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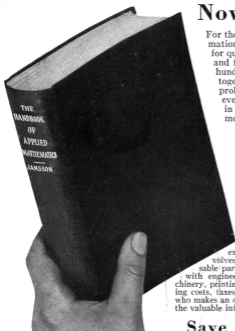
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MARCH, 1934

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VOL. 58, NO. 5

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Specially Attractive Short Stories

- Round the Clock** By Leland Jamieson 4
A stirring story of the air mail in winter, by the pilot who wrote "Lost Hurricane."
- The Garden of T. N. T.** By William Makin 14
An Intelligence officer defeats a plotted wholesale murder in the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Tony, Mario and Zeke** By Robert Mill 27
A lively story of the State police by the man who gave us "The Wild Man of Wolf Head."
- Killing No Murder?** By Percival Christopher Wren 60
The famous author of "Beau Geste" is at his best in this powerful drama.
- Black Lightning** By Jay Lucas 72
An engaging story of the range country, and of friendships among horses and men.
- Mr. Jennis Disappears** By Clarence Herbert New 78
A mystery of the Sea by the author of Free Lances in Diplomacy.
- Wrong Number** By Arthur K. Akers 91
A dark and desperate man turns a street-sweeping machine into a war tank.
- Fists Across the Sea** By Charles Layng 135
Wherein a searchlight battalion entertains an angel unawares.

A Much Discussed Serial

- After Worlds Collide** By Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie 36
This unique novel grows in power and fascination with each chapter.

Prize Stories of Real Experience

- Twenty-four Days Adrift** By Theron Bean 140
Suppressed by the war-time censors, the story of the Dumar's destruction and of the dreadful open-boat voyage of the survivors can now be told.
- The Crevasse** By Mrs. Imogene Humphrey 144
A woman mountain-climber is carried away by a landslide.
- The Graveyard Shift** By Brendish Harrison 145
An oil-refining expert's terrific experience in a Rumanian still accident.
- Mars Ahoy!** By Robert De Vines 147
The unexplained result of an attempt to signal another planet.
- The Land of the Long Night** By Charles D. Brower 148
The foremost of Arctic pioneers brings his record down to date.

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Around the Clock

By LELAND JAMIESON

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

PAYNE, the dispatcher, hung up the telephone and leaned back in his chair, his dark eyes filled with mild concern and some amusement. He didn't blame Gary Wilson for not wanting to go out, a night like this. He could still hear Wilson swearing fluently, saying, "Oh, the hell with Jones!" not meaning it to be so tough as it sounded on the wire. "I've got a heavy date tonight—the girl."

And Payne had said: "Sorry, Gary. This seems to be the way it goes. I'll have your ship warmed up and waiting. Step on it."

So now Wilson was stepping on it, driving to the field. How like him, Payne thought, not to waste time with useless questions; how like him to accept the thing and take it on the chin and never say a word. Payne wished all pilots could be like that, human beings, quiet and sincere instead of blowing off their faces about how great they were, and raising Cain when something they didn't like happened. If this had been Hardy going out tonight, for instance—

Gary Wilson came into the office, his lean face pinched by cold. "Have any idea of what they want with me?" he asked, stripping off his gloves and rubbing cold hands briskly on his frigid ears.

"Jones wouldn't say. But he wants you down there—fast."

Wilson's leathery young face was grave. He was tall, lithe, yet with a quality of rigidity in both his face and stature. His voice was resonant, filled now with concern and curiosity. "Anything happen? Anybody get knocked off, I wonder? This weather—it looks a lot worse out here than it did in town; and unless it's something bad—"

"Couldn't get a word out of him. Said Stone needed you immediately."

"Odd," Wilson considered. "Funny. I don't get it." For a minute he stood staring out the window, listening to the ticking of hard, fine snow against the panes. A mechanic shouted through the

bitter wind outside, and cursed. A J-5 rippled throatily to life, its exhaust a drifting, swinging sound against the gale. Wilson said restlessly: "Call Jones back. Doesn't he know everything is canceled?"

Payne put the call through. He went on with reports, glancing up occasionally to see Wilson standing expressionless before the door. The bell beneath his desk jarred their ears with sudden violence, and Wilson whirled and grabbed the instrument. "Jones? . . . Wilson. Why all the shooting?"

Jones' voice was heavy. "I'll explain when you get here. How long will you be?"

"If it isn't something pretty important, I'm not coming. We have a blizzard here."

"It's important. Stone wants you."

"Is he there? Let me speak to him."

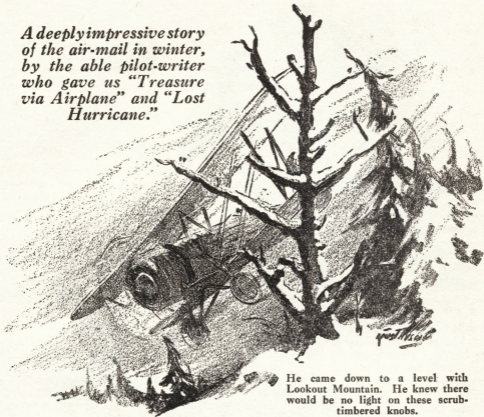
Jones seemed to hesitate. "He can't speak to you. But you're to come. His orders. I can't tell you on the telephone—there may be other ears."

"Okay," Gary Wilson said, further questions pressing in his mind. Some quality in Jones' voice made him withhold them, and that same quality left him feeling peculiarly disturbed.

Thick dusk was filtering through the snow. Wilson struggled into a heavy leather flying-suit. He wrapped a muffler securely around his throat, pulled on his gloves and forced the office door against the biting blast. The Stearman was a blur in a mat of white that fell in slanting lines. Wilson battled the wind and reached it. He waited while the mechanic stepped shivering to the ground, and then swung a leather-covered leg into the cockpit, climbed in and slid down until only his head showed above the cowl. As he ran up the engine, the field lights winked on, yellow and red and ghostly green.

It was a hundred and seventy miles to Phillisboro. This snow extended south about halfway. Wilson deliberated for a moment before taking off, weighing

A deeply impressive story of the air-mail in winter, by the able pilot-writer who gave us "Treasure via Airplane" and "Lost Hurricane."



He came down to a level with Lookout Mountain. He knew there would be no light on these scrub-timbered knobs.

hazard against skill and confidence. He would be blind as long as the snow fell, flying at a thousand feet. The temperature was down to nine. In 1929 there were no radio-beams to guide a pilot on this route. Beacons and dead reckoning were his only aids.

But he had instruments, and knew how to fly by them. That ability, in 1929, was rare. He took off north into the gale, turned slowly west and then south, climbing steadily. At five hundred feet, on a south-southeast course, he leveled out and tried to check his position by lights upon the ground. It was not quite dark yet; the earth was in that half-light which is more difficult than darkness. The horizon was wiped out by snow.

Sitting there "on his instruments" with the cockpit lights turned up until he might have read a newspaper, he could see his face reflected in the dials. He stared at it, subconsciously watching and reacting to the flicking of the turn-indicator, wondering what had happened that he should be called thus, suddenly.

Gary Wilson was still a young man—twenty-eight; yet years of flying had made of him a veteran. To himself he

seemed extremely old, for he could remember only the high points of his life before he started flying. It seemed, now, that he had been flying, or had wanted to be, all his life. At twenty-one he had already seen quick, violent death strike down a dozen times at his contemporaries; there had been one since then almost every month or so. And each time it happened, he had aged; each time it had happened, he found one more illusion about flying gone. The years had molded him, and left him master of himself; and yet sometimes he could not guard his thoughts, and memories flooded back and left him with a mist upon his eyes and a nameless melancholy in his heart.

NOW, at twenty-eight, he was old, and he knew the game for what it was—a constant gamble with his life. Sometimes he wondered—with a small, sharp pang of fear he tried to hide even from himself—how long he could go on. He had seen too many others go, to think himself immune forever. But he had changed as much as possible to meet his task; eight years of it had left him introspective, calculating. He had probed himself as impersonally as a surgeon



"Good Lord," Gary said,
"I've no experience for this
sort of thing! I'm just a
lousy pilot."

probes a wound. Finding his weaknesses, he changed them slowly into strengths. He had deliberately set out to conquer fear, to subdue that type of imagination which invented fear. . . . For he loved flying. And yet at times he hated it.

Knowing him, you would not for a moment have suspected that he was forever working at these things. He was filled with an impulsive friendliness. But that was on the ground. In the air—the instant he stepped into a cockpit—a stark transformation left him hard. He knew, as every pilot does, that in the air none could help him but himself. . . .

Now, he burst out of the snow a few miles north of Nashville, found himself, and ten minutes later picked up the beacon on the hangar roof at Phillisboro. When he had landed and taxied to the gas pit, a man came through the darkness from the office leanto. He recognized Jones, the small, blunt-featured treasurer of Mid-state Airlines.

"Quick trip," Jones said.

"Cold," Wilson returned, walking awkwardly, impeded by his parachute against his thighs, toward the yellow light that spilled through the office windows. "Who started all the shooting, anyway?"

"The shooting's yet to come. Nathan Stone was flying a glider today, and crashed."

"Crashed?" Shock sharpened Wilson's face. "Crashed? He's—dead?"

"No. Concussion. But he had no business in that glider, and I don't want this to reach the New York office. This

line must go on as if nothing had happened. We're going into night schedules tomorrow night, you know. Stone once told me if anything happened to him, to get hold of you—you could run the line. That's why I called."

As Gary Wilson followed him into the hangar office, he pondered this. He was the senior pilot on the line, and he would naturally take Stone's place in operations; but taking charge did not seem to him so instantly necessary that he should have to fight a snowstorm to get here.

"What's the rest of it?" he asked, sitting down upon a desk.

"Ringer-Elery," said Jones, pacing nervously about, snapping out the words. "They've got the Old Man on the spot. You know this line isn't ready for night flying, and Stone knew it. He's been trying for six weeks to get new equipment and better facilities—trying to keep you pilots out of danger. He was about to get it through, and Haynes Ringer sneaked down here and flew over the line—sent word to the New York office that he'd take Mid-state and put it on night operations with the present equipment. He might do it, if he's lucky.

But Stone wouldn't trust just to luck. Ringer's report has put him in bad with the home office."

He produced a telegram which, addressed to Nathan Stone, put the ultimatum bluntly:

NIGHT MAIL OPERATIONS ONLY HOPE OF MAKING MID-STATE PAY STOP REPORT FROM HAYNES RINGER INDICATES YOU INCOMPETENT SINCE AFTER INSPECTING YOUR LINE HE REPORTS HE CAN START NIGHT OPERATIONS NOW WITH PRESENT EQUIPMENT STOP IF YOU CANNOT DO SO AS ORDERED REQUEST YOUR IMMEDIATE RESIGNATION.

BURCH.

"It sums up," Jones hastened on, "that Ringer-Ellery is trying to swallow us. They have a chance of doing it, since they terminate in Chicago too. Stone has worked two years to get this outfit running. If we don't put through this night schedule for him, he's out. But this is more than that—it's more than loyalty. It means our own jobs, too. We're fighting for the line, and for ourselves. The load was on Stone until this afternoon. Now it's on you. I've got to send Burch an answer. You've always seemed to know exactly what to do. Can you put this thing across?" His voice, rising, ended like a whip.

He reminded Wilson, pacing back and forth, of a human dynamo. There was distraction in his eyes. He was almost helpless in this crisis, for he knew little of the flying of a schedule; his job was on the ground, and this battle would be fought out in the air.

Gary Wilson was disturbed at the prospect facing him. For eight years he had made a study of himself, to be more capable in the air, less liable to fatal error. He realized now that in this task he must apply to other pilots the same rules he had formulated for himself—he had no others; and he knew what might be safe enough for him might kill some other man. His own confidence in himself would not give confidence to Wallace, Hart or Nicholson; his knowledge would not help them after they had taken off in blinding snow.

"Good Lord," Gary said, his grave face reflecting awe, "I've had no experience for this kind of thing! I'm just a lousy pilot."

"All of us will help you," Jones declared.

"You can't do anything. There isn't a pilot on this line who ever flew at night in really dirty weather. I sup-

posed the Old Man was going to postpone night flying until this snowstorm had—"

"He tried, but you see how far it got him! If we fail in this, we'll be a part of Ringer-Ellery inside thirty days!"

"True. But what if I step in here and kill some pilots trying to shove them through tomorrow night—trying to urge them, when I should hold them on the ground? That would make it worse for Stone—for everybody."

"You've got to do it," Jones snapped. "Anything can happen if the breaks go against you. What shall I tell Burch?"

Wilson seemed to think aloud: "This storm is just beginning. By tomorrow night it will cover the whole line."

"I know, I know," Jones persisted, increasingly impatient. "But Stone picked you as the man to take his place. He would have put it through; now he's depending on you. He got in trouble fighting for the pilots. Now then—are the pilots going to fight for him, or let him down?"

GARY WILSON did not understand himself. Decisions were habit with him—quick estimation of a problem in the air, quick arrival at a course of action. Now he was nervous, baffled. He thought of the pilots on their first runs tomorrow night. None of them had had much night flying. All of them were overanxious, or overconfident. Their safety was now his sole responsibility—and he had had no more experience than they had.

He said, deliberating: "If you'd get me the Old Man's order-file, so I could see what preparations he has made—I'll have to work tonight—check the weather service, field lighting, flare equipment, instruments, personnel—double-check it after him. I'll have a hundred things to do. But the job begins in the morning. We've got to fly our day runs just the same, then double up and fly again tomorrow night. We've got to fly around the clock."

"Right!" Jones nodded several times. "How do you feel about it?"

Wilson met his eyes. "Scared," he said tersely. "Scared to death."

"That's needless. Nothing to be scared about, except failure. Just impress the pilots that they must get through on this first run." He smiled reassuringly. "Just put them through."

Wilson's eyes grew hard. "Wouldn't you be scared, if you could kill a man

by making a mistake? If you didn't know enough about your job to keep from making one—or half a dozen? And if you had to go on and make decisions, right or wrong?" He paused, studying Jones' round face in grim appraisal. "Maybe you wouldn't be. But I am."

"What shall I tell Burch?" Jones insisted.

"You're forcing my hand. If you've got to tell him something, tell him we'll put things through tomorrow night." His voice was soft, musing when he added: "If we get away with this, it will go down in the history book!"

He fortified himself against his fear of making errors, with a tense belief that he could handle operations better than Jones would have done, and got out of his flying-clothes and into a heavy overcoat. Then, with the stack of file-folders before him on the desk, he set in at his work.

There was little system in those days. Everything was embryonic. The market crash had come that fall, but aviation executives still thought in high-pressure, gigantic terms: promotion, mergers, new lines, stock-sales. The stock-sales had become by then a little slow.

Mid-state Airlines was but one of the dozen lines which had mushroomed from the dreams of one group of financiers. It reached from Atlanta to Chicago and St. Louis, over the hump of the Smokies above Chattanooga, down the valleys of Tennessee, and then on up through Kentucky to the plains country, and Chicago. It was still raw and new, even after two hectic years of operation. Its pilots had been recruited from the ranks of that traditional old-day crowd, the barnstormers. Things have changed vastly since then, but in 1929 aviation was a seething caldron of clattering publicity, of cut-throat politics, of fatal crashes, of ignorance and waste. Mid-state was an angel by comparison with some other lines; and Mid-state was extremely bad.

AS Wilson thumbed through the files, the story of Stone's bitter struggle with the New York holding company grew clearer. He could see the trend of gradual consolidation, the poaching efforts of other subsidiaries of that holding company. He saw that the Old Man was a dreamer, an idealist, but a fighter too, wanting the best of everything for the men who flew his line.

And a slow fury was ignited deep in Wilson, mingled with an increased re-

spect and loyalty for Stone. When a man had fought for you, you couldn't let him down. Life meant nothing to that New York crowd. Money was the only thing. Disregard the pilots' lives; haul the mail at night, and thereby increase the loads and swell the revenue.

The night wore on. There were too many things to do, to think of sleep. Wilson, in the thin gray snow-filled dawn, trudged to the restaurant, gulped hot coffee, and went back to the job. He checked the run-assignments. Newton was to come east from St. Louis with the night run at ten-thirty. Wallace was due south from Chicago at nine-twenty-five. Wilson smoked a cigarette in indecision. Neither of those men was apt at blind flying; they had been scheduled because their day-run terminations had chanced to put them in position. Hart and Nicholson were better qualified for night-weather flying.

BUT it was an unnerving responsibility to make the change. Suppose he switched these men, and some one crashed? The other man might have got away with it. Yet he knew the men intimately, understood their strengths, their weaknesses, their processes of thought. Any of them would go out; that was their job: but some of them should not be permitted to go out.

And suddenly Wilson understood the difference between the man sitting in a cockpit and the other one who sat before an operations desk. The first one lived as long as he was right in his decisions on the job, and he went on through the years gathering confidence, exuding it in everything. His first bad mistake was frequently his last. But the man on the ground could not build up a fortifying confidence; he lived to view mistakes, and sometimes he saw others die when he had made them. He learned to be deliberate, to progress slowly—in some matters almost fearfully—as Gary Wilson was progressing now. He had become a man tied to the ground, and his entire viewpoint had been changed.

Yet, knowing Newton, Wallace, Hart and Nicholson, knowing and realizing painfully how far this act might go, he at last wrote out the telegram to bring about the changes in assignment. He sent it, and worried over it for the remainder of the day.

The day wore on. He worked at high speed, dictating orders, shouting orders, telephoning a dozen points upon the line

to check on final preparations. He called Hart and Nicholson, and said to each of them: "We want to put these schedules through tonight, for the Old Man. He's in a jam, and he got there fighting for us. But for God's sake, take it easy. I'm going to leave it up to you whether you come out, or cancel. If you come out and pile up, there'll be the devil to pay. Don't stretch things. Don't start unless you can come through. If you come out and get caught, don't try to save the ship or mail—you bail out and save your own neck, see. But give it hell."

The day mail went through, fighting the snow and poor visibility. It came over the hump from Atlanta and disappeared in a white welter toward Chicago. It came from Chicago and skimmed the trees and plunged into the mat of driving flakes in the direction of Atlanta. Presently reports came in that all planes were safely on the ground. The day was done. But night had not yet started.

Gary Wilson, only then, took off for Atlanta, to be in position to come out at midnight with the northbound. As he flew through the white, horizontal streaks he thought about the vastness of this growing industry. People made long speeches about the romance of the mail, the glamour of a pilot's life. But there was no glamour. It was hard, heart-pinching work, with death always waiting somewhere beyond a patch of fog, or somewhere behind a mountain. There was no romance. Nothing but a deadly schedule. Come in from a run, rest a day to still your nerves from that bad scare you got when taking off through frozen mud, and get ready for another ride tomorrow night. You cashed your checks, big checks, that somehow dwindled in your hands and left you with nothing in the end. Save it for old age? Why? Hell, who ever heard of a veteran on the night mail living to old age?

WHAT held him? What was the invisible, magnetic power that made men become pilots and then go on year after year, while fatalities slowly and inexorably thinned their ranks? It must be an appetite for pulse-quickening hazards, inborn perhaps, certainly ingrained and fostered through the years. Youngsters quit sometimes; the older ones stayed, and stayed, and finally—

He put such thoughts from his mind. Imagination can be a pilot's greatest enemy. In Atlanta he went to his

hotel and crawled into bed. He'd done everything that could be done in one short day. He fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, dreamed, and then the telephone was ringing in his ear at half-past ten. Wearily he put on his clothes and went to eat before driving to the field.

THE airport was a silent place, a row of hangars lighted by yellow floods upon the eaves, with inky darkness indefinite beyond, where the ground came to a crown in the center of the landing-area. Snow was an inch deep now, dry and crunching underfoot. The surface wind had died, and the flakes filtered out of black nothingness above. Wilson stood for a moment on the office steps and tried to fathom the impenetrable sky. With a feeling of smallness, of loneliness, with a tight hard fear for the other men who should now be plunging through this storm, he opened the door and passed into the warmth of the dispatcher's office.

"Ships moving?" he inquired.

"Hello," said the dispatcher. "Bad luck. Nick rolled one in the snow." Gary Wilson picked up the yellow tape, while a numb, premonitory fear shot through his mind. The message had been sent from Danville, Illinois.

LOST IN SNOWSTORM FOUND FIELD HERE
POPPED FLARE NOSED OVER LANDING TRAINING MAIL DETAILS LATER.

NICHOLSON.

Hot rage brought blood to Wilson's face. This was what happened when you overstepped the bounds of reason for the brass-hats in New York. Nick might have been killed—they all might be killed, a night like this. It hadn't worked, and it never would work. You couldn't take green day-flying pilots and turn them loose on a new night run in weather. It made him cold, thinking about Nicholson up there hunting for that field, and finally landing, going over. He said to the dispatcher:

"What about Hart? Out of St. Louis yet? I'm going to stop him!"

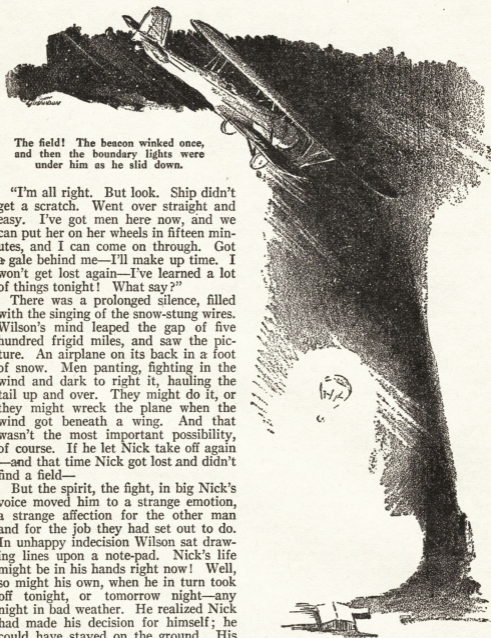
"No message has come through."

"Send one—send him this one—"

The telephone jangled. The dispatcher lifted the receiver, listened, spoke a word and handed it to him.

"Gary?" The voice in the instrument sounded frozen. "Gary, this is Nick, in Danville."

"Nick? Good Lord! Are you all right? Sorry you piled up, but that's all right. You—"



The field! The beacon winked once,
and then the boundary lights were
under him as he slid down.

"I'm all right. But look. Ship didn't get a scratch. Went over straight and easy. I've got men here now, and we can put her on her wheels in fifteen minutes, and I can come on through. Got a gale behind me—I'll make up time. I won't get lost again—I've learned a lot of things tonight! What say?"

There was a prolonged silence, filled with the singing of the snow-stung wires. Wilson's mind leaped the gap of five hundred frigid miles, and saw the picture. An airplane on its back in a foot of snow. Men panting, fighting in the wind and dark to right it, hauling the tail up and over. They might do it, or they might wreck the plane when the wind got beneath a wing. And that wasn't the most important possibility, of course. If he let Nick take off again—and that time Nick got lost and didn't find a field—

But the spirit, the fight, in big Nick's voice moved him to a strange emotion, a strange affection for the other man and for the job they had set out to do. In unhappy indecision Wilson sat drawing lines upon a note-pad. Nick's life might be in his hands right now! Well, so might his own, when he in turn took off tonight, or tomorrow night—any night in bad weather. He realized Nick had made his decision for himself; he could have stayed on the ground. His voice oddly stifled, Wilson said:

"Take it easy, son. I'm pulling for you." And after he had said it, he felt like a potential murderer.

"Check. I'll make it. See you."

Soberly Wilson put the receiver on its hook. It was almost time for him to go, and he was going. He sent the dispatcher to warm the engine of his plane, and sat smoking a cigarette, wondering about Hart, in St. Louis. Maybe Hart had canceled, wisely. The teletype machine clicked once, and the bell twanged tentatively three times. Wilson punched a key, and the message

rolled out beneath the steady thudding of the type-bars:

Hart was out for Evansville on time.

When Mid-state mail was at last ready, Gary Wilson shook off his worry for the other men who were pounding through this night. Massive, bulky in his leather clothes, he padded out across the snow-blanketed apron, climbed in and revved his engine up with tense finality; he taxied out and turned back into the wind.

In the air the snow was a thick mat

like fog around him, smothering the earth and streaming past his navigation lights. It was thicker now than at any other time since this prolonged storm had started. The wind was swinging slowly to the east. It changed the Stearman's drift, and changed the compass course.

He missed the first beacon, and spent five worried minutes finding it; and then, a new drift calculation made, swung back upon his path. He couldn't see a thing even from five hundred feet, except the quick winks of the beacons when he reached them.

SLOW going, tonight! It was thirty minutes before he saw the T-shaped boundary lights of the Adairsville field as through a dull white screen. He missed the next three beacons, and knew he must be somewhere in the pass near Dalton, with a slanting range on one side, and hills upon the other. He was afraid to risk a milling, circling search to find the light. To see it, he must stay low; if he stayed low, he'd smash a mountain-side. The beacon might be but a mile away, but it was probably much farther. He was lost.

But he drove this certain knowledge from his thoughts, and climbed until he was above the highest range in the vicinity, knowing he would never find himself up here. He plunged on toward where he thought Chattanooga should be. The cold had eaten into him in the beginning, but now his blood was racing in a dull excitement. He was sweating underneath his heavy clothes. "Bad," he muttered. "Should have checked each beacon and not come on until I found it. Hit something if I don't watch out!"

He knew he wouldn't be able to find his way back. He couldn't go down, here, for mountains reared their heads on every hand. He flew on, holding his compass accurately upon its course.

But he had to come down. He had to find Chattanooga, not to land there, because the field was not yet lighted, but to check his position and thus avoid smashing a mountain later on. Fear was eating into him as minutes passed; it numbed him, made breathing difficult. He checked his time and throttled back a little. He might hit that mountain at any instant now! His head was bursting with the pounding of his heart. He came down to a level with the top of Lookout Mountain, sat there, mashing down, his head hanging from the cock-

pit to see a light if there should be one. But he knew there would be none, on these bleak, scrub-timbered knobs. He was afraid to go much lower.

Then a light did leap from the snow. It hurled itself at him. He reacted without thought, slapped the throttle forward, hauled hard on the stick, kicked almost full right rudder. The light was past, fifty feet beyond his wing. In a fleeting glance he saw the outline of a group of buildings, recognized them with the pain of sharp relief, pulled on up once more into the safety of his former altitude. He was over Lookout Mountain; Chattanooga, smothered in the snow, lay five miles to the northeast two thousand feet below.

His heart slowed to its normal pulse, but Gary Wilson was left shuddering at the realization of how close that had been. A hundred feet more, and he might have been too low to see the light in time. He turned toward Phyllisboro, navigating carefully. He must cross Suck Creek Mountain, and the narrow Sequatchie Valley, then go on for fifteen minutes. The last ordeal would come in mashing down in the broad plateau of the Barrens, looking for the lonely field at Manchester. He must find it, in order to find Phyllisboro; Phyllisboro was pocketed in a bowl-like declivity among the hills.

A ridge of mountains lay across his course, and he must be sure of clearing them before starting down to find the Barrens. That scare at Chattanooga had somehow robbed him of his nerve. He was afraid to take this second chance. He couldn't go on trusting to his luck forever—sometime it wouldn't save him. He was shivering now, his teeth chattering. The minutes crawled around the clock. Certainly he must be past the ridge, but he went on five minutes longer, to be sure. . . . Then he was sure, but coming down took every nerve throughout his body and frayed it raw.

HE gunned the engine, to keep it warm so it would run in this freezing air. And the third time he gunned it his heart leaped and seemed to flutter and then stand completely still.

The engine missed. It coughed, and missed again. It ran irregularly, coughing at three-second intervals. When Wilson slammed the throttle open he found that the power plant had dropped five hundred revvs, and would not now sustain him in the air.

Instantly he knew what was the matter, but he was helpless: ice in the carburetor. With air so cold up here in the clouds, air filled with tiny particles of ice which were the clouds, the carburetor heater could not raise the intake temperature. The intake stove was choking gradually with ice, and soon the engine would revv down entirely.

Of course, he could jump. He could get down with his parachute, and perhaps land in a pine tree on a mountain-side or on the flats, and hang there and freeze to death before he could get to the ground. But he had mail in the pit in front of him; and he had at least a large part of the future of old Stone and Mid-state Airlines in his hands. Nicholson had piled up in the snow, but hadn't stopped. Hart was pounding through. If he jumped now, it would make their efforts useless, wasted risk. So he did not jump. He decided quickly, knowing what might follow if his decision should be wrong. And then, with effort, he forced imagination back and tried to crowd out fear.

The navigation-lights stopped glowing when he dropped below the clouds, but the snow still streaked back in horizontal lines so thick that no beacons on the ground could penetrate it. The altimeter crawled downward as Wilson gradually perforce descended. The engine coughed and barked and coughed again, running at wide-open throttle with a continued shivering vibration. He came down until he had five hundred feet above the level flats that formed the Barrens, until the mountains behind and to the sides of him were a thousand feet above him now. If his navigation proved imperfect—

LOOKING down, straining his eyes, with occasional quick glances at his instruments, he held his course. The engine ran spasmodically. He was much too low to jump now; the decision that might save his life was long behind him. The Stearman came nearer maintaining its meager altitude as it neared the earth, flying through denser, more sustaining air. But it still lost altitude, and it was touch and go. He must find himself within the next five minutes and get into the field, or he would smash into the trees. A flare was useless in the snow.

Then, with the altimeter showing a scant three hundred feet, a sprinkling of lights swept through his field of vision. There was only one town big enough to have that many lights, up

here on this barren, desolate expanse of country. Wilson, with the lights behind him, swung sharply and headed northeast toward the field at Manchester.

The field! The beacon winked once, and then the boundary lights were under him as he slid down on the snow with both landing-beams cutting sharp cones through the darkness and the fleeing flakes. He hit the frozen ground in snow six inches deep. The Stearman bounced and swerved—stopped less than a hundred feet from the ghostly beacon tower.

Wilson climbed stiffly to the ground. His emotions were garbled—relief and thankfulness mingled with determination to go on. He took a screw-driver and scraped away the ice from the carburetor-intake throat, and then set hurriedly to work to start the engine, his mind upon the hazard of the take-off from this field.

COLD almost immediately when it stopped, the engine would not start. The oil on the cylinder-walls had congealed, and Wilson could not spin the starter fast enough.

He stood there by the wing, sunk in the realization of defeat. He had done the best he could, but it had not been enough. A sense of futility descended on him as he thought of Nathan Stone, of all the men and women who indirectly or directly would be affected by his failure. The wind whispered past his head, filled with cutting particles of ice. The beacon on the tall steel tower emitted its rhythmic "*click, click-clack; click, click-clack*" as the gears revolved it. For miles on every side the Barrens reached away, to the hills around Beech Grove upon the west, and the rounding knobs of the Smokies on the east. It was unutterably lonely standing there. Yet this spot was only thirty miles from Phyllisboro.

That realization prompted him to one last effort. He left the Stearman, and trudged off through the steady snowfall toward the road that bordered on this field. Reaching it, he turned down it, and went a half mile, his flashlight a probing finger in the night. A dog challenged him when he came to the field caretaker's house. He pacified it with a word of confidence, and went up to the porch and knocked.

The caretaker, at last aroused, admitted him. He knew something of mail operations, and he accepted the necessity of taking the mail load on

to Phillisboro. They drove back to the field, transferred the pouches, and then rode in silence, tracing out the snow-smoothed road as it wound down from the Barrens through the hills. Thirty minutes later they were turning off into the Phillisboro field.

"Down at Manchester," Wilson told the worried dispatcher. "I brought the mail. Get out another ship."

"Crack up?" The dispatcher lit a cigarette with hands that still were trembling. "God, this waiting for a pilot when he's overdue—"

"Ice in the carburetor." Wilson sat down to read the tape, wondering acutely how Hart and Nicholson were making it. The dispatcher called back from the door: "Coffee in the thermos if you want it."

Nicholson was out of Terre Haute two hours late, but picking up his schedule. "What a night's work he's put in!" Wilson muttered. Hart was in Evansville, waiting to go north with the mail Wilson had brought in. The ships were running late, but the mail was getting through!

He got into the air again. He bucked and fought the northeast wind for almost two full hours, and landed in Evansville at daylight with both cheeks almost frozen. The temperature was down to three. The snow had stopped, leaving heavy, leaden skies. Hart took the mail and roared on north.

GARY WILSON knew he should go into town, to get some sleep for his southbound trip that night. But there was the report of this night's work to make, so the brass-hats in New York could see that Mid-state was running an air line the way the brass-hats thought it should be run. He couldn't make that report until all the ships were through, and down.

Nicholson had been asleep, and the dispatcher woke him to go on with the St. Louis mail. Wilson heard them talking, laughing, in the pilot's room; and then Nicholson, massive in his flying suit, lumbered through the door, and Wilson cried:

"Hi, guy! I see you got away with it. Swell stuff. You'll make the grade."

The big man nodded, grinned sleepily. "I hear you had a close one too."

Wilson yawned. "For a while I thought it was the trees, but I got into the field. It's never bad, if you guess right, and get away with it."

Nicholson waved his great gloved hand and forced the door against the wind and went outside. A minute passed, and the J-5 stopped idling and roared. It moved unseen across the field, down wind, rolling back in bursts of changing sound against the gale. Then it turned, swung sharply to a roar, and rose and faded quickly on the upper air.

Wilson settled down to wait, sipping bitter coffee. Time passed. Hart went in and out of Terre Haute. Nicholson landed in St. Louis. Van Noy was safely in Atlanta—eleven minutes early!

WILSON grabbed the telephone to make a short report to Jones. They had done it—they had shoved it through! A warm exultance swept up through his veins like wine, a strange wild happiness. Jones answered him, alarmed at being roused so early.

"What's happened? I hope—"

"Tell that guy Burch we put it through! We'll show him how to run—"

The other telephone on Payne's desk rang, and the dispatcher answered it. He halted Wilson. "Newspaper just got word Ringer-Ellery lost a man. Spun in flying blind in snow, apparently."

"Who?" Wilson's voice was like a rasp. The bright light of enthusiasm vanished from his eyes.

"Samuels."

Absently Wilson put the receiver on the hook. He sat there, musing. "Samuels, eh? I knew him—nice kid. . . . Old-timer at this game." He sank back in his chair. A melancholy seemed to close about him like a shroud, and he stared out across the snow-smoothed field. Finally he looked up, his blue eyes guarded, distant. "Funny. . . . You sit on the ground, admit it's dangerous. Then you get in a cockpit in the air, and kid yourself that you can go on beating it forever."

He moved to the door and stood studying the sky. A subtle change came over him, the swift accumulation of time's passing showing in his eyes. "Samuels, eh? I remember him quite well." He shook his head, and his voice trailed off to silent, somber pensiveness. Five minutes passed. He seemed suddenly to remember that he was standing there, that he must get to bed, to go back with the mail tonight. He shrugged his shoulders into his overcoat, passed without a word out into the bitter morning wind. Head down, he disappeared around the hangar corner toward his car.

The Garden of T. N. T.

A tremendous adventure of the Anglo-American Intelligence officer known to the natives as the Red Wolf of Arabia.

By WILLIAM MAKIN



Illustrated by
John Clymer

THE king is dead; long live the king, eh?" suggested Paul Rodgers, smiling slightly.

"Exactly," replied the Chief of Police, twisting his mustache and crossing his legs with a slightly nervous air. "The leader of the rebel Druses, the Sheik Sonieda, was murdered on his way here in the Jerusalem Express. Thanks to you, the murder was no mystery."

"Except to the Druses themselves," replied Rodgers—an Anglo-American Intelligence officer whose daring exploits had caused him to be known among the natives as the Red Wolf of Arabia.

The Chief of Police nodded.

"Lost without a leader, their revolt in Jerusalem never materialized," he mused, uncrossing his legs. "And a good job for us, too! Give me a quiet life."

"Is that why they made you Chief of Police in Jerusalem, my dear Travers?" asked Rodgers with another smile.

Colonel Travers flushed, which is unusual in a policeman. But it was whispered that the wife of some great British pro-consul had once seen that flush, and had been so delighted with it that immediate promotion followed for Travers. He now held the highly nervous job of Chief of Police in Jerusalem, where most of the crime was political, and fanatics

from three great religions involved were in it.

"Nevertheless, I know these Druses have found a new leader, and they're up to some devilment," went on the Chief of Police, ignoring Rodgers' thrust. "I know they are," he repeated miserably.

"Who is the leader?" asked the Intelligence officer.

"That I don't know," was the reply, given with another twist of the mustache. "My spies—and although they're a cut-throat crew, they can be depended upon—assure me that something is brewing. That is all they can tell me. And that is why I've come to you."

"Who sent you?" Rodgers was blunt.

Once again Colonel Travers flushed.

"It was the Governor," he admitted. "When I took him my report, he threw it aside and said: 'Go and talk with that fellow Paul Rodgers. If you can keep him away from a piano, he'll find out more than all your spies.' . . . And so, here I am."

The Red Wolf did not smile. He was fully aware that his reputation as the finest Intelligence officer, his astonishing adventures and his ruthlessness in unraveling a mystery to the finish, were bruited from one end of the Red Sea to the other. With a characteristic gesture he stroked the back of his flaming crop of hair, and said abruptly:

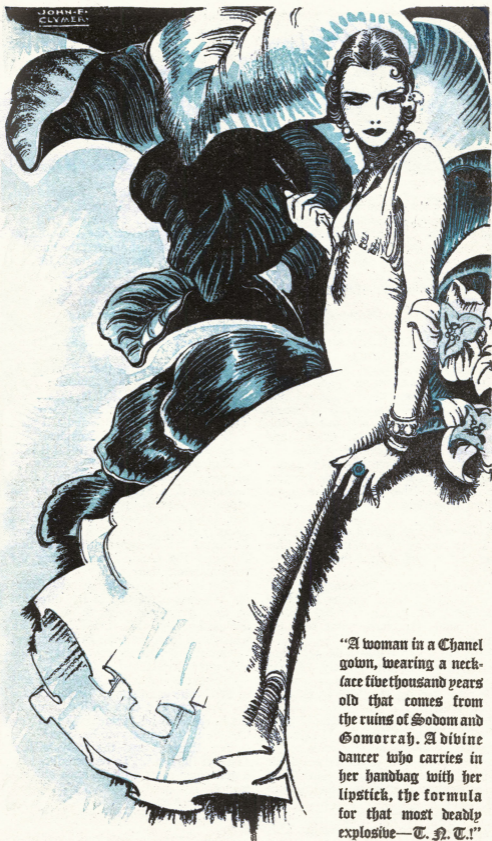
"Talking of pianos, do you realize, my dear Travers, that there isn't a decent one in this hotel—which calls itself the most civilized in Palestine."

"Isn't there?" inquired the Chief of Police blankly.

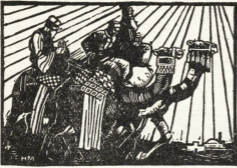
"No, there isn't," snarled Rodgers. "There's a crime that, as Chief of Police, you might investigate."

"But it isn't a crime not to have a piano in a hotel, surely?"

The Red Wolf thrust his youthful, energetic face forward.



"A woman in a Chanel gown, wearing a necklace five thousand years old that comes from the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah. A divine dancer who carries in her handbag with her lipstick, the formula for that most deadly explosive—T. N. T.!"



"I once knew a man who intended to go out at night and commit murder," he said solemnly. "But he found a piano and sat down to play. In ten minutes he had played all the rage and murder-desire out of his soul."

"That's devilish interesting. How do you know?"

"Because the man was myself," replied Rodgers.

Aggressively he stared round the luxuriously furnished lounge of the Crusaders Hotel, which lies to the north of Jerusalem. There, within sight of that Garden of Gethsemane where once a Man prepared Himself for execution, beautifully gowned women and men in uniforms and evening-dress strolled, and chattered of the trivialities of life.

"Well, if they haven't a piano here," murmured the Chief of Police, twisting his mustache, "they at least have an excellent dance band."

AND as though he had commanded it, the strains of a waltz, the "Blue Danube," floated toward them from the ballroom.

"A dance band!" muttered the Red Wolf bitterly. "And playing the 'Blue Danube' in that muddled, stodgy fashion of all bands that have never seen the Danube."

"It's not a bad waltz to dance," went on the Chief of Police bravely. "I even proposed to the woman who is now my wife after dancing the 'Blue Danube.'"

"Naturally."

"Well, why not dance tonight?" went on Colonel Travers jovially. He glanced approvingly at the evening-dress which Rodgers wore, and which revealed his slim, athletic figure to perfection. "Find an attractive woman and dance with her."

"And then marry her?"

Colonel Travers blushed again. This Paul Rodgers, Red Wolf of Arabia, was a

difficult fellow in all circumstances. But the man of many adventures had narrowed his gray eyes and was staring across the lounge.

"Perhaps I will dance tonight, Travers, after all. Good night."

Slightly bewildered at this sudden dismissal, the Chief of Police rose.

"But I have your promise that you will help?" he ventured.

"Help! In what?"

"In finding the new leader of the rebel Druses."

"Oh, that! Of course." Rodgers nodded and held out his hand. "By the way," he added in a whisper, "tell me, when you turn, Travers, the name of that woman who has just entered the lounge."

Instinctively, Travers turned. He saw a tall, slim woman in a white satin gown of Chanel stamp, whose dark hair coiled voluptuously about her ears and emphasized the pallor of her face.

"That is Lola Nerval, a Frenchwoman. I'm told she's delightful. But alas, I don't speak French."

"Why is she wearing that red necklace, which I'll swear is four thousand years B. C., with a gown that is 1934 years A. D.? But don't stare so deliberately, Travers. Light a cigarette and tell me."

"I hadn't noticed the necklace," faltered the Chief of Police. "But if it is as ancient as you suppose, it is easily explained. Her husband, Jean Nerval, is an archaeologist, a Syrian, attached to the expedition that is digging near the Dead Sea. It is claimed that the expedition has discovered the old cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were destroyed by fire. Probably the necklace was among the trinkets found there."

"Daring, but effective," agreed Rodgers, his eyes narrowing in the direction of that blood-red necklace that hung against a perfect white throat. "A woman who comes from the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah to dance the latest jazz! Lot's wife was not so lucky."

"She rather looks like a pillar of salt in that white satin gown," laughed Colonel Travers; and then flushed again at the boldness of his remark. "Would you like me to introduce you, Rodgers?"

"No, thanks," was the reply with a shake of the head. "To be introduced by a policeman casts a blight upon any romance. It's good of you, Colonel, but I'll introduce myself."

The Chief of Police shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I'd like to stay," he said; "but

hearing that waltz reminds me that I must get home to my wife. She's a bit nervous, these days, with all this trouble brewing."

"I'll do my best for you, Travers," nodded the Red Wolf, and with a parting smile, he turned away from the Chief of Police.

Ten seconds later Colonel Travers turned in the doorway that led out of the lounge. What he saw caused him to twist his mustache. Paul Rodgers was walking toward the ballroom, and the dark-haired beauty in white satin was at his side. She was laughing easily, and her hand slid into the arm of her companion.

"Quick work!" approved the Chief of Police. "These Intelligence fellows have all the luck."

And with a sigh he set off toward his home, to allay the fears of his wife.

RODGERS had been bold. Women, particularly beautiful women, frightened him. The dark beauty in white satin before whom he bowed had an alluring quality which ordinarily would have caused him to turn his back on her. But it may have been that brilliant red necklace, or perhaps a perverse intuition of his own, that drove Paul Rodgers to an unusual social gesture.

"Madame Nerval—" he began.

She stopped in her progress across the lounge, and regarded him with surprise.

"I am a complete stranger here," he continued in rapid French. "A desolate stranger, madame. And on seeing such beauty and hearing such music, I am mad enough to beg a dance with you."

Her surprise disappeared in a laugh.

"Are you drunk, monsieur?"

He shook his head.

"Drunk only with the vision of you crossing this room. Say the dance is mine, madame!"

"I couldn't resist it, after such a speech from a complete stranger," she replied. Then, as with the most natural air in the world they walked toward the ballroom, she asked:

"Who are you?"

But once again Paul Rodgers shook his head.

"It is too early in the evening for the stranger to unmask, Madame Nerval. Let this dance be with a stranger."

"And yet you know my name," she pouted.

"Who would not demand to know it, the moment that he set eyes upon you?" Rodgers smiled.



"All these pretty speeches suggest that you want something," she murmured, eyeing this strange red-haired man who looked so attractive in evening-dress.

"Only a dance," he said, taking her in his arms and gliding easily to the music of the waltz.

The Intelligence officer danced well. Lola Nerval was superb. The color in her cheeks heightened, and there was a sparkle in her dark eyes as she realized that this stranger was no clodhopper in the ballroom. As they circled round amidst the well-dressed throng, Rodgers let his gaze rest upon that blood-red necklace clasp the white throat.

She was suddenly conscious of his attention.

"You like it, this necklace, *hein*?"

"I think it is beautiful," he said.

"Where did you get it?"

"From the neck of a skeleton, five thousand years old," she replied calmly.

"You are a brave woman."

"Why?"

"To wear what has adorned a skeleton."

She laughed easily.

"The skeleton was once a woman of fashion."

"Yes?"

"A woman who lived and loved in those cities known as Sodom and Gomorrah. My husband turned over the skeleton with a spade."

"An archæologist?"

"So you might call him. I expect, my friend, you are thinking that he is but a grave-robber."

Rodgers guided her gently toward the center of the ballroom.

"Only the ancients buried treasure with their dead," he observed. "Today we are practical enough to see that no wealth is lowered with the corpse."

"You have a gruesome mind, my friend."





"You have a gruesome ornament, Madame Nerval."

For a moment they stared into each other's eyes—a dark, challenging gaze from Lola Nerval; a shrewd gray glance from Paul Rodgers. Then the waltz dribbled to an end; slowly they sauntered from the ballroom back to the lounge.

"That was a divine dance," she murmured.

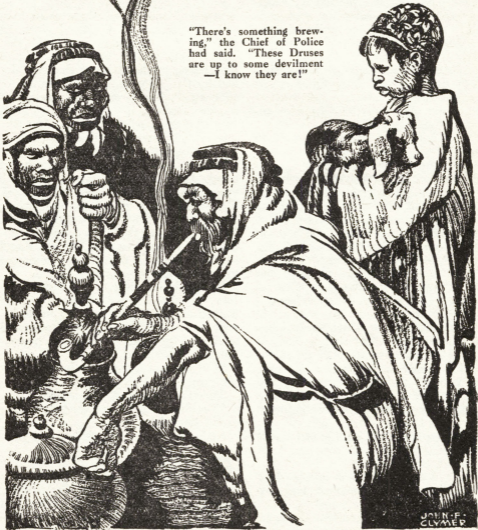
"You dance divinely," said the Red Wolf, bowing her to a seat.

She accepted a cigarette from his proffered case, her painted fingernails drooping for a moment like red talons.

"And now that you have granted a stranger the desire for a dance," said Rodgers slowly, "I am going to beg another favor."

"*Mon Dieu!* I might have guessed you

"There's something brewing," the Chief of Police had said. "These Druses are up to some devilment—I know they are!"



JOHN F. CLYMER

were being too nice. What is it now, my friend?"

"I would like to see the grave from which that necklace came."

She blew a cloud of cigarette-smoke into his face.

"Are you then pretending to be interested in archæology?"

"There is no pretense. I am intrigued."

"With Sodom and Gomorrah?"

"Who would not be?"

She flicked the ash from her cigarette.

"That should be easy enough. The Governor of Palestine, Sir Hubert Laidler, is paying a state visit to the diggings the day after tomorrow. Why not join the official party?"

"I hate official parties," protested the Intelligence officer. "And surely I could ask for no better guide than yourself."

She hesitated. This persuasive stranger seemed possessed of a pertinacity which interested her. Moreover, he was sufficiently good-looking and well-mannered to appeal to her.

"I GO back to the diggings tomorrow," she said. "They lie to the north of the Dead Sea."

"Let me take you there by car—tomorrow," he suggested boldly.

"Why not?" she murmured, half to herself.

"Yes, why not?" he repeated.

She turned her dark eyes toward him.

"Very well, my friend. But let us now cease this romantic *blague*. The time has now come to unmask. You know me as Madame Nerval. Who are you?"

His sunburned face smiled at her.

"My name is Paul Rodgers."

"Paul Rodgers!" The flush in her cheeks disappeared, and a dead pallor remained. "Then you are the man they call the Red Wolf of—"

A little evening bag which she had carried slipped to the floor with a thud. It burst open, and a mixture of ridiculous contents spilled forth. Lipstick, powder-puff, a small tube of perfume, a key and other objects. In the confusion that followed, Rodgers bent down and gathered them in his hands.

But even as he did so, the red talons descended.

"Thank you, monsieur."

Swiftly she scooped them into her bag. Then she rose. The incident had disturbed her composure.

"I must go now, Monsieur Rodgers. Thank you for an amusing half-hour. Good-by."

"*Au revoir*, Madame Nerval. Until tomorrow."

"Are you serious, then?" she asked.

"Are you afraid?" he countered.

Once again their glances challenged each other.

"Till tomorrow, then," she said with a sigh.

He bowed. Still statuesque in the white satin gown, she sauntered away.

The Intelligence officer stood with his hands clenched. As she passed out of the doorway, he sank back into a chair and unclenched his hands. A ball of paper was in one of his palms. He had concealed it from that spilled evening bag. Carefully he smoothed it out over his knee. It was scrawled with strange hieroglyphics, and signed. He read:

CH₃ C₆ H₅ (NO₂)₃

Raoul Sabin.

"Queer," murmured Rodgers to himself. "A woman in a Chanel gown. A necklace five thousand years old that comes from Sodom and Gomorrah. A divine dancer who, in a bag that contains her lipstick, also carries a formula for that most deadly explosive known to science—T. N. T.!" . . . A strange mixture that required sorting . . . And who was Raoul Sabin—Raoul Sabin—Sabin?"

Like the *leitmotif* in a musical composition, the name began to reiterate in his mind. *Raoul Sabin*. It was a theme with variations. Memories began to be stirred, like dead leaves in an autumn wind: Raoul Sabin. Paris. A boulevard café. Newsboys crying the latest noonday scandal. Dynamite. Yes, that was it! Raoul Sabin, the famous dynamiter—sentenced to transportation to Devil's Island.

With a quiet smile of triumph on his face, the Intelligence officer rose. He walked across the lounge and made his way to where the hall porter rested lethargically against a series of pigeon-holes of abandoned letters.

"I shall want a car for a long journey tomorrow," he said to the porter.

The porter blinked into action.

"Yes sir. I will get you the best motorcar in Jerusalem, sir."

Rodgers grinned and walked away.

THE motorcar purred easily over the brown plains that led toward the Dead Sea. Paul Rodgers was driving, and his slim hands controlled the wheel as easily and as firmly as if he were aboard his favorite mount, a camel.

For some time the woman in white,

Madame Nerval, who was seated at his side, had been silent. Suddenly, with a slight hesitation of her rouged lips, she asked him:

"Why did you insist upon coming with me to the diggings?"

He smiled. "Because I am curious, Madame Nerval."

She did not smile.

"Will you stop the car, please?" she commanded.

AUTOMATICALLY he did so, glancing at her in surprise. But her gaze was fixed beyond him toward the brown plain where a few stumps glistened white in the sunshine.

"There was once a woman who was curious—" began Madame Nerval.

"Naturally."

"She stood on this very spot, and gazed back upon the burning cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. For her curiosity, she was changed into a pillar of salt."

The Red Wolf narrowed his gray eyes.

"Lot's wife?"

"Lot's wife." She nodded gravely.

He laughed lightly.

"But where is the pillar of salt?" he asked, looking round at the brown plain.

"Some enterprising Levantine business man decided to dig it up and sell it as table-salt," she explained. "This particular pillar of salt was always described by guides as Lot's wife. And when hundreds of pilgrims heard of the desecration, they protested vigorously."

"Did it have any effect?"

"It merely gave the Levantine gentlemen a new idea," she continued. "In future they sold their salt as a rare and curious commodity—salt that had once been Lot's wife. And they got a much better price for it."

"You know the history of this region very well," he observed.

"My husband is on the diggings," she explained.

Rodgers eyed her cautiously.

"Am I to suppose, then, that there is a moral in the story you have just told me?" he asked.

Her face was white and set. Her dark eyes stared ahead.

"You said you were curious."

"I am, very curious," he said quietly.

Imperceptibly she shrugged her shoulders.

"Very well, then. I have warned you. Let us drive on."

And for the rest of that swift journey across the plains, she did not speak.

Very soon they reached a number of little hillocks alongside the River Jordan. It was an area known as the Wady Djarafa. Heaps of earth were being flung up by little armies of Arabs with spades. At first glance it gave the impression of a series of trenches being built for the use of a defending army.

"Sodom and Gomorrah?" asked the Red Wolf.

She nodded.

"And there, on the right, is the tent of the leader of the expedition, Father Talman," she added dryly.

Rodgers switched off the engine of the car, and gallantly helped the beautiful woman in white to descend. A slight smile of triumph crossed his face as he noticed that here, away from Jerusalem, she seemed slightly ill at ease. Much of her poise had disappeared. Nevertheless she accompanied him as he strolled toward the tent set among the rough heaps of rubble.

Father Talman came out to meet them. He was a fat, swarthy Frenchman, whose absurdity was heightened by the khaki shorts, piratical-looking belt and tennis shirt in which he was garbed. A scraggy beard hid his throat.

"*Bonjour*, Madame Nerval. You come back early."

"And I have brought with me—a friend," explained Madame Nerval. "He is curious to see the work you have done. He—insisted upon coming."

"Your work, *cher maître*, is known even in Europe," smiled Rodgers, holding out his hand. "When a few weeks ago I was talking with some friends at the British Museum, there was much,—shall I say, scientific?—envy of your brilliant discoveries. And when in Jerusalem last night I made the acquaintance of the charming Madame Nerval, I could not resist paying a personal visit to your diggings, Father Talman."

The fat and sallow Frenchman blushed with pleasure at this greeting.

"But of course, monsieur, you are very welcome," he purred. "I will myself conduct you over the ruins. It will be a pleasure, Monsieur—er—"

"Rodgers," said Madame Nerval quietly. "Monsieur Paul Rodgers."

FATHER TALMAN nodded. The name meant nothing to him. He took the Intelligence officer by the arm and began walking toward the diggings. Then he suddenly recalled the existence of the woman.

"Ah, but I am forgetting. Your husband, Madame Nerval—"

"Yes?"

She now seemed listless and indifferent.

"He is at work by the house."

"By the house!"

Despite the monotonous repetition, something like a gleam of satisfaction came into her eyes. Then she turned those lustrous dark eyes toward Paul Rodgers.

"I shall see you before you leave."

"Of course." He bowed.

FATHER TALMAN hurried him away to the heaps of rubble and stones and the delving Arabs which told of the great cities of antiquity being restored. Caressing his scraggy beard, the fat Frenchman told of his discoveries.

"I came across it by chance. A stone in the sand! You understand, *mon ami*? I began digging. In three weeks my proofs were convincing. I had discovered the long-lost cities of Sodom and Gomorrah—the cities of antiquity and great iniquity."

He chortled to himself.

"And they were destroyed by the wrath of Jehovah?" asked the Red Wolf, his gray eyes searching the men and the objects they delved.

Father Talman nodded.

"It would appear so, my friend. What probably happened was in the nature of an earthquake. And doubtless as you know, there is much oil below the surface here. An American company has recently acquired the rights. This earthquake of antiquity probably started several gushers, some of which caught fire. It was not long before the cities began to be engulfed by the blazing oil. That is the scientific explanation."

"And your own opinion?" asked Paul Rodgers politely.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"I belong to the Church, not to science."

He bent down and took up a piece of pottery that had been carefully put aside with a few other broken objects.

"Exquisite, is it not?" he asked. "It is a pity that the wrath of God, in the shape of fire and earthquake, left so little for a poor archæologist to discover. Not even the walls of the cities were left standing."

The Intelligence officer examined the pottery with interest. His life in the des-

ert, his extensive reading of Arabic literature, and the Koran in particular, had made him an authority on the ancient Middle East. The discovery was genuine.

"But did I not hear you mention to Madame Nerval something about a house?" he ventured.

"That is so," babbled the Frenchman. "We shall go there at once. A luxurious house with the remains of what must have been a garden. I think I can justifiably claim that the house is one which originally belonged to the Lot of the Bible, and in which his family dwelt while this city endured in its wickedness."

"A great claim!" said Rodgers.

"But justified. I have proofs," went on Father Talman. "I will show them to you. In this house Lot received the two angels who came to warn him of the forthcoming destruction of Sodom. It is this house which I hope to show with great pride to His Excellency the Governor, Sir Hubert Laidler, when he honors me with a visit tomorrow."

Obviously the forthcoming visit was to be a great occasion for the fat Frenchman. As he led Paul Rodgers through the heaps of rubble, his voice in sonorous fashion announced the program of the visit. The Red Wolf paid little attention to the details. His narrowed gray eyes were fixed on the Arabs, nearly all young men, who were working vigorously with spades.

They neared what had obviously been the principal gate of the city. Father Talman was prattling away vivaciously. But a single sentence growled in Arabic by a workman arrested Rodgers. It was a simple but mysterious sentence:

"The tulips are planted in the garden."

"Aiee!" grunted the other Arab to whom the sentence had been addressed.

RODGERS glanced swiftly at them. But they had bent over their spades and were digging vigorously.

"And here is the house of Lot," went on Father Talman. "Magnificent, is it not, my friend? Regard the solid workmanship. Thick walls, which only the wrath of Jehovah could overthrow. We have even found traces of frescoes which suggest that artists of diabolical skill existed in Sodom. But enter, Monsieur Rodgers."

The Intelligence officer passed beneath what had once been the doorway. Then he crossed a heap of rubble and found himself in the remains of a spacious



A shot rang out. . . The sullen Syrian pitched forward and began to slither down the slope.

courtyard and garden, with a lily-pond and fountain—obviously the house of a person of consequence.

"Even Lot believed in luxury," ventured Rodgers, examining the ruins with interest.

"Lot was favored by Jehovah," went

on the Frenchman. "But let me show you an altar which—"

"The tulips are planted in the garden."

Once again that phrase was uttered, this time in French. Rodgers looked up. But it was not Father Talman who had spoken. A dark, sour-faced Syrian had whispered the phrase to a woman.

"Be quiet, you fool!" was her reply.

The woman was Lola Nerval.

"Ah, permit me, Monsieur Rodgers," burst out Father Talman. "This is my chief assistant, Jean Nerval. I depend

upon him, particularly for the Arab labor."

Sullenly the Syrian bowed.

"*Bonjour, monsieur.*"

"An excellent army of workers, Monsieur Nerval," commented Red Rodgers. "They seem so well—er—disciplined."

"It is not an army," growled the Syrian in reply. "And they work because today is pay-day."

The Intelligence officer smiled pleasantly.

"Nevertheless, I must compliment you on the splendid work you have done, here particularly," he replied. "Not only have you cleared this courtyard, but you have almost made the garden bloom again."

The Syrian started. Father Talman interposed with a laugh:

"That, I am afraid, would be impossible, my friend. A garden blooming in the ruins of Sodom! No, no, that is too fantastic. Perhaps when His Excellency the Governor visits us, we may present him with a bouquet."

And Father Talman roared at what he considered an excellent joke. Even the Syrian lost his scowl for a moment, while Lola Nerval smiled gently. Only Rodgers remained serious.

Then, abruptly, he faced the little group.

"But already I have taken up too much of your time, *cher maître*. I recollect that I have urgent business in Jerusalem. I must take my leave."

"Surely you will lunch with us?" protested Father Talman.

Rodgers shook his head.

"Alas, it is impossible. But I am so enchanted with your discoveries that I will surely arrive with the Governor tomorrow. I must see them again."

Father Talman purred.

"That is indeed a compliment. For the moment then it is only *au revoir*."

THE fat Frenchman shook hands with the slim figure in white. Rodgers murmured his thanks, nodded casually to the Syrian, and walked over to Lola Nerval.

"These ruins are an admirable setting for you, Madame Nerval."

Her dark gaze rested upon him.

"Am I to consider that a compliment? Sodom was a wicked city."

"I enjoy wickedness," observed the Red Wolf.

Her dead-white face seemed strained in the cruel sunlight.

"Must you really return tomorrow?" she asked.

His gray eyes opened a little in surprise.

"Not necessarily," he replied. "But I should like to come to see you."

There was silence for a moment.

"I would advise you not to come to the diggings again," she said curtly, and walked away.

AN hour later Paul Rodgers had stopped his car at the identical place where earlier in the day Madame Nerval had commanded him to halt. It was the spot which tradition had identified as the death-place of Lot's wife.

Within the shade of the car he had squatted in Arab fashion, an incongruous figure in his white European clothes.

"Why a tulip garden in the desert?" he asked himself.

The very absurdity of the phrase had stamped itself on his mind. Tulips of the cultivated varieties were flowers unknown to the Arab. But were they? A thought, a devilish thought, entered the mind of the Red Wolf. The audacity of it took away his breath. His sunburned features set grimly.

"A garden of death!" he muttered. "And the tulips are explosives buried in the earth. Once again there are to be screams of destruction in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah."

He continued to sit there until the sun had dropped below the scarlet ruined hills. Then he stood up and began to walk. But his direction was toward the diggings of Sodom. . . .

Next day a procession of white motorcars moved toward the diggings near the Dead Sea. They carried the Governor of Palestine, a few bored A. D. C.'s and others. In the rear car of that procession sat the Chief of Police, Colonel Travers, and an inscrutable Intelligence officer.

"But why, my dear Rodgers, drag me into a picnic of this character?" protested Colonel Travers. "I loathe picnics."

