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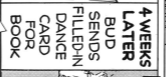
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APRIL, 1937

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- Sinister Hollow** By Anthony Rud 108
Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

Prize Stories of Real Experience

- Duel in Douala** By Captain Brian O'Brien 132
 It happened in that former German colony in Africa, the Cameroon.
- Tun-kho the Bandit** By N. Baikov 135
 What happened to a Russian professional hunter in the Manchurian forest.
- The Search in the Snow** By Joseph E. Crosson 139
 Hazardous Arctic flying in the hope of rescue for Bert Eielson.
- Tiger! Tiger!** By Mabel Stark 142
 A noted wild-animal trainer tells of some specially exciting experiences.

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Sound

RECENTLY we attended a moving-picture of a Shakespeare play. Very well done it was too, save for the usual unrestrained camera trickery of moving houses and juggled landscapes. And we were inclined to wonder, of course, what Shakespeare himself would have thought, could he—he who had to put his play over with almost no help from scenery or mechanical devices—have seen it. Most probably he would have loved it—much of it, anyhow. But most certainly, could he have had the help of all these devices of sound and scene, he never would have written the magnificent lines which have become interwoven into our language as its second most precious heritage. He wouldn't have needed to.

It is for a similar reason that discerning people still find so special a reward in reading a magazine, where the best work of our best writers finds its first publication. Without the help of the sound effects and scenic devices upon which the cinema and the radio may so easily depend, with only the modest help of the illustrator, he has to win and hold his reader by the fascination of his story and the skill of his word-play alone. He has to be good. And, we believe, he *is* good.

Consider for example the rich imagination and color-crammed writing that lend such glamour to James Francis Dwyer's "The Treasure of Vanished Men." And the fine characteristic humor of the Irish folk-lore which so curiously graces it. There's a treasure such as his wild hawks of trouble will never find in ruined Angkor itself.

Consider likewise the strange simple charm of Mr. Chester's Natow'an fantasies. Perfectly preposterous they

Effects

are in one sense—and at the same time perfectly faithful to mankind's universal quest of the unknown, to our inherited cave-man tradition of desperate adventure among the fearsome beasts of an untrodden wilderness, to the imagination which does so much to make civilized man's dull life worth while.

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The foregoing has perhaps suggested one of the standards by which this magazine is edited. And this standard will be maintained:

Coming to you next month, for example, is a novel by Henry Rowland, who will be remembered for "Sea Scamps," "Mile High," and many another moving novel. Next month also will bring you specially notable stories in the "Arms and Men," "Ships and Men" and "One Against a Wilderness" series; a striking novelette about Richard Wormser's race-track detective; and many fine short stories by Fulton Grant, Leland Jamieson and the like. And in the very near future are coming: a new and even more memorable series by Bedford-Jones to follow his "Arms and Men;" a novel by Leland Jamieson; and important contributions by R. G. Kirk, Beatrice Grimshaw, Meigs Frost, Frederick Becholdt and other favorites.

Blue Book writers are good, we believe. Like Shakespeare, they have to be.

—The Editors.



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One Against

By WILLIAM L. CHESTER



Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

UPON a cliff which overlooks a winding forest river, two bare brown figures amused themselves by shooting arrows out across the water. One was a boy of ten or thereabouts, slim, black-eyed, coarse-haired, copper-skinned; the other was somewhat older, by far more lithely muscular, with blue-green eyes and the clear brown skin of a well-tanned Caucasian.

Near by, a great good-natured bear reared up manlike, with small red puzzled eyes, to watch the arrows fly. Beside the older youth a full-grown puma, silver-gray with eyes of blazing ice, rubbed its glossy side against his thighs, and curled its tail about his ankles. When the panther showed its shining fangs the younger boy drew back. His friend admonished him:

"Shrink not, Ohali, or Mika will wish to bite. That is the way of all like him. Now Aki, here, is harmless, and lets us ride upon his back—yet he could kill a tiger."

Ohali's eyes widened as his companion spoke, and he answered in higher tones:

"Kioga knows the forest people better than all others."

"Why not, *chi*?" said Kioga. "I dwell among them. I know their tongue. I've had a hundred different pets."

"A tiger, even?" asked Ohali.

"Not so," Kioga said with evident regret. "But look you here, Ohali!" And he held forth a piece of leather rope, fashioned into a noose. "With this I soon shall capture one and tame him."

"Capture Guna?" gasped Ohali.

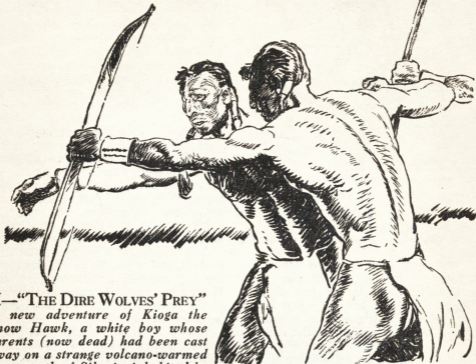
"Or else Gunahi, his mate," assured Kioga grandly. "One or the other, I do not care. Come on! Let's go upstream a way. I'll show thee how I'm sure a tiger may be taken."

"I am afraid," Ohali said, holding back.

"Afraid?" echoed Kioga, looking here and there in scorn. "With Aki at our side? I tell thee, little brother, that is folly. Come, Aki, we will show him."

And with the monster bear rolling on majestically ahead, the pair set blithely forth. As they walked along an animal trail, Kioga whittled a notch into a

a *W*ilderness



II—"THE DIRE WOLVES' PREY"

A new adventure of Kioga the Snow Hawk, a white boy whose parents (now dead) had been cast away on a strange volcano-warmed coast north of Siberia, inhabited by cousins of the American Indians

stick. At last he called a halt near where a good stout sapling grew just off the trail. With monkey skill he climbed it rapidly, and at its apex forced it downward in an arc. But his weight was not enough to bend it down to earth. And so Ohali climbed, more slowly. What with the added weight the tree's crown touched the trail.

Now to that bent-down crown Kioga tied his noose, and to the running end affixed the trigger-stick, and set the trigger-stick into a notch he had cut in a stump beneath it. Most warily he spread the noose raising its sides upon four twigs an inch above the ground. The runaway snare was set.

"In a day or two Guna will come along and put his foot into the trap. Then we shall have our tiger," said Kioga. "But now—what's that? I hear the boatmen singing! The trade-canoes are coming! Come, Ohali, we will join them. Begone, Aki! And thou, Mika my lithe one, or the warriors will put arrows between thy ribs."

Responding to some sign unknown to

Ohali, the great bear shuffled off. The puma trotted away in another direction.

Upon the river-bank Kioga hailed an oncoming craft.

"Luck to you, warriors! Take us on. We're going to Hopeka."

The pole-men recognized the familiar figure. One canoe passed close to shore, and into it Kioga lifted Ohali. "See thee anon, little brother," he said. "Wokili is coming. I'll ride upon his great craft."

A trade-canoe drew near, with many a friendly quip and smile from the warriors; and leaping from a rock, Kioga came aboard.

THE time was dusk of a day in the Moon Before the First Snow Flies. The place was Nato'wa, a newfound Arctic land, unknown to civilized men when these events transpired. . . . The canoes moved toward old Hopeka-town, chief village of the red-skinned Shoni tribesmen who dwell in the somber forest on the eastern coast of Nato'wa. And as they drew near, a voice rang loud from within the palisade.



The voice was Saki's—unmistakably. From wall to twelve-foot palisaded wall her lusty cry rang musically:

"*Ohai, ya!* Come look! Come see my wares! *Ohai!*"

The words came from the lips of one whose hair was flecked with many winters' snows. Beneath her garb of shell-beaded buckskin, her body was but a wisp of life, a bag of skin containing bones. All Saki's strength, the villagers declared, had gone into her vocal cords. And once again, incongruously, as if a kitten were to utter a tiger's roar, her strong voice rose from her wizened chest:

"*Ohai! Ya!* Come trade with Saki. *Ohai!*"

The dense pine leafage overhanging the village wall quivered at those penetrating tones. Beyond the tall log walls, and even out upon the gleaming bosom of the ebon river, dark-skinned men drifting downstream in deep-laden tradecanoes heard her, and smiled.

Lighted on their way to Hopekaton by flares at stem and stern, the trading-craft came on in small flotillas, manned by sweating pole-men, whose naked bodies glistened in the smoky light. Indians these were, surviving cousins of the hunter tribes who roamed America in the ancient days. In cast of face, in color of their skins, no difference could be seen. But in their ways and tribal customs peculiar changes have occurred, nowhere more notably than in the laws of barter and of trade. Because of their form of union—seven tribes under one emperor-chief, linked together by the forest rivers—seasonal bazaars have long been customary, whereat the differing produce of these several tribes is traded and exchanged.

To such a bazaar now went the trading craft. Some creaked with loads of edibles, grown and harvested in mountain valleys far to the north and brought to Hopeka in baskets large enough to contain a warrior. Others rode deep with glazed pottery and polished cups and brilliant vases that caught the eye. Still more were piled with fragrant woods, savage weaponry and skins of wild animals, all heaped so high that it seemed none could survive the trip downriver without cap-sizing.

IN one of these stout craft, atop a bale of precious skins precariously poised amidships, Kioga came upon all fours, stood gracefully erect in perfect balance upon that shaky footing, his splendid, supple all-but-naked body gilded by the torchlight. Then from his own lips skirled a wild, ear-splitting whistle—his answer to the cry of withered Saki.

And Saki, surrounded by her bursting baskets, and skins displayed, and clothing and maple-sugar, heard him. She showed her toothless gums and cackled at the naked red-skinned children lurking all about her.

"*Eh-hee!* Look out, thieving young crows. Kioga comes to watch when Saki sleeps. He has an arm that's long."

Hardly had she spoken, when Hopeka's gates swung out. Through them, chanting the weird refrain of a riverman's song, came a troop of burdened men, bowed down by the weight of goods for trade at the autumn bazaars.

In their van a supple youth cavorted, an animated coil of flesh and blood turning handsprings like a spinning Catherine-wheel until those who watched grew dizzy. As suddenly the Snow Hawk ceased his nimble antics, and cried out:

"Water for the warriors! *Ahai*, Saki! I am here again!"

Kioga sprang to her side, and with a flourish dropped something in her buckskin lap; a little bunch of forest flowers, to pluck which he had dared a viper's fangs. And as he came near, the ring of village children fell quickly back, for all stood in awe of this strange child of the wilderness.

"Aha, my jumping-bug!" said Saki. "What's this?"

"A nosegay to please thy nostrils, Grandmother," quoth Kioga. "*Ahi*—but I am hungry! What's to eat?"

"O belly that is never full—here's a roasted joint to fill thee up," grumbled Saki, tossing him a haunch of venison.

With ravenous appetite Kioga fell to; and in amazement the old crone watched the deer-meat disappear, and with it two great bowls of steaming soup.

"O jug without a bottom," she marvelled as Kioga drew one wrist across his lips, "what news along the river-lips?"

"Great tidings, Grandmother. The traders come by hundreds. The greatest chiefs from all the northern tribes are on the way. In one more week your bazaar will be crowded. But I have also heard some speak of evil men within our tribes."

"Too true! Too true!" declared Saki, casting a furtive glance about her. "The very trees do listen. Something ill is brewing, my son. Sawamic's warriors have been alert—more so than usual, these latter days."

"What do they fear?" asked the youth Kioga.

Again that furtive look, before old Saki answered: "The Long Knives' secret brotherhood, whose members no one knows for certain. Takaso, the double-tongued, is thought to be a leader among them. But trouble not thy good young head with thoughts of this. What else has happened thee, my son?"

"Well," replied Kioga, rocking on the end of his spine and continuing with his river news, "I saw a tiger, fat with young, for one thing. And when a water-snake bit Saya-hala, with my tomahawk I chopped his finger off—*squit!*—like that!"

"*Eh-eh*—did he flinch?" queried Saki.

"A little—the blade was dull. But he gave me twenty arrows just the same, for saving his life. This morning," continued Kioga, "T'yone snarled at me from a bank. With a paddle I knocked one of his teeth out. See!" And with that he displayed the wolf's long fang.

"*Tsik-tzik!* You're never at a loss," declared Saki fondly.

AS they spoke, the village children edged in closer, eying the articles on display in Saki's bazaar. Kioga went on talking.

"Wokili got an arrow in the back. Ketchawin sneaked into the forest and came back with a scalp. It was a Wa-Kanek's, by the top-knot. But nothing exciting happened. . . . Oh, Ketchawin brought me a piece of rawhide. With it I fixed my whip. See!" And with a deft movement he flung out ten feet of tapered bull-hide lash, fixed to a springy stock of wood and bone.



Old Saki cried out suddenly, pointing the while to a village boy who, taking advantage of her preoccupation, had reached into an open basket. "*Ya-ya!* He steals!"

BEFORE her words were fairly out, Kioga's bull-hide thong snaked forth. With a cry the little pillager drew back. But quicker than any human hand, the lash had caught him, lapping twice about his wrist. Now with one jerk Kioga brought the boy sprawling to the feet of Saki, who belabored him with a stick until he dropped what he had taken, and ran howling away.

Kioga laughed loud and long. "Now, Grandmother, do thou go and sleep awhile. I will guard thy baskets." And turning a sharp and watchful eye upon the semicircle of village children, Kioga crossed his legs and squatted upon a tall wicker basket, his ready whip in hand. Presently he jeered them.

"Come nearer, crows!" invited Kioga with gleaming eyes. "Come just a little nearer. . . . You will not? Then here!"—tossing a trinket on the earth before them. "Pick it up, crows—pick it up!"

As Kioga spoke, he played the supple lash upon the ground in sinuous undulations, and cracked it with a soft sound, the whisper of its anger-voice. But though covetous lights showed in their eyes, no one among the village children dared reach forth when that quick-striking leather thong was in Kioga's hand.

Now, while they ringed him enviously at respectful distance, the Snow Hawk dipped into basket after basket, calmly sampling all that was good or sweet in Saki's bazaar—his proper right in the circumstances. . . .

All this transpired in the happier days before Kioga, son of the first white civilized discoverer of this unknown strand, became the outlaw, foreordained for future fame among the savage Shoni tribesmen. Yet even now no cronies had Kioga among these little redskins. He was The One Who Plays Alone, the pariah, the outcast. What friends he had were older folk—the river-men who took him everywhere in their great canoes, the aged ones who loved him for his sprightly walk and laughing face, and for little kindnesses he did, beyond the thought of the other wild children in primitive Hopeka-town.

One other loved him too—old Sawamic, Emperor-chief of the Seven Shoni tribes; for old Sawamic's lodge was without living son; and Kioga—body, heart and mind—was all and more than any warrior-chief could wish for in his own.

And now Sawamic came in person, to bring a fresh-killed buck to Saki of the single eye. Kioga put the buck into a wooden chest, out of the way of other things. Breathing hard from labor which he might have assigned to another, Sawamic still had time to speak a pleasant word with Kioga.

"Tis well you are returned, my son. Trouble brews among the warriors. Come soon to visit at my lodge again. 'Tis suitable a famous chief-to-be should learn to speak our several dialects."

"I will, Grandfather-chief, when Saki returns," promised Kioga, full of importance that so great a chief should speak to him in public before the other village boys.

SAWAMIC turned away. The band of Hopeka children followed, clinging to his robes. Through the dusk Kioga beheld a band of other figures, four warriors approaching with their heads together. Saluting him most respectfully to his face, when the old Emperor-chief had passed, the four stood looking after him, respect gone from their features, and hatred in its place.

Kioga saw. And seeing, he thought of what Saki had said, and Sawamic had confirmed, of hidden plottings against his rule among the Shoni. And so Kioga, instead of standing boldly forth and offering Saki's wares, as he had intended, raised the cover of the nearest wicker basket. Jumping quickly in, he lowered its top so that only a crack appeared. Through this he watched the oncoming warriors, led by Takaso.

Well Kioga knew this red-skinned malcontent who hailed from Sioket, a village far up-river. Leader among the secret Long-Knife society, Saki had said he was; and recalling that, Kioga eyed the nearing band the more closely as they came behind surly Takaso—tall, fierce, scarred on the jaw, and coldly truculent of gaze.

NEARING the bazaar, and observing its aged attendant nowhere in sight, the four paused, apparently to await Saki's return. But since she did not soon appear, the warriors squatted down and fell to talking. Deserted at the supper-hour, the bazaar was an ideal corner for exchanging confidences.

"You take great risks," said a lowered voice.

"Great ends demand great risks," said Takaso boldly, slapping his tomahawk with a lean brown hand. "And when Sawamic walks across the slippery log, we Long Knives will rise and rule the nation in his place. Men were given arms to wield weapons. Too long has Sawamic the Peacemaker held us back from plundering the rich villages of the People of the Plume upriver."

"Aya!" agreed another voice huskily. "But Sawamic's warriors suspect us; and they are many and quick to act."

"What matter if they do?" answered Takaso craftily. "They know not when we'll strike, nor whose will be the tomahawk."

"Ssst!" went some one warningly, at sound of a shambling step. "Silence! Saki returns."

"Ho, warriors!" cackled the old woman, shuffling into view. "What do you whisper of, hiding among my baskets, eh-eh?"

A companion nudged Takaso, pointing at a company of Sawamic's loyal stalwarts approaching through the dusk. The plotter started. It would do his cause no good to seem conspiring with others. Quickly, to allay suspicion—

"O Saki," he said in a loud voice calculated to carry to the ears of those approaching, "what will you trade for two canoes of redstone pipes, and eating-ware from far upriver—the finest to be had?"

Never lacking words where trading was involved, Saki answered swiftly: "Three baskets filled with feather robes." Then with an instinct which bade her to be sharp, she added: "But you must take them as they are, upon the spot."

Now this was trading sight unseen—but Sawamic's warriors were eying Takaso and he wished to look the part of a simple trader. He dared not hesitate.

"Agreed," he said loudly. "Here, warriors, take up these baskets. You, Teniko, and Arako, go fetch the pipes and wares from our canoes."

Nearer drew the group of loyal braves. The eyes of all were sharply on this well-known firebrand from another river-village.

Suddenly Saki voiced the query: "Where's Kioga?"

Almost Kioga answered from the depths of his basket. But just in time he checked himself. If he so much as spoke a word, it sealed his doom. Unsuspected bearer of Takaso's deadly secret, the merest hint of his presence within the basket would bring a killing stroke. More than that, if he betrayed himself, the beloved Sawamic's life was also forfeit. He must wait until the plotters had gone, then come forth and warn the Peacemaker.

BUT even with the thought, strong hands were laid upon the handles of the basket wherein he hid. It was raised and swung in time to the bearers' strides. He felt the container lowered grating on the river sands, and heard the liquid lap of water, the sounds of canoes being emptied and laden, the grunts of straining men at labor. He dared to raise the basket top a little, then lowered it without a sound. Takaso stood close beside him.

An instant more, again the feeling of being raised, then the gentle movement, up and down, made by a canoe rocking to the weight of a cargo. Once more Kioga peered forth. A warrior was shoving off. A weight fell down upon his creaking basket. He could see no more.

But Kioga felt the canoe turn upstream against the currents. He smelled the rich balsamic breath of the forest, bespeaking ferny jungle and trackless glade pressed only by the paws of prowling brutes. He sensed the rhythmic urging of the poles, and heard the *tump-a-tump* of a village drum dying to a whisper far behind. And finally, some miles north upon the silent river, he felt the long poles cease their rhythm, and heard the voice of Takaso.

"Now let us see if Saki robbed us," it said. Came then the sound of baskets being opened, and the rustle of feather robes pawed over in the torchlight. "All



well in these," said Takaso. "Now we will open the last."

Another would have shrunk with fear. Not Kioga! As touch fell on the basket cover, he drew his knife with one hand, while with the other he pulled a robe down about his head. Takaso might find him here. But Takaso would never live to tell of it.

Up went the cover. Sinewy fingers clutched the topmost robe beneath which crouched the Snow Hawk, tight as a spring compressed. But suddenly came blood-stopping interruption—the jangle-jarring thunder of a tiger's voice. The basket cover fell.

Shrill yells of startled men. *Twang-twang-g-g* of bows discharging almost at Kioga's ear. Followed then the bite of frantically bending poles, the snarls of an angry animal receding with the shore, the taunts of the warriors at the wounded beast. Then once again the easy rhythm, the *swish-h-h* of curling water astern and the gurgle at the wooden prow.

Fears of having been out-traded were forgotten by the warriors in the greater dangers lurking along the river highway. For the moment Kioga was safe, scarce daring to swallow, lest his presence be discovered. Presently, however a wisp of down from the robe which hid him tickled his nostril and before he could help himself, he sneezed.

AGAIN the poling rhythm stopped. He heard a whisper:

"What was that?"

He could sense the warriors straining all their ears. From ashore once more a forest denizen helped him. A wolf coughed, and howled hoarsely.

"T'youne has a cold," said Takaso as the tension eased. The canoe moved forward, and Kioga's heart took up its beat again. The green-walled forest glided past the hurrying craft. Copper shades of men dipped wetly gleaming rods of silver into sepia water. Without pause the Shoni warriors labored hour after hour, until at last with a grunt of satisfaction Takaso spoke.

"The village of Sioket—just around the bend. I see a light upon the wall. We'll trade these furs with that old bag of bones K'yopit, and pass the word about among our secret brethren that Sawamic's skull is to be cloven."

"K'yopit is coming now," declared Teniko.

"Old fox! He smells a trade ten sleeps away," grumbled Takaso. And then in louder tones: "*A-hai*, Wrinkle-belly, keeper of Sioket's captive wolves! Three baskets of feather robes from Hopeka. What will you give for them?"

"First I must look at each and every one," whined old K'yopit. "I'm very poor, *eya*, and the skins from Hopeka are not what they used to be."

K'yopit's canoe touched against the greater trading-craft. Nimble as a wizened monkey, he climbed to the higher level, dwarfed among the tall straight warriors. From one basket he dragged out all the magnificent gleaming robes.

"*Bah-bah!* What mangy skins!" muttered the old red Shylock craftily. "They're hardly worth the wearing."

"The best Hopeka boasts, you dry-skinned skeleton!" retorted Takaso, on a note of indignation. "Ten hunting-jackets, worked in stained quills, will take three baskets full."

"Ten jackets!" cried K'yopit jeeringly, diving into the second basket and clawing forth all its contents. "You must be mad. I'd give but four for all I've seen thus far."

K'yopit's skinny fingers raised the cover of the third basket, fumbling with

the skin. Kioga felt dry hooks close about his ear and waited tensely for discovery. He felt K'yopit start in deep amazement as he explored Kioga's features with his fingers.

"Eight, then—give us eight jackets and we'll have done," Takaso was saying.

"A skin worth having!" reflected K'yopit as his hand paused upon Kioga's neck. "A slave escaping—and Takaso does not know of it." He shut down the lid upon Kioga with a bang. "Say five jackets," he announced, "and I will trade. Five jackets—beaded front and back with colored shells, and hung with soft long fringe, that make the maidens turn and look. Take five."

Takaso wavered; and seeing it, K'yopit eyed him with a quick shrewd glance. "Six I might give," he added suddenly, "if you bear the baskets to my lodge. Ask more—and throw them in the river!"

"Six beaded jackets I will take," agreed Takaso at last. "Where are the jackets?"

"At my lodge," answered the other, binding the covers of his baskets securely with lengths of leather thong. "Deliver the baskets thither, and the jackets shall be yours."

And thus, without more ado, it was done. Takaso and his warriors took the fruits of their trade and went about other affairs in the upriver village.

IN the lodge of K'yopit, when they had gone, the old redskin turned to the third basket, untied the thong, threw back the cover, and seizing Kioga by the hair, raised him into view.

Half suffocated by the closing of the basket and the muffling robe, Kioga was in no condition to resist. Before his strength returned, K'yopit relieved him of his knife and tied his wrists behind him.

"Six buckskin jackets—little enough for one so lean and strong," muttered old K'yopit, feeling of Kioga's lithe young muscles. "You'll be a fine slave to bear my water and guard my lodge."

Now slavery (uncommon among American Indians except in the Pacific Northwest) among the Shoni is of this nature: Whoso counts *coup* upon an enemy in open battle, or during raids upon another village, declaring his intention, may take his captive as a slave, no matter what the captive's age. Often captivity becomes in fact adoption; and many well-fed slaves there be among



the Seven Tribes who would not exchange these light shackles for their former way of life. When a slave seeks escape, Shoni primal law has always held that whoso captures him becomes his owner. If the captor so desires, he may trade him back to his previous owner for what he can obtain, or else support him.

A slave in Hopeka this youth must have been, thought K'yopit—else why had he been seeking to escape? Right glad was the old trader to acquire this strong young property to do the labors which long had been wearisome to him.

"You'll help me feed the captive wolves," went on K'yopit, rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

FROM somewhere near there came a mournful sound, howled up from a savage throat among K'yopit's ferocious charges. These were the totem beasts of Sioket village. Penned in a log-walled den just outside the palisade, the wolves were fed but twice a week in order that their hunger-howls might frighten off all river-spirits—a superstitious custom ancient as the people who believed in it.

"To feed the wolves—there is no shame in that. But—I—a slave?" thought the aghast Snow Hawk, with dilating pupils. "I,—Kioga,—a water-bearer to this old scalp atop a skeleton!"

"Why not—or would you have me tell the warriors you are here?" cackled the old savage, divining Kioga's thoughts. But Kioga's face presented the blankness of a wall.

"Tell them—or not," he said with a show of indifference. "Who then would be your slave?"

"You are a clever youth," K'yopit grinned.

"Clever," conceded Kioga, "—and hungry as well."

"Eh! Already?"

"Even a slave must eat," said Kioga pointedly, "if he is to remain useful to his master."

"That's true," said old K'yopit grudgingly. Going to one of the baskets, wherein he kept meat for the fierce communal pets, he took up a chunk of meat and flung it before the Snow Hawk. "Sweet juicy venison to make thee strong. Eat!"

Kioga eyed the meat. "Cut my cords that I may obey," he said. Warily K'yopit loosened the thongs a trifle, and Kioga took up the meat. "Such a little piece—and stale," he said indignantly



and threw it in a corner. A cooking-pot was bubbling near by. Into this Kioga reached, and fishing up a tender fowl, devoured it in twenty mouthfuls.

The old red miser's eyes were fairly popping. "You'll eat me out of lodge and home!" he cried.

"Ah, bah!" said Kioga. "I am growing—not like thee, old Rattle-bones, who only shrink with age."

"'Tis true," agreed K'yopit mournfully. He began to wonder if after all he had had the better of his trade with Takaso. When Kioga had eaten, again K'yopit tightened his bonds.

ELSEWHERE in Sioket, Takaso paced the lodge of a friend restlessly. "It seems to me," he said, time and again, "K'yopit acted very strangely—in that he offered four and finally gave up six hunting shirts for our three baskets. This is most strange. I cannot understand it."

His two companions of the river episode smoked lazily, indifferently. When presently Takaso left the lodge, Teniko laughed.

"Uneasy are the covetous. When they gain much, they would gain more. When more they gain, 'tis not enough."

But Takaso, far from being covetous, was in truth, uneasy. Suspicious by nature, K'yopit's peculiar actions had unsettled him, filled him with a vague but troublous apprehension that drove him toward the trader's lodge to reconnoiter.

Slowly he neared K'yopit's hovel, muffled the eyes in his blanket; glancing about to see that none were near, he moved into its shadow. And thus Takaso overheard part of the talk between K'yopit and another, at sound of whose voice Takaso started.

With his knife's sharp edge Takaso warily cut through a barken patch on the dilapidated lodge, and peered within. His worst fears were realized. He suddenly recalled that sneeze, back somewhere along the river, and that not he nor any of his warriors had looked into that third basket, which now stood empty and open in a corner. He remembered Saki's missing Kioga. And he realized that Kioga had been concealed in that third basket and must have heard their plot against the Emperor-chief.

Takaso's eyes narrowed. He gripped his tomahawk in hand, then belted it again. The village was no place for a killing. K'yopit was moving toward the exit and passing through, leaving Kioga squatting by the fire, looking at his tied hands. K'yopit had not gone ten paces before Takaso stepped from the shadows to his side.

"*Ai*, Wrinkle-belly, I see the reason for your eagerness to trade with us!"

K'YOPIT shrank back guiltily, then recovered. "The more fool you, seeing too late what cannot now be altered," he answered boldly.

"I want the boy myself," said Takaso, himself the pleader now. "I knew not he was in that basket. Indeed, his father is my closest friend, a great warrior in Hopeka-town."

"Eh-eh?" demanded K'yopit. "But I thought—" There he checked himself in time, and continued on another line to cover his momentary confusion. "Worthy Takaso!" he said ironically. "Surely since it is for a bosom friend, you will pay me a fine high price for him."

"Ask what you will," answered Takaso sullenly.

"Ask what I will!" thought K'yopit, confused more deeply still: for if Kioga were no slave, as first he had surmised, Takaso had but to demand that he be set at liberty. Who—least of all trembling old K'yopit—would dare detain him then? But trading whets the wits. K'yopit reasoned: "The treacherous of heart do not develop friendships overnight. Takaso has some cause to fear the boy—else why this open offer for one who is no slave at all?" Then seeing Takaso impatient: "Twenty prime snow-leopard pelts," he demanded on a bold impulse.

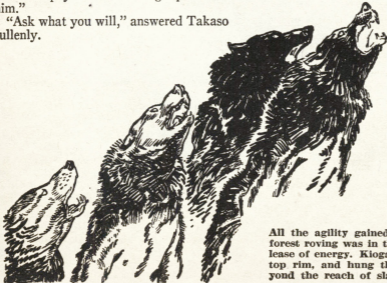
"I'll give fifteen," answered Takaso, prepared to give three times as many, if only that secret Kioga shared could be confined to him alone.

"He'll give fifteen," thought K'yopit, to himself again. "He wants him very badly, then. Eh-eh, there's something here I do not understand. But better that I wash my hands of it while still there's time. If this should be a chieftain's kin—" K'yopit shivered slightly. But to Takaso he turned a face of adamant: "Twenty pelts—not one skin less, or I will keep him!"

"Then twenty let it be," said Takaso with a false show of rage. "But where will I get twenty pelts this night?"

"Twenty pelts, delivered at my door," cackled the inexorable K'yopit, like cat that plays with mouse, "or mayhap I'll send the boy back to Hopeka myself."

EVEN K'yopit was amazed at the effect of this blind random threat. Takaso paled, then gained command of himself again, and looked daggers at the little



All the agility gained in years of forest roving was in that quick release of energy. Kioga grasped the top rim, and hung there just beyond the reach of slaving jaws.

wizened trader. "Then I will arrange down at the river-front to get the skins. But look you, Wrinkle-belly: No one must see me take him away. You understand?"

"Better than you think," reflected K'yopit, while aloud he answered: "Aiyah! Not even I shall see you go. I'll bind his mouth and put him in a basket as he came. I'll mark it with a turkey plume hung on the handle. I wish to know no more of this. Therefore I will go away before you come."

WITHIN the lodge Kioga crouched bound and helpless, with ear pressed listening to the wall.

K'yopit entered. "N-nyi," he whined with a show of apprehension. "Crawl back into the basket. The warriors who brought you here are coming back. Quick, or you will be discovered," urged the old man, holding something hid behind his back.

Affecting haste and fear, Kioga obeyed. With a sudden movement K'yopit bound his mouth up tightly. Kioga did not resist; the hour was not ripe to do so. When the time came he would sell his life as wildcats do. Until then he husbanded his strength. K'yopit secured the fastenings of the basket cover, and marked it as agreed. Then K'yopit shuffled from the lodge and left the door-skin flap hang open.

Silently, with utmost patience, Kioga set to work within his prison. Of his sharp strong teeth he now had urgent need. With slowly numbing fingers he worked to get that gag of skin from between his jaws. Long minutes, picking at K'yopit's knots, resulted in success. Now, wrists at teeth, he gnawed his raw-hide bonds, and in the end his hands were also free, the thong preserved against some future need. Then flexing his wrists, he tried his strength against the heavy basket. With time, perhaps, he had broken out, for his was a muscular strength rarely given to one so young. But suddenly he ceased all effort, listening.

Takaso came, in company of Teniko. Kioga heard them moving in the darkened lodge, toward his basket; and at once he replaced the gag against the time when Takaso would undoubtedly look in upon him.

"The feather marker," whispered Teniko. "This is the one."

"Make sure," hissed Takaso. "Reach in and feel if his mouth is stopped. One



cannot see in such darkness so thick as is this!"

Up went the cover. Sinewy fingers ascertained that the gag still performed its office. "A knife-thrust would better silence him," said Teniko grimly through his teeth.

"And leave a trail of blood as well," warned Takaso swiftly, shutting down the lid again securely. "I know of twenty better ways to still a tongue. Of all of them the river is the best. Quick, now, take up your side and let us go."

Again Kioga knew the sensation of being lifted, but now there was no uncertainty as to his fate. Yet still he waited, ready but relaxed, silent, alert as a ferret—excited, truly, but without a trace of panic.

He felt cool outer air blow through the interstices of his reedy cell and drew away the gag.

They neared the gate; the sentry there would challenge, inquire perhaps into the contents of the basket. But that was pure formality in time of peace, the



loosest kind of primitive customs inspection. But to cry out were folly, with those sharp tomahawks so near and ready.

"Ho, warriors!" a voice called. "What have you in that basket?"

"The best of old K'yopit's skins," replied Takaso boldly. "And dearly have they cost me!"

The sentry laughed. "Whoever gets K'yopit's best at any price deserves it. I wish you good of it. Pass, warriors. Make haste. We throw the plum-stones—I am winning."

Kioga heard a creak. The gates swung wide. The warriors passed out. At sound of passing footsteps, the totem wolves, denned in their enclosure just outside the village gate, began to snap and snarl and then gave famished tongue. And if Kioga's flesh began to creep, there was an excellent reason.

For these are the fiercest wolves on earth—not wolves such as are seen in park and steel-barred zoo, but wolves of far Nato'wa, related to the Dire wolves of deep antiquity; tall as Great Danes at the shoulder, with fangs like keen stillettos.

Ravenous, with bellies knotted up by long denial, their howling hunger clamored up. Grating scratches on the wall bespoke the fury with which they moved along with Takaso and Teniko, no more than that high log wall of their enclosure between.

AND suddenly Takaso spoke. "Ahu! Of all the twenty ways to rid ourselves of Kioga, the twenty-first is best."

"What's in your mind?" asked Teniko as they lowered the basket between them. "To sink him in a whirlpool with a stone tied to the handle?"

"The river often gives up its dead," Takaso answered; "but when the jaws of Sioket's wolves devour, there's nothing left to be returned."

Within his cell Kioga's blood ran cold. He heard the wolves increase their din, expectant of some offering from without. And then Kioga of the fearless heart had to grip his courage tight in both his hands: To die in the night beneath such yellow fangs!

"A great idea!" said Teniko. "Quick, then, and have an end of it!" And with the words he loosened the cover of the basket.

KIOGA heard them grunt, as with a mighty effort they raised the basket atop the wall. A moment more, and they would overturn it and dump him out to be bitten and butchered. And then, too late, Kioga gave the wild shrill yell he hitherto had stifled.

Maddened by the familiar sound of a basket on the wall, the wolves raised up a fiendish din which drowned his one voice out. In desperation Kioga kicked mightily, clinging the while to avoid being hurled down those yelling throats. What with his struggles and the awkwardness of the basket so high above their heads, Takaso and his friend lost both their holds upon it.

Kioga fell groundward, still contained within his prison. But that prison proved a godsend now. For luckily the reed frame held together. Its cover flapping open, upside-down the basket fell, covering Kioga.

Rendered helpless for the moment by his heavy fall, Kioga let one hand protrude, and jerked it in just as a gaunt-jawed wolf made snap for it—but not before one fang had ripped his palm.

A dozen fierce hot breaths beat through the baffling wicker-work, inside of which Kioga crouched, aware of his good fortune and seeking means of utilizing it. Through a hole stove in one corner by the fall, he could dimly see the wall near by. Toward this he edged the basket, inch by inch, by raising it a little and pushing forward.

But as he went, strong jaws tore at the stout vine tendrils of which it was woven. One brute ripped out a section large enough to get his head half in. And in that moment Kioga had his golden inspiration.

The basket—now a cage—was at the wall. An old gray pointed head jammed snarling through the opening, maddened

by the smell of Kioga's blood. Quick as a flash Kioga snapped a running noose, made of the cords which once had bound him, about its snout, drew it tight to close the jaws, and made a knot. Then with both hands—enduring the agony of using the one which had been bitten—he seized it by the windpipe. A moment passed—another, before the wolf gave up its thrashing and stretched out senseless.

Kioga thrust the wolf's head, smeared with his own blood, out among its ravening fellows. And at once their raving ceased. There was the tear of flesh, the crunch of bone, a hideous worrying: the totem pack was feeding on part of itself, with the basket and the one beneath it overlooked.

This was the moment for which Kioga had hoped. When it seemed that all the wolves were occupied, with one quick thrust he hurled his cage among them. Then, as a spring of steel recoils, Kioga leaped straight upward into air. All of the agility and quickness gained in years of forest roving was in that quick release of energy. Had he been less swift, the nearest wolf had pulled him down. Instead it got no more than half his loin-cloth. And had he fallen back, the other long hard-snapping jaws had chopped him into bits. But Kioga did not fall back.

He grasped, instead, the top rim of the den-wall, near the narrow gate, and hung there just beyond the reach of slaving jaws. Beyond the den-wall Takaso would have looked to make certain that Kioga was dragged down to death, but for a sudden startling diversion. Even as the basket had crashed amid the dens, a short but infuriated figure in a tattered blanket rushed from the village and sprang among them, crying malediction. It was K'yopit the trader, who had spied upon them from the village wall, roused to a fury of righteous anger at them who would destroy a child so inhumanly.

But K'yopit's ninety years could not long support his anger. That white blaze flickered swiftly out. When Kioga looked first above the wolf-den wall, the trader's other self had just returned, and suddenly K'yopit wheeled and ran like rat before the terriers.

BEHIND, with knives and clubs uplifted, the warriors pursued fiercely, to avenge his interference. Straight past the dens K'yopit scurried, bleating in fear of death. Kioga saw the old features contorted with the agony of running. And



though Kioga knew him for a rascal, he none the less was filled with pity for a helpless old man.

K'yopit stumbled past the gateway to the dens, but did not see Kioga. Takaso and his warriors glimpsed the boy a-perch upon the wall beside the wolf-den gate. Takaso's hand shot forward—*thud!*—his knife was quivering in the wall beside Kioga's hand.

Swiftly Kioga dropped to earth outside the dens. The plotters now were closing in. To the gate Kioga darted, threw up its bar, and swung it wide before they could divine his intention.

OUT with a rush like water from a bursting dam two dozen shaggy giant bodies charged. The village totem wolves were freed! In panic Takaso and the others broke pursuit before that snarling white display of fangs, and ran toward their canoe, the loud-tonguing pack close on their heels.

Seizing a lance that Teniko had dropped in his amazement, Kioga melted into the thickets, glancing back to watch the outcome of his ruse. The totem wolves proved but a momentary threat. With freedom offering, the pack was racing off into the forest.

K'yopit lay exhausted on the sand. Takaso stood above him, his tomahawk bared. The others watched from their canoe.

"Whither went the boy?" demanded Takaso savagely. "Answer, quick, before I slice thine ears off!"

"I do not know—I do not know," protested the terror-stricken old trader. Cowering pitifully, K'yopit wrapped his arms about Takaso's knees and begged for life—in vain. He looked toward the shore—

no escape in that direction. Up went the shining tomahawk. Then—

Whis-s-s-k!

Soft as breath of air a slim spear came singing, skewering the tomahawk arm through the biceps. Takaso yelled in surprise and pain and warning, pointing toward the forest whence the spear had come.

"Ashore! Ashore—the Snow Hawk—get him!"

Quick to obey, his companions forced the canoe's hard prow against the bank and plunged into the looming forest, while K'yopit's aged feet grew wings, and he was seen no more.

The Shoni mingle caution with their bravery. They do not wander by choice in the deeper glades where leopards prowl and tigers lair. The friends of Takaso came quickly forth.

"He's gone," they said. "He'll fill a tiger's belly."

Takaso broke the spear and wrapped a strip of hide about his arm by way of bandage. "Your words are empty as your heads. Know you not he roams abroad with bears and beasts while all the villages are asleep? I shall not paddle for a month. But waste no time, you others. Back to the village! Pass the word among our allies to arrow him on sight. While Kioga lives, our scalps are all in danger."

Spurred by a common fear of betrayal to Sawamic, whose life they plotted, the warriors plunged deep their poles and sent the trade-canoe furiously forward. And in the forest Kioga fled as never in his life before, toward Hopeka.

The race was on—his speed of hand and foot, his stamina, against the strength of these warriors, aided by the river-currents. The race, for all its evident one-sidedness, offered slight advantage to either. For where the river made wide turns and bends, Kioga gained by traveling a straighter course; and where the stream was straight, the trade-canoe cut down his earlier lead.

UPON the river hazards waited. But the place of every sunken rock and treacherous cross-rip was charted upon the brains of the river-men and easily evaded. In the forest through which Kioga fled, the barriers were infinitely more frequent.

Here a great tree twelve feet in diameter, had fallen on the path. Straight at it Kioga rushed, sprang halfway up, found purchase on its deep-grooved bark and

scrambled atop it. Then down to its far side he lightly leaped—squarely upon a puma, licking fresh bones to whiteness with its red, barbed tongue. But boy and startled puma at once broke apart, each fleeing, though for different reasons.

BUT the incident threw Kioga off his stride. A ground-vine completed his downfall. He picked himself up, an old ache in his lower leg, and staggered on to where the gleaming river abutted on the trail he followed.

In view upstream the canoe of Takaso was coming swiftly, white bone in teeth. Lamed by his fall, Kioga could not now outpace that flying craft. But there were other ways. . . .

Not far ahead white water roared about a rapid which this deep craft could not negotiate, he knew. If pass it would, it must come close to shore, where smoother water ran, below a scarp of overhanging granite. Upon that scarp Kioga quickly rolled two great round boulders.

The trade-canoe turned shoreward, the pole-men intent upon the treacherous eddies. Takaso, with his one good hand, steered astern. A moment, waiting, Kioga crouched. The long canoe came nearer; its prow was not yet below him, when he pushed over the first boulder. Caroming from a stony spur, it spun away and did no damage.

The second poised, this time Kioga stood erect, exposed to the arrows of the shouting warriors. A quick shaft whistled past his head, another between his legs. With infinite care Kioga waited, aimed, let fall. The stone dropped hissing, and bomb-like struck amidships. Black water rushed in through the hole it made. A hundred feet down-river the canoe foundered, far offshore.

Kioga hurried on; Hopeka now not many miles away—Hopeka-town where old Sawamic the Emperor-chief slept, unconscious of the drama now enacting with his life the forfeit if Kioga's strength gave out. For with their hand forced, the enemies must needs strike at once.

Yet Takaso and his warriors were not defeated. Kioga had the start of them; but where, once ashore, they ran, he limped more slowly on his way. But as he went Kioga knew a little thrill of satisfaction. Not far ahead—unless some prowling brute had sprung it—was the runway snare which he and Ohali had made and set the other day.

With eyes upon the lookout, he presently saw it—undisturbed. He leaped the outspread lurking noose. His quick ear heard the sound of his pursuers. With head turned halfway backward he listened to determine if the snare would act.

Coming at full speed along the trail Takaso overleaped the waiting noose and saw it not. Not so the unlucky Teniko, who tripped it cleanly. He sprawled, but halfway to the ground Kioga's springe acted. The other warriors close behind him sent up a yell, whereat Kioga, hearing, grinned.

There was a leafy commotion just beside the trail, then the upward thrash of a limber sapling. Takaso wheeled to see a startling sight—Teniko soaring upward into air like trout on giant's fishing-rod. An instant in midair he hung head-downward, caught about one ankle. Then with a snap one of Kioga's knots slipped open. Twisting toward the ground, Teniko dropped, all flying arms and legs, to land with a sickening thud among his friends—and lie inert.

From far ahead a defiant laugh rang back.

Takaso looked into the eyes of his remaining warriors, with something closely kin to awe. But greater than their awe was fear of imminent disclosure. Once more the warriors took up the pursuit. But now they went more carefully, less hastily.

And so Kioga dragged himself just before them to Hopeka-town, a strange and bloody limping figure who scarce had passed between the closing gates when Takaso and his warriors arrived, demanding admission. There was a momentary delay, while they identified themselves.

SWIFT thoughts raced through Kioga's head. Far gone in exhaustion as now he was, the distance to Sawamic's lodge seemed doubly long. If the pursuing warriors found him ere he reached it, they would most surely tomahawk him, inventing pretext for their act. The fastenings of the gate were grating behind him. Takaso and his companions were being admitted.

With his last strength Kioga turned another way, his wits still functioning—straight for the bazaar of old Saki, who drew in hissing breath as he came near.

"You bleed and pant! What's happened you? Where have you been?"

"Quick, Saki!" he gasped. "Hide me—hide me!"

Catching that note of desperate urgency, the old woman rose, drew back a robe that hung rug-like from a horizontal pole. A dark place offered. "In here," she whispered, and in Kioga threw himself. Upon the earth old Saki perched, owl-like and imperturbable, just as Takaso walked swiftly near, a question in his mouth.

"Hast seen the youth Kioga, old witch?" he demanded. Kioga heard Saki answer vaguely:

"What do you want of him, O Double-Tongue?"

Curbing his impatience, Takaso answered: "I wish to give him this long sharp knife."

"He went toward Sawamic's lodge, limping and bloody. If you hurry, you may catch up with him," said Saki.

KIOGA heard the footfalls of Takaso die away ere Saki came to him to bathe his wounded hand. All was lost, he thought, unless—

There was one thing which would reach and warn Sawamic before Takaso arrived. In a rush of words he told old Saki all. Then:

"Cry out, Grandmother! Cry out in thy mighty voice, or Sawamic will be a dead chieftain."

And cry out Saki did, in strident, piercing tones that fairly shook the village.

"*Ohai! Ohai!* One goes to kill Sawamic! To arms, you warriors! Defend your chief! *Ohai*, Peacemaker, beware the arrow from behind! Death to all traitors!"

Now rose a sudden bedlam between the high log walls. Takaso, already creeping through the door of Sawamic's darkened lodge, caught the rising swell of it, hesitated for one fatal moment, then hurled his tomahawk at a reclining figure and wheeled to make his escape.

But he was too late!

As he burst into the open a ring of warriors hemmed him in, with bending bows. There was no fight. It was an execution, quick and bloody. Takaso fell with twenty arrows through his body before old Sawamic appeared behind him at the doorway, a slight scratch, no more, upon his brow.

But in Saki's bazaar, four lean avenging shadows suddenly appeared, with knives and hatchets baring. The companions of Takaso, hearing her outcry, had divined the reason. Hurling the shrieking old woman from her perch

atop a chest, and raising up the cover, they drove in their spears at something huddled up within it—the last act of their mortal lives. For as they wheeled to number Saki among their slain, a storm of arrows carried death among them, riddling them with the barbs of Sawamic's faithful.

A moment later the old Emperor-chief of all the Seven Shoni tribes drew near, encircled by a band of his closest retainers, informing him of all that had just transpired.

A little speechless group, among them Saki, had gathered round an open chest, and gazed down into it. The group fell back, all save old Saki, upon whose withered cheek great tears were glistening below her single eye.

Sawamic paused beside the open chest from which the rigid spears protruded. Sawamic's eye grew dim, and something in his strong old spirit seemed to crumble at thought of Kioga's laughter, nevermore to echo throughout his lodge.

"Weep not, Saki," he said in kindly tones, placing a sympathetic hand upon her shaking shoulder. The shaking ceased. Then Saki was convulsed again before she spoke.

"Weep—do I seem to weep? Not so, O Chief. I laugh. For they have only killed the dead. Look closer. 'Tis a deer they've speared to earth—the buck you sent me—a buck these many hours dead."

"Where, then, is Kioga?" cried Sawamic, his seamed face changing as if the sun were rising up behind his eyes.

"I'm almost sitting on him," cried Saki, rising from before her rack of robes and drawing one aside, that Sawamic might gaze within. "I fended them from that chest which held the buck you sent this morning. And they—the simple fools—thrust in their spears. Before they knew the truth—*eh-hee*—your warriors shot them down."

"*Hai-ya*, Kioga," called the near-sighted old chief to the lad who lay curled up and breathing heavily upon the ground. "Come forth, that we may honor thee. Come forth, I say—"

"*Ssst!* Be quiet!" said Saki, suddenly, forgetful of the quality of him to whom she spoke. Then like a troubled old hen she drove Sawamic and all the rest before her. "Away—away with all of you," she said in bated tones. "Kioga is asleep."

Another exciting adventure of One Against a Wilderness will appear in our next issue.

The Law

By LELAND
JAMIESON

Illustrated by
Grattan Condon

THEY spin the yarn, down at the Dinner Key Coast Guard Base, of how Lieutenant Robert Hurley took one of his big planes far out to sea on a mission—and it never came back. It was a strange affair, that flight. There were some aspects about it that had to do with a girl, and because of that were unofficial and therefore exceedingly *sotto voce*. They are still *sotto voce*. And now the seaplane rests in five fathoms of water on the sandy ocean floor, just off a white coral reef in the distant Bahamas, with the blue sea tranquil above it except when the hurricanes roar.

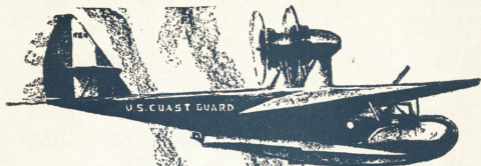
The girl's name was Marcelle Dallen. Lieutenant Hurley, junior flight officer of the Dinner Key Base, heard of her the first time when Commander Newsom called him into the office—that square, gray-painted office in the hangar lean-to, filled with its file cases and framed charts on the walls, with the little apple-cheeked yeoman at his machine in one corner busily typing out personnel forms. Newsom was signing papers, his pen scratching, his tanned, leathery face faintly grim. He didn't look up, when Hurley came in. He finished a signature, and asked, with unusual curtness: "Can you dance?"

Bob Hurley grinned, standing there at attention by the mahogany desk. He was a tall young man in his late twenties, straight as a flagpole, very fine and military in new khaki.

"I've been known to attempt it," he said.

Old Newsom cleared his throat noisily. He gave the yeoman a quick, hard look that held, perhaps, a hint of embarrassment. Then he said crisply: "Clear out of here, Jenkins."

of Hot Pursuit



Our pilot writer here returns to us with the first of a fine group of stories—stories of hazardous adventure along that last and eternal frontier of the sky.

The Old Man waited until the door had closed. Then he straightened his lean body, and the hoods came down over his eyes as he pinned a sharp glance on Hurley. They had been together for years, these two, doing their jobs, flying their seaplanes. They understood one another. And it was because of this understanding that Hurley could sense now the disturbance which was in Newsom's mind.

"Well," Newsom snapped, with a gruffness that might have been a defense against feeling ridiculous, "do you like it?"

"Dancing?" Hurley smiled. "Not particularly. As a matter of fact—"

"But you do all right," Newsom interrupted. "You don't step on people's feet. . . . This is an unusual detail. My niece has been here four days. She's from Boston. Best schools, best society. But bored. She's twenty-two, and a devil, Hurley. A little she-devil. Wants excitement, romance, glamour—do you know what a twenty-two-year-old girl is likely to want?"



"I'm not sure," Hurley said. "What—"

"This is a splendid opportunity to find out. I'm exhausted, trying to keep up with her. My wife's exhausted. You take her places, show her the town, give her a thrill. I pay for it, and I get my rest." He chuckled. "This is going to be wonderful!"

A little dubiously, Hurley inquired: "What's she like?" He had been assigned, a time or two in the past, to escort wives or daughters of brass-hats. There were usually complications, some of them rather dreadful.

The Old Man lighted a cigarette and tossed the pack across the desk-top.

"A beautiful little hyena," he said. . . .

They met that afternoon at a cocktail party Mrs. Newsom was giving. There were Coast Guard people there, and some tourist friends from the North, and a couple of artists. A few minutes after Hurley arrived, Commander Newsom came in, with a very pretty girl.

"Marcelle," the Old Man said, "this is Bob Hurley. He's under orders—but you're not. Feel free to torment him."

They sat down on a sofa in one corner of the room.

"I'm just a little surprised," Marcelle Dallen said, "that he didn't warn you that I was a wildcat, or something." Her voice was low and pleasant; she was small, and built on fine, lovely lines; her hair was brown, very silky and bright.

Hurley grinned. "I was reliably informed about a beautiful hyena," he said. "But I like hyenas, except when they scream."

He noticed then how quickly amusement could brighten her dark eyes. The bones of her face composed balanced straight lines, rather than curves. She was lovely. But there was a reckless curve to her lips.

"I don't scream," she said lightly, "even with cause."

LATER, at sunset, they were driving along Brickell Avenue, beside the lush jungle that bordered the bay. Marcelle's head lay back on the seat as she watched the incredibly blue sky with its tangle of color among the high, lacy clouds.

"Now what do you want to do?" Hurley asked.

Marcelle sat up. "What's left? I've seen nearly everything, Aunt Louise says. I'm sick of dog-races, horse-races, night-clubs, drinking-bouts, slick-haired gigolos, parties. I want something different—something exciting."

