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BLUE BOOK

An illustrated magazine of Adventure, Mystery and Humor

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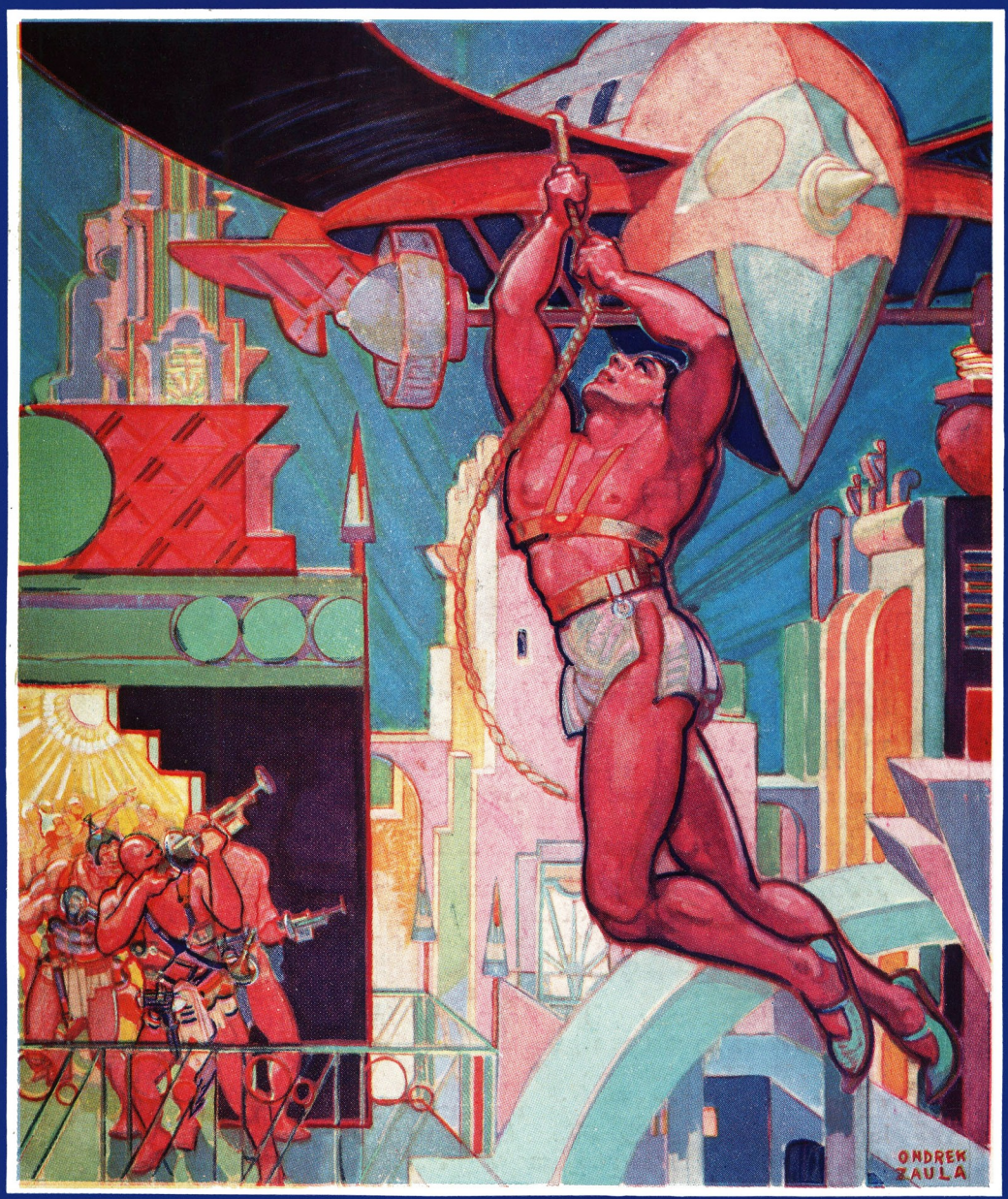

BENGAL REBELLION, *by* Talbot Mundy

Beatrice Grimshaw, Henry Knibbs, Leland Jamieson

SWORDS *of* MARS, *by* Edgar Rice Burroughs

Who's Who in Blue Book

TALBOT MUNDY, whose vivid "Bengal Rebellion" leads this issue, was for many years in the British service in India and Africa. He won his first literary reputation with "King of the Khyber Rifles," and has followed that with many other successful stories. His latest book, a historical novel called "Tros of Samothrace," has been received with enthusiasm by the reviewers.

HENRY KNIBBS, whose engaging "The Cowboy Shepherd" follows, is a Canadian who lives in our own West, and is known for many fine poems as well as for his stories. "Songs of the Outlands," "Sundown Slim," "Partners of Chance" and "Songs of the Last Frontier" are the titles of some of his books.

REG DINSMORE started his career as a professional guide in the Maine woods, and has found his knowledge of forest lore very useful in writing stories like "Midnight" in this issue, and "Costly Fur," which will appear soon.

LELAND JAMIESON was formerly an army pilot and instructor at Kelly Field. Since that time he has also flown mail and passengers, and he still works as reserve pilot to keep his hand in. His Blue Book story "With the Night Mail—1932" led a volume of "Best Short Stories of 1932," and his stories have also appeared in Collier's and Redbook. A novelette, "The Mystery of Indian Key," is scheduled for our next issue.

BEATRICE GRIMSHAW is an Irishwoman who set out to "write her way around the world" for a Dublin newspaper; when she got to the South Seas, however, she liked the region so well that she has stayed there ever since. From her home Rona Cottage, at Port Moresby, Papua, comes the fine story "Away from It All," which begins on page 67. Another of her very best will appear in the next issue.

JACLAND MARMUR is the name of a writer new to these pages whose fine drama of the deep sea "The Final Splendor" will likewise appear in the February number. Like Joseph Conrad, he is of Polish birth, and he has sailed the Seven Seas in many capacities. Two novels, "Wind Driven" and "Three Went Armed," have appeared in book form and his short stories have been published in Redbook, Collier's and the American Magazine.

H. BEDFORD-JONES is a name too well and favorably known to require discussion here; but we want to tell you that one of his most swift-moving and colorful stories, "The Face of Buddha," will appear in our next issue—and that with it will be printed specially attractive fiction by such writers as Bigelow Neal, Warren Hastings Miller, George Worts—and of course Edgar Rice Burroughs.

—*The Editor.*

BLUE BOOK

JANUARY, 1935 MAGAZINE VOL. 60, NO. 3

A Remarkable Novel

Eight Noteworthy Short Stories

A Deeply Interesting Novelette

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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A pen name may be used if desired, but in all cases the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for while we handle manuscripts with great care, we cannot accept responsibility for their return. As this is a monthly contest, from one to two months may elapse before you receive a report on your story.

"Where did you get this?" Ann demanded. "You should have taken it to Mr. Brand."

Bengal

IN four years, three commissioners had been murdered in the office in which John Brand sat. At this moment, he wished he might be the fourth.

Chosen as the best man for the most dangerous job in all Bengal, he had betrayed, he felt, the confidence of the governor and Council. "Brand of Bengal," he had been called in admiration for his exploits. And now! Brand stared at the empty secret desk-drawer, which he had thought so cunningly masked. The memoranda were gone. Leaders of the criminal-political underworld were probably already gloating over the draft of plans for destroying their organization. Brand's stubbornly good-tempered face grew ashy gray. His sturdy shoulders drooped in the first recognition of defeat since he took up the appointment.

He must not even admit the existence of the memoranda, they were so important and so secret. Hue and cry was out of the question. He could not employ the Secret Service; the memoranda included a list of names of secret-service agents known or suspected to be disloyal. He set his head between his hands and groaned. Then, with a characteristic gesture of intolerance of weakness, he sat up and touched a button on his desk. A chair creaked instantly behind a screen, and Nava Bala came and stood at his elbow—one of three "specials" selected from among hundreds to protect him from assassination—a tall, bold-looking Kathiawari, alert, immaculate and statuesque in khaki uniform. Brand jerked his head toward the opened drawer.

"You have been on duty since—"

"Since noon, sahib."

"Was that drawer locked when you came on duty?"

"I do not know, sahib. Is something missing?"

Brand nodded. "A sealed envelope."

"I have seen the Sahib take packets of papers to bed to place under his pillow. Shall I search?"

"Yes. A big envelope, several inches thick, marked *'Very Secret'* and addressed to me. It has been opened and re-sealed with my thumbprint half a dozen times."

He knew it was no use searching. The building was surrounded by guards of various sorts, always. And the secret drawer which pulled out behind the obvious drawer—that should have baffled any ordinary thief. But some one, somehow, had discovered it. And anyone clever enough to do this, and to slip in during Nava Bala's absence while guarding his master, would be clever enough to make good his escape.

Brand felt sorry about Nava Bala, whose time would be up in two years. Twice in three months the man had intervened bravely between him and death. He had meant to recommend him for promotion, so that he might draw a higher pension. But recommendations from broken men are the reverse of valuable in a world that reckons values

FASCINATING indeed is this story of the Commissioner Brand of Bengal and the American girl who helped him handle a plotted rebellion—by the famous author of "Tros of Samothrace" and "King of the Khyber Rifles."

By

TALBOT MUNDY

Illustrated by John Richard Flanagan

Rebellion

by results. Results? John Brand was one of only three non-members of the Council even to know of the existence of those memoranda. His career was ended, in disgrace. There was nothing to do but to write his resignation. He put paper into his portable machine and started typing it:

"In humiliation, having betrayed a confidence, for which there is no excuse nor any possible forgiveness—"

But that day's mail had gone. There was no hurry. He flung the unsigned letter in the open drawer and slammed the drawer shut. Nava Bala returned from the bedroom.

"Finding no such package, sahib."

"Go on looking. I'll be back soon."

"Not going walking, sahib? Then I follow."

"Stay here."

"But there is danger. Sahib, my honor—"

"'Rooted in dishonor stands,' if you know what that means. No, of course you don't know. I order you to stay here until I return."

He would soon have no orders to give to anyone. He walked out and turned shoreward, along the dusty mile between draggled palms and hibiscus, expecting and receiving no recognition; it was years, in that part of India, since a British official had been treated in public with even formal courtesy. The "civil disobedience" campaign had intensified

bitterness and let loose anarchy, without providing a bridge for reconciliation. Even the poorest natives turned their backs. Some jeered as he passed, but he was only enough aware of their ill-will to know that he no longer cared. He strode as grimly and deliberately as he had faced death scores of times, but this disgrace was more bitter than death: it involved so many others, one of whom it would hurt cruelly.

The sun dipped below the wide-spread town behind him, turning the Bay of Bengal blood-red. Dusk shrouded the moaning beach. Two miles away to his left, as glorious in the sunset as a gilded city in some drunkard's heaven, stood the Temple of the Triad, acres vast, the home of his arch-enemy the High Priest. Once he had tried to establish acquaintance with that proud hierarch, but the priest had snubbed him with ingenious insolence. Later, when official duty forced him to interfere with the priest's more cruel methods of extorting revenue, he had soon learned, although he could never prove it, who was advising, from behind a screen of sanctity, the gangs that aimed at anarchy through rumor, theft, assassination and a reign of terror. That priest loved power. He condoned all means whatever that could serve his purpose. And he was bold; he ignored precedent and defied the fanatical doctrinaires by courting popularity.

Brand could see the spot where he stood now, half a mile away, on a stone platform above the beach, beside the ancient Bell of Blessings. Thousands of suppliants for heaven's favors waited on their knees for the moment of sunset. They darkened the beach. They were all "untouchables," all forbidden even to approach the Temple of the Triad. But they were permitted this one mercy. With his own thrice-sacred hands the High Priest drew back a beam like a battering-ram. It swung forward against the bell's rim:

"Doom-m-m-m-m-m!" And then the sun went down.

Those kneeling thousands thought the bell's reverberations bore their prayers upward toward Infinite Compassion. But the deep note struck like a knife into John Brand's heart. And then came a worse heart-stab.

He had to call forth all the iron of his being before he could make himself face Ann Gilbert. He saw her suddenly. She was folding a sketch-box and handing it to a servant, almost on the very spot on

There was a smack like the blow of a pole-ax as John Brand's fist hit the Thug's ear. The silken cord writhed like a snake.

the beach where, fourteen days ago, they had confessed their love to each other, and he had explained how she must wait for his promotion, because the widows and children of three murdered commissioners had had to be provided for, and he had had to promise not to marry as long as he should hold that dangerous

position. He had promised without hesitation. But afterward he had fallen in love with Ann—the moment he saw her.

Secretary to the American Archæological Expedition, Ann had called at Brand's office to ask permission to examine fabulously ancient ruins in the neighborhood. He had had to refuse, and so their acquaintance had begun poorly; but it made swift progress, and he had made no promise not to become engaged. Now he must be ruthless. He walked toward her without attempting to hide his misery. Ann said:

"Tell me the trouble. Can you?"

"I will," he answered. "I've no right to tell you an official secret. But one error forces another. I shouldn't have made love to you. I gave you the right to know I'm ruined."

Ann's eyes met his, young, grave, questioning. Then she smiled, and her eyes grew bravely steady.

"Tell me. I'll face it with you."

Grimly he told her. "My career is ended. Ann, it means we lose each other. You mustn't ruin your life. They'll send some one to take my place here. I'll vanish. I can probably get some sort of job in one of the colonies, where I can live forgotten. You'll return to your own country before long. You won't forget me—or I hope not. But you'll find a better man, more worthy of you—"

She interrupted: "You make me wonder what you think I *am* worth. Have you done all you can?"

"There is nothing to do. I have written my resignation."

"Haven't you any idea who stole the papers?"

"No. But I can guess who has them."

He glanced toward the High Priest. The full moon shimmered on the sea and on the crowded beach. It silvered the priest's white raiment and shone on his shaven skull; it showed the corpselike pallor of his proud face; it revealed the ferocity of his contempt in the calculated condescension of his gesture as he blessed the kneeling throngs. He had no bodyguard, although repeated threats had been made by fanatics to slay him for his condescension toward untouchables. His icy aloofness kept the throngs at a decent distance. He passed within twenty-five feet, and spared one baleful glance for John Brand, then turned away to bless petitioners for grace who laid their foreheads on the sand.

"See him, Ann? He knows I know who ruined me. He knows I can't prove it. He gloats over it; if he knew how much it hurts, he would gloat more."

"Let him get all he can out of it," Ann answered, "and see what happens. Go and tell him it hurts!"

Brand could hardly see her face. She was bare-headed; the moonlight shining through the edges of her hair made an aureole that graced the curves of her head and shoulders. She seemed unreal —an embodied voice.

"Tell him it hurts. Give him the blood with the pound of flesh!"

The sea sighed on the beach. Reality was weird and shadowed and unreality seemed real. An iron anger, so cold that it seemed impersonal, seized John Brand and he took a few steps forward. Ann followed. But he stopped within ten paces of the priest; his memory warned him he was only courting further humiliation. He watched. Triumph might cause an indiscretion. The High Priest might acknowledge his presence—might even speak first. But the Brahmin, turning, observed, ignored him and passed on, smiling. Brand would have gone away, had not Ann touched his shoulder.

"What is that man doing?"

The High Priest had paused again to murmur benedictions. Behind him, a man had risen from the fringe of a group of suppliants; he was standing very close to the Brahmin. He had the ends of a silken cord in either hand. Rigid with the concentrated passion of a killer, he stood like a panther that times its spring. His arm trembled with the vibrancy of a panther's sinews strained for the loosing of spastic strength and skill.

There was a smack like the blow of a pole-ax as John Brand's fist hit the

Thug's ear. The silken cord writhed and flickered like a snake in the grip of a mongoose. They fell together at the High Priest's feet, straining, writhing, gasping, Brand's right hand gripping the Thug's killing-cord, his left fist flailing like a bludgeon.

No one interfered. The crowd fled; was not one a cursed government official, the other worse—a would-be slayer of a thrice-born Brahmin? Let them slay each other and descend into life forever in the bellies of the worms that writhe in carrion!

Ann was borne backward in the flight and for several minutes Brand fought to prevent that silken cord from being flicked around his neck, while he rained blows on a man who knew all the arts of torture.

The Thug's body was oiled. He writhed out of every hold. Brand felt himself weakening as he pounded away at the man's ribs. The Thug was on top; he was wrenching the cord from Brand's grip when Ann returned. She kicked, not knowing what else to do, and the Thug let go. He was gone like a flickering shadow, into the sea, diving, swimming along the moonlit shoulders of the swell, before Brand could get to his feet. . . .

He and Ann were alone then on the moonlit beach. There was a fringe of fleeing shadows that made no noise on the sand. The sea crooned solemnly, and Ann went and wetted her handkerchief in it because Brand's nose was bleeding.

"Did the High Priest run?" he asked her when she returned.

"No. He turned and went slowly; he didn't look back."

BRAND went to wash the blood from his face at the edge of the sea. Ann chafed his wrist. Then they walked together toward the former hotel that the American party had rented—slowly, because the Thug had twisted John Brand's muscles.

"Stay and dine with us," Ann suggested.

"No. I'd be a ghost at a banquet."

"Very well, come later. They'll go swimming. You and I can talk on the veranda."

"Yes." He agreed to that instantly. It would give him time to think of the right argument. Ann's pluck and loyalty had only strengthened his determination not to let her throw herself away on a man whose career was ended. "When do they go swimming?"

"Ten or ten-thirty."

Wisely she restrained emotion. The wrong word, even the wrong thought, and he might not realize that she too could face calamity, and would rather die than fail him in his hour of need.

He left her standing at the gate, and strode to his own quarters—in torture, but welcoming the pain in his twisted muscles, because it drove humiliation for the moment out of mind. But Nava Bala, standing at attention as he entered, noticed the limp that fortitude could not control.

"Not injured, sahib? What has happened? Said I not that I should follow to protect your honor?" He offered his arm.

"No, no. Nothing serious. Did you look again for that envelope?"

He received the expected answer.

A HOT bath relieved the pain in his muscles. He dressed for dinner, hardly aware of what he did; then he drank his customary glass of sherry and went and sat in the office. He had sat there for fifteen minutes, staring at the desk, when Nava Bala announced a visitor.

"No name, and he will not tell his business."

"Say I'll see him in the morning."

"He is a Brahmin, sahib, and he says it is urgent."

"Oh, all right." He gestured to Nava Bala to take his place behind the screen. Then he went to the door and admitted a lean, ascetic-looking Brahmin whose face was half hidden in the folds of a white cloth, above which his dark eyes glowed with excitement. He cut short the preliminary formal phrases of respect, and even laid a hand on John Brand's sleeve as they stood facing each other.

"Sahib, the most holy High Priest of the Temple of the Triad is beholden. Please permit him to make recompense."

Brand stiffened his stubborn jaw as the mercy of indignation swept over him. He had expected to be thanked for having saved the High Priest's life. The more formal and impersonal, the better. Even barbed with irony, if courteously phrased, an expression of gratitude would have been acceptable. But this second-hand offer of recompense was naked insolence. He answered in the level unemotional tone that he used to reprove subordinates:

"I wasn't interested in any particular person, but in preventing murder. High Priest or sweeper, it was all one."

The messenger winced to hear a priest and sweeper mentioned in the same breath.

"Sahib, he is sacred!"

"All life is sacred, isn't it?"

"Sahib, that thrice-born serves the Higher Law. Preserved by Your Honor's bravery, he is under obligation. Please permit him to repay now. Ask what you will, and if it can be done, it shall be."

"Does his conscience worry him?"

"Sahib, should you not permit him to defray the obligation now, at Your Honor's price, the Higher Law will demand it of him, perhaps ten times over, in ten times ten future lives on earth."

"That is not my problem."

"Sahib—"

Grim amusement forced a smile to John Brand's lips. He interrupted:

"If he is such a stickler for the higher justice, let him apply to Miss Gilbert. She is the original source of his soul's predicament. It was she who drew my attention to the Thug."

"But sahib, Your Honor's courage and Your Honor's right hand saved that sacred life."

"For which a Higher Law may judge *me*. Who knows?" Brand showed his barked knuckles. "Besides, it was my left hand." He knew no thrice-born Brahmin would enjoy that information. He saw his visitor shudder; it was almost more humiliating to be saved left-handed than to owe one's life to a hated alien.

"Please, sahib, permit the holy one to recompense you. The importance of it is beyond your understanding; but I assure you there is nothing, if it is only possible, that the holy one will not grant, that he may be free from this encumbrance on his spirit."

"I don't interfere with things that are beyond my understanding," said Brand.

"You make no request?"

"None. Good evening."

HE showed his baffled visitor to the door, then summoned Nava Bala from his hiding-place.

"You heard that? Did you see him? Recognize him? Very well, then, shadow him. Report to me where he goes and what he does."

It was a forlorn hope, but it might lead to something. Nava Bala's intuition had more than once turned up a clue to a plot that had baffled investigation. . . .

Brand went to his lonely dinner, and almost enjoyed it. No non-Oriental, he knew, can fathom the full significance of a Brahmin's religious scruples, or the full depth of a power-greedy Brahmin's duplicity. Scruples and duplicity can coëxist and coöperate. He had no doubt that the High Priest dreaded the Eternal Law which ultimately forces the fulfillment of all debts. To be beholden for his life to a hated alien was something, also, that his pride might hardly stomach. But John Brand suspected a trap. He had refused to be caught in it.

AT ten-thirty, Nava Bala being still absent, he locked the office and set off alone to the Americans' headquarters. He would rather have gone to his own hanging. He loved Ann, as he loved his job, beyond compass of phrase or reach of soaring thought. His job was the expression of his uttermost integrity of will to leave life better than he found it. Ann was all that he had needed to make life full to the brim with worth. Well, he had lost both, and it was no use flinching.

He strode in moonlight resolutely up the drive to the hotel portico, and called *"Koi Hai?"* in a voice like a sentry's challenge. The Goanese servant who answered stared, frightened.

"No. Miss Gilbert not at home, sir."

"Oh. Did she go swimming?"

"No sir. The others went swimming."

"Where did she go?"

"Into the garden."

"Is she not there now?"

"No sir."

"How long since she went out?"

"Fifteen minutes."

"How do you know she is not in the garden?"

The whites of the man's eyes flashed in the shadowy porch. He stammered, hesitated and shrank into the sullenness that some children adopt when they know but won't say. It would be a waste of time to question him; Brand took the path around the house and followed it toward the back gate. In a place where the gardener's hose had leaked and the moonlight shone between clumps of bamboo and bougainvillea, he found Ann's footprint, and a man's. She appeared to have stood speaking to the man. Beyond that spot there were no marks made by Ann's feet. Some one had seized and carried her, or else, walking behind her, had obliterated her footprints. He followed the man's tracks through the back gate to an enormous baobab. Beneath that were hoofprints, and the ruts of wheels.

Cursing himself for having sent Nava Bala on a Tom-fool's errand, so that now he had no bodyguard or weapon, Brand followed the track of the wheels in the deep dust. He was afraid now. Fear took concrete shape; the almost limitless but vaguely guessed political disasters that might follow on the theft of the secret memoranda changed, like magic, into one immediate and dreadful fear that Ann might be the first victim of the plot aimed at himself. He hurried. The pain in his muscles, following a line of least resistance, stabbed at the fear he felt on Ann's account.

He soon guessed so confidently whither the track was leading, that he hardly hesitated when he came to crossroads where the milky moonlight shone on the marks of unnumbered wheels. He cast forward, toward the outskirts of the town, along a rarely used unsurfaced road toward an ancient house surrounded by a high wall, and a ditch, and a thick hedge of impenetrable cactus. Four wavering lines, etched in the dust by moonlight, told the story. A two-wheeled cart, an *ekka,* probably, had come out through a wide gate in the wall, had fulfilled its errand, and returned with its burden. Somewnere within the many acres which the wall enclosed stood the fabulously ancient ruins that Ann had asked, and had been refused, permission to examine. The Americans, careful not to clash with the local prejudices, had observed the prohibition; but their scientific hunger for research was no secret. Had Ann been trapped with that bait? If she were killed, for instance by a snake put in her path, or by any other of a hundred cunning Eastern tricks, there could be no denial of trespass, and there would be one more accusation to hurl at all foreigners—sacrilege—and one more embarrassment for the almost desperate Bengal Government.

BRAND leaned against a tree-trunk, motionless in the shadow. He heard footsteps. A moment later he saw Nava Bala, bulky in the moonlight, striding down a side-road toward a foot-gate near the farther corner of the wall. Good! Luck was with him. He had an official witness. Now he could go to the gate and demand to know where Ann was.

He had raised his foot, to kick the tree, to attract Nava Bala's attention, when he detected other footsteps, much less noisy. They sounded stealthy. He could not see who made them. But when Nava Bala crossed the foot-bridge over the wide ditch and cautiously opened the narrow gate in the wall, some one emerged from a shadow cast by a clump of trees. The cloth over the lower part of his face looked familiar. Brand recognized him after a moment. Instead of Nava Bala shadowing the priest's messenger, the priest's man was shadowing Nava Bala!

He watched the Brahmin stealthily follow Nava Bala through the door in the wall. No latch clicked; there remained a narrow shadow, as if the door were left slightly ajar. Perhaps some one else was expected, who might lock the door after entering; if so, it was now or never. He hurried across the creaking foot-bridge, found the door unlatched, slipped through, groped for the heavy iron bolt, locked the door and waited breathless in deep black shadow.

THERE were no audible sounds. Fifty feet from the shadow of the wall, a rambling stone house stood in silent moonlight amid ancient trees. Far away to his right, a lantern cast pale light on the interior face of an ancient arch. He saw Nava Bala walk swiftly across a wide beam of moonlight; a moment later he again caught sight of him, in the light from the lantern, disappearing through the archway, apparently downward into a bulk of masonry whose form loomed shapeless amid phantom trees and gloom.

He followed, keeping carefully in shadow. Nava Bala might need help if he was on the heels of treason. Or had he learned where Ann was? He had entered that archway like one who knew where he was going and what to expect.

Brand groped his way along in the shadow of the wall, leaped the beam of moonlight where it was narrowest, and approached the archway from an angle to avoid the lantern-light. His fingers clutched stone that had been worn soap-smooth by the passage of centuries. He could only see the cavernous throat of a flight of steps descending into darkness, and could hear nothing but a rumble that might be the echo of footfalls, or of running water.

Suddenly something clammy that felt like a cobra touched the back of his neck. He sprang back from the wall, crashed into some one and faced about, with his heart in his teeth. He couldn't speak; his will seemed paralyzed. But self-control returned in a wave, although the sweat turned cold all over him. He took a short step forward, following a

shadow that receded into darkness. Ruins loomed like a lightless chaos on his right hand. Something—this time it felt like a finger—touched his cheek. He tried to grasp it, missed, sprang forward and heard some one step aside to avoid him. An electric flashlight stabbed at his eyes; in another second he recognized the High Priest's messenger.

"You should not be here, sahib. This is sanctuary, and none may enter here uninvited."

"Where's Miss Gilbert?"

The Brahmin stepped backward but Brand made a feint and caught him by the slack of his linen robe.

"Did you hear me? Where's Miss Gilbert?"

"She is receiving a reward for service rendered."

"Lead me to her, or I'll march you to the jail. . . . Ah—thought so!" He detected a sudden movement—snatched at the man's right wrist, and seized a repeating pistol.

There was a moment's breathless silence. He almost felt the Brahmin furiously thinking. He expected a trick; and when it came, he knew it was one; but it was too subtle to be seen through in a moment.

"It is then your request that you shall see Miss Gilbert?"

"Yes. At once. And take her out of here."

"I have authority to grant whatever possible favor Your Honor chooses. Follow me, then."

A shadow, but it was solid and made a footfall, slid between John Brand and the ruins on his right hand. Some one had overheard the conversation. That might portend anything. And in spite of himself, he had asked a favor! They would grant it literally. Then what? They might accuse him, and Ann too, of sacrilegious trespass. . . . However, he followed. He must find Ann.

ABRUPTLY the Brahmin faced him in an echoing passage that plunged into cavernous darkness.

"For your own sake and for her sake, silence!"

"Lead ahead."

"The very holy one commanded 'any *possible* request.' You have made a request. Its possibility resides in silence. To be heard or seen by those who should not hear or see—"

"I will be guided by events. Lead on." He knew he had been heard and seen by some one who hurried away with the news.

The Brahmin's flashlight cast a thin ray forward—downward. Steps between walls, whose monstrous carvings grinned where the flashlight touched them. The stairway turned twice. There were fifty steps, then a smooth-walled passage and a modern door of rare wood strongly made, well polished, fitted between ancient posts of black teak. He followed the Brahmin through the door and heard a latch click. Without ceremony he snatched the Brahmin's light and examined the place.

He was in a four-square chamber hewn from the rock. It resembled a dungeon, except that there were monstrous faces carved deeply on the wall at one end. Light streamed through four of the eyes, dimly through two, strongly through two others. The Brahmin put his ear to a dimly lighted eye and looked through the eye through which a stronger light came. Following suit, Brand discovered he could hear and see through an enormously thick wall into a chamber beyond. He looked straight into the eyes of Ann Gilbert.

SHE was seated at a plain teak table, frightened, evidently facing men whose backs were too close to the wall for him to see them. From the movements of her eyes, he deduced that there were two men, or perhaps three; the sound of their breathing came through the wall exaggerated as if they had asthma. Ann's fingers pressed the table. She was speaking with restraint, but her voice came through the wall, clear, dynamic:

"In the garden you said one thing. Now you propose something else."

A voice answered: "Perhaps you did not understand."

"I understood perfectly. You said I saved the High Priest's life, and his religion obliges him to pay the debt at once, or else be beholden to me in future lives, which he is unwilling to be. And I would not like him even to feel beholden to me. So I accepted your offer to come with you and make a request of my own choosing. I have made it. I ask for the return of the documents that were stolen from the drawer of Mr. Brand's desk in his office."

"But they are not yours. You have never seen them. How could you identify them?"

"Mr. Brand will identify them. Keep your promise."

Brand snatched the Brahmin's light and examined the place.

"Did you not ask to see these ruins, which are forbidden to all but Brahmins? None but Brahmins' eyes have ever seen them. You shall be shown the lower crypt, where are kept greater marvels than you have ever heard of. That is the request you made over your signature."

Ann's voice was firm, steady.

"I ask for those stolen papers. I said so in the garden when you made your offer."

"Is that loyal to your archæological associates, whose paid secretary you are? Was it not they who through you made a written application to inspect these caverns? So strong was your desire to see these wonders, that the Life Force guided you to be the instrument of Destiny that saved a sacred life, and thus opened a way for fulfillment of an otherwise impossible desire."

"Probably you mean your High Priest hasn't as much influence as he pretends," Ann answered. "If you mean you can't recover those papers, why not say so? I'm not interested in your High Priest's future lives, but in straightforward dealing in this life. Keep your promise, or let me go home."

Some one clucked irritably and then blew his nose. A different voice spoke:

"You expect to get out of here on your terms? Are you not afraid to speak thus insolently?"

Ann made no reply. John Brand, fingering the Brahmin's pistol, discovered it was not loaded. He walked swiftly to the door. It was locked; he could find no latch or keyhole. He returned to the hole in the wall. Some one was speaking. Ann's face looked drawn and more afraid, but resolute.

"An ill wind," said a voice near the wall, "blows on whosoever asks too much but yields too little. A higher law than any known to you compels our very holy one to grant whatever favor you demand. But take the consequences! It is written: 'Thrice cursed is she who seeketh to snare wisdom in the nets of guile.' Like is she unto a fool who seizeth Hamadryad for his beauty. She tempteth fangs that know not mercy. She shall know death's bitterness, in shame, in the night of despair, and alone."

Ann answered firmly: "Is that meant for a threat? Very well. I will face the consequences. Keep your promise: Unless your boasted influence is bluff, get me those papers. After that, we will see what happens."

Brand's left hand reached out for the Brahmin's neck, to seize him as a hostage for Ann's safety.

"Silence!" the Brahmin whispered. "Her request is granted."

THREE Brahmins, solemnly in single file, passed out through a door at Ann's side. She sat still, drumming her fingers on the table. The Brahmin's right hand touched Brand's lips, commanding silence; he was about to shout to Ann nevertheless, when astonishment gripped his throat. The door opened again, and in walked Nava Bala!

The man looked scared, but at the sight of Ann, he looked shocked. His jaw fell. His eyes betrayed horror. He tried to retreat. The door shut with a thud behind him, almost catching his fingers. Then he braced himself, hesitated for a moment, and strode forward to the table. There was something bulky beneath his tunic that he held in place by pressure of his left arm.

Ann spoke: "I am very glad indeed to see you. But what does it mean?" Her voice shook. Nava Bala's terror had increased hers. He was trembling. His back was toward Brand, but the sound of his tongue trying to moisten a dry mouth was distinctly audible. Saying nothing, he unbuttoned his tunic and laid a bulky envelope on the table.

"Where did you get this, Nava Bala?" Ann demanded. "You should have taken it to Mr. Brand, shouldn't you?"

No answer. He seemed tongue-tied. He had probably been told he would find his sahib in there. Now he knew he was trapped—probably guessed he would be accused of the theft.

WHAT quick-thinking devils! Nava Bala must have scared the man he was shadowing, so they trapped him too—probably told him where to go to get something his sahib had lost. And so now the trick was obvious. An obligation had been literally paid. The High Priest would incur, according to his view of it, no spiritual blame for the death of the three trespassers in a secret crypt held secret from profane eyes. No Brahmin would do the murdering. They would be ambushed on the way out by ignorant "untouchables" who would think they were earning heaven's favor. And the stolen memoranda? Already studied, copied and perhaps photographed, they would be "found" and returned with a smile to their embarrassed owners.

Action! Brand heard the Brahmin beside him slip off his sandals and start for the door barefooted. He stuffed the empty automatic into his pocket, overtook him and cracked his head against the door.

"Open!"

While the Brahmin fumbled for a secret latch, he shouted, hoping Ann could hear him:

"You and Nava Bala try to find your way out! I'm coming. I'll meet you. But get a move on."

The door opened. He discovered a bolt on the outside, slammed the door shut in the Brahmin's face and shot the bolt home. Then he turned to the left and tried to reach the room where Ann was; but a blank wall faced him, and so he turned back and raced up the dark steps with his heart in his throat, breathless, his ears singing and his temples bursting with the effort. Even in that raging haste, he doubted that the Brahmins would do murder in their own sanctuary. They would leave murder to others. Speed might forestall those others.

Gasping at the summit of the steps, he charged into the moonlight, tripped on broken masonry, fell headlong, and lay half-stunned for several seconds. Then he staggered to his feet, groped his

way along the flank of the ruins, reached the lantern-lit archway, entered that and started downward into rumbling darkness. At the first turn of the steps he remembered having put the Brahmin's flashlight in his pocket. He fumbled for it, and flashed it—full in Ann's face. Nava Bala was behind her.

"Here," she said, "take this!" And she thrust a package into his hands. He had nowhere to put it; his dinner jacket had no pockets half large enough; he had to keep it in his right hand while he dragged Ann up-steps with the other. He was too breathless for speech until they reached the foot-gate in the high wall. There he shot one word at Nava Bala:

"Weapon?"

"Yes, sahib." He produced a pistol.

Brand opened the gate and led the way out into amber moonlight that cast impenetrable shadows. A night wind rustled in the trees. There were a thousand sounds that might be the movements of fanatics lurking to earn the reward of whoever requites sacrilege with murder. The shadows moved in the wind, but no man showed himself until they reached the road. The wheel-tracks had been smoothed out; there were no longer even footsteps in the dust. Suddenly two shots spat from a clump of bushes. One knocked the package from Brand's hand; a third shot missed him as he stooped to pick up the package. Nava Bala answered with six shots from his pistol, reloaded and stood waiting. . . .

A horn honked near by. Headlights glared through a cloud of dust and nodded along the dirt road. Ann shouted. An old touring-car, with two Americans on the front seat, bucked to a standstill in a dust-cloud.

"Ann, is that you? What the devil have you been doing? Oh, is that you, Brand? What's the trouble? Get in, won't you?"

JOHN BRAND waited for Nava Bala, calling to him. Three more shots spat out of ambush. Nava Bala answered them, then Brand walked toward him, touched him on the shoulder.

"Come away," he commanded.

"Sahib—"

"Come, I told you."

He obeyed, and Brand shoved him into the back seat. The car whirled away, and no one spoke. Brand used the little flashlight to examine the seals of the envelope, until at last he said: "My office first, if you don't mind." After that, silence again until they passed the sentry at the outer gate. Then he said: "Would you fellows mind waiting in your car while I attend to official business?" He glanced at Nava Bala in the rear seat beside him, and gave Ann the key of his office door. "Go in and wait for me, will you?"

Nava Bala sat still.

"Very well, lean on me," said Brand. A night watchman came on the run, but he dismissed him. He had to pull Nava Bala out and help him up the three steps to the porch and the office door. Ann was still groping for the light-switch. In darkness he found a long chair for Nava Bala, and then himself turned on the light.

Ann gave an exclamation and started forward—but Brand stopped her.

"It's a case for mercy," he said. Then he phoned for the doctor, asking him to come in a hurry. After that, he held the heavy envelope toward the light. It had been slit by a bullet, but the seals were unbroken.

"How many years' service?" he demanded.

Nava Bala stared dumbly, then swallowed and spoke:

"Twenty; and so little pension, sahib."

BRAND threw the envelope into a desk drawer. He left the drawer open.

"Well?" he said. "Go on. Tell me." There was blood on his hand, but it was not his own. "That bullet that hit you was meant for me. That makes the fourth time you've saved my life. I'm going to save your honor. But why did you betray mine?"

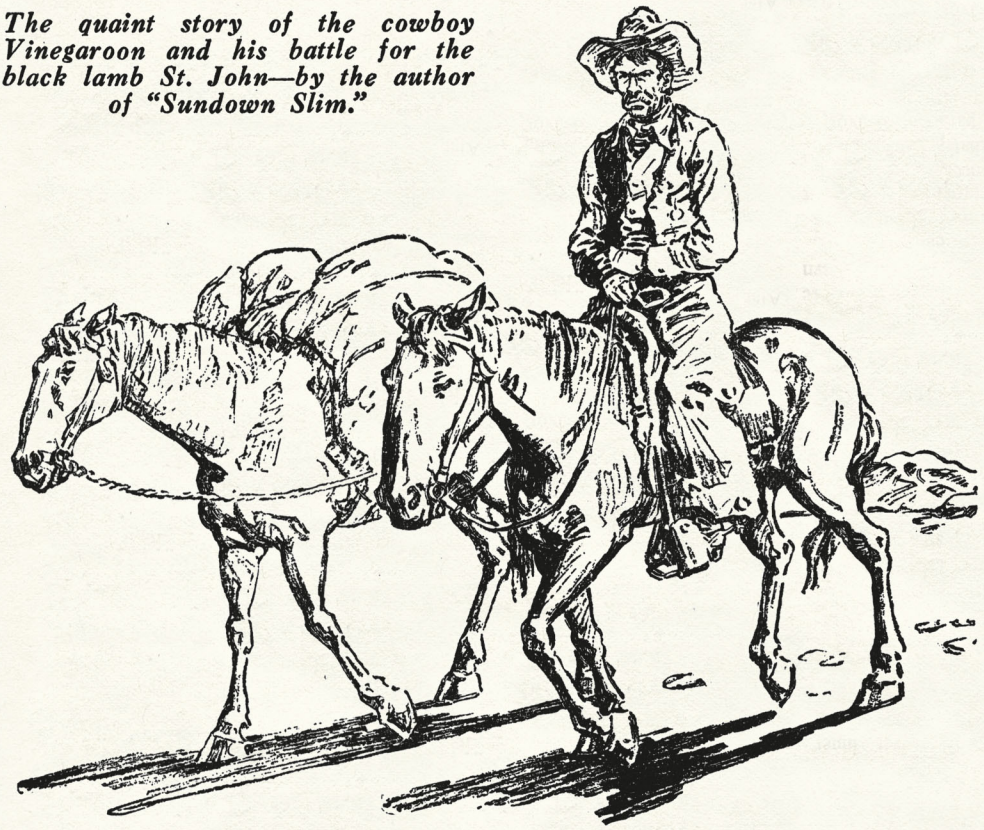
"Sahib,"—the man could hardly speak above a whisper—"it was told to me, that in that envelope, are names—of men—most honorable—charged with—" He drooped, then summoned all his remaining strength for the last word: "*—treason.*"

"So it seemed like honest money you were offered? Well, old fellow—thank you for having saved my life so often. You shall go on record as wounded while doing your duty."

He carried Nava Bala to his bedroom—summoned servants—gave what first aid he could. Then presently he returned to the office, took his resignation from the drawer and gave it to Ann, lighting a match while she read it.

Ann held it to the flame; and business, after that, until the doctor came, ceased to have the slightest official import.

The quaint story of the cowboy Vinegaroon and his battle for the black lamb St. John—by the author of "Sundown Slim."



EVER since those ancient days when the herdsmen of Lot and Abraham battled for the grazing land between Bethel and Hai, cattle-men and sheep-men have waged war upon one another. Even Vinegaroon, the Moonstone cow-hand, knew that.

He was lank, stoop-shouldered and pop-eyed, and he was called Vinegaroon because of an alleged resemblance to the attenuated and pestiferous variety of scorpion known by that corruption of its Spanish name. In the back of his not too large head revolved a blurred panorama of Biblical scenes; and in his not too small ears rang a sonorous succession of Biblical sayings which he often found difficult to adjust to the demands of life on a cattle-ranch. Yet, argue as you might, there were many things in the Good Book you could not budge. They were bedrock. He never read the Good Book openly, however; it would, he felt, be a reflection upon his manhood.

In Vinegaroon's circle it was not unethical to be kind-hearted. But to be openly so, argued a soft-spot. Usually cow-hands with soft-spots hid them deep. Vinegaroon was openly kind. Pride, and an eternal willingness to do his darnedest, kept him up to a reasonable workday standard. But when he contemplated what would happen should his companions learn that one of his peculiarities was a sneaking fondness for sheep, he actually shuddered. Lambs especially! Cute little cusses, funny and innocent and kind of lost-looking—which was not altogether an inaccurate description of Vinegaroon himself.

Peter Annersley, the Moonstone rod, was a considerate taskmaster. He never sent a top hand on a second-rate errand. But there are many second-rate errands connected with a big cattle-ranch, and Vinegaroon was something more than an ornament. Yet he never complained, no matter what he was required to do. Cowboys take their medicine and grin.

Twenty miles southeast of the ranch-house lay the Tanks, a desert water-hole marking an average boundary beyond which Moonstone cattle seldom ranged. Water was precious in that arid country. Though neither squatters nor sheep-men had intruded, there was no telling when they might. So usually there was a man stationed at the Tanks. Your duty there was to see that no slick-eared stock went unbranded, and that no outlander invaded the territory. You were just like one of those keep-off-the-grass signs. And

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

The Cowboy Shepherd

Illustrated by Monte Crews

that was no joke, either. Bud Shoop and Vinegaroon took it turn about. It was Vinegaroon's turn.

His hat-brim low against the morning sun, his old and frayed chaps flapping languidly to the steady plodding of his mount Ringleader, he rode pensively—a Don Quixote of the chaparral. Out on the big mesa, where the going allowed an unbroken rhythm, he fell to singing one of his favorite hymns. Just imagine being able even to hum that in the bunkhouse, and not get a boot flung at your head!

Quite as though she knew just where she was going, the old pack-horse Nellie plodded ahead, the pack rocking gently. Lots of grub in that pack. Ma Annersley had seen to that.

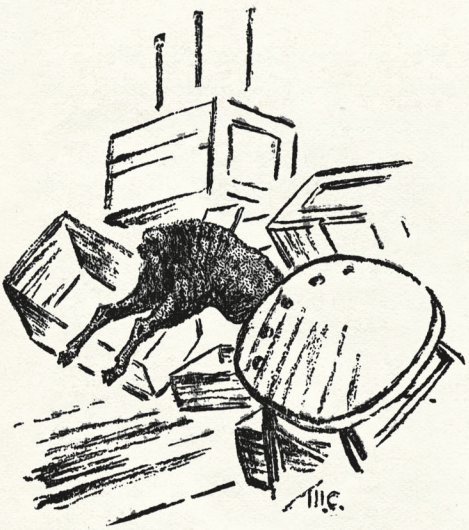
Another five miles, and he would cease to feel the pull of the Moonstone. The great mesa would take him to herself—swallow him up, as it were. Just like disappearing forever. It wouldn't even matter when he arrived at the Tanks. There would be no one to ask him if he had walked, or just waited for the wind to blow him in. By gosh, he was a free man!

He felt down into a saddle-pocket. Yes, the Good Book was there, the Bible his mother had given him when he left Kansas for Arizona. Now he could read it unmolested. And evenings, wouldn't he just blow a couple of reeds out of the old mouth-organ, the moon shining, and the coyotes over in the hills trying to ring in on the tune! He could even play hymns if he wanted to.

Lone Butte began to show its head. "A great rock in a weary land," breathed Vinegaroon. "Only I aint tired, and the old butte's more than a big rock. It's a chunk of the world. Got shoved up, I reckon, about the time Noah was looking for a dry spot." Slowly Lone Butte began to swing toward the west; in about three hours, the line shack would show up, way off in the distance, squatty and black. And there would be black dots around the water-hole—cattle belonging to the Moonstone ranch.

VINEGAROON greeted the old line shack as though it had been a human. It was his castle of romance, his citadel. The boys had been ragging him pretty hard, recently. He longed for solitude in which to readjust his world. He unpacked Nellie, hobbled both horses and turned them loose, and scoured the immediate country for fuel. Gosh, it was good to be alone! The setting sun slanted red across the salt-rimmed water-hole, as he prepared his meal.

Dishes washed and provisions put in order, he watched the horizon lift and blot out the sun. Almost immediately stars appeared. The air was as still as the surface of the water-hole. Nevertheless there were sounds, a rustle here, a creak there, and the far-off chime of the pack-horse bell, thin and sweet. This was just about perfect! The stars, now:



that one especially, big and glowing over the eastern hills—Star of Bethlehem, maybe. Long time ago. But stars didn't change.

The Shepherd Kings and the Manger. Funny how a star could make you imagine things. Here he was thinking he had heard the distant bleating of sheep! But there had been no sheep in that section for over thirty years. Sheep? Why, anyone that would try to run sheep on the Moonstone range would be plumb crazy. And if the Moonstone outfit heard of it, somebody would get hurt.

Vinegaroon found his mouth-organ in his pocket. Sitting in the doorway, he began a long-drawn sentimental tune. But doggone it, something was wrong with the old harmonicum! He tapped the mouth-organ on his boot-heel and tried again. It squawked on another note. But maybe it wasn't the mouth-organ. He stopped playing and listened. Faint and mellow across the still night air came the barking of a dog. A little shiver ran down Vinegaroon's back. First sheep bleating, then a dog barking! No, he wasn't imagining things because of thinking about a manger and the Star of Bethlehem. Somebody was running sheep on the Moonstone range.

AFTER a hasty breakfast Vinegaroon caught up Ringleader, saddled him. He would ride over to the eastern ridge and look around, just to satisfy himself there really were no sheep in the neighborhood. From the mesa level, east of the ridge, rose the thin smoke of a breakfast fire. Two pack-burros drowsed under a wide-spreading juniper; pack-saddles, packs, blankets and camp gear were scattered round about. With elaborate slowness, the Moonstone cowboy focused his field-glass first on the sheep-camp, then on the dirty white patch moving lazily across the distant mesa. Already his naked eye had told him, but he had not believed it. Sheep—on the Moonstone range!

The immemorial duty of a cowboy was to inform his boss at once. Sheep permanently destroyed grazing, and the stern ethics of cattle-land forbade a cowboy even to tolerate the thought of sheep. There was no argument. You simply loaded your rifle and ran 'em off the range.

Doggone sheep-men, anyway! Why couldn't they keep their darned old sheep where they belonged? Why didn't they read the Bible and do like Lot, who ran his sheep over in Jordan and stayed away from Canaan? The question was, here in Arizona, which was Jordan and which was Canaan? Now in his own case, what would the Good Book say? "A man cannot serve two masters." Was he to be loyal to the Moonstone, or to something bigger? Was he to break faith with his employer, or bring on war and bloodshed? Sweat trickled down Vinegaroon's lean face. Cattle wars were bad enough, but cow-hands didn't wantonly shoot cattle. They did shoot sheep, and stampede them over the rims of arroyos, hundreds at a time. Sheep and lambs crushed and shattered. . . .

Of all the many emergencies in Vinegaroon's knockabout life, this was the most serious. Fragments of Biblical sayings kept crowding into his mind. "Let not your right hand know what your left hand doeth." Did that mean when you were doing something good or something wrong? But a man couldn't go around with one hand in his pocket all the time. To warn that sheep-man would be a good deed, especially if you didn't report to the boss. Yet not to report would be black disloyalty. And both Peter Annersley and Ma Annersley had been mighty kind to him.

He had just about made up his mind to make a quick ride to the Moonstone to report, when from out on the mesa came the cry of a lamb, followed by the deep quavering answer of its mother. Sheep and lambs crushed and shattered. . . . Vinegaroon rode slowly down to the camp.

Pedro Montoya, owner of the sheep, a big man, quiet of manner, greeted the Moonstone cowboy courteously but with

reserve. Vinegaroon began to feel nervous. Cow-hand and sheep-man facing one another—the old beginning of many a frontier fracas.

"Them your sheep?" he asked.

The big sheep-man nodded.

"All of 'em?"

Montoya nodded again.

Vinegaroon gestured round about. "This here is the Moonstone range. What I mean is," he stammered, "it's cattle country."

"And very good cattle country, señor."

"But hell! Them are sheep!"

"Two thousand head, señor."

Vinegaroon grew desperate. "But I'm working for the Moonstone," he blurted. "They pay my wages. I got to tell 'em. You got to git out."

"That is in the hands of God, señor."

"No, it aint. It's in my hands, and doggoned if I like the job."

"You are a strange *vaquero*."

VINEGAROON had begun to think that, himself. But it was his first meeting with a sheep-man in forbidden territory. His pale gaze swept over the tall, stalwart figure. Maybe some of those sheep-herders in the Bible looked like that, big and broad, with black beards, and eyes that were steady and untroubled. . . . The cowboy learned with surprise and deepening respect that Montoya had been of the Rurales of Mexico. That meant that he was a real hand, a picked fighting-man, a man who simply had to be fast with a gun. And here tradition had it that sheep-men were a low-down ornery lot, cowardly, treacherous and easily stampeded.

The water in the arroyo was low, Montoya told him, and he was moving his sheep across the eastern mesa and bedding them near the Tecolote foothills that night. Courteously he asked Vinegaroon to dismount and have coffee with him. Moved partly by an inexplicable feeling of friendliness for this quiet shepherd, and partly by considerations of policy, the cowboy did so.

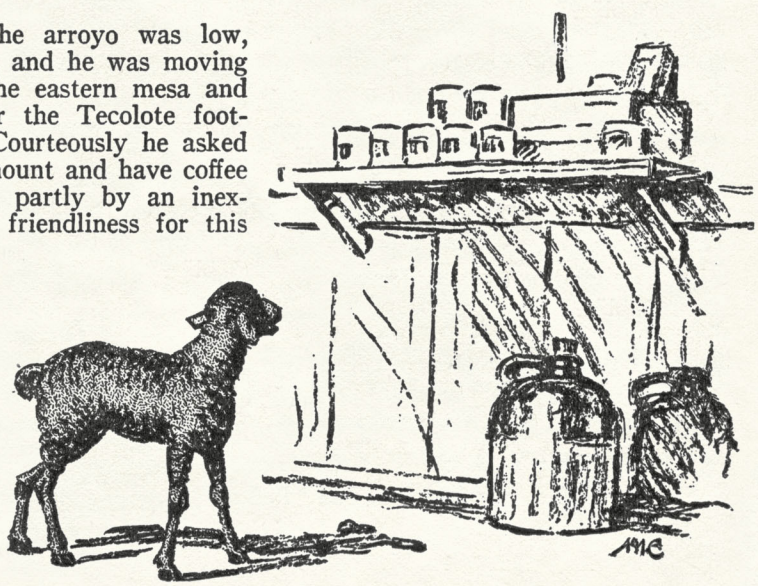
The stout brew stimulated his mind. He, a cow-hand, hobnobbing with a sheep-man, and one who was trespassing on Moonstone land! Vinegaroon finished drinking his coffee and rose hastily. "Thanks." He looked again into the grave dark eyes. "But honest, if you don't move them sheep today, I'll sure have to report to the boss."

The patriarchal sheep-man smiled. "You are a good boy. Do not worry. At noon we move the camp." And somehow Vinegaroon felt about five years old.

His feeling that his world had gone all awry had not left him when at the top of the ridge he turned and looked back. He had actually been friendly with that Mexican, just like he was a real human being and not a sheep-man!

After his noon meal Vinegaroon began to read in the Good Book, searching for something with which to justify himself. Finding much about sheep, but nothing to fit his case, he concluded that he just about broke even. He had served two masters, but he had done a good deed. And by jings, his right hand would never know what his left hand had done!

Although believing Montoya would do as he had said, the following morning Vinegaroon saddled up and rode slowly, very slowly to the juniper-covered ridge. He felt mean and low down to be spying around like that. Still, if the sheep had not been moved, he would simply have to head back to the ranch and report.

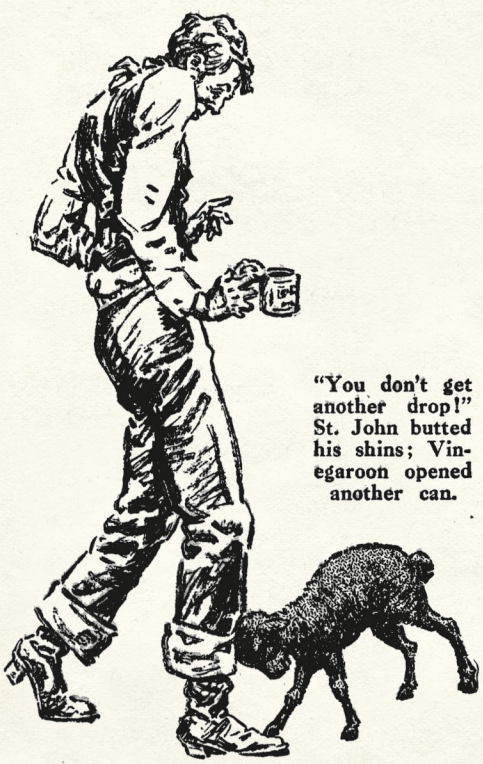


The supply of canned milk was now getting mighty low; St. John, consuming more than its foster parent, had left scarcely enough to get them back to Moonstone.

The camp below was empty.

About to swing round and ride back, he decided to take a good look with his field-glasses first. The glass picked up distant details amazingly—a stone here, a tiny patch of gravel there, and a lizard perched on the snakelike twist of a dead greasewood branch. No sheep. But sheep tracks—thousands of 'em. And one of the herders had left his coat, rolled up and tucked under that big greasewood. Black, of course. All Mexicans had black coats to wear in town. But what was a sheep-herder doing with a coat out here? Vinegaroon's heart thumped. The small black heap under the greasewood had moved. He steadied the glass. A newborn lamb! Some ewe had abandoned it. Ewes did that sometimes. Wonder the herder overlooked it. But herders did that sometimes, too. Slowly Vinegaroon put the glasses away. Old Master was sure piling it on. A newborn lamb, helpless, and as black as your Sunday hat! Well, it was none of his business, and the coyotes would get it before sundown.

With a last look, the Moonstone cowboy turned and rode sternly toward the Tanks. He would just forget about the whole business, sheep, abandoned lambs, Montoya, coffee, his right hand, and everything. But the harder he tried to forget, the clearer rang certain soul-searching phrases from the Good Book. "A little lamb shall lead them." Or was that just right? He felt a trifle vague, but it seemed like the right idea, somehow.



"You don't get another drop!" St. John butted his shins; Vinegaroon opened another can.

Impatient to get back to the Tanks, Ringleader took a stiff hold of his end of the reins. Vinegaroon's tone was unusually sharp. "Just for that, you'll turn round and look the other way a spell!" Ringleader's rider, however, did more than turn him round. Back up the eastern ridge, down through the abandoned sheep camp and out onto the mesa he urged the cow-pony. Not that Vinegaroon cared a hoot what became of the newborn lamb. He was a cowboy. But he would just take a look—see if it actually was a lamb. . . .

The lamb's black, woolly sides were plastered with clay. It was exceedingly gaunt and weak. At Vinegaroon's approach it raised its head. Vinegaroon saw its eyes, and turned away. When something that is hungry and helpless looks at you like that— Whose fault was it? Not his. Doggone sheep-men, anyway! Why couldn't they look after their own lambs? But the Good Shepherd, now—would He have walked off and left it to starve, or get et up by coyotes? "Feed His flock like a shepherd . . . gather the lambs in His arms . . . gently lead those that are with young." The lank cowboy spoke as though afraid some one might hear him. He didn't know exactly what the quotation referred to, save that it suggested kindness and gentleness. He stared down at the lamb. He sure would like to do something for it; but shucks, he just couldn't. The lamb raised its head again, and uttered a faint quavering sound of distress. This was too much for Vinegaroon. Definitely he took up the lamb and mounted Ringleader. On his way back to the Tanks he glanced down at the limp little black bundle in his arm. He'd gone and done it—adopted a sheep! And him a cowboy!

HIS experiments with warm canned milk, a spoon, his finger, a twisted rag, were discouraging. The lamb choked on the spoon, mumbled the finger, and all but swallowed the rag. Still too weak to get up on its feet, which is about the first thing a newborn lamb does, it lay on its side, panting, its eyes closed. Vinegaroon's heart sank. After all this trouble, was the darned thing going to

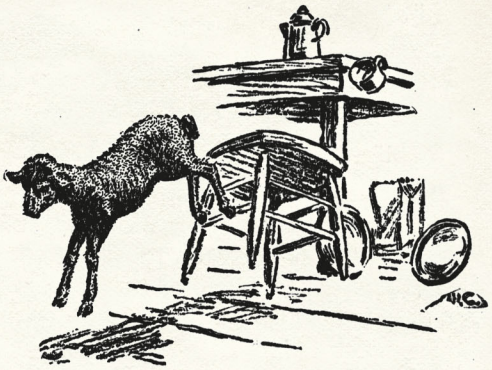
cash in? He cast about with anxious eyes. In a corner of the shack he found a thick strip of rawhide. He whittled it down to what he thought was the proper size and shape and dipped it in the milk. The lamb took it with avidity. Vinegaroon was kept busy re-dipping and hanging on to the slippery makeshift.

Vinegaroon sweated. The milk disappeared. Then, to his consternation, the lamb's head sank and it lay still. His kindness had killed it! Well, he had tried to save it, anyhow. Now he'd have to pack it out and bury it. He didn't want any gorged buzzards flapping near the shack. . . . For the first time since his arrival, Vinegaroon realized that this was a mighty lonesome job. Stepping to the doorway, he stood looking out across the desert. Yes, and this was a mighty lonesome country. But shucks, he was a cowboy, wasn't he? Mebby it was just as well the doggone lamb had cashed in. The sheep were gone. There wouldn't be anything to explain, now.

The lamb lay on the bunk. Vinegaroon stood gazing at its tiny feet, its small woolly head. Pore little feller! It's troubles were over. He stooped to take it out and bury it. The lamb came awake, and with startling vigor *baa-a-ed* in Vinegaroon's face.

"Might 'a' knowed. Had its belly full, and just naturally had to sleep it off. I'll know better next time." Vinegaroon chuckled. He had quite forgotten that he was supposed to be a hard-hearted cowboy, an exterminator of sheep.

Placed on the bunk, the black lamb hoisted up its hindquarters and asked for more milk. By evening it was on its four feet, constantly following Vinegaroon about. It got in his way, strayed outdoors, came in again, exploring the shack, mumbled everything that even faintly resembled a meal-ticket, and kept him awake most of the night soliciting nourishment. Next day it not only walked, but it romped. Small as it was, it seemed to occupy the entire cabin, and Vinegaroon congratulated himself that he had not adopted a calf. After breakfast for two, he took the dogie lamb to the water-hole and gave it a much-needed bath. There was also the immediate problem of giving it a name. Barricading the doorway with boxes to keep his charge from straying, Vinegaroon had recourse to the Good Book. Lots of lambs mentioned there, but none of 'em with names. Finally, in a vague way connecting the bathing of the lamb



with a baptism, he named it St. John. When he tried the new name, St. John came to him—also when as an experiment he called it Pete. It didn't seem to make any distinction.

