BLUE BOOK

Magazine May

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LONE HAND by Frederick R. BECHDOLT

William J. Makin, S. Andrew Wood, Beatrice Grimshaw, Warren H. Miller, Clarence Herbert New and many others . . . Cash prizes for Real Experiences

For a' That

WHERE do you live? In these United States or perhaps Canada: places uncommonly troubled, these days. You also live in a particular State and county, in a particular house; and you are now sitting in some one room of that house. But always you live in a room narrow indeed, which yet includes the whole universe: your own head. And whatever happens to these United States, or to your town or your house, it is what goes on in that very narrow room that determines your happiness. Whether you have drawn a good hand or a poor one, if you play it to the best of your courage and ability, you may enjoy some measure of triumph.

Robert Burns said it: rich or poor, colonel or corporal, lowly or exalted—a man's a man for a' that. . . .

It is interesting for reader and editor alike to observe how this saving grace of our existence works out in fiction as well as in fact: *Curt Huntoon,* a poor man playing his lone hand against terrific odds in Mr. Bechdolt's stirring novelette of the old West; the Free Lances in Diplomacy in Clarence Herbert New's (there was a man!) "The Transatlantic Air Mail"—rich men risking their lives in a deadly dangerous venture for the sake of their country's progress; the *Weaver,* in Ewing Walker's fine "The Son of Stardust," a poor man backing his skill and courage in a long chance on the race-track; *Alan Brock* and his wife in Warren Miller's lively story, carrying the white man's burden despite peril and hardship in Central America; wastrels of the Foreign Legion, in Mr. Cumberland's Indo-China drama, charging headlong into extreme hazard for the sake of a crippled comrade—these and the other fiction people in this magazine are interesting to us primarily because they are *men,* regardless of rank or wealth or condition.

So too, also, getting back to fact, the stories of Real Experience are worth attention because they reveal men like you or me, fighting from that narrow conning-tower of a room in which each of us essentially lives—fighting through the most exciting crises of their lives.

Indeed, the choice of stories offered you, whether of fact or fiction, is based largely on this foundation; and in the next and succeeding issues also you may look forward to stories of men and women chosen with serious consideration of what they are at home in that strait yet limitless apartment in which each one dwells.

—*The Editor*

Next Month!

"Old Man River"

A deeply interesting novelette of the Mississippi in flood-time.

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There's Murder in the Air

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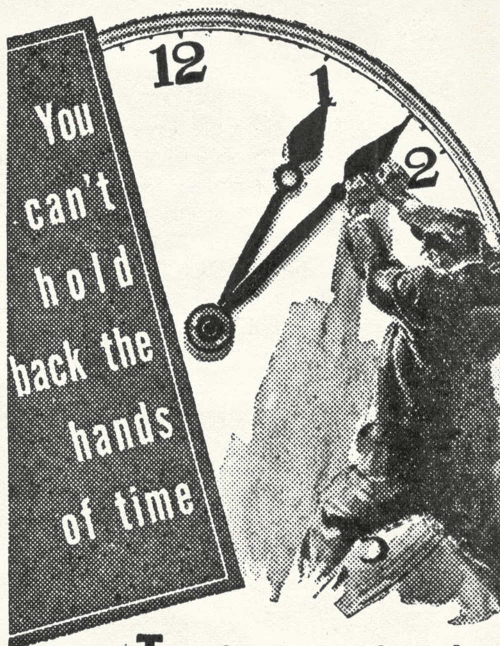

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BLUE BOOK

MAY, 1933 MAGAZINE VOL. 57, NO. 1

Nine Unusual Short Stories

The Son of Stardust By Ewing Walker 4
A fine story of the race-track, by the gifted author of "Dead Man's Hand."

The Flaming Sword By Beatrice Grimshaw 16
From far Papua comes this impressive story of eerie adventure and Paradise denied.

Two Jots and a Tittle By J. Frank Davis 25
This soldier of fortune returns to find plenty of action in the old home town.

Thirteen Men By William J. Makin 34
A stirring adventure of the Red Wolf of Arabia.

Black Beauties By Arthur K. Akers 47
A stove-colored detective risks life and limb to judge a beauty-contest.

The Legion Settles a Claim By Stephen Cumberland 56
Not only in North Africa but in Indo-China the Foreign Legion fights deadly battles.

Murder on the Island By Robert R. Mill 94
The author of "Hands" gives us a story of detective-work by the State Police.

The Transatlantic Air Mail By Clarence Herbert New 102
A specially attractive story of the famous Free Lances in Diplomacy.

The Guns of Rebellion By Warren Hastings Miller 113
Wherein a plantation manager has to nip a young war in the bud.

Don't Miss This Novel

Red Terror By S. Andrew Wood 68
Two Americans in a death-struggle against the dread secret police of Soviet Russia.

A Novelette of the Old West

Lone Hand By Frederick R. Bechdolt 124
The author of "Youth Rides Victorious" at his best.

Prize Stories of Real Experience

The Typhoon By General Thomas Cruse 150
In charge of a mule-cargo when the barometer dropped to a record low.

A Gladiator Unafraid By Morley Donald Cameron 152
An eyewitness' account of a strange jungle battle.

Within the Enemy Lines By Mark Turrell Pattie 155
These indomitable soldier-boys deftly turned rank failure into success.

Earthquakes to Order By Thomas M. Nelson 157
An oil-prospector wields a terrific weapon against an attacking herd of wild cattle.

"Go Ahead, Pete!" By Dr. Peter Browning 159
Here a young medical student has to take a long chance to save a friend's life.

Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events.

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Why don't you write?

A specially engaging story of the race-track by the gifted writer who gave us "Christmas Gif'," and "Dead Man's Hand"—also "The Sportsman's Scrapbook."

The Son of

By EWING

Illustrated by

IT was Uncle Milo Brent who gave the Weaver his pseudonym. "Look at that ridin' fool!" he once shouted during a six-furlong race. "They jes' nachally can't pocket 'im! Lawdy, Lawdy, look at 'im weavin' in an' out! Come on-n-n, you weaver!" And the name stuck.

Those had been happy days; but the Weaver wasn't happy now. He hadn't ridden for three years. When you find yourself, all of a sudden, blinking at the startling fact that you're in your late twenties, and realize that a stubbornly increasing weight is about to claim you for its own, it's time to sort of look around. For a while, the Weaver had fought back at this enemy of just about all jockeys. In a rubber jacket and plenty of sweaters, he had done his roadwork day after day; even Turkish baths came to know him. But at last he surrendered.

Too heavy to ride on the flat and not caring for the jumps, he had decided to start a stable of his own and make a fortune. He started the stable, all right, but he didn't make the fortune. Instead, he went broke—or right near it.

And now, on this particular day, he wasn't happy. He certainly wasn't that. His seamed and freckled face was sober; he jerked his head as though to fling off an unpleasant thing. Craning his neck, he gazed toward Stable 12. Peggy was still there, the five-feet-three of her erect, trimly shod little feet wide apart, and fists on narrow supple hips as she studied four or five thoroughbreds being slowly led around and around under the cooling-shed.

The Weaver has a way of musing in a language all his own. "How come she didn't pick somebody else for her dad? Ol' Cap'n Wallace!" Actually, he lacked a couple of decades of being old. "Jus' nachally *too* proud, walkin' 'long wid his head throwed back like a niggah huntin' for a bee-tree. I certainly got to light a shuck an' *do* sumpin', *get* somewhere, 'fore I goes askin' him *that* kind o' question. Yes, suh! Go up to ol' Cap'n Wallace and say, 'Cap'n, Peggy and I want to—' "

No sir, he couldn't do that. Not yet. He was pretty sure how Peggy felt about it all, but he was *mighty* sure how Cap'n Wallace would feel. Seemed like the Cap'n liked him well enough; but he certainly wasn't letting his little girl marry just anybody. "And who're *you?*" the Weaver demanded of himself. "The tracks are all cluttered up with just your kind—ex-race-riders too heavy to ride an' small-time owners that've gone broke." He grinned. "The only good thing I can say 'bout you, sonny, is you haven't turned tout."

No, the Weaver wasn't happy. Cap'n Wallace was shipping to Lexington; and Peggy'd be gone; and likely as not, some fellow up in Kentucky—

At a pace ranging from a running-walk to buck-jumpin', he weaved in and

Stardust

That imperious heritage in his very blood whispered he must stay ahead of this black challenger at his side.

WALKER

Frank Spradling

out of clumps of live-oaks, stables and cooling-sheds until he emerged into the open down by Stable 21. His small booted feet moved slower; in rhythm with his step, his head swayed from side to side. Removing his cap, his sunburned straw-colored hair was yielded to the whim of the breeze. In an undertone, he blithely sang:

"The public sloughs its coin away;
The owners take a fall-l-l;
Jocks an' bookies all go broke,
An' the feed-man gets it all-l-l!"

"Hi, Weaver!" called a voice.

He halted before Stable 25. Sandy Murdock and his partner Slim Yates—dubious owners of a small string of dubious thoroughbreds—lolled in the pleasant warmth of an afternoon sun.

"Set down." Sandy proffered an upturned bucket. "We just been talkin' 'bout you."

Knowing these two, the Weaver smelled a rat.

"How-come?" he asked.

"You aint doin' right by yourself. Knowin' the racket like you do, you ought to have some hosses of your own."

"Mebbe so," mildly agreed the Weaver.

Sandy spat. "If you aint got the jack to start out with a string, you ought 'o have at least one piece o' hoss-flesh, if it aint nothin' but a badge-hoss. —Aint that right, Slim?"

"Sure's you livin'," agreed the long and melancholy Yates.

"Mebbe so," admitted the Weaver, his freckled face expressionless.

Sandy rose, stretching. The conversation wasn't progressing just as he would have it. "Now, me an' Slim got a real bargain for you. We wouldn't *think* o' partin' with 'im, 'cept we just nachally been carryin' too many. He's a real comer, and in your hands'll cop plenty. —Aint that right, Slim?"

"Sure's you livin'," Slim lugubriously confirmed.

Sandy swallowed. "If there ever was a colt with class, it's him."

The Weaver, his mild eyes unblinking, uninterestedly observed a rangy gray receiving a belated workout on the track before them; his glance drifted on toward the deserted grandstand across the green infield. "And just what is this blessin' in disguise you're tryin' to wish off on me?"

"A two-year-old colt by Stardust out o' Mary Maud, she by—"

THE Weaver started, but quickly controlling himself, feigned indifference. "Never mind the pedigree."

"He'll make a *hoss!*"

"Mebbe so. Who bred 'im?"

"Wallace," stated Sandy.

It wasn't easy, but the Weaver maintained a stolid countenance. "You mean —Cap'n Wallace?"

"Sure! Knowin' the game like you do, you can start a string with him an' mop up. Aint that right, Slim?"

"Sure's you livin'," sadly corroborated the other member of the firm.

An inspiration had come to the Weaver. "Mebbe so," he acquiesced, lighting a cigarette.

"He can run like a rabbit," boasted Sandy.

"An' prob'ly aint much bigger," softly countered the Weaver.

"He's bred in the purple," Sandy urged.

"But'll keep you in the red," the Weaver prophesied.

"He's a comer."

"Mebbe so, but a long ways off. Howcome you so hell-bent on partin' with this world-beater?"

"Well, it's this way: Me'n Slim are shippin' to Bowie, an' we got just one over a carload."

"I see." The Weaver studied a low-scudding cloud. "So you're shippin' all the dogs, an' sellin' the class of the stable. That sounds like you an' Slim."

"Sure 'nough, Weaver. He's a comer. We just nachally got too many two-year-olds."

"Mebbe so. An' I 'spect I'd have one too many if I had him. Let's take a look at this comin' Man o' War."

"Right!" The usually phlegmatic Slim moved with unwonted celerity.

AN undersized chestnut colt, with a star in his forehead and two white stockings on his forelegs, was led from his stall.

"Unh! Whyn't you just carry him to Bowie in your pocket?" There lurked in the Weaver's averted eyes an expression not in keeping with the disparagement of his words as he studied the strangely large flat bone of the colt and the general appearance of immaturity. "So Cap'n Wallace bred him?"

"Sure did. By Stardust out of Mary Maud. Me an' Slim bought him as a yearling at Wallace's sale; and take it from me, we paid plenty. I *mean* plenty. You can have him for two hundred. He's a gift at the price."

"Mebbe so." The Weaver heard but vaguely. Other thoughts were racing through his mind: So this undersized chestnut colt was by Stardust. Well, well! Funny world! A droll fate or Lady Luck certainly had guided his steps toward Stable 25. Couldn't ignore a thing like that. He turned to Sandy; with annoying deliberation, he thrust his hand into a trousers pocket, withdrew it and counted off five twenty-dollar bills. Slim and Sandy avidly looked on. Thoughtfully the Weaver fingered the money. "Here's a big hundred dollars—I mean a *big* hundred."

Sandy reddened. "Say, don't try to kid me, Weaver."

A beatific expression overspread the Weaver's face. "Make me up a bill-o'-sale, an' all this money's yours. Just think o' the oats you can buy with it. An' listen: make that bill-o'-sale in the name of Miss Margaret Wallace."

"You mean—" Sandy sputtered. "You a stick-up man?"

"Mebbe so."

Rising, Sandy pointed a rigid finger. "You're on! He's yours! Gimme the hundred. And son, I'm namin' him for you: I'm callin' him Mebbe So."

The Weaver grinned. "Fair enough."

No job, too heavy to ride, mighty little money left, and one runt thoroughbred! Such, the Weaver reflected, was his status. But— Plenty o' days yet to come, and the world still wide.

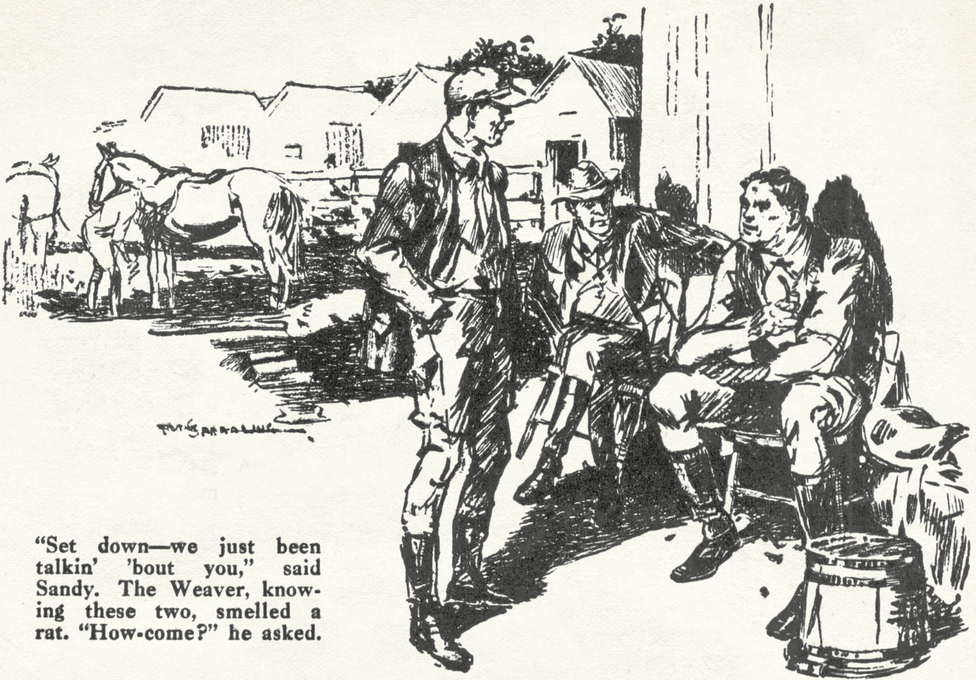
By Stardust! He might not have much of a colt, but he was by Stardust—Cap'n Wallace's favorite stallion Stardust. A few years before, the Cap'n had had the second-best horse in the country in that same Stardust. Long Tom Burney's Black Orchid had been the best that year, and had beaten Stardust the three times they met—in the Preakness, the Derby and a stake at Saratoga. The Cap'n had never got over it. To win a Derby and to beat Tom Burney were the great aims of his life.

And now he, the Weaver, had a son of Stardust. Funny world!

Turning, he cupped Mebbe So's nose in the palm of his hand. "Know what I'm goin' to do with you, little one? I'm goin' to feed you. I mean *feed* you! If I know my oats and bandages, you're goin' to grow to that bone you got. It aint goin' to be just finicky feed, either." Playfully, Mebbe So shook his head. "You'll get your oats an' your hay, all right, an' mebbe some mash now an' then; but you'll get plain old corn, too, an' I 'spect some pea-vine hay, an' the Lord knows what else. Boy, you're goin' to *grow!* Come on! Let's me an' you be steppin'."

DAWN was spreading a pale gold mantle over the marshes. To the right and the left stretched mist-shrouded Lake Pontchartrain, at the moment placid as a sea of glass. His flanks dripping from the early morning fog, Mebbe So delightedly strode on.

Sniffing the soft moist air, the Weaver



"Set down—we just been talkin' 'bout you," said Sandy. The Weaver, knowing these two, smelled a rat. "How-come?" he asked.

flung back his head; his lips parted in song.

Off toward the east the exhaust of a fishing-boat was vaguely heard; a pelican struck the water in quest of its breakfast, missed and disappeared into the fog. . . . Mebbe So's feet beat rhythmically upon the concrete bridge leading north. Now and again, he playfully shook his white-starred head. Already he was coming to like this droll being upon his back, who talked interminably and soothingly to him, who sang when the spirit moved him,—which was often,—and who fed him as he never before had been fed.

Seated upon a discarded five-pound racing saddle, and with one short leg thrown across Mebbe So's withers, the Weaver, turning, kissed his stumpy fingers. "'Bye, Nawleens!" he blithely called. "I'll be seein' you, 'long 'bout Turkey Day next year!"

Whipping his tail, Mebbe So made as though to break into a trot. The Weaver pulled him up. "Save it, baby, save it! You got a heap o' miles to go, an' only four legs left to do it on. Save yo' shoes, boy, save yo' shoes!"

A vegetable truck, city-bound, emerged from the mist ahead. "Hold him, pahdnah!" shouted the driver.

"Doin' my best!" the Weaver called.

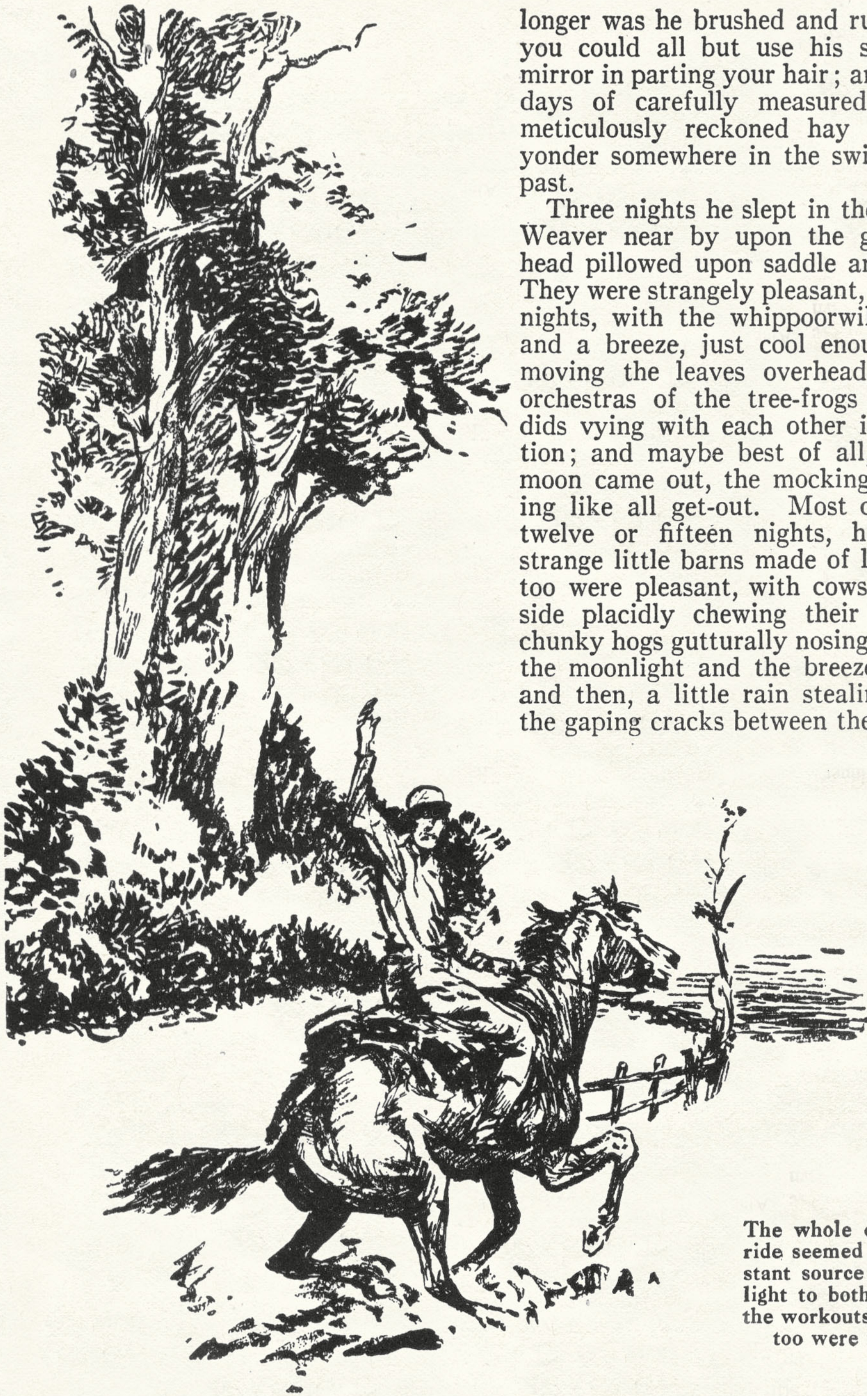
Yes sir, pretty good old world after all! Food to eat; no mad race-track scrambles over races and horses and form-sheets; Peggy waiting for him thirty or forty or fifty days ahead up yonder —she certainly had been snappy that last day, but she *did* kiss him at the last! No stuffy hotel rooms or darting taxies or milling throngs; and under him, a nice little hoss for a partner—a plumb sociable little hoss that maybe might in the end work things out for him. . . . Yes, a pretty good old world!

They passed the second drawbridge. Rolling in unison with Mebbe So's stride, the Weaver somehow found himself singing again. He didn't exactly mean to; it just sort of bubbled out:

"It's a long road waitin' for you an' me.
It's a long road waitin' for you an' me,
But it aint as long as it used to be.
Oh-h-h, Lawd!"

And the road wasn't as long as it used to be—by a matter of twelve or fifteen miles; but it was plenty long enough. New Orleans to Lexington overland. *Plenty* long!

THAT was a ride unique, I think, in annals of the thoroughbred world. But for that matter, so were the Weaver and Mebbe So unique. And the whole of it seemed a constant source of delight to both. Whether the sun shone blandly, or a mellow saffron moon guided their steps, whether a gentle and fragrant breeze or a surly wind with stinging rain confronted them, they went along blithely their way.



The whole of that ride seemed a constant source of delight to both. And the workouts—they too were fun.

Mebbe So seemed to feel about as would a young boy suddenly spared ear-washings and Sunday-school attendance. No longer was he stabled in a neat and snug stall; no more was he saddled and given a brief workout on an unchanging track, by a mite of a stableboy who didn't understand things at all, and who rarely spoke to him, and never sang; no longer was he brushed and rubbed until you could all but use his sides for a mirror in parting your hair; and the drab days of carefully measured oats and meticulously reckoned hay were back yonder somewhere in the swiftly fading past.

Three nights he slept in the open, the Weaver near by upon the ground, his head pillowed upon saddle and blanket. They were strangely pleasant, those three nights, with the whippoorwills calling; and a breeze, just cool enough, gently moving the leaves overhead; and the orchestras of the tree-frogs and katydids vying with each other in syncopation; and maybe best of all, when the moon came out, the mockingbirds singing like all get-out. Most of the first twelve or fifteen nights, he slept in strange little barns made of logs. They too were pleasant, with cows right outside placidly chewing their cuds, and chunky hogs gutturally nosing about, and the moonlight and the breeze and, now and then, a little rain stealing through the gaping cracks between the logs. The last thing each night, the Weaver came to see that all was well with him, and to cup his hand about his nose.

Naturally, the days were best of all, for then he and the Weaver were together all the while. In an easy now-and-then sort of way the Weaver talked to him mile after mile, or hummed or crooned or sang. Once in a while the Weaver

dozed, to waken with a start and a chuckle. And the variety, the constant change! At first, miles of cane-fields, level as a sea; and then pine forests, with trees straight as telegraph poles; shadowed and ominous swamps; lakes and bayous and rivers; clay hills red as some racing colors; broad acres of cotton in which uncounted negroes laughed and bantered and sang.

And the workouts—they too were fun. None of that careful saddling and running of a measured distance on an uninteresting track. Not a bit of it! They'd come to a level stretch of road, and the Weaver would gather up the reins.

"Let's go-o, baby!" he'd say. "Put 'em down an' take 'em up!" And away they would go. The Weaver seemed especially interested in running him over heavy, sandy roads. Uphill or down or flat, they took all such at a brisk gallop.

In the hills near Vicksburg, they stayed four days, for the Weaver chanced upon a farmer who thought he could play dominoes,—the Weaver's favorite pastime,—and who had a rolling pasture ankle-deep in succulent grass.

FINALLY one mid-afternoon, the Weaver and Mebbe So approached Roswell, a thoroughbred horse-farm a few miles out from Lexington. Passing through the gateway and approaching the paddocks, the Weaver moistened his lips in an effort to hold back a grin.

Leaning over the outer rail of the farm's training-track, Tod Dugan, Roswell's trainer, issued orders to a penitent exercise-boy. "When I tell ye to work a horse in fifty, I don't mean—" He caught sight of the Weaver, bronzed as a Cajun, and of Mebbe So, rough-coated as though brush had never touched him. Unsmiling—Dugan rarely smiles—he stared; blinking rapidly, he shook his head. "Yep." To himself: "I *do* see it. Haven't took a drink in months, an' yet I'm seein' things." Advancing, he gingerly touched the Weaver with stiffened forefinger. "Can ye—talk?"

The Weaver extended a broad short hand.

"How you been, Tod?"

Dugan, granting himself a faint smile, shook the other's hand.

"Boy, where under high heaven have ye been?"

The Weaver got to the ground. "Oh, just been takin' a little ride."

"'Ride?' Where from?"

"Down the road a piece—New Orleans."

Dugan sucked in his lips. "Ye rode *that* brush-heap"—pointing toward Mebbe So—"plumb from New Orleans?"

The Weaver nodded. "How 'bout puttin' up with you a few months?"

Dugan motioned with an eloquent hand. "Ye can stay from now on, but not *that!*"—indicating Mebbe So. "I got all the plow-horses I need, and I aint dealin' in hides."

THE Weaver and Mebbe So stayed. Years before, he and Dugan had together passed through those trials—and follies—of which lasting friendships are molded.

The first night, they talked on into the small hours, Dugan's words interspersed with frequent head-shakings and "can't see it's," but in the end, understanding and agreement prevailed between them. . . .

Mebbe So had grown—and still was growing. His coat, roughened by neglect and all manner of weather, was intractable as a lad's cowlick; but hour after hour the Weaver persevered with brush and cloth. Of course the days weren't as nice as the blithe and care-free ones on the road, but Mebbe So liked them well enough, for the Weaver ever sang or chatted as he worked. It would seem that Mebbe So especially liked his song of the ill-fated little jockey *Danny Green*, who, it appears, passed from this vale of tears in the very flower of his youth. Seemingly, the verses were innumerable, but a few told the sad and tearful tale. Brushing Mebbe So, the Weaver's hand followed the rhythm of his doleful song:

"Now, Danny Green, of whom I sing,
Was ridin' Silver Spray.
The odds was easy nine-to-five
That he'd win goin' away.
But Number 'Leven, Bower's Gnat,
In tryin' to come around,
Bumped into Danny and his mount,
An' both went to the ground.

Now, Silver Spray at last got up
An' trotted from the scene;
But still upon the ground there lay
Poor little Danny Green.
The crowd was cashin' of their bets
On Bower's Number 'Leven;
But broken little Danny Green
Was cashin' his in heav-en."

Usually Mebbe So was not the only appreciative auditor. Small black stable-boys paused and, eyes wide, listened

raptly. Several invariably blinked and swallowed at the Weaver's tremulous "heav-en."

Frequently, after a workout or rubdown, the Weaver slowly circled Mebbe So, critically examining him. "Honey, you sure have grown. *Now* you're a hoss. If we only can—" The rest of this he never confided to Mebbe So; but it didn't much matter, for the colt, roughly nosing the Weaver, was content.

Many days he was turned loose in a small bluegrass pasture. This too was fun. High-flung head turning from side to side and tail arched behind him, he challengingly trotted along the path at the base of the wooden fence; other times, playfully shaking his low-held head, he bucked and snorted about the pasture. It was particularly pleasant to roll on the soft grass and to hear the small darkies call: "Dat's a *good* hoss! Look at 'im turn plumb ovah!"

And it was nice to pause once in a while, just to look and listen. Apt as not, away up yonder a half-dozen buzzards would be lazily floating about the sky; maybe, over by the gooseberry bushes a catbird was singing and pretending he was a sure 'nough mockingbird. Yes, it was a comfortable-like, a gladsome world.

ONE October morning the Weaver and Dugan stood before Mebbe So's box-stall.

"Ye're cra-zy!" pronounced Dugan, waving his hand from the wrist.

"Mebbe so," acknowledged the Weaver; "but let's try it out."

"And how'll ye do that?"

"What's the best two-year-old you have?" the Weaver asked.

"Well-l, let's see: I reckon as how 'tis a toss-up 'tween Gray Lad and the Lark. No-o,"—thoughtfully,—"the Lark's a few pounds better, I'd say."

"All right. Tomorrow at two we'll try Mebbe So an' Lark on the track."

At two they did try them on the track; and when that trial was done, Dugan's under lip overlapped his upper one, and his canny near-green eyes rested upon the Weaver's a long moment. Then, slowly motioning with a forefinger: "Come with me."

Thirty minutes later, every hand on the place was in Dugan's office. Fists on hips, he confronted them; face grim, he leaned toward them. "Ye like yer work here?" None hazarded the obvious answer. "Right. Ye want to keep yer jobs?" Silence. "Then listen to me: There's a chestnut colt on this place called Mebbe So." He paused. "Ye know nawthin' about him. Understand? Forget he's livin'. If ever ye're asked a question about him, he looks like a dawg to ye. I'm tellin' ye!" Belligerently he strode from the room.

NIGHT in Dugan's sleeping-quarters. The trainer of Roswell, his feet upon a table, immersed in his daily paper. The Weaver, across the room from him, fidgeting. He moistened his lips; twice, gripping the arms of his chair, he made as though to speak. Finally, after a deep breath: "Wonder if everything's all right down at the stables."

Dugan studied him a moment over his glasses and resumed his reading.

The Weaver swallowed. "Thought I —heard somethin'—down there."

Petulantly Dugan shook his head, as though to fling off the Weaver's words.

Suddenly the Weaver bent over, listening. "What's that?" he demanded sibilantly.

"Damn!" Dugan flung his paper to the floor. Striding across the room, he glowered down upon the Weaver. "Ye'd give a man the heebie-jeebies. Out with it! What do ye want?"

"I was thinkin' I'd like to use the—phone."

"So, that's it? A skirt, eh? Well, why in—" Muttering, he strode from the room.

Shifting from one small booted foot to the other, the Weaver waited as long-distance effaced space. Finally there reached him a crisp "Hello!"

The Weaver paused to swallow. "He-hello! That you, Peggy?"

"Yes. Who—why, *Weaver!* Where *are* you?"—a little breathlessly.

By now the Weaver could grin. "Out at Roswell. I certainly do—"

"How long have you been there?"

She *would* ask that! "Oh, just a few months. I sure do—"

"A few months? And you haven't—"

"Now, listen, Peg, just listen a minute. I been dyin' to see you, but—"

"It would seem so."

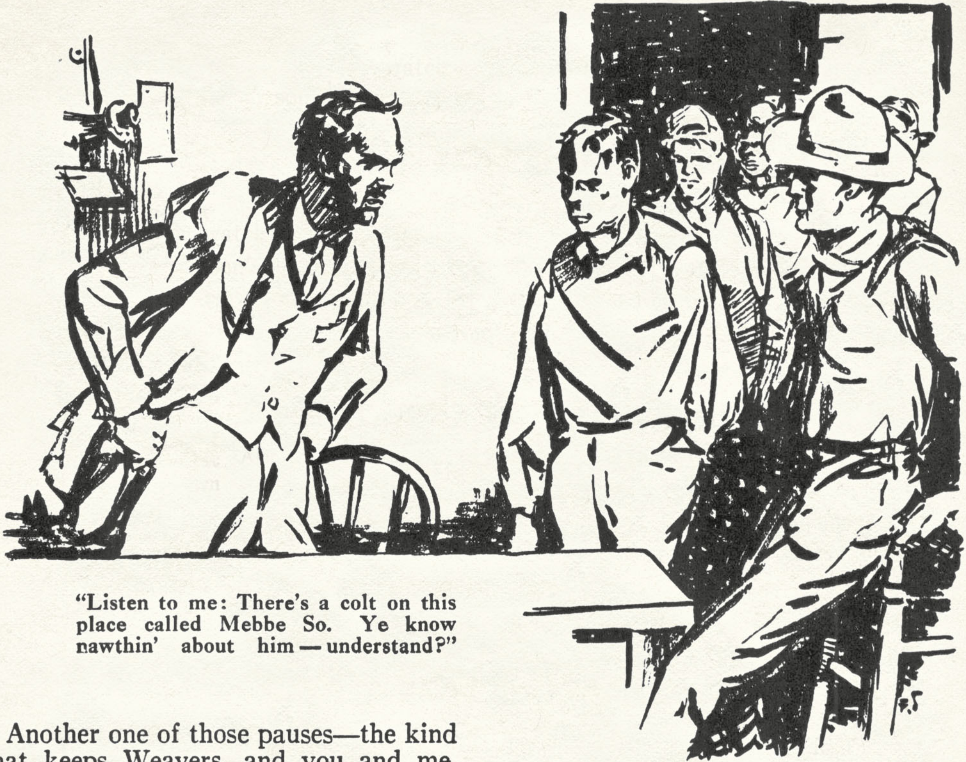
"Sure 'nough, Peggy." Then, in a lower tone: "Got somethin' for you."

A discomfiting pause. "What is it?"

"Can't tell you. Got to show you."

"When are you going to bring it over?"

He chuckled. "It's somethin' I can't tote. How 'bout drivin' over to Roswell tomorrow? Got a heap to tell you, an' we got a heap to plan."



"Listen to me: There's a colt on this place called Mebbe So. Ye know nawthin' about him — understand?"

Another one of those pauses—the kind that keeps Weavers, and you and me, in line. Then: "You mean you want *me* to drive over *there?*"

"Listen, Peg: It's the only way. Honest! Come on over tomorrow. Will you? *Please!* Got somethin' here I just nachally *got* to show you."

Her tone had softened by the time she hung up.

THE next day a long and low roadster approached Roswell; and soon after that roadster arrived at that particular breeding establishment, Peggy and the Weaver stood before Mebbe So's stall.

"How's your dad?" the Weaver asked.

A small gloved hand touched his arm. "He's downright sick."

"How come?"

"He's got four eligibles for the Derby; but Weaver, they simply haven't the class; it's just not his year. Have you looked over the list of eligibles and the prices in the future books?"

"*Uh-huh.* A little."

"Well, it looks like Long Tom Burney's Orchid Boy is the class of the lot. He's by Black Orchid, you know, and seems to be a real colt. The future books've made him favorite at six to one. It's about to kill Dad. You know how he loves Tom Burney."

The Weaver smiled. "Turn around. Shut your eyes." He led Mebbe So into the open. "All right." The Weaver grinned. "How you like your colt?"

"Mine?"

"Uh-huh."

Peggy's glance swept Mebbe So from head to heel. She forced a smile. "Looks a bit—well, rough, doesn't he?"

"Mebbe so; but honey, hosses don't win races with their hair."

"But Weaver, dear! Why mine?"

His seamed face came close to hers. "'Cause I bought 'im—for you!" Returning Mebbe So to his stall, he led Peggy to a stone bench under his favorite walnut tree. There he unfolded the story.

At the end of it, her face beamed. "So, you really think—"

"A chance, honey, just a chance. You can't never tell, you know, 'bout women an' elections an' soft-boiled eggs an' hosses."

"Of course, you'll ride him."

The Weaver stared. "Who? *Me?* No ma'am! Not *me.*"

The five feet three of her tautened. "You are the only one who knows the colt, and certainly can get more out of him than anyone else. Just why won't you ride him?"

"Aw, Peggy, have a heart! *You* know why I can't ride him. They carry a hun-

dred and twenty-six in the Derby, as you mighty well know. I'm weighin' right at a hundred and thirty-five right now. With tack an' all, that means takin' off around fifteen pounds."

A moment Peggy's lips were drawn in. "We'll take them off," she crisply decreed.

The Weaver winced. "Now, listen, Peg! You don't know what it means to work off—"

Small chin tilted, she regarded him disdainfully. "We'll take them off. To play safe, we'll take off seventeen."

They took them off. Day after day, Peggy's roadster drove through the gateway of Roswell; and day after day, wearing a rubber jacket and, as he expressed it, "a gross o' sweaters," a despairing Weaver jogged around Roswell's track. Now and again he lagged; but not for long, for at such misguided moments a trim little martinet, seated upon the outer rail of the track, shouted: "Make it snappy, you! Step on it!" At which he stepped on it, and made it snappy—and at which numerous small and black stableboys snickered, and Trainer Dugan granted himself a broad grin. Day after day, as the Weaver stood upon the scales, Peggy watched closely as might a frugal housewife purchasing a roast. Groans, sighs, prayers—naught availed the Weaver. Day by day she was on hand; pound by pound fell away. The first day, when about to leave, she patted the Weaver's arm encouragingly. "A kiss a pound," she whispered. Starting her car, she turned. "You'll do it?"

The Weaver swallowed. "Mebbe so!"—disconsolately.

ONE hundred fourteen colts and fillies had been nominated for the Derby, the process of nominating costing little. Between twelve and twenty would start—a process costing plenty. Injuries, financial reverses, colts going off form, plain common-sense — realizing their nominees have no chance—thus reduce the number each year. Among the one hundred and fourteen were the four colts of Cap'n Wallace; but they would not be among the twelve to twenty destined to face the barrier. They simply lacked that edge, that added quality, which would give them a chance in the old classic. Of course, it was a blow to him, for he had pinned his hopes to one of these sons of Stardust. To breed a Derby winner had been the ambition of his life—a hope that would endure while life endured. And to beat Long Tom Burney? That was a mania.

Three weeks before the barrier would be sprung at Churchill Downs and send a field of eager thoroughbreds on to glory or defeat a short—or infinitely long—mile and a quarter away, Peggy offered the Cap'n an evening paper. "Here's a list of the probable starters."

His head jerked. "I don't care anything about 'probable starters.' Doubt if I even watch the race."

Crossing the room, she sat on the arm of his chair. "Oh, don't take it so hard! Here! Look 'em over, anyway. I may want to make a bet."

IMPATIENTLY he scanned the list of eighteen alphabetically arranged. Artless. . . . Badger: that'd be one of Bailey's, all of whose horses bear names beginning with the letter B. . . . Diamond Cutter. . . . Fox Brush: nice colt, lot of promise as a two-year-old; the East was backing him heavily. . . . Orchid Boy: the Cap'n grimaced. . . . Lilac Bush: not a chance; no filly since Regret had won a Derby, and maybe no other ever would. Wrong time of year for mares and fillies, whose thoughts at that season were pretty apt to be on domestic matters. . . . Mebbe So: never heard of him. . . . Rollicking: lacked the heart; crowd him, and he'd switch his tail. . . . Thistle Bloom. . . . West Wind: nice, game colt. Give him a heavy track—

"Which one looks good?" demanded Peggy.

"None!" he barked.

She turned away, lest he see her smile. "Well,"—musingly,—"I may want to make a little bet. How about—Orchid Boy?"

He wheeled upon her. "If I thought for a minute that you'd—"

"Never mind, old dear." She waved a placating hand. "I'm as anxious to beat him as you are—more so!"—significantly. "But you *are* going to the race?"

"I don't know!"—testily.

"Of course you're going. You haven't missed a Derby in over thirty years. Come on!" She tweaked his nose. "Be a sport."

He went to the Derby. For nineteen years he had been doing what this young person ordered. Too late now to break over the traces. . . .

Derby day. From his box, with Peggy at his side, he surveyed the colorful, milling throng. The first and second races he watched with indifference.

Shortly before the third, he stiffened. Long Tom Burney was passing, a hint of a swagger in his stride.

At the end of that third race, Peggy rose. "Come on."

"Where you going?"

"I want to watch the Derby from the infield."

"Why, you can't see half of it from down there."

She bent over him. "You can see all you want of Orchid Boy from down there, can't you?"

He went with her to the infield. A member of the Jockey Club, there was no difficulty reaching that guarded area. They leaned against the inner rail near the judges' stand, and waited through the fourth race and the following intermission.

Suddenly, a bugle sounded "Boots and Saddles." A hush came over the crowd. Necks craned. A piebald pony with scarlet-coated rider emerged from the paddock. Behind him, walking in forced decorum, came fourteen bold-eyed thoroughbreds. Crossing the track, they passed the stands in bright-colored review: Badger, walking soberly; Diamond Cutter angrily whipping his tail: Artless, her sides wet with sweat, stepping mincingly; Mebbe So now and again playfully shaking his head and eager to break into a gallop and leave that tedious, orderly line. But the voice of the Weaver soothed him:

"Now, Silver Spray at last got up,
And trotted from the scene;
But still upon—"

"Say! You gone nerts?" called the boy on Fox Brush.

"Mebbe so."

"—the ground there lay
Poor little Danny Green.
The crowd was cashin'—"

He came abreast of a certain tall and grim-faced man and of a certain small and, at the moment, pale-faced girl.

"WHEN did the Weaver start riding again?" demanded Cap'n Wallace.

"Only recently, I think!"—a little breathlessly.

"What's that he's on?"

Peggy's heart by now was racing. "A colt called—Mebbe So."

"He's a rough-looking customer."

"Yes!"—trying to speak evenly. She and the Weaver had four hundred dollars bet in the future books at thirty to one on that "rough-looking customer"—and a big slice of their future on that same little thoroughbred who seemed to regard this race as but one more droll adventure.

On past the stands they paraded. The piebald pony fell into a trot. The even line was broken, some trotting, some loping under their now-crouching jockeys. At last, far up the broad track they turned and slowly came back to the barrier of tape now stretched taut. One reared, plunging through the barrier. Back he was brought, and the tape again was adjusted. Others wheeled, crowded, kicked out viciously. The whips of crouching, darting, waving assistant starters cracked.

MEBBE SO didn't like this medley of shouts and curses, this chaos of milling, plunging, backing, wheeling horses; but the while, the loved voice of the Weaver soothingly if dolefully crooned an air of the unfortunate Danny Green. So, but for an impatient—or was it amused?—shake of his head now and again, Mebbe So stood still, but quiveringly alert.

Eighteen minutes they were there, when—*"Zing!"* The barrier flashed; the hoofs of fourteen thoroughbreds tore into the ground. Rolling, bouncing up the track to meet them came a muffled roar —*"They're off!"*

Fox Brush was off in front. Their noses on a line with his rump, came the Badger, Diamond Cutter, Mebbe So, Orchid Boy and Artless, with the rest close behind.

"Good start," said Cap'n Wallace.

"Mebbe So! *Mebbe So!*" whispered Peggy.

He glanced down at her. "Sure, it was a good start," he emphasized.

She didn't hear. *"Mebbe So,"* she breathed, her face tense and her small fists clenched.

They clattered past the stands. "Come on-n, you Artless!" "Atta-boy, Badger!" "Orchid, Orchid, Orchid! "Let's go-o, you Lilac!" The voice of the throng, falling in behind them, seemed pushing them on.

They made the first turn, the filly Artless, running lightly as a gazelle, now in the lead. On they raced toward the six-furlong pole. Now they were straightened out. Artless, brilliantly flashing a moment, had fallen back. So close it would seem a blanket might cover both, Fox Brush, the hope of the East, and Badger, had gained the lead. A short length behind tore Diamond Cutter and

Orchid Boy and a star-faced, white-stockinged little chestnut whimsically named Mebbe So.

"He's quit!" A score—or a hundred, or a thousand—voices shouted it. He had. The Badger was through; he'd finish nowhere.

"Mebbe So! Oh, please, *please,* Mebbe So!" prayed Peggy, futilely trying to identify them far over yonder across the infield.

"He's movin' up," calmly stated a stranger at her elbow, peering through his binoculars and oblivious of all about him.

She wheeled upon him. *"Who?"*

"Orchid Boy."

"Oh! Who's leading?"—tensely.

"Fox Brush," said he, slowly moving his glasses in following the hurtling forms.

She touched his arm. "Who's second?"

"Second? Just a—Diamond Cutter."

Around the far turn and into the straight they tore. She could see only a vague flashing of colors and indistinct flying forms. She was afraid to ask more.

"Well, *he's* died," stated the stranger.

"Who?"—affrightedly.

"Fox Brush. Folded up just like a yellow— Well, I'll be—" He paused, to make sure.

The horses were turning into the stretch.

Face white, heart racing, she looked up at him.

"What is it?" she gasped.

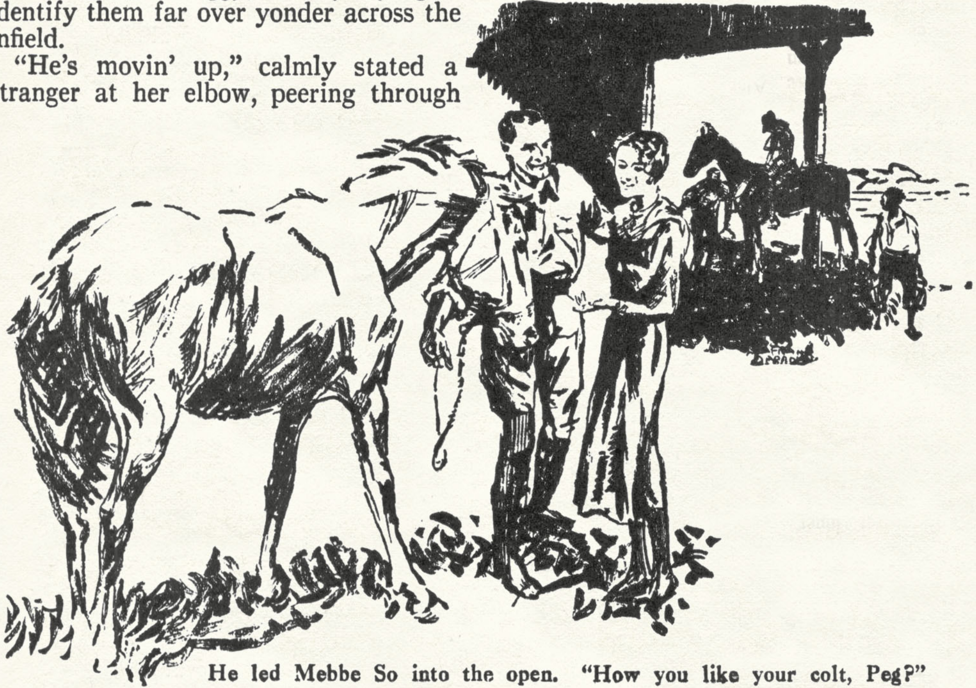
"Who the hell— 'Scuse me, lady. I didn't realize—"

Impatiently she shook her head. "Oh, never mind that! What is it?"

"Who's Number Five, for the love o' Pete?"

"Mebbe So," she gasped. "Why?"

"'Why?' 'Cause it looks—" Maddeningly, he paused further to study this new development through his glasses.



He led Mebbe So into the open. "How you like your colt, Peg?"

"Oh, *tell* me! Is he down?"

"'Down'?"—never taking his binoculars from his eyes. "I'll say not! He's up—plenty. He and the Orchid are fighting it out for the lead. Some—hoss—race!"

She leaned over the rail, trying to see; but her five-feet-three was a hopeless handicap, for so many larger ones along that rail were trying to see. Her eyes closed; pink nails bit into small palms; ridiculous little fists slowly rose and fell, rose and fell. "Mebbe So! *Mebbe So! Please, Mebbe So!"* It was a whispered command, a murmured supplication.

Far down the track, a rough-coated little chestnut thoroughbred for once in his three years of existence was finding this thing called Life something more than the droll affair he had regarded it. This was something new, this struggle in which he found himself. Nothing like the blithe spurts and breezes down South by the cane and cotton-fields and

through the pine-woods; nothing like the workouts and the schooling at the barrier, and the brushes with other colts back yonder at Roswell. His heritage, that vague, imperious something in the very blood of him, whispered he must stay ahead—ever ahead—of this gleaming black colt fighting at his side—must stay ahead, even though they raced on to the Valhalla of the gallant. And a vague something in the voice of the usually blithe but now strangely serious Weaver told him he must stay ahead—ever ahead—of this challenger at his side.

The Weaver's words were a strange hodgepodge, but their meaning was clear. "Let's go-o, baby! Put 'em down an' take 'em up! It's a long road, but it aint as long as it used to be! Now, Silver Spray at last got up and— A little more, baby! Just a lee-tle more! *He* can't beat you!"

"Come on-n, you Orchid!" "Weaver, Weaver! Bring 'im home, boy!" "Now you movin', Orchid!" The voice of the frantic throng prayed, taunted, begged, reviled.

A "bat" of whalebone fell searingly on Black Orchid's flanks. As though to race away from that burning lash, the stout heart of him found a little more speed for his flashing legs. Slowly, surely, he moved ahead of Mebbe So—a nose, a head.

"'The odds was easy nine-to-five—'" Crouching along Mebbe So's neck, the Weaver crooned in his ear; and he too found, there in the heart of him, that needed atom of added speed. Only a nose now. Even. Ahead an inch, then a nose— Again the Weaver was whispering soothingly, encouragingly: "Let's go-o, boy! Let's go-o! Put 'em down an' take 'em up! Let's go *home!*"

They went home. The records have it by half a length. I don't know. Perhaps a head would be fairer.

The crowd, standing, waited to accord the winner that homage all gallant winners merit. Back the horses trotted or galloped toward the judges' stand.

"Come on," ordered Peggy, doing her best to make her heart behave.

"Where to?" demanded the Cap'n.

"Follow me."

Nineteen years of it had taught him. He followed her.

THERE seems no need of recounting in detail how the Cap'n was hurriedly—if a little breathlessly—told the truth; how he and Peggy and the Weaver and Mebbe So—a great horseshoe of flowers about his drolly swaying neck—stood there on the track, as a self-conscious governor delivered a grandiloquent and somewhat tedious speech, the while cameras clicked. Nor can I explain just how the sports-writers got the story, appearing in the evening papers, relating how Cap'n Wallace bred a small chestnut colt by his great Stardust, how the colt was disposed of at his sale of yearlings; how later the Cap'n came upon him as a young two-year-old and found him regarded cheaply by his owners, but—astute horseman that he was—immediately saw the class and promise of the colt; how he commissioned the Weaver to purchase that colt for his daughter; and how, under the Cap'n's sage directions, that colt flourished and grew and ended a Derby winner. No, I cannot explain how the reporters came upon that somewhat fanciful tale. I only know that the Cap'n, reading the tale that evening, grew somewhat crimson about the gills, now and again moistened his lips, and finally rose, smiling. It is true that the Weaver, immediately after the race, was interviewed by a group of sports-writers; but I take it that interview had to do only with his riding of the race.

ON a balcony of a certain hotel, and partly concealed by a cluster of anemic palms, the Weaver and Peggy looked down upon a crowded lobby. Whether either saw the milling throng below them is doubtful, for certain matters of considerably more moment had been, a little breathlessly, discussed by them, and certain glamorous plans had been made.

Blowing somewhat from his effort, the Cap'n climbed the stairs and came up to them, a hint of embarrassment in his manner.

"Nice ride, Weaver," said he.

"Thank you, sir."

He glanced over the Weaver's head. "We'll be getting back home tomorrow. Come out to see us."

"Glad to, Cap'n."

A long moment the Cap'n regarded two clasped hands that the palms didn't quite succeed in hiding.

"I may not be at home when you get there," he finally said; "but"—smiling—"reckon you and Peggy can make out without me a little while?"

The Weaver grinned.

"Mebbe so, sir," he agreed cheerfully.

The Flaming Sword

A not-soon-forgotten story of a far Pacific island: a place of loveliness, and peace—and terror.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

Illustrated by Joseph Franké

ROBERT NIVEN, hard and thin and thirty, watched his fellow-tourists start to pile into the seven cars in which they were covering the island of Bali. He had had plenty of time to look at them already during this world voyage, but somehow he had not really seen them until now.

They had just finished lunch at this rest-house on a Bali mountain-top. After having collectively paid their organized tips, and collectively looked at the view, they were ready to be off.

"I'm not going," Niven said suddenly.

The forty-six companions of his journey cackled. The cars honked. The procession swept away, and silence fell.

Niven brought a chair out from the rest-house, and sat down to smoke and think. Far below him were forests, blue and green as a peacock's breast; rice-fields of aquamarine and silver; the huge sinister cone of the volcano, smoking a little today; misty clouds drifting by.

Bullock carts went by. A Bali man or two passed, leading little cows beautiful as deer. The men were handsome; they wore richly colored sarongs and bright turbans. He had heard that they did no work save the cultivation of the rice-fields; hard enough, but by no means constant. They danced every night, listened ecstatically to the strange complicated music of the *gamelan* gong bands. They had fighting cocks, and bet furiously on the matches. They had horses, rode them, petted them, built shower-baths for them along the road. They smoked, indulged agreeably in the agreeable drug of betel nut; and they and the beautiful girls always seemed to be eating; Niven wondered how they kept their statuesque figures.

As for love, no wonder the men went proudly and held high their handsome heads, knowing themselves so precious to the lovely, innumerable girls. Every man could have a beautiful wife or two; and so amiable were these Bali folk that even the rival wives did not quarrel.

Robert Niven could not help thinking that it was somehow wrong that these people should be so happy. They didn't work enough. They hadn't earned it. Here was he, a successful Ulsterman, taking this world tour not because he was extravagant (Lord forbid!), but because he had become thin and run-down from overwork as manager of the Dalriada Weaving Mills. Here was he almost a third through life, and he didn't expect for another ten years to be as far on as every one of these Bali men was now.

There was something wrong. What?

Two people came out of the rest-house behind him and walked across the gravel. Niven was annoyed. He had wanted the place to himself.

Then he saw the face of the girl, and decided she wouldn't be in the way. She was almost as graceful as a Bali girl. Not quite. No clothed white woman could be. But she had beauty of an unusual and distinguished kind. Bronze-gold hair and blue-green eyes, white satin skin and a red, delicate faun-like mouth. And with all these, something else. She had the almost regal bearing of one used to homage.

Where had he seen her before? The elderly man with her was her father, Niven decided. They walked on; and the young man, baffled by his half-recognition, went in and looked in the register. Under his own bold signature, he found the new ones. Nationality, *British*. Address, *London*. Names, *J. J. Laverty* and *Miss G. Laverty*. A common enough name in the North of Ireland.

Niven did not know what to expect. . . . Then he saw Genevieve standing under the moon—singing, as a bird sings.

"Perhaps they're traveling incognito," he thought. Well, he wouldn't bother them. But one wouldn't be in a hurry to leave this quiet lovely rest-house.

He returned to his chair and his view. Again peace possessed him. Was it possible, Niven mused, to find a way through the invisible wall separating these calm and beautiful and happy people of Bali from the restless, dissatisfied race to which he belonged? He had money enough to give up business now, live almost anywhere in a modest way, with maybe just a little house, sun and flowers and good food, and sport (they shot tigers in Bali), and a horse to ride,

a fine little Timor stallion costing no more than a pound. With—with—why not? They were lovely; and you could, if you wanted, marry one—or two, or more.

There the magic glass of his dream shivered. Since he had seen the girl with the bronze hair and blue-green eyes, he hadn't wanted any one of these Bali sweethearts who walked with golden basins on their heads and carried so beautifully their bare lovely figures, supple as flowers. Perhaps it was the beauty, the golden climate, the magic and mystery of Bali; but he almost thought he was in love—after one glimpse—with this unknown girl.

Then he lifted his eyes, saw her coming back from her walk, and knew immediately who she was. Genevieve Lavelle, the singer!

Lavelle! Here in the farthest East at the height of the musical season! What could have happened? Lavelle, who had taken the musical world by storm with her marvelous voice; a daring, amazing girl who rode wild horses, flew her own plane, continually astonished her public. Not for publicity but for the sheer enjoyment of it.

He remembered now that she had changed her name from *Laverty* to *Lavelle* for stage purposes. So the older man *was* her father!

She seemed a spirit of flame. In her the hidden romance of the North had fully flowered. Luck, incredible luck, to be alone with her, or almost alone, on this mountain-top of Bali, with the bond of a common nationality to draw them together!

Before night came down with wind and misty stars, the distant glow of the Batoer volcano lending a false warmth to the cold sky, Genevieve Lavelle and Niven had made acquaintance. After dark, sitting wrapped in steamer-rugs, they found themselves becoming friends.

But first of all, he had to find out why she was in Bali in the midst of the musical season. She told him quite simply. She had had diphtheria, lost her voice—it was thought, irrevocably. Yes, she felt frightfully about it, but one could get over anything if one only made up one's mind. And Bali was the place to do it. Why? Oh, because it was such a wonderful end of the world, where nothing seemed to matter. Yet there was always a new thrill or two. . . .

As if the word had been the chime of an alarm-clock, Laverty, dozing in a corner of the lounge, raised his head.

"What's that you say, Jinny?" he demanded.

"I was saying," she answered smoothly, "that Bali is the end of the world."

"I heard ye. I heard more than ye think. And I can tell ye that ye're not going to go makin' a silly show of yourself before the natives."

"What is it she wants to do?" Niven asked.

Genevieve, lying draped in her rug like a Tanagra figurine in a classic shawl, turned toward him with a swift impatient movement. The rug caught and held her; she flung it off.

Niven had a curious vision of the spirit of the girl, held by circumstance even as her limbs were held by the heavy wrap. Talk of thrills! Had she not lost the finest thrill of all, the singer's great moment, sweeping Valkyrie-like above the world on the winged steed of her voice? In that nightly apotheosis, passion, feeling, had found release that was now denied. No wonder she struggled, sought for excitement, wherever she could find it.

Her father answered Niven curtly: "She wants to go and spend the night in one of those native temples."

"But I don't understand—"

The girl broke in: "Surely you've heard about the native woman who de-

"The Bali people tell you that evil spirits have little power over a pure young girl. The native woman who died had no such shield."

fied the law, and went and passed a night in an unconsecrated new temple, down at the little port beyond Boeleleng? They won't let a woman do that, or anyone, if they can help it, but a woman most of all. And, of course, she wanted to find out why."

"Did she?"

"Maybe she did. She never said. She was found dead in the morning."

"You want to try it? Why?" Niven asked.

"*I* want to find out." She was lying on the floor again, swathed in her tawny wrap, long and supple as a young pantheress. Her eyes, as she looked up at Niven, seemed to shoot sparks of gold.

"If I could make her look at me, for me, like that," he wished, knowing that in truth she was not looking at him, but through him, at some strange picture in her mind.

"I shall go," she said. "I shall go and stay the night in the inner court of this new temple they're putting up halfway to Singharadja. There are two almost together. People say you see wonderful and awful things—"

"Ye were simply taken in," put in Laverty.

"If you don't believe there's anything, you can't mind my trying. And if you cross me too much, and keep forbidding —well, you know what might happen."

The old man turned dark red. "Has he had the impidence to come after ye?"

"As to that, I don't know. I heard they were in Java, sometime ago, he and she, and that they were getting on as badly as ever."

Niven felt slightly embarrassed; the conversation was becoming intimate. He could guess what remained unsaid—a married admirer, a girl, restless, desperate . . . . What a fool her father was to keep her from seeking sensations in her own way!

THERE was a momentary silence. The wind, cold as an English wind, battered about the bungalow; in the chilly lounge, pictures swung on walls, papers rattled, and "the long carpets rose upon the gusty floor." Tonight, at this very moment, black heat brooded on the plains below, among the palms and the banana groves, where Bali maidens walked, laughing and fanning, and *legong* dancers sweated, in their jeweled silks, posturing to the silver clang of the *gamelan* band. A climate within a climate; one more count in favor of marvelous Bali. These people had all—even to heat or cold at will. Country of a fairy-tale, if ever there was one.

Well, he would be mad. He would capitalize what he possessed. He would buy a little land, have a little bungalow, somewhere among the banyan forests and the rice. Leave civilization behind him. Ride and swim, and shoot Bali tigers, keep fighting cocks, race spirited Timor stallions. Live on palm-wine and Malay *hors d'œuvres,* like the Bali people. Sleep the hot days, travel and dance the moonlight nights through. Share it all with a blue-green-eyed girl who wanted excitement and who, by Jove, if she joined her life with his, should have it.

As for the married suitor, he'd crush him under his heel like a cockroach. So far had Bali brought him in a day and half a night—Bali, where all life ran slowly and softly, except the life of love. . . . .

All this he thought in a moment. The next, he said: "But, Mr. Laverty, there can hardly be any objection—if your daughter takes precautions."

"Ay so? And what pree-cautions would ye suggest?"

"Well, you know how these temples are built—no roof, just open courts with carved walls and shrines. She wouldn't be shut up. She could make her experiment if she liked, with you and myself staying outside the walls, ready to come in if called upon."

"And me with chronic lumbago? No, thenk ye."

"Well, then, myself, if you trust me."

"I trust Jinny," Laverty dryly answered. "But I tell the both of ye, I don't like it."

Followed a week or two of uncertain weather, heavy rain at night, and high winds during the day. Genevieve's project was postponed for the time being. Some travel was done by the three, some quiet sight-seeing, away from the larger parties. The rain passed over; weather of gold set in. Temples and altars stood out in the pure light, lovely beyond telling, for the most part quiet, with now and then a Bali maiden coming to kneel before a shrine, hold up high her offering of fruit and flowers; with, once in a way, a brief eruption of tourists shouting, snapshotting, storming about the place and trampling underfoot its loveliness; then, in a few minutes, storming on again, with laughter and loud honking of many cars.

In between, often for days together, there would be such silence as Niven had never dreamed of; silence that did not merely exist, but was kept by something unnamed and unknown. Then the temples, with their flowering trees standing stately within grass courts, their strange and terrifying faces grinning down from walls and columns among stone bird wings that seemed about to rise and flutter; the temples, with their dreaming stillness, their gray beauty, and their rare, amazing outburst of pure sensuality, springing up here and there among the lovely carvings like flames among flowers—all this seemed to symbolize, as nothing else could have done, the very spirit of Bali.

IN these days, it seemed to Niven, Genevieve was feeling the spirit of the place as he felt it. Love, he knew, if it came to her here, would come swiftly. And there were little things that encouraged him. Her voice, that lovely speaking voice (how, he wondered, could she speak so like a singer if her voice was gone forever?) softened exquisitely when she used his name; her thoughts seemed to lean toward him. It was as if she caught and read what he was thinking, without need of speech.

"To have a home here," she said one day. "To live among these people who are so happy—it would be like heaven. And I'd study their music. You don't know how much there is in it—"

"I know they simply live for it."

"I could find things in these *gamelan* orchestras that no one else has found.

They shake you so. They are wicked sometimes. But they're—great."

They were standing alone in one of the innumerable temples; a frangipanni tree shed falling stars upon her head; the wind went ruffling under dark-arched gateways; a long way down, below the temple courts, from among the fields of rice that shone like emerald and gold, came faintly the tingle-tangle of a native band.

"It's as if the whole country sang," she said. "And the people—they sing even when they are silent. Let's never, never go back!"

She had come to it herself. He took one quick step nearer; he was about to say the words that should bind them both to Bali forever, when they were struck from his lips.

A TALL stranger had come into the temple court, was advancing with a smile toward Genevieve. Niven instantly guessed who it was, summed up, in a quick second glance, the appearance of his rival. The man was about forty; he wore whites and a solar topee, like most of the tourists; he was massively made and had a penetrating, commanding black eye. Sallow he seemed, like one who spends much time indoors, and there was something of the scholar's stoop about his wide shoulders; but he had good looks of a certain stony kind.