"So do I," was the reply. "But this picnic may have startling consequences. I hope your camel patrols started early this morning?"

"My men can be depended upon," grunted the Colonel, glancing instinctively at his watch. "They should be in the vicinity now. But why be so mysterious, Rodgers? Can't you explain the need for bringing nearly half the police-force of Jerusalem into the desert?"

"The Governor is in danger," said the Intelligence officer briefly.

"So you have said," was the weary reply. "But what danger can there be in two dead cities?"

"Has it ever occurred to you," asked the Red Wolf, "that rebels might consider it well worth while to conquer two dead cities before moving on to living cities?"

"I don't understand what you're talking about."

"These ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are already in the hands of the rebel Druses."

"Nonsense! It's an old French padre who's in charge of the diggings."

"A figurehead," said Rodgers, "a blind man concerned only with the Bible and his scientific discoveries. All the Arabs who work for him are rebels. An army of Druses! Naturally, Father Talman does not know."

Colonel Travers began to be interested.

"Then the leader of these Druses—"

Rodgers nodded.

"We shall find him there. He will be introduced to the Governor."

"Good heavens! What's the game? Assassination?"

"Not only of the Governor," Rodgers said calmly, "but all of us."

"How? Sudden attack?"

"Something more cataclysmic than that. Dynamite!"

"Good heavens!" Colonel Travers began to look uncomfortable. He looked ahead at the other cars. "Don't you think we ought to stop this—er—"

"Picnic? Certainly not. You want to capture this leader of the rebels?"

"Naturally. But—"

"And you carried out my instructions to the letter?"

"I did, but—"

"Then there's nothing much to worry about, my dear Travers. Let us look at the scenery. Did you know that this was the spot where Lot's wife is said to have met her doom?"

"I only hope it isn't going to be the spot where we meet our doom," grunted the Chief of Police.

ON arrival at the diggings they were received by the perspiring, excited Father Talman. His beard had been combed, his garb newly laundered. The Governor, Sir Hubert Laidler, shook hands with him, and the tour of inspection began. The diggings seemed deserted. Only a few Arabs were visible.

"They asked that they might be gathered outside the diggings to welcome Your Excellency," explained Father Talman.

RODGERS gazed round for a glimpse of Lola Nerval, but she was not to be seen. Then his eyes turned toward a sandy hillock in the distance. Something white was crouched there. He smiled grimly, and whispered something to Colonel Travers. The Chief of Police gave a whispered order to one of his lieutenants, who saluted and walked away in a casual fashion.

After an examination of several *objets d'art*, discovered among the ruins, the Governor, accompanied by Father Talman, began a stroll among the heaps of rubble. Slowly they approached the house that might have been Lot's. The fat Frenchman was babbling excitedly. He indicated the doorway. The Governor stooped and entered.

"And now for the courtyard and the garden, Your Excellency," said Father Talman. "It is, I venture to think, the finest piece of archæological work in Palestine today."

The Governor stepped forward. The lily-pond and fountain attracted him at once. He moved toward them.

The A. D. C.'s followed. Behind were the Red Wolf and the Chief of Police.

Colonel Travers looked at Rodgers.

"Is this quite safe, Rodgers? Aren't we carrying this play-acting a little too far?" he whispered.

The Intelligence officer did not answer. He knew only too well that it was a gamble—a gamble with death. Beneath that garden was enough T. N. T. to blow them all sky-high. And connecting that garden was a thin copper wire that led to an electric detonator on a sandy hillock near by, where a woman in white squatted, awaiting a signal. . . .

The signal was given. A figure in the distance raised a hand. Even at that distance Rodgers recognized the man. It was the sullen-faced Syrian, Jean Nerval. And while Rodgers waited for the white flame of the explosion that in the moment of death would tell him of failure, he turned to the Chief of Police.

"That's your rebel leader, my dear Travers. He was introduced fifteen minutes ago. Better get him, now."

Nothing had happened. The Governor was still talking amiably with Father Talman, and bending over the lily-pond.

Once again that silhouetted figure

raised his hand, this time with a gesture of impatience.

"—and I am now convinced, Your Excellency, that it was in this courtyard that Lot received the two angels sent by Jehovah to warn him."

"Most interesting!" said the Governor.

They turned away from the lily-pond. It was then that the figure in the distance lost all control of himself. He stooped, picked up a rifle and leveled it at the little group in the garden. The Red Wolf drew himself up tensely. One shot into that garden of dynamite, and the lost city of Sodom would be destroyed again.

A shot rang out. But it did not come from the figure in the distance. Instead, the sullen Syrian pitched forward in the sand, and his body began to slither down the slope. And simultaneously there was a shout, and a roar from beyond the diggings. The massed Arab army, also awaiting that blinding flash in the sky, had suddenly found themselves surrounded by armed police on camels. Rifles and revolvers were pointed at them.

The Governor looked up inquiringly. He strolled toward the Intelligence officer.

"Is anything the matter, Rodgers?" he asked. "You look a little pale."

Rodgers stroked beads of perspiration from his brow with his fingers.

"I find this garden rather uncomfortable, sir," he said.

"It is a trifle hot," nodded the Governor.

Slowly they passed out of the house of Lot, walked among the rubble heaps, and toward the tent where Father Talman pressed liquid refreshment upon them. The swarthy Frenchman was still babbling of archaeology, still talking of his newly found cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, still bowing and shaking hands, as the procession in the white cars left again for Jerusalem.

RODGERS found himself seated in the last car, beside the Chief of Police. "And the woman, Travers?" he asked. "What happened to her?"

Colonel Travers stared out at the burned landscape.

"I'm sorry to say, Rodgers, she was shot trying to escape. When she realized that the detonator did not work, that some one had cut the wires, she knew that the plot had failed. There was a horse waiting. She jumped into the sad-

dle and galloped away. Some of our police followed.

"It's strange, you know," the Chief of Police went on. "But at that very spot which you pointed out to me this morning, the spot where Lot's wife turned and gazed back at the burning Sodom and Gomorrah, and was turned into a pillar of salt—there for some inscrutable reason Lola Nerval turned and gazed back at her pursuers. They fired. When they reached her, she was dead."

Rodgers nodded.

"Poor woman! It was her hatred of the French, and therefore of Europeans generally, that drove her to plot with that Syrian. Did you know, Travers, that her real husband is a man named Raoul Sabin?"

"I didn't. Who is Raoul Sabin? And where is he?"

"He's a prisoner on Devil's Island, the French penal settlement," replied Rodgers. "He was convicted for an attempt to dynamite the Chamber of Deputies in Paris. A former chemist, with an extensive knowledge of explosives. Haven't you heard of him?"

COLONEL TRAVERS shook his head. "I never bother myself with French criminals," he replied.

"I confirmed my suspicions by a telephone conversation with the French police at Damascus, the evening I introduced myself to Madame Nerval," went on the Intelligence officer reflectively. "I also discovered that her husband, her real husband, had sent her all the necessary formulæ for this explosive camp which would start the rebel Druses scampering through Palestine again. She hated the race that had imprisoned her husband. Then when the Syrian, Jean Nerval, offered her fame and fortune, with himself as the future conqueror of Palestine, she accepted. And the *coup* very nearly succeeded. A chance remark I heard sent me hurrying through the sands last night into that garden. It was as I suspected. I found the wires and cut them."

"And supposing they had discovered the cut wires and replaced them early this morning?" asked Travers.

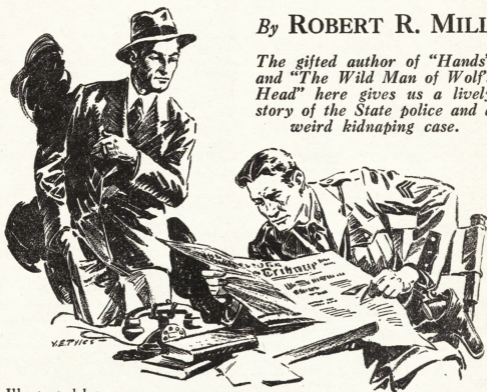
Rodgers smiled.

"We should have joined those citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah who died five thousand years ago."

The Chief of Police lit a cigarette. He felt comfortably alive.

By **ROBERT R. MILL**

The gifted author of "Hands" and "The Wild Man of Wolf's Head" here gives us a lively story of the State police and a weird kidnaping case.



Illustrated by
V. E. Pyles

Tony, Mario and Zeke

"O H, Neuralgia!" The call came from Sergeant Edward David, otherwise known as Tiny, who reclined idly in a wicker chair on the porch of a smart cottage. Both his voice and manner indicated the words had been an effort. He shifted six feet two inches of bone and muscle as he repeated the effort:

"Neuralgia!"

The door of the cottage opened; and Trooper Louis Green stood before him.

"Yes, Sergeant."

Tiny David surveyed the speaker with-out favor.

"Lots of room for improvement," was his verdict. "Even the second man bows slightly when he addresses me. You'll have to spruce up a bit if you are going to stay with me in society."

"Yes, Sergeant."

"In a way," continued Sergeant David in a judicial tone, "it isn't your fault. Here you are, just out of training-school.

Your head is full of a lot of useless information about arresting people and presenting legal evidence against them. Hadn't counted on the New York State Police setting up a temporary substation in a millionaire's cottage at the Lake Tranquil Club, had you, Tonsilitis?"

"No, Sergeant." Trooper Green was long-suffering.

Sergeant David sighed.

"You can vary your replies by saying 'Yeah' or 'Uh-huh.' I won't hold it against you as long as you bow when you first see me in the morning. I hate monotony." He glanced up. "Here comes an end to it."

A taxicab halted before the cottage, and from it issued a group of reporters and photographers. Sergeant David regarded them calmly.

"Show the gentlemen in, Diphtheria," he ordered his companion, "and ask them if they will have tea. Don't let a little thing like a kidnaping disturb

the best club traditions." He turned slightly to greet the visitors. "The publicity department is out. It is flitting hither and yon. It will be back in an hour or so. Meanwhile, let my good man here take your hats and sticks while you enjoy our view. We have had a very pleasant season, but I must admit that the club is not as exclusive as it once was. Remind me to speak about it to the secretary, Jeeves."

"Yeah," said Trooper Green.

A REPORTER perched on the rustic rail before Sergeant David.

"We aren't looking for publicity, Tiny. What we want is news."

"That," declared the man in the chair, "is something we are fresh out of. We put out all that we had, over the telephone."

"Put it out again," begged the reporter. "You see, they chased us out as the story was coming in, and we have only a hazy idea of what it is all about."

Tiny David sighed, made what appeared to be a great effort and produced some notes from the pocket of his gray coat.

"Fellow named Malcolm Bledgett was kidnaped from this cottage some time last night. He had arrived about eight o'clock, and had gone right to bed. He was to meet Henry Larrimort, the owner, here today. They were going on a hunting trip."

"Larrimort, the New York banker?" asked the reporter.

"In person, and wired for sound. We had a load of it over the telephone this morning, and he will be here on the afternoon train."

"Who is Bledgett?"

"Bledgett," declared Tiny David, "is one of those little cousins of the rich. One branch of his family has a little money, but not much. What they do have, they aren't putting out to Bledgett. He lives up here, and knows the country well. Killing a few deer has made him a big-game hunter. He makes a living taking his rich friends on hunting trips. Not a paid guide, understand. Perish the thought!"

The reporter on the rail smiled.

"We have a perfect picture of Mr. Bledgett, Tiny. Go on with the kidnaping."

"Well, Larrimort's servants are coming up with him, so the club servants took care of Bledgett when he arrived last night. Then they left him, and he

was alone in the cottage. When the maid came in this morning she found the door of his room open. Most of his clothes were here. His rifle, his revolver and his hunting kit were in one corner of the room. But there were signs of a struggle, and Bledgett was gone. The maid found a note."

Sergeant David produced a piece of wrapping paper, upon which words and letters, evidently clipped from newspapers, were pasted. The reporter glanced at the message:

"We have LarryMur. You will get NOTE tell how to Get him BACK."

The reporter returned the paper.

"How do you think they will feel when they learn they have Bledgett instead of Larrimort?"

Sergeant David replaced the paper in his pocket.

"I have gone as far as my controls will take me at a public séance," he asserted. "Persons with additional questions may obtain a private reading for the nominal fee of five dollars. Speaking for myself, if I thought I was kidnaping Larrimort, and found out I had drawn Bledgett—well, I wouldn't like it."

"Have there been any other messages?"

"The publicity department had a phone call from his wife that one had showed up. He went over to his home in the village to get it."

"Who is the publicity department?"

"One Norman Claytor. In addition to his other misfortunes, he is Bledgett's nephew."

"Why do you call him the publicity department, Tiny?"

Tiny David settled deeper in the chair.

"You'll meet him in a little while. Let's take things easy. Something tells me I am in for a lot of chasing around." His deep voice became a plaintive whine. "I hate chasing around, particularly when there is a nice place like this with a comfortable chair." He glanced at the reporter on the rail. "You aren't comfortable there. Poison Ivy, get the gentleman a chair."

"Uh-huh," said Trooper Green.

CLAYTOR arrived in a small roadster, and with him he brought a burst of activity.

"Good morning, gentlemen. Claytor is my name—Norman Claytor. Mr. Bledgett is my uncle. If there is anything I can do for you, feel free to call

upon me. You are welcome to anything we have. That is, anything that will not interfere with the work of the police. Naturally, the first thing we are interested in is the safe return of my uncle."

"How well does your uncle know Larrimort?"

Claytor smiled.

"The three families, the Larrimorts, the Bledgetts and the Claytors, have been friends for years. My uncle first interested Mr. Larrimort in this wonderful Adirondack country. Mr. Larrimort is an ardent hunter and fisherman. My uncle always accompanies him in the woods, frequently neglecting his own duties in order to do so."

"What business is your uncle in?"

"He is retired."

Tiny David nodded his approval.

"That," he declared, "is the job I have been looking forward to for years. Now, if these gentlemen will excuse us, we will step inside and see what you have." He turned to the reporters. "See you later."

Inside the cottage, Claytor produced a page torn from a newspaper.

"My wife found that under the kitchen door," he said, handing it to David.

TINY DAVID examined the page and found a message written along the margin and over the print:

Norm: Three men overpowered me in the cottage and took me to a hut somewhere in the woods. Their names are Tony, Mario and Zeke. They thought I was Larrimort, and they want \$20,000. They have been ugly since I convinced them of my identity. They made me tell where you lived, and then they made a note by pasting letters from newspapers.

After giving the note to a boy—I think he is Zeke's son—they all went out to watch the roads. I persuaded the boy to take this note. I am praying that it will reach you. The boy refused to tell me where the cabin is located, and I was blindfolded on the way here so I have no idea where I am.

They have me chained to the stove. Have had nothing to eat since I have been here. They say they will kill me if they don't get what they want. For God's sake, try and do what you can.

Sergeant David whistled softly. "Sounds serious, doesn't it?"

"It surely does," Claytor admitted.

"But read this."

The Sergeant accepted a piece of wrapping-paper covered with letters taken from newspapers:

CLAYTOR

bludgeT not LarrymURT but we collect aLL same. get \$20,000 in tens Fives and 1s. If you KEEP numbers we will kill bludGET. HAVE one man take MONEY tomorrow morning and walk traile up SCARface to fire tour. he can be Cop but he must put gun at TOUR. then He walk To clear At top OF mt and drOp money at WeSt sidE. NEXT he walk to eaST side of clear and put blindFoLD on and sit with back to tour for At leaST 2 Hours. Then he Go back to village. ThRee days later blUDGet come back safe. BUT if you start surch we can see and he DIE. If man and money not there he DIE tOO.

SERGEANT DAVID'S whistle was louder.

"Clever," he admitted. "You're the doctor, Mr. Claytor. What do you say?"

Claytor hesitated.

"I can't take the responsibility, Sergeant. Despite the fact we will do anything within our power to insure my uncle's return, twenty thousand dollars is quite out of the question for my family at the present." He paused. "Suppose we wait for Mr. Larrimort. He is a man of affairs, and accustomed to emergencies."

Sergeant David nodded.

"I can't take the responsibility, either," he admitted. He walked to the telephone and removed the receiver. "Malone nine, two hundred," he told the operator. "Sergeant David speaking. I want to talk to Captain Charles Field."

Ten minutes later the two men returned to the porch, where Claytor exhibited the notes.

"Sure that is your uncle's handwriting?" came the question from a reporter.

"Quite sure," Claytor answered.

"Think the kidnapers will keep their word if the ransom is paid?"

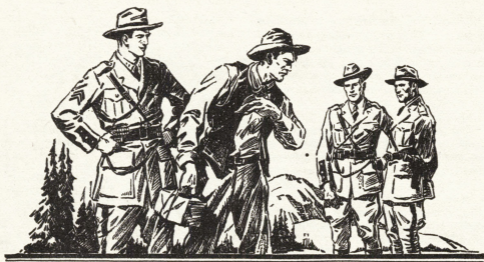
"I think Bledgett will return unharmed if the money is paid," Sergeant David replied.

"Will you agree to their terms?"

"Bigger and better minds will decide that," Sergeant David asserted. "It is a wise man who knows when he is licked. These notes put Bledgett in a tough spot." He frowned. "Besides, I see a lot of walking, ahead. Don't like walking. I'm going to make friends with these chairs while I have the chance."

But Tiny David's enjoyment of the chairs soon was interrupted by the arrival of Captain Field, commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop.

The Captain was accompanied by the



banker Henry Larrimort, whom he had met at the station. There was an immediate conference in the living-room of the cottage.

Sergeant David, his deep voice booming in the unfinished room, outlined the case from start to present. Then Larrimort, with the air of a man accustomed to command, took charge.

"The note," he declared, "shows very clearly that Mr. Bledgett is the victim of mistaken identity. He has suffered the fate intended for me."

CLAYTOR nodded in agreement. The banker addressed Captain Field.

"What chance would your men have of finding the kidnapers on Scarface Mountain?"

Captain Field hesitated.

"That is wild country," he admitted.

"The problem is complicated because the searching party must be limited to practical woodsmen—others would only be in the way. Offhand, I'll call it an even chance."

"And in the meantime—"

The suggestion came from Claytor.

"Exactly," snapped the banker. "In the meantime, these men, if they mean what they say, will kill Mr. Bledgett."

"Not necessarily," Captain Field objected. "Mr. Bledgett is their ace in the hole. Alive, he is worth \$20,000. Dead, he means the electric chair for them."

Larrimort's manner showed he did not regard objections with favor.

"Had much experience with kidnaping cases, Captain?"

Captain Field smiled.

"No," he admitted, "I haven't. We

don't go in for kidnaping up here. But all crime—"

Larrimort's hand was upraised.

"In the city,"—there was condescension in his voice—"the police are forced to cope with it frequently. Experience has shown that desperate men will not hesitate to carry out their threats." He paused. "I would welcome the opportunity of consulting the experts of the New York department. Here, however, time is the factor."

"Exactly." Captain Field's patience was near an end. "You are confronted with two possible courses of action: either you accept the terms of the kidnapers, or you turn the entire affair over to us."

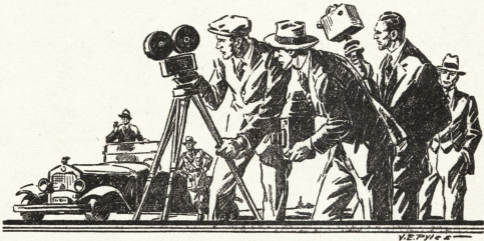
The banker, visibly annoyed, shot a question:

"Can you guarantee success?"

"I can guarantee you that every resource of my department will be used to bring about the safe return of the missing man. I can promise you that we will never stop until we find the guilty persons in this crime, and see that they are punished." He fought back his anger, and a slow smile played over his face. "We do not specialize in failure."

Larrimort's caustic voice gave no hint that he had heard the first part of the statement.

"We are not interested in your past performances. Our problem is to bring about the safe return of Mr. Bledgett. After a careful survey of the situation, I see no alternative save to accept the terms of these men. I shall furnish the twenty thousand. I shall demand that the terms be complied with."



Captain Field was silent.

Claytor, however, was on his feet.

"I hardly know how to thank you, sir. Speaking on behalf of our family, I know that we place the utmost confidence in your judgment. Also, we shall be greatly in your debt."

The banker expanded visibly.

"Not at all," he protested. "I have a selfish interest in this matter. I can't forget that I was the target of these men. We must bring about your uncle's safe return." This salve to his vanity made him generous. "After Mr. Bledgett is safe, we shall be very glad of any aid Captain Field can give us in capturing the men. I have no desire to part with twenty thousand dollars."

Captain Field made a gesture of resignation.

"Very well. I have only one demand: Mr. Larrimort must announce to the press that the terms of the kidnapers are being met because of his orders, and over my objections."

Claytor stepped forward.

"That can be done very easily," he asserted. He turned to the banker. "If you will step out on the porch with me, we can make the announcement at once."

When the two men were gone, Captain Field turned to Tiny David.

"What do you think, Sergeant?"

SERGEANT DAVID'S drawl was pronounced.

"Just what the Captain is thinking. We can get Bledgett back safely. We can round up Tony, Mario and Zeke. We can even return Larrimort's twenty thousand, sir."

He stretched indolently.

"But it means a lot of chasing around. It's four miles by trail to the top of Scarface, and upgrade every foot of the way. I hope the Captain will remember that when he makes out details in the future. I sure hate to go chasing around, particularly up mountains."

Captain Field was smiling.

"I'll remember," he promised. "But aren't you keen to get your hands on Tony, Mario and Zeke?"

Tiny David sighed.

"Yes sir. I am right anxious to meet them. But I hate to climb mountains after them." A note of anxiety crept into his voice. "Besides, they might not all be there. Sure hate to miss any of them after doing all that climbing."

"That's right," Captain Field admitted. "They might leave one man here in the village to see how things are breaking." He studied the face of the huge man at his side. "Which one do you figure they have left behind, Tiny?"

Sergeant David pondered.

"Zeke is my bet, Captain."

Captain Field nodded.

"Yes, I guess it would be Zeke. Well, if it will ease your mind any, I'll stick around here and see if Zeke shows up."

"Thank you, sir. I'd sure hate to miss Zeke."

Captain Field's eyes were twinkling.

"Just one thing, Sergeant. Don't let your desire to get your hands on Tony and Mario make you forget that your first job is to bring back Bledgett unharmed. That comes first, even before recovering the money."

"Very well, Captain," Sergeant David assented.

"Think you'll have any trouble?"

"No sir. I am counting on Tony and Mario being right reasonable after I have had a little talk with them."

Then Larrimort and Claytor reentered the cottage.

"I shall instruct the Bank of Lake Tranquil to deliver the money here at once," said the banker, moving toward the telephone.

When the call was completed, he addressed Captain Field.

"Captain, we call upon you to give us a man to deliver the ransom." The gray eyes of the banker flashed, and his lips narrowed. He was the executive in action. "The note says a policeman will be satisfactory. So I want a man who knows that mountain. I want a man who will carry out orders without making any foolhardy and blundering attempts that may cost Mr. Bledgett's life. Do you have such a man?"

Captain Field hesitated only a second.

"Why, yes, Mr. Larrimort. I think I do. Sergeant David here answers all your requirements."

"Me, Captain!" protested Tiny David. "I'll go if the Captain orders me to, but I hadn't counted on chasing around all over any mountain."

Larrimort was studying the speaker.

"He'll do," was his verdict. "Capable enough when carrying out orders, I have no doubt, but needs somebody to do his thinking for him. Well, we'll do that."

"Yes," Captain Field agreed, "I can't think of a better man for the job than Sergeant David."

TWO hours later Sergeant David and Bertrand Harrison, the reporter who had questioned him at the cottage, were seated in a restaurant in Lake Tranquil.

"We have steak, ham and eggs and veal potpie," recited the waitress. "The steak is very nice."

"Ham and eggs," Tiny David ordered. "Can't afford to waste my strength cutting steak. Lot of chasing around to do tomorrow."

The girl departed.

"Tiny," the reporter asked, "is this thing a phony?"

The Sergeant inspected a platter of ham and eggs delivered to an adjoining table.

"My ham can't be any thinner than that, unless they cut it with a razor." His attention came back to his companion. "Just suppose," he began, "that

along about tomorrow night I should show up with Bledgett safe and sound, with the twenty thousand and with Tony, Mario and Zeke. Would you call that a phony?"

The reporter leaned forward.

"Come clean, Tiny. You have the dope on this gang."

SERGEANT DAVID inspected the offering the waitress brought.

"They found the razor," was his verdict. "Start a second order right away, sister." He paused with the fork halfway to his mouth. "Didn't you ever play just-suppose when you were a kid, Bert? That is what we are doing now." He lowered his voice. "Stick around tomorrow afternoon, and have your photographer ready. But not a word until then."

"You know me, Tiny," protested the reporter.

"Yes," Sergeant David admitted; "if I didn't, I wouldn't play just-suppose with you."

"How did you get the dope?" Harrison asked.

"What dope?" Tiny David grinned. "Well, in case it should happen, Bledgett gave us the dope to work on. I take back what I said about that bird. He was excited, and he had to work fast, but he packed more information into a short note than most men would get in a ten-page report."

Tiny David sighed.

"Could eat more," he complained, "but you get hard looks on the third order. Well, guess I'll finish this sample and get some sleep. Have to be up early and do a lot of chasing around. Sure dread it."

He sighed again, and rising, ambled out of the restaurant. . . .

There was a crowd along the main road near the start of the trail to Scarface early the following morning. Reporters and photographers were much in evidence. Automobiles belonging to tourists were parked near by. Natives lined the road.

Shortly before eight o'clock Captain Field, Sergeant David and three troopers drove up. Larrimort and Claytor followed in a second car. Cameras clicked as the occupants of the two automobiles stepped out.

Tiny David chuckled as he glanced at the throng.

"Wish I had thought to sell the soft-drink concession," he lamented.

Captain Field smiled.

"Don't be greedy," he advised. "It should belong to Larrimort. He's paying for this. It's all his party."

The banker, apparently, was aware that the party was his own, and was determined to make the most of it.

"I would suggest having one of your men guard the entrance to the trail." His voice was loud. "The others can keep traffic moving."

"Good idea," said Captain Field quietly. He gave the necessary orders. Then he addressed the crowd: "You people are welcome to stay here, but I'll have to ask you to keep off the trail." He paused and then added: "Mr. Larrimort's orders."

A rustic, seated on a fence along the road, halted his whittling.

"Who the big hemlock is Mr. Larrimort?"

Captain Field wheeled toward him.

"Mr. Larrimort is the gentleman in charge of today's—er—festivities. Have you ever had a nicer time at a kidnaping?"

The banker glared at Captain Field. That official calmly smiled.

"Any other orders, Mr. Larrimort?"

"Yes," snapped the financier. "Get him started. What's he waiting for?"

Tiny David drew his huge form from the ground slowly. He stretched his big arms. He sighed. Captain Field handed him a package wrapped in thick paper.

"That's the ransom money!"

The murmur went up from the crowd. Claytor stepped forward.

"Just a moment—I promised the gentlemen of the press they could have some pictures."

They snapped Larrimort handing the money to Sergeant David. They took a shot of Claytor shaking hands with the Sergeant, and wishing him success. They took a final picture of Tiny David as the dense foliage along the trail swallowed him up.

CAPTAIN FIELD walked with his man for a short distance.

"Tough going, along this trail."

"Sure is, Captain. I dread it."

"Watch out that these branches don't tear those chevrons off your sleeves."

"Had 'em two months this time, Captain. Sort of aim to keep 'em until I trade them in for a silver bar." He pondered. "Don't know as I would care so much for the bar, at that. Lieu-

tenant has to do a lot of chasing around—even more than a sergeant."

Captain Field smiled.

"For a man who has to have his thinking done for him, you get along rather well." He extended his hand. "Good luck, Tiny."

The Captain stood watching the huge man walk slowly forward, complaining bitterly about the length and condition of the trail. He saw the slouching crawl change to a steady pace which, he knew, Sergeant David could and would maintain for hours. He heard the protests cease.

He chuckled, this State Police Captain. He spoke his thoughts aloud:

"Lazy—hates to chase around—needs to have his thinking done for him!" He chuckled again. "If a knowledge of human nature helps any, wouldn't I make a wow of a banker!" There was a warm glow about his heart as he thought of the dangers toward which his Sergeant was climbing. "Stout lad, Tiny. Wish I had fifty like him."

He listened. The sound of snapping branches was no longer audible. So he rejoined Claytor and Larrimort, and resigned himself to one of the hardest tasks of an officer who is forced to send men alone into peril—waiting.

UPWARD, steadily, went the trail. Tiny David struggled through thick foliage, where twigs and small branches scratched at his face and hands. The thick foliage gave way to scrub pines. They in turn were replaced by low bushes. Here and there came open spaces, which afforded a breathing spell. Then the bushes vanished, and jagged rocks appeared.

Slowly but surely, and with the sure-footedness of a mountain goat, the huge man picked his way among them. He was breathing easily. He climbed with a grace that gave the lie to the slouch he so often affected. The ripple of the muscles playing beneath his gray uniform shrieked a contradiction to his favorite claim that he hated exercise. Upon his broad face there was a little quizzical smile. . . .

It was almost noon when he drew near to the fire-tower, which was not manned by a ranger because frequent rain-storms had for the present drawn the teeth of the red menace of the forests. Tiny David drew his revolver from its holster, unbuckled a snap that attached a strap to a ring in the base



Tiny David leaped to his feet. The revolver went up.

of the butt, and placed the weapon on the ground beneath the tower. Then he walked on to the clearing that marked the peak of Scarface. At the west side of the clearing he placed a package on the rocks. He worked slowly, calmly, and apparently he had no idea that hidden eyes might be watching him.

After leaving the money, he walked to the east side of the clearing. There he sat upon the rock, with his back to the fire-tower. Off in the distance was Lake Tranquil. His keen eyes picked out the small ribbon that was the main road, and followed it until a cluster of dark dots told him that was the place where the crowd awaited his return.

He chuckled softly as he produced a large handkerchief, folded it to three thicknesses and tied it about his eyes. When the blindfold was adjusted, he fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette and matches. He lighted the smoke clumsily. Then he shifted his position slightly, apparently in an effort to find a comfortable place on the rocks—and waited.

For fully five minutes the only sound was the whistle of the wind around the rocky top of the mountain. Sergeant David threw the cigarette aside. He sat with his elbows propped upon his knees, and his chin resting in the palms of his hands.

He heard a faint click from the direction of the fire-tower. . . . Then a silence. . . . A slight scuffling sound. . . . Silence again. . . . The faint rustle of paper. . . .

Tiny David leaped to his feet, tearing the blindfold from his eyes. He wheeled about. Before him stood a man clad in the rough garb of the woods. In this man's left hand was the package of money. His right hand clasped a revolver.

"Hello, Tony!" Sergeant David's tone was conversational.

The face of the man before him contracted with sheer rage. The revolver went up until it was trained at the breast of the man in the gray uniform.

Tiny David walked slowly forward. There was a convulsive movement of the hand that held the revolver. Then Sergeant David threw himself forward.

The gun roared. Something struck the trooper full in the chest, driving the breath from his lungs. But his huge body fell upon the man in rough attire, almost smothering him beneath its weight. . . .

Back on the road, the crowd grew as the hours passed. Additional troopers arrived to assist in unraveling the congested traffic.

Larrimort surveyed the scene from the seat of an automobile. Claytor paced back and forth on the road, occasionally exchanging words with the reporters. Captain Field sat upon the running-board of a troop car.

IT was almost four o'clock in the afternoon when a cry went up from the trooper guarding the entrance to the trail:

"Somebody coming, sir!"

Captain Field swung into action.

"Back!" he ordered. "Everybody back!"

Troopers formed a human line at the entrance to the trail. The line parted, and a man wearing the garb of the woods walked forward uncertainly. His glance was trained upon the ground. In his hand he carried a package wrapped in paper.

The line parted again. Sergeant David stepped forward. He walked slowly.

"Bledgett!"

The cry came from Larrimort.

"Shut up!" roared Captain Field, his respect for wealth vanishing suddenly.

The reporters surged about Sergeant David. His slow drawl sounded above their excited questions.

"Mr. Bledgett is safe and sound. He brought the money back with him. We didn't need it."

The cameras were clicking furiously.

"You are holding out on us," declared the reporter Harrison. "Where are Tony, Mario and Zeke?"

Tiny David grinned.

"Right here," he said. "Don't waste any more plates. You have the pictures of Tony, Mario and Bledgett right now."

Captain Field's hand descended upon the collar of Claytor, who was moving toward the edge of the crowd.

"Here is Zeke!"

He held the squirming young man before the cameras. A babble of questions went up.

"Easy," cautioned Tiny David. "I'm all tired after that running around. Well, let's start at the beginning:

"Anybody with the inside knowledge necessary to stage this crime wouldn't have taken Bledgett in mistake for Larrimort. So that put the spotlight right on Bledgett and Claytor, the gentlemen who stood good to profit from the affair.

"The notes—incidentally, Claytor put them under his own door as he left the house and allowed his innocent wife to find them—made it a cinch. The mistakes in grammar and spelling weren't those made by an ignorant man. The names, Tony, Mario and Zeke, helped some more. The first two, of course, are foreign names. Zeke is a name among the natives. The natives and foreigners don't get along well enough, usually, to go into partnership on a deal like this. Then, only experienced woodsmen would fool around on the top of Scarface. I don't know any foreigners who know the woods that well.

"By planting the idea that Bledgett had been taken in mistake for Larrimort, they put the banker into such a receptive mood that he volunteered to furnish the ransom money."

Tiny David grinned. "He got a run for his money, and he has his money back. We even let him order us around. He has no kick coming.

"Now, to get back to Bledgett: He left the cottage and went right up on the mountain. He left his revolver in the cottage. Thought that was clever. He knew we would smell a rat if an armed man was kidnaped. Besides, he had planned a way to get one when he might need it.

"He specified in his note that a cop could bring the money, and that he should leave his revolver under the fire-tower. That was done for two reasons: Having a cop act as pay-off man removed all suspicion. Also, it made sure

that Bledgett would have a gun, if he needed it."

Tiny David's smile vanished.

"I left my gun there, and it was loaded. I knew Bledgett would look at that first thing. But it was loaded with blanks, with bullets of paper painted with aluminum bronze. The wadding from one of them gave me an awful kick in the chest when you tried to kill me, didn't it, Tony?"

THE man at his side muttered something.

"The gun helped in another way," Sergeant David continued. "I really was blindfolded. Knew he wouldn't come out if I didn't play the game according to the rules; and hunting a man up there would be like looking for charity from a pawnbroker. But the click when Bledgett released the safety told me Tony and Mario had arrived."

"But how did they think they were going to get away with the money?" asked Harrison.

"Claytor," Tiny David pointed out, "sold Larrimort on the idea that Bledgett would be killed if we tried anything at variance with the plan outlined. The note said Bledgett would be allowed to return after three days. They were sure I would leave the money, wait two hours, and return. They counted on Claytor's spreading the gospel of fear so effectively, innocently aided by Larrimort, that no search would be made.

"At the end of three days Bledgett would have returned with a story fit for any man's Sunday magazine section. The money would have been buried up on Scarface, where they could find it after things died down. No hurry, understand. Twenty thousand is worth waiting for."

Sergeant David grinned.

"And that's that. Any member of the class in kidnaping have any questions?"

They did, of course. And while they were asking them, Larrimort approached Captain Field with hand outstretched.

"I owe you an apology, Captain. I also congratulate you, and I congratulate your man. My confidence was much misplaced."

"Mr. Larrimort," Captain Field answered, "I have always admired you—as a banker." His eyes twinkled. "Sergeant David and I would make an awful mess of a bank."

"And I have a lot to learn about police work," the banker admitted.

After Worlds Collide

The terrific adventure of the daring men and women who escaped in a space-ship from this earth before the cosmic collision which destroyed it, and who became pioneers beyond the sun on a new planet.

By EDWIN BALMER
and PHILIP WYLIE

The Story Thus Far:

TWO new planets, the astronomers discovered, were sweeping toward the earth on an orbit that would bring about a collision with one of them. Its companion planet was smaller; its path, while carrying it close to the world, would bear it by. So, before the cataclysm, there might be—*might be*—a chance of escape.

How some human beings prepared their escape from the earth, and how they accomplished it, by means of an ark of the air—a giant space-ship driven rocket-like by the new atomic engines—already has been told. This is the chronicle of their adventures on this new world of Bronson Beta.

They had landed near the coast of a great sea. And directed by their leader the old scientist Cole Hendron, they established a temporary camp and explored the immediate vicinity. They found a river of sweet water near by, and a valley green with mosses and ferns whose spores had withstood the age-long cold which Bronson Beta had endured since it had been torn away from its original sun—until now, when our sun was warming it again. More, they found a long smooth-paved road extending into the far distance, and a tablet of some unknown substance inscribed with what might have been writing. And they came upon a wreck of a machine, a vehicle, apparently, built of some unknown crimson metal. Had it been driven, æons ago, by human beings, or by creatures of another sort?

And then one night—they heard the drone of an airplane overhead, caught the flash of a wing-surface. But the visitor vanished without signal or landing.

Definite perils, moreover, beset this loneliest company of adventurers in all history. Terrific showers of meteors—presumably fragments of the old earth—bombarDED them from time to time. And three of the men—three of those who had examined the wrecked machine—died of a strange illness.

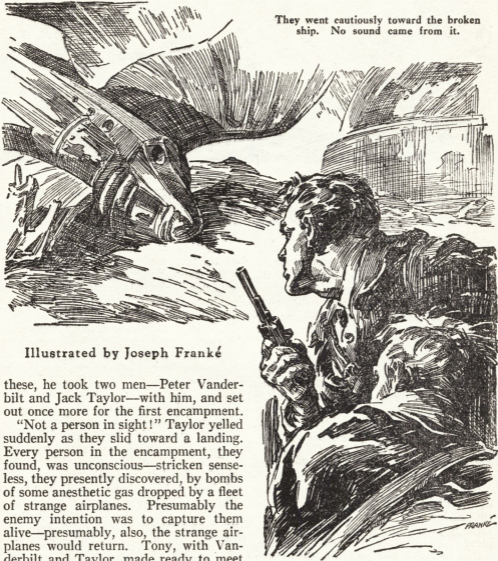
It seemed essential to learn more of this new world they had exchanged for the old; and to this end they built a small airship out of the wrecked space-ship. Hendron's right-hand man Tony Drake, with the writer Eliot James, was chosen to make an exploration flight.

It was a thing astonishing indeed which these two pioneers of a new planet found some hundreds of miles away: a great city of the Unknown People who æons ago had inhabited Bronson Beta, perfectly preserved under a gigantic dome of some transparent metal. And in exploring this long-dead city, they came upon the portrait of a woman, differing but slightly from the women of earth! God then indeed had made man in His Own image!

After three days, Drake and James set out again—and found David Ransdell with those of another American space-ship who had survived a disastrous landing. Most of their equipment had been lost, as well as many lives; and Tony's arrival was for them a promise of rescue. They too, moreover, had been visited by a strange airplane which neither landed nor signaled.

Leaving James and taking Ransdell, Tony flew back to Hendron's camp, then returned alone with a radio and other urgently needed supplies to the survivors of the second ship. Having delivered

They went cautiously toward the broken ship. No sound came from it.



Illustrated by Joseph Franké

these, he took two men—Peter Vanderbilt and Jack Taylor—with him, and set out once more for the first encampment.

"Not a person in sight!" Taylor yelled suddenly as they slid toward a landing. Every person in the encampment, they found, was unconscious—stricken senseless, they presently discovered, by bombs of some anesthetic gas dropped by a fleet of strange airplanes. Presumably the enemy intention was to capture them alive—presumably, also, the strange airplanes would return. Tony, with Vanderbilt and Taylor, made ready to meet their attack by the terrific atomic blast from the space-ship's propulsion-tubes, which had already been set up like cannon at the corners of the encampment.

The attack came, and they met those weird down-swooping planes with the same dreadful blast that had destroyed their enemies back on earth—met them and annihilated them. Their unconscious comrades recovered unharmed; but they realized that other attacks would come, and decided to take refuge in the nearest of the domed cities of the Other People. They set out along an ancient but perfect road; and on the way they met—one of the strange vehicles of the Other People, driven by an English girl! A British space-ship, she told them, had also made the voyage from Earth, but had suffered severely; and its sur-

vivors had been made captive by the militant crews of a Russo-German-Oriental coalition who were determined to rule this new world. They had mastered the secret of the Betan vehicles—and Lady Cynthia had escaped in one. . . .

Hendron had been failing rapidly, and had turned over the command to Tony. Now, like Moses of old, he died within sight of the Promised Land—the domed city of the Other People. His grieving friends carried him within, and set out to explore their new domicile. . . . One of them, Von Beitz, failed to return. (*The story continues in detail.*)

DAY broke with its long, deliberate dawn, while the strange, eerie glow of the night light that illumined the city faded. There was no sound in the



streets but the scuffing feet of the sentinels whom Tony had posted, and the echo of their voices as they made occasional reports to each other or called a challenge.

Now the night watch was relieved; and with the brightening day, searching parties set out again under strict order not to separate into squads of less than six, and to make communication, at regular intervals, with the Central Authority.

This was set up in the offices near the great hall in which Hendron lay dead—the Hall of Sciences of the Other People.

So the enormous chamber manifested itself. It had been, one time, a meeting-place of august, noble-minded Beings. The dimensions and proportions of the great hall, its modeling and decorations, declared their character. It was most fitting that the greatest scientist from Earth—he who attempted and triumphed in the flight through space—lie here in this hall.

Thus Hendron lay in state, his face stern and yet peaceful; and his people, whom he had saved from the cataclysm, slowly filed past.

Eve, his daughter, stood at his side.

Dodson had begun the vigil with her, but he had retired to a couch at the end of the great hall, where he had dropped down, meaning to rest for a few moments. Exhaustion had overcome him, and he slept, his huge chest rising and falling, the coat-sleeve of his armless shoulder moving on the floor with the rhythm of his breathing.

As the people filed from the hall, they passed Dodson, gazing at him but never disturbing him. His empty sleeve brought keenly to mind the savage battle in Michigan in the horrible hours when the mob there assailed the camp near the end of the waiting for the escape from earth. Where was Michigan? Where was the earth now?

The people passed more slowly for gazing back again at the catafalque of the Bronson Betans, whereon Hendron lay. . . .

Maltby, the electrical engineer, together with four others was exploring behind the walls of the building. Power was "on." Impulses, electrical in character, were perceptible; and Maltby was studying the problem of them.

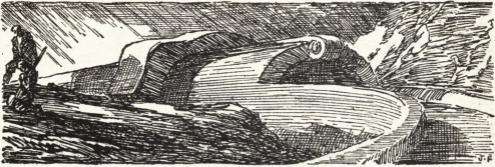
Their manifestations were most conspicuous in the glow which illumined the dome over the city at night, and which so agreeably lighted certain interiors by night and by day. These manifestations resembled those which Tony and Eliot James had reported from the first Sealed City which they had entered.

Maltby and his assistants discovered many other proofs of power impulses.

The source of the power they could not locate; but Lady Cynthia's account of the activities of the "Midianites" suggested to Maltby a key to the secret.

"I BELIEVE," Maltby said, "that the Bronson Betans undoubtedly solved the problem of obtaining power from the inner heat of the planet, and probably learned to utilize the radium-bearing strata under the outer crust. They must have perfected some apparatus to make practical use of that power. It is possible, but highly improbable, that the apparatus came through the passage of cold and darkness in such state that when the air thawed out and the crust-conditions approached normal, it set itself in operation automatically.

"What is far more probable is that the Midianites have discovered one installation of the apparatus. We know from Lady Cynthia that they are months ahead of us in experimenting with Bronson Betan machinery. I believe that they have put in order and set going the power-impulse machinery connected with the city which they have occupied.



"The impulses from that installation may be carried by cables under the ground; more probably, however, they are disseminated as some sort of radio-waves. Consequently they reach this city, as they reached the city that Tony and James entered, and we benefit from them."

Behind the wall at the end of the hall, near the couch upon which Dodson slept, one of Maltby's men came upon a mechanism connected with what was, plainly, a huge metal diaphragm. He called his chief, and the entire party of engineers worked over the mechanism.

Suddenly sound burst forth. Voices! Singing! And the thunder of a tremendous chorus filled the hall! Men's voices, and women's! How triumphant, sublime, the chant of this chorus!

No syllable was of itself understandable; the very scale and notes of the music were strange. Strange but magnificent!

It caught all the people in the hall and awed them into stillness. They stood staring up, agape; not frightened at all, only uplifted in their wonder!

Voices—voices of men and women a million years dead—resounded about them, singing this strange, entrancing requiem.

Eve, beside the body of her father, straightened and stood, with her head raised, her eyes dry, her pulses pounding full again.

Tony, outside in the street, heard the chorus, and he came running in—to be checked at the entrance of the hall as though caught there in a spell. Only slowly, and as if he had to struggle through an invisible interference, could he advance; for the singing continued.

It suggested somehow, though its notes were not like, the Pilgrims' Chorus in "Tannhäuser." It was now like the "Fire Music"—now an exalted frenzy like the "Ride of the Valkyries." Some great

Wagner had lived a million years ago when this planet pursued its accustomed course about its distant star!

The chorus ceased.

Tony caught Eve in his arms, lest she collapse in the reaction from her ecstasy.

"Tony! Tony, what a requiem for him! It leaves us nothing now to do for him! Oh, Tony, that was his requiem!"

DOWN the sunlit streets of the city the children of the earth, Dan and Dorothy, walked hand in hand, staring at the wonders about them, crying out, pointing, and flattening their noses against the show panes.

Though they plainly remembered the thrills and terrors of the Flight, they could not completely understand that the world was gone, that they had left it forever. This was to them merely another, more magic domain—an entrancing land of Oz, with especially splendid sights, with all the buildings strange in shape and resplendent in colors, with tiers of streets and breath-taking bridges. Behind the children, Shirley Cotton and Lady Cynthia strolled and stared; and along with them went Eliot James, who could not—and who did not attempt—to conceal his continued astonishments.

"Isn't this like the other city?" Shirley asked him.

"In general, but not in details," Eliot answered; and he asked Lady Cynthia: "Is it like the city where you were?"

"In general, as you say," the Englishwoman agreed. "But in detail these people certainly were capable of infinite variety. And what artisans they were!"

"And architects!" added Shirley.

"And engineers—and everything else!" said Eliot James.

"Where," demanded Dan, turning to his older companions, "where are all the people?"

"Where?" echoed Eliot to himself, below his breath, while Shirley answered the child: "They went away, Danny."

"Where did they go? . . . Are they coming back? . . . Why did they all go away? . . . What for?"

The questions of the child were the perplexities also of the scientists, which no one yet could resolve.

"Don't run too far ahead of us," Shirley bade the children in a tone to avoid frightening them. For danger dangled over these splendid silent thoroughfares apparently untenanted, yet capable of catching away and keeping Von Beitz. Was it conceivable that survivors of the builders—the Other People—haunted these unruined remains of their own creation? Or was it that the ruthless men from earth—the "Midianites"—had sent their spies ahead to hide in this metropolis before its occupation by Hendron's people?

Tony called a council of the Central Authority to consider, especially, this problem. The Committee of Authority assembled in what had clearly been a council-chamber near to the great quiet secluded room, and yet illumined by the sunlight reflected down and disseminated agreeably and without glare.

Ten men chosen more or less arbitrarily by Tony himself composed the Committee of the Central Authority—four from the survivors of the hundred who had come from Hendron's camp, six from Ransdell's greater group; and these, of course, included Ransdell himself.

Such was the Central Authority improvised by Tony and accepted by his followers to deal with the strange and immediate emergencies arising from the occupation of this great empty city by less than five hundred people ignorant of it.

The searching-parties, as they returned or sent back couriers with reports, appeared before this committee.

JACK TAYLOR, haggard and hungry, made the first report.

"I'm back only to suggest a better search organization," Taylor said excitedly. "I took a truck and toured the widest streets at the lower levels; and some of them at the upper levels. At every corner my driver and I stopped, and yelled for Von Beitz. We didn't see a sign of life or get any reply."

"Did you see any evidence of recent—occupation?" Higgins, of the Authority, asked.

"Nothing."

Kyto brought food for Taylor, and he talked as he ate. "I've been over miles of streets, and covered only a little of the central section. The city's too damned big. If five hundred people had moved into New York when it was emptied—and nobody else was there except maybe three or four people, or a dozen who wanted to keep in hiding—what chance would the five hundred have of finding the dozen?"

"Of course there may be no dozen, or even four or five hiding people to find," Tony responded. "We can't be sure that Von Beitz fails to return because he was captured. He might have fallen when exploring somewhere; or something might have toppled on him; or he might have got himself locked in a building."

TAYLOR shrugged. "In that case, he'd be harder to find than the dozen who, we think, are hiding from us."

"You feel surer, I see," Tony observed, "that some people, unknown to us, are here hiding from us."

"Yes, I do."

"But without any further proof of it?"

Jack Taylor nodded. "I tell you, there are people here. I can feel it."

Duquesne came in. He had returned from a search in another section of the city.

"*Rien!*" he made his report explosively. "Nozing. Except—perhaps I saw a face peering from a window—very high! It was gone—*pouf!* I entered the building. I climbed to the room where the window was. Again—*rien!* Only—as I stood there—I said: 'Duquesne, people have been in this room not long ago.' With the sixth sensation, I smell it." He was excited; but he could add nothing more positive to the account.

He also began to eat, and soon reported himself ready to go out for more investigation.

Ransdell quietly arose. "I'd like to go out again too. You don't need us, Tony," he continued, speaking for the rest of the committee as well as for himself. "It's nice of you to pretend we're necessary; but we know we're not—though we'll be glad to try to be useful when you really want us. We'll all obey you as we would have obeyed Hendron."

"You're going to join the search?" Tony asked.

Ransdell shook his head. "There's enough of us searching now. I want to join Maltby and Williamson and their

men, who are working on the Bronson Beta machines and techniques."

Duquesne gestured emphatically, unable to speak for a moment because of the food crammed in his mouth.

"They are mad—mad—all but mad, our technicians! I have seen them!" he presently exclaimed. "It is the problem of the charging of the batteries of the Bronson Betans that eludes them—those marvelous, amazing batteries which first we saw in the vehicle wrecked beside the road; and one of which Lady Cynthia herself operated in the vehicle that carried her to us.

"To operate the vehicle, once the charged battery is installed—that is nothing. But the secret of putting power into the battery!

"The Midianites have discovered it, my friends; but they have guarded it so that Lady Cynthia could not even suspect what it is. But if they conquered it, so may we! Ransdell is right," Duquesne ended his declamation. "That secret is far more important than further search. I too will join our technicians!"

Tony found himself alone in the great council-chamber. Now and then some one else arrived to report; but all reports, which had to do with the search for Von Beitz and for the unknown people who might have captured him, were negative. The couriers returned to their exploring squads; and the others scattered in their wondering examination of the marvels of the city.

There proved to be eight gates to this city, and four great central highways which met and crossed in the Place before the Hall of the Sciences, in which Hendron lay, and before also the splendid structure housing the council-chamber.

FROM right to left, before the Hall, ran a wide roadway, and another equally splendid cut across it at right angles, while obliquely, so that seen from above they must have made a pattern like the Cross of St. George, were two other highways only slightly less majestic. Each of these roads ran straight to the edge of the city, where the huge transparent dome joined the ground; at the eight points where these four roads penetrated were the gates; and at each of these gates stood a squad on watch.

High toward the top of the dome, on towers attained by arduous climbing, others of the men whom Hendron had brought from earth stood on watch, scanning the sky.

Tony strode out into the sunlight of the wide square, and he halted and lifted his head in awe.

He was in command in this city!

He had had nothing to do with creating it. A million years, perhaps, before he was born, this city had been built; and then the light which fell upon it was from some sun to which the sun of the world—the sun which now shone upon it—was a distant twinkling star. Quadrillions and quintillions of miles of space—distances indescribable in terms that the mind could comprehend—separated this city from Tony Drake, who would not be born for a million years. But it had traveled the tremendous reaches of space after it lost its sun until it found the star—the sun—that lighted the earth! So Tony Drake today stood here in its central square—in command.

HE glanced up toward the orb of the sun; and he saw how small it was; and in spite of himself his shoulders jerked in a convulsive shiver.

"Tony!"

He heard his name, and turned. Eve had come out to the square, and she approached him, quietly and calmly.

"We must—proceed now, Tony," she said.

"Proceed? Of course," he assured her gently. He had ceased to be a commander of a city built a million years before his birth and endowed with marvels which men of his time—if they had remained on earth—might not have made for themselves for another millennium. He became again Tony Drake, recently—not three earthly years ago—a young broker in Wall Street, and friend of Eve Hendron, whose father was a scientist. On earth, Tony Drake had wanted her for his wife; here he wanted her also; and especially in her grief he longed to be her close comforter.

"Your mind doesn't help you much, does it, Tony?" she said.

"At a time like this, you mean. No."

"I went once with Father and with a friend of his, Professor Rior, through the Pyramids, Tony—when we were back on earth."

"Of course," said Tony.

"It was before ever the Bronson Bodies were seen, Tony; when the earth seemed practically eternal. How out of fashion it had become to look to the end of the earth, Tony! Though once it was not. . . . I was saying that Professor Rior was showing us through the Pyra-

mids, and he read us some of the Pyramid texts. Did you know, Tony, that in all the Pyramid Texts the word *death* never occurs except in the negative, or applied to a foe? How the old Egyptians tried to defeat death by denying! Of course, the Pyramids themselves were their most tremendous attempt to deny death."

"Yes," said Tony.

"Over and over again, I remember, Tony, they declared that he, whom they put away, lived. I remember the words: *'King Teti has not died the death; he has become a glorious one in the horizon!'* And, *'Ho! King Unis! Thou didst not depart dead; thou didst depart living! Thou diest not!'* And *'This King Pepi dies not; this King Pepi lives forever! This King Pepi has escaped his day of death!'*

"Tony, how pitiful those protests seemed to me to be! Yet now I myself am making them.

"*'Men fall; their name is not,'* the Egyptian psalmist of the Pyramid Texts sang, Tony:

*"Men fall;
Their name is not.
Seize thou King Teti by his arm,
Take thou King Teti to the sky,
That he die not on earth,
Among men."*

Tony reminded her, very gently: "Your father did not die on earth."

"*Rien! Nozzing!*" Duquesne reported. "Except—perhaps I saw a face peering from a window—very high!"



"No; he escaped to the sky, bringing us all with him. . . . There's the sun. How small the sun has become, Tony."

"We are farther from the sun, Eve, than men of earth have ever been."

"But we're going farther away, yet."

"Yes."

"We're swinging away from the sun; but they say—Father said, and so did M. Duquesne and the rest of the scientists—we shall swing back again when we have reached almost to the orbit of Mars. But shall we, Tony?"

"Reach almost to the orbit of Mars?"

"Shall we swing back then, I mean. Or shall we keep on out and out into the utter cold?"

"YOU don't believe your father—or Duquesne?" Tony asked.

"Yes; I believe they believed it. Yet like the old Egyptians, they may have been declaring denials of a fact they could not face."

"But your father and Duquesne and the rest faced the end of the world, Eve."

"That's true; but when they faced it,—and admitted it,—they already had schemed their escape, and ours. For this end, if Bronson Beta drifts out into the cold without return, there is no escape."

"No," said Tony, and combated the chill within him.

"And could they *know*?" Eve persisted. "They could calculate—and undoubtedly they did—that the path of this planet has become an ellipse, that it will turn back again toward the sun; but it never *has* turned back toward the sun, Tony. Not once! This planet appeared out of space, approached the sun and swung about it, and now is going away from the sun. That we *know*; and that is all we do know; the rest we can merely calculate."

"You mean," questioned Tony, "that your father said something privately, during those days he was dying, to make you believe he was deceiving us?"

"No," said Eve. "Yet I wonder, I cannot help wondering. But if we keep on away from the sun, don't think, Tony, I'm—"

"What?" he demanded as she faltered and stopped.

"Unprepared," she said; and she recited: "*'Thy seats among the Gods abide; Re leans upon thee with his shoulder.*

'Thy odor is as their odor, thy sweat is as the sweat of the Eighteen Gods.'"

"What's that?" asked Tony.

"Something else I remembered from earth, from the Pyramid texts, Tony. *"Sail thou with the Imperishable Stars, sail thou with the Unwearied Stars!"*"

She returned to the great Hall of Science of the men a million years dead, the hall wherein lay her father.

Several people crossed the square, some obviously on errands, other curiously wandering. Tony returned the hails of those who spoke to him, but encouraged no one to linger with him; he remained before the great hall, alone.

He had taken completely on faith the assurance which Hendron and Duquesne had given him, together with the rest of the people, that the path of this planet had ceased to follow the pattern of a parabola, but had become closed to an ellipse, and that therefore Bronson Beta, bearing these few Emigrants from Earth, would circle the sun. Tony still believed that; he had to believe it; but the death of Eve's father seemed to have shaken her from such a necessity.

He gazed about at the magnificent façades of the City of the Vanished People—his city, where he had come to the command perhaps only to die in it, with all his refugees from Earth's doomsday, as they drifted out into the coldness and darkness of space.

As this strange world had done once before with its own indigenous people! Where they had gone when the deadly drift began? Where lay the last builders of Bronson Beta?

"Hello! How's every little thing?" said a cheerful voice at his side.

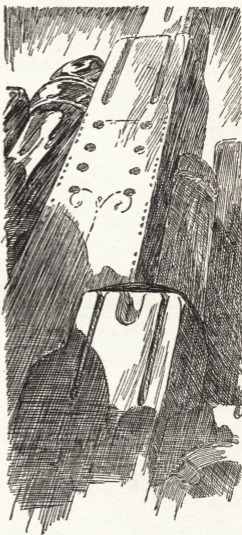
TONY faced about, and confronted the red-haired girl whom he had met in Ransdell's camp, and who had not been selected for the voyage from earth; her name had not been on the lists in Michigan.

Tony remembered her name, however—Marian Jackson. She had been an acrobatic dancer in St. Louis.

She carried on her shoulder the animal stowaway of the second Ark, the little monkey, Clara.

"Can you beat this place? Can you tie it?" Marian challenged Tony cheerfully. "Gay but not gaudy, I'd call it. D'you agree?"

"I agree," acquiesced Tony, grateful for the let-down. The girl might be mentally a moron; but morons, he was discovering, had their points. This girl simply could not take anything seriously.



"But the taxi-service here is terrible," objected Marian.

"We hope to improve it," offered Tony.

The girl walked away. "Don't go into any of the buildings alone!" Tony reminded. "And even on the streets, keep close to other people!"

Marian halted, looking up. "Hello! Hello!" she cried out softly. "Look at the taxies!" And she pointed to one of the wide spiral ramps to the right.

DOWN the ramp Tony saw descending two Bronson Beta vehicles of the type discovered wrecked beside the first-found roadway, and duplicates of which were stored by the hundred in the first Sealed City. Here there were hundreds or thousands more of the machines.

The two that appeared were followed by two more, and these by two larger and heavier vehicles not of the passenger type, but of truck design.

"By God," cried Marian, "they got 'em going. —Hey! Hey!" she hailed them.

Tony thrilled too, but tempered his triumph by realization that, since the cars came in sight they had been descending, so that they might not be under power at all, but having been pushed to the incline of the ramp, were coasting.

The drivers seemed aware of this flaw in their demonstration, or else they could not yet be content to stop; for when they gained the ground in rapid procession, instantly they steered up the ascending spiral on the other side, and putting on power, climbed even faster than they had dropped.

That ended any doubt of their means of propulsion. Tony felt his scalp tingling. One more secret of the mechanics of these people a million years dead was in possession of his own people!

NOW the vehicles, having vanished briefly, swept into sight again, still climbing; then they whirled down, sped into the square, and though braked somewhat raggedly, halted in line before Tony.

Eliot James stepped from the first with a flourish.

"Your car, sir!" He doffed his battered felt hat.

From the second car stepped the English girl Lady Cynthia. Williamson piloted the third; Maltby, Jack Taylor and Peter Vanderbilt were the other drivers.

Williamson, the electrical engineer, made his report to Tony as a hundred others gathered around.

"We discovered the technique of charging the batteries, which are beyond anything we had on earth," he said with envious admiration, "both in simplicity and in economy of power application. There is a station underground which they used. We are using it. All the batteries which we have discovered were discharged or had discharged themselves, naturally, in the tremendous time that the planet was drifting through space; but two out of three batteries proved capable of receiving a charge when placed in sockets of the charging station."

"You mean you found the charging station with its power on?" Tony asked.

Williamson looked at Maltby as if to enlist his support when replying: "We found the power on."

"What sort of power?"

"Something between the electrical impulses with which we were familiar on earth, and radio-activity. We believe the Bronson Beta scientists, before they died—or disappeared—learned to blend the two."

"Blend?" asked Tony.

MALTBY took up the task of explanation. "You remember that on earth we didn't even know what electricity was; but we knew how to use it for some of our purposes. Still less did we understand the exact nature of radio-activity; but we used that too. Here we have come upon impulses which exhibit some of the phenomena of electricity, and others of radio-activity. We do not understand it; but we do find ourselves able to use it."

"But the power-station below ground, in order and in operation!" objected Tony.

"I think," said Maltby, "it should not have been described as a power-station, but rather as a mere distributing station. The power, I believe, does not originate in the station which we discovered, and in which we charged the batteries of these machines. Our station is, I think, merely a terminus for the generating station."

"The generating station—where?"

At this, Maltby and Williamson, the technicians, both gazed at the English girl; but she, without making direct reply, nodded to Maltby to proceed.