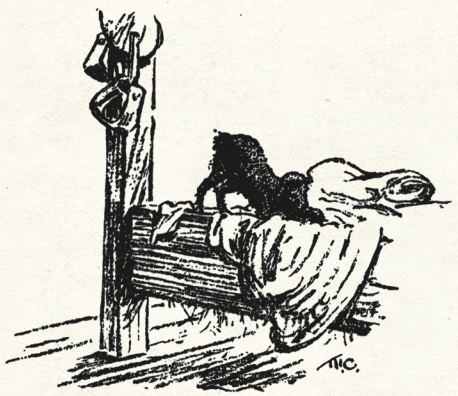
Its sides were rounding out. It looked bigger already. Vinegaroon began to wonder what in thunder he would do with the darned thing. Sooner or later he would have to go back to the Moonstone, and eventually St. John would become a sheep. A sheep on the Moonstone? He just couldn't bring his mental vision into that focus. Every possibility, he confessed, looked blurred-like, especially as he was learning one thing: Were you cowboy, preacher, or gambling man, once you had saved anything from starving to death, that kind of made it feel you were honest-to-gosh its friend. You couldn't say: "Now vamoose, and rustle your own grub."

DAY after day went by. Consuming more milk than its foster parent, St. John waxed fat and frisky. When Vinegaroon was not out riding the district or gathering firewood, St. John entertained him by butting his shins, romping round the shack till it sounded like a drum-corps on parade, upsetting everything that could be upset, and generally raising Cain. There was no longer room for even the thought of loneliness in Vinegaroon's mind. Yet when evening came and the gold faded from the west, he was wont to become pensive. This happy companionship couldn't go on forever.

One afternoon Bill Hapgood, the Redbank cowboy, making a long ride from San Carlos to his home ranch, stopped at the Tanks to spend the night. "Where in hell did you get the woolie?" was his first and only greeting.

Vinegaroon's status as a cowhand was imperiled.

"Didn't get it. It come."



Hapgood looked skeptical. "Must have come from heaven, then. No sheep in this country."

"You bet they aint. And he aint a sheep, yet."

"Why don't you get rid of it? It wouldn't take long."

"I sure aim to. Never liked sheep around, nohow." Vinegaroon changed the subject.

His arms filled with greasewood roots, Vinegaroon was plodding back to the shack that evening when he heard St. John bleat. It was not the usual bleat, but much shriller, a cry of terror. Dropping the fuel, Vinegaroon ran.

Hapgood had thrown the lamb down. Vinegaroon caught the sheen of a butcher knife. He leaped onto the Redbank cowboy and wrenched the knife from his hand. His face aflame, Hapgood rose. "You said you wanted to get rid of it, didn't you? And we aint got no fresh meat for supper."

White as chalk, his pop eyes hazed with red, Vinegaroon could not speak. Thinking the Moonstone cowboy had gone crazy, Hapgood knocked him down. Still clutching the knife, Vinegaroon got up, stammering. Hapgood knocked him down again.

"I turned the other cheek," mumbled Vinegaroon; and flinging the knife away, he lit into the Redbank hand.

IT was a brief scrap. After taking several well-meant punches, Hapgood put Vinegaroon down for the count. When the Moonstone cowboy came to, he stumbled over to the water-hole and washed his face.

After supper, instead of spreading his blankets, Hapgood saddled up. He didn't intend to stay and take any more chances. Vinegaroon was sure as loco as a sheep-herder!

Vinegaroon immediately went in search of St. John and carried him back to the shack. He had battled for a doggone' lamb, and had got pounded up plenty. Yet strangely enough, he thought more of it than ever. And he wasn't going to let anything like that happen to it again.

SEVERAL days later, returning from a hat-snatching chase among the junipers after a slick-eared yearling, Vinegaroon found the low barricade of boxes across the doorway pushed aside. St. John had vanished.

Laboriously he tracked the missing lamb across the big arroyo north of the shack. Searching the country beyond with his field-glass, he found no sign of St. John. He called and whistled. He heard nothing save the answering whistle of a circling hawk. But St. John must be somewhere out on the great mesa—and so were the coyotes! Or one of them anyway, over there near the foothills, trotting along like he was looking for something. The coyote was a long way off, but apparently heading for a definite spot. It took Vinegaroon about ten seconds to figure it out. He set the spurs into his mount. As Ringleader leaped rock and ridge, Vinegaroon's gaze swept the mesa. Was that little black blur standing in the middle of yonder sandy opening St. John? Yes. And St. John had seen the coyote. Vinegaroon could hear him calling for help. Dismounting and steadying himself on one knee, the Moonstone cowboy drew down on the swiftly moving figure. At the snarl of the carbine, the coyote leaped into the air and fell in a heap.

All the way back to the shack, St. John got lectured roundly. The lamb, however, seemed quite indifferent, nibbling at the tag on Vinegaroon's tobacco-sack; and once more corraled in the shack, it promptly asked for supper.

Vinegaroon opened a can of milk. But by gravy, St. John didn't deserve it. "Butting them boxes down and canteloping round the country like that!" The lamb's tail twitched rapidly; the milk disappeared. Vinegaroon grinned. "No, you don't get another drop." But when St. John butted his shins, Vinegaroon opened another can. After the fourth can, St. John resembled a football on four clothes-pins. Leaping to the bunk, he folded his legs and went to sleep. Vinegaroon gazed proudly and admiringly: the doggone' lamb could eat as much as a calf. The supply of canned milk

was getting mighty low. St. John had left them scarcely enough to last them back to the Moonstone.

The Moonstone! Vinegaroon came to with a jolt. Day after tomorrow he was due to return. What in thunder would he do with the lamb? All that he had done so far was nothing compared with what he would have to face should he take the lamb back with him. That meant disclosing the fact that he had failed in his duty as a cowboy. What would the boss think, and Ma Annersley, who had been as kind as his own mother? Probably he would lose his job. Even if he didn't, the boys would make life miserable for him. Of course, he could hunt up another job. But he was no drifter, no chuck-line rider. He belonged to the Moonstone. It was the only home he had known since leaving Kansas. And now to ride up to the ranch with a measly lamb!

All that night and the next, Vinegaroon battled with powers of darkness. The final morning came at last, and with it his decision. Not until after his coffee was he able to look St. John in the face. Vinegaroon was sitting in the doorway smoking his after-breakfast cigarette when St. John pattered up behind him and gently nibbled his ear. Vinegaroon tingled from head to foot. If that lamb only knew what was going to happen, most probably it would walk plumb out to the middle of the water-hole and drown itself. Yet Vinegaroon had done all he could for it. Hated like thunder to leave it behind. And now he was scratching its head just like they were going to be friends forever. Here, this wouldn't do! Rising, he stalked out, caught up the horses, packed his few belongings and made ready to leave.

Yet he delayed, his excuse a loose door-hinge, which he repaired. Next he cut some whips of brush, fashioned a crude broom, and actually swept the floor of the shack. And the old stove never was plumb straight; so, using a pan of water for a gauge, he wedged it to a proper level. Uncomfortably affectionate that morning, St. John frisked about, dogged Vinegaroon's every step; and when the cowboy finally stopped work and stood gazing out across the mesa, rubbed against his leg. "No," said Vinegaroon sternly. "Can't you see that wherever you are, there's bound to be trouble?"

"Ba-aa!" said St. John.

After a final and quite unnecessary inspection of the premises, Vinegaroon mounted Ringleader, and without a glance at the lamb, headed down the mesa trail. The cowboy felt that his heart had turned black and his liver white. The powers of darkness had won.

WERE those little hoofs pattering behind him? He had become so accustomed to hearing them, Vinegaroon imagined he heard them now. To assure himself that they weren't, he looked back down the trail. St. John, only a few yards in the rear, was trotting along as though he enjoyed it! Presently the pattering ceased. Vinegaroon rode on. Well, that was settled; St. John would go back now. But St. John was made of sterner metal. Again Vinegaroon heard the patter of feet. This time he wouldn't look back, doggoned if he would! But the lamb, determined not to lose the only parent it had, kept on coming. Vinegaroon grew desperate. He thought of putting the horses to a faster gait; but that, somehow, seemed a mighty low-down trick. The horses plodded steadily along. St. John almost caught up, lagged and rested, then came on again. Vinegaroon's black heart began to get a little pink around the edges. Not that he intended to take the blamed thing to the Moonstone. He simply couldn't. But St. John's pluck and perseverance had made a dent in his soul.

The cowboy experienced a strange feeling of pity and exultation. Kneeling, he took the black lamb in his arms.

It was a long, slow pull up the rounding hill. The patter of feet ceased. Vinegaroon kept on, not looking back. Over the top and down at the other side plodded the horses. No pattering feet now. St. John had quit at last. Far out on the mesa level, Vinegaroon turned and looked back. On the top of the hill stood the black lamb, looking so small, so lonely and forlorn in that great empty country, that Vinegaroon could have wept. Then across the shimmering space came a shrill cry, an accusing cry, the cry of one lost in the wilderness. Vinegaroon's black heart suddenly blanched. He reined Ringleader round.

Galloping down the slope and bleating at every jump, St. John met him halfway. As he came up to Vinegaroon, the cowboy experienced a strange feeling of pity and exultation. Kneeling, he took the black lamb in his arms.

YET even now he couldn't quite overcome the old cowboy tradition. He stuffed the lamb into an empty alforja, and glancing about hurriedly, drew the pack-sheet down so that only its head showed. Too tired to resent this confinement, St. John drowsed, its head bobbing up and down as the cavalcade moved on.

By the time that they halted at noon, midway between Cutbank and the Hopi ruins, where St. John was fed and tucked back into the alforja, Vinegaroon's odd exultation had diminished considerably. Some of the teachings in the Scriptures were mighty fine, and also mighty hard to use on week-days. Though his heart had suffered no change, he began to feel the pull of the Moonstone. Pretty soon he would be in the ranch-yard, unpacking, and the boys crowding around. He looked down at the small woolly head in the alforja. Abruptly he left the trail and took a roundabout way home, the old road beyond the Hopi ruins. It would bring him in long after dark.

He arrived at the ranch house about midnight. Carrying St. John to the toolshed, Vinegaroon dropped him into a high-sided wooden box and laid a heavy sledge on the cover. He tiptoed to the bunk-house like a burglar, pulled off his boots and overalls, and rolling into bed, tried to forget what he must face in the morning. . . .

"What in hell you doin' in here?"

Dawn light shimmered in the bunk-house doorway. Bill Wade and Buck were sitting up, staring. Vinegaroon awakened with a start. In the gray light stood a familiar shape, small and black, with funny legs and a funny, roundish head. Tonto, Bud and the new hand also stared. A sheep in the Moonstone bunk-house!

Vinegaroon sat frozen, hoping that the lamb would not recognize him. Evidently searching for something, St. John pattered round the bunk-house. In front of Vinegaroon he stopped short, gave a loud *baa-aa,* and leaped onto his bunk.

Buck uttered an exclamation. "Say, is he yours?"

The questioning eyes of his fellows upon him, Vinegaroon's heart failed him. "Hell, no! Think I'm a damn' sheepherder?" He pushed the lamb off the bed. St. John promptly leaped back again and began to nibble Vinegaroon's hand.

Bill Wade playfully reached for his six-shooter. "Then he's mine." The gun came down slowly. "Talk up, Vinegar! This here trigger-pull is cut fine."

Vinegaroon's voice rose shrilly. "Don't know anything about him. Never saw him before."

Out in the dooryard Ma Annersley's big Plymouth Rock rooster crowed vigorously. Vinegaroon started up, his pop eyes heavy with pain. *Before the cock crow,* the Good Book said. And he had denied—well, it wasn't exactly the same as in the Good Book, but he had denied all responsibility for the lamb he had saved. He snatched his pistol from the wall. "You touch that lamb," he stammered, "and I'll blow your damn' head off."

The room grew exceedingly still. Whoever made the wrong move now would probably get shot. Tonto Charley, the most reckless of the outfit, flung a boot at Vinegaroon's uplifted arm. It hit the lamb back of the ear and knocked it off the bed.

Dropping his gun, Vinegaroon grabbed up St. John and turned on Tonto Charley. His face was white with rage.

"WELL, I declare! How long since you boys stopped answering the breakfast-bell?" Ma Annersley stood in the doorway. Feet shuffled. Ma Annersley's eyes lifted from the gun on the floor to Vinegaroon, then to the lamb. The lank cowboy stammered, unable to speak. "Vinegaroon, you get your clothes on and come over to the kitchen."

St. John in his arms and tribulation in his heart, Vinegaroon obeyed.

"Where in consternation did you get that lamb?" Ma Annersley's voice was uncompromising.

"I found it," blurted Vinegaroon. "Over the ridge east of the Tanks. It was laying out there in the desert pretty nigh dead." His eyes implored her. "It didn't cost nothing to save it. I'll pay for the milk."

Sheep on the Moonstone range! Why hadn't he reported?

"I dunno. Mebby because I figured it would mean shooting and killing. Sheep all trampled and dead. Some of our boys killed too, mebby." His stumbling attempt at justification failed. Yes, he knew it wasn't any use, but he just had to go on. "It's like in the Good Book. You know, Ma. Where it says, 'suffer little children to come unto Me and forbid them not.' And it seems to me lambs aint so awful different."

"Well, I never! You mean to tell me you read the Bible?"

Red crept into Vinegaroon's face. "Yes, Ma. Sometimes."

THE hall door opened; Peter Annersley, his boots in his hand, stepped in. He stared at Vinegaroon, at the black lamb in his arms.

"It's Vinegaroon's," said Ma. "It seems we've got a hand on this ranch that reads the Bible."

Peter Annersley grunted. In silence he sat down and began to pull on his boots.

"St. John, he—" broke in Vinegaroon.

Peter gave a start. "Saint what?"

"St. John."

Ma Annersley exchanged glances with the owner of the Moonstone. "Vinegaroon, you can step outside a minute."

He did so. Hatless, his lean face framed by a tangle of hair as he stood with the black lamb in his arms, the lank cowboy was not unlike certain crude lithographs of the Biblical shepherds. His pop eyes, filled with anxious questioning, were fixed on the doorway. Bending close to Peter, Ma Annersley gestured and talked in a low tone.

Presently she came to the door. "Vinegaroon!" she said crisply. Vinegaroon felt that he had no hope left. He'd done lost his job. And worse, he was going to catch particular hell. He could have stood it from Peter. But from Ma!

"You can leave that lamb with me a spell." She was once more the commanding officer. "And plain *John* will do around here." Her eyes began to twinkle. "One saint on the Moonstone is a plenty."

In his pilgrimage to the bunk-house, Vinegaroon trod on sunbeams. Peter was the owner of the Moonstone, and a mighty fine boss. But Ma was the real rod, if anyone was to ask you.

"Ba-aa!" came in a long-drawn chorus from the bunk-house as he stepped in. It was startlingly like a band of sheep in a new bedding-ground. Vinegaroon's face burned. Yes sir, trying to follow the Good Book sometimes led a man down a mighty thorny trail. There was the sound of pattering feet. He turned. Doggoned if it wasn't St. John! The little cuss had heard sheep calling, and he'd had to come looking for his kind.

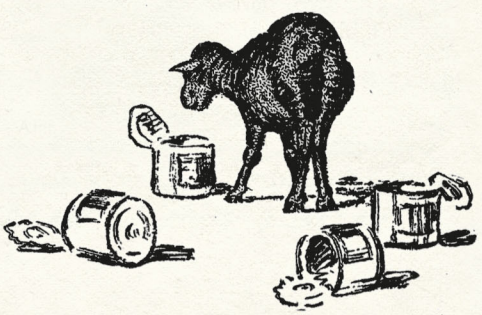
The boys jeered as he took the lamb in his arms. Vinegaroon's lank form straightened. "All right. But I'm here to tell you he's mine. And if you want to know, his name is St. John, out of the Bible."

And this was Vinegaroon! Bill Wade grinned. "Any more to that song?"

"Plenty." A tinge of defiance was in his tone. "Last month I set in with a Mexican that was running sheep east of the Tanks. And I didn't light a shuck for home and report to the boss, neither—because I didn't aim to start you fellas shooting at a better man than you are." Though outwardly the same loose-jointed and amiably inconsequent figure, he was not the same Vinegaroon who had set out for the Tanks several weeks ago. He had fought the good fight and had won. To some it might seem a small field and a trivial encounter. But not to Vinegaroon. "And what's more," he declared, "this here lamb is going to stay as long as I do. Now what you got to say?"

Strangely, the boys said nothing. . . .

That is why, should you happen to visit the Moonstone ranch, you will not be surprised to see an old black ewe ambling placidly about the door-yard, and to learn that her name is John.



SWORDS of MARS

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

A mechanical brain which directs a space-ship on a terrific journey beyond the sky to the moons of Mars—there's adventure for you! And it's described with all the magic that has won for the author of "Tarzan" his high reputation.

Illustrated by Robert Fink

The Story Thus Far:

KILLERS and kidnapers and other criminals are a curse to America, the land of my birth; but these constitute but a slight menace as compared with the highly efficient criminal organizations which flourish upon Mars.

Ever since I—John Carter of Virginia, an emigrant from Earth—had become Warlord of Mars, I had been seeking to extirpate this criminal system. With this end in view, I finally decided to go alone, secretly and in disguise, to the city of Zodanga, which lies nearly two thousand miles from my capital Helium—and which serves as headquarters for the most powerful guilds of assassins on Mars.

My wife Dejah Thoris and my son Carthoris sought to dissuade me from the dangerous undertaking; but my purpose was fixed; and so one night I set forth in a fast one-man flyer. I covered my body with red pigment so that I might pass for a Martian; and I had provided myself with Zodangan harness and weapons. Taking advantage of the heavy air-traffic next day, I managed to evade the patrol planes, slipped into the city and landed at an unpretentious public hangar.

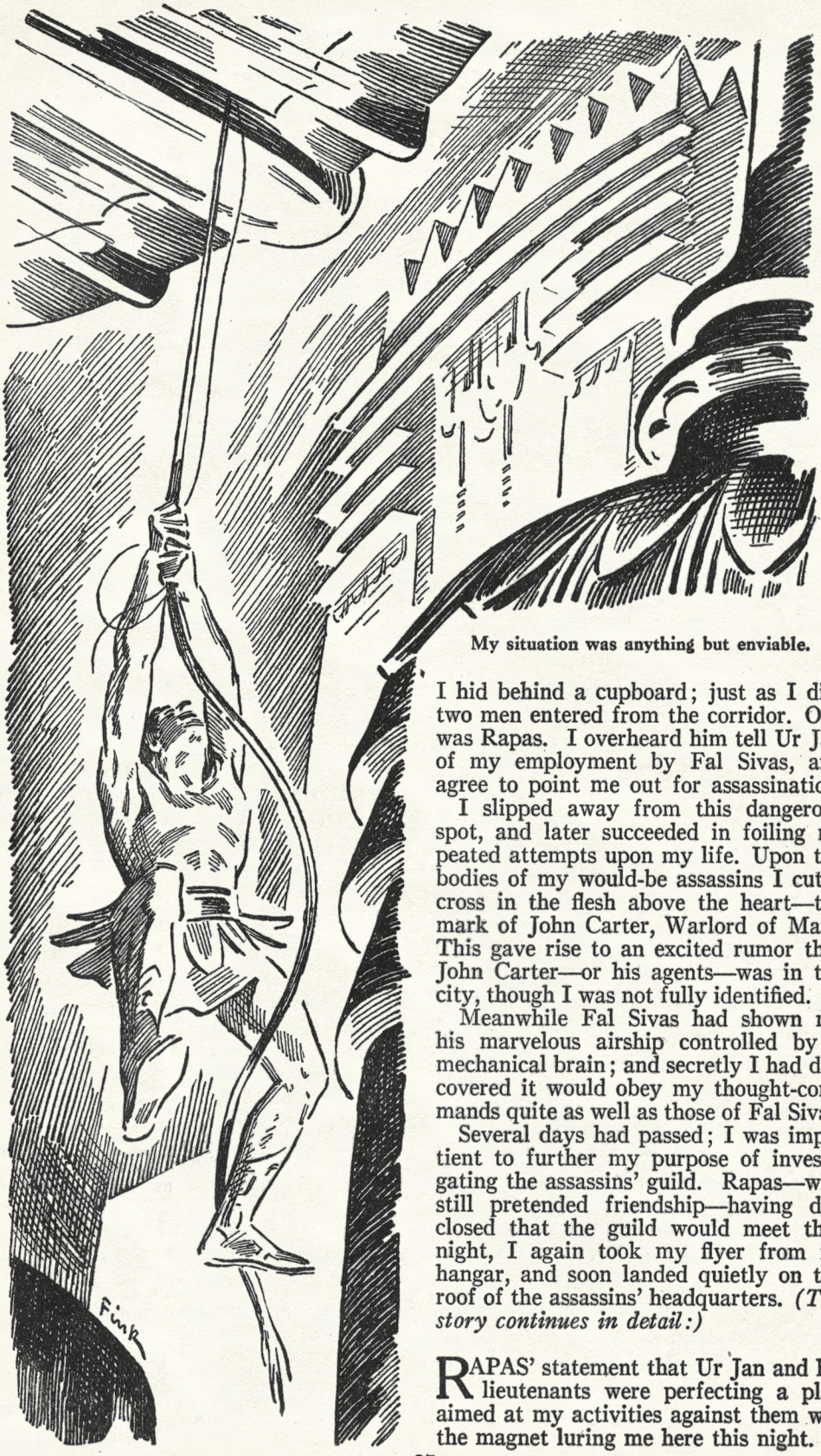
My flyer safely sheltered, I found lodgings for myself in a public house. And here I had a stroke of luck; for occupying the sleeping-platform next to mine was a shifty-eyed fellow with whom I contrived to strike up an acquaintance. I learned that his occupation was that of an assassin, and that his name was Rapas the Ulsio (the Rat). And when I stated that I too was a fighting-man, and that I had been compelled to flee my own city because of a murder, he offered to introduce me to his employer,—a wealthy inventor named Fal Sivas,—as he himself had other prospects.

That night a slave admitted us to a great walled mansion; and presently I found myself in a room of Sybaritic luxury, answering the questions of Fal Sivas. He had many enemies, he explained, chief of whom was a rival inventor who sought to steal his inventions and destroy him, and who had employed the assassins' guild headed by Ur Jan for that purpose. To test my ability, Fal Sivas proposed a fencing-match between me and Rapas. In the duel which followed, I twice disarmed Rapas, earning his hatred; but Fal Sivas, highly pleased, hired me.

That night I was inspecting the commodious quarters assigned me, when a girl burst in and begged me to hide her. Later, she told me a dreadful story.

"Fal Sivas," she told me, "is not so great an inventor as he is a murderer and a thief. He steals ideas from other inventors and then has them murdered in order to safeguard what he has stolen. . . . His greatest invention is a ship that will travel through interplanetary space, controlled by a mechanical brain. To duplicate the human brain, he must examine it. For this he needs slaves, who are purchased or kidnaped for him—slaves like me. By means of rays which penetrate the tissues, he watches their brains function. For hours he applies various stimuli, and watches the reaction. Imagine the suffering of his poor victims!"

Next day I selected this girl Zanda for my slave, and so contrived to protect her for the time being. And that night, with Fal Sivas' permission, I undertook a scouting raid upon the headquarters of Ur Jan's guild of assassins. Boarding my flyer, I cruised to the building described, and alighted undetected on its roof. I let myself down to a balcony, and made my way within. Off a corridor, I presently found an anteroom, and beyond a closed door I heard the sound of voices.



My situation was anything but enviable.

I hid behind a cupboard; just as I did, two men entered from the corridor. One was Rapas. I overheard him tell Ur Jan of my employment by Fal Sivas, and agree to point me out for assassination.

I slipped away from this dangerous spot, and later succeeded in foiling repeated attempts upon my life. Upon the bodies of my would-be assassins I cut a cross in the flesh above the heart—the mark of John Carter, Warlord of Mars. This gave rise to an excited rumor that John Carter—or his agents—was in the city, though I was not fully identified.

Meanwhile Fal Sivas had shown me his marvelous airship controlled by a mechanical brain; and secretly I had discovered it would obey my thought-commands quite as well as those of Fal Sivas.

Several days had passed; I was impatient to further my purpose of investigating the assassins' guild. Rapas—who still pretended friendship—having disclosed that the guild would meet that night, I again took my flyer from its hangar, and soon landed quietly on the roof of the assassins' headquarters. *(The story continues in detail:)*

RAPAS' statement that Ur Jan and his lieutenants were perfecting a plan aimed at my activities against them was the magnet luring me here this night.

I had decided that I would not again attempt to use the anteroom off their meeting-place, as not only was the way to it fraught with too much danger but even were I to reach safely the shadowed niche behind the cupboard, I still would be unable to hear anything of their proceedings through the closed door.

I had another plan, and this I put into immediate execution.

I BROUGHT my flyer to rest at the edge of the roof directly above the room in which the assassins met; then I made a rope fast to one of the rings in her gunwale.

Lying on my belly, I looked over the edge of the roof to make sure of my position and found that I had gauged it to a nicety. Directly below me was the edge of a balcony before a lighted window. My rope hung slightly to one side of the window where it was not visible to those within the room.

Carefully I set the controls of my ship and then tied the end of a light cord to the starting lever. These matters attended to, I grasped the rope and slipped over the eaves of the roof, carrying the light cord in one hand.

I descended quietly, as I had left my weapons on my flyer lest they clank against one another or scrape against the side of the building as I descended and thus attract attention to me.

Very cautiously I descended; and when I had come opposite the window, I found that I could reach out with one hand and grasp the rail of the balcony. I drew myself slowly to it and into a position where I could stand securely.

Shortly after I had dropped below the edge of the roof, I had heard voices; and now that I was close to the window, I was delighted to discover that it was open and that I could hear quite well nearly all that was going on within the room. I recognized Ur Jan's voice. He was speaking as I drew myself to the balcony.

"Even if we get him tonight," he said, "and he is the man I think he is, we can still collect ransom from the girl's father or grandfather."

"And it should be a fat ransom," said another voice.

"All that a great ship will carry," replied Ur Jan, "and with it a promise of immunity for all the assassins of Zodanga and their promise that they will not persecute us further."

I could not but wonder whom they were plotting against now—probably some wealthy noble; but what connection there was between my death and the kidnaping of the girl, I could not fathom, unless, perhaps, they were not speaking of me at all but of another.

At this point, I heard a rapping sound and Ur Jan's voice saying, "Come in."

I heard a door open and the sound of men entering the room.

"Ah," exclaimed Ur Jan, clapping his hands together, "you got him tonight! Two of you were too many for him, eh?"

As I sped through the thin air of dying Mars, Thuria rose above the horizon, flooding with light the ruined cities upon the verges of ancient seas.

"We did not get him," replied a surly voice.

"What?" demanded Ur Jan. "Did he then not come to the usual eating-place tonight?"

"He was there all right," said another voice, which I recognized instantly as that of Rapas. "I had him there, as I promised."

"Well, why didn't you get him?" demanded Ur Jan angrily.

"When he left the eating-place," explained one of the other men, "we followed him immediately; but he had disappeared when we reached the avenue. He was nowhere in sight; and though we walked rapidly all the way to the house of Fal Sivas, we saw nothing of him."

"Was he suspicious?" asked Ur Jan. "Do you think that he guessed that you had come there for him?"

"No, I am sure he did not. He did not seem to notice us at all. I did not even see him look at us."

"I cannot understand how he disappeared so quickly," said Rapas; "but we can get him tomorrow night. He has promised to meet me there then."

"Listen," said Ur Jan; "you must not fail me tomorrow. I am sure that this man is John Carter. After all, though, I am glad that we did not kill him. I have just thought of a better plan. I will send four of you tomorrow night to wait near the house of Fal Sivas. I want you to take John Carter alive and bring him to me. With him alive, we can collect two shiploads of treasure for his princess."

"And then we will have to hide in the pits of Zodanga all the rest of our lives," demurred one of the assassins.

Ur Jan laughed. "After we collect the ransom, John Carter will never bother us again," he said.

"You mean—"

"I am an assassin, am I not?" demanded Ur Jan. "Do you think that an assassin will be so foolish as to let a dangerous enemy live?"

NOW I understood the connection between my death and the abduction they had mentioned. The girl was none other than my divine princess, Dejah Thoris!

It was from Mors Kajak, Tardos Mors, and myself that the scoundrels expected to collect two shiploads of ransom; and they well knew, and I knew, that they had not figured amiss. We three would gladly have exchanged many shiploads

of treasure for the safety of the incomparable Princess of Helium.

I realized now that I must return immediately to Helium and insure the safety of my princess, but I lingered there on the balcony for a few moments longer, listening to the plans of the conspirators.

"But," objected one of Ur Jan's lieutenants, "even if you succeed in getting Dejah Thoris—"

"There is no 'even' about it," snapped Ur Jan. "It is already as good as accomplished. I have been preparing for this for a long time. I have done it very secretly so that there would be no leak; but now that we are ready to strike, it makes no difference. I can tell you that two of my men are guards in the palace of the princess, Dejah Thoris."

"Well, granted that you can get her," objected the former voice skeptically, "where can you hide her? Where, upon all Barsoom, can you hide the Princess of Helium from the great Tardos Mors, even if you are successful in putting John Carter out of the way?"

"I shall not hide her on Barsoom," replied Ur Jan.

"What, not upon Barsoom? Where, then?"

"Thuria," replied Ur Jan.

"Thuria!" The speaker laughed. "You will hide her on the nearer moon! That is good, Ur Jan. That would be a splendid hiding-place—if you could get her there."

"I can get her there all right." Ur Jan's tone was assured. "I am not acquainted with Gar Nal for nothing."

"Oh, you mean that fool ship he is working on? The one in which he expects to go visiting around among the planets? You don't think that thing will work, even after he gets it finished, do you—if he ever does get it finished?"

"It *is* finished," replied Ur Jan, "and it will fly to Thuria."

"Well, even if it will, we do not know how to run it."

"Gar Nal will run it for us. He needs a vast amount of treasure to complete other boats, and for a share of the ransom he has agreed to pilot the ship for us."

Now, indeed, I realized all too well how carefully Ur Jan had made his plans and how great was the danger to my princess. Any day now they might succeed in abducting Dejah Thoris, and I knew that this would not be impossible, with two traitors in her guard.

I decided that I could not waste another moment. I must leave for Helium at once!

Then Fate intervened and nearly made an end of me.

As I started to climb the rope and swung away from the balcony, a part of my harness caught upon one of its iron ornaments; and when I attempted to disengage it, the thing broke loose and fell upon the balcony.

"What was that?" I heard Ur Jan's voice demand, and then I heard footsteps coming toward the window. They came fast, and an instant later the figure of Ur Jan loomed before me.

"A spy!" he yelled, and leaped onto the balcony.

CHAPTER XI

Jat Or

WERE I prone to seek excuses outside of myself to explain the causes of misfortunes which overtake me, I might, at that moment, have inquired why Fate should throw her weight in favor of evildoers and against me. My cause was, unquestionably, a cause of righteousness, yet the trifling fact that an iron ornament upon a balcony in the city of Zodanga had been loose and that my harness had accidentally caught upon it had placed me in a situation from which it seemed likely that I could not escape with my life.

However, I was not dead yet; and I had no intention of resigning myself to the dictates of an unkind and unjust Fate without a struggle. Furthermore, in the idiom of a famous American game, I had an ace in the hole.

As Ur Jan clambered out onto the balcony, I had swung away from it, clinging to the rope attached to my flyer above; and, at the same time, I started to climb.

Like a pendulum, I swung; and, having reached the end of my arc, I swung back again, seemingly directly into the arms of Ur Jan.

IT all happened quickly, much more quickly than I can tell it. Ur Jan laid hold of the hilt of his sword; I drew my knees well up against my body; I swung toward him; then, as I was almost upon him, I kicked out at him with both feet—full in the chest and with all my strength.

Ur Jan staggered back against another of the assassins who was following him onto the balcony, and they both went down in a heap.

Simultaneously, I pulled on the light cord that I had attached to the starting lever of my motor. In response, the ship rose; and I rose with it, dangling at the end of my rope.

My situation was anything but an enviable one. I could not, of course, guide the ship; and if it failed to rise rapidly enough, I stood an excellent chance of being dashed to death against some building as I was dragged across the city; but even this menace was by no means the greatest which threatened me, for now I heard a shot, and a bullet whirred past me—the assassins were attempting to shoot me down.

I climbed as rapidly as I could toward my flyer; but climbing a small rope, while swinging beneath a rising airship, is not an enviable situation, even without the added hazard of being fired at by a band of assassins.

The ship carried me diagonally across the avenue upon which stood the building that harbored Ur Jan's band. I thought surely that I must hit the eaves of the opposite building; and, believe me, I put every ounce of my strength and agility into climbing that rope, as I swung rapidly across the avenue.

In this instance, however, Fate favored me; and I skimmed just above the roof of the building.

The assassins were still firing at me, but I imagine that most of their hits in the past had been scored with daggers or poison, for their pistol practice was execrable.

At last my fingers closed over the gunwale of my ship, and a moment later I had drawn myself to her deck. Reaching for her controls, I opened the throttle wide and set her nose for Helium.

Perhaps I was reckless, for I ignored the threat of the patrol boats and made

no effort to escape their vigilance. Nothing, I felt, mattered to me now but to reach Helium in time to safeguard my princess.

How well my enemies knew where to strike at me! How well they knew my vulnerable spots! They knew that nothing I possessed, including my life, would I refuse to give for the preservation of Dejah Thoris. They must have known, too, the price that they would have to pay if harm befell her; and this fact marked them for the desperate men that they were. I had threatened their security and their lives, and they were risking everything in this bold attempt to defeat me.

I wondered if any of them had recognized me. I had not seen Rapas at the window; and, in the darkness of the night, there seemed little likelihood that the other two assassins, who had seen me but momentarily in the eating-place, could have been sure that it was I whom they saw for a second dangling at the end of a twirling rope. I felt that they might have suspected that it was Vandor, but I hoped that they were not sure that it was John Carter.

My swift craft moved rapidly across the city of Zodanga; and I thought I was going to get away without difficulty, when suddenly I heard the warning wail of a patrol boat, signaling me to stop.

It was considerably above me, and slightly ahead and to the starboard when it discovered me. My throttle was open wide, and I was racing through the thin air of the dying planet at full speed.

THE patrol boat must have realized instantly that I had no intention of stopping, for it shot forward in a burst of speed, at the same time diving for me. Its velocity in that long dive was tremendous; and though it was, normally, not as fast a craft as mine, its terrific speed in the dive was far greater than my craft could attain.

I was already too low to gain speed by diving, nor could I thus have equaled the great speed of the larger craft, the weight of which added to its momentum.

It was coming right down on top of me and overhauling me rapidly—coming diagonally from my starboard side.

It seemed futile to hope that I could escape it; and when it opened up on me with its bow guns, I almost had it in my mind to give up the fight and surrender, for at least then I should be alive. Otherwise, I should be dead; and dead I could be no help to Dejah Thoris. But I was faced then with the fact that I would be delayed, that I might not be able to reach Helium in time. I was sure to be arrested, and almost certainly I would be imprisoned for attempting to escape the patrol boat. I had no papers, and that would make it all the harder for me. I stood an excellent chance of being thrown into slavery, or into the prison-pits beneath the city to await the coming games.

The risk was too great. I must reach Helium without delay.

SUDDENLY I swung my helm to starboard; so quickly the little craft obeyed my will, that I came near to being catapulted from her deck as she swung suddenly into the new course.

I tacked directly beneath the hull of the patrol boat as she hurtled close above me; and thus she could not fire upon me, as her guns were masked by her own hull.

Now it was that her greater weight and the speed of her dive worked to my advantage. They could not check the velocity of this larger ship and turn her onto the new course with the same facility with which I had maneuvered my lighter one-man craft.

The result was that before she was on my trail again, I had passed far beyond the outer walls of Zodanga; and, running as I was without lights, the patrol boat could not pick me up.

I saw her own lights for a few moments, but I could tell that she was not upon the right course; and then, with a sigh of relief, I settled myself for the long journey to Helium.

As I sped through the thin air of dying Mars, Thuria rose above the western horizon ahead, flooding with her brilliant light the vast expanse of dead sea bottoms where once rolled mighty oceans bearing on their bosoms the great ships of the glorious race that then dominated the young planet.

I passed their ruined cities upon the verges of these ancient seas; and in my imagination I peopled them with happy, care-free throngs. There again were the great jeddaks who ruled them and the warrior clans that defended them. Now all were gone, and doubtless the dark recesses of their stately buildings housed some wild tribe of cruel and mirthless green men.

And so I sped across the vast expanse of waste land toward the Twin Cities

of Helium and the woman I loved—the woman whose deathless beauty was the toast of a world.

I had set my destination-compass on my goal, and now I stretched myself upon the deck of my flyer and slept.

IT is a long and lonely journey from Zodanga to Helium, and this time it seemed stretched to interminable length because of my anxiety for the safety of my princess; but at last it was ended, and I saw the scarlet tower of greater Helium looming before me.

As I approached the city, a patrol boat stopped me and ordered me alongside.

During the day, I had removed the red pigment from my skin; and even before I gave my name, the officer in command of the patrol boat recognized me.

I thought I noticed some restraint and embarrassment in his manner, but he said nothing other than to greet me respectfully and ask if his ship might escort me to my palace.

I thanked him and asked him to follow me so that I would not be detained by other patrol boats; and when I was safely above my own hangars, he dipped his bow and left.

As I alighted on the roof, the hangar guard ran forward to take the ship and run her into her hangar.

These men were old and loyal retainers who had been in my service for years. Ordinarily, they greeted me with enthusiasm when I returned from an absence, their manner toward me, while always respectful, being more that of old servants than strictly military retainers; but tonight they greeted me with averted eyes and seemed ill at ease.

I did not question them, though I felt intuitively that something was amiss. Instead, I hastened down the ramp into my palace and made my way immediately toward the quarters of my princess.

As I approached them, I met a young officer of her personal guard; and when he saw me he came rapidly to meet me. His face looked lined and careworn, and I could see that he was laboring under suppressed emotions.

"What is wrong, Jat Or?" I demanded; "first the commander of the patrol boat, then the hangar guard, and now you, all look as though you had lost your last friend."

"We have lost our best friend," he replied.

I knew what he meant, but I hesitated to demand a direct explanation. I did not want to hear it. I shrank from hearing the words that I knew he would speak, as I had never shrunk from anything before in my life, not even a rendezvous with death.

But Jat Or was a soldier, and so was I; and however painful a duty may be, a soldier must face it bravely.

"When did they take her?" I asked.

He looked at me in wide-eyed astonishment.

"You know, sir?" he exclaimed.

I nodded. "It is what I hastened from Zodanga to prevent; and now, Jat Or, I am too late; am I not?"

He nodded.

"Tell me about it," I said.

"It happened last night, my prince—just when, we do not know. Two men were on guard before her door. They were new men, but they had successfully passed the same careful examination and investigation that all must who enter your service, sir. This morning when two female slaves came to relieve the two who were on duty with the princess last night, they found her gone. The two slave women lay dead in their sleeping-silks and furs; they had been killed in their sleep. The two guards were gone. We do not know, but we believe, of course, that it was they who took the princess."

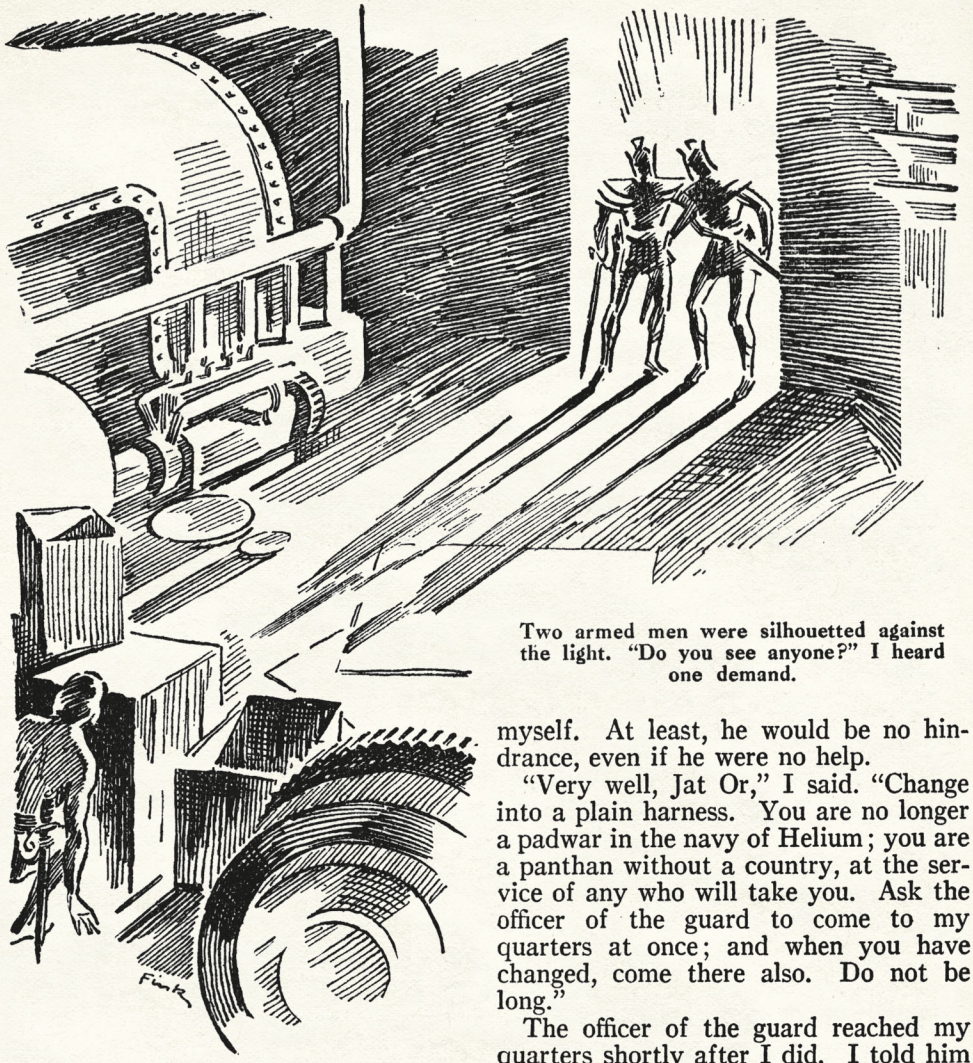
"It was," I said. "They were agents of Ur Jan, the assassin of Zodanga. What has been done?"

"Tardos Mors the Jeddak, her grandfather, and Mors Kajak, her father, have dispatched a thousand ships in search of her."

"It is strange," I said; "I saw not a single ship on my entire flight from Zodanga—not one!"

"BUT they were sent, my prince," insisted Jat Or. "I know, because I begged to be permitted to accompany one of them; I felt that the responsibility was mine, that in some way it was my fault that my princess was taken."

"Wherever they are searching, they are wasting their time," I said. "Carry that word from me to Tardos Mors. Tell him to call back his ships. There is only one ship that can follow where they have taken Dejah Thoris, and only two men in the world who can operate that ship. One of them is an enemy; the other is myself. Therefore, I must return to Zodanga at once. There is no time to be lost; otherwise, I would see the Jeddak myself before I leave."



Two armed men were silhouetted against the light. "Do you see anyone?" I heard one demand.

"But is there nothing that we can do here?" he demanded. "Is there nothing that I can do? If I had been more watchful, this would not have happened. I should have slept always before the door of my princess. Let me go with you. I have a good sword; and there may come a time when even the Warlord himself would be glad of another to back up his own."

I considered his appeal for a moment. Why not take him? I have been on my own so much during my long life that I have come to rely only upon my own powers, yet on the occasions when I have fought with good men at my side, I have been glad that they were there—such men as Carthoris, Kantos Kan, and Tars Tarkas.

This young padwar Jat Or I knew to be clever with the sword; and I knew, too, that he was loyal to my princess and myself. At least, he would be no hindrance, even if he were no help.

"Very well, Jat Or," I said. "Change into a plain harness. You are no longer a padwar in the navy of Helium; you are a panthan without a country, at the service of any who will take you. Ask the officer of the guard to come to my quarters at once; and when you have changed, come there also. Do not be long."

The officer of the guard reached my quarters shortly after I did. I told him that I was going in search of Dejah Thoris and that he would be in charge of the household until I returned.

"While I am waiting for Jat Or," I said, "I wish that you would go to the landing deck and signal for a patrol boat. I want it to escort me beyond the walls of the city, so that I shall not be delayed."

He saluted and left, and after he had gone I wrote a short note to Tardos Mors and others to Mors Kajak and Carthoris.

As I completed the last of these, Jat Or entered. He was a trim and efficient-looking fighting-man, and I was pleased with his appearance. Although he had been in our service for some time I had not known him intimately in the past, as he was only a minor padwar attached to the retinue of Dejah Thoris. A padwar, incidentally, holds a rank corresponding closely to that of lieutenant in an earthly military organization.

I motioned Jat Or to follow me, and together we went to the landing deck. Here I selected a fast two-man flyer; and as I was running it out of its hangar the patrol boat that the officer of the guard had summoned at my request settled toward the deck.

A moment later we were moving toward the outer walls of greater Helium under escort of the patrol boat; and when we had passed beyond, we dipped our bows to one another in parting salute. I set the nose of my flyer in the direction of Zodanga and opened the throttle wide, while the patrol boat turned back over the city.

The return journey to Zodanga was uneventful. I took advantage of the time at my disposal to acquaint Jat Or with all that had occurred while I was in Zodanga and of all that I had learned there, so that he might be well prepared in advance for any emergency which might arise. I also again tinted my flesh with the red pigment which was my only disguise.

Naturally, I was much concerned regarding the fate of Dejah Thoris, and devoted most of the time to useless conjectures as to where her abductors might have taken her.

I could not believe that Gar Nal's interplanetary ship could have approached Helium without being discovered. It seemed, therefore, far more reasonable to assume that Dejah Thoris had been taken to Zodanga and that from that city the attempt would be made to transport her to Thuria.

MY state of mind during this journey is indescribable. I visualized my princess in the power of Ur Jan's ruffians; and I pictured her mental suffering, though I knew that outwardly she would remain calm and courageous. To what insults and indignities would they subject her? A blood-red mist swam before my eyes as thoughts like these raced through my brain, and the blood-lust of the killer dominated me completely, so I am afraid it was a rather surly and uncommunicative companion that Jat Or sailed with during the last hours of that flight.

But at last we approached Zodanga. It was night again.

It might have been safer to have waited until daylight, as I had on a previous occasion, before entering the city; but time was an all-important factor now.

Showing no lights, we nosed slowly toward the city's walls; and keeping constant watch for a patrol boat, we edged over the outer wall and into a dark avenue beyond.

Keeping to unlighted thoroughfares, we came at last in safety to the same public hangar that I had patronized before.

The first step in the search for Dejah Thoris had been taken.

CHAPTER XII

In the House of Gar Nal

IGNORANCE and stupidity occasionally reveal advantages that raise them to the dignity of virtues. The ignorant and stupid are seldom sufficiently imaginative to be intelligently curious.

The hangar man had seen me depart in a one-man flyer and alone. Now he saw me return in a two-man flyer, with a companion. Yet he evidenced no embarrassing curiosity on the subject.

Storing our craft in a hangar and instructing the hangar man that he was to permit either one of us to take it out when we chose, I conducted Jat Or to the public house in the same building; and after introducing him to the proprietor, I left him, as the investigation that I now purposed conducting could be carried on to better advantage by one man than two.

My first objective was to learn if Gar Nal's ship had left Zodanga. Unfortunately, I did not know the location of the hangar in which Gar Nal had built his ship. I was quite sure that I could not get this information from Rapas, as he was already suspicious of me, and so my only hope lay in Fal Sivas. I was quite sure that he must know, as from remarks that he had dropped, I was convinced that the two inventors had constantly spied upon one another; and so I set out in the direction of the house of Fal Sivas, after instructing Jat Or to remain at the public house where I could find him without delay should I require his services.

It was still not very late in the evening when I reached the house of the old inventor.

At my signal, Hamas came to admit me. He appeared a little surprised and not overly pleased when he recognized me.

"We thought that Ur Jan had finally done away with you," he said.

"No such luck, Hamas," I replied. "Where is Fal Sivas?"

"He is in his laboratory on the level above," replied the major-domo. "I do not know that he will want to be disturbed, though I believe that he will be anxious to see you."

He added this last with a nasty inflection that I did not like.

"I will go up to his quarters, at once," I said.

"No," said Hamas; "you will wait here. I will go to the master and ask his pleasure."

I brushed past him into the corridor. "You may come with me, if you will, Hamas," I said; "but whether you come or not, I must see Fal Sivas at once."

He grumbled at this disregard of his authority and hastened along the corridor a pace or two ahead of me.

As I passed my former quarters, I noticed that the door was open; but though I saw nothing of Zanda within, I gave the matter no thought.

We passed on up the ramp to the level above, and there Hamas knocked on the door of Fal Sivas' apartment.

For a moment there was no answer; and I was about to enter the room when I heard Fal Sivas' voice demand querulously, "Who's there?"

"It is Hamas," replied the major-domo, "and the man, Vandor, who has returned."

"Send him in, send him in," directed Fal Sivas.

As Hamas opened the door, I brushed past him and, turning, pushed him out into the corridor. "He said, 'Send him in,'" I said. Then I closed the door in his face.

Fal Sivas had evidently come out of one of the other rooms of his suite in answer to our knock, for he stood now facing me with his hand still on the latch of a door in the opposite wall of the room, an angry frown contracting his brows.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

NATURALLY, I am not accustomed to being spoken to in the manner Fal Sivas had adopted; and I did not relish it. I am a fighting-man, not an actor; and, for a moment, I had a little difficulty in remembering that I was playing a part.

I did even go so far as to take a couple of steps toward Fal Sivas with the intention of taking him by the scruff of the neck and shaking some manners into him, but I caught myself in time; and as I paused, I could not but smile.

"Why don't you answer me?" cried Fal Sivas, "You are laughing; do you dare to laugh at me?"

"Why shouldn't I laugh at my own stupidity?" I demanded.

"Your own stupidity? I do not understand. What do you mean?"

"I took you for an intelligent man, Fal Sivas; and now I find that I was mistaken. It makes me smile."

I thought he was going to explode, but he managed to control himself. "Just what do you mean by that?" he demanded angrily.

"I mean that no intelligent man would speak to a lieutenant in the tone of voice in which you have just addressed me, no matter what he suspected, until he had thoroughly investigated. You have probably been listening to Hamas during my absence; so I am naturally condemned without a hearing."

HE blinked at me a moment, then said in a slightly more civil voice: "Well, go ahead, explain where you have been and what you have been doing."

"I have been investigating some of Ur Jan's activities," I replied, "but I have no time now to go into an explanation of that. The important thing for me to do now is to go to Gar Nal's hangar, and I do not know where it is. I have come here to you for that information."

"Why do you want to go to Gar Nal's hangar?" he demanded.

"Because I have word that Gar Nal's ship has left Zodanga on a mission in which both he and Ur Jan are connected."

This information threw Fal Sivas into a state of excitement bordering on apoplexy.

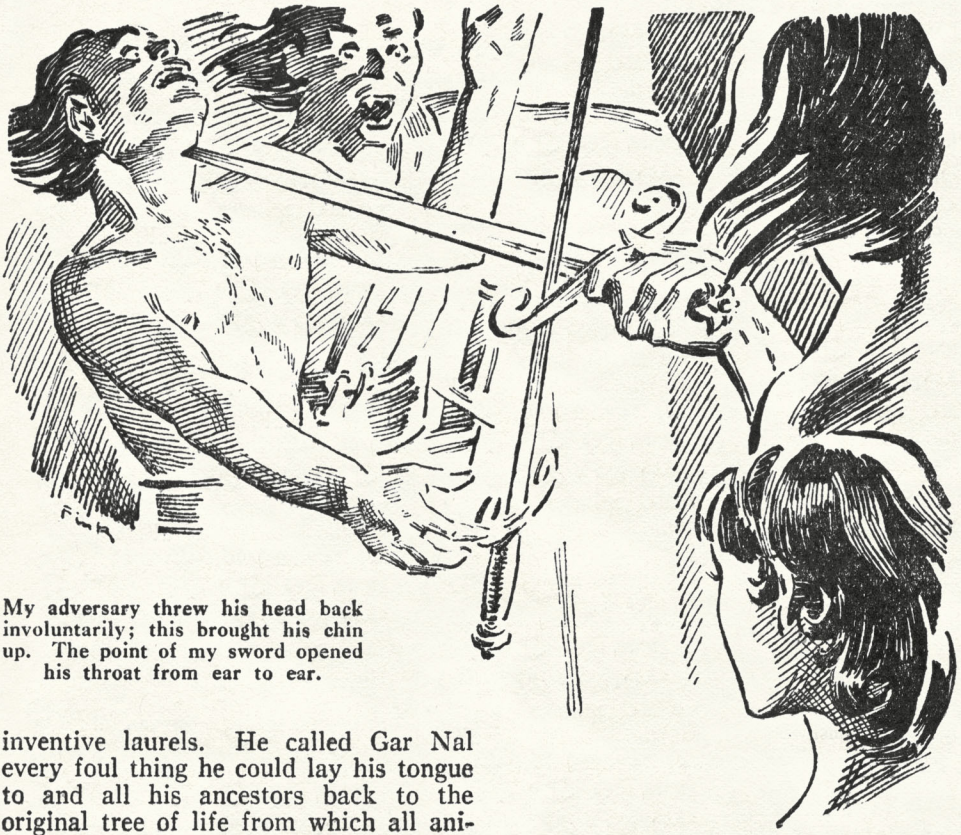
"The calot!" he exclaimed. "The thief, the scoundrel! He has stolen all my ideas and now he has launched his ship ahead of mine! I—I—"

"Calm yourself, Fal Sivas," I urged him. "We do not know yet that Gar Nal's ship has sailed. Tell me where he was building it, and I will go and investigate."

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed, "at once; but Vandor, do you know where Gar Nal was going? Did you find that out?"

"To Thuria, I believe," I replied.

Now, indeed, was Fal Sivas convulsed with rage. By comparison with this, his first outburst appeared almost like enthusiastic approval of his competitor for



My adversary threw his head back involuntarily; this brought his chin up. The point of my sword opened his throat from ear to ear.

inventive laurels. He called Gar Nal every foul thing he could lay his tongue to and all his ancestors back to the original tree of life from which all animate things on Mars are supposed to have sprung.

"He is going to Thuria after the treasure!" he screamed in conclusion. "He has even stolen that idea from me."

"This is no time for lamentation, Fal Sivas," I snapped. "We are getting no place. Tell me where Gar Nal's hangar is, so that we may know definitely whether or not he has sailed."

With an effort, he gained control of himself; and then he gave me minute directions for finding Gar Nal's hangar, and even told me how I might gain entrance to it, revealing a familiarity with his enemy's stronghold which indicated that his own spies had not been idle.

As Fal Sivas concluded his directions, I thought that I heard sounds coming from the room behind him—muffled sounds—a gasp, a sob, perhaps. I could not tell. The sounds were faint; they might have been almost anything; and now Fal Sivas crossed the room toward me and ushered me out into the corridor, a bit hurriedly, I thought; but that may have been my imagination. I wondered if he, too, had heard the sounds.

"You had better go, now," he said; "and when you have discovered the truth, return at once and report to me."

On my way from the quarters of Fal Sivas, I stopped at my own to speak to Zanda; but she was not there, and I continued on to the little doorway through which I came and went from the house of Fal Sivas.

Hamas was there in the anteroom. He looked disappointed when he saw me. "You are going out?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Are you returning again tonight?"

"I expect to," I replied; "and by the way, Hamas, where is Zanda? She was not in my quarters when I stopped in."

"We thought you were not returning," explained the major-domo, "and Fal Sivas found other duties for Zanda. Tomorrow I shall have Phystal give you another slave."

"I want Zanda again," I said. "She performs her duties satisfactorily, and I prefer her."

"That is something you will have to discuss with Fal Sivas," he replied.

I passed out then into the night and gave the matter no further thought, my mind being occupied with far more important considerations.

My way led past the public house where I had left Jat Or and on into

another quarter of the city. Here, without difficulty, I located the building that Fal Sivas had described.

At one side of it was a dark narrow alley. I entered this and groped my way to the far end, where I found a low wall, as Fal Sivas had explained that I would.

I paused there a moment and listened intently, but no sound came from the interior of the building. Then I vaulted easily to the top of the wall, and from there to the roof of a low annex. Across this roof appeared the end of the hangar in which Gar Nal had built his ship. I recognized it for what it was by the great doors set in the wall.

FAL SIVAS had told me that through the crack between the two doors, I could see the interior of the hangar and quickly determine if the ship were still there.

But there was no light within; the hangar was completely dark, and I could see nothing as I glued an eye to the crack.

I attempted to move the doors, but they were securely locked. Then I moved cautiously along the wall in search of another opening.

About forty feet to the right of the doors, I discovered a small window some ten feet above the roof upon which I was standing. I sprang up to it and grasped the sill with my fingers and drew myself up in the hope that I might be able to see something from this vantage point.

To my surprise and delight, I found the window open. All was quiet inside the hangar—quiet and as dark as Erebus.

Sitting on the sill, I swung my legs through the window, turned over on my belly, and lowered myself into the interior of the hangar; then I let go of the sill and dropped.

Such a maneuver, naturally, is fraught with danger, as one never knows upon what he may alight.

I alighted upon a movable bench, loaded with metal parts and tools. My weight upset it, and it crashed to the floor with a terrific din.

Scrambling to my feet, I stood there in the darkness waiting, listening. If there were anyone anywhere in the building, large as it appeared to be, it seemed unlikely that the racket I had made could pass unnoticed. Nor did it.

Presently I heard footsteps. They seemed at a considerable distance, but they approached rapidly at first and then more slowly. Whoever was coming appeared to grow more cautious as he neared the hangar. Presently a door at the far end was thrown open, and I saw two armed men silhouetted against the light of the room beyond.

It was not a very brilliant light that came from the adjoining chamber, but it was sufficient to dispel partially the gloom of the cavernous interior of the hangar and reveal the fact that there was no ship here. Gar Nal had sailed!

I had evidently been hoping against hope, for the discovery stunned me. Gar Nal was gone; and, unquestionably, Dejah Thoris was with him.

The two men were advancing cautiously into the hangar. "Do you see anyone?" I heard the one in the rear demand.

"No," replied the leader, and then, in a loud voice: "Who is here?"

The floor of the hangar had a most untidy appearance. Barrels, crates, carboys, tools, parts—a thousand and one things—were scattered indiscriminately about it. Perhaps this was fortunate for me; as, among so many things, it would be difficult to discover me as long as I did not move, unless the men stumbled directly upon me.

I was kneeling in the shadow of a large box, planning upon my next move in the event that I was discovered.

The two men came slowly along the center of the room. They came opposite my hiding-place. They passed me. I glanced at the open door through which they had come. There seemed to be no one there. Evidently these two men had been on guard; and they, alone, had heard the noise that I had made.

THEN a plan flashed to my mind. I stepped from my hiding-place and stood between them and the open door through which they had entered.

I had moved quietly, and they had not heard me. Then I spoke.

"Do not move," I said, "and you will be safe."

They stopped as though they had been shot, and wheeled about.

"Stand where you are," I commanded.

"Who are you?" asked one of the men.

"Never mind who I am. Answer my questions, and no harm will befall you."

Suddenly one of the men laughed. "No harm *will* befall us," he said. "You are alone, and we are two. Come!" he whispered to his companion; and drawing their swords, the two rushed upon me.

I backed away from them, my own sword ready to parry their thrusts and cuts. "Wait!" I cried. "I do not want to kill you. Listen to me. I only want some information from you, and then I will go."

"Oh, ho! He does not want to kill us," shouted one of the men. "Come now," he directed his fellow, "get on his left side, and I will take him on the right. So he does not want to kill us, eh?"

