scramble back into the courtroom, slammin' the door in Brandy's face just when he was about to get inside. Me and Dannymite Dobbs ran up the water-tower which was erected on the edge of the square and from there we watched the show, holdin' our sides.

BRANDY found himself alone and surrounded by the dogs. Damside started quittin' Tallspieces and circlin' around the befuddled Judge. He rode like a Comanche, blowin' his horn and workin' up his troop to a frenzy. Brandy stood in his tracks, still as a snubbin'-post, while the hounds pawed at him, smelled him, chewed his clothes and licked his face, all the time yappin' and howlin' fit to wake the dead.
"Ya-hoo!" yelled Damsite. "Why don't you fine 'em twenty-five dollars apiece, you darned old fake? Wa-hoo-o-o-o! Sick 'em, dogs! He can't do you no harm, the dad-blasted old robber. Waaaaa-ooo-o-o-o!"

No tellin' how long this would of lasted, but from our point of observation we saw Onhander and the four deputies sneakin' out of the back door and makin' for their horses. They were goin' to try rescuin' the Judge.

But Damsite must of figured on that move beforehand. He took out at a lope from the square, his army of curs followin' in his tracks.

Brandy was white with rage.

"Ketch that renegade!" he ordered. "Ketch him alive and bring him to me. I deputize everyone here to bring that outlaw to justice. I fine you a hundred dollars more, Mr. Sheriff! And now get to your job while you still hold it. Wait, I'll go along and see you do it right."

The only men which answered this call to duty were Onhander, Limestone Lawson, Peavine Fritchett, Skimmer Thompson, Pine Ridge Peterson and three or four others which had bet on Brandy bluffin' out Damsite. The rest of the crowd made no move to join the hunt.

In two minutes the posse was mounted and on their way, Brandy in the lead wavin' an old rusty borrowed six-shooter. And in two minutes more they were back, headed the other way and not losin' any time to pass any idle remarks between each other.

The cause of this sudden reversal in attackin' tactics was caused by the return of Damsite, who was conductin' a one-man charge and whirlin' a lump of something tied to a rope over his head.

This something, we saw with horror, was a package of about twenty sticks of dynamite tied together and a fizzin' long fuse attached to 'em.

"Ho-yaas, you hell-hounds!" yelled Damsite. "Prepare to meet yore Maker, you bunch of draggle-tail apes! Run, damn you—I'll ketch you just the same!"

"My Gawd!" gasped old Dobbs, clutchin' at his hat. "We'll all be blew to hell and gone!"

The members of the posse were ridin' for their lives, and they traveled so fast that they gained an inch on Damsite every jump. The sounds of the chase drawed away in the distance, and everybody in town settled down to wait, strainin' their ears for the sounds of the explosion.

But after ten minutes of anxious waitin', we saw Damsite comin' back in the middle of the street, joggin' along slow and hummin' a song in his whiskers. He dismounted from Tallspies in front of Caribou's place and walked in through the swingin' doors. Celestial City flocked in after him, shoutin' loud hurrahs and congratulations.

Damsite stood up at the bar, a glass before him.

"Boys," he said. "I told that old monkey to stay out of hyar and I meant it. The way I see it, we been gettin' along to suit ourselves without any courtin' and wranglin' with the law, here in Celestial City and I reckon we can keep on doin' the same for some years to come. Am I right, boys, or aint I?"

"You're damn' tootin' you are!" shouted Dannymite Dobbs for the rest of the crowd.

"All right, then!" continued Damsite. "Gentlemen, I move that this day be henceforward called 'Emancipation Day' in Celestial City, and that it be fittingly celebrated accordin' to every man's full capacity. Crowd up, everybody, and irrigate yore innards!"

Which you can be shore we done, and this was a day which won't be forgot in Celestial City for some time.

Back at our cabin that night, I said to Damsite: "Damsite, wasn't you afeered you'd blow yourself sky-high, whirlin' that there dynamite so careless?"

Damsite blinked one eye and scratched his whiskers.

"I was just a leettle bit fearfull," he agreed. "It would of went pretty hard with me if them hombres had found out all they was runnin' from wasn't nothin' more than sticks of wood, wrapped in dynamite wrappers!"
The Riddle of Asta

A deeply engrossing story of the secret service in combat with that master mind of the enemy known as the Man with the Clubfoot.

By Valentine Williams

Illustrated by Joseph Franké

Her first name was Asta—her surname doesn't matter now; and she was a magnificent creature. A face that Greuze would have wanted to paint if only for the sheer beauty of its shape and its frame of shining hair, ruddy like Australian gold; eyes that had the sparkle of the morning dew; full red lips forever pouting as though to drain to the dregs every cup that came their way; and a figure of exquisite mold, yielding and supple and pulsating with life. And always perfectly gowned; heaven knows what she or somebody—it wasn't Herr Ruth alone—must have spent on her clothes!

Age? Somewhere in that splendid burgeoning that for women lies midway betwixt the late twenties and early thirties. Nationality? Danish, she said; but I judged Austrian or South German. At any rate she spoke both French and English with the same slight slurring of the r's—it was charming to hear. A creature of moods, alternately exacting and winsome, but headstrong always and, I suspected, fundamentally arrogant. And there you have the thumbnail sketch of one of the loveliest and most captivating—and most heartless—women I ever met.

Only she and I and, I suppose, whoever was in charge of the German secret service at that date, knew the true story of Hans Ruth. I must say I had a pang, that afternoon at Winchester Assizes, as I saw him taken down from the dock with a seven-year stretch hung round his neck. The sound of his feet rang hollow on the little stair, for his trial was held in camera, and the court was six-sevenths empty—even the press was shut out.

To the world at large he was just another enemy spy, a non-descript—on the charge-sheet he was entered as "Clerk." But neither his bourgeois-sounding name, nor his shabby clothes, nor the obscure background he had so painstakingly built up for himself during those weeks in which he was operating on the Scottish coast, deceived me. I had formed my own conclusions about him, based upon his well-set-up appearance, his careful courtesy and, above all, the uncomplaining stoicism with which he took his medicine. For philosophy is almost always a product of good breeding. And it shocked me to think of a man of his distinction and high character relegated for seven of the best years of his life to the society of criminals.

Though it was I who brought the police to the inn at Rosyth where he was arrested, he seemed to bear me no ill will, and in the course of a number of interviews I had with him while he was awaiting trial we became quite good friends. The Service is like that, you know, or used to be in those pre-war days—though an outsider will hardly understand. All of us, Germans and French and Russians and British, had a job to perform, and we tried to do it with the minimum of bitterness toward the individual.

Scenting a secret behind Hans Ruth's identity, I had meant to seek permission for a final interview with him after sentence. I thought he might wish to send through me a private message to his people at home. But he forestalled my intention. I was still in court when an usher plucked my sleeve to say that the judge had given leave for me to see the prisoner.

The condemned man was not downcast. But he was strangely ill at ease. He kept eying me with an embarrassed, speculative air as he thanked me again for certain small services I had been able to render him while he was in jail. I asked if I could do anything about notifying his family. But he shook his head. "I have no one that matters now," he said rather wistfully. "But if you would tell me one thing—"

"If I can, I will," I promised.

His mien was very earnest. "Who gave me away?"

He would not wait for me to put my negative head-shake into words. "It's asking you to break a rule, perhaps? Well, if I give you my word of honor that nothing you say goes beyond these four walls? Let me finish! Before you refuse, I'm going to tell you who I am, so that you may know that my word is not quite valueless. But you must promise me to keep my identity secret, even from your chief. Is it a bargain, Clavering?"

"You must know that what you want me to disclose is against regulations," I replied. "It's absolutely out of the question."

A nervous gesture of the hand cut me off. "If I tell you my real name, do you swear not to divulge it?"

"I think I can promise that," I said.

By the way he always bore himself, I had guessed he was a Guard officer, and I was right. I must not give his name, but it is famous in Prussia's military history. His family had furnished a regular dynasty of officers to his particular regiment of Prussian Foot Guards, and had cast him out when, as the result of a duel, he had been compelled to resign his commission. In this duel he had killed a brother-officer—a business over a woman. (I caught myself wondering if the woman was Asta.)

"The affair was forced on me, Clavering," he said. "My hands are clean. You can trust my honor."

But the Service never reveals its sources—that's one of the first things a fellow learns; and I shook my head again. "Man," cried he hysterically, "you don't realize what this means to me. I'm not afraid of jail: what I can't face is the prospect of being locked away for all these years without ever knowing, without ever being sure—"

He lifted tragic eyes to mine. "For God's sake, my friend, answer me this one question. You needn't even speak, just move your head, and I shall understand—"

He paused, then demanded hourly: "Was it—was it a woman?"
“Now see here, Ruth,” I said briskly. “I’m devilish sorry for you, as I should be sorry for any good chap in a mess. But you’re a soldier the same as I am, and you know damned well that what you want me to do is impossible.”

“But I’ll go mad in prison unless I know!” he exclaimed wildly. “Forget you’re a soldier, Clavering, and have a little pity.”

“Would you?” I retorted.

“You expect me to be logical when I’m almost out of my mind,” he flared back. “Do this for me, my friend. No one shall ever know.”

But I stood firm. Nor did I weaken when presently he told me the story of his relations with this woman whose strange fascination I had experienced myself. He had met Asta when he was on maneuvers in Silesia—she was appearing with a traveling company at the theater of the town where he was billeted. He brought her to Berlin, lavished money on her, only in the upshot to find her betraying him with his best friend. In the scandal caused by the duel she fled from Berlin, accepting a long engagement at the Thalia Theater at Warsaw. Ruth followed her there, and a reconciliation ensued. “I couldn’t keep away from her,” he explained simply.

Ruth said nothing about it, but I was not unaware that the Great General Staff maintained a large and active espionage organization in Poland, and I suspected that Asta’s flight marked his first enrollment on the books of the German secret service. The more so when he mentioned that, six months before his appearance in England, Asta had taken it into her head that she wanted to live in London and had gone off there without consulting him. This seemed to me to explain his transfer to the Admiralty Intelligence Staff.

It was a tragic story, the more tragic to me who had seen her signature, Asta, and the surname that doesn’t matter, on the back of a check for five hundred pounds. Since Judas Iscariot’s day the cost of living—or should it be loving?—has gone up. Her demands on Ruth for money were incessant. To supply them, he had mortgaged his small estate in Pomerania, drawn his salary months in advance; yet he was never free from the torturing suspicion, during his frequent absences from London, that some one else was contriving toward her maintenance. I could have told him the truth; but, as I have said, my lips were sealed.

I did what I could. I warned him she was no good, begged him to try and put her out of his mind. But he would hear no word against her unless I would answer his question. And that I could not do. He wanted me to go and see her. But that too was impossible.

She had her own reasons for not communicating with Ruth; but the poor devil could not understand why she had never written to him since his arrest. And I might not enlighten him. As was only to be expected, the prisoner steadfastly declined to answer any questions regarding the German espionage system in Great Britain, but the chief hoped that a taste of jail might render him more amenable, in which case he was prepared to get the whole or part of the sentence remitted.

Ruth did not know this as yet, and it was essential he should not discover that Asta had been in relations with us. The fact was that, though we had ascertained that the lady was not engaged in espionage herself, her continued presence in England was considered undesirable, and she had been given twenty-four hours in which to clear out—as I had the best reasons for knowing, having personally conveyed to her the chief’s intimation and escorted her to the Ostend boat. She made no protest, but beautiful as always, if a shade more inscrutable than her wont, departed for an undisclosed destination.

It must have been two months later that I ran across the fair Asta again. I was in Paris on the way home from a rather tricky job of work I had been doing for our Admiralty at the Austro-Hungarian torpedo-base at Pola. In May, Paris is at its best; I had a week’s leave and a pocketful of accumulated pay; if anybody knows a better combination than that, I’d like to know what it is.
The Riddle of Asta

The day after I arrived, I was sampling the baby lamb at Henri’s when she sailed in, trailing behind her the odd sort of old Frenchman you think does not exist outside a Palais Royal farce—corseted, dyed and generally dollyed up. I had no idea she had recognized me until a waiter came across with a note torn off the menu card.

"Please don’t go until I have spoken with you," I read. "It is most urgent." The last two words were trebly underscored. The note was signed Asta.

What will you? Spring was in the air and I was young in those days and then, as now, a bachelor. I knew she was a worthless drab, but was as lovely and divinely gowned as ever and—well, you’ve guessed right. I was lighting a cigar when she and her old beau passed out and this time her enchanting eyes rested on my face with an imploring gaze. Before my cigar was half smoked she was back again.

The first thing I noticed about her, on seeing her at close quarters, was the expression of her eyes. It was oddly tense and I seemed to discern in those liquid depths the shadow of an unspoken fear. She sat down just as she was, in her evening wrap.

"You haven’t forgotten me, then?" she said.

"No..." Now that I was face to face with her, I could not help thinking of that poor devil in jail and I found it hard to be empressée.

She laid her hand on my sleeve. "Mon cher, I have always remembered how courteous you were to me in difficult circumstances. It was odious to expel me, but you, at least, were considerate. And so I think you will be willing to help me now. I am in such trouble—"

"What’s the matter?" I asked. I thought it was money; but it wasn’t.

She drew her wrap closer about her and shuddered. "I am afraid," she whispered.

"Afraid? Of what?"

"Of the German secret police. They follow me everywhere. For two months already. Ever since I leave Territet—I went there from London. I have been to Italy, to Spain, to Portugal, to North Africa, even, and always this man—this terrible man—is on my track. A month ago, thinking that in a big city like this I shall throw him off the scent, I came here to Paris. I take an apartment in an assumed name: I live quietly. But the day before yesterday I see him. I make a call at a small hotel near the Etoile and he is there in the hall. I run away without knowing if he has recognized me and since then I am afraid, so afraid, that I do not eat, I do not sleep, any more."

"And what do you want me to do about it?" I questioned bluntly.

Her hand caressed my sleeve. "You know the truth about me, chéri. See this man for me and tell him I did not mean to betray Hans. Was I to guess that this Englishman, this Captain Dunlop, was not what he pretended to be? He was rich: he liked me. When he questioned me about Hans, I naturally thought it was because he was jealous of him as a rival."

"Wasn’t there a check?" I put in coldly.

"Eh bien quoi? I was pressed for money and Hans could give me no more. So Jimmee—Captain Dunlop—saw that I was worried and made me take this check to pay my bills." She flushed angrily. "How should I know how this dull Hans makes his living? He told me he was traveling on business in Scotland. Chéri, you’ll explain things to this man. If Jimmee, if the Captain, were here, he would do this for me—he was always so gallant. But since he is not, I appeal to you. This man is at the Hotel Carlisle—a man so big like a house, who walks with a stick—"

"In the German secret police?"
"Yes, yes. And very important. You can tell that by looking at him."

I glanced at her sharply. "And lame, you say?"

She nodded. "Mais si. He has a deformed foot."

YOU will probably think it odd that in the upshot I let her wheedle me into undertaking her commission. It was not altogether her charm, however, or yet the fact that I was disposed to give her the benefit of the doubt in the matter of Ruth's betrayal—all she wanted, from him or any other man, was money and I don't believe she ever stopped to inquire how her lover earned his. It was the personality of her pursuer that interested me. This man of authority, "so big like an elephant," who walked with a stick, could be none other than my old adversary, Dr. Grundt, head of the Kaiser's secret police, the awe-inspiring Clubfoot, of whom I had had no tidings since our encounter in Macedonia in the preceding year. It gave me a curious sense of exhilaration to hear of him again, for I had believed him dead. The prospect of measuring my strength against his once more amused me.

He came to me in bed—I had taken the precaution of calling early—attired in a white nightshirt and smoking a large cigar. He was considerably astonished to see me there, but his greeting was cordial enough. "So it's you, friend Clavering?" he cried. "We're on neutral territory here, you and I. Or do you come as a foe?" He spoke jestingly but I noticed that one of his large, hairy hands had disappeared under the bedclothes.

"That depends on you, Herr Doktor," I rejoined. "I've merely called to ask you to lay off Madame Asta."

"Die Asta?" He cocked his head at me. "So, so? Then I was right. She does work for you."

"You're wrong there. If it's Hans Ruth you're thinking of, we had our suspicions about him from the first. We only discovered Asta through him."

"You're not trying to tell me she didn't sell him?"

"Certainly I am. One of our fellows, with funds supplied by the office, got in touch with her and combed her out. It wasn't hard."

"A certain Captain Dunlop, wasn't it?"

I laughed. "'No names, no pack drill,' I quoted. "And that check?" Grundt inquired. "Five hundred pounds, wasn't it?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "All in the way of business."

"For value received?"

"Precisely."

Grundt drew reflectively upon his cigar. "The point is immaterial. The lady has displayed considerable adroitness in eluding me. But the matter is as good as settled. The advantage of Paris, my dear colleague, is that the organization of the underworld enables trifling affairs of this kind to be carried out expeditiously, without fuss—his bulbous lips, pursed up, discharged a long spiral of smoke,—"and at a reasonable cost."

I shook my head. "She's not even worth an apache's hire, Grundt."

The huge cripple's eye flashed. "But Ruth is. A good prize that, Clavering—one of our best men. My august employer was considerably perturbed by his fate. For the rest, the lady has been under observation since the day before yesterday. She will not escape me this time."

"Bah!" I exclaimed. "She has not a thought in her head except frocks. For an ermine wrap she'd sell herself and anybody else. And Dunlop did his work well. She'd no idea of what he was after—or rather she did not suspect that what she thought he was after was to him of only secondary importance."

Clubfoot laughed grimly. "You waste breath," he said sternly. "Ruth must be avenged!"

Then I brought out my trump. "In Macedonia last summer," I observed, "you were good enough to say I had placed you under an obligation."

Grundt nodded. "You saved my life. I have not forgotten it. Well?"

"I claim my bisque now, Herr Doktor. I want to collect that debt."

His grotesquely tufted eyebrows came together in a heavy scowl. "For a baggage like this one? Man, you can't be serious."

"I was never more serious in my life. You must let this woman go, Grundt, and we'll call it quits."

He laughed hoarsely. "Are you in love with her?" he inquired.

"Not in the least," I avowed truthfully. "Then what?"

I considered my answer. "There are circumstances in which it is impossible for a man who has any sense of chivalry to refuse a request from a woman."

He grunted. "Chivalry with that trollop? Fiddlesticks!"

"Nevertheless," I persisted, "trollop or not, if there have been well, certain tender passages between a man and a woman, he must necessarily feel some delicacy about standing by and seeing her murdered in cold blood."

The ogre-like mouth curled disdainfully. But then a crafty look flamed up in the hot eyes—Clubfoot's brain always worked fast.

"So?" he murmured. "Then you were Dunlop?"

I BOWED. With a loud gustaw he flung himself back upon his pillows. "Kolossal! And so she got you to tackle me!"

"She never knew that Dunlop and I were the same person, if that's what you mean. And she still doesn't know."

He laughed stridently. "Don't you believe it!" He simmered gently. "The baggage!" Stretching out an immense paw he lifted the telephone from its hook beside the bed.

"You win, Clavering," he said. "But I am still in your debt. If the little Asta goes free, it is because she has shown she knows how to use her wits in an emergency. A brain like hers is worth preserving." He gave the exchange a number. "And now I must ask you to withdraw. The party to whom I wish to speak does not care about publicity."

And as I left the room, he was cackling hoarsely, repeating over and over again to himself, "Smart, devilish smart!"

Was he right? And had she known me all along? I was destined never to learn the answer to that riddle. But Clubfoot must have had the courage of his belief in Asta's intelligence, for at frequent intervals during the war I heard of her at various neutral capitals; invariably she was associating with more or less shady individuals connected with German espionage. Then in 1919 her dead body was found in a Stuttgart hotel. She had been strangled. The murderer was never found; but I noted as a coincidence that, three weeks before, Hans Ruth was discharged from prison where he had remained throughout the war and, according to the invariable practice in such cases, had been deported from England.
The Triumph of Tarzan

New and specially exciting exploits of the world's premier adventurer in defense of his jungle empire.

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

The Story So Far:

KABARIGA, chief of the Bangalo people, knelt before Tarzan of the Apes—imploring his aid against the raiding bands of slavers—many weary marches to the south of the Ghenz Mountains.

Alone in the cold wet clouds, far above an unknown African mountain range, Lady Barbara Collis found her petrol almost exhausted and her Cape-to-Cairo flight hopeless. She breathed a little prayer as she bailed out, and counted ten before jerking the rip-cord of her 'chute.

In Moscow, Leon Stabutch entered the office of the dictator of Red Russia.

Ignorant of the very existence of the black Bangalo chief, or of Leon Stabutch, or of Lady Barbara Collis, one Lafayette Smith, A.M., Ph.D., Sc.D., twenty-six years old, professor of geology at a military academy, boarded a steamship in the harbor of New York.

Far apart, these people! Yet Fate was weaving a web that brought them into close and dramatic conflict.

Weeks rolled by. Trains rattled and chugged. Steamships plowed. Black feet padded well-worn trails. Three safaris, headed by white men from far-separated parts of the earth, moved slowly along different trails that led toward the wild fastnesses of the Ghenzies. None knew of the presence of the others; nor were their missions in any way related. From the west came Lafayette Smith and Gunner Patrick; from the south an English big-game hunter, Lord Passmore; from the east, Leon Stabutch.

Stabutch had a definite mission to carry out for his Red employers—to kill Tarzan of the Apes, who had courageously thwarted Russia's attempt to embroil the other European nations in their African colonies. But Stabutch got off to a bad start, for a crew of raiding shiftas or bandits under white leadership frightened off the Russian's safari, made Stabutch prisoner and carried him off to a palisaded and guarded village beneath a rocky cliff, where he was confronted by a cruel-faced white man, who called himself Capietro. Stabutch divulged his mission against Tarzan, whereupon Capietro, declaring his own enmity toward the ape-man, admitted leadership of the band of slave-rovers and promised aid in the way of men and equipment.

Lafayette Smith had undertaken certain geological explorations in Africa; and on the steamer he had made the acquaintance of an amiable young racketeer known as Gunner Danny Patrick who was taking a vacation from warfare with enemy gangsters. Patrick invited himself to accompany Smith and the scientist found him an amusing companion. But these two young men were sadly inexperienced travelers—especially so in the wild country where they now found themselves. Smith undertook some independent exploration of this terrain so fascinating to a scientist—and promptly became lost. A lion trailed him for a time, and in his effort to escape the beast, Smith fled through a deep fissure in the rocks and emerged from it to find himself overlooking an uncharted valley. He saw firelight and figures of human beings in the distance and approaching them, came upon an astonishing and horrifying sight.

For Lady Barbara, who had landed safely by means of her parachute, had found herself the captive of a queer degenerate people who for nearly two thousand years had lived, shut off from the rest of the world, in this valley of Midian. In the awe wonder induced by her mode of arrival, she was at first hailed as a goddess; but the fanatical high priest resented her usurpation of his prerogatives—when she tried to prevent his human sacrifices—and caused her to be cast into the lake, enveloped in a weighted net. From this Lady Barbara cut herself free, but upon rising to the surface, found that her only friend, the golden-haired Jezebel, had been sentenced to be burned to death, as punishment for protesting at the English girl's fate. In an effort to avert Jezebel's death, Lady Barbara followed the villagers to the place of execution—but succeeded only in being herself seized and bound to another stake.

As the torches were applied to the fagots, however, Lafayette Smith opportunely arrived, shot down one of the Midianites who attacked him, and—in the brief space that the crowd stood spellbound—cut the bonds of the two girls. While Lady Barbara and Smith were hastily chafing the numbed feet of Jezebel, the crazed priest crept up behind them, the bloodstained sacrificial knife in his hand. They heard his hoarse breathing and turned—just in time.

Gunner Patrick, searching for his lost scientist friend, and armed with his cherished "tommy-gun," chanced to see, crouched upon a cliff and watching the village below, a giant white man clad only in a leopard-skin. Danny recognized the watcher as the man who had rescued Smith's
party from the charge of an infuriated lion several days previously. Patrick had wounded the beast; then at a highly critical moment, the machine-gun had jammed. The men were apparently doomed, when this strange giant had dropped from a tree-branch in the lion's path, and dispatched the beast with his hunting-knife. He had then spoken briefly to them in English; after he disappeared, one of Smith's black men identified him as Tarzan of the Apes.

As Tarzan now crouched upon the cliff, watching the village which harbored Stabutch and Capietro, a landside precipitated him almost in their very midst. Danny, observing that the resultant fight seemed going against Tarzan, brought his trusted weapon to bear upon the scene, and shot down several of the villagers, who hastily dispersed, enabling Tarzan to escape. The ape-man scrambled up to Danny's vantage-point, and thanking him for his timely aid, inquired as to Smith's whereabouts. Danny admitted his leader was missing, and Tarzan instructed him to return to camp, saying that he himself would endeavor to locate the missing young scientist. This Danny did—but it was a long retracing of the trail, and on his arrival at dusk, he found the camp in the possession of Stabutch and Capietro and their men. Capietro was skeptical of Danny's protests as to the innocent aim of their expedition, and demanded that the Gunner pay a ransom of ten thousand dollars to insure his own safety. This Danny reluctantly agreed to do. "And now," he said, "do I eat? If you don't feed me, I won't be worth nothing!" (The story continues in detail.)

"Tie his hands," Capietro ordered one of the shiftas. Then he fell to discussing plans with Stabutch. The Russian finally agreed with Capietro that the palisaded village of the raider would be the best place to defend themselves in the event that Tarzan attacked them in force. One of their men had seen Lord Passmore's safari and, even if their prisoner was lying to them, there was at least another white, probably well armed, who might be considered a definite menace. Ogonyo had told them that this man was alone and probably lost, but they did not know whether or not to believe the headman. If Tarzan commandeered these forces, which Capietro knew he had the influence to do, they might expect an attack upon their village.

By the light of several fires the blacks of the captured safari were compelled to break camp and, when the loads were packed, to carry them on the difficult night march toward Capietro's village. With mounted shiftas in advance, upon the flanks and bringing up the rear, there was no lagging and no chance to escape. The Gunner, plodding along at the head of his own porters, viewed the prospect of that night march with unmitigated disgust. He had traversed the route twice already since sunrise and the thought of doing it again, in the dark, with his hands tied behind him, was far from cheering. To add to his discomfort he was weak from hunger and fatigue, and now the pangs of thirst were assailing him.

"Geeze," he soliloquized, "this ain't no way to treat a regular guy! When I took 'em for a ride I never made no guy walk, not even a rat. I'll get these damn' wops yet, the lousy bums—a-thinkin' they can put Danny Patrick on the spot, an' make him walk all the way!"

CHAPTER XIV
FLIGHT

As Lady Barbara and Lafayette Smith heard behind them the hoarse gasps of Abraham, the son of Abraham, they whirled only to see him fall in a faint from rage, the knife clattering to the ground from his nerveless fingers. Smith was horrified, and the girl blenched, as they realized how close death had been. She saw Jobab and the others standing there, their faces contorted with rage.

"We must get away from here," she said. "They will be upon us in a moment."

"I'm afraid you'll have to help me support your friend," said Smith. "She can't walk alone."

"Put your left arm around her," directed Lady Barbara. "That will leave your right hand free for your pistol. I'll support her on the other side."

"Leave me," begged Jezebel. "I will only keep you from escaping."

"Nonsense!" said Smith. "Put your arm across my shoulders."

"You will soon be able to walk," Lady Barbara told her, "when the blood gets back into your feet. We must hurry while these people are still unnerved by the excitement."

Half-carrying Jezebel, the two started to move toward the circle of menacing figures surrounding them. Jobab was the first to regain his wits after the prophet had collapsed at the critical moment. "Stop them!" he cried, as he prepared to block their way, at the same time drawing a knife from the folds of his garment.

"One side, fellow!" commanded Smith.
The Triumph of Tarzan

"The wrath of Jehovah will be upon you," cried Lady Barbara in the Midian tongue, "as it has been upon the others who would have harmed us, if you fail to let us pass in peace."

"It is the work of Satan," shripled Timothy. "Do not let them weaken your heart with lies, Jobab. Do not let them pass." The elder was evidently under great mental and nervous strain. His voice shook as he spoke, and his muscles were trembling. But still Jobab stood his ground, his knife raised in a definite menace against them. All around them the circle was growing smaller and its circumference more solidly knit by the forward-pressing bodies of the Midians.

"I hate to do it," said Smith, half aloud, as he raised his pistol and aimed it at Jobab. The apostle was directly in front of Lafayette Smith and little more than a yard distant when the American, aiming point blank at his chest, jerked the trigger.

An expression of surprise mingled with the rage which convulsed the features of Jobab the Apostle. Lafayette Smith was also surprised, and for the same reason—he had missed Jobab. It was incredible; there must be something wrong with the pistol!

But Jobab's surprise, while based upon the same miracle, was of a loftier and nobler aspect. It was clothed in the sanctity of divine revelation. It emanated from a suddenly acquired conviction that he was immune to the fire and thunder of this strange weapon that he had seen lay Lamech the torch-bearer low but a few minutes earlier. Verily, Jehovah was his shield and his buckler!

For a moment, as the shot rang out, Jobab paused, and then, clothed in the fancied immunity of this sudden revelation, he leaped upon Lafayette Smith. The sharp and unexpected impact of his body knocked the pistol from Smith's hand, and simultaneously the villagers closed in upon them.

Lafayette Smith was no weakling, and though his antagonism was inspired by a combination of maniacal fury and religious fanaticism, the outcome of their struggle must have been a foregone conclusion had there been no outside influences to affect it. But there were: Besides the villagers, there was Lady Barbara Collis.

With consternation she had witnessed the futility of Smith's marksmanship, and when she saw him disarmed and in the grip of Jobab, with others of the villagers rushing to his undoing, she realized that now, indeed, the lives of all three of them were in direst jeopardy.

The pistol lay at her feet, but only for a second. Stopping, she seized it, and then, with the blind desperation of self-preservation, she shoved the muzzle against Jobab's side and pulled the trigger; and as he fell, a hideous shriek upon his lips, she turned the weapon upon the advancing villagers and fired again. It was enough. Screaming in terror, the Midians turned and fled. A wave of nausea swept over the girl; she swayed and might have fallen had not Smith supported her.

"I'll be all right in a moment," she said. "It was so horrible."

"You were very brave," said Lafayette Smith. "Not as brave as you," she replied with a weak little smile, "but a better shot."

"Oh," cried Jezebel, "I thought they would have us again. Now that they are frightened, let us go away. It will require only a word from one of the apostles to send them upon us again."

"You are right," agreed Smith. "Have you any belongings you wish to take with you?"

"Only what we wear," replied Lady Barbara. "What is the easiest way out of the valley?" asked the man, on the chance that there might be another and nearer avenue of escape than the fissure through which he had come.

"We know of no way out," replied Jezebel. "Then follow me," directed Smith. "I will take you out the way I came in."

They made their way from the village and out onto the dark plain toward Chinnereth; nor did they speak again until they had gone some distance from the fires of the Midians and felt that they were safe from pursuit. It was then that Lafayette Smith asked a question prompted by natural curiosity.

"How can it be possible that you young ladies know of no way out of this valley?" he asked. "Why can't you go out the way you came in?"

"I could scarcely do that," replied Jezebel. "I was born here."

"Born here?" exclaimed Smith. "Then your parents must live in the valley. We can go to their home. Where is it?"

"We just came from it," explained Lady Barbara. "Jezebel was born in the village from which we have just escaped."

"And those beasts killed her parents?" demanded Lafayette.

"You do not understand," said Lady Barbara. "Those people are her people."

Smith was dumfounded. He almost ejaculated, "How horrible!" but stayed the impulse. "And you?" he asked presently. "Are they your people too?"

"No," replied Lady Barbara. "I am English."

"And you don't know how you got into this valley?"

"Yes, I know: I came by parachute."

Smith halted and faced her. "You're Lady Barbara Collis," he exclaimed.

"How did you know?" she asked. "Have you been searching for me?"

"No, but when I passed through London, the papers were full of the story of your flight and your disappearance—pictures and things, you know."

"And you just stumbled onto me? What a coincidence! And how fortunate for me!"

"To tell you the truth, I am lost myself," admitted Smith. "So possibly you are about as badly off as you were before."

"Scarcely," she said. "You have at least prevented my premature cremation."

"They were really going to burn you? It does not seem possible in this day and age of enlightenment and civilization."

"The Midians are two thousand years behind the times," she told him, "and in addition to that they are fanatics."

Smith glanced toward Jezebel, whom he could see plainly in the light of a full moon that had but just topped the eastern rim of the crater. Perhaps Lady Barbara sensed the unspoken question that disturbed him.

"Jezebel is different," she said. "I cannot explain why, but she is not at all like her people. She tells me that occasionally one such as she is born among them."

"But she speaks English," said Smith. "She cannot be of the same blood as the people I saw in the village, whose language is certainly not the same as hers, to say nothing of the dissimilarity of their physical appearance."

"I taught her English," explained Lady Barbara.

"She wants to go away and leave her parents and her people?" asked Smith.

"Of course I do," said Jezebel. "Why should I want to stay here and be murdered? My father, my mother, my brothers and sisters were in that crowd you saw about the pyres tonight. They hate me. They have hated me from
the day I was born, because I am not like them. But then there is no love in the land of Midian—only fanaticism.”

Smith fell silent as the three plodded on over the rough ground down toward the shore of Chinnereth. He was considering the responsibility that Fate had loaded upon his shoulders so unexpectedly, and wondering if he was equal to the emergency—he who, as he was coming to realize, could scarcely be sure of his ability to insure his own existence in this savage and unfamiliar world.

Keenly the realization smote him that during the thirty hours he had been thrown exclusively upon his own resources, he had discovered not a single opportunity to provide food for himself; and the result of this was becoming increasingly apparent in a noticeable loss of strength and endurance. What, then, might he hope to accomplish with two additional mouths to feed?

And what if they encountered either Savage beasts or unfriendly natives? Lafayette Smith shuddered. “I hope they can run fast,” he murmured.

“Who?” asked Lady Barbara. “What do you mean?”

“Oh,” stammered Lafayette, “I—I did not know that I spoke aloud.” How could he tell her that he had lost confidence even in his revolver? He could not. Never before in his life had he felt so utterly incompetent. His futility seemed to him to border on criminality. At any rate, it was dishonorable, since it was deceiving these young women, who had a right to expect guidance and protection from him.

He was very bitter toward himself; but that, perhaps, was due partly to the nervous reaction following the rather horrible experience at the village, and physical weakness that was bordering on exhaustion. He was excoriating himself for having dismissed Obambi, which act, he realized, was at the bottom of all his troubles; and then he recalled that had it not been for that, there would have been no one to save these two girls from the horrible fate from which he had preserved them. This thought somewhat restored his self-esteem, for he could not escape the fact that he had, after all, saved them...

Jezebel, the circulation restored to her feet, had been walking without assistance for some time. The three had lapsed into a long silence, each occupied with his own thoughts, as Smith led the way in search of the opening into the fissure.

A full African moon lighted their way, its friendly beams lessening the difficulties of the night march. Chinnereth lay upon their right, a vision of loveliness in the moonlight, while all about them the grim mass of the crater walls seemed to have closed in upon them, and to hang menacingly above their heads; for night and moonlight play strange tricks with perspective.

It was shortly after midnight that Smith first stumbled and fell. He arose quickly, berating his awkwardness; but as he proceeded, Jezebel, who was directly behind him, noticed that he walked unsteadily, stumbling more and more often. Presently he fell again, and this time it was apparent to both girls that it was only with considerable effort that he rose again. The third time he fell, they helped him to his feet.

“I’m terribly clumsy,” he said. He was swaying slightly. Lady Barbara observed him closely. “You are exhausted,” she said.

“Oh, no,” insisted Smith. “I’m all right.”

“When did you eat last?” demanded the girl.

“I had some chocolate with me,” replied Smith. “I ate the last of it this afternoon sometime.”

“When did you eat a meal, I mean?” she persisted.

“Well,” he admitted, “I had a light lunch yesterday noon, or rather day before yesterday. It must be after midnight now.”
"And you have been walking all the time since?"
"Oh, I ran part of the time," he replied with a weak laugh. "That was when the lion chased me. And I slept in the afternoon before I came to the village."
"We are going to stop right here until you are rested," announced the English girl.
"Oh, no," he demurred; "we mustn't do that. I want to get you out of this valley before daylight; they will probably pursue us as soon as the sun comes up."
"I don't think so," said Jezebel. "They are too much afraid of the North Midlands to come this far from the village; and anyway, we have such a start that we can reach the cliffs, where you say the fissure is, before they could overtake us."
"You must rest," insisted Lady Barbara.
Reluctantly Lafayette sat down. "I'm afraid I'm not going to be much help to you," he said. "You see, I am not really familiar with Africa, and I fear that I am not adequately armed for your protection. I wish Danny were here."
"Who is Danny?" asked Lady Barbara.
"He's a friend who accompanied me on this trip."
"He's had African experience?"
"No," admitted Lafayette, "but one always feels safe with Danny around. He seems so familiar with firearms. You see, he is a protection guy."
"What is a protection guy?" asked Lady Barbara.
"To be quite candid," replied Lafayette, "I am not at all sure that I know myself what it is. Danny is not exactly garrulous about his past, and I have hesitated to pry into his private affairs; but he did volunteer the information one day that he had been a protection guy for a big shot. It sounded reassuring."
"What is a big shot?" inquired Jezebel.
"Perhaps he meant a big-game hunter," suggested Lady Barbara.
"No," said Lafayette. "I gather from Danny's remarks that a big shot is a rich brewer or distiller who also assists in directing the affairs of a large city. It may be just another name for political boss."
"Of course," said Lady Barbara, "it would be nice if your friend were here; but he is not, so suppose you tell us something about yourself. Do you realize that we do not even know your name?"
Smith laughed. "That's about all there is to know about me," he said. "It's Lafayette Smith; and now will you introduce me to this other young lady? I already know who you are."
"Oh, this is Jezebel," said Lady Barbara.
"Is that all?" asked Smith.
Lady Barbara laughed. "Just Jezebel," she said. "If we ever get out of here, we'll have to find a surname for her. They don't use 'em in the land of Midian."
Smith lay on his back, looking up at the moon. Already he was commencing to feel the beneficial effects of relaxation and rest. His thoughts were toying with the events of the past thirty hours. What an adventure for a prosaic professor of geology, he thought. He had never been particularly interested in girls, although he was far from being a misogynist; and to find himself thus thrown into the intimate relationship of protecto r to two beautiful young women was somewhat disconcerting. And the moon had revealed that they were beautiful. Perhaps the sun might have a different story to tell. He had heard of such things, and he wondered. But sunlight could not alter the cool, crisp, well-bred voice of Lady Barbara Collis. He liked to hear her talk. He had always enjoyed the accent and diction of cultured English folk.
He tried to think of something to ask her, so that he might listen to her voice again. That raised the question of just how he should address her. His contacts with nobility had been few—in fact almost restricted to a single Russian prince who had been a door-man at a restaurant he sometimes patronized, and whom he had never heard addressed otherwise than as Mike. He thought Lady Barbara would be the correct formula, though that snacked a little of familiarity. Lady Collis seemed, somehow, even less appropriate. He wished he were sure. Mike would never do. Jezebel. What an archaic name! And then he fell asleep.
Lady Barbara looked down at him and raised a warming finger to her lips lest Jezebel awaken him. Then she rose and walked away a short distance,beckoning the golden one to follow.
"He is about done up," she whispered, as they seated themselves again. "Poor chap, he has had a rough time of it! Imagine being chased by a lion with only that little popgun to defend oneself with!"
"Is he from your country?" asked Jezebel.
"No, he's an American. I can tell by his accent."
"He is very beautiful," said Jezebel with a sigh.
"After looking at Abraham the son of Abraham, and Jobab, for all these weeks, I could agree with you if you insisted that Gandhi is an Adonis," replied Lady Barbara.
"I do not know what you mean," said Jezebel; "but do you not think him beautiful?"
"I am less interested in his beauty than in his marksmanship; and that is positively beastly. He's got sand, though—my word! No end. He walked right into that village and took us out from under the noses of hundreds of people with nothing but his little pea-shooter for protection. That, Jezebel, was top hole."
The golden Jezebel sighed. "He is much more beautiful than the men of the land of North Midian," she said.
Lady Barbara looked at her companion for a long minute; then she sighed. "If I ever get you to civilization," she said, "I'm afraid you are going to prove something of a problem." Wherewith she stretched herself upon the ground and was soon asleep; for she too had indeed undergone a strenuous day.