One could not tell how much, or how little, Genevieve was pleased by the interruption. With the perfect self-possession of the actress, she turned to the newcomer and met him smilingly.

"This is quite a pleasant surprise," she said. "I thought that you and Mrs. Messervy were still in Java."

The man said, looking hard at her: "Mrs. Messervy is still in Java." Then he added: "We buried her in the cemetery at Batavia, six weeks ago. Java fever."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't know."

"You understood the unfortunate circumstances, I believe. In such cases—"

"Yes, exactly. May I introduce Mr. Niven? Professor Messervy, of Camelot University. The Professor is frightfully clever; they actually pay him to run round studying colored people and so on. I'm not clever; I don't understand his work, but you must listen reverently to everything he says."

Niven saw that she was chattering to hide her embarrassment. Somehow, that pleased him.

The Professor threw a coolly estimating glance in Niven's direction. He saw a sandy fellow with a very blue pair of eyes, and a toothbrush mustache; a tall, tough, ordinary young man who didn't look as if he owned any sort of degree. . . . Niven had taken his B. A. at Trinity College, Dublin, but that would not have saved him in Messervy's eyes.

Ignoring Niven, he spoke to the girl.

"You mustn't undervalue yourself," he said. "You understand, I'm sure, that marriage customs are my specialty—primitive marriage customs, as compared with those of later origin, in especial. I believe there will be great scope for observation here in Bali, where they have so happily solved the serious problems of unsatisfactory marital relationship which continue to embarrass nations supposed to be higher in the scale of civilization. —Have you got a match?"

The last sentence was addressed to Niven, and for the moment it made him jump. Then he realized what was wanted and produced his box.

Messervy gave it back, started a large cigar, and continued his talk with Genevieve.

"This," thought Niven, "is a new sort of professor—not much like the kind in books, in spite of his long-winded chat." Messervy, he thought indignantly, had taken the girl away from him as coolly as he would have taken the last piece of bread in a shipwreck, and for the same reason—because he thought himself more worthy to have her, and it, than anyone else.

"But we'll see," Niven told himself. "We'll see."

NEVERTHELESS, things changed from that time on.

Professor Messervy attached himself to the party, and it seemed that Laverty, at least, was inclined to like his company. Niven thought he understood. If Genevieve was not going to make money by singing, it might be well for her, from Laverty's point of view, to marry a man who evidently had resources above and beyond any furnished by the university. Messervy was a free spender when his work or his pleasure seemed to require it. His clothes were impeccable; he hired the best of cars, and his purchases of Bali gold and silverwork, so Niven enviously noted, must have made a big hole in a hundred pounds.

He didn't give away any of the stuff, but he recommended himself to Gene-

vieve by taking up the question of the proposed night visit to an unconsecrated temple. All the facts about the end of the lovely native girl who had been found dead in the temple beyond Boeleleng, he industriously collated, and compared with similar incidents elsewhere, letting loose so deep a flood of comparative anthropology upon the heads of the two men and the girl, that in the end nobody quite knew what he was talking about. They did gather, however, that he took the question seriously, and that he was by no means opposed to Genevieve's experiment.

"He's told us nothing we didn't know before," Niven somewhat bitterly commented to old Laverty.

"I d'knaw," the other said. "The fella did say that thur's a tradition that Bali doesn't like the white people—"

"Exactly. Some of them, anyhow. They call the tourists wild beasts."

"Ay, but before thur were towrists. There's been a gey wheen of fellas took the notion they'd like to stay here, but nawn of them has, except maybe a two-three, and they're naw lucky. . . . It's not the natives themselves, though. Maybe I could find ye a reason or two again it, though I'm naw professor."

"What do you make of it?" Niven inquired.

"I make this," the other answered. "The like of us were cowped intil the wilderness, owa the Garden of Eden, long ago. Maybe we were the better for it. But anyhow, ye can't be goin' back, once ye're out—the angels with the flamin' swords keeps the gate."

"Do you believe all that?"

"Spur'tully, ay; acshully, I d'knaw. No matter. The swords are thur. And thur's no luck for annyone tries to lep over them."

"It sounds like nonsense to me," Niven commented. "But I dare say it isn't. Anyhow, it won't affect you—by the look of things."

GENEVIEVE and Messervy were walking up and down the shady avenue of waringin trees that ran outside the hotel. They had been constantly together during the past few days, and Niven had seen almost nothing of the girl. He was beginning to feel unhappy about his chances. Genevieve had been somewhat attracted by this man, even before the death of his wife. Was the fascination returning? Niven could not tell. He did not believe that Genevieve would choose Messervy before himself, simply as man to man—the fellow must be as unscrupulous as they make them, to have made love to her when he wasn't free; and anyhow his talk, disguised as it was in the garments of science, showed him to have not as much decent sense of morality as would lie heaped up on a thruppenny piece—so the Ulsterman indignantly put it to himself.

But Messervy had personality, fascination beyond common; one could not mistake that. Genevieve—had she been caught in the net?

FULL moon came and passed, and dry weather came with it. Genevieve's experiment was fixed for a night when moonrise was due about twelve o'clock. That would give time to reach the unconsecrated temples in the dark, secretly, so that neither the Dutch Government nor the natives should know what was afoot, and it would make sure of light later on, when perhaps light might be wanted.

Messervy, who as a matter of course took everything into his hands, had declared his intention of spending the night in the temple adjacent to that chosen by Genevieve. There was not a stone's-throw between the two; and he would, he said, be quite near in case she wanted him. Niven, wishing uselessly that he had thought of this idea himself, was left to make his own plans. "It won't be necessary for you to bother at all," Messervy told him, addressing him much as if he were a tiresome undergraduate. Niven made no reply—there was no use talking.

When Messervy and Genevieve, about eleven o'clock, started afoot for the temples, Niven silently followed them. Hidden, he watched the girl run lightly up the steps of the nearer court, flashing her electric torch to see the way. She carried a wrap over her arm; she was whispering and laughing with Messervy. The professor, encumbered with rug, pillow, sandwich-case and flask, as well as a torch and a revolver, had clearly taken no chances where he himself was concerned.

They had a long whispered talk at the top of the stairs. Niven noted, with relief, that Messervy was not pleased by the substance of it. He seemed to remonstrate with Genevieve; once he came so close to her, snatched her hand so eagerly, that Niven was on the point of coming forward.

But Genevieve smilingly withdrew from him; she seemed to bid him an amiable good-night, and went up the steps, under the great carved archway, into the temple courtyard. Messervy went down the road to the gateway of the second temple and, ascending the steps, disappeared.

Niven, during the daytime, had found a hiding-place for himself—a clump of young bamboo, just outside the wall of the nearer temple. There he settled down to wait. He didn't know just what he feared. The Bali people were kind; even if Genevieve should be discovered in the very act of desecrating their holy places, violence was not to be apprehended. And the Professor, whatever his ideas of morality might be, would surely not annoy a young girl whom he confidently hoped to marry.

No. There was something else. Of course, one did not believe in such things; but Genevieve had been drinking in stories about Bali ghosts and devils: About the evil spirits that haunted every native temple until the sacred ceremonies had driven them away, and set the carved stone guardians at the gates upon the watch for wicked things. About the special risk run by women, who were more obnoxious to evil spirits than men. Genevieve was sensitive, like all artists; if she saw a shadow, she might be frightened. He must be near. As for Messervy, Niven placed no confidence in him. He would be making anthropological notes by the light of a torch; maybe he'd even be sleeping. . . .

It was very quiet there in the little grove. Only the stars looked down upon the new pale loveliness of the temples; only the coco-palms, outside, whispered; and the scent of lotus from the sacred ponds lay on the air. In the temples not a sound was heard. Messervy must be sleeping. As for Genevieve—

WHAT was that? Niven sat suddenly upright. He had been conscious, ashamedly, for some little time, of a curious sensation of fear, a mounting dread that seemed to come in waves, as though something unnamed, not to be understood, now and then sent forth a cautious tentacle toward himself, and then drew back into dark. Yet there had been no sound; only the faint gossiping of coco-palms, and the *drip-drip* of water from the temple ponds. There had been nothing to see, although the moon was up at last, and everything clear as on an English winter's day.

Messervy was lying across the low wall that divided the two temples. . . . He was dead—the man had died in terror.

Now, from the temple where Messervy watched, came a strange noise—a choking sound, the sound of a scramble and of a fall.

NIVEN was instantly on his feet, listening hard. Was there no noise from the court where Genevieve sought her perilous thrill? Yes. There was a sound,—impossible, yet not to be denied,—a sound as of low sweet singing.

"God!" said Niven. He vaulted the temple wall.

He did not know what he expected to see, but he had a loaded revolver in his pocket; he took it out before he looked about him after landing violently on the grass. Then he saw Genevieve standing in the middle of the court, under the pouring moon, just as she might have stood in days that were past beneath the limelight that falls on and follows the prima donna of opera. And she was singing!

Her voice had come back; there she stood, head raised and eyes half closed, singing just as a bird sings, exquisitely, clearly, some light operatic air.

Niven ran forward and caught her hand. "Are you all right?" he cried.

She did not answer him, did not seem to see him. She went on singing.

He tried to lead her away. She followed where he led her, stopped when he stopped, never looked at him or seemed to be conscious of his presence. And still she sang. The beauty, the horror of it, shook his heart. It seemed as if the very spirit of her had fled in the night, leaving instead this mechanical singing bird caged in the body of a beautiful and soulless woman.

"She's had some fright," he thought. "Saw something that shook up her nervous system, brought back the voice, but left her—left her—"

No, he could not say it.

Staring about him in the vivid moonlight to see whether any trace of that which had alarmed her was left, he saw Professor Messervy. The man was lying across the low wall that divided the two temples, his head and arms trailing down on the grass of the court.

"What the devil does he think he's doing there?" Niven wondered. He went over and lifted the body. Messervy was dead, and his face was not good to see. The man had died in terror.

Hand on lip, Niven stood looking—looking. What had Messervy been doing on that wall, in the midst of the lonely night? Why had he started to come over to Genevieve, who (Niven was almost sure) had but just refused to marry him? It might have been that he was fleeing from something frightful, unbearable, that had pounced on and torn his scientific beliefs to shreds, there in the unconsecrated temple. It might have been—otherwise. In any case death, and an ugly death, had caught him.

Leaving him there till morning, when the Dutch officials should look after the matter, Niven took Genevieve by the hand and very gently led her home. She sang a little now and then along the way. She did not speak.

There was an inquest and an inquiry. Messervy, they said, had died of heart failure brought on by the effort of climbing the wall. His spirit-flask was found beside his rug and pillow—empty.

No more was to be known.

AFTER some months Genevieve Lavelle took up her singing again for a short time—on concert platforms only. But it was whispered that she had lost her mind; that she seldom if ever spoke, but could not keep from appearing in public and singing with all the former beauty of her voice.

Laverty was despondent, but Niven, going in day by day to the flourishing factory of which he was now part owner, never gave up his hope, his conviction that Genevieve would recover.

"She ran frightful dangers," he said to Laverty, "but the thing—whatever it was—did not get her. It couldn't."

"Why for no?" Laverty asked, and Niven explained:

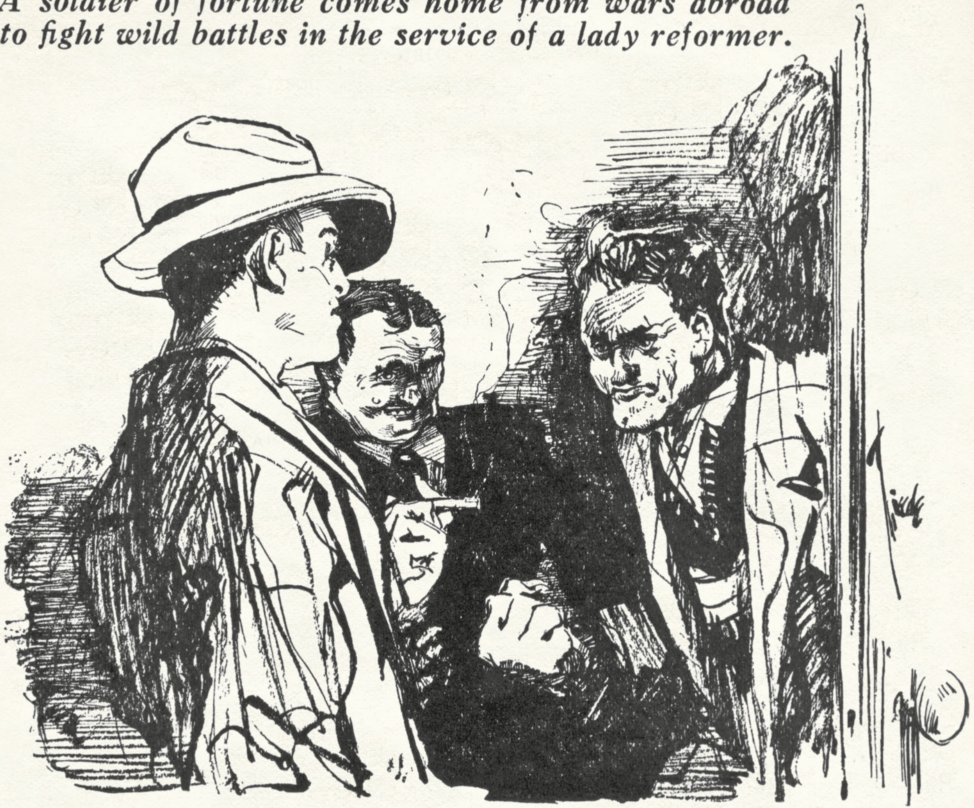
"The Bali people tell you that evil spirits have little power, comparatively, over any pure young girl. The native woman who died had no such shield."

"Havers and nawnsence," was Laverty's acid comment. . . .

But Niven's faith had its reward, apparently. For gradually a change came over Genevieve. And while public appearances grew distasteful to her, she became in speech and thought, seemingly, much like any normal woman. Never once, however, has she referred to that night in the Bali temple; it may be that those hours are mercifully gone from her memory.

And if Paradise has been denied to Niven and to her, even as it has been denied to you and me, their marriage has been, to all seeming, at least as happy as most marriages. One learns not to ask too much of this world.

A soldier of fortune comes home from wars abroad to fight wild battles in the service of a lady reformer.



Two Jots and a Tittle

By J. FRANK DAVIS

Illustrated by Henry Thiede

LITTLE BILL McBRIDE grinned as symmetrically as the recent startling wreckage of his features would allow, and waved an airy Number Twelve hand at my solicitude. "I come by it in a good cause," he said. "You'll never believe it of me, but I'm a crusader for civic righteousness. In my quiet and self-effacing way, I've been wrestling with dark powers and sinister forces—under the auspices of high society."

Little Bill—who is an inch taller than Gene Tunney—has been on bowing terms with death most of the time for the past fifteen years, starting with the Marines and continuing since then, throughout the world, in whatever public bickerings he has been able to find a welcome. Only lately had he come back to the city of his birth pending a new revolution somewhere which he was planning to get into, and plainly his week among us had not been wholly one of rest and peace. His facial disfigurements, while probably but temporary, were spectacular.

"There seem to have been wars and alarms," I remarked.

"You'd be surprised!" he replied. "Five hundred dollars' worth, and expenses. But you won't see anything about it in the public prints. You would, maybe, if it hadn't been for the jots."

"Jots?" I inquired.

"And a tittle," he amplified. "She might have weathered the jots, but the tittle was one too many."

"It would seem from here," said I, "that you are still delirious. Who is

'she'—if it isn't dragging in the name of some lady who can't be mentioned?"

"Can't be mentioned!" he echoed. "If there's any day she *isn't* mentioned, either in the society column or the reports of the uplift clubs, I bet that secretary of hers gets reproved something shameful. Mrs. Henry Leslie Gibbs!"

"Oh!" I said.

"Well may you 'Oh!'" Little Bill replied. "I did myself, when she sent for me. There's only one woman in the city that's a bigger brass hat in society, so I'm told."

"Right," I agreed. "Mrs. Courtney Morelack."

"And she," declared Bill, "was one of the jots. But she doesn't know it, and I don't suppose she ever will. Boy, did I have one large afternoon and evening! You can ask two bootleggers, one gambler, three gorillas and eight cops; they'll tell you. Or rather, they won't."

"Will you?" I asked.

"Sure," said Little Bill. "It'll give you a good laugh; it does me, every time I think of it."

IT all started (he began) when a letter comes from this Caroline S. P. Gibbs—Mrs. Henry Leslie—that she would like to talk to me on an important matter at her house out on Riverside Heights, and can I make it convenient to call at eleven o'clock Tuesday?

I'd never met the old girl, although I had a brief speaking-acquaintance about twenty years ago with her husband; he had a bunch of us Eighth Ward kids pinched one day when some windows got broke in an old vacant factory he owned a few blocks from my house. So I guessed that whatever she had in her head had been put there by that hooey about me that was in the paper on Sunday.

Maybe you saw that piece: "Famous Soldier of Fortune Returns to Home City." The reporter that wrote it didn't know as much about South American geography as I do about manicuring, but he's a nice little guy and meant well. His name is Connie O'Neill.

I get out there to the Gibbs mansion at eleven sharp, and Caroline don't make me wait more than five minutes. Then she comes in all smiling, and greets me like I'm the prodigal calf. She looks older than she looks, if you know what I mean, and she talks like she thinks Boston talks.

"It is a great pleasure, Mr. McBride," she says, "to welcome to our city such a famous hero as you. It must be wonderful to have had such experiences. And a great satisfaction to have the reputation the paper says you have among other soldiers of fortune—not only of being unafraid, but of perfect reliability. And that is why I have taken the liberty of sending for you—because you are trustworthy and fearless."

THIS looks like she's got somebody she wants put on the spot, which is altogether out of my line, but I stall along for more information.

"Now that you have returned to the old home," she says, "I know you will be interested in its civic welfare."

"Sure," I agreed, still sparring.

"This city," she says, very earnest, like it was something out of one of her club speeches, "is in the grasp of sinister forces. Right languishes, and wrong is triumphant. Our officials falter. We are at the mercy of dark powers."

I nodded, waiting, and she went on:

"The good men of the community have done what they can to better conditions, and they have failed. Even my husband, who is not without influence, has been able to do nothing. Yet, where the good men have failed, I believe the good woman can succeed. I have decided to undertake it myself—with your help. Will you give it?"

"I'm afraid I'll need better specifications than that," I told her. "Help how?"

"There are, in this city," she said, "vicious criminal rings—gangsters—haunts of vice—establishments which almost openly violate the prohibition laws—gambling dens. Perhaps you know where some of them are."

"No ma'am," I said. "I aint been here but three days, and I've had to visit round with my folks."

"But you could find them."

"I always been able to," I told her, without seeking to boast.

"BUT finding them isn't all," she said. "Movement against merely small lawbreakers is useless. To succeed, it must get at their superiors—those who are called the 'higher-ups'. May I speak to you with the assurance that what I say will not become common knowledge?"

"Sure thing," I agreed.

"I have seen the district attorney, secretly," she said. "And he has promised

"'This,' said I, 'is my opportunity. Mr. McBride is fearless. He has at times consorted with rough and lawless people. It is more than possible that he drinks.' Do you?"

me that if I can find out who these men are, and tell him, he will take the necessary steps. I want you to get me their names. It came to me as an inspiration when I read that article in the paper. 'This,' said I, 'is my opportunity. Mr. McBride has no affiliations with local politics. He is fearless. He has at times consorted with rough and lawless people. It is more than possible that he drinks.' Do you?"

"Occasionally," I said. "But not too much."

"I must have help," she went on, "from some one who can penetrate the dens and dives. That necessarily means one who can meet these people on their own plane."

"Let me get this right," I put in. "What you want isn't the goods on the bootleggers and gamblers and such, but on the men whose pull keeps them going."

It made a difference, of course. I couldn't take on her work and not deliver the goods, or try to; I'm no double-crosser. And a man couldn't go out and buy booze and gamble, and then give away the guys he dealt with. But if it was only getting the political higher-ups into a jam, that would be all right—the 'leggers would only be put to the trouble of doing business with a new set. And I've had no use for the cops in this town since the last time I was here, three years ago, when a bunch of them beat me up shameful and then got me fined plenty for resisting arrest. And the chief—the same one as now—told me he'd show me there couldn't any four-flushing bad-man come into his village and try to run it. I may be a little bad occasionally when I'm crowded too much, but what I start I finish, and I don't care to be called a four-flusher by any fat-headed chief of police.

"That is right," she replied to the question I'd asked. "I want you to secure this information, in some quiet, self-effacing way, and then give it all to me—without fear or favor, not suppressing the truth by so much as one jot or tittle."

WHAT do you know about them two words? They're real, though. I've looked 'em up.

"Well," I allowed, "I might be willing to take it on. For a proper consideration."

"I had hoped," she said, "that you might do it out of public spirit."

"No ma'am," I told her. "I might get killed or something—you've no idea how rough some of these gangsters are. I'd have to get about a thousand dollars,

besides whatever legitimate expenses I may have."

"Isn't that a bit mercenary?" she asked.

"Sure," I agreed. "They call fellers like me 'soldiers of fortune,' nowadays; but the word for it used to be 'mercenaries'—you can find it in the histories. When I do a job of work, I get paid."

WELL, we went on from there; it winds up I'm to receive five hundred and expenses, provided I'm successful—with a hundred of the expenses in advance to get the evidence with. And she is to get all the credit for what I find out, with my name never being mentioned. Would you believe it, she made that last stipulation herself—not me. Aint that a laugh?

I make just one condition: If these dark powers should get on to me and succeed in framing me,—which they certainly would try to do if they suspected my plots and stratagems,—she's got to listen quick when I get her word, and come across with help, the same being a lawyer with what expenses are necessary. She agrees to this, seeing I won't take the job otherwise; and after listening to a few more speeches about the vicious ring that has this fair municipality in its fell clutch, I make my getaway and go ask this Connie O'Neill that's on the newspaper to have lunch with me. These city newspaper guys may be as ignorant as a dressmaker about what you do when a gun gets jammed, but they're likely to know something about their home towns.

I don't put him wise to my wanting information, of course—just make out I want to thank him for the nice piece he wrote about me. While we are eating, I sort of run on about the changes in the old city, and get him talking. I speak of Henry Leslie Gibbs, and that leads to passing comment on Mrs. Henry Leslie, and I hear all about her being the biggest noise in society except for Mrs. Morelack. Connie has heard about some of the tactics she's used to get into the Morelack inner circle. She wouldn't any more do anything that would offend Old Lady Morelack than she'd refuse to join these Colonial Damsels, if they ever asked her.

All this was just gossip to fill in while I was leading up to her being a reformer, and from that to what there was to reform. But when I get to this, I'm disappointed. Connie knows mighty little. He's only a kid, and he's had no experience with police or politics. And he's never been in but one speak-easy in town—a joint out in the Washington Park suburb that's run by an ex-prize-fighter named Jerry Smith.

Connie's got to get back to work, but I allow I'd like to go out to this dump. And when we come to a taxi, Connie is acquainted with the driver. He asks:

"Do you know where Jerry Smith's place is?"

"What d'ye think I am—a stranger in town?" says the taxi.

So I say good-by to Connie, and we roll.

This Smith joint is almost out to the city line, and the house sets way back from the road. When we get there I see some cars in the yard, but out in front is a traffic cop. His motorcycle is standing up against the fence, and as we start to turn in at the gate, he stops us. It looks like the place must have just been pinched.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asks, suspicious.

"This guy," says the taxi, "is a friend of Connie O'Neill, that works on the *Globe-Ledger*. Connie brung him to me himself."

"All right," the cop says. "Drive in."

That's service! A bull in harness directing traffic in front of a bootleg parlor! I knew now Old Lady Gibbs wasn't wrong as to there being a smooth machine in this town.

I LEAVE the taxi when we get into the yard, and go to the door; a big gorilla with a cauliflower ear opens it.

"What do you want?" he says, cordial as a flatfoot with a warrant for murder.

"To see Mr. Smith," I told him.

"Yeah?" he says. "And what's your name?"

"Bill McBride."

"That means nothing to me," he growls.

"You can ask the taxi man."

"I don't know him, either," he comes back.

"Connie O'Neill told me it would be all right," I said.

"Who's he?" sneers the doorkeeper. It gets me a little peeved.

"Say, listen, you baboon!" I says to him. "I want to see Jerry Smith."

"You get noisy with me, you big bum, and I'll bust you in the snoot," says he.

Something rough might have happened

right there, if we hadn't been interrupted. A voice behind the gorilla says: "What's the trouble, Barney?"

"This punk looks to me like a Federal dick," says Barney. I see the fellow in the hallway behind him, a little man with a flat nose. Another ex-pug, all right.

"Are you Mr. Smith?" I asks. "Connie O'Neill told me to come out here. My name's McBride."

"Well, well!" says Smith. "You've grew about three feet since the last time I seen you. I read in the paper you was home. Let him in, Barney. This is Little Bill McBride, the fighter."

"Who did he ever fight?" Barney asks.

"Mexicans and Indians, and such as that," Smith tells him. "He was in the Marines, too."

"Them Marines is Federal," says Barney, "and you say yourself you aint knew him since he's grew up. I don't like his looks."

"As far as that goes," I remarks, "I don't like yours; and for the price of one small drink, I'd give you another rubber ear."

"Steady!" says Smith. "Barney's supposed to be fussy about who gets in. We have to be careful, you know. Matter of fact, we've had a tip there's a new Federal man in this district that we don't know. That's why I've got that cop out front. He stops 'em all. A Federal man would flash his badge—and then there's a little push-button near the gate, and the Federal guy would come in and find only empty pitchers."

As I'm entering, he goes on:

"I knew your father, back when I was doing preliminaries at the Pastime Athaletic. My fightin' moniker was Kid Reardon. Here's a good table in the corner. What'll you have?"

"Whatever hard stuff you've got that's the least poisonous," I said. "Pay that taxi out of this, and send him home, will you, and then join me in a little snort."

SO we had a few drinks. He's curious to know of these foreign brawls I've been in and there are some of the old gang in the Eighth Ward to be talked of, and by and by he asks me what I'm going to do next.

"Well, I was wondering about that," I said. "I can drive a truck, fast, without busting it up. And I wouldn't be a total loss to the owner if anybody tried to hijack it. What do you know about any chances like that?"

Truck-drivers and guards are usually hired by the Big Shot himself, of course, and this got me what I was looking for.

THE Big Boy, he tells me, is named Gersin. He can be found sometimes at an exclusive speak-easy downtown, on Morgan Street. After another drink or two Smith went to the telephone and came back to tell me he'd called this Morgan Street joint, and Gersin might be there late in the evening. Smith said everybody was being careful, on account of this new Federal man, but he had described me, and I would be let in.

I sounded him out about the political higher-ups, but he don't loosen up too much. All I got—and that took the whole afternoon and a lot of buying—was that he had to deposit all his dough in the Fifth National Bank, and be told who to pay his protection-money to, by a guy named Poulton, who is one of the vice-presidents. And that if there was any trouble, the mouthpiece he went to was a lawyer named Henderson.

Some barkeep might have to take a rap once in a while, but if anybody of importance got into a jam, this Henderson was always able to get bail, and then have the case continued until it was forgotten; or if that would make too much talk, deliver a fixed jury. The police did what he said, and so did the district attorney.

Well, by then it was past six o'clock, and I get Smith to phone for a taxi. I wasn't oiled or anything—I don't suppose I'd had more than ten or fifteen drinks; but I was feeling pretty comfortable when the taxi arrived and I went out into the hall, with Smith following me.

Barney started to open the door, and I said to him, pleasant enough and meaning no harm: "So long, you big ape. I'll be seeing you in the penitentiary."

And he says—he's just one of these goofs that when he gets one idea in what passes for his brain, there aint room for any more: "I still think you're a Federal dick; and if you aint, you're a big piece of cheese, anyway, you crook-nosed so-and-so!" And naturally I had to smack him one.

Smith could have been irritated, but he wasn't.

"He'll come to, in a minute; you can't hurt that baby," he says. "I have to admit he came looking for it. You pack a nice right hook, Bill. Goo'by. Come again."

I toss him into a corner and get ready to attend to his two friends, who are acting hostile; but Skippy Ogg comes in with a couple of waiters and says: "We'll take care of these guys while you make your get-away."

"Sure, Jerry," I says. "And give this palooka my regards."

"You already done so," he laughed. So I leave there, with everything nice and friendly, and come downtown.

I get me a good supper, and after that I go into a picture-show and have a little sleep. Then, about ten o'clock, I ramble into this exclusive speak-easy on Morgan Street.

I BUY a few times for the boss, whose name is Skippy Ogg. It seems he has seen that piece about me in the paper, and after we have talked over this idea of me perhaps driving a truck, he allows that Gersin aint coming to this place tonight, but I might find him around midnight at the Merchants' Exchange Club, which covers the whole top floor of the Cuttrell Building, on Twelfth Street.

It seems that top floor was built for club-rooms—the Chamber of Commerce used to be there. And the building owner is one of these real-estate guys that don't worry any more over having a whole floor vacant than he would over being told by a doctor that he needs three major operations. So, when the Chamber builds its own shack, being strong with the administration anyway, he leases it to Gersin and his gambler friends.

Skippy tells me this Merchants' Exchange joint is the biggest gambling establishment in the State, and it has never been pinched and never will be—not as long as the present political outfit is going strong. And is there a good working system in this town? Any man smart enough to learn all about who is in it, in one night, would be able to tell you what all the keys on his key-ring are for.

Well, time passes pleasantly; and just

before midnight, with the place crowded, I'm talking to a fellow that I've had a few drinks with. I'd paid for the last round with a five-dollar bill and left the change lay on the table at my elbow while I'm finishing whatever it was I was saying—and when I turn to pick up my three dollars, it aint there.

I look around quick behind me, and there at the next table is a bozo with oily black hair, and he's just sliding back into his chair, and his fingers are still in his pocket.

So I up and slap him a couple of times, and take the bills out of his vest pocket and put them into mine, and then I toss him into a corner and get ready to attend to his two friends, who are acting hostile; but Skippy Ogg comes in with a couple of waiters and holds them. And Skippy says:

"It's time for your date, Bill, over where we were speaking of. We'll take care of these guys while you make your get-away."

"I don't need to have any guys taken care of for me," I told him. "Leave them at me, and if I don't smack them down *pronto,* it'll be because something is bracing them. And I don't like that word 'get-away,' Skippy. I don't ever brawl with my friends; but if you say I need to make a get-away from no more than three greasy scuts like these, you aint no friend of mine."

"That's all right, Bill," Skippy soothes me. "Of course I'm your friend. Just to prove it, I'll buy a drink—right there in the next room. What I said was just a slip of the tongue, being what I might say to a stranger."

SO we had a drink, and he went to the street door with me. When I was out on the sidewalk I remembered those three dollars of mine that I'd stuffed into my vest pocket and went after them to shift them into my pants with the rest of my roll—and you'll die laughing, but there was nine dollars in the wad.

Well, I had to give the crook back his change; I'm no thief. So I went back to the door and rang the bell, and the peephole came open, but it shut again, and I didn't get any service. So I raised my voice a little, speaking to the doorkeeper—and a minute later somebody right at my shoulder says:

"Say, what's the big idea? Cut out that hollering."

It was a husky cop with a night-stick, and I told him, positive but polite: "I got an errand in here. If you've any business to attend to, you might go do it."

"One more yip," he says, "and my business will be to give you a ride in the wagon."

"You and who else?" I asks.

At that he made a quick swing at me, and I took his club and tossed it where he couldn't do any harm with it, and what did the big stiff do but drag out his pistol! Naturally, that brought on action.

I didn't need the gun, so I left it there in the gutter on his breast, but first I took out the cartridges and dropped them down a sidewalk grating. I don't walk away from no enemy and leave him with loaded firearms. He might come to, before I'm out of range.

The street was empty, and the brief disturbance didn't seem to have at-

tracted any attention; but to take no chances, I went around through an alley and then cut across to Twelfth Street. You know the Cuttrell Building, of course—about fifteen stories high, with the Fifth National Bank on the ground floor. I had a card that Skippy had given me,—me being a stranger,—and I went up in the elevator.

Talk about plenty protection! When you see fancy, expensive layouts like that, you know there aint going to be any raids, and the gamblers are sure of it. Wheels, and chuck-a-luck, and poker-rooms, and dice, and a bar—it's the best equipped club I've seen this side of Juarez. Nobody had to tell me that whoever controlled that building didn't take off his hat when he spoke to the chief of police, or to the district attorney, either. He'd be one of the higher-ups, all right.

Well, I ask for this Gersin, and he isn't there yet. So I have a few drinks and decide to pass the time with a little blackjack.

The dealer is a sallow twenty-minute egg with quick hands. I sit in with ten dollars.

Now my eyes may have been a little bad, and they may not; I'm not claiming I was as sober as I am now, and I want to be perfectly fair. But it looked to me, when he gave me the king that busted my second bet, like he dealt it off the bottom. Nevertheless I kept my temper and spoke to him calm.

"Take it back and give me one off the top, fella!" I says.

"What d'ye mean?" he asks me, with a look that I don't care for.

"Nothing," I says, "except that you can't gyp me, you lousy Levantine!"

I'm naturally getting my feet set, ready to kick back my chair if I have to; and that was lucky, because behind me, at just this minute, somebody says: "That's him. He's a Federal dick."

AND there stands this dumb cluck Barney, that I'd last seen sleeping in a corner over at Jerry Smith's. With him is a couple of other gorillas—the regular bouncers for this place, I suppose; and before I had a chance to more than rise up out of my chair and get a good grip on the back of it, the three of them come at me.

Then the blackjack-dealer and one or two others joined in, and of course I had to leave. After the chair was busted, I used my hands. The elevator happened to be at that floor with the door open, and I mentioned to the operator that I'd take him apart if he let anybody else on, so we came down to the ground floor peaceably enough. And I slipped out of the door and around the corner and went for a walk.

There isn't any doubt I'd had just a trifle too much to drink; and after I'd gone a block or two, I sort of lost track of things. The next I remember, I was on a corner somewhere there in the business district, and a policeman is asking me what I'm doing with the fire-extinguisher.

Now, how do I know what I'm doing with it? I didn't even know I had it. It's one of these little extinguishers like they carry on automobiles, and I suppose I had some perfectly good idea when I got it, but I can't remember what. So I merely tell him in a good-natured way that I wouldn't care to hear anything more about it, and if he had let it go at that, there would have been no trouble; but when he began to act warlike, I naturally had to hit him with it.

I left it there beside him and continued quietly on my way. I must have gone about six or seven blocks when this patrol-wagon caught up with me.

THERE was five cops in that wagon besides the driver, and they all jumped me. Boy, did we have a nice ruckus! And listen, buddy! They gave me most of these little scratches and bumps I've got, but I went into that wagon perfectly conscious—and that's more than two of them cops did.

I get a good sleep at the station; and when I wake up in the cold gray dawn, I see it's necessary to do something. So I get out the ten-dollar bill they didn't find when they searched me because it's hid in my shoe,—that's an old Irish custom,—and I slip it to the turnkey and tell him if he gets word right off to Mrs. Henry Leslie Gibbs that I've been overcome by the enemy and that she is to send aid and assistance, he'll get another ten when such aid has arrived. And that he's to make it clear to her this is no time for delay; we got to get action before court sits.

It works. A lawyer arrives, name of Bushee. He gets to me, after first having observed what the charges are on the blotter. They include drunk and disorderly, disturbance of the peace, assault on a couple of officers, resisting arrest, theft of a fire-extinguisher, and mali-

cious destruction of property, the same being several cops' uniforms. He tells me I'm good for about two hundred dollars in fines and a year in jail if the judge happens to be feeling lenient.

"But what you're here for," I remind him, "is to keep me away from any judge. Didn't Mrs. Gibbs tell you?"

"She told me to use every effort to get you out immediately," he admitted. "But from what the officers upstairs say, —and the chief himself is there,—I feel certain they will entertain no propositions. Not from me, anyway; I have very little practice in the police courts."

"Who's this lawyer named Henderson?" I asked.

"Morelack, Chisholm, Reese and Henderson," he says. "I see your drift. He undoubtedly could accomplish something for you—if there were any way of making him want to. I, however, am not active in municipal politics."

"Listen, brother," I said. "Do you know who owns the Cuttrell Building? And can you get to him in a hurry?"

"Yes," he told me.

"You go to him," I said, "and tell him that if he moves lively and gets this Henderson, and if Henderson goes right to work on the police and gets them to lay off me, then I won't tell a single Federal official about what I saw in the Merchants' Exchange Club, last night. Remind him that these Federal judges use padlocks."

"You were in that place?" Bushee asked.

"If I wasn't," I assured him, "this right eye of mine is wide open, this minute."

So he went away; and by and by they came and turned me loose.

I WON'T say they liked to do it, or that they were cordial. In fact, both the captain and chief had remarks to make that if the time and place had been different would have brought on a discussion.

But I didn't make any retort whatsoever—except to say, sort of humble, that I didn't mean to lay any of those officers out cold, honest; I wasn't really using my strength—they merely happened to be easy ones to slap over. And what the chief said to that, he could be arrested for, if only half the laws against profane and abusive language were enforced.

Well, that was that; and I went and got a doctor to plaster me up a little, and had some coffee and a couple of orders of ham and eggs, and changed my clothes and bought me a hat, and then I went out to see Mrs. Gibbs.

SHE oh'd and ah'd, shocked at what these dark powers had done to me. Then she asked if, notwithstanding the reprisals of the police, I had succeeded in getting the information she sought, and I said I had—down to the last jot and tittle.

I handed her the first jot quick, to get it over with.

"I wouldn't be surprised," I told her, "if the district attorney was choosing his words careful, when he promised to take steps provided you told him the names of the political higher-ups. One of them is a gentleman named Poulton. He's a vice president of the Fifth National Bank."

"Impossible!" she exclaimed. "He is my brother."

"Yes ma'am," I said. "And another —or rather a bunch of them, and if you don't believe me, your Attorney Bushee can tell you—is the law firm of Morelack, Chisholm, Reese and Henderson. Perhaps you know Mr. Morelack—or Mrs. Morelack."

"Oh!" she said, working her mouth like a goldfish.

I was kinda sorry for her, so I went easy and tactful on the tittle.

"And the name of one of the really big guys," I told her, "you might be able to find out for yourself; I haven't been in town long enough to get familiar with all the real-estate owners. The biggest joint in town fills the whole top floor of one of his office-buildings. I've drank in it, and gambled in it, and had to fight my way out of it because they thought I was a Government officer—the way these sinister forces use violence is something shameful."

"What office-building?" she asked.

"The Cuttrell, on Twelfth Street," I told her. "Of course, if you want me to look into the ownership—"

"No," she said. "No. You've done very well, Mr. McBride—but from now on I'll attend to it myself, thank you. I'll write you your check."

Which she did, with a hand that shook —as much from anger as from sorrow.

Boy, I wouldn't be in her husband's shoes when he got home, for the fun of seeing your chief of police buried! That Cuttrell Building, you know, is owned by Henry Leslie Gibbs.

Thirteen Men

A fascinating adventure of the Intelligence officer known as the Red Wolf of Arabia.

By WILLIAM J. MAKIN

PAUL RODGERS examined his ticket for the opera house in Cairo with some interest. It appeared an innocuous slip of paper, perforated, and announcing that the holder was entitled to seat himself in Seat C 6. The opera to be performed was Bizet's "Carmen."

"And a very likable opera too," he mused, "even though it was overpraised by Nietzsche because he had quarreled with Wagner. But I wonder why Seat C 6 should be so excessively popular this evening?"

There was a mystery surrounding that ticket. Paul Rodgers, adventurer of the Red Sea, was determined to discover the solution. The ticket had been bought a month previously by Barrington Pasha, his friend in Cairo, in response to a telegram that had come from an outpost in the Nubian desert:

"BOOK ME AT THE OPERA FOR THE EVENING OF THE FIFTEENTH.
RODGERS."

"Within two hours of the seat being booked by my secretary," Barrington Pasha explained, "I was offered double the price for it on the telephone."

"And you refused?"

"I refused," said Barrington Pasha, taking out his monocle and polishing it. "I remembered how crazy you were about music."

The gray eyes beneath a dangling lock of red hair twinkled. His face burned black by a desert sun, Rodgers sprawled in an easy-chair. This man of mystery, whose exploits were whispered from one end of the Red Sea to the other, whose Arab disguise could not be detected even by Arabs, had only one real passion—music. He knew intimately every piano from Port Saïd to Aden.

"Surely the whole of the opera house was not booked," he asked.

The other shook his head.

"No, but the whole of Row C was booked. It was booked *en bloc* ten minutes after my secretary had obtained the ticket. Fourteen seats in the row."

"Queer," agreed Rodgers. He again looked at the ticket in his long, lithe fingers. "I only entered Cairo this morning. I put up at Shepheard's Hotel. Within ten minutes of being in my room, the telephone rang. It was the box-office clerk of the opera house speaking."

"Yes?"

"He informed me in a gabble of excited French that he had unfortunately let me have the wrong seat for this evening. Would I change it? He had one vacant three rows behind. I laughed and was about to agree. Then, for some absurd reason, I became stubborn. I insisted upon retaining my original seat."

"Well, opera bores me," sighed Barrington. "I'm always in danger of falling asleep and snoring in the pianissimo passages."

A smile twitched at Rodgers' mouth.

"Perhaps I might have walked round to the box-office and handed in my ticket," he said reflectively, stroking the back of his fiery crop in a characteristic gesture, "if I had not had another telephone call later—from a woman."

Barrington Pasha looked up.

"This is *really* interesting," he murmured. "Who was the woman?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," said Rodgers, a little impatiently. He had a distrust for the sex. "The woman had a soft, musical voice," he admitted grudgingly. "She begged me in a sort of terrified whisper not to go near the opera house this evening. 'It may mean death,' she concluded. 'I beg of you, for my sake, for the sake of a woman who—er—likes you, don't go to the opera.' "

"Now it becomes exciting," smiled Barrington. "It looks as though some of your enemies of the desert realize only too well that you are in Cairo and intend to finish you off in spectacular fashion in the opera house. If you take my

A hand stretched out from the darkness and touched his arm. "I beg of you," said a soft voice. "Accept his terms—he will kill you if you do not."

Illustrated by John Clymer

advice, you'll come to the club this evening and play bridge. Your lady friend will then thank you prettily over the telephone later. Then—again, it is only my advice—arrange a rendezvous with her, give her lunch and take her out to see the Pyramids. Women never look at the Pyramids when they're with a man."

"I'm going to the opera tonight," Rodgers said decidedly.

Barrington Pasha shrugged his shoulders.

"Then I'd better have a dozen policemen in the opera house," he sighed. "We can't afford to lose you, Rodgers."

The Intelligence officer shook his head.

"I want no police protection," he said stubbornly. "I insist upon going alone."

LOOKING highly civilized,—certainly more a man of cities than of deserts,—Paul Rodgers, in correct evening dress, strolled languidly into the opera

house. Motorcars and taxies were disgorging the usual cosmopolitan mixture of Europeans and Egyptians who make the opera house in Cairo the center of their social life.

He insinuated his way through the crowd and entered the brilliantly lighted theater itself. A brown hand stretched out for his ticket. He eyed the grimy paw for a moment, smiled, and passed on.

"Failure again," he mused.

A flood of warm air, the drafty smell of the stage mixed with crowded humanity, and he was standing inside the area devoted to the *fauteuils*. Already the theater was packed. The chairs were rapidly filling up—with the exception of row C. This row aired its red-plush seats, the fourteen seats, all empty but one. Even without counting, Rodgers knew that the occupied seat was C 6. The occupant, a fat Armenian in evening dress, seemed to be jammed in it.

Without hesitation Rodgers beckoned to an attendant. He indicated the solitary occupant of Row C.

"My seat is occupied," he said, displaying his ticket. "Please see that the gentleman is put elsewhere."

As they approached, the fat Armenian seemed to wriggle himself firmer into the seat.

"There must be a mistake," he smirked, as the mysterious ticket was produced. "This seat is most certainly mine."

And he fumbled forth a dirty counterfoil.

Rodgers took it and gave it one glance.

"A crude forgery," he said coldly. "Please give up the seat."

"But this is impossible," protested the Armenian. "I—"

"I want that seat." The gray eyes had become dangerously steely.

Perspiration broke out on the fat face of the Armenian. His head twitched sidewise and his gaze roved desperately. His pudgy paws clung to the plush arms of the seat. He was determined not to move.

Rodgers' hands were about to leap forth and drag the Armenian from the seat when he saw a sudden change in the fat face. The roving gaze had become fixed. He seemed to be receiving a message. Involuntarily, the Intelligence officer turned, but he saw only a stage box in which an immaculately clad Egyptian, wearing several orders, was taking his seat. Behind him was a veiled woman.

"I understand there has been some unfortunate happening in the *fauteuils* this evening," the Prince went on. "Perhaps you will partake of my hospitality for the remainder of the opera."

"I am very sorry. A mistake—" babbled the Armenian.

To the astonishment of Rodgers he was heaving his bulk out of the plush seat and almost scurrying along the empty row toward the door.

The officer chuckled softly to himself and sank into C 6.

FROM the corners of his keen eyes he observed: Immediately in front of him was a Syrian father and mother, daughter and young man. A happy family party, indulging surreptitiously in Turkish delight. Behind him was a Lancashire cotton-merchant and his wife, obviously in Cairo for a month's holiday combined with business. For the rest, the audience seemed an ordinary happy crowd prepared to enjoy the well-worn melodies of Bizet.

The orchestra players were scrambling into the pit. The bored conductor took his stance and idly flicked over the pages of the score while that strange cacophony that all orchestras make before settling down was already fighting the chatter of the audience. In a few minutes the auditorium would be dimmed and the overture begin.

And still Row C was empty except for the lithe figure of Rodgers sprawled comfortably in Seat 6.

But even as the conductor tapped the music stand with his baton and the orchestra held themselves tense, ready to be unleashed, the doors on each side of the auditorium swung open and a number of men in evening dress poured into Row C.

They trailed in on each side of the Anglo-American. All in evening dress. Not a woman among them. He counted them: Thirteen men. They sank into their seats almost in one mechanical motion. And then the lights flickered out as the brassy, high-sounding overture to "Carmen" was begun.

The curtain swished up. Girls of the cigarette factory, including the tantalizing Carmen, flaunted themselves before the soldiers. The violins surged in the brilliance of the crowd music. Paul Rodgers, with the sigh of a man who is thoroughly enjoying himself, leaned back in his seat.

But really it was to give a side-glance along the row. From the light flung out by the stage, he could glimpse the faces of those thirteen men. Levantines, nearly all. Swarthy, brutal, pinched and desperate. Not one of them seemed in the slightest degree interested in the music. A few ogled the chorus. For the rest, they seemed a typical bunch of desperados from the Cairo underworld. And all in evening dress!

When the conductor, with a clawlike ferocity dragged the orchestra to the finale of the first act, and the curtain descended to tumultuous applause, Rodgers smiled, and half-rose as the lights of the auditorium flickered into life. Already many people were strolling toward the exits.

Then the officer hesitated. He suddenly realized that not one of those thirteen men had moved. They sat stolidly in their seats. Once again Rodgers sank back, so that Row C presented an unbroken line.

The men immediately on each side of him stared with heavy brutal faces toward the curtained stage. Not a word was spoken. What was this mystery?

Electric bells thrumming in the distance were driving the audience back for the second act when Rodgers made a discovery. The red plush seats of Row C were new. They stood out from the rest of the auditorium. The significance of this had hardly time to dawn upon him before the lights were dimming for the second act.

At that same moment the man seated on his right had swiveled his head away from the stage. Rodgers followed his gaze. It was directed toward the Egyptian seated in the stage box with the veiled woman behind. And almost imperceptibly the Egyptian nodded. Darkness and the thumping crescendo of drums descended upon the auditorium.

IN a leaping torrent of melody, the *Toreador* song burst upon the ecstatic audience. It was then that Rodgers became aware of startling developments. Each of those thirteen men in Row C had taken a knife from his pocket. They gleamed dully in the darkness. Rodgers' hands closed involuntarily.

"Make a move, and you are a dead man!"

A growling whisper from the man at his right, and the unmistakable jab of a pistol against his ribs. Rodgers hesitated. One glance at that swarthy face, however, assured him that this was no idle threat. Fascinated, he gazed at those knives which were cutting deep into the arm-rests of the *fauteuils*. Silently, the red plush was being ripped.

Each man did his work well. On the

stage, all was bustle and melody. The orchestra was in a frenzy of movement. The audience was held by melody. But in Row C the knives had done their work; swarthy hands were gripping small packages.

Once more there seemed to be a nod from the Egyptian in the stage box. A whisper, impregnated with garlic, reached Rodgers:

"Let me warn you! You will still be covered when you are alone. One false move, and—"

There was a shrug of heavy shoulders as the fellow rose. Simultaneously the other twelve men rose and the seats of Row C were emptied with a startling rapidity. Of all except Rodgers!

PATIENTLY he awaited the end of the act, and did not move. The curtain descended to thunderous plaudits; the lights gleamed again, and he waited for the hubbub that was sure to arise as soon as those torn and slashed seats were discovered. . . .

Within two minutes of the lights being switched on, a bewildered and gesticulating manager, together with three attendants, were regarding the damage.

"But this is an outrage—a dastardly outrage!"

The manager flung his fat, jeweled fingers aloft in helpless despair. Then he regarded the solitary occupant of Row C with suspicion.

"What do you know of this, monsieur?" he began wrathfully in French.

Rodgers grinned in his face and turned to one of the attendants.

"Have you a knife?" he asked.

The attendant produced a small pocket-knife.

Rodgers took it, and with a quick motion dug it into the arm of his seat. Then he began ruthlessly to cut away at the red plush.

"Monsieur!" raged the manager.

The plush covering fell apart. The lean fingers of the officer dug into the opening he had formed, and dragged forth a package.

"It is for this," he murmured, "that your beautiful seats were slashed open."

"What is it?"

"Hashish. Smuggled hashish."

At those words the manager paled. To be guilty of smuggling that deadly weed into Egypt meant a heavy penalty.

"But I do not understand," he gasped. "These new *fauteuils* only came over from Trieste a month ago. They were specially ordered by myself. Tonight for the first time they were installed in the theater."

"Exactly," nodded Rodgers. "The all-powerful hashish syndicate arranged with some one in the employ of the makers in Trieste to fill these arm-rests with hashish. You innocently helped in the transaction. The syndicate here permitted the seats to be installed. This evening, they have collected their valuable consignment—that is all."

"But it is a sinister and diabolical plot," babbled the manager in gesticulated French. "The police must be informed, and—"

He broke off. An attendant was whispering in his ear. The rage died out of his face. He gave a glance at the stage box, where the Egyptian in evening dress lounged easily. The manager bowed. A nervous smile creased his fat face. He turned to Rodgers.

"The great and noble Prince Ali Sakkara presents his compliments to you, monsieur, and begs you accept the hospitality of his box for the remainder of the evening."

The officer stroked the back of his fiery crop.

"I shall be delighted to make the acquaintance of the Prince," he murmured.

A nod from the manager, and Rodgers followed the attendant. In a few moments he stood outside the door of the stage box.

"Come in, my dear Rodgers," said a voice in perfect English. "Let there be no ceremony."

"Your Highness, then, knows me?" murmured Rodgers.

THE thin dark face before him smiled shrewdly.

"Who has not heard of Paul Rodgers—the famous Red Wolf of Arabia? My dear fellow, your exploits have been whispered among my own retainers until nothing but a personal meeting would gratify my own curiosity."

"Your Highness flatters me."

He was aware that in the darkness of the box sat a luxuriously dressed woman, the lower half of her face veiled. Her kohl-darkened eyes glittered strangely. Prince Ali Sakkara, with true Orientalism, ignored her presence entirely.

"I understand that there has been some unfortunate happening in the *fauteuils* this evening," went on the Prince, the heavy lids of his eyes dropping mask-like. "Perhaps, then, you would partake

"A man comes to dinner one evening, and —*pouf!* The next evening he is no more."

of my hospitality for the remainder of the evening."

"It is very good of Your Highness, but I—"

"Please do."

The whisper came from the silken form in the darkness. That voice, soft and musical, caused Rodgers to look up, startled. His eyes narrowed. At the same time the Prince swiveled his head in the direction of the woman, anger stamped on his swarthy features. At that look, the woman cringed.

"But alas, I am not here on pleasure," continued Rodgers. "There are duties to be done—"

The Prince scowled. But in a moment the scowl was replaced by that charming smile.

"I understand, Rodgers. But I must insist that you dine with me—tomorrow evening, say?"

"I shall be more than delighted," said the Intelligence officer.

The silk-clad form had shrunk into the darkness.

"You are staying at Shepheard's Hotel?"

"Your Highness is well informed."

"My car will be at the hotel at seven o'clock tomorrow evening. My house is in the desert, some miles from Cairo. I hope my poor attempts at entertainment will not be considered too hopelessly dull."

"I am looking forward to an exceptionally interesting evening."

Prince Ali Sakkara laughed lightly.

The orchestra was once again taking its place. The conductor had his baton raised. The lights dimmed. With a crashing crescendo the last act opened.

"I BELIEVE in blackguards. They are the only men I can trust. All my servants are blackguards of the worst description."

Prince Ali Sakkara laughed softly as he made this remark. He and Rodgers were alone in the luxurious dining-room of the house in the desert.

"And I see that you tame them," murmured Rodgers. "Was not the famous desert bandit El Balad the man who brought in this delightful coffee?"

Again the Prince chuckled.

"You have eyes, my dear Rodgers. Yes, it was El Balad. What do you know of him?"

The officer shrugged his shoulders.

"Just a little of his record. It would be of great interest to Barrington Pasha to know that the bandit of the desert now serves coffee in the house of Your Highness."

Prince Ali dipped his brown fingers toward a cigarette-box and politely offered it to his guest.

"Barrington Pasha, chief of police, eh?" he murmured. "But surely he has forgotten the few miserable throat-slittings indulged in by my coffee man? By the way, you have not yet tried the coffee."

Cool and collected though he was, Rodgers flushed a little at the implication. He knew by instinct that he was dining with the most dangerous man in Egypt. Following upon that strange occurrence at the opera house the previous evening, he had made some quiet investigations of his own into the extraordinary career of Prince Ali Sakkara.

"You are my guest," murmured the

Prince reproachfully, as he calmly took Rodgers' cup of coffee, sipped it, and substituted his own cup.

"You are an extraordinary host, Your Highness," said Rodgers bluntly, helping himself to a cigarette.

"And yet," smiled the Egyptian, "I was for three years at Oxford—which, I am told, molds a man more definitely than does any other university in the world."

"Nothing in the West can change the East," said Rodgers.

"There is a suspicion of despair in your tone," went on the Prince. "Is the white man's burden, then, going to be shouldered by the brown and black races?"

"I am not interested in politics," said the officer, sipping his coffee.

"Nor am I," rejoined the Egyptian. "An Oriental who disdains politics! Does that surprise you?"

"Your Highness has other interests," Rodgers quietly pointed out.

The dark eyes flashed at him. "Commercial interests, eh?"

"I have heard gossip in the coffee-houses," murmured Rodgers.

The Egyptian lit a cigarette and masked his face with the blue smoke.

"You are a shrewd man, Rodgers. Because of that, I have asked you to dine with me here this evening. You do not mind if I talk—er—business?"

"No."

"But first let me entice your interest with a brandy *liqueur*," said the Egyptian, clapping his hands. "As a Moslem, I am of course, denied wine. But as you are my guest I intend to make an exception."

The smile seemed to have frozen on his brown face. While the desert cutthroat El Balad poured out the old brandy, Rodgers contemplated his host.

TO all appearances he was dining with a cultured, cosmopolitan Egyptian of the new school. Ali Sakkara had had a brilliant career at Oxford. Afterward he had lived in Paris, the modern paradise of the brown and black races, and then toured Rome, Vienna, Budapest and Constantinople. In the latter city Prince Ali Sakkara had accepted an official position, but he soon relinquished it and returned to Cairo. And the reason for that return, Rodgers shrewdly suspected, was the state of the family finances.

Yet within two years this clever cosmopolitan Egyptian was living luxuriously and spending freely. The house in the desert outside Cairo was almost a palace. The servants were many, and as the Prince had lightly suggested, all notorious scoundrels. There was something more than mere coincidence in the fact that Prince Ali had been at the opera house on the occasion of the hashish raid. The Intelligence officer felt a growing certainty that Prince Ali was the real secret leader of the gigantic hashish syndicate whose ramifications spread from Marseilles to Bombay.

Rodgers nodded. "A charming but too optimistic philosophy," he said cryptically.

"Princes today must make money like other men," said Ali Sakkara as though answering unspoken suspicions. "Democracy, such as I know it in the West, has inflicted the bread-and-butter politics of trades-unionism even among aristocrats. Unfortunately Egypt has not escaped this curse of democracy. When I discovered that my father had wasted his last thou-

sand piasters in the purchase of an unpleasantly stout addition to his harem, I realized the necessity of engaging in commerce."

"And were your efforts successful?"

"Successful beyond all my luxurious dreams, Rodgers. And let me say in passing, I have many luxurious and expensive dreams. Big business has to pay for them."

"It seems to pay handsomely," murmured the guest, glancing round the luxuriously furnished dining-room.

"Big business, I discovered, needs only big imagination," went on the Prince. "Strong leadership—careful exploitation —clever manipulation."

"It is the gospel of a dictator."

"And what are your Wall Street magnates of today but dictators? In the olden days my ancestors maneuvered men on battlefields. The children of Mohammed fought their wars with the chemise of Ayesha as their battle-standard. Nowadays we fight on the world's stock-exchanges. We huckster in the marketplace. Power comes to us through money and men. It is always the same, even to the chemise. Wall Street battles today for its women."

"But what of the business which is outside the law?" asked Rodgers.

The Prince shrugged his shoulders.

"There, I am afraid, we are likely to differ. That is a matter of ethics. Tonight I intend to keep strictly to business."

"Am I to understand, Your Highness, that the business concerns myself?"

"Very much so."

"Supposing I said that I knew just exactly what this big business is."

The Prince smiled.

"You are no fool, Rodgers. I am sure you know a good deal. It is because I have assumed you know more than is good that you are invited to dinner here this evening. . . . Have another cigarette. You like them, eh? It is a special brand that I have prepared exclusively for myself in Cairo. I will send you a box in the morning. No, I insist."

RODGERS lighted the cigarette, and smoked in silence for a moment. Then, quietly, he asked:

"May I hear the proposition, Your Highness?"

The Prince nodded.

"You are an adventurous man, Rodgers, and the project I have in mind should appeal to you. I wish to devote some of my money to geographical enterprise. Do not be astonished. I am perfectly sincere. Egypt, and particularly the desert, has need of modern explorers. You have just returned from the Libyan Desert, I hear?"

Rodgers did not reply.

"THE Libyan Desert is particularly fascinating to the explorer," went on the Prince. "There is, for example, that lost oasis which undoubtedly exists, south of Siwa. Few men have dared to penetrate that area of sand and wilderness. Yet history tells us that men and camels used to dare that route south of Siwa—and survive. It might be done today. I suggest that the discovery of that lost oasis of the Libyan Desert would be a geographical discovery of the greatest importance. And"—the Prince blew a cloud of cigarette-smoke into the air—"you, Paul Rodgers, the Red Wolf of Arabia, are the man to discover it."

"You suggest I disappear into the Libyan Desert?"

"Your expedition would be amply financed," said the Prince. "You will not find I haggle over some thousands of piasters. There are plenty of geographical-society honors waiting the discoverer of that oasis. I do not care if you take a year in your search. But I ask only one condition."

"And that is?"

"That you start for the Libyan Desert at once."

Rodgers laughed aloud.

"I appreciate the desire of your highness that I shall go on a long holiday in the Libyan Desert," he chuckled.

"There is the oasis to be discovered," said the Egyptian, his eyes narrowing.

"And when it is discovered, providing an excellent new route for the camel caravans bringing hashish from the Mediterranean coast into Egypt," replied Rodgers. "Thank you for the offer, but —I think I mentioned it at the opera house last night—I have some duties to perform."

"For example?"

"The duty of discovering the real head of the hashish-smuggling syndicate in Egypt."

"That is a very big and dangerous job, my dear Rodgers."

"Nevertheless I intend to complete it."

"Very soon?"

"I shall not leave Cairo until I do." The officer rose. "And now, Your High-

ness, might I be permitted to return to my hotel?"

The Prince also rose. Once again he was the perfect host.

"Of course, my dear Rodgers. Of course! The car shall be ordered at once to take you back." He clapped his hands. A servant appeared. Orders were given in Arabic. The Prince lightly clapped Rodgers on the shoulder.

"And so our pleasant little dinner-party has come to nothing," he drawled quietly. "I am sorry, very sorry."

"At least you have kept your word," said Rodgers. "I have not found it dull."

"Ah, but life is very sad," murmured Prince Ali. "A man comes to dinner one evening; he talks, he dreams, he goes away; and—*pouf!* The next evening he is no more."

Rodgers nodded grimly.

"A charming but too optimistic philosophy," he said cryptically.

"And now good-by," said the Prince, holding out his hand. "The chauffeur has instructions to take you safely to Shepheard's Hotel."

"Are we not to meet again?" queried Rodgers.

"I doubt it."

"Au revoir!" murmured the officer, and left the dining-room.

He passed along the carpeted corridor, dimly lit by lattice-work lanterns. It was a corridor of deep shadows. Just as he neared the doorway that led to the desert, a hand stretched out from the darkness and touched his arm lightly.

"I beg of you," said a soft musical voice. "Accept his terms."

His gray eyes searched her in the shadows. He saw only a black silken figure.

"Why should I accept?" he whispered back.

"He will kill you if you do not."

In the distance came the laugh of Prince Ali Sakkara. At the sound of it the woman shrank deeper into the shadows. She disappeared as silently as she came.

Bracing himself, Rodgers walked to the door. Beneath the glittering stars of the sky over Africa was a luxurious limousine, waiting.

SILENTLY Rodgers unlocked the door of his room at the hotel. His hand crept quietly to the switch and clicked on the electric light. He stood in the doorway and contemplated the room. He had an instinct that somewhere within those four walls deadly danger lurked.

During the rapid motor-drive back across the desert, he had reviewed the events of the evening. Prince Ali Sakkara was the head of the secret hashish-syndicate. He had realized that Rodgers was dangerous and must be kept out of the way. Probably another huge consignment of hashish was expected. The suggestion of an expedition into the Libyan Desert was a temporary expedient. Now that this had failed, action would be swift and ruthless. Millions of piasters were at stake. Big business! The syndicate would not permit one man to stand in their way.

PRINCE ALI had warned him—then the strange soft-voiced woman. For over four hours he had been away from his room at the hotel. In those hours much could have happened. As his gray eyes narrowed and his gaze searched the room he saw that a few objects had been moved slightly.

A servant, perhaps had dusted the table? A servant! A vision of the gross, eunuchlike figure in long white garb came to him. Was that servant to be trusted?

His finger hovered against the electric button. No, it would be a bad error of tactics to confront the man at this hour. Nevertheless, Rodgers regarded that room from the doorway for two minutes before he stepped into it and closed the door. The latticed window looked out on one of the main streets of Cairo. A curtain covered it. He stepped toward and pulled the curtain aside. The phosphorescent bladder of the moon silvered the street and showed it almost empty. A glance out of the window revealed that there was no foothold there even for the most agile of assassins.

Reassured for the moment, he went to the table on which stood a telephone and writing materials and a box of cigarettes that he had bought that afternoon. He drew open the drawer of the table, and then whistled, softly, to himself. His revolver, which he had placed there, had disappeared. He was defenseless.

He regarded the bed. A mosquito-net draped it. In the electric light it looked ghostly and treacherous. The top of the sheets had been turned back invitingly. His pajamas draped a chair. Yes, the bed might be the place where the danger lurked. He eyed it speculatively.

"Think like the enemy!"

The old military textbook maxim came back to him as he stood there irreso-

lute. But who could sense the working of that brown brain that called itself Prince Ali Sakkara? The man was subtle. He possessed the Oriental crookedness which few Western minds could follow. But Rodgers knew the type. It was necessary to think, to go back over every detail of that dinner-party, weigh every word that had been uttered, interpret every gesture. Somewhere, the boastfulness of the Oriental had been unable to resist showing his hand. But where, when, how?