"She believes that the chief generating station is under the city of our Midianites. It is a far larger city than this, and was probably the metropolis of the planet—or at least of this continent. She knows that the technicians with the Asiatic party got much of the machinery of the city going weeks ago.

"We believe that their technicians are employing the power-generators of the ancient civilization here without thoroughly understanding it—or without understanding it at all beyond having learned how it works, and what they can do with the power impulses."

"We believe that we get the power here because they cannot use it themselves without giving us some of it. Probably much of the power is disseminated without wires or cables. Undoubtedly the light-impulses are—those

that light this city at night and illuminate interior apartments by day.

"These impulses probably are spread in a manner similar to radio waves. Williamson feels sure that power in the charging station cannot be so explained. He feels sure that the charging station below this city must have a cable connection—underground, undoubtedly—with the generating station.

"Now, if that generating station is under the city of the Midianites, either they know they are sending us that power—or they don't know it. If they know it, they may be unable to cut off our power without also cutting off their own; but if they don't know they are now giving us power, they may find it out at any moment—and cut us off. Duquesne thinks the latter; so he has remained below with all the men he needs to keep all the charging sockets busy, while we"—Maltby smiled deprecatingly—"allowed ourselves this celebration before busying ourselves above."

"At what?" asked Tony, half stupidly, half dazedly. "At what here above?" Too much was being told him at once; too much—if one had to think about it.

Marian Jackson, who had remained beside him, had heard it all; but it had not confused her. It had merely amused her. She went to Eliot James and teased him to show her the controls of his machine; and she sat in it and started it.

"Easy! Easy!" Eliot yelled, and running beside her, shut off the power. "It's perfectly easy and obvious in its steering and controls. Anybody can run it; but from the little I've seen, it must do over two hundred miles an hour, or three hundred, if you open it up. *So don't open it up!*"

THE other drivers argued only less emphatically with other experimenters, and the crowd followed the machines.

"You see," Maltby was explaining to Tony, "now we know how to use their power, we ought to get other things going besides the vehicles; we ought to get a part of the city, at least, in some sort of operation.

"Of course," Tony comprehended. "Of course." And he led Lady Cynthia aside, with Williamson and Maltby. "When we have power," he challenged the English girl, "how much of its use can you show us?"

"I know how to get in and out of the buildings which have doors operated

by electricity—or whatever it is. I know how they run the kitchens and the lights and baths, and things like that."

Tony said: "Then you had better take these men through a few buildings. Show them everything you've seen in operation—how it seemed to work. . . . Williamson,—Maltby,—you choose the party to go with her. When you're through with her, please ask her to come back to the Council Hall."

AS Tony turned away, Jack Taylor approached him.

"You don't want a ride," he tempted his friend, "in one of the new million-year-old machines through the city?"

"Not yet," Tony said.

"Why not yet?"

"You," said Tony, "you take it for me, Jack."

"All right," said Jack, staring at him almost understandingly. "Sure. I'll take the ride for you!"

Tony retired to his deserted Hall of the Central Authority. He would have liked nothing better than to feel free to ride the ramps to the highest pinnacles as, in the square below him, others—many of them no younger than he—were preparing to do. Those allowed to experiment with the vehicles were as eager and excited as children with their first velocipedes. Tony watched them for a time enviously. No one but himself stopped him from rejoicing them and claiming his right to ride the amazing highroads of this city. But not yet!

"Why?"

He glanced up toward the sun, the small, distant sun, warm enough yet when the sky was clear, warm enough especially under the splendid shield spread over the city.

He dropped back from the window and slumped down before the beautiful desk which had served its original purpose countless years ago when this world whirled about some other star. He still was alone.

Two tiny images of men—men not of the world, but of this planet—decorated the desk, one standing at each of the far corners of the desk-top. They were not secured to the metal top, but could be plucked from their fastening without breaking. Tony toyed with them; they reminded him of little images brought from Egypt. There had been a name for them in the world. "*Ush—ushab—*" He could not quite recall it.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FUNERAL OF COLE HENDRON

"WHAT weapons did the Midianites find in their city?"

"Practically none. None at all, that I know of," Lady Cynthia corrected.

She had returned from her tour with the technicians, having demonstrated all she had learned of the manner of manipulating electric locks, taps, pumping-apparatus and other mechanisms which now were capable of being operated.

Duquesne had delegated to other competent hands the continuous charging of the batteries; and he sat with Tony, as did also Eliot James in the office of the Hall of the Central Authority. So the three men listened to the girl and questioned her—to learn, with least delay, of the discoveries of the Midianites.

"We found no weapons in the city we entered," Eliot James reminded Tony. "We have come on nothing like a weapon—except some implements in what must have been a museum—here."

"The people of Bronson Beta," pronounced Duquesne, "seem to have had no need of war in their later development. Why? Because morally they had passed beyond it? I do not believe it. Other causes and conditions intervened. No greater authority upon human development than Flinders Petrie lived on earth; and what did he say?"

"There is no advance without strife. Man must strive with Nature or with man, if he is not to fall back and degenerate." Certainly these people did not degenerate; there is no sign in this city but of a struggle, *magnifique*—epic! But not of man against man. It was, of course, of man against Nature—even against the drift into the darkness of doom which they saw before them.

"In comparison with this struggle, strife between themselves became puny—imbecile. Long ago, long before the drift into the dark, they ceased to wage war; and so they left to our enemies none of their weapons."

"They left material, however, which could be used as weapons," the English girl corrected.

"Most certainly; the gas—gas that was merciful anesthetic for the Vanished People, probably."

"How much progress," Tony asked the girl who had been a prisoner in the other city, "did your captors make in reading the records of the Vanished People?"



Some one entered. It was Eve; and he arose, awaiting her. His mood had returned to readiness for her; and she was calmer than before, and quite collected.

"What are those, Tony?" She gazed at the exquisite little images in his hand.

"You tell me, Eve."

"Why, they look like *ushabtin*, Tony."

"That's it! The '*answerers*,' weren't they? The *Respondents*."

"Yes," she said. "The *Answerers*, the *Respondents for the Dead*. For when a man died, the Egyptians could not believe that he would not be called upon to continue his tasks as always he had done them in his life. So they placed in his tomb the '*Answerer*' to respond when he was called to perform a task after he was dead. '*O Answerer!*' the soul appealed to the statuette: '*If I am called, if I am counted upon to do any work that is to be done by the Dead. . . . thou shalt substitute thyself for me at all times, to cultivate the field, to water the shores, to transport sand of the east to the west, and say "Here am I; I am here to do it!"*'"

"I see," said Tony. "Thank you. I remember. I hope your father can feel I am his *Answerer*, Eve."

He knew, then, why he had not left the Hall of Authority to ride the ramps of the city: Cole Hendron would not have done it.

"Very considerable, I am sure. They brought over from earth an especially strong staff of linguists. They seemed to have realized, even better than did our party—or perhaps better than did you," the English girl said, "the importance of solving quickly the secrets of the original civilization. And they went right at it."

"How did they learn?"

"From repairing and putting into operation what seems to have been instruction-machines for the children of this planet—machines which in form are very unlike but in effect are like talking motion pictures. The machines illustrate an object, and print and pronounce a word at the same time. I have shown M. Duquesne similar machines found here."

"Maltby and Williamson together," said Duquesne to Tony, "are working on them now."

TONY arose. Again the implications of what he heard were so tremendous that he could not think of them without confusion. He put them aside for the moment.

He paced up and down. "What was on that lake where your space-ship fell?" he asked the English girl.

"Nothing. It seemed to have been burned over all around the border. The water was fresh."

"Half of you, you said, were drowned?"

"Nearly half."

"All the survivors of the crash were captured?"

"Yes; and when I escaped, I figured that three hundred and ten of us were living." She repeated the figure she had given in her first account.

"And how many were *they*—your captors—our 'Midianites?'"

"More than our number, considerably. They never said how many they were, nor gave us a chance to count them. They were always on the move."

"Where to?"

"Everywhere."

"You mean they visited several other cities?"

"Oh, yes."

"How many?"

"As many as they could find and reach. And I believe they could have found all within reach. For they had a globe of this planet. I heard about it; but they never let any of us slaves see it."

"Every city of course has a globe—or

several," Tony said to himself, aloud, and asked her: "What did you pick up from them as to their opinion of the different cities?"

"They believed they had the best one."

"Did they say why they believed it the best?"

"No."

"What else could you pick up?"

"They said that one city was a good example of every other. They're all complete, and all similar in a general way."

Tony gazed out of the window. More and more of the vehicles of the Vanished People were appearing on the ramps and the streets. The sun, the small clear sun, shone down through the huge transparent dome. He swung back.

"Did they find how the air was kept fresh in the cities when they were fully—populated?"

"Yes; and they even operated some of the ventilators, though it was not necessary with so few people in the city, of course. The Original People had huge apparatus for what we would call air-conditioning, and for heating the air. The Asiatics of course were especially interested in that."

"The heating, eh? Did they think the planet was drifting again into the cold?"

"That," said Lady Cynthia, "surely worried them. They had their own computations, but they repeatedly asked what ours were. They were—and are, I am sure—especially careful with our scientists. They aren't sure, you see, that this planet will stay livably near the sun."

"Were your scientists—the English, I mean—sure?" asked Tony.

"They said they were. We'd go out into the cold nearly as far as Mars—and then come back."

"Yes," said Tony.

"That's what you think here, isn't it?" the girl appealed.

INTENTIONALLY Tony waited until Duquesne replied. "It is upon that," said the Frenchman, "that we rely. Now may I ask something? Did these people—your captors, these Midianites—find any trace as to where the builders of these *magnifique* cities and the other inhabitants went?"

"No! Constantly they talked about it. Where were they? Where did they go? And did any—survive?"

"Precisely," said Duquesne.



*"O Answer!
If I am called
to do any work
to be done by
the Dead. . . ."*

"We shall name this city," said Tony suddenly, "Hendron. *Hendron*. I am sure no one objects. . . . I thank you," he said to the English girl, "for all you have told us. Of course we will have much more to ask; but not now."

He left them and went out. Now he had need, as he had not before, for an inspection of the city.

Jack Taylor, seeing him, stopped one of the cars and took Tony in with him. Dizzily they spun up a twisting ramp and shot out upon a wide boulevard. They pulled up after a couple of miles, which had been coursed in barely a minute, beside a building at one of the guarded gates. On the far side of its entrance-lobby was a dining-room where a score of women were setting out upon tables the square metal plates upon which the Other People had dined perhaps a million years before.

Tony got out and went in. He smelled the aroma from a caldron of stew, but he was not hungry.

Higgins was there eating—excited to be sure, but eating.

"Tony!" Higgins called. "Tony!" he beckoned, rising.

Tony sat beside him. "I've been two miles underground!" Higgins reported. "Two miles! Maltby got the lifts working. I took a chance on one. Two miles down. Wonderful. Temperature rises all the way."

Tony whipped his thoughts to this problem. "Temperature rises? How could it? Didn't this planet cool—ages ago?"

"Not to the core. Only the crust. Two miles down, it was a hundred and six degrees Fahrenheit. I brought back—well, you will see."

"What?"

"Samples of what they tried to preserve below, or store for themselves.

Some of it preserved, some of it not; some sealed in naked rock close to the surface and allowed to get terribly cold; some stored in metal containers and placed at strata where some heat would have endured—and did. There is enough stuff under this city to feed a Chicago for years—generations. I can't estimate how long—that is, if the stuff remained edible. The meat must be decidedly questionable."

"Meat!"

"From what animals I can't say; the vegetables from what plants I am unable to guess. Some of it may not be digestible by us. Some may be poison, we'll discover. But some must be edible, for I've eaten some and I still feel fine."

TONY went down the staircase to the hall with Higgins. In the hall a half-dozen square glasslike containers, each about two feet high and a foot in its other dimensions, had been set on tables. Covers sealed them hermetically. Their contents were visible; meat indeed—a reddish lean meat not unlike beef, and a lighter meat in small fragments; and vegetables—one appeared as long yellow cylinders, another as pink balls not unlike radishes, a third streaked with yellow and green and of an indeterminate lumpy shape.

Tony regarded the exhibit thoughtfully. "They covered their cities. They stored food-supplies for a prodigious time. They must have prepared for the journey into space."

"Of course," said Higgins.

"But where are they?"

"I do not know."

"And the heat increased with depth?"

"Exactly."

"Probably the same system that lights the cities heated the storerooms, so the precious food there would not at first freeze, crack its containers and spoil."

"Possibly," said Higgins. "I am a plant biologist, not an engineer. But I would venture to disagree, even so."

"Why?"

"I saw no evidence of heating-mechanisms. Ventilation—yes. Heat—no."

"But the air—it's warmed," Tony persisted.

"It wasn't. Observation showed the air on Bronson Beta was frozen solid—as it approached."

"We couldn't make observation under the domes."

"True. But you will find ample evidence in fractures and wash-marks to

show that the air in the city was frozen. Yes—it is not heated air from the domed city which has kept these immense subterranean warehouses warm.” Higgins shook his head. “Radium.”

“Radium?” Tony repeated.

“Radium. Deep in this planet. Only radio-active minerals could maintain heat inside a planet during untold ages of drift through frigid space. So we may conclude that the interior of Bronson Beta is rich in such minerals.”

“Then it must be dangerous—”

Higgins shrugged. “The presence of heat does not mean that rays are also present. They are doubtless absorbed by miles of rock. Hundreds of miles, maybe. But the heat is there, the activity of radium; and the rocks carry the heat almost to the surface.”

There was silence in the group. Tony addressed a bystander. “Jim, get Duquesne. Tell him to turn the power-station over to Klein, and investigate this. Take Higgins with you.” Then: “If the interior of Bronson Beta is warm still—then it is quite possible—”

“That the original inhabitants still persist somewhere? How? They melted air from the frozen lightless desert above them on the surface, and lived down in the radium-warmed bowels of their planet? I found no living quarters underground. But—who can say!”

Tony squared his chin against his imagination. “They are all dead,” he said.

Higgins started away with Jim Turnsey, talking excitedly.

BEFORE noon, people began to collect for their next meal. No one brought any information about Von Beitz. He had vanished. But another clue to the possible existence of living people in Hendron had been discovered. Williamson, exploring with a searching-party, had found three beds that had been slept in. He had been led to the find by an open window in a building on the northern edge of the city. Whether the beds had afforded resting-places for the Other People after the city was built, or for scouts from the Midianite camp, he could not be sure.

Three beds, with synthetic bed-covers rumbled upon them. No more.

The vast dining-room was filled as the sun came directly overhead. Twenty of the women waited on table. Plates of stew was served, then coffee in stemmed receptacles which had handles for five fingers—five fingers a little different from



“ . . . Thou shalt substitute thyself for me and say ‘Here am I, to do it!’ ”

human fingers, evidently, for they were awkward to use.

After that, Tony rose and spoke.

“My friends,” he said, “we are safe. Our security is due to the courage and intelligence of our dead leader. No praise is adequate for him. I shall not attempt to reduce what is in your hearts to words. Prodigious labors, great dangers, even the dangers of battle and peril of annihilation at the perihelion of our orbit, lie ahead of us. Unknown conditions, diseases, poisons, threaten us. Enemies may lurk among us. An evil and powerful aggregation of fellowmen is striving and planning now to conquer us. Mysteries of the most appalling sort surround us. Still—Cole Hendron faced calmly both hazards and enigmas as awesome. We must endeavor to emulate him. And on this afternoon we shall pay a last homage to him.

“I have prepared the earth to receive him. I have named this city for him. I shall ask you to remain inside the protecting dome of this city—standing on the ramp of the western skyscraper—while Cole Hendron is buried. I do not dare to expose you all. The following will accompany me to the grave.” He read from a paper: “Eve Hendron, David Ransdell, Pierre Duquesne, Eliot James and Doctor Dodson. His pallbearers to the gate will be the men whose names I have just read, and also Taylor, Williamson, Smith, Higgins and Wycherley.

“We will march from here to the gate. You will follow; Eve will open the gate.”

ONCE more, before Cole Hendron—Conqueror of Space—was borne from the Hall of Science, the music of Bronson Beta burst forth. Maltby once more made rise the tremendous tones from the throats a million years silent

to sing Cole Hendron's requiem. Then the bearers of the body descended the staircase of the majestic building.

Cole Hendron had no coffin. Over the body was an immense black tapestry—a hanging taken from the great Hall in which he had lain.

The procession reached the street, amid muffled sobs and the sound of feet.

At the gate, Eve pulled the control lever. Hendron's closest friends and his daughter marched into the open.

It was cold.

The mourners filed up a great spiral ramp and stood watching.

Tony beside Ransdell, at the head of the bier, walked with his head down. Eve came last, a lone regal figure.

They surmounted the knoll. The body was lowered. They stood around the grave, shivering a little in the cold.

"The greatest American," Tony said at last.

"The greatest man," said Duquesne, weeping openly.

Dodson, a person of expletives rather than of eloquence, looked down at the dark-swathed and pathetic bundle. "I doubt if ever before so much has depended upon one man. A race, maybe—or a religion—or a nation; but never a species."

Eliot James spoke last. "He did not make mere history. He made a mark across cosmos and infinity. Only in memory can adequate honor be paid to him. . . . Good-by, Cole Hendron!"

THEN, from the city, came suddenly the sound of earth's voices raised in Rudyard Kipling's "Recessional:"

*God of our fathers, known of old. . . .
The tumult and the shouting dies,
The captains and the kings depart. . . .*

Earth's voices singing to the skies, where never earth people had been before.

Tony sprinkled earth upon Hendron—earth not of the earth, but of the planet that had come from the edges of infinity to replace it. The grave was filled.

At the last Eve and Tony stood side by side, while the others rolled a great boulder over the spot as a temporary marker.

Tony heard Eve whispering to herself. "What is it?" he said. "Tell me!"

"Only the Tenth Psalm, Tony," she whispered: "*Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?*"

And in the far sky a speck passed and vanished beyond the hill, an abrupt and vivid reminder of the exigencies of the present.

CHAPTER XV

VON BEITZ RETURNS

ELIOT JAMES sat in the apartment which he had chosen for his residence, and looked from its unornamented gray walls out over the city of Hendron. Presently he began to write. In a cabinet at his side were drawers filled with notebooks upon which was scribbled the history of the migration from earth.

"In summary," he began, "since there has been no time for detail, I will set down an outline of our conditions since our perilous removal to this city of the ancient people.

"We have shelter, the gorgeous shelter of these buildings rising in a hundred hues under their transparent dome. We have warmth, for although we are moving out into the cold at a prodigious speed, the air sucked into the city is heated. Around the rim of the dome are situated eight tremendous ventilating and air-conditioning plants. We have light in abundance—our city in the long dark of night is like day. Underground is food enough for us for unmeasured generations. Some of that food disagrees with us. Some is indigestible. In some there is no nourishment which our gastric juices can extract. Two varieties of vegetables are definitely poisonous to us. But the vast bulk of the stored produce is edible, delicious and healthful.

"We have a plethora of tools and machines. In the development of electricity the Other People have far outstripped us. Also in the extension of what we called 'robot-control.' They manufactured almost no machinery which needed human attention. A technique of photo-electric cell inspection and auxiliary engines makes every continuous mechanical process self-operating. The vast generators which run underground to supply light, the powerful motors of the ventilators, and the pumps which supply processed water from the river for our consumption, not only run by themselves but repair themselves.

"The northwest ventilator cracked a bearing last week—and in the presence of Tony and Ransdell it stopped itself, took itself apart, removed the cracked

metal, put on a new bearing, reassembled itself and went into operation again. They said that the thing reminded them of the operation of one of those earthly phonographs which stops automatically and has a moving arm to take off played records and put on new ones. Only—the ventilator motor was thirty feet in height and proportionately broad and long.

"We have clothing. In our first camp there is still much clothing from earth, but we have not reclaimed it. The Bronson Betans wore very light and very little clothing. We know so much about them now, that we can follow their clothing trends over ages of their history. With domed cities, always warm, they needed clothes only for ornament—as do we—in reality. But they left behind not only vast stores of garments and goods, but the mills in which the materials were fabricated. We are using the materials now. No one has yet appeared, except for amusement, in a Bronson Betan costume. Their shoes, of soft materials, are all too wide for us. Their garments were like sweaters and shorts,—both for men and women,—although the women also wore flowing robes not unlike negligees. However, we do wear portions of their garments, and we use their materials—all intermingled with the remains of the clothes we brought from earth, so that we are a motley mob.

"All Bronson Betan clothes were of the most brilliant colors—they must have loved color to live in a paradise of it. I saw Tony yesterday, for example, in a pair of old brogans, old corduroy trousers and a shirt (made by Shirley Cotton, who is now in charge of textiles) crimson in color, ornamented with green birds about a foot high—by all odds a more strident and stunning garment than I've ever seen on one of New York's four hundred. Ransdell has been running around in jade green Bronson Beta shorts, and Lady Cynthia has remodeled one of the 'negligees' I mentioned into a short metallic gold dress.

"WE have baths of every temperature—private and public. The Bronson Betans were great swimmers. Jack Taylor made a study of their athletic records—and found them superior in almost every kind of event to ourselves. We have ray baths—ultra-violet and infra-red, and others we cannot use until they have been more thoroughly studied.

"We—and when I say we, I mean a score of our number—have mastered the language and much of the science of the Other People. Of course, we have not delved into their history deeply as yet, or into their fiction, or their philosophy or their arts—into their biography or their music. And their poetry is still quite incomprehensible to us.

"We fly their planes now. We run their machines."

HERE Eliot James paused before continuing:

"Our personal relations are interesting at this point. I have given them little time in my diary hitherto, because of the pressure of my activities.

"Our most notable romance—the love of Tony and Dave Ransdell for Eve Hendron—has reached a culmination.

"Tony is going to marry Eve.

"There was a period shortly before our desertion of our original camp when it appeared for a little while that Eve would marry Ransdell. That was immediately after his dramatic return to our midst. Eve indubitably still holds Ransdell in high esteem, and even has a place of sorts for him in her heart. But Tony is her kind of man. Tony is nearer her age. Tony is our leader—and she was the daughter of the greatest leader of all time. Tony worships her. They announced that they would celebrate the first wedding on Bronson Beta in the near future. And it will be the first. The Asiatics have, according to Lady Cynthia, made a complete mockery of marriage—and marriage was apparently unknown to the Other People.

"Ransdell, I think, knew always that Eve was not for him. He is a silent person, usually; but I believe that occasionally his love for Eve must have been very nearly indomitable—that he was more than once on the verge of asserting it wildly and insisting on it. He has that kind of passion—but I believe it will never be seen uncontrolled. Now he is resigned—or at least calm. And he has been not only one of Tony's ablest men, but one of his closest friends—if not his closest.

"Shirley Cotton, the siren of the city, is still in love with Tony. She talks about it in public, and tells Eve that when the biologists eventually decide that because of the larger number of women than men, two women will have to marry one man, she is going to be

Tony's second wife. An odd situation—because some day that may be a necessity—or a common practice. There are now nearly ninety more women than men in our city. Eve is so brave and so broad-minded and so fond of Shirley, that if the situation ever became actual, I almost think that she would not mind. We have passed through too much to stoop now to jealousy. And all of us feel, I think, that we belong not to ourselves but to the future of man. The emotion rises from the spirit of self-sacrifice that has marked our whole adventure—rather than from such a cold, cruel and inhuman law as that which attempts to set up the identical feeling among the Midianites.

"Dan and Dorothy, under Westerley, are going to Bronson Beta school—learning the language by the talking-picture machines, just as the Other People's children did. And they are the only ones who are beginning to be able to speak it naturally. In two or three years they would be able to pass as Bronson Betans—except for their minor physiological differences.

"Dodson is having trouble with the language. He goes about the city talking to friends, eating in the central dining-room and mumbling that 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks.' He never was a good linguist—as Duquesne has proved by talking in French with him for the amused benefit of all who spoke the language. But Dodson is frantic to learn, because from illustrations in the metal books and in the screened lectures on the subject, he has found that surgery on this planet was a science far beyond terrestrial dreams. Working with him are five women and eleven men doctors.

"**JACK TAYLOR** is the sheik and *Romeo* of Hendron. About twenty of our handsome girls and women (they are handsome again, the long strain of our first rugged months having ended) are wildly vying for his attention. The tall red-headed oarsman takes his popularity with delight—and he is seldom seen without a beautiful lady companion. When he was absent on a mission for Tony, the number of blue damsels was appalling. They could not even write to him, which seemed to distress them enormously.

"Duquesne has moved next door to the German actress who joined us in Michigan. He is working on the mystery

of our power source—and 'cementing the bonds of international amity,' he says.

"Higgins has found some carefully preserved seeds in the radium-warmed cellars of the city, and he has planted them. He keeps digging them up to see if they have sprouted—which, so far, they have not; and he goes about in a perpetual daze."

A GAIN Eliot James paused. Again he wrote:

"All those factors are on the pleasant side of our ledger. We are a civilization again. Love and clothes and cosmetics and fancy desserts and gossip and apartment-decoration have returned to us. Our animals have been collected from the encampments, and they are installed in a 'barn' made from a very elaborate theater. We have harvested and dried a quantity of the spore vegetation as hay for them. They thrive. We are wakened by a cock's crow in the morning, and we serve fresh eggs as a badge of honor with great ceremony at the rate of four or five a day. Dan and Dorothy have milk. We've made butter to go with the eggs. We should be perfectly happy, perfectly content. But—

"Where is Von Beitz?

"He vanished the day Cole Hendron died—the day we arrived here. That was sixty Bronson Beta days ago. And nothing has been seen of him or learned about him since then.

"And—

"Who dwells secretly in our city? Who stole one of our three roosters? Who stole Hibb's translation of a book on electricity? Who screamed on the street in the dead of night three days ago—turning out the people in Dormitory A to find—no one? Do the Other People still live here—watching us, waiting to strike against us? Do the Midianites have spies here?

"We are virtually agreed upon that theory. Yet we cannot find where they hide. But we do know—to our sorrow—that they have spies in other cities.

"After learning to fly the planes, we armed them. Then Tony dispatched a fleet of six to make a thorough inspection of the surrounding country and the neighboring cities. He wanted full information on the Midianities, and on the territory around us.

"There are two cities south of where Ransdell landed his ship. There are several inland. All were entered and explored. In the southernmost city the

"A third plane did not return. It was subsequently sighted near the northern city occupied by the main Midianite colony—shot down and wrecked completely.

"We have been spied upon several times by planes flying over the city. A request for surrender to the 'Dominion of Asian Realists' was dropped twice, and our failure to reply brought one tremendous bomb—which, however, did



"As we move out into space toward Mars, that red world increases in size and brilliance, and its color is malevolent and ominous."

crew of a plane commanded by Jack Taylor was sniped upon, and two of his men were killed.

"In the nearest vacant western city Ransdell fought hand-to-hand with twelve or fourteen Midianites, who attacked his party as it came through the gate. Ransdell is a deadly shot. His five men took cover, and in a battle that lasted for three-quarters of an hour, one was wounded. Six Midianites were killed. I should say—three Japs and three Russians.

not penetrate our tough, transparent envelope, although it was unquestionably intended for that purpose.

"It is not safe to leave the city. Twice parties on foot exploring the geology and flora outside the gates have been fired at by the enemy planes which appeared from the north and dived at them.

"It is evident that the Midianites are engaged in a war of attrition. They mean to conquer us. They mean to have Bronson Beta for themselves—or at least to insure that all human beings upon the planet will be governed by them and will live by their precepts. And Lady Cynthia has left no doubt in our minds about their desire for our women. They need what they call 'breeding females.' I think that 'need' in itself would be sufficient to cause every man and woman here to fight to the death.

"Yes, we could and should be happy here now. But—

"More than three hundred Englishmen and Englishwomen are living in subjugation, and we are unable to set them free. They are our own blood and kin. They are living under conditions at best odious, at worst horrible to them. We cannot be happy while they are virtually slaves.

"And also—Bronson Beta moves ever into cold. Bitter cold! Sixty days ago the surface of the planet was chilly. Then, for a while, it warmed again, so that we enjoyed a long fall or Indian summer. But now the chill is returning. Our seasons are due not to an inclination of our axis, as on earth, but to our eccentric orbit. The earth in winter was actually nearer to the sun than in the summer, but in winter the earth's axis caused the sun's rays to fall obliquely. Here on Bronson Beta we move from a point close to the orbit of Venus to a point near that of Mars—and the change in distance from the sun will bring extremes of temperature.

"THAT is not all. That is not the only problem—anxious problem—which faces us in these autumn days. Shall we turn back toward the sun? Our scientists say so; but shall we? This planet has not done it yet. Its specialty seems to be a drift out into space.

"Our astrophysicists and mathematicians burn their lights far into the night of this new planet in order to anticipate the possibilities in our state. They are not romantic men.

"Meanwhile as we move out into space

toward Mars, that red world increases in size and brilliance. Already it is a more vivid body than was Venus from the earth, and its color is malevolent and ominous.

"So the days and nights pass.

"Yes, our colony is returning to the happy human pursuits of love and knowledge and social relationships. But we are surrounded by mysteries, terrors, spies within our city, enemies who would conquer us; and always the red planet draws nearer—as not long ago the two bodies from cosmos drew toward the condemned and terrified earth."

AS Eliot James finished that entry in his diary, he was interrupted by a knock on his door.

"Come in!" he called.

Shirley Cotton entered. She said something that sounded like "*Hopayiyato!*"

"*Hopiyayto* yourself," Eliot James answered.

"That's a Bronson Beta word," she said. "It means, 'How the devil are you?'—or something like that."

"Sit," said the writer. "I'm fine. What's news?"

Shirley grinned. "Want a nice mauve-and-yellow shirt? Want a pair of red-and-silver shorts?"

"Any rags? Any old iron? What's the trouble? Your clothing-department running out of orders?"

"Nope. And when we do, we'll revive fashions—so you'll have to patronize Shirley Cotton's mills, whether you want to or not."

"My God," said James with mock anger, "you'd think that after managing to abolish styles for a couple of years, people would be glad enough to give them up forever!"

She shook her head. "This year we're going in for light clothing with animal designs. Next year I plan flowers. Higgins is going to present some patterns—"

"He never will, I trust."

"I'll bribe him with a waistcoat in Bronson Beta orchids and mushrooms. By the way—how long have you been sitting in this cramped hole?"

"All morning. Why?"

"Then you haven't heard about the green rain."

James looked at her with surprise. "Green rain?"

"Sure. Outdoors. Didn't amount to anything—but for about ten minutes it rained green."

"I'll be damned! What was it?"

Shirley shrugged. "Search me. A green sky is bad enough. But a green rain—well, anything can happen. Higgs has bottles full of whatever it was—more like snow than rain—only not frozen. It misted the dome a little. And then—you probably haven't heard the rumor about Von Beitz that was going around."

"News?"

"Not news. A rumor. Scandal, I'd call it. People have been saying this morning that the spies hiding here are undoubtedly from the Midianite gang. Some of them are Germans. Von Beitz was a German. So they say that he wasn't kidnaped, but that he had always belonged to them, and merely joined them at the first opportunity."

Eliot James swore. "That's a lousy libel. Why—Von Beitz is one of the whitest men I know. A great brain. And nerve! I fought side by side with that guy in Michigan, and—why—hell! He's practically a brother of mine. Why do you think I went out scouring the other cities last month, and why do you think I've been in every corner of this burg looking? Because Von Beitz wouldn't turn us in for his life—that's why."

The handsome Shirley Cotton nodded. "I agree. But everybody's nervous these days."

"The Lord knows there's enough to make them nervous—"

They were interrupted by a banging on the door.

"Come in!" James called.

The door swung inward automatically. On the threshold stood Duquesne. He was ordinarily of ruddy complexion, but now his face was white. "Have you seen Tony?" he asked.

"No. What's the trouble?"

The Frenchman stepped into the room, and the door closed behind him. "I have searched everywhere."

JAMES leaped to his feet. "You don't mean that Tony—"

"Oh—no, not lost. Just busy somewhere." Duquesne regarded the man and woman for a moment. "I was in a hurry to find him, because I have some very interesting information. I shall tell you. It is for the moment confidential."

"Sit," said the writer, as he had to his previous guest. "What's it about?"

"The source of our power."

James leaned forward. "You found it?"

"Not specifically. I have clung to the theory that power was generated under the city. When we learned that the interior of the planet was still warm, it seemed plausible that the power was generated from that heat—deep in the earth. So I explored. It was difficult. All the electrical connections are built into the very foundation of the city. They cannot be traced. My assistants meanwhile studied the plans of the city—we found many. The clue in them pointed always toward a place in the earth. We finally—this morning—located that place. It is far underground. But it is not a generating plant. No."

"What is it, then?" James asked.

"A relay-station. A mere series of transformers. Stupendous in size and capacity. From it lead the great conduits—out, underground, deep down—toward the north. The station for this city is not here. It is as we suspected, in some other city—or place. And all the cities near here derive their power from that place. That is the explanation of why, when the lights came in one city, they came in all. It was a central plant which had been turned on—and which supplied every city."

"That's a very interesting confirmation," James said.

DUQUESNE snorted. "My dear young man! Can't you think of more to say than that it is interesting?"

James leaned back. "I see. You mean that now it is sure that they have control of our power."

"Exactly."

"And they can shut it off whenever they wish."

"Precisely."

"So that—when it gets colder—they can cut our power and not only put out our lights, but stop our heat."

"Right."

James tapped on his desk with the pencil he had been using.

"How much chance," he asked, "have we of setting up a power-station of our own—a station big enough to heat a couple of buildings, and light them, all winter?"

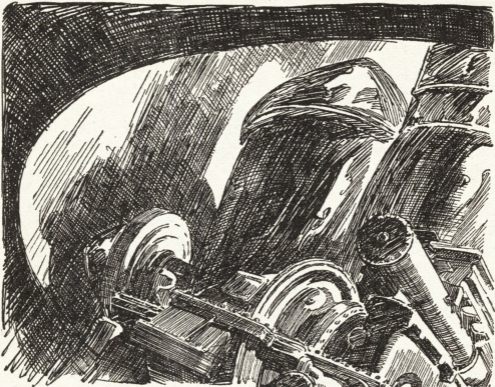
Duquesne shrugged. "What do we use for fuel?"

"Not coal—we've seen none. Or oil. How about wood? Those forests?"

"And how do we get wood here?"

"Trucks."

"And if our enemies are trying to freeze us into submission, would they



"The clues in the plans pointed always toward a place in the earth. This morning we located that place."

let us save ourselves by running trucks day and night to distant forests for fuel? No. They would blow up the roads and bomb the trucks. It would take much wood to keep us warm. We could not run any sort of blockade—or cut wood under fire from an enemy. No."

"The river, then?"

Duquesne spread his hands. "You have imagination, my boy. But already it is too cold. And to build a dam and a hydro-electric plant takes months. I have thought of those things."

"In other words," Shirley said slowly, "if you are right about the Midianites being in possession of the power-plant, we'll have to take it away from them—or beat them somehow. Or else—"

James grinned bitterly. "Why not just leave it at, 'or else'?"

The Frenchman rose. "That is told in confidence. I may be mistaken in my conjectures. I shall now search for Tony further. He will in any case appear for luncheon." He left them, and they heard the nervous click of his heels as his short legs carried his large body down the hall.

"Not so good," said Shirley Cotton.

James went to the window. Down on the street below, people moved hither and thither. A few of the Bronson Beta automobiles shot back and forth on their roadways, and wound the spiral ramps of buildings. Overhead in the green sky the sun shone, brightening the city, touching with splendor its many-colored facets.

Then a mighty bell sent a rolling reverberation over the district. James



turned from the window. "Lunch," he said.

He went with the girl to the dining-room. The five-hundred-odd inhabitants of Hendron were gathering. They came together on the street outside the dining-hall in twos and threes, and moved through the wide doorway to their appointed places. They talked and laughed and joked with each other, and on the faces only of a minority was an expression of unalterable apprehension. The rest were at least calm.

In ten minutes the hall was a bedlam of voices and clatterings, and the women on duty as waitresses hurried from the kitchens with huge trays.

Higgins invaded this peaceful and

commonplace scene in great excitement. Instead of taking his place, he went to Tony—who was engaged in earnest private conversation with Duquesne—and spoke for a moment. Tony stood, then, and struck a note on a gong. Immediate silence was the response to the sound.

"Doctor Higgins," said Tony, "has made a discovery."

HIGGINS stood. This ritual had been followed in the announcement of hundreds of discoveries relative to Bronson Beta, and the life, arts and sciences of its original inhabitants.

"It concerns the greenness of the sky," Higgins said. "We have all remarked upon it. We have agreed that normal light polarization would always produce blue. We have agreed that any gases which would cause a green tint in atmosphere—halogens, for example—would also be poisonous.

"This morning at seven-eighty, Bronson Beta time, we had a green rain of nine and a half Bronson Beta minutes' duration. I collected the precipitated substance. It proved to be the explanation of our atmospheric color." He took a vial from his pocket and held it up. Its contents were green. "The color is caused by this. A new form of life—a type of plant unknown on earth. You are all familiar with the algæ in the sea—minute plants which floated in the oceans of earth in such numbers as to change the color in many places. Very well. The higher atmosphere of Bronson Beta is crowded by plants in some ways similar. These plants are in effect tiny balloons. They germinate on the surface of the earth apparently, in the spring. As they grow (the ground everywhere must be covered by them), they manufacture within themselves hydrogen gas. They swell with it until, like small balloons, they rise. Their hydrogen holds them suspended high in the atmosphere during the summer and fall—trillions upon countless trillions of them. They make a level of thin, greenish fog overhead. Examined microscopically, they reveal their secret at once.

"There is sufficient carbon dioxide and moisture to nourish them. They live by simple photosynthesis; and it is the chlorophyll they contain which makes them green—a characteristic of all terrestrial plants except the parasites. These plants reproduce from spores."

Higgins sat down.

His brief description was greeted by applause in which the botanists and biologists were most vehement.

Carter stood up. "About their precipitation, Higgins?"

Again Higgins took the floor. "I have only a theory to offer. Temperature. I believe that, although they are resistant to cold, an adequate drop in temperature will cause them to crack and lose their hydrogen. Then, naturally, they fall to earth."

"So you anticipate more green rain?"

"I do—a tremendous volume of it. And I may add that these plants fix nitrogen, so that their dead bodies, so to speak, will constitute a fine fertilizer, laid annually upon the soil of the entire planet."

Carter nodded. "Excellent, Higgins! Have you made calculations relative to the possible and probable depth of 'green rain' we may expect?"

"Only the roughest sort. I shall work on that at once, of course. But to give the color-intensity we observe in the sky, I should imagine that the atmosphere contained enough of these vegetable balloons to cover the ground to a depth of two feet, at the least. Of course, decay would soon reduce the green blanket to a half inch or less; but in their expanded state, two feet would be conservative as an estimate."

Again there was applause. Other questions were asked. The bottle began to pass from hand to hand. The meal was resumed. It did not continue long without interruption, however. While the five hundred people saved by Hendron dined in the city named for him, they were guarded by a perpetual watch. Not since the first glimpse of a strange plane flying over the original camp, had vigilance been relaxed. In Hendron, day and night, men and women stood guard—at the gates, in the top of the tallest building, and underground in the central chambers.

DURING that noonday meal the guards on the north gate saw one of the Midianite planes moving toward the city.

It was not uncommon for an enemy plane to pass across their range of vision. This plane, however, was evidently headed for the city of Hendron. When that fact became assured, the alarm was sounded.

In the dining-hall there was an orderly stampede.

A swift car from the north gate brought news of the danger.

Arms were taken from racks, and at vantage-points near the gates, men and women—some still carrying hastily snatched bits of food—took their posts.

The plane, meanwhile, had reached the dome of the city. It did not fly over, however. It did not drop bombs, or a message. Instead, it circled twice to lose altitude, and from a hatch in its fuselage a white flag was run up on a miniature mast.

Then it landed.

BY the time it touched the ground, more than two hundred persons were on hand to see. The transparent cover of their city gave them a feeling of security. However, the flag of truce upon the plane did not encourage them to any careless maneuver.

The ship was expertly brought down to the ground, but afterward it behaved badly. It slewed and skidded. Its engine died and then picked up as it started to taxi toward the gate. It did not cover the intervening stretch of ground. Instead, it lurched crazily, hit a rock, smashed a wheel, dragged a wing—and its motor was cut. Then, half wrecked, it stopped.

There it stood, like a bird shot down, for five full minutes. No one moved inside it. No one made an effort to descend.

By that time everyone in the city had rushed to its edge.

Tony gathered his lieutenants and advisers together.

"Ruse to get the gate open," Williams said.

"I think so," Tony agreed.

They waited.

Dodson, standing near Tony, murmured: "The Trojan-horse gag."

Tony nodded. . . .

Ten minutes.

"Let me go out there," Jack Taylor said finally. "Just open one gate a crack. They can't get a wedge in at that distance. It's some sort of booby trap—but I'll spring it."

Tony said no. They sat.

A thought moved through the mind of Eliot James. He went to Tony. "It might be Von Beitz. He might be hurt—"

Tony lifted a pair of powerful glasses to his eye. He saw several areas of

holes on the plane's side. Machine-gun bullet-holes.

"Open the gate a crack—and lock it behind me," he commanded. He stalked to the portal. It yawned for an instant. He went out. Jack Taylor, winking at the men who manipulated the gate, followed close behind Tony.

Tony turned after the gate clanged, and saw Jack. He grinned. The people inside the city who watched, were deeply moved. Tony's decision to accept the danger—Jack's pursuit of his leader into peril—those were the things of which the saga of Hendron's hundreds were made.

They went cautiously toward the broken ship. No sound came from it. They were ready to throw themselves to the earth at the first stirring.

There was none.

The crowd watching held its breath. The two men were under the shattered wing. . . . Now they were climbing the fuselage.

Tony looked cautiously through a window.

Inside the plane, alone, on its floor, in a puddle of blood, lay Von Beitz.

Tony yanked the door open. Taylor followed him inside.

VON BEITZ was badly wounded, but still breathing. They lifted him a little. He opened his eyes. A stern smile came upon his Teutonic face.

"Good!" he mumbled. "I escaped. They have the power city. They plan to cut you off as soon as it is cold enough to freeze you to terms. I do not know where the power city is—it is not like the other cities."

He closed his eyes.

"Did they kidnap you here?" Tony asked.

He thought that Von Beitz nodded an affirmative.

From the outside came a yell of warning from many throats. Tony looked. The gate was open. People were pointing. In the north was a fleet of enemy planes winging toward the spot.

"Hurry!" Tony said to Taylor. "Take his feet. Gently—and fast! They're going to try to bomb us before we get Von Beitz' information back to the others!"

As he spoke, he and Taylor were carrying the inert man to the door of the shattered ship.

Perilous adventure and breath-taking discoveries in this strange new world combine to make one of the best installments yet—in the next, the April, issue.

Killing No Murder?

By PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN

A powerful drama by the author of the world-famous "Beau Geste" and "Valiant Dust."

THE dawn "hate" began again, from the few dozen Arabs whose job and ambition it was to get McSnorrt and me and our machine-gun.

"If they were half the de'ils they think they are, they'd rush us," growled McSnorrt.

"Not till the gun jams and they know it," said I.

"No. Probably the idea is to make us use it till it does. Well, we won't, till they rush. Veecious circle. . . Ah!"

A deep grunt of satisfaction from McSnorrt. "Got him!"

And undoubtedly he had; for a body on the mountain slope opposite to our machine-gun nest (of two) fell sidewise from behind a rock and slid clattering down the slope.

We could hear the fall of dislodged shale and pebbles, and the crash of the rifle that dropped over a small precipice.

The morning hate died down, it having been established to the Chleuchs' satisfaction that we were still in our little defended cave, watchful and wary, if not merry and bright.

"How many does that make now?" I asked McSnorrt.

"Here, this week, d'ye mean?"

"No, your grand total."

"Grrraand total! Huh! God knows."

"Did you ever kill a man in cold blood?" I inquired as I cleaned my rifle while McSnorrt kept watch across the narrow valley.

"It depends on what ye call 'cauld,'" was the reply.

"Well, in private life—as a civilian."

"Oh, aye. Whiles. Now and again."

"Again?" I asked skeptically, hoping to provoke Mac into a story.

He turned and looked at me.

"Did you ever hear o' a certain pamphlet, written, I believe, in the lasceevious days o' the Restoration, or some other time, called '*Killing no Murder*'? I tell ye, laddie, a man can make worse

slips than killing, whether ye call it murder or not. Why, half the folk ye meet would be better dead. Some—'twould be a mercy to put them out o' their misery; some—'twould be a good deed on behalf of the community. Aye, when the warrld's more civilized, there won't be so much trying o' so-called murderers just to see whether they should be hanged. More often 'twill be to see whether they shouldna be given something out o' the poor-box—something substantial. Have ye never met a man ye wanted to kill?"

"Many," I truthfully replied.

"And why didna ye do it? Because ye hadna the guts. Did I tell ye about yon time I hurt a chiel from Peru?"

"You did not," I replied.

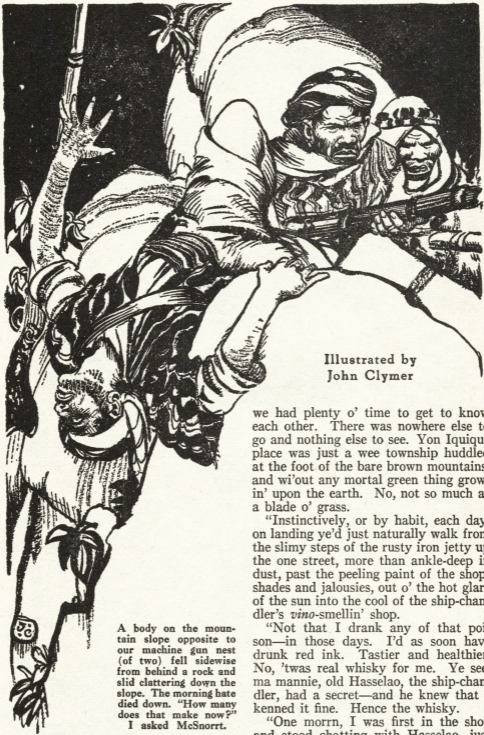
"Did ye ever hear of Iquique?"

I nodded. "Chile way."

McSNORRT cleared his throat. "Engineer, I was. In the *Stourbridge*, commanded by the graandest man that ever trod a deck—yon Bobby McTavish. There's haverin' fules that say oil and water willna mix, and so there can never be real friendship between the blue-water man o' the bridge, and the black-oil man o' the engine-room. Bilge! Look at Whisky Bobby and Whiskier McSnorrt, as they call me.

"The *Stourbridge* was the only steamer lying at Iquique, and among all the skippers and mates that met in the room behind the ship-chandler's shop I was the only engineer, and although they were stick-and-string men, and forever cracking the old windjammer gag about 'giving up the sea and going about in steamers', never a wry word did I have with any of them.

"Mind ye, laddie, it needs a *real* man to bring one o' they lofty skysail-yarders round the Horn, outward-bound. They carry no bonny engines to take them against the storms, and within his particular limits, I count the best of the



Illustrated by
John Clymer

A body on the mountain slope opposite to our machine gun nest (of two) fell sidewise from behind a rock and slid clattering down the slope. The morning hate died down. "How many does that make now?" I asked McSnorrt.

windjammer captains something nearly as good as a chief engineer—*nearly*, I'm sayin'.

"Aye, they were braw lads and mostly Scotch, ye ken, and in those days o' waitin' for cargo and leisurely loading,

we had plenty o' time to get to know each other. There was nowhere else to go and nothing else to see. Yon Iquique place was just a wee township huddled at the foot of the bare brown mountains, and wi'out any mortal green thing growin' upon the earth. No, not so much as a blade o' grass.

"Instinctively, or by habit, each day, on landing ye'd just naturally walk from the slimy steps of the rusty iron jetty up the one street, more than ankle-deep in dust, past the peeling paint of the shop-shades and jalousies, out o' the hot glare of the sun into the cool of the ship-chandler's *vino*-smellin' shop.

"Not that I drank any of that poison—in those days. I'd as soon have drunk red ink. Tastier and healthier. No, 'twas real whisky for me. Ye see, ma mannie, old Hasselao, the ship-chandler, had a secret—and he knew that I kened it fine. Hence the whisky.

"One mornn, I was first in the shop and stood chatting with Hasselao, just haverin' all about nothing.

"All of a sudden, a braw big man, that might have been a police agent, shoved his ugly head in the door and says sharp-like:

"'I want Hassel.'

"Old Hasselao went white, and shrank



"He gave a grraund exhibition of a bare-fist boxer



back like ye'd struck him across the face with a whip.

"'You can't touch me here on Chileno soil; I'm naturalized,' he whispered, putting out a hand as though to fend off a ghost or a devil.

"'What d'you mean?' said the man.

"And it turned out that the big fellow was only a second mate, looking for an apprentice, by the name o' Hassel, that had run away from a Liverpool barque loading in the harbor.

"And then it was that I put two and two together, and knew that old Hasselao spoke such fine English—aye, he might have been a Scot—because it was his own mother tongue. Then it was that I knew that his daughter, for all she was called Dolores Juanita, was the most beautiful woman on the Coast by virtue of British blood—that saved her from the fat, the yellowness and the heavy coarseness of her mother.

dealing with a man armed with an ugly long knife."

"So ye're an Englishman—for all ye call yourself Señor Don Juan Hasselao, are ye?" thought I to myself, eying the old man. 'And Dolores Juanita is half English, is she, eh?'

"I'm tellin' ye, yon lassie was bonny to look upon, and many o' they captains used the room behind the ship for little else than to look upon her; and with that little they had to go empty away. Speeritually empty, I mean. Not speeritously, ye ken.

"Ye see, not only was there a lover in the offing: but he was living in the same house—Dolores Juanita's lover. I wouldna say he was the perfect lover; but ma certie, he was the perfect ship-chandler's clerk. He would board an inbound ship in the strongest gale that ever blew, and well before she had her anchors in the water. No, there was never any doubt that the trade card o' Señor Don Hasselao, ship-chandler and purveyor o' fresh meat, would be the first to reach the hand of the steward, along wi' a few good cigars, or maybe something better.

"To give him his due, there's no doubt that the dark Spanish eyes and golden English hair of the lovely Dolores Juanita counted more wi' him than did her father's fine business. All the same, him having no son and no chance of one, old Señor Don Juan Hasselao was pleased enough to think that one day his fine indispensable clerk should marry the lassie and inherit the store.

"In fact, it suited him fine; but it wasna all plain sailing. For this clerk of Hasselao's, who'd put to sea in a leaky dinghy and a raging norther, while as competent a boatman and ship-chandler's runner as ever lived, was just about as competent at wooing a lass as the marble statue o' a moderator of the kirk.

"Mind ye, he was something very like a man, this Herman as he called himself; a tow-haired, blue-eyed giant he was, and said he was a Dane, which he wasna. He could speak a dozen languages, lift a weight that would scare a Chileno stevedore, break a man across his knee, or knock a mad fightin'-drunk fo'c'sle-bully stone cauld—but he couldna make love to a lassie.

"And mind ye, no woman is content wi' what a mirror tells her, however flattering be the tale. She wants a lover to tell her too. And though puir Herman knew a dozen other languages, he didna know the language o' love. He was



dumb in all senses of the word, and could only look at her—dumbly.

"And as each fresh admirer, observing some grraand feat of strength staged for his benefit, wisely agreed with himself that perhaps Herman was the very man for her, the lazy smile of the lovely Dolores Juanita barely moved her beautiful lips—and she herself didna seem quite so certain about it.

"ONE day when I was about tired watching Herman's foolishness and longing to urge him to pick the wench up and spank her, tell her she was the loveliest thing God ever made at His best, put her under his arm and take her off to the Church, the de'il himself sent his own brother to Iquique. Aye, Pat Morophy surely was the de'il's own twin brother—unless he were his favorite first-born, and the only legitimate son of Satan.

"Like Herman, he was a huge big blue-eyed fair-haired man. But was he tongue-tied, too? He wasna!

"Now the warld's a small place, laddie, as ye may have heard, and as luck or fate or the de'il would have it, there was a captain then in Iquique who knew all about Pat Morophy—or a whole lot about him. And this captain, the fule, drank *vino* and when he was up to his Plimsoll mark in *vino*, he'd talk, and one night he talked about Pat Morophy. Told us he'd come out to either Chile or Peru to a job on the railway—whether plate-layer or ganger or engine-driver, he didna ken. Belike, it had been a job where there was graft—conductor, selling tickets at what he thought the ignorant peasant could afford to pay, and



"Yon audience was under a spell, for, wi' all her swift and intricate steps and heel-tappings, her head could have supported a full glass of whisky and never spilt a precious drop."

charging according to a tariff of his own, for freight.

"Anyhow, he made money, bought nirate land, and made a fortune. Started bad and grew worse. The richer he grew, the wickeder. And he was a man that loved playing wi' fire, and to him women were fire, and according to our informant, he feared nothing that walked on two legs; and ye might find him one day a debonair and bonny gentleman, and, another day, a dommed low scoundrel.

"Whatever he wasna, he was—experienced. And whatever he didna know, he knew—women.

"WELL, just imagine him matched against dumb Herman, and think what a revelation to a buried-alive untutored lassie was Pat Morophy with his rascally grace and his mischievous wit, the wild wicked Irishman.

"Before long, there was a total eclipse of the moon-calf Herman. And what did he do?

"Yon Morophy was politeness and good manners incarnate and I'll wager my pay-day that he never allowed himself one word o' love to Dolores Juanita—until the day he took her away.

"No, there was no need for speech between those two; for, within a week o' getting sight of him, Dolores was his slave and couldna keep the love-light from out her glorious eyes. And Pat Morophy smiled kindly at Herman and just copied his strong-man tricks of liftin' full barrels of salt pork and the like: for what the puir Herman could do, Pat Morophy could do, and one better.

"One night, he showed more than strength. He showed his fighting skill; for a Chileno came into Hasselao's shop full of *vino* and began to make trouble. He called puir old Hasselao names; put his fist under the señor's nose; bawled and shouted and threw things about; and then pulled out his knife.

"Puir old Hasselao backed into the room where we were, and Pat Morophy went to it. I willna say that with one drive o' his right he knocked that Chileno from the back door of the shop clean through the front door, knife and all, but it looked like it; and he gave a graand exhibition of a bare-fist fighting boxer dealing with a man as big and strong as himself, armed with an ugly long knife. A graand sight!

"And when Herman came in, he didna really enjoy Dolores Juanita's account of the matter.

"The next day Pat Morophy was gone—and so was Dolores Juanita.

"When I arrived at the store, I found Hasselao alternating between raving, chattering and gesticulating like a maniac, or the Dago he pretended to be, and fainting away like the blue-lipped corpse that he looked.

"And believe me, the most unconcerned man in Iquique was the deserted lover. When Hasselao screamed:

"Her-man . . . Her-man! Like hell you're her man, Herman! Her man! Why, you aren't a man at all!' Herman would only shrug and smile and say:

"I wait, Señor Hasselao, I wait. She go of her own free will. One day she will need me, and then I shall go to her. I shall do nothing while she think she need this Morophy! . . .

"Before the *Stourbridge* sailed, Herman had drawn his money from the Bank of Tarapaca and left the puir lonely old Señor Don Juan Hasselao.

"And being then young and inexperienced, I thought that, with that tame ending of the matter, I'd seen and heard the last of a lovely and misguided lassie.

"NOW markk the mysteerious workin's o' fate and let it be a lesson to ye, ma mannie.

"Two years later, at Marseilles, a waiter of Pete's American Bar in the Cannabière, opened the second act of this drama without knowing he was playing his little part.

"Why, I ask ye, should this little rat pester me about Spanish dancers? I told him that he could keep them all, provided he brought me Spanish wine—when the so-called American Bar lacked good Scotch or Canadian rye whisky.

"*Ah, mais écoutez, Monsieur le Capitaine,*' he'd gabble, not knowing a third engineer from a first mate. 'The fandango you have seen it many times, but nevaïr, as rendered by this so beautiful Carmelita Concepción, a Spanish girl with golden hair—at the Palais Regina. But think of it, monsieur! Black eyes and golden hair. But think of it!'

"And the dirty little worm kissed his bunch o' black-nailed fingers and flicked them open toward the ceiling.

"I did think of it. Black eyes and golden hair. Spanish Carmelita Concepción. And I thought o' Spanish Dolores Juanita wi' her black eyes and golden hair. I felt it in my bones, wi' absolute certitude, that that night, if I went to the Palais Regina, I should see

—an English-Spanish girl from Iquique, a girl who'd been the Señorita Dolores Juanita Hasselao.

"I went, though grudging the time when I might have been sitting round a bottle.

"At the Palais Regina every seat was occupied; but there was a wide promenade on each side, and by a little judicious use of my weight, even in those days considerable, I was able to find standing-room by the starboard end of the front row.

"Tis little I remember of the lassie's dancing, but I can tell ye that yon audience was under a spell, for, wi' all her swift and intricate steps and heel-tappings, her head could have supported a full glass of whisky and never spilt a precious drop throughout the performance.

"And almost before the long roar of applause had ended, an attendant passed along in front o' the stage, came down, and handed me a note.

"*Meet me at the Bristol at ten,*" it said.

"She had seen me and recognized me, for mine is a face ye remember, laddie.

"In the lounge of the Bristol she was waiting, and she gave me both her lovely hands, and sat me down beside her on the settee.

"I knew we should meet again," she said, in English. . . .

"Twas a long talk that we had, and she told me many things—many and sad. How Pat Morophy had taken her to Lima and left her there, stranded, when he was tired of her: how nearly she died o' misery, starvation and a broken heart: how she cried the eyes nearly out of her head to think that for such a man she had left her father and puir Herman, whose little finger was worth a hundred such men as the one who'd left her: how, rather than creep back, shamed and disgraced, to Iquique, she had 'appeared' in a Callao café cabaret-show: how an agent had offered to have her taught to dance if she'd tour the cities of South America with him.

"TWAS that or starve, or worse; and she danced in Panama, Cristobal, Manáos, Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Rosario. Aye, the whole lot of them. And then he brought her to Europe.

"And in Europe, her dancing having improved until she was a wonder, a bill-topping star-turn, she danced in Lisbon,

Madrid, Barcelona, Marseilles, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and finally London at—what would the place be? The 'Empire,' was it? Well, no matter; but supping one night in a restaurant, whom should she see standing at the far end of the room, but—Herman!

"Aye, Herman himself, there in London; and evidently in some employment in that hotel. She hid her face behind her hand or the menu-card, or something, and didna linger; for she was ashamed. The sight o' Herman's face had brought it all back. Her home—her puir kind old father. . . .

"Though, mind ye, the life she'd lived, dancing for a leevin' in the wickedest cities of the warrld, hadna made Dolores Juanita any younger or softer, or a better woman. In fact, by the time I met her there in Marseilles, she was—well, a verra experienced dancing-girl; and I wouldna say that she wasna a schemer, a designing minx, weel knowin' on which side her bread was buttered—and verra ready to butter the other side too.

"SOON it transpired she hadna sent for me because of my *beaux-yeux*, as the French call them. Or would they call them just that? . . . No, what she wanted was for me, when next in London, to go to that same restaurant—Romani's, we'll say, for it wasna Romani's—and spy out the land.

"Weel, in due course we made the Port o' London, and to Romani's I went. And there I found Herman—aye, and right glad to see me. Squeezed my wee hand to a jelly, he did.

"Now diplomacy was never my long suit, and barely had we feenished the fine dinner he gave me in his private den, than, plump out, I asked after Dolores Juanita Hasselao, and whether he had ever heard what became of her.

"He gave me a long and thoughtful look.

"You are the first person to make that kind inquiry," he says, very supercilious and suspicious.

"I apologize if ye're affronted or hurt. 'Twas a natural question," I said.

"Well, as you knew Dolores and know me, it's not a natural question, from you," he growled. 'But don't let us quarrel.'

"And so ye've never married," I observed more as a remark than as a question.

"Ja," said he, grinning on one side of his mouth. 'Married this place. 'Tis all

the wife I've got, or likely to have, and it's my own.

"'Ye've made money, then, Herman,' said I, thinking of my own bank-balance that wouldna have balanced the off hind leg of a fly had ye dropped it in t'other scale.

"'Made some of it,' said Herman. 'Poor old Hasselao died and left me the store and his savings, and I sold the business well. . . . Then bought a dirty old black ship and sold it as a clean new white one; bought a total wreck after a norther, had her afloat in a month and made a jug of money—went into the hotel business in Valparaiso, sold out, and came to London, tired of the sun and the spigs. . . . Came to London.'

"'And lived happy aver afterward,' I observed.

"'Happy! Do I look happy?' he asked.

"'Ye do not,' I said, and full well I kenned why.

"'Herman,' said I at long last, the time being come, 'I've seen her.'

"'And he jumped as though he'd been shot.

"'Seen her in Marseilles,' I said, 'alive and well and like you—happy.'

"'Happy? Like me?' he said softly, when the breath came back to him. 'And what's she like, McSnorrt? Does that same smile play hide-and-peek between her lips and her eyes?'

"'An' if it does,' said I, 'tis little thanks to you, Herman. Did ye no' leave her to sink or swim, without lifting a hand or asking a word of inquiry, when she went off with yon Irish de'il, Patrick Morophy?'

"HE looked at me—dangerously.

"'Well, didna ye?' I asked.

"'I did what I thought best,' he said. 'She chose. . . . And if she didn't know the real Morophy, she knew the real Herman. She knew she'd only to turn to me for help if she needed it.'