CHAPTER XV
ESHBAAL THE SHEPHERD

THE sun shining on Lafayette Smith's upturned face awakened him. At first he had difficulty in collecting his thoughts. The events of the previous night appeared as a dream, but when he sat up and discovered the figures of the sleeping girls a short distance from him his mind was jerked rudely back into the world of realities. His heart sank. How was he to acquit himself
creditably of such a responsibility? Frankly, he did not know.

He had no doubt but that he could find the fissure and lead his charges to the outer world; but how much better off would they be then? He had no idea now, and he realized that he had never had, where his camp lay. Then there was the possibility of meeting the lion again in the fissure, and if they did not, there was still the question of sustenance. What were they going to use for food, and how were they going to get it?

The thought of food awoke a gnawing hunger within him. He rose and walked to the shore of the lake, where he lay on his stomach and filled himself with water. When he rose, the girls were sitting up looking at him.

"Good morning," he greeted them. "I was just having breakfast. Will you join me?"

They returned his salutation as they rose and came toward him. Lady Barbara was smiling. "Thank the Lord, you have a sense of humor," she said. "I think we are going to need a lot of it before we get out of this."

"I would much prefer ham and eggs," he replied ruefully.

"Now I know you're an American," she said.

"I suppose you are thinking of tea and marmalade," he rejoined.

"I am trying not to think of food at all," she replied.

"Have some lake," he suggested. "You have no idea how satisfying it is if you take enough of it."

After the girls had drunk the three set off again, led by Smith, in search of the opening to the fissure. "I know just where it is," he had assured them the night before; and even now, he thought that he would have little difficulty in finding it. But when they had approached the base of the cliff at the point where he had expected to find it, it was not there.

Along the foot of the beetling escarpment he searched, almost frantically now, but there was no sign of the opening through which he had crawled into the valley of the land of Midian. Finally, crushed, he faced Lady Barbara. "I cannot find it," he admitted; and there was a quality of hopelessness in his voice that touched her.

"Never mind," she said. "It must be somewhere. We shall just have to search until we find it."

"But it's so hard on you young ladies," he said. "I must be a bitter disappointment to you. You don't know how it makes me feel to realize that, with no one to depend on but me, I have failed you so miserably."

"Don't take it that way, please," she begged. "Anyone might have lost his bearings in this hole. These cliffs scarcely change their appearance in miles."

"It's kind of you to say that; but I can't help but feel guilty. Yet I know the opening cannot be far from here. I came in on the west side of the valley, and that is where we are now. Yes, I'm sure I must find it eventually, but there is no need for all of us to search. You and Jezebel sit down here and wait while I look for it."

"I think we should remain together," suggested Jezebel.

"By all means," agreed Lady Barbara.

"As you wish," said Smith. "We will search toward the north as far as it is possible that the opening can lie. If we don't find it, we can come back here and search toward the south."

As they moved along the base of the cliff in a northerly direction, Smith became more and more convinced that he was about to discover the entrance to the fissure. He thought that he discerned something familiar in the outlook across the valley from this location, but still no opening revealed itself.

Presently, as they climbed the rise and gained the summit of one of the numerous low ridges that ran buttress-like from the face of the cliff down into the valley, he halted with an exclamation of discouragement.

"What is it?" asked Jezebel.

"That forest," he replied. "There was no forest in sight of the opening."

Before them spread an open forest of small trees that grew almost to the foot of the cliffs and stretched downward to the shore of the lake, forming a landscape of exceptional beauty in its parklike aspect. But Lafayette Smith saw no beauty there—he saw only another proof of his inefficiency and ignorance.

"You came through no forest on your way from the cliffs to the village?" demanded Lady Barbara.

He shook his head. "We've got to walk all the way back now," he said, "and search in the other direction. It is most disheartening. I wonder if you can forgive me."

"Don't be silly," said Lady Barbara. "One might think that you were a tourist guide who had got lost during a personally conducted tour of the art galleries of Paris, and expected to lose his job in consequence."

"I feel worse than that," Smith admitted with a laugh, "and I imagine that's saying a lot."

"Look!" exclaimed Lady Barbara. "There are animals of some sort down there in the forest. Don't you see them?"

"Oh, yes," cried Jezebel, "I see them."

"What are they?" asked Smith. "They look like deer."
“They are goats,” said Jezebel. “The North Midians have goats. They roam over this end of the valley.”
“They look like something to eat, to me,” said Lady Barbara. “Let’s go down and get one of them.”
“They will probably not let us catch them,” suggested Lafayette.
“You’ve a pistol,” the English girl reminded him.
“That’s a fact,” he agreed. “I can shoot one of them.”
“Maybe,” qualified Lady Barbara.
“I’d better go down alone,” said Smith. “Three of us together might frighten them.”
“You’ll have to be mighty careful, or you’ll frighten them yourself,” warned Lady Barbara. “Have you ever stalked game?”
“No,” admitted the American. “I never have.”
Lady Barbara moistened a finger and held it up. “The wind is right,” she announced. “So all you have to do is keep out of sight and make no noise.”
“How am I going to keep out of sight?” demanded Smith.
“You’ll have to crawl down to them, taking advantage of trees, rocks and bushes—anything that will conceal you. Crawl forward a few feet; and then stop, if they show any sign of nervousness, until they appear unconcerned again.”
“That will take a long time,” said Smith.
“It may be a long time before we find anything else to eat,” she reminded him; “and nothing we do find is going to walk up to us and lie down and die at our feet.”
“I suppose you are right,” assented Smith. “Here goes! Pray for me.” He dropped to his hands and knees and crawled slowly forward over the rough ground in the direction of the forest and the goats. After a few yards he turned and whispered: “This is going to be tough on the knees.”
“Not half as hard as it’s going to be on our stomachs if you don’t succeed,” replied Lady Barbara.
Smith made a wry face and resumed his crawling, while the two girls, lying flat now to conceal themselves from the quarry, watched his progress breathlessly.
“He’s not doing half badly,” commented Lady Barbara after several minutes of silent watching.
“How beautiful he is!” sighed Jezebel.
“Just at present the most beautiful things in the landscape are those goats,” said Lady Barbara. “If he gets close enough for a shot and misses, I shall die—and I know he will miss.”
“He didn’t miss Lamech last night,” Jezebel reminded her.
“He must have been aiming at some one else,” commented Lady Barbara shortly.
Lafayette Smith crawled on apace. With numerous halts, as advised by Lady Barbara, he drew slowly nearer his unsuspecting quarry. The minutes seemed hours. Pounding constantly upon his brain was the consciousness that he must not fail, though not for the reason that one might naturally assume. The failure to procure food seemed a less dreadful consequence than the contempt of Lady Barbara Collis.
Now, at last, he was quite close to the nearest of the herd. Just a few more yards and he was positive that he could not miss. A low bush, growing just ahead of him, concealed his approach from the eyes of his victim. Lafayette Smith reached the bush and paused behind it. A little farther ahead he discovered another, still closer to the goat, a thin nanny. She did not look very appetizing, but beneath that unprepossessing exterior Lafayette Smith knew there must be hidden juicy steaks and cutlets. He crawled on. His knees were raw and his neck ached from the unnatural position his unfamiliar method of locomotion had compelled it to assume.
He passed the bush behind which he had paused, failing to see the kid lying hidden upon its opposite side—hidden by a solicitous mother while she fed. The kid saw Lafay- ette, but it did not move. It would not move until its mother called it, unless actually touched by something, or terrified beyond the limit of its self-control.
It watched Lafayette crawling toward the next bush upon
his itinerary—the next and last. What it thought is unrecorded, but it is doubtful that it was impressed by Lafayette's beauty.

Now the man had reached the concealment of the last bush unseen by any other eyes than those of the kid. Carefully he drew his pistol, lest the slightest noise alarm his potential dinner. Rising himself slightly until his eyes were above the level of the bush, he took careful aim. The goat was so close that a miss appeared so remote a contiguity as to be of negligible consideration.

Lafayette already felt the stirring warmth of pride with which he would toss the carcass of his kill at the feet of Lady Barbara and Jezebel. Then he jerked the trigger.

Nanny leaped straight up into the air, and when she hit the ground again, she was already streaking north in company with the balance of the herd. Lafayette Smith had missed again.

He had scarcely time to realize the astounding and humiliating fact as he rose to his feet, when something struck him suddenly and heavily from behind—a blow that bent his knees beneath him and brought him heavily to earth in a sitting posture. No, not to earth. He was sitting on something soft that wriggled and squirmed. His startled eyes, glancing down, saw the head of a kid protruding from between his legs—the little Capra hircus had been terrified beyond the limit of his self-control.

“Missed!” cried Lady Barbara Collis. “How could he!” Tears of disappointment welled to her eyes.

Eshbaal, hunting his goats at the northern fringe of the forest cocked his ears and listened. That unfamiliar sound! And so near. From far across the valley, toward the village of the South Midlands, Eshbaal had heard a similar sound, though faintly from afar, the night before. Four times it had broken the silence of the valley, and no more. Eshbaal had heard it, and so had his fellows in the village of Elija the son of Noah.

Lafayette Smith seized the kid before it could wriggle free, and despite its struggles he slung it across his shoulder and started back toward the waiting girls.

“He didn’t miss it!” exclaimed Jezebel. “I knew he wouldn’t!” And she went down to meet him, with Lady Barbara, perplexed, following in her wake.

“Splendid!” she called to him as they came closer.

“You really did shoot one? I was sure you missed.”

“I did miss,” admitted Lafayette ruefully.

“But how did you get it?”

“If I must admit it,” explained the man, “I sat on it. As a matter of fact, it got me.”

“Well, anyway, you have it,” she said.

“And it will be a whole lot better eating than the one I missed,” he assured them. “That one was terribly thin and very old.”

“How cute it is!” said Jezebel.

“Don’t!” cried Lady Barbara. “We mustn’t think of that. Just remember that we are starving.”

“Where shall we eat it?” asked Smith.

“Right here,” replied the English girl.

“There is plenty of dead wood around these trees. Have you matches?”

“Yes. Now you two look the other way, while I do my duty. I wish I’d hit the old one now. This is like murdering a baby.”

Upon the opposite side of the forest Eshbaal was once again experiencing surprise, for suddenly the goats for which he had been searching came stampeding toward him.

“The strange noise frightened them,”

soliloquized Eshbaal. “Perhaps it is a miracle. The goats for which I have searched all day have been made to return unto me.”

As they dashed past, the trained eye of the shepherd took note of them. There were not many goats in the bunch that had strayed, so he had no difficulty in counting them. A kid was missing. Being a shepherd, there was nothing for Eshbaal to do but set forth in search of the missing one. He advanced cautiously, alert because of the unexplained noise that he had heard.

Eshbaal was a short, stocky man with blue eyes and a wealth of blond hair and beard. His features were regular and handsome in a primitive, savage way. His single garment, fashioned from a goat-skin, left his right arm entirely free; nor did it impede his legs, since it hardly fell to his knees. He carried a club and a rude knife.

LADY BARBARA took charge of the culinary activities after Lafayette had butchered the kid, and admitted that, beyond boiling eggs, his knowledge of cooking was too sketchy to warrant serious mention. “And anyway,” he said, “we haven’t any eggs.”

Following the directions of the English girl, Smith cut a number of chops from the carcass, and these the three grilled on pointed sticks that Lady Barbara had had him cut from a near-by tree.

“How long will it take to cook them?” demanded Smith.

“I could eat mine raw. I could eat the whole kid raw, for that matter, in one sitting, and have room left for the old nanny I missed.”

“We’ll eat only enough to keep us going,” said Lady Barbara. “Then we’ll wrap the rest in the skin and take it with us. If we’re careful this should keep us alive for three or four days.”

“Of course you’re right,” admitted Lafayette.

“You can have a big meal this time,” she told him, “because you’ve been longer without food than we.”

“You have had nothing for a long time, Barbara,” said Jezebel. “I am the one who needs the least.”

“We all need it now,” said Lafayette. “Let’s have a good meal this time, get back our strength, and then ration the balance so that it will last several days. Maybe I will sit on something else before this is gone.”

They all laughed, and presently the chops were done and the three fell to upon them. “Like starving Armenians,” was the simile Smith suggested.

Occupied with the delightful business of appeasing wolfish hunger, none of them saw Eshbaal halt behind a tree and observe them. Jezebel he recognized for what she was, and a sudden fire lighted his blue eyes. The others were enigmas to him—especially their strange apparel.

Of one thing Eshbaal was convinced. He had found his lost kid, and there was wrath in his heart. For just a moment he watched the three; then he glided back into the forest until he was out of their sight, and then broke into a run.

The meal finished, Smith wrapped the remainder of the carcass in the skin of the kid, and the three returned to the cliffs to prosecute their search toward the south.

An hour passed, and then another. Still their efforts were not crowned with success. They saw no opening in the stern forbidding face of the escarpment; nor did they see the slinking figures creeping steadily nearer and
nearer—a score of stocky, yellow-haired men led by Eshbaal the shepherd.

"We must have passed it," said Smith at last. "It just cannot be this far south." Yet only a hundred yards farther on lay the illusionary opening into the great fissure!

"We shall have to hunt for some other way out of the valley," said Lady Barbara. "There is a place farther south that Jezebel and I used to see from the mouth of our cave, where the cliff looked as though it might be scaled."

"Let's have a try at it, then," said Smith. "Say, look there!" he pointed toward the north.

"What is it? Where?" demanded Jezebel.

"I thought I saw a man's head behind that rock," said Smith. "Yes, there he is again. Lord, look at 'em. They're all around."

Eshbaal and his fellows, realizing that they were discovered, came into the open, advancing slowly toward the three.

"The men of North Midian!" exclaimed Jezebel. "Are they not beautiful?"

"What shall we do?" demanded Lady Barbara. "We must not let them take us."

"We'll see what they want," said Smith. "They may not be unfriendly. Anyway, we couldn't escape them by running. They would overtake us in no time. Get behind me, and if they show any signs of attacking, I'll shoot a few of them."

"Perhaps you had better go out and sit on them," suggested Lady Barbara wearily.

"I am sorry," said Smith, "that my marksmanship is so poor; but unfortunately perhaps, it never occurred to my parents to train me in the gentle art of murder. I realize now that they erred, and that my education has been sadly neglected. I am only a schoolteacher; and in teaching the young intellect to shoot, I have failed to learn to do so myself."

"I didn't intend to be nasty," said Lady Barbara, who detected in the irony of the man's reply a suggestion of wounded pride. "Please forgive me."

The North Midians were advancing cautiously, halting occasionally for brief, whispered conferences. Presently one of them spoke, addressing the three. "Who are you?" he demanded. "What do you here in the land of Midian?"

"Can you understand him?" asked Smith, over his shoulder.

"Yes," replied both girls simultaneously.

"He speaks the same language as Jezebel's people," explained Lady Barbara. "He wants to know who we are and what we are doing here."

"You talk to him, Lady Barbara," said Smith.

The English girl stepped forward. "We are strangers in Midian," she said. "We are lost. All we wish is to get out of your country."

"There is no way out of Midian," replied the man. "You have killed a kid belonging to Eshbaal. For that you must be punished. You must come with us."

"We were starving," explained Lady Barbara. "If we could pay for the kid, we would gladly do so. Let us go in peace."

The Midians held another whispered conference, after which their spokesman addressed the three again. "You must come with us," he said, "the women at least. If the man will go away, we will not harm you—we do not want him; but the women must come with us."

"What did he say?" demanded Smith, and when Lady Barbara had interpreted, he shook his head. "Tell them no," he directed. "Also tell them that if they molest us, I shall have to kill them."

When the girl delivered this ultimatum to the Midians, they laughed. "What can one man do against twenty?" demanded their leader; then he advanced, followed by his retainers. They were brandishing their clubs now, and some of them raised their voices in a savage war-cry.

"You will have to shoot," said Lady Barbara. "There are at least twenty. You cannot miss them all."

"You flatter me," said Smith, as he raised his revolver and leveled it at the advancing Midians.

"Go back," shouted Jezebel, "or you will be killed!" But the attackers only came forward the faster.

Then Smith fired. At the sharp crack of the pistol, the Midians halted, surprised, but no one fell. Instead the leader hurled his club, quickly and accurately, just as Smith was about to fire again. He dodged, but the missile struck his pistol hand a glancing blow, sending the weapon flying.

And then the North Midians were upon them.

CHAPTER XVI

TRAILING

TARZAN of the Apes had made a kill. It was only a small rodent, but it would satisfy his hunger until the morrow. Darkness had fallen shortly after he had discovered the spoor of the missing American, and he was forced to abandon the search until daylight came again. The first sign of the spoor had been very faint—just the slightest imprint of one corner of a boot-heel—but that had been enough for the ape-man. Clinging to a bush
near by was the scarcely perceptible scent-spool of a white man, which Tarzan might have followed even after dark; but it would have been a slow and arduous method of tracking which the ape-man did not consider the circumstances warranted. Therefore he made his kill, ate, and curled up in a patch of tall grass to sleep.

Wild beasts may not sleep with one eye open, but often it seems that they sleep with both ears cocked. The ordinary night sounds go unnoticed, while a lesser sound, portending danger or suggesting the unfamiliar, may awaken them on the instant. It was a sound falling in the latter category that awoke Tarzan shortly after midnight. He raised his head and listened; then he lowered it and placed an ear against the ground. "Horses and men," he soliloquized as he rose to his feet. Standing erect, his great chest rising and falling to his breathing, he listened intently. His sensitive nostrils, seeking to confirm the testimony of his ears, dilated to receive and classify the messages that Usha the wind bore to them. They caught the scent of Tongani the baboon, so strong as almost to negate the others. Tenuous, from a great distance, came the scent-spool of Sabor the lioness, and the sweet, heavy odor of Tantor the elephant. One by one the ape-man read these invisible messages brought by Usha the wind, but only those that spoke of horses and men interested him.

Why did horses and men move through the night? Who and what were the men? He scarcely needed to ask himself that latter question, and only the first one interested him.

It is the business of beasts and of men to know what their enemies do. Tarzan stretched his great muscles lazily and moved down the slope of the foothills in the direction whence came evidence his enemies were afoot.

DANNY stumbled on in the darkness. Never in his twenty-odd years of life had he even approximated such utter physical exhaustion. Each step he was sure must be his last. He had long since become too tired even to curse his captors as he plodded on, now almost numb to any sensation, his mind a chaos of dull misery.

But even endless journeys must ultimately end, and as last the cavalcade turned into the gateway of the village of Dominic Capietro the raider, and the Gunner was escorted to a hut, where he slumped to the hard earth floor, after his bonds had been removed, positive that he would never rise again.

He was asleep when they brought him food, but aroused himself long enough to eat, for his hunger was fully as great as his fatigue. Then he stretched out again and slept, while a tired and disgusted shifty nodded drowsily on guard outside the entrance to the hut.

Tarzan had come down to the cliff above the village as the raiders were filing through the gateway. A full moon cast her revealing beams upon the scene, lighting the figures of horses and men. The ape-man recognized Capietro and Stabutch; he saw Ogonyo the headman of the safari of the young American geologist, and he saw the Gunner stumbling along in bonds.

The ape-man was an interested spectator of all that transpired in the village below. He noted particularly the location of the hut into which the white prisoner had been thrust. He watched the preparation of food, and he noted the great quantities of liquor that Capietro and Stabutch consumed while waiting for the midnight supper being prepared by slaves. The more they drank, the better pleased was Tarzan.

As he watched them, he wondered how supposedly rational creatures could consider the appellation beast a term of reproach and maw one of glorification. The beasts, as he knew, held an opposite conception of the relative virtues of these two orders, although they were ignorant of most of man's asininities and degradations, their minds being far too pure to understand them.

Waiting with the patience of an unspoiled, primitive nervous system, Tarzan watched from the cliff-top until the village below seemed to have settled down for the night. He saw the sentries on the banquette inside the palisade, but he did not see the guard squatting in the shadow of the hut where the Gunner lay in heavy slumber.

Satisfied, the ape-man rose and moved along the cliff until he was beyond the village, and there, where the escarpment was less precipitous, he made his way to its base. Noiselessly and cautiously he crept to the palisade at a point that was hidden from the view of the sentries. The moon shone full upon him, but the opposite side of the palisade he knew must be in dense shadow. There he listened for a moment to assure himself that his approach had aroused no suspicion. He wished that he might see the sentries at the gate, for when he topped the palisade, he would be in full view for an instant. When last he had seen them they had been squatting upon the banquette, their backs to the palisade and apparently upon the verge of sleep.

Here, however, was a chance he must take, and so he gave the matter little thought and few regrets. What was, was; and if he could not change it, he must ignore it; and so, leaping lightly upward, he seized the top of the palisade and drew himself up and over. Only a glance he threw in the direction of the sentries as he topped the barrier,—it told him they had not moved since he had last looked.
In the shadow of the palisade he paused to look about. There was nothing to cause him apprehension, and so he moved quickly, keeping ever in the shadows where he could, toward the hut where he expected to find the young white man. It was hidden from his view by another hut which he approached, and had circled, when he saw the figure of the guard sitting by the door, his rifle across his knees.

This was a contingency the ape-man had not anticipated, and it caused a change in his immediate plans. He drew back out of sight behind the hut he had been circling, lay down flat upon the ground and then crawled forward again until his head protruded beyond the hut far enough to permit one eye to watch the unconscious guard. Here he lay waiting—a human beast watching its quarry.

For a long time he lay thus, trusting to his knowledge of men that the moment he awaited would arrive. Presently the chin of the skjita dropped to his chest; but immediately it snapped back again, erect. Then the fellow changed his position. He sat upon the ground, his legs stretched before him, and leaned his back against the hut. His rifle was still across his knees.

After a while his head rolled to one side. Tarzan watched him closely, as a cat watches a mouse. The head remained in the position to which it had rolled; the chin dropped and the mouth gaped; the tempo of the breathing changed, denoting sleep.

Tarzan rose silently to his feet, and as silently crept across the intervening space to the side of the unconscious man. There must be no outcry, no scuffle.

As strikes Histah the snake, so struck Tarzan of the Apes. There was only the sound of parting vertebrae as the neck broke in the grip of those thews of steel. . . . The rifle Tarzan laid upon the ground; then he raised the corpse in his arms and bore it into the darkness of the hut's interior. Here he groped for a moment until he had located the body of the sleeping white, and knelt beside him. Cautiously he shook him, one hand ready to muffle any outcry the man might make; but the Gunner did not awaken. Tarzan shook him again more roughly; then he slapped him heavily across the face.

The Gunner stirred. "Geeze," he muttered, "can't you let a guy sleep? Didn't I tell you you'd get your ransom, you damn' wop?"

Tarzan permitted a faint smile to touch his lips. "Wake up," he whispered. "Make no noise. I have come to take you away."

"Who are you?"

"Tarzan of the Apes."

"Geeze!" The Gunner sat up.

"Make no noise," cautioned the ape-man once more.

"Sure," whispered Danny as he raised himself stiffly to his feet.

"Follow me," said Tarzan. "And no matter what happens, stay very close to me. I am going to toss you to the top of the palisade. Try not to make any noise as you climb over, and be careful when you drop to the ground on the other side, to alight with your knees flexed—it is a long drop."

"You say you're going to toss me to the top of the palisade, guy?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what I weigh?"

"No, and I don't care. Keep still, and follow me. Don't stumble over this body." Tarzan paused in the entrance and looked about; then he slipped out, with the Gunner at his heels, and crossed quickly to the palisade. Even if they discovered him now, he still had time to accomplish what he had set out to do before they could interfere, unless the sentries, firing on them, chanced to make a hit; but on that score he felt little apprehension.

As they came to the palisade, the Gunner glanced up, and his skepticism increased—a fat chance any guy would have to toss his one hundred and eighty pounds to the top of that!

The ape-man seized him by the collar and the seat of his breeches. "Catch the top!" he whispered. Then he swung the Gunner backward as though he had been a fifty-pound sack of meal, hurled him forward and upward, and in the same second Danny Patrick's outstretched fingers clutched the top of the palisade.

"Geeze," he muttered, "if I'd missed, I'd of gone clean over."

Catlike, the ape-man ran up the barrier and dropped to the ground on the outside almost at the instant that the Gunner alighted; and without a word he started toward the cliff, where once again he had to assist the other to reach the summit.

Danny Gunner Patrick was speechless, partly from shortness of breath following his exertions, but more from astonishment. Here was a guy! In all his experience of brawny men, and it had been considerable, he had never met, nor expected to meet, such a one as this.

"I have located the spoor of your friend," said Tarzan.

"The what?" asked the Gunner. "Is he dead?"

"His tracks," explained the ape-man, who was still leading the way up the slope toward the higher mountains.

"I gotcha," said the Gunner. "But you ain't seen him?"

"No; it was too dark to follow when I found them. We will do so in the morning."

"If I can walk," said the Gunner.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Tarzan. "Injured?"

"I ain't got no legs from the knees down," replied Danny.

"I walked my lousy dogs off yesterday."

"I'll carry you," suggested Tarzan.

"Nix!" exclaimed Danny. "I can crawl, but I'll be damned if I'll let any guy carry me."

"It will be a hard trip if you're exhausted now," the ape-man told him. "I could leave you somewhere near here, and pick you up after I find your friend."

"Nothing doing! I'm going to look for old Smithy if I wear 'em off to the hips."

"I could probably travel faster alone," suggested Tarzan.

"Go ahead," agreed the Gunner cheerfully. "I'll tail along behind you."

"And get lost."

"Let me come along, Mister. I'm worried about that crazy nut."

"All right. It won't make much difference, anyway. He may be a little hungrier when we find him, but he can't starve to death in a couple of days."

"Say," exclaimed Danny, "how come you knew them wops had taken me for a ride?"

"I thought you walked."

"Well, what's the difference? How did you know I was in that lousy burg of theirs?"

"I was on the cliff when they brought you in. I waited until they were asleep. I am not ready to deal with them yet."

"What you goin' to do to them?"
Tarzan shrugged but made no reply, and for a long time they walked on in silence through the night, the ape-man timing his speed to the physical condition of his companion, whose nerve he was constrained to admire, though his endurance and knowledge he viewed with contempt.

Far up in the hills, where he had bedded down earlier in the night, Tarzan halted, and told the Gunner to get what rest he could before dawn.

"Geeze, them's the pleasantest words I've heard for years," sighed Danny as he lay down in the high grass. "You may think you've seen a guy pound his ear, but you ain't seen nothin'. Watch me!" And he was asleep almost before the words had left his mouth.

Tarzan lay down at a little distance, and too was soon asleep; but at the first suggestion of dawn he was up. He saw that his companion still slept, and then he slipped silently away toward a water-hole he had discovered the previous day in a rocky ravine near the cliff where he had met the tribe of Zugash the Tongani.

He kept well down the slope of the foothills, for with the coming of dawn the wind had changed, and he wished to come upwind toward the water-hole. He moved as silently as the disappearing shadows of the retreating night, his nostrils quivering to catch each vagrant scent borne upon the bosom of the early morning breeze.

There was deep mud at one edge of the water-hole, where the earth had been trampled by the feet of drinking beasts; and near here he found that which he sought, the sticky sweetness of whose scent had been carried to his nostrils by Usha.

Low trees grew in the bottom of the ravine, and much underbrush, for here the earth held its moisture longer than on the ridges that were more exposed to Kudu's merciless rays. It was a lovely sylvan glade; nor did its beauties escape the appreciative eyes of the ape-man, though the lure of the glade lay not this morning in its aesthetic charms, but rather in the fact that it harbored Horta the boar.

Silently to the edge of the underbrush came the ape-man as Horta came down to the pool to drink. Upon the opposite side stood Tarzan, his bow and arrows ready in his hands; but the high brush precluded a fair shot, and so the hunter stepped out in full view of the boar. So quickly he moved that his arrow sped as Horta wheeled to run, catching the boar in the side behind the left shoulder—a vital spot.

With a snort of rage Horta turned back and charged. Straight through the pool he came for Tarzan; and as he came, three more arrows, shot with unbelievable accuracy and speed, buried themselves deep in the breast of the great beast. Bloody foam flecked his jowls and his flashing tusks, fires of hate shot from his wicked little eyes as he sought to reach the author of his hurts and wreak his vengeance before he died.

Discarding his bow, the ape-man met the mad charge of Horta with his spear, for there was no chance to elude the swift rush of that great body, hemmed in as he was by the thick growth of underbrush. His feet braced, he dropped the point of his weapon the instant Horta was within its range, that he might have no opportunity to dodge it or strike it aside with his tusks. Straight through the great chest it drove, deep into the savage heart; yet the beast still strove to reach the man-thing that held it off with a strength almost equal to its own.

But already as good as dead on his feet was Horta the boar. His brief, savage struggles ended, and he dropped in the shallow water at the edge of the pool. Then the ape-man placed a foot upon his vanquished foe, and screamed forth the hideous challenge of his tribe.

The Gunner sat suddenly erect, awakened out of a sound sleep. "Geeze!" he exclaimed. "What was that?" Receiving no answer, he looked about. "Wouldn't that eat you?" he murred. "He's went. I wonder has he run out on me? He didn't seem like that kind of a guy. But you can't never tell—I've had pals to double-cross me before this..."
In the village of Capietro a dozing sentry snapped suddenly alert, while his companion half rose to his feet. “What was that?” demanded one. “A hairy one has made a kill,” said the other.

Sheeta the panther, down-wind, stalking both the man and the boar, stopped in his tracks; then he turned aside and loped away in easy, graceful bounds; but he had not gone far before he stopped again and raised his nose up-wind. Again the scent of man, but this time a different man; nor was there any sign of the feared thunder-stick that usually accompanied the scent-spoor of the Tarman-gani. Belly low, Sheeta moved slowly up the slope toward Danny Gunner Patrick.


He arose and moved about, feeling out his muscles. They were lame and sore, but he realized that he was much rested. Then he scanned the distance for a sight of Tarzan, and instead saw Sheeta the panther a few hundred yards away.

Danny Patrick’s hoodlum, racketeer, gangster, gunman, killer though he was, trembled in terror. Cold sweat burst from every pore, and he could feel the hair rise on his scalp. He felt a mad impulse to run, but fortunately for Danny, his legs refused to move. He was literally, in the vernacular to which he was accustomed, scared stiff.

The panther had stopped and was surveying him. Caution and hereditary fear of man gave the great cat pause; but he was angry because he had been frightened from his prey after hunting futilely all night, and he was very, very hungry. He growled, his face wrinkled in a hideous snarl, and Danny felt his knees giving beneath him.

Then, beyond the panther, he saw the high grass moving to the approach of another animal, which the Gunner promptly assumed was the beast’s mate. There was just a single, narrow strip of this high grass, and when the animal had crossed it, he too would see Danny. One of them might hesitate to attack a man—Danny didn’t know; but he was sure that two would not.

He dropped to his knees and did something that he had not done for many years—he prayed. And then the grasses parted, and Tarzan of the Apes stepped into view, the carcass of a boar upon one broad shoulder. Instantly the ape-man took in the scene.

Dropping the carcass of Horta, he voiced a sudden, ferocious growl that startled Sheeta no more than it did Danny Patrick. The cat wheeled, instantly on the defensive. Tarzan charged, growls rumbling from his throat, and Sheeta did exactly what Tarzan had assumed the beast would do—turned and fled. Then Tarzan picked up the carcass of Horta and came up the slope to Danny, who still knelt, open-eyed and petrified with awe.

“What are you kneeling for?” asked the ape-man. “I was just tying my boot-lace,” explained the Gunner.

“Here is breakfast,” said Tarzan, dropping the boar to the ground. “Help yourself.”

“That sure looks good to me,” said Danny. “I could eat it raw.”

“That is fine,” said Tarzan, and squatting, he cut two strips from one of the hams. “Here,” he said, offering one to the Gunner.

“Quit your kidding,” remonstrated the latter.

Tarzan eyed him questioningly, at the same time tearing off a mouthful of the meat with his strong teeth. “Horta is a little bit tough,” he remarked, “but he is the best I could do without losing a great deal of time. Why don’t you eat? I thought you were hungry.”

“I got to cook mine,” said the Gunner. “But you said you could eat it raw,” the ape-man reminded him.

“That’s just a saying,” explained the Gunner. “I might, at that; but I aint never tried it.”

“Make a fire, then, and cook yours,” said Tarzan. “Say,” remarked Danny a few minutes later as he squatted before his fire grilling his meat, “did you hear that noise a little while ago?”

“What was it like?”

“I never heard nothing like it but once before. . . . Say, I just took a tumble to myself! That was you killin’ the pig. I heard you yell like that the night you killed the lion in our camp.”

“We will be going as soon as you finish your meat,” said Tarzan. He was backing off several pieces, half of which he handed to the Gunner; the remainder he dropped into his quiver. “Take these,” he said. “You may get hungry before we can make another kill.” Then he scraped a hole in the loose earth and buried the remainder of the carcass.

“What you doin’ that for?” asked the Gunner. “Afraid it will smell?”

“We may come back this way,” explained Tarzan. “If we do, Horta will be less tough.”

The Gunner made no comment, but he assured himself, mentally, that he wasn’t no dog, to bury his meat and then dig it up again after it had rotted. The idea almost made him sick.

Tarzan quickly picked up the trail of Lafayette Smith and followed it easily, though the Gunner saw nothing to indicate that human foot had ever trod these hills.

“I don’t see nothing,” he said.

“I have noticed that,” returned Tarzan.

“That,” thought Danny Patrick, “sounds like a dirty crack.” But he said nothing.

“A lion picked up his trail here,” said the ape-man.

“You aint spoolin’ me, are you?” demanded Danny. “There ain’t no sign of nothin’ on this ground.”

“Nothing that you can see, perhaps,” replied Tarzan; “but then, though you may not know it, you so-called civilized men are almost blind and quite stone deaf.”

Soon they came to the fissure, and here Tarzan saw that the man and the lion had both gone in, the lion following the man, and that only the lion had come out.

“That looks tough for old Smithy, doesn’t it?” said the Gunner when Tarzan had explained the story of the spoor.

“It may,” replied the ape-man. “I’ll go in and look for him. You can wait here, or follow. You can’t get lost if you stay inside this crack.”

“Go ahead,” said Danny. “I’ll follow.”

The fissure was much longer than Tarzan had imagined; but some distance from the entrance he discovered evidence that the lion had not attacked Smith; for he could see where Numa had turned about, and that the man had continued on. Some recent scars on the sides of the fissure told him the rest of the story quite accurately.

“It’s fortunate he didn’t hit Numa,” soliloquized the ape-man.

At the end of the fissure Tarzan had some difficulty in wriggling through the aperture that opened into the valley of the land of Midian; but once through, he picked up the trail of Smith again and followed it down toward the lake.

He walked rapidly, for the spoor was plain. When he came to the shore of Chinnereth, he discovered Smith’s tracks intermingled with those of a woman wearing well-worn European boots, and another shod with sandals.
When he had first entered the valley, he had seen the village of the South Midians in the distance, and now he drew the false conclusion that Smith had discovered a friendly people and other whites, and was in no danger.

His curiosity piqued by the mystery of this hidden valley, the ape-man determined to visit the village before continuing on Smith's trail. Time had never entered greatly into his calculations—trained, as he had been, by savage aces to whom time meant less than nothing; but to investigate every detail of his wilderness world was as much a part of the man as is his religion to a priest.

And so he continued rapidly on toward the distant village, while Danny Patrick crawled and stumbled slowly along the rocky floor of the fissure.

Danny was tired. Momentarily he expected to meet Tarzan returning either with Smith or with word of his death; so he stopped often to rest, with the result that when he had reached the end of the fissure, and crawled through to behold the mystifying sight of a strange valley spread before him, Tarzan was already out of sight.

"Geeze!" exclaimed the Gunner. "Who would have thought that hole led into a place like this? I wonder which way that Tarzan guy went?"

This thought occupied the Gunner for a few minutes. He examined the ground as he had seen Tarzan do, mis-taken a few spots where some little rodent had scratched up the earth, or taken a dust-bath, for the footprints of a man, and set forth in the wrong direction.

CHAPTER XVII

She Is Mine

THE stocky blond warriors of Elia the son of Noah quickly surrounded and seized Lafayette Smith and his two companions. Elia picked up Smith's pistol and examined it with interest; then he dropped it into a goat-skin pouch that was suspended from the girdle that held his single garment about him.

"This one," said Essbaal, pointing to Jezebel, "is mine."

"Why?" asked Elia the son of Noah.

"I saw her first," replied Essbaal.

"Did you hear what he said?" demanded Jezebel of Lady Barbara.

The English girl nodded apathetically. Her brain was numb with the disappointment and the horror of the situation; for in some respects their fate might be worse with these men than with those of South Midian. These were lusty, primitive warriors, not weak, half-witted creatures.