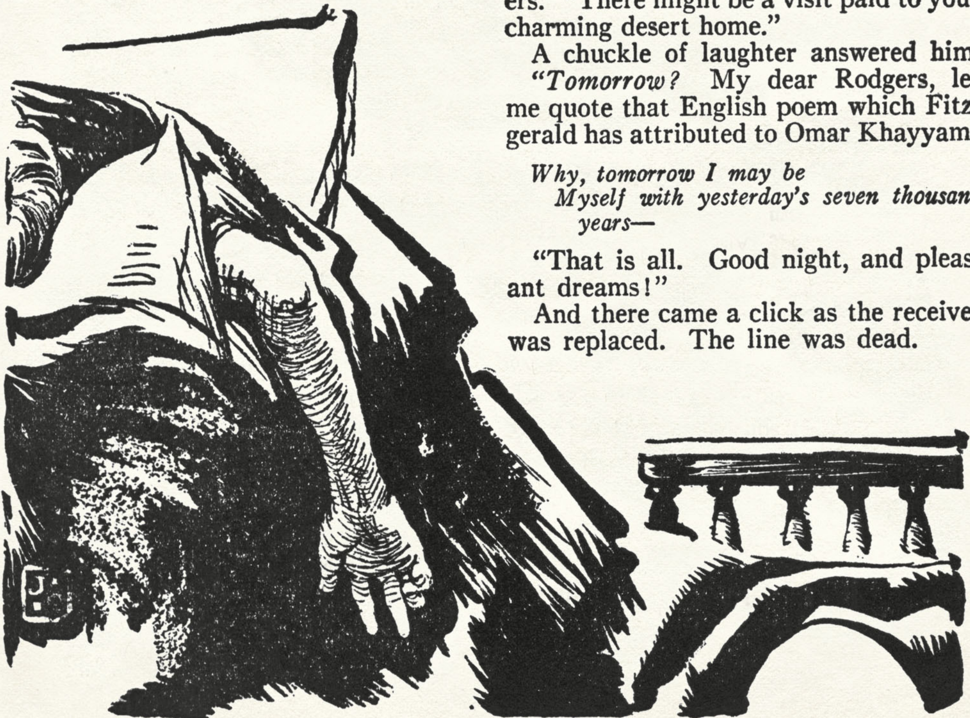
INTO the deep silence of that hotel room with a man in evening dress standing quiet and tense, there exploded the burr of the telephone bell. Rodgers gripped the table. He stared at the black instrument vibrating and shrilling its summons. Was this the trap?

He took out his silver case, selected a cigarette and lit it. These men were playing with him. They had sensed his mind. Rodgers, who was perfectly at ease in the desert and beneath the stars, was unsure of himself in a room cluttered with furniture and civilized objects. And still the silence was shattered by that continuous ringing of the telephone.

He stretched out a hand and took up the receiver. Slowly he placed it to his ear.

"Hello!" he called softly.

"Paul Rodgers?" said a suave voice.



It was the voice of Prince Ali Sakkara.

"Yes, Your Highness?"

"My dear fellow, I wanted to assure myself that you had arrived safely."

"Thank you. As you have discovered, I am in my room."

"I hope you have not been dragged out of your bed to answer this telephone call?"

"I am not yet in bed."

"Ah, perhaps, you are still thinking over our conversation?"

"I am thinking over it very much, Your Highness."

"Perhaps you will reconsider your decision about the Libyan Desert, my dear Rodgers."

"I shall not reconsider it."

"No?"

"No."

"A great pity. A great pity. Well, I must apologize for disturbing you. And so once again good-by."

"Your Highness!"

"Yes."

"May I make a suggestion?"

"I think you ought to set out on that Libyan Desert expedition yourself—at once."

Silence for a few moments.

"I don't quite understand," drawled the Prince.

"I shall be having a long talk with Barrington Pasha tomorrow," said Rodgers. "There might be a visit paid to your charming desert home."

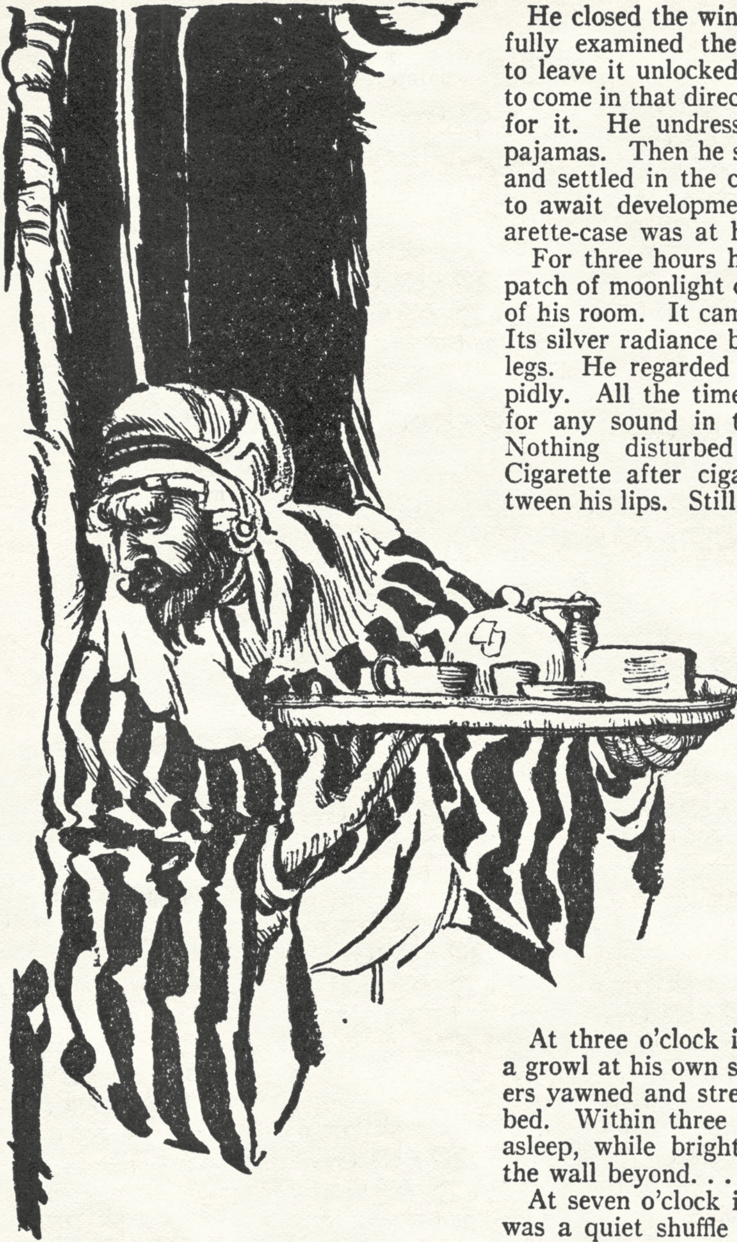
A chuckle of laughter answered him.

"*Tomorrow?* My dear Rodgers, let me quote that English poem which Fitzgerald has attributed to Omar Khayyam:

Why, tomorrow I may be
Myself with yesterday's seven thousand years—

"That is all. Good night, and pleasant dreams!"

And there came a click as the receiver was replaced. The line was dead.



The fat Egyptian, his eyes wide with alarm, stared at the prone figure as he shuffled into the room. "Good morning!" said Rodgers —and the man nearly dropped the tray.

He closed the window. Then he carefully examined the door. He decided to leave it unlocked. If the danger was to come in that direction he was prepared for it. He undressed, and put on his pajamas. Then he switched off the light and settled in the comfortable armchair to await developments. His silver cigarette-case was at his elbow.

For three hours he sat and watched a patch of moonlight crawl across the floor of his room. It came nearer and nearer. Its silver radiance began to creep up his legs. He regarded it, sleepily and stupidly. All the time his ears were alert for any sound in the corridor beyond. Nothing disturbed the deep silence. Cigarette after cigarette smoldered between his lips. Still nothing happened.

At three o'clock in the morning, with a growl at his own senseless fears, Rodgers yawned and stretched himself in the bed. Within three minutes he was fast asleep, while bright moonlight climbed the wall beyond. . . .

At seven o'clock in the morning there was a quiet shuffle in the corridor outside. Instantly Paul Rodgers was awake. Already sunlight bathed the room. So tomorrow had arrived! Prince Ali had failed.

There was a gentle knock at the door. It must be the servant. Rodgers was about to call out to the man to enter. Then he stopped himself. He waited. Quietly, ever so quietly, the door was opened. The pockmarked face of the fat Egyptian appeared. His eyes, wide with alarm, came peering from behind the door. He stared at the prone figure on the bed.

He shuffled into the room. He carried a tray with early morning tea. He ap-

With the cigarette smoldering between his lips, Red Rodgers contemplated the bed once again. Carefully he approached it, drew aside the mosquito net and smoothed back the clothes. Nothing.

He began a systematic search of the room. The carpet was torn aside, the wardrobe examined, the chair inspected. And at the end of half an hour, Rodgers had to admit himself baffled. He was developing nerves. Might it be that the subtlety of Prince Ali was just blind stupidity? Nevertheless, Rodgers intended to take no chances. He was fighting a dangerous adversary.

proached the bed, the half-frightened look still on his face.

"Good morning!" said Rodgers, opening his eyes.

The man shivered, and nearly dropped the tray. Then a scowl crossed the pockmarked face.

"Good morning, sir," he muttered. "Your tea."

"Thank you."

"There is also a package which has arrived by special messenger."

He pointed to an oblong parcel that was on the tray.

"Who is it from?" asked the officer.

"It comes from Prince Ali Sakkara," said the servant quietly.

Rodgers did not move. So this was the subtle plot. The box of cigarettes. He recalled Prince Ali's saying: "You like them, eh? It is a special brand that I have prepared exclusively for myself in Cairo. I will send you a box in the morning. No, I insist." There was death in that gift of cigarettes. The crooked Oriental mind had decided, snake-like, to terrorize his enemy first, and then strike death at the end. Not in the moonlight, but in the sunlight.

Rodgers' mind worked swiftly. Already the servant was shuffling out of the room. He called him.

"Open that parcel, will you?"

The servant hesitated for the fraction of a second. Then he shuffled back into the room.

"Yes sir."

Slowly and carefully, he tore away the paper wrapping. The box of cigarettes was revealed. A jerk of the wrists, and the cigarettes neatly packed were displayed before Rodgers, lounging against the pillows.

His long fingers selected one, haphazardly. He slipped it between his lips. The servant struck a match and lit it. Calmly he puffed away at it. An excellent cigarette.

ONCE again the servant was shuffling away, but a call from Rodgers swiveled him round.

"Pah! A beastly cigarette for the early morning," grunted Rodgers. "Give me my cigarette-case there!"

He pointed to the silver object lying in the chair.

"It is empty, sir," said the servant.

"So it is. There are some in that box on the table, near to the telephone. Bring the box here."

And he yawned.

But his eyes were watching that pockmarked face closely. He saw the man go to the table. The hands trembled as they took hold of the cigarette-box that had been there throughout the night. He carried it toward the bed.

"Open it!" commanded Rodgers.

He watched the hands grasp the box all the tighter. A bead of perspiration began to trickle down that pockmarked face. And there was fear, deadly fear, in his eyes.

"I—I can't, sir!" he gasped, and almost thrust it into the hands of the Intelligence officer.

The next moment the servant had lurched out of the room.

THOUGHTFULLY Rodgers regarded the cigarette-box in his hands. Carefully, he slipped out of bed and replaced it on the table. Then, gingerly, with a pen, he slowly raised the lid. What he saw caused him to pale a little, and quickly close the box.

Sprawled over the cigarettes were three deadly desert tarantulas. A sting from them meant death.

The servant knew the habit of Rodgers when in thought of dropping his fingers into the box and taking a cigarette, his eyes gazing elsewhere. If he had not had his cigarette-case well-filled and by his side during those moonlight hours, he must assuredly have dipped his hand into that box. It would have been the end. Those black, hairy spiders carried with them a poison that meant a painful death.

Carefully, Rodgers wrapped up the cigarette-box in paper and tied it firmly with string. Then he took up the telephone.

In a few moments he was put through to the house in the desert beyond Cairo. A sleepy, irritated voice eventually spoke.

"Of course it's Prince Ali Sakkara! What the devil do you mean by—"

Then he recognized the cold, unemotional voice of the officer.

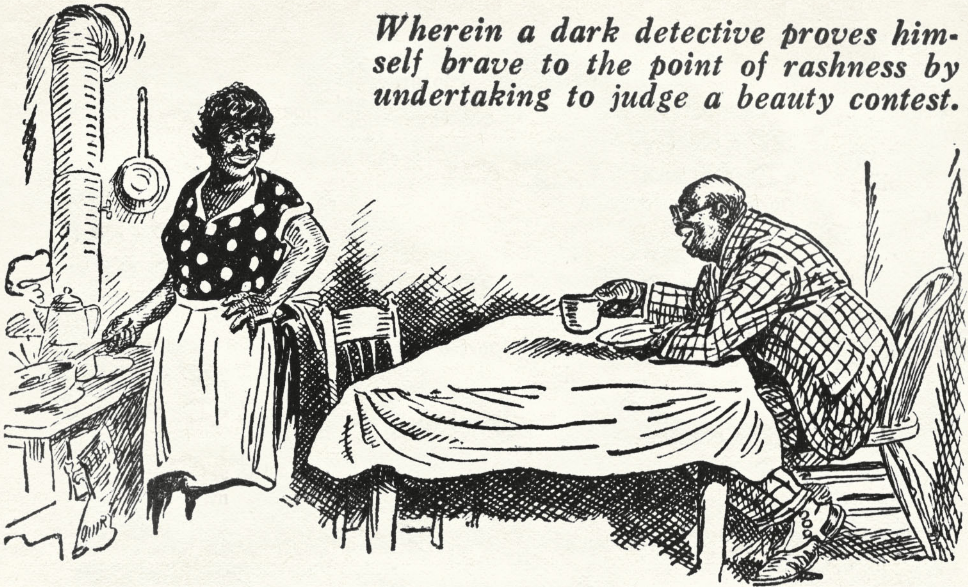
"I'm sending you a gift box of my own cigarettes in return for yours, Your Highness. I am hoping that the servant from the hotel will deliver them."

A short silence.

"I regret, Rodgers," replied the Prince quietly, "that I shall not be here to receive them. I am leaving almost immediately for the Libyan Desert."

Red Rodgers chuckled.

Another of these graphic tales of the Wolf of Arabia will appear in an early issue.



Wherein a dark detective proves himself brave to the point of rashness by undertaking to judge a beauty contest.

Black Beauties

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

BUGWINE BRECK couldn't read, but he could read signs, as now, when he came upon Willie Freeman, the sign-painting boy, busily making alterations in the lettering on the dingy window of the Columbus Collins Detective Agency for Colored—*A Criminal with Every Case.* And any change there was a sign of trouble for Bugwine, who held a silent partnership in the firm's successes but a full one in its errors. Mr. Breck was five feet nothing—mentally and physically—and wore overalls and a put-upon expression.

"What de sign say now, Willie?" He gasped foggily in front of the two new words that the tongue-in-jaw Mr. Freeman was painfully inserting on the dusty glass.

"Makin' it read '*General detectin' and overhaulin'* in all its branches,' enlightened the man of letters.

"'*And overhaulin'*'?"

"Dat what Columbus say put in; he de head-man, aint he?"

Bugwine's mental fog failed to lift.

"Yeah. But what *dat* for?"

"Aint know. I aint git paid enough to cover understandin' what I does: jest does it. Here come Columbus now; maybe he tell you."

The approaching Mr. Collins was tall and troubled-looking. The furrows which 1931, ably assisted by 1932, have put into presidential foreheads were conspicuous in his. And when he saw Bugwine they deepened, then smoothed—as though reminded first of a difficulty and then of its remedy.

"Hang dat coal-hole of yourn open any furder, and you be able swaller de window!" he snapped at the adenoidal Mr. Breck. "And look brainy, too, before I busts you one for hurtin' business!"

"Tryin' make out what general overhaulin' got to do wid de detectin' business."

"Figure of speech. Means us'll tackle anything dey is dough in; times gittin' so tough us got to take in more territory."

"Cain't hardly eat out de territory us *is* got—"

But his chief cut him short acridly.

"Not wid you gittin' dumber and dumber all de time! But dis way us laps over into new fields; gits more work out of *you.*"

Bugwine winced. A minute more now, and Trouble would be whistling for his station!

"So I gits de sign changed,"—Columbus eyed his assistant appraisingly,—"to fit more better de times and de new assignment you is gwine git."

"New assignment?" And Mr. Breck hunched his shoulders resignedly, like a horse in the rain. When any bananas were peeled, he got the peelings!

Columbus, however, seemed in no haste. He even appeared to change the subject. "Boy," he recalled something seemingly foreign to the situation, "you sho was in circulation last night!"

"Women rallies round me regular," admitted Mr. Breck conservatively: any second now a conversation like this was liable to reach back and bite a boy.

"Specially dem Atlanta ones," persisted his chief reminiscently. "Dat gal Roseola Moss was hangin' on your arm like a bucket. For a married man, you sho is drap a mean wing, runt! What Geranium say to dat?"

"What Geranium aint know, aint knock none of my lungs loose," Mr. Breck summarized his domestic status. "You say you seen me and Roseola?"

"Couldn't see nobody else! Dat gal so good-lookin' she remind me of your new job what I enlarges de agency's territory to take on for you."

"What new job?" Again Columbus' aide aged visibly before uncertainty.

"Jedge."

"Jedge?"

"Uh-huh. In de big bathin'-beauties contest de Three-A lodge boys is puttin' on at Prout's Lake next Sat'day."

RELIEF rose in Bugwine, swelling him to practically a perfect twenty-six. "You means," he demanded delightedly, "all dem gals gits on bathin'-suits and struts past *me* and *I* jedges 'em?"

"Aint mean nothin' else! 'Married or single,' de new bills what Snakefoot Anderson, dat new big organizin'-boy in town, puttin' out say. He puttin' it on for de lodge. He gits ten per cents—"

"Last organizer dey hires gits it *all,*" recalled Mr. Breck.

"Dat before dey learned to watch de ticket-seller better. Got eve'ything fixed right, now! Cain't git away wid *nothin'.*"

Mr. Breck refused to brighten further as a new collateral thought struck him: sauce for the gander was not necessarily sauce for the goose. *He* might step out and do a little mess of judging, but Geranium—that was different! "Knows dat Snakefoot boy," he grumbled. "All time hangin' round Geranium." Then, brightening, "But, boy, when *I* jedges women dey stays jedged! Hold eve'ything!"

"Whar you think you's gwine now?" interpolated Columbus: Bugwine was wheeling to flee.

"To tell Geranium about my job. When dey somep'n come up about me and another woman, I aims to tell her my ownself, and tell her first—make sho she git it in de right light."

Following this sound policy, Bugwine's caution increased as his distance from his home-alley decreased. The more territory a boy's detecting took in, the harder it grew for a jealous wife to understand all his business, especially bathing-beauty business.

SHORTLY Bugwine was reading signs indicating Geranium's presence but not her frame of mind, which was equally important. Bugwine crossed his personal No-man's Land, and peeped within. There all looked serene, and Geranium looked as if she was cooking.

Mr. Breck cleared his throat propitiatingly. Geranium whirled; Bugwine ducked frantically, and her favorite skillet clanged against the wall a bare sixteenth of an inch from his skull. Bugwine had misread the domestic barometer!

"Come in dis house, runt!" his ears confirmed just that. "What all dis I been hearin' about you?"

Bugwine gulped. In Geranium's hands a question like that could take in even more territory than Columbus' new sign. "Jest out talkin' over a little lodge-business wid dat Atlanta gal, Roseola," he launched his defense.

Geranium instantly flung a milk-bottle—full and hard-hurled. *"Gal?"* she screamed as it christened whitely the wall immediately back of him. "Who say nothin' about no *gal!*"

Mr. Breck blanched to match the milk. He had explained the wrong thing!

"I's talkin' about *gals!*" Geranium bore down on the plural. "—About you jedgin' all dem half-nekkid beauties! Gits around to one Atlanta gal *after* dat!"

Bugwine shrank below half-fare size. As usual, everybody had heard about his

The worm turned—an eighth of an inch. "You means Snakefoot Anderson? From New Awleans?" Bugwine imitated a husband.

"—What's been eve'ywhar and seen eve'ything—exceptin' another boy as dumb as you is! Yeah! And you claimin' to be a detective!"

"All *I* ever see dat fat loud-vest boy do is loaf around here, eatin' and lyin'," retorted Mr. Breck. A man had to assert himself. "Look like a crook to me. Aint nothin' but a big noise, and—"

Bugwine made the sidewalk barely in time. But a miss was as good as a mile.

"Makin' it read *'General detectin' and overhaulin' in all its branches,'*" enlightened the man of letters.

Yet on second thought, he put the mile behind him too, in case of miscalculation.

This brought him face-to-face with the cause of recent skillet- and milk-bottle incidents. "Hi, Mist' Breck! How you git through de evenin' last night?" None other than that dangerous bit of eye-ease, Roseola Moss of Decatur Street, Atlanta, was hailing him joyously. "Boy, for a runt you sho was singin' a loud bass last time I listens to you!"

"*Canary-birds* sings bass when dey lay eyes on you, sweetness!" the pint-sized Bugwine tried himself out to see if he was still going good.

"Aw, Mist' Breck! I jest aint see how de gals is let a big strong man like you stay single all dis time!" giggled Roseola.

business, it was evident, before he had—and had talked too much.

"Who gwine be in dis contest for no shrimp wid de hoof-and-mouth disease like you to jedge, huh?" Geranium kept right on.

"Aint seen de head-man about dat yit," stalled the knob-eyed Mr. Breck. He eyed the door as a thirsting camel eyes an oasis.

"Well, *I* is: he's Mist' Gawge Anderson—"

Bugwine came up for air, in a big way. Here was a good-looker who had him right, even if she was wrong about Geranium!

"Besides, I jest hears somep'n about you," continued the gorgeous Roseola archly.

Bugwine's heart skipped, then started strong; this wasn't Geranium talking.

"—Say you is gwine be de jedge in de big bathin'-beauties show Mist' Snakefoot's gittin' up."

Roseola paused expectantly. "Rallies noble round de jedgin'," stated Mr. Breck, expansively but vaguely. What he still needed was information about his business.

"Ten dollars' prize and a railroad ticket to Atlanta for de winnin' beauty," Roseola possessed data he had lacked, it seemed. "And—er—I been kind of studyin', twel now, about how I was gwine git back to Atlanta—before I hears *you* gwine be de jedge."

Something hit Bugwine between the eyes, twice: A hint—and an idea; the latter seemingly his own. "*You* gwine be in dat contest?" he furthered and fathered the latter first.

Roseola loosed a high-voltage smile, calculated to floor at three miles. Bugwine was a lot nearer, and didn't have a chance. "W-e-l-l," she hesitated coyly, "I *was* thinkin' some about it. But, course, it aint no use—not unless'n I gits in right wid de jedge *first.*"

"Good-lookin'," the dazzled Mr. Breck hastened to settle a lady's mind and his own feminine future with one stroke, "you's in already! And wid me jedgin', you wins in a walk. —I done seen de other gals!"

"Aw, Mist' Breck!" bridled Roseola. "You sho is one fast worker!"

"Way to git nothin' attended to round Demopolis," Bugwine consolidated his gains, "is git Bugwine Breck to tend to it. Even if 'taint nothin' but a accident, I always comes out on top."

DOWN in Hogan's Alley, Mr. "Snakefoot" Anderson, fat, gold-toothed, loud of vest and voice, was busy with his own business. Mr. Anderson was of the type that looks ahead. "Looks like you is sort of flustrated in de throwin'-arm, peaches!" he was greeting a grim-jawed Geranium on her front steps.

Geranium thawed to flattery like a glacier in Liberia. "Messin' wid dat boy Bugwine I marries by mistake," she explained shortly. "All time thinkin' he is a detective—and hangin' around women!"

"Jest sort of gittin' my mind on a little lunch before de duties of de day," Mr. Anderson's foresight came to the front. "Gits all wore down, gittin' up de beauty contest."

Geranium stiffened. That beauty contest was where Bugwine had stripped *his* gears. "Contestin' for what?" she made conversation.

"Winner gits ten bucks and a ticket to Atlanta."

AFAR off, a train blew for a crossing, and hankerings stirred in Geranium.

"And *Bugwine* jedgin' it?" she followed a yet-dim trail.

"Us hires de jedge from de Collins Detectin' Agency—dey been expandin' some; aint know his name," Mr. Anderson was above petty details and judges.

"Is, eh? *Hmph!*"

When Geranium said *hmph* like that, it could mean a lot. But Snakefoot was too new to know that, besides being busy with making himself solid. And Geranium was also already busy stimulating a "fringe" of ham around her skillet for him.

"Whar you gwine from here, big man?" Geranium at length made herself heard above the splutterings in her frying-pan. "After de beauty contest git settle, I means."

"*Was* gwine nawth, but—" Snakefoot hesitated unaccountably: Geranium remembered that afterward. "Uh—you aint got a dollar handy, is you, till Sat'day, Miz Breck? Kind of shawt while I's makin' a killin' here, and—"

Geranium was a forward-looker, too. Hence, "Got three—is I git 'em back," she preliminaried. "Been savin' for a year to train-ride myself to New Awleans. Still lacks six bucks."

"Three be three times as good," acquiesced Mr. Anderson avidly.

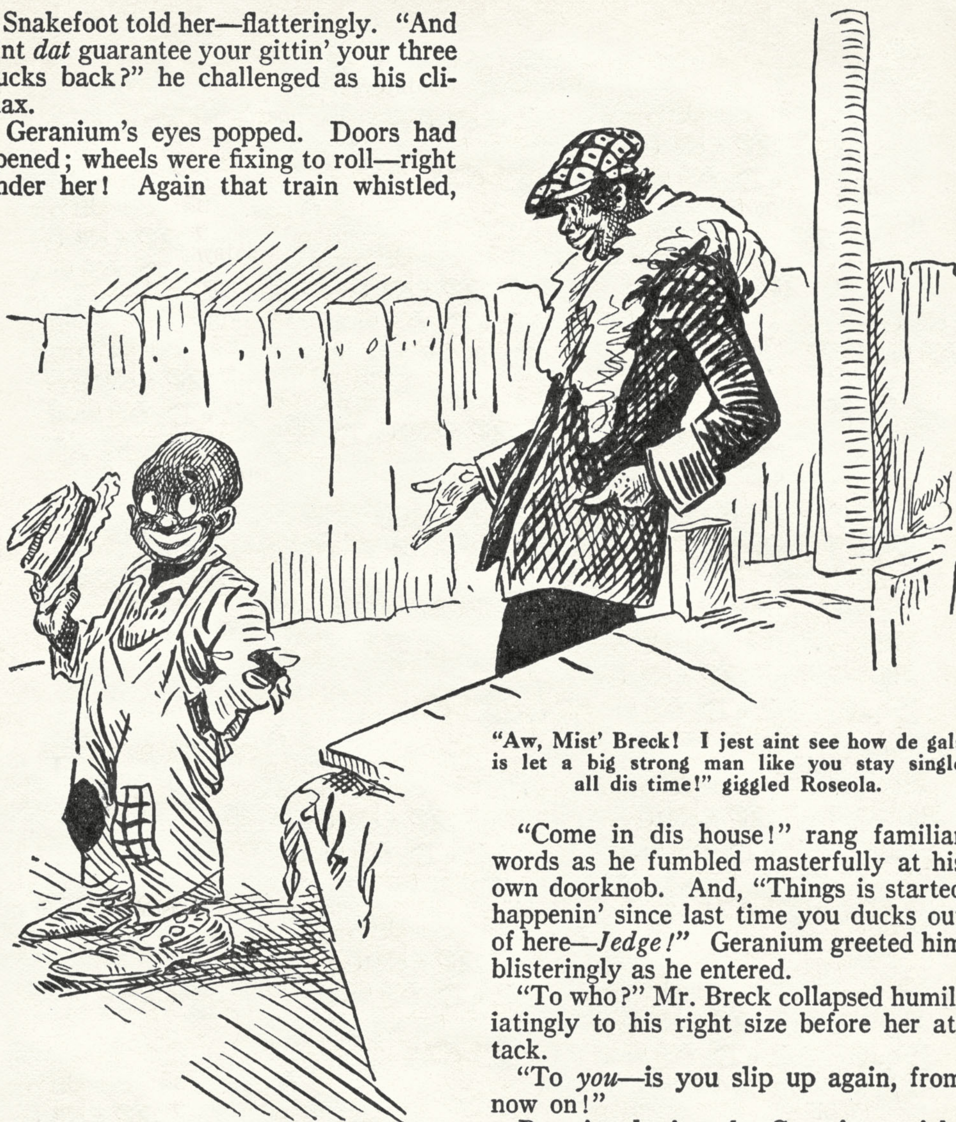
"How I know I git 'em back?" With Geranium love might be blind, but it wasn't foolish.

Improvising was the best thing Snakefoot did. Hence his: "Dat's easy. I jest thunk up a security for de loan what de Federal Reserve would knock over four counters and a cuspidor, jest gittin' *at.*"

"What I likes to see in a man—besides looks—is brains," giggled Geranium relievedly. Creditors always dominated debtors. "What dat security sound like?"

Snakefoot told her—flatteringly. "And aint *dat* guarantee your gittin' your three bucks back?" he challenged as his climax.

Geranium's eyes popped. Doors had opened; wheels were fixing to roll—right under her! Again that train whistled,



"Aw, Mist' Breck! I jest aint see how de gals is let a big strong man like you stay single all dis time!" giggled Roseola.

and already everything was different. "I sho cain't lose wid dat security!" she agreed. And there was a touch of determination in her delight.

"Not while you is married to Bugwine, you cain't," confirmed Mr. Anderson. "Wid him like he is and whar he is, you couldn't *be* surer of gittin' your money back. Makes lendin' me six bucks jest like lendin' 'em to de Bank of England!"

"Says three," corrected the lender. "Six is what I lacks of coverin' a New Awleans ticket."

Bugwine Breck, the great assistant sleuth, steamed into his home alley that evening with everything, including an overdose of Frog Bottom gin, under control. He was a big man, and Geranium was about to find it out.

"Come in dis house!" rang familiar words as he fumbled masterfully at his own doorknob. And, "Things is started happenin' since last time you ducks out of here—*Jedge!*" Geranium greeted him blisteringly as he entered.

"To who?" Mr. Breck collapsed humiliatingly to his right size before her attack.

"To *you*—is you slip up again, from now on!"

Bugwine hesitated: Geranium might have heard some more—

"Now, pin back dem lop-ears and listen," she resumed grimly. "But, first off, who all is de women you gwine pretend to jedge in dat fool beauty contest, huh?"

"Whole pa'cel of 'em," evaded Mr. Breck uneasily. He was beginning to detect the wind's newest direction without holding up any wetted fingers.

"Is Roseola Moss in de lot?"

That smoked-out feeling flashed familiarly over Bugwine. "Maybe," he admitted. "How I—"

"Uh-huh!" Geranium cut him short. "Boy, you reads like a book to me—a book wid big print! And you done promised *her* de prize-trip already, too, aint you?"

Bugwine's guilty start saved him the

trouble of lying. "H-h-how you know dat?" he finished the job of betraying himself.

"I aint. Jest knows *you!*" Triumph shone through her truculence. "And now, you loop-legged little louse, here's whar you starts listenin' sho 'nough! I jest finish fixin' it wid Mist' Anderson for *me* to enter dat bathin'-beauty contest, too! 'Married or single,' de bills says."

"Says *huh!*" howled the horror-stricken Bugwine. Abysses yawned blackly!

"—And what's more," Geranium widened and deepened them, "you gives me dat prize while you's jedgin'! Craves dat ticket. Here I been savin' up for two years to git myself a train-ride to New Awleans, and now's my chance to ride, and yourn to live! You hear me, boy?"

Mr. Breck swallowed his Adam's apple, then choked on it. His eyes started from his suffering face. But his strangled moans left no doubt of one thing—he was committed to award one prize to two different women, with himself in no position to disappoint either!

"Prize ticket's to *Atlanta*—not New Awleans," he grasped at straws.

"Jest so de wheels is under me," Geranium grew broad-minded about that. "What I gwine for is de ride. If I *ruther* go to New Awleans, dat aint none yo' business!"

MORNING saw Bugwine showing up at the detective agency hesitantly and in a badly reduced condition. Every time Columbus took in more territory, *he* took in more trouble! Now Mr. Collins sat grimly waiting for him at the firm's battered kitchen table. "I been checkin' up on de agency's record," he greeted his undersized aide sourly, "and finds out why you is sich a flop as a detective."

"How-come?" Mr. Breck had to act interested in order to borrow cigarettes.

"All time hirin' yo'self out to both sides de same case, dat's how-come! Aint never learn nothin'. I done decided git results or git shut of you—you make good or git out. As a detective, you all time kickin' yo'self in de seat of yo' own pants!"

Mr. Breck craned his neck to eye the reputed scene of his sorrows.

"So jest wants tell you before you starts actin' natural around dis bathin'-beauty contest,"—his superior fixed him with disparaging glare,—"dat is you commence double-crossin' yo'self in *it*, you cain't git away wid it. You cain't even git away."

"What de jedge wear to de jedgin'?" Bugwine strove to brighten the subject.

"*You* better wear a track-suit!" Columbus' reply, however, merely lowered the spiritual level.

THEN, in passing the railway station on his way home, Mr. Breck was depressed some more, by a glimpse of the foresighted Snakefoot within it, holding low and earnest converse with the ticket agent through the bars of his window.

"Dat boy would look better to me, too, is I could see him like dat regular—through bars!" yearned the little sleuth as he saw green money and green paper change hands within. Money and a ticket—that was what had got *him* into all this mess! Now he was seeing Snakefoot buy the ticket, and the gate-receipts would amply provide the ten-dollar additional prize for beauty. Gate-receipts that were not even going to be allowed out in the open, so sad had the Three-A experience lately been, with promoters.

Arriving cautiously at his own vine and fig-tree, Mr. Breck was in time to stop another *solar plexus*. Geranium was packing her trunk!

Bugwine didn't have to ask what for. Such confidence was both terrifying and well-placed. With Snakefoot in charge and Bugwine judging, a contestant who was married to the latter and lending money to the former needn't worry.

Staggering under the implications of that packing, Bugwine felt the need of air in quantities that one alley couldn't supply—only to find, as his feet automatically bore him to Roseola's open doorway, that she too was packing, for the same prize-trip.

Mr. Breck's heart-rending groan caught her ear, and, "Boy, *is* I got a bathin'-suit!" she turned and dazzled him on sight.

"And gal, *is* I got a pain!" echoed the anguished Bugwine, stumbling from the scene. No need to tell a lady where a boy's pain was—in the neck, at thought of how again Columbus' schemes, plus his own penchant for hiring out to both sides, had ruined him past mending!

Bright and warm, at length the great contest-day dawned; as great days will, no matter whom they crush. With Bugwine Breck, America's worst bedeviled beauty-judge, in a mental condition bordering on chaos in a vacuum, as the hour of judgment neared.

Constantly now signs of the coming contest—and cataclysm—thickened. Importantly the officials of the Three-A lodge hurried to and fro. Lustily the second-hand steam-calliope of Latham Hooper was heard in the land. Ever and anon "Professor" Alex Dinghouse's one-man band flivvered melodiously by, with the Professor writhing in his harness in the rear of the car driven by his wife. Giggling contestants, squired by determined relatives, mingled with the mob.

Then came public revelation of the crowning precautions taken by a lodge that had employed promoters before—Ticket-seller Gladstone Smith chugging proudly past, locked within the cage of the Demopolis municipal dog-wagon, pressed into service by the contest management as promoter-proof and the town's nearest approach to an armored truck! Chauffeuring it, rode the impresario Snakefoot Anderson, cocking an eager ear backward while Gladstone counted his change *en route*, as though to catch the clink of the percentage.

Perspiring afoot behind the dog-wagon, in a one-piece bathing-suit worn under her street apparel, Contestant Geranium Breck kept an eye upon her loan, and already felt train-wheels beneath her. . . .

Increasingly, as the glad May day wore on, all roads led to Prout's Lake, to reveal the noble use to which scrap lumber, informally borrowed from the white-folks, had been put. From it had been built an elevated runway upon which Demopolis'—and Atlanta's—fairest would shortly strut their stuff before a thousand paid-for admissions. No wonder the lodge needed an armored truck in which to do its business!

Arriving amid this press, under propulsion of the grim Columbus who had hired him for this slaughter, Bugwine suddenly paused to attend to his shivering. For midway of the lengthy stage, he had suddenly glimpsed the setting for his sorrow—a wooden packing-case, rudely railed and lettered, *jUDGEs sTAnD.*

ITS railing worried Mr. Breck. It was liable to trip and delay a boy, right after he had done a mess of judging! But heedless of a judge's fears, thick and ever thicker now pressed the holiday throng. At the far end of the runway Bugwine's despairing gaze fell upon the twenty-nine fair contestants, chattering, coolie-coated or kimono-clad, in the midst of a lot of male relatives and admirers who looked to Bugwine too much as though they took their calisthenics stevedoring on a steamboat. Fast and husky, in brief. Twenty-nine contestants! And an hour from now, gloomed Bugwine, twenty-eight of them would be mad at him.

Off at the far edge of the crowd Bugwine could see Gladstone Smith taking in money through the protective meshes of the dog-wagon, with both hands, with Promoter Snakefoot Anderson perched on its seat in front. A watched pot never boils—and a locked-in ticket-seller or locked-out promoter never embezzles, was clearly the fiscal policy of the Three-A lodge boys!

"Step on yo'self now, Bugwine! Git up in dat box and jedge: show fixin' to start!" As detective-in-charge of judges, the harsh voice of Columbus rang like a knell in the ear of Mr. Breck.

AS in a nightmare, he was advancing toward his doom. If he gave the prize award to Roseola, Geranium would give him the works—including a tombstone! And if Geranium won, his standing around Roseola would henceforth resemble that of a wet dog at a party. No matter who won, *he* lost!

Then the shrilling of a whistle, and all eyes were instantly focused on the runway end where the impending ocular treat would first appear. Bugwine stumbled forward, his eyes glassy. He saw the oncoming line, headed by Roseola and tailed by Geranium—making his task one for a diplomat, rather than a judge! Solomon and the two mothers had a cinch beside this!

"General overhaulin', eh?" mumbled Bugwine to himself. "All *I* aims to overhaul is airplanes, gwine my way!"

But he was swept inexorably forward, helpless in the grip of events. The Dinghouse band struck up; the Hooper calliope joined magnificently, not so much in the same tune as the same off-key. The line of beauties stiffened expectantly. In the outer rim of the throng, toward the ticket-wagon, a motor roared into life. But none heeded, for a quickening, the *toot-toot-tootle* of the calliope, ran contagiously through the crowd. Roseola set one mincing foot upon the runway steps, and the great bathing-beauty contest was on!

Again in the distance came the sputtering roar of the motor. And it shot over Judge Bugwine Breck that lacking airplanes, only auto flight would be fast enough to fit his needs.

Then a fanfare on the Dinghouse accordion, and the beauties were coming—up the steps and down the runway toward Bugwine! Roseola in front, and Geranium in the rear, his doom was marching on! Every eye was riveted upon them, when once more, in the rear of the rapt crowd, that motor spun—making it now or never, for Bugwine.

And Mr. Breck—instinctively, convulsively—made it *now!*

Vaulting the dreaded railing of the judge's stand like a kangaroo, he came off its elevation into the crowd in a long slanting diagonal, like a hen. His sound-effects were also like a hen, as he hit the ground running. Ahead, through parting spectators too startled to stop him, he glimpsed vaguely the car he had heard. It was already moving off. Desperately the one-man judiciary sprinted for it, to fling himself flat upon its running-board and cling there face-down and panting, while the gravel of its acceleration rained about him.

The detective agency, gasped Bugwine to himself as the scenery began to go by, might be taking in more territory, but they hadn't *seen* any territory-covering yet!

But before he could congratulate himself upon his escape, that which he most feared was upon him—the roar of an angry crowd behind. The chase was on. They were after him!

Horn, siren, and exhausts confirmed it. Crouched flat, and hidden, on the leaping running-board, Mr. Breck clung and closed his eyes, trying to close his mind and ears as well to what lay behind—and ahead, if they caught him!

The honkings and howlings in the rear faded, then increased. The pursuit was gaining implacably. *Now* a boy knew how old rabbit felt when the dogs were closing in, thought the frenzied Bugwine. And it would be just his luck to have Geranium in the first car of the pursuing mob, Roseola in the second, and Columbus not far behind!

ON and on—until in the careening body of the car, above his head, a new sound impinged upon his consciousness: a steady hammering and squalling that caused him to look up, fearfully—and all but lose his hold, in horror!

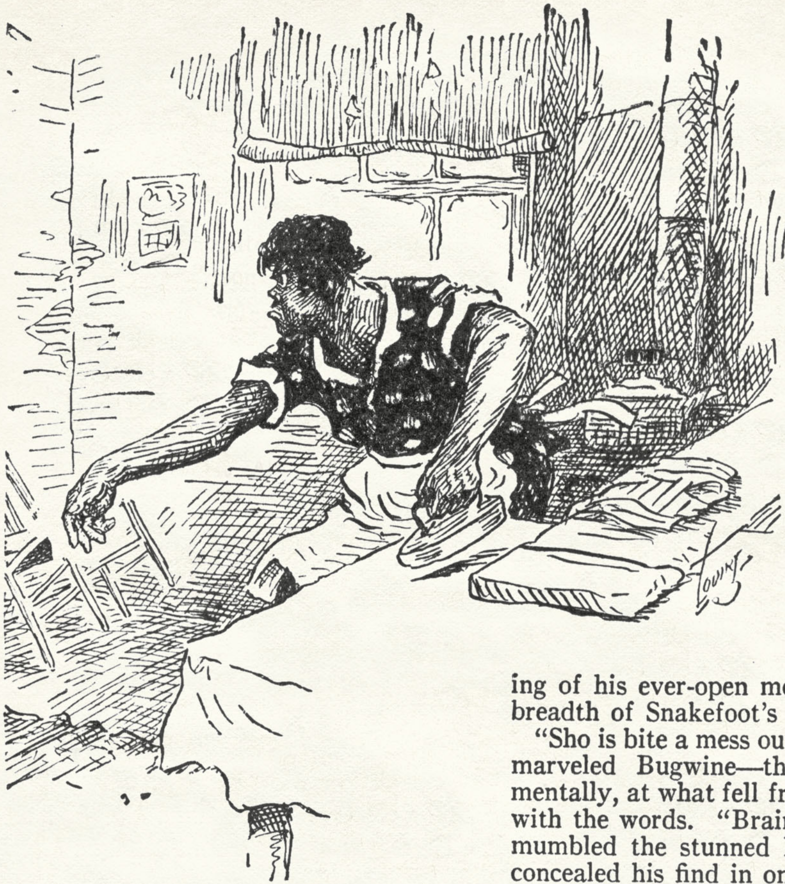
For, hunched low over the steering-wheel above him, was Snakefoot Anderson, with Ticket-seller Gladstone Smith and all his takings locked howling and hammering within the cage behind him!

Bugwine's brain reeled. Then the light! Foiled in any hope of stealing the cash alone, Snakefoot was stealing the dog-wagon, with Bugwine an accidental stowaway aboard it!

Groaning at every bearing, the Bugwinian brain strained amid wind and gravel at the problem thus presented. Already in evil odor himself now, if he remained aboard the mob would but link his flight with this greater crime—he a detective, sworn to uphold law and order, and already on thin probation with his chief because of past blunderings! While a foot below him, if he unloaded, flowed a road-surface that would be like emery-wheels, once he hit—or was shoved—upon it.

"*Ugh*-oh!" wept the goose-fleshed Bugwine to his horrified inner self. "Jumps over dat railin' out de fryin'-pan right smack *into* de fire now!"

Yet one necessity emerged more clearly every second: more speed must be got out of the dog-wagon or all was lost indeed. The pursuit was overhauling them. The caged Gladstone's desperate squallings rose to new heights as the plunging truck leaped and swayed and slithered



Geranium whirled, Bugwine ducked frantically, and her favorite skillet clanged against the wall a sixteenth of an inch from his skull.

on the curves. Clinging desperately to the wires of the ticket-seller's ignominious booth, Mr. Breck pulled himself upright, made to creep forward and implore more haste—but with most startling results.

For suddenly glimpsing thus unexpectedly at his elbow his near-inamorata's husband, Snakefoot jumped to wholly natural conclusions and the opposite running-board, letting go the wheel as he leaped, simultaneously with their encountering a sharp curve and a deep thicket. Instantly the truck took to the ditch.

GRADUALLY, for Bugwine, the song-birds ceased their twitterings; the crash and swing of blazing constellations through pitch-dark skies slowed and dimmed—and he awoke feebly to the inert bulk of Snakefoot Anderson beneath him, the babble of excited voices about him. When he fully came to, it ran hazily through his mind, Columbus would fire him, and the white-folks kill him, for wrecking that truck!

Meantime, woozily, Mr. Breck made shift to spit out something that was gagging him, following the wreck-born burying of his ever-open mouth in the front breadth of Snakefoot's gaudy vest.

"Sho is bite a mess out dat boy's vest!" marveled Bugwine—then reeled anew, mentally, at what fell from his lips along with the words. "Brains, do yo' stuff!" mumbled the stunned Mr. Breck as he concealed his find in one clenched hand. "Slip up now, and us is *still* ruint!"

Public attention was being diverted to the unlocking of a Gladstone whose mind was already far in the future, on the tale he should tell his grandchildren of the run Grandpa once made in the Demopolis dog-wagon! But public comment still ran on excitedly, loudly—to the fresh bewilderment of a Bugwine who could not believe his ears when they reported: "—Yas, suh! Bugwine Breck *always* git his man! Bugwine jedgin' de women, when he sees de crook drive off wid de gate-money—and old Bugwine aint stop for nothin'! Drap de jedgin' and light out right after him!"

Mr. Breck's faculties plunged wildly, then steadied. Again he had blundered squarely into triumph! Deftly he snatched from beneath his tattered overalls the rusted bear-trap used by the agency for handcuffs, snapped it upon the fat right ankle of the still-knocked-cold Snakefoot, and staggered upright to clarion: "Us smells 'em out whar others jest sniffs about! I seen him from de stand—and Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound, always gits his man!"

But ever short-lived, it was suddenly

brought home to the strutting Bugwine, are the triumphs of a married man. He might look like a hero to the public, but to Geranium he was just unfinished business. Like the elephant, Geranium never forgot. And:

"How about dat bathin'-beauty business, *Jedge?*" she confronted him once more. Behind her, expectantly, alluringly, stood Roseola.

Mr. Breck lost elevation like a broken-winged airplane. Now he was right back where he had started, so far as his main business and health was concerned! Geranium took another searing look of farewell at the handcuffed and sleeping Snakefoot who had her three dollars, and turned her full glare on Bugwine, who looked frantically about him and again saw no escape—clenched his fingers convulsively, and felt something forgotten—

And then, unexpectedly, inexplicably to the beholders, the judicial and diplomatic heights for Bugwine—heights equal in altitude to those just regained by him professionally by capturing the great dog-wagon bandit, accidentally but none the less red-handedly! "—Jest gittin' *to* dat when de crook-cotchin' interrupts me," he proclaimed. "Awards de committee's first prize and de ticket to Atlanta to—*Miss Roseola Moss!*"

Roseola's grateful giggle, however, was cut in two by a gasp—Geranium's gasp, preliminary to her sudden outraged, *"Let me at him!* Dat's all, let me *at* him! —De little four-flushin', frawg-faced two-timer!"

But Bugwine stood his ground—to play his further and final ace-in-the-hole before the infuriated Geranium, her three dollars, her trip, and her triumph all equally gone glimmering into the discard, could reach him—with:

"—And de *other* first prize," he unclenched his hand, held aloft that which he had accidentally bitten away along with Snakefoot's ravished vest-pocket, "I awards special to Geranium Breck—dis railroad ticket to somewhar what Snakefoot cain't use nohow—after he gits through listenin' to *another* jedge, in de court-house in de mawnin'!"

With the climax yet to come, at that in the forgiving cry of a shining-eyed and softened Geranium over her husband's ultimate blunder, as she read her prize: "De big fat four-flusher! *Hmph!* Tellin' *me* he was gwine nawth—when he had dis get-away ticket in his pocket all de time! Stand back, Bugwine, honey! *New Awleans, here I come!*"

The Legion

A one-time soldier of the Foreign Legion tells a highly exciting story of a minor but deadly war in a little-known field of its activities—French Indo-China.

By STEPHEN CUMBERLAND

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

WHILE the soldiers on duty gazed enviously from a distance, the Légionnaires of the garrison of A Pa Tiai, due for a few hours of freedom, stood rigidly at attention in the courtyard of the fort.

Lieutenant Duttier paced back and forth in front of them; his thoughts entertained many a misgiving. To disarm the hordes of defeated Chinese rebels flowing across the border, his men had spent the last two months in continual duty. Now they would be released with plenty of pent-up deviltry in their systems, and eight weeks' pay in their pockets.

Duttier knew that he would spend most of the next day listening to wails of complaining natives, but he philosophically considered that such occurrences were inevitable, like the mosquitoes and malaria fever of Tonkin. Indeed, on that Sunday afternoon he rather envied his men; with longing he remembered when, as a private and a corporal, he too indulged in care-free sprees, a pleasure now denied to him by the stiff rules regulating a commissioned officer's life.

But when at length he turned to face his men, his face assumed as a matter of routine an expression of forbidding rage.

"Bunch of *salopards!*" he roared. "I know that you feel like mad dogs straining at the leash—but God save you from making a nuisance of yourselves in the village, or from running amok across the

Settles a Claim

Although outnumbered, the Americans snatched bottles and bayonets and made a furious counter-attack.

border! The *salle de police* is always ready to receive transgressors, and courts-martial can be assembled at any time!"

He paused a while to let his words sink in. Then he shouted a thunderous "*Dismiss!*" and walked—grinning into his beard—toward the officers' quarters.

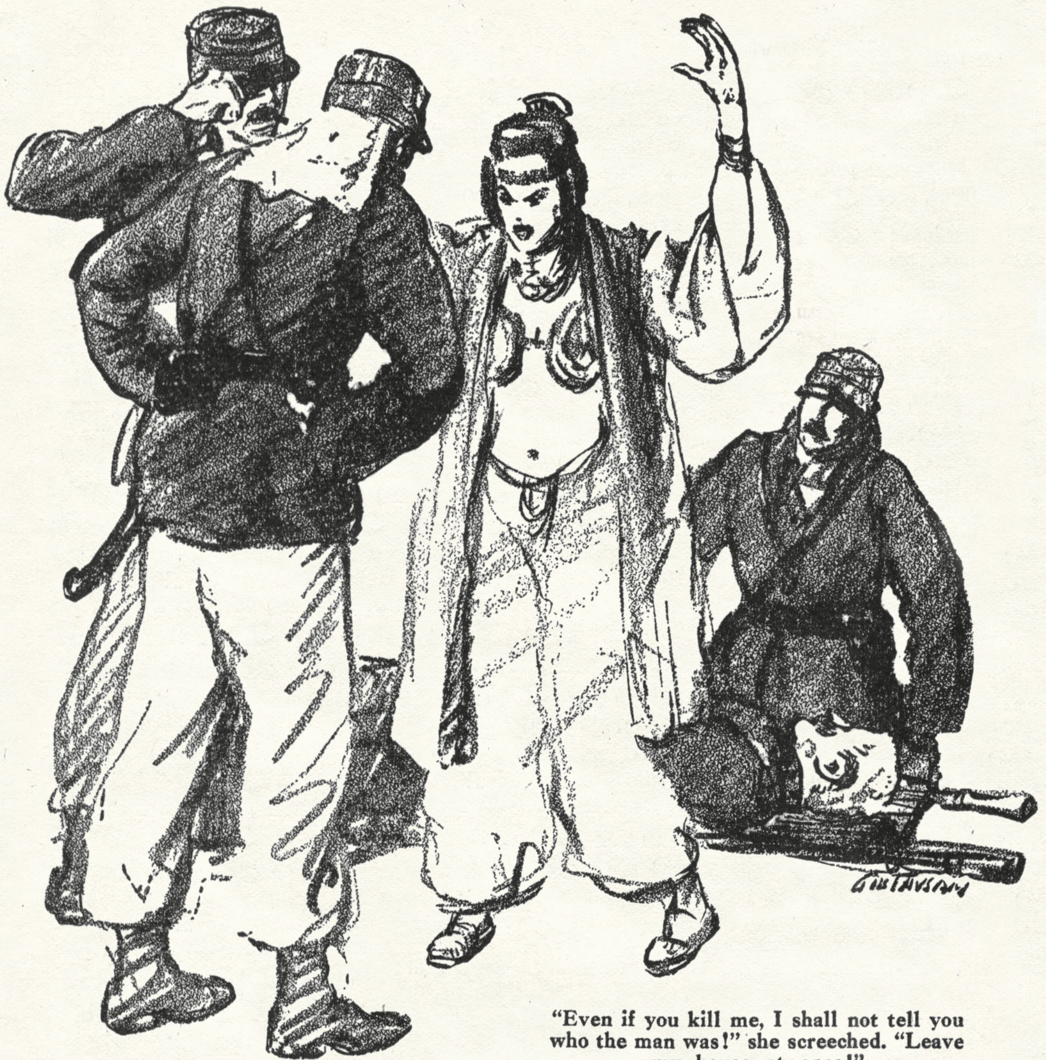
A few moments later the Légionnaires were tramping vociferously on the path leading toward the village. Brown children ran to meet them, pleading for *centimes.* Down in A Pa Tiai throbbing excitement spread among the concentric rows of huts. The diminutive Annamite women, the Congais, jabbered excitedly with their husbands and brothers; the owners of open-air stands got ready to boil their pond-raised fish in honey, and carefully inspected the boxes containing the big black crickets on whose fights the Légionnaires usually bet with boisterous enthusiasm; the proprietors of disreputable dives pulled out jugs containing diluted alcohol and fourth-rate cognac, and prepared for a rushing business.

But a group of five Légionnaires lingered behind the others, scorning these rude amusements. They were the ones constituting the so-called *"Coterie Américaine-Ecossaise,"* because the three minor stars of the group, Légionnaires Aubry, Bauer and Zeinheer, knew the English language and spoke it, off-duty, as a mark of deference to their ringleaders, a Scot named Macpherson, and one Gilroy, late from New York.

That Sunday marked a happy reunion, for Zeinheer had just returned from a forced stay of three months in the hospital of Hanoi due to malarial fever. He was a former school-teacher of Amsterdam, fallen from grace on account of his excessive passion for curaçao and gin, mixed half and half.

"What is on the wind, my slabs?" he boomed. "A bit of gambling and some *schnapps,* or what?"

"Nix, buddy; we're too wise to give our dough to Chink games," Gilroy replied, "or to go 'to the bamboo'—one of



"Even if you kill me, I shall not tell you who the man was!" she screeched. "Leave my house at once!"

those ratty places where patrons sprawl on lousy rattans and look at the bamboo pegs of the ceiling, while dirty Congai attendants give 'em something to eat and a doped pipe if they call fer it! We'll bring you to a real classy *co-dao,* where one can enjoy a good meal and there's a good dancing show."

"Hum! Is that true?" asked Zeinheer.

"Aye, laddie," Macpherson confirmed seriously.

"I think you are trying to get my goat," the Dutchman mused aloud. "Gilroy has described a place fit for officers or rich Tonkinese and Chinese. Why should its owner let in miserly privates of the Légion?"

"Losh, mon, 'tis what ye micht truthfully call a matter of gratitude," Macpherson explained.

"Mais oui!" Légionnaire Aubry confirmed. "On a Sunday, exactly ten weeks ago, Macpherson, Bauer and I were locked in the *salle de police* after an argument with that son of a cow Sergeant Zaburoff.

"Gilroy, being alone, went to the village, grew tired of it, and wandered to the surrounding countryside. Thus he blundered on Tscheo, owner of the *co-dao* he mentions. She was beset by a native footpad, who turned on the American with a knife. But Gilroy kicked the dagger from his fist, gave him a sound beating and carried him prisoner to the fort. From that day Tscheo has given us the freedom of her place, despite our unimportant station. It's the truth, Zeinheer."

A HALF-HOUR later the five soldiers knocked at the massive door of a pagoda-like building hidden in a thick

growth of castor-oil plants and tall canes. A native servant admitted them into a passageway.

"I go tell Tscheo," he announced, and pranced pigeonlike to a contiguous room.

PRESENTLY a dainty Congai came to greet them. She was draped in a sarong of heavy silk and gold brocade. A kind of gold diadem was pinned on top of her head. Her smooth and slim brown arms were covered with precious bracelets.

Tscheo opened her rouged lips to smile; instantly the sight of her blackened teeth spoiled the allure of her face, which was comely in an exotic way.

"Don't you remember what I suggested to you before?" Gilroy said disgustedly in Giao-chi, the language spoken all over Indo-China. "Why don't you scrub your teeth white instead of smearing them with lacquer?"

"Because if I should do so, my fellow-countrymen would think that I am a woman of loose morals!" the Congai unhesitatingly piped.

"Of course!" Zeinheer butted in, slipping into the tutoring attitude of his bygone days. "In Tonkin black teeth stand for virtue, and white ones for license. Therefore the natives cover their teeth with black paint—"

He would have lectured still further, but Gilroy interrupted him with a savage howl: "Oh, dry up, will ya!"

Zeinheer subsided. Tscheo said: "I will send you to the left wing, where you will be entertained."

"Okay with me!" replied Gilroy.

The place mentioned by Tscheo was a huge hall, furnished with a square table and a number of low benches piled up with cushions.

Four diminutive Congais soon made an appearance and began loading the table with foodstuffs. Eventually two of them produced stringed instruments and began drumming a rhythm; another girl seized a large bowl of alcohol, and followed by the fourth entertainer, who held a spoon in her tiny hand, she tiptoed up to Macpherson.

A curious ceremony took place. The diminutive beauty who bore the spoon dipped it into the fiery liquid, then into her mouth, and inhaled stertorously. Again she plunged the spoon into the bowl, retrieved it full to the brim and stuck it into the capacious mouth of the Scotchman, who swallowed with evident pleasure.

Zeinheer, Aubry and Bauer were in their turn regaled in the same way; but Gilroy, the last one to be honored with that offering, raised a protest. "What kind of pig am I supposed to be? D'you think I'd suck the spoon which has been in everybody's mouth?"

He was pacified with a full cup of his own, and the ceremonial of distribution from the bowl began all over again.

At the fourth or fifth spoonful Aubry became decidedly mellow and attempted to sing with the music, heightening the general hilarity. The Congai who held the alcohol-container resigned it to the eager hands of Zeinheer and began one of the figurative dances of her country.

The party was going on gloriously, when a door at the bottom of the hall opened several inches and a massive head peered within. Its great trap of a mouth let forth a belligerent shout: "What are those girls doing there?"

"And who are *you,* funny-face?" Gilroy quickly retorted.

That remark seemed to exasperate the stranger, who thundered in Giao-chi: "I wish this clamor to cease instantly!"

"Take a drink first!" Aubry flared. He grasped the almost empty alcohol-container from the hands of Zeinheer, and hurled it at the interloper, who quickly ducked behind the door.

The crash of breaking glass still lingered in the room when the door flew open, and while the screams of the girls rose loud, a throng of Chinese came out firing, then hurled themselves on the Légionnaires.

That was a mistake on their part, for in the ensuing chaotic fight their firearms were useless. Although outnumbered and somewhat dazed by the unforeseen attack, the *Coterie Américaine-Ecossaise* snatched bottles and bayonets and made a furious counter-attack.

THE Chinese gave way. They ran through the building, emerged from a side door and scurried into the canebrakes. A concerted volley stopped Gilroy and his companions from pursuing them farther.

"Where is Zeinheer?" the habitually silent Bauer suddenly exclaimed.

"Nom d'un nom! I heard him scream when the Chinese fired before they would jump on us," Aubry remembered.

They returned tumultuously to the scene of the party so brusquely interrupted, and there, to their utter dismay, they found the Dutchman stretched on

the floor, surrounded by Tscheo and a bevy of girls.

"His knee is hurt," a Congai stammered.

Swearing and cursing, the four Légionnaires knelt by their injured comrade. They slashed a trouser-leg open, uncovering a bad wound. The knee-cap was shattered; evidently the bullet was embedded in the tendons at the back of the joint.

Since better disinfectants were lacking, they poured alcohol on the wound. While Zeinheer winced and moaned, smarting under the bite of the burning liquid into raw flesh, they bound the injured limb with clean linen strips furnished by the solicitous Tscheo.

Macpherson, Aubry and Bauer built a makeshift stretcher with a section of bamboo ladder and a spread of cushions and carpets.

Then Gilroy took Tscheo aside.

"If you have any friendship for me, tell me who is the big Chink who started all this trouble," he demanded.

The Congai lifted her head and gazed at him, her eyes narrow. Gilroy noticed a warning smile which lifted ever so little the corners of her mouth; then he heard her voice in shrill protest:

"You say that you identify the honorable ancestor who fought with you as the captain commanding the Chinese garrisons across the border! You are wrong!" She paused, then screeched: "No, even if you kill me, I shall not tell you who the man was! Leave my house at once!"

Shouting curses and threats, the four Légionnaires placed their wounded friend on the stretcher and left the place. On their way back to the fort, Aubry voiced his indignation. "What a fine friend *she* turned out to be!"

"If you were not soused, you'd know better," Gilroy corrected him. "Why, you dumb egg, didn't ya see that, by denying that the Chink captain from across the border was the bird I was looking for, she gave 'im up as slick as can be? Course, she had to fuss up a bit and make believe that she was sore at us, to save her own skin."

"Well, noo that ye ken who smoshed Zeinheer, what guid does that do?" Macpherson groused.

"Wait and see. I've a plan," the American promised.

AN hour later the lieutenant-surgeon of A Pa Tiai's fort emerged from the operating-room and confronted four anxious Légionnaires, who arose from their waiting-room benches as if propelled by springs, and crowded around him.

"How did he get that wound?" he asked severely.

"Just hard luck," Gilroy explained, trying to look as innocent as possible. "A tribesman got into a row with another heathen and shot at him with a smuggled gun—hitting Zeinheer, who chanced to pass by."

"I presume you caught the culprit," the surgeon remarked with fine sarcasm.

"He ran too fast for us. He disappeared into the canebrakes before we could lay hands on him," Gilroy affirmed.

THE surgeon sharply scanned the faces of the others. Macpherson's face was expressionless as stone. Aubry traded glance for glance. Bauer tried to smile ingratiatingly—but with disastrous effect.

"Zut!" said the lieutenant-surgeon. "Your story is just tripe. But I am not responsible for the discipline of the Légionnaire company. I am sorry for your friend," he continued after a pause. "He will be crippled for life. Do you know what that means?"

The four soldiers nodded, shuffling uneasily. Disability due to an injury received off-duty implied discharge without a pension, and without one of the civilian jobs reserved by the governments of Algeria and Indo-China for veteran Légionnaires.

Out into the courtyard of the poste, Macpherson commiserated the plight of Zeinheer:

"Wi' the world i' its preesent beset state, a whole mon doesna find any job, let alone a cripple! Dootless Zeinheer will hae trooble to feed himself."

"That's it!" Gilroy snapped. "We dragged the Dutchman with us, and we're responsible for him. We can't let him go out in the world and starve!"