SOMETIMES I feel I am entitled to little credit for my countless successes in mortal combat. Always, it seems to me, and it certainly must appear even more so to my opponents, my flashing blade is a living thing inspired to its marvelous feats by a power beyond that of mortal man. It was so tonight.

As the two men charged me from opposite sides, my steel flashed so rapidly in parries, cuts, and thrusts that I am confident the eyes of my opponents could not follow it.

The first man went down with a cloven skull the instant that he came within reach of my blade, and almost in the same second I ran his companion through the shoulder. Then I stepped back.

His sword arm was useless; it hung limp at his side. He could not escape. I was between him and the door; and he stood there, waiting for me to run him through the heart.

"I have no desire to kill you," I told him. "Answer my questions truthfully, and I will let you live."

"Who are you, and what do you want to know?" he growled.

"Never mind who I am. Answer my questions, and see that you answer them truthfully. When did Gar Nal's ship sail?"

"Two nights ago."

"Who was on board?"

"Gar Nal and Ur Jan."

"No one else?" I demanded.

"No," he replied.

"Where were they going?"

"How should I know?"

"It will be well for you, if you do know. Come now, where were they going; and whom were they taking with them?"

"They were going to meet another ship somewhere near Helium, and there they were going to take aboard some one whose name I never heard mentioned."

"Were they kidnaping some one for ransom?" I demanded.

He nodded. "I guess that was it," he said.

"And you don't know who it was?"

"No."

"Where are they going to hide this person they are kidnaping?"

"Some place where no one will ever find her," he said.

"Where is that?"

"I heard Gar Nal say he was going to Thuria."

I had gained about all the information that this man could give me that would be of any value; so I made him lead me to a small door that opened onto the roof from which I had gained entrance to the hangar. I stepped out and waited until he had closed the door; then I crossed the roof and dropped to the top of the wall below, and from there into the alleyway.

As I made my way toward the house of Fal Sivas, I planned rapidly. I realized that I must take desperate chances, and that whatever the outcome of my adventure, its success or failure rested wholly upon my own shoulders.

I stopped at the public house where I had left Jat Or, and found him anxiously awaiting my return.

The place was now so filled with guests that we could not talk with privacy, and so I took him with me over to the eating-place that Rapas and I had frequented.

Here we found a table, and I rapidly narrated to Jat Or all that had occurred since I had left him after our arrival in Zodanga.

"And now," I said, "tonight I hope that we may start for Thuria. When we separate here, go at once to the hangar and take out the flyer. Keep an eye out for patrol boats; and if you succeed in leaving the city, go directly west on the thirtieth parallel for one hundred haads. Wait for me there. If I do not come in two days' time, you are free to act as you wish."

CHAPTER XIII

"We Must Both Die!"

THURIA! She had always intrigued my imagination; and now as I saw her swinging low through the sky above me, as Jat Or and I separated on the avenue in front of the eating-place, she dominated my entire being.

Somewhere between that blazing orb and Mars, a strange ship was bearing my lost love to some unknown fate.

How hopeless her situation must appear to her, who could not guess that any who loved her were even vaguely aware of her situation or whither her abductors were taking her. It was quite possible she, herself, did not know. How I wished that I might transmit a message of hope to her!

WITH such thoughts was my mind occupied as I hurried in the direction of the house of Fal Sivas; but even though I was thus engrossed, my faculties, habituated to long years of danger, were fully alert, so that sounds of footsteps emerging from an avenue I had just crossed did not pass unnoticed. Presently, I was aware that they had turned into the avenue that I was traversing and were following behind me, but I gave no outward indication that I heard them until it became evident that they were rapidly overtaking me.

I swung around then, my hand upon the hilt of my sword; and as I did so, the man who was following addressed me.

"I thought it was you," he said, "but I was not certain."

"It is I, Rapas," I replied.

"Where have you been?" he asked. "I have been looking for you for the past two days."

"Yes?" I inquired. "What do you want of me? You will have to be quick, Rapas; I am in a hurry."

He hesitated. I could see that he was nervous. He acted as though he had something to say, but did not know how to begin, or else was afraid to broach the subject.

"Well, you see," he commenced lamely, "we haven't seen each other for several days, and I just wanted to have a visit with you—just gossip a little, you know. Let's go back and have a bite to eat."

"I have just eaten," I replied.

"How is old Fal Sivas?" he asked. "Do you know anything new?"

"Not a thing," I lied. "Do you?"

"Oh, just gossip," he replied. "They say that Ur Jan has kidnaped the Princess of Helium."

I could see that he was looking at me narrowly for my reaction.

"Is that so?" I inquired. "I should hate to be in Ur Jan's shoes when the men of Helium lay hold of him."

"They won't lay hold of him," said Rapas. "He has taken her where they will never find her."

"I hope that he gets all that is coming to him, if he harms her," I said; "and he probably will." Then I turned as though to move away.

"Ur Jan won't harm her, if the ransom is paid," said Rapas.

"Ransom?" I inquired. "And what do they consider the Princess of Helium worth to the men of Helium?"

"Ur Jan is letting them off easy," volunteered Rapas. "He is asking only two shiploads of treasure—all the gold and platinum and jewels that two great ships will carry."

"Have they notified her people of their demand?" I asked.

"A friend of mine knows a man who is acquainted with one of Ur Jan's assassins," explained Rapas; "communication with the assassins could be opened up in this way."

So he had finally gotten it out of his system. I could have laughed if I had not been so worried about Dejah Thoris. The situation was self-evident. Ur Jan and Rapas were both confident that I was either John Carter or one of his agents, and Rapas had been delegated to act as intermediary between the kidnapers and myself.

"It is all very interesting," I said; "but, of course, it is nothing to me. I must be getting along. May you sleep well, Rapas."

I venture to say that I left the Rat in a quandary as I turned on my heel and continued on my way toward the house of Fal Sivas. I imagine that he was not so sure as he had been that I was John Carter or even that I was an agent of the Warlord; for certainly either one or the other should have evinced more interest in his information than I had. Of course, he had told me nothing that I did not already know; and therefore there had been nothing to induce within me either surprise or excitement.

PERHAPS it would have made no difference one way or the other had Rapas known that I was John Carter; but it pleased me, in combating the activities of such men, to keep them mystified and always to know a little more than they did. . . .

Again Hamas admitted me when I reached the gloomy pile that Fal Sivas inhabited; and as I passed him and started along the corridor toward the ramp that led up to Fal Sivas' quarters on the next level, he followed closely after me.

"Where are you going?" he asked. "To your quarters?"

"No, I am going to the quarters of Fal Sivas," I replied.

"He is very busy now. He cannot be disturbed," said Hamas.

"I have information for him," I said.

"It will have to wait until tomorrow morning."

I turned and looked at him. "You annoy me, Hamas," I said; "run along and mind your own business."

He was furious then, and took hold of my arm. "I am major-domo here," he cried, "and you must obey me. You are only a—a—"

"An assassin," I prompted him meaningly, and laid my hand upon the hilt of my sword.

He backed away. "You wouldn't dare," he cried. "You wouldn't dare!"

"Oh, wouldn't I? You don't know me, Hamas. I am in the employ of Fal Sivas; and when I am in a man's employ, I obey him. He told me to report back to him at once. If it is necessary to kill you to do so, I shall have to kill you."

His manner altered then, and I could see that he was afraid of me. "I only warned you for your own good," he said. "Fal Sivas is in his laboratory now. If he is interrupted in the work that he is doing, he will be furious—he may kill you himself. If you are wise, you will wait until he sends for you."

"Thank you, Hamas," I said; "I am going to see Fal Sivas now. May you sleep well," and I turned and continued on up the corridor toward the ramp. He did not follow me.

I WENT at once to the quarters of Fal Sivas, knocked upon the door, and then opened it. Fal Sivas was not there, but I heard his voice from beyond the door at the opposite end of the room.

"Who's that? What do you want? Get out of here and do not disturb me," he cried.

"It is I, Vandor," I replied. "I must see you at once."

"No, no, go away; I will see you in the morning."

"You will see me now," I said; "I am coming in there."

I was halfway across the room, when the door opened and Fal Sivas, livid with rage, stepped into the room and closed the door behind him.

"You dare? You dare?" he cried.

"Gar Nal's ship is not in its hangar," I said.

That seemed to bring him to his senses, but it did not lessen his rage; it only turned it in another direction.

"The calot!" he exclaimed. "Son of a thousand million calots! He has beaten me. He will go to Thuria. With the great wealth that he will bring back, he will do all that I had hoped to do."

"Yes," I said. "Ur Jan is with him, and what such a combination as Ur Jan and a great and unscrupulous scientist could do is incalculable; but you too have a ship, Fal Sivas. It is ready. You and I could go to Thuria. They would not suspect that we were coming. We would have all the advantage. We could destroy Gar Nal and his ship, and then you would be master."

HE paled. "No, no," he said, "I can't. I can't do it."

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Thuria is a long way. No one knows what might happen. Perhaps something would go wrong with the ship. It might not work in practice as it should in theory. There might be strange beasts and terrible men on Thuria."

"But you built this ship to go to Thuria," I cried. "You told me so, yourself."

"It was a dream," he mumbled; "I am always dreaming, for in dreams nothing bad can happen to me; but in Thuria—oh, it is so far, so high above Barsoom. What if something happened?"

And now I understood. The man was an arrant coward. He was allowing his great dream to collapse about his ears because he did not have the courage to undertake the great adventure.

What was I to do? I had been depending upon Fal Sivas, and now he had failed me. "I cannot understand you," I said; "with your own arguments, you convinced me that it would be a simple thing to go to Thuria in your ship. What possible danger can confront us there that we may not overcome? We shall be veritable giants on Thuria. No creature that lives there could withstand us. With the stamp of a foot, we could crush the lives from the greatest beasts that Thuria could support."

I had been giving this matter considerable thought ever since there first appeared a likelihood that I might go to Thuria. I am no scientist, and my figures may not be accurate, but they are approximately true. I knew that the diameter of Thuria was supposed to be about seven miles, so that its volume

could be only about two percent of that of, let us say, the Earth, that you may have a comparison that will be more understandable to you.

I estimated that if there were human beings on Thuria and they were proportioned to their environment as man on Earth is to his, they would be but about nine-and-a-half inches tall and weigh between four and five pounds; and that an earth-man transported to Mars would be able to jump 225 feet into the air, make a standing broad jump of 450 feet and a running broad jump of 725 feet, and that a strong man could lift a mass equivalent to a weight of 4½ tons on earth. Again such a Titan, the tiny creatures of Thuria would be helpless—provided, of course, that Thuria were inhabited.

I suggested all this to Fal Sivas, but he shook his head impatiently. "There is something that you do not know," he said. "Perhaps Gar Nal, himself, does not know it. There is a peculiar relationship between Barsoom and her moons that does not exist between any of the other planets in the solar system and their satellites. The suggestion was made by an obscure scientist thousands of years ago, and then it seemed to have been forgotten. I discovered it in an ancient manuscript that I came upon by accident. It is in the original handwriting of the investigator and may have had no distribution whatsoever.

"However, the idea intrigued me; and over a period of twenty years I sought either to prove or disprove it. Eventually, I proved it conclusively."

"And what is it?" I asked.

"There exists between Barsoom and her satellites a peculiar relation which I have called a compensatory adjustment of masses. For example, let us consider a mass traveling from Barsoom to Thuria. As it approaches the nearer moon, it varies directly as the influences of the planet and the satellite vary. The ratio of the mass to the mass of Barsoom at the surface of Barsoom, therefore, would be the same as the ratio of the mass to the mass of Thuria at the surface of Thuria.

"You were about right in assuming that an inhabitant of Thuria, if such exists, if he were of the same proportion to Thuria as you are to Barsoom, would be about eight sofs tall; and consequently, if my theory is correct, and I have no reason to doubt it, were you to travel from Barsoom to Thuria you would be

The girl on the fourth slab was Zanda. . . . Quickly I cut her bonds.

but eight sofs tall when you reached the surface of the moon."

"Preposterous!" I exclaimed.

He flushed angrily. "You are nothing but an ignorant assassin," he cried. "How dare you question the knowledge of Fal Sivas? But enough of this; return to your quarters. I must get on with my work."

"I am going to Thuria," I said; "and if you won't go with me, I shall go alone."

He had turned back to enter his little laboratory, but I had followed him and was close behind him.

"Go away from here," he said; "keep out, or I will have you killed."

Just then I heard a cry from the room behind him, and a woman's voice calling pleadingly:

"Vandor! Vandor, save me!"

Fal Sivas went livid and tried to dash into the room and close the door in my face, but I was too quick for him. I leaped to the door and pushed him aside as I stepped in.

A terrible sight met my eyes. On marble slabs, raised about four feet from the floor, several women were securely strapped, so that they could not move a limb or raise their heads. There were four of them. Portions of the skulls of three had been removed, but they were still conscious. I could see their frightened, horrified eyes turn toward us.

I turned upon Fal Sivas. "What is the meaning of this?" I cried. "What hellish business are you up to?"

"Get out! Get out!" he screamed. "How dare you invade the holy precincts of science? Who are you, dog, worm, to question what Fal Sivas does; to interfere with the work of a brain the magnitude of which you cannot conceive? Get out! Get out, or I will have you killed."

"And who will kill me?" I demanded. "Put these poor creatures out of their misery, and then I will attend to you."

So great was either his rage or his terror, or both, that he trembled all over like a man with the palsy; and then, before I could stop him, he turned and darted from the room.

I knew that he had gone for help; that presently I should probably have all the inmates of his hellish abode upon me.

I might have pursued him, but I was afraid that something might happen here while I was gone, and so I turned back to the girl on the fourth slab. It was Zanda.

I stepped quickly to her side. I saw that she had not yet been subjected to Fal Sivas' horrid operation, and drawing my dagger I cut the bonds that held her. She slipped from the table and threw her arms about my neck. "Oh, Vandor, Vandor," she cried, "now we must both die. They come! I hear them."

CHAPTER XIV

Pursued

HERALDING the approach of armed men was the clank of metal on metal. How many were coming, I did not know; but here I was with only my own sword between me and death and my back against the wall.

Zanda was without hope, but she remained cool and did not lose her head. In those few brief moments I could see that she was courageous.

"Give me your dagger, Vandor," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"They will kill you, but Fal Sivas shall not have me nor these others to torture further."

"I am not dead, yet," I reminded her.

"I shall not kill myself until you are dead; but these others, there is no hope for them. They pray for merciful death. Let me put them out of their misery."

I winced at the thought, but I knew that she was right, and I handed her my dagger. It was a thing that I should otherwise have had to do myself. It took more courage than facing armed men, and I was glad to be relieved of the ghastly job.

Zanda was behind me now. I could not see what she was doing, and I never asked her what she did.

OUR enemies had paused in the outer room. I could hear them whispering together. Then Fal Sivas raised his voice and shouted to me.

"Come out of there and give yourself up," he screamed, "or we will come in and kill you."

I did not reply; I just stood there, waiting. Presently Zanda came close to me and whispered, "There is a door on the opposite side of this room, hidden behind a large screen. If you wait here, Fal Sivas will send men to that door; and they will attack you from in front and behind."

"I shall not wait, then," I said, moving toward the door leading into the outer room where I had heard my enemies whispering.

Zanda laid a hand on my arm. "Just a moment, Vandor," she said. "You remain where you are, facing the door; and I will go to it and swing it open suddenly. Then they cannot take you by surprise, as they could if you were to open it."

The door was hinged so that it swung in, and thus Zanda would be protected as she drew it inward and stepped behind it. She stepped forward and grasped the handle while I stood directly in front of the door and a few paces from it, my long sword in my hand.

As she opened the door, a sword flashed inward in a terrific cut that would have split my skull had I been there.

The man who wielded the sword was Hamas. Just behind him, I saw Phystal and another armed man, while in the rear was Fal Sivas.

Now the old inventor commenced to scream at them and urge them on; but

they held back, for only one man could pass through the doorway at a time; and none of them seemed to relish the idea of being the first. In fact, Hamas had leaped back immediately following his cut; and now his voice joined with that of Fal Sivas in exhorting the other two to enter the laboratory boldly and destroy me.

"On, men!" cried Hamas. "We are three, and he is only one. Onward, you Phystal! Kill the calot!"

"In with you, yourself, Hamas," growled Phystal.

"Go in! Go in and get him!" shrieked Fal Sivas. "Go in, you cowards." But no one came in; they just stood there, each urging the other to be first.

I did not relish this waste of time, and for two reasons. In the first place, I could not abide the thought of even a moment's unnecessary delay in starting out upon my quest for Dejah Thoris; and, secondly, there was always the danger that reinforcements might arrive. Therefore, if they would not come in to me, I would have to go out to them.

And I did go out to them, so suddenly that it threw them into confusion. Hamas and Phystal, in their efforts to avoid me, fell back upon the man behind them. He was only a slave, but he was a brave man—the bravest of the four that faced me.

He pushed Phystal and Hamas roughly aside and sprang at me with his long sword.

Fal Sivas shouted encouragement to him.

"Kill him, Wolak!" he shrieked; "kill him and you shall have your freedom."

At that, Wolak rushed me determinedly. I was fighting for my life, but he was fighting for that and something even sweeter than life; and now Hamas and Phystal were creeping in on me—like two cowardly jackals, they hovered at the edge of the fight, waiting to rush in when they might do so without endangering themselves.

"Your weight in gold, Wolak, if you kill him," screamed Fal Sivas.

FREEDOM and wealth! Now, indeed, did my antagonist seem inspired. Life, liberty, and riches—a princely reward for which to strive; but I, too, was fighting for a priceless treasure, for my incomparable Dejah Thoris.

The impetuosity of the man's attack had driven me back a couple of paces, so that I now stood at the doorway, which was really a most strategic position in that it prevented either Hamas or Phystal from attacking me from the side.

Just behind me stood Zanda, spurring me on with low words of encouragement; but though I appreciated them, I did not need them. I was already set to terminate the affair as quickly as possible.

THE edge of a Martian long sword is as keen as a razor, and the point needle-like in sharpness. It is a trick to preserve this keen edge during a combat, taking the blows of your adversary's weapon on the back of your blade; and I prided myself upon my ability to do this, saving the keen cutting edge for the purpose for which it is intended. I needed a sharp edge now, for I was preparing to execute a little trick that I had successfully used many times before.

My adversary was a good swordsman and exceptionally strong on defense; so that, in ordinary swordplay, he might have prolonged the duel for a considerable time. For this, I had no mind. I wished to end it at once.

In preparation, I pushed him back; then I thrust at his face. He did the very thing that I knew he would do. He threw his head back, involuntarily, to avoid my point; and this brought his chin up, exposing his throat. With my blade still extended, I cut quickly from side to side. The point of my sword moved but a few inches, but its keen edge opened his throat almost from ear to ear.

I shall never forget the look of horror in his eyes as he staggered back and crumpled to the floor.

Then I turned my attention to Hamas and Phystal.

Each of them wanted the other to have the honor of engaging me. As they retreated, they made futile passes at me with their points; and I was steadily pushing them into a corner when Fal Sivas took a hand in the affair.

Heretofore, he had contented himself with screaming shrill encouragement and commands to his men. Now he picked up a vase and hurled it at my head.

Just by chance, I saw it coming and dodged it; and it broke into a thousand fragments against the wall. Then he picked up something else and threw at me, and this time he hit my sword hand, and Phystal nearly got me then.

As I jumped back to avoid his thrust, Fal Sivas hurled another small object;

and from the corner of my eye I saw Zanda catch it.

Neither Phystal nor Hamas was a good swordsman, and I could easily have overcome them in fair fight, but I could see that these new tactics of Fal Sivas were almost certain to prove my undoing. If I turned upon him, the others would be behind me; and how they would have taken advantage of such an excellent opportunity!

I tried to work them around so that they were between Fal Sivas and myself. In this way, they would shield me from his missiles; but that is something easier said than done when you are fighting two men in a comparatively small room.

I was badly handicapped by the fact that I had to watch three men; and now, as I drove Hamas back with a cut, I cast a quick glance in the direction of Fal Sivas; and as I did so, I saw a missile strike him between the eyes. He fell to the floor like a log. Zanda had felled him with his own weapon.

I could not repress a smile as I turned my undivided attention upon Hamas and Phystal.

As I drove them into a corner, Hamas surprised me by throwing his sword aside and falling upon his knees.

"Spare me, spare me, Vandor!" he cried. "I did not want to attack you; Fal Sivas made me." And then Phystal cast his weapon to the floor; and he, too, went upon his marrow-bones. It was the most revolting exhibition of cowardice that I had ever witnessed. I felt like running them through, but did not want to foul my blade with their putrid blood.

"Kill them," counseled Zanda; "you cannot trust either of them."

I shook my head. "We cannot kill unarmed men in cold blood," I said.

"Unless you do, they will prevent our escape," she said, "even if we can escape. There are others who will stop us on the lower level."

"I have a better plan, Zanda," I said, and forthwith I bound Hamas and Phystal securely in their own harness and then did the same with Fal Sivas, for he was not dead but only stunned. I also gagged all three of them so that they could not cry out.

THIS done, I told Zanda to follow me and went at once to the hangar where the ship rested on her scaffolding.

"Why did you come here?" asked Zanda. "We ought to be getting out of the building as quickly as possible—you are going to take me with you, aren't you, Vandor?"

"Certainly I am," I said, "and we are going out of the building very shortly. Come, perhaps I shall need your help with these doors," and I led the way to the two great doors in the end of the hangar. They were well hung, however, and after being unlatched, slid easily to the sides of the opening.

Zanda stepped to the threshold and looked out. "We cannot escape this way," she said; "it is fifty feet to the ground, and there is no ladder or other means of descent."

"Nevertheless, we are going to escape through that doorway," I told her, amused at her mystification. "Just come with me, and you will see how."

We returned to the side of the ship, and I must say that I was far from being as assured of success as I tried to pretend, as I concentrated my thoughts upon the little metal sphere that held the mechanical brain in the nose of the craft.

I think my heart stopped beating as I waited, and then a great wave of relief surged through me as I saw the door open and the ladder lowered itself toward the floor.

Zanda looked on in wide-eyed amazement.

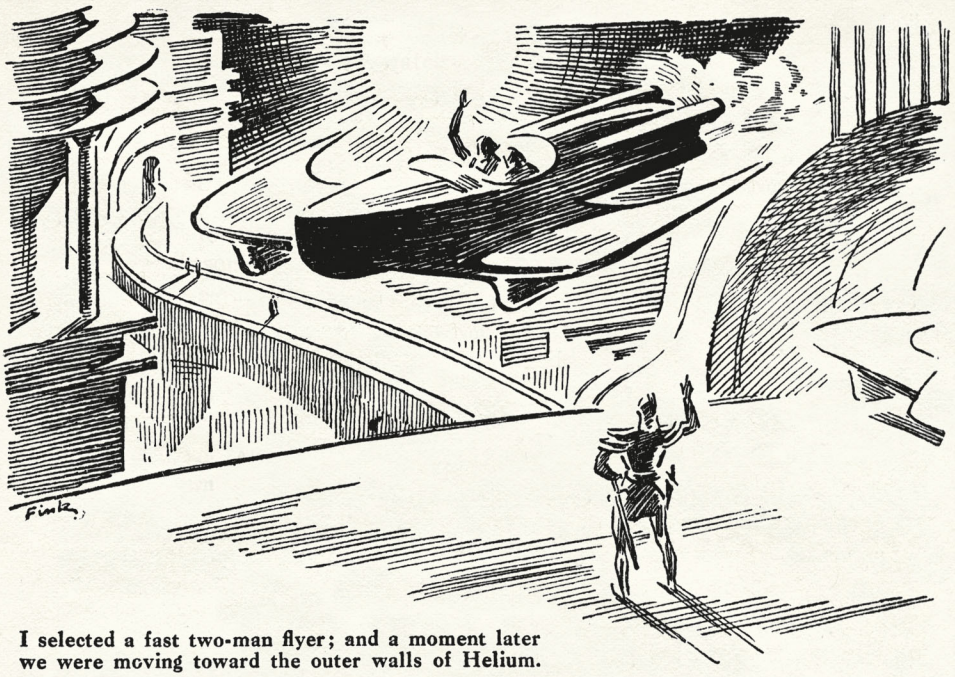
"Who is in there?" she demanded.

"No one," I said. "Now up with you, and be quick about it. We have no time to loiter here."

SHE was evidently afraid, but she obeyed me like a good soldier, and I followed her up the ladder into the cabin. Then I directed the brain to hoist the ladder and close the door, as I went forward into the control room, followed by the girl.

Here I again focused my thoughts upon the mechanical brain just above my head. Even with the demonstration that I had already had, I could not yet convince myself of the reality of what I was doing. It seemed impossible that that insensate thing could raise the craft from its scaffolding and guide it safely through the doorway, yet scarcely had I supplied that motivating thought when the ship rose a few feet and moved almost silently toward the aperture.

As we passed out into the still night, Zanda threw her arms about my neck. "Oh, Vandor, Vandor!" she cried, "you have saved me from the clutches of that horrible creature. I am free! I am



I selected a fast two-man flyer; and a moment later we were moving toward the outer walls of Helium.

free again!" she cried hysterically. "Oh, Vandor, I am yours; I shall be your slave forever. Do with me whatever you will."

I could see that she was distraught and hysterical.

"You are excited, Zanda," I said, soothingly. "You owe me nothing. You are a free woman. You do not have to be my slave or the slave of any other."

"I want to be your slave, Vandor," she said, and then in a very low voice, "I love you."

Gently I disengaged her arms from about my neck.

"You do not realize what it is that you are saying, Zanda," I told her; "your gratitude has carried you away. You must not love me; my heart belongs to some one else, and there is another reason why you must not say that you love me—a reason that you will learn sooner or later, and then you will wish that you had been stricken dumb before you ever told me that you loved me."

I was thinking of her bitter hatred of John Carter and of her avowed desire to kill him.

"I do not know what you mean," she said; "but if you tell me not to love you, I will try to obey you, for no matter what you say, I am your slave. I owe my life to you, Vandor, and I shall always be your slave."

"We will talk about that some other time," I said; "just now I have something to tell you that may make you wish that I had left you in the house of Fal Sivas."

She knitted her brows and looked at me questioningly.

"Another mystery?" she asked. "Again you speak in riddles."

"We are going on a long and dangerous journey in this ship, Zanda. I am forced to take you with me because I cannot risk detection by landing you anywhere in Zodanga; and, of course, it would be signing your death-warrant to set you down very far beyond the walls of the city."

"I do not want to be set down in Zodanga or outside it," she replied. "Wherever you are going, I want to go with you. Some day you may need me, Vandor; and then you will be glad that I am along."

"Do you know where we are going, Zanda?" I asked.

"No," she said, "and I do not care. It would make no difference to me, even if you were going to Thuria."

I smiled at that, and turned my attention again to the mechanical brain, directing it to take us to the spot where Jat Or waited.

Just then I heard the wailing signal of a patrol boat above us.

On a journey to the moon, in a ship with a mechanical brain! What could be more thrill-filled than the next installment of this novel?—in the next, the February, issue.

MIDNIGHT

By REG DINSMORE

WITH a mittened hand, Sergeant Jim Kirby pawed the snow from his lashes to peer through the white smother that beat against him. Again a howling blast momentarily ripped asunder the storm-curtain, to disclose a glowing rectangle of pale yellow in the darkness ahead: candleshine from a window.

Kirby's snow-plastered face cracked in a pleased grin, and he lurched forward, leaning against the screaming wind. "Man," he exulted, "a snug cabin and a red-hot stove! Here's where old Charley entertains a lodger until this young blizzard's over!"

Kirby's snowshoes made no sound as he approached the cabin. With practiced twists he loosened the squaw hitches that bound the webs to his feet. Then, without knocking, he flung open the door.

Charley Two-otter, an ancient Cree, was kneeling on the floor, wrapping a bunch of marten pelts in a ragged blanket. When the door swung, the old man came to his feet with the agility of a weasel. One backward leap, and he was across the cabin, his back to the wall. A gnarled hand streaked to his belt, and eight inches of naked steel glinted sinisterly in the candlelight. He crouched tense, set himself for combat; yet his jaw hung slack and in his sloe-black eyes flamed the unmistakable light of fear.

"Nerves, Charley?" laughed Kirby. He stepped inside, where the light fell upon his face.

Only for a moment longer did the old Cree stare. Then his stringy form relaxed. He sheathed his knife, and with no word of greeting, returned to his task with the marten-skins and the blanket.

Kirby closed the door, stamped the snow from his feet and stood looking down at the old man. By his every action, Charley Two-otter had shown he expected some terrible menace to walk in out of the night. And now, although characteristically striving to conceal his emotions, reaction was getting in its work. His hands shook so that he could hardly knot the ropes of the bundle.

Sergeant Kirby knew his Indians. Slowly, nonchalantly he shrugged out of his pack-straps, tossed his pack into a corner. "Nice catch of marten you've got there, Charley," he remarked casually. "How many?"

"Four hands," grunted the Cree, without looking up.

"Twenty, eh? Well, that's fine! This must be good fur country."

Old Charley nodded. His smoky fingers fumbled uncertainly with the last knot.

"Then," asked Kirby quietly, "why are you pulling traps and getting ready to leave?" He touched with his foot a pile of steel traps on the floor, traps to the jaws of which frozen snow and bits of forest litter still adhered—traps that had been taken from their sets but recently.

"Me done trappum!"

"Done trapping—in a country where you've already caught twenty marten this early in the season?"

The old man finished with the fur bundle and began tossing the traps into a gunnysack. He looked up, the light of terror still plain in his eyes. "Me die soon!" he stated flatly.

"Die soon? Why, you're tough as a bobcat, Charley!"

"Me die soon!" came the hopeless repetition. "No want die here. Go Pouce Coupé. My people there."

"Sick?"

"Not sick. Spirit fox scratchum on my door. T'ree day she scratchum. Black fox. Much bad sign! Me die soon!"

"A black—aw, you're crazy, Charley!"

Without another word the old Cree reached for the guttering candle, swung the door wide. Kirby, bending and peering in the flickering light, saw unmistakable claw-marks on the weathered wood.

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

A detective story of the North country by the woodsman writer who gave us "The Flying Fur Trader" and other well-remembered stories.

All the twelve miles to Squaw Creek valley the black fox accompanied him like a dog.

"Somebody's dog, Charley."

The old Indian's word had been questioned, his dignity offended. He stiffened. "Charley Two-otter no speakum crooked! Black fox! T'ree mornin' me seeum!"

"Now I know that you're loony—else you'd have shot it!" laughed Kirby. "A black fox! Worth half as much as all the marten there in your pack!"

"No shoot. No good. Bullet no kill-um spirit fox!"

"How d'you know? You didn't try."

"No try. No good. Fox carry gold medicine-charm on neck. Scratchum on door t'ree mornin'. Death-sign! Me go now."

The old Cree fastened on snowshoes, shouldered his pack, pulled his rifle down from its wall-pegs and went out into the night. And Sergeant Kirby, knowing the futility of argument with an Indian, made no attempt to stop him. . . .

Kirby was out of his blankets early next morning. He frizzled bacon and made coffee over Charley Two-otter's sheet-iron stove, and warmed up a can of beans. The wind no longer howled. A glance outside showed him that the storm was done. Two more days, and with good luck, this uninteresting patrol would be done and he'd be back at N Division barracks at Railhead. Even the regulation food and beds would be a welcome change after a month on trail.

Finished with his meal and whittling a fill of plug for his pipe, Kirby's attention was suddenly caught by a slight sound—a faint noise of scratching. The wild yarn of Charley Two-otter flashed through his mind, but he smiled and told himself that it was something like this—a twig brushed against the cabin wall by a vagrant breeze—that had started the old Cree's imagination to working overtime. Black foxes just didn't come to scratch on the doors of trappers' cabins. It was contrary to the very nature of the animal.

And then the sound came again, more distinctly this time. There was no further doubt about it; something surely was scratching at the cabin door.

In grim-faced silence Kirby put down his pipe and reached for his rifle. With the hammer of the weapon drawn back, finger on trigger, he tiptoed to the door and flung it open.

A small animal bounded off the doorsteps and streaked away toward the shelter of the near-by spruces. And although the morning light was yet dim, Kirby made out that it was a fox. And a black one at that.

FOR a moment the unreality of the thing amazed him so that he forgot to shoot. Then remembering that the pelt of a black fox represented a full two months' pay, he pitched the rifle to his shoulder and lined the sights on the swiftly moving ball of fur.

And then the fox stopped—stopped and looked back over its shoulder. Stood poised for instant flight, yet offering a standing shot. But even as Kirby's finger curled on the trigger, he saw something at the animal's throat which caused him to hold his fire—some small object that glinted like yellow metal.

Slowly Kirby lowered his rifle and stood it against the wall. "Well, you little beaut!" he said aloud in his amazement. "A *tame* fox! That's what you are! A tame fox that's escaped from some fur ranch, and is starving because you were pen-raised and never learned to hunt your own living. So that's why you dared come near the cabin, eh? Trying to get to the food you could smell inside."

At the sound of Kirby's voice the black fox turned to face him, sank to its haunches in the snow. Its jet-black ears pricked sharply forward. It canted its head from side to side, for all the world like an inquisitive dog.

Kirby, noting the effect of his voice upon the animal, continued talking in a low, quiet tone: "Blackie, you sure had a close one that time! But I can't shoot a tame fox, can I? And I want most mightily to get a good look at that shiny thing on your neck. C'mon, baby! Come and make friends with old man Kirby. He won't massacre you. C'mon!" He whistled, a soft, coaxing note.

At the whistle, a nervous tremor ran through the little animal. It shifted its feet daintily, inched forward. Then again it sat down in the snow.

Kirby smiled and reached to the table behind him. Picking up a fragment of bacon rind left from his breakfast, he snapped it to the fox.

The rind fell short by a full six feet, sank out of sight in the soft snow. But the fox hadn't missed it. Its sleek head shot forward, super-sensitive nostrils widened, quivered as they caught the appetizing odor of the bacon. Then in one graceful bound the fox was at the spot, nuzzling the rind from the snow, crunching it down in famished haste.

"That settles it!" was Jim Kirby's thought. "No wild fox would have touched that rind, strong with man-scent as it was. Maybe I'll get a look at that shiny neck pendant after all."

Sergeant Kirby, wise to the ways of forest creatures, knew that no animal possesses greater distrust of man than the fox; knew that none are born with more inherent caution. Even though it was apparent that this fox had been made a pet by some one, he realized that he must proceed with infinite patience if he was to capture it alive.

Continuing his low-toned patter of talk, he snapped the fox another bit of bacon and then backed slowly from the doorway. He found a long length of stout fishline that Charley Two-otter had left behind. This he made fast to the door-latch, and reeved it through the catch on the jamb in such a manner that a pull on the line would close the door. The end of the line he carried across to the cabin's back wall. There he sat down on a stool, wound the line about one hand and with the other began snapping bits of bacon and hardtack through the open doorway to the fox.

AN hour of coaxing and baiting, and the fox was taking crumbs from the doorstep. The candle had long since burned itself out. The fire had died down until now it was as cold in the cabin as outside. But Kirby was smiling. His patience, aided by the animal's ravenous hunger, was turning the trick.

Then a sudden snapping of the cooling stove sent the fox scurrying rods away, and Kirby had it all to do over again. But in the end he won. Three hours after the beginning of this fascinating game the fox crept to his very feet to reach a particularly tempting morsel of bacon. Then Kirby jerked the fishline.

The door closed none too quickly. Even as it swung, the fox, with the

flashing quickness of its kind, whirled and leaped for the narrowing opening, missed gaining its freedom only by scant inches.

Finding its escape blocked, it whirled again and flung itself in a terrified bound at the cabin's single window. But the panes were small and strong. They held. For a moment the fox clung to the narrow windowsill, pushing its slim muzzle against the transparent barrier which it could feel but could not see. Then dropping to the floor, it took refuge in the cabin's darkest corner.

KIRBY did not move. His voice droned quietly on; well he knew the virtue of calmness, of a quiet voice, when dealing with horses and dogs. And he found that the old formula applied in the present case. The flickering light of panic gradually faded from the animal's golden eyes. It no longer crouched but sat erect like a dog.

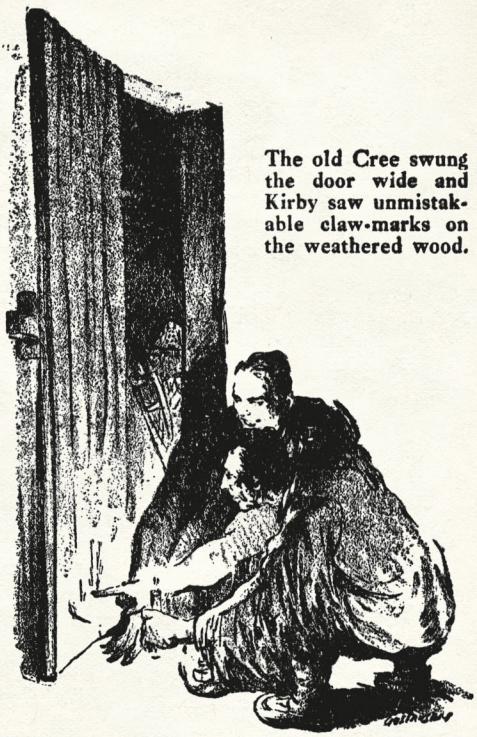
Kirby got to his feet and began moving slowly about the cabin. Ignoring the fox, he rebuilt the fire, washed the few dishes and smoked out his long-neglected pipe. But each time he moved, he managed to pass nearer the fox.

At the end of a half-hour the black fox no longer cringed when Kirby came close. Its fur, which when first trapped had stood on end like that of a frightened cat, now had resumed its normal sleekness. And a wonderful coat it was: deep, lustrous, black as night itself, with the exception of the tail-tip, which was snow-white.

And by now Kirby had made out the nature of the thing at the animal's neck. It was not, as Charley Two-otter had thought, a golden medicine-charm, but the brass case of a rifle cartridge.

Kirby's fingers fairly itched to get at that rifle-shell. To be sure, he could have donned his heavy gloves and taken it from the animal's neck by force. But grim-faced man-hunter though he was, such was not his way with animals.

Again he resorted to the persuasive power of bacon. Mincing with his knife a handful of the fat meat, he sat down on the floor and began the old baiting game all over again. Once he had coaxed the little animal near enough to rub its pointed ears gently, its distrust seemed to vanish. Soon afterward he was feeding it scrids of bacon with one hand, while with the other he gently loosened the slim chain by which the rifle-shell was slung to its neck.



The old Cree swung the door wide and Kirby saw unmistakable claw-marks on the weathered wood.

It was a .44-40 shell. The thin brass lips of its open end had been closed, hammered flat. Then a hole had been punched through the thin metal, and the chain—a man's gold watch-chain—threaded through.

Kirby pried open the mouth of the shell with his knife-point, inverted it. A small roll of thin paper fell out onto his palm. Eagerly he carried it to the window, unrolled it.

It was a penciled note, laboriously printed, not written. It read:

SQUAW CREEK FOX RANCH

I'M SICK, SUFFERING TERRIBLY. IF SOMEBODY SHOOTS OR CATCHES THIS FOX, PLEASE COME QUICK.

I'M TOO SICK TO GET OUTSIDE. IF NOBODY DON'T SHOW UP HERE SOON, I'M SHOOTING THE FASTENINGS OFF THE DOORS OF MY FOX-PENS—LETTING THE FOXES GO SO THEY WON'T STARVE. THEN A BULLET WILL PUT AN END TO MY AWFUL PAIN.

TOM WADE.

Although Sergeant Kirby had never been on Squaw Creek, he had heard of old Tom Wade and his fur ranch there. Corporal O'Connor of the Railhead barracks, had told of spending a night at Wade's cabin. And now Kirby remembered that O'Connor had mentioned a black she-fox, a pet fox, that shared the

old man's cabin with him. "As intelligent as a dog," O'Connor had said. "The old man had fixed her up a nest-box, and I'm a son-of-a-gun if she wasn't raising a pup right there in the cabin!"

And what was the name that O'Connor had said Wade called his pet fox? Kirby racked his brain, trying to remember. And then when the name did flash into his mind, he spoke it aloud:

"Midnight!"

The black pricked her ears and looked quickly up into Kirby's face. She arched her white-tipped tail, whined thinly and edged closer.

Kirby smiled, bent and stroked the little animal's head. Then as he ran his hand down the length of her back, his rugged face sobered and he shook his head gravely.

"Midnight, you poor old girl," he muttered, "under that deep coat of yours, you're nothing but skin and bones! After Tom Wade started you off, hoping you'd bring help, you must have hung around Squaw Creek a long time before hunger drove you into the woods. That's bad! I've got a hunch I'll be too late to do the old man much good."

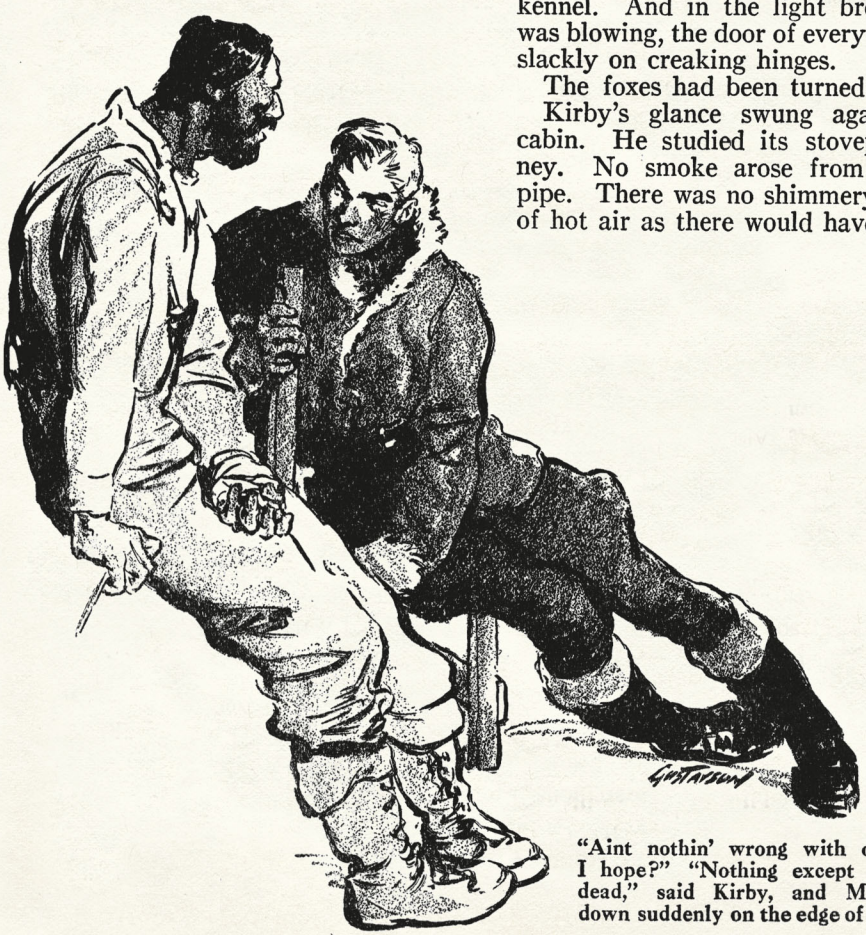
Five minutes later, when he was ready to leave, Kirby paused and eyed the fox quizzically. "And what about you, girl? Are you going to follow me back to the old home diggings, or are you going to beat it the minute I open the door?"

But he needn't have worried about the fox's leaving him. All the twelve miles across the range to Squaw Creek valley, she accompanied him like a dog. When nearly down the last spruce-clad slope, within a mile of the stream, she trotted away ahead, and Kirby knew he had only to follow her tracks to find the fur ranch.

Thirty minutes later he came to a small clearing, through the middle of which ran the creek. On one streambank squatted a small log cabin. Across the stream, on the far side of the clearing, stood a row of wire-netted fox-pens, each with its small wooden kennel. And in the light breeze which was blowing, the door of every pen swung slackly on creaking hinges.

The foxes had been turned loose.

Kirby's glance swung again to the cabin. He studied its stovepipe chimney. No smoke arose from the rusty pipe. There was no shimmery radiation of hot air as there would have been had



"Aint nothin' wrong with old Tom, I hope?" "Nothing except that he's dead," said Kirby, and Meade sat down suddenly on the edge of the table.

there been a smokeless fire in the cabin stove. Ominous signs. . . .

Sergeant Kirby's worst fears were realized.

He found old Tom Wade dead—the top of his head ripped half away by a rifle-bullet. . . . The body was frozen. Kirby judged that death had taken place at least ten days before.

Wade's body was in a chair that had been drawn up to the hewn pole table. Across the table was a window that looked out onto the stream and the fox-pens. A lower pane of the window had been smashed out. One of Wade's dead hands gripped the muzzle of a .44-40 carbine which lay across the table, muzzle toward him. His other hand still held the cleaning-rod with which he had pushed the weapon's trigger to send the bullet through his brain. Beside the dead man's elbow was a cartridge box which still contained a few unfired cartridges. And scattered on the table and on the floor about the body, were forty-odd empty shells.

ANOTHER pencil-printed note, half hidden beneath the stock of the carbine, was, in effect, much like the one Kirby had taken from the neck of the fox. Only this note evidently had been penciled but shortly before Wade's tragic end. A short note, crudely worded, yet eloquent of the old man's suffering and hopeless despair. A terse, pitiful explanation of his last act. . . .

Kirby left the cabin, crossed the icy creek on the flattened foot-log that served as a bridge and examined the fox-pens.

The wooden frame of each wire-nettted door was literally shot away at the place where its hasp had been attached. On one or two of the doors the hasps still clung by a single screw but were battered to shapeless scrap by the impact of bullets.

The situation was plain enough—a repetition of a tragic story old to the north. A lone man stricken by sickness. Days of insufferable, increasing pain. The soul-breaking wait for help which did not come. Then the quick, desperate way out.

But for some reason, which as yet he was unable to define, Sergeant Kirby's trained mind refused to accept the evidence of his eyes. Something was amiss, something wrong with the picture. What? As he stood there by the fox-pens, trying to analyze his vague suspicions, the thing came to him like a flash of light.

Why, it was fully a hundred and fifty yards from cabin to fox-pens. Yet Tom Wade, a man in such acute pain that death had seemed sweeter than life, had shot away those door-hasps. There were twelve pens—twelve hasps. And Wade—judging from the number of empty shells there in the cabin—had blasted those hasps away with an average of only three shots to each.

Good shooting for a sick man. Too good!

At a run Kirby returned to the cabin. He wanted to try that carbine of Wade's while yet there was daylight. With some difficulty he loosened the weapon from the frozen fingers which gripped it. He levered the empty shell from its firing chamber. Then feeding some cartridges into the magazine, he stepped outside.

Across by the fox-pens a flat-faced boulder reared its gray bulk above the snow. Near the center of its perpendicular face grew a hand-sized patch of green moss—an excellent bull's-eye. Kirby sat down in the snow, put his back against the cabin wall, rested the carbine across a knee and squeezed off five careful shots. Then he went to take a closer look at the rock.

Only one bullet had touched the moss bull's-eye. White spots of pulverized granite and spatters of lead showed where the other four bullets had struck. The shots were not grouped; instead they were scattered on all sides of the mark, some of them missing it by as much as a foot. And Kirby knew he had held correctly.

"Tom Wade," he admitted thoughtfully, "*might* have shot away those hasps from his cabin window. But if he did he was a darned sight better shot than I am—with this gun!"

HIS suspicions now aroused by the erratic shooting of the carbine, Kirby spent the remainder of daylight going over the place with a fine-toothed comb. By painstaking search he found where the death-bullet had escaped from the cabin by passing through the moss-and-mud chinking between two logs. There was no way of anyone's telling whether it had been a .44 or a bullet of another caliber.

And if Tom Wade had been murdered, what was the motive? Surely not robbery, for in the old man's fur-shed Kirby found three fox-skins still on

their stretching-boards—skins of animals which Wade had evidently pelted before his sickness. Two of them were blacks, the other a silver—prizes unlikely to have been left behind by anyone who would murder for gain.

If only it weren't for that miraculous shooting of Wade's! Kirby couldn't forget it. It nudged his mind with aggravating persistence. Yet there was no way of proving that some one other than Tom Wade had shot away those door-hasps.

No, Kirby concluded, his report to headquarters must be that Tom Wade, Squaw Creek fur-rancher, had committed suicide because of ill health and despondency. Yet he'd always have the feeling that he had missed something, some point that was of vital importance.

IT was near midnight when Kirby finished chopping the grave in the frozen earth. And when he had left the cabin with his gruesome burden, he had been unable to close the door behind him. Now as he entered the place and struck a match, the first thing he saw was a glowing pair of eyes watching him from above the rim of a box in a corner—the golden eyes of Midnight, the black she-fox.

"Back to the old nest, are you, baby?" smiled Kirby, glad of something to talk to after his disagreeable task. "Okay, we'll have a fire and a feed now. And Midnight, how I wish you could talk and tell me exactly what happened here! Guess I'm too dumb to find out for myself."

When Sergeant Kirby sat down to his long-delayed meal, Midnight displayed all the friendly familiarity of a tabby-cat. She would jump to his knee to take the bits of food which he offered. She would sit up and wave her forepaws, begging like a trick dog for more.

Kirby was fast developing a strong attachment for the graceful little animal, and it worried him to think of what might happen should he leave her here alone. Tom Wade had doubtless hand-raised her from a pup. On Wade she had depended entirely for her food. Her excessive thinness was sufficient proof that she was a poor hunter. Even in the few days she had been away from Squaw Creek, she had nearly perished from hunger. She could never survive the long cold winter that had just set in.

Then a pleasing thought struck Kirby. "Say, girl, how'd you like to go down to Railhead with me? Oh, boy, what a mascot you'd make! Midnight, the black fox mascot of N Division! Yes sir, that's what we'll do! I'm taking you to Railhead if I have to carry you in a crate, baby!"

But no crate was needed. After Kirby had packed his pack-sack next morning and had tacked a notice on the cabin door that the place was not to be entered without permission from the Mounted, he called to the fox and started off. At first Midnight was reluctant to leave the familiar clearing, but in the end she yielded to Kirby's coaxing and followed him with doglike trust.

By midafternoon, Sergeant Jim Kirby and his sable-coated escort topped the barren ridges beyond which lay the broad timbered valley of Moosefly River. Standing there, looking over the country ahead, Kirby's eye was caught by the white blotch of a snow-carpeted clearing. In the clearing was a log house and a larger log building which looked like a barn.

"Must be the Meade homestead!" was Kirby's thought. "Sure it is. Those mounds there by the barn that look like big muskrat houses are haystacks—hay that Meade cuts on the beaver meadows for winter cattle-feed. By George, guess I'll drop over there and talk with Meade. He might be able to tell me something of Tom Wade's sickness."

THE black fox Midnight developed sudden shyness when they reached the edge of the Meade clearing. By dint of much coaxing, Kirby induced her to follow him part way across the opening, but there she stopped, sat down in the snow and refused to go farther. Thinking that perhaps Meade had a dog which she smelled and feared, Kirby left her there and went on past the haystacks and the barn to rap on the door of the log house.

There was a moment of silence, then the sound of heavy footfalls crossing a floor. The door opened and a bearded man appeared, a man whose heavy shoulders filled the doorway from jamb to jamb. His pale eyes ran gravely over Kirby as he waited for him to speak. Kirby noticed that one of the man's hands was bandaged, the wrist red and swollen.

"You're Mr. Meade?" Kirby asked.

The man nodded.

Kirby pulled back the front of his mackinaw, showing his scarlet tunic be-

neath. "I'm Sergeant Kirby, of the Mounted. I'd like to ask some questions."

The man's indifference vanished. He smiled. "Sure! Sure, Sergeant! C'mon in out of the snow!" He stood aside for Kirby to enter.

Kirby jacked the cartridge from the chamber of his rifle, leaned the weapon against the log wall outside the door and stepped inside.

"What you got on me, Sergeant?" asked Meade with a grin.

"Not a thing, Meade. Just trying to pick up some information I need."

"Information's my middle name, Sergeant! But haul a chair up to the stove there. And how'd a cup of hot Java and a juicy moose tenderloin go?"

"Thanks, Meade! Sounds mighty good, but I can't stop that long. Got to get through to Railhead by tomorrow night, if I can."

Meade's heavy face brightened. "Glad to have you spend the night here, Sergeant. But gladder you're going straight through to Railhead. Gives me a chance to send word to Bart Taylor, my brother-in-law there. I'd be mighty grateful if you'd look Bart up and tell him to come up here for a few days." He held up his bandaged hand, grimacing with the pain the movement cost him.

"Stuck a rusty nail plumb through her last week. Musta got infection or something. Soaking it in hot salt water does no good. Binding on pork rind—best medicine I know of for nail puncture—does no good. Thing gets steadily worse. It's mighty awkward forking hay one-handed, for twenty head of cattle!"

"Tough!" sympathized Kirby. "And I'll be glad to tell Taylor. Why don't you have a doctor come along with him, Meade? Infection is something that it doesn't pay to neglect."

MEADE shrugged, grinned resignedly. "This paw'll come all right, give it time. But I sure do need some one to help me with the stock. Say, Sergeant, what was it you was going to ask me?"

"I'd like to know when you saw Tom Wade last."

Meade's forehead puckered in thought. Then his smile returned. "Why, dog-gone, I believe I can tell you to a day when I last seen Tom. It was just—just three weeks ago today. He came over here to buy an old crow-bait of a hoss I had. Wanted the critter for fox-feed. Led him back to Squaw Creek."

"And did Wade appear to be well?"

"Well? Well, I didn't take particular notice, but he must have been feelin' fairly perky to double the road between here and his fur-ranch at one session. But why you asking? Aint nothin' wrong with old Tom, I hope?"

"Nothing except that he's dead."

FOR a moment Meade stared dumbly at Kirby, his jaw sagging. "Now, aint that jest somethin'!" he said slowly, and sat suddenly down on the edge of the table.

"Yes, I found him at his cabin yesterday—dead in his chair."

Meade shook his head sorrowfully. "I guess Tom's heart was none too right. Too old a man anyhow to be living off in a God-forsaken place like Squaw Creek."

"It wasn't his heart, Meade. It was his head."

"His head?"

"The top of it had been lifted clean off by a rifle-bullet."

The pupils of Meade's pale eyes dilated. A look of horror overspread his stubbled face.

"You mean, Sergeant—you mean he'd been *murdered?*"

"Looked like suicide, Meade. And there was a note on the table saying that he was suffering terrible pain from some sickness and was taking the suicide route to end it all."

Meade pondered this. Then: "Who'd thought old Tom would pull a thing like that! Been dead long, you think?"

"Several days, I should judge."

"And them penned foxes of Tom's—they must have been nigh starved when you got there?"

"The old man released them before he shot himself. The pens were empty."

Meade smiled. "Now, aint that jest somethin'! Old Tom always was mighty thoughtful of them foxes. But say, that's going to make mighty soft picking for the boys who've got traps out around here. Them yard-raised foxes won't be no more trap-shy than a skunk. Somebody'll make a good haul of blacks and silvers this season. Cripes, believe I'll put out some traps myself soon as this game paw gets better!"

Kirby arose to go. He had learned little, and there was nothing to be gained by mentioning his suspicions to Meade, so he kept them to himself.

Meade followed him to the door. "Mighty sorry to hear about old Tom!

And say, Sergeant, don't forget to see Bart Taylor for me, will you?"

"I'll see him," promised Kirby. And then remembering that it would be three days at least before Taylor could reach the ranch, he asked: "Wouldn't you like me to fetch some hay into the barn from the stacks, Meade? It would make it easier for you till Taylor comes."

"Now that's mighty fine of you, Sergeant! And I don't mind if you do. Wait! I'll get on a coat and go with you."

Leaving his rifle leaning by the door, Kirby followed the man to the barn.

MEADE pridefully showed Kirby the twenty head of fat steers, chewing their cuds at their stanchions. "The up-river mines will pay me a good price for beef like that next spring," he boasted. Then handing Kirby a pitchfork, he opened a door in the back end of the barn, a door that opened out to where the hay was stacked.

Meade started to step outside, halted suddenly, stared and stiffened. Then he drew swiftly and silently back. His eyes were wide with excitement. A finger went to his lips, enjoining silence. He motioned for Kirby to look.

Kirby smiled inwardly, well aware of what Meade had seen. Nevertheless he stepped to the door.

It was Midnight, the black fox. She was down by the tarpaulin-covered haystack, farthest from the barn, a stack from which as yet no hay had been used. And her strange actions instantly aroused Kirby's curiosity.

The little animal was crouched flat on her belly in the snow. Her golden eyes were riveted intently upon the stack. Her glossy head was outstretched, and her sensitive nostrils were dilated, twitching. The scent, whatever it was, seemed to excite her strangely. She sprang up, whirled and trotted a little distance away. There she stopped and, looking back over her shoulder, yapped several squalling calls. After a moment she turned slowly back toward the stack, and as she approached, her dark fur lifted, bristled as if with fear. Yet some invisible force seemed drawing her on.

"Black fox!" Meade's whisper was sharp in Kirby's ear. "Huntin' mice in the haystack! Hell, and my rifle's in the house! Try a crack at the critter with your belt-gun, Sergeant! Quick!"

But Kirby made no move to draw the gun at his belt. Instead, he continued to watch Midnight, strangely fascinated by her unusual actions. Foxes didn't bark while hunting mice. That much he knew. Then what was she doing?

Now Midnight had crept to the very base of the stack. Now she was standing, sniffing at the hay above her head. And now she reared and began digging furiously at the stack with flying forepaws.

Kirby heard a slight noise behind him, and turned to see Meade tiptoeing swiftly toward the front of the barn.

"Where are you going?" Kirby was surprised at the sharpness of his own voice.

Meade turned his head, whispered over his shoulder: "Goin' after my rifle!"

There was a light in Meade's eyes that gave Kirby a distinct shock. The man's pale orbs were fairly blazing. Yet excitement would show in the eyes of most any man when a shot at a black fox offered.

Meade left the barn and sprinted toward the log house. So anxious was he to get a gun into his hands that he did not enter the house for his own rifle but instead grabbed up Kirby's from beside the door. Kirby saw the man turn back toward the barn at a frantic run, then again gave his attention to the fox.

Midnight was still burrowing into the haystack. She had forced her head and half the length of her body into the hay. Loose hay flew out behind her in a thin cloud.

Behind him, Kirby heard Meade's feet hit the barn floor, to come pounding along its length.

SERGEANT KIRBY had no intention of allowing Meade to shoot the fox, of course, though why he did not turn and warn the man against it, he did not know. Something seemed to be holding him, some gripping tenseness that seemed suddenly to have charged the very atmosphere. He found himself strained, waiting, listening to the drum beat of Meade's every footfall, measuring time, gauging distance the man must yet come. Yet his eyes never once left the fox.

Now Midnight was backing from the hole she had dug, backing and humping her sleek back as she tugged at something she was pulling from the stack. Now her hay-covered shoulders came into sight. Now her head. Every fiber of Sergeant Jim Kirby's lean body sprang taut as steel when he saw and recognized the object between Midnight's jaws.

"Back against that post, Meade! Put your arms around it!" The tines of the pitchfork sprang menacingly against Meade's chest.

Now Kirby was aware that Meade had come to a sudden stop close behind him, heard the man's breath catch in a sharp gasp. Knew that Meade too, had seen. Then he whirled.

The eyes of the two men met. "Drop that rifle, Meade!" Kirby's voice bit like arctic frost.

Meade made no move. His eyes were like pale agates, cold, glittering. He laughed, a chuckling belly-laugh that shook his huge form. "Yeah?" he sneered.

"Drop it!" commanded Kirby, and stepped toward the man.

Meade pitched the rifle to his shoulder. Its hammer, at full cock, lay back like the ear of an angry cat. He trained the weapon squarely on Kirby's chest. An insane light sprang into his shallow eyes, and he grimaced horribly as he jerked the trigger.

Click! The drive of a firing-pin on an empty chamber.

With a snarled curse, Meade flipped the lever of the weapon, trying to lever a cartridge from magazine to chamber. But before he could complete the movement, Kirby had swung the pitchfork.

The heavy hickory handle of the fork cracked sharply across Meade's bandaged hand. The man yelped like a struck dog. The rifle clattered to the floor.

"Back against that post, Meade! Put your arms around it from behind!" The gleaming tines of Kirby's pitchfork sprang against Meade's heaving chest, slipped through clothing, menaced the flesh beneath.