"He wants me," said Jezebel. "Is he not beautiful?"

Lady Barbara turned upon the girl almost angrily, and then suddenly she remembered that Jezebel was little more than a child in experience, and had no conception of the fate that might await her at the hands of the North Midians.

"Poor little Jezebel!" said Lady Barbara.

"What do you mean, Barbara?" asked the girl. "Are you not happy that the beautiful man wants me?"

"Listen, Jezebel," said Lady Barbara. "You know I am your friend, do you not?"

"My only friend," replied the girl. "The only person I ever loved."

"Then believe me when I say that you must kill yourself, as I shall kill myself, if we are unable to escape from these creatures."

"Why?" demanded Jezebel. "Are they not more beautiful than the South Midians?"

"Forget their fatal beauty," replied Lady Barbara, "but never forget what I have told you."

The North Midians marched loosely and without discipline. They seemed a garrulous race, and their arguments and speeches were numerous and lengthy. Sometimes, so intent did they become on some point at argument, or in listening to a long-winded oration by one of their fellows, that they quite forgot their prisoners, who were sometimes amongst them, sometimes in advance and once behind them. This was what Lady Barbara had been awaiting, and what she had to some extent engineered.

"Now!" she whispered. "They are not looking. She halted and turned back. They were among the trees of the forest, where some concealment might be found.

Smith and Jezebel had stopped at Lady Barbara's direction; and for an instant the three paused, breathless, watching the retreating figures of their captors.

"Now run!" whispered Lady Barbara. "We'll scatter and meet again at the foot of the cliff."

Just what prompted Lady Barbara to suggest that they separate, Lafayette Smith did not understand—but as he had more confidence in Lady Barbara's judgment in practical matters than in his own, he did not voice his doubts.

The English girl ran in a southeasterly direction, while Jezebel, obeying the commands of her friend, scurried off toward the southwest. Smith, glancing to the rear, discovered no indication that their captors had as yet missed them. For a moment he was hesitant as to what course to pursue. The conviction still gripped him that he was the natural protector of both girls, notwithstanding the unfortunate circumstances that had nullified his efforts to function successfully in that rôle, but he saw that it was going to be still more difficult to protect them both, now that they had elected to run in different directions.

However, his decision was soon made, difficult though it was. Jezebel was in her own world; contemplation of capture by the North Midians had, so far from alarming her, appeared rather to have met with enthusiastic anticipation on her part.

Lady Barbara, on the other hand, was of another world—his own world; and he had heard her say that death would be preferable to captivity among these semi-savages. His duty, therefore, was to follow and protect Lady Barbara and so he let Jezebel take her way, unprotected back toward the cliff, while he pursued the English girl in the direction of Chinnereth.

LADY BARBARA COLLIS ran until she was out of breath. For several minutes she had distinctly heard behind her the heavy footfalls of a man. Frantic from hopelessness, she drew her pocket-knife from a pocket of her jacket and opened the blade as she ran.

She wondered if she could destroy herself with this inadequate weapon. She was positive that she could not inflict either fatal or disabling injuries upon her pursuer with it. Yet the thought of self-destruction revolted her. The realization was upon her that she had about reached the limit of her endurance, and that the fatal decision could not be long averted, when her heritage of English fighting blood decided the question for her. There was but one thing it would permit—she must stand and defend herself. She stopped then, suddenly, and wheeled about, the little knife clutched in her right hand—a tigress at bay.

When she saw Lafayette Smith running toward her, she collapsed suddenly and sank to the ground, where she sat with her back against the bole of a tree. Lafayette Smith, breathing hard, came and sat down beside her.

Lady Barbara was the first to regain her power of speech.

"I thought I said we would scatter," she reminded him.

"I couldn't leave you alone," he replied.
A
SMALL black sedan bearing two bulky figures dressed in leather flying-suits flung itself from the doorway of a garage in downtown Cleveland at eleven o’clock at night and slithered hurriedly through a snow-filled street toward the west, its tail-light dwindling rapidly in the flurry of silent flakes that sifted down upon a deadened, bitter wind.

“You want to take this modoc?” asked Collyer McGinus, who was driving.

“Godunk,” Mat Ollinger corrected gravely. “I don’t care, Col. You can have him if you want him. Or I’ll take him. He’s a damn fool, whoever he is. Damn! I’d ride across those mountains on this kind of a night if I were that guy! Who is this boyeg, anyhow?”

“Doctor,” Collie explained, taking a corner drunkenly. “Funny, with all the doctors there are in New York, they’ve got to have this one. Pete said this guy was on the eastbound out of Chicago—had to get through—some kid in New York has a safety-pin stuck in her lungs—this guy’s the only one in the country, they say, who’s got brains enough to get it out without killing her. Man, what a night to take a passenger! I’ll match you to see who gets him.”

Ollinger, awkward and unable to move freely because of the size and weight of his flying-suit, scrounged around in the seat and fished in his pocket for a coin. He found it, brought it out to the air through five thicknesses of clothing. Without looking to see whether “heads” or “tails” would be uppermost, he slapped it down upon his wrist.

“Call it,” he demanded.

“Tails,” Collie said.

Mat looked, cautiously that he did not lose the coin.

“Heads.” He laughed. “Some day I’ll be wise up to match with you! Mister, look at it snow!”

Collie drove in silence. They reached the outskirts of town, picked their way through a suburb, out upon an open highway with snow drifting badly on it. The chain of red lights, like rubies strung upon a cord around the area of the field, loomed up suddenly through the flitting flakes.

“Better let me take this fella,” Collie said at last.

“You take him?” Mat challenged. “What’s the matter with my taking him? I’ll get him through!”

Collie slowed the car, turned carefully into the driveway that led to the H-T Airlines hangar. He was having an argument with himself, and Mat observed this.

“You think I won’t get through?” Mat asked tersely.

“Afraid I’ll hurt this bozo?”

Collie nodded almost imperceptibly. “You might not get through—and you might hurt him,” he admitted with utter frankness. “I might bust him up myself, if I took him, but probably I wouldn’t. I’ve been flying the run longer than you have, Mat, that’s all.”

“You’re the ‘big air-mail pilot,’ aren’t you?” Mat asked, with a light sarcasm in his tone. “What the hell, Col! Give me a chance for some front-page stuff once in a while. I’m not going to kill this bozo—I’ll get him through!”

Collie stopped the car in front of the operations office, sat there at the wheel while he fought his way into an inside pocket for a cigarette. He lighted it, puffed slowly.

He knew that Mat, with his ordinary mail load, would probably get through tonight; he was sure that the younger man would turn back to the field if the weather became impassable. He had studied Mat for more than a month, now, and he knew that his friend’s failing was his pride. With this doctor in the mail-pit, with a child’s life hanging in the balance of whether or not he got through to New York, Mat would be likely to attempt to go through against his better judgment. And if he did this and failed, the child in New York would die—and so would both men in the airplane.

Collie considered these various factors before replying to Mat’s almost bitter gibe. He considered for a time Mat’s youth: youth is often impatient to attempt things which older men avoid. It was so with Mat tonight.

“I know you’d probably get him through,” Collie admitted, “but I think you’d do a better job of flying if you were by yourself. You wouldn’t feel forced to try to buck something too tough. I know you’re not afraid—but if you were more so, you’d be safer.”

Mat laughed unpleasantly. “It’s a real laugh to hear you talk like that!” he said acidly. “You with all your tough-weather runs, going out when other pilots wanted to sit on the ground—forcing pilots to follow you—or seem like cowards! Don’t talk to me about safety! Don’t try to ride me about busting into tough stuff! Why, say! You’ve forced me into more bad weather than all the doctors in the country ever will! Pride—that’s a laugh! What makes you go out on nights when you can’t see your wing-tips? Nothing in God’s world but your rotten pride!”

“Listen, Mat, you’ve got me wrong—”

“I’m going to fly this bozo tonight,” Mat declared, hurrying his words. “I’m going to take him, and I’m going to get him there. Laugh that off!”

He climbed out of the car and walked away in the darkness toward the hangar. Collie sat there at the wheel, thinking of the irony of friendship. He liked Mat, and he had evidence that Mat reciprocated this feeling. He had helped Mat to learn to fly blind, to buck bad weather, to do half a dozen things which, a month ago, had been impossibilities to the youngster. This outburst did not worry him particularly, for he knew that Mat was in one of the sudden flashes of anger so characteristic of him; but the revelation of how Mat felt toward the record Collie had set up in months gone by was disconcerting.
In the end he accepted the situation as it was, for there was nothing more that his dignity would let him do. He climbed out of the car, locked it, trudged silently through the thick blanket of snow toward the operations office. His clothing made him look twice his actual size; in the light of the office window as he passed it, he looked like some monstrous, black-skinned, hairless animal that was walking erect.

He shoved his way through the door of the operations office, found Pete Henley, the operations manager, at the weather map inside. He saw that Mat was in conversation with Pete, so he waddled silently on into the hall and thus to the pilots' room.

From there, in disconnected snatches, he heard Pete telling of the doctor who was going East tonight.

Collie learned, thus, that this man was Doctor Dyer. He heard Pete telling Mat to get through—to dive into the weather, regardless of how dirty it might become, to get through. There would be a parachute, Pete said; Dyer would be instructed in its use, if Mat got in trouble.

Just then the eastbound from Chicago roared down above the hangar, sounding like a giant sawmill biting into hardwood. The mail was in, it was time to go out with it again. Collie was flying the first section.

He struggled into his fleece-lined moccasins, slipped his face-mask on, emerged from the pilots' room at a half run. He took a hurried glance at the weather map, spoke a word of greeting to Pete Henley and a wish for good luck to Mat, and was gone into the darkness bordering the circle of light thrown down from the hangar floods.

THREE hours and a half later, after one of the hardest battles Collie had ever had with weather, he landed his ice-covered plane at Hadley Field, outside of Newark. It was three-thirty in the morning. Once again, following on the heels of a hundred other similar occasions, Collyer McGinus had come through with the mail when no other ship had come or gone through the same kind of weather.

But there was no feeling of exultation from this trip. There never would be that old excited tingle and thrill and satisfaction which he had used to have after a flight with dirty weather. Never again, after seeing how Mat Olinger felt about it! He had thought Mat admired him, rather envied him his ability; and he had tried to give this same ability to the younger man in return for the imagined adulation. Well, that was finished.

Yet Collie still was Mat's friend, would always be, until Mat, by his actions, indicated that the friendship was not wanted.

He climbed stiffly from the cockpit, took his post-office forms into the hangar office to make them up before the truck-driver took the mail to town. He was cold after those long hours fighting snow and sleet; and although he saw Van Duyne, the Hadley operations manager, when he came in the door, he was only semi-conscious of the other's presence there. He wrote stiffly for perhaps five minutes, made up his trip log and other papers, turned them over to the office boy, who always waited there inside the door with admiration in his eyes and a word of welcome on his lips.

It was three-forty when Collie stretched languidly, sighed, and slumped down in his chair in complete relaxation. He looked up at Van Duyne, who worked at his desk in silence.

"Ice tonight," he remarked, as if that condition of the weather were an ordinary thing. "Ice—and tough going."

Van Duyne nodded absently; he was not a friendly man, although he was pleasant in a forced sort of way after one broke through his deep reserve.

"Thought there would be," he said a little wearily.

Collie did not notice the lines of worry on Van's face, the veiled fear in his eyes, the strained, subdued nervousness in every move Van Duyne made. Collie didn't notice such things readily.

"Mat ought to be coming in most any time, now. Say, did Pete wire you about that doctor Mat's bringing through? That's a helluva way to travel—sit up there in that open mail-pit and freeze to death! Mat better get through—some kid in town's liable to die if he doesn't, Pete said."

Van Duyne tapped his pencil on the plate-glass table-top in front of him. His jaw muscles bulged slightly under tawny skin. His lips suddenly grew grim.

"Why," he asked, with a slow and heavy emphasis, "—why didn't you fly this doctor—instead of sending him with Mat? You had the first section—you knew enough for that."

Collie laughed shortly, mirthlessly. He knew what Van Duyne was thinking, what other pilots would think when they heard of this. He was the oldest pilot on the run; it had been his place to bring this doctor, regardless of Mat's protests. He knew that, had thought of it when Mat demanded the opportunity to have the passenger. He would be condemned if Mat didn't come in, if this child waiting in a hospital should die, if Doctor Dyer or Mat—or both of them—should be killed in a crash out in that welter of snow and ice.

But explanations in a time like that are futile. Collie had had a responsibility, and he had failed to accept it. There was no excuse; it was far better, he thought, to say nothing than to wrangle with Van Duyne about a fault from which there was no absolution.

He got up, paced the floor slowly, lit a cigarette. "Mat wanted it," he said. "Oh, it was a damn' fool thing for me to do—I realize that. We got in an argument over whether to take him—he got sore—thought I thought he wasn't good enough to get through in a pinch like this."

With a sudden movement he flung his cigarette away, walked
to one side of the room and sat down, leaned back against a radiator. There was a visible agitation in his manner now.

Van Duyne watched him with a steely gaze. "I see," he said acidly, and turned back to the stack of papers on his desk.

It was four-fifteen before Collie began to worry about Mat's getting through. He knew that the younger man had reached Bellefonte on time—fifteen minutes after he himself had got there; and he knew, from reading the schedule-board in the office, that Mat had left Bellefonte on time. He should have been in at three forty-five—thirty minutes ago. It was possible that he could have been delayed by winds—that he could have flown at an altitude different than that at which Collie had come across the mountains; but the general wind-direction was north or northwest, and a delay of thirty minutes on this account was improbable.

But thirty minutes in a snowstorm in an airplane at night may be consumed in many ways. Mat might have climbed up to a level of colder air, if he encountered ice. If he had done that, he might have overshot the field. Yet Collie had heard no motor passing overhead, and none had been reported...

Minutes passed, and still the teletype machine at Van Duyne's elbow brought no word. And these minutes brought to Collie first an uncertainty of Mat's safety, and then doubt, and then alarm; and these feelings he could not suppress, despite his efforts to be calm.

"Something's wrong!" he cried at last to the silent man before him. "Mat ought to be here—should have been here long ago!"

Van Duyne looked up. "Why should you worry?" he asked cuttingly, and turned to the telegraph machine. Collie noticed, suddenly, the fatigue and apprehension which the operations manager showed so plainly.

Just then the telephone jangled, and Van Duyne jumped, jerked around and grabbed it quickly.

"No," Collie heard him say; "no, haven't got a word yet... What's that?... Over Bloomburg? That's funny. Well... No, you'd better start phoning—you've got the list of farmers along the route. Keep at it—this is pretty serious—there's a doctor on that ship, coming to New York for an operation... All right, Jack; see what you can get on him..." He set down the instrument, turned back to the telegraph. Collie, reading over his shoulder, saw that he was questioning Bellefonte for any word. And five minutes later the message came that there was none.

"Somebody heard him over Bloomburg?" Collie asked, for Van Duyne had made no explanation. "What time? He was on his course, anyhow."

"Five—ten minutes after two. You can't tell about a report like that—Jack got it after we put it on the air that he'd not come in. It might have been Mat—or a truck or something. They spent four days looking for Squires around Clarion, and then found him thirty miles out of Cleveland."

Silence, and somber thoughts. Bloomburg was about a hundred and twenty miles from Hadley, and Collie tried to understand why Mat, with a northwest wind upon his tail, had not made better time. But, as Van suggested, Mat might not have been there at all; reports of that nature were obscure and unreliable. It was as well to assume that Mat had never crossed the Susquehanna as it was to believe that he had been forced down east of it.

There was a growing certainty in Collie's mind that Mat had been forced down. There was no other explanation for his failure to get in. The minutes, dragging by like the hours of a death-watch, had brought six o'clock. Forty more would bring daylight.

The telephone rang again, and Van Duyne talked once more to Jack, who was starting a search by questioning farmers along the route whom he could reach.

"Got anything?" Collie asked, when Van had finished.

"Not yet. Wires are down west of here—probably won't hear for quite a bit." He studied Collie a minute, added: "Pretty tough last night, I guess. What happened to you—pick up ice, or just blind all the way across?"

"Both," Collie admitted. "Lots of ice, but I climbed up into the stuff until it quit forming—too cold up there. Mat knew enough to do that too, when he bit it."

"That doctor!" Van Duyne said, his face showing his distress. "That kid down there! McGinus, do you realize what you may have done by letting Mat bring that man through?"

"Certainly I do. It was a mistake. But we're not going to help by sitting here—let me have a ship and I'll go out and find them."

"They're probably dead!" Van Duyne predicted viciously, becoming angry. "Damn you—"

"Don't be an ass, Van," Collie snapped.

"Damn you, McGinus, don't you see what you've been doing to these younger pilots? You're going to—"

"I know what you're going to say, Van," Collie interrupted wearily. "You've said it a hundred times, and you'll probably say it a hundred more, unless you kick me off this job—which you can damn' well do if you want to. Maybe I've been a sap—I think so tonight. I've been trying to teach Mat some of the things I know—some of the things that have saved my life. I've been doing it to help him, no matter how he comes out of this mess. I feel to blame—don't think I don't!—about this doctor being in the ship. I should have taken him myself. As far as Mat and these other youngsters are concerned, I should teach them all I know. I didn't have anybody to teach me—I learned those things for myself—fought them out, almost got knocked off for my trouble several times. I like Mat, and I'm just as much worried about him tonight as—"

"You're going to kill him, McGinus, if you keep this
up!" Van Duyne accused bitterly. "You think you're helping him, but you're getting him ready to be killed. You're making him overconfident—you're making it necessary for him to go out into weather that nobody has any business in. I want you to quit it—stop putting crazy ideas into his mind."

There was a sudden, subtle change in Collie's manner. He laughed quietly, shrugged his huge shoulders as if to throw off the weight of Van Duyne's deprecations. He smiled slowly, and the grin-wrinkles shot out from the corners of his eyes. But there was a glint of battle in his veiled glance when he looked up at Van; there was insolence, perhaps a taunt.

"I wish you'd fire me," he mocked. "I wish you'd kick me out, or quit riding me about how I fly the mail or how I get other men to fly it. It's my business—and theirs— isn't it? You're here to route these ships and take care of this office and the maintenance of the ships we fly." He hesitated, then added, with a sneer on his lips: "You'd make more money flying the line than you make as operations manager; I wonder—I've often wondered, Van—why you don't do that?"

Van Duyne leaned forward, and his knuckles went white against the desk-top. "You're through, McGinus!" he roared. "Get out! Damn you, if I hadn't liked you, hadn't wanted to see you get along, I'd have stopped this months ago. You're a trouble-maker in the organization. Get out!"

Collyer McGinus was on his feet and standing with his hands pressed hard on Van's desk. The movement was made so quickly that an observer would have been astonished at the grace of it. Van Duyne wasn't looking, or he would have been.

"I'm going out to look for Mat, Van!" Collie was saying, his voice sharp and hard. "If I got him into this, I'm going to get him out. When that's finished, I'll let you take your organization and your men to hell. And if you aren't too green around the ears by the time I'm ready to shove off, you're going with me, whether it's raining, or snowing, or what the hell's happening!"

"O.K. by me—but I'm flying," Van Duyne said coldly. And Collyer McGinus, with a meaningless growl, whirled and left the room.

He hurried down the steps and into the hangar, barked harshly to a mechanic, and ordered his ship started and run up inside the building. Then, while the crew scurried to their work, he went out into the meteorological room and spent ten minutes intently studying a weather map.

At six-twenty the ship was ready to go. Collie heard a mechanic "gun" it to wide-open throttle in its final test, and he walked into the hangar and climbed wordlessly into the open mail-pit and sat down, scowling around and adjusted his parachute beneath him.

Two minutes later Van Duyne appeared, dressed for frigid weather. His flying suit was bulky, huge; his parachute, buckled tightly to his thighs and hugging him as he walked, impeded him. He said nothing to Collie, climbed in, tested his motor and then signaled for mechanics to slide back the hangar doors.

He taxied out, and the chill blast of a ten-above-zero wind smashed against them. He nursed the ship carefully into position on the runway, turned on his left wing light, and by the mottled glare it threw upon the snow, took off. The ship wobbled on its run; it seemed to stagger as a cross-wind blast assailed it; but Van Duyne pulled it determinedly into the air and headed west, climbing slightly.

The snow was lighter, now, than it had been all through the night, and it was possible to stay "under" the blinding stuff and find one's way. From two hundred feet above the ground, clusters of light were visible now and then, and occasionally even the general outlines of certain fields, completely white, could be established. Around these fields were darker lines, trees and fences, and often in the corners of them were houses, stark black.

It was an unusual experience for Collie to ride the mail-pit. He had done it several times when he ferried out to bring back a new ship, or to pick up an old one that had been wrecked and then repaired; but these occasions had been seldom, and the last time was long ago. Too, the weather always had been good when he had done so, and he had known the pilot well.

There was a vague worry in his mind, and he weighed the wisdom of coming out this way with Van Duyne. The operations manager had been as "hot" a pilot as there was—in his day; but he hadn't flown a run during the past three years, and his occasional flights had become less and less frequent as his duties had increased as manager of the line at Hadley.

Yet Collie felt confident of his safety, in spite of this knowledge; he had a parachute strapped to his legs, and four times in the past he had resorted to it in emergencies. He could again.

He was interested to see how Van Duyne proceeded through the storm, how he planned to meet the obstacles of the mountains to the west, where he would begin his search. Collie himself had had a plan worked out, had known exactly what to do. He wondered if Van had also.

The operations manager, flying at two hundred feet, passed to the right of a large town which Collie knew was directly on the course. It would have caused Collie no anxiety, if they had been out of Hadley an hour or more, but they had been in the air only ten minutes—which indicated that Van was flying by his compass, that his compass was evidently wrong! It might amount to nothing, and it might mean that at the end of thirty minutes, when they were well in daylight, they would be miles away from the point where the search should be started. . . . And Mat Ollinger and the doctor with him must be found!

It had been ten degrees above zero when they took off from Hadley, and Collie expected the temperature to drop gradually as they proceeded westward. He expected the snow to cease, and the sky to clear partly if not completely. It was normal that these things should come about, for the trailing edge of a "low" area had brought the snow, and in the same way a high area of pressure should erase it.

But as they made progress to the west, the mercury in the strut-thermometer crept upward! They flew out of the edge of the low—and continued on into another one; and the temperature went up to thirty-four, while the snow changed imperceptibly to freezing rain.

Daylight found them then, and daylight revealed to them the ice that was forming on their wings, upon the wires, upon every portion of the ship. It was collecting so rapidly that Collie could almost see the sizes of the wires change.

Van Duyne had not, as Collie always did, used his flashlight every few minutes to see that his plane had not collected ice; and for this reason Collie had been unaware of it. If Van Duyne had known, he had betrayed no evidence of it; he had continued on, holding to his course unwaveringly, his head down behind the windshield, his thoughts
Tough Going

apparently far distant. Actually he was studying the vague outlines of the ground, but he could see nothing.

This, Collie decided, was what Mat had encountered on the trip from Bellefonte into Hadley. He probably, hadn't pulled up in time, had stayed in the level of the ice-forming temperature. And Collie knew that if Mat had done this, he was down; the ice had weighed his ship until it sucked it to the ground, smashed it.

A swift, slashing remorse possessed him. He had let Mat come out, and in doing so he had probably killed both men in the plane! The irony of this thing was that Mat knew how to fly tough weather, knew enough to pull up into safety. Why hadn't he—

Suddenly Collie realized that Van Duyne was in trouble. The ship rocked crazily from side to side, and Collie looked quickly behind him, caught the operations manager's signal, saw that the ice upon the ship was more than it could carry, that it was losing altitude, although Van Duyne was flying at wide-open throttle, trying to climb. The ship was mashing, plowing through the air as might a weary horse bucking at a drift, and slowly settling.

Five minutes more of this, Collie knew, would put them down. They had two hundred feet above the knotted hills and etched ravines that lay beneath them. They were over rough country where there were no fields, where a forced landing at full speed as this would be would kill them certainly.

Jumping, resorting to their parachutes, was useless; they would strike the ground before the streamers of silk could save them!

Collie looked quickly around to see Van Duyne, half wondering in his racing thoughts, what reaction he would find in the other man; but Van's expression was not changed. He did not respond to Collie's forced grin, but he was not afraid.

They passed over a deep, narrow valley, and as if grasping at this last hope Van Duyne slipped the ship around in a flat turn and headed down it. The ground was suddenly eight hundred feet below them, and Collie turned again and made a quick motion as if to jump. Van nodded.

Collie straightened up in the mail pit, fought savagely with the wind, started to climb out. He wanted Van Duyne to hold the ship in its present stalled position until he had fallen clear of the tail surfaces, but the plane was settling fast—it was urgent that they both be gone.

At that moment Collie felt a jar, as if the ship had struck a heavy bird in flight, or as if some portion of the structure of the plane had broken. He looked quickly around at the man behind him, and Van Duyne pointed unexpectedly to a flying wire on the left wing. Collie looked, saw the wire trailing back upon the wind, snapped off above its fitting on the fuselage.

"Get outta here!" he yelled to Van. "She'll fold up in a minute!"

Van Duyne, half out of the cockpit now, waved his hand and dived suddenly from his place behind the windshield. He seemed to be jerked back by the wind, and disappeared beneath the tail group.

Then before Collyer McGinus, with all his skill in handling his bulk, could step up on the cowling and fall away, there came another crunching shock, and then two more, like pistols fired almost simultaneously. The plane lurched, swung crazily, plunged downward.

Collyer was thrown inward, back into the mail pit; and as he fell, he saw the left wings, intact and still tied together by their remaining wires, snap off. They broke free, were flung viciously away upon the shrieking wind.

Collie found himself down upon the floor of the mail pit, and he struggled madly to climb up and out and jump to safety.

But he couldn't move! The force of the ship's rotation held him in his place. He fought to get a foothold, fought to lift himself. He struggled, not in terror, but with a frantic effort; yet with all his will, with all his concentrated strength, he was held as if pinned there.

He managed to slide back into his seat by a superhuman effort, but his arms and legs and his determination all were insufficient to move farther. He sat there, held in his seat as by a magnet, and watched the ship rotate in drunken frenzy toward the earth.

The ground and sky were merged into a solid wall blanketed out by sleet and rain. Collie knew the ship was spinning; nothing but a spin would hold him so.

And there was a grim irony in the situation for him. He had always played with flying, always experimented with new things, new dangers; but in doing so, he had always remained within what he considered the bounds of safety. He had jumped four times when death had beckoned, jumped to live to jump again. Had he been flying this time, he could have jumped, would have jumped before this happened, for he would have remained high enough. But he would have flown so that jumping would have been unnecessary.

In those fleeting seconds while the plane hurtled on, he thought of Mat Ollinger, of Streeter, of a dozen others that had preceded him in death. He did not let his mind freeze into an agony of fear at seeing it approach, for he had watched too long its steady progress through the ranks of men who flew the mail. Death, after all, was an illusion—a thing to be feared only until one met it, and then to be welcomed. He wanted to live, but that was impossible, and he was not afraid. He feared the physical pain of dying, but that was all; and there would be no pain in his going, so suddenly would it come.

Thus downward, perhaps a hundred feet to each turn of the plane. It was spinning as all ships without one set of wings will spin: flat, with the remaining wings extended vertically, the fuselage horizontal to the earth. Yet Collie was sitting almost normally in his seat, so violent was the centrifugal force.

He looked up at the remaining wings, half expecting them to snap off from the strain of the ship's rotation. And at that moment the plane struck the ground.

The ship struck, and the remaining wing telescoped downward into a shapeless mass of wrinkled fabric and gnarled wires and splintered wood. The tail, striking on edge, collapsed. There was a dull, indefinite sound, as of a bag of sand falling into snow, and then the snarling, snapping reports of minor breakage.

A smother of angry snow covered Collie. He thought of fire, and struggled to get free. He was conscious of a dull, stabbing pain in his shoulder, but was unaware of the blood that oozed from his left cheek below the eye where a jagged piece of cowling had ripped through it. He wanted to get out, and he got out, burrowing in the snow as might a mole.

He found himself standing on the ground beside the wreckage, and still there was no fire. He collected his thoughts, stifled his rising anxiety for Mat and Doctor Dyer. There was nothing he could do for them; they had probably crashed as Van Duyne had done, were dead by now.

And in spite of Collie's injuries, his muddled reactions, and his increasing anger at the operations manager, he was filled with a great grief for the youngster who had been his friend and who had tried to bring a famous
surgeon through to save a life. There was tragedy in this thing for Collyer McGinus, something he would never quite recover from.

Van Duyne must be somewhere around, he reasoned. Van Duyne, the man who would never go blind, who had crashed because he hadn't, rather than because he had! Collie grunted unpleasantly, turned to look for his superior. Van Duyne was just then approaching over the brow of a low hill.

"Nice work!" Collie accused bitterly, when the other reached him. "Nice! We oughta be dead!"

Van Duyne shrugged. "We've got to find Ollinger and that doctor," he said. "They must be around here somewhere near."

"Aint this a helluva way to find 'em!" Collie snapped, forgetting grammar. "Van, you're a damn fool! Why didn't you pull up?"

"How you going to look for anyone when you're flying blind?" Van Duyne asked bitterly. "I didn't see a thing of them. I watched—"

He walked away, struggled through the heavier drifts until he reached a wind-swept ridge where the going was much easier; and Collie followed at a distance. He was still dazed, uncomprehending of their uncanny escape from death, still half unbelieving that he was alive. And when he started walking, he discovered anew the pain in his left shoulder, found another in his ankle. He wondered how his injuries could have been so slight.

Van Duyne trudged along ahead, and Collie followed painfully. They found a road, all smooth and leveled by the sleet and wind, and they turned and followed this. Presently they came upon a house, set back from the road; they struggled up the unused path and knocked at the entrance. No one was at home.

So they went back to the highroad which they had followed, and at long last a dairy car labored up behind them. The driver stopped at Van Duyne's signal, and they climbed carefully inside the cab, cautious of hurting Collie's wounds.

The driver plied them with a hundred questions, and they answered impatiently, for they were worried about Mat and Doctor Dyer. They inquired of their whereabouts, found that they were almost upon their course, and a hundred miles away from Hadley.

"Head wind," Van Duyne surmised.

"Must 'a been," Collie answered noncommittally.

They reached a town, and Van Duyne suggested that they call a doctor for Collie's injuries; but the pilot insisted that they telephone the field and inquire for word of Mat. They had consumed two hours getting into town; some farmer might have called the field meanwhile.

So Van Duyne agreed, and Collie got a car, and they went down to the telephone building. He put in the call, and they sat there waiting, made impatient by their worry and fatigue.

And at last the call came through.

"Hello—is this Hadley?" Collie shouted at the instrument.

Far off, like an echo in the wind, there returned a voice that brought a shiver through his body—Mat's voice, pitched high, excited.

"Who's talking—that you, Mat?" Collie asked.

"Yeah—Ollinger speaking."

"Collie, Mat. Say, where you been? What happened to you? God, I'm glad you got in safe!"

He heard Mat laugh, and he suddenly relaxed, while a strange emotion played upon his sagging nerves. It seemed to choke him.

"What—why didn't you call up, or something?” he managed.

" Couldn't," came the echo. " Started gettin' ice, and had to sit down out in the sticks. Ice all over the telephone lines—couldn't call. Knocked the ice off, and couldn't get the damn motor started for a while—Doc Dyer cranked until he wore out; then I cranked—had a devil of a time. . . . That Doc, he's a great scout—got him here at daylight—just called up awhile ago fixed this kid up has to get back to Chicago tonight wants me to take him."

Collie laughed, his worry forgotten. "Why don't you?"

"Goin' to. . . . Say, what the devil happened to you—where are you now?"

"Wait a minute," Collie said, and turned to Van Duyne. "What town is this? . . . Salt Springs, Mat—we're O. K."

"That's fine, Col," the echo said. "We got worried about you. Gregg and Sherman are ready to go out hunting you—thought maybe you were down somewhere. When'll you be in?"

And Collie grinned, said lustily: "Had a little trouble—cracked up, and—"

"What?" Mat cried. "You cracked up! Well, fella—"

"Hell, no! I didn't do it!" Collie yelled, but to an empty line. He tried to call back.

"Why worry 'em?" Van Duyne protested. "They'll find out about it soon enough!"
One Desperate Night

By H. Bedford-Jones

Illustrated by Hubert Mathieu

LIKE all newspaper correspondents, Bronton knew that anything was likely to happen in Paris; and something had happened: he had just lost his job. Now he sat at a table before the Café Mazarin, sipped a good brown beer, and cared not a bit. There were other jobs, other press services, and he was tired of taking up news-stories anyhow.

His waiter came by, gave him a nod and a look, and dropped a folded paper before him.

Bronton carelessly unfolded it, and then started suddenly. He looked again, read over the penciled scrawl a second time to be sure of the words:

You are an American. Please help me get rid of him. I'm afraid. Corner Table.

Glancing up, thinking it might be some joke, Bronton looked at the corner table of the terrace, by the glass wind-break. Two people occupied it. Dusk had drawn down on the boulevards, but light struck full upon the two, and instantly Bronton knew that this was no joking matter.

The girl was slender, young, obviously American. She was not the sort to seem afraid, but Bronton had learned that Americans newly come to Paris are like fish out of water; despite her level eyes and calm air, she was probably in terror of her companion, and no wonder. She was pretty, remarkably pretty, gowned as though she had come straight from Lucile's, with a saucy little fur-tipped hat that accentuated her golden hair and blue eyes. She glanced at Bronton, and he nodded quietly. She took no apparent notice, but he saw that she relaxed in her seat as though some inner tension had been loosened. Then he saw that her outstretched hand was gripping her handbag on the table, and her companion was attempting to take it from her quietly.

Bronton rose. He knew the man by sight—a slender, dark, agile rascal whose name was a byword in certain circles of Paris, but who had been too clever to fall into the hands of the French police. Lynch knew all the tricks of the trade, and was said to have a powerful pull somewhere; probably a lie, for pull seldom helps Americans abroad.

Stepping over to the corner table, Bronton saw that Lynch was now trying to get the handbag by main force, and the girl was resisting. He tapped the man on the shoulder, and Lynch twisted about, startled. Bronton smiled down at them both, with an assumption of surprised greeting. His gray eyes were beaming, and the gay, slightly reckless smile that men liked so well gave him an air of cordial delight.

"Upon my word, who'd have thought to find you here?" he exclaimed; and the unknown girl reacted excellently to the cue, shaking his hand warmly and murmuring something about Chicago. Then she turned eagerly to Lynch.

"Mr. Lynch, you must meet my cousin Jimmy—"

"Bronton," put in Mr. Bronton promptly. He did not shake hands with Lynch, but looked back at the girl.

"Why didn't you write me you were coming to Paris, eh? When did you get here? What kind of a way is this to treat the old folks, get me? Come on, spill it!"

She laughed, and patted his arm gayly.

"Well, you know after Hartley got into that row and disappeared, I thought maybe I could locate him or get some track of him, so I pushed over on my own, without—"

Lynch intervened. He did it with a sleek, easy suavity that Bronton had to admire.

"Beg your pardon, folks—but have you forgotten about that date, Kit? I'm frightfully sorry, Bronton, but we'll have to shove along; overdue now to meet some folks—"

"Kit's going to be a long time overdue, Lynch," said Bronton, turning to him.

"Eh?" The dark eyes narrowed, took swift warning
from Bronton's level look. "I'll have to ask you to explain—"

"With pleasure." Bronton smiled cheerfully. "You're saying good-by to Kit right now," he added in rapid French. "You're saying it fast, and you're saying it forever. You see that agent standing at the curb? Well, make your get-away before I call him in. Yes, I know all about you. Don't try any bluff. You're not in any Montparnasse hangout, and you'll do no purse-snatching around here. Drift along!"

Lynch's sallow features became dark with fury, but Bronton had said enough to settle his rage. He turned to the girl, bowed, murmured a few words and was gone. Bronton swung back a chair and beckoned to the waiter.

"Thanks, monsieur!" he said with the easy informality of a Frenchman. "You have helped save this young woman from embarrassment. Now, a fresh café, if you please!"

The waiter beamed and departed. Bronton sat down and met the curious gaze of the girl.

"You seem able to make yourself popular or much disliked at will," she said. "What did you say to him? My French is pretty poor."

"So's mine," and Bronton chuckled. "But it gets over. Oh, Lynch! I told him I knew all about him, and he beat it; there's a cop outside, you see. He's a pretty notorious gent in these parts—preys on tourists. His particular game is getting women into bad company and leading them into drug habits—hashish, chiefly, but snow and hop when it can be done. Known him long?"

"Only since yesterday." Her eyes widened a little at his words. "So that explains it!"

"Some, but not all," said Bronton. "Explains what?"

Her hand touched the bag on the table; then she checked herself and regarded Bronton with a trifle of hesitation. "I must thank you for acting so promptly," she said. "I haven't been very polite—my name is Catherine Lemay. I knew you were an American, and I was a bit afraid of him—"

"Permit me—my card!" With a flourish, Bronton laid a pasteboard before her. "If you don't mind, I'll stick to Kit. It's familiar, short, entirely charming, and therefore suits you. This card, by the way, isn't quite accurate, I'm no longer a correspondent; I got fired today, or rather resigned before I could get fired. So I'm out of a job, but cheerful."

"You are certainly cheerful!" she exclaimed, and put out her hand. "I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Bronton—"

"Jimmy," he intervened. "You struck it right the first time."

"And you're really out of a job?" she queried.

"Really."

"Oh! Then I might give you one. Do you know, I believe you're the very person who could help me?"

"That wouldn't be a job; that would be a joy! Difference of one letter only," said Bronton promptly. "Accepted! If you—"

"But I'm not joking, really!" Her face became serious, and the gravity in her eyes sobered him swiftly.

"Neither am I," he rejoined with a quiet nod. "I like you, Kit. You like me. Say no more! We'll work together fine. That is, if we work together. Do we?"

"Yes," she said, hesitating on the word, searching his face. "But please, you must get me straight: it's a real job. It isn't easy. It may be dangerous."

Bronton waved his hand carelessly, waited until the garçon had left his coffee, then spoke more earnestly.

"All right. Conceded. The job's mine. But first, I'm interested in knowing why Lynch was after your bag? He's no petty thief, no purse-snatcher. He's supposed to be one of the big dope-runners, or at least in the syndicate. That's rumor, of course. But why would he be after a girl's purse?"