"So I gathered," Hurley said dryly. "There's a new casino on Miami Beach. We can dance—"

"Dance!" Marcelle said, her voice suddenly plaintive. "But I can dance any time." She touched his arm, and glanced up into his face, a wicked look in her eyes. "Up North, you hear so much about wild night-life in Miami—gambling for huge stakes, tough people." She laughed a trifle excitedly. "But you never see any of it. Last night, we were all talking about some place that was run by a man named Petroni. I'd like to see that."

"Nothing doing," Hurley said positively. "I'll take you anywhere else—almost anywhere else—but I don't take you there."

"But why?" Marcelle coaxed. "I'm not a child. It wouldn't hurt me just to see such a place. We wouldn't have to stay long. Nothing could happen to me"—she flashed a provocative smile—"with you there."

"Not to Petroni's."

"You're afraid to, that's why!" she taunted.

Hurley laughed softly.

"You are! And I dare you! If anything happens, I'll say I made you go. But nothing ever happens to me—"

HURLEY thought: "So this is what one twenty-two-year-old girl wants!" Then, against his judgment, impulsively, he agreed: "All right. If I don't take you, you'll find somebody who will, I suppose. But I warn you—this is a joint."

"I know we'll have fun," Marcelle said. "I hope something happens!"

They drove steadily for nearly an hour, north along Biscayne Boulevard, past the chromium-and-glass-fronted stores, over canals and out on the winding coastal highway, through Hollywood and Dania and Fort Lauderdale, on and on. Then at last there was a sandy side road, and Hurley turned down that; and after a few minutes came to a grove of gnarled oaks, beyond which, set back low and almost out of sight, was an unpainted, rambling structure. Cars were scattered about the parking-lot, and a negro boy came immediately to take their machine.

An indefinable air of secrecy, almost of evil, clung to this place. Marcelle's attitude of tolerant boredom had disappeared.

"Is this it?" she asked. And going in, she tucked her hand under Hurley's

arm, as if the contact provided her a reassurance she needed.

"Just another gambling joint," he said. "But a hot one. Do you know how to act?"

"No."

Hurley laughed. "Neither do I. I don't get inside a dump like this very often, except on a raid."

INSIDE, after they had filed through a narrow corridor and had been scrutinized by a scar-faced man wearing a dirty Panama drawn low over his eyes, they came upon a labyrinth of rooms, low-ceilinged and dirty, filled with people, noise and vitiated air of many odors. There was a long bar, and a dance-floor, with five or six musicians blatting on muted trumpets and saxophones. In one room was a roulette-wheel; in another a poker-game was in silent grim progress, the table piled high with chips under a green-shaded center lamp. Elsewhere other games were going; everywhere was that sinister tension, that watchfulness, which indicated that both patrons and owners might be expecting something—anything—to happen.

Marcelle, taking it all in with wide eyes, her cheeks flushed, asked: "Now what do we do?"

"Play—if you get any kick out of losing your money."

"But I don't," she protested.

"Then just stick around and get an eye-ful. This is the toughest joint in south Florida."

She gave him a quick side glance. "Aren't they supposed to keep places like this from operating?"

Hurley said: "Sure. Sheriff McCann busts it up every month or two, but it opens again. See that guy?" He pointed out a thin-faced, crooked-nosed man by the doorway, who was observing them with a sultry-eyed watchfulness. "That's Slash Petroni. Up North he buys and sells little girls like you for a living. . . . Like it?"

Marcelle Dallen shivered. She made no reply.

Hurley tensed suddenly. He said in an undertone:

"You'd better pretend to like it, anyway; Petroni wants to meet you."

The man Petroni was dressed in dinner clothes, although the evening was warm. He slipped through the crowd with a deft feline grace, those black eyes taking in every detail of Marcelle, and then resting briefly on Hurley. He came

up, hands carelessly in coat pockets, his pale, pinched face inscrutable.

"Evening, Lieutenant," he said in a queer, softly metallic voice. "Enjoying yourself?"

"Hello, Petroni," Hurley returned. "Business seems to be good."

Petroni's eyes slitted brilliantly. "And wouldn't you like to do something about that?" he challenged, and laughed. "But don't get ideas!" There was an ugly twist to his lips.

Hurley shook his head slowly. "Just slumming, tonight," he said carelessly.

But Petroni was not listening, now. He had turned to Marcelle, smiling blandly; when he smiled, his face had a vicious handsomeness of a sort. "I'm Slash Petroni," he said. "Hyar' you, babe?"

"Miss Dallen," Marcelle said, looking a little frightened and very impressed.

Hurley watched Petroni glide away through the crowd. He looked down at Marcelle.

"I wish you hadn't told the guy who you are," he said thoughtfully.

"Why?" Marcelle's eyes were wide and amused.

"He's a bad actor. He'd cut his own mother's throat for a dime!"

"But isn't he fascinating!" she exclaimed. "I don't think he likes you."

Hurley laughed. "Well, why should he? I sent him up for a stretch once."

AT midnight Hurley was ready to leave. But Marcelle had succumbed to the fascination of roulette, and was playing the black at a dollar a whirl. She had won eleven dollars; her eyes had that stunned brightness which comes from intoxication with gambling; her cheeks glowed, and her hands trembled each time she put down a chip.

"Come on," Hurley said. "The Old Man will scalp me if I don't get you home pretty soon."

"Don't be silly," Marcelle said. "I'm having fun. Come on—let me bet for you."

Hurley shook his head. "I don't feel lucky tonight."

"You're sleepy, that's what! Just like my uncle."

Just then the orchestra stopped playing in the middle of a phrase, so abruptly that an instantaneous hush fell over the crowd. A waiter came running through this room, his loose face wearing a queer expression of fear. "Raid," he said to the croupier at the wheel.

"Raid! Clear the room. Get that stuff outta here!"

After that, things were confused. People swirled toward the doors, waiters fighting them to be quiet. Men cursed. A woman screamed. Somebody kept saying: "Take it easy—easy!" From outside, somewhere, there was a shot, and then a steady, spaced battering up on a door.

All this Hurley heard and saw, as he shoved Marcelle ahead of him toward the exit. He was not concerned about her safety, or his own; he wanted only to shield her from publicity which would inevitably result if they were dragged into a police court and "mugged." Fighting his way there, he regretted intensely the impulsive indiscretion which had brought him here tonight. And he thought: "Squiring a brass-hat's niece! I should have known something like this would happen, from the way Petroni watched us. The guy was nervous—had a tip-off on this raid, thought I was here to work from the inside."

They got out of the roulette-room, into the big barnlike space containing the dance-floor and bar. The orchestra was playing again now. Petroni and two of his helpers were trying to line people up at the bar, offering them drinks on the house. With the gaming-rooms emptied, there would be no evidence for the law, and therefore no danger to guests.

SUDDENLY the front door was burst in. Hurley caught a glimpse of old Sheriff McCann, his hat off, his white hair awry, a gun in his hand. There were four or five deputies with him, and they came into the room in a wedge. The Sheriff shouted in his hoarse, cracked voice to the crowd:

"Stand back—stand back!" And then: "Petroni, we want you."

They moved steadily toward Petroni, who stood by the bar waiting, a sneer on his face.

And then a strange thing happened. Petroni, watching one of the deputies, started violently; his lips curled viciously. He whipped out an automatic from his coat and fired three quick shots. The lights went out at that same instant, leaving the room filled with screams, with the pungent odor of burnt powder, with that swirling confusion of people actuated by panic.

Marcelle cried into Bob Hurley's ear: "What's happened? Did he shoot somebody?"

Then a flashlight was stabbing through the darkness, with a man's bulk behind it, coming toward them. It rested briefly on Hurley's face, and on Marcelle. In the press of people there, the Coast Guard officer was hemmed in almost helplessly. But he heard Petroni's reedy voice snarling: "Your idea, was it?" And the next instant something crashed upon Hurley's skull, just as Marcelle was snatched out of his grasp. Stunned, he fell to the floor. There were several shots spaced closely, and then only the groaning of somebody who had been hurt, and subdued, frightened voices.

Frantically Hurley fought his way through the darkness, through the churning crowd, after Petroni. He could not understand what had happened, what violent cause could have produced this dreadful effect. But it turned him suddenly sick with fright to realize the danger Marcelle Dallen was in.

AT ten minutes past two o'clock Hurley was in Fort Lauderdale, in Sheriff McCann's office, trying to control his nerves and sit still while they pieced the fragments of this night into a pattern. The aging peace officer of Broward County, sitting there at his desk, looked almost exhausted. His gray eyes were squinted and bleakly bright, but a bitter weariness lay deeply etched into the lines of his face. He spread both hands out on his desk, staring down at them briefly, and then back at Hurley.

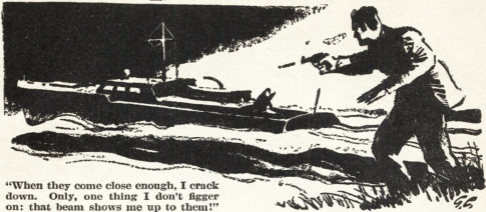
"Petroni knew this wasn't a routine raid tonight," he said, "as soon as we broke down the door and got in. He wasn't expecting it, or there wouldn't have been a piece of gambling equipment in his joint all evening. What seems to have happened was—"

"I don't care what happened!" Hurley explained. "Marcelle Dallen is on Petroni's boat, and they're headed—God knows where they're headed. I'm responsible—I've got to do something—not sit here! That girl is Commander Newsom's niece. You know what Petroni is!"

"Yes," McCann nodded. "But the man's desperate now—he's involved in a murder. We've got to move cautious, or we'll never get that girl back."

"What started Petroni shooting it out with you tonight?"

"Coming to that," McCann said. "Remember the Littermann murder in Miami last week? That was Petroni, we thought all along. But nobody could



"When they come close enough, I crack down. Only, one thing I don't figger on: that beam shows me up to them!"

prove it, because the one man who probably witnessed it was found the next morning in the Biltmore canal with a piece of sash-cord around his neck. But we thought all along it was Petroni. Then we discovered that one of my deputies looked enough like that witness to pass for him. It gave me ideas. So we staged this raid, and my deputy came in beside me, wearing a steel vest, expecting Petroni to shoot him. Petroni got one look—you saw him start shooting. We know for a fact he's the man we're after, now. If he hadn't grabbed the Dallen girl for a shield as he ran out the back door, we'd got him, right then."

In impatience and anger that were beyond restraint, Hurley exploded: "I don't care what Petroni was mixed up in, before. We've got to run him down. He's got too long a start now."

"Easy, son," McCann said. "There's ways you have to go at things. You can't search every cruiser you see in the Stream. We don't know what boat Petroni's on. Only one man, that I know of, saw him pull out of Hillsboro Inlet. That's Parsons—Deputy Parsons. He got shot, tonight. When Doc Laramie gets him sewed up, he'll tell us what kind of boat we're looking for. Some things, son, you can't hurry too fast."

"God!" Hurley whispered. Then, dreading it more than he had ever dreaded anything in his life, he picked up the telephone to tell Commander Newsom this news.

It took some time to establish the fact that the Old Man and Mrs. Newsom, quite early that evening, had accepted an invitation to spend the weekend on a friend's yacht, and were now probably somewhere among the lower Florida Keys.

Grimly, Hurley racked the receiver. "That's that," he said to McCann. "The Old Man's out of reach. I'm on my own. . . . Now listen: there's only one way to go at this. I'm heading back to the Dinner Key Base. You have Parsons down there before six o'clock. I'm going after Petroni by plane. If Parsons knows that boat when he sees it, we'll find it, we'll—"

McCann shook his gray head. "Now, don't get excited, son. You may not be able to do this. Parsons may not be able to fly. He got a slug through the shoulder, and flying—"

"You have him there!" Hurley barked. "If he can live through that battle tonight, a day's flying won't hurt him."

"Don't you do nothing rash, son," the old sheriff said slowly, his puckered eyes grave. "Remember, Petroni's a killer!"

"If he were only a killer, and Marcelle Dallen weren't on his boat, I'd call this a picnic!" Hurley said, and hurried out.

DAWN broke, pink and silver and gold, over Biscayne Bay. Under the glint of sunlight the water appeared to smooth itself into a sheet of highly lustrous brass from Dinner Key all the way to Cape Florida, with the Atlantic lying beyond, seeming to brood under a high bank of white clouds that had been a thunderstorm during the night, and would become one again during the day. Then, as the sun rose, those clouds obscured it, and the bay grew lifeless again.

On the apron in front of the Coast Guard hangar, one of the old General planes was being dollyed down to the ramp by a tractor. At one side, charts in hand, Bob Hurley stood talking to Parsons, a thin, wiry shadow of a man who had a white bandage around his head, and his right arm in a sling. Par-

sons' face was a gray-white, and his wide, thin-lipped mouth drooped at the corners from weariness. Hurley, keenly attentive to the details Parsons was relating, was none the less observant of the preparations that were being carried on tensely around him: the loading, by Gunner's Mate Livermore, of a sub-machine-gun and a dozen drums of ammunition into the plane; the quiet, efficient way Scott, the cadaverous radio operator, was testing his communications equipment.

PARSONS was saying gloomily: "Me and Miller seen which way Petroni run, with the girl, when he got out of the joint. We took after 'em. I lost Miller in the crowd. Petroni got to a car, and got away from there mighty fast. I got my car and tried to keep up. They took me for one wild ride, I tell you, all along that back beach road up toward Hillsboro. It was sure unlucky't the Sheriff and the others went the other way—we'd 'a' got 'em. They was Petroni and another guy, and the girl.

"Anyhow, they run up Hillsboro way, and at the bend in the road, with me pretty close on their tail, they turned their car sideways in the road, and jump out and run down to the inlet. I take after 'em afoot. They get that boat moving awful quick—pull out of the slip and head down by the lighthouse. I'm afraid to shoot, account the girl. But there's a place where the channel's narrow. I figger I can maybe take a crack at the guy at the wheel, so the boat'll run itself aground, when the guy pulls up close enough. So I cut across that neck of sandy land, and when they come up close enough, I crack down. I can see the boat mighty plain, when the beam of the lighthouse swings around.

"Only, one thing I don't figger on, myself. That beam shows me up to them. They start shooting—two of 'em. I get banged on the head, and then all hell lets loose in my shoulder. . . . I drove back with one hand. They sure get away to sea fast." Parsons shook his head regretfully; his face had a strange shrunken look, as if that memory were completely exhausting.

"How many men on the boat, altogether?" Hurley asked.

"Just them two, I expect. They had to cast off their own lines."

"Sure of that?"

"Well, if they'd been more, they'd 'a' been shooting at me too, I've no doubt," Parsons said soberly.

"How big a boat?"

"Big cruiser. I'd say maybe fifty feet, maybe some less. Looked mighty fast. Dark color. They must 'a' kept her up there, figgering all the time on a get-away if the time ever come."

"Well," Hurley said, "I hope you'll know her when we sight her out there today. Because we're going to sight her, if I have to go out five hundred miles."

He helped Parsons aboard the plane, while Livermore and Scott took their places in the cabin, the latter at his radio panel, sitting on the little swinging stool. The Wasps, high in the engine mounts above the single wing, were already ticking contentedly, their props flicking, dull metallic discs in the reflected light from the water. Hurley, in the cockpit, checked all the instruments. He nodded to the ground crew, and the tractor eased the plane down the incline into the bay, where, when the beaching wheels left the ramp as the hull floated, the plane heeled over on one pontoon, the other wing canted fifteen degrees up in the air. Livermore, from a position in the companionway aft the cockpit, was raising the beaching-gear now; Hurley blasted the guns and taxied out past the channel buoys. The water was glassy.

He had trouble breaking the suction of the water against the hull, because of the slick; but finally got up on the step and at last rocked the plane off. In the air, with the engines' vibration making the controls tremble against the balls of his feet and the palms of his hands, he pointed the nose upward in a slow, steady climb. At a thousand feet, he turned northeast, over Miami Beach, and roared out to sea. Parsons, in the co-pilot's seat, sat clutching his belt with a look of avid yet fearful curiosity in this strange sensation of flight.

HURTLING over the sea, watching the gray-green of shallows blend into greens and then blues that finally, at the sharp dividing line of the Gulf Stream, became pure indigo, Bob Hurley was filled with a steadily increasing tension of mind. Pursuit of a quarry always excited him; but this was more than excitement. Some strange sixth sense seemed to touch his subconsciousness, warning him of danger that he could not fathom. Again the image of Marcelle Dallen's bright, eager face came before him, tormenting his conscience.

Below them, here and there on the smooth Atlantic, they spotted a gray



Hurley demanded:
 "You're positive this
 is the boat?"

picket boat or a white fishing craft. The Fort Lauderdale Base, Hurley was relieved to see, was co-operating. But a picket boat could do nothing today; Petroni had too great a lead. Hurley had no illusions. He had started this episode with the impulsive desire to show Marcelle something new; he had started it, and now the burden of ending it lay heavily in his hands.

Parsons, his nervousness forgotten in concentration, stared through binoculars at each vessel they passed—always, in turn, shaking his head. Charts spread out on his knees under the control-wheel, Hurley followed the line he had sketched, a zigzagging line that carried them over

Bimini, and far past, and then sharply back toward the low coast of Florida, and then once more almost east, a hundred miles from the coast. He knew it was guesswork; he knew Petroni might have turned north and gone up the Stream, well offshore. But he tried now to envision the processes of Petroni's mind, tried to think as he believed Petroni would think. The man would run toward British waters, he felt confident. Confident, but not at all sure. At best, he knew, the search was a gamble.

Now and again they droned over some small isolated island of the Bahaman group. But futilely, for these places, in main, were totally uninhabited—flecks

of white sand that blazed in the sun, surrounded by the incredibly blue, peaceful sea. Gulls rose up, and pelicans, wheeling away in fright and disorder at the plane's roar.

Scott, the tall radio operator, came forward presently, to shout into Hurley's ear: "The Base reports a thunderstorm approaching the station—reception poor now and soon impossible for a time. If you have anything to report, sir, they want it now."

Hurley shook his head, his face worried. "Nothing. Tell 'em to call us as soon as the thunderstorm's passed."

"Yes sir." Scott's long, sober face was expressionless. He sat down, and started tapping the key. Hurley touched the throttles, to synchronize them more perfectly. They flew on and on, every eye searching the flat, lifeless expanse of the sea.

Then suddenly Parsons snatched the binoculars down from his face, blinked quickly, and lifted the glasses again. And a prickle of apprehensive excitement lay cold against Hurley's spine at Parsons' hoarse shout:

"There! Over there! That looks like the boat!"

Hurley focused the binoculars hastily. Far off to the left was a black-hulled cruiser that churned steadily eastward. He swung the plane smoothly that way, nosing down. He handed Parsons the glasses again, said, "Watch it!" and unconsciously fingered over his safety-belt.

EIGHT minutes later, at a thousand feet, Hurley banked over the craft, studying it with a tense, detailed speculation. His heart was accelerated; perspiration had broken out on his face. The cruiser was running at sixteen or seventeen knots—heading out into the open Atlantic. With a quick reference to his charts, Hurley estimated its position as a hundred and fifty miles from the Florida coast; he jotted down its latitude and longitude on the edge of his chart, and yelled back to Scott:

"Get this through to the Base. Tell 'em to rush patrol boats."

"Landing here, sir?" Scott inquired.

"Haven't made up my mind. Tell 'em I'm looking it over."

Scott nodded and went back, wearing an expression of doubt. He started pounding the key.

Livermore, his thatch of dark hair awry from scraping his head on the hatch above, came up and peered into the cock-

pit, giving the cruiser a half-minute's scrutiny.

"Innercent-looking enough, from up here, aint she?" Then he went back and got out his sub-machine-gun.

FOR ten minutes, at reduced revvs, Hurley circled the craft. If the plane were observed by the men below, they gave no indication; the bow wave still curled up white on each side, spewing back into a frothy blue-white wake that lay in a perfectly straight line aft for a mile. Hurley glanced through the companionway to see how Scott was progressing. The operator was bent over his radio set, banging away at the key, and pressing his earphones close to his head with both hands, then tapping the key again with a bouncing movement of wrist.

It was clear that Scott was not getting that message through to the Base.

Then, either in anger or agitation, Scott yanked the earphones from his head and threw them down on the little desk under the set. He jumped up and shouted into the cockpit, his voice raucous against the thundering engines: "Can't work 'em. I can read them, but they can't get a thing. What about it, Lieutenant?"

Hurley sat silent, wheeling the plane. In a few minutes, because of shortage of gas, it would be necessary to head back to the Base. There was no surface Coast Guard craft in this vicinity; the nearest patrol boat was probably sixty or seventy miles to the west. By the time some one could get here, Petroni would have lost himself once more in darkness at sea.

Knowing fully the odds they would face, he said to Livermore: "Keep that tommy-gun handy. Give me an automatic—Scott and Parsons too. The water's smooth down there. I'm going to land."

Parson's shrill protest came instantly over the rumble of the exhausts: "They're killers, man! How you going to take a boat, with a plane?"

Hurley, through set lips, demanded: "You're positive this is the boat?"

"There aint any doubt about that! But—"

His voice was lost in the roar of the engines as Hurley gunned into a turn at nineteen hundred revvs.

He circled once more, and then eased back on the throttles. The engines back-fired with a loud, erratic popping. Livermore came forward again, when Hurley

beckoned over his shoulder; together, they planned the attack.

Then the big gunner's mate went aft, and opened the hatch on the left side of the fuselage. Wind whipped inside, a hollow blast that changed tone with the slightest variation of the plane's speed.

Hurley, sucking in a deep, nervous breath, swung down alongside the boat.

As the plane hurtled past, Livermore leveled the sub-machine-gun, and a chatter of shots made little white geysers of water under the boat's bow. She slowed instantly. The men in the cockpit began gesticulating wildly, shaking their fists. Through the binoculars, Hurley could identify Slash Petroni, as the man scrambled up on the bow and left the helmsman alone.

Hurley blasted the engines and climbed in a circle that kept the cruiser constantly in Livermore's range. In that fashion, the plane made a complete turn around the stern of the boat, and came once more alongside.

And now the craft was no longer thrashing a wake. Her propeller had stopped, and she was drifting, slowing, pitching gently with the long undulations of the blue swells. Beside Petroni, up there on the bow, was the helmsman; both men had their hands in the air. Close alongside, cautiously, Hurley skimmed onto the sea; the hull spanked once, and nuzzled in gently, coming to a quick stop. After that, while Livermore stood ready in the hatchway with his machine-gun, Hurley taxied the plane in a circle, and finally snuggled the nose up against the black hull, the thrust of the props holding the aircraft pressed tightly there.

It wasn't, he saw from this position, so large a boat as Parsons had thought. It was no more than forty feet in the extreme. The superstructure consisted of a single spacious cabin, with a large cockpit aft; there was a single mast, an improvised affair that would make the use of a sail possible in case of emergency.

PETRONI, as Hurley lifted his cockpit hatch and thrust his head out, came to the rail, cursing, his sallow face contorted by rage. Yet he did not lower his hands.

"What's the idea?" he snarled. Then, identifying Hurley, he added: "Oh, you, is it? Listen, mug—we're on the high seas. We're out of your jurisdiction, in British waters. You can't get away with a stick-up like this!"

Covering them with his automatic, Hurley said: "Save the words, Petroni. Under the doctrine of hot pursuit, I could chase you across the Atlantic. Where's the girl?"

A FLICKER of wonder crossed his mind at the faint look of relief which showed itself on Petroni's face. But he gave it no thought. From the edge of his vision he saw Livermore slide through the companionway, through the cockpit and the bulkhead into the bow. Then the bow hatch lifted, and the big gunner's mate emerged, machine-gun in one hand. He leaped up to the cruiser's rail, covering Petroni and the seaman, a business-like gleam in his eyes. Livermore always relished a fight; he probably wished now that Petroni would start something.

But Petroni did not. He seemed completely subdued. "The girl's below," he said almost plaintively. "We didn't hurt her. Had to tie her up so she wouldn't jump overboard. Lieutenant—"

Hurley snapped off the switches, and the engines clanked to a stop. He crawled forward and leaped to the rail. Scott and Parsons, less agile, followed. Scott took the plane hawser and found a boat-hook and occupied himself with keeping a wing from scraping the rail. While Livermore kept Petroni and the seaman covered, Hurley searched them with a deft haste.

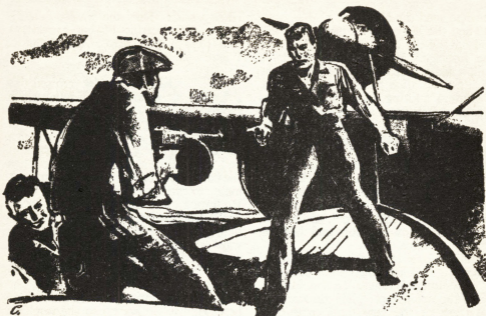
"Two guns." He smiled mirthlessly at Petroni, thrusting them into his pockets. "Expecting a fight? If you want one, you'll get one!"

His hooded eyes on that machine-gun, Petroni sneered: "You must think I'm nuts."

"You were, to kidnap a girl. This time you won't get off with a smuggling charge. . . . Livermore, take Scott and go below. If you find any more rats down here, burn 'em up! Parsons, slip bracelets on these two."

Petroni said nothing more, merely stood there, while Parsons came forward and snapped handcuffs over his wrists, shackling him to his seaman. Then, when that had been done, Livermore and Scott turned briskly aft.

And somehow, Petroni's very silence, his complete submission, made Hurley nervous. This was not Petroni's way. He was a vicious man, cunning as a rodent. The tropical sun beat down from almost directly overhead, its heat turning the air flaccid and stifling, seeming to generate an added suspense. Standing



Hurley lifted the pistol just as Petroni swung the machine-gun around.

there, with the sea lifting boat and plane on its successive slow swells, Hurley debated the best course of procedure. It would be the safest way to put these men aboard the plane, manacle them securely, and taking Marcelle with him, fly back to Dinner Key. He could, he decided, leave Parsons and Scott to bring back the cruiser, and let Livermore keep guard over Petroni with the machine-gun.

Just then, as Hurley had reached this decision, he heard, in the bowels of the boat, a violent crash, and the sound of scuffling. Then Livermore's voice sounded up through the deck, muffled yet filled with frenzy and rage:

"Lieutenant!"

IT came over Hurley, in that split second, that he had sensed all the time some eventuality of this kind, and he remembered Parsons' questioning phrase—"How you going to take a boat, with a plane?" Now he growled at Parsons, "Keep a gun on these two!" and started to turn aft to Livermore's aid.

But before he could launch himself into motion, a voice from somewhere behind him snarled:

"Drop the gat, buddy—*drop it!*" And for emphasis a bullet splintered planking six inches from Hurley's feet.

Reluctantly he let the automatic slide from his fingers. It clattered to the deck. Parsons, beside him, let his own weapon fall likewise. There was a sar-

donic sneer of triumph on Petroni's sharp face as the man said: "That's sensible, Lieutenant. Now be a smart guy and take off these bracelets. Dake's got the front cabin window open, and that sweet little machine-gun is aimed at your back." He and his seaman stepped up, keeping Parsons and Hurley between themselves and the gunman behind. Parsons gave Hurley a quick look of question, as if there might be doubt in his mind about unlocking the cuffs. Hurley nodded, wondering in miserable regret what had happened to Livermore and Scott, that they had fallen into this trap. An instant later Petroni was free.

He picked up Hurley's pistol, jabbed its blunt muzzle into the Coast Guard officer's stomach, and retrieved his own guns. Then, stepping back cautiously, he called in a reedy, confident voice: "It's okay, Dake. Come up here." To Hurley, now, his manner was one faintly patronizing, yet exceedingly venomous. "So you came after your girl!" he said. "Like I figured on. She wasn't no good to me, except as a decoy. But she aint on the boat. She's probably just about getting home now, after a twenty-mile walk. Son, you're real smart!" Petroni laughed silently.

"All right," Hurley said. "This play's yours. But you'll burn in the chair before it's all over. You can't get away with murdering Coast Guard—"

"Murder?" Petroni interrupted blandly. "Give me credit! Your two pals aint hurt very bad—knocked in the head. Me—all I want now is for you to send a radio message back to your Base that you've got me, are bringing me in. Then I'll leave all of you in your plane, just as peaceful, and I'll go my way." His eyes slitted suddenly in that dangerous way they had; he added, his voice rasping softly: "It won't be my fault if your plane sinks from a few bullet-holes in her hull. . . . But murder!" He shook his head in a mocking reproach. "Tsk! Tsk!"

Drawing a deep breath, Hurley said: "You can't get away with that, either. Patrol boats are out. They'll run you down."

Petroni grinned. "But they won't stay out, after you radio that you've captured me. You'll tell your Base that you're disabled—you're bringing my cruiser in, towing your plane. It should take you till tomorrow evening to get back, like that. By then, when you don't show up, it won't make any difference how many patrol boats and planes they send out. I'll be where I'm going. And so," he finished sardonically, "will all you guys."

The man Dake came up from below, cradling Livermore's machine-gun in the crook of his arm. He, like the other seaman, was dressed only in dungarees, naked from the waist up; his face was flat and square, with thick, brutal lips and heavy features. He circled Parsons and Hurley with a feline caution, his rubber-soled sandals soundless on the blistering deck.

"Them two below," he said to Petroni, "maybe I conked 'em too hard. They aint come around. But it's okay. I got 'em roped up."

"Get aboard the plane," Petroni said, ignoring Dake's comment. "You and Otto. I'll handle these guys. Bring out all the life-preservers. There ought to be a rubber raft somewhere. Bring it. Also the guns and ammunition. We'll collect us an arsenal, while we're about it."

THE two seamen pulled the plane up to the rail, and dropped to her bow. Parsons and Hurley stood with hands in the air. Parsons was trembling, his face covered with perspiration, pale as a fish's belly. Now and then his lips worked tremulously, but without sound. Seeing those life-preservers being thrown up on deck, he knew what was coming, and he had lost hope.

Shifting his arms to ease their ache, Hurley tried desperately to control his own fear; completely unleashed, it would rob him of all power for coordinated planning. And he must plan! He knew that the chances of outwitting Petroni now were one in a million. The gangster's ingenuity was perfectly clear; it was equally clear that it would succeed. How far he must have been thinking ahead, last night in that bar-room, Hurley considered, to have feigned then to kidnap Marcelle—that Hurley would hunt him down, and when he found him, be the means of perfecting Petroni's complete disappearance by calling off other pursuit!

ONE at a time, Hurley gave quick consideration to the scant possibilities presenting themselves in his mind. He and his men would be without weapons in the plane. Dake, with that machine-gun, would probably drill the hull as Petroni pulled away from the cruiser. And sinking in five or six fathoms of water, what could any man do? If they got out of the cabin, it would do them no good; they were far from steamer lanes, where they might hope to be seen. They could swim, perhaps, for a few hours, while sharks came nuzzling curiously before making the kill.

Facing Petroni, Hurley demanded: "Is this business of drowning us one of your cute little pleasures, or is there a reason for not lining us up at the rail and having it over with?"

Petroni's features sharpened, so that his face looked like a rat. "You rather have it that way?" he inquired.

"No!" Parsons protested. "Not that way, for God's sake, man!"

Grinning, Petroni said: "Okay." Then he added: "Sure, there's a reason. If your radio operator don't come up for air, you'll send my message, Lieutenant. I'm not so dumb I don't know an operator's swing on a sending-key is as good as his signature."

"I'll be glad to send it!" Hurley said bitterly.

But now, with that thought, a glimmer of hope flashed through his mind. It wasn't much of a hope; it could fail far more easily than it could succeed, but it was a chance. Thinking of it, standing there helplessly, Hurley had to fight down a nauseating excitement that set him to shaking. . . .

Dake and Otto overlooked nothing inside the plane. They brought out the

rubber life-raft, the Springfield rifle that had been in the aft locker, the ammunition which Livermore had put aboard this morning—cons ago. They found the Véry signaling pistols and flares.

YET Hurley was not so concerned with them now. He made his small plans. The sun grew constantly hotter, it seemed, although his perspiration came now from that nervous excitement, that hope, which lay torturing in his mind. It seemed irony, suddenly, as Petroni ordered him down into the plane, that just then his straining eyes picked up a faint smoke on the western horizon: a freighter making its southing outside the Gulf Stream.

"Bring them other guys up," Petroni said to Otto. "Leave 'em on deck." He prodded Hurley with the machine-gun. "Okay, you—let's go."

Once more Hurley was aboard his plane, feeling its slow surge against the hawser, feeling the jar as the nose eased into the hull. He went aft and sat down at the little radio-stool, and turned on the transmitter to heat up the tubes. Petroni, watchful as a lynx, wrote out the message:

LANDED AND CAPTURED CRUISER STOP ALL
WELL STOP PETRONI AND TWO SEAMEN
PRISONERS STOP PLANE DAMAGED COLLISION
BOAT PROP BENT STOP RETURNING BASE IN
CRUISER PLANE IN TOW STOP GIRL NOT
ABOARD HERE PETRONI INSISTS HE RE-
LEASED HER ON ISOLATED ROAD NEAR GLADES
STOP EXPECT NO FURTHER CONTACT UNTIL
ARRIVAL HURLEY

"That the way you sign it?" Petroni demanded.

"That's right."

"You head it up like it should be," Petroni's eyes slitted murderously. "No funny stuff now. Dake can read code. I'm sending him down here to listen to you. One wrong word, and you'll get a slug through your head!"

"I won't try anything," Hurley said meekly.

"Where's your guts?" the gangster taunted. "Aint you the brave guy! If I was in your fix, I'd try something. . . . Dake!" he shouted through the open cockpit hatch. "Leave them guys to Otto. Come down here and listen."

It was hot, here in this metal cabin, inside the plane. Perspiration bathed Hurley; his hands trembled as he adjusted the transmitter. Everything depended upon his tricking Petroni, yet

seeming so craven with fear that thought of trickery would never occur to the other. Dake came in, holding a pistol, and read through the message.

"See he sends it," Petroni snapped. "If he starts giving positions or calling for help, put one through his skull."

"Okay," Dake said, his voice a deep guttural. Petroni backed through the companionway. Dake said to Hurley: "Well, get going, there!"

Hurley nodded. He reached up to the rack by the receiver and pulled down the heavy code-book, opened it at random, pretending to look for call letters. Then he laid the book at his left hand, two inches from the transmitter key. Dake snarled: "Well, send it! We aint got all day!"

Quickly now, holding his breath, Hurley pressed down on the key. The dynamotor under the transmitter hummed with a new tone, high-pitched and nervous, as it hurled its thousand volts into the plates of the tubes. With a bouncing wrist-movement, Hurley began the preamble of that long message which would be his own death-warrant and would set Petroni free.

But he stopped, after a repetition of the Dinner Key call. He looked up at Dake guilelessly. "The antenna," he said. "It's coiled up in its spool in the wing. Have to string it up before the message will go out on the air. If you'll drag it across to the boat and string it up to the mast, I'll get on with this."

DAKE hesitated suspiciously. He knew something about radio; no man learns code and gets a license to operate without doing so. Thus he knew there was no danger from handling the antenna; the high-frequency emission, if Hurley depressed the key, might burn his hand slightly, but without shock. Dake moved to the cockpit hatch, and yelled to Petroni, explained. Petroni said: "Well, drag it out and toss it up here. I'll see he don't try to get outta the plane."

It seemed to Hurley forever before Dake climbed up through the cockpit hatch and lay down on the wing, reaching under and clutching the leaden "fish" attached to the antenna end. But then, when Dake was gone, there was not enough time.

He snapped open the transmitter case. He had no screw-driver, no pliers, no tools of any kind. So he jerked off his wrist-watch, and reached inside and laid the ends of the metal strap across

the antenna coupling condenser, crimping them down as securely as possible with his fingers.

Then, breathless with excitement and the uncertainty of what he hoped to accomplish, he closed the transmitter case, and half arose in the companionway, looking through the cockpit windows at Dake, who was then stepping over the cruiser's rail, trailing the antenna out behind him.

Feeling the pound of his heart, Hurley made himself wait. Dake took the antenna end to the mast, and reached up to attach it to a cleat on the mast. Then Hurley leaned over and pressed the key down; with his left hand he shifted the heavy code-book upon it to maintain the contact.

INSTANTLY, as the points of the key came together, Dake was transfixed by the impact of almost a thousand volts of low amperage current. With that watch-band as a jumper across the antenna coupling condenser, the antenna no longer carried its harmless radio-frequency current; it carried low frequency plate current that lacked only scantily the power to kill. The shock was so violent that Dake could not jerk loose from the wire.

But he could scream, and his screams lifted up against the breathless heat of high noon. Through the cockpit window, Hurley could see him standing there, his arms flexing in awful convulsions, his face contorted by pain.

"Drag me loose! Get me loose!" the gun he had held in one hand had been thrown, by one uncontrolled jerk of his arm, halfway across the foredeck. "Kill the guy in the plane!" Dake screamed. "He doctored that radio. He's holding the key down!"

In that instant the deck of the cruiser was the scene of utmost confusion. Scott and Livermore, tied hand and foot, were sitting against the port rail ten feet away, laughing. Parsons was yelling hysterically. Otto, the seaman, was running toward Dake, shouting: "Let go! Let it go!" And an instant later, trying to knock the wire out of Dake's hands, was himself held there, powerless. Petroni, a confused look on his face, was threatening Parsons, and trying to look into the seaplane at the same time. Then he raised the machine-gun to fire down at the plane.

Hurley, seeing his gesture, stepped aft and dived through the open hatchway behind the wing. He struck, and went under, just as the shattering staccato of that gun in Petroni's hands riddled the hull of the plane.

Swimming under water, Hurley reached the boat's bow. He knew that if a bullet from Petroni's gun struck the transmitter in the proper place, or shattered a battery, the current would stop. He came up, found a trailing loop of the anchor hawser in reach, and quickly pulled himself up over the rail. Petroni was still drilling the plane. Hurley dived for that pistol which Dake had flung down on the deck. He got it, and lifted it, just as Petroni caught sight of him—just as Petroni swung the cumbersome machine-gun around.

The two guns seemed to join their voices in one detonation.

But it was Petroni who sagged to the deck, the machine-gun still going, throwing a shower of splinters up from the planking. Parsons had grabbed up another gun now, the one which had fallen from Otto's hands as he took hold of Dake. Parsons fired at Petroni a split-second later. The chatter of the machine-gun was silenced abruptly; Petroni slid down and sprawled out supinely.

It was Scott who, when Hurley had quickly released him, went down into the plane to turn off the current. Hurley stood there, covering Otto and Dake. There was no need to cover them, for some length of time; they stood there screaming and jerking; Scott seemed in no hurry to bring an end to their suffering, or perhaps he was looking about, to see what Bob Hurley had done to his radio set.

THE cruiser fetched the low shore of Florida the next morning at dawn.

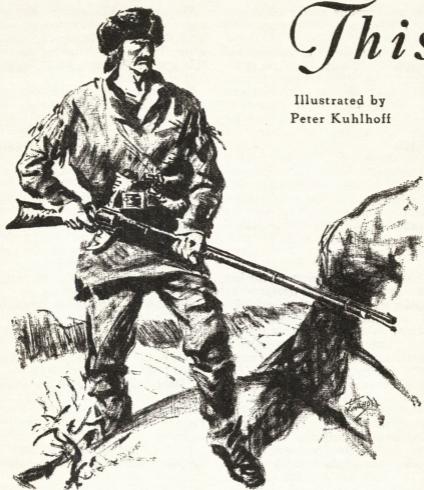
Dake and Otto were below, tied up and locked in the fo'c'stle, holding a wake over the gangster Petroni.

Bob Hurley was at the wheel, when the skyline of Miami grew up out of the sea, when the palms of Cape Florida showed color against the gray western sky. He was thinking moodily of little Marcelle Dallen. He liked her. It was ironical, a pity, he thought, that she should have started this episode in search of excitement—and had had to end her part of it by walking twenty miles home.

Another swift-moving and authentic story of air-adventure by Leland Jamieson will appear in an early issue.

This

Illustrated by
Peter Kuhlhoff



IN a Dakota city, near the Black Hills, lives Alex Patterson, atop a huge modern hotel which bears his name. He is a cautious man, of many attainments; chief among them, a love for the Black Hills and a surprising knowledge of their history.

He took an old gun-butt from the wall of his study and handed it to me.

"Something you should have for those Blue Book yarns about weapons," he observed. "It holds a remarkable story. Look it over." And he watched me with a quizzical smile.

The thing had once been a rifle. Rust and some mineral agent had eaten away most of the barrel—which, when you stop to think of it, does require more chemical reaction than rust alone. The breech was a huge mass of coagulated rust. The butt was of curly maple, which was unusual in anything except the old Pennsylvania-made rifles. It was badly

split and weathered. In it was deeply cut the name *Gus Smith*, nothing else.

"Well," I said cautiously, "maybe I'm imagining things; but it looks to me as if this rusty mass had once been a revolving chamber, like those the early revolvers had, with a nipple for a cap on each chamber."

"Right the first crack!" Patterson said heartily. "I got this from a rancher forty years ago. He had pulled it out of the ground near a mineral spring, when he first settled in this country. It was sticking in the ground, he said, with only the butt showing. There's a remarkable significance in his pulling it out and thinking nothing of it; that is, when you get the whole story of the thing, and of Gus Smith."

"Have you got it?" I asked quickly. Patterson nodded, in his cautious way. "More or less; you're welcome to it. I got it secondhand, from Injuns, from

Way Rode Smith

This story of the first repeating rifle is one of the most dramatic in all the Arms and Men series.

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

old-timers—here, there and everywhere—patching it until I got it all straightened out. Picking up details and fitting 'em has been an absorbing bit of work. This chap Manley, for instance, later published a book in England about his travels in the West; while it's worthless as a truthful narrative, it helped to link up many things about this rifle."

He hesitated, then went on slowly:

"It takes courage to face the truth of this story. You must remember that those mountain men, as they called themselves, who opened up the whole of our great West, didn't live by our present-day standards of ethics, morality or anything else. Just bare life was a fight. Most were squaw-men; but the rifle was more to them than woman. On the rifle hung life and liberty. Why, some of those old chaps would have their guns reloaded two or three times, till they must use bullets of twenty-five to the pound! And to understand Gus Smith, you must remember this fact."

"Who was Gus Smith, anyhow?" I demanded. Patterson gave me a startled look, then a most enigmatic smile.

"That, my dear sir, is a remarkable question for you to ask; however, let it pass as mere chance. As a matter of fact, I have a description of the man here among my notes. I got it from an old, old Injun squaw who claimed to have seen him—"

GUS SMITH was tall and lean, with black mustache and his beard plucked out, Indian style. His face was bony, brown, weathered, his eyes vividly alert under his beaver cap with ear-flaps. His rough, heavy garments, his buffalo-hide leggings with the hair in, bespoke readiness for the coming winter.

A bison horn, a black one, carefully scraped so thin that each grain of powder could be seen through the transparent

horn, was slung at his belt, with charger and Green River knife. His horse was saddled with a pad, also Indian style, and he held a rifle across his knees as he sat squinting amazedly at the horseman who had appeared before him. He flung back a glance at his companion, waved an arm, then turned again to advance his slit-eared Comanche pony toward the stranger.

"WELL, I'll be damned!" he ejaculated by way of greeting. "What be you, pardner?"

The stranger halted, staring likewise at Gus Smith. He had a rifle slung over his back, sure sign of a greenhorn; polished hat and boots, a sleek horse and Eastern saddle, handsome tailored garments, a brace of pistols at his saddle, and a hawk face with high aquiline nose. His linen was immaculate as his boots. His gaze was intolerant, proud, headstrong. He was such a man as might be met in Philadelphia, perhaps; but here, close to the hostile Sioux country, where there was scarce a white man within hundreds of miles, the apparition was unreal, incredible. Gus Smith rubbed his eyes.

"Hey! Be you real?" he went on, somewhat alarmed, to tell the truth. "I aint been drunk since summer rendezvous. My med'cine may have turned bad on me—"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the other, and laughed suddenly. "You're a white man! You talk English!"

"Huh? What d'ye take me for? Do I look like a Injun?" Gus Smith was indignant. "I talk English and Snake and French and Crow and Ree and sign talk, and I'm learning Scotch right now."

The other man blinked. "Scotch! My God, man, are you insane?"

"I reckon I am, lookin' at you," said Gus Smith. "A tarpaulin hat—my gosh! I aint seen one since I was to St. Louis

four years ago, with Kit Carson. Reckon I forgot to be polite, pardner. My name's Smith. I'm hunting with a feller named Stewart. Him and me aim to winter in the Yellerstone. Whar on earth did you come from anyhow?"

The intolerant eyes of the stranger warmed a little.

"Manley is the name; Horatius Manley, of Nottingham—in England, sir. I am in these regions on mingled business and pleasure. I rode on ahead of my party in the hope of coming on a bison, and now I seem to have lost my party."

Smith broke into a grin. "So that's it! Weak in the head, huh? Well, seein' as you're a Britisher, that's to be expected. Bison? Oh, you mean buffler! Me and Stewart just downed one yonder, last of the herd, I reckon. He's cuttin' out the tongue and hump right now. Whar's your wagon-train?"

"Train? I have only a light wagon," said Manley uneasily, "with my domestics and impedimenta."

"Your which?" Smith blinked. "Well, it don't matter. Buffler's most all gone now across the Arkansas for the winter, but we've struck sign of Injuns. Raiding party of Blackfeet, I judge. Here comes Stewart now. Scotch, he is. Don't you go to calling him a Britisher or you'll git his mad up. I reckon he can savvy your talk better'n I can."

UNUSUALLY talkative Smith had been, in his astonishment and curiosity. Now he relapsed into his usual taciturn manner, as Stewart appeared.

A big, bluff, bearded man, extraordinarily handsome, so radiant of hearty cheer and frank camaraderie as to be liked at sight, whether by Indian, mountain man or greenhorn. His costume was that of Smith, but better turned out, his equipment the same but of better style. Blood was spattered all over him, and the pack-horse he led was heaped with fresh hide-wrapped meat that dripped blood.

"Hey, Stewart!" said Smith laconically. "Meet Manley. Britisher. Greenhorn."

Stewart brought his horse alongside and shook hands heartily.

"Glad to see you, sir, glad to see you," he said with a Scotch burr.

Manley stared hard at him.

"Impossible! You can't be the man my guide has told me of—Stewart of Grandtully?"

A hearty laugh came from the other.

"The same, sir, the same—Captain Sir William George Drummond Stewart, seventh baronet of Grandtully, at your service! But in these regions, plain Bill Stewart and proud of it. A mountain man, Mr. Manley, is a high title in these parts, and I'm happy to say that I've won it. But where's your camp? Your wagon-train?"

"My guide and wagon? I'm sure I don't know," said Manley rather helplessly. "I seem to have lost them."

STEWART met the gaze of Gus Smith, and forebore comment.

"We'll soon remedy that," he observed cheerfully. "How many in the party?"

"My guide, Cinnamon Harrison, whom I engaged at Bent's Fort; one Cutnose Jake, a half-breed, who drives the wagon; his wife, who cooks for us."

"Well, suppose you stay right here," said Stewart, giving him the thong of the pack-horse. "Hang on to this critter for me. We'll scout a bit and locate your party, and return for you. Come on, Gus!"

Manley regarded the baronet, slack-jawed. The two mountain men rode off. When at a safe distance, Stewart guffawed.

"Gus! Did you savvy that? Cinnamon Harrison, a guide, philosopher and friend!"

"Bad med'cine," Gus Smith said sourly. "That feller is plumb ornery. Got kicked out of every fur outfit. He aint a human, but a coyote. And old Cutnose—and his wife. Wife! My gosh, wonder whose woman he's stole? Bill, this feller is plumb out o' luck. I sure wonder they've let him git this fur 'thout killing him and lighting out with his plunder. Whar the devil is he bound for—and why?"

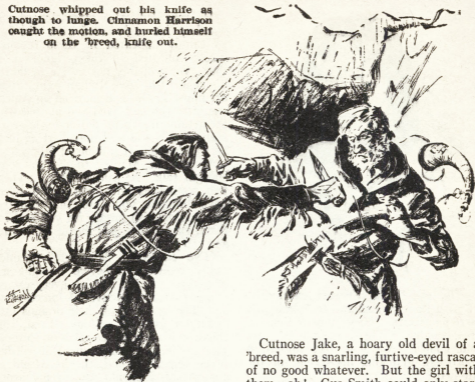
"Right. I think we'll have to take the matter in hand," Stewart agreed. "Circle out and fire a shot if you see anything."

"That's about all old Blow-'em-down is good for," and Gus Smith caressed his rifle sadly. "Best gun in the mountings once, and that last rebore job plumb ruined her."

"Well, I told you to fetch along a new one and I'd pay for it," Stewart replied impatiently. "You wouldn't do it, so don't whine about it."

"Whine? Durn your dirty hide, this is still the best gun in the mountings!" Gus snorted. "If she don't bust on me, all right."

Cutnose whipped out his knife as though to lunge. Cinnamon Harrison caught the motion, and hurried himself on the 'breed, knife out.



They separated. After some search of the rolling country, Gus Smith heard a shot, and wended his way back to the spot where Manley waited. Stewart hove in sight, with a wave of his hand and a shout.

"Come along! The fools are making a smoke."

"Smoke in Sioux country—oh, my gosh!" groaned Gus Smith to the wondering Britisher. "If we don't all git our ha'r lifted, we're lucky. Come on."

LUCKILY, it was close to sunset. When they struck the camp, complete from tent to portable stove, it was not hard to divine why Manley had been riding off alone in an impotent hope of finding buffalo. That there was no love lost and little trust between this Englishman of the intolerant eyes and his "domestics," as he termed them, was plain.

Cinnamon Harrison, so called from his hair and whiskers of cinnamon hue, was a lounging, filthy brute, inordinately lazy and given to liquor at all times, including the present. Everything about him was unkempt and slattern. He was eschewed by all mountain men as an idle, worthless blowhard. When he greeted the new arrivals, Gus Smith met him with a snort, Stewart with open contempt.

Cutnose Jake, a hoary old devil of a 'breed, was a snarling, furtive-eyed rascal of no good whatever. But the girl with them—ah! Gus Smith could only stare at her wide-eyed: a lissom, slender thing, this Arapahoe woman, Little Moon by name; shy, frightened, in deadly fear of Cutnose—no more than a domestic slave, on whom Cinnamon looked with hot eyes despite the snarls of the 'breed.

"There'll be hell to pay over her, or I'm a monkey!" thought Gus Smith.

Both the 'breed and Cinnamon Harrison scoffed at Gus Smith's warning of a raiding party of Blackfeet. They had seen no Injun sign, said they; and were so emphatic about it that Gus made no further attempt at conversation. His keen, alert eyes missed nothing. He discerned bad blood between the two precious scoundrels; he read their glances.

And very late that night, after the feast was finished, Gus Smith was not alone when he slaked his thirst at the creek and remained there for a time.

Manley and Stewart, however, smoked their pipes apart, talking confidentially.

"Nonsense! It won't hurt you,"—and Stewart laughed when the other deplored how much meat he had consumed. "Funny thing about this bison meat; one can eat enormous quantities and feel no ill effects. . . . How did you happen to engage these rascals?"

"I could get no others," Manley said. "I was warned about them, but I'm quite competent to handle them."



"Oh, aye," said Stewart cautiously. "I wish their competence to handle you were as certain. They know nothing of this country. Where, may I ask, are you going? Are you, like myself, a sportsman indulging his liking for the life here?"

Manley smiled. "In part, yes; I hope to shoot a bison, and one of these bears I have heard about—the gray kind. I have a decided errand, however, though I fear it may seem a bit unusual. It merely gave me an excuse, you understand, to see these regions."

MANLEY, it appeared, was a solicitor, wealthy, and in civilization obviously a forceful and determined man. In the settling of an estate it had devolved upon him to find the heir to a barony. The rightful Sir Michael Grange was somewhere in this western country, somewhere among the mountain men. His parents had come over from England forty years previously, just before his birth.

"I traced them to Philadelphia, then to St. Louis," said Manley. "From there I had to trace the fellow himself—they had died in St. Louis. He had been adopted by a trader named St. Jean, a Frenchman. I started west; then at Bent's Fort I learned that St. Jean had been killed by Indians, twenty years ago. Hoping to get some trace of his adopted son, and to have a bit of hunting, I came on. And I must say that the vaunted dangers from the redskins are much exaggerated. We've not seen a single wild Indian."

"You're deuced lucky," said Stewart.

He regarded, with astonishment and wonder, this eagle-nosed man who had so calmly appeared in these regions; wholly unfitted to them, ignorant of them, yet probably not averse to taking his chances in some Indian fight. Stewart himself, who had married an American girl, who had lived and hunted with the mountain men for half a dozen years, realized only too well that, barring luck, he was looking at a doomed fellow.

"Permit me, Manley, to give you some straight talk," he said frankly. "These two scoundrels with you would never have brought you into this country, which is devilish unsafe for you and for them, except they had meant to murder and rob you."

"I've suspected as much," Manley coolly replied. "They've brought me along very slowly, seeking every excuse to hang back. However, I forced them on. They've not put their designs into execution for two reasons. First, this Harrison blackguard has eyes on Cutnose Jake's wife, and it has caused ill will between them. Second, they're afraid of me—rather, I should say, of my arms. By the way, they may interest you."