Nursing his injured hand, cursing foully, Meade backed to the post.

Kirby circled, jerked the man's hands behind him. Handcuffs clicked as he linked Meade's arms around the eight-inch post.

"You're under arrest, Meade," he said, "—for the murder of Tom Wade. Remember that whatever you say may be used against you. And now thanks for forgetting that I unloaded my rifle before I went in the house! Habit I have!"

Then he left the cursing man, to go down to the haystack.

Midnight was still there. She was trying to play with the object she had dragged from the haystack. She would nuzzle it playfully, then spring away to race in a small circle. A moment of this, and she would pause to gaze at it in a puzzled manner. These maneuvers she repeated again and again.

For a time Kirby watched her, pityingly. Then circling the stack, he began looking for places where the hay had been recently disturbed. At such places he would run his arm into the stack and feel about. At the end of a half-hour he had taken from their hiding-places eighteen prime fox-skins, blacks and silvers—a small fortune in fur.

By now Midnight had despaired of her efforts. Failing by her pitiful coaxing to make the fox-skin she had pulled from the stack show signs of life, she had curled disconsolately down beside it in the snow.

Kirby went and knelt beside her, examined the black pelt. It was smaller by a third than any of the others. "You poor devil!" he muttered, and stroked Midnight's head.

Everything was clear to Kirby now. Meade had shot Tom Wade through the cabin window. He had killed the foxes that were in the pens. Then, cunningly, he had set the stage to make the old fur-rancher's death appear like suicide.

By printing those despondent notes and shooting away the hasps of the fox-pen doors with Wade's carbine—presumably at short range—Meade had made the disappearance of the foxes appear logical. He had saved the empty shells, scattering them in the cabin. Then by leaving those three valuable skins in the old man's fur-shed, he had strengthened the illusion that there had been no robbery—no motive for murder. And the several snowstorms of the past ten days had obliterated his tracks.

"Meade made his big mistake," Kirby told the fox, "when he didn't butcher you too, black baby! Sending you off with that phony note to be shot or trapped turned out a whole lot different than he expected. He never guessed that note would bring you where your uncanny nose would put the hemp around his neck!"

Midnight, the she-fox, raised golden, trusting eyes to Sergeant Kirby's face, then reached to rub her cheek lovingly against the black pelt of her lifeless pup.

The Dark

A pilot gambles with death and gives odds in this not-soon-forgotten story by the author of "Murder Island."

By LELAND JAMIESON

A GRAY bi-motored air-liner snarled past the office window at two hundred feet, cutting sharply back to line up with the runway; and George Boice watched it in a rapt abstraction before swiveling his chair to face his partner. George was a tall, angularly formed man just under thirty; his dark face now reflected worry. His voice, a resonant bass, picked up the argument: "The thing's impossible, I tell you. You can't put in forty-five hundred miles through the drought area in four days. Since we won't get paid unless we do that, what's the use of making the attempt? Besides, this is not a pretty business, Sam. Jermace is trying to make a killing on misfortune. I hate a man like that."

Sam Druggan shrugged thin shoulders and retorted quickly: "It's all right to hate him, George. But his money is as good as ours—if we had any. Don't bankrupt us just because you don't approve of what he's doing." There was irritation and impatience—and perhaps some apprehension—in his tone, when he reminded: "Three years ago we had eight ships. We've got one left. We take this job on Jermace's terms, or we go up against the wall. Remember that! I've got a wife and two kids to think of, man! You're the senior partner, but you carry scruples too damn' far. You're just opposed to what he's trying to do."

"Of course I am," George rumbled. "And I'm opposed to starting something I have so little chance of finishing. If anything happens to delay me on this trip—and something always delays you on a trip this long—Jermace doesn't have to pay a cent."

Horizon

Illustrated by
Monte Crews

"He's advancing all our operating costs," Sam said. He got up from his chair and paced in agitation back and forth before the huge wall map that occupied the space between two windows of the office. "George, I'm desperate. We're broke. You don't have to live with it the way I do—you get out now and then, and fly a charter trip—but me, I keep the books; and I'm going nuts trying to figure what to do."

George Boice listened until Druggan's harried words had ceased, and remained seated, silent, baffled. It was hot in here, with the thermometer soaring stubbornly above a hundred, while a searing blast of dry, dust-laden air swept low across Chicago from the Southwest plains. Outside, in the hangar, an airplane engine crashed to life with a staccato barking. Somewhere from the adjoining building came the harsh and tinny reverberation of loud-speakers as an air-line dispatcher announced the departure of a transcontinental plane.

"Even if he paid the price we ought to get," George said, "I wouldn't want a part of what he's trying to do. But I suppose we ought to take him on—and stay in business."

SAM DRUGGAN wiped the perspiration from his upper lip, and jerkily reversed his steps. He muttered something angrily beneath his breath, and then his thin, protesting voice burst out in hot acerbity:

"Damn a partner like you!" He took three strides, and turned and glared at George. "There never was a white man quite so stubborn. No wonder we go broke!" He clicked his teeth shut with a traplike grimness, and sullenly went on marching—then a moment later burst forth again in added aggravation: "You can't prevent Jermace's making this survey. If we don't take him, he'll get somebody else who doesn't give a hoot about his plans. . . . After all, it's not against the law to estimate the damage of the drouth before the Government crop-estimates are issued, and then try to corner grain. That's Jermace's business. Is it immoral for us to sell him transportation?"

"We don't seem to be selling it, Sam; it looks to me as if we're giving it away. I'd like to cut his throat—he's trading on the misfortune of the farmers who are starving in this drouth." George Boice got up suddenly, his moist shirt sticking to the tacky varnish of his chair-back, and crossed to the map and put his finger on a spot in the upper Texas Panhandle. "I was raised down there," he added somberly. "I know what it is to slave all year behind a team, eating dust and fighting chinch bugs and grasshoppers in summer, and blizzards in the winter-time. My sister is still there. I sympathize with those poor devils."

"So," Sam blurted caustically, "you throw away a lot of dough, because you feel sorry for a lot of people you can't do anything to help! Dammit, you're too soft. This business shows it. You pay mechanics more money than you have to; and any hungry pilot who comes by, you give him a dollar from the till. Some of the bums you give dimes to, have credit-ratings at the bank! But are we taking Jermace on, or letting him rig up a deal with some one else? If we don't take this job, we're broke, I tell you!"

"And if I don't manage to take him over the mileage he specifies, in the time he specifies, I've worn out a lot of airplane, and we're still broke. Add that up and get the total."

"You've *got* to get him over it! I've put ten years' savings in this business!"

"If he gets a corner on grain, through our help, we'll have helped raise the price of bread to millions of people who have less than we do, Sam. That isn't right."

Sam Druggan gave a whinny of exasperation. "Nuts! He's going to try that, anyhow." His voice turned grating, and he was deeply angry now. "I'm in this mess just as heavily as you are, and I'm damned if you can stand there and rob me of a chance of profit I'm entitled to. Do you realize this money means food to three people besides me? What am I to do when I get thrown out in the street?"

George Boice stared out across the airport blankly, thinking of Joan, his sister. She was down there with her husband in the center of this frightful area of drouth, fighting valiantly to save a ranch their father had homesteaded. He remembered his past efforts to be of help to her, with loans. He remembered a letter from her last week, in which she had described conditions, yet tried to veil the bitter despair he knew she felt. Somehow, she represented to him the victims of Jermace's ruthless profits, and he could not eliminate that feeling. Yet he knew that Sam was right, and that Jermace would make the survey with some other pilot, if he himself refused to go. And he recognized that he owed Sam this opportunity to take in what cash they could. They were fighting for survival now.

"All right," he said harshly. "Call up Jermace and accept. Cash for expenses in advance."

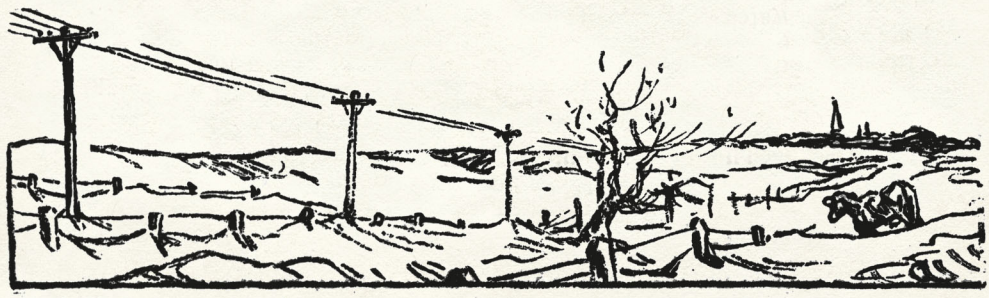
He turned back to his desk, seeing an almost pitiable relief flood sharp across Sam's face. He hadn't realized that it would mean so much to Sam. It didn't mean much to him, at the moment, because he had so little hope of meeting the terms that Jermace had insisted on. But he could see that Sam thought he would meet them; he could see that Sam thought their troubles would be over, when this flight was made.

"Now," Sam warned, "you watch yourself." It was amazing, to hear the new life in his tone. "I know he's a chiseler, and you watch out he doesn't get a chance to delay you at the last. For once in your young life, get tough. You be accommodating—for a stiff price!"

George grinned, watching Sam's thin, excited face. He liked Sam. And he could see, suddenly, how far-reaching the next four days might be, how much difference they would make, not just to himself and Sam, but to Sam's wife and kids. If he failed in this, he would be responsible for a lot of hardship they would suffer. The thought almost frightened him. And with it came a rigid, hard determination not to fail. Yet, he wondered, how could he avoid it, if luck went consistently against him?

THE single-engined cabin monoplane was at the loading ramp, its engine silenced after being run up a final time; and George Boice was in the office going over last details with Jan Jermace. Yesterday's stifling heat still clung here against the ceilings, although it was now an hour before dawn. There was no refreshing dampness with the dawn. Even here, bending over maps beneath a droplight, there was that same acrid, dusty smell and feel, to the night air. . . .

Jermace was a heavy, dour man, known from the Wheat Pit in Chicago to the Texas cotton country as the shrewdest and most heartless of the speculators. He had been a "bear" two years ago. Now, with characteristic foresight, he was turning back before the tide, instead of with it like the ordinary man, and going "bullish" in a vast operation.



"We'll take off at four o'clock," he said, glancing at the huge gold watch he had taken from the pocket of his bulging trousers. "This figures forty-four hundred and eleven miles—I've cut out Joplin. This is Saturday. Our agreement requires you to have me back here Tuesday morning in time to reach the Pit before it opens, and *en route,* to maintain the schedule we've set up. No delays and no excuses—you understand that? If you don't get back, or if you fall behind the schedule, the contract is void, and I can recover gas and oil expenses I've advanced. Otherwise, I pay you sixty cents a mile. That must be very clear."

George Boice looked up and scrutinized the other's face beneath the chartboard light. His bronzed cheeks went a little flat with anger. "Of course," he reminded, "weather conditions are entirely out of my control. Shouldn't I be entitled to consideration in case we are forced down? That should be included for your own protection—so I won't bust into weather that is dangerous, just to satisfy the contract."

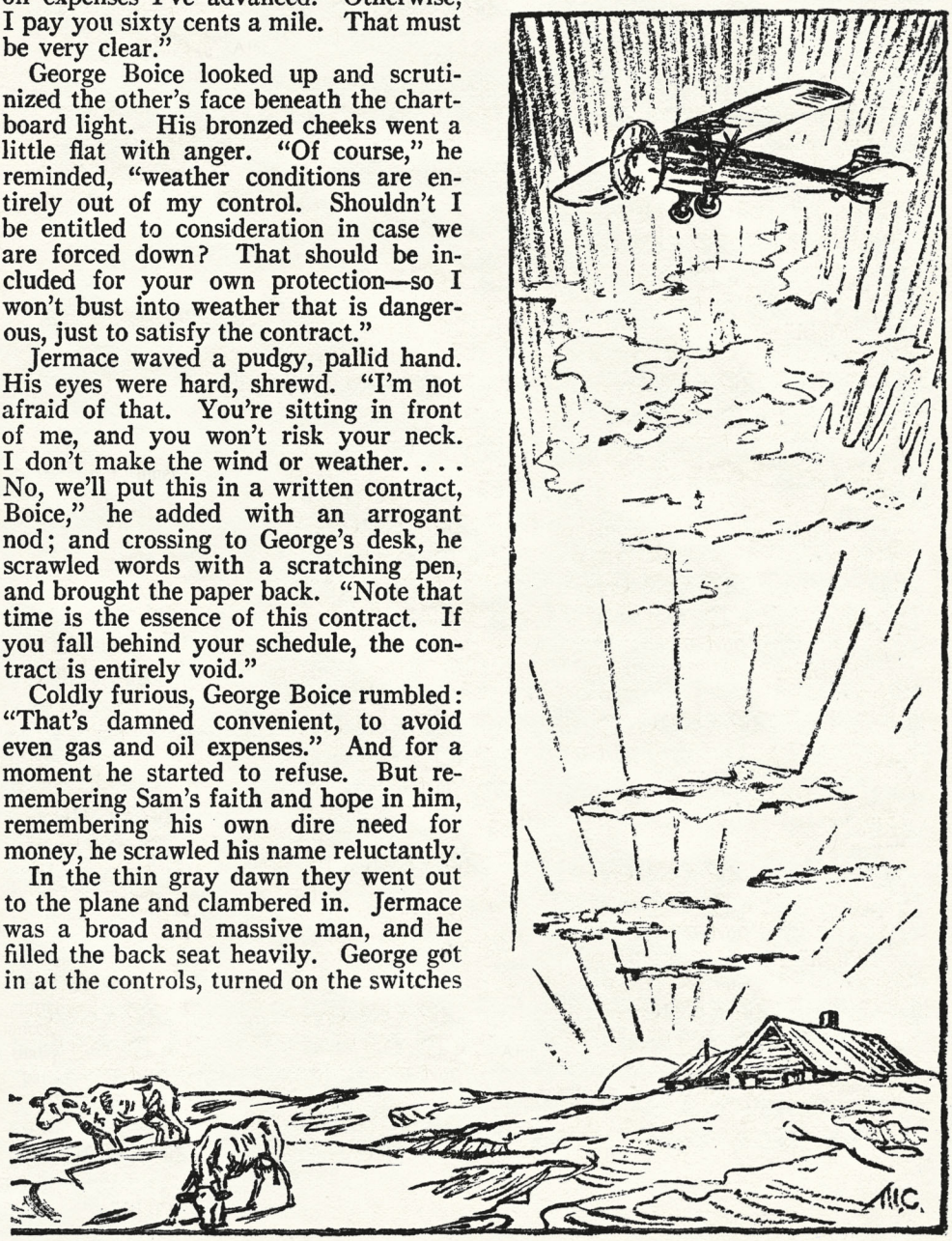
Jermace waved a pudgy, pallid hand. His eyes were hard, shrewd. "I'm not afraid of that. You're sitting in front of me, and you won't risk your neck. I don't make the wind or weather. . . . No, we'll put this in a written contract, Boice," he added with an arrogant nod; and crossing to George's desk, he scrawled words with a scratching pen, and brought the paper back. "Note that time is the essence of this contract. If you fall behind your schedule, the contract is entirely void."

Coldly furious, George Boice rumbled: "That's damned convenient, to avoid even gas and oil expenses." And for a moment he started to refuse. But remembering Sam's faith and hope in him, remembering his own dire need for money, he scrawled his name reluctantly.

In the thin gray dawn they went out to the plane and clambered in. Jermace was a broad and massive man, and he filled the back seat heavily. George got in at the controls, turned on the switches and the gas and pressed the starter. The engine coughed and then smoothed out into a throaty roar.

The airport was a lonely place, at this time of morning. Hangars were great ghostly hulks of steel against the dark horizon; the beacon was a twirling pencil of white light, flashing green each revolution; the runway markers were chains of yellow crystals, beyond which,

As the day wore on, fields turned to barren reaches on which almost nothing grew.



on their poles, obstruction lights were individual rubies set high and sharp against the sky.

As the traffic-control light blinked green, George eased forward on the throttle and the plane accelerated. It got off with a rush, climbing into gloom and slipping upward without apparent effort over lights and wires, and then above an area of black fields beyond which factories jetted plumes of smoke and steam against the background of a bright illumination. He settled himself, turning west toward Iowa.

Down there upon the earth, as daylight spread itself across the land, there seemed little evidence of drouth as yet. But as the day wore on, putting miles and miles behind them, fields turned from sallow green to sickly brown, and then to barren reaches on which almost nothing grew. At eight o'clock, Jan Jermace lifted his reedy voice against the engine, shouting:

"Go down low. This looks like what I'm after!" He took a pair of black binoculars from a heavy leather case and focused them upon the earth. George Boice muttered, "You really enjoy seeing this, I think!" and went on down.

The land looked dead. Dust and sand lay in long windrows over fields and roads—fields in which this drouth had choked all vegetation to extinction. Everywhere, now, there was a haze of dust, a yellow fog that darkened the horizon and cut down visibility. Flying became hazardous and difficult. Sitting there, with a map spread out across his knees, that dark horizon seemed symbolical to George. Just as the course ahead was blurred to him, obscured, so the future was to all these luckless people living down there on this land. So it was to Sam Druggan, worried to distraction over finances. What would become of Sam—and of him too, he added grimly—if he failed now in this flight? What would become of the Texas ranch he still owned a portion of, if he could not supply the cash to carry it another year? His sister and her husband were involved in that. And he himself, of course. It frightened him, looking at it starkly, this way. He *must* make this flight!

SIOUX CITY loomed suddenly ahead, and he swung northwest, looking for the airport. But for half an hour he was lost in the pall of smoky dust that hugged the ground. When he finally landed, he was all but out of gas.

"I'll make up this time on the hop to Minneapolis," he promised Jermace soberly, while mechanics poured fuel in the tanks.

The broker grunted, computing acreage-yield figures with rapacious eyes. "That's for you to worry over. You see now why I insisted on that contract. I've chartered airplanes before." He paced the ramp, a smug and almost gloating satisfaction showing on his face, while he figured busily with a pencil.

Once more they lurched into the murky air. Against a cross headwind, hours lengthened until the plane could not reach Minneapolis on one tank of gas. George went down at Mankato. An hour lost. The same thing happened, plunging on to Bismarck. He squeezed into that field at dark. Fifteen hours on the ground and in the air this day, traveling twelve hundred miles. He was exhausted, and beginning to be desperately afraid.

Four days like this, with breaks against him, and he would fail dismally. It made him cold to think of that, to think that he could fight so hard to satisfy this wealthy man whose blood was ice-water—and then lose everything—everything for half a dozen people, and himself. He had to make his own luck, these last three grinding days.

IN the morning, the field attendant was an hour late in getting out to unlock the hangar, and it was six before they got into the air. Bismarck to Pierre, then west against that everlasting head-wind to Cheyenne, and then southeast to Lincoln in a long and grinding jump. Lincoln to Wichita, flying over barren plains, seeing cattle that were gaunt and starved, feeling the heat and dust and feeling even more the heartless arid poverty of all this country. West to Dodge City, and gassed up and ready to go on, with just two hours before dark. Wisdom demanded that they stay all night at Dodge, but if he did, he would be behind his schedule, and he would have hauled Jermace two thousand miles for nothing. Amarillo was the scheduled stop tonight.

In the beginning, he had hoped to be able to spend an hour, perhaps, with Joan at the ranch. But that was beyond hope, now. The ranch lay almost on the airline course, but he would have to pass it by. Grimly he took off, setting his course through brownish, dirty air, flying over plains, and wheatfields

that were burned until they held no grain.

Drive, pound, and slash at time and distance. The plane winged low across the Oklahoma Strip, and plunged down into the Panhandle of Texas. The sun was a dull-red disk against the smoky sky, and in the west there was a high and heavy blackness that seemed to rise up from the ground. The wind had swung to the southwest, strong upon his nose, and there was nothing he could do but sit there tensely and wait out the miles.

He recognized Spearman, and picked up a sandy road and followed it, seeing landmarks grow more familiar as each minute passed. A thin, driving excitement pierced his weariness at the thought of seeing once more the place where he was born. One fleeting glimpse, before he lost it in the murk behind. But maybe Joan would come outside to watch the plane, and he could see her, too. Childhood memories and thoughts of precious family ties flooded in across his brain, bringing a swift pleasure and then a twinge of melancholy. His mother and his father had pioneered this land, suffering its hardships, to sleep at last within its bosom, leaving Joan and Tom a splendid and yet difficult tradition. He had not been home, he realized suddenly, since that week his mother died.

But nothing had changed much, outwardly, except that this year the fields weren't golden with ripe wheat, and the sky wasn't purple in a clear, stupendous dusk, and the streams weren't deep and cold. Only people changed, he thought; the land remained the same.

The darkness in the west swallowed the sun with an abruptness that was startling. And suddenly George Boice realized that this wasn't smoky dusk that he was witnessing. That high dark horizon was a sand-storm, bearing down across this country from the northwest, sweeping clouds of dust and sand a mile into the air, obliterating everything within its path. And as quickly as he recognized it, he realized that he could not reach Amarillo before its heavy blackness had swooped down across these plains.

LAND here, or try to bore on through, trusting to luck? If he landed, he would be here for the night, and Jermace would be entitled to release from payment for the trip. Shrewdly the broker had foreseen that something of this kind might happen—the same kind of foresight that was sending him upon this survey of a drouth's destruction. George Boice added all the factors. A half-dozen people's future depended on his choice. The thing to do was smash on through to Amarillo, now.

Yet, he reasoned, was this wisdom or soft-hearted sentiment—his usual failing? To be caught out in darkness in this open country, with no landing lights or flares or radio, with only a State map to guide him through, was rankest folly. Suppose he crashed? If he killed Jermace, the broker's beneficiaries would get judgment against Sam, and pin Sam deeper than ever in financial ruin. And, despite his loathing for Jermace, it wasn't right to risk the other's life; it wasn't fair: Jermace did not realize the danger.

So, at last, his decision was to land. Find the ranch, if possible, and stake the ship down firmly, to hold it through the fury of the wind. Explain to Jermace; no just man would hold to the letter of a contract in a time like this.

THE ranch was somewhere ahead; George dropped lower, almost skimming the parched ground. He found a faint, dust-flattened trail that cut off the main road, and turned and followed it. And when a cluster of buildings took shape abruptly in the dirty dusk—a low, white-painted house and a long squat tool shed and a sheet-iron granary—he swung around to circle it and land. The sand-storm was already darkening the sky.

As he banked up sharp, drifting with the wind, he saw a tall, fair-haired girl rush from the back door of the house. She stared up at the plane, and waved, and he waved back; then he slipped down into a sterile wheatfield in a cloud of drifting dust.

It was queer that he could forget so many all-important things in this moment of home-coming. Affection for this time-worn place took hold of him, blurring his eyes and tightening his throat as he taxied toward the fence.

Jan Jermace cried above the staccato idling exhaust: "What's the matter? I have urgent appointments in Amarillo for tonight!"

George sat there for a moment, watching Joan come running down the path, and answered tersely: "Sand-storm going to hit here in a little while, and it's not healthy, busting into it at dark. I play this business safe."

Anger coarsened the grain-broker's voice. "A night here in these sticks will

cost me more money than you've ever seen! I've got to buy grain—twenty million bushels—before that Government report comes out! What kind of pilot are you, that you can't go through a sand-storm, anyhow?"

George Boice said, very carefully: "I know you are supposed to get to Amarillo. I want to get you there, not kill you. Any pilot can bust into weather, but not every one knows when to stop."

Jermace clamped a long cigar between heavy, yellow teeth. Rage turned his flabby, drooping jowls a vein-marked scarlet, and he roared: "A night out here is going to cost me half a million dollars, Boice! Who's going to reimburse me for that loss, I'd like to know!"

Mute, because he was afraid of what he might say if he spoke, George jumped from the cockpit door and scurried back to open the baggage compartment at the rear. There was little enough time: the swirling cloud of sand would be here in ten minutes, if not less. The air already was a kind of dead and breathless calm that seemed like vacuum, sinister and stifling.

This, George thought with biting irony, was the appreciation that a hard man gave for being saved the threat of danger. It seared him, cutting deep until it touched somewhere a core of hardness in his being. He had worked two days as he had never worked in all his life, and this was what he got for it—condemnation and abuse. But he had little time to dwell upon that now. It would be insane to accede to Jermace's demand to take off into this mess. Perhaps later, when the frontal area of the storm had passed, he could somehow go on. He'd have to do that, have to risk it. Driving against weariness, he tugged to get the stake ropes out, to lash the plane against the coming gale.

Joan came running past the wing, and he looked up, still working with the stakes and ropes among Jermace's bags. She was exclaiming in a vast excitement:

"George! Where did you come from? You don't know how grand it is to see you!"

He took time to kiss her, quickly, dragging out the ropes. "Hell, that sandstorm would scare anybody down. I've got a grain-broker on here who's wild to get to Amarillo, but I've got to save this plane, before the wind picks it up and throws it half a mile. . . . How are you, kid? I got your letter. Is the bank softening at all about the renewal on this place?"

Joan could combine work and conversation. She helped George with the ropes, glancing once at the black line of approaching wind. "No," she said with sudden gravity. "I guess the place is gone. But I'm not worried so much about that, as I am about the typhoid that's spreading here. Everybody's got it, and drinking-water's so scarce. . . . George, it's terrible!"

Shock straightened George, as he was bending to untangle the stake ropes. He stared at Joan, exhaling sharply with quick fear. She hadn't changed, and she was still, to him, his little sister, although the bright crown of her golden hair came past his ear. She wore a loose house dress, but that did not obscure the litheness and the beauty of her figure.

"Have you been vaccinated?" he demanded harshly. "Where's Tom?"

"No—there isn't any serum left. . . . Tom's gone to Dumas to try to get some. Doctor Martin is down with heat-exhaustion, and Tom's trying to arrange to get some other doctors here from Amarillo." She glanced nervously at the black line of approaching wind. "They'll be delayed in coming, now. A car's no good, in drifted sand. George, eighteen people have died in the last three days. Eighty-odd are sick."

George Boice did not answer for a moment. He knew what typhoid meant, out here. Water was a scarce thing in this prairie land in normal times; and this was drouth. Drinking-water was hauled in barrels to these isolated ranches, most of it. One contaminated well could inflict a hundred cases of the dread disease before it was discovered.

"Drouth," he thought, "crop-failure, and foreclosures on their land—and now this!" He shook his head. These people were still the pioneers.

Jermace climbed heavily from the cabin, brief-case in one hand, a look of almost cunning satisfaction in his eyes. His first rage had mysteriously subsided,

Jermace saw George's frantic efforts to pound a stake into the ground, and demanded caustically: "So you're quitting, are you? You can pay your own expenses to Chicago—I've seen all I need to see, to know my plans!"

and he seemed to be sustaining anger consciously. He saw George's frantic efforts to pound a stake into the ground, and demanded caustically: "So you're quitting, are you?" He glanced at the dark band of the horizon. "I would have said nothing about being late, if you'd gone on into Amarillo, but I'm finished with you—now. I'll do my buying on a telephone, and you can pay your own expenses to Chicago. I've seen all I need to see, to know my plans."

George went on pounding on the stake, the pinging of steel echoing with a peculiar hollowness against the stagnant, heat-filled air. This, then, was the end—an end in failure, as he had been afraid. It turned him into an almost crying rage to think that all the money he had hoped to have was gone, like smoke before a wind. He understood: Jermace's avarice at the thought of los-

ing half a million dollars had blinded him to danger, but now, when he thought he saw a way to buy by telephone from here, he was simply feigning anger and distress, and using this forced landing as an excuse for canceling the contract. George panted, beating at the stake: "You dirty crook! I knew you'd do this if you got a chance."

"Your opinions are of no importance," Jermace grunted. "You broke your contract, so I have none to keep." He turned to Joan, studying him in puzzled wonder. "May I use your telephone?"

Before Joan could reply, George looked up and demanded: "Then this is final, is it? I'm fired, on this spot?"

"You can call it anything you like," Jermace returned, and started off toward the fence.

Joan called after him, her Western drawl compressed into clipped syllables: "The nearest telephone is in Dumas, and that's seven miles from here." A faint, enigmatic smile changed the lovely contour of her lips. "But I have a splendid horse, if you know how to ride."

Jermace checked his step and whirled, emitting a baffled snort of rage. "Horse!" he snarled. "I've got to reach a telephone, and reach it fast!"

"Why not start walking, then," George snapped, "and see how quickly you get lost when this sand-storm hits? You're not in the Wheat Pit in Chicago, now." He tied the last rope to the wing, and eased aching knees and stepped to face Jermace in the swelling darkness. For the first time in his life he felt an almost vindictive pleasure in causing some one harm—although this wasn't harm, but rather, justice. "You fired me a little bit too soon."

JERMACE pursed his lips; consternation replaced the look of feigned anger on his face, and in the transformation much of his austere, overbearing confidence went with it. He replied, in a silky, tentative tone, as if feeling his way carefully; "I was wrong to question your judgment in the first place, but the thought of all that money drove me wild."

George retorted thinly: "But the thought of the money I was going to get soon calmed you down."

Ignoring that, Jermace suggested: "If I admit that I was wrong, can't we renew our understanding? Can't you wait here for an hour or two while the storm passes, and then push on?"

George Boice was trembling a little. Slowly he shook his head, his eyes like ice. "I'm fired," he said, "and I stay fired. When I leave, you stay. Now laugh at that, before your mouth gets full of sand."

Jan Jermace jerked his head as if he doubted that he had heard the words correctly. "How," he asked uncertainly, "can you do that, when I'm going to lose so much?"

"With a pleasure you'll never comprehend," George purred.

Jermace's voice went desperate, wild. "But my God, Boice, see here—I trusted you, you know."

Stonily watchful of the rising wall of sand, George sneered: "Yeah—in writing! If you're going to lose so much, why don't you hire me again—in writing. If I leave you here, you won't get out for several days. The nearest railroad is not less than forty miles, remember."

THE broker's face slowly turned pasty. He circled dry lips with a fat, pink tongue. "Hi-jacking, eh?" he grated. "How much is it going to cost?"

"I need ten thousand dollars, pretty badly," George said evenly. "That's the price, from here to Amarillo. And after that—"

"Are you insane?" Jermace thundered. "Preposterous! Why—"

"All right. The price is now twelve thousand, and in another minute it will be fifteen. Make up your mind."

The broker opened his mouth, but no words came. A look of enraged bewilderment was on his face, and he was rocking on his feet. At that moment the vanguard of the wind descended on them. The first breath of it was like a cool lash across the face. A hundred feet away, earth and sand and dust roiled up along a long straight front, a rolling, tumbling advance that moved with incredible noise and speed and burst suddenly with amazing violence upon them.

The shriek of it was in their ears, the blasting of a gale. The ship, caught almost as by a giant hand, was picked up bodily. Then, caught short by the taut ropes, it slapped the ground again, and tilted crazily.

And a rope snapped under the terrific strain! One wing-tip, loose, rose up until the other touched the ground—and for an instant it appeared that the plane would be turned over in that second smashing impact. Joan screamed something which George could not hear clear-

ly. Jermace only stood there, body bent against the wind, shocked by the energy behind this cutting sand.

"She's going!" George bellowed, voice lost in the roar. And it appeared then that the plane was lost. Wheels were locked by brakes, but the wind lifted the whole structure from the ground and dragged it backward until the one remaining rope pivoted a wing and dragged it low. "I've got to take off—to save it!" he yelled, cupping his hands to make his sister understand. "When I'm inside, you loosen that other rope." He squeezed her fingers and leaped up through the cockpit door.

This was no ordinary wind, and no ordinary ropes would hold the craft. In the next blast the ship might be picked up and flung down, a heap of bent and shattered metal.

But in the air, flying, there was a chance to ride the bumps and get away until the most violent of the gusts had passed. He saw Joan jerk loose the slipknot from the strut, and with a mounting scream of wind against his ears, he pressed the starter and gunned the engine wide. Like a free balloon, the plane rose vertically and was swallowed in the swirling clouds of sand.

George scarcely thought, during the first three minutes of that mad, wild flight. He knew that Jermace had scrambled in behind him, but he had forgotten that Jermace existed, in this frantic effort to save the one remaining plane that he and Sam possessed. He had to save it, or he and Sam would be completely out of business, their capital and earning-power gone. The fact that it was growing dark, the fact that he was certain to become completely lost in this curtain of black storm, did not at once assume its real importance in relation to the prospective wrecking of the ship.

BUT as he nosed into the wind, flying by his instruments and trying with futile effort to glimpse the ground, he realized the extent of his predicament. He eased back on the throttle, and "felt" the plane down cautiously, until he thought he must be near the ground—and at that altitude he could not be sure whether he was looking at the dust-swept fields or at this dirty brownish fog that had engulfed him. So then he knew he couldn't land, even if by some miracle of judgment he located the ranch again.

And it swept over him with a paralyzing force that this flight, so impetuously begun, might end in death. A tingling, premonitory chill traced up his spine and crawled across his scalp. Weariness dropped from him like a cloak. There was no time for active fear. He was too busy to become morbidly afraid. But he knew he had to fight, and he knew how small his chances were.

It was ironical, he thought, to be up here with Jermace. He would never in the world have taken off into this storm, except to save the ship. He thought of Tom, fighting this sand and wind and darkness, trying to get a doctor and some serum back to all those sick and dying people in that isolated area. Tom, down there on a horse, trying to do a service for mankind.

AND it came over him suddenly that here, now, was the real great task. It wasn't taking Jermace on a flight to reach a telephone. It wasn't particularly important that he save the plane, after he had utilized its usefulness. There were people in distress back there, and he alone could help them to the utmost—if he had the nerve.

Amarillo was only fifty miles away, if he could find it. A beacon marked the field. In this mess of stuff he wouldn't see the beacon till he was on top of it. But that was all right, too. He'd find it. He had to find it. He turned straight south, quartering the southeast progress of the blasting wind, setting his compass course for Amarillo at wide-open gun.

On his instruments, pounded and jostled by the roughness of the air, for twenty minutes he flew south. He didn't know the distance he had drifted, or the distance he had flown. Amarillo should be somewhere ahead, but he might be missing it ten miles. He had seen no light in all this time—nothing but blank, turbulent darkness, empty with the blackness of this roiling sand.

And then, with an impact that tore the stick from his tense fingers, he hit the storm front, hit it from behind and rode an airplane gone crazy—for three endless minutes. . . . Then he emerged into a clearer air, into a thinner night; and behind him the sand-storm moved across the dark horizon in a straight black wall.

But there was nothing here, and he was lost. Desperation bordering on a kind of panic took possession of him for a moment, eating at his nerves and crumbling the fiber of his confidence. Lost! He was flying over rising ground,

and he might fly into it. He might mill up here indefinitely and never find a beacon, and run out of gasoline. His eyes might tire from the strain of staring at his instruments without adequate board lights, and go haywire—and he might spin in this rough and choppy air.

He fought to stifle thoughts like that. He turned his mind back to those people in their prairie cabins, suffering. He cursed himself for a coward and a fool, although he was not either. And minute after minute he flew on, tensely straining to pick out a light.

Then at last, dimly through the haze, he caught a yellow wink, so weak, so distant, that he did not think it was a beacon, then. But when it came again, and then again, he knew it was, and turned right, toward it.

There in the gloom, he circled that twirling shaft of smoky brilliance which cut sharply through the dust. And despair assailed him. This wasn't Amarillo. He was ten miles east of Amarillo, and he had drifted this far off his course across the plains. The field was west.

And the dust-storm front had cut him off.

He knew now he'd never find the field. He could have turned east and run to Dallas—he could at least have saved the plane. If he hunted for the field, he might not have gas enough to get back to Dallas in the end, in case he didn't find the field. This might, he knew, be a decision that would mean the difference between life and death for both himself and Jermace. . . . But it might also mean the difference between life and death for half a hundred others, who did not know anything of what was going on.

In a sweaty resolution, he forced himself to line up on the course-light of this beacon, forced himself to sit there with a calm alertness and read his compass and set his course once more into the blank, flat wall of wind.

FOR the third time in thirty minutes, he plunged into that dark horizon. Walking his rudder in reaction to the swinging needle of the turn indicator, he tried to fly a perfectly straight, unvaried course. That was impossible, with the violence of the air. But he averaged out his turns, swinging as much left as he had swung right, and thus on and on, counting minutes against miles. This was the last chance. If he missed this time, before he could go back to that lone beacon and get lined up to try again, it too would be covered by this rolling mess of sand.

Five minutes, and he should be near. . . . Six—and he should be over English Field. . . . Seven—and he had seen no amber wink. In a stale despair, he went on another minute, forcing himself to wait on time that lengthened dreadfully. Still there was nothing under him but blackness and rough air.

Well, again luck had been against him. He had failed to carry through. He had failed Tom, and Joan, and all the others back there in the country that typhoid was ravaging. It was hopeless to go on, and it was time to try to save himself. He started a slow turn to the left, flying perilously at three hundred feet, cursing himself in bitter anger.

And in the turn, he caught the yellow wink and then the green one that told him he was here. Circling, he saw the dull outline of a square of boundary lights. With relief draining weariness into his muscles, he eased down, touched his wheels, bounced, settled back, and ground-looped at a vicious speed.

AT the hangar office, waiting for a taxi, George Boice said: "Mr. Jermace, I'll bother you to write me out a check. I think twelve thousand was the amount we settled on. I saved you half a million, so my fee seems cheap enough." His voice was very tired.

Jermace demurred. He objected violently. He fumed. But finally he paid, for he knew Joan Perkins had been a witness to his getting on the plane, and that he would lose a lawsuit if it came to that.

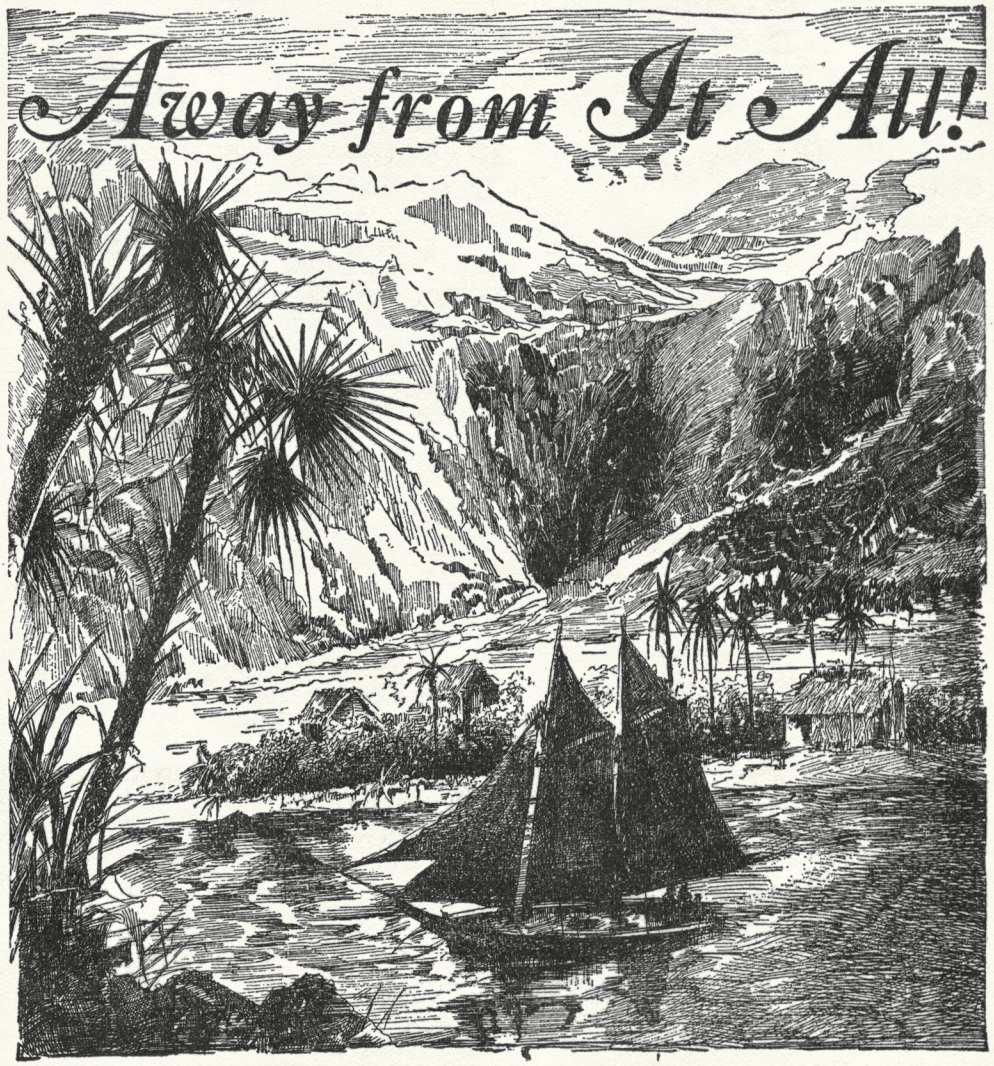
George was exhausted. Yet a deep, permeating satisfaction eased his weariness, somehow. There was still a lot of hurrying to do—getting two doctors, and the serum, and getting ready to take off at dawn. He sat down on a divan in the hangar waiting-room, to rest a moment. He grinned, thinking that he could take a week off now, and fly from ranch to ranch, and see people he had not seen for half a dozen years. Helping people was life's greatest source of happiness.

Then his grin broadened, thinking of Sam Druggan and what a wire in the morning would do to brighten Sam's horizon. For the first time in weeks he could arouse no pity for Sam.

"Hell," he thought sleepily, "who could feel sorry for a bloke who just made six thousand dollars—and hasn't spent it yet!"

Have you ever wished to trade places with some other man? Here is the extraordinary story of two men who swapped lives—their names, sweethearts, jobs, a city shop and a remote island plantation.

Away from It All!



By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

Illustrated by Alexander De Leslie

THERE comes a time in the life of every man when he feels that he simply cannot keep on with it for one more minute—whatever it is.

Nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every ten thousand discover this just five minutes before they discover that they have *got* to keep on, whether or no. The ten-thousandth misses that discovery, and blows his brains out.

The ten-thousand-and-first finds a way. But not once in ten million, in a hundred million, does any other man find the way that Seagoe found. . . .

Seagoe and Cooke encountered each other in the Bondi surf on a blazing December Sunday. There were perhaps fifteen hundred other young men of fine physique, sharing the matchless waters with them. There were more than fifteen hundred girls,—much better formed, on

an average, than any short-waisted, suety-hipped Greek statue,—sun-bathing and swimming with the young men. The glory that was Greece never saw such girls; the grandeur that was Rome knew no such men. They were second-quarter Twentieth Century, and the earth had not seen their like.

Seagoe missed his wave, riding it without a board, as they do in Bondi. He tumbled all over Cooke; and Cooke, getting up half drowned, cursed him, looked at him, liked the looks of him, and asked him to come out and have a sun-bake and a smoke.

Seagoe came, apologizing for what he sincerely felt was not his fault. They bought cigarettes, and lay down on the hot sand.

A girl lolling near by—a glorious creature in a breech-clout and a brassière—said to her friend:

"Viola, d'you see those two blokes that just knocked each other down? They're the dead spit of one another."

Viola (who liked to be pronounced as if she rhymed to *pianola)* disagreed.

"No, Irene," she said, "the near one is the handsomest."

"Well, it's the other that's looking at us."

"They're not looking at us; they're looking at each other. Come and have an icecream, and don't waste your time," advised Irene.

Being piqued, they went away, and so, for the mere lick of a spoon, passed out of the story.

SEAGOE and Cooke, baking on the sands, each thought that he liked the looks of the other; and neither yet knew that it was because the other resembled himself.

In fair complexion, in gray eyes, good build, and similarity of age, they were, as Irene had said, almost "the dead spit" of each other. As Viola herself had said, one was slightly better-looking. Seagoe had the fresh complexion of a man who lives in a good climate. He had also an intriguing little tooth-brush mustache, and his hair was brushed flat back, instead of being parted. Otherwise they were much alike. And what was most remarkable in the likeness was a strange effect of weariness, a shadow of age flung back upon brilliant youth, that distinguished both these young men lying side by side on Bondi sands.

They told each other who they were, and what. Seagoe, for some years an assistant in a colossal Sydney store, was, so he said, fed up with it to the last degree. Yes, the salary was good, and the work not hard. Yes, Sydney had lots of amusement, and plenty of girls. . . . Nevertheless, he was fed up. To the teeth. And Cooke?

COOKE had come down from the Islands for a holiday, and now he was due back again.

His job was plantation manager, on a small far-out island. Yes, it was beautiful. Yes, there was a good deal of adventure—if you wanted that. Cooke didn't. He wanted Sydney, golden glorious Sydney, with its picture-shows and its theaters, and its boxing nights at the stadium, everything foreseen, everything the same and safe and pleasant, forever and ever.

Seagoe was not listening now. A steamer had just made her way through Sydney Heads, was beginning to lift and scend in the long Pacific swell. She was black, with a checkered funnel.

"That's an Island boat," he said. "The Islands!" And again, with a sigh as long as the sigh of the breakers on the beach: "The Islands!"

"Sydney!" countered Cooke. "Oh, gosh, Sydney!"

"You can have it," jerked Seagoe as the checker-funneled steamer set her course northward to the Islands that are, for Sydney's youth—

The Hesperides
Of all their boyish dreams.

Cooke said suddenly, sharply: "Do you mean that?"

"Mean what?"

"That you'd change with me if you could."

"Oh, if fairy tales came true—yes." Seagoe kicked up the sand with his brown toes.

There was silence between them for a minute, silence filled with the creaming of the breakers, and the silvery cries of surf-riding girls. Then Cooke said: "Could you manage a holiday? You could stay with me, and I'd show you all round."

"Well—the sub-manager's a sort of relation of mine—not that he ever looks my way. I reckon I could get a month or maybe six weeks, if I paid my own substitute part of the time. Haven't had a holiday this year. And I won a bit in the Golden Casket last week, and some of it's left. Yes, I could, thanks

Seagoe and Cooke lay down on the hot sand of the Bondi Beach. "Viola," said a girl lolling near by, "see those two blokes? They're the dead spit of one another!"

very much; but—what's the good? It would only make me sick because I couldn't stay."

"Lord, you do talk! Me, I'm sick of the Islands, long ago; I was never meant for them. Offered the job, after a row at home—I'm English—and took it to get away. You're the lucky one."

Seagoe stared in amazement at him.

"What, in the gents' hats—a job that doesn't need any more brains than a rabbit's?"

"The gents' hats—and Sydney—sounds like Paradise to me. People *live,* in Sydney."

"Now, I think they live, in the Islands. Something doing—some adventure! Your own master, too. I wish I dared chuck my job, and go. Anything available there?"

Cooke shook his head.

"No chance. Not any more than there is here in Sydney, in these days, I suppose."

"That's right," Seagoe agreed mournfully. "If you came here looking for work, you might wear the soles off your boots, and find nothing. I suppose we're both lucky, but I don't feel so."

"The natives of the Shebas, where I am," Cooke said irrelevantly, "know some funny things. Most savages could teach us a bit—if one didn't have to live white-man fashion. I sometimes wonder if they aren't laughing at us for a pack of fools. Do you know,—only you wouldn't believe,—when a Sheba headhunter chap gets fed up with things in general, he just goes off and is some one else."

"Sounds ratty," commented Seagoe. "But all sorts of queer starts happen in the Shebas, I believe. Do you know, I think I'll do it. I'm due for a holiday—and if you'd really show me round, it would be bonzer. I expect you know a thing or two."

Cooke, lying with his arms under his head, and staring up at the pale-blue Sydney sky, answered slowly, almost absently: "Yes—a thing or two."

IT seemed to Seagoe, lounging on the veranda of the hotel, that he must have arrived in the port of the Shebas quite a week ago. But it was only on that morning that he had landed. The beat of time was slow here; hours were like days, days like weeks and months. Slow and gentle, many things in the Shebas. Swift and violent, others.

Everything here seemed to burn and sparkle.

The tops of the coconut palms shone like polished silver; all the little leaves of other trees seemed varnished; the waves were full of broken diamonds, and the white trunks of the palms, the white sands of the beach, flung back the furious light of three o'clock, like glass on a western wall. A good way off, across the flat china blues of the harbor, black-purple peaks lifted up their sinister horns. From one of the horns, volcanic

smoke came out. There was a war-canoe on the water, making for those mountain islands. It sped like a launch; the four-and-twenty islanders who paddled it screamed as they went, and rattled their paddle-blades in a curious angry rhythm.

Seagoe looked at it all, and found it good. Even the mad contrasts, the lazy loafing and the wild speeding, the peace of the harbor and the fury of the smoking hills, pleased him, piqued him like some of the costly combinations of strange flavor he rarely had tried—ice-cream and burning brandy, mixed sweets and sours. The Shebas, he thought vaguely, were like that.

Cooke said, yawning: "We won't stay in this shack; they've no use for anyone but boozers from the bush. We'll get away in our schooner by sunup tomorrow. And I'll show you the real Shebas, as much as you want.... I wonder what's on at the Picture Palace in Sydney, this week?"

"Damn Sydney!" said Seagoe pleasantly.

"Oh, yes, damn anything and everybody I can't have."

"Everybody?" queried Seagoe.

"I said everything, didn't I?" He rose, and strolled toward the bar. "Since they expect you to drink—" he said.

A ship's boy came up the pathway. He looked for Seagoe, called his name, and handed him a radio from the steamer. Seagoe signed for the message, and tore it open.

COOKE, coming back again, pleasantly mellowed, saw his companion standing with a paper in his hand.

"Read it," said Seagoe, his face tallow-white.

The radio ran:

RETURN AT ONCE STOP FREDERICKS KILLED STOP WILL HOLD JOB TILL STEAMER RETURNS —JEVONS

"When does this boat go back?" Seagoe demanded.

"Tomorrow night."

"No time to see anything?"

"Hardly. The local boats won't move till she's gone. You could—you could—" He stopped, and looked at Seagoe thoughtfully. "You could go over to the big island across the harbor, if you liked. Hard luck on you. I suppose Fredericks is your substitute, and Jevons the Lord God manager?"

"Yes." Seagoe's tone was bitter.

"I remember your place. I bought a hat in the Castle Emporium once. Gents' hats—quiet corner of the big floor, partitioned off, with windows—"

"Windows that don't open, looking out on the traffic," supplied Seagoe.

"That's right. Windows that keep out the noise, and show you all that's going on. And the light—"

"Half dark on a summer day, with a dark carpet, and a roof—"

"Yes. Nice brown arched roof like a church or something, and green carpet like moss. Glass cases with hats, and boxes, and one or two quiet fellows selling—"

"They're in boxes and glass cases too, if they only knew it. And I'm going back into the box. Me!"

The look he cast at the harbor was like the look a lover sends his maid, when the paper streamers are beginning to break on the ship's rail, and the stream of water widens.

"Maybe," said Cooke, staring at the blues and greens of the Shebas as a man stares, unseeingly, at a wife of whom he has long grown weary: "Maybe—not. Come with me to the big island tonight, and don't tell anyone you are going."

IT seemed to Dick Seagoe that he must have been watching the Sheba dancers for hours and hours. He had no idea how long it was since they had landed on a coral beach, ivory-pale in moonlight, and made their way, guided by the thrumming heartbeats of gigantic drums, to the cluster of tall brown houses, crazily roofed, and the square of beaten earth, where the dance was going on. He remembered that Cooke had shown a sort of pass—a crescent and circle cut in orange-colored shell—and said, half laughing: "Without this, you and I would maybe go home short of a head. Means safety for a day and a night—sun and moon—see? Now you keep quiet, and ask me about anything you don't understand; but don't talk more than you can help, because they're touchy brutes, and the Government don't count, outside the ports."

The dancers were all young fighting-men, naked save for their decorations of bead and shell and dangling croton leaves. They had feathers on their heads; the feathers nodded to a prearranged rhythm, as the men danced, danced ceaselessly, rank with rank, brown skins shining with sweat in the torch-light, beads and boar-tusks jingling on broad

chests. They were splendid people, curiously alike, standardized almost as a regiment is standardized; their arms were long like gorillas' arms, and their shoulders made you think of bisons ready for a charge. Their eyes were bisons' eyes too, small, dark and flaming, deep-set beneath mats of black curling hair. Tirelessly they went on to the sound of the heart-beating drums, the drums that never ceased, that kept you from thinking, left you a sodden rag of mere sensation, hypnotized by that unending *thrum—thrum—thrum*. . . .

Of a sudden it ceased, and the silence hit Seagoe in the face like splashed water.

"What are they going to do?" he whispered.

"They are going into the big men's house, that sort of temple with the tower on it. You may come. They're going to exchange two men."

"What?"

"I told you before. It's a custom. When two men are tired of their lives, they pass through certain ceremonies, taking on each other's lives. Everyone is bound to recognize it; A is B, and B is A, thenceforth. Property—gardens—everything goes with the change. They die to their own lives. And the odd thing is—you won't believe it, you don't know how many secrets of personality these primitive people keep—that they really do become each other, in a way. Their faces grow different, and their manners, and mind you, there's something in these ceremonies that white men don't understand; no words to express lots of things they can do. For example, there's a thunderstorm coming up—"

Yes, Seagoe had noticed that; they were going to have a "snorter," he thought.

"Well, that's not accidental; they knew it was coming, and they wouldn't have held the dance without. The dance, they say, calls spirit powers into action. The lightning and thunder—well, if you ask me, it looks uncommonly like some way of getting at electric power from the very source. . . . But wait. Come in."

WITH the carved "pass" well in view, the two white men entered the dark temple house where the ceremony was to take place. Torches of coconut stump, held by young boys who were prisoners of the temple for the year of their initiation, lighted up the strangest, wildest sight that Seagoe had ever witnessed. The dancers, forming in two long lines, stood underneath a rack filled with human heads, that stared down from white eyes of cowrie shell, of gleaming mother-o'-pearl. The torches threw a smoky glaring light upon two men who stood between the lines of dancers; men of middle age, with strong brown limbs and the tremendous chests of Sheba savages.

"Keep back," warned Cooke, as a crashing peal of thunder spilled itself over the roof of the temple house, simultaneously with a flare of blue-mauve light. "They will begin now. Say nothing. You and I are going to be the next."

NOW it was morning; and Seagoe, running down the bay in a little schooner sped by engine and by sail, wondered if the things that he remembered were real—if he had only dreamed them, perhaps, and was still entangled by the dream.

Last night? Last night was incredible, even now. He recalled it as one recalls things seen and undergone in a fit of intoxication.

Some of it had been ugly—the blood-letting and blood-drinking of the ceremony. But it was nothing worse than transfusion, if you looked at it in that light.

Then there had been dancing and drumming and singing, and drumming and drumming. A man who was a sorcerer had gone into a trance. Other men had gone into trances. Spirits, they said, had spoken. It was all frightfully like the Sunday-night "séances" in Sydney's less reputable streets, but like with a difference. This thing had a punch to it that was lacking from the blitherings and scribblings of fat women in *djibbah* frocks. This thing had death in it somewhere, if you went far enough. Seagoe knew that, but didn't know how he knew—unless it was from the glittering eyes of the heads that swung above the dancers and the drummers.

At one period there were electric shocks, or something so like them that you couldn't tell the difference. The two men who had been first done were almost knocked down. They picked themselves up trembling, and went out by opposite doors of the temple, without looking at or speaking to each other. Henceforward, to all the Shebas, black A was black B, and black B was black A. People were waiting for them—greeted them by each other's names.

Seagoe found the work surprisingly simple. . . . He had only to see that the day's tally of nuts was collected, the weeding done, and the nuts split and dried.

Then it was the turn of Cooke and Seagoe. . . .

Not till the last day of his life could Seagoe have told just how the thing was done. The drumming seemed to sear your mind; the reek of torches choked you; the smell of some sort of incense made you half drunk, so that you hardly understood the spirit-raising and general kicking up of hell that went on. When it was over, when the unseen force —maybe an electric shock, maybe not— had struck them both, and shaken them on their already shaky legs; when they were going out, as the others had gone, by opposite doors—then Seagoe saw something pass from the fingers of Cooke to the chief sorcerer's brown paw. Sovereigns, bright gold, such as hadn't been seen in Sydney for years and years. . . . He had heard that the Sheba savages

hoarded gold, valued it above their own treasures, and now he knew it was true.

It put the cap on the climax of the whole queer, incredible thing.

Then he was outside, in the dark and the hot rain, and the thunderstorm was grumbling away toward the burning mountain. He was coming back to himself. His mind was clear and he knew that something in it had changed during the night. He was still Seagoe—though the boatmen who were to take them back addressed him as "Mistah Cooke." But he had new knowledge; he had looked, a little way, into the huge reservoir from which all human personality is drawn; he had carried something off.

It would be easy, strangely easy, now, if he wished, to play the part of Cooke—Cooke, who had all the world of wonder and adventure at his feet, and thought the gents' hats department in the Castle Emporium a better place.

That night, in the hotel, Cooke changed clothes with him, cut his hair for him, parted it on one side, and saw him shave off his tooth-brush mustache. Cooke had been growing a mustache during the two weeks' voyage, and his hair was sleeked back now as Seagoe's had been. It all made an amazing difference.

"The schooner and crew will be ready for you in the morning," he said. "I'll sail by the steamer for Sydney, and you'll hear no more of your Lord God manager; he'll be satisfied, maybe better than he was before. Yes, I know what you want to ask: you want to know why one couldn't just exchange jobs, and let it go at that, if employers were game? Well, first place, employers wouldn't be, and second, it wouldn't be a real getting away from yourself. I tell you, for all practical purposes, we've done that. I've no past but yours; and you—" He paused a moment, looked at Seagoe a little oddly. "Well," he went on, "so far as the islands are concerned, my past is yours, now. And I tell you—I tell you, even if we hadn't happened to be a common type, a good deal alike, the thing might have been done all the same. Only it wouldn't have been so simple. You believe me now; you wouldn't have —before."

Seagoe did believe; he knew there were depths he had not sounded. But he had no wish to sound them.

When they parted, publicly, next morning, Cooke said to him: "Good-by, Cooke—glad to have met you." And Seagoe, burning his boats, said before all the loafers and the lodgers, on the hotel veranda: "Good-by, Seagoe—pleasant voyage." And nobody looked surprised.

LATER the little white-sailed schooner carried him away, over seas bluer, greener, than any seas by the gate of Sydney Heads. He knew that it was beginning, that he had got his wish at last.

The island plantation was reached in a couple of days. It was solitary to the last degree, lovely beyond telling. The long points plumed with coconuts, that ran out over grape-blue bays; the enclosed lagoons, secret and still, with clusters of pale orchids hanging above their stretches of silver glass; the reefs, the beaches, burning white, were the embodiment of all that he had dreamed as a boy. The plantation had a house—a good little timbered bungalow, with cane furniture. The labor force, of head-hunting savages, proved easier to manage than he had expected; but he wouldn't have troubled, if it had been hard. It was all in the adventure.

He found the work surprisingly simple. He had only to call over in the morning, give out food and medicine, tie up wounds, and see that the day's tally of nuts was collected, the weeding done, and the nuts split and dried. He knew that the salary was small; that did not astonish him, in view of the work expected. But he expected in the end to find it large; so much of it was paid by the realization of his dream.

They had told him that life in the outer islands was unbearably lonely. He didn't find it so, at first; he was too deeply intrigued by the delights of being so utterly his own master, of shooting a bit and fishing a bit, and sailing a great deal, of doing every darned thing when he pleased and how he liked. And by and by, neighboring planters began to call—from a neighborhood forty or fifty miles away. He thought they had not known Cooke very well, perhaps; they seemed to accept him without question. So did the labor. So, amazingly, did the traveling inspector, on his one hurried call. He seemed a bit surprised to find the books in such excellent order—told Seagoe that he was improving, and would get a good report; and hurried away in the steamer almost immediately.

Gents' hats! The dark, carpeted room with the windows that didn't open! The safe, sure existence, everything forseen, everything known! Had he ever lived like that? He played with the idea that he never had, that he had always been Cooke and lived in the islands at the end of the world; captained his schooner, commanded his boys, got nearly wrecked and drowned now and then, quelled mutinies among the labor, knocked down a bison-faced head-hunter who went for him with a clearing-knife, and jollied the brute afterward till he gave in and laughed, and became a model worker. All these things, he liked to tell himself, he had always done. And it was all good.