"'Eh?' said I. 'If she didna know her Pat Morophy she knew her Herman, did she? An' did this same Herman know Dolores Juanita? Did he know she'd sooner have died in the gutter, rather than turn to the man she'd left, and who never lifted a finger at her leavin'? . . . The brave dreamin' chivalrous *caballero*, witless and gutless, who couldna fight for his own and didna trouble whether she lived or starved. D'ye think Dolores Juanita, wi' her English and Spanish and Inca blood, would

whine to ye for help? Man, ye were the last last person in the whole wide warrld to whom she'd have appealed.'

"Herman drew a fine handkerchief from his breast pocket o' his dinner-jacket, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"'If ever I saw a man in pain, I saw one then. Not pain of body, mind ye, but agony of the soul; and that's a million times worrse, for the pain o' his mind racked his body till the sweat ran down his face.

"AND after I'd quite finished talking to Herman for his good, Herman talked to me.

"'Aye, ma mannie; and, ere long, 'twas my turn to suffer. And d'ye know what hurt me most and first? 'Twas learrnin' what I'd never guessed—that this big grraand man, Herman, had admired me as a hero, loved me as a brother, looked up to me, copied me, aye, and sworn by me—*me*—as the man the like of what he'd love to be. Think o' it! To this day I feel ashamed.

"'An' then he told me the truth, until I felt smaller than the insect that a crawl-in' ant looks down upon.

"'Me an' my admonitions o' the witless gutless deserted lover who couldna lift a finger to save his woman and his honor! Listen. . . .

"'He had spent his money like water, to trace Dolores; and had found her at Lima, just as she'd been deserted by the scoundrel who'd seduced her. An' marrk the noble chivalry o' the man. Never did he let her know that 'twas his help, his money that saved her. No idea had Dolores Juanita that Herman's man had bribed the café proprietor to employ her. Never did she dream that 'twas Herman who brought yon agent from Valparaiso to offer her her chance; have her taught to dance; and take her on a tour of the cities. Never in her wildest dreams did she imagine that 'twas Herman who arranged her European program.

"'Aye, 'twas Herman an' none other that guaranteed the agent's commission and her salary. Dolores Juanita could go her ways, but if the lovely woman stooped to folly 'twould not be for need. She had thrust herself into a bad man's arms for love; she needna do it again—for money.

"'Dolores was what she was, and would be what she would be—but all of her own free will. To the agent (whom he knew and trusted) Herman said:

"I fainted with my left and hit him with my right—a blow that shook him from head to foot."



"Do as I say, and while Dolores Juanita Hasselao lives, you have a living, and a good one. Cross me, cheat her, be dishonest, and I'll follow you and kill you with my bare hands."

"In point of fact, the man had found, in Dolores Juanita, a gold-mine; keep-in' strictly to the letter and the spirit of his agreement with Herman, he had made a fortune.

"But why this secrecy for so long, man?" I asked Herman, after I had abased myself in apology before him; had taken his hand and begged him to forgive me, which he had done right handsomely. 'What I canna understand is why, when all was well with the

lassie, ye didna follow her, go to her, tell her everything, and ask her to marry ye.'

"'As a reward for my noble doings?' he sneered.

"'No, to take her from yon hectic life o' dancin'."

"'And shut her up in this—cage?' he asked.

"'But man,' I expostulated, 'common sense! Could ye no' go and see her, for auld sake's sake?'

"'And beg her to marry me in return for the money I had spent on her—or for the money that I've got?' he asked bitterly.

"'Look you, I'll tell you the real reason. . . . A man's mind is his mind; his thoughts are his thoughts; his ways are his ways; and 'tis in my mind and thoughts that Patrick Morophy, the man who decoyed her from her father's house is, in the sight o' God, her husband. He is her husband; and while he lives, I cannot marry her. I mean, I cannot ask her to marry me. I cannot make love to her. I look upon her as his wife.'

"'Heard ye ever the like o' that, for a fool; a daft conscience-ridden wrong-headed grraand-minded *Quixote* of a dommed fool?

"'An' if ye could make this Patrick Morophy marry her, would ye do it?' I asked him.

"'I would,' said Herman.

"'Say it again, man,' I begged. 'Say it again, plain an' slow and clear. If you and Patrick Morophy stood in the same room wi' Dolores Juanita Hasselao, and she looked at him and she looked at you, and swithered between ye, between the bad man who'd ruined her and the good man who'd saved her, would ye open your mouth and say to her:

"'Dolores, marry yon scoundrel, Patrick Morophy?'

"'That I would,' replied Herman, without any hesitation. 'I would, for I regard him as her husband. She loved him; she went away with him; she lived with him as his wife. . . . That no priest blessed her going, makes no difference. She went as his wife; she was his wife; she is his wife. . . . And while Patrick Morophy lives, I will not make love to Dolores Juanita.'

"THAT was that. And nothing I could say would shake him.

"'Nothing, and I tell ye, laddie, I filled myself to the brim wi' the finest Scotch whisky, neat, until I was as eloquent

as Demosthenes, and spoke wi' the tongue o' man and angels. I wouldna say I didna weep, even. I begged, I prayed, I besought; I wrestled wi' the stubborn chiel the whole night long, and Herman remained the stubborn chiel he was. Not while Patrick Morophy lived would he stoop to seek his own happiness and salvation, or the woman he loved far better than life itself.

"'And now mark ye the ways o' Providence. Mark them and tell me whether 'twas the hand o' the Lord or the cloven hoof o' the de'il that appears in what I will tell ye the noo.

"I WENT my ways and, in time, they led to the wicked city o' Naples—and wicked it is. Some talk o' Port Saïd, some o' Barcelona. Some there are that say Marseilles is the wickedest city on airth; but give me Naples, laddie, every time. Aye, Naples for naughtiness; the assorted naughtiness o' mankind from the days of the knowledgeable Nero.

"'And who was the idol of the theater-going, or the music-hall-going, public of Naples, at the moment? The Spanish dancer, the Señorita Carmelita Concepcion, better known in Iquique as Dolores Juanita Hasselao.

"'Aye, my wee mannie; and who d'ye think was the fattest moth desiring the star—the moth that had beheld its bright beams from afar, and had heard the loud word of its fame? Why, the moth that had not singed its wings at the flame of the poor little candle in Iquique, but had beaten out the candle's light. . . . Patrick Morophy, nitrate millionaire!

"'The hand of the Lord, or the cloven hoof of the de'il, I ask ye?

"'Patrick Morophy.

"'His great white yacht had put in to the port o' Naples and tied up not far from the *Stourbridge*. Owing the warrld, patronizing the Mediterranean, taking his ease like a fat lizard in the sunshine o' Taormina, Capri, Amalfi, the fine big fella had looked in at Naples—had heard o' the wonderful dancer; had gone to the Scala to see Carmelita Concepcion and, his eyes popping from his head, had beheld none other than Dolores Juanita Hasselao, the little Dolores whom he'd loved and left in Lima.

"'And what did he do?

"'What would sic an animal do?

"'Sent a bouquet as big as himself, a ring with a diamond as big as the top of his finger, and his card, to Dolores Juanita's hotel next day.

"And what did Dolores do? What did she do when she saw the flowers, and the princely gift and the printed name o' the man who'd ruined her, broken her father's heart, broken her lover's heart? Guess what she did, ma mannie, and then learn o' the ways o' women.

"Invited him in to supper!

"Aye, and when I spruced myself up and went to call on her at the Excelsior Hotel—she told me all about it. Told me she'd met an old friend. An old friend, marrk ye!

"'An old flame, belike, Dolores?' said I quietly, hiding the raging turmoil of my thoughts, for I could see the face of puir Herman as she spoke. 'An old flame, eh?'

"'Flame? Yes! Hot enough to be called that,' she laughed.

"'Aye?' I said. 'Aye. Journeys end in lovers' meetings, eh?'

"'Lovers?' quoth she. '*Amore de asno coz y bocado*—the love of an ass is a kick and a bite.'

"'Aye! He kicked ye and bit ye, once upon a time, Dolores,' said I.

"'Well, he shall marry me this time,' she answered, 'and make up for it. He's a millionaire. That's his yacht down there at the quay. The *Moonbeam*.'

"'Ye'd marry him, would ye, Dolores?' I asked.

"SHE laughed. 'Wouldn't any dancin' marry any millionaire?' she asked—so far down the road of knowledge and wisdom had the simple Dolores Juanita of Iquique traveled.

"'But this millionaire won't marry a dancin', Dolores,' said I.

"'Won't he, my dear?' laughed Dolores. 'You wait.'

"'I'm going to wait,' said I.

"'And I waited, night after night, between the Excelsior Hotel and the *Moonbeam* yacht.

"'At last I met him, face to face.

"'Twas between three and four in the mornin', and there were more moonbeams than his about, for 'twas a glorious moonlight night.

"'Mr. Morophy, I think,' said I, stepping out from the shadow o' the Customs shed and confronting him: a graand figure of a man in his evening dress wi' white waistcoat, white tie, opera hat and wi' diamonds in his shirt-front and on his finger.

"'Mr. Patrick Morophy,' I repeated.

"'I am,' said he, 'but I don't think I know you, my man.'

"'Aye, I'm your man, all right,' said I, 'and ye're going to be mine. . . . Put your fists up and fight.'

"'What for?' he growled.

"'For your life, ye dog,' said I, 'and for Dolores Juanita Hasselao, that you took away from Iquique.'

"'And I feinted with my left and hit him with my right—a blow that shook him from head to foot and settled the fight.

"'He was game, and he fought like—an Irishman; but I was in graand fettle with harrd worrk and harrd living, and he was soft with no worrk and soft living. And that crushing blow on the point of his jaw had knocked him silly, had knocked him out, on his feet, knocked him out, though he didna fall.

"'Aye, but he fought, even so, and I didna have it all my own way. Dinna think it. His diamond ring gave me this mark, just here, above my right eyebrow.

"'But while I was yet fresh, unwinded, and going strrong, he was breathing like an asthmatic, pale as a ghost, sagging at the knees, and the lovely white front of him a gory mess, from his beautiful tie to the big blue sapphire buttons of his white waistcoat.

"'Suddenly he dropped his fists. Whether to give me best, to ask for mercy, or because he could hold them up no longer, I didna ken. But e'en as they fell from before his face, I hit him.

"'Man, 'twas a smack that roused o'er that sleeping city—and it knocked Patrick Morophy clean into the harbor.

"'And like a log o' ebony he sank.

"'They found him next day under a sewage-barge—a fitting place.

"'And early that mornn the *Stourbridge* sailed."

"WHAT about Herman?" I asked.

"'He read o' the sad accident in the papers; and straightway he went to Naples, for always he knew where Carmelita Concepcion was performing.

"'They were married in London.

"'An' noo I'll tell ye the most interesting thing of all, laddie, the thing that shows ye that the very wisest of us never know: *They are happy*.

"'I visited them in London at their fine hotel, and if ever I saw a happy couple in my life, 'twas they. Happy as the day is long.

"'An' that's a thing to ponder on, ma mannie. . . .

"'Murder? Oh, aye. Perhaps."



Black Lightning

TO the rest of the wild horses, perhaps Black Lightning was of no particular consequence, for his were not the massive head and wicked hoofs of a fighter. Perhaps some of the other stallions who lorded it in their untamed bands over the Mogollon Mesa eyed the four-year-old appraisingly and speculated as to what menace he might hold in another year, when he had outgrown the weakness that comes with the cutting of permanent teeth. If they did, they saw little to alarm them, scant promise of future challenge to their authority; for Black Lightning was the embodiment of delicate grace, of fleetness. There was naught in the tapering muzzle, in the delicately flaring nostrils, to speak of valor in the mortal battle of hoof and tusk; nor did the brilliantly liquid brown eyes speak of aught but the joy of life—the wild heart-throbbing joy that comes when one sweeps across the scanty sod, the loving fingers of the wind caressing one's sides, hoofs drumming, drumming ever faster, until the sound becomes a purr. Thus would he race alone, for there was none other fleet enough to make his run a race.

Glistening black to the last hair was Black Lightning, unblemished by cattle-man's iron on shoulder or hoof. His coat glittered in the sun like wet coal, and his thick, wavy tail brushed the ground. His neck was a proud, arching crest above which flaunted a jet, wind-tossed mane. Dainty of hoof he was, with legs that tapered to slender hocks.

And ever beside him was Hammerhead, the gawky, the misshapen, the slow—Hammerhead, his partner. He loved Hammerhead with every fiber of

his high-strung soul; and Hammerhead worshiped his beautiful friend as only a horse can worship—or a dog.

No stud-book held Black Lightning's genealogy; but to the eyes of a horse-man it was written in every line of his graceful body, written more plainly than upon paper—which may be forged. His was the blood of those swift proud Arabs which the cattleman Dan Harkness had imported fifty years before—those Arabs which Dan, growing old, had come to love almost as children. He had loved them so that by his will he gave them their liberty beyond his fences, that they might shame the scrubby mustangs with their speed and beauty.

Of Hammerhead's pedigree little need be said: A nester¹ windbroken work mare, abandoned as not worth her keep, had mated with a scrubby mustang stallion who could find no better. Eighteen months later she had been pulled down by the wolves, leaving behind a scrawny colt who hung around the water-holes, filling his little belly with water for lack of better sustenance. For months he was a solitary, lonesome little figure, unwanted even by the mountain lion, to whom he would not furnish a satisfying meal. And then one day another youngster had come curvetting up, little hoofs flying with the pride of a tiny war-horse, bushy black mane tossing above high-held crest—a sight to make poor little Hammerhead raise his weary neck. They nuzzled each other—Hammerhead timidly at first; they drank together. The black wanted to play, but the other was too weak.

Black Lightning told the stranger, in the silent language of his kind, of a little



A fine story of friendships among horses and men.

By **JAY LUCAS**

Illustrated by Margery Stocking

valley where the grass grew lush and sweet; and presently they were there, grazing side by side—pals. . . .

Over the camp-fires, by the chuck-wagons, the cowboys often talked of this strange friendship of the ill-mated pair.

Once Mustang Jack heard them talking thus. Mustang Jack was half Apache—and, the cowboys added, all darn fool. How else could one explain his choosing to make a scant living by catching wild horses, and he a graduate of Carlisle? He listened in silence a long time, and then raised his eyes—piercing, dark-blue eyes such as had peered beneath the brows of Geronimo, his great-uncle. He spoke, softly:

"Dave, when a cowboy goes to pick a partner, does he take the handsomest in the outfit, and the best rider and roper? And does he measure him to see that he's over six feet, and has broad shoulders and narrow hips?"

There was a silence, the boys puffing their brown cigarettes, a silence to be broken by Hank Bly, short, ugly, clumsy, and barely "hand" enough to hold a job. Hank glanced across the fire at Paul Henderson, "top hand"—with the figure and grace of a Greek god—and nodded.

"Yes sir—aint that the truth! Like me takin' up with that little scrub of a Paul there. You see I jest figger the pore cuss is good-natured an' can't help his looks."

There was a general laugh, and Paul shied a half-empty war-bag at Hank's head—which Hank was too clumsy to dodge, and so got bowled over almost into the fire. That settled the argument: horses, like men, pick partners—well, because they make good partners. . . .

The Old Man—old Tom Wagner—had hired Mustang Jack for a month, to take charge of a great round-up of wild horses. Jim Nelson, the foreman, did not mind his temporary loss of position—indeed, he looked forward eagerly to "making a hand" under the famous Mustang, and perhaps learning some of his secrets. They were to begin by "taking stands" on the wild horses—running them in relay. A man on a hard-running horse would suddenly appear from nowhere, shooting into the air and yelling, driving the wild band ahead of him on a given course. Soon he would be outdistanced, for no ridden horse could hold the terrific gait. And then, from around some hill, from some arroyo, would come a second mounted figure riding like the wind, whooping, shooting, waving his hat. He too would be outdistanced—but there would be a third, a fourth, a fifth—a seemingly interminable chain, each on a fresh, grain-fed horse, until weary hoofs grew leaden and breath came only in panting sobs. And then two skillful riders would swing in behind; there would be a narrow opening, a hidden corral, a gate swinging to. Wild horses—wild horses no more.

UNDER the blazing cloudless sky of Arizona, Mustang Jack lay on a little butte, with Jim Nelson, the foreman, beside him. They peered through a shallow screen of scrub oak. Behind them, concealed by the shoulder of the hill, stood their horses with cinches hanging loose. From far in the distance came the echo of a shot.

Jim Nelson spoke:

"They're bringin' 'em in!"

His voice showed his excitement. Mustang Jack nodded slightly and pinched out his cigarette. He turned to the man beside him:

"Here—take my glasses and watch that little open pass to the west—they'll come through there."

Jack Nelson took them—a pair of the finest binoculars—and rested his elbow on the ground for steadiness. They were very high-power glasses, and the distant pass sprang toward him so clearly that he gasped. He could almost recognize the features of Paul Henderson as the tall top hand scurried back down the hillside, hastily pulled the cinch tight on his horse, and leaped into the saddle; he could almost see the excitement on Paul's face. Then the distant man was diving his horse into a little clump of trees, out of sight.

For a few moments nothing happened. Then, over the middle of the pass, came a rangy sorrel mare, a kinky-tailed little colt racing at her heels. And suddenly the pass was bristling with horses, a powerful roan stallion thundering in their rear, keeping them to a close-packed band. They came pounding down in a steady, dogged run, heads low—ten, twenty, nearly thirty of them. Jim Nelson could see the little dark rivulets of sweat on their legs, could see the dust of many weary miles caking their heaving sides.

Now they were well down the pass. From the little clump of trees came Paul Henderson, riding as though the devil were after him. Downward, through loose stones and cactus, he hurled his horse madly, holding its feet under it with the skill that was his. Jim Nelson could see Paul's head go back, could see his mouth open wide—it seemed strange that he could not hear the yell.

THEN Paul's horse went down. There was a sickening lurch, a dust-cloud, a hat flying sidewise, a horse's legs waving above him in the air, flying stirrups and flying rope. Over and over, down the hillside, rolled man and horse. Now the horse was scrambling to his feet, stiffly; the man was lying still, huddled queerly.

An instant later the man was staggering blindly to his horse, reeling drunkenly into the saddle. Now he was driving home the spurs, plunging down the hill more madly than before. Jim Nelson, the cold sweat on his face, heard a soft voice beside him:

"Jim, you got a hand in that fellow—he don't want the broomies to get away."

"Hand is right!"

Jim groaned, and mentally decided to pester the Old Man next payday until he gave Paul a five-dollar raise. It always scared Jim to see one of his men get into such a mix-up, but if Paul had hesitated an instant he'd have had to fire him—he couldn't get the work done with men who gave thought to their necks. Yes, the Old Man would kick through with another five dollars, or there "shore would be hell a-poppin'." Damn Paul, anyway—scarin' a feller out of a year's growth!" he thought. Again he heard Mustang's voice:

"They've got Black Lightning in the bunch, like I figured they would."

AGAIN Jim Nelson raised the glasses. The wild horses were tearing across a little open flat, much nearer, but far enough that he marveled at the half-breed's recognizing an individual horse, even the famous black. The band was pounding along close-packed, obviously tiring fast from the terrific gait to which they had been held. Hank Bly, far behind, seemed to be actually gaining on them, though his mount was none the best, nor was his skill in handling it. Jim, through the glasses, could see the little white puffs of smoke leap straight in the air from Hank's revolver, and presently he heard the heavy crack of the forty-five.

And then Hank, grinning and mopping his face, was drawing down to a walk. Ahead, coming from a little gulch, a youngster on a fresh horse was charging madly after the fleeing, tiring band. Mustang Jack reached for the glasses, a sour look on his face. He touched the focusing screw with a finger, and in a moment he spoke:

"That black's figgerin' whether he should break bunch or not. He'll do it in a minute unless that fool kid stays away back like I told him to, instead of crowdin' 'em."

Hammerhead, though racing his best, was dropping slowly to the rear of the band. Beside him, still running easily, was Black Lightning. The boy, forgetting his instructions in the excitement of the chase, crowded his mount still closer to the band. Black Lightning glanced back at him as he ran, and then suddenly swerved to the left—twenty, thirty, fifty yards. Still Hammerhead lumbered after the band, running dog-

gedly, head low. The black saw him, tossed his head—and circled back to his side.

"Won't leave him!" grunted Mustang.

Then the band swept out of sight around the curve of a hill. After a time, the popping of a thirty-eight came plainly, and then a high-pitched yell. The half-breed rose to his feet, hitching his chaps straight:

"We'd better be gettin' ready; they'll be along soon."

Jim Nelson leaped erect and ran back to his horse, quickly to tug the cinch tight and leap into the saddle. Mustang took his time. He pulled his hat tight on his head and swung slowly into the saddle. As they rode into a concealing patch of tall oaks, he spoke, diffidently, apologetically:

"Yore cigarette, Jim—they might see the smoke."

Jim Nelson, reddening quickly at his blunder, pinched out the fire and dropped the dead cigarette. The keen eyes of the wild horses would see the tiniest curl of blue smoke over the hill, and the band would turn and be lost.

There was a yell or two, very close now, and the cracking of a gun. Jim Nelson wriggled restlessly, uncertainly.

"Jack—uh—hadn't we better lope down to the flat; they'll never come up here around the shoulder."

Mustang Jack spoke gently, pointing:

"They'll pass between those two big trees."

Jim stared at him. How the devil could anyone tell where a band of wild horses would come? It was only by an effort that Jim refrained from sniffing; this fellow must be badly overrated—he felt entirely too sure of himself.

NOW there came the drumming of hoofs, faint at first, but swelling rapidly. A curl of reddish dust arose to tinge the sky-line above the butte. Around the shoulder of the butte thundered the desperate, hard-pressed band, fleeing the madly riding, yelling figure behind. Straight between the two tall trees they came as though a fenced lane had led them there. Jim Nelson glanced at his companion with a new respect that was very nearly awe; Mustang Jack well merited his reputation for uncanny skill with wild horses. Had the two men been down in the flat, they could but have watched helplessly while the band swept outside the wing fence and away.



The rush and rattle of hoofs swept toward them and past, fifty yards below them. A cloud of dust hung in the air behind.

"All set, Jim? Let's go!"

The single rider dropped back, with a wave of his hand. Jim Nelson and Mustang were flying after the band, both erect and stiff in their saddles, with the seat of cowboys. Jim glanced quickly sidewise at Mustang as a piercing pantherish shriek came from his companion's lips; no full-blood white could yell thus!

PANTING, sweating, staggering, poor Hammerhead pounded heavily along at the rear of the band; he looked as though he might collapse at any instant. Close by his side, sweating, but unwearied, ran Black Lightning, his partner.

This was a tense few moments. Half a mile more, and the band would be inside the wings leading to the trap; wings formed of weak twine and pieces of old rope hung at close intervals with fluttering rags of various colors, with scraps of paper. A weak fence, to be sure, but one that would hold the terror of a nameless horror to the distracted wild horses. This weak fence would guide them between its narrowing sides until they saw the one opening before them—an opening that led to a high corral of stoutly woven wire masked by brush.

The two men had separated, Jim Nelson going to the left, Mustang Jack to the right. Now Black Lightning was swerving off the right, to Mustang's side, glancing eagerly back at his partner. The six-shooter leaped from the half-breed's holster and spat. There was a little spurt of dust before the black's nose. Black Lightning leaped high in



panic, swerved—and resumed his course straight across the furrow of the bullet. After him lumbered Hammerhead.

Mustang Jack fired again, but this time behind the black. Poor lumbering, tired Hammerhead saw the spurt of dust and clumsily, doggedly, turned back to follow the band. There was not a moment's hesitation; Black Lightning swung in a circle to follow him.

Mustang Jack crowded his horse in closer, motioning Jim Nelson to do likewise. Now they were riding furiously on the very heels of the tired, desperate band, yelling, waving their hats. Crowded thus, the sorrel mare swung off to the left,—to see that horrible row of fluttering things and turn back. To the right she went; again those writhing, dangling things, potent with unknown horror; again she swung back. And so, in a long zigzag, the weary band thundered down upon the trap that would forever end their freedom. Jim Nelson turned with a joyous whoop:

"We got 'em, Jack!"

But the half-breed hardly heard him. There was surprise, almost admiration, in Mustang's dark-blue eyes. The black had swerved inside his partner and was shouldering, actually jostling him, to the right and away from the band. Yard by yard they drew off at a tangent from the rest. Poor Hammerhead saw the fluttering line of rags before him, and tried wildly to turn back, but ever crowding him on was Black Lightning. Mustang whirled in the saddle, to yell:

"Take the rest in, Jim—these are goin' through the fence."

WHAT terror it was to poor Hammerhead, no one shall ever know, but straight into the fence he was forced. The rope hung across his streaming chest, sawed across—and snapped. In panic he made a last burst of speed. And close behind him came Mustang Jack on a splendid blood-bay that covered the

ground like a great antelope; the wild-horse hunter must be mounted on the best, though his clothes be rags.

Half a mile they raced. The man was gaining rapidly, for always Black Lightning stayed his gait to wait for his slower, exhausted partner. Mustang glanced once over his shoulder, to see the rest of the band enter the trap, Jim Nelson forcing them on.

Now the half-breed was swinging off to the right, around the two—far around them, for he knew that a wild horse will race you if you are close, turn if you are far off. He rode his hard-running bay as though born in the saddle, as though he ate and slept there. Gradually, almost inch by inch, the partners turned, until they found themselves headed squarely back toward the break they had made in the fence. Another cowboy—he whom Jim and Mustang had relieved—appeared and joined in the chase, coming from the left.

IT was then that the black did a strange thing, a wonderful thing. He raced squarely in front of his partner and shouldered him sidewise until he had him headed outside the wing—and then he left him. The two men did not waste a single glance on the scrubby brown; ropes whirling above their heads, they turned to give chase to Black Lightning. One rope fell far short; Mustang's missed by a hair, the rawhide loop sliding across the horse's back to the ground. Across a ridge, unnoticed, pounded Hammerhead, still running his paltry best.

Other mounted men were coming racing now. They had seen Black Lightning leave his partner, and they whooped with joy. But Mustang Jack did not whoop. Often he had smiled as a fluttering bird, pretending a crippled wing, had tried to lure him from her nest and young; he had seen the coyote lope slowly ahead within pistol-shot to lead him from her den. He alone understood why Black Lightning had left his friend. Mustang Jack did not whoop; but his business was to catch wild horses, and for that Tom Wagner was paying him.

The touch of the rope had struck terror to the wild heart of Black Lightning. He raced through the break in the wing, straight for the other side—to be met by a mounted man with whirling rope. Again he turned back—a yelling, racing crescent was closing in on him. Now he showed his tremendous speed, but the riders were too many for him.

But one way left to go! Black Lightning turned and fled that one way, toward where he could catch glimpses of the band, milling frantically in one spot, dashing themselves madly against something he could not see for the dust of many hoofs. There, perhaps, was no safety, but at least there was company, the company of his kind.

Then he was through the opening. A wide gate was slamming behind him. Black Lightning was trapped.

OLD Wagner himself was there. With his cowboys beside him, he peered through the high fence. Against this fence, now and again, a horse would dash himself wildly, as a bird might dash himself against the glass of a window. Nostrils quivered and flanks heaved in terrible fear; what new horror would come next? Would those hideous, two-legged creatures start leaping the fence and begin tearing, eating?

The men were in high spirits; they had a right to be after such a day's catch. Some one yelled that it was too bad that Hammerhead had got away; he'd have made a top horse for Hank Bly. Poor slow-witted Hank grinned sheepishly, as he always did when they poked fun at him. Paul Henderson, the handsome, made a sour remark about Hank perhaps not being the best rider in the world, but he could lick some fellows they all knew—and if he couldn't do it alone, he'd have help. He who had yelled became suddenly apologetic, for Paul, among his many accomplishments, could and would fight, if he felt that his little partner was being abused. But presently some one cracked a more good-natured joke, and they were all laughing again, even Paul. They had good cause to feel cheerful, for there was many a good horse in that corral besides Black Lightning, who alone was worth a month's work.

But Black Lightning was not cheerful. He stood apart from the other wild horses, trembling, legs wide apart as he watched those hideous creatures who stared through the fence and made such queer noises. What would they do to him? Far more than the slinking, tawny mountain lion he feared them; the lion was a familiar danger; those things were not. The cold sweat of terror coursed down his slender legs.

Now the gate was opening a trifle, and a man on a fine blood-bay was riding through. He was a tall, slender man,

with a thin, hawk nose and piercing blue eyes, and his face was even darker than the faces of the others. He was taking that long, deadly thing from the horn of his saddle—that Thing that had once touched the back of Black Lightning. Now he was riding close, the Thing whirling over his head.

Black Lightning raised his delicate head. There was terror and anguish in his brown eyes as they looked over the high fence, swept away to where, on a distant butte, a solitary brown horse stood miserably, dejectedly, lonesomely, gazing wistfully back at him. Hammerhead, his partner! Not all these powers of evil who surrounded him could part him from Hammerhead! He must go to Hammerhead!

The man on the bay was dashing toward him. He fled. A wild bound took him beside the fence. Another, and he was sailing straight in the air in a leap that long was to be talked of on the Mogollon Rim. Up, up, until the top wire was under his belly. A rawhide rope hissed out and settled squarely around his neck even as he went downward in that splendid arc. It broke the grace of his giant leap; he tumbled in a heap in the dust outside, strangling. With a choking scream, he struggled to his feet, the Thing still around his neck. He turned to run to where he could still see his partner on the butte, but he felt that the attempt was useless—was he not in the clutches of the Thing?

TO his wonder, nothing held him back, although an end of the Thing, whipping his side, lashed him to terror. His downward jerk had broken the rawhide. Like a black arrow from a well-bent bow, he raced across the flat, belly to earth, to disappear in the oaks. Five minutes later, the watchers saw him sweep like a dark shadow up the side of the butte, saw him pause an instant to nuzzle the scrawny neck of Hammerhead, saw them trot swiftly over the sky-line, tails high. Some one swore softly.

"And we'll shore have the fence high enough next time we trap him!"

There was a soft little chuckle:

"There'll be no next time. You'll never get him in a trap again after that lesson."

And Mustang Jack, the half-breed, laughed softly as he stood looking at the sky-line where the wild horses had disappeared. In his hand was his best *reata*, broken, ruined; still he laughed.



Mr. Jennis

*A mystery of the sea, by
the author of the celebrated
Free Lances in Diplomacy.*

THE *Srinagar* had warped out of the Royal Albert Dock just before noon—was past the Goodwin Sands by four o'clock, and running into dirty weather. Not the rising gale and heavy seas which somehow never seem to worry a seaman badly, but one of those thickening "pea-soups" with little breeze and flat water which make the English Channel so dangerous. For it is crowded water—with the cross-Channel ferries, the boats of some fifty great steamer-lines running through in both directions, and flotillas of cargo-boats to and from the world's outports. And when the fog shuts down, they talk—in hoarse bellows, piercing squeals, siren-screams: sometimes so close by that averting a collision approaches a miracle.

The gangways were deserted—chairs and rail had become too dripping wet, the canvas-covered planking too slippery. In the saloon, social-halls and music-room, passengers were trying to play bridge or other games—starting nervously with each monstrous bellow of the chime-whistle. Three or four of the men, knowing from long experience that heaving decks and a howling gale were preferable to the absence of all motion and the deathly stillness between the tooting of the fog-horns, were pacing up and down the gangways in mackintoshes. One of them, with privileges not accorded the others, climbed to the bridge where a wetly glistening figure recognized his face as he lowered it to peer at the gyro-compass and "metal-mike." Medford was one of the most competent masters in the merchant marine—and had phone-receivers over his ears, listening to the radio-detector in a recess of the hull, under water. It was registering the beats of screws at various distances from them—one mile to twenty miles—and occasionally the musical note of a submarine bell.

"Anything very close, Medford?"

"Little chap was somewhere around here a few minutes ago—but he got scared an' stopped his engines—has no submarine bell. Why the devil he doesn't sound his siren I can't understand. One of the older Channel-boats, I fancy. . . . Ah! That'll be him startin' up again! My word! The little beggar's fairly close aboard of us!"

Medford stepped into the wheel-house and sounded the great chime-whistle in three peevish grunts. Close aboard on the starboard side came little answering yaps signifying that the boat had right-of-way and was proceeding. Protesting bellows from the *Srinagar* and a sudden stoppage of her engines. More yaps—a little farther aft—sounding as though the smaller craft was heading to strike the big liner squarely abeam. Sudden activity in the *Srinagar's* engine-room, where the big quadruple-expansions were now racing ahead at full speed.

Sir Edward Coffin slid down the port ladder and ran aft along the boat-deck. At the after-rail, with the "well" between him and the stern, he couldn't see ten feet through the fog, but a chorus of confused shouts indicated that the smaller craft was just about scraping the *Srinagar's* stern-rail. Her engines had been stopped so that she was barely moving. Had it not been for the sudden push ahead from the liner's powerful screws, she would have smashed squarely into her on the quarter. However—a miss is as good as a mile. Yet there was one minor occurrence which nobody would have imagined possible, and which took quick thinking upon the part of a man whom nobody on the cross-Channel boat had noticed since he came aboard with a large suitcase. He had taken no cabin—belonged to the class who doze in a chair and go ashore, casually, as merely a bird of passage.

When the sharper tooting began, close aboard, he had come out on deck with his suitcase and walked up forward,

Disappears

By CLARENCE
HERBERT NEW



along the flush gangway, to the bows. Coiled near the anchors, there was something over a hundred feet of inch manila to which a small four-pronged grapnel was attached—used to grapple and hold any small boat coming alongside. As shouts from the bridge of the liner indicated her position sufficiently to show that the boats would touch somewhere,—probably no more than a bad scrape,—the man lashed one end of the grapnel-line to the straps of his suitcase and swung the grapnel from his right hand—waiting. When the phosphorescence from the churning screws faintly outlined the *Srinagar's* stern, he hove the little grapnel toward it and lifted his suitcase on the top of one anchor. The grapnel caught firmly upon something—and held. When the Channel-boat's stem slowly scraped off a section of the liner's stern rail, the man swung himself aboard her with the aid of the line, and quickly hauled in the slack so that he just prevented his suitcase from dropping into the water. Before any of the deck-hands reached the spot, he had disappeared with his suitcase, leaving the grapnel—where they found it a few minutes later and wondered what anybody's idea could have been in heaving such a thing aboard.

WHEN the Channel-boat docked at Dieppe, the Customs officials made her master search his craft for two passengers who were on the list and had surrendered their tickets after leaving port, and assure himself that they were nowhere to be found. In the light of the collision in the fog, it appeared self-evident that the men had been knocked overboard and presumably drowned.

In his temporary hiding-place at the stern, the man was considering what to do next. By sheer accident he had two passports in his pocket—one describing his present appearance, under a hastily assumed name which was not his own; the other belonging to some passenger on the Channel-boat who must have dropped

it in the gangway just before he had gone up forward to see if there really was going to be a collision. He had taken a hasty glance by the light from a saloon-window to see what it was, but had no recollection of it beyond the photograph, which had been sticking in his mind as just about the way he used to look before he grew a beard. While considering what his next procedure was going to be, he saw three alternatives: The first, of course, was to see the master or purser at once and explain how he came to be aboard—taking whatever accommodation he could get, and proceeding wherever the *Srinagar* happened to be going. But a report of this would be wireless back, destroying any supposition of his death in the barely averted collision—and the idea of being posted in the news-sheets as dead appealed to him, for reasons of his own. By stowing himself away on the boat, coming out during the night for whatever food he might steal, until they made the first port, and then going calmly ashore, the death supposition would be clinched. But he wasn't so sure he could manage it without being caught or nearly starved before they stopped anywhere.

There was another course requiring a good deal more nerve to carry out, but if he did get away with it, by all odds the most desirable scheme. He had noticed the name of the boat stenciled upon a life-preserver; he had indeed seen her builders' plans before she was put in commission—and so remembered that the rooms of the mates and engineers were on the two main-deck gangways going through the midship-house from the after to the forward well-decks. Some of those men would be on duty for another hour or two. A room with no light showing through the slats of the door-blind might contain a sleeping man or be vacant—it wasn't taking so much of

a chance to open the door a crack and look in.

Watching his opportunity when the deck-hands had gone forward again, he slipped into the starboard gangway and softly turned the knob of a door. Evidently the occupant of the room was below somewhere, on duty; so the man slipped in, locked the door, turned on the bulb and hung his mackintosh over the door-slats so that no light shone through. Then he took the other passport from his pocket and skimmed rapidly through the description. It was so close to his own in general appearance and coloring that he closely examined the smooth face in the photograph, holding his beard tight against his chin.

PASSPORT photographs being notoriously as misleading as those of taxicab chauffeurs, it seemed to him there was little risk of anybody's questioning it. But he very carefully made two slight erasures and changed the height to six feet instead of five feet five—the weight to 198 instead of 148. Yanking open his big suitcase, he had his razor, brush and shaving-stick out in five seconds. In just seven minutes more, that beard was off, and the clean-shaven man who emerged bore no resemblance whatever to the one who had entered the room.

Putting on his mackintosh and switching off the light, he picked up his suitcase and quietly went up a small boxed-in companionway to the "B" or saloon-deck. Along the covered gangway were stateroom windows—with those of the main saloon, forward. Some of the windows were lighted as the occupants washed up for dinner, which was at seven. Some were partly open for ventilation. In one of these a couple of women were asking their room-steward if "that horrid man in the green mackintosh" had the room across from them at the other side of the little passage—but he was reassuring them.

"No, lidies—the gent as was booked for Number 64 'asn't turned h'up as yet. The chief steward an' h'I was a-thinkin' mebbe 'e might 'ave gorn an' got left when we was a-warpin' h'out of the R'yal h'Albert. 'E might turn h'up, d'ye see—wot with the fog or mebbe stoppin' wi' some chap in the smoke-room. Purser won't be 'avin' h'all the tickets until h'after dinner, prob'ly. But 'e'll not be the chap h'in the green rain-coat—so y'e'll not be worritin' about that, d'ye see."

The man outside chuckled—and deliberately lighted a very good cigar. This was almost unbelievable luck. He hoped it would hold. Sauntering in through the main-companionway with his big suitcase, he walked aft along the inside gangway until he came to the right passage branching off from it, then turned and went into Number 64 as if he had booked it in the regular way at the company's offices in Moorgate St. He shoved the suitcase under the lower berth, brushed his clothes clean of all traces of his scramble over the stern, put on his steamer-cap and locked the door as he came out. Then he sauntered along to the purser's office. Two or three passengers were still at the window getting their tickets checked up. When they left, the man presented a smiling face and a hand filled with bank-notes.

"I'm Samuel J. Marston, Purser—in sixty-four. You haven't me booked for it—an' I've no ticket. I found at the last moment, this morning, that I could just about catch the *Srinagar* if I looked sharp. Telephoned Moorgate Street, but they had nothing except in the second class. Just then they got a message that the chap booked for sixty-four couldn't make it in time—delayed somewhere; I caught some of the talk over the wire. Told 'em not to book the room for anyone else, as I was taking it—if I could reach the Royal Albert in time. Taxi-driver nearly smashed us—but I was about the last on the plank, I fancy. So—if you'll make out the ticket, I'll just hand you the cash. Better make it Singapore, I fancy; then if I get a wireless to drop off at the Canal or Colombo, you can give me a refund—eh? What?"

IT was the sort of thing which frequently happens on any passenger line. So the purser smilingly remarked:

"You don't look like a criminal, Mr. Marston—an' that wouldn't int'rest me anyhow, unless the police were after you. Got a passport about you?"

"Naturally—though it's not required at any British port."

Frome gave the document a careless glance and handed it back. The mere production of the passport indicated that the man couldn't very well be escaping from Scotland Yard.

"Suppose the other chap makes up his mind to go overland an' catch us at Gib?"

"He'd get either a refund or a transfer of his ticket to the next boat, wouldn't

he? You can't be expected to hold the room unless you're notified by this time. Did he have the whole room—or a berth?"

"Only the lower berth—but nobody else was booked in with him. Looked as though he might be some friend of the owners—on the list that way."

"Quite possibly. For that matter—I'm a friend of Mr. Seldon Jennis myself. He's the majority shareholder."

"But it's Sir Michael Smarrt who is managing director."

"Subject—very much subject to Jennis' orders. It's Jennis who runs the line an' who can elect a new board at any time he pleases. He owns an' controls a good sixty-five per cent of the capital. If Smarrt tried to put over anything durin' Jennis' temp'ry absence, he'd be dropped from the board the moment the owner returned."

"Aye—we've been given to understand something of the sort. But Sir Michael, d'ye see, is a sort of chap who likes to have his way—an' generally gets it, I fancy. He'll be aboard of us, now—goin' as far as Port Saïd. That's why I wished to avoid any mix-up about your room. But I don't see how there can be any. If t'other chap had any idea of comin' overland, I'd have had a wireless from the office before this. You'll be wishin' just the lower berth, I suppose?"

"W-e-l-l—you'd book some other fellow in with me at Gib or Port Saïd, if you had to—an' I do like my bit of privacy. D'ye know, I fancy I'll just take the entire room as far as Singapore, anyway. Runs to something like seventy-five pounds—not? When I've paid my money an' got my ticket, there'll be no further argum'nt, as I understand it—from Smarrt or anyone else. What?"

"Oh, none whatever, Mr. Marston! I fancy you'd best see the chief steward at once about your table-seat—the bugle will go in a few minutes. Fancy he'll not have anything desirable at Captain Medford's table. Sir Edward Coffin an' Sir Michael are next to him—an' it's pretty well filled below them. Possibly you'll not mind bein' at the Chief's table—next to him an' the Doctor—both fine chaps? I'm at the other end, myself."

"That'll suit me very well."

"Very good, sir—I'll go with you to the steward's office, an' arrange it."

WHEN the supposed "Marston" got back into Stateroom 64 and locked the door, he sat on the cushioned transom

a few minutes—thinking. The situation in which he found himself was so amazingly unexpected that he could scarcely believe it.

"Sir Michael—here—on the same boat! Hadn't even heard he was contemplatin' bein' out of London just now! Wonder if it's some sort of alibi? Wonder if some friend of his, or tool, was the chap who missed out on travelin' in this stateroom? An' Coffin? One of the finest seamen alive—retired, with a title an' fortune—settled down ashore. Supposed to be enjoyin' life—pleasin' himself, wherever the fancy takes him to go. But possibly havin' some under-cover affiliation with—well—what? Not Scotland Yard or the Foreign Office. Might be Lloyd's. Now—what possible combination between Coffin an' Sir Michael? Between Coffin an' Cap'n Medford, which'd be a deal more likely because they're both as straight as they make 'em? My word! Fancy I'm due to acquire some education this trip—an' quite possibly enjoy myself, at that! What?"

THE supposed Mr. Marston took his seat at dinner next to Rintoul, the chief engineer, and proved to be a welcome addition—good company, evidently an extensive traveler, undoubtedly interested in some branch of commercial business. After dinner he met Sir Edward Coffin in the smoke-room—saying that they had come together before in the Orient when Coffin was in command of a Brock liner. Although there seemed to be something familiar about the man, Coffin couldn't place him, but there was nothing odd about that—a shipmaster meets so many thousands of persons that it is practically impossible to pigeonhole them all. And when Captain Medford dropped in for a few moments, Marston spoke of meeting him also—and produced the same impression of familiarity.

When Sir Michael Smarrt came in and they introduced Marston to him, the man was courteous but not genial, as he had been with them before, and presently excused himself to go below. Smarrt had maintained his usual superior manner, which was at times offensive, and had no idea he ever had seen the man before. Presently, Coffin and the Captain went out together and climbed to the boat-deck, where they went aft to the wireless-house and looked in upon "Sparks" as he was listening to bits of Channel gossip among the various boats bound in or out.



"Tatham," said the Captain, "I've fetched along a 'wireless-bug' to chat with ye—quite interested in the game, d'ye see: Sir Edward Coffin."

"I'll be pleased to chat with Sir Edward when I'm off-duty, sir—but you'll be knowin' our regulations, of course. Marconi station, you know—not a 'ship-an'-comp'ny' outfit."

Coffin and the Captain grinned as they stepped inside and closed the door—and the Baronet tossed a folded document upon the operating-bench.

"They're kind enough to mail a license-renewal to me as chief operator, each year, Tatham—fancy I'd rank you several notches if we bothered to look it up. Frankly, old chap, it's quite possible that I may need to do some talking with your outfit during the voyage—so I asked the Cap'n to introduce us. Do you know, I seem to recall that somebody mentioned your name to me as doing a good bit in the line of experimentation—trying out different hook-ups, all that sort of thing?"

"Don't know who it could have been, Sir Edward—fancied nobody had been keeping track of me as closely as that! Of course I do a bit of experimenting in off-hours—many of us do, you know."

COFFIN had been glancing around the cabin's interior, and noticed three or four "sets" and other equipment he had not seen before in any Marconi station.

"Then all this extra installment will be your own personal property—eh?"

"Aye, sir. I fancy you may be int'rested in it. If you can tell me what sort of a hook-up I have over yon at the end of the bench, I'll say you've gone on a good bit in your own experimentation. What?"

"Well, I've never seen anything exactly like it before, far as I can tell from panel and mike—but I'd say it's a short-wave transmitter using about six different waves in order to get your various ranges by utilizing the 'skip-stops' and 'dead-

spots.' With that sort of equipment you can produce a modulated carrier-wave that will broadcast the human voice with very little power. I'd say five hundred watts would do it, easily—requiring only what you have in this wireless-house for generation and everything. I know of one chap who is talking in code between New York and Egypt with a mere fifty watts—the power of your Mazda lamp, there. Does it three days in every week. If he can get that far in code on fifty watts, you certainly can get more than five thousand miles broadcasting voice on ten times that power."

Tatham grinned.

"I was fairly certain you were a radio-shark, sir. You're quite right. I'd a most int'restin' an' pleasant chat with the London manager of the telephone comp'nies, d'ye see—an' because all that sort of thing helps 'em in workin' out a perfect service system for transoceanic talk, he suggested my callin' up his offices at any time, from wherever I happened to be, at sea—an' gave orders to the exchange that when I called any of their ship or shore stations equipped to talk, they would give me any connection I wished—without charge, if it was my personal experimentin', or chargin' the regular rates if it was an outsider wishin' the communication, provided some one guaranteed the tolls."

"By Jove! And you've been doing that, successfully, from this shack—with these instruments you've built yourself?"

"Aye, sir—from as far away as the China Sea—from the Bay of Bengal, Red Sea, Mediterranean, North Atlantic. For the past six months. Built everything but the small motor-generator which runs on a hundred an' ten volts from any light-socket—that I purchased in London, secondhand, for twenty pounds. Listed at seventy-five when new."

"Ever had a passenger use your transmitter for a shore connection—and pay the tolls?"

"No sir—too much bother figurin' how much of the toll would belong to the Marconi Comp'ny—didn't care about gettin' into that, because I'd not taken it up with them—might get myself in trouble. But I got the Cap'n's house for him, in Surrey, so he could talk with his wife—several times. An' I've had the Chief talkin' with Aberdeen. Of course they charged him but the toll from London up—but when an Aberdonian pays one pound three for a ten-minute talk, it's like tearin' the inside out of him. I was

the Doctor he was talkin' with—his wife was havin' her fourth, an' there'd been complications."

"H-m-m. I say, Tatham! If I talk with one of the Lloyd's managers, it would come pretty close to being under the same official status as Cap'n Medford's talking with his home—wouldn't it?"

"Wait a bit! You're a regularly licensed chief operator in our comp'ny—have been for years? They must know you very well—would certainly approve anything you do as an operator. As you said before, you rank me—any orders you give as chief operator, I'm supposed to carry out, an' if I accommodate you with my own experimental set, I'd say I should be credited instead of censured. Aye—go ahead, Sir Edward! We're not two hundred miles from their phone-receiving masts—I'll call London an' get whatever number you wish."

"Let's see. Six bells haven't gone yet—he'll not have turned in if he's at home. If not, he'll be playing bridge at the club. Of course he's not at the Lloyd's offices this time of night—we'll try the club first. Call Central 5657—City of London Club. If he's not there, he'll be at his place in Hants, not far from Aldershot—the number's Aldershot 1260. He's also a member of the National Maritime in Rangoon Street, but that's a smaller club—not often there except for tiffin."

SETTING his dial at forty-two meters, Tatham began calling the General Post Office Telephone letters—and in a few moments got an acknowledgment:

"Telephone Exchange. Who is calling?"

"Experimental 20X96. Will you kindly put me through to Mr. Francis Yelverton—of Lloyd's, Central 5657, City of London Club. Official."

"Stand by and hold the line—we'll call you in a few moments."

In twenty minutes one of the pages at the club was saying that Mr. Yelverton would be in the phone-booth directly—which was much better service than Tatham had hoped for.

Tatham shoved the mike along to Sir Edward, who already had a duplicate set of head-phones over his ears.

"Are you there, Yelverton? Coffin speaking."

"Oh—I say! My word! An' where'll you be, now?"

"South of Bolt Head, I fancy. We should round Ushant by morning."

"By Jove! I get you as distinctly as if you were here in the city."

"This is experimental equipment—not in general use. As you see, I decided to book passage on the chance of turning up something—following out the line of investigation we were discussing. Man is on board, booked to Colombo—but may drop off at Gib or the Canal according to his wireless advices. Now—don't mention names of any sort, but tell me if anything has turned up since we pulled out."

"Aye—one or two important occurrences an' bits of evidence. We've learned that the owner has had a suspicion, based upon apparently trivial evidence, that if he were to sell out an' the control pass to the other chap, four new boats would be laid down at once, and the line's foreign activities secretly extended to something which might be very much outside of maritime law. With the control in his hands, t'other chap stands to make millions in two or three diff'rent ways. If he plays safe an' keeps off these dangerous activities, the line has been making good money under owner's handling—so that, getting absolute control, t'other chap makes all the profit there is. If he goes into the risky business an' gets away with it, he makes a lot both ways. Incidentally, we learned today that his wife is an adopted daughter of the present owner—has a large block of the shares standing in her name which she can't sell or transfer during her father's lifetime because they're tied up that way in his executors' hands. But she has given her husband an option, and in case of her adopted father's death, she will transfer her shares to him an' let him handle 'em."

"HMPH! That's interesting!" Coffin commented. "Might explain—or partly explain—that insurance!"

"Fancy it does—one way or another. Well—a month ago the owner begins to get threatening sort of letters—telling him to get out of the shippin' business if he wants to live. Owner certainly has got away with a good bit of trade from other lines in the Orient, though in perfectly straight competition. Letters supposed to have got on his nerves. Went up to see old shipbuildin' friends on the Clyde—talkin' over a new boat or so, presumably. That'll be three weeks ago. They saw him but two days. Nobody has seen or heard of him, since. T'other chap comes to us with a case of nerves

—says the owner's continued absence is hurtin' the line—several Eastern shippers won't make big deals with anyone else. T'other chap thinks it a reasonable precaution to take out a hundred thousand pounds' insurance on owner's life—in favor of the Line—to give 'em that much extra workin' capital in case owner dies. Had the chap taken it out in his own favor, we'd have been suspicious at once—but the extra-capital idea seemed to be reasonable. He paid the premiums himself, saying he'd charge 'em up to the comp'ny. We made one stipulation: no paym't in case of murder. Suicide, yes, if clearly proved; but not murder—too demmed much incentive! We've had this other chap under constant espionage, but he put one over on us by sailin' with you—we'd no report of that. Unless the owner also is on board, it seems to be a perfectly innocent proceeding—an' we're quite sure, d'ye see, that owner was *not* aboard of you."

"HOW'S that?" Coffin asked alertly. "When last seen, he'd a milit'ry mustache an' the tuft of imperial he's worn for several years past," said Yelverton. "This morning a man answering his description closely, an' with a Van Dyck of just about the growth he would have sprouted in three weeks, booked on the Newhaven-Dieppe packet for France—no rail-ticket beyond Dieppe. Then along comes Scotland Yard with information that they've been keepin' a certain acquaintance of t'other chap's under observation for some time because he's been in rather shady comp'ny in London an' may have a criminal record—though they haven't a shred of proof in that direction. This man, they say, was traced to the Newhaven-Dieppe packet an' is supposed to have left on her today. He'd no ticket—but three days ago he took out a passport under the name of Samuel J. Marston. If our supposition is correct, the owner also took out a passport—under the name of William B. Shields. Of course duplicates of the identifying photographs are kept at the Passport Bureau when the passports are issued. The man Marston had a smooth face—rather fine, responsible-lookin' chap somewhat under medium height—probably a crook, but doesn't look it. Shields, as I said, had a Van Dyck and was a good six feet in height.

"Now we get, this evening, two final bits of news which may have a bearing on the proposition: The Newhaven-Dieppe

was in collision during a pea-soup fog—early this evening, an hour before dinner—with some big liner not identified. Section of the starboard rail and a few of the upper plates at the bow scraped off. Damage to liner, if any, has not been reported—probably negligible. Report from master of Newhaven boat to his comp'ny by wireless, didn't mention any casualties, but he said that point couldn't be checked up until his passengers went ashore at Dieppe. We'll get that later. All day there have been rumors in the city that the steamship line is believed to be in difficulties. It's pointed out that the owner's mysterious disappearance has a pretty fishy look. Their shares went down five points on the exchange this afternoon—heavier drop expected tomorrow."

"Looks to me as if the whole proposition is a frame-up, Yelverton—as I thought during our discussion last night. If the owner is unquestionably murdered, that lets you out on the hundred-thousand-pound insurance—but it doesn't prevent the other chap from getting control of the line and doing anything he damn' pleases with it. On the other hand, if the owner dies by accident, suicide, or natural causes, you lose—and the line loses—all round. I've met the owner three or four times—sized him up as a man who really hasn't any nerves, whether he looks scared or not—by no means the type to be easily killed by any thug or bolshevist—he's too level-headed, too far-sighted. Don't you pay a cent on his reported death, or admit it, until I tell you it's probably so! Tell the newspaper men when they come to you, as they will, that you've inside information which convinces you the owner is *not* dead. See his bankers, brokers and executors, tell 'em the same thing—and sit tight. By the way, do you know of any mark or feature by which the man might be recognized?"

"UM—wait a bit—let me think! 'Pon my word, I believe I do—an' it's something not likely to be noticed, at that! Across the back of his left wrist, pretty well up under the sleeve, there is a white diagonal scar from an old slash with a Malay kris, years ago, in the East. He's a hairy man on his chest an' limbs—hair covers that scar so it wouldn't be noticed in a casual glance. I doubt if even his adopted daughter knows of it—he's never had a valet. Showed it to me, ~~once, when he was tellin' the story.~~

You'll certainly not run across two men with that same scar!"

"Good! That little bit of evidence might come in handy—never can tell. You can call me up at any hour of the voyage, with our regular station-letters."

CAPTAIN MEDFORD had left a moment after introducing them; and while Coffin was talking, Sparks had courteously stepped outside the door to light his pipe, so that the Baronet could be as confidential as he chose. While he was standing there, a figure came aft from the A-deck companion—Sir Michael Smarrt, who wished to send a London message. Hearing the indistinct murmur of a voice inside the wireless-house, he remarked dictatorially:

"I fancied it was against your comp'ny's regulations to permit anyone else inside your operating-room, Tatham!"

"That applies to everyone outside of our operatin' an' official force, sir."

"Oh—I see! Then you have two operators aboard this boat—eh? I was not aware of that."

"Sir Edward Coffin holds a chief operator's license, sir—has had it ever since he was mate on the Brock Line boats."

"Hmph! Your comp'ny consider him as still in their employ, do they—when he's settled down ashore an' given up the sea altogether?"

"I really can't say as to that. May be a matter of courtesy—but he carries about with him a chief operator's license—an' that quite naturally outranks me. I'm supposed to take any orders he may give me."

"What's he doing in there? Sounds like telephoning!"

"Aye—possibly. You might ask him when he comes out."

"Hmph! I fancy I'll go in an' ask him now—at once!"

"I fancy you'll not, sir."

"The devil you do! I'm managing director of this Line!"

"But not of our comp'ny, sir. The inside of that wireless-house is our ground—not the steamship line's, d'ye see."

"I say, Tatham—you'd best keep a civil tongue in your head! How long do you fancy you'll last if I send in a report that you've been offensive?"

"As long as I enforce our regulations, sir, that doesn't worry me such a lot. You'll do as you please about reporting me, of course."

"Look here! How does it happen you are equipped for wireless-telephoning?"

"We're not—officially or commercially. But we're naturally experimentin' along that line. The instruments in there belong to me personally—an' are merely for experimentation in off-hours."

"But Coffin seems to be holdin' a regular conversation with somebody!"

"Quite possibly. I've done that myself—over varying ranges."

"Could you talk with anyone in London—from this boat?"

"Well—I have done so—at a much greater distance than this."

"Good! I wish to speak with some one at my house in the West End."

"I'll be pleased to take any message for transmission in code, Sir Michael—but I can't give you a telephone-connection. The comp'ny has no equipm't for it on board, an' would seriously object to my handlin' such business until they have."

"Now look ye here, felle-me-lad! Ye'll do as I order, aboard my own ship, or ye'll be walkin' ashore at Gib without a berth, d'ye see!"

"I doubt if I do, either! Damn it, man, the employees of our comp'ny are not supposed to take abuse from anybody! You can send your message along to me by one of the stewards, with the money, just as other passengers do—an' I'll return the change by him. But if you're doin' any business with me direct, you'll keep a civil tongue in your nut!"

IT chanced that Coffin had finished his conversation before the end of the talk outside and had overheard nearly half of it. He grinned as he came out.

Sir Michael started in on him:

"So ye're by way of bein' but an employee of the wireless-comp'ny after all, Coffin! One hadn't heard that the operatin' force ran to titles—eh?"

"Oh, there are lots of things you haven't heard, Smarrt. Tell me something—will you? Suppose you considered some chap very much in your way, cramping your style on things you meant to do. Would you merely say: 'Well, it can't be helped'—and let him live? Or would you undertake to bump him off? Eh? You've been civil enough since we met, aboard, here—in your own way; but I can't help the feeling that you don't really love me, for some reason or other. Now, is this all my imagination? I can't recall having injured you in any way. On the other hand, I don't relish condescension from anybody. If you really don't like me, say so like a man—"

and I'll look out for myself. But if you want me bumped off at any time, don't arrange to have some other man do the job! That sort of thing is so likely to leak out somewhere—your executive may double-cross you at any time."

"What—what d'ye mean!"

"Oh, nothing. Just making a suggestion—to see what shape your nerves are in. I don't have to have a man slap my face in order to catch the impression that he'd rather have me anywhere else in the world than on the same boat with him. And I'm curious to know just why you feel that way. Either I must have done something which made you pretty sore, or else you've done something which scares you blue when you think I may have found it out and intend giving it to the newspapers! Which is it?"

"Duce take it, Coffin—I—I fancy ye must be crazy! I've nothing against ye—nothing in the world! Ye're just imaginin' a lot of bally rot! I did lose my temper a bit with Tatham, here, because I can see no good reason why you should have communicatin' facilities from one of my boats which are refused to the managin' director of the line—quite a natural feelin' for me to have."

"In the circumstances, it's not. I was merely experimenting a bit with Tatham's own private equipment, which his company certainly wouldn't authorize him to use for commercial business. And if you attempt to carry out your threats against him, there'll be my report and that of a big organization against you."

"Are ye by way of bein' an F.O. man, Sir Edward?"

"No—nor Scotland Yard, either. But I've some influence in other quarters."

Smarrt turned about and went below without another word—just as Captain Medford, attracted by what sounded like a quarrel, came down from the bridge and went into the wireless-house after the other two, closing the door after him.

"An' what'll ye ha' been doin' to our managin' director, Sir Edward?"

"Just getting his goat, that's all, Dick."

COFFIN rapidly sketched for them, not the whole story he'd obtained from Yelverton, but just enough to indicate that, on circumstantial evidence, Sir Michael was up to his neck in some scheme to obtain control of the line and freeze out Seldon Jennis, the majority shareholder—even possibly arranging to have him killed.

"My object was to get him both rattled and scared—which I think I did. He's no idea how much I know, but fears it may be a good deal. If he has three or four confederates aboard, I'll have to watch my step, or they may shove me overboard with a knife in me. I'm pretty sure there's one other passenger who's playing the game with him—and I've a sort of hunch that he expected to find one other man aboard who hasn't turned up. Smarrt is looking for wireless messages, day and night. Way I figure is about like this: he's been polishing up some scheme within the last week—possibly an attempted murder—that won't look so good for him if he's in London when it happens. But if it's shown that he was at sea, on his way to Singapore, that's an unshakable alibi. Meanwhile he's left the dirty work to hirelings he doesn't altogether trust, and is nervous lest they bungle the play somewhere. If he could telephone instead of trying to give orders and handle the thing by code-messages, it would give him a heap more advantage in directing the situation. That's why he was sore because Tatham wouldn't let him use his short-wave transmission. Well—I got him way up in the air just now. He won't do anything with the cool judgment he needs as long as I'm aboard with him. So I'm looking for some little slip—some bit of carelessness—that'll tell me a good deal before we make Gib. By the way, Dick, how do you like that chap Marston?"

"**W**HY—rather better than the bulk of the passengers, I fancy," Medford replied. "Can't think where I met him before—but he looks pretty decent, and is evidently a man of wide int'rests."

"That's my impression. What did he say his front name was?"

"Didn't say—but Frome has it on the list. He's Samuel J. Marston. Liverpool man, originally—been in London a good many years."