"For what's in it, of course." He saw a change in her face, a shadowed tenseness. "Well, I might as well tell you, Jimmy. You see, I met him accidentally this afternoon as he was going through the hotel lobby—I'm staying at the Royale Monceau. We'd been introduced last night at the studio of a friend, the only person I know here. Well, when we met today, he was terribly delighted and surprised, and asked me to wait while he telephoned. I waited, and presently a rather odd-looking little fat man, glittering with diamonds, came up to me and asked if I would take care of a package for Mr. Lynch. It was a little package and went into my handbag, and I forgot all about it until we got here; and then Lynch asked if anyone had given me something for him, and I joked him about it and said no—and he became almost nasty. That's when I scrawled that note to you—after he'd telephoned someone and came back and said for me to hand over the bag or he'd call in the police—oh, he was talking high and mighty! It made me so angry that—"

"Let's see the package," suggested Bronton. "Dope, probably. You were being used. H'm! So that's it, eh?"

She produced a fat little brown envelope, very solid. Bronton coolly tore it open—and produced a folded wad of black-and-white Bank of England notes. With a whistle, he opened them up, and then sat staring blankly. The notes were of large denominations.

"Money?" she demanded.

"My Lord, yes!" He thumbed them over rapidly, and thrust them at her. "Here, get it out of sight! There's over eight thousand pounds here—forty thousand dollars, a million francs. Good gosh, woman! Who's crazzy now?"

As Bronton very properly said, the thing to do was to go back into the restaurant, settle down to a lingering, exquisite dinner with a bottle of good Vouvray '21, and figure out where that million francs came from and why.

So they did it.

All, that is, except the figuring out. As Bronton said, it might be payment for dope; it might be cash with which to buy dope; it might be anything at all: but it certainly was good money. And Lynch had been afraid to stay and demand it back. That was the best evidence that it was illicit in character.

"But let's leave all that aside," said Bronton gayly, when the Vouvray was tested and the bisque poured into the hot plates. "Let us talk about a job—the job! Not about salary, mind. That can wait."

"But what am I to do with this money?" demanded Kit Lemay uneasily.

"Talk about that later. We're discussing jobs right now. Shoot!"

She assented, but said nothing about the job until they had finished the bisque. Then, half hesitant, half defiant, she met his eyes and plunged in.

"I thought Lynch could do it; I spoke to him about it. That's why I said what I did about Hartley. You see, he is my brother. He came here last year to study art, and dropped out of sight after some months. We don't know what became of him. I came to see."
“Eh? You did?” Bronton frowned at her. “Where’s your father?”

“Dead. We lived with an uncle. He’s an invalid and can’t travel. I’ve studied commercial art, advertising and the like, and held a pretty good position. When we could get no trace of Hartley, I gave it up at the end of the summer and came over. Uncle Ned had a good deal of faith in my ability, you see. He put up a thousand dollars, and here I am.”

“My gosh!” exclaimed Bronton. “But this—this is sort of breath-taking, Kit! What about the police? Letters and so forth?”

“He just disappeared.” She made a helpless gesture. “Uncle Ned had the police in La Salle get busy with the Paris police—we live just outside Chicago, you know. They got a report that Hartley had disappeared—had presumably gone to Italy. That’s all. Your job is to find him.”

“H’m!” said Bronton. “It wouldn’t be the first time a journalist had turned up something the police couldn’t discover—but this is a real job, and no mistake. All right, you’re on. I want a picture of your brother.”

“At the hotel I have several.”

“Good. Now, what’s his weakness? Mind you,” went on Bronton calmly, “he’s probably dead or in jail; don’t have any false hopes. You go to tracing a vanished American in these parts, and you’re likely to run up against pretty ugly realism. Did he drink?”

“Yes, but not much.”

“Women?” She shrugged. “He was usually in love, yes; but he’s an idealist. He never went in for materialism. He was fine-strung, nervous, fastidious in his tastes.”

“How much money did he have?”

“Quite a bit of his own—several hundred dollars a month.”

“What happened to it?”

“His income has piled up since he left, in Uncle Ned’s hands. Checks and mail came back unclaimed. He was never in any money trouble, if that’s what you mean.”

“I expect he’s dead,” said Bronton. “But we’ll see. Here’s the roti, and it’s good, so have some more Vouvray. We’ll finish dinner and then go back to the Royale Monceau and get all the dope, and have the evening before us.”

She eyed him frowningly.

“You talk,” she said a little coldly, “as though you expected to find what became of my brother this very evening!”

“I do,” said Bronton coolly. “Look here, these cabbages of Brussels are magnificent, so pitch in! You never ate sprouts before, as you’ll agree, to equal these.”

“If you think this is a joke?” she demanded. Bronton gave her a sudden flashing smile.

“Kit, you won’t think it’s a joke when you get back to the Royale Monceau. You’ll find there’s hell to pay over that money. Now, you leave everything to me! It’s seven-twenty. You enjoy your dinner, and we’ll be back alongside the Etoile at eight-thirty. At nine-thirty, I’ll tell you whether your brother is dead or alive.”

She regarded him fixedly. “Yes, you’re in earnest; are you a magician, or is it a bluff?”

Bronton broke out laughing. “My dear Kit, you’ll observe my technique for yourself in good time. If I’m a bluff, you can fire me at nine-thirty. Meantime, enjoy life and don’t get critical! You don’t look half so nice when you’re critical, really. At all other times you’re charming beyond words, and I can see that I’m going to enjoy Paris at last.”

A smile touched her lips.

“I see,” she returned after a moment. “You’re trying to cover it up, are you?”

Startled by her acumen, Bronton’s gray eyes gave her a flashing glance.

“Maybe,” he said shortly. “Where was Lynch taking you tonight?”

“He didn’t say. A place that would amuse me, and he hinted we might find some trace of Hartley there.”

“Then we wouldn’t,” said Bronton.

HE was, in truth, trying to conceal from her his very real alarm—for her. Somehow she had been made use of; perhaps the police had been watching Lynch at the moment, perhaps the danger came from other sources. The only sure thing in Bronton’s mind was that this girl had tangled with the worst thugs in Europe—which is to say, the worst in the world. American gangsters may be ruthless, but they lack the depravity, the insensate, vice-steepled deviltry, that obtains in more cultured quarters. In his newspaper work Bronton had seen and heard enough about the dope and vice ring to know that any gang at home could not hold a candle to this outfit, whose ramifications went deep and far and high up.

When Kit Lemay reentered the exclusive and expensive portals of the Royale Monceau, somebody would be waiting for her—this was certain.

“Let’s put the cards on the table, Kit,” he observed, giving her an appraising look. “You’re clever; I like you fine! But don’t hold out on me.”

“Just what do you mean?” she exclaimed, her eyes uneasy.

“Come across,” he said calmly. “How long have you been in France?”

“Three days.”

“And in that time, you met Lynch and started him on your brother’s trail? Don’t kid me any more. There’s something you haven’t told. Why not?”

A touch of color rose in her cheeks and ebbed again, but her gaze did not falter.

“Because—well, because I didn’t know you very well; and—”

He smiled. “Just because, eh? You’re honest, Kit. Now, we’re, in this together, so cough up everything. What’s the answer? Were they waiting for you to come?”

She looked startled.

“Perhaps; I don’t know. I thought of that, but it seemed silly and unreasonable. When I landed and got to the hotel, a note was waiting for me.” She hesitated, then went on: “It was unsigned. I destroyed it carelessly; I’ve no proof of this at all—”

“Steady, now!” His voice, dispassionate, level, strong with restraint, was like a tonic. “Never mind proof. I believe you. What did it say?”

“That if I would get in touch with a Mr. Lynch at the studio of the artist I knew from home, he might have some word of my brother.”

Bronton laughed. “And you thought I’d misunderstand or disbelieve? Don’t be silly. That helps a lot. D’ye see, they were waiting for you to come? You’re in bad over here, and no mistake. Now let’s know why. You wouldn’t go to the Royale Monceau, which is a pretty high-class establishment for tourist blood, unless you had a fat purse. Eh?”

She nodded, almost defiantly. “You—you said you were out of a job, Jimmy. I couldn’t tell you that I wasn’t poor—I hated to be offensive. Uncle Ned is rich, you see. Hartley and I would inherit his money. He’s an invalid, and has been expected to die for some time past. Oh, it’s so sordid, so—”
“Check,” he cut in quietly. “Never mind all that. When you’ve been here as long as I have, you’ll find that some of these French lads are about as sordid as they make ‘em. Behind the boulevards are the faubourgs, if you get me. Now I’ll ask a straight-out question: Will it be a shock to you to learn that your brother’s dead?”

“No,” she said; her brave eyes backed up the word.

“That he’s a dope fiend?”

She faltered at this. “That—it can’t be!”

“Make up your mind to the worst. You don’t know what depths are like over here, Kit. The fact that this money was slipped to you, gave everything away. They had you spotted and were taking no chances, as they thought. Now,—extending a cigarette case, which she refused,—“don’t you get the idea that I’m philandering. I’m not. I like you, and this time next week I’ll probably be head over heels in love with you. Any man would, because you’re one in a million! Just the same, this game we’re in is going to be a hot and fast one, and looks to me like a damned wild one as well. Let’s talk business. If we locate your brother, what’s the reward?”

“Name it,” she said quietly. “Five thousand? Dollars, I mean, not francs.”

“Fair enough.” He nodded. “We’ll talk about that later. How much cash in hand have you? Cash, not letter of credit.”

“Two thousand dollars.”

“I may need some of it.” Bronton glanced at his watch. “This is a partnership deal, and if my hunch is right, we’re going to play for some high stakes, and play fast, before this precious outfit learns that I’m in it or gets any line on me. We have one ace in the hole that will count big, maybe—this.”

He flipped a card across the table to her. She examined it with interest.

“A sort of passport?”

“A reporter’s police-card, about the hardest thing to get in Paris. Over here, it means something. This couple-file, as it’s called, is something potent. Now, we’ll have to gobble our coffee and be on our way. Things are due to happen, and you be ready to take a cue from me. I’ll depend on you to help at a pinch.”

“That’s better,” she said, and smiled, so that her eyes were very kind and warm.

Bronton had been studying her as they talked, and the more he probed, the better satisfied he became. He liked her, and could see that she would be a hard antagonist, a worthy partner, especially if playing with some one she knew, with her own kind. Against a gang of French thugs and international crooks, she would be a helpless bird in the net, which was natural; but he was more than willing to plunge ahead into this business of her brother and to count heavily upon her to do her share. He had the grim conviction that there would be plenty to do ere long, and in this he reckoned wisely.

Twenty minutes later they walked into the Royale Monceau, and before they had passed the desk, Bronton knew that action was at hand.

The lofty, spacious lobby, with the absurd little elevator at the right to ridicule its air of grandeur, was well filled; the strains of an orchestra came from the dining-room opposite the entry. Glancing about, Bronton’s trained eye instantly took in two well-known American millionaires, a Brazilian diplomat, and a Belgian banker among the notables.

Then he pressed the girl’s arm quickly.

“You see the man coming toward us, to the left? Is he the one who gave you the packet?” he asked in an undertone.

“Yes,” she replied.

“Then head for the writing-room, and be sharp about it!” Bronton directed.

They turned to the left past the desk. An instant later, when the man arrived to intercept them, they were at the door of the large and ornate but now-deserted writing-room.

He was a stout, perspiring, excited man, partly bald, with bulging eyes and an enormous beard that flowed down across his shirt-bosom. Several diamonds glittered on his fingers.

As he was about to speak hastily, Bronton turned and faced him with a level gaze.

“This is Baron Lé-maitre, I believe?” he inquired.

“Yes, yes,” said the other. “But, if Made-moiselle will pardon me, there is—”

“Come along with us,” said Bronton. “Your business is with me, Baron; the money’s in my pocket.”

The stout Baron looked shocked, patted his face with a handkerchief, and followed them into the writing-room. Kit went to the big divan facing the door and a smile at the agitated Baron. He stood before her, and met Bronton’s direct gaze.

“You have the advantage of me, m’sieur,” he said.

“I have,” said Bronton coolly. “Very much the advantage. I happen to know a good deal about you; since your expulsion from Monaco three months ago, you’ve been running with a pretty bad crowd. So you’re one of the narcotic syndicate, eh?”

The Baron drew himself up with angry hauteur.
“M’sieur!” he exclaimed. “I am not accustomed to being addressed in this manner—”

"Tu gueule, toi!” snapped Bronton. “Shut your mouth, imbecile! Listen to me. I have your money. You made a bad mistake. Lynch has told me everything.” These words did not miss their aim. The Baron paled, and his eyes distended even more. “Now,” went on Bronton calmly, “you have slightly under one hour to get your money back. I shall be here until nine-thirty. At that hour, to the minute, I expect you to bring me definite information regarding the whereabouts of Hartley Lemay, with proof that you’re not lying. I know all about your little game in regard to him—or rather, the game that’s been played, for I presume you know nothing of it. Don’t argue, now—just shove off and get the information; upon your return with it, the English notes are yours.”

Baron Lémaître stared at him. “But, m’sieur! Who are you?”

“Don’t you wish you knew?” Bronton smiled dryly. “If you prefer that I speak to the manager here, telling him you are the notorious Lémaître who was expelled from Monaco for stock and banking frauds, that your private life is in the dossier of the police, that you are connected with—”

The Baron checked him. “I accept your ultimatum, m’sieur,” he rejoined quickly. “You will wait here?”

“Here,” said Bronton. “Get busy.”

With a bow to the girl, the flustered Baron rushed away. Bronton laughed, took out a cigarette and sank down on the divan.

“So that’s it!” Kit regarded him with amused eyes. “This explains your magic, eh? You’d better take the money, by the way.”

“Thanks,” Bronton took the packet from her, and shoved it carelessly into his pocket. “The old boy fell for it, didn’t he?”

“Beautifully!” Her laugh pealed softly on the room. “And he’ll do what you want?”

“Of course. He can telephone and get the information from some of the gang, but it’ll take a little time to get the proof I demanded. I rather think they’ll send a note from your brother, if he’s alive. If he’s not—”

“Yes?” Swift anxiety replaced the laughter in her eyes.

Bronton shrugged.

“No use conjecturing, young lady. Now, I’d suggest that you slip up to your room and get your passport; we may run into the police before the night’s over. You haven’t a gun, of course—too bad! Get what cash you have; we may need it all.”

“What?” She eyed him with a puzzled look. “You don’t mean—”

“I mean,” said Bronton, “that we’re in for a hot evening, Kit. As I figure it from a very scant knowledge, this syndicate of crooks has a few men like the Baron at the top, but below them are various branches of activity—blackmail, dope-passers, blackguards of all kinds. So far as the money goes, we’re dealing with the Baron, but don’t forget Mr. Lynch! He’s raising all kinds of hell about this time. We’ve started a private war, and the artillery is going to let go any time now.”

“But what can they do?” she inquired. “What do you expect?”

Bronton puffed at his cigarette. “The unexpected. They can do anything. If I knew what would happen, I wouldn’t be waiting for it, believe me! Let’s see; I’ve just thought of something. Was your brother any special kind of artist? Was he good at anything in particular—any line of work?”

“Yes. He’s an etcher; that’s what he was studying
here; but he had done some commercial engraving and was very fine at it. He had hoped to get into the Bureau of Engraving at Washington, after completing his studies here. He liked it, and while he didn't have to do it for a living, he wanted—"All right, all right!" Bronton waved his cigarette, broke into a laugh, and gestured her away. "Go on and get your stuff. He's alive and well—I can tell you that right now. Why the devil didn't I think of that before? Go ahead, Kit! Everything's all right!"

"Well," she said, rising, "I don't understand, but I'll take your word for it. You really think he's alive?"

"And well," said Bronton positively. "All my first theory is shot to pieces, Kit. They're not after blackmail, not after your money at all. Go ahead and get your stuff. I'll explain when you come back. And let me tell you, we're going to have one busy evening! We'll have to strike before they get their trenches dug. Snap into it!"

"Right," she said, and with a flashing smile was gone.

BRONTON drew out the money, looked at the wadded but fresh and crisp English notes, and frowned. Only an expert could tell, of course; these might or might not be good.

With this one remark of the girl's, everything had come clear. He knew only too well the way in which various counterfeiting gangs operated in Europe, where they had the money of a dozen countries upon which to work, and where they interlocked with criminal organizations of every variety.

Many an American expert had come over here, where he was comparatively safe from pursuit or interference. In the ten years after the war operations had been heavy, and the mortality had been high also, for the European police were anything but fools. Where they had the one tremendous advantage was in knowing all about every engraver who had sufficient skill to make good plates—a matter which takes a very high degree of artistry.

"It's a cinch they learned about Lemay and grabbed him," reflected Bronton, as he smoked and waited. "They simply put him to work and have kept him at work. He hasn't suffered, and is probably in or near Paris this minute. But Lord! They'll sure be a hornets' nest to tackle, and I don't mean maybe! It's a shooting job. If we call in the police, then good night to Lemay, for they'll bump him off to shut his mouth. H'm!"

"The Baron," he mused, "will come along to pump me and make up a report by telephone. They'll want to know who I am and all about me. The Baron himself won't be in on that part of the game—aside from pumping me, he's not dangerous. The trouble is, what's Lynch cooking up all this while? I was a fool to let him slip away out of sight. That bird is bad!"

Bronton was not astonished, therefore, when Baron Lémaître showed up a few moments later and came toward him, beaming, evidently intent on being most friendly. The Baron came over to the divan and fished out a couple of superb Havanas.

"Here, m'sieur, you will join me? The finest Belgian. Good! Well, I shall have the information you desire; it is promised. A messenger will arrive shortly. I am at a loss to know, however, with whom I am dealing."

Bronton smiled, bit at the cigar, and lighted it.

"Anything I may tell you, Baron, will be held confidential?"

The stout man lifted his hands and eyes to heaven.

"Word of honor, m'sieur! Upon the sacred word of honor of a gentleman."

"That's all right, then," and Bronton nodded, with a satisfied air. "You will pardon my brusque manner. My name is Bronton—I was down at Monte Carlo at the time of your unfortunate embroilment with the principality, and heard about it."

"Oh! M'sieur is a tourist, then?"

"A friend of the Lemay family, yes. Since I may trust you."—Bronton glanced about, then lowered his voice to a confidential pitch. "—I have myself been in financial difficulties not unlike your own. I am traveling for my health, you comprehend? An unfortunate misunderstanding with the police in America made the trip very beneficial—one might say, imperative. To tell the truth, I should be very sorry if M. le Préfet of Police here were to concern himself about me. There was a regrettable error in America by which my fingerprints were found on the scene of a murder. It is terrible how such things may happen to an innocent man!"

"Terrible," agreed the Baron, with a nervous glance. "You have done well to trust me, m'sieur; I am glad indeed that our relations will be friendly. The mistake that was made about this money—"

"Was not your fault," said Bronton. "Lynch was entirely to blame in directing the affair, and should have used better judgment."

The Baron glanced at his watch, then jumped up in apparent concern.

"You will excuse? I have an appointment with a lady—it must be broken, you comprehend. I forgot it entirely in my haste. Two minutes only, m'sieur!"

He hurried out, and Bronton laughed softly.

"Not so bad," he reflected. "He'll tip 'em off that I'm an American crook, wanted on the other side for murder and so forth. They'll know they're not dealing with the police, and won't be in any rush to bump off Lemay. H'm! Good thing I'm not dealing with Lynch right now; he wouldn't be so easy, by a good deal! So Lynch was covering Kit—knew all about her! That shows he's in with the gang that's holding her brother. This money is probably his split on a narcotic shipment. I'd like to collar some of this gang's money, but we're out to get Lemay away safe and can't afford to split our objective."

A MOMENT later Kit showed up, a dark coat over her arm.

"Any news?" she inquired. "Messenger's on the way," said Bronton laconically, and beckoned one of the bell-hops who was passing the entrance. The boy came into the writing-room, and Bronton got out some money.

"Can you do some work for me, during the next half-hour?"

"But certainly, m'sieur!"

"Good! In ten or twenty minutes a man will arrive in a car at the main entrance and will come straight inside. He will not be well dressed; he will seek M. le Baron Lémaître, who is here as a dinner-guest. Fetch me word as soon as such a man arrives."

The boy took a hundred-franc note and departed gleefully.

"And what may all that mean?" queried the girl. Bronton chuckled.

"It means that war begins. The Baron has just telephoned headquarters that I'm not a police spy but an American scoundrel who fears the police. The messenger is sent here at once, probably with a note from your brother and some plausible yarn. The next move is up to us—savvy? Look out, now. Here comes the old rascal, and you watch for cues. Trust me!"

"I do, of course," she rejoined, as Baron Lémaître rejoined them.
"Well, well! M'sieur, you showed sagacity when you asked me for information about M. Lemay!" he exclaimed genially, and patted the girl's arm with a fatherly air. "Look you, what my associates have accomplished! This poor M. Lemay, he has been ill for a long time, not so far from here—he was struck by a taxicab one night and was picked up. A good kind family took care of him. He has had fever of the brain, you comprehend? Alors, he is now recovering, but is very weak still. They are sending a note from him."

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RONTON listened to this rigmarole with a grave face, and Kit Lemay acted excellently.

"Oh! He is sick?" she exclaimed, her eyes wide. "Oh, but this is terrible—and yet it is such a relief! I feared he was dead, that something worse might have happened to him! I owe you great thanks, Baron!"

"You owe me nothing," said the Baron, beaming. "It is an honor to be of service to you, mademoiselle."

"I suppose she could go and see her brother, eh?" said Rontron carelessly.

"But yes, if she likes. Why not?" The Baron spread his hands in Gallic gesture. "And you will accompany her, eh?"

Rontron glanced at his watch and frowned.

"Sorry," he rejoined. "I encountered Mlle. Lemay purely by accident tonight, and have an engagement of the utmost importance in half an hour, which I cannot possibly break. However, since the matter is now settled, she can look up her brother—perhaps she could go with the messenger?"

The Baron, obviously, was returning silent thanks to heaven at this.

"But yes, yes!" he exclaimed. "It is only a matter of going to Boulogne, and back—not far at all."

"In that case," said Rontron to the girl, "I might as well be on my way. Oh! The Baron's money—that should be returned now, eh? We can trust him absolutely. And you'll give me a ring at the Continental Hotel tomorrow? Good. About noon. M. le Baron, I am charmed to have made your acquaintance. You'll see the young lady on her way? Thank you."

He departed hurriedly, for the bell-hop whom he had engaged was now approaching, and the messenger had evidently arrived. So he had, indeed. Rontron caught sight of a tall, dark man, fairly well dressed, standing by the desk, and this was all he desired.

He hurriedly left the hotel, walked up the street a few paces, then cut over to the long line of parked taxicabs which occupied the center of the street, running up almost to the Etoile. He picked out a new, powerful Rénault, and beckoned the driver. The brilliantly lighted entrance of the hotel was in plain sight.

Knowing how to deal with Frenchmen, Rontron took the driver into his confidence, which makes all the difference in the world.

"Mon ami," he said familiarly, "here is an affair of a lady—you comprehend? She will leave the hotel in a few moments, with another gentleman, whose car is probably waiting there just beyond the entrance. The trail runs to Boulogne, I imagine. If they thought I were on their heels, the results would be embarrassing. So! I place myself in your hands."

The chauffeur was not only delighted, but from that instant became an ardent partisan of Rontron's.

There was a risk, of course, and a good deal of risk; it could not be avoided. If he had been dealing with anyone except this crooked, middle-headed financier, Rontron would not have perilled the girl or have attempted such a game.

He was confident, however, that the Baron had swallowed the bait—hook, line and sinker. It would be a far different matter with those ahead. As they waited, he leaned forward and spoke through the open pane that divided him from the chauffeur.

"If you have a pistol, mon ami, I'd be glad to buy it from you."

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the driver. "M'sieur, a matter of a crime passionel? But of a surety I have a weapon—"

Excited, thrilled, the driver exchanged an excellent automatic for cash, and a moment later sighted the quarry—Kit Lemay leaving with the tall, dark man whose car was waiting just past the entry. It was a small Citroén, a private car and no taxicab. Next moment Rontron was rolling in pursuit, the driver half expecting him to lean out and shoot.

They followed to the Porte d'Auteuil and drew up alongside the other car, whose driver was getting his return ticket to the city from the official inside the gate-house. Rontron leaned out, and for an instant met the gaze of Kit in the other car, made a gesture of reassurance, and then ducked from sight. The Citroën's driver jumped back into his seat and set off down the long avenue toward Boulogne past the Botanical Gardens, and after a little the Rénault was following, but not too closely.

Rontron was now certain that he was headed for no pleasant quarters. The once fine old suburb had largely become a place of factories, of Algerian and Italian laborers, of stabbings in the night and the vilest of crimes; in short, unsavory in the extreme. And if the chauffeur failed in his tracking, the result might be unpleasant for all concerned.

He did not fail, however.

THE Citroën came to a halt before one of a line of old-time residences—great solid old structures of stone, built to withstand a siege by Communists or police. One glance at the place, with its iron shutters all closed, its dark and sinister aspect, told Rontron that he must work fast or not at all.

"Stop!" He checked his driver, even as they swung out to pass the other car. "Let me out quickly! Here's a hundred francs—wait a bit down the block. The lady may come—we'll see—"

Unheeding the man's protests, he swung open the door and was out before the car halted.

Rontron found himself not twenty feet from the Citroën. The dark man was just opening the car door for Kit to emerge, and turned suspiciously as Rontron approached. The latter came straight up to him with a low, hurried word.

"There has been a mistake, a frightful mistake!" he exclaimed. "I followed you—Lémaître sent me after you. Kit, take her inside! I must see Lynch at once, you understand?"

"'Eh!" The other peered at him, half-suspicious, half-awed by mention of these names. "And who the devil are you?"

"An American. There's the devil to pay. Lémaître got warning only an instant after you left. Set her adrift, get rid of her, and come along to find Lynch! He'll have to get this note at once,"—and Rontron patted his pocket. "Somebody's blown the whole game to the police, you understand? It's serious! Get rid of this fool woman and come along."

His voice was urgent, and a sharp whistle broke from the dark man.

Kit, meantime, had stepped to the curb, and was looking from one to the other of them. The dark man addressed her in broken English, saying there had been a
mistake and that she had best not accompany him inside. Bronton intervened swiftly.

"Beg your pardon, miss, but I see my taxi's waiting down there a bit, and you might catch it. Something has come up to hurry us—frightfully important! Baron Lémaitre sent me to catch you. There has been a mistake after all. Your brother is not here."

The dark man did not know what to think, and was momentarily confused. The girl took her cue promptly, however, and gathered her coat about her shoulders.

"Very well," she said, and walked off toward the taxi.

Bronton caught the dark man's arm, like a flash.

"Quick! Not a moment to waste, my friend!" he exclaimed impressively, giving the other no time at all to reflect or think. "Nothing else matters—we must reach Lynch with this warning at once! He knows me; the rest of you don't; so come along—"

He swung the other around toward the blank front entrance. There was, he knew well, some signal that must be given, and he certainly could not give it. Now that the ruse had succeeded, now that he had been led to the proper place, the rest was up to him.

"Oh? But one moment, m'sieur!" exclaimed the dark man. "She knows now that her brother is here! You comprehend, I brought her a note from him—"

"I know all that," cut in Bronton. "It doesn't matter. We can get rid of the fellow if necessary. I tell you, this is important!"

The other yielded, and approaching the massive doorway that opened directly on the street, did not ring the bell as Bronton had hoped, but produced a key-ring and selected one of the keys. This fitted the outer door, and they stepped into a vestibule. The dark man pushed a button, and a light sprang out overhead. Bronton closed the door carefully. Ahead was a second door. The dark man was selecting a key, and stooped to insert it in the hole. As he did so, and straightened up, something happened—but he never knew what it was.

The blow was swift, sure, and straight to the jaw. The man collapsed, and in a flash Bronton seized his keys, then switched out the overhead light. The inner door stood half ajar; and leaving the collapsed form of his guide, Bronton pushed into the hallway beyond and closed the door behind him. He had, at least, gained admission!

He stood silent, motionless, listening and waiting. There was no sound to indicate that the entry had been heard. Ahead of him was a dark and apparently empty house. Then, all of a sudden, a door upstairs was flung open, letting a burst of light play upon a wide staircase ahead of him, and he caught voices in rapid French.

"You had better decide quickly what to do with her, then!" This was in a deep bass growl. "Jean will have her here soon, for Lémaitre telephoned that they had left the hotel."

A laugh sounded, and this was Lynch who made reply.

"Why worry about her, my old one? I'll take care of her, never fear. It's the man I'm uneasy about, this Bronton! Better see if Lémaitre knows anything about him."

"Better leave Lémaitre alone," came the response. "He'll have those plates finished in another hour; he's doing the retouches now. I've told Zamroff not to let a soul past the kitchen until after the boss gets here—he'll inspect the job when he comes. He promised to be here before midnight, as you know. We don't want Lémaitre's work bothered by anything at this stage of the business."

By H. Bedford-Jones
“Right enough,” said Lynch. “Then you tell Zamroff to be ready and slip a stiff dose of morphia into her when they get here. That'll keep her quiet until tomorrow, and then I'll take charge of her. Till phone Stein to look up that Bronston who was Hand, and settle him. After you tip off Zamroff to take care of her, slip into the garden and see if there's any signals from the workshop. Get moving! We've no time to waste.”

Bronston slipped behind a heavy velvet hanging in the hall, just as lights were switched on, and stood waiting.

What all this meant, he was by no means certain.

The workshop? Some other building in the vicinity; it was slang that might mean anything at all. For the rest, two men were obviously upstairs; one of them was descending now, humming a tune in a deep bass voice as he came. Lemay was at work in the cellar—so much was clear, and a man named Zamroff was in the kitchen as guard. Zamroff, Stein, Lynch—a fine international gang! And the boss was coming later. Who was the boss, then? Was it taking the look? Bronston found the lighted hallway clear, with a door at the rear end standing open and voices coming from the kitchen. He approached this door, heard a laughing remark in the bass voice, then the slam of a door. Cautiously he edged forward until he could see into a lighted kitchen, hung about with brass and copper pans and kettles, with a huge brass-mounted French range against one wall. At the sink, washing dishes, stood a man with huge mustaches—Zamroff, evidently.

Just this side of the kitchen, however, and not four feet away, was a door—the door going down to the cellar. Bronston edged forward, caught the kitchen door with his finger-nails, and an inch at a time drew it a little shut. Zamroff rattled away merrily at his dishes. Next instant Bronston tried the cellar door, found it bolted with a huge brass bolt, and shot this back. Then he swung open the door, ducked swiftly across the intervening space, and unperceived by Zamroff, was on a curved and descending stairway. He drew the door shut behind him and closed it without a sound.

Light from below showed him the way, and he descended to an astonishing sight.

Before him was an immense paved cellar lighted by strong electric bulbs, the windows covered over. Here, at any rate, was one workshop—a real one! Two massive work-benches stretched across the floor; racks of bottled acids, engraver’s tools, huge cupboards—and a man alone here, hard at work before one of the benches.

Bronston inspected him closely. Strain had put deep lines in his face, which was strong enough and handsomely carved. A smudged white workman’s smock covered him from neck to heels. He straightened up, passed a hand wearily across his eyes—then turned sharply and met the gaze of Bronston. His eyes widened.

“Who the devil now?” he muttered.

“Not the devil!”—and Bronston came forward with a laugh. “Careful! You’re Lemay? My name’s Bronston. I’m a friend of Kit—your sister. She’s outside in a taxi. Want to get out of here?”

Lemay stared at him, open-mouthed.

“Another trap?” he said with a half snatch. “I suppose she got that note, did she? She’s three thousand miles away. What are you devils up to, anyhow?”

“Eh?” Bronston frowned. “Look here, old man, snap out of it! Any minute now, there’ll be hell to pay upstairs, if they find the man I knocked out. It’s no trap. Your sister’s here in Paris, and Lynch damned near got his grip on her—Good Lord! It’s happened.”

It had, indeed. Up above broke out a sharp tumult—shrill voices, a volley of oaths, a thudding of feet. Bronston jerked out his pistol, but the other man suddenly wakened from his daze.

“In there—quick!” he pointed to a door at Bronston’s right. “Under the bed.”

Bronston caught at the door, opened it, saw a bedroom with a dim light burning. Without hesitation he dashed in, closed the door, and flung himself down, rolling beneath the bed. Barely in time! As he composed himself, the door was jerked open, and a medley of voices rang out.

“What’s up, Lynch? What are you devils after, anyhow—gone crazy? No one’s been here since Zamroff brought down my dinner,” Lemay said sharply.

Feet stamped about, but clearly enough the cool, sane voice of Lemay impressed them. From the sharp words, Bronston gathered that the dark man had been found in the entry—had perhaps come to himself and raised an alarm. Bronston thought of Kit Lemay, sitting out there in the taxi—but matters here were pressing enough!

Then they were gone, tramping upstairs again. After a moment the door swung open and Lemay spoke softly.

“Come along, Bronston. Stay in the hallway. They may come back. Be ready to duck.”

Gaining his feet, Bronston came to the doorway and the other stared at him.

“I’m convinced,” said Lemay quietly. Then he took a step forward, and impetuous words came from him in a burst. “Man! No time to talk about it—but you don’t know these devils! They’ve tortured me. I’ve seen two men shoot down, murdered. I’ve had to do what—”

Bronston lifted his hand, and his gaze checked the other.

“I know them,” he said. “Brace up, Lemay! We’re not out yet, and Kit’s in a taxi on the street. It’s up to us. The boss, whoever he is, will be here, and we’ve got to get away before he comes. There’s the dope. If you’ve got any weapon, come on.”

Lemay shook his head and flung a glance around. “I’ve thought of that. No weapon—unless I use this.”

He caught up a hammer from the bench, and Bronston nodded.

“Right. Any other way out than the front door?”

“No. Gardens in back—two savage dogs. Mastiffs.”

“Then out we go by the front door.”

He turned to the stairs; and Lemay, stripping off the smock to reveal shabby garments, joined him.

Ascending softly but swiftly, Bronston gained the door at the top of the stairs. It had been bolted. He turned, spoke under his breath.

“Can we get out from below?”

“No chance,” said Lemay. “My room has two windows on the garden. Barred.”

“Then hammer. Tell ‘em you’ve burned your hand with acid, want help, anything!”

The hammer hit the door hard and repeatedly. Outside came a growing voice.

“Allo! What is it?”

“Help!” cried Lemay. “I’ve spilled acid over my hands—help me! I’m badly burned. Get some oil.”

“Lynch! Jean!” rang out the alarmed voice, as a hand shot back the bolt. “This one has burned his hands! Where the devil have you all gone to?”

Bronston could guess where they had gone, after hearing the dark man’s story. He leaned forward, shored hard on the unbolting door, and it flew back.

The man at the door tumbled backward. Bronston was upon him instantly, hammering in blow upon blow; it was the cook, Zamroff. The man caught Bronston about the legs, yelling; then came a dull crack, and his arms relaxed. Lemay straightened up with a curt laugh, and darted into the hallway.
The front doors both stood wide open.

For one flashing instant Bronton had a vision of getting out of the place without a fight—then he saw something move, sprang aside with a cry, but too late. Lemay went down in a sprawling heap. A man on the stairs, leaning over the balustrade, struck again with his whalebone mât-rague—a long, springy slingshot; but Bronton’s leap had saved him from the sharp, swift blow.

It was the man of the bass voice, a big, horse-faced rascal. With a resounding oath, he regained his balance and hurled his weapon. The whalebone handle struck Bronton across the face, momentarily confused him. He looked up just in time to see the pistol jerked up and aimed at him.

His own weapon spoke first.

To the report, the big fellow slumped down against the balustrade and fell on the stairs, the pistol rolling from his hand. Bronton jerked at Lemay’s coat, tried to pull him up, tried to drag him along, but in vain. The house seemed to erupt into sound. Voices, shrill oaths, the pounding of feet, came from everywhere. In desperation, Bronton leaned over the senseless Lemay, picked him up bodily, plunged forward at the inner front door.

It slammed in his very face, with no hand touching it.

BRONTON half fell against the suddenly closed door, let Lemay go down, and came upright.

In that split second of time he perceived the reason. At the first alarm some mechanism from upstairs was set into motion, automatically closing the front doors—but this did not mean they could not be opened from within. They were shut, naturally, against enemies from outside.

Lynch and the dark man, Jean, had no doubt run hastily out to locate Kit Lemay, leaving both doors open. Even as he realized all this, Bronton was fumbling at the door; and as he expected, it opened to his hand. He pushed it back, and leaned down to drag Lemay outside into the entry. As he stooped, he looked back and saw several figures descending the stairs, heard their oaths and shouts.

Next instant he was in the entry. Snap after snap—silenced-automatics! The bullets crashed and whined all around him, splintering into the doors, smashing glass. Something jerked at him, nearly flung him off balance. Lemay dropped out of his grip to the entry floor. He was hit, somewhere, but felt no pain. They were running down the stairs, plunging forward.

In desperation Bronton seized the inner door and swung it. He had time for one shot. The first man was almost upon him, and to the blast of the pistol went pitching sideways. Then the door slammed shut. Bits of wood spurted from it—bullets from those silenced weapons were tearing through. A square pane of glass in the upper center, set in the wood as a peep-hole, flew into shreds.

There was no light here in the entry. From Lemay, on the floor, came a groan and a stir of movement. Bronton still felt no pain, knew only that his left arm seemed quite useless. He started for the outer door, pressing close to the wall to avoid any bullets, and as he did so, heard the scrape of a key in the lock. Lynch was returning.

Swiftly, Bronton dropped to the floor, against the wall. He reached out, caught hold of Lemay with his right hand, spoke sharply.

“Quiet, Hartley! Stay down.”

The other, evidently conscious now, grunted assent. At this instant the outer door swung open on the street. The dark man, Jean, had unlocked it, shoving it back, and behind him stood Lynch, holding Kit Lemay by the arm. Evidently she had chosen to accompany him.

A gasping groan broke from Jean, and he dropped like a plummet. One of those silent bullets had found him. And even as he went down, the inner door was flung wide to spread flight across the amazed Lynch, and the rush of men from within halted at sight of him.

Bronton, at the edge of that light-lane, lifted his pistol and fired, deliberately—shot after shot.

Oaths, screams, the smashing reports, blended into the pandemonium of a madhouse. And in the midst of it all a figure uprose and hurled forward. It was Lemay, flinging himself at the hated Lynch, with the vicious intensity of one paying a debt long overdue.

Bronton scrambled to his feet, leaned against the inner door, and slammed it shut. The men inside had vanished before his murderous burst of fire, either down or taking cover. He whirled hastily. Outside, on the sidewalk, Lemay and Lynch were locked in furious combat, the cloaked figure of the girl at one side. Shoving the body of Jean out of the way, Bronton stepped out and closed the outer door behind him. He heard bullets slap into it as it swung to. Free!