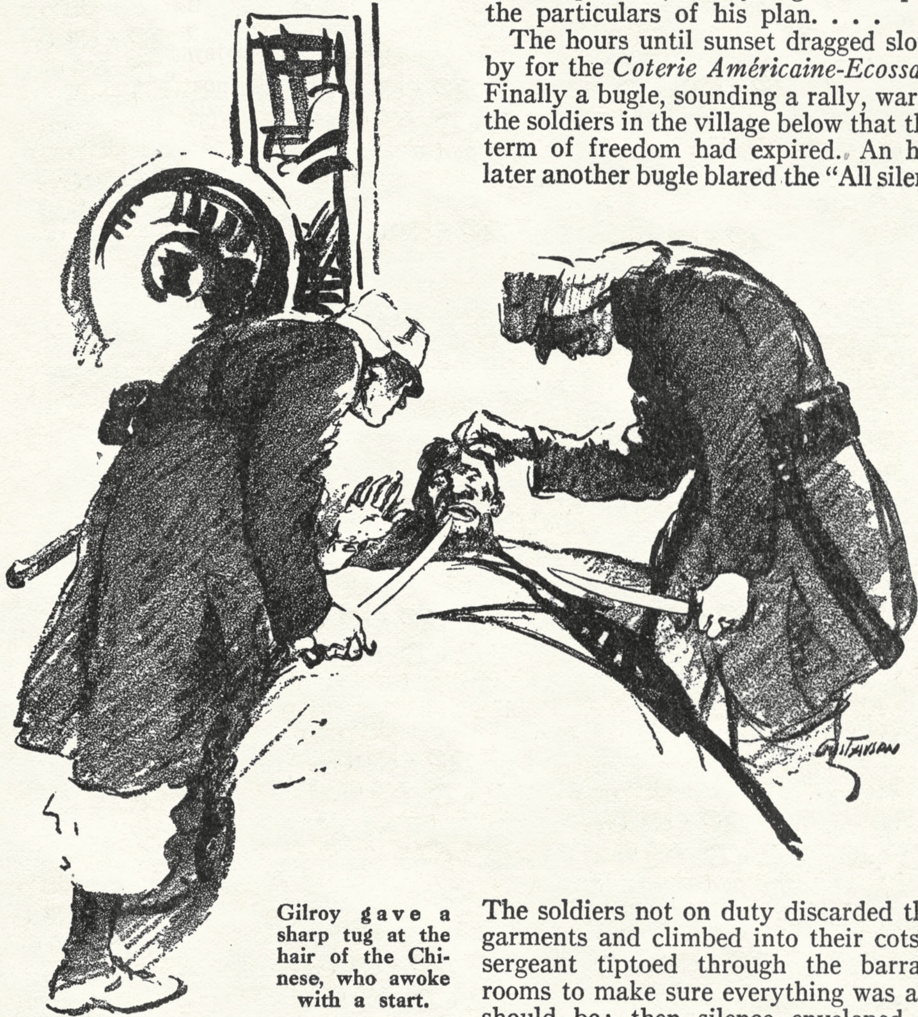
"My friend, you forget that our pay could not steadily feed even a poodle; our weekly *sous* would not help much a feeder like Zeinheer," Aubry said coldly.

"Who mentioned the Légion pay?" Gilroy protested. "I have much better in mind. We'll collect for damages from the buzzard who butted in on our party. Believe me, that bird must have plenty of dough! Those Chink captains make fortunes levying taxes on the countryside, and stealing from the bandits who fall into their hands."

"I have no doubt that, if we could get hold of the *Capitaine Chinois,* we would persuade him to give a substantial sum

for Zeinheer's support," Aubry rasped. "But he is by now on the other side of the border, surrounded by his men, and entirely out of our reach."

"Out of our reach—nothing!" exclaimed Gilroy. "The Chinese worry only



Gilroy gave a sharp tug at the hair of the Chinese, who awoke with a start.

about their own rebels and bandits coming from the north; they don't even watch the frontier since they don't expect troubles from Tonkin. The three miles' trek to the Chink camp will be easy. Sometime ago I learned from a deserter that the captain lives in a bungalow, about forty yards away from the barracks, and that at night only two sentries guard him."

"I will say, he is vurra ondiscreet, to entrust his safety to only two of his roofians, who micht be easily waylaid," Macpherson interrupted.

"I see. We could get hold of him," Aubry conceded. "Since the institution of the Légion, men of the foreign regiments have brought to a successful end undertakings even riskier and crazier than that!"

Bauer mumbled his approval; and seeing that he had won the endorsement of his companions, Gilroy began to explain the particulars of his plan. . . .

The hours until sunset dragged slowly by for the *Coterie Américaine-Ecossaise.* Finally a bugle, sounding a rally, warned the soldiers in the village below that their term of freedom had expired. An hour later another bugle blared the "All silent."

The soldiers not on duty discarded their garments and climbed into their cots; a sergeant tiptoed through the barrack-rooms to make sure everything was as it should be; then silence enveloped the post.

Sometime later Gilroy and his companions emerged from their cots and quietly attired themselves in their marching outfits. The other men who shared their room either slept or feigned to do so, because as a rule Légion privates never interfere with a comrade's doings.

Soon the four comrades crept carefully up to the arsenal-room. They inserted the barrel of a rifle under the latch and dexterously snapped it without a sound. A few minutes later they vaulted over the wall surrounding the barracks, armed with an automatic gun besides their regulation rifles, several drums of ammunition, and a sack of hand-grenades.

The fort was separated from the border by a mile of rough ground thick with shrubbery—of which Gilroy, however, knew every inch. As a result he chose to enter Chinese territory at a point where the barbed wire laid by the French was invisible among the tall grass of a steep ravine.

Sentries were placed on top of the hillocks on both sides of that gorge, which was about a hundred yards wide. Their location enabled them to perceive large bodies of men rather than isolated transgressors.

Therefore when the sentries noticed the blurred shapes of the Légionnaires slinking through the thickets, the four were already in Chinese territory. Unable to distinguish their uniforms in the dim light, the sentries judged them to be a Chinese border patrol.

Following valleys and avoiding thoroughfares, the four Légionnaires came in sight of the Chinese post some two hours later, near midnight. From a short distance the barracks and the bungalow of the Chinese captain loomed exactly in the position described by Gilroy.

The capture of the two sentries, who paced in front of their commander's residence, proved however a hazardous undertaking; to rush them was out of the question because an outcry or the report of a fired gun would instantly throw the whole garrison into a frenzy.

For a long while the Légionnaires crouched in the bamboo grass. Eventually the two guards met for a friendly chat, with their faces turned toward the building. That was the opportunity waited for by the invaders.

Rapidly and smoothly, close to the ground like huge bats, they ran toward the Chinese soldiers—jumped on them, fastened steely hands on their throats to stifle their cries, and dragged them into a thicket before the dumfounded fellows could make out what it was all about.

FIVE minutes later the guards lay gagged and securely fettered under a thick canopy of leaves. Rejoicing at the thought that success was within their grasp, the Légionnaires advanced to the door of the bungalow. They found it locked, but the sharp point of a bayonet inserted between door and framing gradually worked on the latchstring, forcing it out of the fastening.

The four men opened the door and stepped within. Across a darkened hall the glow of a dim light loomed through the cracks of another door giving onto the rear part of the building. Gilroy tiptoed to that second entrance, opened it with infinite care, and found himself in the sanctum of the Chinese captain.

THE flickering light of a small lamp hanging on a wall brought into relief the massive features of that worthy, who snored loudly on a luxurious couch covered with skins and with silken pillows.

Macpherson strode up to the couch and bent over the Chinese leader, who even in sleep seemed choleric and intolerant. "A mean, oncouth face!" he mumbled. "Ease 'im awake, Gilroy, while I put my ain bayonet to his throat, just i' case he sh'u'd misbehave."

"You bet, pal!" the American chuckled, and gave a sharp tug at the hair of the Chinese, who awoke with a start and glared wildly at the Légionnaires.

"If you prize your life, don't scream or attempt to trick us in any way," Gilroy growled.

An expression of baffled rage, of intense hatred, convulsed the features of the captain. Gilroy continued:

"Your footpads shot and crippled for life one of our party. We're no thugs—we don't want anything for ourselves. But we expect you to settle with our friend, to pay a lump sum of his support."

"And if I refuse?" the Chinese challenged.

"In that case, we would force you to agree in some other way. For instance, by means of a few bamboo strokes on the naked soles of your feet."

"Ah, swith! Gilroy, I ken better than that!" Macpherson corrected. "The lichted point of a cheroot stuck into his ain nostrils will gi' yon scoondrel Chinamon a lesson i' sportsmanship."

Gilroy was trying to bluff the captain into submission; but he had no intention of actually resorting to torture.

"Let's ransack the joint first, and see if we find what we want without experimenting on this mug," he proposed.

The bungalow had four rooms. Aubry and Bauer scoured them from top to bottom, finding a small sum of money—less than a hundred taels. But Gilroy, who during the search had not left the side of the captive, noticed that the latter's glance repeatedly wandered to a section of floor near a corner of the room. At length Gilroy became suspicious, and went over to knock with the butt of his rifle on that spot. The resulting sound was markedly hollow, despite the fact

that the teak planks of the floor rested on a platform of masonry.

"Come here, Aubry and Bauer," said the American. "If I am not wrong, our friend the captain has a cache here!"

While Macpherson held the Chinese leader helpless at the point of his bayonet, Gilroy and the others industriously attacked the teak planks. At length they succeeded in removing them, disclosing a round hole carved into the masonry. Here a flat metallic box lay embedded in a nest of small leather sacks.

A brief examination showed these pouches to contain coins, gold-dust, jades and uncut precious stones—valuable loot, which was, however, clumsy to carry and hard to dispose of. When they tore out the lock of the strong-box and pried the lid open, they found it filled with American, French and English bank-notes, and with Chinese paper taels of all denominations: a bunch of bills worth about twenty thousand dollars.

"We'll take just half of this dough," Gilroy proposed. "We're not burglars, jest plain claim-adjusters."

At the idea of parting with most of that bounty, an expression of pain contracted the features of Macpherson.

"Hold hard, ye sonctimonious Yankee," he protested, with tears in his voice. "In such ceercumstances it's customarra for yon claim-adjusters to tak' a gude allowance for their ain trooble."

"All right; I'll be big-hearted, considering that the Chink captain pays fer it," Gilroy agreed. "We'll take a hundred apiece."

Macpherson sniffed audibly. "To heel wi' yer disgusting prudery," he said hotly. "It's onjust to leave so much money to a grosping Chinese futpad!"

"Aw, go on, Mac, we came here for Zeinheer's sake, and we play the game clean," Gilroy decided with an air of finality. He took from the box ten thousand dollars' worth of bank-notes and stuffed his pockets with them; then he returned the remainder of the bills, and the leather sacks, to their hiding-place.

"I am not through with you yet," he said, turning to the Chinese captain. "I want from you a written declaration that you gave us this money freely, as an indemnity for the disability of Légionnaire Zeinheer. If you refuse, we'll take with us all your robber's hoard—bills, gold-dust and stones—and we'll beat you within an inch of your life, in the bargain!"

The eyes of the Chinese flashed, but at length he seemed to resign himself to the inevitable and bowed his head.

Bauer found on a desk some official paper, an ink-pot and a brush. A veteran of seven years' duty in Tonkin, he knew the Chinese language well. He placed the paper before the captain, and scanned every word he wrote; when the document was duly signed, he took it, nodding approval, and proffered it to Gilroy.

"One moment!" The captain stopped the Légionnaires, as they made ready to gag and tie him, to forestall their speedy capture. "I will give you an extra thousand taels if you will confirm my surmise that it was Tscheo who suggested to you this visit."

His words struck the Légionnaires with the certainty their little Congai friend was doomed, unless they found a way to divert from her the captain's suspicion.

Hot-headed Aubry blurted: "No—Tscheo tried to fool us telling that you were a rich merchant from Hanoi! Luckily an Annamite *tirailleur* from the Poste of Nam-Kham brought to our fort a message from his commander. On the verge of returning to his outfit, he stopped long enough to hear our description of your appearance. He recognized you at once, for not long ago he visited your territory under a disguise."

"Tell me his name, and the thousand taels are yours!" the Chinese captain rasped.

But Gilroy had had enough of that conversation. He tore a piece of drapery from an hanging curtain and resolutely gagged the Chinaman, whose cries became indistinct mumblings, then wrapped him up from neck to feet with a stout rope.

Scarcely was the last knot tied when angry Chinese voices rang in front of the bungalow, followed by the unmistakable clanging of rifle-butts.

"Maybe some one found those sentries tied up like hams and hidden in the bush. It aint healthy to stay here any more. Come on, boys!" Gilroy urged.

The Légionnaires hastily retrieved their weapons and emerged from the rear of the house, to confront a wooded slope. They ran noiselessly to that haven of tangled rocks and thick vegetation, and kept on as swiftly as they were able for several minutes, until they reached the top of the ridge. Screened by the bushes and the dim light of the night, they turned to gaze at the Chinese camp below.

Red specks of lighted torches bobbed all around the bungalow of the Chinese

"Tscheo was beset by a native footpad. Gilroy kicked the dagger from his fist and gave him a sound beating."

captain and the barrack buildings in the distance. The night wind carried to the summit of the hill a faint sound of beaten gongs and of clamoring men.

"They've found the captain tied, and are now lookin' for us," said Gilroy.

"Do you know what time it is? It lacks but a few minutes to two," Aubry warned, peering at his watch. "If we don't reach the post within three hours and a half, before reveille, we'll be marked down as deserters."

As to confirm the gravity of their predicament, two flaming rockets arose high from the Chinese barracks. The warning was answered in kind by a barrage of green rockets which sailed into the sky at regular intervals along an immense winding line, close to the French border.

Gilroy gazed at the ominous fireworks and shook his head.

"To think I had everything sewed up so nicely!" he moaned. "If we could only get back in time and put the grenades and rifle on their place, we could say that the Chinaman willingly gave us the money yesterday, on our side of the border—and prove it with his own written assent.

"Now we're out of luck. Those Chinee *avant-posts* are warned to be on the lookout. We could march around them or smash through fighting, but never fast enough to get back to the post before dawn.

"There is only one thing to do; we'll migrate to Burma and write from there to Zeinheer to join us as soon as possible. It's a hundred and twenty miles' march. If we get hold of Chinese clothes some way, we have a chance to make it."

His companions agreed, and meekly followed him across-country in a western direction.

They soon came on a hut typical of that part of China. It harbored an ox, tied near the couch of his master, and a heap of clothing—patched and filthy, but most efficient for purpose of disguise.

The Légionnaires were unable to find the owner, who was away on some errand. However, they seized his belongings, leaving as pay a bundle of taels fastened to a bamboo cane, which they left erect in the middle of the hut; then they donned the Chinese clothing over their own, tied the ox to a cart they found close to the rear of the hut, and climbed on the massive four-wheeled contrivance.

Toward six o'clock in the morning the cart was creaking along a winding path above a chain of ridges which dominated the valley of the sluggish Nam-Kham River. A chaotic maze of hills, marshy valleys and wooded slopes spread at their feet. Farther south was the border line, though invisible in the distance.

With the idea of using the barracks of Nam-Kham as a landmark to make sure that they were going in the right direction, Gilroy brought to his eyes the excellent field-glasses he had "borrowed" from the arsenal of the fort of A Pa Tiai.

He had hardly done so when an angry shout broke from his lips: "Aubry, what possessed you to tell that Chink captain an Annamite soldier gave him away? Seeing that we gave him the slip, the big son of a gun decided to revenge himself on the fort of Nam-Kham and its whole garrison. There's a fight on there!"

"The commander of the Annamite company stationed there is the Lieutenant Szeckeny, who rose from the ranks of the Légion," Bauer commented. "Those little brown soldiers of his are not at their best against surprise attacks. It will go hard for Szeckeny—and he's the sort who'd die rather than desert his fort."

GILROY and Aubry exchanged a meaning glance, then jumped down from the cart and began to tear the Chinese garments from over their Légion garb.

"What you up to?" Bauer inquired.

"Well," Gilroy drawled, "Aubry's big mouth has put Szeckeny in a hole, and as leader of our party I'm in a way as responsible as he is. It's only right for us to lend a hand to Szeckeny. You can keep on riding to Burma with Macpherson, and with Zeinheer's dough."

"Poseeteevely no!" the Scot boomed. "I shall ne'er forgi' ye for leaving so much money wi' the Chinee scoondrel captain—but I'll come alang!"

"And so will I," Bauer declared. *"Gott im Himmel!* All alone in Burma I would die of boredom!"

They untied the ox from the cart and set him free, to look for luscious grass and for mud in which to wallow. Then, running across-country, they speedily diminished the distance which separated them from the border.

An hour later they crossed a strip of wooded ground which marked the frontier. Bodies of Annamites scattered all about told the story of a crafty Chinese surprise attack which had quickly overwhelmed the border guards, rendered careless by prolonged peace.

AS soon as the four emerged from the wood, the post loomed clearly before them across some three hundred yards of flat, treeless plain. The fort and the barracks were burning. Triumphant Chinese soldiers wandered in scattered groups on that wide green esplanade, or clustered busily around piles of booty.

Some twenty men advancing toward the frontier attracted particularly the attention of the Légionnaires. About six of them were Chinese, brandishing guns topped by fixed bayonets. The others were short Annamites, prisoners who marched grouped about a tall white officer, bareheaded and covered with blood.

"See that big fellow, Gilroy?" Bauer whispered excitedly. "I recognize him in spite of the blood running down his face. That's Szeckeny."

Without a word, the American unsheathed his long bayonet and fixed it on the muzzle of his gun, and shouting; *"En avant, la Légion!"* he darted out from the bushes, followed by the others.

Less than fifty yards separated them from their quarry, and they covered the distance so quickly that the dazed Chinese escort had no chance to make out if an isolated group or a whole section of the dreaded Légion had come to rescue their charges. Irresolutely, they tried to line up, but succeeded only in receiving the full brunt of the headlong attack. Three of them were instantly bayoneted; the others ran, throwing down their guns.

The Légionnaires darted to Szeckeny and the Annamites, and slashed the fetters from around their wrists. While the grateful little *tirailleurs* hurriedly retrieved the rifles of their former custodians, Szeckeny blinked uncertainly at his deliverers.

"I don't know who you are, or where you come from," he gasped. "But certainly you are God-sent, *mes amis!"* He paused awhile, swaying uncertainly on his feet. "Funny, how a plain scalp wound affects one," he added. "The glancing bullet merely furrowed my skin, but it

affected me like the blow of a blackjack."

A fit of dizziness sent him reeling into the arms of Macpherson, who promptly pulled out a flask and brought it to his lips. "Ha'e a drap of cognac—not as guid as whusky, but sateesfactorra enough in a time o' stress!" he invited.

Szeckeny took a long draft, coughed and nearly choked. "Better now, thanks," he announced, returning the bottle.

A swelling roar of rifle-fire came from woods which bordered the opposite side of the plain. "My *tirailleurs* must have rallied down there! In the brush they are at their best," said Szeckeny hopefully.

IN the meantime the Chinese grouped on the esplanade became aware of the arrival of the Légionnaires and of the delivery of the captive Annamites, and aimed against them a hail of bullets.

Bauer uttered a strangled cry and pitched face-down on the ground. His companions ran to his side and turned him over. His forehead was pierced by a ragged hole.

Gilroy, Aubry and Macpherson arose without exchanging a word. Heartsick though they were, the hard school of the Légion had trained them to consider death as inevitable, not to be cheapened with resounding expressions of regret.

An Annamite took the gun and the cartridge-belt of the slain Légionnaire. Aubry took the automatic rifle and marched on, clearing a wide path with a fanlike spray of bullets. As a result the Légionnaire-Annamite party progressed rapidly through a roomy aisle lined with dead and wounded; but the Chinese, temporarily routed toward the eastern and western sides of the plain by the stream of bullets from the automatic rifle, soon converged on the flanks and rear of the tiny column and invested it with a rapidly increasing fire. Then they repeatedly attempted to launch a drive.

The latter came to grief under the murderous explosions of the hand-grenades thrown by Macpherson and Gilroy, but the heavy Chinese fire exacted its toll. One after another, four *tirailleurs* fell, dead or badly wounded. Aubry, shot through the right forearm, was obliged to pass the automatic rifle to the American.

Barely fifty yards separated the much-thinned group of Légionnaires and *tirailleurs* from their objective—the woods south of the burning buildings—when their situation became desperate. Their supply of hand-grenades had become exhausted, and now Macpherson collapsed, pierced through the left hip and thigh by three consecutive bullets. Things would have gone very badly for them if a swarm of *tirailleurs* had not emerged, firing, from the near-by thickets, rolling back the Chinese already running to the kill.

Five or six little Annamite soldiers ran to Macpherson, lifted him and carried him away, like big tropical ants dragging a long-legged cricket.

"Come with us! *Vite!*" a hatless corporal stammered to Szeckeny and Gilroy. He had lost his hat; the thick coil of black hair fastened to the back of his head gave him the appearance of an undersized woman of surpassing ugliness. "*Vite*—no time to lose!" he urged.

They entered the thick clusters of trees, followed very shortly by the Chinese. But within this dense growth the short and thin Annamite soldiers were decidedly at an advantage. Their catlike agility, their ability to slide through nooks where even the smallest Chinaman was unable to pass, gave them a peculiar dexterity in dodging bullets and bayonet-thrusts, and enabled them to force home their blows with telling effect.

A few minutes later they entered a last fringe of woods, beyond which lay a semicircular strip of open ground topped by a knoll, where another party of Annamite *tirailleurs* were making a spirited stand.

WITH a headlong charge, Szeckeny and his followers tore through the Chinese who surrounded the hillock from every side, and united with the defenders.

Less than a score remained, however; all were wounded, though the knoll was covered with dead. And among these Gilroy discovered the body of the Chinese captain, killed at the head of a charge.

"Including the men who came with us, we have about forty wounded able to handle their rifles," Gilroy said to Szeckeny, after a hasty rearrangement of the defense. "I hope, sir, that you had time to send a request for help to the poste of A Pa Tiai."

"I tried to, as soon as the Chinese overcame my negligent sentries and streamed into my fort," the lieutenant unhappily replied. "But the sergeant whom I ordered to send couriers was killed shortly afterward; I don't know if he managed to execute the order."

He had barely finished speaking when loss of blood and the terrific ordeal he had gone through finally got the best of him. His eyes rolled, and he would have

fallen to the ground, had Gilroy not caught him.

With the help of a few Annamites the American placed him in a sheltered nook, alongside Macpherson and Aubry, who tossed, moaning, his arm pierced from wrist to elbow.

The fire of the Chinese now became intense and fairly well-aimed. The casualties on the hillock grew alarmingly with the passing of every minute. There were no more hand-grenades, and the drums of the automatic rifle soon became empty. Though convinced that the end was but a matter of time, Gilroy desperately endeavored to keep the defense alive.

In command, and the only white man spared by the bullets, he saw his every movement followed by the worried glances of the handful of Annamites still able to fight, and by the pleading stares of those too sick to move. The hopelessness of that drawn-out struggle weighed on him like a leaden pall. He almost hoped that a merciful shot would soon put an end to his responsibility and disheartening suspense.

At length he heard the barking of sing-song commands and noticed the flashing of naked bayonets in the surrounding fringe of bushes. He understood clearly that the Chinese were massing for a final attack, which would sweep everything by sheer force of numbers.

But instead, a sudden bedlam of dismayed Chinese voices arose from the woods; and repeated volleys crashed out beyond them.

"The Annamite couriers got through, after all," Gilroy mumbled dazedly. "Old man Duttier is coming with the Légionnaires—and so is a court-martial, with several years' penal servitude for me, and Macpherson and Aubry!" Shaking his head wearily, he sank on the stump of a tree and wished that he were dead.

THE ousting of the defeated Chinese force, the burying of the dead, and placement of temporary bamboo roofs and floors on the charred shells of the buildings of the post of Nam-Kham necessarily took some time.

Thus it was that only toward evening did Lieutenant Duttier send for Gilroy.

The American found his commanding officer, along with Szeckeny in a hastily repaired room of the fort, which had been furnished with salvaged and much-battered desks and chairs.

"Now, Corporal Gilroy," Duttier began, "I want you to tell as clearly as you can in what confounded way you spent the past night!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Gilroy stammered, hardly believing to his ears. "Did you say *corporal?*"

"Of course." Duttier nodded. "The report of Lieutenant Szeckeny leaves me no other alternative than to promote you. Now, go on with your story."

GILROY felt that he was in a dream; but he knew that with a man of Duttier's type he had better tell the truth and wait for a decision, than spoil everything with makeshift lies. Therefore he related at length the odyssey of the *Coterie Américaine-Ecossaise.*

"Hum!" Duttier commented. "Your enterprise was hardly an ethical one, but it proved your qualities of initiative and leadership." He mused awhile, then continued: "If I am not wrong, your bosom friend Zeinheer once lost much through overdrinking. Are you sure he will employ for a good purpose that Chinese bounty, so nicely legitimated by that precious written declaration?"

"I will force him to give me his word of a Légionnaire that he will, and he shall abide by it," Gilroy declared.

That answer seemed to please Duttier, who explained: "That Chinese captain has for a long time been a thorn in the side of our authorities. He was behind all the political trouble-makers and cut-throats who infested this part of Tonkin. We hoped that he would break into open warfare, and hang himself with his own rope." He puffed meditatively at one of his pestiferous cheroots and concluded: "You and your companions worked that wonder; therefore I shall not go too deeply into the means you employed. By the way, you will perhaps be glad to know that Macpherson and Aubry are marked down for the *Médaille Militaire.* But I warn the three of you never to rush out again on a patrol of your own, or it will go hard with you. You may go now to sew your chevrons on your tunic, Corporal Gilroy."

Overjoyed, and filled with gratitude, the American let out a strangled cry:

"I thank you, *mon Lieutenant!*"

"Ten days *salle de police* for thanking out of reason. Turn about, *en avant,* march!" Duttier instantly snapped.

Partly sobered, Gilroy clicked his heels in salute and left the room. Then he thought of Bauer dead, and of Zeinheer, who soon would leave them—and his joy gave way to irrepressible loneliness.

Red Terror

By S. Andrew Wood

Illustrated by Joseph Franké

The Story So Far:

KOREGORVSKY the Public Prosecutor took the four *dossiers* from the portfolio, and gave them to his bullet-headed secretary to read aloud.

"'Prohackai,'" began the secretary, "'a Mongol of the Kinghan Mountains. Priest in a Buddhist Monastery. Abandoned religion and preached the Brotherhood of Man in 1927. Moscow 1928; then propaganda in the East. Greatly successful. Reputation flawless. Agents' reports on his movements all favorable till early this year. Proved then to be receiving heavy bribes from counter-revolutionaries in Asia. Vanished three months and was seen in Kabul with agent of British India. For details see *dossier* "Espionage GPU."'"

"The next," directed the Prosecutor.

"'Lee Armitage, American citizen,'" the secretary's voice went on. "'Architect and consultant designer of the Schnitzler Building, New York. Engaged under the Five Year Plan to design and assist in building the new Asiatic Palace. Was in Moscow during the Revolution. Speaks Russian and knows Moscow like a native. Difficult under surveillance. Has no political opinions, but is Capitalist in ideology. Works conscientiously. Agent reports that he is enamored of a woman of his own nationality, Ishbel Dane, who belongs to the Party in Moscow (see *dossier*). No friend of the Revolution. Possibly dangerous. Watched closely....

"'Lidoshka Wei, artiste of the Eastern Propagandafilm. Chinese girl revolutionary (see GPU Agents). Girlhood spent among armies of Chang. Counter-revolutionary General Tse died while L. W. was in his tent.'" ("Judith and Holofernes!" commented Koregorvsky, wagging his head). "'Brought to Moscow as reward and became cinema-star. No flaw in her devotion to the State.

"'Ishbel Harrison Dane, American citizen. American woman of society who has thrown up her possessions to come to Moscow. Does not live among American Communist colony, but with the artiste Lidoshka Wei (see *dossier*). Enthusiastic but untried.'"

And now the dread Gay-pay-oo began to function in its sinister fashion. The suspected Prohackai was found murdered—pinned by a sword to a Buddha in the apartment of Lidoshka Wei. The Chinese girl had loved him—and had killed him at the order of the terrible Three Letters. And though she plunged from a window into the ice-filled river afterward, she was cast up alive again.

Armitage's turn came next. For Erik Valentine, a handsome half-Russian secretly in the service of the Gay-pay-oo, was also in love with Ishbel Dane; and he knew he could never win her while Armitage lived. He therefore provoked the American to a quarrel, and taking sudden advantage, strangled him. Thrown, supposedly dead, on a refuse dump, Armitage was rescued by a band of child waifs and brought back to life. . . .

Valentine at last won Ishbel's reluctant consent to a marriage ceremony. Back at his luxurious quarters, he confessed to his bride his connection with the Gay-pay-oo. And Ishbel, terrified and rebellious, slipped into another room and turned the key in the lock.

The window was a full forty feet from the lamp-dotted street. A fire-escape zigzagged down, though it passed close to several windows. . . . The door was rattling. "Ishbel!" Erik's voice called.

But she was already halfway down the escape. There was the open window of a room that seemed empty; she dropped lightly inside and pulled the window down. *(The story continues in detail:)*

AFTER all, the room was not empty. The light of a candle glowed behind a tattered screen. It showed a truckle-bed, a wall bearing two framed photographs of Lenin, one picture of a blast

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The distinguished author of "Comrades of Chaos" is at his best in this flame-vivid story of two Americans' amazing adventure in that land of amazing social experiment, Soviet Russia.

His foot caught on something. . . . Wire! He flung Ishbel headlong, as the air above them tore and whistled in a devil's tattoo.

furnace, and what looked suspiciously like an ikon, disguised as an indeterminate ornament. On the scrubbed floor among a litter of toy Red Troops and a toy collective farm, sat a small boy, with his head cropped smooth as a bullet. He turned stolidly at Ishbel's entrance, and surveyed her curiously, a tired thumb stuck in his mouth.

"They are at the opera," he said. "There is nobody here but me, comrade. Is it my sister Lena you come to see?"

Ishbel answered quickly. "Of course. I am Lena's friend. You are Dmitri, little comrade?"

"Joseph." He showed no offense. "Why did you come in through the window?"

"It is the new way, little Joseph."

"Ah, the new way." He seemed satisfied. Like all children of the Five Year Plan, he was intensely solemn, intensely earnest. His cheeks were pendulous with fat, his eyes bright blue, but without any child's laughter in them. "Have you seen the new political playthings? They are very pretty."

SLIPPING to the window, Ishbel listened. Probably Erik had gone down to the street by the stairs to intercept her. When she stepped behind the screen again, Joseph was holding out a toy.

"They come from the Red Artel of Toys. My *mamochka* works there. They are to make fun of the church and the capitalist. See this." It was a doll made like a fat and silk-hatted capitalist. "It opens—and behold, a priest! One takes the priest's head off, and behold a *kulak,* then a fascist, then a *bourjoi* speculator, and so until the last and smallest is Henry Ford, the American. But one gets tired."

The little red mouth yawned. Joseph rubbed his fist in his eyes and nodded over his toy Red army. Ishbel lifted him gently in her arms, and with a model of a tractor clutched in his fingers, he curled up on the truckle-bed.

With a hard-beating heart, Ishbel tiptoed to the door and found it unlocked. It was not that she was afraid of Erik, she told herself. She could divorce him for two rubles, and meant to do so. But she hated him icily. He had brought her ideals tumbling.... The ill-lit landing seemed quiet, save for the *shuffle-shuffle* of a fat woman going with a bundle of washing to the communal bathroom. Ishbel slipped outside, and stood glancing up and down the corridor.

"Get inside again," said a voice by her side, a voice with an American accent.

She was thrust gently; the door closed behind the tall blue-bloused figure that towered over her, in the dim light of the candle that burned behind the screen. The whole pulse within her seemed to stop like a stalled engine, then leap fiercely forward.

"No one in here?"

"A child—asleep." She stared with fascination at the bearded grimy face. Nondescript. It was nondescript. A hundred thousand workmen in Moscow had faces like that. But—

"That damned Proletarian on the boulevard outside my rooms lied, Ishbel."

"It's Lee, isn't it?"

"Alive and kicking. I saw you on the fire-escape from the street below. You see, I'd been watching. Dogging you and Valentine! Like a full-blooded Three Letter agent. Had the clerk in the marriage-office dirty finger-nails, as I prophesied, Ishbel?"

"I never noticed. This is bad for the blood-pressure, Lee." The momentary effort at lightness broke down. "I'm running away from him—from Erik. I married him, you know—this evening. Married at leisure and repented in haste. There was a wedding-party in his studio. Koregorvsky, the Deputy to the Public Prosecutor, and Lidoshka, who had pretended—oh, it's too long, too mad to tell you—"

"I guess I know it, Ishbel. Lidoshka pinned Prohackai to that idol. She's Three Letter. So is Valentine. Don't I know? I went back to the apartment and walked into the languid Erik's arms. Full-dress Gay-pay-oo business. Obviously, I couldn't live to tell the tale. He has fingers like a steam-roller, and he got me by surprise. They put me outside a den of *Bez Prizorny.* The late Lee Armitage, American architect! But I'm the present Feodor Petrovitch, Ishbel, and I'm registered with Lisa Semenova, whom I haven't met yet."

"I'm registered with Erik. But I've finished with him. Oh, I never began, Lee. *He* killed you?" Her eyes were wide, in horrified incredulity.

GRIMLY Lee Armitage nodded, his face stern.

"With darned strong fingers! But not quite. Listen, you've got to get out of this."

"Out of—"

"Out of Russia. You could be in Paris in two days. You're Ishbel Dane, an American subject. For God's sake, go!"

Ishbel caught the iron rail of little Joseph's truckle-bed, behind her. Only she, in all Moscow, would know this man for Lee Armitage. The thought sent a whisper of forlorn pleasure through her.

"You're Lee Armitage, an American subject, too."

"Not on your life! He's dead. If he came awake, Lee Armitage wouldn't have a dog's chance of reaching the frontier. There'd be an—accident."

He was pale and strained beneath his grime. Not for himself, Ishbel knew, but for her.

"Somehow, Lee," she said slowly, "I don't think Ishbel Dane would have a tremendously good chance."

IN silence they stared at each other. The boy in the truckle-bed pushed his toy tractor to the floor, and thumb-sucked himself to sleep again. Somebody in one of the rooms had a radio-set, and it began to croak in a loud monotone. An airplane clattered in the dark overhead.

"You poor kid!" Armitage had seen a single big tear roll down Ishbel's cheek. She tried to smile, but it was very twisted.

"It's the crash that hurts, Lee. I feel as I felt when first I guessed that there wasn't any Santa Claus. I didn't believe in the GPU. I thought that when people were clean and new and young, they could walk to the jail without—without dogs and whips. Now—it's like some giant racket. Capone with a touch of Ivan the Terrible. Why, why, why, Lee?"

"Because it's Russia," answered Lee Armitage. "They'll tell you there were always secret police in Russia. And don't I know?"

Ishbel shook herself.

"Joseph's people may come back at any time—he's called Joseph, and he believes the children of capitalist countries have two heads, and put a silk hat on each of them when they get out of baby-clothes. Where are you going to, Lee? I'm just going back to Moscow, as Comrade Ishbel, again."

"And let Valentine reach out his paws for you?"

"He won't get me. Women are free in Russia. He won't try to strangle me, and give me to the *Bez Prizorny.*"

Her hand fell on Armitage's arm.

"I've been an idiot," she said simply. "I thought I loved Erik."

"Let's beat it," said Armitage, almost roughly. "I'm glad we saw each other. You'll forget it. You'd forget it easiest out of Russia. You don't know what the Ogpu can do to women, even in these days. I don't. Nobody does, clearly. But it's something."

"I'm staying. We might—need each other. Let me help, Lee."

"Feodor Petrovitch, to you!" He grinned, but only grimly. "And lucky to be. Got his factory-card—everything. Rather a hard-boiled egg, I judge. Feodor Petrovitch—forget I'm Armitage."

Their whole conversation had been in whispers. With his glazed cap tilted, and a dirty cherrywood pipe in his hand, Armitage walked to the window and looked out. Valentine was probably searching for his runaway bride in the Moscow streets. There was faint, bleak comedy in it—Gogol comedy. He lurched out on to the landing, followed by Ishbel. Good-humoredly, he kicked aside two frying-pans which obstructed the passage.

The rain drizzled down upon them.

"It's got to be good-by here," said Armitage. "There's a train for Warsaw at midnight. For God's sake, get it. It wouldn't be cowardice."

Ishbel turned a face that was a little pinched and white in the lamplight.

"I won't. . . . What was that girl's name and what's she like?"

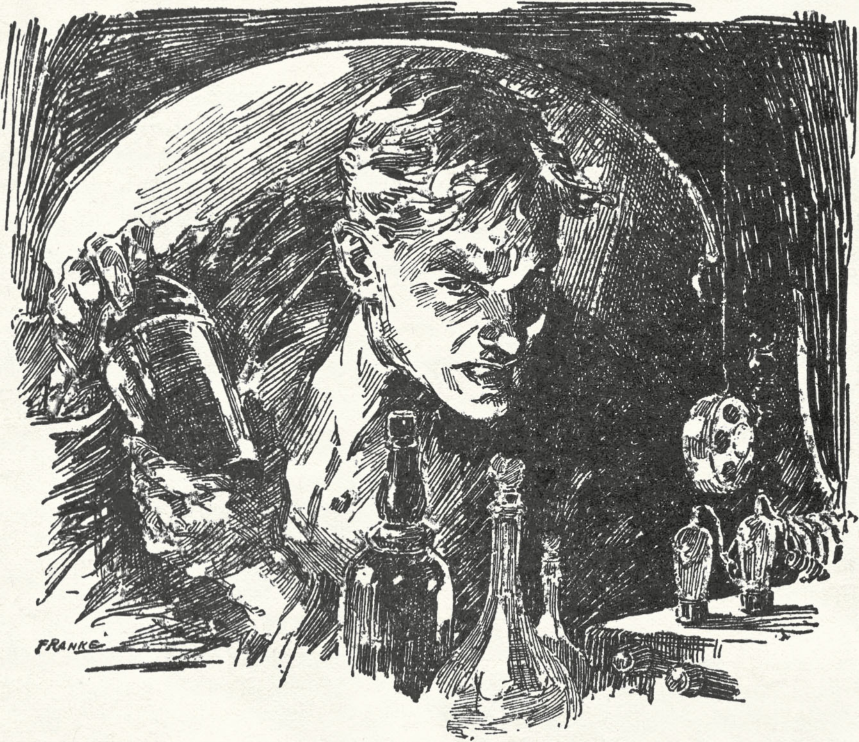
"I haven't seen her yet."

There was a workman's café at the corner of the street. Feodor Petrovitch lifted his hand in parting salute, and with his rolling gait, passed through the swinging doors.

THE concluding scene of the picture, "Prohackai Lives," was designed to present Lidoshka Wei, the Little Lotus, in a kind of softly glowing bubble of light.

The scene was built on the small stage of the big Soviet-kinofilm Studios, and was, simply, a Room in Pekin. The Little Lotus sat on a couch awaiting the entrance of Japanese imperial soldiery, fleeing from the defeat she had sent them into. There was a poisoned azalea blossom in her hand, which she would presently crush, and die.

One of the sound-technicians held the needle of the sound-mechanism ready. The "Silence" light went up. Lubin, the



Valentine unlocked the cabinet—brought forth a cocktail-shaker. . . . "A passport and visa for Comrade Who?"

famous *régisseur,* who was directing, made a gesture.

Prohackai's voice came flooding richly, booming but soft. It was to flood all the scenes of the picture with a soft wash of sound. But this climax, though the picture was not half finished yet, was Lubin's masterpiece.

"There is no death, Comrades. There is Life and there is Slavery; there is Sleep and there is Waking. In the East the tocsin sounds for the Waking, the chains of Slavery fall, the dawn comes over the plains of China, the tundras of the Samoyedes, the mountains of Manchuria. From your brothers of Moscow, it comes. When I am with my fathers, you shall see it, and clap your hands at the voice of Prohackai the Mongol, who has passed on his way."

The Little Lotus lay crumpled on the couch, with the azalea flower crushed in her white fingers, tan-legginged Japanese soldiery all about her. The cameras glided in for the close-up of her dying smile. . . .

"It was marvelous," said Koregorvsky softly. "So touching! So real!"

He had watched it from the darkness outside the set, and came to his feet with a sigh. Wizened and smiling, he took Lidoshka's hand as she moved to the dressing-rooms. She drooped a little, and out of the heavy mask of her make-up, looked at him. He stroked the hand, on the palm of which a tiny scar still remained.

"Exhausting, too—the emotion. . . . May I have the poisoned flower, as a souvenir? No doubt it is really quite harmless?"

"Quite harmless. Not even real." The limpid but husky voice had no life now.

"I will take you home in my automobile, eh?"

"As you please."

Koregorvsky stood, awkward and retiring among the beautiful men and women of the Soviet-kinofilm, until Lidoshka emerged from her dressing-room. In her sables the tiny limp added piquancy to her movements. Again she sent a look at Koregorvsky, a look that was long and glittering, and infinitely weary.

"Prohackai's voice was wonderful. It is a great invention, the phonograph."

"Yes." A faint, enigmatic smile as Lidoshka sank back, an exquisite Oriental doll in European clothes, as the flood-lighted studio fell behind. She looked down at the hairy wrists of Koregorvsky

as he struck a match for the long Herzegovina cigarette she put between her lips.

"He serves the Cause better now. But it left you lonely, *matushka*. We famous ones are all lonely, eh?"

The deep-sunk eyes which gave to the Deputy Prosecutor the look of a genial chimpanzee turned pathetic for an instant. He stroked Lidoshka's hand very gently. It was past midnight. Not even a Black Crow was visible. It gave Koregorvsky a modest pride that it should be so.

LIDOSHKA said slowly: "I am lonely without Comrade Ishbel. I loved her."

"Ah, I was thinking of another kind of loneliness. That American girl! What spirit, what courage! It will be useful. She loves Valentine. She will serve Russia through him. All is grist that comes to the mill. Are you cold, little one?"

"Could she get back to America if ever she wished?"

"How extraordinary! She will not wish, with the little god Cupid transfixing her to Moscow with his arrows. But Little Lotus, must you go home tonight?"

With a kind of amorous bashfulness, the Deputy put the question. As he was wont to say, he had forsworn the other sex, and was clumsy in the presence of beauty.

"I must." Lidoshka's lisp was slightly ironical. It differed from her eyes. If Koregorvsky could have seen them, he would have been amazed and alarmed. They were like those of some trapped animal roused from its despair to a sense of pain and horror and outrage.

"There is no husband waiting."

"None."

"Then—"

Something flashed between the fingers of Lidoshka Wei. It touched Koregorvsky's knuckle, and he jumped back galvanized.

"So sorry," said Lidoshka timidly. "I was tired. I forgot. It was habit. One gets habits. May I get out now, comrade? My apartment is quite close. . . . How tired I am! Did you think that a Chinese girl could cry for very fatigue? But I have acquired the habit."

With considerable precipitation Koregorvsky had stopped the car, and the perfume of Lidoshka's ylang flower stirred subtly as she stepped out and stood on the curb, holding out a white hand to the Deputy. Her eyes were gleaming and miserable behind their misty smile. The disconcerted Koregorvsky felt fascination draw him to them, and to the warm, olive mystery of her face. But a much livelier sense of caution held him back.

"Forgive me. Some other time."

She floated along the sidewalk, and the drizzling rain took her. Mechanically he bade the chauffeur drive on. He shook his head, and wiped a drop of sweat from one bushy eyebrow.

"Spitfire! Will o' the wisp!"

But the Little Lotus exhilarated his old bones. Not that they were very old. Even in the Gay-pay-oo, one had to have a private life. He sniffed musingly at the artificial flower in his hand, and it had that rich but elusive scent, that picture of flowery gardens and a lithe little figure that brushed mimosa blossoms as it ran, but stopped now and then to beckon him. . . .

By a modest doorway he entered the great GPU Building. He passed rooms in which the tiny shrieks of radio messages sounded, telephones buzzed, telegraphs chattered gently. The efficient machine moved smoothly, guarding and holding up with its vast, hydraulic strength, the edifice of the State. He had a sleeping-chamber in the tower of the building in comfortable proximity to the hidden machine-guns which the fool dreamers would rob him of. But before retiring he had the caprice to glance again at the *dossier* of Lidoshka Wei, artiste of the Eastern Propaganda Films:

"Counter-revolutionary General Tse died while L. W. was in his tent."

Koregorvsky coughed as he put the *dossier* away. The crushed azalea, with its scent, was much more charming. Yet the other was a challenge—as a candle is a challenge to a moth.

THREE days later Feodor Petrovitch was accosted.

"Your card, Comrade Lazybones. I am tired of seeing you hanging around."

The bottle-green uniform blocked the narrow pavement. A pair of good-humored but saturnine eyes surveyed Armitage. It was one of the everyday uniformed branch of the militia.

"So! The Red October Metal Works are working night and day, friend Feodor. There is no unemployment in Russia, as you may have heard. Why are you a truant? Is it vodka, a nagging wife, or only a thirst for adventure?"

"Neither, comrade. I am resting. I sustained an internal injury."

"The bellyache that comes at the sight of work, eh? Go home to little Lisa, wash, and present yourself at the Red October tonight. The advice of a friend."

Armitage slunk sheepishly away. This was only a Moscow flatty, but the encounter set his nerves a-tingle. It showed how the individual among the herd was watched. As yet he had found no permanent shelter. Feodor Petrovitch, of Little Sretinka, 194Y, had not yet ventured to that address. The problem of some steel-haired virago who would know him for an impostor at a glance, deterred him. In the guise of the shiftless and drunken workman he imagined the late Feodor Petrovitch to be, he had lived on the edge of the Moscow underworld. But it could not continue. Almost unconsciously he was growing gaunt and desperate with a sense of futility. Ishbel Dane was still in Moscow: that much he knew. She would stay there, with her shining obstinacy, until catastrophe happened to one or both of them.

The crowd swept him through the spring sunlight. Asiatic hordes, for all their white skins—the future masters of the world, it might be. Every man and woman among them had lived with death and famine. All were eager puppets in the giant hands that worked behind the colored walls of the Kremlin, and the herd was the god, the individual nothing. No wonder Ishbel was thrilled. . . .

THE concrete foundations of the Asiatic Palace were already poured. Tartars, Tunguses, Kalmucks, all those high cheekboned men of Russia in the East, swarmed over it, working. There was a Red Flag fluttering over withered red wreaths, and an inscription: *"Prohackai the Mongol, of the Brotherhood of the East, lies below."*

Armitage tramped on. He had a fancy that somebody dogged his footsteps through the crowd that morning. He smiled tightly. It was a precarious disguise, at best, in that docketed and card-indexed city. There was a large black automobile standing at the curb, outside the K.K. Clinic. Perhaps it was his imagination, but it had a faint effluvia of Gay-pay-oo about it. The thrusting crowds on the sidewalk glanced at it slyly, and hurried past. . . .

Ishbel started work at the K.K. Clinic, at that hour. Two mornings he had seen her brave, high, foolish head above the crowd. It was visible now, glinting in the sunlight, under its severe brown hat. She and little Xenia of the Ear, Nose and Throat, hurrying from the hostel, together, made their way to the Clinic.

There was a little wavering movement among the sidewalk crowd. A man in a long green coat had stepped lightly from inside the black automobile. Little Xenia shrank back with her hand crushed to her red mouth. Ishbel turned inquiringly. The crowd parted. A few stopped, but many more hurried on.

WITH a sense of cold and despairing rage, Armitage saw the man's hand drop lightly to Ishbel's shoulder, saw little Xenia scuttle with her face averted into the clinic. Some of the color died out of Ishbel's cheeks. . . . He sprang forward.

The crowd poured past like a diverted river. Few there who did not know a Gay-pay-oo arrest when they saw one, and quickened their footsteps to get out of its vicinity. It left Ishbel, like some brave prey in the hands of a pack, with only a dirty workman forcing his way toward her. At that moment her eyes, over the gray-coated shoulder of the Three Letter man, met Armitage's. They shone with a quick recognition and warning, and she stepped inside the automobile. The street traffic stalled; the black car droned away.

A group of civil servants in leggings and mackinaws, with portfolios complete, brushed Armitage from the curb. Then he felt a sharp jerk at his coat from behind.

"Move on, Comrade Feodor, for God's sake," said a voice.

It was Sasha the Frog. His angelic young face peered up at Armitage from under the huge astrakhan cap; his stunted legs, encased in thigh-boots much too big for him, made a quick tattoo on the pavement as he slipped his hand into the American's and ran alongside.

"Through here!" He pulled Armitage into a warren of little streets. "There is a droshky-stand. Behold the one with the fleabitten white horse? The driver and I are acquainted, for I steal his dinner and he throws stones at me. It is all very anti-social. At the moment, he is breakfasting. The white horse is a very Pegasus. Her name is Poppet. She will keep in sight the GPU car—though I fear we shall get no further than the GPU headquarters, where Koregorvsky

sits scratching his bald pate. . . . She will be interrogated there, no doubt, before they take her to the Butyrka. . . . I have followed you every morning, to keep you from coming to harm, because you are foolish and headstrong. Jump inside. . . . Thank you, the hospital cured Maria Vassilissa and I took her away again yesterday—without permission. The Freebooters have gone to the country. But I prefer Moscow. Hold tight. Poppet is a little convulsive."

Sasha grinned round from the box as he ended his jerky speech. The lash slapped on the horse's flanks, and the droshky clattered at breakneck speed down the narrow street. The Frog was taking some shortcut, and like a steed in a runaway chariot, Poppet galloped between the bulging houses, followed by curses and execrations from foot-passengers as they dived into doorways for shelter. Armitage's eyes left the harum-scarum little moujik who wielded his lash like a flail, and as they wheeled into the boulevard, he saw that the black automobile was ahead, gliding over a street-crossing.

ARMITAGE smiled stiffly. He was in the hands of fate and of Sasha, who now had Poppet trotting tranquilly. For some reason, the car they followed was not going at the usual breakneck speed of a police automobile. It lounged in the traffic, and blew no siren. And quite leisurely it swerved out of the boulevard that led to Red Square and the GPU Building, into a cross-street.

"Keep low, brother," said Sasha out of the side of his mouth. "You do not look like a droshky-fare. Observe, she is not going to kiss Koregorvsky after all. They are going another way. It looks to me like a kidnaping."

The blood dyed Armitage's forehead. The thoroughfare began to look familiar. It was the street which held Valentine's studio. He said sharply: "Stop right here, Sasha!"

"Anywhere." Sasha clambered down. "It will be wise to bid farewell to Poppet, in case her master comes." The baby-blue eyes looked curiously at Armitage. "Always bear in mind that it is more comfortable to be officially dead, than really so, Comrade Feodor. I speak not from experience, or even from hearsay, never having heard a dead man tell tales. But I imagine it to be so."

Armitage nodded. There was no room for such sane certainties in his mind just then. He felt blood on his lips where his teeth bit. In the strange underworld of a city still half-Asiatic, among which Feodor Petrovitch had slunk, he had met killers, and he felt like one of them now —but not so Russian, not so pleasantly careless.

The car was standing before the block which held Valentine's studio. Ishbel stepped out between two men; she turned slowly and saw him, knowing somehow. . . .

She looked steadily at him again, freed herself and went into the entrance. The black car vanished silently.

Armitage stood on the pavement where it steamed in the hot spring sun. A deadly coolness that was far enough removed from caution came to him, then. At that hour the inhabitants of Maxim Gorky Street, by the Tverskaya, were either at work or sleeping from their night's toil. Ishbel would neither struggle nor scream, but only carry up her flaming scorn to Valentine, the shining little dreamer. . . . .

The two men who had escorted her came down as he lounged into the building and he passed them with shoulders hunched, the fatigue of hard work upon him. The top landing, with its swinging lamp and orange paint was bathed in sunlight, when he reached it.

There was no answer to his first knock. A second impatient rap. The door opened.

"Comrade Valentine, the artist?" The visitor grinned with a block-headed good humor. "I am sent by Molovinoff, of the Propaganda. He tells me I must show you my—what is it?—ah, my torso. God knows where I keep it. But perhaps you can find it for me if I take off my clothes."

Valentine stared.

"I fear you have left it at home, comrade. Go home, wash, and search carefully for it. Then come back. In the meantime, take your foot from the door."

But the man stood stolidly.

"Pardon, comrade artist, but it was to be this morning. Molovinoff said so. He told me you were uncertain of temper, but I must take no notice. One look at this torso of mine would pacify you, he said; so with your permission—"

VALENTINE stepped back with an amused laugh. Through an inner door a girl had appeared, standing slimly against it, frowning at both—Ishbel!

Armitage saw the pulse beating at her throat, saw the wave of dread and control that went across her before Valentine turned to her.

"A comrade who insists upon undressing and showing his grimy beauty here and now. —You see, friend, why it cannot be done."

Ishbel Dane forced a smile. Her glance and Armitage's met. She shook her head. As though her soul had been visible behind a window, Armitage understood. She was quaking inwardly for him. All else was forgotten, fear for herself,—if she had any,—rage and scorn, everything. It made him as exultant and reckless as if he had taken a strong draft of spirits. . . . Slowly he became aware that Valentine's eyes were narrowing, the pupils growing still.

"Of course not. Send him away. Don't you see the time is inopportune, comrade?" said Ishbel.

She turned to reënter the room with a shrug of amusement. It was well done. The strength within her was wonderful. But it could not be.

Armitage strode after her. He was within the room in an instant—and so was Erik Valentine. On the wall, by the big English fireplace, a leather pistol-holster hung, and he was backing toward it. But Ishbel was there first. She tore it down, hook and all.

"I had my eyes on this since they brought me in, Erik," she said.

Valentine sat down on a chair. He never took his glance from Armitage. The thundering shock of the moment had robbed him of all color, though Erik Valentine was iron-nerved.

"Is there anybody else in the place, Ishbel?" Armitage asked.

"I don't think so. But you must be insane."

"Give me the pistol. Do you know me, Valentine?"

"I think I do," answered Valentine carefully. "I don't deny that it's an ugly shock, Armitage. A very ugly shock. If it is indeed you!"

"It is. I'd like you to leave us, Ishbel. You never meant to stay?"

The girl passed her hand across her forehead.

"I meant to, if I could have got you away, just now. I meant to play some sort of movie-picture trick to make you think I was reconciled to him, but there wasn't time to work it up properly. I'm not going. It's too—too interesting."

"I ought to point out that Ishbel is my wife," said Valentine, his color returning slowly.

Ishbel laughed softly, unnaturally.

"I got a divorce from him yesterday, if that's of any importance. I noticed the clerk's fingernails particularly this time, Lee. To my surprise, they were actually clean."

Tawny powder puffed into the faces of the men, and sent them reeling, clawing at their eyes. "Red pepper," jerked Sasha brusquely, running back. "It never fails!"

Valentine drummed his finger-tips softly upon the carved arm of his chair. He said:

"I never loved you more passionately, never felt more surely your husband than I do at this moment, Ishbel. Why the devil won't you drop that gun, Armitage? Let me point out what a child could see: You saw that I got my wife back here under an official ægis, just now. If I'm found with a bullet in me, it is Ishbel who pays, whether or not they find the actual Jack o' Lantern who did it."

Armitage nodded grimly.

"And if I leave you alive, your precious GPU will hunt this Jack o' Lantern all over Moscow."

Valentine drew a sharp breath, came lightly upright, and laughed. He made a picture of alert and sinewy coolness now. "Awkward! The only way out seems to be a bullet for each of the three of us. Draw a card for the suicide. I can't think of anything better."

The words made Armitage step forward and swing at the pointed chin. It meant noise, but the hunger to see Valentine spread-eagled was too great; the man's clean spruceness against his own dirt was an outrage. . . . The splintering sound of the chair he crashed upon was good.

"That's no good, Lee," said Ishbel's low voice. "It leads nowhere. There's only one thing—go away and hide again. Leave him to me."

"I want to kill him. It could be done noiselessly."

"Hooey!" She gave a wan smile, then shuddered. "We haven't his facilities for moving dead bodies. I know what you're thinking of—you'd give yourself up for it and finish everything. Nothing doing, Lee."

THEY both watched Erik Valentine come to his feet from the rug, dabbing his mouth with a handkerchief.

"*Impasse!*" he said. "No use if I promised to hold my tongue about all this?"

"None whatever," said Armitage. "I wouldn't trust you, you coyote."

"A hefty fist of yours! Better than my fingers." There was something in the man's debonair manner, with that blood at his lip, that fascinated Lee Armitage, in spite of himself. "There was no slip-up about it," Valentine added. "It did what it intended."

He took three glasses and moved to a cupboard. At the movement of Armi-

tage's pistol he cocked an eyebrow and shrugged. His silken calm was assumed, for the three glasses rattled in his hand.

"A cocktail-cabinet; that's all. I'm not sure that you couldn't get me imprisoned for keeping it. We could all do with one."

"Erik!" He turned at Ishbel's voice, and listened attentively. "I'm willing to make a bargain with you. You must trust me to carry my part out. I only want to talk about yours now. Oh, a woman's at a damnable disadvantage in a—in a scene like this with two men." She laughed chokily. "But listen. You seem to have some influence in high quarters. I know Lee Armitage is dead. I'm learning that when a man is dead in Russia—well, he's dead. But you could get a passport for this man. —Be quiet, Lee!" as Armitage started to protest.

VALENTINE looked at Armitage, and back again, clinking the three glasses thoughtfully.

"I must know your part of the bargain, Ishbel, if you'll excuse me. We all seem to be in a position to dictate to each other. Extraordinary! I think,"—his hand rested on the back of the smashed chair, and the knuckles whitened,—"I think Armitage should know also."

"I should stay here, with you," said Ishbel.

Valentine unlocked the cabinet. He brought forth a cocktail-shaker, caressed the frosted glass.

"It would be kind. A wifely act! I've told you I look upon you as my wife. So too, I may mention, does Koregorvsky. A passport and visa for Comrade Who?"

"Comrade Ivan Ivanovitch to you," shot Armitage with a steely smile. "Ishbel's unstrung. She thought out that movie-situation, but it wouldn't work, in real life. . . . Stand back from that cabinet! Quick!"

Valentine wheeled with a flash of white teeth. His arm made a trajectory, and the cocktail-shaker spun through the air and flew at Armitage's face. Why it did not smash his forehead in, he never knew, but it glanced off his cheek-bone to break on the wall with the sound of a shell. Armitage lunged over. The pistol-butt dropped true; Erik Valentine sagged and dropped among the fire-irons.

Armitage stood before the open cocktail-cabinet: There was the hum of a tiny dynamo, and the faint glow of tubes; above, half-hidden, a little microphone was hung by slender wire; the low chirruping sound of a small radio-transmitter came from behind the thin cedarwood partition: *"GPU, S.O.S., VAL. . . . . GPU, S.O.S., VAL."*

With a quick blow, Lee Armitage tinkled the tubes to fragments, and turned to look at the tall girl who crouched by his side.

"You can't beat them. Guaranteed foolproof. Your money back and a medal if they don't corral you somehow. I mean the Gay-pay-oo."

"It's a radio-set, isn't it? He got through, I think."

"I think so too. Guess I want to be Russian for the first time in my life."

"Why?"

"I could beat his brains out, without losing any appetite. It ought to be done."

"You can't do it. For one thing, we must get out of here—quick, as you remarked just now. . . . Lee!" She caught his arm and crushed herself against him suddenly. "It's all real, isn't it? It's not just my dream? Only a week or two ago, I thought Moscow was safer than New York, and a lot more civilized. I thought the next stop was the millennium. I loved it. Even the mud seemed clean. When my people wept over my Bolshevism in their letters—"

"This isn't particularly Bolshevism," said Armitage. "It's just old Russia. It was hidden beneath the new, and we both kicked it up. It's always there."

NOW they were out on the landing together, where the dull rumble of street-traffic floated with the amber sunlight streaming through the open windows. There might be Three Letter Men on the very stairs, both of them knew; but the queer light-headed happiness which often comes to human beings at incongruous times, even in the face of death, filled both man and girl.

"There's little Joseph. He'll know us soon," said Ishbel as they passed that little proletarian, frowning over a toy concrete-mixer on his landing. Joseph's father, a big fair man with a misty tangle of golden beard, came clumsily from the apartment. He picked up little Joseph, grinned at them, and—though they did not know it—followed them slowly.

Somewhere, a factory hooter was droning. At the corner of the street, a squat tramcar clanged past. A street-scavenger clumped by, singing. Nowadays the streets were cleaned and sometimes one

sang without the necessity for vodka to warm the throttle. The rich, greasy smell of the quieter pavements of Moscow came on the damp and warm air. There was no sign of Three Letter men on foot or on wheels, yet.

"Some American woman will go with you to Paris, Ishbel. Let it be just a month's visit—anything. They'd let you go."

Ishbel was very pale.

"I've cut myself off from foreigners, Americans or anything else. You're sending me away. What's to become of you?"

"I'll 'dree my own weird.' No woman can help me."

"Not even Lisa." She laughed unsteadily. "All right, Lee, I'll go. Good-by."

SHE lied. He knew that much before her slender figure had turned the corner of the street, as though blown by the soft, warm wind. She would stay in Moscow to fight with her brave, weak hands the giant machine which had caught her. He had persuaded her to leave him there and go away; that was the extent of his power over her.

He felt almost indifferent to his own fate as he stepped into the street. The GPU knew now that Armitage the American was alive. Koregorvsky used the very ether as his spider's web. . . . . Armitage was no coward; but it weakened him, made him fatalistic.

As he went along the street, another scavenger passed him—no, it was the same. The man looked at him furtively, still whistling. Glancing round, Armitage saw that he was joined by another man, the golden-bearded lout who was little Joseph's father.

They were trailing him. Perhaps little Joseph's father also had a hidden radio-set, or else, in many years, the Three Letters had found some means of communication akin to the African tom-tom. Armitage crushed an instinct to break into a run.

"Not so quickly, Comrade Feodor," said Sasha the Frog's voice. "It will be wiser just to saunter. Besides, my mother did not run to long legs when I was born."

The Freebooter of Moscow had slipped into step with him, from nowhere. He took off his astrakhan cap, wiped his face with it, and put it back again.

"They will not try to arrest you. They are only of the jackal-brigade, and will do no more than shadow you. They function till the real wolves come, you understand. Presently we shall turn a corner quickly, and slip them—I hope. But, if not, I have a plan. I have always a plan; I should be on the Party *komintern*."

"Better leave it to me, Sasha."

Sasha's velvety face wrinkled. He spat out. The action expressed grave amusement, but he kept politely silent and clumped on in his thigh-boots, through a drab sea of thrusting people crowding the Rosa Luxembourg bridge, across a mud-caked quay by the river, and into a ganglion of riverside warehouses and hovels.

After quarter of an hour thus, he looked round, and jerked Armitage aside. It was a dark and fœtid alley-way, running under a huddle of the old wooden houses that the Five Years had not yet swept away. Through the thick mud of the cobbles Sasha led the way, talking jerkily from the side of his mouth again.

"It is a pity there is no sewer manhole open—it would take too long to open one. . . . I know all the sewers in Moscow, and the rats are my little friends. . . . I assure you that they have a soviet of their own and a King Rat that I call Stalin. . . . Ah, those burnt pagans know their job, for all they are but jackals! And it is very necessary to shake them off, now. They still stick. Will you stand rooted to the spot for a moment, Comrade Feodor?"

THE extraordinary little creature turned, lounging back in his tracks to meet their shadowers. Armitage, leaning against an oozy wall, watched him. The narrow alley was deserted save for the two men, who stopped, obviously nonplused by this swaggering double-back of Sasha the Frog. The little Freebooter had one hand negligently thrust beneath his long coat-tails. He smiled ingratiatingly in the same instant that he whipped out the hand like lightning. A cloud of some tawny powder puffed into the faces of the two men and sent them reeling back, clawing at their eyes. The sound of frenzied sneezing filled the alley. . . .

"Red pepper," jerked Sasha brusquely, running back. "It never fails. Round the corner, here!"

Later on, Armitage remembered with wonder that all the time the little stunted bandit kept his look of a wise Botticelli angel as they twisted out beneath the open sky again. Sasha obviously had some objective and was close to it. The

muddy river flashed into view, surging sullenly beneath its background of colored towers and new concrete buildings. His companion pulled him through a broken-down gateway. It was some disused brewery—now a rabbit-warren of people, for the very kilns on the roof were pierced with stove-chimneys, and washing hung outside a row of inverted vats that looked like Eskimo huts. The whole place stewed in the hot sun and reeked with the sour smell of old mash, beer-sodden wood and crowded humanity, but on a signboard, carefully painted, was the name *Little Sretinka*. . . .

"This, Comrade Feodor Petrovitch," said Sasha with a grin, "is where you live. The number is 194Y. Let us get into shelter."

A faint jar of alarm passed through Armitage. Sasha the Frog saw it. He said gravely:

"The situation is this: you are either Feodor Petrovitch, who lives, or the American architect Armitage, who is dead. The Three Letters do not know Petrovitch. But they know Armitage."

"True, Sasha," said Armitage. "But there is Lisa."

"She is a good girl," replied Sasha cryptically. "I have met her. And you know the right way to treat a woman, comrade; of that I feel convinced."

He opened a door on the landing and gently thrust Armitage inside.

THE worthy Deputy to the Public Prosecutor, Comrade Joseph Koregorvsky, had long ago forsaken his first naïve belief that the new Proletarian State would dissolve and fill the gutters with blood, as had its predecessors. The sight

Armitage looked out at the court below. "They come after me, Lisa! Do you see them—the Three Letters?"

of the striving hordes of Moscow, the flushed and enthusiastic crowds of Young Communists, the fire-signs and posters that trumpeted the success of the first Five Years all filled him with grave delight. He was of the old school, though the new school used him. His prime had been spent in blood and fire; there had been a time when he had rubber-stamped his execution-warrants, to save writer's cramp. He was older now. The work was more subtle, more technical. The old wolf had turned into an intelligent house-dog. One did not need to arrange for a dozen different hiding-holes in case of sudden mishap.