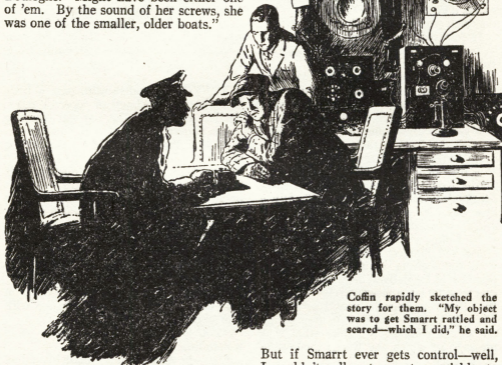
"Samu—What's that? Samuel J. Marston. Oh, my sainted aunt! What d'you know about *that*! Oh, it's just coincidence, of course—simply impossible for it to be anything else! But—"

"Why? What's wrong with him? What's the coincidence?"

"Now, wait a bit—wait a bit! Let me think over what Yelverton said—and get this straight. Samuel J. Marston is a man about fifty-two—smooth face, rather fine-looking, five feet seven and a half—and went aboard the Newhaven packet

this afternoon. That's all straight enough! And our Marston is six feet or more—and sailed on this boat from the Royal Albert Dock three or four hours earlier. Hmph! That seems to let him out! Wonder what boat it was that scraped us?"

"Nobody even got a glimpse of her in that fog—unless it was you, Coffin. It was about the right time for the New-haven packet—but I won't swear we were nearer her course than the Folkestone-Boulogne. Might have been either one of 'em. By the sound of her screws, she was one of the smaller, older boats."



Coffin rapidly sketched the story for them. "My object was to get Smarrt rattled and scared—which I did," he said.

In the morning the pseudo-Marston made a point of having a pleasant chat with Sir Edward after breakfast, and presently fetched the talk around to stock-investment—as distinguished from speculation.

"I don't mind admitting, Sir Edward, that at my present age of fifty-two I'm in comfortable financial circumstances for the rest of my life, unless all my investm'ts go phut at the same time. One of my habits has been to buy outright for investm't at the bottom of a bear market an' hold for the top of a bull-market if property behind the shares appears to be sound. Take this line, for example. I've a little block of their shares—but before we sailed yesterday, I noticed that the shares had dropped five points, and there were rumors it would fall still further—some vague apprehension be-

cause the majority shareholder appears to have mysteriously disappeared. Well, d'ye see, under Jennis' management I'd hold the shares indefinitely, because he's made money for the line, an' this chap Smarrt doesn't dare disobey his orders.

But if Smarrt ever gets control—well, I couldn't sell out any too quickly to please me. I've no real belief that he can get control—Seldon Jennis should be more than a match for him. An' this droppin' of the shares may be a frame-up—a freeze-out. At all events, I'd like to wireless certain instructions to my brokers, but I don't wish to do it in my own name. I often use another which they know an' will consider quite authentic for an order. But, d'ye see, I fancy the operator on this boat might object to acceptin' a message from me under a false name. Even if he did accept it, he might mention the circumst'nce to somebody an' give me away. D'ye see?"

"I think I do, Mr. Marston. You have your own good reason for not wishing it known that you are out of the United Kingdom at this moment. But—er—just why did you imagine that I could help you?"

"Well—possibly you may have offend- ed Sir Michael in some way. At all events, I overheard him tellin' one of the passengers that you were by way of bein' a licensed operator in the wireless com- pny's employ an' were rather inclined to be above your position in that capac- ity. If there was any truth at all in that statem'nt, I fancied you might, as a matter of courtesy, accept my messages for transmission an' turn 'em over to 'Sparks' as bein' perfectly all right. The replies would come addressed in the other name, d'ye see—an' you could have it understood you would deliver 'em. Eh?"

It was really a legitimate transaction —and Coffin thought he might dig out valuable information by it.

"Why, of course I'll accommodate you to that extent, Mr. Marston—and keep a close mouth about it. Write out your message—I'll take it up at once!"

Marston drew one of the steamer's note-sheets from a rack on the smoke- room bulkhead and scribbled a message to a firm of brokers within half a block of the Royal Exchange: "*If Oriental- Straits-Navigation drops to 110, buy a thousand. At par, buy all you can get. —Lycurgus Small.*"

As Coffin stepped into the wireless- house and handed Tatham the message with the smiling remark that any re- plies could be delivered by him, the op- erator grinned appreciatively—thinking the Baronet himself was the sender. Then he passed over a code-message on one of the company's blanks—that is, a message in which the words themselves were coded.

"You're a good bit faster than I am, Sir Edward—prob'ly more sure of get- tin' code-words straight. Would you care about sendin' this for me while I go outside an' smoke a pipe? It's from Sir Michael, d'ye see—an' I'd not like to have him catch me in any mistake."

THE Baronet cheerfully nodded and Tatham went out well pleased. He wouldn't have risked his berth and possi- bly a criminal charge by monkeying with that message—but he had the idea that whatever organization Coffin might be connected with, under the rose, would stand behind him in anything he decided to do. Sir Edward got the Land's End W/T Station and sent the message in regular form—getting a very careful re- peat to make sure that Tatham's records were clear. Then he rapidly copied the coded words on a sheet of blank paper

and stuffed it into his pocket. In a few moments Land's End was calling him again with a message to Sir Michael from a firm of London brokers. This also was coded—but it was the old familiar "A-B-C" which most commercial houses use in alternation with the "Internation- al"—recognizable at a glance. Coffin could have decoded most of it from memory, but he copied it as he had the other—jabbed the message-form on Ta- tham's hook—and then glanced through the code-book hanging upon the bulk- head to get the words he couldn't remem- ber. It read: "*Smarrt—R.M.S. Srin- agar—Bay of Biscay. Have sold your account ten thousand Oriental-Straits Prefd. —Haley & Grant.*"

COFFIN'S room-steward was a little cheerful Cockney of forty or more. At first glimpse of the Baronet when he came aboard, there was a glow in his eyes like that of a faithful hound-dog whose tail begins a preliminary wagging at the sight of a former master. He placed himself in Sir Edward's way once or twice, casually, until that gentleman chanced to see him—and stopped short.

"Sniffin, by jove! *Sniffin!* You were my cabin-steward all the years I was in command for the Brocks! Well—well —I'm glad to see you, old chap! We must have a good long chat. I say! How much will it take to satisfy the man who does for me now—and change with him? Eh?"

"You leave that to me, Cap'n—leave h't to me!"

"No—he won't like it a little bit unless you square him—which means you'll cough up two or three pounds—and that I won't have. Here are five pounds— give 'em to him! Say I haven't a word of complaint—give him a first-class rec- ommend any time—but that you did for me five years, transferrin' to all the boats I commanded, and we'd like to be to- gether again. He's to have the whole five, mind—you'll have plenty!"

Coffin didn't know at the time, nor did Sniffin even think of telling him, that he also looked after the pseudo-Marston's room on the deck below—Coffin having the de luxe suite at the starboard for- ward corner of A-deck, with the music- room bulkhead forming one side of it—the little communicating passage, an- other—and outside-bulkheads for the other two sides. So unless an eaves- dropper placed his ear against the pan- eling in plain sight of several other

people, nobody could hear a word spoken inside the cabin or the bathroom. Sir Michael had the corresponding suite on the port side—and his steward was an intimate crony of Sniffin's. On the third day out, Sniffin casually spoke of Marston as being quite evidently an old traveler who knew his way about and would get along with ships' people anywhere—a decent considerate sort of a body, but one who'd take no nonsense from anybody. Incidentally, it had been Sniffin whom Marston had heard telling the ladies that the man in the green mackintosh was not in Sixty-four.

As the steward was talking, it suddenly struck Coffin that here was an opportunity for acquiring the results of a little close observation; a room-steward sees a good deal.

"Sniffin—did Mr. Marston come aboard early, on sailing-day?"

"H'I reely couldn't s'y, Cap'n, just when 'e did come aboard—cause h'I never lays me h'eyes on 'im until after we was scraped by that Channel-boat h'in the fog. 'E was h'up gassin' wi' somebody 'e knows h'in the smoke-room, h'I farncy—cause 'e didn't come below with 'is luggage until just before the bugle goes f'r dinner. 'E'll be 'avin' a trunk h'in the 'old, of course—'cause 'e's nothin' but a suitcase h'under 'is berth. Sort o' gent as is accustomed to travelin' light, belike. Mr. Frome, 'e says the gent found at the larst minute that t'other chap wasn't tikin' Number Sixty-four, an' beat h'it f'r the docks in a taxi."

A WILDLY impossible notions suddenly flashed through Sir Edward's brain. He didn't see how it was possible, but—

"Ever see him without his coat or shirt on, Sniffin?"

"H'I scrubbed 'im in 'is barth this mornin', sir."

"I suppose you didn't happen to notice any long white scar on one of his arms or legs—eh?"

"H'm! I did so, Cap'n! H'it wasn't a-showin' so plain h'under the 'air of 'im ontill 'e gits that left arm wet—but then h'I sees h'it pline across the back of 'is left wrist—like h'it might ha' been done with a carvin'-knife or a kris."

"Sniffin—I know you'll forget you ever saw that scar or told me about it, if I ask you to—but I'm making a little present of five pounds just to fix that in your mind. Understood?"

Coffin had been working on the code-message sent by Sir Michael—at odd

moments, in his cabin. Women, as a rule, find code too difficult to bother with—and he was acting on a hunch that the message might have been to a woman, though it was addressed with initials instead of prefix. Hence, the code would be of the simplest sort—probably numerical and alphabetic. It wasn't long before he struck the key and decoded it. The message was to Lady Smarrt—and had been sent before any message had come to the *Srinagar* concerning casualties on the Channel-boat. It read:

"Man drowned by falling overboard from Newhaven packet, during collision with liner, answers in every particular the description of William B. Shields, whose photograph at Passport Bureau is that of your father. Deeply regret unfortunate accident—but see no reason to doubt that he is dead. Must be one day in Egypt upon important business, but will return overland from Brindisi as quickly as possible. Our shares being attacked on Change in mysterious and disastrous way. Shall need to hold every one can purchase or get. Wish to take up option on your shares, at the market, as agreed upon in the event of your father's death. Please see his executors at once and have transfer made."

After reading this, Sir Edward's first action was to get in communication with Yelverton, of Lloyd's, at the Association's offices—assuring him that Seldon Jennis not only was alive but could be produced in ten minutes if necessary. He then asked him to see Jennis' executors at once and convince them of the same thing. Yelverton said he'd seen them the morning after the *Srinagar* left—and they had agreed that they would not permit any transfer of the shares until Jennis' death was proved beyond any possible doubt. After this radiophone conversation, Coffin hunted out the fake Mr. Marston and fetched him into his cabin.

"I say, Marston—I've been sending and receiving *nom-du-guerre* messages for you. Now—I want to know if you have any other emergency name which your executors will recognize as being unquestionably from a live man instead of a dead one?"

"Fancy I don't get you, old chap!"

"Unless your executors know positively that you're alive, they may transfer the shares they're holding for your adopted daughter to her husband, as she gave him an option to do in the event of your death. According to the casualty report from the Newhaven-Dieppe packet, you

are supposed to be completely dead at this moment!"

Marston laughed.

"Even if Smarrt got those shares from his wife, they wouldn't give him control, Sir Edward. Those *non-du-guerre* messages you've sent for me to my brokers succeeded in catching Smarrt short, as I hoped they would. We bought as fast as he sold. He dumped all he had on the market—sold a lot more he hasn't got and can't get. The man is irretrievably ruined. When my daughter knows what he has done, she'll leave him—and I fancy I might be able to prove that he has put his neck dangerously close to the noose. The real Marston tried to trip me off my feet an' shove me over the rail of that Channel-boat on which I was crossing—that is, I suppose he must have been Marston, because I afterward found this passport in the gangway, and I doubt if anyone else could have dropped it there. You see—I weigh a lot more than he did. His shove didn't even jar me off my feet. But in trying it, he lost his own balance and went over the rail. Two men had tried to kill me before—so that unquestionably this was more of the same. The master of the packet had no time to lower a boat and search for a man in the water—his mind and hands were too much occupied in trying to avert a collision. Five minutes afterward, we scraped the stern of this boat. I'm not telling as much as this to the police, because they'd swear I knocked the man into the water—which I didn't; he came up behind me, and I didn't see him until he was too far over the rail to grab."

Coffin nodded. "Right! Now let's get Smarrt in here, and put the fear of hanging into him before he tries something else!"

WHEN Sir Michael appeared—under protest—Coffin asked:

"Smarrt—would you mind telling us where and when you heard that the supposed Mr. Shields was lost overboard from the Newhaven-Dieppe packet in a fog-collision?"

"Hmph! I've been sending quite a lot of wireless messages since I came aboard—and receiving a good many more!"

"There has been no mention in a single one of them either of the fog-collision or anyone who was aboard of that packet—except by you. Nobody on this boat knew what craft struck us—nobody on that packet knows what boat this was.

Nobody ashore, except your wife, knows that yet. But you wirelessed your wife that her father had been lost from that packet—that his passport-picture had been identified at the Bureau. Which was another lie. It hasn't. Now—unless you are guilty of conspiracy to murder—where did you get that information? When nobody on this boat knew what happened after we left port?

"YOU needn't bother to answer—it isn't necessary. Mr. Marston here, represents Scotland Yard. You're ruined, financially. We'll give you two alternatives: First—write out your resignation from the Board. Then write a statement that you knew certain men were out to kill Mr. Jennis and had reason to suppose they might actually do it. We'll not force you to say you paid them. That you then contemplated getting control of the Line by rigging a deal in the stock-market after the report of Jennis' death—that you secured insurance on his life from Lloyd's to the extent of a hundred thousand pounds when you were convinced he would soon die,—by accident or otherwise,—that you demanded from your wife the transfer of her shares according to an option you had made her give you, against her wishes and better judgment. I think that's all."

"And—if I refuse to write any such incriminating statement?"

"You'll be put in irons now—sent home from Gibraltar on the first boat, to stand trial on a charge of criminal conspiracy involving both murder and fraud—with the wireless message to your wife, decoded, and the other facts we have to back it up. Lloyd's will prosecute on a charge of fraud. Jennis will prosecute on three charges of attempted murder. You won't stand much chance in a British court. If you sign the statement, we'll let you get off at Gib. You'll not enter England again without risk of arrest. And don't try any more funny business against either Jennis or me—there's too much on record against you!"

Sir Michael disappeared at Gibraltar without suspecting that Marston was Seldon Jennis. Jennis admits that Coffin convicted Smarrt when it might have been difficult if not impossible for the shipowner to prove his charges against the scoundrel—but is still puzzled as to how the Baronet solved his identity and drew the threads of the game together. And Coffin smilingly refuses to tell him.

Another of Mr. New's famous stories will appear in the next, the April, issue.

"Lookin' for yourself a house, ma'am?" Mr. Pegram asked.
 "Aint aimin' to camp out all winter," snapped the Amazon.

Illustrated by
 Everett Lowry



A tale of—
business, blunders and battle
 By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Wrong Number

WITH the yelp of a kicked dog, Skilletface Pegram leaped to the left. Nimbly his ample-figured wife Otelia leaped to the right. Between them in a big touring-car roared Calhoun Pond, the real-estate boy.

"Closest *you* ever comes to bein' a business man is gittin' run over by one!" observed Otelia, starting a fresh chapter in an old story, practically in midair.

"Come *doggone* close dat time!" The underbuilt and saddle-colored Mr. Pegram was checking-up instead of listening.

"Walkin'—and wearin' overalls!" Otelia stuck scornfully to her theme. "While *business* men is ridin' in big loud cars and smokin' *new* cigars. Why aint you amount to somethin', runt, before I busts you one?"

Lacking any answer that he could trust, Skilletface eyed the long cloud of dust that told where Mr. Pond was showing the Titusville section of Birmingham how busy he was.

"And don't fotch up de depression on me no more, neither," Otelia headed off her husband from another favorite refuge. "Mess of no-count niggers is done

wore out dat alibi too, along wid dey pants. You git into business, or git up a fresh lie, you hear me? Done swallered dat gag till I gags on it!"

Otelia headed into their gate, and Skilletface headed for Sycamore Street: Knowing when a wife meant it was what kept married boys out of hospitals.

Get a Deep South darky into difficulties, and his route runs straight toward his "white-folks." Which fact forthwith brought Skilletface to the home of Mr. Job Wending, of Sycamore Street.

Mr. Wending at the moment was busy adding his taxes, interest and insurance-premiums on a row of Florida Road negro-rental houses, subtracting his income from them from that sum—and achieving a further total of despair.

Skilletface circled him cautiously: you had to know how white-folks felt, first. "Mawnin', Colonel!" he cast a conversational hat into a metaphorical door.

Even phonetic spelling cannot convey the tone and timbre of Mr. Wending's answering snort.

Mr. Pegram fumbled fast for an irritating subject—and fell over the



"Closest you ever comes to bein' a business man is gittin' run over by one!" observed Otelia scornfully.

Lost Chord! "Think maybe I could git you a mess of tenants for dem empty houses of yourn, suh." He solidified himself more aptly by accident than he could have done by design.

Mr. Wending came up through a fog of figures. He was solidly built, florid of face, gray of eye and hair. "Get them how?" he lowered. "I can't rent them, and I can't sell them."

"I knows everybody round," outlined the skinny Skilletface hopefully. "Jest let de word git out dat I's a business man—same as Calhoun Pond—and aint no time till I's rented all dem houses of yourn."

"Yes, and have my rent-list looking like a carbon copy of the unemployed-roster too!" snapped Mr. Wending. "Birds of a feather are generally broke together. Not counting your record for gumming up about half of everything you touch. . . . But I just lost my last two paying-tenants in Alley B this morning—I've got to do something."

"Yas suh, sho is. What de matter wid dem?" Mr. Pegram was agreeable if ignorant.

"Fighting. Lived next door to each other, and the women got to high-hat-

ting. Prize-fighter's wife trying to queen it over the other woman because *her* husband was a street-cleaner. Durned near wrecked both houses before I put 'em out in the street, too."

"When I rents 'em, dey *stays* rented," contributed Skilletface under inspiration. "Jest gimme de list, and watch dem empties fill!"

MR. WENDING demurred, then debated. "You can't make 'em any emptier than they are now," he reached a reluctant conclusion, "so I'll try you out, on that Florida Road string first."

"Gits 'em sign leases too. Den dey *cain't* move," Mr. Pegram already had the business bit in his teeth.

"Get them to sign anything, and you'll be good," retorted his white-folks. He was digging in his inner coat pocket. "Here are a few standard lease-forms I signed up in blank the other day — spoiled 'em, so might as well give them to you to use if you rent anything. Which you won't. And here's the house-numbers on Florida Road, in the 6300-block. Here's another list of alley-numbers along Second Alley back of them, where they get garbage and make deliveries.

"I'll give you a dollar for every signed lease of paying tenants that you turn in with as much as the first week's rent. Now beat it!"

Skilletface paused only to get his strut in working-order. But before he had gone half a block, previous boasts returned as boomerangs. His list of acquaintances, after three years of local industrial paralysis, was perilously near to being the roster of Red Cross beneficiaries. And that brought up the question of where he was going to get all those paying-tenants he had so largely promised Mr. Job Wending.

THE teeming purlieu of Alley B suggested, and Skilletface followed. Fingering his blank leases importantly, he cast an eye up that noble thoroughfare. A pile of furniture and a liberal sprinkling of broken glass midway in the block indicated a prospect; somebody was fixing to be house-hunting.

On an ancient and out-of-date Morris chair in the midst of the furniture he found an embattled Amazon in a hard hat with rooster-feathers on it. Adjusting his overalls and putting on his best real-estate manner, Skilletface elbowed his way forward.

"Lookin' for yourself a house, ma'am?" he opened negotiations that were to bear him far.

"Sho aint aim to camp out all winter!" snapped the rooster-feather woman.

"Pegram's de name. Rents houses. Tenants most tore de clothes off me, tryin' to rent dem swell ones I lists in Florida Road." Skilletface could practically see Otelia wilt as she listened to him being a business man.

The Amazon glanced at her gallery. "Scram!" she rumbled at her late neighbors. They scrambled. She cast a cold eye upon Mr. Pegram and his proposition. Then, "Careful where us lives next time," she outlined in a light bass, "—not 'sociatin' social no more wid garbage-men and dey wives."

A budding realtor sensed his cue. "Git out of dis alley," he suggested, "and you goes up, social, like a skyrocket wid a can tied to it. Whar at all de swell white-folks lives? On 'roads'—not jest streets. *Anybody* can live on a street, and aint nobody whut *is* nobody lives in alleys noway. Git you one dem swell properties I lists on Florida Road, and you busts de society-page wide open every week."

The rooster-feathers indicated the

touching of hidden springs. "Here come my husband now." Their wearer pointed out a human truck, in size, approaching from farther up the alley.

"Dis here Mist' Pegram, de rent-man. Mist' Pegram, meet yourself Mist' Willie Munroe, de heavy-weight champ," the Amazon did the amenities. "Memphis Buzzsaw, dey calls him all over Tennessee."

"Us lookin' for house to rent—pays de rent regular," rumbled the mountainous Mr. Munroe. "Craves class in de neighborhood—not livin' next door to no garbage-man, too. What you got?"

Mr. Pegram rattled Florida Road numbers. "Even got leases wid 'em," he concluded his recital. "So landlord *caint* put you out, is he git peeved."

A gleam entered the sullen orbs of Mr. Munroe. "You said it!" he responded satisfactorily. "Whar at de place?"

A street-car and a bus entered the scheme of things. Later, when he was the success he was fixing to be, Skilletface would acquire an auto, and run over pedestrians like Calhoun Pond; right now, prospects even paid their own fares.

The dusty monotonies of Florida Road's frame houses at length revealed themselves. Mr. Pegram flung open the door of a three-room, "shotgun" type shack, Number 6343, near a corner.

"Runs all de way back to de alley, whar you gits service—not no garbage-men messin' round in your front yard dat way," he climaxed.

Skilletface tore down the FOR RENT placard, too, to show his confidence in the property.

"Hopes it's dat Carr boy, too, so I can holler at him to step on de garbage service," was the first intimation to Mr. Pegram that he wouldn't have to tack the card back up again.

AS a member of the upper and more educated classes, the mighty Buzzsaw produced a fountain-pen and five soiled dollar-bills. Skilletface fed the signed lease-forms of Mr. Wending under the former and pocketed the latter. Inflation set in—in Mr. Pegram. Wait until he flashed these twin proofs of his business ability under the skeptical nose of Otelia!

"Moves yourself right in," he remembered, and reassured his client in time.

"Right after dinner," confirmed the new tenant. "And like to see nobody throw me out of here!"

Back in Titusville's unpaved byways,

word was called from every side: "Mr. Job Wendin' been down here pawin' up de patch lookin' for you eve'ywhar, Skilletface."

"Lookin' for *him* too—to collect me my commission, soon as I finishes fillin' out dis here lease," Mr. Pegram indicated that a big business man was always in demand.

THEN he entered his own house, and assumed his right size.

"Mist' Job sho is been scoutin' about for you, runt. What you mess up now?" Otelia's tone and touch on a hot flat-iron intimated that a man wasn't half the hero to his wife that he was to his valet.

"Mess up nothin', copious," mumbled Skilletface resentfully. He ostentatiously laid a legal-looking document on the ironing-board. "And craves my vittles; keep up my strength while I's doin' business."

"Is *you* done it, it aint no business!" snorted the ample Otelia.

"Yeah? I jest rented a house in Florida Road for Mist' Wendin'—jest like Calhoun Pond would've done. Woman, I's a business man now. So laugh *dat* off—and step on dem greens!"

Otelia's lip and her lord's crest drooped, in the order named. No use in a business man getting all crippled up before he could rent out another house—Skilletface soft-pedaled himself as he pulled an accurate piece of lip-reading in time.

"You a business man? *Humph!*" Otelia's scorn would penetrate armor-plate.

Skilletface eyed the iron and bided his time.

But, his meal over, further problems arose: Skilletface didn't care to confront Mr. Wending immediately—or Otelia again—with just one lease signed. Two paying-tenants would put him into the plural, and sound a lot better. Meantime, more women would see a business man pass if he got over on Avenue G, which was paved and a boulevard.

Parked there, he discovered something new and arresting. Roughly, it resembled a city truck used in street cleaning, only it had a vast brush in its rear that revolved as the machine moved, apparently. Just now it was not moving, and an oversized ducky with a push-broom was mounted proudly on its driver's seat, doing nothing in a big way.

"Sho aint have to honk your horn when you takes yourself a ride in de cool of de evenin' on dat thing, is you! What

is it?" Mr. Pegram struck up conversation affably.

A shadow crossed the stove-hued countenance of the other. "Street-sweeper. And I aint git to drive it none," he voiced an evident secret sorrow. "Boy what runs it is in his gal's house yander. All time lunchifyin' hisself while I watch it for him—and works behind it wid old push-broom when he drives it."

"How you run it?" persisted Skilletface amiably. As soon as he quit talking, he would have to go to work: that was the big trouble with being a business man.

"Aint know. Heaps of times I starts it, but den I gits down; other boy stops it while I rallies in de rear wid de broom. Aint learned stoppin' yit."

The subject gave symptoms of exhaustion. "Real-estate business keeps me rallyin' round, too," Mr. Pegram saw his chance to impress the lower classes. "Tenants got me in a sweat, fightin' to rent my houses."

A responsive chord proved struck. "I got to rent myself a house, and aint feel like it," the street-sweeper brightened faintly.

"How-come you aint feel like it?"

"Been livin' next-door to de wrong boy." The sanitarian felt involuntarily of certain even darker areas about an eye. "Tryin' to start somethin' about *me* bein' no garbage-man! He elephant-size, but I whups him down to jest a hippopotamus before de cops and de landlafd comes. Puts us both out in de street."

Two and two leaped at Mr. Pegram, and made four. "You means you been livin' in Alley B?" he demanded incredulously.

"Uh-huh. Calls me Big Boy Carr. All I craves is to rent fur off from dat Buzzsaw and Maggie Munroe."

WHHEELS revolved rapidly in the brain of Mr. Pegram. Here was where a real-estate boy had to watch his step: he had stumbled upon the other half of that major engagement on the Alley B real-estate front. Florida Road was out, then—which stumped a boy trying to rent Florida Road houses. Until light almost immediately pierced his ensuing and encircling gloom: he had another list!

"Boy, luck done led you right!" he exulted under its impetus. "You is talkin' to de leading-most real-estate boy of Titusville, and aint know it! When dey lists properties wid *me*, tenants gits

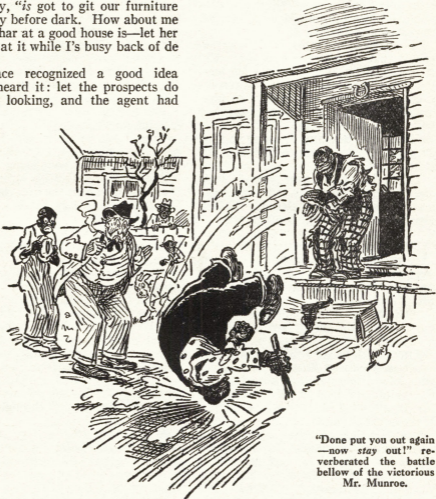
a new deal what *is* a deal! Houses what I rents sight-unseen is better'n what other agents *shows* you. Name your needs, and I backs right up and dumps de answer!"

"Me and Insomnia—she's my wife," the huge street-sweeper confided, reviving slightly, "*is* got to git our furniture out de alley before dark. How about me knowin' whar at a good house is—let her be lookin' at it while I's busy back of de sweeper?"

Skilletface recognized a good idea when he heard it: let the prospects do their own looking, and the agent had

"Done 'tended to dat my own self," reassured real-estate's latest adherent. "Rented dem Munroes a house way out on Florida Road, personal."

"Jest see *him* again, and I runs dis



"Done put you out again—now *stay* out!" reverberated the battle bellow of the victorious Mr. Munroe.

more time in the pool-room, where Mr. Job Wending couldn't find him until he had more than one lease signed. White-folks were all the time checking up on a business man before he was ready to check.

"Sixty-three-forty-four Second Alley," answered Mr. Pegram promptly. "Door aint locked. Got three rooms and a lease, so de landlawd cain't kick you out after you moves in. Quiet 'xclusive alley neighborhood wid plenty class—not noisy like dem night-club set what live on dem snooty-soundin' 'Roads.'"

"Insomnia like it, I leases it," decided Mr. Carr. "Jest so aint git round no low-down prize-fighter no more."

road-sweeper over him!" menaced Mr. Carr at his safe distance from a dusky Dempsey.

"Whar I find you after you looks?" Business reentered the discussion.

"I finds you. Whar you be?" countered Mr. Carr.

"Tends to a heap of my business around de Gallopin' Goose pool-room, up on Fourth Avenue close to de Royal Presidential Hotel."

"I be dar, round four o'clock," promised Mr. Carr firmly. "How about watchin' dis here sweeper for me while I go call up Insomnia at her mamma's and tell her git out and look at dat Second Alley house, like you say?"

Skilletface considered his course while Big Boy telephoned. Personal scarcity was indicated. Likely enough, back of Mr. Wending's desire for him, was a job of work: Mr. Pegram was a business man now, and through with work. And if home was where the heart was, it was also where Otelia was. Until she grew less ambitious for him, Mr. Pegram preferred pool-rooms. . . .

Seventeen games later, Skilletface perceived that he was being paged. Also that a *good* business man had his business brought to him—his street-sweeping client was seeking him lustily, an able-armed woman of no mean dimensions with him.

"Insomnia, here, say de house suit her all right; r'arin' to move in," Big Boy closed the deal for it.

"Move in soon as you signs de lease and slips me five bucks rent; old land-lawd done signed first, already," Skilletface met them two-thirds of the way.

THE tenth patron approached had a pen, and the rest was easy: the Carrs were ready to move, and Mr. Pegram was ready to receive congratulations from Mr. Wending.

"Old house done rented you; you moves right in," Skilletface beamed on his clients.

After which he got ready to cut a wide swath in Sycamore Street, collecting his two dollars in commissions and letting the white-folks look at a business man. Mr. Wending wanted to see him, did he? Well, here he came!

But Mr. Pegram's reception was not what he had pictured. Relief and exasperation mingled in and marred it as, "So you've shown up at last, have you?" his patron rasped. "After I've left word for you just about everywhere!"

"Had a whole mess of business to 'tend to, suh," Skilletface passed over the pool-room part of his activities hurriedly. "Couldn't git around no quicker. Is you want nothin' 'tended to, always rallies myself reliable round it."

Something further came into Mr. Wending's face, not attuned to the joyous note being striven for. "Done got two swell tenants for you a'ready," Skilletface headlined to dispel it. "Got de money, too, and de leases all signed up good and tight. Here dey is."

Mr. Wending took them, glanced at the leases—and hit the ceiling, so to speak.

Mr. Pegram eyed the horizon hurriedly

—in case he should suddenly need horizons.

"I *tried* to stop you, too!" The incipient apoplexy of Mr. Wending became partially coherent, although wholly perplexing to Skilletface.

"Tried to s-stop me?" he stuttered.

"Yes! To keep you from doing the one thing I didn't want done—now. And now you've done it! Sewed up good and tight—on a lease—a house where I've just got the first decent offer in years to buy it. From an oil company, for cash, as part of a filling-station site on the corner. And now you—you—"

The flutter in Mr. Pegram's brain got into his knees and eyelids also.

"You," recovered Mr. Wending, "have not only rented 'em, but taken leases I can't bust now without being held up!"

Skilletface recalled his strong talk to those tenants about the iron-clad and unbreakable feature of those leases—and suffered audibly.

"Now," snapped a white-folks increasingly beside himself, "you've ruined it: have they moved in?"

"Yas suh; movin' in now," mourned Mr. Pegram.

"And I can't even evict them then, as long as the house is habitable at all," Mr. Wending completed the bad news.

But just here came respite for a realtor as, "Telephone, Daddy," sounded a daughter's summons from the hall.

"Stay here," barked Mr. Wending menacingly at his uneasy agent, "till I get back. I'm not *half* through with this business yet."

A statement that was to prove prophetic. In no time later Mr. Pegram was discovering that his previous bad five minutes was scant preparation at all for what was to follow fast.

"Get into that car with me! Quick!" snapped a white-folks practically purple-faced now from something either new or additional. "This looks like *more* of your work to me!"

DETAILS were lacking—with Skilletface too busy hanging on to his hat to speculate. Never had he seen the white-folks in such wrath and haste. Or saying less, which was ominous. Worse, their direction was toward Florida Road; somebody had been telephoning something, maybe! Mr. Pegram's eyes got badly knobbed at the thought. But as they passed Sixtieth Street, and began to slacken speed, an icy hand reached up and clutched paralyzingly at a heart al-

ready cold with dread. For now he heard—even before he saw.

Parked across the road from the latest house of Munroe stood something familiar yet somehow newly sinister—the big street-sweeping machine. Mr. Pegram recalled in partial relief the sailor-like propensity of its driver to have a girl in every port, or thoroughfare—particularly around meal times. That accounted for *that*. But what was the empty truck back of it for?

A question instantly displaced by livelier matters. For as Mr. Wending leaped from his car, the very walls of 6343 Florida Road could be seen to bulge and shudder with what went on inside them. A thrown lamp hurtled murderously through a window; then one end of an iron bed suddenly splintered startlingly through flimsy siding, as by-product of battle within.

"Ugh-oh!" foreboded Skilletface fearfully. "Fixin' to be a fuss!"

HOWLS, screechings—male and female—blood-curdling yells, punctuated by the thuds of fists on flesh, bore out this diagnosis. Eager spectators swarmed avidly and agape, only to scatter wildly as ever and anon some fresh *objet d'art* missed its mark within and crashed another window-pane.

But only as the front door banged violently outward did the appalled Skilletface gain first faint inklings of the awful thing he had done. A mountainous man shot heavily through it, to land crashingly upon his neck and shoulders on the grassless ground without. While, "Now tell me you *gwine move in anyhow!*" bellowed the truck-sized gladiator who had hurled him forth.

The ashen-hued Skilletface looked at one, then at the other, then at Mr. Wending—and the illness that came over him was practically fatal! His legs were suddenly as wet strings, and could only support him weakly and in circles as he staggered before the impact of a suspicion that his mind refused to encompass. "Name of de Lawd, Mist' Job!" his preliminary anguish rose above even the berserk roarings of ejector and ejectee. "I—I aint—"

But before the steely-eyed and purple-faced Mr. Wending could gather breath to explode, fresh glimpses for Skilletface of the truck in front—and of a partially-unloaded one in the alley in the rear—explained the rest and confirmed the worst.

"You quarter-wit moron!" The white man now whirled in fresh and far deadlier fury upon his stricken realtor as he too saw all. "You've not only gone and rented to the same families I put out for fighting in Alley B, but you've rented them both *the same house!*"

"De *s-same* house?" stammered Mr. Pegram in wild-eyed unbelief. "Colonel, dat *cain't* be! I rents one of 'em on Florida Road here, and de other in Second Alley—"

"Don't I know it now! But, you bat-brained idiot, the house runs through, I told you! From the Road back to the alley—with numbers on both. It's the numbers that are different—not the houses. So you've rented *one house* to the *two* worst enemies in all Darkytown—and got *both* of them trying to move into it at once, from front and back!"

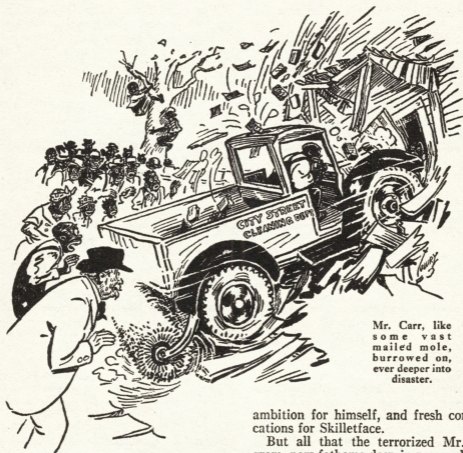
But even as a business man gaped shuddering at his own wreckage, Mr. Carr like that fabled figure of old, apparently gathered fresh strength from his recent contact with the earth. Roaring, he returned to the fray. Gladly Mr. Munroe, the Memphis Buzzsaw, accommodated him. And again imperiled walls bulged and rocked to the conflict within them.

"Costing me money every minute—and all your fault!" raved Mr. Wending impotently at Skilletface without. "Already done a hundred dollars' worth of damage to my property, on top of all the rest of the hell you've played!"

Crash and splinter of fixtures and furniture punctuated the caterwaulings of a realtor who could stand no more—and was standing it. Particularly as his mind gave birth to the fresh and fearful thought—wait until Otelia heard, and took her text, from *this!* Already he could feel firm feminine fingers in the scruff of his shirt, as a once-boastful business man dined copiously upon crows beneath her grip and tongue.

SUDDENLY there was not even time to suffer. From the partly unloaded truck in the alley the ample-armed Insomnia rushed noisily with reinforcement in the form of a piano-lamp, high held and poised like a javelin. In the kitchen the still-rooster-feathered Maggie met her, repelling boarders with two far-flung flat-irons and a sturdy stool. And again the slaughter was on.

High and ever higher once more rang the shoutings of the embattled Buzzsaw at the front. "Says you aint nothin' but



Mr. Carr, like some vast mailed mole, burrowed on, ever deeper into disaster.

a *garbage-man*, and aint gwine move in here!" he lashed at the infuriated Big Boy with tongue and a table-leg. "I aint more'n git shet of you—*wham!*—in Alley B, dan you's back here tryin' to live in de same house wid me! *Whuff!*"

"*Street-cleanin'* department—not garbage!" The giant Mr. Carr drove home the difference with a chair. "City official, I is—*pow!*—and not takin' nothin'—*c-r-r-rack!*—off no bum like you! Any time I lives—*whack!*—in house wid no lousy prize-fighter, it's *wrong number*, I tells you!"

But even as the sanitarian rebutted loudest, the battling Buzzaw gained the hold he sought. And again the mountainous Mr. Carr suffered the bum's rush, to land ignominiously and upon an ear without.

"Done put you out again—now *stay* out!" reverberated the battle-bellow of the again-victorious Mr. Munroe, making maddening dusting-motions with his palms.

At which the prostrate Mr. Carr went wholly berserk indeed—to achieve an old

ambition for himself, and fresh complications for Skilletface.

But all that the terrorized Mr. Pegram, now fathoms deep in personal pessimism, first perceived was that with a strange hoarse scream Big Boy ran not toward his adversary but away from him.

"Dat's right, *run!*" clarified Mr. Munroe triumphantly. "Yellow, aint you! And I craves service out of you hereafter wid my garbage, too!"

Mr. Wending was shouting also, something unheard about arrests for further property-damage—damage that Skilletface could see was already beyond all profit, but not yet enough to break those damning leases; No. 6343 Florida Road might look like the late site of a cyclone, but it was still there. Also still in possession of a vindictive lessee who had been evicted before, and clearly did not intend to be again.

But here a new element projected itself. Literally! Big Boy Carr had run, it was true. But now he was coming back. And how! Retreat had been strategic only.

At what came next, the startled Skilletface recalled with a squawk of horror that earlier meeting of his on Avenue G, the frustrations of a boy who humbly swept while another drove. Now, not

only was Big Boy mounting the street-sweeping machine where it stood across the street with its motor idling heavily at the city's expense, but there was a new light in his eye, and a new and wilder note in his voice.

"Aint no prize-fightin' bum puts *me* out of no house!" he was proclaiming hoarsely. "Put me out, is you? Den I *flattens* you out!"

Upon which Mr. Carr's fearsome purpose more fully appeared. He released a lever, shoved in a foot, tugged at the steering-wheel—and the machine was on the move! Toward the belligerent Buzzsaw, toward the house—

WILDLY then the dusky spectators parted before its path. If Mr. Carr yearned to run over Mr. Munroe, no innocent bystander cared to be included! Incontinently they swarmed forthwith up tree and roof and pole. And like Juggernaut, Big Boy bore down upon the ill-fated bone of battle, Mr. Wending's house, to run its current occupant down. Like matchwood the rickety fence in front fell before the sweeper.

Aghast at last, the Buzzsaw grasped his adversary's intention to render him something less than the dust beneath his improvised chariot-wheels. A purpose made doubly clear by Mr. Carr's clationed, "Boy, I'll fix you so you cain't live in *no* house no more now!" as the mighty Buzzsaw turned tail and fled within the house, the street-sweeper splintering the steps at his heels.

But here it was that fuller complications came, a new aspect appeared—at Big Boy's sudden startling discovery that his craftsmanship was incomplete. Like so many with a half-knowledge of a subject, it was the other half that grew vital now: Mr. Carr knew how to *start* street-sweepers—but not how to stop them!

Even as his enemy fled within before him, his battle-cries abruptly changed from belligerence to dismay. But too late. Already the porch in front was crumpling like cardboard before his onslaught. And as he ducked instinctively, frantically beneath the stout steering-wheel for protection, new sounds of rending and crackling arose to attend irresistible progress. Progress that now became unseen, if far from unheard, as the flimsy wall folded over him, to become his roof and shield.

Like some vast mailed mole Mr. Carr burrowed on, deeper and ever deeper in-

to disaster now. As the panicked Buzzsaw shot clamorously outward through the back door, partition-walls, chimney and outer planking were toppling, shattering, and falling behind him within. Dust, bricks, stove-piping and plaster rose, rained, and reigned about Big Boy Carr, as the machine plowed relentlessly onward through the debris that had so lately been a house.

"*He's ruinin' de house! He's ruinin' de house!*" Above all the confusion rang the squalls of a realtor looking ahead, a husband who had bragged prematurely and too well. To be drowned in very mid-squawk by the mightiest crash of all, as the house-wrecker fetched up immovable at last against a saving back-yard tree, while the yowls of the fleeing Buzzsaw yet lingered in the distance.

Like Samson emerging from the wreckage of the temple, there crawled forth a victorious if dazed Big Boy—to shake scantlings from his shoulders and the plaster of a Pyrrhic victory from his pants, just as there came to the ears of the distracted Skilletface fresh and even more incomprehensible sounds. Sounds that to Mr. Pegram in his plight were far from fitting, particularly in view of Otelia's impending attitude toward him as a business man—or Mr. Wending's as owner of the wreckage. For not only were they of laughter, wild and inexplicable, but they issued from the throat of one who least of all had laughter coming—Mr. Job Wending, who had just lost a house!

AND this fact produced for Mr. Pegram a perplexity that was but augmented as this unfounded mirth merged into the startling question: "Well, Skilletface, how about my getting you to rent some *more* houses for me, huh?"

"Y-you means," Mr. Pegram struggled, gape-mouthed, with the incredible, "you craves me to rent a house again for *you*?"

"Yes. For, when one of *your* tenants gets through wrecking a house, he's wrecked the lease too—"

"Wrecked *de* lease?"

"By making the house uninhabitable, yes." And Mr. Wending added an explanation that started Skilletface swelling into a one-man business-man's parade destined to be hours in passing Otelia and all over given points in Titusville: "You ape-minded accident! Now I can sell these lots to the oil-company after all—and not even spend a nickel to tear *this* house down to clear the site!"

Blood Brothers

A COMPLETE NOVEL



Decorations by E. H. Kuhlhoff

THE road along Alacrán Island reeked abominably of swamps and mud and mangroves, of fish-gurry and old turtleshell. A marvelous place for *tómagofs* and other utterly deadly snakes, too, among all those coconut-groves. Pete Sturgis, A.B., wished himself safe aboard the *Dos Equis*, that red-rusted little Mexican tramp at Puerto Hondo; especially now when night was closing in, and the sun plunging down into clouds that certainly menaced storm.

Pete Sturgis, A.B.! Pause to regard him. The A.B. is not a university degree. No, it signifies *Able Bodied Seaman*. Just at present, very much out of a job; but also, very able-bodied. If you guess his age at twenty-four, you won't be far wrong. Fighting-weight, some hundred and seventy pounds. A red-haired young man, and handy with his fists. Too handy, perhaps. If he hadn't been quite so handy, he might have possibly avoided that scrap aboard the banana-steamer *Almendares*, when mutiny had threatened; the scrap off the coast of this God-forsaken island, which scrap had ended by his being clouted over the head with a club and dumped into the Gulf.

That would have finished most third mates—such being the position he had occupied when the misunderstanding had taken place. But God loves the Irish; and somehow or other Pete, for all his being dazed, had swum ashore, and missed the sharks, and found his way to Puerto Hondo. And after that he had met and chummed up with good old fat Captain Gonzales, of the *Dos Equis*.

The Captain had offered to take him along to Vera Cruz, when and if the *Dos Equis* ever got there. She might start *mañana*—perhaps. Charming uncertainty, so characteristic of the Land of the Aztec.

Now Pete Sturgis, after having killed a few hours perambulating round this most obnoxious island, started back to town—the town he was destined never to reach. He whistled as he walked, even though he hadn't much to whistle about. For Pete simply *had* to have two thousand dollars, P.D.Q., to hold on to that Madre del Oro gold-mine option, which was ninety-nine per cent sure to make him some real money *if* he could hold it. And Pete needed that real money. Two years ago he had quit college and gone to sea because his father

An American's tremendous adventure in search of Maya gold in Yucatan.



By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

A writing man who has given us many good stories, and an adventurer who has himself sought buried treasure in the jungles of Yucatan, like the hero of this fine novel.

could no longer afford the college, and jobs ashore were mighty scarce. But lately he had received letters from home that weren't so good—and Pete thought a lot of his folks. Through business treachery on the part of an associate, the old man was going to be on the spot in a month or two unless twenty thousand dollars turned up from somewhere to save him.

Pete's total capital was now just \$28.45, Mex. And the option would be out, in only a little over a month; and with it, all his savings, and his chance to rescue the old man. Not so hot. Nevertheless, Pete whistled as he struck toward Puerto Hondo with that said capital in his pocket, where it jostled the snake-antidote kit that old Captain Gonzales had insisted on his carrying if he went walking on Alacrán.

But the whistle died on Sturgis' lips as—coming along the rocky road that dimmed to a vague ribbon of white among dense-arching groves—he saw a Mexican. Here in such desolation, even a poverty-bitten, limping fellow like this looked good to him. The Mexican could tell him the best road back to Puerto Hondo. Out in these damned coconut-groves, with all these confounded paths, it was pretty hard not to get lost. So Pete Sturgis stood there and waited for the Mexican to come along.

"*Buenas!*" he greeted the Mexican, now close at hand. "Which is the best way back to town, señor?"

The other said nothing, but came close; and if a man ever had a gallows-

face on him, this was certainly the one. A lantern-jawed, saffron-tinted fellow, dressed in fine clothing which had, however, apparently suffered misadventures.

"*Americano, eh?*" snarled this *hombre*.

"Sure! What about it?"

Then the bad *hombre's* very dirty left hand snapped back to the bad *hombre's* hip, and Pete Sturgis felt a gun poking him moderately hard in the short ribs.

"*Arriba las manos!*"

Sturgis obeyed by reaching for a cluster of coconuts about sixteen feet overhead.

The stick-up man laughed without merriment.

"It grieves me, señor," he mocked. "But I am a child of misfortune, and must needs recoup my fortunes. Only yesterday I was wealthy, for I had sold my—a ranch, for one hundred and twenty-five thousand pesos. Last night I was set upon by robbers who stole every penny and left me—as you see. It grieves me indeed, señor, but I am desperate. So—your pocketbook, money and watch—throw them down in the road. And then, *Americano*, be quickly on your way!"

Pete hit him—hard.

AS for science, pooh! Very little science. But it was a good wallop just the same. It landed on the bad *hombre's* mouth, and did the job. The Mexican crashed. His gun skidded away.

Pete Sturgis, with knuckles bleeding where the Mex's teeth had gashed them, stood over him, cursing heartily.

Only a groan replied. There the bandit sprawled limply.

Sturgis wanted that gun. He peered about, in the dimming light. Stooping, he groped around for it. Where the devil? Ah! There it lay!

Just as he almost had it, the Mex was on him. Pete felt a rush, a fling. So then, that sprawl had been only a 'possum ruse? Sturgis ducked. Pain slashed his right forearm.

He struck at random, hard. It landed. He felt the jar of it, right back to his spine. Something crunched.

The bad *hombre* dropped again. Pete heard a sort of choking grunt.

What was all this warm trickle down Sturgis' fingers? He half-sensed it now, as he stood there in the darkening road and peered down at something motionless, white, vague.

The fellow had knifed him!

Sturgis felt a cold wrath, and longed for a chance to hit him again. He prodded the inert figure with his foot; the Mexican yielded to it with utter relaxation.

"Knocked him for a row of goals, this time," judged the American. He knelt, touched the highly unsuccessful bandit, shook him. "Hand over that knife!"

More silence.

The man was out, right enough. Sturgis, bleeding a bit freely, felt about and located the knife. He rammed it into his pocket. Then he scabbled around in the blood-spotted road, came across the gun, held it ready lest this collapse also be a stratagem.

"Get up, you!"

No groan answered, nor any breath.

"Whew! What the hell?"

Suspicion whispered alarmingly at the back of Pete's mind. He knelt again and listened closely. The fellow wasn't even breathing!

STURGIS found one of his wrists and located the place where a pulse ought to be, but where now most certainly one was *not*.

Bending, he applied his ear to the wastrel's chest. Heart-beats? Nothing doing.

Pete Sturgis crouched staring, realizing that he had just killed a Mexican, and that it was one devil of a long, hard trek from there back to the U. S. A.

If he were caught now, with a Mexican's blood on his hands—

Blood still dribbled down his arm from the gash made by the bandit's

knife; it dripped to the roadway, but he gave it no heed. If pain lay in his wounded flesh, he felt none. Nothing. What did that matter? What did anything matter, except just the one supreme effort to save his life?

FOR perfectly well he understood it meant death now, if he was caught. He knew all about the deep, underlying hate and resentment against Americans in Mexico; down here, especially, in this remote corner of the country. Mexico City might have been different. He'd have had a chance, there. But in this far island at the Back of Beyond—

"Not a chance! Once they get me, I'm done!"

No matter what his story or his plea—self-defense, justifiable homicide—the local court in Puerto Hondo would speedily convict him of murder.

Then the firing-squad awaited him; or if not that, interminable years of torture in some filthy jail. And he had others besides himself to think of too—the folks in trouble back home.

"No *carcel* for mine!" determined Sturgis, shoving the gun into his pocket, along with the dirk. "No firing-squad, either. Not while there's all outdoors to get away in!"

Instant flight—here lay his only hope.

First, though, he must check his bleeding. Did he leave a crimson trail, peril would track him. And much further loss of blood might bring collapse.

One of his shirt-sleeves, ripped off and tightly bound, gave him rough first-aid.

He dragged the body off the road, into some bushes, and for a moment more stood peering, listening. What was that sound? Voices of some one plodding along the road? Pete's heart thumped painfully. But no—only a far-off cur was yapping. Save for this, and a mournful susurration of surf on beaches, the world lay quiet under a purple velvet sky now pricked with faintest stars. Along the west, those stars were blacking out, behind a sullen-drifting band of cloud. Time to be on the move!

Sturgis realized numberless cohorts of mosquitoes were swarming to torment him, but what odds? Nothing mattered now, but just the get-away. But how about all that blood on the path? That certainly would never do. In the morning it would surely raise a hue-and-cry. It must be obliterated.

The American stood a moment, to think. Then he knelt, risked lighting a

match—one of those exasperating, weak little wax affairs used by all Mexico. Dimly he saw dark spots. The match died. In that gloom, sultry and oppressive, he scooped dust, scattered it. Another match; more dust; and so on till no visible sign of blood remained.

Then he took off his shoes and socks. Holding them in hand, he walked barefoot many times up and down the road, covering all that place with naked footprints. Splendid alibi, this! What Mexican would ever connect a shoe-wearing gringo with bare footprints?

Now all traces were obliterated as best they might be, and Sturgis once more turned his thoughts actively toward a get-away. A peculiar stinging sensation on his left wrist brought his right hand to it. He shuddered at feeling some soft, pulpy thing that clung there. Another match showed him a gorged tick. He pulled it off with a cry of disgust, and flung it far.

Some country! Which way out?

Only one solution seemed obvious to this problem, and that was none too promising. It hung on the possibility of stealing a *cayuco*—a dugout—at a fishing-village, and striking across the lagoon to the mainland, to the Usamantina River country.

What Sturgis might find over on that coast, he could hardly guess. More swamps, probably; mangroves, venomous reptiles, insects, fever, starvation, probably death. But at all hazards, the chance of life existed, and of freedom.

"Must be some kind of settlements over on the mainland," he judged. And those settlements, if any, wouldn't be likely to hear of anything that had happened on the island. "If I can get ashore and hide the boat, or sink it, I can maybe strike a trail that'll lead me to some village or other. Let's go."

He stuffed his socks into a pocket of his not over-clean white drill jacket, and hung his shoes by their lacings round his neck. Barefoot and watchful, he plodded back along the road toward a cluster of fishing-huts he remembered having seen about half a mile to eastward. Mosquito-swarms tormented him. He felt a bit light-headed from loss of blood, but plenty of strength still remained in him. And never had his mind been keener.

Cautiously scouting along, he presently sighted the vague glow of a few lights. Somebody was still awake in the village—worse luck!



"No closer, now," he judged; and waited, crouching and listening in a bamboo-thicket. Some of the fisherfolk were still out and about. Cooking-fires glowed under open sheds. Sturgis could see dim, barefoot figures—men in flapping loose clothes, women in head-shawls and dresses, like long Mother-Hubbards. Tick and flea-infested bags of bones in canine form wandered and scratched around the huts.

ONE by one the lights in the village winked out. The tiny settlement of thatched huts grew quiet as the inside of a church on Monday morning.

At last, after three-quarters of eternity, Sturgis decided it was safe to make the try. Cramped, stiff, swollen with insect-bites, he made way down through soft white sand to the beach. He scouted along it, toward the village. Shells bruised and cut his bare feet.

Now he waited awhile, near the surf, to make sure everybody in the village was asleep. A glory of stars loomed overhead; and far beyond the lagoon, the Southern Cross hung tip-tilted against the sky.

Then presently a vast black drive of cloud smeared out all constellations, like a giant hand wiping a slate clean. The breeze flamed, freshened to a wind. The lagoon, all of thirty miles wide, seemed darkly ominous. In those shoal waters, no great gale was needed to kick up hell's own tumult of sea. A spit of rain pattered. What utter obscurity!

At thought of venturing out into that unknown and perilous dark, the most foolhardy man in the world might have paused for a brace of thoughts. Pete Sturgis gave it three. After all, mightn't it be better to turn back to Puerto Hondo, slip aboard the *Dos Equis* and stow away there? She might be out of port and gone, in the morning. Pete could square things with the captain—if indeed any suspicion fell on him, at all.

For a few breaths, he was almost persuaded. But no, no—

"Fat chance a gringo'd have, a wounded gringo on a steamer, with a Mexican killed! Me for the mainland!"

He pushed on along the beach, and all at once stumbled across a boat drawn up safely above high tide. Coconut-palm leaves covered it, as commonly in the tropics, to keep the wood from cracking. Sturgis felt underneath these leaves, grunted with relief and satisfaction as he found a paddle.

Then a sudden, throaty growl swung him round. Something dim, hostile in the black night, confronted him—a dog.

This brute's intentions were only too clearly homicidal. Sturgis unwisely attempted diplomacy.

"*Ven acá, chico!*" he tried to cozen it. But the dog, well enough sensing a stranger, burst into savage tumult; surged in at him with bared fangs.

Sturgis reeled back as the animal leaped against his right thigh. He felt flesh tear. Snatching out the dead man's knife, he drove to the hilt between ribs. A shrill yelp—and the dog lay thrashing there on the sand at his feet, convulsed with agonies of death.

Wiping the blade, Sturgis once more pocketed the knife, and bent to his task of hauling the *cayuco* down into the surf.

Gleams wavered in a hut. Then a door, opening, cut a vague oblong of illumination in the black. Dim-seen, a man was standing in that doorway.

"*Ea, Carlos!*" called a voice.

Another voice began mumbling. The man in the doorway vanished. Sturgis sensed that this man was now outside, was coming to investigate.

WITH a surge of effort he dragged the *cayuco* down. It grated loudly on loose corals and broken shells. How damnably clumsy and heavy! A second, it stuck. Sturgis tugged till the veins swelled in his neck. Again the dugout started. Already some of the higher surfs were lightening one end. Now, into the tumbling breakers it slid.

"*Quién va?*" the voice shouted.

Straight out into the surf, Sturgis hauled the boat. Knee-deep in warm rollers that hissed and crumbled, he waded; waist-deep, then almost to his breast.

Shipping much water, he scrambled aboard. The long, narrow but wonderfully seaworthy craft yawed. It rolled heavily, scooping another load of brine.

Sturgis groped for the paddle, found it. Now up on his toes with keen exertion, if ever in his life, he flung all his muscle into a long, hard stroke.

Logy, but none the less bucking like a terrified bronco, the dugout swerved and reared. Halfway round it slewed. Another wave would have swamped it, rolled it ashore—and with it Sturgis, to his very certain finish.

But before that other wave could batter, he had swung the slim canoe straight out to sea, driven it on, on. Spray-flung, in a succession of fantastic and violent leaps, the *cayuco* forged ahead.

Now surf diminished. Shouts from the beach impotently faded through that impenetrable dark, black as a stack of the world's blackest cats. Silently, sweating with blind effort, wounded and dizzy, Peter Sturgis thrust the heavy dugout south, out into the ebon mystery and silence of that lost lagoon.

CHAPTER II

THE GUEST FROM GOD

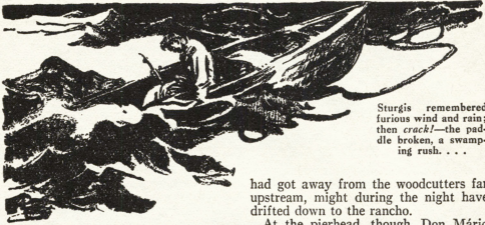
THE Señor Mário Martínez, at gray dawn of a sullen and windy day, came out on the red-tiled porch in front of his ranch-house at the mouth of the Río Fangoso. He yawned, stretched, and cast a weather-wise eye at the milky shoals beyond the river-mouth, the sullen heavens and low-scudding clouds.

"A bad morning," he judged, "and today we need a good one. Ill-luck seldom comes alone. It will be hard, a day like this, for my *vaqueros* to round up those cattle, but it must be done."

Two hours before, the great ranch horn had blared to rouse the *vaqueros* out of their hammocks, in their earth-floored, thatched huts; for, "God helps the early riser," was Don Mário's favorite proverb. An hour past, after their *tortillas*, bread and coffee had been gulped, the *vaqueros* had saddled their broncos and hauled on their huge leather "chaps" that all night long had been soaking in the water-trough.

Then with leather *reatas*, grub-bags, water-bottles, machetes and rifles—in case of meeting peccaries or jaguars—they had departed in fading darkness for wild regions far up-country.

At the Rancho de San Agustín now only the womenfolk and children remained, with old Tío Pablo, the store-keeper. Don Mário was counting on a quiet day with his wife, Doña Perfecta,



Sturgis remembered furious wind and rain; then *crack!*—the paddle broken, a swamping rush. . . .

and with Lolita their nine-year-old daughter, light of their eyes.

"Ho-hum!" yawned Don Mário. He stretched again, rolled and lighted a cigarette. Erect and wiry, with only a slight grizzle in beard and mustache to show his more than forty years, he looked rather an aristocrat. His white linen shirt, well-scrubbed blue trousers and rawhide sandals, into which bare feet were thrust, made him a figure worth looking at twice; these, and his deep-set black eyes, hawk-nose and firm-set jaw. The slightest coppery tinge imaginable, on high cheek-bones, told that his Spanish blood had somewhere in the past been mingled with a drop of Indian.

As was his custom, now he strolled a bit before his coffee, for a general inspection of his little kingdom. "The eye of the master fattens the cow," was a firm article of his faith. He cast searching glances into the calf-pens, into the corrals, then through his coconut-grove. All seemed in order.

"It is well," judged Don Mário, and lighted another cigarette.

In front of his ranch silently flowed the turbid, paint-green current of the Río Fangoso, out toward the oyster-shell bar that all but closed the river's mouth. On mud-flats beyond the bar, Don Mário could glimpse rose-pink flamingos, cormorants, snow-white cranes. Still farther he could see the olive lagoon, with here or there the vague dot of a fishing-boat. Nothing unusual.

"Let us see if the river has brought us, perhaps, a few *pesos*," thought the Don. He walked leisurely, blowing smoke, down the long pier built of palm-logs and earth, the pier that extended far out into the river. Perhaps some worth-while mahogany or logwood stick, that

had got away from the woodcutters far upstream, might during the night have drifted down to the rancho.

At the pierhead, though, Don Mário saw, across a yellow and muddy shoal, something that made him look with close attention.

"*Dios mio!* What is *that?*"

A man, motionless, silent, was lying half in the water on a mucky flat composed of mud and oyster-shells.

Don Mário paused for no speculation, but turned and strode up the pier. As he went, he violently clapped his hands together, in Spanish style, summoning old Tío Pablo.

Tío, a privileged character, was just out of his hammock in his yellow-plastered hut with the palm-thatch roof. Out through this thatch, smoke was now drifting as the old man brewed coffee over a tiny fire of driftwood in a sand-filled firebox. Now hearing the master's summons, he appeared in his doorway, blinking his one good eye. The other was covered with a horn-like cataract, which gave him the nickname of El Tuerto—"The One-eyed."

"What is it, señor?"

"A man ashore here, Pablo! Drowned, perhaps. Come, launch a boat swiftly!"

"A man, señor? What kind of a man?"

"Thousand devils! No questions, now, but come!"

BACK to the river they hurried, launched a dugout, plied round-bladed paddles swiftly. In five minutes they had reached the mucky flat. Barefoot and with trousers rolled high, Tío Pablo leaped into the mud.