Or nearly all. . . .

There were women on the island. Some of the "boys" had been permitted to bring their wives with them, and this was the main cause of the troubles and fights that Seagoe, every now and then, had to suppress at the risk of his own life. There was other trouble too. Seagoe himself was troubled when he passed the boys' quarters after knock-off—saw the fires lit and smelled the suppers that were cooked by the little brown women, and not eaten alone. All his meals were managed by a huge cannibal who flung things on the table, and burned everything he didn't serve raw. The men were no good as cooks. But Seagoe didn't want to establish the usual colored housekeeper. He was Australian, and strongly "white Australian." The mixture of races had always seemed blasphemous to him.

Nevertheless, the sight of the brown girls and the little brown babies who rolled laughing in the dust before the doors, made his heart ache. He thought of the girls on Sydney beaches. He thought of Irene in the scanty bathing-suit. He wished—

WEEKS went on. And now it was as if the curious preconceived knowledge won from the sorceries of the temple had begun to melt away. Real knowledge was taking its place. He was no longer a planter by the grace of some sort of spirit-control; he was a planter who had learned his job beneath rain and sun, in a common, wholesome way; he was a Sheba settler who knew the affairs of the neighbors and the islands, not through some sort of devilish second sight, but as a result of visiting and gossiping within a radius of a hundred

miles. And the other fellows liked him. He liked them. It was most of it very good. Only when he met one of the rare white wives of the plantation world did his content crack suddenly across, like a mirror struck by a stone. He wondered that Cooke, during all the years of island life, had never thought of marrying. And he remembered Cooke's significant phrase (he saw it significant now) about damning anything and "everybody" he could not have.

"Some girl turned him down," he thought. "I don't much wonder. You might like him well enough for a start, but at bottom he's as hard as flint. He seemed soppy on those girls we saw at Bondi, the whole lot of 'em. Bit of a Turk, eh? I'm sorry for the one he picks." He could not say that Cooke was not good-looking—hadn't he himself been called "the Hermes of Bondi Beach" by a lady professor from whom he had fled as from the plague, and was not Cooke the "dead spit" of him? Well, good-looking or not, Cooke was a "hard case," and Seagoe thought that if he had had a sister, he wouldn't have wanted her to marry Cooke. But he had no sister, and no people at all; he was in some ways the most solitary fellow in the world.

THE hot season had gone, and the cool season come; there was very little difference between the two in the burning Shebas, but at least, nights were milder, and it didn't rain every day. Seagoe planned an excursion to the far side of the island, where he seldom went. He wanted to try for swordfish in the big lagoon. There was a boat due that day from the main port of the Shebas, but he wasn't going to trouble about that; the boys would take and tally any cargo there might be for him, and he would escape the bother of entertaining unknown and undesired guests, if he kept away till night.

When he came back, it was quite dark, and the lights of the bungalow seemed to welcome him as he tramped up the path. On the veranda, Wakaka had laid the dinner-table; he could see the shine of the white cloth, the twinkle of silver. "Coming home's not so bad after all," he thought. There was no discontent in him that night; he was pleasantly tired; he had had good sport; and he wanted nothing but food and sleep. . . .

What! He hadn't escaped the visitors, after all: there was some one on the veranda, sitting in a long chair, with his back to the steps. Seagoe could see the fellow's body bagging down the canvas, his dark head topping the chair-rail. "Curse it," he thought, feeling for his cigarettes, feeling suddenly more tired than he had thought he was. To have to entertain strangers, keep this man maybe for weeks—

The man rose, turned around and faced him. But it was not a man. It was a woman, short-skirted, slim, shingled—a woman of some seven-and-twenty years, with very beautiful dark eyes, with an egg-shaped face, and a pointed little chin. With hands—you couldn't help noticing them—like ivory flowers. Rings on the hands. Diamonds. And one ring more.

IT may have been the remnants of the temple sorcery—hypnotism, whatever had been—that whispered the truth to Seagoe. Certainly he knew, before the woman spoke, that she was Cooke's wife.

"Charley!" she said, coming toward him with her hands out. "Charley—you mustn't be angry. I never meant to see you again; but the baby died, Charley, and I was so lonely; and I hoped—I thought maybe—you hadn't taken to anyone else. I—"

She was embarrassed; she seemed to be pleading for mercy, this flowerlike thing, this woman like a velvet pansy. She seemed afraid of him. And yet Seagoe was as sure that she had done no wrong, as he was sure that he stood on his own feet. But somebody must have done wrong, to separate these two. Charles Cooke—the fellow who was a bit of a Turk, the handsome hard chap, keen on all girls, maybe cruel to some—had he been the sinner? And had she, with a woman's divine kindness, forgiven him? But why was she embarrassed, awkward? She was not the awkward kind. She was a little gentlewoman every inch. "More fit for me," ran the thought of Seagoe, "than for Cooke." For he could not but remember that he was the first of his people to serve in a shop or take a wage. There was family history behind the Seagoes.

Then came upon him the greatest temptation of his life. He was alone on the island, with a beautiful woman, who thought him to be her husband. They must have parted at least seven years ago, Seagoe knew, from what Cooke had said about his affairs. Any slight difference would be accounted for by those

There were women on the island; and the sight

years; and after all, the sorcery of the temple—or the hypnotism of it—seemed to count. There was no doubt in Mrs. Cooke's eyes, as she lifted them to his. She had loved the man whom she thought was Charley Cooke. She was ready, more from duty than from passion, he thought, but still ready—to take him back again.

He stammered, choked. He did not know what to say. Some sort of phrases came at last. He heard himself telling Cooke's wife that he was glad to see her, mumbling about journey and tiredness, explaining that he would get the cook-boy to prepare her room, and that they would have dinner by and by; would she like to go and tidy up?

She slipped away silently as a bird. He thought, but was not sure, that she cast him a look over her shoulder, and that it was a look of reproach.

She did not join him at dinner. From the spare bedroom he heard her voice, gently asking if something could be sent in to her. She was tired, she said.

That night Seagoe, worn out as he was, could not sleep a wink. His life had crashed about him. Who would have thought of this? Cooke he excused of all complicity—plainly the fellow had thought himself separated for good, and probably he'd deserved it. But into what a hole he had flung the innocent Seagoe!

Seagoe was no fool; he realized that in actual life, things didn't fall out as they did in plays: that Cooke's wife was bound to find him out very soon. But she mightn't find him out just at once. He had heard of men coming home from the war to find their places taken by some impostor who, after four years' parting, had been unsuspiciously accepted by the

of the brown girls and the little brown babies made Seagoe's heart ache.

wife. These things had happened, and happened not once or twice. But Seagoe couldn't believe, no matter how hard he tried, that the wives didn't really know, after a while. That they had not simply accepted things as they were—liking, maybe, the impostor better!

He flung himself about on his hot bed. The moon looked mistily through the mosquito-net upon him, tossing there. He hoped the woman in the next room couldn't hear. She had not made a sound—except once, when he thought he heard a half-suppressed sob. It might have been a ghost-pigeon, mourning in the woods outside. Again it might not. He supposed he hadn't given her a very kindly greeting, for a husband.

Curse this sorcery! It must have done something after all. The woman did think he was Charley.

She was too good for Charley, a thousand times. She was probably too good for *him*. But if he allowed the delusion to go on until familiarity shattered it, it might be that she wouldn't care to go back to Charley after all. It might be that, like the deserted wives of the war, she would come to like the impostor better than the real man.

And the loneliness of the island (yes, he knew that it was lonely now—as Eve and Adam, once their eyes were opened, knew that they were naked), and the sight of those cooking-fires, with the fat brown children rolling in the dust, the women waiting for their lords to come home—all that wouldn't sting any more.

He was certain, lying there on his creaking bed, trying to keep quiet, so that he could hear whether the little soul in the next room was really crying

or not—he was as certain that he could love her, loved her already, as he was of the heartbeat in his own hot side. And he had only to stretch out a hand—

But that he could not do. It was too damned tricky. The sort of thing that Cooke would have done without a moment's hesitation. But he wasn't Cooke—in spite of all the bedevilments, the sorcery and the spirit-controlling of the Sheba temple. He was glad he wasn't. He would have scrubbed Cooke out of his soul, as he would have scrubbed dirt off a floor, if he hadn't been sure that the strange possession was almost at an end.

It was late now: the ghost-pigeon wailed no longer; the owls had ceased lamenting in the bush beyond the lagoon. It was the dead hush of the night, when men, awake, see clearly—listen, in the silence, to the speech of their own souls.

Seagoe knew at last what he was to do. The certitude calmed him; he turned over and went to sleep.

BY noon next day Seagoe and this wife of Cooke's were far down the island coast, in Seagoe's schooner. He had told her that he was obliged to visit the port on sudden and important business; and she had agreed, with a hurt, puzzled look that went to his heart. Just once she had lingered beside him on the veranda, and said tremulously: "Don't you want me back, Charley?" And he, not answering directly, had said: "We'll talk everything out in Port Absolom, when we get there."

"I've been sorry I did it," she said. "I was angry, and you know you gave me cause. But a woman alone, Charley—the world's hard. I've been teaching in a school in London ever since, and when I saw in a Sydney paper that you were managing a plantation in these islands, I couldn't help longing for the loveliness and the peace of them. London! The school! You don't know what it's been."

"Oh, yes, I do," thought Seagoe, suddenly seeing a vision of the Gents' Hats. "I know, much better than you think."

They went down the coast together in the little schooner; stormy weather met them halfway, and to Seagoe's great relief, there was no chance of talking things out, as Cooke's wife evidently intended. He could see by now that she was puzzled, that she thought him considerably changed. But his ready acceptance of the situation, in words if no more, had kept her from suspecting the actual, amazing truth.

As for himself, he was so busy running the ship and avoiding the numberless uncharted reefs of the Shebas, that he had little chance of picking up any further information about her. One thing he did learn: her name. She was called Beth—probably Elizabeth. She said to him once: "You haven't called me Beth since I came." And after that, holding the wheel through fierce and sudden squalls, warning her, as they jibbed, to avoid the swinging boom, lending her his oilskin to keep her dry when she came up from the stifling cabin for a breath of air, he addressed her always by the little pretty name of Beth.

There was time for thinking, if little chance of talk, during those long tricks at the wheel, and Seagoe found himself fighting bitterly against what he could not but call the mean close-fistedness of Fate.

"Never let a man have what he wants, and enjoy it," he mused, putting the wheel down and "meeting her" as the schooner answered. "Give him a lump of cake, and there's stones instead of currants in it. Give him money when he's too old to have fun, and public dinners when his digestion's gone to hell. Fate! Gives me the islands I've always wanted, and then makes them so lonely I could talk to my hat set up on a stick; gives me a woman like a pansy-flower, and marks her off married to some one else, and b'gosh, looking for him. That's you!" He didn't know whom exactly he was addressing—his classical education had been cut short; but he did remember that there was a fate, or fates, and that they were a pack of nasty spiteful old women. Also that there was a Latin tag about *"amari aliquid"*—something those same cursed fates dropped into your drink, he thought, to make it bitter, when there was any danger of your liking it too well.

"The old chaps who wrote the Greek and Latin books knew a thing or two," he told himself. . . . "Here, you beggars, ready about!"

IN this manner they made their way to the port, came to the little hotel—and as a matter of course were assigned by the half-drunken host to one room. Seagoe had meant to talk things over with Beth, tell her the truth, or not tell it, as seemed best—anyhow, pack her away again on the calling steamer. What else could you do, if you didn't mean to be a thorough cad?

But the steamer, like all island steamers, was running late—would not come back for a day or two. Seagoe swore when he saw how he had been caught. He did not know what was going to happen next. He would get his letters from the mail,—not that he expected any,—go for a long walk, and turn up at the hotel in the evening so late that he'd have to camp on the veranda. And tomorrow—well, sufficient unto the day was the worry thereof.

There were letters, after all; one anyhow, addressed to Charles Cooke, and carrying the private mark that he and Cooke had agreed upon.

Seagoe opened it.

It spoke, cautiously enough, of the Castle Emporium and the Gents' Hats. It insinuated that Cooke was doing far better there than ever Seagoe had done; that he was up from promotion, and making his mark, in the Hats. ("He would say that," commented Seagoe.) It chattered a bit about Sydney, about the "fun of the fair," the fine food, the good drinks, the picture-shows, the theaters, the stadium, the beaches. It came by degrees to something that made Seagoe spring from the seat he had taken on a fallen palm, wave the letter above his head, and shout.

YOU may recall Irene, who with her friend Viola (pronounced to rhyme with *pianola*) ice-creamed herself out of the story at an early date. Irene was not the sort of girl you could keep down, or out of anything; and she didn't know she had walked out of a story, so she simply walked back into it.

Cooke had "picked up with" Irene, whom he had admired exceedingly when he saw her on Bondi Beach. He was engaged to her, and would be married before the letter reached Seagoe.

"I was married before," he wrote, "and my first wife chucked me—divorced me by English law, for all the usual causes. I suppose she was too good for me. Irene isn't; I reckon she and I will hit it off all right, better than Elizabeth and I did.

"You'd better not tell anybody anything. Let things stop as they are. If you're content, I am."

He ended the letter there.

"Am I content?" thought Seagoe. He laughed, thinking of that dusky shingled hair, those pansy eyes, in the hotel. "Am I? Have I got the better of the vile old fates at last?"

He knew that he had not; that no man can, in the end. But when you are still in the blessed twenties, who thinks of ends?

"I wonder," he mused, "how long it takes one to get married, in this place? For I'm not going back to the plantation alone."

TWO days later Elizabeth was married, under her maiden surname, to the man commonly known in the Shebas as Charles Cooke, but entered privately on the register as Richard Seagoe. It was supposed by the officials that the bridegroom, like a good many other island settlers, had reasons for changing his name—reasons not good, but doubtless sufficient. They asked no questions. They had known him for years, and he seemed to be a good deal improved, of late.

To Beth, however, on the evening of their wedding-day, Seagoe told the whole truth.

"Do you think you can forgive me?" he asked her. "I wanted to make sure of you. And you did say that you were ready to remarry me—him—whatever you like to call it. And I was afraid to say anything, because I thought it would seem like nonsense to you—not knowing this queer place."

"It does," said Beth briskly. "It's the most absurd nonsense that ever was dreamed of, and I don't believe anything of it from beginning to end, and no woman would. My dear—do you think I didn't know?"

"Know? When?"

"I don't know *when*, any more than I know *how*. But I was sure, almost from the first. And I was afraid—"

"What?"

"That I might miss you," she said, with her arms about his neck.

"RICHARD SEAGOE" of the Castle Emporium is very happy in the Hats. He is going to be moved to the Coats soon. Irene is his master, but that is good for "Richard," who is getting on well, but not so much liked in the Emporium as he used to be, years ago.

"Charles Cooke" of Naruna Island, on the contrary, is better liked by everybody, every year.

Both men have done what maybe you and I would like to do, but never, never shall. And because no one, almost, believes in these queer tricks of the Shebas, nobody is likely to do it again.

The Big

Lesser men might ride in flivvers, but that dark financier Samson Bates foreclosed on a bus and used it as his limousine . . . Pride, however, goeth before destruction.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

"Whyn't you run over President Roosevelt's duck?" protested Ammonia Jackson. "How come to Gawd you have to run over *my* duck?"

ALONE and like the wind drove Samson G. Bates, long-famished Wolf of Wall Street, in his bus. Headlong behind roared his dusky aide Frisco Johnson, on a motorcycle, in its side-car two briefcases stuffed with Samson's devious papers.

Where lesser men rode in flivvers, Mr. Bates thundered to business in a bus—his through forced foreclosure. Nothing kept down the populace's doubts about a big man's size like giving them his bus-dust to swallow!

And now conjunction of blue eagles, Federal aids, and Russian recognition—all were playing right into the itching palms of Mr. Bates, to end depression with a bang—if he could but get to Eckie Evans first!

For report had come that Eckie—widely known as a financial half-wit—had just negotiated a fifty-four-dollar Government loan on his cotton-crop, and was wavering dizzily between matrimony and investment.

Hence the stir in the hearts of the women, the blur that was Mr. Bates. Hence a million rubles in imperial Russian bonds (bought by Samson from a Harlem waste-paper house with the proceeds of privately pawning his wife's rabbit-fur lodge-robe) in Frisco's speeding side-car!

Bedelia Bates would not need or miss that robe until her lodge's annual formal fish-fry on Friday. And this left ample time for a fast turn-over in the bond-market, and a financial come-back for her husband.

But Eckie was also janitor in the banking-house of Mr. Bates' bitter rival, Horseford Burnam—hence the headlong haste.

Yet ever haste makes waste; Careening magnificently into Kaufman's Alley, there came a frenzied *"qu-a-a-a-c-k!"* a flash of white—and abruptly the bus slammed to a stop—with the too-close Frisco Johnson instantly plastering himself like a chocolate pie against its unyielding rear.

And from beneath and about the bus arose fuss, feathers, Frisco—and the file-edged voice of the widow Ammonia Jackson: "Why aint you run over President Roosevelt's duck? Why aint you run over Gen'al Johnson's duck? How-come to Gawd you got to run over *my* duck? Dat's my head duck, too! . . . And *now* look at him! You jest plumb *ruint* dat duck!"

"Hell wid de duck! Aint see no duck!" rebutted Mr. Bates. "Go git a egg, gal, and hatch yourself out a *good* duck! I—"

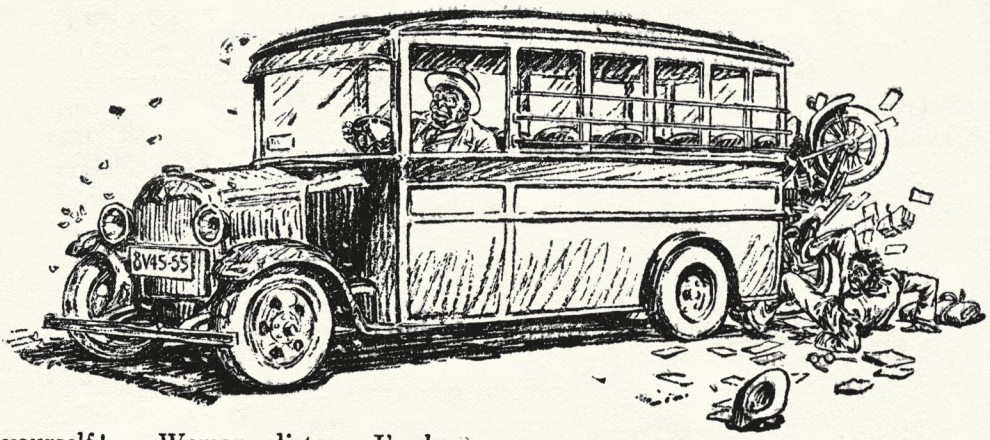
"'A *good duck'?* Dat's a four-dollar duck right now! Says *'Pay me!'*"

"Four *dollars?* What you think dat duck *is?* Hollers like crossin' a dime-duck wid a bus make a *truck* out de duck!"

Samson stepped disgustedly on his starter. "I got to git gwine. Frisco, rally

Bad Wolf

Illustrated by Monte Crews



yourself! —Woman, listen: I's busy floatin' a flock of securities. Aint got time to mess wid no duck."

"You *aint*, is you? Well, lemme tell you, fat-face, you aint *started* messin' wid dis duck yit! Besides, he aint my duck no more: he's yourn! *You* run over him, and *you* gwine pay for him!"

"Pays for nothin'! Old duck aint blow his horn—"

Too late a fleeing financier let in his clutch. Through a bus window hurtled humiliatingly a flattened fowl, to wrap and cling loathsomely about a big man's neck, while Frisco departed noisily—to leave to Ammonia Jackson the field, the future, and what fragments still lay scattered all about.

WITH lordly hiss of air-brakes the bus of Bates drew up before the bank of Burnam and dwarfed it. Nothing built a big man up like listening to himself ride! Importantly Samson Bates alighted—then halted at sight of his prospective investor busily dusting off a shabby desk newly placed just inside the wide front window of the bank, well within the admiring view of passers-by. For some reason, Eckie seemed fairly knob-eyed with importance.

As Samson halted before the cloud of dust, the voice of bank-president Horseford Burnam rang out in welcome:

"Come right in, Mist' Bates! De new vice-president, Eckie, is jest dustin' off he desk—"

"Vice-president?" Samson took the blow standing.

Eckie sneezed violently in his own dust.

"Fixin' to invest hisself in de bank's stock, so us elects him vice-president."

"Puts in de money de Government gimme, so I can collect my back wages better," interposed Eckie illuminatingly.

"Strengthen de bankin'-structure, he means," corrected Mr. Burnam hastily. "Eckie aint been back of de bars long enough yet to learn de bankin'-language good."

"Naw, all he's got is de idea—"

"Sho wisht I could build myself up wid a little mess of lunch!" yearned an executive-elect hollowly.

"*Bankers* eats after two o'clock—" began Mr. Burnam.

"Depositors aint eatin' a-tall!" observed Samson, joining the guerrillas.

"Sign-paintin' boy on his way here now," Mr. Burnam re-burnished his bait, "—to paint 'Eckie Evans, Vice-president' right smack *on* de bank window. Whar everybody gwine see it!"

Eckie saw all the women seeing it. Mixing matrimony *and* investment was the idea! Samson saw a bad break coming in bonds: some banker was always unloading his own stock before a legitimate wolf could get at the prospect!

Frisco arrived like a life-saver outside, and Samson sought conference:

"Don't sign nothin', Mist' Evans, till us shows you what Frisco jest fotched from Harlem."

"Sho is hongry!" Eckie's continued class-less croak followed him out.

"Been detourin' round dat Ammonia woman!" Frisco accounted ruefully for delay. "She still all busted out in a rash about dat duck."

"Big business-man like me aint got no time to mess wid poultry!" Samson saw himself raising blue eagles for their eggs. "Us got to step on it. Eckie hongry and Hoss Burnam tryin' to sell him *his* name on *Hoss'* window for *our* fifty-four bucks. Slip me dem bonds—"

But Frisco, glancing, gasped, gulped—and saw there was no honor among bankers!

Mr. Bates also looked—to see the perfidious Horseford passing his prospect a pencil, paper, and line of language. Eckie's *X* could yet mark where Samson sank!

But quickly as Samson leaped, Frisco's hand—and brain—was quicker. Nor stopped to count the cost—to Mr. Bates: as one, Samson's lunch and a hungry vice-president hit the sidewalk before the bank!

A SECOND later an ever-resourceful Frisco was stuffing both into the bus.

"Nice work in de knob, Frisco!" Samson rallied nobly from his loss. "Hung around me till you thinks fast! —Climb right in de bus, Mist' Evans! Lunchify while you rides. Us transact de rest your business in my office. Way to keep from gittin' skunt is stay out of banks."

"Aint it so!" Eckie's chest joined his mouth and eyes in bulging. A heap of women couldn't read, but all of them could see a boy go by in a bus!

"Run over any of dem poor boys 'at gits in front of us!" Mr. Evans definitely joined the upper classes, as he rumbled gloriously out of Mr. Burnam's life and clutches. "Itches to invest!"

"You aint itched no itch *yit!* Wait till you sees dem Russian bonds Frisco haulin' for you in dat side-car," boomed Mr. Bates. When a big man got ready to come back, old chisel cut more ice than two codes!

"Sho is noble bus!" admired a lamb *en route* to his shearing.

"Jest a old one I keeps to run errands in!" Samson glanced proudly at thirty empty seats behind him. "Gits three gallons to de mile, regular. But *you* be buyin' yourself one dem second-hand Coast-to-Coast busses to ride in soon, from dem bonds."

Eckie saw himself a bus-owner, and waved airily to an unknown woman on the sidewalk.

In the lair of a fast-recovering Wolf, technique in moth-balls since '29 was revived with a rush. "Take de investor in de customers' room, back dar," Samson directed Frisco. "Got to get dese coupons tore off up to date."

"Boy," exulted Mr. Bates at his aide's prompt return, "it's in de bag!"

"Aint nobody in de bag," foreboded Frisco, "is you aint right in de room wid 'em: knowed a woman once come in de back door and married a prospect for his money right *while* de big business-man was out front hollerin' how good he was before he skunt him."

"*Dis* back room aint got no door. Fotch in dem bonds now, out de side-car!"

"Bonds comin' up. Cain't see 'em for de dust!"

As Mr. Johnson departed via the front door, Samson entered the rear room, to make sure no sirens had come down its chimney.

"It's in de bag!" he chortled.

Returning, both financiers met in the outer office again. "Aint you got dem bonds, Samson?" Worry was in Frisco's face and tone.

"Aint *I* got 'em? Aint *you* got 'em?"

"Naw. And old side-car plumb empty—"

Frisco paused appalled. Old czar himself hadn't looked like *that* when old bonds went flooie!

"Bonds must have got jolt' out when you run over de duck." Frisco's voice had flattened to a quack.

Then Samson saw! And Frisco tried to climb the walls! For his portly principal had not only revived but gone mad! Circling the room like a maniac, giving tongue the while like a farm-hound shot with rock-salt!

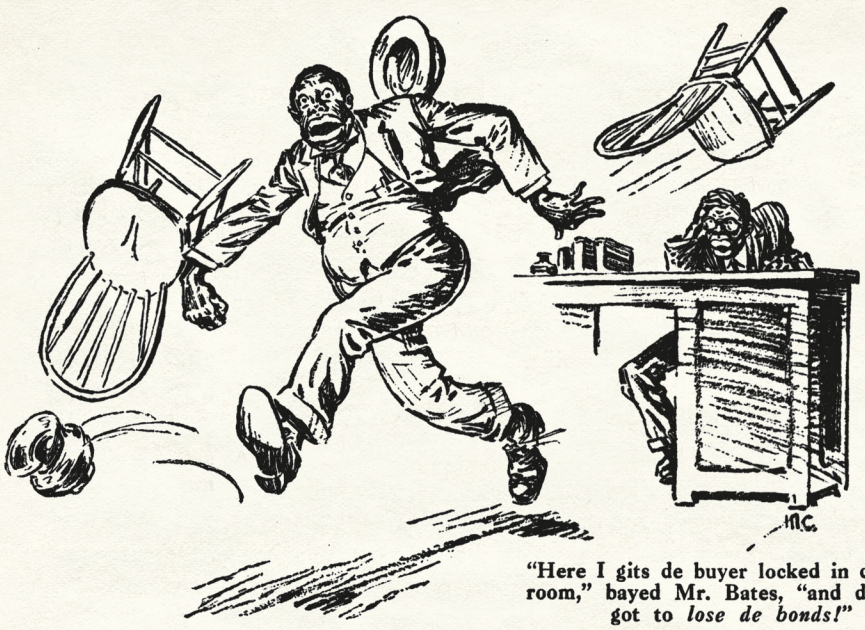
"Here I gits de buyer away from Hoss!" bayed Mr. Bates as he hurdled two chairs and a cuspidor in his anguish. "Gits him locked in de back room here on our home grounds—*itchin'* to invest! And den you, *you* got to *lose de bonds!*"

"Prospect'll *hear* you!" shushed the stricken Frisco frantically.

"Aint no prospect—now! Was bellerin' to buy—now us aint got nothin' to sell! *You*—YOU—"

FRISCO leaped for his life. "Maybe I can git 'em back!" he threw an idea—and a chair—in front of his charging chief.

"Back from whar?" Samson still came murderously on.



"Here I gits de buyer locked in de back room," bayed Mr. Bates, "and den you got to *lose de bonds!*"

"From whar dey fell out," Frisco gained the safety of the door at a speed of forty miles per hour.

"Is dey aint, I's ruint—and you gwine to be!" Mr. Bates roared after his helper's receding form. For Recovery was on the rocks. Old pawn-ticket for one rabbit-fur robe fixing to read "Admit One" to trouble! Bedelia operated under the same code as buzz-saws, and losing her robe just before that fish-fry was no time to tamper with her! Especially with Samson's last dime already tied up in the bonds that ticket now represented. He *had* to find and sell them!

But sorrows never come singly. A wretched wolf reëntered his rear room to find his ex-prospect surreptitiously pocketing a photograph. Mr. Bates didn't like his smirk. "Always takes myself a little mornin' exercise before a big bond deal," he endeavored to draw a red herring across the trail of his late outburst. "Who dat picture of?"

"Thunk you was in a fox-hunt! Gal gimme her picture—"

"Before or after yo' loan?" Frisco's croakings recurred disturbingly to Samson.

"After—"

Mr. Bates locked the door back of him. "Boy wid all your money," he purred paternally, "got to watch his step wid women: else you wakes up some mornin' finds a stranger cookin' for you—wid your money gone and one dem marriage-certif'cates made out *'To Bearer'* hangin' on your wall."

"Aint nobody gwine marry me yit, den!" Again Samson didn't like Eckie's emphasis! "Becaze I aint got no money."

Samson's symptoms clanged into reverse! If Eckie had no money, Bedelia had no lodge-robe, and *he* had no recourse!

"Been so busy standin' off de women since I git de *loan* I aint had time to git de money, I means," Eckie completed a thought and saved a life.

Samson's heart resumed business at its old stand. This New Deal suspense was killing.

"S'pose den," he rallied, "dat I drives you to de government buildin' after it, in de bus? Keep down chance somebody skinnin' you out of it—"

THE reference was unfortunate: Eckie brightened to the bus, but darkened to a memory.

"Dat what de white man say to me," he recalled devastatingly. "Come by myself, or I cain't git it. Anybody wid me liable be after it, and he aint give it to me."

Again the Brain Trust had scored on Samson. Yet no mother starting her six-year-old off to school through traffic felt more misgivings at contemplating Eckie's return through the banker- and woman-infested streets of Demopolis with that fifty-four dollars.

But just as he could not bear it, inspiration came to cheer: he could at least keep an eye on Eckie *en route.* And again a bus rumbled in grandeur

through the streets of Baptist Hill, a block behind the shuffling Eckie, while fear for the fruitlessness of Frisco's errand ever recurred to chill the pit of Samson's soul and stomach.

But the trouble with the bond business was the bond buyers! Witness Eckie, shifting his route senselessly, until it lay directly past the homestead of Mr. Bates.

Too late Samson saw his peril: already then the body-rattles of his bus had betrayed him foully. While shrill and familiar rang Bedelia's cry: "Whar you think you gwine, Samson? Leavin' me wid all dis washin', widout no wood!"

"Busy wid a big deal!" barked Mr. Bates indignantly from his halted bus. "Fixin' to finance. Aint got time to monkey wid no firewood, woman. I—"

"I'll monkey *you* in a minute! Also, *whar at my rabbit-robe?*"

Mr. Bates' stomach suddenly went off on a trip, leaving him behind. "R-robe?" If Bedelia had found that hidden pawn-ticket—

"Yeah, robe! What I is fixin' to bust dat fish-fry wide open, noble, wid!"

"Aw—uh—yeah, de robe! I took dat to de cleaners—"

"Look more like it was *you* fixin' to git took to de cleaners! Listen here, Big Business: Is dat robe aint back here by tonight, I is gwine strew you round over de Hill so small your own gizzard aint know you! *You hear me?*"

Samson heard—and fled. Only to make fresh if fatal discovery: while he had dallied with Bedelia, Eckie Evans had been marching on. And now he was gone!

Then indeed was a man-hunt on! For with Bedelia definitely suspicious and dead-lining him, Samson had to sell those bonds to Eckie now, whether Frisco found them or not.

UP Ash Street and down Strawberry; through Decatur and startled Fish Alley, clamored a one-man wolf-pack in his bus, baying desperately on the trail of Eckie Evans and fifty-four dollars that, more than ever, Samson had to have. But only once he found a scent, and it was cold: Eckie had been seen leaving the Federal building—with a woman "lookin' powerful lovin'"—on his arm!

Lower than the blister on a deep-sea diver's heel, Mr. Bates at length, in his headquarters, faced facts and future of equal inkiness.

To which depths there penetrated a familiar splutter, honk, and death-rattle that meant Frisco was returning from his foray.

"Is you find 'em?" croaked Samson dully as the door opened.

"Naw. Aint nothin' round dar but jest little mess of duck-feathers. So I hatches myself a swell idea." Frisco was tugging at a package in his pocket.

"So was dem Russian bonds a swell idea—at de time. What you got?"

"Coffee-coupons—to you. But Russian bonds to Eckie! He cain't read—"

Again genius was too late! Every time a big business-man fixed his wagon in one place, it broke down in another! "Eckie gone!" Samson removed the lid from the Pit.

"Gone?" Frisco leaped a startled foot.

"To git his money. Aint see him since. But some woman is—"

"To *git* his money? Thought he *had* his money?"

"Aint thunk it no wuss'n *I* is!"

"You done lost de prospect!"

"You lost de bonds!"

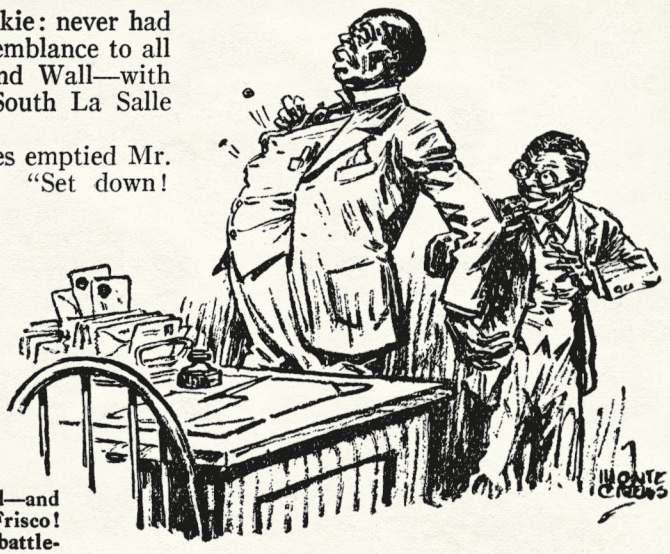
"You run over de duck!"

"You—"

Abruptly recrimination was interrupted. Mr. Bates glanced, gasped—and reswelled till his vest, taken by surprise, lost two buttons and a buckle in its rush. "Stand back, Frisco! Fixin' to finance!" A battle-cry not heard since Steel was above 200 rang out. Again the Spirit of '29 was marching on, for Eckie was at the door!

And yet not the old Eckie: never had *that* Eckie borne *this* resemblance to all four corners of Broad and Wall—with the two best blocks of South La Salle thrown in!

Automatically Mr. Bates emptied Mr. Johnson from his chair. "Set down!



Mr. Bates glanced, gasped—and re-swelled. "Stand back, Frisco! Fixin' to finance!" his battle-cry rang out.

Put your feets on de table, Mist' Evans!" rang a welcome. "Frisco, take his hat!"

Mr. Evans sat. Beneath his overalls he had acquired spats. Above them his frog-eyed symptoms were not only of adenoids but of one who has just come a far fast journey upward, and is more than satisfied with his trip.

"Did you git your money, Mist' Evans?" yearned Samson.

"Sho is!" Eckie's manner indicated that he was already watching himself drive up to banks in his own bus, too.

"Move de cuspidor closer to de prospect, Frisco! Slip him one dem new cigarettes! Shine his shoes!" Hospitality in Samson reached fever-heat. Avarice gnawed him like some Spartan fox. Pawning that lodge-robe had been a master-stroke after all, signalizing that he was his old pre-crash self. Recent darkness was but the well-known before-dawn kind. Who was afraid of the big bad Bedelia now?

"I done got de money," declared Eckie, lifting Samson's soul still nearer to the stars "—and I done invested it a'ready, too!" he added, kicking the universe from beneath Samson's soles.

The table caught Mr. Johnson's chin, keeping him off the floor above his elbows. Samson's startled stutters were spreading rapidly to his knees.

"S-s-says *huh?*" contrived the bat-eyed Mr. Bates.

"Says I gits dem fifty-four bucks okay —and invests fifty of 'em in a sure shot what gwine pay off quick and big. Wid four bucks left over. Dat gal still lookin' lovin' at me, too!"

Samson joined himself physically in his fiscal collapse.

"How-come 'sure shot'? What you buy?" Mr. Johnson took up the inquest.

"Buys myself a half-interest in a law-suit!" Eckie attained his zenith.

"Half-interest in a *w-w-what?*" Frisco gave instant imitation of an unsuccessful swallower of a croquet-ball.

"In a law-suit, dat what! Against a rich man. 'Bleeged to win it. But I got to git gwine now: got a date wid dat gal what gimme her picture."

"WHAT hit me, Frisco?" in time Mr. Bates was able to demand.

"Aint nothin' hit you: You jest busted in your own face."

Mr. Bates' mind fled frantically from his future into his past, only to find memory closing in on him there with a new aspect of an old predicament. Again new need for haste had entered, he perceived. Even now it might be too late!

With a moan he leaped for his battered desk, to begin pawing through papers there like two terriers after one rat.

"Done mislaid yourself again?" demanded Frisco disgustedly.

Mr. Bates answered question only with hysterical question: "Whar at my other portfolio?" he yowled.

"Done tell you all both dem briefcases gits lost out when you hit de duck—"

"Forgit de duck! I had—"

But even as the implication of this newest cataclysm swept and shipwrecked the frantic Samson, fresh complication was at the door.

"Come in!" he croaked to the knock that resounded firmly there.

The door opened to frame a dark and rotund figure, with brown derby hat and asthma.

"Mist' Bates?" this figure greeted the distraught Samson inquiringly.

"What you sellin'? I aint want it." Mr. Bates eyed his caller hostilely.

"Aint sellin'—I's tellin'." The visitor took Frisco's chair. Frisco took his departure. Mr. Johnson was psychic! "Rhetoric Anderson my name," stated the caller. "Attorney at law, and come to settle out of court for my clients."

"Settle *what?*" All the cornered-rat blood in Mr. Bates' blood stirred.

Mr. Anderson removed his horn-rimmed glasses. He polished them, meticulously. Then, sharply: "Did you, or did you not, Mist' Bates, feloniously, willfully, and wid malice aforethought, run over a valuable duck dis mornin'?"

SAMSON'S explosive *"Hoink!"* could be either affirmation or incipient apoplexy.

"In which event," Mr. Anderson chose the former, "it is always more better to settle outside de court-house. So my clients is authorized me—"

"Clients?" the recurring plural caught in Mr. Bates' consciousness like a barb.

"Clients! —To say to you dat dey is willin' and agreeable to settle reasonable and for less dan de four thousand dollars I otherwise sues you—"

When higher ceilings were hit, Samson would hit them! *"Four—thousand—bucks!"* his fog-horn bellow split the air in mid-leap. "For *one duck?*"

"Four *dollars* for de duck," corrected the counselor coldly. "De balance bein' for mental anguish, humiliation, and loss of de duck's services. Also for assaultin' de duck wid a deadly weapon, to-wit and viz, de bus; also for legal fees, costs, *nom de plume,* and punitive damages; which last de law allows in many times de sum of de actual damages prayed. *But,* as I says when you starts hollerin' like a stuck hawg wid hangnails, I is authorized to settle for de small sum of ninety-eight dollars and twenty-six cents. Else, dey says sue—"

"*'Dey'?*" Again that irrepressible plural! "Who own dat duck, nohow?"

Now it was Mr. Anderson's turn to be amazed. "Aint you know? Why, my client Mrs. Ammonia Jackson is. Except for a half-interest in de deceased,—and in all actions at law arisin' dar-from and dar-after,—what she sold for fifty dollars to a boy named Eckie Evans. I drew up de—"

Mr. Anderson abruptly stopped talking, because nobody was listening. Least of all the wild man who had once been Mr. Bates. Awful among the rafters rang the squallings of a strong man laid low, of a business-man mortally boomeranged from behind! And leading to but one deafening conclusion: some fresh *Frankenstein's* monster had turned upon its creator; an ingrate Eckie had boneheadedly bitten the hand that would have bled him!

"Settles nothin'!" boomed Mr. Bates when coherence grew possible. "Aint got nothin'! And fixin' to have less dan dat! Depression ruint me!"

"Yeah?" countered the assured Mr. Anderson easily. "Well, I never goes into dese damage cases widout a good stout ace in de hole: somethin' dat'll make a turnip bleed like a stuck pig—and like my client jest slip me. You comes across wid settlement now, or I shows you what trouble *is!*"

"You say you gwine show *me* what trouble is?" Samson's mind was shooting back over calamity after calamity, to the crowning blow of that discovery that had had him digging so desperately in his desk when Rhetoric came.

"Uh-huh!"

"Well, lemme tell *you* somethin'," Mr. Bates was breathing like a wind-broken horse and a wolf at bay, combined. "You cain't show *me* no trouble—"

"I cain't, eh?" Mr. Anderson was reaching confidently into an inner pocket.

"Naw! Cain't *no*body show *me* no trouble! Becaze I is done *already got* all de rest of de trouble dey is—when I finds out about two minutes before you comes dat *I is lost de pawn-ticket for Bedelia's robe!*"

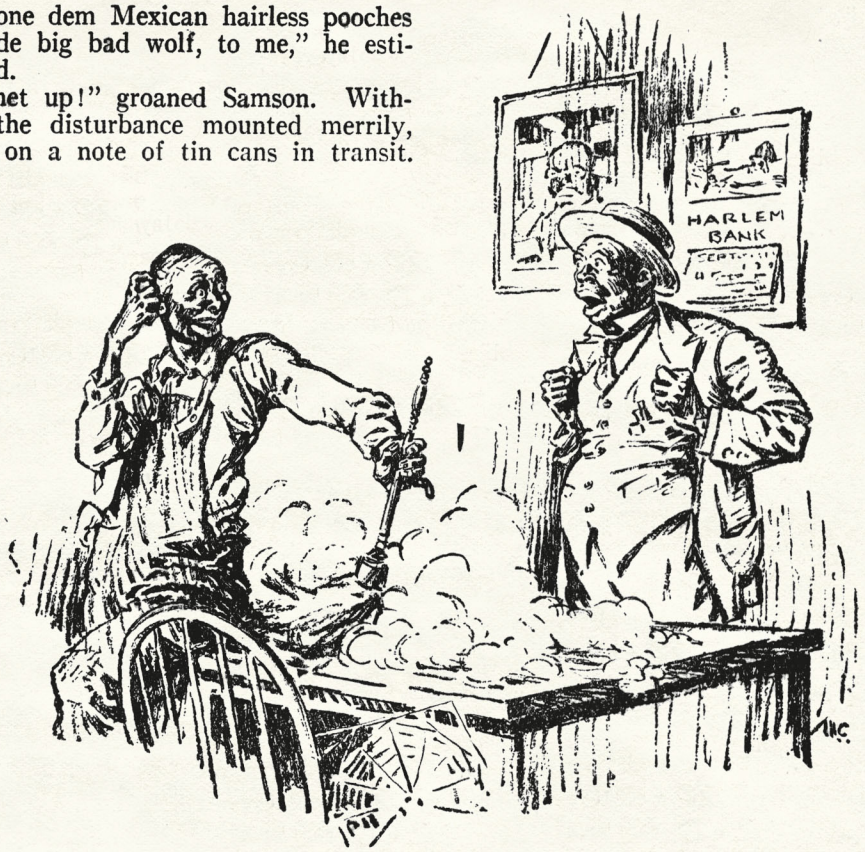
"Yeah? Well, look here at *dis* den!" And to Mr. Bates' startled gaze, Mr. Anderson revealed—and gloatingly repocketed—his ace, with: "—And *now* us gits down to business!"

THROUGH Hogan's Alley rang sounds of revelry as evening shadows fell, sounds suddenly made the louder in the lair of Samson Bates as his door opened to permit cautious return of Frisco from beneath some distant house.

Mr. Johnson surveyed the wreckage before him critically, including a dressing-gown, fitting Mr. Bates like a puptent without the pup. "You looks more

like one dem Mexican hairless pooches dan de big bad wolf, to me," he estimated.

"Shet up!" groaned Samson. Without the disturbance mounted merrily, took on a note of tin cans in transit.



"De new vice-president's jest dustin' off he desk—" Eckie was knob-eyed with importance.

"What de fuss about in de alley? Fight?"

Frisco peered out, then listened, puzzled. "Aint no fight—yit," he qualified. "It's a weddin'. But *what*—" Then he paused, thunderstruck, and amended his query to: "What's *Ammonia* doin' ridin' in your bus, wid all dem flowers?"

"Ammonia is de bride!" The answer seemed torn from Mr. Bates' very vitals.

"Bride?" Vaguely beyond her now Frisco discerned something even more incredible. It looked like merely a pile of good clothes. Incongruity still distinguished all he saw! "Bride of who?"

"*Eckie,* dat who!" the reply bordered on a yelp.

"Eckie? Marryin' Ammonia when he's busted?"

"Naw—marryin' her *because* he's busted!—for *his* fifty bucks back, and for *my* bonds, what she found by de duck. . . . And *both* of 'em marryin' *each other* for *my* bus!"

"For your bus?" Frisco was hanging on the ropes mentally now. That bus was the apple of Samson's eye—sign of his supremacy: this was more puzzling than why Samson was wearing his old dressing-gown to business! "You means," —his perplexity thickened—"you rents dem folks your bus for dey weddin'-trip?"

"*Naw!* I means, before dat gosh-blamed lawyer would gimme back de pawn-ticket for Bedelia's robe, what Ammonia found too, in dat other brief-case you lost out dar—"

"But whar's your good suit of clothes?" Frisco's mind was no longer equal to its traffic.

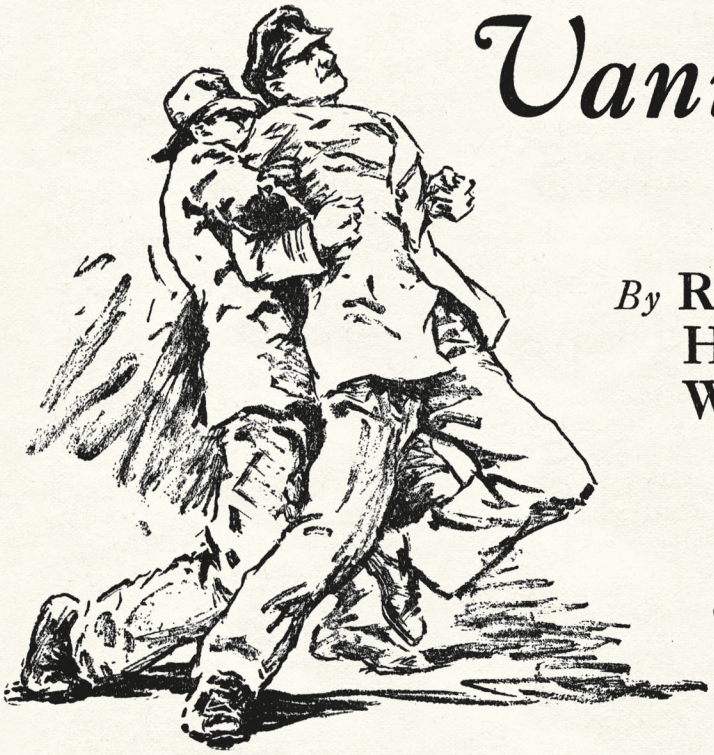
"Eckie git *it* too!"

"Git your *clothes* off you?"

"To git married in." That puzzling pile of clothes then was accounted for! "For four dollars, to me. To redeem dat robe wid—or aint been no use in me settlin' dat law-suit wid Ammonia and Eckie, fifty-fifty, at de point of dat pawn-ticket—"

"Fifty-fifty?"—from the fog-bound Frisco.

"*Fifty-fifty!*" A new-made pedestrian's last wolf-howl jarred the stars. "Swappin' dem even: one good bus for one dead duck!"



Vanished

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Illustrated by George Avison

THE young and red-headed master of the K.S.W. Bell freighter *Kenworth* burst out of the radio shack with his weathered face rigid and grim. He had just been hit by a high-voltage shock out of the ether.

"Great Peter!" he muttered. He laid a broad hand gently on the rail of his ship, and stared unseeingly over the placid blue Mediterranean. "I can see my command jerked out from under me —and just because of a blasted shore robbery!"

Straightening up his long body, Captain Crane climbed the ladder to the bridge where Joe Olvarg, his second mate, was standing a care-free fair-weather watch.

"You're headed toward the beach, Mr. Olvarg," Ralph Crane said with crisp certainty. Joe Olvarg was his friend as well as his second officer.

The mate's startled glance at the compass showed him the old tramp was square on her course for Marseilles, but he did not contradict his skipper.

"Now what, sir?" he asked.

"A French broadcasting station reports that a gold shipment off the *Southwick* has been stolen at Villefranche," Crane explained tersely. "And Ben Baldi, our line's agent in French Mediterranean ports, admits the line hasn't a receipt for the shipment from the people ashore."

"What's that mean?" Olvarg inquired uneasily.

"It means that the line, not the French consignee or the insurance company, is hooked for a hundred-thousand-dollar loss."

The second mate grunted as if somebody had driven the butt end of a king-post into his middle. Like the master, he knew that the line was only hanging onto its solvency by a hair during this unending shipping slump.

"The hooker's sunk, Joe—sunk just as surely as if we'd piled her up on a reef," Ralph Crane rasped, tramping the bridge and swinging his fists in helpless agony. He was a scrapper, which was why he had achieved command in the hard-bitten K.S.W. Bell fleet at the age of twenty-nine. But here was something he couldn't fight.

"A demand for half a hundred thousand would throw the whole works into receivership. The old *Kenworth* will rust at a mooring, and we'll rot ashore."

"I guess that's right," agreed the second mate.

The radio operator stuck his round head up the ladder just then. Crane seized the yellow slip he held out, and read the scrawled message in a single glance. He scowled at it and took another turn on the bridge in silence.

The message instructed him to put into

Gold

A stirring novelette of an American shipmaster's terrific adventure with foreign thugs in a French seaport.

Crane put forth all his might to break that terrible grip, as the other man drew closer, his stiletto in his tight-clenched hand.

Villefranche. It was signed by Ben Baldi, the line's French Mediterranean agent.

"Villefranche!" Crane muttered in perplexity. "Where they got away with the gold from the *Southwick!* Why Villefranche?"

Well he knew that Villefranche was a pleasure-port of the Riviera, not a place where freighters sought cargo.

Still frowning, Crane spoke crisply down the engine-room speaking-tube.

"Burn some coal, Chief," he said.

The *Kenworth* wasn't halfway to Villefranche when Crane began shooting radio queries through the air to the line's head European office at London, as well as to Baldi at Villefranche. He wanted confirmation of that order.

"It isn't like this line to chuck steamships around," he told the elderly chief engineer. "We've got stuff waiting for us at Marseilles. I want to be sure nobody's trying to sidetrack us."

NEAR evening, without a reply from his queries, Crane picked up his pilot and put into the high-walled picturesque harbor of Villefranche. In the sun's declining rays the Riviera port was a bowl of deep blue water held in the arms of two green mountainous headlands. But that cut no ice with Ralph Crane.

"The freight to be had at this port wouldn't fill a hat," he confided to Joe Olvarg. "D'you suppose that order could have any connection with the gold robbery?"

"Ask me easy ones," the barrel-chested second mate requested. . . .

It didn't take Captain Crane long to get set for his trip ashore. As he slung a leg over the side onto the Jacob's ladder, Joe Olvarg stopped him.

"Any objection to me taking a look around the town, Skipper?" the second officer asked hopefully.

Despite his annoying apprehension, Ralph Crane laughed. Only when discipline was needed did he show his iron hand.

"You'd want to take a look around if we put in at the port of hell," the shipmaster said.

"Sure," agreed the huge, blasé-looking mate with a slow grin. "I wouldn't be staying as long as some!"

"Go ahead if you can get by these French port officials," Ralph Crane said. "Meet me at the *bureau de poste* or the café nearest to it in forty minutes. If you're late, you'll walk home."

The shipmaster's shore boat took him past a big three-stack cruising Cunarder, several spruce white motor yachts and a small dingy Italian craft that was brigantine-rigged, a type fast vanishing even on the unprogressive Mediterranean.

In the fading light the stern of this relic proclaimed her the *Gabriella Circci* of Genoa. Crane's critical eye noted that she badly needed a rigger's hand.

There was no sign of the *Southwick* in the harbor. Apparently the gold robbery had not delayed her voyage to Eastern ports.

BALDI was not at the quay to meet him. Getting by formalities of the port, Crane started through a passage that cut steeply upward between closely huddled houses.

Villefranche, in ranks of steep terraces, towered over him like a medieval castle. His way took him into the heart of the old town, not too sweet smelling, up a narrow cobbled passage that became now and then a succession of broad steps. In the growing darkness the passage seemed to contract steadily, and the picturesque yellow houses loomed higher as he mounted. A chilly following breeze rushed by his ears.

Once he looked back and caught a glimpse of a solitary pedestrian, bent-backed, climbing well below him. He pushed on. Suddenly he found himself in a sort of narrow street over which the houses stretched, making of it merely a vaulted passage. It was a *cul-de-sac*.

Decidedly this was not the way to the post office. As he turned back, he heard the footsteps of the lone pedestrian who had been climbing behind him from the harbor. Surveying the vaulted roof with casual interest, he waited for the man. Then, as the footfalls drew nearer, he stepped out into the way.

His appearance was sudden.

The black-mustached man he confronted staggered back with a quick low cry. Ralph Crane caught a momentary glimpse of his face, with dark eyes staring out under bushy black eyebrows.

The man's right hand shot down to his coat pocket, which sagged under a heavy weight.

Crane's eyes darted to that heavy pocket, and he caught a glint of blue steel as the hand emerged a trifle. The shipmaster's own right hand clenched instantly into a fist, and he pivoted warily before this soberly clad individual.

There was a pause. The hand came no farther out of the pocket. It relaxed a trifle.

Ralph Crane broke the silence.

"Pardon, m'sieur," he said laboriously. *"Ou est le bureau de poste, s'il vous plaît?"*

The other man, eyes glaring, suddenly ducked his head. He exposed to Crane's view only the top of his high-crowned brown felt hat. Turning, he hurried down the hill. Not a sound, not a word, simply instant departure.

Ralph Crane was tempted to follow. But something—perhaps that glint of steel—stopped him.

Vaguely he realized that the pudgy, bowed figure was familiar. There had been a man with a back like that loitering on the pier when he disembarked.

"That's a queer one!" the skipper of the *Kenworth* reflected. "I should have taken a clove hitch on his mustache to hold him. That gentleman had a gun."

Blundering on, he found the *bureau*, which was about to close. Presenting his passport, he asked for the message which he had requested the London office to send to the ship or to Villefranche. To his surprise, two telegrams were handed to him.

The first was from the London office:

STRONGLY CONDEMN YOUR INSUBORDINATION STOP IF YOU DO NOT PROCEED IMMEDIATELY TO MARSEILLES YOU WILL BE RELIEVED OF COMMAND

K.S.W.B.

The curt words danced giddily before Crane's blazing eyes. No explanation, no answer to his inquiry, nothing but threat of dismissal! He read into that peremptory message sheer blind panic in London over the impending loss from the gold robbery.

He ripped open the other envelope. Within was a telegram dispatched from Nice, the big pleasure town on the other side of the western headland of Villefranche harbor.

MEET ME CAFE BLEU VILLEFRANCHE ON ARRIVAL. —BALDI.

Grim-faced, Ralph Crane weighed those two messages, one in each hand. It was his job that hung in the balance. And command of the rusty, salt-crusted *Kenworth* meant a bit more than a job to him.

"I'll stay and see Baldi," he decided.

CHAPTER II

The Death Thrust

OUTSIDE the *bureau* he bought a newspaper and headed toward the Café Bleu. Baldi was not there. Crane bagged a small table near the front. He ordered a drink and began to dyna-

mite information about the robbery from the French journal. The exploit of *les bandits en auto* was several days old, but the newspaper was still full of it. That type of robbery was most unusual in France.

Rapidly he collected details. The gold shipment, from Mexico, worth approximately two million five hundred thousand francs or one hundred thousand dollars, consisted of U. S., Mexican and South American coin, and was consigned to the Comte de la Vrai, a celebrated sportsman, who desired it, as the newspaper said delicately, for "private reasons."

"That means this titled gentleman wanted to put that cash out of circulation by sinking it in his sock," Ralph Crane deduced. "There's plenty of that going on these days."

Critically he examined the newsphotograph of a round-faced, almost bald man of middle age, clad in shooting costume, with an ornamental cup in his hand. The caption described the gold-hoarder as "The unfortunate Comte de la Vrai, on the occasion of winning first prize in the pigeon-shooting at Monte Carlo."

The Comte had not received his gold. The shipment had been unloaded from the ship at night with great secrecy under the eyes of a member of the banking house of Bouchon-Michel, acting for the Count, and of M. Ben Baldi, agent of the line.

Placed on a truck, guarded by two armed men besides the driver, the shipment had departed for a destination unknown to the newspaper. The driver, unconscious from a fractured skull, and one of the guards, dead with three bullets through his chest, had been found half an hour later under a mimosa bush on the outskirts of Villefranche. The police were confident that the alarm had been given, filling the roads with vigilant *gendarmes,* before the truck had got far away. But nevertheless the truck had vanished without trace.

The Comte made it plain that both he and the firm of Bouchon-Michel were confident that legally the line was responsible, but the Count had nevertheless offered a reward of two hundred fifty thousand francs for return of the gold.

It looked bad to Ralph Crane. He cursed gold-hoarders and auto-bandits.

"If I wasn't a stubborn fool, I'd obey London and crawl out from under," he told himself. "But—"

He sat still and sipped his drink.

Somebody, murmuring a word of apology, slipped into the chair opposite him at the little table. Tables are common property in a French café; Captain Crane glanced with only casual interest at his *vis-à-vis*. The newcomer, a big man, both broad and tall, had a head far larger than correct proportions demanded. A pair of black eyes were set deep in the broad expanse of olive flesh. These eyes, startlingly small, were doubly dwarfed in that huge head.

Crane nodded to the man, slightly surprised. This was Ben Baldi, his line's local agent. But he had slid into his chair as stealthily as if he were a pickpocket.

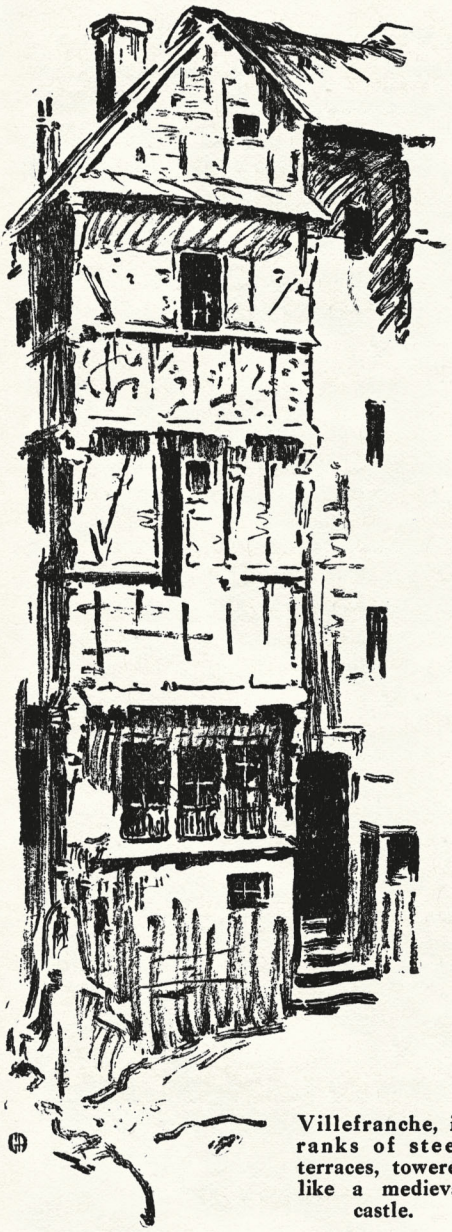
Ben Baldi spoke, in faintly accented English.

"Ah, Captain, I see that you obey orders even though you break owners. The old rule, yes?"

Ralph Crane wondered if Baldi knew that he was disobeying owners' orders by dallying here. The remark raised the question. The brain inside his flaming red head, which sometimes could be cautious, took command.

"The old rule," he repeated noncommittally.

Ben Baldi leaned forward. His small black eyes gleamed confidentially. "I order you into port here, Captain, after securing permission by wire from London. That is all fixed."



Villefranche, in ranks of steep terraces, towered like a medieval castle.