“Take it, you devil!”

That was Lemay’s panting voice. Lynch went staggering, and then Lemay’s fist struck him with terrific force, sent him headlong, lifting him from his feet, sending him headfirst into the house-wall. He struck and dropped, and lay in a limp heap.

“Quick!” cried Bronton. “To the taxi, Kit! This way, Lemay!”

The taxi-driver was running toward them—everything had happened in a sharp moment of time. Windows were being flung up along the street; voices were ringing out. Catching the girl’s arm, Bronton hurried her to where the taxicab stood waiting. The chauffeur had turned and was scrambling under the wheel. Lemay followed them.

Bronton wrenched open the door, pushed the girl inside, caught Lemay and shoved him after. He was about to follow them, when a subdued oath came from the chauffeur and two dark figures loomed up alongside—two of the bicycle police who patrol Paris in pairs by night.

“Come, messieurs, an accounting if you please!” said a sharp voice. “Did we hear shots?”

Bronton dropped the pistol into the cab and straightened up, his good hand reaching to his vest pocket.

“The car was backfiring, gentlemen,” he said. “Allow me—my coupe-fle. Of the press, you comprehend!” He pointed to the figure of Lynch, lying back of them by the house-wall. “That rascal is an American crook—he is very happily knocked out. I suggest that you investigate him, and also the house yonder. Will you permit us to depart? I wish to take this young lady to her hotel. You have my address there?”

THE agent jotted it down; his companion started toward Lynch.

“Right, m’sieur,” he rejoined. “You may go. You assume responsibility?”

“Full responsibility. Au revoir, m’sieur!” Bronton climbed into the cab, which started off an instant later. The Royale Monceau, driver! And after you pass the gates, stop first at a doctor’s house, if you know of one. I caught something in the arm—”

“Jimmy! Are you hurt?” The girl leaned forward in the darkness, her voice sharply anxious. Bronton caught her outstretched hand and pressed it.

“Hurt? Nope. Just happy,” he rejoined cheerfully. “Arm isn’t broken, but my heart’s affected. Let’s go! We’ll talk of rewards later on; also—”

He leaned back, sudden faintness upon him, blood dripping from his arm; but the glare of a street-lamp showed the smile upon his lips, and the girl’s fingers pressed his with promise of reward in full.
Fetch on the Crime Wave!

Wherein a stove-colored Dr. Watson pawns the pants of his Sherlock Holmes, buys a bloodhound and solves a dark, dark crime.

By Arthur K. Akers

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

A BOY what would double-cross nobody," quarreled private detective Columbus Collins, colored, at his assistant, Bugwine Breck, "is so low-down he'd have to stand on a stepladder to button a snake's spats."

"Aint double-cross nobody," mumbled the undersized Bugwine apprehensively. Having pawned his lanky superior's golfing plus-fours privately for three dollars to Willie Freeman the previous day, gummed-up a boy's reporter—particularly as Columbus was due to shine in a miniature-golf-course match in them the following Wednesday.

"Den whar at you git no three bucks to buy dat pook you calls a bloodhound wid? Buyin' a dawg when us aint had no case for a month!"

"Needs a dawg, he'p track down de clues," evaded Mr. Breck mournfully. Old gallopers had messed up his plan for redeeming those pawned pants, too. Boy was in a jam already, without all this dog-talk from Columbus now!

"Yeah! Any dawg what 'sociate wid you long couldn't find a skunk in a telephone-booth. More you detects, de dumber you git!" scoffed his chief.

"Mess around wid you, and he can't even eat. Last time I nourishes myself, workin' for you, my stomach think somebody done give us a su'prise-party."

"Old de-pressure done hit de detectin'-business same as eve'ything else," Columbus showed new impatience at economic ignorance. "'Cain't hardly do enough business for de head-man to eat, let 'lone feedin' a lil dawg-buyin' total-loss like you! Us got to stir up a side-line when de main line aint pay. And aint no profit in de main line us got no mo'."

"Nor vittles neither," Bugwine's mind continued on a nation-wide hook-up with his stomach.

"A crim'nal wid eve'y case,' but dey aint no case," Columbus summarized the firm's motto and situation.

"Yeah! And, if you can't catch de crook, create one! —dat's de rest of it," Bugwine unconsciously planted a seed. "But when us gwine eat?"

"Done told you us needs a good side-line," rapped his superior. "But all you does is set around wid yo' mouth open and buy dawgs. Whar you git dem tres dollars you buy dat dawg wid, nowo?"

Bugwine bestirred himself hastily, lest the conversation get personal. "Gangway for de Go-gitter!" he claredon. "You run on de side-line—me and de bloodhound run on de main line. Fotch on de crime-wave while I's fotchin' de dawg!"

But when Mr. Breck, his sudden fervor dissipated, shuffled back into the firm's dingy headquarters later, with a flop-eared mongrel trotting sadly in his wake, it was to find the room, like the firm's treasury, empty.

"Columbus say he aint wait for no four-flusher like you," vouchsafed a loafer beside the door. "Say he gone out to stir up good side-line for de business. Be back when he git it."

"Is, eh? Well, Coney, you done see de last of Columbus befo' you ever see de first of him, den," he addressed the dog, "becaze he aint gwine be back wid nothin'."

And for the next forty-eight hours it seemed that Mr. Breck might be right. Not only was Columbus missing, but so was crime. Law and order lay like a profitless pall upon Demopolis and upon the Columbus Collins Detective Agency. Supply waited fruitlessly upon demand.

Then suddenly there was dust in Kaufman's Alley, dust in Decatur Street, and a turning-point in the affairs of detectives. Dust raised by an excited messenger in haste and overalls, combing the barbecue-stands of Fish Alley for Doctor Watson in the continued absence of Sherlock Holmes.

"Cullud lady down at de detectin'-place lookin' for you!" was the first and the last that Bugwine heard. The rest was lost in the rush of his own wind about his flaring ears, the flap-flap of large flat feet upon the unpaved surfaces of Decatur Street and Kaufman's Alley.

Arriving hopefully, if breathlessly, Mr. Breck found a scrawny but able-tongued woman seated grimly in the firm's other chair.

"You de detectin'-man?" she combined interrogation with suspicion.

Bugwine shifted his rusted tin star into plainer view on his vest.

"Lookin' for somep'n bigger—and brighter," her ensuing remark seemed to carry double and uncomplimentary meanings. "Whar at de head-man?"

"Aint see dat boy in two days. Aint need him, nowo, since us gits de bloodhound—"

Bugwine seemed to have sounded the right note by accident. "Bloodhound? Whar?"

"Parks hissef' in front de meat-store when he aint got no case. Prizes him loose wid a plank—"

"Den git de plank. 'Caze he sho got hissef' a case dis time. Big one!"

Bugwine thought of fried liver and onions, in event he could contrive an advance on the firm's fee.

"Whut de nature de crime?" He looked as professional as his overalls and torn-brimmed straw hat in December would permit.

"Kidnapin', aggravated. In de night-time."

Mr. Breck gaped, and fumbled hastily in the table drawer for the wrapping-paper and the firm's chewed stump of a lead-pencil. Always looked better to the client if a boy made writing. And here was a real crime! While Columbus was out beating the bushes for a side-line, big
business on the main line just naturally came to a bright assistant on the inside!

"Us smells 'em out whar others jest sniffs about, me and Coney Island—that de bloodhound," Bugwine skillfully side-swiped competition and his superior as he went by them in his mind. "Who git kidnapped, and how?"

"Husband, Gone two days, wid a rope wrap around him, and man draggin' him off through de woods, gal whut see it say. She aint know de man. And I got too much money tied up in dat man to wait no longer for him to come back."

Bugwine's brain hadn't been so busy since he pawned the pants.

"Who else know 'bout dis?" he followed the germ of a new inspiration.

"Aint nobody. Jest git pestered when I look at de calendar—"

Mr. Breck couldn't hear her, for the clamor of his own brain with a new idea. Here was where Columbus got shown! All the time bellowing around about a boy being dumb. All the time making cracks about old pooh not being able to find a sandwich in a drug-store. Fetch on the crime-wave, had been Bugwine's challenge—and here it was! Columbus running on the side-line, Bugwine on the main!

"Needs de missin' man's name and description," he launched upon the cop that was to make the name of Bugwine a household word in the underworlds of Spocari and Frog Bottom. Boy couldn't hardly see the table for the smoke of Mr. Breck's bridges burning behind him as he cut out Columbus and took the case single-dogged.

"Name's Duke Mann. Mine Cynthia—"

"Whut he look like?"

"Look like a truck, only not so handsome. Big mean man in blue overalls and a black hat."

"Whut he got on he feet?"

"Bunion."

"Means whut kind of shoes he wars," amended Mr. Breck hastily.

"Say whut you means," the client's tongue sharpened.

"Warin' one shoe and a old suitcase, last time he wuz home—wid places cut out de suitcase what it wuz too tight."

"How much de rewawd?" Bugwine hit the heart of the matter.

"Five dollars—dead or alive. I jest paid up dat man's policy: done got too much money tied up in him to run no risk now."

A vest-button shot across the room as Bugwine swelled at fresh revelation of his luck. Five dollars, less three dollars required to redeem Columbus' golf-pants, still left two dollars for personal liver and onions! Finding the missing mammoth would fix Bugwine up both pecuniarily and professionally.

"Yo' husband jest same as found," he gave tongue, "soon as old Coney Island sniff somep'n whut he used own. Dat dawg's nose jest like a elephant—ain't never forgot."

The visitor fumbled grimly in her pocketbook, to draw forth a torn two-dollar bill, tissue-mended across its middle. "Here somep'n he used own," she accented the past tense. "I gits it out of Duke's clothes de last nap he took at home."

"Come here, Coney," ordered Bugwine importantly.

"Keep yo' nose open and yo' mouth shut to Columbus 'bout dis. Now, lay yo' sniffer across de big money, dawg, and inhale yo'self deep. Den find de boy whut dis she-note used belong to."

The drooping dog sniffed, looked puzzled, and was off in full cry after a flea in the shadow of his fourth rib.

"He aint used to nothin' bigger'n four-bits yit," apologized Bugwine. "I aint had him long enough for him to ramble reckless mongst de big bills."

"How 'bout givin' me back dat one?" Cynthia repaired an omission and ruined a prospect—for Bugwine to eat. "I pays off C.O.D. for Duke. Craves results, too, and craves 'em snappy."

"Let dat dawg sniff two snowflakes," boasted Bugwine hollowly on an empty stomach, "and he find de Nuth Pole befo' breakfast!"

Some hours later, with the campaign planned and work divided,—the headwork for Bugwine and the footwork for the dog,—the slumber of an assistant sleuth on a box in the wintry sunshine were rudely disturbed, by the box being kicked from under him.

"Cain't leave you by yo'self a minute, dat you aint go to sleep on de job!" a familiar voice penetrated the outer layers of slumber still enveloping the bewildered Bugwine.
"Uh-huh!" the disgusted Columbus divined, divulged, and confirmed Bugwine’s fears. “Somebody done tried to carry a soup-bone past dat dawg of youn’! And now listen at him!”

Bugwine shivered, and his eyes projected whitely. No mere soup-bone ever made or caused all that fuss!

Louder, nearer, lustier came the uproar. "Ow-woooooohh! Ow - Ow - Owooooo-ohhh!" the full-throated clamor of Coney Island on the trail. And, "A w Lasy! Aw Lasy! H-e-e-l-p!" in equal volume the clamor of the pursued.

Sickened, Bugwine made for the window. The thing was full of possibilities. Then one glance there, and he grew sicker, his hands across shuddering eyes to hide the horrid sight—of Coney Island treeing not the crook but Bugwine’s client!

Halfway up a thorn tree opposite detective headquarters, with Bugwine’s bloodhound baying eagerly at its foot, was Cynthia. And in her hand the explanation. Whoever said there was no luck in two-dollar bills knew their stuff, mourned Bugwine. Old Coney Island had trailed—and treed—this one on sight, and regardless of its holder! And with Columbus right on hand to see the mishap.

Fish-mouthed and gasping, Bugwine grappled with the fresh turn of events. Harder and more complicated now grew the task of retaining his client, keeping Columbus in ignorance that he had been double-crossed by Bugwine in respect to her case until Mr. Breck could catch the crook, collect the reward, redeem the pawned plus-fours, and eat again.

"Now go git her down from dat dawg—and find out why Duke Mann got hissef’ kidnaped," Columbus exploded two more bombs beneath the Bugwinian feet.

"Got hissef’ kidnaped?" Mr. Breck staggered mentally and physically in slowly widening circles. There were inferences here that took the wind out of a boy’s sails, the meals out of his mouth—

"Shoo. E’v’ybody know dat but Cynthia up yander."

"Huccome?" Bugwine struggled for air and information. He had set out to show the world single-handed what detecting really was, curb a crime-wave—and here even the crime was about to be subtracted from his case!

"To give he ears a rest," enlightened Columbus, "he git hissef’ kidnaped."

"By who?"

"Rope wrooped round he arms twel he can’t move nothin’ but he legs," Columbus ignored questions. "He fix it so Cynthia seen him dat way last. Wait twel dat woman tu’n loose on you now bout yo’ dawg treein’ her up dat tree, and you gwine und’stand why Duke couldn’t stand it no mo’. She talk de arms off a telephone pole."

But Columbus was wrong. Something that filled her with verbal restraint was on the treed Cynthia’s mind, —and in her pocketbook,—it proved. A barrage of loose rocks removed the bloodhound, and the thorns removed
a lot of excess clothing; but new need for a detective had Cynthia tamed when she struck earth once more.

"Let dat dawg sniff somep'n, and he aint never forget it—just like old elephant," depreciated Bugwine as his puzzled hound fled yelping from the scene.

"Gits de she-note out my purse to buy side-meat wid, and old dawg come right on after me," recalled Cynthia as she stowed away the tissue-mended cause of her rout. "Craves him git after who kidnap Duke de same way, before dat policy I pays on done lapse out."

Bugwine stumbled groggily before new aspects of an older idea. He recalled sickeningly what had happened to Willie Freeman for displeasing Duke Mann. And now he was firmly retained, committed—by Cynthia, and circumstances—to find a big bad man who did not wish to be found. Not to speak of the mental strain on Coney Island involved by kidnaper and kidnapped being the same individual! Bugwine's own intellect burned out a bearing just trying to encompass the predicament involved. Columbus' ideas about stirring up a good side-line had never looked better to Bugwine: old main line was fixing to ruin a boy. With a lot of personal trouble about starvation and a pair of pawned plus-fours looming nearer every second, whether he did or didn't collect five dollars for finding a kidnapped gentleman who did not crave to be found!

Cynthia was digging again in her pocketbook. So far, all that had come out of it for Bugwine was trouble. "Gits me dis note jest now," she culminated the search, and handed it to the perspiring little sleuth.

"Gits rock in my eye," Bugwine quick-wittedly covered one eye and serious gaps in his early education. "You read it to me while I runs down de rock."

"To Cynthia Mann," read his client in a scared voice, "Your husband, Duke Mann, is bein' held captive, kidnaped by des'prate men twel his life-insurance lapses. Den prepare yoself for de wust unless you puts fourteen dollars in a milk-bottle at de nawth end de old freight depot befo' midnight tonight for de ransom-money. Do dat, and den go home and wait for Duke. Say nothin' to nobody. Signed, Des'prate Dozen."

Gray drops gathered heavily upon the lined forehead of Mr. Breck as he listened. His knees sagged in sympathy with his burdened brain. If Duke Mann had kidnaped himself, who were the desperate dozen? Life was growing exactly as simple as the Einstein Theory for him. Yet with Columbus all the time talking about the heinousness of double-crossing and the desirability of side-lines, how else could Bugwine emerge with honor, five dollars and a whole skin—in the order named? Then alternatives swept him and blotted out the whole side-part of the picture. He was liable to be a big manufacturer's outlet for bandages, as soon as three or four people got through with him. And all he could write down on the asset side of his books was that Columbus did not yet know he had been retained by Cynthia. For the rest, his hand was not only to the plow, but lashed there.

"Got so much money tied up in dat boy now, wid dem premiums," Cynthia's voice penetrated his fog, "dat I bleeched to bail him out. Done 'tained you and dat dawg to run him down and cotch de crook."

"Ransom, eh?" he struggled with the newest aspect of a bad business. "Ransom for de man?"

"Who you reckon it for?" Cynthia's temper was not improving under exercise and anxiety. "Mo' I looks at you, no. I wonders wussome you git de notion you'z no detective, nephew."

Mr. Breck was in no shape to support a weak case with argument.

"And says Duke goes off wid rope wroup around he arms, and somebody leadin' him?" he fumbled to reconcile old facts with new.

"Aint say nothin' else."

"Who doin' de leadin'?"

"Is I know dat, would I pay you five bucks to find him?"

Bugwine blinked. Didn't seem to be any answer to that one, either. Boy was getting more of that surrounded feeling every second.

"Who gwine put de fourteen bucks under de depot?" he covered another vital angle.

"I is—and you gwine be right dar wid me!"

Bugwine capitulated, then recapitulated. Heavily! If Duke Mann had kidnaped himself, where did this Desperate Dozen come in? And the fourteen dollars? Which led to a further financial question: How was he going to get his five dollars? In event of which final failure, how long could he keep ahead of Columbus about those unredeemed plus-fours when the agency shortly after broke up in a two-man foot-race, with Bugwine in front?

There was a glazed and baffled look in his protruding eyes when Bugwine let himself cautiously into detective headquarters an hour later. Life held more unanswered questions than an overalled little stove-colored detective in a broken-brimmed straw hat seemed able to handle.

Worse, Columbus was there. A somewhat changed Columbus, though not for the better, so far as Bugwine was concerned. One who seemed to have recovered for himself, plus, all the spirits that Bugwine had lost.

"Line of women fawsms on de left, to see me play dat lil' golf-tournament next We'nesday in dem plaid-stripe' plus-foah britches of mine!" he reminded Mr. Breck of more trouble to come. Wednesday was approaching fast.

"Old note say go home now, and wait for Duke," Cynthia concluded.
“Yas suh!” Columbus continued in irritating exuberance. “Trouble aint mess wid me but jest so long—den I ups and licks it. Old main line lay down on me in detectin’ busines, what I do? I jest stir up de old brains, and sees good to put it in a line—den I puts it right in while you and yo’ half-wit bound is out treen’ women. What a boy as dumb as you is would start in double-crosin’ when he git in a jam, I jest starts double-shift in de brains. Comes out wid a scheme what is a scheme! And boy, when I ‘tends to nothin’, it gits ‘tended to right. Aint all time gummin’ up some’n, like you is.”

“Aint gum up nothin’?”, denied Bugwine obscurely. “Gits gum up for me. What kind of scheme you done scum?”

“Tell you, and it aint no scheme—it’s jest a mess what one wuz befo’ you started blabbin’ round about it,” de murred Mr. Collins. “Jest like yo’ dawg—can’t keep yo’ mouth shut about nothin’.”

So far as Coney was concerned, Columbus seemed suddenly correct. Again his bayings were heard in the alleys of the Hill.

“Coney sniffin’ about for two dollars”—essayed Bugwine when caught himself. Columbus did not know of his retention by Cynthia, or the sad and precise cause of her treewing by Coney Island earlier in the day.

“She shows heap of judgment not sniffin’ round you for none, den,” derogated Mr. Collins. “Got to git on out and ‘tend to de side-line now what I seen de chance to put in.”

THAT night, at the eerie hour of eleven, Bugwine Breck sat in the darkened headquarters of the Collins Detective Agency, awaiting his zero hour—also the arrival of Cynthia Mann with fourteen dollars and a milk-bottle. Ransom for Big Duke Mann who did not wish to be ransomed, according to Columbus, but who certainly needed ransoming, according to the note that Cynthia had received. Never had it looked less probable that Duke had not kidnapped himself, yet who could kidnap such a mammoth of a man against his will unless it was indeed a dozen desperate men? Mr. Breck shuddered at both thoughts.

Outside an owl whooed, and Bugwine climbed halfway up the stovepipe before he could stop himself. If he earned that five dollars now, would he live to enjoy it—or redeem Columbus’ pants? And pants, in turn, reminded him of the pressing circumstances that overtook Willie Freeman when Willie had displeased the gigantic Mr. Mann. Everything had started when Bugwine set out to double-cross a partner!

A rattle at the knob of the agency’s door sent the panicky Bugwine over backward. A turn of the knob fear-somely followed. Bugwine sprang yelping to his feet—to confront Cynthia with a pint milk-bottle under her arm, her eyes rolling nervously in the darkness of her face and the night. A slim roll of greenish hue was visible through the glass.

“Tooken about all de money I could scratch up to ransom dat man,” she greeted her private and palpitating sleuth. “Two fives and two twos—one of ’em mended. But I got more’n dat tied up in dat Duke—can’t take no chances wid what I done sunk in him in dem policies.”

Bugwine gurgled and gulped, in lieu of speech. Cynthia kept on talking and didn’t notice it, as the march to the abandoned freight depot began. Far off was the bay of the found-wanting Coney Island, evidently abroad on some private business of his own.

All too soon they came to the spot that Mr. Breck expected others to find marked X in the lurid accounts of what happened to him on the night of December twelfth, at about half-past eleven.

“Dar de depot!” hissed Cynthia in his ear. Deeper into the soul of Mr. Breck bit his regret that he had not followed the preachment of his partner regarding double-crossing, turned this case into the common pot instead of holding out with it as a means to pants-redemption and personal vainglory.

Again rang the cry of Coney Island—warning to some fresh wrong trail, reflected Bugwine bitterly. As though he didn’t have trouble enough now!

“Old note say for me go home now, and wait for Duke to git dar,” Cynthia concluded the business of depositing the milk-bottle.

“Is twelve desp’rate mens write me note to lick a lion, old lion better lay in hisse’f some liniment,” summarized Mr. Breck between chattering teeth. “Right now, I got some mo’ detectin’ to do—about foah miles off.”

“You got stick around wid me twel dem dozen foach Duke home to me, you means,” amended Cynthia, “else I jars de handle loose from de Big Dipper up yander, wid one lung tied behind me.”

Being already numb, Bugwine’s brain could merely grow more numb—thinking about what might happen should an oversized husband return after midnight to find a strange shrimp-sized boy in his home without previous introductions. A boy’s business got worse as it went along. Double-crossing was no game for amateurs!

Wherefore Bugwine Breck perspired on the edge of a chair in the Mann “front room” with his hat gripped tightly in two terrified hands an hour later, when there was a fumbling at the latch.

“W-w-w-who dar?” quavered Bugwine in a high tenor before he thought.

“Who dar say ‘who dar’?” rumbled a bass without that was a bass.

Cynthia flung open the front door as Bugwine dived for the back. To flatten himself there with his back against it while it came over him that there was more, much more yet to come—that he was by no means gazing upon the final chapter yet in tangled and terrible affairs.

For in the lighted front doorway stood Duke Mann all right, but what a man! Clad in rags and rage! Tied to his spreading feet were scraps of leather that once might have been shoes. Fluttering from arms, legs, and shoulders were tatters of blue that might once have been overalls.

“What is he? Dat all I wants know—what is he?” bellowed Mr. Mann to the stars. And even in his gibberings the wall-eyed Bugwine noted the singular, not plural, that rang through the demand. Looking right at him, too! There was more here than met the eye—“Lawd, look whut de Desprate Dozen done done to him!” squealed Cynthia in dismay. “Sho is good thing I pays de ransom in time!”

But this was like oil on flames. “Ransom? Ransom?” roared the mammoth. “Desprate Dozen?” Against the back door Bugwine gave mustard-plasters lessons in flattening as he sensed new elements in an ever-complicating situation. His hour was coming.

“I’ll git him! I’ll git him!” the returned Mr. Mann continued, deafeningly incomprehensible. “Tyin’ me up so I’ll look natural, he say. Tyin’ me to a truck, in de night-time! And den somebody move de truck—fawty miles, wid me gallopin’ along back of it in de dark! Been walkin’ back for two days ever since!”

“B-b-but,” stuttered Cynthia, “how ’bout de fo’teen dollars I puts in de bottle under de depot to ransom you out wid?”

“Fo’teen dollars? Under de depot? Ransom?”

But conversation, however heated, was rudely interrupted here—by the clamor of a man-hunt sweeping past
the door, from the direction of the depot. Earth and sky filled with the “Ow-wooohh! Ow-ow-wooohh!” of Coney Island on some fresh wrong trail—mingling madly with the screams of his quarry in mortal terror; possibly a full dozen of them, estimated the shrinking Bugwine, from the volume.

“Nemmit de dawg, git de money!” screamed Cynthia practically above the uproar, as she started depot-ward.

The battered and tattered big Duke followed thuddingly in her wake. As for Bugwine, when remoter backgrounds were made, Bugwine would be in them; but he had a dim if dwindling interest still in Cynthia’s money. A block behind, he too followed on.

Which placed him in the position of practically running over by the reverse movement of the treasure-hunt.

“De money done gone! De bottle done gone already!” shrialled Cynthia to the night.

Doors were still being opened anxiously, heads still being excitedly thrust forth along the street that Coney Island and his quarry had so recently traversed. Far to the rear, Detective Bugwine Breck, his brain bogged to the axles, struggled with new and ever-more-conflicting phenomena. Big Duke, he mourned, had been kidnapped, after all—so he wasn’t sore at Bugwine. Duke had not been kidnapped—yet the ransom-money was gone. So was the reward, then, for Bugwine—for the crook wasn’t caught. Which summed up incapacitately that Bugwine’s own mighty machinations had merely been a round-trip from trouble. He was right back where he started, only worse.

From every house curious spectators were hurrying now, joining the indignant procession, the dazed Bugwine; drawing on toward the new civic center that had been created by the leapin’, bayin’ Coney Island beneath a magnolia tree. Barking up the wrong tree, as usual, gloomed his master.

But once beneath the leafy magnolia, the mountainous Mr. Mann wasted no further time. Seizing a newspaper from a bystander, he set fire to it, held it high among the spreading branches—and went berserk in a way to make his previous bellowings but the feeble whimperings of a newborn babe.

“Dar he is! Dar he is!” Big Duke started swarming up the tree. “Dar de double-crossin’ crook whut tie me to dat truck! I git you! I git—”

But again words were interrupted by deeds—deeds double-barreled with explanation. Throwing light on previous lost allusions—vindicating Bugwine as a sleuth, Coney as a bloodhound! All in one swift crash of falling glass from the gloom above, as a pint milk-bottle hurtled downward, to shatter at Cynthia’s astounded feet and release there the lost ransom! Two fives, and two twos: one of them torn and tissue-mended—the “she-note” to which the unforgetting nose of Coney Island was ever drawn, no matter who possessed it!

And while the populace gaped and gasped at what was loudly transpiring above, Cynthia looked at Bugwine, looked at one of the fives—and passed it swiftly, startlingly to him, with:

“Five I says—and five you gits. For findin’ Duke and who kidnap him, after all.”

And Bugwine, casting triumphant eye—and ear—upward to where kidnapper and kidnapped mingled as indistinguishably in the branches as they had in fact, gave tongue.

“Double-crosser, is I?” he essayed to crow, only to leap aside, as the unknown victim of Mr. Mann’s wrath above him suddenly lost his hold, clutched, missed, and crashed yowling hideously through the branches to earth, there to arise and flee madly through the darkness and an intervening greenhouse, with Duke Mann murderously at his heels.

Bugwine staggered at what he saw. Recognition—and revelation—flashed over him.

Now he knew why Columbus Collins knew so much about Duke Mann’s kidnapin’! Columbus, who had cooperated with Duke as far as his fatal error about the truck, and then—

“Double-crosser, is I!” clarioned Bugwine into the night after his fleeing chief; beholding in him proof more potent than all Mr. Collins’ past preachers that duplicity does not pay. “Thinkin’ up pawnin’ dem pants might been my notion; but tryin’ to horn in as a side-line and collect de ransom for a kidnapin’ whut you aint even pull off—dat wuz your own idea!”
Free Lances in Diplomacy  

"The Silencing of John Cowdray" presents an extraordinary drama of international politics with Mr. New's customary skill and power.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by A. E. Briggs

ONE of the Trevor cars with its Afghan chauffeur drove down Park Lane and into Kensington at a leisurely pace and stopped before a well-kept house in one of the streets south of the Gardens, where the Marquess got out, dismissed the car, and rang the bell. He was admitted by a butler who apparently knew him well. The butler escorted the caller to the living-room on the second floor, where he left him in a comfortable chair by the window after placing drinks and the evening paper on a table within reach. It appeared Mr. Cowdray, M. P., had not yet returned from his club but was expected in shortly. This living-room was at the front of the house and was separated from the rear study, where Cowdray worked, by mahogany folding doors which happened to be partly open at the time.

His Lordship didn't glance at the newspaper. He had the somewhat unusual quality of being able to relax completely—to sit or stand in so absolutely motionless a position that birds in the parks sometimes perched upon his shoulder to inspect him more closely—while he allowed his impressions of this or that occurrence to penetrate.

Presently he heard the front door close softly and steps ran up the stairs. Before they reached a hall door opening into a room adjoining the study, he was out of his chair and over behind a high-backed divan in a corner next to the folding doors, examining one of the pictures on the wall. The other man, coming into the rear study, glanced into the living-room from between the folding doors, but didn't go close enough to see that there was anyone in the room. Supposing himself quite alone on that floor, he went over to a large Chipendale desk between the two rear windows and opened some of the drawers with a bunch of skeleton keys. Then he turned to a safe which was set into the wall at the side of the fireplace, drawing from his pocket a scrap of paper with penciled memoranda which he studied as he twirled the combination-knobs. In a moment the door swung open and he began to search rapidly among the documents in pigeon-holes and drawers.

The Marquess had supposed that the man was Cowdray, until a muttered curse indicated that he was having trouble unlocking the drawers of his own desk. That was enough of a suspicious circumstance to make His Lordship step along behind the heavy brocade hanging and glance into the study. The shape of the other man's head, his height, build and coloring, were apparently those of Cowdray—but why the skeleton keys in that slightly trembling hand? As the man turned toward the safe even his profile resembled Cowdray's. The Marquess thought it odd that this never had struck him before—insomuch as the man now proved to be Charles Black, Cowdray's efficient private secretary—a man who was himself thoroughly a political that it was supposed he might stand for Parliament at one of the by-elections.

Presumably, Black had access to practically all of his employer's papers—very likely had the combination of the safe. Cowdray certainly thought highly of him, and was supposed to trust him implicitly. And of course he might have lost his keys and had to get the skeletons from a locksmith; he might have found himself uncertain about the combination, and jotted it down on paper. Still, the inference seemed to be that he was procuring for purposes of his own, information which his employer had been at some trouble to prevent his obtaining. So the Marquess remained standing as motionless as a stone image until he heard Black go out into the hall and tiptoe down the stairs. Stepping noiselessly into the hall, he saw the fellow let himself out of the front door so quietly that nobody in the house could have heard him—in fact, it was practically certain that neither the butler, nor Cowdray's valet on the upper floor, nor the two servants in the basement, knew that he had been in the house at all. After waiting another half-hour, His Lordship decided that Cowdray must have been detained somewhere. Ringing for the butler, he said he would call again at some other time.

As the Marquess is far too busy a man to devote more than a minimum of time to the affairs of any one person, he scarcely gave Cowdray another thought until, after dinner at one of his clubs a week or two later, the man's political influence was mentioned in a discussion between several prominent men in the smoking-room. Sir Jarvis Benton, K. C., remarked that the Marquess of Lyonesse had been said to know more about Cowdray's early history than any of those present, and asked what he thought of him as a factor in public life.

"Well, I noticed him first while chatting with one of the instructors in the toxicology lab. This chap Cowdray was leanin' against a bench with his nose in a textbook. Another student came bargin' along an' shoved him at least a couple of feet—but Cowdray never took his eyes off the line of print he was tryin' to absorb. He'd taken honors in medicine an' surgery while livin' in a Stepney lodgin'-house with the room so cold he had to study in bed by candlelight. And now he was figurin' how he could pay his way through a law-course. War interrupted things. He went in a private—came out a Major, Army Intelligence—saved half his pay. Was called to the bar in two years instead of three; practiced four years, building up a wide political acquaintance. Stood for Parliam'nt and returned twice by safe majority. Employed as counsel by some of the large corporations."

"Hum! Er—would Your Lordship consider him well-balanced, as a political? Isn't he a bit extreme at times?"

"Not if he knows after exhaustive study that he's right. When he makes a state'mnt in the House—he knows. Often those statements appear ill-aided at the time—but who knows whether they are or not?"
“It’s rumored about Westminster that he’s to make some
amazingly sensational charges tonight in the House,” ob-
served Sir Jarvis.
“I hope he’ll not—the temper of the city an’ country
isn’t what it was,” replied the Marquess in some concern.
“We’re taxed almost beyond endurance—there’s doubt
an’ discouragement everywhere; these are just the condi-
tions the radicals feed on—an’ they’re damned dangerous!
Cowdray’s much too valuable a man for us to lose!”

The atmosphere of the House of Commons that night
was tense. There was an ugly undercurrent on the Labor
side, which did not fancy its Premier’s heading a coalition
government, and foresaw restrictions upon several measures
it had meant to put through.

Shortly after ten, Cowdray rose. He said that he had
been spending some time in quiet investigation, resulting
in his conviction that large sums voted by Parliament for
the relief of unemployment had become so attenuated in
passing through the subsidiary channels for actual distri-
bution that the relief-payments had fallen far short of
what it had been anticipated they would be. More than
that, he regretted that certain Honorable Members were
permitting themselves to associate with outside political
bodies which, among other things, were advocating a cam-
paign of serious offenses against trade with the United
States with the intention of causing an eventual rupture in the relations between
the two countries—on the ground that
much of the depression and bad labor condi-
tions in the United Kingdom were
caused, directly or indirectly by the

Here he was interrupted by a storm of
protest from the Labor benches. McCor-
mack, one of the more quarrelsome Labor-
ites, was on his feet demanding
that Cowdray name the Mem-
bers to whom he was referring.

Cowdray waited until quiet
was restored. Then he said:
“It is my belief that there are
other matters even
more serious than the
two I have mentioned.

Up to this moment, I
haven’t definite proof
upon any of them;
but I expect to get it
within a few days.

One month from
tonight—that is, the
seventh of next month
—I will give you from
this bench what
information I have
obtained, with definite
proof that it is well
founded—and men-
tion whatever names
I know to be implicated.”

Matthew McCormack—who was said
to have a comfortable income, obtained
nobody knew from what source—shot to his
feet again.

“The Honorable Member had best take
excellent care that he makes no false ac-
cusations, at that or any other time—for, if
he does, he may be signin’ on for a short life
an’ by no means a merry one!” he said
threateningly.

Although Cowdray admittedly had given some veiled
provocation, McCormack was temporarily suspended and
fined. When Cowdray left the House, shortly after eleven,
the Marquess of Lyonesse was waiting near the door, and
drew him aside:
“I say, old chap! . . . Nothing particular on hand, I
hope?”

“I’m supposed to look in at the Duchess of Pevensey’s,
but I’m a bit done up—fancy I’ll go straight home.”

“Er—could you stop a few moments with me in Park
Lane, on the way? Matter of some importance, d’ye see.
What?”

“I’ll stop, of course! Devilish kind of Your Lordship to
suggest it. Preciate your int’rest—very much.”

Then they were in the Marquess’ car, and a few minutes
later sitting over bottles and glasses and fragrant cigars in
the big Jacobean library of the famous Park Lane man-
sion of the Trevors.

“Well,” began His Lordship, “we’d best get down to the
meat of what I’ve to say. Your speech tonight was a
courageous thing—and a foolish one in the present temper
of the country. Whether you may have headed off trouble
for the Govern’nt durin’ the next month or so, I can’t say
—it’s quite possible. But one thing certain is that if you’re
seen about, before the middle of next month, you’ll not
last that long! For all his loud-mouthing, I don’t see Mc-
Cormack killin’ you—but some of the men he’s associat-
in’ with will do it! I’d much prefer your not goin’
to your house at all, tonight! Of course it’s a bit soon for ‘em
to be startin’ anything, but you’re pretty hot on their
trail—they simply can’t afford to let you live much
longer. Why, man—there is treachery in your own
house! Did you know that?”

“Suspected it a fortn’ ago, from bits of wax on key-
holes in my desk. Can’t be my butler Burroughs—I’d
stake my life on him! Or Enson, my valet—know all about him.

Burroughs has known the cook-
housekeeper and
and the maid all their
lives. fancied I
knew Charley
Black, as far back
as the Stepney
days; he’s under
many obligations
to me. But evi-
dence is turnin’
up against one
‘Carl Schwartz’
as one of the
politics. I’m
after. Carl
Schwartz
Charles Black!
Sorry! He’s not got
anything of impor-
tance—I removed it
desk an’ safe
two weeks ago. Ex-
cept some of his
fingerprints which are
in a secret compart-
ment of the safe—
he’s not likely to
discover it if he opens
the thing. Well—
have to get home
long enough to
change clothes, you
know. I gave the servants the evening off after Morris took the car back—"

The Marquess raised one hand deprecatingly.

"No trouble about clothes, John—I can do you very well right here. Always havin' chaps turn up more or less out of repair! Then we can fly down to Trevor Hall in Devon until you've the situation figured out—"

"I've rented diggings in the East End, where I'm supposed to be chief clerk in a Bermondsey leather-house. If you'll have a taxi called, I'll go to the alley back of my Chelsea place—through the tradesmen's door in the brick wall—change my clothes, pack a suitcase, and be out in the alley again in half an hour. I'll go down to the Bermondsey house, lie low there—not come near Chelsea for a month—"

"Did Black ever know of your comin' or goin' by that alley?"

"Fancy not—never did it while he was in the house."

"Well, it's a bit of a risk, even so—but possibly not so much of a one. I've a tunnel under my gardens to Prince Abdool's house on Park Street. Take you through that—have the taxi waitin' there. Nobody will see you leave this house—if it happens that we were followed from Westminster."

And as the Member left him, His Lordship went to bed and was asleep in a few moments. Two hours later, the buzzer on the small table by the head of his bed started intermittingly with its low but persistent vibration—wak- ing the Marquess in about a minute. Reaching for the telephone, he heard the voice of his chief operator in the communications-room sixty feet under the gardens.

"Mr. Cowdray's butler is calling, sir—says it's a matter of the utmost importance or he'd not disturb you—"

"Switch him on. ... Are you there, Burroughs? Aye? Very good! What is it?"

The butler's many years of training enabled him to main- tain an ordinary tone of voice and speak with a thorough understanding of the fact that there might be listeners on the wire.