Nevertheless, he kept a very comfortable secret apartment in a quiet street among the artists, the prima donnas of the State opera, and the Propagandafilm stars; and tonight, so unusually well-groomed that his corrugated ugliness seemed to be scraped all the more naked, he sat there and wagged his head at Erik Valentine.

"To think the dog was alive all the time—and the report of his demise already in all the American newspapers! I suggest Czerny's exercises on the piano, three hours a day, for those famous fingers of yours, Valentine. As for your wits, love has dulled them, no doubt."

Valentine flushed; his red underlip closed hard. He sat in silence under the gentle castigation, though he did not quake beneath the soft viper that looked out of Koregorvsky's eyes, as most of the Deputy's subordinates would have done.

"Your mouth has not yet healed. Did he hit hard when he walked into your arms a second time? *Nitchevo,* then! We must catch him again, that's all."

"I'll get him. I'll stake my life on that."

"Such a bargain is not unknown in the State Police," returned Koregorvsky courageously.

He leaned back in his chair, and puffed his cigar with sudden relish. After all, this was an hour in a great man's private life. He liked this lean young stag—he was socially brilliant. It was highly amusing, too, that the American girl had whisked out of his shapely hands. For some reason, Koregorvsky smiled and preened himself. A manservant brought

in coffee and *liqueurs* on a gold salver which had once been thrown down an alabaster staircase with a pile of other loot after the body of the Grand Duchess who had owned it. Outside, Moscow murmured softly.

"I lent you a car and two of my officers to capture your bride. The devil! But let us not rub it in. I have a new phonograph," said Koregorvsky. "They are producing ten thousand a day in Leningrad. The Industrial Effort is not all blast-furnaces. . . . Do you like the tone?"

The record he put on was that of a deep bass voice that crooned softly an old Karachaite folk-song. Koregorvsky quirked one sparse eyebrow and said, "Chaliapin? No, the sainted Prohackai, on my honor. He could sing like the angel he now undoubtedly is. . . . Have you seen your wife today?"

"Not today." Valentine lowered his faunlike eyes. For an instant he wondered if his fingers would retrieve their failure if ever he got a chance on this sly old fox. . . . It was mere exuberance of fancy. "She claims not to be my wife. I understand we're divorced."

"So! Comrade Ishbel is a spirited woman. But doesn't she understand that I gave my blessing to the marriage?"

"Scarcely." Valentine smiled bleakly. "She is American. Until quite recently she believed that the Three Letters was mostly what her fellow countrymen call 'bunk'—only a figment of the Capitalist Press."

"May it always remain so," said Koregorvsky unctuously; then, with an edge to his voice: "But she is one of us. She knows too much to remain a mere foreigner. That is decided."

There was momentary silence. A large Bokhara curtain screened an inner room. Behind it, the soft splash of water sounded. Valentine turned with a start, but the little Deputy smoked his cigar serenely.

"Comrade Ishbel could find this Armitage for us. She is in love with him."

"Only pity," said Valentine harshly. "She's soft-hearted."

KOREGORVSKY prodded a stubby finger through a smoke-ring. He looked like a tarantula off-duty, deep-sunk there in his chair.

"Let us suppose the situation thus," he said. "You love your wife, Comrade Ishbel,—we will still call her your wife,—and Comrade Ishbel loves this American, Armitage. The American is dead, of course, but somewhere in Moscow is hidden a workman whom we will call Ivan Ivanovitch—since we don't know his name. Comrade Ishbel, your wife, afraid for his safety, will find him sooner or later. She shall lead you straight to him, friend Valentine—and alive or dead, we shall have this Ivan Ivanovitch. Thus"—Koregorvsky smiled smoothly—"the forfeit you have just offered will be unnecessary. Yet, let us not be crude; let us remember that Comrade Ishbel lives among the young *komsomolkas* of the K.K. clinic, who would look upon it as an outrage for a husband to force his wife's company. Why, I have an inspiration!"

The Deputy was enjoying himself. He sat up with a delighted smile and smote his hands together. Involuntarily Valentine passed his tongue across lips too dry for comfort as he watched him.

"Lidoshka! Are you there, *dusha maya?*"

FROM behind the curtain, Lidoshka Wei came with her graceful walk. A quick, veiled smile at Valentine, a slight languid obeisance to Koregorvsky, who caught and kissed her hand.

"Sit down, little yellow kimono, cross-legged by my chair, as you and I would sit among the scented mimosa—if there was any mimosa available in Moscow. All pale ivory and black spun silk. Valentine is in love too, and will understand. Do you miss your little American friend Ishbel, Lotus Flower?"

"Very much." It was a limpid lisp. Lidoshka Wei, of Moscow, seemed to have gone back into the centuries. Long silken sleeves hid her hands; there were silver butterflies in her hair; her eyebrows were painted black wisps. Blue silk trousers covered her small feet. She looked sideways at Valentine and giggled as Koregorvsky caressed her sleek head fondly.

"So, little willow-pattern! You shall be friends with Comrade Ishbel again. The American Armitage is alive; through her you shall learn where he is hiding."

"He is a dangerous man," said Lidoshka, with a long-eyed smile, as she lit a cigarette. "He knows about Prohackai. Counter-revolutionary! Lidoshka Wei never believed him dead."

"Comrade Ishbel shall lead you to him. I think the Little Lotus had better leave him alive for you—eh, Valentine?"

Lidoshka shrugged indifferently. She

sat like an idol, but darted another look at Valentine and said with a rueful rosebud of a mouth:

"So Comrade Ishbel has deserted her husband? Lidoshka swam through the ice of the river for nothing! It is strange. All for nothing!"

"It brought the blessing of the Three Letters to Comrade Ishbel, little goldfish."

"Ah, yes."

"So it is arranged; Lidoshka shall help you retrieve your efficiency-lapse, Comrade Valentine. The details can wait."

With a great effort, Valentine smiled. He was dismissed, put to one side, though Ishbel was his wife and if he possessed her for but a single twenty-four hours he could make her lead him to Armitage. . . . He seemed to hear all Moscow laughing at him softly. But when he rose and bent over Lidoshka's fingers as the silken sleeves fell from them, only the green speck in his eyes betrayed his thoughts.

"A charming hand, Comrade Deputy! Beware of beauty with charming hands."

He liked to dig at the wizened little rat, dangerous as it was. He might be a GPU puppet, and he liked the sly, deep thrill it gave him, but he was also Valentine, the artist of Propaganda—and the Kremlin itself looked upon him with a benevolent eye. He saw a strong tremor pass through Koregorvsky who was so satiated and old that he could only get his joy when he played with fire that had burned others. . . . .

"Envious dog! They're kind hands."

"Comrade Erik loves his joke," said Lidoshka Wei sedately. "Shall I persuade Ishbel to return to you, Comrade Erik?"

Slit eyes, Chinese eyes. . . . They sent something through Valentine that was akin to Koregorvsky's exhilarated cowardice. He had seldom looked directly at the eyes of Lidoshka Wei, though they had worked together often enough. Yet they glittered softly at him, with an almond compassion that carried no visible mockery.

IN his studio, half an hour later, Valentine stood at the window with the room in darkness. He looked out at the lights and the moving dark specks below, that gray, uncomfortable Moscow crowd which was passing through something no other race upon earth would stand, for the sake of the future. They thought the millennium was already in sight because there was now enough food for all, and in the cities they called it the New Paradise because their thin and calloused women factory-hands were allowed three months from toil to bear their children. . . .

Gray. And he loved color. Yet he was Russian; the Gay-pay-oo gave him color enough. And his ache for Ishbel was scarlet!

TWO evenings later Lidoshka Wei, star of the Propaganda Pictures, woman-soldier of the armies of Chang, widow of Prohackai the Mongol, lectured to the *komsomolkas* of the K.K. clinic. The chairwoman was Fenie Lupkin, who as everyone knew, had delivered over her *bourjoi* old father to the Ogpu, for deliberate sabotage. Fenie sat proud and dry-eyed, at her breast a red rose which had been presented to her. Lidoshka Wei, in dove-gray breeches and belted blouse, kissed Fenie lightly as she finished her lecture upon "Prohackai the Mongol, his Life and Work." One excused the tears that welled into Fenie's eyes though they were against the ideology of common-sense. It was something to be kissed by Lidoshka Wei.

The Chinese girl moved lithely among the eager, steely girls of the clinic, her revolver-lanyard at her waist, for she was also a flying-officer in the League of Aviation and Chemical Defense. It was very impressive to see a woman of the East so much a part of the progresssive machine.

"Was she not your friend, Comrade Ishbel?" asked fluffy little Xenia.

"One changes one's ideology of friendship," Ishbel answered carelessly, though with a slight involuntary shrinking as Lidoshka came closer.

"How mysterious you are!" Xenia's eyes grew big at the memory of the Three Letter men who had taken away Ishbel in the black car. Xenia was a gossip. But on such things even her foolish mouth remained sealed.

Ishbel felt the room hot and stifling. The chatter of the *komsomolkas* made her head ache, though once she had loved it. She shivered. How they surged, shining-eyed, round Prohackai's widow!

She was glad to step through one of the windows that opened out onto the concrete roof, and draw a deep breath. There was a gorgeous moon, and the wind blew soft. It was as light as day. From the sky-shattering towers of the Kremlin to the distant furnaces of the suburbs, Moscow was visible. Ishbel,

leaning against the parapet, clasped her hands tightly, and thought of Lee Armitage. . . .

"It is a lovely night, Comrade Ishbel," said a voice by her side.

SHE looked round, and answered slowly: "I wonder what they would have said if I had told them the truth about Prohackai?"

"They would have thought you mad," said Lidoshka, without emotion.

"I don't think I want to talk to you, Lidoshka. Why have you come out here?"

A silver button gleamed on the epaulette at Lidoshka's shoulder. The tawny throat at its open collar caught the sheen of the moonlight.

"You hate me. Yet I love you. You are West and I am East. Our love is different. . . . As for me, I have only a dog's love left now. But it is all yours; dogs die for those they love."

"I don't wish you to die for me. I don't wish for your love," answered Ishbel in rather tremulous scorn. Lidoshka disturbed her. She looked into the somber oval face. Yes, it was pleading. Lidoshka, who walked alone, could perhaps love one other woman.

"Let us go round the corner. They think I am downstairs. I came here for you, not to give the lecture."

"It was ghastly. I wanted to scream."

"And did I not, also?"

Lidoshka's hand caught Ishbel's; it was icy-cold as she led the American girl to where a little solarium, gleaming beneath the moon, hid them.

"Love is a strange thing. I thought you loved Erik."

"So did I," said Ishbel, under her breath. "And I thought you loved Prohackai."

"He was the last man I loved. I am a shell. There is no Lidoshka for any man now. Even to Lidoshka herself there is no Lidoshka; she is a phantom who cannot suffer. She can act—ah, any part. She can kill, because to her death is only part of life, a doorway out of one room in a big house. It is very useful to think that. She learned it at ten years old when she was a spy for Moscow in Canton. They called her the Little Lotus, even then. —What were *you* doing at ten years old, Comrade Ishbel? . . . . . Do you know who is my latest lover? Koregorvsky!" A faint smile curved the Chinese girl's lips.

"Horrible," murmured Ishbel.

"Not to Lidoshka; she is beyond shame, fear or love—save for her dear friend Ishbel, who hates her." The limpid voice softened. The haunting black eyes looked out over moonlit Moscow. Something fierce and forlorn which had always been in the Chinese girl's devotion to her came back painfully to Ishbel.

"It is the American, Armitage, whom you love. I know, now."

"He is—dead."

"We both know he is not." Lidoshka turned with a quick movement that caused the shoulder-chains of her uniform to tinkle.

"You are so clean and flashing. Unsoiled. That is why I love you. But that is why you don't understand. You are of the State Police. Did you know that? They have taken you to themselves. Who knows their secrets becomes one of them. Guardians of the machine. . . . Look at Lidoshka! They have her soul. You must go before they take yours. Go, Ishbel! Go soon!"

ISHBEL felt her hands close tightly. The Chinese girl's eyes burned upon her; there was a subdued passion in her voice that only lasted a moment. It went, and left her veiled, quiet again—of the Orient, for all her airwoman's uniform.

"You said something about Lee Armitage. What do you know about him?"

"He is living disguised in Moscow," Lidoshka answered. "They will get him soon. Valentine will find him. I don't think he will kill him—immediately."

Ishbel drew a breath. Could she trust Lidoshka? Could she trust anybody, anything, in all this abyss that had suddenly opened in the smiling ground—

"I'm a bit frightened. I'll not deny it. I thought it was only the—only the capitalist world that bolstered itself up with wickedness and cunning. Out of very bitterness I want to stay till I go under, Lidoshka. Some day I know it will all come clean. There'll be no need for secret police—"

"Some day," murmured Lidoshka Wei, and paused. "We have not much time, Ishbel; the *komsomolkas* will come to look for us. You are going to say that you will not go without Lee Armitage."

Ishbel nodded her head in assent. She leaned over and touched the other girl's hands, all her horror and distrust going out like a spent candle.

"Poor Lidoshka!"

"No, no! That Lidoshka is dead!"—

One of the vodka bottles ricocheted from the intruder's ear and burst on the wall.

almost harshly. "Listen to me. You will find this Russian workman, as I could have found Prohackai. . . . The plan is simple. I have thought it out. Trust me. Do you trust Lidoshka, who has done a hundred treacherous things, Ishbelovna? Find him. Bring him to me. It is to be an escape by airplane like you see on the capitalist movies, and it would satisfy your own American *régisseurs*. But no more, now." . . .

There came a cry: "Here they are!"

Little Xenia came running forward, rounded and alluring in the moonlight, despite her austere blouse and skirt. A little knot of the other girls of the clinic followed and one of them spoke eagerly, hot with argument.

"We would like you to elucidate the psychology of the Asiatic temperament for us, Comrade Lidoshka, more especially regarding its reactions to Communism and having regard to the deeply rooted God-instinct and the forefather-ideology of the Chinese—"

Lidoshka rose with a little nonchalant smile. Her military boots creaked. She made a kindly gesture that thrust the earnest creatures back into the lighted room, and followed them.

"It shall be explained," she said.

IT was in a little cribbed and cabined room under the eaves of the brewery roof that Lee Armitage found himself, after the gentle push Sasha the Frog had given him. He leaned against the door, and watched a girl who sat at a table before a sewing-machine. The steady *thud-thud* of the treadle did not stop;

the head of cropped red curls that bent over it did not raise itself.

Armitage stepped forward. His shadow fell across the machine. The girl looked up with a start.

"Who is that?"

She came precipitately from her chair and stood back. Color flushed her pale cheeks.

"Feodor! Is it Feodor?"

"The same," said Armitage. A grim recklessness was upon him. It was utterly unbelievable that he could pass himself off as Feodor Petrovitch to this girl who was Feodor's wife. Such things did not happen, even in Russia. But it was too late to retreat.

"With the militia after you again? This time, I thought they had you."

"The militia or worse, little Lisa," he attempted, with the sheepish defiance that the real rapscallion Feodor might have used. "I will not stay long. But if they come to Little Sretinka, you must hide me. . . . . Mother of God, you look at me as though I was a stranger. Am I?"

He sent the question roughly, but he must make the test. Yet it was hard, even playing a part, to be rough with this fragile little thing. She had timid violet eyes, shadowed with great rings, and the red curls made her like a child. She came closer, but shrinkingly. But as she walked straight into a small footstool and all but tripped over it, Armitage threw out a hand and caught her.

"Hold up! Have you gone blind these days, *matushka?*"

LISA stood strangely still. Afraid of a blow, perhaps. Probably the real Feodor was a cruel brute—a blue mark still visible on her temple argued that.

No, she was merely listening. He too had heard a sound in the filthy and sour-flavored brewery yard below. He stepped to the window, where a wretched geranium bloomed in a pot, and looked out at the court below. A black automobile had swept among the sun-smitten litter. Heads were popping out of the igloo-like vats, and being as swiftly withdrawn again. The scavenger and the father of little Joseph must have recovered quickly from Sasha's pepper-attack. . . .

Armitage pointed.

"They come after me, Lisa. It is your chance to get rid of your Feodor for good. Do you see them—the Three Letters? It is useless to tell you I am innocent."

"I see them," said Lisa slowly. "They will go through every house in the Little Sretinka. They carry small-tooth combs."

"It would be dangerous for you if you hid me, and they found out, to be sure. Well, then!"

A quick glance from the violet eyes. Startled, inscrutable. Then—

"You must get into bed, as you did last time. Quick! No, you must undress. Idiot! Have you forgotten? You sleep like the dead, for you have been on the night-shift at the Red October. . . . And listen, you have erysipelas. Dozens have erysipelas in this hole. I am quick at bandaging."

Lisa flitted to the window and glanced down uncertainly, a strip of cloth in her hand.

"Yes, I see them, of course!"—a laugh of excitement that passed for a moment into a racking cough. "Are you in bed?"

ARMITAGE set his teeth against an impulse to run from the situation. It was vaguely like a French farce. The girl bandaged him quickly, and then he dived beneath the clothes, glad to hide his head, while cursing Sasha the Frog for leading him to Little Sretinka. . . . When his pursuers were gone, he would go too, *tout de suite!*

"Your factory-card." Lisa went quickly through the pockets of his clothes. Against the window her red curls looked like an aureole. "Do they know your name? No? Sleep, idiot! But let the bandage be seen."

She had been peering at him, but drew away now. Presently the *thump-thump* of the sewing-machine recommenced, drowning the uneasy tokens of alarm which were spreading throughout the Little Sretinka. Lisa came to her feet with the sewing in her hand; then, at the sound of heavy footsteps on the landing, she opened the door, and peered out. With an alarmed look she stepped back from a group in GPU uniforms, faltering: "We have done nothing, comrades!"

"More erysipelas!" growled the granite-faced officer in charge. "Is this your man, comrades? All right, little ginger-knob, we leave you your husband this time."

It was a narrow moment, but the Three Letter man cut it short. With a laugh of disgust, he hustled the scavenger and the father of little Joseph out into the corridor again.

Thump-thump went the sewing-machine. A hot silence lay over the Little

Sretinka, as though it held its breath before shuddering with relief. Now and then, the drone of another black car in the yard below. The Little Sretinka was being thoroughly combed.

BUT presently a communal rustle sounded in the corridor outside, as the hunt passed farther away. That part of the Little Sretinka released its held breath. A shuffle of shoes, and a knock at the door—and a large blowsy woman sidled in, wiping a sweating face.

"Did they question you, Lisaveta? They make one feel guilty even if one is lamb-innocent, to be sure."

"They did not even stay long enough to awaken Feodor. He is in bed. He came back last night."

"That good-for-nothing!" The woman sniffed sourly. "That quarrelsome vodka-bottle! He comes when he wants something, that is all. He comes when he has no rubles and remembers that his wife is young and pretty. Yet you call yourself an emancipated woman!"

Laughing with shrill indignation, the visitor took herself away. Apparently Feodor Petrovitch was in no good odor about the Little Sretinka. In bed, Lee Armitage felt himself involuntarily growing sheepish. He waited cautiously, then sat up. Beneath his grime he felt himself flush at the frowsy picture he must make.

"Good little Lisaveta! It was kind of you. Now I must go."

The girl looked at him. Her glance wavered. She was extraordinarily white. Freckled, and very pretty; a little *gamine* of the Moscow streets, perhaps, before Feodor had begun to hammer the laughter out of her. Something about her eyes was touching and wistful. A simple and faithful little animal, nothing more. Not strong—for now and then came a paroxysm of coughing. . . .

"It is too soon yet; the Little Sretinka will be watched. Have you— It is not murder, Feodor?"

"Not that. Nothing political either, I swear, Lisa. I am innocent of anything. It was but a foolish scrape." He tried to put a whine into his voice but it was not very successful. "I know a good hiding-place elsewhere till it blows over."

"Stay in bed; that is your hiding-place. I have captured your trousers. They will watch the Little Sretinka all day, those police. . . . How many days have you been away, Feodor?"

"I forgot. If you'll give me my trousers, Lisa,"—Armitage tried to laugh lightly,—"I will give you money for them."

"From somebody you have killed? But no—I believe you. You were away more than two weeks. Since you left, something has happened. I must be clever that you haven't noticed it. I am altogether blind, now!"

"Blind!"

The girl perched on the edge of the bed. Now that Armitage looked straight into her pupils, without fear of his imposture being recognized, there did seem a tiny mist in them. He remembered the stumble she had made a short time before.

"S-sh! Nobody knows. They mustn't yet. It is nothing; I knew it would come."

SHE was no longer the frightened little animal whose brutal mate had come back. On the stove she put pan and coffee-pot, and then returned to the bed. She sat there, though timidly, and talked. Her sight had been going quickly. . . . Feodor used to put things in her path for her to fall over, because it made him laugh, did he not? Then, at the factory, she had been suspected of sabotage and suspended; but it was her eyesight—she was still able to sew, she was able to feel for everything, but blindness had come. . . . It came from her chest, the doctor said, which proved the belief of Lisa's village grandmother—who though she was a God-maniac, was very wise—that all doctors were mad. . . . Lee Armitage, an architect from America, sat up in bed in a dirty shirt, and a bandage, and listened, a little awed. This was refuge. He had pictured Feodor's wife, when he thought of her, as a steely-haired, sharp-eyed young Communist girl, or perhaps an odorous slut of the slums. Instead she was a blind, gentle little redhead, already flushed with happiness because her scapegrace husband had not yet knocked her down!

Little Sretinka, that old brewery by the river where humans now swarmed, would be watched all day, no doubt. Valentine, seething with vengeance, would make sure of that. The two humble agents, alarmed for their own skins, would make sure of it also. The great State machine, working as silently and smoothly as an electric motor, would make sure. . . .

A queer lethargy came to Lee Armitage, a feeling as near to indifference and despair as he had ever felt. It was not

"Look!" said Ishbel. In the sky a monoplane circled slowly and came down—right out of the east!

unpleasant. He watched the flies buzz about the geranium in the window, and Lisa's delicate shoulders as she moved. The child was singing softly. Now and then she turned round to look at him, and then put out her hand gropingly, though she seemed to know her way about the room.

"Do they hurt, Lisa—the eyes?"

She came running toward the bed, fell over something, laughed.

"No, Feodor. But I feel like one of the blind babies that are born in America nowadays because of the unemployment. A lecturer at the factory cell told us about them. He said their mothers die like flies in the street, poor things. Sometimes they are kidnaped by gang-men employed by the capitalists. *Ai!* I am glad I am Russian! .... Now you shall wash."

Even a clean skin might be disguise. Lisa brought a wash-tub and a suit of blue jeans, and went to the communal wash-house for a pail of hot water. Armitage did not hesitate to strip, since she was blind. A theory that part of St. Peter's outfit at the gates of Paradise would be hot water and soap became conviction as the filth of Feodor Petrovitch fell away from Lee Armitage, and his own firm, bronzed flesh appeared.

"Oh, how different!" gasped Lisa.

Armitage looked up, startled, where he stood in the blue jeans, which certainly made a transformation in his appearance.

"How can you see me, *matushka?*"

"I can't"—quickly but sedately. "Yet I know. Now you shall eat. But first, I have a letter. There was that friend of yours in the wash-house—the Frog, he calls himself. He slid down the old brewery silo, and there he was."

Sasha's note was brief and succinct enough:

"The streets about Little Sretinka are lousy with you know who, Comrade Feodor. Keep indoors and be kind to your little ginger wife till I give you word. I have comfortable quarters in the brewery chimney-stack."

At nights, Lisa's cough woke Armitage now and then. He slept upon a small mattress in a corner of the room. What she thought of it all he could not tell. She lay very quiet, save when her racking cough shook the bed. But once, in the middle of the night, there came heavy footsteps, the clash of metal and the gleam of electric torches. Like a flash, Lisa slipped the bandage on his head, then stood on the threshold with glinting teeth and flaming eyes, storming at the police who, in a free Russia continued to disturb a sick citizen. . . .

The days crawled. Nobody in the rest of the building troubled Feodor Petrovitch. A pious hope that the erysipelas he had caught would poison him and carry him off, seemed to be the extent of the interest. Obviously Feodor was a hard-boiled egg.

Lisa sang softly over her sewing-machine. The wretched little room became brighter, and spotlessly clean.

"So different!" said Lisa softly. "How warm the sun is. I shall not feel the sun next year, Feodor. What does it matter? Life is only today. When you go blind, the past, the future—*nitchevo,* they are nothing. Even in the United States of the Soviet."

"Sometimes I think you are not very blind, Lisa," said Armitage.

"As a bat," returned Lisa tranquilly. She knocked a cup from the table and it smashed on the floor. "That proves it, does it not?"

No word of Sasha in his chimney-stack. None of Ishbel, wherever she was.

None of Lee Armitage, that dead man, save where he sat cooped in an old brewery, making a little consumptive peasant girl think he was her husband, watching, now and then, the light in her blind violet eyes, the grace of her body, the tremulous surrender that she tried to hide.

THERE was one occasion when the door opened, and a loose-mouthed, low-browed man of middle age came in, closing it silently behind him. He did not knock; in the Little Sretinka, one did not knock. In the crook of his arm he carried two bottles of vodka.

"For Comrade Feodor," he grinned. "There is no better cure for erysipelas, in any husband."

Later, Armitage remembered how Lisa crouched against the wall, her freckled skin first deluged with color, and then white as marble, loathing and horror in her eyes, which at that moment, at any rate, seemed to have vision.

Armitage caught the man by the slack of his trousers and the collar of his blouse, kicked open the door, and heaved him out. One of the vodka bottles broke on the floor. The other ricocheted from the intruder's ear and burst on the wall behind him.

Armitage grinned.

"One is taken by surprise by visitors, nowadays! Did that sore place of a man trouble you while I was away, Lisaveta?"

The girl held on with both hands to the back of a chair, shaking—but with something other than fear.

"No, not while you were away. But before you went you promised Tibor, the monk-who-was, to divorce me and leave me to him. You were drunk, Feodor, and so was he. But I think you meant it, then. Now, I care for nothing, save that you flung him out. Like a strong bear! And he is the house-spy for the Three Letter corps. Everybody knows it!" She crept close and began to breathe quickly. "You are another Feodor. Why will you never let me touch you? I should know then, if the old Feodor was quite dead. I would be content. I would ask no questions, because you are so good, so kind to me—"

It was too late for Armitage to move. Without roughly disengaging himself, he could not repel the frail little thing who crushed herself into his arms and ran her fingers over his face. She lifted her lips, and he kissed her, feeling her heart beat like that of a captured bird. The waif of the Little Sretinka was as warm and fragrant as new-mown hay. She stayed a moment with her lips on his, then gently disengaged herself.

Armitage's voice was a little strained, as he strove to laugh.

"Is it your Feodor, Lisa?"

"My Feodor!"

Her reply was barely audible. A long sigh came from her. She picked up the fragments of the broken vodka bottle, and moved about the drab little room with no more noise than a wraith. Presently, in the growing dusk, her sewing-machine began to thump again.

Armitage looked out of the window, where the beer-soaked wind blew. A mist was stealing up the river and pouring into the brewery-yard of the Little Sretinka, making it more than ever like something from the joint brains of Dante and a comic cartoonist. The night would be murky. He felt caged. His luck had been marvelous, but the imposture had gone far enough with Lisa, the brave little creature. Out into Moscow again, with the best of luck. . . . When he sat and thought quietly he realized how the dice were loaded against him. Perhaps he had absorbed a sort of Russian fatalism. But he must go. . . .

He went that night—with Ishbel Dane.

LISA had gone out to the Coöperative Stores. There was some new Russian macaroni, and Feodor loved *lobsha.* Her new Feodor did also—or had his appetite changed?

She went with sure steps along the crazy landing. But her blue kerchief, with the russet curls peeping out, came round the door again almost immediately. With a kind of dumb passion, she drew down Armitage's head, then went—running this time.

The Little Sretinka simmered sleepily. Armitage put on the table a roll of rubles—loot of Sasha's, that still remained. The bandage, a good disguise, he put on his quite healthy head. There was a tap on the door. It caused him to look round with a start. Somebody had slipped into the room—a woman in a long cloak.

"God, Ishbel!"

"Be quiet! I'm disguised." Her lips quivered unsteadily. "Are you alone? You're hurt, Lee!"

"I'm alone, and I'm not hurt. It's synthetic erysipelas. This is pretty dippy, Ishbel. Correct me if I'm wrong."

Involuntarily, he held both her hands and frowned down at her, conscious of

that light-headed happiness again, behind his harsh concern for her.

"I'll correct you. Where's Lisa? Oh, of course, I met her, on the stairs. Let's go. Lidoshka is going to take us to Poland, in an airplane. It can't be explained now—it's beyond explaining. . . . It was hard finding you, Lee. But last night, a kind of little Eros, with bowlegs, came to the Clinic. He walked straight to my sun-arc bed, smiled angelically and began to whisper while I undressed him. . . . Let's go!"

"Wait!" Armitage tiptoed to the door. His pulse was going like a hammer, his wits ablaze. A hunched figure strolled the landing, turned, and against the discolored wall, grinned wickedly.

He closed the door.

"Talk Russian—but low. The house-spy is outside. 'Both' you said? And Lidoshka?"

"Yes. I'm coming. And Lidoshka's a friend."

ISHBEL nodded. Under the slit of the door she watched the feet of Tibor, the monk-who-was. The man's interest was pornographic rather than political. But he effectively barred the way out. Quite shamelessly he glued his eye to the keyhole, and Armitage, lunging out, almost got him by the hair, but missed. He glided back. Perhaps the creature began to suspect that all was not as it should be with the little Lisa's husband Feodor. . . .

Armitage gritted his teeth helplessly. The landing was quiet enough just then, but an alarm would set that grubby hive swarming. He was aware that Ishbel's arm was locked in his, and—marvelously, she was leaving everything to him.

There sounded a sharp, dry *clop* on the other side of the door and the slither of something. The door was flung open, and Tibor's head, with blood spreading among his frowsy hair, hit the floor limply.

"Lisa!"

"Pull him inside, quickly," said Lisa's voice.

She took off the blue kerchief, and threw it upon the table, shook her red hair straight, and dropped on the bed the rusty iron bracket she held in her hand. A long look she sent to Ishbel, and then a grave, crooked smile to Armitage.

"I never went to the Coöperative, because I knew you meant to go. I just wished to watch you go. . . It is nothing, Feodor. When I saw him looking through the keyhole I went to find something to hit him with. Why not? I shall say that he forced himself into my room. The house-committee will believe it—he is well known. I tell you that, Feodor, because you will be concerned about me, you are so kind."

Lisa sat down. She said to Ishbel:

"I knew he was somebody's lover. Or perhaps your husband?"

"Not yet," Ishbel said in a low voice.

"It was wicked of me, pretending to be blind. True, I do not see well and shall be blind before the year is out, the doctor says. But, since he wasn't Feodor my husband, I must pretend, I told myself, otherwise he would go away and get caught. And perhaps I thought—though it was mad to think *that*. . . . But you know what women are, comrade, when they meet their first good man, and are lonely, and the Little Sretinka changes in one hour to the God-merchant's heaven. . . . How I talk! You must go. Good-by, Feodor. I know no other name. I am safe. Don't let him worry, comrade."

Lisa opened the door. Wisps of fog rolled about the landings and beaded the walls. Little Sretinka, that den where one lived till the millennium should bring houses and autos for all, simmered in its strong flavor.

When they turned, Lisa had closed the door of her room again. The damp stairs stretched down to the misty darkness. A train, the *train-de-luxe,* which would be in Berlin-on-another-planet in thirty-six hours, hooted over the river as they went out.

THE Sovietkinofilm, "Prohackai Lives," produced by Propagandafilm with Lidoshka Wei, the Little Lotus, and Yissun Timur, the Mongol, bade fair to be the most original ever made in Russia. Stark brutality, and burning idealism were in it—beauty and blood and a breathless audacity of treatment. It tore the erotic sentimentality of the banker-ridden capitalist films to shreds.

As always, the resources of the State were there, for the sacred cause of Propaganda. Particularly so for Scene Sixty, Reel Two, which was filmed at the giant Sovietsky flying-field. It was an inspiring sight, that sunny morning. The camera-trucks lurched over the sodden field with young men, shock-brigadiers of the Propagandafilm, yelling a clear way for them. Lined in squares of gray

and crimson, Red troops stood motionless while airplanes swooped above them, taking shots from dynamic angles. Machine-guns rattled and gray phalanxes of Japanese were mown down. The shining-eyed crowd of spectators, held back by mounted police, roared their enthusiasm when the great red light which had held them silent went out.

Lidoshka Wei, the Little Lotus, stood negligently by the tail of one of the big *Red Dawn* planes of the League of Aviation and Chemical Defense; neat yet exquisite in her dove-colored flying-suit. In his wonderful make-up as Prohackai the Mongol, big Yissun Timur lounged, while apart, stood a crowd of extras—Tartars, Chinese, and plain proletariat of Moscow.

LIDOSHKA smiled gravely at Lubin, the bull-necked *régisseur;* fat Lubin, the most famous man in Russian films, though he walked like a duck and was as short in the legs. The infatuated Comrade Koregorvsky, watching his "Little Kimono" from a closed automobile, had no cause for jealousy of fat Lubin.

"Yissun Timur and I are ready, Comrade Lubin. The two extra players I wanted are in the cabin?"

"Everything is aboard," grunted Lubin, "including your two extras. It is not in the script. But I will use them somehow."

"You will have one of your inspirations," said Lidoshka with a little laugh. Even to Lubin she looked this morning like a dainty piece of teak. Her eyes were black slivers beneath her flying-helmet. On the cabin-steps she turned and blew a fleeting kiss to a closed automobile round which three GPU officers hung unobtrusively. Lubin grimaced; always he had suspected that the Little Lotus had friends in the secret police!

The *Red Dawn* had been specially gutted so that there was no partition between cockpit and cabin. A glass roof let in the brilliant sunlight upon Lidoshka at the controls, upon Yissun Timur by her side and upon two extra players, —a man and woman chosen by Lidoshka Wei,—whom Lubin's agile brain was already fitting into the picture. They should be contrast, parable. . . . Ivan and Nadeshka of Moscow, among the glittering drama of Prohackai.

Smoothly the flying-field fell into the void, and left instead a field of gilded cupolas and smoking chimneys, of boulevards and huddled houses, of concrete blocks and the vast, colored toy city which was the Kremlin, swinging away behind.

AS she looked down on it all, terror surged upon Ishbel Dane in a great wave; terror of something unknown and dangerous she had played with and fondled, something which she still loved in a wistful way, now she was leaving it. Some of the terror spilled over for a moment to Lidoshka's small tawny hands, so firm and strong at the controls. It was all fantasy: Lidoshka Wei, once of the armies of Chang, was flying with Lee Armitage and herself to Poland, in a Soviet plane, and only the three of them knew it! Lidoshka, whom even yet Ishbel scarcely trusted, had kept them hidden for three days. . . .

Above the roar of the engines and the buffet of the wind, Lubin's voice, shrill and piping, sent orders.

"Go aft, behind the camera," bade Lidoshka, with a smile. "You are not in the scene yet. It is only Prohackai and I."

Ishbel and Armitage made their way along the cabin. Huddled together, they crouched by the rear window. A smoking ironworks passed below with the painted spires of some cathedral gleaming in the reek like spears. The *Red Dawn* swooped down to it, the cameraman sprawling over his machine. There was a momentary hiccup in Lubin's thin tones, and his flabby face, shaped like a large nut, took on a mottled tint.

"The fat man will be air-sick before long," murmured Armitage.

He wet his dry lips. To him also this was such fantasy as, in a life of considerable adventure, he had seldom encountered. His youth had been spent in Russia of the Revolution and he had known fantasy. But nothing like this. It went with the marching dreamers who still had their dreams guided and kept to the true path by Koregorvsky and his kind. . . . Beneath her kerchief, Ishbel's face was painted past belief, and her hair was almost of platinum hue. Lidoshka had done that. He himself was just Feodor Petrovitch.

In a whisper he asked:

"You're sure you trust Lidoshka?"

"Some way, I do. I think she—loves me. She could have given us up instead of hiding us until this morning. She's flying west—we must be going a hundred miles an hour."

"She wouldn't let me bring a revolver."

"She has one. But it's to be an accident—we're to lose our way and come down on the other side of the frontier, remember."

"Simple!" gritted Armitage.

LUBIN'S reedy voice kept on doggedly, above the wind. The camera, in its slings, moved here and there. Against the gleaming instrument-panel Lidoshka and the Mongol—so chillingly like the Mongol who was dead—grouped their Oriental faces, talked, looked into each other's eyes. . . . The *régisseur* gestured to Ishbel and Armitage, thrust them together like a sculptor roughly molding clay, while the *Red Dawn* climbed roaringly up into the sky.

"Enough! It was the background of wind and sky. You will see. The Americans would do it all in a studio, but not Lubin. . . . And now I will be sick."

He was. He entered the cabin and oblivion. Yissun Timur, too, left the cockpit to reach the flask of fermented camel's-milk which always accompanied him. Slowly, fascinatedly, with memories haunting her eyes, Lidoshka's head turned to watch his broad back and hunched shoulder-blades. Her look slid to the two Americans. She smiled and beckoned—the kindly, capricious star.

"Watch! There is a thunderstorm ahead. I am going to climb over it—only the mechanic knows our direction. He thinks it is a joke on my part. I am the Little Lotus, a film-star, remember. Even in Russia we are indulged a little."

The thunder cracked and the lightning slashed the woolly floor of clouds beneath, but far ahead was brilliant blue, toward which the big airplane hurtled like a humming bolt. It came out over vast, sunlit marshes unbroken by anything save the white steam of a Transcontinental train.

"You will catch it at Pinsk," said Lidoshka, laughing softly at Armitage, her voice taking the innocent lisp which always baffled him. "You think Lidoshka is always false? It does not matter; I do it for Ishbel. Now sit still and rest."

Ishbel put out her fingers, and those of the Chinese girl closed on them. Ishbel Dane running from Russia!

The airplane flattened out and came down lightly upon a vivid green marshland. The black hosts of pine forests cut the sky on every hand. A wolf and her cubs loped away, growling, from the giant phantom which had dropped into their silences.

Lubin and Yissun Timur lurched out of the cabin and down the ladder—two dazed men, the one with the stupor of sickness, the other stolid with sleep.

"God alive!" said Lubin, too relieved to find his trembling legs on firm ground, to say any more just then.

"The petrol finished," said Lidoshka with a grimace, "and we are lost. My instruments went wrong. I thought you were asleep, Comrade Lubin, and felt mischievous, and sick for the moment, of Moscow. So I flew and flew. These comrades will go and find a village; it seems they were peasants originally."

That was Lidoshka's only farewell. Ishbel turned and saw the trim, breeched figure lighting a cigarette from her mechanic's match, but she did not look their way.

They strode through the thickets.

"Quick!" said Armitage, trying to keep the huskiness from his voice.

FANTASIA still! This was Poland—barely Poland, and no more. In four hours from Moscow they had reached it, that edge of beyond, over which the perplexed outer world peeped. There was no visible frontier. There were only frontier-guards, Russian, Polish. Neither were they visible in that smooth waste where new Russia trickled into the lands of the old civilization, but they must have both seen the *Red Dawn* come down. . . .

Escape, not by police-ridden roads, or watched railway trains, but casually, by airplane! Armitage's breath felt constricted. He caught Ishbel almost roughly, and pulled her along a foot-track which went westward into the lowering sun. Why couldn't they mark the frontier, some way? There was danger—the Poles shot as hastily as the Russians on that armed frontier. . . . Escape! It was in Ishbel's pale, eager silence, in his own thumping heart. It changed them jarringly from the two people who had once sat with Prohackai the Mongol in Lidoshka's apartment, discussing the civilizations of East and West. . . .

"Look behind!" said Ishbel, and there was something flat in her voice as she turned and pointed.

They were among the trees, but the marsh where the *Red Dawn* rested like a languid bird was still visible through the aisles of black trunks. So was the sky above it, in which a slender monoplane circled slowly and came down with a lazily turning propeller, right out of

the east. A black monoplane, with the hammer and sickle painted on its underwing. A mirthless laugh left Armitage: Lidoshka, playing one of her elaborate treacheries! She had a radio-set on the *Red Dawn,* of course. . . .

"No!" Tremblingly Ishbel read his unspoken thought. "I don't think it's Lidoshka. She wouldn't, Lee! Anyhow, we're safe over the frontier."

"Sure." Armitage caught her arm and gently led her forward.

The forest was all green twilight. Their feet squelched into bog and out again. But there was a track. It wove in and out of the tree-trunks, but always kept its westward direction. Not a beaten track, yet precisely marked . . . . and presently they found something vaguely sinister about it. Armitage tripped over something and turning, he saw it was a large ikon, thrust deep into the ground, its image and cross covered with rust and verdigris. A wind came like a cold draft, setting the branches above them to moaning. But only the twilight and the multitude of tree-trunks remained. No rustle of animal life. Ishbel saw Armitage's face, hard and alert. She too was straining ahead to see any opening in the forest, any sign of the cluttered houses of a Polish village. But there was none. Yet that path went on—steadily on.

Suddenly Armitage stopped. He found himself staring at the bark of two trees. They were seared with clean raw scars, at about the height of a man's heart. Almost every tree near had such chipped wounds. Machine-gun bullets. . . .

"I don't like it, Ishbel. It's too damned unending."

"Nor I—much, Lee. Shall we stop a moment?"

HE turned and drew a deep breath. They looked at each other. Ishbel let the kerchief fall back from her platinum head. Into a little pool of water at her feet she dipped a handkerchief, and cleaned the make-up from her face.

"Better?" she asked gravely.

"Heaps. It's you again. The hair will wait. Ishbel—"

"Let me say it first!" Her hands fell on his shoulders. "I love you, Lee, dear —I always did. I tell you now, in case we don't get out of this wood. I said my prayers last night. It was foolish, I know. But I felt better. It brought us this far. God-merchandise and biological insanity —how far away those *komsomolkas* seem now!"

Armitage held her gently. Her lips were warm and curved in laughter at herself; no chill of fear upon them, though the forest was like some quiet Russian beast, watching them. . . .

"I forgot Erik Valentine. He has crumbled, if he ever really did exist. I don't regret my dreams, Lee. They were splendid, and Moscow is full of them. Like a river. But the undertow you can't see is pretty strong, I guess. . . . What a time to talk!"

"Habit." Armitage smiled faintly. "I have it myself. The God-merchandise is better stuff at the moment. It'll take us further. We'll start on again."

WEST—but which was the west? Only a pale light came through the branches above to illumine the path. It dipped into a hollow, filled with ghostly bluebells and pine-needles. They went down together, but Armitage drew ahead, sinewy with a sense of hidden peril. Some odor, sharp and carnal, in his nostrils. There was a pile of rags faintly visible, with small shapes scurrying from it. Animal life at last! His foot caught something. . . . Wire.

Afterward he knew that he flung Ishbel headlong into the bluebells. The air above them tore and whistled; the quiet of the forest was hellishly shattered, and lit with tiny flashes of lightning that made the undergrowth jump red. The silence and the darkness seemed to have waited for that devil's tattoo which burst forth all around them, in satanic triumph. The barrage clattered and swept above them as they stayed pressed to the ground, their faces in the earthy coldness of the flowers. A chill anguish of failure swept through Lee Armitage as he lay there in that minute, that eternity before the drum-fire died to a stutter, and ceased.

It did cease. Like something mechanical that had run down. Not a sound followed it, save the crackle of a severed branch that bent over and fell slowly. He turned his face to Ishbel. "What was it?" she murmured.

"Machine-guns. That wire sent them off. We're not across the frontier!"

"No. This path just—leads back!"

"GPU tricks. This is one of their game preserves. . . . Lidoshka sent us into it."

This thrilling story of modern Russia continues with mounting interest in the next—the June—issue.

Murder on the Island

By ROBERT MILL

Illustrated by V. E. Pyles

THEY parked their troop car near the shore of the Adirondack lake and walked to the narrow beach. There they stood for a moment gazing out at the island. Upon it was a hill, its slopes cloaked with majestic pines, and upon the summit perched the house.

"The boat," said Sergeant James Crosby, "should be near here." He peered about. "Yes, there it is. How are your muscles, Tiny?"

Trooper Edward David stretched his six feet two inches of body, weighing two hundred and twenty pounds, and smiled.

"My muscles are all right, but what is it all about? Anyway, I hadn't counted on doing any rowing today."

Sergeant Crosby consulted a note written upon elaborate stationery.

"Before the day is over, you may do a lot of things you hadn't counted on. Here is the plot: One Joseph Bahn, the owner of yonder landed estate, writes to the captain requesting the presence of a trooper today. No reasons given, and no reasons asked." He launched the boat and seated himself in the stern. "While you are getting acquainted with those oars, you might also ponder the fact that Mr. Bahn is about the richest gent summering in this neck of the woods. He has more money, Tiny, than you have bad habits."

Trooper David whistled.

"He must be rich," he admitted. He pulled lazily at the oars. "Suppose you have hobnobbed around with him, you being a sergeant and all that."

"Never saw him," Sergeant Crosby admitted. "The old boy keeps to himself. Even puts his camp on an island to discourage visitors. But today we are invited guests."

Trooper David rested upon his oars. "I wonder why?"

"Oh, perhaps the motorboats make too much noise. You know what these calls usually are. But keep exercising those oars; this wind will put us back where we started."

A few minutes later they beached the boat and stood gazing at the steps that wound up the hill to the camp.

"Anybody who visits this Mr. Richguy gets a good workout," said Trooper David. "If the rowing don't get you, the stairs will. Good thing I haven't let myself get soft like some sergeants do."

They began the climb in silence. Slightly more than halfway up, the Sergeant paused. He pointed to a cove around a point of the island, which had not been visible from the place where they landed their boat, and in which a seaplane rode at anchor.

"Trim boat," declared Sergeant Crosby. "Wonder why—"

He broke off the sentence, for Trooper David was no longer with him. The huge man was making his way toward the seaplane with a speed that was in marked contrast to his indolence at the oars and during the upward climb. Sergeant Crosby waited until he returned.

"No license number on that boat," drawled Trooper David. "Cap'n always chasing me after things without a license." He tapped a pocket of his gray coat. "Coupla of spark-plugs in there. Make it easier if we should have to chase that boat. Hate to chase things."

"I wonder why that boat has no license," the Sergeant mused.

"You should have brought your fortune-telling outfit," retorted Trooper David. "Anyway, little things like that shouldn't puzzle a sergeant."

Crosby made a gesture of annoyance.

"Drop that sergeant stuff, Tiny. You've had your stripes and lost them so often that the top sergeant has to look at the pay-roll before he knows what to call you. And it wasn't my fault this time."

The New York State police solve the mystery of a strange crime in one desperate hour.

"I wonder why that boat has no license," the Sergeant mused. "You should have brought your fortune-telling outfit," Tiny David retorted.

Tiny David merely grinned.

They had reached the great house on the island hilltop. Their ring brought a tall, slender man dressed in shapeless tweeds. His excitement was obvious.

"I'm Sergeant Crosby," said the man with the chevrons on his sleeve. He turned to his companion. "This is Trooper David. We—"

"I'm Bahn," interrupted the man in tweeds. "This is quick work, Sergeant."

"Quick work?" repeated Crosby. "The let—"

The slow drawl of Trooper David carried above the voice of his companion.

"Too quick to suit me, Mr. Bahn. I don't care particularly about rowing, especially in hot weather. But we did the best we could."

"Remarkably quick work," repeated the owner of the camp. "I telephoned just twenty-five minutes ago. I called your barracks and the doctor at the Inn. Something terrible has happened here."

He led the way through a living-room a dining-room and into a small room evidently used as a butler's pantry. Upon the floor was a still form. Trooper David knelt beside it.

He saw a tall, thin man dressed in the livery of a butler. In the center of the forehead there was a round hole surrounded by an irregular black circle. The trooper felt for a pulse he knew did not exist. Then he stood up and faced the owner of the camp.

"His name is Jenkins," said the man in tweeds, "Herbert Jenkins. Been with me for two years." He struggled to control his emotion. "Best butler I ever had."

Sergeant Crosby was writing in a notebook.

"How did it happen?" he asked.

"We had finished breakfast," the man in tweeds began. "Jenkins had served us —by 'us' I mean my daughter and myself. Then I retired to my room, and my daughter went to hers. A short time later the servants, with the exception of Jenkins, took a launch for the mainland. They had been given the day off."

He lowered his voice.

"You see, I was expecting some valuable securities that needed my signature. After they had been signed, they were to have been flown to New York. You may have noticed the seaplane anchored in the cove. Jenkins, in addition to being a butler, was an experienced pilot." Again he struggled with his emotion. "He was invaluable to me."

Sergeant Crosby's pencil was moving rapidly.

"I heard the launch from the Inn come over with the mail," Bahn continued. "Jenkins walked down to the dock to meet it. I heard him enter the pantry. I remember smiling as I thought that Jenkins would deliver even securities worth half a million upon the conventional silver tray."

he was aware of the value of this package. He also knew that I was waiting for it. Soon I went downstairs to investigate. When I came to this room, I found—this."

"Did you hear the shot?" asked Sergeant Crosby.

"I heard a muffled report that may have been a shot, but I attached no importance to it at the time."

"See or hear anybody running away?"

"Neither sight nor sound."

"The securities are gone, of course?"

"Yes. I have been unable to find them."

"Negotiable?"

"Only with my signature. I had no chance to sign them, of course."

Sergeant Crosby smiled.

"That simplifies things," he said. "If you have no objections, we'll take a look around the first floor."

"By all means," Bahn asserted.

It was Trooper David who discovered an open window in the kitchen.

"Probably where they made their getaway. Had a boat waiting."

Sergeant Crosby nodded. He turned to face Bahn.

"Sorry to disturb her, but I am afraid I'll have to ask Miss Bahn a few questions."

"Certainly," answered the man in tweeds. "I'll call her at once."

"Something terrible has happened here," said the owner of the camp. . . . On the floor of a small room —evidently a butler's pantry — was a still form.

Trooper David, who had been peering about the room, bent over an object on the floor.

"Here is the tray," he said. "It must have fallen out of his hands."

Bahn walked toward the tray.

"Yes," he said, "that is it." He stooped to pick it up.

"Never mind that," directed the Sergeant. "Go on with the story."

"Well, I was puzzled when Jenkins failed to appear at my room immediately. He delivered all mail promptly, and

He left the room, but as he was walking through the dining-room the peal of a telephone-bell halted him. Trooper David, standing in the doorway, saw him throw a switch and pick up the receiver.

"Hello! Bahn speaking. . . . Oh, yes. . . . Yes, of course, I understand. . . . But we are in quite a state of confusion here. . . . I'll try to arrange it."

He put aside the telephone.

"That was the Inn calling," he explained. "Their boat is out, and Dr. Jacoby has no way of getting over here. I told them we were terribly upset, but I promised to see what I could do."

Tiny David, lounging in the doorway, showed signs of resentment.

"Too hot to row over to the Inn and back. Don't feel equal to it."

Bahn addressed himself to Crosby.

"But isn't a physician necessary to the investigation? I thought it was part of the legal formality. I also thought he could tell you much about the wound that would aid in locating the murderer."

"Too hot to row," repeated Trooper David. The drawl was evident, but underneath it there was emphasis.

"Pipe down," ordered Sergeant Crosby. "You're big enough and ugly enough to do a lot of rowing without getting hurt. If you think you are being abused, I'll row over and get the doctor. I'll start as soon as we have a talk with Miss Bahn. You can stay here and do some chair fatigue." He turned to the man in tweeds. "If you will call your daughter, Mr. Bahn—"

"Mildred!" the owner of the camp called. "Mildred, come here, please."

She had dark hair and dark eyes. Her strong, capable arms, burned to a dark brown, were revealed by the trim sports-suit she was wearing.

Her story, as she told it, was much the same as that given by her father.

"Think, Miss Bahn," Sergeant Crosby begged, "is there anything you can add? Even the smallest thing may help us."

She pondered.

"No," she said, "there is nothing else. Oh, it is all so terrible!" She turned to her father. "Where is Dr. Jacoby? Even if it is hopeless, I will feel ever so much better if he is here."

"Dr. Jacoby," Bahn said, "is—"

"I am about to row over after him," Sergeant Crosby answered.

The dark eyes of the girl flashed her gratitude.

Bahn started toward the door.

"I'll walk down to the beach with you, Sergeant. We have a lighter boat than the one you came over in. You'll find it easier going."

"Thanks," said the Sergeant.

DAVID dropped into a huge chair. "Don't get hurt," was his somewhat disrespectful advice to his superior officer. "That wind hasn't calmed down any, and it is plenty rough."

Sergeant Crosby disregarded the warning, and the two men walked from the room. Bahn led the way to the rear of the house and down a path screened by the boughs of huge trees. Suddenly he paused, obviously winded.

Sergeant Crosby smiled. "Take it easy," he counseled.

Soon Bahn recovered.

"Lead on, Sergeant," he directed. "I'll try to keep with you."

Crosby followed the path, with the owner of the camp behind him. Near the foot of the hill, on the opposite of the island from which the troopers had approached, the Sergeant noticed a low frame building.

"What's that?" he asked.

Bahn was approaching from the rear.

"Icehouse," he panted.

The hand of the owner of the camp went upward. In it was a heavy object. That heavy object descended upon Sergeant Crosby's head. He fell to the path without a sound.

BACK in the house Tiny David, from the luxurious depths of the chair, regarded the girl.

"Jenkins have any family?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered. "I know nothing about him—nothing except that he had excellent references."

"He didn't happen to have any pictures of himself, did he? You see, a picture would help us in locating his family." Trooper David studied the walls and the mantel over the fireplace. "You don't seem to go in for pictures here."

The girl drew herself up with quiet dignity.

"My father dislikes publicity. I share that dislike. Pictures taken by photographers have a way of finding newspaper offices. We have avoided that by having none taken."

Trooper David nodded.

"Good idea," he admitted. "Well, we can search his things. Probably find letters or something there that will help us." He yawned. "No hurry about that. It can wait until the Sergeant gets back with the doctor." He grinned. "Anyway, I am just one of the help. The Sergeant is the boss."

Miss Bahn displayed unflattering lack of interest in all this.

"You know," Trooper David continued, "you don't have to stick around here. Go back to your room, if you want to."

"Thank you." Her voice was icy.

"That's all right," declared Trooper David. He burrowed deeper into the chair as the girl left the room. . . .

Down the path, Bahn was working with feverish speed. He produced sev-

eral lengths of rope from the bushes and bound the hands and legs of the unconscious officer securely. A soiled rag was thrust into the Sergeant's mouth, and a third piece of rope held it in place. Then, with surprising strength, he picked up the limp form and carried it to the door of the low frame building.

There, placing the Sergeant upon the ground, he produced a key and unlocked the door. Entering the building, he bent over a girl, who was bound and gagged in a manner similar to the way in which the Sergeant had been trussed up. Anger and fear blended in the girl's blue eyes as he calmly examined her bonds.

"Take it easy," was his sinister advice. "I've brought you company. You two are getting the breaks. Some others aren't going to be as lucky."

He placed the Sergeant beside the girl, stepped out, closed the door and locked it. He carefully readjusted his attire. Then he made his way back to the house.

TROOPER DAVID watched his entrance without outward interest.

"I hate to interrupt your rest," Bahn said, with anger in his voice, "but you seem to forget that I have lost securities worth half a million dollars. How about at least going through the motions of recovering them?"

Tiny David shifted in the chair.

"They aren't negotiable. You said so yourself. You hadn't a chance to sign them before they were stolen."

"Ever hear of a crime called forgery?"

"Yep," Trooper David admitted. "Arrested a fellow for it last week." Again he shifted his position in the chair. "But this isn't forgery." He paused. His drawl was gone for the moment. "This is murder. Murder, and perhaps some other things."

"What?" Bahn demanded.

The drawl returned. "Robbery, for one. You were robbed, weren't you?"

"Certainly," snapped Bahn. "And what are you going to do about it?" He fumbled in his pocket. "Here is a list of the stolen securities. Can't you at least go through the formality of telephoning them to your barracks and asking them to be on the lookout for them?"

Trooper David reached for the list.

"I'll telephone this to the barracks." He left the chair with obvious reluctance. "Hand me the telephone, will you?" He accepted the instrument. "You have to throw that switch in order to get an outside line, don't you?"

Bahn made the necessary adjustment.

When the connection was made, Trooper David called off the names and numbers of the securities.

"Everything is under control here, Max," he concluded. "Tell the Captain we won't want any help. Crosby has rowed over after a doctor. Mr. Bahn has given us all the dope. Soon as the doctor is finished here, we'll be all cleaned up. Then we'll come in and make out a report. So long, Max."

He turned from the telephone and faced Bahn, who had a revolver trained upon him. There was a snarl upon the face of the man in tweeds.

"Put 'em up, you Boy Scout!" roared the man with the revolver. "Wise guy, aren't you? Too tired to row! Thought you had me fooled. If you still think it, make just one move and see what happens to you."

Tiny David elevated his hands, resisting the temptation to draw the revolver in the holster at his belt. The crooked grin played over his face.

"I know the answer to that one," he drawled. "One move, and I won't be able to move. I'm quick like that."

"Not quick enough," retorted his captor. "You won't move long. You know too much."

Trooper David shrugged his shoulders.

"So that's the plot, eh? Well, let's get along with it. How about taking this gat out of my belt and then letting me sit down?"

The man in tweeds grinned.

"Good idea that—at least part of it."

He removed the revolver from the holster, unsnapped the buckle that held it to a strap and placed the weapon in his pocket. All the while his own gun was trained upon Trooper David.

AND Trooper David, as soon as he was disarmed, calmly slipped into the chair.

"It's none of my business," he ventured, "but just how are you planning your get-away?"

The man with the gun favored him with a snarl.

"Seaplane, wise guy. What's it to you? You won't be here, so the noise won't disturb you."

Tiny David sighed.

"Too bad. I was afraid of that."

His captor paused in his task of hurriedly collecting various objects about the room.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Well, I sort of figured that. The seaplane was the first thing that struck me as wrong. No license-numbers on the wings or fuselage. A rich guy like Bahn doesn't go in for unlicensed seaplanes."

The trooper paused.

"Hate 'em myself," he continued. "Cap'n always chases me after things without a license. You get tired chasing things. So on the way up I just stopped off and took a couple spark-plugs out of that motor. Threw 'em in the lake because they were too heavy to carry around on a day like this."

He waited until the stream of profanity had subsided.

"Even a good motor won't run without spark-plugs. You haven't any spares —I looked. And spark-plugs fished up from the bottom of a lake aren't helpful. What are your plans now, Mr. Big Brains?"

The man with the blazing eyes drew closer. The revolver was pointed toward Trooper David's head.

"First," hissed the man in tweeds, "I am going to kill you. Then the girl and I will row over to the Inn and make our get-away."

Trooper David sighed again.

"Mildred!" roared the man with the gun. "Come down quick. We're leaving!"

"I was afraid of that too," drawled Tiny David. "Too bad."

DESPITE his better judgment, the man rose to the bait.

"Why?" he demanded.

The girl, dressed for traveling, was at his side. She carried two suitcases.

"Well," drawled Trooper David, "the people at the Inn are bound to see you. The trail will start there. Be easy to follow after that."

He shifted his position slightly, and went on in an easy conversational tone:

"It can't be done. You've made too many mistakes."

"What were they, wise guy?"

"Start with the seaplane," continued Trooper David. "That put me on my guard right away. Then, when you met us at the door, you made a crack about the quick time we had made. There was nothing in the letter we received about any particular time of arrival. So I cut the Sergeant off when he started to mention the letter, and you make a crack about telephoning for us. You also said enough to make me realize you didn't know anything about any letter."

He paused. "Suppose there is any chance of my getting a cigarette?"

The man with the revolver laughed, and it was not a pleasant sound.

"Why not?" he asked. "It'll be your last. Here, take mine."

Tiny David lighted the cigarette.

"WELL," he continued, "Bahn was supposed to have written the letter. It was a safe bet he had. Anybody else wouldn't have wanted State troopers within a hundred miles of this place. That made it easy. You didn't know about the letter. So you weren't Bahn."

"Yeah! Well, who am I, wise guy?"

Tiny David exhaled a cloud of smoke.

"Jenkins," he answered. "Jenkins the butler. The phony butler."

"Remarkable, *Watson!* Just like a story-book detective, aren't you? Tell us the rest of it. It'll be your last chance to recite."

"The rest of it is simple," said Trooper David. "You got a job with Bahn and played the part of the perfect butler. You got the girl a job here, and you waited for your chance. It came today.

"The other servants were away when the securities came. You probably arranged that. You killed Bahn—robbed him. The seaplane was waiting for you and the girl to make your get-away. You didn't know anything about the letter Bahn had written the barracks asking us to be here today.

"But while you were getting ready to light out, either you or the girl looked across the lake and saw two troopers rowing toward the island. You knew the alarm couldn't have been given, so you determined to bluff it out.

"You thought fast, and you acted fast. You called the barracks, and you reported the murder of Jenkins the butler. You gambled on being able to ditch us and get away in the seaplane before any other troopers arrived.

"You stripped Bahn of his clothes, and you put them on. You dressed him as the butler. It was a hurried job, but it was a good job. You made only one mistake there."

"Yeah," snarled his captor. "What was that?"

"Lot of fingermarks on the shirt around the studs. Man like Bahn would be particular about the livery worn by his servants. He wouldn't stand for that.

"Then there was the matter of the doctor. That was another of your mistakes. You didn't call the Inn. That

call you received came from the girl upstairs, and it was timed to send us off in a boat after Jacoby, so you and the girl could get off in the seaplane."

"How do you figure that, wise guy?"

"When you answered the call, you threw the switch. Later, when I called the barracks, it was necessary to throw the switch again before I could get an outside line. Simple, isn't it?"

"Yes," Bahn snarled. "Just as simple as rubbing you out."

"But you haven't heard the half of it yet, dearie," purred Trooper David.

The girl strode forward.

"Give it to him now, Carl!" she screamed. "Don't let that clown sit there and make a monkey out of us."

Tiny David sighed.

"Didn't some bird write a piece about female mosquitoes biting harder? Lady, I didn't make a monkey out of you. Nature beat me to it. You see, you made quite a few of the mistakes yourself."

The girl took the bait.

"Let's hear 'em," she ordered. "Talk fast, or you may not be able to spit 'em all out, and I'd hate to have my education neglected."

"Well," drawled Trooper David, "dear father and shrinking daughter had just discovered that their beloved butler was murdered. They had been robbed of a lot of jack. They were alone in a lonely house on a lonely island. There hadn't been any search of the house or the premises; and for all they knew, the murderers were still around. Yet timid little daughter calmly goes to her room on the second floor and stays there, while brave father is below. Isn't reasonable, is it, sweetheart?"

The girl burst into vivid profanity.

"I MUST remember some of that," declared the trooper. "Max, the top sergeant, will eat that up. Well, to get on with your shortcomings, my dear:

"When you showed up, you couldn't resist the temptation to prod us along on our trip after the doctor. Your loving heart just couldn't stand having that dear butler lie there without medical attention. But you slipped up, light of my heart! If all that tender mercy had been tugging at your heart, you wouldn't have left the butler's side. You would have been there, doing everything for him you could, until the doctor came. A corpse, more or less, meant nothing in your young life. I noticed that when you came into the room."

"That's enough."

The man stepped forward; the hand holding the revolver was raised.

"Just a minute," Trooper David begged. "There is just one more trick in the game. It isn't going to be a slam. You take this last trick. Don't you want to hear about it?"

He sat studying the face of the man who might soon be his executioner. Outwardly he was very calm. In reality, his heart was racing and the blood pounded in his ears. He saw curiosity clash with murderous hate, and curiosity won.

"Play it," ordered the man.

"You had me call the barracks and list the stolen securities. That was a clever and nervy bluff. It got you what you wanted. You found out no other troopers were on their way here."

Tiny David's shoulders dropped in resignation.

"That was my mistake. I knew it soon as I took up the telephone. I knew that if I said one word about sending other men, I would die right there. I wanted to live." He laughed. "Besides, I didn't begrudge your victory. So when the top kick asked me if I wanted help, I told him no."

THE eyes of the man with the revolver were flashing with triumph.