This was a lie. The angry telegram in Crane's pocket proved that. He nodded, nevertheless. This soft-voiced agent both puzzled him and aroused his suspicions.

"I've got to have a telegram from London confirming my action in putting in here—or pull out by midnight," he said bluntly.

Baldi blinked. That was the only visible effect of Crane's statement, yet Crane felt strongly that Baldi was disturbed.

"You will have that confirmation," Ben Baldi assured the shipmaster in his smooth low voice. "I have a rich cargo —at a high rate—waiting here. We will let the bit of freight at Marseilles go."

Startled, Ralph Crane's eyes contracted. A rich cargo!

Ben Baldi laughed murmurously.

"No, Captain, not gold," he said with easy understanding, glancing at Crane's newspaper. "I see that you know of the line's misfortune. The gold, if it is recovered, goes on to the Comte de la Vrai by land. But this cargo will help to make up the loss these brigands have caused us. A rich cargo, Captain!"

"Good," muttered Crane.

OVER the square shoulder of Baldi he suddenly saw his heavyweight second mate lumbering into the café. Joe Olvarg started in the direction of his skipper. But Ralph Crane had no desire for his second's company just then. Ben Baldi was acting too confidential, almost too conspiratorial. Catching the full force of his skipper's blank, unrecognizing stare, Joe Olvarg dropped into a seat near the door as if he had been straight-armed.

Abruptly Ben Baldi stood up. Beneath his smooth geniality Ralph Crane sensed a driven urgency.

"I go to see if I can find M. Dulac, the shipper," the agent said. "He may be upstairs. Await me, if you will. And here—take this!"

With something of a flourish he drew out of his pocket a sealed envelope and handed it to Crane.

"Keep that until we meet M. Dulac. Do not open it. We will discuss its contents later, Captain. Keep it safe!"

With a nod of his big head and a stiff inclination of his big body, he turned toward the rear of the café. In another moment he was out of Crane's sight.

Frowning in uncertainty, the shipmaster slipped the envelope into his pocket. He encountered the inquiring eyes of Joe Olvarg. He shook his head as he saw Olvarg make a move to join him. On impulse he drew the telegram from London from his pocket and penciled a note on it.

"Joe: Something sour. Follow this bird Baldi when he leaves. Meet me on quay at midnight or at one a.m."

He thrust this message under the newspaper on the table and glanced at Olvarg, who nodded and kept his seat.

It was a wise precaution, for Ben Baldi came into sight then.

"M. Dulac awaits us," Baldi announced. "Come, Captain."

He led the master of the *Kenworth* to the rear of the café and opened a door in one of the side walls. A flight of stairs stretched upward, and M. Baldi politely waved Crane ahead of him.

Crane ascended the steps. He moved steadily, although the puzzled frown was again on his face. As he paused at the top, he drew in through his nose a quick inquiring breath or two. It seemed to him that he could detect a faint, sweet but unpleasant odor in the stagnant air. Chloroform? He could not be sure.

Ben Baldi knocked at a door at the head of the stairs. It swung open after a mere second's delay. The odor Crane had detected was intensified.

"M. Dulac," announced Baldi. He was bowing politely, ushering Crane into the room, and the little white-faced, rather elderly gentleman who had opened the door was also bowing and smiling.

"The captain of the *Kenwairth*," murmured M. Dulac politely.

Ralph Crane stepped in. The door closed behind him.

SIMULTANEOUSLY several things happened. Baldi, behind him, suddenly swung his long arms around Ralph Crane's body, pinioning one arm. His right arm Ralph Crane had raised with flashing swiftness at the sight of a movement from Dulac.

His thin, white-faced host had suddenly leaped at him with a wadded handkerchief which he thrust toward Crane's face. From that white, sodden cloth came strongly the reek of chloroform.

Though powerless to move his body in the mighty grip of Baldi, Ralph Crane lashed out with his free arm. The impetuous Dulac ran directly into it in his eagerness to push the handkerchief under the tall seaman's nose. Ralph Crane hit him with all he had. It was plenty.

Dulac, with a smashed and bleeding nose, went staggering backward. The handkerchief dropped from his hand. His wavering legs struck the bed on the other side of the room, and he fell on it. His arms and legs moved uncertainly as he strove to regain his jarred wits.

Baldi's arms relaxed around Crane's body, then whipped around him again. This time they imprisoned both arms, and their strength was greater than Ralph Crane had ever encountered in many a rough-and-tumble scrimmage. He put forth all his might to break that terrible constricting grip.

Baldi rasped out a couple of words.

The man on the bed leaped to his feet. Gone was all semblance of a respectable shipper. He was a small, white-faced bloody fury with red, flaming eyes. In his talonlike fingers was a knife, thin-bladed and long.

He took two darting steps toward Ralph Crane, and dropped into a crouch. With feet weaving a sinuous, wary course on the floor, he drew closer. He kept his gleaming stiletto close to his body in his tight-clenched hand as his murderous eyes sought a sure opening.

Again Baldi hissed out a command, and Dulac slipped closer, still watching alertly that struggle of heaving bodies and straining muscles.

Crane's arms, despite his most desperate effort, were still held in chancery. But suddenly, before Dulac raised his blade for the decisive thrust, Crane kicked out.

His stoutly shod foot just reached Dulac's crouching body. There was not quite the same solid impact that his fist had encountered.

Dulac uttered a high-pitched cry. His face was terrible. He wavered on his feet. Suddenly his left hand gripped his right over his chest, and he made a frantic effort with both.

It was then that Ralph Crane saw. Dulac's spasmodic effort brought the stiletto's blade into sight before his chest. It was not gleaming now, but dripping red. That unexpected kick had driven the knife into the body of the man who held it! Blood was gushing from the little man's breast as the blade came clear away. Without another cry Dulac crumpled up.

He lay on the floor, grotesquely bent, while the life-blood welled from his heart.

CHAPTER III

Trailed

BEN BALDI, staring over the motionless shoulder of the horrified shipmaster, abruptly released his hold. As Crane swung around to face him, Baldi shoved him away with both his long arms; and Crane, off-balance, stumbled back a foot or two, then slipped on the bloody floor and crashed down on the body of Dulac.

When he recovered, Baldi had one hand on the door; in the other was an automatic. But Baldi, despite his snarling face and cruel sunken eyes, did not loose the thunder of his weapon.

"The *gendarmes* will care for you," he rasped, and slipped out the door. Ralph Crane, leaping up, laid a hand on the knob an instant after the lock clicked.

He was shut in this room with a dead man—a man who gave every evidence of being murdered. And there were stains of blood on his own blue suit. Crane grasped all that while his hand was still on the door-knob. He listened intently, but Baldi had raised no outcry. The *Kenworth's* master heard a footfall or two on the stairs, but nothing more save the clatter of coffee-cups and glasses from the café below.

Although he drew a quick breath to raise a shout, he never uttered it. The police meant for him interminable delay and suspicion—and for Baldi, the police meant time to escape. Keenly he realized what a serious situation he was in.

He went over to Dulac's body, but a single glance as he drew the knife out of the body told him that the man had died. Over at the dirty wash-basin in a corner of the room Crane rubbed the blood-stains from his clothes and shoes with a towel.

The window was strongly barred, as a glance told him, so he returned to the door. It was stout enough to resist all but the noisiest assault, and noise meant arousing a swarm of potential enemies. But the pins could be driven out of the hinges, and after that—

In three minutes the master of the *Kenworth* had the pins out and the hinges bent backward. He thrust his knife into the crack, edged the door inward, and then, getting a grip, jerked mightily. The door came away from the jamb, and the bar of the lock groaned but slipped out of place. He stepped into the hall and left the door leaning against the frame.

THERE was no one in the hallway to question him. He softly descended the stairs, paused to iron all expression from his face and stepped into the café. Nobody paid the slightest attention to him as he moved among the crowded tables and gave the hurrying waiters right of way.

He stopped beside his table and picked up the newspaper that still lay there. There was no telegram lying beneath it. And Joe Olvarg had departed too—Joe Olvarg, who had his orders to follow Baldi. That was a break.

"We've got to get Baldi before the *gendarmes* get me," Captain Crane decided. The picture of the Frenchman stiffening upstairs was vivid in his eyes.

He moved slowly toward the door, stuffing the newspaper into his pocket. Suddenly he stopped, and dropped into the nearest chair—his eyes had fallen upon a huddled figure at one of the tables outside the café. There were only a few patrons braving the chill breeze on the sidewalk, and this one had hunched himself up forlornly, his back to the café windows. But Crane recognized that back: The shaggy-browed and profusely mustached gentleman who had almost answered him with a bullet on the way up from the harbor was waiting outside.

A WAITER came to serve him—the same good-natured fellow who had taken his order before. Though keenly aware that it was perilous to linger here, Crane ordered a coffee.

"Can you tell me who that man outside is—the fat little one with the black mustache?" he asked the waiter in his labored French, and thrust a fifty-franc note into his hand.

The *garçon* shrugged as he stowed away the note. "Who knows?" he said. "He is newly come to Villefranche. I have heard him called M. Roux."

He bent low, swabbing the table. "It is strange that when your large friend with the small eyes is inside, then M. Roux is outside. And when your friend left the café two minutes ago, M. Roux got up as if to follow, then sat down again."

He whisked away. Crane sat still, trying to make something of this. If Black Mustache—or M. Roux, if that were his name—was interested in Baldi's movements, why had he not followed Baldi?

Still perplexed, he remembered the envelope Baldi had given him so ceremoniously. He pulled it out eagerly and opened it. Within were two sheets of writing-paper. But they were both blank.

"Baldi intended to chloroform me," he reflected. "That means he didn't want me to leave—didn't want the *Kenworth* to leave port tonight. Why? Why did he order me in here in the first place? It has something to do with that gold robbery."

His coffee came. He gulped it down hurriedly. He became aware, as he glanced through the window, that he was being covertly regarded by Black Mustache. He stuffed the sheets of paper back into the envelope and put it in his

pocket. Then he rose. He must get away from here. Any moment there might be an outcry above. And then—

He moved toward the door and strode out onto the sidewalk. He noted a certain tension in the attitude of M. Roux, though his position did not change. His face was rigidly averted.

The master of the *Kenworth* headed toward the post office. The place was closed now, but he was able to make sure, while he pretended to stare at the darkened *poste,* that Black Mustache was following him. The man passed the *bureau,* then took his stand beside a palm tree across the street.

Puzzled, but with growing apprehension, Crane headed once more for the narrow and gloomy passages of the old seaport. Once he stopped to light his pipe beside a jutting wall. After burning two matches, he made sure that he was still escorted at a distance by the stout gentleman who carried a pistol.

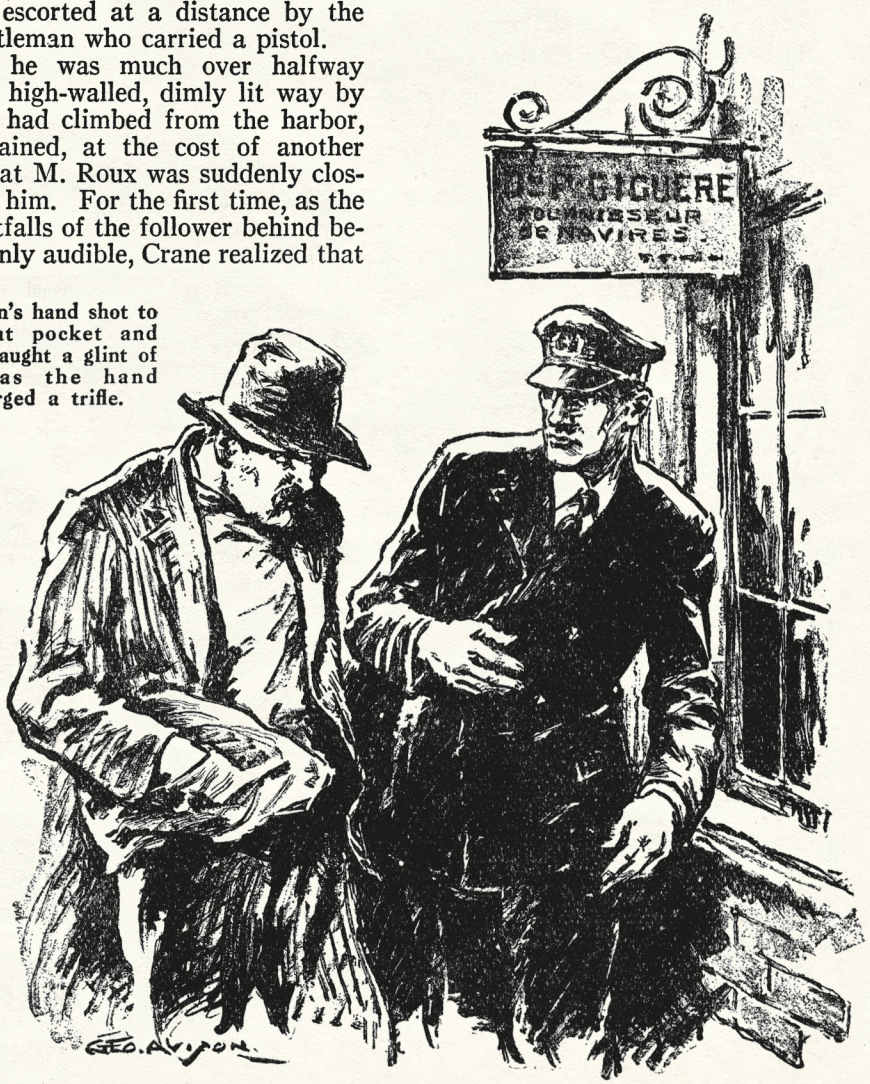
Before he was much over halfway down the high-walled, dimly lit way by which he had climbed from the harbor, he ascertained, at the cost of another match, that M. Roux was suddenly closing up on him. For the first time, as the rapid footfalls of the follower behind became plainly audible, Crane realized that he might have been too bold giving this armed man a chance to track him to a dark, unfrequented way. But despite this thought, he gripped his pipe with one hand, tightened up the fist of the other, and slowed his pace a bit.

M. Roux did not overtake him; but as Crane reached the spot where the alley debouched upon the wind-swept and deserted quay, the man behind him suddenly called in a low intense voice:

"M'sieur! M'sieur! Un moment!"

Captain Crane halted. Turning, he walked a pace or two back up the alley toward the black-mustached trailer. His wariness was carefully masked by leisurely movements.

As he approached, Black Mustache fired a volley of French, emphasizing his swift, unintelligible words by lavish gestures, equally unintelligible. These lat-



The man's hand shot to his coat pocket and Crane caught a glint of steel as the hand emerged a trifle.

ter were slightly reassuring, however, in that they kept his hands away from his coat pocket. But Crane got a decided impression that the voluble man was not interested in his own words. He was just talking.

"Slowly! Slowly!" the red-headed shipmaster requested in French, shaking his head. "You must speak—"

Something in the sudden tenseness and immobility of Roux made Crane whirl around.

This was a trap!

CHAPTER IV

The Fourth Enemy

THERE was a man behind him—a small young man who had run softly from the seemingly deserted quay. His right hand was upraised. That was all the skipper saw before the hand whipped down at his head.

Crane staggered under the impact of a heavy blow. It was not a knock-out, that blow, for it had not landed squarely. But it was hard enough to send Crane reeling in dizzy uncertainty. He felt as if a knife had pierced his skull and brain.

Staggering, he thrust blindly forward, breasting the little man out of his way by the power of his heavier body. He gained the quay, but the quay was empty. There was no help here.

The two were after him instantly, like wolves on a kill. The younger man launched another blow. By sheer chance it failed to touch Crane's wabbling head. He staggered on across the quay, too dizzy to fight, hardly able to walk.

Roux was at him too. His hand went thrusting eagerly toward one of the seaman's pockets. Then, together, the two men dragged him down. But his brain was clearing steadily as the pain ebbed.

As he fell, Crane realized the man was trying to reach the pocket into which he had thrust the envelope that Ben Baldi had given him.

The older man with the mustache flung himself on top of the shipmaster as he thudded onto his back on the stone flags. He slipped his hand into Crane's pocket and snarled a soft command to his comrade to hit again, and harder.

The master of the *Kenworth* did the only thing he could do. He dragged Roux down onto his chest and locked his arms around the Frenchman. Then, he rolled suddenly sidewise.

It needed only a half roll. Roux cursed furiously; the other assailant clutched at his partner instead of striking, but nothing availed. Roux and Crane, linked together by Crane's clutching hands, went tumbling off the quay into the cold black water.

As they sank into chill depths, Ralph Crane felt his enemy's hands tighten upon him in tense panic. The seaman wormed his knee up between them. Then he straightened his leg, levering mightily. In an instant he tore himself loose from the desperate clutch.

Drawing on the scant remainder of his breath, he swam a few feeble strokes under water. He was keenly aware that only one of his enemies was in trouble. His stretching right arm hit the stone side of the quay; he pushed his way to the surface. His head broke through into the air; he gulped and gulped again. His eyes, pivoting swiftly, made out the loom of a small boat moored a few feet away from the quay.

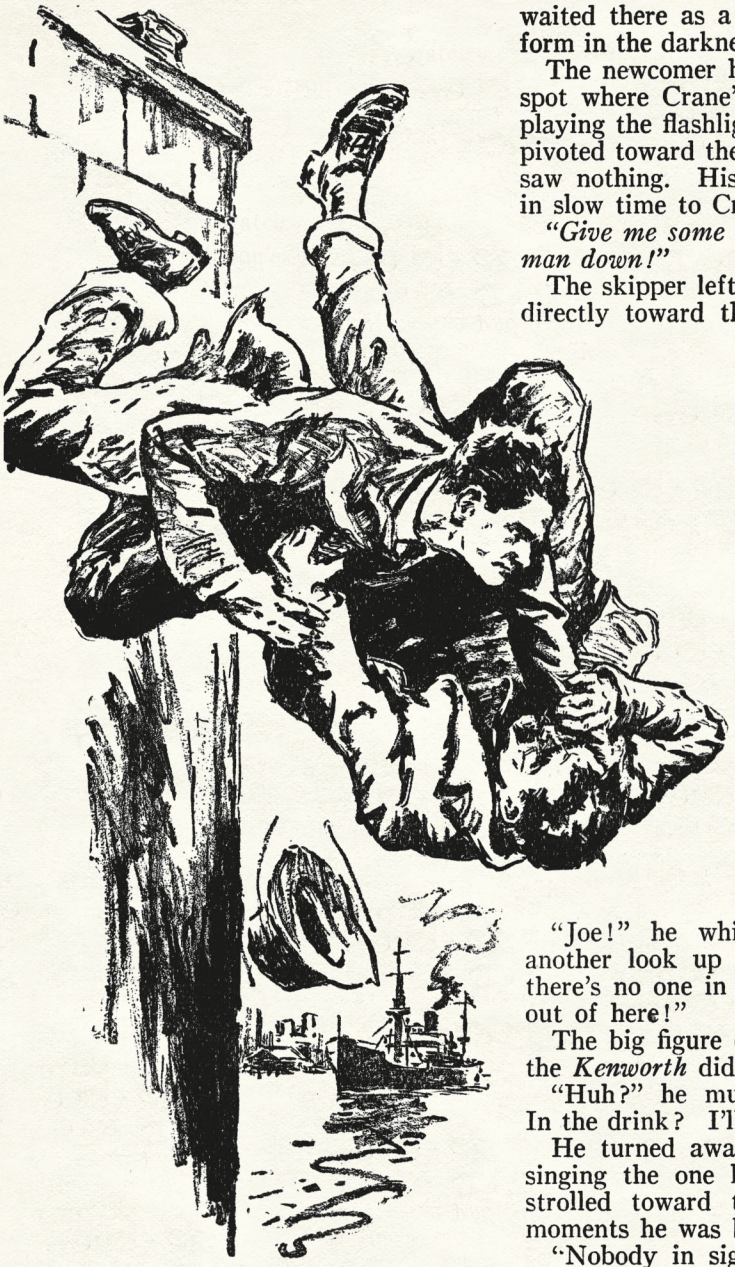
He let himself sink again and swam under water a few strokes. Then his forehead came in rough contact with the rowboat's bottom; he clawed sidewise and raised his head slowly above the surface. In the shadow alongside the boat he felt safe enough. He looked around, and all but grinned. For the moment, at least, his enemies were busy:

M. Roux, still in the water, was swimming with a splashy, amateurish dog paddle that kept him afloat but did no more. The smaller man was flat on his stomach on the edge of the quay, one arm extended, his lips pouring forth advice and encouragement.

Roux reached the stretching arms. He was drawn alongside, and after a joint effort punctuated by venomous oaths and furious commands, managed to scramble out. He lay flat on the stones, panting.

The little man looked furtively around the quay but saw no one. Then he trotted frantically this way and that on the edge, like a dog trying to pick up a scent, as his eyes searched the black water.

CRANE, in the shadow of the boat, watched tensely, restraining his chattering teeth. He saw Roux recover his breath and join his companion in that painstaking but wary search for him. The two men were cursing each other now in an ecstasy of fear and disappointment. After a bitter argument, the smaller one drew something out of his pocket. The beam of a flashlight



The master of the *Kenworth* locked his arms around the Frenchman and rolled sidewise. Roux and Crane went tumbling off the quay into cold black water.

suddenly pierced the water alongside the quay.

Instantly Crane swam behind the boat. The two men continued their search, always keeping the rays low over the water. Suddenly the light flicked off and the men melted like shadows into the alleyway down which Ralph Crane had come.

The skipper, shaking the water out of his ears, made out the clump of heavy shoes approaching along the flagstones. He swam around to the side of the boat and rested a hand on the gunwale. He waited there as a big man slowly took form in the darkness.

The newcomer halted abruptly at the spot where Crane's assailants had been playing the flashlight on the water. He pivoted toward the alley, but apparently saw nothing. His voice came moaning in slow time to Crane's ears:

"Give me some time to be-e-e-low the man down!"

The skipper left his shelter and swam directly toward the man on the quay.

"Joe!" he whispered. "Joe! Take another look up that alley! Then, if there's no one in sight, give me a hand out of here!"

The big figure of the second mate of the *Kenworth* did not start; it tottered.

"Huh?" he mumbled. "You, Skip? In the drink? I'll be— Yes sir!"

He turned away from the edge, and singing the one line softly to himself, strolled toward the alley. In a few moments he was back.

"Nobody in sight," he reported, and lowered an arm as strong as a six-inch hawser to his skipper. "What the—"

Ralph Crane crawled out, shivering. It was bitter cold in the wind.

"That's the first time in my life I was glad to hear you sing, Mister," he said with chattering teeth.

Joe Olvarg was examining him with incredulous eyes. As his shaking skipper took refuge against the inner wall of the quay, he followed slowly. Despite his chill discomfort, Crane was trying to think.

"Let me in on this!" Olvarg implored, but Crane grabbed him by the shoulder

with such a grip that the tough mate winced.

"Where did Baldi go, Joe?" Crane demanded, wringing out his coat-sleeve. "Tell me!"

"He walked down the hill by a wide zigzagging street with me after him," Olvarg reported hastily. "He looked around once, but I didn't try to hide, and I don't think he got on that I was following him. There's a café at the bottom, and when he got close to it, a short, pot-bellied man with a brown beard popped into sight from somewhere."

"A brown beard?" Crane interjected.

"Yeh—a short thick brown beard. Know him?"

Crane shook his head. "My friend has a black mustache," he said. "Go on."

"Baldi and this other one didn't say more'n thirty words to each other. Then they split.

"Well, you wanted me to follow Baldi, so I went after him. He walked along the quay, hopped into a boat and rowed himself out into the harbor. He headed toward that dirty brigantine rig—I think she's Eyetalian—that's moored near us.

"Of course I couldn't see much. I figured you didn't want me to go out there after him, so I stuck around down here until I saw a light this end, and—What were you doing in the drink?"

"Bathing!" said his skipper savagely. "Bathing—that's all. So he met a little pot-bellied man with a beard, hey? That makes four men we don't know anything about in this town, Joe—Baldi, Brown Beard, Roux and a young fellow that hangs around with Roux."

"And four is plenty," Joe Olvarg asserted, looking around apprehensively.

CHAPTER V

Spoils of War

CRANE felt in his pocket. The envelope that Baldi had given him was gone. He felt reasonably sure that it had gone into Villefranche harbor, not into his assailant's pocket. The two attackers had been looking for his body too assiduously to have had the envelope themselves.

"What's it all about, Skipper?" persisted the second.

Crane's hand encountered the pulpy mass of the newspaper in his pocket. He strove to halt his shivering.

"Joe, there are a couple of tough citizens somewhere in the old town. One of 'em's named Roux. He's wet, black-mustached, shaggy-eyebrowed, with a pistol in his pocket; the other's a quick-moving, nasty little squirt with a blackjack or something like that. I want to know who they are, and maybe what they know about why Baldi called us into harbor. After that we'll tackle Baldi on the *Gabriella Circci*. You game?"

"Me?" said Olvarg. He thought it out. "A swell chance I have of saying no," he answered.

"You may be right," Crane answered crisply. "I'm feeling sort of sore, Joe; these two have bad manners, for Frenchmen. Come on!"

At a trot he headed along the quay. Olvarg clumped after him with long, heavy strides.

THE skipper turned into the next street, which zigzagged up the hill. He climbed at a pace that sent the blood surging close under his cold skin again. At a cross-street he turned to the right. He reached a narrow way that looked familiar. It was at about the right place, too. He moved down it at a walk, slowing and beckoning his second mate to come alongside. Olvarg was too breathless to ask a question.

"Unless I'm all off, those two may be somewhere between us and the water," Crane said softly. "Probably they won't run far, for Roux is wet. Of course they may have a hide-out."

"They won't be expecting trouble to come down the hill, huh?" Joe Olvarg suggested.

"That's it! Grab 'em—but remember that gun. The little one may be armed too."

"Hell, I hope not," the big mate said piously. "All we got is surprise."

Ralph Crane stopped by a black doorway and bent down.

"And a couple of bottles," he said with grim satisfaction, picking up two of the long-necked containers of the wine of the country. "Take that one, and hang onto it. In this country it's not unusual to see men carrying home a little *vin rouge* unwrapped."

"Hurray for light wines," muttered Joe approvingly, as he gripped his bottle by the neck. "They won't knock anybody out—maybe."

Shoulder to shoulder, their arms almost brushing the two sides of the descending passage, they went on down. They made no effort to move silently. This was a public way; the mere ap-

proach of two men should not alarm their quarry.

At a steady pace, searching the walls on either side for doors or passages, they strode downward. Suddenly as they passed a gate of iron grillework, the skipper gripped Olvarg's sleeve and pulled him on, for some score of paces. Then he halted.

"Back!" he whispered. "I heard something going on behind that gate."

Olvarg gripped his bottle tighter and turned with his skipper, moving with the utmost care. Nearly opposite the gate, set in a high stone wall, they stopped, listening.

Through the iron grille there came to them the sound of dripping water and a low voice.

"On your shoulders!" Crane muttered.

Obediently the second mate stooped, grunted softly, and hoisted the shipmaster up onto his back.

Crane put his hands on the top of the wall. They encountered sharp-edged fragments of broken glass set in the mortar after the French fashion, studding the entire top of the wall.

He peered cautiously over that formidable barrier.

He made out a tiny plot of grass below him, in which grew a scrawny mandarin tree. And under the tree, and almost under him, were the two men he sought. The plump one was trouserless and in shirt sleeves. The two were linked together by a wet coat which they were wringing out. On the ground near the foot of the tree was vaguely perceptible a litter of objects, doubtless the contents of the wet man's pockets. In this pile the skipper noted the dull sheen of a bit of metal—doubtless Roux' gun. Ralph Crane bent down awkwardly, teetering on the mate's broad shoulders.

"Bottles!" he commanded softly. "Safety first!"

Joe Olvarg passed them up to him.

RALPH CRANE took his time. Then, with care, though with murderous violence, he dispatched a bottle toward the hairy damp head of Roux. The missile thudded fairly on his crown, but did not break.

The man tottered; his hands instantly released their grip on the twisted coat. His companion went staggering backward, cursing. Then after a single glance at his falling friend, he dived for the gun.

The skipper ducked promptly out of sight. He scrambled down from Olvarg's shoulders and silently flattened himself out against the wall alongside the iron bars of the gate.

"Not a sound!" he whispered.

The little man within the glass-studded wall made no outcry. It was impossible for the two waiting men outside to tell what he was doing; whether he construed that falling bottle as an attack or an accident. There were at least two houses abutting on the garden from which the bottle might have been tossed.

Seconds passed, then a minute. The silence continued on either side of the wall. Olvarg, too, had stretched himself flat against the stonework, staring upward on the chance that the man inside should try to return the bottle.

SUDDENLY the dark figure of a man was outlined against the grillework of the gate. He did not open it; he stood within, close to it, to take a wary look out at the passage.

Ralph Crane's hand shot through the grille. His fingers enveloped the enemy's right hand, in which was clutched a pistol. Crane clung to the weapon and pulled the holder of it violently against the ironwork of the gate. His other hand got a grip on the little man's throat.

The small Frenchman, pressed against the grille, struggled violently. Despite the clutch on his windpipe, he managed to emit croaking, half-strangled cries. Crane could feel his forefinger working on the trigger of the pistol, but his own grip prevented the man from firing, and in an instant he wrenched the pistol from him.

"Quick!" the skipper muttered to Olvarg. "Skip and grab all that stuff out of the coat! Under the tree!"

Although he kept his struggling enemy jammed hard against the gate, Crane managed to swing it back. Olvarg lumbered into the garden.

Rapidly the master of the *Kenworth*, still holding his small foe by his scrawny neck, searched him. He confiscated a heavy tape-wound weapon, a flashlight and a few papers.

The second mate bent beneath the tree and scooped up the litter that had occupied Roux' pockets. As he did so, Roux himself, prostrate on the ground, took a hand, or rather a voice, in the game. He heaved himself upright, bellowing lustily.

Olvarg rushed through the gate. Ralph Crane with a shove sent his captive tottering backward. He fell over the outstretched figure of his big accomplice. As

he landed on Roux' chest, the man's voice ceased abruptly, with a pained grunt. Then his cries redoubled. There was fear—and fear of more than mere assault in his agonized bellow.

"Make knots!" Crane muttered to his second mate. They pelted down toward the harbor.

CHAPTER VI

In the Back

THE big man's cries and the shriller wail of his small friend arose unceasingly behind them. But the inhabitants of the near-by houses showed a judicious caution about investigating.

Villefranche is a compact little place, full of people. But at night it is a town of silence and deserted passages. There were many opportunities to change direction. They ran only a short distance; then they walked.

Chance soon led them past a crumbling and deserted stone house of which the narrow entrance gaped wide open. Crane reconnoitered—looked up and down the quiet alley, and then motioned Olvarg in. They took refuge in the roofless kitchen.

"Whoosh!" muttered the mate. He sat down on the floor. "A fast country—France!"

"I want a look at this loot of ours," the skipper explained. "Give me a dry cigarette; my pipe tobacco's sopping. Did anything about that little party seem queer to you?"

"Huh?"

"Didn't it seem strange that those two should raise such a racket after we jumped them? Generally gun-carrying crooks don't roar for the police like that."

"Well—" Joe Olvarg was dubious. "You got to remember, Skipper, that any *gendarmes* that showed up would certainly line up against the foreigners. This is a tight corporation—*la* France."

Ralph Crane was already crouching in a corner over the little pile of spoils. Olvarg, at a gesture, dropped his loot there too, and knelt beside the damp shipmaster. Crane snapped on the flashlight, shielding it carefully, and they studied their booty in silence. The papers included documents that held their attention.

The skipper was the first to speak.

"Detectives!" he said. "Those two are private detectives—and damn' crooked ones, at that!"

He chuckled softly, and dropped the credentials onto the pile again.

"That explains why they weren't afraid to yell for help—and also why they figured they could get gay with a lone foreigner like me. Black Mustache is M'sieur Roux—and the thin young one must be his son—and they're in the private-inquiry business."

"But what's it all about?" Joe Olvarg demanded. "Why did they jump you?"

Captain Crane pawed the damp wad of newspaper clippings.

"That's easy too," he said. "All these clips concern this hundred-thousand-dollar gold robbery, which includes at least one murder." Rapidly he told what he had read in the paper concerning the hoard of the Comte de la Vrai and of his own adventure with Baldi.

Joe whistled a single low, disconsolate note when he heard of the dead Frenchman with the stiletto-wound in his heart.

"Baldi is certainly deep in this robbery," Crane concluded. "And these two private dicks somehow must have got the inner track of the *gendarmes*. They've picked up something on Baldi, and they're trailing him and those he meets."

"Why don't they pinch Baldi, if he jumped that gold truck?" demanded the second. "And if he's guilty, why should they jump you?"

"They haven't pinched Baldi, because they don't give a hoot about bagging the guilty. They're private detectives, and there's a reward out—two hundred fifty thousand francs—for the return of the gold. The reward is not for the arrest of the murdering crooks; it's for the return of the gold. Get that distinction? The hoarder wants his gold—to hell with justice! And the reason I was followed and jumped, was that old Roux saw Baldi talk to me most confidentially and then give me an envelope. Roux thought that envelope might point them to where the gold was hidden."

"And the envelope had blank paper in it," Joe Olvarg muttered. "This gets harder and harder on my head."

CRANE frowned, and absently played the flashlight on the little pile of loot. "Let's see, now—" he said slowly. "Old Roux was waiting for me on the quay when I landed. That meant he knew the *Kenworth* was putting in here. I'm guessing he was trailing Baldi when Baldi sent that radio order to us. Somehow Detective Roux managed to see the message after Baldi filed it."

Joe Olvarg massaged the back of his skull vigorously.

"Say, do you suppose Baldi meant to make a get-away with that gold in the *Kenworth?*"

Captain Crane shook his head. "Undoubtedly that is what Roux and his bright son have deduced," he said slowly. "They figured that when Baldi met me at the café, he gave me directions as to where to pick up the gold. According to the newspapers the truck carrying the shipment couldn't have got far from Villefranche without being spotted."

"Well, is the gold on the *Circci,* where Baldi went, then?" the second mate demanded.

Crane shook his head. "Not yet, or Baldi would have been off with it and to hell with me and Roux."

He strode to a sashless window and stared out over Villefranche harbor in thoughtful silence. After that inspection of the harbor shore, Captain Crane's eyes wandered to the shipping.

Joe Olvarg stared too. His gaze centered rather longingly upon the dark bulk of the *Kenworth.*

"When we go back to the old wagon, we may find a boatload of *gendarmes* waiting to nab us for robbing these detectives," he suggested sadly.

"If Papa Roux calls in the *gendarmes,* he calls off the chance of grabbing that reward," Crane said. "He won't do that in cold blood."

"Well, he sure will want to take a crack at us somehow," Olvarg insisted.

Instead of answering, Crane poked him imperatively in the ribs.

"Look at that riding-light!" he said. "It's the Italian brigantine's light—and it's winking!"

Joe Olvarg focused his sea-trained eyes upon the dim distant yellow light that indicated the position of the *Gabriella Circci.* The light in the fore rigging of the sailing craft was steady when he located it. But suddenly it blinked three times, as if a man had passed something between it and the town of Villefranche.

"That's the second time—three blinks," the skipper muttered. "And it isn't just a swinging lantern, either. It winked too regularly. Somebody's signaling,—or answering a signal,—from the shore. And you say Baldi went out to her!"

"It looks like a signal, all right," Joe Olvarg agreed. "But that doesn't mean Baldi is making it."

Crane thrust the pistol into his pocket and handed the flashlight to Olvarg; then

he covered over with rubbish and loose stones the loot taken from Papa Roux and son.

"Come on," he said briskly, and led the second mate out of their ruinous shelter. On the way down the hill toward the harbor he avoided the old part of the town where they had despoiled the Roux family.

Suddenly Crane halted with such abruptness that Olvarg blundered into him.

"What's the row ahead?" the skipper asked uneasily.

Somebody was talking—almost shrieking—in a high thin voice.

"Those two can't still be yelling for help," the second mate argued. "Besides, it wasn't in this part of town that we jumped 'em. It must be some other hell-bending."

"It sounds like young Roux' voice," Ralph Crane muttered. He drew closer to the wall of a house before he turned the corner. Then he stopped again.

In front of them was the crossing of two streets. A solitary electric light overhead cast its rays on a little crowd that was rapidly growing.

Even as the seamen stared, a couple of *gendarmes* came up on the run. The crowd parted for them, and revealed the nucleus around which it had gathered—the outstretched figure of a short, plump man with a luxuriant black mustache.

He lay on his face, and there was the haft of a good-sized pocket-knife projecting from his back. The man was the elder Roux.

CHAPTER VII

The Darkened Boat

"JUDAS!" muttered Olvarg, with starting eyes. "He got it while he was looking for us, I guess. But who—"

As the police thrust into the circle, Captain Crane caught a glimpse of the younger Roux springing up from beside

his father. He confronted the two policemen. His shrill voice rose again in a perfect torrent of information.

"What's he say?" Olvarg muttered, as the master listened intently to that high excited voice. "Is he blaming us?"

"BACK away from here," Crane commanded, edging back around the corner. Nobody noticed them; all eyes were centered upon the scene under the light.

"Keep moving toward the harbor," Crane instructed. "Young Roux isn't pinning this on us. As well as I can make out, he says he and his father separated —looking for a couple of thieves. That's us. During his search he caught a glimpse of a round, fat little man with a brown beard, running down the hill."

"A brown beard!" muttered Olvarg. "Say—"

"Young Roux didn't pay any attention to him," Crane went on. "He climbed on up the hill, and found his father with that knife in his back just where he is now. His father muttered something about a brown beard, and fainted. I think he's still alive."

"I'd say he wasn't dead, but he looked mighty sick to me," Olvarg agreed. "A round, fat little man with a brown beard, hey? I'll swear that's the fellow that spoke to Baldi. But why he should stab Roux—"

"Maybe Detective Roux knew too much," the skipper said grimly. "I figured he knew more about this than the police."

He relapsed into silence, but his pace quickened. Joe Olvarg, staring intently down at his feet, swung along beside him. With great care Crane avoided the little port where the customhouse was located. They moved along a dark and deserted part of the waterfront, until they came to a spot where several small boats were moored.

"Just for luck, we'll borrow one of these on the quiet," Crane said. "I've got a little prying to do before I go to the police with what we know. No use being too conspicuous."

"Right!" agreed the second mate. He was already aboard one and fumbling appraisingly at the small chain that locked the oars to a thwart. "What's one crime more for a couple of thugs like us?"

His shoulders tensed and heaved; the chain parted. With the skipper in the stern sheets, Olvarg pushed silently out into the dark water. He rowed toward the *Kenworth.*

"Port!" commanded Crane. "I want a long look at this dirty little brigantine rig. Take it easy, Joe. It's time to do some skull-work."

Joe Olvarg snorted approvingly as he changed his course.

"I just been wondering if that blinking light we saw had anything to do with the fat boy with the brown beard," he said. "If he stabbed Roux, he would have reached the harbor front and signaled for a boat just about the time we saw that flicker."

"He would," Crane agreed grimly. "We're both detectives, Joe."

"We better be careful, then," the second murmured. "This town don't seem too healthy for detectives."

"Shut up and circle around her—well away," the skipper commanded softly. He peered at the stumpy masts of the brigantine; then slowly, picking his words, he voiced a question:

"Joe, supposing you were Ben Baldi, and you found you were being trailed by private detectives who wouldn't jump you until they knew where the gold was hidden? What would you do?"

JOE OLVARG grunted. "How can I scratch my head over that one, when I'm rowing?" he demanded.

"Maybe you'd try to put the detectives on a false scent," Crane said thoughtfully. "If you knew they had discovered that you were trying to get the gold out of the country by water, maybe you'd rig things so they'd suspect and watch the wrong boat—the *Kenworth,* for instance."

Joe Olvarg gasped.

"You mean—Baldi dragged the *Kenworth* in here by radio so he could make his get-away on this Italian craft while the two dicks were watching our hooker and waiting around the café for you to come out o' the chloroform?" he demanded. He let his oars trail.

"Why not?" asked the skipper. "Baldi was desperate. And it was simple enough to bring the *Kenworth* in here and meet me, wasn't it? I've a hunch that Papa Roux had a net almost around Baldi. He had to do something brilliant, for once Roux spotted the location of the gold—"

"Then how does the stabbing of Roux by this brown-bearded fat fellow fit in?" Olvarg asked. He resumed his rowing.

"It doesn't fit in perfectly," Crane admitted. "Maybe that fracas was—"

Abruptly he stopped talking and checked Olvarg's swinging oars with a reaching hand.

"Look—beside the brigantine!" he breathed.

A small dark shape, muttering softly to itself, was moving gently away from the side of the *Gabriella Circci.*

"Speedboat—throttled way down," Crane whispered.

Motionless in the drifting boat, they watched the other craft, which showed no lights, push through the water. Its course took it within a hundred yards of them. They had made a wide half-circle around the *Gabriella Circci.* The motorboat was headed away from Villefranche, toward the wooded, villa-sprinkled shores of Cap Ferrat, opposite the port.

"Get under way," Crane commanded. "I don't think they saw us. We'll try to find out who they are and where they're going."

The second mate swung his oars again. Despite his best efforts they were left behind, but not before the skipper had reckoned about where the speedboat's straight course would take it on the dark shore.

"Plenty of empty villas for sale or rent around here," he confided softly to his mate. "Most of 'em have a good bit of land around—make fine places to hide out."

Joe Olvarg did not answer, but he kept his oars going with steady, silent strokes. They approached the land.

The motorboat had vanished. Near the entrance to a tiny narrow cove, Crane stopped his oarsman.

"There's a big villa in there—and I think I can make out a small boathouse and landing pier. We've got to take to the rocks."

Obediently Olvarg swung the boat's head to the nearer point of the cove. With slow strokes he ran her alongside a ledge. Crane scrambled out, heaved her bow up onto the rock; the tideless Mediterranean would not carry her away.

IT was rough going in the darkness. But by dint of much feeling they managed to clamber along the crumbling rocks. They moved more slowly as they approached. The villa disappeared behind the thick foliage of the garden, but the unlighted boathouse and the short concrete pier running out from it showed more distinctly.

"Look!" murmured Ralph Crane, throwing up a hand.

The speedboat, its motor still muttering softly, lay alongside the pier. The boat was moored and unoccupied.

Subdued activity was going on near the boathouse.

CHAPTER VIII

"Stand By!"

THE skipper deserted the rocks and climbed, with Olvarg close at his heels, to the lawn. They crept over the short grass in a wide detour. Soon they saw that the boathouse was also a garage. The landward door opened on a road that descended sharply from the level of the villa above.

Here, in a little hollow shielded by the rising hill on three sides, and by the wall of the boathouse on the fourth, a man with a moving flashlight in one hand and an automatic in the other was directing the activities of several others. The reflected light from the concrete wall revealed plainly the huge body and disproportionate head of Ben Baldi.

The spotlight revealed other things as well: A man was lowering the overhead door of the garage. Before the metal shutters shut down with a subdued rumble, the two seamen caught a glimpse within of an old road-worn truck.

"Maybe that's the truck that carried the gold," Crane muttered. "Good hiding-place!"

"On the grass over there!" the second mate whispered, pointing. "Look!"

The skipper was already staring that way. The flashlight in Baldi's hand had shifted, to direct its beam onto the grass beside the driveway.

An outstretched figure lay on the turf. A single glance told Ralph Crane that the stiffened form was that of a man who must have been dead some hours. Beside the body were piled three heavy crowbars, and a coil of steel wire.

It did not take Crane long to guess that here lay the guard, fellow of the man slain by bullets, who had vanished with the truck. He too had been true to his trust, and it had cost him his life.

The fellow who had closed the garage, and another man as furtive and evil in appearance, bent at the head and feet of the dead guard. They lifted the corpse and silently carried it in the direction of the pier where the speedboat waited.

A third man picked up the weighty crowbars. With an effort, he slung the coil of wire on his shoulder and followed.

Joe Olvarg's oars dug into the water, bit hard, and sent the rowboat straight across the

In the unsteady radiance of the flashlight it was a macabre procession.

"They're going to sink him—in the bay," Olvarg muttered. "With those bars wired to him, to keep him down."

As the trio vanished, the flashlight in Ben Baldi's hand directed the two watchers' eyes to another quarter. The beam fell suddenly to three burlap bags at Baldi's feet.

The bags seemed nearly empty. Only a small lump showed in each. And yet there were three stout bags.

"Maybe—the gold!" Crane breathed.

"Do we jump Baldi now—while he's alone?" Olvarg growled. "No chance to get police over here." His big body tensed and drew forward.

The skipper gripped him with frantic hands. "Down! Down, you fool!" he murmured. "Down! See there!"

Olvarg, subsiding, peered into the darkness farther up the driveway as his skipper's hand indicated. He made out the looming bulk of a huge glossy limousine. Then he stared harder, with straining eyes. Baldi's flashlight, flicking that way, made his task easy.

Olvarg saw in that momentary blaze of light a short, round-bodied man with a broad, spadelike beard who stood beside the car. In his right hand, competently gripped, was an automatic. The man remained there in the background, waiting, motionless, wordless. He was a sentinel who commanded the approach to the rendezvous by way of the drive. Only their extreme caution had concealed from him their approach over the soft turf of the lawn.

Baldi averted his light the instant he had noted the position of the man with the brown beard. He did not speak, but bestrode the three burlap bags, waiting.

"That's the one I saw meeting Baldi!" Joe asserted softly. "And I reckon he's the guy that stabbed Roux. What do we do?"

"Back!" murmured Crane. *"Back!"*

With a strong hand clutching the reluctant mate, he edged on hands and knees across the lawn. He did not speak again until they were fifty feet away. Then he halted near some bushes.

"Five killers—probably all armed," he muttered. "I won't jump that lot with one wet gun—not me! I'm no heroic loser. Back!"

"By the time we dig up some *gendarmes*—" the mate objected, but Crane cut him short.

"To the boat!" he directed sharply. "Maybe you'll get all the jumping you want."

In silence they made their way back to the heavy rowboat.

"Push off!" Crane ordered softly, and the second mate manned the oars.

He had taken only a couple of strokes when the skipper, with a glance into the cove, stopped him. "Way enough!" he said. "We'll lie here awhile, Joe."

mouth of the cove. Crane was on his feet. "Ready to jump, Joe!" he shouted. "Board—"

Olvarg, resting on his blades, stared into the night-shrouded cove. "What's the idea?" he asked restively.

"Did you see that car waiting in the driveway?" Ralph Crane asked. "Did you notice the size of the speedboat? My guess is they're separating."

The second mate grunted doubtful assent. "Maybe that makes it easier," he admitted. "But some will get away."

"It's certain the gold is going aboard the *Gabriella,*" the captain of the *Kenworth* declared. "And where the gold goes, I think you'll find the leaders of this gang—Baldi and that knife-wielding little fat man. They're the ones I want —not merely the thugs who take orders. And I'm going after them."

"How do we get them?"

"They'll be coming out of the cove in the motorboat—dead slow, without lights—as the boat came. They won't see us in the lee of the shore here. We—"

"What's happening?" Olvarg broke in, cocking his ears.

Crane crouched in the stern sheets, all of his attention concentrated upon the dim-seen boat landing in the cove.

The sound of a man's voice, repressed yet furious, reached them. Plainly some one was expostulating with more fervor than caution. A babble of words from other throats, rising rapidly in volume, burst forth. Then came blows—unmistakable blows thudding upon bodies; a man cried shrilly in pain.

"Sounds like a bust-up!" Joe Olvarg said.

Something splashed into the water. Then the motor of the speedboat roared full throttle. Piercing the din of the exploding gas, came the sharper crack of a pistol—two quick, echoing shots.

The glow of burning gas erupting into the night air above the thundering speed-craft appeared plainly to their watching eyes. The boat was surging forward, growing in size as it lunged toward the opening of the cove.

"Stand by!" Ralph Crane rasped. "It's coming close to this side—we've got to stop 'em! Pull when I give the word!"

Keenly he watched the flying craft. Joe Olvarg planted his heavy feet against a thwart, and braced himself to get swift way on the heavy boat at the skipper's command.

"We've got to stop 'em—or they'll get clear!" Crane moaned. "They can make Italy in that thing in forty minutes! Ready—pull!"

The flashing acceleration of the powerful motor in the speed-boat had deceived him. His command rasped out on the very tail of his comment.

JOE OLVARG was ready. His back bent like a bow—and straightened with a snap. His oars dug into the water, bit hard and sent the boat surging straight out across the mouth of the cove.

Crane, facing him in the stern sheets, was on his feet. One hand was braced on the gunwale, the other clutched Roux' pistol.

"Ready to jump, Joe!" he shouted. "Board—"

The flying motorboat hit their solid little craft squarely, a scant three feet forward of the thwart on which Joe Olvarg sat. There was a splintering smash that almost jerked Crane over the side. Olvarg reeled in his seat, clutching at his oars to steady himself.

The rowboat slued around under the impact. The stout planking of the side crumpled up like matchwood; water gushed in.

"Board!" roared Ralph Crane again —and he flung himself across the watery gap toward the side of the speedboat.

CHAPTER IX

"SHOOT!"

MIGHTY as was that leap from the submerging wreckage, it gave him only a clutch on the motorboat's rail; he splashed into the water alongside, but his hands hooked onto the side of the cockpit like grappling-irons. The pistol he held hampered the grip of his right hand, but he clung like a leech.

Joe Olvarg scrambled to his feet in the sinking rowboat. But his leap was too late. He vanished in the flurry of white water astern, with a bitter expletive.

The motorboat, nosing past the wreckage, roared on.

Crane was dragged through the water at a speed that ripped his clothes to ribbons. His head was out of water, and the muscles of his arms, contracting in a desperate effort, pulled him shoulder high along the rail. He hooked his elbows over the edge of the cockpit.

For the first time he caught a glimpse of the men in the speedboat. There were two; one was bent over the wheel. The other, by his big head looming against the sky, was Baldi. That was all Crane saw before a heavy boot kicked the automatic out of his right hand. The weapon clumped to the bottom of the boat; and his assailant, Baldi, darted after it.

It was an error. While Baldi groped for the gun, Crane heaved himself further inboard. Then, as Baldi straightened up alertly, Crane fastened himself like an octopus on his broad back.

Even as Crane reached around Baldi's neck for a grip on his throat, he knew he was doomed if Baldi had found the gun.

The big thug did not try to loosen Crane's grasp. Instead he flung himself backward into the bottom of the boat.

Crane, carried downward, thudded against something softer than the bottom boards of the boat, and Baldi came smashing down on top of him. Only that yielding thing underneath prevented him from being crushed. The body of the guard had saved him.

His arms, jerked out of their clutch on Baldi's neck, whipped back again. The man on top of him was struggling upward, but Crane's arm curved across his throat, tightened, and dragged him back.

Baldi snarled like a wild beast as the forearm crossed his windpipe and bore down upon it like an iron bar. Crane's left arm was reinforcing his right.

Back to his foe, Baldi was at a disadvantage, even though he was on top of Crane. His fingers clawed at the forearm across his throat, and every nail cut through the flesh.

Failing to loosen that constricting band, he jabbed backward over his shoulder with a rigid forefinger. His gouging nail missed the seaman's right eye by an inch, and tore along his cheek.

Crane buried his face in the back of the broad, column-like neck of his enemy, and held his grip. The blood was spurting from his cheek, and his ears were drumming strangely with the thunder of the motor.

Baldi ceased to struggle for an instant. Crane sensed that his enemy's right hand was moving downward, toward his coat pocket.

The skipper rocked his body violently from side to side, and freed his right leg from Baldi's weight. In a flash he had flung the leg over Baldi's pocket, hooking it across his body. It covered the heavy lump of metal that he could feel against Baldi's side.

The big man on top brought both his terrible punishing hands into play against that leg. His grasp dug into the flesh; he shoved it downward steadily. Only his failing breath, cut down by that violent, unyielding pressure on his throat, prevented him from pushing the leg away and reaching his pistol.

THE speedboat, its motor pounding out that devilish tattoo, and the silent pilot clinging to the wheel, rushed on across the black water of the harbor. It no longer leaped from crest to crest of

the harbor swell, but it was moving fast. The man at the wheel drove with his head turned backward, giving scant attention to his course, and much to the grim struggle behind him. He had taken no part in it so far, but one of his hands held a pistol.

Baldi's huge body completely covered Crane's, but the pilot waited his chance alertly. The boat was not lunging ahead as fast now.

Though Baldi was weaker, he was not through. Abruptly he stopped the fight to get at his gun. Through his constricted throat he gurgled a barely intelligible word to the man at the controls of the speeding craft:

"Shoot!"

Then, inch by inch, with Crane fastened inexorably to his throat, Baldi strove to rise. His mighty body bent; with his feet braced under the pilot's seat, he slowly lifted himself and his clinging enemy upward. It was a last desperate effort, and one that Ralph Crane could not combat.

The man at the wheel glanced ahead; then slipped out of his seat. The speedboat, plunging sluggishly, thrust onward through the night. It seemed bent upon diving into the waves it should have leaped over.

CRANE, pulled upward, saw his new assailant coming. He kept one arm bent across Baldi's throat. With his left he groped feverishly toward the bottom of the boat for that precious gun.

His hand touched the floor-boards, an iron crowbar, the corpse of the unfortunate beneath him, the wire with which the body was bound. But it touched no gun. And then Baldi's movement carried his hand beyond reach of the bottom.

The speedboat pilot took another step from the wheel and brought up his pistol. Crane's despairing eyes caught a glimpse of the man's beard, his glinting eyes.

Then he saw the man sway, grab for the side of the boat, and dart a glance around. Almost at the same moment water gushed over the seaman's body.

The boat beneath him, with the weighted body of the guard, suddenly seemed to dissolve, to vanish. Water was all around him. Baldi's body ceased to exert force against him; he seemed to float untrammeled. And the other man—the man with the gun—no longer loomed almost above him.

For an instant Crane was utterly bewildered—half wondering if that pointing gun had exploded in his face—had blown the life out of his body in a swirl of delusions.

Then he understood. The speedboat's bow had been broken in the collision with the rowboat; the heavy motor amidships and the flooding compartment had pulled the boat under in a final dive.

The motorboat was sinking beneath him, but its eddying descent toward the bottom was drawing him downward too. He was beneath the surface.

He realized suddenly that as the boat plunged under he had relaxed somewhat his clutch upon Baldi's throat. He had felt through the muscles of his arms the sudden, tremendous heave of Baldi's chest, the swift swelling of his throat, as his starved lungs filled.

Yet the man was not struggling now; he lay inert. It had been cold water bringing death, not cold air bringing life, that Baldi had gulped so greedily.

The sea had saved the captain of the *Kenworth*. . . .

Baldi's head slipped from under his arm. It vanished in black watery space. Crane groped vaguely, but his moving arms encountered only water. And his own lungs were burning. He struck out, with arms moving slowly in a feeble breast-stroke.

His head broke through the surface. He gasped, breathed again and looked about on the black water for Baldi.

Baldi was not there, but was somewhere below. Baldi's legs had been thrust beneath the fixed seat of the speedboat; of course he had been dragged with the boat to the bottom, along with the gold and the dead man so carefully weighted with iron. Baldi had needed no iron weights.

BUT though Baldi was gone, some one else was struggling in the water. Crane turned himself with a dextrous stroke and beheld a man's head and thrashing arms close to him. The man was gurgling and coughing like one half drowned; his hands clawed at the seaman as a drowning man's hand will claw—with terrible menace. There was no pistol in those hands now. And Crane was facing his assailant, this time.

His right arm shot out, pressing upon the bearded chin of the struggling man. And suddenly the beard slipped away under his fingers, leaving a bare chin.

Crane braced his palm against that shaven chin. He straight-armed the man until the clutching hands slipped from

his neck. Then, before the thrashing body could sink, he swam closer. He hit the white jaw a powerful blow with his fist. The thrashing ceased; the man relaxed. The fight was over.

The master of the *Kenworth* darted a look around him. His seamanlike gaze lined up the riding-light of the *Kenworth* with a church tower in Villefranche; the white blinking lighthouse on Cap Ferrat with another light higher up, in a villa. He was not too far from the *Kenworth*. Crane's arm churned purposefully.

CHAPTER X

A Shock for M. Michel

WHEN the sun arose on Villefranche harbor next morning, the rusty old *Kenworth* swung at her mooring, still obeying the false order that had brought her into port.

The queer-looking Italian brigantine, the *Gabriella Circci*, was no longer in the bay. She had chugged slowly to sea under the inadequate power of an ancient motor, even before Captain Crane had won a hard victory against the cold and strangling water.

The *Kenworth* had a visitor that morning. He was a thin, trim elderly man clad in the elegant morning attire without which no important business can be transacted in France.

The gentleman gave his name to a surprised bos'n as M. Michel, of the banking-house of Bouchon-Michel, of Nice.

Captain Crane received the visitor in his own room. M. Michel's handshake was most cordial.

"That you have by your great courage and energy defeated this iniquitous Baldi and his robbers I know, Captain Crane," he said in well-spoken English. "I have heard much, but it is very conflicting."

The master of the *Kenworth* nodded his acknowledgment of the praise.

"This man Baldi was iniquitous, as you say," he agreed politely. "He even went so far as to send the London office of the line such impertinent and insubordinate messages signed by my name that they threatened to fire me. He was bent on keeping the *Kenworth* here somehow. And he also caused me to kill one member of his gang who tried to knife me. Fortunately, this was a man with a criminal record, so the police have accepted my account of the affair."

M. Michel raised horror-stricken eyebrows at this latest instance of Baldi's villainy, but the expression was perhaps a trifle perfunctory.

"Of course the great point to be elucidated in the view of my firm and of the Comte de la Vrai, our client, is the whereabouts of the gold," he pointed out with ill-suppressed eagerness. "You know this?"

Captain Crane nodded. Even that slight movement gave his racked body pain. "That, of course, is the important point," he agreed. "But I gathered from the newspapers that the point is of even greater importance to our unfortunate company than it is to you or the Comte."

M. Michel threw up his hands, smiling fleetingly at this polite thrust.

"We have abandoned the contention that the delivery of the gold was not in order," he said. "Our further inquiries have revealed that the receipt we gave the master of the *Southwick* will probably stand as a release for the K.S.W. Bell Line. Only the courts, after long proceedings, could say whether Baldi's individual acts after we had received the gold would involve your company."

"That's fine," said Captain Crane heartily. "If the *Southwick's* skipper has a receipt, we aren't too badly in the hole. It's unfortunate, of course, that the gold was stolen from you."

HE relapsed into polite silence. His eyes were level, interested, waiting.

M. Michel sighed. "You should be a man of affairs—of big business—not a shipmaster," he said with rather a sad smile. "You have—shall we say 'the delicate touch'?"

He reached into his breast pocket and produced a flat wallet. From this he drew out a check and laid it on the table beneath Captain Crane's eyes.

"I did not come unprepared for trouble," he said. "Bouchon-Michel have offered a reward of twenty-five thousand francs for the recovery of the stolen gold. You are not the master of a steamship of a reputable firm without good reason, Captain, so I will take your word. Tell me where the gold is located and this certified check is yours."

The master of the *Kenworth* did not touch the slip of paper.

"The gold is sunk," he said bluntly, and nodded toward the broad expanse of Villefranche harbor. "And there are a couple of dead men with it. I can give you some bearings that will save you nine-tenths of the cost of finding and salvaging it, but that is all."

M. Michel sat still. He thought with a concentration that brought tiny wrinkles across his forehead.

"It is enough," he said at last. "Even though we found it ourselves you would have a strong claim against us for your efforts. I have not consulted my client, the Comte de la Vrai, for I cannot reach him, but I need not. We have his authority. It is your check, m'sieur, and you will return it only if we fail to find the gold."

Ralph Crane nodded briefly. He picked up the check. M. Michel leaned forward alertly, watching with intensity the face of this grasping American.

The shipmaster read his glance.

"I am not usually so greedy, M'sieur," he said. "But this check is a punishment as well as a reward. I have a shock for you. You have been unable to reach your client, the Comte de la Vrai?"

M. Michel nodded. "It is unnecessary," he said. "But yes; it is true that we cannot reach him, so far today."

"Perhaps I can help you," Crane said. "Come with me, m'sieur."

He walked slowly down an alleyway to the second mate's room. An *agent de police* sat outside the door. He stood up politely as Ralph Crane walked past and opened the door. Joe Olvarg was sitting in a chair tilted against a partition.