"An *Americano*, señor! He must be from far up-river, from the San Rosario chicle-camp!"

"Never mind! Aboard with him!"

Pablo lifting, Don Mário hauling, they boggled the stranger over the tilting gunwale and into the bottom of the dugout.



"Dead, señor?" asked Tío Pablo.

"Not yet!"

"Praise to all saints! There is a remedy for all things but death. With a mouthful of tequila we shall bring him back to his senses. But how came he here? We have seen no boat arrive. And surely, he could not have swum down-river or across the *laguna*, with sharks and barracudas and—"

"Silence, Tuerto! *Vamos!*"

Back at the long pier, they took the human derelict head-and-heels, carried him sagging and dripping to the guest-room of the ranch-house, laid him in a sisal hammock stretched between white-washed walls.

Tío Pablo hastily brought tequila from the little ranch store, spilled a stiff shot of the fiery white fluid into the stranger's mouth, then exclaimed:

"Ay, *mi madre!* Look, señor, he is wounded!"

"Yes, on the arm. Bandaged with a piece of shirt, eh? And his leg, too, it has been bitten. This man has suffered many things. He may yet die."

"All saints forbid!" piously ejaculated the old servitor, crossing himself. "Shall we undress him, care for his wounds, and wrap him in warm ponchos?"

"At once, Tío! And here—open his jaws again. Another swallow of tequila may save him. Ah, so!"

GRAY glimmerings of consciousness won back to Peter Sturgis. He got vague impressions of white walls with rows of iron rings in them, a window with iron bars,—could it be a prison?—ropes and rough beams, a massive wooden door. Just a glimpse came to him of a tiled floor. He could see row after row of palm-leaf fans overhead, beyond all calculation.

Two, four, eight, sixteen rows—or were those pulsations of pain he was counting? Something burned inside him. But an arm ached, too; and somewhere down in regions that might have been a thigh, more pain tried to register.

At some indefinite time, long after, he found himself looking at a strip of sunlight now slanting through the barred window. A cock shrilly crowed, outside; and somewhere cattle were bellowing. A fly settled on his forehead. He raised an arm to brush it away, and saw the arm was neatly bandaged. What the devil?

Last thing he could remember was a madness of furious warm whitecaps washing over him, surging, thrusting, battering him down. Before that, what? Oh, yes—some frantic nightmare—a boat—furious wind, driving rain—luminous combers breaking in pitch-darkness. A roaring, frothing confusion. Frantic efforts to bail, with cupped hands. Muscles that ached, panting breath, the agony of a supreme and hopeless struggle once more with the paddle.

Then, *crack!*—only a useless pole in hand. Paddle broken. After that, stark confusion—a swamping rush, a short, mad battle with whelming waters that choked and strangled him in inky dark—and then, *this!*

"WHERE the hell's bells am I at, anyhow?" he gulped thickly through swollen lips. "And what's it all about? Where's the dugout, and how did I get here, and what the devil—"

In the long sweep of the hammock stretched between those walls of plastered whiteness, once more he lapsed, lay senseless and inert.

"Drink this, señor!"

A voice, speaking in Spanish—a vibrant, grave and soothing voice—penetrated fogs of lassitude and confusion. Sturgis felt something hot and spicy, something savory, tempting, at his battered lips. He swallowed, with painful effort. Ah, good!

"A little more... And now, rest."

"No, no! I've rested enough. How did I get here? What place is this?"

"It is your house, señor, as long as you will honor us. We call it El Rancho de San Agustín. You have met with great mischances. But fortune always leaves some open door."

Sturgis saw a grave and quiet face, with lean cheeks, grizzled mustache and beard; hair black and stiff almost as an Indian's, and somewhat streaked with gray; eyes deep-set, black but kindly. The voice went on:

"You came ashore here in some manner that I do not know. You are an *Americano*, señor?"

"Yes, that's right," gulped Sturgis. Then giddiness once more took him. He let his eyes droop shut, lay very still, conscious of pain but also of a vast relief. He thought:

"So then, I'm alive, anyhow. This is no pipe-dream. I got across the lagoon, after all."

For the moment, this seemed quite enough. But presently he was thinking again:

"And I'm spotted as an American, of course. And the way they've overhauled me, they've never missed my tattooings. They've got me as a sailor, okay. What yarn shall I spin 'em? Well, the nearest possible to the truth, the better—so long as that dead bandit doesn't figure in it, that's all!"

By noon, everybody at the ranch knew that a Meester Esmith, mate of an American freighter, had been in a fight with some members of a mutinous crew, just outside the lagoon; that one of the mutineers had set a savage dog on him, while another had knifed his right arm; that he had beaten them off, and bandaged his wounded arm, only to have them attack him again and fling him overboard in the dark.

A thrilling story! It gave the ranch more to talk about than anything that had happened in a month of saints'-days.

"And to think," exclaimed the plump and comely Doña Perfecta, mistress of the ranch, while the family sat at dinner, "to think he clung to a floating beam and was drifted ashore here! Surely, a miracle!"

"Yes, certainly the hand of the good God was in it," assented Don Mário, while Lolita listened wide-eyed, and the Maya serving-maid almost forgot to pass the black beans, chicken, tortillas and stuffed cheese-cake. "Poor Señor Esmith! He has suffered greatly. But he will take no great harm. No bones are broken, and his wounds are not deep. His clothes are already dry. In a few days he will be well again—*si Dios quiere*."

"Surely God will wish it," the rancher's wife assented. "But would it not be well to take from his pockets whatever he has in them, and dry those things separately?"

Don Mário shook a negating head.

"No, my dear one. A man's house and his pockets are never to be invaded."

"You are right. But now, I will send him some more broth, also a bit of chicken. These, with some good coffee, will bring back his strength."



"Send nothing, my wife. I myself will carry him food and drink. No guest, under our roof, can have too much honor shown him. For such a one is sent to us by God."

CHAPTER III

THE NAUYACA

BEFORE a week was out, Peter Sturgis had begun to feel somewhat like himself again. Rest and care, with plenty of good ranch provender—beef and *plátanos*, oysters from long reefs in the lagoon, eggs, pork, chocolate whipped to froth in a wooden jug; and beside all these, odd, high-seasoned things that piqued the appetite—were rapidly putting him back on his feet, once more.

The dog-bite on his thigh amounted to little. As for the knife-slash, that was healing with no complications. If only no news from the island happened to reach San Agustín—

"I'll be sitting pretty!" judged Peter Sturgis, A.B.

He inventoried his personal effects; found his watch done for; totaled his cash at—as aforesaid—a little over twenty-eight pesos; overhauled the knife and gun. These he cleaned and oiled, laying them away—together with the uninjured snake-bite kit that Captain Gonzales had given him—in an ancient Spanish mahogany chest of drawers in his guest-quarters.

"Some souvenirs, when I get back to the States!"

The knife, eight inches long and razor-keen, had an ebony handle, a blade beautifully inlaid with silver. The gun was a .38, and a good one. Sturgis showed them not even to Don Mário. Just as well, down there in Mexico, to make no display of weapons.

Life became singularly restful, brimmed with a peace such as he had seldom known. Luck, so far, accompanied him. Danger stood afar, and all seemed peace.

Sturgis enjoyed the hens and turkeys that roamed about the ranch-house, and the tame peccary that rooted in the strip of land along the river. At times that peccary and those fowls would invade the porch or even the house, all in a most democratic spirit. Doña Perfecta would shoo them out, and laugh; or she would bring her embroidery to the bench near Sturgis' hammock, and talk with him of the incredible things in *Nueva-Yor'*.

STURGIS presently began to wonder just how long he'd have to stay within those gates. A bit of questioning brought out the information that—unless he wanted to go back to Puerto Hondo in a dugout, which most emphatically he did not—he might be in for a protracted stay.

"You see, señor," Don Mário told him, "we have no regular communication with the outside world. That is, except once in three months, when a *goleta* from San Ignacio anchors off the river-mouth, and we swim cattle out to it."

"When will the next *goleta* be here?" Sturgis asked anxiously.

"One left, only a fortnight ago. The next will come in two months and a half."

"About the last of March, then?"

"Yes, *amigo*."

"Good night!" thought Peter. "It's all off with that option."

"What is it, my friend?" asked the rancher. "You look disturbed. Is it that you have urgent business, so that you want to hurry away from us?"

"Oh, no, no—it's nothing."

"If you must go, of course it might be arranged. I might send one of my men to borrow some kind of boat at the village of San Ignacio, a few kilometers up the coast, and thus get you over to Puerto Hondo."

Sturgis shook his head, in negation. The mining-option, he saw, was up the flue. Better let it go, cold, than risk returning to Puerto Hondo. And evidently no other town existed, for a long way up and down the coast, that he could use as an exit back into the world again.

"As I say," the Don continued, "we are here very much cut off from everything. Except for the *goleta* every three months, only a chance fishing-boat now or then puts in here, for a bit of fresh meat. I advise against your trying to leave here, otherwise than on the *goleta*."

"Yes, yes, you're right."

"At this season of the year, a *norte* is always liable to swoop over the Gulf and the lagoon. Treacherous gales, that strike swiftly as a clenched fist. So, señor, you had best be patient and stay with us a while. We will do our best to make you happy. And here you are in your own house, Señor Esmith."

And as day drifted into lazy day, the exotic ranch-routine grew familiar. Sturgis liked the Indian women carrying water-jars balanced on their heads, striding along with barefoot ease, and smoking cigarettes. He enjoyed the lowing of cattle, the fat herds grazing on broad vegas amid tall grass; the whish and crack of quirts, pulling up of cinches; the roping and breaking of wild horses in dusty corrals, by yelling and excited *vaqueros*; the black buzzards perched on tall gates of the enclosures built of vertical palm logs laced together by lianas.

He watched the throwing and branding of cattle, the training of steers. These the *vaqueros* flung to earth and tied. Then through the long horns they bored holes, to receive iron pegs. Horn to horn they lashed pairs of animals—now called *mancornados* so that for many months, the pair lived as one, night and day, lying down together, getting up, eating, sleeping together. And all their lives thereafter, those two creatures would obey as one, till death.

The making of high-horned, wooden saddles interested him; the cutting and finishing of *reatas*, deftly spiraled out of a single rawhide. The *vaqueros* would tie one end of such a *reata* to a horse's tail, take a turn round a post of *granadilla*-wood, then—keeping the leather well greased with tallow—make the horse pull it smartly away. A few such pulls, and the *reata* was smooth, tight-twisted, pliant, a marvel of efficiency.

HE wondered why some of the men had their faces smeared with blue pigments.

"Ah, this is the carnival season, señor," Tío Pablo explained, smoking with him in the primitive little store. Tío fixed on him his single eye, that blinked from a parchment face. "And then too, it is the fiesta of the very ancient god, Kukulkaan."

Greatly Sturgis puzzled over that. Did the ancient Maya faith still hold sway? What were these people, anyhow—Christians? Pagans?

TOWARD mid-afternoon of the ninth day since the American's coming; there shrilled from the patio a sudden, terrified wailing. A shriek in a child's voice—the voice of Lolita, the ranchero's little girl. And the child cried out:

"Ay, mamá, mamá! Ven, ven acá!"

Then, in a moment, a scream from the mother:

"*Jesús-María!* Mário, Mário, come quick! A *nauyaca*—and it has bitten our Lolita—God have mercy!"

Other voices mingled. Oaths, shouts sounded, in terrified confusion, Don Mário's voice among them.

Running to the patio, Sturgis saw the rancher—pale to the lips—furiously thrashing with a quirt at something sinuous and black and brown, something deadly, something that from a venomous serpent was now being swiftly reduced to a bleeding, twitching pulp.

Caught up in the mother's arms, Lolita was moaning, while servants and *vaqueros*, crowding into the patio, uttered confused cries and prayers. Some were crossing themselves. Old Tío Pablo shook a furious fist, trampled with blasphemies on the mangled rag of flesh that had been a deadly snake.

On the child's thin brown ankle, two small but terrible punctures had already grown livid, swollen. The hand of death was swiftly closing on Lolita.

"Into the house with her!" commanded Don Mário, foam on his lips. "You, Tío, get my razor—*quick!*"

Sturgis turned, ran for his quarters, flung open the old chest of drawers, snatched his snake-bite kit. When he got back to the bedroom of the ranch-house, though hardly three minutes had passed, Lolita was barely moaning. Tremors ran through her slim little body, as she lay in a hammock beside which her father knelt. Don Mário looked up, haggard-eyed.

"Clear this crowd out of here!" he commanded Tío Pablo. "All out, but the mother and a couple of *criadas!*"

His hand shook, but his waxen face was stolid as an Indian's, as he tightened a rawhide ligature about the child's leg, twisted it up with a bit of stick.

"The razor!"

He cut deftly, sucked and spat blood. "Permanganate!" he ordered. "Tío Pablo, bring it from the store-room! *Pronto!*"

"Hold on!" cried Sturgis. He had assembled the nickel-plated syringe. Now he held it out. "Permanganate



PETER STURGIS

won't suffice, Don Mário. Here—let me try this!"

"Eh, what?" The father squinted, as with eyes that could not see. Doña Perfecta had slumped into a chair, was praying with white lips, while a couple of maids called on all the saints they knew. "What is that?"

"It is an American medicine. It is very powerful! May I use it?"

"Yes—and God give it strength!"

Sturgis shot the antivenin home, under the skin just above the child's knee.

"If it's only in time!" he exclaimed.

"Is it not, oh, my friend?"

"Ought to be. Isn't five minutes since she was bitten!"

Don Mário said nothing. Now his face was gray. In those few moments a mask as of old age—sunken, deep-lined—seemed to have drawn itself across his features. His lips trembled soundlessly in prayer. Quivering fingers made the sign of the cross.

"Not too tight with that bandage, Don Mário," warned the American.

"And loosen it a bit, now and then."

The ranchero nodded.

"Yes, I know."

F AINTING, Doña Perfecta collapsed. The servants carried her to her own hammock. At the door, ranch-folk crowded, murmuring prayers.

"Ay, madre santísima! . . . Ay, Jesús! . . . Misericordia!"

One of the serving-women lighted a candle.

"Blow out that damned thing!" commanded Don Mário. "That shall be only for a funeral—and by God's grace there shall be no funeral here!"

Agonized, he hung over his dear treasure, light of his eyes. Lolita now hard-

ly moaned at all. Her pulse was swift and thready, her breathing shallow.

Wrenched with grief and sympathy, the American stood by. In Lolita's blood, white magic of the American antivenin battled with black magic of that deadly venom—venom of the terrible *nauyaca*, the yellow-jawed *tómagof*, scourge of southern Mexico.

CHAPTER IV

OATH AND BETRAYAL

LATE that night, with everybody else asleep, Don Mário sat alone with Sturgis in the living-room of the ranch, sat smoking in a silence that had lasted now some minutes.

An old hand-wrought Spanish lamp burning on the table of broad and rough mahogany planks threw vague light over a wine-jug and glasses; on tiles and whitewashed walls with huge hand-hewn beams, on holy pictures, on ponchos and sombreros that hung against the door leading into the store-room. Through the iron window-bars sounded a whispering rustle of palm-fronds, the sleepy mooring of cattle, a vague murmur of dark-sliding waters, as the Río Fangoso slipped onward to the wide lagoon.

Don Mário's aquiline nose looked more stern than ever, his beard and mustache more severe, by that dim light. Deeper shadows cut across his hollowed cheeks and touched the salient bones above them. Half-lying in his huge chair covered with the skin of a jaguar,—*tigre*, they call it in Mexico,—he at last made speech:

"*Amigo*, my heart is very full. Too full, for me to tell it. What, after all, are words in any tongue, when one man has done for another man what you have done for me? Our old proverb says you must eat a peck of salt with a friend before you really know him, but is it true? Not always. I have eaten not yet half a cupful of salt with you, Señor Esmith, but already I know you as a brother. What you have done—"

"You needn't say anything, Don Mário," cut in Sturgis, from his chair beside the table. He took another drink of wine. The *ranchero* did the same. "What less would any man have done? A friend is a friend; and if he's really such, he'll go against hell with one bucket of water, for the other fellow. But what I did was little. Mostly luck, that I happened to have the stuff with me."

"Luck? No. The hand of God! And you, *amigo*, were the instrument through which that divine hand worked."

To this, Sturgis made no answer. He was rather hard-boiled about matters theological, but why argue?

"Perhaps I should have said 'the gods,' Don Martínez added, after a long and smoky pause punctuated by two more drinks. "When life and death hang in the balance, and life wins,—as now,—something stirs in my blood, not wholly Christian. Something of the old days, something from beyond the white man's world. Reversion, atavism—*qué sé yo?* My great-grandfather was a Chimalapa Indian. In my veins still run a few drops of that primitive blood. You may as well look for five feet on a cat, as hope to kill that kind of blood completely. One little drop is enough to give a man thoughts that are—different."

"Yes, I suppose so. But why speak of this? Lolita will get well. In a few days she will quite recover. Nothing else really matters."

"Señor, something else does matter!"

"And what?"

Light glinted in the ranchman's dark eyes. He tugged at his mustache.

"And what?—the relationship between you, señor, and me! You, an American; and me, a Mexican. Since you have done this thing for me, given me more than life, are we not brothers now?"

"All men are brothers, Don Mário, when it comes to that."

"Yes, but not in this special sense. Would you accept blood-brotherhood with me?"

NOT understanding, a bit surprised, Sturgis knit his brows and looked at the *ranchero*.

"Eh? How do you mean?" he asked.

"*Oiga, amigo!*" And Don Mário leaned forward, his deep-set eyes steady on the American's face. "The bond between us, for good or evil, should be stronger than mere words can make it. My life is yours now, to dispose of as you will, should need arise. I pledge it! And that pledge—will you not seal it with the ancient Chimalapa Indian ceremony—a ceremony so very simple, yet more binding than the gates of hell?"

"What—what ceremony do you mean, señor?" Sturgis stammered, astonished.

"The blood-exchange. A drop of your blood for a drop of mine. Then we are brothers, truly, till eternity—and beyond!"



A moment Sturgis pondered this arresting proposal. In his rather ticklish circumstances, what could fall more welcome than some such protection as this? He nodded:

"*Muy bien*, Don Mário."

"Ah! And when?"

"Any time that suits you. Right now, if you like."

Don Mário got up, strode across the tiled floor, opened the drawer of an old hand-made cabinet. When he turned back, a slim blade gleamed in his hand.

"Give me your left hand, *hermano mio!*"

Sturgis arose, advanced to him, extended his hand. The ranchman bared his own left arm, brown, sinewy. Sturgis imitated him.

"Think well, now," warned Don Mário. "This alliance is defensive and offensive. Once this oath is taken, your friends are mine, my friends are yours. Our enemies, the same. Life or death, we must share as one. Are you duly and truly prepared to swear this oath, for life and all its perils?"

"Yes, Don Mário," the American made answer, strangely moved. "I pledge my word to it, for life and all its perils."

"To heaven or hell?"

"Yes! To heaven or hell!"

"To all eternity?"

"And beyond!"

Don Mário's steel drew a drop of blood from the American's naked arm, one from his own. The arms, close-pressed, mingled those drops.

"Now are we brothers indeed," he said. "*Está acabado!* It is finished!"

IT was on the third night after Lolita's narrow escape—again in the lamp-lit living-room of the hacienda—that Sturgis had proof of how deep, how all-comprehensive this new bond really was.

"Listen, my brother," said the Don. "Words without deeds are poor indeed.

A close mouth is good, at times, for no flies enter there. But again, speech is necessary, even to the telling of a great secret."

"A secret, brother?"

"Yes, and a mighty one. You are a mariner?" The American nodded. "And not rich, I take it?"

Sturgis laughed, but his heart-strings tightened with portents of expectancy.

"Rich, Don Mário? When were sailors ever rich?"

"Never, since my ancestors, the Spanish *conquistadores*, overran this country." The ranchero eyed his coiling smoke. "Tell me, brother, what is your dearest wish?"

Peter Sturgis, A.B., felt his heart give a bump or two.

"Just now," he made answer, "it would be to hold on to a valuable mining-option I've got, in Sonora. It's called the Madre del Oro, and how I happened to get hold of it would take too long to tell. But anyhow, I'm liable to lose it, if I don't pay something on the option."

"How much?"

"Well—two thousand, American."

"Pooh! A mere trifle!" Don Mário dismissed it. "If *this* is all that worries you, dismiss it. It is paid. No matter what happen, the option remains in your hands. But,"—and he leaned forward, looked earnestly at Peter,— "but I am speaking of larger things. Of real wealth. Have you never thought of wanting it?"

"Why, of course! Who hasn't? But what chance has a sailor, at best a mate on a freighter, to—"

"The chance is yours, now, my brother! For I will give it you!"

"You mean—" Peter began.

"Understand me well, brother. It is not that I am paying you, for anything you have done. Never that! It is rather that one brother, who *needs* nothing but who knows of much, offers

the other one that which will help him. Do you comprehend?"

"I do. And then?"

"As for me," continued Don Mário, drawing at his cigar, "money means little. True, we say that for money the dog dances, but who needs dancing in this wilderness? I have had much money, lost it, forgotten it."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Before I came to this lost lagoon, I lived on a vast estate in Tabasco. My father had more than eight million pesos, in lands and cattle. A revolution finished him. All the cattle were driven off, and killed. The buildings went up in smoke. Many of our people were shot, others drafted into the army of—well, never mind. Those were black days, my brother. We learned the meaning of the old proverb: 'Trust no one, and you'll never be deceived!'"

"Lots of truth in that, Don Mário."

"Not between you and me, though. But as I was telling you, we were ruined. My father—God rest him in peace!—escaped with his life, and little more. But he soon died. The soul was dried, in him. As for me, I was arrested as a rich man's son. I was condemned to the firing-squad. Two Americans interceded for me. My life was spared. For that, I owe all Americans a debt of gratitude, that sometime I swore to pay."

"And then?"

"I came here. How I married, built up this rancho and all, matters nothing. But here I am, content. The happy heart makes the unending feast, eh? Money means little, so long as I have health, food and shelter, wife, child. To you, though, money could mean much. And to you I shall give it, as much as you can carry hence!"

HE paused, keen eyes on Sturgis. The American felt his head swim.

"Lord!" he thought, leaning forward in the lamp-shine, elbow on knee. "Now we are getting down to tacks! Is this a hop-dream, or—"

"Listen, my brother. Far up-country in the swamps and jungles of Chiapas, far to the southwest of here, lies the ruined Maya city of Yaloxcaan."

"Yes?"

"In that city is a subterranean hiding-place, where the last of the sacred Maya books—histories, works on astronomy and mathematics—lie hidden. The Spaniards swept through this country like wolves. I, of their race, admit it. They

burned, tortured, slaughtered. They hanged women, with children hanging from those women's feet. One of the old Maya histories records:

"Then began the construction of the church, and great labor was ours. Then began the execution by hanging, and the fire at the ends of our hands. Then also came ropes and cords. Then we passed under the hardship of legal summons, tribute and Christianity."

"Why didn't the Mayas fight?"

"They fought well; but armor and gunpowder were too much for them. Two hundred Spaniards defeated seventy thousand Mayas at Ti'hu, which is now Mérida. So the Mayas were enslaved; and even now there is hatred for the name of Spain. Most of the Maya books were destroyed, but the remnant were carried far inland, were hidden at Yaloxcaan. It is the gold for the making of these books that I can give you."

STURGIS made a gesture of disappointment.

"Books, Don Mário? But ancient Maya books are of no value to me!"

"Ah, but these books are different. Books so important that a black curse lies on any Maya who dares touch them. The curse of Kukulkaan!"

"Kukulkaan? And who is he?"

"A great god of the Mayas. The Feathered Serpent. Also, the curse of Ah Puch, God of Death, rests on any Maya who takes away those books. Myself, I have no Maya blood, or—even though you are my brother—I would not tell you this. But all the Indian blood I have is Chimalapa. My ancestors were enemies of the Mayas, and had other gods. Despite all that, however, I myself would never touch those books. But I can go with you and show you where they lie—the books, and the blank gold sheets to complete them. None of my men would go, for they all have Maya blood. But with my help, you can find them."

"And what then, Don Mário? What should I do with Maya books?"

"We shall have to penetrate a formidable wilderness, risk perils from blood-lusting tigers and more blood-lusting wild jungle Mayas with curaré-poisoned arrows. Some few Spaniards have tried it, and failed. In our old saying, where they expected to find bacon, they found broken bones. Then too, you will have to face the curses of Ah Puch and of Kukulkaan."

"Oh, those!" Sturgis shrugged his shoulders. "But suppose I find those books? What good are they to me?"

Don Mário stroked his beard, and his voice lowered: "They are not books such as you know. They are made of solid gold. Each—so I know from Mayas who have seen them—is perhaps an inch thick, two feet long, a foot and a half wide. They are all engraved with ancient hieroglyphs, that no living man these days can read. Each represents a fortune for the gold alone, but of course as records they are priceless. And there are known to be over a hundred blank gold sheets besides—wealth almost beyond calculation. And these blank sheets are of value for their precious metal alone. Now are you interested?"

"Interested? Holy heaven!"

"Ah, I thought you would be," smiled the ranchero.

"*Vamos!* How soon can we start?"

"Softly! First you must understand how far it is, and how perilous."

"Oh, the devil take that!" Sturgis got up, and began pacing the tiled floor. "Only show me the way!"

"That is the voice of youth," said the elder man. "Perhaps of true wisdom. Good wits jump swiftly, and Fortune gives her hand to the daring. But first, you must know the great distance. I have a map that shows the location of Yaloxcaan."

"A map?"

"Yes. It has come down to me from my grandfather, and beyond. It is very ancient."

"And where is it?"

Don Mário gestured toward the door on which hung the ponchos and sombreros.

"In a chest in my store-room. Bring the lamp, and you shall see."

Sturgis' hand shook with something like "buck fever" as he took the old Spanish lamp and followed the ranchero. Don Mário drew a ring with clumsy iron keys from his pocket, turned the squeaking lock, threw the door wide.

Boxes, sacks and bales, old saddles, bridles, a general confusion cluttered the windowless and dark place. The lamp carved out only a small sphere of light from this dense gloom. Don Mário pointed at a leather-covered chest in the farthest corner; a chest with rusted lock and bands of iron.

"Here is where I keep it, my brother, together with all my valuable documents, the title-deeds to this ranch, everything



DON
MÁRIO

of that sort. Nobody knows about it. Nobody has ever seen it, these many years. But now you, my blood-brother, nearer than any kin of mine, you shall see it. For its secret is yours, so that you may bring away from Yaloxcaan all the gold that you can carry. It shall be all yours, and yours alone!"

Don Mário knelt beside the chest, and by the dim light coaxed the lock open. He threw up the lid. Dust floated on that close, dead air. It hung dimly golden in the lamplight.

For a moment Don Mário fumbled in the chest. He peered more closely, uttered a startled word.

"What's the matter now, Don Mário?"

"Closer with that lamp!"

Sturgis held it at the very edge of the open chest. Its rays flooded the interior, revealed packets, books, documents sealed and taped.

Don Mário stared with blank dismay.

"But, but," he stammered, "the big envelope—the big blue envelope—"

"What, in the devil's name?"

"The map—the title-deeds— *Madre de Dios!* Gone—all, all gone!"

CHAPTER V

INTO THE JUNGLE

FOR a moment Don Mário remained kneeling there, speechless, staring into the chest. Then, with hands that shook, he fell to scrambling through the contents.

"The map—deeds—*mil diablos!*"

"Sure you had them here?"

"Sure? Am I sure of my own name?"

"How long since you saw them last?"

"A year, maybe. They have always been fast locked, here. Who, in God's name, could have robbed me? When?" "Some enemy, I take it," suggested the American.

"But I have none, that I know of!" Don Mário exclaimed. "Here in this lonely corner of nowhere, what enemies should I have? And so—the deepest wound comes from the hidden hand!"

"You've probably put your papers somewhere else," suggested Sturgis, "and forgotten about it."

"No!" Don Mário shook a decisive head. "I have been robbed! God knows what the outcome may be."

"You'll find them all right, Don Mário! And even supposing you don't, could anybody else do anything with that map?"

"The map! It is not the map I am thinking of now!" cried the rancho, still kneeling. "In my mind I have an outline of the way to Yaloxcaan, clear enough to find the gold. But my title-deeds!"

"You can get a copy made. Surely your deeds are recorded in Puerto Honduras. The law—"

Bitterly Don Mário laughed.

"The law! You know only the law as it is in the United States! Here"—his laugh flickered out like a blown candle-flame—"the law is one thing, and what happens is another. Here, when we go to law, we may leap out of the flames and fall into the glowing coals. This is the bitterest blow that could have come upon me, save only the death of my señora or the little one!"

"Cheer up, Don Mário. It can't be as bad as all that."

"It can be very bad, my brother." The rancho got up, looked Sturgis in the face. "With these deeds missing, what day am I not afraid some *bandido*, with forged signatures, may come, may claim this ranch as his own? May throw me out, in spite of all I can do? May ruin me, annihilate me—"

STURGIS laid a hand on the rancho's shoulder.

"Patience, and shuffle the cards!" he smiled. "I wager you'll find your deeds somewhere round the house. And even if you don't, you have forty or fifty *vaqueros*, with plenty of guns. I've got a gun myself, and—"

"And then?"

"Am I not with you—through all?"

Don Mário extended a hand that trembled. Sturgis took it. Under the lamplight, each man looked silently into the other's eyes. Their clasp tightened. Then Don Mário said:

"An untried friend is like an uncracked nut. But a blood-brother—"

THOUGH no searching, that night and next day, revealed the slightest trace of map and deeds, and though for a while Don Mário was beaten down to blackest depths of dismay and ugly foreboding, his purpose in regard to the gold plates was by no means destroyed or even weakened. His word once given, he would carry out his promise.

"Despite all, my brother, we will go. And soon! Delay breeds danger. As quickly as we can prepare, we will be on our road. Now that some one else has the map—"

"Yes, Don Mário, the sooner now, the better. How about entering the ruins with me? Changed your mind about that?"

"No. That part of it must be for you alone. A brave man carves out his own fortune. Call it superstition, if you will. Call it the last few drops of Indian blood in my veins, or anything you please. But something tells me not to invade the final stronghold of the priests of Kukulkaan. As for you, though—"

"I'll take a chance. Gods or men, ghosts or devils, they all look alike to me, provided there's gold enough at the end of the trail!" And he thought again of his father, who was going to be in deep trouble, unless real money came to his rescue. . . .

Dawn of that tomorrow had hardly begun to gray over the Río Fangoso and the vast lagoon, when the little cavalcade trekked out of the rancho and set a course southwest, toward the formidable jungles, swamps and forests of the interior.

Not even Doña Perfecta knew the truth. For "in this affair the hidden cat must not be seen," Don Mário had quoted the old proverb. So his señora, like all hands at the ranch, had accepted his word that this was nothing but a hunting-expedition for wild game.

"And may all the saints go with thee, *querido mio*," the señora had prayed, hanging a scapulary round her husband's neck. "I shall say many Paternosters, many Ave Marias for thee, till thy return—and some, too, for the *Americano*. And come back soon to me, soul of my

eyes, for till I see thee again, my heart will be as dust and ashes."

"It shall be soon, my heart," Don Mário had promised, kissing her and Lolita. "Soon and sure. Only the mountains never meet again. Remain thou with God!"

The two best horses at the rancho—Mariposa and Bravo—with tails carefully braided, carried the adventurers. A pair of stout burros completed the remuda. Two more animals sufficed to transport their freight, into which Don Mário had managed to smuggle a small pickaxe and handle, also a short-handled spade.

The equipment was complete as any foresight and reckoning could make it. Grub-bags contained corn, rice, *frijoles negros* and coffee, tortillas, bacon and jerked beef. These, with perhaps a little game they might pick up—if they dared risk the noise of firearms—would suffice. The señora had also slipped in various packets containing *arroz con pollo*, cheese-fritters and cakes. Two bottles of tequila also went along.

The medical kit included permanganate, iodine, quinine and the antivenin syringe with the second—and last—vial of serum. "God grant you need not use it!" prayed Doña Perfecta.

Ponchos, hammocks, candles, supplemented the layout. Sturgis wore the usual huge chaps, but for work at the ruins had a pair of stout leather leggings. Don Mário took a small pocket-compass.

Armament consisted of two rifles, two shotguns and a pair of revolvers—one of these, the gun that Sturgis had taken from the bandit. Sturgis also had the bandit's knife; Don Mário carried a hunting-blade of his own. And there was ammunition aplenty. In case of meeting jungle Mayas, it might be sorely needed. Machetes were not forgotten.

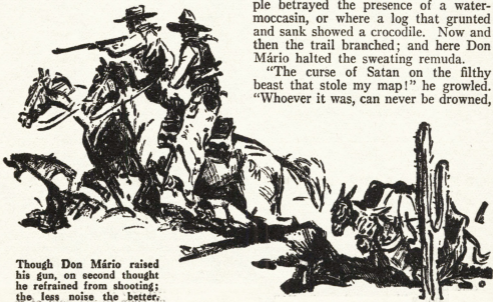
More than three hours they followed a fairly well-beaten trail through immense vegas of sour savanna-grass, saw-grass and *yerba guinea*, now and then plowing through swampy stretches of lush reeds, or winding among patches of thorny cactus.

At Las Pocilgas the party halted to feed and water the animals, as well as to rest the men. Three grass huts with a handful of *vagueros* made up this outpost of the rancho, beyond which lay almost unbroken jungle. Coffee, tobacco and a few tortillas—rolled out on broad leaves and baked on an iron plate over three stones—refreshed them.

Well before noon they were once more on their way. Now insects began to grow more pestiferous, as the trail narrowed into forest paths. Sunlight faded, blotted out by a dense and leafy roof where gorgeous macaws screamed. They sighted a few grotesque iguanas, but though Don Mário raised his gun once to shoot, on second thought he refrained; the less noise, the better.

Swamps began to impede them, dismal and tortuous morasses that confused the trail among miasmatic pools which stank abominably, pools where a V-shaped ripple betrayed the presence of a water-moccasin, or where a log that grunted and sank showed a crocodile. Now and then the trail branched; and here Don Mário halted the sweating remuda.

"The curse of Satan on the filthy beast that stole my map!" he growled. "Whoever it was, can never be drowned,



Though Don Mário raised his gun, on second thought he refrained from shooting; the less noise the better.



for he is destined to be hangman's meat. With the map, all would have been simple. But now—"

"You can't find Yaloxcaan?"

"Have I said so, my brother? Ah, no. Even though it is well not to count on the bearskin before having killed the bear, we shall find the ruins. But the way must be much more difficult. To lose one's path, to retrace it, to seek—it wastes time. And time is precious. For, once any of the jungle Mayas suspect we are bound for Yaloxcaan—"

"It may mean fighting?"

"Yes. And we should try to avoid all hostilities. Even though no curaré-poisoned arrows wound us, and we gain the victory, war is not what we seek. And if we kill or even injure a forest Maya, that will be bad business. It might mean fire thrown into the thatch of a rancho building, some dark night—and *vaya!*"

"I see. Well—"

"But there will be no fighting, if God wills. So, forward!"

About two o'clock they halted in a green-gloomy clearing where mahogany-cutters had felled giant boles beside a sluggish scum-covered stream. The Río Pardo, Don Mário named it. Reeking with sweat, swollen with insect-bites and with stings of the *xbubul*, a poisonous beetle, muddy and splashed, both men had already begun to show the effects of even less than one day in the bush.

Coffee, grub and a brief lie-down on their ponchos somewhat refreshed them. By half-past three they were under way again, through ever more difficult entanglements. Now an almost intolerable stench of stagnant waters assailed them. The heat blurred those jungle depths with steamy haze.

Lianas, dangling from orchid-grown trunks and limbs obstructed the path—if now indeed a path it could be called. Here machetes came into play.

"Nobody has passed through here for some weeks," judged Don Mário. "And

this is good. For if the road to the ruined city is really abandoned, so much the better. The last animal I want to see now is the human animal."

Slowly, floundering and with heart-breaking exertions, the caravan forged ever into the southwest. Toward evening Sturgis began to notice that his eyes were smarting, face and hands growing crimson and swollen.

"What kind of damned bug, now?" he wondered. And when the symptoms kept increasing, and he reported them to Don Mário, the Don looked grave.

"Ay, this is far from good! It is *guao* poisoning."

"What's that?"

"When God had made all the good plants and trees, Satan created *guao*, to balance them. It is the devil's own work. To touch it, even to pass near it—and behold what happens!"

"Doesn't last long, though, does it?" asked the American.

"It may last days and days, my brother. It may grow much worse than this, even to the blinding of a man."

"How about medicine? Anything in our kit?"

Don Mário shook his head.

"No. Only the juice from leaves of the *gudsima*—which God bless!—will cure it. I will watch keenly for a *gudsima*-tree. There is nothing more I can do. Forward!"

Already suffering intensely, but more grim-jawed and determined than ever, Sturgis rode along. Ticks had also begun to torment him—and liquid fire has no advantage by way of torture, over Mexican *garrapata* ticks.

Toward night, with men and animals now tormented almost beyond endurance—many a fat black leech clinging to the animals' legs—they reached and forded a slimy bayou.

"Not much farther now, to rest," said Don Mário. "I recognize this place."

"The ruins are near?"

"Not quite yet. But we shall presently reach Pozo Negro, a chicle-camp, where we can pass the night."

Just beyond the ford, Don Mário hauled to a stop, and pointed.

"*Gudsima!*" cried he.

A FEW machete-slashes, and leafy branches lay across his saddle.

"Here, brother! Rub the juice well on hands and face. It will cure you. And an hour from now we should be at Pozo Negro."

The spent and sweating cavalcade slugged onward through thorny thickets, among swamps, past giant termite-nests. Dusk was beginning to threaten, the early-falling gloom of tropical jungles. Two burros now were limping; round the shoulder of one which had been gashed by a thorn, carrion-flies were clustered.

Then, quite at once, at another fork in the elusive trail where again they paused to reconnoiter, Sturgis beheld a moving creature that crouched, that peered.

He had but an instant's glimpse at this; but in that instant he had seen—or thought to see—a vague white shirt, blue apron, long thin reed. A blow-gun, maybe?

"Don Mário!" called the American.

"Eh, what?"

"A man! There, see?"

At Sturgis' pointing, the *ranchero* knit his brows, peered keenly. The figure seemed to melt, to fade and vanish, silent as a wraith.

Don Mário's mouth grew hard as he exclaimed: "A *bravo!* I would have given much had he not seen us!"

DUSK had fallen like a thin gray curtain as the spent and weary cavalcade limped into Pozo Negro, where a chicle storehouse was surrounded by half a dozen huts, all grouped beside a dark-flowing stream, the Río Sucio.

The old Gallegan foreman, Hernández Bermejo, welcomed them; gave them hot soup and venison. The chicle-gatherers fed and tended the horses and burros, showed themselves friendly; for Don Mário's fame ran even to these remote regions.

As the Don and Sturgis squatted at supper on the dirt floor, protected from at least part of the mosquitoes and gnats by an eye-stinging smudge, a few dim canoes came poling in over dark waters where stars lay mirrored. In those canoes were *chicleros* and spears of fish, eager to hear news of the outside world, to gossip with the guests.

"Hunting, eh?" queried the old Gallego. "Well, take a fool's advice, señores, and go no further to the southward. For one thing, rains have made the swamps beyond here almost impassible. Even our best men are not slashing the zapote-trees, down yonder. Then too, the ruins of Yaloxcaan lie in that direction, and you know as well as I, it is not safe to approach them too closely."

Don Mário shrugged indifferently.

"What have we to do with ruins? We, who seek the wondrous rare plumes of the white egret, the feathers of the *quetzal*, the skins of jaguars?"

"Nothing, of course. But go not near that place, señor. I have been told that on moonlight nights ghost-music is still heard there, and that Ah Puch, the ancient God of Death, has been seen walking there—he, the terrible one, with full-fleshed arms and legs, but with skeleton ribs gleaming in the moon. With strings of skulls rattling on his wrists and ankles!"

"Is that old nonsense still believed?" laughed the Don, though some of the silent listeners cringed and shuddered. "If so, after all that the *padres* have tried to teach in this country, I can only say that he who washes a donkey's head, loses both his labor and his soap."

"Ah, señor! You may laugh, here in a dwelling with living men. Here, with fire, and *tigre*-skins to sit on. But in Yaloxcaan it is different. Ghosts still walk there, seeking to touch men who still live. And whatsoever man they touch, that miserable one must die."

"Thank you, my friend. We shall take care not to go near the ruins. It is not ghosts and death and hell we seek, but rare plumage and pelts for the museums of the *Americanos*, so have no fear!"

A night under cover greatly restored the two. The *gudsima*-juice worked miracles with Sturgis' poisoning. Dawn had hardly begun to glimmer in pale gold through the forest, very loud with bird-song and the harsh cries of whooper-cranes, when the little party was ready, to set out again.

The cavalcade had now been reduced by one burro. One limped so badly that Don Mário saw it could not possibly go on. This meant increasing the loads of the other animals, but—

"There is no help for it," said Don Mário. "Onward!"

THAT day, guided by the compass, tried their mettle sorely. Sometimes on trails, again floundering through swamps where crabs scuttled in the mud, and swarms of torturing insects droned about them, they pushed forward. Added to these, and clutching, ripping thorns that with diabolical persistence impeded them, was now the peril of *charcán* snakes—tree-serpents that made the life of the chicle-gatherers a nightmare.

By noon, rain had begun to fall, increasing the muck and stife. About

three o'clock, spent and exhausted but still fighting southeast, they suddenly picked up a trail. Faint though it was, it vastly enheartened Don Mário.

"Now then, the city is near," he judged. "There are jungle-Maya villages scattered about Yaloxcaan. This trail must lead toward it. We are surely on the way to the ruins. God grant we encounter no settlement. *Vámonos!*"

IN a thicket of thorn-trees something like a wet firecracker squibbed—a foolish little *pop!* that seemed no more than the noise of a child's cap-pistol. Don Mário's horse reared and floundered. The Don cursed, clutched at his left leg. "Some son of hell has shot me!" he cried.

"Where?"

"In the leg. It is nothing—if the bullet be not poisoned!"

Already Sturgis was out of his saddle.

"Get those chaps off, quick!"

The ranchero swung himself to mucky earth, but his leg crumpled, and he fell. Sturgis pulled his gun and loosed a volley at the spot whence the attack had come. The jungle grew loud with raucous screams of parrots, beating of wings.

"Hope I hit something! Maybe it'll scare the devils off for a while, anyhow." He turned to Don Mário, hauled down his chaps, then with a knife ripped up the wounded man's trousers. "Now then—"

The wound was only superficial, a little above the knee. Its jagged look, though, told of some rough and primitively cast slug; no regular bullet could have made such a tear.

"Poison, you think?"

"*Quién sabe?*"

Without hesitation, Sturgis sucked the wound. He spat crimson, repeated the process.

"Pooh! A mere scratch," said Don Mário, but the eyes in his deep-lined face showed anxiety.

"I'll have you good as new, in no time," the American cheered him. He dipped water from a scummy pool, added plenty of permanganate crystals, and dressed the wound. When it was tightly bandaged, Don Mário smoked a cigarette and said he felt much better. But something of the greenish light of that foul, sodden and miasmatic jungle seemed to have spread over his features.

"No fortune without pain," he tried to smile, as Sturgis reloaded his gun.

"Spice is good, with meat—and the spice of danger, too, is good with life. This is nothing, my brother, less than nothing. Provided always that there be no poison on the bullet."

"Where did that bullet go? It's not in the wound."

"*Quién sabe?* Never mind it. Give me a hand, now, up into the saddle, and away once more!"

The bullet could hardly have been poisoned, for no symptoms developed. As they rode on, Don Mário declared himself all right, save for some pain and a bit of fever.

Floundering with spent animals and sore-ried courage, dusk found them deep in a black cedar and mahogany swamp, apparently as much lost—under a deluge of devastating rain—as though on some strange planet long-abandoned to its own horror. But with almost the last dim fading of light through the forest roof, Don Mário turned lamely in his saddle, drew rein with a joyful cry:

"*Gracias a Dios!*"

"Eh, what?" demanded Sturgis, his nerves chafed raw. "Looks more like something to thank the devil for!"

"Ah, no—these cedars! And beyond, I know the land will rise. Soon we shall be on the higher ground where lies Yaloxcaan! Only one more camp, my brother. Then, tomorrow, the City of the Golden Books!"

CHAPTER VI

CITY OF DEATH

MORNING, after a fevered, hammock-spent night of insect-torments, of disordered dreams, found Sturgis crouching with Don Mário at a sullenly smoldering fire. That night had been stark hell, with the tree-frogs' maddening chorus a-throb like pulses of madness; with now or then the scream of the jaguar echoing like the shriek of a damned soul through the jungle; with rain doggedly beating down. A colony of fire-ants had capped the peak of misery by attacking men and animals alike, and that had meant moving camp in the pitch-darkness. All about the invaders, hostile and deadly forces—whether of man or nature—seemed closing inexorably as the hand of Ah Puch, himself, the Maya god of Death.

But strong coffee, chile-con-carne and a couple of tortillas somewhat dispelled these mental fogs. What, after all, was



to be feared by modern men, from gods of the long ago? If only the jungle-Mayas did not attack, and if the jungle spared them, what could happen?

"How about going up to the ruins with me, Don Mário?" asked Sturgis, blowing smoke and scratching some of his flaming tick-bites, there in that mysterious, vague jungle gloom.

The rancharo shook a negative head.

"But it would help a lot, if you only would!"

"No, my brother. Only in the last extremity of peril to you, can I go. If death menaces, fire three revolver-shots, close together, and I will come. Or if you hear me fire thus, come swiftly to me. But otherwise, now we must separate. You alone must take the final steps. There is no bad bread to a good appetite; nor are there any too-great hardships where gold waits. I will trace you a map of the place, as I remember it from the paper that some son of hell stole from me. You can take a burro, more sure-footed than any horse, and bring back what you can. I will await you here."

"How long ought it to take me to reach the ruins, now?"

"An hour, if God wills."

"In that case, I may be able to make two or three trips up and back, before night."

Don Mário shrugged.

"Do not seek too much, and perhaps lose all," he advised. But see—I will draw you the map I spoke of."

He scraped leaf-mold, detritus, ants and litter from the sodden black earth, which sent up a smell as of ten thousand generations of things that had lived and died there. With his knife-blade he traced outlines.

"Straight ahead now, up this rising ground to the south, you take your way. You cannot miss it, for the land slopes up in all directions, toward the ruins. At the top, maybe three or four kilo-

meters from here, you will come upon something like a large clearing."

"Ah?" queried Sturgis, crouching beside him. "The trees have been cut there?"

"No, it is not that. In centuries, no woodcutter has ventured there. They have been fools, perhaps; but who is not? If every foolish man had to wear a white cap, this world would look like a flock of sheep. So, as I say, Yaloxcaan has never been deforested. The forest has never grown there, at all. For the center of the city was once paved with great limestone slabs. It was a place, long ago, of more than a million people. The jungle has not yet been able to conquer it. Though small bush has sprung up between the paving-stones, no heavy growth has ever rooted there. So you will find only low scrub. You understand?"

"Yes, my brother. Go on!"

EAGERLY the American watched, listened as Don Mário sketched more outlines.

"Now then, suppose this to be the great central plaza. It lies at the highest portion of the ruins."

"And about how big is it?"

"Some thousand meters long, I have been told, by perhaps half as wide. At the eastern end of it you will come upon a mound of masonry and earth, something like the top of your sombrero, though not quite so pointed."

"And then?"

"Patience, my brother, till I tell you! You must circle about that mound. On its eastern side—I hear—stone steps descend into its interior. Those steps are probably choked with earth and bushes, but you can clear the way."

"I go down the steps?"

"Yes. And then—what you find is yours. If you can make it so!"

"Leave that part to me!" Sturgis exclaimed, with dry lips that trembled a



little, spite of all that he could do to hold his nerves in leash. His insides felt as if some giant hand were winding them up tight, like the spring of a mechanism. Three kilometers, four perhaps, and then—

"*Muy bien!*" he exclaimed. "I understand it all, Don Mário. And the sooner I get started, now—"

"True, my brother. And may you go with God!"

HOW many decades, centuries perhaps, had dissolved into eternity since the dead plaza of that thrice-dead but ever sacred city of Yaloxcaan had seen a sight like this?

No telling! For now the vanished gods, wherever they still dwelt, were beholding invasion by an outlander of alien race, color, speech. Kukulkaan, the Feathered Serpent; Balam, God of the Black Jaguar; Itzimna, the Supreme; Ah Puch, Lord of Death; and all the others—now they were watching a thing strange to them, and very terrible.

Under a cooking, brain-adding sun this invader forced his way, machete swinging to lop down thickets of thorn bushes, spiky cacti with hooked barbs, wild-grape and palmetto tangles. He looked no very heroic figure; hardly a type or symbol of those Conquistadores who centuries ago ravaged most of this land. Instead of armor, he wore a torn sombrero; ragged shirt; foul and muddy drill trousers; scratched leather leggings. He bestrode no prancing barb, gayly caparisoned; but led a lowly and patient Mexican burro, long-eared, gaunt and plastered with ticks.

Sweat, mud, insect-bites and vegetable poisons made him an object grotesquely repellent. But for all that, under his skin he was of the same breed as Cortez, Pizarro or any of that plundering crew.

A hundred yards or so out into the plaza, Sturgis paused to reconnoiter. Behind him now lay the primitive jungle that ages ago had buried all the unpaved

portions of this city. Carefully blazing a path along which to return, he had forced his road among ruined temples, palaces, observatories, glyphs, pyramids of ancient Yaloxcaan.

There, once upon a time, magnificent processions had streamed onward; princes and kings been carried—decked with gold and gems and quetzal plumes—in brightly painted litters. There drums and trumpets had once stirringly sounded, where now only the crested cat-owl mournfully hooted, or vagrant butterflies wafted like bits of living flame.

There smooth-polished roads and streets had once gleamed white in the suns of ages past and gone; there magnificent and tremendous structures of splendid masonry had towered toward the blue. There soft-eyed and graceful women had laughed and jested, bearing their water-jars homeward; slaves had sweat and sunk under grievous burdens; merchants had chattered for gold and turquoise, copper and pottery, fine fabrics, little bells. The busy din of market places had sounded there; myriads of soft-sandaled feet had trodden the inevitable ways of life, to death; games had been hotly contested and applauded; human sacrifices been bloodily offered for the appeasement of gods never yet insulted and outraged as now, by this intruder.

Life in its fullest measure of numbers, toil, joy, hope, faith, achievement, grief, pride and splendor had been lived here, in long-forgotten times; and now? Save for the dart of that green jewel-eyed lizard up that serpent-like and twisted vine, the web-spinning of a crablike spider on the plinth of a dead king's palace, the slow and high drift of those watching buzzards, all had vanished.

OPPRESSION weighed on Sturgis. Not even the golden dream of his errand could dispel an ominous dread. A thing scuttered near his feet—a large red scorpion. He stamped it to creamy pulp, and felt a bit giddy. That sun! What, he vaguely wondered, was sun-stroke like? To get a touch of that, all alone here—not so good. Better be on his way. But where?

A glance at his shadow, then at the compass, gave him his direction plainly enough. "East end of the clearing," Don Mário had said. *That way!*

Turning east, dragging the exhausted burro after him, he slashed his path along. A lovely long-feathered blue-

green bird winged away—a sacred quetzal, though Sturgis knew it not. Through thick scrub, over heaved-up slabs of limestone and crusty brown ant-hills, among thorny vines he shoved ahead.

Thirst assailed him, and ever more feverishly a giddy oppression swirled and bubbled in his brain. Most terrible of all was the dead silence, which the swish and whack of his machete, the cracking of branches, and the plodding tread of the burro threw into more ominous relief. Then—he saw it—the conical, bush-grown mound!

A wave of surging exultation swept out every cobweb from his brain, left him once more taut, keen, eager.

"There she *is!*"

BUT when, with pounding heart and dry mouth he reached its brush-tangled base, it looked hopeless. In that confused and desolate ruin, could there indeed be any entrance?

"Pipe-dream!" mused Sturgis, as with shaking hands he lighted a cigarette, then stood surveying the tumulus, hoary with age. There could be nothing to the story. And yet—had not Don Mário himself risked everything, even his own life, to guide his blood-brother here?

"Don Mário said the door was on the east side of it," he recalled. So, round the tumulus to its other side he forced his path. Grass, bushes, lianas yielded to his blade, as—half-drowned in sweat, panting like a blown dog—he cleared the way. Limestone blocks, some showing odd and complex hieroglyphs, lay overgrown with flowering vines. Sickly palms shoved up between them, with three or four clumps of wild pepper and a couple of half-dead breadnut-trees. On the summit, perhaps twenty feet above the plaza level, a nest of black wasps hung to the limb of a half-grown tree. The hum of their busy swarming reached Sturgis' ears. Where the devil could the entrance be?

He stood at gaze, now with fair coolness and more steady nerves surveying the mound. Earth, he saw, for the most part covered it; but here and there gaunt juts or thrusts of masonry peeped through. All seemed solid, impassable.

"How the blazes, now, am I going to get into *that?*"

Then all at once Sturgis saw the entrance. Square on the eastern side, blocked by earth and tangled vines, yet clearly visible, he perceived drunkenly leaning uprights of stone, a cracked

and sagging lintel made of an immense monolith.

Again his heart tightened. He shivered, as with an ague. Then his machete cleared the thickets right up to the very threshold of this House of Mystery.

"Pick and shovel, now!" he decided. Jamming his machete point-down in the earth, he shoved back to the patient and suffering burro. "Stick with me, old kid, and you'll soon be on Oat Street, for life!"

Once more at the blocked doorway he fell to work.

Plug! Deep into the mold of centuries he drove the pick. Again he struck, again. Presently his spade came into play. Sweat burst from every pore. Within his skull, pulses like trip-hammers fell a-pounding. Still he struck and dug, delved, flung the earth spinning away.

Panting and spent, he had to stop for wind. From a block of carven masonry a tiny chameleon unwinkingly stared at him, then vanished. Once more Sturgis threw himself into that inferno of toil; and—

Something slid, caved in, gave way. Amid blinding dust-clouds, an opening yawned, down-sloping. Sturgis felt a waft of dead, sepulchral air, so choking and so foul that he recoiled, a-gasp.

"Got to wait for *that* to clear out!" he gulped, in a mental blur that dimly grasped at thoughts of poison-gas. "But in a few minutes, now—"

He gave ground, stumbled back to where his machete stuck, jerked it from the earth. The tail of his eye had almost subconsciously caught a glimpse of something sinuous, deadly, repulsive—something gray and fatal.

He swung round, leaped back with a choking cry as an undulating streak of horror launched itself.

Thud!

On his left leg he felt the grisly impact of the serpent. He saw it fall and writhe.

His machete flailed. There at his feet, thrashing halves of the *uol-potch* flung themselves about, whipping the earth in their death-struggle.

SICK at heart and yellow-faced, Sturgis stared down at his leg. Bitten? Could this be death?

On his legging he perceived two tiny scratches, down from which in the sunlight oozed trickles of a pale, clear, yellow liquid.

Sudden nausea gripped him. Clearing, sky and mound and everything swam into one whirling, darkening blur.

Slumping, he folded together grotesquely as a broken marionette; and—close beside the still-twitching halves of the severed *uol-potch*—plunged into a swooning blackness of unconsciousness.

CHAPTER VII

GOLD

FLIES and ants crawling over his face, an intolerable glare of sun on his bare head, heat and oppression—these were Sturgis' first perceptions as he came back to gray-glimmering consciousness. With racking efforts he heaved himself up to a sitting posture.

There still loomed the treasure-mound. There, almost at his feet, lay the severed snake, about which already a host of carrion-flies had begun to swarm. Sturgis shuddered and turned away.

A shadow skimmed the earth. The American saw a swoop and fold of broad wings. Then, a-top the mound, on a branch of the stunted zapote-tree, he perceived a foul and hunchbacked bird with wattled bill, hooked like a scimitar. The vulture fixed on him a calculating eye. Sturgis quivered.

"God!" he gulped. "I better get out of here."

Then his thoughts surged to the bitten legging. Had those deadly fangs pierced the leather? Gingerly, with shrinking horror, Sturgis focused his vision on the legging. No, the leather was only scratched.

Faint and giddy, he drew his knife. With infinite care he shaved off poison and leather. Then, plunging the blade time and again in black earth, he made sure no taint remained upon it.

"Whew!"

His nerves were steadying. He picked up his sombrero and jammed it once more on his head, which dully ached. Only an idiot would come so far, go through so much hell, to stop now!

In five minutes more, after a welcome cigarette, Sturgis was back again at the entrance. Cautiously he scouted step by step down the declivity. On he pushed, into the cavernous burial-place of the dead gods' golden books.

A fetid waft of air still rose from below, an odor of decay and death. But Sturgis judged the air was breathable. Foot by foot, machete ready in right

hand, he slid and stumbled down. Nothing now seemed to menace. For the moment, silence held. No creature stirred. But suddenly, from depths unknown, a faint chipping noise grew audible.

"More snakes?"

He paused, staring, listening. Then he recognized the sound, and laughed hoarsely.

"Only bats. I must be going cuckoo, to let bats worry me!"

With strengthening nerves he advanced. Underfoot, the detritus of centuries crumbled, filled the air with choking dust. Sliding, now on his feet, now half-sitting, he descended. Overhead, he saw stone slabs that sagged, that might at any shock break loose, bringing down tons of débris. Never mind—

"They've lasted God knows how many hundred years. Thousands, maybe. Reckon they'll hold up, an hour more!"

A sudden slide, a plunge through reeking dust—and down Sturgis catapulted neck-and-crop into a murky gloom. Unhurt, he struggled up and waded out of a muck of loose, granular stuff—bat-guano. Narrowly he squinted round.

"Bottom of this dump, anyhow—that's something!"

True enough; he had at last come to the floor of this ancient temple, vault, storehouse, tomb or whatsoever it might be. Now, with dilating pupils, he began to gather certain vague impressions of a chamber perhaps thirty feet wide and stretching away into shadows impenetrable; time-blackened walls most curiously carved, with here or there a red hand painted on them; a roof nearly lost in dim obscurity.

From that roof sounded the faint, querulous chipping that told of clustered bats. He felt an odd relief at their presence. Even that queer form of life seemed to companion him.

Lighting one of his candles, he shuffled forward through the accumulated guano of centuries untold. The candle-flame, as he held it aloft, grew spangled with tiny dust-motes. Dim though it was, it half-revealed something that halted him, staring—a thing vague and immense, a thing grotesque and frowning, that seemed to curse and to repel.

AN archæologist would have known it, at a glance; would have called it a "stela." But Sturgis knew no more of archæology than a mouse knows of mathematics. So this fifteen-foot stela of Ah Puch was just, to him, "an idbl."

For a moment the Lord of Death and the invading pillager, of alien race and color, looked each upon the other. Ah Puch beheld a ragged man, grimy and hollow-cheeked. The invader dimly saw a skull of carved stone, skeleton ribs, grotesque arms and legs, with bracelets and anklets of death's-heads; and at the sides of this ominous figure, plumed serpents, with rows of intricate carvings.

NOW Sturgis' eyes had fallen to something that lay stretched before this mighty god of stone; something that riveted his attention, there under the feeble yellow candle-gleam. This thing was an object that might be called a table, a stone table, standing about three feet in front of Ah Puch.

A table, indeed, but of such strange form, of workmanship so massive, as to suggest the labor of Titans rather than of human hands. Six rough-chiseled legs supported its ponderous length. And as Sturgis lowered the candle toward it, straining his bloodshot eyes, he saw it was covered with something confused yet regular—something that suggested a series of objects laid in slanting rows.

"The books, by God! The books!" he gasped.

Yes, there they lay, the golden archives of Maya. Now more plainly Sturgis saw them, as with pounding heart he came closer. He perceived plates of some kind; plates arranged in ranks, each rank overlapping the next and resting on it.

Brown, massive, covered with batguano, now for the first time in all this world those sacred books were being seen by any white man's eye.

For a moment complete realization could not win through to Sturgis' consciousness. His mind seemed split, divided between the commonplace and the fantastic, the real and the incredible.

One part of his brain appeared to say:

"Here are scores of gold plates. Here are more than five million dollars! And a priceless record of a great civilization."

The other part seemed to assert:

"This is just a bunch of junk, lying on an old stone bench. There's nothing to this. There can't be anything!"

Hot candle-grease dropping on his hand roused him to something like coherence. Holding the candle down close to some of the objects, he stared open-jawed, motionless and dumb.

Plates, plates, plates—what an incredible number of plates, all square-cor-

nered and oblong! Each plate, he now saw, was pierced at one end by a round hole; and every row was held together by a curved metal bar with a knob at both ends.

The rows all sagged down in a curve, into the concave table-top. Yes, with utmost care and order, all those plates had been laid there—when? By what hands, now dust these centuries gone?

Sturgis held the guttering candle nearer still.

Now he could see the plates were about two feet long, perhaps a foot and a half wide, a half-inch thick. He pried the end one loose and held the candle so that the flame shone along its surface—a surface that gleamed yellow through the dust of ages; a surface covered with strange symbols and hieroglyphics carved into its flat-beaten surface.

"Yeah, those are the books, all right. But—gold?"

CHAPTER VIII

TERROR

BEHIND him, it seemed as if the faint light grew for a second even more tenebrous and dim. Sturgis thought he heard a slight thudding sound. Was it a stone that fell, jarred loose by the echo of his cry?