"That last trick takes game," he asserted. "Now, wise guy, let me tell you another mistake you've made: You've been stalling for time. You figure out that your pal will find out at the Inn that Doc Jacoby wasn't sent for, and hotfoot it back here for you. Well—"

Trooper David halted him with a gesture of negation.

"No, I am not counting on that. The Sergeant got his when he went for the boat. I knew that was coming to him." The crooked little grin played over his face. "I let him take it.

"I didn't have a chance to tip him off, if I had wanted to. Besides, it will be good for him. He's a good guy, but he's too sure of himself, and he is too easy with good-looking skirts. This won't hurt him a bit. You didn't bump him off; that would have made too much noise. You just tapped him on the head and trussed him up somewhere. He's with Bahn's daughter—if Bahn had a daughter. He probably did, but all this daughter stuff may have been just a bluff to account for this pretty lady here. I don't know that. But I do know that no break is coming to me from Crosby."

"When you answered the call, you threw the switch. Simple, isn't it?" "Yes," Bahn snarled. "Just as simple as rubbing you out, wise guy!"

"Well," demanded the man with the gun, "where is your break coming from? Or are you ready to die?"

Tiny David glanced over the shoulders of the man and the girl. He saw framed in a window, a broad-shouldered man with two silver bars upon the collar of his gray shirt. In the hand of this man there was a revolver.

David moistened his dry lips with his tongue.

"I'm not ready to die, Jenkins." His tone was still conversational. *"—Shoot straight, Captain!"*

He watched the man before him make a split-second decision. Reason told the murderer this was a bluff. Instinct caused him to turn toward the window.

But when he did turn, he saw the armed man in the window, and he hesitated. That was his undoing.

Trooper David threw himself upon the revolver and forced it upward. The struggle was still on as Captain Charles Field ran into the room. It ended quickly. Handcuffs were slipped over Jenkins' wrists. The girl, fighting like a wildcat, was subdued.

The securities were found in one of the suitcases.

A search of the premises revealed Bahn's daughter and the Sergeant. Crosby was groggy, but otherwise unharmed. Miss Bahn was taken to the Inn. . . .

One hour later the troopers and their two prisoners were in Captain Field's car, bound for the barracks.

"The last trick," declared Trooper David, "was just luck. When you reported the murder, it happened that Captain Field was at the Inn. Max Payton, the top sergeant, called him there. The Captain came over to see what was happening. That was what Max told me over the telephone. I told him I didn't need the Captain. I did that, just as I told you, because I wanted to live, and because I knew it was too late for Max to head the Captain off. So your telephone-call was a mistake too, Jenkins."

Captain Field smiled.

"Don't rub it in," he advised. "I know a sergeant who came near making a lot of mistakes. He must have had a rabbit's foot for luck."

"A sergeant, sir?" asked David.

"Temporarily," answered the commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop. "But put your chevrons on with pins. It is harder to get them off if you sew them on."

"Yes, sir," agreed Tiny David. His huge form relaxed in the soft seat. "I'd sure hate to do any sewing on a hot day like this."

The Transatlantic

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

AT the top of the steps leading down from the level of the lounge into the magnificent dining-room of the big Royal George—London's tallest building and newest hotel—two men of distinguished appearance and three strikingly handsome women stood surveying the room while the *maitre d'hotel* and one of his assistants came hurrying up to them. A slight nod indicated their wishes as to location—a window-embrasure halfway along the embankment side—and as they sauntered along to it, chatting in undertones, a number of the diners tried to catch their eyes. At least three of the five were celebrated personages, known in every quarter of the globe—but they were in no mood to make their entrance an occasion, and seated themselves unobtrusively. At the second table from them were two Foreign Office men, one of whom called his companion's attention, first, to the slightly taller man of the party, and then to a couple of stouter men at a table beyond—men who at first glance might have passed as English, but were talking in German and were known to the Foreign Office as Prussians of most pronounced Teutonic convictions.

"Humph! There's a situation one might call int'restin', at least," said the Foreign Office man softly. "Directly after the war, it would have been dramatic—in fact, I'm not sure it isn't that even now. Were you lookin' at Von Lahm when the Marquess' party came down the room to that table? I'm fairly sure Von Lahm didn't recognize him—he looks a bit diff'rent in dinner-kit."

"What's the story?"

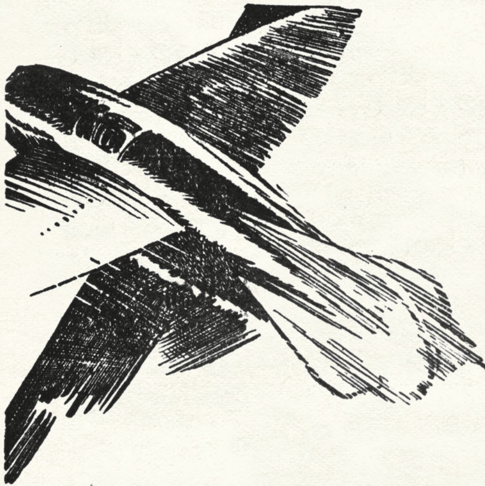
"You'd know part of it, of course—but not up to date. Von Lahm was by way of bein' rather spectacular as an ace durin' the war, with the Marquess—then Sir George Trevor—even more so, though not as much in the dispatches, because he wasn't in the R. F. C. He ranked as rear admiral, on detached service—which covered the fact that he was the star of the Intelligence, acting on his own initiative. His first meeting with Von Lahm was when he flew from his flagship in the Aegean over into Bulgaria just after Ferdinand threw in with the Germans—and Von Lahm's fire when both were over a thousand meters up, put his motor out of commission. Trevor volplaned down to a mountain on the south side of the valley, made a safe landing and got the information he went after while his mechanic was repairing the motor—got back to his ship without bein' stopped. Later, flying along the Russian border to spot the camp of some Wilhelmstrasse men, Von Lahm came across after him and Trevor crashed him, afire—but he stepped off with a 'chute and only got a broken leg. Three times, the two met afterward where the air-duel could be seen from both lines. Trevor got his damaged plane home, once—and sent his enemy down twice, more or less hurt. After the

With the window searchlight they saw a monster plane. "Your New York ship, ladies!" said His Lordship.

Air Mail

A fascinating story of the famous Free Lances in Diplomacy.

Illustrated by Austin Briggs



war, Von Lahm went into commercial-plane building—turning out a type of ships which can be converted into war-craft inside of forty-eight hours. He has made a large fortune, though it's not in the same class with that of the Marquess. The Prussian would give a fortune for some of the secrets which have been worked out in the Marquess' Devon shops—but that estate has the status of a Royal Naval Station, is defended as such, and none of Von Lahm's spies ever yet got inside."

"Humph! You're right as to the int'rest in those two men, sitting a few feet from each other in a place like this—but—where does the dramatic feature come in?"

"From a few underground rumors which are getting about in reference to Von Lahm. Three or four big multi-motored ships have been spotted goin' up from his plant near Stettin at night—planes of that general description have been just barely made out at high altitudes over the North Sea, heading in the general direction of Iceland or the tip of Greenland—and there's some impression that the man is testing out a trans-atlantic service. Air-mail service across the Western Ocean is about due; it's only a question of exhaustive testing out of the best an' safest route, then experimenting with planes which have some chance of maintaining schedule—"

"How is it that the Marquess isn't getting busy in that game?"

"My belief is that he's some laps ahead of the Prussian right now. Eighteen months ago he had the controllin' int'rest in one of the most powerful wireless stations on the globe, situated on Pico in the Azores, and several very large amphibian planes are said to have been constructed in his Devon shops—which are all underground, by the way. Von Lahm has been heard to ridicule anything but the northern route for practical air-service—but Lyonesse has said more than once that it's a death-trap."

"By the way, where does the Marquess live when in town—now that a big block of apartm'nts is going up on the Park Lane property where his famous Jacobean mansion used to be? I've seen him in this dining-room more than once since the hotel opened. Does he live here?"

"The clerks in the office say no—they say he occasionally fetches a party in for dinner or luncheon, but has no rooms here. Seems to be a bit of mystery about his present diggings—nobody knows, apparently, just where he an' his family are living. They surely can't come up from Devon every day."

MEANWHILE, at Von Lahm's table, his companion studied a few sheets of memoranda which had been passed across to him, nodding in approval as he finished.

"Considering that only three of the stunt aviators have made the western passage and lived to tell about it, what you have accomplished is wonderful, Rudolf. Of course the one outstanding objection is that so far you haven't maintained any really regular schedule—which is merely a matter of detail and practice, I suppose. But you've made eight successful crossings with ships of forty-passenger capacity, both ways—a demonstration that you can keep on doing it even with occasional set-backs. I see no reason why there should be any difficulty about increasing the original five millions to a fifty-million capitalization, for an operating schedule of twice

A miniature airplane of silver was pinned upon the map to show exactly where they were.

a week, at first. How soon would you be ready to undertake that?"

"Mebbe next week—yes. I start in this way: We advertise a semi-weekly service, both ways. Then if we don't make it on schedule owing to weather conditions or little motor troubles in the planes themselves, we merely point out that ocean steamers are frequently several days late owing to engine-trouble or weather—that we are entitled to as much patience and consideration as they, in the circumstances."

"You're really sure of getting across every time, are you?"

"Yes—because we are prepared for emergencies in advance. Ice will form on the wings, flying over this northern route—it's bound to—but we have a network of tubes from one of the exhaust-pipes running under the top surface of each wing. After a film of ice forms, the underside loosens until it drops off. We use eight motors in four pairs, tandem—four can be out of action without bringing the plane down. We carry enough fuel and oil for the entire trip, and provisions also—but can renew the supplies at the Iceland, Greenland or Labrador fields. And we have no problem of hitting tiny fly-specks of islands in mid-ocean—as on the southern or the Pacific routes. We cannot miss Iceland. We pass over Denmark and the tip of Norway where it is possible to land in an emergency. Greenland is there—too big to miss; and Labrador the same. All of our targets are big—with our long cruising-radius we must hit them before long. The northern route is the practical route!"

"You know—there are occasional rumors that a heavily capitalized company is shortly to operate a mail and passenger service by the southern route with stops at the Azores and Bermuda—"

"Who is behind it?"

"Nothing definite's known about that—but every month or so we get an underground tip that such a company actually has been formed and is building planes for the service."

"Well—you know the size of those islands in the Azores group, don't you? And the size of Bermuda? That means every plane must hit two fly-specks on the ocean to get across—without fail—trip after trip! *Mein Gott*—it is a death-trap! Once in ten times—maybe!"

"You—er—would consider such competition—well—negligible?"

"In the present development of aviation it is impossible! That is, with any attempt to run on schedule!"

"But—suppose, Rudolf—suppose that some rival company does succeed with it?"

"On the surface appearance, there is business enough for all who wish to try it. The proposition is one of millions, you know—not a few leetle hundred-thousands! But if three or four companies are successful, the field would be overcrowded very soon. So—well—I'd say it would be advisable to discourage any competing company like those."

"You mean—"

"Me? . . . I don't mean anything—of course not! But out over the ocean—with nobody else in sight— Well, anything might happen—no?"

"Hmph! . . . You seem to have considered about everything, Rudolf. By the way, did any of your planes go on down to New York from the Labrador field?"

"Not yet. The first time one appears at the Newark flying-field all the newspapers in the city will spread it on the front page as another wonderful westward crossing with a big cabin-plane—we get too much attention focused on us in case there are delays. In fact, my agents are looking about for a much less

conspicuous place, where we can lay out a private field of our own. Of course, the flight down from Labrador is practically the same as Newfoundland—the easiest of the whole trip."

AT Trevor's table, Marchioness Nan had spotted Von Lahm as they came in, and now was telling her guests the story of His Lordship's aërial duels during the war. Then the Marquess supplemented this by mentioning the coincidence of his chief adversary being now a manufacturer of aircraft while he himself was engaged in working out the most phenomenal ships yet developed in the lines of speed, safety and cruising-radius.

"Von Lahm is by no means as fit as he was during the war, an' his brain isn't as keen as it used to be. I've had confidential information that he's about ready to open a regular transatlantic mail and passenger service, and has pinned his faith on the northern route instead of testing out what I consider by far the safer one."

One of the ladies exclaimed at this, in amazed protest—based upon newspaper information.

"But—but, Marquess—surely a regular dependable service across the Atlantic is still years away. Stunt-flying with light planes—yes. Zeppelins perhaps once or twice a year, but never when obliged to take the weather as it comes. Do-X or similar big flying-boats, at speeds not exceeding a hundred miles—possibly—when they can pick weather conditions. But none of those propositions is a practical schedule service and most certainly doesn't represent the mail- and passenger-service that will have to be worked out some day. If this Herr Von Lahm has been testing planes over the northern route and getting across with them, nobody seems to have heard about it—"

"And *won't* hear about it, until he's sure enough to give some sort of a service which as far as the public knows, never has been done before. On the other hand, the British Ocean Air Service, in which we happen to be int'rested, has been running ships between Salcombe Harbor in Devon an' a cove in Cape Charles, Virginia — near our Chincoteague wireless station—at regular intervals durin' the past month. I'll wager you've seen nothing about that, either! What? Nor has Von Lahm! He'd be cursing us enough to blister, if he had!"

"You mean that this service you mention could actually take, say, this party of five from Devon to somewhere near a railway in the United States at any time we felt like taking such a trip—with a reasonable guarantee that we'd get there alive and uninjured? I'll not believe it!"

"Whether you believe it or not is a bit wide of the point. The question is whether you an' Miss Fotherington have enough sporting blood to test it out for yourselves. How early could you ladies be at Tilbury tomorrow morning? Or, better yet, how long will it take you to pack suitcases for a four-day absence—then come back an' spend the night in our diggings? We'll get you to the docks in the morning before the ship goes up. Tilbury is to be our London terminus when we open the service to the public—with some bit of water around New York City, at the other end. The Marchioness, Prince Abdool and I have a box at the opera in New York Thursday evening, with a ball at the Waldorf-Astoria, later—we're stoppin' the night there. This is Tuesday night. We leave Tilbury at eight tomorrow morning—arrive at New York thirty-five hours later, their time—which is seven P.M. Thursday evening. If delayed, we'll dine and dress on the ship before we come down—then drive direct to the opera house in our own car. On Friday we go up at ten A.M., an' reach Tilbury at four P.M., Saturday—by Greenwich time, which is five hours earlier than New York, making the round trip—London to New York an' back again, crossing the Atlantic twice—in three days an' eight hours. We're carrying six or eight sacks of mail, but no commercial passengers as yet. Care to try it? All three of us have been across an' back five times in the last month."

"YOU mean that each of you is sure enough of your safety to be going anyhow, whether we do or not?" Lady Moncton asked incredulously.

"I'm telling you that we have that box at the opera—have accepted invitations to a rather exclusive ball at the Waldorf, an' booked our suite there for the night."

"Why, I don't know just what to say, Marquess! Sir Charles will probably object—he would, you know!"

"Oh, Moncton is a pretty decent chap. Could he join us?"

"Why, I fancy he'd have no engagem'nts too serious to postpone a bit—

and he really is a good sport. Lucy's father and mother are somewhere on the Continent—with luck, we'd be back before they heard about it—"

"Very good! . . . Then we drop Miss Lucy at her own house to pack—go on to yours—collect Sir Charles (better phone ahead, I fancy) an' the suitcases—go back for Miss Fotherington—an' then to our own digs. It's understood, by the way, that you give us a promise not to mention where you are to anybody. We like our bit of privacy, d'ye see?"

Descending one level below the street to the cab- and car-rank under the great caravansary, after leaving the dining-room, they got into the Marquess' car and were driven to the London homes of their guests, finding Sir Charles Moncton just arriving from his club where the message had caught him. He was surprised at the proposition so suddenly put up to him, but game. Then the entire party returned, driving through the West End.

Chatting as they rode, neither of the guests noticed where they went or the night appearance of the Royal George's western façade on the narrower side-street which ended at the Embankment railing. Here a man in an enclosed recess in the stone wall of the building noted the square of white cardboard with the letters A-5 on it resting against the glass of the windshield in front of the chauffeur. He touched a button, and a steel portcullis-door rose smoothly in its guide-sockets until the car had run into the sloping tunnels inside, and then came silently down again until it fitted snugly in its brass pavement-socket. Halfway through the great building, and two levels below the street, the car turned a right-angled corner into a transverse section of the tunnel, along one side of which was a platform and seven doors, each equipped with a special lock and a trick knob, giving access to a small passage at the end of which another locked door admitted one to a private lift accommodating eight or ten persons and going up in a sealed shaft to its own particular apartment high up in the big donjon of the hotel—an apartment of some fifteen rooms, the only access being by the always-guarded lifts, and a private stairway to the next floor above or below, in case of fire.

The guests never before had seen an apartment with so complete an array of modern conveniences, so beautiful a banqueting-hall, or such extensive accommodations for casual guests. Especially were they attracted by the great living-room on the river side, with its Tudor fireplaces at each end and its cushioned seat along the whole range of mullioned and leaded-glass windows overlooking the Thames, the Surrey side, the West End and, from the middle bay, the Isle of Dogs and river below the Tower.

WHILE Lady Moncton and Lucy Fotherington were looking down upon Big Ben in St. Stephen's Tower, just at midnight, they noticed that the sky had cleared, and the stars had come out with unusual brilliance for London weather. Presently one exclaimed:

"Oh, I say! . . . Come quickly—and look! There's a meteor coming this way—getting nearer every second!"

The Marquess sat down beside them, and reaching under the drapery below the seat, he fished out a searchlight with flex attached and a five-hundred-watt projection-lamp.

"Fortunately, ladies, that doesn't happen to be a meteor. Now—watch!"

Holding the rim of the metal hood against the leaded glass of the window, the Marquess moved a little switch with his thumb and a pencil of dazzling light shot out through the night air. With rapid motions of his wrist he bobbed

the pencil up and down so that the flashes spelled out code letters. When he stopped, there were answering flashes from the supposed meteor. Then the light shifted—and, with the window searchlight, they saw a dull silvery sheen for three seconds upon what looked like a monster plane with two rows of ports, one over the other.

"Your New York ship has been ordered for tomorrow morning, ladies," said His Lordship. "I phoned to Devon right after dinner and the pilot flew up here to show me that the plane is in perfect condition. He'll come down somewhere in the Thames estuary, where nobody is likely to be around in a boat—an' be up at Tilbury in the morning."

A FEW minutes before eight, the party stepped from the Trevor car into a launch at the docks. Five minutes later, they were climbing an accommodation-ladder into the big amphibian plane—then the entrance-port was locked with a screw-gear and the ship taxied down Gravesend Reach, getting off the water a couple of minutes later. In a sweeping curve, it swung up over Kent and Sussex, striking the Channel at Brighton—then straight down the middle of it past Land's End. As long as there were fields and towns below them to look at, the party did not leave the big two-foot ports of laminated, indestructible glass—but after the cliffs of Cornwall sank below the horizon they started on a tour of inspection. All but Lucy Fotherington had been up before on the much smaller planes of the French and Belgian services, but none of the three had really believed that a ship of this size was a practical flying proposition—and the Marchioness took pains to point out where space and weight had been saved at every step in the construction, yet without in the least curtailing the safety or comfort of passengers and crew.

On each side of the cabin there were ten berths, patented by the Marquess, which followed somewhat the general idea of railway-coach berths but were of much lighter construction. The ship was constructed throughout of a metal worked out by Lord Salcombe and the scientists associated with His Lordship on the Trevor Hall estate—a metal lighter than duralumin, yet having two or three times the strength of steel per cubic-inch. The berths made restful beds at night and deep, comfortable seats by day. Light metal tables locked across each passenger's lap for meals—yet could be tilted for books or newspapers while reading. Directly in the rear of the cabin there were double washrooms—back of these, the kitchen and pantry, with a garbage-chute slanting down below the tail-fin.

On the forward bulkhead—at the extreme side of which was a narrow door leading up to the cockpit—a beautifully painted map of the North Atlantic in several colors faced the passengers. A faint line of slightly heavier tint than the blue of the water indicated the route followed by the British Ocean Air Service—it being one of the radio operator's duties to pin a miniature airplane of silver, two inches long, upon the map at frequent intervals to show the passengers exactly where they were, and whenever he picked up wireless advices as to the position of other ships, London-bound to place other markers to show where those ships were. The London operator dropped off at Horta to get his rest before returning upon the next eastbound ship, with a second operator taking his place as far as Bermuda—so that there was not a moment, day or night, when the plane was not in communicating condition by wireless-phone or radio-code. Forward of the bulkhead the floor of the cockpit, with its navigating instruments and hood of laminated glass, was four feet higher than the cabin level, while below it was the mechanics' room with a miniature machine-shop and equipment for emergency repairs. In the space below the cabin were the fuel-tanks, mail and luggage compartment, and the wireless-room—equipped with sub-meter-wave broadcasting and receiving-sets which had a daylight range of three thousand to four thousand miles under favorable atmospheric conditions, or fifteen hundred under the worst conditions likely to be encountered.

FOR the first hour after they left the land, the guests were too comfortable and interested in the ship itself to waste much thought upon potential accidents or catastrophes. The motion was even smoother than that of a powerful express-train running over a perfect road-bed. When they overhauled one of the Union Castle boats bound for the Cape and passed it as if the big steamer were at anchor, they began to realize the speed at which they must be flying. But after that the possibilities in the vast expanse of sea beneath them without a wisp of

smoke or sail in sight began to get somewhat on their nerves. Flying from Croydon to Le Bourget, with the terrain and villages below to check up as they went along, was one thing—but this hitting fly-specks in mid-ocean was something else! Lady Moncton expressed something of this to the Marquess, who was occupying one of the two forward sections reserved for officials of the Ocean Air Service. Taking down the telephone hanging at one side of his port, he spoke to the radio operator below them:

"Sam, switch in the cabin loud-speaker so that we can hear any talk an' code as we go along!"

IN a moment, Tarrant's voice filled the soundproofed cabin clearly.

"Very good, sir! . . . I've just called to check up with the radio-compass. This is his beat coming in, now. He's bearing two hundred and twenty-six degrees, or within one degree of due southwest from us. Comyn figures he's averaging a little better than a hundred and sixty, which puts us approximately three hundred and fifty miles southwest of Tilbury, airline, and eleven thirty-one to go before we reach Horta. Due there six P.M. if we get no head-wind—or at seven, if we do. Float A is on a fixed post, sixteen and a half degrees west of Greenwich—forty-six and a half north latitude—two hours ahead of us. Here's the float talking to us now: 'Griffin has just come down from four thousand meters —fifty-mile gale along the water here, but he reports very little above cloud-ceiling—twenty-five hundred. Best go up a bit as you approach. Gale has blown us thirty miles off post—back in few hours.' "

Again the Marquess spoke through the phone.

"Been getting anything from the beam-station at Trevor Hall?"

"Aye, sir—they've been picking up bits of talk between Greenland and a field near Stettin, on the Baltic, which we figure must be the headquarters of the transatlantic service they're tryin' to start. One of their ships with forty persons aboard—mostly connected with their service—was due at the 'drome they've built in Iceland not far from Reykjavik at seven o'clock last evening. Not heard from since leaving the 'drome near Stettin—supposed to be trying for their field on the fjord back of Frederiksdahl at the tip of Greenland, in one hop, but no wireless received from them. Another ship just managed to get down at the Greenland fjord overweighted with ice; the exhaust system in the wings is not working practically or somehow went wrong. One ship at Labrador station near Rigolet on Hamilton Inlet was ordered this morning to make Newark airport just as a test—smallest bus of the lot. They seem to be having trouble in picking up the regular governm'nt radio beacons—Cape Race and the others—say they fade out for long intervals and seem deficient in power. Their own beacons are not working yet—won't be, for another fortn't."

"Have you called our own beacon on Pico?"

"Aye, sir—got them strong five minutes out of Tilbury. At Trevor Hall, we can get both Pico and Chincoteague, Virginia, any hour out of the twenty-four—but according to your regulations for this air service, neither of them gives any beacon-signals at all until requested by one of our ships for bearings, and then not over five minutes at one stretch. We've not picked up Bermuda any trip until an hour out of Fayal, but they should use ten times the power there at Hamilton."

"Very good, Tarrant—thank you. Just one more little demonstration for the ladies, please: Ask Comyn to run a few points off his course for three minutes an' then come back again. Give us the Float A beacon while he's doing it, with the loop-frame of your radio-compass in line with the ship's keel. —Look down from the ports, ladies, and note the change in direction—but listen closely to the beacon."

FOR a second or two, the beats of the beacon sounded like the ticks of a great clock, sharp—distinct—loud. Then, with the plane now flying nearly parallel with the waves, the tick-tocks were not so loud; in a few seconds they were less than the ticking of a watch; then they faded out. In a couple of minutes they noticed that the plane was swinging around again, head-on to the wave-lines. Faint ticks grew louder—more distinct —louder. And the Marquess said:

"That's about it! The loop of Tarrant's radio-compass is now presenting the edge of the coil in the direction of the float—but, as you just heard, a deviation of twenty degrees makes the sounds much fainter—at forty, you lose it altogether. All Comyn has to do is head the *Ariel* in the direction whence he gets

them loudest, and the ship automatically hits the mark. Without radio-compass and beacons, it would be pure gamble and guesswork. Obviously, no ocean air service can be run that way!"

WITHIN the next hour, they noticed the weather thickening, with heavy clouds overhead and an increase in the force of the wind which made the big plane buck just a little. Then the guests felt a slight tilt in the cabin deck; opaque fog closed in against the big ports —and they no longer could see the water below. After fifteen minutes of this there was more light outside the ports—an increasing brightness. Suddenly the sun's rays came blindingly in, lighting up a vast sea of tumbling masses of condensed vapor below them. The ship raced forward on a smooth even keel with apparently no wind-resistance ahead of it. They were four miles up in perpendicular altitude above the Atlantic —and the *Ariel* maintained that height for the rest of the afternoon until four o'clock, when the masses of clouds underneath thinned out and disappeared. The sparkle on the water below was now merely pin-points—and far down, heading a tiny trail of black smoke, they made out a steamer of the Portuguese national line crawling eastward toward Lisbon at twelve knots. Presently a word from the Marquess through the phone brought a swerve in the course of the plane as he directed their attention to a dark blue cone rising from the water on the southern horizon:

"There's old Pico, ladies—rising seven thousand four hundred and sixty feet from the sea at his feet—close to a hundred miles from us. Our powerful wireless station is on the west end of the island just across the narrow strait from Horta, on Fayal. We also have a first-class hotel of concrete, in the Portuguese style, accommodating two hundred guests. It is a hundred feet above the water on the edge of the Strait, facing Horta—with broad, cool verandas all around the building on each floor. First-class table with considerable variety. We'll have just about time to dine there, if you wish, an' then take a short stroll through Horta before we go up again at eight-thirty. Comyn did better than a hundred an' eighty this afternoon—bit of a back-draft tail-wind to help him—so we're a good hour ahead of schedule."

Sir Charles and the ladies were much pleased with the company's hotel on Pico, and interested in the little Portuguese city on Fayal—commenting upon the fact that they could leave London on Friday morning, spend the week-end in the Azores, and be home again Monday forenoon, at any time they took the notion to do it.

As they went up from Horta, heading a bit south of west, the moonlight on the sea and the occasional wisps of clouds in the sky were beautiful enough to watch for another hour or two—but finally the guests expressed their willingness to try sleeping in mid-air. Hollow tubing of the Salcombe metal was thereupon dropped from its sockets in the cabin ceiling, fitting rigidly into clamped floor-sockets. Then exceedingly light sheets of the same metal, the thickness of drawing paper, were slipped into grooves in the tubing and cabin-wall, forming partitions between the berths which would have surprised anyone trying to barge through them. Light silk curtains were draped in front of each berth. Tubes, partitions and curtains weighed altogether less than eight pounds per berth, yet insured all necessary privacy.

AFTER the six berths were made up, all but two in the cabin retired. It was after eleven when the Marquess and Prince Abdool stepped softly along the gangway between the berths as one does in the corridor of a sleeping-car, until they came to the trapdoor and narrow metal stair leading down to the lower deck. Here they talked a few minutes with the mail-clerk, busily sorting letters from three regulation mail-sacks into others for Bermuda, the New York area, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Atlanta, St. Louis, Chicago and San Francisco, and adding the shilling-stamp of the British Ocean Air Service to the U. S. air-mail postage. Up to this time there had been no attempt to secure a mail contract from the Postmaster General—who had had his attention directed to a few sacks of transatlantic air mail delivered at the general post office every day for a fortnight—but a representative of the service was to be found on the ground floor of the Royal George each evening who accepted first-class mail for transmission by air in forty-eight hours without giving any details. By this time, he was averaging a thousand pieces of mail per day from curious individuals who wished to find out whether the proposition was a hoax or not, and cheerfully risked a shilling on it.

In the wireless-room Atchison—the operator picked up at Pico when Tarrant dropped off—had been getting still more gossip about the German service from the powerful beam-station at Trevor Hall, and adding it to the memoranda Sam Tarrant had left in his report for the first leg of the flight. The recent data picked up on seventeen meters (an illegal wave-length for the Prussians, by the way) gave the information that there had been no news during the day of their missing ship with forty persons aboard—that others had reached the Iceland and Frederiksdahl fjord 'dromes several hours late—and that the smallest of the fleet, though the largest ever to have made the western passage, was then on her way to Newark airport at New York with eighteen persons aboard.

After listening to the Bermuda beacon Atchison had picked up and the weather-reports from Repair-floats "B" and "C"—on fixed positions one-third and two-thirds of the distance between Pico and Bermuda, about six hundred knots apart—the Marquess and Prince Abdool went forward to the machine-room where the mechanics reported the four tandems—eight motors keyed on to one shaft per pair—purring as smoothly as so many kittens half asleep. Then they climbed into the cockpit where Williamson and Baynes had relieved Comyn and his co-pilot at Horta and were navigating strictly by the instrument-board, which was equipped with every gadget known to last-minute aviation science. Baynes had been getting, through ear-phones in his helmet, everything coming into the wireless-room below. He now said—though with eyes and hands strictly on his job:

"One could wish they were having better luck up north, sir!"

"Any particular reason, Johnny?"

"Aye, sir. I'd like to see that other service fairly successful at first. They'd get more than they can carry, from the Continent—not really competitors of ours at all—and they'd be so busy handling the traffic that they'd have no time to bother us, since it would mean a lot of money and trouble to do it. But with our service successful, as it has been right along, owing to your foresight in testin' out every smallest detail before you risk it—an' theirs all goin' blooey as it has been—I can see Von Lahm an' his crew starting after us just about the minute he sees we're doin' well."

"I've been anticipating that for the last year, Johnny—and that's why every one of our ships—passenger-craft an' scout-planes—is equipped with the long, glass-enclosed electrodes and high-frequency fan-generators to use the 'G-ray' in stalling their motors an' sendin' 'em down any time we may find it necess'ry. That's why each of our repair-floats on fixed positions was built with a double hull, one inside the other, and torpedo-nets besides, so they'll be to all intents impervious to torpedo attack—with nothing to suffer above deck, but short squat funnel-ventilators for her engines, emergency-boats and aërials—all of which can be replaced in three days at the outside. We rate our ships at a cruising average of a hundred and fifty knots, to give a low consumption of fuel. But every one of them has done two hundred and fifty on her trial flight, with normal loads—and we take no overloading at any time."

DURING the night, Jack Baynes and his co-pilot got a lucky break in the shape of a tail-wind that added knots to their motor-speed, bringing them down at Castle Harbor, Bermuda, by ten-thirty instead of noon; and they were up again by one o'clock. The late morning papers which they picked up in St. George's had the accounts, just cabled from New York, of the arrival at the Newark airport of the first commercial plane across the Atlantic—inaugurating a paying service with eight passengers who were then giving interviews to crowds of reporters at two of the leading hotels. By the time that the *Ariel* came down at Port Washington on the Sound, the metropolitan press was publishing pictures of letters received by several different persons in New York during the previous fortnight which had come through from London and been delivered to them in less than forty-eight hours, according to the postmarks at both ends. Also there were statements from a dozen more that they had been carried on different days from Salcombe Harbor in Devon to a cove in Cape Charles, Virginia, in an average of thirty-one hours, with two stops of three hours each—both mails and passengers having been transported on different planes of the British Ocean Air Service, which was thus the premier air service across the Atlantic by eighteen days.

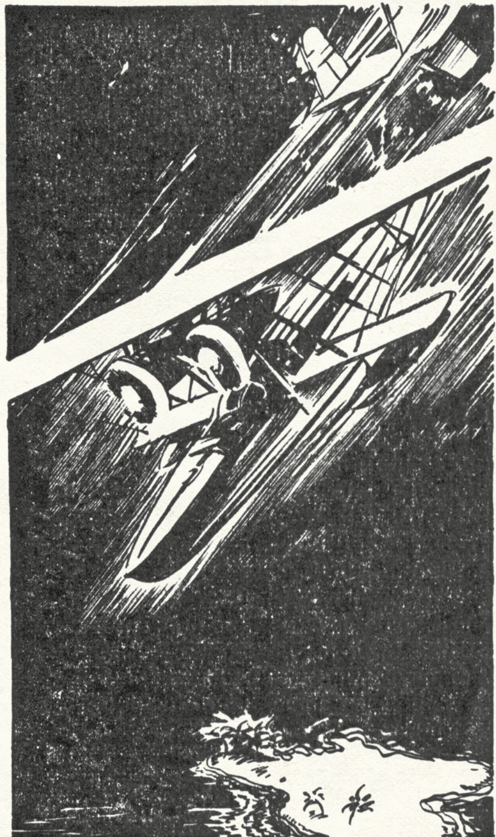
The pilots and passengers of the Prussian plane swore that no such service had been so much as heard of in Europe, and that there was something doubtful about the statements. Offsetting that, the Marquess' party gave a short interview at the Waldorf-Astoria in which they stated that they had left Tilbury the previous morning at eight o'clock—their ship fetching seven sacks of mail which were at the moment on the way to various cities across the continent via U. S. airmail—and that they would be returning next forenoon with eight or ten sacks of mail, to be transported by private service until delivered at the general post office in London.

THE bragging of those on the Prussian plane had forced Trevor's hand a bit. It hadn't been his intention to open regular commercial service until the ships of his company had been maintaining a daily schedule for two months, in order that he might check up on the number of delays normally to be expected, also possible catastrophes, and their preventable causes. But as long as both companies were now out in the open, he was actually in a far better position to maintain regular transportation than was the competing service—the Prussians not having had the forethought either to build their beacon-stations or experiment in advance with two-way communication. And during the whole of that evening a representative of the British Ocean Air Service sat by a table in the foyer of the hotel with a small, handsomely painted announcement on the wall over his head:

> THE CABIN-PLANE WHITE EAGLE CARRYING TWELVE PASSENGERS AND LIMITED MAILS, WILL LEAVE PORT WASHINGTON, L. I., SATURDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 17TH, AT 10 A. M. DUE LONDON 4 P. M., SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18TH.
>
> BRITISH OCEAN AIR SERVICE.

During the performance at the opera, the New York manager of the service sat with the Marquess' party in their box. He was given instructions down to the last detail.

"You're going to strike one problem right at the start, Forbes," His Lordship observed. "One or two men from that Prussian plane which came down at Newark are certain to book transportation on the *White Eagle* or one of the following ships—and we don't want to fly any of that breed under the present conditions. No matter how safely or comfortably we put them across, they'll talk against our service, one way or another, when they get ashore—an' what is more serious, they'll learn too much about our planes—find out where we're most easily attacked. Best way I can think of at the moment for dealing with this is to ask promptly for their passports, and examine them an' the photographs closely. McPherson is pretty sure to spot their nationality—he's good at that, even if they're naturalized American citizens. Then a smile—a shake of the head—regrets that we can't take them on that passport. All perfectly good-natured an' courteous, y'know—but we just can't take 'em —and don't have to explain why. There's no law compelling us to accept as a passenger any man who's got the three hundred to blow in that way. Another method of handling it would be to require a personal recommendation from the British consul. He'll assist us in anything of this sort like a shot—that's a part of his job. All he'll want to know is what type of passenger we'll take, an'



which are barred. The Prussians can't complain, for they've got their own service for their own nationals—or they can start other services by other routes. They can't use our beacons or wireless stations because we don't operate the beacons except on request from one of our own ships, identified by name an' code-letter, and because we use a sub-meter-wave that no commercial receiving-set can get down to unless specially built—and 'scrambling accelerators' besides."

As the *Ariel* went up from Port Washington Harbor next morning, the Marquess of Lyonesse was feeling a sense of heavy responsibility, although nobody would have suspected it from his manner. There were five other wealthy men associated with him in this enterprise, but since none of them were in his class as to aviation, mechanical or organizing ability, the service was entirely in his hands as managing director. With departures from each side every day, there would be stretches of hours when the service would be responsible for the lives and well-being of from eighty to one hundred individuals. Prince Abdool—and Earl Lammerford, in London—shared his responsibility, each of them having personal charge of different details. But the Marquess was in supreme authority.

His first action after getting into the air was to have the steward and one of the mechanics search every crack and space in the plane, from nose to tail-fins, for possible stowaways—but the only one they found was the black mascot cat Timmy, who had crawled in behind the mail-sacks in search of what he suspected to be a rat, and had to be pulled out by a hind-leg.

Meanwhile—one of the supposed "passengers" on the Prussian plane had been talking by transatlantic telephone with Von Lahm, in Stettin—giving him a résumé of their arrival at the Newark airport, the flattering front-page publicity in earlier editions and the prompt refutation of their claims in the evening ones—together with the apparently unquestionable proofs that the British service had been operating without a hitch for over a month. In his opinion, nothing could be done about it before the Marquess' plane reached the Azores—but with luck, some "accident" might happen to it five hundred or six hundred miles from the Channel.

If the Marquess actually had overheard the conversation he couldn't have taken his precautions more intelligently. When going up at Pico, he got Repair-Float "A" by wireless—instructing the commander to send up two or three light scout-planes armed with machine-guns and crisscross the London course from there at different altitudes for a hundred miles in both directions. When within an hour's flight of the float the commander told him that a mysterious cab-in-plane, small enough to be a bomber, was loafing back and forth across the course about fifty miles northeast, and had been talking with Stettin in code on seventeen meters—signing *"BH"—Brunhilde.*

Sam Tarrant was now with them again, and he switched on the "speaker" as His Lordship seated himself at the operating-table in the wireless-room.

The Marquess kept up the Prussian's call on seventeen meters until he acknowledged. Then he said:

"If you look about you, Heinie, you'll notice that we have three boats to your one—all of them armed in ways that you know nothing about, but that are most effective. I could send you down with this regular service-plane—but I'm good-natured and have no desire for your lives as long as you don't interfere with us. The air is free, of course. If you happen to be going our way we'll escort you as far as London—but please get one thing clearly through your thick heads—if you come nearer than one sea-mile from any of our ships, we'll drop you into the water without the slightest compunction or hesitation! *And I hope Stettin is listening in to what I say!"*

In an office at the wireless station connected with the Prussian Transatlantic Air Service, Von Lahm sat with a tinge of purple slowly rising through his heavy jowls. Presently his fat fingers grasped the key again. In their private code, a message flashed through the air to the pilot of the *Brunhilde:*

"Was he bluffing about those other three planes?"

"We make out two others, Excellenz—three hundred meters above."

"Then you must come back, Hauptmann. Some other time, when we have studied him a little more—eh? *Ja!* . . . Some other time—an ocean mail-plane of the British Service maybe will be 'not since heard from'—as is said in the Lloyd reports. *Ja!"*

Another incomparable story of the Free Lances will appear in our next issue.

The Guns of Rebellion

Managing a banana plantation may be an all-too-exciting affair, as Alan Brock and his young wife discovered.

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Illustrated by Charles Fox

IT was with a pleasant sense of mystery that Alan Brock had received the Chief's wire: *"Meet me at bodega La Junta four* P. M. *sharp. Jonas Conway."*

Pleasant, because the general superintendent, viceroy of Universal Fruit here in Honduragua, did not often honor his young plantation-manager with a personal wire; mysterious, because why La Junta, that hole of a Central American town up in the foothills? It was some distance by a mule-trail from Alan's plantation, which was the farthest of all from Puerto Corrios, where Corporation steamers loaded millions of banana stems by modern belt-conveyors, and there was a big up-to-date American-built town.

Marge,—Alan's wife and Conway's daughter,—had clapped her hands over the wire. "You're making good, Alan!" she had crowed. "After three years! He's been watching you. It's something to do with our diplomatic work, I just know!"

Alan sat sipping port. He was on time, but the Chief was late. La Junta seemed to be living up to its name. He was watching with an amused smile a group of probable conspirators at a table near by, who were chattering Spanish volubly. A small knot of sycophantic colonels surrounded an extraordinary Central American generalissimo, all of them plotting, no doubt, against the "ins" of the present Honduraguan government. Their uniforms were all dungarees, on which were sewed epaulets and much gold braid.

Brock shrugged his shoulders whimsically at the quaint group of officers; then his gray eyes widened with astonishment, for that gorgeous ape over there was nodding to him and smiling. He was getting up from among his colonels and was coming over, beaming a fat smile.

Conway barked: "You've got just six hours to make our steamer. Any other way you try to leave will get you into trouble."

"Señor Brock!" he cried effusively, a hairy hand outstretched.

Alan could not believe it was the same man; but his mind did a loop back into his old waster days, and there was recognition. He was back at the tables in Monte Carlo, and not so wealthy for the moment; in fact, dead broke. He had risen with trousers pockets turned inside out significantly, and his last chip gone. It was a terrible moment! He was due to play the fascinating Marge Conway at tennis in Cannes next day. And he hadn't a sou. He could not dare ask her the momentous question now, though hopeful that she loved him. To win her, if penniless, would be a crooked deal, as he saw it in those days. He had been wondering how a man went out on the terrace and blew out his brains, if he had no revolver—when a fat, greasy man in loud clothes, who looked like an Argentine, tossed him a chip.

"Play him on twenty-one, young fellah. It ees my birthday number."

Alan put it on the number just as the croupier was calling, *"Rien ne va plus!"* The frowsy company, all playing individual systems, watched. The ball stopped in twenty-one. Alan was being showered with chips.

"You see?" gurgled the fat man. "We play your hunches now."

They did. It was a kind of game; Alan's left palm being gripped by the fat man, while hunch after hunch floated into his mind. They went away rich. All Alan knew about him was a rumor that he had skipped with the funds of some Spanish-American republic, and was blowing them in around Europe.

ALAN'S mind flashed to the present. This was the same man, in that fantastic uniform. Honduragua was the republic he had looted, and now he was back for more! Instinctively Alan was hostile. But he owed this man a debt. Just a chance-flung chip; but it had been the turning-point of his whole life. He had never seen the fat man again after that night until now, nor gone near Monte Carlo. Marge had accepted him after the tennis-game. But Jonas Conway had a condition to impose; that he take service in the Corporation's tropical department, beginning at the bottom as plantation time-keeper, and immediately. That had been three years ago. He had risen to manager since.

"Señor Gibete, isn't it?" Alan asked with some show of cordiality.

"Yes. I am always lucky, Señor Brock! This is March twenty-one, my birthday; and I find you here, *hein?"*

It was a gentle reminder of that night in Monte. Also that helping hand out of despair would demand its *quid pro quo.* Alan was embarrassed. Gibete was an out, all right; and even to be seen talking with him would be frowned on by the Corporation. Doctor Zelayos, of the fine old régime, was in the presidential chair of Honduragua, honest, benevolent, put there by much diplomatic management on the Corporation's part. This swashbuckler of a professional revolutionist would not have dared approach a Corporation executive openly, did he not consider he had a hold on him.

"We make dose croupiers seek dat night, *hein?"* Gibete gurgled. "Now you do *me* a leetle service."

"Anything within reason!" And Alan laughed. "I've not forgotten, señor. You did more than you knew when you flung me that chip."

"It was nothing," Gibete shrugged eloquently. "My birthday number, she is always good. And now I ask nothing. . . . Shoes."

"Shoes?" Alan echoed, smiling. "Sure you don't want 'em for an army?"

"*Bah!* They have feet that are all fingers, these *mozos!* No, I go into business up in the city. San Luis."

It was the capital, where society aped Madrid, and shoes were indispensable. But Alan had been looking over at the knot of gesticulating colonels, and among them was slumped down Jim Gipe, drunk as usual, but the shadiest adventurer in secondhand army goods on all the Coast. He was in on this somewhere.

"All right. You'd have a mutiny on your hands if you tried to march these peons anyway but barefoot, granted," Alan said. "Just where do I come in with these shoes up at the capital?"

"You can do me the favor, young friend—" Gibete was beginning when he stopped abruptly with a sidewise twist of his eyes and lowered his head. Alan looked around. The big figure of Jonas Conway, general superintendent of the Puerto Corrios Division, was stalking into the *bodega.* His tall height clad in tropical whites seemed to illuminate the cool interior of the *bodega's* massive masonry arches. Over his white mustache his formidable blue eyes under bushy white brows glanced swiftly about, took in the knot of colonels in their fantastic uniforms, did not overlook Jim Gipe, and swept on around to perceive Alan with Gibete. The latter had risen to his feet and was all bows and scrapes.

CONWAY did not offer his hand. His eyes were threatening, irate, as his heavy voice barked: "You've got just six hours to make our steamer, the *Managua,* Gibete. I'm giving you a pass on her. Any other way you try to leave the country will get you into trouble. Report to Bartlett at the pier for your pass."

"Señor! This is outrageous!" Gibete protested. "You cannot command this way a peaceful citizen of this republic!"

Conway eyed him inflexibly. "There is no way but out, Gibete. You've been trying to stir things up over in Costa Rica, but they're all busy over there. We've traced you across the frontier, and—La Junta, of course. I've been expecting the report since last night. Here's where they all start, and always have. But let me tell you, Gibete, the days of revolutions are over in Central America. Doctor Zelayos has the chair; and we propose that he shall keep it. You get a free pass to New Orleans, and that is all. Let me advise you—"

"This is outrageous!" Gibete protested. "You cannot command this way a peaceful citizen."

"*Bah!* I spit on you! You shall see!" Gibete clawed the air, apoplectic with fury. Alan suppressed a grin. He looked ludicrous in the *opéra bouffe* uniform. But he was a menace and a portent, in this country of idle peons, none the less. The tall white civilian waited him out, stern, cold, unimpressed. The Corporation had to have peace in these countries, and the only way to get it was to deport these professional revolutionists before any of them could gather a following and collect war material.

Conway did not wait Gibete's fury out. He cut in abruptly with the grunt: "We finish loading seventy thousand stems at eleven tonight, Gibete. I'll know immediately if your name is not on the passenger list. You'll be wise not to be left ashore."

"Ah, bah!" Gibete raged. He hopped

over to his group of colonels and gathered them up. They left the *bodega* in a silhouette of shaking fists and furious gestures against the hot sunlight outside the massive dark archway. Conway turned sternly on Alan.

"How do you come to be talking with that swine, Alan?" he demanded with annoyance. "You don't happen to know him, by any chance?"

ALAN was embarrassed again. Neither Conway Senior nor Marge knew how close he had been to utter bankruptcy that night. They knew he had money, or the daughter of the fruit magnate would not have been eligible for him at all. That he could play high, risking his entire fortune at the tables, would have finished him forever in their eyes.

"Yes, I know him. I met him once, down on the Riviera," Alan answered.

"Humph! That must have been when he was bumming around Europe with this country's treasury funds. He was president here, once. What was he talking about with you?"

Alan grinned. "Shoes, sir. He wants to go into honest business up in San Luis."

"Wanted you to put in? Don't you have anything to do with it!" Conway commanded. "You'd lose your money. But it's unlikely, anyhow, that Gibete would engage in any honest business. His kind never work. What did he want?"

"I was to do him some sort of favor. And then you came in, sir, and he never got around to it."

"Yes? Shoes, eh? There's a catch in it somewhere. He wants to land something. Now, what I wanted you for is to watch that very thing. The San Luis river flows into the Caribbean north of your tract. Coastal boats drawing four feet can come up it some distance into the jungle. If he's not aboard the ship tonight, it means he defies us, and we'll have another revolution on our hands. These fellows can't start without war materials. You saw that Jim Gipe was with them? That means he's selling them more than shoes, you can bet! We have to draw the line at maintaining armed forces here, but we can at least watch for landings and notify the authorities. I want you to do that on the San Luis. Detail some of your peons to go up and camp there in the jungle. If they report any boats coming, telephone me immediately."

"All right, sir. I might scout around a bit and see if they have a camp started anywhere up there," Alan suggested. "If this means business, he'd have a nucleus of idlers collected already. They sure had the uniforms!"

The Chief frowned. "No. You've no time for it. Just have the river watched. I might say, Alan, that I was pleased with your shipment today. Six thousand nine-hand stems—your full quota, and all excellent in quality. They were in at the pier ahead of some of the nearer tracts, too. You're learning this business all right! Get on with those ditches in the new ground, while you have time, before the next boat."

Alan flushed with the Chief's praise. Old Conway had assumed that his play days of purposeless loafing around the resorts of Deauville and Biarritz ended when he married Marge. The young man who did that would have to work, from the bottom up, in his Corporation. He got up now with a reassuring pat on the young man's shoulder, a hint that bigger employment was to come, and went out to confer with the local *jefe politico* about Gibete. Alan rode back to his own bungalow.

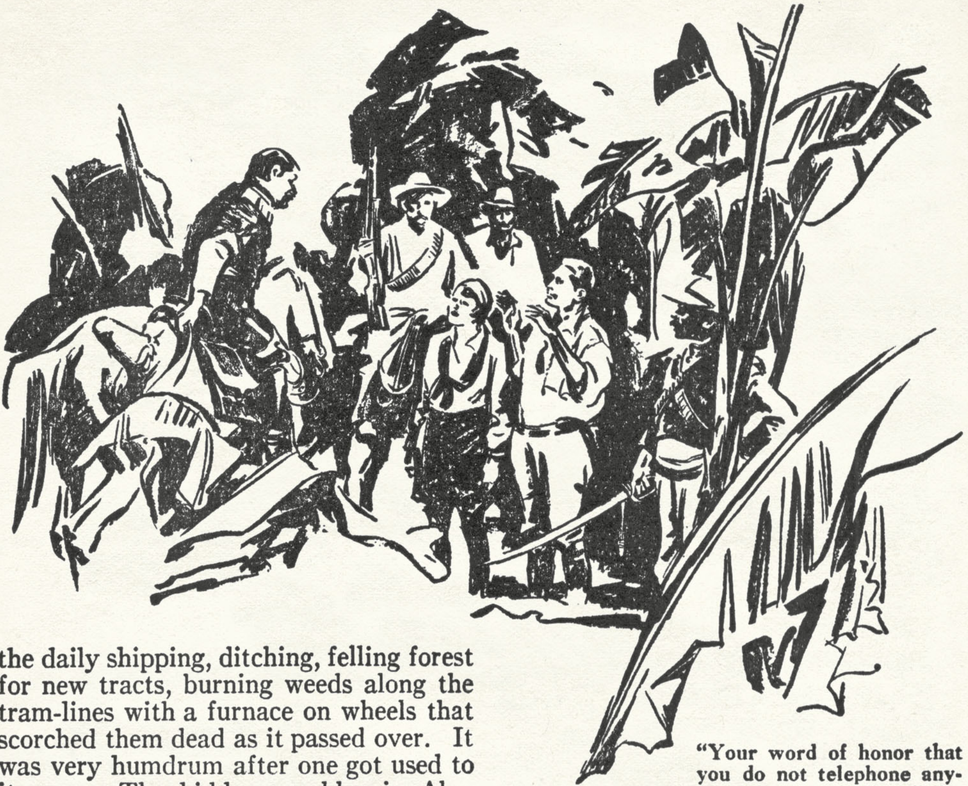
IT was a lonely knock-down house, centering miles of slatting banana-leaves, the sections intersected with tramway lines all feeding the main route to Puerto Corrios. Marge met him at the veranda steps as their *mozo* took his horse. She was a vivacious and energetic little person, blue-eyed like her father, and possessed of the winning heart, as anyone who faced her over a tennis net would learn.

"What was it all about, Alan dear? Do tell me!" she cried eagerly from Alan's embrace.

"A professional revolutionist. Your father bounced him," he told her. "I am to watch the river in case he fails to deport himself, as per order."

"How exciting! And suppose he doesn't go?" she asked, the wish father to the thought. "It will be like the Richard Harding Davis books here, won't it?"

"Maybe." Alan grinned. Marge's ideas on Central America were still romantic, soldiers of fortune aiding the noble revolutionary leaders against tyrannical dictators. She would like to see her Alan in that rôle, and herself as *Hope Langdon* or some such heroine. Nothing ever happened here but work,



"Your word of honor that you do not telephone anyone what we do here," demanded Gibete.

the daily shipping, ditching, felling forest for new tracts, burning weeds along the tram-lines with a furnace on wheels that scorched them dead as it passed over. It was very humdrum after one got used to it. . . . The hidden gambler in Alan sighed for a revolution too. He was fed up with work, though rising steadily in the Corporation.

"Why must you watch the river?" asked Marge. "I'd like to go too. There are snakes and things, so you mustn't go without me to look after you. You're so moony, Alan!"

"Well, in case Gibete doesn't—"

"Gibete?" Marge interrupted. "You know him? You met him? What sort of man does he look like?"

Alan laughed. "Precisely like an organ-grinder's monkey, Marge. He had on all the uniform the traffic would bear. Your father was not impressed. He gave him till eleven tonight to board our *Managua* and leave the country for its good."

"How horrid of Father! Suppose he has a good cause?" Marge asked. "This Zelayos is really a dictator, isn't he? I've heard they count all the ballots themselves and throw out all the opposition votes."

Marge had the proper indignation with Central American politics, which were somewhat different from her own New England's, where people talked it over around the country grocery-store before giving their vote to anyone. She was inclined to sympathize, on principle, with revolutionists, and provide them with a "cause" if they hadn't one. Alan knew that the "cause," here, was simply who could get at the treasury first and squeeze the foreign corporations the most. . . .

"About the river," he brought her back to the original questions. "To start your revolution, you must have guns and ammunition. This jungle river north of us is the one place. The ports all have customhouses and a *guardia civil.* All Gibete wanted of me, however, was help with some shoes."

"Shoes?" she pealed. "What, on these splay-toed mestizos? He couldn't march an army two miles before they'd be hanging them around their necks!"

"There's graft on the purchase, though," Alan laughed. "Your generalissimo gets his percentage on all army supplies. That interests him more than any military utility—"

"I tell you what he was after!" Marge broke in, her nimble imagination leaping far ahead. "He wanted the use of your tram-lines. They *are* going to land something!"

"Yes, shoes. Believe it or not, Gibete wanted to go into business up in San

Luis. I could save him the custom duty on them by lending him a few banana-trams. We connect with the railroad to San Luis—" His eyes were unseeing as he mulled over that. That debt to Gibete bothered him. It was so little, but so enormous. What might have happened to Alan Brock if that jovial fat man had not tossed him a chip out of his plenty? If Gibete only *would* go into an honest shoe-business in San Luis, he could have this young fellow's help—and welcome!

"Don't you have anything to do with it!" Marge was crying out in accents of alarm. "Besides, the trams are not ours to lend—"

"Oh, that's all right," Alan cut in on her easily. "We'll have a lot idle while ditching the new tract."

"Just the same—" Marge was insisting, when their Scotty began barking rabidly at the living-room door. It had grown dark. Alan went to let in the visitor, while Marge hastily turned on the electrics. Out on the veranda stood a fat and audibly breathing figure, in no flashing uniform this time, Alan noted. But it was Gibete, and Alan's heart beat uneasily. The fellow could easily say too much, with Marge around.

"Señor, I have a request to make," Gibete began in somewhat of the tones of a command, as Alan stood in the door.

"All right, come in. But not a word about Monte," Alan warned him. "My wife's in here."

"Yes?" Gibete bulked in, sat down on a cane sofa. Marge effaced herself, seeing that Alan was not going to introduce him. But in that flimsy house she could not help but hear.

"Yes, Señor Brock, I am going to the steamer," Gibete said lugubriously, fanning himself. "Señor Conway has no right; but my poor country is ruled by foreigners these days."

"THERE was the agreement at the Washington Conference," Alan reminded him. "All the states were to deport professional revolutionists, wherever found. Conway was within his rights, with you and your followers in uniform. It is an offense in any country that I know of, wearing an army uniform and not regularly commissioned."

"Is there no redress against tyranny, then?" Gibete sighed mournfully.

"But I give up. I have disbanded the patriots; and you see that I wear not the uniform of my rank now." He pointed to the unclean whites and the equally regrettable sun-helmet. "But Señor Brock, a little favor, for what I did for you, once."

ALAN nodded hastily. That was dangerous ground; Marge would be filled with curiosity when they were together again.

"I, plain Señor Gibete, ask it!" his visitor appealed dramatically, and Alan could have choked him for that Latin outburst. Marge knew his identity now. The gallant revolutionist of her romance! "It is but to cut some wood up in your new tract, señor," Gibete went on. "Not for myself; no. But the patriots have nothing. *Nothing!* My faithful few are camped up in the jungle, and they will be glad to cut up your felled trees."

"What for?" Alan asked. "We just leave them to rot. The banana buds are already planted in that tract. They seem to get along well among the down timber. We never pay to have them cleared off."

"I ask not pay—just the wood," returned Gibete with still more drama. "It can be sold for a few pesos. My patriots will not starve if they become poor woodcutters."

It looked fishy. There was plenty of dead wood in the jungle itself. Why cut over his tract, unless perhaps that his trees were already somewhat seasoned and the sap out of them? And who would buy wood, this side of San Luis? The railroad freight on it up there would eat up any possible profit on the billets, too. But it was a small request, and all Gibete was asking in return for that great favor of three years ago.

"All right, go ahead and cut it if you want to," Alan agreed. "I see no objection. How about those shoes?"

Gibete waved them away with a gesture. "Another time, señor. When I land in your country, I see about them. There must be correspondence with President Zelayos, permitting me to return as a peaceful business man. And now *adios*, señor! I tender the thanks of my patriots for this boon. Sure they won't disturb your people?"

"No. No one is working up there. Just the ditching dredge along one side. Go ahead; but I tell you they'll be cutting at a loss—"

"They will peddle enough to keep body and soul together, señor. *Adios. Muchas gracias!*"

He was going. And then Marge swept into the room. "No," she said breathlessly. "Alan, you mustn't! You haven't permission from the Company—"

"Why, Marge!" Alan silenced her huffily. "That's the merest formality. I don't think I even have to ask it, have I?"

"Just the same—*no!*" Marge repeated positively. "It doesn't *look* right, Alan. Without Father's knowledge or authorization—"

"Oh, nonsense, Marge!"

GIBETE took his cue from that; women were to be browbeaten, in his experience with them. He thought he had to deal with some obscure planter's wife, and inquired with asperity: "And who is this so-powerful father of yours, señora?"

"Jonas Conway, señor!" Her eyes flashed at him, defiant, aggressive.

Gibete collapsed. "The great beeg Señor Intendente? Señora, you see before you a fallen man!" He wept. "My poor, poor country, she is grind under the heel of the tyrant! Enough! I go! But señora, you would not refuse the wood, that cost you nozzing, that my starving patriots may eat?" He struck an attitude.

Marge looked uneasily at Alan. "I don't like it," she said. "No; there's a catch in it somewhere."

"*Ha!* You refuse, señora?" Gibete had suddenly become threatening. He jabbed a forefinger accusingly at Alan. "He shall *not* refuse—*por Dios!*—or I tell you somesing you not like to hear, señora!"

"What on earth does he mean, Alan?" Marge asked. "Has this person a hold on you?"

"In a way, yes," Alan admitted unhappily. "Something I never wanted you or your father to know—"

"Hei-*yah!*" Gibete burst in triumphantly. "He was broke! At Monte Carlo. His pockets turned out—*so!* I throw him a cheep, the poor devil, an' he play it on my birthday number. From then on we win. *Hein?* Who save him from shoot out de brains dat time, *hein?* And now I ask but for wood!" Again a pose.

"When was this, Alan?" Marge asked. She was trying to adjust herself to this discovery that Alan was a gambler, *had* gambled, anyway—a thing abhorrent to her New England upbringing. It had shocked her. It would upset still more her father, for to them both money won by chance was as bad as stolen.

"The night before our tennis-game in Cannes," Alan answered her. "I got in pretty deep—"

"You mean you risked your entire patrimony in that place?" Marge inquired with indignation. She might have been Conway Senior himself in that attitude, so alike were they.

"Yes. But I've been off it ever since—you know that. But that night there was nothing for it but never see you again. And then Señor Gibete, who was playing two men beyond me, tossed me a chip off his pile and pulled me out. Seems as though anything I can do for him now—"

Gibete breathed softly and his smile of good humor had returned. "You see, señora?" he appealed to Marge. "It is an affair between brothers of the tables."

The girl's frown deepened. "It's all distasteful to me, very. If you owe him this gambling-debt, Alan, pay it any way you like, but out of your own pocket. The company's property is not to be used for favors. And if I had known—" She was thoroughly angry with Alan. She had all unknowingly trusted her heart and her life to a man who was fundamentally unstable, as she saw it.

"HOW about it, Gibete?" Alan was asking. "She says no. Anything else I can do—"

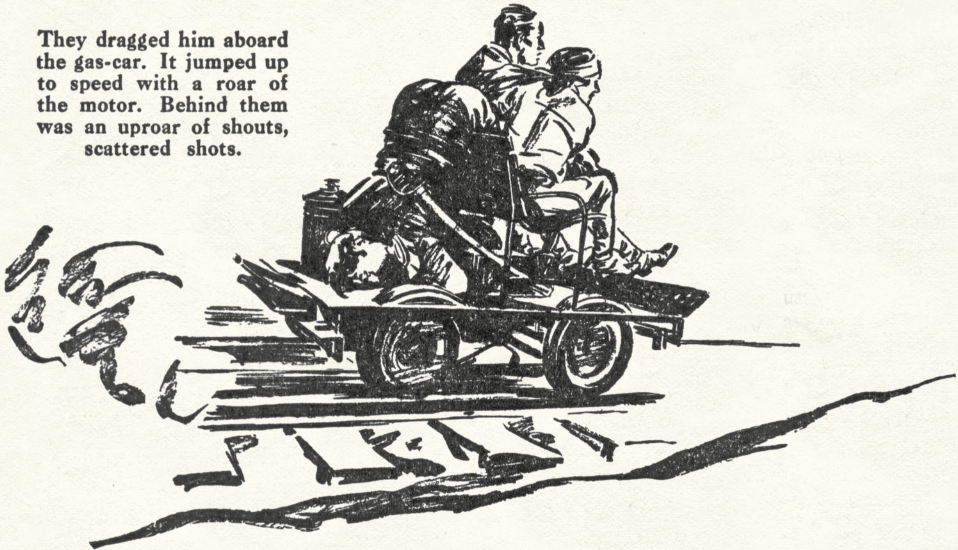
"*Bah!* You *Americanos!* Ruled by your wives—*bah!*" Gibete had risen in a rage. "I ask nozzing now! But you shall pay—t'rough de nose! You shall see!" He jammed on his hat and stormed out the door. The clatter of his pony's hoofs could be heard riding away in the night.

They looked at each other amusedly, yet uneasily, when he was gone. Abrupt and volatile in his shiftings of passion, the man was utterly without control. He might do anything this night.

"You poor lamb!" Marge was beginning, all forgiveness, when Alan cut her short with the exclamation:

"By George, how do we know he is boarding the steamer at all, Marge? And why so insistent on permission to cut up our down-timber? It lies between the river and our tram-lines—that's what!" he answered himself.

"They are landing something—and it's not shoes, you can bet! Something heavy—that has to have the trees out of the way. . . . *Artillery!* He thought



They dragged him aboard the gas-car. It jumped up to speed with a roar of the motor. Behind them was an uproar of shouts, scattered shots.

I'd let him clear a road for his guns, right under my very nose—can you tie it? And he would have, if you hadn't come in! Ye gods!"

It had been a long time since she had heard him use that outdated expression. The essential Alan was back in the old careless days when excitement and the turn of chance were wine to him—and she rather liked it. He seemed five times more energetic than when plugging steadily at plantation management. The idea that Gibete never had any intention of obeying Conway's order to clear out fascinated him. It had all kinds of possibilities for action and violence in it.

"Do you know, it's past ten now," she said. "He can't possibly make the steamer. It's twenty miles from here."

"Yep. Where he's ridden is to his rebel camp. Whatever he's doing will be done tonight. I'd better have you run into Puerto Corrios on a tram, Marge, first off."

She smiled frostily. "Not I, Alan! I've always wanted to be in a revolution. Besides, you need looking after, you're so moony."

"You staying here alone?"