"There's a matter which I find myself quite h'at a loss to 'andle by myself, M'Lud. Serious, I fancy you might consider it, sir. An' it seemed to me that you, M'Lud, would be more h'in the marster's confidence than h'anyone else who occurs to me at this moment—"

"Did he come in a while ago—an' then go out again?"

"'Has to that, M'Lud, I couldn't rightly say. The marster was h'uncertain as to what time 'e might be comin' h'in, tonight—gave us permission to be h'out."

"From the way you speak, Burroughs, one infers that you'd not care about goin' into particulars over the wire. What?"

"H'it would be most h'ill-advised, sir—it really would."

"An' you're suggestin' that I come around there as soon as possible—eh?"

"H'If Your Ludship h'onely could, sir! I trust Your Ludship will understand that I shouldn't dream of disturbin' you in this way for h'anything but a most serious matter."

"Very good! ... I'll be there in twenty or twenty-five minutes. —Fred! Ring up Sabub Ali—I want a car inside of ten minutes!"

Apparently Cowdray had just changed from his dinner clothes into a morning suit and had stepped into the study to procure something before packing his suit case. It looked as though he might have been sitting at the open desk when some one reached over one shoulder to clap a hand over his mouth and then gag him. Then he must have been asked for the combination of the safe, and refused to give it—for both of his hands had been held in the glowing embers of the cannel-coal fire until the fingers were badly burned. He must have broken away from his captors for part of a minute—long enough to reach into a desk drawer and pull out his service-automatic—from which it was subsequently found that three shots had been discharged. A heavy iron sash-weight had been lying on the floor under one of the windows until a carpenter came in to re-hang it. (His Lordship had noticed this the day he called.) With this as a club, Cowdray's face had been brutally beaten in. The man must have been dead, from the blow, inside of two seconds—which might have been merciful, except for the charred hands. They indicated no mercy!

Somehow his assailants had managed to open the safe, and had scattered its contents over the floor. The desk had been cleaned out the same way. Books had been pulled down from the well-filled shelves and rifled to see if any papers were concealed between the leaves. The attractive little study was now in chaos as the Marquess stood between the folding doors and carefully scrutinized everything in sight.

"You noticed the light when, Burroughs?"

"About 'alf h'after two, M'Lud."

"From—where?"

"My room h'on the third-floor, sir. From my window, h'if at one side, I can see the 'arf of the further study window, below."

"What time did you get in?"

"About one, M'Lud, by the front door. We do not make a practice of usin' the h'alley, sir. H'it 'as the h'appar- ance of bein' a bit low, sir."

"And the cook-housekeeper—Mrs. Hounslove?"

"She 'ad retired early, sir—a very 'eavy sleeper, she is."

"The maid? Chauffeur? Enson?"

"Enson took Andrews to a ball, sir, with the marster's permission—they were h'in just after me—Morris, possibly ten minutes later—all of them tired an' sleepy."

"Where's Black?

"H'T was given to h'understand, sir, that Black was spendin' the night with relatives or friends h'at 'ampstead—an' will return shortly h'after breakfast."

"When would you say this must have happened?"

"Very shortly before we came in, sir. The bloody murderers—H'T arks your pardon, M'Lud—might even 'ave been goin' out by the alley when H'T came in at the front."

"You've touched nothing in the study?"

"H'I've not even stepped a foot h'into it, M'Lud, an' have been most careful not to put my 'ands on the door- casings or stair-rails. H'T suppose there'll be no avoidin' 'avin' the police in to take charge, here. Of course h'all of us will be wishin' the brutes who did this to the marster caught an' 'anged, sir—but the police 'as a way of sus- pectin' h'everybody—even us, as wouldn't 'ave 'armed an 'air o' the marster's 'ead!"

"Don't worry about that, Burroughs. He told me just a few hours ago that he'd trust his life to, Mrs.
Hounslow, or Enson or Morris—and I'll pass that along to the police, myself. But he didn't trust Black and I don't, either. I'd like to have the lot of you keep a close eye on Black when he turns up—don't let him out of your sight! Now—I've friends at Scotland Yard—and I fancy we can keep the news-johnnies out of the house most of the time. I'll use your phone in the lower hall—get through to Sir James Baldwin's house—have him here with the Yard medico in half an hour. Er—before they get here, it might be as well to waken Enson an' Morris—have 'em up in that room across the hall, so I can ask a few questions—they may have noticed something outside when they came in. Don't take too long about it, Burroughs!

When the valet and chauffeur came up, and had taken a long, horrified look into that ghastly study—the Marquess beckoned them across the hall and closed the door.

"Enson, you've had exceptional opportunities for noticing Mr. Cowdray's habitual ways of keeping things—his general everyday methods of arranging his belongings. Morris, as I understand, was under him in the Army Intelligence, and is naturally a close observer even today—one doesn't get out of the habit. You'll know as much of Cowdray's ways outside of the house as Enson does inside—both of you saw more of the man each day than Burroughs would. Well—the Scotland Yard people will be here in a few moments. When they get around to it, they'll have you in that study, examining everything you can see and asking a deal of questions. Up to a certain point you certainly should tell them everything you know or suspect. But—well, d'ye see, I may be entirely wrong as to a certain bit of evidence that struck me. If you notice it, you'll understand at once what I have in mind an' see that our best chance for runnin' down the matter is not to let anybody know about that one point—catch the brutes before the police even know where to look for 'em. Absolutely mum to the police—understand?"

Enson nodded.

"I know Mr. Cowdray considered Your Lordship one of his very best friends—and, from your reputation, it's quite possible you'd suspect certain political, both English an' foreign. At the moment, I can't imagine what Your Lordship has in mind—but I shall probably know when I examine the room. Thank you for the hint, sir—you may rely upon my keeping mum. —Eh, Morris?"

"Absolutely! There's something trying to edge into my head at this moment—but I can't get any shape to it until I have a close look-see in there. I say, sir! Would there be a chance for our conferrin' with you somewhere later?"

"I intend asking Sir James to send you around to Park Lane after breakfast—by that time I'll have looked into the affair more, with him, and possibly turned up something else. Just wait in here until he calls you—I fancy he'll not disturb Mrs. Hounslow at this time of night."

When the Scotland Yard Superintendent reached the house with the official physician, Burroughs led them up to the living-room and closed the hall door. Sir James shook hands with the Marquess, took one long comprehensive look between the folding doors, then spoke, in a tone so low that it couldn't have been overheard in the hall outside.

"I suspected when you gave this address, My Lord, that something of the sort might have happened. There are men in London who knew how much Cowdray already had dug up before ever he made that speech in the House—but this looks like a tougher gang than I supposed they were. Those I had in mind would have killed him without a moment's hesitation—but one fancies they'd have done it in a far less brutal and mess way. Still, if the lot were on the Muscovite side—well—there you are!"

Five minutes of questioning put him in possession of all the facts known to the butler or Marquess. Then he asked:

"Has Your Lordship any suggestions to make before I get a detail from the Yard?"

"We might go over one or two points, I fancy. While waiting for you, I made this free-hand sketch of the positions of everything I could see in that study—simple matter to check up measurements as soon as the Doctor has"
finished with the body. Cowdray told me about midnight that he suspected his secretary, Black, an' had some of his fingerprints in a secret compartment of that safe. We'd best find that secret drawer an' get whatever's in it before you call your men in. Judging from the light reflections on the polished woodwork, I'd say there are a number of fingerprints in this study—we may find others on the rear doors.

And I'm thinking of Matthew McCormack; despite his bluster, the fellow hasn't nerve enough to kill anybody—but he might have been here with the gang, for all that. Is there any way you can get his fingerprints without arresting him? You've no evidence to justify that at present.

"Oh—aye. Chap can't refuse bein' interviewed by us—havin' his statement taken down, d'ye see. An' we've special notebooks for that sort of thing, now. We hand a chap the book, for him to sign with pencil. Sensitized paper an' cover, d'ye see—he can't touch it anywhere without leaving prints which we develop afterward like photograph-paper. But—is Your Lordship serious in considerin' McCormack a suspect? Threats on the floor of the House can't be taken seriously, y'know—much too common an occurrence!"

"Er—quite so. But suppose you do find a fingerprint of his in that study? Since he's never been known to set foot inside of this house, how would that strike you?"

"Oh—my word! Quite sufficient grounds for arrest—no matter what the bounder might say! What?"

"Fancy it would look that way. However—let me caution you, old chap, not to make the arrest if you do find any—just keep the fellow under close observation. There are some features which have almost unlimited ramifications; you're not goin' to run down John Cowdray's murderers as easily or as quickly as you may think!"

The Marquess' sensitive fingertips had been moving gently over the interior woodwork of the safe—and he now saw that there was an inch-and-a-half space between the bottom of the lower drawer and the steel of the safe itself. Taking the drawer out, he shoved his hand into the recess and began pressing at various points upon the thin mahogany sheathing upon which the drawer rested. When his fingers reached the back and pressed down, the front of the sheathing lifted half an inch, just where a thin stripe of gliding ran across the polished front. Grasping the edge of this, he carefully pulled it out, revealing half a dozen papers in the recess underneath. Handing these to Sir James, he replaced the sheathing—which couldn't be lifted until pressure was applied within two inches of the back after the drawer was removed.

"There are Black's fingerprints, Sir James—with his name endorsed upon them in Cowdray's handwriting. Now Doctor—what have you found?"

Cowdray's body had been straightened out on the rug behind the desk, his shirts unfastened and coat and waistcoat removed.

"Killed instantly by that frightful blow on face and forehead with the sash-weight," the physician pronounced. "Jugular torn wide open by a second blow along the jaw—he would have bled to death in five minutes from that one. Bullet from an automatic ranged upward through the abdomen, and lodged under right shoulder-blade—I'll have it out presently for comparison."

"Need an autopsy?"

"Aren't three mortal wounds enough? No necessity whatever for an autopsy!"

"How long has he been dead?" Trevor asked.

"Well—rigor is scarcely beginnin' to set in, as yet. I'd say put it betwixt twelve-thirty an' one—but that's on the butcher's evidence and your own, sir, more than the condition of the body. You say he left you a few minutes after midnight; it's a four to six-minute drive around here with no traffic in the streets. Butler got in shortly after one—and heard no shots or any disturbance whatever; it must have happened before he came. He investigated at about two-twenty—called you at once—you were here before two-fifty. Probably exact moments don't matter in this case."

While they were talking, the photographers and fingerprint men arrived. Presently Sir James asked: "Findin' much, Bolton?"

"One set of prints all over the place, sir, also those of three other persons, one of 'em a woman—and two thumbmarks from a cotton glove. Maid probably doesn't dust here more than once in two or three days. I fancy most of the prints may be those of Cowdray himself—or possibly his secretary. But those two cotton-glove thumbs—""

Burroughs quietly intervened:

"'Tis customary, sir, for me to wear white gloves during the h'evening—both in the dining-room an' when h'answearing the front door. 'Tregret very much, sir, that the maid should 'ave been remiss in polishing the woodwork in this room an' will 'ave words with her about it when she's down."
“Hmph! ... We may be thanking her for assistance in running down Cowdray's murderers!”

Most of us have wondered, many a time, how it is possible for the newspapers to scent a mysterious murder and have their men on the spot before anybody in the neighborhood even dreams that such a thing has taken place. In that quiet Kensington street there had been no sound of any disturbance. But when the butcher's boy came up the rear alley at seven, he saw a constable standing just inside the brick-wall door. Half an hour later, the grocer's boy saw two—and raced his push-bike around a considerable detour to a West End office of the Daily Mail, receiving a crown for his information. A Morning Standard man saw one of the Mail men ringing the bell of Cowdray's house. After that, the police had considerable difficulty in keeping reporters out—and "extras" were soon on the streets.

WHEN Sir James reached Park Lane he was almost exploding with wrathful annoyance.

"Confound them, Marques! Everybody's howling for Cowdray's murderers, before his body's fairly cold! I wish to God they had the job of runnin' 'em down!"

"Oh, well—you've been through all this many a time before, old chap—keep your shirt on! Did you get McCormack's fingerprints?"

"McCormack—we've got McCormack's fingerprints, sharply defined—an' the joke of it is he hasn't a notion we have them! Tells the most impudently amazin' story the Yard has heard in some years. Says he went down to see a couple of the district leaders in his borough, last night—some pub down Rotherhithe way—had a few drinks, not many—but found himself gettin' jolly sleepy. Doesn't recall anything else until he woke up in his own bed about nine this morning, with his clothes on the floor, an' a most frightful head. His valet said, when I got hold of him, that McCormack was not in the house at two o'clock—but apparently got in an' up to his room without disturbin' anyone. . . . A thumbprint on the service-pistol in Cowdray's study, an' one of the two bloody ones on the furniture, are McCormack's. I've three men dogging him now, wherever he goes. Any good reason for not arrestin' him?"

"Aye—rest red h'nings! McCormack fairly asked for implication in this job by what he said in the House—he was too good a bet to overlook. Undoubtedly he was drugged at that pub in Rotherhithe—you can gamble on that—then taken in a car, unconscious, up that Kensington alley—into Cowdray's house—and his fingers pressed where they would have the most damning appearance. Then he was taken home—carried upstairs—hands washed—clothes stripped off—dumped into bed. That's why I made a point of your getting his prints—I was morally certain he'd been used in this murder in some such way. And the men who were with him in that Rotherhithe pub are two of the gang we're after! I suppose most of the other prints must have been Cowdray's."

"Oh, not at all! I never saw any prints from Cowdray's fingers—can't seem to find anybody who did. But a good four-fifths of the prints in that study were made by the secretary, Charles Black—or Schwartz—who is known to some extent down in the East End and whose prints Cowdray had in that secret compartment in the safe!"

"Not so good as evidence—what?"

"Well—spendin' hours every day in that study, he naturally be leaving finger-impressions upon nearly every bit of glass or polished wood in sight—wouldn't he?"

"But—one of those prints happens to be a bloody one—on the arm of the chair in which the body was lying!"

"Hmph! . . . That'll be something else again. Still I'm puzzled! Did you ever in your life, Sir James, know of a murder case in which there were as many fingerprints as

there are in that study? I certainly never heard of one! You found the cotton gloves were Burroughs', I presume?"

"Faith, we did not! They were at least two sizes smaller—not a woman's fingers, but those of a thin or small man. Burroughs is on the large side."

"Fancy I'm beginnin' to get it! We know Black was a treacherous snake—systematically betraying his employer and benefactor. A man who would do that might double-cross the murdering gang too. If they suspected that, it would naturally occur to them as a good joke to use Black as they did McCormack—planning to get him hanged, and cover up their own trail. On the other side—well, old chap, I can't get rid of the idea that Black is playing a lone hand, for some ulterior object, possibly two or three years ahead. We know that he means to stand for Parliament sometime. There wasn't the slightest object or reason in his killing Cowdray. But betraying his political secrets for money—you, yes, possibly!"

"Killin' him—for a sufficiently big pot of money—eh?"

"I fancy not. Nobody would offer him a sufficiently big pot to offset his very excellent chance for bein' hanged. If they did—the man is bright enough to know they'd kill him next, to get it back. After I've had a talk with Enson and Morris I may have a better idea where to start in. With the evidence you have, I think you might induce a jury to hang McCormack—but you'd be hanging an innocent man, as far as murder goes. Those cotton-glove prints are the only real ones—because they were accidental."

When the valet and chauffeur reached Park Lane, Enson said he thought he had noticed what the Marques had in mind—but it might not prove conclusive evidence. Morris had seen it also. Then the Marques began getting at what they knew of Cowdray's investigations. Did Morris know, for example, he asked, about Cowdray's having taken a house down in the East End in order that he might appear to be a chief clerk in a leather house?

"Aye, sir—we never knew just where he spent certain nights down there, but fancied it wouldn't be in any of the lodging-houses or cheap hotels, because of the risk to him, personally. I'd drive him as far as the Mansion House, where he'd get out an' take a bus goin' over the Tower Bridge down into Bermondsey an' Rotherhithe. I remember tellin' him, once, that if ever I arrested or anything about a respectable leather clerk bein' found dead in a Rotherhithe pub known as the 'White Dog,' or a cheap navvies' restaurant farther down the same block, I might take a run down there to see if it was anyone I knew; but he laughed as he said it—seemed to fancy he'd not be suspected."

"He told me about having rented a house down there—and we'll find that that's where this affair started! We know that Black is treacherous—but—did you ever fancy that he might have a good deal of admiration for Cowdray as a Member of Parliament—to try copy any of his manner, or anything of that sort?"

"I wouldn't say tryin' to copy the Guv'nor, Your Lordship—but he certainly fancied himself as a comin' politician. I caught him once posin' before his mirror—talkin' to himself as if he were a public man."

THAT night the Marques—accompanied by Prince Abdool of Afridistan—was driven down to the Mansion House, where they got out of their own car and presently hailed a not too respectable taxi which took them along to a certain corner in Rotherhithe and dropped them there. In one way, neither of the two was disguised—yet it would have taken some one who knew them very well to recognize either. Both wore suits that seafaring men or longshoremen would have purchased with an eye to wearing quality, in one of the East End shops. Their hair was carelessly toused. The Marques wore thick-lensed spec-
tacles with steel ear-hooks—the Prince, a full day's growth of black beard. Their shoes were heavy box-toed affairs. Calling for pints of "bitter," and biscuits that were like small hardtack, they seated themselves at a corner table in the shabby basement restaurant where the food and drink were much better than the appearance of the place implied. It catered to a class of political demagogues and foreign agents who always had plenty of money for food that was several cuts above that served in neighborhood places. It also had a few private rooms reached directly from the restaurant. The "White Dog" on the corner was under the same ownership—with the same features.

I n a moment or two a nappy in a jersey, who had been sitting at a table up near the door, strolled back and sat down next to them. Without appearing to do so, both of them studied him closely as he came down the low-ceilinged room. Then the Marquess said softly:

"Anything particular on your mind, Phil?"

The nappy grinned.

"Knew Your Lordship would spot me sooner or later—thought we might compare notes a bit.

"Foreign Office already on the job—is it?"

"Well, such a murder is a blow at all law an' order! The whole country is howling over it! An' we've some facilities which the Yard has not—particularly in knowin' the nests of foreign bounders down here. One thing's bein' puzzlin' me all day. That private secretary, Black, is down in this neighborhood right now. I happen to know he's been sellin' political information to a big pot from Moscow connected with one of their banks—no connection with the regular communist gang—which of course makes him a suspect in Cowdray's murder. But there isn't a word in the news-sheets to that effect. Police are supposed to be waitin' for him to turn up in Kensington so they can question him. —My word! There's the chap, now—just comin' down the steps! Hmph—that's a bit odd! I never noticed before how much general resemblance he has to Cowdray himself! Do you fancy he may be tryin' in an unobtrusive way to pass himself off here, as Cowdray?"

"Not with the entire press full of Cowdray's murder—these East End folk read their hal'penny sheets if they have to skimp on tobacco—an' they don't miss much!"

"True—I was forgetting Cowdray's death for the moment. But—dammit all—the bounder's riskin' something, if anyone begins thinkin' of Cowdray an' then looks at him! I say! Would he knew either of you by sight? He's comin' back here as if he does!"

During the next four weeks, the Marquess and Captain Phil Barrington of the F. O. picked up all the evidence they needed in the East End. By the first of the month there were a dozen secret-service men from the F. O. constantly watching certain groups in Rotherhithe, and four times the usual number of Scotland Yard detectives. Sir John Baldwin had no real hope that the Marquess knew enough to warrant an arrest, or had tangible evidence against the actual murderers—but a hint had come down from the Home Secretary that he was to act upon any suggestion made by His Lordship.

As the seventh of the month approached, no attention whatever was paid to it. The man who had set that date had been foully murdered, and what he said in that last memorable speech had been almost forgotten by every Member in the House. On the night of the seventh, there was nothing but routine legislation under discussion for the moment—until some of the Members noticed there were a number of F. O. men and Yard detectives in the passages back of the benches—scattered through the galleries overhead. Then there was a growing buzz of speculation. What was it all about? In the midst of this a well-built man of medium size, with rather marked features—a most familiar figure—came in by the Members' entrance, strolled across the floor in a leisurely manner, and took his seat upon one of the Conservative benches. Throughout the Chamber there was a deathly stillness.

Upon being at last recognized by a thoroughly stunned Speaker, Cowdray got slowly upon his feet and began to speak—his voice carrying to every part of the big chamber. Starting with the mysterious shrinkage in the unemployment funds which had been voted, he offered documentary proof that the worst of it occurred in certain discharging departments which he named. They had received so much—they had passed on much less. He said that his evidence against Members serving on those committees was circumstantial—that he proposed to withhold it for the present in order to see whether the leakage would not be immediately remedied. If it were, it would indicate that the Members had not been definitely implicated—and he would not give their names. If there were no improvement, he most emphatically would give them—and had already filed memoranda to be published if he were killed.

He then described a plot intended to disrupt the friendly relations between England and the United States—saying that the Foreign Office had had control of that situation. Then he referred to the revolving chairs of his private secretary, Charles Black, under the misapprehension that Black was the Member himself. He described his investigations in Rotherhithe—the concealing of F. O. men where they overheard conversations in which certain foreigners and two British renegades had tacitly admitted the murder—had even discussed the details. Those four men were now under arrest with direct evidence enough to hang them. He unfolded a packet and held up a white cotton glove with smears of blood on the fingers, as one bit of evidence—the prints from it being in possession of the police. . . . Although it was against the rules, the House cheered itself hoarse.

L ater, in Park Lane, Sir James Baldwin and Captain Barrington wanted to know how the Marquess had been positive that the man in the Rotherhithe eating-joint had been really Cowdray instead of the impostor who had evidently been impersonating him upon more than the fatal occasion.

"Well—d'ye see, when I saw that bounder, Black, snooping about in Cowdray's desk an' safe, there were no rings upon his fingers. Cowdray wears, as you may have noticed, a sardonyx intaglio ring upon his left hand. Enson and Morris were by no means sure that the ring hadn't been pulled off or melted when the hands were thrust into those red-hot coals. Of course the fingers of the body had been severely burned—nobody could have said whose they were—and there wasn't enough of the face left to be recognizable. Well—you can melt gold, but you can't destroy it in a coal fire—I looked all through the embers an' there was no trace of it. Then there was the matter of feet: When the body was laid out on the rug the light fell rather strongly upon the soles of the shoes—and they seemed to me a bit large around the ankles. An' when I pinched the toes inside of 'em, I knew the feet were a size or two smaller.

"That settled the matter in my mind. Enson subsequently corroborated it. Cowdray was alive—undoubtedly had read all the details of the murder and would know in just which of the gangs that he was after, the murderers would be found. So my problem boiled down to this: Find Cowdray—and between us we'd have the murderers where they could be arrested at any moment. A joking remark of Cowdray's to Morris, one night, gave us the clue to the 'White Dog' an' the restaurant."
The cowboy is the range blacksmith—not all around blacksmith but just horseshoer. And he learns to do that as well or better than any town horseshoer, because he’s the one who has to ride the horses he nails the shoes on, and he can tell mighty quick when a shoe fits and when it don’t, by doing that riding.

On an average outfit the cowboy gets from eight to twelve head of horses in his string. All depends on the country and the horses, how many he gets. In the rocky range countries of the South, and which stays rocky in many places as far north as the Montana line, the cowboy has to keep his whole string shod all the time he’s riding. And even after a saddle-horse is turned loose, if that horse is expected to keep in good shape and rustle feed over the rocky ground, he’s often turned loose with new shoes on him.

In some of the lava countries I’ve seen shoes wear plum off a horse’s foot within a month, while that horse was doing nothing but running free, hunting feed and traveling the long distances that laid between the water and that feed.

It was in such a country that one of my horses lost a shoe once. I rode him for half a day, and he was limping bad when I run across the scattered parts of a prospector’s shack. There I found a heavy horseshoe that must of belonged to some freighter’s horse. It was away too big for my horse, and there was big toe- and heel-calks on it. But it looked good to me, and now the next thing was how to fasten it on. Well, I found a few rusty shingle nails amongst the scattered timbers of the shack, and with a rock I put that shoe on my horse so that he lost his limp.

Many of our horses don’t take to getting shod. They’ll kick the shoe off when it’s half on. Some have to be threwed and tied down, and it takes a range blacksmith to handle ’em, a cowboy.
"And now," said the chief crook, "I'm off to a foreign country, and I'll leave the field to you."

An extraordinary criminal gang contrived to murder even a citizen who took refuge in jail. The vivid story of their destruction, written by the author of "Manhattan Adventure."

By Seven Anderton

The day had been quiet at Detective Headquarters. Inspector Joseph Harding, his feet resting on the corner of his desk, half dozed in his swivel chair. The telephone on the desk suddenly set up a clamor for attention. The inspector opened his eyes and gave it a reproachful look.

"Hello," he growled sleepily.

"Hello, Inspector Harding?" inquired a tense voice over the wire.

"Yes."

"This is Salvador Credi," went on the voice. "Please come over to my office at once. I am in great danger. My life is threatened. I will tell you all about it when you get here—and you must protect me. Please hurry!"

"I'll be right over, Mr. Credi," promised Harding, now wide awake.

It was ten minutes past two o'clock in the afternoon when Harding hung up the receiver. At twenty minutes past two the Inspector entered the office of Salvador Credi on the fourth floor of a building some twelve blocks from Headquarters and on the fringe of the district known as "Little Italy."

There was a reason why Inspector Harding had answered this particular call in person and without delay. Salvador Credi was a prominent and politically powerful figure in Little Italy. As a broker of real-estate, insurance and rentals he had amassed considerable wealth. On the side—very carefully and quietly—he loaned out his accumulated dollars at a high rate of interest on short-time collateral loans. Credi was one of the men upon whom Inspector Harding depended to keep his job as chief of the Detective Bureau. Little Italy's vote was practically in Credi's pocket—and Credi saw that it went the way Harding wanted it to go.

Harding entered a small reception-room in which a girl sat at a desk beside a second door that led to Credi's private office. The girl was doing nothing. It was plain that she was nervous and more than a little frightened.

"Go right in, Mr. Harding," said the girl. "Mr. Credi is expecting you."

Harding nodded and crossed to the door of the private office. He noticed that it was slightly ajar. Pushing it wide, he stepped into Credi's sanctum. The broker sat at a big desk in the center of the fairly large room. He held a revolver in his right hand. An expression of relief crossed his face as the Inspector entered. The office girl had been told that she might leave for the day as soon as Harding arrived. She lost no time in departing. The outer door closed behind her as Harding entered the private office.

"Hello, Salvador," greeted Harding. "What's the matter?"

"Shut that door and shoot the bolt," answered Credi in a voice that was slightly husky. "Then I'll tell you."

Harding did as the broker had bidden. Then he turned and stood facing Credi across the desk.

"Sit down," invited Credi.

Harding sat, his eyes fixed questioningly on the weapon in the broker's hand. Credi was a small man inclined to fat. His skin was dark and his eyes almost black. Just now his ordinarily ruddy face was pale.
"Well?" inquired the detective.

A package around which the heavy paper wrapping had been loosened lay on the desk before Credi. The broker pushed it across toward Harding.

"Look at that!" said Credi.

HARDING looked—and a low whistle came from his lips. The package contained a number of bundles of yellow-backed bank-notes.

"Lotta dough," observed the Inspector. "Where did it come from, and what’s the story?"

"A week ago," answered Credi, after moistening his thick lips with his tongue, "I got a letter from somebody who signed it 'The Dealer.' It came by special delivery and was marked personal. It was a demand for five thousand dollars in cash. I was to send the money to a certain place at a certain time or, the letter said, I would be killed."

"Why didn’t you tell me about it right then?" demanded Harding.

"Because," replied Credi, "the letter also said that I would be killed if I notified the police. I thought it over and decided to pay. I can spare five thousand better than I can spare my life. I got the money you see in that package from the bank, and sent it as directed by the letter. Fifteen minutes ago a messenger brought it back to me—and this note was with it."

The broker drew a folded sheet of paper from his coat pocket and handed it to the detective. Harding unfolded it and read:

Dear Mr. Credi:

It was eleven minutes past noon when you placed this money in the spot where you were told to leave it not later than twelve o’clock. Therefore we are returning the money to you. Take some good advice and arrange all your affairs—for you die before the sun sets tonight. We are sorry, but it is a matter of policy, and we cannot grow lax. When we notify a customer of the time and place where we wish a payment deposited, we cannot tolerate anything but absolute obedience. Time is, above all, important. You were three minutes late with your deposit. Your tardiness has cost you your life. Prepare to die within the next few hours.

THE DEALER.

When the detective had finished reading the astonishing note, he dropped it on the desk and sat glaring at the yellow sheet in defiance.

"You see," muttered the pudgy real-estate broker, "I don’t want to die. What am I to do?"

"Aw, hell," snorted the detective. "This ain’t possible. Somebody is trying to have some fun with you. Who ever heard of a gang of shakedown artists sending back a bundle with five thousand bucks in it just because it was eleven minutes late in being delivered? Cool off, little fellow, cool off! You’re not in any danger. Just the same, we’ll find the birds who pulled this little stunt and make them do some sweating. There—"

A sharp rap on the door of the office interrupted the big detective’s speech. Credi started and shot a glance at Inspector Harding. The detective drew his gun, rose and went over to the door.

"Who is it?" demanded the Inspector.

"Don Freeman," answered the voice beyond the door.

"That you, Harding? Let me in!"

Harding drew the bolt, the door swung open, and a tall, slender young man in a baggy suit of gray tweed stepped into the office.

With a low exclamation of disgust, Inspector Harding thrust his gun back into his pocket. He knew the caller, Donald Freeman, ace of the Daily Beacon’s staff of reporters.

"Hello, Freeman," growled the detective, closing the door and again shooting the bolt. "What the devil brings you here?"

"Greetings, Inspector," said the reporter. A grin spread over his lean face, and his fingers flashed to the brim of his disreputable soft hat in a mock salute. "I was brought here by a taxi, chartered at the expense of the dear old Beacon. Finding you here makes me think that perhaps the taxi-fare was not wasted. When does the murder take place?"

"What in hell you talking about?" demanded the detective.

"Be calm, old dear," smiled the reporter, "be calm! Somebody, name unknown, called the office of the Beacon some ten minutes ago and told the city editor to send a reporter to interview Mr. Salvador Credi—if the Beacon wished to print Mr. Credi’s final statement before he departed from this world. Is this the gentleman who is about to die?"

The reporter shot a glance from his keen eyes toward the dumpy little Italian, who at this astonishing statement had swung about sharply in his chair.

"This is Mr. Credi," snapped Harding. "And he ain’t going to be bumped off. Somebody is having some fun that’s going to land them in the stew. You can trot on back to the Beacon and report that you went out on a false alarm."

"Yeah?" inquired the reporter. "Is that what you’re going to report when you go back to Headquarters?"

"Never mind what I’m reporting," snarled Harding. "You damned reporters are too fresh. Get out!"

"Sorry, Harding," retorted Freeman, "but the party who telephoned the Beacon promised very definitely that Mr. Credi would die before sundown tonight. I can’t take a chance on missing that—and you can’t take a chance on getting in bad with the jolly old Beacon by chasing me away."

"Have some sense, Freeman," argued the detective. "There is nothing to this. Go on about your business. The Beacon was the city’s leading paper and Harding realized that the reporter had spoken the truth when he said the detective could not afford to antagonize his paper. Still, the Inspector wished heartily to be rid of Freeman.

"Listen, Harding," said the reporter firmly. "This is all the business I have right now. Barring earthquakes, tornadoes and apoplexy, I’m going to keep my eye on Mr. Credi until the sun has safely set. I’ve been a reporter, man and boy, for a long time. I’ve covered a lot of murders after they’d occurred. This is the first time I was ever invited to watch one happen. My ringside seat isn’t going to be vacant."

"And now—" began Inspector Harding.

THE sudden sharp crack of breaking glass cut off whatever the detective had begun to say. There was a cry of pain that ended in a gurgle, and Salvador Credi twisted in his chair before pitching limp onto his desk. For a brief moment Inspector Harding and Donald Freeman were like two frozen men. Death had struck swiftly before their eyes. They knew that, even as they leaped toward the twitching figure of the little broker, Credi’s fat, stubby fingers clawed for a moment at the top of the desk and then relaxed.

"Dead," declared Harding as he straightened up from his examination of the slumped body. "Dead as a smoked herring. A bullet hit him in the back and went to his heart."

"And the bullet came through that window," answered the reporter, pointing to the shattered glass in a window
directly behind the desk at which the murdered man had been sitting. "Looks like the baby who called up the *Beacon* wasn’t kidding us."

The telephone on the desk beside Credi’s body suddenly set up a clamor. Inspector Harding snapped up the instrument, and barked, "Hello." The reporter stepped over and bent close beside the officer, listening to the words that came over the wire.

"Hello, Inspector Harding,” said a masculine voice in which there was a sardonic, purring quality. “This is the Dealer speaking. As you probably know by this time, Salvador Credi is quite dead. My riflemen never miss. I just called to tell you that you will merely be wasting time if you make any attempt to solve the killing that has just happened under your nose. And furthermore, you might get a dose of the same medicine Credi just received. Take a tip from a much smarter man than you are. Good-by!"

A CLICK in the receiver told of a severed connection. Inspector Harding jiggled the hook and began frantically ordering the call traced. The lanky reporter turned and went to the window. For a moment he stood gazing at the shattered glass. There was a round hole where the bullet had crashed through. From this hole radiated countless cracks, but none of the glass had fallen from the frame. Freeman next walked over and knelt on the floor beside the body of the murdered man. Closing one eye, the reporter sighted toward the hole in the glass. After several moments he rose. There was a thoughtful expression on his face.

"That call," snapped Harding as he slammed up the receiver, “came through a switchboard located in the Hotel Camas.”

"Know where the Hotel Camas is?" inquired Freeman.

"Right across the street," barked the detective.

"Correct," declared the reporter. "I’ve been doing a little surveying. Since it is the habit of bullets to travel in a fairly straight line, I venture a guess that I can, in not more than two attempts, find the room from which the bullet that killed Credi came. It will be on the fifth floor.”

The Inspector strode over to scrutinize the bullet-hole in the glass, and Freeman quickly picked up the yellow sheet with its weird message that had warned Credi of the death which hovered over him. The reporter, with a quick glance at Harding’s back, thrust the paper into his pocket.

"Come along with me," ordered Harding as he turned from the window and strode toward the door.

"Just like your shadow," replied the reporter.

In the corridor Harding closed the door of the office where the murder had been done and tried it to see that the spring lock had caught.

"The janitor will have a key," growled the detective.

"And I don’t want anybody meddling in there until I get back.”

Some three minutes later Harding and Freeman entered the Camas, a second-class hotel across the street from the building which housed Credi’s office. Commandeering an elevator, they went directly to the fifth floor. There they hurried down a corridor to the doors of the rooms whose windows faced the street.

"This is my guess,” said Donald Freeman, pausing before a door upon which metal numerals read—12.

Harding grunted and grasped the knob of the door. The unlocked portal swung open; detective and reporter barged into the room.

"You guessed right,” snapped the detective.

The room was small, and a boxlike bath opened off it. On the cheap white coverlet of the bed lay a rifle, and on a small table against a wall stood a typewriter. One of the two windows which faced the street was open, and a great hole had been torn in the screen. In the typewriter was a sheet of yellow paper. Bending over the machine, Harding and Freeman read the typed message:

**Inspector Harding:**

*This is the typewriter upon which the notes to Salvador Credi were written. It was stolen a couple of weeks ago from the offices of a wholesale grocery house. So you can trace its purchase if you have nothing better to do. The rifle on the bed has served its purpose, and you are welcome to it. It also was stolen, from a hardware store in a smaller city quite a distance from here. You will find no fingerprints—although you might just as well waste your time looking for them as in any other effort to trace me or my men.*

**THE DEALER.**

Inspector Harding finished reading the message and turned with a snarl of anger to face the clerk who had followed the two high-handed visitors upstairs and now stood just inside the door of the room. Freeman was hastily copying on some note-paper the message which Harding had not removed from the machine.

"Whose room was this?" demanded the detective.

"A Miss Levin engaged this room some ten days ago and has been occupying it since," replied the clerk. He had seen the silver shield on Harding’s vest, and his tone was duly respectful.

"Where is she now?" queried Harding.

"I don’t know," answered the clerk. "She came in about an hour ago and came upstairs. I haven’t seen here go out. What’s the matter?"

"Plenty," snapped Harding. "A shot fired out of the window of this room killed a man in a building across the street about fifteen minutes ago. Who left this hotel during the last quarter of an hour?"

"Nobody came in or left during the past half-hour, sir," answered the clerk. "It has been a very quiet afternoon."

"The hell it has!" barked the detective. "For you, maybe! You stick around here. I may want to ask you some more questions."

The big detective next began a search of the room, but he found nothing. Besides the rifle and the typewriter, there was not a scrap of anything that might be evidence about the room. There were no garments, no toilet articles, nothing to indicate that the room had been occupied. While the detective was concluding his fruitless search, Freeman quietly left the room.

"What a story!" muttered the reporter as he emerged from the hotel and hailed a passing taxi. "Wait until I lay this on the city desk."

**BACK in Room Twelve at the Hotel Camas, Inspector Harding looked around from his search of a closet and missed the reporter.**

"Damn!" snapped the detective, glaring at the wide-eyed clerk. "What became of that reporter?"

"If you mean the other gentleman—" began the clerk.

"He’s no gentleman," barked Harding. "He’s a confounded reporter! Where did he go?"

"He went out," replied the clerk, "just a few moments ago."

"Listen," Harding almost shouted at the unfrowning clerk. "You lock this door and see that nobody gets into it until I get back. Got me?"

"Yes, Officer," said the clerk.

Harding dashed from the room and down the hall to the elevator. "Blast all newspaper men," growled the detec-
tive as he dashed across the street. "If I catch him messing around in Credi's office, I'll break his neck."

But when the puzzled janitor let Harding into the office where the body of the murdered man lay, there was no sign of the reporter. Nothing had been touched since Harding closed and locked the door. He did not miss the note which Freeman had taken from under the dead man's arm. The big detective strode to the telephone and called the Beacon. Presently he was in touch with the city editor.

"This is Inspector Joseph Harding speaking," growled the detective. "Has Donald Freeman come in with a story about this Credi business?"

"Yes," answered the editor. "Do you wish to make a statement, Inspector Harding? We will be going to press with the extra in about ten minutes, but I can still rush in anything you care to say."

"You can't print that story yet," shouted the detective. "I'm not ready. I haven't even reported the killing to Headquarters yet."

"Aint that too bad!" chuckled the editor.

"You'd better hurry up with your report—or Headquarters will learn the news from the Beacon extra."