He reached out one of the pistols at his belt—from which, as Stewart had noted, he did not separate for an instant. Stewart took the weapon, and exclaimed in astonishment; it had five revolving chambers, each fitted with a cap-nipple.

"Where on earth did you get this monstrosity?" Stewart exclaimed.

"A gentleman in Philadelphia, who had invented it, presented me with rifle and a brace of pistols. The rifle has identical workmanship. Like the pistols, it will shoot five times."

"I never heard of such a thing!" said Stewart. "Does it work?"

"To a marvel," Manley asserted. "The inventor, one Samuel Colt, prayed me to put the weapons to use, and to report upon them to him. So far, I have fired them only at a mark. The five chambers are loaded in the usual manner, from the muzzle end. To tell the truth, I am not very conversant with firearms, but these two scoundrels think I am, and having seen these in use, they have been slow to risk attacking me."

Stewart kindled. "What a weapon! What an invention!" he declared warmly, his wide eyes all ablaze. "Why, Manley, this should change the whole system of hunting, of Indian warfare; this entire region itself should feel the effect of such an arm!"

"Perchance," Manley agreed without enthusiasm. "It's nothing new. I remember seeing in the Tower, a revolving pistol from the time of Charles I, the chambers rotating automatically with the raising of the hammer. I do not fancy new things, myself. We get along very well in England with the old things."

"This isn't England, thank God!" And Stewart laughed at the shocked expression of the other. "Tut, tut, man! You're in a new country. Well, I must tell Gus Smith about these weapons. You must show them to him. He's a fine fellow, is Smith—really a heart of gold."

"I thought him an Indian, when we met," Manley confessed. "But I say, Stewart—what outrageous things you and he wear on your feet!"

"Not neat, but damned necessary, where we're aiming to winter," said Stewart, with a glance at his ungainly extremities. "The fur inside will keep us warm. Are you heading for any particular point?"

"I fear not," said Manley. "This rascal Harrison agreed to guide me to where the mountain men are to be found."

"As he could not do at this season, and well knows," Stewart rejoined. "They're scattered over a thousand miles of country, on the winter hunt. I never heard of any such man as you mention, but Gus Smith might know of him. He has mixed a good deal with the Frenchmen. Now, since you realize that you're in a hole, I presume you'll not take offense at an offer to be of service to you with these scoundrels of yours?"

"But, my dear chap, I am not in any hole!" said Manley. "—Oh, I perceive your meaning; upon my word, you talk like these Americans themselves! Yes,



yes; I shall be more than grateful for any advice and help you can give me, I assure you!"

"Then let it rest until morning."

STEWART was already asleep when he was roused by Gus Smith rolling up beside him, then touching his cheek and speaking in a curiously soft voice.

"Look'ee, pardner. I'm fixing to give that 'breed Green River—I am that!"

Stewart chuckled. This was the usual name given by the mountain men to their Hudson's Bay Company hunting-knives, stamped with the initials G.R.

"Our friend Manley would call it George Rex, Gus. Where've you been?"

"Talking with Little Moon, down by the crick. Cutnose is a durned coyote. Stole her out of a lodge after getting her folks drunk. But that aint all. She says the two on 'em, Jake and Cinnamon, fixed it up. Cutnose had a Blackfoot mother and knows all them devils. He sent out word from Bent's to a chief he knows, telling him to take this feller's scalp and divvy up the plunder. They've been heading for Gaunt's Post up here, but they don't know it's been abandoned and quit."

Stewart breathed an angry oath.

"What? They've deliberately brought the man here and arranged with Injuns to kill him?"

"Aye. Dassn't do it themselves. Both chicken-hearted bullies—" Smith snorted in contempt. "Well, settle it tomorrow."

Stewart was almost asleep again, when he felt another touch.

"Hey, Bill! That there squaw is a-going to the Yellerstone with us—if you got no objections."





"Let 'em have it!" said Stewart. . . . Manley jerked out his pistols and began to fire

Stewart, being as broad-minded as he was broad-shouldered, merely chuckled again and gave Gus Smith his blessing. He was paying Smith to accompany him on the winter hunt and to let the pursuit of peltries go, and if Gus chose to take a wife after the fashion of mountain men, it would be an amusing experiment to watch. He understood that Little Moon was snatching at any straw that offered escape from her present situation, and he could not blame Gus a particle for welcoming the opportunity. . . .

With daylight, the camp was astir; but early as it was, Gus Smith was gone, as was his split-eared Comanche pony. Stewart rolled out, to see Manley returning from his morning dip in the creek, rosy and shivering. Being direct and unshrinking when a thing had to be done, Stewart nodded to the other and spoke.

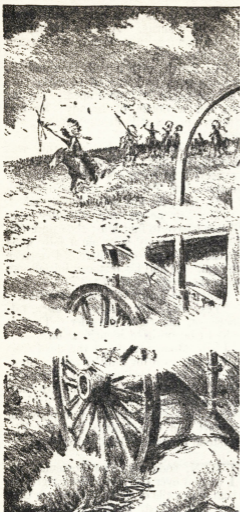
"You'd best stand by while I get rid of these two rascals, in case they get ugly. The quicker it's done, the better."

"Right," said Manley. "Your man seems to be gone—"

A shrill, frightened cry caused Stewart to whirl. Little Moon lay on the ground, where Cutnose Jake had just knocked her headlong. Cutnose himself was facing a furious, roaring Cinnamon Harrison, fingering his knife and cursing malevolently. Manley moved to intervene, but Stewart checked him with calm look and word.

"Wait. No hurry."

No hurry indeed. Cinnamon roared and ranted, cursed and fumed; then, his vanity satisfied, grunted and half-turned away. Quick as a flash, the 'breed whipped out his knife as though to lunge. Cinnamon Harrison caught the



with both hands. That ended the battle.

motion, thought himself menaced, and hurled himself on the 'breed, knife out. The two men grappled, went rolling and kicking and lunging—and then Harrison came to his feet with a whoop.

"Good God! He's killed him!" gasped Manley.

"Good job, too," said Stewart with cool, detached air. "Aye, I thought so!" And he pointed to the scene. Harrison had stooped and was deftly scalping the dead half-breed. What had caused the sudden explosion, remained unknown.

"Hyar, you!" roared Cinnamon, at the frightened Little Moon. "You belong to me now, savvy? Ketch up with that breakfast or I'll break your neck! I'll tame you, by Gawd! I'll l'arn you who's your master—"

A shout intervened, and the quick thudding of hoofs. Stewart looked up.

Over a rise came Gus Smith at full gallop; his rifle was gone, and he was clutching at one arm as he rode.

"Your gun, Manley—quick!" snapped Stewart. "Injuns, Harrison! Your rifle!"

He himself dived headlong for his duffle, and was ramming home a load almost before he ceased speaking. Little Moon darted to the mules and brought them to the wagon, Cinnamon Harrison seized his rifle and began to load, Manley got his own rifle and stood out before the tent, half dressed, clapping caps on the nipples of gun and pistols.

ALL this in a moment, before Gus Smith came rushing down upon them, to slip from the saddle and curse.

"Quick! Git this arer out!" he said to Stewart. "Twenty Blackfeet, durn 'em—they jumped me whilst I was scoutin'. Lost old Blow-'em-down—"

He extended a right arm which was transfixed by a war-arrow. Stewart wasted no time in talk or fancy action, but pulled the arrow through to the feathers, whipped out knife and circled the shaft, then broke it. He pulled out the feathered end, and the arm was free.

"Comin' to beat hell," said Gus. "Gimme a rifle."

"Take Jake's," said Stewart calmly.

One glance showed Gus Smith what had happened, but as he plunged for the rifle of the dead 'breed, he wasted no time in talk. Already a file of horse-men was breaking over the rise, pausing momentarily to take in the camp, then bursting forward with a chorus of yells.

It had all taken place in a scant moment—rapidly as a horse gallops.

Stewart erupted an oath. A glance showed him that Cinnamon Harrison had taken cover under the wagon, was staring forth white-faced and cowardly, all ferocity washed away. Gus Smith had jumped in beside the tent and was hurriedly slapping in a load. Manley, still badly shaken by the killing and scalping he had just witnessed, spoke quietly:

"Say when, Stewart."

"Let 'em have it!" said Stewart; and Gus Smith's rifle banged out. Stewart followed suit. The Blackfeet, spreading out widely and thinking to overwhelm these two men out in front of the tent with one rush, and no doubt counting on the treachery of Cutnose Jake and Harrison, broke into yells and came rushing on, a flight of arrows hissing ahead of them.



Manley began to fire. His rifle spurted smoke, again and again. Yells of dismay and consternation arose. He was no shot; he knocked one warrior off, no more. But when he dropped his rifle, jerked out his pistols, and began to fire at close range with both hands, whether he hit anything or not mattered nothing. Stewart, at least, killed two-horses with his own pistols, and Gus Smith's "pups" barked likewise to get the riders.

And that ended the battle. This man who fired shot after shot, without reloading, who fired pistols the same way, with both hands, was no whit interesting to those Blackfeet braves. Past doubt, they thought themselves betrayed into an ambush, and with one consent their charge wheeled out and swept away, and was gone, leaving three warriors dead, and two wounded, at whom Gus Smith leaped with his "Green River," dispatching them and securing the grisly trophies with a yell of delight.

Oddly enough, while no new sight to Stewart, this vision of Gus Smith yanking off scalps stuck in his head as though burned there.

He swung around to Manley with a yell of delight, pounded him on the back, and only broke off when Little Moon emerged from the brush with the mules. She pointed, and Stewart looked at what lay beneath the wagon. Cinnamon Harrison, sheltered there, was the only one of the party killed; an arrow had gone through eye to brain as he peered.

Manley sat down abruptly.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "I never realized before what it meant to take scalps. Did you see that man ripping them off?"

"Better theirs than ours," said Stewart, with a shrug. "And it's the custom of the country, my friend; whites and reds alike do it."

Gus Smith, with a yell, mounted his waiting pony and was off to make sure the war-party had decamped. Manley got out a bottle of brandy; he and Stewart had a stiff drink together, and needed it.

As he said very frankly, this was enough for him; this one explosion of savagery had filled his cup of curiosity to the brim. But what about the search for St. Jean, the lost heir, Stewart asked.

"The heir be damned," Manley said. "I don't have to find him; the estate will revert. It merely gave me a jolly good excuse to come over here. I've seen enough. He and his tattooed initials can go to the deuce for all of me."

"Tattooed initials?" Stewart asked.

"Yes. *M.G.* for *Michael Grange*, tattooed on his right shoulder. That is said to be positive identification."

Little Moon plundered the dead warriors while awaiting Smith's return. Stewart and Manley walked about, discussing plans. Manley must come on with them for the winter. To escort him back to Bent's Fort would break up all plans for Stewart and Gus Smith; and the Yellowstone beckoned them powerfully.

THEN, suddenly, two horsemen appeared over the rise. Stewart greeted them with yells of delight, although they were half-naked, barebacked, starved; two beaver men whom he knew, caught by the Sioux and barely escaped with life itself; their comrades dead. On the heels of this unexpected arrival, Gus Smith came back with definite word that the Blackfeet had cleared out.

"Them guns!" he gasped, staring at Manley. "What kind of guns be them, pardner? Gimme sight of 'em!"

"Better let me dress that wound of yours," Stewart said. Gus Smith, examining the rifle with revolving chambers, was deaf and blind to all else. The two refugee hunters joined his exclamations of wonder and delight.

"If you like the weapon," said Manley rather sourly, "let me present it to you, Mr. Smith. I shall keep the pistols in case of need, but I have no further ambition to explore these regions. Perhaps these gentlemen," and he glanced at the refugees, "will escort me back to Bent's Fort? I'll pay them well."

Stewart winked at the trappers.

"Sure they will," said he, heartily. "There's your new outfits, boys! And if you push, you can still get down into the Cimarron country for the southern beaver, before the winter comes on."

SO that was that, and all settled. Gus Smith was overwhelmed by the present of the rifle and its accouterments, but he did not neglect to have a word with Little Moon and make sure that she was going on with him, rather than back to Bent's. Which was as it should be, as Stewart observed to the Britisher, a twinkle in his eye.

Then, and only then, while the mules were being hitched to the wagon and camp struck, did Stewart prevail on Gus Smith to come down to the creek and get his wound washed and bandaged. Mountain men thought little of wounds, but this was a nasty one, with much torn flesh.

So Gus struggled out of his shirt, after getting his scalps on makeshift stretchers in the sun, and let Stewart have his will with the raw flesh. Stewart bandaged up the torn right arm and was very silent for a space.

"Gus, ever know anyone named St. Jean?" he demanded abruptly.

"Sure," replied Gus Smith, admiring his scalps. "Look at that there one!"

"Never mind, stick to business." Stewart touched the initials tattooed on the bare shoulder. "What do these letters mean?"

"I dunno, Bill, for a fac'," said Gus Smith. "They allus been there. . . . Yeah, St. Jean was my pappy. I run away from him. I didn't hanker after no French name, and I was scart he'd run me down, maybe—shucks, I was only a kid anyhow. I fell in with a Taos trader named Smith, and took his name and worked for him, teamster. He's been dead a long while. Howcome you're so danged curious?"

"I'm a curious man, Gus," said Stewart. "There y'are. Climb into your shirt and you're all right."

He stayed down by the creek, puffing at his pipe, staring hard in front of him,

for a long time. Before his mind remained the picture of Gus Smith, a prime mountain man, jerking off those scalps; Gus Smith, one of the best, with his arm about Little Moon; Gus Smith with his repeating rifle, happiest man in all the West, looking forward with wild and eager heart to conquest of fur and redskin with this same rifle.

Then he thought of Michael Grange going back to Bent's Fort with Manley, back to the far East, back to England and the stiff, formal life there. And Stewart of Grandtully took the pipe from his mouth, spat, and swore a great oath.

"By the bones of God, I'd be a damned scoundrel if I opened my mouth about it!"

And that was that.

Yet, when winter was run and past, when the pack-horses were loaded with peltries, when Stewart and Gus Smith and Little Moon had left the Yellowstone behind and were making for the Green River rendezvous, came sharp and swift regret.

For there Gus Smith died, by a little mineral spring that discolored the earth around—died swiftly, from pneumonia.

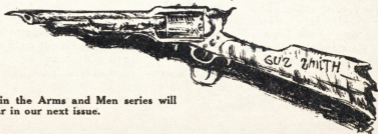
He fondled the rifle as he was dying.

"You want it, Bill?" he asked. Stewart shook his head. "Got my name carved in it," gasped Gus Smith. "Stick it in the earth over me, Bill. I'd sort of like to take it with me—with me—you know—"

He died there, with Little Moon sobbing out her heart.

AND so, in a later day, it happened that Alex Patterson came into possession of this ruined, rusted old rifle with the name carved in its butt. But as he observed, there was something strangely significant in the fact of that farmer's finding it by the mineral pool on his land, and pulling it out, and thinking nothing of it.

For how was he to know that this way rode Smith, back in those old brave days? Or that Gus Smith and Sir Michael Grange lay here by this spring, together unknown, together forgotten?



Another fine story in the Arms and Men series will appear in our next issue.



*One of the strangest cases ever
handled by Duke Ashby and
the F. B. I. men.*

Guiltless Murder

By ROBERT R. MILL

"JUST what, if anything, do you know about Java?"

The Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, turned to face the man sitting on the other side of the desk as he asked the question.

A slow smile played over the thin, rather handsome face of Special Agent James Ashby, whose elegance of appearance and manner had earned him the nickname of "Duke."

"That won't take long, sir. Java is an island in the Dutch East India group. The people belong to the Malay race. They raise coffee there. The climate is tropical. All of which represents about the sum of my knowledge."

He paused to accept a cigarette the other man offered.

"One night, about a year ago," he continued, "I was dining in the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. At a table

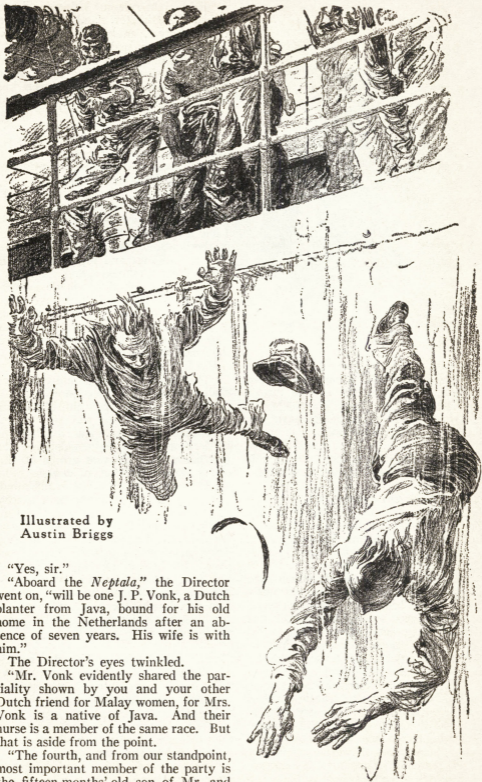
near by sat a Dutch planter from Java and his wife. He was heavy, stolid, the typical Dutch Colonial; and, so I was told, wealthy enough to buy the hotel and a bit of the Golden Gate in the bargain. His wife was small, dainty and her features were really exquisite. I fear I showed my interest to the point of rudeness. . . . Am I going to Java, sir?"

The Director returned his smile.

"No. Java is a bit out of our jurisdiction." He fumbled with some papers on his desk. "But you are going to San Francisco."

Duke Ashby masked his surprise.

"There," continued the Director, "you will meet the steamship *Neptala* due in from the Orient on a world-cruise. You will sail aboard her, through the Canal, and to New York. Outward-bound from there to Europe, you will leave with the pilot off Sandy Hook."



Illustrated by
Austin Briggs

"Yes, sir."

"Aboard the *Neptala*," the Director went on, "will be one J. P. Vonk, a Dutch planter from Java, bound for his old home in the Netherlands after an absence of seven years. His wife is with him."

The Director's eyes twinkled.

"Mr. Vonk evidently shared the partiality shown by you and your other Dutch friend for Malay women, for Mrs. Vonk is a native of Java. And their nurse is a member of the same race. But that is aside from the point.

"The fourth, and from our standpoint, most important member of the party is the fifteen-months'-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Vonk. We brag about our copper heiresses and pork heirs, but I'll venture to state that in all the United States

"Man overboard!" rose the cry. . . . A figure leaped from the ship; then a second—gallant sailors going to the rescue.



there isn't a youngster with a fortune waiting for him that even approximates the sum that some day will be turned over to little Peter Vonk."

"Most Dutch planters in Java are wealthy," Ashby interposed.

"Mr. Vonk," declared the Director, "is about the wealthiest of the lot. And right now he is the most worried."

"Yes sir."

"Just before he started on this voyage he received word from at least four different sources that his son would be dead before he reached Holland."

Ashby leaned forward.

"Kidnap threats, sir?"

"Yes, and no. The threats, which were delivered in varying ways, bore earmarks which might have made them the work of some secret society among the natives, with branches all over the world, or an international gang of kidnapers that has selected as its victim about the richest child in the world."

The Director glanced at his papers again. "Mr. Vonk was frantic. There had been no demand for money, but he at once offered a preventative ransom that would convince some of our very best kidnap artists they have attempted to sell their birthrights for sorry messes of porridge. No answer has been received up to this time."

Ashby drew a pattern on the floor with the tip of a faultless English brogue.

"This might rule out kidnaping," continued the Director, "and suggest a revenge motive, probably the work of natives with a real or fancied wrong. Again, the delay may be part of a careful plan, designed to bring out just the belief I first outlined, while the kidnapers wait to strike until they are in a familiar and favorable territory."

The Director's smile was grim.

"Despite some costly lessons, it is not improbable the belief persists that the United States answers that description."

He pushed the papers aside.

"At any rate," he continued, "Mr. Vonk regards the threats very seriously. The Dutch government shares his view. I had a call from the Ambassador of the Netherlands. They have taken their own precautions, and my knowledge of Dutch thoroughness and efficiency prompts the belief they will do a splendid job. Nevertheless, they have asked us to sit in on the game while the ship is in American ports and American waters. Nothing like having an alibi if the worst should happen."

His face was grim.

"That is why I am determined nothing shall happen. Any questions?"

"Yes sir. Just how did Mr. Vonk make his money?"

"Diversified crops. But the bulk of his fortune, so the Ambassador told me, was made from his vast groves of cinchona trees. Quinine, of course. The whole thing is rather vague in my mind, and I was afraid it might be a touchy subject with our friend from the Embassy, but I recall that the Dutch planters of Java had a neat corner in the drug. They raised prices at will. Then, I believe, the League of Nations stepped in. A little later German chemists produced a synthetic product—but not before Mr. Vonk, the head of the Java combine, had rolled up one of the greatest fortunes in the world."

"I SEE, sir." Ashby leaned forward, and consulted the papers on the desk. "The *Neptala* docks in San Francisco for four days. Airplane job, sir?"

The Director nodded.

"That way you can make it, and with time to burn. And in the meantime—"

Duke Ashby stood up.

"Right now, sir, I am headed for the State Department. About all I know about Java is that its women are exquisite. Might not hurt to enlarge my knowledge."

The Director nodded with approval.

"Sound idea." A thought came to him. "See Grady. He knows all the Malay countries backward. Bit of a nut on studying rare and far from delightful tropical diseases, upon which he rambles on and on, but when they are exhausted he will give you what you want."

Ashby smiled. "I am willing to listen to anything about Java, sir."

DANGER seemed very remote as the *Neptala*, a stout Dutch ship, designed for service in the tropics, pursued her appointed course. She was running south through the Pacific when Ashby first talked with Vonk.

They met, apparently by accident, in the Captain's quarters. The mariner, after a few commonplace words, retired, leaving them alone in the cabin.

"You are young," was Vonk's first statement.

Ashby smiled, but made no reply, as he continued to study the planter. Vonk, he decided, was in his late forties or early fifties. He was lean, tanned, full of nervous energy, and quite the reverse of the conventional picture of the phlegmatic Dutchman. His sharp features gave a hint of power and ruthlessness.

"I said that you are young," Vonk repeated, in his perfect but somewhat stilted English.

"But that is not what you wished to discuss with me."

Vonk's eyes narrowed.

"No," he admitted. "There are more important things. First, you must understand the location of my quarters—"

"The veranda suite on the promenade deck," Ashby interrupted.

Vonk's voice was cold:

"I gave orders that you and the others were not to attract attention by appearing in that section of the ship, and—"

"I studied the cabin plans," interposed Ashby.

Vonk appeared slightly mollified.

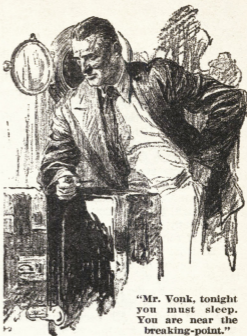
"Very well. Now about the others."

Ashby was smiling.

"A stout gentleman in first class," he supplied, "who gives a very convincing imitation of a bank official bound home for a holiday. The writing chap in second. In third class, we have—"

"My orders were that you were to make no attempt to contact them. You were to operate independently of them. It was not necessary—"

Ashby's voice was as cold as that of the planter.



"Mr. Vonk, tonight you must sleep. You are near the breaking-point."

"Those orders have been followed, Mr. Vonk."

The penetrating glance of the planter was upon the special agent.

"Then how did you know them? They are stupid, yes?"

Ashby apparently was unruffled.

"They are not stupid. They play their parts well. But I, knowing they were here, would be stupid if I was unable to spot them by using a process of elimination."

Vonk nodded.

"That is true." Behind his yellow mask of a face an inward struggle was raging. Ashby remained silent, and allowed the planter to reach a decision.

"We did not get off to an auspicious start. Perhaps the fault is mine." He glanced at a card the special agent had given him. "Mr. Ashby, my remark about your age was rude. I can only ask you to believe my rudeness was prompted by my fears and my worries."

Ashby started to speak, but an upraised hand checked him.

"We must begin again, and on a different basis. Here, confronted with something that means more than my own life, I am helpless. I must cease to give orders. I must throw myself on your mercy, and make use of your specialized knowledge. I must—"

He continued to speak, stripping himself of his pride.

There was no denying his sincerity.

Duke Ashby stemmed the flow of words.

"Mr. Vonk, tonight you must sleep. You are near the breaking-point."

He was standing, bracing himself against the motion of the ship, and presenting a picture of calm confidence.

"I have been through things like this many times. It never has been my duty to tell parents their child was lost to them. Please God, it never will."

Vonk was standing beside him. His brown hand found the comparatively white hand of the special agent.

"Tonight I shall sleep; but first I must answer any questions you care to ask."

The veranda suite, as Ashby had deduced from the plans, was virtually an entire section of the ship, isolated from other passengers. Stout Dutch sailors, men chosen by the captain, and vouched for by him, guarded both approaches day and night. All necessary service was performed by members of the crew also chosen by the captain. There were no other contacts.

The nurse?

Vonk asserted confidently:

"My wife knew her for years; she was chosen before Peter was born. She loves the child blindly. I think she would give her life for him. Incidentally, she renounced Mohammedanism and has embraced Christianity. Her one fault is that she is perhaps a bit too devout." Then, with the tolerance of the Dutch colonial: "But that is to be expected."

"Quite so," said Ashby. "And the threats: Have there been any since the ship sailed?"

Vonk said there had been none.

Ashby hesitated. Then, perhaps, thousands of miles separated this Dutch child from the perils his father dreaded. The fear of the man became less plausible, almost ridiculous. Then the special agent glanced at the man at his side. Vonk was no weakling, to be terrorized by vague threats. Unstrung though he was, his courage was apparent. That had been proven by his residence in a fever-infested land. He was not swayed by fanciful things. His financial success gave testimony to that.

VONK, apparently sensing Ashby's thoughts, said:

"There is nothing tangible. To all intents and purposes that terror may have been left behind on the other side of the world. But—"

He hesitated, then shot the question: "Do you believe it is possible for a man to be psychic?"

"Yes," said Ashby shortly.

"So! I have a feeling—it has become a conviction—that the danger to my son increases as we near New York. If this thing strikes, it will be there."

Ashby nodded.

"If there has to be a showdown, I would prefer to have it there. We are taught to depend a great deal on our organization. Here, I feel at a disadvantage, knowing it cannot help. New York is home ground. But I hope you are wrong, Mr. Vonk."

The planter shook his head.

"I am right. You will see."

ASHBY paused in the doorway of the cabin.

"How were these threats received?"

"Always in the same way. I would find a note, impaled with a kris. Always the message was the same: 'Your son will not live to reach Holland.'"

"What language was used?"

"One note was in Dutch. Another in English. Two were in the language of the natives, but these were in different dialects. The Madurese live in the eastern part of the island, and the Sudanese in the west. Their tongues differ."

"And the handwriting?"

"The notes were printed, but I believe they were the work of the same man. The experts agreed."

"You have the notes?"

"No. The authorities kept them."

"Where were the notes received?"

"At various places, as I made business trips around the island."

"None at your home?"

"None."

"That," said Ashby, "would tend to rule out servants."

"Exactly."

"I suppose your estate is vast and well protected?"

"You are correct, Mr. Ashby."

Ashby thought aloud:

"That explains why none of the threats reached you at home."

"Exactly," Vonk admitted. "It also explains why they plan to strike on this voyage, when I no longer am surrounded by that protection."

Ashby made his voice casual:

"Have any idea who might hate you enough to go through with anything like this?"

Vonk's smile was bitter.

"When a man succeeds, he makes enemies. There are many men who have no reason to wish me well. That is business. Business is cruel at best, and doubly so where even life is a battle. But I would not be honest if I singled out any ill-wisher who might go this far." Irony crept into his smile. "My enemies are what the world calls honorable men."

"Natives?"

Vonk's face softened.

"I wouldn't know why. I am known as a fair master. I understand them, and like them."

Ashby nodded.

"You have been through all this before with your own officials, Mr. Vonk. I must not detain you longer. Remember my instructions: you must sleep. Get something from the doctor, if that is necessary. Good night."

Vonk extended his hand.

"Good night, Mr. Ashby. I think I shall sleep. You have given me confidence that is better than a doctor's powders."

THE *Neptala* headed in toward the coast and began her leisurely passage of the Panama Canal one sunny day at noon. That evening, when Duke Ashby went to his cabin to dress for dinner, he came to an abrupt halt in the passageway.

Stuck in the door of the cabin was a Malay kris. Impaled on the blade of the weapon was a piece of paper.

Ashby glanced about, saw that the passageway was deserted, and then removed the dagger from the wood, taking care not to touch the hilt. Then he entered the cabin, bolted the door, and examined his find.

The note, which was in English, was crudely printed:

"Leave ship at Colon or Havana and save face. You can't prevent what must happen. If you loved justice you would not try."

He put the note aside, and went to work upon the hilt of the kris, dusting it with black powder which he took from a kit. He bent over it anxiously. Not a trace of a fingerprint. The note came next. The result was the same.

Ashby's face wore a worried frown. This was not the work of an ignorant Malay fanatic. The man was clever.

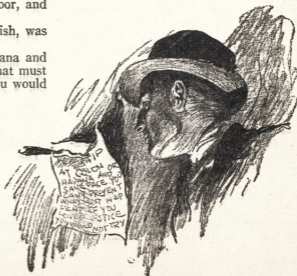
The special agent pressed a button on the wall, and when the steward answered, directed him to request the purser to come to the cabin. When that official appeared, they went over the passenger list, although they had done that at least four times before. Nothing the purser told him threw any light upon the problem. The frown remained as Ashby dressed, and made his way forward to the dining-saloon. . . .

The stay at Colon was brief. Then the *Neptala* was at sea again, plowing her way through the Caribbean, Havana-bound.

The voyage was uneventful. There were no more notes, and no alarms of any kind—only the routine life on ship-board.

Ashby prowled about the ship. Passengers and crew came under his keen glance. There were at least a dozen Malays in third class. There were other passengers who attracted his attention. But it was a hopeless task. He performed it only because he was unwilling to leave any stone unturned.

Then he concentrated upon a search for weak points in the guard that was kept over the Vonk suite. He found only one. Every afternoon when the weather was fine the nurse took the boy upon the private veranda deck outside the cab-



That evening, when Duke Ashby went to his cabin to dress for dinner, he came to an abrupt halt in the passageway.

ins for an airing. Vonk and his wife were not in sight.

It seemed safe enough. Barriers kept the other passengers at some distance. Only the knowledge that planned attacks are based upon the regular habits of the victims caused Ashby to believe that the danger, if it did strike, would come at this point. So he prepared to meet it.

Aft of the private deck, and at a slightly lower level, was a sports deck, used by first class. It was only a few feet from the private deck. The windows there were invariably lowered to permit a greater circulation of air.

Ashby found a place behind a ventilator which commanded a view of the private deck, and had his chair placed there. Outwardly, he was engrossed with a book, while all about him fellow passengers were playing deck games, chatting or indulging in short naps. In reality, he was following every move of the nurse and her charge.

The nurse appeared to be an intelligent and kindly girl. It was obvious that little Peter was devoted to her. Her every move showed that she returned that devotion. Ashby smiled with amusement as the youngster, tired of toddling about, extended his arms, and was taken into the arms of the girl, who walked back and forth with him.

Ashby glanced about for possible danger spots. Looking aft, a rail marked the end of the sport deck. Below it was a cargo deck, in which the after mast was mounted. Aft of the cargo deck, at the stern of the vessel, was superstructure, in which the third-class passengers were accommodated. The top deck on the superstructure was on a level with the sport deck, and passengers promenaded about it, in plain view of the occupants of the sport deck, and also visible to the persons on the private deck outside the Vonk suite.

The special agent noticed that a considerable distance separated the superstructure and the private deck.

"Too far for accurate shooting," he mused. But he moved his chair so that it formed a barrier. And he carefully scrutinized the third-class passengers who were moving about.

ALL this, however, had failed to yield results when, on a hot, sultry morning, the *Neptala* passed old Morro Castle and tied up in Havana. She remained at the pier all day, and during that time Duke Ashby never relaxed his vigilance.

The majority of the passengers went ashore to sample the delights of gay Havana. There was no liberty for the crew, for the ship took on coal and supplies. Mr. and Mrs. Vonk remained in their suite, and the guard of sailors was not withdrawn.

Ashby heaved a sigh of relief that evening when he heard officers shouting commands in guttural Dutch, and felt the ship get under way. He waited until the pilot was dropped, and then turned in. Two hours later he was up to prowling about looking for something which he admitted he would be unlikely to recognize if he encountered it.

THE following day found the *Neptala* surrounded by, and carried along in, those bluest of waters that are known as the Gulf Stream. Mild trade winds were blowing. Gulls circled the vessel, and schools of fish were visible.

The morning passed without event. Luncheon, with substantial Dutch food, was not a thing to be treated lightly, and Ashby felt sluggish and sleepy as he resumed his vigil on the sports deck. He read a bit, closed his eyes, and then fought back to wakefulness.

Fifteen minutes went by as he declined the invitation of two girls to take part in a deck-tennis tournament. He resumed his reading, and by means of sidewise glances saw that the private deck outside the Vonk suite was deserted.

Aft, on the third-class promenade deck, four or five persons were getting in a bit of exercise after luncheon.

Mechanically, Ashby catalogued these persons in his mind:

A girl, probably the maid of one of the passengers. . . . A youth, who looked as if he might be a mechanic. . . . A Chinese, who paused at the rail to stare at the distant horizon with unblinking almond-shaped eyes. . . . A man of mixed race, probably some sort of Eurasian, and evidently a priest or holy man, who walked to and fro with an open book in his hands, and whose lips moved as he read aloud.

There was nothing about any of them to hold the attention of the special agent, and his glance returned to the private deck. The nurse and little Peter had appeared. Using his book as a shield, Ashby watched them closely.

The nurse was carrying the child in her arms as she walked to and fro on the private deck. She was out of Ash-



"First Mr. Vonk will assure himself of his son's safety."

by's range of vision when she reached the forward limit of the space. She was comparatively close when she returned to the after boundary of glass windows, all of which were open.

WITH a start of surprise, Ashby stiffened in his chair. The girl's lips were moving, but if any sound came from them it was not audible. Her glance—it was a fixed stare—was trained upon the stern of the vessel.

The special agent turned to follow that glance. At the forward end of the third-class promenade, stood the Eurasian. The book was cradled in his arms. He was leaning forward over the rail, and his steady, almost hypnotic gaze was directed at the nurse.

A cold chill passed over Ashby. He watched the nurse and the man continue their duel of glances. Something snapped in the mind of the special agent. This was the menace he had been sent to fight. He must get to that menace before it had a chance to strike!

He slipped from the chair without standing erect. He was below the level of the two principals in the strange drama, and his cautious move passed unnoticed.

Dodging behind a ventilator, he made his way to the opposite, or port side of the deck. There he dropped to the cargo deck, and began to make his way aft. He looked up, and saw the Eurasian still standing at the rail, still training his hypnotic glance upon the nurse.

Ashby darted toward him. The man pressed the book tight against his breast. He was smiling, a smile in which hate and triumph blended. The special agent quickened his stride. The Eurasian's hands fell away from his breast. He held the book as a man would carry logs to a fireplace. Both arms swept out in a swinging motion. The book sailed into space, and then dropped into the sea.

EVEN before the book left the man's hands, sharp fear and disappointment stabbed at Ashby's heart. Now he knew what this menace was! Fragments from the conversation he had held with Grady in the State Department fitted into place. He had been blind. The thing had happened before his very eyes, but he had failed to see it. He had been drawn away from the spot where he was needed most.

Ashby wheeled abruptly, intending to race back to the private deck. His foot caught in a rope attached to a cargo boom of the after mast, and he fell headlong. Even as he fell, he knew that he had failed completely, that he was too late. "Man overboard!" rose the cry, from forward.

The special agent, struggling to his feet, heard in it only a verification of what he knew had happened; a tragedy, hidden from his sight, but one he was as familiar with as if he had witnessed it.

Now Ashby was on his feet, a trifle dazed by the hard fall, but lurching toward the starboard rail to risk his own life in an attempt to undo what he felt he had permitted to happen. But even before he reached the rail, a blue-clad figure appeared ahead of him and without hesitation leaped away from the ship. The special agent saw a second blue-clad figure dive from the sport deck above. Gallant Dutch sailors were going to the rescue.

Ashby pulled up abruptly. The siren of the *Neptala* sounded. A bell clanged. The pulsing of the engines ceased. A whistle sounded, an officer roared an order, and the davits creaked as a small boat was lowered away.

The special agent retraced his steps, and headed toward the superstructure at the stern. Above him, the Eurasian stood at the rail, calmly watching the efforts of the two sailors and the boat to reach a dot that had appeared on the surface of the ocean, disappeared from sight, reappeared, then vanished again.

Ashby mounted an iron ladder. He gained the deck. Blind anger surged through him as he rushed toward the man standing at the rail.

The Eurasian turned to face him. He was smiling with triumph and confidence. For just a second he lost his composure before Ashby's rage. Then he recovered.

"You want me?" All the calm of the Orient was at his command, and he was making use of it. "I have done nothing. I throw a book into the sea. That is not a crime."

Ashby stood beside him, his fists clenching and opening.

"If that baby dies," his voice was low and ominous, "you are guilty of murder just as surely as if you had tossed him overboard."

The man's smile was mocking.

"You prove that? You make a jury believe? Ah, I see. You will attempt to prove hypnotism. You, a member of an enlightened race—"

"Shut up!" Ashby ordered. His hands darted out, and played over the form of the man. He was unarmed.

"Not hypnotism," Ashby declared. He was groping in his mind for a word. It was an unusual word that Grady had used. "Something that doctors know and recognize." The word came. He shouted it at the man before him:

"*Lata!*"

The Eurasian cringed. Ashby seized him by the collar.

"Come along."

AS they made their way forward and topside, a cheer went up from the passengers lining the rail.

"They have him!"

They passed the first officer. He fell into step beside Ashby and his prisoner. Seeing the anxiety on Ashby's face, he said:

"The baby will be all right, yes. The doctor is in the boat."

They entered the Captain's quarters. A Dutch detective, working through an interpreter, questioned the weeping nurse.

"Why did you do it?"

The interpreter talked with her, and turned to the detective:

"She says she does not know."

The detective advanced toward the nurse.

"Just a moment," Ashby spoke in a low tone. "She is innocent." He produced cigarettes. "Suppose we wait for

Mr. Vonk. First, he will assure himself of his son's safety, but then he will be here."

They waited. The Eurasian tried to speak, but was silenced by Ashby.

Then Vonk entered, shaking with emotion.

"My son—Peter—is safe. God sent a sailor to perform a miracle. Those men, Captain, I must reward—"

He saw the nurse.

He spoke to her in dialect, his voice deep with anger and reproach.

"Just a moment, Mr. Vonk." Ashby's calm voice silenced the planter. "This woman is innocent. She is ill. She needs sympathy and medical treatment."

He was standing beside the planter.

"This woman is afflicted with a disease known as *lata*. When she suffers one of the attacks, she is powerless and will imitate any action."

He turned to his prisoner.

"This man knew of her illness, and planned to use it to accomplish his purpose. He attracted her attention, and threw a book into the sea. She was holding the child, and, in the grip of the disease, she followed his example."

The Captain nodded.

"I have heard of that," he said.

"Yes," said Vonk. "In Java, we hear vague reports of something of the sort. But you, an American, thousands of miles away, how do—"

Ashby brushed that aside.

"I deserve no credit. As a matter of routine, I obtained what information I could about Java when I received this assignment. An expert in our State Department told me that and many other things. I failed. I saw this being done before my eyes, but did not sense what was happening. I could have saved your son. Instead, he is alive because of the courage of those sailors."

He wheeled upon the Eurasian.

"Why did you do this?"

THE man's eyes were blazing with hate as he glared at Vonk.

"You killed my brother. You killed my father. They died with malaria because your quinine cost so much they could not buy. I made a vow that your son—"

"That's enough," snapped Ashby. He turned to the detective. "This is a Dutch ship upon the high seas, so he is your prisoner."

The detective nodded, and prepared to depart with his prisoner.

"This woman needs care," said the Captain. "She tried to throw herself overboard."

Ashby nodded with sympathy.

"Turn her over to your doctor, Captain. As you say, she needs care."

VONK stepped forward, his fingers fumbling for a pocket checkbook.

"She shall have the best of care. I am a man who has been relieved of a burden too heavy for him to carry. I shall insist upon sharing my happiness with all you who have helped me." He turned to Duke Ashby. "You, my friend, despite your modesty—"

"No, thank you." Ashby's voice was icy. "I am glad your son is alive." He flicked a spot of dust from his immaculate coat. "As a member of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, I am not allowed to accept rewards." He apparently failed to see the hand which Vonk had extended. "As a private citizen, tips hardly interest me. Give my share to the fund for the widows and orphans of Dutch seamen. The courage of such seamen will justify the acceptance of quinine-trust money."

He addressed the Captain:

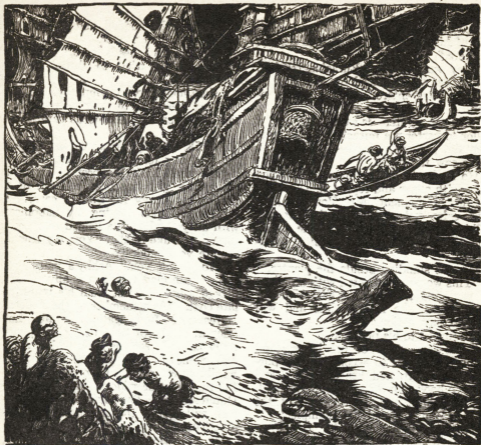
"With your permission, sir, I shall visit the fore-castle and shake hands with two gallant gentlemen."

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Lata*, or *Latah*, as it is known in Java, is a form of *palmus*, a disease of the nervous system, in which religious emotionalism plays a part. In his textbook, "The Practice of Medicine," Dr. James Tyson says of this disease: "An endemic neurosis, the subjects of which are liable, on any sudden emotion, to jump violently and utter a loud cry or sound, and obey any command or imitate any action without regard to its nature."

The disease is not peculiar to Java alone. Dr. Tyson cites as examples the "jumping Frenchmen" of Canada, the "Jerkers" in Kentucky, the "Holy Rollers" in New Hampshire and Vermont, and the American "jumpers."

Dr. Tyson makes no mention of the fact, but the author learned from other sources that the criminal records of Batavia, Java, include the conviction on a charge of murder of a man who, knowing a woman was afflicted with *lata*, caused her to throw a child into a river, (where it drowned), by making a motion which she imitated.

Another deeply interesting story by Robert R. Mill will appear in an early issue.



The TREASURE

A fascinating novel by the author of "Caravan Treasure," in which a Russian seeks the secret of prolonging life, and two wild Irishmen search for the lost riches of Angkor.

The Story Thus Far:

NOW, the eyes of my uncle Thurland Spillane always made me think of two spearmen on a castle wall; his brother Flane, too, was just such another wild hawk of trouble. And when the Russian count, who was looking for two able and daring men to risk with him a great adventure, made our acquaintance in Paris, he knew he had found the right men. So it came about that we who had already shared that hazardous journey across Africa which I have described in "Caravan Treasure," found ourselves embarked upon an even more terrific quest.

At the Paris exposition, it seems, had been displayed a reproduction of a part

of the astounding ruins of Angkor, in the remote French colony of Cambodia. A part of the exhibit was a native of the region, a priest or bonze who claimed to be of incredible age. And the bonze had told the Russian that the inhabitants of Angkor had fled the plague many centuries ago, leaving their great city deserted as the French had recently found it.

The Count believed the bonze possessed the secret of prolonging life indefinitely—the secret also of the hiding-place of the rich treasures taken from ancient Angkor. And so it came about that we all, including the Count's lovely American niece Joyeuse, took ship for far Cambodia.

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of Vanished Men

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

Illustrated by John Richard Flanagan

Almost at once our troubles began, for there were others who had learned of the old bonze's secret: and repeatedly during the journey strange attacks were made upon us. But my uncles, as I have said, were resourceful and courageous men; and at Port Saïd they had discovered a friend, the American John Martin, who proved a real help. Moreover the old bonze himself possessed a strange and dreadful power—a power that even I who saw it could hardly believe: for when hard pressed, the old fellow would raise his skinny arm and point a claw-like finger, muttering savagely the while. And at once his enemy would wilt to the ground as if smitten of the plague. . . .

It was this dreadful power which the old man called upon to destroy his enemy the burly mate of the vessel which took us from Rangoon to Saigon. As a result we were quarantined, for the mate was thought to have died of the plague; in the night, however, we escaped from the ship by the aid of Flane,—who with Martin and Joyeuse had traveled by another steamer,—and set off secretly up the Saigon River in a hired motor-boat. (*The story continues in detail:*)

WE swung into the narrow channel with Martin at the wheel, and the Count busy explaining to the bonze why it had been necessary for Thurland to



wrap the old fellow's head in a blanket and drop overboard with him. Tohsároth seemed a little sulky. It was plain that the kidnaping didn't please him.

The arroyo narrowed. We turned toward the bank, a lantern swinging slowly, marking the landing. We bumped against a slippery stringpiece and stared upward at the holder of the lantern. It was Joyeuse—looking quite mannish in pantaloons and sports-shirt.

Martin tied up the motorboat, and Flane hurriedly explained matters to the Count. There was an early morning train to My-tho, where we could take the regular steamer that connected Saigon with Angkor, or we could start immediately for My-tho in an automobile to be hired in the Rue Lagrandière.

"Automobile," the Count decided. "At My-tho we'll hire a private launch to take us up to Pnom-Penh and beyond."

We roused a sleepy garage-man, who in turn roused a sleepier Chinese chauffeur. After much discussion a big American car was pushed out, and we climbed into it.

All Saigon seemed asleep, breathing heavily like some big animal. Indeed, the moist air, hot and languorous, made one think that all around one were huge sleepy beasts of the kind that roamed about when the world was young.

As the car started with a jerk, I stammered: "Wouldn't you think that—that the night is alive? That the whole place is sort of—sort of watching us?"

Thurland laughed softly. "It is," he said. "The funny little people in the West think that the East is dead. It reminds me a lot of Billy Granger of Glen-gariff. Billy died, and all his friends came to the wake, bringing bottles of whisky and quarts of stout. When they got settled down for a fine drinking-bout, Billy sat up in his coffin and squealed like a horse at them. They ran like the devil, and he got quickly out of the box and locked the door so that they couldn't come back. He had lashings of drink,

and he threatened to shoot anyone who came near the place. They say he was drunk for three weeks."

The car rushed through the hot dark, with strange odors coming to our nostrils. The bonze, pacified by the Count, slept soundly; Joyeuse and Flane talked in whispers; Thurland explained to Martin why it was necessary for us to go to Angkor instead of proceeding straight up the Mekong to search for the lost city of Klang-Nan.

"The old man is like a hound," said Thurland. "He's got to pick up the scent from the place where the whole lot of them piled into the pirogues on the night they fled. It'll bring everything back to him. When he gets his nose to the ground, or to the water, it's 'Yoicks!' and away."

"It's strange," said Martin.

"It's more than that," laughed Thurland. "It's unreasonable, as Tommy Hepikey said when they sentenced him to death for killing an Englishman."

IT is the *Me Nam Kong* and not the Mekong to the people who live alongside it; and if a river deserved three names instead of one, it is that same *Me Nam Kong*. For a fine lusty river it looked to us when the morning light struck it as we reached My-tho. The rains had fattened it, and it rolled by proudly, its dark waters flashing in the sunshine as if they wished to tell you that they had come over two thousand miles from the highlands of Tibet.

We stood together and stared at it. And I think we were a little awed with the force that came out from it, and the vastness of it. We watched the native boats going down on it, boats that were houses in a way, for whole families lived on them, catching the big fish from the river and drying them in the hot sunshine, so that the reek of drying fish that came to our nostrils on that morning at My-tho was seldom far from us in the days that followed.



The bonze made his obeisance to the river, and we wanted to do the same, but the foolish pride of the whites stopped us. The river was the thing we had sought, with the fierce fury that a lover seeks a mistress. Night after night it had rolled through our dreams, black and frightening. Night after night we had seen the long line of pirogues going up it, the forty rowers flailing the water, the frightened sweating nobles urging them forward, the screaming beauties throwing their bangles at the monkeys that chattered on the branches of the big trees. It was the great gut of the world, to us—the gut up which we would go to find the treasures that were taken from Angkor hundreds of years before.

"Agh!" grunted Thurland, as he stood, feet apart, and surveyed the waters. "It's a bully stream you are, for certain. You could put the Shannon and the Blackwater in a corner of your stomach, and you wouldn't know you had eaten them!"

We found a boat—a motor-launch that was clean and comfortable. Its owner, an undersized Annamese, knew the river from My-tho to Luang-Prabang, the capital of the Lao state of the same name, to which he said he went often to get loads of cutch, cardamom, indigo, cinnamon, deer-horns, ivory and fish-roe. The launch was called the *Ang-Duong*, after the predecessor of that King Norodom who gave his country to France.

Joyeuse laughed as he named his cargoes. "Ask him if he ever carried wimwams for geese's bridles, or silver coronets for toads," she whispered.

At noon on that morning at My-tho we went aboard. We were curiously excited. The river acted as a drug; the air, the sunlight and the nearness to Angkor-Vat, the place of great mystery, put a spell upon us. And Tohsârôth was a greater Tohsârôth here in his own kingdom. For the men on the waterfront bowed before him; the little Annamite women, their bare breasts the color of saffron, curtsied to him; the naked chil-

dren wilted under his glance. What they knew about his great age I know not, but they were impressed—greatly impressed. The power was there, a power that came out to them when they looked at him.

THE *Ang-Duong* headed bravely upstream, into Sroc Khmer, as the country is known to its people. The little Annamese, whose name was Thlök, was at the wheel; his assistant, Kèt, looked after the engine. The dress of each consisted of a loin-cloth.

We forgot Schiemann and Bruden and the sailor with the large lobes in his ears. We forgot the *Kelantan*, held in quarantine in Saigon River. We were afloat on the river of dreams—a little fey with the wonder of the place, and the fact that we had reached the river.

Huge trees along the banks, tamarind, palms, teak and ironwood. Bamboos of enormous height and thickness. Stretches of green brush like a painted wall; paddy-fields with workers knee-deep in water; old pagodas on hilltops, houses perched on poles to escape the flood waters, and junks innumerable. And the hot air filled with uncountable odors: rotting vegetation, exotic flowers, fish in the process of fermentation for that luxury of the Cambodians the sauce called *nuoc-mam*; and above all, that frightening odor that comes from oldness itself—from a country in decay.

"This is no white man's country," said Martin. "The French have buried thousands of brave lads here; but I don't know what they'll get back for them."

"If we get what we're looking for, we'll make a contribution," said Thurland softly. "If the French hadn't dug Angkor-Vat out of the forests, we would never have heard the story."

The Count was whispering to the old bonze. The treasure did not concern the Count—the reason that he had given for the voyage on that evening at Neuilly was the one and only reason: he wished, to use the words of my uncle, "to beat



Death." And the belief that he could do so, seemed to have taken possession of him now.

It was curious to us—a little startling. From the atmosphere that seemed in itself to hold the strange perfume of death, he absorbed strength. The sea trip had tired him, but now he seemed like a man who had been ill and was convalescing. And it looked as if the old bonze was whispering secrets to him, secrets of great value, if we could judge by the look on the Count's face.

"I was told once," whispered Thurland to Flane, "that for every man in the world there is a climate that suits his soul and his body, and that he should search till he finds it. A wise man in Fez told me."

"It may be," said Flane; "but for myself I've never found one that suits exactly. They're either too hot or too cold; and if the climate is halfway bearable, the police are not."

"The Count has found his," whispered Thurland.

Joyeuse agreed with Thurland. Whether the Count had managed by the strangeness of his surroundings to hypnotize himself, or whether the ancient had whispered some strange secret connected with the system of *Hatha Yoga*, I know not; but the change was there—although vague and fleeting, it was quite plain to us. . . .

We were to stop at Pnom-Penh for the night, and continue the next day to Angkor. So all that day we *pit-pitted* up the Mekong, past little villages whose names were called out to us by the smiling Thlök. Strange names, which Thurland

found with difficulty on the map—Vinh-long, Tan-chau, Vinh-xuong and Banam. And the queer spell of the river deepened. It seemed (but this of course was impossible) that the enormous pagoda of Angkor itself had created an influence that went out for leagues and leagues, so that one who didn't know of its existence would *feel* there was something strange and curious in the neighborhood.

And this, so Thurland told me, has been noted by explorers who have discovered ruins of great value. Cities of the strange folk that once lived in Central America, and who worshiped the sun and made sacrifices to it; and the monster stone pillars on an island in the Pacific called Easter Island, pillars that no man knows the use of, or how they were brought there. For the quality of life that is in ruins of that kind goes out from them, so that sensitive folk feel it, and fight their way through seas and jungles to reach the relics of the past. So we felt Angkor—felt it with our skin, as we saw Pnom-Penh show up in the blue haze that hung like a bridal veil above the river.

MY Uncle Thurland wondered why American gunmen didn't investigate some of the great treasures of the East—treasures that are loosely guarded by men who would be mightily astonished to have an automatic thrust under their noses. Now in that town of Pnom-Penh is a golden image—made for old King Norodom—that is inlaid with diamonds, and the gold itself has a value of a million dollars. And there are others nearly as valuable. "Possibly the gunmen haven't heard of them yet," said Martin, when on that afternoon of our arrival Flane, Thurland, Martin and I went to see the *Vat-Prah-Keo*, or Emerald Temple. "Besides, that statue would be an awkward thing to get down to the coast."