He shifted his machete to the left hand, drew his gun and swung round. Every nerve taut, he struggled up the crumbling slope.

"*Quién va?*" he demanded, as once more he reached the sunlit glare. No answer. No sound or sight of anyone. Scrub jungle and ruined plaza stretched away deserted, silent.

His mind inflamed with a suffocating excitement, Sturgis circled the mound. Heavily upon him lay the feeling that somebody hostile and deadly, had now entered this loneliness. Again he challenged:

"Who the hell's here, now?"

Then he stopped short, gaping. In the saw-grass beside the stunted coco-palm, a dark object was lying. An animal—the burro!

Sturgis crashed through the bush to it, stood for a moment staring. And very well he might; for from the creature's throat a tiny trickle of blood had clotted down. Unseeing the burro's filmed eyes looked up at him with cynical indifference, as if to say—

"I'm out of hell, anyhow; and you're just beginning it!"

"God's sake!" choked Sturgis. "What the hell did that—or who?"

No answer. Only the deadly silence of the plaza, ringed by watching jungle, offered its blank and terrible hostility.

Pondering a moment and with crisped nerves, Sturgis remained there on the watch. Presently he began to understand that death might have come to the burro through other means than human. In this land of poisonous creatures, something unknown to him might have bitten the animal, reached a vein, and swiftly killed it. Maybe a snake— He examined the slight wound. Was it double? If so, surely it was a snake-bite. But no—only one tiny puncture showed.

Panic struggled for mastery, a second. Sturgis felt an almost uncontrollable urge to abandon everything, to run.

But this was only a swift-passing quiver of nerves long overwrought. Almost at once, he steadied again.

"Damned if I'll quit!" he swore.

Nerved afresh by this decision, he took his *reata* from the dead burro and went back to the mound. Unmolested, he slid down once more into the dark chamber, relighted his candle that he had dropped near the bottom of the slope, and again approached the table of the books.

With a little hot wax he fastened his candle to the edge of the stone table. And now he saw, piled flat under the table, a dozen or so plates similar in size and shape to those resting in ranks above. He tugged off the top one, stood it on edge. Its surface was flat and plain and dingy yellow. Gold? With his machete he shaved at one edge, and a bright golden sliver curled off.

Gold! Gold indeed! And in ecstasy Sturgis burst forth in a ringing shout: "Gold! Gold!"

Disjointed plans flitted through his brain, plans about sometime coming back, getting up an expedition to clean out the whole temple, rose to mind. He shut them out. Never mind that, now!

WITH a strong effort Sturgis slid the plate off the severed bar toward the entrance.

"Weighs all of a hundred avoirdupois," he judged. "But I'll drag a couple of 'em out of this joss-house, or bust my b'ilers!"

Sweating like rain, in that close stifle, he scraped the bat-guano from the plate. He knotted his rope fast to it, dragged

it to the entrance. Grudgingly it slid along, as if held back by ghostly hands.

At the base of the exit slope, he paused to rest and breathe. Then up, and out!

"That's one of 'em!"

Sturgis smoked a cigarette in the shade of the temple doorway, then untied his rope and went down for another plate. After that, he'd cut poles, rig a travois and be on his back-tracks.

"Couple of hours, at the outside," he judged, "and I ought to be at camp, with Don Mário." And then—the rancho! All these fool notions about hostile forces in the jungle, and ghosts among the ruins—

"Just a bunch o' bull, that's all. Nothing to 'em—not a thing in the world!"

When he got back to the plaza, though, with the second plate—

"Where the devil's the first one?" he gasped.

His scalp crawled with a nameless terror. Skin quivered, tightened, with panic. No sign, no trace remained of the first golden plate hauled from the crypt of Ah Puch, God of Death.

THEN Peter Sturgis knew fear. To have met and done battle with any visible enemy, to have killed or been killed—that would have been all in the game. But this silent, hostile mystery now closing in on him, clutched his soul with a horror very close to superstition.

Panting heavily, he peered about with smarting and inflamed eyes. Dust was in them, in hair and nose and throat, a dust that stung, that strangled. He spat, hauled up his belt, and cursed again.

It got him nowhere. Insulting the vacancy of a Maya ruin was fruitless as Xerxes' flogging of the Hellespont with chains. A wonder came upon him—was this all some wild, fantastic dream? How else could a gold plate weighing a hundred pounds or so completely disappear, with no visible, no audible agency?

"Holy Lord, I'm getting out o' here!"

One gold plate would have to do, now—if indeed this plate were real. To look for the first one, or to go down into that crypt for another—never! Perfectly well he knew that, did he leave this plate which he now had, it too would vanish. His only hope now was to hang fast to it and try to make his escape with it.

Whether even that was possible seemed more than doubtful. But still, the bulldog in him would not quit, beaten. When he went, this plate was going too!

Stopping not to cut poles and rig an Indian sledge as planned, he cast the



rope over his shoulder, and leaning far forward, dragged the plate away from the mound. It slithered through grass and bush, smeared out the remnants of the dead *wol-potch*, streaked a long furrow past the carcass of the burro.

Machete penduluming against his leg, gun in hand, he toiled like any beast of burden back along the slashed-out path that he had come. Flies, cruelly biting, tortured him. Sweat stung his eyes. Into his shoulder the leather rope gouged deep. Now and again the gold plate wedged and stuck. Bitterly cursing, he had to stop and free it. Still he slogged onward.

Unmolested, he reached the edge of the ancient plaza. He shoved into the forest, ever following the blaze-marks made on his way up. But very soon exhaustion forced a halt. Wheezing, he stopped. He cast off the rope and slumped on a fallen cannonball-tree to have a smoke, to pull himself together for the trek of agony that still remained.

Suddenly he stiffened with dismay.

Very far off there to northward in the jungle, he had heard—faint but incisive—three tiny detonations. Don Mário's signal-shots, for help!

CHAPTER IX

THUNDERBOLT

STURGIS' hesitation lasted but a moment, while from the web of immense tree-tops more than a hundred feet in air burst forth the deep and wailing roar of a band of howler-monkeys, startled by the shots.

Then, as those black devils of the jungle started to leap away through clustered vines and creepers of the forest roof, and a chacalaca-bird added its maniacal laughter, Sturgis dragged the golden plate off to one side of the trail under a gigantic ceiba-tree, flung the rope down upon it, and heaped over them an

armful of dead leaves and rotten detritus.

Three answering shots from his gun, straight up into the green jungle gloom—then a couple of machete-cuts on the ceiba, to mark it as the hiding-place of the gold, and he ran down the trail.

Freed now from the burden he had been sweating along, he forged onward at his best pace. None too good, at that! Slithering in slimy and leech-infested waters of swamp-holes as he reached the lower ground, then clambering over roots and windfalls, often he was checked; but still he struggled on.

Nearly spent, he paused a moment to breathe and to reload his gun. Eagerly he listened. What tragedy might not already have culminated? And then, with relief, he heard louder firing.

"That's the shotgun!" Its heavy boom distinguished it from rifle or pistol-fire. "Close work now, I reckon. Don Mário must be flat up against the wall."

Sweating, panting, bleeding from thorn-slashes, he fought his way. Now and again, loud detonations echoed.

He stopped again, to breathe and reconnoiter.

"Ea!" he shouted. "*Hermano mio!*"

An answering hail, through far, dim aisles of the dark forest! Once more Sturgis drove ahead.

Then he saw the tubin-tree where he had left Don Mário. Under it he saw a horse and a burro, prostrate. Over the horse's belly a man's head peeped out—Don Mário's.

"What's happened?" called Sturgis.

The Don reared up, shotgun in hand. He shook an infuriated fist.

"They have killed him!" he roared.

"Mariposa, my best horse!"

Panting, Sturgis came running up.

"Where are they?" he demanded.

"The devils—the forest-Mayas! Cowards, sons of bats! Now that you come, they melt away. They will not stand and fight!"



"All right, let 'em go. Farther they go, the better! Where's the other burro, and Bravo?"

"Back there!" Don Mário jerked a thumb toward a dense thicket of button-trees. "I hid them there. These devils—they have no guns, like the one that shot me. But they have poisoned arrows and blowguns. They shot Mariposa, and—"

"And you?"

"Untouched. Even in death, Mariposa served me. He made a breastwork for me. I sprayed the jungle with buck-shot. May the saints grant that I have killed a few! And you—are you safe?"

"Yes. But they killed my burro."

"Bad business. These forest demons are not only showing their teeth; they are biting, also. And the gold? You found the gold?"

"Yes. Much happened, that I cannot tell you now. I started with one gold plate, dragging it by the *reata*. When I heard your three signal-shots, I buried it, and ran. I can find that plate again. I will go for it—"

"No! To other dogs, such bones. Now you and I are like those who went for wool and came back shorn—if indeed we can get back, at all. Luck has turned. The candle now is worth more than the game."

"You mean, we're quitting cold?"

"I mean, my brother, that the alarm has been given. By tomorrow the whole jungle may be swarming against us, if we try again. But if we depart in peace, perhaps we shall be allowed to go. Not lightly do these devils kill white men. The fear of the Spaniard still lurks in their hearts. We had best go, at once!"

"Go back with empty hands?"

Don Mário nodded.

"What is gold worth, to dead men? Many a mouth that has watered for gold has been filled with earth."

"Might as well be dead, anyhow, as be a quitter! Whatever you do, Don

Mário, I'm going back for that plate. Holy saints, man! More than a hundred pounds of gold—fifty thousand dollars, American!"

"It is much, much. Where did you hide that plate? In the ruins?"

"No. Outside, under a big ceiba in the forest. And worth a hundred thousand, Mex. Are we going to let *that* lie around loose in the jungle?"

"It would seem a pity, no? Perhaps, after all—"

"You'll go back there with me, and help me get it?"

"Yes! For my brother I will risk even life. We will take the two remaining animals, and go. Then, swiftly to the rancho!"

Whether Don Mário's vigorous gunplay and Sturgis' arrival had frightened off the forest Mayas, or whether they had only retired for reinforcements and to perfect an annihilating attack, who could tell? At any rate, no further hostilities now for the moment declared themselves. And early afternoon found the blood-brothers back at the tzubintree camp, with the gold plate lashed on top of their surviving burro's *basto*.

Both men were pretty well at the end of their strength, but fires of spirit sustained the flesh.

"And now indeed we must be gone at once!" warned the ranchero, as they wolfed down such grub as came handiest. "What you have told me of the happenings there among the ruins—well, it shows me these devils will surely kill us now, if they but dare. All that can save us—if anything—is their fear of our weapons. Now—the words are ours, the acts are God's. Every hour counts. Every minute. Away!"

DELAYING not a moment, they girt themselves for the northward trek through jungles and morasses, back toward Pozo Negro, Las Pocilgas and the ranch. By half-past two the now sadly diminished cavalcade was floundering in retreat through that somber and menacing wilderness, with such food as still remained and with the hundredweight of gold. The one horse, Bravo, carried Don Mário and Sturgis, turn and turn about.

Night, dropping a sudden wall of almost solid darkness, found them utterly spent beside a fever-scummed lagoon. They had barely strength to unload the animals and sling the hammocks. Food and tobacco somewhat revived them; these, and a swallow of tequila, urgent-

ly they needed a fire to dry their sodden clothes, boil coffee, and with their smudge abate the intolerable insect-torment; but fire they dared not light, with the possibility of forest-Mayas lurking near by.

"We must stand watches tonight, brother," said Don Mário. "While one sleeps, the other wakes—remembering always that if he so much as closes an eye, neither of us may ever see God's daylight again. I will keep guard till midnight, and after that, you."

"Let's make it three-hour watches," Sturgis amended. "That will be easier. You take the first trick of sleep."

"No, we will spin a coin for it!"

Don Mário lost. Sturgis thrust his aching and feverish head through the hole of his poncho, fell into his hammock and slept almost before he had found time to draw three breaths. Beside him and the exhausted, sprawled-out animals, Don Mário—also wrapped in his poncho—brooded with the shotgun under his arm.

NEAR and far, sounds of the jungle drifted; strange inexplicable noises, furtive, shrill, whispering—the antiphony of life and death ever busily at work. And myriads of tiny lights—fireflies, or perhaps the eyes of little, unknown creatures—glimmered in a dark that seemed to quiver.

Then a vague shimmer of moonlight trickled through the jungle roof of giant treetops penetrating the distorted vines and creepers. It etched the shadows with silver filigree. Sounds died away to timorous murmurs, fading to silence. Miasmas and pale, poisonous vapors wreathed themselves above the swamp. Don Mário wrapped his poncho closer.

The three hours he should have kept watch extended to six, but still he kept his vigil.

"He needs sleep more than I," thought the Don. "How can I have the heart to waken him?"

And it was well past midnight when at last he shook the American's arm, roused him from deep pits of unconsciousness.

But this he did not tell.

"Your turn, now," he lied. "Three hours are past. Now three for you, and then I watch again!"

Waking, sleeping, suffering, they passed the hours. An endless night thinned away. Far above the stupendous tufted curtain of jungle, the broad purple floor of star-dusted tropic beauty paled to dawn. Then up again the blood-brothers

aroused themselves, to a clammy mockery of breakfast—jerked beef, dry *galletas* and a mouthful of tequila. A whiff of sodden tobacco; and so, pack for another day of hell.

PACKING the burro's *basto* with the heavy slab of gold, Sturgis drew his knife to cut a loose end of cord. And having need of both hands to haul a loop tight, he disposed of that knife a moment by stabbing its point into a twisted rubber-tree.

Don Mário's eye fell on the knife. Its curious, silver-inlaid steel woke in him a gathering wonder. He leaned closer, narrowly studied it under that mysterious and dim jungle-light. Then he plucked it from the tree.

"This knife!"

"Eh, my brother?"

"Where did you get this knife?"

"Oh, from a Mexican at Puerto Hondo," Sturgis carelessly made answer.

"You bought it?"

"In a way. Paid for it with quite a lot of blood."

"Mira! I must understand! What is your meaning?"

Sturgis paused in his work at the knot, faced Don Mário.

"What's the idea?" he asked. "What's this all about, anyhow?"

"I demand that you tell me how you got this knife—and do not lie!"

The American flushed.

"If you weren't my blood-brother, Don Mário— Well, I got that knife where I got my gun. From a *bandido* who tried to stick me up and rob me, one dark night!"

"And did he rob you?"

"Not perceptibly. I was just a shade too quick for him. He ended up in a clump of bushes."

"Bushes? The police got him?"

"No, the buzzards."

"*Madre de Dios!* Let me see your gun!"

"My gun?"

"Yes! Give it me!"

Wondering greatly, Sturgis drew his gun, held it out.

Don Mário took the weapon in a hand that trembled. With tightening jaw, eyes that darkened to black slashes, he examined it. An odd, yellowish tinge overspread his face.

"You mean," he asked in a wire-taut voice, "this gun, this knife—you took them from the body of a man you—killed?"

"Well, putting it in plain Castilian, that's about the size of it." Amazed, the American stared. "He was going to kill *me*. He'd have had that knife into my heart, if I hadn't been a breath too quick for him. As it was, he ripped my arm, and—"

"So that was a lie, that story you told about having been knifed in a mutiny?"

"Only children and fools always speak the truth, Don Mário," shrugged the American.

"But you will speak it now!" the ranchoer flung at him. "What kind of man was it, you killed?"

"Dressed in fine clothes, but torn and muddy. He said he had been robbed himself, of a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars that he had been paid for his ranch. So he tried to take it out on me."

"Never mind that! I mean—did you notice anything about him, not like all other men? Answer me!"

"Well, since you insist, the *bandido* limped. He was lame."

"Ay, Dios! And did he hold the knife in his right hand?"

"No! In his left. Why?"

WITH a furious oath, Don Mário flung the knife down. Eyes blood-shot, teeth like a wolf's through retracted lips, he leveled the gun.

"These weapons belonged to Eduardo, my own brother!" he snarled. "That lame, left-handed man was the son of my own father and mother. It was my brother Eduardo you murdered! Now I repay!"

As Sturgis swung a fist that caught Don Mário's bearded jaw, the gun crashed so close to his ear that it deafened him. Powder-grains scorched his flesh. But the bullet struck only swamp-water, jetting up slime and mud.

Another blow dropped the Don. Sturgis leaped on him like a tiger. The jungle echoed to confused cries and curses. Black-sodden muck smeared both men as they rolled, twisted, wrenched in a rage that kills.

Flaring like a fire of dry straw, the combat died as swiftly. For a spraining twist numbed the Don's gun-hand. The weapon dropped, was smeared into the mud. Sturgis landed a smash back of the ranchoer's ear. Don Mário grunted, kicked a couple of times, lay still.

Sturgis staggered to his feet.

"That'll be—about all for you!" he panted, standing over the unconscious

Mexican, with bruised knuckles. He peered down with bitter blue eyes. "Try to shoot me up, eh, because I killed a thug? Get up—get out o' here!"

The American picked up knife and gun. The knife he thrust into his belt, but he held the gun ready.

"*Arriba!*"

No answer. The ranchoer, knocked stiff, lay in a huddled heap. For a moment Sturgis stared down at him. But swiftly a tinge of anxiety shadowed his eyes. He stooped, shook the Mexican.

"Jumping Jupiter—I hope I haven't killed him too!"

Half a sombrero of water sluiced over his face brought back a tiny glimmer of consciousness. That glimmer brightened to a waxing flame of hate. He choked and spat, and struggled to sit up.

"Murderer! The blood of my own brother," gulped the Don, "is on your hands. You must pay! If not now—"

"Look here! I'm not going to argue this thing. You wouldn't understand." Judicially he weighed his gun. "Self-defense probably means nothing to you, a case like this. And you don't believe me now, anyhow. So let it pass. The only question is—what are we going to do about it?"

"Do? *Madre de Dios!* I shall kill you—or you, me!"

"That killing stuff is out. I've had enough of it. And as for you, you're under oath to stand by me!"

"I repudiate that oath! It does not hold, with a murderer."

"Oh, that's how you work it, eh? See here, Don Mário, I demand that you go back to the rancho with me, and arrange some way for me to clear out of this country with my gold! Or else you've perjured yourself."

DON MÁRIO, rubbing his ear, looked blacker than sin. Doggedly he shook his head.

"The oath does not cover a man who has murdered my own brother. To the rancho, no. If you try to reach it—if you get there, my *vaqueros*—"

"Oh, so they'll finish me? That's it, eh?"

"No, I shall not let them touch you, otherwise than to deliver you as a prisoner to the soldiers at Puerto Hondo. And then—"

"Then, the presidio or the firing-squad? Fine! You're what we Americans call an Indian giver. You give—but you take back again. So a life-sentence or a firing-

squad—that's the best you offer the blood-brother that saved Lolita's life?"

Don Mário winced, painfully dragged himself to his knees, got up, stood bracing himself against the rubber-tree. A moment he pondered. Then—

"Listen, *Americano*," he retorted, scowling from under eyebrows heavy with wrath. "Listen. My oath shall at least give you a chance for life and wealth. It was the word of an *hidalgo*, and cannot be wholly broken. You still have one chance."

"I do, eh? What's that? You're generous, in the real old Spanish style! What's the chance, Don Mário?"

The *ranchero* gestured toward the east.

"Almost due into the sunrise, from here, is British Honduras. There is Belize. The distance is perhaps four hundred and fifty kilometers—jungles, swamps, Maya ruins, forest Indians, snakes—but the journey has been made. It can be made again."

"You mean?"

"The gold is yours. I will give you the one remaining horse, the compass, most of the food. Myself, I will keep only a very little of that, with the burro. You may find trails of *chicleros*. Villages, perhaps. You can perhaps fight your way through to the Gulf of Honduras. If you live, you live. If you die, well—death makes all men the same size."

"So that's your program for me, eh?"

"It is my program. It must be yours. Whatever happens, it will sometime end. Every day has its evening. You had best accept, for in a tempest every port is good. What I offer you is at least a fighting chance for life and riches. The road north from here leads you only to prison or the firing-squad. So, choose well, and maybe you will reach safety at Belize—if God wills. This now is my final word, forever. I have finished!"

Silently the American looked at this man, bruised and disheveled, but still with some inherent dignity that nothing could obliterate. That this word was final indeed, Sturgis well understood. The Indian strain in Don Mário had met the European and had conquered it. As well now argue with a Maya pyramid as with this man.

Sturgis nodded.

"*Está bien!*" he agreed. "Let us make the division swiftly, for I must be on my way—back to white men once more!"

Don Mário quivered, but said only:

"It shall all be as God wills. Let God, no other, be the judge!"

TÍO
PABLO



CHAPTER X

DON MÁRIO UNDERSTANDS

TOWARD night of the next day Don Mário rode—on a horse from Las Pocilgas—through the broad vegas to the Rancho de San Agustín.

Torn, lacerated, swollen with insect-bites, gaunt and weary and grim, he reined up at the outer corral gates and stiffly dismounted. He leaned a moment against the gates, hardly able to stand, as welcoming shouts rose from old Tío Pablo.

"The master! The master, home again! Praise all the saints—our master, home!"

The rancho woke to sudden life. Vaqueros set up a joyous tumult. Doña Perfecta and Lolita came running.

"Eyes of my soul!" the Doña cried, in the shelter of Don Mário's arms. "Again I see thee, thanks to God! And, *ay!*—how weary and how spent! But—the *Americano?*"

"Bitten by a *charcán*. Nothing could be done, to save him. It was God's will. I buried him as best I could, and set up a little wooden cross."

"*Pobrecito!*" The señora crossed herself. "May his soul, even though outside the faith, find rest! But thou, my treasure?"

"I am well. We had many hardships. All the animals were lost but one of the burros, that I left at Las Pocilgas. It matters nothing about them. What God has given, God can take. I rejoice only that I am well, and see thee again, *querida mía*. In a day or two, I shall be as always. And what has happened in my absence?"

He released her from his arms. Together they walked toward the ranch-house, while some of his people followed at a respectful distance, others led the horse away.

"Happened? Nothing much. Only, yesterday came two men from Puerto

Hondo, in a little ketch. There, you can see the vessel, just outside the bar." She pointed toward the lagoon, all a wimple of dying pastel shades. "They came ashore in a *cayuco*. They are here now." "Here? And what seek they?"

The wife shrugged, as they climbed the few brick steps up into the *zaguán*.

"How should I know, my husband? It is not for women to put their noses into men's porridge. They told me nothing, except that they wanted speech with thee."

"Hmmm! And what names did they give?"

"One is a Señor Tácito Montante. The other, thou knowest. Chato Piedra."

"What—Chato Piedra? The notary, that human buzzard?"

"Hush, *mi alma!* Remember, they are the guests beneath our roof. And Chato Piedra is a good lawyer."

"Good lawyer, bad neighbor!" Don Mário growled out the ancient proverb. "A curse on all notaries and men of the law! Where are these men, now?"

"There, down past the calf-pens." She pointed in the fading light. "Dost thou not see them? They have spent much time looking at our cattle, talking with the *vaqueros*, asking Tío Pablo about the number bred and branded and sold."

"So?" And Don Mário frowned. "Now they are coming toward the house."

"It is maybe that they want to buy the rancho?"

"This rancho is not for sale. I will speak with them, immediately."

"Wait, my soul, till thou hast rested and eaten."

"No, it shall be at once. Go in, Perfecta. It may be that that what we have to say will not be suitable for thy ears." He thrust her toward the entrance of the ranch-house. "Now, then," he muttered, "here is an egg that certainly needs salt. And I will salt it properly, if God wills!"

WITH a bow of frigid courtesy Don Mário greeted Chato Piedra's over-effusive, greeting, and acknowledged the introduction of the other man, Señor Tácito Montante.

"And to what," he asked, "do I owe the very great honor of this visit?"

"Let us not speak of that, this extremely beautiful evening," smiled the lawyer. "You have been away, traveling far. You are weary. Is not tomorrow another day?"

By the fading light over the sullen-flowing Río Fangoso and the vast, dim lagoon where rode the ketch from Puerto Hondo, Don Mário fixed bloodshot severe eyes on the lawyer. A little, fat, greasy fellow was this man of the law, with curled-up mustachios and a very much too heavy gold watch-chain.

Covertly smiling, Montante cast an oblique glance at the lawyer, as who should say: "Here now is a man who can catch even old birds with chaff!" Don Mário did not miss that glance. He bent his gaze on Montante—a gaunt bag of bones, swarthy and pockmarked.

"A Turco," thought the rancher. "Wolves of the same litter hunt together. There is evil, blowing in this wind!"

MONTANTE indeed bore all earmarks of being what the Mexicans call a "Turk," which is to say an Armenian. Now Montante spoke up:

"No business tonight, señor. My friend the lawyer well says that tomorrow is always another day."

"Tomorrow we may all be dead. Pardon me, but I must know the reason for your honoring me with this visit, no later than tonight!" returned Don Mário. He felt a nameless dread constricting his tired heart.

"If you insist," smiled the lawyer, lighting a cigarette, "I must inform you this gentleman has come to the Rancho San Agustín for the purpose of inspecting and appraising his new property."

"Ah, so?" the rancher queried, sensing relief. "And where may that property lie? Some mahogany forest or some chicle concession, up the river? Or it may be—"

"No, Don Mário. Let us whip no dogs about the bushes. The property he—my client—has acquired is this same Rancho San Agustín, where we now have the honor of finding ourselves. This very rancho, here, señor!"

For a moment Don Mário remained staring at him, seeming not to have heard.

"Eh? You say—"

"He has bought this rancho, Don Mário."

"No more riddles, please! To drink soup and to whistle at the same time is impossible. You, as a lawyer, are fond of spinning words and embroidering phrases. Now I ask you to speak plainly, Señor Piedra! What is the meaning of all this?"

"But I have already told you!" the lawyer affirmed. "This señor, now with

me, has bought your rancho. Bought and paid for it, and it is his!"

"Bought it?"

"Sí señor!"

"But I have never sold it! I do not understand. My rancho, my property—how can he have bought it, when I have not sold?"

"It is useless to deny, señor," replied the lawyer. "The papers are in order."

"Thousand devils! What papers?"

"What should they be, but the deeds?"

"Deeds? But—"

"Everything is properly recorded, Don Mário. First, the sale by you to your brother, Don Eduardo—lands, buildings, cattle, everything. Then, his transfer to my client, here, of all the above. It is all entirely legal, señor. The money has been paid to your brother, and there remains nothing for your family and for you to do but—"

"But what?"

"Need I tell you? To vacate the rancho. My client, the new owner, is taking possession immediately."

"God above!" choked Don Mário, and burst into a raw gust of execration. A flash of lightninglike comprehension blazed through his mind—understanding of the theft of his title-deeds by his brother Eduardo, forgery, villainy past all belief. "*Ladrones!* Thieves, sons of swine—"

A cry from the patio interrupted him; a shout in Tío Pablo's cracked voice:

"Bravo is here! The *Americano's* horse is here! Come quickly, Don Mário—for behold, Bravo has come!"

CONFUSION overwhelmed Don Mário. Then his brain cleared. Was he not after all a *caballero*, and of Spanish blood? Epithets, brawlings—these were for the vulgar. His voice steadied.

"A thousand pardons, señores! You are my guests, under my roof. Forgive what I have just said."

"There is no need to forgive, Don Mário," the lawyer answered. "We heard nothing."

"It is well. Let us proceed in order, and regularly. You say my brother Eduardo sold you this rancho?"

"Sí, señor."

"And on what date?"

"The eighteenth of December, last."

"I see. Five weeks ago. What price did your client pay him?"

"One hundred and twenty-five thousand pesos."

"Hmmm! A bargain. It is worth easily twice that sum. But never mind. And my brother is now where?"

The lawyer gestured vaguely.

"*Quién sabe?* It is believed he took boat for Vera Cruz, a fortnight past."

"It is believed? It is not known?"

"No, señor. Your brother's whereabouts—who can tell? Nothing is known of him, save that he is no longer seen at Puerto Hondo. But the papers, they are regular."

A MOMENT, Don Mário steadied himself, to think. So his brother's death was not yet known! This could mean only that the body had not been discovered. But the American must have lied. For why should even the rascally Eduardo have attempted a hold-up when he had just completed this much more lucrative villainy? . . . Unless, of course, this rascally lawyer and his confederate had stolen again the money they had paid Eduardo. . . . But wait! One hundred and twenty-five thousand pesos! Was that not indeed the precise sum which the American had quoted the hold-up man as having been robbed of himself? Now at last the pieces of this puzzle fitted together. . . . At all events, one chapter of family anguish—that of scandal and publicity—would be spared them.

The Don glanced up.

"I see," he nodded. "So then, my brother has just disappeared. Probably to Vera Cruz, eh?"

"Sí, señor," the lawyer agreed.

"And in that case—"

"Master, master!" interrupted Tío Pablo, arriving with sombrero in hand. "Forgive me, if I break in upon your talking, but Bravo is here!"

"*Está bien*, Tío. I will go, in a minute." Then to the lawyer and the Turco: "Now, señores, I have to tell you very plainly that if you are laughing over your bargain, I shall change that laughter to the merriment of a nut between two stones. I never sold this property to my brother, or to any man. There has been forgery at work, and—"

"Careful, Don Mário! The law is on our side."

"That is a game two can play at. Even though employing a lawyer to fight another lawyer is like calling a tiger to chase away a dog, it can be done. I shall do it. And I shall get at the bottom of this well, where truth lies." He turned to Tío Pablo. "Tell me, Pablo, how

many *vaqueros* are now on the pay-list of this rancho?"

"Forty-seven."

"How many of them would die, defending this home of theirs?"

"Forty-seven, señor. And I make forty-eight!"

"What?" exclaimed the lawyer. "You threaten us?"

"By no means. You are my guests. Here you are in your own house—till tomorrow noon. After that—"

"After that, we are also in our own house! This property is ours."

"As you will," smiled the Don. "I am merely telling you that you are safe here—till tomorrow at midday. After that, I shall answer for nothing. I shall not be here. I have a long journey to make. When I return, let me not find you at the Rancho San Agustín. And should you seek to press this matter in a court of law, I have private knowledge and information which would give you a jail for a dwelling instead of this house. . . . And now, you will excuse me? *Señores, adiós!*"

He turned to Tío Pablo, whose one good eye blinked nervously.

"You say Bravo has come back?"

"Sí, señor. He is now in the farther corral. And so torn and wounded! Come, señor; come and see!"

"I go with you, Tío Pablo!"

Together they strode along the tiles, and away through the dusk to the corral where torch-flares were smokily gleaming.

"But, señor," ventured Pablo, "I thought you told us both horses were dead?"

"The word I used, Tío, was *lost*. So then—"

An excitedly arguing group of *vaqueros* were gathered round the exhausted animal. Don Mário thrust half a dozen men aside.

"Here—a torch!"

BY the guttering light he made swift examination. The horse, spent and with drooping head, could barely stand. Mired, covered with ticks, with wounds from leeches, with long and bleeding thorn-gashes, it made a sorry spectacle.

"This is bad, bad," Don Mário judged. "But Bravo will recover. Nothing fatal here."

"Ay, *pobrecito!*"

"Off with saddle and bridle!"

He himself removed the wreckage of the saddle-bag; the holsters that still

contained rifle and shotgun, the machete hanging in its sheath at the saddle-bow.

What had happened, he could mentally sketch with only too terrible clarity. The torn, ripped saddle-bag gave him evidence. On the side where he had helped Sturgis stow the gold slab, the stitching had ripped. All that side was hanging down loose, eloquently proclaiming what had taken place.

The horse had escaped, either from Sturgis, living; or had trekked home from Sturgis, dead. Somewhere a branch had caught and torn the leather. The weight of the gold had finished that work. Now, God knows where—in some morass, some slimy pool—the golden slab was lying. Even to dream of ever finding it again was madness.

The other side of the saddle-bag, though, gave an even more fatal message. For still untouched in that pocket lay all the weight of food and supplies that Don Mário had left with Sturgis. There too was all the ammunition, everything the American had depended on for salvation, for life itself.

SWIFT determination gripped Don Mário. His nerves tautened; strength flowed back through vein and muscle.

"Saddle Pepita!" he ordered. "And saddle Chiquita, too. Load them with food, *aguardiente*, guns and ammunition, with hammocks, machetes. Tío Pablo!"

"Señor?"

"You are old, but wiry as a *tigre*. Make ready at once to travel! Your one eye sees more than other men's two!"

"Your word, señor, is my law."

"Hasten, then. You and I ride south again, this night. At once—within the hour!"

"*Mi alma*, no!"

Doña Perfecta's voice broke in on the confused tumult of this astonishing announcement. There she stood now in the dust of the corral. Pale, with clasped hands, she fixed dark eyes on Don Mário.

"Thou canst not go away, again!" she exclaimed. "To what end, since the *Americano* is dead and buried? This is madness!"

"Silence!" he commanded. "Come with me!"

He led her to the ranch-house, into their bedroom; lighted a candle—for now dark had come—then closed the shutters. By the wavering light, a crucifix looked down on the ranchero and his wife, from white-plastered walls.

"What is this mystery, Mário?"

"My heart, come here!" He took her by the hand, led her to the crucifix. "There are certain things thou must know. Secret things, never to be told, till eternity is over—and not even then. If I tell thee, dost thou swear silence?"

"I swear!" She crossed herself.

"It is well. Now, listen to me!" His eyes burned redly. Mud still smeared his face, but it was the face once more of a *caballero*. "Time is short. Every moment is golden. So my words shall be few. Thou dost remember that my brother Eduardo was here, seven months ago?"

"Yes. And then—"

"He robbed me. How he got my keys, I do not know. But he took them, opened the leather-covered chest, stole my title-deeds. The deeds to this, our home, all our property, everything."

"Impossible!"

"No, true. And after all I had done for him!" And Don Mário went on to confide in her the whole story of Eduardo's treachery—and of his death at the hands of the American he had attempted to rob.

"Mother of God!" exclaimed the señora. "And now the American also is dead? Dead from the bite of a *charcán*? Ay, what fatality!"

"That was a lie," Don Mário replied thickly, with dry lips. "If he be dead or not, I do not know. Heaven send him its protection till I find him! We were far in the jungle. I discovered it was he who, defending his own life, worked justice on Eduardo. Madness came upon me. I would have killed him, but he was stronger than I. The oath of brotherhood between us, I renounced. I sent him eastward, to Belize—if by any miracle he could reach it. And now—"

"Now, *almita mía*?"

"Now comes his horse with his food, weapons, ammunition, all that could have saved him. Now my blood-brother is either dead there in the swamps, or he is wandering, a madman without hope. And I must—"

"But how wilt thou find him?"

"By returning to the spot where we parted, and then following the track he has made. Tío Pablo can follow it. He is a famous tracker. With only one eye, he could trace the footsteps of an ant, across a desert of brass."

"Go then, Mário. Go with God!"

"And thou, Perfecta, with God remain! Have no fear. This matter of the forger, of the Turco who is a gambler and

a thief, shall all be made right. Our home shall not be taken from us. Remember only, silence!"

"I will remember."

CHAPTER XI

THE GREATER BOND

TWO frightful-looking scarecrows, bloated, reeking with mud and slime, stumbled up a little knoll under the stewing overheated stifle of a poisonous wilderness. Up through a tangle of *chayas*—forest-nettles that burn like living flame—they dragged themselves, and with hoarse cries laid hands upon a third and even more ghastly scarecrow that crouched half-blind and gibbering, that laughed with blood-stopping merriment.

Then this merriment suddenly faded out into a desperate and insane terror. Uttering a throaty howl, the third scarecrow writhed out of the others' clutch, then fought his staggering path into a thorny jungle, fell prone.

"Catch him!" croaked Don Mário—he could not shout—between parched, blackened lips. "*Por Dios*, quick, before he gets into that swamp!"

OLD Tío Pablo, tough as leather and with strength still left in his stringy muscles, crashed after the fugitive. Don Mário's inflamed and squinting eyes dimly perceived a vague, struggling confusion. It ceased. He heard the old man gasping.

"I have him, señor! Can you—help me?"

Together, their joined forces hardly equal to the task, they dragged Sturgis up the knoll again, and laid him down. Inert, unconscious, he remained there, covered with ticks and red-bugs, bitten by leeches and mosquitoes, plastered with mud. Scratches, cuts and bruises, swellings from poisonous plants, made him hardly recognizable as human.

"*Tequila!*" gasped Don Mário. "Quick, Tío—my right-hand saddle-bag. *Tequila*, here!"

Later, Sturgis lay on a poncho under a royal-palm that crowned the knoll. Several slugs of fiery white liquor had been poured into him, some of the filth smeared from his exterior. He had begun to look again something like a man.

Tied to a tree, the horses uneasily nickered, stung by merciless insects. They too showed signs of fearful going. A gorgeous butterfly lighted on a blade

of savanna-grass. Near it a *chintún*-spider lay in wait—a flat, crablike spider, swift and stealthy, horny-plated with wicked, caliper-like jaws. Its bite meant fever to man, death to any small creature. It crouched to attack the butterfly; but this, indifferent to near fate, wavered off through the deep green aisles and vanished.

"Ah, with wings like that, we should soon be home again," murmured Tío Pablo, crouching by the little fire they had dared risk. Aromas of coffee and bacon idled up through the tropic heat. "Many a weary league, though—" One-eyed, he blinked.

"Speak not of that, Tío," the rancher hoarsely reproved him. "These ants travel more slowly, but they at least know where they are going!" He blew cigarette-smoke, and pointed at what seemed a tiny, moving line of green umbrellas. Each umbrella was a neatly cut-out piece of leaf, carried over the head of a marching *vivijagua*-ant.

SILENCE a moment, broken only by the strident cry of a blackbird, the hum of a gold and crimson hummingbird as with blurred wings and long-curved needle bill it quested sugary sap.

"Ay, what a life!" at last the old man muttered. "We weep the day we are born, and every day we live explains why. And the *Americano*—he will live to weep again?"

"If God wills. But rather, I hope, to smile."

"Of course!" And Tío Pablo's parchment face wrinkled into something like a grin. He stroked his horsehair-like Indian mustache, chief object of his pride. "But from what you judge, señor, does God will it now?"

"Yes," Don Mário nodded. "He sleeps. He is young yet, and stronger than a wild boar. These gringos—it is very hard to kill them. What powerful devils of men they be! We have food and drink in plenty. They are good medicine; never forgetting the tequila."

"Which is the best of all. Then too, the saints will help. I have my scapulary. They *must* help!"

"It may be."

Silence again. A black scorpion crept from beneath rotting leaves, approached the sleeper. Don Mário's boot turned it to custardy pulp, that quivered.

"Lawyer!" he growled. "*Turco!*" His heel ground the pulp into dank earth.

Suddenly a third voice sounded, weak but perfectly rational:

"Give me a cigarette, eh?"

"Here!"

Don Mário lighted one, passed it to Peter Sturgis, A.B. For a moment the American lay there, smoking. Vapor drifted on the dusky jungle air, that seemed to quiver with green fires.

"Boy!" murmured Sturgis, in English.

"Last thing I remember, I thought I was selling ice-water in hell!"

Don Mário knelt beside him.

"You know me, brother?"

"Of course. What's all the trouble been about? Where have you been?"

"I have been away—learning wisdom.

Only three days have passed, in time, but more than a thousand years in understanding. Great has been our gain."

"But the gold?"

"Ah, never mind the gold. Dreams come; dreams go. And life remains. Never forgetting, *hermano mío*, that your mining-option will be all taken care of by funds which I have safely set aside—and may fortune smile on it! And now, will you forgive?"

"Forgive what?"

"The wrong I have done you."

"What wrong? Brother of mine, what are you talking about?"

Don Mário's hand, gashed and swollen, sought the American's. For a moment the two hands of the blood-brothers tightened on each other. Then, with a queer little catch in his throat—

"*Oye, chico!*" the rancher hailed Tío Pablo.

"Señor?"

"Coffee, here! Bacon—a tortilla!" The words trembled. "Son of a lazy father, make haste!"

"*Si, señor!* Coffee and all, they shall be ready in one small minute!"

A little pause. Then—

"Brother," smiled Don Mário, "what after all is gold, weighed against wisdom of the heart?"

THEY shook hands again. And Peter Sturgis knew that Don Mário would keep his word about funds for that option. He knew, too, that with the rising price of gold and silver he should have no trouble in selling it, and repaying Don Mário. Better still, he would soon be going home now; and in his pocket would be the money to rescue his dad. Peter Sturgis, A.B., was getting a break at last.

THE END

Illustrated by
Henry Thiede



"We're not French," the
Lieutenant told him. "We're
German spies."

Fists Across the Sea

A right diverting comedy in which a searchlight battalion entertains an angel unawares.

By CHARLES LAYNG

THESE Britishers is yachsins," said Captain Sammy Shevsky, late of the Lafayette Escadrille. "I quite agree," said Lieutenant Adams Quincy, IV, late of Lewisburg Square.

"They is yonkels," said Captain Shevsky, of the Second Avenue Shevskys.

"You're right," said Lieutenant Quincy, of the Beacon Hill Quincy IV's.

"They are Chochems," said the Captain, who had the Croix de Guerre, with enough palms to stock a South Sea atoll.

"That—and more," said the Lieutenant, who had a Phi Beta key.

"Fooley—Englishers is low-lives," said the Captain, equally adept at mangling English or the English.

"You've stated the case splendidly," said the Lieutenant, who had never so much as heard a split infinitive until after he was twenty-one.

"They are schlemiels, chamers and nudniks," said the Captain, who was five feet five in unusually high boots.

"An expressive language, Yiddish—I must learn it," said the Lieutenant, who was six feet four in his stocking feet. . . .

"I say, can either of you chaps tell me where I may find the Second Searchlight Company?" inquired a clear British voice from the table opposite.

Leaving, for the moment, the two officers and the as yet unidentified owner of the voice in the Café Vachespagnol in an unimportant French town (and in the final analysis, what French town is important?) let us explain:

This hatred of the English on the part of the Captain and the Lieutenant was no mere hothouse growth, fostered in the past few hours spent in sampling the horrors of war as exemplified by the *vin du pays* of the Café Vachespagnol. No, its roots extended far deeper than that—shooting, perhaps, a stray tendril back to the Crimean War on the one hand, and the Boston Tea Party on the other.

Invalided home after bringing down three enemy planes with the Escadrille,

Captain Shevsky, with the tenacity of his race, had promptly reenlisted in the Searchlight Battalion. There he found Lieutenant Quincy, scion of a long line of Quincys distinguished in wars that had come along providentially every generation, seemingly for the sole purpose of glorifying an already glorified Quincy line. But then, this patness of wars was not surprising, since all things great and small naturally arranged themselves for the enhanced glory of the Quincy line, under the ægis of that slightly blue-nosed Fate which watches over Bostonians.

BY the time they reached the shores of Albion, both of them were rather strongly of the opinion that they knew something of war in general and of anti-aircraft searchlights in particular. In this opinion they were speedily disillusioned; and the British were at the business end of the disillusionment. Sundry sergeants-major, born within the boom of Bow Bells, told them what was wrong with them, in high-pitched Cockney, and with flagrant disregard of their superior rank.

Mired in a bog of bloaters and of blighters, they were in no fit condition to appreciate Major Lord Parkridge when he came to give them a final looking-over before they departed for France. His Lordship the Major was the possessor of a mustache such as had never been unveiled to Bostonian eyes since the days of John L. Sullivan, and a satire as biting as the stalwart right of that hearty. The Lieutenant he called Quinsy, with a throaty inflection, and the Captain's name he refused to attempt at all. In peace-time, the major rode jumpers; in wartime, he rode Americans; nor spared he the whip and spur in either case.

It was the unlimbering test that drove the final spike into the bloody but still quivering heart of Anglo-American relations. When the members of the Second Searchlight Company got to England, they could, if pressed for time, unlimber the light and its generator from the truck in fifteen minutes. This was one of the legion of things that the sergeants-major had told them were wrong; and bitterly the Captain and the Lieutenant sweat blood over it. At last they were satisfied—and then came Major Parkridge. For him they put on an exhibition of unlimbering, and against all the laws of probability, it went through without a hitch.

"There, sir," said the glowing Lieutenant Adams Quincy, IV, "you have just seen a portable light unlimbered in two minutes, twenty-one and two-fifths seconds."

"What was the delay?" asked His Lordship the Major.

International amity thereupon crawled into an exceedingly small hole and died; and Captain Shevsky and Lieutenant Quincy became English-haters. The star-shelled nights in France, stabbed by the beams of the groping searchlights, were no more pyrotechnical in their display than the lurid descriptions of the English with which the Captain and the Lieutenant whiled away the midnight hours. Perhaps, then, it was only retribution that brought the Duke of Fleetwood down upon the Second Searchlight Company on his inspection tour. The howls that went up when they got the order to receive the royal Duke brought mule-skinners on the run from miles away.

"He's undoubtedly a frosty old indescribable with long whiskers," said the Lieutenant.

Then up spake the doughty Captain, and—but let's not repeat what he said; it is after all a personal matter between him and his rabbi on his deathbed.

SUFFICE it to say they were now in the Café Vachespagnol, preparing to meet their royal guest, when the aforementioned voice broke in upon them. Its owner, a callow infant of perhaps eighteen, apple-cheeked and blond, immaculately monocled and in a British uniform, was still looking at them inquiringly.

"One of de gink's staff noisery," whispered the Captain.

The Lieutenant turned to the youth. "*Vous-avez dit?*" he asked, exercising his only French.

"Pardon, messieurs, I didn't know you were French."

"We're not," the Lieutenant told him. "We're German spies."

"Ah, then you're sure to know where I can find the Second Searchlight Company."

Shaking their heads sadly, and taking the infant by the arm, the Captain and the Lieutenant fared forth into the gathering dusk with him. It was raining—I court tautology with this statement, because it is just barely possible that some of my readers may never have been in France. To those in the know, however, a good and relatively solid road



"Thanks for the show," he said.
 "It was ripping, positively ripping. But I must be toddling now. Toodle-oo!"

offered itself from the café to the field where the searchlight batteries were carefully camouflaged. But the Captain and the Lieutenant, with their precious prize in tow, did not take this road. No; after one careful look at their companion's uniform, reeking with the aura of Bond Street,—Old Bond Street, at that—they set off across the Sahara Desert. This was a particularly uninviting field that got its name from the fact that, in all weathers, its trench-scarred, ten-acre surface was a veritable quagmire, and from the further fact that its outer edges were the camping-place of a regiment of Senegalese.

Like fishing smacks off the Newfoundland Banks, the three wallowed in the heavy going, and in four minutes the Englishman looked like something the cat would think twice about before bringing in. The Americans knew the location of the Sahara's every sinkhole, a knowledge acquired by the process of falling into them a time or two. A look passed from the Captain to the Lieutenant, and they began to use this knowledge, to the extreme discomfort of their companion.

"I say," he said, as his dripping face emerged from the fourth water-filled transverse into which he had fallen, "what do you chaps think of the submarine warfare?"

Captain Shevsky looked at Lieutenant Quincy, and the Lieutenant looked right back.

"What's your name, youngster?" the Lieutenant asked.

The infant spat out a mouthful of muddy French mud, and somehow contrived a smile while doing so.

"Harold," he replied; "but my friends call me Smeller."

It was perhaps significant that his guides led him into no more sinkholes. There were only two or three more left, anyway, and they weren't deep ones.

"A truck you can take back to town, Smeller," said the Captain, when at length they had arrived at the lights, from which the crews were even now removing the camouflage in preparation for the nightly winking at the stars.

"But I don't want to go back," Smeller replied. "It's ripping here, and I'd like to stay with you chaps all night to see the fun."

"Rippink fun he calls it," said the Captain, and the Lieutenant slowly shook his head.

None the less, Smeller remained, and presently the three of them were crammed into a spotter's hole, some feet in advance of the light, peering about through their night-glasses. Hours went by, with nothing much happening.

"I wonder why the mossy-whiskered

Duke hasn't arrived," the Lieutenant remarked at length.

"For vy vonder?" asked the Captain, "Troubles we got enough without more Britishers."

Smeller grinned.

"You don't fancy us, then?"

"No," said the others in emphatic and unflattering chorus.

SMELLER might have replied crushingly, but at that moment the other two stiffened into sudden attention, as the drone of a motor came to their ears.

"Search ready!" the Lieutenant called, as he swept the night with his glasses. Smeller looked too, but it was the Captain who first caught the black smudge against the lugubrious sky.

"Search on!" he called, and a rattle of similar orders came from the string of other spotters' holes.

Groping rays pierced the gloom.

"Search left!"

"Search right!"

"Search up!"

"Search down!"

The eager spotters yelped their commands at the light crews, and the silver fingers ringed with mist entwined, then disentangled only to entwine again, as they hunted, hunted across the sky. Smeller gasped in admiration, and then gave forth an exultant yelp of "Yoicks!" as, for one brief second, one of the probing fingers flashed the cross on the wing of the German plane into bold relief. Another light caught it, and the anti-aircraft batteries suddenly gave tongue like dogs baying at the moon. Then, as the falling shrapnel sprinkled downward, the plane swooped and whirled out of the beams. Eagerly the whirling rays sought it again, striving to pin it in their silver path like a butterfly on a card, but their searching was in vain, and presently the motor went into diminuendo, and the "aunties" stopped their by now futile uproar.

"Search out!" the Lieutenant called, with a disappointed grunt, and the leaping glow of the searchlight crater lapsed into sudden and startling darkness.

"Why all the commands?" Smeller asked eagerly when it was all over. "I thought the lights had some sort of gadget on them for detecting planes."

"They have," the Lieutenant explained; "it's called a paraboloid, and shows us where to aim by its rising and descending volume of sound picked up through the earphones."

"Oh, splendid!"

"Very," the Lieutenant answered dryly. "Only, with a hundred trucks back-firing in the vicinity, not to mention the aunties almost in our laps, the damned thing doesn't work."

Once again they resumed their vigil; and until nearly dawn they sat with no more excitement than that provided by Smeller's frequent sneezes. Then, abruptly, leaping pencils of light suddenly burst forth beyond a near-by ridge.

"Hope they have more luck than we did," the Lieutenant grumbled.

"Will the chappie come over here?" Smeller inquired.

"I don't think so. If he gets out of their light net, he'll probably consider himself lucky and head for home."

A sudden shuddering roar, and a huge jet of crimsoned water spurting out of the Sahara, proved almost at once that the Lieutenant's guess was wrong. A frantic crackle of, "Search on!" went down the line of lights. Almost at once another roar sounded, as another pair of bombs came down; but this time a series of blood-curdling screams, followed by fierce cries that had something of the beat of the tom-tom in them, indicated that they had found human targets.

"Oy!" Captain Shevsky sputtered excitedly. "The Senegalese he got dot time."

THEN a cry of triumph rose from the whole searchlight crew—one light had the bomber fixed. Then another pinned him, and almost instantly, a third. With a snarl, the aunties unlimbered their shrapnel teeth at the ghostlike plane that seemed to be hanging transfixed upon the light-beams. Frantically the bomber's pilot put the heavy ship into a spinning turn that must have set her struts to singing the Funeral March, but the whirling lights stayed with him, and a fourth one joined them.

"We'll get him now, sure," the Lieutenant yelled.

Another despairing and fruitless turn, and the fifth light had him, followed by another and another, until the blaze of almost the whole battery threw the plane into such bold relief that the watchers almost imagined they could detect the features of the pilot and his observer.

Then, suddenly, above the welter of other noises came the menacing and unmistakable roar of a power dive.

"He's coming down our beam!" the Lieutenant yelled.

Hopeless, and in a last mad gesture, the German pilot was diving his ship straight down the ray of light.

"Oh, sporting!" the Smeller cried.

"Search out!" screamed the Lieutenant above the din, and the searchlight crew wasted no time obeying the order.

BLINDED by sudden darkness, the German none the less came on, but he missed the light, flattened out, and zoomed over the heads of the three in the spotter's hole at a distance, as Shevsky later swore, no wider than a schiksa's ankle. In the faint light they could see him try to lift her nose; but it was no go, and into the Sahara they crashed.

"Guts, what he's got," said Shevsky.

"Intestinal fortitude," murmured Quincy, in slight reproof.

"I like *guts* better," Smeller decided.

Then the three jumped out of their hole, the same thought animating all of them.

"Maybe they're still alive—they landed in a soft spot," the Lieutenant shouted, as they ran toward the plane.

A discouraged dawn began to filter through the French atmosphere. By its light they could see that the observer was dead, but the pilot brushed the smashed goggles from his bleeding face and crawled out of what was left of the cockpit as they approached the wreckage. He tried to rise, and grinned apologetically when he found he couldn't.

Then, abruptly, running figures loomed in the murk, howling the howl of the wolf-pack.

"The Senegalese!" Quincy shouted. "They want revenge for their dead."

He and Shevsky tugged frantically at their automatics; but Smeller, armed with nothing but a swagger-stick and a mud-bespattered monocle, walked straight up to the mob of blood-mad savages. The hearts of the Americans stood still as they saw the gleam of knives among the pack of Senegalese.

Smeller burst into a spate of French as a huge negro walked threateningly up to him, and the black replied with a slaving snarl. Back came Smeller with another flow of words, and two or three more negroes grouped about him. Several of the others edged over toward the plane, where the Americans grimly stood their ground over the pilot.

Still Smeller held them off, his shrill boyish voice giving incisive orders. His face was gleaming dead-white beneath the mud, and the less said about his

knees the better; but he was standing his ground like a general at review.

Then suddenly the Senegalese were not to be denied. Knives gleamed, and a menacing group of them surrounded the still-talking Smeller. The Americans groaned, and then they gave a shout, for slithering through the mud came a group of French officers, backed by half a hundred poilus. Angrily the hard-bitten French colonials screamed at the Senegalese in their own language, and the negroes growled back for a moment. But the members of the searchlight batteries were coming up now, and finally the savages turned and moved off like shamefaced children.

One of the French officers turned to stare curiously into the mud-stained face of Smeller, and then he gasped.

"*Altesse!*" he cried wonderingly.

They talked excitedly for a moment; then Smeller turned to the Americans.

"Thanks for the show," he said. "It was ripping, positively ripping. But I must be toddling now. Toodle-oo!"

Just in time, the Captain and the Lieutenant halted their tongues from replying, "pip-pip!"

NEXT evening found them again in the Café Vachespagnol, discussing their visitor of the previous night.

"I wonder who he was?" Quincy said.

"And I vunder vot happened to the Dook," Shevsky replied.

The Lieutenant jumped as though some one had fired a .75 immediately adjacent to his left ear.

"Great Jupiter, you don't suppose—" he began, then left off speaking, to thumb over the pages of a French dictionary he produced from a pocket.

"*Altesse* means *highness*," he said at length.

Silently the Captain and the Lieutenant regarded each other; and then, for a change, they regarded the label of the bottle that stood on the table between them. At that moment there arrived Captain Smithers of the First Searchlight Company.

"How'd you boys like the Duke last night?" he asked; then, without waiting for a reply: "In my opinion, all English are saps of the purest ray serene."

"Oh, I dunno," said Captain Sammy Shevsky, of the Second Avenue Shevskys. "Some of my best friends is Britishers."

"Quite," said Lieutenant Adams Quincy, IV, of the Beacon Hill Quincy IV's.



WHEN I signed on as radio operator of the U. S. Shipping Board wooden steamship *Dumaru* in 1918, I was sixteen years old. I was proud that I had been able to get a commercial operator's license and with zest I anticipated the long cruise the ship was to make to the Philippine Islands.

The *Dumaru* never completed the cruise. She blew up in the Pacific, and there followed a drifting voyage of thirty-two men in a lifeboat, with deaths by hunger and thirst, with suicide and cannibalism. I was one of the fourteen survivors of that lifeboat.

On September 12, 1918, the *Dumaru* left San Francisco with a cargo of gasoline, munitions, and naval stores consigned to the U. S. Naval Base at Cavite, Philippine Islands. Touching at Honolulu for fuel, we proceeded to Guam, where we discharged naval supplies. Ensign Arthur Holmes came aboard to accompany us on the final lap of our westward voyage. He had commanded the naval tug *Piscataqua* at Guam and was being transferred to Cavite.

We steamed out of Apra Harbor early in the afternoon of October 16, 1918, on a straight westerly course for Manila Bay. The ensign was to occupy my sleeping quarters on the main deck. While I was moving my belongings to a room farther aft, I noticed that the sky was growing dark rapidly. In two hours we were bucking a strong head wind. Heavy black clouds blocked the horizon. Despite the wind, the air felt hot and sticky. Recalling my shipmates' tales of southern waters, I realized we were in for a heavy tropical storm.

The storm broke at five o'clock in a fury of thunder and lightning. I went forward for supper, and as I left the deck, a terrific bolt of lightning struck the sea just off our starboard quarter.

Twenty-four

The terrible story of the Dumaru, which blew up off Guam in 1918, and of an open-boat voyage which rivals that of the victims of the Bounty mutineers.

All of our forward holds were filled with cases of gasoline. The dynamite, gun-cotton, torpedo-heads and munitions that made up the balance of our cargo lay in the after holds. The officers sensed the seriousness of the situation. Little was said as we began supper.

Then the worst happened. A jagged streak of lightning struck the *Dumaru* somewhere near the forward mast. There was a terrific crash. The mess-room deck settled with a jar that shook our teeth. A wall of flame shot upward before the bulkhead.

We rushed for our stations. When I reached the main deck, the entire forward part of the *Dumaru* was a mass of white-hot flames. The head wind blew the fire rapidly aft. The bridge and forward superstructure were already ablaze, kindled by scattered gasoline.

As I started up the ladder to the radio-house, located on the boat-deck just aft of the smokestack, Howell, the chief engineer, met me. "The old man is going to abandon ship!" he shouted. "Can you get Guam?"

I nodded. I caught a glimpse of an excited group of men milling about the starboard lifeboat davits as I closed the door of the radio shack.

Starting the transmitter, I tuned the set to send out a broad interfering wave and began pounding out the S.O.S. and our position. At intervals I listened for an answer, but could hear nothing save the almost constant crash of static from the electrical storm. The naval radio station at Guam was scarcely thirty miles away. But each time I cut in the receiver and varied the dials, I heard only the crashing of static.

I had been at the key perhaps fifteen minutes when the door flew open and the chief engineer shouted to me. I threw down the head-set. "The last boat is

REAL EX-

Days Adrift

By THERON BEAN

The wireless operator of the doomed ship, who stuck to his post till the last moment.

over, Sparks!" Howell yelled. "Come on!" He disappeared in the rain that now fell like a cloudburst.

I shut the door for another fling at the key in a prolonged hope of raising Guam. But no answer came. The flames had struck the shack now. I shut off the transmitter and dashed down the ladder to the main deck.

I could see a boat bobbing about in the heavy seas astern of the *Dumaru*. There was no one on the after-decks of the ship. I splashed through the water on the after well deck and dived over the stern. I swam to the lifeboat, and Howell and Holmes hauled me over the side.

The lifeboat was crowded, and there was great confusion. The mate and the men at the oars were trying to steady the craft in the heavy seas.

Although the *Dumaru* carried two life-rafts and four lifeboats, nested in pairs, only two of the lifeboats had been launched. The patent davits and rope falls had fouled so that the men, many of them novices as seamen, could not get the other two boats into the water. The first boat had pulled away with only nine men. The other boat—to which I had swum—was commanded by Chief Officer August Waywood. He had filled it with thirty-one men, but it had drifted rapidly astern before Captain Borresen and four other men could get aboard. The five marooned men had then pushed a life-raft into the sea and somehow clambered aboard. They pulled away from the dangerous ship with the oars that formed part of the raft's equipment.

The *Dumaru* burned rapidly now, the drenching rain having no apparent effect on the fire. She had swung about some in the wind, but the flames steadily ate their way aft toward the high explosives.

"Lay hold and pull!" the mate bel- lowed at the men on the oars.

Each of us has had at least one crowded hour of excitement in his life that is well worth telling about. Here five of your fellow-readers relate their most interesting adventures. (For complete details of this Real Experience contest, see page 1.)

When perhaps a half-mile separated us from the blazing vessel the munitions ignited. We saw the *Dumaru* torn into a jumble of flaming timbers. There was a dull roar, a tremendous swell, and burning embers littered the sea where the ship had been. Waywood guided the lifeboat back along the edge of the burning wreckage. We lighted signal flares. Time and again we would think we could see an answering torch. When we rowed to it, we would find but flickering débris.

Abandoning hope of meeting our ship-mates, the mate set a course for Guam, and the men rowed steadily for a time. The wind was favorable. A few hours' hard rowing might have brought us to Guam, but we were afraid of piling up on the reefs along its shores in the dark.

NONE of us doubted Guam had heard our distress signals, and felt certain a boat sent out would find us. Anyway, we could make the island by rowing the next morning. So oars were stowed, and the sea-anchor tossed out to keep us from drifting during the night. We spread the boat's sail for shelter from the pelting rain—precious rain that we were to pray for in days to follow!—and crawled beneath the canvas.

The morning dawned clear. We could see for miles. But there was no sign of a rescue ship. Of course our boat was a speck on the Pacific; it might take all day for a searching ship to sight us. Lashing two oars together for a mast, we set our lug-sail to take advantage of the wind. According to the compass in the bow, it would blow us inshore. We brought the craft closer and closer to Guam, taking turns at the oars. Toward noon we could distinguish the island mountains on the horizon.

Then the wind shifted, and the boat would not tack. She was a flat-bot-

PERIENCES

tomed type, designed to be towed by a power-boat. She was stanch but clumsy, and would not sail into the wind. We dropped the sheet and devoted our efforts to the oars. A strong offshore current doubled the handicap of the headwind. The best oarsmen could not overcome it. Guam faded from sight.