The mate's head turned toward the other occupant of the room, a small fat beardless man who lay in the bunk. He was recovering from the effects of prolonged submersion.

The second mate had a newspaper in his hand open to the picture of a pigeon-shooting "sportsman" who had been robbed of much gold.

"Permit me to show you the Comte de la Vrai, your client," Ralph Crane said crisply to the banker. "He is also a hoarder who, with Baldi's connivance, stole his own gold in an effort to double it."

M. Michel gasped and leaned weakly against the frame of the door. He shook his head incredulously.

"What is this?" he stammered. "What —what is the Comte doing here? What is it you say?"

THE man on the bed opened round, protruding eyes at the sound of M. Michel's voice; then closed them again hastily.

"Incidentally, in the course of his efforts the Comte de la Vrai killed or caused to be killed three or four men, and I am waiting a visit from the police," the master of the *Kenworth* continued.

"Yes—I see it—I see it!" murmured the startled banker. "If the gold had never been found our honorable house or the steamship line would have had to stand the loss. Yes! Ah! *Canaille!*"

The round-bodied Comte de la Vrai suddenly opened his eyes as M. Michel lashed out that last word. He disregarded his banker but glanced under lowered lids at Crane.

"You have no evidence against me, M'sieur—not one scrap!" he murmured with a tinge of complacence in his voice.

OLVARG grinned in slow satisfaction, and Captain Crane laughed shortly.

"Did you stab Roux, the detective, because you thought he recognized you in spite of that thick brown beard that later came off in my hand?" the shipmaster demanded. "There's a chance Roux will live to identify you, Comte."

"No evidence!" the Comte persisted. "You must release me—it is unlawful—this."

"You are mistaken," Crane answered steadily. "Your greed got you in a trifle too deep. When you and Baldi tried to make a get-away in the motor-boat, leaving your three thugs without their share of the loot, you started trouble. Your trio of friends thought, as you and Baldi intended they should, that the gold was going to the *Kenworth.*

"The three tried to raid this ship an hour before dawn, after I brought you aboard full of salt water and quite unconscious."

The Comte de la Vrai sat bolt upright.

"My second mate, here, was restless and happened to be out on deck. When he saw a man sneaking up the ladder, he dropped a pair of binoculars on his head and put the fourteen-pound lead through the bottom of the boat. We fished the three lads out of the bay, and they weren't too drowned to talk. Bad haters, two of 'em were. They're willing even to die, Comte, if you die first."

Crane glanced out the porthole.

"Here comes a shore boat full of uniforms," he added. "I think you're well enough now to travel to other quarters, Comte, to join your friends."

He moved to the door with the silent banker, to receive his new visitors. Then he paused.

"Thanks for the reward, Comte," he said. "Mr. Olvarg and I will take it back to the States—in gold."

Death by Accident

By FRANCIS COCKRELL

Illustrated by Paul Orban

JOE MUDD called me about nine-thirty and said: "All right; you've been moaning about how you want to watch one. Come on down. This may be fancy."

Ordinarily it's a thirty-minute drive from where I live out on Eagle Drive, down to Headquarters, but I shaved that some tonight. If Mudd was going to let me watch the wheels go around, I didn't want to miss any more turns than I had already.

I knew Mudd's room, and went on up. He was sitting there with his feet on the desk, and eating a sandwich. Mudd's the ugliest man I know. His nose is too big and his lower lip hangs down too far. His ears are low, and stick out. His skin is like old leather and what hair he has left doesn't amount to anything. He's so ugly there's something fascinating, almost attractive about it, combined with his personality. He's as hard-boiled as he is ugly, but there's nothing selective about it whatever; he'll tell a governor or a mayor to go to hell with the same casualness he would an insurance salesman, if he feels like it.

I said hello to him and to Swenson, one of the men who work with him, and pulled up a chair.

Mudd took an audible gulp of coffee from a pint paper container and put it back on the desk. "This guy was pretty cute," he said. "Henry Earle, assistant cashier at the Planter's National. He had arranged to get off a couple of days to go to Chicago about something. He brought his bag to the bank with him this morning, because his train left at three-ten. They found out later that when he carried his bag out with him at about a quarter of three he carried a hundred and fifty grand along with him too. Just tucked it in his pockets and the bag during the day, of course, when he had a chance. He'd have plenty of chances, you see. Simple, easy and direct—huh? From what they say over to the bank, they might not've found out about it till tomorrow or next day. Something about books he altered a little before he left. But they happened to catch it about five-thirty this afternoon."

"Did he take the train to Chicago?" I asked.

Mudd nodded, took a bite of sandwich and talked through it. "Yeah, we found out for sure he took it. But when we got in touch with the train the conductor still had his ticket, and his luggage was still there, only *he* wasn't. So he wasn't takin' any chances on them not findin' it out today."

"So what?"

"Well, we found out he drove to work from his hotel this morning, instead of leavin' his car out there in the garage. He'd left early enough to take the car out to Rosedale,—that's the first stop,—and leave it, see? So we got out his description, and the car make and license, see, and waited. We got hold of the car about an hour ago."

"Huh? You did? You mean you have him? Where?"

"I said the *car,*" Mudd grunted. "It was parked in front of a restaurant down on Main. Not three blocks from here." He looked disgusted.

"Then he's here in town?"

"Maybe."

"You seem to be working on it pretty hard," I said.

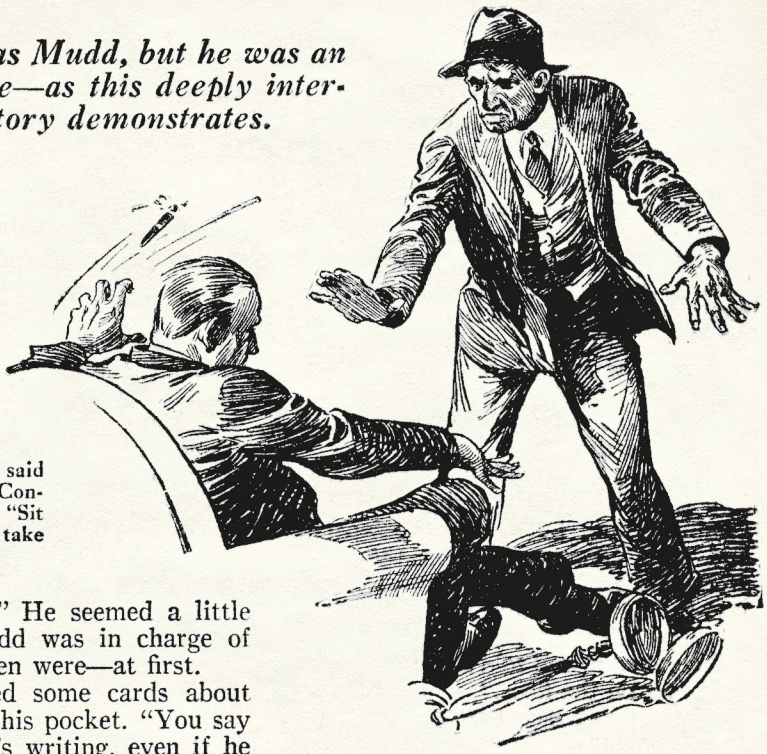
Mudd shoved the last third of the sandwich into his mouth and sloshed it down with the rest of the coffee.

"I'm waitin' for a guy," he said. "Hell, been busy! Didn't even get any dinner." The phone rang; he said a couple of words into it, then hung up and said to me: "He's on his way up now. This guy is cashier of the Planter's."

PRESENTLY there were footsteps down the hall. Swenson rose and opened the door for a nice-looking fellow of some fifty-odd who looked about like you'd expect a cashier of a big bank to look. He glanced around at the three of us and said, "Mr. Mudd?" to me.

Joe said: "I'm Mudd."

His name was Mudd, but he was an able detective—as this deeply interesting story demonstrates.



"Yeah, I'm crazy!" said Mudd. He pushed Conroy into a chair. "Sit down, so you can take it easier!"

"Oh! I'm sorry." He seemed a little surprised that Mudd was in charge of things. People often were—at first.

Mudd had pulled some cards about six-by-eight out of his pocket. "You say you can tell Earle's writing, even if he tried to disguise it, Mr. Brownell?"

Brownell nodded. "I think so."

Mudd handed him the cards. "See if it's in those."

Brownell began thumbing through the cards and stopped at the fourth one.

"Why," he said, "this is his hand—this one that says Harvey Small. Why, I don't understand! What—"

Mudd grabbed the cards out of his hand and handed the one to Swenson. "Get that on the broadcast right now," he said, and Swenson went out and down the hall in a hurry.

Mudd turned to Brownell. "That was a card from the Hazlett Drive-Ur-Self place. It was just a couple of blocks from where Earle parked his car, so I went in and got all the cards that had been signed since three-thirty till when we found his own car."

Brownell shook his head bewilderedly. "He must have had it all planned. It's amazing. He's been with the bank fifteen years. Always sober, reliable. As far as we knew, of course."

"Yeah," Mudd said. "Well, we won't need you any more, I guess. Thanks."

"Oh, not at all. It's as much to our interest as yours, I daresay. I—"

"Uh-huh," Mudd said. "So long."

"Er—yes. Yes, quite so. Good-night."

He went out. Mudd kicked the wastebasket across the room.

"Makes it kind of tough, eh?" I said.

Mudd sat down. "Hell, no, it's not tough. I'll get him. Only I should've had sense enough to know he wouldn't try to get away in his own car. I should've had 'em lookin' around town harder. We'd have found it sooner."

"Don't those cars have mileage meters on the hub?" I asked. "Won't that make it easier to spot?"

"These don't. People knocked too many of 'em off on curbs." Mudd got up again and paced. "The guy can be long gone by now. Take one train a hundred miles, take another somewhere else. Only thing we can hope is he don't expect us to find out about this drive-it, so soon. That may make him drive too long."

I couldn't help laughing a little. Mudd had such a monumental conceit. No, it wasn't that, either. It was just a supreme confidence in himself. He was perfectly certain of what he could do, and made no bones about admitting it.

"The great Mudd," I said.

"You're damn' right," he flared. "I'm the best you ever saw, sonny, and don't forget it." He went over and sat down. "You won't be interested in this now. Just a lot of work. May take months. But stick around a couple of hours an' you can buy me a drink."

"Thanks," I said.

"Don't mention it," Mudd said, not looking up from a road-map he was spreading out on the desk.

Pretty soon Swenson came in. "Say," he said, frowning a little, "Doc Conroy just phoned in from out toward Clanton and says to send the dead-wagon out—that a car went over an embankment and is on fire and whoever is in it is burned up. He thinks it's a Hanley roadster. That's what Earle was in. You don't suppose it could be that—"

MUDD was on his feet and around the desk. "Get a cruiser out, stupid," he barked at Swenson. "Bring it around front. You drive."

He tore on down the hall. after Swenson. He didn't say anything to me about coming along, but I went downstairs, and when Swenson brought the cruiser around—a long black touring—I climbed into the back seat and tried to look unobtrusive. Mudd came along in a minute and climbed in and told Swenson: "Keep your foot on the floor."

Right away I began to see why he had told Swenson to drive. He switched the siren on and snaked that long buggy through holes in traffic I'd have looked at dubiously if I'd been on a bicycle.

It didn't take him more than ten or twelve minutes to get out of the city, and on a fairly open road where he could let the car out in earnest. . . . I finally managed a deep breath.

"Even if it should be the right car," I said, "which it probably isn't, what's the hurry?"

"If it *is*," Mudd said, "and that dough got burned up, it's okay if we freeze the ashes, see? Then they can issue new bills. But if some one messes around and spoils the ashes, it's gone money."

The few stores that were Clanton shot back past us, and in a minute we came around a bend and saw a sort of glow, about a mile ahead. Presently Swenson began to slow down, and finally pulled off on the shoulder of the road forty or fifty yards short of where several cars and some people were silhouetted in ghostly outline against this reddish-yellow light beyond them.

Mudd got out and went over and shouldered his way through the little knot of people that had gathered. I followed more slowly. The people weren't saying much. They seemed subdued, hushed by this stark reminder that life is an uncertain thing, and you can't tell when your number is likely to go up.

The road is on a fill here, ten or fifteen feet high. It runs straight for about a mile, curves and then goes straight for another mile. The outer edge of the curve is defined by a white wood fence. It had a jagged gap in it, now.

I stepped a little closer and looked down. The roadster had plunged straight down the embankment, burying its nose in loose earth at the bottom, and staying there, on end.

The flames had died down and you could see things clearly: The body bare of paint, the metal a dull color like red dirt; the top and cushions nothing but ashes, still glowing dully; the windshield frame, empty of glass, drooping a little from the heat it had been in; the gas-tank puffed out from pressure within, which had finally exploded it, dumping gallons of fuel down to feed the fire already started.

And the figure in the seat—the crumpled, shapeless figure in the seat, pitched forward on the wheel, charred and shriveled by the flames. A formless cinder of a man—or woman, for all you could tell from the top of the embankment.

I gulped and stepped back.

Mudd was bending over, staring down. He took a card from his pocket and looked at it, and looked down again. He turned around and I raised my eyebrows, asking a question. He nodded almost imperceptibly, and I tried to find some relief from the effect of what I had seen by telling myself it was better that a criminal had had this death than some more blameless person.

CONROY, the coroner, had come over now—a square man with a deep voice and a quick, decisive way of saying and doing things. His eyebrows were so light and thin they were almost invisible.

"Well, well, what's this?" He looked at Mudd and Swenson. "What are you boys doing out here?"

"Just came for the ride," Mudd said. "What about you? Thought Marney did all the work in the coroner's office." Marney was Conroy's assistant.

Conroy laughed. "I was just on my way in to town. Got a farm out this way, you know. Out looking it over. I saw this and called in and stuck around. No use in Marney coming out when I'm already here. What's up?"

"A guy went off with some of his bank's money," Mudd said, "and he was in a car like this. I just wanted to be sure this wasn't the one."

"Can't there be some mistake?" Conroy's voice was sharp. "Are you *sure* this is—him?"

"Oh," Conroy said, "then it wasn't, huh?"

"It is," Mudd said.

"Well! Lucky for you, eh? Now you won't have to chase him. Who was it?"

"Henry Earle. Planter's National."

"What? Surely not!" Conroy's voice was sharp. "No—it can't be! Why, I know him—had dinner with him just a few nights ago. Can't there be some mistake? Are you *sure* this is—him?"

"I'm sure that's the license that was on the car he had at four-ten this afternoon," Mudd said, and walked off.

Conroy stood there muttering, "It's terrible!" for a little while; then he walked away too. I went over to the cruiser and sat on the running-board with Mudd. In about half an hour Swenson came over and said he thought the car was cool enough.

Mudd got up and went over with him. He told Conroy to wait a little, until he looked around. Conroy climbed down with Mudd and a couple of other fellows who had come out from Headquarters in another car. I decided I could see quite well enough from the top of the embankment, so I stayed there.

They pried up the lid of the rumble, but nothing was there. They moved down the bank and looked in the front seat. Mudd pointed; one of the other men slid a sheet of metal under something that had fallen down against the dash, and lifted it out very carefully. It was the charred remains of a suitcase. Mudd lifted away one corner, but there was nothing in there, not even ashes. Just plain empty. Mudd grunted and gave it back to the man, who took it to one side and began spraying it with something. Freezing it, I guessed.

Presently Mudd nodded to Conroy and the two men that drove the dead-wagon went down and got the body. Horrible. . . . . I couldn't watch any longer and I turned away as Mudd reached down and picked up a watch that had dropped.

After they got the body away, I went down. Besides the watch we found a knife; both had the initials H. J. E. on them. Also a key-ring, with a tab that said "Henry J. Earle" and gave his address and phone-number.

Mudd had them get samples of all the different kinds of ashes, and they took flash pictures, too, from several angles.

Conroy was making out his report when we came back up.

"What are you putting on it, Doc?"

"Why, just *Death by accident—Henry J. Earle.* Why?"

"You can make out another later, if you want to, can't you?"

"Certainly. But why? What's the matter? It can't be anyone else."

Mudd just said, "Come on down to the morgue when you get in, will you?" and walked off before Conroy could say more than, "Sure, but what the hell is—"

I was sitting in the back with Mudd again. After we'd gone about five miles I asked: "What about the money?"

Mudd snorted and looked at me. "Sure," he said; "what about it?" He cursed a little and got out a cigarette and lit it. When Mudd had smoked a cigarette a few puffs the end looked like a broom. He gnawed his cigarettes, the way some men do cigars.

"It's funny, isn't it," I said as we were coming into the city, "that a man can work out something like that and then have it all come to pieces just because of an accident? Looks like fate punishing the evildoer or something of the sort, doesn't it?"

Mudd didn't look at me, but after a moment he said absently: "You aint got any idea *how* funny it is." When I asked him what he meant he didn't say anything, and later we reached town and pulled up in front of the morgue.

WE went in. Conroy and the two men who had brought the body in were there.

Mudd said: "Doc, is there any way of bein' sure that that is Earle?"

Conroy frowned. "Well, yes, as a matter of fact, there is, but I don't see what more you need. Earle had false teeth."

"Just because that,"—Mudd nodded over his shoulder toward a door,—"had false teeth, wouldn't mean it was Earle."

"Of course not. But a dentist can generally recognize his own work. All you have to do is show them to his dentist."

"I see," Mudd said. "Okay. Thanks."

"Not at all, but I can't see the point. Do you think it might *not* be Earle?"

"I just like to be sure about things," Mudd said.

"That shouldn't be any trouble in this case," Conroy said. "Well, good night, if that's all."

"Yeah," Mudd said. "Good night." Conroy went on out, and Mudd turned to one of the other men. "Don't let anyone monkey with that stuff," he said, "and I want the teeth. I'll send Farret over for them. But he's gonna make a cast of them before he takes them, and you make him sign a receipt for them and keep the cast, see?"

The man nodded and we went on out.

Swenson was outside in the cruiser. "You can put it away," Mudd said, and then turned to me. "You can buy me a drink now," he said; "there's nothing more to do tonight."

"That's a great privilege," I told him as we moved off down the block toward the Tetler Grill, "but what the hell is all this about teeth? Can't a man get killed in an accident without you running all over town with his teeth?"

"Yeah," Mudd said, "only people don't go through fences and over embankments by accident when their car's in low gear. Keep that under your hat, you hear?"

I said something pungent, and we walked in silence a moment. "Are you *sure?*" I asked then.

"Hell, no," Mudd said. "I dreamed it."

"Couldn't the fall or something knock it into low?"

"You think something is going to knock the lever down out of high, and then back *up* again, into *low,* when the car and everything in it is falling *down?*"

"But you didn't tell Conroy," I said. "He's made out his report wrong."

Mudd stopped on the sidewalk and looked at me for a moment exasperatedly. "Look!" he said patiently. "The guy who knows that car was in low is the guy that knows something about that dough. Probably has it. If I told Doc he'd have to change his report. It'd be in the papers. What do you think this is, a game? You want me to tell whoever has the money, 'Tag, watch out now, I'm comin' after you'? Doc can change his report any time." And disgustedly he added: "There ought to be some kind of prize for guys like you!" He stalked on.

We came to the Tetler Grill. "Anyhow," I said, "I can buy drinks."

"Certainly," Mudd said. "What did you think I've got you along for?"

I got down to Headquarters about eight the next morning, but even so Mudd was just about to leave. He looked a little sour when he saw me, but let me buy him a drink and go on out to the Aurora Apartments with him to see Earle's wife.

"What's she like?" I asked.

"I don't know. I aint talked to her yet."

"How come? I should think you would have."

"If she doesn't know anything, she couldn't tell me anything—and if she does, she wouldn't," Mudd said. "My only chance was to put a guy on to watch her and have her phone-calls checked. But that hasn't turned up anything yet."

THE Aurora Apartments is a big place, twelve stories, with car entrances and so forth. Not extremely expensive, but dignified and nice, in a good district. Mudd had us announced and we went up to Earle's apartment on the third floor.

A colored maid let us in, and said Mrs. Earle would be out in a moment. Mudd looked around and sat down in a big, soft chair, putting his feet in another near by. He stuck a cigarette between his teeth and lit it.

When Mrs. Earle came in he didn't get up, though he did take his feet off the chair. She was beautiful in what seemed to me a skin-deep way—a seductive figure leaning toward the Mae West school, and a pretty face that showed it had always had good care. She was probably about thirty.

"It's tough about your husband," Mudd said rather absently.

She had on a negligee which left no doubt as to her physical charms. She had a handkerchief in her hands with which she dabbed at her eyes now and then.

"Yes," she said softly. "I—I—you'll have to forgive me. The shock was—"

"Didn't he have a lot of insurance?" Mudd said.

She took the handkerchief from her eyes and looked up, nodding sadly. "Yes. Quite a lot, I think. But what good is that now, when—"

"Yeah, I know," Mudd said. "Who was his dentist?"

"What?" she said. "His dentist?"

"Yeah. He had false teeth, didn't he?"

She nodded. "Yes. Dr. Eddy was his dentist."

"Did he make the teeth?"

"Yes, I'm sure he did. But I don't understand what—"

"Nothin'," Mudd said. "I'm just checkin' to be sure it was your husband got killed in that car."

"You mean perhaps—" she began.

Mudd got up. "Lady," he said, "I don't mean anything. I'm just checkin'. Don't get your hopes up, see?"

"Oh! Yes, I see," she said quietly.

"So long," Mudd said, and I nodded good-by and we went out.

"She seemed pretty cut up," I said.

"There wasn't any tears in her eyes," Mudd said. "You can get your eyes red just by rubbin' 'em."

"Do you think she knows anything?"

"She might. A man'd be a fool to go off and leave a dish like that, unless he was expectin' to meet up with her some time later." He let his breath out in a long sigh. "Is she built!"

She hadn't affected me quite that way, but I could see what Mudd meant. We went on down to see Dr. Eddy.

They were Earle's teeth, all right. He said he had made them, and was quite positive, showing us several points I didn't understand about, by which he could identify his own work.

I've never seen Mudd madder than when we came out of Eddy's office. He walked along the street paying no attention to anything, just cursing softly.

He turned in at the Tefft Hotel and went into the grill-room. He found a table and when the waiter came he told him to bring a bottle of Scotch—the best he had. The Tefft's a big hotel, and men on the force don't generally loiter around in public places to do their drinking. But Mudd was different, not giving a damn about anything much, which was possibly why he was still no more than a sergeant.

He downed a couple of jiggers quickly when the bottle came and then poured a third and sat there looking at it for about fifteen minutes as though he had a grudge against it. I didn't say anything, for there didn't seem to be much to say. I couldn't think of anything, at least.

"It's all nuts," Mudd grunted and took his drink and poured another. I mixed myself another with seltzer and thought for a moment about twitting him, but decided it might not be a very safe sport right then. He seemed to be in no light frame of mind.

Doc Conroy, passing through the grill on his way into the hotel,—he lived there,—stopped at the table a moment.

"Well," he said to Mudd, "did you find out? I don't suppose I have to change my report, do I?"

Mudd didn't even look up. "They were his, all right," he said savagely. Conroy murmured something like, "I thought so," and went on into the hotel.

ABOUT fifteen minutes later Mudd abruptly sat up and gulped his drink. Then he stood up.

"Pay the man and come on," he said, "if you're goin' with me."

I had to hurry or he would have gone off and left me. As it was I got my foot on the running-board just as he let the clutch out.

"Where we going?"

"We're going to the Aurora," he said. "And shut up; I'm thinkin'."

I started to say "That's encouraging," or something of the sort, but didn't because his driving made me forget it.

We got to the Aurora, though. He stopped in the lobby and talked a moment to the switchboard girl, then ducked around a corner and came back in a moment to have us announced to Mrs. Earle. We went up.

She was dressed this time, but there was something about that woman that made even a dress seem too intimate, too personal—made you feel as though you ought to look the other way.

Mudd looked at her a moment without any expression and then said: "Well, I went around to see Eddy."

"Oh," she said. "Then it *was*—"

"Naw," Mudd said, "they wasn't his teeth at all. Eddy said if he ever got those teeth in his mouth he couldn't even talk, let alone eat anything with 'em."

"What?" Her voice was sharp, excited. "They weren't—his? You—you're sure?" She didn't seem able to believe it. "Why, then—then it wasn't Henry in the car! Oh!"

"That's right," Mudd said. "It wasn't Henry. But don't feel *too* good about it, lady. We'll find Henry, and we'll find out who the guy was in the car, too. I just thought you might like to know he wasn't dead. So long."

He sauntered out the door, leaving her standing there looking at him with different expressions trying to get control of her face.

But as soon as he got in the hall, Mudd started running.

Without waiting for the elevator he ran down the three flights of stairs and through the lobby, paying no attention at all to the people staring at him. He cut around a corner and when I got around it he was inside a phone-booth with another man and was taking the receiver from him. He stayed a couple of minutes and then came out and dashed over to the switchboard.

"What was that number?" he snapped.

"Walnut 4090," said the girl.

"Find where it is," he barked. "Make it snappy."

He grabbed a phone-book and began thumbing the pages quickly, said, "Never mind, I got it!" then, "Tell Swenson to meet me at Twelfth and Main right now," he called over his shoulder to the man who had been in the phone-booth, and I had to run across the lobby myself, or he would have left me again.

HE drove faster going down than he had coming out, but it didn't bother me so much, for he seemed to be paying some attention to what he was doing.

At Twelfth and Main he slowed a little and Swenson climbed on the running-board, and got in. Two blocks farther he pulled to the curb in front of the entrance to the Tefft, and we followed him in.

He told us to wait at the elevator and went over to the desk a moment. He came back and got in the elevator and said: "Seven." We went up also, and followed him down the hall.

"What's going on?" Swenson whispered, and I said, "How the hell should I know?" as Mudd stopped and knocked on a door.

Conroy opened the door, and Mudd said: "Howdy, Doc," and walked in past him. Conroy looked a little puzzled, and turned and followed him back into the living-room of his little suite.

"What is it?" he said. "Don't tell me you've gone and found they *weren't* his teeth after all!" He laughed.

Mudd looked at him about as nastily as I ever saw one man look at another.

"SO you *knew* they were his teeth, huh?" His tone was derisive, jeering. "You were *sure,* huh? Now hang up and forget it. You shouldn't have called me." Conroy was turning pale. "I'll say you knew they were the right ones," Mudd went on. "You ought to—you put 'em there!"

"What's the matter with you?" Conroy blustered. "Crazy?"

"Yeah, I'm crazy," Mudd said. He walked over and pushed him into a chair. "Sit down, so you can take it easier." He leaned down and stuck his face close to Conroy's.

"Didn't think about the low gear, did you? Or else you figured there wouldn't be anybody smart like me to figure it out so quick, and be there, and you could change it. Thought we'd find out about the drive-it afterwards, huh, but checkin' *backwards.* You don't reckon the county undertaker might know anything about a corpse you got lately, do you, Doc? One that you *didn't* use for experiments, like you do sometimes. How long did you have to wait until a nice stiff about the right size without any teeth came along, Doc?"

He chuckled. Conroy was getting his color back now—too much of it!

"You—you don't know what you're talking about. Or anyhow, *I* don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, you want some more, huh? All right. You take the corpse out at night dressed in a suit of Earle's clothes. You meet Earle out there in the drive-it. You put the corpse in his car, the money in yours. You put his watch and stuff in with the corpse. You come out on the main road and drive to this curve where you see a mile in either direction. When no cars are comin' you dump some gasoline over the stiff and the front seat just to be sure, put the car in low, give it the gun, headed for the rail, and drop a match in just as you step off the running-board. You and Earle get right away. Later you just happen to be passing there, and so you make the call in and stick around out there. That enough? Want to talk now? Where's Earle?"

Conroy set his teeth. "Listen, you fool! I tell you I don't know anything about all this. Maybe some one pulled that trick on you, but *I* don't know anything about it. Understand?"

"Okay," Mudd said. "You won't talk, huh? Think about this a minute, Doc. Would you rather go to the pen yourself and have Earle go free, with all that dough, or would you rather have Earle go to the pen—*instead* of you?"

Conroy looked at him a moment. He licked his lips.

"You was a couple of chumps for lettin' the dame know anything about it, Doc. She threw you. You should 'a' known better."

"What do you mean?" Conroy sounded hoarse.

"I was just thinkin'," Mudd said airily, "how you might make it look pretty good for you if you was to go down and make a post-mortem on your own hook, findin' out that body was dead before it got burned. See? Then if nobody got curious about whether you had a corpse or not, things might not look bad. You'd have to contradict Earle's testimony, but you ought to be able to get away with that. You got lots of influence."

"Yeah," Conroy said bitterly. "Swell. With you and those boys there." He nodded at Swenson and me.

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that," Mudd said. "You know me. I want Earle and the money; that's where *my* reputation comes in. An' these boys won't talk 'less I say to."

CONROY got up and walked back and forth. He got out a cigar, bit the end off, then put it back in his pocket.

"Suit yourself, of course," Mudd said. "But *somebody's* gonna take this rap—and it might as well be Earle as you."

"All right," Conroy said thickly.

"Where is he?"

"Out at my farm." He added quickly: "You—you can forget where you find him, huh?"

"Your farm! Damn, I must be gettin' old. I should 'a' thought of that. Well, maybe I would." He turned to Swenson. "Take him over and stick him away," he said, jerking his thumb at Conroy. "Better put bracelets on him."

"Here!" Conroy roared. "What's this? You said—"

"Shut up," Mudd said disgustedly. "I didn't say anything. Just asked you whether you'd rather go to the pen or have Earle go. Just idle curiosity, Doc, just idle curiosity."

Swenson had the handcuffs out, but Conroy resisted.

Mudd went over. "Am I gonna have to clip you one? I'd like it, all right."

Conroy quieted, but his face was livid. "You lied to me," he choked.

Mudd chuckled. "Aint that hell? You just can't trust anyone, can you, Doc? A poor, honest bank-robber aint got a chance. It's a wicked, wicked world." He chuckled again, and Swenson went on out with Conroy.

"You going after Earle?" I said.

"Why should I? He'll be there. He don't know about this."

He picked up the phone and called Headquarters and told them to send a couple of men out to get Earle.

"You can buy me a drink now," he said.

"Where did they slip up?" I said as we went down the hall.

"They slipped up when I got assigned to the case."

"I mean what tipped you off?"

"Yeah, I know. Well, the low gear didn't tie up with anything. An' if they could plant the watch and stuff, why not the teeth too? Besides, I didn't think she had been cryin', an' if she hadn't, then why did she wanta look like she had? It couldn't hurt nothin' to try this on her, an' if anyone else was in on it, she was almost sure to call him, if she knew about it."

"Suppose she hadn't known?"

"Hell's bells!" Mudd said disgustedly. "She *did* know, didn't she? Why don't you suppose Earle never robbed a bank?"

We went down in the elevator and headed for the grill.

"How did you happen to look up Conroy's number right away? Suspect him?"

"When I thought I recognized his voice, I did." He went down the two steps and sat at the first table. "Well, you've seen one," he said, "are you satisfied?"

"With this one," I admitted. "I'd like to see some more. Let's see,"—the waiter had come up,—"we might try something special. In celebration of something. No limit."

Mudd looked sad and sighed. "That's my luck. You say that—and I don't like nothin' but Scotch. Oh, well!" He seemed to brighten. "Scotch," he said to the waiter. "The best you got. Six bottles," he added.

I looked at him blankly a second. "Of course it's all right," I said; "but really can you drink six bottles?"

"What the hell?" Mudd grinned. "I got pockets, aint I?"

Who's Boss

She was a good hard-rock man herself, though he had to rescue her when she left her battle-station after the fighting started down in Brazil.

By ROBERT WINCHESTER

Illustrated by Edward Ryan

THE door of the superintendent's office—American Mine and Milling Company, Caraçao, Minas Geraes, Brazil—opened, and Mr. John Bradford looked up from the ore-report he was checking.

Almost any other young man would have smiled at Miss Elizabeth Jane Russell. But Mr. Bradford only frowned and said sternly:

"Beat it, while the going is good! I've got five ore-shipments to check before your pa goes. Go hunt up some other place to play."

Miss Russell, dressed in a soft, fawn-colored flannel shirt, riding trousers, trim, highly polished little brown leather riding-boots and with a soft hat perched jauntily on her sleek young head, absolutely ignored this ungentlemanly order, and sat down on the corner of the table that served Bradford for a desk.

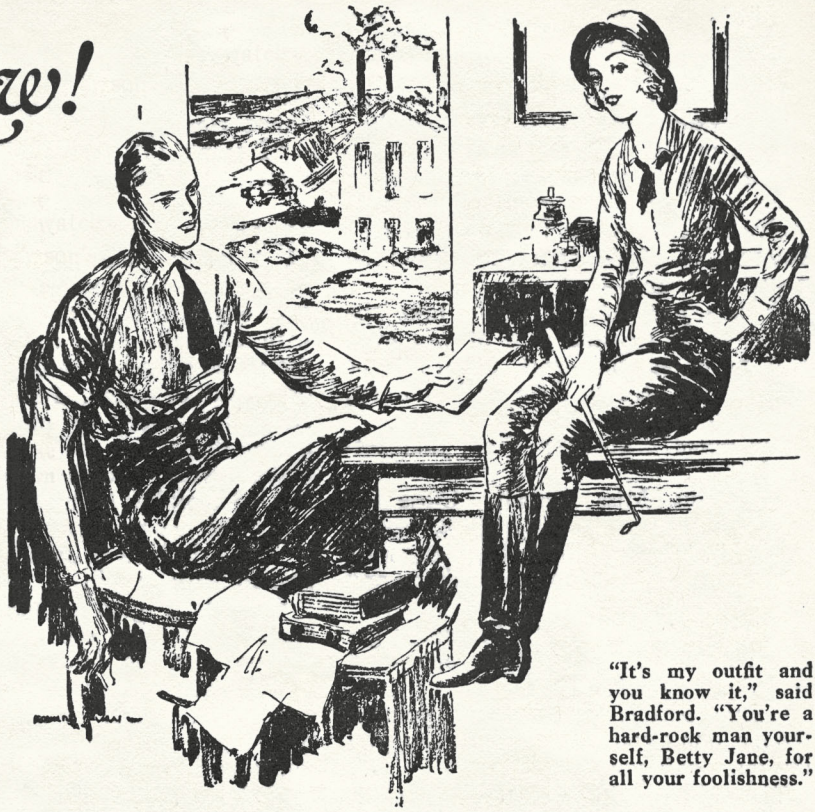
"You needn't draw back that way, Jonathan. I'm not going to kiss you, much as I would like to."

"Say, listen—do me a favor and fade away from here! Why don't you go and see Mike? I heard him say that all you knew about a hoisting-engine you could put in your eye and see clear through."

Betty Jane's lovely hyacinth-blue eyes, which generally looked out at all the world in a spirit of comradeship, at once became like the steel of a sword-blade.

"He did not! Mike never said anysuch thing—and well you know it, Mr. Jonathan Bradford! You just want to get rid of me, that's all; and"—here Miss

Now!



"It's my outfit and you know it," said Bradford. "You're a hard-rock man yourself, Betty Jane, for all your foolishness."

Russell, aged eighteen, gave a perfect sniffling imitation of old Mrs. Murphy, with the aid of a dainty little nose and the sleeve of the flannel shirt—"I don't take it kindly av yez at all, at all!"

The tall, lanky young man sighed as he put the report down. From Massachusetts Tech, '27, Bradford was rated by Betty Jane's father, who owned the American outfit—and other mines and smelters all over the world—as one of the best superintendents in the business.

"All right, what game will we play? I know darn' well there is no way of getting rid of you unless I throw you out bodily."

"And that would take not only you, but several other members of the Bradford family," answered Betty Jane, who was all of five feet two inches tall and weighed some one hundred twenty pounds.

But there is nothing in size, as old Mike Dolan the millman had announced after a run-in with Miss Russell. "She aint any bigger than a minute," he protested, "but inside herself, is twenty-nine M.P. sergeants—bad luck to the scuts!"

To which the concentrating foreman had agreed, with: "Boy, you aint told the half of it! I been bawled out under three flags, and I'm an expert at judgin' good ones."

Now, at her ready defiance, Bradford smiled. His thin bronzed face was not a handsome one, but when he smiled any woman or child who saw it would promptly smile back at him. "You're here after something," he said. "What is it?"

"Why, John! Can't I come in here to pay you a social call without wanting something?"

"You could, yes—but you are not, this time. If it is anything to do with your sticking around here while your pa goes to Rio—nothing doing. I've got enough responsibility without looking after you being tacked on to it. You're going with him."

"What?" Miss Russell at once cleared decks for action. "Well, I will stay right here if I wish, John Lawrence Bradford! Since when must I have your permission to stay at one of my own daddy's mines? I'm going to stay right here, with Mrs. McCarthy, until he gets back."

"Try to do it! It's my outfit as long as I'm superintendent—and darn' well you know it, also. You're a hard-rock man yourself, for all your blame' foolishness."

That was a subtle compliment, and Miss Russell weakened at once. "I know it's your outfit, John, as long as you're superintendent. And I love it here, and I don't want to go to that darn' old Rio; I want to stay right here. I won't be any trouble to you—and I'll do everything you say. My goodness, I guess twelve Americans can take care of me! You're just afraid that the revolution might start, and—"

"That's just it! It would take the twelve of us to take care of you even if it never started—and, believe it or not, we are here to do a little mining, not to act as nurse—"

"As *nurse!* To me? Well, that settles it!"

"All right, Miss Russell. Close the door gently as you go out, please."

"John Bradford, you look at me! You put that darn' old report down and look at me."

"My persecuted race! I'll never get this done in time!" protested John—and went down in defeat.

"That's better, John! Now, you do like me, don't you? For all you say, you like me, don't you, Jonathan?"

"I've told you nine hundred times not to call me Jonathan! Certainly I like you; everyone does around here. What has that got to do with your staying here while your father goes to Rio?"

"You can take care of me, can't you, John?"

"My sainted Aunt Maria! What is the use? What *is* the use? Yes, I can take care of you—anywhere and at any time. Now that is settled. Are you going quietly and as a lady should, or are you going out on your ear?"

"No, I am not going, either as a lady should or as she shouldn't—either on my ear or off it. You like me and can take care of me. Then why can't I stay?"

"Listen! If I say you can stay, will you get out of here?"

"Why, of course I will, darling. Right away, and—"

THE door opened and a big man with gray hair came in. He was Thomas T. Russell, multimillionaire mine-owner. Betty Jane came legitimately by her love of mines and the mining country—and the men who mined. For all his millions, and his seat on the board of directors of powerful banks and railroads, Russell was never happy until he could get back into working-clothes and do what he called "fuss around with the roughnecks."

"You here?" he demanded. "Fly your kite! I want to talk business to John—and Mrs. McCarthy said if I saw you to tell you she was making gingerbread. You better high-ball it!"

"I think I'd better. Good-by, Jonathan! I'll bring you a piece."

"HERE it is, John," Russell said as Betty Jane disappeared, neglecting to shut the door in her hurry, "I've got to get in to Rio to close that deal with Gunnell. The country is up and there's no telling when the revolution will break out, or where. I don't dare to take Betty Jane along because the only way to get through is to travel light. I can make it with a couple of men and a guide, but if I took her I'd have to take a young army for her protection."

"She's decided to stay here," John answered with a grin.

"I'm darn' glad to hear that. Ever since her mother died I've packed her around with me, but this is one time I don't want to take a chance. You'll take care of her, John? I wouldn't have the little finger of her hurt, for all the damn' mines and mills in the world."

"I know you wouldn't, Mr. Russell. Neither would I. I'll take care of her."

"All right, that's settled. I'll be back in a month and take her back to Boston with me. Her aunts have been raising hell and high water with me for a year or more. They say it's time she 'came out,' or some blame' thing. —Let's see that report." And the two men fell into a highly technical discussion. . . .

Betty Jane, after eating all the hot gingerbread she could hold, feeling very pleased with herself and the world in general, sauntered over to where the young chemist and three or four of the foremen were standing at a truck that had just pulled in with supplies. As she drew near, she saw they were standing around a man who evidently had arrived on the truck.

"Give me room according to my size," Betty Jane demanded, coming between the chemist and the concentrating-man. "Who is it? Oh, my goodness gracious!" This last as she looked at the man. He was dressed in grimy overalls, very dirty canvas shoes that had once been white, a sleeveless tight-fitting jersey that had once been red, and from a narrow belt that also had once been white, there hung a sheath-knife. He wasn't a bad-looking little man at that, in spite of the wisp of mustache just under his nose. His atti-

tude, as he stood in front of the immaculate, high-booted foremen, was one of combined bravado and attempted nonchalance.

"Look what the cat brought in," the chemist Loring said to Betty Jane, grinning.

"Why, how did he get here? Did Sam bring him up on the—"

"I should say not," interrupted Sam, the driver of the truck. "He must have crawled in down at—"

Thereupon the little man spoke. "Hey, how do youse lads get that way? What's the big idea? Talkin' about me as if I was in the line-up at headquarters! Youse guys is Yanks, aint youse? Well, so am I, see? I aint had no scoffins for three days. Can the comedy, and give me somep'n to eat and drink. I'm a right lad, see?"

"Well, I'll be darned!" said Mike, the mill foreman. "A weary Willie, way down in Brazil! How come you on that truck, Willie?"

"Aw, I jumps ship at Victoria, see? Me and the third had a run-in."

"What were you, a fireman?"

"Naw, nuttin' so high. I was passin' coal. Say, how about some chuck—and gettin' the story of me life after?"

"Do a little talking first, feller. We want to know—"

"We do not," announced Betty Jane hotly. "Didn't you hear him say he was hungry and thirsty and—and everything? The very idea! Billy Loring, you go and get that white suit of yours right away. You are just his size. Mike, you take him over to the men's shower-baths first. George,"—to the concentrating-man,—"you go and tell the cook to give him all he wants to eat and drink, right now. Billy, you bring clean underwear and everything with the suit."

"Hey, listen!" Billy protested. "That's the only clean whites I have, and I want to wear them to the dance tonight. Have a heart, for Pete's sake."

"I won't have a heart! You stood here and—and kidded him when he was hungry and thirsty and everything!"

"NIX, lady, nix! I don't need no skirt to fight for me. I'm a tough guy, see? I can take it—all the time." The newcomer straightened up and pulled the dilapidated vizored cap down over his left eye. But as he did it, he swayed a little from weakness.

"You all ought to be ashamed of yourselves," Betty Jane flamed. "Big, husky, well-fed men teasing him! You need not take him to the cook, Mike Dolan; I will take him myself. Come on, Mr.—Mr.— What is your name?"

"Percy White, lady."

"Holy cats!" said the concentrating-man. "*Percy White!* Hot dog! You sure don't live up to your name, Percy."

Mr. Percy White started to reply, but Betty Jane beat him to it. "Don't answer him, Mr. White! From now on, I am Miss Russell to you, Mr. George Anderson. Remember it, please."

"Them's harsh words, Nell," moaned the concentrating-man, highly delighted.

AN hour later, Betty Jane sat beside a different-looking Mr. White. Now he lived up to his name, at least as far as the clothes he was wearing, and his general cleanliness. They—Betty Jane and Percy—were sitting on a pile of mining sticks that were waiting to go into the ground.

"Now," she said sociably, "tell me about it!"

Betty Jane was very much the same as her father. If Thomas T. Russell liked anyone, it did not make any difference who or what they were—or had been. Miss Russsell had liked the game little man from the moment he issued his defiance of the much bigger foremen.

"Aw, there aint nuttin' to tell, lady. I was coal-passin' on the *Victus*, see, and I had a run in with the third. That big hunk of—"

"The third what?"

"The third engineer, lady. Aint youse ever been on a ship?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. White—many times. Only I have never been down where they—they pass coal, I think you said."

"Youse can call me Percy. Say, youse is a swell, all right. I've seen 'em up on deck. I never thought that a swell skirt could be so—could be such a regular guy. Honest!"

"Oh, my goodness! I'm not a—a swell, Percy. Why, my daddy used to work in the mines, and everything, until he struck it rich."

"Don't make no difference. Youse is a swell and a real one. It's the real ones that do things like youse just done for me."

"Tell me what happened between you and the third."

"Aw, he tried to put it over me, see? He says, 'Youse aint trimmin' this coal right, you little—' But I'll leave it to youse to guess what he said, lady."

Betty Jane laughed. "Perhaps you'd better, Percy. Then what?"

"I come back with, 'Says youse!' And he says, 'Dat's right, says *me*'—and he makes a pass at me, see? I ducks it and gives him the shovel alongside his ear, *bambo!*"

"Oh, my goodness!" said Miss Russell, her eyes shining. "Then what?"

"Then I unloaded."

"Unloaded what, Percy?"

"Aw, I went over the side. Dat's unloadin', see? It was no place for me after I connected with the third."

"I shouldn't think it would be. But, did you—did you kill him, Percy?"

"Naw, youse couldn't kill dat big hunk of cheese! Before I makes it to the shore he was in a boat comin' after me. I fooled 'im, though. I saw dat truck standin' there and I crawled in it. If he and his buddies had caught me, it would have been Mary-bar-the-door for me, lady."

Betty Jane laughed, a pretty, musical laugh and John Bradford, who was walking toward the mill from the office, looked over and waved his hand.

"That's Mr. Bradford, the superintendent. Come on, Percy! He'll give you a job, and you can stay here until the third gets tired of looking for you."

PERCY rose as Betty Jane did, and hitched up the spotless white trousers of Mr. William Loring—which were a trifle too big around the waist for him.

"Aw, he's sailed by now, lady. Dat's what I'm lookin' for, a job."

"You'll get it. And listen, Percy: Don't try to fight any of the foremen, will you? They are much too big for you and—"

"The bigger they are the harder they fall, lady. But I won't if youse say so. What youse want goes with me, see?"

John Bradford smiled as he looked over Percy White and announced that the one thing he needed around the mine was another good man in the engine-room. After Percy was enrolled on the pay-sheet and taken over to the engineer, John came over and sat down beside Betty Jane, who was watching some of the timber crew trim timbers for the ground.

"Well," Betty Jane said, "Daddy's gone, Jonathan. Give orders, O King!"

John grinned. "About the only one I can think of right now is, no going outside of our lines. All kidding to one side, Betty Jane, we're in a tight place up here. If the revolution spreads to the Indians they may try for us, knowing that we haven't made a gold shipment for two months. We're hooked up to take care of anything they can bring us, but we can't get in the open and—"

"Hooked up how?" demanded Betty Jane eagerly.

"I suppose you think you are going to be detailed on a machine-gun? The best you'll get will be chief nurse."

"You mean that if they attack us I can only be a nurse? Well, I won't be anything of the kind, John Bradford. I can shoot a thirty-thirty rifle just as good as any of you and—"

"For a pretty girl, you are the darnedest, bloodthirstiest old pirate I ever heard of!"

"John, do you really think that I am pretty?"

"Quit fishing. You know blame' well that you are."

"Am I as pretty as Dolores y Barros?"

"Double, Miss Russell. I've got to be getting to work. *Adios, amiga.*"

"John, are you going to her dance tonight?"

"I guess so—if some more of the outfit go."

"Why do you want them to go?"

"I just told you. The Tupinambas Indians may be up."

"Well, my goodness! Are you *afraid* of them? Is that why you won't go unless some of the other men go? I never thought you were a coward, John Bradford."

"No? Well, I am—an awful big one! Nothing doing on that dance thing unless a bunch go, Betty Jane."

"Oh, you are afraid for me? Well, I'm not. I'm going, if I have to go alone."

"Try to do it!" said John, starting away.

"What? John Bradford, you stop right there and tell me what you just said!"

"You heard me the first time. I said, 'try to do it!'" And John went on.

Miss Russell slowly rose. "If there is one man in the world I hate," she announced to the timber on which she had been sitting, "it is that darned old John Bradford!"

THE Hacienda Barros blazed with many colored lights and the dancers overflowed from the ballroom to the wide verandas and even out in the stone-flagged patio.

The descendant of the Portuguese conquerors sailed through the air and landed in the fountain. "Oh!" said Miss Russell. "Good for you, John!"

Bradford, who had been dancing with Dolores y Barros, found Betty Jane sitting with Billy Loring on one of the stone benches near a fountain.

"So you have finally torn yourself away from your dear Dolores," said Betty Jane scornfully.

"I got torn away from her," John answered with a grin as he sat down. "Her cousin or what-not,—Don Duarte Coelho Pereira,—came along and snatched her from my protecting arms."

"It's a wonder he could, you were holding her so tightly. You are in love with her, John Bradford."

"Not by a durn' sight. I'm in love with some one entirely different, Miss Russell. Billy, I thought I heard that you couldn't come on account of Betty Jane's Percy White? Mike was telling me—"

"It cost me two bucks to have this suit washed and ironed in time! How about charging it in on the lab' account, John?"

"You've got as much chance as a snowball in Hades."

"Well," Betty Jane said, rising, "here it is a beautiful moonlight night and I'm at a dance, and everything—and all I get is to sit here and listen to you two argue about a washing-bill! I'm offen the both of yez."

"Wait until you get to Boston with those two old maiden aunts that are trying to catch you," Billy Loring warned. "They'll sure edit your language. When we see you again all you'll be able to say will be prunes and prisms, I bet you."

"Oh, yes? Well, on seeing you two, prunes would be the first thing I would think of, anyway! Come and dance with me, John."

"No can do. I've got a date with old man Barros in a minute. Your pa sent word to him about some land. Stick around for a little while. I'll be back in fifteen minutes."

"I won't do anything of the kind. I can find plenty of dancing-partners, Mr. Bradford."

AND there was no question but what Betty Jane could; if she had looked lovely in her riding-outfit, she looked like a little dream princess in her dancing-frock of black and gold. As she walked haughtily away, Billy Loring drew a long breath. "Darned if Betty Jane isn't the

best-looking girl I ever saw! She's a thoroughbred, that kid!"

"What do you know about thoroughbreds?" John asked lazily, as he looked at his watch.

"Heck of a lot," answered Loring. "I was born and raised in old Kentuck', boy! I know 'em—no foolin'!"

Betty Jane just reached the entrance of the ballroom when Don Duarte Pereira came up to her. The Don was a young man, stockily built, and without question had been giving considerable attention to the wines and liquors for which the Hacienda Barros was famous. He was carrying it very well, though.

"Ah," he said with a courtly bow, "the so-lovely Señorita Russell! May I have the honor of thees dance?"

NOW, Don Duarte was very much in love with Dolores y Barros and really cared nothing at all for any other girl. But he was Latin, he had drunk a lot, Betty Jane was pretty, and as light on her little feet as a moonbeam. Also, Don Duarte was very jealous of the lovely Dolores and had not relished at all her dancing so much with the Americans. He meant to show her that two could play at that game. Before they had circled the floor more than twice, Betty Jane was sorry she had accepted his invitation.

If she had thought John Bradford was holding Dolores y Barros too closely,—which he hadn't been, however,—it was nothing compared to the way Don Duarte was trying to hold her. Betty Jane did not like it at all and told him so two or three times. But Don Duarte was watching the effect his caressing ways were having on Dolores, and so paid no attention to Betty Jane's icy protests. Finally, as they neared an entrance, she wriggled out of his arms.

"It is much too hot to dance, señor," she said. "If you will pardon me, I will go out near the fountain where it is cooler."

Don Duarte, highly pleased by the flash he had seen in the black eyes of his loved one, answered, "I will accompany you, señorita."

"You needn't," Betty Jane said coldly. "I—frankly, Don Pereira, I would much rather be alone."

"But no, beautiful one! To be alone in the moonlight? It is not to be thought of."

Betty Jane, curbing her desire to—as she related to Billy Loring later—"give him a good wallop," turned and walked away. Don Duarte promptly caught step with her. Betty Jane did not know just what to do. She did not want to create a scene; nor did she want to appear to be so unsophisticated that she could not handle a situation of this kind.

But as a matter of fact, she was. Her life so far had been spent with hard-rock men whom she could figuratively wind around her little finger. To any of them the command, "Don't do that," or, "Go away now," would have been entirely sufficient. She did not know just how to handle this Latin who, she now realized, had been drinking, so she walked along, her little nose elevated, her dainty lips tight.

When they reached the fountain, Don Duarte grew eloquent. "Sit down, little one of so much loveliness, and I will tell you how beautiful your starlike eyes are. Close them, that I may kiss them awake!"

That was the straw that broke the camel's back as far as Miss Elizabeth Jane Russell went. She stepped back a step. "You—you dare! Why, you are *drunk!* How dare you even—"

Don Duarte laughed and took a quick step forward, seizing the indignant little Miss Russell in his arms. "I will show you what I dare," he said.

BUT he did not have time to do it. A sinewy hand closed on his shoulder and spun him around; as it did, he of necessity let go of Betty Jane.

The spin ended as he faced John Bradford.

"You touch me, American pig?" snarled Don Duarte, the drink in him sending him from a lovemaking angle into a fighting one instantly. "This, to lesson you!"

He struck at John—a wide swinging blow with his right hand clenched. To give him credit, he never would have done it if it had not been for his jealousy of Dolores, the strong brandies and liquors, his Latin temperament and the fact that Betty Jane had so clearly shown her contempt for him in her pretty blue eyes. All in all, it made him forget that he was striking at a guest in his cousin's house.

But that was all he did do—strike at the guest. The blow never landed. John stepped in; his right fist did not seem to travel up more than eight inches, but when it landed on the point of Don Duarte's chin that descendant of the Portu-

guese conquerors literally sailed through the air for three feet, and fell into the fountain.

"Oh!" said the exquisite Miss Russell. "Good for you, John!"

To give Don Duarte credit, he was a fighter. He came out of the cool water like a jack out of the box. But as he reached the ground, Dolores y Barros was standing there to greet him. Her midnight black eyes were as cold as northern ice in a cold gray dawn.

"You attack a guest in my father's house, Don Duarte Coelho Pereira? Truly you have fallen very low!"

He broke into excited, liquid Portuguese, gesturing with both hands. Dolores finally interrupted, speaking in English: "You will apologize to Señorita Russell for striking a blow in her presence. Then you will apologize to Señor Bradford for your action. After you have done that, you will go to my father and explain to him why you, a Pereira, offer violence to a guest in the house of Barros."

This started the luckless Don Duarte off on another gesturing speech, still in Portuguese, which was plainly pleading. Dolores merely stood and looked at him, her eyes still cold. Reluctantly at last he said in English: "I beg your pardon, Señorita Russell—and yours also, Señor Bradford."

"Let it go at that, Señorita Dolores," John urged. "The Señor Pereira has been drinking, otherwise I know he would have controlled himself. If you take him to your father it will make a mountain out of a molehill."

"I do not understand what you mean, señor, about the mountain and the—the hill of the mole. But I will not send this—this *caballero* to my father, who truly would lesson him as to the treatment of a guest. You will mount your horse,"—to Don Duarte,—"and ride from the Hacienda Barros at once. And do not come again until I send for you, Don Duarte Coelho Pereira."

THE unfortunate young don bowed very low, to Dolores, then to Betty Jane, and lastly to John. The last bow wasn't so low; and the look in his eyes as he straightened up told John plainly that *he* had not heard the last of Don Duarte Coelho Pereira.

After the bows, the young Latin turned on his heel, and stalked away.

Dolores' eyes grew warmer and she smiled a little as she watched him.

"He is of the so-bad temper," she said softly, "and yet—see, señorita and señor, I know that he did not mean it. If you will be so generous as to forget—"

"We will," John said with a smile. "It's forgotten already, isn't it, Betty Jane?"

"It is," answered Miss Russell gravely. "So much so that I don't know what you are talking about." At that, they all laughed and Dolores said, "Will you come and dance with me, Señor Bradford?"

"Thanks, I should be very glad to, señorita, if it were not for the fact that Miss Russell has just promised to dance with me."

"Don't let that interfere," Betty Jane said with extreme hauteur. "I really had rather not dance."

DOLORES looked at her and then at John. Then she laughed. "Go and dance with him, señorita. It is what you both wish."

"It isn't what *I* wish at all," replied Betty Jane pettishly. But Dolores was halfway around the fountain.

"What do you mean it isn't what you wish?" demanded John. "You know darn' well you've been wasting away pining for the chance to dance with such a topside dancer as I am. Come on!"

"Says you," Betty Jane answered with a happy little sigh. It was good to be back with her own kind of men-folks. Then as they walked toward the ballroom, "John, that was a peach of a wallop you handed him, wasn't it?"

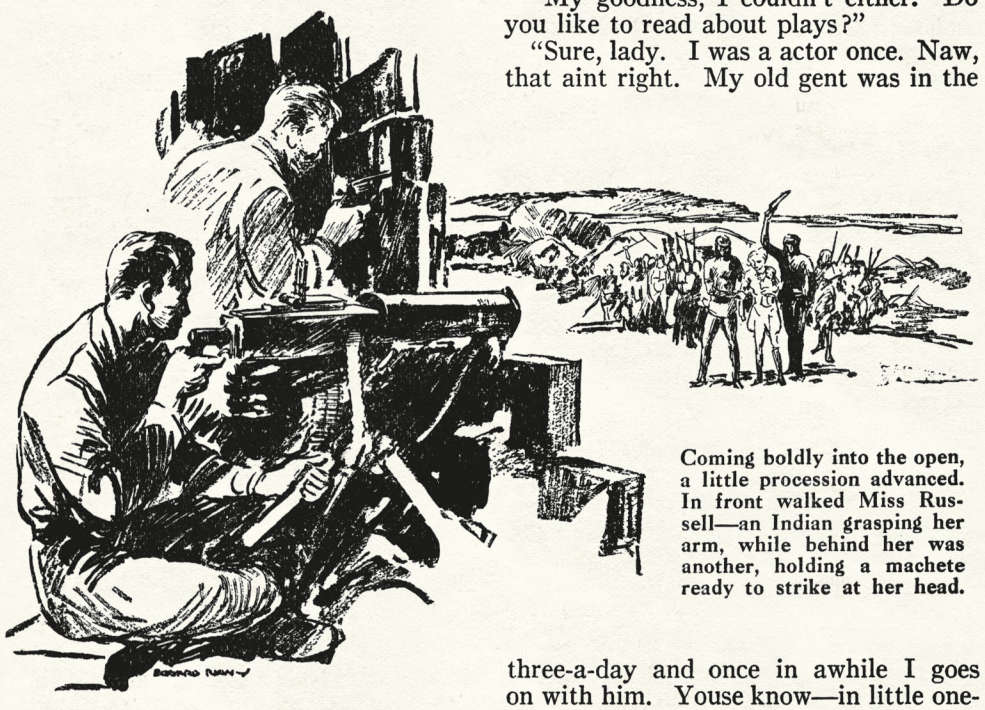
"I did the best I could," John answered with a grin. "I couldn't get set very well, though. I had no idea he would make a pass at me. What was it all about, Betty Jane?"

"He held me too tightly, and when I stopped and walked out here he came right along. Then he started some—some darn' foolishness, about kissing my eyes and—and—well, anyway, I started to bawl him out good and proper, and—"

"Say, for Pete's sake! You better sink that line of talk before you get to those maiden aunts, old kid! Where did you—"

"That is just what I did, Mr. John Bradford—I bawled him out good and proper. That is perfectly good English also, and I am going to use it all I want to, in Boston as well as anywhere else. You are not so awfully correct yourself that you may be always correcting other people's—"

"Cease firing, Miss Russell. Use any kind of English you darn' well please. Here we are almost to the dance-floor and you want to start a war. Show your old Uncle John how you can dance."



Coming boldly into the open, a little procession advanced. In front walked Miss Russell—an Indian grasping her arm, while behind her was another, holding a machete ready to strike at her head.

"John—had you really rather dance with me than with Dolores?"

"Double rather—and what is more, you're the prettiest girl here tonight."

"That's nice of you, Jonathan. You don't often say nice things to me."

"Go on! If I don't say them, I think them anyway, Eliza Jane."

"I've a—a darn' good mind not to dance with you! *Eliza Jane,* indeed!"

"Well, cut out that Jonathan thing, then. Either dance with me, woman, or get a bawling-out, good and proper."

Betty Jane laughed and snuggled into his arm as they danced away.

ON the day after the dance Betty Jane chanced to pass by Percy White, who was sitting in the shade of a tree, it being his off-shift period.

"Hullo, Percy. How is everything?" she asked sociably, pausing.

"O. K., lady. This job is a pipe alongside of passin' coal on an old hooker."