"It's a nice piece," said Thurland quietly. "A handy lad with a screw-driver or the blade of an old penknife could pick a handful of those stones out while you were winking."

A yellow-robed monk, burning incense in front of the statue, stared hard at Thurland, as if he saw the cupidity on my uncle's face. Flane moved us away.

"That fellow might be a tough gentleman if you tried gouging the stones," said Flane. "There's a chance he has a gun under that overall of his."

We went back to the hotel near the wharf of the *Messageries Fluviales Com-*

pany, and we found that the big boat from Saigon which comes up from the mouth of the Mekong had just arrived, bringing passengers for Angkor who would sleep that night at Pnom-Penh. They were just coming ashore.

Not wishing to make ourselves noticeable, we stood behind some bags of rice to watch them, little thinking that they would have any interest for us. The deck passengers were Cambodians, Annamese, Hindoos and Chinese. There stepped down a score of dancing-girls that had been down to Saigon to give an exhibition, *ballerinas* belonging to the palace—serious little things who moved like animated dolls and were convinced their business of dancing was one of the most important in the world, as indeed it is throughout the whole of Cambodia. Behind them came some French officers and Government officials, half a dozen tourists, then a man walking by himself.

Thurland gave a grunt of astonishment and stepped quickly behind the bags, pulling Flane and Martin with him. Without speaking we watched the man as he walked toward the Grand Hotel. It seemed years since we had seen him, and yet it was only a few days. But those few days had been so full of happenings that the sight of his ugly mug startled us. The man was Schiemann, the supposed Latvian, who had sailed with us from Marseilles on the *Van Tromp*! Schiemann, who had brought Bruden aboard at Suez! Schiemann, whom we had left at Rangoon!

"Well, as the fox said when sixty dogs were chasing him, 'there must be something about me that's attractive,'" growled Thurland. "It's too late to warn the Count. Schiemann will spot them on the terrace."

WE returned to the hotel, to find that the Count and Joyeuse had seen Schiemann. They had been sitting in the lobby when he entered, and they had recognized him immediately.

"Where's the old one?" asked Thurland.

"In his room," answered the Count.

"We must keep a tight watch on him," said Thurland. "I wouldn't be surprised to know that Bruden and the fellow with the big ears are on that boat. Martin, you go up on the balcony and sit outside the old chap's room. Flane will take a turn after dinner, and then I'll relieve Flane. One of us should be close to him throughout the night."

Schiemann didn't come to the dining-room. He stayed in his room. Flane made a visit to the wharf, but could see nothing of the two we thought might have accompanied Schiemann. If the *Kelantan* was still quarantined (which was a certainty), Bruden, to follow us, would have had to leave the ship in the manner in which we had left it.

LATER in the evening Martin went to the spot where the motorboat was tied up. He came back at a run. A white man had tried to board the *Ang-Duong*; and when refused permission by Thlök, the visitor had lashed out viciously with his fists and knocked the little Annamese unconscious. Kèt, the mechanic, had rushed forward with a boat-hook, and the unknown had fled into the darkness.

"Go back and stay with the boat," said Thurland. "That bird wants to cripple the engine. Go quick! Flane and I will watch Methuselah. Jimmy, you go with Martin."

Martin and I went at a trot to the *Ang-Duong*. Thlök had recovered from the punch, but his saffron-tinted face carried a fine bruise where the blow had landed. He was busy sharpening a knife—hoping that the visitor would return.

The two Annamese lay down and slept after a little while, but Martin and I stayed awake. A big red moon shot up out of the dark forest, and the night talked in the way it does in lonely places. For although Pnom-Penh was a town with sixty or seventy thousand people in it, there was about it the fearful loneliness that sits in countries that have passed their springtime and have settled into decay—countries that are far away from the throbbing heart of the Western world. As my uncle once said, you might give a shot to these Eastern countries that might wake them up for a little while, just as you'd wake up an old horse; but the betting is that they'll slip back into the slime. . . .

Big fish sprang out of the water, leaping at the millions of insects that flew around—beetles with horns and sawlike claws, and mosquitoes that moved in swarms, so that a fish that was clever got a whole mouthful of them when he hopped. And we saw the big bats flying across the face of the moon, the horrible leather-winged things whose ancestors had lived in the great halls of Angkor-Vat till the French drove them out and disinfected the place to kill the



odor that they left behind them: fox-bats with a wing-spread of five feet, bats that eat fruit and, so it is said, suck the blood of anyone who is too sleepy to feel their razor teeth on his skin.

We were glad when the morning came, and the Count and Joyeuse, Thurland, Flane and Tohsároth came down to the boat; nothing had happened at the hotel.

Just as we were starting away from the wharf, a little Annamese girl came at a run from the hotel. A small doll of a thing, the size of the *ballerinas* that had come off the boat. She was about eighteen years of age, her body from the waist to her bare feet wrapped in a piece of flowered brocade called *panung*; but the upper part of her body was uncovered, and her little pointed breasts shone in the fierce morning sunshine.

She called to the bonze as the engine turned over, and the old man, who looked like a sleepy lizard, sat up and shouted an answer.

"I'll wager this is a great-great-great-granddaughter of the old bonze," said Martin.

The girl gave a Cambodian whoop of joy, gathered her *panung* around her legs, took a flying leap across the yard of water that separated the *Ang-Duong*

Her eyes came to rest upon Tohsároth; the smile that had been

from the shore, and landed in Tohsâr-oth's lap. They embraced without a thought that anyone was observing them, and they chattered like two mad parrots in the springtime.

"The devil!" said Thurland, looking at the Count. "Will you please ask the old rooster how long we are to wait around?"

The Count had difficulty in putting the question, the ancient having no ears for anyone but the little lady in the flowered skirt. But at last he explained: The young woman was, as Martin guessed, a relative, she being the direct descendant of a sister of the bonze who had died, so he asserted, some two hundred years before! Her name was Om.

"It has a dangerous sound," whispered Flane.

In silence we sat and gazed at the old man and the girl. Om seemed amused. She giggled, showing her teeth lacquered in black, her little tongue red from chewing betel. She picked Thurland as the leader of the party, and made a sort of obeisance to him.

"Well, if he has asked all the questions concerning the family, we'll unship her and get along," said Thurland.



in them died, and in its place came a fear that hurt one to look at.

The Count spoke again to Tohsârôth. The old man replied with energy. His protests were translated.

The girl Om was friendless. She had no relatives in Pnom-Penh. By chance she had heard of the arrival of her much-removed uncle, and she had rushed to him for protection. By the family laws of Cambodia he could not refuse it. She had to come along with the expedition.

"Great jumping catfish!" cried Thurland, and he stared at the little saffron-colored lady, who wriggled and squirmed under his gaze.

Suddenly she sprang from the side of the ancient, grabbed the big hand of Thurland and kissed it with enthusiasm. Joyeuse was amused; Flane and Martin guffawed; but Thurland was annoyed. A bunch of nearly naked loafers on the bank commented on the happening.

Thurland turned to the boat-owner and shouted an order.

The *Ang-Duong* swung away from the wharf. We were a curious party of eight on our way to Angkor the Mysterious.

CHAPTER XIX

GHOST MUSIC

ONCE my Uncle Thurland told me of a spot in the ocean supposed to exist on the rim of space. Sailors call it "The Sink of the World," and they believe that ships are drawn toward it by some magic power, slipping into a vast whirlpool, never to be heard of again. I thought of that "Sink of the World" as the motor-launch headed up through the Tonlé-sap toward Grand-Lac. For the power of that strange nightmare of sailors was upon us. *We were being pulled toward Angkor!*

We were in a net of dreadful witchery that held us body and soul, a net that was made out of the mysteries of the dead centuries, out of rites and ceremonies, out of charms and spells and incantations, out of enchantment and vampirism, and all the hocus-pocus through which the world has passed since Time began.

We were silent, because the fingers of Angkor were upon our lips. The breath of Angkor was on our faces. We sat quiet, staring at the reed beds along the shores, from which rose at times enormous flocks of white herons with crests of red and yellow. And here and there an old temple peered at us through the trees, and yellow-robed monks stood

and stared at us. Once, when we were quite close to the bank, a group of monks saw Tohsârôth and became dreadfully excited. They raced madly along, crashing through the reeds in an effort to keep up with us, screaming questions at the ancient, to which he croaked answers. One by one they dropped with fatigue, except one lean wretch who discarded his robe and running completely naked, kept up with us for a mile or more. He was foaming at the mouth when he fell exhausted as we swung into the entrance of Grand-Lac. The two Anamese boatmen looked with frightened eyes at Tohsârôth. They whispered to each other.

Night came down when we were crossing Grand-Lac, which is over a hundred miles in length. The Anamese boatman consulted with the Count and Thurland. He could put into shore for the night, or he could go on and make Siem-reap in the dawn.

"*Continuez!*" said the Count.

"*Continuez!*" echoed Thurland.

Flane smiled. Flane knew; Martin knew; and I knew. The Count and Thurland could not have ordered a halt. They hadn't the power to combat the unseen force that was dragging us forward. In the darkness before us was the magnet, the enormous temple of the snake-god, the mortar of which had been mixed with a fanaticism and religious fervor that the centuries could not kill.

The monk chanted prayers, and the thick night became alive. Now and then the old man seemed to go into a sort of trance that brought chills to us. The Count listened to him with astonishment, his hands cupped to his ears, so that he would not miss a word that came from the ancient's mouth.

"What is he chattering about?" asked Thurland.

"Of the past," whispered the Count, and there was a note of fear in his voice, a sort of quaver that startled us. For fear gains by being transferred from one person to another, so that the half-terror that was upon the Count became a sort of super-virus when it entered us.

Joyeuse was upset by it. All that long day she had sat quiet and watchful, but the mad pursuit of the monks along the bank had affected her, and now at the chattering of Tohsârôth, she began to sob softly. Flane tried to comfort her.

"It's all right," he whispered. "There's no danger."

"I—I am sorry I came," sobbed Joyeuse. "I'm horribly frightened!"

Flane was angry with Tohsároth, and asked the Count to stop the chanting of the old man; but the Count's orders had no effect on Tohsároth. For now, across the dark waters of Grand-Lac, came the thin wailing notes of a flute that took our thoughts back to the garden of the villa at Neuilly. And the strange sobbing music stirred the bonze.

Lariats of sound came out of the velvety darkness, swirling around us, eerie, ghostlike, bringing a tenseness to our nerves.

"Where the devil is the music coming from?" asked Thurland.

Martin thought it came from the left; Flane thought it came from the right; and I thought it came from behind us. The Count questioned Thlók, the launch-owner. The man was so frightened that he could hardly speak.

"*C'est un ma-couï!*"

"*Ma-couï?*" questioned the Count, puzzled by the native word.

"*Un diable!*" explained Thlók.

He hunched his shoulders and looked into the night. His remarks seemed to suggest that he had heard the sounds before, but his manner showed that he did not wish to inquire into where they came from or who produced them.

"It's from junks," said Martin. "I thought I heard the noise of their paddles."

"If it is, they must be going round and round us," grunted Thurland. "It's here, there and everywhere!"

We couldn't lose it. On and on across the lake went the swift-moving launch, but the ghostlike melody hung to us. The two boatmen crouched low, as if they thought the strains were invisible lassos thrown by the evil spirits of the waters. We sat silent and puzzled. The monk had fine spurts of talkativeness, and now and then the girl Om beat his thin hands with hers as if to bring him out of a trancelike state into which, so it seemed to us, he slipped at times. We longed for daylight. . . .

At six o'clock the launch owner pointed ahead. "Siem-reap," he whispered, and we looked with joy at the little village on the lake. For Siem-reap is the doorstep of Angkor. Here one steps into the circle of vast ruins that speak of the glory of the Khmers.

We had arrived!

Possibly it was what we had heard that made the first view of the ruins so terrifying to us. For the place had a cloak of mystery around it that bred fear—



a fine biting fear that clutched us by the throat and brought a shiver into the words that we whispered to each other. A fear that made us turn our heads to see if the legions of the past were walking with us.

THERE it was as the French found it, with its great moat two hundred yards wide and over three miles in length. And a wall of two miles with four gates through it. And the great terrace along which run the carvings of the sacred snakes of Nāga leading to the doors of the temple itself. Gray with age, the centuries pockmarking the conglomerate and sandstone out of which it is built.

Tohsároth led us—Tohsároth, still in the trance-like state that had come upon him on the launch. Chanting softly to himself, but loud enough to attract the attention of the few people that were around. They found something curious in the manner of the old bonze. They stared at us, and some of them followed.

Tohsároth climbed the main stairway, and we were within the building. Within the great gallery of the first story, surrounded by the bewildering carvings that were made a thousand years ago, carvings that made us stare pop-eyed at them, we never having seen their like. For in stone they told the history of the Khmer race, and all the traditions connected with it. They showed battle-scenes with the dead and the wounded, men hacking and cutting with spite and fury, generals on horseback and on elephants cheering them on. There was heaven and hell, with stone figures enjoying themselves in the one place, and having a devil of a time



A small piece of devilry was Om.

in the other. And there were processions that made us drunk with the wonder of them: gods riding on the backs of peacocks, and a goddess sitting on the seven-headed snake that was called Nāga. And the never-ending stories in stone increased the fear that the place brought to us. They were nightmares, that had lived there in the darkness for centuries, and had now come to light in a world that could not understand them.

But Tohsároth understood them, he being of the past in which they were made. At times he paused in his chanting and spoke to the Count, explaining this or that; and the Count whispered the information to us—as if afraid the stone gods would hear and spring at him.

Tohsároth walked up and down before a carving that ran along a wall for fifty yards, and we followed him backward and forward, wondering a little what it was all about. That it was fine work we knew; but a puzzle-picture to the brains of all of us till the Count explained.

"This," said the Count, "explains the churning of the sea. This is Mount Mandara, with the great serpent twisted around the root of it. One god pulls his tail and the other pulls his head, and the mount turns round and churns up the sea. Do you understand?"

"I don't," said Thurland, "but it doesn't matter anyhow. The place gives me the jim-jams. What's he searching for now?"

"We must wait for the night," said the Count. "I've questioned him, but he won't be hurried."

Flane and Joyeuse got tired of the promenade and found a stone seat on the terrace, but the rest of us followed the old bonze, who walked hand in hand with Om, and the stone gods looked at us with that cynical smile that one saw sometimes on the face of Thurland, the smile that tells of the futility of knowledge, and the smallness of man whose little butterfly flight is soon over, while a stone god rolls down the centuries.

CHAPTER XX

THE SNAKE WITH SEVEN HEADS

WE rested in the hot noon. Tohsároth was silent now. He sat with the little girl, apart from us, his eyes upon the temple.

Thurland questioned the Count. Thurland's mind was filled with thoughts of the treasures that had left Angkor one night in the long ago: the great rose-col-

ored pearls from Jiddah and Koseir, the diamonds that made men invisible, the enormous rubies thought to be the eyes of dead pythons. The delay irritated him.

"It is necessary," said the Count. "I cannot explain. I have asked him for reasons, but he will not give any."

THE hot afternoon wore on, with us waiting and watching, the place and the ruins producing a sort of mental torpor that made conversation difficult. Yet although my uncles and Martin were annoyed at the delay, they were in their hearts satisfied that there was a reason—a reason that was known to Tohsároth. In some way that we could not understand, he was seeking a means of stirring his memory so that he could see again the night of the great flight.

We felt the effort as we watched—felt it so that we were hurt by the strain that was upon him. He was trying to remember, to remember a night that had rolled over Angkor hundreds of years back—a night of terror. Behind the dark eyes he was flicking over the pages of memory, getting the "scent" of the flight, seeking it like a hound, because it had become faint with the years—with the terrible destroying years. In the middle of the afternoon the old monk stated that he wished to visit the ruins of Angkor-Thom, which is situated a little more than a mile from Angkor-Vat, and the Count hired a wagon to take us. Joyeuse was tired and had no wish to go; so Flane stayed with her—also the little girl Om, whose bare feet had grown weary from tramping up and down the galleries of the great pagoda. Tohsároth, the Count, Thurland, Martin and I climbed into the wagon and took the road to Angkor-Thom—Angkor-la-Grand—the great city of luxury, where a million persons once lived, but which is now a place of desolation.

Here lived the great Khmer kings: Jayavaman, who built Prah-Khan eleven hundred years ago; and Cri Yaçovarman, the king of kings, who enlarged Angkor-Thom till it was the most glorious city of the East. The gate through which we passed had been the main entrance, and through it in the long-dead years there had passed colorful processions of knights and ladies, of chanting bonzes, magicians, and dancers out to honor the snake-god Nāga. Now there was nothing but overthrown walls, broken pillars, and the chipped faces of gods that had once rested on flower-decked pedestals to receive offerings of rice and incense.



Joyeuse, named after a sword.

"It's a merry place indeed," said Thurland. "One would think that big guns had pounded it to pieces."

"The big guns of Time have done the job," said the Count.

A wailing monk came up to us and spoke to Tohsârôth. The monk led us to a place that is called the *Belvédère du Roi Lépreux*, which is the Turret of the Leper King; and there our Methuselah seated himself, chanting softly, and not taking any notice of us. And the shadows deepened, and the loneliness of the place grew greater. And the silence was a great hand upon our mouths, so that speech seemed impossible. And we were a little afraid, for it seemed that at any moment something might happen, something unexplainable and terrible, the setting being there with the ruins and the silence and the feeling of despair.

IT was Martin who saw the thing. He grunted in a curious fashion and drove his elbow into the ribs of Thurland. And Thurland stared, and the Count stared, and I stared. With eyes that couldn't flicker for the life of us, we stared. And the silence wrapped itself around us till we choked under the clutch of its invisible fingers.

Before Tohsârôth was a broken slab on which appeared the carved snake, the seven-headed sacred cobra; and to us it seemed that the snake had come alive, with the sole difference that he now had one head instead of seven. One head instead of seven, and that head was weaving backward and forward as if he intended to strike the old monk, who sat and stared at him.

That is what we thought when our eyes first fell on the serpent; but as we stared at the crawling thing, we saw that the carving was still there, and that the cobra was a chap who lived in a hole beneath the slab, and had got a little mad because the old monk had come and squatted too close to his home.

Thurland reached for a rock to brain the thing, but the monk saw the movement and stopped him with a gesture of his thin hands. And there in the frightful stillness we sat and stared at the weaving head with its expanded hood, the black and white spectacle-mark showing plainly on the back of that same hood, with the two spots on the under surface. So close it was that we could have counted the scales of the thing.

Tohsârôth spoke to the snake—spoke in a low soft voice with words that we

didn't understand. Later the Count told us what he said. The old man was telling the cobra to go back to his hole, because we didn't wish to hurt him; but the cobra, unimpressed, blew out his hood to its full size and commenced to hiss.

Tohsârôth spoke again—more firmly now, and with a little bit of temper in his voice. He lifted his right hand in a gesture of command and uttered two words. Plainly he was warning the crawling thing to go back or he would run his ugly hooded head into trouble.

The cobra didn't like advice. He got himself ready to strike. Thurland cried out a warning as the head of the snake lashed forward at the bonze; but in the very act of striking, it was arrested. Aye, arrested with a sudden jerk in midair; then—then as we watched—it was drawn back slowly, and it and the body disappeared in thin air! Like smoke it vanished; and there, behind where it should have been, was the broken slab with the carving of the seven-headed cobra!

Thurland and Martin were on their feet. "Where did it go?" cried my uncle. "What the devil happened to it?"

Now there are explanations given for many happenings that occur in the East, happenings that are thought supernatural by those who have seen them. The wise lads say that most of them are explained by mass hypnotism, all the watchers being fooled by the fellow who performs the supposed miracle. But the little sequel to the disappearance of that cobra seems inexplicable.

The stone slab that carried the carving had been lying in the sun all that sultry afternoon, and like every other fragment around, it was hot to the hand when touched. Tohsârôth had risen when Thurland asked the question; and now as we stood staring at the place where the serpent had disappeared, the old man pointed to the carving and spoke.

The Count translated. "He says it is there," he cried excitedly. "The third head! He says to touch it with your fingers and you will find the proof!"

Looking a little bewildered, Thurland stooped and timidly touched the third stone head of the fanlike seven. He gave a yelp of wonder; then, in turn, he touched the other six.

He straightened himself and looked at the Count. "It's like ice, but the others are hot as hell!" he said.

The Count walked over and touched them in the manner of Thurland. Martin did the same; then I laid my fingers

on them. The third head seemed to have that cold frozen feel that one would expect when touching a serpent. A chill came out from the stone, a frightening deathlike chill, while the six other heads had absorbed the heat of the afternoon sun so that they were like coals under the touch of my hand!

Tohsároth was on his feet. He appeared excited. He spoke rapidly to the Count. The matter of the cobra had produced a change in his manner. Some long-buried memory had been brought to the surface by the happening. In some mysterious manner it formed a connecting link with the great flight from Angkor.

"We are on our way!" cried the Count. "He remembers! Lord in heaven! I can't explain, but—but—*come on!*"

At a half run we left the Turret of the Leprous King and hurried toward the main *gopura*, the gate where a three-headed elephant supports the carved pillars. We climbed into the waiting wagon and turned toward Angkor-Vat. The dusk was on the ruins when we came to the spot where Flane, Joyeuse and Om were awaiting our return.

CHAPTER XXI

THE AMBUSCADE

BUT if the ruins were awesome in the daytime, they were a thousand times more so when the night came down upon them. They breathed terror. There in the darkness were hundreds and hundreds of carven Buddhas. Smiling with that half-cynical smile as if they, as Thurland remarked, knew under which thimble was the pea that might be the very secret of life and death. The place was dead, and yet curiously alive. Throbbing with some strange force that it had absorbed in the long centuries when no man had laid eyes on it. Crouching in the thick forests with the millions of bats fluttering within its dead heart, it had gathered to itself a vicious power. Something like the power that men say comes from the Sphinx, only a thousand times greater; for the Sphinx is a poor thing compared to the great ruins of Angkor.

But we were on our way now. The old bonze had the scent. As the red moon came up out of the forest, he raced with skinny legs along the terrace, explaining to the Count—telling of the happenings of that night of long ago. The terrace is raised three feet from the ground, and that elevation permitted the nobles to

climb on the backs of the elephants that were brought up against the outer side. And on that night of the great flight, the elephants were drawn up there to take the king and the nobles and the pretty ladies of the court down to the shores of Grand-Lac. The old monk, by signs and talk, made us see them—the great beasts with their decorated howdahs shouldering the raised terrace to take their loads. . . .

On went the bonze, with us after him. Mad as a March hare he was now. He was living the night of the great stampede. He was fleeing the Plague—the Plague, that had come up the Mekong from the marshlands of the coast, and had squatted on the terrace of Angkor-Vat!

His hands were over his ears as he ran, and we understood why. He was shutting out the screams of the thousands who were mowed down by the Black Death; for the Past was on him and he heard those screams again—heard them in the stillness of the night.

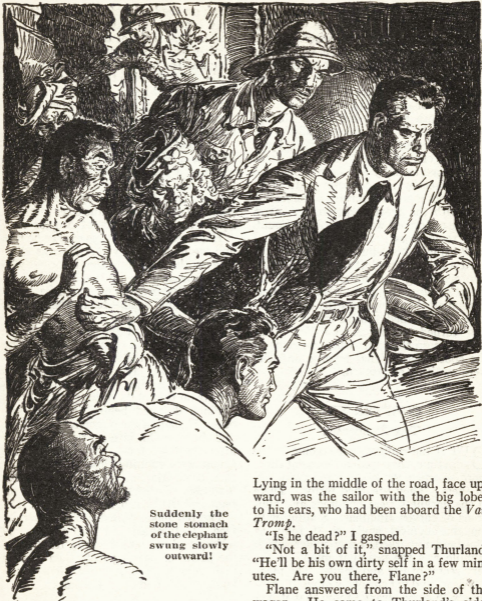
Heading toward the lake, the wagon clung to our heels, the man not having been paid, but the bonze wouldn't wait for the wagon: The "scent" was on the ground, he having run behind the elephants on that night of long ago.

Flane dropped behind, to help Joyeuse. He halted the wagon and lifted her and the tiny Om into it; then he ran on after the rest of us. Thurland and the Count were running close to the monk; then came Martin, with me a little behind him. Somewhere in front was Siem-reap, and the launch, and Thlök and Kêt.

The red moon pulled a cloud over its face. I stumbled and fell, picked myself up and ran on. From in front came the patter of running feet; then came a high yelp of pain, a curse, then Thurland's voice cried out a warning.

THE road was tree-lined; the moonlight came through in long white toothpicks, and these hit the bodies that were struggling on the ground. Hit them here and there as they writhed around, so that one had the belief that they were serpents and not men battling there—serpents who grunted and cursed and threshed about in the dust.

A hand caught my ankle and jerked me to the ground; then as I climbed to my feet, I saw Thurland plain in a patch of moonlight. He was clutching the old monk with his left hand, and swinging mighty blows with his right. And now and then he unloosed a war-cry that tore through the night.



Suddenly the stone stomach of the elephant swung slowly outward!

The wagon clattered down upon us, its single lamp dim with the dirt and dust. The driver pulled up as he heard the yells of Thurland. I got a smack on the side of the head that might not have been intended for me; and as I lay on the ground, heavy shod feet trampled over me. I heard Flane calling to Martin; then, with a queer suddenness, the fighting ceased. A hand grabbed me and pulled me to my feet. It was Thurland.

"Hurt?" he asked.

"No," I answered. "What—what happened?"

"A few laddies jumped on us," he said. He struck a match and stooped down.

Lying in the middle of the road, face upward, was the sailor with the big lobes to his ears, who had been aboard the *Van Tromp*.

"Is he dead?" I gasped.

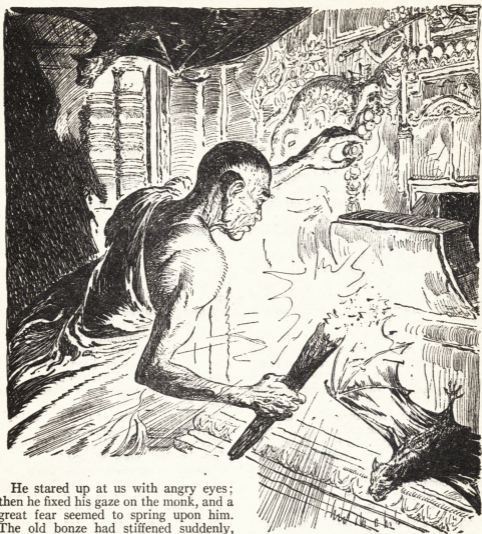
"Not a bit of it," snapped Thurland. "He'll be his own dirty self in a few minutes. Are you there, Flane?"

Flane answered from the side of the wagon. He came to Thurland's side. "Did you use a knife?" he asked.

"I did not," snapped Thurland.

"Well," said Flane, "the gentleman named Bruden got a prick from a blade. It's not much, but I was wondering who gave it to him. He came back after they stampeded, and was making a rush at you when some one pricked him."

Thurland pulled the unconscious sailor to the side of the road and walked over to the spot where the Count, Martin and the old monk were standing. Half-sitting, his back against a tree was Bruden. His shirt was open, and in the light of the wagon lamp a trickle of blood ran from a wound in his right breast.



He stared up at us with angry eyes; then he fixed his gaze on the monk, and a great fear seemed to spring upon him. The old bonze had stiffened suddenly, drawing himself up in the manner he had done when he struck down the mate of the *Kelantan* on the way to Saigon; and that gesture seemed to frighten Bruden. He clawed himself to his feet with a cry of fear and dived into the brush. In the silence we heard him crashing madly through the vines.

Thurland looked us over. "We're all here," he said quietly. "It was a nice fight while it lasted. I thought some one would be hurt badly. Now—who stuck the skewer into that fellow?"

Joyeuse looked over at Om; and Om wriggled from one foot to the other, her little bare breasts shining as the shafts of moonlight touched them. She hadn't understood Thurland's question, but she felt that she was under observation.

Thurland whistled softly. Om smiled up at him; then, with a certain bashfulness, she thrust a hand beneath her em-

broided skirt and brought out a lean and vicious-looking dagger. To save Thurland Om had given Bruden a jab!

"Well, I'm damned!" said Thurland. Then he wheeled and cried: "*Look out! He's off!*"

The forced halt had annoyed Tohsâroth. He was afraid that he might lose the "scent" if he wasted time on such silly interruptions as a fight, and now he was off, running swiftly in the direction of Siem-reap and the water.

Human shadows at the wayside screamed and yelled at us. A guard of the countryside, thinking we were pursuing a thief, joined in and refused to be shaken off till Thurland spoke sternly to him. Strung out along the road, with the wagon in the rear, we came to the landing-place where we had left the launch.

Thlök and Kèt were asleep; but the arrival of Tohsároth, who beat Thurland by some yards, roused them. Hurriedly they tore the covering from the engine and set about tuning it up. A group of chattering persons had gathered on the bank. A small official advanced and informed the Count that it was necessary for us to await the arrival of the French Resident and the Receveur des Postes. There had been, he asserted, rumors of *combats*.

The Count pooh-poohed the suggestion. "*Ce n'est rien du tout, monsieur!*" he said.

"*Mais, monsieur,*" cried the other, "*il faut attendre!*"

The Count watched Joyeuse and Om climb into the launch, heard the engine sputter and throb as the lean skillful hands of Thlök brought it into life, then he glanced at Thurland.

"Let's go!" cried Thurland. "Once you start arguing with these little officials, you're lost."

The Count hopped aboard; the official made a rush at the bow of the launch as if tempted to jump aboard; but Thlök swung the *Ang-Duong* away from the stringpiece, and the widening distance frightened the fellow.

We saw him dance up and down in the moonlight, shrieking orders to the cluster of local people who had been puzzled by our doings; then Tohsároth took our attention from them and we forgot them. For Tohsároth was under the spell that had seized him. He was fey with the rush of memories that had come to his mind. A sort of fierce dignity had fallen upon him. His skinny claws gave the startled Thlök the course, and Thurland and the Count accepted his directions without questions. The bonze had become the captain of the *Ang-Duong*.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MONK SEES THE PIROGUES

AGAIN the music swirled around the launch—the thin ghostly music that brought chills to us. The old bonze cocked his head and listened to it as if it conveyed a meaning to him. We thought it did, for he screamed unintelligible words at Thlök, and motioned him to stand in closer to the eastern shore of the lake, a suggestion that Thlök combated because he thought it dangerous.

The Count questioned Tohsároth, and the bonze poured out a flood of reasons.

"What does he say?" asked Thurland.

"We must follow the route of the pirogues," answered the Count. "He says unless we do that, he cannot guide us."

"But the channel might have changed," said Thurland. "This boatman seems afraid to take his directions."

"We must chance it," cried the Count. "He says—he says he can see them!"

"See what?" asked Flane.

"The pirogues!" whispered the Count. "He's—he's staring at mental photographs he made some hundreds of years ago. I don't know what to think, but—but if we're going to let him lead us, let us pluck up our courage and follow him."

THLÖK had stopped the engine, and we were all looking at the bonze. He had dropped on his knees; his skinny hands clutched the gunwale of the boat, and he was staring out across the moonlit waters of the lake: staring as if he saw monsters swimming upon the quiet water, staring as we had never seen anyone else stare in our lives. His lower jaw had been dragged down by the wonder that he alone saw out there on the lake; his outstretched neck was something to put the fear of God in the heart of anyone watching him.

"Wow!" gasped Martin. "What—the devil does he see?"

Joyeuse screamed softly, while Om slid from her seat and put her little hands on the shoulders of the old man. But Tohsároth took no notice of her.

Now his head moved slowly, ever so slowly, as if following the course of something moving toward the mouth of the lake, something moving slowly. The muscles of his neck were strained to their utmost as the lean head was thrust out to catch the last glimpse of the thing; then suddenly he relaxed and slipped to the bottom of the launch.

The Count pointed ahead at the spot that had held the eyes of the bonze when he slumped. He shouted an order to Thlök, and the launch leaped forward. Thlök had seen the old man watching, and was too astonished to dispute regarding the channel.

Now and then the Annamese turned and looked at the old monk, looked at him with fear and respect. Tohsároth, recovered now, urged him on with motions of his hand. We sat silent and watched. And the music clung to us like a skein of colored silk, caught by the small pennant at the bow. . . .

The moon dropped into the lake. Dimly we could see each other, and now and then some one whispered—whispered fearfully, as if the sound of a voice would break the spell that was upon us. But our minds were busy—busy with pictures of what this ride would bring us. For each of us felt that the great finishing drive toward the lost City of Klang-Nan had commenced. The course had been long, but we had now arrived at the straight, with the winning post in the distance.

All depended on the old monk, who sat and stared at the darkness ahead of us—the darkness where, to the eyes of Thurland and Flane, Martin and myself, danced the rose-colored pearls that had been soaked for seventy days in the milk of white mares to give them greater luster; the diamonds that made men invisible, and the great emeralds that preserved the chastity of the women who wore them. What the Count thought about I know not. Perhaps he had the thrill that came from the belief he would beat death, beat it as Tohsároth had beaten it, so that he could watch the centuries roll by and defy the skeleton hands of the Grim Reaper.

We passed out of Grand-Lac in the early morning. The monk waved a hand to the right bank, where lay the small town of Kompong-chnang. We wanted food, but we knew that Tohsároth had thoughts beyond provisions. He was following step by step a flight of long ago. We thought from his manner that the pirogues had stopped at Kompong-chnang. We were certain they had.

Tohsároth pushed through a mob of staring natives and marched toward an old pagoda that overlooked the water. A shaven monk came at a run, and our Methuselah questioned him. From the gestures of the local monk we understood that the pagoda was now not used, it being undermined by the floodwaters so that it was considered unsafe.

Tohsároth ignored the information. He marched toward it; and we followed, wondering a little as to the reason. The crowd increased.

WE followed him into the pagoda, the crowd making cries of warning as they clustered around the door. Part of the roof of the place had fallen in; and here, hanging from the beams, were the great fruit-eating bats of Asia. Hundreds of them. Awakened by our entrance, they flew around, making curious

noises, and swooping down over our heads in a threatening manner. The stench was frightful.

Tohsároth paused for a minute as if trying to get his directions; then he steered for the east wall of the temple, stumbling over the broken masonry, his black eyes gleaming with excitement. Joyeuse, Martin and the small Om had stopped inside the door; but Thurland, the Count, Flane and I clung to the heels of the old man.

The wall was a picture in stone. There was a whole line of elephants; and on the back of each rode a god or a goddess, each sitting under an umbrella made of sculptured palm fronds. The elephants had carved wreaths of flowers around their trunks, lotus and jasmine and tuberose, and they were all marching toward a door that looked to be the opening on the Cambodian paradise.

The old monk counted the elephants. He counted them again. He stood and stared at them. He seemed puzzled. The forefinger of his right hand went up and down as he counted for the third time, his withered lips moving with the finger. A sort of helplessness showed upon his lined face. He looked around and beckoned to the local monk, whose lean shaven head was thrust within the door, he being afraid to venture inside.

HE came now when Tohsároth called him. The two talked, Tohsároth gesticulating and pointing to the row of elephants marching bravely, the near foreleg of each lifted high.

The local monk raced out of the pagoda with the evident intention of seeking information, and after a while, he returned with the super-bonze, a very old man who walked with difficulty, and who had to be supported across the floor by his skinny-legged associate.

Tohsároth questioned the old man, and by bits that the Count overheard and translated to us, we began to understand what was wrong. An elephant was missing! On the night when the king and the nobles fled Angkor, there were eleven elephants marching along the wall of the pagoda—now there were only ten! We felt a bit qualmy as the Count informed us of the reason for the discussion.

The old super-bonze became excited. He waved his hands and talked. He motioned toward the inner wall of the chamber in which we were then standing. Something had been changed. Dimly, from his gestures and the words the



Count heard, we knew that a division wall had been erected, and that the missing stone elephant was in a room at the rear! The wall had broken the procession, and that last elephant had been cut off. He had been cut off, so the Count thought, for two hundred years. But Tohsároth knew that he had been in the line at one time. . . . At one time! On the night of the great flight he had been with his stone brothers!

The lot of us stumbled through an arched door into a corridor at the rear. Darker and more smelly. Some one brought a torch; the flickering light showed the missing elephant that the wall had cut off from his fellows.

Tohsároth, with a gesture, waved the others back. He took the torch and walked alone to the wall on which the great stone beast stood out plainly. In silence we watched him. The angry bats flew circling about over our heads. Now and then one, made angry by the torch, dived and touched the leaping flame with its leathery wings, making frightening shadow-patches on the walls.

Tohsároth was on his knees. His claw-like hands were fingering the stone flowers around the neck of the elephant. One by one he went over them, and we craned forward, a fierce and terrible expectancy upon us. For there came to us a feeling that something was going to happen within that ruined pagoda, something that would clinch the belief that we held—the belief in the age and the knowledge of the old man with whom we had trav-

eled the long leagues from the Villa Mille Fleurs at Neuilly.

The long fingers of Tohsároth's lean hand clung to a carved lotus. The fingers went over it, caressing it, touching each leaf; then suddenly, he thrust against the center of the flower with force, chanting softly as he did so.

The stone stomach of the elephant swung outward! Slowly, ever so slowly—the creaking sound of hidden hinges could be heard above the meowing of the fox-bats, above the heavy breathing of the packed crowd behind us. Tohsároth had dropped upon his knees and was making obeisance to something within the stone stomach of the beast.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE JEWELED BUDDHA

THE fists of my big uncles Thurland and Flane, saved us from death at that moment. For the crowd that had followed us into the pagoda were seized with a sort of madness when they saw the stone slab that formed the stomach of the elephant swing outward. They made a mad rush forward, and it was then that Thurland and Flane used their fists to such good advantage.

The two of them, standing shoulder to shoulder, knocked down the leaders of the rush; and they, falling, tripped up the others that followed them, so that in the space of a few minutes there was a heap of the nearly-naked devils squirming on the dirty floor, clawing and biting at each other. And as they fought with each other, bits of the ceiling of the place, disturbed by the shouting and the pounding of bodies, tumbled down upon us, and there was a great danger of the whole building collapsing and burying the lot of us in the ruins.

The Count wasn't idle at that moment. He dashed forward to the side of Tohsároth. I saw him stoop above the shoulders of the old man; then, as he saw what was within the secret place, he spoke rapidly to the bonze. The Count grabbed the torch; the hands of Tohsároth were thrust within the opening; they seized something, drew it out and lifted it high.

The light of the torch struck the object, struck it so that it blazed like a small sun, throwing out a thousand splinters of colored fire. Thurland and Flane, at a cry from the Count, formed a bodyguard for the bonze; and pushing aside the screaming mob, they led the

old man with the glittering treasure out from the ruined pagoda into the light of day.

There the crowd saw clearly what it was that Tohsároth carried. A shout of terror went up from them; they crouched in fear, dropping to their knees in the wet clay. Silence crept over the place, a fearful silence. . . .

There has been published since then a little book, called a *brochure*, entitled "The Jeweled Buddha of Kompongchnang." It can be bought in Paris for five francs; but those that read it might well think it is a fairy story, and that no such object ever existed, although the man who wrote the book tells truthfully of the finding of it, and even mentions the name of my uncle, misspelling the name, which is the habit of the French, calling him "Sir Durland Splane"—he that had no claim to the title, although there was no finer knight in the world's history.

Here is a bit translated from that same book, which I have beside me:

It was a golden statue of the Lord Buddha, standing some fifteen centimeters in height, encrusted with diamonds of the first water, the largest embedded in the chest of the figure. But the most astonishing part of this magnificent example of Khmer workmanship was the rose-colored pearl that formed the stomach, a pearl which, from all the descriptions given by persons who examined the find, was unique in size and luster. . . .

Now, it was the great pearl that made the stomach of the squatting Buddha which held the eyes of my uncles, and Martin and the Count. For, curiously, those words about the rose-colored pearls that Marco Polo had seen placed in the mouths of the dead in the city of Ta-pin-zu had about them a magic that made them more desired than the other treasures the Count had spoken of. Possibly it was the story about their being soaked for seventy days in the milk of white mares that thrilled us, for that suggested high sorcery; but this I know: the great gleaming pearl held us, it sitting like a lustrous moon amongst the diamonds, smooth and calm and quiet, while the other stones danced in the sunlight.

Hungry for it were Thurland and Flane. Aye, and the Count and Martin. Desire made their hands open and shut, their fingers itching with the longing to get hold of it; and for that, no man who ever saw the thing would blame them.



The super-bonze who ran the pagoda was standing close to Tohsároth, his old eyes on the statue, his hands raised in adoration. Tohsároth looked at him, spoke to him for a few minutes in a low whisper; then—the hearts of us were shot with the pain it brought—he placed the treasure in the yellow hands that were thrust out greedily to receive it. . . .

The Count spoke fiercely to Tohsároth, and the old man replied. He said, so the Count translated, that the statue of Buddha had been placed there on the night of the great flight, so that it would guard and protect Angkor. It had, according to Tohsároth, done the work it had been asked to do, and now it should remain in the old pagoda of Kompongchnang forever.

IT was no use arguing, although there was a look on the faces of Thurland and Flane that made the half-naked mob back away from them. Martin swore. But the Count, who was not treasure-mad like my uncles and Martin, spoke softly to them, explaining we had no claim at all on the find, which was the truth, it being solely the business of Tohsároth and the super-bonze who bossed the pagoda in which the thing was hidden. But it was hard for my uncles to see this.

"It's a hell of a business to leave a thing like that with a lot of bare-poll'd monks," growled Thurland. "Some big-fisted thief will come along, squeeze the throat of a few of the lice and stick it in his pocket."

"And that's the blessed truth," said Flane. "There's no strongbox here to put it in, and a big man could mop up a score of them. It's putting temptation in the way of a thief."

"It's not our business," said the Count. "It has nothing to do with us."

Thurland and Flane looked at each other and then at the old super-bonze and the crowd. I think the big pearl that made the stomach of Buddha had them under a spell at the moment, and that very little would have made them rush the old boss of the pagoda and take the thing from him. Then Flane grinned.

"It's nothing to what we'll get at Klang-Nan," he said. "Let's go away from this place before we grow green with longing for the pearl."

The Count collected Tohsároth, and we went down to the water, the crowd following us, pushing and scrambling to get close to Tohsároth, whom they thought was a miracle-worker. And they weren't far short of the mark in thinking that. We climbed back into the launch and headed down the Tonlé-sap toward its junction with the Mekong, up which we would go on the long journey to the hills. . . .

From what I find in the little book about "The Jeweled Buddha of Kompong-chnang," that which Thurland thus prophesied came to pass. This lad who wrote the brochure says this about the theft:

The find was not reported to the French Resident by the monks, they fearing that the Resident would seize the treasure. One of their own number watched the statue day and night; but on a morning six months after the wonderful relic had been unearthed, this guard was found with his throat cut, and the statue had disappeared from the box in which it had been locked. The theft is attributed to a Japanese rice-dealer who visited the district to buy the paddy crop. This Japanese has not been heard of since.

So Thurland was right; but whether it would have been proper for my uncles to grab the thing, fearing that a thief would get it if they left it unprotected, is another matter. My uncle said that the English argued that way when they grabbed every little island they found in the oceans of the world; but there's a difference between an island and a statue of Buddha, as the English might explain to you. For clever are the English at explaining why they gather up

islands that are lying loose and unprotected. . . .

The business at Kompong-chnang increased the fever that was upon all of us—the queer fever that made us forget everything but the story of the great flight. A fever that was a torment and a pain to us, but sweet withal.

We sat without speaking as the *Ang-Duong* rushed down the Tonlé-sap, each one of us fingering our dreams the way the yellow-robed monks finger the great strings of beads that they carry. And we weren't in a world that we knew, for those same dreams put a glamour on everything, bringing to the reed-beds a glow that thrilled us, and twisting the squawking of the cormorants and herons into music that hurt us with the sweet beauty of it.

The eyes of the Count glowed with pleasure, the age of Tohsároth being once more proved to him by the finding of the golden Buddha. Thurland and Flane and Martin were drunk with expectation, the hunger bred by the sight of the rose-colored pearl showing on their faces. Joyeuse was quiet; and when she looked at Flane, she smiled softly, for it was plain that she loved him. The little Om had become a slave of Thurland, she thinking him a god; and she was quite ready to stick her dagger into anyone that touched him, as she had stuck it into Bruden. A small piece of devilry was Om.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HONEY-COLORED DANCING-GIRL

WE swung into the Mekong, and the river had "its head up." The rains in the hills had fattened it, and the junks came down at a speed of twenty miles to the hour. Thlök hugged the bank to dodge the strong central current, and the *Ang-Duong* had to struggle for every mile she made. Pirogues going in the same direction fought bravely against the stream, the naked *piroguiers* yelling like demons, their steersmen cursing the river devils that held them back.

We at silent and stared at the banks. The river was a yellow stallion. It raced across the paddy-fields; it foamed under the little houses built on poles; it grabbed trees whose roots were too weak to stand the pressure, tore them from the bank and carried them downstream, to the great danger of the flying junks that went with them.

We passed villages to which the flood had brought a fierce activity. Naked men were wading in the water, armed with huge nets on poles. They scooped out fish, which the women and children gutted hurriedly, split deftly, and hung on bamboos to dry. The Cambodians were harvesting their food supply for the year.

The stench brought an army of big birds that dived upon the bamboo racks if an opportunity offered. Pod-bellied youngsters fought them off. Here and there a yellow-robed monk, finding fishing easier than begging, had tucked up his garments and was busy hooking seven-pounders from the water. For the Mekong, with the Grand-Lac, produces enough fish to supply all Cochin-China.

HIS face turned to the stern of the *Ang-Duong*, sat the bonze; his black glittering eyes were fixed unswervingly on the river. He watched it as if he expected at any moment to see a faster boat in pursuit of us.

"What is it?" asked Thurland. "Does he think the police are chasing us?"

The Count questioned the old man, but he didn't answer. He sat in a crouching position and stared and stared at the river. Then, as the evening closed in, we understood: Tohsároth was living in the Past. It had taken possession of him. He was once more in one of the long pirogues that had fled Angkor. Somewhere behind us, so Tohsároth thought, pursuing us, was the Plague!

As the dusk came down, he screamed for speed. He cursed Thlök; and Thlök, fearful of the trunks of trees that came charging down the current, was upset by the curses. He begged permission to tie up for the night at the first village we came to; and in spite of Tohsároth's protests, the Count ordered a halt. There was a fine chance of a racing log sinking us in the darkness if we went on.

There was a monastery close to the village at which we tied up for the night. Half a dozen monks were on the bank when we climbed out of the launch; and the moment they saw Tohsároth, they gave little yelps of surprise and gathered round him. He spoke to them, and they listened with startled eyes, staring at the river up which we had come. We felt sure he was telling them of the Plague.

"He'll frighten the devil out of them, and they'll run us out," said Flane. "Look at the fear he's plastering on their faces!"

The men, women and children gathered around to listen: Something evil was coming up the river, up from the coast. What it was they couldn't tell. Open-mouthed, they ran around the cluster of monks. Women wept, and children squealed with fear.

An old bonze waddled from the monastery. He was so fat from eating and lack of exercise that he could hardly walk. He listened to Tohsároth, and he seemed to understand. He spoke to the villagers and soothed them. The Thing that they feared, he asserted, had passed years and years before. It was only a memory of it that terrified the old man.

The Count put a question to him. When did he, the fat monk, think the Thing had passed?

The fat bonze replied that he had heard of something that had passed the village hundreds of years before—something like that which Tohsároth feared.

He ordered the villagers to prepare a feast for us. In no time we sat down to a great feed. We had a marmite of rice with a stewed peacock, dried fish, and bananas; five-score persons watched us eat. But Tohsároth ate nothing. He watched the river, and the monks and frightened children watched with him.

Two huts were made ready for us. We were given mats. Joyeuse and Om slept in one hut, the four of us in the other. Tohsároth did not sleep. The terror was on him. In the half light before sunup we heard him chanting, stopping now and then to curse Thlök.

THE river was waiting for us—angry waters from Tibet. Nervously Thlök looked at the stream. He would have liked to turn the nose of the *Ang-Duong* and go racing back to My-tho, but the Count was stern. And the size of Thurland, Flane and Martin terrified Thlök.

Tohsároth increased the troubles of Thlök. The old monk ordered the boatman to cross to the other side of the stream. Thlök objected. There was a fine chance of a log swatting us in mid-stream and sinking the outfit.

The Count questioned Tohsároth. The old man poured out a stream of reasons for the change to the eastern shore. At the point at which we were at the moment, these pirogues of long ago had crossed to the other bank! He recognized the bend in the river, the great sweep of forest on the other side.

"Does he know what is beyond the bend?" asked Thurland.



The statue should remain in the pagoda.

The Count put the question, and Tohsároth answered. At ten kilometers beyond the bend there was a large village with a pagoda on a hilltop, with an immense Buddha carved in the rock.

The Count questioned Thlök. The boatman agreed: The village was there; so was the pagoda and the enormous Buddha.

"Has Methuselah been here since that night?" asked Thurland.

"He says that he hasn't."

"Well," said Thurland, his eyes upon the old man, "I think we should take a chance and cross the stream."

The face of Thlök showed the fear that gripped him as he swung the launch away from the bank. Great logs rode the current like monster sea-serpents. Flying junks came round the bend with cargoes of naked men who screamed and yelled warnings at us. The Mekong was on the rampage.

A huge log rose like a crocodile and plunged at us. Thlök lost his head in trying to dodge it, and the launch got a slanting blow that shook us. The boatman and his assistant looked back at the sheltering bank we had left. They decided against the crossing.

Thurland stood up, lifted Thlök from his perch and took the wheel. If Tohsároth said the pirogues crossed over—well, we were going to cross over. We had followed the route from Neuilly, and we were going to keep to it.

A mango tree torn up by the roots charged us. The branches whipped our faces as Thurland swung the launch out of the way. We were in the center of the stream. A huge junk charged like a black bull. A raft, with a family crouched under a shelter of mats scraped the side of the *Ang-Duong*; the wife of the raftsman on her knees before a small statue of a god imploring protection.

Flane and Martin were busy thrusting off the hurrying logs, the rest of us feeling none too pleased with the crossing. Tohsároth was the only calm person. He sat upright, his eyes upon the forest, a slight smile showing on his face, as if he was happy to see the place once again.

We reached the quieter water. Thurland handed over the wheel to Thlök. We breathed again. . . . A bad river is the Mekong in flood-time.

IN the huge trees along the bank were the monkeys of which the old monk had spoken in the Villa Mille Fleurs at Neuilly. Thousands of them. They sat on the branches, their tails, as he had described them, hanging down like a fringe beneath the limbs. And they screamed and gibbered at us as they had done at the fleeing nobles and the women in the pirogues.

"The place hasn't changed a bit," said Thurland. "The only difference is that we have no gold bracelets to throw at the monkeys."

Flane looked at Joyeuse and smiled. "We'll get some later if they didn't throw them all away," he said.

We came to the village. It was exactly as the old bonze described it. We tied up while Thlök and Kèt overhauled the engine; and once again Tohsároth spilled fear on the people who clustered around. To us, it seemed that the fear was already there like tinder, and all the old man had to do was to put a match to it.

The Count, who was wise, explained to us. "This is a primitive country," he said. "Few things happen—that is, things that have any importance. I have talked a lot with Tohsároth; and I think the flight from Angkor, although hundreds of years ago, is still remembered."

"By whom?" asked Thurland.

The Count looked around him in the queer way that he had. He stared at a battered statue of Buddha squatting on a stone lotus. The thing had been there a thousand years, perhaps. Perhaps longer. The roots of a great tree had plowed under the statue and tilted it a little, so that the figure had a half-tipsy look about it.

"By *him*," said the Count softly. "He recalls the old pagoda and those carved monkeys on the wall opposite. And the old trees. This place, as you said, hasn't changed, and the flight is still remembered. It was photographed by—by everything along the river. The memory of its passing has never been wiped out."

Now that was a strange remark, a puzzling remark; but there seemed to be some sense to it. For the river was the same as it had been on that night of long ago. It hadn't changed. The same pagodas squatted along its banks, the same little villages, the same kind of people with the same ways and the same thoughts. There had been no big sweeping movements like those that had taken place in the Western World. None at all. No new religions, no new customs, no skyscrapers, nothing. The women were beating the paddy as they had beaten it in the days when the plague came up the Mekong; the men wore the *sampot* around their loins in the same fashion as they did then; the bamboo huts on poles were the same.

The Count looked at Tohsároth and the eager-faced crowd that surrounded him. "The photograph of the flight is here around us," he said; "and now the presence of the old man makes them see it clearly."

A MAN spoke excitedly, and the crowd broke apart. Two boys started up the hill at a wild gallop; the rest milled around Tohsároth. We watched the runners, wondering what they had been sent for.

The boys disappeared in the pagoda; the crowd became silent; the roaring of the wild stallion of a river was the only noise that came to our ears. The odor of flowers and rotting vegetation was like a drug, stifling and overpowering.

The boys darted out the door of the pagoda. Behind them came four monks, and behind the four walked a girl. But in saying that she walked, I am wrong. She didn't walk—she floated, or so it appeared to us as we stood and watched her come slowly down the hillside.