The boat contained two large tins of hardtack and two twenty-gallon capacity fresh-water tanks. Mike Sutse, the bos'n, sounded the tanks. One was half full; the other held five or six gallons. The tropical heat had probably evaporated much of the water while the lifeboats hung in their chocks on the decks of the *Dumarú*. Waywood, a veteran seaman, knew better than any of us what the future might hold. He passed out one sea-biscuit and a whisky-glass of water to each man. That would be the daily ration, he decided.

SEVEN days we rowed. At night, the sea-anchor was put out to keep us from drifting too far from the vicinity of Guam. Arguing over chances of rescue made up half the daily conversation. There were a few clean-cut American lads and a few stanch old seamen like Jim Ferriter, but for the most part the men were of foreign extraction. Bickering went on continually.

To maintain discipline and some sort of morale, the officers finally agreed that the mate was in charge of navigating the craft, Holmes and Howell were to look after rationing the water and hardtack, and Harmon, Mackey and I were to look after keeping the boat clean and end arguments over places to sleep.

Some of the men were beyond discipline. The ship's cook, a doleful negro called Graveyard Shaw, refused all duty and devoted his time to lying in the bottom of the boat, alternately cursing and praying, or howling for water—which he frequently got, when a disgusted shipmate would dash a bucket of sea water in his face.

We aimed at a sort of routine. A notch cut in a thwart denoted the passing of a day. The boat was washed down from stem to stern regularly. At night we stood hourly look-out watches. Rations were distributed at the same regular intervals. But we were crowded, weak and miserable. The seas splashing into the boat soaked our skins, and salt-water boils developed to add to our suffering.

At the end of seven days the mate told us: "The trade-winds are carrying

us west, always west. We can make the Philippines."

A majority had faith in Waywood. By vote we decided to sail for the Philippines, more than a thousand miles away.

Howell carved his name in the gunwale of the boat one day, and the name and address of his wife. Other men with pocket-knives took up the carving. Each day new names were added, or some incident of the wreck of the *Dumarú* until a running record of the disaster decorated the oaken strips of the lifeboat.

On the thirteenth day, in a frenzy of prayers and curses, Shaw died. It was Death's first visit to the lifeboat. Howell held a short service, and we buried Shaw over the side. Strange to say, the sharks that had followed us since the first morning disappeared then.

Our water-supply had come to an end. There was no indication of rain to replenish it. We had pilot-bread left, it was true, but our throats had become so parched we had to soak the biscuit in salt water to down it. It was water our throats and bodies demanded. It was thirst that made our throats burn and our tongues thick and swollen. The sea stretched about us, beckoned us to drink.

We got some relief by washing our bodies in the salt water each day, splashing it on one another with a bailing pump. Finally some of the men could resist the clear green water no longer. Olsen, the engineer, was the first to try sipping the brine. Howell joined him.

"If you just sip a little of it," Olsen explained, "it won't hurt you."

Jim Ferriter censored him. "You are a fool," the old seaman said. "He had cut a button from his jumper and sucked it. I tried that too, and found that it eased the burning in my throat.

Olsen soon ceased sipping the salt water. Tossing reason to the winds, he downed the brine by the cupful. On the morning of the seventeenth day he was delirious. His strength failed rapidly; at noon he lay stiff and cold. We buried him with a brief ceremony, and looked after the others who were fast approaching the end. Within two days we buried five men in the Pacific, all delirious before death.

Our little steward, Christensen, went to his end in another way. His fair skin burned and blistered in the tropical sun until he could stand the agony no longer, and threw himself into the sea.

A burly Greek fireman called George, who had proved himself a dangerous man

in the stokehold of the *Dumaru*, seemed utterly unmoved by anything that occurred. He expressed small interest in anything except his daily rations.

It was not surprising that a man like George should be the first to suggest cannibalism. He told us bluntly that there was nothing else to do. The ghastly idea met with hearty opposition, and we heard no more from him for a time.

Harmon and Mackey had a more humane idea for cheating Davy Jones. They outlined an ingenious evaporator, and we set to work on it. A bucket with part of the side cut out formed the furnace. One of the large hardtack tins half filled with brine and set on top of the furnace was our boiler. We connected this with an empty water-tank by using the cylinder of a bailing pump for a connecting-pipe. We had only a hatchet for cutting holes in the boiler and tank. To prevent leakage, we wrapped the joints with cloth torn from life-preservers.

Anything at hand went for fuel—wood gratings from the bottom of the boat, oars, life-preserver cork. We ignited the fire with a signal flare. It took hours of hard work to chop the fuel, hours of patient nursing to keep the fire burning. The smoke irritated our aching throats. But the water boiled, and some steam passed into the tank, where we condensed it by pumping brine over the tank.

Our efforts for a day and a night at last gave us sweet, fresh water, though a woefully small amount. When rationed out we each received about two tablespoonfuls of water, barely enough to help ward off death.

George the Greek was now not to be silenced. And as the deaths were becoming more and more frequent, his idea became less and less horrible. "Either that or we all die," Howell said. A few agreed with him. The others were silent.

Howell himself was the next man to die. Perhaps he knew he was near the end when he approved the Greek's plan to use the next corpse for food. Howell, like Olsen, had succumbed to the temptation to drink large quantities of salt water. He died at evening, talking in his delirium of the cool Alaskan waters where he sailed in his younger days. . . .

That night George the Greek gorged himself. He became crazed and violent. Risking their own lives, the mate and Harmon pounced on him and grabbed the knife with which the raving man might have massacred all of us. We bound him to a thwart. He died the next day.

By the morning of the twenty-fourth day, sixteen men had gone to Fiddler's Green. Ensign Holmes was the last.

ABOUT eight hours after the young naval officer died, we sighted the Island of Samar in the Philippines. Skeptically we stared long at the mountainous coast before we would believe. Cloud-banks had tricked us before. But there could be no doubt this time. It was steadily becoming more distinct.

Toward midday a rain-squall engulfed our boat and curtained our view of land. With bony hands trembling we dropped the sail and caught the precious water, tipping the canvas so that the rain flowed into the empty water-tank. We threw back our heads and sucked in the drops as they fell on our faces. When the squall lifted, we licked the thwarts and gunwales, that not a drop be wasted.

The mate distributed the water from the tank, a half-cup to a man. No need to save it now. We would land by sundown, Waywood said.

And land we did—in a crashing surf that flipped our sturdy lifeboat end over end, and sent poor Oley Heckland and one of the Filipino boys to watery graves. The combers tossed the rest of us onto a reef. We dragged ourselves to the beach and dropped on the sand.

Visayan natives found us. In the weeks that followed they nursed us back to life under the guidance of an American school supervisor named Hartendorp. We gained strength, and later the cutter *Polillo* took us to Manila.

We subsequently learned the cruiser *Brooklyn* had picked up our distress calls while in the San Bernardino Straits, some twelve hundred miles from the *Dumaru*. Guam had not heard the S. O. S. Whether they had grounded their aerial during the storm, or whether they had been working on long wavelengths and not listening for ships, we were never able to find out.

On that wide expanse of sea between Guam and the Philippines, five Government ships had missed both lifeboats. The other boat, with nine men, landed also in the Philippines. The U. S. Army transport *Logan* picked up the Captain and four men on the life-raft nine days after the *Dumaru* blew up. Incidentally, the *Logan* found the remains of the wooden hull of the *Dumaru* two hundred miles from Guam. A few shots from the *Logan's* gun crew sent the derelict to the bottom of the Pacific.



The Crevasse

*A woman mountain climber
is carried by a landslide
into a mountain abyss.*

By MRS. IMOGENE
HUMPHREY

MY husband and I left our camp at Pamela Lake in the chill of early dawn and started to the top of Mount Jefferson. We were undecided as to our course, as there is no prescribed method of ascending this precipitous mountain. Every fool for himself!

At the base of the mountain we studied the situation carefully and chose a high ridge that ran to the very top of the mountain. We found it difficult going at first, but at the snow-line the arduous business of beating the brush was left behind. Crossing snow-belts was risky, of course, as the sun had not yet risen, and the crust was frozen and exceedingly slick, but our shoes were hobbled and we were using alpenstocks.

On we went. The ridge was growing narrower and was very rough, due to erosion. Many places were difficult to climb over and the altitude was beginning to get me; I grew dizzy and a little ill. Slowly we crept upward till we were perhaps three or four hundred feet from the top and could see the pinnacles rising like spires.

My husband was ahead; and suddenly he called out to me not to come farther. I looked up, and saw the reason: a jagged ledge of rock jutted out several feet in width, and the earth under it had eroded until it would be extremely perilous to try to climb over it. He came back to where I was, and I decided quickly enough that I should not attempt it, but I saw he would like to go on.

Most women would rebel at staying alone in such a difficult place, but I was not disturbed, as I am seldom afraid of

anything. "Go on," I said to my husband. "I'd like to watch you go to the top. I'll stay right here till you return."

"I believe I can make it," he replied eagerly, "but I hate to leave you alone."

"Go on," I said. He unstrapped a pack which contained our lunch, camera and a heavy sweater, left it with me and started. I wrapped up in the sweater and lay down flat on my back, glad to rest my dizzy head. I watched him, and was thrilled at his skill and sure-footedness as he scrambled on unimpeded to the towering pinnacles.

After a while, the spell of light-headedness passed, and I stood upon my feet steadily. What a glorious view! Taking the field-glasses, I stepped to the edge of the ridge to study the glacier that lay about one hundred and fifty feet below me, but suddenly I felt my feet slipping! Then I was flat on my back sinking into the landslide of earth and rocks that was moving rapidly down the steep side of the crevasse! I screamed, but there was no one to hear me. Down I went, but fortunately the major part of the landslide was below me; I was at the very top of it. I shut my eyes, but knew when I hit the bottom as I was crushed by the weight of dirt and rocks. Then unconsciousness took me for a while.

When I came to, I wiped the blood from my face and hands, and glanced about, but was afraid to move. The white glacier was now black with fresh debris, but as I looked downward, I almost died of fright at the cavern: it was as if I were in the great jaws of a gigantic animal whose drowsy yawn opened to the very heavens.

Ice-cold moisture was seeping down from the glacier above and was soaking through my clothing. It was not only uncomfortable but chilled me to the

bone. I moved slightly and found my legs and one arm completely buried in debris. Luckily my left arm was free. Should I dare to move the stuff from my aching body? I debated the question in my mind, and finally decided I might as well die sliding on down the cañon as to be crushed to death, so began clawing at the mass that covered my right arm until it was loose. When I did get it out, I knew it was broken.

My legs were numb; I scarcely knew whether I had any legs. I tried to wiggle them, but they were fast in the dirt. I dreaded trying to sit up—that one glance downward into the abyss below me had been enough; but keeping my eyes on the immediate foreground, I dug out my legs, and in scooping away the dirt I discovered I was sitting in a deep snow-cup! I was safe unless the glacier itself took a notion to slide down that hellish incline.

Then remembering that there was still some one on the earth besides myself, I looked up to the ridge where I had formerly stood—and there was my husband, waving frantically. I waved back to let him know I was alive. He made signs to me that he would go for help. I watched him running down the ridge until he was out of sight.

Alone! Alone on this terrible glacier and these ferocious yawning abysses! An eagle flew around and around the peak of the mountain, screaming wildly. Several times I thought I was dying.

Hours later my husband returned with the forest ranger and ropes. They let a noose down to me and dragged my beaten body back to the ridge. Then they had the strenuous task of carrying me down the mountain in a blanket. It was late at night when we arrived at camp. I haven't attempted to climb any snow-peaks since.

The Graveyard Shift

"I hope," writes Mr. Harrison, "you will not think I have tried to make myself out a fearless sort of person. Frankly I was scared to death." When you have read this oil-refiner's experience, you will agree that he had good reason.

By BRENDISH HARRISON

WHEN it happened, I was stillman on a high-pressure cracking unit in Rumania—the most modern of its kind in the oil industry at that time, and consequently the hardest to operate. With three other stillmen I had been sent to this Rumanian refinery to "start" and teach local men to operate the unit. It was far from an easy task, for the men detailed for instruction had heretofore only operated "topping" or low-pressure stills, and had first to learn the fundamentals of cracking operation. To add to the difficulties, we Americans could issue our orders only through an interpreter.

The refinery in which the unit was located was the most carelessly managed one that I have ever been in; there was no real provision for handling fires; and fires do occur even in the most modern plants. The native operators lived inside the refinery fence, in wooden shacks built close to the stills, and the place was overrun with sheep, goats and dogs.

I had come on at midnight, and the man whom I had relieved had told me to watch the tubes in one of the new furnaces; owing to faulty firing by the native fireman on his shift, several of the tubes showed signs of overheating.

About two A. M. one of the helpers asked me, through the interpreter, to go up on the flash-chamber and examine a flange on a vapor line, that appeared to be leaking.

I climbed up to the flange with him. It was located at a point about two-thirds up the fifty-foot steel chamber. Happening to glance down, I noticed my native fireman go to the furnace and adjust one of the burners.

I yelled at him to leave them alone, and he appeared to understand me for he waved assent and readjusted it, as I thought.

On examining the flange, I found that it was leaking, and by signs indicated to the helper that he should fetch pin wrenches. When he returned with them,

we commenced to tighten the nuts on the stud-bolts that held the flange together.

The tighter we drew them, the worse became the leak; and finally there was a sudden whistling roar as the metal gasket in the joint broke. In an instant we were in the middle of a cloud of terrifically heated vapor. It was a miracle that it did not "flash" or ignite as it reached the cold air; it usually does, for the sudden change of temperature causes a form of spontaneous combustion. Hastily the helper and myself scrambled up to the top of the chamber above the fumes, which completely cut off our descent. Through the yellow mist of the vapor I saw the other four men of the shift come out of the receiver or pump-house and run around wildly below us.

I yelled at the interpreter, telling him to order the men below to open the remote-control valves and dump the contents of the unit in the underground sewers. The vapor would continue to pour out until the pressure on the whole system was released, and once it encountered an open light, we were due for an explosion.

Then suddenly above the roar of the escaping vapor there came the sound of a sharp explosion. I looked at the furnace, and for a moment thought that it was about to disintegrate before my eyes. One or perhaps two of the tubes had gone, and flames were pouring from it both front and back. As I watched, a flock of goats that were immediately in front of it were drenched in blazing oil. Some were consumed at once; but others, living fire-balls, fled in all directions. One headed straight for the bottom of the chamber on which the helper and myself were marooned.

As it came directly beneath us, the vapor just below us flashed.

For one awful never-to-be-forgotten instant I had a taste of what Biblical hell would be like: I was bathed in fire. Then it passed, and I opened my eyes and found that I could see.

Beneath me fire was pouring from the leaking flange and circling the chamber. I saw the steel stairs melt like butter in the awful heat. The fire seemed to be increasing instead of diminishing, so I knew that the unit had not been dumped, and that oil, vapor and gasoline, some of which was heated to nine hundred degrees, was still circulating.

The helper was lying beside me with the clothes burned from his body; my own shirt and hat were consumed, and

all I had on was a pair of strong duck pants and my shoes. I turned him over and felt his heart; it was beating faintly.

I tried to decide what to do. If we remained where we were, we should be cooked alive, or the fire might gain entrance to the chamber and we would be blown to fragments. The stairs were gone, so we could not descend. A jump to the graveled ground fifty feet below seemed the only other alternative.

Suddenly a chain-wheel valve caught my eye. This valve, instead of having the ordinary hand-wheel, had a sheave through which ran a stout chain used for opening or closing the valve from the ground without climbing the tower. It offered a way of escape for us, if the fire from the flange did not consume us as we passed through it.

Frantically I shook the helper, trying to arouse him, but he did not stir. I could not leave him there as long as he was alive. Then an idea struck: one's wits are sharpened by danger, for I would never have thought of it under other circumstances, I am sure. I tore off my duck pants; and raising him,—luckily he was a small man,—placed his back to mine and fastened his body against my own by tying the pants around both our waists.

DRAGGING him with me, I wrapped both naked legs around the valve chain, and grasping it with my hands, slid down it through the fire. It was agony. Though my mouth was closed, I knew that I was screaming. . . . The pain increased, and I could hold on no longer. I felt myself falling, and there was a sudden shock as I hit the ground on my back with the body of the helper.

Some one picked me up and carried me out of the flames that were all around the bottom of the flash-chamber. Some one else gave me a drink and untied the helper from me. I managed to get to my feet, terribly conscious of my burns. The interpreter was beside me; and leaning on his shoulder I dragged myself to the remote-control valves and dumped the unit. Then, just as one of the other American operators arrived, I fainted.

For nine weeks I lay in the hospital at Budapest, and when I finally left there it was to return home.

I am still operating, but I'm staying on the North American continent from now on, where they have modern plants and understand English.

Mars Ahoy!

An army radio expert describes the unexplained result of an attempt to signal another planet.

By ROBERT DEVINES



I WAS on duty at the time as transmitter maintenance technician at an Army radio station, in the West. And when the gang at the radio station read of and heard discussed among radio men the possibilities of anything so exciting as communicating with another planet, we decided to try our hand.

What an opportunity we had! Plenty of power, plenty of tubes.

There were five of us in the group. We had at our disposal ten fifteen-kilowatt "bottles," so we started work building a rack to hold them and their water-cooling jackets. We had to do all our work in the evenings, and during the signal officer's off hours.

It took us about five evenings of intense, fatiguing work to build our improvised lay-out. On Saturday evening, we all got together in the squad-room right after chow and hurried down to the transmitter.

I pushed the key. Seventy-five amperes in the antenna! Think of it! More than a hundred and fifty horsepower of energy hurtling out into space and controlled by a single piece of metal—that piece controlled by man!

We had decided that we would send a series of signals regularly spaced, and we reasoned that since mathematics is a science of the universe, if there were intelligent beings on another planet and if they received our signals, they might transmit them back in the same manner. Rotating in tricks at the key, we transmitted all night in fifteen-minute intervals—five dots, five dashes, then five dots. But no answer. Six o'clock Sunday morning saw a tired bunch of men, yawning and damning their luck as they tore down the apparatus.

Four days later I was transferred to another post to install some new equipment. The fifth afternoon our two-kilowatt long-wave set was handling traffic in corps area net, when suddenly the generators in the basement of the building dropped to a low growl as if a

great hand had grasped hold of the shaft and slowed it down. I whirled around. The instruments on the panel read normal. Again like a ghostly fist operating the transmitter, the power-surges on the generators took definite form, a regular tempo—five short intervals, five long intervals and five short intervals—and during the time the surges were repeated, the insulation on a temporary antenna leading into the transmitter, a half-inch thick, burst into flames. Normally, to cause such a thing as that, would have required the passage of hundreds of amperes, and our equipment was incapable of producing more than ten or twelve amperes of current.

If it hadn't have been for the distinctive characteristics of those power-surges, I would have accepted the phenomenon as I have many other peculiar actions of a transmitter that take place around high-power stations from time to time. But those five dots and five dashes and five dots—there was no escaping the facts. I said nothing to anyone that evening. At noon the next day we received a service message from operators from different parts of the country asking if we had heard any unusual interference or signal on the afternoon before. The time given in every inquiry corresponded to the time I heard the signal. No single transmitter in the country could have sent out a signal of such strength on such a wide frequency-range or over such an area.

We waited to hear if any report should be issued from Washington, but nothing was ever heard beyond the fact that we were issued orders to say nothing more about the matter to anyone.

Did our little group succeed in spanning the millions of miles of distance? Perhaps some day the question will be answered. There are five men in different parts of the world waiting.



(Learning that for some reason the bottom has fallen out of the whalebone market, Mr. Brower leaves his Arctic outpost for the States, to look into the matter.)

WE left Point Hope with a fair wind, sighting Cape Prince of Wales in the morning; the weather was fine, but the current so strong that it took us all day to get anywhere near it. As we came into Bering Strait, the wind hauled more ahead, and we were quite close to land. The mate had charge of the deck, and Backland and I were turned in. All at once the schooner bumped on the reef off the end of the cape. The first time she hit the rocks, it waked me; the "old man" was awake on the deck before I could get a chance to ask him to light a lamp. I tried to get up in the dark, but got all tangled up in the blankets. The *Volante* bumped twice more before getting clear and standing offshore; all the while I was wrestling with those blankets.

As we entered the Bering Sea, the wind increased and hauled more to the southwest, and the schooner had to be hauled on the wind, standing offshore, but not making much headway from hav-

Women's fashions decide the adventures of Arctic frontiersmen. Corsets are no longer worn, and the whale is no longer hunted for its bone. So fur-trapping and trading become their mainstay.

The Land of

ing no ballast. By morning it was blowing a gale. We had drifted just south of the little Diomedes Island, in the thick fog that had come up. There was nothing possible to do. The schooner was so light she would not tack, with no chance to wear, so we just drifted on the land.

At nine o'clock, it was still so foggy we could see nothing; we were so near the land we could hear the surf breaking on the rocks. In a short while we were able to see the cliffs just under our lee. The schooner drifted in so close it seemed as if we could almost jump ashore. Blowing as it was, it seemed as if there was no chance of any one being saved. As we got closer to the rocks, we could see the surf hit them, the spray going as high as our mastheads; then the backwash would throw the schooner away. It was the only thing that saved her. When we were close to the rocks the wind was all gone; it was like a dead spot. The *Volante* just lay with all sails slatting broadside to the land, the top of which was lost in the fog. Drifting along the shore, everyone seemed to lose his head. The man at the wheel left; Captain Backland stood aft on one side of the poop and I on the other, while all the sailors were chasing up and down the deck, just crazy. Some one suggested they let go an anchor; then some one else thought it would be a good plan to bend the only new line aboard to a kedge and let that go; no sooner said than done, and when the anchor was over and almost all the line gone, some one else wanted to cut it.

That was one of the longest half-hours I ever spent; no one seemed to think we would ever escape and the only thing

CHARLES D. BROWER

*Our foremost Arctic
pioneer brings his splen-
did record down to date.*

the Long Night

that seemed to enjoy itself was a fox we had aboard, which stood on the rail watching the land, sniffing and no doubt wishing it was on the rocks. Just before we reached the end of the island, Sweeney ran aft, and asked me what I thought of it. I told him I expected to meet him in hell in just fifteen minutes. Dan never forgot that answer. The *Volante* finally drifted the length of the Little Diomedes; then as we came from under the cliffs, the wind filled our sails. I, standing near the wheel, put it to port, and the schooner went off before the wind into the Arctic, where we stayed a week before getting started south. . . .

It was good to get home once more; the girls were now young ladies; Elizabeth was teaching school; Flo was going to the State normal school; and the boys were growing fine, and doing nicely at school. I had a fine visit with them at my mother's, before going to New Bedford, which had always been the home of the whalebone market.

Now bone was not selling. I visited friends for a while and then started on my journey to find what substitutes were being made, for bone, and how they made it. On inquiring, I found that the nearest place any was made was Butler, N. J.; and going there, I had an interview with the manager. Showing him a small piece of bone, I soon interested him, and then he kindly showed me how they made bone for corsets, using a small piece of steel and covering it with rubber and vulcanizing it. After it was finished and polished, it looked just as bone does, and acted just as well for corsets.

Returning to San Francisco, I talked over the whaling possibilities with Izaak Liebes; he thought the market for bone



would come back, and insisted we stay in the game. I wanted to quit then, while we were ahead. He told me if I quit they would wind up their business, so I stayed, and before long was broke.

I RETURNED to Barrow in the summer of 1911, to find everything as well as could be expected. As whalebone was unsalable, I shipped all our Eskimo help on a percentage for the coming year; they were to draw their rations, as usual, but nothing else, unless they caught furs. Whaling started soon after, and the first day, Jack caught a small whale off from the station and returned home that evening. That was a good start, but it did not keep up, for after we had taken two whales the luck changed, and we took no more. I saw that we were going to lose a lot of money that year.

On June 25th Mr. Stefansson came to the station. He had been far to the east among the new Eskimos, and had sledged all the way from Coronation Gulf during the spring, while Dr. Anderson remained, expecting to come out in the summer with their collection. Steff stayed with me until fall, for he wanted to get a collection of all kinds of old implements

from the old villages near here when the snow was gone. As I had been doing this for a number of years, in a small way, I took charge of it for him, hiring the Eskimo people to do the work; and before he left, I bought for him over twenty thousand specimens of all kinds.

IN July, Axel, a man who had come up the coast, was hunting geese inland ten miles or so from the station; he returned on the run, saying he had killed a walrus inland a long way from salt water. Everyone laughed at him, telling him he was crazy. Still he insisted he had killed it with a shotgun; this seemed so ridiculous, no one would go with him to see what he had seen. Finally one of Gordon's boys went with him. Sure enough, he had killed a half-grown walrus. It was asleep on the banks of a small stream that empties in the big lagoon; it no doubt had wintered in the lagoon, and when the river broke out, the walrus had come up eight miles and hauled out to sleep. Axel had heard the thing snoring and crept close, putting the barrels of his shotgun in the back of its neck. He let both charges off at once; then, when the walrus moved, he dropped the gun and started for home. It was dead, all right, the first and only walrus I ever heard of being killed inland. The tusks were a foot long. . . .

Whaling was the poorest this fall I ever had seen, for no whales were sighted.

The winter was one of the quietest we ever had. The only thing for excitement was lynx-hunting. These fine cats migrate from inland somewhere at irregular intervals, and come to the coast, generally staying around all one winter, and leaving in the spring. While they are around, it is almost impossible to catch a fox and save it, for they will go from trap to trap, eating the foxes as fast as caught. It is no trick to trap them, for they seem stupid, apparently walking out of their way to get into a trap, and when caught they make little effort to get loose. Everyone here caught lynx this winter, but as they were not of much value, it did not pay for the loss on the fox-skins. Often, some of the boys would find a lynx out on the tundra, and run it down. A lynx will start off rapidly when first alarmed. Undisturbed, they travel over the snow without difficulty, their long claws, like a cat's, curled inside their fur on their feet, but when they start running, their claws are extended. Then, they are so long they hook in

the crust on the snow; this soon tires the lynx and they will lie down facing anything that is following them, so they can spring upon them. Usually they were shot.

Some of the men have told me that often they have had a lynx jump at them, when they had no rifle, and that they would catch it by the throat, as it landed, and kill it with their knife. A large male lynx certainly can make a mess of a dog. If the dog takes him, he will not run but turns on his back, and with his hind claws rips the belly from the dog. We often heard the Eskimos tell of their dogs being killed. The lynx were very destructive to the fawns in the spring, and many were eaten and killed while the reindeer herders were away from their herds.

This time, instead of leaving in the spring, they were around all summer. While I was at Brant Point, the spring of 1913, we killed three along the banks of the lagoon, and saw traces of a large number that were hiding way back under the banks. Lynx are good eating, especially if they are fat, and I am fond of their meat, as it is like chicken and tastes something similar. I tried to get Fred to cook one for me, but he drew the line at that, saying if I wanted to eat a damn' cat, I could cook it myself.

WE had no whaling in the spring of 1913—for the station only caught one, and not a very large one. I let the boats out on shares, as I often had, and Jack Hadley and I went out because we did not know what to do otherwise. It had been our habit so long it did not seem right not to go out on the flaw, and besides we enjoyed the excitement of the game; there was always something to keep us interested.

We had heard that Stefansson was coming north in the *Karluk* with a big expedition (the Canadian Arctic Expedition); they expected to be in several years, and Captain Bob Bartlett was master of the *Karluk*. Sometime later we saw the *Karluk* south of the village; the ice was in along the coast, and we thought she had come up in a lead, and was waiting for the ice to open. Shortly afterward, to our surprise, Steff and Dr. McKay came walking up the coast. The *Karluk*, when they left, was fast to the ice, which was solid enough so that they walked ashore. Steff wanted to get two oomiaks from me with sleds and all kinds of gear, for the expedition. When

I had everything ready that Steff wanted, he then asked me to get two Eskimo men to go along with the expedition. He wanted one that had a wife that would sew for them, as they had many deer-skins but no seamstress. One of the men who had worked for me many years was willing to go and take his family. I recommended to them another younger man from Tigera, and they were soon busy getting their possessions together.

STEFF told me that he had two other boats that would be along later, the *Mary Sachs* and the *Alaska*, and to my surprise, said Lefingwell was aboard the *Alaska*. He had come back to prove some of his work that had been questioned at Washington. He was going to stay a year and he hoped to have his survey finished.

When he arrived at the house, Steff gave me to understand that the *Karluk* was tied up to the ice, and it would not be long until the ice moved off. As the wind was on-shore, I did not expect her for a day or so, until the wind changed but she kept coming closer all the time. I called Steff's attention to this fact, and that she must be drifting with the ice, as she was not always in the same position. I did not know what to make of this, but when the ship was almost abreast the village, Steff said he would go aboard with the boat. As he had a big load, I got all the men around with their sleds to help, and when the *Karluk* was almost abreast the house, they started off. I said good-by to them all, never expecting to see any of them for several years.

After the tenth of August, the ice was most all gone from the beach, but it was still in sight offshore when the *Transit* came in with freight for us, and the mission. I put my freight aboard on the twenty-third, expecting them to sail the next day. Sunday morning, August 25, Backland was ashore at the church; the ice was coming in fast, and before he could get aboard, a piece caught the schooner, carrying away her anchor. The next thing, another piece struck her on the starboard bow and stove a hole in her. By this time, Backland was aboard getting up sail. We soon saw that the schooner was not acting right, for when sail was set, she headed for the beach and Backland ran her ashore five miles south of the village.

When we saw what was happening, everyone went down the beach to see if there was any chance of getting her off.



Naturally I was anxious about my freight on the schooner. The *Transit* was hard and fast; her hold was nearly full of water; her bow was stove so badly that the water ran in faster than it could be pumped out, if they had a dozen pumps. Backland had tried to haul a sail over the hole, hoping the water would force the canvas into the break and stop the leak some. It did not seem to make any difference and everyone was getting out the cargo, which by good luck, was mostly in between the decks. I got all my furs and bone that same day; they all had been under water, but not long enough to harm them if we started drying them at once.

By night, it was plain that the *Transit* was there for good. Backland and his crew had a row and he told them they could go where they pleased. They were not a nice bunch to get along with. I, as usual, had to take them in.

Backland had a nice lot of merchandise that I tried to buy, but he would not sell: he wanted to build a house with the lumber he saved and open a store, leaving Hanson in charge, along with Edwardson. Next day, Backland informed me he was going to Kotzebue Sound with a whaleboat and that he would take the passengers and all of his furs. As soon as everything had been landed and brought to the village, Hanson started on his store, and Backland left, after paying off his crew. The passengers went along with Backland.

When it looked as if I would have to take care of the men all winter, I took all the shelves from one side of the store and built bunks. It was much more comfortable there than if they had to go off somewhere, and also it did not take so much fuel to keep them warm. My coal cost me about fifty-seven dollars a ton and we burned a great deal.

In October, my boarders started to try and run the house to suit themselves, and they all wanted too much waiting on to suit me. The second mate was behind the crowd, and told them as the Government was to pay for their keep, they were entitled to service; and the time we had our meals did not suit them. So I put them all out of the station in a small house we owned half a mile away, where they had the pleasure of cooking for themselves, and could sleep as long as they wished. It was a surprise for them, for everything was fixed before I told them to leave, but it taught them a lesson. I kept one boy, named Johnson, with me. He was only fourteen, and I knew the rest would make him their servant. I had myself been shipmates with their likes when I was a boy.

AFTER whaling was over, one morning in October I was surprised to have Stefansson and three other white men blow in from the east. He told me that the *Karluk* was adrift and he did not know where she was. The *Karluk* seemed unlucky for him. Steff and his party had come ashore to try and get deer. They landed on Jones Island, and it began to blow. In the morning, the *Karluk* had disappeared, undoubtedly to the west, as the wind was from the other direction. To make matters worse, they could not get off the island to the mainland, as the ice would not bear their sled. The men with him were George Wilkins, Dr. Jenness and Burt McConnell, all members of the expedition.

As soon as Steff had the news of the ships to the east he wanted me to have an outfit ready for him so he and the others could join the expedition at Collinson's Point. I at once got busy and had clothing made for them so they could travel in comfort. Steff was like a mother when it came to fitting the attigas; he had been so long in the country he knew just how they had to be made to get the comfort from them. Then I built him sleds and although they were not as heavy as he wanted, I did the best I could with the material at hand. Tents of all descriptions, round, square, and pointed were made for him, some of them double, as they expected to be living in them most of the winter.

It took me at least three weeks to get their outfit ready, and then there were dogs to buy, that being the hardest job. Most every one was going trapping, and only the poorest dogs could be bought.

As there was no way of getting any more dogs from the Eskimos, I had to let Steff have some of mine.

The trapping was splendid all this fall. We had a larger collection at Christmas than we ever took in a season, for everyone was getting foxes close to the village. We were busy enough all the winter and spring of 1914, taking care of our furs; they came in from all over the east and inland, in sled-loads. It did not hurt my feelings any, as fox-skins were just beginning to go up in price and I needed all I could get to pull me out of the hole I had got in, trying to make whalebone sell when no one wanted it.

The *Herman* was the only ship to come north this summer trading. Later the *Jeanette* showed up with our freight, and then the cutter *Bear* arrived, bringing the news of the wreck of the *Karluk* north of Herald Island sometime in January 1914. She had never got clear of the ice after the last fall and drifted west until crushed.

Bartlett was aboard of the *Bear*. When the *Karluk* was crushed, he and most of the crew had reached Wrangell Island over the ice; then he and Katuktoovik crossed to Siberia and came south to East Cape, where they were picked up and taken to Nome. The *Bear* was to try and reach Wrangell and get the rest of the crew, as soon as she had coaled at Nome. While the *Bear* was lying here, we heard by the ship's wireless, news of the war starting in Europe.

After the cutter left, Leffingwell came from Flaxman Island in his dory, and stayed with me until the *Jeanette* sailed. Swenson came from the south in a power schooner, the *King and Winge*, and as he did not care to go east, I bought a lot of merchandise from him. Burt McConnell also came out to the station, having severed all connections with the Canadian expedition, and got a passage out with Swenson. Leaving here, the *King and Winge* started west along the ice, and by good luck, they reached Wrangell Island in time to rescue the crew of the *Karluk*, marooned there.

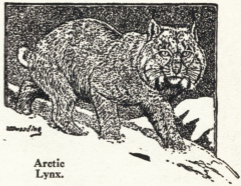
DURING that summer I had Eskimos hunting for museum stuff in the village, both Utkieavi and Nubook; they brought me all they found, and I catalogued this material during the winter. It became interesting, and many of the things found, I never knew were used in the old days. One day a man brought me what he called armor. It was made

of pieces of the flattened ends of bear-ribs, laced together with seal-hide thong. This armor was just long enough to cover one's stomach and part of one's back and the upper part of the arms. It would have been no protection against a bullet, but I could see it would help some against bone arrow-heads. Another kind of armor was made from the shoulder-blade bones of a bear, cut so they fitted the body, and laced together with some kind of lashing.

Some of the old men told me how in their early times, they bred men to do nothing but fight. They were taken from their mothers when small, and had to go through a hard training, often going without food and water a long time, so when they grew up, they could travel several days without eating or drinking. These men had to meet the fighting men from other villages, and fight until one side was vanquished, using their bows and arrows, knives of bear bone, and war-clubs. The clubs were mostly made of bone with teeth like a saw on one edge, about an inch deep; the handle was made so it fitted a man's hand, and had a thong so the owner could not lose it. The best one I ever found I sent as a gift to the American Museum. It was picked up near Cape Halkett, where the Eskimos say there was a place that the fighters used to meet.

These fighting men also had to travel inland, and if they could, they killed any of the inland people they could find off their guard. This was just the same as murder, but the other side did the same, sometimes even killing the women and children. At other times the women and children were brought to their villages for adoption. Another thing told me was that these fighters were not allowed to marry or have anything to do with women until they were past the age for fighting, which age I thought would be nearly thirty.

THE winter of 1914 and the spring of 1915 were quiet, and toward the latter part of the trapping season, the foxes came in from the ice, and our men made a good catch. White foxes are the most plentiful in the north; seldom do they go far inland, breeding and having their dens from thirty to fifty miles inland, wherever they can find a suitable place to dig their burrows in the banks. In the fall of the year, after the ice makes on the ocean, they go out on the ice in droves, coming back in the spring,



Arctic
Lynx.

if the ice lets them. All winter they live on the ice, following the polar bears, and living on what these animals leave from their kills, mostly seals. Then in the early spring they catch the young seals, which are born on top of the ice, under the snow, smelling them out and digging until they reach where they lie. The young seals do not go into the water until they are over a month old, and are easy hunting for the foxes. The foxes find the dead seals and walrus that are drifting in the pack, as well as a whale once in a while. If a dead whale drifts in near the shore and stays all winter, hundreds of foxes will be caught there.

When everything else fails, the white foxes eat the small marine animals that freeze fast to the bottom of the young ice. This, in a pressure, is turned over, and everything is left exposed. At times in the spring, while I have been whaling, I have seen fox after fox come from the pack, on their way ashore to where they will have their young. Generally they begin to come ashore in April, if the ice is in; if not, they may not come until May. Their young are born in July, from four to ten in a litter. Many young are killed by the white owls that hang around the dens waiting until they come out playing. In the fall, they are off again on the ice. Some springs they do not return here, and then trapping is poor, but there are always some that stay around, and they seem to be those that have laid up a store of food for the winter, or because the lemming are plentiful. The white foxes are burying food all summer, which they seem able to find, no matter how much snow is over it. I have watched them as they robbed a duck's nest; they carry the eggs away and bury them in moss, never putting more than one in the same place. If they eat a bird, they always put away what is left for future use. . . .



In the fall, some of the hunters from inland brought me the skull of a small mastodon, with two teeth in the upper jaw. The company has it yet in their storage vault in San Francisco. I also had the teeth of a mammoth, one tooth of a mastodon, the skull of a prehistoric horse, and the head of a musk-ox with part of the horns still fast to it, all brought at the same time, but not from the same place. All these I sent to Dr. Hornaday for the heads and horns collection of the Bronx Park museum. I did not know what the mastodon tooth was; it was the first I had ever seen and Dr. Hornaday told me it was the first ever found in the North. The horse's skull was unknown to the old fellow who brought it to me; he called it the head of a *oogroognoon*, a mythical animal said to live under the banks of some lakes in the interior, with fur like an otter, and supposed to be able to kill and devour human beings.

The ice made early this fall, coming in great sheets from the north, perfectly level as far as we could see. It came in to the shore grinding along the beach, with not an opening to be seen anywhere. This made it bad for the chances of getting a whale. Long before anyone could travel on the ice, we could see polar bears walking along, mostly traveling south. This kept up for days, until the ice was strong enough to bear the weight of a man; then everyone was hunting bears. From the top of the station we could see two to six bears at once most any time. The Eskimos killed sixty before the ice went off.

The wind hauled around offshore one morning while most of the hunters

were out; those that noticed it came back immediately, but six others that were out, were carried off. Two came forty miles south of here the next morning; each man had two bear-skins they saved, just getting on the shore ice as a point of the pack swung in and hit the flaw. The other four we never heard of again; they were all from Point Barrow, and were all young men. No doubt the ice, as it moved from the land, broke up in small pieces, and soon the water was wide enough to make it rough; then of course they were drowned.

A polar bear can travel over ice that will not hold a man's weight. When the ice is thin, they spread themselves out so they cover a large space; and on very thin ice, they lie on their bellies, hauling themselves along with their claws. When the ice is so thin they cannot do this, they swim under the ice, breaking through with their head to breathe.

LATER that fall, when the heavy ice came in, there were bears around. Konnettowra, a hunter from the village, was out sealing all day; and dragging his seal home at dusk, he felt something tug at it every little while, but thought it was rough ice he was traveling over. His hauling-harness over his shoulders was on the top of his rifle. Finally a harder tug than usual made him look back; a bear was following him, trying to eat the seal. Konnettowra slipped the harness from his shoulders in a hurry, and when he stopped, the bear started for him. Seeing he had no time to get his rifle from its sack, he used his ice-pick on the end of his spear to defend himself. Fortunately, he managed to kill the bear with one thrust of the pick, hitting the bear right between the eyes, the point penetrating the brain. The bear was not large but it could have given him a nasty mauling.

One night this same winter, at the point during the storm, a small bear came in the village, wandered all over the place, finally winding up on the top of an igloo where it fell through the gut window, down in the house where some people were sleeping. All hands sleep naked, but they did not let that detain them—they just poured out through the hole in the floor, before the bear had a chance to get his senses together. And then one of the men grabbed his rifle in the tunnel on his way out and shot the bear through the window he fell through. When the excitement was over, it was

found that a baby asleep in the igloo, wrapped in skins, had never wakened.

In February 1918, Archdeacon Stuck on his trip around the Arctic coast stayed with me while he was at Barrow about two weeks. Walter Harper, who was with him when he climbed Mt. McKinley, was with him. He brought a lot of news: the United States was now in the war. My two sons were both enlisted, Jim in the army and Bill in the navy. (Jim came out a second lieutenant and was bayonet instructor at Camp Fremont until he started over.) When Walter heard that my two sons were in the war, then he insisted that the Archdeacon permit him to enlist. When they left here to go to Herschel, I found them a young man to go along as guide and helper. They left here in March, making the island in twenty-one days. The native returned in April, making the journey home in nineteen. He brought us news of the Stefansson party. Steff himself was taken sick with typhoid fever and had been quite ill at the island. Just before Stuck arrived, he had been taken over to Fort Yukon to the hospital. When the Archdeacon heard this he started at once, hoping to overtake the party and help them over the mountains.

By our first mail, we heard the war had ended. That was what interested us most, and everyone was thankful. Both my boys were home at my sister's, in Orange, N. J. We also heard of the flu epidemic at Nome, that many had died and more and more were dying all the time; the mail-carriers had been quarantined at Kotzebue, not because we had the flu here, but so they would have no chance of bringing it along with them.

In August the *Herman* arrived with freight. The company had sent a man, Harry Bloomfield, to learn the business so I could come out when I was ready.

WE heard by mail that we were to have a hospital this coming summer. Archdeacon Stuck, when he was here, thought it was just the place to have one, and when he went out said that he would do all he could to have the Mission Society build it. He was as good as his word, and I think he deserved all the credit for it. We had needed one for a long time, for many people from all parts of the North came here for treatment. Sure enough, when the ships came, the hospital lumber arrived, with a man to stay all winter and erect it.

The summer of 1920 I decided I had been at Barrow long enough without going outside. Harry Bloomfield had been with me a year, so he was quite capable of carrying on the business, and as his wife was coming to join him, I could leave in some comfort.

It did not take me long to get ready; inside of two hours I was on my way, landing at Nome five days later. I had an enjoyable winter visiting in the East and on the Pacific coast. I met many old friends, including Stefansson, Burt McConnell, and Dr. Hornaday; but I was glad when the time came for me to start north again.

IN San Francisco on my way back north, I found some excitement over oil supposed to be near Point Barrow. Several people had at different times seen the oil seepages at Cape Simpson and talked about it. I had twice sent out samples and had it analyzed, but both times had received no encouragement, it being so far from civilization.

Now the Standard people were making inquiries about the possibilities of getting a party in; and in Seattle I met another party going north to look over the oil proposition around the vicinity of Barrow. They were for the North Star Oil Syndicate. . . .

When we reached Barrow, everyone was out to welcome me. All seemed glad to have me back, and my old dog Alaska, a white collie, seemed to know I was coming, and almost went crazy with joy. . . .

It was not long before the oil-prospectors began coming back. All were pleased with the outlook, and soon started out again, going up the Mead and Chipp rivers, then down the coast south of us as far as Skull Cliff. Everywhere they went there were good indications of oil, and in some places gas escapages.

This year the *Bear* was late in getting here. They had some young men out for the Colorado Museum on a collecting expedition, Alfred M. Bailey* and R. W. Hendee, naturalists. They had a successful trip, going as far east as Demarcation Point.

The winter was passed uneventfully, and in the spring of 1922, in our last mail, word was received that all this northern section of Alaska had been made a naval oil reserve, and no more claims could be

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staked; this dashed all our hopes of becoming millionaires.

This summer Captain Amundsen came to Wainwright in the schooner *C. S. Holmes*, bringing with him an airplane with which he intended flying across to Spitzbergen. Lieutenant Omdahl, of the Norwegian navy, was with him as aviator. They built themselves a house just at the mouth of the inlet on the inside of the sandspit, calling their place Maudheim. Amundsen did not expect to fly until the following spring. Late in October he paid me a visit at Barrow, staying three days. We had a very pleasant time talking over his various trips in the Arctic and Antarctic. One thing, however, he did not like, was the noise made at night by some lemming I was keeping in a cage. They kept scratching at the wire gauze around their house, keeping it up all night. Amundsen told me that he got no sleep and had half a mind to get up in the night and kill them. However, I fixed that by taking the wire away and putting a glass in.

At this time I was making a study of the banded lemming of the district. In the spring of 1922 I had brought to me, alive, a male and a female. These I put in an old show-case and fixed it up with straw so they could make a nest for themselves. It kept me busy getting willow shoots to feed them, as they had to be dug from under the snow. Twenty days later they had four young; these were a great source of amusement to everyone. Every twenty-two days for several months there were new families.

TWICE I have seen the lemming migration. The first was in 1887 when we were out whaling on flaw ice. During the month of May the lemming came across the country from the southeast—how far we had no way of finding out, as everybody was whaling, and no Eskimos lived inland at that time of year. They came in one immense drove eight miles across, traveling almost northwest, and passed the station and village at Barrow, going right out on the sea ice and then jumping into the ocean, where they swam off shore for a while and finally were drowned.*

Our oomiaks would paddle through the dead ones that were in windrows just as chips form in tide-rips miles away from

*As we go to press, the newspapers are carrying many stories of a migration of the common gray squirrels westward from New England.

the ice. These lemming were five days passing the station. The whole land was covered with them. That spring and summer there were a great many all over the country—no doubt, stragglers from the army that had passed. That same summer there were a great many snowy owls and jaeger nesting here. These lived almost entirely on the lemming; always, when lemming are plentiful, these birds are here in large numbers.

The rest of the winter of 1922 and spring of 1923 was the usual thing around Barrow. Fox-skins were rather plentiful, and we were busy in the regular way. The only break was in April when I made a trip to the Wainwright station, but that lasted only a week.

Amundsen was at Nome, Lieutenant Omdahl being in charge of Maudheim. Omdahl was a likable fellow and had the airplane all ready to try out.

A few days after I left, Omdahl did get up in the air, taking my storekeeper along with him. They did not fly far, and in landing, their landing-gear was wrecked, and the plane had to be hauled back to Maudheim. There Omdahl tried to repair her, and when Amundsen arrived a little later, they tried to build pontoons for landing in water, but had to give up after working all spring.

CONSIDERABLY later that season—in September—the Bureau of Education boat *Boxer* arrived with W. T. Lopp, the Alaskan Commissioner of Education, on board. They also had with them Edna Claire Wallace and Earl Rossman, who were to stay at Wainwright the coming winter, hoping to get enough material for a motion picture.

Pedersen in the *Nanuk*, and the *Kindersly* came out a little later. The *Kindersly* had on board a Danish photographer named Hanson, who was to join Knud Rasmussen, the Danish explorer coming from Greenland.

After all the ships had left, the Eskimos caught two good whales, and so we started the season with some whalebone.

The following May, Knud Rasmussen, the Danish explorer, with Hansen, the photographer, and two Greenland Eskimos, arrived here from the eastward. Rasmussen had been the best part of three years on his way. He had summered at King William Land, and in the fall started this way, meeting Hansen at Kent Peninsula.

There was a great deal to talk about regarding the Eskimos and their cus-

toms; and I think he was the best-informed man on Eskimo lore it has ever been my good fortune to meet. We had the same theory of which way they had arrived on the north and east coast of America. Always, since I had first studied their culture and implements, I have maintained that they came here from the east; and he was of the same opinion. To me it seemed that the implements that they had brought with them, such as their soapstone lamps and old cooking utensils, along with the copper found in their old dumps and dwellings, pointed always to their having brought these things with them.

After the Eskimos arrived here, there was a break in their migration, and centuries may have passed without communication with their eastern relatives. Still, there was always the tradition among them that those things had been brought with them.

Stone lamps were heirlooms handed from mother to daughter, and were valued highly. It was almost impossible to buy them when I first came among these people. These lamps were the only means of heating and lighting their houses, and it was not until they started building frame houses and using stoves that they cared to sell them.

The implements used in hunting and tanning skins by the Greenland and Alaska Eskimos were almost identical, as is their language. The Greenland Eskimos brought here by Rasmussen had no difficulty in talking to and understanding our people here.

The sled brought by Rasmussen was a great source of interest to the Eskimos along the coast, as was also his method of driving his dogs; each dog was on the end of a long trace, and they were all the time tangled up. Here dogs were always driven tandem.

LATE in July the *Nanuk* came in. The *Kindersly* was next, then the *Arctic*.

Early in August the ice started moving. When it was quite a piece from the ridge, the *Kindersly* tried to get under way, but a large cake of ice of an acre or more in extent caught her under the stern and broke her rudder; then, being forced offshore, she was soon surrounded by drifting ice.

The *Arctic* had to hunt shelter, and thinking her old place behind the ridge the safest, went back there and tied up.

Here she stayed until August 11, her crew coming and going all the time over

the ice. During this time the *Kindersly* drifted north and then started drifting east; she was in sight for several days, but at no time was there any crush around her.

On the morning of the 11th there came another pressure from the southwest, the ground ice moving in. The ridge just outside the *Arctic* was forced inshore so that she was hard and fast, and then, at five A.M., she was crushed. Her whole starboard side stove in.

BY the time I arrived, the *Arctic* was settling fast and almost full of water, and seeing that the ship was a total loss, a survey was held and the ship condemned, and then sold at auction for the benefit of the underwriter.

After the ship had been sold to a half-breed, who was the highest bidder, I bought it from him for the company, and at once set to work with all the Eskimos around, to save some of the cargo.

On the 12th we took the receiving set from the wireless aboard the *Arctic* and set it up in the station, where we could listen in and hear the *Kindersly* telling where she was drifting. After passing well offshore of Point Barrow, she drifted to the east, all the time fast in the ice-pack; two or three times they sent messages that they were going to abandon her and walk over the ice to the edge. We, of course, had no way of answering.

I made up my mind to go to Nome if there was any way to get there, to try and charter a small power boat, sending all the goods I could from there. I had planned to supply the eastern stations from here, as we were all stocked for another year, and with what had been saved, could give them a good outfit. The *Teddy Bear* was planning to get away just as soon as we got a northeast wind to open the ice, so I made arrangements with Joe Bernard, her captain, to take me to Nome.

As everything had been done that it was possible for me to do, and I was needed outside, I started south in the *Teddy Bear* at eight A. M.

We arrived at Nome in the middle of the night, nineteen days from Barrow. We had hardly got the anchor down when Tom Ross of the Coast Guard came alongside, asking what schooner we were, and when found out I was there, took us ashore. He also informed me that the *Boxer* would be in port in two hours, five days from Barrow, with all the shipwrecked crews aboard.

Sure enough, that morning the *Boxer* arrived at Nome, bringing the crew of the *Kindersly*, which had been abandoned, and the remainder of the *Arctic's* men.

There did not seem much chance of chartering a power boat around Nome, that was at all suitable for what I wanted. All were too small, or unseaworthy. We had been in Nome two weeks or more when a boat named *Nome* came in from Kotzebue Sound, a perfectly new and sound schooner, able to carry fifty tons of freight and travel eight knots. She had hardly got in the river before I was aboard and chartered her. On October 14th I sailed on the *Victoria* for Seattle.

Our trip down to the States was uneventful, and I spent the winter along the Pacific coast. Besides enjoying myself, there was much business to attend to as we were purchasing a new ship to replace the *Arctic*. Finally the motor ship *Caroline Frances* was bought. She was almost new and was the strongest built ship of her size I had ever seen, but needed something done to make her a good ship in the ice. We had the whole bottom sheathed with iron bark well above the water-line. We also had a heavy steel stem fitted on her bow for breaking ice. The company decided to name the new ship after me; and when most of the work was finished she was christened the *Charles Brower*.

BEFORE leaving on my return north, I met Miss Wallace who was still in San Francisco, working on a novel, but thought she would like to go north again for a year to get more material, and wanted to know how she could get up. We talked things over, and finally she decided if possible to come with me to Nome, and from there by the *Brower* to Barrow, where I had plenty of house room for her. As the company was willing to give her a passage on the *Brower*, that was quickly arranged and she proceeded to get her outfit together. . . .

Nothing unusual happened during the fall at Barrow. Trapping-time arrived, but there seemed to be no foxes around; no one did much, and all the natives were getting in debt.

Late in January, 1926, I received a wire from George Wilkins, late of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, dated November 13, from New York City, telling me he was coming to Barrow with an airplane, and asking me to reserve all the aviation gas I had here and at Wainwright for

him. When I had been in New York the previous spring, I mentioned to Stefansson that I had several drums of aviation-gas that belonged to Amundsen's expedition; he had left it with me, some at each station.

Later I received another wire from Wilkins, dated New York, December 19th, saying he would arrive at Barrow at the end of February, and asking me to mark out a landing-field for him and have clothing for three men. He said the plane would be fitted with wheels.

On February 25th I had the landing-field all ready and staked; the skins for clothing were scraped and ready to make up as soon as the airplane arrived.

As time passed and no plane arrived, I about gave them up, but on the 31st of March just after lunch, some one came running into the house saying an airplane was coming. There was a scramble to get outside; sure enough, there it was coming in from the northeast. It flew low right across the field I had staked out over the ice, circled twice, and then, heading into the wind, started to land between the end flags of my landing-field. When almost to the snow, they swerved and landed in fine style, coming to a stop a few yards from the bank of the lagoon just south of the station.

At the ship's landing, everyone gathered around and greeted Wilkins and the aviator, Ben Eilson. Wilkins was an old acquaintance of mine, as he was here with Stefansson in 1913 for several weeks, and again with me in the spring of '14 when I was whaling.

When we got a chance to talk, I heard all about the expedition which was called the Detroit Arctic Expedition, being financed in Detroit with assistance of the North American Newspaper Alliance. Wilkins himself, Stefansson, Dr. Bowman, and others were the directors of the venture. They were to fly from here, trying to discover new land, and not succeeding in this, they were going to fly over the Pole, landing at Spitzbergen.

They had left Fairbanks that morning, flying over the mountains which they found much higher than they anticipated—at least eleven thousand feet in height.

MANY friends in New York had sent me messages. Among letters sent me was one introducing a young newspaper man, Hutchinson, who had been killed a few days before at Fairbanks when he walked into the propeller of the plane and was killed instantly.

All hopes of bringing gasoline by sled had been abandoned, and he planned to fly back and forth, bringing a surplus of gas each time until enough was accomplished to fly out on the ice. They were intending to start back in the morning, so everyone was up early, but it was found impossible to start the motor. The oil was too cold and although they tried for hours, it was no use.

Finally on the fifth day, after many trials they got away, expecting to come back in a day or two.

On April 10th I was over by the schoolhouse when some one hallooed that the airplane was in sight; before I could get to the field, they had landed, and in a few minutes, had taxied to their old place; the tent was soon rigged over the engine, and Wilkins and Ben Eilson came to the house.

EARLY next morning everyone was up helping to get the track clear. There was no trouble starting the motor, and on the first attempt they were off, leaving thirty-two cans of gas, each containing five gallons, which they had freighted over the mountains.

The plane arrived back at Barrow on the 15th, bringing more gas which was soon in their storeroom, and the plane was in its old quarters and covered with a tent.

Wilkins had hurt his arm, and it was much swollen. He had nothing done for it at Fairbanks. I insisted on looking at it, and found he had crushed the bone in the lower part of his arm just above the wrist. It was paining him a great deal, and he was not even carrying it in a sling to ease it. I at once got some splints and bandaged it for him, making him carry the arm in a sling. This gave him some comfort.

For several days the weather was not fit for flying. On the 23rd they took off, but flew only five miles or so, and then returned on account of engine-trouble.

After the return of the plane, it was at once covered with the tent, and everyone came up to the house for lunch. Hardly had we finished lunch when some one came in, telling us the plane was on fire. Certainly there were some quick moves, several grabbing the fire-extinguishers which I keep handy in the station.

When we got to the plane, the Eskimos had put out most of the fire, and the propeller was the only thing burning; this was soon put out with the fire-extinguishers. The gas and ether



dripping on the stove started the blaze; the tents caught fire, and almost immediately, everything was blazing. The tents were entirely destroyed, and if it had not been for the natives, it probably would have been the last of the plane.

The propeller was in bad shape. Wilkins wanted me to put some brass bands on it to hold it together, as many of the layers in which it was built had warped with the heat. Working outside in the cold, I did the best I could, hardly thinking it would be of any use. Ben overhauled the engine, meanwhile.

The next morning, the 24th, the airplane again took off, but did not get far, as the propeller was in such a state and the vibration so bad, they were glad enough to get back where we could still work at it. I thought I could fix it if they could get it off and bring it in the house, and next morning early, Ben got the propeller off and brought it up where I could work on it without freezing my fingers. Working all day, I took off the bands already on, making new ones and setting them in flush with the surface of the wood, two on each blade. These were screwed and riveted through the bank each side of the propeller blade, making it impossible to separate the wood layers. Then the propeller was scraped smooth, sandpapered, and finally two coats of shellac put on it. It looked fine, almost like new. Everyone was pleased with the job, even I.

On the 30th the weather was good and after lunch, just as soon as I finished working on the propeller, the engine was started, going fine. The *Alaskan* taxied to the runway, and was off on the first try, and that night arrived safely at Fairbanks at seven-thirty.

On May 2nd, we heard by wireless that Amundsen was at Spitzbergen, waiting for the right kind of weather to fly over the North Pole, hoping to make land

here and continue to Nome. Then we heard that a new propeller was put on the *Alaskan* at Fairbanks and would not work, so the old one I had repaired was replaced; and then, the next thing we heard was the *Alaskan* had tried to take off for here on the 6th, but crashed and ruined one of her wings.

WHALING did not start until late this spring, the boats leaving for the flaw May 2nd. Earl Rossman, who had arrived April 29, badly snow-blinded, but whose eyes were better now, was on hand with his camera and got pictures of their departure.

On the seventh of May the only decent whale was taken by Tommy, my son. The bone was eight feet long, but three others were taken—all small ones, with hardly any bone—a little later.

May 8th, just after we had finished lunch, an airplane passed close over the house. It continued out over the sea ice, then circled and came in, landing in the regular place on our lagoon.

This plane, the *Detroit*, was fitted up with three motors, and carried besides Wilkins, Major Lamphere and Pilot Wisley, Ben having been left at Fairbanks. They did not expect to stay here long, as they wanted to make the flight out over the ice, look for land, and then go back to Fairbanks.

That afternoon all tanks were filled with gas, and everything made ready to fly the next day. They did not get off then, and many days passed before there was a chance to do so; the weather was bad for flying, being cloudy or foggy.

On the 9th we heard by wireless that Byrd had hopped off from Spitzbergen, flown to the Pole, and returned, beating Amundsen to it.

May 11th, Amundsen reported leaving Spitzbergen in his airship for Nome. We expected to see him sometime the next night. On the 12th, at seven-thirty P.M., a native reported seeing Amundsen's airship and everyone was soon out.

Sure enough, she was there, coming from the north, and about six miles from land over the lead of open water. She was in plain sight, coming slowly closer, or we thought so.

The *Norge* was in sight for over an hour; the sky being clear behind her, made her show up in fine style. Everyone here watched her as long as she was in view, and Rossman tried to get a picture with his telescope lens, but no doubt she was too far away for that.

Amundsen flew down along the coast, coming low over Wainwright village, where he had wintered before; all hands on the *Norge* waved and made all kinds of signs to the people there. He did not arrive at Nome; he ran into a storm, so came down at Teller, where the *Norge* was deflated and shipped out during the summer.

Day after day the weather at Barrow was unfit for flying; once in a while there would come a day that promised to be fair; but then there was trouble with the engines. Or when the engines did work, they were not able to keep the wheels in the runway. Sometimes one engine and propeller would turn up all right, then the other would not act right, and as the one that made the most revolutions had the most power, it forced the plane out of the track into the deep snow, and then it was all off. This happened so often that finally there was hardly gas enough to fly over the ice and return to Fairbanks.

ON Sunday, May 30th, it was decided to get a gang of men to clear off the snow from a strip of ice forty feet wide and eleven hundred feet long, and make a last attempt to get back to Fairbanks.

On the following morning, work was started and that day the runway was finished. Looking at it, it seemed an ideal place to take off from. We waited to get weather reports from Fairbanks until June 5th when everything seemed right. The engines were tried out every day, and worked all right. This morning they were to try once more.

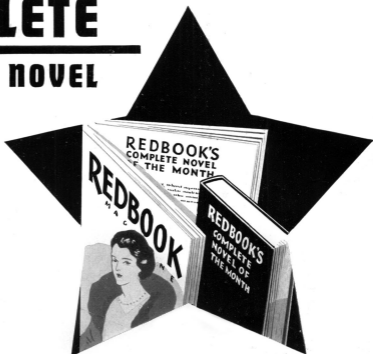
The motors started; everyone that was going got inside, including Alex Smith, and they started down the track; near the end they were just off the ice; gradually, they rose in the air, just clearing the rack where I dry bear-skins, and then they were off. Circling once, they headed southeast and were soon out of sight in the clouds. It was a pretty sight, watching them go up through a hole the sun was shining through, until the clouds drifted over them. They left here at 11:15 noon, and arrived at Fairbanks that same evening at six P.M.

(Here Mr. Brower's narrative ends. He is still on the job at Point Barrow, however, a hale and able man in his early seventies. And we'd not be surprised at any time to receive from him the record of an adventure such as few younger men could handle.)

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