Betty Jane smiled. "Had any fights?"

"Naw, them guys are regular fellers."

Betty Jane saw the book Percy held in his hands.

"Why, Percy! That's Shakespeare. Where did you get it?"

"Aw, dat kid Loring has got a shelf full of books. He lent me dis one, see? I like to read it—all the plays. But I don't get it all," he added, by way of confession.

"My goodness, I couldn't either. Do you like to read about plays?"

"Sure, lady. I was a actor once. Naw, that aint right. My old gent was in the three-a-day and once in awhile I goes on with him. Youse know—in little one-act plays. Dere was one, dat I took de part of a goofy kid."

"A what?"

"Aw, a kid what is loose in the top—nutty, see?"

"Oh—crazy!"

"Yeah, cuckoo. Only I didn't last long. De old gent used to likker up all the time and when he did, he used to get rough, see?"

"You mean that he used to—to *strike* you?"

"I'll say he did—and how! Not in de play, because he was an Indian chief and no Indian touches a goofy guy. It was afterwards and before. So I takes it on the lam and—"

"You did what?"

"Aw, dat means I run away, see? Youse mustn't say dat. Dat's stir-talk and not for a lady like youse is."

Betty Jane promptly sat down. "What is *stir,* Percy?"

"Nix, lady, nix."

"What is stir, Percy?"

"Aw, stir is prison, see. Take it on the lam means in prison-talk to run away."

"That's awfully interesting, Percy. Tell me some more."

"I will not," answered the scandalized Percy. "Dat's no kind of talk for youse to learn."

A little Indian boy, the child of one of the miners, came by with an armful of pretty wild flowers. He smiled shyly at Betty Jane and took off his dilapidated straw hat.

"Oh, aren't they pretty! Where did you get them, Alfonso darling?" Betty Jane asked.

"You weesh them, señorita?" The little boy held the flowers out. "I find—I found—them in thees—thees—" The little boy's English, gained in the school established for the children of the miners, failed him and he fell back on the sign language, holding up two fingers. "In thees—them—in the"—he wiggled the two fingers—"*gulch!*"

"That's a smart boy, Alfonso. *Second* is the word you want. You take them to your mother. I'll go and get some a little later."

"No, señorita! Plenty bad Indians down there."

"*What?* Where, Alfonso?"

"Down in gulch and valley. I see them come and so I start for home, queekly. Me, I weesh to be under the guns that the señor—"

"My goodness, why didn't you tell me right away!" Betty Jane had flashed to her feet. "Get to the mill, Percy! Go to your mother, Alfonso!" She ran to the boiler- and engine-house. A moment later there came one short, one long and then one more short blast on the powerful whistle. The white women and children started for the mill. From the native quarters there poured the wives and children of the Indian miners. Every man on top stopped what he had been doing and ran to the battle-station Bradford had assigned to him. The hoist began bringing the men from the ground, Bradford and the assistant superintendents coming up with the first load.

It was as smooth and efficient as the first few moments on a battleship after "general quarters" has been blown by the bugle. That call means every man on board, no matter what rank, goes to his battle-station.

RIGHT after the whistle blew, three rifle-shots came from the top of the highest hill. Bradford had stationed lookouts on that hill and others. After the shots the men running for the mill could see the lookouts, three of them, running down the hills to the mine. One pitched forward, an arrow through his chest, before he had come a hundred feet. The other two made it in safety.

As Bradford made the mill, the attack came—a hard, fast one, heralded by yells and a flight of arrows, followed by the whirling charge of the Tupinambas Indians. They were armed with bows and arrows, knives, spears, war-clubs, their heavy brush-clearing machetes and some few trade guns. The Brazilian Indians are among the best fighting-men of the world, bar none. In spite of their antiquated weapons, they are hard to stop.

THE attack on the mine had been inspired by cupidity. These Indians had decided to join the revolution—not that they knew what it was all about, but they had seen other tribes parade past with loot, so they thought they also would be revolutionists and get their share. *En route* to a gathering-place of the clans, they had met Don Duarte Coelho Pereira, who was well known to the chiefs. And that gentleman, more with the revengeful idea of getting back at Bradford than anything else, had hinted to them that there would be much gold which his friends the Tupinambas might acquire, up at the mine worked by the Americans.

Then he had ridden on, well pleased with himself. He had not stopped to think of what might happen as far as loss of life went. If Pereira thought at all, it was that the Americans would do as any Latin-American mine-owner would do—give up what gold he had, and let the Indians loot as much as they pleased, glad to be able to save his life.

That Americans might not feel that way about it, never occurred to Don Duarte. His chief idea was that he had started something which would cause John Bradford trouble. . . .

How much defense the Indians expected to encounter there is no way of knowing—but they got plenty. Two machine-guns opened up from the mill tower. From the warehouse, the engine- and boiler-house and the powder-house there came a cold, accurate, merciless fire—a sleet of steel-jacketed bullets, sent by men who were veterans of the A. E. F. and the British army. No flurry, no wasted shots. The two machine-guns, each stationed high enough to swing in a half-circle, began the staccato chatter of death—*tat-tat-tat tat-tat-tat*—and the rifles were almost as fast.

In less than a minute, the Indians ran for cover, leaving a third of their number on the ground.

"Boy howdy—we sure hesitated 'em, John!" said George, the concentrating-man. George had been first sergeant of a machine-gun company in France.

"That's right," answered Bradford. "Now they'll pull that siege thing. Well, we can last a long time."

"Aw, let's go out and run 'em down the hill!"

"Not any, old kid. Here we are perfectly— Nope—we're sunk!"

"What do you mean, *sunk?*" And then George saw the amazing sight that Bradford had seen.

COMING boldly into the open from the rear of one of the native cabins, the last of a line that reached to a foothill, a little procession advanced. In the front rank walked Miss Elizabeth Jane Russell, holding in the crook of her left arm a little native girl about two years old. Grasping Miss Russell's right arm was a Tupinambas Indian. Behind her there walked another, holding a machete ready to strike down at her proudly poised head. Following this group came several more Indians. As they came along the line of cabins, other Indians left their cover and joined in the parade. Others—all the rest—came out from behind buildings and stood calmly, insolently, in the open.

George began a soft, steady stream of curses. The mill, the engine-house, the warehouse, the pumphouse and all other places that had issued a deadly defiance were still. The men in them waited for John Bradford. He was superintendent, and it was up to him to make the first move. That machete, poised over the pretty head—

"Take things over, Pete," John said quietly to the assistant superintendent, oldest in point of service, who had been feeding one of the machine-guns. "I'll try to get close enough to shoot that bird away from Betty Jane. They'll give me a chance to see what I have to say. When I do, I'll throw Betty Jane to the ground. The rest of it is up to you. Put down a barrage for her until she makes the mill—cut loose, the second she hits the ground. Never mind about me. So long, you fellers."

"Hey, for Pete's sake, wait a minute," protested George. "Show a flag of truce! We can dicker for her in exchange for the gold—"

"No chance," Bradford answered from the stairs. "They wouldn't live up to any agreement. Only way to get her is to shoot 'em away from her."

"I'm going with you. Two of us can— Hold 'er, John! Come back here a minute. What the hell is that crazy nut pullin'?"

Bradford came back to the platform and looked out of the opening where George and the assistant superintendent already were.

Going toward the Indians, who had halted, was a grotesque figure, advancing with a little weaving, mincing, dancing step, every foot or so stooping to pick imaginary flowers and smell them, then toss them away. The figure had on a pair of short linen drawers and nothing else. All of the naked body showing was striped with alternate stripes of black and red—made with engine-grease and red-lead paint.

In the right hand the figure held what looked like a roll of paper, also striped red and black. It was being used as a sort of wand or baton.

Several of the Indians drew back as the figure came near them, especially those at whom the roll of paper was pointed. It had been all of four hundred yards from where the parade had started from the cabin and by the time the figure appeared, the foremost group was within three hundred feet of the mill.

"It's Percy White," George announced. "Well, the bughouse son of a gun! What's he—"

"Get back on your gun! If he can get by with it, he's got Betty Jane! Holy mackinaw, that's clever work! If you can do it, Percy, old kid, the best job at this man's mine is— Let 'em have it! Shoot 'em back!"

THE figure had reached the procession. Not an Indian raised a weapon. It danced up and down along the line, then swerved in at the Indian who held Betty Jane's arm. The Indian let out a yell of fear, let go her arm and shrank back against the one who held the machete, who in turn fell back. This put Betty Jane and the little girl ahead of the Indians, with Percy White at her back, facing them.

As he advanced, all the Tupinambas promptly stepped backward away from the "poor crazed one." Unquestionably Percy White could have shepherded Betty Jane and her burden right into the mill without any interference, so strong

"Run, lady, run to the mill!" shouted Percy. The words were enough, let alone the appearance of the pistol. The Indians gave a yell of fury and closed in.

was the Indian code of not interfering with a crazy person's actions—the idea being that one "touched by the hand of God" is sacred. But after he reached Betty Jane, Percy abruptly went out of character—and that was fatal. The Indians are clever and it took no more than one slip to tell them they were being fooled. "Run to the mill," shouted Percy. "Run, lady, run!" —And his right hand came out of the roll with a heavy .45 in it. The words were enough, let alone the appearance of the pistol. The Indians gave a yell of fury and closed in.

Betty Jane Russell showed then and there that she was entitled to live with hard-rock men in the mining country. Instead of running, she instantly slipped to the ground, lying as flat as possible, and holding the little Indian girl as much beneath her as she could.

Percy White stood as straight as a soldier—his shoulders back and his heels together—and emptied the pistol into the lean powerful brown bodies that surged at him.

But just as John Bradford shouted, "Shoot 'em back!" a thrown war-club struck Percy on the side of the head and he went down. The bodies that fell on him were sent there by the bullets from every gun the defense had. Over Betty Jane's head there came a roof of steel and to the right and left of her prone body, there was erected a fence of steel by men all of whom could wear the "distinguished marksman" badge.

The Indians, caught in the open, showed their bravery. They charged straight from where they stood at the mill. This time they were going through to the end. They went down like leaves in an autumn storm but those who were left came on, their grim fighting-faces like the stone images of devils. One of the machine-guns jammed and the two men left it, picking up rifles.

"Get on that bunch by the pump-house," Bradford ordered calmly. "That's the boy, Billy! Stay with 'em! I'm going to get Betty Jane."

Then a circle of mounted men closed in on the mine buildings—hard-faced, cold-eyed men, men who swung their heavy machetes mercilessly on the now fleeing Indians who tried to break through. It was the *vaqueros* of the Hacienda Barros, coming to the rescue. And leading a compact body of a number more of them coming in from the main trail, rode Dolores y Barros, an automatic in her right hand.

The dusky *vaqueros* would have fought valiantly, anyway, but now, under the eyes of their adored mistress, they "sure strutted their stuff," as Sam the truck-driver said afterward.

JOHN reached Betty Jane just as that young lady was getting on her feet. She began apologetically:

"John, I—I— Mrs. Alvarez was crying for her baby and I— You said that I was a h-hard-rock m-man. I couldn't let—"

John took Betty Jane, little girl and all in his arms. "You're a brave, good girl, darling. Of course you couldn't—being a hard-rock man. I love you, Betty Jane! Why, don't start crying now! It's all over."

"I am not c-crying! Put me down. And if I am it is because I am s-so glad that— Oh, my goodness gracious!" This last was caused by the sudden appearance of Mr. Percy White from under a pile of bodies. Percy got to his knees, then rose slowly. One side of his head was bloody but he was still in the ring.

John put Betty Jane down, so he could go to Percy's assistance, but Betty Jane beat him to Percy's side.

"Percy! You aren't dead, then? You saved me, Percy! Oh, I'm so—so glad that you aren't dead, Percy. Let John carry you."

"Aw, nix, lady, nix. Dat was nuttin'. I knew them Indians wouldn't touch me, see? The engineer chiefed me up and out I comes. I lots o' times got worse wallops dan dis! I can take it, lady, any old—"

But even as he spoke, Percy began to give at the knees and would have fallen if John Bradford's strong arms had not caught him.

IT was evening when Betty Jane came into the superintendent's office. Bradford was there alone. This time he looked up and smiled.

"Well," demanded Betty Jane, "can you tell me if that Dolores y Barros has finally gone home?"

"She has, with all the cavalry. What happened to you? What did you sneak off for?"

"I *didn't* sneak off, anything of the kind—and you know it. I was—I was busy taking care of Percy."

"How is he now?"

"All right. Billy sewed up the cut on his head and— How did she happen to get here just in time?"

"Do you mean Señorita Dolores y Barros, Miss Russell?"

"John, please don't tease me! I—I don't feel like fighting—that is, very much. All those Indians killed, and everything! I—when I was walking along not knowing when that sword was going to—"

"That's right, Betty Jane. Sit down in that old rocker. I won't tease you any more, honest. Do you want a little drink?"

"Yes. But I'm all right here on the desk—if you don't fight with me."

"I won't," John promised, producing a bottle of medicinal supplies and a glass from the drawer of his desk. "Here, drink this, and you'll feel better, Mr. Hard-rock Man."

BETTY JANE obeyed and after a moment announced, "I feel much better, John."

"You ought to; that's five-star stuff! Well, it seems that Dolores was out on some kind of round-up, and heard the firing. A little while before she had met her cousin, the gent I knocked into the fountain. He looked kind of guilty and it didn't take her long to dig out of him that he had sic'd the Injuns on us. She said he seemed to think it was some kind of joke. Anyway, she once more sent him home in disgrace, rounded up a lot of her pa's cowboys and came over. There you are—short, sweet and to the point, Betty Jane."

"And I suppose you thanked her, with tears of joy, and probably kissed her hand and—"

"Hold it, Betty Jane," John interrupted. "You know better than that."

"I do not know better," stated the revived little Miss Russell promptly. "You are— John, what was it that you said to me when you picked me up in your arms?"

"I bawled you out good and proper for disobeying orders and not sticking to your battle-station. Don't you remember?"

"No, I don't remember anything of the kind. You tell me again just what it was you said."

"Listen, Betty Jane, what I said was in the heat of battle. You know, I was so darn' glad to see that you weren't—"

"Never mind that heat-of-battle stuff. It isn't in the heat of battle now. Tell me. That is—if y-you meant what you said."

"I do mean it, Betty Jane," John said gravely. "I mean it—every word. I love you, darling."

"Well," said Betty Jane, sliding along the desk toward John. "It has taken you long enough to tell me! But I love you, too."

John reached out his arms to receive the dainty little Miss Russell. As they closed around her, he heard a muffled voice saying something like: "—And when we are married I'm going to be superintendent of us, Jonathan!"

REAL EXPERIENCES

Most of us have had at least one experience so exciting as to deserve record in print. For this reason we offer each month prizes for the best five true stories of adventurous experience submitted, and publish them here. (For details of this prize contest, see page 3.) First a Canadian tells of the gallant little jockey who pulled him out of a burning horse-barn.

By B. M. STEWERT

Greater Love Hath No Man—

LAST winter I was working in a stock-yard, tending horses and cattle on the night shift. Besides the regular slaughterhouses and barns, there was a section of the yard that was rented out to a large brewing company. In this section the brewing company kept their dray-horses, splendid animals, to the number of sixty-five.

When I had been employed about a month, I was given charge of this stock. I had two assistants: Luke, a short, broad-shouldered, red-faced Yorkshire-man, and Tom, a small pale-faced ex-jockey, who was, I thought at the time, the greatest physical coward I had ever encountered.

Before I was given charge of the stables and Tom made one of my helpers, the men on the night shift used to bully him unmercifully. I dropped the word to several of his chief tormentors that I would consider it a personal matter if they did not immediately cease their baiting of the little fellow, and it soon stopped.

Tom was pathetically grateful; in fact his gratitude became somewhat of a nuisance, as he insisted on following me around in his spare time. Eventually I had to tell him to stop it.

It was one of the coldest nights of last winter; the thermometer was about twelve, and we finished feeding and currying the horses early. I suggested to Tom and Luke that we go to an all-night lunch-room across the street from the yards and get some hot coffee. Barely had we seated ourselves and been served when Luke, who was sitting nearest to a window, suddenly jumped to his feet, yelling: "Fire! *Fire!*"

We all ran to the door and looked out. Flames were dancing over three of the barns across the street; and as we looked two more of them burst into flame. I yelled at Tom to run to the street-corner and pull the fire-alarm box, and with Luke at my heels, I ran toward the fire.

The other men who were on shift were frantically trying to connect a hose to a fire-hydrant when I reached them. I gave them a hand, but when we finally managed to get it connected and opened the valve, no water came out. The plug was frozen.

Part of the pens, used only in the summer, had caught by this time, and the heat in the yard was becoming intense. The snow and ice on the burning buildings and adjacent ground melted fast, and the clouds of smoke and steam

nearly blinded one. I could hear the cattle bawling in the barns, and told some of the men to run and drive them out if it was possible. They dashed away just as the clang of the arriving fire-engines sounded close at hand.

LUKE pulled at my coat sleeve and yelled in my ear that our stables had caught. I looked in that direction, and saw that the back of the building was already alight. Quickly we ran around to the front and dashed inside. The interior was full of smoke, and it was nearly impossible to distinguish an object a foot before one's face.

I could hear the horses stamping and snorting in their individual stalls along each wall. I groped my way toward the nearest, and had nearly reached it when a terror-stricken animal knocked me down and ran over me. It stepped on me—and broke two ribs, I found out later.

I managed to get to my feet and reached the stall. The smoke was getting thicker, making it very difficult for me to breathe. I could see patches of flame now and again. I grasped the halter of the animal in the stall and taking off my sheepskin coat, put it over the beast's head. Blindfolded, it allowed me to lead it to safety. I made fourteen trips into the barn, each time bringing out a horse. Luke joined me, and managed to lead out sixteen, for on three occasions he brought two. Each time I appeared, Tom was at my elbow, tugging at me and half bawling. He kept pleading with me not to go back, but I shook him off and cursed him for being yellow.

The last time I came out, the firemen who were fighting the blaze insisted that I stay out of the building. It was now a flaming torch, and had attracted scores of onlookers from the neighboring houses, who were kept back at a safe distance by a dozen policemen.

From inside the burning stable I could hear the poor horses screaming as they were burned alive. I could not endure the sound. During the months that I had tended them I had grown attached to each animal and the thought of the torture they must be enduring made me a little crazy, I guess. Close beside me was a policeman; he had just shot a steer that had sustained a broken foreleg, and still had his service revolver in his hand. I snatched the weapon from his hand and ran back into the stable.

Inside, it was a small inferno. Horses wild with agony and fear dashed back and forth, screaming. The poor brutes did not seem to realize that safety lay through the open door. I attempted to seize one or two halters, and was knocked down for my pains. I had a glimpse of one poor brute with its coat on fire, and shot it through the head.

I killed the horses until the gun was empty and then tried to make the door. My clothes had caught on fire in several places by this time, and I was nearly suffocated. My strength seemed to go out of my legs all at once, and I fell on my face. I could not get up.

I was not unconscious, though, for I could see and hear all that was going on around me. The whiplike noise that the flames made sounded nearer and nearer to where I lay on a pile of hay. One corner of the building collapsed as I watched.

The pile of hay caught on fire at my side, and I tried to roll off it. Another horse stepped on me; I thought that I was gone.

Then I felt some one trying to lift me. I could not make out who it was, but he seemed to find me very heavy. I remember trying to help, but everything went hazy and I passed out.

IT was the next afternoon when I woke up in a hospital bed. I opened my eyes, to find Luke seated in a chair at my elbow. His face was all scorched, and covered with some kind of ointment. My own face and hands were swathed in bandages, and I felt as though all my body had been burned.

I could talk, though, and I asked Luke what had happened.

He told me that when I had snatched the policeman's gun and disappeared into the stable, several of the firemen had started after me, but the flames had driven them back. Then Tom had suddenly run to the burning doorway and dived inside. Five minutes later he had appeared, dragging me by one arm. His clothes were nearly burned off him, and when the firemen took me from him, he was blind. We had been placed in the same ambulance and rushed to the hospital. Tom had died an hour afterward.

I am not ashamed to admit that I cried like a baby when Luke told me. I'll always remember that little ex-jockey. I knew him well enough to know that he must have been horribly frightened when he came in after me.

But he did come.

Rocket Dead Ahead, Sir!

A dangerous rescue at sea described by a sailor-writer already well-known through his book "The Log of a Limejuicer."

By ROLAND BARKER

A FIERCE northwesterly gale and heavy seas raged along the eastern coast of Australia. Outside the Nobby's Head, tall gatepost of the harbor of Newcastle, New South Wales, the weather had taken full charge of things and many ships were scurrying for cover. I watched the arrival in port of several of these prudent vessels through the rain and spray which swept in sheets against the pilot-house windows of my father's command, the British freighter *Lord Cromer*. The *Lord Cromer* lay at her dock ready to sail, having just finished loading a cargo of Carrington coal destined on time charter for Valparaiso, Chile, nearly ten thousand miles distant across the Pacific.

It was with keen excitement that I heard Captain Barker announce that afternoon that despite the weather he had decided to proceed to sea. My father knew his ship and what she could do; the turmoil of waters beyond the long twin breakwaters at the mouth of the harbor seemed to hold no fears for him.

Therefore the *Lord Cromer's* lines were hauled aboard and we moved down the heaving harbor. Beyond the breakwaters the full fury of the weather struck us, and the land was soon blotted away by the chaos of gale and water astern. Under a sodden gray sky, giant seas shouldered out of the northwest against the port quarter of the *Lord Cromer* and drove us pitching on toward the rolling horizon, our propeller racing madly in the intervals when it was lifted out of the seas.

I was delighted. My July vacation from grade school had just begun, and now the long-promised privilege of a voyage in the *Lord Cromer* was mine.

The *Lord Cromer* was a colorful ship, especially in the eyes of a schoolboy most of whose dreams had been of open water and the deep seas. Her black-gang was made up of Mongolians, a striking body of men, not one of them being less than six feet tall, which distinguished them from any Chinamen I had ever seen before. They kept very strictly to themselves and had even brought aboard their own odd provisions, notably a hundred pounds of dried octopus tentacles.

The rest of the men were Britishers, all of fine type. . . .

There was no let-up in the weather. When I crawled between the sheets on the second night out, the ship was still at Slow Ahead, running before it. I woke at one A.M. My father was bent over his desk, with his wet sou'wester and oilskins glistening in the yellow light of an oil lamp which swung incessantly in its beckets. The door opened with a bang, and in came a blast of wind, sheets of rain, and the second mate.

"Captain!" he said. "Captain Barker! I've just seen a rocket dead ahead, sir!"

My father spun around. "My God, sir!" he said, and hurried up onto the bridge. I sprang out of the bunk and listened. Through the droning of the gale I could hear their footsteps in the pilot-house overhead, then my father's voice: "Steady, now. Keep her slow ahead!"

Twenty minutes later the door swung open again, the wind screaming wildly, and my father returned. He smiled at me and wrapped me in a blanket and waterproof, then carried me onto the bridge, out into the lee of the dripping weather-cloth, and pointed ahead into the blackness. All I could see were giant indistinct outlines, a bit blacker than the night, with ghostly white water foaming at their crests.

A trail of reddish fire climbed into the night, curled over, and burst.

"That's a rocket, laddie!" Dad shouted above the weather. "A ship in distress. Probably a number of men aboard her! They need our help."

In the pilot-house, he set me down. I watched the dim forms, the captain, the two officers, the quartermaster at the wheel. At long intervals, two more rockets curved up out of the inky welter beyond our bows. The fourth, perilously close, came with the first hint of dawn.

"Port one point!" My father snatched me up and made for the starboard weather-cloth. With my eyes barely above the canvas, I could see nothing unusual at first in the vague mountainous forms of the seas which built themselves up and up and slid away into yawning hollows all about us. Then, on a crest some hundred yards distant, a hulk appeared. It sank from sight, then I could see white water boiling as if over a submerged rock, and a schooner's battered hull rose out of the water itself, liquid tons pouring off her as she wallowed broadside in the troughs. Her masts were snapped off about ten feet above the decks and floated in a tangle of rigging to leeward. Men were lashed on her poop. We could make out five who had bound themselves to the rails, and one at the wheel. This man, my father said, must be the master.

He put me down, and swinging up his trumpet roared: "I'm standing by you till daylight! Be of good cheer!"

Two barrels of oil were hove on deck, and as soon as it grew light enough to see what we were about we began to pour them slowly through the lee scupper-holes. The *Lord Cromer's* way was all but stopped and she was held partially athwart the path of the driving seas, sheltering the schooner under her lee as the two vessels drifted down the storm. A thin film of oil was spreading across the intervening expanse, somewhat checking the breaking of the crests, but the furious heave of those great hills and watery gullies boded trouble for the oarsmen who must venture over the side.

AN hour after the sighting of the wreck, my father called for volunteers. It gives one a thrill of pride to recall that every man aboard the *Lord Cromer* showed himself willing to go—with the exception of the Mongolian firemen, a group of whom had climbed up from the stokehold by the fiddley-ladder and stood on the boat deck jabbering excitedly, their pigtails whipping like loose halyards in the gale. Fascinated, fatalistic, they followed the drama of those hours like spectators at a play. Meantime a boat's crew was being told off sharply. Chief Engineer Jimmy Brown cried: "How about it, Captain? You'll need an engineer to keep 'em going!" The boat aft of the bridge had been made ready, and Mr. Taylor was placed in charge, with Mr. Brown and our five best seamen grouped around him as they prepared to take their places.

With Mr. Taylor at the stern-sheets, Mr. Brown in the bow, both officers ready to unhook the falls, the frail white craft was swung out with a lurch and lowered away. A vast dark sea welled up to meet it as the ship suddenly rolled, and horror swept through me as I watched the abrupt demolition of that boat. Crushed against the ship's plates with an impact all hands aboard could feel beneath their feet, it was smashed like an eggshell and dissolved into fragments which splashed into the receding water.

And then, staring, I saw a miracle of agility and boatmanship. It took place almost before I realized. Somehow, all seven of the men were clinging to the dangling falls and were shinnying up the strands toward safety. And as soon as each man's feet struck the boat deck he made for the next boat aft and climbed into it. In a moment, they were again dropping toward the waves.

THIS time they caught a receding sea and got clear of the *Lord Cromer*. Through the pall of smoky spray which drove from high-tossed crests to windward, the boat drew away from the ship, rising and falling, at one moment lifted as high as the bridge, at the next plowing down a shifting watery slope to begin its new ascent from a valley some fifty feet below us. At last we saw them round the schooner's rolling stern and vanish to leeward of the wreck. The six men of the wreck were watching numbly from the rails and stanchions where they hung as if crucified. With an effort the figure at the wheel-post freed himself from his lashings, balanced, hauled the rope of his bonds toward him and coiled it. Then he made his way down over the flooded planking to the lee quarter and flung the line to the boat. We could see the heads and shoulders of our men, and their long ash oars which swirled and backed in the sea.

Waiting their chances, the men of the schooner let go their lashings and made for the line. One by one they slid down it. Samuel Craig, the schooner's donkeyman, suddenly relaxed his hold while between the deck and the rescuers and dropped into the water like a stone. A seaman of ours, Conroy by name, lunged over the gunwale and gripped Craig by the hair. Strong arms heaved him into the boat.

LAST of all went the captain, and as he was guided to a place on a thwart, our boat fell away from the dark wreck. I watched them pull into sight around her stern, deep laden, and their toilsome, perilous progress as they pulled back toward the ship. I gazed at the schooner again, a specter-ship abandoned to the mercy of the whelming deep, her spirit still in her as she drifted away. Living men had left her and it was her time to die, alone.

And now Mr. Brown and Mr. Taylor hooked in the elusive falls and twelve men scrambled wearily up them to our deck. The thirteenth, Jim Mullin, cook of the ill-fated schooner, was almost dead. The shock had been too much for him, and he was hoisted aboard with a line passed under his arms. He and his mates, who were all half frozen, were laid on the warm gratings amidships where the hot draught rising from the engine-room began to thaw them out.

I went below to our cabin as the throb of our engines increased its beat and the *Lord Cromer* gathered way. It was now seven-thirty in the morning, and gray light came through the cabin ports. Before I had been sitting there long I heard the tread of clumping sea boots and my father came in with an elderly man down whose weathered cheeks tears rolled.

"Captain Barker," he said as they stepped inside, "I've been going to sea for forty years and this is the first time I've ever lost a ship. Well, I suppose you'll have to dump us on the dock at Valpo."

My father put an arm around the older man's shoulders and hastily poured a glass of toddy.

"Here, Captain Cringall—drink this down, sir, and leave everything else to me. I want you to get into my bunk, go to sleep, and try to forget everything. Now then, laddie"—he said to me—"climb down from that bunk to make room for Captain Cringall!"

Then Dad introduced us. "Captain Cringall, this is my son." And the captain told us that he had a boy my age back home in Newcastle.

Valpo and the time charter notwithstanding, the *Lord Cromer* was immediately headed back to port. It was about three o'clock two mornings afterward when we arrived in the lee of the Nobby's Head breakwater and hove to, the wind being down a bit but the sea still high. A message was flashed in Morse to the signal station on the Head, reporting the incident and giving the position of the derelict, a menace to navigation.

Half an hour later the old pilot-steamer *Ajax* hove alongside us in the dark.

"My God, Barker!" bawled a loud voice from her bridge. "What the devil are you doing back in Newcastle? Thought you were halfway to Valparaiso by this time!"

"Never mind that, Pilot Jones!" Dad sang out. "Get that boat over the side! These men want to get home in time for breakfast—and I want to get to Valpo!"

In Newcastle, the men of the schooner —*Tramp* was her name—spent the rest of the night comfortably in the Sailors' Home. This we learned later, for as soon as the transfer had been effected, my father sent for the chief engineer.

"Brown," he said, "we've got to get along to Valparaiso without losing too much time on that charter, sir!"

"Don't worry, Captain, I'll make those engines sweat blood," said Brown.

So he did, and they drove us all the way from the Nobby's Head to Reeftopsail Point with a most agonizing hee-honk refrain which never ceased till we had entered Valparaiso Harbor, to dock only a day overtime. No claim for the extra day was ever entered against the ship by the charterers.

BUT ah, the thrill of the scareheads in the newspapers my mother had saved at home, and the pleasure of fingering the medal of the Royal Shipwreck and Humane Society which my father received for his part in the work of those tense hours following the burst of the rockets! From the Commonwealth, an engraved silver tea service and pair of binoculars came his way, and with them a certificate, illustrated with classical forms, which now hangs on my wall.

"To James P. Barker for bravery at sea in rescuing the crew of the dismasted schooner Tramp, *during a heavy gale and high seas off the coast of New South Wales in the Pacific Ocean on the 5th of July, 1913."*

The Pigtail

By ELIZABETH

FAR to the northwest of Pt. Augusta in South Australia, across gibber and saltbush country, Coolibah Station lay hazed in a mirage of heat as my brother John and I in our light wagonette pulled out of the low scrub and struck across the soft bluebush plains to the distant homestead with its shady coolibahs and giant sentinel windmills.

We were returning from taking provisions to the jackaroos on the east boundary fence some miles back, and I was heaving a sigh of relief at leaving behind us the muffling dust and sticky flies of the scrub track, when I noticed a "swaggy" some distance ahead, making for the station.

He hailed us as we overtook him, and when John pulled up the horses I looked with instinctive dislike into the upturned face of a Chinaman—undoubtedly a Chinaman, but quite unlike the inoffensive yellow man one usually sees. An admixture of Mongol or Tartar blood had darkened his broad, flat face to a red-bronze, and his black, slanting eyes glinted sullenly. Beneath his hat a pigtail of coarse hair was braided close to his head.

Though I knew John was needing fresh hands with the lambing season ahead, a prickle of unease shivered my spine as he pointed with his whip and the Chinaman climbed up and took his seat behind me. I felt conscious of snaky eyes slithering over our backs, as we rode on to our homestead.

When we reached the house, I pulled John's sleeve as we watched Kem Sing, as he called himself, walk across to the men's quarters and I protested:

"John, I just can't bear the look of that man. You're surely not taking him on as cook, are you?"

A smile crinkled John's tanned face. "Cook? That fellow? Oh, he'll do anything he's wanted to. You don't want to put Dinah and Nobby off the job, I suppose."

Dinah, a kindly, decent lubra, cooked for the house, and Nobby, her spouse, did for the men.

"No, and I don't want to wake up one fine day and find that we've all been poisoned, either."

John grunted expressively. "Rot! You women are full of fancies. He's just the big, strong sort of chap I've been looking for, and I don't suppose you'll be seeing much of him at the house."

True enough, I saw very little of Kem Sing for some time, as he was watering sheep at a distant billabong and camped on his job; and as the weeks passed I ceased to wonder about him at all. But gradually the rush of work concentrated near the homestead and the Chinaman took up his quarters with the other men. And then hints of trouble began to come in from the boys, and Kem's face grew even more sullen and repellent than before.

"What's all this about Kem?" I asked Bob, a fresh-faced young jackaroo, as he pumped a bucket of water in the yard one day.

"He's a damned yellow hound!" Bob's voice was tense with feeling.

"You say that because he's a Chinaman!" I taunted, anxious to hear what the trouble really was.

"He's only a half-caste, and scum at that!" Bob flashed indignantly. "A decent Chink wouldn't cheat at cards!"

"So that's it, is it? Why didn't you tell him off?"

"Can't catch him at it; he's too snaky! But he'll get what's coming to him one of these days!" Bob snapped.

I felt I was making a fool of myself when I found myself glancing nervously behind if dusk caught me still far from the homestead when I had ridden out on some errand for John. And I laughed angrily and twitted myself for a craven when I decided to move my stretcher from the fresh, open veranda to the stuffy interior of the house. Try as I

# of Kem Sing

MARLOWE

A woman on a remote Australian sheep "station" saves her brother from the attack of a vengeful half-caste.

would I could not rid myself of a shrinking dread of the man.

Then one day as I sat sewing by the kitchen window I saw the Chinaman, enraged at tripping over the tomcat which had blundered beneath his feet, seize the animal by his tail, and swinging him violently round, strike his head with a sickening thud against the fence. Rushing out, I told him in good round Australian what a cruel, vindictive devil he was, and that I hoped that he would be put off the place for what he had done to my cat! But my rage was quenched in cold fear at the sudden gleam of malignancy in the black, unblinking eyes, and the Chinaman's unbroken silence; and swallowing a frightened sob, I hurried off into the house.

AS I was helping Dinah with the dinner a few weeks later, we heard a shrill screaming from little Jimmy, her small pickaninny; and running out, we saw Kem Sing holding the little fellow by an ear while he laid a switch about the small bare legs.

With a spring like a wildcat, Dinah launched herself against the Chinaman, forcing him with clawing fingers to release his hold of her terrified offspring, just as John rode into the yard, and demanded the reason of the uproar.

It was some time before Jimmy's sobs subsided and we could make out his childish tale of throwing his tiny boomerang as Kem was mounting his horse.

He was a mischievous little imp, and delighted to play innocent pranks on the men, who laughed and encouraged him; when he would throw his small weapon at them, the boys would skip and jump in pretended terror. But surly Kem Sing had a strange lack of humor, and poor little Jimmy was petrified with fright when the Chinaman pounced on him instead of playing the splendid game of pretense which should have followed the attack with the boomerang.

I noticed now that John was careful to set Kem Sing's work farther afield, and he was seldom in the house-yard. Little black Jimmy played his saucy pranks unmolested, and the stone grave he was building above the remains of old Tom grew high and fine.

Work went steadily on at Coolibah, and I tried to forget Kem's flat face and oblique, furtive eyes. I knew that John kept him only because we were so short-handed, for Kem was a steady worker, and experienced hands were scarce. . . .

And then came the news of Kem Sing's dismissal following a dispute at cards. The game had consistently gone the Chinaman's way, as had happened often of late, and young Bob, who had lost heavily, had dashed his fist into Kem's face and accused him of being a cheat and a rotter. A fierce fight followed, and Kem, backing against a table snatched up a skinning-knife and succeeded in slashing Bob's arm before the men could interfere and disarm him.

Next morning I could think of nothing but Kem Sing's departure, and neglected my work to run to the kitchen window, where securely hidden by the curtains, I at last saw the Chinaman emerge from his hut, and after standing motionless in the doorway for some time staring steadily down at the house, he hitched up his swag, and taking a billy and a bundle from the box by the door, he turned and followed the track leading across the bluebush plains.

I waited until I judged him to be well on his way and then ran up to the gate, and screwing my eyes against the sunglare, watched his figure dwindle and disappear into the distant scrub line.

So glad was I to see the last of him that I felt as happy as a sand-boy, and I ran back to the house singing gayly and thankfully.

THAT afternoon when little Jimmy begged for a game, I promised him that in the afternoon we would take nets and lines and old Ranger the dog and catch yabbies at Wilson's dam. But when we were all ready to go Jimmy came pounding in to tell me "him dog plenty bad sick-fellah."

We tried every remedy inside and out that we could think of, but in spite of all, poor old Ranger stiffened and died, and the pickaninny and I wept together.

John's face was grim when he came in later and we stood looking down at the faithful old hound.

"Was it the sun, John?" I asked anxiously. John looked at me soberly for a second, then shook his head:

"It's poison, if I know anything about it," he said.

A picture flashed before my eyes—Kem Sing standing in the doorway of his hut, his brooding stare fixed on the house.

NIGHT came, sultry and oppressive. When John rose from his books and stretched himself, announcing his intention of going off to bed as he was dog-tired, I felt strangely reluctant to leave the brightly-lit room and his company.

Some hours later I found myself sitting bolt upright in bed, a heavy pounding in my chest and my eyes wide and strained, striving desperately to pierce the soft blackness which closed me in, my senses keyed up to something which threatened and menaced me. And then, shattering the silence, a long roll of thunder muttered away into the distance. A dingo howled as he nosed his hungry way around the sheep, seeking to make his kill.

Slipping silently from the bed, I crept to the window and stared wide-eyed into the night, searching again and again each dense shadow, each separate clump of bushes in the narrow stretch of garden skirting the long veranda.

A sudden glare of lightning flashed the countryside into naked brilliance; and in that split second I saw the crouched figure of a man hunched against a dense oleander. For a moment I was spellbound, stricken dumb and motionless with the realization of my fears; and then, watching tensely, I saw the shadow detach itself and move cautiously inch by inch toward the far end of the veranda.

That it was Kem Sing and he was aiming to avenge himself on John, I had no shadow of doubt; and a sudden cold fury spurred me into action. Snatching up a shotgun from the corner of the room, where it stood ready loaded to deal with the army of sparrows which chattered and wrangled at early dawn, I slipped along the passage and out of a door opening on to the veranda.

Keeping close-pressed to the wall, I moved swiftly along, my bare feet soundless on the boards, lightning flickering and flashing across the thick darkness.

At the corner I waited, listening intently, until the slight creak of a board warned me that the intruder was stepping onto the veranda. With thudding pulses, and hardly daring to breathe, I gripped the gun tightly against me, forcing myself to wait till a blue searchlight of lightning showed me the Chinaman moving stealthily toward John's stretcher, his long pigtail held in both hands in front of him.

I think I was prepared for the gleam of a knife or a weapon of some sort; but the cold malignancy of that rope of hair revolted and stunned me as I realized that it was to be used to strangle John.

A wild shriek of warning tore my throat as I swung the gun round and pulled the trigger. With a startled curse the Chinaman straightened up, then plunged away into the darkness.

I knew no more till I opened my eyes in the lighted sitting-room to see John standing beside me awkwardly bathing my face and looking worried and anxious.

I stared for a minute, then sobbed with relief as I hung on to his hand. So I hadn't shot John, after all! I'm sure it was the frantic fear that I had got him instead of the Chinaman when the gun roared beneath the veranda which had turned me craven and faint.

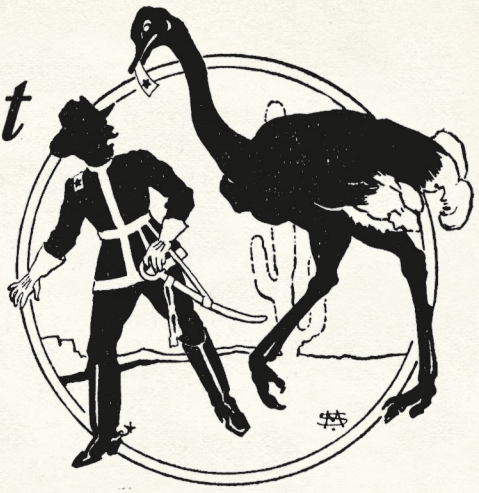
But John said there was nothing to be ashamed of if I did faint, that any girl would do that. And I had saved his life.

MY story was quickly told, and the boys were roused; they searched the sheds and around the homestead, but the rain was now lashing down, and the darkness hampered them. Kem Sing got clean away.

In the early morning the boys saddled and rode out for miles around, but the heavy rain had washed out any tracks there might have been, and they had to abandon the search. It was extremely unlikely that the man would ever venture back again—he had had too severe a fright. We were well rid of him.

Weeks later, when John was in Pt. Augusta, he made inquiries and learned that a Chinaman had been treated at the hospital for a gunshot wound in the arm, which he told them had occurred while out rabbit-shooting. After leaving the hospital he disappeared completely, and from that day to this we have heard nothing of him.

The Mascot



The regimental mascot was an ostrich, and he loved bright things like silver stars.

By COLONEL GEORGE RODNEY

HE started in the regiment as a mascot but he won a general's stars. And he stood nearly eight feet high from his black head to his two-toed, horny feet.

I first heard of him on a cold November day in southern Arizona when my adjutant entered my office followed by Captain Blake, commanding the machine-gun troop of the regiment. The adjutant remarked casually:

"Captain Blake wishes to speak to you, sir, about a bird for the troop."

It was nearly Thanksgiving and the only bird in men's minds was *Turkey!*

"I'd like to buy one for the troop, sir," said Captain Blake. "If it meets with your approval."

"Go ahead," I said—busy with a lot of forage returns. "That's all right."

Two weeks later the adjutant laid before me some papers for signature and the very first one read: *"Expressage for one bird from Phoenix . . . . $11.20"*

"What the devil does this mean?" I demanded. "What sort of a bird?"

"I presume it will be turkeys for the troop, sir." But the adjutant was puzzled, for he knew the quartermaster supplies all turkey for the messes on holidays.

"We'll just take a look-see," I said.

Most of the regiment was massed about the machine troop stables, and a voice shrilled out as we approached:

"Look at 'im! By God, he's like the General! Lookit the way he grabbed that seegar! Just like the General when the Y. M. C. A. man hands seegars at the prize-fights!"

"Hyeah! Lookit his toes! The bone-setters'll have a time findin' shoes fer him. Look out! Here comes the Old Man."

The group scattered as I came up. Horses, lines, all were as they should be. Then I caught sight of something else; above the heads of the crowd, wriggling like a snake but with an iron picket-pin in his mouth, I saw the head and neck of a huge ostrich.

I beckoned to Captain Blake.

"Where did that damned thing come from?" I demanded.

"That, sir? Why, that—that's the bird you authorized me to buy for the troop, sir. It's our new mascot." And he began hurriedly to explain the bird's fine points, though handicapped by the limitations of a cavalryman's vocabulary:

"He's got fine hocks, sir, but his withers are mighty high, and I don't like his crest. His tail's set on too straight, too, sir, and—"

Two unseen critics on the other side of the hay-pile made comment:

"Aye, God! Just look, will yuh! When he walks, his bloomin' tail shakes just like the General's at a dismounted formation. Lookit!"

From that day on, the bird was called "The General."

An average bull ostrich stands nearly eight feet high and weighs about three hundred pounds. He has two toes on each foot, and he kicks straight to the front, like a man. In two days his new owners discovered why they had been able to buy that bird at a bargain. In the first place he had a most inordinate curiosity and an insatiable appetite for anything that was bright and shiny; not a tent or door could be closed to him. If he could get the end of his beak under a door, he managed to pry it open, and he had a magpie's love for bright things. It was only a few days before the adjutant appeared at the door of my office.

"Sir," he said, "Horseshoer Brown of Troop B would like to speak to you."

Before I could reply, Horseshoer Brown entered. He brought with him a

breath slightly tainted with rye whisky, and peppermint, so I knew he had been "warming up" at the troop kitchen.

"Sir," he began tempestuously, "I'd like to ask if somep'in can't be did about that damn' bird—I mean the General, sir! I was a year at the Blacksmiths School at Fort Riley. While I was there, they made each of us forge a set of miniature horseshoer's tools just to show what we could do. I made a whole outfit an' had 'em nickelplated. They was tacked to a black velvet shield, an' I nailed it up in my shop. While I was shoein' the Captain's horse today, that damn' bird come nosin' around. . . . I heerd a sort of a tap-tap—an' when I looked up, that bird had eat all my tools an' was chewin' at the velvet—"

Then I overheard the chaplain:

"Really, Captain, some action must be taken. I had collected six dollars and fifteen cents to buy magazines and newspapers for the prisoners. I had it in a box on my desk under my window. This morning while I was in my shower-bath, I heard a noise. I glanced in at the desk, and that—that pestilential ostrich had swallowed it all!"

"Tell Captain Blake to get rid of that bird within twelve hours," I ordered the adjutant.

"Sir, the men have planned to take him to the Thanksgiving Day football game tomorrow as the Troop mascot. Can they keep him till after the game?"

"All right. But not an hour longer."

THANKSGIVING DAY was cold and cloudy, with a dust-storm making. Dinner ended, I saw the regimental band forming behind the football team, and at the head of the team paraded that accursed bird. A saddler had made for him a collar of white enamel leather about two feet high, ornamented with the regimental number in brass nails. Two long, light chains were fastened to the collar, and he was being led by two trumpeters. The big bird stepped high and daintily, his neck weaving to and fro as he passed the massed lines of the rival regiment, whose mascot was a burro. Even in heaven there will be keen rivalry between cavalry regiments—if cavalry ever gets to heaven. Shouts and cat-calls made a pandemonium. Then one of the opposing team gave the bird an orange!

The bird snatched at it as he did at anything colorful or bright. Fascinatedly I watched that orange being swallowed. I could trace it every inch of that four-foot neck—till it struck the top of the leather collar! Then it stopped! The big bird gave a leap, then a convulsive wriggle, and threw himself down, with two men on top of him. One man held him down while the other straddled the sinuous neck, seized it with both hands and squeezed it as one might squeeze a rubber tube to force out the contents. I could see the orange moving slowly upward till finally it came out of the open beak like a bullet from a gun.

"They done it a-purpose," shrilled McGinty of D Troop. "They was tryin' to kill our mascot!"

A convenient singletree gave him a temporary advantage, but he lost it as a man hit him with an iron picket-pin in a nose-bag. Then the dust of battle rose in a cloud, from which came shrill voices:

"Hold him, I tell you! Ow! Damn it, leggo my ears! Stop bitin'! This aint no dog-fight!"

The provost guards of both regiments sailed in, hitting every head they could reach till the crowd filtered away; from the dust emerged the mascot, minus his collar and with a blouse-sleeve hanging from his open beak. At that moment the real General arrived, justly incensed at the riot. He cursed, placed four innocent bystanders under arrest, sent two officers to their quarters—and at that moment caught sight of the mascot.

The two generals eyed each other askance. One stood, not much more than five feet high, red-faced and angry, with brand-new silver stars glittering on his shoulders. The other stood nearly eight feet high, elated by successful combat, and he coveted all bright things. The long neck weaved; the head shot forward and back, and the horny feet lifted in a rhythmic sort of cadence. . . . Then he moved—forward!

"Look out, sir!"

An agile aide ducked under an automobile just ahead of the real General.

"Get well under, sir. He's on the prod!"

("He sure give the General two pecks an' a quart," said Private Devlin later. "An'—he got the stars he wanted.")

"Get that damned bird," shouted a dust-choked voice from under the car. "Some of you men round him up!"

It took ten men, and they had their hands full as they led the General away to the tune of "Fuss and Feathers" by the massed bands; and in the mascot's beak hung a khaki shoulder-strap that bore a general's star.

What an American saw—and did—when a Mexican bandit captured the town!

By ARTHUR CLARK

The Bandit Raid

THE average tourist in Mexico sees only a colorful land, gay with flowers and filled with laughing dark-skinned people, whose babies roll under one's feet from every doorway. Everywhere there is music, no house is without an instrument of some description. But there is another side that the tourist rarely sees, a dark and deadly side. It is the eternal small bands of bandits who terrorize whole communities and kill indiscriminately.

On Thursday, May 10th, 1934, I arrived with my partner, John Holden, in the small town of Santo Domingo in the state of Oaxaca. We were delivering a truckload of machinery to a rancher of the vicinity, who had just become converted to modern American methods. Señor Morales had left word that we were to stay at the hotel, at his expense, until Monday. I wanted to take the truck and a guide and push on to the ranch at once, but the *jefe* said that the road was unsafe, as a local bandit named Cruz had been raiding in the vicinity for ten days.

It was late next morning when we rose, and after bathing in a wash-basin we went down to breakfast. The meal was served to us on a small piazza or side porch. I was just pouring my second cup of coffee when a sudden long yell from the street, followed almost immediately by a burst of rifle-shots, caused me to crane my neck around a post.

Down the street at full gallop came a group of horsemen, firing their rifles at every window that they passed. As they drew level with the hotel, their leader, a short, stocky man wearing a huge white sombrero, and with crossed cartridge-belts spanning his chest, looked straight at me. Then with a wild yell he threw his rifle to his shoulder and fired, directly at me. The speeding horse made his aim inaccurate, and the bullet hit the wall about ten feet from where I sat. I dropped the coffee with an exclamation. Johnny, who from where he was sitting could not see the street, asked what the devil all the shooting was about.

At that moment the landlord appeared. He was shaking so badly that we could not understand what he was trying to say at first. Eventually we understood that these horsemen were the band of Cruz.

The landlord wanted us to get out of sight as quickly as possible. There seemed sense in this suggestion, and so we followed him inside. From our bedroom window we watched the bandits dismount in front of the City Hall and pour into the building. A few minutes later there came the sound of shots from the interior, and several people ran from the main doorway.

About half an hour later there came the dull boom of an explosion from inside the City Hall. The landlord, who was peering out the window at my side, chattered that the bandits must have dynamited the safe and added that the bank would probably be next on their list.

Hardly had he finished speaking when three men scurried out of the bank, which was nearly opposite the hotel and began to put up heavy wooden shutters over the windows. As soon as they had done so, they scuttled back inside at a speed that would have been ludicrous at any other time.

I glanced at my watch. It was eleven-thirty A.M. A few moments later the bandits appeared, and leaving four of their men lounging on the steps of the City Hall, the remainder mounted their horses and rode in our direction until they came to the shuttered edifice of the bank. Here at a word from the leader in the white sombrero, whom I judged to be Cruz himself, they dismounted and some of them began to pound on the big

wooden door with the butts of their rifles. I counted them, and including the leader there were eighteen of them. They were a wild-looking lot, unshaven and wearing plenty of weapons.

Cruz seemed to grow impatient when those inside the bank failed to open in response to the pounding on the door. I heard him order five of the raiders to go to the rear of the building. When they had disappeared around the corner, he ordered those in front to try and shoot the lock off the door.

Three of them placed the muzzles of their rifles against it and fired; there were no appreciable results. It seemed to me as though the door must have been bolted as well as locked.

Then from the rear there came three or four rifle-shots, and some one screamed. At the same instant a man came around the corner of the building, running at top speed. From his dress I judged him to be a clerk or the manager.

He had gone perhaps fifteen yards when Cruz drew a pistol. Leisurely he raised it, and then snapping it down, pulled the trigger. The running man stumbled and fell forward on his face.

John leaned out the window beside me and shook his fist at the bandit leader. "You rotten murdering devil!" he yelled.

CRUZ looked up at the sound of the foreign tongue, and for an instant I thought he was going to shoot; but just then the men who had gone to the rear of the bank opened the door. Shouting something at John in Spanish, Cruz dismounted and went inside.

Suddenly around the corner of the street came two men on horseback. They were dressed in an olive drab uniform I recognized as that of the *rurales* (the Mexican rural police force). They saw the group of horses in front of the bank, guarded by three of the bandits, and spurred their own forward.

The bandits in charge of the horses saw them, and one ran inside the bank while the others threw up their rifles and fired at the policemen. The latter widened the distance between them a little and drew their revolvers. The bandits fired again, and then the officers shot them down.

From the bank door a dozen rifles sounded, and the nearest policeman threw up his arms and tumbled to the ground. His companion did not pause, but spurred his animal and shot on down the street. The bandits ran out into the street and fired at him, but we saw him turn the corner, apparently uninjured.

The landlord babbled excitedly that the surviving policeman had gone to get help. All the telephone wires leading out of the town were cut, he said, and the *rurale* might have to ride twenty miles before he could send word to the soldiers at the next large city.

Johnny and I went over to our baggage and got the pistols we always carried on a journey, and while we were doing so, the landlord went downstairs. More shooting from the street caused us to run back to the window. We saw the bandits, their leader carrying two small, apparently very heavy sacks, leaving the bank. It was evident that they had not done the shooting.

We looked toward the City Hall and saw that the four men who had been sitting on the steps had disappeared. While we were looking, they came out of an adjacent store, their arms loaded with loot. Another man, evidently the owner of the place, followed them and commenced to tug at the arm of the last bandit. That individual dropped his load and struck the storekeeper with the butt of his rifle.

The men who had looted the bank joined the other four, and the whole party entered the City Hall. No guards were left outside this time. They seemed contemptuous of the townsfolk's courage.

Down in the street the fallen bandits, policeman and clerk had been left lying in the sun. I did not care very much about the bandits; their own comrades had not spared them a second glance; but that the bodies of the clerk and policeman should lie there seemed indecent to me. I asked Johnny if he would come with me and bring them inside while the bandits were out of sight. When he nodded, we went downstairs.

The landlord had barred the heavy door, and when Johnny and I opened it, he began to expostulate and tried to stop us. A group of women in a corner added their voices to his. Paying no attention, I opened the door and we ran across the street. The clerk was farthest away, and I picked the body up. He was of slight build, and I had no trouble in carrying him. I noticed that Johnny seemed to be handling the policeman's body very carefully, and that though he was nearer the hotel than I, he was behind me when I reached the door. The landlord was just about to shut it when I arrived, and I pushed so violently against it that he fell over.

I walked in and laid the clerk's body in one corner. Johnny followed me, but laid his burden on a couch. He said the *rurale* was still alive.

Together we examined the man. He had been shot four times, but none of the wounds, though bad, was in a vital spot. The excited landlord brought water and some cloths for bandages. With the help of his wife, who seemed very capable, I bound up the wounds. When we had finished, I asked the landlord if there was a doctor in town. He said there was, but that he would not go to get him.

I said that I would go myself if some one would tell me where he lived. A young boy, evidently one of the hotel servants, said that he would accompany me. I told him to lead the way before he could change his mind. We went out the back door, which opened on another street. As I hurried along behind the boy, I saw people dodging into their houses.

It was not far to the Doctor's house, and he was at home. I explained what had happened. At first he was reluctant to go, as his wife and three children would be left alone; but when I offered to stay with them until he returned, he accompanied the boy back to the hotel.

His wife, Señora Gomez, was very nervous, and for the next hour I chatted about this and that in an effort to distract her thoughts from the presence of the bandits in the town. At the end of that time Doctor Gomez returned, bringing with him Johnny and another man, who were carrying the wounded policeman. The Doctor said that he would require almost constant attention; and as he himself could not stay at the hotel, he had decided that if the wounded man was handled carefully, he could be moved.

I helped the Doctor put the wounded man to bed in an upstairs room. The man who had helped Johnny carry him from the hotel had left, being anxious to get back to his family. Johnny and I were preparing to go, when Doctor Gomez inquired if we would not care to stay at his residence until the raid was over, adding that he would appreciate our presence in the house in case the bandits paid him a visit.

I did not like the idea of being so far away from our truck and the machinery, but if the bandits wanted it, they would in all probability get it whether we were there or not. Johnny, too, thought we might as well stay where we were.

About two hours later there came a loud knocking on the front door. The Doctor opened it while Johnny and I stood behind him with our guns in our

hands. There was no cause for alarm, though, for about a dozen women and girls, accompanied by two men, were at the door. There were also several small children with the women. They asked the Doctor if they could stay in his house for the night, saying they did not believe the bandits would bother them there.

Doctor Gomez gave them permission, and questioned the men as to what the bandits were doing. They said that the mayor's secretary had been shot, also two clerks who had been in the City Hall when the raiders arrived. The bandits had looted all the stores and were now engaged in going from house to house seizing everything of any value. One man added that his brother had gone to the nearest ranches on horseback to try and get help, and that a good many of the people were deserting their homes and slipping out of town in the darkness.

DURING the next few hours a dozen more women and children arrived to seek the Doctor's protection. They all told of having their homes looted.

No raider had appeared at the house by midnight, and we began to congratulate ourselves on the fact. But about one A. M. we heard the sound of drunken singing approaching the house. Some of the women and children began to cry and the Doctor ordered all upstairs.

He armed himself with a shotgun, and when one of the two men produced a rather rusty-looking pistol, gave the other a revolver. The shutters had been placed on the windows hours before. We heard the raiders stop outside the door, then came a profane command to let them in. We did not answer, and some one began to pound with a rifle-butt.

Johnny raised his gun and fired twice through the door, about waist high. There came a gasping sort of scream, and the pounding stopped. Then there were angry shouts, and a bullet came through a shutter, and the window-pane tinkled to the floor. I fired in reply.

The Doctor put out the oil lamp and asked the man with the rusty revolver to go upstairs and reassure the women. His voice was shaking, but otherwise he seemed cool enough. The other man had gone to the rear of the house to guard it, now we heard him yell once and then shoot three times. The Doctor ran back to see if he needed any help.

Two or three bullets came through the front door. Leaving Johnny alone, I ran upstairs and cautiously peered out a window, from which I could see the raiders clearly in the street. There appeared to be about ten of them. One was lying just in front of the door, and I judged he was the man who had screamed when Johnny had fired through the door. I rested the barrel of my gun on the window-ledge and emptied it at the raiders. I heard a yell, and then I saw them running down the street. For the rest of the night I sat at the window. The bandits did not return, but later we saw a house on fire down-street.

Up until noon the next morning the situation remained unchanged. We heard an occasional shot, but sighted none of the raiders. Evidently they had decided that looting the Doctor's residence would prove a costly affair. At noon about fifty men on horseback galloped past the house. They were followed by three cars loaded with armed men. In one car I saw two men in the uniforms of *rurales*.

They must have taken the bandits by surprise, for there was very little shooting. A few minutes after the cars had passed, eleven bandits, with their white-hatted leader well in the van, swept by the back of the house. Right at their heels came the body of horsemen who had just passed the house. The Doctor said that they were neighboring ranchers.

Late in the afternoon two truckloads of soldiers with machine-guns appeared. By that time Johnny and I had returned to the hotel to find that it had been looted. Our bags had been emptied, and the two front tires on the truck had been ripped with a knife.

The streets were a mess. One could hardly take a step without treading on some object that the raiders had looted from the houses. People were hunting around for their belongings. The door on many of the houses had been broken, and three houses and one *cantina* had been gutted by fire.

Eleven dead raiders lay in the streets; eight townsmen had been killed and four women wounded.

SEÑOR MORALES arrived early on Sunday morning, a day early, with wagons to take the machinery. I was glad to see the last of it, for I wanted to leave there as quickly as possible.

I never heard if they captured Cruz. I sincerely hope they did, for what I saw in Santo Domingo made me a convert to the Mexican military manner of dealing with bandits—standing them against the first handy wall after capturing them.

This Month's Complete Novel

"DEPUTY OF THE DEVIL"

by

Ben Ames Williams

"HE WHO EATS with the devil will need a long spoon" was the warning the eminent Dr. Greeding failed to heed when he discovered his uncanny power to direct the will of others. For deliberately, with cool scientific cunning, he experimented with the happiness of those who loved and trusted him . . .

Suspense and horror mount as the "Deputy of the Devil" becomes enmeshed in the toils of his own power . . . thrill piles upon thrill as we follow his strange career. This dramatic novel by Ben Ames Williams is published complete in the January Redbook. It is a distinguished addition to the ranks of Redbook Complete Novels and is sure to obtain success when published later in book form. Don't miss it! Remember, it is included with all of Redbook's sparkling regular contents.

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