She was slim and beautiful. The upper part of her body was bare, and the color of golden honey. Around her loins was a twisted shawl with a pattern of peacocks embroidered in gold that fell to her knees. Her feet, like her hands, were small and beautiful; and around her ankles were a dozen great bands of shining gold that made nice clinking sounds as she walked.

AS she came down the hillside, she kept her eyes on the ground, picking her steps, for the path was rough; so she did not see our little party till she was within a few yards of us. It was then that she lifted her eyes and looked at us—looked at us one after the other; but it was upon Tohsároth that her eyes came to rest. And the smile that had been in them when she looked at Joyeuse died. Hurriedly it died, and in its place came a fear that hurt one to look at—a fear that pecked at your own heart, knowing the dread that was on hers.

She stepped back a pace, and her two little hands were pressed to her bare breasts. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them; then with a great effort she cried out a word that we had heard weeks before. It was the word that Tohsároth had screamed out when he had finished his story of how the Plague had come to the city of Klang-Nan. The word he had called himself, believing that he was the "carrier," and that it was in his body the germs waited. It was the word "*Karsh!*"

In a startled silence we stood and stared at her. No one moved. The monks, the watching villagers, we who had invaded the place, stood as if we had been turned to stone by the word that she had uttered.

The girl began to cry with the great fear that was on her; and it was then that Joyeuse broke from the side of the Count and rushed toward her—rushed toward her and flung her arms around the honey-colored body, soothing the little thing with words that she didn't understand, but which were so soft that they stroked the frightened soul of her.

A lean, shaven monk ran at Tohsároth as if he would strike him. Flane pushed the fellow away, the monk cackling like a hen that has laid an egg. And a leper howled like a mad-dog. A queer devil of a man, that leper—for he had no eyes and no hands, and he was tied to a gray-bearded monkey. The monkey picked up scraps of fruit and a few grains of

rice and placed them in the man's mouth, although the beast looked half-starved himself.

The Count spoke to the stuttering monk, and by degrees he got the reason for her fear. And by the motions of the monk and the bits that the Count translated, we understood. The anklets that were around the feet of the girl had been found on the bank of the river years and years before. They were thought to have been tossed there by the god of the waters, who would in his own good time send a celestial dancer to wear them.

The dancer—the honey-colored girl whom Joyeuse was then comforting—came some months before our arrival. She came in the manner that the god Cakiamouni came to Angkor, whose strange arrival is described in Páli on his monument. A mist appeared, although it was not the season; there was a storm of wind and rain; and there in the pagoda they found the girl, sheltered as Cakiamouni had been sheltered by the great stone hood of the snake god, expanded miraculously to keep the cold rain from her naked body. Knowing at once that she had been sent to wear the golden anklets, the monks had taken them down and placed them on her feet.

"Before they placed anything else on her, I'll wager," said my Uncle Thurland. "Well, it's a great story. Will you ask our Methuselah what he has to say to it?"

The Count spoke to Tohsároth. He asked him if he could explain how the girl came to recognize him. The old man shook his head. He had never seen her before.

Tohsároth wished to examine the gold anklets, but the girl screamed when he approached, holding Joyeuse as a shield between herself and the ancient. A monk was at last persuaded to take one of the anklets from the leg of the girl and carry it to Tohsároth, on condition that it would not be touched.

WE stared as the monk held it up for our inspection. To me it was a fine coil of gold worked with little figures; but to the Count it was something the equal of which the world had never seen.

The Count spoke of it to Thurland and Flane. He was thrilled with the fine work that was on it. He looked at Tohsároth, and the old man roused himself from a sort of trance and nodded. Tohsároth thought the anklets belonged to the little ladies who had fled Angkor

in the long ago. They were the anklets they had thrown, in their hysteria, at the monkeys who sat on the branches and mocked them!

"Let's get on!" cried Thurland. "We're wasting time!"

We climbed into the launch. In silence the crowd watched us. The Count tossed a small coin to the howling leper. The gray-bearded monkey picked it up and placed it in the leper's mouth. The honey-colored girl watched Tohsároth. The monk was kneeling before her, placing the golden ring on her ankle.

"Those fellows are not as silly as they look," said Martin in an undertone, as the launch pushed away from the bank.

THE Count, in the days that immediately followed, was upset by the presence of Joyeuse. Again and again he asserted that he should have used common sense and parked his niece at Saigon or My-tho or Pnom-Penh. But each time he rebuked himself aloud, the girl combated him. She was not afraid; the dangers didn't trouble her; she would have died of loneliness if she had been left behind. And each time she endeavored to excuse or justify her presence, she glanced at Flane. And the small Om would giggle and show her black lacquered teeth and the inside of her mouth, scarlet with betel. She would pat the hands of Joyeuse and whisper to her of devils and spirits that lived in the forests along the banks. And although Joyeuse understood few of the words, the voice of Om, charged with wonder, brought thrills to her.

The country spawned mystery—a fine cold mystery that crept into your bones. A mystery that followed you like a padding wolf, so that at times you felt the breath of the thing. For Cambodia is still in the hands of the gods of old, although the French control it, and send their thousands of *poilus* out there to fight diseases that are not known in the sunny France from which they came. Aye, the gods, immense and smiling, whose stone faces you meet at every turn, own the East; and as my Uncle Thurland said, they'll get back anything they give, like Jerry Cafferty of Kenmare, who always put a shilling on the plate in church and picked up two sixpences!

Strange things we saw in the days before we got to Luang-Prabang. We saw

a hundred men surround an imaginary devil and stamp him under their bare feet, stamp him in a way that made us believe he was really there. And we saw the cobras of the temples that were fed with frogs by the poor devils who believed the reptiles to be the sons of gods. And there were trees with great fleshlike flowers that folded up on birds or bees that came to sniff them, folded up and ate them. Vampire flowers whose petals were so much like soft white flesh that one was afraid to lay a finger on them. The natives believed that the trees could move themselves about from place to place if the birds and the insects didn't come to them in sufficient numbers when they were hungry. And there was a look about them that made us believe they could do that same.

The country bred nightmares. You saw faces on rocks that were not there, but which you thought should be there, the rock giving an invitation, so to speak, for some one to carve the head of Buddha on it. The rubber trees that were being bled for their gum had cuts in them that looked exactly like red mouths. And we heard in the nights the flutelike noise which we had heard first in the garden at Neuilly, and later on the Suez Canal and the Grand-Lac. Here the natives said it was made by a great snake whom no one had ever seen.

MYSTERY and magic everywhere. Men knew of our coming before we arrived; the gods of the river had told them. . . . One described the farmhouse where Thurland was born. This native could do many things. Each morning he took a flock of ducks into a rice-patch, stuck a bamboo in the ground and told the ducks not to wander more than two hundred meters from it. The ducks never did.

And time wasn't measured as we measure it. It was the Hour of the Dog, the Hour of the Snake, the Hour of the Owl, the Hour of the Rat, and so on. The small Om taught them to Joyeuse, and Joyeuse pretended to like them; but to me it was another thread of the sorcery that the place was wrapping around us. The unclean sorcery! For there was life in the things, that in other places would be dead. A life and an intelligence that questioned our presence. The trees wondered why we were there; the rocks wondered; and the old pagodas hated us.

The great climax in Mr. Dwyer's extraordinary story follows in our forthcoming May issue.

Don't Tell Your Right

By ARTHUR K. AKERS



"I heabs ol' shot-gun go bang! bang! in de lumber-yahd—dat de firs' time I ever knowed a nigger c'd fly!"

SKILLETFACE PEGRAM, decidedly of color, took off his shoes and started tiptoeing the four blocks past the lumber-yard where he *had* worked. Like a recent unhappy event which was keeping him away from the steamboat landing at Decatur, Alabama, Skilletface's lumber-yard employment was now strictly in the past tense. And even though two freight trains were thundering past each other on the tracks between him and the lumber-yard at the present moment, a boy couldn't be too careful about stamping around and getting overheard. Things might get to happening to him again. Mr. Pegram shuddered even yet as he recalled his last personal interview in there with "Cap'n Henry." Captain Henry Simpson ran the lumber-yard, and had also run Skilletface—about three miles—at their last meeting.

The argument, as Mr. Pegram now recalled it, had centered about this Prohibition the white folks still kept going in spite of Federal repeal. Cap'n Henry was a life-for-a-pint Dry. Skilletface could take it or leave it. The trouble was he had been leaving it too freely around Cap'n Henry's negro employees'

lunch-room, where they could do the taking—for a consideration to Skilletface. And when Cap'n Henry had fully informed himself on this, only superior ability to hurdle lumber-piles and box-cars at high speed had saved Mr. Pegram's life and looks.

And now, as an indication that his luck was still unreliable, Skilletface, halfway past the lumber-yard fence, ran out of freight trains. He barely had time to dodge behind a convenient railway tool-shed as the last caboose clicked by. However, a boy never could tell who else was going to be behind a tool-shed. In this case it proved an old and embarrassing acquaintance from Skilletface's home town, Demopolis.

"Dawggone!" ejaculated Skilletface. "Ol' Loose-change Jackson, de lion-tamer, hisse'f! When you git out of jail?"

"Las' week," mumbled Mr. Jackson. "Jail-house gent'man say whut 'come of you—is you want him fo'ward yo' mail or hold hit?"

"Huh! Aint nobody write to me no mo'."

"No, dey jes' *comin'* fo' you now."

"Whut you mean, *'comin'*?"

Name

A highly colored tale of dark, dark deeds.



Illustrated by
Monte Crews

"Mean somebody done did you dirt, dat's whut. Done tol' yo' D'mop'lis wife, Bella, whar at you is, so de alimony done staht some mo'."

Skilletface's knees buckled under this further blow. Whoever had started this alimony idea had ruined half the value of a divorce for him, anyhow.

"Who dat tell her?" he demanded with what fierceness Cap'n Henry had left in him.

"Li'l big-footed boy move in dar from Eutaw. Name Sid Livin'ston. Done got stone-bruises all over he feets now from not bein' used to pavements."

"Aint know him, but sho would like see him—tellin' Bella whar at I is—so I c'n move he face round to new place on he haid fo' him," Skilletface declared.

"You—an' who else?" Loose-change queried, unimpressed. "Dat boy look dumb, but he git you in a jam befo' he staht. Say he make 'rangements wid Bella an' git writin' from de judge 'bout hit. He say he gwine collect de alimony from you fo' her on c'mmission. I thought he done seed you a'ready, way you lopin' down de track heah wid yo' face so close to yo' feet."

Mr. Pegram made negative sounds. He was thinking, but it wasn't doing him any good. No legal defense presented itself to this fresh evidence that Bella was fixing to gang him again. Long experience had taught Skilletface Pegram to keep away from courthouses, anyway: a boy was too liable to get justice there. Now two years of freedom, through not leaving any forwarding address, merely meant two years' alimony accumulated against him, and

a collector on his trail. Which—in his current financial condition—was but another way of saying that he was shortly going to take a big personal interest in the good-roads movement, with a State-owned shovel in his hands.

Then from up the tracks a switch engine, loafing south with a long string of ore empties from a blast-furnace, spelled Opportunity to the marooned Mr. Pegram.

"See you round Fo'th Av'nue tonight!" he bade Loose-change a relieved farewell, and began using the train as a moving screen between him and the Simpson lumber-yard.

HALF an hour later Skilletface slid obtrusively through the open doors of the barbecue-stand of the Royal Presidential Hotel for Colored. There, and in the pool-parlor at its rear, seemed gathered every darky in north Alabama. Mr. Pegram cheered at this safety in numbers, and threw a leg over a stool at the lunch-counter preparatory to ordering sufficient nourishment for one in his run-down condition.

Then his eyes fell upon the occupant of the adjoining stool, and times got better. For the medium-sized, weazen-faced darky perched thereon was known to him—favorably.

"Hey, dar, Frisco!" he greeted. "How's de fixin'-business heah lately?"

Frisco Johnson shoved his check carelessly over beside Skilletface's plate. "Fixer, whut dey calls me down in D'mop'lis," he admitted cheerfully. "Up heah in Bumin'ham dey's mo' of 'em says hit, is all. Whut pesterin' you?"

"Licker," ruminated Skilletface inclusively. "An' women—"

"Aint no use specifyin' de rest," interrupted Frisco. "Time you finish wid dem two, yo' time done all took up. Why aint you marry de gal?"

"Did," stated Skilletface succinctly. "Dat huccome she thunk up de alimony. Dat, an' boy from Eutaw name' Sid Livin'ston. He find out whar at I is, an' tell her. Heahs he's fixin' come to Bumin'ham an' collect de alimony from me fo' her on c'mmission. I's two yeahs behin' wid hit now—dollar a week fo' two yeahs."

"Dat 'splanify de women—how 'bout de licker?"

"Gits me in acc'dent wid some gin up in Decatur firs'. Den lately I been sellin' hit round lumber-yahd whar at I *did* work. Aint work dar no mo' aft' Cap'n Henry find hit out. I gwine pin dese heah life-savin' medals on both my hind laigs fo' whut dey done fo' me *den!*"

"Well, aint nothin' hu't yo' app'tite, I sees," commented the Fixer. "An' quit all time shovin' yo' eatin'-check under aidge my plate."

"Jes' a habit I got," apologized Skilletface. "L'arns hit from you."

"Sho is l'arn fast," retorted Frisco. "When you 'vites yo'se'f to eat wid me, hit's Scotch treat."

"Huccome, 'Scotch treat?"

"You pays fo' both of 'em. Den maybe I go partners wid you in fixin' up yo' business. Whut you need 'sides money?"

"Mo' money."

"Bes' way git money is sell some'n. Whut you got to sell?"

"Aint got nothin' but my dawg—"

"Yeah, an' he li'ble gnaw loose an' go back to who own him befo' you c'n git him sold, too."

"All de sho 'nough money come from sellin' whut I aint got," explained Skilletface sadly.

"Dat de firs' time you said nothin' since you open yo' mouth," Frisco interjected. "De big money come from sellin' whut you *aint* got. Hit's all profit den."

Skilletface gaped respectfully. Everything he had heard about the majestic brain of Frisco was evidently correct.

"You sho is de Master Mind," he quoted from a movie poster.

"Specify some'n you aint got, an' maybe I fixes fo' you raise dis heah alimony money an' keep out de jail-house dat way," Frisco suggested. "All I charges is half de profits fo' yo' idea."

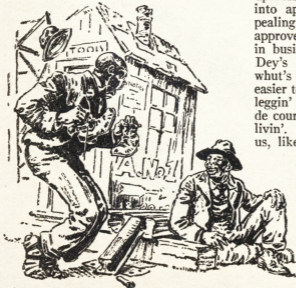
SKILLETFACE agitated the surface of his skull at length with a stubby finger. And thus stimulated, he found the aroused brain beneath suddenly running alongside an idea, as it were. When their respective speeds became approximately the same, he leaped for it—and into speech.

"Knows whut you means," he evolved. "C'd sell some'n I used to got an' aint got no mo' now."

"Jes' eatin' 'side me he'ps yo' brains," commented Frisco patronizingly. "Whut you thunk up fo' us to sell now?"

"Bootleggin' permits. Git 'em up coverin' some dese big plants round heah whar at bunch dese gin-hounds works."

Frisco sat stunned a second at the aptness of his protégé. Then he broke into applauding elaboration of so appealing an idea. "You said hit!" he approved. "Jes' so you aint try to stay in business too long in de same town. Dey's boys comin' to town ev'y day whut's itchin' to git rich quick. Hit be easier to sell 'em fine yaller-printed bootleggin' permits dan to git 'em buy paht de courthouse, like I used have do fo' a livin'. An' us splits de profits 'tween us, like I says. Dat 'tend to yo' ali-



"Jail-honse gent'man say is you want him fo'ward yo' mail or hold hit?" asked Mr. Jackson. "Somebody done tol' yo' D'mop'ls wife, Bella, whar at you is, so de alimony done staht some mo'."

mony trouble. . . . Whar at dat lunch check of you'n? Cain't have you all time buyin' vittles fo' me!"

"COME back in 'bout a houah, when de yaller ink be dry on de stiffkits," a printer-friend of Frisco's shortly accepted their order and Skilletface's advance payment on it.

Then Frisco unfortunately thought of something full of future consequences. "Git mo' fo' dem stiffkits, is us sell 'em from a office," he stated firmly.

"My alimony aint in shape fo' me have no office," Skilletface balked. "Too many folks lookin' fo' me now widout me he'pin' 'em dat way—my rabbit-foot got mo' business 'an hit c'n 'tend to right now!"

"Aint no class widout a office." Frisco was adamant.

Thus the firm of Johnson and Pegram opened for business the following morning in a second-floor room of the Knights of Temperance lodge headquarters—an oasis in an ostensible Sahara—prepared to sell the violation privileges for various of the white folks' industrial plants to aspiring country negroes at such prices as the aspiring ones might happen to have about them in cash.

"Couple days good business, an' dat alimony-boy aint worry you none," Frisco greeted Vice President and Assistant General Manager Skilletface Pegram of the firm, cheerily.

"Li'ble be heah lookin' fo' me befo' dat," gloomed Skilletface nervously, "wid all dat writin' from de judge. Den whar I be? Dat Bella sho can think up mean ways of gittin' money."

As a tonic, Mr. Pegram pulled out the drawer of the rickety kitchen table which served him as a desk, and gazed upon the reassuring sight of the yellow-printed certificates reposing therein. Undeniably they looked good, beginning resoundingly with "*To Whom It May Concern and Know All Men By These Presents,*" and containing blank lines to be duly filled in with the name of the purchaser and the name of the plant for which the permit was alleged to be good—

"But don't you tell yo' right name," cautioned Frisco as he outlined the campaign in its details. "An' you be de inside man—you stay in de office an' 'tend to business after I fotch in customers to buy. I circ'lates round back of de Union dee-po' an' picks up de country boys wid cash in dey pants. Which way

you gwine be lookin' th'u' de bars aft'-wahds in dis business 'pends a heap on how you picks yo' prospec's."

"Don't fotch in no Decatur boys," warned Skilletface mournfully. "I cuts de gin I *wuz* sellin' up dar wrong once—some dem steamboat boys swaller hit, an' dey aint caught 'em yit! Me, I been livin' heah in Bumin'ham ever since."

"Aint meet nothin' but de right trains an' de right customers," Frisco restated his policies. "An' heaps times I kills two birds wid one rock. 'Fixer,' dey—"

"Kill one bird wid *two* rocks is all right wid me," grumbled Skilletface, "is he dat Sid Livin'ston."

But no sooner had Frisco departed than the doorway and business situation were darkened for Mr. Pegram by the unwelcome shape of Loose-change Jackson. Even his conversation was distasteful, for he asked:

"Is dat alimony-collectin' boy find you yit?"

"You aint seed no fraish fun'rals round heah lately, is you?" Skilletface counter-questioned bravely. "When dem traffic-lights tu'ns yaller an' fo'-five amb'lances stahs comin' aft' de same boy, den you c'n figure dat dat li'l alimony-hound done found me—an' wished he hadn't!"

"Sho is talkin' loud when you by yo'se'f," observed Mr. Jackson acidly.

"An' is you see him firs'," further directed Mr. Pegram, "tell dat boy he better bring he pussional vet'rinarian wid him—he gwine need somebody whut know dey business to put him back together again when I gits th'u' wid him."

"You still aint say who gwine he'p you," interpolated Loose-change softly. But Skilletface did not hear him, his attention being suddenly absorbed by sight of a pair of darkies crossing the street below. One was Frisco, the other evidently the firm's first cash prospect.

"Beat it!" he therefore barked at Loose-change. "Cain't have de prospec's seein' you round heah: hit li'ble ruin ouah bus'ness!"

"Gwine now. Might think I knowed you," grumbled Loose-change, heading too slowly for the door.

"You's too late now—git back from dat front do'!" Skilletface halted him. "Dey see you! Pahk yo'se'f back of dat curtain dar twel de cust'mer git suhved!"

SCARCELY had the curtain settled itself behind Mr. Jackson, when ascending footsteps foreshadowed the entry

of Frisco and a pair of huge new yellow shoes inhabited by a limping and obviously rural ducky.

"Set down an' fan yo' feet while I sees c'n de vice-pres'dent an' 'sistant gin'ral man'ger see us," Frisco continued to make himself agreeable to his prospect.

The newcomer slumped hastily into a chair, removed his shoes, and sighed like an unharnessed horse. Frisco meantime was tiptoeing back to where the multi-titled inside man of the firm sat scanning a month-old newspaper as though both his life and his alimony payments depended upon it.

"Dis boy's from so fur back up de headwaters I cotch him wid a baitwum' an' bent pin," he sketched the caliber and cunning of his applicant. "He got twenty dollars—from workin' all winter. 'Member half of hit's mine."

"Tell de gent'man step right back!" blared Skilletface dutifully. "Plenty good terr'tory lef' if he hurry."

BUT the course of commerce apparently had hit a snag. Difficulty and delay arose, due to the inability of the prospect to get his shoes back on.

"Done—ouch!—shrank up on me," mourned the prospect as he tugged at them. "But I still got de same money I showed you at de dee-po'—"

Frisco remembered the currency and waived the shoes. "Boy wid all dem frawg-skins," he amended his earlier statement, "c'n talk business wid ouah Mist' Pegram in a barr'l."

Behind his kitchen table Skilletface tried to look as important and financial as the president of a burying society. And success was only diluted by the shadow cast by two years' back alimony, liable at any moment to be prematurely brought to his attention.

"Heahs you craves to buy good gin-sellin' terr'tory 'round Bumin'ham," he opened business negotiations.

"Craves to quit choppin' cotton," admitted the prospect dubiously. "But aint had no luck yit makin' no money no other way. An' is you got way to make livin' widout no mules in hit, craves to heah 'bout dat firs'."

"Dis heah somep'n whut you c'n git rich at settin' down," Frisco sounded the note of greatest immediate appeal. "You say you done did too much foot-work a'ready?"

"Gits bunions plumb up to my knees from walkin' round town heah so much now," explained the stranger dispiritedly.

"I done 'splain ev'ything to him," Frisco hurriedly re-addressed the vice president *et cetera*. A shade too hurriedly, the latter suddenly began to feel.

"He ve'y p'tic'lar," continued Frisco, "to git de 'xact terr'tory I done been tellin' him 'bout comin' over heah. Lemme fix de stiffkit fo' him my own-se'f."

Again Skilletface blinked and seemed to balk. Frisco, watching him, thought he detected a regrettable tendency for his ears to lengthen and slant backward—plus a faint but growing hint in the air of emery dust just flung into the bearings of their business.

Already, too, Frisco had been feeling himself treading on eggs, metaphorically: golden eggs, where a false word or step would be fatal to the goose involved. For his trip from the depot had by pure accident of conversation revealed a strategy calculated to keep Skilletface working hard and dividing the profits somewhat longer than might otherwise be possible in the circumstances. A strategy the details of which, however, were so highly confidential that Frisco hesitated even to breathe them to himself. Besides, partnerships were always more profitable if he had something on his partner.

Meantime, behind the curtain something was going wrong. More agitation than any wandering breeze could account for was evident there—as though disturbing information had penetrated behind it.

But Frisco was too busy to risk the situation getting away from him now. "S'pose you go up front an' try git yo' shoes on now," he hurriedly and helpfully suggested to the prospective purchaser of a permit, "while me an' Mist' Pegram heah fix up yo' terr'tory. Mist' Pegram hold yo' money fo' you so you have both hands free."

"Cain't run fast 'nough now to let no boy hold my money fo' me," demurred the prospect.

"Boy, you be able run so fas' after us finish fixin' you up dat nigger whut jes' seed a ghost couldn't catch you," Frisco reassured him heartily. And at which remark the disturbance behind the curtain grew no less.

SKILLETFACE waited only to see that their prospect's back was turned before seizing the office ink-bottle and hurling it with murderous aim at the agitated bulge in the curtain. "My dawg back dar," he explained to the questioning

Frisco, "heah me talkin' 'bout sellin' him an' git ambitious."

"Sho make funny noise fo' dawg," responded that gentleman suspiciously as an uncanine-like grunt marked the impact of the bottle.

"He aint good as mos' dawgs," continued Skilletface bitterly.

"You done ruin de ink," Frisco changed the subject. "Gimme de pencil an' lemme fill out de name of de territory I been boostin' to dis here bunion-hound up front. 'Fixer,' dey calls—"

OVER Frisco's shoulder Skilletface read the result, and his eyes began to resemble doorknobs in his amazement. Reading it aloud was not only no more convincing, but seemed to cause fresh agitation behind the curtain.

"W-w-what you tryin' do?" stammered Skilletface through the dark expanse of vacancy that was his face. "I wouldn't do dat to *nobody!* Not even to my dawg heah—not even to *Loose-change!*"

At which final straw the curtain partially parted to reveal the last-mentioned gentleman in wrathful person.

"Jes' fo' dat, Skilletface, I aint tell you all I jes' find out I knows!" he muttered viciously, one hand still caressing the anatomical spot where the ink-well had evidently taken recent terrific effect. "'Fixer,' Frisco call hisse'f! Boy, wait!"

With which cryptic words Mr. Jackson essayed once more to shuffle forth visibly via the front door.

"Let ouah cust'mer see you befo' us gits his money, an' you goes round town feet-firs' wid six boys wid white gloves on, carryin' you!" hissed Skilletface as he diverted traffic forcibly to the rear stairway.

Loose-change hesitated angrily, as though on the point of divulging something, then departed with the irritating air of one who is filled with pleasing anticipations, while biding his time.

"Dat boy think he know too much," opined Frisco obscurely. Then the returning permit-purchaser—shod—claimed his attention with: "Craves my stiffkit an' git gwine."

"An' heah 'tis," Mr. Johnson produced it with a flourish, "all fill' in wid de name yo' terr'tory—fo' de full an' 'clusive bootleggin' privileges in an' round *Cap'n Henry Simpson's lumber-yahd!*"

"Week mo' like dis," Frisco greeted his apprehensive assistant an hour later, "an' you be all set fo' dat alimony c'lector."

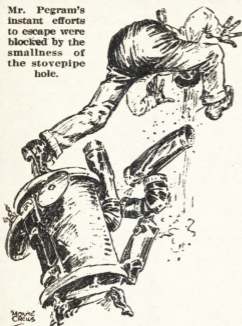


"Us feel better in Decatur, is us bury him up dar!"

Skilletface glanced nervously at the runway he had cleared for himself between his kitchen table and the back stairs, and said nothing. This office foolishness kept a boy sleeping in his hat and shoes all the time. Mr. Pegram retained his preference for transacting business out of doors, where there was more room and more directions in which to run.

And Frisco's fixing began to look too much like riding old Flying Jenny at the circus—you got off right where you got on, or maybe farther back. Selling too many certificates brought on alimony money, it was true: also a traffic jam of former customers looking for bail and blood—Skilletface's blood. While selling too few meant there would be financial followed by physical trouble when Bella's collector appeared. And clearly nothing had been done about the drawback that trains were still running from

Mr. Pegram's instant efforts to escape were blocked by the smallness of the stovepipe hole.



Decatur; not to speak of Loose-change's acting like he knew something else that might be fresh bad news. All in all, the back stairway and a Pacific Coast address kept looking better and better to the mournful Skilletface.

"Dat right!" Frisco upbraided him in addition. "Set dar like a wart on a frawg while I does all de work an' bring in all de business!"

Skilletface continued to say nothing in nine languages.

"I gets *half* de money an' does *all* de work," persisted Frisco after the immemorial manner of a partner. "Gwine back out now an' look fo' mo' prospec's sell dem stiffkits to. Tu'nover's whut keeps you out de jail-house in dis business, an' you aint even tu'n yo han'!"

But Frisco was back unexpectedly soon, accompanied by a strange muscular-looking dardy of the promising pyramidal design that usually went best with Frisco's schemes—large at the feet and diminishing steadily as his outlines converged upward to a bullet-shaped head.

"Freight wreck tie up de road some," Frisco announced cheerily. "Trains jes' come in from both ways—"

BUT these pleasant preliminaries were suddenly and violently cut short by a mingled growl and screech. The growl—deep, fierce and guttural—was from the throat of the newest prospect; while full responsibility for the screech could evidently be ascribed to Skilletface.

More, Mr. Pegram was earnestly following it up by a dive for the back stairway similar to that of a circus performer into a water-tank. Nor was he a second too swift in obeying the well-known first law of nature.

Indeed, only the imminent loss of a commission lent Frisco the needed speed and strength to halt and hold his enraged prospect.

"Lemme at him!" howled the muscular one bloodthirstily.

"He done passed Cincinnati by now," urged the resourceful Frisco, his brow furrowed by the strain suddenly being thrown upon the brain back of it.

"Us feel better in Decatur, is us bury him up dar!" persisted the pyramidal-shaped one, testing a razor edge carefully with his thumb.

"In Decatur?"

"Yeah. Been lookin' fo' dat boy ever since he put too much lye in my drinkin'-gin up dar!"

The astounded Frisco felt his ingenuity being taxed until it groaned. His business was suddenly getting as complicated as a Goldberg cartoon, his reputation as a fixer suddenly trembling in more balances than one. Here was a fresh situation that called for fast action. For with Skilletface rapidly growing scarcer than a place to park, the total eclipse of Johnson and Pegram looked dark and possible ahead.

THEN, in the nick of time, something occurred to him. He perceived anew, in the light of it, that the application of the title Master Mind to him had been no empty compliment. He had it! His newest mental fruit proved it! Nor was bribery but a minor premise and promise in it. A larger deeper good was innate and inevitable, depending only on how his newest prospect took it.

"Take dat Skilletface so long to git back from whar he gwine by now dat you c'n sell lot of licker wid one ouah fine permits while you waitin' fo' him," he returned the conversation skillfully to its original subject. "Dese heah yaller stiffkits cures mo' trouble dan a mustard plaster."

The prospect wordlessly tested his razor.

"An' fo' extra good man—like you," Frisco offered impressively, "us puts 'em out on *ten days' free trial*. If you aint like hit, you aint owe us nothin'."

"Aint in'sted in nothin' but 'clusive terr'tory," muttered the other.

"'Sclusive is only kind us offer," caroled Frisco in relief. "An' fills in yo' name on hit *personal*. Lemme git my pencil!"

IT was dusk when a kinky hatless head was cautiously inserted in the doorway of Johnson and Pegram, dealers in liquor licenses, and hastily jerked back. Nothing happened. Encouraged, the head reappeared, followed by a neck and the still-frightened form of vice-president and assistant general manager Skilletface Pegram.

"Whut 'come of dat big Decatur boy?" he expressed interest in the life-extension movement—his life.

"I done fix him," returned his partner. "You run off an' leave me do all de work. Aint even wait fo' yo' hat."

"Too busy movin' my skin to safe place to pester 'bout no hat," retorted Mr. Pegram peevishly. "Whut I tell you 'bout meetin' dem Decatur trains?"

Frisco cocked his feet up on Mr. Pegram's table and looked wiser than an aviary full of chocolate-colored owls.

"How you cripple him?" Skilletface pursued his questionings in the face of it.

"Wid whut *you* aint got," responded Frisco superiorly. "Wid my brains. I aint sell him no stiffkit: I *gives* him one."

"Huh? *Gives* him one? Fo' sellin' whar at?"

"Well," explained Frisco condescendingly, "like I says, I uses brains—an' gives him de 'sclusive permit to sell lick-er in an' 'round *Cap'n Henry Simpson's lumber-yahd*."

Again the startled Skilletface collapsed, from the neck up, producing dizziness and a desire for fresh air and information. Frisco had fixed things *now* all right! Fixed new features to their finish, too! Skilletface's numbed brain picked feebly at the frightful facts.

"You says," he recited thickly, "dat you gives two diff'ent niggers—one of 'em from de Decatur steamboat-landin'—de 'sclusive permit to sell drinkin' lick-er in *Cap'n Henry's yahd*?"

"Uh-huh. All time fixin' somep'n—"

"Yeah, an' you done fix hell, too, dis time!" wailed Skilletface as it fully dawned upon him. "Tells you all time aint no luck in dis heah office business! I aint gw— Aw, my Lawd! W-w-w-whut dat? W-w-who dat comin' *now*?"

For loud on the front stairway was a sudden sound as of many feet.

"Naw, you aint!" Frisco barred Skilletface's way to the back door. Mr. Pe-

gram's instant further efforts to escape otherwise were also blocked by the smallness of the stovepipe hole, through which, casting aside the stove, he next endeavored to cram himself at ninety miles an hour.

But, emerging sootily to attempt a third route out, it was revealed to him that all the commotion had been caused by but two feet—both of them Loose-change's. And in the hands of Loose-change were two familiar objects which Frisco was even then reaching for.

"Gimme!" he was demanding. And as he examined them: "Huccone *you* git both dese heah permits sell gin in Cap'n Henry's lumber-yahd? Aint you know dey aint transfe'able?"

But Mr. Jackson was yet wide-eyed and added from what he had witnessed. "Up on de railroad," he responded at length, "'cross de track from Cap'n Henry's. I heahs of' shotgun go *bang! bang!* in de lumber-yahd—an' den couple of squawks, like—an' dat de firs' time I ever knowed a nigger c'd fly!"

"FLY?" hiccoughed Skilletface amid his soot.

"Yeah, fly," persisted Loose-change. "Two of 'em! Comes sailin' over dat high boa'd fence 'round de Cap'n's yahd wid dey coat-tails all spread out like couple of hens leavin' a hawk! But hit aint twel Cap'n clumb up on de fence an' shoot de *third* time dat dem niggers drap some bottles an' dese heah two pieces yaller-printed paper, an' really stahts bein' *airplanes!*"

"Nemmind airplanes," interrupted the partially revived Skilletface. "Lemme out befo' dat alimony-boy git heah now."

But, "*He* aint never comin' back heah now," startlingly asserted Loose-change.

"Back heah? '*Back*' heah, you says?" Skilletface sputtered in bewilderment.

"Yeah. Back heah! If you wa'n't so dumb, you know all time dat whut I hintin' at: hit wuz dat alimony-collectuh, Sid Livin'ston, whut Frisco fotch in heah an' sell dat firs' lick-er-permit to, while I wuz watchin' from behin' de curtain—"

"'Fixer,' dey calls me," murmured Frisco triumphantly to the staring-eyed Skilletface. "Runnin' 'cross—an' fixin'—dat Livin'ston boy by sellin' him stiffkit an' tellin' him nothin', wus easy. But dat Decatur boy—he mighty nigh stump me, twel my brains tu'ns over right, an' I fix him wid stiffkit too—so Cap'n Henry c'n 'tend to all yo' business at once—widout reloadin'!"

SHIPS and Men

"Nile Skipper" takes you to old Egypt and a colorful story of the ships that helped to build the Pyramids.

OUR steamer was getting into Rangoon. I stood at the rail, taking "home movies" of the Burmese fishing craft, a strange solitary Chinese junk, and all the queer river-life of the Irrawaddy delta, when the chief steward came along and halted.

"There's something you seldom see nowadays." And he pointed to an ungainly boat coming down the river. She was propelled by long oars, but she carried an odd sort of double mast, shaped like the letter "A."

"A real old-time Burmese junk," the chief steward replied to my query. "The type that has sailed this river for hundreds of years, for centuries past counting, and is pretty near extinct today."

"Obviously, a craft peculiar to this river," I remarked.

At this, the chief steward grinned and produced a photograph.

"I thought some of you would spring that remark on me! . . . Here, look."

His photograph showed a ship model, exactly like this Burmese junk. The same double mast, the same overhang of prow and stern, with steering-oars at one side of the stern.

"That," said he, "is a model from an Egyptian tomb of five thousand years ago."

"What?" I exclaimed in surprise. "Exactly similar to this Burmese junk?"

"In every detail. The Irrawaddy, my son, is like the Nile: the current flows one way; the prevailing wind blows the other. Take a good look at that photo, and let me have it back later. I'm on a call to the bridge." He dashed off. . . .



Five thousand years ago? Khufu had been king in Egypt then, he whom the Greeks named Cheops. A legendary golden figure, seldom or never seen by these workers in the shipyard below Memphis; and only then a tiny dot amid throngs of priests and nobles and slaves. To these workers, the authority of the Pharaoh was represented wholly by their immediate overlord, the thin and saturnine Enuser, chief of naval construction.

The comings and goings of Enuser were unhappy occasions, and luckily rare. Borne on his palanquin, attended by secretaries and nobles and slaves, the eagle-eyed, cruel-lipped lord would get his monthly reports, issue clipped orders to the overseers, and then men would be lashed to death or mayhap rewarded. Even the captains of the Nile ships, free men, bronzed hearty fellows, stood in

By H. BEDFORD-JONES and



From an etching by Yngve E. Soderberg

fear of Enuser, for they too were beneath his authority, and when things went ill, they felt his displeasure.

Things were going ill enough now, and over the shipyards arose the sound of men groaning, and the whistling of knotted whips. Enuser was in a white rage born of his own fear, since upon him had descended the threatening anger of the Pharaoh. He had left his palanquin, was talking furiously with the overseers, and at one side waited the captains who were about to catch his wrath.

"It's intolerable!" he snapped at the overseers. "The chief priests and architects complain that we don't deliver sufficient stone from the quarries—and whose fault is it? You all know that the Pharaoh is building this pyramid at Gizeh, that the labor and material is eating the heart out of the country, and

that if the granite supply fails the whole work is delayed."

"Lord, is it our fault?" spoke up the chief overseer. "Look. The boats are large and well built, all is done according to regulation—"

"And last month a good fifty of them disappeared coming down from the quarries," Enuser snapped. "The month previous, thirty-five sank or went ashore. What is worse, on the way upriver a dozen were lost and the others were so slow in reaching the quarries that the whole system was thrown out of order."

"That, lord, is not due to the construction," said the chief overseer sturdily. "We supply the boats. We've added two thousand workers to the shipyards since that pyramid was begun; we turn out double the former number of craft. There our responsibility ends. If the

CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

captains and pilots can't deliver the stone or handle their ships, it is not to our account."

This was plausible enough, and a hum of approbation rose from the mass of overseers. But, from the throng of pilots and captains waiting, who now saw the gaze of Enuser turned on them with the threat of approaching wrath, stepped out one Nefer, youngest of the captains.

He was bronzed and smiling, a resolute, handsome fellow; and as became a free man, made no obeisance to Enuser.

"Lord, the argument is good but the facts are otherwise," said he boldly. "If you'll honor me by listening, I can show you where the fault lies."

"Have the gods inspired you, then?" sneered Enuser.

"They have, lord," Nefer replied calmly. "Also, I know my trade. I have pilot's license for the entire river, and captain's ticket to boot. I have piloted above the cataracts and in the Nile delta. I have helped construct ships. In other words, lord, I know my business inside and out as a seaman should."

Enuser noted the confident carriage of the man, the eager, assured eye, the air of authority. His guile returned to him, and he banished his sneer.

"I listen," he said quietly. "Where lies the fault?"

"Not in these overseers," Nefer rejoined. "They do honest work; there's no fault in the yards. Not in their product, either. Not in the labor concerned. Not in the pilots and captains, all of whom know their job and have good crews. But look, lord—look at the basin there, and you'll see the fault."

EUSER, for all his cruelty and deep craft, was a man of brains who overlooked nothing. He turned. In the canal basin at one side lay a number of nearly completed ships of the largest size. Enuser joined the young captain and approached the basin, walking among the piles of huge beams, each stamped with bird and sun and serpent, the mark of Khufu the Pharaoh. Nefer stopped and pointed to the nearest ship, whose mast was being stepped. A plain, old-fashioned, solid mast, with broadsquare sail-yard.

"There is the fault," said he. "These boats were designed a thousand years ago, lord. They are built today as they came down to us, broad-beamed, pegged together, heavy of stern and bow, with

a mast solidly stepped. They were designed to carry slaves and corn and produce and trading-goods—not stone from the quarries. Even with fifty slaves at the oars, they are most difficult to handle when full laden. The fault lies in the design of these boats, and nowhere else."

AT this, men gasped. It was the rank-est heresy. Construction of all kinds, all architecture, carving, design, was done according to the strictest form of conventionalized art.

"Careful!" said Enuser sternly. "These are the designs of our fathers, approved by the high priests, laid down by law. Perhaps the devil Typhon has inspired you, rather than the gods."

Nefer laughed. "Not so, but from my voyages up far beyond the cataracts, where men use other craft than ours, I have learned. At least, my lord, listen to me. You know well that our boats go upstream with the wind, though it does not always serve their stubby masts and low square sails. They are designed for cargoes, not for lumps of stone which weigh heavily but take small room. Now look at this."

He stooped, and in the dust drew with his finger the outline of a boat, while Enuser frowned down with careful gaze. Enuser was actually ready to grasp at any straw. The previous night his brother, one of the chief priests of the sun-god, Ra, had slipped him word that unless he got busy there would be a shakeup that might land him in a chain-gang.

"Here is a boat, long and narrow," and Nefer pointed to the enormous overhang of bow and stern, "which can make the landings without smashing up, as ours so often do. So far as weight of cargo goes, it can handle as much as our two-hundred-cubit keels. The straight, high sides will give thirty oars to a side, double our present strength. But most of all—look at this double mast!"

He indicated the high bipod mast.

"That will carry a lofty sail to catch the higher currents of wind," he went on. "Each foot is fitted into grooves, so that when not in use it can be taken down and won't be in the way. Such a boat will handle like a charm, my lord! It will have twice the speed of our present bumboats," he added with contempt. "And six men with oars on the right quarter will control her perfectly."

"Hm!" said Enuser. His quick brain grasped the conception at once. "If you



Drawings by Harvé Stein

"Enuser lied," said the Pharaoh. "He lied. He thought to steal from another man's brain and labor. Quick, Enuser! Your defense?"

presented such a scheme to the chief architect, you'd be flogged to death for heresy."

Nefer grinned. "But if *you* presented it through the priests of Ra, as a direct inspiration from the sun-god—eh? It might mean a step in rank, even a seat on the board of engineers. For you, of course."

"And for you?" Enuser glanced around, to make sure no one had overheard.

"Well,"—Nefer chuckled softly,—*"if you should happen to vacate your present post, I'd be very glad to become chief of naval construction."*

"Agreed," said Enuser abruptly. "Suppose I give you full authority to construct two of these boats, a requisition on whatever workmen and supplies you need—how soon could you produce them for tests?"

"In a month's time. Say, two days before the feast of the Nile god."

Enuser summoned a scribe and dictated rapidly. As he took the reed pen and bent over the sheet of papyrus to sign, he darted one swift, terrible glance at Nefer.

"Failure means that you are flayed alive," he said curtly.

"Agreed, my lord."

THAT afternoon Nefer moved among the swarming thousands in the shipyard, picking master carpenters, shipwrights, crews, material. He chose a secluded basin for the work, sketched out preliminary designs, and ere sunset was satisfied that the morrow would see the job under way.

Then, with sunset, he turned to something else.

Bathed and freshly clad, the last lingering daylight found him sauntering among the vast crowds that sought the quays and landings of the river for relief from the oppressive heat. The Nile was tending toward its new flood, but the feast of the annual inundation was still a month distant, and all Memphis emptied itself along the river to seek the evening coolness there.

For any who might not be seen together, there was greater seclusion and protection here amid the crowd than in any corner of massive temple or palace. Slaves were filling water jars, hawkers of wine and food moved about, and on the stone stairs fringing the quays were multitudes at their washing or bathing.

Dusk descended. Nefer came to a certain spot on the quay and waited there,

staring at the river where a few boats of nobles or princes passed up and down, hurling boomerangs or shooting arrows at drifting marks ere the daylight died, with snatches of music and song coming from the larger craft. In their place, his wandering vision beheld a longer, stranger boat, whose lofty sail would catch the upper breezes that scarce stirred the water surface.

SO the sailor takes his holiday in watching the river!" said a soft voice.

Nefer stirred. At his elbow stood a figure, hidden under the robe of a woman of the artisan class—a slender girlish figure, a face half glimpsed that was alive with eagerness and rich youth, an olive face of beauty and glowing flame.

"Ah, Tera!" he exclaimed joyfully, and put out his hand to hers. "I heard that the court had gone upriver to the summer palaces, and I feared the chief scribe had taken his family along."

"We go tomorrow, Nefer," she replied. "But breathe not my father's name nor mine, for the love of heaven! It would ruin us both."

"Not now, my dear," he said, with his quick, eager laugh. "I've news for you! A month hence, I'll be chief of naval construction—a job that carries nobility with it, a fat salary, a palace on the river, and will let me seek the chief scribe openly and demand his daughter in marriage!"

"Nefer! Are you mad?" she gasped. "You know well that Enuser holds the place. You know that if he dreams of aught between us, you'll be dropped into the Nile with a knife between your shoulders some night. Only today he was talking with my father and me, hinting at some great fortune about to befall him, and trying to get a decision out of me. If I don't want to marry him, my father won't force it—but Enuser can use his influence with the priests."

"Time enough to worry about Lord Enuser when the moment comes," said Nefer. "Listen, my dear, listen to what happened this morning!"

He told her rapidly what had occurred at the shipyard, and with sweeping brush painted his glowing vision of accomplishment and reward. When he had finished, his hand could feel the shiver that passed through her.

"Ah, my Nefer, my beloved of Ra!" she said softly. "You're quick and bold, frank and ardent; but you don't know

these palace folk as I do! And I know Enuser. I dread those sharp, cruel eyes of his, that agile and unscrupulous brain! Did you ever hear the story about the wharf at Tanis, and how Enuser became chief of construction?"

"Hm!" grunted Nefer. "I've heard some hints at the captains' mess, but nobody speaks too openly about it. Didn't some chap design that wharf, and Enuser take the credit for it?"

"Yes," she said. "And the man died very suddenly. Oh, I'm afraid for you, my dear! You shouldn't be associated with that man—you shouldn't trust him!"

"I don't," said Nefer. "But in this case, there's nothing obscure. The matter is open; the tests will take place openly, before the board of engineers. I'm not turning over plans that he can steal."

"Perhaps; but life is such a big thing, Nefer, and it can fly through such a tiny hole, no bigger than a dagger-blade!" she said. "I'll not see you again until the festival. But if I get any news, if anything comes up, I'll send you word. Trust anyone who carries my own scarab—you know it well."

"Aye," said he. "And don't worry about Enuser. Why not give your answer at once and get rid of him?"

"Better play him along. If he brings pressure to bear from the priests of Ra, and you know his brother is one of them, my father would have to give in. It's an open secret that Snefru, the keeper of the royal strong-room, was treacherously dealt with by them last year. The chief scribe would be an even easier victim. Of course, once you're made a noble and have a real position—"

"Everything's different, then!" Nefer laughed, and pressed his lips to the girl's hand. "Thanks, my dear; I understand. And I'll play safe with that rascal, I promise you!"

The girl turned away, with a little sigh of dread and regret. He was so confident, so sure of himself! Such a man would make the easiest sort of a victim for the keen cruel eyes of Enuser to gloat upon. And there was no use trying to make Nefer realize it.

WITH the next day, Nefer settled to his new job. Tera had departed, the court had departed; and Enuser also had departed with the court. The chief of naval construction was an important man, as needs must be since the office carried with it a title of nobility.

Day by day, the two ships grew, with a rapidity that was astonishing. Nefer made a number of rough sketches and drawings for the various portions of the work, merely for use of the artisans. He acted as his own overseer, giving detailed and explicit instructions by word of mouth alone.

When, one day, a caldron of pitch overturned and burst into flames that came near causing a disastrous conflagration, and in course of this the sketches he had made were reported destroyed, Nefer merely shrugged. This made no difference whatever to him. In his own room he worked late into the night over secret plans of his own, so that each morning he came to the task with every last detail in his head. And the two ships grew.

They were not of great size, barely a hundred cubits indeed, but plenty large for testing under working conditions. The tremendous overhang of bow and stern caused some of the old hands to shake their heads ominously, as did the new-fangled notion of an A-shaped bipod mast and its high yard. The linen sail made according to Nefer's demand was lofty and thick; the hull of pegged timbers was strengthened and padded both inside and out by stout lotos stalks woven together.

AS the weeks passed and work continued, other innovations were noted. As in the old ships, the bow platform remained; the bowman with his sounding pole was indispensable. But under this, and again in the stern, a massive bollard was built into the deck, for which Nefer gave no explanation.

With his absolute authority, he visited the ropewalk and there gave orders for two massive cables such as had never been seen in the world. As thick as a man's waist, made of twisted hide, they were enormous and unreasonable things, beyond any conceivable use. When they arrived, he had them placed in a hut, with a number of heavy forked sticks; then they were forgotten. . . .

Two weeks passed. The third was nearly completed when, one afternoon, a Nubian slave sought him out as he directed the work, and showed him the scarab that bore the name of Tera. He walked apart with the Nubian.

"You have a message?"

"Yes, Lord Nefer. The noble Lord Enuser has presented the Pharaoh himself, having the approval of the priests

of Ra and the board of engineers, with the sketches and designs of a new type of ship for bringing stone downriver from the quarries. This ship is of his own making and was inspired by the gods."

Nefer clenched his hands, stood for a long moment motionless, in stupefaction. Warned he had been, yet the thing was a blow that sapped him to the very marrow. No doubt informed by spies of the progress of the work, Enuser was taking full credit. What was more, that flaming caldron of pitch had seen no accident; the plans and sketches had not been destroyed; instead, they had been conveyed secretly to the chief of naval construction.

"Come to me at my house tonight," said Nefer to the Nubian, and the black departed with obeisance.

THAT afternoon, Nefer gave careful directions to his overseer. The two ships had been launched and floated before him in the harbor. Their details were now complete. There remained only to finish the work and assemble the various parts that remained, such as mast and cordage and oars. This would take a week at most.

Nefer gave his orders as to each and every finishing touch. He was no longer the laughing, eager-eyed man he had been, but was grave and thoughtful, as though he had aged ten years in a few hours. In all truth, he saw that death was very close to him. Spies were at work. Enuser had presented those sketches as his own designs. And to the Pharaoh himself! Clearly as he had foreseen the magnitude of his invention, Nefer now for the first time realized how great it really was.

Two thousand years, these clumsy old-style ships had plied the Nile, year after year, life after life, century after century, unchanging. How long would these new-style ships of his endure? It was past realization. Uncounted generations and dynasties. Perhaps as long as the Nile endured. And for this Enuser would be honored and rewarded and made immortal—perhaps.

Nefer smiled grimly.

The cymbals clashed; the work-day was ended, and the thousands poured from the shipyards. He himself went to his own lodgings, where he found the Nubian slave waiting. He beckoned the black into his room, took a slim roll of papyrus from its hiding-place in the brick wall, and gave it to the Nubian.

"Take this to the Lady Tera your mistress," he said, and gave the slave money. "Now for the message that must go with it—"

He spoke rapidly, low-voiced, curt, explicit. The sharp-witted black missed not a word. Nefer had nearly finished when, outside, he caught a clash of grounded spears and a harsh voice asking after him. Swift premonition seized upon him. He jerked aside a curtain.

"Quick!" he told the Nubian. "The back way—run for it!"

The black slid away like an eel. Almost before the curtain had fallen, into the room strode a captain of guards.

"Nefer, captain of the river, you are under arrest," he snapped.

"For what cause?"

"Ask the Pharaoh, who orders. We but obey."

The men came in; and Nefer, bound, was led away among the spears—away to the dungeons of the Pharaoh and the priests of the sun-god Ra.

And there the days passed for him, in filth and darkness and sickening heat. He needed no explanation. Enuser had found the new type of ship so promising in its vast importance, had found himself so well equipped with the rough sketches and the nearly finished ships, that he had acted with ruthless precision. Only one man could give him the lie; with that man out of the way his road to fame and greatness was clear.

And if by any mischance the new ship failed, the actual inventor would be flayed alive. Not a pleasant prospect; but the possibility kept Nefer from a quick death.

Thinking of these matters as he lay in his dungeon, Nefer still smiled grimly. Two things Lord Enuser overlooked: love, and seamanship.

NOW the Nile was coming to flood once more in its annual miracle of fertility. The court returned to Memphis for the yearly festival, and Enuser was commanded to make test of his new ship on the daily widening river, before the board of engineers and the Pharaoh himself.

There was something of roughness in this Khufu who sat upon the throne of Egypt; he had character, as must have a ruler who could have built a pyramid greater than all those of the preceding three dynasties that had ruled the land. Because Enuser had brought this affair to his attention, and because the board

of engineers viewed the new type of ship as a development of the greatest importance, he commanded the test to be viewed from his own galley.

They were hard-bitten, skeptical men, these engineers; great nobles and princes as became their achievement, but not chosen from the court. They were picked for their ability, and from the hewing of an obelisk to the planning of a temple, they ran the business with a hard hand and a shrewd eye.

SO, with Enuser in their midst, they saluted the Pharaoh on his golden throne, with ostrich-feather fans to shade him from the sun, and the galley stood out. Before them moved the new ship, one of the twain Enuser had chosen for the trial, with a crack river captain aboard, a picked crew of oarsmen, their blades glittering in the sunlight.

Under the oars, the ship handled like magic, now coming close for inspection, now sweeping about the royal galley in circles. Then she ran far down the river and her sail was hoisted, and with the wind fair abaft she came bowling up against the current with a bone in her teeth.

Suddenly confusion was observed aboard her. Exclamations broke out from the engineers. Khufu himself leaned forward intently.