"No; riding with you, sweetie," she told him saucily. "There's no law against lady belligerents, is there?"

"Gosh, Marge!"

But she went, just the same. Alan telephoned the Chief at Puerto Corrios while their horses were being called. "No; he's not showed up yet," he heard Conway's heavy voice. "I'll rouse out the *guardia civil* and send them up to you by tram."

"Better collect a force of our own men, sir, if you want anything done," Alan answered. "I've got three hundred peons here, but they'll all decamp at the first hint of bandits. Gibete must have some force up in the jungle. With all those colonels, there must be one squad of men."

The Chief laughed. "Maybe two. I'll turn out some of our transportation personnel. Avoid any shooting, if you can. Have you got those lookouts posted?"

"Immediately, sir."

"Good God! You should have done it soon as you got back," the Chief belabored him angrily. "This may all be merely a supposition on your part!"

"I don't think so, sir. Gibete was here. He wanted permission to cut firewood on our new tract. It abuts on the river, so what he really wanted was to clear a road for something to the tramlines. He went off in a rage when I refused."

Marge nudged him. "Oh, man!" she whispered in his ear. She had been getting into her riding-habit while Alan was at the phone. "*You* refused!"

"Looks interesting," the Chief commented. "I'm sending you the *Teniente* and a gang of our transportation men under Fulshaw. Telephone me if anything develops."

Alan hung up. "*Now!*" he said, his eyes lit up, his mercurial temperament aroused. "Since you insist, madam—"

"Of course. If there's danger, I want to feel what it's like," she said. "One thing I never tried."

She hadn't. All her life she had been sheltered and protected. Alan would rather she was protected now; the gaso-

line hand-car to Puerto Corrios would do it. But it was a perfectly hopeless argument. . . . They rode to the nearest tram-line, cantering down lanes of black banana leaves. It was a hot sticky night, and silent except for insect noises. At a hut by the turntable Alan roused out José and his brother, two fairly reliable gang foremen, to head down to the river-mouth and report back if any vessel was anchored there. Then he and Marge rode north along the tram-line.

For a mile there was nothing but the slatting whisper of big leaves in the lane of banana stalks. That day this lane had been a busy place, gangs of three men each cutting the stems, one on a mule to receive the heavy bunch, one with a pole-knife to cut the stem, one with a steadying pole to ease it down. Now the lane was all silent and deserted, the slashings of cut stalks lying to rot and fertilize the ground.

Marge reined in. "Listen, Alan! You were right. . . . Hear them?" A distant and regular sound, thin and growling, formed an undertone to the insect chorus. Then a faint crack, and the reverberation of a thump.

"Timber saws," Alan pronounced the noise. "He didn't lose any time!"

THEY rode on slowly till the spur ended. Beyond lay acreage of timber slashings; here thousands of banana buds had been planted, and the felled trees left to rot over them. The young shoots didn't seem to mind. Their own shade and the moist tropical heat soon disposed of the trees. The tract was in muggy darkness, but sounds of sawing and clearing were near and distinct now. All Gibete had to do was to saw a trunk in half and swing the ends out of the way to make a lane through the tract. It was moving fast, that lane. By one in the morning he would reach this spur end. This night would see those guns moved through his plantation and assembled on the government railway to the capital. That turntable gave a spur west to the road. There would be no difficulty in collecting an army, once Gibete had artillery to show!

"Guess we've seen enough, all right!" said Alan. "We'll ride back and pick up José and report."

That was not so easy to do. A blur was down the track, making the banana lane seem shallow. Within a quarter of a mile it developed into the silhouette of something moving that terminated the twin pale lines of steel abruptly. Alan grabbed her bridle-rein and turned off both horses into the banana stalks.

"Gee-roo!" he whispered. "Trams coming. He has his nerve, I'll say!"

GIBETE had helped himself. A detachment of his army passed within fifty yards of them, trundling a long line of steel banana-trams. The glint of rifle-barrels strapped over shoulders, their tall straw hats, their ragged dungarees filing alongside the cars, were Marge's first glimpse of a Central American revolution. She shivered with excitement. At the first hint of their presence here those rifles would crash out a volley into the bananas.

And then there was a gruff challenge, and a man was riding right at them through the stalks.

Alan picked up his horse like a cat and wheeled. The movement put him between Marge and the flanker; then they had dug in spurs and were off like the wind, bending low, but constantly whacked by leaves. The stalks were sixteen feet apart, diagonal or straight, and they headed southwest for the bungalow, the pony hoofs drumming a rataplan. But there were shouts, shots, the rip of bullets through the soft stems, pursuit, all of it to the south. Gibete had the shorter line direct from the tram track. Riders crashed in on their flank, swept across in front, headed them more and more to the west. Then a hubbub of horses converging, crash of banana-stalks, stumbles, both of them ridden down and thrown. Swords flashed menacingly. A gilded caballero jumped down over Alan with brandished weapon and barked savagely: "Surrender, gringo! *Viva Gibete!*"

Alan put his hands up to quiet him. "Gosh! All the colonels!" He laughed ruefully at Marge, who was being surrounded by them. She had put her hands up too, but was being begged not to, now that they saw she was a girl. Gold braid vied with gold braid in gallantry, helping her to her feet, assuring her it was most regrettable, but *por Dios*, it was war, señorita!

Gibete came pushing through the stalks—Gibete the magnificent, on that white horse! He had on everything there was at that *bodega*, and Marge gasped at the change. He swept off his sombrero on recognizing her.

"So, señora!" he said in high good humor. To Alan: *"Ha!* You who would

not do for me one leetle thing! There is a *camaraderie* of the tables, Señor Brock. Give, when a man is down, and Lady Luck she smile on *you!* You *not* geev, when I come hunted and friendless, an' your luck she say, 'Goo'-by!' . . . Now you see!" He gestured eloquently.

"Anything in honor, Gibete," Alan protested. "You changed my whole life that night, did you but know it."

"It was nozzing!" Gibete shrugged. "And now one more chance, señor. You and the Señora may ride back to your bungalow, but—I must have your word of honor that you not telephone anyone what we do here. We must have your plantation, for a few so-short hours, señor. So that our rebellion against tyranny, she may start. Otherwise, you and the Señora mus' go weeth us." He slowed up with a timbre of menace in those last words.

Marge spoke up quickly. "We go with you—er—General Gibete," she said quietly.

Alan caught his breath. Not a hint would Gibete have got from him that a force from Puerto Corrios was on its way, if he were alone; but to risk Marge! He had been on the point of telling Gibete that his whole revolution was hopeless, long before he could get those guns ashore, but she had forestalled that attempt to save her. Gibete swept the sombrero across his heart.

"Bravo, señora! No parole from you, *hein?* Good! We go now to my camp, so the be-autiful enemy has no chance to telephone."

Alan worried over the implications of that "be-autiful," but there was no help for it. They were allowed to mount; and they rode, separated, through the banana-lanes toward the new tract. Marge was questioning her captors in fluent Spanish. Unconcealed approval of their "cause," and artless harping on romance, was her line. She had an enthusiastic and trustful bodyguard by the time they had reached the cutting.

ALAN rode silently beside Gibete. He felt distressed, and in the wrong, because he could do no possible thing to help this man who had helped him out of a disastrous hole three years ago. The worst of it was that he *could* do him a favor, a very great favor, right now, by telling him to abandon this and clear out into the interior. But Marge's, "We will go with you," had put the sterner attitude on that. They were to suffer any humiliation whatsoever, so that the rescue-party could nip this revolution in the bud. The Corporation demanded that of them.

Gibete paused to look over the work. An hour had passed, and the lane had progressed nearly through the clearing. Alan could see the dark ribbon through the trunks swung aside. More, in it were now groups of struggling soldiers grunting over heavy loads. The nearest was in two staggering lines shouldering a pair of poles, and among them gleamed the pale reflections of a long steel cannon of some three-inch caliber. There were wheels, trails, caisson-boxes on axles, all the paraphernalia of a battery.

IN vivid flashes of imagination Alan could see this revolution was very likely to succeed. With that battery on the road to the capital, Gibete would gather cheering thousands of malcontents in his advance. It needed but to run this equipment down the spur to the turntable, push it west to La Junta, assemble the pieces, and march. Conway's force would be just too late. It was a matter of not more than half an hour now, before they would be out of his plantation altogether, with that artillery.

The gasoline handcar of the plantation came chugging up the track at this juncture. Alan could tell by the awkward way it stopped and bumped the rear cars that it had been captured and was being run by some revolutionary sergeant who knew little about machinery. Gibete cursed him for his clumsiness—and into Alan's head shot a plan: a plan that his gambler's instinct of putting everything to the one great chance welcomed with a thrill of excited enthusiasm.

Gibete was frowning with thought. Time was everything to him. He dared not trust that driver with towing this train loaded with his priceless battery, lest he stall somewhere and block everything. But beside him was a man who could be made to run the gas-car.

"Señor Brock," he said, "I geev you one last chance. You understand the machinery? *Bueno!* You shall run the train for me to La Junta, and the debt is paid."

Alan's heart leaped. His opportunity was coming nearer. All it needed was to dare. If he failed, it would be singularly unpleasant for him and Marge. He feigned acquiescence.

"Let's see if the fool has done any damage already," he said.

They wheeled their horses and walked them down the line of trams. Marge left her group of caballeros and followed. Her eyes blazed as she caught up and put a hand on Alan's arm. "No; you're not going to do this, Alan, I beg," she appealed. "Don't mind about me. And that you should, even for a moment, think of selling your honor—"

Alan managed a wink that she could see even in the dark. The three had reached the gas-car, and he was noting that the sergeant was trying to couple up but fumbling it. Gibete turned on Marge huffily at that moment. He had had enough of her protests, and her interference with his and Alan's affairs!

"Be quiet, señora!" he commanded. "This is not for you. Enough!"

"I won't let him do it! I won't! I won't!" Marge raved tearfully, but Gibete turned in his saddle and called out:

"Colonel Cabeza! You will escort this woman to camp. *Bah!* You will await my pleasure there, madam—"

It was his last word, for Alan struck in fury. The blow was to Gibete's chin, a terrific hook that had all the force of shoulder and body and stirrup-thrust behind it. Gibete reeled into Marge's arms. She clung to him and was dragged down off her horse by his weight. Alan had dismounted in one leap, and the crack of his fist knocked flat the bewildered sergeant. They grabbed Gibete between them and dragged him aboard the gas-car, with Alan already snatching at the levers. It jumped up to speed with a roar of the motor and the grind of gears, and whirled down the track. Behind them was an uproar of shouts, scattered shots from surprised infantry, the furious clatter of hoofs. They had kidnaped the generalissimo of the revolution!

MARGE laughed hysterically. The boots of Gibete were gripped in her lap; the rest of him was limply doubled over the seat-back into a rumble filled with gasoline-cans, rope, chains and tools, those homely workaday utilities of the plantation that had nothing to do with romance.

"Alan! You'll kill me dead!" she gasped. "I had no i-*dea!* Gosh, I was thick! What in the world you were winking at me for—but I did my part, didn't I?" she chattered. "Golly, I *love* revolutions!"

"Yeah?" Alan grinned. "Take a chance, Marge! You have to do it, sometimes. Especially in a jam. They'll be quarreling all the rest of the night over who's to be general now, with Gibete gone."

Marge laughed afresh over that angle of it. The car sped past the turntable as she declared: "You're a genius, Alan, for all you're so moony! What are you going to do with him—turn him over to Father?" she asked after a pause.

"Nope. This is the end of the buggy-ride, Marge," said Alan firmly. "I'm turning in here. I owe him a debt, just the same, don't I?"

HE had slowed down, for they were approaching the dark car-barn of the plantation. The switch to it was open, just as the sergeant had left it. They rumbled under the corrugated iron shed and stopped.

"Get some of that rope, Marge. We'll tie the Señor up and hide him in the tool-shed till this blows over. Then I'm going to set him free—on his honor to leave the country by his own route. Tomorrow. I'm square with the Corporation in doing that, aren't I?"

Submissively she agreed: "You know best, Alan. You captured him yourself, anyhow."

"Yes, and a man's word is good if he's going to sit in any game; it has to be," said Alan. "Gibete won't welch! Misguided, maybe, and an adventurer always; but his heart's all there. You'll never understand gamblers, Marge."

"But I do!" she cried. She was beginning to.

They heard Conway's police train go whooping by up the track at that moment. They were not there when Gibete's disorganized band was rounded up and the guns captured. But next morning early they came down to let the generalissimo out. That vagabond of fortune rubbed his jaw ruefully when untied. His warm smile had returned.

"What a poonch, señor! *Por Dios,* one wallop!" he laughed, massaging the jaw. "And my revolution?"

"Conway's." Alan grinned. "The freedom of the jungle, Gibete. It is the best I can do for you. You can make a boat from British Honduras."

Gibete's eyes twinkled as he tapped his belt. "The fonds of the revolution, señor, are here. *Gracias!* I return to that dear Riviera!"

He swept them a theatric bow and vanished in the banana-stalks. Alan turned to Marge and laughed. That was the way most of the revolutions ended!

Lone Hand

Sunburned young rebels riding down to the ford, every one a threat against the cattle company. . . . The angry voices of rifles. . . . Saddles empty beneath wreaths of powder-smoke.

THE fight at Thorp's Crossing took place one warm noon in the month of April. It did not last more than five minutes at the most; but time means little, in such an affair. Before the first shot outraged the stillness of the spring day, there were five sunburned young rebels riding down to the ford, every one of them a threat against the wide dominion of the L. S. Land & Cattle Company. And when the flat angry voices of the rifles ceased, five saddles showed empty beneath the thinning wreaths of powder-smoke. From that time, the lesser cow-men were on the run in that region; and because might spelled right in this particular neighborhood, they ran—the most of them—with prices on their heads. . . .

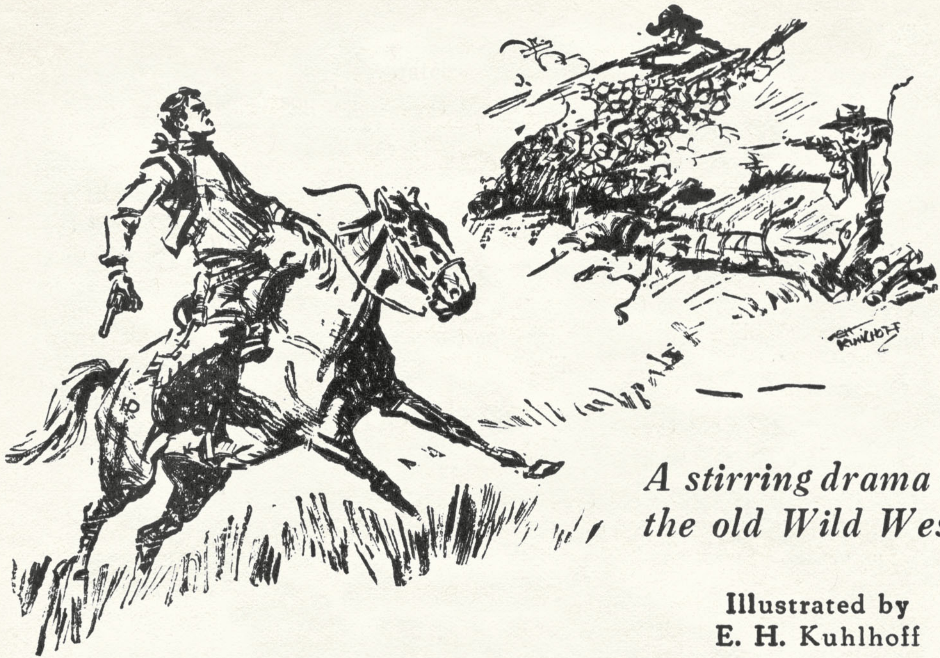
Jim Thorp was sitting on the porch before his store at the beginning of that decisive conflict, whittling a slat of yellow pine; and although two forty-five slugs slammed into the wall of the little building within a few inches of his head, he was still peeling narrow shavings from the bit of wood when the victors thrust their weapons into the sheaths beneath their stirrup-leathers and called it a day. Men said that Jim, in the wilder years of his youth, had smelled more than his share of powder-smoke, which was undoubtedly correct, for he came from that part of Texas which lies west of the Nueces. But in these more sedate years when his hair was showing streaks of gray, he had two passions: the one was whittling, and the other was minding his own business.

The latter, however, was not strong enough to prevent him from delivering his opinion when Hank Shaefer, the L.S. manager, rode up from the river-bank after the affair was over, and swaggered into the store to buy a plug of tobacco. He was a burly man with a rope of a mustache whose ends dangled away below his chin.

"Me, I handled this," Shaefer stated. "And if anybody has got anything to say, I'm the one to say it to."

Jim finished cutting the plug from the strip in silence. Then:

"That'll be ten cents." He took the



A stirring drama of the old Wild West.

Illustrated by E. H. Kuhlhoff

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

money, dropped it into the till, and faced the manager of the L.S. Ranch across the counter.

"The way I look at it," he said coldly, "it wasn't a nice killin'."

Springtime passed, and summer came. It was a July afternoon when Lee Scott drove up to the little store. During the three months which had intervened since the reek of powder-fumes and hot blood had tainted the air here, the cottonwoods down by the river had come into full leaf, the grass on the wide ranges where the L.S. cattle were fattening for the shipping-pens had taken on a yellow tinge; and the last disputant of the company's claims to lands and water-holes had vanished. The so-called war had ended like a hundred others of its kind, which left their wooden headboards and their bitter memories scattered over the lonely upland reaches that yearn toward the timbered flanks of the Continental Divide. All was serene—or seemed to be—and Jim Thorp was whittling another slat of boxwood before his door.

The store stood on the first rise above the river-bottom. Here the cottonwoods and willows which marked the stream's course had drawn apart, leaving a wide aisle between dense ranks of green down to the ford. From the porch where Jim was sitting, you could see for many miles across the river to low gypsum bluffs where a dust-wreath betrayed the coming of Lee Scott. It was a long time after this had shown, when Jim distinguished the buckboard and the team. It was still longer before he knew that the broad-shouldered man in the gray suit and wide-rimmed hat, creased at the crown, was the proprietor whose initials scarred the flanks of ten thousand cattle, whose name had been coupled with curses when it was spoken by men who had never laid their eyes on him. And for this recognition Jim had to thank the vehicle and the horses; for Lee Scott was what was known, in the parlance of cattle-land, as an absent owner.

Team and rig came dripping up the nearer bank. They passed between the cottonwoods and the willow thickets, and Lee Scott pulled up before the store. Jim Thorp ceased whittling, and the two men looked each other over as they exchanged the customary greeting of the open ranges. One word and that was all:

"Howdy." When he had spoken it, the owner of the L.S. wrapped the reins around the whipstock and shoved the brake down. Jim folded up his knife and thrust it into his pocket. His face had

CURT

no more expression than a block of wood, which meant that he was—and this for good reasons of his own—taking much interest in what the visitor might have to say to him.

But the visitor, it would seem, was in no hurry to voice anything more important than his opinion of the weather and the feed out on the range. And so Jim waited, studying his face and manner. If they had been a pair of Comanche Indians, they would not have gone about the business more carefully, the one in biding his time, the other in backing into the subject which was on his mind. The opening came at last, apropos of a remark which Jim had made concerning business.

"Which," he had stated, "it aint as good as it used to be. Too few riding through, these days."

"They tell me,"—Lee Scott nodded,—"a heap of men have left the country since last spring." And as the other made no comment, he went on: "And most of 'em riding hard."

"I've heard," Jim said as one whose words come with reluctance, "there was some who went keeping the news behind them."

Scott took out time to make a cigarette and light it.

"Here's where the big fight came off, isn't it?" He asked the question with apparent indifference.

"This is the place," Jim told him.

"And you saw it?"

"From start to finish."

"How did it happen?"

Jim pointed toward the river-bank. His face was without expression.

"See them two woodpiles? The L.S. crowd was waiting there, ten of 'em, five behind each pile. I didn't know it till they jumped the boys. Then it was over —one, two, three. Like that."

Scott was silent for some moments, looking straight ahead of him.

"I'd like to hear the whole thing—the way you saw it," he said at length.

"Well, the boys come from the west. The two McLoskys in the lead. Charley Long and young Penrose was next, and Curt Huntoon a little ways behind. They waved to me when they rode by the store. The McLoskys was going down the bank, and the rest was between the woodpiles, when the firing started.

"It was Hank Shaefer turned loose first—with a double-barreled shotgun. One of them express-messenger guns, sawed off short. He got Charley Long. I saw one of the McLoskys—the redheaded one—trying to pull his six-shooter when he went down. And a minute after that the saddles was empty, only for one. Curt Huntoon had his hoss in the river, and six or eight of the L.S. crowd was shooting at him. Who got him, I don't know."

"Which is a somewhat different story than the way I heard it told," Scott said. "And now there's one thing more: That's young Huntoon. The story goes that he wasn't killed—that he got to the bank somehow without my men seeing him. That he was wounded pretty badly, and some one found him. And he's around here somewhere—being taken care of." He was watching the other narrowly while he said it. But Jim's eyes did not avoid his—and all he said by way of reply was:

"The's always a heap of stories goes round like that after a shooting."

"Fact." Scott nodded. "Well, I'll be getting on." He freed the reins and turned the team, and Jim sat watching him depart across the river.

JIM waited until the dust-wreath had swallowed the rig, and then until the wreath itself had melted into the shadows of the distant eastern bluffs. Then he got up and went to the corral behind the store. When he came forth, he was riding one horse and leading another animal, and the latter was wearing both saddle and bridle. He rode away into the west.

Where the first mesa broke from the long valley flats, he departed from the wagon track and held to a northerly

course. So for five miles, and he reached the mouth of an arroyo into which he turned. Three miles farther on, he came in sight of a little house of limestone fragments perched upon the summit of the rim-rock. Apparently it was deserted; but as he drew near, the figure of a man came into sight before the door, as if he had emerged from the earth.

The trail up the mesa was steep and winding, and when Jim drew rein at the top, the horses were breathing heavily. The man before the door was looking at the spare animal. He was smiling, but there was no mirth in the smile.

"I see," he said, "that you've been having visitors."

He was, or should have been so far as looks went, hardly more than a boy. His brown eyes slanted a little. They gave to his face a blazing recklessness—the recklessness of one who is equally ready for fight or frolic as the case may be. But now the joy of living, which belongs with such faces, was clouded over.

"One visitor." Jim swung from the saddle and dropped the reins. "But I have got an idee he may come again, and fetch more with him. How's the sore side?"

"All mended up." The smile was more eager now. "Sometimes I feel that slug I'm packing in my thigh. But not enough to hinder me; I'm fine as silk."

"That bein' the case," Jim announced, "yo' may as well start right now."

"Suits me. Who was it come?"

"The ol' man himself—Lee Scott."

The oblique eyes narrowed. "I didn't know he was in the country."

"Been here several weeks." Jim paused to roll and light a cigarette. "It was the first time I ever laid eyes on him. And from what he said, I reckon he aims to finish up where his men left off. Anyhow, he knows yo're somewheres close by, and he's looking for yo'."

"Seems like I'm getting mighty important." The young lips were bitter now, and the eyes were hard. "Well, I'm off. On the run." He shook Jim's hand. "Some day I'll show up again, and I'll pay you back—and pay Scott and Hank Shaefer too."

CHAPTER II

THAT was how Curt Huntoon departed from the Valley, leaving behind him his claim and cattle and all the high hopes which he had brought

ELISA

with him six months before. He rode into the west, and he was riding hard.

Which does not mean a dead run and a lathered horse, for he had far to go and only the one mount to carry him. He traveled like many another of those fugitives—some of them good men and some bad—who took the lonely bypaths of the West, seeking new ranges and new towns beyond the horizon which bounded the activities of those who hunted them. The gait to which he kept his horse most of the time was what they call the running walk; sometimes he pressed the animal into a trot.

And in the long run, that pace eats up the miles. It was the next afternoon, and he had snatched three hours' sleep in the pale oak-dotted mountains, when he came down the western flanks of their bare foot-hills, where grass that had been good in spring was but a memory. He saw Shannon's Ranch on the flat far ahead of him.

That was its name. Really it was no ranch at all—only a pair of buildings, with a windmill and two dreary cottonwoods. In days gone by it had been a stage station; now it was a stopping-place for teamsters and such other occasional travelers as came through; one of those windcuffed, sunbitten oases whose alkali water and greasy cooking left rankling memories with its guests.

From the slope the buildings looked like a pair of child's blocks, the trees like two green whips, bent by the never-ceasing breeze. It was a good ten miles away, but he could see the flashing of the windmill's blades as the sun-glare caught them in their swift rotation.

Three hours of daylight left, and he was intent on putting the miles back of him. The chances were there would be none hereabouts who knew his face, for he had been a newcomer when the whirlwind of local warfare swooped upon him over there in the valley; and he had never ridden on this side of the mountains. But when a man comes through the open flat lands, he is visible for a long time; and this was the range of the Half Circle A; and Pete Albright, the owner, was an ally of the L.S. On the plain below, a road branched southward to his home ranch thirty miles away. There was the ever-present possibility of some stray rider from the distant valley turning up there, and Shannon's was too close by for comfort. Better to wait for nightfall when he could approach that lonely outpost on the flat unseen, and have a look at its guests before he showed himself.

At the foot of the slope there was a water-hole, a good-sized pool surrounded by a wide ring of trampled mud whereon the alkali had traced white patterns. A few bushes had once sheltered the spring with grateful greenery, but the cattle had browsed their tops away. Near by, a ravine gashed the bare hills. When Curt had let his horse drink its fill, he led it up the draw and unsaddled; and after the animal had rolled, he replaced the saddle and bridle, leaving it to graze on the poor feed, with the split reins trailing on the ground. Then he went back to the pool and sat behind a clump of stunted brush, where he could watch the road without being seen.

But he had ridden far, and the long weeks of slow recovery from his two bullet-wounds had left him soft; the day's heat still lingered in this sun-baked nook. He struggled for half an hour or more to keep awake, and he was reaching into his pocket for his tobacco with the intention of rubbing the smarting grains on his eyelids as a last resort, when sleep came upon him with the suddenness of a blow from behind.

THE sun was low when he awakened, and some one was calling:

"Whoa there! Stand still."

Curt's right hand was gripping the butt of his revolver before his eyes were fairly open. But the voice went on:

"All right, my friend. I'm peaceable."

What doubts he might have cherished as to that statement vanished when he saw the speaker's face. It was, above all else, benignant. Fringed with a shred of white beard and seamed with many little lines, some of them shrewd, all of them good-natured, it brought to Curt a shamed feeling for the attitude in which he found himself; and—this came almost as quickly—a feeling of envy for the quiet security in those twinkling eyes. His hand dropped from his gun, and he straightened up.

The stranger must have been somewhere in his sixties, and he was slight of frame; there was no stain of sun or wind on his lean features. He wore one of those long alpaca coats which men called dusters; and his hat was of oiled straw. He was leaning back in the seat of a dusty buckboard, smiling down on the cowboy.

"I'm sorry," Curt said. "You gave me a start. I reckon it was that made me—"

"Go for your gun?" the other finished for him with a chuckle. "Well, that's all right. I'm sorry too for waking you up so suddenly—which makes us even."

There was something about him—an air of honest placidity—as if he were immune to such rude alarms and bloody ways as were the rule in this wild country—that made him seem unreal here. And as the thought crossed Curt's mind, the stranger's smile went out, like a candle-flame in a sudden gust of wind.

The head bowed until the fringe of white beard rested upon the chest. The slender form crumpled and slid from the seat. . . . The report of a rifle sounded down on the flat.

Curt's weapon was drawn when he leaped to his feet. The horses turned sharply, cramping the buckboard until it hung on two wheels. Then they went off on the dead run.

The dying man raised himself upon one hand. His lips were moving. And Curt heard him say:

"Get—the—news—to—" His voice died to a dry whisper. He sank back and was still.

A slug flicked off a twig from the nearest bush. No time for the dead now. Curt had his own life to look out for.

Here at the mouth of the ravine the land sloped gently to the wide expanse of plain. The murderer was down there, less than two hundred yards away. He must have ridden up behind his victim and dismounted to fire the first shot. And when Curt had risen into view, he was swinging into the saddle again. It

had caught him by surprise—this sight of another, where he had expected only one. So he had fired the second shot before he fairly settled into his seat. Now he flung the clumsy rifle from him and dug in the spurs; his horse came on at the dead run; his revolver was in his hand, and it was spitting flame.

Curt took his time. For he had smelled enough of powder-smoke to learn the most essential lesson of such affairs as this: it is usually the last shot that counts, and not the first. He felt the hot breath of flying lead upon his cheek; the wet mud beside the pool spurted up, flecking his boots. He waited, but he was never still; weaving from one side to the other, holding his eyes always upon the target that he was to seek.

A little man, as slight of frame as the old man he had slain. But he was young and lithe. Curt saw his face against the cloudless sky as the horse topped a slight rise. Wide eyes and a small chin. And a thin wisp of black mustache—like the face of a cat.

So Curt was thinking as he pressed the trigger of the single-action revolver. He saw the horse fling up its head. The loud, sudden voice of his weapon assaulted his ears. The wind swept the smoke back into his eyes. When the acrid fumes had passed, the animal and man were down; and the dust eddied upward, hiding both of them.

He had an idea of what had taken place. The slug that had been meant for the rider had been intercepted when the horse threw up its head. But he did not wait to see. His own mount was up the gulch, and his rifle was in the sheath beneath the stirrup-leather. He turned and ran. And when he had caught up the bronco and leaped into the saddle, he rode back slowly, keeping to the low ground, where he would have the hill behind him and not be skylined.

His course took him some distance from the spot where he had been. And when he came forth, the dead horse lay there, grotesquely large upon the flat. But the murderer was not in sight.

HANK

CHAPTER III

WHEN a man is on the run and the stake in the race is his own life, he must deny himself many things. Curt Huntoon would have liked nothing better than to remain until he had exacted justice, here on the spot where a crime had been committed. There was no doubt as to the hiding-place; no cover showed for miles, except the thicket by the water-hole. But if he stayed and fought it out and won, leaving the body of the killer beside the victim, there was no telling what complications might follow. He had abided long enough in this hard land to realize that power does not always lie with those whose cause is right. There were plenty of chances that this cold-blooded slaying might have that behind it which would send a dozen men—with stars upon their breasts—out on his trail, if he were to become involved. He might even find himself in the end with a rope around his neck, and none to bear witness of the part he had really played. Such things had happened before to men in his position.

So he rode on. The sun was down before he had gone another mile. And by the time he neared Shannon's Ranch, darkness was come. The place showed from afar as a fleck of orange light. Close by, the buildings revealed themselves, blurred shapes, soft as velvet against the blue night. Save for the creaking of the windmill and the ceaseless dry whisper of the two wind-tortured cottonwoods, there was no sound. And although he had traveled hither from the east, Curt took care to come in from the west. He left his horse by the corral, and he approached the old adobe building, which had been the station in former days, so silently that even the dogs failed to betray his presence by their barking.

The door was open, letting forth a flood of orange lamplight. He stood beyond the threshold and he looked

within. Three men were sitting at the oilcloth-covered table, one with his back toward the outside, and two facing him. Beside the one, a girl! Her face was turned, so that Curt saw the profile; it was dead white; and there was a tenseness in her slender figure as if she were holding herself with a great effort. Her hair shone in the lamplight like finely spun gold. The man beside her held his knife suspended with a load of beans upon the blade, and he was saying:

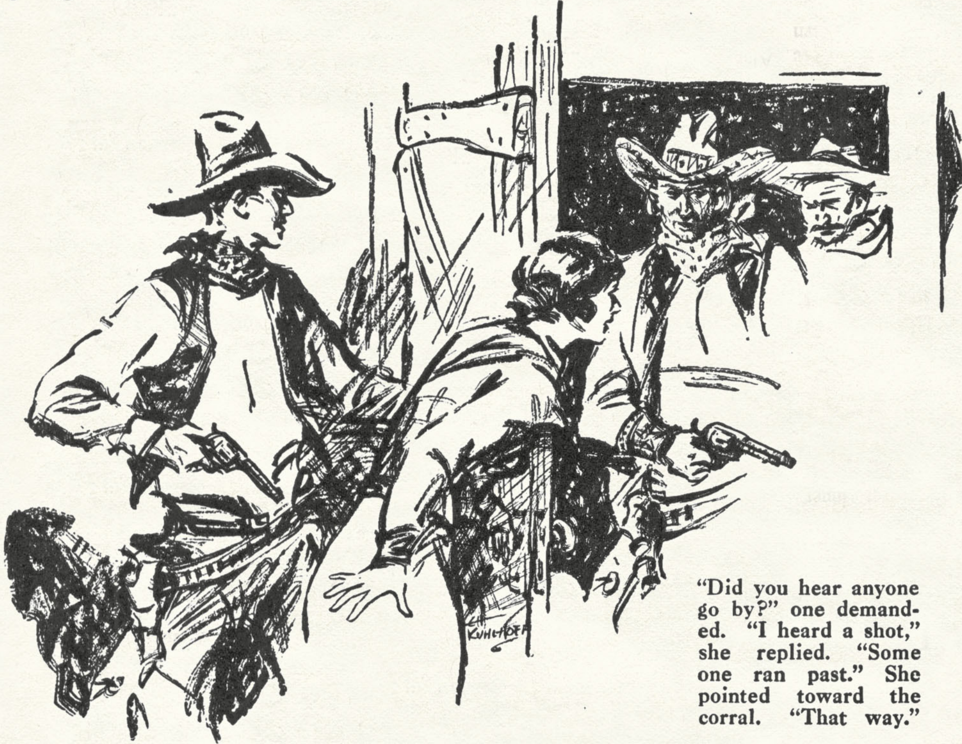
"Five cents a pound. Yessir. That's what them teamsters charges for fetching grub from the railroad."

By which Curt knew he would be the landlord. The pair opposite were paying no heed to him; they were busy with their feeding. The gray dust of the country was upon their shirts of blue flannel; and some of it had settled in their hair.

One was a burly man, thick-chested, with a bristle of red beard on his wide jowls; his companion was thin-chested, sandy-haired. Hard men, the two of them; and from this lower level where Curt stood, he could see the big six-shooters dangling in their holsters beneath the table. But hard men were common in this part of the country, and Curt had never seen the faces of these two before.

He called the landlord, and they went to the corral to attend to the feeding of his horse.

When Huntoon returned to take his place at the end of the table, the two strangers regarded him in silence before they resumed their attack upon their plates. It was the sort of meal one would have expected: *chile con carne,* beans, leaden biscuits and what passed as coffee in this part of the world. The girl was trying her best to make a pretense of eating; but the best she was able to accomplish was a picking at the edges; that was all.



"Did you hear anyone go by?" one demanded. "I heard a shot," she replied. "Some one ran past." She pointed toward the corral. "That way."

Curt, looking up, found her eyes on him, and there was a look in them which made him catch his breath. It was as if she had cried out to him for help. A little later when he glanced up and met those frightened eyes again, she said:

"You came from the east?"

He shook his head. "The west." And as he told the lie, he saw the eyes of the pair across the table fixed upon him. They had hardened suddenly when she asked the question; it was as if they were awakened to a quick, fierce regard; but if the men had cherished any suspicions, his quiet answer drove these away. They pitched into the *chile con*

carne and the beans once more. He thought—he might have been mistaken, but it seemed so to him—there was relief in their demeanor.

He had seen enough to make him suspect that these three—the girl and the two men across the table from her—might somehow be involved in the tragedy that he had witnessed. All of which, he told himself, was none of his business; and he went on to assure himself that the wisest thing he could do would be to clear out of the place as soon as possible, to put as many miles as possible behind him before he stopped again.

THE girl was first to leave the table. And sometime afterward, when the rest of them had got up and sought the open air where the coolness of the night was settling down and the flies were not so enthusiastic as they were within, Curt noticed the lamplight leaking around the edges of a curtained window near the building's end. That, then, would be her room. Like all the others in the old-fashioned adobe, its door led to the outside. He wondered what had brought her here. She did not belong to this country, that was plain; she had a daintiness which would never have lasted in the fierce sun and the dry wind. There was something in the idea of her, in that room alone with her fear riding her, which made him forget the taste of his cigarette, the comfort of a full stomach.

Three other cigarettes were glowing here before the building wall. The landlord was complaining; this time it was about the price of hay. The windmill creaked, and the rustle of the cottonwoods was like an arid presence. Somewhere to the east, wheels rattled over the rough ground. Curt felt his spine stiffen. A moment later he rose and tossed his lighted cigarette from him.

"That *chile* you dish up," he told the landlord, "bites mighty hot. Where do you keep your water-pail?"

The answer was as he had hoped—beside the kitchen door. He departed leisurely. The rattle of wheels had grown of a sudden more distinct, as sounds do in the night; and by the time Curt had found the water-pail, he could hear the driver's voice as he halted the team down by the corral. He stepped back to the corner of the building, and looked around. Two cigarettes showed in the darkness, twin points of yellow, moving toward the corral bars.

"And if you'd used good sense at the start," Curt told himself, "you'd have been ten miles away from here by this time."

The windmill stood out in silhouette against the starry sky; and near it, the two cottonwoods. He waited until the flecks of light had disappeared; then he slipped through the night until he gained the pool of blackness beneath the trees. Now he could see the patch of radiance before the kitchen door marking the spot where he was supposed to be—which was sound strategy; and he could hear—which was blind luck—the voices of the three who would be looking for him presently.

He could hear them, but that was all; they were as blurred as the shapes of the buildings in the gloom, less distinct than the stamping of the horses and the jingling of harness. From the latter sounds it became evident that they had not unhooked the team, but left them tied to the hitching-rack. This fact he noted, and later on he had good reason to be thankful that he had done so.

The voices were coming nearer now; and one broke forth, a sharp rasping tenor, as thin as the voice of a boy, but with an ugly edge:

"What does he look like?"

IF there had been any doubts as to who the speaker was, that question settled them for good. Curt found himself wishing that he had delayed a little longer at the water-hole, to finish what he had begun when the horse crashed to the earth with its rider. The night breeze came stronger; what with the creaking of the windmill and the rustle of the cottonwoods, he did not catch all of the answer—only a few words at the end:

"—eyes like a Chinaman." That was the big one with the red bristles on his jowls; and he added: "He said he came from the west."

"He did like—" The speaker delved into the depths of his profanity to polish off the simile. "He can lie faster than he shoots; that's plumb sure. Where is he now?"

They had come close by, so close that Curt could have made a clean shot of it—and his hand was resting on the butt of his revolver, the weapon loose in its sheath. The little man was a step in advance of the other two.

"He went to get a drink of water. By now he would be back, I reckon." It was the unshaven one.

The three came to a halt.

"All right." The little man was talking. "You two go on ahead. Wait for him to come back, if he aint there. You understand? Then get one on each side of him. If he makes a play when I show up, you're there to grab his arms."

Curt had his revolver in his hand. And the passion to kill was surging strong within him. One against three! If the odds had been twice as great, they would not have checked him. It was the sandy-haired man who saved his small companion's life then.

"What about the girl?" he asked.

Curt started violently. It was as if the question had been put to him. What about her? He lowered his revolver. And the questioner went on:

"What we was told. Remember? She wasn't to see anything—nor hear. And she's plumb scared now. If you ask me, she never did swallow that line of talk you handed her. This has got to be handled careful, Ed."

The little man swore quietly.

"And I am handling it," he said. "There aint time to lose. Maybe you don't know that. Things has gone bad enough already. Me with a bad leg where my hoss fell on me, and wasting two hours catching up that team. We have got to finish here right quick, and burn up the road from now on. There is a bigger man than that lawyer to 'tend to at the other end; and if he should get word—" He swore again at greater length than before. "Better to give the girl another scare than run a chance of this feller gettin' in the clear to tell what he saw. You two do like I said."

They started on, and the darkness swallowed the three forms.

CHAPTER IV

THEY would wait for some time before they began searching for him, and his horse was in the corral. It would not take him long to saddle up. Before they knew that he was gone, he would be well on his road. And in an hour he would be as safe as if he were a thousand miles away. These thoughts crossed Huntoon's mind; but he belonged to a breed to whom snap judgment was second nature, to whom the bold way always held the strong appeal. And he had turned his back on that way once today.

"I'm going to stick," he told himself.

Just what lay behind it all, he did not know; but he had an inkling of what lay ahead.

"A bigger man than that lawyer to 'tend to at the other end."

So the murderer had said—and that would mean the one for whom the dying man's unfinished message was intended.

One man killed, another to be slain! He remembered the girl's white face, and the questions she had asked him at the supper-table. For which of these two her dread had been—the one who had died or the one who was picked for death—he had no idea. But she was here with the murderers.

As far as she was concerned, she ran no danger. That was one thing you could say for such as these three who were waiting for him to show himself that they might kill him foully—they did not slay women. But they were perfectly willing to let women endure the sight of bloodshed, and to leave them with none but their dead for company.

And she was new to this harsh country and its hard ways. There was one thing to do: He had to help her out of this.

WHAT he would do then—where he would take her and to whom—he did not stop to think. There was no time for that, and if there had been, it would have been the same. The thing just now was to go for her.

From where he was, he could see the glowing of their cigarettes where they were waiting for him, while their companion bided somewhere near by in the darkness. Better, then, to go behind the building. Her room was in the front by the farther end.

He went on tiptoe, making a wide semicircle, lest the one who was out there in the night catch sight of him. It was some moments later when he passed the kitchen, and the door was open. He had a glimpse of the Mexican cook polishing off the supper dishes with a greasy cloth; and the man was singing as he worked. The singing stopped. Curt heard a heavy step beyond the flimsy curtain which draped the doorway to the dining-room. That would be the landlord— "Aiming to get out of the line of fire before the lead begins to fly," Curt told himself.

Out here it was black dark. He felt his way along the wall. It was slow going in the gloom, and the knowledge that the slightest noise might bring the three upon him made him stay his pace. He wished with all his heart that this

affair was more simple,—just him against them,—so that he could come forth from the night upon them and have it out. This business of stealing along like a burglar was not to his liking. He reached the building's end, and he turned the corner. He was nearing the front when he halted at the sound of a voice.

"Quick, now. He's liable to give us the slip." It came from the direction of the dining-room—the thin hard tenor which he had already grown to hate. And then the sound of footsteps. More than one man, and they were receding. Evidently they had gone to seek him.

It was perhaps twenty feet from where he was standing to the room. And the corner of the building lay between. He started on; and now he went more quickly. It was his haste that drowned the sound of another step, less cautious than his own; and the first he knew of this presence was when the blurred night gave forth a black shape. It loomed before him, less than an arm's-length away.

There was an instant while they stood fast, the two of them; and in the passing of that little space of time, Curt saw the dull glint of the other's weapon as it rose from beside his thigh. But his own hand had been the first to move, and it brought up his heavy revolver, sweeping high above his shoulder. The thick steel barrel crashed down upon the man's head. The blow sounded strangely loud against the stillness of the night. He felt a warm smear of blood upon his fingers. The black bulk lurched forward, and as it fell, the man's revolver spat a stream of fire into the earth.

Some one called out behind the building; and Curt could hear them coming on a run, when he whipped around the corner. In another moment they would be in sight. No time for such small matters as ceremony now. He was before the door. He seized the knob and flung it open.

SHE was standing in the middle of the room. In this narrow cubicle with its dingy walls that had once been white, its few mean bits of furniture, and the fly-specks over everything, she looked as a flower would look transplanted from a garden to a sordid alley. Her eyes were fixed upon him, wide with fear; they were—he noticed it even in this tense moment while he was stepping across the threshold—deep blue, as dark, almost, as violets. Her hands were clenched.

She had uttered no sound. When he whispered, "I have come to help you," she only nodded slightly. He thought he saw a change come into her face. Whether it was at sight of him or because of what he had said, he did not know. But the fear which had held her petrified was gone. He closed the door behind him.

VOICES outside. . . . The two men had come around the corner of the building and were close by the window.

"He aint dead," one was saying. And the thin tenor whined:

"Fer all the good he'll do us now, he might as well be." Then the first speaker swore:

"Pull back your head, Ed. You're right in the light." There followed a silence that lasted for a long time. They must have been arguing in whispers as to where he was hiding, for suddenly the sharp tenor broke the stillness again.

"I tell you, I hear a door go shut. He's in there now."

That was all Curt caught, for the girl was moving toward him. It was the first time he had seen the color come into her face. Her hand swept in a quick gesture, waving him to one side. For a moment he failed to understand; and when he obeyed, drawing away from the threshold, the pair outside were at the door.

She flung it open, and she stood there looking out into the night. He could see her face in profile with the shine of the lamp upon it; her lips were parted slightly, and she was breathing hard. But when she spoke, her voice was steady.

"What has happened?"

They stood facing her, their weapons in their hands. But before either of them could reply, a sound came from the direction of the dining-room, where the landlord had taken refuge from any likelihood of stray slugs. The two of them leaped back into the darkness as abruptly as if it had been the report of a forty-five.

"Did you hear anyone go by?" It was the little man, the one called Ed.

"I heard a shot." And then, as if it were an afterthought, she added: "Yes. Some one ran past." She pointed toward the corral. "I think it was that way. Has anyone been hurt?"

They did not wait to answer. And she remained there while their voices trailed off in the night. So for some time, and then she closed the door.

The girl stood holding a rifle she had snatched from the wall. "I'll kill you if you don't do as I say. . . . Lay that revolver on the table!"

"They've gone." The steadiness had departed from her voice, and there was no color in her cheek now.

"I've got to get you out of this," he said.

"Why did you come?" she whispered. "Why are they looking for you?" But before he answered, he asked:

"You know a man who drove away from here this afternoon? An old man with a white beard?"

"He brought me here." Her hand went to her breast. "You did come from the east. You've seen him, then?"

"It's not easy to tell." His face was grave. And then he gave her the story of what had happened by the waterhole.

When he had ended, she said quietly: "I was afraid of this."

"They're not through yet. And we'll have to move fast." He started toward the door. But she seized his arm.

"Not now. They called him out, the man who keeps this place. They left him watching when they ran on to the corral."

She went to the door and opened it; and when she came back, he saw her lips were trembling.

"He's there, by the dining-room, with a double-barreled shotgun."

He was frowning at the floor. If this were only himself, it would be easy enough; but he had her to look out for; and a load of buckshot scatters far. It occurred to him then—how sadly a woman can complicate the affairs of men! He felt her hand upon his arm, and she was whispering.

"Is there any way we can escape from here, if we were able to leave the house?"

He nodded. "All we have to do is make the corral. They left the team tied at the hitching-rack. But how to get out of here—" He shook his head.

"I've thought of that," she cried. "I'm going to talk to that man. And I'll stand on the other side—you understand? So when he answers me, his back will be toward you. Then you slip out. They'll not be watching me. It will be easy for me to avoid them and to join you. Where will you be?"

"Under those cottonwoods." And then he added: "You are game!"

She was on her way to the door when he said it, and she looked back to smile into his face; then she was outside, and he stood here for a moment before he stepped to the threshold. He could see the vague bulk of the landlord, close by the building wall; and just beyond him, within the pathway of lamplight that flowed from the dining-room door, the girl. Her face was toward him.

"If he don't mind you, let him have it!" Curt bade.

He stepped out, closing the door behind him. Another moment, and he was around the corner of the building. His heart was in his throat. Before, it was excitement that had gripped him. Now it was fear—fear for this girl who had smiled a good-by as she was leaving.

He was behind the building, giving it a wide berth, when he heard the two men somewhere ahead of him in the night. He waited until the sound of their steps had receded, and then he hurried on to the two cottonwoods.

It seemed to him a long, long time while he was standing there within the shadow of the trees with the ceaseless complaint of the windmill and the rustling of the leaves above him for company. He wondered whether she had got back to the room. Perhaps they had grown suspicious and were keeping guard on her. He was on the point of retracing his steps and seeking her, when he caught her footfall; and he realized that she was running.

He heard the sobbing of her breath as she came near, and then other footsteps —and heavier—behind. He stepped out before her, and she would have fallen if he had not caught her. A voice came from the gloom:

"This way—" That was the little man, the one called Ed.

For the moment Huntoon thought that she had fainted, for she was limp, a dead weight in his arms. But when she heard that voice, she straightened abruptly.

The team was standing at the hitching-rack not more than fifty feet away. He held her arm, guiding her through the night, and he whispered:

"Get in, and when I untie them, don't wait. Line them out." And then he lifted her into the buckboard.

He was loosing the first knot when a forty-five threw a thin stream of fire. The horses were plunging violently; he heard her soothing them; and he thought for an instant that the vehicle was going to capsize. Then the animals were off, and so quickly that he was barely able to seize the iron railing at the rear and drag himself up.

She was leaning back in the seat with her feet braced against the dash when he climbed beside her; and the two scared broncos were running up the road that led toward the east. Suddenly he had a queer cold feeling within him, and he called to her:

"Where do we go?" Her voice came through the noise of the flying hoofs and the scraping of the iron tires:

"The L.S. Ranch."

CHAPTER V

IT was as sudden as a blow in the face. All these miles behind him; and now, when he had reached the limits of the ranges wherein men hunted him as if he were a wild animal with a bounty on his scalp, he heard her say the words that turned him back. He leaned over and took the reins from her hands.

"All right. Hang on."

And with that answer he settled down to the task of handling the team. One thing at a time, and take them as they came; that was his way—he had learned the habit in his wild calling, where emergencies were the rule, and the opportunity for reflection came only after all was secure.

The L.S. Ranch was a long way ahead; and just at present these two horses were doing their level best to wreck the buckboard. He could not see the road, and if he found it, the going was but little better than elsewhere. He lined the team out, holding his course by the black outline where the mountains met the sky ahead of him.

The flat was freckled with clumps of sage; now and again a shallow ditch lay like a crooked crack, where water found its way after the occasional rains. When the wheels struck one of these obstacles, it took all his skill to keep the vehicle from overturning. He was swinging the

team to right the buckboard after such an encounter when he heard her cry out, and saw that she had barely saved herself from falling. Then he shifted the reins to his right hand and flung the other arm about her. So he held her securely against the sudden lurchings, and the team ran on. She made no sound, and he could feel her, pressed tightly to his side, a little thing and soft—too soft for such a land as this.

So he was thinking. And he was wondering whence she had come. Who was it she was seeking at the L.S. Ranch? What strange set of circumstances had brought it about that she had traveled here, to bring him back into the country of his enemies?

He had no resentment toward her, no rebellion at the fate which had brought her. She was a girl, and she needed help; and that was all there was to it. He met the situation as he found it and let it go at that.

Shannon's Ranch lay far behind them now. The plain stretched before them, vague as mist, soft to the eye as if it were the ghost of bygone waters under the stars. The team had settled down into a steady stride. No sound came through the noises of the rig. He waited for another mile, then pulled the broncos down to a walk, then to a halt. The silence of the night was disturbed by a faint noise, a dull throbbing hardly louder than the drumming of the pulses when a man has been running hard.

THE girl stirred, and Huntoon looked down at her. He found her eyes fixed on his. And he said quietly:

"They're in the saddle now, and they're burning up the road."

She made no answer, and he loosed the reins. The horses started on. He was frowning now, his eyes on the black wall of the mountains looming into the sky before them. While they were on the flat, they had an even chance at best; but once they began that climb, the race was lost.

"And," he was thinking, "those fellows know where we're heading for."

The surface of the plain was growing rougher here—low undulations like the long easy ground-swell on the surface of the sea climbed toward the foot of the range.

Just ahead of them a shadow crossed their path where the trough dipped between two of these crests. He eased the team down into it, and then turned aside. So to the right for half a mile or more, and at last he brought them to a stop.

"Now if you'll hold the lines," he told her, "I'll go to their heads." She took the reins without a word; and as he stood before the team, with a hand upon the muzzle of each, ready to pinch down and stifle the animal if it flung up its head to whinny, he was thinking of her silent acceptance of each situation as it came.

"Some women would want to know what's up. But never a word out of her. That's being brave."

SO he told himself, as he glanced at her figure in black silhouette. She looked very lonely here in the blue night. He remembered the softness of her within the fold of his arm, the warmth of her breath as he had felt it against his cheek when the lurching of the buckboard had thrown her face close to his.

The darkness behind them gave forth the dull drumming of hoofs. The sound grew louder; and once—perhaps it was some shifting of breeze—it swelled so suddenly that he thought the riders had discovered their whereabouts and turned off the road. But that was for a moment only. The pursuers passed by; the noise began to trail off; gradually it died away. Some time later Curt came back and took the reins.

"At the rate they're going," he said, "they'll be out of hearing soon."

She was silent for some moments, looking off into the night, and then she said softly:

"You were riding west, and I am taking you back. I haven't even thanked you."

"So far," he reminded her, "you haven't had much chance. Things have been coming fast."

It was by way of changing the subject that he asked her the question which had been in his mind for some time.

"You've folks at the L.S.?"

"My father owns the place."

Somehow her answer did not even surprise him. Things, as he said, had been happening fast; and it seemed altogether in keeping with the manner of this day's sudden events that he should find himself helping the daughter of the man who had been hunting him.

"I wish you'd tell me how this play came up," he said.

"I'll tell you all I know. That's little. You see, we live in California, and this is the first time in two years my father

has been at the ranch. I was on my way to visit him.

"When I got off the train at Lordsburg, his lawyer was there to meet me—Judge Buck. The man they killed this afternoon!" Curt heard her draw a sharp breath; then she went on steadily:

"He was to drive me through. He told me he had to make the trip anyway—it had to do with the business that had called my father to the country, and he was in a hurry.

"That was this afternoon. It seems a long time ago. We reached this place where you found me. There was a change of horses waiting for us there. And these three men came. Who they are, I don't know. But they said the Indians were out, that there had been signal-smokes in the mountains. So Judge Buck started on alone to Albright's ranch. He thought he could get some one there to make the trip with us across the range.

"When he had been gone for quite a while, I noticed that one of these men had left; and there was something in the way the other two acted when they looked at me that frightened me. And after that—you came."

"I see." Curt was thinking of the words which the dying man had uttered by the water-hole:

"Get—the—news—to—"

And then the words that he had overheard when he was in the shadow of the cottonwoods:

"A bigger man than this lawyer at the other end."

It was plain to him now. That other, for whom the dying man had tried to voice a warning—that was Lee Scott.

He sat looking off into the east where the mountains made a black wall against the skyline. Beyond that barrier the men who had shot down his friends were waiting for him to show his face. He could feel the dull ache in the muscles of his thigh where he was carrying one of their leaden slugs; the wound in his side gave him a twinge as if to remind him what was in store for him. He shrugged his shoulders and accepted the irony of blind luck.

CHAPTER VI

IT was from no desire to avoid the issue—the relief that came to Curt Huntoon when he saw another way was because that way seemed to him to offer security to the girl beside him. It seemed to him to promise her an escort who would not run ten chances to one of being killed before they reached the L.S. ranch, who would be able to face her father without danger of being shot down before giving that warning.

In the swift passage of events he had forgotten the side road which turned away into the south—and the ranch whither it led. Pete Albright's place! The Half Circle A had been the allies of the L.S. The owner was a large figure in this part of the country. Thousands of his cattle on a wide range which he had wrested from the Apaches more than ten years before. He held the beef contract with two military posts.

RECALLING these things now, Huntoon breathed a deep sigh of relief.

Thirty miles to go. And if it should so happen that there was anyone who knew him, he had an even chance to get away. She would be safe, and there would be fast riders to carry the tidings to her father.

"I reckon they're in the clear and we can shove on now," he said. The horses were sobered by their run; they plodded through the darkness at a slow jog trot. He told her the decision he had made. And—this seemed strange to him—he found it hard to say; he wished that things had been different, that this necessity to leave her in the care of others did not exist.

"I wish I could tell you how grateful I am." Her voice was filled with an honest feeling that made the blood surge to his cheeks. "My father will thank you for this."

He smiled grimly to himself. And she went on: "Won't you tell me your name? He'll want to know who it was."

He did so.

"Not that it makes any difference," he added. "I'm leaving the country."

"I'm sorry for that," she said. "I know he would want to see you."

He did not answer her; the water was getting too deep for him. There was no sound now but the dull rattle of the buckboard. Midnight was past. And the day had been a weary one. He found it hard to keep awake, even with the task of guiding the horses upon him. With her, there was no such aid to fight off sleep; and presently the slow lurching of the vehicle brought her close to his side. She nestled against him through the long hours.

By dawn they would be at Albright's. Then he would get another horse,—they could do no less than that for him,—and he would go on his way into the West. And she would be all right.

"All right!" he repeated the words to himself sternly, as if perhaps the idea were hard to accept. Now and again he looked down upon her small form, and he caught the glint of her fair hair. Then he would find himself wishing for things that he knew were beyond the bounds of possibility; rebelling against the bloody events that had put him where he was.

And he wondered what she would say if she knew those things.

CHAPTER VII

THE sun was near the summit of the eastern range when Curt saw Pete Albright's ranch ahead of them, a little cluster of white buildings gleaming in the shadow of the mountains.

"We're here," he said; and she smiled up at him. He looked down into her face, and he felt a fierce tugging at his heart. For he had gone through much in this little time while he had been with her; and he was one of those to whom sentiment oftentimes became a habit engendered by the loneliness of those wide spaces where they rode. But he strove to talk lightly.

"One thing dead sure—Albright aint afraid of whitewash."

The sun shot over the mountain wall while they were driving up to the little rise where the buildings overlooked the flat-lands. The long house glared.

"Like a pile of bleached bones," Huntoon was thinking. On the tawny flank of the near mountains two riders showed descending; they looked like two moving dots. . . .

There is something in a place where men have lived and carried on their work that reflects their nature. This home ranch of the Half Circle A was bare and bleak, as hard as the sun-dried hides that hung on the pole fence of the corral. The flies were already busy at the hitching-rack where three saddle-horses stood with bowed heads.

A man came to the open door. He stood there looking at them in dead silence. A huge man, and in years gone by he must have been well built; now his waist was gross. His big face shone like a copper plate; his little eyes were like two opaque gray marbles. They went from the buckboard to the pair of riders who were growing larger now along the tawny flank of the near-by mountains. Then he turned abruptly and spoke to some one within.

Curt had the team tied and was helping the girl to get down when this other came forth and hurried down the slope. He did not so much as nod at either of them, but took one of the saddle-horses from the hitching-rack and rode away.

Now the big man came down the bit of hill, and he was smiling; but Huntoon's lips were tight. There was that in the nature of their welcome here which aroused his anger.

"I reckon," he said coldly, "you're Pete Albright." And as the other nodded, he went on, ignoring the proffered hand: "This lady here is Lee Scott's daughter, and she's in trouble."

He thought that the little eyes changed at his announcement, as if they found it hard to remain meeting his own; but he was still rankling at this cold reception in a land where every guest is welcome, and he was in no mood for noticing small things. All he wanted now was to get out of here.

"I'm Pete Albright." The voice boomed like a war-drum. "Come up into the house." He led the way, and before they stepped within, Huntoon had a glimpse of the cowboy who had departed so suddenly. He was riding out across the flat-lands toward the pair who were approaching in a series of slow zigzags down the mountainside.

The room was as bleak as the outside, and almost as dusty. There was a huge saddle in one corner; and the long table was littered with the breakfast dishes; a rifle hung in a rack upon the wall. Pete Albright passed his clumsy tongue over his lips.

"Lee Scott's daughter." He said it slowly. "So!" He did not look at her nor Huntoon, but through the door, as if the pale landscape beyond held some answer to his thoughts. Then abruptly: "You better come with me." He turned to her. "This aint much of a place for women. I'll have the cook fetch you a bite to eat in your own room."

SO far, she had not said a word, but when he had opened the door leading to the bedrooms beyond, she came to Curt and took his hand.

"Thank you for all you've done." It seemed to him—there was something in her eyes that hinted this, the way she

Curt lifted Elisa down from the saddle. The woman ran forward and snatched the girl from Curt's arms.

held them on his own—as if she would like to say more if she could have done it without being overheard. But Albright was waiting in the doorway, and she smiled up at Curt—it was a little wan, that smile, as if she were badly frightened and trying to brave it out. Then she followed the cow-man into the other room.

HUNTOON sat at the table awaiting Albright's return. Just why it was, he did not know; but there was something about this place which made him uneasy. And he did not like the manner of the man. Why had he stood there in the doorway staring at them instead of coming out to meet them? Such a proceeding was altogether out of keeping with the customs of a hospitable land where women were a rarity. It was as if their coming was the last thing he had expected—or the least of his desires.

Yet Albright was known as the strongest ally of the L.S. hereabouts. It was the first time Curt had seen him, but he had heard tales of him—how he had helped Lee Scott's manager in half a dozen raids against the small cow-men during the recent war.

"Which, like as not," he told himself, "is the reason I don't take a fancy to him." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Mebbe he don't suit me; and he's got a hard name; but one thing's dead sure: he's going to look out for her; and he's going to get that word through to her father. And I'm going to get a horse off of him to ride back to Shannon's Ranch and pick up my own outfit. Before sundown I'll be on my way again."

He glanced outside. A man was taking the team to the corral. A few moments later the cook came in with coffee and soda biscuits and fried beef. Curt fell to, and he was attaining that comfort which comes with a replenished stomach when Albright came in and pulled up a chair across the table.

"All right," he boomed. "I reckon the lady's bedded down by now. Let's hear what's up."

The uncertainty which had been present before was gone. His big face was as hard as metal.

"You look to me like you'd made up your mind to something," Curt reflected. "Now, I wonder what it is?" He found himself wishing that he had chosen the table's other side, where his face would be toward the door. But of these matters which were in his mind he gave no sign. He told the story, from the beginning, only leaving out his reasons for the journey westward.

HE was interrupted twice—both times by the same question: Once when he was describing the murder of the lawyer at the water-hole, again when he had come to the trio at Shannon's Ranch.

"Ketch sight of a brand?"

The first time it had been the distance and the dust that had concealed the iron on the horse the killer rode; and at the road-house the darkness had hidden the marks on the saddle-animals in the corral. And when Albright heard his answers, it was the same with each:

He shook his head as if in disappointment, and he said:

"Too bad." But to Curt it seemed as if his look belied his words. There was a light that flitted over the marble-like eyes which hinted that their owner was relieved.

"Me," Albright boomed, "I sure would like to know who backs this play. For I am Lee Scott's friend."

"And if I didn't know you were," Curt assured himself, "I'd bet my saddle-horse and outfit that something is wrong here." He finished the last coffee in the tin pot and shoved back his chair, to roll a cigarette.

"All right!" The cow-man rose. "I'll see the news gets through; and as for the girl—"

Whatever his intentions were as to her, they remained unspoken. For while he was saying the words, his face had quickened suddenly, and Curt had heard the hissing of his breath, intaken at the pause. The man was looking through the door. Curt turned in his chair. The tobacco and the paper dropped to the floor, and his hand went to his gun.

Outside in the white glare of the newly risen sun three men were standing where they had swung from their horses by the corral. Two of them were facing the door: a lanky man with sandy hair, and a small man whose wide eyes and pointed chin, and the slender shred of mustache gave his face a catlike look. The riders had come down from the hills.

And on the animals the brands showed plain: Half Circle A. Pete Albright's iron! The voice of that iron's owner reached Curt's ears.

"Put yo'r han's on the table—empty. Understand?" It was like the boom of a great drum, struck softly.

Curt turned his head and looked into the muzzle of a single-action revolver. Albright's face glowed like burnished copper, and his eyes were two pin-points of gray.

"I knew you were a liar from the start," said Curt. "Now I know you are—" And he finished with the supreme insult of cattle-land.

"Both han's—an' empty. Make it quick." The face remained unmoved. The huge muzzle of the weapon did not waver by a hair's-breadth.

Whether he would have complied or whether he would have gone down to death with his fingers on his revolver-butt, Curt did not know. For such matters are decided in the instant, and before the time had passed, the decision was taken from him by another.

He placed his hands upon the table when he saw her in the doorway that led to the rooms beyond. And Albright's lips tightened at the sound of her light footstep. But he did not stir.

CURT'S face remained unchanged; but his eyes were not upon the little gray eyes. And he was thinking, as a man thinks sometimes in such moments when life is hanging in the balance, of something entirely aside from the issue itself. It was the color that had flown into her cheeks, and the light that was blazing from her eyes as she stood there holding the rifle that she had snatched from the rack on the wall.

"I'll kill you if you don't do as I say." The rifle was at her shoulder now, and she was within ten feet of where he was standing. Albright's face became dull gray. And she went on:

"Lay that revolver on the table."

The cow-man hesitated.

"If he don't mind you, let him have it," Curt bade her quietly.

Then Albright obeyed. And Curt rose from his chair. His own weapon was in his hand now. He picked up the other's and thrust it within his waistband.