When the click in the receiver told him that the editor had hung up, Harding swore heartily and jiggled the hook on the instrument he was holding. When the operator answered, he gave her the number of Headquarters and barked a request for speedy service.

The rush hour crowds going home to dinner bought copies of the Beacon extra and read Freeman's "whale of a story." The readers went home to discuss over dinner the fact that a wealthy real-estate broker had been murdered while he sat talking to an officer called to protect him. They were intrigued by the fact that the victim had been killed because he had been eleven minutes late in delivering the money demanded by the mysterious gang headed by a rogue who called himself the Dealer. They read with avidity the report of how the five thousand dollars which had arrived too late had been sent back to the victim with a note of regret and reproof.

"These gangsters nowadays certainly mean business," was the composite remark of the general public. "If we were a rich guy," commented Mr. Average Man, "and this Dealer party sent me a request for money, I'd be damned sure that the dough he asked for got to the place of delivery in plenty of time."

During the next couple of days the papers, carrying the story of the cold-blooded and fantastic murder of Salvador Credi in their news columns, tore into the police and detective departments, tooth and nail, in vitriolic editorials.

"If the murdering extortionist who calls himself the Dealer," said the editorials, "is not speedily run to earth and sent to the electric chair, the affairs of the city had better be placed in the hands of a new administration without delay."

And so the tormented police and detective departments went frantically around in circles and got nowhere during the next week. Salvador Credi was buried, and those responsible for his death had apparently escaped. The clever murderers had not left behind a single clue that led anywhere except to a blank wall.

Then something happened which revived the rapidly dying hope of the baffled authorities. Late one afternoon a quiet little man wearing a meek air and a pair of thick-lensed spectacles appeared at Detective Headquarters and asked for Inspector Joseph Harding. A few words scribbled on a card which the little man sent into Harding's office gained him a speedy audience.

"I am Floyd Manners," said the caller as he stood before the desk in Inspector Harding's private office. "I am secretary to Thomas J. Liston. My employer sent me to you with this note."

Harding took a folded square of paper from his visitor's hand, opened it and read:

Dear Mr. Liston:
You have been assessed the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars. This note will reach you by a Western Union messenger shortly after two o'clock. If you decide to pay the sum mentioned, hang a white handkerchief in the center window of the three which light your private office. If the handkerchief appears, you will receive another note at this hour tomorrow telling you where and how to leave the money. If there is no handkerchief shown, you will have three more days in which to prepare to die.

The Dealer.

"When did Mr. Liston receive this?" demanded the Inspector when he had finished reading the message.

"About ten minutes past two," answered the meek little secretary.

"It was delivered by a Western Union messenger?"

"Yes."

"It is now four o'clock," growled the Inspector, glanc-
"Vandyke 7-7170," answered the secretary. "But if I may suggest, Mr. Liston thought it might be unwise for you to call him by telephone. I am authorized to establish a rendezvous where you can converse with Mr. Liston at six o'clock."

"Listen, brother," begged the Inspector, "let's try to get along without an interpreter. You mean Liston wants me to meet him some place at six o'clock?"

"Yes sir."

"Where?"

"At my apartment on East Sixty-fourth Street," answered the secretary. "Mr. Liston wishes you to be extremely careful that you are not followed."

"He needn't worry about that," grunted Harding. "I'll be there."

Promptly at six o'clock Inspector Harding, having taken great care to be certain that he was not followed, arrived at the rendezvous. Thomas J. Liston, one of the city's most wealthy men, was waiting in the apartment with his secretary.

"There doesn't seem to be much to tell in addition to what my secretary has already told you," said the millionaire after the greetings were over. "Frankly, I'm frightened by the threat of this Dealer person. I am willing to pay the sum asked rather than risk the vengeance of the man who killed Salvador Credi. But I am trying to do my duty as a citizen and aid the police in apprehending this extortionist. In return for my help, I demand protection—adequate protection. If you will guarantee me that, I will do whatever you wish me to do in order to bring this Dealer to justice."

"Fair enough," nodded Harding. "You placed the handkerchief in the window as you were told to. So you're to receive another message at two o'clock tomorrow telling you how and where to deliver twenty-five thousand dollars to this Dealer guy. Go on about your business as usual in the morning. I'll be doing some things, but I'll be with you at your office at two o'clock."

"If you get the message, arrange to have the money sent as the guy says. Then I'll take good care that nothing happens to you until we have this murdering hoodlum in the Big House. We'll get him this time—if he tries to get the money you send."

"I'll do as you say," agreed the millionaire. "But do you mind telling me just how you plan to protect me?"

"We'll have a cell, one of the safest, renovated and made comfortable," replied the Inspector. "We'll lock you in it and put a guard in the corridor. I'd smile to see this Dealer guy—or anybody else—get to you there unless they have permission from both you and us."

"That's an idea," admitted Liston, with a rather wry smile. "Put the innocent in jail to protect them from the crooks! But they say it's a poor rule that doesn't work both ways. You may count on my doing as you have suggested."

Next morning the police and detectives were busy. Every Western Union and Postal office, and every commercial messenger bureau, was instructed that any person who appeared to send a messenger to the office of Thomas J. Liston was to be betrayed by an arranged signal to an
officer in plain clothes who would be loitering near the entrance of the office. The sender of the message was to be kept under surveillance without fail, but not arrested or allowed to become aware that he was watched.

Two o'clock came. Inspector Harding was sitting in Liston's private office with the millionaire. There was a tenseness in the air that increased as two o'clock passed and the minutes continued to tick away.

At twelve minutes past two the door of the private office opened and the secretary Floyd Manners stood in the opening. Harding and the millionaire both faced the man inquiringly.

"There is a boy here with a box of flowers for you, Mr. Liston," announced the secretary.

"Send him in here," growled Harding.

A tall, awkward boy entered with a long pasteboard box in his arms. He looked from one to the other of the waiting men. Harding snatched the box and ripped it open. Roses tumbled unheeded to the floor, and a small box made of thin steel dropped with a thump among them. Harding's fingers had found a folded sheet of yellow paper. Frowning, the Inspector read:

Dear Mr. Liston:

Enclosed with the posies you will find a container in which you will please place twenty-five thousand dollars in United States gold certificates of hundred-dollar denomination.

You will then have your secretary carry the box to 348 Fuller Road, which is a vacant house and in a rather isolated spot. He will reach the house at exactly ten minutes after two o'clock tomorrow afteroon and place the box on the veranda just in front of the door. He will then leave the vicinity at once. If these instructions are not carried out to the letter, you will never see the sunshine day after tomorrow.

The Dealer.

The Inspector handed the note to Liston and retrieved the metal box from where it had fallen among the scattered roses. After inspecting the box quickly, Harding whirled upon the messenger. The detective was chagrined. He had counted upon one of his men picking up the person who sent the messenger. He had not thought of a florist's messenger being used.

"Who engaged you to deliver this box?" demanded Harding.

"A lady who came to the shop and bought the flowers," answered the boy. Realization that he was talking to an officer had made him nervous. "She said they were for her father, and she put the tin box and the note in after the flowers were packed. Said it was a little joke her father would understand."

"Who do you work for?"

"The Horto Floral Company."

"You saw this girl?"

"Yes sir."

"Tell me how she looked."

"She was a swell looker," answered the boy. "She wore spiffy clothes, and her hair was black and curly."

"Big or little?" demanded Harding.

"Kinda medium," replied the lad.


The boy left, and the Inspector turned to face the millionaire, who had finished reading the note. Liston's face was pale, and the hands which held the sheet of yellow paper were trembling.

"Well?" inquired the Inspector.

"I'll give my secretary a check and a note that will get him the money from the bank," answered Liston. "I'll instruct him to put the money in the container and place it in the designated place at the exact time. Then I shall feel easier if you will take me to that cell which you promised to have ready. And I assure you that if your attempt to trap this fellow fails, you'll have a permanent guest in jail until he is caught."

Twenty minutes later the millionaire was in one of the largest cells in the great city's bastile. The cell had been renovated and made as comfortable as was humanly possible.

Inspector Harding at once set about the task of laying a trap for the person who might try to get the steel box and its contents from the veranda at 348 Fuller Road.

The house in question stood on a plot of poorly kept ground in an unpretentious suburb. Harding mapped the vicinity and marked four hundred stations in a wide circle about the rendezvous. An officer was assigned to each one of those stations. The officers were to wear plain clothes and arrive at their stations exactly ten minutes before two. Thus, at the exact moment when Liston's secretary placed the steel box on the veranda, a cordon of officers would be drawn about the territory.

On the top of a building some four blocks from the vacant house an officer lay with eye glued to a telescope. It was his job to watch 348 Fuller Road. At this officer's hand was a switch which would explode a signal bomb whose bursting could be heard for several miles. When the officer saw the box being removed from the veranda, he was to pull the switch. His four hundred comrades would then close in on their prey. All persons caught within the cordon were to be taken to Headquarters for examination.

It was a neat plan, and Harding felt rather proud of it. Because of the nature of the district there would be, the Inspector estimated, not more than a hundred persons inside of the cordon he had drawn. There would be four officers for each of those. The officers had instructions to take their shields from their pockets and pin them on their breasts when the signal bomb burst. Thus they could identify one another as the circle closed.

"We'll get whoever comes after that dough," Harding opined. "And if he ain't the Dealer—well, he'll damned well put us on that dude's trail before we finish with him."

As the time for the coup approached, Inspector Harding drove toward the scene in a private car. He drove slowly and kept well behind his men, who, he noted with pleasure, were closing in upon their assigned positions in perfect order. In a couple more minutes the men would reach their stations. Harding began to wonder why the secretary did not drive past him toward the vacant house where he was to leave the box. Harding had told the secretary to follow the same road along which he was driving. Thus the Inspector would see the secretary pass and know almost to a second when the box was placed on the veranda. The box was to contain no money—only some worthless paper. Regardless of the fact that Liston had arranged for the money at the bank and was under the impression that it would be delivered as bait, Harding had vetoed that part of the plan.

Another minute, and the men would be in place. Harding looked back anxiously. Why didn't the secretary arrive? There was no sign or sound of the car bearing the messenger. Harding swore. Had the darned fool taken the wrong road or something?

The zero moment had arrived. It was ten minutes of two. All the officers were at their stations, waiting tensely for the sound of the signal bomb. But the minutes dragged past, and there was no explosion. It was two o'clock—five minutes past. Harding fumed...
Half-past two. An open roadster came speeding along the road from the city and skidded to a halt beside Harding's car. Donald Freeman was at the wheel of the roadster. He leaped out and dashed to the side of Harding's auto.

"Just as well call off your dogs, Inspector," he cried, handing Harding a sheaf of yellow paper. "This came to the Beacon by messenger just before two o'clock."

Harding read:

To the Beacon:

I have just left Thomas J. Liston's secretary dead in his apartment. He was supposed to have delivered a box containing twenty-five thousand dollars of his employer's money at 348 Fuller Road at ten minutes after two. But Liston convinced with the police to trap the man who claimed the box, so I went to the secretary's apartment. I had to kill the fellow, because nobody can live after he has seen me and is able to describe me. Then I found the box contained no money.

Liston will die for that. Just at present Harding has him hidden in jail, but I hardly think he will care to stay in a cell forever. I might have forgiven Liston for squealing to the police if the money had been in the box. But since the box contained only rubbish, I'll attend to Liston's demise at the earliest possible moment.

You can hunt up Harding where he and his men are lying in wait if you wish—or you can let him remain there. He is as useful there as anywhere else.

THE DEALER.

Harding cursed with a vim and set about calling off his men. The body of the secretary was found in the apartment, shot through the heart with a thirty-eight-caliber bullet—evidently from a silenced gun. It was a big story, and the papers played it accordingly.

One of the city's richest men hiding from the mysterious Dealer in a cell of the big jail! The millionaire's secretary murdered in cold blood simply to keep him from describing the arch-killer! It was headline stuff. The city read, wondered and developed a still greater fear of the outlaw who called himself the Dealer.

Scathing editorials appeared with the news stories in the evening papers. The writers had done their best to take the hide off the authorities. One columnist suggested that the police might have accidentally hit upon a plan, after all. Since the authorities seemed unable to catch the criminals, why not lock up all the honest people and let the crooks prey upon one another?

THE POPULACE TOOK ITS Cue FROM THE PAPERS AND PROCEEDED TO MAKE THE POLICE MORE UNCOMFORTABLE BY PANNEERING THEM UNMERCIFULLY.

Then, at eight-thirty that same evening, the city editor of the Beacon answered his telephone to hear a sardonic voice tell him that Thomas J. Liston was dead.

"This is the Dealer speaking," went on the voice. "Liston reported to the police that he had been nominated as one of my customers. Naturally, I could not overlook the action—so Mr. Liston is dead. He died from cyanide placed in one of the strawberries which he ordered with his dinner. The police don't know that yet, but they will learn it from the autopsy.

"The waiter who carried the dinner over from Henri's café is also dead. He accepted a ten-thousand-dollar bribe to let us doctor the strawberry. On his way back from the jail we shot him and took back the ten grand. He asked too much for his trifling service. His body will be found in the mouth of the alley just south of Henri's."

With a final chuckle, the voice died away, and the editor found himself listening to a dead receiver. A swift check-up proved that the diabolical Dealer had spoken the truth. Liston was dead. So was the waiter who had carried the poison food to the jail. In fifteen minutes the city was reading the story from the Beacon extra.

MORNING FOUND THE CITY GRIPPED IN TERROR. THE COLD-BLOODED DEALER HAD KILLED A VICTIM IN A CELL OF THE JAIL—a victim guarded by steel bars, sturdy locks and dozens of watching officers! The papers redoubled their editorial attacks on the administration, and thousands of private citizens kept the telephones at Headquarters buzzing with requests that something be done.

Rewards for the capture of the super-extortionist were offered by county, State, city and various civic organizations. Then the Beacon topped them all with an offer of one hundred thousand dollars, bringing the total to three hundred and twenty thousand.

The Beacon's reward, with the others added, appeared in bold type under black headlines in the home edition of the paper. Sitting at his desk in the news-room, Freeman read that offer while the ink was still damp, and a low whistle came from his lips. Then his expression grew thoughtful.

"At my present salary it will take me a hundred and twenty years to earn three hundred and twenty grand," muttered the lanky reporter. "And by that time I probably can't enjoy my savings. Don, my lad, here's your chance. Keep your eyes open. You've got as good a chance to smoke this bozo out of his hole as anybody else has."

During the next three days Freeman went about his assignments with half of his mind busily groping for possible ways to locate and trap the Dealer. As a result he drew several sharp rebukes from the city desk, but he couldn't quit toying with the possibility that he might succeed where Harding and his minions had failed. He took to carrying a heavy automatic, for this his colleagues on the paper boasted him quite a bit, but his hope of crossing the Dealer's path was growing more robust all the time, and he wanted a gun if such a thing happened.

Returning from lunch on the fourth day after Liston's murder, Freeman walked into the news-room at the Beacon, to be promptly hailed by the city editor.

"Here's a little chore for you, Don," said the editor.

"Yesterday we printed a yarn about Franz Holman having cleaned up almost a million in three hours on the Exchange. A few minutes ago one of the leg men called in with a tip that a passport to England has just been rushed through for Holman. You know, Holman has always boasted that he was never out of the U. S. A. and never intended to be. Might be a good little yarn in this if he'll talk. You've always had the open sesame to his office. Skip over there and get a few words with him."

Freeman reached the offices of Franz Holman, one of the city's most wealthy and powerful financiers, at two o'clock. He greeted Holman's secretary, with whom he was on quite friendly terms, and asked if he might see the financier for a few moments.

"Mr. Holman is too busy to see anyone today," answered the girl.

"Just for a couple of minutes?" begged the reporter.

"Not at all," declared the girl. "Strict orders. Anyhow, he isn't in."

"When is he sailing?" asked Don.

"How did you—" began the girl. Then she bit her lips and eyed Freeman sharply.

The reporter grinned. The girl was plainly regretting the words that she had let slip.
“Mr. Holman,” she said, “wishes no information given out concerning his plans.”

“I think you’d better tell me where I can find him,” replied the reporter. “You know I have always got along with him. I keep things out of the paper for him as often as I put them in. Is he eloping with a Follies beauty or something?”

“Perhaps he might want to see you, at that,” said the girl, “if you are going to put something in the paper.”

“I nearly always put something in the paper,” smiled Freeman. “What I put in often pleases the person it concerns much better if he talks with me before I do the putting in. Where will I find Mr. Holman?”

“I think you can catch him at his house if you go up there at once,” replied the girl. “But don’t tell him I told you where to find him.”

“Thanks,” smiled the reporter. “I’ll tell him I trailed him with a couple of bloodhounds.”

Leaving the office building, Freeman hailed a taxi and gave the driver the address of Franz Holman’s residence. The financier was a widower, but he had continued to keep up and occupy the mansion on the Drive since the death of his wife.

The taxi was still more than half a block from the Holman house when the millionaire came out the front door and started down the eight or ten stone steps which led to the sidewalk. A big closed car with a chauffeur at the wheel stood waiting at the curb. Holman carried a small satchel of brown leather. He was followed by three servants carrying hand-luggage.

“Looks like friend Holman is going on a long journey, sure enough,” muttered the reporter. “I’m just in time to see him off.”

And Franz Holman did go on a long journey—suddenly, and before Donald Freeman’s unbelieving eyes.

Above the noise of the traffic that sped constantly along the drive there suddenly sounded a sinister clatter. Freeman had heard that sound before, and he recognized instantly the spiteful snarl of a machine-gun. The reporter gave a little cry of horror as he saw the bodies of Franz Holman and his three escorts crumple and go tumbling down the stone steps amid the numerous pieces of baggage that had dropped from lifeless hands.

The sputtering gun continued its hymn of hate, pouring a spray of death into the bodies from which life had already departed. For a moment Freeman was too stunned to speak or move. A cry from the taxi-driver brought him out of his half-paralysis. The driver had set his brakes and halted the cab with a jerk as the gun began to chatter.

“Lookit!” came hoarsely from the cabby. “They snuffed out the chauffeur too. Burned him down sitting at the wheel!”

It was true. The deadly weapon had been turned for a moment on the chauffeur who waited in the banker’s big car. With half a dozen slugs through his chest the poor fellow slumped down into oblivion.

All at once Freeman was aware of the source of the death-volley. It had been poured from the rear window of a car that had suddenly come up from the rear and shot past the taxi, to begin spouting leaden death as it drew abreast of the Holman mansion.

Even as his eyes fell upon it, Freeman saw the death-car halt with the jerk of powerful brakes quickly applied. The spot where it stopped was not more than its own length ahead of the big auto in which the Holman chauffeur was a limp heap under the wheel. A man leaped from the vandal car and darted across the sidewalk. Twobounds took him to where the murdered millionaire lay at the foot of the steps.

A gasp of excitement came from Freeman’s lips. The fellow had snatched up the small bag dropped by Franz Holman as he fell under the hail of lead. Freeman was suddenly in action. His hand flew to his hip and procured the heavy automatic. He was out of the cab and racing toward the scene of the murder as the man who had snatched up the bag turned to run back to the murder car with his loot.

Gun in hand, Freeman charged on, the Holman car between him and that of the bandits. His long legs flashed in almost incredible strides. If he could only get within effective range of that murdering thief! The reporter was within twenty yards when the rogue with the bag crossed the sidewalk. Halting abruptly, Freeman took
quick aim and pressed the trigger of his weapon. The automatic roared, and even as he felt it recoil in his hand Freeman’s heart leaped. The man with the bag stumbled and spun half round, coming almost to his knees!

Then the bandit recovered his feet and staggered across the curb toward the waiting car. Quickly the reporter fired a second shot; but the man, still grasping the stolen bag, had gained the shelter of Holman’s car, which stood at the curb and hid the vandal car from Freeman’s view.

Swearing, Freeman sprinted ahead, but he was too late to get another shot in. The man with the bag had been pulled into the bandit-car, and that vehicle was already speeding up the drive with tortured gears whining. The reporter wheeled and waved frantically to the driver of his taxi, but the cab remained where it was parked. Evidently the cabby had no inclination to pursue that car from which that machine-gun sprayed lead with such telling effect.

More than a dozen cars had now halted in the drive before the scene of slaughter and more were coming up from both directions. In another moment there would be a traffic-jam. Freeman realized that it was already too late to catch the vandal car. He shot a glance after it just in time to see it careen around the corner into the first side-street. Then he realized that he had not even tried to get the license-number. With a snarl of disgust he thrust his gun into his pocket and turned back to where the cab stood at the curb.

With a few pungent words he dismissed the driver. A traffic-jam had now formed. A police car with siren howling skidded up to the edge of the jam and in a moment the officers were plunging through the gathering mob to the scene of the slayings. Freeman followed them.

The four men on the stone steps had been literally riddled with machine-gun slugs. The chauffeur also had died almost instantly.

Freeman mingled with the crowd, asked a few questions of the officers and got the story. He did not reveal that it was he who had shot and apparently hit the fleeing bandit. If this was the Dealer’s work, and Freeman felt sure that it was, —he didn’t want that arch-fiend to know who had plugged one of his henchmen. Perhaps the fellow at whom he had shot had been the Dealer himself.

“Anyway,” muttered the reporter as he pushed from the crowd and headed for a telephone to give the Beacon a flash on the story, “I’ll bet my other shirt that this is the Dealer’s handiwork.”

He was right. When he reached the office after telephoning in the story of the slaughter, he learned that the diabolical Dealer had sent another message to the Beacon which, printed verbatim, read:

The Beacon:

Yesterday I notified Franz Holman that I had him on my list for a donation. Instead of preparing to pay me, he prepared to run away. I do not permit my customers to run away until they have settled with me. Franz Holman tried to save a few paltry thousands—and now his heirs will spend his millions. Incidentally, I obtained the cash which he was planning to take to Europe with him, and it was nearly the amount of the contribution for which I had asked. Perhaps this will be a lesson to others.

The Dealer.

The Beacon story went on to say that a man who had later disappeared without making himself known had shot and evidently wounded the man who snatched the bag from beside the dead banker. Inspector Harding hoped to catch the wounded man if he sought medical attention.

“Hope on, Inspector,” mused Donald Freeman. “But I’ll bet a hat the Dealer is too sly a fox to walk into that sort of snare. Confound it, why can’t I think of some way to get a line on that bozo and grab off that reward boodle for myself?”

It was five o’clock when a boy came into the news-room and distributed still damp copies of the home edition containing the complete account of the slaughter of Holman and his servants. Freeman grabbed a paper and once more read the story through. Then he sat silent in deep thoughts while he consumed two cigarettes. Presently a new thought brought a quick light to his eyes.

“By thunder!” exclaimed Freeman under his breath. “Franz Holman cleaned up a million on the Exchange yesterday, and the story was in the papers. Pronto, he was chosen by the Dealer. That murdering buzzard probably thought that a man who had made so much dough so quick would let go of a bunch of it without much urging. Then he shadowed Holman or his secretary—probably both—and tumbled to the fact that Holman was preparing to duck out on him. But the big idea is that he
picked Holman from the financial page immediately after Holman made a killing on the market. There’s a good chance that he’ll pick more victims in the same manner.”

Snatching the paper from his desk, Freeman turned quickly to the financial page and began to scan it swiftly. In a couple of minutes his eyes found a story that held them and brought a low whistle from his lips.

“Sam Bohling,” muttered the reporter. “That’s a break for me too. Sam’s a scrapper. And I think he likes me well enough”—

Freeman rose suddenly and walked over to the city desk. The city editor looked up as Don halted beside him.

“I’ve got a hunch—a darned strong one—that I am going to catch the Dealer,” said the reporter. “Can I check out now? I want to look into a few things.”

“Such as the muzzles of machine-guns!” growled the editor. “You leave that egg to the cops. I haven’t any reporters to spare.”

“I’ll try to dodge the Tommy guns,” grinned Freeman. “But think what a credit it will be to the Beacon when the Dealer’s scalp is collected by one of its reporters. And I need that bundle of reward money.”

“Well,” said the city editor, “if you get bumped off, I’ll not send a darned flower to the funeral.”

Freeman left the office and took a cab to the Lancaster Club, an expensive and exclusive establishment facing the east side of Central Park. He gave his name, inquired about Mr. Samuel Bohling and was presently told that Mr. Bohling would see him in his rooms. An attendant conducted the reporter to the seventh floor, where he was ushered into the comfortable quarters occupied by Samuel Bohling, a young broker who had come to the city some three years before and had since been a spectacular figure in the stock-market. He was a plunger, but a shrewd one; and he had amassed a formidable fortune. He was thirty-four years old and a bachelor—a big red-haired man who was a fighter to the core.

THE young broker had been interviewed by Freeman on many occasions and had taken a genuine liking to the lanky newspaper-man. He rose to greet his caller.

“I note,” grinned the reporter, “that Mr. Samuel Bohling took time this afternoon to kick the props out from under the well-known copper pool and gather into his coffers several more bushels of shekels.”

“I’m glad I did it,” smiled the big chap, “since it earned me a visit from you. There’s one thing about you, however, that I don’t like.”

“Only one? If that’s all, tell me what it is.”

“It’s this,” replied Sam Bohling. “You never look me up except to get me to talk for publication. Is there never a time when a reporter is not reporting?”

“It’s sort of a habit with us,” grinned Freeman, “just as it is with you millionaires to keep gobbled up wealth that you haven’t the slightest use for. How much wool did you grab off the copper nets today?”

“Haven’t counted it,” answered Bohling.

“Well,” said Freeman, “the boys estimated it for the papers at better than half a million. Have you thought that you probably made yourself meat for the Dealer?”

“I’ve what?” cried Bohling.

“You’ve sort of issued an invitation to the Dealer to come and get a flock of dollars,” replied Freeman. “You’ve read what happened to Franz Holman this afternoon?”

“Yes,” nodded Bohling. “What you driving at?”

“Holman made a million yesterday,” answered the reporter. “And the Dealer promptly solicited him for a donation. You made half a million today, and—” Freeman finished with an expressive shrug.

“By thunder!” cried Bohling. “I wonder if there is something to that. Do you really think that murdering crook may pick on me?”

“I’d almost lay a bet on it,” declared Freeman. “If he does, I want you to let me know. I’ve some ideas.”

They talked for another fifteen minutes, and then Freeman departed. He left behind a thoughtful Samuel Bohling. Tilt had laid a plan whereby the broker could get in touch with Freeman in case of an approach by the Dealer, and do so without a chance of the Dealer’s becoming aware of the move.

SOON after midnight that night—just about the time Freeman had succeeded in falling asleep—five men sat in the living-room of a small, modestly furnished cottage in a suburb. In a grave, now covered by kindling and other débris, in the coal-bin off the basement, those five men had just finished burying a comrade—the one who had stopped the bullet from Freeman’s automatic.

One man, the Dealer, poured stiff drinks for all from a bottle of Canadian whisky. The drinks were tossed off, and the Dealer put the bottle away in a cupboard. He was a dark-skinned man nearing forty, so thin as to be almost scrawny. He might have been tall but for a very decided stoop to his thin shoulders. His eyes and hair were black, and his brows met about a thin, high-bridged nose. It was a sinister face, yet shrewd.

The other four men were all in their late thirties or early forties, unusually well groomed. Each face bore the unmistakable mark of the man who lived all beyond the law with the shadow of prison and the gallows looming over him daily. Cold-blooded killers, the lot of them.

“I’d give a lot of money,” snarled the Dealer, as he faced his four henchmen, “to know who the man was that came up with that gat and plugged Charley. He’d be where Charley is by tomorrow night.”

There were growls from the other four. The Dealer went to a closet and brought out the bag which the now dead Charley had snatched from Franz Holman’s lifeless fingers. While the others stood around their chief opened the bag and dumped its contents onto the table in the center of the room. In silence he divided the money into five stacks. Then he pocketed the largest stack and pushed one of the remaining four to each of his followers.

“There’s your dough,” said the Dealer crisply. “It was nice of Holman to supply himself with such a sweet bundle of cash. He evidently figured I wouldn’t be able to check up and find out where he had gone if he sent back no checks or drafts. He’ll have no use for money where he is now—they don’t print money on asbestos. Clear out now and put your dough away. Meet here, nine o’clock tomorrow night. I’ll have two or three sweet wads lined up for collection by that time. After the rich birds in this town get through reading about what happened to Holman, we’ll have no trouble getting any sort of a bundle we ask them for.”

The four men left, driving off in a car that had been parked before the cottage. A short time later the Dealer locked up the place and left in another car which had been parked in the drive at the side door. . .

Shortly after ten o’clock next morning the message Freeman expected reached him in the news-room of the Beacon. The reporter lost no time in making his way to the building in which the offices of Bohling were located. He was shown at once into Bohling’s private office.

“Hello, Freeman,” greeted Bohling, rising and shaking hands. “Well, I’ve been chosen.”

“For how much?” inquired Freeman.

“Two hundred thousand.”

“Plenty,” nodded Freeman. “And you’re still game to have a try at nabbing our Dealer?”
“I sent for you, didn’t I?” retorted Bohling grimly. “I suppose you’ve got a plan?”

“Not exactly,” replied Freeman. “As I told you yesterday, I’ve got a few of rough ideas. Plans will have to be built according to Mr. Dealer’s approach and the time allowed us to prepare in.”

“Time is short,” said Bohling. “I’m supposed to deliver the money in person tonight. Dealer’s orders are to get it in cash in hundred-dollar bills and put in a handbag. I’m to leave my hotel in my car with the money-bag in the back seat tomorrow night at nine o’clock sharp and proceed out of town, driving at a speed of not more than twenty-five miles an hour. I’m to follow the Post Road until another car, passing, flashes a signal through the rear window—three flashes from an electric torch.

“The instructions are to follow that car till it stops. Then I am to get out, leaving the bag with the money in the rear seat of the car. I’m to walk rapidly back in the direction I came from for ten minutes. Then I can go back and get my car. I have the Dealer’s word of honor that I will not be harmed if I do as directed.” Sam Bohling smiled wryly as he paused.

“Neat scheme,” nodded Freeman. “And I suppose you are to let the Dealer know in some manner whether you mean to deliver the money as requested?”

“If I am willing to pay as directed, I am to go to Razoni’s grill for lunch today, arriving at exactly twelve-thirty. For ten minutes I am to stand before the entrance as if I were waiting for some one. Then I am to go in and get my lunch.”

“I see,” grunted Freeman. “There are thousands of places where the Dealer or his lookout can watch that entrance. Go ahead and keep the date. We’ll have to make our stab at catching him tomorrow night.”

“Yes,” nodded Bohling. “And now that you know the layout, how are we going at it? I’m game to give this crook a scrap, but I’m not keen about committing suicide. I called you because I decided I’d rather trust you in case this happened than any cop or detective. Frame your plan. I’ll play if I can see a fighting chance. Otherwise, I’ll pay. I’ve got a lot of dollars, but only one life.”

“In either case you’ll want to keep the Razoni date. I’ll come back here at two o’clock and let you know what I’ve figured out. Will that do?”

“Good enough,” nodded Bohling. “Perhaps I’ll have some things to suggest myself.”

“Then I’ll go out and take a walk,” said Freeman. “I think better with my legs in motion.”

Sam Bohling kept his vigil before the entrance of Razoni’s grill. He had his lunch and returned to his office, where he was joined by Donald Freeman. There was a gleam of excitement in the reporter’s eyes.

“I’ve got it, Mr. Bohling,” cried Freeman. “I think the Dealer’s finish is in sight if you’ll carry out your part of the scheme I have doped out.”

“Spill it!” grunted Bohling.

IT took the reporter fifteen minutes to spill it. When he had finished, the light in his eyes had found its counterpart in those of the young broker.

“By jingo,” cried Bohling, “my faith in you was not misplaced! That should do the trick. It beats anything I’ve been able to think of. But you’re taking a long chance, old fellow.”

“I’ll take a lot longer one for that reward money,” retorted Freeman. “Then, if the plan suits you, I’ll be on my way. I’ll have to do quite a bunch of things. I’ll leave the fixing of your car to you. Be sure to go about it carefully. You can depend upon me for the rest.”

“All right,” said Bohling. “Good luck!”

At two o’clock the following afternoon Sam Bohling left his office carrying a large brown leather handbag. He hailed a cab and was driven to his bank. He was followed by another cab in which rode a slender, swarthy man with sharp, shifty eyes. The slender chap followed the broker into the bank and was still following when Bohling left and entered another cab. The shadow clung to the trail until the broker carried his bag into the Lancaster Club. Then the trailer went to a telephone-booth in a near-by drug-store and called a number.

“This is J-6,” said the man. “Tell D-1 that party went to the bank and got the dough. He took it to his club. He’s there now. S-4 is covering the door.”

There was a pause of several minutes while the man stood with the receiver at his ear. Then the voice at the other end of the wire spoke again:

“Okay. D-1 says to come in.”

UPON entering his club, Sam Bohling went directly to his rooms. When he opened the door, he found Freeman waiting. Bohling nodded to the reporter, went to a closet and placed the bag he carried within.

“There’s your bag,” said the reporter, pointing to a satchel which sat on a divan against the wall. It was a duplicate of the bag Bohling had locked in the closet.

“You all set?”

“Yes,” answered Bohling. “The garage will deliver my car at the entrance at exactly five minutes after nine.”

“Good. Before morning we will have our brand on nearly four hundred grand of reward money.”

“You can have the reward,” grunted Bohling. “All I want is to save my two hundred thousand and share the credit of finishing the Dealer. I wish I could feel as sure this was going to work out without a hitch as you seem to. Have a drink?” He jerked a thumb toward a decanter.

“Thanks, not now,” answered Freeman. “I’ll drink with you after the fireworks are over. Now let’s run over the thing again just to be letter-perfect.”

At a quarter of nine that night the Dealer and three of his hired men were in the drive-in cottage that was their rendezvous. The Dealer took a bundle of bills from his pocket and proceeded to divide them into five stacks. He passed three of the stacks to the other three men.

“There,” said the arch-murderer, “are your shares of the stake poor Charley had salted away. You know he gave me his safety-deposit-box key and power of attorney before he died. I got the money this morning. I have split it the usual way.”

The three men nodded their heads and put the bundles of money away in their pockets. The Dealer waited until the cash had been stowed.

“And now,” said the chief crook, “as I told you, this is our last trick here. I am off to a foreign country where I mean to play an even sweeter game than this has been. After we get the money this sucker is bringing to us tonight, we will have more than a million. All of you said that you wished to go with me to the new spot. I have made arrangements to take you—but if there is any one or more of you who would rather stay here and try to carry on this racket, you are welcome to do so. I’ll leave the field to you, and you will be welcome to use the name I have used. What do you say?”

There was a moment of silence. Then one of the men glanced quickly at the other two and spoke for the trio.

“We’re sticking with you, Chief,” declared the spokesman. “You put us all on Easy Street, and if you’ve got a still softer graft lined up we sure want to be in on it.”
At the wheel Sam Bohling held the speed of the car between twenty and twenty-five miles an hour. When the big machine had rolled through the suburbs and reached comparatively open country, the broker stepped on a button which flashed a light in the compartment where Freeman lay. The reporter pushed up the cushion of the back seat and propped it with a stick that had been provided for the purpose.

“No car in sight behind,” said Bohling over his shoulder. “And the only one I can see ahead is a quarter of a mile in the lead.”

“Good,” grunted Freeman. “I’m going to crawl out of this place and give these long legs of mine one stretch. Keep your eyes on the mirror so I can duck back in whenever you see another wagon overtaking us.”

FREEMAN squirmed out of the compartment and stretched luxuriously.

“Now you know how a sardine feels,” said Bohling. “I’ll say I do,” agreed Freeman. “I don’t think it will be long now until the fireworks start. Whenever I go back into my hole, you run up all this bullet-proof glass. I want as near an even break as possible.”

“I’d rather be in my place than yours,” replied Bohling. “When I get out of this car, I’m going to put distance between it and me as fast as I can.”

“Listen, brother,” said Freeman, “when you get out, walk away as fast as you please; but don’t run. That might make them suspicious.”

“All right,” agreed Bohling. “I’ll walk, but the walking I’ll do will make Edward Payson Weston turn over in his grave. If you shoot the bird who takes the bag out of the car, I want to be out of range of the guns of his pals.”

“I may plug the fellow who takes the bag, and I may not,” answered Freeman. “We’ve been over all that before. All you need to do now is remember the signals.”

“I won’t forget them,” promised Bohling. “And here comes a car behind us.”

Freeman scrambled back into the compartment beneath the back seat and lowered the cushion into place. Presently he heard a speeding car pass, but it was evidently not the car for which they were watching. No signal was flashed by the light in the compartment under the seat. For another half-hour the car rolled on. Then Freeman stiffened as the light in his cramped quarters flashed twice. That signal told him that the bandit car had passed them and had signaled Bohling. It also told the reporter that there were two men riding in the car from which the Dealer’s signal had come.

Freeman tugged his gun from his pocket and held it in readiness. He pushed upward on the cushion which covered his hiding-place and propped it with the prepared stick in such a manner that there was a narrow crack through which he could peer out. He could lift that cushion with one hand and with the gun in the other, shoot down almost instantly any man who reached into the car to get that bag off the back seat. Whether he did so or not depended on how things developed after Bohling halted the car.

Presently Freeman felt the big car swerve around a corner, and he could tell from the feel that they had left the paved highway to follow a much rougher—probably unpaved—byroad. Another five minutes slipped away, and then suddenly applied brakes brought Bohling’s car to a halt. Tense in his hiding-place, the reporter heard Bohling climb out of the car and walk swiftly away to the rear.

There followed several moments of silence. Then Freeman, straining his ears for any sound, heard noises.

In a big, powerful car parked some ten feet ahead of Bohling’s the Dealer sat behind the wheel with Levi Mortz
in the seat beside him. The windows of the bandit car were down, and the words spoken by the two crooks carried plainly to Freeman's ears in his hiding-place.

"He's gone," chuckled the Dealer. "He hiked away down the road like the devil was after him. Jump out and get that bag out of the back seat of his car, quick. I'll take a look and make sure the money is there; then we'll be on our way.

Levi Mortz climbed out of the car and went back to Bohling's auto. He reached into the car and snatched the bag off the back seat. Freeman lay still. He had heard the Dealer declare that he meant to look at the contents of the bag. Levi Mortz hurried back to the auto where his chief waited, and handed the bag to the Dealer.

As he took the bag with his left hand, the Dealer's right hand flashed around, holding a gun which he had taken from a door pocket of the car. The muzzle of the weapon was jabbed against Levi Mortz's body just over the heart. The Dealer's finger contracted on the trigger, and the weapon spoke. With a gasping gurgle, Levi Mortz staggered back a yard and crumpled to earth.