"By the disk of Ra!" he cried. "Look! Look! Those overhanging ends are dipping—she is rising in the center!"

"Hogging it, by the gods!" said one of the board, who had worked his way up from common seaman. "Hogging it!"

So she was, indeed; buckling upward amidships, the huge overhang of bow and stern being unsupported by the water and dropping down. Hastily the sail was taken off her.

"What's this, Enuser?" exclaimed one of the board. "No correction for such a fault?"

Livid, Enuser saluted the Pharaoh. Another of the board spoke out.

"And what are those bollards for, bow and stern? They have a reason, Enuser?"

"Aye, my lord," said the hawk-beaked man. "For spare cables, indeed. And with a fair load of stone in her bottom, she'll behave aright. She was not designed to sail empty."

"By the gods, she sails upriver empty and down under the oars, full laden! Or that's her purpose, indeed," was the tart response.



"I'm afraid for you, my dear!" said Tera.

"Beloved of Ra,"—and Enuser, desperate, saluted Khufu again,—“let this test be repeated tomorrow with the second ship I have built. Perchance there is some flaw in this first vessel, perchance the design has not been followed aright.”

"Granted," said Khufu promptly. "After the way she handles under oars alone, she's well worth careful testing. But it looks to me as if that queer mast and the high sail are too much for her."

"Humph!" grunted one of the naval engineers to his neighbor. "Any fool of a seaman could tell she wouldn't swim with that overhang. Why blame the new-fangled mast?"

An unexpected silence caught the words and wafted them to the Pharaoh, and all those men fell into stark consternation. But Khufu's black eyes twinkled at the speaker.

"Right, my lord; what should a mere son of Ra know of your trade? It is you doers of the word who have made Egypt what she is, and may I be damned if I don't love you for that hearty tongue of yours! Back to the palace. We'll have in those singers and dancers from the lower country and make a night of it."

So the royal galley put about for the Memphis wharves again. . . .

That night came torches to the cell where Nefer lay, and the bronze grille rattled as the bolts were shot. Bidding

the guards to remain to outside, Enuser stepped into the cell, bearing a lamp, and threw the light on the unshaven, filthy, naked figure of the prisoner. The shadow of his old laugh broke from Nefer.

"Ha! My lord Enuser come to visit me! Welcome, noble chief of construction! Or are you now a member of the board of engineers—no?"

A snarl contorted the thin-lipped face with its glittering eyes.

"No jests, Nefer. I have come to draw you from this cell."

"Indeed? Then the tests must have been held. And the ship failed. Eh? She hogged it, as seamen say; but you're no seaman, Enuser."

FURIOUS anger and comprehension flashed over the thin hawk-face.

"So! You knew she would fail—is that it?"

"Precisely," Nefer made cool retort. "Who designed the Tanis wharf for which you got the credit, Enuser? Do you think I was fool enough to put all my secrets in your itching palm? Not much! And the ship failed—ha! She failed!"

Enuser denied nothing, made no protests.

"The second ship is to be tested tomorrow," he said curtly. "Can you keep her from buckling in the center?"

"Of course I can; but you can't," said Nefer. "You got no sketch of that with the others that were stolen. You got no finished design of the ship. And you thought a knife would stop my mouth, eh? Once you succeeded, I was to disappear."

"What's done is done," Enuser rejoined. "Liberty and wealth for your secret, Nefer. What's your price? Can we come to agreement?"

"Perhaps," said Nefer. "Are you willing to keep the bargain we made?"

"Aye, gladly, and repay you with wealth beside."

"Then swear it, by Ra, by the gods of the upper world and of the lower world! Swear it by the head of Osiris, by the hand of Isis!"

The eyes of Enuser glittered sharply. He took the oath, and it was a great oath; swearing to keep the former bargain, should the morrow's test succeed.

"Let me out of here, place me in command once more, and I'll handle that ship tomorrow myself," said Nefer. "And, lest you forget your oath, she'll not be made ready until the very time

that she leaves the yards for the test. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said Enuser.

So Nefer was set at liberty, to get rid of the prison-smell ere morning if he could. But later that night, in the palace of Enuser by the river, three men stood before the chief of naval construction. They looked at the wealth piled on the table—the gold, the scarabs, the garments, the rings and amulets—and greed convulsed their brown faces, and they listened right willingly to the words of Enuser.

These three were the overseer of the rowers and two pilots, from the picked crew of the test ship.

"Agreed, then," said Enuser. "This wealth is yours; and further, you shall have good positions under me. Remember, do nothing until the tests are finished and the new ship returns to the yards. Before she enters the shipyards again, fall upon him and kill him."

"And if there are questions from the police, lord?" asked the overseer.

"Then I will make answer. Did not this man cause the first ship to fail today by departing from my plans for her construction? I have placed him in command of the other. He will do the work aright, under pain of death; therefore, see that he dies anyway."

It was agreed; the three departed.

WHEN Ra was in mid-heaven and a light wind was blowing up the Nile, the royal galley set forth again to witness the second test, with Enuser and the board of engineers grouped about the throne of the Pharaoh.

Now, Khufu was no puppet. As heir to the throne, he had been initiated into all the mysteries. The theories of architecture and of design were all his, and while he practised no engineering, he had studied every branch of the art. Because of this he was causing that enormous pyramid to be built at Gizeh, and with his own hands had drawn some part of the plans.

A flush of confidence tinted the lean features of Enuser when that long, swift ship came dancing upriver, high linen sail aloft and drawing. Then down came the sail. The mast was lowered until it rested on its supports. The oars flashed out, and Nefer, standing on the stern platform beside the overseer with his whip, put the ship through her paces.

Again the mast went up, and the sail broke out from the yard. The ship

heeled, took the wind, ran before it nobly, with never a sign of hogging.

"Order her closer," said Khufu, and he signed to a trumpeter, who blew a blast, while a signal-man repeated the signal.

AS the new ship drew in, from the engineers broke murmurs of astonishment. Now they could see that an enormous cable or truss made of twisted leather thongs ran the full length of her. From the forward bollard, where the individual thongs were made fast, to that in the stern, ran this huge truss. It was upheld by massive forked beams which put sufficient strain upon it to withstand three hundred tons' pressure.

"Clever work, Enuser!" exclaimed the Pharaoh. "Yesterday you showed us how the ship would buckle if left alone; today you show us your ingenuity in overcoming this defect. Is not Enuser worthy a place on the board, my lords?"

There arose murmurs of assent. But Khufu, smiling a little, crooked a finger at the captain of his galley.

"Order that ship alongside. I desire to speak with her captain."

Voices blared over the water. While Enuser watched, a shadowy frown in his eyes, the new ship crept alongside, a line was thrown, buffers were put out, and then Nefer leaped lightly aboard the royal galley and came aft.

He fell on his face before the son of Ra.

"Stand up," ordered Khufu, and Nefer did so, bronzed and stalwart. From about his neck, the Pharaoh took a massive necklace of wrought gold and stones, and the captain of his guards handed it to Nefer. "You handled the new ship well; it is my pleasure to reward your service. My lords,"—and he glanced at the ranks of the board of engineers,— "you agree that the designer of this new ship deserves a place among you?"

There was a murmur of assent once more. Nefer stood silent; until the Son of Ra addressed him directly, he could not speak. But his pulses hammered.

"My Lord Enuser,"—and Khufu took from a scribe a small roll of papyrus,— "can you inform me what this paper contains?"

"I, beloved of Ra?" exclaimed the surprised Enuser, staring on the roll. "How should I know what is contained in a scroll I have never seen before?"

"Then you have not seen it? Look well, Enuser!"

Troubled, perplexed, Enuser scowled at the roll and shook his head.

"Never, beloved of Ra."

"So!" Khufu leaned back and held up the roll. "And you, Nefer, captain of the river—know you what this roll contains, which was given me last night by the daughter of the chief scribe?"

Nefer saluted. "Beloved of Ra, it contains detailed plans for this new ship which I invented, with calculations as to the thickness of the truss necessary for ships of different sizes, and the weight of stone cargo each may carry."

"Give this roll to the board of engineers," said Khufu to his guard captain. "Let them determine whether this man speaks the truth."

Pale and yet more pale stood Enuser, glimpsing now the frightful trap into which he had fallen; sweat stood out on his livid face, and his lips twitched. The board of engineers crowded about the unrolled papyrus. Murmurs of astonishment broke from them. One after another verified the words of Nefer.

"Beloved of Ra, he spoke the truth!" exclaimed the chief engineer.

"And Enuser lied," said the Pharaoh, a sudden flash in his eyes. "He lied. He thought to steal from another man's brain and labor. Quick, Enuser! Your defense?"

Enuser tried to speak, but his voice failed. His stunned senses could summon up no plausible tale.

Khufu signed to the guard captain. "Slay him."

So it was done, there in the white sunlight; and across the bulwark of the galley spread the dark stain. It was like the crimson stain of betel-nut juice, spat out by Burmese rowers as their craft came down the Irrawaddy and drew in beneath the counter of the steamship at whose rail I stood, staring and dreaming of other days.

THE chief steward came bustling up to me, and took back the photograph I still held in my hand.

"Funny thing about it all is," he observed, "that this bipod mast idea was used on the British dreadnaughts, which only goes to show—"

What it went to show, I did not learn; for I was staring over the water and thinking of the new member of that ancient board of engineers, and the ships which brought stone down the Nile for a good four thousand years.

Another vivid story in this unique series will be a feature of our next issue.

Great Gifts

"In case you aint interested, Doc, don't get the idea of sickin' the cops on us!"



DR. JOHN MARDIN sat at the battered desk in the small room which served him as office, surgery and waiting-room. The glance he directed at the two visitors was emotionless. One of them, the larger, seemed to be the spokesman. The other, hands suggestively deep in the pockets of his overcoat, was ominously quiet.

"We've had your record checked from the time you left that hick-town high school in Ohio," the large man continued. "The boss doesn't take chances unless he has to. We know every school you went to, an' every mark you got. We even know damn' near every patient you've had in the three years you've been set up here."

Two lines of grim amusement touched the corners of Dr. Mardin's mouth, at this. Here had been no great task of detection! The neighborhood was cheap, the patients few and cheaper. There had been little money from his father's estate. The old man had been a country doctor, wealthy only in contentment

and debtors. And the legacy of his practice had been absorbed by others while his son was still in medical school. There had been barely enough to buy the necessary equipment for this surgery.

"There isn't much we haven't found out—see? You've been puttin' every dime away, haven't you? Well, we even know why. So you can go to Europe an' study to be a big-shot surgeon.

"Listen, Doc," the man's voice coaxed, "you seem to've been a pretty smart guy. Why not keep on bein' smart? Ten thousand bucks, and not a dime of it hot money. Just for a little job of face-liftin' that won't take no time at all, hardly. The boss's no welcher. You play straight, an' you'll get your dough right on the line. An' listen, Doc: no one'll be any the wiser, see?"

Doctor Mardin made no reply, but his silence seemed to give the spokesman encouragement.

"We got two other doctors on our list," he went on; "so if you don't see things our way, we'll get it done anyway."



*A brief but memorable story by a writer
new to this magazine.*

By **RAYMOND CAMP**

He nudged his silent companion. "Get goin'." As quietly as they had entered, the two men left. The spokesman glanced at Mardin sharply before closing the door.

"Remember, Doc," he cautioned, "don't pull nothin' that wouldn't be smart."

FOR several moments Dr. Mardin sat quietly in his chair. His slow glance traveled over the meager furnishings of the room. Here, and in the small bedroom which adjoined—almost a monk's cell in its simplicity—were his worldly possessions. His eyes rested on the chipped cabinet with its glass trays of gleaming instruments. The merest scalpel, the smallest forceps, represented something acquired through stern denial.

The Doctor's glance fell to his hands; to the long, slender surgeon's fingers. Even now, despite an inward excitement, those fingers were quiet, nerveless.

At last, after three years of almost hopeless effort, hungry economy, these hands would have their chance. Or would they?

"You have the surgeon's gift, my boy," his memory fled backward to the parting words of the chief surgeon at the hospital where he had interned. "Too bad you can't afford Vienna. Three years there, under Von Gaumetz, and you would go far. If ever you find you can go on, let me know. I'd be glad to arrange things for you."

Three years of practice in a filthy slum. Three hard years which had yielded less than a third of the necessary sum. With ten thousand he could leave for Vienna at once—carry on his studies free from all financial worry.

Dr. Mardin's old-young face grew stern with determination. It was too great a chance to sacrifice to a mere matter of violated ethics. Why, the good he would be able to do with his greater knowledge would atone for the means. Hadn't the man said he had two other doctors on the list? Surely no other poor practitioner would be fool enough to pass up such an opportunity. Why should he? No one would ever know.

His glance again swept to the instrument-cabinet. He had all the instruments needed for such an operation. One

"Get this, Doc." The voice softened to a confidential tone: "We aint afraid of you doin' any talkin'. But just in case it turns out you aint interested, don't get the idea of sickin' the cops on us. First place, you wouldn't make nothin' by it. Second place, if you did, you wouldn't live to spend it. See?"

The two men tensed at the sound of feet on the hall stairs.

"Don't get nervous, gentlemen." Dr. Mardin's voice twisted the last word with an irony lost on his visitors. "That's just one of the upstairs lodgers going out. Your careful investigation must have told you I rent only the first floor."

The large man waited until the outside door closed with a vibrating crash before he resumed. He glanced at a wrist-watch.

"It's six o'clock now. We aint rushing you, Doc. You got an hour to think it over. If you decide to be smart, pack up the stuff you'll need, an' stand on the sidewalk in front of the house at seven sharp."

GREAT GIFTS

of the "boss's" lieutenants could be coached in the administering of anesthetic. . . . And no one would ever know.

Seven o'clock, had the man said?

Dr. Mardin took out a heavy hunting-case watch that had been his father's. He pressed the stem, and as the case snapped open, he glanced at the dial. Six-fifteen. Plenty of time.

How often, he reflected, had his father looked at this watch, his finger on a throbbing pulse, while the large second-hand made its hesitating journey around the dial! He remembered, as a small boy, spelling out the words engraved in fine letters on the inside of the case. . . .

For a moment Dr. Mardin paused as the significance of the recent events flashed through his mind. Strange—the memories invoked, the pictures envisioned, through the medium of a few engraved words. He had a fleeting vision of his father, whistling as he twisted a woolen muffler about his neck preparatory to facing a blizzard in answer to a call. . . .

With a quick movement Dr. Mardin lifted the desk telephone from its pronged bed and dialed the operator.

"Will you get me police headquarters," he requested; "and hurry it, please?"

The name he mentioned brought an almost immediate connection with a deputy commissioner. In a voice that was as steady as the fingers grasping the telephone, Dr. Mardin related the conversation of his recent visitors.

"Perhaps you'd better have some of your men follow the car that picks me up," he concluded. "I've an idea it will lead you to the man you want."

"We'll do our best to keep you covered," the official replied, "but I must warn you what it may mean. This man—"

"I know," Dr. Mardin broke in, "I know. I'll just have to take my chances."

AT one minute to seven, a bulging suitcase at his feet, Dr. John Mardin stood under the street-lamp in front of the dingy house that had sheltered him for three years. As the head-lamps of a slowly moving car drew nearer, he pressed the stem of the old hunting-case watch he held in his hand, and peered at the lettering inside the case.

The light was too dim, but he did not need to see. Dr. Mardin's lips framed the words as he stepped into the car:

*Great gifts should be worn like a crown befitting,
And not like a gem in a beggar's hand.*

Savage Patience

*A spirited little drama of
the African wilderness,
by an artist-writer who
knows his subject well.*

By WALTER
WILWERDING

Illustrated by the Author

THE sun had just hidden its red face behind the huge crater of Ngorongoro, rearing like a flat-topped mesa to the southwest of Longido's peak in northern Tanganyika; for here at the feet of their monster volcanic mother Kilimanjaro, a multitude of cones and craters were scattered over the East African wilds, some large, some small—all dead. Upon Kibo, the highest peak of Kilimanjaro, the ice and snow-cap lay glistening in a bath of rose, in contrast with the forested mountain-sides, purple with enshrouding shadows. But even as Kibo lay momentarily shimmering in reflected glory, the shadows reached upward with clutching fingers to extinguish its borrowed light.

At the moss-draped forest's edge, where dense and tangled bush blended forest and plain, a lion raised his mane-circled head to send a rumbling roar vibrating and echoing through the night-conquered wilderness. It seemed as though he acted as a mighty master of ceremonies, sending forth a thunderous summons to warn the timid creatures and arouse the carnivorous.

As if in answer to that summons, a hyena wailed a moaning, sirenlike reply, a jackal yapped in shrill derision, and back in the forest's secret depths a



Paka froze into immobility when the dik-dik raised its head to look nervously about.

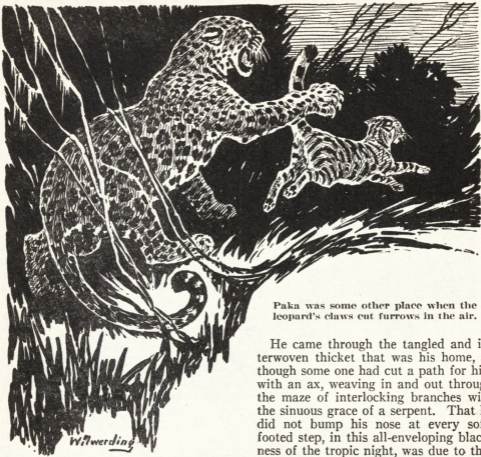
leopard coughed, "Ugh-hah! Ugh-hah!" For a time, save for the undertone of insect shrilling, there was silence. The quiet was broken by a quavering yowl, a caterwaul that could not be mistaken, whether heard in Africa's jungles or in the back alley of a city lot. Paka was on the prowl, crying his age-old caterwaul to the night, even as the descendants of his forebears do their screeching and yowling at a time when men would sleep. For Paka was an African bush-cat, or fallow cat; and had you met him in the African bush, you might have called, "Kitty, kitty!" to him, so closely did he resemble our fireside tabbies.

PAKA was the size of a domestic cat, of a yellowish-gray color, with markings on head, neck, body and limbs, and he flirted a ringed tail. His kind were the ancestors of our common house-cats, caught young in northern Africa, domesticated and revered in Egypt, and brought to Europe by the conquering Romans. Proud, independent, self-contained, the descendants of these wild cats have retained their original natures down

through the centuries, hunting for the love of hunting, even when well fed; obtaining their food and a soft place to sleep by cajolery, but bending in service to no man.

Paka had a freebooter's code for living: get your living as you may and where you may, and concern yourself not with others. By nature a lone hunter, he was not given to consorting with his kind, for he who lives by stealth had better hunt without company.

That his hunting methods were ruthless, is granted; and that he was bloodthirsty, there is no doubt; but he lived as he was ordained by nature to live. Nature had made him a killer, an eater of flesh; she had armed him for this task as those are armed who live by tooth and claw. And to him was given the gift of patience to aid and abet him in the life he led, a patience that was born way back in the dim ages when the world was young, of such monumental proportions that if all the patience of all other creatures of the earth were molded into one, and this great patience went seeking its match, it would find its equal only in the



Paka was some other place when the leopard's claws cut furrows in the air.

possession of that cat which the native Africans call Paka.

Nature had neglected to give Paka the nose of the wild dog, so he could track things by scent; she had forgotten to give him enduring speed, so he could run things down; she had been careless about his size, and he lacked the bigness and strength of the lion and leopard, who often spring upon prey larger than themselves and bring it down by the sheer power of their steel muscles, that can wrench a strong beast's neck until the bones crack with the strain.

But in all creation, the seemingly neglected possess some wondrous gift that stands like a colossus above their apparent shortcomings. The sluggish viper has its lightning-quick strike, backed by a lethal venom. The timid, defenseless gazelle has the speed of the wind in its legs. The monkey has been given four hands to enable it to climb swiftly out of harm's way. And to the little Paka the gift of patience, without which his claws would avail him not. Lacking it, he would perish. . . .

He came through the tangled and interwoven thicket that was his home, as though some one had cut a path for him with an ax, weaving in and out through the maze of interlocking branches with the sinuous grace of a serpent. That he did not bump his nose at every soft-footed step, in this all-enveloping blackness of the tropic night, was due to that wonderful iris in each eye, which opened wide its doors at night to enable him to see in the dark; and to his whiskers, each attached to a sensitive nerve, that felt the way for him through the murk of blackness, as a man holds his hands in front of him, to avoid bumping into things in the dark.

NOW and again he stood motionless, listening, for Paka's ears were keen. Then he flitted lightly and silently along the trail, if the trackless maze he trod could be called a trail. Also, again and again, he advertised his coming with a yowling, "E-yow-er-r-r-r-ow-uh!" It was not usual for him to give his whereabouts away in this fashion, but Paka was not hunting food this night. He had satisfied his hunger early that evening, when the francolin came to the edge of the bush to forage for food. He had concealed himself in a clump of grass, all hunched up into a motionless lump of yellowish-gray, so broken up by his markings that he was camouflaged perfectly. The francolin, which are small grouse that look like prairie chickens,

were very nervous and on the alert, everlastingly bobbing their heads this way and that while feeding; but for all their bobbing heads and keen eyes, they failed to discover any lurking danger in that inert form of yellowish-gray.

Paka waited until one came scratching about near him, then sprang at it like a streamer of unrolling ribbon, at the end of which two claw-extended paws slapped quickly together. The francolin had sensed its peril in that one split second when Paka sprang, and rose straight upward with booming wings, but Paka raked it down out of the air, as a baseball-catcher reaches for a high one.

That francolin had furnished him with a good meal, even though a jackal had come nosing that way and robbed him before he had quite finished with it. To the jackal fell only the head, neck and feet, a scant meal indeed in exchange for the smarting scratches on his delicate nose, with which he had paid for this meager repast.

AND now that Paka was full-fed, he was on the light-headed quest of love. It is ever thus: full of stomach, empty of head. He should have known better. Burning scratches on face, neck and shoulders still strove vividly to remind him of that quest the night before which had ended in ignominious defeat for him.

Paka was young; he was sleek, supple and handsome; but he had not yet learned all about the meanness and villainy practiced by the older male members of his clan. His face still lacked the fullness that advertises the Tom of the cat family. The rancorous malignity of an old Tom, with the experience of a hundred battles behind him, was not yet part of Paka's equipment. He still had to learn that love comes only to those in the wild, who will fight for it with fiendish savagery, giving no quarter, no advantage, no fair chance to a rival. He had just grown to full maturity; he lacked practice in battle and the crusty, tough outlook of an old Tom, who takes punishment in battle with vindictive bitterness, and keeps on fighting with savage aggression, though his face be red-furrowed and his ears in tatters. To one like that, the loss of an eye, an ear, the skin of his nose, is nothing compared to the right to mate.

The mating urge drew Paka forward. He was seeking the sleek female who had come into his life the night before. To

be sure, it had been but a brief acquaintance, and the lady had been none too friendly. She had, in fact, in a very unladylike manner, spat in his face. Then, to turn an old saying about, she had added injury to insult by raking him on the nose with a pawful of needle-sharp claws. This made Paka forget momentarily that he was a gentleman bush-cat, and he gave her such a cuff beside the ear that she entirely abandoned what was left of her breeding to curse him in shuddering language. Then another, hearing their hellish love-making, had come to see what could be done about it. This other was an old Tom bush-cat, thick of head, mangy of coat, battle-scarred, with one ear partly gone. His entrance upon the scene was as silent as the drop of a feather from a flying bird. At first he crouched disdainfully in the thick of the bush, to watch in round-eyed, cynical contemplation Paka's attempts at love-making. Then the idea formed sullenly in his crusty brain that some one who knew how should take a paw at this. The idea had no sooner formed, than he made his explosive appearance in a wild scrambling rush, intended to take Paka off-guard and send him scurrying.

BUT Paka had a few extra senses in addition to his nine lives. He somehow sensed the presence of this evil one, and even as the old Tom executed his crazy rush, Paka whirled to meet him. There were a few clamorous moments of vituperative epithets, intermingled with flashlike darts of claws, up, down, left and right. There were low, murderous curses and high, virulent language. Then they separated, to crouch flat-eared and swollen-tailed, and face each other, calling loathsome names through clenched teeth. Their mumbling maledictions rose to a fiendish high wailing, ending in wild shrieks, all run together and mixed up, as though their heinous expressions were being rapidly stirred with a spoon; and their claws once more sought each other.

They closed, scratching, slashing, tearing, yowling, shrieking! Paka's red-hot claws seared the old Tom's face; and swearing horribly, the old rascal reared upon his haunches to strike back like a boxer. Right and left and up and down he struck, with such rapidity, such malevolent and vindictive fury, that Paka was fairly overwhelmed with a multitude of claws that came from every direction at once. It appeared as though he might lose his ears, his eyes, his nose, indeed his

very face, under this diabolic onslaught. It was his first battle, and it was too much for one of his limited experience. Precipitately Paka left the field, with the old Tom bounding in his wake. But what Paka lacked in fighting ability he made up in nimbleness of foot, and he quickly left the older cat behind.

To the accompaniment of pessimistic complainings, Paka sought the shelter of a dense thicket, to set about the business of licking his wounds and smoothing his much-ruffled fur. Now and then he would stop this licking of himself to prick ears and listen to far-away yowling and caterwauling that indicated the old Tom at his wooing of the fair lady. Perhaps Paka thought, as he listened to those soul-searing sounds, that the score would be evened some other time; for though Paka was a fire-brain, ruthless, merciless and bloodthirsty, he was patient: he knew that all things eventually came to the wild-cat who would wait.

SO it was that the smarting of his wounds did not stop Paka from once more going on the quest of love this night. Perhaps he counted on again finding the female alone, as he threaded his sinuous way through the thicket, yowling his love-song as he went along.

It was not long before his ears caught an answering wail from down at the edge of the thicket. He quickened his pace, speeding toward the sound like a released homing pigeon. The cry seemed to draw him forward, as though he were pulled by a cord, and he was oblivious of other things.

Paka should have been very much on the alert, picking his way through this disordered growth with infinite caution, for though he was of the killer clan, there was a multitude of other killers in this same district, beasts of fang and claw that were giants beside him. Usually he avoided these with furtive care, attending his own secret affairs and letting the larger cats and the hyenas attend their own. But when the mating urge burns within a beast, be he large or small, he casts aside his usual caution.

To expedite his arrival, Paka cut straight down through the bushes to the very edge of the grass-lands. Here he skirted the thicket, for traveling was easier in the grass. For a time he had heard no yowling from the female, and hoping to receive an answer and locate her the better, he raised his voice in high caterwaul. That cry produced a rather

startling result, for a bushbuck that had been feeding at the edge of the thicket, barked sharply, like a dog, and bounded frantically away. Paka stopped short with upraised forepaw, startled by the bushbuck's bark of alarm and sudden going away. He had placed his upraised forepaw upon the ground to proceed about his affairs, when something swore sibilantly, it seemed in his very face, accompanying its vicious remarks with a savage sweep of five sickle-shaped claws. But the startling encounter with the bushbuck had momentarily cleared Paka's head to an alert awareness of his perilous surroundings. Even as the leopard hissed, "*Phaugh!*" Paka tensed his muscles. He was some other place when the leopard's claws cut five furrows in the air.

But the leopard was furious because Paka had disturbed his hunting. He had been lying in ambush for the bushbuck, when this pint-size image of himself had come crying his fool caterwaul into the bushbuck's ears. It was time to teach these little runts to do their yowling elsewhere. Of late this particular stretch of bush had heard a bit too much of this. All the rancor and hate that is the leopard's heritage broke out. He burst from the thicket, a spitting, swearing, snarling bundle of spotted malevolence. Raving and screaming, he bounded after Paka, swinging first his right paw, then his left, at the scurrying form of the thoroughly frightened bush-cat.

AT first the mad chase led through the tall grass; then Paka turned and made for the bush. He knew that his chances of escaping the fiend were better in the tangled thicket, for his small form could find a way that would baffle the larger cat. And thus with twisting and turning and picking the most difficult way, he soon left his pursuer behind.

This taught Paka to be more quiet about his prowling, and he now went on the hunt for the female in furtive silence. By a roundabout course he made his way toward the place where he had last heard her wailing, but when he arrived, he found that his rival, the old Tom, had reached the scene before him. This profane old warrior had also heard the cries of the female and had gone silently to the trysting-place. No sooner did Paka arrive, than the old Tom rushed at him in vehement attack. Paka fought back briefly, a bit half-heartedly, seeming to realize that he was no match for this

veteran. The encounter with the leopard had taken the wind out of him, which also added its bit to discourage him, and he soon retreated to seek a thicket, attend to the washing of his furry coat, and snatch a few winks of sleep.

THE long hot dry season passed; the rains came; the yellowed veld-grass sprang into a vivid green life. Birds busied themselves with their nesting, and because nestlings are both imprudent and weak of wing, Paka lived well. He grew more robust; his face took on the heavy appearance of the Tom-cat; he had come to mature cathood.

One day Paka stole to the edge of the bush country to see what he might pick up in the way of a rabbit, veld-rat, francolin or dik-dik. The dik-dik are antelope, about fifteen inches high, equipped with horn and hoof like their larger cousins, though of diminutive size. Their fawns are beautiful, fairylike things; but Paka had his mind on one for a meal. Living things that came within claw-reach, were food. The beautiful feathers of birds, the graceful forms of small creatures, were as nothing to him. No doubt he was part of the scheme of things which kept the natural balance among creatures that flew and ran.

He crouched in the roseate young dawn, with the cones and craters misty in the distance, a beauty of landscape that his eyes did not discern, even had he been capable of appreciation, for the tall grass hid the view from him. Patiently he crouched, for two whole hours, with never a quiver of ear or eyelash, and not even a twitch to the tip of his tail. The sun flooded the veld below, but the high mountain was between him and the rising sun, and here things were still in shadow. Birds came and went. They twittered, fluted and flirted about; but always they remained exasperatingly out of reach. Paka knew, just to a fraction of an inch, how close his intended victim must be before he tensed his muscles for the spring. He did not chase things; that would have been folly—he pounced upon them, and he knew how far he could spring. When the distance was just right, no speed of wings nor nimbleness of foot sufficed to escape his clutching claws. But to get the distance just right, took patient waiting, with no thought of time. At this, he was expert.

Finally, when it seemed that all the wild life was in league against him to keep him from securing breakfast, a



The mighty taloned one dropped, as a stone drops into a pool. That moment's hesitation sealed the bush-cat's doom.

dik-dik came furtively from the cover of bushes to nibble at green grass along the edge of the thicket. This one was a buck, with horns about two inches long, stepping about daintily with its tiny hoofs and pencil-like legs. Though it was not a fawn, it would do; but Paka would have to spring upon its back to bring it down, much as a lion springs upon a larger buck. This would in fact be like a lion's hunting in miniature. Africa always presents such contrasts: on one hand the huge and powerful lion, hunting the gnu, kongoni and eland; and almost in the same spot, the little cousin to the lion, hunting the little cousin to the larger antelope.

HE practised patient waiting for the dik-dik to come close enough for the final rush and spring, but the dik-dik had not learned its part well, and was disposed to graze away from Paka's hiding-place. Then, with infinite stealth and craft, Paka stole forward under cover of grass and bush, taking advantage of every bit of concealment, of every depression in the earth, of each stone and blade and twig. Soft-footed and tense, he crept closer inch by inch, his actions giving the impression of a slow-motion picture. A paw was raised with uncanny care and placed forward so deliberately and quietly that it seemed a wraith and not a living creature moved there. When the dik-dik lowered its head to bite a blade of grass, Paka moved forward more rapidly, to freeze into instant immobility when the little antelope raised its head to look nervously about. Paka's head was down, his ears forward, the vertical slits in his eyes trained ever on his intended prey, to take advantage of every turn away of the dik-dik's head. He kept his body low, his tail just brushing the ground. If ever nature had fashioned a living hunting-machine, she had succeeded with this one.

Now Paka was almost close enough for the final rush and spring. The dik-dik raised its head to look furtively about. Paka seemed to squeeze his form against the earth until he was a part of it. The dik-dik stared and sniffed, but that motionless form gave no hint of danger, and as Paka was hunting upwind, its sniffing brought no dread message to the little antelope. It wandered along for a bit, lowered its head again and started to nibble. Paka crept forward once more to make up the lost distance, employing for cover the base of a dead tree that

stood here like a lone sentinel. He was minded to make a quick scrambling rush from behind this dead tree, then spring upon the little buck, for the sun had already topped the mountain, and unless Paka finished this business soon, there would be so much wild life about that it would give the alarm to his prey.

Paka was tensing his muscles for the final sally, when the dik-dik suddenly looked up and bounded away into the thicket. On the instant, Paka also looked about, wild-eyed, to see what had disturbed his hunting. The evidence was plainly at hand: A floating shadow on the ground had caught the dik-dik's eye, and it had not waited on the order of its going. A bit upset by this sudden turn of events, Paka hesitated for a moment, but the shadow seemed to settle over him; there was a whistling above him, of air playing a faint tune in pinions. Paka doubled back and sprang for cover, almost turning a somersault in his great hurry. A huge wing brushed him, even as he sprang, and outstretched talons just missed his tail.

From the safe concealment of bushes Paka watched a large tawny eagle flap upward with laboring wings and once more take its watch-post on the dead tree that stood alone at the edge of the thicket. Paka swore sibilantly, sore with disappointment. The narrow escape from death meant nothing to him—his life was full of such happenings; but the loss of the dik-dik was very disturbing. For a time he watched the eagle on his perch, seeming to impress the sight on his memory, for lacking a language, an animal's memory is apparently composed of a series of pictures, which must leave a much more vivid impression than our own way of trying to remember a jumble of words and pictures. Paka would not forget that tawny eagle, nor the place that it used as its accustomed watching-station.

THEN Paka went away from there, to wander up into the moss-draped and creeper-entwined forest. Here he lay in ambush for the little grizzled-tan squirrels with faint rings on their tails, and contrived by many hours of watchful waiting to pick up a meal of sorts. This over, he attended to his toilet, smoothing his fur until he was once more sleek of appearance, and then took a nap through the hottest part of the day.

Toward late afternoon he awakened, refreshed and alert. Usually he set out

on the hunt for food at this time, but he now set out on another hunt. It was the African springtime, when a bush-cat's fancy turns lightly toward other things than food. Down through the forest and into the stretch of bush he went. As he picked his way through the tangle, he meowed hoarsely, pricking his ears for an answer. He had not long to wait, for the female bush-cat is fickle and ever ready to meow an invitation to any wandering male, though other males might be ringed about her in a courting circle at the time. Perhaps she likes to make up Tomcat fights, or maybe she likes the limelight and enjoys seeing many males contesting for her. Whatever the urge, she lured Paka to her with her siren calls, lured him to her and to a contest with another young Tomcat who was waiting in crouched and flat-eared readiness.

PAKA was now older, stronger, more experienced and more sure of himself. The sight of this Tom did not fill him with fear, though he doubtless remembered his defeats when fighting the old one-eared Tom. Paka crouched to face the other Tom, and as the sun dipped low, the two fought for the love of a lady—a vicious, bitter, high-worded battle that observed no rules.

Paka pressed the combat from the first, and it was not long before his youth and strength began to wear out the other Tom. Up on their haunches, swearing and cursing, the two raked and tore. Paka handled his paws like an expert boxer. A raking stroke closed one of his opponent's eyes. This one turned his head in recoiling from that stroke, and another of Paka's needle-armored paws tore his right ear to ribbons. Then Paka was all over him at once, scratching and biting; and the defeated Tom hurriedly left the scene to save what was left of his features and skin. Paka chased him for a short distance, to make sure he would not return, and then made his confident way back to the female.

His confidence suffered a setback when he discovered the old demon warrior with one ear, crouched beside the lady and waiting for him. Once more there was a furious battle; but though Paka was now an even match for the old Tom, the first fight had taken something out of him, and he had not quite enough left for this second combat.

As the sun dropped behind Ngorongoro and its rays tinted the heights of Kibo with rose, the warm, dying light showed

Paka once more in full retreat before the old warrior. The veteran was filled with vindictive fury because of the punishment he had taken from Paka's claws, and was possessed of a savage desire to drive his young rival away for good and all, seeming to realize that another combat with him might end in his own defeat. With this intent, he was close at Paka's heels, reaching out now and then to strike at Paka's retreating tail. He was so engrossed in dealing out punishment that he paid scant attention to his surroundings, nor to the fact that Paka was leading him along the edge of the thicket. Then Paka bounded into the open, running around the base of a dead tree, as though to put it between him and his tormentor.

Now, whether Paka did this by design or not is difficult to tell, for none are permitted a glimpse into the hidden recesses of such minds as his; but this dead tree was the very one that the tawny eagle used as a lookout roost.

The mighty taloned one looked down with grim and glowering eyes; and he dropped, as a stone drops into a pool. Perhaps Paka, with the memory of this look-out place in mind, was listening for the sound of whistling pinions; at any rate he quickly made a side-leap into the thicket, while the old Tom, a bit surprised by this sudden turn, put on his brakes for a moment to change his course. That moment's hesitation sealed his doom. Curved talons cut into his vitals, and he was borne, screeching and kicking, aloft. Even before the eagle reached his perch, the wild fire in the old Tom's brain had flickered out.

And as the purple shadows once more reached upward to extinguish the reflected light on Kibo's crown, Paka made his soft-footed way to where a bush-cat lady was waiting.

NOT far away, a lion stretched his mighty, awakened self, then thrust forward his heavy muzzle to announce to the whole wild world that the night had come once more and that timid ones should beware. Hyenas cackled, and jackals yapped; and back in the moss-draped forest depths, the galagoes called raucously in answer. And there was wailing and yowling in a certain part of this bush country, a wailing and yowling that sounded much like a back-fence serenade in our own civilized land; for Paka was courting, and thus it is that bush-cats give utterance to their ardor.

Sinister Hollow

The thrill-charged mystery of a strangely stricken town is here wrought into a specially attractive novellette by the author of "Some Call It Courage."

By
**ANTHONY
RUD**

THE highway down from Burlington and Montpelier, Vermont, follows the Goosebone River, until that rushing Green Mountain stream empties into the White. The region for twelve miles by three, just before the White River is reached, is lush bottom-land of exceptional fertility for New England.

Some one with the powers of seer and prophet must have named it Sinister Hollow; for until the afternoon Cyanide Neilan stopped his paintless fourth-hand flivver to grin at a signboard, nothing more awesome than the usual births and deaths of humanity had occurred in the valley. Cyanide had a pleasant grin, and no one would have suspected that his two front teeth had been knocked out while boxing with a fellow-football-player in the college gym, and that this inconspicuous pair were the handiwork of a local dentist.

Since graduation he had taken two years toward a doctor's degree in science. Money running low, he had become an instructor in freshman chemistry. Each summer he added a couple of credits at Columbia, and would get his degree eventually. This had been a trout-fishing trip after summer school and before college opened.

The young man's legal signature was C. Neilan. Few associates ever learned that the first initial, bestowed by his archeologist father at the time of some excavations at the Throne of Chosroes, stood for *Ctesiphon*. Naturally the students to whom he lectured on inorganic chemistry took both his initials, and



called him Cyanide. But they liked him, especially in the laboratory, where admittedly he knew his stuff. . . .

The signboard there where a gravel road led away south from the concrete highway, read as follows:

SINISTER HOLLOW

Crawfish Flat 2m

Straight Ahead

An arrow pointing to the gravel road slanting downhill to the right, bore the amusing legend:

Sog Meadow 1m

Boodle Corners 3m

Sentsbury 7m

"Us fer Sawg Medder," smiled Cyanide, giving a bad imitation of the Vermont pronunciation. He turned the car downhill on the gravel road, shrugging as he happened to think of possible mudholes in or near Sog Meadow. But he was in no hurry to get back to New Hampshire; and it was a stroke of luck for many people that this was the case.



Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

The town of Sog Meadow consisted of three farmhouses, backed by fields where the timothy hay stood in blanketed stacks, and browned areas where the last of the mammoth strawberries for this year had been gathered. Beyond, toward Boodle Corners, the valley was more rolling. Here and there a power thresher roared in the midst of harvested fields, sending aloft fine chaff.

There were no politicians here, save those of the stove and cracker-box variety. A family named Boodle had run a general store here at the crossroads since the days of witch-burning. It still served the farmhands with overalls, cut plug, bandannas and rock candy.

Neilan felt the grating scrape of keen steel on his ribs. . . . He let out a savage yell, flung up his pistol and fired pointblank

Neilan bought a bottled soft drink, then drove onward. Sinister Hollow was prosperous-looking, in spite of the fact that no railway came near. The fences were taut, the farmhouses painted almost as well as the barns.

"I'll eat at Sentsbury," the young man told himself. "Hope it's a village, not just a crossroads store."

The valley became more wooded and rolling. Climbing a hill where wash-outs made him drop to low gear, Neilan saw a fence of granite boulders on his left—and something that looked, from a distance uphill, suspiciously like a wrecked

car. Had some one failed to make that easy curve? Frowning, the young man drove ahead, then parked in the ditch opposite. The car, one of the long tortoise shapes, did not seem damaged. It looked as though it had merely wandered from the highway, and halted with the front bumper against that granite wall!

TWENTY seconds later Neilan was lifting out from behind the wheel, and trying to awaken, a young woman who seemed to have decided to take a nap right here. Neilan was puzzled.

"Breathes normally. Heart pumping along at seventy-two." And he frowned. "Mighty funny! No smell of liquor—"

He could not bring to mind any sedative which would act in this manner, leaving the heart-action and respiration practically perfect. So after the usual chafing of wrists, and trying to get the girl to swallow some tepid coffee from his thermos,—with no success,—he lifted her into the tonneau of her car. The seat was wide. She would not fall unless he hit a bad bump.

Cyanide Neilan realized this young woman must be in the neighborhood of twenty years of age. Probably pretty when she opened her eyes, though it was hard to tell. Well dressed for country motoring, in felt hat, tan polo coat, knitted sport dress, suede shoes and heavy silk stockings of shade to match.

One thing to do before driving away: Neilan searched the car pockets, found the license. The car, a 1936 model, belonged to Lester Manties, M. D., of Gorham Road, Sentsbury, Vermont.

The sleeping girl's leather handbag yielded a driving-license, but of New York State, not Vermont. The name given was Cecile Haight. Age 21, white, female, five feet, five inches tall, eyes blue, hair brown, weight 118. Residence: Ticonderoga, N. Y. That was not far away, just across the southern end of Lake Champlain.

Beside the usual compact, lipstick, keys, handkerchief and cigarette-case, the envelope bag contained four ten-dollar bills, a five, two ones and some change. Neilan tossed the bag in beside the sleeping girl and took his place under the wheel of her car, leaving his own puddle-jumper there in the ditch.

"If this girl is ill, I'm an Ogalalla!" he said to himself. Her cheeks had faint color. Yes, she was good looking. . . .

Only thing was to get her to Dr. Manties. Probably her uncle or guard-

ian. A medico, anyhow. Neilan began to smile as he felt the smooth surge of power in the car. Some different from his antique!

Just across the crest of the first low hill, Neilan hastily braked. Two horses and an overstuffed load of hay occupied three-fourths of the road. The horses had heads down, and were browsing at some grass and shrubbery. The driver had wound reins about whipstock, and was lying back, snoring!

"Say, for the love of some dago woman!" snapped Cyanide half angrily. "Hey! Wake up! Get out of the way!"

He suddenly knew, however, with a queer presentiment, that this man on the hay load was *not* going to wake up the instant his shoulder was shaken! There was something queer, alarming, going on! Why should these two people sleep this soundly in the middle of the day?

The driver refused to awaken. Goose-flesh beginning to creep along his fore-arms, Neilan quit trying, after a minute. He gazed down the road in the direction of Sentsbury, with the beginning of a scare in his eyes. He had read some Wellsian fiction, dealing with electrical anesthesia of whole nations; and now for the first time he began to question whether such a thing might be possible.

He was leading the hay-wagon team out of the road, when from the same direction he had come, a twelve-cylinder Packard full of people, probably tourists, sounded a three-tone request for the road and the big car flashed by, scarcely slowing as it brushed the projecting hay. Well, they would know nothing about this business, anyhow.

Really worried, though telling himself he was letting imagination run away, he tied the hay team, and resumed his place in the girl's car. She had not moved. Driving perhaps a half mile, he sighted a white-painted farmhouse, with a big red barn and a tall silo. With a breath of relief he saw a telephone wire leading in. Dr. Manties surely would have a phone.

He found a slow-tongued but courteous Swedish hired man in overalls, busy mending harness beside the barn. "Yah, Mees Yonson, she lat you talaphone, sure. . . . Oh, *Mees Yonson!*" The last was a stentorian bellow which brought to the door a rather cross-looking blonde woman with a broom in her hand.

The exasperation of the housewife proved to be due to the fact that her phone had gone dead: It seemed that

Mrs. Johnson had promised to call up Mrs. Christianson, who was expecting, and find out if it was time for a little neighborly assistance.

"But I can't even get Central!" she told Neilan, after he had explained finding the young woman unconscious in her car. Mrs. Johnson only sniffed, at that, evidently thinking it a matter of drinking; and Neilan did not disabuse her mind. Instead, he asked if she knew where Dr. Manties lived.

"The Doctor? Why, yes. He has that big place, the Knoll, right on the road to town—the way you're going," she answered. "You can't miss it. Big creosote-stained cypress house, only the tile roof and the second story windows showing over the big stone wall on the road."

Ten minutes later Neilan stopped the car outside a walled estate he knew to be the Knoll. From this eminence he looked down on the village of Sentsbury, less than a mile distant—and caught his breath in a gasp.

Down the road a short distance was another auto, turned on its side! And there in the main street of Sentsbury not a creature moved! No cars. No horses. Not a sign of life of any kind!

"By heavens!" Neilan breathed in an awed voice. "Down there on the sidewalk there are three or four bundles! *Are those people, lying there asleep?*"

CHAPTER II

AS Neilan was to learn, this strange lethargy had come to the village queerly enough. Not all of a sudden, as is the case when a town in the war zone is shelled with gas; but over the whole of a rainy week there had been signs of sleepiness in many of the inhabitants. Of course no one paid any attention, except to grin, when Sam Volk, paying teller in the bank, yawned many times and finally slumped forward against his brass grille, sound asleep. That would have been a minor scandal—except that President Elias Hawkins, who would have had the job of reprimanding Sam, was found at his desk just as sound asleep as his employee!

Others were yawning too. The weather, was the general verdict.

But all this Thursday morning the sun had been shining. Blankets of white fog had lain in the hollows at dawn; but by noon the last vestige had disap-

peared, and the day was as clear and crisp as ever a third of September had been.

Just the same, the proprietors and employees of the stores in the bank block, Sentsbury's business section, came to work yawning. By noon most had made excuses and had started home to rest. Some had not got home. When the electric siren in the firehouse marked noon, everyone in the immediate vicinity of the bank block was as dead to the world as Rameses.

Farmers and tourists, stopping, became furious at the lack of attention. But in several cases that fury did not spur them to prompt-enough action. They stayed—and slept!

MAKING a last cautious attempt to waken his charge, Cyanide Neilan left the car at the roadside, and banged the antique cast-iron knocker of the studded oaken door. This was the only approach to the brown-stained house from this side, apparently. Somewhere else there must be a drive to the garage, but the young man was too excited to waste time.

When there came no response to his first thunderous banging, he shouted. Damn people who didn't put electric bells on their garden gates, if they intended to lock them against intruders!

Two things happened at once. From the car at his back came a cry, as the girl swung open the door and stared dazedly about her. And simultaneously the top half of the studded oaken barrier in front of Neilan gave back a few inches, revealing a scowling and wholly inhospitable face.

"Oh! Where—what has happened?" Cecile Haight cried, and immediately descended from the sedan, staring at Neilan. "I have been asleep! You—did you *find* me somewhere?" She colored with a rush of embarrassment. "It's all right, Mœbus," she added hurriedly, speaking to the black-browed creature at the half-door, who now had revealed himself as a hunchback no more than five feet in height.

Neilan had a sudden urge to caution. "You had just a slight accident, Miss Haight," he said, inwardly glad that this hunchback was not the physician whom he sought. "I just looked at the car license, and drove you over here, thinking that Dr. Manties had better see you. Now—" He noted that the dwarf was still there, scowling with inexplicable en-

mity. So Neilan suddenly dropped his voice to a whisper. "There's something awfully queer, Miss Haight. Could I speak to you a moment alone?"

"I'll say it's queer!" she agreed in a low tone, flashing an appraising glance at his tanned, earnest face—and apparently finding it reassuring. "Yes. It's all right, Mœbus. I'm just going out for a few minutes now. Be right back."

With a disgruntled snarl the black-browed creature slammed the upper half of the door.

"If you're all right, I'll drive you back to where I left my car," offered Neilan. "I can tell you the whole thing on the way. But first, come here. Look down there into town. What do you see?"

Cecile Haight stiffened, and the color drained from her cheeks. "Then I *didn't* dream it!" she whispered. "The town, the people lying there on the sidewalk—oh, heavens! I—I felt myself getting drowsy too, so I hurried up the hill. I thought the air was stifling, and—"

Neilan nodded, handed her into the car, then took his place and drove away. Out of the corner of his eye he had seen a white curtain whisked away from an upper window of the house, and the ugly countenance of the servitor called Mœbus, frowning down at them; though any connection between Mœbus and the mystery of Sentsbury seemed far-fetched.

BRIEFLY he told about himself, gave his name and occupation—and noted that the girl started slightly. It had been at the mention of chemistry.

"But I swear to you I know nothing of this, if it does prove to be some gas which has put you all to sleep!" he assured. "By the way, have you any ill effects now? Does your head ache?"

"Not a bit. The only thing is,"—and here she yawned,—"*I feel terribly much like lying down and going right back to sleep! You don't suppose there's anything all over this country? Anything like a gas from some earth-crack?*"

Neilan could not answer that offhand, but said he would do his best to find out. He was not due back at college for several days; and this phenomenon had him absordedly interested.

"We'll have to report this to the State police right away," he added. "Do you know where I can reach them? The phone-line seems to have gone dead."

With an odd reluctance Cecile Haight gave in to this, and showed him a turn which led to the main highway by a

shortcut. Here they soon came upon a motorcycle officer, and Neilan said briefly that something very funny was going on down there in Sentsbury—people sleeping on the sidewalks! He let the motorcycle policeman believe that he, Neilan, had not wanted to stop, thinking this might be a gang raid of some kind, with machine-guns popping.

The officer recognized the name of Dr. Manties, and evidently held it in respect, for he let Neilan and the girl go along, while he thundered down the hill in the direction of the stricken town.

NEILAN drove back for his own car. He saw that the hay-wagon was gone. It seemed this sleepiness, or whatever it was, affected people profoundly, but for only a short space of time. When it passed, they were all right, and able to go on about their concerns. Neilan itched to go right down into Sentsbury to hear, see, taste and smell; but he knew enough of gases and their effects to want at least an impromptu mask before venturing. If the cop was gassed, it would be necessary for some one outside to send for a gas squad and ambulances, lest all these people breathed enough so that they died!

In spite of the exciting problem, Neilan was aware of the nearness of Cecile Haight. Yet she evaded his hints with smiles, even when he said impetuously:

"Oh, I hope you don't think I'm just going to let you drive away out of my life *now!*"

"Why 'now'?" she smiled. "Oh, of course we'll be friends. Only, you have this funny business to investigate; and then—well, there are difficulties." She turned clear eyes on his.

"I know you think me unnecessarily secretive, Mr. Neilan," she added in a troubled tone. "It's not myself, though. I'd like to see you again sometime. Dr. Manties, for whom I work— Hm."

"You didn't mean to say that," he broke in quietly. "I'll try to forget it."

"Oh, you don't understand. I— But do you know, I'd like to ask a favor. Come back to the Knoll with me again. Never mind Mœbus, who is the world's worst grouch. I want you to meet Dr. Manties, tell him immediately that you are in the chemistry department, and then tell him what you've observed in regard to Sentsbury. Will you do it?"

Neilan agreed eagerly.

"All right, you follow me. If you and the Doctor can get along, perhaps we can



"Breathes normally. Heart pumping along at seventy-two. . . . Mighty funny! No snell of liquor—"

learn about this queer business at Sentsbury, right this afternoon. He—*might lend you a gas-mask!*"

A thrill that was almost a shiver skidded the length of Neilan's spine as he trod on his starter, and followed the other car. Dr. Manties, whoever he might be, had something to do with war or gases! Could he also have some connection with this strange occurrence at Sentsbury? Manties—the name was completely new to Neilan, and he would have heard of any scientist this near who was concerned with any sort of chemical experiments. Northern New England did not exactly bristle with them.

Cecile Haight had more than hinted at some such thing. Yet if she worked for a chemist, at least she did nothing in the laboratory. It is impossible to keep hands unstained, particularly the fingernails; and hers were beautifully manicured, and perfect.

Manties! Perhaps he was nothing but a country G. P. with independent

means, and a slight bent for research. Neilan racked his brains for men hooked up with late developments in anesthesia—Goodenow, Stallmyer, Rast. . . . Yes, if he had been Isidor Rast, for instance, the man at Rochester who had put his surgical patients to sleep without their ever knowing they were taking gas!

THEY reached the Knoll. With another cautionary word not to pay any attention to the hunchback Mœbus, Cecile rapped loudly on the outer door.