"There's two horses at the hitching-rack." She nodded as she saw the question in Curt's eyes.

"Don't worry. I can ride," she told him. He took the rifle from her hands, and touched Albright with the muzzle.

"You go ahead of us," he said.

So they passed out into the hot white sunshine, with him before them; and when they came down to the hitching-rack, the other three men were inside of the corral.

She untied the animals and leaped into the saddle. The horse was a raw bronco, and the flutter of skirts set him off into a series of stiff-legged bucks. There was a cloud of dust; the scuffle and the thump of hoofs came through it. Curt had a glimpse of her sitting bolt upright, with the reins in her hand. The other horse snorted and edged away.

Curt had thrust the rifle into the sheath beneath the stirrup-leather. He held his forty-five on Albright as he backed off, following the animal. For the time being, he had lost sight of the corral. A slug kicked up a handful of dirt at his feet; he heard the sharp report of the revolver; and the girl's voice came through the tumult: "All right. He'll line out now." From the tail of his eye he saw her setting her mount back on its haunches. His left hand found the dragging reins that it was seeking.

Two six-shooters were clattering by the corral bars. He faced about, ignoring the cow-man, and he fired twice. One man fell upon his knees before the bars—which one it was, he did not know. The other had emptied his weapon and was ducking back to cover. Curt whirled and flung himself into the saddle.

The mountains loomed before them like a wall. The horses were on the dead run. Curt looked back. Albright was standing with one arm upraised, and the bellow of his great voice came through the noise of flying hoofs; a man was running toward him—the little killer with the cat-like face. The other lay in the dust by the corral bars.

Curt turned his eyes ahead. The girl was riding in the lead. He looked on past her where the pale tree-dotted summits climbed into the hot sky of the land where men had set a price upon his head.

CHAPTER VIII

THE land was growing rougher, little hills with swales between the crests. The horses settled down to a steadier stride; and as they neared the base of the mountain, a narrow trail revealed itself, descending toward the flat-lands in a series of wide loops. What had looked like a steep wall in the distance began to take on irregularities. Bare ridges showed, where the pathway stood out sharply, and these were interrupted by gulches where it was completely hidden for long intervals.

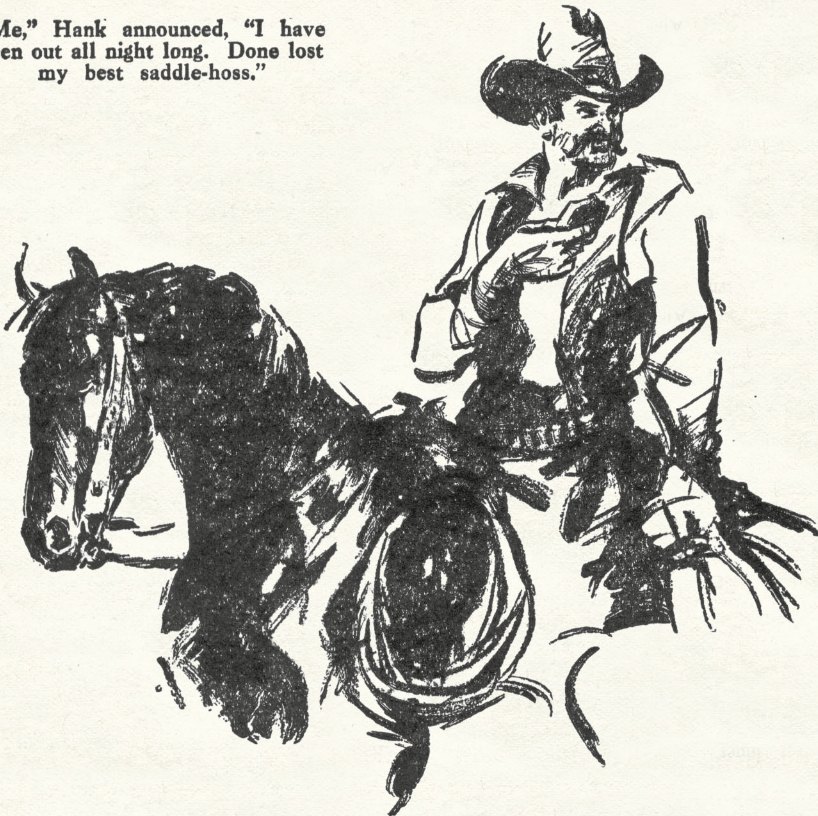
The two horsemen who had followed them from Shannon's had come to the ranch by this bridle-path. It must lead to the road which crossed the range—one of those shortcuts which riders use in the rougher country. So Curt was thinking; and it came to him that the other hands at Albright's had set forth in the hour of the dawn on their long day's riding, and these three who were left must still catch their mounts and saddle up before they started in pursuit. All of which would consume some time. He called to the girl to take it easier, and when they reached the beginning of the long climb—

"You go ahead," he bade her. "I'll hold them off when they show up."

SO he hung back and she went on; he watched her and her horse, growing smaller on the heights until they disappeared around a turn. When they came into sight again, a good thousand feet above him where the bridle-path clung to the steep flank of a cañon that gashed the range, the plain beneath was still empty. The white ranch-buildings glared in the distance, and no sign of life showed about them. Then he rode on, until he had reached the point where she had vanished around the backbone of the ridge. He halted here and looked once more upon the country below.

The wagon-road lay like a gray ribbon reaching on and on until it melted into the shimmering borderland of earth and sky. And on the ribbon, looking from this distance like one of those toy horsemen which children get in their stockings at Christmas time, a solitary rider showed, moving northward. For some moments Curt watched him.

"He sure is traveling fast!" And then he asked himself: "What of the other two?" There was no sign of them. His horse was breathing easier. He loosed the reins and touched him with the spur. And as the ridge closed in behind, shutting off the wide view, Curt saw the girl; she was halfway to the summit now. He shook his head. There was something all too easy in this escape.



"Me," Hank announced, "I have been out all night long. Done lost my best saddle-hoss."

He rode on, frowning, and when the solution came to him, the line deepened between his brows.

Where they were traveling, the land was rough; the slopes were steep, slow going for the best of horses. The narrow trail formed the hypotenuse; and the road from Albright's joined the highway to the east, to make the other two sides of a triangle. That route was the longer; but a man could keep his animal to a brisk pace—and if he were to get a fresh mount, he could crowd it to a headlong gait. Which meant that by the time they came to the point where the trail cut the main road, the solitary horseman below would be well ahead of them.

"And you can bet he's bound for the L.S." Curt told himself.

ON the way from this point to Lee Scott's home ranch there were two stopping-places before you came to Jim Thorp's store. The first of these was a cabin in the hills where a pair of Albright's cowboys held forth through the summer months; the second was Davis Wells, one of the old stage-stations where travelers still stopped for meals and lodging on their way across the mountains to the valley. They must swing wide of that line-riders' camp if they would avoid the chance of ambush. This meant more loss of time, and they were already trailing in the race.

The girl had pulled up to breathe her horse. Her eyes were troubled when they met his.

"There's something wrong!" she cried.

He told her what was in his mind.

"If we can slip past those line-riders, the chances are we'll make Davis Wells before dark," he said. "And I can leave you there." He saw her shake her head, and he went on: "It's on your father's range, and they're his friends."

"Albright was supposed to be my father's friend," she interposed.

"That," he confessed, "is more than I can understand. And there is something in the play—the way that it came up, the killing by the water-hole and all—which sure looks mighty strange. But these people at Davis Wells are not Pete Albright's kind. And there's a woman there, so I've heard tell. It will be safe for you, anyhow."

They started on, and now he rode ahead. He held the rifle across his sad-

dle-bow, and when they came around a turn, or reached the summit of a ridge where new country opened before them, he always scanned the landscape for signs of riders. Between times they talked, and so he learned how she came to steal into the room and get the rifle from the rack while Albright was holding the revolver on him at the breakfast-table.

"From the beginning, when I got sight of his face, I did not trust him. And when he left me in the room alone, I was afraid. It was as if I knew just what was happening."

As he listened to her, he thought of his own distrust, and how cold reason had made him put it aside. And he promised himself that in the future he would pay more heed to feeling and less to logic.

The trail climbed from the flank of the cañon to the summit of the mountain, where oaks grew, and some patches of the darker pines showed ahead of them. And farther on were more tawny ranges with gorges turning deep purple in the shadows. They came down into a little amphitheater, where the oaks gave grateful shade and the fallen leaves made a thick carpet about a cold spring. And while they were watering the horses, she told him of California hills towering inland from the sea, and of dark-skinned *vaqueros* who watched her father's cattle, and how she had grown up with the feeling of a horse under her as one of her early childhood memories.

They rested some time, for he could see that she was already weary, with the hard night behind her; and he feared a harder day ahead. The sun was getting down to work in real earnest when they came out again upon the open grass-lands. The horses kept to the running walk, for the going was now easier than it had been; but they were range animals, soft from the grass feed, and the stiff climb after the first headlong run had taken a good deal out of them.

"You can lie as fast as I can," Jim mused. "But you aint original." Aloud he said: "Hosses is hard to find, off their own range."

"They'll do well to carry us through to Davis Wells," Curt told himself. He shrugged his shoulders. Time enough to worry about such things when they came up. He turned his thoughts to pleasanter matters. While they were at the spring she had let drop her name, telling of the days when she had been a little girl. He repeated it to himself.

"Elisa." It had a pleasant sound. And then he said it again, wishing that he could speak it aloud—that he could call her by it only once. Strange, how she had come across his path there at Shannon's last night, just as he was on the last lap of his flight from her father and his men, with the country ahead where he could ride secure. And now he was on his way back. . . .

Maybe when they reached Davis Wells, there would be some one who could ride on and bring the warning to her father. Then he could leave her and turn again into the west. There was the chance. Yet he found himself looking at her and wishing—

He frowned; such wishes as that were impossible. And every mile he traveled now brought him more deeply into the land of those who sought his life. If he got as far as Davis Wells, he would be lucky to escape a second time.

The sun was high. Noon was within the hour. And they were coming up a long easy slope, nearing the summit. His mind snapped back to the present.

THE road lay off to their left. For some time past they had been almost within sight of it; for they had left the trail which joined it farther back. The line-riders' cabin should be close by. He called to Elisa, and she drew rein.

Then he dismounted and crept to the top of the rise; and when he looked down, the cabin lay beneath him, less than a quarter of a mile away. He came back to the place where he had left her.

"No one about the place," he said. "And most likely, if they have got word, they will be watching the road. But you can't tell."

Then to himself he added:

"This is what comes of mooning. You'll do better to keep your mind on business from now on."

They were a long time in making the detour, and the sun was swinging down toward the western summits when they descended the long slopes into the east once more. He noticed that her horse was stumbling, and that the reins were slack in her hand; and he remembered how she had not eaten that morning nor the night before.

"It's going to be hard lines for you, Elisa," he said to himself, and he spurred up to her. She looked into his face and she smiled, but there was that in the smile that told him it had been hard to muster up.

"You'll get a good rest at Davis Wells," he said.

"Will you"—she hesitated before she said the last words—"go on?"

"Why, yes, of course." And when he said it, he realized how much it meant. Yet if he had it to say again, it would have been the same.

Now in the waning of the afternoon there was but little speech between them. The shadows lengthened, and the horses grew more jaded as the slow miles passed behind.

The punishment of downhill riding was beginning to tell on the girl; more than once Curt saw her swaying in the huge ill-fitting saddle. And when the dusk was creeping up the long slopes, they turned to seek the wagon-road. Twilight was deep before they came to the pair of ruts, and he dismounted to look for tracks.

"One man ahead of us," he told her. "And he's riding fast." She did not answer, and he glanced up quickly. "You're all right?" he cried.

"All right,"—but her voice shook a little, and when he swung into the saddle, he was swearing to himself at the country and the men whose hard ways had brought her to such a pass.

"Only another hour now, and you can rest," he announced cheerfully.

"Do you think that man is far ahead of us?" she asked.

"Can't say." He strove to hide his own anxiety when he made the answer.

"Get a fresh horse. That's the idea," he was thinking. "If it wasn't for that, I could let her ride in alone, and I could slip by without their seeing me. But I have got to make the change if I go through with this." He shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe there's no one there who knows me. It's time my luck took a turn."

And when they came to Davis Wells a good hour later, it seemed as if fortune had made up her mind to treat him kindly; for the only man to show himself was a Mexican stable-hand whom he had never seen before.

IN the New Mexican night the place seemed a replica of Shannon's: the same clump of cottonwoods whose leaves were forever whispering dryly in answer to the stirring breeze; the same windmill creaking drearily without pause; and the long low adobe building with its flat roof and the lamplight flowing from the open doorway. Curt had lifted Elisa down from the saddle, and she would have fallen if he had not held her in his arms. Then she uttered a broken cry, and the resemblance to that fly-bitten station where they had met the night before was gone. For a woman was standing in the doorway.

She was as sun-dried as a strip of rawhide, and her lean bronzed arms were bare to the elbows; her pale hair was

skewed into a tight knot; but that cry transformed her, and when she ran forth to the hitching-rack where they were standing, her worn face was alight, and her eyes were glorified. She snatched the girl from Curt's arms, and bore her off as if she were a little child. The Mexican was starting away with the animals. Curt overtook him.

"Change that saddle to a fresh horse and make it quick." And then as the other hurried off to the corral, he turned back to the door. The two women were within now. He could hear their voices. He stood there in the shadow of the building; there was something comforting in the sounds which came from beyond that lighted threshold.

"She's all right now." And with the thought, he squared his shoulders and faced what lay ahead of him.

One thing at a time, and take them as they come! But what to do now?

LUCK was on his side. No one about, to recognize his face. And that was as much as he had a right to ask of fortune, for this was Lee Scott's range, and Lee Scott was hunting him. The word would be out. And there were plenty of men who knew him, hereabouts. At any moment one might come.

Easy enough to do the safe thing—step to that door and say three words to her. He could hear the soft thud of hoofs approaching through the darkness. The horse was coming now. Just say: "I'm riding west." And then clear out.

There would be those about who could carry on the word for her. And if there were none—or if the rider who was summoned, lost the race—what matter then?

It crossed his mind—the day he had set forth, when Jim came riding to the little rock house and brought the warning, and the promise he had made when he rode away:

"Some day I'll pay you back, and pay Hank Shaefer—and Lee Scott too!"

The horse was here. He took the reins and stepped to the pathway of light before the open door. He did not look within. He only said: "All right. I'm off."

Then he swung into the saddle and he rode away into the east.

What was to come of it he did not know. He did not even try to see. Time enough to face it when it came. And in the meanwhile he was going to keep his faith with her.

CHAPTER IX

IT happened that Jim Thorp was up early the next morning, hunting for some colts that had strayed from his little pasture, and the tracks which he was following took him westward into the breaks where the first mesa rose from the valley floor. The sun was still hanging close to the eastern skyline when he rode forth from one of the steep-walled arroyos which gashed the low bluffs, and drew rein upon a rim-rock promentory, to scan the landscape for some sign of the fugitives. The ears of his mount went forward, and Jim's eyes followed the movement. What he saw caused him to ride back at once into the gulch.

There were two reasons for his retreat: one was the caution which had stuck with him since the wild years when he had ridden with a rifle across his saddlebow; the other was a deep dislike for Hank Shaefer, manager of the L.S. And whom Jim disliked he distrusted always.

Like many other men who spend most of their time alone, Jim had fallen into the habit of talking to his horse. So now he confided in the animal:

"Yesterday afternoon he rides by, headed west, and now he shows up here. Where did he stay las' night?"

That was a pertinent question, for the nearest stopping-place this side of the river was Davis Wells; and it was a good forty miles away.

"Which you and I know," Jim went on, "he done slep' out. And that within two hours' ride of the home ranch!" He was silent for some moments. "He was alone yesterday. Now there is two of them. I wonder who this party is, that Shaefer has got to dry-camp beside the road all night, to wait for him?"

He was a seasoned hand, and the methods of such men as Hank Shaefer held no appeal to him; he had no desire to mix up in their affairs one way or the other. And after what had come and gone in this immediate neighborhood, he had a pretty definite idea that he would do well by himself if he were to keep his knowledge of this meeting undiscovered. For the time being he lost interest in the errant colts; and when he rode back to the store, he kept to the low ground where there was no danger of his being seen.

AS to the man whom he had sighted in the company of the L.S. manager, there had been no opportunity for any

knowledge beyond the fact that he was a little man. But horses betray their peculiarities at a greater distance than their riders; and the animal which carried the stranger was a sorrel with a blaze of white upon its face. This fact Jim took homeward with him.

He was sitting on the porch before the little store an hour later, and he had put aside the belted six-shooter which he had worn, after the manner of all men when they went forth into the open hereabouts. He was whittling a slat of yellow pine, when Hank Shaefer came riding across the flat. The L.S. manager drew rein and crooked his leg across the saddle-horn as he bestowed his customary salutation of the country.

"Howdy!"

Jim nodded, and responded with a noncommittal grunt.

"Nice mo'nin'." Shaefer stroked his ropelike mustache, and his eyes wandered briefly to the west whence he had come.

Jim made no reply; nor did his face betray the slightest enthusiasm—in which he was quite justified, for the sun was already getting down to a hard day's work, and the wind that was bending the branches of the cottonwoods was like the blast from an overheated furnace. He continued looking straight ahead, as if he were oblivious of the other's backward glance—and of the horseman who showed far off within a swirling wisp of gray dust, where the mesa came down to the valley flats.

No social climber ever received a more pointed snub from one of her sex.

Hank Shaefer tugged at his mustache, and there was a line between his brows; but even in these days it needed more of an excuse than that to beget violent action in this part of New Mexico, and he had his own reasons for wanting peace just now. So he went on:

"Been ridin' out into the hills, I see."

That, Jim told himself, would be the near-by tracks in all probability. And he found voice now:

"Looking for them colts of mine. They done broke out ag'in las' night. I was up-river combin' down the brush."

The other took a plug from his hip pocket and worried off a good-sized chew. When he had tucked this within his cheek, he dismounted leisurely and dropped the reins over the hitching-rack.

"Me," he announced, "I have been out all night long. Done lost my best saddle-hoss; and some of the boys said he was on this side of the river." He swore. "I wouldn't take five hundred dollars for that hoss."

"Which yo' can lie as fast as I can," Jim mused. "But yo' shore aint anyways original." Aloud he said:

"Hosses is hard to find, once they get off their own range."

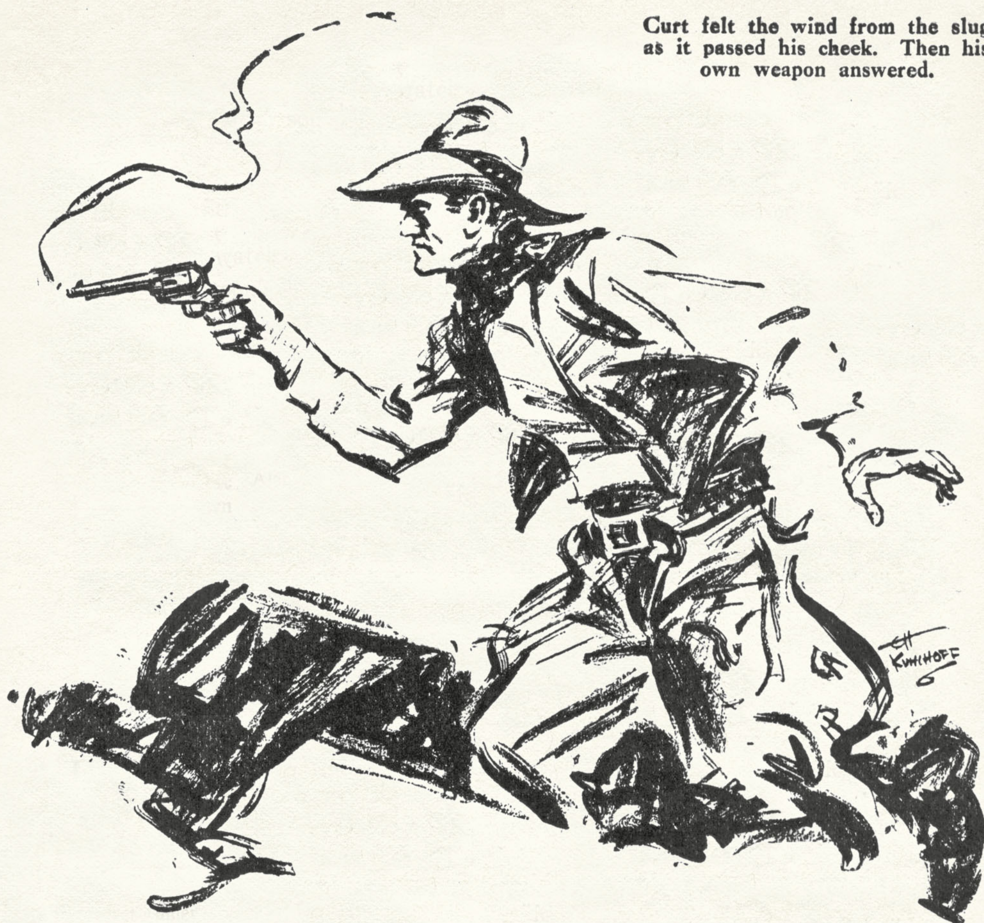
Shaefer's eyes roved to the west. The rider was drawing nearer now. His horse was a sorrel with a white blaze on its face. Jim looked into the east, where another dust-cloud showed.

His visitor came up the steps.

"Some of the boys asked me to pick up a few things for them if I happened to ride by this way," he said.

And they went within.

It would seem that the boys of whom Shaefer had spoken were out of many things, and that the manager of the L.S. had of a sudden grown extremely solicitous of his hired hands. No woman shopper at a drygoods counter ever took more time in her selections than he did this morning. But if this slowness roused any speculations on Jim's part, he showed no



Curt felt the wind from the slug as it passed his cheek. Then his own weapon answered.

sign; he had never been more adept in minding his business than he was now.

You would not have judged that he had a thought except for the shaving-soap which he was hunting, when the sound of unshod hoofs padding in the dust before the store reached the ears of those within. It was apparently by accident that he turned to face the doorway just in time to see the rider of the sorrel horse.

A little man, with a wisp of a black mustache and a face like a cat's. He went on past the building at the running walk.

"Me," Shaefer announced some minutes later, "I'm plumb out of chewing-tobacco."

Jim looked him calmly in the eye; and there was nothing in his face to indicate that he was putting two and two together. Which two and two consisted of the fresh plug that he had seen in the other's hand less than a half hour since, and the fact that the chewing-tobacco was behind the counter in the rear of the store.

"The flies," he said, "are raising hell." He stepped to the screen door and pulled it shut before he followed his customer to the end of the long counter. And he carried fresh food for thought.

For the horseman who had passed from the west, and who should have been across the river by this time, was nowhere in sight. And the dust-cloud which was coming from the east now revealed within its haze a two-horse buckboard. A man was on the driver's seat. It was too far for recognition, but Jim knew the rig from that former visit. The man would be Lee Scott.

Hank Shaefer pulled out a blue-and-white bandana handkerchief and mopped his brow. Jim busied himself cutting a strip of tobacco into plugs. By now, he was thinking, the buckboard should be making the crossing. And what of that rider who had come from the west? As he was wondering, there came the noise of rapid hoofs.

Another horseman, and he too was from the west. Hank Shaefer thrust his handkerchief into his pocket and hurried

toward the door. Jim shifted to the middle of the counter, where he kept his six-shooter. But before he gained that strategic position, and while the L.S. manager was still on his way to the front, the brief climax for which men and blind luck had been preparing for a long time past, was in full swing.

HERE in the roadway where Curt Huntoon was crowding his wearied horse to its utmost, the angle of vision was different than from within the store. So he saw more than Jim had seen.

It had been in his mind that when he reached Thorp's Crossing he would get a change of mounts, to finish the long last lap to the home ranch of the L.S. on the dead run; and so, if luck were with him, to arrive before it was too late for that warning which he brought. Now, when he was within the act of pulling up, his eyes took in the landscape which lay before him:

He saw the buckboard near the river's middle, and the man who was driving, a wide-shouldered man in a gray suit and broad-brimmed gray hat. And he saw the two woodpiles where the road came down to the ford on this side of the stream—the same woodpiles between which he and his young companions had ridden so blithely that other morning.

And behind one of them a man! It was the sound of Curt's horse that had brought this other from his hiding-place before the moment which he was awaiting with a rifle in his sweating hands.

And when Curt leaped from the saddle, they were face to face, with some twenty yards of open ground between them. The rifle came up to the man's hip, and its flat report drifted away on the hot breeze to awaken the echoes in the distant hills. Curt felt the wind from the slug as it passed his cheek; then his own weapon answered.

The horses plunged and veered in midstream. The driver strove to soothe them, the while he held the reins in one hand and groped for his six-shooter with the other. The rifle fell among the little bushes beside the woodpile, and Curt stood watching while its owner took a single step toward him, then sagged forward, as one who seeks for something on the earth in front of him, and fell upon his face.

Hank Shaefer had reached the door. It was the sound of his high heels upon the porch that made Curt turn. The movement came just as the L.S. foreman squeezed down on the trigger; and so the slug, that had been meant for Curt's back, midway between his shoulder-blades, caught him off balance when it plowed through his right side. He was falling as he fired; and the last thing of which he was conscious was the stab of pain which came when he strove to raise himself upon one arm. That caused him to sink back. But before it had come, he had a glimpse of Shaefer lying sprawled across the steps, his booted feet upon the porch, his head upon the beaten earth below.

And now when unconsciousness came upon Curt, there came with it a satisfaction which penetrated the mists of pain.

CHAPTER X

JIM THORP was standing in front of his store door, and his old revolver was in his hand when Lee Scott drove up the near bank. The tall cattle-man eased the horses past the woodpile where the dead man lay, and pulled up at the hitching-rack. He glanced at the body on the steps; then his eyes went to Curt.

"We'd better get him inside," he said quietly.

It took some time; and after they had laid him on Jim's bed in the little room behind the store, the two of them were too busy with such first aid as they could give to do much talking. When they finally faced each other, Scott asked:

"Isn't this Huntoon—the man that I was hunting for the other day?"

Thorp nodded.

"Think he'll live?" Scott asked.

"The way it looks to me, that slug went through and never touched his lung." Jim's voice was cold. "Now that yo've found him, what do yo' aim to do?"

Scott smiled. "Send for a doctor first. Then get the sheriff." He saw Jim's brows draw close together, and he went on evenly: "There's more in this than you understand."

He told the story then; and because his hearer knew the men who were involved, he did not need to use more than twenty words. Later, repeating it to Curt, he went into details. By that time the doctor had come and gone, and the sheriff had made his visit, to depart elsewhere; they had brought Elisa from Davis Wells, and she was at the home ranch. The two new wooden headboards under the cottonwoods were weathering in the hot dry air beside the four which

had already begun to turn gray since last spring. Pete Albright had hastily left New Mexico for parts unknown. Curt's wound was healing; for Jim's diagnosis had proved correct, and the good luck which had attended him from the beginning of the whole affair—disguised most of the time, as good luck often is—had seen to it that no infection followed.

LEE SCOTT sat on the edge of the bed where the invalid was propped up, and he went straight to the point.

"The way that things turned out, it's just as well I didn't find you when I was on your trail. For if I had, there'd have been several trials, and it would have cost the county a heap of money. Besides, there's no telling how the juries would have decided. Sometimes—and this was one—a six-shooter settles things better than the courts can." He took time out to roll and light a cigarette.

"Since I've owned the L.S., there's been no profit from the place—because of stealing. And the reports I got said that it was the neighbors who were doing the rustling. The small cow-men. . . . All right—"

He squared his shoulders, and he looked Curt between the eyes.

"I believed it for a long time. And it cost some good men their lives, because I did. That can't be helped now. But I was like a good many other absent owners—I was a fool."

With that off his mind, he seemed to feel a little better and he went on:

"It was last spring—when I got the news of the killing here—that I made up my mind to take hold myself. It was my idea to straighten out matters, to weed out the rustlers and to clean up things in general. So I came here, and one of the first things I did was to hire a good lawyer.

"It wasn't long after I got here that I found out that I'd been made a fool of. I've been in the cattle-business since I was a boy, and I've learned to know what's going on without asking many questions—that is, when I'm on the ground.

"That's why I was looking for you, the day I came here. I wanted you for a witness. Well, as I said, that's just as well, the way it turned out. There were more things going on than I knew myself, and they were moving fast.

"For one thing, my manager was beginning to see the way the land lay. And he was getting busy on his own account. He had his skin to save, and he had others to look after, or they might turn against him. One of those others was Pete Albright.

"The stealing had been carried out on a big scale—so big that it was taking all the profits. Albright was selling beef to the two Army posts and making a good thing of it. He was the ringleader. Shaefer furnished him with a good many of my cattle—and blamed the loss on the small cow-men. It was the same old game that's been played from the Rio Grande to the Yellowstone, on nearly every range.

"So, when Shaefer found out they were suspected, he watched more carefully. And he learned that Judge Buck was coming to the home ranch. I suppose he thought that it was Buck who had the evidence; and likely Albright thought the same. As a matter of fact, he was coming to talk it over with me and pass his opinion on what steps should be taken. But anyhow, Albright made up his mind to do away with him. And when that was handled, it happened that you were coming along in time to see it.

"The rest, I think, you understand." He bent his eyes on Curt. "I got the story from my daughter—what you did and how you did it. She didn't know, of course, how much that meant to you —to turn back when you did, and to ride on to warn me."

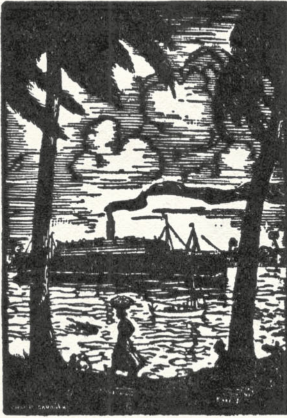
He paused, and there was one of those awkward moments which come when one man is trying to express his feeling for another's help in time of need. Then he extended his hand and took Curt's.

"You did a lot for me," he said.

SO Curt heard the tale; and it would be in accordance with the way things should turn out—the way all of us like them—if Elisa had come to his bedside then, to nurse him back to strength. But she was at the home ranch, two hours' ride away. And he did not see her for some time thereafter.

That was when he was in the saddle once more. And he was riding his own small range, handling his own cattle, which had been turned back to him from the scattered herds of the L.S. And the visit which he made then does not belong, by rights, to this story, for it begins another; and this other tale holds no wild adventure; it is the simple story of a happy courtship.

THE END.



REAL EX-

Most of us have been through at least one tremendously exciting experience. Here five of your fellow-readers tell of theirs. (For details of our prize offer for these stories see page 3.)

The Typhoon

ON September 26th, 1900, a telegram from the Adjutant General's Office in Washington reached me at Pagosa Springs, Colorado, ordering me to San Francisco to take charge of the transport *Leelanaw* sailing with a cargo of horses and mules urgently needed in Manila for operations in Northern Luzon against the forces of Aguinaldo.

Arriving in San Francisco, I reported to the depot quartermaster, Colonel Oscar F. Long, whom I had known well at West Point and elsewhere. Long and I both personally supervised the building of the stalls and superstructures. It took about three weeks to get ready. The cargo consisted of two hundred and thirty-six mules and fourteen horses belonging to officers of the 8th U. S. Infantry.

Our personnel consisted of the ship's Captain Storrs, an old Navy man of wide experience with hurricanes, pamperos, and other sea-storms. The Chief Engineer, Evers, was a good second to the Captain. There was a crew of about twenty-six, while my officers and men numbered over seventy.

Sailing day—October 10th—came and the mules and horses were quietly led aboard, each to a stall of strong planking, well padded with hay and burlap, and with excellent arrangements for feeding and watering.

We reached Honolulu on October 21st, on the 26th we reloaded our animals and sailed forth again.

On November 14th we passed a black basaltic peak which the Captain remarked was near the deepest part of the Pacific, and added that we were about three days from Manila.

The next day—the 15th—the Captain seemed anxious; during dinner he turned to me and said worriedly: "I have never seen anything like it—the mercury is dropping clear to the bottom of the barometer, and it looks as if we are going to have a storm. I suggest that you have your men stand by and see that every animal is secured in his stall."

Though the sea was smooth, the sun about to set as usual, and outside of that queerly acting barometer no external indications of anything happening out of the usual routine, I at once ordered my men to their stations. This was done quickly and quietly. Suddenly a jet-black curtain seemed lowered over the sun, a roar came over the sea apparently from every direction, and the ship was shifted as if by some titanic force rapidly fore and aft, which downed most of the animals; then quickly from right to left, which left my men clinging to uprights or anything near. This was accompanied by a din as of a thousand demons, as the terrific force of a hundred-mile-per-hour wind blew over the tops of the waves, shaving them off and throwing the spray so high that we were submerged. I was holding onto the hatch coaming looking into the after hatch, lashed with a rope to the mainmast, when I saw the body of a mule which had been thrown out of its stall, start from one end of the hold and rising two feet off the floor proceed as if by levitation the full length of the hold to smash against the bulkhead at the other end, catching a teamster's foot as it proceeded and mashing it badly. How the man escaped instant death no one knew. I saw that human effort was futile, and ordered the men out of the holds. As they painfully crawled to their cabin, the leaders told me that practically every animal was lost, either drowned—on the upper deck—or with legs or backs broken, though still in their stalls, except in a few cases. By seven-thirty it seemed doubtful if even we would sur-

PERIENCES

An army officer tells what happened when one of the worst storms in history (Barometer 27.90!) struck the ship upon which he was in charge of a cargo of mules for the Philippines.

By THOMAS CRUSE

Brigadier General, Retired, U. S. A.

vive, for the storm seemed to increase in fury until nine o'clock. Then a man rushed up from the engine-room and said that two of the firemen had been tossed bodily on the front of the red-hot furnace and were badly burned. Could I send some men to pass coal? I called for volunteers and ten men went down in the stokehole.

As my cabin was awash, I crawled up to the bridge, where I saw the Captain and second officer lashed to stanchions assisting the helmsman. Then as the ship gave a quick lurch, the helmsman was torn loose from the wheel and thrown out the door. He disappeared utterly and we supposed he was lost in the raging sea. The Captain and second officer grabbed the wheel and held her steady until another man came up. The helmsman did not go overboard, however, but the peculiar movements of the boat carried him through the ladder opening, thence to the lower deck, where he washed about senseless until the first officer in the hand-steering-gear room noticed him, and reaching out, pulled him in. He was senseless for ten hours, but ultimately recovered.

When I related this story in Manila and showed the erratic and apparently impossible course of this man as he reached the lower deck, without breaking his arms or legs, my reputation for veracity fell almost to zero with my listeners!

About two minutes afterward the Captain turned to me, and pointing to the barometer, said, "What do you read it?" The light was over the instrument, so the figures were plain, and I said "27.90"—unaware of the amazing thing that I was witnessing. Soberly he assented. "Yes, but if we ever reach shore and tell people of such a reading, they will say we are liars; such things cannot be!"

Finally, about ten-thirty, the disturbance seemed to be abating. By midnight the terrifying lurching of the ship had quieted down and at daylight we were floating about, having been blown more than seventy miles off our course. Now we were faced with a new peril—the waves, the tops of which had been leveled during the storm, now commenced to rage mountain-high, and we had many narrow escapes when thousands of tons of water came aboard and it seemed we would never emerge.

All during the typhoon, the first officer and two of his best men had remained by the hand-steering-gear below the bridge. Just before noon I heard a terrific crash, followed by a grinding noise. The steam steering-gear had stripped every cog in the quadrant! The mate and his men grabbed the big hand-wheel just in time to prevent the ship from slamming broadside on into one of the big combers, which certainly would have sent us to the bottom. . . .

When we were clearing up the ship on the 17th, we found one mule in the fore-peak, still alive—the sole survivor of our cargo of animals. He was coddled in every way, and on the fifth day after the typhoon he got on his feet and nibbled a little hay. He was still standing as we rounded Corregidor into Manila Bay, but just as we dropped anchor he fell over and died instantly. Manila had a great joke about the *Leelanaw* arriving with a cargo of one mule. In fact, we arrived without one animal; our pet was fed to the sharks of Manila Bay.

Perhaps the barometer reading may be better understood when I state that the Weather Bureau shows the lowest ever recorded on the Atlantic Coast is 28.32—therefore our reading of 27.90 was incredibly lower.

The extraordinary and heroic battle put up by a peccary against an ocelot is vividly described in this unusual tale.

By
MORLEY DONALD CAMERON

A Gladiator Unafraid

THE fighting heart! Out of the caves of our primitive ancestors, and up through the dim struggling ages, these three words have ever sounded a responsive chord within the souls of men...

With another engineer, I was the guest of a *mandador*, or overseer, on a fruit-ranch in the interior of Central America. This friend of ours was interested in cattle raising, particularly the crossing of native stock with bulls imported from India. These cross-bred cattle seem to be immune from ticks, as well as sundry other tropical diseases; for that reason, the calves are valuable.

Our host complained bitterly about the ravages that jungle killers had been inflicting among his herds. Not only had the huge jaguars slain numerous cattle, but panthers and leopardlike ocelots had also visited him. These fierce marauders had become so bold that they had of late even raided the calf-pens which were close to the house.

The second night of our visit we were awakened by shots close by. Rushing to the window, we saw our host running toward the pens. He had attached a floodlamp to the porch, and in the glaring light we could see him blazing away into the darkness beyond the corrals. Grabbing our rifles, we rushed out and joined him.

"What was it, old man?" I inquired.

Our host spoke tersely: "Jaguar." Then he added disconsolately:

"Big fellow, he was—got a few shots at him as he lifted a calf plumb over the corral fence, but I missed him, I guess."

We kept a sharp watch until dawn, but nothing further occurred. After breakfast, Ed Newton, my companion, suggested that we follow the trail of the big cat. We found it ended in a clearing less than half a mile from the corral. The killer had eaten but little of the calf, and we were careful to keep away from the carcass.

Returning to the ranch, we borrowed the floodlight with its battery, and retraced our steps to the clearing. There were numerous trees around the glade, so we selected a ceiba having two large branches growing close together. These limbs overlooked the entire clearing, and were about fifteen feet from the ground. Our next move was to cut saplings and build a crude platform upon the branching limbs.

Just before dark we climbed the ceiba tree. We matched pennies for first shot, and Ed won. Then we settled ourselves to wait. Hour followed hour, and the nocturnal jungle life began to stir and slink all around us—but no jaguar.

It was about two-thirty when we heard a peculiar, guttural sound in the darkness on the other side of the clearing. It sounded like *"Hoo-omph! Hoo-omph!"*

The tangled wall of jungle growth suddenly parted, and out into the moonlight ambled—a wild boar! His huge foreshoulders, and compact, muscular body appeared to be almost out of proportion to the slender legs; while the massive, white-streaked head ended in an ugly snout. This snout told its own story. It was armed on either side by glistening four-inch tusks that gleamed ominously in the rays of the moon.

As we watched the black peccary abruptly lifted his snout, and gave vent to a challenging, *"Hoomph! Hoo-omph!"*

The gruntlike battle-cry had barely ceased, when we saw the head and shoulders of another animal entering the clearing through the same path by which the peccary had arrived. A long, sinuous body, spotted like a leopard, followed the shoulders, and with tail swishing nervously—a full-grown ocelot bounded into the glade!

"That's an awful big ocelot," muttered Ed. "I thought he was a young jaguar, at first. . . Boy, that's a smart pig!"

"What's smart about it?" I inquired.

"Why, that boar knew the ocelot was after him," replied Ed. "And he knew he wouldn't have any chance in the bush—couldn't shake the big tom-cat—so he used his bean, and got him out into the open.... The cat's closin' in on him!"

Sure enough, the agile ocelot was circling the peccary. Belly to the ground, every rippling muscle tense, and with tail switching jerkily, the spotted killer was opening hostilities. I felt rather sorry for the stout-hearted peccary. Every advantage was against him, but the boar did not seem to be conscious of the fact; he appeared to be absolutely unafraid. As his opponent circled warily, the tusked peccary wheeled with each move, and faced the snarling menace defiantly.

Abruptly the ocelot sprang, but fell short by three feet. He did not attempt to reach the peccary, but seemed to be feeling out the pig's defense. Again the lithe cat flashed through the air, but ended his leap within two feet of the peccary. Obviously he was attempting to goad the boar into charging, but the grizzled old porker refused to be caught napping. He stood his ground—and waited. Twice more the snarling killer feinted. He was trying to make an opening for his lightning-like spring—but he had too much respect for those menacing tusks, to rush in and take his chances.

Suddenly the spotted feline adopted a new line of attack. He would double in his tracks with such rapidity that we could hardly follow his movements in the dim light. He would leap in and out—trying to dazzle the boar, and catch him off balance. Speed—and still more speed—but turn and twist as he would the peccary matched every move with whirling speed of his own. Always the vicious ocelot found that battle-front of needle-like ivory fronting his attack.

Closer and closer came the flying cat; and now he appeared to be concentrating on the legs of the wild pig. He was attempting to knock the tusked porker off balance as he pivoted on his slender hind legs. But it was all to no avail. The footwork of the battling boar was too nimble.

Whirling like a boxer, the wild pig spun around to meet the fast-changing, and bewildering attack of the leaping, feinting ocelot—but as the cat flew in from a sudden angle, the boar slipped! It was only for the split fraction of a second that he was off balance, his side exposed to the snarling cat—but it was long enough. Like the whistle of a rapier, the lithe killer sailed through the moonlight!

NEVER let anyone tell you a peccary is slow. Even while the cat was in the air, this one snapped his powerful head and shoulders sidewise like a striking snake. Still struggling to regain his balance, and before the ocelot could swerve, the tusked porker ripped through the outspread paws with his armed snout, and a scream of agony from the big cat proved that the boar had scored heavily. Then—eighty pounds of spotted viciousness landed on the back of the battling peccary.

"Good night, pig!" growled Ed. "He's a goner—or nope, not yet! The cat's too far back—see, he's tryin' to get at the pig's neck!"

Sure enough, the blood-smeared ocelot was attempting to shift his grip on the madly plunging peccary, in order to reach the throat of his bristly foe—but the foxy old boar had other plans. As the clinging cat, with snapping jaws and tearing claws, moved to reach the jugular vein, the wild pig abruptly threw himself completely over—with the squirming feline underneath. It was all that I could do to refrain from cheering, as the spotted killer, with a screech of pain, released his grip, and struggled free. For a moment the

wind was knocked out of him, and the alert boar raked him twice with punishing tusks—before the cat could get out of reach. Badly hurt, the ocelot retreated.

By this time, we were limp with excitement and suspense. All sport-followers hope to see the underdog put up a brave battle, even if he is not expected to win—but so far, the fighting peccary had more than held his own. The natural odds were all with the ocelot, but the blazing courage of the battling pig had roused our hopes.

Now the panting contestants faced each other at a distance of ten feet. Both were severely wounded, and exhausted by the speed and ferocity with which they had fought. Great hunks of torn flesh hung from the tusked porker where the terrible teeth and claws of the killer had slashed and torn. On the ocelot, great dark gashes showed lividly on his spotted hide where the tusker had ripped him open. I decided to end the fight, and raised my rifle—intending to get the ocelot first, but Ed grabbed my arm.

"Nix, old-timer," he hissed in my ear, "This scrap will bring that jaguar here if he's anywhere near, while the shot might scare him. Lay off!"

Meanwhile both fighters had been getting their second wind, and for a minute, there was an intense hush over the bizarre scene. Then the maddened ocelot crouched once more for his spring. This time, there were no preliminaries—no feinting. Gathering his rippling muscles together, he tensed his powerful legs beneath his body—and launched himself with savage directness at the peccary.

THE badly injured boar side-stepped to avoid the hurtling danger, but his ghastly wounds tricked him—he was a trifle slow, and although the flying cat failed to land squarely on his back, he struck the wild pig a glancing blow on the shoulder. The force behind the spring knocked the boar off his feet, while the spotted feline was thrown to one side by the impact.

The quick cat was first to his feet, and as if propelled by coiled steel springs, the jungle killer leaped at his prostrate enemy. It was at this vital moment that the dauntless peccary sprung the biggest surprise of the strange battle.

As the blood-crazed ocelot was nearly upon him, he appeared to spin like a top, and in the twinkling of an eye, came up from the ground. To our amazement, the nimble porker seemed to literally pop out of the grass—pivoting on his hind legs. So rapidly that we could barely follow his movements, that upward, twisting action brought him almost underneath the flying menace, and for a second, the body of the cat hid the ugly head—and needle-pointed tusks. He actually impaled that big ocelot on his armed snout while it was in mid air!

IN one breath-taking moment the fight was over, and with a last toss of his powerful head and shoulders, the wild boar threw the disemboweled killer to one side, as if it had been a sack of old rags. The dying ocelot dragged his frightfully ripped body a few feet, and keeled over—dead! The winner was in almost as bad shape, but nevertheless, bracing himself on wabbling legs, he sent forth a triumphant battle-cry: *"Hoomph! Hoo-hoomph!"*

Then he collapsed; but that fighting heart brought him to his feet again. With unsteady legs, and swaying body, he lifted his torn head—from which the flesh hung in bloody ribbons—and sounded again his defiant challenge.

Ed grasped my arm fiercely, as he rasped, "What's he lookin' at?"

I strained my eyes toward the farther side of the glade, and saw the head and shoulders of an enormous jaguar entering the clearing. He was making straight for the dying but still grimly defiant peccary. I switched on the floodlight.

A dazzling blaze of light flooded the clearing. There, defiantly facing the terrible jaguar, was the torn and bleeding peccary—dying, but still grimly unconquered. A few feet away lay the mangled carcass of the dead ocelot. Last, but not least, was the huge jaguar—caught as if carved in marble by the blinding floodlight. The king of the jungle seemed frozen in the crouching posture he had taken for his leap at the tottering peccary.

In that brilliant illumination, the figures in the savage drama stood out like a cameo. Then abruptly, the heavy rifle at my side roared out its message, and the jaguar leaped high in the air with a scream that echoed weirdly through the tropical night. While he was in midair, the powerful rifle barked once more, and the gigantic jungle king fell in a huddled lump. The drama was ended—and yet, just as we leaped to our feet, the dying peccary weakly raised his mangled snout for a final challenge: *"Hoomph!"*

Then he slumped gently to the ground—and a fighting heart was forever stilled.

Within the Enemy Lines

Two signal-corps men stumble into the enemy trenches at night—and come back with a prisoner!

By

MARK TURRELL PATTIE

OF all the many talented men in the American army during the World War proficient in the art of expressing themselves profanely, General Blank—was perhaps the most brilliant, albeit the most vitriolic. As he said once before a company front: "I've been in this man's army more than forty-five years, and I know of more ways of making hell for you men than you could ever think of."

On a day late in October, 1918, our brigade moved forward into some German dugouts on a hillside north of Verdun after a grueling hike of fifteen kilometers. I was a sergeant in a signal detail attached to the brigade to maintain communications with other division units. It was late evening when we pulled in, dog-tired, muddy and hungry. The dugout assigned us was dark, cold and damp, but we found some broken-down German bunks and made ourselves as comfortable as possible.

We had been asleep perhaps half an hour when Lieutenant Smith, in charge of our detail, normally a mild, easy-going person, came tearing in like a wild man. He had just come, we learned later, from a brief interview with the General and was so crazed with anger that he stuttered.

"Ev-ev-everybody out!" he shouted. "The G-g-general tells me that he must have c-c-communication with the 318th B-B-Brigade t-t-tonight! You men must put that l-l-line through to Etraye right away. If it's not through by m-m-morning, I'll have every d-damned one of you shot at sunrise! Now g-get g-going!"

We didn't stop to argue the matter—a war was on and it was quite possible for anything to happen in those days.

A full spool of artillery wire weighs about a hundred and fifty pounds and is a heavy load for two strong men. Eight of us took four spools of wire, carrying them between us by means of poles thrust through the cores, and set out to lay wire to the other brigade, a distance of ten kilometers. Another man remained behind at a switchboard to await word when we tested through. The night was black, with the usual drizzle.

As the Germans were but a scant kilometer beyond, we were forbidden to use lights and cautioned to silence.

It is difficult enough to put through a line in daylight, but when you cannot see and the ground beneath is a maze of shell holes and trenches, with all manner of débris lying about, it becomes something akin to one of the labors of Hercules. By the time we had progressed a half kilometer we were a sorry mess.

One man of my detail finally collapsed from sheer weariness, and I left him with one of the others to assist him back to the dugout.

Shortly afterward we stumbled across a trench that seemed to lead in the direction of the 318th, and we strung our line alongside. By the time we had unreeled three spools the rest of us were ready to drop also. Just then we came upon the outlines of a dugout roof and I felt sure we had reached our destination. We were on the side of a hill from which the huts projected. A duck-board walk ran along the bottom of the trench in front of the huts. I realized if we laid the wire there it would be tripped over and in the way. To avoid trouble we must lay the wire behind the dugouts, I decided.

With Private Vaughn on the other side, I took hold of the last full spool. We started up the grade, gritting our teeth and panting. We had just gone far enough to turn laterally when I stumbled

and let go the pole. Vaughn was too weak to hold onto the spool alone. The heavy object started rolling. It struck the bare elephant tin roof of the hut with a crash, sounding like the direct hit of a bomb. We held our breath while the iron spool crashed on down into the trench below.

Some one shouted within the hut. A moment later we heard the door fly open and a guttural voice: *"Was ist es?"*

My knowledge of German had been acquired in high school, most of which I had forgotten, but there was no mistaking the words that had just been uttered. Unwittingly we had crossed the German lines and were in enemy territory! To put it mildly, we were in a hell of a fix.

For several seconds none of us dared breathe. Then we heard shouts farther down the trench. The unseen individual below bellowed an order. In a moment the whole place was in an uproar.

"Get your guns loose and beat it quick!" I called to the detail in a hoarse whisper. "Back the way we came—follow the wire! But don't shoot unless you have to!"

A MAD scramble ensued. In the darkness we tripped and skidded over everything possible. Our progress was anything but orderly, yet we managed to reach more level ground and leg it out of immediate danger. We sprinted for about a hundred yards before all of us, as if by common consent, pulled up to catch our breath. Though we could hear voices far in the rear, apparently no one followed.

"All here?" I gasped.

"Where's Vaughn?" some one asked.

"Wait here a minute," I said. "I'll take a look. Maybe he's fallen and hurt himself."

Gripping my automatic tightly, I started back. I was too spent to run. When I failed to find Vaughn by the time I had nearly reached the dugouts again, I became thoroughly alarmed.

I approached the place cautiously where we had dropped the spool of wire. Excited voices still chattered a short distance away. Then a few feet ahead I heard the muffled sound of bodies thrashing about; now and then a grunt; the thud of fists landing against flesh. I ran forward. Two men were struggling on the ground like wild animals.

"Is that you, Vaughn?" I asked as loudly as I dared.

"Yeah!" came the panting answer. "Get—this damned—Kraut—off me! He's—" Vaughn's words were suddenly choked off.

It was difficult to see. I was fearful of striking Vaughn, but I leaped into action. With one hand I found his assailant's head, with the other I crashed the steel barrel of my forty-five against his skull. Without a sound the German relaxed. Vaughn scrambled to his feet.

"Come on—get out of here!" I whispered in his ear.

"Okay!" Vaughn started to follow; then he suddenly halted. "Say—how about taking him back with us?"

"You're crazy!" I almost shouted. "We're lucky to get out of this ourselves without being shot."

"Aw, come on, Sarge!" he pleaded.

Despite the imminent danger, I couldn't help a feeling of admiration for Vaughn's spunk. Just escaped from the clutches of a foe who wanted to kill him, he was ready for further excitement. I was about to agree, when—

"Get down!" Vaughn enforced his words by giving me a violent shove. Unquestioningly I obeyed. Both of us hugged the earth as though an impending shell threatened. We turned our faces downward to make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible. Guttural voices sounded near at hand. Out of the corners of our eyes we caught the gleam of flashlights. The fact we were all but unrecognizable from mud and slime must have been our salvation. Nature's camouflage, as it were.

In a moment the searchers passed on. We waited a little longer, then got to our feet. Between us, we dragged the still unconscious German down the hill till we came upon our detail, who had become uneasy and started to our aid.

IT was just breaking daylight when we reached headquarters again. We must have presented a ludicrous sight with our dirty faces and mud-covered uniforms. All of us were nearly ready to drop from exhaustion, but we still had our prisoner. He came to, shortly after we found the rest of our detail, and we forced him to stumble along with the rest.

In our weariness we felt we would have welcomed being shot at sunrise—but no such dubious blessing occurred. Five minutes later we were all sound asleep, and an hour afterward the 318th detail put the connecting line through.

Earthquakes to Order

An oil prospector uses a man-made earthquake to defend himself against a herd of wild cattle.

By THOMAS M. NELSON

IN the summer of 1926 I had an experience, every vivid detail of which is fixed in my memory for life; and as in retrospect I relive those few frantic seconds, I marvel that I came through alive and intact, for all the odds were against me.

I was working with a field seismograph party for one of the major oil companies in the Texas Gulf Coast fields. In that region oil is found usually in association with geologic structures known as salt domes. These are gigantic plugs of rock salt which have been forced toward the surface from some unknown, deeply buried stratum.

Portable seismographs are one of the many instruments used in the never-ending search for these sources of black gold. Charges of high-explosive, varying with conditions from ten to a thousand pounds, are detonated, and if the resulting vibrations pass through salt, the seismograph records the fact. It was my job to look after the explosives we used, supervise the loading of the holes, and to do the actual shooting of the charges.

A field party generally operates three seismographs in recording each shot. They are placed about a mile apart, fanwise, about the shooting-point, and a mile or more distant. Communication between the various seismograph stations and the shooting-point was maintained by compact, portable radios. So much for necessary explanation. . . .

On the day in question our first shot was to be fired in the center of a large pasture owned by a local cattle company—a perfectly flat, treeless field covering an entire section, or one square mile.

While my crew drilled a hole twenty feet deep with a specially constructed ground-auger, then tamped one hundred fifty pounds of nitro-gelatin into it, I set up the radio and other instruments at a distance of slightly more than a hundred yards and reeled out the detonating wire.

When the hole was finally loaded I switched on my transmitter to notify the seismograph stations that I was ready to fire. However, on establishing contact I was informed that one of the seismographs was out of order and that the shot would have to be delayed for about one hour, while repairs were being made.

Therefore, to save time on the next shot, I instructed the loading crew to drive on to the next location, two miles away, and get that hole loaded while we were waiting.

This they did; and when the men had departed with the truck, I sat down on an empty gelatin-case, lighted a cigarette and made myself as comfortable as the sun and ravenous salt marsh mosquitoes would permit.

AS we had driven into the pasture I had seen a large herd of cattle down near the southern fence line, but at the time gave them no more than cursory attention.

Now, as I sat waiting, I suddenly noticed that the herd had come much closer. It was now not more than three or four hundred yards away, and spread out in such a position that the loaded hole was directly between it and the point where I was sitting. With considerable misgiving I recognized the cattle as Texas Brahmas, a hybrid breed produced by crossing ordinary stock with the sacred cow of India. Brahmas are

bulky in build, with humped backs and pendulous dewlaps, and they possess the malignant disposition of a trampled rattlesnake.

I had listened to many lurid tales of what those ugly brutes had done to luckless men caught afoot. And there I sat —in almost the exact center of a six-hundred-forty-acre tract, with not a tree in sight and the nearest fence a good half mile away!

It dawned on me abruptly that I was in a mighty bad spot, and the hair on the back of my neck began to creep.

For the next fifteen minutes I forgot the sun and the mosquitoes, while I watched that herd drift closer and closer, and endeavored to make myself as inconspicuous as possible.

I could see that the cattle were in a vicious temper, and tortured by black swarms of flies and mosquitoes; the backs and flanks of the animals were literally plastered with those blood-hungry insects.

WITHIN a few more minutes the herd had milled to within two hundred yards of me.

I cudgeled my brain for some way out of my predicament, but no solution offered itself. If I sat where I was, it would be but a matter of time until the herd would be upon me. If I should resort to flight I would be run down and trampled into the earth before I could cover a quarter of the distance to the nearest fence.

Then it occurred to me like a flash that my one chance lay with the radio; I could call the nearest seismograph station, a mile away, and maybe one of the boys could get to me in a car before the herd saw me.

Slowly, scarcely moving lest a sudden movement on my part attract the attention of the cattle, I began to creep toward the transmitter.

At that instant an evil-looking old steer raised his head with a startled snort. In another second the entire herd was poised motionless, alert, staring fixedly in my direction.

For several interminable seconds the animals stood there, stationary. Then they began tossing their heads, pawing in the dust with sharp hoofs, and bellowing in low, menacing tones.

I halted, immobile—for I knew that, fundamentally suspicious of the unusual, vicious by nature, and goaded into a half-blind frenzy by the blood-sucking insects that swarmed over them, the slightest spark—or motion or sound—would precipitate those cattle into mad stampede.

JUST what furnished the spark I do not know, but in the space of another heart-beat the entire herd rolled into motion. Heads down, tails rigid, in a thunder of drumming hoofs the cattle stormed forward.

For a fraction of a second I remained frozen in petrified inaction. My heart seemed to well up into my throat and I gasped for breath.

Then my brain snapped again into action. . . . I saw my one chance in a thousand.

Lunging to my feet, I grasped the switch of the detonator and threw it over hard, unconsciously praying that there would not be a misfire.

A split-second—then the earth quaked; a gigantic mushroom of sand and clods and smoke, laced through by red and yellow flames, belched up almost under the noses of the charging herd. A deafening crash smashed against my eardrums.

The stampede was smothered. The cattle in the leading ranks reared back on their haunches in terror. Many were thrown violently to the ground. As that great crater, fuming with the smoke and gases of burned explosives, opened in its path, the stampeding herd folded back on itself.

The frantic animals milled madly in a heaving tangle, then many turned tail and fled.

Others quickly followed, as a rain of clods descended on their backs. Ten seconds after its start the stampede was turned into wild retreat—a retreat which did not end until the southern fence was reached.

After that hair-raising experience I always kept my car near by, a ready means of retreat should such a necessity again arise.

AMUSINGLY enough, however, after the company claim agent had made a settlement for several damaged steers, I received a heated criticism from one of the company officials, denouncing my negligence in creating a situation that might have involved the company in a damage suit with the cattle-owners. Just that—regardless of the fact that the company had many millions of dollars, whereas I had but one skin!

An undergraduate physician is faced with a desperate dilemma in a Maine woods camp—and saves a friend's life.

By DR. PETER BROWNING

"Go Ahead, Pete!"

TO be told that one's lungs show an x-ray picture suggesting tuberculosis is not very pleasant. But that was my lot at the completion of my third year in medical school. The chest specialist advised giving up school and all kinds of work for at least a year.

During my early youth I had spent a lot of time in the woods, hunting and camping, so naturally my thoughts turned to that. It was easy to persuade an old hunting partner to go into the Maine woods with me for the autumn and winter. Keltz and I had always hunted together in younger days and knew each other thoroughly. We hired a cabin owned by a guide whom we knew, bought provisions, a canoe, guns and ammunition, and started out. The understanding was that I was to do no heavy work, so most of the paddling and portaging fell to Keltz.

We went about seventy miles into the woods from Greenville Junction at the northern end of Moosehead Lake. During hunting-season the big game which we secured furnished us with an adequate meat supply for sometime. Keltz put out a trap line and was unusually fortunate in securing a good catch of fur. In this way the autumn and early winter was passed. By Christmas I had gained markedly in strength and weight, and now I frequently accompanied Keltz on his trap line.

Up until the middle of January the snows had not been very heavy. But on January 17th a blizzard began. And Keltz that day became sick. He had severe cramps in his abdomen which became steadily worse.

From my medical training I knew what the diagnosis was: Appendicitis! Seventy miles from the nearest doctor, no method of communication, a blinding snowstorm raging outside, and no one to send for help or to leave with Keltz. Even if I could succeed in getting out—which was an utter impossibility in that storm—I could not hope to get medical aid before it would be too late.

I had my medical kit with me, containing a few minor surgical instruments and some medicines. An ice-pack, put down over the appendix region, together with some medicine, gave Keltz a little comfort, but night came with no improvement in his condition. With a change of ice-packs and some sedative pills, the pain eased up for a while.

I lay down in my bunk to rest for a few minutes and consider what to do. All day long I had struggled with the problem. As I lay there I pictured the worst—a ruptured appendix, followed by peritonitis; then continuous and excruciating pain until exhaustion passed on into coma, and then—death. Then I saw the other side of the picture. Good old Keltz; I had known him in my younger days, when I had slept beside him in the deep woods, shared days and nights with him, meals, money, clothing—how fine he had been, to give up a good position to come here with me in order that I might regain my health!

I must do something! I jumped from my bunk, put on the big kettles to boil, tore up two or three shirts, and put them in one kettle. My few little surgical instruments I placed in the other kettle. Then I got out all our forks, spoons, and knives and set about bending and shaping them in such ways that they would be somewhat useful if needed. Our two hunting-knives were fairly sharp, but I spent

half an hour putting a very sharp edge on each one; then I carefully put them in to boil.

In my medical kit I had two or three small clamps, some needles and catgut that I had brought along in case there were any cuts that would need sewing up. Also some bichloride of mercury tablets and a can of ether to use for antiseptics.

WHILE I was making preparations Keltz was writhing in agony. I went over to his bunk, sat down on the edge of it and put my proposition up to him—told him I felt sure his appendix would rupture if allowed to go on, and explained what that would mean. I told him fairly and squarely that I had never done such an operation, had never even assisted at one, but that I had seen several and had studied the surgical procedure. After listening to my explanation of the whole situation and what I planned to do, his only reply was: "Go ahead, Pete—I'd trust you anywhere!" It gave me a queer feeling inside and I had to turn away quickly to keep from showing the emotion that his sudden reply had stirred within me. He had not hesitated an instant to put his life in my hands—though I knew that by lack of experience, training, assistance, and instruments, I was not qualified to merit his trust.

The hours of thinking what to do, my hopelessness, and the boldness of my plan, had made me extremely nervous. But the way he had responded gave me courage, strength and coolness.

By means of some small pulleys we had found in the cabin, I arranged a contraption whereby the can of ether was suspended directly over the place where his head would rest. A string running from the bottom of the ether-can up through the pulleys, had a nail in the end of it which dangled near where my head would be while working. By catching the head of the nail in my teeth and pushing the other end into various holes along a stick, suspended from the rafters above, I could gauge the flow of ether on a crudely improvised ether-mask. In this way I could give the anesthesia without contaminating my sterile hands.

When the instruments and torn-up shirts had boiled sufficiently for sterilization, I carefully laid them out and made ready to start. I scrubbed my hands and arms thoroughly. With everything ready, I carefully washed and sterilized the area of skin where the incision was to be made. With his head in the proper place and supports on each side, so that he would not move while going under the ether, I started. First I soaked my hands in the bichloride solution to kill any germs that might be on them. As I took up the hunting-knife to make the incision I felt a tingling sensation along my back.

"Go ahead, Pete, I'd trust you anywhere," he had said—the words forced me to proceed. . . .

It was necessary to pause every few minutes to note his breathing, then catch the nail in my teeth and adjust the flow of ether. It was slow, hard work.

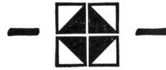
The appendix was badly swollen, and almost ready to rupture. I tied the base of it tight with a loop of catgut, then cut it off beyond the tie. Grasping the handle of a poker with my teeth, I pulled it out of the stove, and allowed the red-hot end to sear the cut base so as to prevent any infection from that source.

By that time my catgut supply was low—and I still had to sew up all the layers of the wound. What could I do? There were only four four-inch pieces left! There was but one thing to do—to take four separate stitches, running each suture down through all the layers of skin and muscle on one side of the incision, back through all the layers on the other side, and then tie the ends together tight. For a sterile bandage I unwound a small roll of gauze bandage that I had for small cuts and put that over the wound. Then I made an abdominal binder out of shirts.

It was with grave apprehension that I waited for the next two or three days to pass. With such crude technique and instruments it seemed inevitable that infection would develop. I watched him carefully, taking his temperature hourly. But as the days passed Keltz came along fine, without any complications whatsoever. He gradually regained his strength, was up and around in three weeks, and had a normal convalescence in every way.

I HAVE done many appendix operations since then, in well-equipped hospitals, and with plenty of nurses and assistants around. But whenever I pick up a scalpel to make an abdominal incision my thoughts carry me back to a little cabin deep in the Maine woods. I imagine myself holding a hunting-knife in my hand, looking out through a window at swirling, wind-driven snow, and I hear a voice from far away: "Go ahead, Pete—I'd trust you anywhere!"

There's Murder In the Air



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