"So long, Levi!" chuckled the Dealer. "There may be some dough in your clothes, but I haven't time to bother about it. I have a great plenty."

Depositing upon the seat beside him the bag Mortz had fetched, the Dealer started the motor of the car and sped away along the rough byway. Now and then he looked back, but there was no sign of pursuit. Presently he would strike another highway that would lead him back onto the Post Road.

In his hiding-place, Freeman heard the shot which felled Mortz. A moment later he heard the motor of the bandit car start and the car speed away. Pushing up the cushion which covered his hiding-place, he scrambled out. He saw the bandit car disappear around a bend in the byroad. As Freeman stooped over the still form of Levi Mortz, Sam Bohling came running back.

Mortz was moaning faintly. Freeman was hurriedly examining the man by the light of the headlamps on Bohling's car. The bullet fired by the Dealer had been terminated by a thick package of hundred-dollar bank notes sewed in the lining of Mortz's vest. The man had suffered only a flesh-wound in the left breast, but was still unconscious from the impact of the bullet over his heart.

"The other crook—I think he must be the Dealer—shot this one," Freeman told Sam Bohling. "This one is not badly hurt; but when he recovers consciousness, we will make him believe he is dying. Maybe he will spill some information."

"But the other guy—the Dealer," retorted Bohling. "Hadn't we ought to chase him?"

"He got away by himself," answered Freeman, "and he has the bag with him. I hardly think we need to chase him."

"I guess you're right," nodded Bohling, after a moment of silence.

Mortz was now moaning faintly. The reporter and the broker stood beside him, waiting anxiously.

"He's coming around," said Freeman to Bohling. "Be sure to make him believe he's dying. By the way, did you get the number of the license on that other car?"


Two minutes later the wounded crook recovered consciousness. And believing that he was dying, Levi Mortz talked. He admitted that the man who had fled with the bag from Bohling's car was the Dealer. He told how the Dealer had shot him, and expressed his opinion that the arch-criminal had also made away with the other three members of the gang. He gave them the address of the suburban hangout and told them where they would find the buried body of Charley, the man killed by the bullet from Freeman's gun.

"And what about the woman in the gang?" inquired Freeman.

"There was no woman," gasped the wounded crook. "Charley used to be a female impersonator on the stage. He used the woman disguise whenever he was doing a trick that the cops might catch up on. You'll find his wigs, dresses and other junk in a big trunk in the same basement where he's buried."

Two hours later Freeman and Sam Bohling entered the news-room of the Beacon with their wounded prisoner between them. They had stopped at the suburban cottage and seen the bodies of the poisoned crooks lying on the floor. Freeman reeled off his story while staff photographers were busy taking pictures.

Inspector Harding was a very angry detective when he arrived at the Beacon office to take charge of the wounded prisoner. But there was nothing the Inspector could do about it—and Freeman did not have the heart to rub his triumph in. Harding growled a "Thank you" to the reporter, and departed with his prisoner.

"Yeah," growled the city editor as he looked up from a swift perusal of Freeman's story, "but I thought you were going to land the Dealer. You put a crimp in his gang all right—but where is he?"

"My guess," retorted Freeman, "is that he is in hell by this time. I had 'Bang' Thompson make that bag into an infernal machine with about seven pounds of explosive that will go boom when the bag is opened. I think all we need do is watch the stuff that comes over the wires. When the Dealer opens that bag, he will be incensed."

"Say," cried the city editor, suddenly grabbing up a sheet of paper from the telegraph hook at his elbow, "here's a story that just came over the Associated Press wire a few minutes ago."

Freeman took the sheet and read:

Completely wrecked by a terrific explosion, a car was found beside the road two miles east of Milltown, Conn., by a State trooper at half-past twelve tonight. Within the car was the body of a man mangled beyond recognition. The trooper found a license-plate bearing the number B-77-1394. Authorities are checking up on the case.

"That's the Dealer," said Freeman grimly. "He probably found a quiet spot after he made sure that nobody was following him and decided to have a look at what was in the bag."

Two days later Freeman sat on the corner of the city desk facing the city editor of the Beacon.

"Well, smart guy," growled the editor, "I suppose this office can now kiss you good-by. Some guys have all the luck. You drag down darned near a half million, and you are the bosom companion of Sam Bohling, wizard of Wall Street."

"Guess again," chuckled Freeman. "I'm sticking right to the old job, just out of sympathy for you. You really ought to have one good reporter on the staff."

"All right," snapped the city editor after a long, searching look into Freeman's twinkling eyes. "But see that you attend to your business. If you don't, I'll fire you just as soon as I would if you didn't have a nickel or a friend in the world. Tearing yourself over to the dog-show and get a human-interest story about some of the prize-winning pooches."

"Going, sweetheart," grinned Freeman. "That's a doggone good assignment."
REAL EXPERIENCES

What was the most exciting moment of your life? Here follow five stories of extraordinary adventure by your fellow-readers. The first, who has been both an Army and a Navy pilot, tells of his dangerous flight over the Andes.

Wings Over the Andes

By John Montgomery

The September sun was just rising over the snow-clad Andes when our big Sikorsky rolled down the runway of Los Cerillos airport. The two Hornet motors roared out, their lusty song as the plane left the ground and headed for Upsalta Pass, sixty miles away.

Aboard the plane were eleven Chilean newspaper men, also McMahon, the other pilot, with the mechanic Medina, the radio operator Hunter, and myself—a total of fifteen. We were taking the representatives of the Chilean press on a fast round-trip prior to the opening of the first airplane passenger service between Santiago and Buenos Aires.

We had made two previous trips in each direction over the route to determine its feasibility. No particular difficulties had been encountered, despite the fact it was necessary to cross at from eighteen to twenty thousand feet, and our company had decided to pioneer the service.

We had reached Chile six weeks previously, after making the first flight from New York to Santiago. While considering our first attempt to cross the Andes, we had listened to much discouraging advice. Many stories were told of the terrific winds and treacherous air-currents encountered at these high altitudes. No transport plane had ever been over, the few previous crossings having been made by one- and two-seater military planes, and numerous fatalities had occurred in abortive tries. We decided most of the trouble had been from underpowered equipment, unable to rise high enough to clear the currents.

At nineteen thousand feet, we had crossed with less bumps than ordinarily encountered in a New York-Washington flight. The press representatives had been invited on this joy-ride to see the magnificent aerial views of the Andes as our guests, with the assurance that the trip would not be as dangerous as the taxicab journey to the airport.

We throttled down the motors after the take-off to normal cruising revolutions and pointed the nose of the ship up for a long gradual climb. This speed had previously insured us of eighteen thousand feet altitude upon reaching the mouth of the pass. The plane was more heavily loaded this time, however, than on any previous trip and as we reached sixteen thousand feet, the yawning gorge of Upsalta Pass appeared on the right.

The highest point in the pass proper is fourteen thousand and the railroad dives through a tunnel under the hump. We had never previously entered the pass at under eighteen thousand feet; that altitude put us slightly above the average of the peaks bordering it.

We had a stiff following wind and approached the hump rapidly, but seemed to gain altitude slowly. The pass narrows from a mile wide at the entrance to a bare hundred yards at the crest and, winds a snake-like path through the range. There would be little chance to turn our ship around, with its hundred-foot span, if it should be necessary—now that we were imprisoned by the huge walls. However, I figured we could make it safely, and we had no forebodings when we soared over the hump.

I glanced at the altimeter; it registered seventeen thousand. I was just going to point out to Mac how our figuring was eminently correct, when the seat seemed to drop out from under me and I was pressed tight against my life-belt. A hurried look at the climb-indicator showed it had swung over to the maximum rate of descent, three thousand feet per minute. A still more hurried look at the altimeter—and “16,000” rewarded that gaze. We each reached frantically for the throttles and shoved both motors wide open, simultaneously pushing the nose down in a dive for more speed. As these rapid actions were completed, the altimeter said fifteen thousand and the air-speed meter showed one hundred and thirty miles an hour, its maximum. The climb-indicator remained constant at the three-fifths-mile-a-minute descent rate. I was scared as never before in twelve years of flying. We were making one hundred and thirty miles an hour and yet dropping at a terrific clip. Thousand-foot marks were going by that altimeter dial like telegraph poles past the Twentieth Century, when it is going full tilt. The walls of the pass were getting closer and closer and the bottom of the cañon seemed rising toward us like a tidal wave.

It was an utterly helpless feeling, that of being caught
Wings over the Andes

by some mighty force against which you can offer no
resistance and watch your death apparently approach. An-
other glance at the altimeter and I saw fourteen thousand
feet; then over the side I could see the jagged rocks on the
bottom of the pass, barely five hundred feet below. Ten
seconds more and we would be a tangled mass of metal
and human wreckage.

Then the altimeter needle stopped its wild dash across
the dial, quivering around that fateful fourteen-thousand-
foot mark. The climb-indicator swung back up to zero
and, for perhaps thirty seconds, these two arbiters of our
fate hung at those points. The air-speed meter still showed
forward progress of more than two miles a minute. Su-
ddenly the climb-indicator switched over to the farthest
point on the upside and the altimeter needle started an-
other mad race, retracing the path covered in its descent,
seemingly picking up speed as it went. Goggle-eyed, I
gazed at it fascinated. Sixteen thousand—seventeen thou-
sand—and then halfway between there and eighteen thou-
sand it stopped. A stolen sidewise glance showed we were
slightly above the top of the walls of the pass. I took an-
other look at the instrument-board; the climb-indicator
had returned to zero and "17,500" was still pointed at by
the altimeter. The nose of the plane remained down and
our air-speed was the same as before. I gasped in a breath,
looked at McMahon, and caught him also gasping. We
pulled the nose up slightly, left the motors roaring full out,
and sat in a state of strained expectancy. What would
happen next? In a space of three minutes we had dropped
three thousand feet and bounced back up thirty-five hun-
dred! What else had the Andes in store for us? I bent
an anxious gaze on the wing-struts for any sign of buckling,
but all were O. K. It seemed almost impossible those
slender wings and struts could have withstood that terrific
pressure, while bearing an eight-ton weight in the center.

Five minutes later, still almost afraid to breathe, we
swept out of the pass over the welcome expanse of Up-
salatta Valley. Not until then did I draw a full breath and
relax. Mac and I looked at each other and solemnly shook
hands. Ten minutes more, and we were across that final
range,—allowing a delicate three-thousand-foot mar-
gin over it,—and spiraling down on the field at Mendoza.
We taxied up to the gas tank, cut off the motors, and
climbed down. Immediately we were surrounded by our
Chilean guests, chatting about the marvelous trip and
the fact that we had crossed in less than two hours, as
against fourteen hours by train. No one seemed scared.

One of the Chileans said: "I've never been up in a plane
before, but it is marvelous. Why should anyone be afraid?
Everybody says the Andes are so dangerous, but if all
crossings are like this, where could there be much danger?"
Turning to me he asked: "Have you ever found the trip
rough or dangerous, or has it always been nice like today?"
I realized then that none of them had had previous fly-
ing experience, and what had been a nightmare to us, had
passed unnoticed in the cabin. Looking sharply at Mc-
Mahon, I replied:

"Well, I can truthfully say that most of the time you
will find the crossing even smoother than today's."
Later Mac said to me: "The guy who said, 'What you
don't know don't hurt you,' must have been thinking of
dumb airplane passengers!"

"No," I replied, "maybe he was referring to dumb pilots
who go into passes too low, not knowing what may hap-
pen to them!" And he nodded hearty agreement as we
cranked up and headed on to Buenos Aires.

I have crossed several times in each direction, but
never have I entered that pass under the eighteen-thousand-
foot mark. Others have done it below that level, and
8

Gun-

Play

Mr. Burt is a modest man—but he fought and disarmed a mur-
derous maniac.

By Fred McC. Burt

AFTER about ten years of sales engineering and engi-
neering sales—or much engineering and darn' few
sales—from St. Louis to Boston, Charleston to St.
Paul, I had accumulated a fine collection of experiences—
an airplane crash, several bad auto smash-ups, fires and a
sinking boat.

After passing days unscathed in Cicero, and in the tough-
est parts of New York City, it took a call on a factory in a
small town close to the Ohio River to furnish an experience
that topped them all.

After some morning calls in a near-by larger city I took
a trolley to this town and was presently chatting with the
young superintendent of the plant in his office over a ware-
room at one end of the factory. With a common wartime
aviation experience we had been able to pass quickly over
the fact that their purchasing needs were practically nil.

In the midst of our gabbing, his desk phone rang.

Then he hung up the receiver, opened a desk drawer and
extracted therefrom an evil-looking mechanism with a handle
and barrel. Starting on the run for the door, he yelled
back: "A bandit just held up the First National and he's
headed down this way!" As I caught up with him he
added, "Shot up the whole town and took thousands."

I was right in my element, my family being very brave
with a record of having survived every war in this country
since 1636. So as he ran down the stairs and out through
the foundry to muster the reserves, I took off my overcoat,
tossed it on some boxes, stepped out the front door of the
wareroom, and looked over the terrain. First was a side-
track for twenty or thirty feet, then the main line. Beside
this was a well-beaten cinder path and a few feet of dead
grass, beyond which was a steep bank down to a full, rush-
ing creek. To my right toward the center of town the rail-
road curved across a bridge about a hundred and fifty
yards distant; beyond this in another hundred yards
it reached and crossed the main street of the town. One
square away along this main street lay the bank. To get
to the railroad this desperado had to run the gamut of six
or eight store-fronts with their garrisons of indignant and
righteous citizens, presumably all armed.

This modern Jesse James had walked boldly into the
bank a few minutes before closing, with his artillery in each
hand. The three bank employees—and one lady customer
—taken entirely by surprise, had no idea as to what prece-
dent to follow. The latter fainted. The only man, an
assistant cashier, reached in a drawer for a gun. But a big
automatic roared and almost before the bullet passed his
ear he started collecting the money, with the other two
assisting, albeit rather clumsily due to the trembling of
their hands.

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In but a few seconds the first man was within ten feet of me. His left hand was still in his coat pocket, but the right hand flashed up from behind him—and I was gazing into the yawning orifice of the biggest Luger automatic I ever saw. It seemed at least a twelve-inch fieldpiece. He impolitely growled at me, “Get the hell back over there!” With complete aplomb and presence of mind, I disguised myself as Rodin’s “Thinker”—though even more immoveable. I would not retreat and my sturdy and brave legs backed me up by refusing to move.

Just as I was about to ask him to step inside where it was warmer, that we might arbitrate the matter, I noticed a cascade of bills erupting from his breast pocket caused by the pistol-arm movement and noticed further that every pocket was filled—though it was hard for me to see past the mouth of that gun.

As he stooped to pick up the fallen kale, but with never-wavering gun, I saw out of the corner of my eye the other man slipping down over the bank for flank attack. I was really almost pleased to know that he was on my side and not another bandit, and being very big-hearted I was quite willing to share in the glory of capture. Around the bend and across the bridge there now came half the town population—but politely, none trying to rush ahead. One bright egg started shooting at my bandit boy-friend at about one hundred and fifty yards—with me only ten feet from the target. One pellet zinged off a rail-top, which made me indignant.

Then the train came across the bridge, belatedly and slowly. By hopping aboard the bold bandit could drop off a ways down in a deserted spot.

I was still in the middle of the track. One move and bingo—for he had said, “Stand there in that track or I’ll blow you to hell!”

This worried me and I was deciding to try to turn a back flip, as the engine was now only about eighty feet away, when up over the bank rushed the other man. The bandit banged away at me but missed, then turned in time to confront my rescuer. But that blessed Luger jammed! Having just been grazed by a bullet, and a train, I was right mad—among other emotions—so when the other fellow yelled, “Pile him, it’s not loaded!” I grabbed his gun-hand and we went down.

In no time the foundry gang was on our backs—the fools all trying to take a crack at the bandit via my anatomy, as I lay with my nose in a nest of fifty-dollar bills. But soon we were excavated and about twelve thousand dollars was removed from the bandit, including six fifties that I came up with—and reluctantly surrendered.

Was I, and my noble assistant, lauded? Oh, yes! One prominent business-man said, “Young man, you are either the bravest man I ever saw, in confronting that bandit unarmed, or else you are the biggest damned fool!” I blushed becomingly and thanked him.

Reward? Sure. You’d be surprised how many people thanked me—and my sweet wife bawled me out for taking such chances till I broke down and told the truth—even though a salesman. I said, “The other captor and myself are of the stuff from which heroes are made. It was no cock-eyed to know what he was doing—while if I’d suspected that fellow ambling down the track was the bandit, you couldn’t have pigeon me out of that wareroom!”

Across the street in a real-estate office an amazed and terrified girl grabbed a phone and notified Central. About the time this was accomplished the bandit saw her and hurled a big slug through the front window. She “passed out” under the table, and stayed put. A man standing in front of this office discreetly froze into immobility—and later told me about this phase of the affair. The rest of the citizens on the street were reminded of furnace-fires needing attention at home, while brave merchants of the row went into executive session with their clerks as to who would have the honor of the first shot—first retiring to the rear that the arguments be not interrupted.

So our bandit, with a fair load of firewater, an itching trigger-finger, and a full desire for economic independence by virtue of unearned increment, nonchalantly confiscated the bank armament, and loose wealth. Distributing the latter through every pocket of his blue serge suit, he cocked his hat on one side and exited, popping out a couple more of the bank windows as a farewell gesture.

Then he started a stroll down the main stem toward the railroad. Several times he added to plate-glass dividends as faces were observed—or imagined, for it would take wonderful eyesight to see through counters.

With pockets full of money, fine glass targets, and three guns, this expert marksman—a genuine hill-billy mountaineer—was thoroughly enjoying himself. Nearly half an hour had elapsed, with several nervous breakdowns but no bloodshed; now it was time for the fast train.

But for once the fast passenger train was late. It ran slowly through the town and did not stop. Therefore he started off down the track—and I was down that track.

STEPPING out of this wareroom door, full of noble resolutions, I saw this blue-suited figure coming down the path not over seventy-five feet up the line. Unarmed and without hesitation I stepped over the middle of the main track as he walked toward me at a moderately fast pace—not looking back or even up. About fifty feet in the rear strolled another man, weaving somewhat from three or four too many under the belt. No one else was in sight up the track.
I shall never forget the spring of 1888—it was during a March thaw that year that Dry Creek flooded old Number Three, with four hundred miners at work.

The creek, which followed a snakelike course through the little town of Bevier in northern Missouri, had broken into the mine previously, but by cutting a canal and building a dam, the troublesome bend had been eliminated. The old entry was abandoned and work run in the other direction. On this bright spring morning, there was no thought of danger, even though the creek was at flood stage.

The main shaft was one hundred and twenty-five feet down, and the entries which were being worked followed a gradually rising drift.

My father, my brother Jim, and I were working a room about three-quarters of a mile from the entrance.

During the morning, Father became restless, and about ten o'clock he said: “Boys, I wish we were out of here; something’s wrong.” Men who spend many years in mines develop a sort of sixth sense, and can discern happenings beneath the earth’s crust, much as an Indian knows weather signs.

We wanted to know his reasons, but when he could give none we laughed and accused him of getting superstitious.

Another hour passed; then he exclaimed: “Let’s get out of here quick, boys! I tell you, something is wrong!”

Rather unwillingly Jim and I agreed to leave as soon as we fired the shot we were then tamping. But that fuse was never lighted!

Only a few minutes had passed since Father’s warning, when Dave Davis, the switch driver, came报表 an empty coal-car, laying the whip on his mule and yelling like mad: “Run, men, run! Run for your lives! The creek is in!”

We dropped our tools and hurried out. It didn’t seem to me just then as if we were in any immediate danger, and I even stopped to laugh at Dave, who was so excited he tried to hitch the mule rear-end-first for the return trip.

Father sternly cut me short; he told Dave to turn the mule around, and we started back at a good trot.

The thud of heavy boots sounded ahead, and we could see the blinking lights of running men. The air smelled foul. As we turned into the east entry, stench staggered us; the thud of boots became a continual splashing; water was running down both sides of the track, and a dull roar could be heard ahead. It was then I realized that we must fight if we were to escape drowning like rats in a trap.

We said little. Running was becoming difficult, for the water was rising rapidly. Soon the rails were covered and we stumbled along in the uncertain footing. It seemed no time until the yellow, stinking water was to our knees, and tin cans, lunch-pails, clothing, and debris of every imaginable sort were tumbling about in it.

Reaching the south entry, which was our only means of escape, we met the flood coming right at us. I’ll never forget the horror of that quarter-mile. Every step took us lower down that inclined entry, and at every step the chilling flood grew deeper, every minute the roar louder. There were men cursing and praying in many different languages; silent, grim-faced men, and men whimpering in fear like wounded animals. Some struggled with arms full of tools and lunch-pails. I remember two fellows sitting atop a coal-car, blubbering; Father called to them to come on, but they would not follow us.

The water was waist-deep when we began meeting floating timbers. There were coming swiftly and we couldn’t see them until they were upon us. The force of one could knock a man down.

When the water was to my chest, I could see far ahead between the water and the roof the lights in the cage as it appeared and disappeared, taking the men up. There was still a chance, if only we could go faster. The roar of the water was deafening, but I shouted and pointed to the cage to encourage Jim. He and Father were not as tall as I, and the water was up to their armpits. It was cold, too, and Jim was only a kid. Could we make it?

A swirling mass of timbers bore down upon us. Men and logs were cast in a seething mass; men struggling, gulping, going under, then up again—lights blotted out, logs pushed away by one man only to come with a crash against another. Father was to my right. Logs raced between us, and men caught by them were carried backward. I saw one log pile up on end and fall with a splash right at Father. His light disappeared and I could not see him again. I fought uselessly to get nearer.

The next few minutes seemed an hour. Finally it was over; I found myself near the shaft with several others as exhausted as I, but neither Father nor Jim was there.
The water didn't seem to be getting deeper and the roar sounded less; whether this was a fact or only a trick of my brain I could not know. As I went back to search for Father and Jim, I thought of Father's warnings. Now if he and Jim were lost my foolhardiness was to blame.

Others told me they were already out. I went up in the cage, and outside, I found Jim—but not Father. Back down I went, and at last I found him there, still searching for me.

On reaching the top we learned how the heroism of a group of wives and mothers, led by the quick-thinking wife of the mine foreman, had saved us all.

The flood had carried away part of the dam at the bend, allowing the water to take its old course, where a ten-foot hole in the creek-bed dropped out, pouring the flood into the old mine workings below.

Repeatedly men tried to fill the breach, only to fail in the swirling flood. Frantic women lining the banks watched these fruitless efforts, knowing that unless the water could be checked their loved ones would be drowned.

Then the voice of Mrs. Scott, the foreman's wife, rang out: "Come, women! We'll save our men yet! We'll stop that water! Grab hold hands and follow me!"

She was running upstream where the water was wider but only about four feet deep. Hand in hand they waded out, to be met by others from the opposite bank.

There they stood, row after row, a living dam—their full skirts and petticoats billowing out, retarding the current and turning it into the canal, while behind them the dam was repaired with frenzied haste.

Some one thought of Bob Herrington the engineer, doing his own firing, trying to get the men out; upon running to his aid, they found an oil-soaked woman—Mrs. Bob—throwing pails of oil in the fire-box to keep up steam.

Not a life was lost that day—but no one present ever forgot the horror of it!

A British naval officer tells the curious true story back of the sinking of a German submarine.

By

Lieutenant

F. G. Huycke

As the world knows, the beginning of the year 1918 saw the height of submarine activities around the British Isles and the North Sea. Many hundreds of thousands of tons of cargo shipping were destroyed by this menace, and the merchant marine, although armed with guns, stood very little chance of retaliating or defending themselves, as the submarine generally struck either at dawn or twilight. With nothing but her periscope out of the water, the submarine would wait for her prey, making sure of her aim and crippling the merchantman before appearing on the surface.

Large vessels were usually escorted by destroyers, if a destroyer was available. The vessels so escorted were fairly safe, for submarine commanders did not dare take the risk of being themselves sunk.

At times, however, escorts were not available, and these unescorted vessels had to take a chance—which was certain destruction, should they be sighted by a submarine.

In January of 1918, I was appointed Lieutenant R.N.V.R. and first officer of H.M.S. Virile, an oiler of two thousand tons registered, supplying oil to warships and carrying supplies from base to base. She had a speed of some eighteen knots per hour. She was built with a cruiser stern and would have made a trim-looking ship had it not been for her camouflage.

She was armed, with one of the new-inch rifles mounted on a swivel on her poop, commanding the sea within an arc of two hundred and twenty degrees. It was a very efficient gun, having a range of seven miles—one that could easily sink a submarine. She had three deck officers besides the Captain, and three engineers. She also carried three gunners, one always to be on watch at the gun with a shell in the breech and in position ready for firing. They served four hours on and eight hours off. In the event of an alarm all three were on duty and slept under the break of the poop, being right under the gun, to be as near as possible when needed. When in port the gunners were at a loose end, as they had no ship duties and were always given liberty ashore until ordered to sea.

On March seventh we loaded with crude oil at the Canada Docks, Liverpool, and I proceeded to the Ad-
miralty Office where I received sealed orders to put to sea. While walking back to the ship a lone, scrappily-looking black cat, thin as a rail, followed me all the way down to the ship and crossed the gangplank, where he was captured by the galley-cook and given a good meal. The quartermaster remarked at the time that bad luck was following him aboard ship. This was the first of three incidents which remain fixed on my memory. The second was that our second engineer was married that very morning, and his bride came down with him from the church to see her newly wed husband off. Third, at the last moment before sailing, our three gunners arrived on the scene much the worse for drink. Two of them were practically carrying the third—a short chap named Bell.

We cast off immediately after—about twelve midday—and proceeded to sea, sailing to a position off Holyhead, where we were to open our sealed orders. The two more sober gunners were keeping the watch while Bell slept off his liquor. On opening our orders, we found we were to sail to Queenstown Harbor, taking various courses, zigzagging most of the time so as to avoid any torpedoes which might be coming our way.

I was on watch in the bridge from 12 A.M. to 4 P.M.; again from 8 P.M. to midnight. Sharing my watch in the engine-room was my bridgegroom of that day, the second engineer. At one bell—7:45 P.M.—I passed his cabin and he invited me to drink to his future happiness, he providing the whisky for the occasion. I wished him “good luck” and went back to my cabin to put on my heavy-weather clothes for my watch on the bridge, as there was an exceptionally cold wind blowing.

I was leisurely buttoning up my coat and dreaming of my next leave in London—when, with a tremendous crash, the ship staggered under a mortal blow. She had been struck amidships! I could hear the noise of steam escaping. I ran to the engine-room; it was rapidly filling with water in which bodies were already floating around.

Rushing up to the bridge, I found all in confusion except the men on duty, who stood at their posts. The other officer awakened, had rushed on deck in all stages of undress.

The quartermaster was hastily dispatched to the wireless-room to send out an S.O.S. call for help. In vain—he found the aerial had been broken by the impact.

The ship was sinking fast on an even keel. The Captain ordered all to the boats.

After throwing overboard the signal-code book,—which is at all times kept in a perforated metal box so that, when thrown in the water, it will sink and therefore not fall into the hands of the enemy,—I rushed into my room and managed to get two bottles of whisky out of my locker and into my club-bag which I threw into a lifeboat. The order was given to abandon ship.

The lifeboat to which I was assigned was on the starboard side. As the seamen started to clear the falls of the rope from which the lifeboat swung—to our horror we discovered one of the davits had been broken by a missile from the torpedo. This caused considerable delay, as we had to rig up jury-tackle and lower the boat with the single remaining davit. The seventeen men left on board slid to the boat in safety down the lifelines. We shipped our oars and pulled clear of the ship so we would not be caught in the suction. Meanwhile, the port lifeboat had lowered away to safety and the men were lying on their oars.

We were waiting for the ship to go down; it could only be a matter of minutes. While waiting, the roll was called—ten men were missing, among them our bridegroom of the previous day and our inebriated friend Bell.

Slowly, about midway between the boats, a long, gray, slimy, barnacle-covered tower rose in the water. It was the enemy submarine! The top of the conning-tower was raised. The men came up on deck and pulled the cover off the gun.

Suddenly we heard a yell from the direction of the ship, and a disheveled figure appeared on the poop. He took in the situation in a glance, ran to the gun, and, training it on the submarine, fired point-blank. Almost simultaneously with the gun report, a terrific explosion seemed to rock the seas—and where the submarine had been was but debris and oil, floating on the surface of the water! In all probability, the shell had exploded the unfired torpedoes in the submarine. The men in the lifeboats were cheering wildly, as they had expected instant death.

The gunner dived overboard and swam to the nearest boat, which picked him up. He was Bell!

The poor old Virile slowly rolled over on her side, and disappeared beneath the waves.

We stepped the mast, and with shortened sail steered a northerly course toward Holyhead. About ten o'clock a steamer passed us, showing no lights. What a relief it would be to be safe and warm! We fired a distress rocket, however, to get permission to land. It was a long way. We sailed on throughout the darkness of the night.

The lifeboat was pitched up and down considerably by the seas, and shipped water which drenched us and set all hands bailing.

It was an experience I shall never forget—the stars above, sometimes hidden under dark clouds, the rising and falling of the frail boat upon that inky sea. Under cover of darkness, we lost touch with the other boat, but discovered it not far distant when light appeared.

At dawn most of the men were in a pitiful state; they had come right from their bunks, only partly dressed, and the weather on the Irish Sea was very bitter at that time of year. The two bottles of whisky which I had been able to save were a godsend to them.

At about ten A.M. a boat appeared on the horizon. As it came nearer we could see that it was a trawler—for no fishing-boat in time of peace.

We watched it anxiously. It came nearer and nearer, still headed in our direction. When it was within signaling distance we learned that it was on the lookout for us. We rowed to it and climbed up, with some assistance from the crew on deck.

The Captain told us they had been notified by the Admiralty to pick up some survivors from a wreck who would be found somewhere in the vicinity of where the Virile had gone down. We had been noticed and reported by the ship which had “passed in the night.” Unfortunately, there was nothing for us to eat aboard the trawler.

Eventually we reached Holyhead about seven o’clock in the evening—a worn-out, bedraggled and half-starved crew, after twenty-four hours’ privation. We made our way to the naval office, where the officer-in-charge received our preliminary report. He instructed us to proceed to the Admiralty in London and make a full report of the disaster. We were then allowed to retire to a hotel where we were told a substantial meal would be provided. To our amazed disgust, after that awful experience, only a cup of tea and half a slice of bread were put before us. A waitress asked us if we each could eat an egg. “Yes,” our Captain replied caustically, “and the hen that laid it!” Of course, we could not have expected much better, as everywhere in the war zone the people were on rations.

Bell, who sank the submarine, was given a medal and promotion for his timely act, and the rest of the crew were given leave and appointed to other ships.
Leopard Palaver

An American college boy who went to Liberia to manage a rubber plantation found his hands full of trouble.

By Robert F. Whitney

Six months after I was graduated from an Eastern university, I was on the west coast of Africa managing the development of a rubber estate. It is rather a far call from the camaraderie of a fraternity house to the solitude of a planter's thatched bungalow; the tangled jungle of the Slave Coast contrasts sharply with the snow-swept campus, and opens a new realm of strange experience.

I was in charge of an area of one thousand acres, which was part of a twenty-thousand-acre plantation being developed by a prominent American tire manufacturer some twenty miles inland from Cape Palmas, Liberia.

My work was the supervision of native labor in the clearing of the dense tropical forest and its subsequent planting with rubber trees. My labor force averaged five hundred men in number. They were of several tribes, Gbaro, Yenabo, Tiempo, Gbobo, and Kiteapo, all closely related and speaking a common language, the Grebo dialect. Most of all of them were able to speak a little pidgin English.

On a small hill in the center of the area was my small mud-and-thatch bungalow, or rather hut. I remember taking my pajamas from a nail on the wall and staring, frozen with surprise, at a long brown snake which glided from under them up to the ridge and disappeared in the rustling thatch of the roof. One of the snakes had reached the top of the ridge and disappeared in the rustling thatch of the roof. On the edge of the edge of the uncut jungle a few yards away and then turned. Staring and motionless, its yellow eyes smolderingly baneful, it faded into leaves, vines and tree-trunks. I rubbed my eyes, but it was gone, had disappeared in the spotted edge of the shadowy jungle without an apparent movement.

All the laborers were tremendously excited, and it was with difficulty that I was able to begin the work again. To me the incident was only an interesting experience, but to the black men it was especially significant, as I was soon to learn.

Next day as I was leaning against an uninhabited ant-hill enjoying a smoke in the comparative cool of early morning, Disco, a Tiempo headman, came up and saluted with: "Morning, Massa." He began to talk excitedly: "Massa, plenty palaver live for me. Leopard make him."

"I hear; you talk."

"Three moons passed, there be devil man for labor camp. He be Sarie Chen. Be be plenty bad man. He be from Frenchman's."

"Ivory Coast?"

"Yes, massa. He be plenty palaver for camp. I be big man for camp. I fine him five pounds for trouble he make. It be mamma palaver. One moon pass, he go. He make juju and tell Miah, that Gbaro headman, that I be leopard-man. Tell him that I wish myself be leopard so I kill Miah. Miah be man leopard fight past day. This night Miah's countrymen try me. I no be fit try..."
by Gbarobo. I no be leopard-man. Those Gbarobo people kill me. So.

It seemed a complicated situation and to my mind an absurd one also, but there was no doubting that Disco was sincerely afraid.

"Disco," I ordered, "you go for workside. Tell Miah to come to Massa quick."

"I go one time."

Miah came. He was unmarked by his encounter with the leopard. The problem was as Disco had stated so vividly: Miah believed Disco was a leopard-man—feared that he (Miah) would be killed. He thought that Disco could at will assume the shape and spots and heart of the dangerous big cat. The fact that the leopard had attacked him the previous day's incident was confirmation of this belief, which had been kindled by the spite work of the devil-man Sarie Chen. Miah had talked the matter over with other members of his tribe: they had decided that Disco must be tried. It would be a trial by ordeal and probably fatal to Disco. It was all real. Miah absolutely thought that he was facing death unless Disco be immediately put out of the way. I called him a fool, but I knew my words were wasted. His belief was founded on superstitions as old, mysterious and deeply rooted as the dark brooding jungle. I ordered him to tell his people not to molest Disco—if they wished him tried, they should go to the Government authorities.

THAT night I had finished my dinner, and dressed only in pajamas, was cooling off on the porch, when the usual murmur drifting up from the camp, the savage yet soft sound of laughter, songs and drums, broke into an angry roar, high-pitched and sustained. I sensed trouble.

I watched and saw a lantern come dancing up the path to my door. It was in the hand of Charley, the watchman. "Massa, it be me, Charley Number One. Plenty palaver live for town. It be war!" He was wildly excited.

"I come. You wait." I went into the house, pulled on mosquito-boots and stuck a pistol into the belt of my pajamas. The gun was not loaded. Sam, the steward boy, came running in from the kitchen and said: "Massa, I fear for you. Them bush boys be plenty bad."

I was not afraid. I was wondering what the cause of the turmoil was, and what I should do when I reached the scene.

Charley and I ran down the path to the camp. As we came near, the noise and shouting was terrific, deafening. I was sure fighting had begun. My heart was thumping, and it was with difficulty that I suppressed an urge to rush madly in. When I was seen, I heard the cry go around: "The Massa come!" The din subsided somewhat.

I found the Gbarobo and the Tiempo lined against each other in the center of the compound, each man with cutlass or short spear in hand, while the rest of the camp surged about in a vast grinning circle of black faces. One Gbarobo was bleeding from a cut on the head.

I elbowed through with kicks and blows. Walking between the tribes, I stood there silent. All crowded around, chattering and gesticulating. I stood quiet, and picking a star, centered my eyes on it, calm and aloof, although I felt much the opposite. They began to wonder at my silence. Finally the chattering subsided to a murmur. Then I spoke.

"When all the boys go into house, I talk this palaver. I no hear all boys who talk at one time."

There was a slight murmur of agreement.

"You headmen, Disco, Miah, Weah, Borteh, Brandy, take your boys into their houses, one time. When all boys are there, you come to me."

The headmen grunted, and with sharp commands drove the men into the huts. The situation was easier, but it was not yet entirely relieved. The headmen returned to where I stood. I spoke.

"Fetch Massa seat. You think he stand all night?"

"Uh."

Some one brought a packing-case. I sat down and heard the palaver. It was the leopard difficulty. The Gbarobo wished to try Disco for attempting, in the guise of a leopard, to kill Miah. The Tiempo refused to give Disco up, and so war loomed. When the talk was finished, I spoke briefly.

"This be black man's palaver."

"Uh." (All the headmen grunted in unison.)

"I be Massa for this camp."

"Uh."

"I don't care for this palaver; but if there be trouble, be blood, be war for this town, it be Massa's palaver. No be so?"

"Uh."

"There be more of this palaver, I chop" (cut) "all headman's pay for one moon. You hear?"

"Massa, we hear."

"You agree?"

"We 'gree."

"Palaver finish. You tell all men. Then you bring them. They make dance for Massa."

Again I was surrounded by black faces, caught in the savage rhythm of the massed shifting dance and the minor wailing of men abandoned utterly to emotion and instinct. It was unreal, yet vital, and seemed to strike a chord of paganism in me.

The dance began as a shuffling slow mass movement, the savages striking cutlasses overhead to the thumping drums. Then the dancers made room for a man who danced with knees bent, almost sitting on his haunches. He shouted, came at me as if to strike with a long sword, and then backed off. He killed a phantom enemy, and severed its head. Then he rose to full height, and the others joined him, wild with the madness of victory. It was the war-dance, Disco said.

Leaving the village, I went back up the hill to the bungalow, sure the trouble was at least temporarily over. Sleep was late in coming that night, in part because my mind was flooded with thoughts of the night's strange events, so alien to anything in civilized experience, but mostly because my thin pajamas had not withstood the attack of some unseen denizens of the camp, fleas.

SOME weeks later Disco came to the bungalow to tell me he was leaving the plantation to go to his home village, sixty miles up-country. He brought the man who was to take his place as headman. I dashed (gave) him a tin of fish and enough rice for his journey.

One day some time later I asked Miah if the leopard palaver had been thrashed out before Disco departed. He answered: "No, massa. But he finish now."

"You take matter to Government, they fine him two pounds perhaps?"

"Disco go for his country. One night he sleep for roadside. Leopard kill him. Palaver finish. No be so?"

"I think it be Gbarobo-Leopard kill him with cutlass?"

Miah laughed. "No, massa. It be proper leopard."

Palaver finish!
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By Seven Anderton

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