"The garage is around there," she said in a low voice, nodding toward the west. "I thought we'd be using the cars again in a few moments, though. I hope—"

She stopped short as the ugly face of the servitor appeared. One glance, and he snarled: "You come. Not him. Not anybody!"

"Look here, Mœbus," she said icily, "take word in to Dr. Manties at once. I want him to meet my friend, and I don't care whether we are admitted, or the

Doctor comes out here. The Doctor is at home, isn't he?"

"Yah, he's home. I ask," he answered sullenly, and slammed the top half of the door squarely in the girl's face.

"What a sweetheart *he* is!" frowned Neilan.

"Oh, don't mind him. He's just a sort of—watchdog. The Doctor is very particular about visitors. He doesn't even let tradesmen deliver here. I have to go and bring home all the food, milk, and even the ice. But I mustn't talk to you about him."

"Mystery, M. D.," thought Neilan grimly, but he said nothing aloud. The thought of a splendid girl like Cecile Haight in a household with that human wart Mœbus, and the queer recluse doctor, exasperated and worried him. Not his business up till now, of course; but that tingling sensation of mutual attraction between himself and Cecile Haight had altered everything.

MINUTES passed, with no sign from the house. Cecile was growing momentarily more nervous.

"Oh, perhaps you'd better not stay!" she exclaimed, pacing up and down. "I don't know. The Doctor is so queer—"

"I'll take the responsibility," said Neilan. "You couldn't get rid of me now."

The girl half-smiled, and seemed relieved for a moment. But nothing happened. More minutes passed. Neilan himself took the initiative, stepping forward and sending a thunderous succession of knocks into the inner court or garden.

Nothing happened. There was no face at the upstairs-window looking down at them. Finally Cecile could stand it no longer.

"Come. Drive around to the garage. I can get in there—unless something is seriously wrong. Sometimes he—he bolts the doors on the inside, and my key won't work."

With a sense of disaster growing, Neilan obeyed, going out to the car. There he halted, pointing downhill into the town, the other hand on the girl's arm.

"Look!" he whispered. "See that something at the curb over at the right? Isn't that a motorcycle and a man—*lying down?*"

"Oh, my God!" breathed Cecile, not meaning blasphemy. Her eyes held full-blown terror now. "Oh, let's hurry! Dr. Manties maybe can do something. I wouldn't wonder—"

The lurching start of a clutch let in too suddenly cut off her sentence. Following her direction, given with a gesture, Cyanide Neilan drove downhill a matter of fifty yards, then inward along the high wall. Here the roof of a double garage showed, attached to the farther side of the house. He swerved the car, backed, and then came forward again so the bonnet was headed for the near side, as Cecile indicated.

She leaped out, taking a jingling keyring from her envelope bag. Neilan waited while she unlocked the small door and swung it open, then bethought himself and descended to help open the swing doors. Cecile disappeared into the dark garage, and a moment later electric lights flashed on.

Neilan stepped in, just in time to hear her ejaculation of surprise. There was another car there.

"Why—that one was being fixed!" she said wonderingly. "It wasn't there when I—"

Neilan had seen the thing which caused her to break off short, and had come swiftly to the front left-side door of the big car. A hatless man with gray hair, and wisps of curious cheek-beard of the same hue just below the prominent cheekbones of his seamed face, lay back from the wheel, his mouth open. His head rested on the cushioned back of the seat, and his right hand still clutched the gear-shift lever.

"Oh! It's Dr. Manties! And he's snoring!" cried the astounded girl. This evidently upset some unspoken suspicion.

In spite of himself Neilan chuckled grimly. "Victim, it seems, not villain!" he said. "All right, let's wake him and see what it's all about!"

CHAPTER III

THE job was not difficult. At almost the first touch and mild shaking of his shoulder, the physician moved, grunted and yawned widely. Neilan stepped back, watching as Cecile Haight spoke to the man. It seemed to the visitor, experiencing a curious twinge not unlike jealousy, that there was far more intimacy and understanding between this girl and the sixty-year-old doctor than the situation demanded or explained.

But Lester Manties awoke with a start, blinking—then letting a veil droop over the brilliance of his black eyes as he saw a stranger was present.

"Who is this?" he demanded in a whisper, gripping Cecile's wrist. "You know I don't like strangers around! I—heavens and earth, you don't mean I've been asleep! *Me?*" He sat up, suddenly realizing his unusual position. "Asleep? What does this mean? What— Oh!" And it seemed that sudden memory came to him. He got out of the car, staggering a little as he took the first steps, but shaking his head impatiently when Cecile caught his arm.

"I'm all right. But something very queer is going on! That can wait, though. Who are you, sir?"

NEILAN had been sizing up the medico, certain that Manties belonged somewhere in the middle of this breathless mystery of the quiet Vermont countryside. He saw a short, chunky man in black, shiny-worn broadcloth coat and gray striped trousers. Manties was a little round-shouldered, and his eyes showed a streaking of red arteries across the whites—which might mean dissipation, or merely late hours and much reading or microscope work.

(Or it might be the irritating effect of gases, was Neilan's afterthought.)

Nothing was to be gained by anything save frankness, though. In a score of sentences Neilan explained himself and what he had seen, his rescue of the sleeping girl, and his sending of the motorcycle policeman down into Sentsbury.

"I suppose you must have been there?" he queried in conclusion. "The gas—if that's what it is—seems to do its work down there in the town. Are there any illuminating-gas mains?"

"In a town of four hundred people?" snorted Manties. "No! Yes, I walked down there, and got this car at the garage. The horn and headlights had been shorted, and I'd left it there overnight to be fixed. Hm! You say you teach chemistry? Well, young man, you seem all right. I have certain connections with that science myself, as I suppose Miss Haight has told you."

This was an offhand observation containing the quality of a question. Neilan was suddenly alert. It would be advisable to avoid getting the girl in wrong.

"I know nothing about you, Dr. Manties—except that you're a doctor, and as such you probably will be able to advise me on this strange thing that seems to be happening in Sentsbury!" he replied seriously. "Can't we—or you—get on a phone, if it's in working order now, and

really find out what this is? I take it you did not get any real information down there?"

"No, I certainly did not!" said the Doctor, knitting his brows. "Now you speak of it, I did see a couple of men lying in the gutter. But I thought it was just one of our usual hard-cider jags, and that Jeb Conley would take care of them. Jeb is the constable. . . ."

"Hm! The young man at the garage certainly yawned. I thought it was just watching him that made me so sleepy. I got away as soon as I could. I remember getting here, opening the doors, and driving in. After that—well, it's a blank!"

"And may we phone?" repeated Neilan pointedly.

The Doctor nodded. There was manifest reluctance in his manner as he invited Neilan to accompany him and Cecile Haight into the house. But he did so, and ushered them through a hallway into a gloomy, book-lined room which had heavy purple drapes on the three windows, and which smelled unmistakably like formic acid—the disagreeable scent which arises when ants are crushed.

"My laboratory is next door. You'll have to pardon the incense," said Manties with forced jocularly. "Have a seat. Mix him a highball if he wants once, Cecile."

AGAIN this familiarity toward the girl! Neilan seated himself, and saw Manties pull out a lattice arm on the end of which was a phone. He lifted the receiver. Cecile, meanwhile, went over and touched a button on the wall. Back somewhere a buzzer whirred like a disturbed sidewinder. No doubt summoning the disagreeable hunchback, thought Neilan, as there were no signs of a buffet or sideboard in this gloomy library-lounge.

The phone remained dead. No one came to answer Cecile's ring. Both people seemed perplexed; and in the case of the girl, Neilan knew this was genuine. They both had seen the hunchback only a short time before. Was he sulking back in a corner somewhere like a misshapen spider, waiting to pounce upon some one and inject his deadly venom?

What went on then for some minutes did not matter much. The Doctor tried again and again to rouse Central, without success. Finally Cecile ran to him, her face pale.

"Oh, it's no use, Doctor!" she cried in a stifled voice. "Mœbus doesn't answer—and I'm afraid to go look for him! You and Mr. Neilan must send out a general alarm. I just *know* all of Sentsbury is sound asleep. Probably Mœbus too! This horror is creeping up around us all!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Manties. "We're living in the Twentieth Century! Go back and see what's wrong with Mœbus. Meanwhile, if you'll excuse me—" He paused, placing a key in the door of an adjoining room, probably his laboratory, from which the acid smell emanated.

NEILAN nodded. His attention was centered more on Cecile Haight. Had the girl some premonition? "Let me go along," he was suggesting in a whisper, when Manties disappeared—and locked the laboratory door behind him!

"Oh, no, I'm just—foolish. Only—" She essayed a wraithlike smile, then disappeared into the hall leading back into the body of the house.

Manties reappeared, unlocking and then locking the door again before turning to the visitor. His left arm was filled with apparatus which Neilan recognized with a tingling thrill. Oxygen tanks and helmets! Far better than gas-masks, particularly when the very existence and nature of the gas in question still was problematical with them.

"I'm experimenting with formic acid," explained Manties, rather unnecessarily, since the stench had come in through the door in almost overpowering concentration. "Bad for the lungs. So I use one of these. They'll come in handy now.

"Shall we take them, and go down to see just what idiotic thing has been happening in Sentsbury?" Manties shoved one of the helmet-masks with its cylinder into Neilan's hands. "We can leave Cecile here, so if anything really extraordinary is wrong down there, she—"

That was as far as he got. Neilan was willing enough to go, but he intended to have a word of warning with the girl first. Now there was no necessity to ask for it. From somewhere beyond the short dark hall, whence she had gone in search of Mœbus, shriek upon shriek in the girl's voice came to their ears.

They stood spellbound a long second. Then simultaneously Dr. Manties and the younger man rushed for the hall, and the doorways beyond.

"Cecile!" Manties cried out sharply. "Where are you?"

But she came stumbling out to meet them, chalk-white of face, and holding both hands away from her as if they stung.

No need to ask why! Both her palms were dripping scarlet!

"Mœbus! He's dead!" she gasped, and sank into Neilan's arms. It was odd, but even in that crazy moment his mind worked in detached fashion, making him glow inwardly with the knowledge that she had deliberately chosen his protection, over that of the man who employed her, and seemed to know her so very well.

Manties paid no attention. He dashed forward. Neilan felt the girl's figure wilt from the rigidity of shock, so he swiftly lifted and carried her back into the lounge. There he laid her upon a mousy velour davenport, took out his own handkerchief, and swiftly wiped away the gory stains from her hands and wrists.

The blood was fresh, no sign of clotting. Throwing the handkerchief into the hearth, on which a small fire of cannel coal smoldered, Neilan ran to see the worst. Sinister Hollow was beginning in earnest to live up to its name!

CHAPTER IV

AT the foot of the narrow back stairway leading upward to the second floor from the serving-pantry off the kitchen, lay what was left of Edward Mœbus. Afflicted and misshapen in life, he was pitiable now. The thin arms and legs with their coverings of clothes seemed almost boneless; mere tatters of humanity surrounding the big dish-faced head and awesome hump which took the place of shoulders and neck.

He had been shot or stabbed in the neck—without a close examination it was difficult to say which—and had fallen forward down this steep flight of stairs. Blood was everywhere. While Dr. Manties, after one horrified exclamation, hunkered down to make a certainty of the fact of death, Neilan avoided the dead man, and concentrated upon the stair and the blood-stains.

"You'll be able to tell more exactly, Doctor," he said in a low voice, coming down and stepping carefully to avoid the awesome gouts of blood, "but according to these stains, your servant cannot have been dead more than a few minutes."



"You come,"
Mæbus snarled.
"Not him. Not
anybody!"

"Eh? Eh?" Manties seemed to be brought back with a jerk, from some unwelcome problem. "Hm, not long. But I can't tell just how long. His body has cooled a little. He was something of a bleeder—a hæmophile."

Well, that would account for the fresh redness of the blood. But Neilan, glancing at his wrist-watch, knew that less than an hour had elapsed since he had gone with Cecile Haight to retrieve his own car, and seen Mæbus staring down at them from the upstairs window. The assassin must have been lurking there even then!

Privately the visitor entertained certain grim thoughts regarding the Doctor himself. Manties had been there, probably had come up from the village at almost the moment that Cecile and Neilan had left. Motive was completely unknown; but if the medico had not been asleep there in his car, but shamming, he certainly had to be granted opportunity!

The back door was unlocked. It seemed the only way a killer could have escaped. But if he had gone this way—

Neilan abruptly excused himself, and made sure by a circuit of the house and grounds. There were no other ways of exit save the drive into the garage, and the locked oaken door opening to the Sentsbury road! Climbing the wall was possible; but there were no natural advantages such as trees with convenient limbs, and there was no sign of a ladder anywhere.

It was by no means water-tight—one of these classic, hermetically sealed rooms so loved by concocters of the sensational; but if one barred a careful long-distance planner who meant to slay the unimportant Mæbus and conceal every trace of his coming and going, then it surely looked as though the killer had remained right there on the premises!

Neilan went back to the lounge, and there found Cecile almost cowering at one end of the davenport.

"This is a place where I'm not going to leave you," he said quietly, sitting down and taking one of the girl's icy hands in his own. "In fact, Miss Haight, since I'm not sure what your employer intends, I suggest that you and I take my old jalopy right now, and beetle over to Tunbridge or Stafford, where we can feel safe. Take a few clothes, so you can stay—"

"While you come back here, I suppose?" she put in with a flash of spirit. "No, thanks! I'll tell you what, though: Let's you and I take those—" She indicated the oxygen helmets and cylinders where Manties and Neilan had dumped them incontinently.

"You can show me how to work one of them, can't you? Well then, let's go!"

"You mean—Sentsbury?" he queried incredulously.

"Of course. Dr. Manties will take care of this part. I think we ought to see if there's anyone there we could help, and then—"

"Then call in the reserves!" he finished grimly. "All right, Miss Haight. It's

a chance for you, but no worse than staying here, the way I see it."

Neilan took the apparatus, and led the way on tiptoe. Once he had this girl away from the gloomy house, he meant to get down to cases with her in respect to Manties. There was no doubt she knew something about his activities, and more than suspected that they had to do with the disaster at Sentsbury—if not, indeed, with the murder of Mæbus.

They reached the garage in safety, slid open the door; and suddenly they heard Dr. Manties' voice:

"Cecile! Where are you?"

Neilan trod on the starter. The car went right into reverse, and then he swung it swiftly, shooting into second immediately. It left the vicinity of the garage with a roar and a rush. Glancing backward, Neilan saw through the rear window that Manties had come running out after them, just too late.

And the Doctor held something in his right hand—something that glittered!

The visitor said nothing of this to Cecile. Instead he reached over, distracting her attention momentarily by lifting the heavy oxygen cylinders from her knees to the floor of the car.

When they were safely out of sight of the Knoll, Neilan turned up a side road a short distance. Then he took out the two helmets with their tanks and harnesses, and tested them. Both worked. He showed Cecile how to use hers, and put it in place. Then he donned his own, and smiled at her through the goggles. The ludicrous flex-tube respirator gave the effect of a hideous proboscis. Had there been anyone looking, it must have seemed that two monsters from another planet were descending upon the seemingly peaceful Vermont countryside.

IN a moment more, however, both of them forgot themselves in the tense excitement of a close look at Sentsbury. Just on the outskirts, stretched in the road, lay a tall man whom anyone could guess was the parish priest—from his garb, and the fact that he had been using a tight-rolled and sheathed umbrella as a walking-stick.

Neilan got down and carried him to the roadside, arranging him as comfortably as possible. Then they went on. The first building of the town proper was a hay-and-feed store. Out in front were two bearded worthies leaning against the wall in tipped-back chairs. No need to ask about them. They slumbered.

"Look!" pointed Neilan, lifting an arm. His lips voiced the warning, which of course was not heard.

Down at the bank block, the business district, three police cars were drawn up at the curb, and behind them a big white car, an ambulance. The warning, then, had been given by others. Men in respirators similar to those Cecile and Neilan wore, were carrying unconscious forms from the bank and other establishments of the block, and stacking them in the ambulance like cordwood. Two men were just placing the figures of a little girl and a boy on a stretcher. These had been taken from a big sedan which had stopped at the dead gas-pump of the garage. This was the car which had passed him while he was engaged with the hay-wagon, more than an hour earlier.

THEIR arrest came suddenly. Intending to help, Neilan drew up opposite the police cars. All of a sudden two determined-looking fellows with respirators—State police—stepped up on the running-boards, flourishing pistols. They motioned imperatively for Neilan to turn around, and drive out of town in the direction from which they had come.

"Good Lord, I don't blame them!" thought the young man in sudden mental panic. "Both of us coming right down here, equipped with oxygen! Lucky if we aren't lynched before we can explain!"

They did their explaining ten minutes later, with handcuffs on Neilan, and a frowning, skeptical State trooper keeping Cecile under guard.

"G'wan," scoffed one of the uniformed men. "You knew all right this village was gassed! You are the bird who told Trent" (so that was the motorcycle cop), "and got him to go down and take a dose of the same so's he wouldn't run you in!

"And now you tell me there's been murder? Okay! Drive up there to the Doctor's place, Ramsey. I'll see these two don't start nothin'!" He stared from cold, disbelieving eyes at the bewildered, half-demoralized pair. The only thing in the world Cyanide Neilan could think of to be thankful for, was that he had not mentioned the fact that he taught chemistry at college. These men would soon find it out from Dr. Manties, however.

"Were—there any serious casualties in the town?" asked Neilan, determined now to find out the worst.

"Oh, it'll be murder, all right!" the man called Ramsey turned back from the wheel to snarl. "Some of these guys we carted out from the bank are practically cold right now!"

"But no one was really dead, was he?" persisted Neilan.

"Wasn't you just tellin' me?" sneered the policeman, who seemed determined to give his prisoners no information at all.

"Oh, it's a nightmare!" said Cecile in a stifled voice. She clasped the hand of the man at her side, who returned the pressure and kept hold. Of course it would all come out all right; and the chances were strong that he would be thanking his lucky stars for the break of having met Cecile Haight, even under the shadow of a murder indictment.

During those minutes following their first interrogation, and until the police brought them again to the Knoll, Cyanide took on years of maturity. He saw the predicament with clearness: No chance, of course, to convict him of any crime. Yet in the breath-taking sensation which this murder of a hunchback would make when added to the inexplicable mystery of Sentsbury, he would get the spotlight—and even liberal colleges are not overanxious to have exonerated murder-suspects on their faculties.

UP to now Neilan had been a care-free young man who had turned to teaching, when a somewhat formless notion of getting a job in the chemical department of a big paper mill had been blasted by the depression years in which research and discoveries of new processes were worthless. Now he saw clearly that he either would come out of this mess in a hurry and with something more than mere exonerated, or he would be up against it—with no more than six hundred dollars left, to his name.

The young man's jaw set with resolution. He would come through some way. He *had* to! Without realizing the fact, he clenched his fists—which was perfectly all right, save for the fact that one of Cecile's hands happened to be inside. Her wince and gasp brought him to the present, with a quick apology, but she smiled rather wanly. Probably she guessed some of the stirring thoughts in his mind, and was by no means displeased.

They reached the Knoll; and the State police acted with quick efficiency. Knocking at the gate brought no answer

from inside. Dr. Manties appeared to be too absorbed to pay attention.

That was quite the truth, though not in exactly the manner they surmised.

"We can get in at the garage, probably," Cecile suggested in a low voice. So the same maneuver was repeated, and her key again opened the small door for their entry.

The other car still stood there, but when Cecile tremblingly unlocked the door leading into the house proper, the medico still failed to put in an appearance.

"DR. MANTIES!" shouted one of the uniformed men, when quieter alarms failed to produce the owner of the property. No answer. The voice echoed hollowly.

"A'right, he aint here, I guess," said the frowning officer. "You sure he *was* here, huh?" He was ready, evidently, to disbelieve anything and everything that had been told him by the two prisoners; and what was to follow did not lessen his skepticism.

"Oh, yes! Why, he must *still* be here!" answered the pair almost in chorus. Then Neilan's voice alone: "Why don't you go look there at the kitchen stairs, where the body of Mæbus is? He—the Doctor—might be too busy. Or he—" It was on the tip of his tongue to say Manties might have fainted, but that was too absurd. He just might have dropped off to sleep again, however. Cecile had said she felt much like lying down and sleeping again, when Neilan had first awakened her.

With a grunt the officer went back to the kitchen. There came the sound of a door slamming, and some movements. Two minutes later he returned.

"C'mon, you two," he said gruffly. "Show me this here dead dwarf you been talkin' about! Sam, you look around. See if the Doc is upstairs, or down in the basement somewheres. I think we got a couple prizes in these two—loonies, or whatever!"

"Look—in the laboratory!" breathed Cecile. "Dr. Manties may have gone there! Break the door down, if you have to. I—I'm afraid something awful has happened to him too!"

"Now what d'ye mean, *too*?" almost snarled the policeman, when Cecile and the astounded Neilan stood staring at the empty stairs leading upward from the kitchen.

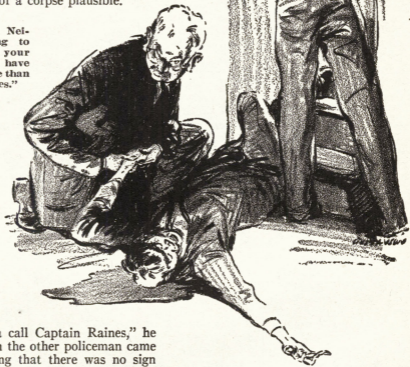
The body of Edward Mæbus had disappeared!

What was more, some one had wiped up the bloodstains rather carefully—though not carefully enough so Neilan could not indicate where they had been.

"Look!" he whispered excitedly. "The body was here, all right! We both saw it, and we left the Doctor kneeling down beside it. If you look close you can see the smear, where the blood has been wiped up since we left. Some of it is caught in this stair-crack! There ought to be more above here, too, as Mœbus fell all the way down the stairs after he was wounded."

"Know a lot about it, don't yuh?" gritted the officer. Nevertheless he did look closely at step after step, and evidently found enough sign of gore to make Neilan's tale of a corpse plausible.

"Doctor," said Neilan, "according to these stains, your servant cannot have been dead more than a few minutes."



"I'm gonna call Captain Raines," he decided, when the other policeman came back, reporting that there was no sign of the well-known Dr. Manties anywhere in the house—not even in the laboratory, the door of which he surprisingly had found unlocked!

"This business looks like hoke to me. But if it aint—then it'll be just too bad for you, young fella!" He glared at Neilan a promise of dire things.

"From your standpoint, I'd say hocus-pocus would be the only thing I had to fear," Neilan retorted. "I'm not guilty of anything and neither is Miss Haight. And the sooner you take off these silly handcuffs and let us really help, the sooner you'll find out what you want to know in this case!"

For a long instant the policeman wavered. Then he shrugged heavy shoulders. "I don't s'pose you'll try to run away," he admitted finally, and took out his key to the cuffs.

By sundown a brisk northeast wind was blowing; and in Sentsbury the cobwebs of daylight lethargy seemed to be whisked away. There had been no serious casualties—two or three bruised patients, and one, whose car had turned on its side, with a broken collarbone. The big city papers decided to treat the

matter with elephantine derision, contending that a Vermont hamlet miles from a railway scarcely would know whether it was awake or asleep, anyhow!

The police did not feel that way about it. Nor did those who had been interrupted in their daylight pursuits by the uncanny somnolence. And the police proved quickly, of course, that an ugly-tempered hunchback named Mœbus really had taken care of the Knoll for Dr. Manties. Mœbus was gone, and there was blood on the back stairs. Dr. Lester Manties—a physician who had performed many a near-miracle in medicine and surgery over this part of Vermont, and was highly respected for his skill—also had vanished. He had not taken his car. He had not even taken a hat, it seemed, when Cecile Haight checked over his wardrobe for the police.

TELETYPE and radio carried descriptions of the two missing men. Every policeman in New England, whether trooper, constable or city patrolman, was on a sharp lookout. Yet through the hours of that long evening no word was received.

"Of course," Neilan said to Cecile Haight the first time they had an opportunity to speak to each other alone, "if Dr. Manties did murder Mœbus, we can see why Manties is missing; but somehow I don't credit that."

"Not for one minute!" agreed Cecile with a forceful nod. "I have reasons to know Doctor Manties was odd. But he wasn't crazy. He—he is a sort of cousin of mine. I didn't mean to tell you that, but it's true. I had never heard of him, but Mother had. When he wrote, asking if I wanted a position—I'd just graduated from college, you know—I was delighted. We had quite a correspondence. I didn't have any special training, you see, but that seemed to be exactly what he wanted in a secretary. He didn't dictate any letters at all. Wrote them all himself, when he had to."

"But then what did you do, if you were his secretary?"

The girl frowned slightly. Then she shook her head, and the blue eyes were troubled. "If anything has happened to Dr. Manties," she said slowly, "I'll have to explain. I'll tell you first, and see what you think. But right now, until we find the Doctor, I—well, I've given my solemn word *not* to tell!"

Neilan reached over to grip her hand momentarily. "Good for you!" he an-

swered. "Some day I might want you to give your word to me. . . . Isn't that the trooper captain? Raines, I think was the name."

CECILE flashed a look of relief. "Oh, I hope he's got sense!" she breathed.

Not only did he exhibit what the girl considered sense, but he provided a real surprise for Neilan. A younger brother, whom Dave Raines was helping put through college, had been taking freshman chemistry the previous year, and had written of the instructors. Within five seconds Dave placed Neilan, and asked gruffly if the latter recalled a sophomore named Johnny Raines.

Fortunately Neilan did recall that eager freshman of the previous year. So the crusty Dave unbent, listened to the wild story of happenings at the Knoll—and then, if he shared the skepticism of his subordinate, Trooper Ramsey, he concealed the fact. The press, when it questioned him, was told that the Vermont police were exceptionally fortunate in securing the services of a well-known university chemist, Mr. C. Neilan, to assist in the unraveling of the Sentsbury mystery!

Best of all, Captain Raines shared Neilan's belief that some chemical jiggery-pokery must be at the bottom of all the trouble. Sensibly he demanded from Cecile just what had been going on at the Knoll—and if the laboratory research of the Doctor had been responsible for the extraordinary precautions against intrusion.

Cecile shook her head. "I suspect it's the reason, all right," she admitted; "sorry to tell you, though, but I know nothing whatever about it. You see,"—and here she smiled at Neilan rather sadly,—"I got my place here chiefly because *I had never taken even one semester hour either in chemistry or physics!*"

"Oh, yes, I know just how fishy that sounds, but it's the truth. And you can verify it in a hurry. My mother is an invalid. She lives over in Ticonderoga, New York, and she has all the correspondence with Dr. Manties. Send a man to her, if you don't believe me."

"I believe you, Miss Haight," said Raines quietly. "That would fit in with the notion of secret experiments. The Doctor apparently wanted no one around him who would be capable of understanding just what he was doing."

"Good!" applauded Neilan. "And now, Captain, if you'll let me prowl

about a bit, it may be that I can begin to make some kind of guess at what it was that had to be guarded."

Raines agreed to Neilan's "prowl," then told Cecile a trooper would drive her to Leicester Junction. There he would put her on a train which would get her into Ticonderoga before midnight.

At the moment Cecile only frowned, as she was too happy over the manner in which Neilan's connection had been established. But the instant Raines left them, she shook her head stubbornly.

"Until Dr. Manties returns, I stay here!" she declared. "You can just tell Captain Raines that, too!"

Neilan thought fast. There was reason, of course, in the girl's stand; and as far as he was concerned, he did not want her to leave.

"Look here, Miss Haight—" he began worriedly, however.

"The name is Cecile," she interrupted with a defiant smile. "And yours?"

"Call me Cyanide—and you don't have to smile!" he returned. "But in regard to staying. Don't you see this place is going to be inhabited entirely by police? If Dr. Manties does return—and I'm grimly afraid he won't—you can get back within a few hours."

"That's not good enough," she denied with a shake of her head. "I'm here until—well, until I know more about what is really happening. Don't you see? I am the only one who knows anything about the way things have gone here!"

"I'm a little bit afraid you may know too much!" said Neilan. But he gave in, and sought Raines. The latter dubiously gave permission for Cecile to stay, and promised to send for a police matron to keep her company.

MEANWHILE the girl, worn out by all that had happened, went to her own apartment, which consisted of a bedroom, dressing-room and bath—and which the anxious Neilan searched thoroughly before taking his leave. With the doors locked and bolted, and the windows all held fast shut by patent burglar latches as well as the ordinary flange locks, it did not appear that anything could get in to harm her.

Neilan went down to the gloomy library-lounge, which Raines had converted into headquarters for the time being, and announced his ideas.

"You tell me that the people have recovered, and that most of them have gone back to their homes in Sentsbury?"

"Yes. Nobody badly hurt, thank the Lord!"

"Then I'm going to take a look at the Doctor's big car—the one in which we found him asleep. After that I'll begin work in the lab—although if there aren't some filed notes around, I'll probably learn mighty little. Didn't come upon a safe or a steel filing-cabinet anywhere, did you?"

Captain Raines shook his head. "One of my men says the Doctor banks in Montpelier, and he also has a safety deposit box there. If he doesn't show up—well, we can get an order to open it, tomorrow."

NEILAN went to the garage, snapped on the lights and started an almost microscopic examination of the floor rugs, the car pockets, the upholstery.

After ten minutes he looked up, disappointed.

Then he went over the outside of the shiny car—a three-year-old model, but one which had been driven only nineteen thousand miles, and which was not scratched, dented or sun-faded. The result again was zero.

Thinking hard, he placed himself behind the wheel, leaned over in the position Dr. Manties had been in when they discovered him.

All of a sudden his eyes fastened upon an odd lever, just below the cowl and instrument board. This was something surely *not* placed there by the manufacturers of this fine car! It was a plain bar of iron, seemingly a lever. From the forward end a taut wire stretched downward, through a hole in rug and floor-board.

Neilan depressed it, let go. It returned to place with a snap! A spring which looked as though it might have been taken from a screen door, brought it sharply back to place.

Nothing, however, had happened. Going over all the old-fashioned gadgets which tinkerers used to put upon their cars, the investigator rejected all of them. He began to be immensely interested, since the car he owned had been a road wreck when he bought it. He had bought parts, and tooled it into shape himself.

Now he followed down that wire, and found that it ran on a spool pulley, straight back to a sort of tin can shaped like a gigantic pepper-box, set immediately above the exhaust muffler near the rear end, and below. Pulling the wire

evidently made something happen inside the pepper-box.

With a screw-driver the young man removed the container, which was heavy in his hand. As he shook it gently, there was a faint rattling sound; but the shaker opener had a spring on it, and stayed tightly closed unless the arm attached to the wire were moved.

His face serious with what he thought the imminence of discovery, Neilan took the container with him into Manties' laboratory. There he carefully shook out on a plate of glass some of the contents, and peered at them, frowning.

They looked unexciting enough, much like very minute iron shavings and filings. Taking a few of the ordinary reagents and some test-tubes in a rack, he used extreme caution in dropping first some fuming nitric acid, then some hydrochloric, then some sulphuric—and finally, a few drops of concentrated ammonia, on four individual specimens.

In no case, not with any of the three strong mineral acids, or with the strong alkaline reagent, was there the slightest perceptible reaction!

"Hell, don't tell me that's *platinum!*" growled Neilan aloud, mentioning one of the very few elements which yields not at all to ordinary acids. He made a test for the valuable metal, and it also was completely negative.

He shook a few grains in his hand, then on impulse put a bit on his tongue.

Nothing happened. Except for a very faint aroma of machine-oil, this substance he had discovered had no taste or smell whatsoever! Half disappointed that it had not started to deliquesce or burn upon his tongue, he spat out the particle.

ENSUED then a routine of tests for a laboratory "unknown"—and this specimen stubbornly intended to remain unknown, too. It was not until Neilan took a Bunsen burner and plate, with inverted cup above to try for melting and possible sublimation, that anything happened. Then the little heap of black particles changed to red heat, then to white. But it refused to melt!

This in itself was interesting, since in the full combustion of the burner a heat approximating 3000 degrees F. was generated—sufficient to melt almost anything save a few substances which can be handled only in an electric furnace.

But the real discovery came a few moments later, when, despairing of melt-

ing the stuff, Neilan lifted it away with wooden-handled pincers. He saw it glint queerly, and appear to give off a faint grayish vapor!

Watching, every nerve tense, he let minutes pass by—nearly half an hour. *And the substance still smoked!*

Neilan backed away and opened the windows. He took out the pepper-box can, and sought Captain Raines.

"**G**OT a piece of your mystery, I think!" he said in a tense whisper. "D'you think Ramsey or some one could scare up a canary bird—or a rabbit—or a chicken?"

"Gas test?" demanded Raines crisply, understanding.

"Something like that—and the means used to put Sentsbury to sleep, I believe!" promised Neilan with a thrill of jubilation.

"Oh-h!" It was the scared voice of Cecile Haight. She had come down, and was staring at the container clutched in the hand of the detective. "D-don't you think you'd better wait till Dr. Manties comes back?" she faltered. "I—I've seen him filling that thing, and I'm afraid—"

"Look here, Cecile! Do you really know what this is?" demanded Neilan seriously, while for the first time a veil of suspicion appeared in the eyes of the trooper captain.

"No—only, it is something he was extremely careful nobody else touched! It came from the laboratory; that much I know. And oh, Cy, I'm afraid!"

In spite of the seriousness of the moment, the young man had to grin. This was a new departure in names, and he liked it.

"We'll be careful," he promised. "You know, this is my business, Cecile. You can come and watch, if you'd like. There won't be any danger, I'm pretty sure."

But the experiment, carried out under the glare of police-car headlights, plus the ordinary lights of the garage, was a puzzling failure. After restoring the pepper-box can to its place, where by manipulation of the spring bar on the dash it could be made to dump a little of the unknown material into the baffle compartments of the muffler, Neilan ran the big car out of the garage. He then turned it around, and placed it so the exhaust pipe was just inside the open garage door.

By this time Trooper Ramsey had returned with a ruffled and indignant

Plymouth Rock hen, and this was shoed into the garage. There it blinked and wandered around in the bright lights, pecking desultorily at this and that.

Neilan started the car. When it was idling smoothly, he depressed the bar on the dash. A moment later a rippling gray stream of smoke or dust poured from the pipe. This hung in the air, then slowly settled—much of it around the hen, which was almost hidden from view of the watchers.

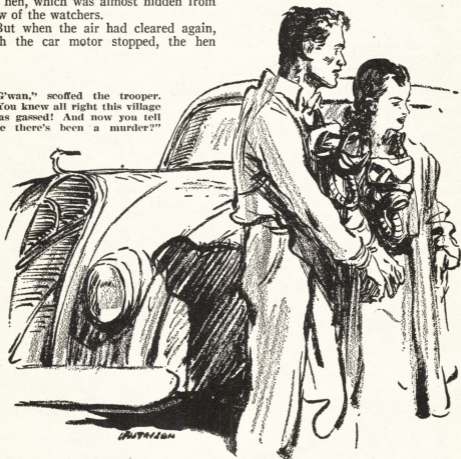
But when the air had cleared again, with the car motor stopped, the hen

it has nothing like carbon-extracting as a purpose."

He ran the car back into the garage. The hen was restored to her home roost. And Neilan took back the mysterious can, with its remaining contents, to the laboratory.

Cecile accompanied him rather fearfully, for this was her first visit to the forbidden room. It looked much like

"G'wan," scoffed the trooper. "You knew all right this village was gassed! And now you tell me there's been a murder?"



went right on pecking experimentally at things on the floor. The mysterious substance seemed to have no effect at all!

Neilan's face grew red. He had been so sure of his theory, that failure irked him—particularly with Cecile Haight looking on. He tried again, but the gray dust or smoke made no difference at all to the hen. He realized, too, that in the laboratory he must have inhaled a certain amount of the fumes from the roasting metal, without as much as a yawn to show for it. So he surrendered.

"I was wrong. Sorry. But I'll do my best now to figure out just what this stuff *can* be meant to do! Certainly

any small laboratory, however, with white-tiled walls on which racks of bottled reagents stood, and two zinc-topped tables with arrays of clean test-tubes, beakers, and other small apparatus such as Bunsen burners, a microscope, a sterilizer and "cooker" for bacterial cultures, and several small retorts arranged neatly.

There were no mysterious experiments in progress. The only unusual features were a large and expensive fluoroscopic screen and X-ray machine (though the Doctor undoubtedly used this in his practice), and a big mercury-arc sun-lamp of the sort used by people who wish to acquire tan in the winter months.

"Why is this sun-lamp bent down over the table?" asked Cecile.

Neilan started to make some facetious remark, but a sudden change came in his expression. "Holy Moses!" he breathed. "I—say, *that* may be the explanation! Wait now, let me think!"

Cecile watched him wonderingly as he ran back to the table—running water into a beaker and dropping some of the mystery substance into that.

"We'll see, Cecile dear!" he said with repressed excitement. "If I get it now, you are the one who gave me the hint!"

CAPTAIN DAVID RAINES was willing enough to allow Neilan full scope for his experiments; but when eleven o'clock came around, and the young chemist remained in the laboratory with Cecile Haight, the officer began to wonder. The case had bogged down, as far as he and his men were concerned. Search for the hunchback and the Doctor would be resumed everywhere at daybreak—with special attention to new graves, and places where bodies could be hidden. But now the Captain had let his men retire, and intended to snatch a few hours' rest himself. This young man and girl, however, ought to go to bed first, he thought. There was a police matron to keep Miss Haight company now.

The Captain went to the closed door knocked. This was just because he shrewdly suspected these two young people had not been concerned for three whole hours with chemistry alone.

He turned the knob and entered. One foot across the threshold, one glance, and Dave Raines turned back, shouting for his men, who had draped themselves on couches and chairs in the various rooms. Panic and sudden anger was in his voice.

In a heap down there beside the zinc table where the sun-lamp burned, lay Neilan, snoring peacefully—and of his companion, Cecile Haight, there was no sign in the room!

CHAPTER V

THE only person at the Knoll that night who slept another minute, was the one who would have given ten years of his life to be up and doing—Cyanide Neilan.

Captain Raines guessed that the young chemist had penetrated the secret, and had him taken out of the laboratory in-

stantly by policemen who held their breaths while they worked.

Nothing could wake up Neilan, seemingly. They filled a tub with ice-cold water, held him by shoulders and ankles, and doused him up and down. No use. They rubbed him with rough Turkish towels. His skin glowed. He stopped snoring, a bad habit to which he was not usually addicted. But he refused to



awaken. Pulse was good, if a trifle slow. The police physician finally said that he could administer a hypodermic which might or might not succeed, but that he advised letting the man sleep until an ordinary shaking would do the work.

"Not a chance!" snapped Captain Raines. "If you've got anything in your bag that'll do it, shoot!" And for that, Neilan would bless him, he knew.

But even with the shot in the arm, Neilan was not stirring and looking

around wildly for Cecile, until half-past one in the morning. Then when he finally understood that the girl he loved, and who had stood at his elbow while he solved the mystery of the sleep that had come to Sentsbury, had vanished without trace, he was an extremely quiet, grim man whose bloodshot eyes turned this way and that, and whose mind raced between possibilities.

"I'm going to find her. Lend me a loaded pistol and a couple extra clips!" he demanded from Raines. In his left hand he held one of the police flashlights.

The policeman complied. "There isn't a thing you can do till morning—but God bless you!" he said.

"There is something!" said Neilan, from between clenched teeth. "Whoever it was took Cecile Haight, came in that lab window we found open. He or they must have had a car waiting; but in thinking this thing out, I've come to the conclusion that the man I'm looking for is right close!"

"Have to be, probably," frowned Raines, "in order to dispose of a body and kidnap the Doctor—if that's what really did happen."

"It did. And now Cecile! Good-by!" snapped Neilan, and stepped out of the open laboratory window, leaping the short distance to the ground and immediately spraying the shrubbery with the oval beam of his flash.

"Come here, Porter!" said Raines, turning back to one of his silent, uncomprehending men. "Don't let Neilan know you're doing it, but keep him in sight. Ought to be easy at night. If anything happens, shoot—and we'll come running!"

JUST too late the trooper captain realized that his chemist-detective had been too wrapped up in thoughts of the missing girl, to elucidate the chemical problem.

"Well, it's got something to do with that stuff in the can, and probably with that sun-lamp!" said Raines sensibly to himself. "I reckon another chem' shark could work it out now, if worst came to worst."

He bethought himself of one test, and sent the annoyed Trooper Ramsey out to rob the convenient hen-roost again. This time, when Raines himself tossed the Plymouth Rock fluttering to the floor of the laboratory, she pecked only five or six times. Then her wings slow-

ly spread sidewise. Her head drooped, the eyelids closing. And a few seconds later she slumped down, sounder asleep than she had ever been with the bar of a roost between her calloused talons.

"Well, *he* wasn't faking, anyhow!" said Raines with satisfaction. He had suffered moments of doubt. Young Neilan just might have been in this somewhere, and playing the captain for a stooge. Now those fears vanished.

AS for the instructor, he was outside with his flashlight, following the prints of two pairs of men's shoes, large ones, straight to the garden wall. In this direction all was in darkness. There had been no watch kept, since the last thing expected was for some one to wish to break *in* to the Knoll!

The visitors must have had a ladder, for there were slight scratches, and a leaf of ivy was crushed near the top of the wall. With some difficulty, taking chances on the rather flimsy ivy branches, Neilan climbed to the top and jumped down.

There were heavy prints in the moist earth, and two round holes to show where the ladder had stood.

"Bet they used the ladder as a stretcher, damn them!" he snarled to himself. "Then with a cover over Cecile, they could walk right down the road. Nobody would question but what it was just some one overcome, and being cared for by the cops!"

A quarter moon and a firmament of bright stars gave enough light so he could see fairly well, once he reached the road and emerged from the trees.

"If they had a car here, no telling how far they went," he reflected despairingly. "But to hell with that! Right now I've got to imagine they *didn't* use a car; that they were right close to the Knoll somewhere. That'd be the sensible thing, anyway."

He wasted a good half-hour in following the gravel road on foot for a mile, as it curved aimlessly about the rolling contours of the hollow. But by the time he had retraced his steps, he felt sure that Cecile, the Doctor and the dead hunchback could not have been carried in that direction.

Downhill from the knoll in the opposite direction lay Sentsbury, still showing a dozen or more lights at this early morning hour for what was probably the first time in the town's history. After that day of drugged sleep and of queer

awakenings, the inhabitants would have too much to talk about, for thoughts of natural rest.

"Nothing that way," Neilan decided. He turned in at the vestigial side road which gave entrance to the Doctor's garage. As he had hoped,—not having paid much attention to the matter before,—it did not come to an end at the garage, but meandered on through the green-black pines.

Neilan followed it, finding it a mere track across the granite hillside. The trees were heavy, and several times he found difficulty in keeping to the faint, weed-grown ruts. But a feeling of restrained excitement, a premonition, kept him from using the electric torch. If there should prove to be any estate or even a hut along here, this would be a logical hide-out for a criminal band. Likely enough, except for Dr. Manties' use of this track as a shortcut to somewhere, no vehicles at all were in the habit of coming this way.

The track wound about so aimlessly that Neilan had difficulty keeping sense of direction; but he thought he was traveling in the general direction of the concrete highway on the north, and the mountain ridge which delimited the Hollow.

Of a sudden Neilan stopped. There ahead of him the trees thinned, and the gray bedrock showed through the surface. Lying there on the rock was something which brought a tight constriction and a throbbing in his throat. Glancing ahead to make sure no one was near, he darted forward and seized the object. It was a woman's brown suede sports shoe!

Recklessly turning the beam of his flash to the inside, Neilan read exactly what he feared and hoped to find. There was the name of the retailer: *Littleton's, Ticonderoga, N. Y.* Cecile Haight came from that town. The chances of any other girl or woman losing such a shoe on this unfrequented track were practically nil. Her abductors, then, had carried her this way!

That second, from somewhere just behind him, came the alarming sound of a dry twig breaking. Neilan whirled, automatic ready. Then as he saw no one, he backed slowly out of the road until he was concealed in the bushes.

SEVERAL yards to the rear Trooper Porter, however, had got himself in difficulties he could not surmount. Un-

able to see, he had stepped into the midst of a heap of dry branches. After holding his breath a matter of seconds, he stepped again. Like the explosion of a firecracker another stick broke, and this time he cursed audibly.

"Nemmind, Mr. Neilan," he said disgustedly. "Cap Raines just wanted me to sorta see you didn't get in Dutch." With that, he moved out into the moonlight, and Neilan breathed deeply in relief as he recognized the uniform.

"Take this back to Captain Raines!" bade Neilan in a whisper. "It's Miss Haight's shoe! They've taken her somewhere right ahead! Have all the men you have follow me. I'm going immediately!"

"I'm s'posed to stick to you—and let go a shot if anything happens," the man said stubbornly. "How'd we ever know where you went? Nope, I'm going along!"

"All right, come!" agreed Neilan from between clenched teeth. "But for the love of Mike, make less noise than you did just now!"

THE two went on, and more than a quarter mile of the vague road passed before they came to a corner fence. This was tight mesh, surmounted by two barbed wires, and reminded Neilan at once of something he had seen recently. In driving down light-heartedly into Sinister Hollow he had not been thinking of fences. Just the same, this arrangement was unusual.

A few moments later he knew. This was the farmhouse where he had come in hope of telephoning to Dr. Manties, after finding Cecile Haight sleeping in her car.

A cross-looking blonde woman with a broom—a Swedish hired man who had called her "Mees Yonson"—and Neilan had not managed to get in to try the telephone!

This was the point where the wandering side road came back to meet the gravel highway from Boodle Corners. On this side stood the big barn and silo, with the farmhouse out nearer the main road. Not a light showed in any window of the latter, yet Neilan felt in his bones this had to be the place. What better camouflage for a gang headquarters than a farm couple and a hired man—who might have lived there all their lives?

In a whisper Neilan told the trooper that the latter should stay outside the

fence and listen. Neilan himself intended to get over the fence, and examine both the barn and house.

"If I do start anything, get Raines immediately. Don't take a chance!" was his parting adjuration, one which he feared the stubborn policeman would not heed.

With that he took hold of a stanch peeled cedar post, stepping cautiously in the wire mesh, and climbing. Each upward step was tested by his weight gradually applied; but even this was not sufficient. In lifting one leg over the barbed wires on top, his trousers caught momentarily.

Instantly from somewhere in the farmhouse came the *brr-ing* ring of an electric alarm bell! The fence was wired to give warning of trespassers!

"That tells the story! Go get Captain Raines!" commanded Neilan. He leaped to the ground and darted forward to the rounded side of the silo. To his chagrin, he saw the policeman still standing there, but there was nothing to be done about that now. The electric alarm was still ringing. Dropping down to hands and knees, Neilan crawled across to the side of the barn, and peered around. There was no sound of movement anywhere, but suddenly the bell stopped.

TWO or three minutes that seemed like hours, dragged past. Then something exceedingly peculiar occurred. There along the ground, at the side of the farmhouse which was in deepest shadow, a slanting line of yellow light suddenly appeared!

It gradually widened to an oblong, and then Neilan understood. This was a slanting wooden door to the cellar, and it was being opened gradually by one of the house occupants.

There was a growled word which Neilan could not catch. Then half of the door was lifted and turned back, and out of the lighted cellar came two men—fully dressed!

One of them carried some kind of firearm, either rifle or shotgun, and the other a walking-stick. They started toward the locked gate and the fence in front. Then they caught sight of that stubborn trooper waiting there on the other side of the fence. Neilan was so angry with the man he almost hoped he did get shot; but even with all his dunderheadedness, he was to provide an opportunity for the investigator.

"Who are you? What d'you want?" came the quick challenge, and both men strode rapidly over to the fence. "Oh, a policeman? Is there something wrong, Officer?" This was a greatly changed tone in which there was more than a hint of alarm.

Porter cleared his throat. "That's what I'd like to know!" he said surlily. "We're patrolling this whole district now, you know. I just touched this—here fence . . . Say, are you the owner of this farm?"

"Why, no," answered the spokesman. "This is Mr. Johnson, the owner. We were sitting up, having a few glasses of cider, and talking about that funny thing that happened in Sentsbury—"

BUT Neilan waited to hear no more. A daring idea had come full blown. Crouching, moving swiftly but silently on tiptoe, he left the protection of the barn and made straight for that oblong of light which opened into the cellar!

He almost made it. Just as he reached the stairs leading down, however, there came a yell of alarm from behind. Then a rifle cracked, the bullet smacking into the slanted door.

"Hold 'em there, Porter!" yelled Neilan, without any real hope that the patrolman would think fast enough to do it.

Hurting down the steep flight, Neilan caromed headlong into the blonde Mrs. Johnson. She screamed, and raised a wicked blade to strike at him. A sickle!

There was no time to think of her sex. Neilan side-swiped his pistol, crunching it against the bone of the upraised wrist.

Now the woman shrieked in earnest, and sat down abruptly on the dirt floor, the sickle clattering from her grasp. Neilan grabbed it in his left hand, and turned to fire one warning shot up and out, in hope of keeping the men from coming right down after him.

From upstairs came sounds of some one running and shouting. Probably the hired man, thought Neilan. Well, the goose certainly was cooked now, unless his guess had been right. If these seemingly suspicious circumstances proved to be nothing more than precautions taken by an innocent householder, Neilan probably would go to prison for life. Even the policeman's being along would not excuse assaulting a woman, and entering with a gun in his hand.

These thoughts came in a flash as he dashed back in the basement, looking for some proof that Cecile Haight was here. He tried a door, which came open—and out of the room stumbled Dr. Lester Manties, hands tied behind his back, and a cord looped loosely about his ankles!

"Cut my hands free!" he demanded huskily. "Look out! There at the window!"

Neilan sidestepped, whirling about. He heard a shot and a spraying of glass. Across the basement was a small window, now broken. Behind it was a malignant face dimly seen. Neilan swung up his pistol and snapped three shots through the window. The face disappeared.

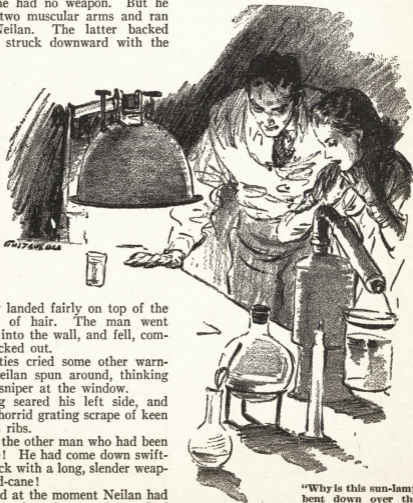
That second the heavy-footed man who had been running upstairs, came down the flight and yelled at sight of the intruder. It was the Swede hired man, and he had no weapon. But he thrust out two muscular arms and ran to seize Neilan. The latter backed away, then struck downward with the pistol.

transfixed his vitals—he let out a savage yell, threw the sickle straight at the grim duelist's countenance, then flung up the pistol and fired pointblank, just as the dapper, gray-haired man disengaged his blade and lunged again.

In a sickening surge of pain which sent clotted red spirals before his eyes, then blackness, Cyanide Neilan fell to the floor even as the swordsman toppled, his throat pierced by that final shot.

CHAPTER VI

NEILAN was not unconscious anywhere near as long as would have pleased him. He came to his senses—partially—to find himself on an ambulance stretcher, being speeded along a smooth road toward a hospital in Montpellier. Riding with him, one hand hold-



"Why is this sun-lamp bent down over the table?" asked Cecile.

The blow landed fairly on top of the tow thatch of hair. The man went straight on into the wall, and fell, completely knocked out.

Dr. Manties cried some other warning, and Neilan spun around, thinking it was the sniper at the window.

Something seared his left side, and he felt the horrid grating scrape of keen steel on his ribs.

This was the other man who had been at the fence! He had come down swiftly, and struck with a long, slender weapon—a sword-cane!

Hurt—and at the moment Neilan had the suspicion that the sword-cane had

ing his wrist, was the pale-faced Cecile Haight, who had refused to leave him until she could be assured that he would recover.

That was very much of an improbability at this moment. Dr. Manties and the police surgeon had granted him one chance in ten. The sword cane had gone through his left lung, avoiding the heart and aorta by a slender margin.

"What—what happened?" came his weak, pain-racked query.

THE interne immediately cautioned him not to try to speak. In the end, because fever had come from the shock, making him unreasonable, Cecile had to tell in a low voice what had occurred at the Johnson farm—Shambles Farm, as Captain Raines had named it after an inventory of the dead and wounded.

"This man who was behind everything, dear," she explained, "was an old associate of Dr. Manties. Dr. Humber was the name. He was a surgeon, and a clever man, but finally was barred from practice because of something he did—employed euthanasia on an old woman patient who had some incurable illness, I think.

"Anyway, Dr. Manties has discovered a terrifically important chemical compound. I mustn't talk much about it even now, though everyone can guess it puts people to sleep. He has named it comatite, and Cy, dear, he says that you are going to be a full partner in the sale of it!

"Dr. Manties made the mistake of showing his results, on animals, to his old crony. Dr. Humber did not let on, but knowing that Dr. Manties was not going to dispose of the secret before he had it at the point of absolute perfection and purity, Dr. Humber stole some of it.

"He could not make it work! Realizing that Dr. Manties must have held back something, Dr. Humber came to steal the formula and notes. He was caught by Mæbus, and killed him with a thrust of that sword-cane. Ugh! That awful thing!

"One really peculiar thing came right then. Dr. Manties had been investigating the results of his invention, and had been overcome by it. Once we had run away, with those respirators, he sat down—and immediately fell asleep. Dr. Humber and that man Johnson kidnaped him, and took him over to the cellar of the farmhouse, where they

trussed him. They intended to make him tell his secret, but even when he woke up really, he pretended to be asleep.

"So they came after me. They knew that I had been copying the formula for Dr. Manties, every time he changed it, and thought I would remember it.

"Imagine! The thing takes me about four days just to copy once! I have to be absolutely exact, you see, and show the steps by which everything is added to what Dr. Manties calls the most complex molecule in Christendom. I—"

"*What enormous molecules you have!*" broke in Neilan in a sepulchral voice. "*I thought they were ears once, but now—*"

Cecile gasped, raising both hands to those small and maligned appendages.

"Out of his head! Don't talk any more!" said the interne.

WHEN college opened, for the first time in decades the student body had an autumn hero who did not wear a football suit.

But Cyanide Neilan was not there to teach inorganic chemistry. He still battled for life in the hospital; and while recovery now seemed much more probable, it was certain that he would have to take a long convalescence, and give up all idea of teaching until the second semester, at least.

He was in command of his faculties now, and if contented happiness could cure a man, he would be on his feet again soon. He had read all the clippings, smiling at the great detective they had created out of what the sword-cane had left of him—and shaking his head sadly over the havoc wrought at the Johnson farm.

"I'd never shot at a living target before—or not since I was a kid with an air-rifle," he whispered to Cecile. "It seems unreal that I actually killed two men!"

"Well, they certainly deserved it!" she reassured him. "I'm glad I was still asleep, and knew nothing of all that was happening. That patrolman, Porter, wants to see you one of these days. He got hung up on the fence there with a bad wound from that sword-cane, but he's well again. He wants you to know he tried to come and help. But if Captain Raines had not heard the firing—"

She shivered. "That awful Swede woman comes up for trial next week.

They say she'll get twenty years. I hope it's all of that, because she's a terror—swears she's going to get you for killing her husband; he was the one who shot at you through the window.

"The hired man, Oleson, won't even be tried. He was just plain dumb, and never did know what it was all about. He did what the Johnsons told him to do."

"I'm glad of that," he whispered. "Where's Manties?"

CECILE smiled. "He's in jail. Didn't you know? Yes. It seems that he went a little too far in strewing that stuff along the road in Sentsbury, and that motorist who came along couldn't see the joke. Neither could the one who broke his collarbone. . . . But the Doctor will have plenty, to pay damages. And he'll be ready to see you as soon as he gets free. You're his partner in the comatite now, you know."

"The papers scarcely mention it anywhere!" he whispered. "If I'm a partner in it, don't I rate knowing what use the stuff is going to be? Is it a practicable anesthetic for surgical use?"

She smiled tantalizingly. "Oh, of course. Would you really like to take a look at it?"

She went to the door, and the nurse came in, holding what looked like a rolled-up window shade, colored black. With thumb-tacks she put up this yard square on the inside of the door, and then closed the door.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" said Neilan. He was staring at white symbols all over that nine square feet of black surface—letters connected with other letters either by one line, two or several. Of course he knew it to be a structural formula, but ten times as complicated as anything he ever had seen diagrammed!

"That's not really comatite!" confided Cecile, leaning close. "Dr. Manties says that this is just the 'mirror picture' of it, and that you'd understand what that meant."

"Oh sure, like dextrose and lævulose are the mirror pictures of each other."

"But you mustn't ever tell that. The United States Government is buying. They're going to put a couple pounds of it in every big shell they manufacture. Then when they shell a territory, they'll simply put everyone to sleep, go over, and take them prisoner without bloodshed! Isn't that marvelous?"

Neilan smiled. "Well, Cecile dear," he said, "it'll be a splendid thing for warfare—unless and until somebody else like Dr. Manties comes along with another discovery that nullifies it. Did—was there much money coming for it?" He slowly colored, not because of any false modesty in taking a share of the comatite he had saved, but because of the use he would have for any money he got out of it. Actually, until that moment, he had discounted the worth of the substance, unless it had real virtues for use as a surgical anesthetic.

"They paid a quarter of a million for the formula; and they will let Dr. Manties—and you—work out the slightly different one for use in surgery," she replied.

"A—a—quarter million!" gasped Neilan, his eyes fairly bulging. "You mean—"

"Your share is \$125,000. I was always very good at math!" she smiled. "But wait. No, you mustn't. Not till—you're better! Tell me, what was it there in the laboratory? I mean, what idea did I give you, so you did solve the problem?"

A BIT impatiently Neilan explained. He had known that the Doctor must have spilled some of the comatite on the streets of Sentsbury. The history there was that for a week it had rained most of the time. The inhabitants had been getting progressively sleepy. Then when the sun came out warmly, they all surrendered—all of those in the immediate neighborhood of the bank block, at any rate.

"I guessed from your hint," he concluded wearily. "The stuff was inert until it had been drenched in water, then heated by the actinic rays of the sun. Whereupon—it worked."

"But Cecile dearest, you will marry me? Being the wife of an instructor won't be so bad—when we've got some capital, and income from it. I love you so!"

She shook her head, but there was a sparkle in her blue eyes. "I've decided to stay here, with Dr. Manties, and marry his assistant!" she declared. Then she paused for emphasis: "But Cy, dear,—that job is open to *you*!"

"No, no! Cy, dear, I'll bend down and kiss you just once. Wait till you're stronger. Just once—or well, *twice*! Now—you must sleep. Please, dear, or I'll have to call for the comatite!"



Duel in

I SHOULDN'T have kicked that Senegalese down the steps, I suppose; but what could I do? He asked for it, and there were twenty scruffy little *sous-off's* standing around waiting to see what would happen.

Nassif's cinema was the only place of amusement in Douala, and that means the whole of Cameroon. It had once been a palm-oil shed, and the spicy reek of the golden fluid still mingled with the thousand other scents of a building crowded with natives. On Saturday nights there was a change of program, and Nassif packed 'em in, both natives and whites, to watch the ancient releases of Charlot, Max Linder and the "Exploits of Elaine." The floor of the shed was fitted with plank seats crowded with howling natives, who screeched their comments on the pictures. At the back of the hall was a raised gallery which was supposedly reserved for white patrons. It contained a bar but no seats, and was usually packed with non-coms from the garrison, traders and Government officials.

One evening Bryant and I were drinking warm whisky and soda, when a coal-black gentleman in white ducks shoved his way in front of me, cutting off my view of the picture.

I asked him to move, but he shrugged with that infuriating insolence of the "savvy" native and turned back to the screen. I moved him. He spun around, spitting like a cat, and clawed at my face. It was a new kind of fighting to me, and I had my hands full trying to dodge the reaching bony fingers of the Senegalese. There were plenty of cries from the non-coms for the *noir* to kill me;

but the end of the battle came when he was propelled down a flight of concrete steps to the road outside.

A pompous, spike-mustached sergeant, who had been dancing about on the edge of the scuffle, was loud in his comments on my behavior. Bryant and I laughed at him, and left.

Next day I was summoned to the weekly tribunal, told by the goat-bearded judge that as a foreigner I had no right to interfere with the amusement of a citizen of *la belle France*, and fined five hundred francs. The Senegalese, it developed, was a Government official of a sort.

The following Saturday my entrance to Nassif's was greeted with much derision by the *sous-off's*, the sergeant who had reported me being particularly offensive. I knew that if I hit him, I would be jailed for assaulting the uniform of the Republic, so consoled myself with verbal comment. At last he removed his tunic in order to gesture more freely, and I was able to deal with him.

Two traders were with me, and we had our hands full. The non-coms turned out, feet flying, fists reinforced with corks, bottles, and one beady-eyed corporal brandished a bayonet, which he did not dare to use, fortunately. No one was hurt much, except for minor abrasions; but Nassif wailed bitterly over the damage done to his bar.

Bryant, who is a big, placid Somersetshireman, later strolled into my veranda. "Fine mess," he commented. "That little sergeant says that we'd better keep out of Nassif's—you particularly. He

REAL EX-

Douala

By CAPTAIN
BRIAN O'BRIEN

says he'll shoot you if you put your nose inside the place."

The following Saturday we climbed the steps rather warily. The sergeant—Marceillant was his name—rushed over to me and thrust his face into mine, so that the combined effects of sour wine, garlic and his natural bouquet nearly poisoned me. He dragged open a filthy shirt, exposing a bony yellow chest.

"Shoot! Shoot, then, *espèce d'assassin!*" he shrieked.

"Thought he was going to do the shooting," commented Bryant. Some one laughed, and that was fatal. The sergeant went over to one of his friends and began whispering.

Bryant and I, nervously wondering if we had been so clever in coming, went out; later that night one of the sergeants from the garrison tapped at my door.

"Meestaire O'Brien?" he inquired, although he knew my name damned well.

"What is it?"

"M. le Sergeant Marceillant demands satisfaction that you 'ave insult him. 'E say in the morning you mus' meet 'im at the rifle-range, behind the barracks."

"What the hell for?" demanded Bryant, who, hearing voices, had come over.

"You will see that a foreigner cannot insult a *sous-officier* of Colonial Infantry. This monsieur will 'ave a lesson—*au coup de pistolet!*" The Sergeant saluted stiffly and strutted off.

"Good Lord! He wants to fight a duel!" yelled Bryant, roaring with laughter. My own laughter was a trifle thin.

"What you going to do about it?" chuckled Bryant.

"I don't know. Go through with it, I suppose. What does one do about duels, anyhow?"

"D'you think he means to go through with it?"

"I suppose so. These Continentals are funny about what they call their honor.

The truth that is sometimes as strange as fiction makes the stories contributed by our readers in this department specially noteworthy. (For details of our Real Experience contest, see page 3.) Of particular interest is the story which immediately follows, for it happened in the Cameroon—one of the colonies which, it is reported, France has offered to return to Germany in exchange for peace guarantees.

I—I'd better start practising with a revolver or something."

"No use doing that," warned Bryant. "Better get some sleep; I'm going to turn in. I'll—er—be your second, or whatever the hell they-call it."

I crawled under my mosquito net, feeling very cold about this business. At the age of twenty-one duels seem awfully romantic and real. I tossed and twisted.

Would he kill me? Would I kill him? I had read somewhere a story of a man who let the other fellow fire first, then with a devil-may-care gesture fired into the air. Yes, nice, gallant thing to do; but what if Marceillant hit me first?

"No," I thought, "I'll have to shoot, first if possible."

I wondered if I would shake, if the pistol would go off before the signal, if in the hurry to get my shot in first, I would miss altogether. Of course, Marceillant took the same chances. Some of those French infantrymen were good shots, I knew. I hadn't been so bad myself, but I hadn't fired a pistol in over a year. I sat up in bed, aiming an imaginary revolver at the shadows on the wall. . . .

Why had I ever come to Cameroon, anyway? Should have had more sense than to go to Nassif's. I looked out the window; still dark, and bull-frogs croaked busily in a swamp down the hill.

"They don't care," I mused unhappily. "Damned things will still be croaking while I lie on the rifle range with a bullet in my liver."

My sweating skin crept. That wasn't the thing to think about. What was the Army motto? "If there's a bullet with your name on it, you'll get it." Yes, that's fine—maybe!

"Expect he's tight. Probably he'll shoot me before I have a chance. . . . Wonder if Bryant's asleep. Roll on, morning; let's get the agony over."

I turned on my back. Ages later, it was morning. I must have slept after all. Phew, what a nightmare!

PERIENCES

Then came a sick feeling. It *wasn't* a nightmare, and I had to go to the rifle-range and fight a duel! I scratched unhappily at prickly-heat blisters and felt a gnawing emptiness in my stomach. The sun shone palely across the wide river which flashed like polished steel. Here and there a canoe slid over it like a beetle, leaving scarcely a ripple on its still surface.

I HEARD Bryant moving about his room; then he came into mine. He looked awful; I wondered if I looked as bad.

"How d'you feel?" he asked, like a confounded doctor.

"Oh, fine!" I sneered. "How d'you feel?"

"Rotten! I think you'd better tell the Consul about this palaver and get out of it."

"What's the use? We'd never dare show our noses off the compound."

We showered, dressed, swallowed some tea and started for the rifle-range. Douala looked quiet and serene in the morning sunshine. Even the evil-smelling market was peaceful. I looked at the women with their naked round-bellied babies, and smiled wanly as they saluted us. Traders were just opening their stores, and I could see white men moving languidly about their verandas. They looked at me pityingly, I thought. Of course, they had heard all about the row last night, and some of them asked questions. Bryant answered; I didn't feel like it. Naked canoemen watched us from their beached canoes as they waited for the stores to examine their oil. Even they seemed to know that tragedy was in the cool morning air. A breeze blew softly from the west, and the twin peaks of Fernando Po mountain shone above a bank of cloud. It would be hot later, but I'd never know it.

The avenue of royal palms to the barracks were swaying gently as mourning maidens when we passed, and the stained white walls of the soldiers' quarters looked oddly comfortable and homelike.

We skirted the buildings and descended the hill to the range. There were a few soldiers there. Marceillant and his seconds, I supposed. Damn it! They *would* have to be there first! Well, why not? They lived nearer than I. . . . But the four men were strangers to me, and they watched us stolidly as we walked out on to the flat expanse between the rifle-pits and the butts. We stood here,

fighting to chat calmly; lit cigarettes and tried to puff them slowly. Bryant walked over to the men and asked if they had seen Marceillant.

No, they hadn't. But they knew he had a rendezvous at the range.

A party arrived at the top of the hill. "Well, here it is," I thought. I couldn't see Marceillant, and caught Bryant's arm to ask him the custom of such occasions.

"How the hell do I know?" he whispered. "I've never been in such a damned mix-up in all my life."

My heart gave a dreadful jump; my mouth went dry and tasted of brass, and the tea I had swallowed sat in my stomach like molten lead. One of the men was carrying a spade! Bryant stood before me, trying to hide the horrid sight from my popping eyes. I felt cold sweat welling in the palms of my hands.

Ah, there was the sergeant who had called on me last night. He walked slowly down the hill and approached us. The others ranged around, silently watching. I tried to look cool. I was actually frozen, and saluted the non-com with what I fondly imagined was an offhand *bonjour*. Bryant told me later it sounded like the bleat of a goat.

"*Bonjour, messieurs!*" saluted the sergeant. "Er—M. le Sergeant Marceillant 'ave ask me to tell you 'e is very seeck. 'E cannot come to meet you, so 'e ask me to apologize for all 'e 'ave said." And the scarlet-faced non-com turned with a roar to the men.

"*Allons 'y, mes cochons!*" he yelled. "Hurry up and clean this rifle-range."

The man with the spade was a sanitary detail!

WE shook the sergeant's hand warmly, blithely invited him up for drinks, beamed at the sanitary men, and marched back to our bungalow.

"Good old Douala! Charming spot! I sniffed the putrescent odors of the market with great appreciation. The pick-anin's were beautiful. . . . Bryant was thoughtful as we entered our compound.

"What d'you suppose is the matter with Marceillant?" I asked.

"Wind up," replied Bryant. "He must have seen us on the rifle range, and lost his nerve. Good thing he couldn't see how scared we were."

"What did he want to fight a duel for, in the first place?"

"He must have seen it in the movies," grinned Bill Bryant.

Tun-kho the Bandit



The strange adventure of a Russian hunter in the little-known forests of Mongolia.

By N. BAIKOV

GLORIOUS Manchurian autumn was upon us, heralded by the long trail of wild geese heading southwards. The geese flew high, almost unseen in the blue haze, as I slowly descended a steep mountain ridge, following a path that led to the valley of the Mai-khe. I was making for the small village, Shito-ukhe-tze, and I expected to reach the village before dusk.

I passed a lonely praying-hut tucked away amongst the rocks, built there, no doubt, by a devout Manchurian trapper, and I came again upon the path which I had missed a short time before. As a rule, when alone in the Taiga, I do not keep to the better-known tracks, assuming that they would be even better known to the Khunghuzes; and a meeting with those bandits of the Taiga was an experience I preferred to avoid. But like other human beings, I have my reckless moments, and on this beautiful day I took a risk and kept to the regular route down the mountain, more preoccupied with keeping my balance than with any anxiety about possible bandits.

I was near the foot of the mountain, when I saw a thick-set man appear from behind a rock. Another figure came into view; then more men came from behind the rock and stood with their rifle-barrels glittering in the sunlight, watching my descent of the steep incline. The men were bandits. There were a score of them, all armed with Mauser rifles and waiting motionless while I descended. The men knew there was no escape for me: I realized it myself! I was on the slope of a barren hill—no cover on either side—and my adversaries could shoot me

dead before I would have a chance to fire a single shot.

There was nothing for it but surrender; or to simulate ignorance of their "profession" and try to make friends. So I hung my rifle over my shoulder, as evidence of my unconcern, and continued the descent toward the rock—and the waiting Khunghuzes. When I drew close to the men I called a Chinese greeting, "*Lao-Khao!*" There was no response—a bad sign; and I had some very uncomfortable moments as I walked on, trusting that my air of indifference was making an impression on the bandits.

When they felt assured that I was indeed alone, the Khunghuzes became more approachable and began to question me. They wanted to know who I was, and whether I had seen any Chinese troops in the neighborhood, and why I was wandering alone in the Taiga. My answers were received graciously enough, though the chief, a fine-looking Khunghuz, while giving me an encouraging pat with one hand, took my rifle in his other and passed it over to one of his men.

ALL of my captors were armed with Mauser rifles and pistols and carried large ammunition bandoliers slung across their shoulders. The youngest of the band was a mere boy of sixteen; others were older; and one man, a kind of adviser, I thought, was about sixty. From the conversation of my captors, I gleaned that they were the advance-guard of Tun-kho, a Khunghuz chief, famous throughout Siberia and northern Manchuria. This information eased my mind a little, for Tun-kho was known to have friendly inclinations toward Russians, and I hoped that his tolerance toward my country would protect my head! I didn't like to think of its being left exposed in a cage, or on a rock or tree, according to popular Khunghuz custom.

The chief assigned a place for me between two bulky Khunghuzes, and very politely advised me to keep well within the file! I took the hint, and we moved slowly upward, the whole band stopping, continually, to scan the rocks and the groups of trees above us. Then, satisfied that it was safe to advance, they resumed the march.

AT dusk we reached a locality familiar to me. I had frequently been to this part of the Taiga when stalking boars, and I had a Chinese trapper friend living near—on my hunting expeditions here, I spent my nights in the trapper's cabin. It gave me a shock when I noticed that we were heading straight for his ground. So the old rascal was in league with the bandits! I could hardly believe it. However, we went direct to his hut, and he came out to greet the bandits with a hospitable welcome. He recognized me at once, and noticing that my bandit companion carried two rifles instead of one, instantly understood the position.

"*Ni-pu-khai-pa*," he said, smiling at me. ("Everything will be all right: don't be afraid.")

I had to accept his assurance, and I jokingly told him I was a person too important to carry my own rifle!

"*Pu-khai-pa*," he said again, and invited us, captive and captors, into his cabin. The inevitable kettle, hung over the fire, was boiling fussily; and strong hot tea was soon ready for us all. We had a silent meal, giving our attention to the tea and to the little stone-hard maize buns proffered by our host.

"Whither are they going tomorrow?" I wondered. "And what will they do with me?"

A piercing whistle interrupted my ponderings and disturbed the tea-party. The whole company was immediately alert. The whistle was repeated at short intervals, and one of the bandits left the cabin, hurriedly. He returned to show us a face wreathed in smiles. "It is Da-lan," he told his comrades. "He is advancing up the hill." About ten minutes later Da-lan, the chief of another small band, arrived with thirty Khunghuzes, all armed to the teeth, and bringing supplies of food, ammunition, and the stirring news that Tun-kho would be with us toward midnight. At this news, and with the new reinforcements to strengthen the camp, the two chiefs gave their men permission to light fires outside and to go to sleep.

The bandits fell asleep near the fires, two sentinels standing on guard over the men. I was offered a place of honor in the hut, in company with the trapper and the two chiefs. A Khunghuz, his Mauser beside him, was posted at the entrance to the cabin. He sat facing the fire, quietly smoking his pipe and occasionally giving a glance at me.

I lay on a narrow bunk, where my trapper friend had obligingly spread old-deer-skin rugs for my comfort. He kept repeating the advice—"Pu-khai-pa."

It was all very well for him to tell me there was nothing to fear; but I had no sense of security regarding my future. The bandits would not be likely to release me unconditionally, if they released me at all. And "conditionally" would mean ransom, a prospect unpleasant to contemplate, for it would mean being dragged from place to place until—until what? The defeat of my captors? And by whom? Probably by another detachment of bandits who would then take care of me!

My future looked gloomy, as I tossed about in my narrow bunk, trying vainly to sleep. I conjectured my meeting with Tun-kho, the chief of chiefs, pessimistically anticipating the worst.

FOR Tun-kho's fame reached far beyond the frontiers of Manchuria. He meted out punishment savagely, ruthlessly chopping off the heads of those who blocked his way. To the rich, he behaved ferociously: to the poor, he was a king or god, and they flocked to him, trusting in him to right their grievances. Several attempts had been made, by the Chinese government, to capture Tun-kho and to destroy his forces. Yet Tun-kho, aided by the population at large, managed to elude the most ingenious military traps and to remain free.

My two companions in the hut snored noisily. It was growing chilly; I wrapped the fur rugs closely round my shoulders and at last fell asleep. . . .

When I awoke and rose from the rugs, I saw that the cabin was empty; though the door was shut, I knew by the creamy color of the paper covering the lattice of the tiny window, that the sun was up. I could hear loud voices speaking near the cabin, and after giving a hasty smoothing to my hair and beard, I opened the door and walked out.

The Khunghuzes stood ranged in a semicircle, a few yards from the hut. Nearer to me were the two chiefs whom

I already knew, and also a third man, a stranger, thickly built and with a commanding voice. The three men had their backs toward the hut, but at the sound of my footsteps the stranger turned sharply to see who came. At once I was aware of the newcomer's personality. This man, I knew, must be the notorious Tun-kho!

His thin, aquiline nose belied his Mongolian eyes and cheek-bones: it was a face giving index to a brain, clever, vigorous and extraordinarily resourceful. He was dressed in the same style as his men, and like them, he carried a Mauser pistol in his belt. He walked briskly over to me and, looking straight into my eyes, asked, in good Russian:

"Are you a Russian? And why have you come to this district?"

I EXPLAINED that I was a professional hunter; that I frequently came to this locality on the trail of big game.

"So, you are a hunter! Indeed! And what kind of game are you after at this season?" His hand, which until then, had been on the handle of his pistol, went into his pocket, fumbled in its depths and brought forth a short clay pipe. This gesture, and the twinkling of his slanting eyes, gave me encouragement to believe my questioner was not altogether against me. Generally speaking, he had nothing to fear from Russians.

"Well—and what do you get here?" he asked.

"Tigers are numerous about the district," I said mildly, "and leopards are not unusual—"

"But aren't they very ferocious? Almost like the Khunghuzes? And unless you've got a decent Mauser, you don't have much chance to stand their charge? Eh?"

The ice was broken. I saw that he was in joking mood, and I talked quite freely about the different fur-bearing animals to be found in the district. "I take my skins to the market at Khan-dao-kheze," I concluded, while his eyes never for a moment left my face.

He didn't answer, just looked at me, and then, without saying a word, turned on his heel and went quickly into the hut.

The audience was over! But was I free to go? Or was our conversation merely an Asiatic preliminary to an unpleasant conclusion?

A fierce Khunghuz presently emerged from the hut and called to me.

"The Chief wants you," he said.

"Now," I thought, "the verdict is to be announced!" I found my captors sitting round the fire and drinking tea. The old trapper was busying himself with the kettle and pouring out tea for his guests. He glanced at me as he passed to the fire, and I saw by the expression in his eyes that my case was won. The old man had given me a good character, I felt sure, when Tun-kho questioned him about me. A Taiga friendship goes deep: it lasts forever.

Tun-kho pointed to a seat as I came in, and handed me a cup of tea. "Please sit down and have some tea with us," he said in perfect Russian.

When tea-drinking was ended, I rose from my seat, strapped my sack on my back and took my rifle from the corner where it was prominently placed. Tun-kho's face, emotionless while we sat at tea-drinking, suddenly brightened into a genial smile. He nodded at me. "Good-by!" he said; and again the impenetrable mask shut out all expression.

I stepped out of the cabin and was followed by the Khunghuz who had called me in. He handed me a scrap of paper.

"This is a pass from Tun-kho. Show it to our people—if you should happen to meet any of them. Don't lose the paper." He added, significantly: "Otherwise—" I did not wait to hear the rest of the sentence. Briefly, I asked the man to convey my thanks to Tun-kho, and hastened away. Free again!

TWO months later I saw Tun-kho again: He was addressing a vast crowd of people in the marketplace of Kuan-tchen-tzy. But this time, he was in chains, and guarded by Chinese regular troops. The famous Khunghuz had been betrayed by one of his band. His arrest had resulted in dramatic disclosures.

It was revealed that Tun-kho came of a wealthy Chinese family and had an extensive business in Inkoi. In Inkoi, living under another name, he was known as a rich merchant and the father of a large and popular family. Nobody had an inkling that the amiable, apparently law-abiding merchant of Inkoi had any connection with bandits. Only after he had been captured, with members of his Khunghuzes, was his double game discovered.

In his merchant capacity he had often had to be away on "business," but had the reputation of being an affectionate and dutiful father, never neglecting his

family. The night of his arrest was the night of his eldest daughter's marriage.

A marriage in China is a serious affair, and no man of any standing would be absent from the wedding of his eldest daughter, unless under great provocation. So Tun-kho, who had been in the north of Manchuria on "urgent business," hurried back to his home in the south to share in the wedding festivities. While they were in full swing, the house was surrounded by a strong force of cavalry; and Tun-kho, the hero of the poor, was captured, handcuffed, chained, and taken to Kuan-tchen-tzy. The man accepted his fate calmly, stoically. He knew that his end was in sight and he asked for permission to speak to the people thronging into the marketplace. It is an old Chinese custom that a man condemned to death, be allowed to speak publicly to his friends and followers.

SO Tun-kho was brought to the marketplace—where I saw him standing on top of an empty box, his chains, like steel garlands adorning a hero, hanging over the improvised tribune. He was a hero to thousands of the people who had journeyed great distances to hear him speak his last words.

The Chinese general commanding the Government forces, stood near Tun-kho's box-platform. It was to the General that the condemned man spoke first.

"Tell them in Peking that I am not a traitor—I never betrayed my country! Tell them I am not a coward! I don't want their pardon. I am ready to die!"

The General held a sheet of paper in his hand—the message of conditional pardon which Tun-kho was scorning. The officer saluted and made a sign that he wished to speak, and the vast crowd of spectators pushed and jostled to get nearer to the platform.

Tun-kho bowed, first to the right, then to the left, as if saying his final farewell, and sat down firmly, on the box. A murmur of approbation came from the crowd! Tun-kho, the Khunghuz leader, sat in the presence of the General! And the General was going to read the Governor's message from Peking! Tun-kho sat erect, his eyes raised toward the far distant mountains.

The General read the message quickly, and the execution of Tun-kho and his twenty-six Khunghuzes was timed for the next morning.

All through the night, thousands more people hastened to Kuan-tchen-tzy. They

came on foot, in decrepit carts, on horseback, most of the travelers bringing their kettles, their food, their rugs, in preparation for staying on, should the execution be postponed.

The red disk of the wintry sun was curving up from the mountain, when, next morning, I saw the prisoners coming through the prison gateway. They were in carts, and all of them were heavily chained. At the marketplace, the condemned men were placed in a row, facing the east—a strange piece of sentiment: It gave them a last chance to see the sun!

Presently the General whom Tun-kho had scorned, galloped up on a magnificent horse. He dismounted, and walked over to the center of the marketplace. From there, he read aloud the order of the execution.

The prisoners were lined up, Tun-kho, his chains removed, at the head. The executioners were called, and two immense men, dressed in black, approached the General. The men had their heads bound with cloth bands, and each man carried an ax. They stood a few paces from the General, waiting for his signal.

The twenty-six men, their hands tied behind their backs, were ordered to kneel. The General waved his hand. The black-garbed executioners ran forward, uttering beastly noises and brandishing their axes. Tun-kho was smoking a pipe. His hands were free, and he held his pipe and looked on, with an air of cool detachment at the scene before him.

AN executioner stopped beside Tun-kho. The ax swung high in the air: it fell, and the head of the Khunghuz leader rolled on the strip of carpet.

The second executioner turned Tun-kho's body onto its back, thrust a dagger into the chest, put his hand inside and pulled out the heart. This dripping emblem was held out toward the crowd of watchers. "Who wants a share of the great mascot, the heart of a brave man?" The executioner shouted to the people, and a stampede followed. Everyone wanted a share of Tun-kho's heart!

I walked across to the headless Tun-kho. Already, a box had been brought for conveying the body to his family. The head, with its jet-black hair, lay near the body—and yet so strangely apart. The dark eyes were open blankly to the blue sky. Only two months before, I had felt such relief to see humor glinting in those eyes!

The long and desperate airplane search through Arctic blizzards in the hope of rescue for the missing Ben Eielson, as told to Burt McConnell—

By JOSEPH
E. CROSSON

The Search in the Snow

IF you have ever stood on the edge of a raging torrent while your closest friend was swept toward the brink of the falls, without being able to help in any way, you will realize how I felt one day in November, 1929, when my flying partner, Carl Ben Eielson, failed to reach his destination on a flight from Teller, Alaska, to a ship frozen in the ice near North Cape, Siberia. The *Nanuk*, an American vessel, was in no particular danger, but she carried a million-dollar cargo of furs, and the only way to bring them out was by airplane. Two of the crew needed medical attention, and a food shortage was imminent. It was expedient, therefore, to transfer the furs and a number of the crew to Fairbanks, Alaska, a distance of nine hundred miles.

Alaska Airways, then under Ben's management, was the logical choice of Captain Olaf Swenson, owner of the *Nanuk*, to undertake the job. Ben and another pilot brought out six men and thirteen hundred pounds of the most valuable furs on their first trip. On the second, Ben and his mechanic Earl Borland set out from Teller in a blinding snowstorm, followed by another pilot. Somewhere this side of East Cape, Siberia, the second pilot turned back; Ben went on. The blizzard raged all that day and night—and for the next ten days.

When the *Nanuk's* wireless operator reported the non-arrival of the flyers, we in Fairbanks felt no great amount of concern. Ben Eielson was no ordinary flyer, lost in a storm. He had been the first pilot to carry air mail in Alaska; the first to establish and operate an air service above the Arctic Circle; the first to fly an airplane over the frozen Arctic Ocean; the first to pilot an explorer in



the Antarctic; the first to land a plane on the floating sea ice in winter. He was the winner of the Harmon Trophy for the outstanding feat in aviation in 1928—the non-stop flight to Spitzbergen, which Amundsen considered a greater feat than Lindbergh's crossing of the Atlantic. He had won the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Congressional Medal of Honor.

In other words, Ben knew his way around. We figured that he had "sat down" somewhere on the coast of north-eastern Siberia to wait out the blizzard. There was also the possibility, in that bleak and overcast world, where it is difficult to determine from the air where the sea-ice stops and the land begins, that he might have veered inland to the country of the native reindeer men.

ONCE it was established that the flyers were missing, reports began to come in from widely separated points. One native trapper said he had seen a wisp of smoke, probably from a campfire; an Alaskan dog-team driver, a Russian trapper, and a Siberian Eskimo declared they had heard the drone of Ben's engine at various points within fifty miles of the route.

When the weather cleared sufficiently for us to see the ground from a height of five hundred feet, two rescue planes set out from Fairbanks. Ice collected on their wings, and they were obliged to return. We were experiencing the worst winter on record since Alaska became United States territory. All planes were of the open-cockpit type. Neither Army nor Navy was equipped with planes suitable for Alaskan rescue work. There were experienced cold-weather pilots in

Canada, and eventually a group of them were requested to join in the search for Ben and his companion. But it was not until the first week in January, 1930, that two of the Canadian planes, brought on shipboard to southeastern Alaska, headed for Nome.

It was about six weeks after Eielson's disappearance that Gillam and I crossed the Strait after seven unsuccessful attempts, and arrived at the *Nanuk*. For the next few days storms raged about the vessel—storms so fierce that it was impossible for men to find their way over the ice to the *Stavropol*, a Russian vessel frozen in two miles away. The temperature ranged about forty-five degrees below zero, with a fifty-mile wind blowing from the north.

Here we learned that Ben had flown a straight course, according to reports from various villages, as far as the Amguen—"The River of Great Width." There a trapper had seen him circle about and go off in a northerly direction. All we were sure of was that Ben and his companion had disappeared into the great white maw that has claimed the lives of hundreds of explorers and whalers.

GILLAM and I flew about twenty-five hundred miles in the next three weeks, searching for Eielson's plane. These were the shortest days of the year, with less than five hours of twilight available for flying. Fuel shortage on the *Nanuk* prevented Captain Swenson from using the wireless more than a few minutes each day. Food for the dog-teams used in the search ran low, and by the end of December there was an actual shortage of food for the owner and crew. Ice conditions made hunting difficult, causing a serious lack of walrus-meat among the natives. We ourselves were handicapped by a shortage of fuel.

At this juncture Secretary of the Interior Wilbur, on the urgent request of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, joined Senator Borah in asking the Soviet Government to aid in the search. False reports of Ben's probable whereabouts continued to trickle into headquarters at the *Nanuk*—for Tcheukchees and Alaskan Eskimos invariably tell white men what they believe the white men want to know. Fog, that silent barrier of the North, lay between the scattered groups of flyers.

On Christmas day the Soviet Government, which had not been certain that the United States would welcome their aid, plunged into the work of rescue.

At Stefansson's suggestion, the Russian colony on Wrangel Island sent out daily weather reports; and these were of incalculable value to the searchers.

Three nations were now engaged in the hunt for the missing flyers. Visibility, however, was so poor that few flights could be made. Gillam smashed the landing-gear of his plane in an attempt to take off from the rough sea ice; there was no sun to throw a shadow on the ground. And we had no fuel-base or food-depot on the Siberian coast.

Despite these handicaps, men with frostbitten faces, driving scrawny dogs in the teeth of a gale, continued to go out from the two ships to run down reports that Ben's engine had been heard in one place or another. Once they came back with an apparently authentic report of natives who had heard the plane, flying low. But the Tcheukchees had not seen the plane; thinking it was an evil spirit, they had hidden themselves in their huts. This, however, proved just another fairy-tale. Another hope was dashed when I investigated from the air a similar report. Four dog-teams were sent toward the Siberian mainland from Wrangel Island, a hundred miles distant, but were compelled by open water to return.

Meanwhile, we repaired Gillam's plane with packing-boxes, reindeer sinew, walrus hide and muslin. Fourteen dog-teams were sent by the Russians from the southward. The Soviet Government made available its aviation bases along the Arctic coast. It shipped one of its largest planes to Khabarovsk by express, there to be assembled and flown to the scene of the search. Another was ordered to fly from Irkutsk to the *Nanuk*—a distance of three thousand miles; still another down the Lena River and along the coast to North Cape; while a fourth planned to carry a dog-team, sled and driver—in the event of a forced landing.

Two experienced Russian pilots, Slepnev and Galyshev, then five hundred miles from the *Nanuk*, were ordered to proceed to the scene and aid in the search. In fact, the entire Soviet Union was thoroughly aroused. The situation was unprecedented in the history of Arctic aviation. A dozen planes and the crack flyers of three nations made up the greatest rescue armada ever assembled in the Great White North. Two planes were damaged in taking off, and one completely washed out at Fairbanks. Dense winter fogs covered Bering Strait. Gillam and I could get into the air at the

Nanuk, but what was the use when we couldn't see the ground?

During the third week in January the sun returned to the point where it would cast a shadow on the ground. Ben and his mechanic had now been missing two months, and people in Russia and Alaska were beginning to express doubt that they were alive. The flyers had left no trail anywhere along the coast; the winter had been unusually severe; their food supplies would last less than a month. Nevertheless the search went on.

ON January 25th, while Gillam and I were flying parallel with the coast, about a mile apart, I chanced to see on the snow a dark shadow. I banked the plane as I came opposite this dark spot, and came down within two hundred feet of the ground. The shadow was cast by the wing of a plane. The wing was covered with a heavy coating of frost and snow, and it would have been impossible to discern it from the air had not the sun been high enough to cast a shadow.

I circled once, and landed a few hundred yards from the wing. Gillam, watching my strange actions, joined me, and we walked over to the spot. There was no doubt about it: this was the wing of Ben's all-metal cabin plane. It lay in the delta of the Amguen River, which is several miles wide at that point. Gillam and I had flown over the spot a dozen times, but in that shadowless world it had been impossible to see any indication of a wreck. We estimated the distance from the *Nanuk* as ninety miles.

We worked for hours, digging down to the fuselage. It was clearly apparent that the plane had hit the ground at terrific speed; that Ben was not attempting to land. Looking about, we saw a knoll about twelve feet high; quite likely Ben, thinking he was flying above the level sea-ice, had collided with one of the small islands in the delta.

There was nothing for us to do but return to the *Nanuk* and report the sad news. It was too late in the day to make an extended search, and we had no tools. Ben's father lived in North Dakota, and Borland's parents in Seattle; they would have to be notified by wireless.

The news that we brought back to the *Nanuk* was a distinct shock, after all the weeks of uncertainty. The next morning Gillam and I took off, carrying food-supplies, digging tools, and a couple of men from the *Nanuk* and *Stavropol* to shovel away the snow. On the way we

overtook and passed two dog-teams that had started out soon after we brought back the news, and waved them on.

We found that the plane's engine had been catapulted a distance of a hundred feet by the terrific impact; this meant that the flyers could not possibly be alive. On the second day the throttle was found—wide open. The clock had stopped at three-ten, which proved that Ben had kept a straight course. He had flown low in the blinding snowstorm, keeping within sight of land—and this had been his undoing. The altimeter read "1,000 feet;" it had betrayed one of the finest pilots in the world into thinking he was flying at a safe height.

The Russian pilots Slepnev and Galyshiev arrived at the *Nanuk* on January 28th. The former, accompanied by Gillam, immediately flew back to the scene of the catastrophe, in order to make a report to the Soviet Government. The diggers were making slow progress; the snow was packed so hard that it had to be sawed out in blocks. Slepnev received from Moscow permission to take husky firemen, accustomed to hard work, from the *Stavropol*, and fly them to the wreck; he also was ordered to take charge, since the plane was wrecked on Siberian soil; and to stay on the job until the bodies were recovered.

Within a few days no less than thirty men were working on that bleak inhospitable coast—all volunteers. We flyers circled over the camp, and dropped food. One day we saw, strongly silhouetted against the spotless white, a black flag—a prearranged signal that one of the bodies had been found. It proved to be the body of Borland. . . . Ben's body was found three days later—but not until the workers had removed enough snow to cover a city block to a depth of four feet.

It was really remarkable the way those Russians put their hearts into the work. Slepnev was familiar with local conditions, could speak Russian, and had the Government back of him, so the search progressed without a hitch. He commandeered all the natives, dog-teams, and sleds he could find, and put them to work carrying food, tools and other equipment to the diggers, and transporting parts of the plane back to the *Nanuk*.

The frozen bodies were reverently laid in the fuselage of Slepnev's big plane, and in a temperature of fifty degrees below zero the Russian pilot took off for North Cape. That afternoon the ship's

surgeon came ashore, convened a coroner's jury and prepared the bodies for burial. Flags on the Russian and American ships were flown at half-mast.

On February 27th the bodies were placed on two sleds, and drawn out to the ship by willing hands—gnarled brown hands of the Eskimos—men, women, and children; and the white hands of Russian, American and Canadian aviators, trappers, firemen, sailors and dog-team drivers. It was a strange cortège that wound its way in and out among the jagged pinnacles of ice.

Plans were made to continue by air the international funeral procession, with Young's plane, carrying the bodies, in the lead. The ten Americans were lined up at right angles to Young's plane. Opposite them stood the Russians, including the Governor of the Chukotsk Peninsula and the captain of the *Stavropol*. Between the two lines came the sleds, with their still burdens. In a solemn speech befitting the occasion, Commander Slepnev relinquished custody of the bodies to the Alaskan pilots. Young expressed the appreciation of those present, and the bodies were covered with the flags of the Soviet Union, Canada and the United States.

These flags were not stitched with silk on machines; they were sewn laboriously by hand. The Eskimo women and girls had cut and sewed the red and white stripes, but they had no cloth for the blue stars, so the forty-eight stars in the American flag were painted upon the white background. The Russian and Canadian flags were made in the same way, by native women who did not know what they symbolized. All they knew was that two very gallant gentlemen had died while transporting food-supplies to Captain Swenson. And we saw nothing incongruous in draping the bodies in the flags of two foreign nations. After all, the Russians and Canadians had risked their lives and their planes in the search, and this was one way of recognizing their heroic efforts.

The next morning, with the sun shining upon a million minarets of ice and snow, the planes took off in formation, with Young in the lead. At Fairbanks, Ole Eielson, North Dakota pioneer, waited to receive all that was mortal of his son. His one remark, when he saw the homemade flags of Soviet Russia, the United States and Canada draped over the still form was:

"Let him be buried that way."

Tiger,

The extraordinary adventure of a famous wild-animal trainer, as told to Gertrude Orr—

ONE morning when I went out to get into the tiger den, I heard a funny noise inside. I thought at first some one had put a cat on top of the cage; but when I looked all around, nothing was in sight. Then one of the boys took down the doors, and I let out a shriek of delight. Inside the cage with Duchess were three beautiful tiger cubs!

Bert heard me scream, and came running. I was dancing in excitement.

"Look! Look!"

He stared in at Duchess. "Well, I'll be— Where did she get them?"

"They must have been born last night. Bert! Quick!"

Duchess, upset by the light and commotion, had grabbed one of the cubs and was shaking it to death.

Bert hit the bars with his whip; Duchess dropped the cub and grabbed another.

"She'll try to kill them all, now that we've let the light in on them," he shouted. "Keep her at the end of the cage while I get them out."

I fought her off with the whip while he got the three cubs out. Then I gathered them into the skirt of my costume and ran to my dressing-room. One of the poor little mites already was dead, and the second died two days later. Duchess had crushed in their sides. But the third one was unharmed. I named him Rajah, and I agreed to raise him.

From raising Fritz and watching the tigers with the show I had learned a lot about cat ways. A tiger mother is as careful of her cub's food as a human mother. When the cubs are young, up to three months, their mother will slap them away if they try to take the meat put into her cage at feeding-time. As they grow older, she will carefully lick all the meat from a bone and then give the bone to the youngsters to gnaw on. Gradually she will leave a little more meat on the bone, letting them become accustomed to this new diet. And then when they are three months old, she weans them entirely.

Tiger!

By MABEL
STARK

A tiger eats beef, horse-meat, mutton and chicken, but no pork. Every circus carries a special butcher to prepare the meat for its menagerie. All the bones must be sawed instead of chopped to keep slivers of bones from injuring the stomachs of the animals.

I found out that tigers never eat large bones. They will chew the soft ends of ribs and knuckles and lick all the marrow from the bones. But each night the attendant rakes the rest of the bones from the cages after feeding.

On Sundays when the tigers are not working they always are fed milk and eggs, as much as they will eat. This light food gives their stomachs a chance to rest and the eggs are good for their coats. In addition they are fed sulphur for the blood, lime water to keep their stomachs sweet and cod-liver oil to keep their fur glossy.

I SPENT hours working on Rajah. I certainly was proud of that tiger cub. Warm days found me back of the circus lot playing with him on the grass. As he grew older and outgrew his goat milk, I bought a thermos bottle to keep the milk warm for his night feeding. Just before I went to bed I would give him a pint of the warm stuff and put him into his basket. If it was the least bit cool I would let him sleep under the covers in bed with me, his head on my pillow.

Every morning, after his bath, I put a jeweled harness on him and would take him for a walk. If the streets were wet I would carry him—for I didn't mean to lose my baby from pneumonia.

One afternoon when I had him out walking with me such a crowd gathered around that a big cop came up to see what was causing the commotion.

"Hey, what is this you got there?"

"A tiger! Isn't he pretty?"

I held him up for the cop to see but he jumped and reached for his gun.

"You're under arrest!" he shouted.

"What for?" I asked innocently. "I haven't done anything. This is my tiger

and we both work in the circus. I'm Mabel Stark."

"I don't give a darn who you are. You come along with me. The judge will soak you plenty for having wild animals at large on the street."

I began to get sore. "He's on a leash! He's not doing any harm."

"Tell it to the judge," he roared as the crowd grew thicker. "Come on."

"If you arrest me, you'll have to take the tiger in too."

I offered him Rajah's leash but he backed away and jerked out his gun. I grabbed Rajah up in my arms.

"You put that beast down," he shouted. "I'm going to shoot him!"

"If you do, you'll have to shoot me too!"

Just then a car drove up, and I saw the boss pushing through the crowd with the Chief of Police.

"What's wrong here, Officer?"

"This woman is under arrest for having wild animals on the streets. She refuses to go along with me."

The Chief turned quickly. "Is this woman with your show?"

"She's my featured animal-trainer."

The Chief grinned. "All right, Officer. I'll take charge of her. Come on, miss."

I stepped into the car, still holding Rajah in my arms, and we drove off leaving the cop looking as if he'd like to murder all of us.

By spring Rajah was full grown, and I decided to try and work him with my act. I knew it was risky, because the big tigers might try to get him, but I'd taught him secretly to wrestle with me on the sand, and I knew the act would be a sensation if I could put it over.

The first day I took him into the arena with the other four I kept him on a leash beside me. None of them paid any attention to him, and after he got over his first fright, he wanted to play with them! The next day I tried out the wrestling act. I put the four tigers high on their pyramid, dropped my whip to the ground and turned to the caretaker outside. "Please unsnap Rajah's lead and haul the door on the job!"

He unsnapped the leash, and stepped close to the chute door. I clapped my hands and called Rajah.

HE sprang from his seat just as I had taught him on the beach and came straight for me, up on his hind legs, his forefeet around my neck. We turned

around once or twice, and then I threw him to the ground and we rolled over three or four times.

Outside I heard one of the men shouting: "That woman's gone mad!"

I rolled over. "Keep still, can't you? I'm all right. —Here, Rajah!" I opened his mouth and put my face inside, then jumped to my feet. I caught hold of his harness and told the doorman to open the chute door as I called the other tigers by name.

"Queen! King! Duchess! Pasha!"

They ran out of the arena without even noticing Rajah. . . .

When Duchess had a second litter of cubs, the boss turned them over to me without question. This time we knew the cubs were coming, and left the sideboards on the cage. Duchess, undisturbed by the light, was a good mother and nursed and bathed them until they had their eyes open. Then we got them out and I took over the job of fostering them. There were only two this time, both females. I named them Kitty and Ruby; and Kitty was as gentle as Ruby was mean.

ONE afternoon just as I had finished my turn with Rajah and taken my bow, I heard some one scream outside the tent. I ran out. The boss dashed up.

"The runaway broke! Two of the tigers are out! There they go! Ed! Jim! Get your guns! We've got to kill those tigers before they get some one!"

Duchess and Kitty were trotting across the back lot at a leisurely pace, while the circus performers with cries and shrieks scattered in every direction. Two of the aerial performers went up a telegraph-pole with speed that would have made them famous if they could have duplicated it in their act. Others were doing a nose-dive to get under cover of the wagons.

I grabbed the boss' arm as he jerked out his gun. "Don't! I'll get them both, if you'll just keep back."

I ran after them, calling their names. They were headed for a field of green corn beyond the circus lot, and I knew if they ever got into it, we never would find them. Kitty heard me calling and stopped, looking around curiously. Duchess trotted on to the field, but fortunately there was a wire fence that stopped her.

I kept walking closer to Kitty, talking to her, calling her name: "Down, Kitty! Lie down!"

Slowly she dropped down on her haunches. Duchess turned around to see what we were doing. I cracked the whip in my hand.

"Down, Duchess! Down!"

Duchess walked slowly over to Kitty, purring, and dropped down beside her.

HALF a dozen of the men came up behind me and spread out in a circle, all with guns in their hands.

"Get out of the way, Mabel," I heard the boss calling. "We're going to shoot!"

I stepped over directly in front of him. "Keep your guns where they belong. Have Ed bring a piece of canvas and raise it behind that wire fence. And hurry!"

I reached out the whip and tickled Duchess on the end of the nose. She grabbed at the whip playfully while Kitty rolled luxuriously in the soft earth.

In a few minutes the men had a circle of canvas around me and the two tigers.

"Get an elephant to push the tiger-cage over here," I called softly. "I'll keep the tigers busy if you'll be quick!"

Kitty rolled over and jumped to her feet as we heard the wagon rumbling across the ground. I cracked the whip sharply.

"Down, Kitty!"

For a moment she hesitated, her green eyes glaring suspiciously. Up on the telegraph-pole a bird lighted and twittered fussily. Kitty's head jerked up; she crouched, her tail swished eagerly. "Hurry," I called. "I can't hold them much longer."

The side wall parted behind me, and the back of the cage was pushed through slowly. The chute door stood open.

"Kitty! Duchess! Get in there!" I shouted, and cracked my whip.

Slowly Duchess got to her feet and started forward. For a second I thought she was coming for me. I shouted. She stood there sulkily for a moment, then turned and ran into the cage. Up on the telegraph-pole the little bird with a defiant "Peep! Peep!" flew away. Kitty looked around, and seeing Duchess in the cage walked leisurely in after her. With a gasp of relief I dropped the outer door.

The boss pulled aside the side wall.

"You crazy little fool! You're a wonder! Why, you worked those darn brutes right out here in the field!"

I managed to grin at him. "Why not? I'm their boss."

Out of the Gale Came Cries of Men



Fishermen Blown to Sea in Sinking Boat Saved as Mate Checks Strange Light

"Two days and two nights we were out there drifting helpless in the gale, and all the while we pumped to keep afloat," write William Neher of New York and Warren Brown of Beverly, Mass.

"Time and again we'd sight a ship during the day, but couldn't make them see us. They'd go on by...leaving us to pump again...and put off drowning a little longer.

"But the second night, we figure our pumping is about over, our hands are so swollen we can hardly grip the pump handle, our backs ache like toothache, and we're beginning not to care much, when way off come the pin points of steamer lights. For hours, as those lights came nearer we signalled with our flashlight and when there was a chance of hearing



us through the gale, we yelled like wild Indians.

"We owe our lives to Third Mate Charles Guy of this ship, the Tanker A. S. Hansen of the Sabine Transportation Co., Inc., and to the fresh DATED 'Eveready' batteries in our flashlight. For it was the light that attracted Mr. Guy, and made him change his course. Soaked by the storm, in use hour after hour, those DATED 'Eveready' batteries lived up to their reputation. If they hadn't we'd be down below there

now with (Signed) *W. Neher.*
Warren Brown"
Davy Jones.



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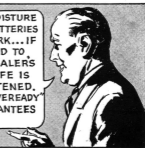
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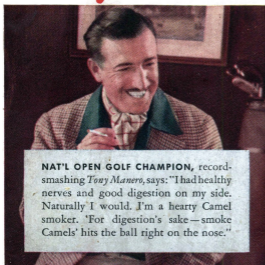


I WANT A FLASHLIGHT AND FRESH DATED "EVEREADY" BATTERIES FOR THE CAR... BUT PLEASE TELL ME WHY FRESHNESS IS SO IMPORTANT.

WELL, YOU SEE MOISTURE IS PUT INTO ALL BATTERIES TO MAKE THEM WORK... IF THEY ARE ALLOWED TO DRY OUT ON A DEALER'S SHELF, THEIR LIFE IS GRADUALLY SHORTENED. THAT'S WHY THE "EVEREADY" DATE-LINE GUARANTEES LONG SERVICE.



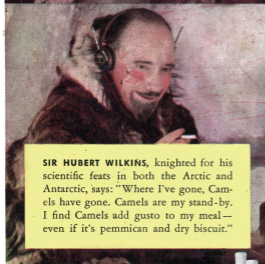
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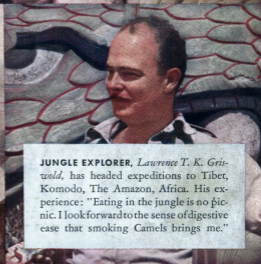
NAT'L OPEN GOLF CHAMPION, record-smashing *Tony Manero*, says: "I had healthy nerves and good digestion on my side. Naturally I would. I'm a hearty Camel smoker. 'For digestion's sake—smoke Camels' hits the ball right on the nose."



SPUNKY, GLOBE-CIRCLING REPORTER, *Miss Dorothy Kilgallen*. She carried Camels on her dash around the world. "I ate all kinds of food—snatched meals anywhere," she says, "but smoking Camels helped to keep my digestion tuned up."



SIR HUBERT WILKINS, knighted for his scientific feats in both the Arctic and Antarctic, says: "Where I've gone, Camels have gone. Camels are my stand-by. I find Camels add gusto to my meal—even if it's pemmican and dry biscuit."



JUNGLE EXPLORER, *Lawrence T. K. Griswold*, has headed expeditions to Tibet, Komodo, The Amazon, Africa. His experience: "Eating in the jungle is no picnic. I look forward to the sense of digestive ease that smoking Camels brings me."

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